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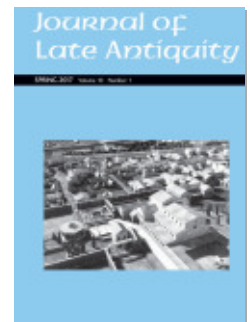
A Contest of Interpretation: Roman Policy toward the Huns as
Reflected in the "Honorius Affair" (448/50)

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A Contest of Interpretation: Roman Policy toward the Huns as Reflected in the “Honorio Affair” (CE 448/50)

The article is dedicated to a famous scandal that happened around the mid of the 5th century at the court of the Western Roman emperor Valentinian III (425–455). His sister, the princess Honorio, who had been forced to dedicate herself to virginity for political and dynastic reasons, was caught in an illegitimate love affair with one of her staff members, the property manager (procurator) Eugenius. The emperor responded with harsh measures, but he was not able to prevent the scandal from become widely known and even involving Attila, the ruler of the Huns, who was contacted by Honorio and exploited her plea for help to his own political advantage. The aim of the article is to analyze the so-called “Honorio-affair,” focusing on the significant fact that this scandal is broadly represented only in sources from the Greek East, whereas policy makers in the West exploited it mainly symbolically. Considering the importance of the “Honorio-affair” within Eastern and Western Roman Hunnic policy, the author demonstrates how it helps us assess the political objectives of both Roman courts during the fifth century and the role it played in the processes of communication between the Eastern and Western halves of an increasingly divergent Roman Empire.

Terrible news made the rounds in the middle of the fifth century; there was talk of an outright scandal right beneath the Western Roman emperor’s nose, talk of intrigue with devastating political consequences: Justa Grata Honorio, the older sister of Emperor Valentinian III (425–455) and the bearer of the title *Augusta*,¹ had abandoned her celibate life and secretly had an affair

¹ The date when Honorio received the title *Augusta* is debated. Bury 1919, 3–5, argues for an early date (425/26), citing an inscription in the church of St. John founded by Galla Placidia, quoted by Agnellus (*Lib. pont.* 42; *CIL* 11.276 = *ILS* 818 = *ILCV* 20: *Iusta Grata Honorio augusta*; see Deichmann 1969, 120, 155–56.; Deichmann 1974, 93–94); Bury interprets the numismatic evidence accordingly (cf. *RIC* 10, pp. 164–69). Following Bury, see most recently McEvoy 2013, 238–39; cf. further Holum 1982, 130. Scharf 1990, 438–40, argues for a later date (437/38). Stickler

with her property manager (*procurator*) Eugenius.² She may have even been expecting a child by him.³ When the affair was uncovered, the reaction at court in Ravenna was swift: Eugenius was executed; Honoria was stripped of her imperial honors (τῶν βασιλείων—her title *Augusta* in particular is probably meant) and betrothed to Herculanius, a politically invisible senator who seemed to harbor no higher ambitions.⁴ But the story did not end there: Honoria protested against her new status and dispatched the eunuch Hyacinthus⁵ to Attila; Hyacinthus not only brought money with him to persuade the ruler of the Huns to intercede on behalf of the princess, but he also carried a ring as a token of his credibility (καὶ δακτύλιον ἔπεμψε πιστομένη τὸν βάρβαρον). Attila, who was already on the lookout for pretexts to attack the Western Roman Empire, was all too happy to accept Honoria's offer. He then demanded that Valentinian surrender her and, later, also half of the Western Roman Empire as a dowry for his “fiancée.” Although Theodosius II (408–450) in Constantinople ordered his cousin to deliver Honoria to Attila, Valentinian stood his ground: Hyacinthus was subjected to excruciating torture and beheaded, and Honoria was saved from death only by the intervention of her mother Galla Placidia. In 451, using the whole affair as a pretext for war, Attila plundered Gaul and the year after even invaded Italy.⁶

The so-called “Honoria affair” has variously been the object of scholarly attention.⁷ Seeck cited it in 1920 to lay bare Honoria's supposed sexual

2002, 126, tentatively suggests “Spätestens anlässlich der Hochzeit ihres Bruders” (i.e. 437); see also Busch 2015, 166–67, on the debate.

² *PLRE* 2: 416 (Eugenius 1).

³ This at least is claimed in Marc. Com. s.a. 434 (Mommsen 1894, 79): *Honoria* [. . .] *ab Eugenio procuratore suo stuprata concepit* [. . .].

⁴ Explicitly stated by Prisc. *fr.* 62* Carolla (= *fr.* 17 Blockley): [. . .] Ἐρκουλιάνῳ [. . .], ἀνδρὶ ὑπατικῷ καὶ τρόπων εὖ ἔχοντι, ὡς μήτε πρὸς βασιλείαν μήτε πρὸς νεωτερισμὸν ὑποποτεῖσθαι.

⁵ *PLRE* 2: 574 (Hyacinthus 2).

⁶ Prisc. *fr.* 62* Carolla (= *fr.* 16–17 Blockley); *fr.* 15 Carolla (= *fr.* 20.1 Blockley); *fr.* 16 Carolla (= *fr.* 20.3 Blockley); *fr.* 65* Carolla (= *fr.* 21.2 Blockley); Marc. Com. s.a. 434 (Mommsen 1894, 79).—Honoria's subsequent fate is unclear. Marcellinus Comes claims that the princess was sent to the eastern court of Theodosius II after her relationship with Eugenius was discovered. His entire entry on Honoria, however, is problematic, since he places it under the year 434 and thus in the wrong spot (as shown already by Bury 1919; see also below, n. 10). It is also possible that the Eugenius episode really should be dated several years before Honoria's offer to Attila. In that case, a temporary transfer of the emperor's sister to Constantinople would definitely be conceivable (thus, for instance, Croke 1995, 81; Kelly 2008, 180). She then vanishes from the tradition after 450; Priscus merely reports that Valentinian spared her life at the request of Galla Placidia and entrusted her to their mother. Priscus' account of the affair ends with the cryptic words, “in this way, Honoria escaped < . . . > at the time,” cf. Prisc. *fr.* 62*, line 18 Carolla (= *fr.* 17, line 21 Blockley): οὕτω μὲν οὖν Ὀνωρία τότε τῆς <κολάσεως> [Bury] <δίκης> [Carolla] ἀπελύετο). The incomplete concluding sentence at least leaves open the possibility that the author knew about later events surrounding the princess. On Attila's campaigns in Gaul and Italy, see, e.g., Stickler 2002, 135–150.

⁷ Cf. Zecchini 1994, 96: “la chiave per comprendere il seguito degli avvenimenti.”

intemperance. Already in 1919, however, Bury had questioned the moralizing depiction of the events, emerging most clearly in Jordanes' account (*licentia libidinis*). Bury favored a political interpretation, conjecturing that there must have been specific interests at work behind Honoria's actions. As to what these may have been, though, there is no scholarly consensus. While Zecchini speculates that Honoria wanted to replace the all-too-powerful *magister militum* Aetius with Attila, Stickler interprets the affair as the product of a risky attempt by the emperor's sister to raise her own status vis-à-vis Valentinian III; whether she was supported by a "court faction," as Börm believes, remains to be seen. Already Mommsen suspected dynastic interests behind the actions of the "liederliche Prinzessin" ("dissolute princess"); Holum dedicates a fundamental study to the dynastically based political influence of the women of the Theodosian house, taking the "Honorio affair" as his starting point. Heather, by contrast, sees the events as further evidence of "Honorio's antics," which supposedly are well documented elsewhere and were of a sort to provide Attila with another pretext for attacking the Western Roman Empire, as he had long planned to do. Demandt also calls the affair a "curious pretext" for Attila's campaigns in 451 and 452. Finally, Pfeilschifter has recently put the emotional aspect of the affair, which Bury had excluded from the debate, back at center stage: "Honorio wollte Genugtuung und zusammen mit Attila ein neues Leben und eine neue Stellung gewinnen, mochte Rom auch dabei untergehen."⁸

⁸ Seeck 1920 [repr. 1966], 297–304, esp. 298: "Wenn in unseren zoologischen Gärten Neger oder Indianer zur Schau gestellt werden, kann man es noch heute beobachten, dass Fremdartigkeit und urwüchsige Wildheit auf manche Weiber einen starken geschlechtlichen Reiz ausüben"; Bury 1919, 11: "Her motive was not profligate passion but political ambition"; 12 "Her motive was ambition"; Zecchini 1994, 99; Stickler 2002, 129; Börm 2013, 86. Börm's basic thesis, however, that there were several *Hofparteien* struggling for power behind the western Roman emperors must—at least for the years around 440/50—remain speculation due to the lack of sources; for the twenties and thirties, however, there is good evidence for it, as the career of Aetius shows. Mommsen 1906, 541; Holum 1982, esp. 1–5; Heather 2005, 335, however, no further "escapades" by Honoria are actually documented. Demandt 2007, 188; Pfeilschifter 2014, 163. Wirth 1999, 93, and McEvoy 2013, 292–93, also interpret the "Honorio affair" as one of several pretexts for Attila's intervention in the West. For literature on the "Honorio affair," see Stickler 2002, 127–28, n. 674; cf. further Thompson 1948, 132–34, esp. 132: "Honorio's motives had been political from the first"; Oost 1968, 282–85, esp. 282: "Honorio [. . .] was a severely frustrated young woman"; Kelly 2008, 177–82; 263, esp. 178: "Honorio had not acted rashly or foolishly. Nor is it likely [. . .] that she was driven by a secret passion for Attila"; and most recently Croke 2015, 112–116. For the dispersion of popular ideas of Attila and Honoria the epic movie *Attila, il flagello di Dio* (Italy/France 1954), in which the "Honorio affair" plays a constitutive role, seems to be important. Various scenes and motives from the fragments of Priscus' *Histories* are loosely used in this movie (even with a few verbatim quotes). The protagonists are presented as archetypes of specific character traits: Attila, the fierce warrior who mercilessly tries to push through his military goals and even sacrifices his brother Bleda (who is killed by him) and his son (by an accident) for them; Bleda as his

Hardly any attention has been paid to a striking fact that stands out even as we first sift through the evidence, a fact that seems to me to be rather important for our interpretation of the events: the entire “Honorina affair” and its supposed implications are attested exclusively by literary texts from the Greek East⁹—in the fragments of the historian Priscus (late 5th century), our main source; in a further notice by Marcellinus Comes (first half of the 6th century), and in authors relying on both these witnesses, such as Jordanes (mid-6th century), John of Antioch (early 7th century), and Theophanes (ca. 800).¹⁰ Only a single piece of evidence from the West even alludes indirectly to the episode: the Gallic Chronicle of 452 contains a note to the effect that Attila attacked Gaul and demanded his wife *quasi iure debitam*.¹¹ But, although active in Gaul, even the author of this work has been identified as an eastern Roman on account of his interests and detailed knowledge of eastern conditions.¹² Was the entire “Honorina affair” invented in the East, as Maenchen-Helfen speculates?¹³ I do not think we can go that far, since we can identify clear reactions to the affair in the West at least on a symbolic level. All the more so, however, does the question arise as to why observers in the East

antagonist who fails with his naive idea of a peaceful coexistence of Romans and Huns; Aetius as self-denying Roman patriot; Valentinian III as a decadent, moronic emperor; Galla Placidia as the egoistic mother and virtual ruler behind the throne, who realizes her mistakes much too late, in the face of impending disaster; and, lastly, Honorina, the scheming princess who wants to rule over the Roman Empire herself and, in order to reach her objective, is ready even to marry Attila, whom she despises as a barbarian. Despite its poor quality the movie, which culminates in the famous meeting of Attila and Pope Leo I and turns out to be a propaganda film for the Catholic Church, proved to be successful and influential as well. Its success is also the result of the all-star cast enlisted by the producers, including Anthony Quinn (Attila), Sophia Loren (Honorina), and Irene Papas (Grune, Attila’s first wife). In this way, *Attila* was seminal in reflecting but also disseminating popular ideas of the ‘characters’ of contemporary protagonists.

⁹ This may be implied when Stickler 2002, 127 laments that the entire episode is “unheilbar mit Elementen byzantinischen Hofklatschs angereichert.” Only Maenchen-Helfen 1978 [repr. 1997], 316, has thus far noted the eastern provenance of the evidence for the “Honorina affair.”

¹⁰ The main source for the events is Prisc. *fr.* 62* Carolla (= *fr.* 16–17 Blockley) (= Joh. Ant. *fr.* 292 Roberto); *fr.* 15 Carolla (= *fr.* 20.1 Blockley); *fr.* 16 Carolla (= *fr.* 20.3 Blockley); *fr.* 65* Carolla (= *fr.* 21.2 Blockley); cf. further Marc. Com. ad ann. 434 (Mommsen 1894, 79), which dates the events to 434; as shown already by Bury 1919, 6–7; 13, this date is erroneous and probably the result of a misplaced indiction cycle; but cf. Croke 1995, 81, who does not want to dismiss Marcellinus’ report, since it could derive from a well-informed source in Constantinople); Jord. *Rom.* 328; *Get.* 223–224 combines elements from both Marcellinus Comes and Priscus, misunderstanding them in some cases; see also Theoph. a.m. 5943 (de Boor 1: 105.4–9).

¹¹ *Chron. Gall. a. CCCCLII*, 139 (Mommsen 1894, 662 = Burgess 2001, 81): *A[ct]tila Gallias ingressus quasi iure debitam poscit uxorem*.

¹² Cf. Maenchen-Helfen 1978 [repr. 1997], 315–16: “die Stimme eines Oströmers”. Muhlberger 1990, 144–46, however, is skeptical of this theory.

¹³ Maenchen-Helfen 1978 [repr. 1997], 98. Sivan 2011, 153–57, is also skeptical of the historicity of the events in the form in which they have been transmitted and claims to see the (literary) topos of the fallen or slandered aristocratic woman in the incriminations against Honorina.

were particularly interested in the events that preceded Attila's massive raids in the West. I will take up this question in what follows.

I will focus especially on the function of the "Honorius affair" as a communications medium. I will show that the deliberate effort in the East to recount and devise a rationale for these events served a very specific purpose, namely, to put a rhetorical veneer on the inconsistent Eastern Roman policy toward the Huns, which had been marked by several abrupt changes of direction, and to divert blame from the Eastern Roman government, which was to be expected after the Huns' devastating invasion of Gaul and Italy. In contrast, it appears to have been in the interest of the West, which resolutely took a defiant stance toward the Huns, to forego any such propagandizing embellishment of the events surrounding the emperor's sister; instead, we can observe all the more clearly how the scandal was instrumentalized on a symbolic level. The different ways in which the Eastern and Western Roman Empire dealt with the "Honorius affair" indicate, in my view, not only the divergent political models they followed in responding to the Hunnic threat, but also, and especially, the way in which they respectively represented and justified those responses. Justification, in particular, would become significant in the context of the Huns' invasion of Gaul and Italy in the years 451 and 452.

My methodology is determined by the question itself: after brief reconstructing the policy of Constantinople and Ravenna toward the Huns in the 440s, I will examine the "Honorius affair," or rather its symbolic and literary representation, to determine whether and to what extent it reflects different interests and political attitudes and what part it played in contemporaries' and near-contemporaries' assessment of Eastern and Western Roman policy toward the Huns. For reasons of space, I will have to simplify complex realities: adopting a macroscopic perspective, I regard "the East" and "the West" each as political units led by independent governments; that does not mean that individual actors within these units could not have pursued their own different goals; I will, however, mention them only when it is necessary for my overall argument.

The Policy of the Eastern Empire toward the Huns

Let us first take a look at the East, that is, the part of the *Imperium Romanum* ruled from Constantinople: the 440s were marked by serious conflicts with the Huns, among which the Hunnic campaigns of 441/442—which occurred when a large part of the Eastern Roman army was in Sicily preparing a campaign against the Vandals—and 447 stand out. Large swaths of the Eastern Roman Balkans were devastated, plundered, or destroyed during these campaigns—allegedly every city in the region with the exception of Adrianople and Heraclea, a total of 70 places according to the author of

the Gallic Chronicle of 452,¹⁴ including important centers Sirmium (Sremska Mitrovica), Viminacium (Kostolac), and Naissus (Niš). Eastern Roman defenses along the Danube intermittently collapsed. In 447, the Huns waged an *ingens bellum* (Marcellinus Comes) as far as Thermopylae, even coming within reach of Constantinople. The threat they posed was palpable even in the capital, and panic and fear of the end times were rampant.¹⁵ The Eastern Roman government was forced to make extensive, extremely costly concessions to the Huns in several treaties. The so-called Peace of Anatolius of 447 stipulated the payment of outstanding sums valued at 6,000 pounds of gold, tripled the Romans' previous annual payment to 2,100 pounds of gold, and established a buffer zone extending five days' journey south of the Danube; Roman troops could no longer operate in this formerly Roman territory.¹⁶ Moreover, most of the Eastern Roman army was lost in 447 at the Battle of the Utus (Vit) together with the *magister militum per Thraciam* Arnegisclus or had been defeated under the generals Aspar and Areobindus.¹⁷ In light of the military emergency, the ongoing devastation of extensive areas, and ever greater Hunnic demands, officials at the Eastern Roman court developed a new strategy for dealing with the Huns in the mid-440s.

Apparently, they had become so well informed about the structure of the Hunnic warrior confederation that they were aware of a key weakness: the king. If his position within Hunnic society could be shaken or if he could even have been eliminated, then the entire confederation would collapse and

¹⁴ Theoph. a.m. 5942 (de Boor 1: 102,26–103,1); *Chron. Gall. a. CCCCLII*, 132 (Mommsen 1894, 662).

¹⁵ On the campaigns of 441/42 and 447, see Thompson 1948, 78–86; 90–94 (now superseded, especially with respect to dates); Stein 1959, 291–92; Maenchen-Helfen 1978 [repr. 1997], 80–93; Croke 1981, 159f.; Blockley 1992, 62f.; Wirth 1999, 58–65; 69–74; Heather 2005, 300–333; Kim 2013, 70–73; Kelly 2015, 199–201. For sources on the events of 441/42, see Zecchini 1983, 177, n. 34. Zuckerman 1994, 164–68, believes that the campaigns of 441/442 and 447 were both climaxes in a larger, ongoing war (sources collected in Zecchini 1983, 260, n. 11). *Ingens bellum*: Marc. Com. s.a. 447.2 (Mommsen 1894, 82).

¹⁶ Peace of Anatolius: Prisc. *fr.* 5 Carolla (= *fr.* 9.3 Blockley); *fr.* 7 Carolla (= *fr.* 11.1 (Blockley); see also Thompson 1948, 95–102; Maenchen-Helfen 1978 [repr. 1997], 92; Blockley 1992, 63f.; Pohl 2000, 251; Wirth 1999, 75f.; Stickler 2002, 123; Stickler 2007, 73. Already in 434/435, Eastern Rome had to make even greater concessions in the Peace of Margus, on which see Prisc. *fr.* 1; 1.1 Carolla (= *fr.* 2 Blockley); on the problem of the date, see Zuckerman 1994, 160–163); Stein 1959, 289–90.; Wirth 1999, 50–51; Pohl 2000, 250–1. Agreements were again made between the Huns and the Eastern Roman Empire in 442: Prisc. *fr.* 3; 4; 5; 61* (Carolla = *fr.* 9.1–4 Blockley); Maenchen-Helfen 1978 [repr. 1997], 80–88; Croke 1981, 160–62; 164; 168–70; Zuckerman 1994, 167–68, who considers it implausible that hostilities were officially resolved at the time. In general on treaties between the Eastern Roman Empire and the Huns, see also Schulz 1993, 110–126.

¹⁷ PLRE 2: 151 (Arnegisclus); 2: 164–69 (Fl. Ardabur Aspar); 2: 145–46. (Fl. Ariobindus 2). Cf. Theoph. a.m. 5942 (de Boor 2: 102.19–103.2); Kim 2013, 71, on the devastating consequences of these defeats.

disintegrate into various smaller groups—the fate that eventually befell the Hunnic empire after Attila’s death in 453. Numerous research activities concerning the structure of the Hunnic warrior confederation during the recent decades have shown that the Eastern Roman government in fact was right in identifying the leader as the main weak point:¹⁸ The Huns were a mobile confederation of warriors, whose effectiveness was based primarily on the subordination of other bands under leaders of their own—Priscus calls them *λογάδες*.¹⁹ These in turn were grouped into the confederation and participated in raids and military campaigns under the leadership of the Hunnic king. Such raids were necessary for the Huns’ survival. They not only ensured a continuous supply of goods that the Huns, who primarily still lived nomadically in the 5th century (despite some early signs of gradually becoming sedentary),²⁰ could not produce themselves. The accumulation and distribution of plunder from raids also enabled the ruler of the Huns to consolidate his own position and to tie the *logades* closer to himself (here we glimpse the charismatic element of the structurally rather weak Hunnic “monarchy”). Thus, the cohesion of the confederation, which had not undergone a process of ethnogenesis like other groups during the age of migrations, depended primarily on the supply of looted goods. This system (which is different from groups of mounted nomads further east, such as Kidarites and Hephthalites, who established more consistent structures of statehood and developed into a dangerous threat for the Persian Sasanians)²¹ resulted in a vicious cycle power dynamic: the permanent need to acquire new goods put the Hunnic rulers under extreme pressure.

In a sense, they were doomed to success: conflict with the Roman Empire was obligatory as their most important source for the supply of goods for redistribution and it therefore became a structural necessity.²² It was essential to determine clearly who did and did not belong. Processes of diffusion between the Hunnic and Roman spheres, which entailed the gradual integration of individual segments of Hunnic groups into the Roman Empire as well

¹⁸ On the Huns and their confederation in detail, cf. Pohl 1992, 177–207; Pohl 1994, 69–91; Pohl 2000, 253–54; Pohl 2003, 395–99; Pohl 2005, 106–118; Pohl 2009, 17–29; Pohl 2015, 247–263; Heather 1995, 4–41; Heather 2005, 324–333; Stickler 2007, 75–83; Kim 2013, *passim*; Meier 2015, 635–58. See also Rogers 2012, 205–56, on inner Asian “steppe empires” in general.

¹⁹ Cf. Prisc. *fr.* 8,23 Carolla (= *fr.* 11.2, line 93 Blockley); *fr.* 8,98 Carolla (= *fr.* 11.2, line 429 Blockley); *fr.* 8,175 Carolla (= *fr.* 14, line 4 Blockley); *fr.* 8,178 Carolla (= *fr.* 14, line 19 Blockley); *fr.* 8,188 Carolla (= *fr.* 14, line 55 Blockley); *fr.* 8,192 Carolla (= *fr.* 14, line 71 Blockley).

²⁰ Cf. Pohl 2005, 113; Stickler 2007, 83–88.

²¹ For comparative perspectives see e.g. Rogers 2012; Kim 2013; Potts 2014, 120–156; Payne 2015.

²² See Kelly 2015.

as the development of relations of exchange and communication (all of which was common between the populations of the Roman Empire and various barbarian groups) needed to be foreclosed in order to maintain the functional “division of labor” on which the existence of the Hunnic coalition depended as a consumer of large quantities of Roman goods. This meant, among other things, that the Huns could not allow the gradual diffusion of individuals, let alone groups, such as *foederati*, into the Roman Empire; they had to plunder the Roman Empire constantly, but they could not strain it beyond its capabilities.

Within this system, the king of the Huns played a key part: only if he succeeded in binding the subordinate groups and their leaders to himself by virtue of his personal prestige and especially by maintaining a constant process of the redistribution of status-constitutive goods could the overall confederation remain intact or even grow. The secret to the Huns’ success in the fifth century was intimately linked to its rulers, who were capable of meeting these demands for extended periods of time—personalities like Ruga or Attila. This meant that the disappearance of a king, whether by death or exodus from the coalition, severely threatened the political union of the group.²³ We may be certain that, without Attila, the centrifugal forces within the already loose and fragile confederation would have dramatically strengthened and the breakup of the warrior coalition would have been the logical outcome.

Eastern Roman diplomacy thus first attempted to undermine Attila’s position among the Huns by weakening the underlying principle of the “Hunnic alternative” (*hunnische Alternative*),²⁴ the strict separation of Roman and Hunnic spheres. Every contemporary was aware of the Huns’ determination to keep both worlds separate. It was not without reason that, before concluding any treaty, the Huns insisted that the Romans surrender all defectors. No Hun could enter the Roman sphere of influence with impunity, and every Roman who resided with the Huns for an extended period had to become a Hun himself.

Eastern Roman diplomacy made this its starting point: the historian Priscus has the Western Roman envoy Constantiolus, whom he had personally met in Hunnic territory in 449, say that at that time Attila held the Roman office of *magister militum* (στρατηγὸς Ῥωμαίων).²⁵ Scholars have usually inter-

²³ Stickler 2002, 122: “Die Legitimierung der Herrschaft durch das persönliche Prestige ihres Inhabers hatte zur Folge, daß bei dessen Tod oder Ausscheiden der Zusammenhalt der Kriegskoalition massiv gefährdet war.”

²⁴ A coinage of Wolfram 1990, 183.

²⁵ Prisc. *fr.* 8,144–145 Carolla (= *fr.* 11.2, lines 623–624; 628 Blockley); for details on the following, see Meier 2015, 647–652.

preted this as evidence that Valentinian III had integrated Attila into the Western Roman military hierarchy in the 440s.²⁶ The context of the passage, however, militates against this interpretation: Priscus explicitly uses the mention of Attila's "promotion" to criticize the fact that Roman tribute was now disguised as regular military pay for a Roman general.²⁷ Criticism of Roman tribute payments appears elsewhere in the fragments of Priscus, but in every case the target is Eastern Roman policy.²⁸ Moreover we do not even know whether the Western Roman Empire ever made payments to Attila. There is no secure evidence of it.²⁹ And yet another argument suggests that the passage in question should refer to an Eastern Roman context: Priscus does not mention the emperor by name, but rather simply calls him βασιλεύς. That he should be referring precisely to Valentinian III rather than Theodosius II, however, is highly unlikely in light of his intended audience in the East—even if one allows for the potential abridgement of the original text by the Constantinian excerptors. Yet they certainly would not have erased Valentinian III's name in a context that otherwise concerned Theodosius II and the East, thereby deliberately creating confusion. Priscus's statements after his reference to Attila's title as *magister militum* thus cannot be cited as evidence of the

²⁶ Thus, e.g., PLRE II 182f. (Attila); see further Zecchini 1994, 93; Maenchen-Helfen 1978 [repr. 1997], 79; Stickler 2002, 116–122; Stickler 2007, 70; Kelly 2008, 172–73; Blockley 1983, 387, n. 69, rightly observes that the Priscus passage is by no means clear evidence that Attila's appointment to *magister militum* came from the West. Demandt 2007, 203, and Croke 2015, 114, view—correctly, in my opinion—Theodosius as the author of Attila's title. Wirth 1967, 44, describes Attila as *magister militum* "des Imperiums," but seems to me to mean specifically the Eastern Roman Empire (cf. 49; 53). For a list of scholarly views, see Gračanin 2006, 51–52.

²⁷ Prisc. fr. 8,145 Carolla (= fr. 11.2, lines 627–631 Blockley): ἦν δ' <ἦ> ἀξία, ἧς ὁ Κωνσταντίολος ἐπεμνήσθη, στρατηγῶν Ῥωμαίων, ἧς χάριν ὁ Ἀττίλας παρὰ βασιλέως ἐδέδεκτο τὸ τοῦ φόρου ἐπικαλύπτοντος ὄνομα, ὥστε αὐτῷ σιτηρεσίου προφάσει τοῦ τοῖς στρατηγοῖς χορηγουμένου τὰς συντάξεις ἐκπέμπεσθαι. Blockley 1983, 279, translates: "The rank which Constantiolus mentioned was that of a Roman general, which the emperor had granted to Attila, thus concealing the word tribute. As a result, the payments were sent to him disguised as provisions issued to the generals." Gordon 2013, 92–93: "The rank which Constantiolus mentioned was general of the Romans, master of soldiers, the favor of which title Attila received from the emperor as a pretext for concealing the tribute. Thus, the contributions were sent to him under the pretense of military provisions supplied to generals." Given 2014, 69: "The rank Constantiolus mentioned was a Roman generalship, the favor of which Attila had received from the emperor. It was a disguise for the word 'tribute,' so that levies were being sent to him under the pretense of tax proceeds distributed to generals." My own, deliberately very literal, German translation is: "Es handelte sich bei dem Amt, das Constantiolus erwähnte, um das eines *magister militum*, dessen Geschenk Attila vom Kaiser empfing, der dadurch das Wort 'Tribut' verschleierte, so dass ihm die Jahrgelder unter dem Vorwand des Soldes zur Ausstattung von Feldherrn geschickt werden konnten."

²⁸ Cf. esp. Prisc. fr. 52* Carolla (= fr. 3 Blockley); fr. 5 Carolla (= fr. 9.3 Blockley) (impoverishment of senators on account of the need to finance the tribute); fr. 6 Carolla (= fr. 10 Blockley); fr. 12 Carolla (= fr. 15.2 Blockley); fr. 15 Carolla (= fr. 20.1 Blockley).

²⁹ Cf. Wirth 1999, 78: "Subventionen entsprechend denen aus Byzanz [. . .] werden nirgends erwähnt."

western provenance of this title. His criticism of tribute payments to the Huns points clearly to Constantinople.

We can even go a step further: even after the Peace of Anatolius in 447, which is the last plausible moment for Attila's appointment to *magister militum* in the course of peace negotiations with Constantinople, Attila still vehemently insisted on the extradition of all deserters.³⁰ If he had taken the title *magister militum* seriously, this demand would have been superfluous, even downright grotesque. As an official general over troops in Roman service, he would have had to accept the interchange of troops between Huns and Romans as inevitable. He could no longer have differentiated himself from a structure of which he was a part. Even Attila's boastful remarks that he ranked higher than the Roman emperor—culminating in the outrageous claim that Theodosius II was his slave³¹—hardly fit the part of a general in Roman service.

From all this, we may conclude the following: Attila was appointed *magister militum* in the 440s by the *Eastern* Roman emperor. The integration of the king of the Huns into the Roman military hierarchy was apparently intended to destabilize his position within the Hunnic confederation. Attila himself, however, does not appear to have gone along with these overtures. His insistence on the separation of the Roman and Hunnic spheres leads to one conclusion: the king of the Huns had rejected his "promotion."³²

This fact may explain why the Eastern Roman leadership soon resumed its efforts to break up Attila's confederation. In 449, a plot was hatched to assassinate Attila during a diplomatic mission into Hunnic territory.³³ Priscus, who accompanied the delegation in an advisory capacity and initially was not informed of its secret mission,³⁴ has left us a lively and vivid account of this diplomatic trip and its failure.³⁵ The assassination plot was revealed to

³⁰ Cf. Prisc. *fr.* 10; *fr.* 11.1, lines 5–7; *fr.* 11.2, lines 12–13, 57–61, 77–78, 178–204, 228–229, 260–263; *fr.* 15.4, line 9 Blockley; Wirth 1967, 44–69.

³¹ Cf. Prisc. *fr.* 8,144–146 Carolla (= *fr.* 11.2, lines 620–636 Blockley); *fr.* 12,2–4 Carolla (= *fr.* 15.2, lines 8–15 Blockley); *fr.* 22.3 Blockley.

³² Shortly thereafter—probably on account of the increasing pressure to succeed that he felt—Attila gave in to the temptations of the Roman sphere after all, representing his campaign in Gaul as intended to protect the Roman population against the Visigoths and portraying himself as *custos Romanae amicitiae* (Prosp. 1364 s.a. 451 [Mommsen 1894, 481 = Becker/Kötter 128–130]). After making the mistake of weakening the division between the Hunnic and Roman spheres by demanding half of the Western Roman Empire, he thus may have inadvertently accelerated the erosion of his warrior confederation.

³³ Cf. Prisc. *fr.* 7 Carolla (= *fr.* 11.1 Blockley); *fr.* 8,1–5 Carolla (= *fr.* 11.2, lines 1–24 Blockley); *fr.* 8,49–51 Carolla (= *fr.* 11.2, lines 205–221 Blockley). Wirth 1999, 81–86; Lee 2000, 41–42; Meier 2015.

³⁴ Prisc. *fr.* 8,1–5 Carolla (= *fr.* 11.2, lines 1–22 Blockley).

³⁵ Prisc. *fr.* 7–8 Carolla (= *fr.* 11 Blockley).

Attila by one of his confidants, whom the Romans mistakenly had believed was on their side, and the Roman envoys could count themselves lucky to escape with their lives. Theodosius II, however, after the plot was exposed and Attila bitterly attacked him,³⁶ was forced to correct his political strategy: henceforth, all the Huns' demands were met and rich monetary payments were sent to pacify their enraged ruler. The result was the treaty negotiated by Anatolius and Nomus in early 450. Both sides showed themselves prepared to compromise, and unexpectedly Attila even gave up the buffer zone south of the Danube,³⁷ an outcome that was possible only because Attila had long³⁸ cast his eyes toward the West and was interested in coming to terms with Constantinople in order to carry out his new plans.³⁹ Theodosius, for his part, did everything possible to implement his policy of peace with the Huns. He even prepared a campaign against the rebellious *magister militum* Zeno,⁴⁰ who had organized the defense against the Huns in the capital in 447 and since that time had seized every opportunity to escalate the conflict.⁴¹ But the war against Zeno never took place. On July 28, 450, Theodosius fell from his horse and died. His successor, Marcian, elevated to emperor on

³⁶ Prisc. *fr.* 12 Carolla (= *fr.* 15.2, lines 1–15 Blockley); *fr.* 13,1 Carolla (= *fr.* 15.3, lines 1–3 Blockley).

³⁷ Prisc. *fr.* 13–14 Carolla (= *fr.* 15.3–5 Blockley); Croke 1981. Attila moreover even gave up his explicit demand for the extradition of Chrysaphius, who had devised the assassination plot against him, see Prisc. *fr.* 7,5–14 Carolla (= *fr.* 11.1, lines 19–66 Blockley); *fr.* 8,1–4 Carolla (= *fr.* 11.2, lines 1–20 Blockley). On Chrysaphius, see *PLRE* 2: 295–97 (Chrysaphius *qui et* Ztummas), with the supplement by Laniado 1995, 122.

³⁸ Cf. Stickler 2002, 124: “schon sehr bald nach 447.”

³⁹ A series of indications suggests that Attila had long planned to attack the West and was looking for pretexts for a potential intervention. The Huns' harboring of Eudoxius, the leader of the Bagaudae, in 448 might already point in this direction (*PLRE* 2: 412 [Eudoxius 2]; *Chron. Gall. a. CCCCLII*, 133 (Mommsen 1894, 662 = Burgess 2001, 80). Attila's interference in a controversy over the Frankish throne also indicates his interest in Western affairs (Prisc. *fr.* 16 Carolla [= *fr.* 20.3 Blockley]). His attack on Gaul may also have been part of an agreement with the Vandal Gaiseric (Prisc. *fr.* 15 Carolla [= *fr.* 20.1, lines 20–21 Blockley]; *fr.* 20.2 Blockley = Jord. *Get.* 184), who may have been interested in weakening the Visigoths (Clover 1973, however, is skeptical of this). Kim 2013, 78–79, paying particular attention to the structural needs of nomadic bands of mounted warriors, conjectures that Attila's real reason for interfering in the dispute over the Frankish throne was because the Franks were in danger of escaping his influence and submitting themselves to the Romans.

⁴⁰ *PLRE* 2: 1199–1200. (Fl. Zenon 6). For Theodosius's preparations for a campaign against him see Prisc. *fr.* 14,7 Carolla (= *fr.* 15.4, lines 25–26 Blockley); *fr.* 62*, lines 16–30 Carolla (= *fr.* 16 Blockley); cf. Damascius, *Vita Isid. fr.* 303 (Zintzen 1967, 241 = Phot. *Epit.* 242, 290).

⁴¹ The defense of Constantinople: Prisc. *fr.* 8,182 Carolla (= *fr.* 14, lines 39–41 Blockley). In the course of his efforts to reach a settlement in 449/450, Zeno quashed an arranged marriage between Attila's secretary Constantius (*PLRE* 2: 319 [Constantius 7]) and the daughter of a Roman aristocratic family (*PLRE* 2: 1240 [Anonyma 21]; cf. *PLRE* 2: 979–80 [Saturninus 3]) by suddenly betrothing her to one of his retainers (*PLRE* 2: 958–59 [Rufus 1]); cf. Prisc. *fr.* 8,180–186 Carolla (= *fr.* 14, lines 25–51 Blockley); *fr.* 12–14 Carolla (= *fr.* 15.2–4 Blockley); *fr.* 18 Carolla (= *fr.* 23.3 Blockley).

August 25, rapidly initiated yet another policy shift, suspending all payments to the Huns and indicating his readiness for war should the Huns make further attacks.⁴² It was the second radical volte-face in Eastern Roman policy toward the Huns within a very short period of time. Now, at the latest, Attila will have decided to head west.

Western Hunnic Policy

Against this background, Western Roman policy toward the Huns during these years presents a far more consistent picture.⁴³ Although the Western Roman Empire had far fewer resources at its disposal than the East on account of territorial losses and ensuing demographic and financial decline, as far as we can tell, the regime prepared for a confrontation with the Huns, which was apparently considered inevitable.⁴⁴ For years, scholars failed to grasp this fact because they always presumed “friendship” between the West Roman *magister militum* Aetius and Attila.⁴⁵ Stickler, however, has shown that this is a construction that even the extant sources refute.⁴⁶ Relations between the Western Empire and the Huns were headed for a dangerous crisis already in the winter of 444/445. As two novels of Valentinian III and several allusions in the *panegyricus* of Merobaudes, in honor of Aetius’ third consulate (January 1, 446), attest,⁴⁷ both sides stood on the brink of war. How these tensions were resolved is the subject of scholarly debate. The murder of Bleda by his brother Attila (early 445) and the ensuing upheaval in the Hunnic confederation that temporarily tied Attila’s hands may have played a part.⁴⁸ It is also possible that a treaty was made between Attila and the West Roman government, as Maenchen-Helfen argues on the basis of scattered fragmentary sources. Attila’s alleged appointment as the West Roman *magister militum* would have occurred in the context of such a treaty.⁴⁹ Even if one is prepared

⁴² Prisc. *fr.* 15 Carolla (= *fr.* 20.1 Blockley). Stickler 2010, 78–79.

⁴³ For previous literature see Maenchen-Helfen 1978 [repr. 1997], 71–80; Stickler 2002, 116–129; Stickler 2007, 65–75; Wirth 1999, 65–69.

⁴⁴ As McEvoy 2013, 293 has also recently argued.

⁴⁵ Still claimed, e.g., by Gračanin 2003, 54; Demandt 2007, 188.

⁴⁶ Stickler 2002, 110–14; cf. Maenchen-Helfen 1978 [repr. 1997], 79–80.

⁴⁷ *Nov. Val.* 6.3 (Jul. 14, 444): abolition of privileges with respect to furnishing recruits and the establishment of new payments in compensation *propter inminentium expensarum necessitatem*; *Nov. Val.* 15 (Sep. 11, 444/Jan. 18, 445): introduction of the *siliquaticum* as a new tax; Merob. *poet.* 1–4; 50–97; see Maenchen-Helfen 1978 [repr. 1997], 71–77; Stickler 2002, 117.

⁴⁸ Thus already Maenchen-Helfen 1978 [repr. 1997], 77.

⁴⁹ Maenchen-Helfen 1978 [repr. 1997], 77–79. Maenchen-Helfen bases his thesis that a treaty was signed in the winter of 444/445 or early 445 on the biography of the “Greek” that Priscus met among the Huns in 449 (which should by no means be taken all too literally) and on consideration of the chronology of the confrontation between Attila and the Akatziri. He extrapolates references

to accept the historicity of this treaty, whatever its terms may have been, there is otherwise not a shred of evidence that Ravenna took a conciliatory policy toward the Huns. On the contrary, as far as we can tell, the West seems to have prepared for the coming confrontation.⁵⁰ It is significant that Valentinian did *not* exploit the “Honorina affair” to strip Attila of a pretext to attack. Had he obeyed Theodosius’s command, he could have simply handed over his defiant sister, who had fallen out of favor already, to the Huns.⁵¹ He refused.

The Import of the Honorina Affair

What was the part played by the events surrounding Honorina in the context of the Roman–Hunnic confrontation and its representation? It seems that no one in Ravenna was interested in commenting on the affair at length or in making it a topic of discussion for others in any way whatsoever. This is completely understandable from a contemporary perspective, given the moral scandal of Honorina’s behavior, unworthy of a Christian *Augusta*.⁵² Yet the

to the existence of a treaty from (1) Cassiodorus’s account of a delegation by his grandfather (*PLRE* 2: 264 [Cassiodorus 2]) and Carpilio, the son of Aetius (*PLRE* 2: 262 [Carpilio 2]), to Attila, which appears to have temporarily appeased him (Cassiod. *Var.* 1.4.11–12) and should be dated sometime after 445; (2) an allusion at *Anon. Vales.* 8.37 to a stay in Italy by Attila that he dates, not to the invasion of 452, but rather to an earlier diplomatic visit; and (3) Priscus’s report that Aetius had left parts of Pannonia to the Huns (*Prisc. fr.* 7,1 Carolla [= *fr.* 11.1, lines 1–5 Blockley]). Stickler 2002, 116–22, has defended Maenchen-Helfen’s arguments from earlier criticism and taken them further, citing the new quality of the treaty concluded in this fashion: in contrast to previous situational agreements, this treaty took a completely new direction in that it included the surrender of areas and the appointment of the king of the Huns to *magister militum* (which he follows Maenchen-Helfen 1978 [repr. 1997], 79 in placing in this context). Stickler explains this in terms of the “Persönlichkeit Attilas und eine durch ihn bewirkte qualitative Veränderung der hunnischen Politik gegenüber dem Reich” (119). The connection between Attila’s alleged appointment as *magister militum* and the events sketched here, however, remains speculation and would have been of no use to either the Western Roman or the Hunnic side in the situation of 444/445 (cf. Meier 2015, 647–49).

⁵⁰ That does not mean that the government in Ravenna did not continue to be interested in a peaceful relationship with the Huns. The fact that Priscus and his companions met a Western Roman delegation at Attila’s court (*Prisc. fr.* 8,74–82 Carolla [= *fr.* 11.2, lines 313–355 Blockley]) shows that the Ravenna government wanted to maintain communications (whatever the actual goal of the Western embassy was).

⁵¹ Stickler 2002, 131, cautions that contemporaries probably would not have accepted a marriage between the emperor’s sister and Attila. In contrast to the case of Arcadius (who married the daughter of the Frankish general Bauto) or Eudocia, the daughter of Valentinian III (who was betrothed to and later married Huneric, heir to the Vandal throne), Attila was, as Stickler states, “ein[. . .] heidnische[r] Hunne[. . .],” not a “christianisierte[r] Germane[. . .].” It supposedly was also well known that Attila had set his eyes on Honorina’s βασιλικά σκήπτρα (cf. *Prisc. fr.* 62* Carolla [= *fr.* 17 Blockley]), with which he could make claims to power that would have been unacceptable to Valentinian.

⁵² The standard was set by the ostentatiously pious behavior that prevailed among the female members of the Theodosian imperial house; cf., for instance, Holum 1982; Limberis 1994; Diefenbach 1996; Leppin 1996.

affair was perfectly suited to send powerful symbolic signals to the Huns—and Constantinople.

The first such signal came in 450. After Attila informed Constantinople that he would henceforth use his army to represent Honoria's interests vis-à-vis Ravenna, Theodosius, as *senior Augustus*, immediately ordered his cousin Valentinian III to surrender her to the Huns. Instead, Valentinian had Honoria's confidant Hyacinthus executed in gruesome fashion and spared his sister only at the behest of their mother, Galla Placidia.⁵³ Shortly thereafter, immediately after Marcian ascended the throne, the king of the Huns dispatched envoys to both Constantinople and Ravenna. The delegation to Constantinople was merely informed of the Eastern Roman government's new policy—namely, the immediate cessation of all tribute payments. In the West, in response to Attila's demand that he give him Honoria in marriage together with her rights to the throne (τὸ τῆς βασιλείας σκῆπτρα), Valentinian declared that his sister had already married another man (Herculanus) and had no claim to the throne anyway, since only men could become rulers of the *Imperium Romanum*.⁵⁴ This last remark was probably a barb directed against Constantinople: there, Theodosius's sister Pulcheria had married Marcian in order to ensure a smooth succession, thus shielding him from attacks on his lack of dynastic pedigree. Ravenna would not recognize Marcian until March 30, 452, and at the time of Attila's delegation he was still considered a usurper.⁵⁵ A subsequent Hunnic delegation in the winter of 450/451 again called for the surrender of Attila's "fiancée," citing her ring as proof, and demanded half of the Western Roman Empire as a dowry, again in vain.⁵⁶ With this backdrop, Honoria could be elevated to a symbol of Western Roman defiance in the face of the Huns.

There is no need to discuss subsequent events in greater detail, especially Attila's campaigns in Gaul and Italy.⁵⁷ For our purposes, it is telling that after the Huns' withdrawal from Gaul, the Western Roman government deployed the "Honorica affair" once more to make a powerful symbolic statement: the

⁵³ Prisc. *fr.* 62* Carolla (= *fr.* 17 Blockley).

⁵⁴ Prisc. *fr.* 15 Carolla (= *fr.* 20.1 Blockley).

⁵⁵ Szidat 2010, 113–117.

⁵⁶ Prisc. *fr.* 16 Carolla (= *fr.* 20.3 Blockley). According to Priscus, Attila mistakenly interpreted the ring that Honoria had originally sent him as a guarantor of her agent Hyacinthus's credibility as if it were a pledge of marriage, cf. Prisc. *fr.* 62*, line 9 Carolla [= *fr.* 17, lines 11–12 Blockley]: καὶ δακτύλιον ἔπεμψε πιστομένη τὸν βάρβαρον. This is generally how the incident is interpreted in the scholarly literature; cf. Bury 1919, 11; Oost 1968, 283–84; Wirth 1999, 94; Kelly 2008, 187. One might ask, however, whether the Hun may have viewed the ring as a symbol of imperial power and accordingly based his demand for half of the Western Roman Empire on it.

⁵⁷ Cf. Thompson 1948, 125–48; Wirth 1999, 98–112; Stickler 2002, 135–150; Heather 2005, 333–42; Kelly 2008, 183–209.

unremarkable, politically insignificant senator Herculanus, now the husband of Honoria, was honored with the consulate of 452. In this way, it was made perfectly clear to Attila one last time what Ravenna thought about his alleged engagement to Honoria.

In the East, the affair received much more intense literary attention, and the reasons behind this were likewise far more complex. Priscus's account reflects not only the interests of the government (or influential persons at court), but also his own concerns as a member of the delegation in 449 that was directly involved in these events. I believe it is still possible, however, to make some revealing observations: we can see that Priscus embedded his account of the affair in the West in the context of *Eastern Roman domestic politics*: Theodosius is initially forced to postpone his campaign against Zeno because he is caught off guard by the news that Honoria had made contact with Attila (ἦκε γὰρ τις ἀγγέλλων).⁵⁸ This frightened him even more than Zeno did (μείζονος δὲ αὐτὸν ἐκταράξαντος φόβου), and so he vainly ordered his cousin to surrender Honoria to Attila. Priscus depicts the emperor in this context as a classic tyrant, tormented by ever greater fears, who shows himself prepared to accede to the barbarian's wishes (this corresponds to Priscus's repeated criticism of the annual payments made by Theodosius). He even sends signals to that effect to Valentinian. But precisely the *junior augustus* in the West takes a defiant stance worthy of an emperor. Marcian is the first to show the resoluteness that the historian requires in the Eastern Roman emperor (when he suspends the payments to the Huns): Attila's new demands are now rejected both in Ravenna and in Constantinople.

The "Honoria affair" is particularly important to Priscus, because it illustrates both exemplary and reprehensible conduct by an emperor. Priscus, however, also had an interest in stressing the suddenness with which the news about Honoria surprised Theodosius. In reality, she must have made contact with Attila much earlier, and perhaps the Western Roman delegation that Priscus encountered in 449 was supposed to have discussed the matter in its negotiations.⁵⁹ Naturally, not a trace of this appears in Priscus's account,⁶⁰ but this *argumentum e silentio* is not necessarily decisive. It is possible that Priscus was simply uninformed about what was said in the

⁵⁸ Cf. Prisc. *fr.* 62* Carolla (= *fr.* 16–17 Blockley).

⁵⁹ Several scholars have already made this conjecture; cf. Šašel Kos 1994, 109–10; Gračanin 2003, 71–72.

⁶⁰ This argument is made by Stickler 2002, 130, n. 688. Following Priscus, the Western Roman embassy in fact had a clearly defined goal. In the context of the so-called "Silvanus affair" (see, recently, Lenski 2015, 230–31), the envoys had to persuade Attila to withdraw his unsubstantiated demand to surrender the Roman banker Silvanus. Any case for further tasks assigned to the embassy and not mentioned in Priscus are, of course, speculative.

secret negotiations. Admitting as much would have hurt his prestige. For this reason, he may have compressed the “Honorio affair” into a series of events that caught those involved completely by surprise after his diplomatic mission.

Despite this distortion, Priscus’s account still reveals the interests of the Eastern Roman government: after the failed assassination attempt against Attila, the authorities on the Bosphorus energetically worked to reach a settlement. Thus, Theodosius’s military aggression toward Zeno was less the result of the proverbial tyrant’s constant fear of being overthrown than the result of his effort to eliminate a *magister militum* who constantly provoked new confrontations with the Huns.

His demand that Valentinian hand over Honorio to the Huns points in the same direction. All of Attila’s demands during this phase were met. Marcian was the first to steer relations toward open confrontation.⁶¹ Even if it had become perfectly clear by this time that Attila would soon head west, this political volte-face on the Bosphorus was sufficiently controversial to stir debate over the blame for Attila’s campaigns there. This was yet another opportunity to exploit the “Honorio affair” to publicize the East’s perspective. Thus Marcellinus Comes tellingly notes, “Honorio incited Attila’s army against the western state” (*Honorio [. . .] Attilanem contra Occidentalem rem publicam concitabat*),⁶² and Jordanes claims that Honorio “had purchased license for her lust at the expense of the commonwealth” (*ut licentiam libidinis malo publico compararet*). Thus, in the East, the “Honorio affair” became an argument in a debate about guilt and blame, which was fostered not least by the numerous eastern policy shifts during the period leading up to Attila’s campaigns in the West.

There are thus several facets to the “Honorio affair.” As the many contrasting opinions on the story amply illustrate, it can be interpreted in different ways. My focus has been on how contemporaries and other close witnesses utilized the incident symbolically and rhetorically. In doing so, I have attempted to tease out the different ways in which observers in the East and West handled the events. Ultimately, this interpretive approach amounts to placing the entire web of events surrounding Honorio’s offer to Attila and its consequences in the broader context of the gradually accelerating process of the separation between East and West, which would acquire visible

⁶¹ In 452, Marcian even supported the defense of Italy against Attila by sending Aetius a contingent of troops (Hydat. *chron.* 154 [Mommsen 1894, 26–27]). This act of cooperation might be connected to the recognition of his position by Ravenna on March 30, 452. For a similar view, cf. Stickler 2010, 78–79.

⁶² Marc. Com. s.a. 434 (Mommsen 1894, 79).

contours in 500 with the establishment of a western, Latin sphere and an eastern, Greek sphere.⁶³ From this perspective, the “Honorina affair” not only represents an example of late antique political rancor, it also proves to be an unmistakable sign of a process of cultural dissociation, which apparently began earlier and had deeper roots than is generally assumed.

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⁶³ These contours I have carved out elsewhere in some detail, cf. Meier 2012; Meier 2014.

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