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Ammianus and Constantius: The Portrayal of a Tyrant in the *Res Gestae*

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Sean Robert Williams entitled "Ammianus and Constantius: The Portrayal of a Tyrant in the *Res Gestae*." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in History.

Michael Kulikowski, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Maura Lafferty, Christine Shepardson

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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AMMIANUS AND CONSTANTIUS:
THE PORTRAYAL OF A TYRANT IN THE *RES GESTAE*

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Sean Robert Williams

December 2009

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that the late Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus used his portrayal of the emperor Constantius II (r. 337-361) as a response to Christian polemic against the pagan emperor Julian (r. 361-363). It argues that, based on the similarities between Ammianus' account of Constantius and some Christian polemical accounts of Julian, the *Res Gestae* should be seen as part of the broader discourse between Christians and pagans that began after the death of Valens at Adrianople in 378. By examining the narrative similarities Ammianus shares with several of his prominent Christian contemporaries—notably Gregory of Nazianzus, Ephrem, and John Chrysostom—this thesis shows by accumulation of evidence that a relationship between the two is probable.

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ABBREVIATIONS

All journal abbreviations are as in *L'Année Philologique*. Abbreviations of primary sources and reference works in the footnotes are as follows. When the author of a work is mentioned in the body of the text, only the name of the work is given in the note.

Ambr., *De ob. Theod.* Ambrosius Mediolanensis. *De obitu Theodosii*. O. Faller, ed. *CSEL* 73. Vienna, 1955: 371-401.

—, ***Ep. Epistulae***. O. Faller and M. Zelzer, eds. *CSEL* 82 (1 vol. in 3). Vienna, 1968-90.

Ambrosiaster, *Comm. in II Thess.* In *Commentarius in Pauli epistulas ad Galatas, ad Ephesios, ad Philippenses, ad Colossenses, ad Thessalonicenses, ad Timotheum, ad Titum, ad Philomonem (recensiones alpha et gamma)*. H.J. Vogels, ed. *CSEL* 81.3. Vienna, 1969: 235-248.

Amm. Ammianus Marcellinus. *Res Gestae qui libri supersunt*. W. Seyfarth, ed. 2 vols. Leipzig, 1978.

Aur. Vict. *Sextus Avrelius Victor: De Caesaribus*. F. Pichlmayr, ed. Leipzig, 1966: 77-129.

CCSL *Corpus Christianorum, series latina*. Turnhout.

CSEL *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*. Vienna.

Eph., *CJ* Ephrem. *Hymns against Julian*, in McVey (1987), 221-257, and Lieu (1989), 105-

128. Except where noted, McVey's translation (from Syriac) is the one used in the notes.

Epit. de Caes. *Epitome de Caesaribus*. In *Sextus Avrelius Victor: De Caesaribus*. F. Pichlmayr, ed. Leipzig, 1966: 133-176.

Eunap., *Vit. Soph.* *Eunapii vitae sophistarum*. J. Giangrade, ed. Rome, 1956.

Eutropius *Breviarum ab urbe condita*. C. Santini, ed. Leipzig, 1979.

- Festal Index** *Histoire «Acéphale» et Index Syriaque des Lettres Festale d’Athanasie d’Alexandrie*, A. Martin and M. Albert, eds. Paris, 1985: 215-331.
- Festus** *The Breviarium of Festus: A Critical Edition with Historical Commentary*. J.W. Eadie, ed. London, 1967: 43-69.
- Greg. Naz., Or. IV/IV** Grégoire de Nazianze. *Discours 4-5: Contre Julien*. J. Bernardi, ed. Paris, 1983.
- , **Or. XXI** *Discours 20-23*. J. Mossay, ed. Paris, 1980: 86-193.
- Hist. Aceph.** *Histoire «Acéphale» et Index Syriaque des Lettres Festale d’Athanasie d’Alexandrie*. A. Martin, ed. Paris, 1985: 11-213.
- Jer., Chron.** Hieronymus. *Die Chronik des Hieronymus*. R. Helm, ed. In *Eusebius Werke*, vol. 7.1. Leipzig, 1913.
- , **Ep.** *Correspondance*. J. Labourt, ed. 8 vols. Paris, 1949-1963.
- Jn. Chrys., De Babyla** *Critical edition of, and introduction to, St. John Chrysostom’s “De Sancto Babyla, contra Iulianum et gentiles.”* M. Schatkin, ed. Diss. Fordham, 1967: 1-106.
- Jul.** L’empereur Julien. *Ouevres complètes*. C. Lacombrade and J. Bidez, eds. 2 vols. in 4. Paris, 1932-1964.
- Lib., Or.** *Libanii opera*, vols. 1-4. R. Foerster, ed. Leipzig, 1903-1908.
- Philost.** Philostorgius. *Kirchengeschichte*. F. Winkelmann and J. Bidez, eds. 3rd ed. Berlin, 1981.
- PLRE** A.H.M. Jones et al. (1971). *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire. Vol. 1: A.D. 260-395*. Cambridge.

- Prud., *Apoth.*** Prudence. *Apotheosis (Traité de la nature de Dieu). Hamartigenia. (De l'origine du mal)*. M. Lavarenne, ed. Paris, 1961: 5-39.
- Ruf., *HE*** Rufinus. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. T. Mommsen, ed. In *Eusebius: Werke*, vol. 2. Leipzig, 1908.
- Soc.** Socrate de Constantinople. *Histoire ecclésiastique*. P. Maraval and P. Périchon, eds. 3 vols. Paris, 2004-2007.
- Soz.** Sozomenus. *Kirchengeschichte*. J. Bidez and G.C. Hansen, eds. Berlin, 1960.
- Suet.** C. Suetonius Tranquillus. *De uita Caesarum*. M. Ihm, ed. Leipzig, 1908.
- Symm.** *Q. Aurelii Symmachi quae supersunt*. O. Seeck, ed. *MGH AA* 6.1. Berlin, 1883.
- Tac., *Ann.*** Tacitus. *Annales*. H. Heubner, ed. 2 vols. Leipzig, 1994.
- Them., *Or.*** Themistius. *Orationes*. H. Schenkl, G. Downey and A.F. Norman, eds. 3 vols. Leipzig, 1965-1974.
- Theod., *HE*** Theodoret. *Kirchengeschichte*. L. Parmentier, ed. Leipzig, 1911.
- Zon.** Ioannes Zonaras. *Epitome Historiarum Libri XVIII*. B.G. Niebuhr, ed. 3 vols. Bonn, 1897.
- Zos.** Zosime. *Histoire nouvelle*. F. Paschoud, ed. 5 vols. in 3. Paris, 1971-2003.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One of the most striking features of Ammianus Marcellinus' *Res Gestae* is its almost entirely negative portrayal of the emperor Constantius II. Traditionally, scholars have usually attributed the historian's resentment towards the emperor to Constantius' perceived mistreatment, and eventual dismissal, of Ammianus' patron, the *magister peditum* Ursicinus, in 360.¹ This thesis will not deny that Ammianus long remained bitter over the sacking of his patron. Instead, it will seek additional motives behind Ammianus' vehement condemnation of Constantius, motives that can be situated in the context in which the historian wrote in the 380s. It seems likely that, after the marked increase of polemic against Julian that occurred after the death of Valens in August 378, Ammianus chose to depict Constantius in a way that responded to the criticisms to which some Christian authors had subjected Ammianus' hero Julian.² Like the Julian we find in the works of Gregory of Nazianzus, Ephrem, and John Chrysostom, Ammianus' Constantius is a militarily inept, easily manipulated tyrant whose death had been ordained by the heavens. Each chapter will begin by examining how Ammianus portrayed a particular aspect of Constantius' personality, as well as the relationship between these depictions. Contemporary Christian sources that deal with a similar aspect of Julian's personality will then be examined, and in the end of each chapter the Christian texts will be compared with the *Res*

¹ Beginning with Thompson (1947), 47-55, and remaining prevalent, to cite only a few examples: Sabbah (1978), 471-475; Vogler (1979), 42-43; Matthews (1989), 35; Whitby (1999), 77; Kelly (2008), 44-52.

² Kelly (2008), 59-61, has noted elsewhere Ammianus' alterations of detail to suit his rhetorical goals, pointing out Ammianus' portrayal of the battle of Amida as a re-enactment of the Trojan War—calling the reliability of his account into question, since it is difficult to know how much is intended as allusive history, historical fiction or some admixture of the two.

Gestae while discussing how Ammianus might be reacting to the former. Based on the number of similarities between Ammianus' account of Constantius and the Christian descriptions of Julian, this thesis will show that Ammianus distorted his image of Constantius to counter claims made by Christians against Julian. The accumulation of parallels between the accounts of Ammianus and his Christian contemporaries provides a compelling argument for the historian's response to the former even if the evidence for Ammianus' response to Christian arguments may not be conclusive in any individual case.

A brief discussion of the date and historical circumstances in which the *Res Gestae* was composed is necessary in order to provide the proper framework and context for works that may legitimately be considered as potential influences on Ammianus. Since Ammianus mentions the consulate of Flavius Neoterius,³ he must have completed the *Res Gestae* between the end of 389, when Neoterius' consulship for the year 390 was announced, and late summer or early autumn of 391, when news of the destruction of the Serapeum in Alexandria reached Rome, since Ammianus described the temple, destroyed in summer 391, as if it were still standing.⁴ When the historian began writing is a more complicated issue, especially in light of the recent challenges launched against many of the long-held biographical assumptions about Ammianus.⁵ When one relies only on the text of the *Res Gestae*, our only sure source of biographical information about Ammianus, few safely dateable events of the historian's life after 363 remain. The two most important of these for our purposes are the historian's presence in Antioch during

³ Amm. XXVI. 5.14.

⁴ See Matthews (1989), 24-26 and Cameron (1971), 259-262.

⁵ Particularly Kelly (2008), 13-158, and Fornara (1992a), *passim*.

the treason trials of 371/2,⁶ and his arrival at Rome sometime in the 380s, probably before the expulsion of the foreigners by the elder Symmachus in 384/5.⁷

The historian did not begin writing until after his arrival in Rome. Although Julian had been the subject of some polemic almost immediately after his death,⁸ the vast majority of extant texts that treat Julian's legacy as a live issue date from after Valens' death at Adrianople.⁹ While arguments from analogy must always contain a level of uncertainty, this fact implies that, if Ammianus did write in response to Christian arguments about Julian, it is much more likely that Ammianus had begun to write his history only after the debates over the interpretation of Adrianople began. Indeed, that Ammianus began writing after 380 seems certain, since some passages in the *Res Gestae* show that the historian had borrowed from the first edition of Eunapius' *New History* (published in 380) as well as Libanius' *On Avenging Julian* (*Or.* 24, probably published in early 379).¹⁰

The question of audience is an important one because of the implications it has for the proper interpretation of any given passage of the *Res Gestae*, although it has proven impossible to define with certainty. Other than the city of Rome, it is difficult to determine exactly what audience Ammianus intended his work to reach, especially since scholars have detected

⁶ Amm. XXIX.1.24.

⁷ As Kelly (2008), 132-134, points out. Ammianus can also be placed in southern Greece at some point after the tsunami that followed the earthquake of 21 July 365: Kelly (2008), 91; Amm. XXVI.10.19.

⁸ See Ephrem, *CJ* and Greg. Naz., *Orr.* IV and V, *passim*, both of which were composed within a year of Julian's death.

⁹ On the pagan side: the first edition of Eunapius' *New History* (380) and *Lives of the Sophists* (395/6) and Libanius' *Or.* 24 (*On Avenging Julian*; 379); on the Christian side there is John Chrysostom's *On Saint Babylas* (379) as well as the polemical notices in, for example, Gregory of Nazianzus' *Or.* 21 (*On Athanasius*; 379), Jerome's *Chronicle* (380/1), and Gregory of Nyssa's *Panegyric on Theodore* (379/80).

¹⁰ Eunapius: Barnes (1978), 114-119; Libanius: Sievers (1868), 154-155.

relatively few direct borrowings from the *Res Gestae*.¹¹ This thesis will not attempt to address the issue, but will presume that the anti-Christian undertones that run throughout the *Res Gestae* is best explained by assuming that Ammianus anticipated an elite Roman audience whose religious affiliation was primarily pagan.¹² The anti-Christian sentiment prevalent in the *Res Gestae*¹³ also suggests that Ammianus assumed that his audience was at least somewhat familiar with the Christian polemic to which the historian's portrayal of Constantius was meant to respond. Many of the citations of Christian polemic in this thesis will come from eastern sources, but there is little reason to doubt that pagans in Rome were also exposed to Christian polemic against Julian. The Christian commentator known to modern scholars as Ambrosiaster, who compared Julian to Nero and Diocletian, wrote in Rome in the early 380s.¹⁴ Ambrose, another Latin Christian who made polemical reference to Julian,¹⁵ lived most of his life in Milan, but had ties to Rome as well.¹⁶ Jerome's antipathy to Julian will be discussed in later chapters. Here it will suffice to mention that, although he was not a Roman by birth, Jerome lived in Rome during the middle of the 380s while producing an authorized translation of the Bible into Latin.¹⁷ Though there was no shortage of polemic against Julian in Latin, many well-educated Romans

¹¹ The sixth-century grammarian Priscian is the only writer to cite Ammianus by name (*Inst. Gramm.* 9.51). Efforts at locating authors who borrowed from Ammianus include Cameron (1970), 333-334; Syme (1968), 15-24; Maenchen-Helfen (1955), 384-395; and Gillett (2000), 490. That Rome is one intended audience for the work does not exclude other audiences that Ammianus mentions, for which see the discussion at Kelly (2008), 181-183.

¹² For Ammianus' hostility to Christianity, see Barnes (1998), 79-94 and Rike (1987), 100-111.

¹³ See Barnes (1998), 79-94.

¹⁴ Ambrosiaster, *Comm. in II Thess.* 2.7. For Ambrosiaster's *milieu* see Hunter (2009), 5-7.

¹⁵ See e.g. *Epp.* X.73 and 74 as well as *De ob. Theod.* 51.

¹⁶ McLynn (1995), 31-33, shows that Ambrose and his hagiographer exaggerated the strength of these ties, but does not question their existence.

¹⁷ Tkacz (1996), 48-49. Jerome was probably in Rome from at least 382 to 385.

like Q. Aurelius Symmachus and his son still received an elementary training in Greek and thus could also have had direct access to many of the texts used in this thesis.¹⁸

Although Ammianus' depiction of Constantius was a response to Christian portrayals of Julian, this depiction was not intended to respond to the work of any single Christian author. There is little doubt that Ammianus used the work of several Christian authors, most prominently Gregory of Nazianzus' *Orations against Julian*,¹⁹ the *On Saint Babylas* of John Chrysostom²⁰ as well as the lost work of the so-called homoian historiographer.²¹ Yet since Ammianus often used his sources in such a way as to obscure their original context,²² it is less profitable to limit the use of sources to those whose use by Ammianus has been decisively proven. By considering many Christian sources that treat Julian's legacy, this thesis hopes to impart what the general sentiment about Julian was probably like in some Christian communities, while keeping in mind the possibility that Ammianus may not have read the text in question.

In the interest of avoiding anachronism, this thesis will use primary sources composed chiefly before *ca.* 400, though occasionally I have used later works (usually the ecclesiastical histories of Philostorgius, Socrates, Sozomen and Theodoret) when they provide relevant material. When collecting and presenting citations hostile to Julian from Christian authors, sources in Greek, Latin and Syriac have been used.²³ Whether one chooses to prioritize

Ammianus' Latin or Greek learning and knowledge, there can be no question of his proficiency

¹⁸ See Symm. III.20.2 (written *ca.* 395): *dum filius meus Graecis litteris initiatur, ego me denuo studiis eius velud aequalis adiunxi*. The collection of Greek *grammatici* at Kaster (1988), 467-468 makes it clear that Greek was still available in the West in the fourth century to those who had the resources.

¹⁹ See Sabbah (1978), 369-371; den Boeft et al. (1991), 13.

²⁰ Sabbah (1978), 368, argues that Ammianus had read Chrysostom's *De sancto babyla*. It is possible that Ammianus had read other works of Chrysostom's.

²¹ Brennecke (1997), 249; for its existence see Brennecke (1988), 92-95.

²² See Sabbah (1978), 147-154; 405-407.

²³ The degree of Ammianus' linguistic proficiency in Greek or Latin is widely disputed. See e.g., Kelly (2008), 188-191; Barnes, (1998), 65-78; Fornara (1992b), 438; Matthews (1989), 461-466.

in, and access to, works in both languages.²⁴ My implementation of Ephrem's *Hymns against Julian* should not be taken to imply that Ammianus had access to, or possessed the ability to read, Syriac texts, even if Ammianus' ability to speak the Syriac language has been all but proven.²⁵ Rather, I believe that Ephrem's hymns provide an example of the polemic against Julian that circulated among Syriac-speaking communities after Julian's death.²⁶ As previously mentioned, Ammianus was certainly in Antioch, where a large Syriac-speaking population lived,²⁷ during Valens' treason trials of 371/2, less than a decade after Julian's death, and so it is not unlikely that he would have been exposed to this polemic in the course of his stay there. Further, the linguistic barrier between the Syriac- and Greek-speaking communities of the East has been shown to be by no means insurmountable.²⁸ Similarly, I have not disregarded material taken from sources written shortly after the publication of the *Res Gestae*; even when polemic against Julian may not have been written down until the first decade of the fifth century (e.g., the final two books of Rufinus' *Ecclesiastical History*), it is plausible that in some cases it had already been in circulation in other forms no longer visible to the modern scholar. Because of the possibility that later works preserve earlier polemic against Julian, it is valid to cite works composed even several decades after the *Res Gestae* as corroboration to my argument, although in no case is my argument based entirely upon them.

In addition to Christian sources of the fourth century, I have also made occasional use of Ammianus' contemporaries and co-religionists, Libanius and Eunapius, in order to better assess

²⁴ Emphasis on Greek: Barnes (1998), 71-78; emphasis on Latin: Fornara (1992b), 438; Kelly, 122-123; den Boeft (1992), 9-10.

²⁵ Matthews (1989), 69-70; Barnes (1998), 60; Kelly (2008), 117.

²⁶ See Matthews (1989), 222-223, Kelly (2008), 129.

²⁷ See MacMullen (1966), 4-5 for a brief discussion on the frequency of Syriac around Antioch.

²⁸ Taylor (1998), *passim*.

the historian's depiction of Constantius. The comparison of Ammianus with his contemporaries helps place the anti-Constantian arguments of the *Res Gestae* in context for several reasons. Libanius and Eunapius were much more explicit in their hostility toward Constantius, meaning that occasionally what appears as an ambiguous or only potentially hostile remark in Ammianus can be clarified by examining similar accounts in Libanius or Eunapius. It is also relevant that Ammianus probably borrowed heavily from the first edition of Eunapius' *New History*, a fact which, given Eunapius' blatantly negative polemic against Constantius and Christianity,²⁹ itself argues for a hostile intent in Ammianus' portrayal of Constantius.³⁰ Comparisons of Ammianus' text with the fragments of Eunapius' work, as well as the *New History* of Zosimus, an early sixth-century historian who virtually epitomized Eunapius for his account up to 404,³¹ thus help provide context with the polytheist side of the debate over the legacies of Constantius and Julian. Occasionally, I have also used the breviaries of Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, Festus, and the *Epitome de Caesaribus* as examples of contemporary depictions of Constantius and Julian. Because of the political ambiguity common in epitomes, however, I have used them simply as examples of claims about Constantius and Julian in circulation at the end of the fourth century. While breviaries certainly had their propaganda purposes, their limited scope meant that breviaries could not be deployed as polemical texts in the same way as full-scale histories like those of Ammianus and Eunapius, a genre in which the conventions of rhetoric could be more fully exploited.

²⁹ See Sack (1986), 54-55.

³⁰ Barnes (1978), 114-121.

³¹ Paschoud (1971), xxxv.

Finally, whatever one wishes to make of his integrity as a historian,³² there can be no doubt that Ammianus wrote in response to contemporary issues. For example, one can see the direct impact of Theodosius' reign upon Ammianus' account when the historian openly praises the reigning emperor for an early victory over the Free Sarmatians,³³ and later omits any discussion of events related to the execution of Theodosius the Elder under Gratian in 375/6.³⁴ Ammianus' praise of the emperor Valentinian's religious neutrality is often interpreted as an allusion to, and implicit condemnation of, the religious bigotry of Theodosius, who legislated against those who were not Nicene Christians during his reign.³⁵ Another example of Ammianus' participation in contemporary discourse can be found in his depiction of the emperor Jovian. By relegating the whole of Jovian's reign to the second half of book 25, the first half of which dealt with Julian's death, Ammianus implied that Jovian's brief reign of eight months was a mere postscript to Julian's Persian campaign.³⁶ Like some of his contemporaries, Ammianus blamed Jovian's cowardice and greed for the loss of the five transstigritine provinces, against the view held by many Christians that Julian's recklessness had left Jovian no choice.³⁷

³² For arguments in favor of Ammianus' integrity, see Thompson (1947), 125; Syme (1968), 94; Stein (1959), 215; Austin (1973), *passim*.

³³ Amm. XXIX.6.15: *dux Moesiae Theodosius iunior, prima etiam tum lanugine iuuenis, princeps postea perspectissimus, Sarmatas Libros...expulit.*

³⁴ Lippold (1980), 175 n. 6; Matthews (1989), 242; Barnes (1998), 184.

³⁵ Thompson (1947), 115-116; Rike (1987), 105; Stein (1959), 215. The passage of Ammianus used to argue this point is XXX.9.5: *Postremo hoc moderamine principatus [Valentiniani] 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 intemeratas reliquit has partes, ut repperit.* For Theodosius' treatment of non-Nicenes see Lippold (1980), 21-25, 45-51.

³⁶ Heather (1999), 115.

³⁷ A good example of Ammianus' stance toward Jovian can be found at XXV.9.9: *numquam enim ab urbis ortu inueniri potest annalibus replicatis, ut arbitror, terrarum pars ulla nostrarum ab imperatore uel consule hosti concessa, sed ne ob recepta quidem, quae direpta sunt; cf. XXVII.12.1. Other examples of this view can be found at Eutropius X.17.1-2; Festus 29; Lib. Or. XVIII.276; Zos. III.34.2; for the opposite view, see Them., Or. V.66A; Ruf., HE XI.1; Jer., Chron. s.a. 364.*

These issues, and Ammianus' participation in debates about them, are well-known. Yet despite the historian's involvement in the formation of the reputations of Julian and Jovian, Ammianus is not normally presumed to have entered into the discussion over the posterity of Constantius.³⁸ If one presumes that Ammianus' audience had a more or less similar exposure to polemic against Julian as did the historian, one can view the anti-Constantian elements of the *Res Gestae* as a means of providing pagans in Rome with a response to polemic against Julian. Given the high esteem with which Ammianus plainly held Julian, we should not be surprised to find Ammianus concerned with the widespread Christian polemic concerning Julian's legacy. The similarity with Ammianus' depiction of Constantius should not be dismissed as the mere deployment of a "bad emperor" *topos*. Ammianus wrote in the aftermath of Adrianople, when one of the key issues in polemic between Christians and pagans became how to properly interpret the deaths of Julian and Valens. The sheer number of similarities between Ammianus and the Christian polemic against Julian in the later fourth century is itself interesting, and the verbal similarities in some instances are quite striking. When combined with the general increase in polemic on this issue that occurred in the 380s, at precisely the time at which Ammianus was composing his work, it becomes difficult to resist the presumption that despite his famed objectivity, Ammianus, too, was part of the response to Christian polemic against Julian.

³⁸ Even specific studies of Ammianus' depiction of Constantius like Whitby (1999) and Henck (1998) assume that Ammianus' hostile treatment of Constantius is entirely the result of the latter's dismissal of Ursicinus.

CHAPTER 2

PRINCEPS SAUCIUS ET AFFLICTUS: THE MILITARY SKILLS OF CONSTANTIUS

One of the many serious flaws Ammianus sees in Constantius II, both in his obituary of the emperor and in the course of his extant narrative, is the emperor's lack of skill as a military leader. Given Ammianus' personal experience as a soldier, as well as the traditional emphasis upon military events in ancient historiography,¹ the historian's use of military competence is perhaps not surprising. Yet despite the conventional prominence of military narratives in the works of ancient historians, an examination of contemporary Christian literature reveals another possible reason for the historian's emphasis on this aspect of Constantius' reign. At the same time Ammianus composed his history in the 380s, opponents of the emperor Julian began to attack the emperor's lack of military competence that resulted in Julian's defeat and death in Persia in 363. Christians frequently attributed Julian's death to a divine judgment resulting from his apostasy and efforts to promote traditional Greco-Roman cult. For Christians, Julian bore responsibility for his poor military decisions during the campaign, especially his decision to trust the advice of a Persian who had pretended to defect and suggested to Julian that the emperor should burn the ships that the army had used to travel down the Euphrates. While the loss of the ships does not seem to have been intrinsically detrimental to the campaign, as they would have been useless in an effort to travel upstream against the powerful Euphrates current, the sight of the burning vessels while the army was already on the verge of retreat dealt a drastic blow to Roman morale and gave polemicists a stick with which to beat Julian about his military

¹ Fornara (1983), 91-98.

competence. The effect of this polemic was not lost upon Ammianus, who stresses Constantius' military incompetence at nearly every opportunity. One might expect emphasis on Constantius' military incompetence in any classical or classicizing account of a "bad emperor." Yet the fact that Ammianus wrote at the same time that Christians began making a wide-scale assault on Julian's military competence strongly suggests that the historian's portrayal of Constantius is not merely to be considered a colorless *topos*.

Constantius faced significant adversity on the Persian, Rhine and Danube frontiers throughout his reign. Yet Ammianus' necrology portrays the emperor as a military failure, claiming that Constantius was frequently troubled and vexed by foreign wars.² Concluding his account of Constantius' Persian campaign of winter 360, the historian mocks Constantius' failed siege of the town of Bezabde, as a "pointless undertaking," since "a ruinous fortune always followed Constantius when he fought with the Persians."³ As Ammianus himself implies in a slightly later passage,⁴ it seems likely that Constantius meant the siege of Bezabde as a way to tie up loose ends on the eastern frontier before leaving to deal with Julian, whose usurpation Constantius had discovered the previous spring.⁵ Ammianus further questions Constantius' military competence in his description of the emperor's triumphal procession in Rome in spring 357, which celebrated the defeat of the usurper Magnentius four years earlier.⁶ In this famous

² Amm. XXI.16.15: *Vt autem in externis bellis hic princeps fuit saucius et afflictus, ita prospere succedentibus pugnis ciuilibus tumidus et intestinis ulceribus rei publicae sanie perfusus horrenda.*

³ Amm. XX.11.32: *Quas ob res omisso uano incepto...euenerat enim hoc quasi fatali constellatione ita regente diuersos euentus, ut ipsum Constantium dimicantem cum Persis fortuna semper sequeretur afflictior...* All translations from Latin and Greek are my own unless otherwise noted.

⁴ Amm. XXI.13.1: *...obsidione gemina Bezabden aggressurus [Constantius] consultans prudenter, ne mox partes petiturus arctuas improtectum Mesopotamiae relinqueret latus.*

⁵ Amm. XX.9.1-2. This would not have been the original intention of the campaign, since it is clear by XX.9.3 that the army had been prepared for a Persian invasion before Constantius learned of Julian's actions.

⁶ This is confirmed by an inscription on the obelisk Constantius had erected, for the text of which see Iversen (1968), 57.

passage, Ammianus criticizes Constantius for not adding anything to the empire or even fighting in person during his campaigns, preferring instead to take credit for victories his generals had won.⁷ The historian next increases the seriousness of the charge by contrasting Constantius' alleged failure to be seen on the front lines with the zeal of earlier rulers who had been eager to fight at the front lines. The historian then disdainfully points out that the emperor's triumphal procession is large enough to even frighten the Persians or Germans.⁸ Ammianus' sarcastic reference to the excessiveness of the parade's size not only ridicules the enormous expense of Constantius' triumph, but reminds the reader that Constantius' triumph squandered precious resources and manpower that could be better used on the frontier. Despite his apparent respect for Constantius' demeanor during the triumph,⁹ Ammianus' language about the triumph leaves the reader in no doubt of his sentiments about the triumph itself.¹⁰

Ammianus' comments directly pertaining to Constantius' military competence are negative enough. Yet because "barbarian" tribes had overrun northern Gaul during Constantius' reign, the historian's comments during the books which discuss Julian's Gallic campaigns are equally indicative of his low opinion of Constantius' ability as a military leader. Though such passages do not refer directly to Constantius, the polemic against Constantius' military competence in other passages indicates that he is to be held at least partially responsible for the problems that took place during his reign. Thus when we read in a speech attributed to

⁷ Amm. XVI.10.2. The historian's claim that Constantius never fought battles in person is misleading if not demonstrably false: Festus 27 explicitly states *acriori Marte nouiens decertatum est, per duces suos septiens, ipse* [Constantius] *praesens bis adfuit*.

⁸ The comparison of Constantius with Julian, Claudius II and Galerius (the identifications of Rolfe [1935], 243-244) occurs in Amm. XVI.10.3; the sarcastic reference to the size of the parade detail is at XVI.10.6: *et tamquam Euphraten armorum specie territurus aut Rhenum altrinsecus praeuuntibus signis insidebat aureo solus ipse carpento fulgenti claritudine lapidum uariorum, quo micante lux quaedam misceri uidebatur alterna*.

⁹ See Amm. XVI.10.9-12.

¹⁰ Amm. XVI.10.1-6.

Constantius that “the barbarians are scouring about Gaul, disrupting the peace of our borders,” the condemnation of the emperor is to be inferred from the fact that the disruption occurred on his watch. Indeed, Ammianus claims in the same sentence that the barbarians invaded because they are “stirred up by this hope, that throughout our distant territories dire straits (*arduae necessitates*) oppress us.”¹¹ Even though Ammianus has placed this speech in Constantius’ mouth, it is difficult to read the “dire straits” to which the historian refers as anything but the consequences of Constantius’ own poor leadership. In his narrative of Julian’s Gallic campaigns, Ammianus describes the young Caesar’s opponents as “the barbarians who had built houses on this [viz., the Roman] side of the Rhine.”¹² By pointing out that Julian drove out barbarians who had settled on the Roman side of the Rhine, Ammianus contrasts Constantius’ failure to drive out the Germanic invaders with the Julian’s military proficiency. Ammianus also points out Constantius’ failure to stop the occupation of Gaul during his account of Silvanus’ revolt of 355. The account begins by stating that, before Silvanus was deployed to Gaul, “the Gallic provinces had suffered bitter slaughters, plunders and flames freely from the advancing barbarians, through lasting neglect and with no one assisting them.”¹³ Though the historian does not need to state it explicitly, the “lasting neglect” must at least include the reign of Constantius, if it is not to be taken as a reference to him alone. These passages, which emphasize the totality of Gaul’s destruction before Julian’s arrival, highlight both Constantius’ military ineptitude and the magnitude of Julian’s accomplishments in Gaul.

¹¹ Amm. XV.8.6: *persultant barbari Gallias, rupta limitum pace hac animati fiducia, quod nos per disiunctissimas terras arduae necessitates adstringunt.*

¹² Amm. XVI.11.8: *Isdem diebus exercituum aduentu perterriti barbari, qui domicilia fixere cis Rhenum...*

¹³ Amm. XV.5.2: *cum diuturna incuria Galliae caedes acerbas rapinasque et incendia barbaris licenter grassantibus nullo iuuante perferrent...* On the historian’s depiction of the Silvanus revolt, see Drinkwater (1994), 568-576.

This also leads us to another of the historian's methods of attacking Constantius' military capability. In many places in the *Res Gestae*, Ammianus uses guilt by association, a method that allows him to imply the emperor's military ineptitude by slandering the generals under his command. We have just observed Ammianus using this method in his suggestion that Silvanus' revolt was, ultimately, the fault of Constantius, both for dispatching him to Gaul and for allowing the barbarians to overrun Gaul in the first place. Attacking Constantius' subordinates had two distinct advantages. First, it dissociated Ammianus from direct criticism of Constantius himself, instead leaving it to the reader to infer the emperor's responsibility. Additionally, it provides Ammianus the opportunity to condemn the emperor's subordinates, who are themselves frequent victims of Ammianus' censure. Barbatio, the *magister peditum* in Gaul whom Constantius appointed in 355, provides a good example of this technique.¹⁴ According to Ammianus, when Julian intended to pursue a group of Alamanni retreating across the Rhine in the course of his Gallic campaigns in winter 356/7, Barbatio destroyed the boats under his own command. Ammianus claims Barbatio did this to avoid send Julian reinforcements,¹⁵ but in fact Barbatio probably wished to put an end to the fighting more quickly, since the battle had already been won.¹⁶ Similarly, later in the same chapter, Barbatio burns a share of the supplies the soldiers had brought with them, an action which Ammianus (unverifiably) suggests might have been secretly ordered by Constantius.¹⁷ Again, it was Barbatio's unit that allowed a group of

¹⁴ Ammianus, at XVI.11.2, takes care to relate that Barbatio's appointment had been fulfilled "by the emperor's order, further stressing Constantius' responsibility: ...*Barbatio post Siluani interitum promotus ad peditum magisterium ex Italia iussu principis cum uiginti quinque milibus armatorum Rauracos uenit*. See also on Barbatio *PLRE*, 146-7.

¹⁵ Amm. XVI.11.8: *qui, ne quid per eum [Barbationem] impetraretur, omnes incendit*.

¹⁶ That Roman victory had been achieved is clear from

¹⁷ Amm. XVI.11.12: *...quae utrum ut uanus gerebat et demens [Barbatio], an mandatu principis confidenter nefanda multa temptabat, usque in id temporis latuit*.

barbarians who had raided Roman territory to escape in retreat.¹⁸ Ammianus' clear linking of Barbatio with Constantius in several passages,¹⁹ combined with his negative comments about Barbatio—the historian refers to him in his obituary as “quite rustic...[and] a deceitful traitor”²⁰—remind the reader that Constantius is at least partially responsible for the consequences of Barbatio's incompetent actions.

Another target of Ammianus' contempt is Sabinianus, whom Constantius sent to replace Ursicinus as *magister equitum* in 359. The historian's hostility to Sabinianus can no doubt be partially attributed to Sabinianus' Christian piety and the fact that Sabinianus happened to succeed Ammianus' patron Ursicinus as Sabinianus' supposed obscurity, which normally would have prevented someone of his standing from achieving the rank of *magister*.²¹ Yet Ammianus' personal enmity towards Sabinianus, which arose from the latter's replacement of Ursicinus in the east, does not preclude the historian's rhetorical use of Sabinianus as an indirect means of attacking Constantius. Indeed, the very context in which the reader first encounters Sabinianus suggests that this is the case: Ammianus states explicitly that the order to send Sabinianus to replace Ursicinus came from within the imperial palace itself, after Constantius had been spurred on by a band of eunuchs.²² The historian resorts to *ad hominem* tactics when he describes his

¹⁸ Amm. XVI.11.6.

¹⁹ Aside from the aforementioned XVI.11.2 and 11.12, Amm. also links Constantius and Barbatio at XIV.11.19, XVI.11.15, and XVIII.3.6.

²⁰ Amm. XVIII.3.6: *Erat autem idem Barbatio subagrestis...proditor erat et perfidus.*

²¹ See Barnes (1998), 85-86; Thompson (1947), 54; Amm. XVIII.5.5: *stetitque sententia, ut Sabinianus uietus quidem senex et bene nummatus, sed imbellis et ignauus et ab impetranda magisterii dignitate per obscuritatem adhuc longe discretus, praeficiendus eois partibus mitteretur...* Seyfarth reads *cultus quidem senex*, but this is an early twentieth-century conjecture and has no MS authority; V reads *uictus*, a probable corruption of *uietus*, as it appears in Gelenius' edition. For the reading *vietus senex*, which appears in Terence (*Eunuchus* 688), see de Jonge (1980), 133. The allusion to Terence could imply that Sabinianus himself was a eunuch, especially when one considers his total lack of attested children (*PLRE* 789), but it must be admitted that this cannot be settled with any certainty.

²² Amm. XVIII.5.4-5.

return to the East and discovery of Sabinianus, “full of pride, a person of meager height and of small and narrow mind, who could hardly tolerate the ease of a banquet without disgraceful anxiety, much less the clatter brought forth from battle.”²³ Though Ammianus does not mention Constantius in either passage, his condemnation of the emperor’s behavior is clear by the historian’s frequent connection of Sabinianus with the imperial court.²⁴ For example, during his report of the siege of the frontier town of Amida in 359, Ammianus informs us that Sabinianus, who remained in command even after Ursicinus returned, refused the latter’s request to sally forth in an attempt to end the siege, since Sabinianus had received an order from the court to refuse Ursicinus any means of gaining glory.²⁵ Sabinianus’ final appearance occurs in Constantius’ court, when he is acquitted for the loss of Amida in order to avoid offending Constantius’ favorite eunuch and court chamberlain Eusebius.²⁶ Since Ammianus held Sabinianus responsible for the defeat,²⁷ Sabinianus’ acquittal by Constantius further shifts blame for his behavior onto the emperor.

Sabinianus and Barbatio are the best, but by no means the only examples of Ammianus’ practice of attacking Constantius’ choice of military leaders in order to show the emperor’s

²³ Amm. XVIII.6.7: *...diu cunctati reuersique fastidii plenum Sabinianum inuenimus, hominem mediocris staturae et parui angustique animi, uix sine turpi metu sufficientem ad leuem conuiuii, nedum proelii strepitum perferendum.* See also 6.1, in which Ammianus refers to Sabinianus as *adepta repentina potestate sufflatus*, “puffed up by the sudden acquisition of power.”

²⁴ Sabinianus’ lack of experience was noticed by Thompson (1947), 49-51. It is interesting that *PLRE*, 789 gives no other direct references to Sabinianus aside from those in the *Res Gestae*: if he were indeed *bene nummatus*, as Ammianus tells us, one might at least expect an appearance on a dedicatory inscription. One might conjecture, then, based on the other negative references to Sabinianus in the historian’s narrative, that the phrase is ironic and Sabinianus was not *bene nummatus* at all, but rather a man of lower social standing.

²⁵ Amm. XIX.3.2: *...clam... corde altissimo [Sabinianus] retinens saepe in comitatu sibi mandatum, ut amplam omnem adipiscendae laudis decessori suo ardenti studio gloriae circumcideret, etiam ex re publica processuram.*

²⁶ Amm. XX.2.2-3.

²⁷ That Ammianus believed this is apparent from his statement at XX.2.3, where he argues that the suppression of *documenta...perspicue demonstrantia Sabiniani pertinaci ignauia haec accidisse, quae contigerunt*, led to the sack of Ursicinus.

military incompetence. The *magister equitum* Marcellus, who was sent by Constantius to replace Ursicinus in Gaul in 356, failed to send Julian reinforcements promptly while the latter was besieged at Sens.²⁸ Ammianus admits that Constantius dismissed Marcellus in 357 upon learning the situation, though not without first remarking snidely about Constantius' willingness to hear accusations.²⁹ Marcellus' successor, Severus, receives far better treatment from Ammianus, but only because he cooperated more effectively with Julian than had either Barbatio or Marcellus,³⁰ though in the end Ammianus attacks him as "vile and cowardly."³¹ Prosper, a *comes* sent by Constantius to replace Ursicinus in 354 while the latter was recalled to court, is according to Ammianus "a cowardly sluggard...pillaging openly, having cast aside the burglar's art."³² Ammianus' repeated insistence on the incompetence of the men sent by Constantius not only reflects the probable anger that the historian felt over Ursicinus' replacement by these men, but also puts Constantius himself, ultimately responsible for their appointments, in a very bad light.

Evidence from Ammianus' contemporaries confirms that, among those who supported Julian, Constantius was frequently attacked for his alleged military ineptitude, proving that Ammianus' attacks upon the emperor were not merely the result of a resentment that the historian had held for decades. The Antiochene rhetor Libanius informs us in his *Epitaph* over Julian (*Or.* 18) that Constantius himself lacked the ability to expel the Alamanni who had settled

²⁸ Amm. XVI. 4.3; see also *PLRE*, 550-1.

²⁹ Amm. XVI.7.1. Ammianus may be influenced by Tac., *Ann.* XV.25, where Nero dismisses Paetus for his failure in Corbulo's Armenian campaign of 63 CE.

³⁰ See *PLRE*, 832.

³¹ Amm. XVII.10.2: *et [Severus] qui saepe uniuersos ad fortiter faciendum hortabatur et singulos, tunc dissuasor pugnandi contemptus uidebatur et timidus mortem fortasse metuens aduentantem...*

³² Amm. XIV.11.5; XV.13.3: *Hunc Prosper adaequitabat pro magistro equitum agente etiamtum in Galliis militem regens, abiecte ignauus et, ut ait comicus, arte despecta furtorum rapiens propalam.* The *comicus* alluded to here is Plautus: Kelly (2008), 172.

on the left bank of the Rhine, forcing him to give Julian the purple.³³ When the pagan historian Zosimus opens the third book of his *New History* by providing a lengthy list of barbarian tribes causing trouble for Constantius,³⁴ it is by no means a leap to argue that Zosimus, like Ammianus, is attacking Constantius for his inability to maintain the borders of the empire. Like much of the rest of his work, Zosimus probably derived this criticism from Ammianus' contemporary Eunapius. Nor were Ammianus' critical comments about Constantius' military proficiency merely the result of his own experience serving in the army, though of course his own military career and the tradition of Latin historiography contributed to his choice of focus. Rather, the historian's emphasis upon Constantius' military ineptitude originates from his wish to counter Christian polemic against Julian by taking the offensive. Since Christians questioned Julian's effectiveness as a military leader, Ammianus responded by attacking Constantius on the same grounds.

Although most Christian authors tended to attribute Julian's death to a divine judgment against paganism,³⁵ the issue of the emperor's military competence was often discussed as well. Indeed, even the earliest authors to write against Julian, Gregory of Nazianzus and Ephrem, level the charge of military ineptitude against him. Though the two discussions are closely interrelated, we will examine Christian accusations against Julian's military competence separately from the claims that his failed Persian campaign and death were the direct result of a divine punishment.

³³ Lib., *Or.* XVIII.36.

³⁴ Zos. III.1.1. Zosimus wrote around the beginning of the sixth century, but large sections of his work are so dependent on the lost history of Eunapius of Sardis (a younger contemporary of Ammianus) that they can be cited as if a contemporary witness: Paschoud (1971), xl-lvii.

³⁵ See Hahn (1960), 230; Shepardson (2009), 111, for authors who make such arguments.

In polemical Christian discussions of Julian’s military capability, the content frequently resembles Ammianus’ jibes directed against Constantius’ leadership ability. The most common charge which Christians leveled against Julian was that he had mistakenly followed the advice a Persian deserter, burned the ships he had brought with him and, for the sake of haste, decided to return home through the barren wastes of Mesopotamia,³⁶ rather than the longer but safer route up the Tigris into Armenia. Whether or not this charge was a valid one need not overly concern us here, though one must note that the strength of the Tigris would have made sailing upstream out of the question, rendering the boats useless.³⁷ What concerns us is the fact that, almost immediately after the emperor’s death, both supporters and denouncers of Julian took the charge seriously enough to integrate them into their debates. Writing within a few months of Julian’s death, the Syrian deacon Ephrem, our first extant source of polemic against Julian,³⁸ claimed in his second *Hymn against Julian* that the emperor’s decision to burn the ships was the result of Persian deception.³⁹ Shortly afterwards,⁴⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, later famous as bishop of Constantinople, attacked the emperor much more explicitly for his responsibility in the event, and likened it to suicide.⁴¹ In his *Chronicle* the monk-priest Jerome, writing in Constantinople

³⁶ Although, as Bowersock (1978), 115, points out, this area would have been barren because of the Persian scorched earth policy, rather than the innate nature of the terrain itself.

³⁷ Matthews (1989), 158.

³⁸ Griffith (1987), 238, accepts Browning’s assertion that Ephrem wrote in the same year that Julian died. McVey (1987), 34-5, argues that the hymns were begun before Julian died, but (with the exception of the *Hymn on the Church*) completed afterwards.

³⁹ Eph., *CJ* II.18: “The madman raged and set fire to his ships near the Tigris. / Without his being aware the bearded ones deceived / the he-goat who promised that he knew secret things.”

⁴⁰ Bernardi (1983), 35, dates the completion of both of Gregory’s orations against Julian to “peu après l’avènement de Valentinien et de Valens,” perhaps as early as seven months after Julian’s death.

⁴¹ *Or.* V.12D: τὰς μὲν ναῦς εἶχε τὸ πῦρ καὶ ὁ σῖτος οὐκ ἦν καὶ προσῆν ὁ γέλως, αὐτόχειρ γὰρ ἢ σφαγὴ σχεδόν. (Fire took the ships, and there was no food, and it was almost a joke, for their slaughter was mostly self-inflicted.)

around 380,⁴² followed Gregory's account and accused Julian of following a pretended deserter from the Persians,⁴³ and in his account of the emperor Jovian, Julian's successor, argued that Jovian had been "compelled by necessity" to surrender the important frontier town of Nisibis to the Persians.⁴⁴ The accusation that Julian was mistaken to burn his ships carried enough potency to continue into the fifth century, when it is found in the ecclesiastical histories of Philostorgius and Sozomen.⁴⁵ It is with such accusations in mind that one must read the polemic of Ammianus concerning Constantius' military incompetence. Christian polemic against Julian had begun almost immediately after the emperor's death and increased after the death of Valens in 378, continuing long after Ammianus completed his history.⁴⁶ The considerable influence that Christian polemic exercised on the mind of Ammianus is revealed, if by nothing else, by the historian's frequent borrowings from polemical Christian sources, including John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nazianzus and the so-called homoian historiographer.⁴⁷

One particularly clear instance of Ammianus' use of, and response to, Christian sources can be seen in his account of the *protector domesticus* Antoninus, who defected to the Persians

⁴² Burgess (1995), 354.

⁴³ *Chron.* s.a. 363: *ubi a quodam simulato perfuga ad deserta perductus, cum fame et siti apostatam perdidisset exercituum...*; cf. *Epitome* 43.2.

⁴⁴ *Chron.* s.a. 364: *Iouianus rerum necessitate compulsus Nisibin et magnam Mesopotamiae partem Sapori Persarum regi tradidit*. The accounts of Jovian's surrender found in Jerome, Gregory and some other Christians contrast strikingly with those of Ammianus and the epitomators, who erroneously claim that Jovian's voluntary surrender of Roman territory was an entirely novel action. See *Amm.* XXV.9.9; *Festus* 29; *Eutropius* X.17.2.

⁴⁵ *Philost.* VII.15; *Soz.* VI.1.9-12. Theodoret, a rough contemporary of Sozomenus, mentions the burning of boats (III.25.1) but not the Persian deserters. Socrates Scholasticus, who wrote earlier than both Theodoret and Sozomen, avoids the issue entirely where one would expect him to raise it (III.21).

⁴⁶ As late as 1497, at least one (possibly even two or three) manuscripts of a Latin translation of this work seem to have been extant at St. Augustine's monastic library in Cambridge, a fact unnoticed or ignored by Griffith (1987), 239-240. The catalog reads, under each of the modern entries 847, 848 and 849: *Libri Efferem Juliani et in eodem libro...* Each is then followed by different works, and three different initial words on the second folia suggest three different manuscripts. Unfortunately, none of these manuscripts survive. James (1903), 286.

⁴⁷ On Ammianus' use of John and Gregory, see Sabbah (1978), 368-371 and below; on his use of the homoian historiographer, a now-lost work composed in the 370s which was a source for Philostorgius and the seventh-century *Paschal Chronicle*, see Brennecke (1997), 247-249.

in 359 because of financial troubles.⁴⁸ Ammianus' depiction of Antoninus is ambiguous,⁴⁹ since on the one hand, most Romans could not have been pleased that the information he provided to the Persians led to their victory at Amida.⁵⁰ On the other hand, however, Ammianus informs us that Antoninus had not acted entirely of his own will, but only after having incurred enormous losses by "the greed of certain people" (*aviditate quorundam*) whom Ammianus does not name.⁵¹ Given that Antoninus sympathizes heavily with Ursicinus' plight at the hands of Constantius, we should see this as an attempt to blame Constantius and his court for Antoninus' defection. Still, the classical exemplum with which Ammianus describes Antoninus seems puzzling. "He crossed over," the historian informs us, "with the opposite pretext of Zopyrus, that similar traitor of Babylon."⁵² The comparison is a curious one, since unlike Antoninus, the betrayal of Zopyrus, as related in the third book of Herodotus, was pretended in order to gain the trust of the Babylonians and betray the city to the Persians.⁵³

⁴⁸ Amm. XVIII.5.1: *Antoninus...aviditate quorundam nexus ingentibus damnis, cum iurgando contra potentes se magis magisque iniustitia frangi contemplaretur ad deferendam potioribus gratiam, qui spectabant negotium...* De Jonge (1980), 112-114, argues that Antoninus' financial troubles were caused by an attempt to force him to pay curial taxes, despite his lack of curial status.

⁴⁹ See Kelly (2008), 50-52, and Matthews (1989), 68, on the ambiguity of the passage and the situation, respectively.

⁵⁰ While discussing Constantius' activities in Persia, Libanius writes of "the wicked wretch Demaratus, who spoke highly of our goods before them and said he would betray the city to them in winter, as if in a net..." (Lib., *Or.* XII.74: ὁ δὲ κακῶς ἀπολούμενος Δημάρατος ὁ τὰ παρ' ἡμῶν ἐπαινῶν πρὸς ἐκείνους ἀγαθὰ καὶ τοῦ χειμῶνος φάσκων αὐτοῖς παραδώσειν ὥσπερ ἐν κύρτῳ τὴν πόλιν...). Demaratus was a Spartan who counseled Xerxes; Libanius' reference, then, must be to Antoninus, as a Roman who turned traitor to advise Sapor. See Kelly (2008), 268, and Sabbah (1978), 279.

⁵¹ Amm. XVIII.5.1; also XVIII.8.6: *necessitate, non uoluntate ad haec, quae noui, scelestas prolepsos. egerit me praecipitem iniqui flagitatores, ut nosti, quorum auaritia ne tua quidem excelsa illa fortuna propugnans miseriis meis potuit refragari.*

⁵² Amm. XVIII.5.3: *...cum omni penatium dulcedine nocte concubia transfretatur ex contraria specie Zopyri illius similis Babylonii proditoris.*

⁵³ Herod. III.153-160; Sabbah (1978), 278-279, and Kelly (2008), 268, both draw attention to the *prima facie* inappropriateness of the analogy. De Jonge (1980), 130, circumvents the issue by translating *ex contraria specie* as "but only when viewed from the opposite image," which seems contrived: although it provides a better meaning for *specie*, it seems to put too much weight on the single word *ex*.

Once we examine Gregory of Nazianzus' *Second Oration against Julian*, however, the referent to Ammianus' allusion becomes clearer. In his discussion of the unnamed traitor who deceived Julian into burning his fleet, Gregory rhetorically describes the traitor as "a man of not inconsiderable standing among the Persians, imitating Zopyrus before Cyrus [*sic*] in Babylon."⁵⁴ Here the analogy is more appropriate: like Zopyrus, the Persian deserter was insincere, and his ultimate goal (at least according to Gregory and other Christian authors) was to deceive Julian and help achieve Persian victory. Further, Gregory's comparison reflects poorly on Julian's decision to trust this unnamed neo-Zopyrus, if for no other reason than that it likens Julian to the barbarian Babylonians who had trusted the original Zopyrus centuries earlier.

It has recently been argued that Ammianus invoked Zopyrus out of a desire to alter the *exemplum* used by Libanius, Demaratus.⁵⁵ There are several reasons, however, to believe that in fact, Ammianus' allusion to Zopyrus in the context of Constantius' Persian campaign reflects an effort to counter Gregory's polemic against Julian. To begin with, there is no convincing evidence that Ammianus used Libanius' *Oration 12*, in which the reference to Demaratus occurs.⁵⁶ The passages produced to argue in favor of such a borrowing do not show convincing similarities, and even if they did, all three passages in question deal with Julian's education and would not prove that Ammianus used *Oration 12* as a source for Julian's Persian campaign. Secondly, there is little question that Ammianus knew of Gregory's *Orations against Julian*. Ammianus' polemical use of Gregory's work in other parts of the *Res Gestae* has been

⁵⁴ Greg. Naz., *Or.* V.11B. Ἀνὴρ γὰρ τις τῶν οὐκ ἀδοκίμων ἐν Πέρσiais, τὸν ἐπὶ Βαβυλῶνι πρὸς Κῦρον Ζώπυρον μιμησάμενος... In Herodotus' version, of course, Darius, not Cyrus, was the king of Persia.

⁵⁵ Kelly (2008), 268, who is following Sabbah (1978), 278-279. Demaratus was a king of Sparta who helped Xerxes during his invasion of Greece in the early fifth century BCE.

⁵⁶ Sabbah (1978), 278.

convincingly argued, most notably his attribution to Constantius of a speech that derived from Gregory's *Second Oration*.⁵⁷ Ammianus' use of Zopyrus, an exemplum found in Gregory, is an example of the historian both alluding to and arguing against authors of polemic against Julian. By giving the exemplum in a context negative to Constantius, the historian reminded anyone in his audience who was aware of Gregory's hostile use of the allusion that Constantius had his own faults. Finally, the invocation of Zopyrus as an *exemplum*, in both Greek and especially Latin literature, was extremely rare during Ammianus' time.⁵⁸ This means that, even if the historian did have access to Libanius *Oration* 12, it would have been *a priori* unlikely for Ammianus to have simply happened to invoke Zopyrus as an *exemplum*.

In response to Gregory's discussion of Julian's betrayal by an anonymous Persian, Ammianus invoked Zopyrus in a different context, one which involved the traitor Antoninus, though in Ammianus' version the emphasis is placed on the corruption that caused Antoninus to defect, rather than (as it was for Gregory) any sense of misplaced trust. Despite Ammianus' change of focus, it seems clear that the historian's purpose was to counter Gregory's accusations by repeating his *exemplum* in a context hostile to Constantius. Constantius' ultimate responsibility for Antoninus' defection is again implied in a slightly later passage, when Ammianus, immediately after condemning Constantius' court as a "brothel and theater," describes the warm welcome of Antoninus at the Persian court.⁵⁹ The implication of

⁵⁷ Sabbah (1978), 369-371.

⁵⁸ Queries of the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, *Library of Latin Text series A*, *Patrologia Latina*, and *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* reveal no other fourth century authors who certainly invoke Zopyrus besides Ammianus and Gregory of Nazianzus. One other possible reference occurs in *Lib. Ep. 722*, but it could refer to the medical figure named Zopyrus rather than the Herodotean character of the same name.

⁵⁹ *Amm. XVIII.5.6: Dum haec in castris Constantii quasi per lustra aguntur et scaenam...Antoninus ad regis [sc. Persiae] hiberna perductus aenter suscipitur et apicis nobilitatus auctoritate...ferebatur.* Despite the protests of de Jonge (1980), 136, *lustra et scaenam* must mean something like "in the brothels and theater," rather

Constantius' guilt in the matter could hardly be clearer. The nature of Ammianus' attack on Constantius, in this passage, is clearly an effort to counter Christian polemic against Julian's military abilities by making reference to, and denouncing, the qualifications of Constantius.

Ammianus did not limit himself to condemning Constantius on the basis of his military capacity. Like the Christian authors of polemic against Julian who targeted nearly every aspect of the emperor's personality, Ammianus had many complaints against Constantius' reign. In the following chapter we shall examine how Christian attacks on Julian's retinue affected Ammianus' portrayal of Constantius at his imperial court.

than "as with feasts and games;" see Lewis and Short s.v. *lustrum* 1, rather than *lustrum* 2, as de Jonge would have it, and cf. Amm. XXVIII.4.29: *hi omnes* [sc. the Roman plebs], *quod uiuunt, uino et tesseris impendunt et **lustris** et uoluptatibus et spectaculis...*; in context, the meaning of *lustrum* must be similar to that used as XVIII.5.6. In the latter passage I have emended Seyfarth's *hi omne* to *hi omnes*, which is found in both V and M and does not require an emendation for sense.

CHAPTER 3

IUSSU IMPERATORIS: THE IMPERIAL ENTOURAGE AS A VEHICLE FOR CRITICISM

While Ammianus' attacks on Constantius' military ability are frequent in the *Res Gestae*, the historian also accused the emperor of having a propensity to maintain what the historian viewed as a corrupt and greedy administration. For Ammianus, the misbehavior of the members of Constantius' retinue was evidence for the tyranny of Constantius himself, since the emperor bore responsibility for the men whom he appointed. Ammianus was not the only author to make such claims, however. When one examines the depiction of Julian in Christian texts written after Julian's death, it quickly becomes apparent that the imperial retinue has become a vehicle for condemning the emperor in both the *Res Gestae* and in the Christian traditions. Ammianus believed that Constantius' merciless and greedy courtiers reflected the character of their imperial master, as Christians believed the lewd and bawdy retinue of Julian reflected that of theirs. Some resemblance is to be expected, since both Ammianus and authors in Christian traditions worked within the broader confines of the Greco-Roman tradition. Yet the temporal proximity of the *Res Gestae* to that of these Christian authors, combined with sheer number of similarities between the accounts of Ammianus and these Christian polemicists that are discussed in the other chapters of this thesis, makes it difficult to avoid the conclusion that Ammianus' portrayal of Constantius provided a counter-example to Christian emphasis on Julian's tyranny.

Before discussing the similarities between Ammianus' and Christian methods, it will be helpful to recall the fact that Ammianus leaves the reader in no doubt of Constantius' tyranny.

One of the historian's clearest methods of accusing Constantius of tyranny is his persistent use of negative exempla against the emperor. The deployment of exempla allowed Ammianus to provide his audience with clear points of reference for his argument, while simultaneously flaunting his knowledge of Greco-Roman historiography. Ammianus seems to have had a particular preference for using exempla when discussing threats to Constantius' power (real or perceived), since this allowed him the opportunity to compare Constantius to the most disreputable figures of antiquity. Indeed, when Ammianus invoked exempla in the course of drawing comparisons to Constantius, the comparisons are not only exclusively negative, but drawn almost entirely from rulers widely accepted as tyrants in Ammianus' day.¹ In his formal obituary of the emperor at the end of book 21, Ammianus criticized Constantius' treatment of potential rivals to power, comparing the emperor to Caligula, Domitian and Commodus, three emperors notorious for their tyranny.² The historian had earlier compared Constantius to Domitian alone in his account of the suppression of Silvanus, claiming that the emperor "always hated those who acted boldly."³ Ammianus had already lamented one of Constantius' several alleged attempts to remove the historian's patron Ursicinus from power for its similarity to Nero's unjust execution of the general Domitius Corbulo.⁴ After Constantius' suppression of several suspected contenders to the imperial throne, Ammianus compared the emperor's suspicions to that of the ancient tyrant Dionysius of Sicily, "who, on account of this same fault

¹ See Blockley (1994), 57-58.

² For examples of late fourth-century views towards these emperors see Jul. *Caesares*, 310A (Caligula); Eutropius, *Brev.* VII.23 (Domitian); and *Epit. de Caes.* 17.3-4 (Commodus). Christian authors, at least in the West, were equally hostile, as Jerome's *Chronicle* indicates (see s.a. 39 and 40 [Caligula], 94 and 96 [Domitian] and 190 [Commodus]).

³ Amm. XV.5.35: *semper [Constantius] oderat fortiter facientes ut quondam Domitianus, superare tamen quacumque arte contraria cupiebat.*

⁴ Amm. XV.2.5. For Corbulo's death in 66/67 see De Jonge (1948), 18, and Syme (1958), 560. Corbulo's death had probably been related in one of the lost final books of Tacitus' *Annales*.

[of suspicion], even taught his daughters to be barbers, lest he should entrust the shaving of his face to an outsider.”⁵ This legendary anecdote about Dionysius reflects well Ammianus’ own belief about Constantius’ paranoia, though it says little about the emperor himself.

Ammianus supplemented his use of comparative exempla with exempla intended to contrast Constantius with previous rulers who, he believed, had succeeded where Constantius had failed. Two striking examples occur in the historian’s obituary of Constantius. In his discussion of Constantius’ persistence in seeking out plotters, Ammianus contrasted the relentlessness of the late emperor to the clemency of Marcus Aurelius. Unlike Marcus, Constantius “stirred up a pile of evils from unimportant cases.”⁶ Given the high regard in which Marcus was held in the late fourth century, a negative contrast is almost to be expected.⁷ Yet perhaps more indicative of Ammianus’ disdain for Constantius is the exemplum invoked immediately prior to that of Marcus. Because of his inability to reconquer the lost portions of the empire in Gaul and the East, some traditions, especially in the West, held the third-century emperor Gallienus in contempt.⁸ In Ammianus’ eyes, even Gallienus surpassed Constantius because at least the former had the excuse of being “assailed by repeated and serious plots of rebellion,” but nevertheless “occasionally punished more moderately crimes that would have

⁵ Amm. XVI.8.10: *...ut Dionysius tyrannus ille Siciliae, qui ob hoc idem uitium et tonstrices docuit filias, ne cui alieno ora committeret leuiganda.* Nero, Domitian and Dionysius appear together as stereotypical tyrants at Themistius, *Or.* 34.15, illustrating how common the deployment of these figures was in the late fourth century.

⁶ Amm. XXI.16.11: *ille...ex minimis causis malorum congeries excitabat, Marci illius dissimilis principis uerecundi...*

⁷ For late fourth-century texts praising Marcus as an exemplary emperor, see Julian, *Caesares* 335C, where Marcus is declared winner in the contest to determine the best emperor; Eutropius, *Brev.* VIII.11-14; and the inclusions of Marcus in lists of good emperors by Themistius at *Orr.* 19.229C and 34.6.

⁸ See the list of negative sources in Dodgeon and Lieu (1994), 71-78. The existence of a tradition positive to Gallienus in the Greek is proved by Bleckmann (1992), 220-275, but this does not discount the simultaneous existence of a tradition in the West hostile to Gallienus.

resulted in death.”⁹ Constantius, on the other hand, “made even doubtful deeds seem quite certain by the excessive force of torture.”¹⁰ To Ammianus, even Gallienus stood up well in comparison to Constantius.

Ammianus’ accusation of tyranny goes beyond the invocation of exempla, however. In several passages, the historian described in detail what he believed to be evidence of Constantius’ tyrannical behavior, including several passages that described the negative behavior of Constantius’ imperial retinue, which implied the responsibility of Constantius himself. For example, in his account of Ursicinus’ recall to the West in 359, Ammianus contemptuously blamed Constantius’ crafty head chamberlain Eusebius, “with whom, if one should speak truly, Constantius had much influence.”¹¹ When narrating the involvement of one of Constantius’ courtiers in a negative incident, Ammianus made sure to point out the emperor’s involvement, as when he emphasized that Eusebius and his accomplices who had been sent to seize and execute the Caesar Gallus in 354, were only acting “by order of the emperor.”¹² Even when the emperor is not specifically named, the trials in the Constantian books of Ammianus’ work nearly always state the responsibility of one of his top officials, such as Arbitio, Paulus Catena or the above-mentioned Eusebius.¹³ Indeed, in several instances, the historian explicitly states that

⁹ Amm. XXI.16.10: *ille [sc. Gallienus] enim perduellionum crebris uerisque appetitus insidiis, Aureoli et Postumi et Ingenui et Valentis cognomento Thessalonici aliorumque plurium, mortem factura criminale aliquotiens lenius uindicabat.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*: *hic [sc. Constantius] etiam facta uel dubia adigebat uideri certissima ui nimia tormentorum.*

¹¹ Amm. XVIII.4.3: *hac autem assentandi nimia foeditate mercari complures nitebantur Eusebi fauorem, cubiculi tunc praepositi, apud quem, si uere dici debeat, multa Constantius potuit.*

¹² Amm. XIV.11.14: *uenere tamen aliqui iussu imperatoris administrationum specie diuersarum eundem, ne commouere se posset neue temptaret aliquid occulte, custodituri.*

¹³ For example, Arbitio and Eusebius were involved in the hearing following the fall of Amida, which led to Ursicinus’ removal from office (Amm. XX.2); Arbitio, Eusebius and Paulus were among those entrusted with trying Gallus’ partisans (XV.3.1-6); Eusebius is blamed for the recall of Ursicinus in 359 (XVIII.4.2-6); Paulus was sent to find those who had conspired with Magnentius (XIV.5.6-9) and later given charge over the Scythopolis trials (XIX.12.5).

Constantius is at fault for the activities of his officials. After relating Paulus Catena's false accusations of those reputed to be involved with Magnentius, the historian called the assignment of Paulus a "wicked crime, which scorches the time of Constantius with the perpetual mark of the event."¹⁴ To Ammianus, Constantius was the emperor who "fattened [the courtiers] with the marrow of the provinces," since his officials "burned with insatiable thirst for riches, without concern for justice or law."¹⁵ In Constantius' obituary Ammianus repeated the accusation even more frankly: "he was too greatly bound to his wives and the elegant voices of his eunuchs and some of his palace officials, who applauded his every single word."¹⁶ As was the case with the military officials discussed above in chapter two, Ammianus not only disapproved of the officials whom Constantius had appointed, but held Constantius responsible.

As mentioned above, one of the similarities between Christian portrayals of Julian and Ammianus' depiction of Constantius lies in the decision to attack one's imperial subject through their retinue. Ammianus held Constantius accountable for the unscrupulous activities of his officials, believing their greed and relentlessness to be evidence of that emperor's own lack of a sense of justice. Most Christian authors were more concerned with proving Julian's impiety and hatred of Christians than in debating his lack of clemency. To prove their point, they often adduced what they saw as the irreverent and vulgar behavior of Julian's retinue. For example, when John Chrysostom condemned the presence of "wizards and sorcerers, diviners, augers and

¹⁴ Amm. XIV.5.6: *unde admissum est facinus impium, quod Constanti tempus nota rei usserat sempiterna*. Seyfarth's edition reads *nota inusserat*, a reading based on a gloss to E, a fifteenth-century MS of the *Res Gestae*; V reads *notare iusserat*, thus *nota rei usserat* seems a more responsible emendation. Of course the meaning of *usserat* must be closer to *inusserat* in this passage, which led E's glosser to propose a correction in the first place.

¹⁵ Amm. XVI.8.12-13: *...eos medullis prouinciarum saginavit Constantius. sub hoc enim ordinum singulorum auctore infinita cupidine diuitiarum arserunt sine iustitiae uel recti...*

¹⁶ Amm. XXI.16.16: *uxoribus et spadonum gracilentis uocibus et palatinis quibusdam nimium quantum addictus ad singula eius uerba plaudentibus et, quid ille aiat aut neget, ut assentit possint, obseruantibus.*

mendicants” at Julian’s court, he believed imperial support of such characters (to which Chrysostom refers as “disgraceful behavior”) indicated Julian’s own personal lack of good judgment by associating himself with such company.¹⁷ As part of his criticism of Julian, Ephrem also invoked the emperor’s reliance upon “augurers, diviners and necromancers and all the children of error,” activity he considered disreputable.¹⁸ Rufinus of Aquileia, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, drew attention to Julian’s “malicious band of wizards, philosophers, *haruspices* and augurers.”¹⁹ Christian criticism was not limited to professional holy men, however, and the throng of women that often accompanied Julian became for Christians an object of derision. Ephrem claimed that Julian had renounced modesty and rejoiced in the prostitution of women at feast days.²⁰ Another author who wrote soon after Julian’s death, Gregory of Nazianzus, asked sarcastically, “How can one not be amazed at the toasts and banquets which he celebrated with harlots at public expense?”²¹ This may have been the source of inspiration for John Chrysostom, who also accused Julian of maintaining prostitutes in his retinue.²²

As is evident from the quotations cited, the Christian tradition of attacking Julian’s entourage was originally vague and preferred not to name anyone, since Julian was the intended target, not the members of his retinue. By the time the ecclesiastical historians of the fifth

¹⁷ *De Babyla* 77.

¹⁸ *CJ* II.4 (translation of J. Lieu, revised by C. Shepardson).

¹⁹ Rufinus, *HE* X.34: *etenim cum velut taetri serpentes de cavernis terrae ebullientes ad eum [Iulianum] processissent magorum, filosofoforum, haruspicum augurumque manus profana, omnes pariter allegant nihil suis artibus successurum, nisi prius Athanasium velut horum omnium obstaculum sustulisset*

²⁰ *CJ* II.5-6.

²¹ Greg. Naz., *Or.* V.22DA: τὰς δὲ προπόσεις τε καὶ φιλοτησίας, ἅς δημοσίᾳ ταῖς πόρναις προὔπινέ τε καὶ ἀντιπροὔπινετο ὑποκλέπτων τὸ ἀσελγὲς μυστηρίου προσχήματι, πῶς οὐ θαυμάζειν ἄξιον;

²² *De Babyla* 77.

century wrote, however, various legends had accrued concerning the anti-Christian activity of Julian's retinue. Sozomen, writing in the 440s, described how Julian's uncle, the *comes* Iulianus, had stolen and desecrated Christian liturgical vessels, followed by Iulianus' forthcoming divine punishment.²³ Two other ministers, Felix and Elpidius, are said to have assisted in robbing the church, and to have suffered accordingly.²⁴ Although the ecclesiastical historians depicted the deaths of Julian's relations more colorfully, attacks against Julian's retinue had taken place as early as Ephrem and John Chrysostom.²⁵ Since it is clear that these accusations against Julian circulated in Ammianus' day, the historian's emphasis on the executions of Paulus Catena and Eusebius following Julian's trial at Chalcedon²⁶ could be seen as a response to Christian legend about the deaths of the *comes* Iulianus and Felix.²⁷

While Ammianus was composing his history in the 380s, Christian polemicists had been using Julian's retinue to the same purpose for over a decade. When seen in the light of the other similarities between the two accounts, which the preceding and following chapters discuss, it seems likely that Ammianus decided to attack Constantius with the same means.

²³ Soz., *HE* V.8.

²⁴ For the role of Felix and Elpidius, see Theod., *HE* III.12; for their deaths, see Theodoret, *HE* III.13 and Philostorgius VI.10.

²⁵ *CJ* IV.3-4; see also Jn. Chrys., *De Babyla* 92.

²⁶ *Amm.* XXII.3.11-12. Paulus was burned alive, while the manner of Eusebius' death is not mentioned.

²⁷ Although both Sozomen and Theodoret wrote in the East and thus were less likely to have reached a Roman audience, Ammianus had spent several years in the East after Julian's death in 363, probably remaining there until after at least 371, if not later.

CHAPTER 4

RECTE EXISTIMANS: EMPERORS AND THE DIVINITY

For Nicene Christians writing in the 380s, Julian's death in Persia became a way to strengthen their argument that their own brand of Christianity was approved by God, since they associated his death in Persia with that of the homoian emperor Valens at Adrianople in 378. Even when Christian polemicists discussed the other issues we have mentioned above, they frequently do so only to bolster their argument that, because of his paganism and/or apostasy, Julian's reign was doomed to failure. Like some of his Christian contemporaries, Ammianus repeatedly insisted that Constantius was subject to a divine curse that prevented him from achieving the success of his predecessors. In doing so, the historian responded to the arguments of contemporary Christians who claimed Julian's defeat was the result of divine intervention. This chapter shall begin by examining the passages in which Ammianus uses the supernatural to attack Constantius, placing them into context with the arguments of other pagan authors who used the role of the supernatural to justify Julian's reign or condemn that of Constantius. Then, it shall examine the works of Christian polemicists who argued that God had been directly involved in Julian's death, provoking Ammianus to respond through his portrayal of Constantius.

Ammianus does not attempt to mask his belief in Constantius' lack of divine favor. In book XIX, Ammianus informs us that during the emperor's Persian campaign of 359/360, an unusually heavy thunderstorm, lightning and rainbows followed Constantius' failed siege of Bezabde. This leads to a brief digression on the cause and nature of rainbows until, near the end, Ammianus tells us, in language very similar to that which he had used earlier to describe the

birth of a deformed child, that “often Iris is sent from heaven, when the current situation should be changed.”¹ Since the historian had just finished narrating at length Constantius’ defeat at Bezabde, the “current situation” to which Ammianus refers is plainly Constantius’ rule over the empire. In our discussion of Constantius’ military capability, we have already seen Ammianus attribute the emperor’s lack of success in foreign wars to his zodiac sign.² Similarly, while discussing the surrender of a group of Alamanni to Constantius, Ammianus tells us that the emperor’s army rejoiced at the idea of a peace treaty, since the soldiers knew that fortune did not follow Constantius into foreign campaigns.³ By linking Constantius’ activities to fate, Ammianus depicts the emperor’s failures as provoked by the heavens. In an even harsher passage, Ammianus provides a detailed description of the portentous birth of a two-headed infant at Daphne, which the historian informs us, “forewarned that the empire was turning into a deformed condition.”⁴ This statement is a clear attack on Constantius’ supposed mishandling of the empire that had led to the treason trials at Scythopolis in 359, which Ammianus had just finished narrating. The historian provides what he sees as another direct demonstration of the divine disapproval of Constantius’ reign when, during his narration of events at Julian’s camp just after his acclamation as Augustus, Ammianus supplies the text of a hexametric verse oracle in Greek that claimed to predict Constantius’ demise.⁵

¹ Amm. XX.11.30: ...*apud poetas legimus saepe Irim de caelo tunc mitti, cum praesentium rerum uerti [necesse] sit status.* The word *necesse* seems to be a gloss for clarity, since it was not originally in the text of V (Vat. MS Lat. 1863, our oldest extant manuscript of the *Res Gestae*) nor is it in the edition of Gelenius, who used the now mostly-lost manuscript M (the only other known pre-Renaissance manuscript) in his construction of the text.

² Amm. XX.11.32; see above p. 11 n. 3.

³ Amm. XIV.10.16.

⁴ Amm. XIX.12.19: *Tunc apud Daphnen...uisu relatuque horrendum natum est monstrum, infans ore gemino cum dentibus binis et barba quattuorque oculis et breuissimis duabus auriculis, qui partus ita distortus praemonebat rem publicam in statum uerti deformem.*

⁵ Amm. XXI.2.2. The relevant part of the oracle states that, when Zeus has reached a certain point in the sky, “king Constantius of Asia shall come upon a miserable and painful end of blessed life” (βασιλεὺς

These passages demonstrate Ammianus' belief that the rule of Constantius was under divine injunction and, consequently, in dire need of replacement by an emperor (viz., Julian) who cultivated a better relationship with the gods. Yet, Ammianus frequently includes in the *Res Gestae* less immediately obvious references to Constantius' lack of divine favor. One of the better-known examples occurs in book 20, when Ammianus launches into a protracted and technical digression on eclipses just before his narration of Julian's acclamation as Augustus at Paris in early 361.⁶ While digressions on such topics are by no means unusual in the *Res Gestae*,⁷ the purpose of the eclipse passage is clearly to foreshadow Julian's eventual replacement of Constantius as Augustus, the narrative of which begins in the following chapter. Ammianus invents⁸ a supernatural sign in order to draw attention to Julian's impending imperial acclamation by the Gallic soldiery, subtly reminding his audience of the heavenly preference of Julian over Constantius.

In an earlier passage in book 17, Constantius decides to raise an obelisk in Rome, the historian does not content himself merely with a detailed account of how the obelisk⁹ travelled from Alexandria to Rome. Instead, Ammianus includes a comparison to Augustus. He maintains that, although Augustus had moved several other obelisks from Egypt to Rome, he chose to leave

Κωνσταντίος ἠΰδιδος αἰῆς / τέρμα φίλου βιοτοῦ στυγερόν καὶ ἐπώδυνον ἔξει). Ammianus points out that Julian interpreted this oracle in his own favor, indicating that the historian himself probably interpreted it in such a light.

⁶ Amm. XX.3.

⁷ For a discussion and more examples, see Barnes (1998), 32-42.

⁸ Ammianus' depiction of the eclipse was almost certainly his own creation, since astronomical tables reveal that no eclipse occurred in Roman territory on the day indicated. The nature of the passage only reinforces the idea that it is part of an attempt to draw attention to Julian and emphasize the upcoming régime change. Barnes (1998), 102-106. Sabbah (1978), 549, attempts to let Ammianus off the hook by arguing that the historian had confounded the eclipse in his narrative with one that did occur in Roman territory almost three years later (17 June 364), but to accept this argument does not restore the historian's credibility: the historian becomes confused, rather than biased.

⁹ Known as the Lateran obelisk to modern scholars. Iversen (1968), 55-64; see also Breasted (1906), 251.

the one later moved by Constantine (and later, Constantius) in place because it had been dedicated to the god Sol.¹⁰ Ammianus then informs us that, following Constantine's removal of the obelisk from its original location at Heliopolis at an unknown time, Constantius transported it to Rome. Immediately after its erection in the Circus Maximus, however, the bronze sphere on top of the obelisk was struck by lightning, an event considered, in the ancient world, as an omen of divine disapproval.¹¹ Ammianus follows this indication of the gods' anger with a Greek translation of the hieroglyphic inscriptions on the other obelisk in the Circus Maximus, which Augustus had transported to Rome during his reign. Translated by the otherwise unknown Hermapion, these passages seem at first glance to be little more than formulas intended to highlight the divine sanction given to the pharaoh Rameses II (reigned 1304-1237 BCE).¹² Yet upon closer inspection, Ammianus' emphasis upon the favor promised to Rameses by various divinities with solar associations (e.g. Phoebus/Apollo, Helios, Amon, Horus)¹³ in these inscriptions raises the question of whether Constantius and Constantine, who had removed the obelisk from its original place in a solar temple, would receive the same blessings after desecrating (in Ammianus' eyes) a monument dedicated to the sun god by removing it from its original location.

Oblique though it might be, the content of the obelisk inscription provides an implicit condemnation of Constantius' lack of divine favor by contrasting him with Rameses, the subject of the inscription, and Augustus, whom Constantius tried to imitate by placing an obelisk in the

¹⁰ Amm. XVII.4.12.

¹¹ Amm. XVII.4.12-16.

¹² The methodical language found in the Greek at Amm. XVII.4.17-23 closely resembles, in both form and content, the hieroglyphic inscriptions on other Egyptian obelisks: see e.g. Breasted (1906), 252, 330-332 and cf. Iversen (1968), 65-66. For the identification of this Rameses with Rameses II, see Demougeot (1986), 153 and the discussion at de Jonge (1977), 118.

¹³ For Amon and Horus as solar divinities, see de Jonge (1977), 122, 124.

Circus. The inscription mentions several times that Rameses' rule, good fortune, and ability “to rule with joy over all the inhabited earth”¹⁴ was due to the pharaoh's good relationship with Helios (the Greek equivalent of Sol). This contrasts strongly with Ammianus' portrayal of Constantius, an emperor who, unlike Rameses, had no relationship with any of the solar divinities mentioned in the obelisk passage and certainly would not have been called an “all-gladdening king” by Ammianus,¹⁵ since, as we have seen, the historian believed Constantius to have been a tyrant. The military success of Rameses, both implied by the content of this inscription and elsewhere in Latin historiography, also contrasts with how Ammianus wishes his reader to view Constantius as a general. For while the obelisk inscription tells us that Rameses had protected Egypt by conquering foreigners—even referring to him as the “son of Aries”—Constantius' reputed lack of military ability was a frequent source of Ammianus' contempt. The next chapter of the *Res Gestae*, which deals with Constantius' inability to settle a peace with the Persian king Sapor,¹⁶ gives a reality to the contrast implicit in the inscription between Constantius and Rameses, since, according to Tacitus,¹⁷ Rameses (unlike Constantius) had succeeded in subjecting Persia under his rule.

In the obelisk passage, then, Ammianus uses the divine favor and worldly success given to Rameses, a ruler of ancient times, to contrast with the divine disfavor and total failure of the reign of Constantius. Not surprisingly, the contrast between Rameses and Constantius has led

¹⁴ Amm. XVII.4.18: Ἡλιος βασιλεῖ Ραμέστη · δεδώρημαί σοι ἀνὰ πᾶσαν οἰκουμένην μετὰ χαρᾶς βασιλεύειν, σοι δὲ Ἡλιος φιλεῖ.

¹⁵ Amm. XVII.4.22: βασιλεὺς παγχαρῆς...

¹⁶ Amm. XVII.5.

¹⁷ *Ann.* II.60.3: *iussus* [sc. Augustus] *que e senioribus sacerdotum patrium sermonem interpretari referebat habitasse quondam septingenta milia aetate militari, atque eo cum exercitu regem Rhamsen Libya Aethiopia Medis que et Persis et Bactriano ac Scythia potitum...*

one recent scholar to interpret Rameses symbolically as Julian,¹⁸ especially given the latter's self-admitted devotion to Helios.¹⁹ The epithets in the inscription refute such a reading, however, as terms like “ever-living” and “he to whom the gods have given excessive length of life” would have seemed almost ironic if applied to Julian, a man who did not live to see his thirty-fifth birthday.²⁰ These and the other epithets of the passage, of course, were originally translations of the hieroglyphic inscriptions and thus not intended to apply to any modern ruler; yet Ammianus' selection of some to the exclusion of others²¹ does imply that Ammianus intended the text to be received in a certain way. Indeed, it would seem almost absurd to assume that Ammianus intended the passage to refer to Julian while ignoring the obvious fact that the emperor had died at a relatively young age.

This is not to argue the inscription passage is not allegorical, however, but if the Rameses of the inscription is to be associated with a Roman emperor, the emperor Augustus seems a much more likely candidate. Augustus' reign of forty-five years exceeded the length of Julian's life, justifying the use of an epithet like “ever-living.” But even more relevant than the applicability of epithets is the fact that Constantius' obelisk was placed in the Circus Maximus, next to the very obelisk whose text Ammianus provides and which Augustus had transported to Rome from Heliopolis in 10 BCE.²² Constantius was probably trying to imitate Augustus by placing his obelisk in the west side of the Circus, even down to the sphere that Constantius originally had

¹⁸ Rike (1987), 29-31.

¹⁹ See e.g. Julian's *Hymn to Helios* (*Or.* IV) and passing references in his *Ep.* 111 (Bidez).

²⁰ αἰωνόβιος, at XVII.4.18, 20, and 23; ᾧ πολὺν χρόνον ζωῆς ἐδωρήσαντο θεοί, at XVII.4.20. For Julian's date of birth, see Bidez (1930), 10.

²¹ Ammianus provides the translations of six lines of inscription, but there would have originally been twelve, unless the selection had already been made by Hermapion. See de Jonge (1977), 121.

²² For the date and location of these obelisks, see de Jonge (1977), 92, and Polzer (1965), 168-169.

placed on the top of his obelisk, which would have made the two obelisks look quite similar.²³

When one considers the text of the obelisk passage in light of the close physical proximity between the two monuments, it becomes apparent that Ammianus included the passage to criticize Constantius' decision to raise the obelisk in the Circus Maximus by contrasting him with Augustus, who had raised an obelisk with what Ammianus believed were the right intentions. In addition to the contrast implicit in the text of the obelisk inscription, Ammianus contrasts Constantius and Augustus explicitly with his account of the destruction of the sphere on top of Constantius' obelisk, an element likely intended to imitate a design element found in Augustus' obelisk.²⁴ By showing that, unlike Rameses and Augustus, Constantius was hostile to the gods and thus could not expect their protection, Ammianus probably intended to respond to those of Christians who had claimed that because of Julian's anti-Christian activities, God had temporarily abandoned the empire to its own devices.

As we pointed out above, Ammianus did not write in a vacuum, but rather in the context of other authors who argued that Constantius' reign was marked by divine displeasure.

Eunapius, for example, asserted that it was only after Julian had consulted with a Hellenic hierophant that he gained the courage to overthrow Constantius.²⁵ Of course, this narrative of events assumes that the gods are opposed to Constantius from the outset. Zosimus' *New History* has preserved an excerpt from Eunapius' history (lost in its original form) which reproduces an

²³ See Iversen (1968), 65-66, who gives the Latin text of the obelisk as follows: **IMP. CAESAR. DIVI F. / AVGVSTVS. / PONTIFEX. MAXIMUS. / IMP. XII. COS. XI. TRIB. POT. XIV. / AEGYPTO. IN. / POTESTATEM. / POPVLI. ROMANI. REDACTA. / SOLI. DONUM. DEDIT.** (emphasis mine)

²⁴ See Amm. XVII.4.15. Augustus' obelisk in the Circus had a sphere on its apex, as Constantius' originally did before being struck by lightning and replaced by a torch. It is not unlikely that the lightning strike passage is another criticism of Constantius' attempt to imitate Augustus. See Iversen (1968), 65.

²⁵ Eunap., *Vit. Soph.* VII.3.7: τὸν ἱεροφάντην μετακαλέσας ἐκ τῆς Ἑλλάδος καὶ σὺν ἐκείνῳ τινὰ μόνοις ἐκείνοις γνώριμα διαπραξάμενος, ἐπὶ τὴν καθαίρεσιν ἠγέρθη τῆς Κωνσταντίου τυραννίδος. On this passage see Kaldellis (2005), 652-655.

oracle that predicted Constantius' demise.²⁶ We have seen the same oracle also in the *Res Gestae* as well as, much later, the twelfth-century Byzantine author John Zonaras' *Abridgment of History in 18 Books*.²⁷ Nor was Ammianus the only pagan to believe that the gods had favored Julian during his brief reign as emperor. Aside from Ammianus' own remarks about the divine favor that Julian received, we see Libanius, in his *Epitaph (Or. 18)* for Julian which he composed shortly after the emperor's death, call upon the emperor as "cherished of the gods, disciple of the gods, and companion of the gods."²⁸ In late 378 or early 379 Libanius would further argue in his *On Avenging Julian (Or. 24)* that the failure to avenge Julian's death had led to the punishment of the Roman empire by the gods: "And now, I think, that the gods have often made mention in their meetings of those things which he [Julian] suffered and which fell upon him as he died, finding fault with one another and calling upon each other for vengeance."²⁹ These comments of Libanius and Eunapius imply that the historian's depiction of Julian participated in a larger discourse over the legacies of Constantius and Julian.

The defensive stance taken toward Julian, as represented here by Ammianus and Libanius was provoked, in part, by the widespread polemic against Julian circulating among contemporary Christians, the primary undercurrent of which was that Julian had failed as an emperor because he apostatized and therefore become subject to a divine punishment. This argument appears very early among our sources: both Gregory of Nazianzus and Ephrem use it in their works against Julian, writing within a year of the emperor's death. Gregory, after complaining about the

²⁶ Zos. III.9.6.

²⁷ Amm. XXI.2.2; Zon. XIII.11.9.

²⁸ Lib., *Or.* XVIII.308: ὦ δαιμόνων μὲν τρόφιμε, δαιμόνων δὲ μαθητά, δαιμόνων δὲ πάρεδρε...

²⁹ Lib., *Or.* XXIV.35: καὶ νῦν οἶμαι τοὺς θεοὺς πολλάκις ἐν ταῖς αὐτῶν ἀγοραῖς πεποιῆσθαι λόγον ἃ τε ἔπαθεν οὗτος ὦν τε ἠτύχησε τεθνεώς, μεμφομένους τε καὶ παρακαλοῦντας ἀλλήλους ἐπὶ τὴν δίκην; cf. *Or.* XVIII.29.

restrictions Julian had imposed upon Christian teachers, concludes with a sense of gratitude that “the benevolence of God preserved us from [Julian’s] tyranny.”³⁰ While narrating Julian’s defeat in Persia, Gregory again specifically attributes the emperor’s choosing to believe the words of a Persian defector (and thus, the ensuing destruction of the Roman army) to the prodding of God.³¹ Finally, while concluding his second invective against Julian, Gregory calls his own pair of polemical orations against the late emperor “our monument to you [Julian]...teaching all others not to risk such a rebellion against God, so that they may not do the same things and suffer the same fate.”³²

Gregory’s contemporary, Ephrem, even more explicitly attributes Julian’s failure to divine retribution in his four *Hymns against Julian*. In each of the four hymns against Julian composed after the emperor’s death, Ephrem at least implies that God was an active force in Julian’s defeat. For example, in his first hymn he compares the fate of Julian to that of the biblical king Nebuchadnezzar: “a king, a Hellenic king, has been rebuked / for he angered God and denied Daniel, / and there near Babylon he was judged and condemned.”³³ The passage of Ephrem refers to a prophecy of Daniel that Christians interpreted to mean that the Temple in Jerusalem would never be rebuilt,³⁴ and reveals Ephrem’s belief that Julian’s intentional attempt

³⁰ Greg. Naz., *Or.* IV.6A: ...τῆς τυραννίδος ἢ φιλάνθρωπία τοῦ Θεοῦ διεσώσατο.

³¹ In a genitive absolute construction at *Or.* V.12C: ὡς δὲ εἶπε ταῦτα καὶ εἰπὼν ἔπεισεν, εὐπίστον γὰρ ἢ κουφότης καὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ μάλιστα συνελαύνοντος, ἅπαντα ἦν ὁμοῦ τὰ δεινὰ. (As he [the false Persian defector] spoke these things and [Julian] believed him—for vanity is gullible, especially when God brings it on—there arose at once every variety of evil.)

³² Greg. Naz. *Or.* V.42.A: Αὕτη σοι παρ’ ἡμῶν στήλη...τοὺς λοιποὺς πάντα παιδεύουσιν μὴ τινα τοιαύτην κατὰ Θεοῦ τολμᾶν ἐπανάστασιν, ἵνα μὴ τὰ ὅμοια δράσαντες τῶν ἴσων καὶ ἀντιτύχωσιν.

³³ Eph., *CJ* I.20. Like Ammianus’ contemporary Claudian, Ephrem here gives a classical locus (Babylon) when in fact another place entirely (Ctesiphon) intended—not out of confusion, but for rhetorical reasons. See Cameron (1970), 347-348.

³⁴ Dan. 9:26-27; see following note.

to disprove the prophecy of Daniel by rebuilding the Temple led to his demise.³⁵ Other than the fact that he never calls Julian by name—preferring circumlocutions like “the Hellenic king” or “the tyrant”—among our early sources, Ephrem makes the least effort to veil his hostility to Julian. Ephrem probably sincerely believed (with some justification) that Julian was responsible for the loss of his hometown, Nisibis, to Persia and the consequent exile of most of the city’s community to nearby Edessa.³⁶ One can perhaps partially account for the harshness of Gregory’s language by pointing out that his brother worked as a doctor in Julian’s retinue, which must frustrated Gregory. It is clear, however, that Gregory’s more general antagonism to traditional Greco-Roman religion as well as Julian’s attempt to forbid Christians from teaching the traditional curriculum was the primary factor behind the fierceness of his invective.³⁷

Despite the intensity of the rhetoric that poured forth immediately after Julian’s death, we must wait fifteen years, until the beginning of the reign of Theodosius I in January 379, before the level of polemic against Julian begins to significantly increase. Interestingly, for a figure who would be so strongly condemned in later centuries, we find no dedicatedly negative portrayals of Julian among Christians after Gregory’s *Second Oration against Julian* in early 364 until the references to him in John Chrysostom’s *On Saint Babylas*, preached around the beginning of 379.³⁸ Chrysostom was followed shortly afterwards by Jerome’s *Chronicle* and biblical commentaries, and later, Rufinus’ *Church History* at the very beginning of the fifth

³⁵ Eph., *CJ* IV.20: “fire came out and devoured the scribes / who read in Daniel that [Jerusalem] would be destroyed forever, / who read but did not learn; they were severely stricken, and they learned;” cf. IV.23: “Daniel passed judgment on Jerusalem and determined / that it would not be rebuilt.” See Lieu (1989), 126 n. 95 and Griffith (1987), 259-260.

³⁶ McVey (1987), 22-23.

³⁷ Bernardi (1983), 44-46; on Gregory’s brother Caesarius, see *PLRE*, 170.

³⁸ I accept the argument of Kelly (1995), 41-42, that the text was composed in early 379, but for other suggestions see Shepardson (2009), 100 n. 5; at 114, the author suggests January 380.

century, as well as several passing but obviously negative references in other authors, some of which we have already mentioned. The reason for such a marked increase in polemic against a target that had been largely ignored hitherto seems quite straightforward. On 9 August 378 the homoian emperor Valens was killed in the battle of Adrianople while fighting against an army of Goths. Shortly thereafter, the young emperor in the West, Gratian, chose the Spanish general Theodosius, who would soon show himself a committed Nicene Christian, to replace Valens.³⁹ In the Nicene vision of history, the violent deaths of both the persecuting Julian and the homoian Valens, as well as the latter's replacement by Theodosius, who soon came to legislate against homoians and non-Christians,⁴⁰ became demonstrative proof that God intended the Roman empire to convert to Nicene Christianity. Indeed, to non-Nicenes, what better apologetic proof could be provided than the deaths of not one, but two emperors who had persecuted Nicene Christians within less than twenty years? After Valens' disastrous death at Adrianople, Nicene Christians believed they saw a pattern in the fortunes of those who persecuted Nicene Christianity and retrojected it onto Julian.

The process of definitively turning Julian's reign into the result of a divine judgment began soon after Adrianople, and it appears in most narrative Christian sources which treat Julian at any length. For example, in his *Chronicle*, Jerome records with typical brevity that "the church of Antioch was closed, and the deadliest storm of imminent persecution was struck down by the will of God," a reference to Julian's closure of the Great Church in Antioch.⁴¹ By placing

³⁹ Valens' religion: Lenski (2004), 93. For discussion of Valens' death, see Lenski (2002a), 355-367; Stein (1959), 189-190.

⁴⁰ For Theodosius' personal religious development, see McLynn (1994), 106-110.

⁴¹ Jer., *Chron.* s.a. 363: *ecclesia antiochiae clausa, et grauissima imminentis persecutionis procella dei uoluntate sopita est*. The event is described in more detail at Theod., *HE* III.12.1: ὁ τύρραννος...τῆς μεγάλης ἐκκλησίας, ἣν Κωνσταντῖνος ἐδείματο, καθηλώσας τὰς θύρας ἄβατον τοῖς εἰς αὐτὴν

the two events so close to one another, Jerome implies that the closing of the church of Antioch in early 363 would have only been the beginning of a much more serious persecution—one which was prevented, of course, by divine providence. Two of Jerome’s letters also reveal his belief in divine agency in Julian’s death. In a letter to the bishop Heliodorus written in 396, Jerome claims that, in Media (an archaic term for Persia), Julian “discovered the Christ whom he had once denied in Gaul.”⁴² In a letter to the Roman rhetor Magnus written a year or two later, Jerome points out that during his Persian campaign, Julian wrote seven books against Christ and subsequently died “by his own sword,”⁴³ indicating that Julian himself was ultimately to blame for his own death. During the controversy over whether to restore the Altar of Victory to the floor of the Roman Senate in 383, the bishop Ambrose of Milan used Julian’s failed attempt to restore the Temple in Jerusalem as an example to Gratian of what could happen to a ruler when he attempted to restore what God had destroyed.⁴⁴ Julian’s reign, and his death in Persia, had been integrated into God’s plan for Nicene supremacy. In a largely theological poem *Apotheosis* written at the beginning of the fifth century, the Spanish poet and lawyer Prudentius could describe Julian as “faithless to God,” before describing a version of Julian’s deathbed scene in which Christ himself menaces the emperor’s last moments with a thunderbolt.⁴⁵

ἄθροισμένοις ἀπέφηνεν. (The tyrant [Julian]...after he had nailed shut the doors of the great church which Constantine had revered, declared it closed to those who were standing nearby.) Cf. Bowersock (1978), 99.

⁴² Jer., *Ep.* LX.15: *Iulianus perditior animae suae et Christiani iugulator exercitus, Christum sensit in Media quem primum in Gallia denegarat; dumque Romanos propagare uult fines perdidit propagatos.*

⁴³ Jer., *Ep.* LXX.3: *Iulianus Augustus septem libros in expeditione Parthica aduersum Christum euomuit, et iuxta fabulas poetarum suo se ense lacerauit.* It is unknown to what work of Julian’s Jerome refers, since the polemical *Against the Galileans* was three books and written in Antioch. Perhaps the reference is to a now-lost book of commentaries written during the campaign which Jerome considered blasphemous.

⁴⁴ Ambr., *Ep.* X.74.12: *Non audisti, imperator, quia cum iussisset Iulianus reparari templum Hierosolymis, divino qui faciebant repurgium igne flagrarunt? Non caves ne etiam nunc fiat?*

⁴⁵ Prud., *Apoth.* 454: *Perfidus ille Deo, quamuis non perfidus orbi;* cf. 488-492. For the date, see Lavarenne (1961), vi.

By the end of the fourth century, then, Julian's apostasy and subsequent death had been largely explained by Christians as proof that God destined the conversion of the Roman empire. Among Nicene Christians, at least, it seems probable that such an interpretation was provoked by the violent death of Valens in late summer 378. This is not the place to engage in a serious discussion of the motivation of Ammianus' Christian counterparts, but there is empirically little question that there was a substantial increase in polemic against Julian in the decades following Valens' death. Whatever the reason for this increase, it coincided almost exactly with Ammianus' composition of the *Res Gestae* in the 380s,⁴⁶ and the numerous Christian references to Julian's divine punishment that appear in this period must have had an impact on someone as devoted to Julian's memory as Ammianus. This is perhaps clearest in his depiction of the destruction of the temple of Apollo at Daphne. John Chrysostom (and probably other Christians as well, to judge from the presence of the claim in later sources) had attributed the destruction of the temple to God himself,⁴⁷ but Ammianus' narrative contains two alternative explanations, neither of which involve a supernatural power. First, the historian tells us that the emperor Julian suspected the Christians of Antioch, and responded by closing the Great Church in the city. Ammianus then tells another version in which a travelling philosopher accidentally burns down the temple by leaving an incense offering burning at the foot of the wooden statue of the *Dea Caelestis*, but not without first discrediting it by referring to it as "the most trifling rumor."⁴⁸ Clearly, then, Ammianus was not only aware of Christian claims about the destruction of

⁴⁶ See chapter 1 for a discussion of the date of the composition of the *Res Gestae*.

⁴⁷ Jn. Chrys., *De Babyla* 121: Βουλόμενος δὲ αὐτὸν ὁ Θεὸς ἀνακρούσασθαι καὶ καταστεῖλαι φλεγμαίνοντα ἐπήγαγε πάλιν τουτὶ τὸ σημεῖον ἐν τῇ Δάφνῃ τὸ πῦρ ἐπὶ τὸν νεῶν ἀφείς.

⁴⁸ Amm. XXII.13.3: *ferebatur autem licet rumore leuissimo...* For the entire story in Amm., see XXII.13.1-3.

Apollo's temple at Daphne, but intended his narrative, which included two entirely human interpretations of the event, as an answer to those Christians who claimed that the temple's destruction was the result of divine intervention. When Ammianus depicts Constantius as an emperor whose efforts were destined by the heavens to fail, he would have had Christian attacks against Julian's relationship with the divinity in mind. Although, in contrast to his Christian contemporaries, Ammianus does not seem to believe the gods directly intervened to cause difficulties for Constantius, the historian's eager cataloging of the numerous portents⁴⁹ that occurred during the emperor's reign is an attempt to prove the divine disfavor of Constantius, as Christians had claimed that Julian's death and other events of his reign were the product of God's desire to eradicate paganism once and for all.

⁴⁹ It is true that the systematic narration of portents was common in ancient historiography, and indeed was a feature to be handed down to medieval chronicles, but, as Thompson (1947), 111-113, noticed, the vast majority of the omens in Ammianus occur in the books dealing with Constantius and Julian. This implies that the historian deployed them largely as polemical tools to respond to Christians, intending to neutralize their Christian interpretations of Julian's reign by introducing signs which occurred during Constantius' reign into his narrative and providing his own interpretation for those that occurred during that of Julian.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In the preceding pages I have argued that the depiction of Constantius found among the pages of Ammianus is heavily influenced by a demand to answer contemporary Nicene Christian polemic against Julian. Ammianus' depiction of Constantius' military ineptitude, decadent court life and lack of divine favor are all indebted, to varying degrees, to the image of Julian in Christian sources of the period. Even if no one of the cases mentioned above is conclusive, the sheer number of similarities between the two accounts strongly suggests that Ammianus was responding to Christian polemic.

There are consequences to this argument. Ammianus' position toward Christianity has been contested since the seventeenth century, but recent academic debate has centered on whether the *Res Gestae* is subtly hostile to Christianity.¹ This thesis has provided several examples of Ammianus actively responding to Christian polemic against Julian by creating a hostile portrait of Constantius, including the historian's invocation of Zopyrus in imitation of Gregory of Nazianzus and his insistence that, because of his poor relationship with the gods, Constantius' effort to raise an obelisk was doomed to fail from the start. The distortion of Constantius' reign reveals that, as previous scholars have argued, Ammianus can no longer be seen as a disengaged or neutral pagan, for whom Christianity was merely an ancillary issue.²

¹ For a survey of such views, see Barnes (1998), 80-81.

² As is argued by e.g. Hunt (1985), *passim*.

This thesis also raises a larger problem. It has long been contended that *Res Gestae* is the only reliable source for secular events from 353 to 378.³ This is even more true for the reign of Constantius, since almost all of the surviving sources are explicitly polemical for either religious or political reasons. Few would advocate the wholesale acceptance of Ammianus' narrative since E.A. Thompson's groundbreaking work on the subject was published over sixty years ago. Yet if one concedes that Ammianus, like most of his contemporaries, engaged in distortion of the facts of Constantius' reign to suit his argument, one must question Thompson's assertion that "it is certain that Ammianus' pictures of Constantius, Julian, Jovian, Valentinian and Valens will stand for ever substantially unchanged."⁴ Thompson himself had questioned Ammianus' depiction of the relationship between Constantius and Ursicinus.⁵ Yet given Ammianus' overt hostility to Christians and Christianity, it is clear that the historian's portrayal of Constantius, who ensured that the Christianizing reforms of his father Constantine would remain,⁶ should come under scrutiny.

Another point of somewhat lesser interest is that Ammianus' reliance upon Christian sources to build his narrative of Constantius, if indirect, provides further evidence that even non-Christians did not conveniently divide their reading practices into categories of Christian and classical.⁷ Not only Ammianus, but at least some of his audience in the city of Rome, would have been expected to recognize the Christian arguments to which the historian responded. Finally, Ammianus' response to Christian polemic reveals that by the late fourth century, Christianity had become so thoroughly attached to the empire that, even for a historian who

³ See e.g. n. 4 below.

⁴ Thompson (1947), 125.

⁵ *ibid.*, 42-55.

⁶ On Constantius' role in the fourth-century bureaucratic reform, see esp. Vogler (1979), *passim*.

⁷ For readership of Christian texts by non-Christians, see Gamble (1995), 103.

studiously avoided its discussion,⁸ the claims of Christianity could not be ignored — even if responding to them meant the deployment of subtle and unannounced distortion.

⁸ See Cameron and Cameron (1964), esp. 316-317.

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