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STRUCTURE AND CHRONOLOGY IN
AMMIANUS, BOOK 14

T. D. BARNES

THE accepted chronology of the first extant book of Ammianus
Marcellinus, and hence of the events narrated therein, derives
from an article by Otto Seeck published more than eighty years ago.¹
Seeck’s chronology for Book 14 has never been challenged in any fun-
damental way. On the contrary, it was taken as axiomatic and pro-
claimed on every relevant page in the subsequent critical edition by
C. U. Clark (1910), and on every other page in the editions with trans-
lations into English by J. C. Rolfe (Loeb 1935) and into French by
E. Galletier and J. Fontaine (Budé 1968). So firmly indeed is Seeck’s
chronology established that it is now enshrined in the very title of the
new partial translation by W. Hamilton and A. Wallace-Hadrill
(Penguin 1986).² Yet Seeck’s chronology exhibits both one immediate
implausibility and one obvious flaw. It makes Ammianus describe
events of the summer of 354 before events of the preceding winter, and
it explains this apparent confusion on the part of the historian by postu-
lating incompetence: according to Seeck, Ammianus had two main nar-
rative sources out of which he fashioned his own account of the period
between 353 and 363, one Thucydidean, which divided events by cam-
paigning seasons, or summers and winters, the other a strictly annalistic
source which dated by consuls and arranged its material by calendar

¹ O. Seeck, “Zur Chronologie und Quellenkritik des Ammianus Marcellinus,” Hermes
41 (1906) 481–539, esp. 494–499.
² Seeck’s chronology is accepted by E. A. Thompson, The Historical Work of Ammi-
ianus Marcellinus (Cambridge 1947) 56 ff., esp. 58 n. 4, and is assumed in the entries for
Clematius, Honoratus, and Nebridius in PLRE 1 (1971) 213, 438, 619. Similarly, Seeck’s
date for chapter 3 is accepted by H. Tränkle with the assertion: “Dazu hat Seeck . . . alles
Wesentliche gesagt” (MH 33 [1976] 168 n. 27).
years, so that he misdates some events because he has taken them from the subsidiary annalistic source and inserted them at the wrong place in his primary Thucydidean source. Seeck’s mechanical analysis of Ammianus’ sources has long been discredited. But his still accepted chronology of Book 14 is logically dependent on this discarded analysis: therefore, it needs to be examined critically. Moreover, there is new evidence which can be brought to bear. Seeck set the execution of the Caesar Gallus, which Ammianus describes at length (11.6–23), in November or December 354 (more precisely, between 13 November and 16 December) on the basis of inferences about the treatment of Julian between his brother’s death and his proclamation as Caesar on 6 November 355. A papyrus provides primary though unrecognized evidence pointing to an earlier date.

In 1983 Rosario Pintaudi published a small papyrus fragment now in the Medicean Library in Florence as a dating formula used at the village of Nicomedia in the Arsinoe nome in September 326 (PLaur. 169). Subsequently, J. G. Keenan revised Pintaudi’s readings slightly to produce the following text:

\[\text{προς[ταχθηναι ϵ...νω...σελ.]}\]
\[\text{εντων αυτων εις γνωσιν απα[...]}\]
\[\text{πρω καλαρθων Οκτωβριου εν Νικομηδεια[ει]ρα[...]}\]
\[4 [υπατος Κωνσταντινος Σεβαστω το] \zeta\] και Κωνσταντιω
\[Καισαρι [ο αν]]\]

3 Seeck 494: “Nicht viel minder häufig als diese Quelle, die wir künftig die thukydideische nennen wollen, benutzt Ammian bis zum 25. Buche eine andere, die rein annalistic tisch ist; das heisst, sie teilt den Stoff nach Consulaten. . . . Die Vermischung dieser beiden, ganz verschieden rechnenden Quellen ist es aller Wahrscheinlichkeit nach gewesen, was zu jenen chronologischen Confusionen geführt hat, die uns auch in den Anfängen der einiger nicht selten stören.”


5 Seeck (above, n. 1) 499; idem, Regesten der Kaiser und Päpste (Stuttgart 1919) 200.

6 R. Pintaudi, Dai papiri della biblioteca medicea laurentiana (PLaur. IV), Florence 1983 (Papyrologica Florentina 12) 101, under the title “frammento di datazione.”
Keenan follows Pintaudi in construing the consular date as 326 when Constantine was consul for the seventh time with Constantius, and he tentatively identifies the text as a “fragmentary constitution of Constantine” issued at Nicomedia between 14 and 30 September 326. Keenan’s identification of the nature of the partially preserved document is plausible and convincing. But it cannot be a constitution issued by Constantine at Nicomedia in September 326, since at that date Constantine was nowhere near the city. Keenan attempts to meet that objection by revising Constantine’s itinerary in 326, on the basis of a constitution in the Theodosian Code which was issued, according to the manuscripts, in Nicomedia on 30 July 326 (CTh 12.5.1). But the emperor’s whereabouts are too well documented to allow any possibility of placing him in Bithynia in September 326: he was in Rome in late July and early August celebrating the twentieth anniversary of his accession (25 July 326), and the available evidence places him at Spoletium on 25 September (CTh 16.5.2), in Milan on 23 October (CTh 4.22.1) and probably at Aquileia on 22 November (CJ 2.19(20).11). Constantine left the area of Constantinople and Nicomedia in the spring of 326 and did not return for a full year, since his presence is attested at Thessalonica on 27 February 327 (CTh 11.3.2). It has long been clear that the subscription to the imperial constitution apparently issued on 30 July 326 is incomplete, or rather lacunose: the constitution was in fact issued (data) at Nicomedia on 30 July 325 but only published (proposita) by its recipient, Tiberianus the comes per Africam, in the following consular year. Whatever the newly published papyrus is, it cannot be part of a constitution issued by Constantine at Nicomedia in September 326.

Since, on palaeographical grounds, the papyrus could belong to the middle of the fourth century, the date in line 4 can (and should) be restored as

\[ \text{ιπάτοις Κωνσταντίνῳ Σεβαστῷ τῷ} \ ζ" \ καὶ Κωνσταντῖῳ \ Καύσαρι \ τ[ο} \ γ′\]

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9 Seeck, Regesten (above, n. 5) 83, 175.
10 Pintaudi (above, n. 6) Tav. 113 provides a photograph.
That is the normal form of the consular date for 354, when Constantius was consul for the seventh time, Gallus for the third. If that is correct, then Gallus was in Nicomedia in the second half of September 354. There is no implausibility in supposing that he issued some pronouncement or decided some legal issue as he passed through the city on his way to his death: Ammianus makes it clear that Gallus’ imperial prerogatives only began to diminish after he left Constantinople and travelled towards Hadrianople (14.11.12–15). Consequently, it seems probable that Gallus was executed in October 354 rather than in November or December, and that he left Antioch to travel west (14.11.12) no later than August or the very beginning of September.

II

Most of the events in the fourteenth book of Ammianus cannot be dated independently of the historian. Besides the journey of Gallus to Europe, however, there is also external evidence for the comites Orientis Honoratus (1.3, 7.2) and Nebridius (2.20). The former was comes Orientis when the orator Libanius returned to a desperate situation in Antioch (Epp. 386). In his biography of Libanius, published posthumously in 1868, G. R. Sievers accepted Tillemont’s date for Libanius’ return to Antioch, viz., a visit in the summer of 353 and permanent return in early 354, and considered the potential objection that these dates do not quite fit Ammianus’ account of events in Antioch: in answer, Sievers argued that Ammianus did not write with a Thucydidean precision for dates and that his lapses are particularly frequent in Book 14. The indictment of Ammianus drawn up by Sievers and later reiterated by Seeck depends on their unhesitating assumption that Libanius returned to Antioch in 354. But is that date correct?

Libanius had left Antioch for Athens in 336, and during the 340s taught in Constantinople, Nicaea, Nicomedia, and Constantinople again. His return to his native city came after his friend Strategius

11 The emendation is accepted by R. S. Bagnall, Alan Cameron, S. R. Schwartz, and K. A. Worp, Consuls of the Later Roman Empire (Atlanta 1987) 243, 636–637.
Musonianus, as proconsul of Achaea, persuaded the Athenians to offer him a chair of rhetoric there. Libanius declined, then obtained imperial permission to leave Constantinople for four months to visit Antioch during the summer, and finally, after much supplication at court, received permission to go to Antioch again, where he remained for the rest of his life. On the second occasion, Libanius arrived to find that Gallus, in a rage, had imprisoned many leading citizens and was threatening to execute them (Epp. 391.9; Orat. 1.81–96). That situation must correspond to Ammianus’ report that Gallus “ordered the leaders of the senate of Antioch to be killed on a single charge” for refusing to help alleviate a food shortage (7.2). Honoratus was comes Orientis when Libanius arrived (Epp. 386) and, at least according to Ammianus, in that capacity saved the leading Antiochenes from death (7.2).

These episodes in Libanius’ life all clearly belong to the period between 352 and 354, but their exact dates are not certain. First, the offer of a chair at Athens when Musonianus was proconsul of Achaea. Musonianus’ appointment is conventionally placed in 353 because Libanius sets it after the removal of both Vetranoi and Magnentius (Orat. 1.81). But Libanius may have telescoped the defeat of Magnentius at Mursa in September 351 and his death in Gaul in 353. Musonianus was probably proconsul of Achaea in 352/3, and the offer of a chair at Athens may more plausibly be lodged in 352 than in 353. Second, Libanius’ temporary visit to Antioch. This, it seems clear, must belong to the summer of 353. Third, Libanius’ permanent return and the arrest of leading Antiochenes. Sievers and Seeck opted for spring 354. Both Ammianus’ explicit indications and external considerations point to the winter preceding, perhaps even to the last months of 353. Much happened between Libanius’ return and Gallus’ departure: if Gallus had reached Nicomedia by September 354, an early date is recommended — and the appropriate time for a sudden rise in the price of grain because of a perceived shortage is immediately after

15 As argued in CP 82 (1987) 211.
16 Norman (above, n. 14) 171.
a poor harvest in the early autumn, as occurred when Julian was in Antioch in the second half of 362 (Misopogon 369A-B).

III

The structure of Book 14 of Ammianus is not altogether easy to analyse. Besides long excursus on the city of Rome (6.2–27) and on the provinces of the diocese of Oriens outside Egypt (8), there are brief digressions on the habits of the Saraceni (4.2–7) and on the working of Nemesis (11.25–26); furthermore, parts of the account of Gallus' misdeeds in Antioch are arranged thematically rather than in strict chronological order. The following summary notes both the structure of the narrative and Ammianus' explicit indications of date:

1 The cruelty of Gallus.

Ammianus begins Book 14 with a precise chronological reference which serves as a transition from Constantius' invasion of Gaul in the summer of 353 to events in the East: it was after the "unconquerable expedition" (which defeated Magnentius at Mons Seleucus shortly before 10 August), but the noise of war-trumpets had not yet ceased nor had the soldiers dispersed to their winter quarters (1.1). The date indicated is September/October 353.

2 Depredations by the Isaurians.

This chapter raises a familiar problem: precisely which event or events in an episode extending over a long period of time does the historian intend to anchor to the date that he attaches to the episode? Historians' practices differ, and Ammianus is perhaps not explicit enough for perfect clarity. Nevertheless, it appears to be the outbreak of serious hostilities which he assigns to 353 (1 ad bella gravia proruperunt). Accordingly, when he marks the passage of time (4 procedente igitur mox

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19 O. Seeck, Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt 4 (Stuttgart 1911) 439.
tempore) and subsequently records the activity of legions “which were then wintering at Side” (10 quae hiemabant tunc apud Siden), he presumably indicates that the date is now at least autumn 353. There is thus no serious chronological problem when Gallus sends the comes Orientis Nebridius to relieve Seleucia and Calycadnum, which was under siege (20). Nebridius succeeded Honoratus as comes Orientis (Libanius, Epp. 400, cf. 1315), and the latter was still in office when Libanius returned to Antioch in the winter of 353/4 (7.2, cf. Epp. 386). Seeck deduced, wrongly, that the whole episode belongs to 354. In fact, Ammianus has merely exercised the historian’s right to continue an episode to its end even when that entails a departure from strict chronological order.

Abortive Persian attack in Mesopotamia.

The introductory words (1 eo adducta re per Isauriam) do not indicate that the Persian attack follows the last events narrated in the preceding chapter, but implicitly take the reader back to the chronological mooring of the Isaurian raids, i.e., to summer 353. The annual fair at Batnae, therefore, belongs to September 353 (3), not to September 354 (as Seeck supposed).

Raid by the Saraceni, whose customs are briefly described.

Events in the West during the winter of 353/4.

Ammianus notes Constantius’ celebration of his tricennalia at Arles (1), presumably on 8 November 353, though the transmitted text has diem sextum idus Octobres (not Novembres).\(^\text{20}\) He describes the punishment of the followers of Magnentius (1–3), then passes to Constantius’ cruelty (4–5) and the activities of the notarius Paul who was nicknamed Catena (6–9).

The opening words of the chapter (1 dum haec in Oriente aguntur, Areolate hiemem agens Constantius etc.) carry an implicit reference back to the opening of the whole book (1.1 nondum . . . milite locato per stationes hibernas). Ammianus, therefore, intended his readers to place the events of the intervening chapters (1–4) in the summer and autumn of 353, not in the winter of 353/4 (as Seeck assumed). However, by some

\(^{20}\) Constantius was proclaimed Caesar on 8 November 324 (New Empire [above, n. 8] 8 n. 31). Seeck, Regesten (above, n. 5) 200, accepts Ammianus’ date of 10 October for the celebrations while retaining 8 November for the emperor’s dies imperii (174).
peculiar and as yet unexplained lapse, Ammianus makes the celebrations mark the end of Constantius’ thirtieth year, not its beginning.

6 The urban prefecture of Orfitus (1), with a long digression on the city of Rome and the disgraceful behavior of its inhabitants (2–27).

Orfitus became prefect of the city of Rome on 8 December 353 (Chr. min. 1.69) and remained in office until at least 6 July 355 (CTh 14.3.2; CJ 12.1.6). The digression refers to an expulsion of peregrini from the city which Ammianus denounces so vehemently (6.19) that it is normally assumed that he refers to a food shortage in 383 or 384 during which he was himself expelled from Rome.²¹

7 Excesses of Gallus in the East.

Ammianus alludes, in a slighting fashion, to a journey of Gallus to Hierapolis on military business (5 Hierapolim prefectus, ut expeditioni specie tenus adesset). Seeck plausibly dated it to the beginning of the good season in 354: that could be as early as March. Writing in Antioch in December 362 for publication in January 363, the emperor Julian observed that nine years had passed since the murder of Theophilus (5–8, cf. Misopogon 370C). That points to the early months of 354, but it is not legitimate to deduce that the arrest of the leading Antiochenes also belongs to the spring of 354 (as Sievers and Seeck did). Ammianus marks a lapse of time between their release and the lynching of Theophilus (5 post haec).

8 Excursus on the provinces of the diocese of Oriens outside Egypt (which was a separate diocese by the time Ammianus was writing).

9.1–2 Recall of Ursicinus from Nisibis.

3–9 Executions under Gallus.

10 Campaign of Constantius against the Alamanni.

The campaign began in spring 354 (1 caeli reserato tepore Constantius consulatu suo septies et Caesaris †iterum),²² and

²¹ Alan Cameron, JRS 54 (1964) 27; R. Syme, Ammianus and the Historia Augusta (Oxford 1968) 5.

²² Valesius emended to ter, which is correct, while W. Seyfarth (Teubner 1978) prints the transmitted but incorrect iterum. It seems unlikely that Ammianus would make such a slip.
Constantius waited at Valentia because supplies were delayed by unusually frequent spring rain (2). In the event, a peace treaty was entered into without fighting and Constantius proceeded to winter-quarters at Milan (16), where his presence is attested in January and February 355 (CTh 11.34.2; CJ 6.22.6).

11.1–5 Ursicinus is summoned to Milan (and takes Ammianus).

6–34 Gallus is persuaded to leave Antioch: his journey, deposition and death, followed by an obituary (27–34).

IV

The preceding discussion has had two distinct but related aims. First, to elucidate the principles on which Ammianus structures his bipartite narrative of eastern and western affairs in the years 353 and 354. If the arguments advanced are valid, he has a careful and fundamentally correct chronology, not a botched conflation of two imperfectly combined sources. The second aim, partly pursued by means of the first, has been to establish a more reliable chronology than that conventionally accepted for the eastern events that Ammianus describes. It may be useful, therefore, to summarize the principal conclusions about Gallus’ activities. (The references in brackets are to Ammianus 14.)

353, summer
Gallus in Antioch (1.4–9)
Isaurian raids begin (2)
Persians prepare to invade Mesopotamia (3)
Raid by Saracen (4)
c. Sept. 1
Persian expedition withdraws when detected (3.3–4)

autumn
Food shortage in Antioch (7.2)
c. Nov./Dec.
Leading decurions imprisoned (7.2)

354, c. March
Theophilus killed (7.5)
Gallus goes to Hierapolis (7.5)
spring
Nebridius sent to Isauria (2.20)
c. April
Gallus in Antioch (7.9–10)
Montius and Domitianus killed (7.10–17)
Death of Constantina (11.6)
c. Sept. 1
Gallus leaves Antioch (11.12)
Sept. 14/30
Gallus in Nicomedia
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Gallus stripped of his imperial rank at Poetovio (11.19–20)
Oct. Gallus tried and executed near Pola (11.20–23)