

Theodosius and the Goths

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In his work entitled *Getica*, Jordanes, the 6th-century Goth historian calls the Emperor Theodosius the “lover of peace and the Gothic people,” and whose death marks the end of the good relationship of Goths and Romans, as the former raise an army and march to Italy.¹

To this day, general scholarship and even the most prominent scholars keep on using the permanent modifier “friend of Goths” as an *epitheton ornans* to describe the Emperor. The survival of this *topos* is especially interesting because in 394 Theodosius used his Goth allies as a shield in front of his own army in the greatest battle near river Frigidus, so that the clash ended up causing severe casualties to the Goths.² The emperor Theodosius was quite indifferent to learn that 10,000 Goths, or, the half of men-at-arms succumbed there, and he did not want to compensate his allies even after the victory.³ What is more, contemporary Christian authors were glad to see that the emperor had solved quite well the Barbarian problem. Orosius went as far as claiming that two victories were won at the river Frigidus: one by Theodosius against Eugenius and the other by the Empire over the Barbarians because Goths had suffered considerable losses.⁴

¹ Jordanes: *Getica* (De origine actibusque Getarum) (abbrev: *Jord. get.*) 29, 146. Published by Theodor Mommsen: *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Auctores Antiquissimi* (abbrev.: *MGH Auct. Ant.*) Munich, ²1982, 1-138.

² A. Demandt, *Die Spätantike*, Munich 1989, 135-136.

³ E. P. Gluschanin, “Die politik Theodosius' I. und die Hintergründe des sogenannten Antigermanismus im Oströmischen Reich,” *Historia* 38 (1989), 231; H. Wolf-ram, *Die Goten. Von den Anfängen bis zur Mitte des sechsten Jahrhunderts*, Munich 1990, 144-145.

⁴ Orosius: *Historiae adversum paganos libri VII.* (abbrev.: *Oros.*) 7, 35, 19. Cf.: Zosimus (abbrev.: *Zos.*) 4, 58, 2-3. Rufinus, *HE* 2, 33. Socrates (abbrev.: *Soc.*) 5, 25. Several scholar have studied the controversial relationship of Orosius towards the Barbarians, a summary of which is H.-W. Goetz, “Orosius und die Barbaren,” *Historia* 29 (1980), 356-376.

The age of Theodosius, the second half of the 4th century, was fraught with internal and foreign policy issues. The power of military leaders of Germanic origin had increased dangerously, while the emperors usurping power were, at the same time, fighting for control. They had been reigning over a particular region of the empire for years while creating a rift in the economic and structural unity of the state. It is symptomatic of the controversial nature of the era that emperor Theodosius went to war against the *usurpators* and their armies using Barbarian troops. The enlarged army had to face impossible problems. Providing food, paying the wages, and replacing troops in the army constituted a constant task all through the late Roman Empire. Old and new religious tensions arose, on the one hand between Christians, gaining strength as a result of state support, and the guardians of the old faith, and, on the other hand, various arguments between Christians themselves also appeared. The government in Rome had to tackle the Barbarian question and the brutal wave of migration, which, by this time, had showed its impact not only beyond the borders of the Empire, but within as well. These difficulties need to be taken into consideration to appreciate the policy of Theodosius towards the Goths in its entirety. The works of contemporary authors also need to be analyzed to find the answer to the development of the modifier “friend of Goths.”

*The Goth – Roman Relationship before Theodosius*⁵

The Goths, an East Germanic tribe, had been attacking the Roman Empire from the 30s of the 3rd century around the Lower Danube area. By the 4th century, Western Goth tribes had become a dominant force along this section of the border so Emperor Constantine agreed to a settlement with them in 322, according to which the Goths took it upon themselves to guard the borders of the Empire and to serve in the imperial military in return for a yearly appanage. In the decades to follow, therefore, a 3000-strong Goth contingent assisted in Roman wars on four occasions.⁶ On several points along the border, trade links had formed between the Goths and the Romans but these were weakened by recurring conflicts. During the reign of Emperor Valens from 367 onwards, they were at war for three years which was concluded by a treaty in 369,

⁵ More on this topic: L. Schmidt, *Geschichte der deutschen Stämme bis zum Ausgang der Völkerwanderung II. Die Ostgermanen*, München, 1941.; D. Claude, *Geschichte der Westgoten*, Stuttgart-Berlin, 1970.; E. A. Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians*, Madison, Wisconsin, 1982.; Wolfram, *Die Goten*; P. Heather, *Goths and Romans 332-489*, Oxford, 1994.; T. S. Burns, *Barbarians Within the Gates of Rome. A Study of Roman Military Policy and the Barbarians, Ca. 375-425 A.D.* Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1994.; H. Wolfram, *The Roman Empire and its Germanic Peoples*, 1997.; P. Heather, *Goths and Huns (320-425)*, 487-515. in *CAH XIII*. Cambridge, 1998.; on the archaeological findings about Germanic people: Malcolm Todd: *The Germanic Peoples (337-425)*. in *CAH XIII*. Cambridge, 1998.

⁶ Three out of these expeditions were led to Persia.

signed on a galley anchored in the middle of the Danube. This treaty was a lot less favorable towards the Goths than the previous one because there were only two centers left to carry out border trade and the Roman benefits ceased to exist as well. However, the quite stable political situation on the Northern banks of the Danube was completely overturned with the arrival of the Huns. In 376, the leaders of the Western Goths sent ambassadors to Emperor Valens in Antioch requesting asylum. After a long debate in the Eastern Roman State Council, the emperor refused the request of the Visigoths to settle within the borders of the Empire.⁷ Because of difficulties in terms of provisions and the corruption of Roman clerks, an uprising broke out among the Goths and they went to battle with the Roman army at Adrianople.

Theodosius' accession to the throne

The accession of Theodosius to power was tightly connected to the Goth problem. When he was young, he participated in the military campaigns of his father, Theodosius the Elder, then, around 373-374, as the military commander of Moesia Prima, he fought against the Sarmatians. His father was one of the most talented generals of Emperor Valentinianus, who waged battles against the Franks, the Saxons, and the *pictus*, *scottus*, and *attacottus* tribes in Britannia. In 370, he fought the Alamanni and the Burgundians at the Rhine and in the following year, in Africa, he clashed with the Moors.⁸ The successful leader got involved in a case of high treason in 375 and was decapitated in Carthage a few months later.⁹ As a result of all these, the young Theodosius retired to his homeland, Hispania. On August 9, 378, the Goths defeated the Roman army near Adrianople in a battle taking many lives: the Eastern Roman Emperor, Valens was also killed there. Emperor Gratianus and his advisors, who were responsible for the condemnation of the father, charged Theodosius with responsibilities on the Danube front due to his experience as a qualified soldier and due to his extensive knowledge of the Balkan Peninsula. This decision shows the severity of the crisis in the Empire. He was given the title *magister militum*, then, after his first successes on January 19, 379, he was appointed the *augustus* of the Eastern Provinces in Sirmium.¹⁰

⁷ The leadership hoped for a strengthened imperial army as the result of employing Goths as Roman mercenaries, while, at the same time, they gave up forced recruiting, so the emperor could start planning to levy new taxes on the class of the Eastern landowners. (Wolfram, *Die Goten*, 125-127.) According to Heather, Emperor Valens did not have any other choice. (Heather, *Goths and Romans*, 165.)

⁸ Demandt, *Die Spätantike*, 125.; A. Demandt, "Die Feldzüge des älteren Theodosius," *Hermes* 100 (1972), 81-113.

⁹ The execution took place in 376. On some possible causes refer to A. Demandt, "Der Tod des älteren Theodosius," *Historia* 18 (1969), 598-626.

¹⁰ The title *augustus* meant the (ranking) emperor in the late Roman period while the word *caesar* meant the designated heir.

The Goth policy of Theodosius between 379-382

No sooner had Theodosius been elected an emperor than he started to combat the Goths. The most detailed account of this particular period is given in *Nea Historia* by Zosimus, who fundamentally uses Eunapius' works.¹¹ The new emperor settled in the city of Thessalonice and his main concern was to replenish the depleted numbers in the Eastern army by 379 as two thirds, several tens of thousands of soldiers of the Roman army had died in the battle of Adrianople.¹² He ordered a round of recruiting, signing up both Roman and Barbarian men, and he fought against defection with force. He moved military corps from Syria and he also mobilized veterans from the East.¹³ All these orders prove that Theodosius had been preparing for the battle against the Goths with determination.

If one studies the speeches of Themistius, the eloquent contemporary *rhetor*, changes in the direction of the imperial politics can be uncovered. Themistius was not only an educated orator and philosopher but also an officer in the court of Constantinople and an advisor to emperors. He was able to influence public opinion with his masterful speeches and he became a mouthpiece of the court propaganda.¹⁴ In his speech #14, dated to 379,¹⁵ the tone used by Themistius is belligerent and offensive. He was glad to acknowledge the fact that Theodosius had been elected emperor due to his military prowess as he had already proven his military talents with his victory over the Sarmatians. His appointment also inspired hope for a changing fate in the war. The orator also remarked that the new emperor mobilized peasants to stir up fear among the "Scythians" and he encouraged miners to produce more iron. He was sure that Theodosius was going to inspire the army to defeat the enemy. He also mentioned the *augustus'* grace and love for the people,¹⁶ but, only briefly. Speech

¹¹ The historical work by Eunapius is the sole narrative source referring to the period from 378 to 395. There are only fragments available today of the work but in the 9th century Photios read it and used it.

¹² Ammianus Marcellinus (abbrev.: Amm. Marc.) 31, 13. Heather, *Goths and Romans*, 142-147; Wolfram, *Die Goten*, 125-127.

¹³ Heather, *Goths and Huns*, 509.

¹⁴ L. J. Daly, "The Mandarin and the Barbarian: The Response of Themistius to the Gothic Challenge," *Historia* 21 (1972), 351-379.; W. Stegemann, Themistios. *RE* 5 A, 2 (1934), cols. 1642-1680. Theodosius appointed Themistius as the teacher of his son.

¹⁵ Themistii Orationes, ed. W. Dindorf. Hildesheim, 1961. Themistii Orationes Quae Supersunt, ed. G. Downey. Leipzig, 1965. (In the analysis of the speeches of Themistius, Heather, *Goths and Romans* was used.)

¹⁶ *Philantropia* received a central role in Themistius' speeches. (Daly, *The Mandarin and the Barbarian*, 354-355.)

#14 describes and praises Theodosius as a military leader, capable of winning the war.¹⁷

After the victory at Adrianople, the Goths attempted to make the most of their success. Without any further delay, they led an attack against the city of Adrianople because they knew that Valens lost his ranking officers, his imperial insignia and his treasury.¹⁸ The attack happened contrary to Fritigern's intentions and the Goths lost many people in the futile battle. The defeat did not break the pride of the Goths; what is more, they marched to Constantinople and assembled siege engines. The size and defense of the city, however, made them acknowledge reality; they destroyed the engines and retreated without attempting an attack.¹⁹ As they had run out of food, they moved to the West of Thrace, to the area of Upper-Moesia, Dacia and Illyricum. In 380, probably because of food shortage again, the Goths separated into two groups. Alatheus and Saphrax led the *Greuthungi* to northwest, towards Pannonia,²⁰ while Fritigern proceeded to southwest to confront Theodosius' newly established army which had also been reinforced by eastern troops. Eventually the Goth army of Fritigern scattered the Roman army in a battle, and Theodosius left strategic leadership to his co-emperor in the West, Gratianus, then retreated to Constantinople.²¹

After the Roman defeats, it had become clear that Theodosius was unable to beat the Visigoths with military force, so he tried to divide enemy lines: he sent enormous gifts to "high-ranking and noble born" tribal leaders and he bestowed esteemed decorations on them.²² He also invited these leaders to his table, he shared his tent with them and he never missed an opportunity to showcase his generosity. It did not take long for a couple of privileged chiefs to react to the special treatment.²³ Theodosius was also keen to welcome Athanaric, the Goth chief who sought asylum in Constantinople, with distinct

¹⁷ Heather, *Goths and Romans*, 166-167.

¹⁸ Amm. Marc. 31, 15, 2-15.

¹⁹ Amm. Marc. 31, 16, 3-7.

²⁰ According to Ammianus Marcellinus, the two branches of the Goth tribes were the *Greuthungi*, residents of the steppe, in the east, and the *Thervingi*, residents of forests, who lived in the outer parts of southeast Carpathians and Transylvania until 376. (Amm. Marc. 31, 3.) More on the division of Goth tribes: Heather, *Goths and Romans*, 12-18.

²¹ The illness of Theodosius also contributed to the victory of the Goths. Iord. *get.* 27, 140-141.

²² Eunapius, frag. 59; 60. Cf.: Zos. 4, 56 Theodosius was aware of the important role gift-giving played in Germanic societies. Regaining the trust of the Goths must have surely constituted a major task, especially if one takes into account the events after the settlement in 376, the different Roman abuses of power, especially the mass massacre of young Goth hostages after the battle of Adrianople. More on this: M. P. Speidel, "The Slaughter of Gothic Hostages after Adrianople," *Hermes* 126 (1998), 503-506.

²³ Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians*, 107.

care. When the chief died two weeks later, the emperor gave him a state funeral. This gesture did not go unnoticed by many Goths.²⁴

After years of armed conflicts, the power of the Empire was clear in the eyes of the Goths. They were obliged to accept the fact that it was impossible to achieve a sweeping victory since every time they destroyed the imperial troops, new ones sprang into life to replace them. When they defeated and killed Emperor Valens, Theodosius immediately turned up; and when they defeated Theodosius, they had to face the army of Gratianus.²⁵ The power of circumstances persuaded both the Romans and the Goths to accept the situation in which triumph over the other was only possible at the cost of excessive losses. Therefore, both parties seemed open towards a peaceful agreement. Themistius was in charge of preparing public opinion for the change in imperial policy. In January 381, in speech #15, a stark contrast can be noticed compared to speech #14, written two years earlier. The orator still hopes for Theodosius and Gratianus to force "Scythians" to the North of the Danube but pays little attention to the chronicling of military issues. The main point of the speech is to emphasize that the most important task of the emperor is not one to fight but to govern. Themistius accentuates the philanthropy of the emperor and calls for a victory over the enemy without the use of violence.

In 381 the western army of Gratianus, led by Bauto and Arbogastes, chased the Goth Fritigern from Illyricum towards the east. Even those everyday people who had wanted to keep on fighting and who had been reluctant to accept the start of negotiations were convinced by this defeat of the necessity of peace. On October 3, 382, after months of long negotiations, the contract which assured the status of *foederati* to the Goths was signed.²⁶

²⁴ This event is usually named as the direct cause of the peace treaty even though by this time Athanaric was far from having as large a role as sources claim he had had. Isidore of Seville, *Historia Gothorum* 11: *Athanaricus cum Theodosio ius amicitiamque disponens mox Constantinopolim pergit ibique quintodecimo die quam fuerat a Theodosio honorabiliter susceptus, interiit. Gothi autem proprio rege defuncto adspicientes benignitatem Theodosii imperatoris inito foedere Romano se imperio tradiderunt.*; Cf.: Zos. 4, 34, 4; Themistius, *Or.* 15, 190; Orosius 7, 34, 7; Iord. *get.* 28, 142-144.

²⁵ Heather, *Goths and Romans*, 178.

²⁶ According to the contract, the Goths were not in a subdued or oppressed but in an allied relationship with the Romans. In return for a yearly appanage and land in the northeast regions of Moesia and Dacia, their tasks included the guarding of the frontier and the manning of auxiliary troops. Their territories were exempt from taxes and they also gained a great level of autonomy. They were assigned their own superior commander in the Roman army. According to Wolfram, it took eighteen months to prepare the contract (Wolfram, *Die Goten*, 138-141). The consensus among scholars is that the peace treaty only included the *Thervingi* and the *Greuthungi* had a separate deal with Gratianus in 380. According to Heather, the contract of 382 included the majority of the *Thervingi* and the majority of the *Greuthungi*, as well (Heather, *Goths and Romans*, 157).

Theodosius' policy towards the Goths between 382 and 394

The contract of 382 could be concluded as a result of Gratianus' and Theodosius' coordinated policy. Gratianus played a role both in the military campaigns on the Balkan Peninsula between 378 and 382, and in the peace treaty negotiations, which, in turn, was appreciated by the court propaganda of the East, as well.²⁷ In a laudatory speech by Themistius in January 383, he highlights how Theodosius was solely responsible for the solution of the Goth problem and minimizes the role of Gratianus.²⁸ Heather remarks ironically that the opinion voiced in the speech was published at the end of the war, when Theodosius no longer needed the military support of the *augustus* of the West.²⁹ The two emperors were said to have a tempestuous relationship.³⁰ In the winter of 382-383, they were faced with an exceptionally severe situation when Theodosius promoted his six-year-old son, Arcadius, to the rank of *augustus* without the approval of his co-emperor. Affronted by Theodosius' open dynastic aspirations, Gratianus deemed the decision illegal and never recognized Arcadius.³¹

Besides the strained relationship of the co-emperors, the Empire had to face repeated Sarmatian and Germanic, primarily Alamanni, attacks.³² What made the situation even more difficult was that in 383, in Britannia, Magnus Maximus claimed his right for the throne as an usurper, then crossed over to Gaul with his troops. When Gratianus set out to obstruct his further advances, the usurper had him killed and moved into his imperial palace in Treverorum (today: Trier), for a couple of years.³³

There were also religious debates in the Western Roman Empire during these years. The adherents of the old religion and the influential Roman senators led by Symmachus petitioned the emperors to re-establish the Victoria altar and to regain the former rights and privileges. Furthermore, the young co-emperor of the West, Valentinianus II, and his mother, Iustina, fought for the

²⁷ In his speech #15, Themistius refers to the two *augusti* as co-commanders. In the summer 382, Gratianus was in Viminacium, in Moesia Superior which proves that the role he played in the conclusion of the contract was just as considerable as his co-emperor's.

²⁸ Themistius *Or.* 16. Even though there is a lack of Western sources in terms of the role Gratianus played in the war, the contradictions between speeches #15 and #16 by Themistius highlight the bias of the orator.

²⁹ Heather, *Goths and Romans*, 172.

³⁰ The first sign of this surfaced in a religious issue when Theodosius thwarted Gratianus' plans for an ecumenical council in 380-381, in order to curb Gratianus' influence in the East.

³¹ Heather, *Goths and Romans*, 171.

³² The commander or magister militum of the army, Bauto the Frank was completely absorbed by the Alamanni attacks by the Rhine.

³³ Demandt, *Die Spätantike*, 129. Treviri, or *Augusta Treverorum*, today: Trier. When the *Tetrarchic* system was being set up by Diocletianus in 293, it became one of the four imperial capitals.

possibility to hold a celebration in the court in Mediolanum in the name of the Arians.³⁴ Theodosius, however, issued decrees that would focus on the total eradication of the old religion, and, as an ardent believer of the Nicene, *Catholic* movement he vehemently supported the *orthodoxia* with the support of Bishop Ambrosius.³⁵

During the winter of 384-385, some new Goth troops managed to cross the Danube on the ice near the estuary of the river. In the next year, an unprecedented, multi-ethnic Barbarian attack was launched, led by the Goth Odotheus (*Greuthungus*), who led his army to Thrace, having crossed the Danube on the ice.³⁶ Theodosius fought them with military force, clearly expressing that the allowances of the contract of 382 were born under strained circumstances and that he was not willing to extend the same *foederati* status to new Germanic tribes.³⁷

Apart from the tensions arising in the Western Empire, Theodosius also had to face problems in the East. He levied a special tax to cater for the needs of the army which led to an uprising in Antiochia.³⁸ In several cities in the East, a pronounced anti-Barbarian feeling was emerging as a result of billeting, the presence of Goth warriors, and the raising of taxes. This feeling was further intensified by the imperial politics along which high ranking military positions were given to Western or Germanic officers.³⁹

In such a difficult situation for the Empire, Theodosius needed especially the military support of the Goths. As the objective of the Emperor was complete independence and the gaining of unlimited, absolute power, he was intent on securing the trust of the Goths in such a way that they would be loyal to him, personally. As part of propaganda, Themistius emphasized the goodwill of the Emperor towards the Goths in his speeches and he claimed the privileges of the peace treaty to be the merits of Theodosius solely.⁴⁰ More importantly, especially for the Goth chiefs, the dinner invitations and the com-

³⁴ Demandt, *Die Spätantike*, 130-131.

³⁵ More on this: H. Chadwick, *The Early Church*, London 21993. As a result of Wulfila's evangelization, the Visigoths converted to Arian Christianity. Between 382 and 395, however, this did not yet constitute a problem between the Goths and the Romans.

³⁶ Wolfram, *Die Goten*, 141.

³⁷ Promotus, a Roman general, lured the dangerous intruders into a trap with the help of his Goth soldiers. Some were killed, but the majority of them were captured as a result of an imperial order and were later deployed in Phrygia.

³⁸ Demandt, *Die Spätantike*, 131.

³⁹ More on this: Gluschanin, *Die politik Theodosius' I.*, 228-230. The most severe uprising broke out in Thessalonice where the Germanic commander, Butheric was lynched by the mob. Theodosius took revenge by massacring 3,000 civil residents. The negative reputation of the Barbarians can also be seen in the works of Synesius of Cyrene (*De Regno* 21), Libanius (*Or.* 19, 16; 20, 14.), Gregorius Naziansus (*Ep.* 136.) and Eunapius.

⁴⁰ Them. *Or.* 16. Themistius emphasized that peace was not reached by weapons but by the trust of the Goths vested in the goodwill of Theodosius.

mon meals continued. Eunapius reports on the many magnificent banquets thrown for them and the numerous gifts sent to them by the Emperor.⁴¹ Theodosius' policy to win over the Goths seemed successful and with Goth and Hun auxiliary troops, he defeated Magnus Maximus, the *usurpator* at Siscia and Poetovio in 388.⁴²

At the end of summer or autumn in 391, Barbarians struck again. The danger was aggravated by the fact that as a result of Maximus' propaganda, certain Goth tribes deserted from the Roman army and joined the aliens invading the Empire.⁴³ The head of the Goth military group was Alaric, whose name turned up for the first time in the sources.⁴⁴ Since 382, they violated the points set in the *foedus* for the first time. After battles of alternating success, the contract was renewed in 392, so order was restored.

In Gaul, Arbogastes, a *magister militum* of Frank origin, after significant military victories, started to make decisions in lieu of the young Valentinianus II more and more frequently and with more and more determination. He had the Emperor killed or forced him into suicide in 392 because he was likely to show resistance in conflict situations.⁴⁵ Because Arbogastes could not become an emperor those years due to his Barbarian origins and his Pagan faith, he nominated a puppet emperor in the person of Eugenius.⁴⁶ The believers of the old faith and Italian senators supported Arbogastes' imperial candidate as it was the last chance to fight Theodosius' religious intolerance.

On receiving the news about the *usurpatio*, Theodosius mobilized his Goth allies. After 382, the Goth chiefs divided into two groups: some insisted on an anti-Roman perspective, while others believed that the advantages of the peace treaty concluded with Theodosius were beneficial, therefore, their promise of military support was to be upheld. Fravittas was the leader of the party friendly to Rome. He married a Roman woman, so he also took up the name *Flavius*. The leader of the other group was Eriulf.⁴⁷ Theodosius invited all the quarreling Goth chiefs to a great feast but violence ensued as a ferocious fight broke out. Fravittas drew his sword and attacked Eriulf, wounding him fa-

⁴¹ Heather, *Goths and Romans*, 187-188.

⁴² Demandt, *Die Spätantike*, 132. The cities of Siscia (today: Sisak) and Poetovio (today: Ptuj). Pacatus describes in his praise what measures were taken to mobilize Barbarians (Goths, Huns, and Alans) for the purposes of the campaign. (*Pan. Lat.* 12 (2), 32, 3-4.)

⁴³ Zos. 4,45,3

⁴⁴ Wolfram, *Die Goten*, 143. The anti-Roman fights of the following decades were led by Alaric.

⁴⁵ More on this: B. Croke, "Arbogast and the Death of Valentinian II," *Historia* 25 (1976), 235-244.

⁴⁶ J. Szidat, "Die Usurpation des Eugenius," *Historia* 28 (1979), 487-508.

⁴⁷ Eriulf and his supporters saw no reason for endangering the independence of the Goths by participating in a Roman internal politics argument. According to Eunapius, Eriulf's group had the majority.

tally.⁴⁸ The followers of Eriulf attacked Fravittas and the fighting parties could only be separated by imperial soldiers. The fact that the case of the murderous chief was not prosecuted thanks to the Emperor's interference shows his bias.⁴⁹ The feast was most probably organized to advance Theodosius' efforts to guarantee the participation of the Goths in the ensuing war.

The battle

By 394 Theodosius reassigned his Eastern troops as well, so, an army of around 100,000 men was at his disposal.⁵⁰ Arbogastes and Eugenius gathered soldiers from Gallic and Germanic territories but they were few and were neither well-equipped nor disciplined soldiers.⁵¹ Theodosius' army was advancing in a narrow mountain pass in the Alps. The emperor placed the Goth allies at the head of the march, that is, at the most dangerous section. Arbogastes ordered his troops to the plains in front of the mountain pass, in the valley of the River Frigidus. He had a camp built for them reinforced with a line of piles and wooden towers.⁵² On the first day of the fight, on September 5, 394 the army of the usurper attacked the Goth forward guards as they exited the mountain pass. Tens of thousands of soldiers were massacred, and the rest were saved by the darkness of the night. The commanders suggested the idea of retreating to the Emperor in the desperate situation but he refused to follow their advice. An unexpected natural phenomenon helped Theodosius in the following days: the violent wind coming from the mountains started to blow and made the army of Arbogastes retreat. Contemporary authors and soldiers deemed it a divine intervention.⁵³ The imperial army followed as they tried to get away, they burnt down their camp, they captured Eugenius and they executed him. In

⁴⁸ The goal of the argument of Fravittas and Eriulf might have been to gain control over the entirety of the Goth people.

⁴⁹ Wolfram, *Die Goten*, 141.; Heather, *Goths and Romans*, 190.; Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians*, 108.

⁵⁰ Theodosius mobilized his soldiers from *Asia provincia* too; Huns invaded this area at that time.

⁵¹ More on the battle, see: O. Seeck - G. Veith, "Die Schlacht am Frigidus," *Klio* 13 (1913), 451-467.; A. Štekar, "Poskus lociranja bitke pri Frigidu leta 394 na območju med Sanaborjem in Colom [The Try to Locate the Battle of the Frigidus in 394 in the Area Between Sanabor and Col]," *Annales: anali za istrske in mediteranske študije (in Slovenian, English, and Italian)*, 23 (1) (2013), 1-14; Paschoud, F.: *Zosime*. Histoire Nouvelle II. 2. Paris, 1979, 474.

⁵² The River Frigidus is called Vipava today in Slovenia, near the Italian border.

⁵³ The locals know well the hard-blowing, northeast wind called Bora, which hit the area of the battle ground frequently. Of the sources, from the Christian side Ambrosius (in psalm. 36, 25), while from the Pagan side Claudius Claudianus (de III cons. Hon. 99.) seem to be the most reliable. Augustinus (*de civ. Dei* 5, 26), Rufinus (11, 33), Orosius (7, 35), Eunapius, Socrates (5, 25), Sozomenos (7, 24), and Theodoretos (5, 24, 12) also mentioned the battle.

order to avoid public humiliation, Arbogastes committed suicide. The battle between Theodosius and Eugenius was the last, big battle of Roman Christianity and the old Roman religion. The victory of the emperor meant the end of Paganism and the gaining of absolute power.⁵⁴

Summary

We deem the policy of Theodosius primarily anti-Barbarian, contrary to the traditional idea that it actually was quite friendly to the Goths. In the first years of his reign, between 379 and 381, the Emperor sought to settle the Goth problem with weapons. When this plan failed, he had no choice but to sign the peace treaty in 382. As a good commander he recognized the military power of the Goths and he used it to make up the missing numbers in his troops and to guard the borders against new Barbarian intrusions. Later, until the end of his reign, he set out not to increase the number of his allies. Later, in case of a new Germanic attack, he focused on defeating the tribes, or, if re-settlement was inevitable, he wanted to force them into an oppressed status. As a result of his will for absolute power and the activities of the counter-emperors, he needed his Goth allies, so Themistius, using appropriate rhetorical moves and propaganda, tried to gain their trust and turn them towards the emperor. Emphasizing Theodosius' philanthropy and his friendship towards the Goths was part of a carefully planned policy which proved to be successful contrary to the facts. The Goths played a decisive role in two great military campaigns led by Theodosius: in the success of the battles against Magnus Maximus and Eugenius. However, when the emperor no longer needed Goth soldiers, he deployed them in the most dangerous positions without any scruples. The Goths themselves were convinced that Theodosius sent them to the line of danger deliberately in order to undermine their tribe and they were afraid that all these great losses would jeopardize their independence.⁵⁵ So, led by Alaric, they rose up against the Romans already on their way back from the battleground.⁵⁶ The uprising broke out in Theodosius' life as a consequence of his actions and was responsible for decades of uneasy relationship between Goths and Romans. The myth of Theodosius being a "friend of the Goths" survived in several

⁵⁴ Autocracy was in effect for only a couple months as the Emperor died on January 17, 395.

⁵⁵ O. Seeck, *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt*. V. Berlin, 1913, 253.; Heather, *Goths and Romans*, 192; 199.

⁵⁶ Claude, *Geschichte der Westgoten*, 16. The *Taifali* joined their uprising. (The *Taifali* were a Germanic ethnic group who lived in the Lower Danube area.)

authors; for example Jordanes' bias towards the emperor can also be seen in his works.⁵⁷ The historiographer of Goth origin was happy to highlight in his sources the *topos* of the Emperor who favored the Goths and who concluded a peace treaty with them, setting him up as an example for his own emperor, Justinianus who had been waging a war for decades against the Eastern Goth kingdom in Italia.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Iord. *get.* 27, 139-146.

⁵⁸ The Goth story of Cassiodorus and Ablabius must be highlighted among the sources by Jordanes. Parts of his story can be traced back to Goth oral tradition (Heather, *Goths and Romans*, 5-6). The Byzantian-Eastern Goth war waged between 535 and 553, while Jordanes completed his work around 551. The hope of the historiographer that the Roman - Goth alliance would happen did not come true.