

## THE CONTEXT AND DATE OF PRISCUS FRAGMENT 6

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A PERENNIAL problem in analyzing ancient texts preserved only in fragments and excerpts is establishing their context and, especially important in the case of historical texts, their date. The many fragments of early Byzantine historians in particular have been extensively used by modern scholars, but there is much scope for more precise and rigorous analysis of them. In using Priscus of Panion, for example, as a source for the 440s we rely largely on the excerpts preserved in two compilations made for the tenth-century scholar-emperor, Constantine Porphyrogenitus. They deal with embassies from the Roman imperial court to various barbarian chiefs and officials (*Excerpta de legationibus Romanorum*) and embassies from barbarians to Romans (*Excerpta de legationibus gentium*).<sup>1</sup>

Since the excerpts are confined to embassies and are torn from their context in the original history of Priscus, dating individual excerpts is primarily achieved by correlating the excerpts with other sources for the 440s, notably the annalistic chronicles (e.g., Marcellinus, Prosper, Chronicon Paschale, Theophanes).<sup>2</sup> A useful check on this method is to analyze the *Excerpts* to see if they bear witness to a systematic and sequential process of extraction on the part of the Byzantine editor. Taking the fragments relating to the Hunnish wars in the 440s (i.e., 1–14), we find that fragments 1, 4, and 8 are successive extracts from *Excerpta de legationibus Romanorum*. Fragment 1 describes events in 435, fragment 4 events in 447, and fragment 8 recounts the embassy to Attila of Maximinus and Priscus in 449.<sup>3</sup> They are therefore in order; and this is made clearer still by the next successive fragments of the Roman embassies: 13(449), 14(449), 18(452), 24(456), 25(456), 28(461), 29(462), 32(464), 33(465), 40(467). When we turn to the *Excerpta de legationibus gentium* we discover that the compiler here engaged in the same process: that is, he excerpted

1. Ed. C. de Boor, *Excerpta de legationibus* (Berlin, 1903). To my knowledge there is no comprehensive study of the purpose and editorial technique in the *Excerpta* (cf. H. Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, vol. 1 [Munich, 1978], pp. 361–62, 366). A measure of this neglect is the fact that in his lengthy discussion of Constantine's literary output and patronage Arnold Toynbee (*Constantine Porphyrogenitus and his World* [London, 1973], pp. 575–605) makes no mention of the *Excerpta*. Of general interest in this regard is P. Brunt, "On Historical Fragments and Epitomes," *CQ* 30 (1980): 477–94.

2. For Priscus and his history, see B. Baldwin, "Priscus of Panium," *Byzantion* 50 (1980): 18–61; and R. C. Blockley, *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire* (Liverpool, 1981), pp. 48–70, 113–23.

3. The dates used here are those of C. Müller in *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum*, vol. 4 (Paris, 1851).

Priscus in the order in which the material appeared in Priscus' history, or at least arranged the extracts in chronological order if they did not appear that way in the original history. Fragment 2, which describes the outbreak of the war in 441, is the first barbarian embassy excerpted. Then follow fragments 3(442), 5(447/448), 6, 7(448), 12(448), 15(450), 16(450), 19(452), 20(453), 21(453), 26(456), 27(460/466), 30(462/463), 31(464), 34(466), 35(466), 36(467), 38(467), 39(467), 41(468). Taken together, then, the excerpts of Priscus contained in Constantine's books on embassies clearly indicate that they are preserved in chronological order. That this should in fact be the case is suggested, in the absence of systematic research, by the judgment of those scholars who have worked closely with both the texts themselves, where such survive, and their excerpts,<sup>4</sup> and is confirmed by some elementary analysis.<sup>5</sup> At least the evidence is substantial enough to give warning that any attempt to violate this sequence must be very carefully considered.

Such an exception has been proposed recently by W. Bayless, who would date fragment 6 to 441 precisely, "in spite of the fact that fragment 6 follows fragment 5 in the *Excerpta de legationibus gentium*."<sup>6</sup> It is the purpose of this paper to examine more fully the validity of this exception to the regular pattern of excerpts of Priscus preserved in Constantine's books.

## I

Fragment 6 of Priscus deals with the inability of the Roman court to cope with Attila's constant embassies following the ratification of a treaty, and begins as follows:

When the peace was made Attila again sent ambassadors to the Eastern Romans demanding the fugitives. And they, receiving these envoys and flattering them with

4. E.g., C. de Boor, "Die Excerptensammlungen des Porphyrogenitus," *Hermes* 19 (1884): 123.

5. So much is already known in the case of Procopius (B. Rubin, "Prokopios von Kaisareia," *RE* 23.1 [1957]: 389–90). A sample comparison of the text of Theophylact Simocatta (ed. De Boor) with the Constantinian *Excerpta de legationibus Romanorum et gentium* (ed. De Boor) shows that the extracts reflect strictly the order of the original text: *Exc. de leg. Rom.* 1 (221.14–222.15 De Boor) = 1.4.6–9 + 1.6.1–3; 2 (222.16–22) = 1.6.4–5; 3 (222.23–223.28) = 1.8.1–11; 4 (223.29–224.7) = 3.17.2–3; 5 (224.8–226.6) = 6.11.4–21; 6 (226.7–31) = 7.15.8–14; 7 (226.32–227.24) = 8.1.1–8; 8 (227.25–33) = 8.15.2,7; *Exc. de leg. gent.* 1 (477.21–478.23) = 1.2.6–1.4.1; 2 (478.24–479.3) = 1.6.5–7.2; 3 (479.4–480.25) = 1.15.1–14; 4 (480.26–481.10) = 3.15.5–10; 5 (481.11–483.17) = 4.10.5–11.11; 6 (483.18–485.14) = 4.12.8–14.7; 7 (485.15–21) = 4.14.8–9; 8 (485.22–33) = 5.2.4–6; 9 (485.34–486.27) = 5.2.7–3.11; 10 (486.28–31) = 5.11.9 + 5.13.1; 11 (486.32–487.2) = 5.16.4–6; 12 (487.3–7) = 6.3.1; 13 (487.8–23) = 6.3.5–9; 14 (487.24–488.7) = 7.7.3–8; 15 (488.8–30) = 7.13.3–7; 16 (488.31–489.3) = 8.4.1–2. The chronological order of Theophylact is also preserved by Photius in his book-by-book summary (*Bibl. Cod.* 65), as it is for his summaries of Theophanes of Byzantium (*Cod.* 64), Procopius of Caesarea (*Cod.* 63), and Candidus (*Cod.* 79). In addition, research on Photius' literary technique has only clarified the fact that, like the Constantinian excerptor, Photius followed the order of the texts he was excerpting (T. Hägg, *Photius als Vermittler antiker Literatur: Untersuchungen zur Technik des Referierens und Exzerprierens in der Bibliothek* [Uppsala, 1975], pp. 197–98, with the specific examples of the speeches of Himerius [p. 128] and Dio Chrysostom [p. 160]).

6. "The Chronology of Priscus Fragment 6," *CP* 74 (1979): 154.

very many gifts, sent them back again, saying that they had no fugitives. And again, he sent other men. When they had transacted their business a third embassy arrived and after it a fourth, for the barbarian, seeing clearly the Romans' liberality, which they exercised through caution lest the peace treaties be broken, wished to benefit his retinue. And so he sent them to the Romans, forming new excuses and finding new pretexts. They gave ear to every order and obeyed the command of their master in whatever he ordered. The Romans were not only wary of undertaking war on him, but they feared the Parthians who were, it chanced, making preparations for war, the Vandals who were troubling the sea coasts. . . .<sup>7</sup>

While this is normally taken to refer to events following the settlement with Anatolius in 447, it is now proposed that the treaty discussed "would be the one-year treaty of 441 mentioned by Count Marcellinus."<sup>8</sup> This thesis is advanced to account for the references in Priscus to Persian preparations for war and Vandal sea raids, which cannot apply, it is argued, to 447 and immediately thereafter. Bayless aims for yet greater precision and argues that "the only war which the Romans fought with the Persians in the period began in 441": consequently, Priscus "is really referring to conditions before the outbreak of the Persian war."<sup>9</sup> There are, however, many unconsidered difficulties in this thesis which emphatically support the traditional date for the important fragment 6 of Priscus.

First, Priscus is describing a time after the ratification of the peace when no fewer than four successive legations from Attila were received in Constantinople. The theme of his account is the powerlessness and impoverishment of the imperial court, a situation exacerbated by each new embassy. Priscus states further that the Romans capitulated easily to the Huns because of the threats of the Vandals, Persians, Isaurians, Saracens, and Ethiopians.<sup>10</sup> If we take this trepidation to apply to the period of the very first legation and allow sufficient time for the conclusion of the Hunnish war in 441 and the ratification of the treaty, then we might, on this construction, expect Priscus to be referring to a period from late 441 onward.

7. Priscus frag. 6 (*FHG* 4:76). The translation is that of C. D. Gordon, *The Age of Attila* (Ann Arbor, 1966), p. 68.

8. Bayless, "Chronology," p. 155.

9. Ibid. Bayless arrives at this conclusion by suggesting that E. A. Thompson and others inferred a treaty of 441 "from Priscus' statement in fragment 6 that the Persians were preparing for war" (ibid.). Rather, Thompson and others reasonably deduce the one-year treaty from the ambiguous and compact statement of Marcellinus (s.a. 441.1, ed. Mommsen, *Chron. min.*, 2:80): "Persae, Saraceni, Tzanni, Isauri, Hunni finibus suis egressi Romanorum sola vastaverunt. missi sunt contra hos Anatolius et Aspar magistri militiae pacemque cum his unius anni fecerunt." Although this passage has been taken to mean that Anatolius and Aspar together concluded a one-year truce with the Persians (O. Seeck, "Flavius Ardaburius Aspar," *RE* 2 [1896]: 608, but not *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt* 6 [Stuttgart, 1920], p. 292) or, conversely, that the Huns with whom Aspar negotiated were those in the Caucasus (A. Demandt, "magister militum," *RE* supp. 12 [1970]: 749, cf. 742), it is apparent that the one-year treaties were those concluded by Aspar with the Huns (O. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns* [Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1973], p. 110) and Anatolius with the Persians.

10. Frag. 6 (*FHG* 4:76).

The Persian war, however, was certainly over by June 441.<sup>11</sup> So if fragment 6 refers to the period before the Persian war was concluded, it means that the invasion of the Huns must have occurred, and been resolved, much earlier in the year. We know that on 6 March 441 the large fleet under Areobindus, which had been assembled to do battle with the Vandals, had not yet sailed.<sup>12</sup> In other words, since it is scarcely likely that the Huns would have invaded when the full strength of the imperial army was still in Europe, the Hunnish war must have begun after 6 March 441. Hence, on Bayless' reconstruction, we must believe that before the conflict with Persia was terminated (i.e., about May), and after 6 March, the Huns invaded Illyricum, were beaten off, a one-year treaty was reached, and at least the first of a series of embassies went to the eastern capital. The compression of all this action into March/April 441, while not absolutely impossible, results in a very tight fit.

More damaging to Bayless' case is his proposal that all the Hunnish embassies took place not only before the conclusion of the Persian war but before it even broke out. In doing so, of course, he is only following Priscus' statement that the embassies occurred while the Parthians "were, it chanced, making preparations for war" (Παρθαίους ἐν παρασκευῇ πυλῶντας).<sup>13</sup> Although the war was not concluded until some time in mid-441, the Persian king Isdigerdes II (438–457) had actually mobilized his troops the previous year, or even as early as 439. The Persian war was well under way in 440.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, in the period after the Hunnish war of 441 the Persians were demobilizing or had already decided on peace. Because the Persian war began in 440, they could only be described as "preparing for war" in early 440/late 439 and certainly not in early/mid-441. This problem, which clearly suggests that the events described in fragment 6 cannot be dated to 441, is overlooked by Bayless.

A still more serious objection to assigning fragment 6 to 441 is its general theme of Roman foreboding and incapacity. In general, the court of Theodosius had been able to treat the Huns with relative disdain in the early 440s. For example, before the outbreak of war in 442 Theodosius' court

11. *NTh.* 5. 3 (26 June 441), with Maenchen-Helfen, *Huns*, p. 109. The statement of Theodoret *HE* 5. 37 that the Persians attacked only when the Romans "were occupied with other wars" is often taken (e.g., by Maenchen-Helfen, *ibid.*) to refer to 441; but it describes circumstances in 421/422 (Seeck, *Geschichte*, p. 85; B. Croke, "Evidence for the Hun Invasion of Thrace in A.D. 422," *GRBS* 18 [1977]: 349–52; and K. Holm, "Pulcheria's Crusade A.D. 421–22 and the Ideology of Imperial Victory," *GRBS* 18 [1977]: 167–71).

12. *NTh.* 7. 4.

13. *Frag.* 6 (*FHG* 4:76).

14. J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*<sup>2</sup> (London, 1923), vol. 2, p. 6; E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire* (Paris, 1959), vol. 1, pp. 291–92. The decisive evidence is E. Vartabed, *Hist. Arm.* 1 (Collection des Historiens de l'Arménie, ed. V. Langlois, vol. 2 [Paris, 1869], p. 184), who says that "in the second year of the reign of Izdegerd II," that is, 439–440, "il fondit sur le pays des Grecs [Romains], s'avança jusqu'à la ville de Medzpin [Nisibis] et dévasta, en les saccageant, plusieurs villes appartenant aux Romains. . . . Cependant le bienheureux empereur Théodose . . . lui envoya des sommes d'argent considérables par un personnage appelé Anadol [Anatolius] qui était son général en Orient"; cf. Moses of Chorene, *Hist. Arm.* 3. 67 (Langlois, p. 172), who dates the invasion to the time of the death of the Armenian patriarch Sahag, "at the beginning of Izdegerd's second year"; also referred to in T. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber aus der arabischen Chronik des Tabari übersetzt* (Leiden, 1879), p. 116, and Michael the Syrian, *Chron.* 8. 14.

responded to the threats of the Hunnish king, Attila, by refusing to surrender Hunnish refugees living among the Romans. In fact, they were prepared to do battle with the Huns, wrote Theodosius, and would send ambassadors to dissolve their agreements.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, when the war with the Huns was concluded in 441, the imperial court worked out a satisfactory arrangement with the Vandals and recalled the imperial army from Sicily, to bolster the forces fighting the Huns in Illyricum and Thrace.<sup>16</sup> In 443 the Romans were purposefully building up defenses on all frontiers as well as refurbishing the Danubian flotilla and camps.<sup>17</sup>

Consequently, the Romans were in a relatively robust and confident position in 441/442, in contrast to their position after the crushing losses to the Huns in 447.<sup>18</sup> In fragment 5 Priscus records the impact of the Roman defeat and the crippling terms imposed by the Huns. He describes the levy of new taxes, how some senators put their furniture and wives' jewelry up for sale, and how others preferred suicide, either by the noose or starvation. In addition, Priscus comments that the Romans pretended to agree voluntarily to such harsh terms, while they were actually compelled to concur by fear and necessity.<sup>19</sup> Clearly the tone of fragment 6, describing an exhausted and bankrupt Roman state, pressed in on all sides and fearful of its enemies, most closely accords with the situation after 447, not that in 441. This observation is reinforced by a consideration of the fragment's position in the excerpts of Priscus.

It was noted above that the order of the Constantinian excerpts relating to the Hunnish invasions reflects the chronological order of Priscus' work. On this assumption fragment 6 would belong between fragment 5 (the terms of Anatolius' treaty and its impact) and fragment 7 (the embassy of Edeco), while the date of fragment 5 would provide the *terminus post quem* for fragment 6. It is vital, therefore, to establish the date of fragment 5.

## II

Although some scholars in the past have dated fragment 5 to 442 or 443, it is now very firmly fixed in 447/448.<sup>20</sup> The two main criteria for this date are the geography of the events described and the identity of the ambassadors involved—Anatolius and Theodulus. Let these be considered in turn.

First, it must be pointed out that the only chronological indication provided in fragment 5 is the phrase "after the battle in the Chersonese"

15. Priscus frag. 3 (*FHG* 4:73).

16. Theophanes A.M. 5942 (p. 102 De Boor).

17. *NTh.* 24.

18. For which, see Maenchen-Helfen, *Huns*, pp. 117–25, ascribing the upsurge in Hunnish power after 445 to the personal ascendancy of Attila.

19. Frag. 5 (*FHG* 4:74).

20. Maenchen-Helfen, *Huns*, pp. 111–25; Seeck, *Geschichte*, pp. 291–94.

(μετὰ τὴν ἐν Χερρονήσῳ μάχην). In 441 the Huns invaded Illyricum only,<sup>21</sup> and in 442 broke into northern Thrace as well.<sup>22</sup> Only in the "Great Invasion" of 447, however, after the Chersonese "Long Wall" had been damaged in the earthquake of 26 January, did the Huns penetrate Thrace and move into the Chersonese.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, much of the province of Europa, in which the Chersonese was incorporated, was leveled in the invasion.<sup>24</sup> "After the battle in the Chersonese" can therefore only refer to events in 447 and later.

Second, the ambassador Anatolius was, as *magister militum*, occupied in the East against the Persians in 440/441.<sup>25</sup> In 442 he was in Edessa, where he provided a silver reliquary for the bones of the apostle Thomas.<sup>26</sup> He was still *magister militum* in the East on 28 January 443.<sup>27</sup> Anatolius had been stationed in the East since 433, in addition to a previous posting in 420, and was only recalled to Constantinople to take up the post of *magister militum praesentalis* in 447.<sup>28</sup> The mere fact of Anatolius' presence in Thrace, acting on behalf of the emperor, presupposes a date of 447 or later. Finally, Theodulus is designated in fragment 5 as *magister militum per Thracias*.<sup>29</sup> He only succeeded to this position in 447, when his predecessor, Arnegisclus, was killed soon after the outbreak of the Hunnish invasion.<sup>30</sup>

In 447/448 therefore, according to fragment 5, Anatolius is sent on an embassy to the Hun court. Attila subsequently concludes an agreement (συμβάσεις) with Anatolius, but makes plain, in voicing his dissatisfaction at the Romans' retention of Hun prisoners and refugees, that he will not ratify the treaty (τὰς τῆς εἰρήνης συνθήκας) unless the prisoners are surrendered or ransomed.<sup>31</sup> Fragment 6 begins with the statement that the treaty had been made and then goes on to describe the procession of

21. Marcell. comes, s.a. 441. 3 (ed. Mommsen, *Chron. min.*, 2:80): "Hunorum reges numerosis suorum cum milibus *Illyricum* irruerunt: Naisum, Singidunum aliasque civitates oppidaque *Illyrici* plurima exciderunt."

22. Marcell. comes, s.a. 442. 2 (ed. Mommsen, *Chron. min.*, 2:81): "Bleda et Attila fratres multarumque gentium reges *Illyricum Thraciamque* depopulati sunt"; Prosper 1345 s.a. 442 (ed. Mommsen, *Chron. min.*, 1:479): "Chunis *Thracias et Illyricum* saeva populatione vastantibus exercitus, qui in Sicilia morabatur, ad defensionem Orientalium provinciarum revertit."

23. Evagrius *HE* 1. 17.

24. Marcell. comes, s.a. 447. 2 (ed. Mommsen, *Chron. min.*, 2:82): "Ingens bellum et priore maius per Attilam regem nostris inflictum *paene totam Europam* excisis invasisque civitatibus atque castellis conrasit."

25. Marcell. comes, s.a. 441. 1 (ed. Mommsen, *Chron. min.*, 2:80), with J. R. Martindale, *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire II* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 85 ("Fl. Anatolius 10"). For the vexed question of Anatolius' tenure of this post, see Holum, "Pulcheria's Crusade," p. 169 with nn. 13 and 66.

26. *Chron. Edess.*, s.a. 753 (= A.D. 442); *PLRE* II:85.

27. *CJ* 1. 46. 3.

28. Theod. *Ep.* 45; *PLRE* II:84.

29. Priscus frag. 5 (*FHG* 4:76), with Demandt, *RE Supp.* 12 (1970): 745.

30. Since Theodulus was already *magister militum* at the time of the embassy of Senator (Priscus frag. 4 [*FHG* 4:74]), which must postdate 445 (Maenchen-Helfen, *Huns*, p. 119), and since Arnegisclus is recorded as *magister militum per Thracias* early in 447 (Jordanes *Rom.* 331; *Chronicon Paschale* [ed. Dindorf] 586. 5) when he was killed, then Arnegisclus must have succeeded the Vandal John whom he killed in 441 (Marcell. comes, s.a. 441. 2 [ed. Mommsen, *Chron. min.*, 2:80]). This means that Theodulus succeeded Arnegisclus, despite "Theodulus 2" *PLRE* II: 1105-6, which assumes a date of 443 for the Peace of Anatolius.

31. Frag. 5 (*FHG* 4:75).

embassies to the Romans and the pliancy of the imperial court in acceding to each new request.<sup>32</sup> It must firmly be stated that fragment 6 fits perfectly between the final ratification of the peace and the embassy of Edeco to Constantinople in 448 recounted in fragment 7. It would seem, then, that the excerpt was taken from Priscus' account of the aftermath of the disastrous invasion in 447.

There are therefore only two possible explanations for fragment 6. (1) If we acknowledge, as Bayless does, that fragment 5 can only be dated to 447/448,<sup>33</sup> and if we accept, as Bayless also does, the usual assumption that the fragments of Priscus are preserved in chronological order, then the events described in fragment 6 must follow those in fragment 5. They are therefore to be dated to 447/448 or just after, and require explication in the light of events in the late 440s, when successive Hunnish embassies did in fact visit Constantinople. (2) If, on the other hand, it is insisted that fragment 6 can only be dated to 441 (while fragment 5 can only be dated to 447/448), then we are obliged to regard fragment 6 as an exception to the sequential order of the fragments.

We have already seen that this latter explanation is almost completely invalidated because of the strict sequence of the fragments, the difficulties in placing fragment 6 in 441, and the continuity between fragment 5, which can only be dated to 447/448, and fragment 6. Such an explanation becomes even more problematic if the details which are claimed to apply exclusively to 441 can be shown to fit circumstances in 447 and afterwards. Consequently, it is necessary to consider the specific details contained in fragment 6.

### III

The core of Bayless' argument is his contention that the picture of beligerent Persians and Vandals only makes sense before 442. A close examination of Priscus' statement, that the Romans were submissive because they were being threatened by other enemies, exposes the imprecision of the historian's description. He continues: "[The Romans] were not only wary of undertaking war on him [Attila], but they also feared the Parthians, who were, it chanced, making preparations for war, the Vandals, who were troubling the sea coasts (τὰ κατὰ θάλατταν ταραττοντας), the Isaurians, who had set out on banditry (τὴν ληστείαν), the Saracens, who were overrunning the eastern part of the empire (τὴν ἑω κατατρέχοντας), and the united Ethiopian races (τὰ Αἰθιοπικὰ ἔθνη συνιστάμενα). Being humbled they danced attendance on Attila and strove to meet other races with military power, mustering their forces and appointing generals."<sup>34</sup>

We hear only vaguely of Persians preparing for war, Vandals raiding

32. Frag. 6 (*FHG* 4:76).

33. "Chronology," p. 154 (thereby contradicting his earlier support for the date of 443: "The Treaty with the Huns of 443," *AJP* 97 [1976]: 176–80).

34. Frag. 6 (*FHG* 4:76), translated by Gordon, *Attila*, pp. 68–69.

coastlines, Isaurians and Saracens plundering the eastern provinces, Ethiopians posing a threat, and the Romans appointing generals to organize their forces. This account (which indeed offers little in the way of chronological precision) is alleged by Bayless to correspond to that described in the chronicle of Marcellinus for 441: "The Persians, Saracens, Tzanni, Isaurians and Huns left their own territories and plundered the land of the Romans. Anatolius and Aspar, Masters of the Soldiery, were sent against them, and made peace with them for one year."<sup>35</sup>

Yet, in view of the arguments already advanced, the essential question is not whether fragment 6 can be made to fit the account of Marcellinus for 441, but whether the situation depicted by Priscus can be shown to have existed in the otherwise sparsely documented period in and after 447. To consider fully this possibility it is necessary to describe and analyze the relations in the late 440s between the Roman empire and the nations that, according to Priscus, were threatening it.

The mobile and elusive desert tribes of Egypt and Arabia were always difficult for the Romans to combat and control fully. The empire was constantly at war with them, although these conflicts rarely appear in our sources. We know, however, that in the latter part of his reign Theodosius II had been forced to divide the province of Thebais into a lower and upper half and take the uncommon step of uniting the civil and military administration in a single official.<sup>36</sup> Such action presupposes a troublesome province and suggests that the Nobadae and Blemmyes had been causing persistent problems for the emperor. It was at this time (449–50) that the deposed patriarch of Constantinople, Nestorius, complained of attacks by the Blemmyes and Nobadae near his place of exile.<sup>37</sup> Soon after the accession of Marcian in 450 the Nobadae and Blemmyes attacked and were defeated by the *dux* Florus. They agreed to seek a peace treaty. Maximinus and Priscus journeyed to Egypt, and the treaty was settled, but Maximinus died, whereupon the barbarians revoked the agreement and began plundering anew.<sup>38</sup>

Adjacent to the Nobadae and Blemmyes, and frequently involved with them, lay the kingdom of the Ethiopians, or Axumites, in a remote but commercially strategic corner of the classical world. Our fragmentary sources for the fifth century leave us in abysmal ignorance about events

35. Marcell. comes, s.a. 441. 1 (ed. Mommsen, *Chron. min.*, 2:80).

36. Bury, *History*, 2: 237–38.

37. Evagrius *HE* 1. 7. It was perhaps at this stage that the Roman general Germanus ("Germanus 3," *PLRE* II:505) was successful, as recounted in the fragmentary *Blemyomachia* of P. Berol. 5003 (most accessible in D. Page [ed.], *Select Papyri*, vol. 3 [London and Cambridge, Mass., 1941], no. 142, pp. 590–94, with the three fragments in L. S. B. MacCoull, "Papyrus Fragments from the Monastery of Phoebammon," *Proc. 16th Int. Cong. Pap.* [Chico, 1981]: 491–98); but it has been suggested recently that the poem refers to an earlier campaign and was written by Olympiodorus of Thebes (E. Livrea, "Chi è l'autore della *Blemyomachia* (P. Berol. 5003)?," *Prometheus* 2 [1976]: 97–123; cf. *Anonymi fortasse Olympiodori Thebani Blemyomachia* (P. Berol. 5003), *Beitr. Klass. Philol.* 101 [Meisenheim am Glan, 1978]).

38. Priscus frag. 21 (*FHG* 4:100); Jordanes *Rom.* 333. Priscus was at Alexandria during the following year (Evagrius *HE* 2. 15).



in Ethiopia.<sup>39</sup> When our materials become fuller and more varied, however, by the reigns of Justin I and Justinian, the Ethiopians and their neighbors across the straits in the Yemen—the Himyarites—come into clearer view, having been recently incorporated into the Christian empire.<sup>40</sup> The whole region appears constantly turbulent, as local factions of pagans, Jews, and Christians (both monophysite and orthodox) vie to assert control. It is not difficult to envision the mid-fifth-century (447/448) forerunners of these generations displaying similar behavior and thereby threatening the imperial government.

Some trade irregularity or the controversial religious policies of the court in the mid-fifth century could easily have provoked rebellion and dissent in a volatile Ethiopia within the doctrinal orbit of Alexandria, just as they did in Egypt. The silence of our extant sources for Ethiopia in the 440s does not necessarily indicate that any trouble not recorded was “not serious enough.”<sup>41</sup> (It should be emphasized, too, that even if fragment 6 of Priscus is to be dated to 441, there is still no corroborative evidence for its statement that the Ethiopians were in revolt in 441. Certainly Marcellinus does not include Ethiopians among the tribes harassing the Romans in that year; nor does Priscus mention the Tzani. The *argumentum ex silentio* is especially untrustworthy when it is applied selectively.) In fact, given Theodosius’ division of the province of Thebais and the situation which came to a head about 450, we have good reason to suppose that the restless tribes of upper Egypt and Ethiopia were a threat to the Roman administration at precisely this time. At least the Himyarites were engaged in a devastating raid on Roman territory, perhaps against Ethiopia and Egypt, in 450.<sup>42</sup>

Another intractable region where civil and military power were united was Isauria.<sup>43</sup> Ammianus was quick to point out what a fickle lot the Isaurians were, at peace one minute, raiding nearby provinces the next.<sup>44</sup>

39. Bury, *History*, 2: 322: “We lose sight of [Ethiopia] for about a century and a half” (i.e., 350–500). Our knowledge has not advanced since Bury’s day. Note the gap in A. H. M. Jones and E. Monroe, *A History of Ethiopia* (Oxford, 1956; repr. 1978), pp. 18–19; D. Buxton, *The Abyssinians* (London, 1970), pp. 41–42; and E. Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians*<sup>3</sup> (Oxford, 1973), p. 53 (“We lack detailed documentation with regard to the following 100–150 years” [375–525]). For the rise of the Axumite kingdom in the early fifth century, see F. Altheim and R. Stiehl, “Die Anfänge des Königreichs Aksum,” *Klio* 42 (1964): 181–94.

40. A thorough account can be found in A. Vasiliev, *Justin the First* (Washington, D.C., 1950), pp. 283–302; see also Bury, *History*, 2: 322–27; Stein, *Histoire*, 2: 101–5.

41. Bayless, “Chronology,” p. 155.

42. Y. M. Kobishchanov, *Axum*, tr. L. T. Kapitanoff and ed. J. W. Michels (University Park, Pennsylvania and London, 1979), p. 79. The late 440s may also provide the background for the recently discovered inscriptions of the Axumite king Ezana II indicating conflicts with the Nobadae (*SEG* 26 [1976/77], no. 1813, p. 410) and Blemmyes (E. Bernand, “Nouvelles versions de la campagne du roi Ezana contre les Bedja,” *ZPE* 45 [1982]: 105–14); as well as for the papyrus letter indicating warfare between the Blemmyes and Nobadae (T. C. Skeat, “A letter from the King of the Blemmyes to the King of the Noubades,” *JEA* 63 [1977]: 159–70, though a late-sixth-century date is argued by V. Christides, “Ethnic Movements in Southern Egypt and Northern Sudan: Blemmyes-Beja in Late Antique and Early Arab Egypt until 707 A.D.,” *Listy Filologické* 103 [1980]: 129–43). None of these documents can yet be dated with absolute certainty.

43. A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1964), pp. 281, 609.

44. 14. 2. 1.

Although we hear of no direct trouble in Isauria in the mid/late 440s, it is clear that some special circumstances had brought Zeno to Constantinople and promoted him promptly. Furthermore, it was probably at precisely this time (447–448), when he is attested in the military service of Zeno, that Rufus captured and killed the Isaurian Balbinus, who had raided certain cities in neighboring Cilicia.<sup>45</sup> By 449/450 Zeno was back in Isauria, having become disgruntled over the Roman capitulation to successive Hunnish embassies, and was apparently planning a revolt against Theodosius.<sup>46</sup> Maximinus was sent against the Isaurians with military support.<sup>47</sup> The Saracens, too, forever troublesome, were also active in the period 447–450. At least we hear soon after of the general Dorotheus campaigning against them in Palestine<sup>48</sup> and Ardaburius fighting against them at Damascus, and of the ambassador Maximinus and his friend Priscus arranging peace with them.<sup>49</sup>

There is, it seems, indirect evidence from the late 440s to vindicate Priscus' statement in fragment 6 that the Romans had reason to fear the Ethiopians, Saracens, and Isaurians in the period, of unspecified duration, when four successive embassies were received in Constantinople from Attila. In addition, we witness in the late 440s a flurry of military appointments to deal with various threats—Anatolius, Zeno, Ardaburius, Rufus—just as Priscus notes. It is also worth emphasizing that our detailed information about these particular trouble spots derives entirely from Priscus, who had himself been involved in negotiations in each area and who incorporated his adventures into his history. Were it not for Priscus, then, we would not be in a position to appreciate the pressure on the Romans in 447/448, precipitated by the demands of the Huns.

There remains the status of Rome's relations with the Persians and Vandals in the late 440s. Since Priscus apparently had no dealings with them, we are less well informed about these nations, dependent as we are on the *Excerpta de legationibus* for our fragments of Priscus. It is assumed by Bayless that the Romans had nothing to fear from either the Persians or the Vandals after 442. Yet there is the testimony of Jordanes, in a passage apparently derived from Priscus, that both the Vandals and Persians were threatening the imperial realm early in the reign of Marcian (450–57), who resolved peace with them.<sup>50</sup> What we really need to know, however, is whether there had been such threats in the changed situation of the late 440s, after the Romans had been so humiliated by the Huns.

Priscus, it will be observed, does not say that the Persians were preparing to do battle against the Romans, but that when the imperial court was being put under pressure "the Persians were, it chanced, preparing for war." It so happens that in the late 440s the Persians were engaged

45. Malalas, 345. 8–11 (ed. Dindorf), with "Rufus 1," *PLRE* II:958–59.

46. "Zenon 6," *PLRE* II:1199–1200.

47. John of Antioch frag. 199. 1 (*FHG* 4:613).

48. Nic. Call. *HE* 15. 9; "Dorotheus 7," *PLRE* II:377–78.

49. Priscus frag. 20 (*FHG* 4:100).

50. *Rom.* 33. For Jordanes' use of Priscus, see Mommsen, *Jordanes* (*MGH:AA*, 5:1), pp. 34–37.

in their continuing war with the Caucasian Huns, the Ephthalites.<sup>51</sup> Priscus could be referring to that. Alternatively, his description appears to fit neatly the situation in Armenia, for it is against the Armenians that the Persians were preparing for war precisely in the late 440s. The Christian Armenians had been ruled by Persian governors since 438 and constantly harassed by proselytizing Zoroastrians. Events reached a climax in 449, when the edict of the *marzpan* Miht Narse required the forced conversion of Armenians. The Christian Armenians resisted fiercely and many suffered martyrdom. Meanwhile, in 449/450 the Armenians sent to the Christian emperor in Constantinople for help. Theodosius was preoccupied with the other enemies<sup>52</sup> and declined to support them.<sup>53</sup> The Persians mobilized, and Armenian resistance soon faded after the defeat of Vardan.<sup>54</sup>

The Vandal threat, too, is only described by Priscus as "coastal raids." Such raids could simply be confined to small islands, or be otherwise relatively harmless. Nonetheless, such raids would in themselves signify the potential danger of the Vandals. It is true that there is no explicit evidence for Vandal harassment of Roman territory between 442 and 455, except for a raid along the coast of Gallaecia in 445.<sup>55</sup> Yet this very exception, a local raid reported only by a local chronicler, exposes the danger of assuming that, because no direct evidence survives, no raids took place. One is permitted to wonder how many other Vandal raids in the later 440s went unreported or remain unknown because of the extremely patchy extant sources for the period. Consequently, we cannot assert categorically and with complete confidence that the Vandals were not seen as a threat in the late 440s, despite the treaty of 442. Certainly, neither the mention of Persian preparations for war nor Vandal razzias is strong enough, in the light of other difficulties, to support unequivocally a date of 441 for fragment 6 of Priscus.

Moreover, it should be stressed that there is evidence in the period after 447 for the stream of Hunnish embassies to Constantinople taking advantage of the straitened circumstances of the Romans. Marcellinus describes how in 448 a severe fire at Constantinople destroyed the Troad porticoes and the towers of certain gates. He goes on to say that these were restored to their pristine condition by the City Prefect, Antiochus, at a time when "Attila's envoys were demanding from Theodosius the tribute formerly agreed on."<sup>56</sup> This fits most comfortably the circumstances

51. Bury, *History*, 2: 5, n. 7.

52. With the Huns at peace, this may indicate the threats of other enemies—Saracens, Ethiopians, Isaurians.

53. For the sources (mainly Armenian), see Bury, *History*, 2: 5–6; Stein, *Histoire*, 1: 353. For the background, see S. Nigosian, "Zoroastrianism in Fifth-Century Armenia," *Studies in Religion* 7 (1978): 425–34.

54. "Vardan," *PLRE* II: 1150–51.

55. Hydatius *Chron.* 131, s.a. 445 (ed. Mommsen, *Chron. min.*, 2:24): "Vandali navibus Turonio in litore Gallaeciae repente advecti familias capiunt plurimorum"; cf. C. Courtois, *Les Vandales et l'Afrique* (Paris, 1955), p. 194, and E. A. Thompson, "The End of Roman Spain, Part 2," *Nott. Med. Studs.* 21 (1977): 24.

56. Marcell. comes, s.a. 447. 2, 3. (ed. Mommsen, *Chron. min.*, 2:83): "... legatis Attilae a Theodosio depectas olim pecunias flagitantibus."

outlined in fragment 6 of Priscus and is another indication that the fragment concerns not the early but the late 440s. There is no such corroborative evidence for Priscus' picture of successive Hunnish embassies after the invasions of 441 and 442. This is hardly surprising, since the treaties following those invasions seem to have been readily acceded to by the Huns at a time when the Romans still held the upper hand.

To conclude. In 441 the Huns under their kings Bleda and Attila invaded Roman Illyricum. Their progress was arrested and a one-year truce concluded by Aspar. The following year they invaded the Roman domain again, this time reaching into Thrace. At this stage the Romans were still in a strong enough position to cope with the Hunnish incursions. By 447, however, their defensive capability had declined, and Attila's hordes were able to devastate the European provinces. The aftermath of this invasion and its settlement is reflected in fragment 6 of Priscus, where the Romans are characterized as impotent, impecunious, and threatened by enemies on all sides. Since the contents of fragment 6 can reasonably be explained in the light of events in the late 440s, it is therefore to be dated to 447/448 and is located logically between the peace settlements of Anatolius (fragment 5) and the embassy of Edeco (fragment 7). So, in excerpting the accounts of barbarian embassies contained in the history of Priscus, Constantine Porphyrogenitus' editor naturally followed the chronological order of the original work. Fragment 6 of Priscus should not be considered the exception to this process after all.

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