



## Structure and Chronology in Ammianus, Book 14

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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.<sup>1</sup> Seeck's chronology for Book 14 has never been challenged in any fundamental way. On the contrary, it was taken as axiomatic and proclaimed on every relevant page in the subsequent critical edition by C. U. Clark (1910), and on every other page in the editions with translations 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).<sup>2</sup> 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 postulating incompetence: according to Seeck, Ammianus had two main narrative sources out of which he fashioned his own account of the period between 353 and 363, one Thucydidean, which divided events by campaigning seasons, or summers and winters, the other a strictly annalistic source which dated by consuls and arranged its material by calendar

<sup>1</sup> O. Seeck, "Zur Chronologie und Quellenkritik des Ammianus Marcellinus," *Hermes* 41 (1906) 481–539, esp. 494–499.

<sup>2</sup> Seeck's chronology is accepted by E. A. Thompson, *The Historical Work of Ammianus 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.<sup>3</sup> Seeck's mechanical analysis of Ammianus' sources has long been discredited.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> A papyrus provides primary though unrecognized evidence pointing to an earlier date.

## I

In 1983 Rosario Pintaudi published a small papyrus fragment now in the Medicean Library in Florence as a dating formula used at the vilage of Nicomedia in the Arsinoite nome in September 326 (*PLaur.* 169).<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, J. G. Keenan revised Pintaudi's readings slightly to produce the following text:

προσ]ταχθῆναι ..ε ... νδω ..σελ [ ]  
 ]εντων αὐτῶν εἰς γγῶσιν απα[ ]  
 πρὸ χ καλα]νδῶν Ὀκτωβρίου ἐν Νικομηδ[εῖα]  
 4 [ὑπάτοις Κωνσταντίνῳ Σεβαστῶ τὸ ζ" καὶ Κωνσταντίῳ  
 Καίσαρι τ[ὸ α"]

<sup>3</sup> Seeck 494: "Nicht viel minder häufig als diese Quelle, die wir künftig die thukydeische nennen wollen, benutzt Ammian bis zum 25. Buche eine andere, die rein annalistisch 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 Anfangsteilen des Ammian nicht selten stören."

<sup>4</sup> G. Sabbah, *La méthode d'Ammien Marcellin. Recherches sur la construction du discours historique dans les Res Gestae* (Paris 1978) 115 ff.

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

<sup>6</sup> R. Pintaudi, *Dai papiri della biblioteca medicea laurenziana (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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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 Spolegium 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.<sup>9</sup> 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,<sup>10</sup> the date in line 4 can (and should) be restored as

[ὑπάτοις Κωνσταντίνῳ Σεβαστῶ τὸ] ζ" καὶ Κωνσταντίῳ  
Καίσαρι τ[ὸ γ"]

<sup>7</sup> J. G. Keenan, “Fragmentary Constitution of Constantine?” *ZPE* 59 (1985) 89–90.

<sup>8</sup> *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (Cambridge, Mass. 1982) 76–77.

<sup>9</sup> Seeck, *Regesten* (above, n. 5) 83, 175.

<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> 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

<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> G. R. Sievers, *Das Leben des Libanius* (Berlin 1868) 215–217.

<sup>13</sup> Seeck 496: "Es steht fest, dass Libanius im Jahre 354 von Constantinopel nach Antiochia übersiedelte." He appeals to the passage of Sievers adduced in the preceding footnote.

Musonianus, as proconsul of Achaëa, 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.<sup>14</sup> 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 Achaëa. Musonianus' appointment is conventionally placed in 353 because Libanius sets it after the removal of both Vetricianus 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 Achaëa in 352/3, and the offer of a chair at Athens may more plausibly be lodged in 352 than in 353.<sup>15</sup> Second, Libanius' temporary visit to Antioch. This, it seems clear, must belong to the summer of 353.<sup>16</sup> Third, Libanius' permanent return and the arrest of leading Antiochenes. Sievers and Seck opted for spring 354.<sup>17</sup> 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

<sup>14</sup> Libanius, *Orat.* 1.12 ff.; cf. the commentary of A. F. Norman, *Libanius' Autobiography (Oration I)* (London 1965) 151 ff.

<sup>15</sup> As argued in *CP* 82 (1987) 211.

<sup>16</sup> Norman (above, n. 14) 171.

<sup>17</sup> So too, recently, R. Kaster, *Chiron* 13 (1983) 41: "late winter 353/4," cf. 49: "not later than March 354."

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.<sup>18</sup> 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),<sup>19</sup> 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*

<sup>18</sup> For earlier analyses based on Seck's chronology, see G. Pighi, *I discorsi nelle storie d'Ammiano Marcellino* (Milan 1936) 65–68; K. Rosen, *Studien zur Darstellungskunst und Glaubwürdigkeit des Ammianus Marcellinus* (diss. Heidelberg 1968; publ. Bonn 1970) 182–183. For a more organic exegesis of Book 14 as an argumentative structure, see Sabbah (above, n. 4) 456–463.

<sup>19</sup> O. Seck, *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.

3 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).

4 Raids by the Saraceni, whose customs are briefly described.

5 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*).<sup>20</sup> 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, Arelate 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

<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup>

- 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 profecturus, 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*),<sup>22</sup> and

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

<sup>22</sup> 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)
	Raids by Saraceni (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

Gallus stripped of his imperial rank at Poetovio  
(11.19–20)

Oct. Gallus tried and executed near Pola (11.20–23)

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