

Importance of Roman Historian Olympiodorus with Regard to Turkic History*

Ali Ahmetbeyoglu

Istanbul University, Turkey

Abstract: The history written by Olympiodorus in 407-425 has survived as fragments to nowadays. Olympiodorus was historian and moreover went to Hun capital, and met Hun King in 412; that makes him more important in respect of Turkic History of Eastern Europe. The book of Olympiodorus contains information about early Hunnic raids toward Ilyria and Thrace.

Key Words: European Hun State, Eastern Europe, Thrace, East Roman, Turkic History

There is no information about Olympiodorus's early childhood and young times who is predicted to be born in Thebes, Egypt between the years of 365-380. Olympiodorus about whom little is known defined himself as a poet. This situation makes us think that he was one of these minstrels in Egypt at those times (Thompson, 1948.p.8; Moravcsik, 1958. p.469). In his time when literary success was honored with diplomatic positions so Olympiodorus spent most of his life by serving II.

* This study is supported by İstanbul University Scientific Research Projects Department

Theodosius (408-450). He is thought to serve for some time for West Roman Empire Honorius (393-395, Rome, 395-423 West Roman Empire) with regard to his interest in West Roman Empire and his use of Latin Language in his works.

His first significant profession known in the name of East Roman Empire was his being sent to Huns as an ambassador¹. Olympiodorus whose philosophical aspect was also dominant participated in the meetings of sophists in 415. After a while, he went to Egypt and visited his hometown: Thebes. Right after this, he was invited to Blymmes and as a result of this trip and his efforts, some tribes entered into Roman Empire. Also, on behalf of East Roman Empire, he was sent to Rome with diplomatic mission in the time of III. Valentinianus (425-455) in 425 (Moravcsik, 1958. p.468).

Olympiodorus wrote a history series of twenty one books which barely survived thanks to historian Photus (9. Century) His books begin with the Germans entering into Galia by passing Rein River and ends with the succession of III. Valentinianus between the years of 407-425 (Olympiodorus' work's publishing Müller, 1851. s.57-68. English translation: Blockley, 1983. p.153-209). Also, it is suggested that there is an introduction part which tells the German invasion in 405-406. Olympiodorus' work is lost now and only the parts taking place in Photios' work. (Photius, 1959. Olympiodorus' works parts. I, p.166-187). Also, Olympiodorus was referred by; Zosimus (V. Century historian Zosimus, he referred completely Olympiodorus in his works last part regarding Alarik's invasion of Roma. Zosimus, 1887), Sozomenus

¹ It is unknown that there was any other ambassador from Eastern Rome when Huns were on the Don vicinity.

(V.century) (Sozomenus, p. 843-1630), Philostorgius (V.century) and partly Prokopios (VI.century. He referred to Olympiodorus in III-IV parts of his book where he tells Vandal wars) (Procopius, 1962) Also, for he was directly referred as main source, some more information was acquired about his that work. His books' first ten volumes have the information about the events between 407-412 and second ten-book part contains the events between 413-425. Olympiodorus' History differs from his contemporary and later historians' works by means of content and pen (Blockley, 1981. s.28-29; Keçiş, 2008. s.134-135).

Olympiodorus' work is not defined as history but a source for those who will write history. In spite of the fact that he was a poet, his pen was open, clear and not official². Also, he used Latin terminology which was quite rare in works written in East Greek. He used Latin terminology while expressing the distance, money sums and district names. Olympiodorus commented vastly upon the causes and effects of the events and paid attention to the characteristics of the people while talking about the events.. In addition to his acceptance of the characteristics of the people as the main motivation of the happenings, he also presented other effective factors like politics and economics. Also, he paid much significance to the statistics, geographical and chronological facts in his work and took social differences into consideration. (Matthews, 1970. s. 79-97).

As being a pagan and having a belief in the power of magic, he presented his ideas regarding the protective traits of pagan rituals for Rome Empire from Barbarian invasions. For example, he talks about

² It could not be detected any documents containing information besides Olympiodorus's personal experience in his history.

how the sculpture refrained both Athena's fire and Barbarians' invasion from the sea and reveals the reality that how the abolition of the 3 rimless sculptures let Got tribes into Trace. Moreover, Zosimus tells how they decided to take the belongings of the sculptures which lost their power due to the fact that they did not pray much and so they would be able to pay ransom to Alarik from Olympiodorus (Müller, 1851. s.63).

Olympiodorus who is thought to receive a good education and spent long time in West-East Empire lands make the accession to the information related to politicians and diplomatic works. Thanks to his position, he always had an access to written sources and official documents. Due to his these traits, his first hand experiences by travels shaped his sources. It was believed that he used Marcellianus (IV. Century) and Eunapius (346-414) and their sources, and even, it is suggested that Eunapius was to complete Olympiodorus' works (Matthews, 1970. p.80-88; Thompson, 1948. p.8-9).

Although his complete work did not survive up to now, Olympiodorus works carries great importance by means of European Huns' early stages in East Europe. Olympiodorus visited Hun Palace in Don Region under the title of East Roman Empire Ambassador before Huns arrived at Pannonia. This embassy from İstanbul was very crucial while Huns were dealing with East Romans (Orkun, 1938. p.7; Nagy, 1967. p.161-164). Olympiodorus arrived at Hun capital and visited Hun Emperor after a very dangerous voyage. He touched upon the archery skills of Donatus to whom he was sent to visit and he tells how he was killed brutally with a broken oath and how the first king Karaton³ was

³ It is estimated that reign of Karaton, whom a little information about, was very short-lived.

angry and tried to be smoothened with elaborate gifts. In addition to these, the mass movement of Gots into Trace and right after the invasion of Illyria and Trace by Huns and Satmats were noted in the following stages of his work (For Huns related topics in Olympiodorus: Müller, 1851.s.61,63).

The name Karaton which Olympiodorus noted is first seen here. Yet, nothing more is known apart from the things that Olympiodorus tells. Donatus who was said to have been killed is a complete mystery. Was Donatus a Great Hun King or a governor due to the Hun state structure? Due to the classical Turkish State system in Hun State structure the most supreme was the emperor and the state was governed in two different wings. The field (west and east) governors (Eligs) were from emperor family and tied to the central empire. The first concrete example of this structure was Uldız who was responsible from west field in the beginning of 400s. The first king and kings that Olympiodorus noted are up to this structure. Likewise Priskos also noted this system as Great and Smaller King (Ahmetbeyoğlu, 2001. p.149). If Donates was the Emperor by moving from the historical events, they directly had a relationship with East Rome and went on invading the Visigots and moved westward. Was west field Elig Donatus the same person with Uldız or his substitute as a result of Hun enlargement policy against East Rome in 409-41? It seems impossible to answer these questions with the present information. Why and how Donatus whom was told was killed will remain as a mystery. Was Donatus a victim of an inner conflict or a foreign suicide? What were the gifts given to Hun Emperor to soothen him and who presented them? If an answer can be found to these questions arising from the little information that Olympiodorus supplied,

the beginning stages of Hun Empire full of mystery will be enlightened to a great extent.

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Received 4 Dec 2013, Screened 6 Oct 2014, Accepted 15 Nov 2014

