

AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS 15.13.1–2: SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE CAREER AND BILINGUALISM OF STRATEGIUS MUSONIANUS

At the end of Book 15 of his *Res Gestae* Ammianus Marcellinus reports how Strategius Musonianus became the successor of the murdered Domitianus as Praefectus Praetorio Orientis (PPO). He tells that Strategius was a man versed in the two languages, i.e. Greek and Latin, and that because of this he had won a higher distinction than was expected. When Constantine the Great, so says Ammianus, was looking for an expert interpreter for his investigation into the Manichaean and similar heresies, he chose Strategius as a person recommended to him as competent. Constantine was so pleased with Strategius' skilful work that he gave him the honourable nickname Musonianus, which became his official name. This assignment was the start of a great career which eventually led to his denomination as PPO under Constantius II.

Domitiano crudeli morte consumpto Musonianus eius successor orientem praetoriani regebat potestate praefecti, facundia sermonis utriusque clarus. unde sublimius, quam sperabatur, eluxit. Constantinus enim cum limatius superstitionum quaereret sectas, Manichaeorum et similium, nec interpretes inveniretur idoneus, hunc sibi commendatum ut sufficientem elegit; quem officio functum perire Musonianum voluit appellari ante Strategium dictitatum et ex eo percursis honorum gradibus multis ascendit ad praefecturam...¹

In this short paper I would like to discuss two aspects of Strategius' career. The first has to do with the beginning of his career, which according to Ammianus Marcellinus started with his assignment to investigate the Manichaean and similar sects, whereas in modern scholarship the beginning of his career is associated with the Council of Antioch in 326. The second concerns Strategius' bilingualism in connection with the investigation into the Manichaean and similar sects: was the use of Strategius' command of both Greek and Latin the real reason why Constantine appointed him as interpreter for his investigation into Manichaeism?

As is often the case with persons from antiquity, our information about Strategius and his career is scanty. The climax of this career undoubtedly was the post of PPO, which Strategius filled for four years, from the summer of 354 until the summer of 358. Before that he attended the Council of Serdica (343) in the function of *comes* as a representative of Constantius II;² he was proconsul of Achaëa (after 351 and before 353) and possibly (also before 353) proconsul of the city of Constantinople.³ About

¹ Amm. Marc. 15.13.1–2: 'After the cruel death of Domitian, Musonian succeeded him as praetorian prefect in the government of the East. His command of the two languages won him a reputation which led to a career of unexpected distinction. Constantine, being in need of an interpreter in the course of his strict investigation into Manichaeism and similar heresies, had Musonian recommended to him as a suitable person, and appointed him to the post. His skilful discharge of this duty caused the emperor to change his name to Musonian (he was previously called Strategius), and from this beginning he rose through a number of career posts to the rank of prefect.' (transl. Hamilton; slightly modified)

² Athan. *Hist. Ar.* 15.3 = Opitz II, 190; *Ap. sec.* 36.4 = Opitz II, 114. R. Klein, *Constantius II. und die Christliche Kirche* (Darmstadt, 1977), p. 78, p. 109.

³ He is not to be identified as *praeses* of the Thebaid as the older literature does; e.g. O. Seeck, *Die Briefe des Libanius zeitlich geordnet* (Leipzig, 1906), p. 282; *RE* 4.1, s.v. Strategius 1; P. de Jonge, *Philological and Historical Commentary on Ammianus Marcellinus XV, 6–13* (Groningen, 1953), pp. 78–9. This was another Strategius (*PLRE* I, s.v. Fl. Strategius 5). It is even not quite

Strategius' prefecture we are rather well informed thanks to Ammianus Marcellinus and Libanius. Ammianus mentions his conduct of the trial against those involved in the death of Theophilus, *consularis Syriae*, and his (failed) negotiations over a peace treaty with the Persians. Ammianus praises him for his mildness towards the provincials but is very critical about his extreme greediness and venality, especially in judicial cases.⁴ Libanius was a good friend of Strategius as appears from his autobiography and his letters. Like Libanius, Strategius Musonianus was most likely a native of Antioch⁵ and it is a not improbable conjecture that they became acquainted there as young men. As proconsul of Constantinople he honoured Libanius with countless gifts which increased the latter's prestige and income.⁶ When Strategius was proconsul of Achaëa he had offered Libanius a chair in rhetoric in Athens, which, however, Libanius declined.⁷ On the wedding of Strategius' daughter in Constantinople Libanius delivered an oration in her honour.⁸ When in 355 Strategius arrived in Antioch, where he spent most of his time as PPO, Libanius greeted him with a short welcoming speech.⁹ Libanius addressed several letters to Strategius—Libanius consequently calls him by his original name—and refers to him regularly in letters addressed to others.¹⁰ He speaks favourably about him and mentions his incorruptibility.¹¹ At the request of Strategius, who seems to have been unusually eager for praise, Libanius delivered a panegyric in his honour at the end of his term of office as PPO. The delivery of this speech, which was held in the *bouleuterion* of Antioch, took three days. Strategius was so pleased with it that he had the panegyric copied and sent to the foremost cities of the empire.¹² After his prefecture Strategius left Antioch. He seems not to have held any other offices. He died before 371.¹³ He was married and had several children but the names of the wife and children are not known.¹⁴ He was most likely an Arian Christian.¹⁵

As said, Ammianus Marcellinus suggests that Strategius' career started with the assignment he was given by Constantine to inquire into the Manichaean and similar heresies. Manichaeism had already reached the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire in the second half of the 3rd century and at the end of the same century Manichees are attested in Egypt. In 302, Diocletian promulgated an edict against Manichees in Egypt, not so much for religious as for political reasons: the emperor

certain whether he is to be identified as proconsul of Constantinople. This supposition is based on information provided by Him. *Or.* 62.6, where is said that the proconsul's name recalls the Muses (cf. also Lib. *Ep.* 580), but it might be that this is a reference to Musonius (*PLRE* I, s.v. Musonius 1).

⁴ 15.13.2–3; 16.9.2–4; 16.10.21; 17.5.15. For Strategius' negotiations with the Persians, see A. D. Lee, *Information and Frontiers. Roman Foreign Relations in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 106–7.

⁵ Lib. *Or.* I 80.

⁶ Lib. *Or.* I 80.

⁷ Lib. *Or.* I 82–86, 106.

⁸ Lib. *Epp.* 345.1; 497.2; 580.2.

⁹ Lib. *Or.* I 111; *Ep.* 405.7.

¹⁰ Letters addressed to Musonianus: 323, 344, 356, 378, 388, 497. For letters which mention Musonianus, see Seeck, *op. cit.* (n. 3), pp. 283–4 and *PLRE* I, p. 612.

¹¹ Lib. *Ep.* 497.1. Only once (*Ep.* 515) does Libanius speak with disgust about Strategius, after a disagreement in which Strategius' nephew Andronicus was involved; cf. *PLRE* I, s.v. Andronicus, where Nebridius not Strategius is mentioned as his uncle; see also Seeck, *op. cit.* (n. 3), p. 73, and P. Petit, *Libanius et la vie municipale à Antioche au IV^e siècle après J.-C.* (Paris, 1955), p. 274. In this case Libanius, like Ammianus, mentions his greediness and the doubtful source of his wealth.

¹² Lib. *Or.* I 111–13; *Ep.* 345.1.

¹³ *Cod. Theod.* 13.5.14 (11 February, 371) refers to Musonianus as a man of 'Most Noble Memory'.

¹⁴ Lib. *Ep.* 497.

¹⁵ R. von Haehling, *Die Religionszugehörigkeit der hohen Amtsträger des römischen Reiches seit Constantins I. Alleinherrschaft bis zum Ende der Theodosianischen Dynastie* (324–450 bzw. 455 n.Chr.) (Bonn, 1978), p. 61.

considered the Manichees a Persian fifth column seeking to undermine Roman resolve to maintain the conflict with Persia.¹⁶ It is not known when Strategius' investigation into Manichaeism is to be dated but it is not unlikely that Constantine's interest in Manichaeism was roused in the 330s through his dealings with the Persian Empire and Shapur II. Mani himself, the founder of Manichaeism, had been a subject of the Persian king. He had preached his religion to the Persian aristocracy and had visited the court of Shapur's predecessor Shapur I. It may well be that the fact that Mani was a Persian subject meant that in Constantine's time Persia came to be considered not only the political but also the theological enemy of the Christian Roman Empire,¹⁷ especially since Constantine regarded himself also as the protector of Christians and of orthodox Christianity beyond the borders of his empire. In spite of Ammianus' report, modern scholarship assumes that Strategius' career started earlier. He is associated with the Council of Antioch in 326. At this council Eustathius was deposed as bishop of Antioch.¹⁸ The bishop's deposition caused great commotion among the Antiochenes. As a consequence, Constantine was forced to send two of his *comites*, Acacius and Strategius, to suppress the unrest. Eusebius of Caesarea tells us that they belonged to the most trustworthy of the emperor's staff. They seem to have reported regularly to Constantine about the situation in Antioch.¹⁹ In all secondary literature the *comes* Strategius mentioned by Eusebius is held to be one and the same as Strategius Musonianus.²⁰ This conjecture, for which no evidence is available, implies that contrary to Ammianus Marcellinus' information Strategius' career did not start with the investigation into the Manichaean and similar sects, but with a pacifying action in 326 in Antioch. This is strange considering the further information Ammianus gives about Strategius. From Ammianus' words it is obvious that Constantine did not know Strategius—at least not his qualities—and that he was only assigned the investigation into the sects after he had been explicitly recommended. From Eusebius' words, however, it is clear that Constantine knew Strategius; he is called most trustworthy, he belonged to the emperor's entourage, he (and Acacius) had sent letters to Constantine to inform him about the situation in Antioch and Constantine mentions Strategius by name in one of his letters.²¹ There is thus an obvious inconsistency between Eusebius and Ammianus Marcellinus on this matter. This is hard to explain, except by concluding that the Strategius mentioned in Eusebius' *Vita Constantini* is not the same man as Strategius Musonianus. That the two men are not identical, cannot be proved; but neither can the identification of Eusebius' Strategius with Strategius Musonianus. However, given the discrepancy between Eusebius and Ammianus Marcellinus, the general reliability of Ammianus' *Res Gestae* as a historical source, together with the fact that

¹⁶ F. Decret, *L'Afrique Manichéenne (IV^e–V^e siècles)*. *Études historique et doctrinale* (Paris, 1978, 2 vols.), vol.1. pp. 161ff.; S. N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China. A Historical Survey*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 63 (Tübingen, 1992, 2nd rev. ed.), pp. 121–5.

¹⁷ Lieu, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

¹⁸ See e.g. H. Chadwick, 'The Fall of Eustathius of Antioch', *JTS* 49 (1948), 27–35; T. D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA, 1981), pp. 227–8.

¹⁹ Eus. *V.C.* 3.59, 63 (letter of Constantine to the council at Antioch); also Socr. *Hist. Eccl.* 1.24 = *PG* 67, 144–5.

²⁰ E.g. Seeck, *op. cit.* (n. 3), p. 282; *RE* 4.1, s.v. Strategius 1; *PLRE* I, p. 611; F. J. Dölger, 'Konstantin der Grosse und der Manichäismus. Sonne und Christus im Manichäismus', in *Antike und Christentum* 2 (Münster, 1930), 301–14, pp. 304–5 (it is interesting to note that Dölger considers Strategius Constantine's foremost lay adviser on religious matters); G. Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest* (Princeton, 1961), p. 352; A. Piganiol, *L'Empire Chrétien 325–395* (Paris, 1972), p. 46; J. F. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (London, 1989), p. 449.

²¹ Eus. *V.C.* 3.63.

Ammianus—being a native from Antioch²²—might have known Strategius, (most likely also an Antiochene) it is more probable that Strategius the *comes*, mentioned in the Eusebius' *Vita Constantini*, was a different man from the Strategius Musonianus mentioned in Ammianus' *Res Gestae*.

Ammianus' expression 'facundia sermonis utriusque clarus' refers to Strategius' knowledge of both Greek and Latin, a quality which earned him his brilliant career. Latin was not wide-spread in the East and most members of the higher circles of the cities in the eastern half of the Roman Empire must have been solely Greek-speaking, in spite of the fact that we know of several easterners in the imperial administration who knew Latin.²³ It must therefore not always have been easy for the Roman emperors to find in the East capable officials with a sufficient knowledge of Latin, the administrative language of the empire;²⁴ Greek was the prevailing tongue.²⁵ Constantine no doubt must have been pleased with an upper-class easterner like Strategius, who was able to express himself adequately in Latin. However, Ammianus' remark about Strategius' bilingualism presents us with a problem. Why should Constantine have wanted to assign the investigation—not just any investigation but a thorough one, as is clear from Ammianus' use of the word 'limatius'—into the Manichaean and similar sects²⁶ to someone who knew both Greek and Latin? In other words, what was the advantage of the knowledge of Latin in this particular case?

It is probable that Strategius, being an easterner, had to inquire into these sects and their communities in the eastern provinces of the empire. Unfortunately, it is not known what exactly Strategius had to investigate: the Manichaean doctrines or perhaps the political activities of the Manichees? Although we cannot completely exclude the latter—after all, Manichaeism originated in Persia, Rome's eternal enemy—it seems more likely, especially since Manichaeism was not the only 'heresy' to be investigated, that Strategius had to conduct an official inquiry into the Manichaean doctrines. If that is the case, then Strategius' knowledge of Latin cannot have been Constantine's motive to employ him. The knowledge of Latin would not have helped him much in this investigation because it is not very likely that Latin translations of Manichaean scriptures were already available in the first decades of the 4th century, at least not on a wide scale, and definitely not in the eastern provinces.²⁷ This means that we have to look for another explanation as to why Strategius was the man Constantine was seeking.

Syria, to which Strategius' hometown Antioch belonged, was a profoundly bilingual region. Besides Greek, the language of the upper class, Aramaic with its

²² Matthews, op. cit. (n. 20), p. 8, esp. n. 1. See also idem, 'The Origin of Ammianus', *CQ* 44 (1994), 252–69, where Matthews convincingly argues again—*contra* G. W. Bowersock (*JRS* 80 [1990], 244–50), C. W. Fornara (*Historia* 41 [1992], 328–44) and T. D. Barnes, (*CPh* 88 [1993], 55–70)—that Ammianus most probably had an Antiochene background.

²³ See Matthews, op. cit. (n. 20), p. 467–8.

²⁴ Cf. also Amm. Marc. 18.5.1, where is mentioned that Antoninus knew the two languages (... *utriusque linguae litteras sciens* ...).

²⁵ J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Antioch. City and Imperial Administration in the Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 247–8, pp. 252–3.

²⁶ Unfortunately it is not known to which other sects, besides Manichaeism, Ammianus refers.

²⁷ Lieu, op. cit. (n. 16), p. 118, supposes that the first Latin translations of Manichaean texts were available at the end of the 3rd century in Africa Consularis. However, only in the latter half of the 4th century is there reliable evidence, thanks to Augustine who studied them, that Manichaean texts in Latin circulated; see *ibid.*, pp. 118–19. For the diffusion of Manichaeism in N. Africa, see Decret, op. cit. (n. 16), vol.1, pp. 179ff.

different dialects was the principal or only tongue of most people in Syria. Whereas Greek was the language of culture, Aramaic was the vernacular of the common man, town-dweller and peasant alike. Antioch itself is likely to have had a large Aramaic-speaking population.²⁸ Accordingly, besides social and economic barriers, there also existed a linguistic barrier between the upper and lower classes in the East: the elite on the whole were not educated in Aramaic, whereas the common people had no knowledge of Greek.²⁹

In the second half of the 3rd century, Manichaeism was well established in Mesopotamia and the eastern half of the Roman Empire. Mani and the first Manichaean disciples employed in their missionary work eastern Aramaic and the original Manichaean scriptures were written in the distinctive script of this language.³⁰ Eastern Aramaic was a branch of Aramaic related to Edessene Syriac and could therefore very easily be understood by Aramaic-speakers in Antioch and the rest of Syria. Syria was one of the main regions where the first Manichaean communities were established within the Roman Empire and in Constantine's days Aramaic-speaking Manichaeans were no doubt to be found there. (Although it has to be said that there is hardly any information about Manichees and Manichaeism from the time of Constantine's reign). It would make much better sense if Strategius was chosen by Constantine not because of his knowledge of Greek and Latin, but rather because he knew Aramaic.³¹ Strategius' ability to understand Aramaic would make him an exceptional man since upper-class easterners who had besides Greek a thorough knowledge of Aramaic must have been even more uncommon than upper-class easterners who knew Latin. This quality made Strategius the right man to investigate into Manichaeism thoroughly, just as Constantine wanted. Knowledge of Aramaic would enable him to read the Manichaean scriptures in their original language, as well as to interrogate the Aramaic-speaking Manichaeans without the mediation of an interpreter. In this way he could provide Constantine with first-hand information about the Manichees and their doctrines.³²

Strategius' polylingualism certainly made him a notable imperial officer. But how many languages did he know: two (Greek and Latin) or three (Greek, Latin and

²⁸ E.g. Downey, *op. cit.* (n. 20), p. 534; F. Millar, 'Paul of Samosata, Zenobia and Aurelian: The Church, Local Culture and Political Allegiance in Third-Century Syria', *JRS* 61 (1971), 1-17, pp. 2-5.; Liebeschuetz, *op. cit.* (n. 25), p. 62; R. Schmitt, 'Die Ostgrenze von Armenien über Mesopotamien, Syrien bis Arabien', in G. Neumann (ed.), *Die Sprachen im römischen Reich der Kaiserzeit, Beihefte der Bonner Jahrbücher* 40 (1980), 187-214, pp. 198-202; H. J. W. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa* (Leiden, 1980), pp. 3-4; G. W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 29-35; W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA, 1989), pp. 187ff., esp. pp. 188-9; Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity A.D. 395-600* (London, 1993), pp. 182-6.

²⁹ This is not to say that everyone was versed in only one language. Especially in church circles and among merchants there was knowledge of both Greek and Aramaic/Syriac; see e.g. Lieu, *op. cit.* (n. 16), pp. 97ff.; G. Bardy, *La question des langues dans l'église ancienne I* (Paris, 1948), pp. 18ff. Even local elites educated in Greek are likely to have had an oral acquaintance with Aramaic; it is, however, unlikely that they could read and write the language.

³⁰ See G. Widengren, *Mani and Manichaeism* (London, 1965), pp. 74ff.

³¹ A suggestion already made by Lieu, *op. cit.* (n. 16), p. 127: 'We learn from Ammianus Marcellinus that Constantine sent one of his polylingual officers, Strategius Musonianus (who might have been a Syriac-speaker) to investigate the Manichaeans and other sects.'

³² The information Strategius provided Constantine with is not known. At any rate it gave no reason for the emperor to take action against the Manichees; we know of no anti-Manichaean legislation during his reign. It may have been reassuring for Constantine that the Manichaean christological stance conformed with the Nicene creed. See Dölger, *op. cit.* (n. 20), p. 306; Lieu, *op. cit.* (n. 16), p. 127.

Aramaic)? If we may believe Ammianus Marcellinus he knew ‘only’ two, but we have seen that his knowledge of Latin was of hardly any use for the job given him by Constantine. Hence it is likely that Strategius commanded the three languages of the Empire, unless, of course, Ammianus’ ‘*facundia sermonis utriusque clarus*’ is not to be understood as implying Strategius’ command of both Greek and Latin. Might it be that Ammianus, as an easterner from Antioch, naturally meant by ‘*sermonis utriusque*’ those languages spoken in his hometown: Greek and Aramaic? If so, Ammianus’ phrase would make perfectly good sense considering the context in which it is used, i.e. the investigation into Manichaeism.

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