

# Attila the Hun

?-453



**WHY HE MADE HISTORY** Attila the Hun was king of the Huns from 434 to 453. He united his people and waged various military campaigns against the Roman Empire becoming a serious threat to the Empire.



*As you read the biography below, think about how Attila's boldness helped him continue his constant campaigns against the Roman Empire.*



The Huns were nomadic warriors who terrorized and controlled the lands to the east of the Roman Empire, extending through the area that is now Hungary. Attila was the greatest Hun leader. As ruler, Attila managed to unite the various groups of Huns and wage military campaigns against surrounding territories and against the Eastern and Western Roman Empire. His conquests greatly extended the Hun territory and contributed to the wealth of his kingdom.

In 434 Attila began to rule with his older brother, Bleda, after the death of their father. The brothers made a truce with the Eastern Roman emperor. Under the truce, the Romans had to pay a **tribute** of 700 pounds of gold a year to the Huns. In exchange, the Huns would not invade their lands. Attila murdered his brother in 445 and became sole ruler.

Attila waged military campaigns against the Eastern Roman empire on two occasions, both resulting in higher tributes from the Romans.

Attila's relations with the Western Roman Empire were good until the emperor's sister attempted to form an alliance with Attila on her own. He interpreted this as a marriage proposal

## VOCABULARY

**tribute** payment to another nation for protection or peace

**dowry** money or property given to the husband when a woman marries

**Attila the Hun, *continued*****Biography**

and demanded half of the Western Empire as her dowry. Attila attacked when the emperor refused, but had to retreat because the emperor had formed an alliance with the Visigoths. This was Attila's first and only defeat. Attila did not give up though, and he continued to attack and raid Western Roman cities.

In the meantime, the emperor of the Eastern Empire refused to continue paying the high tributes. Attila prepared to invade the Eastern Empire again. Before he could do so, Attila died in his sleep from a nasal hemorrhage.

Although Attila secured high tributes from the Romans that added to the wealth of his kingdom, historians describe him as an economical man. He ate plain food on wooden plates and dressed in modest clothing. In spite of his personal simplicity, Attila's people buried him with treasure according to custom. The Huns killed those who buried Attila so that his tomb would remain a secret forever.

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN?**

- 1. Identify** What places did Attila the Hun wage military campaigns against?

---

---

- 2. Summarize** Why did Attila the Hun wage war against the Western Roman Empire?

---

---

**ACTIVITY**

- 3.** A Roman historian named Ammianus Marcellinus wrote the first systematic description of the Huns in a collection that covered part of the history of the Roman Empire until 378. Imagine that you are a historian during Attila's own time writing about the truce negotiations between Attila and the Eastern Roman emperor. Write your account of the negotiations.