

Historiographical Commentary: How Ammianus Marcellinus' First Roman digression functions as socio-political commentary

This paper examines the historiographical methods found in Ammianus Marcellinus' first Roman digression (14.6). This digression offers an insight into the socio-political and cultural landscape of fourth century Rome, as well as highlighting the moral and social decline perceived by Marcellinus. Building on previous scholarship, this paper argues that Marcellinus uses this Roman digression to write social commentary on the perceived decline of the Roman people by the fourth century, with this digression being analyzed as a "temporal ethnography" due to its stark comparisons between the virtuous Roman society of the past and the corrupt Roman society of Marcellinus' present. It further argues that this digression is meant to be interpreted as earnest social critique and not satire, as they have been taken to be in previous scholarship. Through this digression, this paper argues, Marcellinus not only chronicles history but also delivers poignant commentary on the perceived erosion of Roman ideals, providing a narrative that, in his view, is indeed historiographically significant.