

# What Killed Attila the Hun?

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© July 28, 2018

## ABSTRACT

Attila the Hun's horde of warriors helped end what was left of ancient Rome. He came from eastern Europe, and then he mysteriously vanished, sparing western Europe from barbarism. Only seven centuries later did the Mongols equal his ferocity. Here's the story of what killed this charismatic villain.

## Historical Attila

Attila the Hun is one of history's most interesting villains.<sup>1</sup> To his people he was their charismatic leader who created through force of wit and will a mighty and wealthy empire in less than ten years. To his victim opponents he and his ruthless warriors were genocidal monsters beyond belief. As with all "great" leaders, Attila's personal story lies somewhere between these extremes.

Humans have Stone-Age minds and bodies. Individual people of Attila's day were genetically hardly different from today's humans. Herein lies a key for this essay:



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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ancient.eu/Attila\\_the\\_Hun/](https://www.ancient.eu/Attila_the_Hun/)

Attila was born in an area near or east of today's Budapest, Hungary, in 406 AD. He died in 453. Attila was king of the Huns from 434 until his death. During his rule his armies ravaged vast areas between the Rhine and the Caspian Sea, before he was defeated in 451 by prepared joint forces of a weakened Roman army and the Visigoths at Châlons in today's northern France.

He subsequently threatened a year later weakened Rome itself, which had no Visigoths at their side – but Rome did have a brave pope who met with Attila, and may have convinced him (along with some treasure) not to sack Rome.

He returned home with his army, and married a young bride – but he died on his wedding bed after a night of lubricated celebrating. A few years after that surprising death his ruling family wasted the empire he had built on gold booty and conquered people's blood. The Dark Ages only got darker.



We could say in retrospect that the very dark Attila story was like a training experience for the even worse Medieval Era Mongol invaders under Genghis Khan seven centuries years later.

## Death Mystery Solved

The unexpectedly odd death of Attila at age 47 was not clearly understood. He had gone to bed seemingly healthy and happy. In the morning after his elaborate wedding, Attila in the royal bed was found covered in blood, having bled to death from his mouth and nose. There were no wounds. One theory suggests his new

young bride killed him, but that idea is less likely than another theory. Here is what is more likely:<sup>2</sup>

“Sources differ on the exact circumstances of Attila's death, but it seems clear that he died on his wedding night. He had just married a young woman named Ildico and celebrated with great feasting. In the morning, he was found dead in his bed, having choked on his own blood. It is possible Attila was assassinated by his new wife in a conspiracy with Marcian, rival Emperor of the East. It is also possible that he died accidentally as a result of alcohol poisoning or esophageal hemorrhage. The most probable cause, as suggested by the historian Priscus of Panium, is a burst blood vessel.”

Attila had long enjoyed the good life, eating and drinking with his military companions. However, age 47 at that time was not as young as age 47 is in 2018. It is also likely that Attila had lingering pain from his many military campaigns. Alcohol can initially help with all sorts of pains.

Alcoholism can also damage the body in ways unknown until it is too late. Here's where history and modern medicine meet:

Two decades ago a friend of mine died from an esophageal hemorrhage. He was a serious drinker, so the general idea then was that his chronic boozing eroded tissue inside his esophagus, leading to a massive, fatal hemorrhage. Attila's story suggests otherwise, and there is modern medical science to make another case for such bleeding.

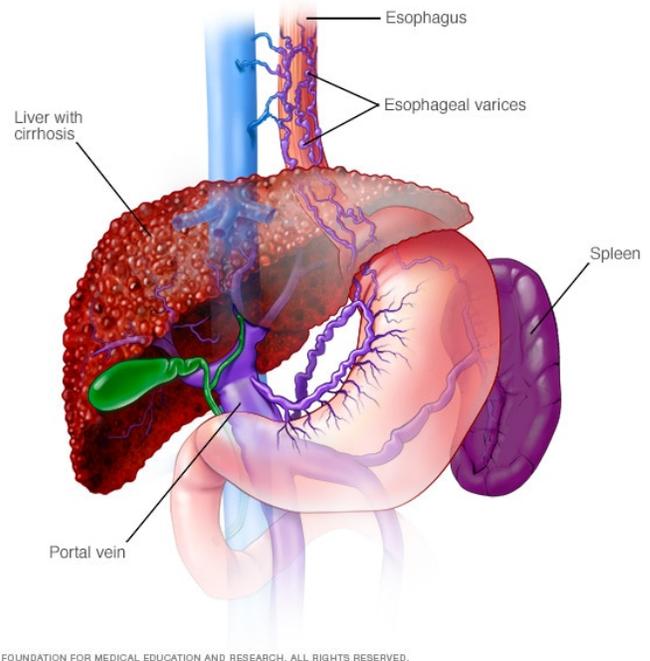
Many “social drinkers” minimize to themselves and to others what they are really doing over decades to their basic organs. One organ in particular, the liver, filters toxins as best it can, until it becomes increasingly scarred. An ultrasound should, in later stages, show cirrhotic areas of the liver that no longer can properly filter the blood flow. Nevertheless, the heart pumps the same amount of blood to a diseased liver as to a healthy liver.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thoughtco.com/how-did-attila-the-hun-die-117225>

Here below is an informative discussion and excellent visual from the Mayo Clinic that explains what can then happen to the blood vessels:<sup>3</sup>

“Esophageal varices develop when normal blood flow to the liver is blocked by a clot or scar tissue in the liver. To go around the blockages, blood flows into smaller blood vessels that aren't designed to carry large volumes of blood. The vessels can leak blood or even rupture, causing life-threatening bleeding.”



We modern humans typically live in a personal “health optimism” bubble, thinking that serious health problems will likely occur only at the end of a long life. Children have some right to believe this fantasy, but not adults. Consider this most recent data:<sup>4</sup>

“In 1999–2016, the number of deaths caused by cirrhosis has been on the rise in 49 out of 50 states.”

“Cirrhosis deaths have increased by 65 percent, and alcohol use is a prominent cause of late-stage liver disease. The most affected populations are adults aged 25–34, and white people and those who are of American Indian and Hispanic descent are the most exposed. The highest average increase in cirrhosis-related deaths per year was seen among young adults, at an approximately 10.5 percent rise each year.”

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/esophageal-varices/symptoms-causes/syc-20351538>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/322506.php>

The philosopher George Santayana famously said:<sup>5</sup> “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

That’s why I originally studied history, because human life is both linear and cyclical. Knowledge of the recent and distant past is the best compass for creating a good future both for individuals and for humankind.

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<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/George\\_Santayana](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/George_Santayana)