

# A NEW READING FOR HYDATIUS *CHRONICLE* 177 AND THE DEFEAT OF THE HUNS IN ITALY

R. W. BURGESS

**M**OMMSEN'S TEXT OF ENTRY 177 in Hydatius' *Chronicle* reads as follows:

*Hesychius tribunus legatus ad Theodoricum cum sacris muneribus missus ad Gal-laeciam venit nuntians ei id quod supra [§176], in Corsica caesam multitudinem Vandalorum, et Avitum de Italia ad Gallias Arelate successisse. Orientalium naves Hispalim venientes per Marciani exercitum caes(os Laz)as nuntiant. (Chronica min-ora 2 [= MGH.AA 11] 29)*

Tranoy's text is the same.<sup>1</sup> The manuscript evidence for the final three words is: *caesas nuntiant* B; *c(a)esa nunciant* FHm; *caesae nuntiantur* Ho.<sup>2</sup> The last would appear to be an emendation by the scribe, who could not understand the text of the original and took the past participle to refer to *naves*; the reading of B is probably a result of the same logic. It is most unlikely that Hydatius would have used *caesae* to describe wrecked ships, since in the other ten instances where he uses *caesus* he applies it nine times to barbarians (Alans, Sueves, Burgundians, Goths, Huns, and Vandals) and once to the

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<sup>1</sup>*Hydace: Chronique* 1 (Paris 1974, Sources chrétiennes 218) 156. The most recent editor, Julio Campos (*Idacio, obispo de Chaves. Su Crónica* [Salamanca 1984, Ediciones calasancias] 106–107) accepts the reading of B, but translates MommSEN's text!

<sup>2</sup>B: Phillipps 1829 of the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, East Berlin, our best manuscript, dating from ca 830, and the only one to preserve the entire chronicle format. For ms C, a copy of B, see below, n. 7. Theodorus' *Annales Palidenses* of 1182 (now known as the *Chronicon abbatiae Polidensis*), a unique autograph manuscript in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (Laud. misc. 633), also reports this entry but its numerous excerpts from Hydatius are culled from an exemplar ultimately derived from B.

F: Lat. 10910 of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, a copy, written in 715, of a Frankish epitome of ca 613 derived from the same hyparchetype as B (δ). This epitome is also represented by a number of other manuscripts with the same reading.

Hm: ms 134 of the Biblioteca de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, a thirteenth-century copy of a now lost eighth- or ninth-century Alcoba manuscript of a Spanish epitome of the chronicle probably compiled in the 570s. The archetype of this epitome (γ) was ultimately derived from the same archetype as δ (β).

Ho: This siglum represents the readings of the now lost thirteenth-century Osma manuscript of another tradition of the Spanish epitome mentioned just above. These readings can be reconstructed from three surviving manuscripts: Hb: Egerton 1873 of the British Library, London; Ht: ms 27-26 of the Archivo y Biblioteca Capitulares, Catedral Toledo; and Hn: ms 1376 of the Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid. All are late sixteenth-century copies deriving directly (Hb) or indirectly (Ht, Hn) from the Osma manuscript. At least three other sixteenth-century copies of this manuscript are known—Ha, the parent of Ht and Hn; Hc; and Hs, copied from Ha with variants from the Osma ms—but all are now lost. For a complete discussion of these

armies of Honorius and Heraclian, whom he probably regarded as barbarian *federates*.<sup>3</sup>

Mommsen's emendation is based on a single reference in Priscus:<sup>4</sup> τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἐς Κόλχους ἐλθόντων καὶ συμβαλόντων πόλεμον πρὸς Λαζούς, ὁ μὲν Ῥωμαϊκὸς στρατὸς ἐς τὰ σφέτερα ἐπανέζευξεν . . . . The rest of the passage concerns diplomatic agreements which ended the war. There is no other reference to this battle in any other source of which I am aware.

This emendation, however, is highly improbable for a number of historical, historiographical, and palaeographic reasons. (1) That this battle is mentioned in no source other than Priscus, not even a Greek one, suggests it to have been of no great importance to Easterners, far less to the Spanish. It thus seems unlikely that Eastern merchants, who are certainly the *orientales* at the port of Seville, would have even known about the battle, let alone thought it worthy of reporting to fellow Spanish traders. (2) Priscus says nothing about a slaughter, only that there was a war. An event of the magnitude and importance implied by Mommsen's text suggests that Priscus and others ought to have said something about it. (3) The distant Lazi, inhabiting the eastern reaches of the Black Sea, cannot have been known to the Spanish and so the fact that Hydatius offers no explanation as to who these people were, where they lived, or what the events were surrounding their fate seems suspicious. (4) There is absolutely nothing in the manuscripts which would even suggest a link between this passage and Priscus. Mommsen appears simply to have searched the sources for an event which could be dated to 456;<sup>5</sup> yet it is impossible for Hydatius to have obtained news of a war in the eastern Black Sea in the same year it occurred (and he is dating the arrival of the merchants, not the event itself). (5) The name of the people in Greek is always Λαζοί; Mommsen's *Lazas* is feminine in form. (6) The dropping of *-os Laz-* seems highly suspicious. It is most unlikely that a scribe's eye would jump from *s* to *z*, given the difference of their shapes. *Lazas* is such an unusual word for a copyist it seems hard to believe that he would have skipped over or condensed it rather than attempted to "correct" it. A simpler error seems called for. In view of these objections, the emendation must be regarded as groundless and insupportable.

So has anything dropped out? The absence of an obvious lacuna in the text of B, for example, proves nothing, since the other manuscript evidence shows that the corruption goes back to the hyparchetype β, which dates to a period of within one hundred years of the original composition of the

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manuscripts and the relationships among them, see my forthcoming critical edition of the chronicle.

<sup>3</sup> §§56, 68, 90, 110, 112, 116, 150, 173, 177, and 227.

<sup>4</sup> Frag. 33.1 (R. C. Blockley, *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire* 2 [Liverpool 1983] 336).

<sup>5</sup> In spite of this, *PLRE* 2.515 (s.v. "Gobazes") uses this passage to date the events in Priscus!

chronicle. A similar example appears the beginning of entry 242, extant only in B, *legati de Gothicorum reversi* . . . . This is obviously lacking two nouns, an ablative (after *de*) and a dependent genitive, yet there is no lacuna in B. As was noted above, *caes-* must refer to barbarians. The termination of the adjective must therefore be feminine singular or neuter plural. If it is feminine, something like *gentem -orum* must be missing; if it is neuter, a phrase such as *-orum* [number] *milia* must have been lost (cf. §§56, 110, 111). But Marcian only once ever engaged barbarians, the Huns in 451 (see below, 362). If the merchants were referring to the Huns, it seems odd that Hydatius would have connected their report with an entry about the defeat of the Vandals. Besides, as will be shown, I believe that Hydatius had already heard about Marcian's activities against the Huns, albeit in a highly garbled form. As a result, there is no known historical event to which this entry could possibly refer and if the merchants were inventing a battle we have no way of filling this hypothetical lacuna.

I do not believe, however, that there is a lacuna. Rather, because of Hydatius' condensation of what was actually said the scribes and editors have become confused over the penultimate word and altered it in order to make sense of it.<sup>6</sup> I believe that the original must have been *caesam* (sc. *fuisse*), which refers back to *caesam multitudinem* earlier in the entry.<sup>7</sup> This theory is not only palaeographically more acceptable but also fits better logically. Palaeographically, it can be easily explained by the loss of a contraction sign over the *a*, or by the loss of a written *-m* in the minims of *nunti-*, and/or by scribal misunderstanding and "correction." The loss of a final *m* is quite common in manuscripts.<sup>8</sup> The absence of a noun (or nouns) here is not at all out of keeping with Hydatius' often rather "free" and (consequently) convoluted syntax, and the necessity of repeating the cumbersome *multitudinem Vandalorum* is avoided. A perfect parallel can be seen in entry 150, where *caesa* at the end of a long sentence refers back to *gens Hunorum* at the beginning of another.

<sup>6</sup>Earlier editors fared little better than Mommsen. San Llorente (1615) offered *captas nunciat*, Sirmond (1619) *caesas nunciat*, and Garzón (published posthumously in 1845, written before 1762) suggested *pro Marciano exercitum caesum nunciant*, noting "nimirum Gaisericus exercitum, qui in Corsicam descenderat" (see below).

<sup>7</sup>After I had written this paper I discovered a new manuscript of the chronicle, Carpentras, Bibliothèque Inguimbertaine 1792 (C), which is unfortunately only a late sixteenth-century copy of B. In a marginal note the copyist of this text also suggests *caesam*.

<sup>8</sup>One need look no further than this very sentence for another example since the *-m* of *Hispalim* has also been lost in B and H. There are twelve other examples of its loss in B and an indication of just how common an error it is can be seen in, for instance, the orthographic index to Jordanes: pref. 3 (*subdita*), §§31 (*blasphemissima*), 48 (*interitu*), 89 (*ecclesia*), 123 (*betica*), 206 (*scallavi*), 216 (*relicta*), 224 (*septebri*), 229 (*Conynbrica*), 244 (*sanguine*), 247 (*degratu*), and 252 (*omniu*). Entries 31, 48, 224, 229, 244, 247, and 252 have been corrected by a later hand. I have noted these from a first-hand examination of ms B. For Jordanes (ed. Th. Mommsen), see *MGH.AA* 5.172–173.

If we replace Mommsen's period with a semicolon, we obtain the parallelism of *Hesychius tribunus legatus ad Theodoricum . . . venit nuntians* and *orientalium naves Hispalim venientes . . . nuntiant*, and the contrasting reports of *nuntiatur occisa per Avitum* at the end of §176 and *per Marciani exercitum caesam nuntiant* at the end of §177, both referring to the same event. Through this parallelism and the linked antitheses of *Hesychius / orientalium naves* and *per Avitum / per Marciani exercitum* Hydatius thus seems to be stating that the merchants were claiming that the Vandal defeat described in §§176 and 177 was in fact accomplished by Marcian's army, not that of Ricimer: "(On the other hand) ships from the East which put in at Hispalis brought word that it was Marcian's army which had slaughtered it (i.e., the Vandal horde)."<sup>9</sup> Hydatius thus had three different sources for this event, two Western and one Eastern, and reports them one after another, all interlinked through parallelism and antithesis. This is unique in the chronicle. The first account is reported in §176 anonymously (*nuntiatur*); the second account is given a stated source (Hesychius) who reports the same news (*id quod supra*) with the added details that it happened in Corsica and that Avitus had retired from Italy to Gaul.<sup>10</sup> The third version is the Eastern merchants' account, which sounds peculiar because of its demonstrable untruth: why would Easterners claim such a thing?

A clue is provided by another even more fabulous claim about twenty entries earlier. In §154, describing the Hunnic invasion of Italy in 452, Hydatius states:

*Huni, qui Italiam praedabantur, aliquantis etiam civitatibus inruptis, divinitus partim fame, partim morbo quodam plagis caelestibus feriuntur: missis etiam per Marcianum principem Aetio duce caeduntur auxiliis pariterque in sedibus suis et caelestibus plagis et per Marciani subiguntur exercitum et ita subacti pace facta cum Romanis proprias universi repetunt sedes . . .* (*Chron. min.* 2.26–27)

The Huns, who were plundering Italy and had even stormed a considerable number of cities, through divine providence are struck down by blows from heaven: partly famine, partly some sort of disease. In addition, they are slaughtered by auxiliaries sent by the emperor Marcian and led by Aëtius, and at the same time they are subdued in their abodes by blows from heaven and the army of Marcian. Thus subdued, they strike a peace with the Romans and the entire people return to their proper abodes.

<sup>9</sup>The merchants' claim that it was an *exercitus* which defeated the Vandals need cause no trouble, since we have no idea what the exact situation actually was. Sidonius Apollinaris reports a victory by Ricimer over the Vandals near Agrigentum which may be related to this victory (*Carm.* 2.367) and the events described in §176 are not actually stated to have been a naval victory (and I seriously doubt that it was): Ricimer could more easily have intercepted the Vandal fleet when it had put in at a Corsican harbour, say, for the night or to gather provisions (in other words, to raid), just as the Vandals were to defeat Majorian's fleet in 460 (§200).

<sup>10</sup>On this part of the entry, see my article "The Third Regnal Year of Eparchius Avitus: A Reply," *CP* 82 (1987) 337–340.

This passage is clearly divided into two parts, the first from *Huni* to *feriuntur* and the second from *missis* to *sedes*, each offering a different aspect of the downfall of the Huns in Italy. This suggests different sources. The content of the first part, though reported nowhere else, can be supported by other indirect evidence and is entirely plausible; it may therefore have derived from a contemporary Western source.<sup>11</sup> It is the second part which causes some difficulties.

Quite clearly Hydatius is stating that a group of Eastern auxiliaries led by the patrician and *magister militum* Aëtius slaughtered the Huns in Italy while at the same time the main Eastern army (along with *plagae caelestes*) merely subdued them in their own territory, forcing both groups (*universi*) to retreat. This account, however, contradicts every other known source. The version supplied by these sources states that Attila feared the fate of Alaric, who died shortly after sacking Rome, and while hesitating as to whether to proceed or not he received a visit from Pope Leo and two legates who persuaded him to retreat from Italy.<sup>12</sup> No source, Latin or Greek, contemporary or medieval, hints at any military activity in Italy or elsewhere being involved in driving the Huns out of Italy or influencing their decision to go.

Unfortunately most modern historians have misread this passage and have thus been able to combine it with the contradictory version offered by our other sources. According to this interpretation, Aëtius is not the Western patrician and *magister militum* but the Eastern *ex-comes domesticorum*, and his military actions are not in Italy (as Hydatius states) but only in the Hunnic *sedes* across the Danube.<sup>13</sup> It is stated that this Aëtius was made consul in 454 as a reward for saving the West from the threat of the Huns, but it is never explained why he had to wait a year for his consulship. As noted above, his heroic and extremely successful deeds have surprisingly gone unrecorded in all other sources, both Eastern and Western. Otto

<sup>11</sup>On the likelihood of these events, see J. Otto Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns* (Los Angeles 1973) 139–140 and E. A. Thompson, *A History of Attila and the Huns* (Oxford 1948) 139 and 147 (based on *N. Val.* 33 of 31 January, 451).

<sup>12</sup>Priscus, frag. 22.1 (Blockley 310–312) = Jordanes, *Getica* 219–224 (*MGH.AA* 5.114–115); Prosper, *Chron.* 1367 (*Chron. min.* 1.482); Victor Tonnennensis, *Chron.* s.a. 449 (*Chron. min.* 2.185); Pope Symmachus, *Ep.* 12 (A. Thiel, *Epistolae Romanorum pontificum genuinae* 1 [Braunsberg 1867] 714); Paulus, *Historia Romana* 14.9–13 (*MGH.AA* 2.203–205). Symmachus *Ep.* 12 was written in 512 by Eastern bishops who were obviously well acquainted with the story of Leo's embassy.

<sup>13</sup>O. Seeck, *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt* 6 (Stuttgart 1920) 312, and notes to volume 6 (Stuttgart 1921) 469; J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*<sup>2</sup> 1 (New York 1958) 295–296 (who calls Hydatius “trustworthy”); E. Stein, *Histoire du bas-empire* 1 (Paris 1959) 336; E. A. Thompson (above, n. 11) 147–148, and *Romans and Barbarians* (Madison 1982) 150–151; E. Demougeot, *La formation de l’Europe et les invasions barbares* 2 (Paris 1979) 555; J. M. O’Flynn, *Generalissimos of the Western Roman Empire* (Edmonton 1983) 98–100 and 182–183, n. 45; and *PLRE* 2.29 (s.v. “Aetius 8”).

Maenchen-Helfen (above, note 11, 137–138, 140) appears to have been one of the few modern historians to have read Hydatius' passage with some care and he in fact translates it correctly; but in spite of this he still accepts its version of events.<sup>14</sup>

In view of the universal silence concerning this episode in all other sources, the much more authoritative and detailed alternative accounts and the very implausibility of an Eastern army's being sent to assist Aëtius in Italy,<sup>15</sup> there should be no hesitation in dismissing the military episodes of this entry. But what source, then, could have been responsible for fabricating a demonstrably untrue story which involved an important Western success against the barbarians and which ignored Western initiative (such as it was) only to replace it with Marcian's armies? Surely we must look to the East. Such Eastern bias concerning events so well-known in Gaul and Italy indicates that this information must have come from the East itself via direct contact with Easterners. Such contacts are explicitly mentioned in the chronicle twice: Germanus, a presbyter from the *Arabica regio*, who appears in Gallaecia in 435 (§106), and the merchants of 456 who have already been caught in this very deception above. It is therefore probable, all things considered, that Eastern merchants, perhaps even the same ones already discussed, are also the source for §154.

But is the account therefore wholly fiction? I think not. In this case the merchants may have had a grasp on some factual material after all. In all probability the merchants have linked the final retreat of the Huns in August of 452 with Marcian's short campaign in Illyricum undertaken in August and September 451 and produced an amalgam in which the Eastern forces emerge as the true saviours of the West.<sup>16</sup>

It must be remembered that the victory at Corsica described by Hydatius was a very significant and important event: Ricimer had destroyed a full Vandal fleet of 60 ships which was set on plundering Gaul or Italy (§176). This was the first major victory Rome had scored against the Vandals and the fact that it had been made against the Vandal fleet, which had controlled the Mediterranean with impunity since 439 at least, made it all the more impressive and important. Moreover, the Huns had been harassing the East for over ten years and now, in the space of two summers, the West had somehow utterly defeated them. We can easily imagine how this must have rankled Easterners, who felt an innate superiority over the ailing West and who believed that any such victories naturally had to belong to the better

<sup>14</sup>Thompson (*Romans* [above, n. 13] 292, n. 61), however, accuses him of having misunderstood the passage.

<sup>15</sup>At no time after 425 did the East offer any military assistance to the West solely for the purposes of defending the West. Even in 425 there was some Eastern self-interest.

<sup>16</sup>For Marcian's expedition, see Seeck (above, n. 13) 301, and notes 466–467; Thompson (above, n. 11) 144, and Maenchen-Helfen (above, n. 11) 131.

equipped and better governed Eastern empire, especially in the case of the Huns. As a result, when the Eastern merchants came to Seville they glorified the military successes of Marcian and told tall stories which they knew the isolated Spaniards would never be able to confirm or deny. However, in the case of the Vandals Hydatius had two other Western versions to choose from; he accepted these Western accounts but nevertheless reported the Eastern one as well. For the defeat of the Huns he also had two accounts, one incomplete Western version and a very authentic sounding Eastern version; he chose both and combined them. His experience with the account of the Corsican defeat should have warned him, however, about the trustworthiness of such sources, for, as Eunapius of Sardis states, "From the merchants there was no reasonable information, since they either told many lies or said what they wished to profit from."<sup>17</sup> These two examples from the chronicle of Hydatius fully confirm Eunapius' complaint.

WOLFSON COLLEGE  
OXFORD

<sup>17</sup>Frag. 66.2 (Blockley 102); translation Blockley's, p. 103.