

GAVIN KELLY: *Ammianus Marcellinus: The Allusive Historian*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 2008. ISBN 978-0-521-84299-0. XI, 378 pp. GBP 55, USD 99.

Gavin Kelly's *Ammianus Marcellinus: The Allusive Historian* is a considerably revised version of his Oxford thesis submitted in 2002. Kelly's general approach in the book is based on the belief that Ammianus is a far more subtle and manipulative author than has been assumed, and that the elements of his text that do not appeal to modern tastes, namely his digressions, allusions and historical *exempla*, are more meaningful than they have been given credit for. Kelly believes that Ammianus' references to past and contemporary sources convey important political, ideological, historiographical and religious messages. Kelly argues that the selectively shared autobiographical details aim to establish Ammianus' honesty, independence and authority as a historian.

The book is divided into two parts which reflect Kelly's main arguments. Part one, "The elusive historian" (chapters 1–3), examines the autobiographical passages of the *Res Gestae* or passages which have been interpreted as such. Part two, "The allusive historian" (chapters 4–7), surveys the nature, extent, methods and meaning of allusion in Ammianus. At the end of the book are an epilogue, an appendix on the sources for the tsunami of AD 365, a bibliography, a subject index, an index of modern scholars and an index locorum. Kelly defines the key concepts of allusion and intertextuality only in Chapter four although they are frequently used also in the chapters of Part one. It would have helped the reader if these concepts had been introduced at the beginning of the book.

The title of Chapter one, "The bones of the battlefield", refers to the description of the indecisive battle with the Goths in the late summer of AD 377. Ammianus writes (31,7,16) that after this battle at Ad Salices only men of distinction were buried. The rest of the slain were devoured by the dire birds ... *ut indicant nunc usque albentes ossibus campi*. Previous scholars have supposed with varying degrees of certainty that the passage 31,7,16 proves that Ammianus had travelled to see the battlefield of Ad Salices. Kelly doubts this and sees it as an allusion to the battle descriptions of Vergil and Tacitus. He interprets the reference to the battlefield white with bones as an example of implicit criticism of the emperor Theodosius' policy towards the Goths.

The Ad Salices passage characterizes Kelly's general attitude to the autobiographical information in the *Res gestae*. Kelly distrusts information given by Ammianus about himself. Kelly argues that Ammianus used references to earlier authors to manipulate his narrative. He claims that the intertextual sophistication of the *Res gestae* has usually been underestimated. Kelly admits, however, that the allusion to Vergil in the description of the battlefield of Ad Salices does not rule out the possibility that the reference might also be autobiographical.

In Chapter two, "The adventures of Ammianus", Kelly questions in greater detail the assumptions made about the life and the career of Ammianus drawn from the information in the *Res gestae*. He thinks that we know hardly anything certain about Ammianus' life. Kelly concludes that many of the biographical assumptions that have been made about Ammianus turn out to be unreliable or conjectural. He believes that behind Ammianus' naïve self-revelation is a carefully crafted literary *persona*. Kelly, however, is not interested in the veracity of the autobiographical information in the *Res gestae*. He instead stresses the literary function and the selectiveness of the personal observations.

In Chapter three, "The limits of biography", Kelly discusses Ammianus' social background, his years in Rome and his connection to Antioch. Kelly once again questions all the assumptions made on the basis of information given by Ammianus in the *Res gestae*. Kelly is right in claiming that we cannot be absolutely certain about much of Ammianus' life but he is too categorical. Although we cannot be certain if Antioch was Ammianus' hometown or if he came from the curial class, the praise and the detailed familiarity of the city in the *Res gestae* are good reasons to believe that Ammianus spent his youth in Antioch. The commission of *protector*, extensive travelling and the living in Rome to write the *Res gestae* argue for an elite background. The simplest explanation for the letter of Libanios to a fellow Antiochene living in Rome (*epist.* 1063) is that the letter is addressed to the historian Ammianus Marcellinus.

In Chapter four, "Ammianus' intertextuality", Kelly progresses to his main theme: intertextuality and allusion in the *Res gestae*. Kelly's main argument which he expounds on widely in the book is that Ammianus frequently used allusions to earlier authors to manipulate his narrative. Kelly presents many convincing examples of how Ammianus uses allusions in his text, but the allusions spotted by Kelly based on only one word are questionable. Even Kelly himself admits that some may find his opinion in some cases "an allusion overstated". Kelly classifies allusions used by Ammianus into seven types. Some of these types seem quite arbitrary and may not contribute to our understanding of Ammianus.

In Part one, Kelly criticized other scholars for making assumptions about the life of Ammianus lightly and demanded certainty. Kelly should have submitted his own arguments in Part two to equally rigorous analysis. Instead he runs the risk of subjectivity in many of his interpretations.

In Chapter five, "Sources", Kelly argues that the usual distinction between source criticism and intertextuality ceases to be useful in case of Ammianus because of the complexity of his text. Therefore Kelly approaches Ammianus' *Res gestae* both as literature and as history. He examines Ammianus' relationship to his sources through four case studies: the obelisk, the tsunami, Herodian, and Eutropius. Kelly's analysis of the inscription of the obelisk erected in commemoration of the visit of Constantius II to Rome in 357 is excellent. The obelisk was at first destined for Constantinople as can be inferred from the text of the inscription, but Ammianus suppressed all mention of Constantinople and used the obelisk to glorify Rome. This is a clear-cut example of the manipulation of the sources which is common in the *Res gestae*, if we believe Kelly. (The inscription is now preserved only in a 16th century transcription, *ILS* 736.)

Kelly discusses in several sections of the book Ammianus' description of the tsunami of AD 365 in the Mediterranean, and a ship on the southern Peloponnese thrown two miles inland by the tsunami (26,10,15–19). Other scholars have considered this an eyewitness description and as proof that Ammianus had visited the place. Kelly instead believes that Ammianus uses the rotting ship as a metaphor of the decay of the state in his time and as tacit criticism of the imperial policy of Theodosius. It is true that the Ship of State was often used as a metaphor in Antiquity and it is possible that Ammianus used the Laconian vessel near the town of Methone as a metaphor, but it may be also a mere eyewitness account without any hidden agenda. (After the tsunami of 2004 in the Indian Ocean small vessels thrown inland by the disastrous wave were a common sight.)

Kelly does not see anything unusual in Ammianus using Herodian as his source. Kelly does not exclude the possibility that Ammianus and Herodian both used the same unknown

source. The use of Eutropius' *Breviarium* as a source, however, puzzles Kelly because Ammianus had no need to use his contemporary's work and especially because Ammianus held epitomes in low esteem. Kelly suggests that one of the reasons why Ammianus used Eutropius as his source is that he exploited the language of Eutropius to make Jovian's death seem bleaker and to give the impression that the Jovian's emperorship was shorter than the almost seven months mentioned by Eutropius.

Chapter six, "The exemplary historian", analyzes the frequent use of *exempla* in the *Res gestae*. Kelly argues that Ammianus did not only use the *exempla* from past times to illuminate the present but he also used the present as exemplary of the future (e.g., the reign of Julian is an example for successive emperors to follow). Kelly believes that the *exempla* are an important part of the *Res Gestae*. Chapter seven, "Julian's monument", explores the role of Julian in the *Res gestae* as the *exemplum* for Valentinian and Valens.

Kelly begins the "Epilogue" by citing Ammianus' farewell to his readers (31,16,9). Kelly sees it as an important programmatic statement and refers to this passage twelve times elsewhere in the book. Kelly asserts that this sphragis illustrates in miniature the diversity of allusion and its potential meaningfulness as he has shown in the previous chapters of the book. In the sphragis, Ammianus writes that he has written his history *...ut miles quondam et Graecus* (31,16,9). Kelly suggests that Ammianus wants to express with the word *Graecus* that he is a man of scholarship (opposite both to barbarism and to Christianity) and with the word *miles* he tells to his readers that he, as a former soldier, is also a man of action.

Kelly mentions in the introduction of his book the two most important studies of recent years: John Matthews' *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (1989) and Timothy Barnes' *Ammianus Marcellinus and the Representation of Historical Reality* (1998). Matthews' approach treated Ammianus as a historian who wanted to describe his era truthfully. Barnes sees Ammianus more as a writer of fiction than as a historian. Kelly can be placed as an intermediary between these opposite views. Kelly has written an important book which questions many long-held views on Ammianus and his *Res gestae*. It will be a necessity for all who are seriously interested in Ammianus but it may not be suitable as an introduction to someone who has no prior familiarity with Ammianus Marcellinus.

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A History of Ancient Greek. From the Beginnings to Late Antiquity. Edited for the Centre for the Greek Language by A.-F. CHRISTIDIS, with the assistance of MARIA ARAPOULOU – MARIA CHRITI. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007. ISBN 978-0-521-83307-3. XLI, 1617 pp. GBP 140, USD 250.

A History of Ancient Greek is a monumental work, a revised and expanded translation of the Greek Ιστορία της ελληνικής γλώσσας. Από τις αρχές έως την ύστερη αρχαιότητα, which appeared in 2001. The sheer quantity of scholars involved is impressive: 75 people have contributed, of whom 40 are Greek. "Revising and expanding" has in this case meant that four new contributions have been added – all important – bibliographies have been updated and some minor modifications made. The volume, originally edited by Anastasios-Fivos Christidis, has been dedicated to this editor who died in 2004, before the English translation appeared. There