

Ross, A. J. 2016. *Ammianus' Julian: Narrative and Genre in the Res Gestae*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. xviii + 253. ISBN 978-0-19-878495-1. £65.00.

This is a revised version of a DPhil thesis submitted at Oxford University. As the title suggests, the focus is on the treatment by the late Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus of the reign of the emperor Julian, both as Caesar AD 355-60 and as Augustus AD 360-63. Ross subjects Ammianus' text to a detailed narratological and intertextual analysis in order to explore how exactly Ammianus creates his distinctive depiction of Julian, the relationship of this depiction to the earlier predominately Greek traditions concerning Julian, and how Ammianus crafted his text to appeal to a Latin-speaking Western audience. However, Ammianus devotes a large portion of his text to the career of Julian, and Ross has necessarily to be selective in choosing what episodes to subject to a detailed analysis in this manner. The result is five main chapters carefully subdivided into a number of subchapters dealing, after the first chapter, with four episodes (or sets of episodes) in the order that they occur within Ammianus' text.

The first chapter, 'In Search of a Latin Julian' (pp. 1-51), acts as an introduction to the text as a whole. It initially sets Ammianus' work in context by means of a brief survey of what had already been written about Julian by the time that he was writing in the late 380s, where the emphasis is very much on the relative dearth of material in the Latin-speaking West compared the Greek-speaking East. It then explains the terms and methods both of narratology and of intertextuality. Finally, it previews the contents of the following four chapters, the heart of the volume. The second chapter, 'The Narrator and the Participant: Gallus and Silvanus in Preparation for Julian' (pp. 52-95), analyses the depiction of the brief reign of Gallus (d. AD 354) as Caesar at Antioch in Syria and of the alleged usurpation of the general Silvanus at Cologne (d. AD 355), partly in order to explain the structural significance of Ammianus' depiction of himself as a participant in these events, and partly in order to demonstrate how these figures were intended to prefigure Julian. The third chapter, 'Julian's Elevation: Tradition and Innovation in Speech and Narrative' (pp. 96-125), finally introduces Julian himself, analysing Ammianus' depiction of his elevation as Caesar at Milan in AD 355. A key part of this analysis lies in the comparison of Ammianus' depiction of this event with both Sallust's depiction of the adoption by the Numidian king Micipsa of his nephew Jugurtha and Tacitus' description of the adoption by the emperor Galba of the young aristocrat Piso in January AD 69. The fourth chapter, 'Strasbourg: Legitimizing Julian' (pp. 126-61), examines Ammianus' description of the battle of Strasbourg in AD 357, when Julian's unexpected but crushing defeat of the Alamanni began to cause him to be seen in a whole new light. The main task here is to try and reconcile the so-called 'face of battle' style of narrative adopted by Ammianus, which seriously downplays the role played by Julian himself in this battle, with the obvious structural importance of the battle within the larger narrative, and the fact that Ammianus clearly intended Julian's victory here to prove his growing suitability to rule alone. The answer, briefly put, is that Ammianus had to tread a delicate balance, and did not want to seem to imply that Julian was ready to seize power as Augustus in 357, and so should have done so, when he in fact waited another three years before taking this fateful step. Finally, the fifth chapter, 'Narrating Failure: Julian and Ammianus in Persia' (pp. 162-202), analyses Ammianus' description of the Persian expedition in 363 resulting in Julian's death, with a focus on three main features, Ammianus' appearance as a first-person participant, the inclusion of numerous omens, and the deployment of historical *exempla*. As far as Ammianus' appearance as a first-person participant is concerned, Ross argues that, in addition to recording his participation and so proving his authority as a historian, the changing nature of the first-person references also serves to mark the changing fortunes of the army itself. As for the omens and *exempla*, they serve to explain Julian's failure, but the very inclusion of the omens itself, combined with the nature of the chosen *exempla*, also serves to place Ammianus' text firmly within the Roman historiographical tradition.

There is much food for thought, and it will well repay any student of the key episodes discussed here to read Ross's analysis of Ammianus' description of the same, why he includes what he does, and why he emphasizes what he does in the way that he does. However, there are some potential problems also. In particular, Ross sometimes pushes the notion of an intertextual relationship between Ammianus and some other author farther than is safe to do. This occurs because he does not require even a minimal lexical allusion in order to prove the existence of an intertext, but insists that

similarities of context and presentation can alone suffice to prove the existence of such. One agrees that this is possible, in theory. In practice, however, the determination of the degree of similarity, or number of similarities, remains problematic. After all, history can and does repeat itself, and the same or similar incidents can occur over and over again in similar circumstances and with similar results. Certainly, Ross is not alone in this methodology. For example, he cites two works by Seager and Drijvers arguing that Ammianus' description of the revolt of Firmus in North Africa in AD 373 was heavily influenced by Sallust's *Bellum Iugurthinum* (pp. 105-6) before proceeding himself to argue that Ammianus' description of the elevation of Julian as Caesar at Milan was influenced by Sallust's description of the adoption by the Numidian king Micipsa of his nephew Jugurtha. In that particular case, however, the literary similarities are entirely explicable on the basis of real historical similarities – of terrain, of climate, of technology, of social structures – and that both accounts were written within the same historiographical tradition.

The other weakness with this approach to intertextuality – apart from the fact that it downplays real historical similarities – is that it tends to ignore the existence of popular storytelling, that there was a far wider world of stories outside the surviving elite literary productions. For example, Ross argues that Ammianus implicitly compares Gallus Caesar to the emperor Nero, and one of his key arguments (pp. 66-68) is that Ammianus' description (14.1.9) of how Gallus used to roam the streets of Antioch in disguise in order to find out what people thought of him is an intertext of Tacitus' description (*Ann.* 13.25.1-2) of how the emperor Nero used to wander the streets of Rome in disguise also. One problem here is that the alleged similarities are not in fact very strong. It is noteworthy that Gallus did not actually commit any real crimes while out in disguise, but simply wanted to know what people thought of him, while Nero's alleged purpose in going out in disguise was to commit all sorts of acts of violence and theft, not to gather information. Another problem is that there are two other examples of imperial figures proceeding out in disguise also, Gallienus, as mentioned by Ammianus himself, and Germanicus, who did actually proceed out among his troops in disguise in order to discover what they thought of him, as Ross duly acknowledges in footnote (p. 67, n. 41), and it is not clear why the real allusion cannot be to one of these incidents instead. Most importantly, however, Ross fails to notice that the king-in-disguise is a common folklore motif occurring in numerous tales across the millennia from a wide range of societies.¹ Hence there is no need to assume an intertextual relationship between Ammianus and any other accounts of Roman imperial figures in disguise, and certainly not without some lexical allusion at least.

As far as the intertextual arguments are concerned, therefore, the strength of this book often lies in the journey rather than the destination. The arguments are interesting, and frequently force one to reconsider the significance of familiar passages and the validity of traditional assumptions concerning Ammianus' aims or methods, but the conclusions are not always persuasive. In contrast, the narratological treatment of the various passages is much more successful and convincing. However, the intertextual arguments are compelling when based on some lexical allusion also, as in the analysis (pp. 167-70) of the relationship between Eutropius (10.16.1) and Ammianus (15.5.22). Furthermore, Ross demonstrates an impressive command of the modern secondary literature not just on Ammianus, but on Roman historiography more generally. It is clear, therefore, that this book marks an important addition to the literary analysis of Ammianus' text, and no-one with an interest either in the emperor Julian or in Ammianus himself as author and historian can afford not to read it.

David Woods,
University College Cork, Ireland

¹ There is a large literature on this subject. See, for example, Walsh, E. 1975. 'The King in Disguise', *Folklore* 86: 3-24; Hutjens, L. 2009. 'The Disguised King in Early English Ballads.' In M. Dimmock & A. Hadfield (edd.), *Literature and Popular Culture in Early Modern England*. Pp. 75-90. Farnham. For the influence of popular tales, or folklore, on the Roman historiography of the reign of Tiberius, see, for example, Champlin, E. 2008. 'Tiberius the Wise'. *Historia* 57: 408-25.