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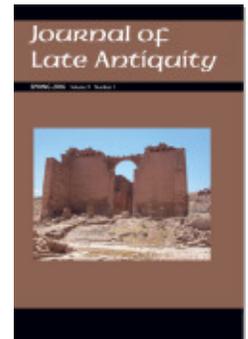
Stilicho, Radagaisus, and the So-Called “Battle of
Faesulae” (406 CE)

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Stilicho, Radagaisus, and the So-Called “Battle of Faesulae” (406 CE)

In 405 CE, an enormous barbarian confederation led by a certain Radagaisus invaded Italy. The western Roman generalissimo Stilicho managed to overcome them near Florence in 406. Historians have treated this war casually, considering it as resolved successfully and soon overshadowed by greater conflicts. However, scholarly consensus on Radagaisus’s defeat is largely dependent on Orosius’s testimony that describes it as the outcome of a Fabian strategy conducted with minimal bloodshed near Faesulae. This report is at odds with other sources which indicate that Stilicho struggled to contain Radagaisus and ultimately inflicted a great slaughter on his forces near Florence. Orosius’s testimony cannot be accepted and internal cross-examination reveals major inconsistencies. A careful analysis of the various stages of Radagaisus’s invasion has major new implications for our understanding of the careers of key protagonists such as Alaric, Uldin, and Sarus, as well as of the breach of the Rhine frontier in 406.

At the dawn of the fifth century CE, the *magister utriusque militiae* Stilicho’s position as helmsman of the western imperial government was uncontested.¹ He had brought the entire western field army under his sole command in previous years, and strengthened his grip over the adolescent emperor Honorius by marrying his elder daughter Maria to him in 398. At first glance, Stilicho’s position seemed secure, but storms were gathering on the horizon. First, he had to deal with an invasion of western territory by Alaric. After Stilicho had terminated his second Greek campaign in 397, the east had sought to

An early version of this article was presented at the “Conflict in Late Antiquity” symposium organized by the University of Helsinki (18 October 2014), where I received helpful feedback from Hagith Sivan, Walter Roberts, and Victoria Leonard. The final article is a significantly revised case study from my PhD dissertation at University College Cork and has benefitted tremendously from sagacious comments by David Woods, Michael Kulikowski, Noel Lenski, and the anonymous peer reviewer.

¹ On the career and policies of Stilicho in general, see: Cameron 1970; Matthews 1975, 253–83; O’Flynn 1983, 14–42; Janssen 2004; McEvoy 2013 141–86. Mazarino 1942 is outdated but still contains valuable sections.

conciliate Alaric by appointing him as *magister militum per Illyricum*. However, in the aftermath of a failed coup in Constantinople by Gainas, a different Gothic general, Alaric found himself stranded without a legitimate command.² Therefore, he decided to switch potential benefactors and invaded Italy in 401 in order to pressure Honorius's court into granting him a similar position. However, Stilicho halted him twice in battle at Pollentia and Verona in 402, so that he was forced to retreat into western Illyricum once more, although he still retained a considerable force. A short period of peace then followed before Radagaisus's invasion in late 405. Zosimus provides the fullest account of Radagaisus's invasion in a succinct, though confused, narrative:

. . . Radagaisus gathered four hundred thousand Celts and Germans from over the Danube and the Rhine and set out to invade Italy. The first word of this news confounded everyone. The cities despaired and even Rome panicked in the face of this profound danger, but Stilicho, taking the whole army stationed at Ticinum in Liguria, which totaled thirty *numeri*, and as many auxiliaries as he could get from the Alans and the Huns, crossed the Danube with his whole army without waiting for the enemy's attack, and, falling on the barbarian without warning, [he] utterly destroyed their whole force. Scarcely anyone escaped, except a few whom he accepted as auxiliaries.³

Despite what Zosimus says above, most other sources describe Radagaisus's followers as Goths, and specify that he was their king.⁴ Scholars often explain this invasion as a consequence of Hunnic pressure to the east,⁵ but it is equally

² On the political crises in Constantinople during the very last years of the fourth century, see: Liebeschuetz 1990, 89–131; Cameron and Long 1993, 199–252; Blockley 1998a, 114–18.

³ Zos. 5.26.3–6 (trans. Ridley 1982, 113, slightly emended): Ῥοδογαΐσος ἐκ τῶν ὑπὲρ τὸν Ἴστρον καὶ τὸν Ῥήνον Κελτικῶν τε καὶ Γερμανικῶν ἔθνῶν ἐς τεσσαράκοντα συναγαγὼν μυριάδας εἰς τὴν Ἰταλίαν ὄρμητο διαβῆναι. Οὐδὲν προσαγγεληθέντος ἢ μὲν πρώτη πάντας κατέπληξεν ἀκοή· τῶν δὲ πόλεων ταῖς ἐλπίσιν ἀπεγνωκότων, καὶ αὐτῆς δὲ τῆς Ῥώμης εἰς ἔσχατον οὐσης κινδύνου συνταραχθείσης, ἀναλαβὼν ὁ Στελίχων ἅπαν τὸ ἐν τῷ Τικίνῳ τῆς Λιγυστικῆς ἐνιδρυμένον στρατόπεδον (ἦν δὲ εἰς ἀριθμοὺς συνειλεγμένον τριάκοντα) καὶ ὅσον οἶός τε γέγονε συμμαχικὸν ἐξ Ἀλανῶν καὶ Οὐννων περιποίησασθαι, τὴν ἔφοδον τῶν πολεμίων οὐκ ἀναμείνας αὐτὸς ἐπεραιώθη τὸν Ἴστρον ἅμα παντὶ τῷ στρατεύματι. Καὶ τοῖς βαρβάροις ἀπροσδοκῆτοις ἐπιπεσὼν ἅπαν τὸ πολέμιον πανωλεθρία διέφθειρεν, ὥστε μηδένα σχεδὸν ἐκ τούτων περισωθῆναι, πλὴν ἐλαχίστους ὅσους αὐτὸς τῇ Ῥωμαίων προσέθηκεν συμμαχίᾳ.

⁴ *CIL* 6.1196 = *ILS* 798; Oros. 7.37.4–8; Aug. *Civ. Dei* 5.23; Olymp. fr. 9; Paul. Nol. *Carm.* 21; *Chron. Gall.* 452.50; *Addit. ad Prosp. Haun.* s.a. 406. Halsall 2007, xvii suggests that Radagaisus is a Latinised name rather than his Germanic original, which may have been something akin to Radegis or Ratchis.

⁵ Thompson 1948, 28; Demougeot 1951, 354; Croke 1995, 68; Wood 1998, 518; Janssen 2004, 187; Heather 2005, 202; Halsall 2007, 208; Mitchell 2007, 199. However, note the poignant criticism of Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 61 that “[Hunnic pressure] is the well-known billiard ball theory, the *primum movens* being hidden ‘in the vast plains of Eurasia.’ Nothing in our authorities indicates that behind Radagaisus stood another barbarian leader whose people were pushed by still another one, and so on. All we know is that the Goths came from the countries across the Danube.”

possible that the western government’s neglect of allied peoples beyond the frontiers may have generated a crisis that induced Radagaisus to invade in the hope of winning new tribute and concessions from the government.⁶

The evidence of the chroniclers suggests that Radagaisus arrived in Italy in 405, and that his final defeat occurred in Tuscany in late August 406.⁷ He probably took the route through western Pannonia and the northern transalpine provinces, descending on Italy through the Brenner Pass.⁸ This helps explain Zosimus’s description of him leading an army of “Celts and Germans”—a classicizing reference to his recruitment of followers on both sides of the Danube north of the Alps.⁹ As argued later, this itinerary also helps explain the presence of Vandals and Alans in his forces. Indeed, Radagaisus had very good reasons to bypass the eastern entrance to Italy. The imperial court had recently moved to Ravenna, and Stilicho had probably stationed the bulk of the palatine field armies close to it, not only to guarantee the court’s protection, but also to monitor the western Illyrian provinces where Alaric still resided after his retreat from Verona in 402. The presence of Alaric’s Gothic army may also have posed an extra barrier preventing Radagaisus’s entry by this route.¹⁰ However, he does not seem to have had any difficulty in bypassing or overrunning Italy’s northern defenses.¹¹

The danger posed by Radagaisus to the imperial west has been downplayed by some scholars, and this is perhaps understandable given the swiftness of his defeat.¹² Furthermore, this war was quickly overshadowed by the Rhine invasion of 406/407, the usurpation of Constantine III, and Alaric’s

⁶ Burns 1994, 198; Elton 1996, 42; Kulikowski 2000, 326; Goffart 2006, 78–80; Halsall 2007, 207–8.

⁷ On the date, see Mazzarino 1942, 278–79 n. 3; Janssen 1994, 187 n. 1.

⁸ Demougeot 1951, 356 n. 19; Burns 1994, 198 n. 54. Janssen 2004, 187 n. 4 summarizes the older scholarship, pointing out destructive layers attested at Vindobona, Carnuntum, and Lauriacum. For reasons unknown, Kelly 2014, 197 states that “[a] group of Goths, led by Radagaisus, had crossed the Rhine near Mainz the previous winter.”

⁹ Heather 2005, 194. Burns 1994, 198 also suggests that some Norican *limitanei* might have joined Radagaisus. This is not impossible, though it is just as likely that these garrisons were swept away by Radagaisus.

¹⁰ Demougeot 1951, 356 n. 20.

¹¹ The fact that Radagaisus managed to enter Italy virtually unopposed from the north is not necessarily a critical fault of Stilicho’s. Theodosius I had already stripped many Alpine garrisons for his civil wars, and the mountain range was never completely manned again after 395, see Burns 1994 105–8. This can be further deduced from Alaric’s earlier invasion of Italy, where he easily defeated minor opposition on the Timavus during his crossing of the Julian Alps (Claud. *De bello Get.* 562).

¹² Oost 1968, 75 claims that Stilicho achieved victory “despite his inferiority in numbers.” Cameron 1970, 187 states that “Stilicho found the huge Ostrogothic [*sic*] horde of Radagaisus easy enough meat in 406.” MacMullen 1988, 191 similarly remarks that “Radagaisus’ Ostrogoths [*sic*] were soon annihilated by Stilicho with a fraction of that smallest army-size.”

later sieges of Rome. However, the evidence suggests that Stilicho probably had to labor hard in order to defeat him. First, the sources are in agreement that Radagaisus's army contained a massive number of people. As quoted above, Zosimus states that he had 400,000 "Celts and Germans." Orosius numbers them at 200,000 but also reveals that this was "the lowest figure we find among historians."¹³ Augustine claims that "many more than a hundred thousand of his army were laid low."¹⁴ Both Prosper and the Copenhagen Continuation of Prosper speak of "many thousands of the Goths" being defeated in Tuscany.¹⁵ Finally, Olympiodorus reports that Stilicho was able to incorporate 12,000 of Radagaisus's men into his army as auxiliaries.¹⁶ Olympiodorus claims that these were his *optimates*, but it is probably safer to interpret the figure as incorporating both the flower of Radagaisus's nobility and their warrior retinues.¹⁷ Even so, Orosius claimed that so many of his followers were enslaved that the slave market crashed due to the abundance of cheap prisoners.¹⁸ It is probable that numbers of this scale—in the hundreds of thousands—are exaggerated, but, as will become clear, the scale of Stilicho's response suggests that Radagaisus's army did number in the tens of thousands at least.¹⁹

In response to the threat posed by Radagaisus, Stilicho gathered thirty *numeri* of the Roman army, together with auxiliaries from the Alans and Huns, in order to create a force that is usually estimated to have consisted of between 15,000 and 20,000 men but may have been even smaller.²⁰ Given the magni-

¹³ Oros. 7.37.4, 7.37.13.

¹⁴ Aug. *Civ. Dei* 5.23.

¹⁵ Prosp. Tiro s.a. 406; *Addit. ad Prosp. Haun.* s.a. 406.

¹⁶ Olymp. fr. 9.

¹⁷ Wolfram 1988, 169–70; Burns 1994, 198.

¹⁸ Oros. 7.37.16

¹⁹ Stein 1968, 249; Halsall 2007, 206. See also Lee 1993, 138, stating that "Although the astronomical figures provided by some sources must be grossly inflated, this was equally clearly an invasion on a grand scale which Stilicho only managed to contain with an army of thirty *numeri*."

²⁰ Bury 1923, 168: "less than 20,000 *comitatenses*" (followed by O'Flynn 1983, 164 n. 44). Demougeot 1951, 357: "20,000 hommes à peine." Burns 1994, 198 n. 53: "something less than 15,000 men." Elton 1996, 211: "perhaps 10–15,000 men." Heather 2005, 198: "at least 15,000 men." Halsall 2007, 207: "about 15,000 men." De Jaeghere 2015, 302 claims that Stilicho's army numbered "30,000 hommes" without elaborating on the number or evidence. The term *numerus* originally just meant a "unit," but during the High Empire it often denoted irregular units from barbarian extraction under the command of Roman officers. Nicasie 1998, 75 and 189 n. 15 points out that during the third century *numeri* were never very large and that we know of about sixty *numeri* from Septimius Severus's reign with a total establishment of perhaps 20,000 men. Jones 1964, 610 notes that from the late fourth century onwards the term could be used generically to describe any type of regular army unit. Elton 1996, 92–93 believes that they were roughly similar in size but also acknowledges that there are very few direct attestations about their numerical strength. Very few scholars are presently inclined to accept the once dominant view of Jones 1964,

tude of the crisis, it is reasonable to suppose that he mobilized troops stationed in Gaul, as he had done during Alaric’s invasion of Italy.²¹ However, he seems to have delayed committing this force to battle, because even as late as April 406, he was still strenuously recruiting soldiers, and even drafted slaves into the army on the promise of freedom and a reward of two solidi.²² The recruitment of slaves in this manner, traditionally a last resort in the time of the greatest crisis, reveals just how desperate the situation was felt to be.²³ Even then, it was not until late August that Stilicho dared finally to challenge Radagaisus in the field. It is possible, therefore, that Radagaisus’s followers as a whole—women, children and elderly included—really did number in the low hundreds of thousands. However, the proportion of combatants to non-combatants for barbarian groups of this era is usually estimated at 1:4 or 1:5,²⁴ leaving Radagaisus with as many as 40,000 armed men under his command—a number that the often careless compiler Zosimus could have boosted tenfold.²⁵

Modern scholarship has often neglected the fact that the sources are at odds about how so large a force was finally brought down.²⁶ Orosius claims that Radagaisus, together with 200,000 men, was trapped in the hills near Faesulae, and that these men were starved into surrender without any losses on

679–84 that such units could number over 500 soldiers; see Tomlin 2008, 159–62 for a summary. Even if we suppose that Stilicho’s *numeri* numbered at least 300 soldiers each, and that they were accompanied by several thousand auxiliaries drafted from Alans and Huns, 15,000 is still a generous estimate. For these reasons, I agree with Burns 1994, 356 n. 24 and Elton 1996, 211 that Stilicho’s army will rather have been somewhere between 10,000 and 15,000 men strong.

²¹ Drinkwater 1998, 275.

²² *CTh* 7.13.16 (issued on 17 April 406, at Ravenna). O’Flynn 1983, 159 n. 29 confusingly interprets this law as Stilicho’s concern that the corps of *bucellarii* should not become excessively large at the expense of the army of the state as reflected in *CTh* 7.13.16, and that it was intended to severely limit their size. The law does not say anything like this. Similarly, Heather 2003, 98 believes that the reference to servants fighting on behalf of barbarian auxiliaries refers to survivors incorporated after Radagaisus’s defeat. However, the law clearly predates the latter event. [*Please add Heather 2003 to list of references.*]

²³ Elton 1996, 154; Blockley 1998a, 121; Kulikowski 2000, 330; Lenski 2009.

²⁴ Burns 1994, 30; Heather 2005, 198. For a general consideration of the problems regarding inflated numbers of barbarian groups in this period, see James 2009, 184–86.

²⁵ Mazzarino 1942, 277 n. 4 was willing to believe that Radagaisus’s horde consisted of 400,000 warriors, thus explaining the great slaughter of his main force, the massive enslavement of many others, and the incorporation of only 12,000 of his warriors. Unless we suppose that Radagaisus’s warriors had the most primitive equipment and no fighting skill whatsoever, it seems impossible to explain how Stilicho could have defeated a force of nearly half a million with a few tens of thousands of soldiers. Heather 2005, 445 suggests that Radagaisus’s force originally consisted of 20,000 or more men. He comes to this conclusion by mainly focusing on Orosius’s account of Faesulae and Olympiodorus’s explanation of Stilicho’s auxiliaries.

²⁶ Kulikowski 2007, 171 cautiously speaks of thousands of Goths being enslaved. Lee 2007, 104 combines Zos. 5.26.5 and Olymp. fr. 9 to state that Stilicho incorporated 12,000 of Radagaisus’s followers, but he fails to note that the two sources contradict each other on the number of auxiliaries. Fear 2010, 399 n. 448 is aware of the discrepancy in the sources but does not investigate it further.

the Roman side.²⁷ Yet all the other sources speak of a slaughter during the final reckoning.²⁸ Zosimus emphasizes that Stilicho “utterly destroyed their whole force. Scarcely anyone escaped, except a few whom he accepted as auxiliaries.” Hence we are faced with a clear contradiction between Orosius and these other sources. So what really happened at Faesulae, and how can one resolve the two contradictory traditions concerning the nature of Stilicho’s victory there?

Division and Defection of Radagaisus’s Forces

It is a recurring theme in Orosius’s history that the Christian God aided the Romans to gain victory without bloodshed, even when other sources clearly contradict this. For example, he falsely claims about the civil war between Theodosius I and Magnus Maximus that “no one practiced treachery . . . that most terrible war was consummated to the point of victory without bloodshed.”²⁹ He also says the same about Theodosius’s victory over Eugenius, claiming that victory was achieved “with very little, or no, shedding of blood.”³⁰ He repeatedly describes how loyalist forces won their victories as a result of divine intervention, when other more mundane factors were clearly at play. For example, he credits the victory of the loyalist Mauri commander Mascezel over his brother Gildo, the *magister utriusque militiae per Africam* who had revolted against Stilicho in 397–398, to advice received from the recently deceased bishop Ambrose of Milan who had allegedly appeared in a dream to him, and explicitly states that “there was no ambush, nor any bribery.”³¹ Orosius doth protest too much.

The fact remains that Gildo was abandoned by his regular army units at the start of the battle near the Ardalio river, and the most plausible explanation of their behavior is that Mascezel had managed to bribe them during the three day lull before the battle.³² So too, Stilicho’s victory over Radagaisus is depicted as a bloodless victory because this was the sort of victory won by those with God on their side, or so Orosius wished his readers to believe. I suggest that the key to understanding Orosius’s account probably lies in the brief description of the same invasion by the Gallic chronicler of 452:

Radagaisus laid many cities waste before he fell: his division of his army into three parts under different leaders opened up to the Romans some means

²⁷ Oros. 7.37.13–15.

²⁸ Aug. *Civ. Dei* 5,23; Prosp. Tiro s.a. 406; *Addit. ad Prosp. Haun.* s.a. 406; Zos. 5.26.5.

²⁹ Oros. 7.35.7.

³⁰ Oros. 7.35.9.

³¹ Oros. 7.36.12. On this episode, see now: Wijnendaele, forthcoming.

³² Diesner 1963, 183; Kotula 1970, 170.

of resisting. Stilicho wheeled around his Hun auxiliaries and annihilated a third part of the enemy force in a notable victory.³³

That Radagaisus split his forces seems entirely reasonable: unlike the imperial army, he did not possess the logistics to supply such a huge following in enemy territory, and thus needed to let them forage for themselves.³⁴ However, the chronicler describes the destruction of only one of the three groups into which Radagaisus had split his forces. What happened to the other two divisions? It has been suggested that these two groups could have been persuaded by Stilicho to leave Italy.³⁵ Yet, given the hostility with which most ancient sources treat Stilicho, they surely would have made ample use against him of the unscathed retreat of thousands of armed barbarians!³⁶ On the contrary, however, all the sources agree that the war against Radagaisus ended in total victory for Stilicho.

Heather suggests that behind Stilicho’s acquisition of 12,000 of Radagaisus’s best warriors lies “a considerable diplomatic coup, drastically cutting away Radagaisus’s support and ruining his chances of standing up to Stilicho’s army.”³⁷ A major defection from Radagaisus’s army would certainly help explain how Stilicho finally managed to defeat him in open battle. A comparison with the Hunnic leader Uldin’s defeat in Thrace by eastern Roman forces in 409 is instructive. The imperial commanders had bribed some of Uldin’s chiefs to defect to them before then engaging his main force in battle.³⁸ Fortunately, Orosius preserves critical information suggesting that something very similar happened to one of the two divisions of Radagaisus’s army, and this greatly aided Stilicho in his victory. Just before his description of Radagaisus’s invasion of Italy, Orosius inserts a crucial but often overlooked note:

I shall say nothing about the internecine fighting between the barbarians themselves, when two divisions of Goths, and then Alans and Huns, destroyed each other in varied acts of slaughter.³⁹

³³ *Chron. Gall.* 452.52 (trans. Murray 2000, 80): *Multis ante vastatis urbibus Radagaisus occubuit; cuius in tres partes per diversos principes divisus exercitus aliquam repugnandi Romanis aperuit facultatem. Insigni triumpho exercitum terciae partis hostium circumactis Chunorum auxiliariibus Stilico usque at internicionem delevit.*

³⁴ Burns 1994, 198; Elton 1996, 77, 219; Halsall 2007, 206.

³⁵ Demougeot 1951, 359; Stein 1968, 250; O’Flynn 1983, 41. Blockley 1998a, 121 simply thinks that the “two [groups] disappear, presumably they left Italy.”

³⁶ See the accusations hurled against Stilicho after his downfall when Alans, Sueves, and Vandals ravaged Gaul: Oros. 7.38.3–4, 40.3; *Chron. Gall.* 452.55.

³⁷ Heather 2005, 206.

³⁸ Blockley 1992, 53.

³⁹ Oros. 7.36.6–12 (trans. Fear 2010, 397, slightly amended): *Taceo de ipsorum inter se barbarorum crebris dilacerationibus, cum se inuicem Gothorum cunei duo, deinde Alani atque Huni*

He never elaborates on this statement, and nothing in the rest of his history seems to provide a context for the mutual slaughter of two different Gothic groups, just as there is no known event where Alans and Huns fought each other.⁴⁰ I propose, therefore, that this conundrum can be resolved by connecting it to Orosius's report on Radagaisus's defeat:

Against, Radagaisus, our most savage enemy (*immanissimum illum hostem*), God granted that the minds of other enemies (*aliorum hostium . . . animi*) should be disposed to help us with their forces. Uldin and Sarus, leaders of the Huns and of the Goths, came to the aid of the Romans. But God does not allow the workings of His power to appear as the valor of men, particularly when they were our enemies.⁴¹

Scholars have often assumed this means that Sarus and Uldin were regular allies whom Stilicho engaged against Radagaisus. Orosius's use of *hostium* could refer to their barbarian identities, thus casting them in their broader stereotypical guise in Roman discourse, but in this particular context they were actually regarded as allies from the start.⁴² However, it makes more sense to interpret this passage to mean that these were enemies of Rome, and had been from the start, but they suddenly decided to help the Romans instead. I propose, therefore, that Sarus was the leader of one of the three main divisions into which Radagaisus had divided his army.

Certainly, the fact that Zosimus describes him as "pre-eminent among the allies for his strength and reputation" during Stilicho's meeting with his barbarian officers near Bologna in 408 supports his identification as one of Radagaisus's most senior officers from some point previous to this year.⁴³ This could be explained, however, if we assume that, after being reduced to starvation, Sarus and his men surrendered peacefully to Stilicho at Faesulae,

uariis caedibus populabantur. For reasons unknown, Fear substitutes Vandals for *Alani*. This is incompatible with the original Latin (ed. Zangemeister, 1889).

⁴⁰ Thompson 1948, 33, followed by Oost 1968, 75 n. 122 explains this as the Huns' being responsible for pushing them out of their lands into Gaul. Yet they do not elaborate on the two Gothic formations. O'Flynn 1983, 39 regards it as a vague reference to "the uncontrollable behavior of the barbarian allies" during Stilicho's war with Alaric in Italy.

⁴¹ Oros. 7.37.12 (trans. Fear 2010, 398): *conceduntur quidem aduersus immanissimum illum hostem Radagaisum aliorum hostium cum copiis suis inclinati ad auxilium animi. adsunt Uldin et Sarus, Hunorum et Gothorum duces, praesidio Romanorum; sed non sinit Deus rem potentiae suae uirtutem hominum ac maxime hostium uideri.*

⁴² See, among others: Stein 1968, 250; Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 60; Ridley 1982, 215 n. 86; Liebenschuetz 1990, 66; Williams and Friell 1994, 136; Croke 1995, 68; Blockley 1998a 121; Janssen 2004, 190; Goffart 2006, 78; Halsall 2007, 207 n. 93. Demandt 1998, 115 confusingly describes Sarus as a "heidnischen Gotenkönigs"—a description that Orosius actually applies to Radagaisus. Heather 2005, 198 inexplicably sees Sarus as a leader of Alan auxiliaries.

⁴³ Zos. 5.34.1.

but that Orosius confuses this event—the surrender of part of Radagaisus’s force—with his final defeat which, as I will discuss later, actually occurred when he was besieging Florence.⁴⁴ Following their surrender, Sarus’s men were then used to help defeat Radagaisus’s division as it besieged Florence.⁴⁵ This was the slaughter committed between “two formations of Goths,” but Orosius did not wish to dwell upon it, since it undermined his wider thesis concerning the bloodless nature of the victories enjoyed by a pious empire, the more significantly since it would have forced him to give credit to Stilicho. We shall return to this point later.

Uldin, Alaric, and the Alans

I turn next to Uldin. While discussing the events of 404/405, Sozomen reports that “the Huns crossed the Danube and devastated Thrace.”⁴⁶ Though he does not name the leader of these Huns, it is widely assumed that this was probably Uldin, the first named Hun leader in Europe.⁴⁷ Already in 400, he had aided the government in Constantinople by defeating the last forces of the renegade general Gainas and delivering his head to Arcadius. Because he also assisted Stilicho later against Radagaisus, scholars often treat him as a regular Roman ally until his raid into Thrace in 408/409.⁴⁸ However, given that he seems to have been raiding eastern Roman territory in the Balkans in 404, it is more credible to interpret Orosius’s description of him as one “of our enemies” in the most literal sense. I would argue that, at this point, Stilicho sought the aid of the Gothic king Alaric to guard Illyricum before then persuading Uldin to come to the western empire’s assistance also.

Given that Alaric had already served as western Roman commander in 405, some scholars have noted his absence in the war against Radagaisus.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ This is a departure from scholarly opinion that usually interprets Faesulae as the location of Radagaisus’s final defeat; see *PLRE* 2: 934, “Radagaisus”; Mazzarino 1942, 280; Demougeot 1951, 359; Jones 1964, 184; Oost 1968, 75; Stein 1968, 250; Matthews 1975, 274; Ridley 1982, 215 n. 86; Paschoud 1989, 22; Burns 1994, 198; Williams and Friell 1994, 156; Blockley 1998b, 431; Demandt 1998, 115; Lee 1998, 234; Wood 1998, 518; Janssen 2004, 193; Heather 2005, 205; Ward-Perkins 2005, 188; James 2009, 55; Merrills and Miles 2010, 34; McEvoy 2013, 175; De Jaeghere 2015, 302; Wijnendaele 2015, 19.

⁴⁵ Note that Paulin. *V. Amb.* 5.10 and *Addit. ad Prosp. Haun.* s.a. 406 both place Radagaisus’s defeat at Florence.

⁴⁶ Soz. 8.25.1.

⁴⁷ *PLRE* 2: 1180, “Uldin”; Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 62–63; Blockley 1992, 53 n. 5.

⁴⁸ Thompson 1948, 37–38; Williams and Friell 1994, 156; Heather 2005, 196.

⁴⁹ Goffart 1988, 153 merely notes that Alaric “kept quiet” during Radagaisus’s invasion. Williams and Friell 1994, 155 surmise that he probably remained out of the conflict because he still had not recovered from the losses sustained during his own invasion of Italy in 402. Liebeschuetz 1990, 66 and Burns 1994, 198 think that Alaric was simply too far away to assist. However, if

The reason for this was simple: he was not recalled to Italy because he was actively guarding the western Illyrian provinces during Uldin's raids on nearby eastern Roman provinces.⁵⁰ Indeed, Olympiodorus specifically states that "Stilicho had summoned Alaric to guard Illyricum for Honorius."⁵¹ Orosius's description of Uldin as one of the "enemies disposed with their forces to help us" makes considerable sense in this context. In 405, the west did not yet have any links with the Huns. However, it is probable that Stilicho sought an alliance with Uldin as a consequence of his need for allies against Radagaisus.

The very fact that Uldin's Huns had previously raided eastern Roman territory means that they could not be regarded as regular auxiliaries. Uldin will have become an ally only after he had first been paid and received hostages.⁵² The negotiation between western Romans, Alaric, and Huns will have required extensive diplomacy and time, time during which Alaric had to stay put and "guard Illyricum," while Uldin passed through the diocese with his forces on the way to Italy. Indirectly, Stilicho was doing the eastern empire a great favor by drawing away a previously hostile leader from their borders. This may help explain why relations between both courts improved greatly throughout 405 and 406.⁵³

When Uldin finally arrived in Italy, his first task was "the slaughter of the Alans by the Huns," vaguely referred to by Orosius above. I suggest that these Alans were the third group in Radagaisus's horde as referred to by the Gallic Chronicler of 452, and that their destruction is mentioned by Zosimus in the following passage:

Previously, in the sixth consulship of Arcadius [Probus was his colleague in 406], the Vandals, after joining themselves with the Sueves and Alans and having crossed these places, ravaged the provinces beyond the Alps. They wrought such slaughter and became so formidable even to the armies in Britain, that they compelled them, under fear they might turn against them too, to elect usurpers, namely, Marcus, Gratian, and in addition to these Constantine. And when there was a great battle with him (πρὸς ὄν), the Romans were victorious and killed most of the barbarians, but by not pursuing those who fled (in which case they would have annihilated them), they allowed

a Hun force led by Uldin could make it to Italy all the way from the lower Danube, surely Alaric could have done the same.

⁵⁰ Heather 2009, 26–28 also suggests that Stilicho solicited Alaric's aid during Radagaisus's war in 406.

⁵¹ Olymp. fr. 6.

⁵² Gordon 1949, 65; Demougeot 1951, 357.

⁵³ In contrast with the situation in 404, both courts recognized each other's consuls (Bagnall et al. 1987, 344–347). Furthermore, the inscription celebrating Radagaisus's defeat was proclaimed on behalf of both emperors (*CIL* 6.1196 = *ILS* 798).

them to recover from their defeat, muster a multitude of barbarians, and make ready for battle again.⁵⁴

Some scholars have interpreted Zosimus’s “Roman victory” above as the defeat by the British usurper Constantine III of the barbarian groups who invaded across the Rhine and into Gaul in 407.⁵⁵ However, in his magisterial edition of Zosimus’s history, Paschoud has argued persuasively that there are serious problems with this interpretation.⁵⁶ The final book in Zosimus’s history saw far less revision, and considerably more confusion, than previous sections in his work. First, Zosimus nowhere specifies the location of this battle. It is particularly noteworthy that Zosimus does not even mention the Rhine, nor even Germania, anywhere here. Secondly, he does not actually state that a British usurper was responsible for this victory. Indeed, a close reading of the ancient Greek strongly disallows for the possibility of πρὸς ὃν referring to Constantine III, since that would make him the leader of the barbarians who the Romans defeated! Thirdly, immediately after this passage Zosimus goes on to describe how Constantine III barred the Cottian Alps against further barbarian entrance, even though he had previously stated this was a precaution taken after an Imperial counteroffensive from Italy in early 408.⁵⁷ For all these reasons, it is evident that this passage cannot be read line by line as faithfully transmitting the advance of Constantine III in Gaul. The most plausible reconstruction is that the fleeing barbarians were actually a remnant of Radagaisus’s third force, primarily composed of Vandals and Alans, who fled across the Alps from northern Italy into Raetia.⁵⁸ It is arguable, therefore, that this *Roman* victory

⁵⁴ Zos. 6.3.1–2 (trans. Ridley 1982, 128, emended): Ἐν τοῖς προλαβοῦσι χρόνοις, ἕκτον ἤδη τὴν ὑπατον ἔχοντος ἀρχὴν Ἀρκαδίου καὶ Πρόβου, Βανδίλιου Συήβοις καὶ Ἀλανοῖς ἑαυτοὺς ἀναμίξαντες τούτους ὑπερβάντες τοὺς τόπους τοῖς ὑπὲρ τὰς Ἄλλεις ἔθνεσιν ἐλυμήναντο, καὶ πολλὸν ἐργασάμενοι φόνον ἐπίφοβοι καὶ τοῖς ἐν Βρετανίαις στρατοπέδοις ἐγένοντο, συνηνάγκασαν δέ, δέει τοῦ μὴ κάπλι σφᾶς προελθεῖν, εἰς τὴν τῶν τυράννων ὀρμησάσαι χειροτονίαν, Μάρκου λέγω καὶ Γρατιανοῦ καὶ ἐπὶ τούτοις Κωνσταντίνου. Πρὸς ὃν μάχης καρτερᾶς γενομένης ἐνίκων μὲν οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι, τὸ πολὺ τῶν βαρβάρων κατασφάζαντες μέρος, τοῖς δὲ φεύγουσιν οὐκ ἐπέξελθόντες (ἢ γὰρ ἂν ἅπαντας πανωλεθρία διέφθειραν) ἐνέδωκαν αὐτοῖς ἀνακτησαμένοις τὴν ἦτταν καὶ βαρβάρων πλῆθος συναγαγοῦσιν αὐθις ἀξιωμαχοῖς γενέσθαι.

⁵⁵ Bury 1923, 189; Kulikowski 2000, 333 n. 51; Heather 2005, 210 n. 42; Halsall 2007, 212 n. 126.

⁵⁶ Paschoud 1989, 28–30.

⁵⁷ Zos. 6.2.6, 6.3.3.

⁵⁸ This suggestion was already made by Edward Gibbon and has been reaffirmed by Paschoud 1989, 22; Drinkwater 1998, 273; and Birley 2005, 458–59. Birley 2005, 459 and McEvoy 2013, 177 see these survivors as crossing the Cottian Alps into Gaul—hence differentiating them from the Rhine invaders of 406/407. Paschoud 1989, 22–23 and Drinkwater 2007, 324 note that these two routes are not mutually exclusive and that different remnants could have fled across both the Cottian and Julian Alps. I agree with this suggestion but would emphasize the role of survivors crossing the Alps into Raetia, where they had previously swept away any defenses and kept marauding until they could link up with the unscathed Sueves. Kulikowski 2000, 326–31 proposed re-dating the Rhine invasion to 31 December 405, advancing upon earlier arguments made by Baynes 1922,

over barbarians was that of Stilicho against the first host of Radagaisus's forces as reported by the Gallic chronicle and vaguely referred to in Orosius.⁵⁹

Vandals and Alans had already been present near Raetia in 401, when Stilicho first had to quell their raids.⁶⁰ When Radagaisus marched through Pannonia and Noricum, they could have easily joined him. Together with other groups from the Danubian basin and the "Celts and Germans" mentioned earlier by Zosimus, they could have constituted the third group whom Stilicho probably destroyed in Liguria with Uldin's help. Most importantly, Zosimus states that Stilicho took "as many auxiliaries as he could get from the Alans and the Huns" near Ticinum before marching on Radagaisus's main army. Therefore, Zosimus corroborates Orosius's description of Huns' slaughter of Alans and the Gallic Chronicler of 452's description of Stilicho's Huns as slaughtering a third division of Radagaisus's army. Stilicho could not prioritize hunting down fleeing bands, since he had to march swiftly further south to subdue Sarus's host and vanquish Radagaisus's main force. One group of survivors fleeing over the Cottian Alps may have triggered the first panic that set in motion the usurpations in Britain. However, the survivors of this slaughter, fleeing back from northern Italy across the Julian Alps to the Danubian basin, reached the nearest location where they could "recover from their defeat, muster a multitude of barbarians, and make ready for battle again." We are then in a better place to understand the dynamics behind the breach of the Rhine frontier in 406/407.

The Defeat of Radagaisus

After dealing with the Alans, Stilicho and Uldin will then have steadily driven Sarus's Gothic force into the Apennine hills and starved them to surrender near Faesulae. The three groups then converged on Radagaisus's main force besieging Florence, as narrated by the Copenhagen Continuation of Prosper:

In the fifth year of the consulship of Stilicho and Artemius, after the entry of Alaric there followed another army of Goths and King Radagaisus entered and devastated Italy. In the next year Stilicho with an army consisting of the flower of the soldiers attacked them at Florence of the Tuscans and, battle being joined, Radagaisus was defeated and captured and was decapitated before the gates of the city.⁶¹

218–19. Kulikowski 2007, 217 n. 37 concedes, however, that Birley might be correct in arguing for the traditional date of 31 December 406.

⁵⁹ Birley 2005, 458–59 also believes that Zos. 6.3.2. refers to a victory achieved by Stilicho but thinks that it is the one at Faesulae.

⁶⁰ Claud. *De bello Get.* 363–403.

⁶¹ *Addit. ad Prosp. Haun.* (marg.) s.a. 406 (trans. Muhlberger 1984, 73): *Post Alarici introitum sequitur alius exercitus Gottorum et rege Radagaiso Italiam ingressus Italiam vastat. contra quem*

That Radagaisus was defeated at Florence is also confirmed by Paulinus of Milan’s life of Ambrose:

[A]t the time when Radagaisus was besieging the above-mentioned city [Florence], when the citizens had despaired of their safety, [the spirit of Ambrosius] also appeared to a certain man and promised that safety would come to them the following day. When the report was received, the spirits of the citizens were revived. And the next day, upon the arrival of *comes* Stilicho with an army, victory was gained over the enemy.⁶²

The other sources are all in agreement that Stilicho annihilated Radagaisus’s main force. Indeed, the western Roman *magister utriusque militiae* needed a decisive military victory for political reasons. After the battles of Verona and Pollentia, Claudian had had to deflect fierce criticism against his patron that Alaric had been able to retreat to safety with quite a large army still intact. Radagaisus had devastated northern Italy for more than half a year, and there was a widespread belief that Rome itself was threatened.⁶³ Nothing but the total destruction of his main army would have ensured that Stilicho’s position remained unchallenged after the war.

Finally, it is important to note that it was entirely consistent with precedent for Stilicho to have sent Sarus’s Gothic soldiers first against Radagaisus’s main force, and Uldin’s Huns to engage the Alans, while he kept his Roman troops in reserve to have them join battle only after all barbarian parties had exhausted each other first.⁶⁴ After all, this is what he had witnessed his patron Theodosius do at the battle of the Frigidus in 394.⁶⁵ It is for this reason that Augustine could claim, with only slight exaggeration, that “no Roman soldier lost his life.”⁶⁶ It is important once again to emphasize that this was not the bloodless victory described by Orosius. Orosius desired not to say

anno sequenti Stilico cum exercitu et robore militum apud Florentiam Tuscorum urbem occurrit commissoque proelio Radagaisus victus et captus est et ante portas civitatis capite truncatus.

⁶² Paulin. *V. Amb.* 10.50 (trans. Lacy 1952, 62): [T]empore quo Radagaisus supradictam civitatem obsidebat, cum iam de se penitus desperassent viri civitatis ipsius, per visum cuidam apparuit, et promisit alio die salutem illis adfuturam. Quo referente, civium animi sunt erecti: nam alterio die, adveniente Stilicone tunc comite cum exercitu, facta est de hostibus victoria.

⁶³ Aug. *Civ. Dei* 5.23; Paul. Nol. *Carm.* 21.1–12; Zos. 5.26.4. Demougeot 1951, 356 interprets Radagaisus’s movements as being drawn to “la Ville éternelle” as if to an Eldorado because of its fabulous wealth. This is not impossible but is probably based on too literal a reading of the sources, who rather capture the anxiety of Rome’s elites about Radagaisus’s advance into Tuscany.

⁶⁴ O’Flynn 1983, 40 also states that this happened during Radagaisus’s war but does not argue the case.

⁶⁵ Oros. 7.35.19.

⁶⁶ Aug. *Civ. Dei* 5.23. It has to be noted that the first five books of *De Civitate Dei* were already in circulation by 415 (Aug. *Ep.* 169) and thus predate Orosius’s work.

anything about the slaughter of “the two formations of Goths” and “Alans and Huns” because they were major victories achieved by Stilicho. Indeed, Stilicho himself boasted on a public inscription that “the Gothic nation had been destroyed.”⁶⁷

These observations have ramifications for Orosius as the main source of the treatment of this campaign. His representation of Stilicho throughout the final book of the *Historia adversum paganos* is unequivocally hostile.⁶⁸ Hence Orosius’s failure to even mention Stilicho’s name throughout his extensive treatment of the war versus Radagaisus cannot be a coincidence.⁶⁹ Rather than including him, and thus having to bear the onus of giving Stilicho credit for the final victory, Orosius cleverly casts different protagonists as unlikely saviors, such as the former hostile leaders Sarus and Uldin.⁷⁰ However, Orosius dexterously downplays the monumentality of this military victory in his narrative through the intervention of the Christian God, who transformed the outcome into a divinely inspired “bloodless” victory, and he uses it as a prelude to Alaric’s later sack of Rome.⁷¹

Instead, the victory at Florence should ultimately be considered a counterexample to the Roman defeat at Adrianople (378). It offers clear proof of what the late Roman military could still achieve through logistics, strategy, and adroit diplomacy in conquering numerically superior groups of diverse ethnicities. Zosimus could rightly conclude that “Stilicho was very proud of this victory and returned with his army, universally honored for freeing Italy miraculously from such anticipated danger.”⁷²

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⁶⁷ CIL 6.1196 = ILS 798: *Imppp. clementissimis felicissimis toto orbe victoribus, DDD nnn. Arcadio Honorio Theodosio Auggg. ad perenne indicium triumphorum, quod Getarum nationem in omne aevum docuere extingui, arcum simulacris eorum tropaeis(que) decoratum s.p.q.R. totius operis splendore. . .* The last line probably featured Stilicho’s name and was erased after the supreme commander’s death and *damnatio memoriae*.

⁶⁸ Stilicho is first introduced as coveting imperial power for his son and assisting barbarians to break into the empire (7.37.1). Orosius is one of the very few ancient authors to abuse Stilicho for his Vandal heritage (7.38.1), and he even compares Alaric favorably to him (7.38.2). He then proceeds to accuse Stilicho of encouraging various barbarian groups to invade Gaul and Spain (7.38.3–4, 40.3), until Honorius and the Roman army kill him for his “crimes” (7.38.5).

⁶⁹ One should also note here Orosius’s failure to mention Stilicho when describing Alaric’s defeats and retreat from Italy between 401 and 403 (7.37.2). Here too, he prefers silence.

⁷⁰ Jord. *Rom.* 321 and Marcell. com. s.a. 406.3 followed this Orosian tradition in the sixth century.

⁷¹ Oros. 7.37.17.

⁷² Zos. 5.26.5.

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