
Graz

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When Athanaric, chieftain of the Theruingi Goths, had a makeshift defensive barrier constructed in the hopes of protecting himself from an attack by the oncoming Huns, we are told that the Huns would have broken through this barrier and overrun Athanaric had they not been weighed down by spoils.¹ Walls did not guarantee safety and security (cf. Amm. 31.15.7–15). In fact, they had often proved ineffective against skilled besiegers, as Ammianus subsequently empha-

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¹ Amm. 31.3.7–8; cf. den Boeft et al. 2018: 47–9.
sizes when discussing the Gothic invasion that the Emperor Decius had faced in the Balkans in the mid third century CE, which saw several Roman cities in Thrace and Macedonia captured and set ablaze. As Ammianus consistently illustrates throughout the *Res Gestae*, well-led and organized and effective forces were the best ‘walls’ that the Romans could provide against military threats, a view that is at the very heart of Book 31. Debate on this book, in terms of its individual parts and as a whole, will surely continue, and in this effort scholars will find the philological and historical commentary on Book 31 a vital resource.

One of the many contributions that this commentary makes is its careful and informed analysis of one of Ammianus’ most famous and important ethnographic sections: his discussion of the Huns and Alans in a double digression (Amm. 31.2; den Boeft et al. 2018: 11–38). For this alone, the four Dutch commentators, or *Quadriga Batauorum*, of den Boeft, Drijvers, den Hengst, and Teitler deserve our thanks. Ammianus immediately followed 31.2 with other sections that explained the impact of the Huns on the migrations of different groups of Goths across the Danube into Thrace in 376/7 (Amm. 31.3–4; den Boeft et al. 2018: 39–79), sections which provide the context of the coming Battle of Hadrianople and prepare readers for it quite effectively. Given that the Huns played a prominent role in events that ultimately led to this battle, which proved so disastrous to Roman forces in the East, it is surprising and disappointing that Ammianus did not say more about them in the remaining chapters of Book 31. And what is said about both Hun and Alan conforms to well-worn tropes and stock claims about barbarians, as the Dutch commentators (2018: 11–13) well note. And yet, Ammianus remains one of the most important literary sources on these peoples and the pressures that they brought to bear against the Roman Empire (Jordanes and Priscus are others).

No less important in Book 31 are Ammianus’ depictions of the behavior of Roman generals, in particular Lupicinus and Maximus, *hombres maculosi* (31.4.9), and the role that they played in alienating the Goths in the lead up to Hadrianople: *quorun insidiatrix auditas materia malorum omnium fuit* (31.4.10). Ammianus, among other things, artfully presents Lupicinus at a dinner party (31.5.4–6) – so often the scene for betrayal and carnage, in the *Res Gestae* and elsewhere –, where he ‘was wilting due to drink and inactivity’ (*uiino marcebat et somno*, 31.5.6) at a time when the situation between Roman and Goth was tense. Lupicinus then made matters worse with his poor response to the Gothic depredations that followed his bloody actions at the banquet (31.5.7–9), and is called an ‘unfortunate general’ (*ducem infaustum*) who was only interested in saving himself. As the *Quadriga* (2018: 94) has observed, this portrayal is completely at odds with Ammianus’ earlier treatment of Lupicinus in Book 27. More striking, however, is his treatment of Lupicinus even earlier in Book 20, where Ammianus grants him the rare and positive

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1 Amm. 31.5.16–17; cf. den Boeft et al. 2018: 103–6.
3 Amm. 31.5.9; cf. den Boeft et al. 2018: 93–4.
adjective *bellicosus* – that is, one who was anything but drunk and inactive –, which the Latin historian reserves for particular generals and emperors in the *Res Gestae*. Moreover, we might see in Ammianus’ use of *dux infaustus* a subtle allusion to Book 24, where Julian’s army in Persia is shown being led astray by unfavorable guides (*infaustis duxoribus a praeuiis*, 24.7.3). If this is indeed a subtle allusion, then the message in Book 31 is even clearer: Lupicinus had led Roman forces in the wrong direction and seriously hurt the Roman cause.

Another notable contribution of this commentary, and in connection with Gothic challenges to Roman security in Thrace, is its analysis of Ammianus’ description of Gratian, especially in contrast to Valens, and the itinerary of the western emperor as he moved eastward in a bid to aid his uncle and eastern colleague before Roman and Goth clashed at Hadrianople (den Boeft et al. 2018: XIX–XXI, 173–78, 192–3). In fact, the Dutch commentators focus carefully on Gratian’s movements and their duration (which they date to June and July 378), and rightly so, since his activities cost valuable time that prevented him from coming to Valens’ aid in early August 378.

As a whole, Book 31 has been seen as something of a puzzle. Here I am thinking of Kulikowski’s (2012) conclusion, that Book 31 was originally conceived and produced as a standalone monograph at Antioch, and in Greek, not Latin. The *Quadriga* has found this position not only unattractive but also untenable (den Boeft et al. 2018: IX), though they might have engaged with his arguments more. In connection with Kulikowski’s thesis, readers will wonder what the commentators think about Rees’ (2014) recent suggestion (not cited), that Ammianus’ lost Books 1–13 are not lost because he did not actually write them, a view that can properly be referred to as «the nuclear option». Questions thus arise about whether Ammianus misled us by design or simply failed to complete a work that was too much for him. If Rees is correct, then Book 31 is in fact

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2 See also J.W. Drijvers and H.C. Teitler, ‘Gratian’s Campaign against the Lentienses and his Journey to Thrace (Ammianus Marcellinus 31.10 & 31.11.6) A New Chronology’, Historia 68 (2019), 115–24, which corrects N. Lenski, ‘Failure of Empire: Valens and the Roman State in the Fourth Century A.D.’ (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 2002), 366, n. 234, who misidentifies the Bononia near Sirmium as modern Vidin instead of as Banoštor. Ammianus’ geography is in no way confused at 31.11.6, cf. 21.9.6. But he is not as detailed as we would like when relating Gratian’s and other emperors’ journeys, such as at 31.12.4: *…Gratianum…ipsum quoque venturum mox*… How we interpret the vague *mox* here is critical.
4 Woods also noted this in his own review (see above); cf. p. 529 n. 1 below.
5 In characterizing R. Rees, ‘Intertitles as deliberate misinformation in Ammianus Marcellinus’, in L. Jansen (ed.), ‘The Roman Paratext: Frames, Texts, Readers’ (Cambridge, 2014), 129–42 as «the nuclear option». I am quoting Alan Ross, who described it as such in a personal communication to me. I thank Alan for drawing my attention to this critical, thought-provoking piece.
Book 18, a conclusion that directly impacts Kulikowski’s thesis of Book 31 as a separate monograph. For, if Ammianus did indeed fail to write his earlier books, then the eighteen books that we have neatly form three hexads (Rees 2014: 142). Furthermore, Book 31, as distinct as it is, still shows some connectivity with the previous books, enough so, in fact, that we can see it as a capstone, as a not unfitting end to the Res Gestae. In support of viewing Books 14–31 (or 1–18) as written as a unified whole, we might consider some common themes and points of contact between Book 14 and Book 31 that Kulikowski (2012: 86–7) did not consider, in addition to the relationship I suggested above between 31.5.9 and 24.7.3.

With Inter haec Fortunae uolucris rota (31.1.1),1 Ammianus began Book 31 with the role of fickle fortune in Roman affairs, just as he had (or would) Book 14 (...Fortunae saeuientes procellae, 14.1.1), that is, with turbulent events at Antioch under the vindictive Valens Augustus and the cruel Gallus Caesar respectively, though Valens’ actions at Antioch were more detailed in Book 29.2 In addition to Fortuna at 14.1 and 31.1, the subsequent chapters of Books 14 and 31 show some overlap in their organization and content, they comprise discussions of the movements and impacts of foreign peoples in and on the Eastern Empire: Isaurians (14.2), Persians (14.3), and Saracens (14.4); and Huns and Alans (31.2–3) and Thervingi and Greuthungi Goths (31.4–5). In Book 14, Constantius II is shown campaigning against some Alamanni in the West (14.10), as is Gratian in Book 31 against the Alamannic Lentienses (31.10), though more actively and successfully. There is even a verbal echo of Book 14 in Book 31 in the rare cunctator et cautus (31.12.6, cf. 14.10.14).3 And Book 14 ends with the execution of Gallus Caesar in the Balkans and its immediate aftermath, a section that includes a necrology on the Caesar (14.11), while Book 31 closes with an elaborate telling of the death of Valens at Hadrianople, a necrology on the Augustus, and the consequences (31.13–16). To be sure, Book 31 has its own peculiarities and narrative flow, but there is a partial structural and thematic symmetry between Book 14 and Book 31 that is discernible and that cannot be dismissed easily. This is not to say that Book 31 was not originally conceived as a separate monograph, only that, for all its uniqueness, there is still much of Book 31 that conforms to Ammianus’ historiographical approach in Book 14 and that connects it to rather than separates it from the

1 Cf. Amm. 22.1.1: Dum haec in diversa parte terrarum fortunae struunt uolubiles casus; 26.8.13: Ea victoria ultra homines sese Procopius efferen et ignorans, quod quidem beatus uersa rota Fortunae ante nesperum potest esse miserrimus. See den Boeft et al. 2018: 1, who note Ammianus’ use of Inter haec to open 31.1.1 and the similar Dum haec at 22.1.1, and in so doing focus on this similarity as a point in favor of seeing the Res Gestae as an intelligible and unified whole; cf. Kulikowski 2012: 83–4. Ammianus’ writing of Book 31 initially as a separate monograph and its connectivity and unity with the remaining books need not be mutually exclusive.


3 See Marcos 2015: 691. Note also 31.10.22, where Ammianus portrays Gratian’s general Frigeridus in positive terms and without an ut: dux cautus et diligens.
earlier books, regardless of which one it was that he wrote first and how. In short, both Books 14 and 31 display a similar kind of Grundriss, which supports a unified whole.

When Ammianus moved to close Book 31 and the Res Gestae, he told his readers approvingly about the effectiveness of the Roman general Julius, which was distinguished across the Taurus mountains as advantageous and timely (His diebus efficacia Iulii magistri militiae trans Taurum enituit salutaris et velex, 31.16.8). For one, the Dutch commentators state that «Efficacia implies high praise» (den Boeft et al. 2018: 292); but we can go further: it is high praise (see Marcos 2015: 680–1 and n. 41). Moreover, Ammianus’ phrase trans Taurus has exercised many observers, some of whom have taken it to indicate that the historian viewed the actions of Julius from the perspective of one resident in Antioch,1 a conclusion that the Quadriga (2018: 291) rejects in favor of Rome as the point of reference. One might also see Rome as the point of reference at 31.5.12, where Ammianus notes the serious danger that the Cimbri and Teutones had posed to Italy, but the debate shall continue on where and when he composed Book 31.

To conclude, students and scholars of Ammianus owe the four Dutch commentators a great debt of gratitude, and they will continue to do so for years to come. But we are not saying farewell to Ammianus, whose philological and historical value will continue to be assessed and refined, and thanks in no small part to what these commentators have accomplished. The commentators should be commended for their extraordinary scholarship and efforts. Ammianus, too, would have been proud. Let us end by offering a fitting tribute to both: bis enim uirtutem oportet esse contentam, quae sudore quaesiuit et dexter-is (Amm. 17.13.31).

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‘Polemica’, un recueil de vingt-et-une contributions parues entre 1960 et 2016 et d’un inédit, se situe donc dans cette thématique. Ces études, précédées d’une inédit,

1 Kulikowski 2012: 96; Kelly 2018: 144–45.