

BOOK REVIEW

Philological and Historical Commentary on Ammianus Marcellinus XXXI. Edited by J. DEN BOEFT, J.W. DRIJVERS, D. DEN HENGST, AND H.C. TEITLER. Leiden, NL and Boston, MA: Brill, 2018. Pp. xxv +357. Hardback, \$ 195.00. ISBN: 978-90-04-35381-7 (hardback); ISBN: 978-90-04-35382 (e-book).

The *Philological and Historical Commentary on Ammianus Marcellinus XXXI* is an impressive accomplishment. It is the culmination of the series of *Philological and Historical Commentaries on Ammianus Marcellinus's Res Gestae*, which started in 1935 with the Ph.D. thesis of P. De Jonge at the University of Groningen on the first seven chapters of Book 14. De Jonge continued his work through World War II, extending it to Book 19 which he published in 1982. He inspired a new generation of scholars, three of whom continued his work with commentaries on Books 20 and 21, and with the addition of J. W. Drijvers, have now arrived at this final volume published in 2018. The scholarly community owes a debt to this group of devoted scholars. Working in harmony that is rare to find, their commentary renders Ammianus Marcellinus's work accessible for future generations of scholars and students. With a wealth of learning, clarity and insight, this volume is a fitting conclusion to these decades of high-quality scholarship and commentary. This volume is arguably the most important of the series owing to its content and to the explosion of contemporary scholarship on Ammianus.

Book 31 has long been recognized as a masterpiece in literary narrative, and it provides unique historical information on a number of key topics. Most of the book is devoted to the dangers created by the Roman decision to allow the entry of the Goths into Thrace that culminated in the terrible defeat of the Roman army and the subsequent demise of the emperor Valens. The focus is almost entirely on the Eastern Empire, but Book 31 also contains matchless information about the western emperor Gratian's interactions with the Alamannic Lentienses at the Rhine frontiers. In addition, Ammianus provides the earliest extant Roman description of the Hunnic people and their culture. Indeed, the ethnography of the Huns, along with the description of the Battle of Adrianople, have long won

admirers, including Edward Gibbon (Chapter 26.5) who famously saw Ammianus as “an accurate and faithful guide, who composed the history of his times without indulging the prejudices and passions which usually affect the mind of a contemporary” (Womersley, 1995, pages 1073-4). Indeed, the detailed narrative of Book 31 has convinced some scholars to argue that this was originally a separate monograph, “drafted in Greek at Antioch in the aftermath of the Roman defeat at Adrianople.”

¹ Indeed, this is not the only time that scholars have disputed the date and composition of Ammianus’s work. But the authors of this commentary make strong, decisive arguments in favor of this book as the intended end of the *Res Gestae*, pointing out that not only had Ammianus hinted at this ending by an earlier omen (29.1.33), but that the Latin shows no signs of a Greek original.

The conciseness of their argumentation, the clarity in their logic and the wealth of detail to support their interpretation exemplify the strengths of this commentary as a whole. A brief introduction follows, with a clear chronology of events before turning to the commentary itself, which proceeds by Chapters, from 1-16. Although it is the nature of commentary that no one publication can address every single issue, this volume certainly addresses the major historical issues. Particularly impressive is the commentary to Chapter 2, which includes two ethnographic excursus on the Huns (2-11) and the Alans (17-25). The former excursus incorporates a wealth of recent archaeological as well as textual evidence to highlight what is the current thinking about the origin of the Huns and their migrations. Moreover, the commentary is enlivened with learned insights into Ammianus’s Latin. So, for example, at Book 31.3.8, (48), the commentary notes: “The use of iam “de préparation” (Chausserie-Laprée, 1969, 497-519) creates tension. Normally, as here, it is followed by a verb in the imperfect or pluperfect.” The insight is especially helpful for it underscores the degree of familiarity with the nuances of Latin that Ammianus used when composing in Latin.

Nonetheless, there are some things that I would wish to change in this commentary. The authors consistently refer to other volumes in the series for extensive discussions. This assumption—that the reader or student has access to the earlier volumes—is a flawed one. In a multi-volume work, this is certainly intended to prevent duplication. But in a commentary released over more than a decade in costly volumes, it would have been better to include a simple clarification and, where possible, avoid cross referencing to widely available commentaries or dictionaries. Problematic, too, to an anglophone audience are the grammatical references to R. Kühner and C. Stegmann, *Ausführliche Grammatik der*

lateinischen Sprache, II, 1955 and 1976. Not just the difficulty of accessing this work, but the terms used to describe grammatical constructions are alien to Anglo-phone students.

But these are minor quibbles. I could go on to praise the sophistication of the treatment of Ammianus's Latin, which is combined with an extensive bibliography, and clarity of presentation. In this regard, the volume is a model for historical and philological commentaries. The introductions to the chapters are particularly useful. So, for example, in considering the necrology of Valens, the editors provide an overview not just of Ammianus's earlier necrologies, but of the scholarship on this key passage. Usefully, there is an e-book version of this work which makes it accessible even for those with limited libraries.

Given the depth of the commentary and the critical importance of this volume, I recommend it enthusiastically.

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¹M. Kulikowski, "Coded Polemic in Ammianus Book 31 and the date and Place of its Composition," *JRS* 102 (2012), pp. 79-102.