

The Crisis of the Kingdom of the Suebi

Relations with the Visigoths and the Romans (456–468)

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In 456, not only did the Suebi suffer a crushing defeat from the Visigoth armies of Theoderic at the River Urbicus [Orbigo], but on top of that their king Rechiarius died¹ and as a result, before long, the Suevoic Kingdom disintegrated both politically and territorially. Hydatius categorically writes about the collapse and destruction of the Suevoic State, as he chronicles the gradual disintegration of royal power and its landing in the hands of several leaders.² In the period following 456, attacks against the Romans increased, and momentary respite was only brought amid the plundering for the time of the Suevoic leaders' own power clashes, or when some of them struck a peace deal with the Romans.³ In the period between 456 and 468, we see, therefore, that the leaders of the Suevoic Kingdom formed relations – or in other cases fought wars – either with the Visigoths or the Romans in order to strengthen their own positions.

The death of Rechiarius probably meant the extinction of the Suevoic royal branch founded by Hermeric, which forecast power struggles. A state of civil war ensued between the various factions of the Suebi, indicating a new era in

¹ Széll G., "A hispaniai Szvév Királyság felemelkedése [The Rise of the Kingdom of the Suebi in Hispania] (409–456)," in Székely M. – Illés I. Á., Eds., *Tanulmányok a hetven éves Wojtilla Gyula tiszteletére [Studies in Honour of the 70-Year-Old Gyula Wojtilla]*, AAASzeged Suppl. XIV. Szeged 2015, 122–123.

² Hyd. chr. 168; in *Hydatii Lemici continuatio chronicorum Hieronymianorum*, in Th. Mommsen, Ed., MGH AA XI., CM 2, Berlin 1894, 1–36; in *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia Constantinopolitana*, R. W. Burgess, Ed. and transl., Oxford 1993, 70–123; in "Püspöki tudósítás Hispaniából [Chronicle of a Bishop from Hispania]. Hydatius: Chronica," Széll G., Transl., in Székely M.–Illés I. Á., Eds., *Késő római szöveggyűjtemény*, Szeged 2013, 347–400.

³ J. C. Arias, *Identity and Interactions: The Suevi and the Hispano-Romans*, University of Virginia 2007, 64.

Suevic history, since before 456 there is no mention of Suevic clashes between political factions or rebellions breaking out against the royal power.⁴ After Rechiarius' death, Theoderic left Gallaecia for Lusitania,⁵ but not before he set up a garrison for the defence of the conquered Suevic territories.⁶

According to Hydatius, in 456 one of Theoderic's commanders, Aioulf left the Gothic army headed for Lusitania and was waiting in Gallaecia to become King of the Suebi.⁷ In contrast, Jordanes claims that as Theoderic's *cliens*, Aioulf, from the tribe of the Varini, was directly assigned to command the Suebi, but the Suebi themselves might also have supported him to ensure an independent king to Gallaecia.⁸ Clear identification of Aioulf is further clouded by the assumption that he could be identical with Censorius' murderer Agiulf, as mentioned by Hydatius.⁹ Thompson treats Jordanes as a less reliable source than Hydatius based on the fact that in both time and space Jordanes lived further from the events that took place in Gallaecia, and also because in general his records are less precise.¹⁰ Being biased towards the Goths, Jordanes depicted Aioulf as a treacherous Varinian, and in his view the Suebi themselves were not innocent concerning the betrayal of Theoderic because, according to him, Aioulf had become duplicitous as a result of succumbing to Suevic encouragement.¹¹ In the end, in June 457 in Portus Cale [Porto] Theoderic captured Aioulf and had him beheaded.¹² According to Jordanes, the Sueves then sent a delegation of priests to Theoderic, who not only remitted the Sueves' punishment but even allowed them to choose their own leader.¹³ However, it was not until 465 that Remismund became King of the Suebi. Thompson claims that Jordanes is also mistaken when he writes about the encounter of the

⁴ E. A. Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians: The Decline of the Western Empire*, Madison 1982, 165.

⁵ Hyd. chr. 171.

⁶ W. Reinhart, *Historia General del Reino Hispánico de los Suevos*, Madrid 1952, 48.

⁷ Hyd. chr. 173; 180.

⁸ Iord. get. 233; in *De origine actibusque Getarum*, in Th. Mommsen, Ed., MGH AA V/1., Berlin 1882, 53–138; in *Jordanes: Getica. A gótok eredete és tettei [The Origins and Deeds of the Goths]*, Kiss M. et al., Transl., Pécs 2005, 43–105.

⁹ Hyd. chr. 131; Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians*, 288. Based on the manuscript (B) of Burgess, the two figures are not identical, however, manuscript (F) unambiguously treats them as one person. In the Suevic incursion Jordanes refers to Aioulf as Agrivulf (Iord. get. 233.), thus even he considers them as one and the same person, which casts doubt on the reliability of manuscript (B) in this respect. As Jordanes can be linked to the 6th century while Fredegarius, the compiler of (B) to the 7th, we can conclude that Jordanes could not have used Fredegarius as a source whereas, conversely, there is no evidence that Fredegarius could have known Jordanes' script; cf. Burgess, *The Chronicle of Hydatius*, 129; D. Claude, "Prosopographie des Spanischen Suebenreiches," *Francia* 6 (1978), 654.

¹⁰ Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians*, 168–169.

¹¹ Iord. get. 233.

¹² Hyd. chr. 180.

¹³ Iord. get. 234.

Suevic high priests and Theoderic since the Visigoth king could not have welcomed the bishops with due respect as in 457 the Sueves were still pagans.

According to Hydatius, a group of the Sueves living in the farthest corner of Gallaecia did not support Aiulf, and that is why in 457 they elected Maldras as king, who was the son of a nobleman named Massilia¹⁴ or Massila.¹⁵ As it was not known whether Maldras was related to Hermeric, many refused to accept even him as the lawful ruler, which led to a split among the Sueves: some of them supported Maldras while the others chose Framtane king in his stead in 457.¹⁶ The two kings acted independently of each other, mainly striving for peace with the Gallaecians, however, they relentlessly pursued their campaigns of plunder. Thompson concludes that the election of Maldras and Framtane points to the fact that after the extinction of the dynasty of Hermeric the Sueves still had certain rights to choose their own ruler.¹⁷ At the end of 457 Maldras attacked the city of Ulixippona [Lisbon], slaughtered and looted the Romans and in 458 plundered along the River Durus [Duro].¹⁸ It is here that we first learn about the *duplicitous nature* of the Sueves:¹⁹ they are known to have often employed the tactic of sending word to the enemy of their intention to make peace, who, in turn in good faith let them into their city, only to be ransacked by them.²⁰

After a few months' reign, sometime between Easter and Pentecost in 458 Framtane died therefore the Goths and the Vandals sent envoys to Maldras but the negotiations probably did not yield the expected results because the envoys soon returned.²¹ Some scholars find it probable that following Framtane's death the two groups of the Sueves reunited under the rule of Maldras,²² but even if this was the case it could not have lasted long as in 459 Framtane's followers elected a new leader in the person of Rechimund, who then made peace with Maldras,²³ and united with him to raid the area of Lusitania and Gallaecia.²⁴

¹⁴ Hyd. chr. 174.

¹⁵ Isid. hist. Goth. 32; hist. Suev. 88; in Isidori iunioris episcopi Hispalensis historia Gothorum, Wandalorum et Sueborum, in Th. Mommsen, Ed., MGH AA XI., CM 2., Berlin 1894, 267–303; *Las Historias de los Godos, Vandalos y Suevos de Isidoro de Sevilla*, C. Rodríguez Alonso., Ed. and transl., Leon 1975; *Sevillai Izidor: A gótok, vandálok és szvévek története [A History of the Goths, Vandals and Sueves]*, Székely M., Transl., Szeged 2008, 27–66.

¹⁶ Hyd. chr. 181.

¹⁷ Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians*, 167.

¹⁸ Hyd. chr. 181; 183.

¹⁹ Hyd. chr. 181: *solito more perfidiae*; Hyd. chr. 183: *in solitam perfidiam*.

²⁰ Hyd. chr. 196; 215; 225; 236; 237.

²¹ Hyd. chr. 182; 186.

²² Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians*, 167.

²³ Isid. hist. Suev. 88.

²⁴ Hyd. chr. 188. Although most historians refuse to believe that Rechimund and Remismund were the same person (Claude, *Prosopographie*, 667–668.) as there is no explanation to the earlier differences between the two names, according to Bur-

In 459, Maldras killed his own brother, attacked Portus Cale and had a blood bath among the Roman nobility. Owing to his cruelty, however, the number of his supporters had dwindled and at the end²⁵ of February 460 he was murdered by his own people.²⁶ After that the followers of Maldras found themselves under the control of Frumarius, who was perhaps Maldras' brother.²⁷

Back in July 458, Theoderic sent military commander (*dux*) Cyrila to Baetica, heading an army of Goths, but he probably did not achieve long lasting results as at the beginning of 459 he was recalled and replaced by Sunieric with a part of the army. The Roman *magister utriusque militiae* Nepotianus and the Gothic *comes* Sunieric sent envoys to Gallaecia in order to spread the news about the peace between the Goths and the Romans after the siege of Arelate [Arles]. Despite this, around Easter 460, in a surprise attack the Sueves killed the Roman governor of Lucus [Lugo] and several noblemen.²⁸

The Sueves' attack of 460 is worth a closer look to analyse what impact the surviving Roman power structure had on the development of the Kingdom of the Suebi. According to Díaz Martínez, the incursions of the 5th century started a process in the Roman population of Hispania that for socio-economic reasons led to the irreversible disintegration of central power.²⁹ Although the strengthening Suevic Kingdom left less and less room for the aspirations of Roman power, the Suevic administrative system was not developed enough to create its own structure,³⁰ therefore after their conquests the Suebi simply took over the surviving Roman system tailoring it to their own needs.³¹ In 460, Hydatius chronicles the murder of the Roman governor of Lucus although it is unlikely that based on earlier custom, this local office could still be gained by the appointment of Rome.³² Even though the sources do not mention any Suevic laws, most scholars agree that the Suevic legal system had developed as a mix of Roman law and Germanic common law.³³ The Sueves were unable to quickly integrate into the local population not least because the majority of

gess, based on the diverse courses of their lives and Hydatius' narrative style the two persons must be identical. (Burgess, *The Chronicle of Hydatius*, 130.) Then, however, the Goths' envoy of 463 cannot be identical with the earlier Remismund (Hyd. chr. 216.) as even Jordanes names him king (Iord. get. 234).

²⁵ Hyd. chr. 190-191; 193.

²⁶ Isid. hist. Suev. 88.

²⁷ Arias, *Identity and Interactions*, 22.

²⁸ Hyd. chr. 185; 188; 192; 194.

²⁹ P. C. Díaz Martínez, "City and Territory in Hispania in Late Antiquity," G. P. Brogiolo - N. Gauthier - N. Christie, Eds., *Towns and their Territories between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Leiden 2000, 19.

³⁰ Arias 2007, 50.

³¹ Reinhart, *Historia General*, 64. This practice can be observed regarding the payment of taxes, among other things; cf. Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians*, 164.

³² Díaz Martínez, *City and Territory*, 17.

³³ Arias, *Identity and Interactions*, 51.

Sueves insisted on Germanic common law while the Roman population still used the provisions of Roman law.³⁴ Hydatius' chronicle of 460 confirms our belief that the Sueves and the Romans indeed lived in separate communities even within one city.

Following the surprise attack on Lucus, Nepotianus shared his leadership with Sunieric in order to make the Suebi withdraw from their united front³⁵ as by this time supposedly no Roman military power was positioned in Hispania.³⁶ As part of the manoeuvre, the Gothic army sacked the Sueves living near Lucus, but three informers from Gallaecia – Dictynius, Spinio and Ascanius –, *adopting the tactic of duplicity*³⁷ created panic in the army and warned the Sueves of the planned attack of the Goths, who, thus betrayed, had no choice but to retreat. On the advice of the three informers, on 26 July the Suevic Frumarius took the city of Aquae Flaviae [Chaves], captured bishop Hydatius and ransacked the city's monastery including the neighbouring areas. At the same time Rechimund pillaged the area of Auregens [Orense] and Lucus,³⁸ while Sunieric took the city of Scallabis [Santarém]³⁹ and in 461 returned to Gaul. Frumarius and Rechimund were in rivalry for the throne⁴⁰ but as Rechimund's political influence gradually waned, he was probably never able to gain the title of King of the Suebi.

In the months to follow, on several occasions the Romans and the Sueves held brief and just moderately successful peace talks: after an apparent agreement, the envoys sent by Theoderic quickly returned⁴¹ and the envoys of the Suebi, referred to as *duplicitous pagans*,⁴² did not linger at the Goths' much longer either. Still, in November, after being a prisoner for three months, contrary to the informers' intentions, Hydatius was released to return to the city of Aquae Flaviae.⁴³ Although Hydatius does not reveal why the informers wanted him out of the way and were against his release, what is known is that Hydatius had taken a firm stand for Roman interests, therefore in 460 Frumarius imprisoned him for a reason.⁴⁴ The activity of the three informers is a

³⁴ P. C. Díaz Martínez, "El Alcance de la Ocupación Suevo de Gallaecia y el Problema de la Germanización," in F. Bouza Álvarez, Ed., *Galicia: da Romanidade á Xermanización, Problemas Históricos e Culturais*, Santiago de Compostela 1993, 219.

³⁵ Hyd. chr. 196; Isid. hist. Goth. 33.

³⁶ Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians*, 181.

³⁷ Hyd. chr. 196: *propriae venena perfidiae*.

³⁸ Hyd. chr. 197; Isid. hist. Suev. 89.

³⁹ Hyd. chr. 201.

⁴⁰ Hyd. chr. 198; Isid. hist. Suev. 89.

⁴¹ Hyd. chr. 199–200.

⁴² Hyd. chr. 203: *gentis perfide*.

⁴³ Hyd. chr. 202.

⁴⁴ Some scholars claim that Balconius, bishop of Bracara [Braga] acted as Hydatius' counterpoint in that he took the Sueves' side in his effort to steer Roman-Sueve relations into a more peaceful direction; cf. C. Torres Rodríguez, *El Reino de los Suevos (Galicia Suevo)*, La Coruña 1977, 93; Arias, *Identity and Interactions*, 53.

good example to show that amid the growing conflict between the Romans and the Sueves, there were still people in Gallaecia who took the Sueves' side.⁴⁵

We next learn of the Sueves only in 463 when the envoys of the Romans and the Goths met those of the Sueves several times. First Theoderic sent the Visigoth Cyrila to them together with Palogorius, a nobleman from Gallaecia, who had met Rechimund's delegation on his way to Theoderic. The envoys were waiting in Lucus for Cyrila to return from Rechimund, but the Sueves, again, *in their duplicitous way broke their promise*⁴⁶ and, characteristically, took to ransacking various areas in Gallaecia. Theoderic then dispatched Cyrila along with a few Gothic envoys who had arrived earlier as well as Remismund,⁴⁷ who, according to Isidore, was Maldras' son⁴⁸ and had married a Visigoth woman and therefore lived in the court of Theoderic for a while. In the end, Cyrila stayed in Gallaecia and Remismund on a few occasions journeyed between Gallaecia and Gaul,⁴⁹ but when he returned to the Gothic king, a full-scale rebellion broke out between the Gallaecians and the Suebi.⁵⁰

In 465, following Frumarius' death, on Theoderic's encouragement the Sueves chose Remismund as their ruler, whom some scholars mistakenly identify with Rechimund. It is still a matter of controversy, how significant was Frumarius' death in Remismund's ascent to the throne, since if Frumarius had controlled only part of the Suebi, in the beginning Remismund held sway over another part.⁵¹ Nevertheless, after Frumarius' death Remismund, based on his *sovereignty*,⁵² had all the Suebi under his control and renewed the peace that had since become invalid. By putting an end to the internal political rivalry, he had practically reunited the Suevic people, which had been split into rival factions for almost a decade.⁵³ In recognition of Remismund's power, Theoderic sent him not only weapons and gifts, but even his wife living in the Visigoth court.⁵⁴ With all this, the Visigoth leadership clearly recognised Remismund's power over the Suebi, however, most historians are of the opinion that Theoderic, by sending the Visigoth princess, was trying to gain control of the Suevic Kingdom.⁵⁵ Jordanes must be exaggerating when he claims that

⁴⁵ Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians*, 171.

⁴⁶ Hyd. chr. 215: *promissionum suarum fallaces et perfidi*.

⁴⁷ Hyd. chr. 216.

⁴⁸ Isid. hist. Goth. 33.

⁴⁹ Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians*, 167.

⁵⁰ Hyd. chr. 216.

⁵¹ Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians*, 167.

⁵² Hyd. chr. 219; Isid. hist. Suev. 90: *regali iure*.

⁵³ H. Wolfram, *Die Goten. Von den Anfängen bis zur Mitte des Sechsten Jahrhunderts*, München 1990, 186.

⁵⁴ Hyd. chr. 222; Isid. hist. Goth. 33; hist. Suev. 90.

⁵⁵ Arias, *Identity and Interactions*, 23; M. Á. Diego Núñez-M. B. Béjar Trancón, "Re-seña Histórica del Reino Suevo," in *Anuario: Instituto de Estudios Zamoranos Florián de Ocampo*, Zamora 1992, 604; Reinhart, *Historia General*, 51; Torres Rodríguez, *El Reino*, 175.

Theoderic permitted the Sueves to choose their own leader and this is how Remismund rose to power.⁵⁶ Following these events, the Sueves, deceitfully, attacked Conimbrica [Coimbra], attacked and robbed the noble Contaber's family, taking the mother and her sons prisoner.⁵⁷ Remismund twice dispatched envoys to the Visigoths, who, on their return, brought word about the death of Emperor Severus, which occurred on 14 November 465.⁵⁸

Hydatius also mentions that it was at this time that Ajax, leader of the Gaulish Arians arrived at the Sueves and started spreading this *dangerous poison*,⁵⁹ the Arian faith among them. The Arian priest must have been conducting his missionary work with Remismund's approval since his efforts at conversion among the Suevic nobility were successful, what is more, according to Isidore, he infected the whole Suevic people with his teachings. Isidore also remarked that it was down to *Alax* that many later Suevic kings took the Arian faith until Theudimir converted them back to Catholicism and took measures to restore Church discipline in Gallaecia.⁶⁰ It is still debated, however, whether Ajax was of Gaulish, Greek or Gallaecian origin. Hydatius names him *Galata*,⁶¹ which is not proven to refer to Gallaecian and Burgess translates it as *Greek* because the Greek authors used this word for the Celts who had settled in Anatolia. Arias also agrees with the assumption of Torres Rodríguez, namely that when Hydatius as a young child was in the East,⁶² he could have encountered this form of reference. Ajax then may have been a Celt from Gaul, who may have been sent to the Sueves by Theoderic in order to further strengthen Visigoth influence.⁶³

Remismund's steps of foreign policy indicate that Theoderic was unable to gain control of the area of the Suevic Kingdom, shown by the fact that the Sueves often launched attacks in opposition to his will. For instance, when in 465 the Sueves were plundering Aunona, even though Theoderic dispatched envoys to Remismund, they were turned away;⁶⁴ in 466 he sent Salla⁶⁵ or Sallanes⁶⁶ to negotiate with the Sueves, but by the time the envoy returned, Theoderic had been murdered by his brother Euric. The new king of the Visigoths wasted no time to send envoys to the Emperor and the Sueves, however, Remismund sent them back and dispatched his own people to enter into nego-

⁵⁶ Iord. *get.* 234.

⁵⁷ Hyd. *chr.* 225. Judging from the detailed description, the attack could have been launched directly against Contaber and his family perhaps because Contaber had rebelled against Suevic rule; cf. Arias, *Identity and Interactions*, 65.

⁵⁸ Hyd. *chr.* 226–227.

⁵⁹ Hyd. *chr.* 228: *pestiferum virus*.

⁶⁰ Isid. *hist. Suev.* 90–91.

⁶¹ Hyd. *chr.* 228: *natione Galata*.

⁶² Hyd. *chr. praef.* 4.

⁶³ Arias, *Identity and Interactions*, 23; Torres Rodríguez, *El Reino*, 175.

⁶⁴ Hyd. *chr.* 229.

⁶⁵ Hyd. *chr.* 233.

⁶⁶ Isid. *hist. Goth.* 33.

tiations with the Romans, Vandals and Goths,⁶⁷ which could be indicative of the deteriorating relations between the Sueves and the Goths. Remismund probably took advantage of the situation to gain greater independence after Theoderic's death.⁶⁸

In 467, after another sacking of Aunona, one of the leaders of the Goths, Opilio, heading a considerable entourage, left Aunona to seek Euric's assistance in the fight against the Suebi. Following the recall of the Suevic envoys, Remismund's troops, characteristically for the purpose of looting went to Lusitania and completely forgetting about the peace agreements, wreaked havoc in Conimbrica: the houses were looted, the walls were demolished, part of the population was killed and the rest taken prisoner, the whole area was left behind without a living soul.⁶⁹ If we are to believe Arias' claim that the Sueves' campaign in Conimbrica was possibly a follow-up after the events of 465,⁷⁰ then in the two years that had passed the Gallaecians rebelling against the Sueves may have gathered strength as action of this magnitude would only be justified if taken to restore order.

Some of the Goths joined the Sueves in 468 and after the Sueves, as a result of Magistrate Lusidius' treachery, took Ulixippona, the arriving Goths started looting among the Sueves and the Romans.⁷¹ According to Isidore, owing to the earlier peace deal, the city was unprepared for a potential attack, thus the Magistrate surrendered the city without resistance.⁷² Supposedly, Lusidius' treachery is another example that some of the Gallaecians took sides with the Sueves. This is further supported by what Hydatius chronicles, namely that the residents of Aunona made peace with the Sueves,⁷³ which could also be viewed as a closure to a long process. Aunona had indeed been plundered by Remismund since 465, but its residents constantly resisted him and rose up against the conquering intentions of the Sueves with varying degrees of success.⁷⁴ The peace deal struck in 468 was one honoured even by the Sueves unlike earlier ones made with the Gallaecians, which they regularly broke.

After this, Remismund plunged himself into looting in the area of Asturica [Astorga] and plundered some parts of Lusitania. The Goths reacted with similar action in the area perhaps with the objective to counterbalance the Suevic campaigns, however, in the sources there is no mention of clashes between Suevic and Visigoth forces. Consequently, the Sueves completely broke off diplomatic ties with the Visigoths while with Emperor Leo they entered into

⁶⁷ Hyd. chr. 234.

⁶⁸ Arias, *Identity and Interactions*, 23.

⁶⁹ Hyd. chr. 235–237.

⁷⁰ Arias, *Identity and Interactions*, 65.

⁷¹ Hyd. chr. 239–240.

⁷² Isid. hist. Suv. 90.

⁷³ Hyd. chr. 243.

⁷⁴ Arias, *Identity and Interactions*, 65.

negotiations mediated by Lusidius.⁷⁵ This is the last entry in Hydatius's *Chronica* relating to the Sueves.

One of the main objectives of Remismund's foreign policy may have been to bring the territories lost to Theoderic's attack under Suevic control again. His other campaigns were aimed at the rebellious Gallaecians, who endeavoured to withstand Remismund's growing power.⁷⁶

As Hydatius' records stopped in 468, we do not know exactly what happened to Remismund, but many scholars have come to the conclusion that the leaders of the Gallaecians gradually accepted Suevic rule⁷⁷ owing to the fact that with his successful foreign policy Remismund was able to stabilise the Suevic Kingdom after the defeat of 456. It is unlikely that in the dark period after 468 anything significant could have happened since no source relates such developments. If we accept that by the end of Remismund's reign relations between the Suebi and the Gallaecians had settled, in the forthcoming long and uneventful period their relations could even have improved.⁷⁸ Although Remismund supported Arian Christianity, apart from this the integration of the Suebi could have increased in the period to come.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Hyd. *chr.* 243–245.

⁷⁶ Arias, *Identity and Interactions*, 66.

⁷⁷ Díaz Martínez, *City and Territory*, 21; Diego Núñez-Béjar Trancón, *Reseña Histórica*, 606–607.

⁷⁸ Arias, *Identity and Interactions*, 66.

⁷⁹ Torres Rodríguez, *El Reino*, 193.