

Opus ueritatem professum

Narrative, purpose, and method in the *Res gestae* of Ammianus Marcellinus

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<p>The time today referred to as Late Antiquity was a time of turbulence and upheaval in the Roman Empire. At the end of the fourth century CE, Ammianus Marcellinus authored an extensive historical account covering the years from 96 CE to 378 CE, <i>Res gestae</i>, although only the books covering the years 353–378 CE are extant. As one of the few literary sources from this period not written by a Christian author, his account holds special significance.</p> <p>This thesis is a narratological analysis of the extant books of <i>Res gestae</i>, focusing on how Ammianus Marcellinus, despite his assurances that he has attempted to create a work without conscious bias and omission, used it as a vehicle for social and political criticism. The narratological framework created by Hayden White serves as a foundation for the analysis, although the toolkit is further expanded and adapted by relying on the Classic field as well. Using those tools, the thesis explores how Ammianus constructs allusive and specific critical narratives, weaving together different events, actions, and characters, Ammianus excoriates the ruling class of the Roman Empire, making the case for what he feels has contributed to a decline in the Empire. It is a far-reaching account, and the thesis covers a selection of subjects he builds his narratives on; the emperors that serve as the narrative focal point, their authority and use of power, religion, the portrayal of the city of Rome, and the use of groups such as eunuchs that Ammianus portray as a manifestation of the ills that plague the Empire.</p> <p>The conclusion is that <i>Res gestae</i> a highly biased and reactionary work, where the last pagan emperor, Julian, is portrayed in a manner that makes him serve as a didactic blueprint for everyone to emulate. The narratives of the other emperors makes clear that they are less than Julian, and are thus contributing to the turbulence in the empire. Ammianus reinforces this through different narrative techniques, weaving together the aforementioned subjects to strengthen his point. The bias Ammianus shows on occasion can be the result of his own natural bias, or it could be a result of him using different subjects to create a critical narrative, or both. Ammianus was affected by the sociopolitical context he was writing in, and thus had to be more discreet in his approach regarding subjects such as religion. The fraught and turbulent times clearly affected him, and <i>Res gestae</i> is a reactionary and didactic response that Ammianus was well suited to write due to his professional and social background.</p>	
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1 Introduction

*Haec ut miles quondam et Graecus a principatu Caesaris Neruae exorsus ad usque Valentis interitum, pro uirium explicauit mensura : opus ueritatem professum numquam, ut arbitror, sciens silentio ausus corrumpere uel mendacio.*¹

*These events, from the principate of the emperor Nerva to the death of Valens, I, a former soldier and a Greek, have set forth to the measure of my ability, without ever (I believe) consciously venturing to debase through silence or through falsehood a work whose aim was the truth.*²

Ammianus Marcellinus, who lived circa 330–395 CE, was a Roman historian who authored an extensive historical account in Latin, *Res gestae*. The account consisted of thirty-one books covering the time from 96 to 378 CE. It linked to Tacitus' *Historiae* and began where *Historiae* ended, namely during 96 CE with the ascension of Nerva to the throne. Today only eighteen books are extant, covering the years 353–378 CE. The remaining books of *Res gestae* are among the few literary works from this period that do not have a Christian author, which means they form a distinct historiographic category of sources from the period in question. Ammianus Marcellinus has for that reason, along with his own posturing, often been compared to historians from earlier periods, and his reliability and abilities as a historian have been diligently debated and viewed in that light.³ His predecessors were notably pagans⁴, which in the context of Late Antiquity, where Christian hegemony was being established, has been given significant attention in later research, occasionally to the exclusion of all else.

The scholarly appreciation of Ammianus Marcellinus and his value as a source has varied during the last centuries, and the discussions broadly reflect the development of historical science. From the middle of the 19th century Ammianus was deemed a substandard historian.⁵ Not only was the value of *Res gestae* as a source questioned, which reflected the current developments in the discipline and new scientific criteria, but his language was especially criticized. He was compared to historians of earlier periods and was deemed to be lacking their

¹Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum Gestarum Libri Qui Supersunt*, eds. Wolfgang Seyfarth, Liselotte Jacob-Karau, and Ilse Ulmann (Stuttgart and Leipzig: Tenner, 1999), 31.16.9. The number 31 refers to the book in question, 16 to the chapter, and 9 to the particular line or sentence.

² John C. Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus III* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 31.16.9.

³ Gavin Kelly, "Ammianus Marcellinus: Tacitus' heir and Gibbon's guide", *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Historians*, ed. Andrew Feldherr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 349.

⁴ Alan Cameron in *The Last Pagans of Rome* defines pagan as the most simple and accurate term to use, especially when treating for example the attitude of the Christian establishment to non-Christian groups. It is also a more restricted reference than for example "polytheism", which contextually was not free of pejorative connotations either. Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011], 25–30.

⁵ See chapter 1.4; Literature review, for more information and examples.

stylistic talent. *Res gestae* was thus pronounced a substandard work and a poor source, but that has since been re-evaluated and the view of Ammianus, his work, and what can be gleaned from it has changed drastically. During the last decades, Ammianus' capabilities as a writer have been reconsidered, and now he is viewed as an astute, manipulative, and allusive historian.⁶ This re-evaluation led to Ammianus being considered the last great Latin historian, who through autoptic (i.e. what he has seen for himself) descriptions conveys visual image and penetrates character. This, along with his highly individualistic use of Latin, and broad consummate literary gestures, led him to produce a work of vast scope and significance.⁷ Since *Res gestae* holds a unique position as a source for an eventful transitional period in the history of Late Antiquity, the conversation about its value and what can be gleaned from it holds a special importance.

1.1 Objectives, research question and demarcation

In *Res gestae*, Ammianus Marcellinus claims that he has produced a truthful account of events from the rule of Nerva (96 CE) to the death of Valens (378 CE) to the best of his ability and without conscious bias, omissions, or falsehoods.⁸ The aim of this study is to analyze and underline how Ammianus, despite his explicit stance regarding truthfulness and objectivity, uses *Res gestae* as a vehicle of social and political criticism. This includes ways in which the author directly and indirectly appears in the text, how he sourced his work, and most prominently the creation of specific narratives to create a highly nuanced and critical story. The central questions of the thesis are how he constructed these narratives, as well as what purpose they serve. It was turbulent and fraught time for the Roman Empire, so it is to be presumed that Ammianus' concern over people, developments, and events he feels has weakened or diminished the Roman Empire are strongly reflected in the text. The aim is to through a narratological analysis question the claim that *Res gestae* is an unbiased and truthful account of events, and explore whether it can be construed as his instrument for highlighting and criticizing the issues that he perceives plagues and weakens the empire. The role of the emperor and how they affect the empire features prominently. In that vein, the thesis will explore whether he suggests remedies for these issues, and what they in that case are. It is to be presumed that his subjectivity and critical narratives are reflected in how he is sourcing his work as well. This

⁶ Gavin Kelly, *Ammianus Marcellinus: The Allusive Historian* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1–5.

⁷ J. F. Matthews, "Ammianus and the Eternity of Rome", *The Inheritance of Historiography 350–900*, eds. C. Holdsworth & T.P. Wiseman (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1986), 17–19.

⁸ See page 1, footnote 1.

pertains to what he chooses to build his narratives on, and what he chose to exclude in doing so.

To avoid severing Ammianus Marcellinus from the intellectual history and societal context he was operating in, the thesis will include some shorter historical and historiographical overviews. Given the unique context and nature of *Res gestae*, there are a multitude of areas to cover, especially when considering the complexity and scope of the text, and the multitude of narratives contained therein. Earlier readings of *Res gestae* often took a largely biographical approach to the text, although this approach is not fit for purpose today, as he is viewed as a far more subtle and manipulative author than he was before.⁹ Rather than simply retelling what he conceivably has experienced himself, he is now viewed as being far more cognizant of larger developments and thus more reactionary in his text, casting a new light on parts of the text that had previously been taken at face-value or summarily dismissed.¹⁰ Presenting brief overviews of certain areas, e.g. the aforementioned sociopolitical context as well as religious affairs, are meant to provide the reader with necessary background and context to some phenomena or events that occur in his account.

1.2 Source material

The primary source material consists of the extant books of Ammianus Marcellinus' *Res gestae*. As previously mentioned, it presumably consisted of 31 books originally, although there has been speculation that there could have been 36.¹¹ The extant books, 14–31, cover the years from 353 to 378 CE. There has been some debate about why the years 96–353 CE would have been covered in only thirteen books, while 353–378 CE stretched over eighteen books. However, older times being treated somewhat summarily, and the accounts becoming more detailed the closer they come to the lifetime of the author, is a relatively common phenomena in ancient historiography. The idea was that “[...] those who give the most detailed information about contemporary events are the most trustworthy, but those who give similar detail about the past are least trustworthy”¹². This seems to be the case with *Res gestae* as well.

⁹ Alan Ross, “Ammianus, Traditions of Satire, and the Eternity of Rome,” *The Classical Journal* 110, no. 3. (2015), 356–357.

¹⁰ Ross, “Ammianus, Traditions of Satire, and the Eternity of Rome”, makes a compelling case for re-evaluating for example the arguably satirical digressions concerning inhabitants of Rome.

¹¹ Timothy Barnes, *Ammianus Marcellinus and the Representation of Historical Reality* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 26.

¹² I. A. F. Bruce, “Theopompus and Classical Greek Historiography”, *History and Theory* 9, no. 1 (1970), 91.

Res gestae has a mostly chronological disposition, although Ammianus Marcellinus sometimes deviates from this arrangement. He writes that he sometimes has to stop himself from digressing too much in order to keep his account concise, and so that events be dealt in their proper order, place, or time.¹³ There are over 300 digressions in *Res gestae*, during which Ammianus deals with a multitude of different subjects. It is mainly during these digressions that he deviates from his chronological plan.¹⁴ The digressions also contain a large part of the geographical exposition in *Res gestae*,¹⁵ which is noteworthy because his focus on natural phenomena (such as earthquakes and solar eclipse) and pestilence, along with geography (which in the ancient sense also included things like ethnography), brings him closer to Greek historiographical tradition, as opposed to Roman.¹⁶ It pertains to how the author might be visible in the text, although the most relevant digressions for the thesis are the ones concerning the city of Rome.

A noteworthy element of *Res gestae* is Ammianus writing it in Latin, presumably in the city of Rome itself, and placing it firmly in the classical historiographical tradition. He does this by for example linking directly to Tacitus.¹⁷ The Latinity of Ammianus was long misconstrued and undervalued, and it is only relatively recently that it has been reassessed and recognized.¹⁸ His style and language, previously regarded as crude and clumsy due to his supposed inadequacy with the Latin language when compared to the classical masters, has been recognized as being the result of the complex and masterful manipulation of the constitutive elements.¹⁹ Gavin Kelly even concluded that “Ammianus *wanted* to speak Latin with a Greek

¹³ Ammianus Marcellinus, 14.9.9: *Quae singula narrare non refert, ne professionis modum, quod sane uitandum est, excedamus*

15.1.1: *Vt cumque potui ueritatem scrutari, ea, quae uidere licuit per aetatem uel perplexe interrogando uersatos in medio scire, narrauimus ordine casuum exposito diuersorum; residua, quae secuturus asperiet textus, pro uirium captu limatius absoluemus nihil obtrectatores longi, ut putant, operis formidantes. Tunc enim laudanda est breuitas, cum moras rumpens intempestiuas nihil subtrahit cognitioni gestorum.*

16.10.17: *[...] cuius originem formamque loco competenti monstrabo.*

14.8.15: *Nunc repetetur ordo gestorum.*

¹⁴ Ammianus’ digressions cover a multitude of subjects, e.g. customs and history of different people (14.4: *Saracenorum irruptiones et mores*: Inroads of the Saracens and their customs; 22.16: *De quinque Aegypti prouinciis, deque Claris eorum urbibus*: On the five provinces of Egypt and their famous cities), and technical exposition (23.4: *Descriptiones muralium machinarum, ballistae, scorpionis uel onagri, arietis, helepoleos, ac malleoli*: A description of mural artillery: the ballista, the scorpion, the ram, the helepoleis, and fire-darts). He also includes numerous digressions about the city of Rome, which will be treated in chapter 3.4: The City of Rome and political centers.

¹⁵ Gavin A. Sundwall, “Ammianus Geographicus”, *The American Journal of Philology* 117, no. 4 (1996), 622.

¹⁶ Kelly, “Ammianus Marcellinus: Tacitus’ heir and Gibbon’s guide”, 353.

¹⁷ Ross, “Ammianus, Traditions of Satire and the Eternity of Rome”, 356.

¹⁸ Kelly, “Ammianus Marcellinus: Tacitus’ heir and Gibbon’s guide”, 348–350.

¹⁹ Roger Blockley, “Ammianus and Cicero”, 306–307.

accent”.²⁰ This underscores the complexity of the text and the degree to which it during previous centuries was often underestimated and misunderstood. It also emphasizes the need for care and consideration when working with a text like *Res gestae*.

Another thing to consider is that the original work in Latin has been preserved through manuscript transmission, the same as countless other texts. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, to say precisely how closely the modern editions corresponds to the original work. There may also be *lacunae*²¹. Some of the *lacunae* may also have been partially filled later by others. However, the modern editions used in the thesis have been produced through textual criticism, having considered the fact that there may have been some changes or different interpretations. David Hunt and Jan Willem Drijvers claim the manuscript transmission of *Res gestae* is not particularly complicated, being mostly based on two manuscripts from the first half of the ninth century; the Codex Fuldensis and the Codex Hersfeldensis. The latter has been lost since the 16th century (although six pages were rediscovered in the late 19th century and some fragments in the 1980s)²², and which they consider the Fuldensis to be a transcript of.²³ Recent studies have challenged this, arguing instead that they are both copies of the same damaged original. However, these have by paleographical consensus been found to have been produced near each other in time and are very close in their text, lacking major divergences and sharing a lot of errors.²⁴

The Latin quotations in the thesis are taken from the 1999 edition edited by Wolfgang Seyfarth (first edition printed in 1978).²⁵ Direct translated quotes are taken from one of the only complete modern translation into English, which is by John C. Rolfe in the Loeb series.²⁶

²⁰ Gavin Kelly, “Ammianus’ Greek Accent,” *Talanta* 45 (2013), 79.

²¹ Lacuna: “blank or missing portion in a manuscript,” <https://www.etymonline.com/word/lacuna> [accessed 27.10.2020]

²² Gavin Kelly & Justin Stover, “The Hersfeldensis and the Fuldensis of Ammianus Marcellinus: A Reconsideration”, *The Cambridge Classical Journal* 62 (2016), 109.

²³ David Hunt & Jan Willem Drijvers, “Introduction: Text, commentaries and translations,” in *The Late Roman World and Its Historian: Interpreting Ammianus Marcellinus*, eds. David Hunt & Jan Willem Drijvers (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1999), 7

²⁴ Kelly & Stover, “The Hersfeldensis and the Fuldensis of Ammianus Marcellinus” 108–110.

²⁵ Wolfgang Seyfarth. *Ammiani Marcellini rerum gestarum libri qui supersunt*, eds Wolfgang Seyfarth, aduuantibus Liselotte Jacob-Karau et Ilse Ulmann, 2nd edition. (Stuttgart and Leipzig: De Gruyter, 1999).

²⁶ John C. Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

John C. Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus II: books XX-XXVI* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).

John C. Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus III: books XXVII-XXXI* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).

1.3 Method and theory

Texts are produced in a particular context, be it societal, geographical, cultural, economic, or any other. This naturally infers a certain degree of subjectivity, even while considering that there is also room for a certain amount of agency within that framework, e.g. how situationally aware or reactive the author is towards certain subjects. The primary method this thesis relies on to approach *Res gestae* is narratology. Since the mid-1980s, narratology has become progressively more prevalent in the analyzing of ancient texts, e.g. challenging the trend of all-too-biographical readings, as well as helping unveil the ideologies of the text through focalization. Analyzing the role of narrator and narrate, characterization, handlings of time, matters of focalization, and similar aspects, introduced a new way to approach texts, especially those previously deemed problematic when approached through a biographical lens.²⁷

The focus of *Res gestae* is predominantly the actions of the imperial males of the period, along with some experiences of the author and the environments and settings in which he was active. This means a prominent focus on the military, as well the higher social and political strata of the Roman Empire. Given the focus of the text, the prominence of the upper elements of society is not extraordinary, but it is a fundamental subjective narrative at the root of the work. Peter Kosso has underlined the selectivity at work in contexts like these:

[...] facts are selected by the original historical sources [and] often written by the victors and a priori must be written by the literate. These and other constraints pick out not only certain kinds of facts, and so the record is biased in favor of information on the powerful, the wealthy, and other past elites, most notably religious ones. Unique and special events were considered noteworthy, while the everyday and mundane were not, and so facts about commoners and the commonplace are missing from the record.²⁸

As such, the narrative is doubly skewed in favor of the powerful and the wealthy, both by choice and by context. Subsequently, there is already an implicit bias that defines the *Res gestae*.

Among the members of the past Roman elite, whom Ammianus Marcellinus often both refers to and engages with, Marcus Tullius Cicero stands out. Ammianus quotes or references him on numerous occasions in *Res gestae*,²⁹ displaying comprehensive knowledge of his work (including parts that are no longer extant). The late Roman Republic, the time in which Cicero

²⁷ Irene J. F. De Jong, *Narratology and Classics: a practical guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 9–11.

²⁸ Peter Kosso, “Philosophy of Historiography”, in *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, ed. Aviezer Tucker (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 5–6.

²⁹ Roger Blockley, “Ammianus and Cicero: The Epilogue of the “History” as a Literary Statement”, *Phoenix* 52, no. 3-4 (1998), 309.

was active, generally constitutes the most referred-to period in *Res gestae*.³⁰ Whilst not directly referenced in *Res gestae*, it is thus highly probable that Ammianus was familiar with Cicero's thoughts about history as "life's teacher", *historia magistra vitae*.³¹ This generally means the study of the past providing lessons for the future.³² This mode of thought serves as a foundation of sorts for this thesis, as it includes discussion about the sociopolitical criticism, warning examples, and subtle but recurring hints at improvement that permeate the narratives of *Res gestae*. Despite Ammianus' proclaimed desire to create a work without conscious omissions, falsehoods, or bias, he created multiple different narratives surrounding a multitude of peoples and subjects, framing some in a positive manner and others in far less flattering ones. His opinions and values permeate the whole of the text, and sometimes he outright praises and flatters certain people, while sharply criticizing others. All of this indicates that he is creating something normative and didactic, rather than wholly descriptive. Furthermore, it points to an explicit bias in *Res gestae*.

Furthermore, it is imperative to note the extent to which the author engaged with, and is the result of, both the contemporary world and the past. Jason König and Tim Whitmarsh highlighted the importance of considering societal context, arguing that conceptions of knowledge and ways of textualizing these were deeply entwined with social and political practices and ideals within the Roman Empire. They highlighted the importance of empire and 'imperialness' in particular.³³ Furthermore, assessing the cultural and historical specificity of knowledge systems must be viewed in relation to what came before. This includes that the relationship between for example ancient empire and knowledge (here deemed mutually parasitic) arose from certain rhetorical traditions and institutional structures.³⁴ Considering e.g. Ammianus' frequent references to the late Roman Republic and allusions to classical authors, the text must be understood in that context as well. Social relations and situations cannot be ignored either, as König and Whitmarsh underline:

³⁰ Ross, "Ammianus, Traditions of Satire and the Eternity of Rome," 359–360, 362.

³¹ Marcus Tullius Cicero, K.W. Piderit, & Otto Harnecker. *Cicero de Oratore* (Amsterdam: A.M. Hakkert, 1965). 2.36: *historia vero testis temporum, lux veritatis, vitae memoria, magistra vitae, nuntia vetustatis, qua voce alia nisi oratoris immortalitati commendatur*

³² Antero Heikkinen, *Historiallisen ajattelun historia: Eurooppalainen perinne antiikista nykypäivään* (Helsinki: SKS kirjat, 2013), 29.

³³ Jason König & Tim Whitmarsh, "Ordering Knowledge," in *Ordering Knowledge in the Roman Empire*, eds. Jason König & Tim Whitmarsh. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2–5.

³⁴ König & Whitmarsh, "Ordering Knowledge," 4–9.

[t]he world of knowledge – compromising both the institutions defining it and the texts embodying it – is never neutral, detached, objective. The assumption that the textual compilation of knowledge is a practice distinct from political power will not stand.³⁵

This highlights how imperative it is to include context for text and author, as well as to consider the structures of power, backgrounds, and hierarchies, patterns of thought, social relations, and similar factors. It is crucial to attempt to understand the texts on their terms and in proper context, rather than treating them as if they were produced in a vacuum. That would risk an anachronistic approach. As shown, including social and historical context is crucial for the narratological analysis. Excluding background and context risks skewing the understanding of both text and author, which would lead to a faulty narratological analysis. Context and parallel history are occasionally even mentioned in the text itself, with Ammianus claiming he will speak no further of certain subjects, as contemporary records will confirm what he has already said.³⁶ However, social and historical context alone is not enough for a proper analysis.

On the topic of sourcing in *Res gestae*, and how it pertains to the appearance of the author in the text, it is possible to separate between what Ammianus based on autopsy and what he based on secondary sources. This can infer a degree of selectivity. Pertaining to the use of sources, there has been debate about the extent of and relationship between Ammianus' own observations, *visa*, and what he has read, *lecta*. One feature of this is how he uses and references what he has read, with his use of historical allusions as opposed to true “cross-references” being spotlighted in modern discourse.³⁷ A second feature is Ammianus shifting between a first-person autoptic witness and a persona as a critical historian. The autoptic witness is presumably largely based on his own observations (or wishing to convey that it is), whereas the historian is treating events and experiences he has not taken part of or seen for himself. How he did this, what he chose to include, and what he was building towards will feature prominently in the narratological analysis. To the broader discussion about *visa* and *lecta* will be added *ficta*, i.e. his presumed own inventions or embellishments, although the line between these can be extremely thin.

³⁵ König & Whitmarsh, “Ordering Knowledge,” 7.

³⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus, 31.14.8: *Haec super Valente dixisse sufficient, quae uera esse aequalis nobis memoria plene testator.*

³⁷ Hans Teitler, “Visa Vel Lecta? Ammianus on Persia and the Persians,” in *The Late Roman World and its Historian. Interpreting Ammianus Marcellinus*, eds. J. W. Drijvers & D. Hunt (London: Routledge 1999), 191–197; David Rohrbacher, “The Sources for the Lost Books of Ammianus Marcellinus”, *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 55, no. 1 (2006), 107; Charles W. Fornara, “Studies in Ammianus Marcellinus: II: Ammianus’ Knowledge and Use of Greek and Latin Literature”, *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 41, no. 4 (1992): 420–438. See “chapter 1.4: literature review” for further discussion on the topic.

The primary narratological foundation for the thesis is Hayden White, who is arguably most famous for his highly influential work on literary criticism in the historical discipline: *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe*. In *Metahistory*, he deconstructs the way in which historians often employ different strategies of explanation, and how they use narratives to achieve their goal. He claims that historical works combine particular data with theoretical concepts to explain the data, which in turn is combined with a narrative structure to present a sequence of events presumed to have happened in the past.³⁸ Whilst White was primarily focused on the nineteenth century, he also explicitly meant it as a general theory to analyze and deconstruct the structure of the “[...] mode of thought which is called “historical”³⁹.

White outlined a difference between chronicles and stories, as well as how the historian interacts with these; a chronicle is an open-ended arrangement of events dealing with events in the time that they occurred, whereas a story organizes these into a process of happening with a beginning, middle, and end. In a story the events are also characterized through certain motifs. White challenges the notion that a historian “finds” or “uncovers” the “stories” that lie buried in e.g. chronicles; this would supposedly differ from fiction due to the historian finding their stories, whereas a fiction writer makes their up. According to White, this downplays or hides the role that inventing stories play in what a historian does:

The same event can serve as a different kind of element of many different historical stories, depending on the role it is assigned in a specific motific characterization of the set to which it belongs. The death of the king may be a beginning, an ending, or simply a transitional event in three different stories. In the chronicle, this event is simply “there” as an element of a series; it does not “function” as a story element.⁴⁰

Stories have a discernible form and raise questions that the historian has to anticipate and answer; questions concerning what happened, how it happened, why it happened one way as opposed to another, and how it ended. According to White, these questions determine the narrative tactics the historian must use in the construction of their story.⁴¹ He also differentiates between such questions, which create a followable story by providing a connection between events, and questions that deal with the structure of the completed story. The latter concern what the story adds up to and what the whole point of the story is. While the thesis will not

³⁸ Hayden White, *Metahistory: the historical imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973), preface ix.

³⁹ White, *Metahistory*, 1.

⁴⁰ White, *Metahistory*, 6–7.

⁴¹ White, *Metahistory*, 6–7.

make use of much of the methodology White constructs in *Metahistory*, the previously outlined parts serve as a theoretical background and framework.

On the topic of historical or scientific objectivity the thesis again leans heavily on Hayden White, more specifically on the essays contained in *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. In the essays he rejects those concepts. He claims that each narrative, however seemingly comprehensive and complete, by its very nature is built on a choice to exclude sets of events that could have been included, but were not.⁴² Peter Kosso argues in similar vein regarding narratives, underlining the need for a story to be analyzed viewing the individual components. The pieces of evidence are used to construct the larger description of what is presumed to have happened in the past, thus also acknowledging that the evidence that builds up the story is selected by the historian.⁴³ This highlights the role of the author of any given historical text, and raises questions about the purpose of constructing a narrative in the manner chosen by the author. This aligns with the previously mentioned questions Hayden White focused on.

White further stressed the relationship between law, historicity, authority, and narrativity. He stresses that the degree of self-consciousness of any historiographical writer is shaped by how much the social system and the law that sustains it occupy their attention. This includes threats to the system as well. This connects to the aforementioned agency within certain contextual frameworks. Linking to narrativity, White argues that it is intrinsically linked to the impulse to moralize reality. He defines this as identifying it with the social system that serves as the source for any morality,⁴⁴ which in the case of *Res gestae* is strongly linked to “imperialness” and religious matters. König’s and Whitmarsh’s focus on context aligns with this. To put it briefly; the social and historical context must be duly considered and incorporated into any narratological analysis, and attempting to remove someone from those skews the analysis and the understanding of the author.

To further furnish this toolkit, the thesis lean on the Classic field as well. Gavin Kelly argues in *Ammianus Marcellinus: The Allusive Historian* that:

the argument and structure of this work is, in common parlance, more ‘literary’ than ‘historical’ (I dislike the antithesis), but it is firmly grounded on historical foundations and

⁴² Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1987), 10.

⁴³ Kosso, “Philosophy of historiography”, 13.

⁴⁴ White, *The Content of the Form*, 13.

some of its conclusions are significant in historical terms: for example, the dubiety of biographical reconstructions [...] and the manner in which the historian used written sources [...].⁴⁵

Kelly argues that rather than taking Ammianus Marcellinus' presumed autopsy as a denominator of expertise and authority, it should be viewed in light of the artistry and interpretation involved.⁴⁶ This aligns with the aforementioned characterization and invention in the historical discipline. Kelly further stresses that autopsy is often used in *Res gestae* to justify or explain something that might otherwise appear to be fantasy, harkening back all the way to the inception of classical historiography, where the use of incredible or legendary *exempla* was quite common.⁴⁷ He also argues that autopsy is used to reinforce Ammianus' authority in certain parts of the text,⁴⁸ even though some of what Ammianus' claims to have witnessed is at best rather dubious and has at the very least probably been embellished. In other words, it is yet another narrative tool used by Ammianus to furnish his story, one which has often lent credibility and supposed expertise to the author. It ties into the debate about *visa* and *lecta* as well. In conjunction with his outspoken claims that he is attempting to present an unvarnished and truthful account, this helped brand him an "accurate and faithful guide"⁴⁹ in the eighteenth century.

This thesis posits that instead of attempting to be simply a descriptive vehicle for events of the past, it has a normative and didactic purpose as well; Ammianus Marcellinus subtly includes both prominent and frequent use of *exempla* as well as his own solutions for the problems he singles out. Leaning on ideas like the aforementioned *historia magistra vitae*, Ammianus Marcellinus constructs multiple narratives dealing directly with his concerns regarding certain developments within the Roman Empire, as well as his suggested remedies for these. Because narratives are also a way of creating, perpetuating, or criticizing the political and social order, placing the historian into the real-world power structures, as opposed to framing them as a neutral bystander, is underlined as critical by White.⁵⁰ This is, as mentioned, strongly supported by König and Whitmarsh. White also, when comparing "stories" to annals and chronicles, highlights that annals and chronicles lack the consciousness of a social center,

⁴⁵ Kelly, *Ammianus Marcellinus: The Allusive Historian*, 7–8.

⁴⁶ Kelly, *Ammianus Marcellinus: The Allusive Historian*, 8.

⁴⁷ Kelly, *The Allusive Historian*, 63–64.

⁴⁸ Kelly, *The Allusive Historian*, 78.

⁴⁹ Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 2 (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1781), 627.

⁵⁰ White, *The Content of the Form*, 10–13.

without which the events listed in them lack cohesiveness, as well as ethical or moral significance. The events are simply there, and do not serve any function. This stands in contrast to narrativity, where the aforementioned social center strings together a sequence of events and imbues them with meaning and motif.⁵¹ Ammianus Marcellinus is the social center of *Res gestae*, deliberately choosing what is portrayed and how it is portrayed, imbuing the sets of events he chose to include with cohesiveness and meaning. Depending on how metatextual one wants to be, the framework of Hayden White could be stretched and Ammianus cast as the narrative center of the work, with the emperors serving as the social center in the text. However, given that Ammianus is still the author, and thus the originator of this dynamic, he is ultimately the social center for the whole text.

Irene De Jong underscores that the author must also be understood within the framework of narratology. Among the different kind of narrators she lists, Ammianus Marcellinus arguably most aptly fits the description of an overt narrator, which De Jong defines as:

a narrator who clearly manifests himself as a narrator throughout the text. His presence can take various forms: he may be dramatized (given a life and personality of his own), comment on the events he relates, or be self-conscious (showing awareness of and thematizing his role as a narrator).⁵²

Given that Ammianus frequently appears in the text, and focalizes the action both explicitly and implicitly throughout the narrative, he most often assumes the role of an overt narrator. As will be shown, Ammianus Marcellinus' posturing and authorial self-fashioning is a recurring theme in *Res gestae*. However, given the scope, complexity and variation both in and of the text, he does not stick exclusively to the role of an overt narrator. A covert narrator, on the other hand, does not offer commentary or reflection in the text.⁵³ Given the both implicit and explicit commentaries and bias in the narratives created by Ammianus that are the main focus of this thesis, it is difficult to argue that he would assume that role frequently. Narrators can also be internal and external to the narrative, and Ammianus switches between the two. His presence in the narrative is occasionally more easily felt when he appears as a first-person narrator, as opposed to when he is adapting his persona as a historian and analyzing events where he was not present.

⁵¹ White, *The Content of the Form*, 11.

⁵² De Jong, *Narratology and Classics*, 26.

⁵³ De Jong, *Narratology and Classics*, 27.

Due to the structure and variation of the material, a chronological review would not be suitable to the purpose of the thesis. For that reason it will have a thematic disposition. In that way the different categories can be discussed in a more concise way. As previously mentioned, these primarily consist of different subjects and individuals that Ammianus Marcellinus portrays in vastly different ways throughout *Res gestae*, building up scathingly critical narratives in regards to certain topics, and blatantly showcasing his opinions and morals. Following the theoretical framework of Hayden White, these narratives will be approached through contextualized close reading. The Whitean framework will also be used to discuss the broader contours of Ammianus' narratology. There is an inherent risk of anachronistic thinking in trying to apply this too strictly to something written so long ago, but it still provides a conceptual framework to work within.

1.4 Literature review

Ammianus Marcellinus and *Res gestae* have, as previously mentioned, been the objects of debate for centuries. The discourse has duly gone through a multitude of different phases, which modern research stemmed from and reacted to. For this reason a brief contextual overview of the research regarding *Res gestae* over the centuries will be presented, followed by examples of more modern and specific research that tie more directly to the thesis. The older research is included in the overview because it has informed the modern research to a significant degree, and thus also informs the methodological discussion of the thesis. In short, it is a background to the research regarding the material.

As mentioned, the reputation of Ammianus and *Res gestae* has varied greatly throughout the centuries. Roger Blockley summarizes the development of Ammianus' reputation as:

[d]uring the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Ammianus was regarded as an estimable and reliable source, and he was of enormous importance to Edward Gibbon for both facts and judgements. From the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century, however, Ammianus' reputation fell. The close examination of his language and its classical antecedents led to the conclusion that he was an incompetent writer, whose main value lay in his uncritical preservation of historical material. More recently, since the Second World War, Ammianus has regained and surpassed his former reputation, and is now generally regarded as one of the outstanding writers of antiquity, complex, subtle, and manipulative, and, therefore, to be handled very warily as a source of historical fact.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Blockley, "Ammianus Marcellinus and his Classical Background", 459.

Edward Gibbon, who wrote his influential *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* during the 18th century, notably praised Ammianus as “[...] an accurate and faithful guide, who composed the history of his own times without indulging the prejudices and passions which usually affect the mind of a contemporary”⁵⁵. However, he still condemned Ammianus’ language and literary abilities. Subsequently, the focus on Ammianus’ supposedly inferior language led to a marked decline in his reputation, casting him as substandard and wanting in comparison to his predecessors from classical antiquity, literary incompetent, stylistically untalented, and incompetent as a historian in a modern sense.⁵⁶

The professionalization of the historical discipline, and the arrival of the Rankean paradigm during the nineteenth century, caused a further deterioration of Ammianus’ reputation. The Rankean paradigm prominently focused on finding out about the past “as it really was”, not sitting in judgement of the past, and affirming objectivity as an essential characteristic of historiography.⁵⁷ The fact that *Res gestae* was a text regarded to have been produced with dubious credibility meant it was ill suited to this methodology.⁵⁸ Furthermore, his language was classified as Vulgar Latin, partially influenced by his borrowing from Greek and earlier writers. The general consensus was that his knowledge of Latin was limited. He was, in short, deemed linguistically and rhetorically subpar.⁵⁹ To some extent the view of Ammianus among historians from that period of time can be summarized with a quote from Kurt Wachsmuth, who claimed Ammianus was writing what he could, not what he wanted (“Ammianus schreibt wie er kann, nicht wie er will”)⁶⁰. The general idea was that someone who was that incompetent as an author cannot be competent as a historian.⁶¹

While there has been significant variation in how historians approach a source like *Res gestae*, anchored in specific social and historical contexts, one recurring theme has been the comparison of Ammianus as a historian to his predecessors from classical times. Whilst the impulse to compare him to Tacitus has been augmented by Ammianus’ own posturing, he was often compared to these aforementioned classical authors because a significant part of the

⁵⁵ Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 627.

⁵⁶ Kelly, “Ammianus Marcellinus: Tacitus’ heir and Gibbon’s guide”, 348–349.

⁵⁷ Paul Newall, “Historiographic Objectivity,” in *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, 2–3.

⁵⁸ John Zammito, “Historians and the Philosophy of Historiography,” in *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, 99–101.

Kelly, ‘Ammianus Marcellinus: Tacitus’ Heir and Gibbon’s Guide’, 353–355.

⁵⁹ Roger Blockley, “Ammianus Marcellinus and his Classical Background – Changing Perspectives,” *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 2, no. 4 (1996), 458.

⁶⁰ K. Wachsmuth, *Einleitung in das Studium der alten Geschichte*. (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1895), 677.

⁶¹ Blockley, “Ammianus Marcellinus and his Classical Background,” 460.

annalistic history in Latin produced between Tacitus and Ammianus is lost. This means an important context is missing.

As evidenced, the reputation of Ammianus Marcellinus has fluctuated, often, but not exclusively, anchored in how people viewed his abilities with Latin. Modern research, including on his Latinity, has strongly pushed back against the views that a supposed difficulty with language would have restricted or held him back, as a writer or as a historian. Gavin Kelly has labelled Ammianus an incredibly allusive historian, a more subtle and manipulative author than previously thought, whose work is rich with intertextuality with earlier classical literature and history.⁶² Recognizing the Latinity of Ammianus renders significant amounts of the criticism previously lobbed at *Res gestae* outdated or outright voided, opening up further discussion about Ammianus' abilities and purpose as a writer and historian.

The question of narratives in *Res gestae* has been discussed by e.g. John Weisweiler. Weisweiler claims that close reading of *Res gestae* makes visible a discrepancy between the comments of the author and the narrative, with the narrative around *Caesar* Gallus especially singled out for criticism.⁶³ Weisweiler further claims that modern research has approached the narrative issues in *Res gestae* in three different ways: one casting the discrepancies as the historian being unable to combine contradictory source material into a consistent chain of events; a second pointing to a lack of revision and inability to deal with such extensive and complicated source material; and a third pointing to the discrepancies being a sign of partisanship and that Ammianus Marcellinus distorted facts due to his sympathies towards for example Julian, pagan religions, and so forth. However, he also points out that this has been a matter of important, albeit not necessarily the most fruitful, debate, and there are plenty of variation in all these views.⁶⁴

Another topic of frequent debate is Ammianus Marcellinus' relationship with religion, which religion he himself adhered to, and how he portrays both Christianity and pagan religions. Ammianus is now generally speaking viewed as an adherent of pagan religion who seemingly treats Christianity gently in his work, but there have been plenty of dissenting opinions. R.L. Rike summarises the discourse around Ammianus and religion as having included everything from him being Christian, a monotheist leaning towards Christianity, a vague monotheist, a

⁶² Kelly, *Ammianus Marcellinus: The Allusive Historian*, 1–6.

⁶³ John Weisweiler, "Unreliable Witness: Failings in the Narrative in Ammianus Marcellinus" in *Literature and Society in the Fourth Century AD*, eds. Lieve Van Hoof & Peter Van Nuffelen (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 105

⁶⁴ Weisweiler, "Unreliable Witness," 105–106.

polytheist striving towards monotheism, a pagan opposed to all opulence and overabundance, a superstitious pagan, or a man who was not affiliated with any religion but still open to superstitions.⁶⁵ There is still some debate regarding the issue, and Rike claims that even if the theories supporting Ammianus being a Christian are not relevant anymore, his reputation for so called neutrality in the question is open to interpretation.⁶⁶ This, along with both the paganism of certain prominent individuals and the rising predominance of Christianity in society, is why religion features in the thesis.

The matter of perspective and sourcing in *Res gestae* has also been debated, specifically the relationship between the details that can be interpreted as autoptic, read, or outright supposedly invented, or any combination thereof. Some parts of *Res gestae* that are allegedly based on autopsy have previously been singled out for criticism, particularly different encounters with the Persians. One prominent example that has frequently been brought up to cast doubt on Ammianus' claims of autopsy and authorial truthfulness is an incident where he claims to have witnessed the Persian army, and most importantly their leadership, from fifty miles away, making detailed claims about them. He claims he could make out the shriveled limbs and wrinkles of king Grumbates as well as the splendid attire of Shapur leading the Persian army from some fifty miles away⁶⁷, something which understandably has come under some scrutiny, and also ties into the debate about *visa* and *lecta*. Hans Teitler, in specifically analyzing the digressions regarding Persia and the Persians, concluded that Ammianus makes frequent use of both *lecta* and *visa*, mixing his own experiences with other sources.⁶⁸ Craig Morley also claims that:

[r]elated to his personal experiences, Ammianus' position as a *protector* in the Roman army ensured he was in an invaluable position to gain information from his contacts in the military, such as Ursicinus, as well as access to the reports of scouts, spies and deserters.⁶⁹

Gavin Kelly argues in a similar vein as well, using another example to claim that:

⁶⁵ R.L. Rike, *Apex Omnium: Religion in the Res gestae of Ammianus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 1–3.

⁶⁶ Rike, *Apex Omnium*, 1–3.

⁶⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, 18.6.21-22: [...] *unde, nisi oculorum deficeret acies, ad quinquagesimum usque lapidem quoduis etiam minutissimum apparebat. [...] agminibus oppletos innumeris, et antegressum regem uestis claritudine rutilantem. Quem iuxta laeuus incedebat Grumbates, Chionitarum rex nobilis, aetate quidem media rugosisque membris [...]*.

⁶⁸ Hans Teitler, "Visa Vel Lecta?", 196.

⁶⁹ Craig Morley, "Beyond the Digression: Ammianus Marcellinus on the Persians", *Journal of Ancient History and Archaeology* 3 (2016), 11.

What he actually saw was the army; his pardonable exaggeration is the supplementary information about the Persian line of battle which he received from informants, from tradition, from what he himself saw at Amida. He may not have beheld with perfect clarity the wondrous sights which he describes in fabulous manner, but they really *were* there, when he said they were.⁷⁰

As a general theoretical framework the thesis will work with the assumption that there is an interplay and combination of *visa* and *lecta* and that they are, as shown, not mutually exclusive. This is partly also why discerning what could be *ficta* is so difficult, given that Ammianus combination of *visa* and *lecta* makes it seem like portions of his text are invented, when they might be based on other sources, despite him framing it as autopsy. The interplay, as well as the switching between and combining of these, serves a narrative purpose as well, building up multiple connected narratives using different sources and inflections, used to highlight certain aspects and disparaging others. It points to degree of selectivity as well, given that the author chose to include and allude to these things specifically, and thus build his narrative like that, infusing some events with particular meaning. This is in keeping with the theoretical framework of Hayden White, putting emphasis on the role the historian plays in stringing together chains of events and the role “inventing” rather than “finding” stories plays. It further highlights why a biographical approach is not fit for purpose.

⁷⁰ Kelly, *The Allusive Historian*, 86–87.

2 Historical background and context

Due to the subject of the thesis some background and contextual information is necessary in order to understand the implicit and explicit criticism in the narratives created by Ammianus Marcellinus. This is because the author, as well as the social and political circumstances, feature so prominently in *Res gestae* that in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of some of the choices and comments Ammianus made, context and background need to be included. In short, it is a background to what can be found in the material itself.

The remaining books of *Res gestae* cover, as previously mentioned, the time period of 353-378 CE and encompass a wide geographical area. It possibly covered the entirety of the then Roman Empire in the complete work.⁷¹ Ammianus Marcellinus started his work with the ascension of Nerva to the throne.⁷² This seemingly connects to Tacitus ending his *Historiae* with a depiction of the murder of Domitian, who was Nerva's predecessor and whose murder happened on the day of Nerva succeeding him.⁷³ This strengthens the arguments that Ammianus is a highly allusive and intertextual author, who possessed knowledge of his predecessors. The books covering the period before 353 CE have been lost, so it is impossible to say to what degree Ammianus rooted his work in Tacitus'. However, because Ammianus began his work where Tacitus ended his, it has been common to compare them and analyze to what degree Ammianus might have tried to imitate or refer to Tacitus. The question of how much Ammianus consciously tried to link to Tacitus and for example what stylistic choices and possible references might be parallels is a disputed one, although it is also possible he was actively trying to at least allude to Tacitus as well. It is also unclear which general historiographical conventions and poetical expressions might be allusions to e.g. Sallust, Livy, Virgil, Juvenal, or Cicero, prominent authors who were still influential in late antiquity.⁷⁴ The debt Ammianus owes the classical authors, both Greek and Latin, has been recognized and debated since the nineteenth century. How he incorporated them into his work later became a frequently debated question as well.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Kelly, "Ammianus Marcellinus: Tacitus' heir and Gibbon's guide," 353.

⁷² See page 1: footnote 1 for complete quote.

⁷³ Brian W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (London: Routledge, 1992), 192–194.

⁷⁴ Kelly, "Ammianus Marcellinus: Tacitus' heir and Gibbon's guide," 351; Antti Lampinen, "Ammianus Marcellinuksen gallit ja myöhäisantiikin klassillisoitu toinen," in *Vieras, outo, vihollinen*, ed. Marja-Leena Hänninen (Helsinki: SKS kirjat, 2013), 100.

⁷⁵ Blockley, "Ammianus Marcellinus and His Classical Background," 455–456.

Whilst Tacitus was undoubtedly an important influence, other influences have often been excluded in order to underline the connection between Tacitus and Ammianus. This, in conjunction with implying Roman historiography in Latin was a sleeping genre revived by Ammianus, tends to ignore the fact that much of Roman historiography in the centuries between these authors is lost. That includes large parts of Ammianus Marcellinus' own work, and it is almost impossible to know or with any surety determine what existed or not.⁷⁶ Furthermore, striving to find similarities between Tacitus and Ammianus can lead to the differences or other influences being sidelined or ignored.

Considering that social and political context serves as a springboard for significant amounts of the narrative criticism in *Res gestae*, the following sections will offer contextual information about this and Ammianus Marcellinus himself. This is followed by the analysis in the following chapter.

2.1 Ammianus Marcellinus

As the writer of *Res gestae*, the life and background of Ammianus Marcellinus is relevant in how it informs the work. He regularly appears in the first person in the narrative, and the narratives in *Res gestae* must be viewed and understood through the lens of his background and experience. The biographical details about Ammianus Marcellinus himself are scarce and primarily based on what can be read or inferred from the remaining books of the *Res gestae*. However, contextual and parallel history provide additional clues to his background.

Ammianus at the end of *Res gestae* defined himself as a former soldier and a Greek.⁷⁷ He was presumably born in the Greek-speaking eastern part of the Roman Empire around 330 CE, possibly in Antioch on the Orontes in what was then a part of the Roman province of Syria, today in southern Turkey, and died around 395 CE. His first language was most likely Greek, and it was long presumed that he had a high-class Greek education and background, only to later quickly and somewhat clumsily incorporate Latin literature and education. This would have colored his work written in Latin,⁷⁸ not to mention a possible cultural affinity for other Greeks. Next to nothing is known about his early life, but it is known that he embarked on a military career and rose in the ranks to a *protector domesticus*, a member of the imperial

⁷⁶ Charles W. Fornara, "Ammianus' knowledge and Use of Greek and Latin Literature," no. 4 (1992), 420–422.

⁷⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, 31.16.9: "*Haec ut miles quondam et Graecus [...]*"

⁷⁸ Fornara, "Ammianus' knowledge and Use of Greek and Latin Literature", 420–438; J. F. Matthews, "The Origin of Ammianus", *The Classical Quarterly* (1994), 252–269.

bodyguard. His military background and rise to this relatively high position, at least gaining him access to the imperial orbit, implies that he was at the very least not a commoner and presumably bilingual, as Latin was the official language of both the army and the court. However, his education and knowledge about Roman historiography is still a matter of debate.⁷⁹

Ammianus' own social background and position is difficult to establish exactly, given the scarcity of information. Contextual clues, such as the aforementioned ones, offer glimpses. Frank Trombley claims that from around 350 CE young men with no prior military experiences were allowed to join the *protectores*, thus in effect becoming trainees for future military commands. These men generally seem to have been from families where the father previously had achieved high civil or military rank, which implies that Ammianus could have been raised and educated in a family of curial rank.⁸⁰ Trombley further elaborates that this schooling and the professional skills of a *protector* presumably colored his approach in interpreting historical phenomena, as well as giving him an insight and methodology for understanding political events at the imperial court along with the military operations.⁸¹ Trombley underlines that Ammianus' attempts at establishing his authority as a well-informed observer of events,⁸² which will feature repeatedly in the analysis. This also aligns with Ammianus appearing cognizant of larger societal developments, and strengthens the idea of him being more reactionary and didactic, as opposed to wholly descriptive, in his text.

The narrative focus of *Res gestae* is, as mentioned, imperial males, along with military officers and members of the aristocracy; influential and power people whose lives and actions Ammianus depicts in different ways in *Res gestae*. These portrayals are based on Ammianus' own opinions or information he has managed to collect, which is strongly rooted in his own background and social position. He occasionally comments directly on some of these people, and is thus tightly intertwined with the narratives he created. Hayden White also stressed that the degree of self-consciousness of any historiographical writer is shaped by how much the social system, and the law that sustains it, occupy their attention. This includes threats to the system.⁸³ The social system, as well as the threats facing it, are at the root of *Res gestae*; the first half of the fourth century CE had been full of upheaval and war, and as will be shown,

⁷⁹ Fornara, "Studies in Ammianus Marcellinus," 421.

⁸⁰ Frank Trombley, "Ammianus Marcellinus and Fourth-Century Warfare: A Protector's approach to historical narrative," in *The late Roman World and its Historian: interpreting Ammianus Marcellinus*, 18.

⁸¹ Trombley, "Ammianus Marcellinus and Fourth-Century Warfare," 16–17.

⁸² Trombley, "Ammianus Marcellinus and Fourth-Century Warfare," 21.

⁸³ White, *The Content of the Form*, 13–15.

Ammianus is consistently aware of and concerned about the state of the empire. This is hugely influenced by his background. However, he also has a tendency to juxtapose the macroscopic narrative of imperial figures to smaller-scale vignettes dealing with a wide variety of topics and people. In that vein, the following section will further explore what this imperial history entails and incorporates, as well as the social and political developments leading up to the extant books.

2.2 Social and political context

Due to the prominent focus on the upper strata of society in *Res gestae* it is relevant to attempt to briefly explain the political and social context for that period of time, as well as the underlying reasons for them. The time period the extant books of *Res gestae* describe was affected by the aftermath of the Tetrarchy, the system of government where the empire was divided between two senior emperors, the *Augusti*, and two junior emperors and the designated successors of the *Augusti*, the *Caesares*. Each of them essentially ruled over their own part of the empire.

The Tetrarchy was instituted in 293 CE by the emperor Diocletian and was built on the aforementioned system of *Augusti* and *Caesares*. It eventually escalated into numerous civil wars regarding succession, leading to the Tetrarchy collapsing around 312 or 313 CE, when the empire was divided between Constantine in the West and Licinius in the East – both *Augusti*, but without *Caesares*.⁸⁴ Shortly put, this too collapsed 324 CE, when Constantine defeated Licinius and ruled as the sole emperor, although it once again came to be ruled by multiple emperors after the death of Constantine (337 CE).⁸⁵ The collapse of the Tetrarchy set the foundation for the political and social development that can be seen in *Res gestae*. The death of Constantine led to the empire being split between his sons, which seems to have led to some differences of opinion regarding how power should be divided and how they should rule, which eventually led to an empire divided between the brothers Constantius II and Constans. Constans came to be overthrown and murdered by Magnentius 350 CE, which in turn led to a civil war between Constantius II and Magnentius, with Constantius II the victor 353 CE. This meant Constantius II remained as the sole *Augustus*, and he raised his cousin Constantius Gallus to the rank of *Caesar*,⁸⁶ which is around the time the remaining books of *Res gestae* begin.

⁸⁴ David S. Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay AD 180–395*, 371.

⁸⁵ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay AD*, 452–453.

⁸⁶ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay AD*, 452–464.

During the fourth century there were notably changes on a sociopolitical level as well, with the traditional aristocracy weakened and power moving to a new aristocracy whose power rested on appointments and positions at court, meaning the traditional aristocracy lost influence over the emperor. In other words, power was concentrated to the emperor due to him no longer needing to strengthen and solidify his position through alliances and support from the traditional aristocracy to the same extent, and the new aristocracy was dependent on the favor of the emperor.⁸⁷ As a result, linking certain trends and actors in the court of the emperor to the emperor himself is made significantly easier for Ammianus. This also provided Ammianus with an opening to in *Res gestae* excoriate the traditional senatorial aristocracy of Rome, which he did for example in a scorching (and presumably satirical) digression wholly dedicated to the faults of the senate and people of Rome.⁸⁸ What virtues Ammianus extolls, how power should be wielded and how it should be backed up are prominent features of the narrative about the emperors and their courts, and will also feature in the analysis. Given the power and position of the emperor, their character and approach to their duties was crucial to the success of the empire; this will be shown to in many ways be the narrative lynchpin of *Res gestae*.

Essential to imperial power is the military, meaning significant portions of *Res gestae*, both explicitly as well as implicitly through Ammianus' aforementioned own military background and training, concern the military situation of the empire. With the empire still reeling from the civil war that made Constantius II sole *Augustus*, it was a fraught and turbulent time. Domestically the empire was unstable after multiple civil wars, and foreign actors were looking to take advantage of any perceived weakness. This links to the role of the emperor, as it concerns the centralization of imperial power. Potter claims that:

[...] a new style of recruitment into the Roman army created a group with links on both sides of the border different from those whose connections could be defined simply by influence, clientage, or economic activity. The bureaucratic structures connected with the army now stretched beyond the frontiers into tribal lands, creating a form of "Roman" who was brought up outside the empire and yet played a role in the defense of the state. To be in the army, and in the service of the emperor, was to be "Roman", even if one's roots were beyond the Rhine or Danube [...]⁸⁹

In other words, the administrative and bureaucratic developments and prominence of the imperial office during the fourth century also affected and was reflected in the social fabric of the empire. Christianity was on the rise, and the interplay between imperial institution, action

⁸⁷ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay AD*, 380.

⁸⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, 15.6: *Senatus populi que Romani vitia*.

⁸⁹ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 433.

and the part religion played in all of this is a prominent aspect of the *Res gestae*. It is especially relevant for the thesis due to the religious affiliations and portrayals of certain emperors in the work. To a varying degree it gradually became what could be described as an identity-shaping part of the narrative surrounding the Roman Empire, again underlining the importance of the emperor as a character, and the characteristics of the emperor.

A second prominent feature of the narrative surrounding the Roman Empire and the ruling class is the aforementioned religion. Prominent figures, as underlined by David Potter, include Emperor Constantine and his sons. The centralization of the institution of emperor also had a certain identity-building and community-shaping power in a geographically and culturally vast and varied empire with occasionally loose ties. The affiliation for and deep involvement of the emperors with Christianity made it a symbol associated with this further centralized institution. The ever-evolving role of Christianity during the fourth century can in short be exemplified by the alleged Edict of Milan 313 CE, which established religious toleration for Christianity,⁹⁰ and the Edict of Thessalonica in 380 CE, which made Christianity the state religion in the empire and enforced Nicene orthodoxy.⁹¹ On a social and political level this represents a marked downturn for pagan practitioners. Keeping in mind that Ammianus, a presumed pagan, was writing his *Res gestae* sometime during 380-390 CE it is plausible that these developments affected him and his writing as well. During the reign of Gratian (367-383 CE) and later Theodosius I (379-395) several laws were passed that curtailed the rights and practices of pagans (especially regarding animal sacrifice) and eventually outright banned their worship, although Alan Cameron strongly questions how widespread and enforced these bans were in reality.⁹² Considering the sheer size of the empire it simply was also not possible to govern it (or even half of it) in a centralized fashion,⁹³ meaning it is often difficult to draw significant conclusions on for example what the edicts of one emperor or another actually meant in practice around the empire. Regardless, the fourth century signifies a significant loss of status, influence and security for pagans, and affirmed the status of Christianity in society. Given that religious office was frequently tied to or even second to political office as well as status in the aristocracy it also exemplifies the downturn of pagan power and influence in a

⁹⁰ David Potter, *Constantine the Emperor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 149.

⁹¹ Gerard Friell & Stephen Williams, *Theodosius – Empire at Bay* (London: Routledge, 1998), 40-41.

⁹² Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome*, 47, 60–61, 65.

⁹³ Peter Heather, “Liar in Winter: Themistius and Theodosius” in *From the Tetrarchs to the Theodosians: Later Roman History and Culture 284-450*, eds. Scott McGill, Cristiana Sogno & Edward Watts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 192–193.

political context, leading to people converting to Christianity in order to maintain their political and economic influence.⁹⁴ This Christian hegemony and influence, as well as the animosity resulting from the actions of some prominent pagans, presumably made Ammianus more cautious and subtle when approaching matters of religion in *Res gestae*.

Julian, *Caesar* from 355–360 CE and *Augustus* 360–363 CE, was the last pagan emperor, later dubbed the Apostate (*Julianus Apostata*) for his attempts at reviving the pagan religions and cracking down on Christianity. Whilst the paganism of Julian is somewhat muted in *Res gestae*, the surviving texts of Julian himself makes it exceedingly clear,⁹⁵ again highlighting the importance of context and parallel history. R. L. Rike also highlights that the pagan revival Julian attempted presumably was important for Ammianus as well, naming his marked anxiety over the present failure of Rome to maintain proper imperially supported communication with the gods.⁹⁶ At the time of writing the *Res gestae* and later, while enjoying his success, the aforementioned laws that restricted pagan worship and ultimately forbade pagans from holding public office were issued,⁹⁷ something which could have caused Ammianus to at the very least tone down any explicit paganism in *Res gestae*. The predominance of Christianity, as well as Christian writers, gave rise to plenty of criticism against Julian, the last pagan emperor of Rome who had cracked down on Christianity during his short reign, for example by forbidding them to teach rhetoric unless they converted and indirectly by attempting to restore the Jewish temple in Jerusalem.⁹⁸ Given that Ammianus sharply advocated for Julian in *Res gestae* it is likely that he was pushing back on the highly critical narrative and writings that had come to dominate the narrative of Julian after his death. As Ammianus was presumably attempting to rehabilitate the reputation of Julian in a sociopolitical context that had a more Christian bent to it, it is possible he played down the religious aspects in *Res gestae* in order not to stoke the flames and confirm the fears or suspicions of the detractors of Julian. This again exemplifies the importance of not plucking the author or text out of its proper context, as exemplified by White, König and Whitmarsh earlier.

⁹⁴ Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome*, 13.

⁹⁵ Rike, *Apex Omnium*, 1.

⁹⁶ Rike, *Apex Omnium*. 27.

⁹⁷ Christopher P. Jones, *Between Pagan and Christian* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 112.

⁹⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, 22.10.7: *Post multa enim etiam iura quaedam correxit in melius ambagibus circumcises indicantia liquid, quid iuberent fieri uel uetarent. Illud autem eras inclemens obruendum perenni silentio, quod arcebat docere magistros rhetoricos et grammaticos ritus Christiani cultores.*

Julian's attempt at restoring the temple at Jerusalem will be treated in chapter 3.3: Religion.

3 Prominent narratives in *Res gestae*

This chapter will, as mentioned, have a thematic disposition; first focusing primarily on the emperors and their character traits, the narratives surrounding them, and their narrative purpose. This is followed by a wider discussion about certain narrative themes that run throughout the whole of the *Res gestae*. This includes a discussion on how they correlate to each other. When discussing these specific themes material from both the main body of the text and the digressions can and will be included. Occasionally, some caveats can be included, depending on how Ammianus Marcellinus has approached an issue, e.g. adopting a specific persona or casting something in a specific light in a digression. Given the frameworks erected by Ammianus himself, his authorial self-fashioning, and elements such as his use of digressions, are a significant part of how he appears in the narrative. While there are multiple different narrative threads that could be picked up, this thesis focuses primarily on those that run through most, if not all, of the extant books, and appear to be building on his social and political criticism and concern.

Ammianus Marcellinus appears in the narrative in different ways, and occasionally alludes or points to constructed narratives himself. He confesses on multiple occasions that he went off track or is being too hasty in his work. He repeatedly interrupts his treatment of different subjects with the motivation that he is getting ahead of himself, and the subject at hand should be treated in what he deems to be the proper place, time, and order.⁹⁹ He even occasionally states that he has allowed himself too long a digression and must return to his subject or theme,¹⁰⁰ or that he does not want to digress too far and make his reader tired.¹⁰¹ He purposefully structured his work and wanted to approach certain subject in what he deemed their proper context, possibly also contributing to a better narrative tension. He also makes numerous comments about how he is attempting to keep things short and keep the story flowing to not bore his reader, or make it difficult for the reader to understand what he is attempting to say.¹⁰² It indicates that he placed certain boundaries or restraints on himself. He not only chose

⁹⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 14.9.9: *Quae singula narrare non refert, ne professionis modum, quod sane vitandum est, excedamus*

¹⁰⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus, 15.12.13: *Euectus sum longius; sed remeabo tandem ad coepta.*

¹⁰¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 21.1.14: *Ne igitur extra calcem, quod dicitur, sermo decurrens lecturo fastidium ferat, ad explicanda prospecta reuertamur.*

¹⁰² Ammianus Marcellinus, 15.1.1: *Vicumque potui ueritatem scrutari, ea, quae uidere licuit per aetatem uel perplexo interrogando uersatos in medio scire, narrauimus ordine casuum exposito diuersorum; residua, quae secuturus asperiet textus, pro uirium captu limatius absoluemus, nihil obtrectatores longi, ut putant, operis formidantes. Tunc enim laudanda est breuitas, cum moras rumpens intempestiuas, nihil subtrahit cognitioni gestorum.*

what to include, but also how much time and space to dedicate to certain subjects, which again indicates a purposefully constructed narrative. He has a framework that he is attempting to remain inside, and trying to construct specific narratives within these self-imposed restrictions.

Regarding constructed narratives, it is possible to differentiate between what Ammianus Marcellinus allegedly witnessed himself and what derives from other sources, e.g. witness accounts and people he interviewed. He selectively combines his own experiences and the testimony of others to construct a particular narrative, meaning there are elements of autopsy, retelling narratives, “storytelling”, as well as technical expositions. Further complicating this is how Ammianus has interpreted and then chosen to represent certain subjects. As previously outlined, the intermingling of the autoptic voice with other sources, be they heard or read, serves a narrative function in that it both anchors the narrative and presumably infuses it with particular meaning. The overlap of *visa* and *lecta* occasionally makes it harder to gauge what might be fabrication, *ficta*, although parallel sources and context can occasionally provide a clue.

Some of the most telling source passages are those that concern the opinions and values of Ammianus. They create a foundation for how and why he created the narratives that he did. This includes the opinions he offers through his first-person narrative persona, as well as those that emerge in a more general manner when he is occupying his persona as a ‘historian’, i.e. interpreting events he has not witnessed for himself, or where he uses a ‘neutral voice’ to give a moral judgement. Occasionally the subjectivity in *Res gestae* seems inadvertent, whilst he on other occasions shows a measure of self-awareness and purpose. He also displays a critical mindset at times, for example when writing about the *exemplum* of Menophilus. Ammianus promptly states that nothing is known about Menophilus, except his commendable behavior in a time of supreme crisis.¹⁰³ He also states that writers of old left them with imperfect knowledge regarding the origins of the Gauls (something later partially remedied by Timagenes, a true Greek by language and vocation according to Ammianus).¹⁰⁴ Whilst on another topic altogether Ammianus suddenly branches out with a comment on the administration of Artemius, the vice-prefect at Rome. Ammianus simply states some mutinous disturbances plagued Artemius’

¹⁰³ Ammianus Marcellinus, 16.7.9: *Uerum si forte scrupulosus quidam lector antiquitatum, Menophilium Mithridatis Pontici regis eunuchum, nobis opponat, hoc monitu recordetur, nihil super eo relatam praeter id solum, quod in supremo discrimine gloriose monstrauit.*

¹⁰⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, 15.9.2: *Ambigentes super origine prima Gallorum, scriptores ueteres notitiam reliquere negotii semiplenam, sed postea Timagenes, et diligentia Graecus et lingua, haec quae diu sunt ignorata collegit ex multiplicibus libris.*

administration, but nothing else happened worth reporting.¹⁰⁵ These rather offhand comments are arguably narrative tools used to demonstrate that Ammianus is knowledgeable about or has researched these matters, lending credibility and authority to his persona as a historian and commentator. They also demonstrate his occasional critical approach to sources. It results in his explicitly and implicitly subjective approach to other matters being more striking, because while comments such as these build up his credibility, they also highlight the contrast in how he approaches other subjects. Ammianus comments on the length of his text at the beginning of the fifteenth extant book, claiming he will pay no heed to those criticizing it for being too long because brevity or conciseness is only to be lauded when it “breaks off ill-timed discursiveness, without detracting at all from an understanding of the course of events”¹⁰⁶. This puts his dismissive attitude towards some of the aforementioned issues into perspective, clearly showing how selective he can be. It becomes even clearer when juxtaposed with for example the supposed heroics of Julian in Gaul, which were apparently so numerous and valiant that Ammianus feels the need to specify that he feels compelled to describe them one by one according to his modest ability.¹⁰⁷

A significant part of the narratological analysis will focus on how Ammianus uses and frames different groups and individuals to further a specific narrative or to critique a specific emperor and/or members of court. Different developments and trends he worries about or appears to think have contributed to a decline of the Roman Empire feature prominently as well. The extant books arguably create a narrative encouraging the return to and the virtues of the one-man-rule imperial system following the chaos of the tetrarchy. The characters and traits of the emperors, and how these affect their rule, are a significant part of this. Ingrained in that narrative, pertaining to the criticism directed towards the administration of Constantius and the other ills Ammianus believes are plaguing the Roman Empire, is his opinions of how the empire should be reformed. The *exempla* and *virtus* of Julian are central to that narrative.

In an attempt to highlight these points, the next part of the analysis consists of different segments where both the implicit and explicit subjectivity are discussed with context. The

¹⁰⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, 17.11.5: *Dum haec ita aguntur, Romae Artemius curans uicariam praefecturam, pro Basso quoque agebat, qui recens promotus urbi praefectus fatali decesserat sorte, cuius administratio seditiones perpessa est turbulentas, nec memorabile quidquam habuit, quod narrari sit dignum.*

¹⁰⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus, 15.1.1: [...] *residua, quae secuturus aperiet textus, pro uirium captu limatius absoluemus nihil obtrectatores longi, ut putant, operis formidantes. Tunc enim laudanda est breuitas, cum moras rumpens intempestiuas nihil subtrahit cognitioni gestorum.*

¹⁰⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, 16.1.2: *Quia igitur res magna, quas per Gallias uirtute felicitateque correxit, multis ueterum factis fortibus praestant, singular serie progrediente monstrabo instrumenta omnia mediocris ingenii, si sufferecerint, commoturus.*

following section will dissect specifically the narratives Ammianus constructs around certain imperial individuals, their character traits, and how this permeates most of *Res gestae*. Following that is an analysis of his moralizing tendencies that further display the inherent subjectivity in the narratives he creates around larger issues or groups. These also quite frequently tie into the narratives around the prominent individuals.

3.1 Portrayal of imperial character

One of, if not the most, prominent example of Ammianus Marcellinus' narrative bias is his treatment of certain prominent individuals. This section will explore how the description of some individuals, such as Julian, can be favorable to them, in some cases explicitly and extremely so. People in their orbit are frequently used as objects of comparison for them, and in the case of Julian and Constantius II, they are often pitted against each other and compared outright. As will be outlined, Constantius serves as a narrative foil to Julian and his *virtus*, being portrayed as the polar opposite of Julian.

It becomes abundantly clear that Ammianus holds Julian in great esteem and admires him, whereas e.g. Constantius is frequently presented as a distant figure with significant defects in character. Ammianus builds a clear narrative around the different emperors, and notably appears to have spent a certain amount of time around Julian; meaning he is basing his account of Julian partly on his own alleged testimony and ripe admiration of Julian. In contrast, the narrative surrounding Constantius has a more narratorial character, based mostly on the eyewitness accounts of other people (along with other sources). It appears that Ammianus created this contrast on purpose, in order to construct and spread a certain narrative about Constantius and his administration, along with the effects this perceived misrule had on the empire. Julian in many ways acts as the narrative center of the extant parts of *Res gestae*; first as a protagonist given by far the most time and space in the narrative, and after his demise as *exempla* and object of comparison. The emperors after the death of Julian in most respects get the same treatment as Constantius, although Julian had already perished. For that reason, the following section is divided into Julian and the “non-Julians”.

3.1.1 Julian (*Caesar* 355-360 CE, *Augustus* 361-363 CE)

*Quidquid autem narrabitur, quod non falsitas arguta concinnat, sed fides integra rerum absoluit documentis euidentibus fulta, ad laudatiuam paene materiam pertinebit. Uidetur enim lex quaedam uitae melioris hunc iuuenem a nobilibus cunis ad usque spiritum comitata supremum.*¹⁰⁸

Now whatever I shall tell (and no wordy deceit adorns my tale, but untrammelled faithfulness to fact, based upon clear proof, composes it) will almost belong to the domain of the panegyric. For some law of a higher life seems to have attended this youth from his noble cradle even to his last breath.¹⁰⁹

Julian was the brother of *Caesar* Gallus and *Caesar* himself after the demise of his brother. He was born in Constantinople, spending the majority of his youth in the East. He did not set foot in the West until 353 CE, at the age of twenty-two. It was not until 355 CE, when he was summoned to be installed as *Caesar*, that he spent any significant amount of time in the West. He notably also appears to never have ventured further south in Italy than Milan.¹¹⁰ Julian thus never set foot in the actual city of Rome, which features prominently in *Res gestae* otherwise. His upbringing was essentially entirely Greek, and he appears to have taken great pride in his upbringing.¹¹¹ This fact presumably sat well with Ammianus, given his previously mentioned background and values and, as will be shown, the fact that he featured it in the narrative.

Julian appears in the extant books after the death of Gallus. Ammianus describes him as being as different from Gallus in character as Domitian and Titus, the sons of Vespasian, were to each other,¹¹² with Gallus being compared to Domitian in this case. Contemporaries described Domitian, whose assassination in 96 CE ushered Nerva to the throne, as a suspicious, irascible, cruel, and egocentric tyrant.¹¹³ However, it has been argued that his tyranny was overblown and that the narrative was created and dominated by a vocal, but small, section of the population who opposed him or suffered under his reign. This notably includes Tacitus and Suetonius.¹¹⁴ Whilst Gallus will be treated more thoroughly in the following section, his presence here is relevant in that Ammianus clearly links Domitian and Gallus, casting them

¹⁰⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, 16.1.3-1.4.

¹⁰⁹ John C. Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus I*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 203.

¹¹⁰ Alan J. Ross, *Ammianus' Julian: Narrative and Genre in the Res gestae* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 10.

¹¹¹ Daniël Den Hengst, "The Romanization of Julian" in *Emperors and Historiography: Collected Essays on the Literature of the Roman Empire by Daniël den Hengst*, eds. D W P Burgersdijk, and J A Van Waarden, (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2010), 220.

¹¹² Ammianus Marcellinus 14.11.28: [...] ; *tantum a temperatis moribus Iuliani differens fratris, quantum inter Vespasiani filios fuit Domitianum et Titum*.

¹¹³ Martin Goodman, *The Roman World 44 BC-AD 180* (London: Routledge, 1997), 64-66.

¹¹⁴ Brian W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, foreword, 12-13, 17-18, 33, 124-126.

both as cruel and egocentric tyrants. He is already laying the groundwork for Julian's *virtus* (and associating him with Titus, whose reputation had become very glowing) by introducing these foils. This appears in keeping with the narrative surrounding Domitian, with Ammianus even reinforcing it and using it for his own narratological purposes. This historical reference also builds on the connection between *Historiae*, which as mentioned ends with the ascension of Nerva to the throne following the death of Domitian, and *Res gestae*, which according to Ammianus started there. It is an example of Ammianus using a "historians' plupast"¹¹⁵, a past already in the past, and going beyond the framing of his own history. Simultaneously, Ammianus is again showcasing his historical knowledge and building up the authority and credibility of his persona as a historian, and in doing so immediately placing Julian in a select group of (at least by Ammianus) exalted figures. He is laying a solid groundwork for the narrative he is creating about Julian. The importance of highlighting the role invention plays for the historian is evidenced here as well; Ammianus weaves together separate chains of events and historical accounts, imbuing them with specific motifs, and casting characters in highly specific ways based on contextual knowledge.

Due to the sheer size of the empire and enemies pressing on multiple fronts, the situation in Gaul being particularly troublesome, Constantius saw a need for someone to share the burden of power with. Julian's ascent to *Caesar* was not without hitches, as there were suspicions of him being linked to Gallus. Some courtiers were also opposed to another *Caesar* at all because Gallus turned out to be a disaster. However, the way Ammianus portrays it, the Empress Eusebia alone opposed those trying to sway Constantius away from appointing Julian, either because she did not want to go to Gaul with Constantius or because of her native intelligence, and Constantius subsequently sent for and appointed Julian *Caesar*, and sent him to Gaul.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Jonas Grethlein, "Time, Tense, and Temporality in Ancient Greek Historiography" (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3–4.

¹¹⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus, 15.8.1-3: *Et haec quidem Romae, ut ostendit textus superior, agebantur. Constantium uero exagitabant assidui nuntii deplorabatas iam Gallias indicantes nullo renitente ad interuentionem barbaris uastantibus uniuersa; aestuansque diu, qua ui propulsaret aerumnas ipse in Italia residens, ut cupiebat, - periculosum enim existimabat se in partem contrudere longe dimotam - repperit tandem consilium rectum et Iulianum patrualem fratrem haud ita dudum ab Achaico tractu accitum etiamtum palliatum in societatem imperii asciscere cogitabat. Id ubi urgente malorum impendentium mole confessus est proximis succumbere tot necessitatibus tamque crebris unum se, quod numquam fecerat, aperte demonstrans, illi in assentationem nimiam eruditi infatuabant hominem nihil esse ita asperum dictitantes, quod praepotens eius uirtus fortunaque tam uicina sideribus non superaret ex more. Addebantque noxarum conscientia stimulante complures deinceps cauere debere Caesaris nomen replicantes gesta sub Gallo. Quis adnitentibus obstinate opponebat se sola regina, incertum*

One of most notable features in the narrative surrounding Julian is the obvious admiration Ammianus has for him, occasionally bordering on almost outright hero-worship. Ammianus actually dedicates several chapters to praise him outright. Ammianus uses most of the first and fifth chapters of the sixteenth book to specifically praise Julian, i.e. the aforementioned claim that Julian's deeds in Gaul surpasses the deeds of many ancient heroes.¹¹⁷ He is again reinforcing Julian's place among former heroes, although Julian had strictly speaking not had much time to accomplish anything at this point in the timeline.

Ammianus exhibits some level of self-awareness when he writes that his praise of Julian may seem close to a panegyric, but in doing so also defends it and attempts to build up his credibility on the issue. However, this mostly serves to highlight his devotion to Julian. Ammianus writes that:

[...] some law of a higher life seems to have attended this youth from his noble cradle even to his last breath. For with rapid strides he grew so conspicuous at home and abroad that in his foresight he was esteemed a second Titus, son of Vespasian, in the glorious progress of his wars as very like Trajan, mild as Antoninus Pius, and in searching out the true and perfect reason of things in harmony with Marcus Aurelius, in emulation of whom he moulded his conduct and his character.¹¹⁸

This sentence, ripe with *exempla*, again links Julian to the virtues of this cast of characters. Worth singling out is Ammianus' claim that greatness followed Julian even to his last breath, and the claim regarding military success. Julian evidently did have some success in military ventures, especially in Gaul during his days as *Caesar*. The following chapter even describes how Julian attacks the Alamanni, slaughters, captures, and vanquishes them.¹¹⁹ While there may be some parallelism to Julius Caesar and *Caesar* Julian triumphing over trans-Rhenane barbarians at work in Ammianus' high praise, the aforementioned last breath of Julian came during an expansive campaign against the Persians that ended in abject disaster. David S. Potter even claims that:

migrationem ad longinqua pertimescens, an pro natiua prudential consulens in commune, omnibusque memorans anteponi debere propinquum.

¹¹⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, 16.1.2: "*Quia igitur res magnae quas per Gallias uirtute felicitatesque correxit, multis ueterum factis fortibus praestant [...]*"

¹¹⁸ John C. Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus I*, 16.1.4: *Uidetur enim lex quaedam uitae meliorism hunc inuenem a nobilibus cunis ad usque spiritum comitata supremum. Namque incrementis uelocibus ita domi forisque colluxit, ut prudentia Vespasiani filius Titus alter aestimaretur, bellorum gloriosis cursibus Traiani simillimus, clemens ut Antoninus, rectae perfectaeque rationis indigine congruens Marco, ad cuius aemulationem actus suos effingebat er mores.*

¹¹⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 16.2: *Iulianus Caesar Alamannos adoritur, caedit, capit, et fugat.*

[t]he disasters suffered by Julian and Valens initiated the progressive military failure of the Roman Empire, the emergence of successor states in western Europe, and the loss of Roman control over the western part of the empire in the second half of the fifth century.¹²⁰

While it is a broad interpretation being presented, it is one not altogether compatible or consistent with the narrative of Julian that Ammianus creates, especially considering that Julian died 363 CE and the surviving portions of *Res gestae* continues to 378 CE. To expect Ammianus to predict the successive decline of Roman power and control in the western regions of the empire would be anachronistic, but the abject defeat and death of Julian was still a fact. Ammianus also laments the condition of the empire in other parts of the book. Towards the very end of the extant books of the *Res gestae*, Ammianus writes of the Goths being allowed into the empire, so bringing in the ruin of the Roman world.¹²¹ Although that comment is arguably an expression of xenophobia and cultural elitism, it also points to a clear awareness of the decline of the empire.

Ammianus usually links the setbacks faced by Julian to *Augustus* Constantius II and his strategy, and does not stop far short of claiming that Julian unhindered would have continued his successful path, something David S. Potter claims could be a sign of Ammianus' limited understanding of strategy.¹²² While it is possible Ammianus had genuine blind spots regarding Julian, it is also probable that he was building a structured and critical narrative of Constantius and the flaws of his administration, or a combination of the two. It can be problematic to focus such large and sweeping developments onto the actions and characters of just a few individuals, but the almost exclusively positive and biased depiction of Julian opens the whole narrative around him to critical analysis. It is impossible to with absolute certainty answer whether or not Ammianus truly did perceive things the way they are depicted in *Res gestae*, or if they also serve as a narrative foil for other administrations. Nevertheless, it is clearly within the realms of possibility.

Ammianus makes a point to list the many virtues possessed by Julian, which included his strict self-discipline,¹²³ evidenced here by how Constantius II with his own hand wrote instructions for *Caesar* Julian where he allowed generous expenses for Julian's table. Julian

¹²⁰ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay AD 180-395*, 475.

¹²¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 31.4.6: *Ita turbido instantium studio orbis Romani perniciēs ducebatur.*

¹²² Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 458.

¹²³ Ammianus Marcellinus, 16.5.1: *Primum igitur factuque difficile, temperantiam ipse sibi indixit atque retinuit [...]*

rejected this and contented himself with the food of ordinary soldiers.¹²⁴ Writing such a specific set of instructions is not precisely a note of confidence in Julian from Constantius, but Ammianus goes on to on several occasions even compare Julian to Alexander the Great, e.g. stating that:

[...] it came about that he divided his nights according to a threefold schedule – rest, affairs of state, and the Muses, a course which Alexander the Great, as we read, used to practice ; but Julian was far more self-reliant. [---] Julian could wake up as often as he wished, without any artificial means. And when the night was half over, he always got up, not from a downy couch or silken coverlets glittering with varied hues, but from a rough blanket and rug [...].¹²⁵

To not only compare Julian to Alexander the Great, but also claim Julian exceeded him in some regards, again speaks to the respect and affection Ammianus had for Julian. It is a narrative technique linking Julian to the imagery and *exempla* associated with Alexander the Great. Considering that *Res gestae* was a historical work presumably meant to last it alludes to the purpose behind that narrative as well. The comparison to Alexander the Great is not isolated to only this occasion either, it appears again in book 21 when Ammianus discusses a military tactic that Julian used that had been successfully been employed by Alexander (and other successful generals) as well.¹²⁶

Ammianus praising of Julian continues, with Ammianus claiming that once Julian had finished with his official duties, he:

[...] turned to the exercise of his great intellect, and it is unbelievable with what great eagerness he sought out the sublime knowledge of all chiefest things, and as if in search of some sort of sustenance for a soul soaring to loftier levels, ran through all the departments of philosophy in his learned discussions. But yet, though he gained full and exhaustive knowledge in this sphere, he did not neglect more humble subjects, studying poetry to a moderate degree, and rhetoric (as is shown by the undefiled elegance and dignity of his speeches and letters) as well as the varied history of domestic and foreign affairs.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, 16.5.3: *Denique cum legeret libellum assidue, quem Constantius, ut priuignum ad studia mittens manu sua conscripserat, praelicenter disponens quid in conuiuio Caesaris impendi deberet, fasianum et uuluam et sumen exigi uetuit et inferri, munificis militis uili et fortuito cibo contentus.*

¹²⁵ J. C. Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus I*, 16.5.4-5: *Hinc contingebat, ut noctes ad officia diuideret tripertita, quietis et publicae rei et musarum, quod factitasse Alexandrum legimus Magnum ; sed multo hic fortius. [---] Iulianus uero absque instrumento, quotiens uoluit euigilauit, et nocte dimidiata semper exurgens, non e plumis uel stragulis sericis ambiguo fulgore nitentibus [...].*

¹²⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus, 21.8.3: *id enim Alexander Magnus et deinde alii plures negotio ita poscente periti fecere ductores.*

¹²⁷ J. C. Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus I*, 16.5.6-7: *Post quae ut ardua et serie terminata, ad procudendum ingenium uertebatur, et incredibile quo quantoque ardore, principalium rerum notitiam celsam indagans, et quasi pabula quaedam animo ad sublimiora scandenti conquirens, per omnia philosophiae membra prudenter disputando currebat. Sed tamen cum haec effecte pleneque colligeret, nec humiliora despexit, poeticam mediocriter et rhetoricam ..., ut ostendit orationum epistularumque eius cum grauitate comitas incorrupta, et nostrarum externarumque rerum historiam multiformem.*

In addition, Ammianus claims that Julian used his time to drive through “lofty and liberal improvements in the civil administration”¹²⁸, something which Ammianus claims contributed to exemplifying the wise governing of Julian, which good rulers should emulate.¹²⁹ Put together it strengthens the impression that Ammianus’ purpose was to create something didactic, rather than descriptive; providing an assessment of Julian that might not actually have corresponded to reality but provides an ideal or a blueprint for others to follow. It further serves to rehabilitate the reputation of Julian following his death. This is reinforced by Ammianus padding his commentary of the actions taken by Julian with comments such as “for doubtless[ly] he appreciated with his keen mind”¹³⁰, which is another example of the incredibly leading statements he sometimes makes about Julian. Stringing together alleged habits, routines, and the presumed intelligence and depth of Julian into a narratological framework that serves to highlight this idealized character also serves as a foil to other, less idealized prominent individuals in *Res gestae*, who most assuredly do not get the same treatment. This ideal of leadership and governing also stands in direct opposition to how Ammianus paints the rule of Constantius, as will be shown in the next section (3.1.2: the “non-Julians”).

Alleged contemporary reaction to Julian also figures in *Res gestae*, with Ammianus Marcellinus explicitly detailing how the servile court of Constantius disparaged and criticized Julian. Ammianus rejects and maligns them in turn; he lists their jokes about Julian and his success, including apparently making jokes about Julian’s “endless victories”, calling him a babbling mole and a Greek dilettante, among other things.¹³¹ Here Ammianus again turns to historical *exempla* to dismiss the courtiers, claiming that such treatment stems from glorious actions always causing envy and thus leading these envious people to could not find any actual wrongdoing to invent it.¹³² He again brings up some heroes of ages past, including Cimon, the son of Miltiades, and Scipio Aemilianus, both of whom according to Ammianus were smeared

¹²⁸ J.C. Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus I*, 16.5.9: [...] *aut in re ciuili magnanimitate correxit et libertate.*

¹²⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 16.5.16: *Inter has tamen regendi moderandique uias, bonis principibus aemulandas [...]*

¹³⁰ J. C Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus I*, 17.1.12: [...] *id nimirum sollerti colligens mente, quod castra supra, quam optari potuit, occupata sine obstaculo, tormentis muralibus et apparatu deberent valido communiri.*

¹³¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 17.11.1: *Haec cum in comitatu Constantii subinde noscerentur – erat enim necesse, tamquam apparitorem, Caesarem super omnibus gestis ad Augusti referre scientiam – omnes, qui plus poterant in palatio, adulandi professores iam docti, recte consulta prospereque completa uertebant in deridiculum, talia sine modo strepentes insulse : „In odium venit cum victoriis suis capella, non homo," ut hirsutum Iulianum carpentes appellantesque „loquacem talpam" et „purpuratam simiam" et „litterionem Graecum" et his congruentia plurima.*

¹³² Ammianus Marcellinus, 17.11.2: *Namque ut solet amplissima quaeque gloria obiecta esse semper inuidiae, legimus in ueteres quoque magnificos duces uitia criminaque, etiamsi inueniri non poterant, finxisse malignitatem, spectatissimis actibus eorum offensam.*

by jealous detractors after varying heroics.¹³³ This highlights how Ammianus' stock of exemplary characters are usually from the Classical or Hellenistic/Republican era. Ammianus also interestingly compares the treatment of Julian to Pompey, who had earned the cognomen *Magnus* ("the Great"). According to Ammianus, the evidence clearly proves Pompey was second to none in his regard for his country, or in his patriotic acts.¹³⁴ He claims that the detractors of Pompey could find nothing in him to blame and ended up smearing him based on two ridiculous traits, namely his habit of scratching his head with one finger, and having worn a white bandage for a time to cover up an ugly ulcer. According to Ammianus these were deemed a feminine or dissolute gesture and the other a sign he was intent on a revolutionary coup.¹³⁵ These rather specific historical *exempla*, with plenty of detail, again not only equates Julian with these supposed heroes of old, it also showcases some of the values of Ammianus in the text, as well as brandishes his authority as a historian who has done his research, shown for example by his comment of clearest proof. It also quite firmly pushes back on criticism against Julian that might have been percolating before or at the time of writing, which also highlights the reactionary and normative nature of the text.

The perceived values of Ammianus Marcellinus are clearly visible in his treatment of Julian. Ammianus shows a large amount of appreciation for abstention, even a degree of asceticism, self-discipline generally, education, as well as intellectual curiosity and a desire to improve. Julian serves as a vessel and recurring example of these values Ammianus seems to hold dear; someone who does not make hasty decisions, takes time to consider, refuses to be swayed by flattery and people trying to turn him to luxury and pleasure instead of his pursuits.¹³⁶

There are only a few instances in *Res gestae* where Ammianus outright criticizes Julian, most of them after Julian becomes *Augustus* and thus rather more free from constraint. On the occasions where Julian encounters criticism before he becomes *Augustus* it is not criticism from Ammianus or criticism implicit in the narrative, but for example from disgruntled

¹³³ Ammianus Marcellinus, 17.11.3: *Ut Cimonem Miltiadis filium, insimulatum ...[...]; Aemilianum itidem Scipionem ut somniculosum aemulorum incusari malivolentia, euius impetrabili uigilantia, obstinatae in perniciem Romae, duae potentissimae sunt urbes excisae.*

¹³⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, 17.11.4: [...] *eum uirum, quo nec fortiori nec amantior quisquam patriae fuit, ut documenta praeclara testantur.*

¹³⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, 17.11.4: *Nec non etiam in Pompeium obtrectatores iniqui multa scrutantes, cum nihil, unde uituperari deberet, inueniretur, duo haec obseruarunt ludibriosa et irrita: quod genuino quodam more caput digito uno scalpebat, quodque aliquandiu tegendi ulceris causa deformis fasciola candida crus colligatum gestabat : quorum alterum factitare ut dissolutum, alterum ut nouarum rerum cupidum asserebant nihil interesse oblatrantes argumento subfrigido [...]*

¹³⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus, 16.2.2: *Nihil itaque remittentibus curis ancillari adulatione posthabita, qua eum proximi ad amoenitatem flectebant et luxum [...]*

soldiers. In fact these occasions are usually used to portray Julian positively in the narrative of the text, serving as examples of Julian turning tribulation to triumph. One such example is when disgruntled soldiers confront Julian, angry because of the lack of rations and pay due to what is first cast a miscalculation by Julian, but swiftly turned to Julian, and thus his troops, being denied proper funds because of malefic policy stemming from Constantius and his court. This, according to Ammianus, was exemplified by Julian at one point handing a soldier a coin for a shave, leading to him being attacked with slanderous speeches by a man called Gaudentius, who served as a notary at that point. This Gaudentius, Ammianus claims, was in Gaul in order to spy on Julian and his conduct, and was eventually put to death on the orders of Julian. The aforementioned angry troops slandered Julian, including apparently naming him a degenerate Greek and a fool, but Julian restored order through soft words,¹³⁷ thus again proving his merit in a situation Ammianus casts as not of his making and certainly not his fault. The recurrent theme of Julian being slandered for, among other things, being Greek by background and disposition, followed by Ammianus explicitly responding to this through either the supposed actions or words of Julian himself, or through historical *exempla*, is a noteworthy dynamic as well. Julian's interactions with the troops are often framed in the aforementioned manner, with Julian meeting an obstacle and managing to sway them through his eloquence and charmed oratory, winning their affection through his speech, brilliant leadership, and sharing in their drudgery.¹³⁸ These occasions are turned into a narratological tool, a storytelling element, to showcase how Julian meets and overcomes tribulation, often making detours in the narrative in order to provide exculpatory commentary, excuses, and details in favor of Julian. It is often interspersed with a contrast to Constantius as well, whose reactions to complaints, tribulation and gossip is a recurring theme in *Res gestae*,¹³⁹ although these will be treated more extensively in the next section.

¹³⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, 17.9.3-10.1: *Frugibus enim nondum etiam maturis miles expensis, quae portabat, nusquam repperiens uictus, extrema minitians Iulianum compellationibus incessebat et probris, Asianum appellans Graeculum et fallacem, et specie sapientiae stolidum. [...] Et erat ratio iusta querellarum. Inter tot enim rerum probabilium cursus articulosque necessitatum ancipites sudoris Gallicanis miles exhaustus nec donatium meruit nec stipendium, iam inde, ut Iulianus illo est missus, ea re, quod nec ipsi, quod daret suppetere poterat usquam, nec Constantius erogari more solito permittebat. Hocque exinde claruit fraude potiusquam tenacitate committi, quod, cum idem Caesar petenti ex usu gregario cuidam, ut barbas detonderet, dedisset aliquid uile, contumeliosis calumniis appetitus est a Gaudentio tunc notario, ad explorandos eius actus diu morato per Gallias, quem postea ipse interfici iusserat, ut loco monstrabitur competenti. Lenito tandem tumultu, non sine blanditiarum genere uario, [...]*

¹³⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, 17.1.2: *[...] uerum facundia iucunditateque sermonum allectum, in uoluntatem traduxerat suam. Amor enim post documenta flagrantior, sequi libenter hortatus est omnis operae conturmalem, auctoritate magnificum ducem, plus laboris indicere sibi quam militia, sicut perspicue contigit, assuetum.*

¹³⁹ This will be further explored in chapter 3.1.2: the "non-Julians".

In 360 CE, Julian was hailed as *Augustus* by his troops, ostensibly as a reaction to a mutiny provoked by Constantius ordering troops sent to him. Ammianus duly emphasizes that this was supposedly not according to the wishes of Julian, who spoke against it and resisted their attempts to proclaim him *Augustus*.¹⁴⁰ However, he was subsequently compelled to consent, and duly hailed as *Augustus* by his troops.¹⁴¹ Ammianus interestingly includes that Julian during the night before he was declared *Augustus* was visited in his dreams by a figure taking the shape the *genius publicus*¹⁴² usually takes, or so Julian allegedly told his inner circle. This figure reproached Julian for resisting its attempts at raising him to a higher position where he belongs, even now that public opinion was unanimous as well.¹⁴³ Daniël den Hengst argued that this not only helped legitimize this coup, but the *genius* is also a quintessentially Roman figure. It also has a topical meaning in that it also represents Roman tradition, especially in the pagan literature of the fourth century.¹⁴⁴ This was presumably also designed to make Julian, who as previously discussed was more Greek by vocation and upbringing, more palatable to the Roman audiences and validate his ascension through Roman divine ordinance. den Hengst also highlights that all manifestations of Genius-worship had been forbidden by Theodosius, so including it could have been a veiled protest against that legislation.¹⁴⁵ He also claims that Julian, in his own works, described how he in this situation asked for Zeus' advice and begs Zeus to give him a sign, which Zeus did. Ammianus, however, does not include this.¹⁴⁶ This is another example of how manipulative Ammianus could be as an author, as well as showcasing him indirectly engaging with contemporary society, given that the pagan Greek angle may have misfired. Hugh Elton also argues that Julian was concealing the measures he had taken to make the insurrection happen, which included assembling the troops and distributing copies of

¹⁴⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus, 20.4.14-15: [...] *ne ad euadendi copiam quisquam perueniret, Augustum Iulianum horrendis clamoribus concrepabant, eum ad se prodire destinatus adigentes, exspectareque coacti, dum lux promicaret, tandem progredi compulerunt. Quo uiso iterata magnitudine sonus Augustum appellauere consensione firmissima. Et ille mente fundata, uniuersis resistebat et singulis, nunc indignari semet ostendens, nunc manus tendens oransque et obsecrans, ne post multas felicissimasque uictorias, agatur aliquid indecorum, neue intempestiua temeritas et prolapsio, discordiarum materias excitaret.*

¹⁴¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 20.4.17: *Conclamabatur post haec ex omni parte nihilo minus, uno parique ardore nitentibus uniuersis, maximoque contentonis fragore, probrosis conuiciis mixto, Caesar assentire coactus est.*

¹⁴² den Hengst, "The Romanization of Julian", 228: "[...] a young man with a cornucopia in the right hand and a patera in the left."

¹⁴³ Ammianus Marcellinus, 20.5.10: *Nocte tamen, quae declarationis Augustae praecesserat diem, iunctioribus proximis rettulerat imperator per quietem aliquem uisum, ut formari Genius publicus solet, haec obiurgando dixisse: „olim, Iuliane, uestibulum aedium tuarum obserua latenter augere tuam gestiens dignitatem et aliquotiens tamquam repudiatus abscessi; si ne nunc quidem recipior sententia concordante multorum, ibo demissus et maestus. Id tamen retineto imo corde, quod tecum non diutibus habitabo."*

¹⁴⁴ den Hengst, "The Romanization of Julian" 227–228.

¹⁴⁵ den Hengst, "The Romanization of Julian", 228.

¹⁴⁶ den Hengst, "The Romanization of Julian", 227.

Constantius' letter.¹⁴⁷ This could further exemplify that Ammianus was either blinded by his devotion to Julian, or he was actively constructing a specific narrative. Through ignorance or will, Ammianus omitted relevant details, and constructs a narrative that portrays Julian in a specific manner. Given that Ammianus has portrayed himself as highly informed on a multitude of other occasions, as well proven himself absolutely devoted to Julian, it is likely the latter.

Ammianus claims that Julian sent Constantius a letter explaining the situation and how he feels they should continue, which Ammianus relays in full. Following that, Ammianus claims that Julian sent Constantius a second letter of a more private nature, one that was more reproachful and bitter in tone, but that Ammianus has not had a possibility to examine it and that it would not be fitting for him to make it public even if he had.¹⁴⁸ The second letter and the inclusion of the fact that it may have been more combative in tone is an odd detail to include as it throws doubt over the sincerity of the public letter. Whilst impossible to say with any certainty, it could be another suggestion that Julian was more actively maneuvering towards the role of *Augustus* than the more overt narrative has suggested. The comment that it would not be fitting for Ammianus to include it in his text even if he had the possibility to read it also points to a certain moralizing selectiveness as well.

Following Constantius rejecting the ascension of Julian they both set off on military campaigns, Julian in Gaul and Constantius towards the east. Julian's venture was, of course, a clear success and he routed the Franks and recaptured territory they had previously seized. Constantius, on the other hand, failed and withdrew without accomplishing what he came for.¹⁴⁹ Ammianus rounds out the twentieth extant book with commentary on how Constantius, whenever he does battle with the Persians himself, loses grievously. However, as he apparently

¹⁴⁷ Hugh Elton, *The Roman Empire in Late Antiquity: A Political and Military history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 78–79.

¹⁴⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, 20.8.2-3: *Inter quae Iulianus apud Parisios hibernis locatis, summa coeptorum quorsum euaderet, pertimescens erat anxius numquam assensurum Constantium factis multa uolendo considerans, apud quem sordebat ut infimus et contemptus. Circumspectis itaque trepidis rerum nouarum exordiis legatos ad eum mittere statuit gesta docturos eis que concinentes litteras dedit, quid actum sit quidue fieri oporteat deinceps, monens apertius et demonstrans.*

20.8.18: *His litteris iunctas secretiore alias Constantio offerendas clanculo misit obiurgatorias et mordaces, quarum seriem nec scrutari licebat nec, si licuisset, proferre decebat in publicum.*

¹⁴⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 20.9: *Constantius Augustus Iulianum Caesaris nomine contentum esse iubet legionibus Gallicanis uno animo constanter repugnantibus.*

20.10: *Iulianus Augustus Francos cognomina Attuarios trans Rhenum inopinantes aggressus post plurimos partim captos, partim occisos ceteris pacem petentibus dedit.*

20.11: *Constantius Augustus Bezabden omnibus copiis oppugnat ac re infecta discedit. Et de arcu caelesti.*

still wants to have military successes he occasionally achieves this through his generals.¹⁵⁰ As previously discussed, the importance of the military and military successes for the emperor, as well as arguably the identity of the empire itself, cannot be understated. With that in mind, it is not surprising that Ammianus does his very best to tie Constantius to military loss and failure.

The supposed abject success of Julian and defeat of Constantius also sets the tone for the next book, which foreshadows the death of Constantius.¹⁵¹ Ammianus claims Julian inferred that the death of Constantius was imminent from prophetic signs and dreams, which Julian as a learned man devoted to knowledge was familiar with, followed by an explanation and validation of the intricacies of augury and divination.¹⁵² In the narrative this serves to both embolden and validate Julian and foreshadow his at this point seemingly inevitable and divinely ordained rise to *Augustus*. This dynamic was arguably set up early on in the extant books when Julian had just been raised to the rank of *Caesar* and traveled to Vienna [Vienne in the Isère], where upon his entry into the city a blind woman supposedly declared that this was the man who would restore the temples of the gods,¹⁵³ verbalizing where the narrative will take Julian.

The fact that Julian was a more active participant in the events leading to him being declared *Augustus*, as opposed to unwillingly being declared so by his vehemently devoted troops, is alluded to almost immediately following Ammianus' explainer on predicting the future. Ammianus recounts an incident that supposedly occurred when Julian was still *Caesar*, again stepping outside his otherwise mostly chronological framing, where Julian was granted a vision of a figure that told him Constantius would meet his doom. Following that Julian kept gradually strengthening his position so that his increase in rank would coincide with a rise in power. In order not to cultivate opposition among people he also pretended to be a Christian, even taking part in a Christian service.¹⁵⁴ This goes somewhat against the grain of the previous

¹⁵⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus, 20.32: *Euenerat enim hoc quasi fatali constellatione ita regente diuersos euentus, ut ipsum Constantium dimicantem cum Persis fortuna semper sequeretur afflictior, unde uincere saltem per duces optabat, quod aliquotiens meminimus contigisse.*

¹⁵¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 21.1: *quo modo Constantium Augustum breui moriturum praenouerit, et de uariis artibus future praenoscenti.*

¹⁵² Ammianus Marcellinus, 21.6-7: *Acuebat autem incendebatque eius cupiditatem pacatis iam Galliis incessere ultro Constantium conciciens eum per uaticinandi praesagia multa, quae callebat, et somnia e uita protinus excessurum. Et quoniam erudito et studioso cognitionum omnium principi maleuoli praenoscenti futura prauas artes assignant, aduertendum est breuiter, unde sapienti uiro hoc quoque accedere poterit, doctrinae genus haud leue. 8-12 is dedicated to explaining different ways to predict the future.*

¹⁵³ Ammianus Marcellinus, 15.8.22: *tunc anus quaedam orba luminibus cum percontando, quinam esset ingressus, Iulianum Caesarem comperisset, exclamauit hunc deorum temple reparaturum.*

¹⁵⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, 21.1.2-4. *item cum apud Viennam postea quiesceret sobrius, horrore medio noctis imago quaedam uisa splendidior hos ei uersus heroos modo non uigilanti aperte edixit eadem saepius replicando, quibus fretus nihil asperum sibi superesse existimabat:*

narrative, and clearly demonstrates Julian navigating what could be called contemporary realpolitik in order to further his own goals and advancement. This also throws a rather cynical light over the incident where Julian was supposedly declared *Augustus* “against his will”. It also alludes to the societal predominance of Christianity in the context of which the last pagan emperor was trying to reach the throne. The predominant narrative leading up to Julian being declared *Augustus* was essentially that Constantius was so incompetent and bad for the empire that the rise of Julian was inevitable, whereas the narrative after his ascension highlight the agency Julian had. It is both possible and plausible that Julian was actively jockeying for advancement and power. This dual perception of Julian could be a further example of what John Weisweiler labeled an attempt at forcing the reader to engage in an interpretative process, playing one version of the events against the other. In short it presents slightly competing versions of what might have happened and lets the reader decide how to interpret it.¹⁵⁵ Whilst Weisweiler was not discussing Julian or this narrative in particular, he points out the deceptiveness of finished historical narratives that mask the processes which lie behind their composition.¹⁵⁶ In the case of Julian this seems to be deliberately vague and hinting in different directions, so people can engage with it and conclude what is most fitting for them. Considering the context of writing this could also be a way of eulogizing Julian whilst conceivably letting his detractors interpret the narrative differently, or giving Ammianus a plausible defense against accusations.

The open ambition of Julian becomes far more noticeable in the narrative following his ascent to the rank of *Augustus*, despite the fact that the narrative of him as *Caesar* significantly de-emphasized this. It essentially made Julian seem like someone who was unwilling to grab power for himself but rose to the occasion because fate ordained it so. There is a clear narrative shift after he reaches the pinnacle of power and becomes *Augustus*. Ammianus makes numerous comments throughout *Res gestae* about how Julian after his numerous and repeated successes began entertaining ambitions going beyond what is possible

Zeus όταν εις παρθενικής Θεέ πλατύ τέρμα μόλγ) κλντοῦ Κρόνος μοίρ-η βαίνγ) έπι νδροχόοιο, εικοστή, τέρμα βασιλεύς φίλου βιοτοῦ Κωσταντίος στυγερόν Ασίδος και αίης έπόδνον εξει.

agebat itaque nihil interim de statu rerum praesentium mutans, sed animo tranquillo et quieto incidentia cuncta disponens paulatimque sese corroborans, ut dignitatis augmento uirium quoque congruerent incrementa. utque omnes nullo impediēte ad sui fauorem illiceret, adhaerere cultui Christiano fingebat, a quo iam pridie occulte descuerat arcanorum participibus paucis haruspicinae auguriisque intentus et ceteris, quae deorum semper fecere cultores. et ut haec interim ceio larentur, feriarum die, quem celebrantes mense Ianuario Christiani Epiphania dictitant, progressus in eorum ecclesiam sollemniter numine orato discessit.

¹⁵⁵ Weisweiler, “Unreliable Witness”, 115, 129.

¹⁵⁶ Weisweiler, “Unreliable Witness”, 130.

for a mere mortal, that he wanted to add to the record of his glorious exploits, sought out more glory and was never satisfied.¹⁵⁷ These comments about the pride and ambition of Julian are interspersed throughout the narrative of Julian as sole *Augustus*, meaning it is not an isolated incident or offhand comment.

The situation between Julian and Constantius kept simmering, and Julian apparently concluded that there would be no way to reach an accord with Constantine. Accordingly, Julian sent a bitter letter to the senate where he berated Constantius. The senate apparently responded by demonstrating what Ammianus seemingly sarcastically calls their independence and affection, saying they expect Julian to show due reverence to his creator.¹⁵⁸ As shown earlier in the analysis, disparaging the nobility and senate, as well as establishing that they repeatedly disparaged and never supported Julian, has been a recurring theme throughout *Res gestae*. Ammianus has already disparaged them on multiple occasions, effectively setting them up as worthless puppets and pre-emptively rejecting their opinions and input. It is thus made to appear that this is simply more of the same, anticipated and not worth the time of day.

The criticism leveraged towards Julian continues when Ammianus claims Julian took certain actions Ammianus thought were only done in order to increase his popularity.¹⁵⁹ A notable aspect of that example is that Ammianus follows it with a comparison to Gallus. Ammianus states that Julian in his refusal to be swayed from his plan despite opposition and the senate at Antioch stating that his plan could not be done at the time showed that he resembled his brother, albeit without the cruelty.¹⁶⁰ These occasional hints at Julian being rather excitable, headstrong, or indulging in excess do not quite fit into the description Ammianus

¹⁵⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, 22.9.1: *At prosperis Iulianus elatior ultra homines iam spirabat periculis expertus assiduus, quod ei orbem Romanum placide iam regenti uelut mundanam cornucopiam Fortuna gestans propitia cuncta gloriosa deferebat et prospera antegressis uictoriarum titulis haec quoque adiciens, quod, dum teneret imperium solus, nec motibus internis est concitus nec barbarorum quisquam ultra suos exsiluit fines; populi omnes auuiditate semper insectari praeterita ut damnosa et noxia in laudes eius studiis miris ascendebantur.*

22.12.2: *Urebatur autem bellandi gemino desiderio, primo, quod impatiens otii lituos somniabat et proelia, dein, quod in aetatis flore primaueo obiectus efferatarum genium armis recalentibus etiamtum regum precibus et regalium, qui uinci magis posse quam supplices manus tendere credebantur, ornamentis illustrium gloriarum inserere Parthici cognomentum ardebat.*

24.7.3: *sed ille auidae semper ad ulteriora cupiditatis parui habitis uetantium dictis et increpitis optimabatur quod ob inertiam otiique desiderum amitti suaderent prope iam parta regna Persidis, flumine laeua relicto infaustis ductoribus praeuuis mediterraneas uias arripere citato proposuit gradu.*

¹⁵⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, 21.10.9: *quae cum Tertullo administrante adhuc praefecturam recitarentur in cura eminuit nobilitatis cum speciosa fiducia benignitas grata. Exclamatum est enim in unum cunctorum sentential congruente „auctori tuo reuerentiam rogamus”.*

¹⁵⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 20.14.1: *Inter praecipua tamen er seria illud agere superfluum uidebatur, quod nulla probabili ratione suscepta popularitatis amore uilitati studebat uenalium rerum, quae nonnumquam secus, quam conuenit, ordinata inopiam gignere solet et famem.*

¹⁶⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus, 22.14.2: *et Antiochensi ordine id tunc fieri, cum ille iuberet, non posse aperte monstrante nusquam a proposito declinabat, Galli similis fratris licet incruentus.*

gave of Julian in the sixteenth extant book. Arguably, the narrative of Julian as some kind of wunderkind who through his sheer talent and fortitude continuously rose in ranks fractured when he reached the peak of power, laying bare the politicking, ideology, and occasional naked ambition fueling him. It is possible Julian changed after accumulating and growing accustomed to wielding so much power, especially after the death of Constantius, which freed Julian from having to deal with another *Augustus*. Another possibility is that it was boiling beneath the surface all along, and Julian now had more agency and freedom to express it. It arguably serves as a minor breaking point in the narrative, as Ammianus at this point starts criticizing Julian for his excess, although he usually tempers it and provides explanations for him. Considering that Julian seems to have kept a lower profile and better control of his impulses as *Caesar*, it is possible that his behavior as *Augustus* was less constrained and presumably well known. This could mean Ammianus did not have the same cover to explain away or diminish these less appealing characteristics of Julian, although this is pure speculation.

The previously mentioned Persian campaign, which ended in disaster and the death of Julian,¹⁶¹ takes up a significant portion of the narrative of his time as sole *Augustus*. Despite significant setbacks and portents of disaster,¹⁶² Julian would not be swayed from his path. When he rashly ran into battle without his armor, he was mortally wounded.¹⁶³ Julian died on the 26th of June 363 CE, at the age of (circa) 31–32. Ammianus subsequently dedicates a chapter to the illustrious character of Julian, describing his many virtues at length. Julian was truly to be numbered with the heroic spirits, a narrative Ammianus has been actively furthering since Julian appeared in the extant books, as well as being conspicuous for his glorious deeds and innate majesty. Ammianus emphasizes the four cardinal virtues extolled by philosophers; self-control, wisdom, justice, and courage, as well as some practical gifts, such as military skill. Julian excelled at all of these, e.g. by being conspicuously and incorruptibly chaste following the death of his wife, and his leadership in sieges and campaigns. He ate and slept sparingly, partook in the less than stellar fare offered to soldiers during campaigns, personally oversaw and participated in their duties, and labored long into the night.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ See page 32, footnote 119.

¹⁶² Ammianus Marcellinus, 25.2: *Inopia frumenti et pabuli premitur exercitus. Iulianus terretur ostentis.*

¹⁶³ Ammianus Marcellinus, 25.3: *Imperator, dum ad repellendos Persas, qui undique instabant, ommissa lorica, temere se proeliis inserit, hasta uelneratur, ac in tabernaculum refertur, ubi circumstantes alloquitur, ac post epotam frigidam moritur.*

¹⁶⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, 25.4.1–2: *Vir profecto heroicis connumerandus ingeniis, claritudine rerum et coalita maiestate conspicuus. Cum enim sint, ut sapientes definiunt, uirtutes quattuor praecipuae, temperantia, prudentia, iustitia, fortitudo eisque accedentes extrinsecus aliae, scientia rei militaris, auctoritas, felicitas atque*

The wisdom of Julian was so abundant that Ammianus provides merely a few examples; Julian was skilled in the arts of both war and peace, courteous, and claiming for himself only enough deference that he was preserving himself from insolence and disrespect. He showed interest in legal inquiries and excellence in the administration of justice, occasionally being a strict judge himself, and occasionally showed leniency. He showed a calm contempt for riches and worldly possessions. Julian maintained that it was shameful for a man who possessed a soul to seek to be honored for physical gifts. However, his physical prowess and courage was showcased on numerous occasions when he participated in the fray, fighting on the front-lines, and rallying his troops. The authority of Julian was well established, and the fear he inspired in his men was tempered by the affection garnered from sharing in their hardships and by his overall exemplary leadership. This is also exemplified by Julian placating and holding on to his troops in Gaul through his words and deeds. He was not greedy and he showed a generous spirit, for example by imposing only a light tribute, remitting the accession money, canceling long-standing debts, impartial and fair settlement of disputes between treasury and private individuals, as well by restoring revenues by taxation to various cities. Ammianus rounds out this list of virtues by linking to Alexander the Great again, claiming that Julian was often heard claiming that Alexander, when asked where he keeps his treasure, kindly answered “in the hands of my friends”.¹⁶⁵

liberalitas, intent studio coluit omnes ut singulas. Et primum ita inuiolata castitate enituit, ut post amissam coniugem nihil umquam uenerium augis larens illud auertens [...]

25.4.4–6: Hoc autem temperantiae genus crescebat in maius iuuante parsimonia ciborum et somni, quibus domi forisque tenacius utebatur. Namque in pace uictur eius mensarumque tenuitas erat recte noscentibus admiranda uelut ad pallium mox reuersuri, per uarios autem procinctus stans interdum more militiae cibum breuem uilemque sumere uisebatur. Ubi uero exigua dormiendi quiete recreasset corpus laboribus induratum, expergefactus explorabat per semet ipsum uigiliarum uices et stationum post haec serie ad artes confugiens doctrinarum. Et si nocturna lumina, inter quae lucubrabat, potuissent uoce ulla testari, profecto ostenderant inter hunc et quosdam principes multum interesse, quem norant uoluptatibus ne ad necessitate quidem indulsisse naturae.

¹⁶⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, 25.4.7–9: *Dein prudentiae eius inidicia fuere uel plurima, e quibus explicari sufficere pauca. Armatae rei scientissimus et togatae, ciuilitati admodum studens, tatum sibi arrogans, quantum e contemptu et insolentia distare existimabat. Uirtute senior quam aetate; studiosus cognitionum omnium et indeclinabilis aliquotiens iudex; censor in moribus regendis acerrimus, placibus opum contemptor, mortalia cuncta despiciens, postremo id praedicabat turpe esse sapienti, cum habeat animum, captare laudes ex corpore. Quibus autem iustitiae inclaruit bonis, multa significant, - primo quod erat pro rerum hominum distinctione sine crudelitate terribilis, deinde quod paucorum discrimine uitia cohibebat, tum autem quod minabatur ferro potiusquam utebatur. Postremo et multa praeteream, constat eum in apertos aliquos inimicos insidiatores suos ita consurrexisse mitissime, ut poenarum asperitatem genuine lenitudine castigaret.*

25.4.10-12: Fortitudinem certaminum crebritas ususque bellorum ostendit et patientia frigorum immanium et feruoris. Cumque corporis munus a milite, ab imperatore uero animi poscitur, ipse trucem hostem ictu confecit audacter congressus ac nostros cedentes obiecto pectore suo aliquotiens cohibuit solus regnaque furentium Germanorum excindens et in puluere uaporato Persidis augebat fiduciam militis dimicans inter primos. Castrensium negotiorum scientiam plura declarant et nota, ciuitatum oppugnationes et castellorum inter ipsos discriminum uertices, acies figura multiformi compositae, salubriter et caute castra metata, praetenturae

Following the list of virtues of Julian, Ammianus turns to his faults. Julian was impulsive, but compensated for this fault by allowing himself to be corrected when in the wrong. He was talkative and seldom silent. He put too much stock in divination and omens, and was superstitious rather than genuinely religious; this led to him sacrificing excessively. He desired popularity and displayed an over-eagerness for praise and applause; this resulted in him occasionally conversing with unworthy individuals. Furthermore, Julian claimed that during his reign, the ancient goddess of Justice, who had fled to heaven in disgust at the sin of men, had returned to earth. Ammianus claims this would be a sound argument, had Julian not occasionally acted arbitrarily and uncharacteristically. His laws were precise and not oppressive, but there were a few exceptions that tarnished his record, including his harsh ban on Christians teaching rhetoric or grammar unless they worshipped pagan gods. Equally unjust and unbearable was Julian allowing people who should be exempt (such as foreigners or those exempt by privilege or birth) to be conscripted into town councils.¹⁶⁶ It is notable that Ammianus caps some parts of this list of faults with a “but” or “however”. He rationalizes and excuses many of Julian’s faults, or downplays them. Attempting to force Christians to turn to pagan worship in order to teach obviously did not please Ammianus, nor forcing people of a certain status to work on the town councils. The religious aspect is the most heavily criticized one, and one which Ammianus does not make excuses for. Considering the context of writing, it is arguably a concession to the detractors of Julian, and a warning example. Calling Julian

stationesque agrariae totis rationibus ordinatae. Auctoritas adeo ualuit, ut dilectus artissime, dum timetur, ac si periculorum socius et laborum et inter concentrationes accertimas animaduerti iubeter in desides et Caesar adhuc sine stipendio regeret militem feris oppositum gentibus, ut dudum est dictum, allocutusque tumentes armatos discessurum ad uitam minaretur priuatam, ni tumultuare desistent. Denique id pro multis nosse sufficet: exhortatum eum supplici contione militem Galliacanum pruinis assuetum et Rheno peragratis spatiis regionum extentis per tepentem Assyriam ad usque confinia traxisse Medorum.

25.4.15: *Liberalitatis eius testimonia plurima sunt et uerissima, inter quae indicta sunt tributorum admodum leuia, coronarium indultum, remissa debita multa diurnitate congesta, aequata fisci iurgia cum priuatis, uectigalia ciuitatibus restitute cum fundis, absque his, quos uelut iure uendidere praeteritae potestates, quodque numquam augendae pecunia cupidus fuit, quam cautious apud dominos seruari existimabat, id aliquotiens praedicans Alexandrum Magnum, ubi haberet thesaurus, interrogatum „apud amicos” beniuole respondisse.*

¹⁶⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus, 25.4.16–17: *Digestis bonis, quae scire potuimus, nunc ad explicanda eius uitia ueniamus, licet dicta sint carptim. Leuioris ingenii, uerum hoc instituto rectissimo temperabat emendari se, cum deuiaret a fruge bona, permittens. Linguae fuosioris et admodum raro silentis, praesagiorum scriscitationi nimiae deditus, ut aequiperare uidetur in hac parte principem Hadrianum, superstitiosus magis quam sacrorum legitimus obseruator, innumeras sine parsimonia pecudes mactans [...]*

25.4.18–21: *Volgi plausibus laetus, laudum etiam ex minimis rebus intemperans appetitor, popularitatis cupiditate cum indignis loqui saepe affectans. Verum tamen cum haec essent, aestimari poterat, ut ipse aiebat, uetus illa Iustitia, quam offensam uitii hominum Aratus extollit in caelum, eo imperante redisse rursus ad terras, ni quaedam ad arbitrium agens interdum ostenderet se dissimilem sui. Namque et iura condidit non molesta absolute quadam iubentia fieri uel arcentia praeter pauca, inter quae erat illud inclemens, quod docere uetuit magistros rhetoricos et grammaticos Christianos, ni tensissent ad numinum cultum. Illud quoque itidem parum ferendum, quod municipalium ordinum coetibus patiebatur iniuste quosdam annecti uel peregrinos uel ab his consortiis priuilegiis aut origine longe discretos.*

superstitious as opposed to truly religious underlines that Ammianus seemingly felt Julian went too far in his devotions. Hugh Elton also underlines that some of Julian's excitable actions left Ammianus shaking his head but no more,¹⁶⁷ something affirmed by mostly throwaway comments in the narrative (such as his impulsiveness and talkativeness). However, Elton contrasts this with comments by the Christian historian Socrates [Scholasticus, active during the fifth century CE], who wrote that some few praised the actions of Julian, but the majority blamed him for his tendency to bring the imperial dignity into contempt.¹⁶⁸ As has been touched upon, and will be discussed in more depth, Ammianus firmly and unquestionably accuses all other emperors of behavior unworthy of their position, with Julian essentially the only exception to this. The contrast between how Christian authors such as Socrates and Ammianus portrays individuals like Julian is striking.

Furthermore, Ammianus attempts to directly rebut those criticizing Julian for the war that eventually claimed Julian's own life, claiming it was Constantine who had actually rekindled the Parthian conflagration [although at this point they were already Sassanids, not Parthians]. This ultimately led to significant military losses and captures, destruction of cities, seizure or demolition of fortresses, and the Persians extending their borders. Ammianus then pivots to Julian's previous military successes; Julian managed to save the situation in Gaul, where the barbarians were swarming Roman territories and about to force the Alps, enabling them to ravage Italy as well. Ammianus paints a dire picture, claiming the inhabitants had suffered immensely, and only had further suffering to look forward to. Julian, then *Caesar* in name only, was sent to Gaul and managed to retrieve the situation with almost miraculous speed. Following this success, he turned his sights to the East due to his passionate eagerness to set things right. Had only Heaven favored his designs, Julian would have won great triumphs and additional titles. Ammianus then claims some people are rash enough to defy experience, i.e. renewing wars after defeat or going to sea after shipwreck. However, there are those that dare blame an emperor who, after an unbroken line of successes and victories, attempted to repeat his success.¹⁶⁹ This narrative neatly excuses Julian of any and all military failures, laying

¹⁶⁷ Hugh Elton, *The Roman Empire in Late Antiquity*, 79.

¹⁶⁸ Hugh Elton, *The Roman Empire in Late Antiquity*, 79.

¹⁶⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 25.4.23–27: *Et quoniam eum obtrectatores novos bellorum tumultus ad perniciem rei communis insimulant concitasse, sciant docente ueritate perspicue non Iulianum, sed Constantinum ardores Parthicos succendisse, cum Metrodori mendaciis audius acquiescit, ut dudum rettulimus plene. Unde caesi ad indignationem exercitus nostril, capti militares aliquotiens numeri, urbes excisae, rapta munimenta uel diruta, prouinciae grauibus impensis exhaustae et ad affectum tendentibus minis cuncta petebantur a Persis ad usque Bithynos et litora Propontidis. At in Galliis feruorum tenore gliscente diffuses per nostra Germanis iamque Alpibus ad uastandam Italiam perrumpendis nihil multa et nefanda perpessis hominibus praeter lacrimas supererat et*

the blame squarely on his predecessors (and, as will be shown, on his successors). Rowland Smith also highlighted the narrative inconsistency at this junction, claiming that the praises in the obituary sit oddly beside the preceding account of what befell the expedition devised to be Julian's crowning glory.¹⁷⁰ Considering the importance of military success for Ammianus and the empire, it is a convenient and contrived way to spin the narrative in favor of Julian, much in line with the narrative of Julian as a whole.

3.1.2 The “non-Julians”:

The following section analyzes the narratives around other prominent figures in *Res gestae*, most of whom are linked to Julian and/or serve as narrative foils to him. Some only appeared in the narrative for a short time, but are included because of their narrative significance in *Res gestae*.

Gallus (*Caesar* 351–354 CE)

Caesar Gallus is described by Ammianus Marcellinus as ruling for four years and dying at the age of twenty-nine.¹⁷¹ He does not feature overmuch in *Res gestae*, as he meets his end in the fourteenth book (the first of the extant books), but Ammianus manages to give an absolutely scathing assessment of him, his actions, and his whole character in the relatively short time he features in the narrative.

The extant books of *Res gestae* begin with a chapter conspicuously named after the cruelty of *Caesar* Gallus¹⁷², which sets the theme right at the outset. Ammianus immediately claims Gallus had unexpectedly been raised to *Caesar* from wretched depths, and immediately proceeded to continuously overstep his authority and wreak havoc through harshness and violence.¹⁷³ Ammianus, who as previously showcased through Julian clearly put great stock in

terrors, ubi et praeteritorum recordation erat acerba et exspectatio tristior impendentium. Quae omnia iuuenis iste ad occiduam plagam specie Caesaris missus reges quo pro mancipiis agitans ignobilibus cuncta paene mira dictu celeritate correxerat. Itaque ut orientem pari studio recrearet, adortus est Persas triumphum exinde relaturus et cognomentum, si consiliis eius et factis illustribus deceret caelestia congruissent. Et cum sciamus adeo experimenta quosdam ruere improvidos, ut bella interdum uicti et naufragi repentant maria et ad difficultates redeant, quibus succubere saepissime, sunt, qui reprehendant paria repetisse principem ubique uictorem.

¹⁷⁰ Rowland Smith, "Telling tales: Ammianus' narrative of the Persian expedition of Julian", in *The Late Roman World and Its Historian: interpreting Ammianus Marcellinus*, 81.

¹⁷¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 14.11.27: *Hoc immaturo interitu, ipse quoque sui pertaesus, excessit e uita, aetatis nono anno atque uicensimo, cum quadriennio imperasset.*

¹⁷² Ammianus Marcellinus, 14.1: *Galli Caesaris saeuitia.*

¹⁷³ Ammianus Marcellinus, 14.1.1: [...] *per multa illa et dira facinora Caesaris Galli, qui ex squalore imo miseriarum in aetatis adultae primitiis ad principale culmen insperato cultu prouectus ultra terminos potestatis delatae procurrens asperitate nimia cuncta foedabat. Propinquitatem enim regiae stirpis gentilitateque etiamtum Constantii nominis efferbatur in fastus, si plus ualuisset, ausurus hostilia in auctorem suae felicitatis ut uidebatur.*

the character and *exempla* of the emperors, here paints Gallus as clearly lacking in character, morals, and being prone to violence. Ammianus very clearly strings together a web of Gallus' supposed deficits and cruel actions to create a narrative so scathing there are few to none redeeming factors. Gallus is portrayed as man of savage nature who is supposedly an expert in doing and causing harm, seeks out and listens attentively to unsubstantiated gossip and whatever poison that people pour into his ears that affirms what he wanted to think,¹⁷⁴ as well as abusing his authority and putting innocents to death.¹⁷⁵ This is in many ways a direct opposite of how Ammianus portrays Julian in *Res gestae*.

Ammianus continuously singles out characters surrounding the emperors in the narrative. In the case of Gallus he points to the praetorian prefect at court, Thalassius, a man of dubious character apparently, who openly roused Gallus' already savage temper as well sent frequent and exaggerated reports to Constantius regarding Gallus' conduct.¹⁷⁶ Considering that Ammianus as of yet does not appear himself in the first-person in the narrative, and does not seem to be basing his text on autopsy, although still acting as an overt narrator,¹⁷⁷ it is notable that he chose to include this. As we are not privy to what sources exactly Ammianus bases his narrative of Gallus on, it does raise some questions on the veracity of the narrative. However, this critical assessment also adds some nuance to how Gallus was portrayed, which could also serve to lend Ammianus credibility on the issue and reinforce his authority.

Considering how the narrative treats Gallus it is also a bridge to Constantius II, whom Ammianus after a few digressions promptly accuses of similar behavior and weakness of character as Gallus. Constantius too was apparently arrogant and willing to accept any and

¹⁷⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, 14.2.2–5: *Qui paulatim eruditiores facti processu temporis ad nocendum per clandestinos uersutosque rumigerulos compertis leuiter addere quaedam male suetos falsa et placentia sibi discentes affectati regni uel artium nefarandum calumnias insontibus affigebant.*

14.6.1: *Excogitatum est super his, ut homines quidam ignoti utilitate ipsa parum cauendi ad colligendos rumores per Antiochiae latera cuncta destinarentur relaturi quae audirent.*

14.7.3: *Erat autem diritatis eius hoc quoque indicium nec obscurum nec latens, quod ludicris cruentis delectabatur et in circo sex uel septem aliquotiens deditus certaminibus pugilum uicissim se concidentium perfusorumque sanguine specie ut lucratus ingentia laetabatur.*

¹⁷⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, 14.3.7–10: [...] *formula missa letali homo sclere nullo contactus, idem Clematius, nec hiscere nec loqui permissus occideretur.*

¹⁷⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus, 14.10.1: *Thalassius uero ea tempestate praefectus praetorio praesens, ipse quoque arrogantis ingenii, considerans incitationem eius ad multorum augeri discrimina non maturitate uel consiliis mitigabat, ut aliquotiens celsae potestates iras principum molliuerunt, sed aduersando iurgandoque cum parum congrueret eum ad rabiem potius euibrabat Augustum actus eius exaggerando creberrime docens, idque, incertum qua mente, ne laterat, affectans.*

¹⁷⁷ De Jong, *Narratology and Classics*, 26-27.

every false rumor or charge as fact and acting on them.¹⁷⁸ In this context it could be argued that this is a narrative technique linking the two together and creating a foundation for the role Constantius will come to serve in the narrative, which as mentioned in many ways is as a foil to Julian and his *virtus*. Seeing as Gallus met his end so soon (in the extant books) it is a sound narrative technique to establish him as a man with few to none redeeming factors, given license to act on his impulses through his position as *Caesar*, and then not only string this to the *Augustus* but establish that they also share in some of these traits. As *Augustus* Constantius was also ultimately responsible for appointing Gallus to his position and enabling him act as he did with the powers granted. Given that *Res gestae* was written with the benefit of hindsight it sets the foundation for the dynamic between Constantius and Julian in the narrative.

The fact that the narrative around Gallus is consciously constructed is alluded to when Ammianus writes about Gallus wantonly sentencing people to torture and death on mere suspicions, after which Ammianus claims that Gallus' bloodlust was raised and he kept trying such cases. Ammianus, however, claims it is not worth recounting all of these due to fear of exceeding the limits which he has set himself, something he feels he certainly must avoid.¹⁷⁹ The narrative surrounding Gallus takes on an almost storytelling character following this, with Gallus being summoned to meet Constantius, ostensibly looking for an excuse to rid the world of his troublesome *Caesar*.¹⁸⁰ Ammianus describes how Gallus, whenever he managed to sleep, was hounded by spectres, ghosts of those whom he had sentenced to death, as well as generally being plagued by nightmares.¹⁸¹ The plot to get rid of the *Caesar* is ultimately successful, and Ammianus describes how Gallus is seized and when confronted about his crimes and misrule pins a lot of it on his wife Constantina (sister of Constantius), who had died of sickness earlier,

¹⁷⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, 14.5.1: [...] *insolentiae pondera grauius Librans, si quid dubium deferabatur aut falsum, pro liquido accipiens et comperto inter alia excarnificatum Gerontium, Magnentianae comitem partis, exsulari maerore multauit.*

¹⁷⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 14.9.9: *post quorum necem nihilo lenius ferociens Gallus ut leo cadaueribus pastus multa huiusmodi scrutabatur. Quae singular narrare non refert, ne professionis modum, quod sane uitandum est, excedamus.*

¹⁸⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus, 14.11.1: *Vbi curarum abiectis ponderibus aliis tamquam nodum et odium difficillimum Caesarem conuellere nisu ualido cogitabat; eique deliberanti cum proximis clandestinis colloquiis et nocturnis, qua ui quibusue commentis id fieret, acciri mollioribus scriptis per simulationem tractatus publici nimis urgentis eundem placuerat Gallum, ut axilio destitutus sine interiret obstaculo.*

¹⁸¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 14.11.17: *Inter haec tamen per indutias naturae conquiescentis sauciabantur eius sensus circumstridentium terrore laruarum interfectorumque cateruae Domitiano et Montis praeuii correptum eum, ut existimabat in somniis, uncis furialibus obiectabant.*

who had allegedly incited it.¹⁸² This prompts Ammianus to make a reference to Alexander the Great, claiming that Gallus was apparently unaware that:

[...] when the mother of Alexander the Great urged her son to put an innocent man to death and said again and again, in the hope of later gaining what she desired, that she had carried him for nine months in her womb, and the king made this wise answer: "Ask some other reward, dear mother, a man's life is not to be weighed against any favour".¹⁸³

This comparison to Alexander, chronologically the first in the extant books, is noteworthy not only for the *exempla* Ammianus invokes, but also because he finds Gallus lacking in both knowledge and action. Julian, as has been discussed, according to Ammianus not only displayed proper knowledge of and followed the example of Alexander the Great, he even surpassed him on some fronts. Gallus is subsequently beheaded and his body mutilated, although interestingly Ammianus goes on to claim that even though Gallus' cruel deeds led to his doom, fate ensured that two people (Scudilo and Barbatio) who through lies and deceit led Gallus to destruction also died painful deaths.¹⁸⁴ Gallus is referenced later in the narrative as well, when Ammianus remarks that Julian was troubled by his dynamic with Constantius. Ammianus again claims that the negligence of Gallus as well as the perjury and deceit of certain men had led to his downfall.¹⁸⁵ These recurring plots Ammianus describe as surrounding Gallus and eventually leading to what is arguably cast as his tragic downfall and death do not quite square with his own narrative of Gallus. It also brings up the question of what the purpose of characterizing the narrative in that way is. Of course, here too a comparison can be made to how Ammianus also frequently described some plot or another aimed at Julian, who did not fall prey to these, but was eventually undone by fate alone.

¹⁸² Ammianus Marcellinus, 14.11.6: *Quae licet ambigeret metuens saepe cruentum, spe tamen, quod eum lenire poterit ut germanum, profecta, cum Bithyniam introisset, in statione, quae Caenos Gallicanos appellatur, absumpta est ui februm repentina.*

14.11.22: *Ad quae Adrasteo pallore perfusus hactenus ualuit loqui, quod plerosque incitante coniuge iugulauerit Constantina [...]*

¹⁸³ J. C. Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus I*, 14.11.22: [...] *igorans profecto Alexandrum Magnum urgenti matri, ut occideret quendam insontem, et dictitanti spe impetrandi postea, quae uellet, eum se per nouem menses utero portasse praegnantem ita respondisse prudenter: „aliam, parens optima, posce mercedem; hominis enim salus beneficio nullo pensatur.“*

¹⁸⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, 14.11.24: *Sed uigilauit utrubique superni numinis aequitas. Nam et Gallum actus oppressere crudeles et non diu postea ambo criciabili morte absumpti sunt, qui eum licet nocentem blandius palpantes periuriis ad usque plagas perduxere letales. Quorum Seudilo destillatione iecoris pulmones uomitans interiit; Barbatio, qui in eum iam diu falsa composuerat criminal, cum ex magisterio peditum altius niti quorundam susurris incusaretur, damnatus extincti per fallascias Caesaris minibus anima illacrimoso obitu parentauit.*

¹⁸⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, 21.1.2: *Quae sollicite reputans utrumque formidabat et amicum cruentum et in aerumnis ciuilibus saepe uictorem maximeque Galli fratris exemplum mentem eius anxiam suspendebat, quem inertia mixtaeque periuriis fraudes prodidere quorundam.*

The aforementioned discrepancies in the narrative surrounding Gallus has also been scrutinized by John Weisweiler, who highlights that this admission of an active opposition towards Gallus is an uncomfortable fit in the narrative.¹⁸⁶ He further suggests that readers might have been:

“[...] presented with competing versions of historical truth from which they have to construct their own histories [---] [and] on this reading, the *Res gestae* was both a complex account of the past *and* an unsettling exploration of the problems of representing that past”¹⁸⁷

The context of writing is also highlighted by Weisweiler, who argued that the rather disjointed and multi-perspectival narrative was an appropriate response to describe a social world where images of past and present were constantly in flux, not to mention that the past is also constantly re-created and re-used for the purposes of the present.¹⁸⁸ The complexity of the text as well as the inherent purpose and subjectivity of it is thus also so tightly linked to the context of writing that separating them is not fit for purpose. Considering the narrative threads Ammianus that have already been discussed, the narrative of Gallus (interconnected with Constantius) fits into the overarching themes of the text as have been presented in the thesis already. Given that this is before the entry of Julian it also serves as a foundation or springboard for that particular narrative, directing heavy criticism towards not only Gallus but also Constantius. The narrative excoriates the general character and moral failings of the then *Caesar* and *Augustus*, not to mention the ruling class in general. It establishes a vacancy of morality, a lack of proper rule and use of power, contributing to a gradual decline of moral and military might of empire. This is arguably enforced by a presumably satirical digression scorching the people and the senate of Rome (the faults of the Roman Senate and People)¹⁸⁹ right in the middle of Ammianus recounting the tyrannical reign of Gallus. Julian, however, is primed to enter the narrative and if not outright remedy the situation then at the very least walk in the right direction when it comes to how Ammianus seems to feel an emperor should act and rule. In the main narrative of *Res gestae* Gallus and Constantius arguably serve as a stepping stone or transitional event¹⁹⁰ for introducing Julian, or at least Gallus does. Arguably the story of Gallus as a whole is cast as something of a tragedy, especially since Ammianus to some degree felt he was also brought down by factors outside of his control. The “meaning” of this story is thus identified through

¹⁸⁶ Weisweiler, “Unreliable Witness”, 105.

¹⁸⁷ Weisweiler, “Unreliable Witness”, 107.

¹⁸⁸ Weisweiler, “Unreliable Witness”, 133.

¹⁸⁹ J. C. Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus I*, 14.6: *Senatus populi que Romani uitia*

¹⁹⁰ White, *Metahistory*, 7-8.

the method of emplotment, which White categorizes as “the way by which a sequence of events [is] fashioned into a story [which] is gradually revealed to be a story of a particular kind”¹⁹¹. Ammianus fashioning these events of the past into a particular story to further the larger narrative can also help explain some of the aforementioned peculiarities of this narrative. Considering that this is presumably not how things appeared or played out in real time the role of the author is laid bare, especially one who here was writing with the benefit of hindsight. Seeing as Constantius and Julian have significant overlap the characterization of Constantius differs from Gallus in that he serves as a more active foil until he eventually meets his end as well, but Constantius’ overlap and similarities with Gallus establish his character as well.

Constantius II (*Augustus* 337–361 CE)

Even before the death of Gallus, Constantius had been harshly disparaged by Ammianus outside of (or in line with) the aforementioned narrative bridge-building between him and Gallus. On top of being arrogant to a fault, and prone to believe any and every false rumor, Ammianus further claims, in the context of Constantius ordering torture, and exile that:

[a]s an ailing body is apt to be affected even by slight annoyances, so his narrow and sensitive mind, thinking that every sound indicated something done or planned at the expense of his safety, made his victory [over Magnentius] lamentable through the murder of innocent men. For if anyone of the military commanders or ex-officials, or one of high rank in his own community, was accused even by rumour to have favoured the party of the emperor’s opponent, he was loaded with chains and dragged about like a wild beast. And whether a personal enemy pressed the charge or no one at all, as though it was enough that he had been named, informed against, or accused, he was condemned to death, or his property confiscated, or he was banished to some desert island.¹⁹²

Whilst this is connected to the civil war against Magnentius it is not far off the tyranny Ammianus ascribed to Gallus. The incessant paranoia and willingness to lash out at the slightest perceived hint or whisper of disloyalty is not precisely a foundation for stability and order, which Ammianus as a self-described soldier appears to have valued. Ammianus further excoriates the courtiers surrounding Constantius, accusing them of exaggerating everything and fanning Constantius’ paranoia, anger, and cruelty. Because of them these traits grew even more

¹⁹¹ White, *Metahistory*, 7.

¹⁹² J. C. Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus I*, 14.5.2–3: *Utque aegrum corpus quassari etiam leuibus solet offensis, ita animus eius angustus et tener, quidquid increpisset, ad salutis suae dispendium existimans factum aut cogitatum insontium caedibus fecit uictoriam luctuosam. Si quis enim militarium uel honoratorum aut nobilis inter suos rumore tenus esset insimulatus fouisse partes hostiles, iniecto onere catenarum in modum beluae trahebatur et inimico urgente uel nullo quasi sufficiente hoc solo, quod nominatus esset aut delatus aut postulatus, capite uel mutatione bonorum aut insulari solitudine damnabatur.*

pronounced with age rather than mellowing out as they sometimes do.¹⁹³ This too can be juxtaposed with Julian, who as evidenced earlier did not cave to the servile courtiers who whispered in his ears and tried to turn him to luxury and pleasure.

Ammianus also takes the time to detail a supposed plot against Ursicinus, then a Roman senior military officer to whose command Ammianus was attached, because Ursicinus was allegedly growing too powerful and well liked. Ammianus names a man called Arbitio as one of these plotters and also describes him as a serpent. Constantius, fickle and paranoid and prone to believe what he wanted to believe, indulged in this and plotted to have Ursicinus murdered without a trial. Ammianus compares this to something from the time of Nero, but Constantius ultimately changed his mind and postponed the plot. Another man, who had been both party to and the instigator of wicked deeds was also brought to trial. However, due to the intervention of eunuchs, who through their clever plotting and lying perverted the course of justice, he walked free.¹⁹⁴ It serves to highlight the dysfunction and paranoia of the court of Constantius. Ammianus paints a pretty picture of an administration where justice is evaded or corrupted, lying and plotting is common, self-interest rules the day and power and authority is abused. By linking most, if not all, of these traits to Constantius, he functions as the narrative center who exemplifies the many wrongs of the administration, again underlining the absence of proper rule and authority.

¹⁹³ Ammianus Marcellinus, 14.5.4–5: *Accedebant enim eius asperitati, ubi imminuta esse amplitudo imperii dicebatur, et iracundiae suspicionumque uanitati proximorum cruentae blanditiae exaggerantium incidentia et dolere impendio simulantium, si principis periclitetur uita, a cuius salute uelut filo pendere statum orbis terrarum fictis uocibus exclamabant. [...] Et exitiale hoc uitium, quod in aliis nonnumquam intepescit, in illo aetatis progressu effluerebat obstinatum eius propositum accendente adulatorum cohorte.*

¹⁹⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, 15.2.1–2: *Iamque post miserandam delicti Caesaris cladem sonante periculorum iudicialium tuba in crimen laesae maiestatis arcessebatur Ursicinus adolescente magis magisque contra eius salutem omnibus bonis infesto. Hac enim superabatur difficultate, quod ad suscipiendas defensiones aequas et probabiles imperatoris aures oclusae patebant susurris insidiantium clandestinis, qui Constantii nomine per orientis tractus omnes abolito ante dictum ducem domi forisque desiderari ut formidolosum Persicae genti fingebant.*

15.2.4: *Impugnabat autem eum per fictae benignitatis illecebras colegam et uirum fortem propalam saepe appellans Arbitio ad innectendas letales insidias uitae simplici perquam callens et ea tempestate nimium potens. Ut enim subterraneus serpens foramen subsidens occultam assulto subito singulos transitores obseruans incessit [...]*

15.2.5-6: *igitur paucis arcanorum praesentibus consciis latenter cum imperatore sententia ... id sederat, ut nocte uentura procul a conspectu militarium raptus Ursicinus indemnatus occideretur, ut quondam Domitius Corbulo dicitur caesus in colluione illa Neroniani saeculi prouinciarum fidus defensor et cautus. Quibus ita compositis cum ad hoc destinati praedictum tempus opperirentur, consilio in lenitudinem flexo facinus impium ad deliberationem secundam differri praeceptum est.*

15.2.10: *Perductus est isdem diebus et Gorgonius, cui erat thalami Caesariani cura comissa, cumque eum auctorum fuisse participem concitoremque interdum ex confesso pateret, conspiratione spadonum iustitia concinnatis mendaciis obumbrata periculo euolutus abscessit.*

Ammianus goes into great detail regarding the people around Constantius and the resemblance to how Ammianus portrayed Gallus and his court is clear, with a parade of examples of serpents and worms and generally unsavory figures who lie and cheat and spread unfounded rumors that Constantius eagerly devours. This leads to a multitude of (mostly unnamed) individuals being subjected to intense cruelty, torture, exile, death or any number of these based on nothing but arbitrary accusations and no possibility to mount a proper defense. Both rich and poor and weak and powerful alike could be affected depending on the whims of those who held more power.¹⁹⁵ In other words, because Constantius held the most power, he empowered these actors by opening his ears and heart to them and indulging in their plotting. It was the ordinary citizens as well as members of court who reaped the consequences, the rot spreading all across. Ammianus claims it even went so far as people in court not even daring to mention things that had occurred in their dreams or even admit they even slept at all lest some bad actors would find out, twist it and pour it into the receptive ears of the emperor.¹⁹⁶ There are plenty of further examples in *Res gestae*, most continuing in the same vein. An overarching theme through not only this particular narrative but the *Res gestae* as a whole appears to be that corruption and weakness at the top will slowly rot the whole body of the empire.

The veracity of the information Ammianus has used to create this narrative around Constantius, a narrative that is almost exclusively negative, is not entirely clear. To put it in line with the framework of Hayden White; Ammianus clearly plucked an assortment of alleged actions and characteristics and assigned them particular motific characterization, giving them a specific function as story elements.¹⁹⁷ The actions of Constantius and his court not only affected the higher echelons of society but also empowered other rotten characters to act, affecting the

¹⁹⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, 15.3.1–3: [...] *Haec dum Mediolani aguntur, militarium cateruae ab oriente perductae sunt Aquileiam cum aulicis pluribus membris inter catenas fluentibus spiritum trahentes exiguum uiuendique moras per aerumnas detestati multiplices, [...] Ad quos audiendos Arbitrio missus est et Eusebius cubiculi tunc praepositus, ambo inconsideratae iactantiae, iniusti pariter et cruenti. Qui nullo perspicaciter inquisitor sine innocentium sontiumque differentia alios uerberibus uel tormentis afflictos exsulari poena damnarunt, quosdam ad infirmam trusere militam, residuos capitalibus addixere suppliciiis. Impletisque funerum bustis reuersi uelut ouantes gesta rettulerunt ad principem erga haec et similia palam obstinatum et grauem. Uehementius hinc et deinde Constantius quasi praescriptum fatorum ordinem consuulurus recluso pectore patebat insidiantibus multis. Unde rumorum aucupes subito existere complures honorum uertices ipsos ferinis morsibus appententes posteaque pauperes et diuites indiscrete, non ut Cibyrateae illi Verrini tribunal unius legati lambentes, sed rei publicae membra totius per incidentia mala uexantes.*

¹⁹⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus, 15.3.5: *Mercurius uero somniorum appellatus est comes, quod ut clam mordax canis interna saeuitia summissius agitans caudam epulis coetibusque se crebrius inserens, si per quietem quisquam, ubi fusius natura uagatur, uidisse aliquid amico narrasset, id uenenatis artibus coloratum in peius patulis impleratoris auribus infundebat et ob hoc homo tamquam inexplicabili obnoxio culpa graui mole criminis pulsabatur. Haec augente uulgatius fama tantum aberat, ut proderet quisquam uisa nocturna, cum aegre homines dormisse sese praesentibus faterentur externis, [...]*

¹⁹⁷ Hayden White, *Metahistory*, 7.

empire as a whole. As such the faulty character of the ruler creates a ripple effect, and Ammianus took pains to include specific examples of how this affects the ordinary citizens of the Empire.

A prominent example of how the rule of Constantius fostered insecurity and unrest is what happened to Silvanus, the master of infantry who was sent to deal with “barbarian” incursions in Gaul. A man called Dynamius, the superintendent of the imperial baggage train, under false pretenses asked for a letter of recommendation from Silvanus, who according to Ammianus naively granted this. Dynamius then proceeded to blot out the words written by Silvanus (minus the signature) with a sponge and write a letter of his own on it. Without going into every detail of this plot to discredit Silvanus, which included multiple actors, it was made to seem like Silvanus was plotting to advance himself and eventually seize the throne, and in the paranoid and cruel court of Constantius this supposed plot found plenty of people willing to believe and spread word of it. Word of this got back to Silvanus, who was supposedly fearful of the fickle and unstable nature of the emperor. Perceiving himself backed into a corner, he actually did proclaim himself *Augustus*. Ursicinus, and Ammianus along with him, were sent to deal with the situation, and after being received by Silvanus under false pretenses plotted to and succeeded in having Silvanus murdered. According to Ammianus, Silvanus was a man and commander of no small merit who was driven to extreme actions due to the plotting of a hostile clique, and so met his end on the twenty-eight day of his rule.¹⁹⁸ Ammianus in his narrative

¹⁹⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, 15.5.2: *Cum diuturna incuria Galliae caedes acerbas rapinasque et incendia barbaris licenter grassantibus nullo iuuante perferrent, Siluanus pedestris militiae rector ut efficax ad haec corrigenda principis iussu perrexit Arbitrione id maturari modis, quibus poterat, adigente, ut absenti aemulo [...]*

15.5.3: *... Dynamius quidam actuarius sarcinalium principis iumentorum commendaticias ab eo petierat litteras ad amicos, ut quasi familiaris eiusdem esset notissimus. Hoc impertrato, cum ille nihil suspiciens simpliciter praestitisset, seruabat epistulas, ut perniciosum aliquid in tempore moliretur.*

15.5.4: *[...] et peniculo serie litterarum abstersa, solaque incolumi relicta subscriptione alter multum a uero illo dissonans superscribitur textus: uelut Siluano rogante uerbis obliquis hortanteque amicos agentes intra palatium uel priuatos [...] ut se altiora coeptantem et propediem loci principalis aditurum ... hunc fascem ad arbitrium figment compositum uitam pulsaturum insontis [...]*

15.5.15–16: *Agens inter haec apud Agrippinam Siluanus assiduisque suorum comperiens nuntiis, quae Apodemius in labem suarum ageret fortunarum, et sciens animum tenerum uersabilis principis timensque, ne trucidaretur absens et indemnatus, in difficultate positus maxima barbaricae se fidei committere cogitabat. Sed Laniogaiso uetante tunc tribuno, quem, dum militaret candidatus, solum affuisse morituro Constanti supra rettulimus, docenteque Francos, unde oriebatur, interfecturos eum aut accepto praemio prodituros nihil tutum ex praesentibus ratus in consilia cogitabatur extrema et sensim cum principiorum uerticibus erectibus collocutus isdemque magnitudine promissae mercedis accensis cultu purpureo a draconum et uexillorum insignibus ad impetum abstracto ad culmen imperiale surrexit.*

15.5.30–32: *In hoc aestu mentis ancipiti ad effectum tendens consilium occulta scrutabamur indagine sederatque tandem mutatis prae timore saepe sententiis, ut quaesitis magna industria cautis rei ministris obstricto religionum consecratione colloquio Bracchiati sollicitarentur atque Cornuti fluxioris ... ubertate mercedis ad momentum omne urseabiles. [31] Firmato itaque negotio per sequestres quosdam gregarios obscuritate ipsa ad id patrandum idoneos praemiorum exspectatione accensos solis ortu iam rutilo subitus armatorum globus erupit atque, ut solet*

clearly associates the rise and fall of Silvanus to the dysfunction of the court of Constantius and the fickleness and paranoia of the emperor, given that none of this would have happened if Constantius was not known for his erratic behavior and willingness to believe any whisper of a plot against him. Silvanus had evidently also plenty of military successes, and Ammianus more or less frames him as an upstanding general who perished needlessly due to politicking and plotting from lesser individuals, meaning the Roman Empire also suffered loss and was weakened on the military level. This must surely have been a personal worry for Ammianus, considering his military background and demonstrated concern for the empire.

The way the episode with Silvanus is portrayed in *Res gestae* has been an object of much debate. John Weisweiler has pointed out numerous discrepancies in the narrative, singling out how inconsistent it is to cast for example Silvanus as merely a passive victim in all of this¹⁹⁹. The aforementioned Dynamius, whom Ammianus casts as the root of this conspiracy and as such brought the empire to the brink of civil war, was later appointed to the governorship of Etruria.²⁰⁰ Furthermore, Ammianus makes clear that the conspiracy against Silvanus was unearthed and Constantius made aware of it,²⁰¹ which brings up some questions about the veracity of the narrative. One option is of course that it is Ammianus who is trying to implicate Constantius and again damn him and his court. Weisweiler points out that parallel accounts of the insurrection of Silvanus broadly conform to how Ammianus presents it and that it was rooted in false accusations by courtiers, but none of the other ones mention any forged letters. Weisweiler claims many incongruities in Ammianus' account would be solved if Dynamius actually did not forge any letters, and if he had merely reported on possible treasonable activities beforehand but not fabricated evidence it would make more sense that he was rewarded with the governorship. Re-evaluating the role of Silvanus, who presumably was also well-versed in the power politics of the day, and viewing him as a cunning conspirator would cast a new light on the advancement of Dynamius. Weisweiler concludes that the text can be read in both directions, with Silvanus either the innocent soldier forced into rebellion or an active conspirator, with Ammianus essentially sprinkling in some comments from his first-hand view

in dubiis rebus, audentior caesis custodibus regia penetrata Silvanum extractum aedicula, quo exanimatus confugerat, ad conuenticulum ritus Christiani tendentem densis gladiatorum ictibus trucidarant. [32] Ita dux haud exsilium meritorum hoc genere appetit mortis metu calumnarium, quibus factione iniquorum irretitus est absens, ut tueri possit salutem ad praesidia progressus extrema.

¹⁹⁹ Weisweiler, "Unreliable Witness", 114.

²⁰⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus, 15.5.14: *Dynamius uero ut praeclaris artibus illustrates cum correctoris dignitate regere iussus est Tuscos [...]*

²⁰¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 15.5.13: *Proinde fallaciarum nube discussa imperator doctus gesta relatione fideli abrogate potestate praefectum statui sub questione praecepit, sed absolutus est enixa conspiratione multorum.*

and experience of the episode that support Silvanus actively working towards advancement.²⁰² This stands in contrast to Julian, whom Ammianus actively (and arguably deceptively) portrays as anything but aspiring to power.

No matter how one chooses to interpret the narrative about Silvanus, Ammianus, as already shown, unquestionably implicates and damns Constantius in the outcome. Considering the aforementioned point that Ammianus had an unparalleled first-hand view of what happened it would be assumed that his description is based on autopsy and should thus be more credible, but the incongruities of the narrative again merits a discussion of how Ammianus incorporates *visa*, *lecta*, or even *ficta*. As Ammianus seems to take some liberties with all of these and mix them quite freely, and although the implication here is that he is basing this part on the text on autopsy, there is, as shown, a case to be made for him potentially inventing some parts of it, *ficta*. By including some parts which may or may not be true, he is also ascribing it meaning, or motific characterization²⁰³, here changing the narrative into one essentially damning of Constantius. In a manner of speaking, Ammianus in the fifteenth book of *Res gestae* casts Constantius as an overarching theme or center, or a kind of macro-narrative, and then through smaller-scale vignettes exemplify how this affects different parts of society and how people suffer for it. Proper leadership and rule is still lacking, to the detriment of the empire.

Another notable event is Ammianus detailing Constantius' state visit to the city of Rome in the sixteenth extant book. Ammianus immediately derides this decision, claiming that Constantius is behaving as if the temple of Janus were shut (which signifies times of peace) and his enemies vanquished. Ammianus also decries Constantius celebrating the fall of Magnentius by a triumph to which he had no title, as it was won by spilling Roman blood. Ammianus claims Constantius had not in person vanquished any enemies, had added nothing to the empire, and had never been seen fighting with his men or at the front rank even during times of crisis. Constantius apparently merely wished to display his ostentatious standards and retinue in an unduly long procession in front of a populace living in peace who had no interest in such a show. Ammianus further ventures that Constantius was perhaps unaware that "earlier emperors" in time of peace had been content with merely the attendance of lictors (a civil servant) and in times of war, which forbids inaction, had committed various heroics.²⁰⁴ This

²⁰² Weisweiler, "Unreliable witness", 111–115.

²⁰³ Hayden White, *Metahistory*, 6–7.

²⁰⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, 16.10.1–3: *Haec dum per eoas partes et Gallias pro captu temporum disponuntur, Constantius quasi cluso Iani templo stratisque hostibus cunctis Romam uisere gestiebar post Magnenti exitium*

section in many ways exemplify the narrative that Ammianus has created as it concerns Constantius. Constantius is unworthy and his only successes are related to strife within the empire, meaning he is weakening it, and he is claiming honors which he was utterly undeserving of. He had not led or fought with his troops, with Ammianus even throwing in some vague historical *exempla* to highlight the immobility and unworthiness of Constantius. Military participation and success, or the lack of, are recurring narrative themes in *Res gestae*, underscoring Ammianus' concern for the direction and power of the empire under Constantius.

Constantius is portrayed as being quite awestruck by the splendor of the city of Rome, being continuously dazzled by the many sights and monuments of power in this home of all perfection.²⁰⁵ Ammianus, as shown earlier, clearly portrays Constantius as being unworthy of this triumphal entry into the Eternal City. Interestingly, Julian was never provided an opportunity for a comparative set-piece, which could be connected to why Ammianus portrays this so negatively.

Ammianus maintains that Constantius kept himself impassive and rigid in public, staring straight ahead and never turning his head. He was never caught spitting, wiping his face, or moving his hand, which Ammianus claims was an affectation to signal that he possessed an unusual self-control.²⁰⁶ Constantius is portrayed as an immobile figure, and Ammianus undermines this alleged attempt at projecting self-control immediately, calling it an affectation.

absque nomine ex sanguine Romano triumphaturus. Nec enim gentem ullam bella cientem per se superauit aut uictam fortitudine suorum comperit ducum uel addidit quadam imperio aut usquam in necessitatibus summis primus uel inter primos est uisus, sed ut pompam nimis extentam rigentiaque auro uexille et pulchritudinem stipatorum ostenderet agenti tranquillius populo haec uel simile quidquam uidere nec speranti umquam nec optanti; ignorans fortasse quosdam ueterum principum in pace quidem lictoribus fuisse contentos, ubi uero proeliorum ardor nihil perpeti poterat segne, alium anhelante rabido flatu uentorum lenunculo se commisisse piscantis, alium ad Deciorum exempla uouisse pro re publica spiritum, alium hostilia castra per semet ipsum cum militibus infirmis explorasse, diuersos denique actibus inclaruisse magnificis, ut glorias suas posteritatis celebri memoriae commendarent.

²⁰⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, 16.10.13: *Proinde Romam ingressus, imperii uirtutumque omnium larem, cum uenisset ad rostra, perspectissimum priscae potentiae forum, obstipuit perque omne latus, quo se oculi contulissent, miraculorum densitate praestrictus allocutus nobilitatem in curia populumque e tribunal in palatium receptus fauore multiplici Laetitia fruebatur optata et saepe, cum equestres ederet ludos, dicacitate plebis oblectabatur nec superbae nec a libertate coalita desciscentis reuerenter modum ipse quoque debitum seruans.*

16.10.15: *Verum cum ad Traiani forum uenisset, singularem sub omni caelo structuram, ut opinamur, etiam numium assensione mirabilem, haerebat attonitus per gigantes contextus circumferens mentem nec relatu effabiles nec rursus mortalibus appetendos.*

²⁰⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus, 16.10.9–11: *Augustus itaque faustis uocibus appellatus non montium litorumque intonante fragore cohorrui talem se tamque immobilem, qualis in prouinciis suis uisebatur, ostendens. Nam et corpus perhumile curuabat portas ingrediens celsas et uelut collo munito rectam aciem luminum tendens nec dextra uultum nec laeua flectebat tamquam figmentum hominis nec, cum rota concuteret, nutans nec spuens auto s aut nasum tergens uel fricans manumue agitans uisus est umquam. Quae licet affectabat, errant tamen haec et alia quaedam in citeriore uita patientiae non mediocris indicia, ut existimari dabatur, uni illi concessae.*

The contrast to Julian, whose self-control enabled him to rival Alexander, is obvious. Julian is also a mobile figure in the narrative, moving and engaging continuously, whereas Constantius is rigid and immobile.

Ammianus momentarily shifts the narrative away from Constantius and focuses instead on Constantius' wife, empress Eusebia. Eusebia had lured Constantius' sister Helena, the wife of Julian, to Rome with a show of affection. Helena had fallen victim to the plots of Eusebia, who, because she had been childless all her life herself, contrived to make Helena take a drug that would cause miscarriage whenever she conceived. These machinations had already made Helena lose a male child in Gaul, as a midwife had been bribed to kill the baby at birth by cutting the umbilical cord too short. This was all done in order to keep the most valiant and bravest of men without an heir.²⁰⁷ What Ammianus is basing this whole narrative of Constantius (and Eusebia) at Rome on is unclear, as it does not seem to be based on autopsy, although Ammianus is certainly acting as a covert narrator. Inserting the alleged plotting to keep Julian childless paints this state visit to Rome in an even worse light, not to mention how it portrays Constantius and Eusebia in general.

The difference between how Eusebia is portrayed at the beginning of the extant books, where she is credited with ensuring Julian's rise to power, and here actively plotting to deprive him of an heir, is notable. Shaun Tougher chalks this up to Ammianus being caught between his differing motivations, namely his hostility to Constantius and his court and his idolization of Julian.²⁰⁸ This aligns with how Weisweiler summarized one part of the discourse surrounding the discrepancies in the narratives in *Res gestae*, specifically that Ammianus distorted facts due to his sympathies for various individuals and causes.²⁰⁹ Tougher also focuses on the social and political context behind these scenes; that Julian had notoriously bad experiences with Constantius prior to his rise to *Caesar*, with Constantius appearing responsible for wiping out a significant part of Julian's (and Constantius' own) family, Gallus being only the most recent victim, and taking strict control of Julian's life. Tougher suggests Eusebia, who married Constantius only after the defeat of Magnentius in 353 CE and as such had no previous

²⁰⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, 16.10.18: *Inter haec Helenae, sorori Constanti, Iuliani coniugi Caesaris, Romam affectionis specie ductae regina tunc insidiabatur Eusebia, ipsa, quoad uixerat, sterilis, quasitumque uenenum bibere per fraudem illexit, ut, quotiensque concepisset, immaturum abiceret partum. Nam et pridem in Galliis, cum marem genuisset infantem, hoc perdidit dolo, quod obstetrix corrupta mercede mox natum praesepto plus, quam conuenerat, umbilico necauit: tanta tamque diligens opera nauabatur, ne fortissimi uiri suboles appareret.*

²⁰⁸ Shaun Tougher, "Ammianus Marcellinus on the Empress Eusebia: A Split Personality?" in *Greece & Rome* 47, no. 1 (2000) 101.

²⁰⁹ Weisweiler, 'Unreliable Witness', 105–106.

connection to the dynamic between Julian and Constantius, was acting as an agent of her husband to further his agenda. This stands in contrast to the benevolent and well-meaning Eusebia who crops up early in the extant books, as well as in Julian's own speeches and writings. Reinterpreting her as such serves to weaken Ammianus' image of Constantius as a weak-willed tyrant who is subject to the influences of wives, courtiers, and eunuchs.²¹⁰ Accordingly Eusebia convinced Julian to adhere to the will of Constantius, and if the matter of Eusebia preventing Helena from having a child is true, it may have been a political calculation rather than some bitterness at Eusebia's own childlessness.²¹¹ Ammianus' use of Eusebia to blacken Constantius and cast him as being subject to the whims of his wives, courtiers, and eunuchs is in alignment with the narrative he has constructed thus far, although parallel history and context disputes Ammianus' characterization to some degree. Consequently, there is once again room for interpretation in the narrative.

After Julian had declared himself *Augustus*, heralding proper leadership in the empire at last, and Constantius summarily rejecting this pronouncement, Ammianus began foreshadowing the death of Constantius in no uncertain terms. The previously discussed episode in which Julian as *Caesar* was granted a vision of the Genius as well as predicting the death of Constantius is a clear example, and later Constantius is disturbed by nightly visions as well. Ammianus claims Constantius saw the spirit of his father holding out a child, which he took and set it in his lap. The child then shook from his grasp the orb he was holding in his right hand, which signaled approaching political turmoil. Ammianus then claims that the seers and soothsayers in Constantius' orbit gave this a favorable interpretation, again faulting those surrounding Constantius and him for listening to them. This was followed by Constantius admitting to his closest confidantes that he felt abandoned because he could no longer see a mysterious something which he thought appeared to him from time to time, albeit dimly. Ammianus claims this was believed to be guardian spirit or angel assigned to protect Constantius, and that it is believed by some that this kind of spirit is assigned to every man at birth to direct him within the limits that fate allows. Some very few of unusual merit can ever see them. The departure of this spirit was supposedly a sign that Constantius was about to die.²¹²

²¹⁰ Shaun Tougher, "The Advocacy of an Empress: Julian and Eusebia" in *The Classical Quarterly* 48, no 2. (1998), 596-598.

²¹¹ Tougher, "Ammianus Marcellinus on the Empress Eusebia", 98.

²¹² Ammianus Marcellinus, 21.14.1-3: *In hoc rerum aduersarum tumultu haerens eius fortuna iam et subsistens aduentare casuam uitae difficilem modo non loquentibus signis aperte monstrabat. Namque et nocturnis imaginibus terrebatur et nondum penitus mersus in somnum umbram uiderat patris obtulisse pulchrum infantem eumque susceptum et locatum in gremio suo excussam sibi proiecisse longius sphaeram, quam ipse dextra manu*

Invoking what is presumably the Genius, this very Roman figure, and not only explaining that Constantius merely saw it dimly sometimes, but also having it abandon Constantius only one book after having broken his chronological framework (in book 20) to explain how it visited Julian earlier seems like a very intentional move. It is unclear what exactly Ammianus is basing this part of the text on, or what closest confidantes Constantius supposedly shared these events with, or how Ammianus then heard of them. Whilst it is not impossible that Ammianus was able to extract testimony from people who had been in Constantius' orbit after the fact, it could also be an example of him leaning towards *ficta*. Being plagued by nightly visions shortly before his death could also be an allusion to what Ammianus claimed happened to Gallus, which could arguably be construed as *ficta* as well.

Constantius is taken by a fever and dies immediately following Ammianus rather blunt foreshadowing. Ammianus conveniently includes that they were told that Constantius, already past medical aid and hot as a furnace but still in possession of his senses, lamented his death and named Julian his successor. Ammianus also mentions an unconfirmed rumor and report that claimed Constantius had left a will making Julian his heir.²¹³ The immediate death of Constantius is essentially used to legitimize Julian based on rumors and hearsay, and again blurs the lines between *lecta* and *ficta*. Considering that it is difficult, if not outright impossible, to state with any certainty exactly what happened as Constantius lay dying, it is telling that this is what Ammianus decided to include.

Following the death of the emperor, Ammianus, as he has done throughout *Res gestae*, sets out the good and bad qualities of the person in question. The positive qualities essentially boil down to Constantius maintaining the dignity of his position and not seeking popularity, rarely conferring higher honors on people. He was also scrupulous with the military, not letting

gestabat. Id autem permutationem temporum indicabat, licet interpretantes placentia responderunt. Post haec confessus est iunctoribus proximis, quod tamquam desolatus secretum aliquid uidere desierit, quod interdum affuisse sibi squalidius aestimabat, et putabatur Genius esse quidam tutelae salutis appositus eum reliquisse mundo citius digressurum. Ferunt enim theologi in lucem editis hominibus cunctis salua firmitate fatali huiusmodi quaedam uelut actus rectorum numina sociari admodum tamen paucissimis uisa, quos multiplices auxere uirtutes.

²¹³ Ammianus Marcellinus, 21.15.2–3: [...] *ubi leuiore febris contactus, raturque itinerario motu imminutae ualitudinis excuti posse discrimen petit per uias difficiles Mobsucrenas, Ciliciae ultimam hinc pergentibus stationem, sub Tauri montis radicibus positam, egredique secuto die conatus illabente morbi grauitate detentus est; paulatimque urente calore nimio uenas, ut ne tangi quidem corpus eius posset in modum foculi feruens, cum usus deficeret medelarum, ultimum spirans deflebat exitium mentisque sensu tum etiam integro successorem suae potestatis statuisset dicitur Iulianum. Deinde anhelitu iam pulsante letali conticuit diuque cum anima colluctatus iam discessaura abiit e uita tertium nonarum Nouembrium imperii tricesimo octauo uitaeque anno quadragesimo quarto et mensibus paucis.*

21.15.5: *fama tamen rumorque loquebatur incertus Constantium uoluntatem ordinasse postremam, in qua Iulianum, ut praediximus, scripsit heredem et his, quos diligebat, fideicommissa detulit et legata.*

them lift themselves too high. Ammianus further claims that appointments at court were scrupulously regulated and no newcomer or unknown entity was ever entrusted with an important function. Constantius further receives the somewhat questionable praise that he had aspirations to learn but was too dull-witted to have any success with rhetoric, and upon turning to verses produced nothing worthwhile. He was not prone to excess and lived frugally, eating and drinking only in moderation, which kept him healthy. He could do with little sleep and had an extraordinarily chaste lifestyle, and was an expert in riding, throwing the javelin, and archery. Ammianus also states that he will not dwell on the facts that Constantius was never seen publically wiping his face or nose, spitting, turning his head to either side, or that he never tasted fruit, because they have apparently been related so often.²¹⁴ Comparing Ammianus summation of the less than stellar character of Constantius to how he portrays Julian after his death makes it abundantly clear where Ammianus' sympathies lie. When it comes to character, the few laudable things Ammianus seems to find is that Constantius was dignified and eschewed excessive lifestyle choices. Ammianus comment on scrupulously regulated appointments also seems at odds with the chaos and corruption Ammianus highlighted in the beginning of his narrative of Constantius, if one does not interpret it as a veiled commentary on the kind of people Constantius appointed.

Following this short recitation of the supposed virtues of Constantius, Ammianus lists the negative traits. Ammianus claims that when it came to administrative affairs he was comparable to other average emperors, but on the slightest suspicion he showed a cruelty that matched or even surpassed the cruelty and savagery of Caligula, Domitian, and Commodus. Even arbitrary accusations were enough to get Constantius involved, and he threw himself into

²¹⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, 21.16.1: *Bonorum igitur uitiorumque eius differentia uere seruata praecipua prima conueniet expediri. Imperatoriae auctoritatis coturnum ubique custodiens popularitatem elato animo contemnebat et magno erga tribuendas celsiores dignitates impendio parcus nihil circa administrationum augmenta praeter pauca nouari perpessus numquam erigens cornua militarium*

21.16.3–7: *In conseruando milite nimium cautus, examinatore meritorum nonnumquam subscruposus palatinas dignitates uelut ex quodam tribuens perpendiculari et sub eo nemo celsum aliquid acturus in regia repentibus adhibitus est uel incognitus, sed, qui post decennium officiorum magisterium uel largitiones uel simile quidquam esset rector, apertissime noscebatur. Ualdeque raro contigerat, ut militarium aliquis ad ciuilia regenda transiret contraque non nisi puluere bellico indurati praeficiantur armatis. Doctrinarum diligens affectator, sed, cum a rhetorice per ingenium deseretur obtunsum, ad uersificandum transgressus nihil operae pretium fecit. In uita parca et sobria edendi potandique moderatione ualeitudinem ita retinuit firmam, ut raros colligeret morbos, sed eos non procul a uitae periculis. Id enim euenire corporibus a lasciuiis dimotis et luxu diuturna experimenta et professions medendi monstrarunt. Somno contentus exiguo, cum id posceret tempus et ratio, perque spatia ita longissima impendio castus, ut nec mare ministro saltem suspicione tenus posset redargui quod crimen, etiamsi non inuenit, malignitas fingit in summarum licentia potestatum. Equitandi et iaculandi maximeque perite dirigendi sagittas artiumque armorum pedestris perquam scientissimus. Quod autem ne eos tersisset umquam uel nares in publico nec spuisset nec transtulisset in partem alterutram uultum aliquando est uisus nec pomorum, quoad uixerat, gustauerit, ut dicta saepius praetermitto.*

these proceedings with an eagerness unbecoming of him and his station (which stands in contrast to Ammianus' previous point about Constantius maintaining the dignity of the station), and appointed merciless judges to precede. When it came to punishment he occasionally attempted to prolong the tortuous death for as long as the victim could withstand it, and employed torture excessively. Ammianus claims that Constantius in this process was similar to how a few sparks from dry wood can start a raging wildfire. Ammianus even invokes exempla of the emperor Marcus and the writings of Cicero to condemn Constantius. At the start of his reign Constantius also destroyed root and branch all who were related to him. Ammianus also brings up Constantius' multiple military failures abroad and that he prided himself on his success in civil conflicts, bathing in the blood pouring from the internal wounds of the state. Constantius was apparently also too much under the influence of his wives and eunuchs. There were multiple other issues with Constantius as well, from his refusal to take any steps to alleviate the burden of the provinces and restraining his tax-collectors to his habit of getting involved in and complicating Christian theological matters and debate.²¹⁵ Constantius savage

²¹⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, 21.16.8–9: *Dinumeratis carptim bonis, quae scire potuimus, nunc ad explananda eius uitia ueniamus. Cum esset in negotiis aliis principibus mediis comparandus, si affectatae dominationis amplam quandam falsam reperisset aut leuem, hanc sine fine scrutando fasque eodem loco ducens et nefas Caligulae et Domitiani et Commodi immanitatem facile superabat, quorum aemulatur saeuitiam inter imperandi exordia cunctos sanguine et genere se contingentes stirpitus interemit. Addebatur miserorum aerumnis, qui rei maiestatis imminutae uel laesae deferebantur, acerbitas eius et iracundia suspicionesque in huiusmodi cuncta distentae. Et si quid tale increpisset, in quaestiones acrius exurgens quam ciuilibus spectatores apponebat his litibus truces mortemque longius in puniendus quisbusdam, si natura permetteret conabatur extendi in eiusmodi controuersiarum partibus etiam Gallieno feocior.*

21.16.11: *iustumque in eiusmodi titulis capitali odio oderat, cum maxime id ageret, ut iustus aestimaretur et clemens. Et tamquam ex arida silua uolantes scintillae flatu leni uentorum ad usque discrimina uicorum agresium incohibili cursu perueniunt, ita ille quoque ex minimis causis malorum congeries excitabat, Marci illius dissimilis principis uerecundi [...]*

21.16.13–15: *ut Tullius quoque docet crudelitatis increpans Caesarem in quadam ad Nepotem epistula: „neque enim quidquam aliud est felicitas” inquit „nisi honestarum rerum prosperitas. Uel ut alio modo definiam: felicitas est fortuna adiutrix consiliorum bonorum, quibus qui non utitur, felix esse nullo pacto potest. Ergo in perditis impiisque consiliis, quibus Caesar usus est, nulla potuit esse felicitas. Felicioque meo iudicio Camillus exsulans quam temporibus isdem Manlius, etiamsi – id, quod cupierat – regnare potuisset” id Ephesius quoque Heraclitus asserens monet ab inertibus et ignauis euentus uariante fortuna superatos aliquotiens uiros fuisse praestantes; illud uero eminere inter praecipuas laudes, cum potestas in gradu uerlut sub iugum missa nocendi, saeuendi cupiditate et irascendi in arce uictoris animi tropaeum erexerit gloriosum.*

21.16.16: *Vt autem in externis bellis hic princeps fuit saucius et afflictus, ita prospere succedentibus pugnis ciuilibus tumidus et intentinis ulceribus rei publicae saniae perfusus horrenda. Quo prauo proposito magisquam recto uel usitato triumphales arcus ex clade prouinciarum sumptibus magnis erexit in Galliis et Pannoniis titulis gestorum affixis se, quoad stare poterunt monumenta, lecturis. Uxoribus et spadonum gracilentis uocibus et palatinis quisbusdam nimium quantum addictus ad singula eius uerba plaudentibus et, quid ille asiatur neget, ut assentiri possint, obseruantibus.*

21.16.17: *Augebat etiam amaritudinem temporum flagitatorum rapacitas inexpleta plus odiorum ei quam pecuniae conferentium. Hocque multis intolerantius uidebatur, quod nec causam aliquando audiuit nec prouinciarum indemnitati prospexit, cum multiplicatis tributis et uectigalibus uexarentur. Eratque super his adimere facilis, quae donabat.*

21.16.18: *Christianam religionem absolutam ei simplicem anili superstitione confundens, in qua scrutanda perplexius quam componenda grauius excitauit discidia plurima, quae progressa fusius aluit concertatione*

responses to anyone even suspected of aspiring to the throne is highlighted by Hugh Elton, although he points out that Constantius had to deal with more civil wars than many Roman emperors,²¹⁶ having risen to power in the fraught and turbulent aftermath of the tetrarchy. It is a relevant observation, especially since the extant books of *Res gestae* do not treat this subject in any depth, and it is unknown what Ammianus might have written about the subject in the lost books.

Several of Ammianus' comments on the negative aspects of the character of Constantius seem almost designed to kneecap the few positives he managed to eke out, with Constantius' unbecoming passion for torture and paranoia arguably not sitting well with the dignity of the office. Gallus and Julian also notably seem to have been spared during the purge Ammianus mentioned. Constantius wading into and complicating debate around Christian theology is yet another example of Ammianus critiquing an emperor getting too distracted and caught up by religious affairs. Another noteworthy element is Ammianus bringing in a multitude of historical *exempla* only when listing the negative traits of Constantius, using this narrative technique to link Constantius to a string of tyrannical and cruel emperors from history. Ammianus' comment on the military failures of Constantius, and thus the empire, and his bathing in the blood pouring from the internal wounds of the state is a very telling one, since it encapsulates many of the critiques Ammianus has implicitly and explicitly built up to in the narrative of Constantius. It is arguably one of the central themes of the entire *Res gestae*. In essence Ammianus brings the narrative of Constantius full circle, ending it as he begun in the extant books by resoundingly damning Constantius proclivity for torture, paranoia and bad governance. There is even a reference to Domitian, whom Gallus as previously mentioned was compared to shortly before Ammianus compared Constantius to Gallus.

Jovian (*Augustus* 363–364 CE)

Jovian was raised to the rank of *Augustus* following the death of Julian. He ruled for only eight months, from June 363 to February 364. The circumstances surrounding his accession were less than ideal, as Julian had recently died and left no designated heir. The army was in dire straits and exhausted, provisions were low, they were unable to properly retreat, and the Sassanids

uerborum, ut cateruis antistitum iumentis publicis ultro citroque discurrentibus per synodos, quas appellant, dum ritum omnem ad suum trahaere conatur arbitrium, rei uehiculariae succideret neruos.

²¹⁶ Hugh Elton, *The Roman Empire in Late Antiquity*, 78.

were pressing down on them. Ammianus claims Jovian was elected due to the hasty actions of a few men, which are often decisive in a crisis.²¹⁷ He further wrote that:

[...] if any onlooker of strict justice with undue haste blames such a step taken in a moment of extreme danger, he will, with even more justice, reproach sailors, if after the loss of a skilled pilot, amid the raging winds and seas they committed the guidance of the helm of their ship to any companion in their peril, whoever he might be.²¹⁸

This is arguably an indirect recognition of the disaster Julian led them to; however, Ammianus pointedly does not directly implicate Julian. Instead, he immediately turns to the crisis at hand. Having attempted a retreat, the army finds itself weak, starving, harassed by the enemy and unable to flee across the Tigris. They begin peace negotiations with the enemy, and Ammianus claims they spent four days starving and agonizing. Ammianus felt that they should have continued their gradual withdrawal from enemy territory, as they could undoubtedly have reached a safe haven in Roman control a mere hundred miles away. However, Jovian instead enters into a peace treaty with king Sapor, which included giving up control of five regions and fifteen forts. Ammianus excoriates Jovian, claiming that the treaty was so shameful, it would have been better to fight ten times over rather than surrendering any of the aforementioned forts and regions. Ammianus portrays Jovian as a man faint of heart, caving to the pressures of flatterers. They scared Jovian by invoking the name of Procopius (who was leading forces around the upper Tigris), whom they claimed could easily orchestrate a revolution if he heard of Julian's demise and returned with his forces intact.²¹⁹ Ammianus creates a narrative of yet another paranoid emperor who caves to the courtiers and flatters. Because Ammianus has already decisively and repeatedly excoriated Gallus and Constantius for this particular flaw, it

²¹⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, 25.5.4: *Inter has exiguas ad tantam rem moras nondum pensatis sententiis tumultuantibus paucis, ut in rebus extremis saepe est factum, Iouianus eligitur imperator, domesticorum ordinis primus, paternis mediocriter commendabilis.*

²¹⁸ J. C. Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus II*, 25.5.7: *quodsi grauis quidam aequitatis spectator in ultimo rerum spiritu factum criminatur improvide, nauticos idem iustius incusabit, si amisso perito nauigandi magistro sacipientibus flabris et mari clauos regendae nauis cuiilibet periculi socio commiserunt.*

²¹⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 25.7.9-13: *Petebat autem rex obstinatus, ut ipse aiebat, sua dudum a Maximiano erepta, ut docebat autem negotium, pro redemptione nostra quinque regions Transtigritanas: Arzanenam et Moxoenam et Zabdicenam itidemque Rehimenam et Corduenam cum castellis quindecim et Nisibin et Singaram et Castra Maurorum, munimentum perquam opportunum. Et cum pugnari deciens expediret, ne horum quidquam dederetur, adolatorum globus instabat timido principi Procopii metuendum subserens nomen eumque affirmans, si redit cognito Iuliani interitu cum intacto milite, quem regebat, nouas res nullo renitente facile moliturum. Hac perniciose uerborum ille assiduitate nimia succensus sine cunctatione tradidit omnia, quae petebantur, difficile hoc adeptus, ut Nisibis et Singara sine incolis transirent in iura Persarum, a munimentis uero alienandis reuerti ad nostra praesidia Romam permitterentur. Quibus exitiale aliud accessit et impium, ne post haec ita composita Arsaci poscenti contra Persas ferretur auxilium, amico nobis semper et fido. Quod ratione gemina cogitatum est, ut puniretur homo, qui Chiliocomum mandate uastauerat principis, et remaneret occasio, per quam subinde licenter inuaderetur Armenia. Unde postea contigit, ut uiuus caperetur idem Arsaces et Armeniae maximum latus Medis conterminans et Artaxata inter dissensiones et turbamenta raperent Parthi. Quo ignobili decretal firmato, ne quit committeretur per idutias contrarium pactis [...]*

is a firmly entrenched narrative tool. In this case, Ammianus uses it to forcefully blame and rebuke Jovian for the treaty, thus absolving Julian for his part in them ending up in this scenario in the first place. Ammianus does not reflect on the circumstances Julian led them to, and left them in when he perished, or that Jovian became emperor in a crisis and had no time to consolidate his power.

Jovian does not feature long in the narrative, despite the fact that he ruled for 8 months. It does not take long for Ammianus to begin foreshadowing Jovian's incoming death. A variety of dire omens predicted disaster following their arrival in Antioch; a statue of Caesar Maximian in the vestibule of the royal palace dropped the sphere it was holding, the beams in the council hall creaked horrendously, and comets were seen in broad daylight.²²⁰ The emperor did not heed the signs, journeyed on, and died suddenly in the night in a town called Dadastana. The exact reasons for his death is unclear, and Ammianus lists several differing accounts; that Jovian was overcome by the toxic smell of fresh plaster in his bedroom, that the fumes of a fire brought on cerebral congestion, or that he died from sudden indigestion after eating excessively. Regardless, Jovian died at the age of 33.²²¹

Following the rather ignominious death of Jovian, Ammianus lists his character traits. He had a dignified bearing and a cheerful expression, and was enormously tall. He modelled himself after Constantius, often working until the afternoon. He was a Christian, and took some steps to honor it. He was, at most, moderately educated, but had a kindly nature. He also made appointments with care, judging from the few he had time to make. However, he was prone to excess when it came to food, wine, and women, which Ammianus felt was unsuitable for the dignity of the position. As Ammianus has done with some previous emperors, he includes a dream relating to their downfall. In this case, it is Jovian's father who supposedly had a dream where he learned what would happen, although he died before he could see his son again.²²²

²²⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus, 25.10.1–2: *His hoc modo peractis discursisque itineribus Antiochiam uenimus, ubi per continuos dies uelut offense numine multa uisebantur et dira, quorum euentus fore luctificos gnari rerum prodigialium praecinebant. Nam et Maximiani statua Caesaris, quae locata est in uestibulo regiae, amisit repente sphaeram aeream formatam in speciem poli, quam gestabat, et cum horrendo stridore sonuerunt in consistorio trabes et uisa sunt interdiu sidera cometarum, super quorum natura ratiocinantes physici uariant.*

²²¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 25.10.12–13: *Hinc quoque Iouianum celeri gradu praescriptus uitae finiendae dies exegit. Cum enim uenisset Dadastanam, qui locus Bithyniam distinguit et Galatas, exanimatus inuentus est nocte. Super cuius obitu dubietates emersere complures. Fertur enim recenti calce cubacula illiti ferre odorem noxium nequiuisset uel extuberato capite perisse succensione prunarum immense aut certe ex colluione ciborum auida cruditate distentus. Decessit autem anno tricensimo aetatis et tertio. Cumque huic et Aemiliano Scipioni uitae exitus similis euenisset, super neutrius morte quaestionem comperimus agitatam.*

²²² Ammianus Marcellinus, 25.10.14–16: *Incedebat autem motu corporis graui, uultu laetissimo, oculis caesiis, uasta proceritate et ardua, adeo, ut diu nullum indumentum regium ad mensuram eius aptum inueniretur. Et*

Ammianus short treatment of Jovian contains several noteworthy aspects, most notably the short mention of Christianity. Jovian rescinded Julian's bans on Christians teaching, disbanded the priesthods Julian created, and enabled Christians to recover what they had lost during Julian's reign.²²³ Framing it as "taking some steps to honor Christianity", and not mentioning any specifics, feels like a measured statement. Ammianus again condemns emperors (and anyone in power) living excessively, here through food, drink, or women. Jovian fails to live up to the *exempla* of Julian.

Considering that Ammianus is disparaging towards Jovian, omits significant parts of his short reign, and generally appeared to consider him unworthy, the aspects he chose to include are telling. The focus is on Jovian hastily succeeding a man who was by far his superior, and then trying to remedy the situation they found themselves in. However, the primary narrative function of Jovian appears to be taking the blame for the situation Julian led them to, drawing the heat from Julian.

Following the death of Jovian, Valentinian was appointed *Augustus*, and he appointed his brother Valens as *Augustus* as well. They were co-emperors, but will be treated under separate headings in the upcoming section. This is partly because Ammianus at this point also breaks the previous narrative order, and splits the narrative between them. However, at the outset of their reigns, Ammianus paints a dire picture of the situation the empire is in, claiming that practically the entirety of the Roman Empire was at war. This was due to the barbarians stirring and raiding the frontiers nearest to them; the Alamanni ravaging Gaul and Raetia [constituting parts of Switzerland, southern Germany, Austria, and northern Italy today]; the Sarmatians and Quadi devastating Pannonia [constituting parts of Hungary, Serbia, and Croatia today]; the Picts, Saxons, Scots and Attacotti were heaping misery upon Britain; the Austorians and other Moorish peoples were at large in Africa; and predatory Goths were plundering Thrace [constituting parts of Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey today]. The Persian king, who had previously entered into the by Ammianus much maligned treaty with Jovian, was attempting to

aemulari malebat Constantium agens seria quaedam aliquotiens post meridiem iocarique palam cum proximis assuetus. Christianae legis itidem studiosus et nonnumquam honorificus, mediocriter eruditus magisque benivolus et perpensus, ut apparebat et paucis, quos promouerat iudices, electurus; edax tamen et uino uenerique indulgens, quae uitia imperali uerecundia forsitan correxisset. Dicebatur autem Varronianus pater eius monitu cuiusdam somnii dudum praescisse, quod euenit, idque duobus amicis commisisse fidissimis illo adiecto, quod ipsi quoque deferetur trabea consularis. Sed impetrato uno adipisci non potuit aliud. Audita enim filii celsiore fortuna, antequam eum uideret, fatali praeuentus est morte.

²²³ Edward J. Watts, *The Final Pagan Generation : Rome's Unexpected Path to Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 156–157.

seize Armenia as well.²²⁴ Considering that this had already happened when Ammianus was writing his history and maligning Jovian, it is likely it informed the stance Ammianus took in *Res gestae*, and affected how he portrayed Jovian. Nonetheless, Ammianus positions himself as very situationally aware and concerned. He has accessed or collected information covering a huge geographic area, and is weaving it into his narrative to present an image of the empire besieged on nearly all fronts. This chaos is arguably also represented in the narrative structure itself from this point on; it is fragmented and difficult to read as a cohesive whole.

Valentinian (Western *Augustus* 364–375 CE)

The narrative of Valentinian sets up a specific dynamic right at the beginning. He summoned his advisers, appearing intent on being guided by their advice, and questioned them about who he should appoint as his co-ruler. All were silent until a man called Dagalaif, then commander of the cavalry, spoke up and said that if Valentinian loves his family he has a brother, but if he loves the state he should look for another man to raise up as his co-ruler. This supposedly angered Valentinian, but he held his peace.²²⁵ Nevertheless, Valentinian eventually proclaimed his brother Valens *Augustus*. This had the approval of the whole army, because no one dared object. Ammianus immediately highlights that Valens acted like a pliant subordinate, not an equal.²²⁶ Whether or not the exchange with Dagalaif actually happened is unclear, and ultimately irrelevant; Ammianus choice to include it speaks volumes. He establishes the dynamic between Valentinian and Valens immediately, as well as portraying Valentinian as not putting the empire first. The latter would arguably be a cardinal sin in the eyes of Ammianus.

²²⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, 26.4.5: *Hoc tempore uelut per uniuersum orbem Romanum bellicum canentibus becinis excitae gentes saeuissimae limites sibi proximos persultabant. Gallias Raetiasque simul Alamanni populabantur; Sarmatae Pannonias et Quadi; Picti Saxonesque et Scotti et Attacotti Britannos aerumnis uexauere continuis; Austoriani Mauricaeque aliae gentes Africam solito acrius incursabant; Thracias et diripiebant praedatorii globi Gothorum. Persarum rex manus Armeniis iniectabat eos in suam dicionem ex integro uocare ui nimia properans, sed iniuste, causando, quod post Iouiani excessum, cum quo foedera firmarat et pacem, nihil obstare debebit, quo minus ea recuperaret, quae antea ad maiores suos pertinuisse, monstrabat.*

²²⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, 26.4.1: *At in Bithynia Valentinianus princeps, ut praediximus, declaratus dato in perendium diem signo proficiscendi conuocatis primoribus quasi tota consilia quam sibi placentia secuturus percunctabatur, quemnam ad imperii consortium oporteret assume, silentibusque cunctis Dagalaifus tunc equestris militiae rector respondit fidentius: „Si tuos amas”, inquit, „imperator optime, habes fratrem, si rem publicam, quaere quem uestigas.”*

²²⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus, 26.4.3: *Indeque cum uenisset Constantinopolim, multa secum ipse diu uoluens et magnitudine urgentium negotiorum iam se superari considerans nihil morandum ratus quantum kalendas Apriles productum eundem Valentem in suburbanum uniuersorum sententiis concinentibus – nec enim audebat quisdam refragari – Augustum pronouitauit decoreque imperatorii cultus ornatum et tempora diademate redimitum in eodem uehiculo secum reduxit participem quidem legitimum potestatis, sed in modum apparitoris morigerum, ut progrediens aperiet textus.*

Valentinian raises his son Gratian as co-emperor in 367 CE,²²⁷ underlining the difficulties in managing an empire as vast and diverse as the Roman Empire. However, as Gratian features only tangentially in the narrative, he will not strongly included in the analysis or treated specifically under his own heading.

Ammianus dedicates a chapter to the cruel, irascible, and savage character of Valentinian. Ammianus claims he was known as a cruel man, but took pains to modify his reputation at the start of his reign. However, he could not keep a lid on it, and had a tendency towards angry outbursts. Ammianus claims anger is defined by philosophers as a long-standing, occasionally permanent, mental ulcer, usually caused by a weakness of the intellect. He further contends that philosophers with some plausibility have argued that this is more common in invalids than in the healthy, in women more than men, in the old more than in the young, and more in those in trouble than in those fortunate.²²⁸ Another pronounced feature of Valentinian's cruelty that Ammianus feels compelled to describe in vivid terms concerns abuse of justice; if someone requested a transfer to a different judge in order to avoid appearing before a powerful enemy, the request was denied and he was sent back to the feared enemy. Furthermore, when Valentinian heard of debtors in such dire straits that they could not pay anything, he sentenced them to death. Ammianus claims the reason some emperors are arrogant enough to commit such acts is that they do not give their friends any opportunities to set them right when they stray in thought or deed. Alternatively, they hold such enormous power that enemies are frightened into silence. There is simply no way of correcting someone who feels that the height of virtues lies in seeing their wishes and desires fulfilled.²²⁹ This is a marked narrative contrast to Julian, whom Ammianus as mentioned pointedly described as willing to be corrected and treated people with leniency.

²²⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, 27.6: *Gratinum filium Valentinianus consentiente exercitu Augustum nuncupat et puerum purpuram indutum ad fortiter faciendum hortatur militibusque commendat.*

²²⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, 27.10.4: *Et quamquam Valentinianus, homo propalam ferus, inter imperitandi exordia, ut asperitatis opinionem molliret, impetus truces reinere nonnumquam in potestate animi nitebatur, serpens tamen uitium et dilatatum licentius erupit ad perniciem plurimorum, quod auxit ira acerbis efferuescens. Hanc enim ulcus esse animi diuturnum interdumque perpetuum prudentes definiunt nasci ex mentis mollitia consuetum id asserentes argumento probabili, quod iracundiores sunt incolumibus languidi et feminae maribus et iuuenibus senes et felicibus aerumnosi.*

²²⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 27.10.8–9: *Ad hanc inclementiam illud quoque accedebat dictu dirum et factu, quod, si quis eum adisset iudicium potentis inimici declinans aliumque sibi postulans dari, hoc non impetrato ad eundem, quem metuebat, licet multa praetenderet iusta, remittebatur. Itemque aliud audiebatur horrendum, quod, ubi debitorum aliquem egestate obstrictum nihil reddere posse discebat, interfici debere pronuntiabat.*

Haec autem et similia licenter ideo altiore fastu quidam principes agunt, quod amicis emendandi secus cogitata uel gesta copiam negant, inimicos loqui terrent amplitudine potestatis. Nulla autem est correction prauitatum apud eos, qui, quod uelint, effici maximae putant esse uirtutis.

Ammianus states outright that since he now feels free to openly express his opinion, he feels that Valentinian was the first emperor to foster the arrogance of the military, to the detriment of the state, by advancing them notably in standing and wealth. Another detestable feature was that Valentinian severely and inflexibly punished common soldiers for offences, but treating their superiors leniently.²³⁰ This broadside against Valentinian is a marked departure from Ammianus' narrative technique up to this point; now he is directly and openly appearing in the narrative and stating his own opinion clearly. While he has been scathing towards other emperors, excoriating Valentinian in this manner is in a league of its own. Tying the character and misrule of the emperor to the decline of the military, and thus the empire, encapsulates what he previously has alluded to on many occasions, but never outright and openly in this manner. It is clearly something Ammianus feels passionately about, enough to now openly stand behind and state what he has previously expressed mostly indirectly or expressed through narrative allusions or techniques.

While regularly condemning Valentinian on character and actions, including regarding the military, Ammianus still shows that Valentinian had some military competence and narrates several successful military excursions.²³¹ Valentinian had multiple successful military campaigns, and fortified the frontiers, which Ammianus does touch upon. Ammianus also lavishes praise upon Theodosius [the Elder, his son later became emperor], a general who was sent to deal with trouble in Britain and Africa, and managed to retrieve the situation.²³² This results in narrative criticism and action occasionally being out of sync. Christopher Kelly argues in a similar vein, claiming that the condemnatory character (regarding both Valentinian and Valens) of the narration occasionally seems to run ahead of the action.²³³ He further argued that the eventual juxtaposition of the condemnation of Valentinian's domestic cruelty, and the praise of his military competence, without explanation or resolution, blurs any easy tracing of a

²³⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus, 27.9.4: *Et quoniam adest liber locus dicendi, quae sentimus, aperte loquemur: hunc imperatorem omnium primum in maius militares fastus ad damna rerum auxisse communium dignitates opesque eorum sublimius erigentem et, quod erat publice priuantimque dolendum, indeflexa saeuitia punientem gregariorum errata, parcentem potioribus, qui tamquam peccatis indulta licentia ad labes delictorum immanium consurgebant; qui ex eo anhelantes ex nutu suo indistanter putant omnium pendere fortunas.*

²³¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 29.4: *Valentinianus Augustus Rhenum nauali ponte transgressus culpa militis Macrianum Alamannorum regem incautum capere non potuit.*

²³² Ammianus Marcellinus, 27.8: *Pictis, Attacottis et Scottis post ducem et comitem interfectos Britanniam impune uastantibus Theodosius comes fuis praedam excussit.*

28.3: *Theodosius urbes Britanniae a barbaris uastatas restituit, castella reparat et prouinciam insulae recipit, quae Valentia est appellata.*

²³³ Christopher Kelly, "Crossing the Frontiers: Imperial Power in the Last Books of Ammianus" in *Ammianus after Julian: the reign of Valentinian and Valens in Books 26-31 of the Res Gestae*, eds. J. den Boeft, Jan Willem Drijvers, Hans Teitler, and Daniël den Hengst (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2007), 289.

coherent theme.²³⁴ While it is true that the overt narrative structure fractures in the last books, the central narrative themes remain intact throughout. Most prominent is the character and *exempla* of the imperial males, and how they affect the empire. Valentinian (and Valens), clearly nowhere near equal to Julian, continue the decline of the empire. Their characters and misrule cause a ripple effect, rotting the empire from the top down. Military competence is required and praised, but the character and domestic actions of the emperor (and the people surrounding him) are of great value too. The only one in the narrative to have embodied all of these somewhat successfully is Julian, and his time was too short to steady the ship. This has been a recurring theme throughout *Res gestae*. Furthermore, the narration outpacing the action clearly signifies how Ammianus wrote with the benefit of hindsight, structuring his work how he wanted, choosing what to include, and how.

Valentinian and his violent temper, and its consequences, figure prominently in the narrative leading up to his death. He was lenient towards people of higher rank, but could savagely punish the ordinary population and soldiers. He took little notice of the abuses the powerful heaped upon people. Ammianus then lists the portents that signified Valentinian's death was imminent; comets blazed in the sky, lightning struck a council-house and forum in Sirmium, and an owl perched on top of the royal bath and uttered a fatal hoot.²³⁵ A dream is included as well, as has been the case with the other emperors. In this dream, Valentinian saw his absent wife, dressed in mourning and with disheveled hair. This was his Fortune, about to desert him.²³⁶ The next

²³⁴ Christopher Kelly, "Crossing the Frontiers," 291.

²³⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, 30.5: *Valentinianus Sarmatis et Quadis Pannoniarum populatoribus bellum illaturus in Illyricum profisciscitur et transito Danubio Quadorum pagos uastat, uicos incendit, barbarous cuiusque aetatis iugulat.*

30.5.3: *Et quamquam terrori cunctis erat, dum sperabatur, ut acer et uehemens mox iudices damnari iussurus, quorum perfidia uel secessionem Pannoniarum nudatum est latus, cum illuc uenisset, ita intepuit, ut neque in Gabinii regis inquireret necem neque inusta rei publicae uulnera, quo sinente uel agente segnus euenissent, curatius uestigaret eo uidelicet more, quo erat seuerus in gregariis corrigendis, remissior ega maiores fortunas uel uerbis asperioribus incessendas.*

²³⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus, 30.5.15-18: *Namque diebus ante paucissimis ruinas fortunarum indicantia celsarum arsere crinita sidera cometarum, quorum originem supra docuimus. Ante apud Sirmium repentino fragore nubium fulmorum excussum palatii et curiae partem incendit et fori et apud Sauariam eodem adhuc constituto bubo clumbinibus regii lauacri insidens occentansque funebria nulla iacientium sagittas et lapides contemplabili dextera cadere potuit, certatim licet ardenti studio petebatur. Item cum ab urbe praedicta tenderet ad procinctum, per portam uoluit, unde introit, exire, ut omen colligeret, quod cito remeabit ad Gallis. Cumque locus aggestis ruderibus neglectus purgatur, lapsam forem ferratam, quae exitum obserauit, multitudine remouere non potuit uiribus magnis enisa et ille, ne frustra tereret diem, coactus per aliam egressus est portam. Nocteque, quam lux erepture eum uita secuta est, uidebat coniugem suam absentem sedere passis capillis amictu squalenti contactam; quam aestimari dabatur Fortunam eius esse cum taetro habito iam discessuram.*

day, envoys from the Quadi angered Valentinian to such a degree that he died of what was presumably a stroke while screaming at them.²³⁷

Following the death of Valentinian, Ammianus lists his achievements. These concern military achievements essentially to the exclusion of all else, and in this Ammianus notably constructs a link between Valentinian and the legacy of Julian. Ammianus claims that following the death of Julian, the Alamanni took heart and renewed their incursions into Gaul, as he was the only commander since Constans (who ruled 337–350 CE) whom they feared. Valentinian made himself a terror as well, and reinforced the army and the banks of the Rhine. However, Ammianus does make sure to give significant credit to the generals who actually commanded the troops, although it could be construed as veiled praise that Valentinian, at the very least, gave these generals the chance to rescue these situations.

As is Ammianus' habit, he follows the death of an emperor with a walkthrough of their positive and negative traits. Valentinian had a hot temper, and was prone to excessively punishing people. He forgot that the ruler of an empire should avoid all extremes. He was greedy and envious, and while prone to lashing out at timid people had a tendency to grow fearful and pale at imaginary scenarios. Ammianus claims philosophy tells us that the goal of a just reign is the advantage and safety of its subjects,²³⁸ and in this Valentinian clearly failed.

Following the defects of Valentinian, Ammianus lists the positive traits. This includes treating provincials indulgently and lightening the burden of their tributes, as well as fortifying

²³⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, 30.6: *Idem dum legatis Quadorum populares suos purgantibus respondet, iratus ictu sanguinis exstinguitur.*

²³⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, 30.8.2–3: *Assimulauit nonnumquam clementiae speciem, cum esset in acerbitate naturae calore propensior oblitus profecto, quod regenti imperium omnia nimia uelut praecipites scopuli sunt euitanda. Nec enim usquam repperitur miti coercionem contentus, sed aliquotiens quaestiones multiplicari iussisse cruentas post interrogationes funestas nonnullis ad usque discrimina uitae uexatis, et ita eras effusior ad nocendum, ut nullum aliquando damnatorum capitis eriperet morte subscriptionis elogio leni, cum id etiam principes interdum fecere saeuissimi.*

30.8.6: *Haec forsitan Valentinianus ignorans minimeque reputans afflicti solacium status semper esse lenitudinem principum poenas per ignes augebat et gladios, quod ultimum in aduersis rebus remedium pietas repperit animorum, ut Isocratis memorat pulchritudo; cuius uox est perpetua docentis ignosci debere interdum armis superato rectori iustum quid sit ignoranti.*

30.8.8: *Auiditas plus habendi sine honesti prauisque differentia et indagandi quaestus uarios per alienae uitae naufragia exundauit in hoc principe flagrantius adolescens.*

30.8.10–11: *Inuidia praeter haec ante dictus medullitus urebatur et sciens pleraque uitiorum imitari solera uirtutes memorabat assidue luiores seueritatis rectae potestatis esse indiuiduam sociam. Arguebat hic idem princeps timidos saepius maculosos tales appellans et sordidos et infra sortem humilem amendandos, ad pauores irritos aliquotiens abiectius pallens et, quos nusquam erat, ima mente formidans.*

30.8.14: *Nec afflictis, si fors ingruisset inferior, erat ullum in principis benignitate perfugium, quod semper ut agitato mari iactatis portus patuit exoptatus. Finis enim iusti imperii, ut sapientes docent, utilitas oboedientium aestimatur et salus.*

the borders and frontiers. Ammianus here portrays Valentinian as being admirably strict concerning military discipline; his only fault was that he treated the upper crust of the military leniently and turned a deaf ear to complaints, which led to disasters around the empire.²³⁹ Ammianus has repeated that multiple times, although he now clarifies that it was not the harsh discipline he objected to; it was the unfair treatment for those at the top. Ammianus further claims Valentinian was entirely chaste in his personal life, which also helped him rein in the court. Furthermore, Valentinian made appointments to high positions with great care.²⁴⁰ Notably, Ammianus finishes his list of positive traits with the claim that Valentinian's reign was distinguished for religious tolerance. Valentinian himself took a neutral position, and did not attempt to force his religion on his subjects.²⁴¹

A noteworthy aspect in the narrative of Valentinian is the emphasis on military matters. This is clearly informed by Ammianus' previously discussed military background, training, and awareness of larger developments. On a narrative level, it is made abundantly clear that the empire is on the brink of catastrophe, with hostile incursions on nearly all fronts. The empire is ill equipped to meet these challenges, in no small part thanks to current and previous leadership. Ammianus' understanding of both military operations and the workings of the imperial court, i.e. the professional competence that Trombley also emphasized,²⁴² defines the narratives. It is a culmination of events that have clearly informed the narrative from the beginning.

Valens (Eastern *Augustus* 364–378 CE)

The narrative of Valens begins with Ammianus disparaging his character and authority. He wrote that Valentinian, feeling unequal to the amount of pressing business needing to be done, appointed Valens as co-emperor. Ammianus further claimed that the subsequent narrative will

²³⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 30.9.1: *Conesentaneum est uenire post hae cad euius actus sequendos recte sentientibus et probandos: si relique temperasset, uixerat ut Traianus et Marcus. In prouinciales admodum parcus, tributorum ubique molliens sarcinas; oppidorum et limitum conditor tempestiuus; militaris disciplinae censor eximius in hoc tantum deerrans, quod, cum gregariorum etiam leuia puniret errata, potiorum ducum flagitia progredi sinebat in maius ad querellas in eos motas aliquotiens obsurdescens. Unde Britannici strepitus et Africanae clades et uastitas emersit Illyrici.*

²⁴⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus, 30.9.2-3: *Omni pudicitiae cultu domi castus et foris, nullo contagio conscientiae uiolatus obscenae, nihil incestum; hancque ob causam tamquam retinaculis petulantiam frenarat aulae regalis, quod custodire facile potuit necessitudinibus suis nihil indulgens, quas aut in otio reprimebat aut mediocriter honorauit absque fratre, quem temporis compulsus angustiis in amplitudinis suae societatem assumpsit.*

²⁴¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 30.9.5: *Postremo hoc moderamine principatus inclaruit, quod inter religionum diuersitates medius stetit nec quemquam inquietauit neque, ut hoc coleretur, imperauit aut illud; nec interdictis minacibus subiectorum ceruicem ad id, quod ipse uoluit, inclinabat, sed intermeratas reliquit has partes, ut repperit.*

²⁴² Trombley, "Ammianus Marcellinus and Fourth-Century Warfare," 16.

show that Valens behaved more like a pliant subordinate than an equal to Valentinian.²⁴³ He underlines that point soon after, writing that Valens was colleague to Valentinian more in appearance than reality.²⁴⁴ Ammianus' claim that the subsequent narrative will unfold in a certain way acknowledges the narrative he has created, as well as again recognizing that it was written with intention with the benefit of hindsight. This is further evidenced by Ammianus claiming early on in the narrative of Valens that while inexperienced, the judgement of Valens was still sound; it was only later that he succumbed to flattery and began inflicting disasters on the state that can never cease to be deplored.²⁴⁵

Even if his judgement was apparently sound for a time, his character was not; the harshness and severity of Valens is a recurring theme in the narrative, such as when he manages to defeat the attempted usurper Procopius. Ammianus portrays Valens as punishing people more excessively than their errors or crimes deserved. In that context, Ammianus injects that both Valens and Valentinian disparaged Julian and his conspicuous merits, even though they were nowhere near his equals.²⁴⁶ Ammianus goes on a quite lengthy diatribe against conditions under Valens, where executions, torture, and inquisitions were being conducted without any distinction of who the victim was, and with no regard as to whether or not they were innocent; laws and statutes were mere pretexts for the vile designs of the powerful, and everything was decided by those with swollen powers and ego.²⁴⁷ The emperor himself was inclined towards violence, listened freely to accusers, and took joy in executions. Ammianus claims Valens was

²⁴³ See footnote 226 (page 67) for full quote.

²⁴⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, 26.5.1: *Acta igitur tranquillius hieme concordissimi principes, unus nuncupatione praelatus, alter honori specie tenus adiunctus, percursis Thraciis Naissum aduenerunt, ubi in suburban, quod appellatum Mediana a ciuitate tertio lapide disparatur, quasi mox separandi partiti sunt comites.*

²⁴⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, 27.5.8: *Quibus imperator rudis quidem, uerum spectator adhuc aequissimus rerum, antequam adulationum perniciosus illecebris captus rem publicam funeribus perpetuo deflendis affligeret, in commune consultans pacem dare oportere decreuit.*

²⁴⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus, 26.10.8: *Euphrasius uero itemque Phronimius missi ad occiduas partes arbitrio obiecti sunt Valentiniani et absoluto Euphrasio Phronomius Cherronesum deportatur inclementius in eodem punitus negotio ea re, quod diuo Iuliano fuit acceptus, cuius memorandis uirtutibus eius ambo fratres principes obtrectabant nec similes eius nec supares.*

²⁴⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, 26.10.9–11: *His accedebant alia grauiora et multo magis quam in proeliis formidanda. Carnifex enim et unci et cruentae quaestiones sine discrimine ullo aetatum et dignitatum per fortunas omnes et ordines grassabantur et pacis obtentu itum detestandum agibatur infaustam uictoriam exsecrantibus uniuersis interneccio bello quouis grauiorem. Nam inter arma et lituos condicionis aequatio leuiores facit pericula et Martiae uirtutis potestas aut absomit, quod occupant, aut nobilitat et mors, si acciderit, nullum ignominiae continent sensum finemque secum uiuendi simul et dolendi perducit; ubi uero consiliis impiis iura quidem praetenduntur et leges et Catonianaue uel Cassianaue sententiae furo perlite residerint iudices, agatur autem, quod agitur, ad uoluntatem praetumidae potestatis et ex eius libidine incidentium uitae necisque momenta pensantur, ibi capitalis uertitur pernicies et abrupta. Nam ut quisque ea tempestate ob quamlibet ualuerat causam, regio imperio prope accedens et aliena rapiendi auiditate exustus licet aperte insontem arcessens ut familiaris suscipiebatur et fidus ditandus casibus alienis.*

unaware of a saying of Cicero, which asserts that those are unlucky who think that they have power to do anything they wish.²⁴⁸ Roundly damning Valens' character and further implying he was not as learned as he should be firmly establishes him as inferior to Julian immediately.

Judicial abuse, misuse of power, and cruelty features strongly in the narrative of Valens. Ammianus claims that Valens, in his tyrannical pride, maliciously pursued and persecuted innocent and guilty alike; that the emperor had decided upon the sentence while the charge was still unproved, and that some learned they had been condemned even before they knew that they were under suspicion. The character of Valens, as well as the courtiers surrounding him, served as spurs to these policies; these courtiers were looking to further their own gains, and on the rare occasions when mercy was suggested they derided it as slackness. Ammianus further claims that these bloodthirsty flatterers fatally corrupted the character of a man who had death at the tip of his tongue.²⁴⁹ With the exception of Julian, this largely follows the same narrative outline as the previous emperors; imperial males of dubious character who surrounded himself with serpents, allowing them to pour poison into their ears. However, when dealing with Valentinian and Valens, Ammianus is more overt with these kind of comments and states them repeatedly and clearly, in no uncertain terms. Particularly Valens is overtly portrayed as being corrupted by courtiers and flatterers, whereas with the previous emperors it was portrayed with more discretion and as being more of a mutually parasitic relationship. The only exception to this was Julian, who as previously evidenced resisted all attempts by courtiers and flatterers to steer him off course.

The abuse continues with the trials of Antioch, where Ammianus appears to be basing his account on autopsy. He even claims that he has seen so many victims dragged away after agonizing torture that his recollection is confused, and since he does not remember the details

²⁴⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, 26.10.12: *Imperator enim promptior ad nocendum criminantibus patens et funereas delationes asciscens per suppliciorum diuersitates effrenatius exsultauit sententiae illius Tullianae ignarus docentis infelices esse eos, qui omnia sibi licere existimarunt.*

²⁴⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 29.1.18–19: *quocirca etiam Valens erat uenia dingus uitam, quam ereptum ire perfidy properabant, omni cautela defendens. Sed inexplicabile illud erat, quod regaliter turgidus pari eodemque iure nihil inter se distantibus meritis nocentes innocentesque maligna insectatione uolucriter perurgebat, ut, dum adhuc dubitarentur de crimine, imperatore non dubitante de poende damnatos se quidam prius discerent quam suspectos. Adolescebat autem obstinatum eius propositum admouente stimulos auaritia et sua et eorum, qui tunc in regia uersebantur, nouos hiatus aperientium et, si qua humanitatis fuisset mentio rare, hanc appellantium tarditatem; qui cruentis adulationibus institutum hominis mortem in acie linguae portantis ad partem pessimam deprauantes omnia turbine intempestiuo perflabant euersum ire funditus domus opulentissimas festinantes.*

clearly anymore, he will briefly share what he remembers.²⁵⁰ He claims Valens had abandoned the path of justice altogether and was prone to break out into furious anger; in this Valens was like a wild beast who breaks free in the arena.²⁵¹ Ammianus describes the trials at length, giving a multitude of examples of people being brutally tortured, and often executed, on arbitrary and flimsy grounds. This affected the general populace as well, with many losing property, suffering torture, and being executed without any chance at a proper defense.²⁵² Ammianus notably juxtapositions this long line of innocent people who suffered extensively due to Valens with another of Valens' "glorious exploits", namely sparing a man called Numerius. Ammianus calls Numerius an incomparably wicked and cruel man, who admitted to, and was convicted of, cutting open the womb of a living woman and removing her unborn child. He did this in order to raise the dead and consult them about a change in the empire. However, Valens looked on him with a friendly eye, and so he walked free with life, wealth, and rank intact.²⁵³

Ammianus caps his damning account of this particular incident by expounding on the proper role of the ruler; the care for the welfare of others. So much suffering could have been averted had only Valens learned this lesson. A good ruler must keep his power in check, resist unbridled passion, desire, and rage, and reflect long and earnestly before making decisions regarding the life and existence of a human being. He even quotes the example of the dictator Caesar, who said that the recollection of cruelty is a wretched support for old age.²⁵⁴ He directly

²⁵⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus, 29.1.24: *Et quoniam addici post cruciabiles poenas uidimus multos ut in tenebrosis rebus confusion cuncta miscente summatim, quia nos penitissima gestorum memoria fugit, quae recolere possumus, expeditious absoluemus.*

²⁵¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 29.1.27: *Constituto itaque iudicio et cognitoribus praescripta ostendantibus legume, sed ex uoluntate dominantis moderantibus momenta causarum horror peruaserat uniuersos. Totus enim deuius ab aequitate dilapsus iamque eruditior ad ledendum in modum arenae ferreae, si admotus quisquam fabricate diffugisset, ad ultimam rabiem saeuiebat.*

²⁵² Ammianus Marcellinus, 29.2: *Multi in oriene ueneficiorum et aloiorum criminum rei delati damnatique, pars iure, pars iniuaria iugulantur*

29.2.3: *Et ne uel coniugibus maritorum uacaret miserias flere, immittebantur confestim, qui signatis domibus inter scrutinia superllectilis patris addicti incantamenta quaedam anilia uel ludibriosa subderent amatoria ad insontium perniciem concinnata. Quibus in iudicio recitatis, ubi non lex, non religio, non aequitas ueritatem a mendaciis dirimebat, indefensi bonis ablates nullo contacti delixto promiscue iuuenes alique membris omnibus capti ad supplicia sellis gestatorii ducebantur.*

²⁵³ Ammianus Marcellinus, 29.2.17: *Accesserat hoc quoque eodem tempore ad Valentis ceteras laudes, quod, cum in aliis ita saeuiret infeste, ut poenarum maiores aegre ferret finiri cum morte Dolores, Numerium tribunum, malitia quendam exsuperantem, isdem diebus conuictum confessumque, quod exsecto uiuae mulieris uentre atque intemptu partu extracto infernis minibus excites de permutatione imperii consulere ausus est, familiaritatis contuitu ordine omni mussante abire iussit illaesum salute et inuidendas opes et militia statum integrum retenturum.*

²⁵⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, 29.2.18: *O praeclara informatio doctrinarum munere caelesti indulta felicibus, quae uel uitiosas naturas saepe excoluisti! Quanta in illa cligine temporum correxisses, si Valenti scire per te licuisset nihil aliud esse imperium, ut sapientes definiunt, nisi curam salutis alienae bonique esse moderatoris restringere potestatem, resistere cupiditati omnium rerum et implacabilibus iracundiis nosseque, ut Caesar dictator aiebat, miserum esse instrumentum senectuti recordationem crudelitatis ideoque de uita et spiritu hominis, qui pars mundi*

verbalizes many of the narrative themes he has worked on throughout the extant books of *Res gestae*. This role of a proper emperor can be construed as a veiled allusion to Julian, as he embodied them as no one else in the narrative of the extant books. There is, in a manner of speaking, a narrative culmination following the death of Julian; Ammianus begins directly and clearly contrasting the values he has propagated within the narrative to the, according to him, inferior emperors. On a narrative level, Ammianus sowed these seeds in the earlier extant books, watched them flower through Julian, and following his demise directly compares the weeds that followed to him.

Following the death of Valentinian at the end of the thirtieth extant book, Ammianus begins foreshadowing the death of Valens and other disasters.²⁵⁵ Narratively he begins foreshadowing the death of Valens further away from the actual death than he has done previously, meaning the narrative is again running ahead of the action.

After foreshadowing disaster and calamity, Ammianus proceeds to describe the Huns and Alans, leading to how they displaced the Goths and caused the Goths to ask to be allowed to settle in Roman territory, crossing the Danube. Ammianus paints the amount and movements of these refugees in highly dramatic terms, claiming they were destined to overthrow the Roman Empire and bring about the destruction of the Roman world.²⁵⁶ While Ammianus presumably exaggerated the amount of Goths, likening it almost to an entire people on the move, it was unquestionably a substantial flow of different Gothic tribes. Dedicating a chapter to the Huns and Alans, although mostly disparaging, gives him further credibility and makes him look informed on this issue.

Further exacerbating the situation were those put in charge of managing the situation on the Roman side, Lupicinus and Maximus. Both were reckless and prone to sinister and

est et animantium numerum complet, laturum sententiam diu multumque cunctari oportere nec praecipiti studio, ubi irreuocabile factum est, agitari, ut exemplum est illud antiquitati admodum notum.

²⁵⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, 31.1: *Caedis Valentis Augusti et cladis a Gothis inferendae prodigia.*

²⁵⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus, 31.2: *De Hunorum et Alanorum aliarumque Scythiae Asiaticae gentium sedibus et moribus.*

31.3: *Huni Alanos Tanaitas armis aut pactis sibi adiungunt Gothosque inuadunt ac suis sedibus pellunt.*

31.4: *Pars maior Gothorum cognomine Theruingorum finibus suis expulsa permissu Valentis a Romanis transportatur in Thraciam obsequium et auxilia pollicita. Greuthungi quoque, pars altera Gothorum, furtim ratibus Histrum transeunt.*

31.4.5: *Hacque spe mittuntur diuersi, qui cum uerhuculis plebem transferant truculentam. Et nauabatur opera diligens, ne qui Romanam rem euersurus relinqueretur uel quassatus mobo letali.*

31.4.6: *Ita turbido instantium studio orbis Romani perniciēs ducebatur.*

31.5: *Theruingi fame et inopia pressi ac pessime habitibus Alaiui et Fritigerno a Valente deficiunt ac Lupicinum cum suis fundunt.*

treacherous greed. The Goths crossing the Danube were starving, so Lupicinus and Maximus collected all the dogs they could find and exchanged each of them for a slave. Among the people taken were the sons of chieftains.²⁵⁷ To put it shortly; the narrative makes clear that the mismanagement and purposeful neglect of the situation by the aforementioned pair exacerbated an already difficult and tense situation, and eventually led to conflict and battle across Thrace. The discontent was widespread, and the situation continued to escalate. Ammianus proceeds to describe the ravages, chaos, and cruelty of the war in Thrace, but also includes mentions of wars in other locations, underlining the narrative of an empire in chaos. This notably includes multiple military successes for Gratian elsewhere, which vexed Valens. Eager to achieve victories and glories of his own, Valens, instead of waiting a short time for Gratian to reinforce him, let himself be egged on by flatterers and courtiers, and engaged in battle with the rebel Goths at Adrianople. Severe mistakes were made, and in an utterly catastrophic and historical defeat for the Roman Empire, the battle ended with Valens dead and the core Roman army of the eastern Empire destroyed.²⁵⁸

In describing the good qualities of Valens, Ammianus highlights that he was a faithful and reliable friend who maintained proper and strict discipline in the military and civil service. He was extremely slow at making appointments and removing officials, but showed fairness when dealing with the provinces. He wanted to lighten the burden of tribute, and treated

²⁵⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, 31.4.9–11: *Per id tempus nostri limitis reseratis obicibus atque ut Aetnaeas fauillas armatorum agmina diffundente barbaria, cum difficilies necessitatum articuli correctores rei militaris poscerent aliquos claritudine gestarum rerum notissimos, quasi lauo quodam numine deligente in unum quaesiti potestatibus praefuere castransibus homines maculosi, quibus Lupicinus antistabat et Maximus, alter per Thracias comes, dux alter exitiosus, ambo aemulae temeritatis. Quorum insidiatrix auuiditas materia malorum omnium fuit. Nam, ut alia omitamus, quae memorati uel certe sinentibus isdem alii perditis rationibus in comneantes peregrinos adhuc innoxios deliquerunt, illud dicitur, quod nec apud sui periculi iudices absoluere ulla poterat uenia triste et inauditum. Cum traducti barbari uictus inopia uexarentur, turpe commercium duces inuisissimi cogitarunt et, quantos undique insatiabilitas colligere potuit canes, pro singulis dederant mancipiis, inter quae quidam ducti sunt optimatum.*

²⁵⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, 31.8.7–8: *Tunc erat spectare cum gemitu facta dictum uisuque praedira, attonitas metu feminas flagris concepantibus agitari fetibus grauidas adhuc immaturis, antequam prodirent in lucem, impia tolerantibus multa, implicates alios matribus paruulos et puberum audire lamenta puellarumque nobelium, quarum stringebat fera captiuitas manus. Post quae adulta uirginitas castitasque nuptarum ore abiecto flens ultima ducebatur mox profanandum pudorem optans morte licet cruciabili praeuenire. Inter quae cum beluae ritu traheretur ingenuus paulo ante diues et liber, de te Fortuna ut inclementi querebatur et caeca, quae eum puncto temporis breui opibus exutum et dulcedine caritatum domoque extorrem, quam concidisse uidit in cinerem et ruinas, aut lacerandum membratima ut seruiturum sub uerberibus et tormentis crudo euouisti uictori.*

31.10: *Lentienses Alamanni a Gratiani Augusti ducibus proelio superati rege Pirario etiam interfecto et post deditionem datis Gratiano tironibus domum redire permissi.*

31.12: *Valens Augustus ante aduentum Gratiani cum Gothis pugnare constituit.*

31.13: *Gothi omnes in unum coniuncti, nimirum Theruingi ductu Fritigerni regis et Greuthungi ducibus Alatheo et Safrace, cum Romanis acie instructa confligunt et fuso equitatu pedites nudatos atque confertos ucm maxima strage in fugam coniciunt. Valens occisus nusquam comparuit.*

corruption and embezzling harshly. Ammianus even claims Valens is remembered more fondly than most other emperors in the East because of his diligence against corruption.²⁵⁹ This description has little to no support from the earlier narrative, and highlights how selectively Ammianus has constructed his narratives. It is clear that Ammianus actively chose to include certain aspects of Valens' character and actions, and in doing so excluded others. Consequently, the narrative portrayal and the action is occasionally unsynchronized. Of course, considering the previously mentioned example of Numerius, who walked away unpunished from his brutal act due to Valens looking at him with a friendly eye, Ammianus' comment about Valens being a faithful and reliable friend could be construed as a veiled or satirical jab. The narrative ambiguity continuously reinforces what a manipulative and allusive author Ammianus can be, underlining the active role he had in creating and shaping these subjective and didactic narratives.

Following the ambiguous list of positive traits, Ammianus lists the negatives. Valens was a boorish, ignorant, cruel, and greedy man who was unwilling to endure fatigue, despite affecting toughness. He was blood-thirsty and willing to further himself at the expense and suffering of others. He refused to allow the law and judges to operate independently and fairly, forcing them to adhere to his will and pleasure. He was prone to listening to any charge and whisper, never attempting to discern truth from fact.²⁶⁰ This is significantly more in line with the narrative and actions preceding his death, which highlighted the negative actions and emphasized the negative traits. Consequently, the portrayal is skewed, and by discreetly inserting actions ahead of the eulogy that arguably rebut any eventual positive aspects of Valens, the narration and action are out of sync. This gives all positive traits listed the appearance of a satirical takedown. Considering also the comment from Ammianus that brevity or conciseness is only to be lauded when it "breaks off ill-timed discursiveness, without

²⁵⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 31.14.2: *Amicus fidelis et firmus, ultor acer ambitionum, seuerus militaris et ciuilibus disciplinae corrector, peruigil semper et anxius, ne quis propinquitatem eius praetendens altius semet efferret, erga deferendas potestates uel adimendas nimium tardus, prouinciarum aequissimus tutor, quarum singulas ut domum propriam custodibat indemnes, tributorum onera studio quodam molliens singulari, nulla uectigalium admittens augmenta, in adaerandis reliquorum debitis non molestus, furibus et in peculatu deprehensis iudicibus inimicus aspet et uehemens. Nec sub alio principe in huiusmodi negotiis melius secum actum esse meminit oriens.*

²⁶⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus, 31.14.5: *Magnarum opum intemperans appetitor, laborum impatiens, duritiamque magis affectans immanem, in crudelitatem procliuior, subagrestis ingenii, nec bellicis nec liberalibus studiis eruditus, alienis gemitibus libenter emolumenta fructusque conquirens tuncque magis intolerabilis, cum incidentia criminal ad contemptam uel laesam principis amplitudinem trahens in sanguinem saeuiebat et dispendia locupletum. Illud quoque ferri non poterat, quod, cum legibus lites omnes quaestionesque committere uideri se uellet destinatisque uelut lectis iudicibus negotia spectanda mandabat, nihil agi contra libidinem suam patiebatur, iniuriosus alia et iracundus et criminantibus sine differentia ueri uel falsi facillime patens, quae uitiorum labes etiam in his priuatis cotidianisque rationibus impendio est formidanda.*

detracting at all from an understanding of the course of events”²⁶¹, it begs the question why he seemingly left significant parts out, and decided to include what he did. The text is far from unbiased and objective, as Ammianus claimed. He still maintains his abject honesty throughout, writing in the 31st book that scrupulous honesty is the duty of every writer of history.²⁶² The ending of the narrative of Valens at the end of the extant books is somewhat akin to the narrative of Gallus in the beginning; there is some narrative disconnect. The action and the narration are not always synchronized, and Ammianus appears to be leaving leeway to interpret his text in multiple ways.

3.2 Morals and values

The moralizing aspect of the narratives in *Res gestae* is significant, as it is another way the author appears in the narrative and influences opinion. His opinions and values permeate the text, inadvertently or outright, differing somewhat between Ammianus occupying his first-person narrative persona and his persona as a historian. This chapter focuses on certain narrative threads that run throughout the work, often used to differing effect in the narratives of the imperial male characters. Ammianus frequently ties this to the woes of the empire and indirectly laments the disappearance of old Roman values (as showcased in the eulogies of the emperors), and as such it is another example of a created and subjective narrative at the root of the work. It further enhances the didactic and reactionary character and function of the work, again linking to *historia magistra vitae*.

A prominent fault Ammianus has found in most emperors is excess and proclivity towards violence and abuse. It continues through all the extant books, serving as a central narrative that spotlights how essentially all emperors, save Julian, are unworthy and contributing to the decline of the empire. Their proclivity to violence and abuse attracts bad subordinates, who are empowered to act and not punished as they should for their transgressions. This causes a ripple effect, often with tangible and harmful outcomes, further harming and weakening the empire. Considering Ammianus’ military background, ascetic values, and concern for the direction of the empire, it can be assumed that this did not please him. Given the narrative weight and importance of these issues, and how strongly they tie into the narrative of the previously discussed imperial males, they are treated more specifically

²⁶¹ See footnote 106 (page 27) for full quote.

²⁶² Ammianus Marcellinus, 31.5.10: *Et quoniam ad has partes post multiplices uentum est actus, id lecturos, si qui erunt unquam, obtestamur, ne quis a nobis scrupulose gesta uel numerum exigat peremptorum, qui comprehendi nullo genere potuit. Sufficiet enim ueritate nullo uelata mendacio ipsas rerum digerere summitates, cum explicandae rerum memoriae ubique debeatur integritas fida.*

under their own heading. Ammianus frequently connects the violent and abusive traits of the emperors to their subordinates as well, highlighting another contributing factor that weakens the empire.

Concerning bad subordinates, eunuchs take a prominent role in the narrative and are specially singled out. The following chapter will explore Ammianus' clear bias against them, and analyze what narrative purpose he might be using them for. Ammianus using a whole subset of people for narrative criticism is a clear subjective expression in a work supposedly free of bias. How, why, and where eunuchs appear are strongly tied to the narratives of the imperial males as well.

3.2.1 Eunuchs

The emergence of the previously mentioned aristocracy and concentration of power around the emperor led to eunuchs being a recurring fixture in the administration of Constantius, something much maligned by Ammianus Marcellinus. David S. Potter claims that the fact that eunuchs per definition were slaves, had meaningful access to the emperor, and were castrated, which separated them from the usual social lives and rooms of the nobility, gave them a unique position of power. By mastering the complex levers of government they could outdo people from the traditional aristocracy, whilst simultaneously creating a symbiotic relationship with the emperor, on whom they relied for their positions. He, in turn, could trust them more than others,²⁶³ which presumably also contributed to them being a source of intense unease among more traditionally-minded circles.

As will be outlined, Ammianus Marcellinus makes it abundantly clear that he loathes eunuchs, and is against their existence and influence in the halls of power (and rather in general). Whilst this in itself is a clear sign of bias, the reason for this chapter is primarily to show that he tethers eunuchs and their general existence and influence to the administration, as well the issues plaguing the Roman Empire. He constructs a narrative where they are frequently linked to the ills plaguing the administration and society in general, both as causes and symptoms, as well taking every opportunity to account for their in his view physical, mental and moral shortcomings, making clear that they are not to be trusted. Connecting physical attributes with their character like Ammianus does, exclusively in a negative sense, could be viewed as an example of physiognomics as well. Those Ammianus links to the eunuchs, such as Constantius, usually get their share of criticism by proxy as well.

²⁶³ David S. Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 457–468.

The first reference to eunuchs in the extant books comes in combination with a reference to queen Semiramis, when Ammianus Marcellinus claims that the sight of eunuchs and their misshapen and mutilated bodies would make anyone curse the memory of her, whom he claims was the first to castrate young men and thus doing violence to the course of nature.²⁶⁴ A while afterwards he follows it with a noteworthy example of the one eunuch who is not utterly detestable, Eutherius. Ammianus even praises him, claiming that:

[t]he subject prompts me to add a few facts about this same Eutherius, perhaps hardly to be credited, for the reason that if a Numa Pompilius or a Socrates should give any good report of a eunuch, and should back their statements by a solemn oath, they would be charged with having departed from the truth. But among brambles roses spring up, and among savage beasts some are tamed.²⁶⁵

Whilst it is perhaps not the most ringing endorsement, the contrast when compared to all other eunuchs in *Res gestae* is striking. Extolling his virtues and giving a short biography of Eutherius, Ammianus further writes of Eutherius having a good conscience and being loved by all classes, which stands in contrast to other eunuchs who, according to Ammianus, gather wealth through dubious means and then hide in the darkness from the people they have wronged. Ammianus even writes that in his research, searching through records of the past, he could find no eunuch to compare Eutherius to, and that while there have been some very few who have showed loyalty and virtue, they were all stained in another way.²⁶⁶ This somewhat ambiguous praise certainly clarifies how he feels about eunuchs, but noteworthy is the context that caused Ammianus to praise Eutherius at all. He had displayed loyalty to Julian, and had been crucial in his defense when Julian, according to Ammianus, was the object of a plot.²⁶⁷ In other words, there are special circumstances that afforded Eutherius special respect. Tougher also highlights the fact that Ammianus linked the good eunuch with the good emperor, and the

²⁶⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, 14.6.17: [...] *postrema multitudine spadonum a senibus in pueros desinens, obluridi distortaque lineamentorum compage deformes, ut quaqua inceserit quisquam, cernes mutilorum hominum agmina, detestur memoriam Samiramidis reginae illius veteris, quae teneros mares castravit omnium prima, velut vim iniectans naturae, eandemque ab instituto cursu retorquens, quae inter ipsa oriundi crepundia, per primigenios seminis fontes, tacita quodam modo lege vias propaganda posteritatis ostendit.*

²⁶⁵ J.C. Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus I*, 16.7.4: *Res monuit super hoc eodem Eutherio pauca subserere, forsitan non credenda, ea re quod si Numa Pompilius vel Socrates bona quaedam dicerent de spadone, dictisque religionum adderent fidem, a veritate descivisse arguebantur. Sed inter vepres rosae nascuntur, et inter feras non nullae mitescunt, itaque carptim eius praecipua, quae sunt comperta, monstrabo.*

²⁶⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus, 16.7.7–8: *Unde factum es tut subinde Romam secedens, ibique fixo domicilio consenescens, comitem circumferens conscientiam bonam, colatur a cunctis ordinibus et ametur, cum soleant id genus homines post partas ex iniquitate divitias latebras captare secretas, ut lucifugae vitantes multitudinis laesae conspectus. Cui spadonum veterum hunc comparare debeam, antiquitates complures invenire non potui. Fuerunt enim apud veteres (licet oppido pauci) fideles et frugi, sed ob quaedam vitia maculosi.*

²⁶⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, 16.7: *Iulianus Caesar a praeposito cubicula sui Eutherio apud imperatorem defenditur aduersus Marcellum; et laus Eutherii.*

other bad eunuchs to the bad emperor.²⁶⁸ Another noteworthy aspect is Ammianus highlighting both indirectly, e.g. through his reference to Semiramis, as well as directly that he has actively researched the issue, building up his own authority and lending credibility to the narrative he is actively creating. It is a further example of him forging links between different events and people, actively stringing them together, imbuing it with meaning that it does not have on its own. In a manner of speaking, he presents it as if these are the things and stories that he has found, and by emphasizing his failure to find for example a single historical example that would refute these stories, he is downplaying the role his own creation plays in this context.

Ammianus continues his scathing criticism of eunuchs during the rest of *Res gestae*, often associating them with greed and avarice in particular. He states clearly that eunuchs always are cruel and bitter, and because they lack other offspring they embrace wealth with the love that otherwise should be afforded to children.²⁶⁹

It is unclear how much direct contact Ammianus Marcellinus actually had with eunuchs, except with some notable exceptions like Eutherius. However, what is clear is that he is deeply biased against them. Shaun Tougher also claims Ammianus narrative use of eunuchs as a group amounts to scathing criticism towards Constantius II and his court. Not only does Ammianus paint a picture of eunuchs as influential and frequent in the court, they also serve as a comment on the general condition of the Roman Empire.²⁷⁰ According to Tougher, this recurring fixation on and attacks against eunuchs by Ammianus is a question that has not been given enough attention, and which has been disregarded by referring to general bias against eunuchs. Tougher, however, connects Ammianus' passionate bias and the impulses that even made him research eunuchs and their role in history to a more personal level, which is his concern that eunuchs have been spreading all around the empire, bringing their moral decay that now not only characterize the court, but the empire as a whole.²⁷¹ The central theme here is that Ammianus used eunuchs to criticize social and political developments, an interpretation that a close reading of *Res gestae* affirms. The subjectivity of *Res gestae* is abundantly clear in this context.

²⁶⁸ Tougher, "Ammianus and the Eunuchs," 62.

²⁶⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus 18.5.4: [...] *auctore et incitatore coetu spadonum, qui feri et acidi semper, carentesque necessitudinibus ceteris, divitias solas ut filiolas iucundissimas amplectuntur.*

²⁷⁰ Shaun Tougher, "Ammianus and the Eunuchs," *The Late Roman World and Its Historian. Interpreting Ammianus Marcellinus*, eds. Drijvers & Hunt, 57.

²⁷¹ Tougher, "Ammianus and the Eunuchs," 60–63.

For Ammianus, eunuchs appear to have characterized the rot taking hold at the top. Ammianus frequently included and belittled them in the narrative, and used them to excoriate certain subjects or individuals by proxy. Upon becoming sole *Augustus*, Ammianus describes how Julian drove all the eunuchs, barbers, and cooks from the palaces, as well as ruminating on the vices of the eunuchs of the court and the corruption of military discipline.²⁷² Ammianus neatly summarizes his opinions on the matter; while it might have been commendable if Julian kept those of good character, few though they were, most of these people represented such a hotbed of all vices that they corrupted the state and did harm by their bad example.²⁷³ It is a clear and concise narrative portrayal of Julian clearing out the rot. The narrative of the eunuchs again ties into proper old Roman values, which they abjectly do not represent, and imperial one-man rule, where the character of the emperor is paramount to the success of the empire. As such, eunuchs are conspicuously absent from the narrative and reign of Julian. However, they are mentioned again during the reign of Valens, signaling what kind of emperor he was.²⁷⁴ In other words, they also serve as discreet narrative markers. The rot began creeping back in after Julian perished.

Another noteworthy insertion of eunuchs into the narrative comes when Ammianus is going through the demise of Gallus and lamenting the fickleness of fortune, who had struck down many a noteworthy men after raising them up. He then proceeds to list some of these, again showcasing his knowledge as well as invoking some particular *exempla*, mentioning Pompey (pointedly mentioning that Pompey had earned the cognomen *Magnus*), who was brought down at the behest of eunuchs.²⁷⁵ Pompey was previously mentioned in the chapter about Julian, when Ammianus was comparing those who plotted against and disparaged Pompey to those who did the same against Julian. That reference was chronologically later in

²⁷² Ammianus Marcellinus, 22.4: *Eunuchos omnes et tonsores ac coquos palatio expellit Iulianus Augustus et de palatinorum spadonum uitiiis ac de corrupta disciplina militari.*

²⁷³ Ammianus Marcellinus, 22.4.2: *Laudari enim poterat, si saltem moderatos quosdam licet paucos retinisset morumque probitate compertos. Namque fatendum est pleramque eorum partem uitiorum omnium seminarium effusius aluisse ita, ut rem publicam infecerint cupiditatibus prauis plusque exemplis quam peccandi licentia laederent multos.*

²⁷⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, 30.4.2: *Ob haec similia concordi consensu dehortantibus multis maximeque Modesto praefecto praetorio regionarum arbitrio spadonum exposito et subagreste ingenium nullius uetustatis lectionibus expositum coacto uultu fallente et asserente, quod infra imperiale columen causarum essent minutiae priuatarum, ille ad humilitandam celsitudinem postestatis negotiorum examina spectanda instituisse arbitrates, ut monebat, abstinuit penitus laxauitque rapinarum fores, quae roborabantur in dies iudicum aduocatorumque prauitate sententiam paria, qui tenuiorum negotia militaris rei rectoribus uel intra palatium ualidis uenditantes aut opes aut honores quaesuerunt praeclaros.*

²⁷⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, 14.11.32: *eadem Mancinum post imperium dedit Numantinis, Samnitum atrocitati Veturium et Claudium Corsis substruitque feritati Carthaginis Regulum; istius iniquitate Pompeius post quaesitum Magni ex rerum gestarum amplitudine cognomentum ad spadnum libidinem in Aegypto trucidatur.*

the extant books, and it is a noteworthy example of the micronarratives that Ammianus include in his work. In this case, eunuchs brought down a great man, to the detriment of the empire. The narrative link between Pompey and Julian is clear, and so is the purpose of eunuchs in the text. Considering also the previously discussed narrative that Ammianus created about Constantius, and Ammianus' decision to at length feature the role of eunuchs in the court of Constantius in the narrative, eunuchs have a clear narrative function. Ammianus tethers the eunuchs firmly to Constantius, again reinforcing that Constantius is the foil to Julian. Michael Hanaghan emphasized a further intertextual allusion between Constantius and the eunuchs; namely that it portrays them both as unable to control their emotions.²⁷⁶ Considering the emphasis Ammianus has already placed on Julian's strict discipline and control, the narrative contrast is clear.

While it is difficult to try to clearly separate between what could be Ammianus' own bias and disgust, as opposed his use of eunuchs as a narratological tool, these are not mutually exclusive, and as such it is not necessarily a problem. Ammianus strings together a narrative of different (named and unnamed) eunuchs, mixing their alleged actions with the supposed general character of their kind. The absolute only exception was the one who was linked to Julian. Presumably there have also been other eunuchs active in his orbit or throughout history who have done no harm, so selectively choosing the examples that he does and constructing a narrative that can be interpreted this way clearly showcases a certain storytelling invention. The narrative he creates around eunuchs essentially implies that they are a pestilence and nuisance weakening the empire, and excising them could alleviate the problem. Those who are empowering eunuchs deserve the same treatment.

3.2.2 Authority and abuse

As was previously established, Ammianus created a narrative that underlines the importance of the power and authority at the top. This aligns with power and authority more strongly coalescing around the emperor during the fourth century, and that he no longer relied on the traditional aristocracy in the same manner.²⁷⁷ This in itself does not appear to have bothered Ammianus, as he has, as previously shown, disparaged and dismissed the traditional aristocracy on numerous occasions, and appears to be propagating a return to one-man imperial rule throughout *Res gestae*. However, the character and abilities of the person in charge was, as

²⁷⁶ Michael Hanaghan, "A Metaliterary Approach to Ursicinus' Outburst (Amm. Marc. 20.2.4)", *Philologus* 162, no. 1 (2018), 122.

²⁷⁷ See "chapter 2.2: Social and political context" for information.

established, a clear concern for him. Given the military power and importance of the emperor, and how crucial this was to the very fabric of the empire, it is paramount that the ruler is worthy. If there is a rot at the top it trickles down, and bad power attracts bad subordinates. This chapter focuses on certain moralizing aspects of Ammianus' work, more specifically his portrayal of different kinds of abuse. This pertains to how his subjectivity is showcased, as well as the purpose behind creating those narratives.

The abuse of (as well as lack of proper) authority covers multiple fields; notably torture, judicial malpractice, and violence. These issues have been briefly touched upon in the chapters concerning the emperors, but given that Ammianus weaves it into all the narratives in different ways a more substantial conversation is required to analyze Ammianus' narrative use of these themes. On issues such as torture, which Ammianus seems to have varying attitude about, he focuses on the recipient and the justification. As will be shown, Ammianus appears to have a matter-of-fact and no-nonsense attitude towards torture in general. What is striking is how and when he justifies it, and whether he deems it done with proper cause. As such, torture is used to further a narrative about misuse of power and political maneuverings in the court, which affects the empire and also occasionally outright affects ordinary citizens. When someone is sentenced to torture by Julian, Ammianus often does not challenge this. This is doubly true if the victims are not Roman citizens, but barbarians or other "hostile" groups. It is possible part of the reason Ammianus does not seem particularly bothered in those instances is precisely because it does not affect Roman citizen, and he deems it justified to employ such methods against non-citizens, but it is also possible it stems from who ordered it and for what purpose. Seeing as he often and strongly directs criticism towards Gallus and Constantine for their misuse of power by highlighting torture and violence it would be narratologically unsound to link that to his superiors, such as Julian, whom he is constructing a very different narrative about and for whom these misuses of power serves as a foil to showcase the righteousness of his rule.

The use of torture, especially against members of the bureaucracy, and how vicious the infighting between different officials was, seems to have reached a new height during this era. This more frequent use of torture within court and Constantius' orbit does not seem to align with the values of Ammianus, because he portrays it as frequently being the result of political maneuvering, grabs for power, and plain abuse of power in the court teeming with eunuchs

whispering in the receptive ears of the emperor, and seeking only to advance themselves.²⁷⁸ Potter further underlines that the consequences of these interdepartmental intrigues, as well as the demise of Gallus, was to strengthen the position of Constantius, because ultimately he served as the arbitrator between these disputes within his administration, whilst simultaneously being willing to erratically move people around in the administration.²⁷⁹ By directing these people at each other, and switching them out as he pleased, it also made it harder for them to work against him like they otherwise might have been able to. This further underlines the centralization of power, and the degree to which people depended on his goodwill, which means the character, temperament and abilities of the emperor are crucial. Through the power they wield they can heap abuse on people and harm the empire at will. Ammianus even states outright that Constantius employed excessive torture to provide circumstances that were invested, or at best uncertain, an appearance of authenticity.²⁸⁰ A person like Ammianus, with his background in the military and who clearly valued order and systematic leadership, would presumably find this kind of chaotic intrigue and pitched battles for power together with the brutal use of violence as frustrating and ultimately damaging to the Roman Empire. Later, when discussing the cruelties of Valens, Ammianus claimed that it would be better for the innocents who were tortured to have lost even ten lives in battle, rather than suffer the punishment for alleged treason. He describes them as falsely accused and their bodies as lacerated and mutilated, something worse than death.²⁸¹ False accusations being acted upon as a result of the actions and temperaments of the emperors, resulting in innocents being savagely tortured and killed, are given such prominence in the narrative that it is clearly something Ammianus felt strongly about.

The narrative juxtaposition between Julian and the other emperors concerning how they wielded their imperial authority is clear: Ammianus pointedly describes Julian's meticulous, fair, and occasionally mild behavior on judicial matters. He was admirably patient

²⁷⁸ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 470.

²⁷⁹ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 472.

²⁸⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus, 21.16.8: *Dinumeratis carptim bonis, quae scire potuimus, nunc ad explananda eius uitia ueniamus. Cum esset in negotiis aliis principibus mediis comparandus, si affectatae dominationis amplam quondam falsam repperisset aut leuem, hanc sine fine scrutando fasque eodem loco ducens et nefas Caligulae et Domitiani et Commodi immanitatem facile superabat, quorum aemulatus saeuitiam inter imperandi exordia cunctos sanguine et genere se contingens stirpitus interemit.*

²⁸¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 26.10.13: *Haec implacabilitas causae quidem piissimae, sed uictoriae foedioris innocents tortoribus exposuit multos uel sub eculeo locauit incuruos aut ictu carnificis torui substrauit; quibus, si pateretur natura, uel denas animas profundere praestabat in pugna, quam lateribus fodicatis omni culpa immunis fortunis gementibus uniuersis quasi laesae maiestatis luere poenas dilaniatis ante corporibus, quod omni est tristius morte.*

and gave every man his due. He occasionally erred and asked someone what religion they professed to follow, but Ammianus quickly claims that no one can find a decision made by Julian that flew in the face of evidence, or that he was biased because of someone's religion. There were, in fact, so many mild and just decisions made by Julian on the bench that Ammianus feels it is enough to just mention one.²⁸² Ammianus repeated insistence that Julian never judged anyone wrongly or harshly because of their religion is a curious thing to emphasize, especially as he has to admit that Julian banned Christians from teaching rhetoric and literature.²⁸³ In that particular case, Julian also failed to properly wield his authority and accordingly diminished his legacy, although Ammianus devotes significant time in the narrative to mitigate the criticism by drowning it out in positives. Furthermore, under Julian, the rampant abuse and torture Ammianus decidedly weaves into the narratives of the other emperors is conspicuously absent, and Julian punishes wrongdoers instead of empowering them.

Ammianus includes several prominent examples of how bad power attracts bad subordinates, and the trickle-down effect this has. The abuse of authority directly impacts the empire and ordinary citizens. This has previously been exemplified by e.g. Silvanus, but Ammianus includes other, more direct, examples. He singles out some prominent individuals and associates them and their actions with the imperial characters, tying their abuse directly to the emperors. One such is Paulus "Catena" (the Chain), a *notarius* whom Ammianus describes as a viper. Paulus was sent Britain to fetch officers who had apparently dared to conspire with Magnentius in the civil war between him and Constantius. While there he exceeded his instructions and began wreaking havoc on the population and imprisoning freeborn based on flimsy excuses.²⁸⁴ This echoes the behavior of Gallus, who was similarly empowered by

²⁸² Ammianus Marcellinus, 22.10: *Antiochiae hiemans Iulianus iura reddit nec quemquam propter religionem grauat.*

22.10.1-2: *Ibi hiemans ex sententia nullis interim uoluptatibus parebat aut illecebris, quibus abundant Syriae omnes, uerum per speciem quietis iudicialibus causis intentus non minus quam arduis bellicisque, quibus distrahebatur multiformibus curis, exquisite docilitate deliberans, quibus modis suum cuique tribueret iustisque sententiis et improbi modicis coercerentur suppliciiis et innocents fortunis defenderentur intactis. Et quamquam in disceptando aliquotiens erat intemptius, quid quisque iurgantium coleret, tempore alieno interrogans, tamen nulla eius definitione a uero dissonans repperitur nec argui unquam potuit ob religionem uel quodcumque aliud ab aequitatis recto tramite deuiasse.*

²⁸³ Ammianus Marcellinus, 22.10.5: *Sufficiet autem pro multis, quae clementer egit in litibus cognoscendis, hoc unum ponere nec abhorrens a proposito nec absurdum.*

22.10.7: *Post multa enim etiam iura quaedam correxerat in melius ambagibus circumcises indicantia liquid, quid iuberent fieri uel uetarent. Illud autem eras inclemens obruendum perenni silentio, quod arcebat docere magistris rhetoricos et grammaticos ritus Christiani cultores.*

²⁸⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, 14.6.1: *Inter quos Paulus eminebat notarius ortus in Hispania glaber quidam sub uultu latens, odorandi uias periculorum occultas perquam sagax. Is in Britanniam missus, ut militares quosdam perduceret, ausos conspirasse Magnentio, cum reniti non possent, iussa licentius supergressus fluminis modo fortunis complurium sese repentinus infudit et ferebatur per strages multiplices ac ruinas uinculis membra ingenuorum affligens et quosdam obterens manicis criminal scilicet multa consarcinaudo a ueritate longe discreta.*

Constantius. Ammianus especially singles out the fact that Paulus set his sights on Martinus, who was governing those provinces at the time. Martinus apparently felt deeply for the suffering of the innocents and begged Paul to release them, and when this failed threatened to retire unless Paulus stopped. Paulus responded to these attempts to stop his slaughter and abuse by threatening to bring Martinus in chains before the emperor's court, whereupon Martinus, fearing imminent death, attacked Paulus. However, due to the weakness of his hand he was unable to deliver a fatal blow, and thus apparently plunged the sword into his own side instead. So perished according to Ammianus a most just governor who had lightened the unhappy lot of many. Paulus, stained with blood, subsequently returned to court with his innocent prisoners, most of whom suffered torture, exile, slavery or death. Rounding this out Ammianus claims it is difficult to bring anyone to mind who was acquitted during the reign of Constantius after even so much as a whisper against him.²⁸⁵ The actions of Paulus and the consequences these had are firmly linked to Constantius, and Ammianus seems to primarily place the blame on Constantius. The rot started at the top and empowered other rotten actors to act with impunity, with innocent people taking the hit from this gross neglect of duty. The narrative Ammianus is building is clearly laying out the supposed deficiencies of Constantius and his entire court, linking this to and at the same time exemplifying it by the actions of people who rely on Constantius for authority and power. Judicial malpractice features strongly, and the torture of innocents is a recurring theme. In short, it is a gross abuse of power and authority with a detrimental effect on the empire. The social system and the laws that upheld it were under siege.

Paulus makes a later appearance in the narrative, pursuing treason trials based on (according to Ammianus) faked charges in the town of Scythopolis in Palestina. It was secluded and positioned between Antioch and Alexandria, from where most prisoners were brought. Paulus' first instinct, expertise, and joy still lay in torture, and did not shy away from falsely

²⁸⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, 14.6.7–9: *Martius agens illas prouincias pro praefectis aerumnas innocentium grauius gemens saepeque obsecrans, ut abi omni culpa immunibus parceretur, cum non impetraret, minabatur se discessurum, ut saltem id metuens perquisitor maleolus tandem desineret quieti coalitos homines in aperta pericula proiactare. Per hoc minui stadium suum existiamans Paulus, ut erat in complicandis negotiis artifex dirus, unde ei Catenae indutum est cognomentum, uicarium ipsum eos, quibus praeerat, adhuc defensantem ad sortem periculorum communium traxit. Et instabat, ut eum quoque cum tribunus et aliis pluribus ad comitatum imperatoris uinctum perduceret; quo percitus ille exitio urgente abrupto ferro eundem adoritur Paulum. Et quia languente dextera letaliter ferire non potuit, iam dextrictum mucronem in proprium latus impegit. Hocque deformi genere mortis excessit e uita iustissimus rector ausus miseabiles casus leuare multorum. Quibus ita scelestis patris Paulus cruore perfusus reuersusque ad principis castra multos coopertos paene catenis adduxit in squalorem deiectos atque maestitiam, quorum aduentu intendebantur eculei uncosque parabat carnifex et tormenta. Et ex iis proscripti sunt plus actique in exsilium alii, nonnullos gladii consumpsere poenales. Nec enim quisquam facile meminit sub Constantio, ubi susurro tenuis haec mouebantur, quemquam absolutum.*

accusing people in order to keep doing it. In a fit of fury over a specific case, Constantius conferred upon Paulus the authority to have cases brought to court at will, causing him to pursue this foaming at the mouth at all the possibilities to do harm. He does this with gusto, essentially setting up a kangaroo court; accusing, torturing, and passing sentence on people completely arbitrarily.²⁸⁶ Through Constantius conferring power and authority upon Paulus, people from Britain all the way to Egypt were unjustly imprisoned, tortured, enslaved, and murdered. It is a clear example where abuse of authority had a detrimental effect on the empire, something Ammianus fastens on to repeatedly in *Res gestae*.

The link between subordinates and emperors is made abundantly clear in the 22nd extant book, when Constantius has recently died and Julian is in power. A multitude of different bad actors, including Paulus, went in front of a tribunal. Paulus was burnt alive, and Ammianus states he met the fate one must have hoped for. However, Ammianus also states that some adherents of Constantius were punished unjustly, but Ammianus excuses this on account of Julian's lack of confidence or lack of awareness of how things should be done.²⁸⁷ However, it is still yet another narrative portrayal of a righteous emperor righting the wrongs of his

²⁸⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus, 19.12: *Laesae maiestatis multi arcessiti atque damnati.*

19.12.5: *Ex his aliqua ad imperatorem maligne sunt missa, qui, ut erat angusti pectoris, obsurdescens in aliis etiam nimium seriis in hoc titulo ima, quod aiunt, auricular mollior et suspicax et minutus acri felle concaluit statimque ad orientem ocius ire monuit Paulum postestate delata, ut instar ducis rerum experientia clari ad arbitrium suum audiri efficeret causas.*

19.12.7: *Perrexit, ut praeceptum est, Paulus funesti furoris et anhelitus plenus dataque calumniae indulgentia plurimis ducebantur ab orde prope terrarum iuxta nobiles et obscuri, quorum aliquos uinculorum afflixerant nexus, alios claustra poenalia consumpserunt. Et electa est spectatrix suppliciorum feralium ciuitas in Palaestina Scythopolis, gemina ratione uisa magis omnibus opportune, quod secretior et inter Antiochiam Alexandriamque media, unde multi plerumque ad criminal trahebantur.*

19.12.13: *Et hos quidem aliosque paucos aequa sors ueritatis adiutrix periculis exemit abruptis. Criminibus uero serpentibus latius per implicates nexus sine fine distentos quidam corporibus laniatis exstinguebatur, alii poenis ulterioribus damnati sunt bonis ereptis Paulo succentore fabularum crudelium quasi e promptuaria cella fallaciarum et nocendi species suggerente complures, cuius ex nutu, prope dixerim, pendebat incidentium omnium salus.*

²⁸⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, 22.3: *Constantiani quidam pars iure, pars iniuria damnantur.*

22.3.1-3: *Breui deinde Secundo Salutio promoti praefecto praetorio summam quaestionum agitandarum ut fido commisit Mamertino et Arbitione et Agilone atque Neuita adiunctis itidemque Iouino magistro equitum per Illyricum recens prouecto. Qui omnes transgressi Calchedona praesentibus Iouionorum Herculanorumque principiis et tribunis causas uehementius aequo bonoque spectauerunt praeter paucas, ubi ueritas reos nocentissimos offerebat. Et Palladium primum et magistro officiorum in Britannos exterminarunt suspicione tenus insimulatum quaedam in Gallum composuisse apud Constantium, dum sub eodem Caesare officiorum esset magister.*

22.3.9: *Ideoque timidus uidebatur uel parum intellegens, quod conueniret, cum Arbitionem semper ambiguum et praetumidum his quaestionibus praefecisset, aliis specie tenus cum principiis legionum praesentibus, quem primum omnium saluti suae norat obiectum, ut decuit uictoriarum ciuiliu participem fortem.*

22.3.11: *Apodemium enim ex agente in rebus, quem in Siluani necem et Galli effrenatius arsisse docuimus, Paulumque notarium cognomento Catenam cum multorum gemitu nominandum uiuos exustos, qui sperari debuit, oppressit euentus.*

predecessors, this time pointedly no longer abusing authority and instead punishing those that did. Further considering Julian banishing the eunuchs and similar elements, Ammianus has portrayed both groups and individuals as either corrupting elements or the results of such, and now he weaves those narrative threads together to portray an emperor both resisting and actively removing such elements, to the benefit of the empire.

Further continuing the theme of torture, violence, and judicial malpractice, a chunk of the narrative of Valentinian concerns trials and executions at Rome for sorcery, fornication, and adultery.²⁸⁸ Despite the emperors not directly appearing, Ammianus clearly wants to connect the narratives of these subordinates to those who empowered them. For example; Ammianus singles out a man called Maximinus, formerly the vice-prefect of Rome, who managed to scheme and deceive his way into being appointed pro-prefect of Rome by Valentinian. This empowered Maximinus to commit brutal and merciless acts, too many to relate. Ammianus compares him to the wild beasts in the amphitheater who break free from their cages. Ammianus then goes through a rather long list of people, including senators and the head of the mint, who were imprisoned, tortured, exiled, or sentenced to death on arbitrary grounds.²⁸⁹ Maximinus was eventually even promoted to the rank of praetorian prefect, one of the highest civil offices of the empire. His cruelty continued unabated, and he continued to do harm from a distance like

²⁸⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, 28.1: *Multi, etiam senators so senatorii generis feminae, Romae ueneficiorum, stuprorum et adulteriorum accusantur et supplicio afficiuntur.*

²⁸⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 28.1.5: *Maximinus regends quondam Romae uicariam praefecturam [...]*

28.1.10: *Accepta igitur nocendi material Maximinus effudit genuinam ferociam pectori crudo affixam, ut saepe faciunt amphithreathrales ferae diffractis tandem solutae posticis.*

28.1.11-12: *his ille cognitis efferatus, ur erat uitiorum inimicus acer magisquam seuerus, uno proloquio in huiusmodi causas, quas arroganter proposito maiestatis imminutae miscebat, omnes, quos iuris prisci iustitia diuorumque arbitria quaestionibus exemere cruentis, si postulasset negotium, statuit tormentis affligi. Utge congeminata potestas erectaque sublatius altiores consarcinaret aerumnas, Maximio Romae agere disposito pro praefectis sociavit ad haec cognoscenda, quae in multorum pericula struebantur, Leonem notarium, postea officorum magistrum, bustuarium quendam latronem Pannonium efflantem ferino rictu crudelitatem, etiam ipsum nihilo minus humani sanguinis audissimum.*

28.1.16: *Tunc Cethegus senator adulterii reus delatus ceruice perit abscisa et Alypsius nobilis adolescens ob leuem relegates errorem aliique humiles publica morte oppetiuerunt; in quorum miseriis uelut sui quisque discriminis cernens imaginem tortorem et uincula somniabat et diuersoria tenebrarum.*

28.1.26: *Circa hos dies Lollianus, primae lanuginis adolescens, Lampadi filius ex praefecto, exploratus causam Maximino spectante conuictus codicem noxiarum atrium nondum per aetatem firmato consilio descripsisse exsulque mittendus, ut sperabatur, patris impulse prouocauit ad principem et iussus ad eius comitatum duci de fumo, ut aiunt, in flammam traditus Sphalangio, Baeticae consulari, cecidit funesti carnificis manu.*

28.1.28: *Nec minus feminae quoque calamitatum participes fuere simulum. Nam ex hoc quoque sexu peremptae sunt originis altae complures, adulteriorum flagitiis obnoxiae uel stuprorum. Inter quas notiores fuere Claritas et Flauiana, quarum altera, cum duceretur ad mortem, indumento, quo uestita erat, abrepta ne uelamen quidem secreto membrorum sufficiens retinere permissa est. ideoque carnifex nefas admississe conuictus immane uiuus exustus est.*

28.1.29: *Paphius quin etiam et Cornelius senators ambo uenenorum artibus prauis se polluisse confessi eodem pronuntianto Maximino sunt iterfecti. Parti sorte etiam procurator monetae exstinctus est.*

a basilisk.²⁹⁰ It boils down to gross abuse of power and authority, and continues the theme of bad power attracting bad subordinates. It brings context to why Ammianus during the eulogies of the previous emperors continuously discussed the care they took (or did not take) in making appointments. However, as previously evidenced by e.g. Constantius and Paulus “the Chain”, any care shown did not necessarily translate into good decisions if the emperor had a faulty character.

Maximinus appears later in the narrative, continuing to cause to havoc and misery. Valentinian’s burning resolve to secure the frontiers led to him ordering the erection of a fortress in the territory of the Quadi (a Germanic people). He treated this territory as subject to Roman authority, overextending his authority. The Quadi, while resentful and grumbling, did not take military action or exacerbate the situation, but the fortress was still delayed and difficult to build. However, Maximinus, always looking for a chance to do wrong, managed to get his son appointed general with the promise that he would get the fortress erected. Being his father’s son, he managed to provoke a war with the Quadi by luring their king to dinner and, violating the sacred laws of hospitality, having him murdered. This very nearly led to the daughter of Constantius, who was en route to marry Gratian, being captured by the Quadi as well, something Ammianus felt would have been a deeply shameful embarrassment for the empire.²⁹¹ The narrative thus links Valentinian, and by extension his son, to the turmoil and tragedies stemming from that conflict.

Ammianus’ moralizing tendencies and creation of subjective narratives are again showcased through authority and abuse, especially considering how clearly he again contrasts Julian to the other emperors. It is presumably yet another case of Ammianus’ being selective

²⁹⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus, 28.1.41: *Post haec praegresso Leone acceptoque successore ad principis comitatum Maximinus accitus auctusque praefecture praetoriana nihilo lenior fuit, etiam longius nocens ut basilisci serpents.*

²⁹¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 29.6.3: *sed Maximinus in omne auidus nefas et genuinos mitigare nequiens flatus, quibus praefecturae accesserat tumor, increpabat Equitium, per Illyricum eo tempore magistrum armorum, ut peruicacem et desidem necdum opere, quod maturari dispositum est, consummato addebatque ut consulens in commune, quod, si paruo suo Marcelliano deferretur potestas per Valeriam ducis, munimentum absque ulla causatione consurgeret. Utrumque mox est impetratum. Qui promotus profectusque cum uenisset ad loca, intempestiue turgens ut filius nullis affatibus delinitis his, quos numquam temptatae cupiditatis figmenta regionum suarum faciebant textorres, opus paulo ante inchoatum aggreditur admissa copia refragandi suspensum. Denique Gabinium regem, ne quid nouaretur, modeste poscentem, ut assensusur humanitate simulata cum aliis ad conuiuium corrogauit, quem digredientem post epulas hospitalis officii sanctitate nefarie uiolata trucidari securum effecit.*

26.6.7: *Euenisset profecto tunc inexpiabile scelus numerandum inter probrosas rei Romanae iacturas; Paulo enim afuit, quin filia caperetur Constanti cibum sumens in publica uilla, quam appellant Pristensem, cum duceretur Gratiano nuptura, ni fauore propitii numinis present Messala prouinciae rector eam iudiciali carpento impositam ad Sirmium uicensimo sexton lapide disparatum cursu reduxisset effuso.*

with what he includes and how he does it, tilting the narrative further in the favor of Julian and the ideal he represents.

3.3 Religion

Religion is a highly significant factor in *Res gestae*, and as showcased influenced the both the emperors themselves, as well as the narratives Ammianus created. Julian being the last non-Christian emperor is difficult to divorce from how he was portrayed, although Ammianus was likely extremely careful in his approach.

The importance of religion in society has been underlined multiple times in this thesis already, being intrinsically linked with political and financial influence and power. The importance of “proper” state funded, practiced, and celebrated cults for Ammianus and pagans in general has also been raised,²⁹² all the more noteworthy considering that there is little to no evidence of official Roman paganism surviving the fourth century.²⁹³ This pagan decline can also be seen in *Res gestae*, and evidently Julian was also aware of this himself. This is evidenced by Ammianus explicitly detailing that Julian in order to win the favor of the many and hamstringing his opposition pretended to adhere to Christianity, which he in secret had long since abandoned, even attending a service in church to conceal this.²⁹⁴ In *Res gestae*, Julian did not openly espouse paganism until later on, when his position as *Augustus* was more secure.²⁹⁵ Navigating this reality after Julian had met his end could for Ammianus presumably have meant walking a tightrope between his own convictions and the changing dynamic of society, of raising up the last pagan emperor of Rome whilst navigating a more Christian dynamic.

The depth and variety of religious polemic in the *Res gestae* can be exemplified by the seemingly throwaway about Constantius not eating fruit after his death. There has been some debate about that line in particular, with some arguing that excessive consumption of fruit was a sign of gluttony, or arguing that it could be the result of for example an allergy, although

²⁹² Rike, *Apex Omnium*, 27; Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome*, 78.

²⁹³ Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome*, 74, 168. Cameron clarifies that this does not reference individual paganism, but that the “formal apparatus of the state cults as administered by the various priestly colleges was gone”.

²⁹⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, 21.2.4: *utque omnes nullo impediante ad sui fauorem illiceret, adhaerere cultui Christiano fingebat, a quo iam pridie occulte descuerat arcanorum particibus paucis huspicinae auguriisque intentus et ceteris, quae deorum semper fecere cultores. Et ut haec interim celarentur, feriarum die, quem celebrantes mense Ianuario Christiani Epiphania dictitant, progressus in eorum ecclesiam sollemniter numine orato discessit.*

²⁹⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, 22.5: *Iulianus Augustus cultum deorum antae dissimulatum palam et libere profitetur et Christianorum episcopos inter se comittit.*

David Rohrbacher disputes this.²⁹⁶ He instead posits that it may have religious connotations, noting that Ammianus already praised Constantius for his chaste lifestyle and moderation when it came to eating. Rohrbacher links this to typical forms of Christian renunciation, which Ammianus in this case might have recast in order to avoid mention of Christianity.²⁹⁷ Rohrbacher analyzed the often acrimonious social and religious context and rhetoric involving paganism, Manicheism, Arianism, as well as other Christian offshoots, concluding that Ammianus appears to have employed Christian polemic for pagan purposes, using it to attack a Christian emperor.²⁹⁸ Correct or not it goes to show the importance of context in understanding how interactive, allusive and manipulative Ammianus could be as a writer. The narratives he created could, as shown, be exceedingly discreet and hard to understand without proper understanding and context. For the right audience, even a seemingly throwaway line about Constantius not eating fruit could be understood in a nuanced manner.

Alan Cameron singles out animal sacrifice as something Christians particularly opposed, and many of the decrees and laws passed by Gratian and Theodosius also targeted animal sacrifice in particular.²⁹⁹ This makes it all the more noteworthy that one of the few critiques of Julian by Ammianus is his excessive sacrificing,³⁰⁰ bringing into question the veracity of the comments by Ammianus. Considering that the overall narrative surrounding and tone towards Julian, and his paganism, is almost exclusively positive, it is an example that stands out. One explanation could be that Ammianus also simply found Julian's excessive sacrificing distasteful, signifying a potential widespread shift in contemporary opinion regarding animal sacrifice even among pagans. The rising dominance of Christianity, and their strong dislike of and campaigning against the practice, could have influenced this. Another explanation is that Ammianus is carefully navigating contemporary social and religious opinion, conforming to this view due to the fact that a full throated endorsement of Julian and his plentiful sacrificing would not only lead to backlash from potential readers but also confirm the worst suspicions of Julian's critics. By conceding some points to the detractors of Julian in this particular context Ammianus builds up his own credibility as a writer and a source on Julian in particular, which means his words when praising Julian could carry more weight and nuance

²⁹⁶ David Rohrbacher, "Why didn't Constantius II eat fruit?" in *The Classical Quarterly* New Series 55, no. 1 (2005), 324.

²⁹⁷ Rohrbacher, "Why didn't Constantius II eat fruit?," 324–325.

²⁹⁸ Rohrbacher, "Why didn't Constantius II eat fruit?," 326.

²⁹⁹ Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome*, 65-79

³⁰⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus, 25.4.17: *Linguae fusioris et admodum raro silentis, praesagiorum sciscitationi miniae deditus, ut aequiperare uideretur in hac parte principem Hadrianum, superstitiosus magis quam sacrorum legitimus observator, innumeras sine parsiminia pecudes mactans [...]*

as well. Figuratively throwing Julian under the bus on the matter of religion could thus be one of the most effective ways of achieving this.

As established, the overall narrative of Julian is highly positive. For Ammianus to concede points on issues such as animal sacrifice might thus not be too much of a stretch, and might aid in rehabilitating the reputation of Julian the Apostate, which is yet another manipulative and interactive move. This is further exemplified by e.g. E. D Hunt, where he analyses Ammianus' portrayal of Julian's temple restoration project, most notably his attempt at rebuilding the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. Hunt here points out that Ammianus' account is striking in that he does not even mention or go near the religious implications of what Julian is attempting, namely reviving the Jewish cult in Jerusalem and in the process dislodging Christianity from its prominent and central place in Jerusalem that it had acquired during the reign of Constantine.³⁰¹ Considering the narrative already surrounding Julian, Ammianus hardly needs to explicitly endorse his actions, but if Ammianus was writing in a more dominantly Christian context, and was trying to defend or salvage the reputation of Julian from incoming fire from Christian authors, it would hardly be conducive to explicitly confirm their worst fears or rub their noses in it. Alan Ross proposes a further dynamic influencing the treatment of religion, namely that it was Ammianus conservative reaction to Christian writers deploying satire against new targets,³⁰² which presumably included Julian. As such, Ammianus would be rather hamstrung by and reacting to contemporary opinion in his portrayal of Julian, and it further highlights what could be described as the somewhat reactionary nature of the text. Hunt also highlights the "[...] preference for secular over ecclesiastical interpretations"³⁰³ in *Res gestae*, which could very well stem from the fact that Ammianus is actively but discreetly coaching the narrative around Julian (and perhaps paganism in general) to the less destructive option. This also works within the framework of Hayden White and serves as an example of how different events can be linked together in a specific manner, not to mention the previously mentioned point of every narrative being based on the exclusion of sets of events that could have been included.³⁰⁴ Motific characterization is also a prominent feature here, given the dynamic Ammianus chose to exclude.³⁰⁵

³⁰¹ E. D. Hunt, "Christians and Christianity in Ammianus Marcellinus," in *The Classical Quarterly*. 35, no. 1 (1985), 194.

³⁰² Ross, "Ammianus, Traditions of Satire and the Eternity of Rome", 370.

³⁰³ Hunt, "Christians and Christianity", 194.

³⁰⁴ Hayden White, *The Content of the Form*, 10.

³⁰⁵ Hayden White, *Metahistory*, 5-7.

As previously discussed, Julian banned Christians from certain professions, and clearly attempted to dismantle the rising Christian hegemony. Ammianus earlier repeated insistence that Julian did not on any occasion judge anyone more harshly for their religion despite inappropriately asking about it fits oddly into the narrative as well, signaling that it may have been a point of contention. The narrative of Julian, as told by Ammianus, is so clearly in favor of Julian that his specific defenses of Julian speak volumes, and so do his silences.

3.4 The city of Rome and political centers

On an administrative and geopolitical level the Tetrarchy led to some enduring changes, and one of the more significant for the narratological analysis is that the administrative division of the empire had led to the center of power definitively being moved from the city of Rome.³⁰⁶ Ammianus clearly fastened on to this, as the city of Rome features prominently in *Res gestae*, and a significant number of digressions specifically concerns Rome. It is a notable narrative technique, because Constantinople, the “New Rome”, was founded by Constantine in 324 CE.³⁰⁷ While the status of the city developed somewhat haltingly,³⁰⁸ by the time *Res gestae* was written the political center had definitively moved from Rome. Given that Constantine’s personal conversion to Christianity led to the Roman state’s adoption of the religion,³⁰⁹ there are clear religious connotations in the dynamic, which could help explain conspicuous centering of Rome in the narrative.

In the extant books, only Constantius II actually spends time in the city of Rome, albeit briefly. Further considering the established prevalence of Julian in *Res Gestae*, and that he was from the eastern part of the empire, and never set foot in Rome, the lengths Ammianus go to in order to bring Rome into the narrative stand out. During late antiquity, the status of any “capital” was pro tempore and dependent on imperial presence, as the idea of Rome being wherever the emperor is was especially prevalent during this time.³¹⁰ That Ammianus continues to not only center the city in the narrative is peculiar, especially as prominent political centers such as Constantinople, Sirmium, Mediolanum (Milan), Nicomedia, and Augusta Treverorum (Trier) are not given similar prominence in the narrative. Given that Ammianus wrote his history to

³⁰⁶ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 360–362.

³⁰⁷ Lucy Grig & Gavin Kelly, “Introduction: From Rome to Constantinople,” in *Two Romes, Rome and Constantinople in Late Antiquity*, eds. Lucy Grig & Gavin Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3.

³⁰⁸ Brian Coke, “Reinventing Constantinople: Theodosius I’s imprint on the imperial city” in *From the Tetrarchs to the Theodosians: Later Roman History and Culture, 284-450*, eds. Scott McGill, Cristiana Sogno & Edward Watts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 241.

³⁰⁹ Grig & Kelly, “Introduction: From Rome to Constantinople”, 3.

³¹⁰ Grig & Kelly, “Introduction: From Rome to Constantinople”, 6-7.

cover the period of 96 CE onwards, it is possible the prominence of Rome in the narrative is a continuation of the role it played earlier in his history, although this is pure speculation.

Alan Ross underlines that for Ammianus, Rome remained the *urbs aeterna* and the *caput mundi*, which ran counter to the political reality of the 4th century.³¹¹ Ross further makes the case that many, if not most, of the digressions regarding Rome has a satirical character, and links it to satire becoming increasingly popular amongst Christians. He claims Ammianus was likely reacting in a conservative fashion against that, as they were deploying their satire against new targets and removing the genre from its urban roots. By bringing the narrative gaze back to Rome, and speaking about Roman affairs, he also drowned out his silences on Christian Constantinople.³¹² This further highlights how intertwined the religious aspects potentially are in every aspect of the work, including the urban spaces, as well as again underlining the need for contextual information.

Although the religious undertones are presumably a part why Ammianus dedicated so much attention to the city of Rome, it arguably serves a narrative purpose as well. During his multiple digressions on Rome, Ammianus often begin by describing the character and defects of the urban prefect, or whoever else is holding the power the moment, as well as repeatedly excoriating the ruling class. The events at the jewel of the Roman Empire, as well as its decline, is thus often attributed to either the inaction or *exempla* of whoever is in charge. In that sense, it serves as a microcosm of the narrative he has created about the emperors and the empire as a whole. Furthermore, it centers the city of Rome, where he presumably wrote *Res gestae*, in the narrative, as well as showing specific (and possibly satirical) examples of the vices plaguing Rome. He is, by extension, making comments on the state of the empire again. The city of Rome is presumably also a more potent symbol for the decline of old Roman values and power than Constantinople would be. Calling Rome the capital of the world, and leaning heavily on its history, is a narrative tool, drawing a direct line between the state of the city, and its history. Considering Ammianus' frequent references to the late Republican era, and the values he openly espouses, it is a link to "old school values". As previously shown, Ammianus keenly feels the disappearance of these is contributing to the state the empire was in.

Ammianus inserts digressions about Rome repeatedly throughout *Res gestae*. Early in the 14th extant book, Ammianus placed the previously mentioned digression on the faults of the

³¹¹ Ross, "Ammianus and Satire", 369.

³¹² Ross, "Ammianus and Satire", 370.

senate and people of Rome,³¹³ where he lays out how the grandeur, history, and glory of the city is laid low due to the actions of its people. He placed that digression right in the middle of him excoriating the rule of Gallus, and thus it serves an apt narrative vignette to exemplify his points. In the 15th book, Ammianus describes the prefecture of Leontius following the death of Silvanus and execution of his prominent followers, describing how he suppressed riots and deposed a bishop.³¹⁴ Leontius also demonstrated his excellence as a judge.³¹⁵ Immediately following that digression, Julian is appointed *Caesar*.³¹⁶ In the 19th book Ammianus inserts a digression about food riots at Rome, where the fear of famine caused the urban prefect to get threatened with violence. However, the urban prefect managed to calm the rowdy crowd with a sincere speech.³¹⁷ This slightly precedes Julian making two different speeches to his troops, inspiring and preparing them after having been “reluctantly” declared *Augustus*.³¹⁸ In the 26th book, shortly after Valentinian was proclaimed emperor, Ammianus includes a digression about the urban prefecture of Apronian.³¹⁹ Apronian was seriously concerned about magic and sorcerers, and made it his mission to uproot and arrest these, although corruption and slackness occasionally stymied these efforts.³²⁰ Considering that Ammianus proceeded to prominently

³¹³ See page 50, footnote 187.

³¹⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, 15.6: *Silvani amici et conscii necati*.

15.7: *A Leontio praefecto urbi populi R. seditiones repressae. Liborius episcopus sede pulsus*.

³¹⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, 15.7.1: *Dum has exitiorum communium clades suscitatur turbo feralis, urbem aeternam Leontius regens multa spectate iudicis documenta praebebat in audiendo celerior, in disceptando iustissimus, natura beneuolus, licet auctoritatis causa seruandae acer quibusdam uidebatur et inclinior ad damnandum*.

³¹⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus, 15.8: *Iulianus Galli frater a Constantio Aug. fratre patrueli Caesar creatur ac praeficitur Galliis*.

³¹⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, 19.10: *Plebs Romana inopiam frumenti metuens seditiones mouet*.

19.10.1–2: *Dum haec par uarios turbines in orientis extimo festinantur, difficultatem aduentantis inopiae frumentorum urbs uerebatur aeterna uique minacissimae plebis famem ultimum malorum omnium exspectantis subinde Tertullus uezabatur, ea tempestate praefectus, irrationabiliter plane; nec enim per eum steterat, quominus tempore congruo alimenta nauibus ueherentur, quas maris casus asperiores solitis uentorumque procellae reflantium delatas in proximos sinus introire portum Augusti discriminum magnitudine perterrebant*.

³¹⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, 20.5: *Iulianus Augustus contionem habet ad milites*.

21:5: *Iulianus Augustus milites suos alloquitur et in uerba sua uniuersos adigit Constantio Augustu bellum illaturus*.

³¹⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 26.3: *De Aproniani praefectura urbana Romae*.

³²⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus, 26.3.1–3: *Dum haec in oriente uolubiles fatorum explicant sortes, Apronianus regens urbem aeternam, iudex integer et seuerus, inter curarum praecipua, quibus haec praefectura saepe sollicitatur, id primum opera curabat enixa, ut ueneficos, qui tunc rarescebant, captos postque agitates quaestiones nocuisse quibusdam apertissime confutatos indicatos conscii morte multaret atque ita paucorum discrimine reliquos, si qui laterent, formidine parium exturbaret. Haec egisse ideo efficaciter fertur, quod Iuliani promotus arbitrio agentem etiamtum per Syrias in itinere unum amiserat oculum, suspicatusque artibus se nefariis appetitum iusto quidem, sed inusitato dolore haec et alia magna quaeritabat industria. Unde quibusdam atrox uisus est in amphitheatrali curriculo undatim coeunte aliquotiens plebe causas discipicis criminum maximorum. Denique post huiusmodi uindicata complura Hilarinum aurigam conuictum atque confessum uixdum pubescentem filium suum uenefico tradidisse docendum secretiora quaedam legibus interdicta, ut nullo conscio adminiculis iuaretur internis, capitali animaduersione damnauit. Qui laxius retinente carnifice subito lapsus confugit ad ritus Christiani sacrarium abstractusque exinde ilioca abscisa ceruice consumptus est*.

include the prosecution of sorcery and magic in the narratives of the reigns Valentinian and Valens, it is another narrative link. In the 27th book, Ammianus devotes another digression to events at Rome.³²¹ He describes the urban prefects who followed Apronian, some of whom, such as a man called Lampadius, was frequently disturbed by riots and mismanagement.³²² Lampadius' successor has problems with religious violence, due to the competition for the episcopal throne becoming bloody. Ammianus further claims the powerful and wealthy in the city might become truly happy if they stopped paying attention to the greatness of the city, which they use a cloak for their vices, and embrace a frugal lifestyle.³²³ Narratively, this coincides with Valens turbulent reign, which as previously established was plagued by excess and violence, and the empire coming under renewed pressure at the frontiers.³²⁴ In the 28th book, he dedicates a chapter to the aforementioned trials and executions at Rome for sorcery. This precedes the trials and executions at Antioch that Valens presided over. The unlawful executions and torture at Rome are described by Ammianus as a blot on the fair face of the Eternal City,³²⁵ which ties heavily into the previously treated abuse of authority. It exemplifies the narrative ties that Ammianus methodically created between these different people and events, and how he skillfully weaves them together to create a nuanced and highly critical narrative. Ammianus dedicates another digression to the vices of Roman society in the 28th book,³²⁶ during the prefecture of Olybrius. He had plenty of good qualities, but all of these were overshadowed by a defect that was discreditable in a high official. He was a pleasure-seeker

³²¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 27.3: *De III praefectis urbi: Symmacho, Lampadio et Viuentio. Sub eo Damasi et Vrsini de episcopatu Romano contentiones.*

³²² Ammianus Marcellinus, 27.3.5: *Aduenit post hunc urbis moderator Lampadius ex praefecto praetorio, homo indignanter admodum usstinens, si, etiam cum spueret, non laudaretur ut id quoque prudenter praeter alios faciens, sed nonnumquam seuerus et frugi.*

27.3.8: *Hic praefectus exagitatus est motibus crebris, uno omnium maximo, cum collecta plebs infima domum eius prope Constantinianum lauacrum iniectis facibus incenderat et malleolis, ni uicinorum et familiarium ueloci concursu a summis tectorum culminibus petita saxis et tegulis abscessisset.*

27.3.11-12: *Aduenit successor eius ex quaesitore palatii Viuentius, integer et prudens Pannonius, cuius administratione quieta fuit et placida copia rerum omnium fluente. Sed hunc quoque discordantis populi seditiones terrere curentae, quae tale negotium excitauere. Damasus et Vrsinus supra humanum modum ad rapiendam episcopi sedem ardentis scissis studiis asperrime conflictabant ad usque mortis uulnerumque discrimina adiumentis utriusque progressis, quae nec corrigere sufficiens Viuentius nec mollire coactus ui magna secessit in suburbanum.*

³²³ Ammianus Marcellinus, 27.3.15: *Qui esse poterant beati re uera, si magnitudine urbis despecta, quam uitii opponunt, ad imitationem antistitum quorundam prouincialium uiuerent, quos tenuitas edendi potandique parcissime, uilitas etiam indumentorum et spercilia humum spectantia perpetuo numini uerisque eius cultoribus ut puros commendant et uerecundos. Hactenus deuiasse sufficient, nunc ad rerum ordines reuertamur.*

³²⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, 27.1: *Alamanni fuis acie Romanis Chariettonem et Seuerianum comites interficiunt.*

³²⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, 28.1.36: *Per haec et alia simili maerore deflenda, quae decolorabant speciem urbis aeternae, grassabatur per strages multiplices fortunarum homo cum gemitu nominandus ultra forenses terminos semet extentans.*

³²⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus, 28.4: *De Olybrii et Ampelii praefectura urbana et de uitii senatus populique Romani.*

whose private life verged on the luxurious, and dedicated significant amount of time to women. It is a lengthy digression, and Ammianus excoriates both the nobility and commoners for their gluttony, excess, corruption, ignorance and arrogance at length,³²⁷ which in many respects reiterates the points he made in the 14th book. This digression is situated during the reign of Valentinian and Valens, notably not long after he dedicated an entire chapter to the cruelty, savagery and irascibility of Valentinian,³²⁸ as well as the debauchery and excess that defined their reigns. The trials at Rome and Antioch, where corruption and abuse were prominently displayed, take place in the 28th and 29th books as well. In many respects, the digressions concerning Rome serve as a microcosm and narrative vignette of the larger narratives Ammianus constructs, exemplifying and supporting the points he makes about the empire as a whole. It ties into the character and action of the rulers, how authority is wielded both in Rome, how the actions of the emperor can directly affect the populace of this highly symbolical city directly and indirectly, and how intertwined religion could be in all these contexts. Ammianus uses the digressions about Rome to underline his social and political criticism, using the highly symbolic setting of Rome for narrative purposes.

³²⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, 28.4.2: *Sed obnubilabat haec omnia uitium parum quidem nocens rei communi, sed in alto iudice maculosum, quod citiorem uitam paene omnen uergentem in luxum per argumenta scaenica amoresque peregerat nec uetitos nec incestos.*

28.4.6: *Et primo nobilitatis, ut aliquotiens pro locorum copia fecimus, dein plebis digeremus errata incidentia ueloci constringentes excessu.*

28.4.12: *Horum domus otiose quidam garruli frequentant uariis assentandi figmentis ad singula ulterioris fortunae uerba plaudentes parasitorum in comoediis facetias affectando.*

28.4.14–15: *Quidam detestantes ut uenena doctrinas Iuuenalem et Marium Maximum curatiore studio legunt, nulla uolumina praeter haec in profundo otio contrectantes, quam ob causam non iudicium est nostri, cum multa et uaria pro amplitudine gloriarum et generum lectitare deberent audientes destinatum poenae Socraten coniectumque in carcerem rogasse quendam scite lyrici carmen Stesichiori modulantem, ut doceretur id agree, dum liceret, interroganteque musico, quid ei poterit hoc prodesse morituro postridie, respondisse, ut aliquid sciens amplius e uita discedat.*

28.4.28: *Nunc ad otiosam plebem ueniamus et desidem.*

³²⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, 27.7: *Valentiniani Augusti iracundia, feritas et saeuitia*

4 Summary and conclusion

In conclusion, Ammianus' assertion that he has produced a work without conscious bias, omissions, or falsehoods is highly questionable. Ammianus wrote with purpose and with the benefit of hindsight; this is clear from e.g. comments he makes, and the fact that the narration and action are often not synchronized. He is a highly allusive and manipulative author through narrative focalization has created a work full of social and political criticism. He selectively weaves different narrative threads together, and through a narratological analysis the focalization of the text can be shown and understood in a manner that a biographical reading does not allow. Older research disregarded the value of *Res gestae* as a source and the Latinity of Ammianus precisely because of their biographical approach, as well as biased reading stemming from their opinion on his Latinity.

The thesis leaned strongly on the narrative framework put forward by Hayden White. The framework, although slightly adapted and expanded with the Classic field, was well suited to analyze the structure and purpose of the narratives in *Res gestae*. These are strongly rooted in both the background and character of Ammianus, as well as contemporary social, political, and religious developments, which necessitates a contextual and historical overview. The narrative focus of *Res gestae* is strongly focused on the imperial males, which links to the centralization of power during the fourth century and the role of the emperor as a symbol for the empire. Their character, prowess, religion, and actions are crucial to the well-being of the Roman Empire. Hayden White emphasized certain narrative "questions", e.g. the connecting questions that make a story followable, and the questions dealing with the whole of the story. Ammianus frequently used motific characterization in his narratives, and he clearly had a purpose when writing his text. Concerning what the point of the text was, a clear central narrative theme throughout the *Res gestae* is Ammianus propagating what a ruler should be like, emphasizing certain character traits and behaviors. He links this strongly to the state of affairs, as an emperor who was prone to violence, excess, cruelty, or averse to learning could not provide proper leadership, thus causing harm to the empire. The character and virtues of the emperor is linked to how he wields his authority and the effect this has on the empire, as well as the people he surrounds himself with. An emperor who surrounds himself with eunuchs and flatterers, lends them his ear, and empowers bad subordinates actively weakens or harms the empire. Julian is the shining example, somewhat diminished by context of writing, but still acting as an overarching narrative center that signals what is needed to restore the empire, or at the very least avert utter disaster. The narrative also fragments following the death of Julian,

with the empire in turmoil and the emperors being unworthy successors of Julian. The narrative corresponded to the turbulence engulfing the empire. *Res gestae* is a didactic and reactionary response to the context of writing, serving as a blueprint for others to follow. In the vein of the former masters, most notably Cicero, Ammianus has created a work highlighting the value of learning from history.

The results of the thesis largely aligns with the broader conclusions similar research has arrived at. John Weisweiler emphasized three different ways that modern research has approached the narrative issues in *Res gestae*.³²⁹ Using the theoretical framework of Hayden White, among others, this thesis clearly positions itself closest to the third view, namely that there are signs of partisanship, and that Ammianus distorted facts due to his sympathies towards e.g. Julian. All three approaches could conceivably be incorporated into the framework, like for example the inability to create a consistent chain of events and how that influences the “creation” of these stories. However, as has been argued throughout the thesis, the narrative discrepancies are not necessarily merely the result of implicit bias, but a carefully structured social and political commentary. It is a reactionary attempt at creating a didactic work by a purposeful and manipulative author. This was already showcased concerning eunuchs and the manner in which Ammianus weaves them into the narrative; the same principle can be applied to all the narratives contained within *Res gestae*. It may be a sign of both implicit and explicit bias, but they are also used as narrative leverage and criticism towards certain subjects. A biased portrayal and a carefully constructed critical narrative are mutually exclusive.

Ammianus leans heavily on texts and *exempla* from especially the late Republican era, as well as prominently highlighting certain values in his text. These old-school Roman virtues have been lost by the people of Rome, and need to reclaim these in order for the empire to recover. A work full of nuanced and historical allusions, as well as overlaying this with an excoriating review of what the situation in the empire during the late fourth century CE, strengthen his points. These require proper background and context to grasp, and need to be understood in relation to each other. The subjects covered in the thesis do not encompass all possible narratives or all the ways Ammianus has created a highly subjective and critical work; the scope of that would simply be too large. Instead, the focus has been on the social and political aspects and concerns, how Ammianus with purpose structured and wove these together, resulting in an implicitly and explicitly subjective historical account.

³²⁹ See page 15, footnote 64.

Summary in Swedish - Svensk sammanfattning

Opus Veritatem Professum – Narrativ, syfte, och metod i Ammianus Marcellinus *Res gestae*

Ammianus Marcellinus (330–395 e.Kr.) var en romersk historiker som var aktiv under tidsperioden som idag klassas som senantiken. Han författade ett omfattande historieverk på latin, *Res gestae*. Det bestod ursprungligen av troligtvis 31 böcker, vilka behandlade tiden från 96 till 378 e.Kr. Idag återstår dock endast 18 av dem, vilka behandlar åren 353–378 e.Kr. *Res gestae* är ett av de få idag kvarvarande litterära verken från tidsperioden i fråga som inte har en kristen upphovsman, och diskussionen om dess källvärde har därför en speciell betydelse.

Ammianus Marcellinus färdigheter som författare och historiker, samt *Res gestaes* källvärde, har diskuterats flitigt i flera århundraden. Diskursen har gått igenom olika skeden, men under 1800- och tidiga 1900-talet ansågs Ammianus vara en undermålig författare i jämförelse med sina klassiska föregångare. Det resulterade även i att *Res gestaes* källvärde avfärdades. Under sent 1900-tal och under 2000-talet har Ammianus språkfärdigheter identifierats och omvärderats, och uppfattningen om honom som författare och historiker förändrats drastiskt. Idag betraktas han som en framstående historiker och en manipulativ författare, som med hjälp av allusioner och ögonvittnesmål författade ett nyanserat historieverk med stor betydelse.

Syftet med avhandlingen är att göra en narratologisk analys av de kvarvarande böckerna av historieverket. Sedan 1980-talet har narratologi blivit ett allt vanligare och mer framträdande redskap inom det klassiska fältet, och har bidragit till att synliggöra dimensioner hos texter som en biografisk metod inte kan. Ammianus skriver i slutet av *Res gestae* att han gjort sitt bästa för att skapa ett objektiva historieverk utan medvetna osanningar och utelämnanden. Syftet med avhandlingen är därmed att med hjälp av narratologi analysera huruvida det stämmer, eller om han använder *Res gestae* för att framföra social och politisk kritik. Mer specifikt handlar det om hurdana narrativ han skapat, hur han skapat dem, och vad deras syfte är. Det var en turbulent tid i Romarrikets historia, och det reflekteras troligtvis starkt i texten. Hurdana problem han lyfter fram, och vad han föreslår kunde göras åt dem, är en röd tråd genom analysen.

Avhandlingens metod och teori förankras i Hayden Whites *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europa*. Han har i det verket framlagt hur historiker använder sig av narratologi för att nå sina mål. Han skiljer på ”berättelser” och

krönikor, där krönikor i princip närmast fungerar som en lista på händelser. De har med andra ord ingen funktion, de är bara där. En berättelse är däremot organiserad och har en början, mitt, och ett slut. Historikern karaktäriserar händelserna och ger dem innebörd. Samtidigt avfärdar han idén om att en historiker "hittar" sina berättelser, medan en skönlitterär författare "hittar på" sina. Han anser att det döljer rollen som "uppfinring" har i historikerns arbete. Berättelser väcker också frågor som historikern måste förutse och besvara, frågor som vad hände, hur det hände, varför det hände på ett sätt istället för ett annat, och hur det slutade. Han skiljer också mellan dessa frågor, som handlar om hur berättelsen hänger ihop, och frågor som berör det slutgiltiga verket. Dessa frågor berör vad syftet med hela berättelsen är. En narratologisk analys kräver också en kontextuell förankring, det vill säga bakgrund och kontext för att förstå fenomenet i berättelsen.

Avhandlingen har en tematisk disposition och fokuserar huvudsakligen på några centrala narrativ som löper igenom hela historieverket. Mest framträdande är framställningen och behandlingen av kejsarna, men Ammianus använder sig även av annat för att framhäva sina poänger. Utöver kejsarna granskas därför hur eunucker, auktoritet och dess missbruk, religion, och politiska center såsom staden Rom och Konstantinopel används i narrativa syften.

Ammianus lägger stor vikt på kejsarens karaktär och gärningar, och Julianus fungerar i princip som huvudkaraktären i de kvarvarande böckerna av *Res gestae*. Hans tid som Caesar och senare Augustus sträcker sig genom majoriteten av de kvarvarande böckerna, och efter hans död fungerar han som jämförelseobjekt för de enligt Ammianus sämre kejsarna som regerade efter Julianus. Genom att spjälka upp analysen om kejsarna i en del som fokuserar på Julianus och en som fokuserar på alla andra framhävs Julianus centrala roll i narrativet. Ammianus skapar ett fördelaktigt narrativ när det kommer till Julianus, där den nästan enda kritiken handlar om vissa religiösa aspekter där Julianus enligt Ammianus går för långt. Som den sista hedniska kejsaren som försökte återuppväcka och förstärka de hedniska religionerna kritiserades Julianus starkt i kristna kretsar. Några årtionden efter Julianus död hade den kristna hegemonin redan etablerats, och statsstödda hedniska religioner var i princip icke-existerande. Den sociopolitiska och religiösa kontexten Ammianus var verksam i gör det troligt att han försökte uppnå en balansgång där han försökte rehabilitera Julianus anseende, medan han samtidigt försökte spela ner de mer kontroversiella aspekterna. Genom ledande kommentarer, fördelaktiga (och till viss grad missvisande) förklaringar, historiska allusioner, och lovprisande anekdoter skapar Ammianus ett subjektivt narrativ som är fördelaktigt för Julianus. Ett ytterligare syfte med det är att skapa ett didaktiskt och moraliskt vägvisande verk för efterkommande kejsare, där också

”gamla romerska” värderingar är centrala. Undervisande och normskapande historieverk är även något som Cicero, vars verk Ammianus uppvisar stor kunskap om och som han hänvisar till upprepade gånger, redan under romerska republiken hade framhåvt.

De övriga kejsarna, det vill säga Gallus, Constantius II, Jovianus, Valentinianus, och Valens används på många sätt som motpoler till Julianus i narrativet. Jämförelserna är stundvis direkta, men de innefattade kommentarerna i texten synliggörs genom den narratologiska analysen. Deras gärningar, karaktärsdrag, och temperament gör dem ovärdiga som kejsare, och resulterar ofta i att Romarriket försvagas eller tar skada. De används för att bygga upp Julianus, samtidigt som Julianus används som ett narrativt inslag för att skoningslöst kritisera dem. Till skillnad från Julianus låter de övriga kejsarna olika aktörer påverka dem och vrida deras sinnen, vilket stundvis har förödande konsekvenser för både befolkningen och riket. Eunucker används som ett påtagligt narrativt exempel på ruttna aktörer. De är både ett resultat av och symptom på rikets och hovets nedgång och korruption, och de används för att i hårda ordalag kritisera i synnerhet Constantius II. Dålig makt lockar även till sig dåliga underordnande, och de andra kejsarna gör det möjligt för ruttna aktörer att agera i princip ohindrat. Det är missbruk av auktoritet, och resultatet är bland annat att otaliga oskyldiga torteras, avrättas, förslavas, och landsförvisas. Maktsträvan och politik resulterar även i att framstående och högt uppsatta individer faller offer för det. Kejsarnas inflytande och makt är omfattande, och dålig makt sipprar ner.

Inbakat i dessa narrativ är en religiös dynamik. Julianus var den sista hedniska kejsaren, och Ammianus var av allt att döma också en anhängare av de hedniska religionerna. Det syns i både värderingar och gärningar, och centralt är även att Ammianus författade *Res gestae* i en överhängande kristen kontext. Hans tystnader och tvetydiga kommentarer på vissa frågor är därför slående, samtidigt som parallella källor visar hur tydligt han försökt minimera den religiösa polemiken och Julianus försök att begränsa kristendomens inflytande. Den religiösa dimensionen är återkommande i narrativen i *Res gestae*.

Ammianus centrerar också staden Rom i narrativet. Han använder det som en konkretisering och exemplifiering av stora delar av hans narrativa kritik – han framhäver stadsprefekten och dess roll, befolkningens värderingar, och hur dessa påverkar staden och samhället. Det kunde framställas som en narrativ teknik för att understryka och konkretisera kritiken och poängerna som är inbakade i narrativet i resten av *Res gestae*.

Res gestae är med andra ord inte ett objektivt historieverk framställt utan medvetna osanningar och utlämnanden, utan ett reaktionärt verk med normbildande och didaktisk syfte. Han har skapat och vävt samman flertalet narrativa trådar, och riktar omfattande kritik mot makthavarna och samhällsordningen. Han framhäver äldre traditionella värderingar, eftersom han uppfattar att de nutida makthavarna och kejsarna, med undantag av Julianus, hänger sig åt överflöd, lyx, och korrruption.

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