TWO ROMAN GENERALS: FLAVIUS STILICHO AND FLAVIUS AETIUS

by

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This thesis examines and compares the careers and policies of two fifth century Roman generals of barbarian ancestry. After tracing in detail the lives and actions of the two leaders in the proper setting of the confused, climactic, final period (A.D. 378-476) of the Western Roman Empire, the writer attempts to show that Stilicho and Aetius acted in response to the demands of contemporary military, political, and social problems in the West, as well as within the framework of established Roman policies. Their efforts to settle and pacify barbarian invaders in the West, to practice religious toleration, and to establish a satisfactory balance of power between the Senate and the Emperor, represent the inclination of the practical Roman military mind to seek a stable basis for the preservation of the Empire. Faced with probably inevitable barbarian invasions and civil discord, the two generals tried for a military and political settlement which might have preserved the Western Empire as a limited monarchy. Their barbarian ancestry led them to accept the Teutonic invaders of the West as part of the Imperial system, but did not cause them to betray the Empire; their deaths and the collapse of their system were key steps in the fall of the Western Roman Empire.
PART ONE

TWO ROMAN GENERALS
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This master's thesis is a continuation and expansion of a paper entitled "Flavius Stilicho, Master of the Soldiers," submitted in May, 1965, as the writer's Senior Honors Thesis at the University of Arizona.

The present paper examines the careers and policies of Flavius Stilicho and Flavius Aetius, the two most prominent political and military leaders of the Western Roman Empire in the fifth century A.D. Utilizing the principal original sources and the major secondary works on the period together with a few of the varied new thoughts or hypotheses of recent students of the Later Roman Empire, this thesis discusses (1) the significance of Stilicho and Aetius with regard to the so-called "barbarization" of army, government, and society in the Late Empire; (2) their probable policies as the dominant Roman leaders in their time; and (3) the importance of their deaths as factors in the collapse of the Western Roman Empire. These matters will be dealt with in the context of the problems and events of late Roman history. Specifically, the writer will attempt to demonstrate that Aetius and Stilicho acted under the influence of Roman policies established in earlier
centuries, as well as in response to the exigencies of their own period, and that their barbarian ancestry did not lead them to betray the interests of their fellow Romans.

Because of the limited scope and fragmentary nature of many of the source materials on late Roman history, some of the original sources pertinent to a study of the careers of Stilicho and Aetius are not available in the University of Arizona Library. In the case of these sources, the writer has been obliged to rely on the citations, and to some extent the interpretations, offered in the principal secondary works on the Later Roman Empire.
CHAPTER II

THE LATER ROMAN EMPIRE

On August 9, A.D. 378, a hot summer day, Visigothic horsemen smashed Roman legions into the dust near the city of Adrianople, in Thrace northwest of Constantinople. Valens, Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, died with many of his officers and men; and with them the greatness of the Roman infantryman passed away forever. Wryly surveying the Battle of Adrianople after an interval of many centuries, modern historians have decided that the defeat resulted on a great increase of the importance of the Roman cavalry.¹

In earlier centuries Adrianople might indeed have had no greater consequences than a shift in Roman military tactics. After all, Roman troops had been decisively defeated before, even by the barbarians, and indeed these very Visigoths had crossed the Imperial frontier only to escape from the scourge of the Huns, and with Valens' explicit permission. Rome had survived the Gauls, the Cimbri, and Hannibal; surely Rome would survive this recent disaster.

Yet in fact Adrianople was a blow from which the Empire never recovered. Roman officials had received the Visigoths as guests, then cheated and plundered them. Roman justice could no longer punish such men, and the Roman Army was unable to salvage victory in the war which followed. Decay had set in.  

The story of the decline of the Empire is a familiar one. The impoverishment of the Western Empire, the rise of great landowners, the declining fortunes of coloni (peasants) and curiales (middle class), the barbarization of culture, the flow of gold to the East, the tendency to natural economy, and the depletion of population have all been pointed out by recent historians.

The rise of the Roman cavalry, it seems, was a prelude to the age of the mounted, armored knight. The cost of military defense of the Empire was becoming prohibitive. While the emperors spent heavily, declining population vacated many lands on the frontier, and the ranks of the Army had to be filled up with "barbarians" from the frontiers and beyond. Many of these outsiders


settled inside the borders which had previously been held against them.

The idea of Empire was still strong, but it was a dream of the old Empire of Augustus and the Antonines. The practice of Empire was slipping. The **senatores** still sat in the Senate, but they were now a class of aristocratic landowners, and they used the higher offices of the bureaucracy in the West to line their own pockets and protect their own interests. They did not regard the Germanic "barbarians" as a serious threat to those interests, and so would not provide troops for service against them, since devastation of the great estates might result, and in any case a too-powerful Imperial Army could be used to bring the senatores under close Imperial control. But these aristocrats failed to keep the peace in their own areas, so that wandering bands of soldiers, deserters from the Imperial Army, were always causing trouble. Perhaps these highwaymen were an important cause of the depopulation of the cities in the West. Certainly neither they nor the


limitanei, the frontier troops who had degenerated into a sort of local militia, were particularly efficient in keeping order or maintaining the great fortresses along the Rhine and Danube.7

Unable to obtain sufficient recruits in the Western areas, the later emperors turned to the East. The Balkan Highlands, the mountains of Asia Minor (Isauria), and of course the frontier, became the most important sources of soldiers in the later Empire. Illyria, or Greece and Dalmatia, was an especially valuable area in this respect, and in fact the reforming soldier-emperors Diocletian (A.D. 285-305) and Constantine (307-37) were of Illyrian stock. Nevertheless, Germanic barbarians became the predominant element on the Roman Army. The emperors strengthened this tendency by recruiting many of the ablest barbarian soldiers, even as officers, granting them citizenship at the expiration of their terms of service, and requiring their sons, under the hereditary occupation laws, to serve as soldiers also.8

The political reorganization of the Empire under Diocletian and Constantine was an attempt, successful in the short run, to solve some of the problems of government

in the Later Empire. The civil and military administrations were separated, so that no administrator would command enough power to challenge the emperor. The Empire was divided into an "Eastern Empire" and a "Western Empire," each under an Augustus, or emperor; one Augustus would be the senior and would exercise a general, overall supervision. Each half of the Empire was further divided, for purposes of civil administration, into two "prefectures" ("Italy" and "Gaul" in the West, "Illyricum" and "The East" in the East), each headed by a Praetorian Prefect. These prefectures were in turn subdivided into "dioceses," each under a Vicar, and each diocese contained several "provinces," with a Governor responsible for each. Thus the civil chain of administration reached from the Augustus at the top to the Governor in each province, and through the Governor to the provincial assembly and local municipal governments.

The separate chain of military command created by Diocletian and Constantine was based upon a reorganization of the army. The legion was reduced in size to about one thousand men, all infantry, and the cavalry became an independent force. A clear distinction was made between the limitanei, or frontier garrisons, and the comitatenses, or field forces. The main military commanders were the Magistri Militum or Masters of the Soldiers. There were about five of these generals in the East, each assigned to
a geographical area, and their powers were carefully regulated. In the West, however, there were only two, a Master of the Cavalry and a Master of the Infantry, with headquarters in Italy, and they possessed great influence, unlike their counterparts in the East. Occasionally supervision of all the forces in the West might be given to one man, a Magister Utriusque Militiae or Master of Both Services.  

So the Roman Empire had undergone profound alterations since the "Principate" of Augustus or Octavian. But in August, 378, it was still intact, and Gratian, Augustus in the West, set out to find a fit successor for Valens, his deceased colleague of the East. Gratian's choice was Theodosius, the son of a distinguished general of Hispano-Roman stock. Created Augustus at Sirmium on the East-West border on January 19, 379, Theodosius set out to subdue the Goths and re-establish firm Imperial control in the East. Most of Illyricum was placed under the protection of the West, but the young Emperor himself led the limited forces at his disposal against the Visigothic marauders. Not daring to risk everything on one battle, Theodosius fought a series of small actions against groups of the Goths throughout the year 379, clearing the area around Thessalonica. In 380 he was able to pacify all of Thrace

9. Ibid., pp. 28-33.
and established himself at Constantinople. Finally, in October, 382, he concluded a treaty of peace with the Goths: unable to defeat them entirely because of the weakened condition of the Eastern armies, he accepted his recent opponents as *foederati* (federates) of the Roman Army, and allowed them to settle peacefully in Moesia and Thrace.¹⁰ And 381, Theodosius declared Roman Christianity to be the sole legal religion in all his domains.¹¹

Among Theodosius' cavalry officers in these campaigns was the first of our subjects, a young soldier who a dozen years later became the most powerful man in the Roman world.


CHAPTER III

EARLY CAREER OF STILICHO

Born about the year 359, Flavius Stilicho was the son of a Vandal cavalry officer serving in the auxiliaries of the Roman Army. Although of "barbarian" ancestry, Stilicho was born a Roman citizen because of his father's military service, and was thus able to hope for a successful career in the regular Roman forces.¹

Stilicho joined the Roman cavalry (the most promising branch of the service) shortly after the Battle of Adrianople, about 379, and won rapid promotion during the arduous campaigns against the Goths in Thrace.² His Germanic good looks and military ability gained for him the attention of Theodosius and the admiration of Serena, the Emperor's niece and adopted daughter.³

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² Herbert Maxwell, "The Last Great Roman," The Nineteenth Century, XXXII (1892), 390-92.

³ Hodgkin, pp. 135-36.
The ambitious parvenu had probably already attained the rank of a Master of the Cavalry when in 383 his great opportunity came.⁴ A new ruler ascended the throne of Persia, Rome's old enemy in the East, and Theodosius entrusted Stilicho with the leadership of an embassy to the Persian capital at Babylon.⁵ So successful was this mission that a Rome-Persia treaty was concluded (387)⁶ which kept peace on the Eastern frontier until A.D. 420.⁷

Stilicho received a double reward for this exploit: the hand of Serena and the important office of Count of the Domestics, or commander of the palace guard. The young officer continued to rise in Theodosius' favor because of his honest conduct toward both his superiors and his subordinates in the Roman political hierarchy.⁸

But Stilicho, more interested in active service, was soon back in the field, bearing the title of Master of

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⁷. Orosius, p. 376.

the Soldiers in Thrace and fighting Gothic and Hun raiders from beyond the Danube.  

Soon, however, the Eastern army was called to new scenes of action. In 383 the Roman garrison in Britain revolted and proclaimed Magnus Maximus, a disgruntled general, as Augustus. Maximus defeated and killed Gratian and thereby won control of most of the Western Empire. He subsequently moved to secure the remainder of the West by driving Valentinian II, Gratian's younger brother and co-Augustus, out of Italy. The defeated Valentinian and his mother fled to Constantinople, where they enlisted the aid of Theodosius mainly through adroit use of the charms of the beautiful Galla, sister of Valentinian. In 387 Theodosius, who was a widower, married the young lady and agreed to a campaign in the West.  

In the resulting operations against Maximus (388), during which Stilicho apparently served on Theodosius' personal staff, the Eastern army defeated the usurper and restored Valentinian II to his throne without much difficulty.  


The Imperial Family of the East visited Rome for a short time, and here (probably in 389) Eucherius, Stilicho's son, was born. Stilicho was absent on frontier duty, but Theodosius was present for the occasion, and his own sons Arcadius and Honorius were also in Rome.  

Thereafter, new difficulties in the East demanded the attention of Theodosius and his army. First came the famous tumults at Thessalonica between the orthodox Christian inhabitants of the city and some of Theodosius' Arian Gothic auxiliaries. The resulting massacre of the offending citizens by the enraged Emperor and his soldiers called down the wrath of the powerful, orthodox Bishop Ambrose of Milan: Theodosius had to submit to a humiliating penance (390). Secondly, some of the "barbarian" federates of the Eastern army had deserted on the march to Italy and were systematically pillaging Macedonia and Thrace. In 391 Roman troops under Stilicho and others virtually wiped out the deserters. When Promotus, a general and close friend of Stilicho, was killed in action, Stilicho, adding Promotus' command to his own, went


looking for revenge, but was restrained by an order of Theodosius. Stilicho believed the order really originated with Rufinus, an ambitious civil servant, and a bitter enmity grew up between the two men. 16

Stilicho continued to campaign along the Danube, driving back stray bands of Goths, Alans, and Huns, for the next several years, and kept the enemy off balance with frequent patrols, even during the bleakest part of the bitterly cold Thracian winters. 17 Soon, however, Theodosius assigned him to an even more important command: he became Magister Utriusque Militiae, or commander in chief, of the Roman Army in the West. 18

Valentinian II, left to his own devices, had not lasted very long. Theodosius had in 388 designated one of his own officers, a Frank named Arbogast, as Valentinian's Master of Cavalry. Arbogast soon tired of his role as second fiddle in the Western Empire, and after Theodosius had returned to Constantinople the Frankish general gladly assumed sole power when Valentinian died of strangulation under mysterious circumstances (392). 19


Theodosius, unable to view this incident with equanimity, ordered the Eastern forces to prepare for a new Western exercise. Stilicho was to command the cavalry on this expedition, while the Gothic auxiliaries were to march under their own leaders, among whom was a young noble named Alaric.

The death of the Empress Galla caused a short delay, but the Eastern army was able to leave in June, 394. The hosts of Arbogast and Theodosius met in the Battle of Frigidus, near Aquileia, at the head of the Adriatic, on September 5-6, 394. Stilicho had counselled attack; after two days of bloody, obstinate fighting, Arbogast had been defeated. The Frankish commander committed suicide after the battle, and Theodosius captured and executed Eugenius, a pagan rhetorician whom Arbogast had set up as Emperor of the West.

Theodosius I, whom the Christians called the Great, declared Christianity to be the sole legal religion of the Empire, outlawed paganism, and ordered all temples closed. The famous Altar of Victory in the Senate House in Rome,

originally donated by the Emperor Augustus, removed and replaced by various Christian or pagan emperors, and recently replaced by Eugenius, was again ordered removed by Theodosius. When the Imperial Family arrived at Rome, Serena made haste to steal a costly necklace from a temple statue of Rhea Silvia, and chased away the last, elderly Vestal Virgin, who predicted that Serena's family would perish for this crime against the gods. 25 Obligingly, the Emperor Theodosius I soon died at Milan (January 17, A.D. 395). 26


CHAPTER IV

STILICHO'S DOMINANCE IN THE ROMAN WORLD

After the death of Theodosius I, the Roman Empire never again had a single ruler. Diocletian's carefully devised system of election and succession gave way to the establishment of hereditary dynasties. In 395 Honorius, younger son of Theodosius, became sole ruler in the West at the age of ten; his brother Arcadius, about seventeen years old, occupied the throne of the East. 1 Stilicho, who had succeeded Arbogast as the principal military leader in the West, was guardian of Honorius and was destined to be for thirteen years the most powerful individual in the Roman world. 2 But for the moment his arch rival, Rufinus, controlled matters in the East, although Theodosius had perhaps given Stilicho guardianship of both the weak-willed little emperors. 3

Bishop Ambrose had barely pronounced the last words of his funeral oration on Theodosius, in which he urged


2. Bury, Barbarians, pp. 64-65.

the Roman Army to support the new boy-emperors, before Stilicho set out to reorganize military affairs in the West. After calming the senatorial party, which had feared the consequences of its ill-considered approval of Eugenius, Stilicho discovered that he would not be able to obtain much military aid from the senatores: with the Western population declining, the great landowners needed all their followers for agricultural work, and would send only their weakest men to the Army. The Emperor in the West could at least compel the magnates to provide cash payments if not recruits, but the Eastern territories, rich in manpower, were closed to him.

The General-in-Chief was at any rate able to make some improvements in the military situation of the Empire in the West. Stilicho appointed a Master of the Cavalry and a Master of the Infantry as his immediate subordinates, but continued to keep a close watch himself over all military affairs. He spent, in fact, most of his time in


the field and was rarely present in Rome. Early in 395 he left Milan, where Honorius had for the time being been established, and crossing the Alps in the dead of winter, journeyed down the length of the Rhine to the sea, inspecting the frontier fortresses, reviewing troops, and where necessary reorganizing and reinforcing the defenses of the West. He also spent time strengthening the mutual defense treaty with the Franks, the Germanic nation living along the Rhine frontier. Yet he was soon back at Milan: the whole tour of inspection had taken less than a month.

But Stilicho was to have little respite. The Visigoths, who had returned to their settlements in Thrace, were dissatisfied with the recompense received for their Italian service. Under their able leader, Alaric, they soon decided to secure a proper reward. Before the end of 395 they had marched to the gates of Constantinople and ravaged most of Thrace. Rufinus refused Alaric's desire for a high military post in


the Eastern government, but dealt gently with the Visigoths in order to protect his own estates in Thrace. Rufinus' hopes of being designated co-emperor with Arcadius had led him to secure the removal of his main rivals in the Eastern government and to formulate policies hostile to the West.

Stilicho, an enemy of Rufinus, anxious to return to the East, marched from Italy with his forces and soon had Alaric and the Visigoths besieged near Thessalonica in Macedonia. Nevertheless, Rufinus persuaded Arcadius to order Stilicho out of his domains, and the Western general obeyed, sending the remaining Eastern troops in his command on to Constantinople. Rufinus, expecting these troops to hail him as co-Augustus, staged a magnificent review. The soldiers responded by murdering and dismembering him in Stilicho's name (November 27, 395). But Stilicho gained little from this transaction, even though he had cleverly augmented the Western forces by transferring the best of the soldiers from the Eastern legions before returning them

to Constantinople. He wanted control of the vital recruiting ground of Illyricum (Greece and the Western Balkans), and claimed that Theodosius had wanted to restore this area to the Western Empire; but it was a eunuch named Eutropius, and not the general Stilicho, who succeeded Rufinus as Arcadius' chief adviser. Hence hostility toward the West remained in vogue at Constantinople. Unopposed by either East or West, the Visigoths pushed on into Greece.

In 396, after Alaric had pillaged a number of Greek cities, Stilicho decided to again intervene in the East. Transporting his army from Italy to Greece by ship, he trapped and besieged the Goths in the Peloponnesus. Again the Eastern government, fearing Stilicho more than the Visigoths, ordered the Western general to withdraw his troops, thereby allowing Alaric and the Goths to move to Epirus. Once again, Stilicho obeyed, even though this settlement put Alaric in possession of the vital arms factories of Greece. The Goths now formally chose Alaric as their king. As a final blow to the West, Arcadius proceeded to appoint the new ruler Master of the Soldiers in Illyricum (397). Poised on the East-West border, Alaric


was in an excellent position to make alternate treaties with, and promises to, Rome and Constantinople.  

Stilicho, meanwhile, had problems enough in the Western Empire. Count Gildo, a Roman leader in that portion of North Africa included in Honorius' domains, after treacherously declaring himself under the jurisdiction of the Eastern government, which promised him virtual independence, had cut off the crucial African grain supplies for Rome. Simultaneously, the government in Constantinople had declared Stilicho a public enemy and had seized all his property lying within the boundaries of the Eastern Empire. The transparency of this Eastern plot against Stilicho's administration enabled the Western general to easily persuade the Senate in Rome to declare war on Gildo. Gildo's brother Mascezel, loyal to Rome, proceeded to Africa with a rather small force and soon put down the rebellion, while Stilicho brought grain from Gaul to feed the Roman populace. A few African traitors were put to death, and a few confiscated estates were used to pay for repairs on Roman aqueducts and for some statues.

praising Stilicho's generalship. When Mascezel, pompous in victory, lost his Christian piety and developed political ambition, Stilicho arranged a fatal accident for him.

In the same year that he defeated Gildo (398), Stilicho arranged for the marriage of Maria, the older of his two daughters, to the Emperor Honorius, perhaps fulfilling a last wish of Theodosius. Honorius' main amusement was feeding his pet poultry, and Maria was almost certainly still a virgin when she died ten years later. Stilicho's brother-in-law fared somewhat better as Gildo's successor in North Africa.

But Stilicho could as a rule spare little time for family affairs. Deprived of Eastern military aid, the Western government struggled continuously to shore up the frontier defenses. In Britain, for example, affairs had gone from bad to worse since 383, when the usurper Maximus had withdrawn most of the garrison.

renovated the military setup in the island province, abandoning the old frontier of Hadrian's Wall but bringing in native British levies to hold the northern town of York as the new defensive line against the barbarians. He built new defenses in some parts of Britain, shifted the few regular Roman troops to deal with the growing threat of Saxon pirates, sent naval expeditions to clear the North Sea, worked for a settlement with some Saxons already established near York, and even dispatched a missionary to convert the heathen barbarians to Roman Christianity.

Arcadius' contribution to the Roman Empire in 399 was the appointment of the eunuch Eutropius as consul, while the Western consul in the same year was a professional civil servant, able and experienced. Stilicho reacted to this Eastern insult by himself assuming the consulship at Rome in 400. During his consulship he paid his first visit to the great city and dispensed a handsome


sum for appropriate games and celebrations.\textsuperscript{34} Granted the title of Patrician, or "paternal guardian of the state,\textquoteright;\textsuperscript{35} Stilicho inspected the City of Rome, still awe-inspiring despite the fact that the effective capital was now at Milan,\textsuperscript{36} and recommended that Honorius have the Theater of Pompey repaired so that the populace could enjoy the inane plays of the day,\textsuperscript{37} and, more pointedly, that funds be expended to restore the fortifications of the city.\textsuperscript{38}

Meanwhile, Roman citizens in the West mutilated themselves to escape military service. New recruits were branded for future identification, but they deserted anyway, and powerful landlords protected them. The \textit{limitanei}, the frontier garrisons, putting aside their weapons, spent their energy in farming. Stilicho called on the citizens to take arms for love of liberty and country, but in the end he had to settle for cash payments from the \textit{senatores} and to refuse to impose the death penalty decreed in 382

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{34} Ibid., II, 43, 59.
\item \textsuperscript{35} J. F. C. Fuller, \textit{A Military History of the Western World} (3 vols.; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1954), I, 280.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Lanciani, pp. 47-49.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Jerome Carcopino, \textit{Daily Life in Ancient Rome} (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1940), p. 223.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Bury, \textit{Later Roman Empire}, I, 77-78. \textit{Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum} (Berlin: Georgium Reimerum, 1862-), VI, Part 1, 248, #1188-90.
\end{itemize}
for those who sheltered deserters. Imperial roads and buildings were falling into disrepair, and the fine Imperial postal service was fading away. Stilicho tried to fight official corruption, but the central government was increasingly becoming a system for exacting financial levies from ordinary citizens.

The year 400 was the last year of peace in the Western Empire: political machinations at far away Constantinople drove the Visigoths into Western territory in 401. A pogrom of Gothic auxiliaries serving in the Eastern capital, coinciding with the fall from power of the eunuch Eutropius, heralded an Eastern reaction against "barbarian mercenaries." Alaric and his subjects had previously been useful as a threat to the West; now they were personae non gratae to the Greeks on whom they had been quartered since 396. The Eastern Roman Empire could still afford to rely on a "citizen" army, while the West had an insufficient supply of "citizens." Ironically, the West would suffer from an invasion by the Visigoths because the East had good military resources.


40. Ibid., pp. 238-44.

41. Monks, pp. 769-70.

Even during Stilicho's first consulship, the pressure of the barbarians was growing all along the northern borders of the Western Empire. In 401 the first major break came: large numbers of Vandals and Alans, forced southward by overpopulation of the areas beyond the Rhine and Danube, pierced the Roman defenses in Rhaetia and Noricum (areas now in Austria) and pushed toward the Alps. Stilicho gathered troops and had just begun to drive the invaders back when he learned of a more dangerous problem. He immediately made a treaty with these Vandals and Alans, offering them lands in Noricum and Rhaetia in exchange for recruits for the Roman Army. Then he began a forced march to the south.  

Alaric had invaded Italy, and Symmachus, a Roman pagan statesman, had met with Honorius at Milan to represent the Senate in begging for protection for Rome. After ravaging the territories on the Upper Adriatic, the Visigoths crossed the Julian Alps and entered Italy (November, 401).  


44. E. G. Sihler, "Disintegration of the Roman Empire and Augustine's City of God," The Biblical Review, VII (1922), 224.

accompanied the expedition in wagons, so that the whole caravan included perhaps 200,000 persons, although only about 50,000 of these were arms-bearing men. It was a formidable host, and while Stilicho was bringing legions even from the Rhine and from Britain the Goths chased Honorius out of Milan and advanced into Liguria.

Stilicho finally caught up with the Goths at Pollentia, where he surprised Alaric by attacking while the Visigoths were at Easter services (April 6, 402). In a stubborn, all-day battle, the Romans won a narrow victory and captured the Gothic camp. Petulantly, Alaric retreated eastward while negotiating with Stilicho for a favorable settlement. Apparently the Gothic leader agreed to return to Illyricum and to represent Western interests there. But when the Visigoths slowed their retreat too much, Stilicho attacked again at Verona, where he dealt the Goths a fairly severe defeat, then besieged their camp. With many of his men deserting and others dying of hunger and disease, Alaric was glad to leave Italy for Illyricum when Stilicho permitted him to move on.

46. Lucki, p. 90.
47. Gibbon, II, 100-103. Claudian, II, 145.
Thus by the end of the summer of 402 Italy had been cleared of barbarians. But Honorius, shaken by his narrow escape, feared that the Goths would return in 403. The feeble-minded young Emperor moved his capital to the heavily fortified, almost inaccessible city of Ravenna, and not until 404 did he emerge to claim the consulship due him in recognition of his "victory."\(^{50}\)

On January 1, 404,\(^{51}\) the Emperor and his protector proceeded into the City of Rome, where crowds of curious citizens hailed the rare appearance of a regal visitor in the ancient capital. And at the magnificent consular games Honorius decreed the abolition of gladiatorial combats for all time. Some Romans complained of the unmanly nature of this Christian decision, but others perhaps claimed to see the dawn of a new era of peace.\(^{52}\) But Rome's troubles were only beginning.

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51. Lot, Pfister, and Ganshof, p. 28.
52. Theodoret, cited in Gibbon, II, 106-08.
Despite Stilicho's victories over the Visigoths, all was not well in the Western Empire. Soldiers killed in the campaign against Alaric could not be replaced from the depopulated territories of the West, and Arcadius, whose growing hostility to the West finally led to a diplomatic incident (406), could not be expected to help voluntarily.\(^1\) Honorius, although annoyed with his brother emperor and his unconcern for the problems of the West, maintained his residence in the port city of Ravenna from which he could flee by ship to Constantinople in case the Visigoths again threatened.\(^2\)

But Stilicho was determined to defend the West: if his available forces were, as he discovered, insufficient to garrison the Rhine-Danube fortresses and at the same time provide a large, mobile field army for the protection of the interior, he would obtain the needed reinforcements from the Eastern Empire without bothering to obtain Arcadius' permission. For the year 405 the courageous

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general undertook the office of consul in order to consult and plan with the Senate a military occupation of Illyricum, the area of Greece and Dalmatia, population-rich in recruits for the Western Roman Army--and weakly held by the East.

The continuing, upward spiral of barbarian assaults on the Western Empire saved Greece for the East. Late in 405 a horde of invaders--Vandals, Suevi, Burgundians, Alans, and Goths, in far more formidable numbers than the wanderers of 401-402--under a savage, pagan Teuton named Radagaisus, broke through the Danube defenses, crossed the Alps, and poured into northern Italy. Stilicho frantically called in the remaining frontier troops, assembling his army at Ticinum or Pavia while the barbarians were occupied in an unsuccessful siege of Florentia (Florence). The "Romans," actually a motley collection of regular legionaries and Alans, Huns, Goths, and other newcomers to the Imperial payroll, overtook the invaders at Faesulae (Fiesole) near Florentia, where Stilicho posthaste besieged Radagaisus' surprised forces. When the siege ended, on


5. Lot, Pfister, and Ganshof, p. 29.

August 23, 406, in a complete victory for the Romans, Radagaisus himself was beheaded, and those of his men who had not starved to death were sold as slaves.  

Stilicho achieved the defeat of Radagaisus only at the cost of denuding the Rhine-Danube fortifications of virtually all their effective defenders: the Roman general's army of perhaps 40,000 men, concentrated at Florentia, represented nearly the whole effective strength of the Western military establishment. Honorius early in 406 had been forced to call for the general enrollment in the Army of all slaves in the Western territories, presumably offering manumission as a reward for service. About the same time, the government at Ravenna ordered provincials to defend themselves: the available regular soldiers were needed for the defense of Italy. The desperate condition of the Western defenses became apparent to Honorius' subjects when Stilicho hired a sizable contingent of Huns as a personal escort for himself.  

7. Lot, Pfister, and Ganshof, p. 29.  
Stilicho's ability or inability to hold the West against barbarian invaders now clearly depended upon his success or failure in attempting to annex Illyricum. Yet, strangely enough, this annexation could not be carried out without the aid and loyalty of the Visigoths. Although Stilicho never hesitated to smash the waves of determined outsiders who increasingly sought to push across the Rhine-Danube line, his own success as a "Romanized barbarian" in the Imperial service led him to expect that future Roman leaders would emerge from Teutonic nations only slightly exposed to the civilizations of the Mediterranean Basin. Regarding the Visigoths, the most Romanized of the barbarians, as "part of the system of the Empire" and as potential citizens, he seems to have had plans for Alaric in Illyricum: the Visigoths would help the depleted Western legions to seize the new recruiting grounds. His confidence in the Goths was well placed, since they had remained quietly in Epirus since 403 and had not lent any aid to Radagaisus. 12

Italy was now the only well-defended area in the West. Remnants of the invaders of 405-406, retreating across the Danube, joined kinsmen east of the Rhine. On the last day of the year 406 these reinforced groups of Vandals, Suevi, Alans, and Burgundians crossed the frozen

Rhine, shoving aside the Franks, who resisted in accordance with their Roman treaty and their desire to protect their own lands. The Vandals and their allies began the sack of Gaul. 13

These invasions of 406-407 marked the start of unmanageable barbarian entrance into the Western Empire. The Vandals were too numerous to be easily absorbed, and they clearly lacked the veneer of Roman culture possessed by the Visigoths. 14

Faced with a critical situation in Gaul in 407, Stilicho was still determined to carry out his plans for the seizure of Illyricum: after obtaining sufficient Greek recruits for the Western Army, he could deal at leisure with the barbarians in Gaul. Having broken off diplomatic relations with Constantinople, he was free to appoint Jovius, a veteran of the Western government, as Praetorian Prefect of Illyricum. Alaric agreed to lead his Goths into Greece, while Stilicho's main army prepared to sail from Ravenna to some point in Illyricum. The Visigoths had already begun operations in Epirus when grim news from Gaul forced Stilicho to cancel the expedition. 15

The meager Roman garrison in Britain had hailed as Augustus a lowly private named Constantine, whose name was almost his only qualification. In 407, fearful of losing communication with Italy, the new Emperor led his little army to the continent, leaving his disillusioned British followers to make a fruitless appeal for help to Honorius. 16 Constantine, after defeating a few small parties of Vandals in Gaul, claimed sovereignty over Spain as well as Gaul and Britain. 17

This new threat, a more serious danger to Western unity than any barbarian migration, naturally caused the speedy collapse of the Illyrian project. Surprised by Stilicho's sudden change of plans, Alaric collected his forces and marched toward Italy, sending an embassy to Stilicho to demand four thousand pounds of gold in payment for his services in Illyricum and as a retainer for prospective service in Gaul. 18 Stilicho succeeded in convincing the Senate of the necessity of the payment, 19 although one senator vigorously opposed the idea and later

16. Blair, p. 3.
18. Bury, Barbarians, p. 84.
thought it prudent to take refuge in a Christian church, where he was left unharmed.  

With Alaric temporarily satisfied, Stilicho turned to his Gallic problems. A detachment of Gothic auxiliaries he sent to investigate the upstart Constantine managed to defeat the usurper's army in the field, but the Goths were unable to capture Constantine's capital city of Valence on the Rhone. Eventually they had to return to Italy, and found it necessary to pay off the Bagaudae, or peasant bandits, to secure safe passage through the Alps.

Meanwhile, back in Italy, Maria, daughter of Stilicho and wife of Honorius, had died (early 408). Stilicho, anxious to maintain his close, family alliance with the Emperor, fortunately had another daughter in reserve: soon the Emperor was safely married to Aemilia Materna Thermantia. According to rumor, Stilicho also hoped to arrange the marriage of his son Eucherius to Galla Placidia, Honorius' half-sister and the only chance for a Theodosian heir in the West. Christian leaders condemned the Honorius-Thermantia marriage as incest and the

projected Eucherius-Galla Placidia marriage as an obvious attempt to place Eucherius (rumored to be a pagan) on the throne.  

Stilicho removed his army from Ravenna to the interior of northern Italy in preparation for a serious campaign in Gaul, posting his regular forces at Ticinum, or Pavia, and his auxiliaries at various other locations, then returned to the capital on the Adriatic to join the Emperor for a tour of the major troop centers.

The two leaders had only reached Bologna, their first stop in the grand review, when they learned that Arcadius, Emperor of the East, had just died (May 1, 408), leaving an infant son, Theodosius II, to occupy the throne. Honorius wanted to go to Constantinople to personally organize the regency on behalf of his young nephew, but Stilicho dissuaded him from taking this course of action on the grounds that Honorius should remain in the West as the symbol of rightful authority opposed to the usurper Constantine. The Master of the Soldiers instead secured appointment as ambassador for himself. Now it appeared that he would be able to unite the economic and military resources of the whole Empire once again. In any case, he could afford to delay for a short time the upcoming Gallic campaign. Convinced that Western fortunes were on the

upswing, Stilicho allowed Honorius and his escort to proceed to Ticinum to review the legionaries there.  

Although everything seemed to be going well enough, Stilicho had actually reached the end of his rope. The Roman soldiers looked down on him as a "barbarian," the pagans despised him as a "Christian" or as no believer at all, and the Christians opposed him as an "Arian" or even as a "pagan." Christian clerics suspected him of plotting to seize the throne, of using the Goths to threaten the state, even of having Gaul invaded to strengthen his own control over the Emperor. Some of Stilicho's opponents already had certain of his "accomplices" marked for punishments for their "plots."  

Stilicho's most dangerous enemy, however, was Olympius, who owed his appointment as an officer of the Imperial Guard to the Master of the Soldiers himself. Olympius cleverly used his position to gain the Emperor's confidence, then worked to undermine Honorius' faith in Stilicho. After the news of the death of Arcadius, Olympius concluded a long period of insinuations by convincing Honorius that the Master of the Soldiers intended  

27. Orosius, pp. 386-87.
to confirm Eucherius, not Theodosius, on the Eastern throne. 28

While Stilicho tried to arrange communications with the East, Olympius was whispering to the Roman troops at Ticinum. Stilicho, perhaps concerned about what might happen in his absence at Constantinople, apparently arranged for a revolt of part of his auxiliaries at Bologna. He then crushed the revolt and pardoned the offenders in his own name to convince Honorius that the Master of the Soldiers was still master in more than title. 29

But Olympius, blinded by his own ambition, had done his work well: ugly rumors about Stilicho, which the terrified Emperor would not or could not quash, circulated among the regular troops. On August 13, while Stilicho was still at Bologna, 30 the Roman legions at Ticinum revolted. Except of course for Olympius, every available appointee of Stilicho—including the Praetorian Prefects of Gaul and Italy, the commanding generals of the cavalry and infantry, the Master of the Offices, Stilicho's quaestor and treasurer, and the Count of the Domestics—was put to death as a frightened Honorius gave his approval. 31

completed these executions, the soldiers drove the magistrates from the city and then began robbing and killing some of the citizens.32

Stilicho, learning of the riots and hoping to restore order among the legionaries, prepared to march on Ticinum with his auxiliaries. But when he heard that the Emperor was unharmed, he hesitated. Even though his political leadership and his very life were in danger, the Master of the Soldiers found himself unable to act against the Emperor,33 "not deeming it honourable or safe to employ barbarians against the Roman army." The auxiliaries, confronted with a dilemma, began to desert.34

Finally, a desperate group of these frightened auxiliaries, led by a veteran officer named Sarus, massacred Stilicho's faithful Hun bodyguards and tried to attack the commander himself. But Stilicho escaped and made his way to Ravenna, issuing a warning to the Italian cities to refuse to admit any of the fleeing auxiliaries. A certain Count Heraclian arrived at Ravenna with a detachment of Roman troops, tricked Stilicho into leaving the Christian church where he had taken refuge, and then produced an order, issued by Honorius, for the immediate execution of

32. Hodgkin, p. 156.
33. Bury, Barbarians, p. 87.
the Master of the Soldiers as a traitor and attempted parricide. The local auxiliaries and some friends and servants of Stilicho were apparently willing to rescue him, but he ordered them not to interfere, and helpfully bared his neck to Heraclian's sword. Honorius rewarded Heraclian by sending him to replace Stilicho's brother-in-law as Count of Africa. The date of Stilicho's death was August 22, A.D. 408, in the consulship of Bassus and Philippus.


CHAPTER VI

INTERIM PERIOD (408-423)

Stilicho's death was the signal for a series of "reprisals" directed against his supposed "accomplices." Most of the government officials denied that they had ever had any connection with the Master of the Soldiers. Others, known friends of Stilicho, were tortured as Honorius' men sought evidence of a conspiracy. Though no evidence was forthcoming, Eucherius met a violent end, and Thermantia, still a virgin, was cashiered as Empress. The pathetic Honorius grandly restored peaceful relations with the East and adopted Constantinople's designation of the late general as the "Public Enemy." Stilicho's pride and power, if not his "crimes," brought down the wrath of deluded patriots upon all his close associates.¹

But the worst blunders were yet to come. Roman soldiers and citizens slaughtered the wives and children of the barbarian auxiliaries in many Italian cities. Infuriated by these actions, perhaps 30,000 of the auxiliaries went over to Alaric, who was not marching unopposed into Italy. After slyly praising Stilicho's virtues, the

King of the Visigoths demanded his 4,000 pounds of gold. The terrified Senate, now ready to negotiate freely, was quite willing to purchase from Alaric the safety of its own members.  

Meanwhile Honorius, remaining secure and comfortable in fortified Ravenna, with serene courage refused to treat with the Visigoths. Alaric, a practical man, promptly lowered the price of his services to a "small sum of money, hostages, and the province of Pannonia." Honorius was unwilling to provide this bagatelle, so the Goths set out for the Eternal City. But the Senate was no more helpful than Honorius: the senatores defied Alaric from behind walls prepared by Stilicho. Alaric continued to roam at will near Rome, while the Senate, reduced to impotence, strangled Stilicho's widow Serena on charges of plotting with the invaders. After two years of useless negotiations with the Imperial government, the Visigoths entered and sacked the great City (410). Six legions sent from Constantinople saved Honorius and Ravenna from the same fate.  

The execution of Serena in 409 and the death of Thermantia in 415 ended the House of Stilicho, but the

3. Hodgkin, pp. 159-61, 163.  
House of Theodosius staggered on. The most important member of the royal family in the West was no longer, however, the shadow-emperor Honorius⁵ but his beautiful half-sister Galla Placidia. Born about 388, she had been in dire danger of marriage to Eucherius, but her strong will and determined individualism had apparently turned her against the Stilicho regime. In 409 she was at Rome, and her name was at the top of Serena's death warrant. For two decades after 410 she was the dominant personality in the crumbling Western Roman Empire.⁶

In 410, though, Galla Placidia was an unwilling guest of Alaric as the Visigoths, moving unsteadily out of Rome, followed the Appian Way toward the south of Italy. Alaric hoped to invade the rich lands of Sicily and North Africa, but the ships he managed to beg, borrow, or steal for the expedition were destroyed by divine wrath, otherwise known as a fall storm in the Mediterranean. Shortly thereafter, the Gothic king himself was enrolled among the gods,⁷ and his brother-in-law Ataulf secured from Honorius a treaty "allowing" the Visigoths to fight on behalf of the Romans in Gaul. King Ataulf, who as an aging adolescent


had wanted to destroy the Roman Empire, now proclaimed himself its restorer. After leading the Goths from Italy to Gaul (412), he rewarded himself by marrying his prisoner, Galla (January, 414).

Honorius felt that Placidia's marriage with a barbarian was a great insult to the august House of Theodosius, but the Emperor of the West had too many other insults to deal with, so Ataulf kept his new wife.

While Honorius was graciously remitting taxes which Italy could never have paid anyway, Count Heraclian of Africa slowly fell under the influence of hubris. When in 413 he became consul, he rebelled against the righteous authority of the Augustus of the West. After cutting off the African grain supply to Rome, he invaded Italy, where he was decisively defeated. Subsequently he was beheaded at Carthage. His death was due to the skill and daring of a rising young Roman officer, Constantius. Italy was not


completely helpless, even if the "Roman" party had previously been less effective against the Visigoths than against the families of the "federates."²¹

Nevertheless, the Italians were pretty much on their own. The Emperor of the East, little Theodosius II, was under the domination of his sister, Pulcheria, an able woman who easily manipulated the weak, religious ruler. But Pulcheria was hotly engaged in a power struggle with Eudocia, Theodosius' ambitious wife, and the encounters between these women, along with pressing matters of state in the East, kept Constantinople from lending much assistance to Honorius and his embattled associates.²²

At least the Western statesmen were almost painfully careful to prevent any "German" like Stilicho from gaining high military command. Constantius, the main warrior of this interim period, was a native of Sirmium in Pannonia, and thus of Illyrian origin like his namesakes of the House of Constantine.²³ But the would-be defenders of the West, although they would learn to speak softly enough, had an even smaller stick than Stilicho. When the guiding hand of the Master of the Soldiers was permanently removed

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²¹ Hodgkin, p. 160.
²³ Jones, I, 177. Olympiodorus, cited in Gordon, p. 44.
in 408, disintegration set in immediately. The remnants of the limitanei melted away, and private citizens soon got control of the border forts and the accompanying lands. Furthermore, the West-East blockade established by Stilicho and fraternally revoked after his death was soon back in full force: no one would be allowed to travel from the Western into the Eastern jurisdiction without letters of identification from Honorius. Theodosius, who proclaimed this new blockade, wanted no barbarians in his domains.

Nor was the West well supplied with field troops (comitatenses). Stilicho had at least been able to maintain a sizable army within the frontiers, but at his death the auxiliaries had disappeared and most of the regular troops apparently took French leave. Honorius after 408 recalled five Illyrian units (6,000 men) and begged six units (4,000) from the Eastern government. These were probably about all the troops available for the Emperor's service, and most of them were ticketed for the defense of Ravenna. Many of these troops were killed during Alaric's invasion. Nevertheless, even at the end of Honorius' eventful reign (423), the official military lists (Notitia Dignitatum) assured the Emperor that he had

18. Ibid., p. 174 (VII, 16, 2).
at his command some 250,000 men. Honorius himself cannot have been completely fooled as late as 423; as early as 409 his frantic orders to the Western legions met with no response. Honorius' 250,000 men constituted a paper army—and no more.

In the meantime the situation in the "provinces" was going from bad to critical. The usurper Constantine in Gaul attempted to guard the Rhine frontier, but if he succeeded it is probably because Gaul and Spain already had their quota of barbarians.

The saving figure of this period was the Roman general Constantius. After serving as Master of the Soldiers in Gaul (411), he came to dominate the weak Honorius and to exercise some control over the Western government until 421. He gained official recognition as Patrician ("guardian of the Emperor") by 415; and on January 1, 417, he married Galla Placidia, who had been recovered from the Goths. He forced Honorius to designate him as co-Augustus (February 8, 421) but died within a few

20. Ibid., I, 683, 685. According to Boak (Manpower Shortage, pp. 89-90), much of the data contained in these lists belongs at the latest to the third century.
22. Zosimus, cited in Bury, Later Roman Empire, I, 139.
months. His able general Castinus then gained sway for a short period.23

But the importance of even Flavius Constantius, whom Theodosius II refused to recognize as co-Augustus in the West,24 does not exceed the significance of the continuing rise of Galla Placidia. She had at first refused to marry Constantius, but eventually bowed to Honorius' demands. She received the title of Augusta when her husband became co-emperor, and their royal children Honoria (born 418) and Valentinian (born 419) were to become central characters in subsequent Western history.25

Outside of Italy, the Western Empire steadily crumbled away. Constantine, who had controlled both Gaul and Spain, lost the latter to a new usurper. There were also several other upstart emperors to deal with, few of whom had much strength. Eventually Constantius was able to defeat some, while Ataulf and the Visigoths accounted for others, and Honorius celebrated the victories as his own.26 But none of these leaders could do much against the flood of barbarian invasions from the Rhine. The Vandals, Suevi,


and Alans poured into Spain in 409, defeating a courageous group of civilian militiamen. Ataulf, ostensibly serving Honoring, led the Goths into Spain in 413-414, where Galla Placidia bore him a son, Theodosius, who died in infancy. Ataulf did not long survive his son, for he was assassinated in September, 415. Following a short period of turmoil, Wallia, the new Visigothic king, tried unsuccessfully to invade Africa. Finally he made a new treaty with Honorius and returned the widowed Galla Placidia to Rome and Constantius. Wallia managed to defeat most of the wandering barbarians in Spain, but in 419 he led his people back to settle at Toulouse, in southwestern Gaul.

With Goths, Burgundians, and Franks fighting and destroying each other and the Romans, Gaul was in a perilous condition. Britain and Armorica (now Brittany and part of Normandy) had become virtually independent, but were constantly harassed by sea raiders. There was, however, some hope. Honorius in 418 revived and reorganized the annual assembly of the seven administrative provinces of southern Gaul. This assembly, meeting at Arles, included the Praetorian Prefect of Gaul, the seven administrative governors, the city magistrates, and the large landholders. It was a brave attempt to strengthen local

27. Bury, Barbarians, p. 100.

ties with the central government. Despite continued treachery on the part of the Goths (421-422), Honorius and his officials were determined to hold the Western Empire together.

Although at this stage about the only effective action Honorius could take against the Visigoths consisted of a decree of capital punishment for the Romans who had taught the Goths shipbuilding in Spain, some sort of settlement was now possible. Ironically, the Visigoths had now decided that their main objective was a place to live within the Imperial boundaries and participation in the famous Pax Romana, an escape from war, migrations, and blood feuds. Incited by the inconsistencies of the Roman administration, they had starved in Italy and in Spain, but now they were ready to settle on the richer lands of Gaul.

It was the general Constantius, soon to be emperor, who arranged the crucial land settlement with the Visigoths. Wallia and his people occupied the province of Aquitania Secunda (the area between the Garonne and the Loire), parts

32. Dill, pp. 357-58.
of Gallia Narbonensis and Novempopulana, and the cities of Bordeaux and Toulouse, while the Romans kept Narbonne and the Mediterranean coast. Within the occupied areas, the Goths received two-thirds of the land, but the Roman provincials remained under their own government.\textsuperscript{34}

Thus by 423 a temporary settlement with all the barbarian invaders was in effect. In Gaul, the Goths, Salian Franks, and Burgundians had won recognition as "federates," and Constantius had designated the Suevi and Vandals as essentially independent federates in an effort to settle the confused affairs of Spain.\textsuperscript{35} Meanwhile, a young officer named Flavius Aetius was fighting for Rome and attracting public notice.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{34} Bury, \textit{Barbarians}, p. 105.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 114-15.
\end{flushright}
CHAPTER VII

EARLY CAREER OF AETIUS

In 408, when Alaric first took advantage of Stilicho's death to march into Italy in pursuit of his four thousand pounds of gold, he demanded an exchange of hostages as proof of good faith in the negotiations to follow. One of the proposed Roman hostages was a boy named Flavius Aetius.¹

Aetius' father was Gaudentius of Scythia, a native of Moesia in the East, about whom very little is known. Although born a Roman citizen, it is quite possible that he was of Teutonic ancestry.² The fact that he began his career in the Imperial Guard suggests he may have come from a family of substance. His talent is indicated by his rise to the position of Master of the Cavalry under Stilicho.³ Among his services to Theodosius I and Honorius were the campaigns against Arbogast and Eugenius in 394,⁴ and

² Bury, Later Roman Empire, I, 33.
³ Gregory of Tours, II, 48, 492.
⁴ Bury, Later Roman Empire, I, 160.
against paganism in North Africa in 396.\(^5\) Five years later he was serving as Count of Africa.\(^6\) Not too long thereafter he probably fell from favor along with Stilicho, but he lived long enough to witness the rise of his son to prominence. His last years were spent in Gaul, where he was killed by soldiers in 424, during the troubled period following the death of Honorius.\(^7\)

Flavius Aetius was born about 396, in the East,\(^8\) to an already prominent father and a wealthy Italian mother. Like his father, Aetius entered the Imperial Guards at an early age. Less striking physically than Flavius Stilicho, he nevertheless equalled his predecessor in energy, courage, military ability, and probably honesty.\(^9\)

Aetius' military career was interrupted by two terms as a hostage among the barbarians: the young noble spent three years with the Visigoths in the time of Alaric and Ataulf,\(^10\) and some years with Rugila, king of the

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7. Lot, Pfister, and Ganshof, p. 75.


The future commander of the Roman Army in the Western Empire used this time wisely, befriending some rising leaders among his hosts and learning much about men who would one day be his allies and adversaries.

Aetius also showed good Roman wisdom in choosing a wife. Like his father, he married a wealthy Italian woman: the daughter of Carpilio, Count of the Domestics at the Imperial Court who brought new estates to the growing holdings of the ambitious Aetius.

The years during which Aetius became a leading figure in the Western scene were, like the first years of Stilicho's career, troubled by dynastic conflicts as well as by barbarian migrations. The weak-willed Emperor engaged in an increasingly bitter struggle with his determined, ambitious half-sister Galla Placidia. Before he died in 423, Honorius managed to force Galla to flee to Constantinople with her two children. In the ensuing struggle for the vacant Western throne, Galla had the support of the Visigoths; but other factions in the West seized this opportunity to put up their own candidate, John, for the highest Imperial office. John had been Praetorian Prefect of Italy on several occasions and had occupied other important posts in the Western

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administration. His supporters naturally consisted mainly of his fellow bureaucrats, but the would-be emperor soon demonstrated his willingness to go to war against the East to protect his own position. His general position was weakened when he lost the friendship of certain elements in Italy by abolishing several judicial privileges previously enjoyed by the Christian clergy.

Galla Placidia, as might be expected, was not giving up without a fight. Her son Valentinian, the rightful heir to the throne of the West, was only six years old. Perhaps her ambition made her want to dominate Valentinian as Stilicho and Serena had dominated Honorius. But in the twenty-five years that her son was to reign, Galla had ample time to discover both her own shortcomings and the power and ability of men who would challenge her right to direct affairs of state.

Galla's powers of persuasion made John's reign a brief one. Theodosius II, the Emperor of the East, designating his cousin Valentinian as Caesar (424),

13. Theodosian Code, pp. 45 (XI, 8, 26), 210 (VIII, 8, 8-10).
grudgingly sent a strong army to establish mother and son in their rightful positions in the Western capital. This invasion force had its problems; but since John could not field much of an army, the easterners easily captured and executed him at Aquileia. Theodosius, who wanted no part of the West's problems, saw to it that Valentinian was proclaimed Augustus before the Senate at Rome (425), arranged an engagement between the new Emperor of the West and the Eastern princess Eudoxia, and temporarily occupied the Western provinces of Dalmatia, Pannonia (now mostly in Hungary), and Noricum, the better to keep barbarians away from the Eastern borders. While these events were transpiring, the Eastern soldiers sacked Ravenna, which had supported John. Galla Placidia, appointed regent for Valentinian, soon became the power behind the Western throne and maintained her influence for a dozen years (425-37).

In the midst of this restoration of the old regime, Aetius appeared in Italy. John had earlier appointed him Cura Palatii or Constable and had sent him to recruit a choice group of Huns to augment the thin Western army.

army.\textsuperscript{21} Aetius now returned with a formidable collection of Huns indeed, although the contemporary estimate of 60,000 is an exaggeration. Finding John out of the picture, Aetius showered his Asiatic friends with gifts and promises to secure their peaceful withdrawal to the Danube.\textsuperscript{22}

Aetius was shrewd enough to make his peace with the victorious party. Learning that the general Castinus, Constantius' successor as head of the Roman Army in the West, had come to a bad end because of his services to John, Aetius hastened to improve his own position in the military hierarchy. With the backing of his Hun connections, he demanded that Galla Placidia give him a new command.\textsuperscript{23} Galla hesitated. Aetius seemed to be a poor friend indeed. Yet the west needed every able soldier it could get.

By 425 the hostile East-West attitude, fostered under Honorius by Stilicho and Constantius, had supposedly disappeared.\textsuperscript{24} But in fact the new rapprochement between Theodosius and Valentinian proved to be a concord between a superior and an inferior: from 425 on, the authority of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Socrates, cited in Gibbon, II, 229-30.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Philostorgius, cited in Jones, I, 175-76.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Barker, pp. 407-08.
\end{itemize}
Constantinople overshadowed the authority of Rome, and the Western Augustus usually needed Eastern approval of his acts.\textsuperscript{25} The division of the Empire continued to work to the disadvantage of the West, inasmuch as the easterners were to contribute little effective assistance during the worst periods of crisis.\textsuperscript{26}

Galla Placidia was the connecting link between the critical reigns of Honorius and Valentinian. As the "daughter, sister, wife, and mother of emperors,"\textsuperscript{27} she now held vast powers in the West, especially since Theodosius II in Constantinople was increasingly occupied with problems of his own. With clear memories of Stilicho, she cannot have supported Aetius with enthusiasm.\textsuperscript{28} But needing his services, she compromised\textsuperscript{29} (but put him well out of sight) by appointing him Praetorian Prefect of Gaul.\textsuperscript{30}

Aetius soon justified his appointment by scoring important successes against barbarians who had been wandering freely since Stilicho's time. In 425 he halted a Gothic threat to the strategic city of Arles; the

\begin{quoting}
25. Lot, Pfister, and Ganshof, pp. 53-54.
\end{quoting}
surprised Visigothic king chose to make a cordial peace treaty with Rome in the following year. Moving deeper into Gaul, the Roman general drove invading Franks back across the Rhine (about 428). These Roman victories heartened the Gallic provincials, and Aetius won personal popularity.

But he had only begun to fight. Securing the post of Master of the Horse in Gaul in 429, he prepared to strike even farther afield. In 430, he carried his war as far as the Danube provinces of Rhaetia and Noricum, where he defeated the attacking Juthungi. Promoted to the rank of Master of Both Services the same year he returned to his Gallic campaign and inflicted another defeat (431?) on a part of the Franks, this time at Helesme or Vicus Helenae, halfway between Tournai and Cambrai. Although the Franks continued to penetrate southward into Gaul, Aetius eventually came to a satisfactory understanding with them: in exchange for Aetius' patronage and support, the Franks were to serve as federates. This agreement was to be of major importance in the campaign against Attila (451). Even after Aetius' death (454), the Franks were to continue

to serve as federates of the Empire. After this encounter with the Franks at Helesme, Aetius conducted, early in 432, another rapid campaign along the Danube in Noricum.

The military reputation won on these lightening campaigns secured Aetius' advancement, just as similar victories and glory had furthered the careers of Stilicho, Julius Caesar, and innumerable other Romans. But the rate of promotion in the Roman political and military hierarchy depended partly on the strength of any aspirants' main rivals. Stilicho had been fortunate enough to have his superiors gradually removed by natural processes. Aetius, like Julius Caesar, had to help nature along.

At first it appeared that Felix, a successful general who enjoyed more of Galla Placidia's favor than did Aetius, would control affairs at Ravenna. Felix was Master of Both Services during the years 425-29, held the consulship in 428, and had won the title of Patrician. But Aetius in some unknown fashion outmaneuvered Felix, and the latter lost his job in 429. In 430, while Aetius was in Italy between campaigns, Felix perished in a "military tumult"; Aetius was probably responsible for the incident.

34. Lot, p. 313.
A far greater threat to Aetius' ambitions was Boniface, Count of Africa since 422. Boniface had apparently won Galla Placidia's friendship by steadfastly supporting the claims of young Valentinian III against John and Castinus (423-25). Boniface, however, at first the devout friend of Saint Augustine, was slowly slipping: he married an Arian woman, had their first child baptized as an Arian, and subsequently took one or more mistresses. In 427 he refused to report in person, as ordered, to the government at Ravenna. His refusal led to a period of civil war. It is probable that this order originated with Felix, although rumor credited Aetius with an elaborate plot against Boniface.

In any case, Boniface, though he realized the weakness of his position, opposed manfully the expedition sent to capture him. When neither side could gain any advantage, both looked for aid from outside. In May, 429, either Boniface or his opponents, or possibly both, called in the Vandals from Spain.

The Vandals were happy to oblige. Gaiseric, illegitimate but brilliant, had only recently become their

39. Bury, Barbarians, p. 120. Lot, Pfister, and Ganshof, p. 55.
king. He now hastened to transfer his people to North Africa, where many of the Moorish inhabitants agreed to join his armed force. Gaiseric further strengthened his position by shrewdly exploiting religious divisions among the Roman citizens. Boniface discovered too late that the Vandals intended to help themselves to a large portion of his domains. Defeated in pitched battle, the Roman leader held only the cities of Carthage, Hippo Regius, and Cirta. It was while he was being besieged in Hippo Regius that Saint Augustine, who was present in the city, died (430). Though aided by a small force from the East, the Romans could hold out no longer, and the Vandals proceeded to devastate Roman holdings as far as Carthage.

After abandoning his position in North Africa (432), Boniface went to Ravenna where Placidia graciously named him Patrician and Master of Both Services. Aetius, who was consul for 432, was infuriated by this "unfair" recognition of Boniface's merits. A confrontation between the two most powerful men in the Western Empire was inevitable: only one soldier could be commander in chief. In a battle at Ariminum (Rimini)--the exact circumstances


are unknown—Boniface defeated Aetius, but Aetius won the war and Boniface soon died of wounds or humiliation.\(^{45}\)

Before he died, the former African leader asked that his property be given to Aetius and that his Arian wife Pelagia marry the victor, since Aetius was the only Roman worthy of her.\(^{46}\) It was a gesture worthy of a dying Caesar or Pompey. But Aetius was apparently satisfied with his first wife, who claimed royal Gothic descent and had presented her husband with two sons, Carpilio and Gaudentius.\(^{47}\)

Aetius earned the hostility of Galla Placidia by eliminating Boniface, but he was not held back for long. Although he was unable to defend his own estates in Italy, he soon secured an army of Huns sufficient for his purposes. Returning to Italy, he forced Boniface's son-in-law Sebastian into exile.\(^{48}\) Some time later the orthodox young man lost his life at the hands of the Arian Gaiseric.\(^{49}\)


\(^{46}\) Hodgkin, p. 214.


\(^{49}\) Hodgkin, p. 224.
Sebastian had been Master of Both Services, having succeeded his father-in-law. He was Aetius' last important rival: the hero of Gaul was now the ranking officer of the Western Roman Army. Aetius forced Galla Placidia to name him Patrician and to reappoint him Master of Both Services. Then he kindly decided to preserve the life of Valentinian, not because of the young emperor's worth but because of his own prudence.

Like his predecessor Flavius Stilicho, Flavius Aetius had won control of the Western Roman Empire.

50. Gordon, p. 28.
52. Gibbon, II, 270.
CHAPTER VIII

Aetius' Dominance in the West

In 432 Aetius was master of the Western Empire, but that phrase would have little substantial meaning unless he could deal effectively with the serious problems confronting the Roman government.

The new Master of the Soldiers rewarded his Hun auxiliaries by permitting them to settle in part of Pannonia, where they had camped periodically prior to 425. Aetius luckily cultivated good relations with Attila, who succeeded the old king Rugila in 434. Perhaps Aetius made the Pannonia grant—the area may still have been loosely under Eastern control—to offset the effect of the tribute which Theodosius II had been paying to Rugila since 424. Aetius' elder son Carpilio apparently went to the Hun court as a hostage at this time, but the diplomatic interchange between Ravenna and the Huns continued to be cordial. It seems that Attila even accompanied Aetius to Italy in 433. Afterwards Aetius sent the Hun statesman two Roman

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3. Cassiodorus, cited in Thompson, Attila, p. 64.
secretaries and had him designated a Master of the Soldiers in the West. 4

Aetius had cause to appreciate a ready supply of Hun recruits in the years after 432. Teutonic barbarians occupied or threatened every province of the Western Empire, and Aetius never had quite enough soldiers to fight them all at once.

The Western commander made haste to secure peace with the Vandals of Africa. On February 11, 435, the West Romans and Gaiseric concluded a treaty at Hippo, with Aetius probably responsible for the Roman position in the negotiations. By its terms, the Vandals received the province of Africa and part of Numidia (that is, modern Tunisia and northeastern Algeria) except for the city of Carthage, while in return they were to pay an annual tribute, probably of corn and oil, to Rome. 5 Gaiseric agreed to send his son Hunneric to Rome as a hostage for the security of Mauretania (Morocco and northwestern Algeria), which the Romans reoccupied.

During the next few years, while Ravenna was busy devising relief measures for Mauretania, Gaiseric was quietly eliminating possible rivals back home. In 439 he


felt secure enough to suddenly seize Carthage. Once in possession of its splendid naval facilities, Gaiseric was able to send out raids all over the Mediterranean, even to the Aegean, and temporarily to hold Corsica and Sardinia.

The Vandals were to continue to harass the Roman Empire until long after the collapse of the Western Imperial government: not until the sixth century were "Roman" troops, easterners sent by the Emperor Justinian, able to reconquer the territories seized by Gaiseric. Boniface in 429 had had adequate troops, sufficient naval forces, and skill enough to defend all the Western territories in North Africa from the Vandals, had he chosen to do so. Aetius, on the contrary, could not spare any soldiers or ships for an African campaign until 446, when Gaiseric was firmly in control of his African acquisitions. Fortunately, Aetius occasionally succeeded in restraining the Vandals by outwitting them in diplomatic affairs.

Unable to contest the barbarian occupation of North Africa, Aetius devoted most of his attention to affairs in Gaul and Italy. The latter enjoyed temporary safety after the Vandal treaty of 435, but Aetius' plan for the

pacification of the Gallic provinces required vigorous campaigns west of the Alps and Rhine.

One trouble spot in Gaul was Armorica, where the Bagaudae represented a serious threat to the authority of Valentinian III. ("Bagaudae" is a Celtic word meaning "the valiant.") Oppressed peasants, deserters from the Roman Army, and even curiales fleeing from the cities, as well as common criminals, had long been banding together into large groups of highwaymen who terrorized the Gallic countryside and raided the smaller cities. As early as A.D. 284 they were strong enough to revolt against the Imperial government; by the fifth century they were a constant, important factor in Western military affairs. In 407, during the Stilicho regime, they had virtually gained control of the Loire River basin, but during Aetius' time their stronghold was Armorica, where they received a steady stream of new recruits from among the numerous refugees from Britain. In 435 Armorica attempted to throw off the yoke of Valentinian's administration. But Aetius' subordinate, Litorius, was able to break the back of the revolutionary movement in the same year, although sporadic fighting continued until 437.


While Litorius dealt with disgruntled Romans in western Gaul, Aetius himself campaigned (436) against Teutonic troublemakers near the eastern border of the province. Masses of Burgundians, dissatisfied with their holdings in the Alpine foothills, were pressing to the south and west, toward the richer lands occupied by the Visigoths. The Master of the Soldiers effectively prevented any devastating interbarbarian war by decisively defeating the Burgundians and driving them into the mountains of Savoy. Meanwhile, an underhanded attempt by the Goths, under their king Theodoric I, to seize the city of Narbonne, failed due to the heroics of Aetius' faithful assistant, Litorius, and the sudden return of the Roman General in Chief with his army of Huns. After an unpleasant encounter with Aetius' Asiatic horde, the Visigoths were happy to return to their own lands.12

The period of shocked quiet which followed these operations in Gaul afforded Aetius time to travel to Italy to assume the consulship for the year 437. Valentinian III reflected the new optimism in the West by vacationing in Constantinople, then returning to Ravenna with a blushing bride, Eudoxia, daughter of Theodosius II of the East. In the same year, Valentinian began to rule in his own right

on reaching the mature age of eighteen. Aetius took advantage of this occasion to extend his influence with the young Emperor: the brilliant soldier began to replace Galla Placidia as policy maker for the West. The general's numerous supporters in the Senate even requested (438) that he be given a third consulship as a further reward for his military successes.  

As a matter of fact, Aetius had to leave Italy in considerable haste before his second term as consul had expired. While the Master of the Soldiers was absent in Italy, Litorius upset the precarious peace in Gaul by leading Aetius' Hun troops in a pointless, disastrous attack on Toulouse, probably with the idea of winning some military glory for himself. Aetius, returning hurriedly to Gaul, managed to conclude a lasting truce with the Goths (439), and Theodoric won the approval of many Gallo-Romans by arranging for a complete classical education for his sons.  

Although affairs in Gaul had thus taken a brighter turn, Aetius had still to deal with his most treacherous opponents, the Vandals. Back in Italy in 440, with Gaiseric and his powerful new fleet threatening the Italian

14. Theodosian Code, p. 6 (Minutes of the Senate).
Peninsula, Aetius in defense was obliged to lead his Gallic army as far south as the Ravenna coast. Fortunately, the threat did not materialize. Aetius would have hesitated to risk his Gallic forces in a battle against Vandal pirates: his army constituted the only effective field forces of the Western Empire. Valentinian's frenetic efforts (apparently fruitless) to raise an Italian defensive force, including the re-establishment of capital punishment for concealment of deserters, reveal the depopulated and almost defenseless state of the home province.

Aetius, however, was still fully capable of defeating the Vandals through diplomacy. About 442 Theodoric, with an eye to improving his own position, worked out some sort of alliance with Gaiseric. But Aetius was able to break up this alliance by hinting to Gaiseric that his son Hunneric might be permitted to marry a daughter of Valentinian III if the Vandals behaved themselves.

Because of the vastly improved situation in Gaul, the year 442 also witnessed Aetius' "barbarian settlement."

The Master of the Soldiers attempted to regularize Gallic affairs by recognizing the virtual independence of the Visigoths in Aquitania, by settling colonies of Alans at Valence and Orleans as federates, and by continuing the Burgundians in Savoy and the Salian Franks around Tournai in federate status. Finally, Aetius secured a new treaty with Gaiseric. 19

Aetius sought a modus vivendi for the Roman and Teutonic inhabitants of Gaul, probably with the expectation that the newcomers would eventually be absorbed into the established population of the Western Empire. Under his settlement the Visigoths were recognized as hospites, or "guests," rather than foederati, but the Roman government still expected them to protect the Bordeaux area from Saxon pirates. A Visigothic chief, his family, and his followers settled on each "large domain" or great estate, receiving two-thirds of the arable land, one-third of the slaves, and a share in the common woods and pastures of the estate. 20

The Burgundians, who had been federates since about 405, now received a permanent place in Sapaudia (Savoy), apparently on terms similar to those granted the Visigoths. Like the Visigoths, they later provided large contingents

19. Piganiol, pp. 505-06.
for Aetius' patchwork army. The Alamanni, another federate people, were allowed gradually to occupy the Burgundians' old territory on the left bank of the upper Rhine.

Aetius' achievements in Gaul, however, did not magically restore the unity of the Western Empire. In 446 Aetius, consul for the third time, received a piteous plea for aid from the Britons, who were succumbing to Anglo-Saxon invaders. But Aetius was unable to help. Within a few years Britain was completely lost to the barbarians. During the same period, a new rising of the Bagaudae won independence and nominal federate status for Amorica, and the Franks, despite dynastic problems, continued to penetrate into Gaul as far south as the Somme Valley. In addition, ravaged Spain and most of North Africa were only nominally controlled by the government at Ravenna.

Nevertheless, Aetius' successful defense of Italy and his settlement in Gaul provided a sound basis for the

continuation of the core of the Western Empire; future efforts might recover Spain and North Africa.

Social and economic conditions in the West continued to deteriorate during the period of relative quiet after 442. When a major famine struck Italy in 450, Aetius sponsored an edict restraining the poor from selling their children into slavery in order to obtain money for food. Some citizens stole the ornaments from public buildings and from tombs for similar reasons.27 The Imperial government continued to issue edicts against city officials who fled to the great landowners, to make futile attempts to punish exacting magistrates who represented the senatores, and even to suspend or remit public taxes and private debts in the most devastated areas of the West.28 But these measures were of little avail since the senatores who forced most of the tax remissions continued to act as Praetorian Prefects in the West. Inefficiency and chicanery persisted.29

Aetius' main concern, however, was still the defense of the Western Empire. Administrative abuses were temporarily forgotten in 451 as Gaul faced a grave new danger: the advance toward the Rhine of Attila and his Huns.

Thus far Aetius had himself kept on good terms with Attila through the skillful use of embassies and occasional money payments. Moreover, the Roman general had many friends among the Huns, some of whom he was later able to retain for service against Attila.  

But the Eastern Empire, closer to the Hun territories north of the Danube, had less success. The humiliating Peace of Anatolius (443) had increased the Eastern tribute payments to Attila. The King of the Huns had the East virtually at his mercy: he could field an army composed of many barbarian nations and tribes besides his own inasmuch as he dominated most of the Teutonic peoples east of the Rhine and north of the Danube, including even some Franks and Burgundians. Gaiseric, King of the Vandals, aware that a substantial Eastern Army had been sent to Sicily to assist the Western Empire in a projected invasion of North Africa, persuaded Attila to invade the nearly defenseless Eastern Empire. In 446-447 the Huns ravaged nearly all of Thrace and Macedonia and defeated the hastily-recalled Eastern field army. Theodosius managed to hold Constantinople, but he had to agree to peace terms


more harsh and oppressive to the Eastern Empire than any in the previous history of his relations with the Huns. ³²

Three years later (450), Theodosius II, dying of injuries sustained in a fall from his horse, was succeeded by Marcian, an able senator and courageous general. The new Emperor was chosen by Pulcheria, Theodosius' sister, who married him, officially if not physically. Using as a pretext Marcian's refusal to continue to pay the annual tribute, Attila decided to again assault the Roman Empire. However, the initial attack, designed to take advantage of the troubled situation there, was directed at the West. ³³

Attila had three excuses for invading the West. In the first place, Valentinian's rebellious sister Honoria had in a bad moment proposed to Attila, and the Hun ruler decided to claim Gaul as his dowry. In addition, Gaiseric the Vandal and Theodoric the Visigoth had become bitter enemies. Attila now promised to come to the aid of his Vandal ally. Finally, two Frankish princes were involved in a dynastic dispute; one sought the aid of Aetius and Valentinian, while the other ran to Attila. Actually, Attila needed no excuses to invade the West.

Some scholars have depicted the struggle between Aetius and the Huns as a great contest between Europe and


Asia, between reason and brute force, between civilization and barbarism. They say that the results of the conflict assured the Teutonic future of Europe and demonstrated the common heritage of Romans and Germanic barbarians. They place the Battle of Chalons on a par with the Battle of Salamis. If the legends which cluster around this war are any indication, the inhabitants of the Western Empire considered Attila a great threat to their safety.

The Huns crossed the Rhine into Gaul in the spring of 451. Soon Metz and other cities were ablaze. Pillaging as he marched, Attila crossed the Seine and approached Orleans (June, 451). Aetius could raise only a few auxiliaries, and no legionaries, in Italy. The Gallo-Roman senatores contributed what men they had to Aetius' army; more importantly, some of them persuaded Theodoric to join the cause. Aetius sent Avitus, a prominent Gallic senator and former Praetorian Prefect, to the Goth court at Toulouse, where Theodoric pledged his aid. Other wavering barbarian groups now sided with the Romans. Aetius eventually marched against the Huns with an army

34. Bury, Later Roman Empire, I, 174-77.
35. Fuller, I, 299.
36. Bury, Later Roman Empire, I, 177.
37. Sidonius, p. 147.
38. Ibid., pp. 149-51.
composed of Gallo-Romans, Visigoths, Armoricans, Swiss (Breones), Saxons, Burgundians, Alans, Huns, Franks, and various lesser elements.  

Halted short of Orleans by this motley force, Attila chose to decline battle until he had recrossed the Seine. The two armies met on the Campus Mauriacus, near Troyes. The ensuing conflict has been inaccurately referred to as the "Battle of Chalons" for fifteen hundred years.  

Attila pitted his Ostrogothic auxiliaries against Aetius' Visigoths in a wild cavalry battle: the Huns scorned the compact battle order of the Gallo-Romans, which they regarded as a sign of fear. Aetius placed his Alan horsemen, suspected of treachery, in the middle of his battle line. (In fact, the Alans, nomads possibly related to the Huns, changed sides during the bloody, all-day battle.) The "Roman" army emerged victorious, largely because of Visigothic heroism. Theodoric was killed, but his son Torismond survived to be hailed as King of the Visigoths in his turn. 

Both armies fortified their camps during the night after the battle. Aetius wished to besiege the Huns, but

the Visigoths were restless and the Roman general wanted to keep them under firm control. Perhaps Aetius was glad that most of the "Roman" casualties were barbarians. At any rate, the Master of the Soldiers persuaded Torismond to lead his followers back to Toulouse immediately lest his brothers dispute his right to rule. Attila retreated across the Rhine, pursued by Aetius' Frankish troops.  

At the Campus Mauriacus, according to legend, the spirits of the fallen warriors continued the battle in the air.

Apparently Aetius feared a too-powerful Visigothic state as much as he feared the Huns. Yet his warning to Torismond concerning possible revolts in the Goth kingdom was a shrewd observation. After only two years on the throne, Torismond was strangled by his brothers.

J. F. C. Fuller, the noted student of military history, has theorized that Aetius visited Attila on the night following the battle to arrange for the "orderly retreat" of the Huns and to arrange for their aid, should it be necessary, against the Visigoths. Other scholars have claimed that the "Battle of Chalons" was not really a

42. Gibbon, II, 282-87.
43. Bury, Later Roman Empire, I, 178.
44. Jordanes, p. 111.
45. Gregory of Tours, II, 48, 492.
46. Military History, I, 297.
crucial moment in Western history: Attila was already in retreat, and even a decisive victory would not have enabled him to establish any lasting Hun domination of Europe. These writers consider the Battle of Nedao (454), where Attila's successors tore apart his hard-won kingdom, a much more significant event. Nevertheless, the great battle near Troyes captured the imagination of contemporaries, while the shadowy figures of Attila, Theodoric, and Aetius still hold the interest of the historian.

Aetius was careful to secure for himself the large amount of booty captured from the Huns after the battle. He presented a five hundred-pound gold service dish to Torismond, probably as a momento of their great victory on the Seine.

47. Bury, Barbarians, pp. 150-51.
CHAPTER IX

DEATH OF AETIUS

The Western Roman Empire had not seen the last of Attila. Early in 452, after again demanding that Valentinian hand over Honoria and her dowry of Gaul, he suddenly crossed the Alps into Italy, capturing and razing the city of Aquileia before continuing southward. Verona, Padua, Milan and Pavia, along with less important towns, fell to the Huns.

Aetius had dismissed his Gallic army, and the various federates were not obligated to serve outside their own provinces. Valentinian fled from Ravenna to Rome while the Master of the Soldiers, unable to defend Italy, prepared to spirit the young emperor away to Gallia Narbonensis.

A famous, obscure incident, which greatly strengthened the authority of the papacy, was instrumental in the preservation of Italy. An embassy, composed of Pope Leo I and two prominent senators, met with Attila and persuaded him to leave Italy. According to tradition, Saints Peter and Paul, appearing heavily armed at the conference,

1. Ibid., II, 287-92.
frightened Attila back across the Danube. Apparently, however, famine and plague among the Hun troopers, along with the threat of an Eastern army which Marcian had sent across the Danube to destroy Attila's base, had some influence on the hasty retreat of the Asiatic horde. Attila's heterogeneous empire broke up soon after his death in the following year.

Aetius survived the great Hun leader, his ablest opponent, by only a year. In 450 he had had to force his best general, Majorian, into temporary retirement on discovering a plot to marry Majorian to Valentinian's younger daughter Placidia. Had the plot succeeded, Majorian would have become Valentinian's heir, while Aetius' surviving son Gaudentius would have lost any chance to become emperor. Subsequently, the Romans broke off the pretended engagement of the elder daughter, Eudoxia, to Gaiseric's son Hunneric, and Aetius decided that Gaudentius should marry her as soon as possible to strengthen his claim to the throne.

4. Fuller, I, 298.
7. Lot, p. 208.
But Aetius and Gaudentius were not the only ambitious individuals in the West. Petronius Maximus, a member of the house of the usurper Magnus Maximus against whom Stilicho had fought in 388, had gained a taste for power as a prominent senator. Although he had great respect for Aetius' ability, Maximus may have coveted the emperorship for himself: an ancient author accuses him of attempting to destroy the great general's influence with the Emperor by hinting to the addled Valentinian that Aetius intended to seize the throne for himself.9

Whatever the involvement of Maximus, Valentinian was tiring of Aetius' tutelage. Since Galla Placidia's death in 450 the Emperor's closest confidant had been an ambitious palace eunuch named Heraclius, who encouraged Valentinian's growing alienation from Aetius just as Olympius had turned Honorius against Stilicho in 408. Overtaken by a false sense of security after the retreat of the Huns and fearful of Aetius' great prestige, the Emperor decided to dispense with the services of his commander in chief. When Aetius arrived at Rome to urge the marriage of Gaudentius and Eudoxia, Valentinian was well prepared.10


On September 21, 454, he and his eunuchs stabbed Aetius to death while the Master of the Soldiers was reckoning the amount of taxes collected during the year. Many of Aetius' companions were also killed, among them a close friend, the Praetorian Prefect Boethius, ancestor of the author of the *Consolation of Philosophy*. When Valentinian asked a prominent Roman what he thought of the assassination of Aetius, the man replied: "You have cut off your right hand with your left."

Revulsion swept the Western public, the Senate turned against Valentinian, and even opponents of Aetius were shocked. Maximus, twice consul and the most prominent senator, became the focal point of a new plot. Valentinian was foolish enough to accept some of Aetius' old soldiers into his personal escort. Maximus apparently persuaded two of these "barbarians," one of them Aetius' son-in-law, to murder the Emperor in plain view of the


No one made any effort to protect Valentinian (March 16, 455).\textsuperscript{17}

In this way, the ablest general and the recognized head of the Western Roman Empire were removed almost simultaneously. The Theodosian House, already extinct in the East, ended in the West, while the emperorship lasted only two decades longer.\textsuperscript{18} After the events of 454-455, no mere distinction of the barbarians would have sufficed to preserve the Empire in the West.\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} Hodgkin, p. 227.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Prosper, cited in Bury, \textit{Later Roman Empire}, I, 182.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid., I, 182-83.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Gibbon, II, 298-99.
\end{itemize}
CHAPTER X

COLLAPSE IN THE WEST (455-476)

The disasters of the years 408-410 were repeated in the period after 455. Maximus, the new Emperor of the West, discovered, like Honorius, that more than pride was required for successful execution of the highest Roman office. A far abler man, Gaiseric the Vandal, hurried to take advantage of the confusion. Repudiating his previous treaties with Rome on the grounds that they had been made with Aetius and Valentinian personally, he appeared at the mouth of the Tiber with the Vandal fleet within three months after the accession of Maximus. The frightened Emperor discovered his own shortcomings as a soldier: his Burgundian mercenaries seem to have betrayed the city to the Vandals and to have joined in the systematic sack which followed. Maximus himself met death and mutilation at the hands of the Roman mob--for a moment the Romans were more barbaric than the barbarians--while trying to flee from the city; Valentinian's widow and daughters, along with Aetius'

son Gaudentius,\textsuperscript{4} survived to sail to Carthage as "guests" of the Vandals. The cynical Gaiseric even claimed Valentinian's Italian properties and Aetius' estate by reason of the prisoners he held.\textsuperscript{5}

While the Vandals were assaulting Italy, Gaul gradually slipped away from the Empire. Saxons, Franks, Alamanni, and Visigoths claimed any territory within reach. Avitus, the prominent Gallic senator and a friend of Aetius, claimed the emperorship with the support of the Visigoths and the Assembly of Gaul. But the Goths were too busy in Spain, attempting to add the Iberian Peninsula to their possessions, to support Avitus, while the Italian senatores were openly hostile to him. Hence Count Ricimer, half-Suevi, half-Visigoth, was quickly able to dispose of the new emperor (456),\textsuperscript{6} and to set up his own Augustus, Majorian (457-61), once a chief subordinate of Aetius. Majorian typified the last vestiges of the old Roman spirit in the West.\textsuperscript{7} However, his very courage and determination made him a threat to Ricimer: the barbarian general shed few tears when his Emperor died under mysterious circumstances. Ricimer was then free to make and unmake emperors

\textsuperscript{4} Lot, p. 208.

\textsuperscript{5} Bury, \textit{Later Roman Empire}, I, 243.

\textsuperscript{6} Victor Tunnenensis, cited in Gibbon, II, 304-11.

\textsuperscript{7} Theodosian Code, cited in Bury, \textit{Later Roman Empire}, I, 30.
at will, and he did. Briefly, Marcellinus and Aegidius, both former officers of Aetius, held parts of the West in defiance of Ricimer--the Eastern government would send no forces against the rebels on behalf of a barbarian puppet-master--but Ricimer arranged violent deaths for both the rebellious generals. Not much later, however, the king-maker did manage to secure some Eastern help against Gaiseric.

Even so, the barbarians continued to dismember the Western Empire. After 472, when Ricimer and his last "shadow-emperor" died, no Western ruler had any more real support than the local obedience which could be exacted by his barbarian mercenaries. Finally, in 476, a barbarian officer named Odovacar deposed the last so-called "emperor" and neglected to appoint any new Roman Augustus. In the twenty years since the death of Valentinian III, nine emperors had ruled and disappeared. Odovacar accepted from the Eastern government the title of Patrician, but he became in effect an independent King of Italy. Although Odovocar retained some aspects of Roman Government, uncontrolled barbarian settlers had now effectively extinguished the unity of Western Europe. The year 476 is generally recognized as marking the end of the Western Roman

Empire. The destruction a few years later of Odovacar and his Hun followers by Theodoric and the Ostrogoths was only a change of masters in a fairly sizable Mediterranean kingdom.  


PART TWO

MEN AND MEASURES
A MILITARY PROBLEM

Considering the individualistic nature of much of Graeco-Roman historiography, it is not surprising to find two figures such as Stilicho and Aetius in large measure dominating a half-century in the history of the Roman Empire. Nor is the historian shocked to find extremes of abject flattery and bitter denigration of each of these individuals in the scanty surviving sources of their period. Modern interpretations of the actions of Aetius and Stilicho sometimes contain rather strong traces of the ancient evaluations.

A slightly different way of examining the deeds and purposes of ancient personalities can be suggested by a paraphrase of a famous statement: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto the times the things that are of the times." The problem is to decide on the one hand to what extent Stilicho and Aetius were acting as influential, even revolutionary individuals, and on the other hand to what extent they were acting within the framework and under the influence of earlier Roman practice, law, and history.
According to J. B. Bury, Stilicho was a semi­barbarian who signally failed to defend the Western Empire and was especially at fault in permitting relatively weak barbarian forces to invade Italy: the Western general is criticized for provoking a crippling East-West dispute when he should have co-operated with Constantinople and should have "struck Alaric mercilessly." Public opinion, in Bury's view, rightly turned against Stilicho, and after his death good East-West relations were restored.¹

J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, discussing Aetius, has claimed that no general capable of ceding a part of Pannonia to the Huns could really be loyal to the Western Empire, whatever his gallant services in Gaul. In Wallace-Hadrill's opinion, Aetius was a feudal magnate whose actions were in defense of his own family and senatorial class: he could with a clear conscience use Hun troops to smash a peasant uprising, then allow the Huns to devastate Italy in order to keep the Emperor Valentinian weak, or lead the Visigoths against the Huns while regarding the destruction of the Goths as advantageous for the senatores. Wallace-Hadrill does admit that Aetius' contemporaries thought of him as a good "Roman."²

These interpretations are clearly at variance with the general tone of the historical narrative portion (Part One) of the present paper. In order to understand the seemingly haphazard course of events in the years A.D. 395-476, it is necessary to examine the historical setting in which these events occurred.

In the first place, one must accept the fact that Stilicho and Aetius were professional soldiers in a society which depended for its unity and security on the proper disposition and use of the greatest professional army produced by the ancient world. The Roman Army from the third century on not only threatened upon occasion the safety of the Empire, but preserved the Empire and protected it from its external enemies. When Bishop Ambrose in his Funeral Oration on Theodosius I urged the Roman Army, commanded by Stilicho, to support the young Emperors Arcadius and Honorius, he was well aware that a substantial portion of the Army, under Arbogast and Eugenius, had fought only five months before to destroy the authority of the Theodosian House. As is so often the case, personal leadership was crucial, and winners (Arcadius and Honorius) made use of the remnants of losers' forces.


By the fifth century, mere survival against outside invaders occupied the minds and demanded the talents of the Roman leaders. Stilicho gave some time and thought to devising corrective economic and social measures, while Aetius devoted almost no energy to solving non-military problems. Although Aetius possessed more lands and a more secure place in the Senate than Stilicho, he was also more purely a professional soldier. It was as "the great safeguard of the Western Commonwealth and the terror of Attila" that Aetius won support in the Senate. The use of the term "Western Commonwealth" in this connection suggests the importance of the Pax Romana as a motive for preserving the Empire.

An able young scholar has recently suggested that modern students of ancient history have overlooked the important influence of the "military mind" in the Later Roman Empire. In his view, the mentality of the soldier controlled and shaped the Roman state from the third century on. The innovations of Diocletian and Constantine, he argues, were less the result of Eastern precedent than of ordinary military policy: the love of precedent and dependence on rank and hierarchy in the Later Empire were a natural outgrowth of the Roman military experience.

Seen in this perspective, some of the deeds of Aetius and Stilicho take on slightly different meanings or significance from the interpretations often given by modern students. After making allowance for personal ambition, the conflicts between Stilicho and Rufinus, Aetius and Felix, and Aetius and Boniface become power struggles in a special sense: each leader strives to unify affairs under one chief officer—himself. We can understand why Stilicho preserved Alaric and destroyed Radagaisus, the leader of the barbarian invasion of Italy in 405-406: the former could be of use within the Framework of the Empire, while the latter merely represented a challenge to Stilicho's authority. Mascezel, who conquered North Africa on behalf of Stilicho in 398, died for similar reasons. And Stilicho's sudden decision in 407 to abandon the Illyricum expedition in favor of a march to Gaul was provoked not by the barbarian invasion, which Stilicho could eventually handle, but by the rise of the usurper Constantine.

Similarly, the love of precedent can be seen in Stilicho's and Aetius' dealings with the barbarians. Despite the practical necessity for some sort of accommodation, the use of barbarians by fourth century emperors, especially Theodosius I, began a trend which Stilicho and Aetius carefully followed as well.

Both Stilicho and Aetius were wealthy in a sense. Stilicho probably exacted generous "contributions" from his
"supporters" and Aetius inherited large estates. Yet Stilicho is described as "the man who was more moderate than any other who bore rule in that time," and no source accuses Aetius of misappropriating funds or of using his own wealth against the emperor.

Apparently Aetius and Stilicho used their wealth for military purposes. We know that Serena, Stilicho's wife, could not afford to buy the expensive town house of a certain senator, although Stilicho had probably stolen the massive gold plates from the doors of the temple to Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill. Stilicho accepted donations of property from prominent Romans and used the proceeds to hire barbarian troops; and he kept a close watch on officials responsible for military financial matters. He confiscated estates after Gildo's rebellion in Africa (398), but seems to have avoided otherwise punishing the most prominent rebels, and in the same way he worked to reconcile the prominent supporters of the usurpers Arbogast

12. Ibid., p. 20 (I, 7, 3).
13. Ibid., p. 258 (IX, 40, 19).
and Eugenius (395). Aetius must certainly have used part of his personal fortune to hire Huns and other auxiliaries, but this is not enough evidence on which to identify him as a "feudal magnate." By Aetius' time, even more than in Stilicho's period, the Western Roman Army consisted of anyone who would fight for the Empire.

In A.D. 400 the Eastern Empire could afford to massacre its Teutonic auxiliaries and turn to a "citizen army." The East had a growing population and hence a good selection of "citizen" recruits, even though some of the "citizens" were no more Romanized than the Germans. But the growing rift between the Eastern and Western Empires prevented the West from drawing on the vast human resources of the East. There were various underlying reasons for this alienation: linguistic differences, differences of living conditions and temperament, and a suppressed hatred among Easterners of all the all-conquering Roman West. Combined with Eastern prejudices against "Teutonic barbarians," these factors of discord seriously weakened Eastern desire to render timely aid to the West after 395. In 406 and later this lack of


15. Haywood, p. 100.

assistance became a fatal flaw in the Empire. By the sixth century Graeco-Roman cultural unity had suffered the same fate as East-West political unity. The Greek language triumphed in all affairs in the East while it fell completely out of use in the West.

Natural cultural divisions were reinforced by the critical problem of succession to the throne of the Roman Empire. The system of division and succession by election or association devised by Diocletian collapsed within his own lifetime. The optimistic association system, in which a ruling Augustus appointed his ablest subordinate as Caesar or Vice-Emperor and eventually retired in his favor, soon gave way to the more natural method of hereditary succession. But the idea of division of the Empire, designed to avoid placing too much responsibility on the shoulders of one man, remained to provide endless civil wars, usurpations, and internal dissensions which fatally weakened the defenses of the Empire. Theodosius I had two incompetent sons, and the division of the Empire between them in 395 continued to the end of the Western Empire. If any one immediate cause for the political and military collapse of the West can be singled out, the

18. Ibid., p. 170.
19. Ibid., pp. 107-08.
East-West division under Theodosius' successors must rank as the prime candidate.

The Western Empire was able to successfully absorb small groups of Teutonic invaders until 406, when unmanageable bodies of barbarians crossed the Rhine. But virtually all the mass movements of Teutons were directed against the West: even the Visigoths and Ostrogoths, who originally crossed the Danube, eventually settled in the West.

As a matter of fact, the West needed these "barbarians" to bolster its sagging population. But the Germans had to be absorbed into the general Western population if Western leaders were to restore the old "citizen army" on the basis of the new strength of a population of Romans and Romanized Germans.

German barbarians under even nominal control of the Western Empire could fit into Western society without difficulty in most respects, and they were in many cases anxious to become "Romans." They were almost pathetically eager to preserve the Roman land and agricultural system, and except for their Arianism (witness the significant

21. Ibid., p. 121.
exception of the Franks) they were easily absorbed into the general populace.  

In their turn, the Roman military leaders of the fifth century—in the West, of course—were willing to compromise with the barbarians, as were some of the senatores. Although some of these "compromises" perhaps suggest feudalism, Stilicho and Aetius were "devoted to the grandeur of Rome." 

It is possible that the irruption of the Germans into the Western Empire was inevitable. In the fourth and fifth centuries larger groups of tribes were organizing, and population pressure apparently made the depopulated Western lands increasingly attractive, and a natural movement occurred as overflow population from the north rushed into the Western population "vacuum." 

But if Stilicho and Aetius favored a fusion of Roman and Teutonic nationalities within the Empire, they were careful to secure the dominance of Roman officers over the barbarians and to maintain the supremacy of the Imperial government, whenever possible, over the barbarian

24. Fuller, I, 277.
leaders. Considering the paucity of regular troops in the West, Aetius and Stilicho deserve credit for holding the Western Empire together at all. 27

CHAPTER XII

THE STRUGGLE WITH "BARBARIANS"

Stilicho and Aetius found it desirable from a military point of view to incorporate large numbers of Teutonic barbarians into the Empire, but the important question is whether or not the Empire could survive such massive penetrations from beyond its borders.

Generally speaking, the Germans serving in the regular Roman Army in the West remained faithful to the Empire even in the fifth century. It was rather the federates, large groups of barbarians attached to the Roman Army but serving under their own leaders, who were main source of trouble for Aetius and Stilicho. ¹

If the western Empire had to make use of these groups of federated barbarians, it had also to find some satisfactory means of integrating them into the Imperial scheme of things. The "unyielding conservatism" of some Romans in their struggle against "barbarian infiltration" made the situation unstable and dangerous.

Demosthenes, the opponent of Philip of Macedon, had once chided the Greeks: "You are no better than a barbarian trying to box. Hit him in one spot, and his hands

¹ Lot, p. 236.
fly there; hit him somewhere else and his hands go there."² Demosthenes might have been describing the Later Roman Empire.

At the end of the fourth century, the Western Empire was a "hollow husk" against which the barbarians across the Rhine and Danube began to exert continual pressure.³ The first permanent breach in the Imperial defenses received official recognition when in October, 382, Theodosius I inaugurated his policy of "peaceful coexistence" with the Visigoths, establishing them upon Roman soil as "federates" on condition that they serve the Empire as soldiers, under the leadership of their own chief, when needed. Perhaps Theodosius later promised Alaric a high office in the Imperial bureaucracy, further complicating the Empire-federate relationship. The Visigothic revolt of 395 was at least partially a reflection of Alaric's disappointment at not receiving such a post after the death of Theodosius.⁴

The Visigoths constituted the first large federate settlement in Roman territory. Since they were not directly under Roman officers nor exposed to Roman


³. Lot, pp. 186, 236.

⁴. Bury, Barbarians, pp. 60-64.
discipline, their submission to Imperial authority was largely formal. The Romans could call upon a federated people as a whole only for service in the vicinity of its allotted lands, but the federates could be required to supply military contingents for use abroad on demand of the Imperial government or when the Romans had paid a suitable sum of money to the federate chief involved. When desertion from the legions became chronic in the confused period after 408, the federates and the mercenaries recruited from them became the mainstay of the Roman Army. After about 450, when periodic pay for the regular soldiers ceased to flow out of Ravenna and regular military units began to disband on their own initiative, the federates and the bands of mercenaries in the service of powerful individuals became the only Roman Army. Stilicho's forces consisted of a hard core of regulars reinforced by substantial numbers of federates and some mercenaries. Aetius at the Battle of Chalons apparently had only federates, barbarian mercenaries, and a few men provided by the Gallic senator.

6. Ibid., I, 611-12.
7. Ibid., I, 649.
8. Ibid., I, 612-13.
Imperial officials from the time of Theodosius I to the collapse of the Western Empire were well aware of the dangers of too great dependence upon barbarian troops. But Stilicho and his successors, unwilling to denude agricultural lands of their working populations, had no choice but to draw recruits from the barbarian peoples.9

The Romans held a variety of attitudes toward these foreign nations. Barbarians were often readily accepted into the Empire on an individual basis. Fierce campaigns against marauding Teutonic tribes alternated with fads of barbarian dress at Rome and elsewhere.10 The praises for barbarian morals in the writings of Tacitus under the Early Empire had late Imperial counterparts in Orosius, who saw the Teutonic invaders of Spain settling down as farmers and cultivating good relations with the Romans there,11 and in Salvian, who compared "the rude, simple purity of the Germans" with the decay of Roman morals and public spirit12 and showed why Romans, oppressed by Imperial exactions, fled to the "chaste" Germans.13 Later, under the pressure

11. Ibid., pp. 313, 316.
of circumstances, Western Romans of the sixth century worked to reconcile Romans and Germans under the rule of Justinian, even accepting Arianism and exaggerating the past greatness of the Teutons.

The incorporation of men of various races, backgrounds, and beliefs into one community or nation was the great achievement of the Roman Empire. But even under the Republic, the peoples included in the term "Romans" were hardly a homogeneous group. Beginning in the third century B.C., many "new men" had entered the Roman polity, and Cicero later praised these "strangers" from other parts of Italy and the uncultivated but vigorous mountaineers who played a great part in Roman expansion and victory to the time of Hannibal. In fact, any attempt to isolate in Roman history a group which can be safely called "the Romans" is a hopeless task. "The Romans" were all those citizens of the Empire, and especially the Western Empire, who shared the mind of the farmer-soldier. The Teutonic "barbarians" were related to, and the equivalent of, the earliest Romans, and in this sense they were more "Roman" than many of the inhabitants of the Eastern Empire.

15. Wallace-Hadrill, pp. 33-34.
16. Piganiol, pp. 77-78.
The Germans had been in contact with the Empire long enough to see that it could offer relief from the constant wars and frequent starvation which afflicted them. They were attracted by the wealth of the Empire and the possibility of "participating in its advantages."\(^{18}\)

As we have seen, depopulation and desertion of lands in the Later Empire had seriously weakened the Western agricultural economic base. The great landlords had long utilized barbarian prisoners as farm workers, harbored deserters and runaway coloni, and resisted Imperial demands for recruits for the Army. Growing insecurity especially speeded depopulation of the frontier provinces.\(^{19}\) After about 395, the agricultural system in the West gradually collapsed. The Western Emperors, concerned over the steady loss of farm laborers and farm taxes, saw little harm in settling barbarians on vacant lands, and apparently the barbarian tribes which crossed the Rhine and Danube were able to find land sufficient for subsistence "without any serious displacement of the existing population."\(^{20}\)

In settling in the West, the Visigoths were anxious to follow "local tenurial practice," and in this way they did act as "guests" of the Romans. They speedily adopted

Latin, and by 464 they had adopted Roman law as well. Theodoric the Ostrogoth and Clovis the Frank might take their titles from Constantinople, but the Visigothic adoption of the Roman "law of nations" and "natural law" could have been the start of a more fundamental development: united by one law and included within one Imperial system, the Franks and Visigoths might have preserved with the yoke and burden of Roman law the Roman Empire which was to elude Charlemagne. One has only to remember Alaric's desire for a "Visigothic kingdom dependent upon the Empire" and Ataulf's determination to use his Gothic soldiers to make himself Restitutor orbis Romani, to realize the possibilities of a Romano-Gothic alliance. The other barbarian federates might offer similar possibilities. But the Visigothic alliance was the mainstay of the Roman West, especially after the death of Stilicho. A later Gothic writer, discussing the marriage of Ataulf and Galla Placidia as a symbol of a Roman-Visigoth entente, claimed that "when the barbarians learned of this alliance, they were the more effectively terrified, since the Empire and the Goths now seemed to be made one."

22. Katz, pp. 109, 144.
Inasmuch as Stilicho and Aetius were apparently of barbarian descent, it is not surprising to find them welcoming fellow barbarians into the Roman Army. If Aetius and Stilicho could become the foremost figures in Roman government, other Teutons might also win fame and fortune within the Empire. Although the Imperial government was obviously not in firm control of the barbarian situation during most of the fifth century, the West owes to Stilicho and Aetius that "coalition of Roman and German elements in the army which made the dismemberment of the Empire in the West less violent than it might have been."²⁵ Had these two generals been allowed to continue their "pro-German" policies, the dismemberment might never have occurred. Yet Stilicho's most severe critic among modern scholars agrees with Saint Jerone's characterization of Stilicho as semi-barbarus, claims that Stilicho and Aetius had no interest in preserving the Western Roman Empire, and says that they paved the way for the barbarian invaders by treating them as welcome guests of the Empire. He endeavors to show that the policies of Aetius and Stilicho were incompatible with the continuance of the Roman Empire because the two generals favored "individual freedom" as opposed to Roman "tyrannical universal law."²⁶

²⁵ Bury, Later Roman Empire, I, 35.
²⁶ Ibid., I, 33.
Along with the partial continuity of Late Roman and Medieval institutions, it is true that interest in religion and emphasis on individual loyalties increased. But the historian must not automatically identify individual loyalties under the later Roman Empire as "feudalism." When a young Frankish prince involved in a fierce dynastic struggle sought Roman aid, he referred to himself as an "ally of Valentinian, adopted of Aetius." There is certainly a personal element here, but to identify it as feudalism is to abuse the gift of twenty-twenty hindsight. Actually, German political institutions were essentially the same as the earliest Roman political institutions, and in neither case was feudalism the dominant element. The Visigoths proclaimed Alaric their king in a ceremony which would have been quite intelligible to the Roman soldiers who acclaimed or hailed their favorites as Emperors. If Roman law was actually "tyrannical universal law," its restrictive tendencies might be beneficially tempered by the "rough energy and freedom" which the Visigoths treasured as much as their hard-won veneer of Roman culture.

27. Arragon, pp. 80-81.
30. Ibid., p. 76.
The Roman Empire was a marriage of convenience, worth while only so long as its advantages outweighed its burdens. If the Imperial government in the Later Roman Empire was oppressive and exacting, it still held the key to the greatest gift of Rome, the Pax Romana. Only under Imperial auspices could the varied populations of the Roman world unite against external foes, and this fact almost balanced Imperial oppression. At the Battle of Chalons the Romans and the Teutons found that unity had its advantages, and that the inhabitants of the Western Empire had certain common interests. But the precarious union barely survived its creator. 31

The most important factor separating Romans and barbarians was the Arian Christian religion adopted by all the Teutonic peoples on the Rhine-Danube border except the Franks. Roman pagans despised the Teutons as mere Christians, while orthodox Roman Christians abhorred the barbarians' Christian heresy. 32 The Visigoths, for example, were initially welcomed as saviors by some Romans, only to be later condemned as Arians by the same men. 33

In the rather bleak world of the Later Roman Empire, the remnants of Classical rationalism gave way to

33. Ibid., pp. 28-29.
religious enthusiasm. This new religious devotion was both a cause and a result of the decline of Rome. "The emphasis shifted from this world to a world to come, from an attempt by man to solve his own problems to a reliance upon a higher power."  

Christianity was not just a new name for antiquity, and the "monkish outlook of retreat," reflected in Augustine's belief in the impending doom of all earthly kingdoms, heralded a period of psychological unease and political instability in Europe. 

The Visigoths, however, could hold to their own religious beliefs as tenaciously as any other nation, and their Arianism was a matter of national pride even after the Goths had become a part of the Imperial system. Since most of their neighbors in Gaul were either pagan or orthodox and intolerant, the Visigoths naturally equated religion with nationality, and conciliation of the Goths and provincials became more difficult. In short, the Goths wanted to accept most of the Roman cultural achievement, but they were determined to preserve their own religion. The Visigothic kings were particularly fond of Arianism because the sect had no papacy to interfere with civil

34. Katz, p. 53.

government. Small wonder that many Romans welcomed the advent of Justinian's Eastern troops in the sixth century. The Romans from their earliest expansion in the Mediterranean had followed a policy of religious toleration to help conciliate their foreign subjects to Imperial rule. The Visigoths would never be securely within the Roman fold unless and until toleration again became the rule in the West. While the Visigoths, Suevi and Burgundians did not persecute the Roman Christians, the Vandals in Africa certainly did, and religious persecution could and did drive a fatal wedge between the German and Roman inhabitants of the West.

One scholar has singled out ecclesiastical persecution as the cause of the breakup of the Roman Empire. If we can accept this thesis, Aetius and Stilicho appear as the devoted champions of the Imperial system. Stilicho certainly soood for toleration, and Aetius probably followed the same policy: theirs was the practical approach of soldiers as opposed to the "orthodoxy of the Court of Ravenna."


Viewed as various aspects of a practical soldier's approach to the problem of religious conflict, Stilicho's apparently contradictory actions in the religious sphere have the look of an established policy of toleration. Although Stilicho praised Saint Ambrose of Milan, his praises were those of a "statecraft Christian" landing a key political figure of northern Italy, not the hosannas of a parishioner. Naturally, Christian clerics reviled Stilicho when his tolerance stood revealed: he was himself a Christian, perhaps an Arian, and the Western ecclesiastical hierarchy favored neither toleration nor Arianism.

It is possible that by Stilicho's time no compromise position between the extremes of paganism, Christian orthodoxy, and Arianism could be found; Stilicho certainly found that no reconciliation was possible.

For many years the Altar of Victory in the Senate had been a symbol of the struggle between Christianity and paganism, and when in A.D. 382 the great senator and orator Symmachus appealed for toleration of the paganism to which he and most of his fellow senators still adhered, his plea

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41. Prudentius, II, 63.

42. Wallace-Hadrill, pp. 22-23.

43. Ibid., pp. 19-20.
upheld the great Roman tradition of tolerance as well as his own personal interests. Under Stilicho's administration the Altar reposed in the Senate, after the death and in defiance of the actions of Theodosius I. Stilicho, the practical man, was working to reconcile the pagan senators, just as he would subsequently find places in his following, political and military, for Arian Christians.

Inasmuch as Theodosius I in the year 381 had secured recognition of orthodox Christianity as the sole legal religion in the Eastern Empire, credulous souls expected a similar restriction for the West after Theodosius became sole emperor in 394. The untimely death of Theodosius the Great left the responsibility for a religious settlement for the Western Empire in the hands of the regent Stilicho, who proceeded to arrange affairs to the advantage of peace and quiet. While opposing any attempt by the pagans to regain the supremacy they had enjoyed under Arbogast and Eugenius, the late and unlamented usurpers, Stilicho forbade the demolition of existing pagan temples and thereby tacitly permitted pagan worship. He claimed that Theodosius had on his deathbed expressed a hope that religious toleration would be possible in the

44. Ibid., pp. 16-17.
future, and the upshot of the matter was Stilicho's proclamation of amnesty for the pagan supporters of Eugenius. After placing some restrictions on the judicial power of bishops in civil cases, Stilicho demonstrated an apparent willingness, partly because of financial problems in the Imperial government, to consult with the pagan Senate. These mild concessions infuriated the Christians and failed to satisfy the pagans: bitter religious factionalism continued. In 408, with Stilicho out of the way, Honorius secured the removal of all but orthodox Christians from the Imperial service. 47

DeterminedpaganscondemnedStilichoforhisChristiandestructionoftheSibyllineBooks. Thelossofthese founts of oracular knowledge, they claimed, deprived the Roman state of wise counsel in the face of the threat posed by Alaric and the Visigoths. 48 But the burning of the books stems probably from Stilicho's desire to conduct affairs in the West without the aid and hindrance of fraudulent seers. Pagan astrologers and diviners flourished at Rome in Stilicho's time, 49 in spite of stringent


measures against them promulgated under Theodosius the Great. 50

While pagans criticized Stilicho's Christianity, Christians abhorred his paganism. Stilicho tolerated pagans, and the suspicions of Christian leaders were aroused. They accused him of plotting to make his son Eucherius, rumored to be a pagan, Augustus in some part of the Empire. 51 Furthermore, Stilicho had actually dared to approve, against Christian morality, the marriage of Honorius to Thermantia, sister of the little emperor's deceased wife Maria. 52

After Stilicho's death, the ecclesiastical courts regained their former wide jurisdiction, 53 and toleration was again only a memory. 54

Aetius apparently adopted much the same practical approach to religious matters as did Stilicho. Considering his name ("Aetius" was also the name of a famous Arian theologian of the fourth century), his probable Teutonic ancestry, the Gothic ancestry of his wife, and the Arian leanings of the widow commended to his care by Boniface,

50. Piganiol, p. 491.
52. Villari, p. 69.
53. Theodosian Code, p. 32 (I, 27, 2).
Aetius most likely shared either the Arianism or the indifference of Stilicho. In the first major step of his career, Aetius supported the usurper John (423-25), who abolished the clerical privilege of trial before ecclesiastical courts and depended upon pagan Hun troops for his own salvation. Aetius, forced to deal with widespread barbarian occupation of the West, used whatever orthodox Christian, Arian, or pagan allies he could find. One of his chief subordinates, Marcellinus, who became a central figure in the West after Aetius' death, was certainly a pagan; the other main lieutenant, Litorius, was either a pagan or a trimmer. Little is known of the religious legislation in the West from 437 to 454, and Aetius apparently spent too little time at Rome or Ravenna to much influence religious affairs at court. In 445 Valentinian III ordered Aetius to enforce the Imperial decree of that year giving the support of the "secular arm" to the supremacy of the Roman see, but the effects of this order are unknown.

In general, Stilicho and Aetius seem to have played the part of politiques, subordinating their own religious

55. Ibid., p. 449 (XVI, 2, 47).
56. Barker, p. 418.
beliefs, if any, to the wider needs of the state. Until 407 the Western Empire was not required to accommodate unmanageable numbers of barbarian settlers. Consequently, Stilicho's religious policy aimed at reconciling sects existing among the Roman citizens, some of whom were of barbarian descent. Aetius was less concerned with religious legislation and more involved with practical relations between the Roman state and its Teutonic "guests." Each man dealt with religious affairs within the framework of practical policy conceived by the professional military mind and directed toward the survival of the Western Roman Empire.
CHAPTER XIII

THE PLACE OF THE SENATE

As central government in the Western Empire weakened in the course of the fifth century (395-476), the Senate, or at least the senatoriae as a class, regained some of the political influence which had fallen to the emperor and his professional army at the close of the Republican period.

Increased localism of government, in which the senatoriae or great landowners exercised virtual hegemony in their own neighborhoods, paralleled localism in language—the clear emergence of the basic elements of the "Romance Languages" dates from this period—provincial separatism and provincial economic autonomy, and "rural self-sufficiency" or subsistence agriculture.¹ The decaying cities provided little support for municipal councils burdened with constant, onerous financial demands from the Imperial government;² impoverished decurions or city councilmen fled to the country and sought the protection of powerful landlords rather than remain in the city and attempt

¹ Arragon, pp. 98-101, 124.
² Theodosian Code, pp. 342-71 (XII, 1).
to discharge their tax obligations to the emperor. Thus the senatores replaced declining municipalities as sources of political stability within each province.

The masses of the population fared little better than the city councilmen. Rising unemployment drove part of the urban population into rural districts where war, famine, and plague had already reduced the small farmer to the level of bare subsistence. Any national disaster could eliminate the narrow margin between existence and starvation: peasant farmers could choose between extinction and acceptance of dependent status on the estate of some local magnate who might successfully resist the inroads of looting usurpers or grasping Imperial financial agents.

Economic centrifugal forces, which from the second century had destroyed any illusion of Imperial unity in trade, commerce, or monetary circulation, strengthened the economic dominance of the senatores. By the fifth century, semi-manorialism administered the coup de grâce to the remnants of large-scale, inter-provincial trade; the great landlords, secure in the isolated, self-sufficient economic world of the latifundia, drew only luxury items from abroad. Large numbers of slaves freed through Christian influence merged with former freemen to constitute what was

3. Ibid., p. 383 (XII, 18, 2).

to become the class of serfs, the warp and woof of medieval manorial society.\textsuperscript{5}

The highest Imperial officials were acutely aware of the increasing power of local political and economic "Strong men": the conflict, often covert, between the senatores and the central authorities of the Western Empire, from the time of Diocletian and Constantine, is reminiscent of the prolonged struggle between the Byzantine emperors and "The Powerful," the local magnates on the East.

For a time, provincial assemblies provided some counterweight to the influence of the senatores. Under the later Empire every province theoretically had such an assembly, in which the representatives of various elements of the population could air grievances and compose petitions directed to the emperor. In the reign of Theodosius I, attendance was made compulsory for the honorati (former Imperial officials), the curiales (decurions qua tax collectors), and the most prominent landowners in each province. As this law indicates, the assembly system was breaking down.\textsuperscript{6} Honorius' reorganization of the provincial assembly at Arles in 418, an overoptimistic attempt to maintain the unity of Southern Gaul despite Visigothic

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., pp. 15, 17, 23.

settlement, 7 empowered Agricola, the Praetorian Prefect of Gaul, to compel the governors of the seven southern administrative provinces as well as the usual members, to attend the meetings. 8 Presumably, the Romans anticipated the eventual inclusion of Gothic representatives on the assembly, since the permanent, negotiated establishment of the Visigoths in southern Gaul dates from the same period as the reorganization (418-419). Honorius and his counselors undoubtedly preferred preservation of the Western Empire even through the loose federal system of provincial assemblies to gradual disintegration of the Imperial framework as the provinces independently battled wandering barbarians. Had this federal system, based on assemblies representing various elements of the provincial population, been erected throughout the West, the Western Roman Empire might have survived as a limited monarchy. 9 However, the system was feasible only where the Emperor could make it worthwhile by providing able civil servants and adequate military assistance, or where loyalty to the central government was especially strong. In most areas, the Praetorian Prefect and provincial governors were apparently little more than figureheads, since the Imperial government

was weakening; the **honorati**, or former Imperial officials, had no effective power because none was attached to their position; and the decurions or **curiales** were decreasing in numbers and influence **pari passu** with the dissolution of their cities. Where Imperial control faltered, the **senatores** were ready to fill the political vacuum.

We have already pointed out that the greatest of the **senatores** feared a strong Imperial Army more than they dreaded the barbarians. Yet the problems of local defense against barbarian invaders occasionally led isolated parts of the Empire to renounce the Emperor: Britain in Stilicho's time, and Armorica during Aetius' period of dominance, declared their independence from the Western Empire, which was giving them no help against the Saxons. Neither revolt was based on "nationalism," and both areas remained on good terms with the Empire; while Armorica even sent a contingent of troops to Aetius during Attila's invasion.10 Nevertheless, both incidents serve to illustrate the rising need for local initiative in military matters in the course of the fifth century. Only the **senatores** could efficiently meet local military needs.

Stilicho and Aetius were able, to some extent, to dominate the **senatores** because of the existence of the Senate as a compact, cohesive body. In their absence, the

Senate often demonstrated the central position it held in practice if not in theory in the Imperial Constitution. During the confused period (408-410) between the execution of Stilicho and the first sack of Rome, Alaric negotiated with the Senate rather than with Honorius, partly because of the young Emperor's unwillingness to treat with a barbarian, but also because of the great influence and prestige of the senatores and the Senate. Later in the century, Aetius' prolonged absence from Italy and his eventual assassination provided the occasion for the further resurgence of the Senate (451-476), amounting for a short time almost to a return to the Augustan dyarchy of princeps and senatus. In 454 Valentinian III actually appeared before the Senate to defend his actions in the murder of Aetius, supposedly to restrain the senators from starting an insurrection to revenge Aetius' death. Appropriately, the prominent senator Petronius Maximus engineered the assassination of the Emperor less than six months later.

The end of the Theodosian dynasty in the West (455) ushered in a period of "senatorial government" in which

11. Lot, pp. 204-05.
the emperors were drawn from senatorial ranks and created by senatorial approval. But the city of Rome, until 455 the "aristocratic headquarters" in the West despite the removal of the Imperial capital to Milan and later to Ravenna, gradually lost its status as a senatorial mecca after Gaiseric and the Vandals sacked the city. The provincial senatores preferred the security of their own estates to the perils of a pilgrimage to Rome: Sidonius, an important Gallic senator, visited the city only twice. 15 The Italian senatores seemed unable to control their own affairs, much less to lend assistance in provincial problems, and it is hardly surprising that the provincials began to take matters into their own hands. A Gallic independence party chose Avitus as emperor after the death of Maximus, acting through a mixed Roman-Goth assembly which would have been a blessing in earlier days. Two years later (457) the Gallo-Romans, Visigoths, and perhaps the Burgundians united in opposing Ricimer's first puppet-emperor, Majorian--until Majorian's senatorial background and generous motives became general knowledge. There is little doubt that the independence movement in Gaul originated with the senatores. 16 From the reign of Majorian to the end of the Western Empire, however, the

15. Jones, I, 553-54.
senatores could at best accept the Imperial candidate nominated by the barbarian troop commanders in Italy. The senatores still had power, but the Senate as a united body no longer existed.17

Under the Roman Republic, the Senate had been the axis of government from which the highest magistrates were drawn and to which most men of ability aspired. During the period of the Early Empire, the Senate looked back to the happy age of "perfect democracy" (i.e., senatorial control) which had ended with the Battle of Philippi in 42 B.C., where "monarchy defeated democracy." After the reign of Augustus (27 B.C.-A.D. 14), the term libertas, long connected with the ideal of the freedom and dominance of the Senate, came gradually to mean mere personal freedom, especially for the senators. The beneficent rule of the Good Emperors (second century A.D.) encouraged the masses of the Roman population to believe that government by a benevolent emperor was far superior to government by senatorial aristocrats. Autocracy and prosperity were easily equated in the sunny middle period of the Empire: a just, able emperor could unite the forces of all Roman citizens.

to maintain peace and ensure the employment and luxuries appropriate to each class. 18

This dream disappeared in the nightmarish revolutions of the third century and the unconcealed despotism of the fourth. By the latter half of the fourth century, anti-monarchial sentiment among Roman citizens was reflected in the Historia Augusta, a series of biographies of emperors who ruled in the years A.D. 117-284. 19 Vociferous in its praise of emperors "who supported the traditional pretensions of the Senate" and in its condemnation of anti-Senate and pro-Christian leaders, the Historia Augusta shaped and represented the ideas of many influential Romans contemporary with Stilicho and Aetius. 20 As the symbol of old-guard hopes for Imperial reform, the Senate stood for old traditions, old families, and ancient stability.

Flavius Stilicho followed a policy of consultation with, and consideration for, the Senate: Rome was still a central location where the Imperial regent could deal directly with the powerful local leaders of all parts of the West. 21 Stilicho's reconciliation of Emperor and rebellious senators (395), his acceptance of senatorial


money payments in lieu of recruits (397), his consulation with the Senate regarding the war with Gildo (398), his apparent presentation to the Senate of plans for the invasion of Illyricum (405), and his speech requesting a subsidy for Alaric (407), are examples of the implementation of this policy. Stilicho was well aware that much of his influence with the Senate was due to the existence of the army he commanded. Yet that army was fairly effective in defending the West, as Symmachus and other senators realized. Stilicho recognized the increasing importance of the senatores—the four thousand pounds of gold he requested as a subsidy for Alaric were "the annual income of a wealthy senator"—but he bore them little ill will: Lampadius, the senator who protested the subsidy, escaped unharmed and later (409) made his peace with the Visigoths.

In consulting with the Senate and occasionally heeding its advice, Stilicho was acting in the tradition of the "best Roman emperors" as selected by the Historia Augusta. His own panegyrist, the Egyptian-born Claudian, repaid numerous favors by glorifying Stilicho and comparing him favorably with Numa, the Scipios, the Catos,

24. Ibid., pp. 15-16.
Marius, and Pompey. Exhorting the Romans to emulate their ancestors, Claudian fondly hoped for the return of the Roman "golden age" (prior to 146 B.C.). Fortunately the mere humans of his own day recognized Claudian's sincerity: the Senate rewarded his exertions with a Forum statue dedicated to the "most glorious of poets." If Claudian was able enough to capture in poetry even the barest hint of his patron's ideas, there is justification for a modern appraisal: "Stilicho seemed to have admired the old Rome as much as any senator did; thus he could figure as a champion of the old way." 

Flavius Aetius had, like Stilicho, panegyrists commissioned to improve his "public image." Frigeridus and Merobaudes, both Romans of Teutonic ancestry, produced lavish paeans to Aetius, and Merobaudes could boast of an inscription erected at Rome by the Senate in recognition of his vast literary talents. We have already mentioned a contemporary's description of Aetius as "the great

29. Lot, Pfister, and Ganshof, p. 75.
30. Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum, VI, Part 1, 378, #1724.
safeguard of the Western Commonwealth," an interesting way of expressing the importance of senatorial unity and the Pax Romana.

Stilicho and Aetius realized the value of classical culture quite apart from straight publicity, however. Stilicho had his elder daughter, Maria, thoroughly educated in the classical fashion even before her marriage to Honorius; Aetius, through his senatorial crony Avitus, was certainly responsible for the education of the sons of Theodoric I, king of the Visigoths. In this way, "barbarians" might be brought within the "classical world."

A famous author of the sixth century called Aetius and his opponent Boniface the "Last of the Romans." In a sense, Aetius was less "Roman" than Stilicho: he was a great landowner, less dependent on Imperial successes than his predecessor. But Aetius was as dependent on the military support of his fellow senatores as Stilicho had ever been. We have indicated that Aetius could count on support in the Senate at Rome, and he certainly obtained from the Gallic senatores the Roman soldiers he employed.

33. Procopius, II, 27.
34. Lot, Pfister, and Ganshof, p. 75.
35. Thompson, Attila, p. 209.
at the Battle of Chalons. The Roman Senate nearly started an insurrection following his assassination; the writings of Sidonius illustrate the popularity of Aetius with the provincial landowners.\textsuperscript{36} Aetius did not, apparently, deal officially with the Senate on many occasions. Nevertheless, like Stilicho he cultivated the friendship of the senatores, and Avitus and Majorian, among others, did him good service.

Stilicho and Aetius are linked with Pompey and the senatorial champions of the first century B.C. by one other circumstance: they listened to their wives.\textsuperscript{37}

\\textsuperscript{36} Sidonius, pp. 85, 139.

\textsuperscript{37} Bury, \textit{Later Roman Empire}, I, 78. Sidonius, p. 85.
CHAPTER XIV

THE PLACE OF THE EMPEROR

Stilicho and Aetius were, as we have seen, conscious of the importance of rank and hierarchy in the military-political world of the Western Empire. Quick to destroy barbarians—Radagaisus and later the Burgundians, for example—who seriously threatened their plan of organization for the West, Aetius and Stilicho made equally strenuous efforts to utilize elements, such as the Visigoths and the senatores, which occupied a useful place on the Western scene.

The most important element in the constitution of the Western Empire, however, was the emperor himself. Theoretically, the Roman laws were the source of the emperor's authority; hence the emperor should be bound by the laws, enjoying the powers they conferred but respecting also the restrictions contained in them. In practice the power of any emperor depended on his personal ability and his strength of position vis-à-vis the Senate and army. Thus the relationship between Stilicho and Aetius and their respective emperors is of crucial importance.

Stilicho certainly made every effort to influence, even to dominate, both Honorius and Arcadius. The death of Arcadius (408) seemed to present a golden opportunity for Stilicho to gain control of the whole Roman Empire, but Stilicho's execution destroyed this last chance for effective cooperation of East and West.

Despite his frequent embroilments with the Eastern government, Stilicho never acted directly against Arcadius. While the Western general might agitate against the Eastern ministers of state, or even have an Eastern opponent (e.g., Rufinus) killed, neither his loyalty to the Theodosian house nor his sense of responsibility to the higher office of emperor would permit him to attack Honorius or Arcadius. If the latter would not have Stilicho as his principal adviser, Stilicho would draw on Eastern military resources indirectly, by the seizure of Illyricum. Apparently Stilicho even tried to justify this step on the basis of a "secret instruction" from Theodosius I. In the end, Stilicho submitted to unjust execution rather than lead his troops against the Emperor Honorius.

Aetius, like Stilicho, wished to be the most powerful figure in the Western Empire, although he was probably too realistic to hope for position and influence in the East. But he also followed, in general, Stilicho's

policy of loyalty to the House of Theodosius. His actions in support of the usurper John, although they placed him temporarily in opposition to Valentinian III, can be said to reflect the importance of the quarrel between Honorius and Galla Placidia: no military man of Aetius' ability could willingly permit a woman and her infant son to rule the Western Empire. Aetius could tolerate able subordinates like Marcellinus and Majorian, but he would be no less than the protector of Valentinian III. He would not attack Valentinian, but he would hold him in check when necessary. In the words of a writer of the following century, Aetius was "born expressly to serve the Roman state," not a particular emperor. An incompetent emperor must be tolerated but not encouraged; Aetius, like Stilicho, died because he trusted the emperor but restricted his freedom.

Aetius' policies reached even the Visigothic princes educated by Avitus at the general's command. Although Avitus and his charges realized the incompetence of Valentinian, the young Goths respected the Empire. This respect is especially noticeable when in 453 as new king Theodoric II abolished the independent Visigothic

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5. Jordanes, p. 100.
kingdom in favor of a return to federate status with Rome. This promising rapprochement ended when the Goths witnessed the rapid disintegration of the emperorship after 455: when King Eurich decided that he could rule more effectively than the shadow emperors, the Visigoths secured permanent independence. 7

Neither Stilicho nor Aetius ever acted overtly against the emperor. Whatever the plans or ambitions of these Masters of the Soldiers, Honorius and Valentinian were their superiors. In fact, the assassination of Aetius was a more decisive blow to the security and prestige of the Western emperorship than the final abdication of 476: after 455 no emperor succeeded in putting his "general" to death. 8 After the deaths of Aetius and Valentinian, the landed aristocracy furnished emperors and praetorian prefects 9 who never commanded the loyalty of more than a minority of the West Romans. The first of the new "Masters of the Soldiers," Ricimer, was virtual king, with closer affinities to Odovacar than to Aetius and Stilicho. 10

8. Bury, Later Roman Empire, I, 249, 279.
Because of their barbarian ancestry, the two great Western generals could not themselves hope to gain the emperorship: many "Romans" were unalterably opposed to any attempt by "barbarians" to rise higher than the positions of Master of the Soldiers and Patrician. For this reason, the incompetent emperors Honorius, Arcadius, and Valentinian enjoyed long reigns. In the turbulent third century, only great ability had secured a man in the emperorship. If Romans of the fifth century half expected their weak rulers to fall by the wayside, they were disappointed. An uneasy truce existed between Roman emperor and "barbarian" general until 455, while after that date Ricimer and Odovacar ended the farce by gradually doing away with the emperorship altogether.\textsuperscript{11}

Stilicho and Aetius could and did covet the emperorship for their sons. The proposed marriage of Eucherius to Galla Placidia, or of Aetius' son Gaudentius to Eudoxia or Placidia, would have accomplished this object, as the proud fathers well knew.\textsuperscript{12} Both marriages failed to materialize because their sponsors were killed: the reigning emperor in each case felt safe enough from the barbarians to do away with his ablest subordinate. Later Patricians were careful not to place themselves at the

\textsuperscript{11} Lot, pp. 199-200.

\textsuperscript{12} Oost, "Aetius and Majorian," p. 24.
emperor's mercy. Ricimer perhaps wished to control the West as Patrician "as Aetius had done with such success," but he never exposed himself to assassination by any of his regal "superiors," nor did he worry about dynastic marriages.

Eventually Ricimer's activity was confined to Italy. The loss of the secure throne of Stilicho's and Aetius' time, and the disappearance of the Theodosian dynasty relegated the Emperors of the West to the obscurity of the Ravenna palace, where they quietly became extinct. Theodoric the Ostrogoth, King of Italy (489-526), did not attempt to revive them. The emperorship, which Stilicho and Aetius regarded as the instrument of Western unity and military strength, was lost forever.

CHAPTER XV

CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION

Flavius Stilicho and Flavius Aetius were, as we have seen, professional soldiers. Their eventful careers reflect their constant concern with the military problems of the Later Roman Empire: by the fifth century, the task of preserving the Empire against frequent barbarian attacks and periodic internal convulsions required the best efforts of first-rate generals.

For Stilicho and Aetius, the military defense of the West took precedence over all other aspects of government and public life. Political, economic, and social reforms were needed, of course. As Gibbon succinctly put it, "the Roman government appeared every day less formidable to its enemies, more odious and oppressive to its subjects."¹ Nevertheless, the restoration of the famous Pax Romana was a necessity if the Western Empire was to regain its former level of prosperity: no Imperial reforms of any sort could be achieved if the Empire itself disappeared, and the Pax Romana was in fact Rome's greatest blessing.

The practical, military minds of Aetius and Stilicho reacted to particular circumstances. Both men

¹ Decline and Fall, II, 298-99.
used whatever resources they could command to solve the most pressing strategic or tactical problems. But both generals were also conscious of established Roman policies designed to achieve long-range goals. Stilicho and Aetius found some of these policies useful and timely, while others proved to be useless or even harmful.

The policy most pernicious for the fifth century was the practice, initiated by Diocletian, of dividing the rule of the Empire between two emperors. Few Romans possessed motives or morals pure enough to rule only half an empire: great ambition usually demanded sole power. Diocletian lived to see his own optimistic Imperial partition and settlement collapse. Yet the practice persisted, and the crippling effects of the last partition (395) contributed to the rapid disintegration of the Western Empire. Stilicho and Aetius were certainly dissatisfied with this policy, which divided the military resources of the Empire, and occasionally they became embroiled with the East. Neither man, however, was able to reunite the Empire.

Some Roman policies, on the other hand, won the approval of the fifth century generals, largely because shrewd practices were as beneficial in the Later Empire as in the Republic or the period of the Principate. Claudian, Sidonius, and other writers contemporary with Aetius and Stilicho present Roman traditions and ideals which must have been familiar to the leading political figures of the
period. The two leaders with whom we are concerned undoubtedly were willing to continue or resurrect traditions apparently valuable for their own times. Like Pompey in an earlier period, they saw nothing in the old system which would restrict their own careers, and the old days were perhaps the Golden Age.

The "barbarization" of culture under the Later Empire had begun long before the fifth century. While Stilicho and Aetius were of "barbarian" origin, we have seen that they respected classical culture and were aware of its importance as a means of Romanizing the Teutons. The differences of motive and subject between the Aeneid and some of the Germanic epics are not great; perhaps an amiable fusion of the two was possible. In any case, the legions descended from Aeneas and his little band of Trojans were by Stilicho's time permeated with generous numbers of distinctly Teutonic soldiers.

Stilicho and Aetius could point to precedents dating to the time of Constantine the Great for their use of large numbers of barbarians in the Roman Army. Actually, as we have pointed out, the two leaders had little choice in the matter: the depopulated West lay open to penetrations from across the Rhine and Danube. By necessity, likewise, Aetius and Stilicho adopted an attitude of religious toleration, and managed for a short time to incorporate men of diverse beliefs into their followings; only the old
Roman policy of toleration, if not tolerance, could satisfy all or virtually all the inhabitants of the Empire. Considering the circumstances, it can hardly be said that either Aetius or Stilicho betrayed the Roman Empire to the Germans.

In the same fashion, the generals' patronage of the Senate and the senatores was apparently a curious mixture of practicality and tradition. The Senate contained the oldest and most distinguished Roman families, but the senatores were also the most powerful citizens of the Late Empire. Oddly enough, the social pyramid of the fifth century was not unlike the grouping of classes in existence in the earliest days of the Republic: powerful patricians, masses of plebeians, many of them bound in a patron-client relationship to members of the patrician order, and smaller numbers of merchants and artisans, were in evidence in each period. The key difference was the size and diversity of the Empire: no mere legislative council could govern the vast Roman Imperial holdings when many senatores increasingly devoted their attention to purely local matters.

Montesquieu long ago pointed out that Stilicho and Aetius, among others, made special efforts to defend Italy, the heart of the Empire. But he also theorized

that only fear could maintain a larger empire. The Imperial government in the fifth century could rarely inspire much fear on the part of its subjects; clearly a new balance of forces was in the making. To the military minds of Aetius and Stilicho, the emperorship was the logical peak of the political hierarchy, and the only institution under which the Western Roman Empire could be united; here again, they were in agreement with time-honored Roman ideas. Of course, the powers of the emperor would be tempered by the influence of the senatores—Aetius surely had this clearly in mind—but only one man could direct the affairs of Western Europe. As a limited monarchy, the Western Roman Empire need not have been a total loss. But to accuse Stilicho or Aetius of plotting to destroy the emperorship is to accuse them of wishing to reduce their own sons' chances in life, as well as to misrepresent their concept of government. Rather, they plotted to strike a new balance of powers, even including the barbarian settlers, which would preserve the Empire for the future.

Those faults which are called "sins" when committed by the least important citizens, and "vices" when perpetrated by the average individual, receive the designation "foibles" in the case of Caesar; perhaps Stilicho and Aetius deserve the same consideration. Their deaths did little to relieve the Roman Empire of injustice, and much to destroy
its chances for survival. Each death was a crisis in the life of the Empire, and it could not recover completely. Public opinion which, according to Bury, rightly condemned Stilicho for his dealings with barbarians, praised Theodoric the Ostrogoth for his mercy only a century later.

Like Theodosius, the half-Roman, half-Gothic son of Ataulf and Galla Placidia, Stilicho's and Aetius' barbarian settlements perished in their infancy. The magic of the Roman name disappeared, in the opinion of the barbarians, in 408 and 455. The Later Roman Empire was a paper dragon, only as powerful as the men on whose backs it was carried; for all their ambition and cruelty, Aetius and Stilicho were two of the ablest of those men.

For many Romans, the City still stood, even in the fifth century, as a symbol of Imperial unity. In 410, when news of the first sack of Rome reached the East, Saint Jerome, no constant champion of Rome or classical studies, wrote: "The lamp of the world is extinguished, and it is the whole world which has perished in the ruins of this one city." 4

What had perished was the open, elastic Roman society of earlier days. Bury is right, to a degree, in claiming that Stilicho favored the Teutons; Wallace-Hadrill

correctly states that Aetius favored his own senatorial class. But both Stilicho and Aetius conceived these favoritisms within the system of the Roman Empire: in their opinion, apparently, their barbarian relatives and senatorial friends had every right to seek position and influence within the Empire itself.

In defense of Aetius and Stilicho, we can quote from the writings of two important Roman authors. Pliny the Elder, writing in the first century, observes: "Italy has been selected by the gods in order to unite scattered empires, to soften customs and unite by the community of one language the diverse and barbarous dialects of so many nations, to bestow on men the intercourse of ideas and humanity, in a word—that all the peoples of the world should have one fatherland."\(^5\) Rutilius Namatianus, a pagan poet who criticized Stilicho's destruction of the Sibylline Books, summed up the matter of Imperial greatness with even more brevity, in an apostrophe to Rome, written in 416: "By offering the vanquished partnership in your own laws you have made a city of what was once a world."\(^6\)

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5. Quoted in Katz, pp. 6-7.
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