

AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS ON THE BATTLE OF STRASBURG: ART AND ANALYSIS IN THE *HISTORY*

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AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS' ACCOUNT of the battle of Strasburg (16.12), in which his hero, the Emperor Julian, decisively defeated a considerably larger Alemannic army, is one of the more impressive parts of his history. Since the historian was writing within the classical, politico-military tradition of historiography, battles and sieges naturally play an important part in his narrative. Not all battles and sieges are treated equally, and decisions whether or not to include accounts of them and how much weight to lay upon them arise out of the writer's historical perspective and are an indication of it.¹ All battles described in the history are regarded as important, but to Ammianus two of the battles which he describes, those at Strasburg in A.D. 357 and at Adrianople in A.D. 378, have an importance of a higher degree. Their climactic nature is indicated by direct comments,² and also by the length of the accounts, by their positions in the history,³ and by the care and artistry lavished upon them.

Scholars have devoted much attention to the battle of Strasburg. The older ones, especially in Germany, were mostly concerned to identify the ultimate sources of the various accounts of the battle, to establish its exact site, and to elucidate the progress of the fighting (list in Pighi, 70-71). Later Pighi produced a general analysis and clarification of Ammianus' narrative; and, more recently, Rosen has considered Ammianus' account in the light of his historical and literary aims. These two studies, together with Naudé's general paper on battles and sieges in Ammianus, are the most important background to the present paper, the purpose of which is to show how some literary aspects of Ammianus' narrative serve also as vehicles for the writer's historical analysis.

¹See C. P. T. Naudé, "Battles and Sieges in Ammianus Marcellinus," *AClass* 1 (1958) 92-105. Also cited by author's name are N. J. E. Austin, "Ammianus' Account of the Adrianople Campaign. Some Strategic Observations," *AClass* 15 (1972) 77-83; G. B. Pighi, *Nuovi studi Ammiane* (Milan 1936) 67-127; K. Rosen, *Studien zur Darstellungskunst und Glaubwürdigkeit des Ammianus Marcellinus* (diss. Heidelberg, Mannheim 1968, Bonn 1970) 95-131. I should like to thank Professor Douglas Wurtele of the English Department of Carleton University, who read an earlier draft of this paper and made a number of helpful suggestions.

²Strasburg: *his tot ac talibus prospero peractis eventu* (16.12.67; cp. 12.70); Adrianople: *haec numquam pensabilia damna, quae magno rebus stetero Romanis* (31.13.11; cp. 13.19).

³Strasburg forms the climax of book 16, the rest of the events of the year being carried over into book 17. Adrianople effectively closes the whole history.

Ammianus' evaluation of the importance of the battle of Strasburg has two origins. The first is a general perception of its importance, which may have been much influenced by Julian's own report of the battle,⁴ and which is found in Christian as well as pagan sources.⁵ The second is Ammianus' own adulatory attitude towards Julian, which led him to build up the battle of Strasburg as part of the process of magnifying his hero to the disadvantage of the Emperor Constantius II (cp. Rosen 127–131). The account of the battle reflects this process of building up in a number of ways. Firstly, Ammianus makes a clear and strong connexion between the defeat, earlier in the year, of the force which Constantius had sent from Italy under the *mag. ped. praes.*, Barbatio, and the decision of the Aleman kings to cross the Rhine and threaten Julian.⁶ Indeed, in a number of passages in the account of the battle of Strasburg he calls attention to the flight of Barbatio which, he alleges, increased the confidence and ferocity of the Germans;⁷ and in his desire to emphasize the flight as the immediate cause of the invasion, he omits the information, preserved by Libanius, that the Aleman leaders referred to a letter in which, they claimed, Constantius had ceded to them lands to the west of the Rhine, which Julian had reoccupied.⁸ In casting Barbatio's flight into such prominence, Ammianus is implicitly continuing the contrast between Julian and Barbatio (the representative of Constantius) which he had made at 16.11 in his description of the fighting that preceded Strasburg (Rosen 84–95); and he is also supporting the opinion that the Germans can only be kept quiet by the successful use of military power, a position at odds with the generally quietist policy of Constantius (Rosen 127–131). Secondly, Julian's achievement at Strasburg is

⁴That Julian wrote an account of the battle is attested by Libanius, *Or.* 13.25; Eunapius, *frag.* 9. Cp. Zosimus 3.2.4; and see other passages quoted by J. Bidez and F. Cumont, *Imp. Caesaris Fl. Cl. Iuliani Epistulae, Leges, Poematia, Fragmenta Varia* (Paris and London 1922) 212–213. On Ammianus' use of Julian see Pighi 79–80 and 83–86.

⁵E.g., Socrates 3.1: *συμβάλλει δὲ τῷ πλήθει καὶ κατακράτος νικᾷ... ταῦτα εὐτυχήσας*, ... (cp. Sozomen 5.1).

⁶He introduces the account of the German aggression with the words, *quo dispalato foedo terrore, Alamannorum reges . . . in unum robore virium suarum omni collecto . . . venerē prope urbem Agentoratum* (16.12.1). *Foedus terror* refers to the flight of Barbatio, which has been described immediately before these words (16.11.14–15). Libanius, *Or.* 12.47 and 18.51, makes a similar, though weaker, connexion.

⁷16.12.5: *ad cuius roborandam fiduciam, recens quoque fuga ducis accessit, numero praestantis et viribus*; 12.16: *turpissimus ducis Romani digressus ferociam natura conceptam auxit in maius*. See also 12.2 and 6.

⁸Libanius *Or.* 18.52. This letter is usually taken to be the communication in which Constantius had encouraged the Germans to attack Magnentius (see Pighi 86–87 and Socrates 3.1).

emphasized both by pointing to the smallness of the Roman force, which was opposed by an Alemannic army at least twice its size,⁹ and through a direct discussion of the dangers of the Romans, which is inserted in the narrative under the pretext of showing that the confidence of the Roman troops, who were eager for battle, was ill-founded (16.12.15–17). Here again, if the version of Libanius can be trusted, Ammianus may have suppressed information, in order to achieve the desired effect. For Libanius says (*Or.* 18.54–55) that Julian, rather than attacking the Alemannic vanguard as soon as it had crossed the river, waited until 30,000 men were over, in order to win a big victory.¹⁰ Ammianus, who has all the Germans across the river before Julian's arrival (16.12.19), could hardly have included this information, if he had it, since to do so, while emphasizing the danger of the Romans, would have made Julian appear to have been over-rash. Finally, after the account of the battle, Ammianus tells how the courtiers of Constantius belittled the Caesar's achievement and adds that the Emperor himself claimed the glory of the victory, a complaint made also by Julian and Libanius.¹¹

The skill which Ammianus displays in his account of the battle of Strasburg is of a high order, even if it is a little lacking in purely technical virtuosity.¹² The narrative falls easily into four parts—the events before the day of the battle (12.1–6); events on the day of the battle and pre-

⁹16.12.1, 2, 6, and 19. Though some scholars (e.g., E. von Nischer, "Die Schlacht bei Strasburg im Jahr 357 n. Chr.," *Klio* 21 [1927] 399, n. 1) have raised the number of Julian's men from the 13,000 reported by Ammianus (16.12.2) to about 20,000 by adding units from Barbatio's army, the general consensus is that Julian was outnumbered by between two and three times (e.g., Rosen 113–114; J. Bidez, *La vie de l'Empereur Julien* [Paris 1965 (1930)] 153; R. Browning, *The Emperor Julian* [London 1975] 85). The reason for adding these troops of Barbatio appears to be that Ammianus (12.2) says that a deserter from the *scutarii*, who had been with Barbatio, had deserted to the Alemanni after the departure of the *mag. ped.* and had informed them of the strength of Julian's forces. Later (12.21) Ammianus says that the same deserter (*ante dictus . . . perfuga*) also told the Germans how Julian would line up his forces for battle. Libanius, *Or.* 18.54, says that deserters (*ἀντόμολοι*) betrayed the dispositions, and also indicates that these had been decided upon before the Germans crossed the river. To know these dispositions the deserter would have had to be attached to Julian's forces (Pighi 87–88). If this does indicate a substantial reinforcement of Julian's forces, then Ammianus stands convicted of a serious omission. (At 16.11.15 he said that Barbatio had placed his troops in winter quarters.)

¹⁰I see no reason to reject this information given by Libanius. It adds nothing to his praise of Julian, and his attempt to justify Julian's decision to wait seems rather strained.

¹¹Ammianus 16.12.67–70; Julian *Ep. ad Ath.* 279c–d; Libanius *Or.* 18.67.

¹²Compare the judgement of J. Gimzane, *Ammien Marcellin, sa vie et son oeuvre* (Toulouse 1889) 303–304, who is generally quite critical of his subject. The remark of A. Momigliano, "The Lonely Historian Ammianus Marcellinus," *AnnPisa* 4 (1974) 1405, that, "He lacks technical competence and aims at literary effects," is too brief to be clear.

liminary to the battle (7–35); the battle itself (36–57); and the aftermath of the battle (58–70). The battle itself is also divided into four phases—the first onset of the Alemanni and the rout of the Roman cavalry (36–41); the infantry battle (42–48); the Alemannic penetration of the Roman centre (49–50); and the flight and massacre of the Alemanni (50–57).¹³ The battle itself, as the climax of the account, also builds to a climax in the bloody massacre in the river Ill,¹⁴ the visual impact of which is enhanced by the use of a theatrical simile and reinforced by words which urge the reader to visualize the spectacle.¹⁵

The importance of the battle is fixed by Ammianus in the opening sentence of the account, where he portentously rolls off the names of the seven Aleman kings who assembled to attack Julian.¹⁶ Throughout the account he strives to emphasize this importance by various means that his rhetoric offers to him. Topoi are sought and elaborated (Rosen 115 f.). There are reminiscences of a Livian battle-scene (Pighi 110–113, cp. 122) and an *exemplum* in which Julian is compared with Sulla (12.41). Assonance and alliteration are constantly in evidence, mostly used for no apparently special purpose beyond the stateliness which they impart to the sentences.¹⁷ The language strains to be vivid, especially in the visual and concrete nature of its images. Thus, for example, developments in the narrative are continually announced by the blast of trumpets, a detail which is both vivid and plausible,¹⁸ as is a fleeing tribune's recognition of the Caesar Julian by the dragon-standard, *summitati hastae longioris aptatum, velut senectutis pendentis exuvias* (12.39). Other details, too, are arresting—for instance, the Alemanni at bay to the

¹³This division of the narrative structure is close to that of Rosen, 95 and 115. The analysis of Pighi, 99 ff., is too complex and in parts rather forced.

¹⁴If the site of the battle were at Oberhausbergen, which is to the north-west of Strasburg (as argued by von Nischer [above, n. 9] cp. J. J. Hatt, "Le champ de bataille de Oberhausbergen [357–1262]," *BullStrasburg* 1963, 427–434), then the river into which the Alemanni plunged must have been the Ill. Ammianus does not name the river.

¹⁵16.12.57: *et velut in quodam theatriali spectaculo, aulaeis miranda monstrantibus multa, licebat iam sine metu videre . . .* (cp. 12.56: *unde id observatum est . . .*). Even the artificial and unsatisfactory image which ends the description—*spumans denique cruore barbarico, decolor alveus insueta stupebat augmenta* (12.57)—reinforces the visual nature of the account.

¹⁶Remarked by Rosen, 96, n. 1. The literary analysis in this paragraph is not intended to be thoroughgoing. Fuller and generally satisfactory analyses appear in Pighi and Rosen.

¹⁷Examples are noted by P. de Jonge, *Philological and Historical Commentary on Ammianus Marcellinus XVI* (Groningen 1972) 164 ff.

¹⁸Trumpets occur six times, at 12.1 (uncertain), 7, 27, 36, 45, and 62, to which add the *barritus* of the Cornuti and Bracchiati at 43. They occur in all of Ammianus' descriptions of set battles with the Germans. R. A. MacMullen, "Some Pictures in Ammianus Marcellinus," *The Art Bulletin* 46 (1964) 445, remarks the popularity of brass bands, and especially of trumpets, in the late Roman period.

Romans and seeking peace, *suppliciter obsecrantes* (12.15), the words thrown to the end of the sentence; or the brilliantly observed detail from the rout after the battle, *splendentesque galeae sub pedibus voluebantur* (12.54), which encapsulates the destruction of the former glory of the Alemanni, which was vested in their proud king Chonodomar, *cuius vertici flammeus torulus aptabatur* (12.24). The firmness of the Roman troops and their leader is given a gestural realization and contrasted with the warlike confidence of the Alemanni at 12.3, where, when the invaders tell Julian to leave the lands *virtuti sibi quaesitis et ferro*, the Caesar is described as *ignarus pavendi* and he remains *in eodem gradu constantiae . . . immobilis*, the first phrase immediately following *ferro*, the second closing the sentence.¹⁹ Finally, the confidence and arrogance of the Alemanni are given a brilliant physical summation in the description of their king Chonodomar: *Chonodomarius . . . cuius vertici flammeus torulus aptabatur, anteibat cornu sinistrum, audax et fidens ingenti robore lacertorum, ubi ardor proelii sperabatur, immanis, equo spumante sublimior, erectus in iaculum formidandae vastitatis, armorumque nitore conspicuus ante alios, et strenuus miles et utilis praeter ceteros ductor* (12.24).

Underlying Ammianus' narrative is a series of related themes, which give shape and coherence to the actions described, and almost constitute a commentary upon them, insofar as they point to differences in the Aleman and Roman approaches to the fighting. As a result of victories over Barbatio and, earlier, Decentius,²⁰ and after the sacking of many cities of Gaul, Chonodomar, the leader of the Alemanni and the *princeps audendi* (12.4), was elated by his success, *ardua subrigens supercilium* (*ibid.*); his followers were confident—*confidentiam caput altius attollentem* (12.2). This confidence and arrogance on the part of the Alemanni (*fastus barbarici*, 12.3) is repeatedly stressed during the account of the preliminaries to the fighting (12.1–36).²¹ It served, in fact, to increase their savagery, their *barbara feritas* (12.2), which is noted, though as yet infrequently (16.12.16, 23, and 31). On the Roman side their leader, Julian, is resolute and calm in the face of the danger to his army,²² and plans his moves with prudence and care, *utilitati securitatisque recte consulens* (12.8). The soldiers, though they reject Julian's advice to postpone

¹⁹The firmness of the Roman soldier is in places given a concrete expression, being likened to a wall or a tower (see 223 and n. 27). On the importance of gestures and poses see MacMullen, *art. cit.* 441.

²⁰Is the reference to the victory over Decentius the only trace of the letter which Libanius (*Or.* 18.52) says Chonodomar used to justify his claim to the territories west of the Rhine? (See also n. 8.)

²¹It appears in various forms about eight times. In addition to the passages quoted see 16.12.5, 35, and especially 24.

²²16.12.3: *ignarus pavendi, nec ira nec dolore percussus*; 12.8: *genuina placiditate sermonis*.

the battle until the next day, which he gives to them in a speech that is a model of caution (12.9–12),²³ do so because of their confidence in his generalship and good fortune: their cause is just and the gods are on their side.²⁴ These themes, Aleman arrogance and confidence and Roman caution, prudence, and trust in the gods, dominate the first part of the account. However, when the actual fighting begins, they are replaced by others. At the beginning of the fighting the savagery of the Germans springs into prominence as they rush into battle, *frendentes immania, eorumque ultra solitum saevientium comae fluentes horrebant, et elucebat quidem ex oculis furor* (12.36). On their side the Romans are resolute (*pertinax miles*), their cavalry fights bravely (*fortiter*), the infantry firmly (*firmitus*) and in a disciplined manner (*frontem artissimis conserens parmis*, 12.37). At places in the account of the fighting, notably 12.44–47 and 49, the ferocity of the Germans flares up, which increases their disorder,²⁵ while throughout the conflict the Romans, in contrast, display discipline and organized fortitude.²⁶ Finally, the Alemanni, unable to breach the legion of the Primani, whose soldiers are likened to towers (*instar turrium*, 12.49),²⁷ break, flee, and are massacred. In the aftermath of the fighting no themes are especially predominant, as they had been in the accounts of the preliminaries to the fighting and of the fighting itself. But after the capture of the Aleman leader, Chonodomar, his humility and fear, and the general tendency of the Germans to humility in adversity, are remarked;²⁸ and Julian is shown treating the captured king in a properly merciful fashion (12.65–66).

Certainly, some of these themes may have been foreshadowed in Julian's account of the battle. Libanius, who also drew upon Julian, remarks the boldness of the Aleman king (*οὐρῶ θρασύν*, *Or.* 18.53) at a

²³Julian stresses caution, discipline, and good order—9: *cautiorem viam*; 10: *regibilem et consultam* (sc. *iuventutem*); 12: *dispositio tempestiva . . . recto consilio*. In the fourth of his exhortations to parts of the army just before the fighting begins he demands *pensatio moderata et cauta* (33).

²⁴See especially the exhortation of the standard-bearer at 16.12.18: *perge, felicissime omnium Caesar, quo te fortuna prosperior ducit; tandem per te virtutem et consilia militare sentimus. praei nos ut faustus antesignanus et fortis, experieris quid miles sub conspectu bellicosi ductoris testisque individui gerendorum, modo adsit superum numen, viribus efficiet excitatis*. Cp. 12.13, and Victor, *Caes.* 42.17–18, who remarks Julian's *fortuna et consilium*.

²⁵Note especially 16.12.44: *violentia iraque incompressi*; 49, where the Romans pierce the flanks of the Germans, *quae nudabat ira flagrantior*; and 36: *(con)cito quam considerato cursu*.

²⁶See 16.12.38, 43, 47, 49, and 55–56; and cp. 45, where the Romans make timely and orderly use of their reserves.

²⁷Cp. 16.12.38: *stetissent immobiles*; 20: *velut insolubili muro fundatis*.

²⁸16.12.60, 61, and 65. Cp. Libanius, *Or.* 18.62, who says that Chonodomar began with a proud defence of his actions, but then turned to humility, much to Julian's disgust.

point at which Ammianus refers to *barbarici fastus* (12.3, noted by Pighi, 89–90). However, there is no indication that anyone but Ammianus had the inspiration to develop these themes and to build his narrative around them, to present the Alemannic savagery, arrogance, and indiscipline first foundering upon the quiet discipline and trust in the gods displayed by the Romans, and then turning to despair and rout. That Ammianus intended to draw this contrast is quite clear. It appears as soon as the battle begins (12.36–37); it is also implied in the lack of trust that the Germans show in their chiefs when they shout for them to dismount, lest they flee if the battle go against them, a sharp contrast with the expression of confidence in Julian uttered by the Roman standard-bearer (12.18); and in the heat of the fray Ammianus stops to compare the Aleman and Roman soldiers, remarking that they were well matched opponents, but with different qualities: *Alamanni robusti et celsiores, milites usu nimio dociles; illi feri et turbidi, hi quieti et cauti; animis isti fidentes, grandissimis illi corporibus freti* (12.47).²⁹

That the use of these themes is more than just a literary device is suggested by the fact that they are intrinsic to the development of the action. Moreover, that they serve not merely as the reinforcements but actually as vehicles for the historian's general explanations of the success and failure of the two contending armies is suggested by a comparison of the treatment of the battle of Strasburg with that of the battle of Adrianople. In the battle of Adrianople, Ammianus implies, the forces were more evenly matched than at Strasburg.³⁰ The Goths were raging as savagely as the Alemanni had been twenty-one years before.³¹ How-

²⁹Rosen argues that the contrast between the Germans and the Romans is not only traditional but also anachronistic (125–126). He points out that since Germans had long since served in the Roman armies, even as high officers, they would have passed on what they had learned to their fellow countrymen. But various limitations, including economic and technological, may well have inhibited the application of what they may or may not have learned; and the force of military conservatism should not be discounted. As late as the end of the sixth century the experienced Maurice (*Ars Militaris*, ed. J. Scheffer [Uppsala 1664] 11.4) was saying of the Franks and the Lombards that they fought in a headlong and disorderly manner. As a matter of comparison, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Portuguese, though in regular contact with other nations of Europe, persisted in a disorderly and individualistic method of fighting on land which was well behind the methods practiced elsewhere (see C. R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire* [Harmondsworth 1973] 119 and 301).

³⁰31.12.1: *ducebat [Valens] multiplices copias, nec contemnendas nec segnes, quippe etiam veteranos isdem iunxerat plurimos*. Zosimus, 4.23.6 and 24.1, implies that there were two divergent views on the strength of the Goths. Austin suggests that Valens had 15–18,000 men (82). The figure of 60,000 given by T. S. Burns, "The Battle of Adrianople: A Reconsideration," *Historia* 22 (1973) 344, is far too high.

³¹31.12.9: *sacvitiam*; 11 *ululante barbara plebe ferum et triste*; 13.4: *celsum ferocia barbarum*; 4: *minaciter circumferentem oculos tristes*; 10: *furor ex oculis lucente*.

ever, on this occasion the Roman Emperor Valens displayed the rashness and over-confidence that Chonodomar had exhibited at Strasburg. He burned (*urebatur*, 31.12.1) to equal the exploits of his nephew Gratian, who had defeated the Lentienses. Misled by the erroneous reports of the scouts that there were only ten thousand Goths present, *procaci quodam calore percussus isdem occurrere festinabat* (12.3). Therefore, despite the advice of many, including Victor, the *mag. equ. per Orientem*, he rashly (*temere*) decided to fight before Gratian arrived with his forces (12.5–7).³² If Valens can be defended in his decision to fight, especially if he were misled by the scouts, who later failed to correct their error,³³ when the day of the battle came (as at Strasburg ushered in by Ammianus with portentous words³⁴), he compounded his problems by his hasty and disorganized preparations. For he moved the troops forward from Adrianople hurriedly (*praepropere*, 12.10) and without sufficient food and water, so that when the soldiers reached the battlefield in the blazing heat of

³²Cp. 31.12.4: *Gratianum impatienter operiens*. A. Solari, "Il consiglio di guerra ad Adrianopoli nel 378," *RivFC* 11 (1932) 501–505, argues that the Arian Valens was eager to fight in order to match the exploits of his Orthodox nephew Gratian and his own general, the pagan Sebastianus. He accepts what is apparently the version of Ammianus, that Sebastianus advised Valens to fight, thus rejecting Zosimus' statement that Sebastianus warned against a set battle (4.23.6). On the other hand, Burns, *art. cit.* (above, n. 30) 342, n. 38, prefers Zosimus' account. Certainly, it is possible that Zosimus has here wrongly inserted Sebastianus' earlier advice in favour of guerilla warfare (Zosimus 4.23.1–4; cp. Eunapius, frag. 47; Ammianus 31.11.2–4). But it is hard to see why Sebastianus should have come out in favour of a set battle when his own campaign was going well (cp. Ammianus 31.12.1: *Sebastianus subinde scribens facta dictis exaggerabat*). Could the words of Ammianus which are taken to indicate that Sebastianus advised fighting—*et cum Sebastiano auctore quidam protinus eundum ad certamen urgerent* (12.6)—really indicate that Sebastianus' reports of his success in guerilla war stimulated his rivals to advise a set battle, as in Zosimus (4.23.5–24.1)? This would, of course, be to accuse Ammianus of a very clumsy and (as far as I know) unparalleled use of *auctor*. But, at any rate, the version of Zosimus does seem better.

³³Austin defends Valens' decision to fight as strategically sound, arguing that the reports of the scouts on the numbers of the Goths were not incorrect, as Ammianus claims—it was the return of the Gothic cavalry that won the day, and Valens was wise to attempt to fight before they did return (77–83). Against this, I see no reason to doubt Ammianus on the reports of the scouts. Furthermore, Austin's arguments by no means absolve Valens of the blame for the defeat, since once he had decided to fight, he should not have allowed Fritigern to stall him. (Perhaps he did need time to allow the left wing of his cavalry to form up, but that problem was a result of his own haste and bad planning.) In fact, although Ammianus remarks Valens' decision to fight as an error, the weight of his criticism falls upon Valens' hasty and incomplete preparations which left his troops tired, hungry, and thirsty on the battlefield. In this Ammianus appears to have been justified (cp. Sozomen 6.40, who says that Valens attacked the Goths *ὑπὸ τῷ ἔδει*).

³⁴31.12.10: *exoriente vero aurora diei, quem quintum Iduum Augustarum numerus ostendit annalis*.

midday, they were already weak from hunger and thirst.³⁵ On the Gothic side their leader, Fritigern, *formidatus dux* (12.15), displayed the qualities of prudence and caution shown by the Romans at Strasburg. The Goths had advanced to the place of battle slowly and cautiously,³⁶ and on the day of battle their general, *callidus futuri coniectior, Martemque pertimescens ancipitem* (12.14), stalled the beginning of the fighting both to give his cavalry, which was absent, time to arrive (12.12), and to increase the discomfort of the Romans.³⁷ The Romans, who had encountered difficulties in forming their left wing because the cavalry was still strung out along the roads (12.12), began the battle almost by accident, when the *sagittarii et scutarii* rushed into the fray *avidius impetu calenti progressi* (12.16), only to fall back, their retreat being as feeble as their advance had been untimely (*immature*). For the Romans this inauspicious beginning, made worse by the sudden arrival and onset of the Gothic cavalry (12.17), was the prelude to a far greater disaster, as the left wing, victorious but advancing too far, was crushed (13.2), being deserted by the cavalry, which, unlike that at Strasburg, was not brought back into the battle.³⁸ Whereafter, the rest of the battle-line, suffering from heat and thirst and hunger (13.7) and unaided by the reserves,³⁹ was destroyed.

At Strasburg the Alemanni were overconfident and disorganized, the Romans were cool, prudent, and disciplined and trusted in the gods, and the Romans won. At Adrianople the Romans were hasty, ill-prepared, and disorganized, the Goths were cautious and prudent, and the Goths won. In no other battle-description in Ammianus is there a similar coherence and correspondence of themes.⁴⁰ Moreover, there is another link between Strasburg and Adrianople which strongly suggests that the correspondence of themes is not merely a result of the comparable importance of the two battles in the eyes of the historian and the comparable care lavished on them as a result. For in his account of the battle of Strasburg Ammianus inserts a formal speech (16.12.9-12) delivered by Julian to the army before it reached the battlefield, but when

³⁵31.12.13: *et miles fervore calefactus aestivo, siccis faucibus commarceret . . . homines et iumenta cruciabat inedia gravis.*

³⁶31.12.3: *gradu incederent leni, et metuentes eruptionem per devia.*

³⁷31.12.13: *relucente amplitudine camporum incendiis, quos lignis nutrimentisque aridis subditis, ut hoc [i.e., to increase the Romans' thirst] fieret idem, hostes urebant.*

³⁸Cp. 16.12.37-41. Orosius, *Adv. Pag.* 7.33.13, also notes the rout of the cavalry at Adrianople.

³⁹At 31.13.9 Victor goes to summon the Batavi, but they had already dispersed. Contrast 16.12.45, where the Batavi come to support the Cornuti and Bracchiati; and also 31.7.12, where the reserves help the Romans to fight the Goths to a draw at the battle *ad Salices*.

⁴⁰The other formal battle descriptions are at 24.6.4-16; 25.3.1-14 (both against the Persians); 27.2.2-8 (Alemanni); 31.7.6-16 (Goths).

it was in sight of the enemy.⁴¹ In it Julian, while encouraging his men to expect victory, nevertheless counsels that they rest for the night and offer battle on the morrow. The troops reject this advice and are supported in this by the high officials, especially Florentius, who are afraid that if the enemy disperse and the troops lose the chance of an expected victory, their mood will turn ugly (12.13–14). It is decided, therefore, to join battle. Ammianus makes no comment on this reverse suffered by Julian. Now, although Libanius (*Or.* 18.53), who, like Ammianus, places the speech before the troops line up for battle, represents it as an orthodox *exhortatio*,⁴² Pighi suggests that Julian did deliver such a speech as recorded by Ammianus, because he had apparently been forbidden by Constantius to exhort the army formally. Therefore, instead of delivering an *exhortatio*, Julian did the opposite, to the same effect as an *exhortatio*, while avoiding the Emperor's wrath (104–110). The ploy is not impossible, given Julian's character; and there might also have been the intent of testing the eagerness of the men, a move recommended by the military textbooks.⁴³ On the other hand, the words of Ammianus, which Pighi takes to indicate that Constantius forbade Julian to deliver an *exhortatio*, could also be interpreted to mean that Constantius banned all formal addresses to the assembled army;⁴⁴ and, if this were so, to give any speech would have been dangerous, especially when the hostile and vigilant Florentius was present. Indeed, Hecker went so far as to doubt the genuineness of the speech;⁴⁵ and certainly, the speech remarked by Libanius could equally well be not the formal speech recorded by Ammianus, but the informal words of encouragement which Julian later delivered to parts of the army just before the battle began (12.30–33). But whether or not a formal speech was actually delivered, it is quite possible that the sentiments, as well as the words, are those of Ammianus rather than Julian. Rosen rightly points out that the contents of the speech reflect the ideal of the general—his *consilium* and *cura* and his expectation of help from the gods (98–99).

In the speech Julian, arguing against fighting immediately, utters the following words: *iam dies in meridiem vergit, lassitudine nos itineris*

⁴¹This is clear from 16.12.13, where the soldiers demand to be led against the enemy, *iam conspicuum*.

⁴²Or rather he uses an Homeric tag to declare, ὅτι τοῖσι δ' ἄφαρ πόλεμος γλυκίων γένετ' ἢ πρότερον τὸ μηδὲν ποιεῖν.

⁴³E.g., Vegetius *Epit. rei. milit.* 3.12: *ipsa die, qua certaturi sunt milites, quid sentiant diligenter explora . . . et noveris te oportere differre, si exercitati bellatores metuunt dimicare.*

⁴⁴At 16.12.29 Ammianus says that Julian declined to deliver a formal *exhortatio*, partly because of the extent of the battlefield and the size of the army, but also *vitabat gravioris invidiae pondus, ne videretur id affectasse quod soli sibi debere Augustus existimabat.*

⁴⁵H. Hecker, "Die Alemannenschlacht bei Strasburg," *Neue Jahrb.* 139 (1889) 73. Hatt (above, n. 14) 433, also appears to incline to this view.

*fatigatos, scrupulosi tramites excipient et obscuri, nox senescente luna nullis sideribus adiuuanda,*⁴⁶ *terrae protinus aestu flagrantes, nullis aquarum subsidiis fultae; quae si dederit quisquam commode posse transiri, ruentibus hostium examinibus post otium cibique refectionem et potus, quid nos agamus? quo vigore inedia siti laboreque membris marcentibus occurramus?* (16.12.11). Julian's apprehensions were ignored, but the sentiments expressed here are later applied by Ammianus in detail as his explanation of the immediate causes of the Roman defeat at Adrianople, causes which sprang from Valens' haste. Thus, he describes how the soldiers had to advance to the battlefield, *decursis itaque viarum spatiis confragosis* (31.12.11), and in three places he emphasizes the heat of the day. The hunger of the troops is remarked twice, and their thirst three times, once in an emphatic remark made well after the end of the battle. Finally, the collapse of the *vires* and *mentes* of the Roman infantry is related to their exhaustion.⁴⁷ In short, the danger feared by the prudent Julian, which proved to be no obstacle at Strasburg, materialized twenty-one years later at Adrianople as a result of the rashness of Valens.

It is quite clear from the foregoing that Ammianus, in his account of the battle of Strasburg, is concerned to highlight the qualities of leadership exhibited by Julian, which, he holds, contributed greatly to the Roman success. This is, of course, in line with his general attitude towards Julian, whom he tends to treat as an *exemplum* of the ideal ruler;⁴⁸ and one of the important qualities of the ideal ruler is his good generalship.⁴⁹ Such a concern for generalship is also exhibited elsewhere in the history. For instance, Ammianus has Constantius II tell the troops assembled at Augst in A.D. 354 that *miles ubique, licet membris vigentibus firmior, se solum vitamque propriam circumspicit et defendit, imperator vero officiorum dum aequis omnibus,*⁵⁰ *alienae custos salutis, nihil non ad sui spectare tutelam ratio, . . . et remedia cuncta quae status negotiorum admittit, arripere*

⁴⁶Ammianus frequently mentions the moon, which, according to Pighi 114–116, he associates with *notti memorabili*. In the present passage the reference seems to indicate the fear that a moonless and starless night will curtail the battle and allow the defeated enemy to escape. Cp. 31.13.11, where *nullo splendore lunari nox fulgens* curtails the massacre of the defeated Romans, and 30.7.7, where darkness prevents the destruction of an entire Alemannic army by Valentinian I.

⁴⁷Heat—31.12.11: *in medium torridus procederet dies*; 12.13 (quoted at n. 35); 13.7: *solque sublimior, decurso Leone, ad domicilium caelestis virginis transiens* . . . (note the magniloquent language); hunger—31.12.13 (above, n. 35); 13.7: *Romanos magis attenuatos inedia*; thirst—31.12.13; 13.7: *Romanos* . . . *sitique confectos*; 15.6: *quidam siti ad usque ipsa vitae detrimenta vexati sunt*; exhaustion—31.13.5: *exhausti labore et periculis pedites, cum deinceps neque vires illis neque mentes suppeterent ad consilium*.

⁴⁸See R. C. Blockley, *Ammianus Marcellinus. A Study of his Historiography and Political Thought* (Brussels 1975) 81–94.

⁴⁹Cp. 25.4.10–11, where fortitude and military knowledge are discussed as part of the *virtutes quattuor praecipuae* . . . *eisque accedentes extrinsecus aliae* (4.1).

⁵⁰The text at this point is corrupt, but that does not affect the value of the passage for my point.

debet alacriter, secunda numinis voluntate delata (14.10.12). With these words de Jonge has compared a passage from the military handbook of Vegetius (3.10): *dux ergo, cui tantae potestatis insignia tribuuntur, cuius fidei atque virtuti possessorum fortunae, tutela urbium, salus militum, rei publicae creditur gloria, non tantum pro universo exercitu sed etiam pro singulis contubernalibus debet esse sollicitus*.⁵¹ In fact, the acknowledgement of the great importance of the general is regarded by Tacitus as a specifically Roman trait.⁵²

Insofar as Ammianus explains the victory at Strasburg in terms of the qualities of the Roman soldiery and its leader, his account serves also to illustrate the particular virtues of Julian and his army. Thus, Julian in his speech to the troops shows his concern that they be well fed and rested before the fight,⁵³ and at the same time he checks on their willingness to do battle.⁵⁴ In his words to some troops who were precipitously demanding the signal for battle he warns them not to follow the fleeing enemy too closely (16.12.33), good advice in the opinion of Vegetius, who points out that excessively hot pursuit creates the danger of disorganization amongst the pursuers.⁵⁵ During the battle itself Julian plays a key role in halting the flight of the cataphracts on the right wing.⁵⁶ And the soldiers themselves, fighting what is essentially a defensive battle, display laudable caution and discipline.⁵⁷

⁵¹P. de Jonge, "Ammianus and Vegetius," in *Ut Pictura Poesis. Studia Latina Petro Iohanni Enk Septuagenario Oblata* (Leiden 1955) 99. In this paper he points to various similarities between Ammianus and Vegetius, which he explains by the similarity of military experience shared by Ammianus and by Vegetius' sources.

⁵²Tacitus *Germ.* 30.3 (of the Chatti): *quodque rarissimum nec nisi Romanae disciplinae concessum, plus reponere in duce quam in exercitu*.

⁵³16.12.11–12. Cp. Vegetius 3.2.

⁵⁴Cp. Vegetius 3.12 and 26 (p. 122, ed. Lang): *numquam ad certamen publicum produceris militem . . . nisi cum eum videris sperare victoriam*.

⁵⁵Also 16.12.55 and 23.5.12; cp. Vegetius 3.25: *frequenter iam fusa acies dispersos ac passim sequentes reparationis viribus interemit*.

⁵⁶16.12.37–41. The account of the flight is not very clear. Pighi, 96–97, thinks that two stages of flight are described (at 37 and then at 38–41, the latter being introduced by *hoc autem exinde acciderat quod . . .*). However, it seems to me that 37 summarizes the flight and 38–41 describe it again, expanding upon the summary. This gives a more natural sense to *acciderat*, though it gives a rare meaning to *exinde* (= "from the following cause," referring forward in the sentence to *quod*). But there is a clear parallel to this usage elsewhere in Ammianus, at 20.7.9, where the bishop of Bezabde is suspected of betraying the town to the Persians. Ammianus defends the bishop, but says of the suspicion, *hocque exinde veri simile visum est, quod postea intuta loca . . . machinae feriebant hostiles*.

From his account of the battle of Strasburg Ammianus has omitted the humiliation which Julian inflicted upon the routed cavalry and which is recorded by Zosimus (3.3; cp. Libanius *Or.* 18.66). Pighi regards this punishment as historical. Its inclusion would have been regarded by Ammianus as reflecting badly upon Julian.

⁵⁷See page 223 at nn. 26 and 27. Cp. Vegetius 3.26 (p. 122), who rates planning and the selection of the best battlefield as of more importance for victory than numbers or *virtus*.

Ammianus has been condemned as either an incompetent military historian, or one simply not interested in details of military history and organization.⁵⁸ This certainly appears to be true of his battle and siege descriptions, in that they are notably deficient in the technical data upon numbers, topography, troop movements and dispositions, etc., which would be of use to a modern historian.⁵⁹ Moreover, looking elsewhere in the history, his incomprehensible excursus on siege engines (23.4) either shows a high level of incompetence, or (more likely) is a failed attempt to encompass the subject without admitting the unseemly *minutiae* which everywhere he is at such pains to avoid. Ammianus had followed a military career, and he shows in places a soldier's clear appreciation of the importance of strategy and tactics.⁶⁰ However, other considerations can certainly overrule the inclusion of important details of this kind. For instance, he omits Julian's use of the robber chief Charietto in a campaign of terror against the Germans,⁶¹ the inclusion of such information probably being considered improper, since it would reflect badly upon the character of his hero;⁶² and in the account of the battle of Strasburg the beginning of the fighting (16.12.36–37) is described without clarity, since there Ammianus is primarily concerned to establish a Roman/Aleman contrast. Furthermore, the nature of the battle descriptions in the history is influenced by the general nature of the work itself. For underlying and informing the history is Ammianus' belief in the importance of character in shaping events. Thus in the battle descriptions the interest is upon the qualities of the generals and their troops; and the rhetoric which marks the accounts of the fighting itself, with its stress upon struggle, suffering, fear, pain, and blood, is hardly an element extraneous to the narrative, for it is central to Ammianus' conception of the roots of success and failure in such conflicts.⁶³ To Ammianus a battle is only partly a matter of tactics. It is also, and perhaps primarily, an effort of discipline, will, and physique.

⁵⁸E.g. A. Momigliano, (above, n. 12) 1404; and "Pagan and Christian Historiography in the Fourth Century A.D.," in A. Momigliano (ed.), *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (Oxford 1963) 97.

⁵⁹Cp. G. A. Crump, *Ammianus Marcellinus as a Military Historian* (Wiesbaden 1975) esp. 72–73 and 94–95.

⁶⁰Cp. Ammianus' comments at 25.4.11. For examples see Austin 80. More detailed discussion by Crump, *op. cit.* esp. 44–113.

⁶¹Described by Zosimus at 3.7. The sole notice of Charietto given by Ammianus in his account of Julian's campaigns in Gaul is at 17.10.5.

⁶²Cp. 20.8.18, where Ammianus says that he would not divulge the contents of a private letter from Julian to Constantius, even if he knew its contents (*nec . . . proferre decebat in publicum*).

⁶³Austin points out that Ammianus tends to reflect tactical moves in a general epithet applied to the originator of the move, an extreme example of the tendency to assimilate a person's actions to his character (79, n. 10).

Another characteristic—not only of the battle descriptions but also of the military narrative as a whole—which is linked to a wider preoccupation, is the “siege mentality” that the writer manifests. Ammianus views the Roman state as a sort of closed fortress, its walls being the borders which have to be continually defended and repaired when they are breached.⁶⁴ This is the task of Julian (and later Valentinian I) as he first pushes out the Germans and then raids their lands to deter them from further incursions and to force them to peace. This “siege mentality” of Ammianus is particularly evident in his descriptions of the relations in the West between the Romans and the various German tribes. To Ammianus the German tribes outside the Empire, and especially the Alemanni and the Goths (the greatest threats at the time), are qualitatively different from the Romans, insofar as their general behaviour and way of life are not what a Roman would consider to be civilized.⁶⁵ This difference is fixed by the use of wild animal imagery to characterize the German opponents of Rome. Such imagery pervades the history when it deals with relations between the Romans on the one hand, and the Alemanni and Goths on the other.⁶⁶ In contrast, it is almost entirely absent when dealings with the Persians are narrated.⁶⁷ The battle of Strasburg represents a microcosm of Ammianus’ overall attitude towards Romano-German relations. For there the raging bestiality of the Alemanni threw itself in disorganization upon the disciplined wall of the Roman legions and was destroyed. Twenty-one years later the wall was breached at Adrianople and the Goths poured through,⁶⁸ never to be expelled.

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⁶⁴It might be suspected that this perspective finds its origin in Ammianus’ own experience in the siege warfare of the East, and this may be partly true. But such a “siege mentality” is also a more general phenomenon during the period (see T. F. Carney *The Shape of the Past* [Lawrence, Kansas 1975] 250 ff.).

⁶⁵Ammianus’ attitude is somewhat different towards those Germans serving in the Roman armies, though he can be sarcastic about the Roman dependence upon them (see, e.g., 14.10.8). I do not wish here to enter upon a discussion of Ammianus’ anti-Germanism. It appears to me that the attempt of A. Demandt, *Zeitkritik und Geschichtsbild im Werk Ammians* (Bonn 1965) 36 ff., to downplay it is rather forced.

⁶⁶Similes have been collected by Blockley, (above, n. 48) 183–184. Similes and metaphors have been collected and discussed by M. Doetsch, *Ammianus Marcellinus’ Use of Animal Imagery in Describing Barbarians* (unpub. M.A. diss., Carleton Univ., Ottawa 1975).

⁶⁷The Huns attract proportionally a larger number of such images, but since they appear only at the end of the history (in book 31), the total number is small.

⁶⁸Note that at 31.13.2 the collapse of the Roman left wing is likened to *ruina aggeris magni*.