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Initium mali Romano imperio: Contemporary Reactions to the Battle of Adrianople*

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The battle of Adrianople ranks among the most serious setbacks in Roman history. This decisive defeat of Roman forces by the people who came to be called "Visigoths" left the emperor Valens dead and the eastern army weakened for years to come—some would say, forever. The Visigoths, at this time still only a confederation of Goths, Alans and Huns, had entered the empire in 376 in the wake of the Hunnic invasions of the lower Danube. Valens accepted these barbarians into Thrace, hoping to draw on their numbers to fill his military ranks. When the barbarians found themselves abused by the Roman soldiers charged with their resettlement, they revolted in early 377 and defeated imperial riparian armies in Thrace. Later that year, the barbarians again prevailed over a large force sent against them by Valens, then resident in Antioch. By 378, Valens himself, together with the elite of the eastern army, arrived in Thrace hoping to stop the revolt in its tracks. Instead, in a battle outside the city of Adrianople, the emperor and his army found themselves overwhelmed and decisively defeated. Two-thirds of the eastern army was lost and Valens himself disappeared in the fray.

The devastation wrought by the battle had radical consequences. Because Roman forces were too weak to defeat the Goths in the aftermath of Adrianople, the empire was forced to accept within its territory a group of semi-autonomous barbarians who would eventually sack Rome and detach much of the west from Roman control. It is only natural that people would later attach great significance to so great a defeat. In fact, the scholarship of previous generations saw in Adrianople a turning point between antiquity and the Middle Ages. Typical of this attitude was M. Bang: "The Empire rocked to its foundations... [Its] power and glory seemed stamped into the dust by the barbarian

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hordes...The battle of Hadrianople introduces the last act of the great drama, the most pregnant with consequences which the history of the world has ever seen."[1] More recent scholarship has avoided such sweeping pronouncements. Indeed, the current, though not universal, tendency has been to downplay the impact of the conflict altogether.[2] Along with this tendency has arisen a concern to demonstrate that the battle was not regarded by ancient contemporaries as particularly threatening. Representative of this view is H. Wolfram, whose judgment is based primarily on the assessment offered in Ammianus, Book 31: "The Romans of the fifth century, who had experienced many horrors in their generation, saw Adrianople as the beginning of the end. But contemporaries of Adrianople thought differently."[3]

In an effort to test this assumption, I will address the question of Adrianople's impact on those who were living when it occurred. The subject has been investigated extensively only once, in an article by J. Straub.[4] His treatment is admirable, though it aims to chart a change in attitudes toward barbarians in the years after the disaster and not to provide a full picture of the various reactions to the battle. Nor does Straub assemble anywhere near a complete list of sources for such an investigation. In fact, sources offering testimony on Adrianople are astonishingly abundant; yet they have never been thoroughly examined. This article offers the first such treatment of the historical and historiographical material. It will avoid questions pertaining to military history as well as to the overall Roman reaction to the barbarian invasions.[5]

[1]Bang 217. Cf. Oman 1.14: "Such was the battle of Adrianople, the first great victory won by the heavy cavalry which had now shown its ability to supplant the heavy infantry of Rome as the ruling power of war"; Straub 1943: 286: "Das Jahr 378 bildet in dem weiten Spielraum, der den 'Untergang der antiken Welt' und die 'Geburt des Abendlandes' umschließt, den entscheidenden Wendepunkt"; Klein 54: "Adrianopel leitet die Ablösung der römischen Weltherrschaft durch die Mittelmeerstaaten der Germanen ein, den Übergang von der Antike zum Mittelalter." For the assessment of Adrianople in previous centuries see Demandt 1984: 100, 102, 133–34, 217–18, 403, 481.

[2]Wolfram 1977, 1988: 127–30: "certainly not a decisive battle"; Ferrill 64–67; Williams and Friell 19; Burns 1994: 33, 42, 54, 60, 72. Contrast Demougeot 143–46; Elton 266–68.

[3]Wolfram 1977: 243–47, 1988: 128–30.

[4]Straub 1943, cf. 1950: 55–60; see also Courcelle 21–26. Pavan covers many related sources but is interested entirely in the propaganda related to Theodosius' Gothic policies, not in Adrianople.

[5]Both have been treated elsewhere. On the battle: Runkel 1903; Seeck 1919: 84–134; Schmidt 400–413; Klein; Austin; Chrysos 129–34; Burns 1973, 1994: 23–42; Wolfram 1977, 1988: 117–30; Wanke 111–230; Heather 1991: 142–47. On contemporary reactions to the

Rather, it will concern itself with the way contemporaries, those who were alive during the battle and who wrote about it in the following thirty years, perceived the events surrounding the Gothic rebellion and defeat of Valens.

Of course, Adrianople was the high point in a Gothic war that lasted five years. As such, it is difficult to isolate reactions to this particular day from those provoked by the military conflicts preceding the battle and arising from it. There will thus be some overlap between specific commentaries on Adrianople and those on the Gothic war of 377–82. Even so, the accuracy and depth of view we can attain are astonishing. In order to take advantage of this depth, my investigation will move beyond the simple question of whether contemporaries did or did not regard Adrianople with foreboding. It will illustrate, rather, a varied and complex set of responses that changed over time and through interaction upon one another: shock, denial, blame, condemnation, apprehension and eventually, with Ammianus, reassessment. In fact, as will become clear, Ammianus' perspective, the basis for Wolfram's judgment, can best be viewed, not as typical of the ancient historian's contemporaries, but rather as a response to the variety of reactions expressed in the decades after the battle.

I. The Aftershock

The battle of Adrianople (Edirne) occurred on August 9, 378. The fighting, which took place about seventeen kilometers northeast of the city, went on until nightfall. By then Valens, the eastern emperor, was dead and his army decimated. The day after the battle, the victorious Goths undertook a siege of the walls of Adrianople, which, they had learned, guarded the consistory and the imperial treasure. After considerable losses they abandoned their efforts and proceeded east to the region around Perinthus to collect plunder.[6] When the Adrianopolitans verified that the Gothic band had quit their walls, they waited until nightfall and then fled along untravelled byways, some toward Macedonia to the south, others westward toward Philippopolis (Plovdiv) and Serdica (Sofia).[7] There they hoped to find Valens, of whose death they had not yet learned.

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barbarian invasions: Fischer; Courcelle; Heinzberger; Lippold; Paschoud 1967; Demandt 1984: 44–70; Doignon.

[6]Adrianople: Amm. Marc. 31.15.2–15 (ed. Clark, Weidmann). Perinthus: Amm. Marc. 31.16.1; 3. My aim here is not to provide a narrative of events following the battle, for which see Heather 1991: 147–56; cf. Wolfram 1988: 131–39; Cesa. Rather, I offer evidence on how those in affected territories reacted.

[7]Amm. Marc. 31.16.2; cf. *Vita Isaaci* 9 (*AASS* 6.604): ἡ δὲ ὑπολειφθεῖσα στρατεία ἦλθεν ἐν Σερμίῳ τῇ πόλει τοῦ Ἰλλυρίων ἔθνους.

Indeed, for some time afterward most people remained ignorant of details. Not only had the emperor vanished, but two-thirds of the army and a host of commanders including two *Magistri Militum* had, in Themistius' words, "wholly disappeared like a shadow."[8] John Chrysostom confirms that the widows of fallen soldiers in Constantinople had no idea what had become of their husbands.[9] The disappearance of the eastern army and its command structure was rendered doubly confusing by the inaccessibility of the emperor in the west, Gratian. Although control of Valens' eastern territories devolved to Gratian after Adrianople, he was cut off from them by the Goths who now occupied the intervening territory of Thrace. Thus, when the *Magister Equitum et Peditum* on the Euphrates required approval for a tactical decision, he submitted his proposal not to Gratian but to the Senate of Constantinople, the only accessible authority. Aside from this incident, this body was almost never called on to decide foreign policy.[10] Similarly, when the Gothic attack continued east to Constantinople, no emperor was available to lead a counterattack. The responsibility for raising and equipping a volunteer defensive force fell on Valens' widow, the empress Domnica.[11] The breakdown in command and communications thus demanded self-reliance and improvisation on the part of locals.

Communication problems in Thrace had already become acute in the spring of 378. Even before Valens' arrival in the region that summer, the Gothic revolt there had all but choked off outside contact. This we learn from a letter written by Basil of Caesarea to his friend Eusebius of Samosata, who was living in Thrace as an exile. Having learned of Eusebius' remarkable survival amidst the rebellion going on around him, Basil claimed he could understand how Jonah survived in the belly of the whale and the three boys in the fiery furnace. Even so, he hesitated to endanger his own messenger by sending him to the region:

[8]Amm. Marc. 31.13.18; Them. *Or.* 16.206d (ed. Downey, Teubner): στρατοπέδων δὲ ὁλοκλήρων ἀφανισθέντων ὥσπερ σκιᾶς. Cf. *Or.* 14.181a: ὀπόση σκιᾶς ἀθροώτερον ἠφανίσθη. For casualties see Hoffmann 1.449–57. On Valens' death, see below, pp. 153–56.

[9]John Chrysostom *Ad vid. iun.* 5 (*SC* 138.138–40): εἰσὶ δὲ αἳ οὐδὲ ταύτης ἠξιώθησαν τῆς διηγήσεως, οὐδὲ ὅπως κατέπεσον μαθεῖν ἠδυνήθησαν, ἐν πολλῷ τῷ πλήθει τῆς συμβολῆς καταχωσθέντων αὐτῶν. On the context of the letter, see Kelly 1995: 46–48.

[10]Zos. 4.26.5–6 (ed. Paschoud, Budé). Cf. Dagron 1974: 199–202. On the incident see below, p. 134.

[11]Soc. *HE* 5.1.3 (ed. Hansen, *GCS*); Soz. *HE* 7.1.2 (ed. Bidez and Hansen, *GCS*); cf. Amm. Marc. 31.16.4–7 for the attack on Constantinople.

> διὰ δὲ τὸ ἀκοῦσαι πάντα λῃστῶν καὶ δησερτόρων πεπληρῶσθαι τὰ τῆς ὁδοῦ ἐφοβήθημέν τι εἰς χεῖρας ἐμβαλεῖν τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ, μὴ καὶ αὐτῷ παραίτιοι θανάτου γενώμεθα.
>
> Because I have heard that all the roads are filled with brigands and deserters, I was afraid to entrust something into the hands of our brother lest I should become complicit in his death too.[12]

With the destruction of Valens' army, the communication troubles, already profound, must have mounted. In fact, immediately after the battle, the *Magister Equitum* Victor was charged with riding to Sirmium in order to inform Gratian of the disaster. P. Heather has noted that he was forced to take a circuitous route south through Macedonia along the Via Egnatia and then north again into Pannonia in order to skirt around the Gothic war bands occupying Thrace.[13] From Thrace, the Goths quickly spread into "most of Macedonia and the greater part of Illyricum" by 379 and forays were later made as far south as Thessaly.[14] In fact, for the four years between Adrianople and the Romano-Gothic Peace of 382, east-west communication through the Balkans was nearly impossible along land routes. After peace had been settled with the Goths in 382 and the Balkans reopened, Themistius proclaimed:

> ἀνοίγνυνται μὲν ὁδοί...σταθμοὶ δὲ ἐγείρονται καὶ ἐπαύλεις καὶ τῇ πάλαι καταπυκνοῦνται ῥᾳστώνῃ· σύμπνους δὲ ἡ ἀρχὴ

[12]Basil *Ep.* 268 (ed. Courtonne, Budé). Here and elsewhere in the text, I give the Greek or Latin and my own translation where no adequate English translation is available; where translations exist, I give only the English. On the date of the letter see Fedwick 18. Tim Barnes kindly showed me an article forthcoming in *Studia Patristica* on the date and significance of this letter.

[13]Zos. 4.24.3; cf. Heather 1991: 149.

[14]Lib. *Or.* 24.3 (a. 379, ed. Foerster, Teubner): Θρᾴκην καὶ Μακεδονίας οὐ μικρὸν καὶ τῆς Ἰλλυριῶν τὴν πολλήν; 15: ἀπόλωλεν ἡμῖν ἔθνη πέντε καὶ εἴκοσι; cf. Ambrose *De fide* 2.140 (a. 380, *CSEL* 78): *nonne de Thraciae partibus per ripensem Daciam et Mysiam omnemque Valeriam Pannoniorum totum illum limitem*, and *De off.* 2.70 (a. 386/9, ed. Testard, Budé): *Illyrici vastitate et Thraciae*. Other sources are similarly specific on the territory affected: Them. *Or.* 14.181a–b (a. 379): ἀντὶ Δακῶν, ἀντὶ Θρᾳκῶν, ἀντὶ Ἰλλυριῶν...ἣν οὐκ ἔστησεν Αἶμος, οὐ Θρᾳκῶν ὄρια, καὶ Ἰλλυριῶν δυσπόρευτα; *Or.* 16.206d (a. 383): ἀνηρπασμένων μὲν Θρᾳκῶν, ἀνηρπασμένων δὲ Ἰλλυριῶν; *Or.* 34.24 (a. 384): δεῦρ' ἴτε, ὦ Θρᾷκες, ὦ Μακεδόνες...τὸν Αἶμον ὑπελάμβανον καὶ τὸν Ἕβρον καὶ τὰς Θετταλικὰς δυσχωρίας; *Pan. Lat.* 12[2].11.4 (a. 389, ed. Mynors, Oxford): *perdidi infortunata Pannonias, lugeo funus Illyrici*; Amm. Marc. 31.16.7: *ad usque radices Alpium Iuliarum*. The passage quoted at Them. *Or.* 34.24 confirms Heather's thesis (1991: 152) that raiding reached Thessaly.

> ἅπασα καὶ ὁμοπαθὴς ὥσπερ ἓν ζῷον καὶ οὐκέτι διέρρωγε καὶ διέσπασται πολλαχοῦ.
>
> The roads are reopened...the traveling stations and inns revived and they are again reinforced with their old ease: the entire empire shares the same breath and the same feeling like a single organism and is no longer split in two and pulled apart everywhere.[15]

The Balkans had become a fissure through the center of the empire. The inaccessibility of the region to communication and supplies helps explain why Theodosius, who assumed the eastern throne on January 19, 379, decided to begin his campaigns against the Goths from Thessalonica rather than Constantinople: the former offered a better port for east-west exchanges. Only in November 380, probably after the southern route along the Via Egnatia was secured, would Theodosius move his base to the eastern capital. Even then the northern Balkans were closed to traffic for two more years.

Before Theodosius' arrival, Constantinople had been forced to fend for itself. Other cities in the region were also forced to rely on local limitanean garrisons or hastily organized militias with no hope of imperial aid.[16] During the Gothic siege of Adrianople, the citizens had to improvise their own defensive operations with stragglers who had survived the battle (Amm. Marc. 31.16.6 and 10). In a passage relating events at Thessalonica that predated the arrival of Theodosius in 379, Ambrose reports that, since no soldiers were available there, the bishop Acholius defended the city with prayers rather than swords.[17] Similar apotropaics were used in a related incident a thousand kilometers away in Pontus. Before Valens had received the Goths into the empire in 376, he drafted a number of their sons into service and disposed them along the Euphrates frontier. When their fellow tribesmen in Thrace revolted, these Gothic youths also broke out in rebellion. Though they were quickly massacred, their revolt left the inhabitants of Pontus and Galatia in shock.[18] In a

[15]Them. *Or.* 16.212b; cf. *Or.* 34.24: ἀνέῳκται δὲ ἤδη καὶ τοῖς ὁδοποροῦσιν ἡ γῆ, καὶ πλεῖν οὐκ ἀνάγκη τὴν θάλασσαν τοῦ βαδίζειν οὔσης ἀδείας. σταθμοὶ δὲ ἐγείρονται καὶ ἱπποστάσια καὶ ἐπαύλεις, καὶ τῇ πάλαι καταπυκνοῦνται ῥᾳστώνῃ. See also Ambrose *Ep.* 51[15].2 (*CSEL* 82): *occupatis terrarum barbarica infestatione regionibus*; Basil *Ep.* 268.

[16]On local militias: Amm. Marc. 31.6.2. More generally see Elton 102–3; Millar 26–29.

[17]Ambrose Ep. 51[15].6 (a. 382/3): *sanctus autem Acholius precibus suis fecit, ut de partibus Macedoniae victores fugaret. nonne et hoc intellegimus virtutis superioris fuisse, ut ubi miles nullus aderat, illic pellerentur sine milite*? Cf. §11. On this letter see McLynn 156–57.

[18]Amm. Marc. 31.16.8; Zos. 4.26.1–27.1; cf. Elbern.

homily delivered the year after the troubles, Gregory of Nyssa gives precious insights into local reactions to the Gothic troubles plaguing not just Thrace but even his native Cappadocia. He appeals to the soldier saint Theodorus, whose protection he invokes for the defense of Euchaita and its territory:

> ὑφορώμεθα θλίψεις, προσδοκῶμεν κινδύνους, οὐ μακρὰν οἱ ἀλιτήριοι Σκῦθαι τὸν καθ' ἡμῶν ὠδίνοντες πόλεμον. ὡς στρατιώτης ὑπερμάχησον... ἵνα μὴ κωμάσῃ κατὰ ναῶν ἢ θυσιαστηρίων λυσσῶν καὶ ἄθεσμος βάρβαρος, ἵνα μὴ πατήσῃ τὰ ἅγια βέβηλος.
>
> Let us fear afflictions, let us expect dangers; the criminal Goths who are giving birth to a war against us are not far off. Defend us like a soldier...so that a raving and lawless barbarian does not break into your shrine and altar like a reveler and a profane savage does not tread on your holy things.[19]

Gregory's fears indicate that he had no idea that the Goths in Anatolia had been annihilated. He probably recalled the more devastating invasions in the same region that his third-century ancestor, Gregory Thaumatourgos, had witnessed. He thus remained convinced that the threat persisted and assumed that only God and his agent, Saint Theodore, could offer protection against this mysterious barbarian presence.

Though the Gothic revolt had been quickly quelled in Pontus, this was hardly the case in the Balkans. Destruction was great and would have been greater had the Goths enjoyed the wherewithal to besiege fortifications. We know from Ammianus that fortification walls kept Adrianople, Perinthus and Constantinople safe, and we can assume that other cities also avoided destruction because of their walls. Thessalonica, for example, no doubt owed its safety more to its fortifications than to Acholius' prayers.[20] Nevertheless, the archaeological record indicates widespread devastation in Thrace and Illyricum around 378. Even those cities that escaped destruction must have been hard put

[19]Greg. Nys. *De sancto Theodoro. Gregorii Nysseni Opera* (*GNO*) X.1, *Sermones* 2.70. Cf. *GNO* X.1 *Sermones* 2.61. See also Greg. Nys. *De iis qui baptismum differunt* (*PG* 46.424) on attacks by the same Goths in Comana. For the connection between the accounts in Ammianus and Zosimus and the sermons of Gregory see Zuckerman.

[20]Adrianople, Perinthus and Constantinople: Amm. Marc. 31.15. 3–15; 16.3; 7. On fortified places more generally: Lib. *Or.* 1.179, Σκυθῶν ἅπαντα πλὴν τειχῶν κατασυρόντων. Cf. *Or.* 24.15. On the walls of Thessalonica, see Gounares. Compare the comprehensive combination of prayers and stones launched against the Goths from the fortifications around Halmyrissa in 395: Callinicos *Vita Hypatii* 6.1–5 (*SC* 177).

to provision themselves.[21] Living twelve hundred kilometers to the east in Antioch, Libanius had heard how:

> the natives who lived outside walled towns have been taken off as prisoners, while those inside eat up everything they have and then, when they die of starvation, are not even buried, but their relatives drag them up to the top of the wall and throw the poor wretches down from there, naked. Such is the carnival that the Goths have held. (*Or.* 24.15 trans. Norman, Loeb)

Themistius, writing nearer the site of devastation, confirms that the city dwellers of the Balkans had little access to provisions. Two years after the peace was settled, he exhorted Thracians and Macedonians to come forth from their walls, to tend to their cattle and ploughs and to sharpen their sickles instead of swords and spears.[22]

Writing from nearby Milan only one month after Adrianople, Ambrose described the devastation most poignantly. In a funeral oration delivered for his brother in late September 378, he returned again and again to the theme of shared desperation, offering the generic consolation that his brother was fortunate to have escaped the present woes:

> *raptus est* ne in manus incideret barbarorum, *raptus est*, ne totius orbis excidia, mundi finem, propinquorum funera, civium mortes, postremo ne sanctarum virginum atque viduarum, quod omni morte acerbius est, conluvionem videret.
>
> "He was taken" lest he should fall into the hands of the barbarians, "he was taken" lest he should witness the destruction of the entire globe, the end of the world, the funerals of relatives, the deaths of fellow citizens and above all the violation of holy virgins and widows, which is more bitter than any death.[23]

[21]On the extent of destruction: Scorpan 121–22; Mócsy 339–46; Soproni 53–106.

[22]Them. *Or.* 34.24: δεῦρ' ἴτε ὦ Θρᾷκες, ὦ Μακεδόνες...ἔξιτε οὖν ἤδη θαρσοῦντες ἐκ τῶν τειχισμάτων· ὥρα ὑμῖν τὰς ἐπάλξεις ἀπολιποῦσι βοῶν καὶ ἀρότρων ἐπιμελεῖσθαι καὶ δρεπάνας θήγειν ἀντὶ ξιφῶν καὶ ἀκοντίων. Cf. *Or.* 16.212b.

[23]*De excessu fratris* 1.30 (*CSEL* 73). On the oration see McLynn 68–78, esp. 69 n. 56 on the date. For the theme of common despair: 1.1 *communem maerorem...publici doloris*; 1.5 *communi dolore*; 1.67 *communis dolor*; 1.72 *communibus lamentis...dolore publico*. Offering consolation for immediate grief through comparison with contemporary woes was a literary *topos*. Jerome does the same in *Ep.* 60.16 (*CSEL* 54); 123.15–16 (*CSEL* 56). Chrysostom voices similar thoughts at *Ad vid. iun.* 4–5. See Scourfield 15–33.

In the years that followed, Ambrose continued to lament the depredations. Indeed, his Balkan contacts kept him informed of the sufferings in neighboring Illyricum to the degree that he even felt obliged to sell some of Milan's church silver to ransom captives.[24]

Destruction was thus widespread in the Balkans and the terror it brought spread well beyond these geographical boundaries. Remarkably, the reaction of those living in the territories affected survives in considerable detail. Even more can be gleaned from stories and reactions that had filtered to those further removed. Together, these offer a clear impression of the disruption in the region, the terror and confusion people felt and the mechanisms they used, human and divine, to cope with the invasion.

II. Coping with the Crisis

As Ambrose's and Libanius' responses of 378 and 379 indicate, news of the disaster spread swiftly beyond the invaded territory and affected all who heard it. Basil's letter to Eusebius of Samosata reveals how desperately provincials hung on every piece of information as events unfolded (*Ep.* 268). Basil had heard news of the Gothic attacks from a deacon named Libanius but knew little of what had happened after this report. Rumors had spread that the trouble had worsened; thus he desperately awaited the arrival of the priest Paul who would bring further information. Other rumors that Valens' army had been mobilized led Basil to hope that the Goths would soon be brought to peace; only then would he send his own man for a full report. We can only imagine Basil's shock when he learned the outcome at Adrianople. We might compare Libanius' reaction:

> When I heard the result of the engagement, I beat my brow, tore my hair and pondered on the causes of the disaster, and the next day imparted them to others too. (*Or.* 2.53)

The depth of despair felt by the empire's citizens called for swift countermeasures on the part of the emperors. Naturally, some of these were

[24]Ambrose *De off.* 2.136–39 (a. 386/9); cf. 2.70–71; 3.84. Ambrose was not acting from entirely altruistic motives. He later used the incident against opponents as evidence of his Christian charity. In his funeral oration for Satyrus, Ambrose also took advantage of the Gothic invasion to redirect attention to himself. He opens with the claim that his private loss acted as a talisman to prevent Milan from suffering more grievous woes: *De excessu fratris* 1.1–2, *communem maerorem privato dolore transegi, et in me conversum est, quidquid timebamus omnibus. atque utinam hic consummatum sit, ut dolor meus publici doloris redemptio sit!* Cf. §1.5. See McLynn 74.

purely logistical. Gratian's appointment of Theodosius to succeed Valens was the most important. Contemporary rhetoric propagated the notion that Theodosius had been chosen specifically to rescue the desperate situation with the Goths.[25] Also logistical was Gratian's decision to reassign the dioceses of Illyricum and Macedonia to the eastern court so as to assist Balkan military operations and increase eastern conscription.[26] Gratian and Theodosius quickly undertook military campaigns that occupied both the eastern and western armies for the following three years. For these, recruitment was essential; it thus comes as no surprise that the three years after Adrianople witnessed the highest concentration of recruiting laws in the Theodosian Code.[27] Another series of laws punished the many soldiers who had deserted during the Gothic revolt and its aftermath.[28] Several laws were also issued to ease the trauma for civilians: forgiving debts for those who had lost their wealth to "some misfortune of an overwhelming force"; postponing judicial cases for anyone held back "because the public enemy has blocked his opportunity of going to court" until such time as "the enemy has been repelled"; and forbidding Constantinopolitans to dig for treasure on others' property, an obvious problem after a military defeat with high casualties.[29]

Just as important as these logistical measures were the imperial efforts to mitigate the psychological impact. These can be gauged from the nine extant orations delivered to Gratian or Theodosius in the decade after Adrianople,

[25]Theodosius' accession: Matthews 1975: 88–100. The suggestion of Sivan 121 that Theodosius' accession was forced on Gratian by a military clique is built on slender evidence. On the rhetoric of Theodosius' election: Them. *Or.* 16.207b; *Pan. Lat.* 12[2].11.4–12.1.

[26]On the redistribution of dioceses, a vexed question: Grumel 8–14; Vera 392–93.

[27]*Cod. Theod.* 7.13.8 (Jan. 29, 380); 9 (Apr. 26, 380) on "replacement troops for the legions" (*supplementa numeris*); 10 (Sep. 5, 381); 11 (May 15, 382); 7.22.9 (May 14, 380); 10 (July 8, 380); *Cod. Just.* 12.47.2 (Sep. 9, 380?). Cf. Them. *Or.* 14.181b; Hoffmann 460–68.

[28]*Cod. Theod.* 7.18.2 (July 2–5, 379); 3 (Apr. 29, 380); 4 (July 15, 380); 5 (Jan. 16, 381); 6 (Apr. 2, 382); 7 (July 12, 383). On deserters during the Gothic revolt: Amm. Marc. 31.15.4; 16.1; Basil *Ep.* 268.

[29]Debts: *Cod. Theod.* 4.20.1 (Oct. 14, 379): *nisi forte propriorum dilapidationem bonorum aut latrociniis abrogatam aut fortasse naufragiis incendioque conflatam vel quolibet maioris inpetus infortunio atque dispendio docuerit adflictam*; *Cod. Theod.* 11.31.7 (Dec. 3, 379): *si possessor...instaurationem non potuerit postulare ob id, quod copiam ad iudicia veniedi hostis obsaepserat, iuris beneficium eiusmodi occasione non perdat sitque depulsis perduellionibus haec prima litium rerumque reparatio*. Treasure: *Cod. Theod.* 10.18.2 (Jan. 26, 380): *nec tamen per hanc licentiam quisquam aut aliena effodiat aut in locis non sui iuris per famam suspecta rimetur*. Gratian's "law of toleration" (Soc. *HE* 5.2.1; Soz. *HE* 7.1.3; Theod. *HE* 5.2.1 [ed. Parmentier, *GCS*]) granting freedom of worship to most sects was probably also a legislative convenience in the face of more pressing problems.

eight of which make some reference to the battle or its consequences.[30] We must of course be careful not to assume that the orators who delivered these speeches were acting merely as mouthpieces for imperial propaganda. Each was his own agent, yet each was also obliged to offer a presentation in keeping with the emperor's conception of the events and circumstances at hand.[31] The rhetoric of these orations thus offers a filtered, but still clear, impression of the picture of Gothic affairs that the emperors wanted their subjects to form. As readers, we must not discount the rhetorical strategies employed by the panegyrists as simple efforts to gain favor with the ruler. Rather, the panegyrics should be thought of as a sort of ceremonialized "press release" that both shaped and was shaped by the larger current of public opinion.

Not surprisingly, the year following the disaster witnessed efforts to dampen the hysteria of chaos with a salutary dose of optimism. In a speech delivered to Theodosius in early 379, before his first engagement with the Goths, Themistius was already predicting "the beginnings of reinvigoration" and the return of "courage to the cavalry and infantry."[32] He argued:

> εἰ γὰρ οὔπω πρὸς τοὺς ἀλιτηρίους παραταξάμενος τῷ πλησίον αὐλίζεσθαι μόνον καὶ ἐφορμεῖν ἐνέκοψας αὐτῶν τὴν αὐθάδειαν, τί παθεῖν εἰκὸς τοὺς κάκιστα ἀπολουμένους, ὅταν ἴδωσι πάλλοντα τὸ δόρυ καὶ τὴν ἀσπίδα νωμῶντα καὶ τῆς κόρυθος τὴν ἀστραπὴν ἐγγύθι λαμπομένην;
>
> If you have already cut down their impudence before you ranged against these criminals simply by setting up camp near them and waiting at bay, what are these utter scoundrels likely to feel when they see you brandishing spear and wielding sword and the gleam of your helmet flashing nearby? (*Or.* 14.181c)

To listen to Themistius one would conclude that victory was at hand, even if the fighting had yet to begin. Across the empire in Trier, Ausonius offered similar rhetoric during his consular *Gratiarum actio* to Gratian in 379. He called "the Rhine and Danube border, brought to peace in one year" as witnesses to

[30]Auson. *Gratiarum Actio*; Them. *Or.* 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 34; *Pan. Lat.* 12[2]. Them. *Or.* 17 makes no mention of the Gothic troubles.

[31]Nixon and Rodgers 26–33; MacCormack 146, 154, 159–66.

[32]Them. *Or.* 14.181a: καὶ δῆτα ἥκω συνεορτάσων τὰ προοίμια τῆς παλιρροίας; 181b ἀλλὰ νῦν ἐπανήκει μὲν τοῖς ἱππεῦσιν, ἐπανήκει δὲ τοῖς ὁπλίταις τὰ φρονήματα. My interpretation of Themistius' rhetoric on the Goths owes much to Heather 1991: 166–75. For the speeches of Themistius that follow: Straub 1943: 263–72; Pavan 6–41; Dagron 1968: 103–12; Daly; Vanderspoel 187–216.

the emperor's *fortitudo*.[33] While Gratian had enjoyed success on the Rhine in early 378, his activity on the Danube later that year could hardly be said to have pacified the territory. Before March of the following year, Ambrose joined in predicting victory for Gratian in the proem to his *De fide*: "Therefore you too prepare for victory, you who beseech Christ, you prepare for victory, who champion the faith."[34] Thus, in the year after Adrianople, the reaction of those addressing the emperor was consistent. All tended to gloss over the disaster in favor of optimistic predictions about the successes that would undoubtedly follow.

As if to fulfill these expectations, Gratian and Theodosius officially declared triumphs "against Goths, Alans and Huns" by November 379, although their successes that year were hardly decisive.[35] Again in 380, Theodosius staged a triumphal entry into Constantinople despite ongoing military difficulties.[36] Indeed, in the decade after Adrianople, the psychological need of ruler and ruled for military success led to an unprecedented proliferation of victory celebrations in both east and west. In the ten years between 379 and 389, M. McCormick has observed (41–46), we know of six such celebrations, as compared with only twelve for the seventy years preceding (306–78). This disproportion cannot be attributed to an increase in military activity, let alone to success. Rather, the emperors felt the need to glorify publicly their military achievements in order to counteract the ill effects of the Adrianople catastrophe.

Exemplary among these staged events was the triumphal celebration offered by Theodosius for the submission of the Gothic chieftain Athanaric and

[33]*Gratiarum Actio* 2.7 (ed. Green, Oxford): *testis est uno pacatus anno et Danuvii limes et Rheni*; cf. 11.52. On the context of the oration: Green 537–38; Sivan 119–23. See also *Precatio consulis designati* lines 20–35, esp. 29–34: *hostibus edomitis, qua Francia mixta Suebis / certat ad obsequium Latiis ut militet armis, / qua vaga Sauromates sibi iunxerat agmina Chuni, / quaque Getes sociis Histrum assultabat Alanis / (hoc mihi praepetibus Victoria nuntiat alis), / iam venit Augustus, nostros ut comat honores, / officio exornans quos participare cupisset*, together with Green 535–36.

[34]Ambrose *De fide* 1 praef. 3: *ergo et tu vincere paras, qui Christum adoras, vincere paras, qui fidem vindicas*; cf. 2.136 *neque vero te, imperator, pluribus tenere debeo bello intentum et victricia de barbaris tropaea meditantem...progredere ad victoriam superioribus promissa temporibus et divinis oraculis profetatam*; 2.142–43. On the date of the *De fide* see McLynn 102 n. 90; 104 n. 94. Contrast Williams 129 n. 8.

[35]*Cons. Const.* s.a. 379. Symmachus himself read the announcement to the Roman Senate: *Ep.* 1.95 (*MGH.AA* 6.38).

[36]Zos. 4.33.1; McCormick 42 n. 30. Cf. Greg. Naz. *De vita sua* lines 1278–81 (ed. Jungck, Winter Verlag) for contemporary claims that Theodosius' entry into Constantinople represented an end to barbarian troubles. Burns 1994: 43–91 offers a more sanguine but less reliable version of Theodosius' military successes.

his entry into Constantinople in 381.[37] After the Hun invasions had split Athanaric's Tervingi confederation and driven most of his people to other leaders, his power had dwindled. His surrender to Theodosius apparently had little impact on the Goths who had revolted in 376 and who continued their rebellion in Thrace for the next year and a half. Nevertheless, in an address to Theodosius on the occasion of his *dies imperii* (January 19), Themistius praised the emperor's achievement:

> ὥστε καὶ τῶν πολεμίων ὁ τέως τὰς σπονδὰς ὑφορώμενος καὶ μηδὲ τραπέζης ῥᾳδίως κοινωνῆσαι θαρρήσας δι' ὑποψίαν νῦν πρόσεισιν ἄνοπλος καὶ ἄνευ σιδήρου, διδοὺς ἑαυτὸν χρῆσθαι ὅ τι ἂν ἐθέλῃς...τοιγαροῦν ὧν τοῖς ὅπλοις οὐκ ἐκρατήσαμεν, τούτους τῇ σῇ πίστει προσηγαγόμεθα αὐτοκλήτους, καὶ ὥσπερ ἡ μαγνῆτις λίθος ἡσυχῇ ἐφέλκεται τὰ σιδήρια, οὕτω καὶ αὐτὸς ἀκονιτὶ ἐφειλκύσω τὸν Γέτην δυνάστην.
>
> So that even this enemy, who formerly feared treaties and risked not to share our table through suspicion, processes unarmed and without sword, surrendering himself to whatever treatment you might choose...for those whom we could not conquer with weapons, we have brought over of their own accord through your trust; and just as the magnetic stone quietly attracts iron objects, so too you have attracted this Gothic ruler to yourself without struggle.[38]

Despite this fortuitous event, Themistius indicates that concerns had hardly vanished. He describes Gratian and Theodosius as twin helmsmen presiding over a ship of state that had seen tremendous storms. He credits their knowledge of statecraft, especially considering:

> πηλίκη ἡ ναῦς, ἣν κυβερνᾶτον, καὶ ὁπόσοι οἱ ἐν τῇ νηὶ ταύτῃ ἐμπλέοντες καὶ ὁπηλίκαι τῷ σκάφει ἐπικρέμανται καταιγίδες. ὕπνου οὖν οὔπω καιρὸς οὐδὲ ῥᾳστώνης οὐδὲ ᾠδῆς οὐδὲ κρατήρων.

[37]Hydatius *Chron.* s.a. 381 (ed. Burgess, Oxford); Zos. 4.34.4–5; Jord. *Get.* 141 (ed. Giunta and Grillone, *Fonti per la storia d'Italia* 117); Oros. *Adv. pag.* 7.34.6–7 (ed. Zangemeister, Teubner); Heather 1991: 154.

[38]*Or.* 15.190c–d. Ambrose played up the same event for the benefit of Gratian, *De spiritu sancto* 1 praef. 17 (*CSEL* 79: quoted below p. XX); cf. Williams 166–67.

> How great is the ship that they steer, how many those who sail on it and how large the swells which threaten the boat. For it is not yet time for rest nor ease of spirit nor song and drinking.[39]

Thus, even as Themistius praises Theodosius for allowing Rome's persuasiveness to win out over barbarian disobedience (§ 197b), he makes clear that complete success remained to be achieved. This leads him to close with a Homeric rallying cry to further victory:

> θηξάσθω μὲν καὶ τὸ δόρυ εὖ, θηξάσθω δὲ πρὸ τοῦ δόρατος τὸν θυμόν, καὶ θέσθω μὲν εὖ τὴν ἀσπίδα, θέσθω δὲ πρὸ τῆς ἀσπίδος τὴν εὐψυχίαν, καὶ ταῦτα παραγγέλλων καὶ παρεγγυῶν, 'ἐξελάσεις ἐνθένδε κύνας κηρεσσιφορήτους / οὓς κῆρες φορέουσι,' καὶ οἴσουσ' ἐπὶ τὸν Ἴστρον, 'Ὄφρα τις ἐρρίγῃσι καὶ ὀψιγόνων ἀνθρώπων / ξεινοδόχον κακὰ ῥέξαι, ὅ κεν φιλότητα παράσχῃ.'
>
> Sharpen well your spear, but sharpen your courage before it and gird on your shield well, but gird on your valor before it, while you proclaim and harangue: "You will drive out these fate-driven dogs whom the fates are bearing off" and will carry to the Danube "so that mortals of future generations will shrink from doing wrong to their host who has shown them friendship."[40]

When Themistius delivered *Oration* 15, two years had passed without Theodosius' enjoying decisive revenge for Adrianople. In the face of this frustration, Themistius' rhetoric resonates with contrasting strains: the disaster had yet to be overcome, but full victory could still be expected. Even so, by emphasizing the role of peaceful persuasion in effecting the "triumph" over Athanaric, Themistius could offer Theodosius the opportunity to proclaim an eventual victory even without a defeat of the Goths on the battlefield.

Two years later, Theodosius took advantage of Themistius' rhetorical loophole. In 382 a treaty was struck under which the Goths were granted the

[39] *Or.* 15.195b. Themistius' "ship of state" image fits remarkably well with the unusual reverse type (Emperor standing left on ship raising right hand) minted on GLORIA RO–MANORUM issues in the east from 379 on: Pearce 183 n. 44; 194 n. 11; 225–26 n. 52; 242 n. 14; 256–57 n. 25; 283 n. 40; 299–300 n. 6.

[40] *Or.* 15.199a. Quotations from *Il.* 8.527–28 and 3.353–54. The last quotation makes Themistius the first in a series of sources to attack the Goths for their ungrateful treatment of their Roman hosts: Eun. fr. 42 Blockley; Zos. 4.20.7; Soc. *HE* 4.35; Soz. *HE* 6.37; and especially Syn. *De regno* 21 (ed. Terzaghi, *Scriptores Graeci et Latini Lyncaeorum*), who quotes the same tag (*Il.* 8.527) as Themistius. Note also Themistius' references to the Goths as ἀλιτήριοι: *Or.* 14.181c; 15.185c.

key demands they had posed already on the eve of Adrianople: land for settlement in Thrace and a relative degree of political autonomy.[41] Despite five years of fighting, Theodosius had been unable to force concessions; he was compelled to accept a Gothic protectorate within Roman territory. Early the following year, Themistius once again offered his spin on the situation. Here at last, protected by the recent treaty and obliged to account for the uncomfortable compromise it represented, Themistius was able to concede the scope of the catastrophe:

> μετὰ γὰρ τὴν ἀδιήγητον τῶν ἐπὶ Ἴστρῳ κακῶν Ἰλιάδα καὶ τῆς ἀτόπου φλογὸς τὴν ἐπιδρομήν, οὔπω βασιλέως Ῥωμαίων πράγμασιν ἐφεστηκότος, ἀνηρπασμένων μὲν Θρᾳκῶν, ἀνηρπασμένων δὲ Ἰλλυριῶν, στρατοπέδων δὲ ὁλοκλήρων ἀφανισθέντων ὥσπερ σκιᾶς, οὐκ ἀντισχόντων δὲ οὐκ ὀρῶν ἀδιαβάτων, οὐ ποταμῶν ἀπεράτων, οὐ δυσχωριῶν ἀδιοδεύτων, ἀλλὰ καὶ συνελθούσης ἐπὶ τοὺς βαρβάρους τὰ τελευταῖα σχεδὸν ἁπάσης γῆς καὶ θαλάττης...τούτων ἁπάντων αὐτοὺς περιστάντων τότε ἄριστα πράττειν ἐδόξαμεν ὅτε μηδὲν προσπεπόνθαμεν χαλεπώτερον.
>
> After the indescribable Iliad of disasters on the Danube and the attack of the uncanny flame[42], no emperor had yet been placed over the Roman government; Thrace and Illyricum were overrun and armies disappeared entirely like a shadow; uncrossable mountains could not hold out nor unfordable rivers nor impassable wastes; but ultimately, almost the whole land and sea had come together against the barbarians...[and] with all these surrounding them, we considered that we had done well then since we had not suffered anything worse. (*Or.* 16.206d–207a)

It had become necessary to magnify rather than minimize the effects of Adrianople. Because Theodosius had failed to achieve a decisive victory and because the concessions he offered in 382 reflected this military stalemate, Themistius chose to paint the disaster as especially grim and intractable. As the oration continues, we learn that Theodosius faced this situation by recognizing that the only strengths left to the Romans were not weaponry and force but wisdom and persuasion.[43] Because he understood this, Theodosius was able to achieve a peace without achieving a military victory (208d–209a) in such a way

[41] On the treaty of 382, see now Heather 1991: 158–65. Burns 1994: 73–91 should be treated with caution.

[42] On this image see below n. 69.

[43] Them. *Or.* 16.207b–c; 208b; cf. *Or.* 18.219b; 19.229b–c; 34.20; 22; see Daly 364–65.

that the Goths could now join the Romans in celebrating this triumph over themselves.[44] While a total victory was within Theodosius' power, the emperor believed it better to fill Thrace with Gothic farmers than with corpses. The last statement epitomizes Themistius' rhetorical recasting of the compromise and was echoed the following year in *Oration* 34.[45]

The tone of *Oration* 18 and its reference to Adrianople make it clear that official attitudes had changed. By now the empire had stumbled its way clear of the defeat, and, in retrospect, the shadow of Adrianople loomed larger than imperial rhetoric had earlier conceded. It had come to represent a battle on an epic scale, an "Iliad of disasters" and, as we shall see, a defeat to be compared with the worst setbacks in Roman history (below, p. 162–63). These same ideas were echoed in 389 in Pacatus' panegyric to Theodosius, delivered shortly after the emperor's defeat of the usurper Magnus Maximus. This panegyric also plays up the miserable state of the empire when Theodosius arrived. At one point Pacatus even assumes the persona of *Roma,* who begs Theodosius to take up the empire lest the barbarians pillage further the legacy of his son (*Pan. Lat.* 12[2].11.4). Because the Goths had recently participated in Theodosius' campaign as federates, Pacatus also returns to Themistius' theme of newfound allies: "[they] marched under Roman leaders and banners, the one-time enemies of Rome, and followed standards which they had once opposed."[46] Nevertheless, from the beginning of the speech, we are made aware that this peace had been laid down over a wound that remained remarkably painful. In reference to the situation after Adrianople, Pacatus writes:

> The State was lying grievously afflicted, or I should say, rendered lifeless, by innumerable ills and barbarian peoples had flowed over Roman territory like a flood. But I shall refrain from going over the causes and irritating a sore that has been assuaged. For not only is

[44]Them. *Or.* 16.210d: συμπανηγυρίζουσιν ἡμῖν τὴν τοῦ στρατηγοῦ πανήγυριν, ὑφ' οὗ καλῶς ποιοῦντες ἑάλωσαν, καὶ συνεορτάζουσι τὰ καθ' ἑαυτῶν ἐπινίκια. Cf. *Or.* 34.24: Σκύθας ὁμωροφίους ἡμῶν καὶ ὁμοσπόνδους καὶ συνεορτάζοντας τὰ καθ' ἑαυτῶν ἐπινίκια.

[45]Them. *Or.* 16.211a πότερον οὖν βέλτιον νεκρῶν ἐμπλῆσαι τὴν θράκην ἢ γεωργῶν; *Or.* 34.22 οὐ γὰρ ἀνῄρηκας τοὺς ἀδικήσαντας, ἀλλ' ἐκτήσω, οὐδ' ἐζημίωσας γῆν, ἀλλὰ προσείληφας τοὺς γεωργήσοντας...εἴτε γεωργοῖς αὐτοῖς ἐθέλει χρῆσθαι βασιλεὺς εἴτε στρατώταις. Cf. Daly 372–4; Vanderspoel 207. Lib. *Or.* 19.16 (a. 387) has similar rhetoric.

[46]*Pan. Lat.* 12[2].32.3–5 at 4; cf. §22.3. On Pacatus' *Panegyric* see the translation (cited here and throughout) and commentary of Nixon and Rodgers 437–519. On this passage: Straub 1943: 273.

> the recollection of calamities vivid in itself, but in addition, I am afraid of darkening the brightness of this present joy by recalling sad events. I shall therefore do what I have often seen done by doctors eminent in their profession: I shall touch with a light hand the scars of deep wounds after they have drawn the skin together to heal them. (*Pan. Lat.* 12[2].3.3–5 trans. Nixon)

A decade after the disaster, the pain of Adrianople remained. Despite the peace that had prevailed for six years and the willingness of the Goths to fulfill their treaty obligations by providing troops, Adrianople gnawed at the Roman psyche.

The fullness of extant material addressed to the emperors in the aftermath of Adrianople allows us a perception of the changing attitudes adopted as the years passed and distance was gained. From these speeches we learn that imperial rhetoric portrayed the battle in increasingly grim terms. Where the immediate aftermath had witnessed confident predictions about the prospects for victory, these soon softened to hopeful imprecations and eventually to doleful recollections of a disaster that could neither be forgotten nor fully overcome. In 382, Themistius began using the scale of the catastrophe to excuse concessions made to the Goths. By 389, when the Gothic peace was even functioning to Rome's benefit, Pacatus still compared it to a barely healed wound. Thus, within a decade, Adrianople had come to be regarded as a canonical disaster among the highest circles of power; the effects of this presentation must have filtered to lower levels as well.

III. Blame and Condemnation

Those less closely connected with the emperor enjoyed greater freedom to express their shock in a fashion uncolored by the need to palliate public opinion. The most obvious reaction was blame. In *Oration* 24, Libanius reports the first question he asked himself on learning of the disaster, "Was I to blame in this?" His answer was "no"; nor, he claims, did he follow his contemporaries in blaming the army:

> Some people accuse our generals, others their men, the ones asserting that the generals have not properly trained the men under their command, the others that the men are naturally cowards. I however cannot bring myself to say this, in view of the many battles they have fought and the way they have died in their ranks and have stained with their blood Thrace, much of Macedonia and the greater part of Illyricum. (*Or.* 24.3)

Elsewhere Libanius has no trouble lambasting the army and its generals (Lib. *Or.* 2.37–40; 45), but in this oration of 379, his object was different. He hoped to prove that the mysterious disasters recently suffered by the empire, chief among them Adrianople, had been caused by nothing less than the emperors' failure to avenge the murder of Julian.

This rhetorical strategy notwithstanding, Libanius' statement is most interesting because of the impression it offers of the more typical response. Already in early 379, Ausonius reported that Gratian had avenged his uncle of the *contumelia belli*.[47] Carping at Valens' performance had thus begun early. Within two years, it had become a part of the imperial rhetoric in the east as well. In *Oration* 15 of 381, Themistius reminded Theodosius of the need for attention to justice, something Valens had often neglected. Fortunately Theodosius understood that:

> ...οὐδέ ἐστιν ἀποφυγὴ οὐδεμία βασιλεῖ ἀμελοῦντι τῆς δίκης, οὐκ εἰς δειλίαν στρατιωτῶν, οὐκ εἰς ῥᾳθυμίαν στρατηγῶν.
>
> ...there is no refuge for the emperor who cares not for justice, not in the cowardice of his soldiers, nor in the indifference of his generals.[48]

The comment is at once a swipe at Valens, his army, and his generals. One year earlier, John Chrysostom had put a similar criticism in the mouth of one of the Gothic kings, a man reportedly "shocked at the impudence of our troops, who, though they had been slaughtered more easily than sheep, still expected to win."[49]

The criticism of army and generals reported in Libanius is further confirmed by close reading of contemporary historians. From Ammianus and Eunapius/Zosimus it emerges that criticism extended even to specific commanders who were blamed for their role in the disaster. We know this from their efforts to defend those whom they felt were unfairly maligned. Chief

[47]*Gratiarum Actio* 2.7: *a contumelia belli patruus vindicatus*; cf. 10.48.

[48]Them. *Or.* 15.189d. Amm. Marc. 31.13.9 confirms that the generals Victor, Saturninus and Richomer eventually deserted Valens on the battlefield. Confirmation that Themistius questioned Valens' sense of justice can be found at Soc. *HE* 4.32.1–5; Soz. *HE* 6.36.6–7; cf. Vanderspoel 176–79; 185. Valens' performance in 378 is also impugned at *Epit. de Caes.* 48.5 (ed. Pichlmayr, Teubner).

[49]*Ad vid. iun.* 4: καί τινα τῶν παρ' ἐκείνοις βασιλέων φασὶν εἰπεῖν ὅτι τῆς ἀναισχυντίας ἐκπλήττοιτο τοὺς ἡμετέρους στρατιώτας, οἳ μᾶλλον προβάτων κατασφαττόμενοι προσδοκῶσιν ἔτι νικᾷν.

among the issues at stake was which general had pushed Valens toward the crucial error of engaging the Goths in open battle before the arrival of western reinforcements. The historians are entirely at odds on this point. Ammianus reports that Sebastianus and his supporters pressed for immediate action while Victor counseled caution (31.12.6). Zosimus, whose source was the contemporary Eunapius, contradicts this with the notice that Sebastianus insisted that Valens wait out the Goths but was overruled by opponents (4.23.6–24.1). The fragments of Eunapius give further confirmation that he was at pains to defend the character of Sebastianus (Fr. 44.2–4 Blockley). While some have tried to sort through the contradiction,[50] it seems safer to conclude that supporters of both generals pointed the finger. Thus, we cannot know with whom the blame lies, though we can be sure that blame there was. Nor did it stop with the war council of August 9. Ammianus makes a plea for another commander who was criticized for his performance prior to Adrianople. He offers a defense of Frigeridus, whose excessive caution before the battle was interpreted by *obtrectatores malevoli* as cowardly negligence (31.7.5; 9.1; 10.21). Theodoret reports that Traianus too was criticized for failing to stop the Goths at the battle of Ad Salices in 377. By his account, Valens himself lashed out at Traianus' μαλακία καὶ δειλία.[51] Contemporaries thus took aim at army officers for their role in the fateful events of 378.

Reading on in Libanius' *Oration* 24, we come across another passage that gains interest for what it reveals about contemporary attitudes opposed to Libanius' own:

> Let there be no talk of cowardice, weakness (δειλίαν ἢ μαλακίαν) or lack of training. Let the barbarian victory not be imputed to this. The nature of the soldiers and their officers was like that of their forebears and they were no whit inferior to them in skill and training. Their love of glory was such that they fought heat and thirst, fire and sword, and preferred death to flight.[52]

Libanius' defense answers those who contrasted the weakness of the contemporary army with the Roman valor of yesteryear. This atavistic

[50] Wanke 199–201 with full bibliography on the debate.

[51] *HE* 4.33.2; cf. 34.1. Amm. Marc. 31.7.1 also criticizes Traianus, along with Profuturus, as *imbelles*.

[52] *Or.* 24.5. Cf. Greg. Naz. *Or.* 22.2 (*SC* 270): οὐ δι' ἀνανδρίαν τῶν προμαχομένων—κατηγορείτω μηδείς· οὗτοι γάρ εἰσιν οἱ μικροῦ πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην παραστησάμενοι—ἀλλὰ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν κακίαν.

admiration for bygone military might is well attested in another contemporary document, Vegetius' *De re militari*.[53] Vegetius provides the emperor, apparently Theodosius, with a blueprint for reviving an army that had grown weak through the "neglect of his predecessors."[54] His recommendations are both tactical and strategic. In the tactical arena, he often counsels how to avoid errors that correspond to those made at Adrianople: always know the strength of enemy forces—Valens grossly underestimated; avoid employing untrained recruits—Valens enlisted new men shortly before the battle; avoid engaging in open battle when raids are possible—Valens rejected similar advice; avoid marching troops too far to battle and fighting in unfavorable conditions—Valens did both on August 9.[55] Vegetius thus seems to respond directly to tactical errors alleged to have been committed by Valens and his commanders. More importantly, he calls for an overhaul of recruitment, with an emphasis on rebuilding the army of Rome's glorious past. Above all, he demands that the emperor rely on native Romans and avoid foreign recruits (*De re mil.* Book 1 *passim*; 2.3; 18). Here his criticism must be aimed both at Valens, who had welcomed the Goths in hopes of boosting recruitment, and Theodosius, who institutionalized the employment of Gothic troops under the treaty of 382. The Roman army had been using barbarian auxiliaries for centuries, but criticism appears to begin here, precisely when barbarians began assuming a dangerous degree of autonomy. Writing in 398, Synesius echoes the same sentiments in reference to Theodosius' use of Gothic soldiers. Like Vegetius, he shares the conviction that only a return to the habits of the past, particularly the exclusive recruitment of natives, could restore the effete army of the present.[56] The criticisms of military weakness alluded to already in Libanius' speech of 379 are thus borne out by later contemporaries.

[53]Here I follow the growing consensus that the *De re militari* was written for Theodosius. Goffart, expanding on Seeck 1876, recently argued for a date in the reign of Valentinian III, but Barnes 1979 and Sabbah have successfully defended the Theodosian date. For the most recent discussion with bibliography, see Milner xxv–xxix. Note especially the possible reference to Adrianople at 3.11 with Milner 87 n. 4 and mention of the barbarian tribes implicated at 1.20.

[54]Veg. *De re mil.* 2.3 (ed. Lang, Teubner): *et fortissima dispositio reparetur armorum et emendetur dissimulatio praecedentum.*

[55]Know enemy strength: Veg. *De re mil.* 3.9; 3.26; contrast Amm. Marc. 31.12.3. Untrained recruits: Veg. *De re mil.* 3.10; ctr. Amm. Marc. 31.11.1; Eun. fr. 44.1 Blockley. Avoid open battle: Veg. *De re mil.* 3.3; 9; 10; 26; ctr. Amm. Marc. 31.12.3–7; Zos. 4.24.1. Avoid marching troops: Veg. *De re mil.* 3.11; ctr. Wanke 214–17.

[56]Syn. *De regno* 19–21; cf. Zos. 4.59.3; Amm. Marc. 19.11.7; 31.4.4; 16.8. Heather 1988 has demonstrated that the *De regno* refers to Theodosius' use of Gothic troops rather than the

It seems natural that the army and its commanders would come in for blame in the aftermath of so great a defeat. In the never-ending struggles over Christian orthodoxy, it was also natural to level blame at heretics. Because Homoian "Arianism" had prevailed in the eastern empire in the period when disaster struck (see Brenneke 181–242), the connection between barbarian and Arian came to be accepted widely and exploited with great effect for rhetorical and political purposes. This too began with remarkable rapidity. In a sermon delivered at Constantinople in 379, even as the Goths were ravaging nearby Thrace, Gregory of Nazianzus blamed his Homoian opponents for the arrival of the troubles:

> καὶ τὸ σύμψυχον τῷ ἑτεροδόξῳ λύσαντες, μικροῦ καὶ τῶν νῦν πολεμούντων ἥμιν βαρβάρων, οὓς ἡ Τριὰς λυομένη συνέστησεν γεγόναμεν ἀλλήλοις ἀπανθρωπότεροι καὶ θρασύτεροι.
>
> Having dissolved the spiritual concord through heterodoxy, we have practically become more inhumane and savage toward one another than are the barbarians now fighting against us, who have been assembled by the dissolution of the Trinity.[57]

This same sentiment was echoed a few months later in Ambrose's *De fide*: "The cause of this divine indignation became evident even before, since faith was first broken for the Roman empire precisely where it was broken for God." Here, Ambrose is speaking specifically about Illyricum, where, he charges, heresy had fomented the present disasters. He contrasts Illyricum with Italy, which orthodoxy had protected.[58] In 381, when the imperial rhetoric proclaimed its "triumph" over Athanaric, Ambrose returned to this theme of divine "surgical strikes" on regions infected with Arianism in the *De spiritu sancto*:

> etenim quamdiu venena Arrianorum suis fovebat inclusa visceribus, bellis finitimis inquieta 'muros armis circumsonabat' hostilibus. postea

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problems with Gainas and Tribigild. Cameron and Long 112 support Heather and offer extensive new material on the *De regno* in Ch. 4. Cf. Straub 1943: 279–81.

[57]*Or.* 33.2 (*SC* 318). I follow the punctuation at *PG* 36.216 rather than that in SC 318.158. Cf. *Or.* 22.2–3 (a. 379/81), esp. διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν κακίαν καὶ τὴν ἐπικρατοῦσαν κατὰ τῆς Τριάδος ἀσέβειαν; *Or.* 32.4 (a. 380, *SC* 318). See Bernardi 143–48; 165–68.

[58]*De fide* 2.139: *evidens enim antehac divinae indignationis causa praecessit, ut ibi primum fides Romano imperio frangeretur, ubi fracta est deo.* McLynn 104–5 notes that Ambrose's contrast was designed to push Gratian toward embracing the protective power of Nicene orthodoxy. See also Jerome *Ep.* 60.17 (a. 396): *nostris peccatis barbari fortes sunt, nostris vitiis Romanus superatur exercitus.*

> vero quam fidei exules abdicavit, hostem ipsum, iudicem regum, quem semper tremere consueverat, deditum vidit, supplicem recepit, morientem obruit, sepultum possedit.
>
> For indeed, as long as (Constantinople) nourished the poison of the Arians enclosed in its belly, disturbed by neighboring wars it resounded at the walls with enemy arms. But after it revoked the exiles of faith, it witnessed the surrender of that very enemy, the judge of chieftains (Athanaric) from whom it had been accustomed to shrink, it received him as a suppliant, buried him once dead and possesses him now buried.[59]

Ambrose thus drew a causal link between the invasions of Illyricum and Thrace and "Arianism" in these regions. Indeed, he exploited the contiguity between Arian dioceses and the invasion zone even more concretely in the real-life activity of church politics. At the Council of Aquileia in 381, Ambrose leveled this charge at specific Arian rivals in Illyricum.[60] Afterward, he even wrote to Gratian charging Julianus Valens, former Arian bishop of Poetovio (Pettau), with dressing himself in barbarian clothes and betraying his city to the barbarians. Judging by his response, Gratian seems to have accepted Ambrose's charges against the Arians of Illyricum. In the years following the *De spiritu sancto* and the Council of Aquileia, Gratian abandoned his former neutrality in ecclesiastical disputes in favor of the Nicene cause.[61]

The connection between the Gothic crisis and Arianism also came to be applied quite specifically to the fate suffered by the Homoian emperor Valens. Of course the condemnation of emperors in subsequent historiography was a standard element of Roman political invective. Striking in Valens' case, however, is the degree to which that invective focuses on Adrianople as the manifestation of divine anger over the emperor's heterodoxy. If we are to believe Theodoret, Valens was already criticized in his lifetime by Nicene generals fearful that his Arianism and persecution of Nicenes had caused the Gothic revolt in 377 (Theod. *HE* 4.33.2–3). Whether or not the association was

[59] *De spiritu sancto* I praef. 17 (*CSEL* 79). See McLynn 120–21; Meslin 13–16. Cf. similar arguments in Jerome *Comm. in Soph.* 1.2.3 (a. 392/4, *CCSL* 76a).

[60] A fragmentary passage in Palladius' *Apologia* (*Scolia in concilium Aquileiense* 59 in *Scripta Arriana Latina* I, *CCSL* 87) seems to record Palladius' attempt to refute Ambrose's association of Arianism with the invasions. See McLynn 129; Meslin 14–15. On the Council of Aquileia: McLynn 124–49; Williams 154–84.

[61] Ambrose *Ep. extra coll.* 2[10].9–11 (*CSEL* 82): *qui etiam torquem ut asseritur et brachiales impietate Gothica profanatus more indutus gentilium ausus sit in prospectum exercitus prodire Romani...is nunc Mediolani post eversionem patriae ne dicamus proditionem inequitavit.* On Gratian's shift in religious policy: Williams 166–69.

made that early, it became widespread in the aftermath of the catastrophe. Orosius summarizes the argument:

> tertio decimo anno imperii Valentis, hoc est parvo tempore postea quam Valens per totum Orientem ecclesiarum lacerationes sanctorumque caedos egerat, radix illa miseriarum nostrorum copiosissimos simul frutices germinavit.
>
> In the thirteenth year of Valens' reign, that is, shortly after Valens had forced afflictions on the churches and murders on its saints, that root of our miseries all at once bore abundant fruits. (7.33.9)

He goes on to describe the Hunnic attacks on the Goths, the subsequent Gothic attacks on the empire and the eventual demise of Valens at Adrianople. For him, the entire course of events, particularly Valens' gruesome death, occurred "so that the testament of his punishment and of divine indignation would be a more terrible example for posterity."[62] Orosius was of course writing approximately forty years after the event, but his interpretation of Valens' fate and its connection with his Arianism and persecution of Nicenes probably stretched back to the immediate aftermath of the battle.

Ambrose seems to make direct reference to Valens' death as a punishment for his persecutions. In his *De fide* (2.141–42), written for Gratian as he set off for battle against the Goths in 380, Ambrose writes:

> sed iam satis superque, omnipotens deus, nostro exitio nostroque sanguine confessorum neces, exilia sacerdotum et nefas tantae impietatis eluimus. satis claruit eos, qui violaverint fidem, tutos esse non posse...non hic infidelis aliqua regio, sed ea quae confessores mittere solet Italia...non hic in imperatore mens lubrica, sed fides fixa.
>
> But enough already, omnipotent god, have we absolved the deaths of confessors, the exiles of priests and the sin of such great impiety with our destruction and our blood. It is sufficiently clear that those who

[62]Oros. *Adv. pag.* 7.33.15: *quo magis testimonium punitionis eius et divinae indignationis terribili posteris esset exemplo*; cf. 7.33.17; 19; 35.9.17. See also Rufinus *HE* 2.13: *impietatis suae poenas igni exustus dedit*, with Thelamon 154–55; 445–46; Theod. *HE* 4.36.2: ποινὴν ἔτισεν ὑπὲρ ὧν ἐπλημμέλησεν; Jord. *Get.* 138: *haud secus quam Dei prorsus iudicio*; August. *Contra Lit. Petiliani* 2.206 (*PL* 43.327); *Narratio de imperatoribus domus Valentinianae et Theodosianae* 2 (*MGH.AA* 9.629): *poenas debitas sacrilegio...concrematus expendit*; Isidore *Hist. Goth.* 9 (*MGH.AA* 11.271); Moses Chorenatsi 3.33 (trans. Thompson, Harvard). Lact. *De mort. pers.* 4.3 (ed. Creed, Oxford) offers a similar explanation for Decius' very similar death.

> violated the faith cannot be safe...here is not some faithless region, but that Italy which is accustomed to sending confessors...here the mind of the emperor (sc. Valens) is not unstable but his (Gratian's) faith is firm.

N. McLynn has demonstrated that in this passage Ambrose stresses the connection discussed above between Arianism and the Gothic invasions in the Balkans. He has, however, gone too far in concluding that Ambrose does not allude to Valens.[63] Only with the extinction of the Valentinianic dynasty, McLynn argues, did the direct association of Valens' Arianism with the invasion of the Goths enter the sources. However, Ambrose's references to the exiles of priests and murders of confessors can only apply to the activity of an emperor, presumably Valens. Given his record, Valens could be charged with both offenses, and, indeed, both were already imputed to him in the year after Adrianople. Gregory of Nazianzus had no compunction about attacking Valens' ruthless persecutions in 379, even while his dynasty continued to rule.[64] Moreover, Ambrose's reference to an emperor of unstable mind must surely point to Valens. It was a charge with which Gratian would have been quite comfortable, given his well-documented animosity toward his uncle (Lenski 450–55). Finally, as we shall see, there is strong reason to believe that Valens' Arianism and his persecution of Nicenes came to be associated with his gruesome death almost immediately in Constantinople.

IV. Competing Prophecies

Two versions of Valens' death have survived in the historiography, one in which he simply disappeared in the heat of battle and a second in which he was wounded and fled to a fortified house where a band of Goths found him and burned him alive. Ammianus and Socrates report both accounts and indicate that contemporaries were generally informed of both.[65] Moreover, both versions are attested early in the source tradition, with the disappearance story already in Libanius' *Oration* 24 of 379 and the burning version in John Chrysostom's *Ad viduam iuniorem* and Jerome's *Chronicle*, each from 380.[66] Chrysostom's account even seems to confirm Ammianus' statement that eyewitness(es)

[63]McLynn 104–5 n. 94. The passage has been connected with Valens at Palanque 1933: 57, 498–99; Nautin 235; Gottlieb 17.

[64]Greg. Naz. *Or.* 33.4 (a. 379), cf. *Or.* 25.10–11 (a. 381, *SC* 284); 43.46 (a. 382), especially the reference in both to Valens' burning of eighty priests in a boat described at Soc. *HE* 4.16.1–6; Soz. *HE* 6.14.3–4; Theod. *HE* 4.24.1.

[65]Amm. Marc. 31.13.12–17; cf. 16.2; Soc. *HE* 4.38.8–10; cf. 5.1.1.

[66]Lib. *Or.* 24.4; John Chrys. *Ad vid. iun.* 5; Jerome *Chron.* s.a. 378 (ed. Helm, *GCS*).

reported Valens' death by fire to the citizens of Constantinople.[67] Given equally strong traditions for both versions, there is no easy way to determine which to credit. It is, however, easy to see which the sources preferred. Both pagans and Christians favor the burning story for the obvious reason that it portrayed Valens' death as a paradigm of divine punishment for the emperor's persecutions.[68] In fact, the preference for this account may even trace back to contemporary imperial propaganda. In speeches to Theodosius, Themistius regularly refers to Adrianople with the image of fire, possibly a broader reference to Gothic depredations, but more likely an allusion to the version credited by the imperial court.[69]

Two generals who survived Valens' death perhaps contributed to this preference for the burning story. Before the battle, Saturninus and Victor had acted on orders from Valens in placing under arrest a contumacious ascetic named Isaac. When he was seized, Isaac predicted that, if Valens did not reopen the Nicene churches in Constantinople and recall exiled Christians before his departure for Adrianople, he would be defeated in battle, captured by the enemy, and burned alive. The prophecy, reported most fully in the sixth century *Vita Isaaci*, is too accurate to be taken as anything but hagiographical rewriting *ex eventu*. But earlier sources confirm that Isaac foretold Valens' demise at least in general terms.[70] In one version of the *Vita* based on an earlier source, we learn that when the Constantinopolitans reported Valens' death to Isaac, he confidently shrugged that he had already smelled the scent of Valens' bones for

[67]John Chrys. *Ad vid. iun.* 5: καὶ ταύτην οἱ μετὰ τοῦ βασιλέως ἀπελθόντες εἰς πόλεμον ἀντὶ τοῦ βασιλέως ἐπανῆλθον τῇ γυναικὶ φέροντες τὴν φωνήν. Cf. Amm. Marc. 31.13.16: *unde quidam de candidatis per fenestram lapsus captusque a barbaris, prodidit factum...is ipse iuvenis, occulte postea reversus ad nostros, haec ita accidisse narravit.*

[68]Pagan: *Epit. de Caes.* 46.2; Zos. 4.24.2; cf. Claud. *Bell. Goth.* l. 610. Christian: Soz. *HE* 6.40.3–5; Philost. *HE* 9.17 (ed. Bidez and Winkelmann, *GCS*); John Chrys. *In Epist. ad Philip. IV Hom. 15.5* (*PG* 62.295) and further sources at n. 62 above. As late as in the sixth century, Evagrius *HE* 3.41 concedes that Valens alone of the Christian emperors since Constantine had suffered a horrible fate for his persecution of Christians.

[69]Them. *Or.* 14.181b: σβέσειν τὴν νεμομένην τὰ πάντα πυρκαϊάν; *Or.* 16.206d: τῆς ἀτόπου φλογὸς τὴν ἐπιδρομήν; *Or.* 18.219b: ὥστε τὴν φλόγα σβέσαι τὴν Σκυθικήν...ἡ φλὸξ ἐκείνη ἀπεμαράνθη; *Or.* 34.22: οἱ πῦρ πνέοντες. Cf. Lib. *Or.* 47.35: στήσαντα δὲ Σκυθικὴν φλόγα.

[70]*Vita Isaaci* 7–8 (*AASS* 6.603–4); cf. the Latin translation of a shorter redaction at *AASS* 6.611. The story is found already in the fifth-century ecclesiastical historians: Soz. *HE* 6.40.1; Theod. *HE* 4.34.1–3. Sozomen reports a vaguer prophecy: ἀλλ' οὐχ ὑποστρέψεις μὴ ἀποδιδοὺς τὰς ἐκκλησίας.

seven days.[71] The success of Isaac's prophecy, however detailed, eventually led to considerable fame. The generals Saturninus and Victor, who had witnessed the prediction, reported it to Theodosius and secured the release of Isaac from captivity.[72] Soon these two vied with one another to create a suitable hermitage for Isaac outside the city. The land donated for this foundation by Saturninus, outside the Xerolophos gate in the eastern part of the Psamatheia, became the site of Constantinople's first Orthodox monastery.[73] Thus, erected shortly after Adrianople, a visible reminder appeared on the outskirts of the capital that confirmed not only the accurate prediction of Valens' death but also the proper identification of its cause, the persecution of Nicenes. In this context, Ambrose's early allusion to Valens' death as a divine punishment seems entirely plausible.

Isaac and his Christian followers were not the only ones to claim the glory of having predicted Valens' demise. The pagan philosopher Maximus, whom Valens also persecuted and eventually executed in 372, was said to have foretold that Valens would "die a strange death and not be given the honor of a tomb."[74] Ammianus reports a number of portents that prophets and augurs correctly interpreted as indications of the same event. *Portenta* are a typical feature of Ammianus' historiographical technique, indeed of all Roman historiography.[75] But those foreshadowing Valens' death are noteworthy for including a particularly elaborate prophecy recorded in hexameters on a stone recovered from the walls of Chalcedon.[76] Valens had ordered the destruction of these walls after the city turned against him during the usurpation attempt of Procopius in 365. One can easily imagine that a citizen of Chalcedon planted

[71]Halkin 77: ἑπτὰ ἡμέραι διῆλθον μετὰ τὸ πληρωθῆναί με τῆς τῶν ὀστέων αὐτοῦ ὁσμῆς.

[72]*Vita Isaaci* 10 (*AASS* 6.605); cf. 15 (*AASS* 6.609) and the Latin (*AASS* 6.611–12). The Greek life even reports that they won for Isaac an audience with Theodosius.

[73]*Vita Isaaci* 14, 16 (*AASS* 6.608, 609) and the Latin (*AASS* 6.612). On the site of the monastery see Janin 3.82–84. On the origins of monasticism in Constantinople: Dagron 1970, esp. 232–33 on Isaac. Dagron demonstrates that Macedonian ascetics had already been living in the city since the reign of Constantius.

[74]Eun. *VS* 7.6.4 (ed. Giangrande, *Scriptores Graeci et Latini Lyncaeorum*): ὁ βασιλεὺς ξένον τινὰ ἀναφθήρσεται τρόπον, οὐδὲ ταφῆς ἀξιωθείς, οὐδὲ ἐνδόξου τάφου. Cf. 7.6.8–9: κἀκεῖνο μὲν εἶχεν ἡ μαντεία τέλος, ἀπέβαινε δὲ καὶ τὰ λειπόμενα. ὅ τε γὰρ βασιλεὺς ἐν μεγάλῃ τῶν Σκυθῶν μάχῃ ξένον τινὰ ἠφανίσθη τρόπον, ὥστε οὐδὲ ὀστέον εἰς ἀναίρεσιν εὑρέθη.

[75]For Ammianus' portents: Enßlin 83–96. For portents in Roman historiography: Krause.

[76]Amm. Marc. 31.1.1–5; cf. Soc. *HE* 4.8.1–9; Zonaras 13.16.37–46; Cedrenos 1.548. See now Wiebe 62–67.

the stone as a curse tablet to be discovered when Valens' order was implemented. But, as with Isaac's prophecy, the Chalcedon verses are so detailed that they arouse suspicion of embellishment *ex eventu*. Even so, their sophistication reveals that they were of particular significance to pagan intellectuals. Another prophecy reported in Ammianus seems more credible in its vagueness, a vagueness that could be lent precise confirmation after the fact. When Valens prosecuted a circle of pagans charged with inquiring into his successor,[77] they read in court three verses predicting his demise at the hands of Ares "raging on the plain of Mimas." After the battle of Adrianople, a funeral inscription was produced from near the site where Valens was said to have fallen. It recorded the death of a distinguished man of ancient times named Mimas.[78] Here again, our suspicion of forgery or at least a liberal interpretation of battle topography draws into question the claim to foreknowledge. Yet the prophecies reported by Ammianus must indicate that pagans, like Christians, believed they had foretold the disaster. Both sides defended their claims with outward signs—the Chalcedon inscription, the Mimas stone and the hermitage of Isaac—and both recorded their uncanny foreknowledge in the subsequent historiographical tradition. These claims offered the consolation that, if not prevented, Adrianople had at least been foreseen. As such, both competing religious ideologies could coopt the disaster in order to verify the validity of their prophetic traditions.

V. Eschatology and Imperial Decline

Very quickly, both pagans and Christians also made every effort to exploit the disaster as evidence of their own versions of divine providence. We have seen that Libanius used Adrianople in *Oration* 24 as evidence that the gods were angry over the unavenged death of Julian. Once vengeance was had, Libanius claimed, the troubles would cease (*Or.* 24.16, 30, 40). Thus the sentiment one year after the battle. Increasingly, however, pagans came to blame a broader range of afflictions on the imperial neglect of their interests and Adrianople became a keystone in their arguments. In the decade and a half following the battle, Gratian refused to accept the title *Pontifex Maximus*, Valentinian II decided to end state support for the cults of Rome, and Theodosius tolerated a wide range of persecutions aimed at polytheists. Faced with this increase in

[77]Wiebe 86–168; Matthews 1989: 219–25; Potter 179–82.

[78]Amm. Marc. 29.1.33; 31.14.8–9; cf. Eun. fr. 39.1–9 Blockley; Zos. 4.13.3–15.3; Soc. *HE* 4.19.1–7; Soz. *HE* 6.35.1–11; Philost. *HE* 9.15.

hostility, polytheists must have regarded the end of Valens' reign as a turning point in state relations with the old cults.[79] It should therefore come as no surprise that Zosimus, apparently relying on Eunapius, reports yet another prodigy that makes of Adrianople a crucial marker on the road to imperial decline. Zosimus tells that Valens, departing for Adrianople, encountered the body of a man lying in the road, covered with blows and seeming to be neither alive nor dead. When interpreters were called, they explained that the body represented the Roman state which would "continue to survive, covered with blows and resembling a dying man, until the day when it would be completely destroyed by the wickedness of rulers and governors."[80] Orosius offers an aside that seems to respond to similar pagan contentions. Where Orosius normally downplays the impact of disasters suffered under Christian emperors, in his treatment of Adrianople he concedes to the "stubbornness and misery of the pagans" that the battle was uniquely destructive (7.33.16–17). Finally, a passage in the *Historia Augusta* "Life of Helagabalus" (7.6–8) alludes to Adrianople as a "city destined to be often stained with blood." The reference would not merit further attention, were it not that the pagan author of the work is commonly agreed to be using his "Life of Helagabalus" to attack Constantine and his Christianizing policies. Such criticism is evident in this reference, since it alludes not just to the disaster of Valens but also to Constantine's defeat of Licinius, his last pagan rival, at Adrianople. By linking the bloodshed of Valens' defeat with Constantine's final triumph over paganism, the author assimilates Christianization and imperial disaster.[81] This veiled reference, Orosius' response to pagan arguments and the prophecy in Zosimus indicate that pagans pointed to the battle of Adrianople as a sign that the empire, having been bereft of divine protection, was in danger.

[79]See for example contemporary arguments over whether the removal of the Altar of Victory had an effect on barbarian invasions: Symm. *Rel.* 3.3 (ed. Barrow, Oxford); Ambrose *Ep.* 73[18].7; cf. *De fide* 1 prol. 3.

[80]Zos. 4.21.1–3: ὅτι τε πληττόμενα καὶ μαστιγούμενα διατελέσει τὰ πράγματα, ψυχορραγοῦσιν ἐοικότα, μέχρις ἂν τῇ τῶν ἀρχόντων καὶ ἐπιτροπευόντων κακίᾳ τελέως φθαρείη. Cf. Demandt 1984: 51. Paschoud 1979: 378 n. 144 argues that Eunapius offered no providential explanation for Adrianople and thus that Zosimus used another source here. The fact is that we have no idea what Eunapius said regarding Adrianople since no surviving fragment of the *Histories* gives us any indication. Note the similarity of Zosimus' image and that presented by Pacatus to Theodosius, *Pan. Lat.* 12[2].3.3; cf. Oros. *Adv. pag.* 7.34.2: *cum adflictum ac paene conlapsum reipublicae statum videret.*

[81]On this reference see Barnes 1972: 69. For more on the "Life of Helagabalus" as a veiled attack on Constantine, see Turcan, Fowden.

Christians too came to regard the Gothic invasion and Adrianople as a providential sign not just of divine anger over Arianism, but of the beginnings of imperial decline. Already in the winter of 378/79, Ambrose argued that the disaster was an eschatological manifestation that had been predicted in scripture:

> namque et futuram nostri depopulationem et bella Gothorum Ezechiel illo iam tempore profetavit. sic enim habes: *propter hoc profetiza, fili hominis, et dic Gog: ...venies de loco tuo ab extremo aquilone, et gentes tecum multae, sessores equorum omnes, congregatio multa et magna et virtus copiosa....* Gog iste Gothus est, quem iam videmus exisse.
>
> For Ezechiel already prophesied in that time both our future destruction and the wars of the Goths. Thus you have: *Therefore, son of man, prophesy, say to Gog: ...you will come from your place from the extreme north, you and many nations with you, all mounted on horses, a vast assembly and a great and abundant force....* That wretched Gog is the Goth whom we now see to have come forth. (*De fide* 1.137–38)

Ten years later, Ambrose expressed similarly apocalyptic forebodings. In explicating Luke 21.9 ("but when you should hear battles and the rumor of battles"), he portrays the Gothic invasion as a sign that the end of the world prophesied in Luke was at hand:

> verborum autem caelestium nulli magis quam nos testes sumus, quos mundi finis invenit. quanta enim proelia et quas opiniones accepimus proeliorum! Chuni in Halanos, Halani in Gothos, Gothi in Taifalos et Sarmatas insurrexerunt, nos quoque in Illyrico exules patriae Gothorum exilia fecerunt et nondum est finis.... ergo quia in occasu saeculi sumus, praecedunt quaedam aegritudines mundi.
>
> None are witnesses to the heavenly words more than we, whom the end of the world has found. Indeed, how great the battles and what rumors of battles have we heard! The Huns rose against the Alans, the Alans against the Goths, the Goths against the Taifals and Sarmatians, and the exile of the Goths made us even in Illyricum exiles from our fatherland and there is not yet an end.... Therefore, since we are at the end of creation, certain sicknesses of the world must go before us.[82]

[82]Ambrose *Ex. evan. Lucae* 10.10 (*CSEL* 32). Cf. 10.14 and *De excessu fratris* 1.30, *totius orbis excidia, mundi finem*. See Paschoud 1967: 188–208.

Ambrose's statements were grounded at least partly in political maneuvering, but they must have reflected judgments common among contemporaries.[83] Others disagreed. Jerome, who encouraged his readers not to accept such eschatological interpretations uncritically, directly questioned Ambrose's association of the destroyer Gog with the Goths. He preferred to reserve judgment about the relation between apocalyptic prophecy and the current disasters until the outcome of the present trials was better known.[84]

With the passing of time, however, Jerome also became convinced that the events of 378 represented, if not the end of the world, at least the beginning of the end for Roman power. In a letter of 396 he writes:

> My mind shudders to come to the ruins of our age. For twenty years and more, Roman blood has been spilt every day between Constantinople and the Julian Alps.... The Roman world is collapsing and yet we do not bend our haughty necks.[85]

In 409 Jerome expressed the same idea:

> olim a Mari Pontico usque ad Alpes Iulias non erant nostra quae nostra sunt, et per annos triginta fracta Danubii limite in mediis Romani imperii regionibus pugnabatur.
>
> Now for a long time, from the Black Sea to the Julian Alps, our own land has not been ours. During the last thirty years, the frontier of the Danube has been destroyed and war has fallen upon soil in the very center of the Roman empire.[86]

[83]Chadwick 127. Proclus of Constantinople used the prophecy of Gog to similar effect in 425: Soc. *HE* 7.43.5–7; on the circumstances see Stein 282–85.

[84]Jerome *Comm. in Hiezech.* XI praef. (*CCSL* 75.480): *in prophetia difficillima illud breviter admonebo, quod vir nostrae aetatis haud ignobilis, ad imperatorem scribens, super hac natione dixerit: Gog iste Gothus est, cui qua ratione possint omnia quae in ea scripta sunt coaptari, non est meum sed eorum qui hoc putant disserere.* See also *Heb. quaest. in gen.* 10.21 (*CCSL* 72): *scio quendam Gog et Magog tam de praesenti loco quam de Ezechiel ad Gothorum nuper in terra nostra vagantium historiam retulisse: quod utrum verum sit, proelii ipsius fine monstratur*; *Ep.* 126.2. See similar criticisms at August. *C.D.* 20.11 (*CSEL* 40). More on Jerome's criticism of Ambrose's exegesis: Jerome *Liber Didymi de spiritu sancto* praef. (*PL* 23.108–10); *De viris illustribus* 124 (*PL* 23.751); cf. McLynn 289.

[85]Jerome *Ep.* 60.16 (trans. Scourfield). For Jerome's reaction to the barbarian invasions: Palanque 1952; Coleiro; Paschoud 1967: 209–21; Doignon 127–34.

[86]Jerome *Ep.* 123.16. Cf. Palanque 1952: 188; Lippold 81–82. Marcellinus Comes·*Chron.* s.a. 327 (*MGH.AA* 9.76) offers a similar chronology with specific reference to Pannonia.

In both passages the intention is clear, even if the chronology is loosely cited in decades. The rebellion of the Goths in approximately 378 marked the beginning of a period of unceasing disasters. Although significant barbarian troubles in the region had in fact ceased between 382 and 395, with the civil wars and, above all, the renewal of Gothic agitation under Alaric in 395, Jerome began to portray Adrianople as a grim turning point. The same sentiment was echoed in 402/3 by Jerome's rival Rufinus who wrote of Adrianople: "That battle was the beginning of evil for the Roman Empire then and thereafter."[87] Both men based their judgments in part on their ongoing experience with invasions. Rufinus, writing from Aquileia, had taken up the work of history as a consolation for the depredations that Alaric was inflicting around him.[88] Jerome was also shocked as he received information of the barbarian woes in his native Illyricum and throughout the west during the 380s.[89] When the Hun invasion of 395 confronted him with catastrophe near his residence in Palestine,[90] he realized that the beginning of the tribulations he was experiencing could be pinpointed at Adrianople. Both authors came to believe the empire was languishing in decline and both dated the beginning of that decline to 378.[91]

There is, moreover, evidence that Jerome was aware of the historical significance of Adrianople even earlier. His continuation of the Eusebian *Chronicle,* completed in Constantinople shortly after the Gothic raids there, stops recording notices with the battle of Adrianople in 378. He states the reason for ending here in his preface: "Not because I feared to write openly and truthfully about those still living, for fear of God drives off the fear of men, but since the barbarians are still going mad in our land, all things are uncertain."[92]

[87]Ruf. *HE* 2.13 (ed. Mommsen in *Eusebius Werke* vol. 2, E. Schwartz, ed., Leipzig, 1908): *quae pugna initium mali Romano imperio tunc et deinceps fuit.*

[88]Ruf. *HE* praef.: *cuius lectione animus audientium vinctus, dum notitiam rerum gestarum avidius petit, oblivionem quodammodo malorum quae gererentur acciperet.* On Rufinus' attitude toward the barbarian invasions: Thelamon 1981: 150–55. For a similar use of scholarship as a consolation for barbarian woes: Ambrose *De Noe* 1.1; 2.2 (a. 382/3).

[89]Jerome *Ep.* 66.14; 122.4; 123.15–16; 126.2; 127.12–13; 128.5; 130.5; *Comm. in Soph.* 1.2.3. Cf. Palanque 1952: 190–92; Demandt 1984: 58.

[90]Jerome *Ep.* 60.16; 77.8. See Scourfield 213 for further sources on the Hun invasion of 395.

[91]For the empire in decline: Jerome *Ep.* 60.16, *Romanus orbis ruit*; 123.16, *quid salvum est, si Roma perit?*; cf. 127.12; 128.5; 130.5; *Comm. in Hiezech.* III praef.; VII praef; VIII praef. Jerome's conception of Rome's decline was influenced particularly by the Gothic sack of 410: Paschoud 1967: 218–21.

[92]Jerome *Chron.* praef. (ed. Helm, *GCS*): *non quo de viventibus timuerim libere et vere scribere; timor enim Dei hominum timorem repellit; sed quoniam debacchantibus adhuc in terra nostra barbaris incerta sunt omnia.* Jerome's continuator Hydatius puzzled over

Jerome finished writing his *Chronicle* in 380 and, though he planned to return to writing history during the thirty years remaining to him, never again did he take up the subject. He was resigned to accept that his foray into the field should conclude with the *lacrimabile bellum in Thracia*.[93] In 380 Jerome could not have predicted the ongoing barbarian problems of the decades to come, but he sensed already the historical significance of the battle. That he was not alone in his judgment is confirmed by other contemporaries who also ended their histories there. The fragments of the Anonymous Arian Historiographer conclude at the death of Valens; Eunapius apparently ended the first redaction of his history with Adrianople; and it has been argued that the much-disputed *Annales* of Virius Nichomachus Flavianus also stopped in 378.[94] For all of these, the battle did not simply offer a conveniently dramatic conclusion; as a historical indicator that Rome was in trouble, it carried tremendous weight.

VI. Historical Corrective

Most interesting among the historians who concluded their narrative with the events of 378 is Ammianus. By the time he was writing in about 394, most of the reactions we have discussed had been aired. Because his *Res Gestae* was composed amidst this ferment, his narrative of the events of Adrianople in Book 31 becomes a fascinating commentary on the almost twenty years of reaction

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whether Jerome had added anything to the Chronicle beyond 378 during the remainder of his lifetime but decided the invasions had prevented it (Hydatius *Chron.* praef. 4). On Hydatius' continuation see Burgess; Muhlberger 193–266.

[93]Jerome *Chron.* s.a. 378 with Palanque 1952: 176–77. Cf. Amm. Marc. 29.1.15: *lacrimosis in Thracia discriminibus*; Oros. *Adv. pag.* 7.33.13: *lacrimabile illud bellum in Thracia*; Jordanes *Get.* 138: *lacrimabili bello commisso*. On the composition and date of Jerome's *Chronicle*: Kelly 1975: 72–75; Cavallera 2.20; cf. 1.68 and Murphy 1952b on Jerome's desire to continue with history.

[94]We have only fragments and testimonia for these histories. It is thus impossible to determine with certainty the point at which each concluded. It is relatively certain that the Anonymous Arian's *Ecclesiastical History* and one of Eunapius' early redactions ended at Adrianople. Arian Historiographer: J. Bidez and F. Winkelmann, *Philostorgius Kirchengeschichte. GCS.* Berlin, 1972: 241, cf. cli–clxiii). Eunapius: Barnes 1978: 114–123, esp. 120: "[Eunapius] wished to show that the adoption of Christianity and especially the reaction after Julian had caused the greatest disaster to Roman arms for centuries." Cf. Blockley 1981: 1.3–5: "Eunapius did not end his first edition there, but one of the parts of his first edition." The case for Flavianus' *Annales* is much less clear: Paschoud (1975: 152) argues for Adrianople, but Bleckmann 93–99 has recently made the case for a conclusion in the 380s. Socrates began and ended the fourth book of his *Ecclesiastical History* with the beginning of Valens' reign and Adrianople. He brackets the book with notices (*HE* 3.26.4; 5 praef.) that the empire suffered unusual disasters under Valens.

and response preceding him. Ammianus' aim in composing Book 31 was to prove that Adrianople was not, as contemporaries had come to believe, a unique event or turning point in history, nor were the difficulties it posed insurmountable. Though he added few new arguments, the comprehensiveness of his analysis, his cool-headed historical judgment and his direct engagement with the responses of contemporaries make Book 31 a fascinating retrospective on the problem.

Like many of his contemporaries, Ammianus saw the corruption of the army as partly responsible for the disaster[95] and, like them, he sought an explanation for the disaster in supernatural causes. However, far from portraying Adrianople as a manifestation of divine wrath at the empire in general, he looked on it as a manifestation on a grand scale of Valens' personal fate. This is clear even in the earlier books of his history. Fate, he believes, did not allow the *scutarius* Sallustius to murder Valens prematurely (29.1.15). Fate, operating through Bellona, was aroused to drive the Goths into the empire by Valens' unjust persecution of the philosophers.[96] Fate dictated that the *funesta principis destinatio* would prevail at the war council on August 9 (31.12.7). By connecting the disaster so closely with the emperor's personal fortune, Ammianus implies that with the death of that emperor, Fate had exhausted its wrath. Moreover, Ammianus encourages his readers with the knowledge that Valens' fate, however awful, was not to be feared as a unique historical event. The emperor Decius also disappeared in battle and the commander Cn. Cornelius Scipio Calvus was burned to death in a tower where he had taken refuge (31.13.13; 17. Cf. 31.5.13; 16). Thus, however Valens had died, there were historical precedents for similar catastrophes from which the empire had recovered.

Just as Valens' fate was neither unique nor insurmountable, Ammianus refused to concede that Rome's defeat was insuperable or even unprecedented:

> Those who are unacquainted with ancient records say that the state was never before overspread by such a dark cloud of misfortune, but they are deceived by the horror of the recent ills which have overwhelmed

[95]Amm. Marc. 31.4.6; 9–11. Cf. Jerome *Chron.* s.a. 377: *per avaritiam Maximi ducis fame ad rebellandum coacti sunt* [*Gothi*]. Oros. *Adv. pag.* 7.33.11: *propter intolerabilem avaritiam Maximi ducis fame et iniuriis adacti in arma surgentes*; Eun. fr. 42 Blockley; Zos. 4.20.6.

[96]Amm. Marc. 31.1.1; cf. 29.2.20. On the role of fate in stirring the barbarians, cf. 31.4.6; 10.1.

> them. For if they study earlier times or those which have recently passed, these will show that such dire disturbances have often happened.[97]

This sober pronouncement is followed by a list of historical *exempla*: the invasion of Cimbri and Teutones, the Marcomannic invasions, and the Gothic invasions of the third century. From the perspective of the historian, Ammianus could see beyond the immediate panic of a disaster that was not unique to the sort of reinvigoration Rome had always experienced. For Eunapius, Ambrose, Jerome and Rufinus, this was not the case. Indeed, it is for contemporaries like these that Ammianus writes.

This does not mean that Ammianus misunderstood the significance of Adrianople. He concedes that the battle actually represented the greatest Roman defeat on record since Cannae.[98] Yet, even here, he appears to correct or modify the historical misrepresentations of his contemporaries. In a speech of 384, Themistius referred to the Goths as "worse for the Romans than Hannibal."[99] Related strains in Vegetius recall the similarities between Rome's present situation and that experienced during the Hannibalic war.[100] Ammianus brings to this argument the reasoned view that Cannae was still worse than Valens' debacle. The implication is of course that Rome's recovery from Adrianople should be no less plausible than its recovery from Cannae. Ammianus' text is thus a palliative for the past.

At the same time, it is a handbook for the future. His choice to add the events of 364–78 to his original narrative and his skillful development of the thirty-first book are part of a didactic program that has been admirably described by K. Rosen.[101] Ammianus' advice on the need to keep the borders impenetrable through fortifications and defense, to starve out barbarians rather

[97]Amm. Marc. 31.5.11 (trans. Rolfe, Loeb). Cf. Straub 1943: 260–62.

[98]Amm. Marc. 31.13.18–19. Despite a lacuna, the sense is clear. For the severity of the disaster, cf. 31.13.11, *numquam pensabilia damna, quae magno rebus stetere Romanis.*

[99]Them. *Or.* 34.22: οἱ τοῦ Ἀννίβα χαλεπώτεροι Ῥωμαίοις.

[100]Veg. *De re mil.* 1.28: *pax ita Romanos illos ubique victores otio et armorum desuetudine enervaverit, ut secundo Punico bello Hannibali pares esse non possent.* See Barnes 1979: 257. Both Themistius and Vegetius often used history as did Ammianus, as a touchstone by which to judge present circumstances: Veg. *De re mil.* 1.1, 3, 28; 2.3; 3 praef., 1. Them. *Or.* 15.197d–198a; 16.211c–212a. Cf. Oros. *Adv. pag.* 7.34.2. Writing fifteen years after Ammianus, Jerome *Ep.* 123.16 used Roman history to the opposite effect when he argued that Alaric's siege of Rome was all but unprecedented.

[101]Rosen. For Ammianus on the barbarian invasions: Lippold 68–76; Paschoud 1967: 33–70; Straub 1943: 260–61.

than engage them, to kill them through treachery where possible, to settle them only in small groups of *dediticii* and to exterminate them the moment they cause trouble, all constitute his plan for how to prevent another Adrianople.[102] Ammianus believed that the Roman empire was eternal, that it could never be challenged in a way that would threaten its existence.[103] He thus attempted to use history not just to disprove the dire droning of doomsayers but to promote Roman recovery and to move the empire beyond a disaster that continued to preoccupy contemporaries decades after the fact.

VII. Conclusion

Ammianus is thus only one in a chorus of voices. As such, his reasoned response is better taken as a coda to the more impassioned discourse that preceded him than as Wolfram's sounding board by which to gauge the contemporary reaction. Here we have attempted to reconstruct that discourse with its varied but interrelated set of responses. We have seen that the mayhem resulting from Adrianople led to confusion in communications and structures of authority that forced people to rely on their own resources and, where those failed, to turn to divine intervention or simply give way to despair. To counteract this confusion, the imperial superstructure made efforts to cope with the crisis, but found it necessary to modify its responses as circumstances changed. Abundant panegyrics from the decade after the battle demonstrate that inflated hopes for vengeance gave way to somber apologetics as the disaster was blamed, rightly or wrongly, for ongoing military disappointments. Outside imperial circles, blame for Adrianople and related setbacks was leveled at the performance of Valens, his generals, and his army, the last of which received increasingly shrill criticisms in the decades to come. In Valens' case and that of his Arian contemporaries, heterodoxy was blamed as well. In fact, from early on, it seems that Valens' death in battle was regarded as a divine punishment for his religious persecutions, not just of Christians but also of pagans. Soon pagan and Christian contemporaries also came to believe that the disaster represented the beginning of the end for the Roman empire or even the world. Ammianus responded to all of these sentiments in an effort to refute those who regarded the defeat as the worst in history and who refused to believe that recovery was possible. In many ways, however, his response was unique. Thus, regardless of its military and political implications, Adrianople very quickly

[102]Sabbah 148–55 notes similar arguments in Vegetius.
[103]Demandt 1965: 142–47; 1984: 53–54.

came to represent a psychological turning point in Roman history. As time passed and new trials confronted the empire, its prominence naturally receded, but it remained a point beyond which attitudes about the empire and its expectations of world dominion were altered.

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