

Alaric the Bold



BIOGRAPHY WORKBOOK

ALARIC THE BOLD
(360-410 C.E.)

Alaric, the "All-ruler," surnamed the Baltha, or Bold, was born about 360, on an island in the delta of the Danube River. As long as the great Theodosius lived, the Goths continued in his pay. But when Theodosius died in 395, and Alaric was elevated on the shield as king of the Visigoths (Western Goths), he determined to lead his nation to independent victory.

1. Alaric was born near what European river?

In 395 and 396, Alaric invaded Greece, and Stilicho, the Vandal general of the Western Emperor, advanced against him. The strategy of Stilicho was masterly, and it would probably have gone hard with Alaric had not Stilicho been suddenly bidden by the Eastern Emperor, Arcadius, to withdraw his western troops.

2. What Roman province was invaded by Alaric in 395 and 396?

- a. Egypt
- b. Greece
- c. Sicily
- d. Thrace

Again, in 396, Stilicho penned Alaric in the Peloponnesus, but for some unknown reason allowed him to escape into Illyricum. The Gothic chief had, however, struck deadly terror into the Eastern Empire. By way of pacifying Alaric, Arcadius made him Master-General of Illyricum.

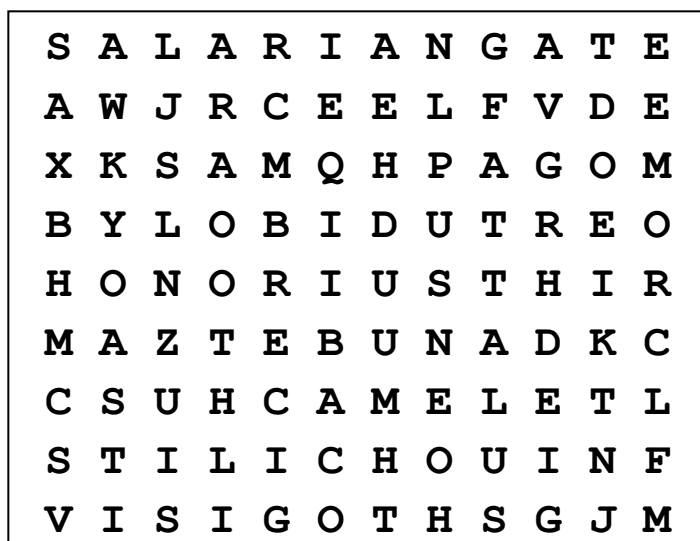
3. Why was Alaric made Master-General of Illyricum?

Alaric had already found the way to Italy when he accompanied Theodosius in his campaign against the usurper Maximus in 394. In 400, Alaric descended into Italy, not with an army only, but with the migration of his entire people. He defeated the Romans under the walls of Aquileia, and in 401 besieged Honorius in Milan. In 402 a vast army under Stilicho met him at Pollentia. When an old chieftain advised him to retire, Alaric, with fierce indignation, silenced his timid counselor, and told him that he had been assured by a voice which came from the grave and said to him, "Thou shalt penetrate to the City" (*ad Urbem*).

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4. Alaric descended upon Italy with the entire nation of Visigoths. Do you believe that this helped or hindered Alaric? Explain your answer.

Word Search Puzzle



But the oracle on this occasion had "paltered" with Alaric in a double sense. He penetrated indeed *ad Urbem*, not however "to the City" but to the little river Urbis (or Borbo), near Pollenzo. On Good Friday, April 4, 402, the Western army, under a dwarfish Hun chieftain named Saulus, attacked and routed Alaric, recovering the splendid spoils of Greece, freeing his captives, and winning back the

purple robes which the Emperor Valens had lost in the battle of Adrianople. In that disastrous defeat even the wife of Alaric, if we may believe the poet Claudian, was taken prisoner.

5. On what day did Saulus route Alaric?



Alaric in Athens.

Alaric retreated through Lombardy, and the feeble Emperor Honorius—"a crowned nothingness"—celebrated at Rome, in 404, that triumph which was signalized by the last display of the brutal gladiatorial games. No sooner had the first blood been shed than the Eastern monk Telemachus sprang down into the arena to part the combatants. His life paid the price of his glorious temerity. He was hewn and stoned to death. But that death was not in vain. The horrid massacres, at which not only men but women gazed in demoniac pleasure and excitement, had been condemned centuries before by Christianity. It was monstrous to many that an emperor calling himself a Christian should preside at such a spectacle.

6. The last gladiatorial games were held in what year?
- a. 396
 - b. 400
 - c. 404
 - d. 408

But the martyrdom of Telemachus at last touched the callous and torpid consciences of nominal Christians. Thenceforth the games of the amphitheatre were abolished. But it was too late, in the eyes of Christians, for Roman repentance. "The incomparable wickedness and the incomparable splendor" of the Imperial City were doomed to destruction. For them, even the blood of a Christian martyr voluntarily shed would not atone for the blood of

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hundreds of brave barbarians who, in that huge Flavian amphitheatre, had been "butchered to make a Roman holiday."

7. The death of what famous Christian martyr helped bring about the end of the gladiatorial games?

The day was near at hand when the Goths would arise and glut their ire.

Alaric, though he had retreated, was still in a position to dictate terms to Stilicho. He fixed his camp at Æmona, and was promised large pay and the government of a Western province under nominal allegiance to the Western Emperor. But the pledges made to him were broken, and their fulfillment delayed.

In 408, the promise of the oracle was fulfilled, for Alaric led his troops under the walls of Rome. The feeble and timid Honorius had retired to Ravenna, where he was safe behind the marshes, the pine-woods, and the stone walls against which Alaric said that he did not fight. In 408, the wretched court filled to the full the brimming cup of its iniquities—first by a massacre of barbarian auxiliaries at Pavia, and then by the foul,

ungrateful murder of Stilicho himself, at the command of Honorius.

8. Who commanded the murder of Stilicho?

No army barred the path of Alaric, but an Italian hermit denounced on him the wrath of heaven. This might have awoken the superstitious terrors of the Gothic soldiers if Alaric had not assured them, with confidence, that he was obeying a divine and irresistible command. The Goths encamped under the walls which for six hundred and nineteen years had never been threatened by a foreign enemy.

The wealthy, dissipated, corrupted nobles, and the people of the Eternal City thought to terrify Alaric back by boasts of their numbers. His scornful answer simply was, "The thicker the hay, the easier it is mowed." He demanded all their gold, silver, movables, and barbarian slaves.

"What then, O King, will you leave us?"

Alaric grimly said, "Your lives."

Alaric was content, however, this time to accept a ransom, of which the most curious element was three thousand pounds of pepper.

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9. Alaric destroyed Rome in 408.

- a. True
- b. False

The folly, pride, and braggadocio of Honorius, or rather of his miserable court, brought Alaric a second time to Rome in 409. The city capitulated, and Alaric raised Attalus to the purple as a rival to Honorius. But Attalus proved utterly incompetent, and the next year Alaric publicly and insultingly degraded him to a private position.

10. Alaric replaced Emperor Honorius with whom?

In 410, a fresh insult and wrong inflicted on the Goths by Honorius brought Alaric once more to Rome. He burst in by the Salarian gate, and sacked the city, which was only saved from irretrievable destruction by the respect of the Goths for the churches, which they regarded as inviolable asylums. The pillage and conflagration of Rome, and the resultant ruin and misery, came on the world like a shock of earthquake. But the Pagans saw that the catastrophe would have been yet more awful if the conquerors had not been Christians as well as the conquered.

11. The Visigoths under Alaric were Christians.

- a. True
- b. False

It seemed as if even the Imperial City could not fall without some circumstance of irony and insult. Paganism may be said to have perished in two bursts of laughter: one when in Alexandria the Christian mob burst into merriment to see the rats scurry out of the rotten head of the shattered statue of Serapis; and again when Theodosius and his soldiers laughed at the golden thunderbolts torn from the uplifted arms of the menacing statue of Jupiter. And Honorius managed to invest even the fall of Rome with ludicrous associations.

Honorius was a great fancier of fowls, and had a particularly large hen, which, out of compliment, he called Roma. An agitated eunuch entered to tell him, "Rome has perished!"

"What!" cried the Emperor, in a voice of deep concern. "Why, she was feeding out of my hand only an hour ago!"

"It is the city of Rome that has fallen, sire!"

"Oh, my friend," said the Emperor, with a sigh of relief. "But I thought you meant that my hen 'Roma' had died."

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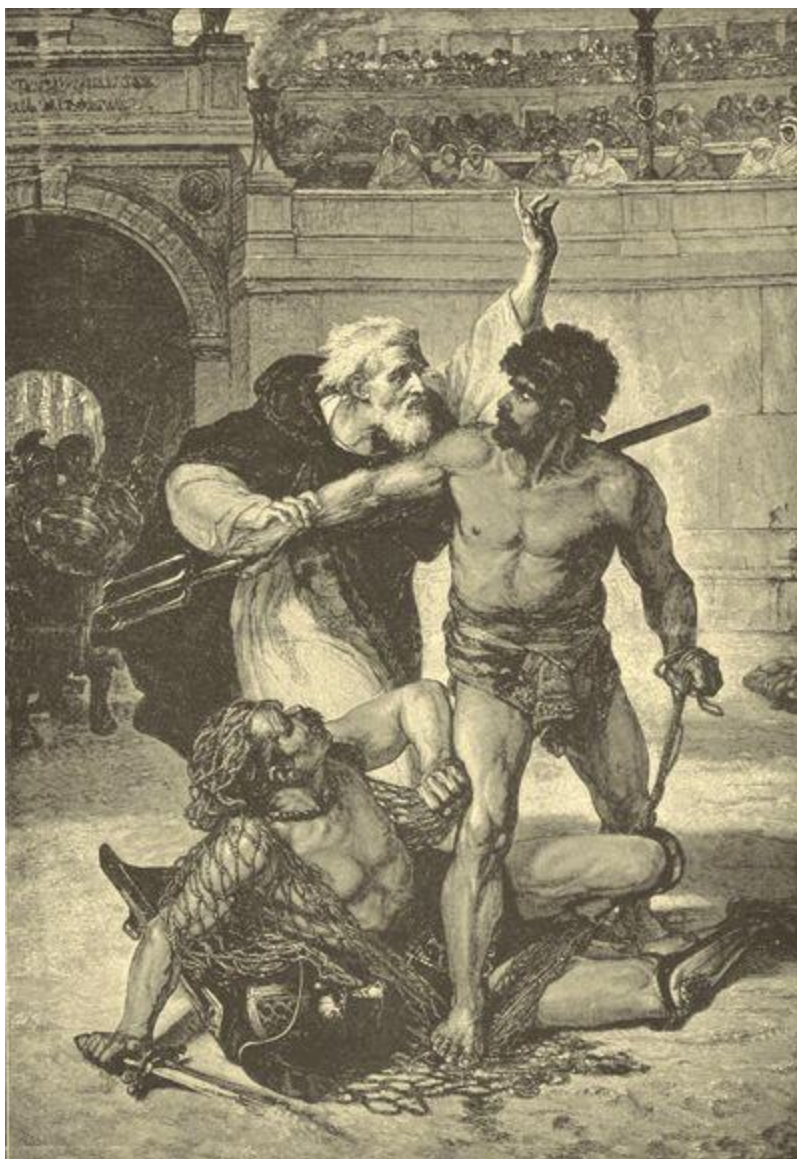
12. Describe the leadership of Honorius.

Laden with spoils of priceless value, the creaking wagons of the Visigoths went southward. Alaric meant to lead them to the conquest

first of Sicily, then of Africa. But death overtook him amid the schemes of his ambition. He died after a short illness, and was buried in the bed of the river which washes the walls of Cosentia. The captives who reared the tomb were massacred, that none might know where the hero lay. The Visigothic kingdom of Spain, founded by the warrior tribe which he first led into the West, is one of the most permanent results of his invasion.

13. What European country, located on the Iberian Peninsula, was founded by the Visigoths?

14. What aspects of Alaric's life would you like to emulate in your own life? What would you like to avoid?



15. The illustration to the left features what famous Christian martyr?

- a. Alaric
- b. Jude
- c. Paul
- d. Telemachus

16. This illustration portrays events which took place where?

- a. Colosseum
- b. Roman Senate
- c. Thermae
- d. Trajan's Forum

The Last Gladiatorial Contest.



CAPTIVE GOTHs

From sculptures on a column erected in Constantinople about 400 A.D. The Goths were tall and athletic, with fair complexions, blue eyes, and yellow hair, more like the Scandinavians than any other modern people. The men wore long beards. Their dress consisted of a short tunic with girdle, wide turned-down collar, and short sleeves; an inner garment to the knees; and trousers sometimes reaching to the ankle. These garments were often referred to as distinguishing the Goths from the bare-legged Romans.

17. The Goths were bare-legged.
a. True
b. False

Artistic Expression: Illustrate a scene from Alaric's life.