

ATTILA: THE SCOURGE AND THE SOVEREIGN

THE DUAL NATURE OF THE HUNNIC EMPIRE

THE MYTH:

To the Romans, he was the Flagellum Dei—the “Scourge of God”—sent to punish a sinful empire.



THE MAN: To his people, he was the son of Mundiuch, a pragmatic king who preferred wooden cups to gold goblets and ruled from the Rhine to the Caspian Sea.

406 AD – 453 AD

406 AD 407 AD 408 AD 412 AD 413 AD 415 AD 419 AD 422 AD 425 AD 428 AD 431 AD 432 AD 436 AD 437 AD 440 AD 443 AD 453 AD

406 AD: Born into a World on the Move



The Environment:

Recent dendrochronological data suggests severe drought in the Steppes (350-370 AD) drove the Huns westward as "armed climate refugees" toward the Danube.



The Origin:

Born roughly 406 AD to the royal line of Mundiuch. The Huns were already serving as mercenaries for Rome before they became its masters.



Cultural Context:

A pastoral society transitioning to a sedentary power base in Pannonia.

Timeline Tracker



434–439 AD: The Double Kingship and the Price of Peace

434 AD: Accession.

Upon the death of Uncle Rua, Attila and his brother Bleda assume joint rule of the Hunnic Confederation.



- Annual tribute raised to 700 pounds of gold.
- Rome must return all Hunnic refugees.
- Trade rights established on the Danube frontier.

Timeline Tracker

430

434 AD: Attila & Bleda Kingship

434–439

439 AD: Treaty of Margus

440

439 AD: The Treaty of Margus.

Negotiating on horseback, the brothers secure a massive diplomatic victory.

441–443 AD: The Total Destruction of the Danube Frontier

The Opportunity:

With Roman armies diverted to fight Vandals in North Africa, the Huns cross the Danube using siege engines likely learned from Roman captives.



Timeline Tracker



445 AD: Fratricide and the Sword of Mars



The Death of Bleda:
Attila kills his brother Bleda, ending the dual kingship. Attila becomes the sole autocrat of the Hunnic Empire.

The Propaganda: A shepherd discovers an ancient sword. Attila proclaims it the 'Sword of Mars,' interpreting it as a divine mandate for supremacy in all wars.

Timeline Tracker



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447 AD: The Walls Fall



The Earthquake



Battle of the Utus

Nature aids the Huns. A catastrophic earthquake destroys Constantinople's walls. The Emperor Theodosius II is forced to triple the annual tribute to 2,100 pounds of gold after a bloody defeat at the Utus.



449 AD: The Priscus Embassy

The Source: Our most intimate details come from Priscus of Panium, a Roman diplomat who traveled to the Hunnic court.



The Debate: Priscus meets a Greek merchant among the Huns who refuses to return to Rome, arguing that life under the Huns is freer than the tax-heavy, corrupt Roman state.

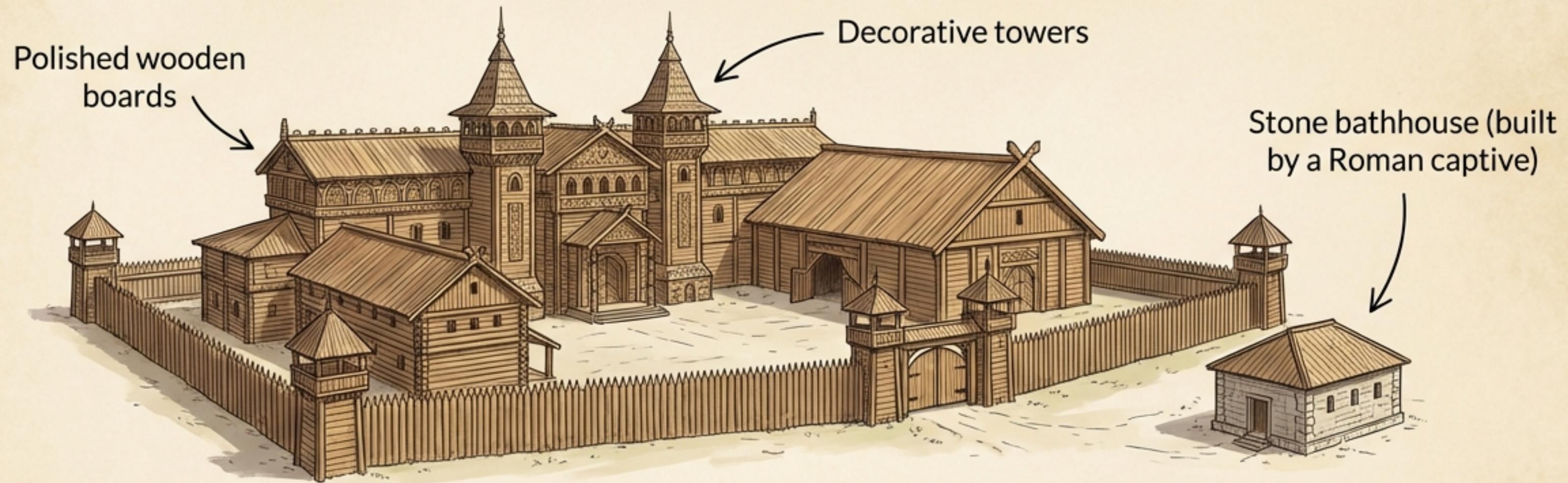
Timeline Tracker

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The Wooden Capital in Wallachia



Contrary to the “tent city” stereotype, Priscus describes a permanent, orderly settlement where laws were adjudicated and envoys from East and West jostled for influence.

Timeline Tracker

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The Failed Assassination Plot

The Conspiracy: The eunuch Chrysaphius bribes the Hun Edeko to assassinate Attila.



The Turn: Edeko reveals the plot to Attila.

The Humiliation: Attila spares the Roman ambassadors but confronts them with the gold meant for his murder, proving his moral superiority over the 'civilized' Romans.

Timeline Tracker

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The Banquet: Gold for the Guests, Wood for the King



Priscus observes a calculated contrast. While poets sang and jesters performed, Attila remained “immovable,” eating from wood while his lieutenants dined on silver.

Timeline Tracker

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The Prophecy of the Youngest Son

The Observation:

Priscus noted Attila showed affection only to his youngest son, Ernas.



The Enervation:

Priscus noted Attila's affection arose to his youngest son, Ernas.

The Prophecy: Soothsayers foretold the fall of Attila's race, but predicted it would be restored by this boy. Beneath the warlord exterior lay a superstitious father aware of his empire's fragility.

Timeline Tracker

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450 AD: The Ring and the Dowry

Honorius's Plea: The sister of Emperor Valentinian III sends her ring to Attila to escape a forced marriage.

The Demand: Attila interprets this as a proposal. He demands Honorius as his bride and half the Western Roman Empire as her dowry.



The Result: Valentinian refuses. Attila now has a *casus belli* for the invasion of the West.

Timeline Tracker

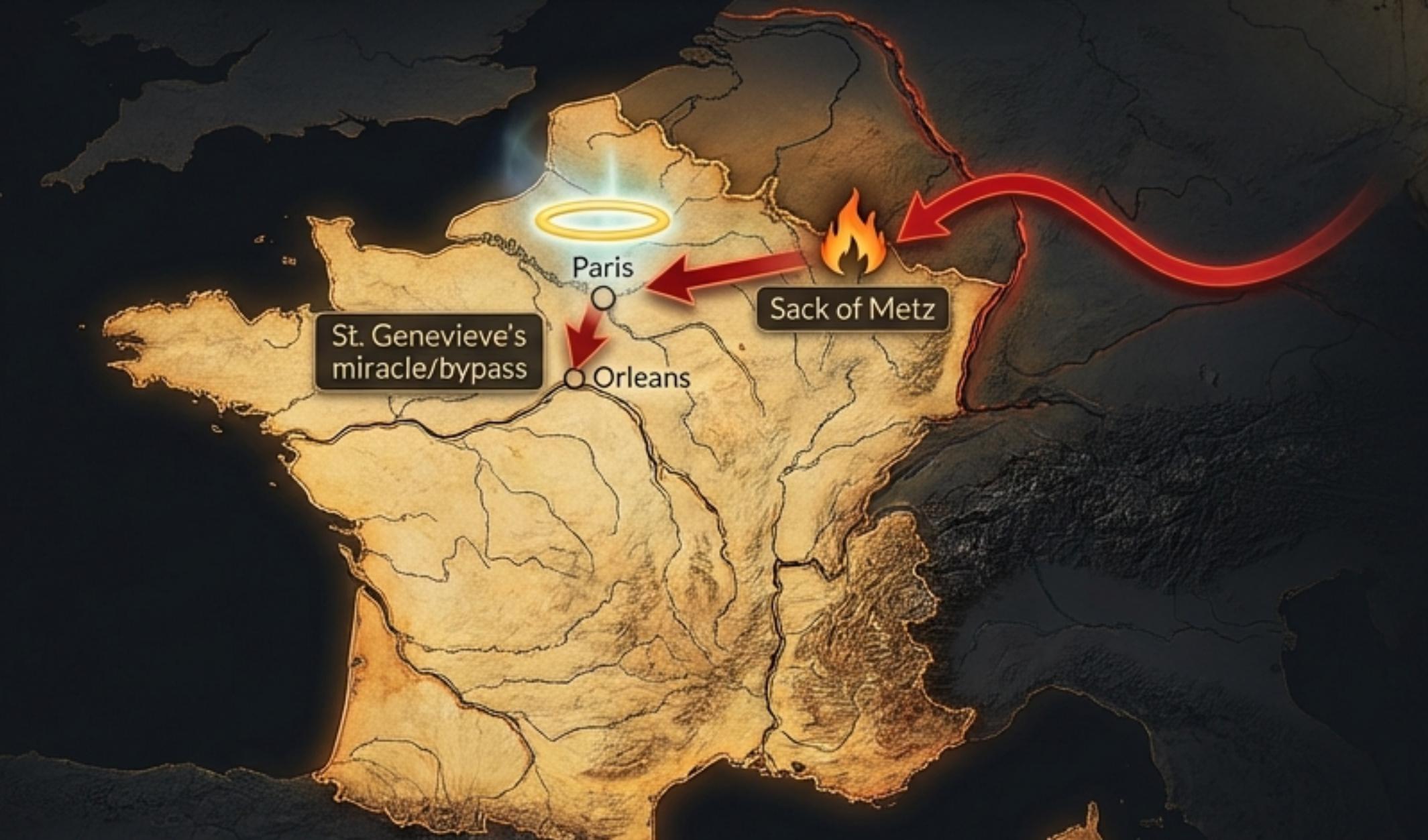
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Spring 451 AD: The Invasion of Gaul

A massive coalition of Huns, Ostrogoths, and Gepids crosses the Rhine. Cities burn, but Paris is bypassed—attributed to the prayers of St. Genevieve.



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The Siege of Orléans and the Strange Alliance

The Turning Point:
Just as Attila breaches
the walls of Orléans,
the relief army arrives.



The Nemesis: Flavius Aetius, who lived among the Huns as a youth, unites Rome with its enemy, the Visigoths, to stop the Scourge.

Timeline Tracker

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June 20, 451 AD: The Battle of the Catalaunian Plains



The Climax: The East meets the West. The Visigoth King Theodoric dies in the chaos.

The Saddle Pyre: Anticipating defeat, Attila builds a funeral pyre of saddles, resolving to burn himself alive rather than be taken captive. The battle ends in a bloody stalemate.

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452 AD: The Invasion of Italy



Timeline Tracker

449 — 450 — 452 — 451 — 453 —

The Meeting at the Mincio: Miracle or Malaria?



The Legend

Why did he turn back?
While the church claimed divine intervention, modern history points to famine in Italy and a plague (malaria) decimating the Hunnic army.



The Reality

Timeline Tracker

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453 AD: A Wedding Night, A Nosebleed, An End



The End: Attila marries a young bride, Ildico. He is found dead the next morning, having drowned in his own blood from a nasal hemorrhage or burst blood vessel.

Theories: Priscus cites natural causes (alcohol/hemorrhage). Rumors whispered of assassination by the bride.

Timeline Tracker

449 — 450 — 452 — 451 — 453

“The Iron, The Silver, and The Gold”



The Burial: Mourned by warriors cutting their cheeks, he was buried in a triple coffin. Captives diverted a river to hide the grave and were then killed to keep the secret. The grave remains undiscovered.

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The Collapse and the Legend

454 AD - Battle of Nedao:
Without Attila, the sons
squabbled and the empire
disintegrated.



Legacy: The Huns vanished,
but the Great Migration they
triggered dissolved the
Western Roman Empire.

Attila lived on as 'Etzel' in
the Nibelungenlied and
'Atli' in the Volsunga Saga.

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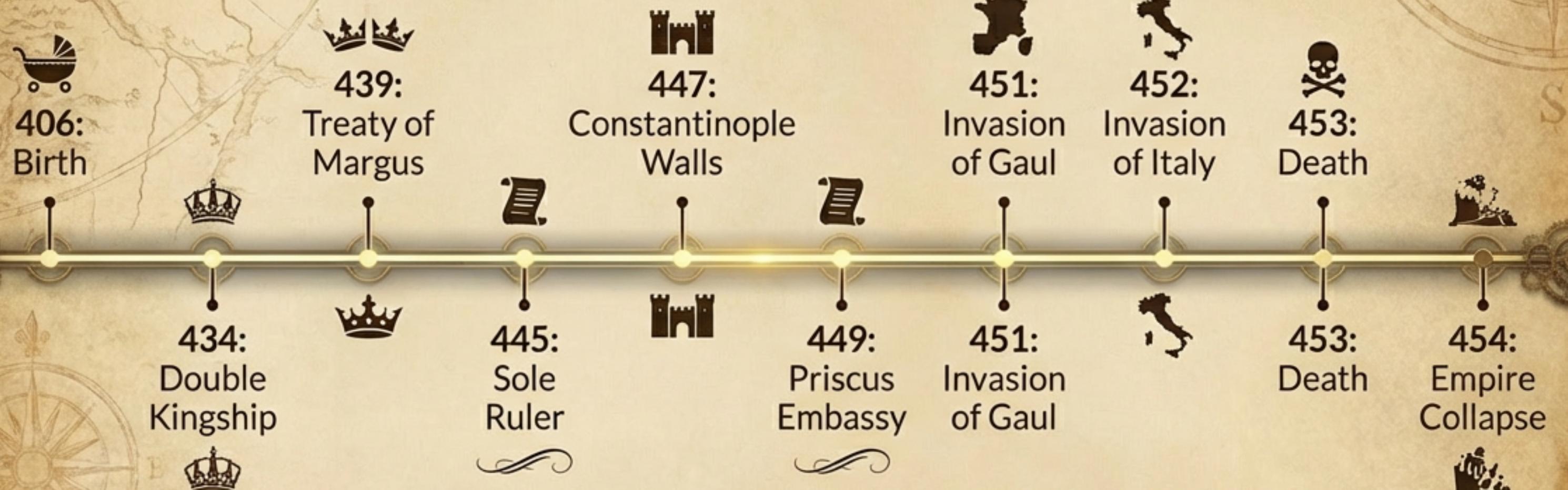
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Legacy

Timeline Tracker

Timeline: The Life of Attila



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