

CHRYSAPIUS, A EUNUCH IN THE COURT OF THEODOSIUS II: INTRIGUES AND DIPLOMACY BETWEEN EAST AND WEST*

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CRISAFIO, UN EUNUCO EN LA CORTE DE TEODOSIO II: INTRIGAS Y DIPLOMACIA ENTRE ORIENTE Y OCCIDENTE

ABSTRACT: In this paper we analyse the role of political and ecclesiastical mediation played at the court of Constantinople by the powerful *praepositus sacri cubiculi* Χρυσάφιος, a key figure both in the rise of Theodosius II and in the doctrinal choices that led the emperor to support the Monophysite trend and to convene the Second Council of Ephesus (449). Despite his diplomatic relevance, the eunuch has received very little attention by the historiography devoted to Late Antiquity in the *Pars Orientis* of the Empire.

KEYWORDS: Late Antiquity; Theodosius II; imperial court; eunuchs; diplomacy.

RESUMEN: En el presente artículo analizamos el papel de mediación política y eclesiástica desempeñado en la corte de Constantinopla por el influyente *praepositus sacri cubiculi* Χρυσάφιος, una figura fundamental tanto en el ascenso de Teodosio II como en las elecciones doctrinales que llevaron al emperador a apoyar la corriente monofisita y a la convocatoria del II Concilio de Éfeso (449). A pesar de su relevancia diplomática, el eunuco ha sido objeto de muy escasa atención por parte de la historiografía dedicada a la Antigüedad Tardía en la *Pars Orientis* del Imperio.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Antigüedad Tardía; Teodosio II; corte imperial; eunucos; diplomacia.

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“An account of Theodosius’ reign based on the careers of officeholders has yet to be written”,¹ remarked J. Harries in the early 1990s. It would be a line of research –also ignored in a recent volume devoted to the last representative of the Theodosian dynasty²– capable of showing how far high-ranking Late Antique “civil servants” used religion as a tool for political survival as well as for promotion. Under Theodosius II, the upper spheres of the Empire, the heads of government departments, the advisors and most loyal confidants of the emperor and professionals of war and finance, formed a power group that, in the dialectic between social classes, which was rarely pacifist, was able to establish itself as a determinant element within the complex relationships between the imperial court and an increasingly demanding *uox populi*. Among these, certain significant personalities, at the head of the main *scrinia* of the imperial chancellery, formed, in Peter Brown’s words, “the top of an imaginative pyramid that linked a discreet but persistent network of upper-class persuasion to Imperial court”³ and zealously controlled the monopoly of power.

Perhaps the most representative of these, in the last years of Theodosius II’s long reign, was the eunuch Chrysaphius Tzoumas⁴, because of the important role he played as a confidant and plenipotentiary collaborator of the emperor⁵, together with his mentor, the monk Eutyches, in connivance with the Bishop of Alexandria, Dioscorus and against the Constantinopolitan Flavian, in the heated political-religious dispute represented by the second Council of Ephesus, better known as the *Latrocinium Ephesinum* (449)⁶. As a filter, secretary, mediator and confidant, the eunuch went beyond his real position in the hierarchy, as according to some sources he began his career in the court as the subordinate of the *praepositus sacri cubiculi* Urbicius and according to others as the *primicerius* of the chamber while also a *spatarius*, a member of the imperial guard. He came to exercise pressures that were dangerous to resist, especially when anyone attempted to alter the consensus in imperial religious policy (Flavian the Bishop of Constantinople came to understand that at his cost). On another occasion⁷, I have described the intrigues following Ephesus II, which removed first

¹ Harries 1994: 36 and Elton 2006: 136-138. *Vid.* Zecchini 2002 and Millar 2006.

² *Vid.* Kelly 2013.

³ Brown 1988: 69. Regarding the pyramidal structure of the imperial hierarchy, see Cameron 1976: 81 and Carile 1988: 123-176.

⁴ *PLRE* 2.295: Chrysaphius. See Scholten 1994: 248; for the second name, spelt in different ways, Theod. Lect. *HE* 1.1.166: Τζουμᾶς; Io. Mal. *Chron.* 14.3634: τὸν λεγόμενος Τζομμᾶν; Geor. Cedr. 1.601.13: Ζουμνᾶ; see Honigmann 1954: 22-23, who proposes that it is a transliteration of the Syrian name Saumā, in connection with the Syrian archimandrite Bar Sauma, who was active in the years before the Second Council of Ephesus.

⁵ On the role of eunuchs in the Byzantine world, see Ringrose 1996: 86-93; Ringrose 2003: 129; Tougher, 1999: 89-100; Küfler 2001: 31-36 and 308; Sidéris 2002: 161-175 and Spadaro 2006: 535-572.

⁶ On the controversial synod, stigmatised as *Latrocinium* by Leo I (ep. to Pulcheria Augusta), see Acerbi 2001.

⁷ Chew 2006: 207-227; Busch 2015 and Acerbi 2021: 96-114.

Pulcheria and later Eudocia from the court, and also succeeded in eliminating a series of men faithful to the latter –Cyrus of Panopolis, *praefectus praetorius*⁸, and the *magister militum* Paulinus⁹– in sum, how, thanks to the support of a circle of “avid parasites”¹⁰ that swarmed around him, he was able to transform his influence into a kind of regency. Here we would like to complete the human and political profile of the charismatic eunuch in his no less intense fall, by analysing the background of the dynamics between the lay and ecclesiastic ruling classes in the Imperial Court, in a very significant moment in the relationships between East and West.

The εὐφημία recorded in the Syriac transcription of the Second Council of Ephesus, which we have studied in a previous work on the processes of social aggregation in Late Antique cities¹¹, provide the ranked stratification of the Theodosian administration in the mid fifth century¹². The people of Edessa, in a public demonstration that took place in 448, acclaimed enthusiastically and rhythmically, according to the established praxis, the names of the emperor and the eunuch and also those of the highest public servants in the Eastern Empire¹³: Protogenes *praefectus praetorio Orientis*¹⁴, Nomus, *quaestor sacri palatii*¹⁵, Urbicius, *praepositus sacri cubiculi*¹⁶, Anatolius, *magister militum* and patrician¹⁷, the *comes* Theodosius¹⁸, the consul Senator¹⁹ and the *praeses* Chaereas²⁰.

On the eve of the *Latrocinium*, Theodosius II's policy was supported by a relatively enlightened group of senators, a small elite that exercised an efficacious balance between the imperial court and internal and external pressure groups.²¹

⁸ PLRE 2.336-339: Cyrus⁷. On this person, “poet and courtier, civil servant and builder, bishop and hagiographer”, see Cameron 1982: 130 and Constantelos 1971: 455-463. Regarding his role, cryptopagan for some, Christian for others, see Torallas 2015: 257.

⁹ PLRE 2.846-847: Paulinus⁸.

¹⁰ Cfr. Gow 1965 and Cameron (1982: 136) attributes the fr. 9.136 to Cyrus of Panopolis, and suggests precisely that it alludes to Chrysaphius' circle.

¹¹ Acerbi 2010.

¹² The mention of Chrysaphius demonstrates, against the opinion generally accepted until now, –see Delmaire 1984: 144 y Chrysos 1981: 467– that the highest officeholders were not remembered in popular acclamations in their hierarchical order, see Scholten 1994: 115-116.

¹³ “Thou, the One God! To Theodosius victory, One God, give the Romans victory! To the Eparchs many years, To Protogenes many years– ... To Nomus many years–... To Zeno the General many years, To Chrysaphius many years, To Urbicius many years, To Anatolius the Patrician many years. May Anatolius be preserved to the Roman Empire, to Senator many years, to count Theodosius many, to Chereas many, may he be preserved to the Augusti...”: Perry 1881: 49-50.

¹⁴ PLRE 1.927: Fl. Flor(entius) Romanus Protogenes.

¹⁵ PLRE 1.785: Nomus¹.

¹⁶ PLRE 1.1188-1190: Urbicius¹, cfr. Scholten 1994: 237-239, and Clauss 1984: 1245.

¹⁷ PLRE 2.84-85: Anatolius¹⁰.

¹⁸ PLRE 2.1101: Theodosius¹¹.

¹⁹ PLRE 2.990: Fl. Senator⁴.

²⁰ PLRE 2.282: Flavius Thomas Iulianus Chaereas.

²¹ For all of them, see a summary in Guiland 1976: 140-174 and Millar 2006: 193.

This group included Senator, the consul in 436 and correspondent of Theodoret of Cyrrihus, who valued him very highly, who, together with Anatolius, was responsible for the difficult negotiations with the Huns that preceded the treaty in 443²²; Anatolius, who had signed another two treaties, and was himself consul in 440, patrician, *magister militum praesentialis*, and closely linked to Nomus with whom in 449 he had undertaken an important mission in Attila's camp, to be explained below; and Nomus, consul in 445, after holding the prestigious post of *magister officiorum*, who was presented in the Proceedings of the Council of Chalcedon as "he who has the control of the whole world in his hands"²³. The prosopographic data confirm that also Urbicius, even after being supplanted by Chrysaphius in the chamber as regards his personal consideration, held an important position in the imperial staff. They were nearly all connected with Theodosius's western policies and the military and diplomatic missions in relation to the Huns, who at that time had intensified their pressure on the *limes* of the Empire and had even reached the gates of the βασιλέουσα πόλις²⁴. The emperor's strategy had been to agree their withdrawal in return for onerous tributes, as the military expeditions had rarely been successful. The idea was to avoid the expense of a new campaign in which the possibilities of victory were very low. In addition to the strictly military costs, the ferocity of the extremely mobile nomadic people had caused numerous human casualties (extermination of population over vast territories) and economic losses (serious damage to agriculture)²⁵. Therefore, advised by his faithful minister Chrysaphius, Theodosius II opted not to take arms against the enemy²⁶. As well as attempting to maintain peace and avoid repeating the events of between 441 and 443, the line now adopted protected much of the Eastern population from the tough financial burden it had suffered in the last decade in the first half of the fifth century because of sieges, earthquakes, shortages and epidemics²⁷. At the same time, a demographic and

²² Bayless 1976: 176-179; Zecchini 1999: 777-791 and Azzara 2003. Write Zecchini 2015: 309: "Gli Unni privilegiarono sempre lo strumento diplomatico, solo sporadicamente affiancato dalla pressione militare, per ottenere migliori condizioni economiche (sussidi aurei; zone franche di mercato) e soprattutto una chiara linea di demarcazione tra due zone d'influenza".

²³ ACO 2.1.1.21.

²⁴ For these nomadic people, cfr. Thompson 1948; Moravcsik 1958: 479-488; Maenchen-Helfen 1973; Thompson 1999; Rouché 2009; Kelly 2008; Roberto 2010; Bozoky 2012; Gordon 2013 and Kim 2013.

²⁵ Carile 1988: 55-87.

²⁶ The tough conditions Attila demanded from Theodosius II are described in the fr. 3 of Prisc. The text has been interpreted in different ways, see Wirth 1967: 54; Maltese 1977: 265; Maltese 1979: 297-320.; see also Whitby 1992: 295-303; Lee 1993; Pohl 2013: 64-83; Nechaeva 2014 and Drocourt and Malamut 2020. Above all, as if it had been planned, there were multiple fronts. As well as by the Huns, pressure was being exercised by the Persians, Vandals, Isaurians, Saracens, Ethiopians, Blemmyes and other nomadic tribes, Sartor 2008: 43-84 and Thompson 1948: 95-96.

²⁷ Nestorius' *Bazaar of Heracleides*: 318, describes the desperate situation in the East at the time of Attila's two great invasions (441-443 and 447): "People had been annihilated by the plague and famine, by the lack of rain and then by hailstones, by heat and tremendous earthquakes, by terror and all kind of

economic-territorial policy had begun which, open to the circuit of exchange, finally favoured the merchants who stimulated the system of trade and communications, the ἐμπορικόν. Those small *negotiatores* who might endanger political order, together with other social groups not wholly without economic means and professional abilities, supported Chrysapius and were loyal to him in his policy favourable towards Eutyches and Monophysitism²⁸. The members of the senatorial class lost out, as they had to pay the high price for peace²⁹. Indeed, to pay the compensation Attila demanded, Theodosius II was forced to take taxation measures that harmed them. Most of the Constantinopolitan aristocracy probably supported their bishop and dyophysitism, not only for doctrinal reasons but, above all, to reject the hard taxation policy imposed by the imperial court to meet Attila's demands.

The historian Priscus of Panium, “universally recognized as the standard authority for the events of the years in question”³⁰ became the spokesman for the discontent of the senatorial class that had been forced to pay the humiliating tax following the agreement with the Huns signed by the *magister utriusque militiae* Anatolius in 443. He deplored the sudden changes in fortune suffered by many people of his own class. Those who had long possessed wealth (οἱ πάλαι εὐδαίμονες) had gone to the market-place, after selling their own goods (ἐπιπλα) to sacrifice their wives' jewellery too (τὸν κόσμον τῶν γυναικῶν). This calamity, added to the hardships caused by the war, had driven many to suicide³¹. This picture was undoubtedly exaggerated by literary rhetoric and Priscus's clear political sympathies, since he was hostile to Theodosius II as he was a member of the staff of his successor Marcian³². Indeed, Priscus was linked to Maximinus, a high-level bureaucrat in the Theodosian court³³ and as an *assessor*, belonged to the οἰκία of Euphemius, who was to be the supervisor of Marcian's policies³⁴. It is a picture that cannot be accepted uncritically: Attila demanded 6,000 pounds of gold in 443³⁵ and this was the amount that the senatorial class had to provide. As Thompson has calculated, if the *ordo* senatorial in the *pars Orientis* consisted

evils. Two invasions on the frontier by the barbarians and the Scythians were destroying everything and taking prisoners who had no hope of being rescued”.

²⁸ For Theodosius's sympathies towards “non-aristocratic classes: craftsmen, merchants and manufacturers” see Frend 1972: 16.

²⁹ *Chron. Min.* 2.82, *MGH AA.9*.

³⁰ Thompson 1948: 222 and Baldwin 1980: 18-61.

³¹ *Prisc. fr.* 7. Also, the passage in which he describes Attila's tough demands is difficult to interpret. See Wirth 1967: 47 and Maltese 1977: 270-217.

³² *PLRE 2*: Priscus¹.

³³ *PLRE 2.743* Maximinus¹¹. Cfr. Ensslin 1926-27: 1-9; Nechaeva 2012: 20-31., suggests identifying him with Maximinus⁶ (*PLRE 2 742*) comes et magister scrinii memoriae. Recently Given (2014: 12-13) thinks that, if Prisco was an assessor, he worked for Euphemius (*PLRE 2*: Euphemius¹), not for Maximinus. The author (*ibid.*) even doubts that he was an assessor: “It seems more likely that he followed Maximinus as an unofficial adviser”.

³⁴ *PLRE 2.424*: Euphemius¹.

³⁵ Thompson 1948: 215.

of about 2,000 members, the tax would not have been more than 60 *centenaria* of gold per capita annually, an amount they would have been able to pay without being ruined³⁶.

In any case, the support of the senatorial class in doctrinal matters and of the local aristocracy for the Constantinopolitan church and its bishop, Flavian, on the eve of the Second Council of Ephesus (449), as well as the cohesion between forces that had been in conflict in the past –nobility and clergy– may be explained by the difficult situations created by the policy of subsidies promoted by Chrysaphius. If in this phase, the scheming eunuch still supported the monk Eutyches, his godfather, it may also have been to cause a distraction to the criticism of his taxation programme and his unpopularity due to the failure of his conspiracy against Attila. In this episode, which is basic to understand Theodosius II's policy towards the West, we now need to pause, to complete a brief description of the eunuch Chrysaphius and explain the antecedents of his fall.

The story of the failed plan to assassinate Attila is found in fragments of Priscus' lost work that other authors have conserved: John, the monophysite patriarch of Antioch in the mid seventh century, whose *Istoria Kroniké* is fundamental to re-establish the tradition of Priscus's original text, and Eustathius of Epiphany in his Epitome. The relative parts of the Roman expeditions to allies' or enemies' camps were also conserved, through a selective copy-and-paste, by the zealous *excerptores* in the service of Constantine Porphyrogenitus (*excerpta de legationibus*)³⁷.

It should be said that if Priscus, a significant exponent of a cultured and pragmatic administrative class and also an eye-witness of many of the events he describes, was highly-valued by the authors who have conserved his work, albeit fragmentarily, this is partly due to his unquestionably polemic view of the last members of the Theodosian dynasty. To him we owe the picture of Theodosius II as timid, weak, irresolute, easily influenced, almost a child in his ministers'

³⁶ Thompson 1948. We are told that Cyril of Alexandria distributed nearly 2,000 pounds after the First Council of Ephesus to corrupt members of the court and high officials; about this, cfr. Teja 1995: 151-163 and Teja 2012: 397-423. Thus, the so-called "Christian Pharaoh" had access to an amount equal to a third of all the capital demanded from the senatorial *ordo*.

³⁷ The *ιστορία*, which covers a period from the first years of Theodosius II until the death of Leo I, can be read in *excerpta* found in other fifth-sixth century sources, until Constantine Porphyrogenitus (mid tenth century), which have been edited: see Müller 1851: 69-110; Müller 1870: 24-26; Bornmann 1979; Carolla 2008. Blockley (1981: 222-376) offers an english translation. The *Excerpta de Legationibus* (ELR) have been edited for the first time by Boor 1903: 121-155 and 575-591; Carolla 2000. Priscus's text, in connection with the sources that transmit it, has been studied by Doblhofer 1955; Maltese 1977; Baldwin 1980: 18-61; Roberto 2000-2002: 117-159, who studies the episodes contained in Io. Ant., *Excerpta de Insidiis*; Carolla 2016. The text, rather long, of the frg. 8 according to Müller 1941: 78-94, has been edited and translated into English by Blockley 1983: 246-376. (Müller, frg. 8 = Blockley, exc. 11.2; 12.1; 13.1; 13.3; 14; 15.1). A good translation is Given 2014.

hands³⁸, which was inherited and successively disseminated by later authors, from Evagrius Scholasticus in the sixth century to Gibbon in the eighteenth century³⁹. However, the esteem that Priscus enjoyed was especially due to his lucid view of the destiny of the West. Like Olympiodorus, Priscus fixed his analysis in the weakness of the state structures in the *pars Occidentalis* by concentrating on the deeds of Aëtius as the bastion of the Empire until he was eliminated on the will of an irresponsible Valentinian, of Gensericus's shrewdness, and the force of the Vandal kingdom, positioned like a strategic curtain between the eastern and western Mediterranean. According to his careful analysis, Aëtius's death, Recimerus' arrogance and the dramatic parable of Anthemius were the events that marked the end of the Western Empire. In addition to certain specific episodes, Priscus –as U. Roberto wrote– appears to transmit the idea of a history of the Mediterranean as the reflection of an Ecumene still united politically and culturally. His work also confirms that there was a public in the East that was very interested in the history of the West: it is not by chance that his historiographical line was continued by such authors as Malchus of Philadelphia and Candidus Isaurichus⁴⁰.

Returning to the conspiracy against Attila, in spring 449, a high-ranked official, of Scythian lineage, called Edecon, corps guard and personal friend of the king, came to Constantinople. He was accompanied by Orestes, a future *magister militum* in Gaul and father of the last emperor in the West, Romulus Augustulus, who at that time was in the service of Attila as his personal secretary. Edecon was admitted into the throne room, where Chrysaphius awaited him with Vigilas, an interpreter, as Edecon did not speak either Latin or Greek. Although Orestes spoke Latin, which would have been useful on his diplomatic missions in Ravenna, he was not allowed to enter the room. After dealing with the matter of the return of prisoners and deserters, the eunuch offered him a huge amount of money for the life of the king of the Huns⁴¹. Edecon accepted the offer but, some months later when a Roman delegation, including Priscus, the author of the report, and Maximinus reached Attila's court after a long journey through Serdica and Nish, he revealed the secret plan to his king. Attila, wild with fury, after an investigation and holding the members of the delegation hostage, demanded the traitor's death⁴². However, Chrysaphius, probably thanks to the intervention of Anatolius and Nomus, who reached Attila's camp in a further delegation bearing

³⁸ Sud. 0145, II 694-695 Adler; cfr. Luiheid 1965: 13-38 and Harries 1994: 36.

³⁹ Theodosius "condemned to pass his perpetual infancy encompassed only by a servile train of woman and eunuchs": see Gibbon 1781: 317. A more balanced view about the emperor is to be found in Manmana 2008 and Manmana 2014.

⁴⁰ On Priscus and the interest of Eastern historiography in the *Pars Occidentis* see Roberto 2000-2002: 119. See also Blockey 2003: 289-315; Liebschuetz 2003: 177-218; Treadgold 2007 and Milazzo 2010: 99-112.

⁴¹ Prisc. fr. 7.

⁴² Prisc. fr. 8. Cfr. Thompson 1950: 74 and Zuckerman 1994: 159-182.

gold⁴³, was able to save his life, against the opinion of the *magister militum* Zeno, who was in favour of his immediate deposition and execution⁴⁴.

Modern historians doubt that Chrysaphius would have been able to draw up such a complex plot on his own. They think that the conspiracy would have been planned by members of Theodosius II's government, who represented an opinion opposed to the policy of conciliation with the Huns and later blamed him for the failure to neutralise him, or even that Theodosius knew the plans and had taken part in them⁴⁵. Indeed, Priscus seems to suggest that the emperor, after being informed of the plot, gave it his approval. It is surprising that the conspiracy was discovered so quickly and that Attila, who was certainly very avid, accepted money and gifts and renounced the eunuch's head as if he did not believe in his exclusive responsibility. Edecon and Vigilas the interpreter may have been given the task with the order of blaming Chrysaphius if they were discovered, or perhaps the conspiracy was only an elaborate "pantomime" to ruin and neutralise the eunuch and break to diplomatic agreement reached by Theodosius's negotiators. Attila's death was not the main interest: it would not have removed the military danger of the Huns and, on the contrary, might have pushed them towards the capital thus benefitting the party in favour of war. Even so, after the conspiracy was discovered, Attila and Theodosius's relationship in the last year of the latter's reign was quite conciliatory, and some claim that this pushed Attila towards the West.

The failure of the plot occurred a few months before the Second Council of Ephesus. According to Goubert, a theological victory would have opportunely balanced Chrysaphius's serious political defeat, especially because in this way the eunuch would have guaranteed the alliance with the enemies of the Constantinopolitan bishop, *in primis* the Bishop of Alexandria, Dioscorus. Evidently, like the imperial entourage, public opinion was also greatly divided. Supporting Eutyches and the cause of the powerful Constantinopolitan monastic community faithful to him would have made him recover his popularity in some parts of the city⁴⁶. Luibheid and Gregory disagree with Goubert. Political activity in Eutyches's service could not have been motivated by the aim of creating an element of distraction as in fact Chrysaphius remained faithful to his godfather's cause even when the monk's "ignorance and ineptitude" had become clear, and the political situation had changed radically⁴⁷.

⁴³ Croke 1981: 165-166. See also Thompson 1945: 112-115.

⁴⁴ Prisc. fr. 12 and 13, *ibid.*, 97.

⁴⁵ See the detailed reconstruction by Kelly 2009: 176.

⁴⁶ Goubert 1951: 308.

⁴⁷ Luibheid 1965: 13 and Gregory 1986: 186: his unpopularity was also aggravated by the fact that, according to public opinion, the eunuch was behind the tough corrective measures of anti-Jewish legislation and against the Jewish communities in Constantinople. However, it has been noted that in the *Book of Heraclides* Nestorius accuses Theodosius of rapacity and not Chrysaphius: Blaudeau 2012: 99-111.

On 30 March 449, Theodosius sent Dioscorus the letter convening the new ecumenical council, which met in Ephesus in August of that same year. On Eutyches and Dioscorus' request⁴⁸, the Synod met to examine the imputations made by Flavian of Constantinople against the archimandrite Eutyches in the ἐνδημοῦσα synod of 448⁴⁹. In accordance with the agenda that had been set, in theory, to confirm the Nicene faith and radically extirpate the Nestorian heresy, the Second Council of Ephesus achieved its objective. The pressure exercised by Dioscorus in the presidency was clearly manifested in depriving all the bishops of the rival party freedom of speech, even the delegates of Pope Leo, who in vain attempted to read an epistle from the pope, the *Tomus Leonis*, addressed to the council fathers. At the end of several sessions, from 8 to 26 August 449, in which the most important theologians of the Antioch school were deposed under the accusation of Nestorianism, Dioscorus succeeded in imposing Eutyches's doctrine as orthodox and undermining the authority of Flavian, who, according to some sources, died as a result of the violence unleashed during the synod⁵⁰.

Following Theophanes⁵¹, many ancient historians, including Zonaras⁵² and Constantine Manasses⁵³, stated that, before dying, Theodosius reconsidered (ἐπιλογισάμενος) what had occurred in the 449 Council and, deploring Flavian's death, had radically changed his attitude towards the eunuch Chrysaphius as the direct or indirect cause of this fatality. After banishing him and confiscating his property, he had again come to be on good terms with his sister Pulcheria and allowed her to return to the court⁵⁴. This Theodosius, converted to orthodoxy and repentant, closer to the image of the *pious princeps* than modern historians will accept, had even organised a solemn procession in the *Hebdomon* in honour of Flavian, the innocent martyr of the Second Ephesus Council.⁵⁵ However, it is difficult to give credibility to this version.⁵⁶ It is quite unlikely that Theodosius, even noting the discontent in Constantinople and the delicate situation as regards

⁴⁸ Liberatus *Brev.* 12 = ACO 2.5.217: *agebant apud principem universale fieri synodum.*

⁴⁹ Acerbi 2001: 102.

⁵⁰ Both Dioscorus and Chrysaphius were accused of Flavian's death, cfr. Blaudeau 2011: 86-100.

⁵¹ Theoph. *Chronogr.* 106.

⁵² Zonar. *Epit.* 3.212.

⁵³ Const. Manasses *Compend. Chron.* 2754-2775, ed. Bekker 1837: 119.

⁵⁴ See Bury 1923: 235: "The power of Chrysaphius remained unshaken until a few months before the Emperor's death, when he fell out of favour and the influence of Pulcheria again re-asserted itself".

⁵⁵ Leo Mag. *Ep.* 77 (Letter of Pulcheria to Pope Leo) and Theoph. *Chronogr.* a. m. 5942, a. 449-450; Vallejo-Girvés 2000 in Reinhardt 2000: 528.

⁵⁶ However, Goubert (1951: 314) admits it, as he thinks it true that Pulcheria was called to the court by Theodosius; in his opinion it was not a problem, not even if the Pope was not informed about it. Also Gregory (1986: 168) is convinced that Theodosius changed his policies before dying. As Chrysaphius had many enemies in the clergy, in the court and in the army (including the *magister militum* Zeno), the historian thinks that Pulcheria would have supported the policy favourable to the Bishop of Rome, together with some "dissident-army officers in Constantinople". These are interesting conjectures, but with no real support in the sources. See also Cosentino 2012: 125-139.

Rome, would have promoted a change in his religious policy. No signs of this are seen in his last letters⁵⁷.

Undoubtedly, the emperor's sudden death following a riding accident in July 450, the succession in the power of Pulcheria, of dyophysite tendencies and philo-Roman, and the enthroning of her husband Marcian⁵⁸, would have led to a rapid change in the political-institutional context and policies towards the Huns. The tension caused by Chrysaphius's taxation measures ended when the new emperor, a general born in Illyria, behind whom the powerful *magister militum* Aspar acted, introduced a significant change in relations with *gentes externae*⁵⁹. He refused to pay the Huns the customary tax and decided to attack them on the eastern edge of the Empire while they were fighting in Italy. The end of the subsidies to the enemy signified a reduction in the taxation burden and immediate tax rebates for the senatorial class⁶⁰. The new measures, which rapidly led to abandoning Chrysaphius's fiscal and anti-senatorial policy, were praised by Priscus⁶¹, which, according to Thompson, explains the antipathy and resentment towards the last heir of the Theodosian dynasty in the East.

It has been noted that it was religious prejudice, as Theodosius II is universally remembered as the emperor of the *Latrocinium* and Chrysaphius as the "grey eminence" of the council, that led historians to issue such a severe verdict on his policy⁶² (praised by monophysite historiography⁶³). Yet, on the contrary, was it not the taxation policy that harmed the senatorial class accustomed to imperial privileges and immunity that influenced the religious options of the upper classes? After Marcian came to the throne, the members of the aristocracy adhered to Chalcedonian orthodoxy as an instrument within a strategy aimed at safeguarding their own socio-economic privileges as well as defend-

⁵⁷ On the attribution of the greater responsibility of Theodosius or Chrysaphius in the decisions at the Council in later Chalcedonian sources, Bevan and Gray 2008: 622-623.

⁵⁸ Burgess 1993-1994: 47-68 and Hohlfeider 1984: 54-69.

⁵⁹ An episode described in Evagrius *HE* 2.1-2.74 aims to justify Marcian's non-intervention policy against the Vandals with the renewed activity against the Huns. When he was fighting the Vandals together with Aspar in 431-432, Marcian fell into the enemies' hands. Genseric, when visiting the prisoners' camp, was stupefied to see an eagle fly towards the soldier, who was asleep because of the summer heat, and continued to fly between him and the sun, to provide shade. Foreseeing the soldier's future in this wonder, Genseric freed him after making him swear that, once on the throne, he would not declare war on his people, see Scott 2012: 131, previously published in Macrides 2010: 115-131.

⁶⁰ Between 11 October 450 and 18 January 451, Marcian issued an edict addressed to Palladius, *praefecto praetorio Orientis*, abolishing the *foliis*, the tax on senatorial properties. A later ruling reduced the number of senators subject to the burdensome tax of the *praetorium*: Cod. Iust. 12.2.2 and Cod. Theod. 2.2a nov. of Marcianus; see Gregory 1986: 194, n. 22 and 23.

⁶¹ Thompson 1948: 222. Prisc. (fr. 15) created the view of Marcian's reign as the new Golden Age, as shown by later chronicles (Theoph. *Chronogr.* a. m. 5946: καὶ ἦν ἐκεῖνα τὰ ἔτη τῇ τοῦ βασιλέως χρηστότητι; Lyd. *Mag.* 3.43.132: Μαρκιανὸν τὸν μέτριον; Prisc. fr. 15).

⁶² "In all, it is idle to speak of the 'weakness' of Chrysaphius' policy on the Danube frontier. No other course was open to him than a policy of subsidies", cfr. Thompson 1948: 220.

⁶³ Whitby 2003; Camplani 2013: 240-257.

ing the political-institutional prerogatives of their social group. A class solidarity formed around Chalcedonian orthodoxy in which theological adhesion was largely instrumental.

The elimination of Chrysaphius was doubtlessly a priority for the newly-en-throned imperial couple Marcian and Pulcheria⁶⁴. In summer 449, soon after the Second Council of Ephesus, the dispute with the Isaurian general Flavius Zeno⁶⁵ whom Theodosius II suspected of planning a conspiracy to take power, had ended in bloody riots⁶⁶. It was a forewarning⁶⁷. Chrysaphius then agreed to call Aspar⁶⁸, who from that time onwards gradually regained the favour of the court and, indeed, who became Marcian's principal mentor.

The sources provide details, sometimes contradictory, about the circumstances of the eunuch's execution⁶⁹. According to Marcellinus's *Chronicon*, it took place in the same year as Theodosius's death, in 450⁷⁰. Insisting on the *auaritia* that led him to his death, Marcellinus seems to be referring to the greed with which Chrysaphius was notoriously known to sell his favours but mostly to accusations of extortion in connection with his major role in Theodosius II's taxation policy⁷¹. Both Victor of Tunnuna⁷² and Prosperus of Aquitania⁷³ mention the causes and circumstances in which the eunuch became trapped in the net of his acquaintances, those scheming relationships in the court –*aulicorum fauore*– thanks to which he had been able to pull the strings of imperial policies during a decade.

Greek historians provide more precise information. Theodor Lector⁷⁴ attributes Chrysaphius's death to Pulcheria. Theophanes's account gives more details⁷⁵. As mentioned above, before dying, Theodosius had become aware that he

⁶⁴ Goubert 1951: 315-318.

⁶⁵ On the Isaurian commander, called by the eunuch himself in 447 to defend Constantinople from the attacks of the Huns, cfr. Demandt 1970: 742-743, *PLRE* 2.1199. Fl. Zeno⁶; the *magister militum* had been opposed to Chrysaphius's policy towards the Huns. See also Lee 2013: 90-108.

⁶⁶ On the circumstances, see Prisc., fr. 8, 12-14 (*FGH* 4.93-98), and Io. Ant. (fr. 199, *FHG* 4.613).

⁶⁷ Gregory thinks that the disturbances had been encouraged by opponents of the Second Council of Ephesus, i.e. Chrysaphius's opponents, as "their resistance to imperial religious policy made them dangerous natural allies of the usurper", Gregory 1986: 165.

⁶⁸ Thompson 1946: 22 and Thompson 1948: 219.

⁶⁹ Marcell. *chron.* a. 450 83; Prosperus *Chron. Min.* 1.481; Victor of Tunnuna 1.481; Theod. Lect. 165; *Chron. Pasch.* 590; Theoph. *Chronogr.* 101.

⁷⁰ Marcell. *chron.* 83: *Chrisaphius eunuchus Pulcheriae Theodosii sororis nutu sua cum auaritia interemptus est.*

⁷¹ However, during the Late Empire, the taxation system was so oppressive that very few emperors or ministers could escape from that type of accusation: Bury 1923: 348. Forty-one years before, the eunuch Eutropius had been the object of the same accusation with Arcadius: *uenale suffragium*; Zos. 5.13.

⁷² Victor of Tunnuna *Chron.* 11.2.185.

⁷³ Prosp. *Chron. Min.* 1.481.

⁷⁴ Theod. Lect. *HE* 1.1.

⁷⁵ Theoph. *Chronogr.* 101-103.

had been a victim of the schemes of the *cubicularius*, and realising the outrage suffered by Flavian and other innocent bishops, had banished Chrysaphius to an island and made Pulcheria return to the palace. Also in this version, like in that of Theodor Lector, it was Pulcheria who decided his death and handed him over to Jordanes⁷⁶, the son of the Vandal *magister militum* John⁷⁷ whom Chrysaphius had had assassinated at the start of his career in the court. It was an exquisitely cruel revenge that freed the pious empress from any scruples of conscience⁷⁸.

The eunuch's definitive exit from the political scene –also taking with him Urbicius the *praepositus sacri cubiculi* who was forced to leave the court and withdraw to a monastic life⁷⁹– must have pleased his numerous enemies and made a noticeable change to the political balance of power, not only in the palace but also in the city. The reason for his execution, which according to Malalas was called for not by Pulcheria but by Marcian, was said to be the circumstance that Chrysaphius was the main patron of the Greens⁸⁰. These, and the segments of society they represented, mainly craftsmen, traders and merchants, who had been favoured by the eunuch's financial policies, lost importance and support after his execution. Unlike his predecessor, Marcian was a keen supporter of the Blues⁸¹ who, we may imagine, attended the capital punishment with great interest. According to the *Chronicon Paschale*⁸², this took place in the imperial city, in the surroundings of the Gate of Melantias⁸³.

Only two years later, many of those who had been closely associated with the eunuch in his attempt to placate the Empire's enemies – Anatolius, Nomus, Senator and Protegenes, together with Florentius, another of Theodosius II's men, who had supported the subsidies policy by backing it with their prestige and had very likely manipulated the failed conspiracy against Attila, attended the Council of Chalcedon. They sat among the lay dignitaries representing Emperor Marcian and supported a religious policy opposed to that of Theodosius, like convinced defenders of a new orthodoxy⁸⁴. Once again, here appears the versa-

⁷⁶ PLRE 2.620, Iordanes³.

⁷⁷ PLRE 2.597, Ioannes¹³.

⁷⁸ As noted by Gibbon 1781 (3.34): “[...] Pulcheria ascended the throne, then she indulged her own and the public resentment by an act of popular justice. Without any legal trial the eunuch Chrysaphius was executed before the gates of the city; and the immense riches which had been accumulated by the rapacious favourite served only to hasten and to justify his punishment”. On the disputed participation of the empresses in the Christological conflicts at the time, see now Blaudeau 2003.

⁷⁹ In the monastery of Rufinian, founded and run by the monk Hipatius, see Callinic. *Vida de Hipacio* 15, ed. R. Teja 2009. It seems that he died there at a very old age, during the reign of Anastasius (491-598).

⁸⁰ Io. Mal. *Chron.* 368.

⁸¹ Miller, Vandome and McBrewster 2010: 592; Cameron 1988: 233; Heucke 1994. In the Council of Chalcedon, the Greens had no ecclesiastic support; see Vespignani 1985: 61-101 and Vespignani 2010.

⁸² *Chron. Pasch.* 590.

⁸³ For the identification of the place, probably a gate in the city walls, see Goubert 1951: 316-317.

⁸⁴ Delmaire 1984: 165.

tility and flexibility of the lay ruling class, parallel to the ecclesiastical class (the chameleon-bishops that Theodoret of Cyrrhus speaks of)⁸⁵. Thanks to this ideological flexibility and adaptability, and a notable capacity of class cohesion, these “enlightened liberals” survived the dissolution of the political system through which they had been able to exert power, maintaining an unquestionable capacity of political influence and even strengthening and legitimising it, within a completely new reality. However, to do that, Chrysaphius, the eternal mediator, had to be sacrificed.

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⁸⁵ Thdt. Ep. 125 (to John of Germanicia).

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