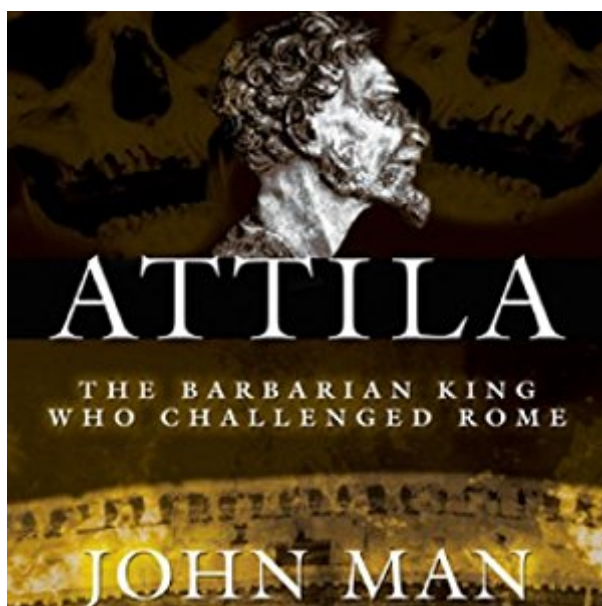


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Attila: The Barbarian King Who Challenged Rome



Synopsis

In the years AD 434-454, the fate of Europe hung upon the actions of one man: Attila, king of the Huns. The decaying Roman Empire still stood astride the Western World, but it was threatened by a new force, the much-feared barbarian hordes. Attila was the one-man wrecking ball that helped put the final boot into Rome's decaying splendor. Today, Attila remains the most enduring bogeyman in history, his name a byword for barbarism, savagery, and violence. Masterful storyteller John Man brings to life this marauding figure of the battlefield. His descriptions of the Huns' grotesque techniques of impaling enemies and unruly family members will leave you with curled toes and crossed legs. Packed with many new insights, Attila is a riveting work of historical scholarship that reads like an adventure story. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Interesting biographical read.

Good, interesting, easy read with lots of information. I used this in a Master's degree research paper, and it helped point me to a few primary sources to further my research.

Very good

A very good book on this historical person!

I was interested in reading a book/novel which presented more about the everyday life of Huns than I had found available in other books. I have read a stodgy histories of the Huns written by University Professors. For the most part they give a chronology of who did what and when without making much speculation about why they did it. I had found no history about the every day life of the Huns. This is probably because there is little primary or secondary information about what Huns looked like, how they lived, how they fought. The book by John Man does repeat the primary information (i.e., Priscus) about the Huns. But he goes on to takes that information and formulates it into reasonable speculations that give a much better idea of what the Huns were like. He always gives the rationale for making the assumptions and speculations that he makes. And, in the end, I think I he provides a much better understanding of the life of the Huns than one can get from any of the intellectual histories which don't give much more to the reader than what (s)he can read at Wikipedia. Let me give an example. The author visits and interviews people who have tried to live the life of a steppe bowman. Men who have learned to make a Scythian bow, learned to use a Scythian bow on foot and on horseback. So the author gives a credible idea how Huns made their bows and used them on horseback. I'd never be able to take that away from reading an academic history. If you are interested in reading a book about the Huns, this book should be on your reading list.

The beginning of the book was stupendous, one of the best books I've ever read. As it went on, at times, it became tedious, especially when it covered a modern day archer and Hun fighting enactor. Having said this, so much of the book was captivating and interesting that I certainly consider it a good read. It seemed well researched and presented many detailed facts about Attila, The Huns, Rome, Visigoths, Vandals, Magyars and more, so well in fact, that I can't say enough good about the quality of the book. The narrator for the Audible version was fantastic.

I love reading about ancient civilizations, their militaries, and most of all about causality of why things happened. To my chagrin, I am fairly ignorant about the Huns per se and was hoping to learn some things with this book. The book is not strictly a biography -- even in Man's own words, the information about Attila is too few and with what is out there, some of the information is questionable. The 300+ pages in the book is a myriad of a biography, anthropology, archaeology, history, psychology, a travel guide, and such. I found the book to be very similar to Robert Kaplan writing style in the books published in the late 1990's and 2000's. Both Kaplan and Man cover a wide variety of subjects to talk about, as well as to throw in their personal stories -- I like it, though I

can understand why some would not. In reading the book, I was captured in the realization that Attila was really no different than his contemporaries when it came to the expansion of his influence on other tribes and civilizations that were either nearby or had been pushed by the Huns into the western part of the Roman Empire. The Vandals, Visigoths, Ostrogoths, and other Germanic tribes did as much plundering in the Roman Empire as the Huns. The Eastern Romans were shown to live up to their Byzantine name with the court intrigue to have Attila assassinated. The Western Romans for the most part were a husk of what they used to be - minus leaders like Aetius. The book shows the causality of the events to which the two Roman governments started to deteriorate, though the western portion had begun its downward glide many years ago and the people in these times helped snuff the civilization out in the few years to come. Attila's claim to fame is that he became the "boogeyman" to which united a variety of enemies in a common goal to stop the Hun hegemony (the Visigoths would have been hunted and likely Rome razed). My disgruntlement with the book was how the dialog and conclusion of whether the Huns were the descendents of the Xiongnu civilization in the steppes near China. I felt he did not really give a definitive answer with the long stories and jumping around. The book does a good job of showing that the Huns with their superior military might was buoyed somewhat with the political savvy of a person like Attila, to only get bogged down and squashed by terrain and the over-reaching greed.

As a fan of history in general, I picked this title up from the audiobooks at my local library. I was pretty excited by it, and it started off very promising. Mr. Man reaches way back, touching on the roots of the Huns, questioning accepted explanations of their ancestry and doing a fine job of it all. His detailed explanation of events is unrepachable. He goes at length at who his sources are, and recounts their reliability almost excessively. He paints portraits of battles with a free hand that a history stickler and a lover of romantic portrayals could both enjoy. He ties together things well in the end, explaining the downfall of the Huns and yet drawing the line of the legend of Attila well past his death. My main problem with the book though were the disjointed way in which he inserted his experiences in researching the book. I have read histories in which the writer recounts how he found his information, and I have read histories in which the author simply shows the history. Man tries to do both, and he does it poorly. You find yourself following along fluidly, then you are accosted with this tale about how hard it was to get a taxi to a certain mountain in Mongolia. He does it fairly frequently, and I must say I did not like it. Overall though, the random tales did not destroy the fact that it is a very complete history, so I compromise with a 3/5.

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