

PAIDEIA AND SELF-FASHIONING IN AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS*

Abstract: In many passages of the *Res Gestae*, Ammianus criticizes contemporary individuals and groups that lack a literary culture befitting their rank. These passages were commonly interpreted as a reflection of Ammianus' class prejudices. In contrast, the main thesis of this paper is that Ammianus' perspective on paideia can also be seen as part of the self-fashioning strategy deployed in his work. Ammianus establishes almost a direct equivalence between the possession of paideia and elite membership. In criticizing the ignorance of emperors, officials, and aristocrats, Ammianus is indirectly asserting his own superiority, not only in the intellectual field but also in the social sphere. Throughout his work, Ammianus does not spare any effort to convince his readers of his erudition and literary culture, constructing for himself the identity of a Greek intellectual. Name-dropping and the digressive style he employs in the *Res Gestae* constitute the main means to construct this identity, because they allow Ammianus to display his encyclopaedic learning in a way not common in historical works.

Keywords: Ammianus Marcellinus, Paideia, Self-fashioning

1. Introduction

In recent decades, a number of important studies have clearly shown that paideia still retained in the later Roman Empire its full force as cultural ideal.¹ These works state that the traditional literary, philosophical, and rhetorical education remained a defining feature of the local elites of the empire, forming a central factor of cohesion that allowed communication between its members and the emergence of shared identities.

The general image of paideia recognizable in the *Res Gestae* of Ammianus clearly agrees with the conclusions of the above-mentioned studies. However, it is a well-known fact that this work also has some idiosyncrasies, such as Ammianus' bitter criticism of the lack of education among many of his contemporaries. Indeed, although Ammianus' work bears clear testimony to his complete identification with the ideal of paideia, it also reveals his repeated disappointments when paideia seemed not to get the attention he thought it

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¹ See Cameron (1984); (1998) 665–707; (2006) 327–55; Kaster (1988); Brown (1992); Vanderspoel (1995); Watts (2006); (2012) 467–86; van Hoof (2013).

deserved from the various elites of the empire. The historian recorded in several famous passages—such as his digressions on Rome—his bewilderment and irritation at this neglect of paideia. Of course, there are similar passages in other authors of the period, in which they complain, like Ammianus, about the ignorance of certain characters or about the lack of attention given to literary culture and education.² However, Ammianus' criticism goes generally further and deeper than that found in most other contemporary examples and constitutes one of the recurring themes in his work.

Ammianus' *Res Gestae* have attracted a great deal of scholarly attention in recent decades, with some of the passages in which he criticizes the ignorance of emperors, officials, and aristocrats being among the most studied and discussed.³ However, few attempts have been made to offer a general explanation of Ammianus' particular focus on paideia. At the beginning of the twentieth century, T. R. Glover was surprised at seeing how Ammianus defined many imperial and other crimes as 'sins of ignorance'.⁴ In the 1950s, A. Alföldi suggested that Ammianus' bitter criticism of the lack of education of the Pannonian emperors and their officials was a sign of his strong prejudices.⁵ More recently, R. Blockley discussed, albeit briefly, the importance attached by Ammianus to paideia with respect to imperial politics. Blockley agreed with Alföldi on Ammianus' snobbishness but he rejected the idea that his attitude could be entirely represented by this. Blockley acknowledged the weight that the Roman historian attached to paideia as being a crucial factor in the education of honest officials and virtuous emperors. He rightly stressed that Ammianus saw paideia as one of the avenues through which the empire could overcome the critical situation in which it found itself in the late fourth century AD.⁶ In a recent study of the images painted of the reigns of Valentinian and Valens in Ammianus' work, J. W. Drijvers considered that one of the main reasons behind their negative characterization in the *Res Gestae* was their lack of paideia. Ammianus connects this lack of paideia explicitly with a

² See e.g., Lact. *mort. pers.* 19.6; 22.3–4; Aur. Vict. *Epit.* 40.15; 42.18; Eutr. *Brev.* 10.3; Lib. *Or.* 42.23–5. Libanius' perspective is different as he does not criticize the ignorance of his contemporaries, but is rather worried by the success of rival studies such as Roman law, shorthand and Latin, which undermine the importance of Greek rhetoric. See Liebeschuetz (1972) 242–55.

³ See e.g. Cracco Ruggini (2003) 366–82; Rohrbacher (2007); den Hengst (2007) 159–79; Vergin (2013) 241–52.

⁴ Glover (1901) 32.

⁵ Alföldi (1952) 118: 'If Ammianus seizes every opportunity to depict his (sc. Valens') lack of polish, that is due in part to the senatorial reaction, in part to the bitterness of a cultured man, coming from a Greek and pagan milieu, towards the highest Christian child of fortune, from whom he has nothing to expect'.

⁶ Blockley (1975) 157–61. Rosen (1982) 120 reaches a similar conclusion.

style of government that does not respect the basic cultural codes of late Roman elites, such as moderation or honour, and this explains the authoritarian and violent exercise of power practised by these emperors.⁷

Following the line of inquiry suggested by Blockley and Drijvers, I will argue that Ammianus' perspective on *paideia* cannot be reduced to a reflection of his snobbishness or class prejudices. The main thesis of this paper is that Ammianus' perspective on *paideia* can also be seen as part of the self-fashioning strategy deployed in his work. Self-fashioning is here understood as the effort to construct an authorial identity and project a stylized persona to the reader by employing a variety of rhetorical and literary resources.⁸ It is a well-known fact that Ammianus is one of the ancient historians most eager to speak of himself, to the point that he includes many first-person narratives when describing his participation in historical events.⁹ Ammianus' propensity to present himself in his work is particularly noteworthy considering the traditions of classical historiography. Indeed, as Momigliano remarked, 'compared to, say, Livy or his own model Tacitus, Ammianus would appear to display an almost indecent readiness to talk about himself'.¹⁰

It is difficult not to relate Ammianus' emphasis on his self-presentation to his position at Rome. Indeed, he was there a foreigner, separated from his family and social relationships. What is more, he was an outsider without literary credentials writing in a foreign language and trying his hand at historiography, a genre with a well-established aristocratic tradition.¹¹ This background of cultural and geographical mobility explains Ammianus' necessity to construct for himself an authoritative identity to present to his readers. Momigliano's famous depiction of Ammianus at Rome as a 'lonely historian' who was 'intellectually isolated', may well be exaggerated.¹² Nevertheless, it seems certain that Ammianus was not a prominent figure in the social and intellectual milieu of the city.

There can be no doubt about the fact that Ammianus employs different rhetorical and literary resources to construct a stylised image of himself. As G. Kelly demonstrated, Ammianus' autobiographical passages present carefully crafted narratives combining references to autopsy with a wealth of so-

⁷ Drijvers (2012) 85–97.

⁸ On self-fashioning, see Greenblatt's (1980) landmark study on how Renaissance authors constructed their identities within literary texts. The applicability of Greenblatt's ideas to the study Roman authors has been demonstrated by, among others, Leach (1990); Riggsby (1995); Dugan (2001) and (2005).

⁹ See Kelly (2008) 31–103.

¹⁰ Momigliano (1977) 128

¹¹ See Momigliano (1977) and Matthews (2008) 465–6.

¹² Momigliano (1977) 133–4. See also Kelly (2008) 132–51.

phisticated literary allusions.¹³ The inclusion of these autobiographical passages allows Ammianus to present himself as an experienced man of action. Similarly, the very numerous learned digressions, allusions, and quotations included in almost every passage of the *Res Gestae* serve to portray him as an author deeply learned in all fields of knowledge. In this way, he carefully constructs an ideal image of himself as an authoritative historian who was in a position to write because he had not only seen but also read many things, as he famously declares at the beginning of his excursus on the coasts of the Black Sea (*visa vel lecta* 22.8.1). These two facets of his self-presentation are perfectly illustrated by Ammianus' famous self-description in the postscript of his work as a *miles quondam et Graecus* that can be interpreted as alluding to his double qualification as a historian.¹⁴ Ammianus alludes to his Greek identity in many passages of the *Res Gestae* where he glosses Greek terms with the first person plural.¹⁵ It seems clear that for him, as T. D. Barnes rightly remarked, the term *Graecus* conveyed a 'strong commendation',¹⁶ and this is so because Ammianus' Greek identity was fundamentally mediated through paideia.

In this paper, I will focus on the centrality of paideia as one of the fundamental principles of Ammianus' self-presentation. As A. P. Johnson noted with respect to Hellenism, paideia, rather than being a defined concept, was a sort of rhetorical and conceptual toolbox from which the educated could build different images and arguments for various purposes.¹⁷ For Ammianus paideia was not just a literary phenomenon but also a tool for identity construction on multiple levels; it mediated not only his cultural identity but also his perception of social class and status. The display of paideia is for Ammianus not only a way of expressing his cultural connection to the revered past and of reaffirming his Greekness but also a way of claiming elite status. In other words, with his emphasis on his mastery of paideia, Ammianus is not only claiming authority as a historian but also a high social standing that identifies him as a member of the elite.

Ammianus' insistence on the fact that many powerful functionaries and distinguished aristocrats lack a literary culture befitting their rank is a central part of his self-fashioning strategy. He establishes almost a direct equivalence between the possession of paideia and elite membership. In presenting himself as thoroughly educated in the liberal arts, Ammianus fashions himself as a member of the true elite of the empire, the one that should rank above those that, despite their undoubted power and wealth, betray with their igno-

¹³ Kelly (2008) 103.

¹⁴ See Crump (1975) 4–5.

¹⁵ 17.7.11; 22.8.33; 23.4.10, 6.20.

¹⁶ Barnes (1998) 65–6.

¹⁷ Johnson (2012) 433–66.

rance their unworthiness to occupy any distinguished position. This can be seen particularly clearly in Ammianus' social digressions in the *Res Gestae*, where he presents what can be considered as a general indictment of the elite's lack of paideia. In these passages, Ammianus employs an especially erudite style that gives proof of his superiority over those he criticizes.

The next section of this paper discusses Ammianus' concept of paideia and its general relationship with his self-fashioning in the *Res Gestae*. The following sections offer an analysis of Ammianus' use of name-dropping and of his digressive style as strategies of self-presentation. Finally, the last section considers the relationship between Ammianus' self-fashioning and the social criticism he presents in the digressions on Rome and in other passages of his work. In presenting my arguments, it will be necessary to repeat some information and facts that are well known in Ammianean scholarship.

II. Ammianus' Concept of Paideia

W. Ensslin, P. M. Camus and K. Rosen argued that Ammianus identified himself with the Hellenistic ideal of ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία or general education, combined with the Ciceronian ideal of the orator as a *vir doctus*.¹⁸ However, ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία is a loose term open to interpretation. Ammianus' educative ideal is very exacting and implies the complete mastery of a vast and complex culture, which combines the knowledge of traditional literary disciplines with that of the major sciences. Indeed, it is this ideal of paideia which is reflected in the encyclopaedic nature of the digressions in the *Res Gestae* in which Ammianus displays his learning and erudition on a very wide range of geographic, ethnographic, historical, religious, philosophical, and scientific topics (see below, section 4).

Ammianus employs many Latin expressions as equivalent to paideia: *doctrinae liberales*, *disciplinae liberales*, *liberalia studia*, *disciplinae sollertes*, *bonae artes*, *scientia litterarum*, *artes doctrinarum*, etc.¹⁹ From the frequent allusions to liberal studies in the *Res Gestae*, a detailed picture can be obtained of what the historian meant by these words. He considered philosophy, rhetoric, literature, and history as the basic components of paideia, but he also included other disciplines such as geography, astronomy, medicine, or even divination. He also thought that knowledge of these disciplines should comprise the classical

¹⁸ See Rosen (1982) 107–8; Camus (1967) 74–8; Ensslin (1923) 37–8. On the concept of ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία see Hadot (1984) 263–93.

¹⁹ *Doctrinae liberales*: 14.6.1; 15.2.7. *Disciplinae liberales*: 14.6.19; 29.1.41. *Studia liberalia*: 19.12.11; 28.1.6; 31.14.5. *Disciplinae sollertes*: 27.6.9. *Bonae artes*: 16.9.2. *Scientia litterarum*: 29.1.9. *Artes doctrinarum*: 25.4.5. *Musae*: 16.5.4. *Doctrinae*: 28.4.14; 29.2.18. I use the standard edition of Seyfarth (1978).

texts in both Greek and Latin.²⁰ The excursus on Alexandria in book 22 confirms this encyclopaedic concept of paideia. In this passage, Ammianus mentions the famous intellectuals of the past who were active in the city and states that the liberal arts are not absent in the Alexandria of his own time, with there still remaining people dedicated to geometry, music, astronomy, medicine, and even to divination.²¹

Particularly revealing are some passages describing Julian's culture and education, a figure consistently presented by Ammianus as coming close to embodying his ideal of paideia. Ammianus comments in detail on several occasions about Julian's studies and especially about his interest in philosophy. For instance, in his deathbed speech, the historian makes him describe himself as *philosophorum sententia generali perdoctus*.²² Moreover, in the famous passage concerning his description of Julian's virtues in book 16, Ammianus shows the young emperor, while campaigning in Gaul, spending his nights occupied mainly in the study of all parts of philosophy (*per omnia philosophiae membra*) but without neglecting the humbler disciplines of poetry and rhetoric.²³ A similar point is made in Julian's obituary in book 25, where he is depicted as taking refuge, after having fulfilled his duties, in the study of the liberal arts: *post haec seria ad artes confugiens doctrinarum*.²⁴ Similarly, in two further passages, Ammianus emphasises that Julian's studies covered all fields of human knowledge, defining him as *studiosus cognitionum omnium*.²⁵

Ammianus stresses also that Julian was able to express himself in Latin as well as in Greek.²⁶ Although researchers have debated the actual level of Julian's knowledge of Latin,²⁷ another passage of the *Res Gestae* clearly confirms the importance Ammianus attached to bilingualism. This is the frequently quoted reference to Strategius Musonianus, labelled as *facundia sermonis utriusque clarus*.²⁸ Of course, the emphasis Ammianus lays on bilingualism can be

²⁰ On Ammianus' bilingualism, see Barnes (1998) 65–71.

²¹ 22.16.17–8. See also den Boeft et al. (1995) 305.

²² 25.3.15.

²³ 16.5.6–7.

²⁴ 25.4.5.

²⁵ 21.1.7: *studioso cognitionum omnium principi*. 25.4.7: *studiosus cognitionum omnium*. In these passages, *cognitiones* cannot be interpreted as a reference to 'legal inquiries', see den Boeft et al. (2005) 129.

²⁶ 16.5.7.

²⁷ See Thompson (1944) 49–51; (1947) 5; Sánchez-Ostiz (2007) 293–308. Eutropius (10.16.3) and Libanius (*Or.* 12.92) also mention Julian's bilingualism.

²⁸ 15.13.1. Drijvers (1996) 532–7 argues that the two languages mastered by Musonianus could be Greek and Syriac, a thesis rejected by Woods (2001) 255–64. Another example of bilingualism is the deserter Antoninus, whom Ammianus in 18.5.1 qualifies as *utriusque linguae litteras sciens*.

seen as another aspect of his self-fashioning strategy. As an author who defines himself as *Graecus* but writes in the language of the Romans, he is himself a clear example of the bilingual culture he praises.

Julian's paideia also plays an important role in the catalogue of virtues that forms the centre of his obituary.²⁹ Ammianus focuses on the analysis of eight virtues of Julian, the classic four 'cardinal virtues' defined by the philosophers (*sapientes*): *temperantia* (25.4.2–6), *prudentia* (25.4.7), *iustitia* (25.4.8–9), and *fortitudo* (25.4.10), and four additional ones: *rei militaris scientia* (25.4.11), *auctoritas*, (25.4.12–13) *felicitas* (25.4.14), and *liberalitas* (25.4.15). This list is conventional, and several passages from the works of Plato, Cicero, and other authorities have been identified as its potential direct or indirect sources.³⁰ Particularly interesting is how Ammianus explicitly connects some of Julian's virtues with his literary and philosophical culture. He explains Julian's conspicuous chastity after the death of his wife Helena from his knowledge of a story told by Plato (*Rep.* 329c) about Sophocles, according to which the poet was happy in his old age because he had escaped the general passion for women, which he compared to obtaining freedom from a cruel master (25.4.2). Ammianus relates Julian's chastity also to the influence of a line of the poet Bacchylides, whom, according to Ammianus, Julian read with pleasure (25.4.3). Furthermore, Ammianus declares that Julian's frugality in peacetime was such that he always seemed anxious to return to wearing the *pallium*, the typical clothing of the Greek philosopher.

Philosophy seems to play a particularly important role in Ammianus' conception of paideia; he views it as the highest form of wisdom.³¹ Indeed, the historian generically refers in several passages of his work to philosophers as *sapientes*.³² As noted by several scholars,³³ Ammianus uses this term in a broad sense to refer to many great authorities of the past, such as Plato or Cicero. As Brandt claims, Ammianus' concept of wisdom corresponds to the definition provided by Cicero in *De Officiis*: *rerum est divinarum et humanarum scientia*.³⁴ Brandt argues that the historian does not use the adjective *sapiens* to refer to any contemporary hero, reserving for them instead words of the se-

²⁹ 25.4. For an introduction to this passage and the extensive scholarly debate on it, see den Boeft et al. (2005) 111–13.

³⁰ Plato *Rep.* 427e is the first mention of the four cardinal virtues. The *locus classicus* in Latin on this topic is Cic. *Inv.* 2.159. The four additional virtues appear in Cic. *Man.* 28, see den Boeft et al. (2005) 117. See also Blockley (1975) 90–3.

³¹ Some passages of the *Res Gestae* reveal an influence of Neo-Platonism and Stoicism on Ammianus thinking. See von Scala (1898) 119–50; Ensslin (1923) 53–4, 59–64, 66–8, 87–92; Szidat (1982) 132–145; Barnes (1990) 65–6; Matthews (2007) 428–31.

³² See 25.4.1; 26.2.9; 29.2.18; 30.8.4, 8.14.

³³ See Brandt (1999) 102–3.

³⁴ *De off.* 1.153. Brandt (1999) 101.

mantic field related to *prudentia*.³⁵ Actually, Ammianus uses the word *sapientia* in connection with Julian in two passages.³⁶

Due to the lower frequency in the *Res Gestae* of words pertaining to the semantic field of *sapientia* as compared with those of *prudentia*, Brandt deduces a lower rank of wisdom in Ammianus' value scale compared to practical intelligence.³⁷ However, here mere statistics lead to a misleading conclusion. In fact, the nature of the relatively few references to *sapientia* in Ammianus' work clearly shows the enormous value he attaches to it as indicating a source of great authority in relation to the *doctrinae*.³⁸ In a passage from his excursus on Egypt in book 22, Ammianus even uses the expression *sapientia gloriosa*.³⁹

Finally, it is important to add that, in Ammianus' eyes, the study of the great classical authors might help emperors and officials to avoid mistakes and might guide them towards good governance.⁴⁰ This is illustrated by a remarkable passage, in which the historian declares that the emperor Valens should have learnt from the liberal doctrines that power must be exercised in a measured way, and that its true goal should be the welfare of the population.⁴¹ Valens is thus represented as Julian's antithesis, as the latter, in the last speech Ammianus has him deliver, claims to know precisely what Valens ignores, namely, that the purpose of a just rule lies in the welfare and security of its subjects: *reputans autem iusti esse finem imperii, oboedientium commodum et salutem*.⁴²

To sum up, Ammianus presents in the *Res Gestae* a particularly broad concept of paideia as a truly encyclopaedic erudition centred in the knowledge of the great classical authors in both Greek and Latin. Moreover, for Ammianus the possession of this knowledge does not only imply intellectual superiority but also a moral one, as illustrated by the example of Julian. Ammianus' concept of paideia is thus key for his self-fashioning, because in representing himself as a man fully educated in this wide-ranging paideia, Ammianus is claiming for himself this kind of intellectual and moral excellence.

³⁵ Brandt (1999) 120.

³⁶ 21.1.7 and 25.4.7.

³⁷ Brandt (1999) 120.

³⁸ See 17.4.8; 18.3.7; 21.1.7; 22.16.22; 25.4.1, 4.7.

³⁹ 22.16.22.

⁴⁰ Rosen (1982) 120–1.

⁴¹ 29.2.18.

⁴² 25.3.18.

III. Name-Dropping as a Self-Fashioning Strategy in the *Res Gestae*

Paradoxically, despite the great importance Ammianus attaches to *paideia* in his work, a negative assessment of his erudition and literary abilities was consolidated in the nineteenth century, largely through the work of German scholars. His erudition was considered to be a second-hand product almost entirely derived from anthologies and epitomes.⁴³ From the mid-twentieth century on, however, this view was gradually supplanted by a more nuanced assessment, which recognized the breadth and genuine character of Ammianus' learning and literary skills.⁴⁴ Recent research has also demonstrated the centrality of intertextuality in the construction of Ammianus' historiographical discourse and its complex layers of meaning.⁴⁵ His numerous allusions to authors such as Cicero and Virgil, as well as to many others (such as Ovid, Terence, Horace, Sallust, Lucan, Apuleius, and Gellius), reveal that he had undertaken considerable reading in Latin literature and that this had left a deep imprint on his thinking and language.

Ammianus is eager to present himself as a learned writer, alluding proudly in different passages to his readings of ancient authors.⁴⁶ For example, in a passage in book 16, he briefly relates the biography of the eunuch Eutherius,⁴⁷ presenting him—in stark contrast to his usual criticism of eunuchs—in strongly positive terms. Ammianus claims to have done extensive research in ancient texts (*antiquitates replicando complures*) without finding another eunuch to be compared to Eutherius. He admits, however, that perhaps a 'painstaking reader of the ancient texts' (*scrupulosus quidam lector antiquitatum*) could confront him with the example of Menophilus, the eunuch of Mithridates, but he questions the validity of that comparison and demonstrates his thorough knowledge of this obscure historical figure in a brief digression. Besides eulogizing Eutherius, Ammianus is here also flaunting his own learning and ability to answer any objection, no matter how erudite. Moreover, as has long been recognised, the phrase *si forte scrupulosus ... lector* is a borrowing from Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. With this wink to the learned reader, Ammianus subtly reinforces the idea that he had also read the classics carefully.

⁴³ See e.g., von Scala (1898) 117–50. For an analysis of the development of Ammianus' image, see Blockley (1996).

⁴⁴ Thompson (1947) 20–41; Alonso-Núñez (1975) 80–1; Salemme (1989); Kelly (2008) 185–92 and 220. See also Fornara (1992) 420–38. Ammianus shows a deep knowledge of contemporary literature; see the detailed analysis of Sabbah (1978) 241–372.

⁴⁵ Barnes (1990); Salemme (1987) 353–7; (1989); Vanhaegendoren (2006) 495–504; Kelly (2008).

⁴⁶ 15.9.2; 16.7.8; 27.4.2; 30.4.3.

⁴⁷ On Eutherius, see Woods (1998).

Although there can be no doubt about the genuine character of Ammianus' education and literary culture, it remains an unquestionable fact that he regularly tries to appear more learned than he really is. He seeks to impress his readers by quoting numerous and, sometimes, recondite authorities (such as, for instance, Didymus Chalcenterus, Euctemon, or Meton) that he often seems to know superficially at best. So in his brief digression on guardian spirits (21.14.3–5), he begins with a quotation from Menander in Greek about how a genius is assigned to every man at birth. He continues with a reference to Homer and then proceeds to present a list of great figures from history who were assisted by guardian spirits: Pythagoras, Socrates, Numa Pompilius, Scipio, Marius, and Octavianus. Finally, he mentions Hermes Trismegistus, Apollonius of Tyana, and Plotinus, and states that they have treated this topic. This display of erudition is clearly designed to impress the reader, although, in fact, Ammianus seems to have derived all information included in this digression from only one source, Plutarch.⁴⁸ Ammianus behaves thus like a veritable 'name-dropper'.⁴⁹ Indeed, name-dropping is a key feature of his self-fashioning strategy in the *Res Gestae*.

Ammianus evidently wants his text to resonate with the names of the great classical writers. He mentions by name more than seventy different authors in his text, almost twenty of whom more than once and a few, Cicero above all, very often.⁵⁰ Direct quotations identified by the author's name are less frequent, Cicero being once more the most quoted author. By far the largest number of mentions and direct quotations occur in the digressions, where the naming of different authorities is a regular feature. However, the references to authors do not seem to bear a close relationship to their context all that often. Good examples are the references to Plato and Sophocles to explain Julian's chastity (see above, section 2) or the quotation of Cicero's *Pro Cluentio* in the description of the inroads of the Isaurians.⁵¹ Clearly references such as these have primarily a stylistic intent. With them, Ammianus presents an image of himself as an omnivorous reader steeped in paideia, and belonging to the pinnacle of the educated elite.

Scholars have identified numerous verbal parallels between Ammianus and many Latin authors that the historian never mentions in the surviving books of his work. Of course, this is not accidental; Ammianus does not quote by name any Latin writer later than Virgil. This is even the case with authors such as Tacitus and Gellius who were central to Ammianus' project. Excepting some writers who are referred to only for their roles in contempo-

⁴⁸ See den Hengst (2010a) 102–5.

⁴⁹ See Jenkins (1985) and Kelly (2008) 162.

⁵⁰ See the information compiled by Jenkins (1985) 159–62.

⁵¹ 25.4.2; 14.2.2.

rary history, the only post-Virgilian Latin authors mentioned are Juvenal and Marius Maximus. Their names are brought up in the famous second digression on Rome, where Ammianus presents their works very negatively as the only reading of the ignorant Roman aristocrats (see below, section 5). The historian seems thus to value the old republican and Augustan classics much more highly than the imperial authors. Similarly, Ammianus does not seem to be very interested in the Greek authors of the imperial period.⁵² With only a few exceptions (Apollonius of Tyana, Ammonius Saccas, Aelius Herodianus, Plotinus, and Julian), the Greek authors mentioned by him belong to earlier periods.

Ammianus mentions by name only the old and most prestigious authorities, although in many cases he had not read them. On the contrary, he omits the names of the most recent writers and of the authors of handbooks and compilers of epitomes (such as Gellius or Valerius Maximus), although he had certainly read and used them for the composition of his work.⁵³ Here we can clearly recognize Ammianus' efforts to construct a stylised image of himself as an author of superior culture, fully acquainted with the original sources of ancient wisdom. It should be clear that I am not pleading for a return to the old view of Ammianus as an ignorant and derivative author; quite the opposite, I see him as a clever artist, capable of effectively using the rhetorical and literary resources at his disposal to deploy his self-fashioning strategy.

IV. Ammianus' Digressive Style

As mentioned above, in the *Res Gestae*, name-dropping occurs most frequently in the digressions, where Ammianus seems particularly eager to display his erudition. As has long been recognised, the digressions are integral to Ammianus' conception of his work, and, although they were a regular feature of ancient historiography, their number, variety, and scale in the *Res Gestae* are particular characteristics of Ammianus' style that clearly distinguish him from all other ancient historians, with the exception, perhaps, of Herodotus.⁵⁴ What is more, many digressions in the *Res Gestae* include material on topics typically foreign to historiography, such as religion, science, divination, or contemporary society. It is thus no wonder that scholars have long been

⁵² See Lana (1993).

⁵³ See Hertz (1874) and Rohrbacher (2005).

⁵⁴ On the nature of the digressions in the *Res Gestae* see Cichocka (1975) 329–40 and Barnes (1998) 70–6. Ammianus' references to the lost books of the *Res Gestae* indicate that digressions were present throughout his work, see Emmet 1983. For a brief summary of the history of research on the digressions in the *Res Gestae*, see Vergin (2013) 1–8.

somewhat puzzled by Ammianus' extensive use of digressions and have tried to explain this feature of his style either by the example of Greek models⁵⁵ or by Ammianus' 'Greek cast of mind'.⁵⁶

Mommsen provided a better explanation in a classic article on the geographical excursions in the *Res Gestae*.⁵⁷ He was the first to recognize in Ammianus' digressions a deliberate plan to cover all different fields of human knowledge, forming a sort of encyclopaedia or systematic exposition of all the information that Ammianus considered relevant.⁵⁸ I contend that this plan is also intimately connected with Ammianus' desire to present himself as the owner of a universal paideia, similar to the one exemplified by Julian (the *studiosus cognitionum omnium*) or by the great authors of the past, the *sapientes*. As a matter of fact, Ammianus' extensive use of digressions allows him to stretch the limits of the historiographical genre to flaunt his bookish knowledge on topics only tangentially related to his narrative, thereby strengthening his authority as a competent historian and his prestige as a man of culture.

Scholars have debated much about what passages in the *Res Gestae* should be counted as digressions and what criteria should be used to identify them, reaching different total numbers depending on the definitions employed.⁵⁹ However, more important than the number of formal excursions in the *Res Gestae* seems the fact that Ammianus employs a digressive style throughout his work, constantly interrupting the flow of his narrative to present his readers with a great amount of additional information, even if it is only tenuously connected with the topic he is dealing with. Ammianus takes advantage of any opportunity to make a display of learning. Indeed, besides the formal excursions, Ammianus' digressive style results in very numerous brief asides about various subjects. They can be found throughout the *Res Gestae* and share many of the characteristics of the larger digressions.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Matthews (1983) 33; Brodka (2009) 19.

⁵⁶ Barnes (1998) 71.

⁵⁷ Mommsen (1881).

⁵⁸ See Mommsen (1881) 602–36. According to Mommsen, the goal of the digressions is 'das encyclopädische Wissen der Gebildeten der theodosischen Zeit darzustellen' (602). Cf. Paschoud (1989) 39–40 and Barnes (1998) 71–6. On the ethnographic and geographic digressions, see Sundwall (1996), Vergin (2013), and the review of Brendel (2013). They provide the most important references on the subject. On the scientific digressions, see den Hengst (2010b).

⁵⁹ For different lists of the formal excursions in the *Res Gestae*, see Schanz (1914) 97; Alonso-Núñez (1975) 55–7; Cichocka (1975) 337; Barnes (1998) 222–4.

⁶⁰ See e.g., 14.9.6 (on Zeno's courage); 14.11.10 (on Diocletian and Galerius); 14.11.18 (on dreams); 14.11.22 (on Alexander the Great); 14.11.25–6 (on Nemesis); 14.11.29–34 (on the instability of fortune); 15.1.4 (on the smallness of Earth); 18.4.5 (on Domitian's law forbidding castration); 18.7.5 (on lions); 19.8.11 (on the sons of Earth); 19.12.19–20 (a portent born in Daphne); 23.5.2–3 (on Cercusium); 24.2.16–7 (on Scipio Aemilianus); 24.3.12–13

We find a good example in book 18, where the historian recounts the events leading to the deaths of the general Barbatio and his wife Assyria.⁶¹ A swarm of bees visited the general's house and his wife interpreted this as an omen of future greatness. According to Ammianus, the woman was indiscreet and talkative and committed the error of sending her husband a letter begging him not to abandon her after he had become emperor. The letter was written in a secret script, but the maidservant that had encrypted it betrayed Barbatio's wife and delivered a copy to Arbetio, a rival general, who presented it to the emperor as evidence of a conspiracy. Consequently, Constantius ordered an investigation and the couple was promptly executed. Ammianus' reflection on the episode is extremely interesting. The historian says that Barbatio was boorish (*subagrestis*) and therefore probably ignored the advice given by Aristotle to his disciple Callisthenes before sending him to the court of Alexander the Great, namely, to speak as seldom as possible in front of a man who had the power of life and death at the tip of his tongue (18.3.7). The mention of these prestigious authorities (a good example of name-dropping) helps not only to differentiate Ammianus from the ignorant general but also to explicitly identify him as belonging to the learned elite. Finally, the historian adds yet another story to illustrate the correct attitude for an educated courtier. According to Ammianus, the geese traversing on their migration westward over the region of Mount Taurus, where eagles abound, close their beaks with little stones in order to avoid making any sound (18.3.9). Ammianus has the capacity to transform even so unpromising a subject as Barbatio's execution into an opportunity to show off his learning.

The overall structure of Book 23 is another good example of Ammianus' digressive style. It opens with Julian's assumption of his fourth consulate (23.1) and then describes the final stages of the preparations and the beginnings of Julian's ill-fated Persian expedition (23.2–3). After narrating the arrival of the army at Callinicum, Ammianus introduces a first excursus on military engines (23.4). The narration continues with Julian's stay at Cercusium (23.5). This chapter contains a brief digression on the history behind the fortification of this city (23.5.2–3) and a speech by Julian that is really a second digression on Roman wars with Persia and other rivals (23.5.16–23). Next follows a very lengthy excursus on the Persian Empire (23.6.1–84), the longest of all in the *Res Gestae*. This excursus seems almost an independent piece that even contains minor digressions in the second degree on so varied subjects as

(on palm trees); 24.4.5 (on Manlius Torquatus and Valerius Corvinus); 25.2.6 (on shooting stars); 26.8.15 (on Pescennius Niger); 28.5.14 (on Burgundian kings and priests); 29.2.18 (on paideia and the moderation of power); 29.2.19 (on the distinction between revenge and crime); 31.13.19 (on Cannae and other Roman defeats).

⁶¹ 18.3.1–6.

the *magi*, deadly exhalations of the earth, or the character of the Chinese. Finally, the book ends with yet another brief digression on pearls (23.6.8–7).

Den Boeft et al. argue that the content of book 23 puts at the reader's disposal 'all the information needed to judge the concept of the Persian expedition'.⁶² This seems hardly to be the case. Actually, the majority of the information provided is completely irrelevant for the narrative of the expedition in books 24 and 25. Indeed, to name but a few examples, the information provided on the etymology of the name 'Adiabena' (23.6.20), on silk production in China (23.6.67) or on the origin of pearls (23.6.85) have no bearing whatsoever on what the historian will present in the following books. The same could be said about the excursus on Gaul in book 15 (15.9–12); it goes far beyond what is necessary for the understanding of Julian's campaigns in the region. What is more, this is a feature common to the great majority of the digressions throughout the *Res Gestae*: they are only weakly linked with their context and provide information that is mostly irrelevant for the development of Ammianus' narrative. That is the case, for instance, with the digression on rainbows (20.11.26–30) inserted after the account of Constantius' campaign in Persia or with the excursus on the costs of Thrace and Pontus (22.8.1–48) introduced in the context of Julian's activities in Constantinople.

As suggested by den Hengst, the digressions in the *Res Gestae* are not distributed at random. On the contrary, 'in many cases they serve the purpose of structuring the narrative, separating reports from different parts of the empire and providing a pause in the action'.⁶³ Ammianus certainly employs some excurses in order to structure his narrative;⁶⁴ this seems, nevertheless, to be only a secondary function of the digressions. In fact, one could equally argue that Ammianus sometimes structures his narrative in order to introduce specific digressions. In book 22, for instance, Ammianus seems to report the discovery of an Apis bull (22.14.6) only to have an opportunity to digress on Egypt. He introduces first a brief digression on the religious meaning of this animal. The mention of Egypt prompts him to introduce next a second lengthy excursus on Egypt's geography (22.15). The description of the region leads logically to a scientific digression on the Nile (22.15.3–13) that includes a discussion of the different theories about its mysterious sources (22.15.4–8). After discussing Egypt's fauna, Ammianus includes next a second digression on the provinces and cities of Egypt (22.16), dominated by a discussion of Alexandria (22.16.7–18) that includes a second digression on the practice of liberal arts in the city (22.16.16–18). This leads, finally, to a discussion of the

⁶² den Boeft et al. (1998) x, see also 129ff.

⁶³ den Hengst (2010c) 246.

⁶⁴ A good example is the excursus on the eastern provinces (14.8) that interrupts the account of Gallus' crimes in order to highlight the first mention of Ursicinus in 14.9.1.

origin of divination in Egypt (22.16.19–22). Ammianus' style results thus frequently in chains of digressions.

As Matthews argued, the digressions in the *Res Gestae* 'served a variety of functions, rhetorical as well as practical: not only to interest and inform the reader but to vary the pace of the narrative, to enlarge its scale, to enrich it by allusion, to define his own viewpoint.'⁶⁵ Matthews omits, however, a central function of the digressions, namely, Ammianus' self-presentation. It is clear that the digressive style of the *Res Gestae* serves foremost Ammianus' display of his expertise on a wide number of topics in a way not common in historiographic works. In this manner, he puts himself constantly 'on stage' before his audience, displacing the historical figures and becoming himself the protagonist. This effect is reinforced in the digressions by references to autopsy and to the authorities Ammianus has read. Both remind the readers of Ammianus' unique qualifications to provide truthful information on these subjects.

V. Self-Fashioning and Criticism in the Social Excursuses

As already indicated in the introduction, Ammianus does not content himself with displaying his learning; he also criticizes many members of the elites because they lack a literary culture befitting their rank. Like other late antique authors,⁶⁶ he establishes in numerous passages almost an ideal equivalence between elite membership and paideia. For him, the former implies the latter, and vice versa, with the lack of either implying the lack of the other.⁶⁷ This can be clearly seen in a passage in book 16, already quoted, where the historian relates the biography of the eunuch Eutherius. Ammianus recounts Eutherius' origins in Armenia and his arrival as a slave at the court of Constantine and states that Eutherius was as much instructed in letters as might suffice for a man of such condition.⁶⁸ Of course, Ammianus means that Eutherius' education was only superficial, as was the norm for a person of low rank.

The close relationship between literary culture and social distinction is also visible in Ammianus' description of the notary Theodorus, one of the main victims of the treason and magic trials at Antioch during Valens' residence there in the early 370s. The investigations were started by an allegation of corruption against two officials of the treasury. Under interrogation, one

⁶⁵ Matthews (2008) 463.

⁶⁶ See e.g., Eun. *VS* 4.1.1; 5.1.1; 6.1.1; 6.6.6; 7.1.4; 16.1.1; 21.1.1; 23.1.3; Lib. *Or.* 1.2 and 2.10. See also Stenger (2009) 198–9.

⁶⁷ Blockley (1975) 158–60.

⁶⁸ 16.7.5: *litteris quantum tali fortunae satis esse poterat eruditus.*

of the accused revealed a more serious offence committed by several men of high rank, who had used magical arts to learn the identity of Valens' successor. Further interrogations uncovered a conspiracy to place the notary Theodorus on the throne, and a growing number of people were implicated in the plot. Employing a highly charged rhetoric, Ammianus presents the investigation as developing into a true witch-hunt in which many innocent people lost their lives, including many pagan philosophers and intellectuals.⁶⁹ In the following passage, Ammianus describes the attributes that distinguished Theodorus and made him look like a suitable candidate for the purple.

visus est aliis excellere Theodorus, secundum inter notarios adeptus iam gradum. et erat re vera ita ut opinati sunt. namque antiquitus claro genere in Galliis natus et liberaliter educatus a primis pueritiae rudimentis, modestia, prudentia, humanitate, gratia, litteris ornatissimus, semper officio locoque, quem retinebat, superior videbatur, altis humilibusque iuxta acceptus.⁷⁰

... it seemed to them that Theodorus surpassed all others; he had already gained second rank among the secretaries, and was in fact exactly the man they thought him to be. For he was born of a lineage famous in olden times in Gaul, liberally educated from earliest childhood and so eminent for his modesty, good sense, refinement, charm and learning that he always seemed superior to every office he held and was dear to high and low alike.⁷¹

Beyond his virtuous and affable nature, the historian emphasizes two qualities that distinguished Theodorus, namely, his renowned Gallic ancestry and his fine education and literary culture. These qualities made him seem always superior to his position of an imperial notary, and they explain, in Ammianus' eyes, why the conspirators thought that Theodorus was the man whose name had been revealed to them by divination. Other ancient sources reporting on this episode try to explain, just like Ammianus, what made Theodorus look like a pretender to the imperial throne. Both John Chrysostom and Eunapius of Sardes exalt Theodorus' personal qualities, his confidence with the emperor and his physical beauty, but they do not mention his

⁶⁹ Ammianus' description of these events in 29.1.5–2.28 and 31.14.8–9. Other ancient testimonies in Eun. *VS* 7.6.3–7; Zos. 4.14.1–15.3; Lib. *Or.* 1.171–3; Epit. 48.3–4; Philostorg. 9.15; Soc. 4.19.1–7; Soz. 6.35.1–11; Joh. *Ant. fr.* 184.2; Theoph. *AM* 5865; 5867; Zon. 13.16. On the trials see generally Funke (1967) 165–75; Lenski (2003) 223–32; Kelly (2007) 283–6; Matthews (2008) 219–26; den Boeft et al. (2013) 73–115.

⁷⁰ 29.1.8.

⁷¹ Trans. Rolfe (1982–6), slightly adapted.

education or culture.⁷² This is indicative of the particular importance that Ammianus' attached to *paideia* as a mark of social distinction.

The connection between *paideia* and social distinction can also be seen in the famous excurses on the habits of the Roman aristocracy and people.⁷³ The starting point for the first digression is Memmius Vitrasius Orfitus' tenure as Prefect of the City. Orfitus was a senator of noble birth and father of the distinguished Symmachus.⁷⁴ Ammianus stresses his wisdom and experience in forensic matters but strongly criticizes his poor literary culture: *vir quidem prudens et forensium negotiorum oppido gnarus, sed splendore liberalium doctrinarum minus quam nobilem decuerat institutus*.⁷⁵ According to Ammianus, Orfitus does not master the 'liberal doctrines' in an adequate manner for a distinguished senator of noble origin. Although this might seem to be a subtle criticism, it is actually a serious disqualification, as Orfitus cannot meet the educational standards of the elite, which undermines the legitimacy of his social position.

After briefly mentioning the riots during Orfitus' tenure of the prefecture, Ammianus declares his wish to explain to 'foreigners' (*peregrini*, meaning, of course, potential readers not familiar with the customs prevailing in the city) why any historian when writing about the city of Rome must keep exclusively to matters of disorders and vulgarities. Ammianus begins his excursus with the famous *Lebensaltersvergleich*, which praises the tranquil old age of Rome after the intensive warfare of her younger years.⁷⁶ The tone of the excursus then changes drastically in the following sentences, in which Ammianus points out the shameful way of life of 'a few' (*pauci*) who forget where they were born. The historian omits any positive examples and it is clear that, despite speaking of the 'vices of a few', the digression presents a general indictment of the Roman senators, as indicated by the words *haec nobilium sunt instituta* (14.6.24). Indeed, the excursus turns into a bitter satirical invective on the luxurious, decadent, and immoral habits of the Roman aristocracy.⁷⁷

A central theme of the digression is the negative comparison between the effeminate luxury and softness of the Roman aristocracy of the Late Empire with the austere and courageous virtues of their peers in the past. Another recurring theme throughout the passage is the aristocrats' lack of *paideia*, with Ammianus repeating the charge presented against Orfitus and extend-

⁷² Chrys. *vid.* 1.4, 245–9 [SC 138 pp. 133–4], Eun. *fr.* 39 (Blockley).

⁷³ 14.6.2–27 and 28.4.1–35. On these digressions, see Pack (1953) 181–9; Demandt (1965) 14–21; Schlinkert (1996) 157–219; Cracco Ruggini (2003) 366–82; den Hengst (2007) 159–79; Rohrbacher (2007); Kelly (2008) 132–41; Matthews (2008) 414–6; Vergin (2013) 241–52.

⁷⁴ Jones et al. (1971) 651–3.

⁷⁵ 14.6.1.

⁷⁶ On this passage, see den Hengst (2010c).

⁷⁷ See van de Wiel (1989).

ing it to a good part of his social environment. He states that aristocrats do not invite learned men to their banquets because they consider them unlucky and useless.⁷⁸ The historian adds that, because of this sorry state of affairs, the few houses that were once famed for the cultivation of serious studies have now sunk into indolence, paying attention only to the light entertainment of the flute and the lyre, while their libraries remain closed as tombs for all eternity: *bybliotheccis sepulcrorum ritu in perpetuum clausis*.⁷⁹

Ammianus resorts in this excursus, without doubt, to the satirical hyperbole and therefore cannot be taken at face value.⁸⁰ The digression, however, presents a strong disqualification of the Roman aristocrats. At the same time, through quoting many authors and alluding to great examples of the Roman past, Ammianus strives to present himself as a writer fully acquainted with the literary culture the aristocrats neglect. Ammianus includes learned mentions of, among others, Numa (14.6.6), Simonides (14.6.7), Acilius Glabrio (14.6.7), Publicola, Regulus, Scipio (14.6.11), the poet Terence (14.6.16), Queen Semiramis (14.6.17), and Homer's *lotophagi* (14.6.21).

Of course, Ammianus does not deny that some Roman aristocrats are, concerning their literary culture, doing exactly what might be expected of them. One example is L. Aurelius Symmachus Avianus, of whom Ammianus declares: *inter praecipua nominandus exempla doctrinarum atque modestiae*.⁸¹ However, when he characterizes the aristocrats collectively as a group, the historian prefers to emphasize the negative traits. In Ammianus' depiction of them, the behaviour of the Roman aristocrats reflects the absence of the self-control and moderation that must distinguish a man formed by paideia. Their life is marked by all kinds of excess and is not unlike that of the plebeians that Ammianus describes at the end of the excursus.⁸² For the historian, the Roman aristocracy seems as excluded from the world of paideia as the vulgar mob of the city.

Ammianus returns to these issues in the second, more extensive, digression on Rome.⁸³ Again, his departing point is the narrative of events during some aristocrats' (Ampelius and Olybrius') tenure as Prefects of the City. In this second excursus, Ammianus' criticism is even sharper than in the first. He does not speak any more of the 'vices of a few'; on the contrary, he con-

⁷⁸ 14.6.15.

⁷⁹ 14.6.18.

⁸⁰ On Juvenal's and other authors' influence on Ammianus' Roman digressions, see Rees (1999); den Hengst (2007); den Boeft et al. (2008) 179, 193–4.

⁸¹ 27.3.3. On Symmachus Avianus see Jones et al. (1971) 869. Other examples: 16.9.2 and 29.1.4.

⁸² 14.6.25–6.

⁸³ 28.4.6–35. On Ammianus' second digression on Rome, see den Hengst (2007) 159–79 and the detailed commentary in den Boeft et al. (2011) 165–229.

siders corruption so widespread in Rome that even the Cretan Epimenides would have been unable to purify the city.⁸⁴ Epimenides was a legendary Greek seer, whom many credited with having purified Athens from pestilence in the sixth century BC.⁸⁵ With this learned reference, Ammianus is already at the beginning of the excursus stressing his literary culture and subtly differentiating himself from the unlearned senators he is about to criticize.

Ammianus next provides a catalogue of the vices of the Roman aristocrats that does not exclude any of the standard elements of invective. He depicts them once more as completely unworthy of their traditions and social eminence, and entirely dedicated to degrading entertainments. He then closes this section with the lapidary words *hactenus de senatu* (28.4.27) to make clear that all senators share these vices. Their poor literary culture is, again, a highlight of Ammianus' criticism, with the historian claiming that some nobles loathe learning (*doctrinae*) as much as poison and only read with interest the satires of Juvenal and the biographies of Marius Maximus without even glancing at any other works.⁸⁶

Scholars have debated extensively about the reasons that led Ammianus to evaluate the works of Juvenal and Marius Maximus so negatively.⁸⁷ However, there is no need for complex explanations. As was argued above, Ammianus does not value the authors of the imperial age very highly. Moreover, Ammianus is here not so much rejecting the reading of these works themselves, but rather pointing out the fact that persons of high standing should read greatly and thereby possess a vast literary culture and not limit themselves merely to light texts. Ammianus affirms once again the existence of an intimate connection between *paideia* and social prominence, claiming that the aristocrats should read many other texts given the greatness of their glory and lineage: *cum multa et varia pro amplitudine gloriarum et generum lectitare deberent*.⁸⁸ He illustrates what he thinks should be the correct attitude towards learning with an anecdote of Socrates' last moments. While the philosopher lies in prison awaiting his execution, he hears a musician interpreting a song of the lyric poet Stesichorus and wants to learn from him. When the musician asks of what use that could be to him, Socrates replies: 'In order that I may know something more before I die.'⁸⁹ Interestingly, the Greek historian contrasts the decadent behaviour of the Roman aristocrats to a proverbial

⁸⁴ 28.4.5: *tanta plerosque labes insanabilium flagitiorum oppressit*.

⁸⁵ See den Boeft et al. (2011) 177.

⁸⁶ 28.4.14: *quidam detestantes ut venena doctrinas, Iuvenalem et Marium Maximum curatiore studio legunt, nulla volumina praeter haec in profundo otio contrectantes*.

⁸⁷ See den Boeft et al. (2011) 193–5.

⁸⁸ 28.4.15.

⁸⁹ 28.4.15.

example of Greek virtue. In fact, he mistakenly attributes to Socrates a story of Solon.⁹⁰

Throughout this second excursus on Rome, Ammianus makes an even greater display of knowledge than in the first. Indeed, he introduces learned references to the great queens Semiramis, Cleopatra, Artemisia, and Zenobia (4.9), Castor and Pollux, the parasites and soldiers of Roman comedy (4.12), Homer's Cimmerians (4.18), the Quintilii brothers, Cato the younger (4.21), M. Claudius Marcellus—the consul of 222 BC—(4.23), and of characters in the comedies of Terence and the tragedies of Euripides (4.27). Moreover, he quotes Cicero verbatim (4.26), and the whole excursus is full of literary allusions to a great number of Greek and Roman authors.⁹¹ With his erudite name-dropping, Ammianus indicates, once again, that his own reading marks him as a person of high standing.

Some scholars have considered that Ammianus' bitter criticisms of the Roman aristocracy must have originated from his own disappointing personal experiences as a resident alien in the city. In a passage of the first excursus on Rome, the historian refers to the expulsion of foreigners (*peregrini*) from the city to alleviate food scarcity at a time of crisis in the city's supply. Ammianus highlights the fact that among the expelled were, despite their small numbers, some practitioners of liberal studies (*sectatores disciplinarum liberalium*), while 3,000 young female dancers were allowed to stay in the city with their teachers and other companions. His choice of words shows very clearly his strong feelings about the event: *postremo ad id indignitatis est ventum*.⁹² Traditionally, it has been speculated that Ammianus may have been among those expelled.⁹³ However, it is not necessary to assume that Ammianus was among the ejected,⁹⁴ as his indignation does not need a personal excuse. Ammianus' problem has less to do with the expulsion of foreigners than with the affront to men of culture, when their presence was less valued than that of simple dancers. Although the decision did not violate any law, it broke the unwritten rules of solidarity that should unite those belonging to the common world of paideia.

The only other digression in the *Res Gestae* that by its tone and content is comparable to these two on Rome is the one relating to the customs and

⁹⁰ den Boeft et al. (2011) 196–7.

⁹¹ See Rees (1999), den Hengst (2007), and den Boeft et al. (2011) 165–229.

⁹² 14.6.19.

⁹³ The biographical interpretation of this passage is already in Seeck (1894) 1846 and is accepted by many other scholars, e.g., Syme (1968) 5; Barnes (1998) 2. Other authors consider that Ammianus' rank as former *protector domesticus* would have protected him from expulsion, see de Jonge (1972) 145–6.

⁹⁴ Kelly (2008) 134.

practices of contemporary eastern lawyers in book 30.⁹⁵ It assumes the form of a general invective against all representatives of this profession, of which Ammianus paints a strongly negative portrait. He begins the digression by briefly reviewing the great glories of ancient Greek and Roman eloquence and emphasizing their firm foundation in literary studies.⁹⁶ Of course, this introduction also allows him to show his knowledge of the subject. In his opinion, contemporary lawyers represented the true antithesis of the great figures of the past. He classifies them into four groups: First, the specialists in encouraging family conflicts for their own profit (30.4.9–10). Second, the experts in ancient and hidden laws that can be interpreted according to convenience (30.4.11–12). Third, those who use their venal tongues to criticize the truth (30.4.13). Finally, the most interesting group, the ignorant who only seek profit (30.4.14–22). Ammianus pays special attention to the latter noting, *inter alia*, that these are people who left school early (4.14) and never owned a book (4.16). Not without humour, he states that if they have heard the learned (*in circulo doctorum*, a phrase borrowed from Gellius 4.1.1) name of an ancient author, they think that it is the term for a rare fish or some other exotic edible.⁹⁷ Without doubt, Ammianus uses satirical hyperbole to disqualify lawyers and present them as parvenus thirsty for riches.

Throughout the excursus, Ammianus introduces once again numerous learned allusions that differentiate him from the uneducated contemporary lawyers. The passage is a perfect example of the antiquarian name-dropping in the *Res Gestae*. Ammianus includes learned mentions and quotations of, among others, Plato, Epicurus, Tisias, Gorgias (30.4.3), Demosthenes, Calistratus, Hyperides, Aeschines, Andocides, Dinarchus, Antiphon (30.4.5), Rutilius, Galba, Scaurus, Crassus, Antonius, Philippus, Scaevola (30.4.6), the republican jurists Trebatius, Cascellius, and Alfenus (30.4.12), Evander (30.4.12), Thersites (30.4.15), Tiberius Gracchus' pipe-player, Cicero's speech for Cluentius, Demosthenes' *Oration on the Crown*, the giant Anteus (30.4.19), Philistio, Aesop, Aristides, and Cato (30.4.21). Moreover, as Sabbah pointed out, the language and imagery of this passage draw heavily on Gellius, from whom Ammianus also borrows some rare words that make his style sound more erudite.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ On this digression see in general Matthews (1992), Caltabiano (1996), Mastroso (2010), and the detailed commentary in den Boeft et al. (2015) 65–99.

⁹⁶ 30.4.5: *florebant elegantiae priscae patrociniis tribunalia, cum oratores concitae facundiae attentis studiis doctrinarum, ingenio, fide, copiis ornamentisque dicendi pluribus eminebant ...*

⁹⁷ 30.4.17: *et si in circulo doctorum auctoris veteris incidit nomen, piscis aut edulii peregrinum esse vocabulum arbitrantur.*

⁹⁸ Sabbah (1978) 516–18. See also Hertz (1874). On Ammianus' complex stylistic strategy in this passage, see den Boeft et al. (2015) 80–1. On Ammianus' sources, see Salemme (1989) 37–58.

Ammianus resorts in these passages to many classic *topoi* from the genres of invective and satire, but their critical content cannot be explained away as a mere reproduction of convenient literary or rhetorical commonplaces. As Cameron has argued, the fact that Ammianus' invectives 'are full of commonplaces does not (as often inferred) mean that they are simply "rhetoric" and can be ignored. Commonplaces tend to be used precisely when they fit.'⁹⁹ Moreover, the historian's insistence on this point and the much smaller presence in his work of other *topoi* of invective demonstrate that what is expressed in these passages was important to Ammianus and not just the result of an imitation of other literary genres. This is confirmed by the fact that, besides criticizing the mentioned groups, Ammianus also refers negatively to the lack of education of individual imperial functionaries and high-ranking military officers.¹⁰⁰ Particularly harsh criticism is levelled, for instance, at the prefect Maximinus.¹⁰¹ In contrast, the positive examples in which he highlights the literary culture of an official are few and usually only passing references.¹⁰² Consequently, his repeated criticism of the ignorance of nobles, officials and lawyers could be better understood as being part of his self-fashioning strategy. In denouncing the decadent habits of nobles and lawyers, Ammianus fashions himself as a more genuine member of the Roman elite than many aristocrats and high imperial officials.

Finally, it is also important to note that paideia is one of the key criteria that Ammianus uses to evaluate the various Augusti and Caesars of the period covered by the *Res Gestae*. In many passages, the historian places himself in the position of a judge of their acts and personalities, with his portrait of each emperor having a clear bias, be it positive or negative.¹⁰³ His ideal emperor would be a fair, moderate, and wise ruler who fully masters paideia and is able, therefore, to follow the best examples of the past. It is clear that, for Ammianus, Julian is the emperor who comes closest to that ideal (see above, section 2).¹⁰⁴

In Ammianus' eyes, an educated ruler and a bad emperor were clearly antithetical terms. This can be seen clearly in his constant portrayal of Valens as a wild and tyrannical ruler, prone to rage and violence against his subjects. In a number of passages, Ammianus emphasizes Valens' lack of

⁹⁹ Cameron (2011) 354.

¹⁰⁰ See e.g., 18.3.6 (Barbatio), 21.10.8 (Nevitta), 26.1.4 (Aequitius), 26.4.4 (Ursatius).

¹⁰¹ 28.1.5–6. See Szidat (1995) 481–6; Cameron (2012) 342–3.

¹⁰² See, e.g., 16.9.2; 26.7.4.

¹⁰³ Blockley (1975) 32–3.

¹⁰⁴ On Julian's image in the *Res Gestae*, see Thompson (1947) 72–86, Blockley (1975) 73–103, Alonso-Núñez (1975) 125–33, Barnes (1998) 143–65, Kelly (2008) 296–317, Matthews (2008) 81–114.

paideia and links it with his brutal style of government.¹⁰⁵ In his narration of the many trials following the suppression of Procopius' revolt he states:

imperator enim promptior ad nocendum criminantibus patens et funereas delationes adsciscens per suppliciorum diversitates effrenatus exsultavit, sententiae illius Tullianae ignarus, docentis infelices esse eos, qui omnia sibi licere existimarunt.¹⁰⁶

For the emperor, rather inclined himself to do injury, lent his ear to accusers, listened to death-dealing denunciations, and took unbridled joy in various kinds of executions; unaware of that saying of Cicero's which asserts that those are unlucky who think that they have power to do anything they wish.¹⁰⁷

Had Valens read Cicero, he would have known better than to tyrannize his subjects. Although this labels Valens' crimes as 'sins of ignorance', it does not imply that the historian is attempting to exculpate the emperor. On the contrary, Valens is guilty of his ignorance as he failed to acquire knowledge, as was his solemn duty.

The connection established in the *Res Gestae* between Valens' lack of paideia and his tyrannical style of government can also be recognized in Ammianus' account of the already mentioned treason trials at Antioch. After the executions of many notable philosophers and intellectuals, various books on magic—probably those owned by the condemned—were burned publicly in court, most likely in order to convince public opinion of the justice of the harsh penalties. Nevertheless, Ammianus states that the texts destroyed were actually books about liberal arts and jurisprudence.¹⁰⁸ The historian further emphasizes that, as a reaction to these events, citizens from all the eastern provinces burned their entire libraries to avoid being accused of practicing magic.¹⁰⁹

In two passages of his narration of these events, Ammianus uses the first person plural, suggesting in this way his presence in the city during these tri-

¹⁰⁵ See e.g., 29.2.18; 31.14.8.

¹⁰⁶ 26.10.12.

¹⁰⁷ Trans. Rolfe (1982–6).

¹⁰⁸ 29.1.41: *deinde congesti innumeri codices et acervi voluminum multi sub conspectu iudicum concremati sunt ex domibus eruti variis ut illiciti, ad leniendam caesorum invidiam, cum essent plerique liberalium disciplinarum indices variarum et iuris*. On this passage, see den Boeft et al. (2013) 66–7. About the burning of books in the ancient world and its meaning, see Herrin (2009) 205–22.

¹⁰⁹ 29.2.4.

als.¹¹⁰ The second one is introduced immediately after the reference to the burning of books by the citizens of the eastern provinces, and in it the author even insinuates that he himself was at risk in these circumstances:

namque ut pressius loquar, omnes ea tempestate velut in Cimmeriis tenebris reptabamus paria convivis Siculi Dionysii pavitantes, qui, cum epulis omni tristioribus fame saginarentur, ex summis domorum laqueariis, in quibus discumbebant, saetis nexos equinis et occipitiis incumbentes gladios perhorrebant.¹¹¹

Indeed, to speak briefly, at that time we all crept about as if in Cimmerian darkness, feeling the same fears as the guests of the Sicilian Dionysius, who, while filled to repletion with banquets more terrible than any possible hunger, saw with a shudder the swords hanging over their heads from the ceilings of the rooms in which they reclined and held only by single horsehairs.¹¹²

It is likely that Ammianus, if he was living in Antioch at the time, felt threatened as a book owner due to the persecutory attitude of the authorities. It is characteristic of his digressive style that in order to express this feeling of fear he makes use of two sophisticated literary and historical examples. Ammianus compares his situation to that of crawling in permanent darkness, likening it to the proverbial Cimmerian darkness described in an episode of the *Odyssey* (Hom. *Od.* 11.14–19). He also compares it to the horror felt by those invited to dine with the tyrant Dionysius of Syracuse, who could observe the ‘sword of Damocles’ over their heads. By using these learned references, the historian reinforces the idea that the violent repression ordered by Valens threatened the educated elite of the Greek East. At the same time, Ammianus presents himself as a member of that educated elite and subtly reinforces the idea of his own superiority over the tyrannical Valens and over his corrupt officials, whose lack of paideia is synonymous with their vices and crimes.

¹¹⁰ 29.1.24 and 29.2.4. These passages are considered to be evidence of the presence of Ammianus at Antioch by Thompson (1947) 13; Matthews (1994) 256; Sabbah (1997) 97–8; den Boeft et al. (2013) 39 and 79–80. Fornara (1992a) 339, however, rejects this.

¹¹¹ 29.2.4.

¹¹² Trans. Rolfe (1982–6).

VI. Concluding Thoughts

The various passages analysed demonstrate that for Ammianus the ideal social order is one in which the members of the upper strata are distinguished from the rest, not only by birth and wealth but also by the mastery of paideia according to the traditions and great examples of the past. He considers literary culture as a particularly important requirement for those who work in the imperial service or occupy an especially prominent social position as members of the Roman senatorial aristocracy. In his narrative of historical events, Ammianus lays particular emphasis on the many examples where reality conflicts with this ideal. Moreover, while presenting his case, he makes it clear that he masters the literary culture that so many shamefully neglect. His criticism and his self-fashioning go hand in hand and are both extremely important to him.

Ammianus wants to make us believe that the literary culture that had distinguished the elites and rulers of the Roman world in the past was losing its central position, and that this was one of the main causes of the problems affecting the empire. Contemporary evidence undoubtedly demonstrates that Ammianus is a biased witness. His testimony does not counter the image of the vitality of paideia in this period convincingly argued in the studies quoted at the beginning of this paper.

As I have argued, Ammianus' focus on paideia is fundamentally connected with his self-fashioning strategy. The historian presents himself as a gentleman (*ingenuus*);¹¹³ he cannot claim, however, to possess either a long noble ancestry—as in the case of the Roman aristocrats he derides in his excursuses—or even a position of influence or power—as the high officials and lawyers he often criticizes. Moreover, he was in Rome a foreigner, and his rank as a retired *protector domesticus* was surely insufficient to impress the proud Roman elites. His mastery of paideia was, accordingly, one of his most important claims to social distinction. Consequently, Ammianus does not spare any effort to convince his readers of his erudition and literary culture, constructing for himself in his work the identity of a Greek intellectual that masters a universal paideia.

Name-dropping and the digressive style he employs in the *Res Gestae* constitute the main means to construct this identity, because, as was argued above, they allow him to parade his encyclopaedic learning in a way not common in historical works. What is more, Ammianus does not only content himself with claiming membership in the cultural elite. On the contrary, in criticizing the ignorance of many aristocrats and officials, he is indirectly asserting his own superiority over the traditional elites, not only in the intellectual field but also in the social sphere.

¹¹³ 19.8.6.

Ammianus closes his work humbly referring to himself as a *miles quondam et Graecus*, a mere former soldier and a Greek. As illustrated by his famous statement about the historian Timagenes (15.9.2: *et diligentia Graecus et lingua*), Ammianus assigns to the term *Graecus* a strong positive meaning clearly related to *paideia*.¹¹⁴ Hence, even in this apparently self-deprecatory statement, Ammianus is presenting himself as a member of the true elite of the Roman Empire, as a Greek more Roman than the Romans.

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¹¹⁴ See Momigliano (1977) and Barnes (1998) 65–6.

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