

Seeck thought that *studiis* conceals the name of a town in south Italy, perhaps *Rudiis*. But *in longinquis Rudiis* is not the way a Latin writer would normally express "in distant Rudiae." Perhaps *solitudinibus* or *saltibus* (Tac. *Ann.* 4. 27. 1).

9. 16 interea de animalibus ludorum apparatus praeparandis admonitionem frequentare non desino, cum *ineam* sponsionem, *quam* me istius curae vacuum reddidisti.

*Quam me istius* Γ: *tu me huius* (II). Seeck reads his conjecture *quod iam me istius*, which I do not understand. Substitute *cum ingeram sponsionem* ("promise"), *quam me* (Scioppius) *istius*.

9. 86. 1 conpotem me optati nuntii praestitisti: fateor enim verae amicitiae hanc esse rationem, ut commoda nostra mutuo gaudeamus. gratulor igitur cum tibi *familiaritatis* nostrae, tum famae temporum, quam recentis iudicii aequitas in aeternam gloriam vindicavit.

Read *tibi*, <*tum*> *familiaritati nostrae*?

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### ODOVACER THE HUN?

The recently issued second volume of the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* will stimulate, as well as facilitate, reconsideration of the many difficulties which beset our understanding of the poorly reported fifth century.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this article is to reexamine one such problem—the ethnic identity of Odovacer, the first barbarian king of Italy—and to argue that in this instance the editors of *PLRE* have put their authority behind a theory of his origins which is extremely dubious.

The entries for Odovacer, Onoulphus, and Edeco state that Odovacer and his brother Onoulphus were Huns because they were the sons of that Edeco, Attila's bodyguard and ambassador, whom Priscus explicitly calls a Hun.<sup>2</sup>

The acceptance by some contemporary scholars of the notion that Odovacer was a Hun can be traced to an article that perhaps few will remember, written thirty-five years ago by R. L. Reynolds and R. S. Lopez.<sup>3</sup> In it they undertook to combat an unduly Germanicized view of late Roman history by proposing Ural-Altaic etymologies for a number of barbarian personal and tribal names

1. J. R. Martindale, et al., *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. II: A.D. 395–527 (Cambridge, 1980).

2. Priscus frag. 8 (ed. Müller, *FHG* 4, p. 78): τοῦ Οὐννου γένους.

3. "Odoacer: German or Hun?" *American Historical Review* 52 (1946): 36–54.

which German philologists had (not surprisingly) always claimed as Germanic. Specifically, they suggested Turkish (that is, Hunnic) meanings for the names of Odovacer, Thela (his son), Edeco, and Hunwulf (Onoulphus), as well as for the tribal names Torcilingi, Rogi, and Skiri—groups which are all connected with Odovacer in one source or another. Debate on this interesting theory sputtered briefly to life when J. O. Maenchen-Helfen, in a communication in the same journal, criticized their linguistic analysis both in method and substance, and pointed out that etymology was not in any case a sure guide to ethnicity, since personal names were freely exchanged among the Huns and their various German subjects. In a reply, however, Reynolds and Lopez declined to concede any major point in their argument.<sup>4</sup>

Subsequently, two respected students of barbarian history, E. A. Thompson and J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, adopted Reynolds and Lopez's conclusions in works which are still widely read today. Moreover, Thompson's influence (one assumes) has not been negligible in the composition of the entries in *PLRE*.<sup>5</sup>

If the linguistic arguments pro and con remain inconclusive, as seems to be the case, it may be useful to point to some nonlinguistic reasons for rejecting the position of Reynolds and Lopez which have received little or no attention in previous discussions of the question.

The crux of the matter lies in the identification of Odovacer's father with Attila's Hunnish ambassador. There are possibly as many as three distinct Edecos in our sources.<sup>6</sup>

(1) Priscus (and only he) mentions Edekon, Attila's envoy to Constantinople in 448, whom he knew personally and whom he describes as a Scythian (frag. 7) and a Hun by birth (frag. 8).<sup>7</sup>

(2) Jordanes (and only he) names an Edica and Hunuulfus as chieftains (*primates*) of the Skiri, who were soundly defeated by the Ostrogoths at the river Bolia in Pannonia sometime in the late 460s.<sup>8</sup>

4. Ibid., pp. 836–41 and 841–45. Maenchen-Helfen restated his arguments more briefly in *The World of the Huns* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1973), pp. 376–89.

5. E. A. Thompson, *A History of Attila and the Huns* (Oxford, 1948), pp. 155–56 (Reynolds and Lopez are cited with approval); and see now idem, *Romans and Barbarians: The Decline of the Western Empire* (Madison, 1982), p. 61 with p. 273, n. 2; J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Barbarian West* (New York, 1962), p. 33. (This popular treatment omits references; nevertheless, the influence of Reynolds and Lopez, seconded by Thompson, seems to be at work.) Among other students of the subject writing after the appearance of Reynolds and Lopez's article, André Chastagnol (*Le sénat romain sous le règne d'Odacre* [Bonn, 1966]), A. H. M. Jones ("The Constitutional Position of Odoacer and Theoderic," *JRS* 52 [1962]: 126–30), M. McCormick ("Odoacer, Emperor Zeno, and the Rugian Victory Legation," *Byzantion* 47 [1977]: 212–22), and M. A. Wes (*Das Ende des Kaisertums im Westen des römischen Reichs* [The Hague, 1967]) ignore their argument. L. Musset (*The Germanic Invasions* [University Park, 1975], p. 27) and F. Lotter (*Severinus von Noricum* [Stuttgart, 1976], p. 276, n. 334) both reject it without discussion. E. Stein (*Histoire du Bas Empire* [Paris, 1949]) and W. Ensslin (*Theoderich der Grosse* [Munich, 1947]) were perhaps unable to take account of the article; they, like all earlier scholars, believed Odoacer to be a German.

6. From this point in the discussion the various idiosyncratic spellings of the name found in the sources will be reproduced as an aid to keeping the references sorted out. There is no question, however, that these are all variant spellings of the same name, which, despite the fact that one of its bearers was a Hun, is probably Germanic (Maenchen-Helfen, *Huns*, p. 388).

7. *FHG* 4. 76 and 78. The latter fragment is Priscus' well-known account of his journey with Edekon from Constantinople to the Huns' camp in Pannonia, where Edekon revealed to Attila the assassination plot for which the Romans had attempted to recruit him.

8. *Getica* 277 (ed. Mommsen, *MGH: AA*, 1:130–31).

(3) Finally, two other sources (and only they) state that Odovacer's father was a man named Aedico (Anon. Vales.) or Idikon (John of Antioch).<sup>9</sup> In the latter passage John also names Odovacer's brother, Onoulphus, and takes the trouble to explain that this is that Onoulphus who was ordered by the emperor Zeno to murder his troublesome general, Harmatius. Of Idikon, however, he says nothing further.

Since the days of Tillemont a majority of scholars have equated all three of these men, or at least (and this is most to the point) the first and the last.<sup>10</sup> Before Reynolds and Lopez wrote their article, however, the plain statement of Priscus that Edekon was a Hun was brushed aside as a careless way of saying that he was a German closely attached to the Huns.<sup>11</sup> Thompson, however, has correctly insisted that Priscus uses the word "Hun" judiciously and must be taken to mean precisely what he says.<sup>12</sup> This in turn leaves us with two clear alternatives: either Odovacer was a Hun, too, or Edekon was not his father.

The ancient sources exhibit considerable confusion over Odovacer's tribal affiliation, identifying him variously as a Skirian, a Rogian and/or Torcilingian, a Herul, and even a Goth.<sup>13</sup> But amidst this confusion of names (some of which could be, but none of which is likely to be, Ural-Altaic) not a single source calls him a Hun. Surely this is a case where the *argumentum ex silentio* carries considerable weight. Our sources for Odovacer are indeed few and fragmentary. Nevertheless, there are passages where the rhetorical possibilities of calling attention to his nationality would have been irresistible to any contemporary who knew or believed that Odovacer was the son of a high-ranking Hun. For example, the author of Anonymus Valesianus knows that the Patrician Orestes, the father of Romulus Augustulus, had formerly been Attila's secretary and therefore (as we learn from Priscus) a colleague of Edekon on his mission to and from Constantinople.<sup>14</sup> Is it possible that he could narrate the death of Orestes at the hands of Edekon's son without calling attention to that fact? Silence meets us, too, in the works of the ecclesiastical rhetorician, Ennodius. Both in the *Life of Epiphanius* and still more in the *Panegyric to Theoderic* he is appropriately hostile to the memory of Odovacer. It is, therefore, all the more striking that he is able to resist calling attention to the fact that Theoderic's adversary had belonged to that terrible nation with whom the Goths had already crossed swords.

There is, in fact, one very good piece of evidence for Odovacer's ethnic identity which has been given short shrift in previous discussions. A passage in the *Suda* informs us that "Onoulphus was born of the tribe of the Thuringians on his

9. Anon. Vales. 10. 45 (ed. Mommsen, *MGH: AA*, 9:314); John Ant. frag. 209 (*FHG* 4:617).

10. The bibliographical background need not be set out in full once again; consult A. Nagl in *RE* 17 (1936), col. 1888, and Reynolds and Lopez, "Odoacer," p. 48, n. 40.

11. E.g., by T. Hodgkin, *Italy and her Invaders*, vol. 2 (New York, 1880), p. 529, n. 1, and Nagl, loc. cit. J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1923), p. 406, n. 2, makes the assumption tacitly.

12. *History*, p. 11.

13. Skirian: Anon. Vales. 8. 37 (*MGH: AA*, 9:308); John Ant. frag. 209. 1 (*FHG* 4:617); Rogian and/or Torcilingian: Jordanes *Rom.* 344 (*MGH: AA*, 1:44) and *Get.* 242, 291 (ibid., pp. 120, 133); Herulian: *Auct. Haun.*, s.a. 476 (*MGH: AA*, 9:308); Goth: Marcell. comes, s.a. 476 (*MGH: AA*, 9:91); Theophanes *Chronographia* a.m. 5965 (1:119 De Boor). This confusion is due to the fact that Odovacer was the king not of any particular tribe but of a motley army, and that after he had achieved success many would have vied to claim him (cf. Hodgkin, *Italy*, 2:529).

14. Anon. Vales. 8. 38 (*MGH: AA*, 9:310); for Priscus, see n. 7 above.

father's side and of the Skirians on his mother's."<sup>15</sup> *PLRE* II (p. 806) rejects the first half of this statement while allowing that the second half might be correct—a curious species of source criticism. In fact the passage in the *Suda* is almost certainly a fragment of the historian Malchus, who was a well-informed contemporary. His plain statement that Onoulph's (hence Odovacer's) father was a Thuringian deserves at least as much respect as Priscus' plain statement that Edekon was a Hun.<sup>16</sup>

As far as I know, it has never been noted that the only two sources who are able to name Odovacer's father are also the only two who associate him expressly with the Skirians (viz., Anon. Vales. at 8. 37 and 10. 45 and John of Antioch in frag. 209. 1).<sup>17</sup> The two facts cluster in such a way as to suggest that certainty about his tribal affiliation was a product of certainty about his parentage. Odovacer's father was a Thuringian but married a Skirian and with one of his sons, Hunulphus, led the Skirians to battle against the Goths at the river Bolia.<sup>18</sup> For some reason this Aedico/Idikon/Edica had chosen to throw in his lot with his wife's people, and it is with that people that Odovacer is associated by the sources who know his father. Now, whatever the Skirians may have been (and it is almost certain that they were German),<sup>19</sup> no one doubts that the Thuringians were Germans. This alone clearly prevents Aedico/Idikon/Edica from being equated with the Hun, Edekon.

Still another consideration might be mentioned. Both Priscus and Jordanes refer to the same hostilities between Skirians and Goths in the 460s.<sup>20</sup> Priscus mentions no personal names in this connection, but does tell us that both sides appealed to the emperor Leo for an alliance and that Leo, against the advice of Aspar, decided to help the Skiri. We recall that Priscus had known the Hun Edekon twenty years before. If, in fact, the same man was now commanding the Skiri—a man, moreover, who had double-crossed the Romans in the plot to assassinate Attila—surely that interesting fact would have elicited some comment from Priscus which his excerptor might have thought worth retaining.<sup>21</sup>

Let us move to another point. Reynolds and Lopez offered the evidence of Odovacer's coin portraits in support of their theory.<sup>22</sup> The thick mustache and "heavy lidded eyes" were said to suggest a Turkish physiognomy. In fact, with a little imagination the poorly rendered face could be thought to represent nearly

15. K 693 (ed. Adler, 3:53).

16. The attribution of the passage to Malchus was made by Bernhardt and is retained by Adler (loc. cit.). Müller did not include it among Malchus' fragments, but Dindorf did (*Hist. Graeci Min.*, vol. 1 [Leipzig, 1870], p. 395, frag. 8 c), followed by C. D. Gordon, *The Age of Attila* (Ann Arbor, 1966), p. 147.

17. *MGH: AA*, 9:308, 314; *FHG* 4:617.

18. Jordanes *Get.* 277 (*MGH: AA*, 1:130–31).

19. Reynolds and Lopez ("Odoacer," p. 39) suggested that the name "Skiri" derived from an Iranian word meaning variously "milk" or "lion"; but they have generally been taken to be a German people; see, e.g., Musset, *Germanic Invasions*, p. 9.

20. Priscus frag. 35 (*FHG* 4:107); Jordanes *Get.* 273–76 (*MGH: AA*, 1:128–29).

21. It is true that Jordanes fails to tell us that the Edica whom he names in this connection was Odovacer's father. Perhaps we can only say that of all our sources Jordanes is, for whatever reason, the most thoroughly confused on the subject of Odovacer's affinities. Note that he alone mentions Torcilingi (unattested elsewhere) and Rogi (who may or may not be the Rugi)—names to which Reynolds and Lopez attached undue significance.

22. "Odoacer," p. 51, n. 48; cf. F. F. Kraus, *Die Münzen Odovacers und des Ostgotenreiches in Italien* (Halle, 1928), p. 56, nos. 25, 26; p. 58, nos. 36, 36a; pls. I, II.

any physical type on earth. There is, on the other hand, one very important datum for Odovacer's physical appearance to which no one has called attention. It occurs in that well-known passage in Eugippius' *Life of Saint Severinus* where the young, poorly clad barbarian, traveling through Noricum on his way to Italy, turns aside to visit the saint.<sup>23</sup> Odovacer, we are told here, was *statura procerus*—so tall, in fact, that he had to bend down in order to enter the holy man's cell. But there are no tall Huns. Or, more to the point, let us say that *ideally* there are no tall Huns. Odovacer is presented in this highly stylized tale not as a stereotypically squat Hun but as a stereotypically tall German; what, in other words, the world knew him to be.<sup>24</sup>

Then there is the matter of Odovacer's religion. The author of Anonymus Valesianus tells us that he "Arianæ sectae favorem praeberet"; that is, like virtually all Germans living within the Empire in the fifth century, he was an Arian Christian.<sup>25</sup> Of course, there may have been the occasional Christian Hun—after all, we hear of a Jewish Goth—but the odds are against it.<sup>26</sup>

When all these considerations are taken together, it becomes very difficult to believe that Italy was governed for fourteen years by a tall, Christian Hun, the son of a high-ranking servant of the Scourge of God, and that no contemporary drew attention to this interesting fact.

The question of Odovacer's ethnic identity is not trivial, since it has invited large historical conclusions: thus, Odovacer's supposed Hunnic nationality has been offered as the cause of his unpopularity in Italy and his difficulties with Constantinople.<sup>27</sup> But if this paper has succeeded in demonstrating that there is at least no hint that contemporaries perceived Odovacer to be a Hun (whatever blood in fact ran in his veins), then such theories fall to the ground.

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23. *Vita S. Severini* 7 (ed. Sauppe, *MGH: AA*, 1.2:11). Anon. Vales. at 10. 45 (*MGH: AA*, 9:314) repeats the story verbatim; it was clearly a famous tale.

24. The physiognomy of the Huns was something of a *topos* in late antique literature, and most examples that we have call attention to their short stature (e.g., Ammianus Marcellinus 31. 2. 1; *Jordanes Get.* 182 [*MGH: AA*, 1: 105]; and the discussion in Maenchen-Helfen, *Huns*, pp. 358–63). The anecdote concerning Odovacer and St. Severinus is not perhaps entirely apocryphal but in shape and detail is highly generic (see Lotter, *Severinus*, pp. 137, 190.)

25. Anon. Vales. 10. 48 (*MGH: AA*, 9:315). Reynolds and Lopez interpret this to mean that he was a pagan ("Odacer," p. 51, n. 48): "For an orthodox Catholic writer of that century [i.e., the author of Anon. Vales.] impartiality [sc., of a heathen] amounted to a bias in favor of the heretics." This cannot be accepted: our sources know how to call a pagan a pagan when they want to.

26. On the Huns and Christianity, see Maenchen-Helfen, *Huns*, pp. 261–65. On the Jewish Goth, see O. Fiebiger and L. Schmidt, *Inscriptensammlung zur Geschichte der Ostgermanen* (Vienna and Leipzig, 1939), no. 22. Odovacer's burial in a synagogue (John Ant., frag. 214 a[*FGH* 4:621]) can only mean that Theoderic, an Arian himself, was unwilling to pollute a Christian church with the remains of one whom he found it convenient to regard as an oath-breaker. (It is, by the way, worth noting that Odovacer, despite his Arianism, was on cordial terms with two Catholic saints, Epiphanius and Severinus.)

27. Wallace-Hadrill, *Barbarian West*, p. 33: "He belonged to the terrible people. . . . The support of a few Roman families and the seeming neutrality of the papacy should not blind us to Odovacer's unpopularity. How could it be otherwise with a man branded a tyrant in Byzantium? . . . Theoderic [was sent to Italy] with full imperial approval to dispossess the Huns." In fact there is no evidence that he was unpopular in Italy and some evidence to the contrary; see Stein, *Bas Empire*, pp. 41–54, and Chastagnol, *Sénat romain*, pp. 52–56. For the complicated problem of his relations with Zeno, our evidence is slight and some of it contradictory: see, in addition to the articles by Jones and McCormick cited in n. 5, J. P. C. Kent, "Julius Nepos and the Fall of the Western Empire," *Corolla Swoboda* (Graz, 1966), pp. 146–50.