

Subversive Intertextual Invective in Ammianus Marcellinus' use of *Exempla*

This paper will argue that, contrary to scholarly consensus, the historian Ammianus Marcellinus subversively attacks the Roman emperor Julian through an intertextual reading triggered by lexical allusions. The *Res Gestae*, a narrative history published around 390 CE, is the most significant historical work in Latin of the 4th century and is the most detailed primary source for the historical events of 353-378 CE. Scholars have recently demonstrated the text's literary sophistication, including the widespread employment of lexical allusions and stock scenes from both mythological and historiographical literary predecessors (Kelly 2008).

While these literary features have led many scholars to reassess the historicity of Ammianus' account, certain approaches remain unchallenged. For example, Ammianus openly positions himself as the supporter of Julian the Apostate, the last pagan emperor of the Roman Empire. This pose is surprising even if Ammianus was himself a pagan, as he composed the work during the reign of Theodosius I, who formally made Christianity the empire's religion during a period when Julian was vilified for his official apostasy. While scholars have identified greater nuance in Ammianus' account, demonstrating how he portrays Julian less positively during the latter's fatal Persian campaign using negative portents and omens (Smith 1999), Ammianus' support for Julian has not been critically challenged. For example, Julian has recently been labeled Ammianus' "hero" (Hanaghan 2019, 238). In part this is due to Ammianus' portrayal of Julian as learnedly following historical and mythological *exempla* (Blockley 1994), a trope shared by imperial panegyric, and Ammianus himself declares that his narrative, despite being based on facts, will seem to relate to panegyric material (*Res Gestae*, 16.1.3). Thus, he draws attention to the generic divide between historiography and panegyric in Lucian (*How to*

Write History, 7), and hence invites readers to interpret the narrative as favorable to Julian as though it were a panegyric. Furthermore, Ammianus depicts Julian as following *exempla* with such frequency that the trope becomes a facet of Julian's character. Hence, scholars have interpreted Ammianus as consciously portraying Julian in a panegyric manner as a declaration of pagan support. However, this paper will demonstrate that an intertextual reading undermines Ammianus' ostensible support for Julian.

When contrasted with the hypotexts to which they allude, passages in which Julian is described as following *exempla* are often revealed to be complicated by moments of intertextuality that subvert Ammianus' praise of Julian. For example, at 24.2.14-17 in the *Res Gestae*, a narrative of the siege of Pirisabora during Julian's campaign against the Persian Empire, Ammianus describes Julian as following the *exemplum* of Scipio Aemilianus. Julian consciously attempts to emulate Scipio, and according to Ammianus, even outdoes his model. During this passage, however, Ammianus employs a lexical allusion to Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (8.15) which subversively equates his depiction of Julian's heroics to a band of women and children beset by wolves as the main character, trapped in the body of a donkey, narrowly escapes castration. Thus, the overt narrative is tonally undermined by this allusion to a work of a lower register, belittling Julian's accomplishments.

The value of this paper is to explore how Ammianus employs the literary and historiographical tropes of *exempla* and lexical allusions to craft a double-layered narrative—one layer overtly positive towards and one subversively invective against the emperor Julian. This paper will thus call into question the historicity of Ammianus' overt and literal narrative account depicting and praising the exploits of Julian and his pursuit of *exempla*, by demonstrating that they are dependent on literary tropes and are undermined by their intertextual readings. As

scholars have recently demonstrated similar literary engagement by Tacitus to earlier works, including Latin poetry (Celotto 2021), by extension this paper will also raise questions for future interpretations of historiography, opening new avenues of approach into the study of Ammianus as well as other ancient historians.

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