



0. ATTILA: FEARSOME RULER - Story Preface

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A fearsome Attila, as he is depicted in a museum in Hungary. Photo by A. Berger. License: [CC BY-SA 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/)

Attila had built an army of versatile and nimble horsemen. Funded by enormous tributes collected from foreigners (and plunder forcibly taken from others), he could pay (and feed) his troops and their horses. The Hun bow was their decisive weapon. Attila held his domains through fear.

Using terrain as cover, until they were within arrow range, the Huns would send arrow showers at unspecified targets. They used the sword as well, for close combat. Historians believe that Hunnic boys were taught to use a sword by the age of five.

Attila created a coalition of disparate people: Hunnic, Germanic and Iranian tribes who remained coalesced while he lived. Frequently raiding the Roman Empire in the East, he also launched two significant invasions of the Empire in the West. Not always victorious, he lost a major battle in Gaul (now France).

Causing death and destruction in Italy, Attila did not conquer Rome. Pope Leo I, according to chroniclers, talked him out of it:

The old man [the pope] of harmless simplicity, venerable in his gray hair and his majestic garb, ready of his own will to give himself entirely for the defense of his flock, went forth to meet the tyrant who was destroying all things. He met Attila, it is said, in the neighborhood of the river Mincio [in the Lombardy region], and he spoke to the grim monarch, saying "... Thou hast subdued, O Attila, the whole circle of the lands which it was granted to the Romans, victors over all peoples, to conquer. Now we pray that thou, who hast conquered others, shouldst conquer thyself. The people have felt thy scourge; now as suppliants they would feel thy mercy."

The dialogue worked. Rome was safe. Returning to his homeland, Attila took another wife. Celebrating that event, sometime during the early months of 453, he drank heavily. He died on his wedding night.

His warriors were stunned by his unexpected death. According to Jordanes, writing about a century later, they cut off their hair and slashed themselves with their swords so that

... the greatest of all warriors should be mourned with no feminine lamentations and with no tears, but with the blood of men.

They buried Attila, it is said, in a triple coffin - of gold, silver, and iron - along with spoils of his conquests. To insure no one learned of his final resting place, his warriors killed the funeral party.

Attila had ruled just eight years. After his death, none of his squabbling sons could effectively stand in their father's shoes. The once-mighty Empire of the Huns fell apart, and the Hunnic warriors - all except Attila - faded into history.

A few hundred years later, another group of mercenaries - this time the Vikings - paid bloody visits to the shores of Britain. What do we know of them?

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/ATTILA-FEARSOME-RULER-Night-at-the-Museum>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/ATTILA-FEARSOME-RULER-Night-at-the-Museum>

Media Stream



Hunnic Army - Attila and His Troops

Image, facsimile of *Chronicon Pictum*, maintained at the University of Maryland Library. Online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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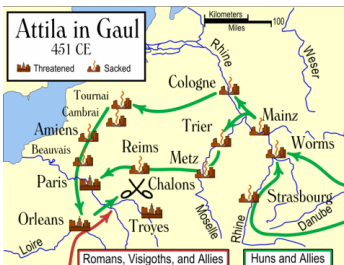


Huns at the Battle of Chalons

The illustration (by A. De Neuville) is included in *A Popular History of France From the Earliest Times* (by François Pierre Guillaume Guizot, 1787-1874), Volume I of VI, at page 135.

Image online, courtesy Project Gutenberg in the e-text version of the book.

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Huns - Triumphs and Defeats in Gaul

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Pope Leo I - Called the Great

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Attila the Tyrant

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Attila Meets Leo I - Medieval Picture, Chronicon Pictum

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Mincio River - Where Attila Met the Pope

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Lombardy Region of Italy

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Pope Leo I Meets Attila the Hun

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Raphael - Leo the Great Confronts Attila

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