

REVIEW–DISCUSSION

AMMIANUS: SOLDIER OR AUTHOR?

Michael Hanaghan and David Woods, edd., *Ammianus Marcellinus from Soldier to Author*. *Historiography of Rome and Its Empire* 16. Leiden: Brill, 2022. Pp. xii + 420. Hardback, \$163.00. ISBN 978-90-04-52529-0.

In a statement unique in ancient historiography, Ammianus Marcellinus describes himself as *miles quondam* (31.16.9), a former soldier. Indeed, he stands out among Latin-language historians due to his military service spanning several years as a *protector domesticus*, accompanying his commander, Ursicinus, throughout assignments in Milan, Gaul, and the eastern frontier. Ammianus seems also to have participated in the Persian campaign of the emperor Julian, although his precise role in the enterprise is unclear. Given his first-hand knowledge of many of the central military events of the age, Ammianus emerges as an extraordinarily qualified chronicler of his era. This raises the question: can Ammianus be considered a soldier-historian?

A historical comparison with Bernal Díaz del Castillo (*ca.* 1492–1584) may help elucidate Ammianus' role as a soldier-historian.¹ Bernal, a participant in the Hernán Cortés-led conquest of the Aztec empire, authored *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, published posthumously in 1632. Bernal's work, a response to Francisco López de Gómara's hagiographic biography of Cortés, aimed to address what Bernal felt was the undervaluation of the real heroes, the rank and file. Regardless, the *True History* succeeds in conveying in unassuming language the common soldier's experience of the conquest.

However, Ammianus was not a late-antique Bernal Díaz. While Bernal's *True History* offers direct testimony from a participant, Ammianus' *Res Gestae* is a complex work within the tradition of classical historiography, honouring its conventional elements. Comparing Ammianus with Bernal Díaz reveals what type of soldier-historian Ammianus was not. The *Res Gestae*, unlike Bernal's *True History*, weaves together autopsy and a wide range of sources, extending

¹ B. Díaz del Castillo and G. García, *Historia Verdadera De La Conquista De La Nueva España*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 2015). English translation: B. Díaz del Castillo and A. P. Maudslay, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain* (New York, 2012). On Bernal's style see F. Leonetti, 'De la oralidad a la escritura: la *Historia verdadera* de Bernal Díaz del Castillo', in A. Bègue and E. Herrán Alonso, edd., *Pictavia aurea: actas del IX Congreso de la Asociación Internacional Siglo de Oro* (Poitiers, 2011) 493–501.

far beyond Ammianus' personal experiences. Additionally, Ammianus' dense, highly stylised prose, filled with literary allusions and digressions, makes it difficult to separate the soldier from the author. Thus, the influence of Ammianus' military experience on his historical work remains a complex issue. The volume reviewed here, containing eighteen essays from international scholars presented at a 2018 conference in Ireland, delves into this subject from various angles.

Ammianus Marcellinus from Soldier to Author is a welcome addition to the ever-growing literature on the fourth-century historian. The editors and authors merit praise for producing a well-balanced volume with insightful and erudite chapters that enrich our understanding of the *Res Gestae*. All contributions deserve thorough discussion. While the present reviewer may disagree with some ideas presented, it is worth noting that all chapters maintain a high standard and successfully offer original insights into this extensively studied topic. Above all, my primary concern regarding some contributions to this book lies in their apparent assumption of an overly literal interpretation of Ammianus' self-identification as *miles*. This issue will be revisited in the concluding section of the review.

In the introduction, Michael Hanaghan and David Woods provide a review of what we know about Ammianus' life and military career, and clearly define the subject of the book: the tension between Ammianus the soldier and Ammianus the educated writer. In other words, the volume seeks to analyse how the experience of military life affected Ammianus' historical writing and, conversely, how his knowledge of classical literature influenced his presentation of military events.

With regard first to the impact of Ammianus' military experience on the way he presents military events in the *Res Gestae*, Woods and Hanaghan recognise three major possible lines of influence. First, they point out that Ammianus' military experiences led him to devote more attention to episodes in which he was personally involved than they would deserve for their historical importance. The example is the account of the siege of Amida. Second, they also argue that it was Ammianus' military experience that allowed him to establish contacts with individuals who would serve as sources for events in which he did not personally participate. Finally, they also claim that Ammianus' own military experience may also have influenced both the selection of themes and episodes covered, as well as the choice of the end point of his narrative. They even believe that Ammianus' military experience may also have been the reason why he decided to write a historical work in the first place.

Woods and Hanaghan stress equally the influence of Ammianus' literary models on his writing on military matters. They speculate, for example, that the considerable attention Ammianus gives to the minor episode of Firmus' revolt in Africa (29.5.1–56) may have been due to the influence of Sallust's

Jugurthine War or Tacitus' account of the campaign against Tacfarinas in Numidia. Another example is Ammianus' rendition of events early in 360 (20.4.9–5.7), with the uprising of Julian's soldiers in Paris leading to his proclamation as Augustus, possibly modelled on Tacitus' account of the revolt of Germanicus' legions on the Rhine frontier in 14 (*Ann.* 1.30–49). Woods and Hanaghan even believe that under the influence of his literary models, Ammianus invented some incidents in his narrative, for example, his indication that Julian attacked the citadel of Pisisabora inspired by the example of Scipio Aemilianus. The lack of confirmation of this fact in the other sources on Julian's campaign in Persia indicates to the authors the possibility that it is an invention. Episodes such as the decimation of a cavalry unit after the capture of Pisisabora (24.3.1–2) or the awarding of prizes to the first soldiers to enter the Persian city of Maiozamalcha (24.4.24) could be further examples of inventions inspired by Ammianus' literary models.

For this reviewer, it is one thing to acknowledge that a literary model has influenced the way Ammianus presents an event, but another to combine the possible influence of a model with the lack of confirmation in other sources to ascribe to Ammianus the outright invention of an event in his account; this seems a weak form of argument from silence. We will have occasion to discuss this same approach in connection with Sánchez-Ostiz's chapter (see below).

The editors close the introduction with a brief outline of the book's contents. It consists of three parts. The first concentrates on the text of Ammianus and features a single contribution by Gavin Kelly. The eleven remaining chapters divide into two blocks, five dealing with Ammianus' military experience and six focusing on the literary aims and models of the *Res Gestae*.

The first chapter by Gavin Kelly states its objective clearly in its title: 'Why We Need a New Edition of Ammianus Marcellinus'. Kelly is working on an edition of the *Res Gestae* for the Oxford Classical Texts series, and he makes a convincing case for why it is needed. He points out that, unlike other late-antique works, the *Res Gestae* has come down to us through a precarious transmission that leaves us with a text fraught with problems and difficult-to-resolve doubts. Kelly rightly draws our attention to the point that the standard text of Ammianus has many emendations that are accepted only for lack of anything better, but that scholars are rarely aware that they often base their interpretations on uncertain passages. Kelly presents three goals in his chapter. First, he aims to explain why a new edition of Ammianus is necessary; second, he outlines the principles on which to base it; and finally, he identifies areas where progress is possible.

Kelly begins his paper with a summary of the complex history of editing the *Res Gestae* since its rediscovery in the Renaissance, culminating in a review

of the respective merits of the critical editions of Clark and Seyfarth.² Kelly is a fan of the former but not so much of the latter, whom he criticises for excessive conservatism. Kelly next discusses the manuscript tradition in more detail (the stemma in Figure 1.1 helps the reader to understand the relationships between the different manuscripts). He highlights the evidence indicating that the loss of the first part of the work occurred very early and that many gaps and corruptions were present in the archetype that (as Kelly and Stover demonstrated in another paper³) served as the source of the earliest preserved manuscripts.

Given the state of the manuscript tradition, Kelly argues that the best basis for improving Ammianus' text lies in the study of his rhythmic prose. He explains the logic of Ammianus' system of rhythmic *clausulae*, which is not metrical or metrical-accentual, but rather accentual, thus resembling the style that would become typical during the Middle Ages. Kelly stresses that the *clausulae* fulfil in Ammianus' prose a function similar to modern punctuation marks and that, for this reason, a critical edition should point out the *clausulae* in its text presentation.

Kelly convincingly argues that the *clausulae* are central to understanding the text since they represent the first unit of meaning, more important than the sentence. Thus, for his future edition, he establishes the norm that any passage that does not respect the rules of Ammianus' rhythmic prose becomes suspect. Kelly devotes a section to show the kind of corrections this method makes possible by working on passages from Book 31 and two from Books 29 and 19. While these examples are promising, it remains to be seen to what extent this approach may result in a more satisfactory or secure text of the whole *Res Gestae*. How long will we wait for the new edition to be in print? We can only hope it will appear soon.

Maxime Emion's contribution, 'Ammianus and the *dignitas protectoris*', opens the second part, covering similar ground to Frank Trombley's 1999 chapter on the subject.⁴ Emion starts by correctly pointing out that Ammianus was no ordinary soldier but a *protector domesticus*. Despite being amply documented in the sources from the third to the sixth century AD, the two categories of *protectores* and *protectores domestici* continue to pose a conundrum to scholars. Emion contends that, although Ammianus' writings shed light on the

² C. U. Clark, L. Traube, and W. Heraeus, edd., *Ammiani Marcellini rerum gestarum libri qui supersunt*, 2 vols (Berlin, 1910–15); W. Seyfarth, L. Jacob-Karau, and I. Ulmann, edd., *Ammiani Marcellini rerum gestarum libri qui supersunt*, 2 vols (Leipzig, 1978).

³ G. Kelly and J. A. Stover, 'The Hersfeldensis and the Fuldensis of Ammianus Marcellinus: A Reconsideration', *CCJ* 62 (2016) 108–29.

⁴ F. Trombley, 'Ammianus Marcellinus and Fourth-Century Warfare: A *Protector's* Approach to Historical Narrative', in J. W. Drijvers and D. Hunt, edd., *The Late Roman World and its Historian: Interpreting Ammianus Marcellinus* (London and New York, 1999) 17–26.

numerous duties of a *protector domesticus*, his autobiographical exploits may have obscured the actual character of this position. In Emion's opinion, a close examination of Ammianus' vocabulary shows that a strictly military focus does not suffice to understand what a *protector domesticus* was. His central thesis is that it was a position defined above all by its symbolic relationship to the emperor. According to Emion, Ammianus' text indicates this by revealing his conception of the *protectores domestici* as a privileged order of dignitaries rather than a regular military corps. Because of the varied nature of their tasks, scholars often regarded *protectores* as staff officers, but Emion stresses that there were other officers or officials with direct responsibility for many of the functions that the *domestici* usually assumed. The lack of specialisation is, in his opinion, a characteristic feature.

Could this lack of specialisation be linked to the role of the protectorate serving as a form of officer-school? Emion doesn't think so. While many *protectores* often advanced to commanding positions, there were also numerous alternative routes to such roles. Many of those who became *protectores* were veterans admitted as a reward for distinguished service, but many others were young men who entered the protectorate based on family connections, as appears to have been the case with Ammianus himself.⁵ These young men had good prospects for a career in the army, and for them, the corps of *protectores* could serve as a kind of school, but that was never the reason for the existence of this position. Emion argues that the study of other positions in the Roman army has demonstrated the limits of a functional approach and that the same holds true for *protectores*. In his opinion, to understand what it meant to be a protector in Ammianus' time, it is necessary to study this title in the context of the whole imperial society.

In his discussion of the military career of Gratianus the Elder (the father of the emperors Valentinian and Valens), Ammianus uses the expression *dignitas protectoris* (30.7.3). Moreover, the Theodosian code and other literary sources refer to the link between *protectores* and *dignitas*. For Emion, this connection indicates that the protectorate was not a regular *militia*. He proposes to understand *dignitas* from a broader perspective as a mark of distinction that, in the fourth century, was no longer connected with belonging to a distinguished social order but to the individual position in a complex social hierarchy defined by proximity to the emperor. The dignity of *protector* was thus both a reward for outstanding veterans and a way for scions of the elite to enter the army in an advantageous position befitting their origin. Admission to the corps of *protectores* entailed participation in the ceremony of adoration of the imperial purple, a clear mark of the emperor's favour. Emion, therefore, posits

⁵ J. Gimazane, *Ammien Marcellin: Sa Vie Et Son Oeuvre* (Toulouse, 1889) 24–7; T. D. Barnes, *Ammianus Marcellinus and the Representation of Historical Reality* (Ithaca and London, 1998) 59. See also J. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (London and Baltimore, 1989) 74–80.

that the *protectoria dignitas* during this era was an element of social prestige, as it indicated the symbolic closeness of the incumbent to the emperor.

According to his interpretation, Ammianus' references to the *dignitas protectoris* and the *ordo* or *consortium domesticorum* reveal his esteem for his corps. He further speculates that when Ammianus describes himself as a former soldier, it implies not just that he is a veteran participant in some of the recounted events, but also that he considers himself a member of a military aristocracy. This dignity, Emion suggests, stemmed from the symbolic relationship with the emperor. Thus, it is not solely Ammianus' firsthand military experience that lent him the *auctoritas* necessary to write the history of his time. His status as a *protector domesticus* also conferred upon him a degree of authority.

Emion makes a valid point in highlighting the limitations of the functional approach to understanding the Roman army. Yet to completely disregard this approach seems tantamount to throwing the baby out with the bathwater. The *protectores domestici* were undoubtedly a socially distinguished and privileged group, but it does not seem right to reduce this position just to a social dignity. There is no modern-day military counterpart to a *protector domesticus*. Their potential duties were various, but they all had one thing in common: *protectores* usually assumed challenging and sensitive missions that could only be entrusted to dependable officers on whose discretion commanders could rely. We should, therefore, not confuse their versatility with a lack of specialisation. The *protectores* lacked well-defined duties because their role was to be available to commanders for undertaking complex missions beyond the capabilities of regular soldiers. Ammianus himself indicates that the *protectores* attached to Ursicinus had the task of assisting him in whatever he needed for the 'good of the state' (*quicquid pro re publica mandaverit impleturi*, 16.10.21). If we relegate the protectorate to merely a social dignity, we risk overlooking the importance of Ammianus' unique military experience. His position placed him close to the command circles of the army, which allowed him to observe its inner workings.

In the chapter '*Simplicitas militaris: Ammianus Marcellinus and sermo castrensis*', Philip Rance sets out to study the influence of Ammianus' military past on his language, which he defines as an exercise in military socio-linguistics. His specific aim is to identify in the *Res Gestae* traces of the linguistic practices of fourth-century soldiers. More precisely, he aims to examine evidence of Ammianus' knowledge and use of the so-called *sermo castrensis*, the language spoken in the army, both for its intrinsic interest and for what we may thus learn about Ammianus and his conception of his work.

Rance acknowledges that his plan faces the considerable obstacle of the literary conventions of ancient historiography, but he still sees Ammianus as a promising author for bypassing these difficulties. The *Res Gestae* represents in his opinion a rare case of a substantial historical work written by someone we

can consider ‘a soldier’ rather than a commander. Ammianus’ military career, moreover, in Rance’s view, while colourful and adventurous, cannot be considered successful, perhaps cut short prematurely by the fall from grace of his commander Ursicinus. Furthermore, Ammianus’ work itself evidences his contact with Roman soldiers, leading Rance to presume that the historian must have had some familiarity with the *sermo castrensis*, even if he did not identify with or hold particular esteem for soldiers.

After a brief review of the history of research on the subject, Rance presents the specimens of *sermo castrensis* found in the *Res Gestae*. Rance classifies his findings into three categories: (1) expressions that Ammianus expressly qualifies as belonging to the language of soldiers: *caput porci(num)*, *capita scholarum*, *probae*, *onager*; (2) military terminology that Ammianus describes as barbarian in origin: *carrago*, *barritus*; (3) military jargon whose vernacular origin is suggested by external evidence: *proculcator*, *lixa*, *litteriones*. Only nine examples of terms from the language of soldiers seem a surprisingly meagre result given the length of the *Res Gestae* and Ammianus’ military experience.

Furthermore, the fact that Vegetius, a prototypical armchair soldier, mentions many of these terms indicates that not much military experience was necessary to know them. Either Ammianus did not know much about the language of soldiers or, if he did know of it, he had no interest in reflecting that knowledge in his work beyond a few generalities. This reviewer is more inclined to the first possibility. Rance acknowledges that his search has yielded a very meagre result but defends his findings by pointing out that we encounter more examples of *sermo castrensis* in the *Res Gestae* than in any previous historical work, with the sole exception of the Caesarian corpus. Rance concludes that the quotations in *Soldatensprache* are more plausibly explained as elements of an intentional artistic strategy—both lexical and authorial—than as unintentional products of cultural and professional assimilation. I believe that the findings of Rance’s study reinforce the idea that Ammianus’ self-description as a *miles* should not be taken too literally. Ammianus might be more accurately described as an aristocratic officer, socially and culturally distanced from the soldiers in the ranks.

Connor Whately’s chapter, ‘Ammianus’ Identification of Named Legions and its Literary Significance’, concentrates on three main aspects: (1) Ammianus’ use of the term *legio*; (2) the reliability and accuracy of its usage to designate specific military units; and (3) what this usage reveals about Ammianus’ practices as a historian. Whately believes there is a tension between Ammianus, the historian, who wished to present an engaging and truthful account of his time, and Ammianus, the soldier, who tried to offer an accurate and detailed description of the military events of his age.

On the first point, Whately acknowledges that Ammianus’ usage of the term *legio* is somewhat imprecise, as he fails to distinguish between different

kinds of legions, such as *limitanei* or *comitatenses*, and often identifies legions by informal names. As for the second point, Whately concedes that while Ammianus may not name military units frequently, his accuracy is apparent when he does. Finally, addressing the third point, Whately concludes that Ammianus' use of the term *legio* is less frequent than that of earlier authors like Tacitus. He attributes this to the diminished importance of the legion in the fourth-century army compared to the High Empire. Ammianus' choice to include or omit the names of legions involved in military operations in his history, according to Whately, is a conscious authorial decision. Whately suggests that by omitting the names of the participating legions, Ammianus intended to emphasise the importance of commanders and senior officers in his account.

Michael Wuk's chapter, '*Religionibus firmis iuramenta constricta?* Ammianus and the *sacramentum militiae*', concentrates on the oath of allegiance that soldiers in the Roman army presented to the emperor at the time of enrolment. Wuk argues that the perception and representation of the oath by a soldier-author like Ammianus, who personally took the oath, would differ from those of authors with a civilian background. More precisely, Wuk sets out to study the mentions of the *sacramentum* in the *Res Gestae* to see how Ammianus' military background might have influenced his narration of events and his depiction of notable characters in his account. His thesis is that the *sacramentum* is important to Ammianus and that he consciously and deliberately refers to it throughout his work.

Wuk posits that the soldiers who took the *sacramentum* saw the practice more as fostering camaraderie among military personnel than as demonstrating loyalty to the ruler. He argues that this corporate perspective is recognisable in the *Res Gestae*. Wuk claims that Ammianus employs references to the *sacramentum* on several occasions to offer judgement on the character of soldiers and commanders. Most notably, the late antique historian emphasises the termination of the oath, particularly in dishonourable circumstances, to criticise various individuals and imply their exclusion from the soldiers' corporate identity. Secondly, although troops sometimes broke their oaths, Ammianus considers that the soldiers mostly respected the *sacramentum*. Wuk also notes that Ammianus does not generally refer to the religious aspect of the *sacramentum*; he believes this is because what he valued most in the ritual was the reinforcement of the *esprit de corps* it engendered in the troops.

Wuk's analysis suggests that Ammianus Marcellinus' depiction of the *sacramentum militiae* diverges from its portrayal by other late-antique authors. According to Wuk, Ammianus interprets the oath as fostering a sense of corporate identity among the soldiers who take the oath collectively. From Wuk's perspective, each instance of the *sacramentum* in Ammianus' narrative should be viewed as the author—a soldier himself—witnessing the events he

chronicles through the lens of a shared brotherhood among warriors, thus identifying with them.

Yet Wuk's conclusion seems to prematurely dismiss other interpretations. For instance, Ammianus' emphasis on the military oath could be seen as reflecting the viewpoint of an imperial officer who understands the importance of fostering *esprit de corps* among soldiers and commanders to enhance morale and effectiveness on the battlefield. Nonetheless, Wuk's study underscores that most of the episodes where Ammianus refers to the oath predominantly concern commanding officers rather than the rank and file.

Jeroen W. P. Wijnendaele's chapter, 'Ammianus on Mallobaudes and Magnus Maximus: A Response to Theodosian Discourse?', focuses on Mallobaudes, a minor character in the *Res Gestae*. He is portrayed in various episodes, first as an officer of the Roman army in different ranks, and subsequently as the king of the Franks. Wijnendaele tries to show that the change in the nomenclature with which Ammianus designates Mallobaudes is not accidental, nor is it the result of an oversight or confusion between homonymous characters. The author sees the case of Mallobaudes as a precursor of what is often called the 'barbarisation' of the Roman army, the use of kingship as a replacement for imperial command after the death of Theodosius.

Wijnendaele begins by discussing in detail the *cursus honorum* of this character. Mallobaudes appears most notably in the *Res Gestae* as a protagonist in the account of the actions taken by the emperor Gratian to come to the aid of his uncle Valens after the battle of Adrianople. Initially, the western emperor dispatched troops to support the eastern forces. However, he had to recall them when the Alamanni capitalised on the situation to orchestrate raids across the frontier. Mallobaudes played a crucial role in the counteroffensive against these aggressors.

Ammianus assigns Mallobaudes a dual title, *domesticorum comitem regemque Francorum* (31.10.6), which has no parallel in the rest of his work. It means Mallobaudes was, at the same time, king of the Franks and commander of the imperial guards. Ammianus had already mentioned Mallobaudes in the context of events twenty years before these as a *tribunus armaturarum*. He is also mentioned, without temporal reference, as responsible for the death of a king of the Alamanni in 30.3.5–7. Given the temporal distance between the episodes of Mallobaudes' life that Ammianus refers to, some scholars have suggested that these are different individuals of the same name, but Wijnendaele argues that Mallobaudes is a single person. He defends his theory by pointing out the name's rarity and the fact that senior officers sometimes re-entered the service after a long retirement. He believes that Mallobaudes would have been compelled to leave the military by being associated with the usurper Silvanus and would only have returned to service during the reign of Gratian.

Wijnendaele explores how Mallobaudes could have simultaneously held the roles of king of the Franks and commander of the guard. He argues that even if Mallobaudes had assumed the title of *rex Francorum* at an unknown point in time, it should not have hindered him from securing a high-ranking position in the late Roman army, a rare but not impossible occurrence. The emperors of the fourth century did not usually appoint Germanic kings as imperial commanders because they fulfilled a crucial diplomatic function. Removing them from their posts created the risk of unrest on the frontiers.

Wijnendaele considers that one of the reasons why Mallobaudes would have been allowed to be king and officer would have been to facilitate the recruitment of Franks for a campaign of Gratian against the Lentienses. The author also speculates on the moment when Mallobaudes might have killed the king of the Alamanni, Macrianus. In his opinion, it would have been in the context of the fall of Magnus Maximus in the years 387–8. Though the author's arguments are insightful and offer a fresh perspective, they remain speculative in the absence of additional confirmatory evidence.

The third part of the book ('Ammianus' Literary Aims and Models') begins with a chapter by J. E. Lendon: 'The Face of Convention: Battle and Siege Description in Ammianus Marcellinus'. In this chapter, Lendon challenges the notion that the battle narratives in Ammianus' *Res Gestae* primarily focus on the tangible experiences of the common soldier—a concept John Keegan labelled 'the face of battle.' Lendon contends, however, that Ammianus' combat stories adhere to the norms of the classical historiographical genre while being modified to suit his particular literary ends.

Lendon begins his analysis with Ammianus' accounts of the battles of Strasbourg and Adrianople, the only canonically detailed battle descriptions in the *Res Gestae*. In his opinion, little in these accounts would surprise a Livy or a Thucydides. The only thing that sets Ammianus apart is his insistence on sensory details (visual and auditory) and his emphasis on emotions. For Lendon, rather than something unusual or novel, these features represent an exaggeration (in Lendon's words, 'hypertrophy') of stylistic traits already present in epic and historiography.

Lendon next discusses Ammianus' accounts of sieges and assaults on cities and fortresses, which in the *Res Gestae* are more common than the accounts of battles. In his descriptions of such operations, Ammianus gives considerable attention to military machines and devices. Lendon asserts that this focus on military machinery is a traditional element in historiography, dating back to Thucydides' account of the siege of Plataea. Ammianus' emphasis on the technical aspects of siege warfare thus represents yet another instance in which we recognise in his style a tendency to exaggerate elements already common in the earlier historiographical tradition. Ammianus is for Lendon just a

particularly enthusiastic representative of what has come to be termed the ‘gadgetary turn’ in ancient historiography.⁶

According to Lendon, it is primarily in the description of military campaigns where Ammianus’ distinctive qualities as a historian emerge. Unlike many ancient authors who tend to focus on the narratives of battles, compressing pre- and post-combat activities into their accounts, Ammianus allocates significant attention to detailing the broader scope of campaigns. In the *Res Gestae*, these general campaign details occupy more space than descriptions of the field battles themselves. The essence of Ammianus’ historiographic artistry is thus exemplified in the narrative of Julian’s Persian expedition in AD 363 (23.2–3, 5; 24.1–25.3), where he skilfully juxtaposes the detailed depiction of sieges with the rapid pace of the campaign narrative, chronicling the forward march of the imperial army.

Lendon concludes from his analysis that Ammianus’ battle accounts do not offer a ‘face of battle’ type of narrative but follow the literary conventions of battle descriptions that had evolved since Homer. Ammianus’ historiographic art is thus conventional but does not lack its distinctive features, such as the emphasis on the sensory and the emotions, which are traits borrowed from epic. Ammianus’ originality lies rather in his campaign narratives. Lendon does not define whether Ammianus’ military background accounts for the emphasis on this kind of narrative. His tone suggests otherwise, but he leaves the issue unclarified.

In the following chapter titled ‘The Literary Function of Ammianus’ Criticisms of Military *luxuria*’, Álvaro Sánchez-Ostiz delves into how the historian presents in his work a specific form of military indiscipline connected with luxury, especially the excessive consumption of alcohol. He focuses this analysis on selected passages from the *Res Gestae*. According to Sánchez-Ostiz, Ammianus resorts to the recurring motif that links military misconduct and imperial decline influenced by three distinct but complementary factors: literary conventions, religious polemics, and ethnic stereotypes. The author argues, however, that it is necessary to investigate whether some cases of military indiscipline narrated by Ammianus have an argumentative, allusive, or structural purpose independent of those factors. Through this investigation, the author aims to obtain a more nuanced view of some episodes in the *Res Gestae*.

Sánchez-Ostiz concentrates on three passages in which Ammianus criticises various military units or officers for their overindulgence in alcohol. A common aspect of his analysis of the three episodes is the identification of a tension between literary strategies and factual accuracy in Ammianus’ military narrative. The first passage (18.81–3) recounts the defeat of seven hundred

⁶ J. Levithan, *Roman Siege Warfare* (Ann Arbor, 2013) 3.

Illyrian cavalrymen who, outmatched by a larger Persian force, were surprised and overpowered while debilitated by sleep and alcohol. According to Sánchez-Ostiz, this incident is cleverly intertwined with others to weave a narrative of Eastern warfare that absolves Ursicinus while laying blame on Constantius for the fall of Amida.

The second episode (22.12.6) details the excessive feasting and drinking among troops stationed in Antioch during the celebrations and ritual sacrifices orchestrated by Julian. This debauchery was particularly prevalent among the regiments of the *Celtae* and *Petulantes*. However, Sánchez-Ostiz points out that no other sources corroborate the soldiers' participation in these ritual banquets organised by the emperor. He posits that Ammianus may have invented the anecdote as a sardonic counter-narrative to Libanius' account of Julian's tenure in Antioch. Sánchez-Ostiz presents three arguments to support his thesis. Firstly, he argues that the context of the anecdote shows that Ammianus was fully aware of the various texts that sought to establish themselves as the definitive account of the events of 362–3 in Antioch. Secondly, he notes that the passage contains similarities of expression with other sections of the *Res Gestae*, indicating that Ammianus used a stereotypical cliché to describe food excesses. Sánchez-Ostiz believes that it is more likely that Ammianus would have recycled a stereotype if he had invented the anecdote, rather than basing it on personal experience or reliable sources. Thirdly, the episode shares the topos of soldiers becoming licentious because of the comforts of urban life. While Sánchez-Ostiz's arguments are compelling, they do not conclusively prove his thesis. If we were to question the authenticity of every episode where Ammianus deploys commonplaces and stereotypes, we would have to discard a significant portion of the *Res Gestae*. In this reviewer's opinion, a more substantial and convincing body of evidence is required before an episode can be dismissed as a wholesale fabrication with a polemical intent.

The final passage (31.5.6) depicts a scene in which the inebriated Roman commander Lupicinus orders the execution of the guards of Gothic kings Fritigern and Alavivus. According to Sánchez-Ostiz, by highlighting Lupicinus' wickedness, greed, and excess in the context of the cruel famine suffered by the Goths, Ammianus not only holds him personally responsible for the escalation of violence but also foreshadows the idea that a lack of discipline within the army contributed to the defeat at Adrianople. In conclusion, Sánchez-Ostiz's study suggests that Ammianus employed the conventional motif of military luxury intentionally, and not merely as a rote repetition of typical stock phrases on decadence and corruption found in moralistic historiography. Each instance serves a specific purpose in his narrative.

The chapter by Sigrid Mratschek, '*Coturni terribilis fabula* (Amm. Marc. 28.6.29): The Goddess of Justice and the Death of Theodosius the Elder', is a new, extended, and modified English version of a German work published in

2007.⁷ In this chapter, Mratschek studies the theatricality of Ammianus' account of the 'Lepcis Magna affair'—a protracted conflict between the citizens of Lepcis Magna and the *Comes Africae* Romanus. She connects this account to an event conspicuously absent in Ammianus' work: the death of Theodosius the Elder. According to Mratschek, in his rendition of these episodes, Ammianus assumes a tragic tone and lets the goddess of justice play a prominent role.

Mratschek begins her chapter by emphasising that the relationship between the *Res Gestae* and historical reality isn't a simple representation, but rather a complex tapestry of reflected patterns of thought and action. Her aim is to underscore how Ammianus, through theatrical mimesis and metaliterary reflection, uses the allegory of Justice not just to convey knowledge, but also to subtly voice his criticisms of the political realities of his time. For Mratschek, in short, Ammianus does not merely narrate history, but stages it as if it were a theatrical performance. Though Ammianus' account alludes to the sins of Romanus, neither are the citizens of Lepcis rehabilitated, nor is the corrupt official brought to justice. Instead, his rival Theodosius, who had revealed the scandal, is accused and removed. For Mratschek, Ammianus in his narration of these episodes stages a tragedy with the elder Theodosius as its fateful hero, but he is careful not to depict his death. The allegorical figure of Justice, repeatedly invoked by Ammianus, assumes the role of a poignant memory marker, intended to make his audience acutely aware of the escalating breakdown of law and order within the Roman Empire. For Mratschek, Ammianus contrasts in his narrative the myth of the emperor Julian with that of the immortal and victorious general Theodosius and aims to help forge a new shared identity among the upper classes after the catastrophe of Adrianople.

In the following chapter, titled '*Ille ut fax uel incensus malleolus: Ammianus and his Swift Narration of Julian's Balkan Itinerary in 361 CE*', Moysés Marcos provides an in-depth examination of Ammianus' portrayal of Julian's Balkan campaign in the civil war against Constantius. Marcos seeks to understand why Julian's Balkan itinerary, despite its success and ending bloodlessly with Constantius' sudden death, is often given limited space in various historical texts and panegyrics, such as those of Claudius Mamertinus, Libanius, Eunapius, Zosimus, and specifically in Ammianus' *Res Gestae*. Marcos argues that this critical period in Julian's career, particularly his journey through the dioceses of Dacia and Thrace, has been overlooked in scholarly studies. His thesis posits that Ammianus is primarily focused on establishing Julian's

⁷ S. Mratschek, '*Et Ne Quid Coturni Terribilis Fabulae Relinquerent Intemptatum ...* (Amm. Marc. 28.6.29). Die Göttin der Gerechtigkeit und der *comes* Romanus', in J. den Boeft, et al., edd., *Ammianus after Julian: The Reign of Valentinian and Valens in Books 26–31 of the Res Gestae* (Leiden, 2007) 245–70.

legitimacy as emperor in Illyricum. To this end, Ammianus selectively omits elements from his account that could potentially undermine this objective. Marcos meticulously examines Julian's reception in Sirmium upon his arrival and his subsequent advance from Sirmium to Constantinople. He suggests that Ammianus strategically employs narrative speed to portray Julian as a swift-moving emperor, highlighting Julian's rapidity as a defining trait of his command, and to focus on points and instances that enhance Julian's legitimacy while minimising potential threats to it.

Moreover, Marcos posits that Ammianus' emphasis on Julian's arrival in key cities, specifically Sirmium and Constantinople, serves as a narrative marker of Julian's smooth transition to sole emperorship. He suggests that the details of Julian's journey between Sirmium and Constantinople are intentionally kept minimal to underscore Julian's rapid rise to power. Marcos also proposes that Ammianus downplays Julian's brief stay in Serdica (Sofia), a point often overlooked in other scholarly works, to maintain Julian's reputation. He concludes that Ammianus' use of narrative speed and selective emphasis aims to depict Julian as the empire's rescuer, rushing to its aid. This careful narrative framing underscores Julian's legitimacy, and focuses on cities such as Sirmium, Naissus, and Constantinople, while downplaying or minimising other aspects of the emperor's journey.

In the chapter 'The Depiction of the Common Soldier (*miles*) in Ammianus and Tacitus and the Intertextual Background of the *Res Gestae*', Agnese Bargagna explores the influence of Tacitus' work on Ammianus Marcellinus. She argues that Ammianus' utilisation of Tacitus represents a broad textual engagement, rather than the inclusion of specific lexical allusions. This engagement is particularly evident in the portrayal of the *miles* ('common soldier') in the *Res Gestae*. Bargagna begins by providing a historiography of scholarly inquiry into the relationship between Tacitus and Ammianus. While mid-nineteenth-century scholars saw Ammianus as Tacitus' successor and imitator, twentieth-century researchers were more sceptical, identifying minimal influence. More recent studies have utilised various interpretations of intertextuality to investigate the issue. Bargagna identifies two contrasting approaches in contemporary research. One approach sees 'allusion' as an intentional and recognisable element of intertextuality, while the other dismisses the question of intention, focusing instead on a holistic analysis of content, form, and historical representation in both the *Res Gestae* and its predecessors. In her study, Bargagna appears to combine elements from both methodologies in her analysis.

Bargagna underscores that despite superficial stylistic resemblances, the authors hold distinctly different attitudes towards their subjects. Ammianus displays empathy for the common soldiers, demonstrating an understanding of their sentiments. Conversely, Tacitus maintains a more detached stance, characterised by his predominantly pessimistic outlook and apparent disdain

for the masses. Although Ammianus' thematic focus often aligns with Tacitean sensibilities, as evidenced by an analysis of his stylistic and narrative structures, significant differences remain regarding their historical context and beliefs. Bargagna concludes from her study that while the influence of Tacitus is discernible, Ammianus upholds his unique voice and perspective.

In the concluding chapter titled 'Xenophon and Ammianus: Two Soldier-Historians and Their Persian Expeditions', Guy Williams presents an examination of Ammianus' depiction of Julian's campaign in Persia. Williams argues that Ammianus portrays Julian, despite his demise, as successful. By characterising the initiative as a 'march' instead of a 'military mission', Ammianus artfully circumvents the issue of Julian's Persian failure, enabling him to portray Julian as a triumphant hero straddling Greek and Roman identities. In the first part of the chapter, Williams compares Ammianus' narrative approach with Xenophon's *Anabasis* to shed light on their storytelling techniques. This comparison uncovers how both texts transform ostensibly failed missions into successful marches. Williams stresses that until Julian's death, the campaign narrative unfolds as a series of military victories, with Ammianus devoting more attention to Julian's advance than to the subsequent retreat. This observation illustrates the parallel narrative techniques and expedition representations used by both authors.

In the subsequent sections, Williams probes the presentation of identities in both works, investigating processes of identity creation, rejection, and adaptation. Through this thorough approach, Williams provides a deeper understanding of Julian's character and the significance of his expedition. Analysing select passages, Williams suggests that Ammianus concurrently portrays Julian and his campaign as both Roman and Greek. Williams concludes that although Julian predominantly saw himself as Greek, Ammianus represents him as a blend of Greek and Roman, thereby constructing a shared identity. The author effectively argues that the question of Julian's dominant identity remains open-ended, with readers not being compelled to choose between Greek or Roman. This conclusion provides a fresh lens through which to view the intricate interplay of identities in Ammianus' work.

Permit me a deviation from the conventional ending for a scholarly review. I wish to circle back to the question posed at the beginning of this text regarding Ammianus as a soldier and historian. An additional historical comparison might shed more light on the kind of soldier-historian Ammianus was. Consider, for example, the English historian of the Napoleonic Wars in Spain, William Napier (1785–1860).⁸ Much like Ammianus, Napier came from

⁸ Napier offers in his history a detailed and balanced account, which rejects the brutality of war and sympathises with the democratic ideas of the French enemy: W. F. Napier, *The History of the War in the Peninsula*, 6 vols (New York, 1863).

an aristocratic background and served as an officer rather than a rank-and-file soldier. He served as an *aide-de-camp* to his cousin, the Duke of Richmond, distinguished himself in various engagements, and eventually rose to the rank of brigade major. After the war, he spent many years writing his *History of the War in the Peninsula and the South of France from the Year 1807 to the Year 1814*, which was published in six volumes between 1828 and 1840, and found considerable public success.

However, despite these apparent parallels, Napier's work greatly differs from that of Ammianus. Napier's narrative style is elegant and rhetorical, but also succinct and professional. The content of his history focuses on his personal experiences and military expertise while the narrative is mainly restricted to warfare, with only a few digressions.⁹ This style starkly contrasts with Ammianus' more flamboyant, literary prose filled with allusions. This difference highlights a key point: in the case of Ammianus, the author overshadows the soldier. Ammianus emerges as a stylist in the tradition of ancient *Kunstprosa*, and this factor exerts a greater influence on his historical work than his military experience.

In the closing of his work, when Ammianus describes himself as a *miles quondam et Graecus*, he underscores above all his unique qualifications for chronicling the history of the empire. However, it seems clear that *miles* should not be taken literally. Ammianus employs the term to refer to his military experience in a broad sense, rather than as an accurate description of his duties or as an indicator of his identification with the rank-and-file soldiers.

We must express our gratitude to the authors of this volume for providing new perspectives on this challenging issue, but for future research, it seems clear that Ammianus the author offers more potential than Ammianus the 'soldier', or, to put it in terms that seem more precise to me, Ammianus the military officer. Given the nature of our evidence, the latter, hidden behind the former, remains a shadowy figure that is difficult to grasp.

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⁹ On Napier's style see E. Adams, *Liberal Epic: The Victorian Practice of History from Gibbon to Churchill* (Charlottesville, 2011) 131–40.