

XIII.—The Roman Digressions of Ammianus Marcellinus

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When he composed his far-ranging historical work, Ammianus sought to vary it by inserting, at fairly regular intervals, digressions mostly of a geographical or scientific nature. There are three, however, that form a separate class because of their exceptional subject-matter and strong satirical coloring. I have commented briefly elsewhere on that which chastizes the legal profession in the Near East,¹ and here I venture a few remarks on the two satires directed against contemporary Roman society.² My particular concern is to call attention to a latent rhetorical pattern and to consider its possible bearing upon a biographical question.

Since, as we shall see, both of the Roman digressions reflect a measure of the author's personal experience, they could have been written, or at least expanded to their final form, only when Ammianus had migrated to Rome from his native Antioch, that is, in the period following 378. The first excursus (14.6.1–26) belongs to a portion of the history (Books 1–25) which was published in 392, in keeping with a momentary decision to conclude the work at that point; and it was in this year that Libanius congratulated the writer on his success in giving public readings (*Ep.* 1063, Foerster = 983, Wolf). The second satire (28.4.1–35) occurs in a series of six books (26–31) added because of a change in plan, composed probably in 392–94, and published after 397. Again, the first digression was attached to the chronicle for the years 353–56, when one Orfitus was city prefect, while the second was connected with events of 369–70 and 371–72, when Olybrius and Ampelius, respectively, held that office. Thus Ammianus placed both satires in a retrospective setting, but he improvised the second with comparative haste when he decided to enlarge his work.

¹ 30.4.5–22; see *CP* 48 (1953) 84.

² 14.6.1–26, 28.4.1–35. The first passage has been treated by P. De Jonge in his useful *Sprachlicher und historischer Kommentar zu Ammianus Marcellinus XIV 1–7* (Groningen 1935). For some points, especially the dates of publication, I rely upon E. A. Thompson, "Ammianus Marcellinus and the Romans," *GaR* 11 (1942) 130–34, and *The Historical Work of Ammianus Marcellinus* (Cambridge 1947) 14–19, 117–20 (cited below as *Hist. Work*).

In both digressions our author complains repeatedly that the natives of Rome are inhospitable to sojourners from abroad (*peregrini*³). Since his situation corresponded with theirs, and since he seems in part to identify himself with them, we might reasonably expect that the second satire, following upon successful publication, would paint the fortunes of the *peregrini* in more cheerful colors. Let us pass these allusions in review. Ammianus says that when you, an *honestus advena*, make your first formal call upon a wealthy Roman you will be received with flattering inquiries, but when you return on the next day he will have forgotten you completely; or when at last you have achieved a client's status you may lose it forever if, after three years of unbroken loyalty, you neglect your attentions for as many days. If a dinner or a dole is in prospect no stranger will share it unless he happens to be a devotee of the races, a gambler, or a potential blackmailer; *homines eruditi et sobrii* — evidently like the historian himself — are shunned by the host or barred by his *nomenclator* in favor of those who offer bribes for admittance (14.6.12–15). In a recent period of anticipated dearth⁴ it was scandalous that the *sectatores disciplinarum liberalium* — another possible case of self-identification, to which we shall return later — were among those expelled from the city to relieve the situation, while three thousand dancing-girls and their trainers and choruses were permitted to remain. The nobles show only a perfunctory courtesy (*humanitas*) to a stranger (28.4.10), and such a one will be in better case if he has killed a man than if he has failed to appear for dinner when asked: this is an instance of Roman *civilitas* (*ibid.* 17). And at the theater the natives in the audience shout that *peregrini* should be ejected (*ibid.* 32). In all of this we find no suggestion of an improvement in the stranger's relations with the elite, unless it is that he has now secured dinner invitations which he dare not refuse, whereas before he could hope only for admittance to a reception. But that would be a trifling gain, and the note of resentment is still clear to be heard. The half-submerged theme of both digressions is the harshness of the city toward

³ Here, as De Jonge remarks, the term *peregrinus* appears in the non-technical sense of one not a native to Rome; contrast with this the legal sense in 25.4.21 (cf. *Cod. Theod.* 12.1.52).

⁴ 14.6.19: "ob formidatam haut ita dudum alimentorum inopiam. . . ." This phrase is a little misleading in context, because the event seemingly occurred "not so long ago" with reference to the time of writing, i.e. 378–92, rather than the years under discussion (353–56); see below, 188–89.

cultured visitors, and in a way it calls to mind the subject of Juvenal's third satire — the city's cruelty to indigent natives.

The terms of Libanius' letter and Ammianus' complimentary references to such members of the Roman aristocracy as the elder Symmachus and Praetextatus have led critics to believe that by 392 the historian had succeeded in finding patrons in this circle.⁵ If so, one would think that in the interest of tact or courtesy he might well have struck out the first satire, with its reminiscences of his early rebuffs. Perhaps he did omit it from his public readings,⁶ yet he not only allowed it to be published but even added a second satire conceived in the same form, repeating virtually the same criticisms, and giving no hint of social or literary success. Since the lost books of his work (1–13) included several earlier digressions on the same general subject,⁷ one might hope to account for his somewhat puzzling behavior by supposing simply that he was so much in thrall to a cherished formula that he could not bring himself to break with it even at the risk of giving offense. No doubt this would serve as a partial explanation, and also the effect of his strictures must have been mitigated by the fact that he refrained from identifying individuals as objects of his ridicule. But I wish to define his formula a little more precisely and to show that in dwelling upon the inhospitable character of the Romans he was elaborating a *topos* that had become traditional in a related Greek genre. Possibly he had obscure personal reasons for stressing the point as he did, yet the basic idea was by no means original.

A first reading of these chapters would probably suggest a predominant influence of Roman satire, and in fact Ammianus does not scruple to borrow an occasional idea from Juvenal, even though he scorns the Roman aristocrats for reading that poet so avidly.⁸ But if we approach our text from a fresh point of view, we find that

⁵ For the elder Symmachus (L. Aurelius Avianius S.), see 21.12.24, 27.3.3–4; for Praetextatus, see 22.7.6, 27.9.8–10, 28.1.24. The younger Symmachus, the epistolographer (Q. Aurelius S. Eusebius), is not actually mentioned by Ammianus, but Symm. *Ep.* 9.110 may have been addressed to him (see below, note 22). Thompson, perhaps rightly, queries the degree of this supposed intimacy (*Hist. Work* 16).

⁶ Note that although Ammianus wrote in general for a Roman public, in this part of his work he addresses himself to the *peregrini*: "Et quoniam mirari posse quosdam peregrinos existimo haec lecturos forsitan . . ." (14.6.2).

⁷ See 28.4.6: "ut aliquotiens pro locorum copia fecimus . . ."

⁸ 28.4.14. Thompson, *Hist. Work* 15, cites the parallel passages, and observes that *iam pridem Syrus in Tiberim defluxit Orontes* (Juv. 3.62) must have been distasteful to this Syrian Greek who hoped to realize his ambitions in Rome.

there are also certain affinities with the epideictic literature of the Greeks. The digressions may be regarded as invectives (*psogoi*) or rather, for a reason which will appear presently, as portions of such compositions, and of course an invective is merely the reverse face of an encomium,⁹ blame being distributed under the same headings (*kephalaia*) as praise. Consequently, the headings appropriate to a *psogos poleôs* can be elicited from Menander Rhetor, who, writing in the third century, discussed them under the caption Πῶς χρὴ πόλεις ἐπαινέιν.¹⁰ One of the discourses from which he drew his examples was Aelius Aristides' encomium *Eis Rhômên* (*Or.* 26, Keil = 14, Dindorf), which would form a direct opposite in theory to Ammianus' *vituperationes Romae*, but a more fruitful comparison can be made with Libanius' *Antiochicus* (*Or.* 11), written probably in 360, because its author was a friend of Ammianus, eulogized the natal city of both, and exemplified the kind of rhetorical training to which the other may have been exposed in his early years, before he turned to the independent study of Latin literature. Besides, Aristides' range is inconveniently broad for our purpose, because he moves beyond the confines of the city Rome and surveys her vast empire as well.

According to Menander, an encomium of a city falls into three main divisions — the beauties and advantages of its situation (*thesis*), the glorious circumstances of its founding and settlement (*genos*), and the pursuits (*epitêdeuseis*), activities, and virtues¹¹ which have brought renown to its citizens. Each of these divisions is further categorized in a way that need not detain us here; let us note, however, that to the third section belong the formulae for the praise of a city's constitution, whether it is monarchical, aristocratic, democratic, or a balanced harmony of the three elements. Here Menander remarks that Aristides (*Eis Rhômên* 90) had praised the mixed constitution of Rome. In the *Antiochicus*, Libanius deals in order with the *thesis* (*Or.* 11.12–41) and the *genos* (*ibid.* 42–131), but when

⁹ Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata* 8 (Spengel, *Rhet. Gr.* 2.35, lines 25–26): 'Ἐγκώμιόν ἐστι λόγος ἐκθετικὸς τῶν προσόντων τιμῇ καλῶν; his definition of *psogos* differs only in the substitution of *κακῶν* for *καλῶν* (*ibid.* 9). Some theorists, e.g. Nicolaus Sophista, *Progymn.* 9 (Spengel, *Rhet. Gr.* 3.482, lines 11–14), balance *psogos* against *epainos* and class both under *enkômion*.

¹⁰ Spengel, *Rhet. Gr.* 3.346–67. See T. C. Burgess, *Epideictic Literature* (Chicago 1902) 109–10.

¹¹ The four virtues are those of the Stoics—*andria*, *dikaïosynê*, *sôphrosynê*, and *phronêsis*—corresponding to those which Ammianus attributes to Julian (25.4.1)—*fortitudo*, *iustitia*, *temperantia*, and *prudentia*. Cf. Julian, *Or.* 2.79B, 100C-D.

he reaches the third division he emphasizes the social rather than the political aspect and lauds the pursuits and virtues of two classes of Antiochenes — the *boulê*, that is, the *curia* or municipal senate, and the *dêmos* or *plebeii* (*ibid.* 132–56). Due to his background and sympathies¹² he chooses to support the dubious proposition that the *curiales* form a dominant aristocracy: he may have felt that the representatives of the imperial government—the *comites Orientis* and the *consulares Syriae* — who resided in his city and actually controlled its destinies were not worthy representatives of the monarchical principle.¹³ Yet he assigns the common folk their due share in the system, and the idea of harmony between the two orders is present to his mind (*ibid.* 132). This by the way: of more immediate interest is the fact that his twofold division roughly matches that of Ammianus, who methodically describes the vices, first, of the *nobilitas*, and secondly of the *plebs* of Rome.¹⁴ And only at this point will it be opportune to remark that Julian's *Misopogon* significantly bears the alternative title *Antiochicus* and thus stands as proof that a *psogos poleôs* is not a mere hypothetical reconstruction.¹⁵ This piece, however, is a spontaneous outpouring in contrast to some of his studied compositions,¹⁶ so that the epideictic formulae, which he knew so well, are largely blurred or slighted. Yet we might fairly say that he arraigns the Antiochenes for their immorality, or lack of *sôphrosynê*,¹⁷ and for their failure to show hospitality to an imperial visitor.

Since each of Ammianus' invectives corresponds to Menander's third division and to a particular section of Libanius' *Antiochicus*, each must be regarded as no more than a portion of a *psogos poleôs*. In his description of Constantius' entry into Rome (16.10.13–17), which evinces admiration for the city's monumental grandeur, he

¹² See *TAPA* 82 (1951) 178.

¹³ In *Or.* 11.142–43 he would have us believe that the governors cheerfully defer to the opinions of the *curiales*, but many of his other speeches give the lie to this claim.

¹⁴ "Haec nobilium sunt instituta" (14.6.24). "Ex turba vero imae sortis . . ." (*ibid.* 25). "Et primo nobilitatis, ut aliquotiens pro locorum copia fecimus, dein plebis digeremus errata . . ." (28.4.6).

¹⁵ *Amm. Marc.* 22.14.2: "volumen conposuit invectivum, quod Antiochense vel Misopogonem appellavit, probra civitatis infensa mente dinumerans. . . ." Julian ironically characterizes his harangue as a series of *loidoriai* directed against himself (*Misop.* 338A–B).

¹⁶ Some of Julian's other discourses, especially *Or.* 1–3, adhere rather closely to the conventions, though he likes to feign ignorance of them (e.g., *Or.* 2.74D).

¹⁷ In *Misop.* 342D–343A he makes them say that they do not even know the meaning of the word.

gives us a specimen of panegyric such as would be at home in the *thesis* of an encomium.¹⁸ And the preface to his first invective (14.6.3-6), in which he reviews Rome's birth, growth, maturity, and senescence by analogy with the ages of man, would fall appropriately under the heading of *genos*.¹⁹ This is like a remnant of eulogy unconverted to the opposite form. Again, he remarks that the Romans display a frivolity (*levitas*) which proves that they are culpably indifferent to their city's glorious past. He then continues: "Ut enim Simonides lyricus docet, beate perfecta ratione victuro ante alia patriam esse convenit gloriosam" (14.6.7). This sentiment would be well suited to an encomium, or at least a *makarismos* (see below, note 21). In his autobiography Libanius refers to the same poet, actually Euripides rather than Simonides,²⁰ when he reckons it as the first element of his good fortune that he had been born in a great and famous city.²¹

If the historian tends to soar into encomium, the sophist occasionally make invidious comparisons which show that the descent from praise to blame is also a short and easy one. In so blandly

¹⁸ We are told that wherever he looked the emperor's eyes were dazzled ("perque omne latus quo se oculi contulissent miraculorum densitate praestricus . . ."). This savors of the panegyric formula, "If you would know our city's beauty, just look this way and that." Cf. Aristides, *Eis Rhômên* 6, 9, and indeed even the motto of Michigan: "Si quaeris paene insulam amoenam, circumspice."

¹⁹ The idea of the four ages, and that of Virtus and Fortuna both contributing to Rome's greatness, may have been directly inspired by the *Prooemium* to Florus' *Epitome*, where the two ideas are combined (see De Jonge, *ad loc.*), though each, taken separately, was commonplace enough. For the role of Tyche and Arete in the growth of Roman imperialism, see Plutarch, *De fortuna Romanorum* (*Moralia* 316c-326c); but Florus seems to have borrowed the thought from Sallust (*A. Nordh, Eranos* 50 [1952] 111-28).

²⁰ See Plut. *Demosth.* 1.1, where the attribution is to Euripides "or someone else." There is a chronological objection to Simonides (H. A. Holden, *ad loc.*).

²¹ *Or.* 1.2. Libanius goes on to praise the *thesis* of Antioch in much the same terms as in his *Antiochicus*, and he adds that he was fortunate also in that his family was one of the most eminent in that city, reminding us that the theorists list good birth (*eugeneia*) among the ingredients of happiness (Aristot. *Rhet.* 1.5.1360b, lines 31-38; Theon, *Progymn.*, in Spengel, *Rhet. Gr.* 2.109-10). Elsewhere Aristotle distinguishes *makarismos*, which deals with the external blessings of fortune, from *epainos*, which praises inward qualities derived from character or judgment (*Rhet.* 1.9.1367b, lines 26-36, *Eth. Nic.* 1.12.1101b, lines 10-25; cf. *Eth. Eud.* 2.1.1219b, lines 8-16, Julian, *Or.* 2.92b-93d, and Synesius, *De regno* 4, where an interesting use is made of this distinction). Since Libanius' autobiography, entitled "On His Fortune," recites the good and ill which Tyche has brought him, it is, in a sense, a self-*makarismos*. One might shun the odium of self-praise by writing one's autobiography from this point of view alone, but of course Libanius' vanity causes him to invade the domain of *epainos* again and again.

commending his countrymen for their orderly domestic life, he implies that riots are unknown in Antioch but asserts that they are of frequent occurrence in Egypt and Italy (*Or.* 11.151). In his *vituperationes Romae* Ammianus makes it a cardinal complaint against the Roman plebeians that they demonstrate whenever there is a dearth of wine, and in fact he relates his Roman digressions to the administration of city prefects who were especially concerned with this problem.²²

Another sidethrust of this sort brings us to a salient point of our comparison. Libanius writes: "Thus our population is well adapted to the land and the nature of the land to the population, so that we have never yet been forced to outrage Zeus Xenios by treating our guests from abroad with cruelty — this, in spite of our having before us the example of Rome, which converts a dearth of provisions into abundance by expelling foreigners whenever such an emergency arises" (*Or.* 11.174). Themistius, addressing Theodosius in 384–85 from Constantinople,²³ paid that city the same compliment, again

²² " . . . quo (sc. Orfito) administrante seditiones sunt concitatae graves ob inopiam vini: huius avidis usibus vulgus intentum ad motus asperos excitatur et crebros" (14.6.1). See 28.4.4 on Ampelius' abortive ruling that *tabernae vinariae* should not open before the fourth hour of the day. For other such riots, see 15.7.3–5, 27.3.4; for the vinous habits of the *plebs*, see 14.6.25, 28.4.29.

I find two striking circumstances which scholars seem not to have related. 1) The anonymous *Carmen adversus Flavianum* (or *Carm. adv. Paganos*) alleges that Virius Flavianus Nicomachus, a conspicuous leader of the pagan resurgence under the usurper Eugenius (392–94), had once "betrayed his country's wine" (line 38: "Non ipse est vinum patriae qui prodidit olim . . . ?"). Robinson Ellis (*Journ. of Philol.* 1.2 [1868] 72) suggested that this may have been done, *inter alia*, by refusing to permit its sale at a low price, and compared Ammianus 27.3.4, where a *vilis quidam plebeius* is said to have attributed such an unpopular intention to the elder Symmachus as city prefect (364–65), with the result that the mob later burned his house. (Ellis favored Praetextatus or the younger Symmachus as the subject of this barbarous lampoon, but Flavianus has generally been accepted due to Mommsen's arguments in *Hermes* 4 [1870] 350–63.) 2) Ammianus, according to Ensslin's conjecture (see Thompson, *Hist. Work* 18), may have been an adherent of Eugenius, because *Symm. Ep.* 9.110 is thought to have been addressed to the historian, and it is known that the names of addressees among the usurper's following were omitted when the correspondence was edited for Christian readers.

We wonder, then, whether the official sale and control of wine was made an issue between the pagan and Christian factions, somewhat as the provisioning of Rome with grain figured in the polemics between Symmachus and Ambrose (see below, note 30). Some such assumption would serve to explain the strong emphasis which Ammianus, writing in 392–94, places on the matter. (For a thorough study of this final pagan effort, see H. Bloch, *HTHR* 38 [1945] 199–244.)

²³ W. Stegemann, *RE*, Zweite Reihe, 5.2.1662. In view of the date, Themistius may have been thinking of the crisis of 383 or 384 (see below).

to the disadvantage of Rome.²⁴ Turning to Menander, we find that hospitality to strangers is topical in the encomium, apart from the special manifestation to which Libanius and Themistius allude: "Just treatment,²⁵ again, is divided into that given by the citizens to visiting strangers and to one another, and a part of it consists in observing fair and humane customs and precise and equitable laws."²⁶ Compare Libanius, *Or.* 11.155: "In humanity, then, our townsmen are so pre-eminent that they pay to strangers those attentions which other peoples fail to show to their fellow-countrymen." Here "humanity," or perhaps "courtesy" (*philanthrôpia*), balances the *humanitas* or *civilitas* which the Romans, according to Ammianus, so conspicuously lack. Though there is no necessity of believing that he had the *Antiochicus* itself in mind when he wrote his criticisms, still that discourse has a theoretical relation to his invectives and reveals some of the standards against which he measured Roman society.

The majority of scholars have dated to the year 383, when one of the powerful Anician family was city prefect,²⁷ the expulsion of *peregrini* to which Ammianus refers in such bitter strains (above, note 4), and his evident antipathy toward the Anicii²⁸ has seemed to favor the assumption that he himself was a victim of that measure.²⁹ Yet a French critic, who has carefully sifted the sources, argues plausibly that the crisis which led to the expulsion of strangers from Rome, and which others have thought pertinent to Ammianus,

²⁴ *Or.* 18.222A. These two passages have been cited occasionally in comments on Ammianus 14.6.19, e.g. by Seeck, *Untergang*, and his ed. of Symmachus (*loc. cit.* in note 29, below) and by De Jonge, *ad loc.*; but I believe that none has related the texts to Ammianus in terms of rhetorical theory.

²⁵ *dikaïopragia* as a phase of the virtue *dikaïosynê*.

²⁶ Menander Rhetor, in Spengel, *Rhet. Gr.* 3.363, lines 4-7.

²⁷ This was Anicius Auchenius Bassus (*RE* 1.2200), who is evidenced as prefect only in November 382, but whose term may well have extended through 383, since his successor, Aventius Sallustius, does not appear in office until June 384 (see Seeck, *Regesten* 476).

²⁸ See 16.8.13, where the purport seems clear though the text is mutilated. For the sketches of Sextus Petronius Probus, a Christian and head of the Anician house (*RE* 1.2205), see 27.11.1-6 and 30.5.3-10 (translated by Thompson, *Hist. Work* 122-24). Perhaps this individual was one of the chief objects of Ammianus' invectives: cf. 27.11.1, on his vast estates, with 14.6.10, on the nobles who boast of their great holdings; and 27.11.4, on Probus' determined defence of his clients or slaves who have committed crimes, with 28.4.16, concerning a noble who punishes a slave if he is slow in fetching hot water, but defends him against a charge of murder.

²⁹ See O. Seeck, *RE* 1.1846, *Gesch. des Untergangs der antiken Welt* (Berlin 1913) 5.496, and his ed. of Symmachus, pp. cxix-xx; Thompson, *GaR* 11 (1942) 132, and *Hist. Work* 14.

must be differentiated from that which is securely dated in 383, and should be assigned rather to the following year, when the younger Symmachus was prefect;³⁰ in fact, he denies its relevancy to our author, remarking that such expulsion was customary in times of famine.³¹ For those who would still maintain that this is the episode mentioned by the historian, a year's difference would of course be immaterial, but a new difficulty would seem to result from substituting Symmachus, a supposed friend and patron of Ammianus, for Anicius, a presumed enemy. Yet how intimate were Ammianus and the younger Symmachus (see above, notes 5, 22)? Beyond this point all speculation appears idle, but on the whole I should judge that historical factors, no less than the discovery that Ammianus' complaint has a grounding in epideictic literature, would tend to diminish its force and reality.

³⁰ J. R. Palanque, "Famines à Rome à la fin du IV^e siècle," *REA* 33 (1931) 346-56. For the crop-failure of 383 the sources are Symm. *Relatio* 3.15-17 (*Mon. Germ. Hist. Auct. Antiq.* 6.1, p. 283) and *Ep.* 2.6; Ambrose, *Ep.* 18.17-21 (*PL* 16.977-78). For the expulsion assigned by Palanque to 384, at a time when, as he maintains, there was no actual crop-failure, but merely delayed importations due to unfavorable winds, see Ambrose, *De officiis ministrorum* 3.7.49-51 (*PL* 16.160); Symm. *Ep.* 2.7. (This letter shows that if Symmachus was responsible for the expulsion, he at least professed regret for its necessity.)

³¹ Here Palanque instances Ambrose, *Off.* 3.7.46 (*PL* 16.159): "cum (ut in talibus solet) peterent vulgo ut peregrini urbe prohiberentur. . . ." Liban. *Or.* 11.174, translated above, would seem to enhance the effect of this generalization, pointing to such incidents, otherwise unattested, earlier than 360. Reiske, to be sure, once assigned *Or.* 11 to the reign of Theodosius, and Seeck would date it by implication after 383 (*loc. cit.* above, note 29), but Foerster accepts the year 360 determined by G. R. Sievers, *Das Leben des Libanius* (Berlin 1868) 245.