

Inviting the Barbarians. Some Episodes of Treason

ABSTRACT. This paper analyses a specific accusation made against men and women of power that appears in several late antique sources. The accusation is that they secretly incited barbarian enemies to invade the Roman empire. This kind of treason is usually attributed to historical figures who sought revenge against domestic enemies, to defeat a usurper, or eliminate a legitimate emperor. The individuals accused of such treacherous “invitations” are emperors (Constantius II), women of the court or Augustae (Serena, Honoria, Licinia Eudoxia), eunuchs (Hyacinthus, Narses), and public enemies (Rufinus, Stilicho, Bonifatius). These episodes should not, however, be regarded as a literary invention. In fact, they manifest the recurring desire among contemporaries to identify and punish scapegoats. These stories show, above all in the Theodosian age, how diplomatic relations with the barbarians were a delicate matter. These accusations of complicity with the barbarians were a means to demonise internal enemies.

1) A “serial” traitor: Constantius II

A very particular military strategy is twice attributed to Emperor Constantius II (Augustus from 337 to 361 AD), first in the war against the usurper Magnentius, then in the conflict against his own cousin Julian. It appears that Constantius secretly provoked barbarian enemies to invade the Roman empire on two occasions¹.

As some sources from the fourth and fifth centuries record, Constantius incited the Germans to rebel against Magnentius² in around 352³. Among these, Zosimus’ *New History* is the only source documenting that Constantius distributed large quantities of money to the barbarians living near the Rhine, on the understanding that they would join his fight against the usurper (2.53.3).

A far more recurrent element in the accounts of the alleged invitation, however, is the presence of letters that attested Constantius’ agreement with the Germans. Libanius mentions the imperial letters that allowed the Germans to break through the Roman borders and occupy as much land as they could (*Or.* 18.33). Of course, those referred to as “barbarians” are very often actually troops at the disposal of Roman generals. As paid barbarian allies, the Germans were available to fight on the emperor’s behalf when requested.

Other sources show that these letters, far from being the instrument of a secret operation, were a kind of official authorisation for them to settle in the Roman lands. As Libanius and Sozomenus record, the Germans were able to produce them as evidence of their right to occupy these territories, when Julian later

¹ THOMPSON (1943), p. 86, believes that the letters sent by Constantius to the barbarians so that they could attack Julian really existed. SZIDAT (1981), p. 90, highlights the presence of Julian’s propaganda in the accusation made against Constantius of having sent the barbarians against him. However, he also stresses that the use of Germanic troops against a usurper is unsurprising. T. D. BARNES, in VITTINGHOFF *et al.* (1989), p. 248, also considers the “invitation”, against both Magnentius and Julian, to be “the product of Julian’s propaganda”. TANTILLO (1997), p. 347 thinks that the accusation of an “invitation” against Magnentius is true, while according to MARAVAL (2013), p. 101, it might just be calumny. According to WOODS (2000), p. 710, Constantius did try to incite the Alamanni against Julian.

² LIB., *Or.* 18.33-34, 18.52; SOCR. 3.1.26; SOZ. 5.1.2, 5.2.20, 5.2.22; ZOS. 2.53.3. See RAIMONDI (2001), p. 102.

³ TANTILLO (1997), p. 347.

proceeded to free these lands from the Germans and give them back to the Gallo-Roman population⁴. Moreover, according to Sozomenus, Julian used these letters as proof of Constantius' treason. Julian presumably did this with the intent of strengthening his own precarious position of illegitimately elected Augustus: Sozomenus stresses this aspect, highlighting that he deliberately made the letters public, or in a deceptive way (ἐπίτηδες, 5.1.2). Considering that elsewhere Sozomenus mentions the letters that bore witness to Constantius' permission for the Germans to occupy the Roman lands in Gaul, without expressing any doubt about their actual existence⁵, it is clear that the adverb ἐπίτηδες does not suggest that the letters shown by Julian were a forgery. In fact, Sozomenus infers that Julian used them deceitfully out of context. In other words, Julian presented Constantius as a traitor, while Constantius, who had to choose between the barbarians and a usurper, was simply opting for the necessary evil – namely, the barbarians⁶.

The fact that external enemies could be considered to be the lesser evil compared to usurpers is not surprising. At least one similar episode is recorded: in the last months of Stilicho's hegemony, Stilicho was ready to send Alaric against the usurper Constantine III⁷. As a consequence of Stilicho's death in 408 AD, the plan was soon aborted. However, this is a significant piece of evidence of the great lengths people of power might be willing to go to in order to eliminate those who threatened the imperial *maiestas*⁸.

As other sources claim, Constantius exploited this kind of military operation again as he had to deal with another usurper – Julian, who had newly been proclaimed Augustus by his troops in *Lutetia Parisiorum* (in 360 AD)⁹. This time, it is possible to clearly identify the original source upon which later literary evidence draws: the writings of Emperor Julian himself. It is Julian who first states, in his Letter to the Athenians (361 AD), that the Germans were sent against him by his cousin¹⁰. As in the previous operations against Magnentius, money seems to have played a prominent role in the dealings between Constantius and the Germans. As Julian argues, his cousin paid them to pillage Gaul¹¹, while according to Libanius, Constantius incited many people to attack Julian by giving them large quantities of money¹².

Another recurrent element, also present in the previous treason by Constantius, is the focus in these sources, with Julian being the first, on the material evidence of the treachery – that is, the letters sent by Constantius to his enemies. Julian claims to have received from the barbarians themselves the letters that

⁴ LIB., *Or.* 18.52; SOZ. 5.2.22.

⁵ See the already referenced passage SOZ. 5.2.22.

⁶ This may also confirm F. Heim's idea that Constantius was less aggressive towards the Germans than Julian was: see HEIM (1992), p. 289-292.

⁷ ZOS. 5.31.4-6. See also O'FLYNN (1983), p. 56.

⁸ According to ROBERTO (2012), p. 122, even after Stilicho's death, Honorius and Flavius Constantius gave priority to the elimination of the usurpers over the solution of the problem with the Goths. See also DOYLE (2019), p. 131, with a reference to OROS., *Hist.* 7.42.1. This passage supports the idea that Honorius wanted the usurpers to be suppressed first and then the barbarian enemies.

⁹ The sources that record the second "invitation" are JUL., *ad Ath.* 286a-b; LIB., *Or.* 18.107, 13.35; AMM. 21.3.4-5; EUN., fr. 7a *FHG* = 14, ed. R. C. BLOCKLEY; SOZ. 5.2.23. There are also other passages that refer to Constantius' invitation to northern barbarians, which however do not specify which of the two invitations they are dealing with: JUL., *ad Ath.* 280b (alluding to Constantius' habit of entering into agreements with the barbarians), 287a (Constantius abandoned Gaul twice to the enemies, whom he often tried to befriend); PANEG. 11[3].6.1 (in Julian's times, the Germans were incited against the Romans).

¹⁰ JUL., *ad Ath.* 286a-b.

¹¹ JUL., *ad Ath.* 286a.

¹² LIB., *Or.* 13.35, πολλῶν ἐθνῶν μυρίαίς ταλάντοις ἐπὶ σὲ παρακληθέντων.

Constantius sent them (while also intercepting the letters of Taurus, the praetorian prefect of Italy and Africa¹³). Julian also highlights that this is clear evidence of what might otherwise seem like unreliable accusations¹⁴. Libanius also mentions the letters that Constantius sent to the barbarians on his second “invitation”¹⁵. During the preparations for the civil war between the two cousins, as shown before, Julian made Constantius’ letters to the Germans public, in order to persuade as many troops as possible to join him. As Libanius writes, “The letters written to the barbarians by the coward traitor were very useful to him (i.e. Julian): as he sailed and marched, he read them aloud to the cities and to the military camps, and compared his own deeds to these excellent letters. These letters motivated the audience to fight against Constantius, and made them Julian’s allies, although Julian led an army that was much smaller than that of Constantius”¹⁶. The same use of Constantius’ letters is later documented by Socrates Scholasticus¹⁷.

These sources do not specify whether the letters made public by Julian were those sent by Constantius to the Germans in order to prompt them to attack Magnentius, or those sent in order to damage Julian’s position. An exception is the passage (cited above) in which Sozomenus says that Julian deceitfully took advantage of the letters sent in order to weaken Magnentius (5.1.2). This does not rule out, however, that Julian also included the letters related to the second treason (i.e. the one putting Julian himself in distress) in the *dossier* which had to be read aloud in the cities of Gaul. This could be confirmed by the fact that, in the initial phase of the civil war, at least in the Letter to the Athenians, Julian made public the accusation that Constantius had provoked the attack of the Germans against him. In general, Julian did not spare any criticism against Constantius in texts that he distributed in many parts of the Empire. Thus, when the Roman senators read a speech of this kind, which Julian sent them during the civil war (361 AD), he seemed ungrateful towards his cousin Constantius¹⁸.

The most detailed account of Constantius’ second alleged treason was written by Ammianus. First of all, the Antiochene historian is more precise about the actors involved, and about which Germanic peoples connived with Constantius. It was Vadamarius, the King of the Alamanni, who was the accomplice of the senior Augustus. “If rumours can be trusted”, explains Ammianus, “Constantius wrote to Vadamarius to start immediately pillaging the bordering lands near to him, as if the agreement of concord had been broken, so that Julian, afraid of this, could not abandon the defence of Gaul to go anywhere else”¹⁹. After implying that

¹³ *PLRE* I s.v. Taurus 3.

¹⁴ *JUL., ad Ath.* 286b.

¹⁵ *LIB., Or.* 18.107.

¹⁶ *LIB., Or.* 18.113. The large dissemination given to the text of these letters, the practical target of their public reading, and the large audience to whom they were read aloud, are unusual elements. Taken together, they may justify, for once, the use of the idea of propaganda in analysing this episode, although this would be anachronistic, in general, in the study of ancient history, as shown by GIARDINA / SILVESTRINI (1989), p. 611-613, and TANTILLO (1997), p. 26-31.

¹⁷ *SOCR.* 3.1.38.

¹⁸ *AMM.* 21.10.7.

¹⁹ *AMM.* 21.3.4. See, in particular, the sentence *si famae solius admittenda est fides*.

these rumours may be false²⁰, Ammianus recounts that Julian first managed to catch a *notarius* carrying a letter sent by Vadomarius to Constantius²¹, and then caught the chieftain of the Alamanni himself²².

Zosimus does not record this new episode of treason committed by Constantius. However, this is not surprising: compared to Ammianus Marcellinus, Eunapius' History (Zosimus' source) adheres far less to Julian's account, for example in the narrative of Julian's dealings with the Salian Franks²³. On the other hand, Ammianus does not deal with the invitation (mentioned in Zosimus' *New History*) that Constantius allegedly sent to the barbarians to attack Magnentius.

One might wonder whether the repetition of this "invitation" on two different occasions is actually the result of a duplication of the same episode in the sources. However, contemporary sources clearly state that Constantius used this strategy twice. This is reported not only by Libanius ("Constantius resorted again to the same trick, by inciting the barbarians through letters", *Or.* 18.107), but also by Julian, whose work is the original source of the accusations ("Constantius abandoned Gaul twice to the enemies", *ad Ath.* 287a).

2) The making of a rumour

Among similar episodes of "invitation", Stilicho's case is, in my opinion, the one that shows in the clearest and most detailed way how these rumours originated and evolved. When the *magister utriusque militiae* Stilicho was beheaded on 22 August, 408 AD, at least two charges had been brought against him. On the one hand, he was accused of plotting against the Emperor – Honorius, according to some sources, or the young Theodosius II, according to others – and trying to have his son, Eucherius, step into the Emperor's shoes²⁴. On the other hand, the more official accusation made against him was of having used money to "enrich and incite" the barbarians. The latter accusation appears to be the more official of the two charges, since it was mentioned in a law later included in the Theodosian Code²⁵. As time passed, however, literary sources began to record further reasons behind his fall. According to Orosius, he had also incited the Alans, the Suebi, and the Vandals to cross the Rhine and invade Gaul. With the western provinces in distress, Stilicho could have easily managed to proclaim Eucherius the new Emperor²⁶.

²⁰ AMM. 21.3.5, *si dignum est credere*.

²¹ AMM. 21.3.5. Of course, this letter should not be confused with Constantius' invitation letter mentioned just above; see THOMPSON (1943), p. 84-85.

²² AMM. 21.4.1-6. See also MARAVAL (2013), p. 166. According to WOODS (2000), Ammianus' main source for this episode is Vadomarius himself. Vadomarius' arrest took place in early 361 AD: see WOODS (2000), p. 690; DRINKWATER (2007), p. 149-150.

²³ AMM. 17.8.3-5; EUN., fr. 10 *FHG* = 18.1 BLOCKLEY; ZOS. 3.6.3; cf. JUL., *ad Ath.* 280a-b. In Eunapius and Zosimus' accounts Julian appeases the Salian Franks; in Julian and Ammianus' accounts, on the other hand, Julian defeats them.

²⁴ According to Sozomenus (9.4.1, cf. 9.4.7) and Zosimus (5.32.1), Stilicho tried to let his son take Theodosius II's place. However, the following sources testify that Stilicho's intention was to usurp Honorius' power and give it to his son: OROS., *Hist.* 7.38.4-5 (*extorquere imperium genero posset in filium*); PHILOST. 11.3, 12.2, ed. J. BIDEZ / F. WINKELMANN; MARCELL., *Chron.* (Th. MOMMSEN, *Chron. Min.* II) p. 69 *s.a.* 408; JORD., *Rom.* 322. See F. PASCHOUD's commentary to ZOS. 5.32.3, note 71. BURNS (1994), p. 221 argues that Stilicho wanted to let his son take the place of Theodosius II, rather than that of Honorius.

²⁵ *Opes (...) quibus ille usus est ad omnem ditandam inquietandamque barbariem* (COD. THEOD. 9.42.22 of 22 November 408). See CRACCO RUGGINI (1968), p. 433; BROCCA (2005), p. 139. See also MAZZARINO (1990), p. 204, 208 and VÁRADY (1968) for the accusations made against Stilicho by his contemporaries.

²⁶ OROS., *Hist.* 7.38.3-4, cf. 7.40.3. See O'FLYNN (1983), p. 25-62; BURNS (1994), p. 183-223; MCEVOY (2013), p. 153-186 for the wider military and diplomatic context of these events.

In the sixth century, Count Marcellinus was probably harking back to Orosius when he wrote that Stilicho incited these tribes to invade Honorius' part of the Empire in order to extort from Honorius the position of Caesar for his son Eucherius²⁷. Marcellinus' Chronicle adds a new element to Orosius' story: Stilicho incited the Alans, Suebi, and Vandals to attack the *pars imperii* that belonged to Honorius by offering them gifts and money (*donis pecuniisque inlectas ... excitauit*). There are no sources before Marcellinus that specify the means by which Stilicho persuaded these barbarian nations to rise up. Thus, it is legitimate to argue that Marcellinus probably had no additional information regarding exactly how Stilicho gained the barbarians' alliance, and thus he might have hypothesised that it was a pecuniary agreement. Decades later, Gregory of Tours even accused Stilicho of being the military leader of those barbarians who invaded Gaul²⁸.

That Stilicho incited the Alans, Suebi, and Vandals to invade the western Roman provinces may simply have been a hypothesis on Orosius' part; or perhaps Orosius knew of rumours that are not attested by earlier literary sources. In any case, one can easily guess the reason behind this invention: Stilicho's numerous negotiations with Alaric, King of the Visigoths, could be perceived as an indication of his willingness to enter into secretive arrangements with Germanic soldiers in order to strengthen his own position – in this case to gain Illyricum for the western part of the Empire²⁹. Therefore, because of Stilicho's allegedly treacherous personality, a betrayal on Stilicho's part could be seen as the real cause of the traumatic invasion of Gaul on the eve of the year 407. This attitude towards the unfortunate Roman general mirrors the official accusation against him of having "enriched and incited" the barbarians, and is well represented not only by Saint Jerome, but also by Rutilius Namatianus, who famously described him as *proditor arcani imperii*³⁰. Orosius, Marcellinus, and Gregory of Tours simply elaborated upon the official accusation, which was formulated shortly after Stilicho's death.

Thus, while the accusation of collusion with the Alans, Suebi, and Vandals may be a later speculation, the charge of negotiating with Alaric originated from the actual relations between Stilicho and Alaric. Stilicho saw Alaric's barbarians as a military potential that should not be wasted. Rather, this potential should be exploited for ambitious campaigns, such as the conquest of Illyricum, and the

²⁷ MARCELL., *Chron.* (MOMMSEN, *Chron. Min.* II) p. 69 s.a. 408, *Stilico comes (...) spreto Honorio regnumque eius inhians, Halanorum, Sueuorum, Vandalorum gentes donis pecuniisque inlectas contra regnum Honorii excitauit, Eucherium filium suum paganum et aduersus Christianos insidias molientem cupiens Caesarem ordinare; qui cum eodem Eucherio dolo suo detecto occisus est*. See CRACCO RUGGINI (1968), p. 434-435, footnote 10. This accusation combines the charge of collusion with the barbarian nations, which was made against Stilicho, with that of trying to give the Roman Empire to his son. Count Marcellinus, who wrote his Chronicle during the reigns of the emperors Justin and Justinian, often uses Orosius as a source: see CROKE (2001), p. 199. This accusation is reported, with the same words as Marcellinus, by JORD., *Rom.* 322. Jordanes made large use of the Chronicle of Marcellinus in his *Romana*: see CROKE (2001), p. 237.

²⁸ GREG. TUR., *Franc.* 2.9, *Stilico, congregatis gentibus, Francos proteret, Rhenum transit, Gallias peruagatur et ad Pyrenius usque perlabitur*.

²⁹ SOZ. 8.25.3-4, 9.4.2-4; ZOS. 5.26.2, 5.29.7. Alaric may have been proclaimed king by his tribes in around 400: see JORD., *Get.* 147. However, whether Alaric ever was a king is debated among modern scholars. See WOLFRAM (1988), p. 143-146. While BURNS (1994), p. 220-221 gives credit to the notion that Stilicho was secretly in league with Alaric, MCEVOY (2013), p. 155 does not. O'FLYNN (1983), p. 53-59 sees charges of treachery against Stilicho as a tendentious interpretation of his recruitment of barbarian troops into the Roman army (which was actually the norm at least since Theodosius I), and considers Stilicho to be the victim of scapegoating.

³⁰ HIER., *Epist.* 123.16, ed. J. LABOURT; RUT. NAM. 2.41-60.

overthrowing of the usurper Constantine III³¹. This attitude derived from the scarcity of soldiers which weakened the western Roman empire at the time³².

It is worth noting that the accusation against Stilicho of trying to usurp the supreme power and give it to Eucherius are first recorded just few years after Stilicho and Eucherius' death. Orosius, who reports this accusation, wrote his *Historiae aduersus paganos* only a decade after this event. Zosimus' *New History*, which also mentions the accusation, depends, for this period, on Olympiodorus, a well-informed historian. Zosimus also reports that if Alaric had reached Eucherius before Stilicho's enemies could kill him, Eucherius would have survived³³. Finally, the law quoted by *Codex Theodosianus* 9.42.22, promulgated just three months after Stilicho's execution, while highlighting the complicity with the Goths as the main cause of Stilicho's fall, also implies that his son Eucherius was condemned along with him³⁴. The accusation of a secret, treasonable agreement with the Goths, and the charge of a planned usurpation in favour of Eucherius, may well have been combined together in public opinion, soon after – or even shortly before – Stilicho's demise.

Interestingly, it was not only Stilicho who was accused of “inviting” the barbarians: so were some of his contemporaries – both his allies and his enemies. After Stilicho's death, while Alaric besieged Rome in late 408 AD, Stilicho's wife Serena was accused of inciting Alaric's Visigoths to invade the city, for which she was put to death. Zosimus' *New History* is the only source of this charge. This section of the work derives largely from Olympiodorus of Thebes. Zosimus states that this suspicion was false: Serena never tried to abandon the Eternal City to the enemies. In any case, according to Zosimus her punishment was well deserved, since she, a devout Christian, committed blasphemy against the traditional gods. Zosimus also gives details of who were responsible for this fatal slander: the senators of Rome and Serena's cousin, Galla Placidia³⁵. Since Stilicho's followers began to be persecuted shortly after his death, the most plausible explanation for this turn of events is that the senators and Galla Placidia's intention was to get rid of one of the last survivors of the purge: Serena.

It is possible that the idea of a connection between Serena and Alaric originated from the fact that Alaric and the barbarian troops billeted in Italy were unsettled by the fall of Stilicho's regime. Thus, they may have been suspected of trying to restore the survivors of the coup to power. As already shown, had it been possible, Alaric would probably have saved Eucherius' life. In addition, after the fall of Stilicho, the women and children of barbarian soldiers were massacred in various Italian cities. The soldiers thus decided to join Alaric in order to avenge them³⁶. Putting Serena to death could be seen as a means to weaken the former supporters of Stilicho, who now supported Alaric³⁷.

³¹ ZOS. 5.31.4-6.

³² BURNS (1994), p. 183-191; MCEVOY (2013), p. 176.

³³ ZOS. 5.37.4.

³⁴ *Qui suas opes praedoni publico uel eius filio ceterisque satellitibus dederunt (...) quibus ille usus est ad omnem ditandam inquietandamque barbariem, his omnem repetendi uiam iubemus esse praeclusam.*

³⁵ ZOS. 5.38.1-2. See BALDINI (2010), p. 39-40 and SIVAN (2011), p. 28-29.

³⁶ ZOS. 5.35.5-6.

³⁷ SIRAGO (1961), p. 89.

Zosimus' firm denial of this rumour parallels his own stance towards the *magister scrinii* Olympius³⁸. He claims that Olympius disseminated the idea that Stilicho was planning to have Theodosius II killed and his own son Eucherius put in his place³⁹. Zosimus condemns Olympius, and his work is, along with Olympiodorus' History, the only eastern source that paints Stilicho in a positive light⁴⁰. However, it is probable that the explanation of Serena's death that Zosimus records had actually circulated in the Senate. As a matter of fact, Olympiodorus' History, upon which Zosimus draws, is an excellent source. Olympiodorus wrote his History in the first half of the fifth century⁴¹. He was generally well informed about the recent history of the West and was not a reclusive historian, having travelled as an ambassador on behalf of Theodosius II since the 410s (though mainly in the East). It would thus be wrong to consider the accusation he reports as a mere hypothesis or invention. It documents the search for a scapegoat that took place among the Roman elites during the distressing siege of the city by the Visigoths⁴².

Scapegoating is common in the cases examined in this paper. It is tantamount to personalising complex events and reducing them to simplistic narratives⁴³. The accusation that Malalas makes against Honorius of having invited Alaric to Rome to fight against the Senate is another result of this search for a person responsible for calamities, in this case the sack of Rome of 410⁴⁴. This interpretation of the capture of Rome probably arises from Honorius' lack of commitment to save Rome. This emerges from Honorius' refusal of all the moderate offers of peace by Alaric, as reported by Zosimus⁴⁵, and is also reflected by the famous tale according to which Honorius was more worried about his hen named Rome than about the city itself⁴⁶. However, Malalas' criticism may also originate from Honorius' genuine hostility towards the Roman Senate. Indeed, Priscus Attalus, who usurped imperial power in Rome from 409 to 410 AD, was an eminent member of the senatorial aristocracy⁴⁷. In addition to Honorius, another scapegoat was found for Alaric's sack of Rome. The noblewoman Anicia Faltonia Proba was said to have opened the gates of the Eternal City to the enemies in order to save the Romans from starving to death⁴⁸.

These kinds of rumours also highlight the unresolved relationship between the Romans and the Gothic armies, whose political importance was then growing. Accusing someone of connivance with the Goths might have been a strong political weapon at the time. It is thus unsurprising that both Stilicho and his

³⁸ *PLRE II s.v.* Olympius 2.

³⁹ ZOS. 5.32.1-2.

⁴⁰ Zosimus only has a positive opinion of Stilicho in the final part of his *New History*, when he draws upon Olympiodorus (starting from ZOS. 5.26 until the end of the work). When Zosimus draws upon Eunapius of Sardis in the previous part of his *New History* (until ZOS. 5.25), he is influenced by Eunapius' negative opinion of Stilicho. See BALDINI (2010), p. 32.

⁴¹ For the date of composition of Olympiodorus' History see GILLET (1993), p. 2, 12, according to whom the work was written in the 440s; see also THOMPSON (1944), 44, MATTHEWS (1970), p. 80, TREADGOLD (2004), p. 729, and VAN NUFFELEN (2013), p. 130, who claim the work was written in around 427.

⁴² See OOST (1968), p. 223-224, footnote 58 and WIENENDAELE (2015), p. 77, for the search for scapegoats in the aftermath of the calamities of the fifth century.

⁴³ I accept the definition of scapegoating given by O'FLYNN (1983), p. 57, who refers to the case of Stilicho.

⁴⁴ MALAL., *Chron.* 349/350, ed. L. DINDORF = 13.48, ed. I. THURN.

⁴⁵ ZOS. 5.36, 5.50.2-51.2.

⁴⁶ PROCOP., *Vand.* 1.2.25-26. See BALDINI (2010), p. 45.

⁴⁷ *PLRE II s.v.* Attalus 2. See CECCONI (2013).

⁴⁸ PROCOP., *Vand.* 1.2.27. See BALDINI (2010), p. 44; SIVAN (2011), p. 156-157.

political enemy Rufinus were accused of the same action: inviting the barbarians to enter the Roman territories⁴⁹. Rufinus was the praetorian prefect of the East from 392 until his violent death in 395 AD⁵⁰. In the first half of 395, Rufinus managed to get Alaric's Visigoths to stop besieging Constantinople⁵¹. In the summer of 395, Stilicho led his troops in Greece against Alaric. His campaign against the Visigoths was interrupted by Rufinus, who ordered him to retreat to the West and send the eastern soldiers back to the East⁵². In November 395, however, Rufinus was lynched and killed in the outskirts of Constantinople by the same soldiers that he had recalled⁵³. The uncertain and volatile military situation, and in particular the scarcity of details as to how Rufinus dissuaded Alaric from the siege of Constantinople, may have aroused suspicion against him. This suspicion may have been exploited by Stilicho and his supporters for their own political agenda.

Both western and eastern sources accuse Rufinus of colluding with the Goths⁵⁴. In his *in Rufinum*, Claudian describes the invasion of Illyricum by the Visigoths as follows: "He (Rufinus) pushes the Goths and the peoples of the Hister to set off; he welcomes the Scythians (*Scythiamque receptat*) so that they can help him, and delivers the remnants of his army to the hostile soldiers"⁵⁵. And further: "That said, he (Rufinus) broke the barriers – as if Aeolus loosened the winds' reins – and thus spread the peoples, and opened the path to war"⁵⁶. This is not dissimilar from the texts that accuse his arch-enemy Stilicho of inciting the barbarians to attack the Romans⁵⁷. The same set of accusations is bounced back and forth from the East to the West, and is used to criticise both Stilicho and Rufinus. However, Rufinus and Stilicho, being the ambitious regents of Arcadius and Honorius, respectively, are presented as similar characters by Eunapius of Sardis, and hence by Zosimus, who draws upon Eunapius for this part of his *New History*⁵⁸.

That similar accusations were used against both Stilicho and Rufinus is confirmed by eastern sources that highlight Rufinus' role in the Gothic invasion of Illyricum. Zosimus, who relies on Eunapius here, writes that Rufinus secretly informed Alaric that he had permission to enter Thrace, Macedonia, and Thessaly along with his barbarians⁵⁹. On the other hand, John of Antioch combines this "invitation" with the accusation, generally made against Rufinus, of trying to usurp imperial power in the East⁶⁰. According to

⁴⁹ MAZZARINO (1990), p. 184-185, drew a parallel between the rumours of "invitation" involving Stilicho, and those involving Rufinus. See also CAMERON (1970), p. 71-72 for Rufinus' "invitations".

⁵⁰ *PLRE I* s.v. Rufinus 18.

⁵¹ CLAUD., *in Rufinum*, 2.73-85, ed. J. B. HALL; cf. JANSSEN (2004), p. 48-49.

⁵² CLAUD., *in Rufinum*, 2.161-163.

⁵³ CLAUD., *in Rufinum*, 2.343-439; HIER., *Epist.* 60.16, ed. J. LABOURT; PHILOST. 11.3; SOCR. 6.1.5; SOZ. 8.1.3; ZOS. 5.7.5-6; JO. ANT., fr. 190 *FHG* = 282, ed. U. ROBERTO = 215, ed. S. MARIEV. Vd. JANSSEN (2004), p. 57.

⁵⁴ CLAUD., *Laus Serenae*, 232-236; *in Rufinum*, 1.308-310, 1.319-322, 2.22-24; OROS., *Hist.* 7.37.1 (also accusing Stilicho of supporting the barbarian nations in order to make his son emperor); ZOS. 5.5.4; JO. ANT., fr. 190 *FHG* = 282 ROBERTO = 215 MARIEV. Rufinus is also said to have provoked his rival Promotus' death by sending the barbarians against him: see ZOS. 4.51.3. See O'FLYNN (1983), p. 27 for these accusations.

⁵⁵ CLAUD., *in Rufinum*, 1.308-310.

⁵⁶ CLAUD., *in Rufinum*, 2.22-24.

⁵⁷ COD. THEOD. 9.42.22, *inquietandamque barbariem*; HIER., *Epist.* 123.16, ed. J. LABOURT, *scelere semibarbari accidit proditoris, qui nostris contra nos opibus armauit inimicos*; MARCELL., *Chron.* (MOMMSEN, *Chron. Min.* II) p. 69 s.a. 408, *gentes (...) contra regnum Honorii excitauit*. See above.

⁵⁸ EUN., fr. 62 *FHG* = 62.1 BLOCKLEY; ZOS. 5.1.1-3.

⁵⁹ ZOS. 5.5.4-5.

⁶⁰ The other sources that mention this serious crime are CLAUD., *in Rufinum*, 2 *passim* and PHILOST. 11.3; cf. ZOS. 5.3.3.

John, Rufinus frightened the emperor Arcadius through his own friendship with the barbarians, and forced him to share with him the position of eastern emperor. Rufinus later introduced a multitude of barbarians led by Alaric into eastern Roman lands, and had Greece and Illyricum pillaged by them. As a consequence, it became clear that he was attempting some kind of usurpation of imperial power (τυραννίς)⁶¹.

Why is it so clear to John of Antioch that the act of provoking an invasion by the barbarians served as a means for a usurpation?⁶² It seems to have been a relatively common way of explaining the faults of a public enemy, as is shown by another example of such behaviour. A parallel is to be found in the very case of Stilicho. Orosius, as seen above, stated that Stilicho tried to obtain the empire for his son from Honorius by means of a barbarian invasion⁶³. Marcellinus wrote that Stilicho “provoked the peoples of the Alans, Suebi, and Vandals to attack the empire of Honorius, out of contempt towards Honorius, and because he was trying to gain hold of his empire”⁶⁴. The tactics are the same: threatening an emperor with a Germanic invasion, then usurping the empire – with the small difference that Stilicho tried to do that on behalf of his son Eucherius.

3) Traitors and barbarians

The action attributed to Constantius II, although controversial, came from a legitimate ruler. What if an “invitation” was made by a usurper or a public enemy? The *comes Africae*, Bonifatius, is rarely defined as a usurper, and, in any case, becoming a usurper is presented more as an intention than as a matter of fact⁶⁵. However, Bonifatius was declared *hostis publicus* by the *magister utriusque militiae* Felix in 427 AD. Felix considered Bonifatius to be too powerful, and thus sent a Roman army against him, which was defeated by Bonifatius in that same year⁶⁶. Several sources state that Bonifatius negotiated with the Vandals (circa 428-429 AD) as a reaction to the conspiracy plotted against him by Aetius, who managed to influence Galla Placidia’s attitude towards him⁶⁷. Among these accounts, the most detailed are those written by Procopius and Theophanes – the latter evidently drawing from the former. These two historians record that Bonifatius

⁶¹ JO. ANT., fr. 190 *FHG* = 282 ROBERTO = 215 MARIEV.

⁶² In two episodes that I have already analysed, on the contrary, the Germans are incited by a legitimate emperor (Constantius II) to destroy usurpers (Magentius, Julian). A later case of an “invitation” to the barbarians against a usurper is that of Licinia Eudoxia and Genseric’s alliance against Petronius Maximus.

⁶³ OROS., *Hist.* 7.38.3-4.

⁶⁴ MARCELL., *Chron.* (MOMMSEN, *Chron. Min.* II) p. 69 *s.a.* 408.

⁶⁵ PROCOP., *Vand.* 1.3.17, recounts that Aetius slandered Bonifatius to Galla Placidia, claiming that Bonifatius was planning to become a usurper (ὡς τυραννοῖν); PROCOP., *Vand.* 1.3.27, after narrating Bonifatius’ alleged invitation to the Vandals, records that some friends of Bonifatius in Rome were puzzled by the possibility that he had become a usurper (τυραννοῖν). THEOPH. p. 94, *AM* 5931, ed. C. DE BOOR, shows that Aetius slandered Bonifatius to Galla Placidia, telling her that Bonifatius was setting up an insurrection (ἀνταρσία). See also DEMANDT (2008), p. 123.

⁶⁶ PROSP., *Chron.* (MOMMSEN, *Chron. Min.* I) p. 471 *s.a.* 427, *Bonifatio (...)* bellum ad arbitrium Felicis, quia ad Italiam uenire abnuerat, publico nomine inlatum est. See *PLRE* II *s.v.* Felix 14 for the career of Fl. Constantius Felix, *magister utriusque militiae* in 425-430.

⁶⁷ PROCOP., *Vand.* 1.3.22-26; JORD., *Get.* 167, *Rom.* 330; JO. ANT., fr. 196 *FHG* = 290 ROBERTO (*spurium* according to MARIEV), where the Germans invited by Bonifatius are mistakenly named as Goths; THEOPH. p. 94-95, *AM* 5931. See also *PLRE* II *s.v.* Bonifatius 3; WIJNENDAELE (2015), p. 69-72, 74-78. As for the question of the authenticity of the fragments of John of Antioch contained in the Salmasian excerpts (like the one just mentioned), see BLECKMANN (2010).

sent his most faithful friends to Spain in order to gain the support of the Vandals, or that he went in person to Spain to the Vandals⁶⁸.

Bonifatius' "invitation" could have been considered plausible by contemporaries. Warlords could have special relations of trust with certain barbarian nations. This allowed the warlords to recruit barbarians into the Roman army with relative ease. As Aetius had strong personal connections with the Huns, Bonifatius could be considered to have established similar relations with the Vandals⁶⁹. My main aim, however, is to understand when this tradition first originated⁷⁰. This is particularly difficult, since the notion of Bonifatius' treason first emerges in the sources a century after the events, in Procopius and Jordanes' accounts. Hydatius' Chronicle, probably written between 457 and 468, and in any case before 470, does not record this accusation⁷¹, nor does (as far as we know) Olympiodorus of Thebes, who writes his History in the first half of the fifth century and has a high opinion of Bonifatius⁷². Prosper makes an allusion to a host of the barbarians (*gentes*) who did not have the competence necessary for sailing and were allowed to cross the Mediterranean Sea in 427, after the defeat of the first army that was sent by Felix against Bonifatius⁷³. However, as J. Wijnendaele has demonstrated, this is hardly strict evidence of Bonifatius' supposed invitation to the Vandals, as *gentes* may also refer to the Visigoths engaged by Felix in the conflict between him and Bonifatius⁷⁴. Finally, there is no positive evidence that Cassiodorus had any role in the making of the tradition regarding Bonifatius' treason⁷⁵.

Thus, it seems reasonable to opt for the idea that Bonifatius' "invitation" to the Vandals emerged decades after the actual invasion of Africa by the Vandals in 429. However, one last aspect should be taken into account. The written sources that blame Bonifatius for the Vandal invasion are the works of Procopius, Jordanes, John of Antioch and Theophanes. These are all narratives that used Priscus of Panion's History as a source⁷⁶. It is possible that the first author who reported rumours of Bonifatius' "invitation", or

⁶⁸ In Procopius and Theophanes' narratives, respectively.

⁶⁹ SIRAGO (1961), p. 279; ID. (2017), p. 66.

⁷⁰ Some of the modern historians who believe that this story is plausible include STORONI MAZZOLANI (1981), p. 332; AIELLO (2008), p. 1120-1125; ROBERTO (2012), p. 125-126. Roberto thinks that the transfer of the entire people of the Vandals from Spain to Africa would have been impossible without the assistance of the Romans. Some of those who consider it to be a later invention are SIRAGO (1961), p. 278-279; ID. (2017), p. 66-67; NAGY (1967), p. 164; OOST (1968), p. 223-224, footnote 58; HEATHER (2005), p. 268; SIVAN (2011), p. 106 and footnote 50; WIJNENDAELE (2015), p. 76. According to COURTOIS (1955), p. 156, this explanation of the Vandal invasion is not absurd; however, it only appears in the written sources some decades after the facts. DIESNER (1963), p. 113-114, does not propose a definitive answer. For a more detailed presentation of the *status quaestionis* in modern studies see OOST (1968), p. 223-224, footnote 58 and more recently SHAW (2011), p. 773 footnote 8.

⁷¹ For the date of composition of Hydatius' Chronicle see MUHLBERGER (1990), p. 193; BURGESS (1993), p. 5; ROBERTO (2000), p. 135.

⁷² For Olympiodorus' high opinion of Bonifatius see BLOCKLEY (1981), p. 29, 46; WIJNENDAELE (2015), p. 116-117. THOMPSON (1944), p. 44, takes Olympiodorus' positive opinion of Bonifatius into consideration, along with the alleged reality of his "invitation" to the Vandals, to reach the conclusion that Olympiodorus' History must have been written before the Vandal invasion of Africa in 429.

⁷³ PROSP., *Chron.* (MOMMSEN, *Chron. Min.* I) p. 472 *s.a.* 427.

⁷⁴ WIJNENDAELE (2015), p. 77-78.

⁷⁵ NAGY (1967), p. 164, supposed that this tradition was created by Cassiodorus in his *Historia Gothorum*, upon which Jordanes later drew.

⁷⁶ This view has been accepted by WIJNENDAELE (2015), p. 115 and by ELTON (2016). For Procopius' use of Priscus' History as a source, by way of Eustathius of Epiphania, see ROBERTO (2000), p. 120-121 and footnote 6; *op. cit.*, p. 123, p. 125 footnote 11; cf. BLOCKLEY (1981), p. 115-116. Jordanes is influenced by Priscus, above all concerning his

independently interpreted the Vandal invasion as the result of such a treason, was Priscus in the 470s. In this case, Bonifatius' alleged treachery first appeared in a written source much earlier than Procopius and Jordanes; what is more, the memory of the Vandal invasion may still have been very much alive at the time Priscus was writing. In addition, putting the blame on Bonifatius for the invasion would be consistent with Priscus' generally negative opinion of this warlord⁷⁷.

Justa Grata Honoria was apparently deemed (circa 449 AD) to have had an affair with her *procurator* Eugenius and thus fell into disgrace. In order to cover up the scandal, she was then forced to marry Herculanius, a man of high rank⁷⁸. Therefore, she took revenge by sending the eunuch Hyacinthus as a messenger to Attila. Through Hyacinthus she promised the King of the Huns a sum of money and sent him a ring, in order to exhort him to help her out of her distress⁷⁹. This could also have been considered plausible by contemporaries. As Galla Placidia had had special connections with the Visigoths as a consequence of her marriage to Athaulf, Honoria's betrothal to Attila was not an impossible eventuality⁸⁰.

The variations among the different sources are in this case more substantial. According to John of Antioch, the origin of Honoria's disgrace was the fact that she was caught going to a secret meeting with her lover Eugenius, who was soon put to death⁸¹. These elements of the narrative are nowhere to be found in other accounts. The eunuch who served as a messenger is explicitly named (as Hyacinthus) only by John of Antioch⁸². On the other hand, the version of the story where Honoria had been left pregnant by Eugenius is only in Count Marcellinus' account⁸³. Even the kind of punishment that the Augusta underwent for her sexual behaviour is different in the various sources. Priscus and John of Antioch write that she was deprived of her imperial authority, while Marcellinus and Jordanes (*Romana*) report that she was expelled from the

knowledge of the Huns: see BLOCKLEY (1981), p. 113-114. John of Antioch appears to have read Priscus without any intermediaries: see ROBERTO (2000), p. 121; cf. BLOCKLEY (1981), p. 114. See also BLOCKLEY (1981), p. 117, GREATREX [-BARDILL] (1996), p. 178 footnote 33, and BARDILL [-GREATREX] (1996), p. 182 for Theophanes' use of Priscus' History, whether or not by way of Eustathius of Epiphania.

⁷⁷ See WIJNENDAELE (2015), p. 115-116. Priscus, on the other hand, has an excellent opinion of Bonifatius' enemy, Aetius: see ZECCHINI (1983), p. 56-57.

⁷⁸ *PLRE II s.v.* Herculanius 2. He became the western consul in 452.

⁷⁹ PRISC., fr. 15 *FHG* = 20.1 BLOCKLEY = *exc.* 15 CAROLLA; ID., fr. 16 *FHG* = 20.3 BLOCKLEY = *exc.* 16 CAROLLA; MARCELL., *Chron.* (MOMMSEN, *Chron. Min.* II) p. 79 *s.a.* 434; JORD., *Get.* 223-224, *Rom.* 328; JO. ANT., fr. 199 *FHG* = 292 ROBERTO = 223 MARIEV; THEOPH. p. 105, *AM* 5943. See HOLM (1982), p. 1-2; ZECCHINI (1983), p. 263-265; STICKLER (2002), p. 125-131; DEMANDT (2008), p. 127; SIVAN (2011), p. 153-157; ROBERTO (2012), p. 136-138; CAMERON (2012), p. 36. According to SIRAGO (1961), p. 329; ID. (2017), p. 113, the idea of an agreement between Honoria and Attila is plausible. While Holm and Sivan take a sceptic's view of the story (in particular, according to Sivan it bears a striking similarity to the vicissitudes of Julia, Augustus' daughter), Zecchini, Stickler and Roberto search for the political motivations behind Honoria's actions. According to MEIER (2017), p. 46 and *passim*, the "Honoria affair" served as a "communications medium". In other words, this tradition originated in the East and was used to embellish the inconsistent eastern Roman policy toward the Huns, by diverting the blame of the Huns' invasion of Gaul and Italy from the eastern Roman government to the West.

⁸⁰ SIRAGO (1961), p. 329; ID. (2017), p. 113; ROBERTO (2012), p. 137.

⁸¹ JO. ANT., fr. 199 *FHG* = 292 ROBERTO = 223 MARIEV.

⁸² JORD., *Get.* 224, simply mentions a eunuch; in JORD., *Rom.* 328, he is presented as a *clientulus*.

⁸³ MARCELL., *Chron.* (MOMMSEN, *Chron. Min.* II) p. 79 *s.a.* 434. The date 434 is of course unacceptable.

imperial palace and sent to the eastern emperor Theodosius II⁸⁴. Finally, according to Jordanes (*Getica*), she was forced to live in chastity and was held under custody by order of her brother Valentinian III⁸⁵.

Not unlike the accounts regarding the recovery of the letters proving Constantius II's betrayal in favour of the barbarians, a piece of evidence for the treason plays a prominent role in the various versions of the story of Honoria and Attila. The "smoking gun" is, in this case, the ring sent by Honoria to the chieftain of the Huns. The first author to speak of this object is Priscus of Panion, according to whom Attila demanded half of the western Roman empire as the dowry of Honoria, whom he claimed to be betrothed to him. The ring served to Attila as proof (τεκμήριον) of the agreement⁸⁶. This piece of evidence for the treason is also mentioned in a fragment of John of Antioch in which the eunuch Hyacinthus is presented as the messenger who brought to Attila not only Honoria's ring, but also, as in similar cases, a sum of money⁸⁷.

The first source to contain this element, as already mentioned, is Priscus' History. Note that this work was written in the 470s, just two or three decades after the alleged facts. Priscus seems to be reporting a rumour originating from the years in which Attila's threat was very concrete, or from the following years, in which the memory of the *metus Hunnicus* was still strong. Priscus was not fond of this kind of court gossip. In fact, in the later episode involving Licinia Eudoxia and the Vandals, in John of Antioch's version (drawing upon Priscus), the "invitation" is just one of the two explanations for the facts⁸⁸. It is thus improbable that Priscus himself came up with Honoria's "invitation"⁸⁹. It is possible that among Roman people, the rumour of Honoria's treason arose from the two following facts: Attila had demanded Honoria's hand in marriage, and, meanwhile, Honoria had fallen into disgrace at court, for unclear reasons. This was excellent material for gossip. It is also probable that Attila himself was interested in exploiting this rumour, by disseminating it through diplomatic channels and thus strengthening his demand for western Roman lands⁹⁰.

In any case, the importance of oral traditions should not be underestimated regarding this episode. Priscus, who was not only a historian but also a diplomat, may have collected them from his acquaintances in the course of his life. Finally, this story may have been generally accepted in eastern Roman historiography because it put the blame for Attila's invasion of the West on the western court, thus concealing the responsibilities of the eastern government⁹¹.

⁸⁴ PRISC., fr. 15 *FHG* = 20.1 BLOCKLEY = *exc.* 15 CAROLLA; JO. ANT., fr. 199 *FHG* = 292 ROBERTO = 223 MARIEV; MARCELL., *Chron.* (Mommsen, *Chron. Min.* II) p. 79 *s.a.* 434; JORD., *Rom.* 328. According to *PLRE II s.v.* Honoria, "The statement that she was sent to Constantinople (...) is inconsistent with other sources and presumably an error".

⁸⁵ JORD., *Get.* 224.

⁸⁶ PRISC., fr. 16 *FHG* = 20.3 BLOCKLEY = *exc.* 16 CAROLLA.

⁸⁷ JO. ANT., fr. 199 *FHG* = 292 ROBERTO = 223 MARIEV. We should not overlook the fact that the ring is a motif in folklore: see MAZZARINO (1989), p. 177, 357-358 endnote 519. Mazzarino considers this motif in Herodotus.

⁸⁸ JO. ANT., fr. 201 *FHG* = 293.1 ROBERTO = 224 MARIEV. See ROBERTO (2000), p. 121 for John's direct use of Priscus' History. See below for a discussion of this episode.

⁸⁹ This last consideration may help clarify the thesis (postulated above) of the presence of Bonifatius' invitation in Priscus' History. This was probably not an original interpretation of the facts by Priscus: the historian just reported rumours that Bonifatius had been having secret dealings with the Vandals. On this particular occasion, Priscus may have approved of such a view, as he had a low esteem of this general.

⁹⁰ MAZZARINO (1946), p. 19-20, argues that Attila's demands are evidence of the plausibility of the rumour.

⁹¹ As demonstrated by MEIER (2017). See above.

According to some ancient sources, 26 years after their invasion of Africa, the Vandals under King Genseric were led again by a traitor into the Roman empire. This time, an Augusta was alleged to be responsible for the catastrophe, and the destination of the invaders was Rome itself. Licinia Eudoxia, the daughter of Theodosius II and widow of Valentinian III, was insinuated of provoking the second sack of Rome by the Vandals led by Genseric in 455 AD⁹². When Valentinian III was murdered by order of Petronius Maximus, who then usurped the supreme power, Licinia Eudoxia was forced to marry the usurper. However, she soon came up with an elaborate plan for revenge. She is said to have called on Genseric for help; the King of the Vandals then reached Rome from Africa with his soldiers and had the Eternal City pillaged⁹³.

This is the basic tale told by the sources. It appears with few and small variations in them. The evidence for the treason, for instance, is presented by two of these sources in a different way. Unlike other authors, Count Marcellinus stresses that Eudoxia incited Genseric by letters (*epistulis*). However, this may simply have been what Marcellinus imagined would be the simplest way for Eudoxia to have contacted the King of the Vandals⁹⁴. Equally irrelevant is the small addition made to the story by Evagrius Scholasticus in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Eudoxia, writes Evagrius, invited Genseric by immediately sending him many gifts⁹⁵. This might simply be an improvisation by Evagrius. A treason hardly works without a bit of corruption, and an already mentioned passage involving Stilicho, along with a passage regarding the eunuch Narses that we will analyse later, are just two of the many parallel cases of this typical behaviour⁹⁶.

Licinia Eudoxia's "invitation" is first attested fifteen years at the latest after the Vandals sacked Rome, since it already appears in Hydatius' Chronicle, which, as mentioned, was written in any case before 470. Hydatius is careful to add that the tale might just be a wicked rumour (*ut mala fama dispergit*)⁹⁷. Nor does John of Antioch present this rumour as the only and official version. In fact, he reports this rumour only after offering an explanation that Genseric invaded Italy because Aetius and Valentinian III, with whom he had made the previous peace treaty, were dead, and because Petronius Maximus was weak⁹⁸.

⁹² See ROBERTO (2012), p. 146-156 for a recent study of the second sack of Rome. As we have seen above, two other women, the *regina* Serena and Anicia Faltonia Proba, were alleged to have invited the barbarians (Alaric's Visigoths) to Rome.

⁹³ HYD., *Chron.* (MOMMSEN, *Chron. Min.* II) p. 28 § 167 *s.a.* 456?; MARCELL., *Chron.* (MOMMSEN, *Chron. Min.* II) p. 86 *s.a.* 455; PROCOP., *Vand.* 1.4.37-39; JORD., *Rom.* 334; MALAL., *Chron.* 365/366 DINDORF = 14.26 THURN; EVAGR., *H.E.* 2.7, 4.17; JO. ANT., fr. 201 *FHG* = 293.1 ROBERTO = 224 MARIEV; ID., fr. 200 *FHG* = 293.2 ROBERTO (*spurium* MARIEV); THEOPH. p. 108-109, *AM* 5947; CEDREN. 1.606, ed. I. BEKKER; ZONAR. 13.25, ed. L. DINDORF. See MOROSI (1882); ROBERTO (2000), p. 124 footnote 10 (with bibliography on the "invitation"); ID. (2012), p. 146, 290-292 endnotes 38 and 40 (with bibliography); SIVAN (2011), p. 157.

⁹⁴ MARCELL., *Chron.* (MOMMSEN, *Chron. Min.* II) p. 86 *s.a.* 455. As we have seen, the presence of letters is a recurrent element in accounts of treason and other shady dealings with the barbarians. According to Ammianus (AMM. 27.5.1) the Goths justified their alliance with Procopius (usurper in the East in 365-366 AD) by showing a letter from Procopius in which he claimed to be a legitimate descendant of Constantine the Great. See *PLRE* I *s.v.* Procopius 4.

⁹⁵ EVAGR., *H.E.* 2.7, δῶρα πλεῖστα παραντίκα δοῦσα.

⁹⁶ MARCELL., *Chron.* (MOMMSEN, *Chron. Min.* II) p. 69 *s.a.* 408, *donis pecuniisque (...) excitavit*; PAUL. DIAC., *Hist. Lang.* 2.5.

⁹⁷ HYD., *Chron.* (MOMMSEN, *Chron. Min.* II) p. 28 § 167 *s.a.* 456?.

⁹⁸ JO. ANT., fr. 201 *FHG* = 293.1 ROBERTO = 224 MARIEV. ZECCHINI (1983), p. 57 and ROBERTO (2000), p. 124, argue that in John's account the political explanation involving the broken agreement has priority over the gossip regarding Eudoxia's "invitation".

The tradition according to which Licinia Eudoxia called on the Vandal Genseric for help is, according to S. Mazzarino, a “duplicate”, created by Roman public opinion, of the earlier episode of the invitation of Attila by Honoria, which is based on more solid historical grounds⁹⁹. It is true that the tale of Honoria, like the one of Eudoxia, involves a vengeful princess, a forced marriage, and an external enemy. However, it is possible to offer a new window into the tale of Eudoxia’s treason. A duplicate is the product of an aseptic operation that cannot be done when the material the historian is dealing with is too “hot”. The first available source mentioning Eudoxia’s betrayal, however, is Hydatius’ Chronicle, which was written fifteen years at the latest after the Vandals sacked Rome – thus a recent and traumatic event¹⁰⁰. Whoever first charged Eudoxia with treason was not playing on a literary invention. Was the accuser (or were the accusers) somewhat influenced by the previous rumour involving Honoria and Attila? This cannot be ruled out with certainty. However, it is more important to stress the fact that the accuser, or the accusers, were trying to interpret recent facts. Such an interpretation, though false, may have given rise to new facts. A simplistic or false narrative can influence public opinion. In other words, scapegoating is a historical matter. Explaining this case as a “duplicate” would thus be misleading.

This view is further strengthened by the reevaluation of a passage written by John of Antioch regarding Eudoxia’s treason: fr. 201 *FHG* = 293.1 Roberto = 224 Mariev. When writing this passage, as U. Roberto has demonstrated, John was drawing upon Priscus of Panion’s historical work¹⁰¹. It is possible that this passage recalls another, relatively early, literary attestation of the gossip, since Priscus wrote his History in the 470s. Thus, the rumour of Eudoxia’s betrayal might have arisen around the time of the sack of Rome of 455, or not much later.

The main explanation that Priscus (*apud* John of Antioch) offers for the Vandals’ sacking of Rome is that Genseric invaded Italy because Aetius and Valentinian III, with whom the previous agreement of peace between the Vandals and the Romans had been struck, were dead. Moreover, Petronius Maximus, who had become the western Roman emperor after Valentinian III’s murder, was in a very weak position. It is only after offering this line of reasoning, that Priscus reports the rumour (οἱ δὲ φασὶ) that Eudoxia asked Genseric to avenge her. It is clear that Priscus is trying to balance the gossip by giving an explanation that is more plausible than a simple “invitation”. Hydatius had already presented the idea of Eudoxia’s treason with scepticism, as if it were a nasty rumour (*ut mala fama dispergit*)¹⁰². Unless both Hydatius and Priscus were drawing upon an earlier written source¹⁰³, it is possible that, when they referred to Eudoxia’s invitation, they were simply reflecting an oral tradition.

A final aspect that strengthens the idea that the rumours of Honoria and Eudoxia’s treason were part of the contemporary debate is the presence of the theme of kinship with the barbarians. This theme is

⁹⁹ MAZZARINO (1946), p. 20 footnote 8.

¹⁰⁰ ZECCHINI (1983), p. 33 also thinks that the presence of the rumour in Hydatius’ Chronicle demonstrates that the gossip of Eudoxia’s invitation first arose in the aftermath of the Vandals’ sacking of Rome.

¹⁰¹ ROBERTO (2000), p. 121. Roberto thus shares Zecchini’s view: see ZECCHINI (1983), p. 55-56. Also according to *PLRE II s.v.* Eudoxia 2, in this passage John of Antioch is “probably using a good contemporary source”.

¹⁰² HYD., *Chron.* (MOMMSEN, *Chron. Min.* II) p. 28 § 167 *s.a.* 456?.

¹⁰³ This view is suggested by ROBERTO (2000), p. 140, 158.

clearly not just a literary invention, as kinship was important leverage for both Attila and Genseric. Attila hoped to enlarge his empire, boost his finances, and increase his influence by marrying into the Theodosian dynasty¹⁰⁴. In addition, the Vandals' sacking of Rome may have been justified by the fact that Genseric's son Huneric had been betrothed to Eudocia, daughter of Valentinian III, but the marriage had later been thwarted by Petronius Maximus¹⁰⁵. Marriage thus seems to have been a crucial political instrument for those barbarians who were keen to gain a foothold in the Roman world¹⁰⁶. On the other hand, kinship with the barbarians could explain why a Roman woman could call on the barbarians for help against domestic enemies.

Charges of "invitations" are not limited to the fourth and fifth centuries. A later parallel can be found in a famous episode of Paulus Diaconus' *Historia Langobardorum*, written in the late eighth century. As Paulus recounts, the Armenian eunuch Narses was accused of provoking the invasion of Italy by the Lombards in 568 AD by offering them the fruits and produce of the Italian lands¹⁰⁷. Modern historians have debated whether this tale mirrors actual facts or is just a legend¹⁰⁸.

Although Paulus Diaconus offers the most detailed account of the alleged treason, the core of this tradition dates back much earlier. The *Origo gentis Langobardorum*, written in around 643, states that King Alboin led the Lombards into Italy, and that the Lombards had been invited by Narses¹⁰⁹. Also in a section of the *Liber Pontificalis* that was written between 657 and 672, Narses is said to have incited the Lombards to conquer Italy¹¹⁰. In addition, Narses' treachery is mentioned in Isidore of Seville's Chronicle, in *Prosperi Continuatio Hauniensis*, and in Fredegar's Chronicle, which date back to the early seventh century¹¹¹. This

¹⁰⁴ CROKE (2015), p. 114-115; MEIER (2017), p. 43-44.

¹⁰⁵ HYD., *Chron.* (MOMMSEN, *Chron. Min.* II) p. 27 § 162 s.a. 455. See *PLRE* II s.v. Eudocia 1; s.v. Hunericus; DEMANDT (2008), p. 142; CROKE (2015), p. 103, 105.

¹⁰⁶ ROBERTO (2006).

¹⁰⁷ PAUL. DIAC., *Hist. Lang.* 2.5.

¹⁰⁸ JARNUT (1982), p. 35, considers it to be an unfounded story. CHRISTIE (1991), p. 103, 108, suggests that the "invitation" by Narses is "malicious court gossip". However, he argues that, either an invasion by the Lombards or an invitation by the eunuch took place, the result was the same. ID. (1995), p. 62-63, adds that Narses may have invited the Lombards, so that they could settle in northern Italy as federates, and thus repopulate and strengthen it. This decision may have been sanctioned in Constantinople. The story of the invitation is just a legend according to FAUBER (1990), p. 176-183 and CAPO (1992), p. 429 (commentary to PAUL. DIAC., *Hist. Lang.* 2.5). POHL (2002), p. 198, believes that an "invitation" is not impossible. In the end, I think that there is no solid evidence for solving the problem of the historical plausibility of this episode.

¹⁰⁹ *Origo gentis Langobardorum*, 5, ed. G. WAITZ, *Ipse Albuin adduxit Langobardos in Italia, inuitatos a Narsete scribarum*.

¹¹⁰ LIB. PONTIF., vol. I, *Iohannes III*, p. 305, ed. L. DUCHESNE, *Tunc Romani inuidia ducti suggesterunt Iustiniano* (i.e. Justin II) *et Sophiae quia "expedierat Romanis Gothis seruire quam Grecis, ubi Narsis eunuchus imperat et seruitio nos subiecit; et piissimus princeps noster haec ignorat. Aut libera nos de manu eius, aut certe et ciuitate Romana et nos gentibus deseruimus". Quo audito Narsis dixit: "si male feci Romanis, male inueniam". Tunc egressus Narsis de Roma uenit Campania et scripsit genti Langobardorum ut uenirent et possiderent Italiam*. See CHRISTIE (1991), p. 86, who rightly argues that the *Liber Pontificalis* was Paulus Diaconus' main source for this episode. For the date of composition of this part of the *Liber Pontificalis*, see CAPO (1992), p. 428. The Spanish continuator of Hydatius writes that Narses *provinciam Italiam Alboino regi Longobardorum tradidit* (*Continuatio Epitomae Hispanae*, MOMMSEN, *Chron. Min.* II, p. 36). This is the last piece of information reported by this short Continuation. The tradition of Narses' treason is also reported by the *Historia Langobardorum codicis Gothani*, 5, ed. G. WAITZ, *Iste Albuin mouit et adduxit Langobardos in Italia, inuitatos ad Narside proconsule et praeside Italiae, qui minas Suffiae reginae erat perterritus*. However, this text was written in the early ninth century, after Paulus Diaconus' *Historia Langobardorum*.

¹¹¹ ISID., *Chron.* (MOMMSEN, *Chron. Min.* II) p. 476 § 402; PROSPERI C.H. (MOMMSEN, *Chron. Min.* I) p. 337 § 4; FRED. 3.65, ed. B. KRUSCH. See CAPO (1992), p. 428.

demonstrates that the first literary testimonies to this episode are not much later than the actual invasion of Italy by the Lombards¹¹².

It should be noted that Narses' "invitation" is an exclusively western tradition, as it is only present in the Latin sources. It would also seem that the eastern sources had little interest in the Lombard conquest of Byzantine Italy¹¹³. The tradition of Narses' treason, which originated in the Latin West, was soon accepted into the Lombard sources, starting from the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum*, probably because it justified the Lombards' invasion of Italy¹¹⁴, or at least did not present it as a traumatic event¹¹⁵. It can thus be concluded that Narses' invitation is not just a literary tradition; on the contrary, it was exploited both by the native population of Italy and by the Lombards as an explanation of their own recent history.

4) Rumours and invention

In all the cases examined, except perhaps for the episode of Bonifatius' treason, sources can be found to demonstrate that the rumours of "invitations" arose at the same time as the events narrated – or slightly later. Generally speaking, these rumours cannot be considered to have simply been invented by historians. Nor should they be viewed as literary invention. They are rather the product of a search for a scapegoat among contemporaries. We are dealing with a kind of accusation that was circulating and being used within the political life of the later empire. It was reflected in literature only to a secondary and derivative degree. For example, it was accepted in historiography when it provided an effective narrative explaining complex historical developments, or was used by the historian to justify certain contexts or the actions of certain individuals¹¹⁶. The sources are thus reflecting live political debate and polemic, not using their own literary template to make sense of events.

When people saw that something very serious had happened, they tried to figure out what the sovereigns and the people at court were responsible for. It would have been normal to surmise that untrustworthy people of power were behind the calamities. This may then have led people to accuse emperors perceived as being "bad" (Constantius II), alleged traitors and public enemies (Rufinus, Stilicho, Bonifatius?), and above all women (Serena, Honoria, Licinia Eudoxia) and eunuchs (Hyacinthus, Narses)¹¹⁷. Women were especially the object of suspicion in patriarchal Roman society. Charges of "invitations" are the product of common sense as perceived in the Roman world.

Moreover, these rumours arise from different and clearly separate historical situations. "Invitations" are a matter of contemporary political debate, which may influence a military success or failure (Julian gained allies thanks to Constantius' alleged treason), life or death (as with Stilicho and Serena).

¹¹² As also POHL (2002), p. 197 suggests, the idea of an "invitation" by Narses originated from among his contemporaries.

¹¹³ CHRISTIE (1991), p. 83.

¹¹⁴ POHL (2002), p. 197.

¹¹⁵ CAPO (1992), p. 429-430.

¹¹⁶ For example, the attitude of the eastern Roman government towards the Huns in the case of Honoria's alleged invitation to Attila; see MEIER (2017).

¹¹⁷ For the role and perception of eunuchs in late Roman society see HOPKINS (1963); LONG (1996), p. 107-146; BARNES (1998), p. 127-128.

Finally, at least in the episodes of Honoria and Eudoxia, we can postulate that the historians who recorded the rumours were to some extent relying on oral traditions.

The common and basic element of the accounts examined is the idea that a domestic enemy has secretly negotiated with an external enemy. But this idea is not necessarily an attitude from late antiquity, since it is implicit in the universal concept of “traitor”¹¹⁸. Therefore, it is not only the presence of a common mental scheme that can explain the concentration of tales of secret arrangements with the barbarians in late antiquity. This phenomenon must also be explained by the existence of a common historical problem.

Thus, after looking for a rhetorical or mental pattern in the accounts of “invitations”, we should identify the burning contemporary issue that provoked the search for scapegoats. As we have seen, these accusations are evidence of an unresolved relationship between the Romans and the barbarians. However, the barbarians are secondary players in these kinds of accounts. The aim of these accounts is to construct an internal enemy. It is traitors who put the healthy elements of society at risk. The external enemies, as portrayed in the works of Christian writers such as Salvian, are a neutral force; they can even contribute to the fall of cruel usurpers (for example, Petronius Maximus), although their main target is to ravage Roman lands. This search for a scapegoat is perhaps the reaction of a society unsettled by the problem of the presence of large numbers of barbarians both in the civilian and military contexts, and of their increasing power. Finding a domestic enemy guilty of complicity with them could help in the quest to find a way out of the predicament. Traitorous actions such as those examined may point to a negative behaviour, and to a level of wickedness that could not be disputed by anyone. The problematic relation between the Romans and the barbarians in the age from Stilicho to Licinia Eudoxia can explain why there were so many accusations at that time.

We are not always aware of the identity of those who invented or spread these rumours, or of those who inflated the ambiguous attitudes of some historical figures. Olympius contributed to disseminating the idea that Stilicho was planning to make his son Eucherius emperor after having Theodosius II killed. Serena was accused of “inviting” Alaric by the Roman senators and Galla Placidia. As for the accusations made against Rufinus, one can suppose that Stilicho and his supporters played a large role in spreading them. In particular, Claudian made his audience and readers (presumably at court) aware of the treason attributed to Rufinus. We are dealing here with western elites. In addition, Attila used the notion of his betrothal to Honoria as a means to claim his rights on half of the western Roman empire¹¹⁹. On the other hand, John of Antioch, drawing upon Priscus, reports that “some people say” that Licinia Eudoxia invited Genseric to Rome. In all these cases, it is possible that the rumours are, at least partly, the outcome of opinion-making by interested individuals.

Given the scarce amount of information regarding the oral sources of the historians taken into account in this paper, we cannot rule out *a priori* that even gossip from the lower strata of society could find its way into historiography. While analysing another controversial rumour (the alleged adoption of

¹¹⁸ From the treason of Tarpeia, to that of Benedict Arnold, and endless other cases.

¹¹⁹ Finally, although this precedes the Theodosian age, it should be taken into account that Julian spread the notion of Constantius II’s invitation to the barbarians.

Theodosius II by Yazdegerd I), for instance, Agathias says: “This story is often told among us. It has been transmitted for a long time to the memory of the next generations, and until now it has been repeated among the notables and the people. However, I do not know this story because I found it reported in writings or historical works”¹²⁰. As mentioned earlier, the importance of oral traditions should not be underestimated, particularly when it concerns traditions that came into being shortly after the events.

It should now be clear that the rumours examined, whether true or not, should not be excluded from the study of history. In fact, they are genuine historical material. We will probably never know the extent to which Attila exploited the notion of Honoria’s proposal of marriage to him, as he led his army towards Italy. However, we do know that, at least according to Zosimus, Serena was falsely accused of helping Alaric to get into Rome, and was actually put to death for this. Even false rumours, such as the one related to Serena, can lead to subsequent events; in other words, they can create history¹²¹.

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¹²⁰ AGATH., *Hist.* 4.26.4, ed. R. KEYDELL, ἄδεται γὰρ οὗτος ὁ λόγος ἐπὶ πλεῖστον ἐν ἡμῖν ἐκ παλαιοῦ τῆ μνήμη παραδοθεὶς τοῖς ἐφεξῆς καὶ μέχρι νῦν παρά τε τοῖς λογίμοις καὶ τῷ δήμῳ περιεγόμενος• γραφῆ δέ τι καὶ λόγοις ἱστορικοῖς οὐκ οἶδα εὐρὼν τοῦτο φερόμενον. Agathias then goes on to say that the only written source for this story is Procopius of Caesarea.

¹²¹ As Marc Bloch wrote, “Mais l’œuvre critique n’est pas tout pour l’historien. L’erreur n’est pas pour lui seulement le corps étranger qu’il s’efforce d’éliminer de toute la précision de ses instruments ; il la considère aussi comme un objet d’étude (...). De faux récits ont soulevé les foules”. See BLOCH (1999), p. 14.

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