

КАБАХСКИЙ НАЦИОНАЛЬНЫЙ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ ИМЕНИ АЛЬ-ФАРАБИ



**ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ ВСЕМИРНОЙ ИСТОРИИ
В КОНТЕКСТЕ АКТУАЛЬНЫХ ПРОБЛЕМ
СОВРЕМЕННОСТИ**

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Attila the Hun and his Military Campaigns

Introduction

For two millennia the ancestors of the Kazakh people played a significant role in the development of states from the Far East to Western Europe, from Siberia to India. Moving across vast distances, tribes and tribal unions repeatedly changed the ethnic and state picture of Eurasia. This paper relates primarily to the history of the Huns, which is an integral part of Turkish history, and therefore of the history of Kazakhstan.

There are a number of Western authors who have devoted summarizing works to the Huns [1].

In Soviet historiography, the history of the Huns and their relationship with the Great Migration in the West was hardly studied. In Soviet times, as is known, historical studies were too idealized and politicized. This made an impact on both the development of world history problems and those of the history of Kazakhstan. Central scientific institutes, i.e. those located in Moscow and Leningrad monopolized the study of world history. Modern Russian science also mentions the Huns in Europe very briefly. The history of the Xiongnu (Hunnu) in the East was studied by L.N. Gumilev.

The years of independence that came after 1991 provided a good opportunity to deal objectively with the problems of general and national history in Kazakhstan. Scientists and experts could travel to foreign countries for research more often.

The rarest written sources for the period of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages have come to us in the original Latin, Greek, Early Germanic and Scandinavian languages. There is also evidence regarding the Turkic world and the Huns. In particular, these are the

chronicles of Ammianus Marcellinus, Sidonius Apollinaris, Claudius Claudianus, Hidatii, Marcellinus Comes, Orosius, Jordanis, Priscus of Panitus, Prosper Tiro, Joahn Antioch, etc.

The documents and materials in scientific collections and museums of the Vatican, as well as the materials in the interiors of St. Peter's Basilica – the world's largest Catholic Church – are of particular value. There is papal correspondence, and also chronicles, eyewitness accounts of those years, exhibits that could shed much light on the nature of international relations during this tumultuous period in world history.

In addition, we have extensively used the modern materials of archaeological excavations and interdisciplinary research, witnessing a high level of development of industry, trade, military art and other aspects of the social development of the Hun society.

Thus, our research methods are based on the use of rare written sources in Latin. The data of archeology, ethnology, historical linguistics and modern interdisciplinary research are made use of especially widely in our study.

We will focus on the complicated vicissitudes of the relationship between the Hunnish Empire and the Western Roman Empire during the reign of Attila.

The main part

1. Migration of Hun tribes and its role in the Great Migration

The IV-VII centuries went down in the history of Eurasia and Europe as the era of the Great Migration. These four centuries experienced a peak of migration that swept almost the entire continent and changed its political, ethnic and cultural character radically. This was the period of death of ancient foundations and orders and the time of formation of new social relations and a new civilization – that of the Middle Ages.

Today, it is of particular importance to single out the Great Migration as a transitional historical period. It allows not only study of the specific history of the Great Migration, but also opens some opportunities to study the history of traditional views of the Great Migrations. At the turn of classical antiquity and the Middle Ages, not only did tribes and nations started to migrate, but also, so to speak, knowledge and understanding of the various tribes and peoples 'came to life' and intensified.

The Great Migration, which was initiated by the Huns' tribal union, starting from the depths of Central Asia to the west of the European continent, became a turning point in world history. Since that time, the social relations, cultures and traditions of the tribes and peoples who inhabited the Eurasian space have become synthesized and integrated.

At the same time, it should be noted that resettlement and migration in Europe had taken place even before the Huns. The Germans were the first to be written about. The earliest ancient sources on the middle and northern European regions are pieces of information by Pytheas of Massalia (fourth century BC), a Greek author and follower of Aristotle. Pytheas was the first to stress distinguishing features of the Celts and Scythians (Skythen) and to give evidence of the lands and their inhabitants, who later were called the Germans [2].

South Scandinavia, Denmark and the German area of the North and Baltic Seas were the ancestral home of the tribes who later identified themselves as the 'Germans'. In the fifth century BC, they moved towards the south as far as the Harz and Hall, where the Germans faced with the Celts. Then, from the beginning of AD, the Germans tribal unions were in constant movement and confrontations with the Roman Empire.

The apogee of the Great Migration was the Huns' travels from the east the Eurasian continent to its west.

The Huns (Hunnoi) had inhabited Central Asia since ancient times. They belonged to the Turkic tribes. As far back as the fourth century BC, the Chinese called the Huns their most serious enemies, because the Hun chieftains had made real progress in the wars against the Han Empire.

In the first centuries of A.D., the Hun tribes migrated actively and they also travelled from the territory of modern Kazakhstan and other regions of Central Asia to the West. In the middle of the fourth century BC, the Huns invaded the land between the Volga and the Don, having conquered the Alans in the Northern Caucasus, brought to heel the Kingdom of Bosphorus, crossed the Don and broken the neck of the multiracial power of Ermanaric, the king of the Ostrogoths in South-Eastern Europe (in the year 375). That year was the beginning of a series of movements that led to the Great Migrations in Eurasia and Europe. In 376 AD, the Visigoths,

narrowed by the Huns, crossed the Danube, and, with the permission of the Roman government, settled within the Roman province of Moesia with an obligation of military service and obedience. After that, the Huns attacked the Balkan provinces of the Eastern Roman Empire repeatedly. The relationship between the Huns and the Western Roman Empire was initially on a different basis. So, the detachments of the Hun warmongers were a part of the Roman Army, especially since the 20s of the fifth century. In particular, the empire used them to fight with the Franks and Burgundians who had settled on the Rhine and rebelled repeatedly, as well as to master the *Bacaudae* – peasants of north-western Gaul, who had tried to secede from the Roman Empire. In the late 40s, the situation changed. Attila, the ruler of the Huns, (born ca. 395, died in 453) started to interfere in the internal affairs of the Western Roman Empire.

Attila ruled from 434 to 453, and in his reign the Hun Empire reached its greatest strength and territorial expansion in the West. Greek and Latin sources indicate that Attila was from a royal lineage, which had ruled the Huns for generations.

At that time, the territory of the Hunnish Empire stretched from east to west, from the Altai Mountains, Central Asia and the Caucasus to the Danube and the Rhine. The Huns' tribal union in Central Asia contributed to the later formation of the Kazakh ethnic group and other Turkic peoples.

2. Attila the Hun's campaigns against Rome

Attila's time left an indelible mark on the history of Eurasia, which has been not only preserved in historical works, chronicles and epic creations. We have also been able to establish that the great deeds of the Huns and their ruler were reflected at least in eighteen works of the German heroic epos and Scandinavian sagas (in which he was called Attila, Etzel, Atzel, or Atli).

At the same time, one might ask why so much attention is paid to the Huns in the scriptures and legends if they came to the West as conquerors. In my opinion, the answer may be as follows. Many European nations considered the Hun power as a counterbalance to the Roman Empire, as the savior from the Roman expansion. Thus, a number of Germanic tribes who were dependent on the Hunnish Empire participated in the wars against Rome.

By the middle of the fifth century the relations between the Western Roman Empire and the Hunnish Empire had increasingly

deteriorated. It became obvious that those forces were on the brink of a great confrontation.

The events that took place in the mid-fifth century gave evidence of the military might of the Hunnish Empire.

Having accumulated and concentrated power, Attila, the ruler of the Huns, launched a military campaign against Western Europe, i.e. against the Western Roman Empire.

The struggle against the Huns united the Roman Empire, the Visigoths and other unions of Celtic and Germanic tribes. Old contradictions and struggle were forgotten. The combined army of the Roman Empire, the Visigoth Kingdom and other tribal alliances of the West, was headed by the patrician Flavius Aetius. In the period of struggle for power in Rome, he had fled to the Huns, who lent him support, so returning to Italy in 433 with the Hunnish cohorts; Flavius Aetius took a top position in the state again and gained command of the armed forces of the Empire.

In addition to the chronicles, the archives and materials of the papal correspondence, which, unfortunately, has not yet become the subject of a proper analysis, are valuable sources for that era. They were not studied in the literature of the Soviet period either. Yet, the rarest, by definition, of the sources allow a reconstruction of the complex vicissitudes of that time. Thus, in a letter of April 23, 451 to Marcian (450-457), Emperor of the East Roman Empire, Pope Leo I (the Great) (440-461) made it clear that understanding between the two Christian Emperors of the Eastern and Western halves of the Roman Empire would have withstood the heretical encroachments and the Barbarian invasions ('nam inter principes Christianos spiritu dei confirmante concordiam gemina per totum mundum fiducia roboratur, quia profectus caritatis et fidei utrorumque armorum potentiam insuperabilem facit, ut propitiato per unam confessionem deo simul et haeretica falsitae et barbara destruat hostilitas ...') [3].

We get very important information from Priscus of Panium, a fifth century chronicler of Greek origin, who participated in the Byzantine embassy to the court of Attila. During the whole journey, and the Byzantines' stay at the headquarters of the ruler of the Huns, he was keeping detailed records, which formed the basis of his famous work that has survived only in fragments. Priscus describes his journey to the court of Attila, meetings with him, and the life and customs of the Huns in detail. According to Priscus, Attila also sent

an embassy to Rome, to Western Roman Emperor Valentinian III, with a request to give Honoria, Valentinian's sister, in marriage, together with her share of wealth. However, the emperor refused ...

According to Priscus, the embassies' mission failed. Attila did not know what to do, but gradually finding tranquility, he decided to launch a war against the West: 'Illic enim sibri rem fore non solum cum Italis, sed etiam cum Gothis et Francis; cum Italis, ut Honoriam cum ingentibus divitiis secum abducereret; cum Gothis, ut Genserichi gratiam promereretur' [4]. (However, Attila did not discriminate against the population of the Empire; he was going to fight against the Goths and Franks, against the ruling elite of the Italic peoples to take Honoria with her wealth).

Immediately after returning from the Campaign for Gaul, 451 AD, Attila resumed demands to the Eastern Roman Empire for the payment of tribute in what had been an earlier scale, in the times of Emperor Theodosius. Otherwise, according to Priscus, Attila threatened to go to war. This fact also shows that the strength and fighting ardor of the Huns were far from being exhausted. On the contrary, their ruler continued to challenge the two Roman Empires at the same time.

A contemporary of that driving age, Prosper Tiro, a native of Aquitaine, calling Attila's campaigns against the West the main event, wrote: 'Attila post necem fratris auctus opibus interempi multa vicinarum sibi gentium milia cogit in bellum, quod Gothis tantum se inferre tamquam custos Romanae amicitati denuntiabat. sed cum transito Rheno saevissimos eius impetus multae Gallicanae urbes experirentur, cito et nostris et Gothis placuit, ut furori superborum hostium consociatis exercitibus repugnaretur, tantaque patricii Aetii providentia fuit, ut raptim congregatis undique bellatoribus viris adversae multitudini non inpar occurreret'. (Attila, who, after he had his brother murdered became even stronger, forced thousands of neighboring nations to war, which, as he explained, being a friend of the Romans, he was waging only on the Goths. Once he crossed the Rhine, fear gripped numerous Gallic cities. So our men [the Romans - K.Zh.] and the Goths quickly decided to combine forces to meet the brazen enemy. The patrician Aetius approved himself, as he was able to quickly gather the forces scattered throughout and counter the enemy') [5].

3. The Battle of theCatalaunian Fields as the largest battle in world history

In April 451, the Gaul cities of Metz, Tongeren, Speyer, and Reims were all aflame. Paris was in a blue funk. The inhabitants of ancient Lutetia were about to flee away. A legend explains the salvation of the city by the extraordinarily brave behaviour of a woman, St. Genovea (Genevieve) [Heilige Genovea], who later became known as the patron saint of Paris. From the 'Life of St. Genovea' we learn: 'At that time, Attila, the king of the Huns, began to ravage the provinces of Gaul. Parisians were frightened of his cruelty and anger, so they decided to send women and children and some belongings to a safe place. There St. Genovea turned up and she resolved to persuade women not to leave the city, in which they had been born and grown up, in the hour of danger and, moreover, to prepare themselves and their men to the defense. St. Genovea told the women to ask God for help and salvation. They listened to Genovea and decided to stay in the city and rely on God's mercy' [6].

But Attila did not reach Paris. Having approached to Orleans on the left flank, the Huns began to assault it. It should be noted that the city was secured with stone bridges over the Loire and high defensive towers. How could Orleans withstand the onslaught of such a formidable foe? The Roman army and the forces of the Visigothic Kingdom arrived in time to help the besieged of Orleans. This, of course, hindered the Huns in capturing the city. Attila may have raised the siege because he doubted whether they would be able to force Orleans quickly, or he may have turned to the Oracle, because the Hun soothsayers had advised him not to continue the siege. Perhaps Attila was seeking a more convenient open space to fight... And so the Catalaunian Fields (Latin Campi Catalaunici) in Champagne (France) became the place for the decisive (major) battle. This area has its origin from Catuvellauner, the name of a Celtic tribe, and it is a plain between Troyes and present-day Châlons-sur-Marne.

After a victorious march by the Huns through the territory of Northern Gaul, i.e. France, there was a decisive battle on the Catalaunian Fields in Champagne in 451. I rate the battle among the largest ones, since along with the Battle of Cannas (216 BC) gained by Hannibal and that of Waterloo (1815), the last great battle of

Napoleon, it ranks among the most famous battles in the European and world history.

The parties met on the Catalaunian Fields. Jordanes, the chronicler of the Goths, wrote, 'The place was shelving; it looked heaved having a hill crest. Both armies sought to occupy it, because the convenient terrain would have delivered considerable benefits; so the right side was occupied by the Huns with all their men [allies] and the left one was manned by the Romans and Visigoths with detached units. And they engaged in combat on the hill to possess the top'. The struggle for the commanding point was going with varying degrees of success. Aetius, well acquainted with the battle tactics of the steppe-warriors, seemed to be able to repel another attack by the advancing Huns. This had not been Attila's experience and he decided to strengthen his army with speeches at a most seasonable time. Being inspired by his words, everybody rushed into the fight. Attila himself directed the battle. In an instant, everything had become confused: battle-cries, the glance of cavalry swords and the dust that rose after the rushing riders. The warriors were fighting hand to hand: the battle was fierce, hit-and-miss, brutal, last-ditch [7].

The Visigoths craved revenge after their king, Theodoricus, died in the battle. However, Aetius was able to stop them by saying that the Huns might return to their kingdom when leaving the place. Having noticed that the Goths had withdrawn, Attila stayed in the encampment for a long time, suspecting a war ruse. 'But when, following the enemies' absence, there was a lengthy silence, the Huns set themselves up for victory, they triumphed, and the mighty King returned to his previous belief in fate' (*sed ubi hostium absentia sunt longa silentia consecuta, erigitur mens ad victoriam, gaudia praesumuntur atque potentis regis animus in antiquafata revertitur*)[8].

However, Attila decided to return to Pannonia, the centre of the Hunnic Empire. He decided to take a break in the battle against the united army of Europe and to conduct a movement. The army slowly turned to the Rhine. Attila and his army returned to Pannonia through Thuringia and Hungary, and no one pursued them.

We have made an attempt to reconstruct the events of Attila's Campaign in Gaul from extant written sources: the writings of Roman, Byzantine and early medieval authors. Describing the Huns in general, the latter made some exaggerations and inaccuracies,

endowing them with the traditional features of so-called savage barbarians. Thus, Jordanes wrote: 'This savage race, according to the historian Priscus, having settled on the far bank of the lake of Meotia, knew no other business than hunting, except for the fact that when they grew up to the size of a tribe, they began hatter the calm of neighboring tribes by perfidy and looting' (quorum natio saeva, ut Priscus istoricus refert, Meotida palude ulteriore ripa insidens, venationi tantum nec alio labore experta, nisi quod, postquam crevisset in populis, et rapinis vicinarum gentium quiete conturbans)[9].

Undoubtedly, the onslaught of the Huns was so violent that the chroniclers of the 4th-6th centuries took no 'academic' interest in the origin of the formidable union of tribes. The authors of Western chronicles sometimes looked on the Huns with sharp hostility, so that a historian cannot reconstruct an objective picture of reality based on their information only.

The data of modern archaeological excavations [10] and interdisciplinary research demonstrate rather a high level of industrial arts, trade, military art and other aspects of social development of the Huns' society [11].

When evaluating the largest battle under consideration, a number of Western scholars of modern and contemporary history, who had obtained information from the chroniclers of the early middle Ages, used it uncritically. This approach always makes it difficult to assess the historical reality objectively. According to A. Pirenn, a Belgian historian, in the spring of 451, Attila crossed the Rhine and devastated all the areas as far as the Loire. 'Aetius stopped him [Attila – *K.Zh.*] with the help of the Germans near Troyes. The Franks, the Burgundians, the Visigoths and others showed themselves as good allies; the military art of the Romans and the Germans' bravery decided everything here ... Attila's death in 453 resulted in the collapse of his empire and thereby saved the West ...' [12].

Western historiography traditions in assessing the history of the Huns influenced Russian, Soviet and post-Soviet historiography deeply.

In our opinion, the situation in Gaul can be explained by the over-large scale of Attila's campaigns and the inability to restrain dozens of tribes and entities that were not related to the Huns socially and ethnically within the vast territory under the unified leadership.

Indeed, the forces of the Huns were by no means exhausted after 'the Battle of the Nations' in 451. The fact that the next year Attila launched a new campaign to the heart of the Roman Empire, Italy, gives evidence of this.

During the age-long existence (the 4th – 5th centuries) in Europe, in the turbulent era of the Great Migration, the Hunnic Empire was centered in Pannonia (in the territory that later became Hungary, Austria and parts of Yugoslavia) and objectively had an impact on the fate of European history. In addition to wars and migrations, that historical epoch showed multifaceted interaction between the East and the West, synthesis and integration of traditions and cultures.

The Hunnish invasions of the middle of the fifth century – 451-452 AD – undermined the Western Roman Empire all the more, bringing about its decline. This was going to happen very soon, namely in 476 AD, when Romulus Augustulus, the last Western Roman Emperor, was deposed by Odoacer, the leader of German mercenaries and the son of Edeko (Edikon), who at one time held a high position under Attila.

Here, we would like to mention the periodization of the world history of the turn of the antiquity and the Middle Ages, which deals with the history of Eurasia and Kazakhstan. It is known that Russian and Soviet historiography considered the year of 476 AD to be the end of ancient history and the beginning of the Middle Ages. This date appeared in Soviet historiography and it is accepted by that of Russia and the CIS countries. But it is simply a conditional date, the year of deposition of the last Western Roman Emperor, which was not a major historical event. The background was founded a century before, when, after the year 375 AD, the Great Migration in Europe began, and the Hunnish invasions of Europe agitated the entire Eurasian continent, Europe; they had global far-reaching consequences and contributed to the transition from one era to the next, from one civilization to another. This was an epochal event, common to all the countries of Europe and Asia.

Therefore, we have compelling reasons to date the beginning of medieval history on a global basis, including the history of Kazakhstan, from the second half of the fourth century (375 AD) – the turning point of the Great Migration in Eurasia. Such an approach to the question of the end of the history of antiquity and the beginning of medieval history has been presented, in particular, in a

number of publications of professor Zhumagulov in Kazakhstan and abroad. And it was included in the sample syllabus on the history of the Middle Ages, developed and published by the Department of World History, Historiography and Source Studies of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University for all the humanities specialties of the universities of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The syllabus has been approved by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

After Attila's death, the Hun Empire collapsed in the West during the reign of his sons. Some of the Huns stayed in the area northward of the Lower Danube. However, most of them went to the Greater Black Sea area and farther to the east, towards the Urals and the Aral Sea, i.e. to the frontal eastern limits of the huge Hunnic Empire. The local Huns continued marching on the neighbouring countries. So, the Huns-Ephtalits subjugated Gandhara at the end of the fifth century after a successful struggle against the Sassanids. Their leaders Toramana and Mihirakula captured the Gupta Empire in India in the first quarter of the sixth century.

The problems of the history of the Huns are still waiting to be studied. Based on a thorough analysis of the sources, we have a need to open an objective picture of historical reality.

In research and practice of teaching in universities it is necessary to show that many of the nations of Europe considered the Hunnish state as a counterbalance to the Roman Empire and saw it as a savior from Roman expansion. It is necessary to study the life of the Huns in detail, as the representatives of particular steppe civilization (*Reiternomadische Kultur*).

Having existed for about one hundred years in the turbulent era of the Great Migration, the Hunnic Empire had an objective impact on the fate of European, Eurasian history in terms of the transition to a new era and the civilization of the Middle Ages.

After the collapse of the Hunnish Empire, numerous tribes mentioned in a number of early medieval sources stayed to roam in the European steppes. Among these nomadic ethnic groups the Avars stood out.

Archaeological data confirms the historical continuity of the Avarians Khaganate of the sixth and seventh centuries, and of the Hunnish Empire, its multitribal nature, and the development of international relations from the East (the Altai, the regions of Central

Asia, Iran) to the West (the Byzantine Empire, tribal unions and kingdoms of the Germans) [8].

Later, the mass migration of Slavic tribes and their migration to the territory of the Byzantine Empire was one of the final stages of the Great Migration in Eurasia and Europe.

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8. *Ibid.*, 218.
9. *ibid.*, 122-123.
10. So, for example , during excavations at the site of the Battle of the Catalaunian Fields in France, a fragment of a Hunnish sacrificial cauldron was found near the camp of the Huns. It is possible that the cauldron was buried along with the body of Laudariha, Attila's relative, killed in the battle. Similar findings were found in many Hunnish graves, from Central Asia to Hungary, Germany , France (Sr.Takats Z. Catalaunischer Hunnenfund und seine ostasiatischen Verbindungen. – In: Acta orientalia Hungariae, Budapest,1955, V. V, 43 -173).
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