

Gunther

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(Redirected from Gundaharius)

Gunther (Gundahar, Gundahari, Latin *Gundaharius*, *Gundicharius*, or *Guntharius*, Old English *Gūðhere*, Old Norse *Gunnarr*, anglicised as *Gunnar*) is the German name of a semi-legendary king of Burgundy of the early 5th century. Legendary tales about him appear in Latin, medieval Middle High German, Old Norse, and Old English texts, especially concerning his relations with Siegfried (Sigurd in Old Norse) and his death by treachery in the hall of Attila the Hun.

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According to the *Nibelungenlied* (1859) by Peter von Cornelius, Gunther orders Hagen to drop the hoard into the Rhine.

History

In 406 the Alans, Vandals, the Suevi, and possibly the Burgundians crossed the Rhine and invaded Gaul. In 411 AD, the Burgundian king Gundahar or Gundicar set up a puppet emperor, Jovinus, in cooperation with Goar, king of the Alans. With the authority of the Gallic emperor that he controlled, Gundahar settled on the left or western (i.e., Roman) bank of the Rhine, between the river Lauter and the Nahe, seizing Worms, Speyer, and Strasbourg. Apparently as part of a truce, the Emperor Honorius later officially "granted" them the land. Olympiodorus of Thebes also mentions a *Guntiaros* who was called "commander of the Burgundians" in the context of the 411 usurping of Germania Secunda by Jovinus. (Prosper, a. 386)

Despite their new status as foederati, Burgundian raids into Roman upper Gallia Belgica became intolerable and were ruthlessly brought to an end in 436, when the Roman general Flavius Aetius called in Hun mercenaries who overwhelmed the Rhineland kingdom (with its capital at the old Celtic Roman settlement of Borbetomagus, now called Worms) in 437. Gundahar was killed in the fighting, reportedly along with the majority of the Burgundian tribe.^[1]

In legend

The destruction of Worms and the Burgundian kingdom by the Huns became the subject of heroic legends that were afterwards incorporated into many works of medieval literature such as the Middle High German epic poem, the *Nibelungenlied*, where King Gunther and Queen Brünhild hold their court at Worms, and Siegfried comes to woo Gunther's sister Kriemhild. In Old Norse sources, the names are Gunnar, Brynhild, Sigurd, and Gudrun as normally rendered in English.

In the *Waltharius*, Gibicho and his son Guntharius are kings of the Franks, whereas the king of the Burgundians is named Heriricus who is father to Hiltgunt, the heroine of the story. Hagano appears here as a kinsman of Gibicho and Guntharius, but the relationship is not made explicit. In their combats with Waltharius, Guntharius loses a leg, Hagano loses half his face and one eye, and Waltharius loses a hand. But there is no hint in later tales that Gunther is in any way maimed. Another version of the story of Waltharius and Hiltgunt appears in the Norse *Thidreks saga*, but in this account Gunther plays no part at all.

Gunther otherwise only appears in tales relating to Siegfried and the fall of the Niflungs. In most texts, such as the *Nibelungenlied*, Gunther/Gunnar seeks to make Brünhild his wife, but can win her and master her only because the hero Siegfried/Sigurd aids him and takes his place. Siegfried marries Gunther's sister Kriemhild/Gudrun. An impassioned debate between Brünhild and Kriemhild about their respective status leads to the secret that Siegfried had taken Gunther's place being revealed. Gunther then agrees to assist in Siegfried's murder. After Siegfried is murdered, Brünhild commits suicide. Gunther and his brothers, despite deep suspicions of treachery, accept an invitation from Etzel, or Atli in Old Norse (i.e., Attila the Hun), to visit his court. There Gunther and his brothers were betrayed. In some versions of the story, they were thrown in a snake pit to die, while in others they were killed fighting the Huns and their allies.

According to the Norse poem "Atlamal", Gunnar remarried after Brynhild's death to a woman named Glaumvor.

These stories were later adapted by Richard Wagner into *Der Ring Des Nibelungen*. Gunther appears in the last part *Götterdämmerung*. From there events happen in a similar manner to the *Volsung Saga*. After Hagen kills Siegfried he and Gunther argue over the Ring, leading to Hagen murdering Gunther.

References

- [^] Prosper; *Chronica Gallica 452*; Hydatius; and Sidonius Apollinaris.

See also

- Burgundians
- Nibelung
- Völsunga saga

Preceded by Giselher	King of Burgundy ?–437	Succeeded by Gunderic
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