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Walls, Boundaries, Frontiers, and Borders: Ausonius, the Rhine-Danube *Limes*, and the Battle of Adrianople

By way of an Afterword

Walls, boundaries, frontiers, and borders are far more than neutral markers of territory. They differ from one another and are theorized and experienced differently and subjectively. This can clearly be seen if one compares, say, an early 19th c. border crossing with modern ones. Inspired by Alexander Demandt's "Römisch-germanische Grenzpolitik" and the questions it raises, this Afterword uses Ausonius, poet and politician, to reconsider the Rhine-Danube *limes*. The homecoming poet's wishes in the *Mosella* betray a Rhine *limes* that wasn't all it should be, despite the panegyric topoi of *Epigram* 28 of 369 CE. The Afterword ends with a detailed discussion of Gratian's march east to help Valens at the Battle of Adrianople in August 378. It argues that he took his time marching east, it clarifies some details of his itinerary in the Balkans, and questions whether he ever actually reached Adrianople or Constantinople. It uses Ausonius' *Gratiarum Actio* of September 379 and its emphasis on Gratian's quasi-miraculous celerity in returning West to argue for a "schönreden" of his ineffectual role at and after Adrianople. It ends with Ammianus Marcellinus' verdict on Adrianople arguing against those who want to read it positively as a recoverable situation. One has only to compare Rutilius Namatianus' discourse in 417 after the Fall of Rome to see that Ammianus was no optimist. The promises of Ausonius' *Epigrams* 28 and 31 that gave a triumphant and optimistic voice to the personified Danube promising success to Valens would be vain panegyric. The Goths were able to cross the Danube in 376 and defeat Valens in 378.

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Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
[...]

Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense.¹

Old men who have followed the Eagles since boyhood
say nothing in the Empire is more wonderful
than the first sight of the Wall!²

Fest steht aber: Mauern liegen im Trend.³

I. Good Fences and Good Neighbors: from Boundary Wall to Border (via Frontier)

Boundary and Border

In “Mending Wall”, Robert Frost described how, after the ravages of winter frost-heave, he would engage in an atavistic ritual⁴ with his rural neighbor. The two would walk their boundary and replace the stones that had fallen out during the past year.⁵ Frost mischievously mused that there was no actual danger that his apple trees would cross the wall to consume his neighbor's pine-cones. But the neighbor would dourly insist, “Good fences make good neighbors.”

Caesar had asked the Sygambri to surrender other Germans, Usipetes and Tencteri, who had invaded Gaul.⁶ He reported their quite reasonable response. The Rhine was the border of Roman imperium, and, if he objected to Germans crossing into Gaul, why should he assume any jurisdiction or power across the Rhine?⁷ Tacitus began his *Germania* with a striking *paraprosdokian*: that Germania was separated from the Sarmatians *mutuo metu* (“by mutual fear”) *aut montibus* (“or by mountains”). The sentence has something of the zeugma (“in a huff and in a Cadillac”), but also contains a sinister Tacitean weighted alternative where we are left wondering which barrier (fear or mountains?) is, or should be, the more effective.

¹ FROST 1971, 33.

² KIPLING 1964, 128.

³ MAU 2021, 54.

⁴ One can compare GRIMM 1845, 132-133.

⁵ FROST 1971, 33.

⁶ BG 4.16.3 *Ad quos cum Caesar nuntios misisset, qui postularent eos qui sibi Galliaeque bellum intulissent sibi dederent.*

⁷ BG 4.16.3 *populi Romani imperium Rhenum finire; si se invito Germanos in Galliam transire non aequum existimaret, cur sui quicquam esse imperii aut potestatis trans Rhenum postularet?*

A border is ideally an acknowledged, accepted, and respected, consensual line of division between jurisdictions. But borders also entail pathologies. To take two obvious examples. A border can be experienced as permeable and ineffective from the insider's perspective, the border that one fears *for*. It can also be seen as a line that bulges or marches aggressively outwards to secure more territory for those inside it, the border that *others* fear, often a bridgehead.

Frontier

There is yet another relevant concept. In 1893, Frederick J. Turner delivered a famous lecture to the American Historical Association that tackles something quite different from the Roman *limes*, namely the American frontier.⁸ This was a line that marched westwards propelled by individuals. And the frontier, according to Turner, exercised a strong psychological effect that radiated eastwards to the Atlantic coast and to the Old World,⁹ enabled the melting pot,¹⁰ and indelibly marked the American character in ways that are quite recognizable today.¹¹ All of this was quite different from the ancient Roman Empire.¹² But the topic inspired many of the cadenzas and exciting sentences that the *limes* does,¹³ and at points Turner was clearly thinking of Rome.¹⁴ In the American schema, however, it was settlers from inside who risked turning into "English Tatars", if they were to rebel against regulation from home.¹⁵ Most intriguing is Turner's courage in thinking hard about how a frontier could affect not just politics, but psychology and culture. But the Roman *limes* was not like the American frontier.

⁸ TURNER 1940. My gratitude to Benjamin Garstad for bringing Turner to my attention.

⁹ TURNER 1940, 30: "Mobility of population is death to localism, and the western frontier worked irresistibly in unsettling population. The effect reached back from the frontier and affected profoundly the Atlantic coast and even the Old World."

¹⁰ TURNER 1940, 23: "In the crucible of the frontier the immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race, English in neither nationality nor characteristics. The process has gone on from the early days to our own." Also *ibid.*, 28: "composite nationality".

¹¹ See TURNER 1940, 21, 30 and 37-38 on mobility, individualism, democracy, and more.

¹² TURNER 1940, 3.

¹³ E.g. TURNER 1940, 12, 14 and 19-21. See Introduction, above, pp. 10-12.

¹⁴ TURNER 1940, 34 citing Thomas Benton (1825) on erecting a statue of "the fabled god Terminus" on the highest peak of the Rocky Mountains.

¹⁵ TURNER 1940, 33 citing Edmund Burke.

Boundaries

German has one (originally Slavic) word, “Grenzen”, that covers two English lexemes, “borders” and “boundaries”. And a magical aura surrounds the latter, which can sometimes be seen as sacred. We know of Zeus Horios and Jupiter Terminalis.¹⁶ Famous legal historians tell us of gruesome late medieval punishments for *Grenzfrevel*.¹⁷ The whole subject is regularly mythologized to such an extent that one might wonder whether different peoples conceptualized boundaries differently. Perhaps Late Antique *Germanen* had more latitudinarian views? But the work of Harald Siems shows quite clearly that the early medieval barbarian law codes were actually quite mild and reasonable – and drew heavily on Roman law.¹⁸ Siems emphasizes the importance of not lumping sparse evidence and ending up with anachronistic composites.¹⁹ But these are all *boundaries*, related to possession, not *borders*. The latter are not just drawn, policed, and litigated by individuals, but also lived and experienced by travelers.

Coming Home

As a philologist and literary critic, I would like now to explore a series of subjective responses to legal border-crossings diachronically. I will work my way back to one special “home comer”, a later Roman witness to warfare on the Rhine-Neckar *limes* who functioned in part as a spin-doctor and panegyrist for Valentinian I and eventually for his own student Gratian: the poet Ausonius of Bordeaux. We will first experience his own homecoming from the *limes* to Trier in the *Mosella*. We will see him use fluminal propaganda to veil less than ideal events on the Rhine *limes*. We will conclude by examining the implications of a panegyric he delivered in thanks for his own consulship of 379, immediately after the Roman defeat at Adrianople. I hope to show that the text may indirectly be apologizing for a failure of alacrity on Gratian’s part in coming to Valens’ rescue. In line with Professor Demandt, I return to a dark reading of Ammianus on Adrianople. We can use Rutilius Namatianus who returned to his Gallic homeland in 417 as a control for the rhetoric of recovery.

¹⁶ GRIMM 1845, 127.

¹⁷ In the Middle Ages Germans (and what would be Austrians) certainly understood the importance of boundaries. AMIRA (1922, 127-128) documents how the punishment for violators of boundaries, *Grenzfrevel*, was to be buried in the earth and have their heads sheared off by ploughshares (“Abfahren” or “Abackern”). The topic had already been touched on by GRIMM (1845, 130-131).

¹⁸ SIEMS 1979, 268, 287, 288 and 291.

¹⁹ SIEMS 1979, 268-269.

Modern Experiences

Since the 19th c. all have had to suffer at the borders between national jurisdictions, where the official's eye moves coldly up and down between the travelers' documents and their faces. There is the degradation of searching, of course. Heine was memorable about its indignities:

Deutschland: ein Wintermärchen, Kaput II
 Während die Kleine von Himmelslust
 Getrillert und musiziert,
 Ward von den preußischen Douaniers
 Mein Koffer visitiert.
 Beschnüffelten alles, kramten herum
 In Hemden, Hosen, Schnupftüchern;
 Sie suchten nach Spitzen, nach Bijouterien,
 Auch nach verbotenen Büchern.
 Ihr Toren, die ihr im Koffer sucht!
 Hier werdet ihr nichts entdecken!
 Die Konterbande, die mit mir reist,
 Die hab ich im Kopfe stecken.
 Hier hab ich Spitzen, die feiner sind
 Als die von Brüssel und Mecheln,
 Und pack ich einst meine Spitzen aus,
 Sie werden euch sticheln und hecheln.
 Im Kopfe trage ich Bijouterien,
 Der Zukunft Krondiamanten,
 Die Tempelkleinodien des neuen Gotts,
 Des großen Unbekannten.
 Und viele Bücher trag ich im Kopf!
 Ich darf es euch versichern,
 Mein Kopf ist ein zwitscherndes Vogelnest
 Von konfiszierlichen Büchern.²⁰

He paid back the Prussians too: (Kaput III)

Sie stelzen noch immer so steif herum,
 So kerzengerade geschniegelt,
 Als hätten sie verschluckt den Stock,
 Womit man sie einst geprügelt.²¹

Some régimes were worse than others. "There wasn't much to be enjoyed about border crossing in old Eastern Europe, but one thing they always did well was make you feel alien."²² Things have gotten far worse now: X-rays, being "patted down", even stripped, etc. In the USA one must pay "Global Entry" fees for the privilege of coming home without standing for hours in an undifferentiated queue with the huddled non-citizen masses and being

²⁰ HEINE 1884, 195.

²¹ HEINE 1884, 197.

²² BARNES 1994, 46.

asked what the purpose of one's trip was.²³ Borders, as the sociologist Steffen Mau points out, now function primarily as *Sortiermaschinen* and far less frequently as disputed limits between jurisdictions.²⁴ But no one has yet solved the problem of the forbidden books in our brains.²⁵

II. A Later Roman Return

However difficult and unpleasant modern régimes make it, there is always a positive side to coming home. And, interestingly, three major Roman poets wrote *itineraria* that mixed the personal and the political in homecoming.²⁶ Horace described how from one point on his journey south to Brundisium in 40 BCE, Apulia began to show her familiar mountains to him,²⁷ scorched by the harsh native Scirocco, Atabulus. Centuries later, in magnificent orchestral fashion, as in Smetana's "Moldau", we can follow the introduction to Ausonius' *Mosella*. The poem is about a river and about the politics of rivers, the fierce Rhine vs. the peaceful Moselle, and dates from precisely the period in the later 4th c. when the Rhine-Danube *limes* was under threat.

Transieram celerem nebuloso flumine Navam
addita miratus veteri nova moenia Vingo,
aequavit Latias ubi quondam Gallia Cannas,
inflatæque iacent inopes super arva catervæ.
unde iter ingrediens nemorosa per avia solum
et nulla humani spectans vestigia cultus
praetereo arentem sitientibus undique terris
Dumnissum riguasque perenni fonte Tabernas
arvaeque Sauromatum nuper metata colonis,
et tandem primis Belgarum conspicio oris
Noiomagum, divi castra inclita Constantini.
purior hic campis aer Phoebusque sereno
lumine purpureum reserat iam sudus Olympum,
nec iam consertis per mutua vincula ramis
quaeritur exclusum viridi caligine caelum,
sed liquidum iubar et rutilam visentibus aethram
libera perspicui non invidet aura diei.
in speciem tum me patriae cultumque nitentis

²³ This works in the USA on fingerprints and facial recognition. MAU 2021, 113 and 162 for the (ugly) business model and the future.

²⁴ MAU 2021, 15. Ukraine is now a glaring exception.

²⁵ In the late 1990s I was interrogated when flying home from Tel Aviv Airport for several hours in a way that forced me to prove my identity *as a professor of Classics* and not some imposter.

²⁶ The third, from whom I adduce *comparanda*, is Rutilius Namatianus, whose journey of *De reditu suo* can be dated to 417 CE.

²⁷ Sat. 5.77-78.

Burdigalae blando pepulerunt omnia visu:
 culmina villarum pendentibus edita ripis
 et virides baccho colles et amoena fluenta
 subterlabentis tacito rumore Mosellae.
 Salve amnis ...

I had crossed the swift-flowing **Nahe** with its misty waters and admired the new walls added to the old city of **Bingen**, where once upon a time Gaul equaled the battle of **Cannae** in Latium, and unwept hosts of the dead lie helpless on the fields. Starting my lonely journey from there through the trackless groves, and seeing no traces of human cultivation, I skip over dry **Dumnissus** with land that is parched on every side and **Tabernae** that is well watered by an ever-flowing spring and the fields that have recently been measured by Sarmatian tenant-farmers, and finally – at the very border of the Belgae – I behold **Neumagen**, the renowned camp of the deified Constantine. The atmosphere is purer in these fields and Phoebus, now clear, unlocks an Olympus brilliant with unclouded light. No longer must one seek a heaven excluded by a green cover of branches joined together in mutual fetters. Instead, the free breeze of a brilliant day doesn't begrudge the clear light and glowing empyrean to onlookers. Everything about this delightful sight then compelled me to think of the beauty and refinement of my homeland in shining **Bordeaux**. The roofs of the villas high on steep river-banks and the hills green with vineyards and the delightful waters of the Moselle that glides alone below soundlessly. Hail, O river! ...

Ausonius's magnificent proem most probably describes how he returned from campaign with Valentinian I to his adopted northern home in Trier.²⁸ He had crossed the Nahe and admired Bingen before heading west, cross country towards Dumnissus and eventually to Neumagen on the Moselle. The beauty of the northern river landscape reminds him of the place he was born, his true *patria*, Bordeaux at the estuary of the Garonne and Dordogne.²⁹

Transieram, "I had crossed" the Nahe. How many works begin with a pluperfect?³⁰ How many works begin *after* a completed crossing? The opening automatically poses the question of the author's starting-point. Yet Ausonius says not a word about the Rhine. He has turned his back on it. We catch him *in mediis rebus* very close to *barbaricum* and on the *limes*. He is thinking of a crossing, of a river, of new fortifications (359 CE or

²⁸ I see no reason to declare that the journey "should not be treated as a historical event", as does GREEN (1991, 456).

²⁹ The Gironde. The optical comparison to the Moselle seems to fit the green and winding Dordogne rather better than the great flat Garonne at Bordeaux, but things might have looked different in Late Antiquity.

³⁰ We see a sort of equivalent in Hor. *Sat.* 1.5.1 *egressum magna me accepit Aricia Roma*, which spans 25 km. GREEN (1991, 463) notes how "carefully calculated" the opening is. He cites Ovid, *Met.* 1.216 *Maenula transieram* as, I suspect, a possible source. It isn't strikingly parallel, being neither an opening of a work, nor a first word.

later),³¹ a skirmish of 71 CE blown up into a Gallic Cannae,³² whose dead are imagined as still lying unburied on the field.³³ Ausonius had his own late antique version of the “double vision” affecting historians of the Fall of the Roman Empire.

Ausonius then moves into what he describes as the pathless wilderness of the Hunsrück, but must have taken an attested Roman road. This landscape is devolving, being decivilized and abandoned. This is a journey that can be mapped, but it is also a journey in time where the past comes back to meet the present in the poet’s mind.³⁴

In the dry and the watered places, we see, I think, an homage to Horace, *Sat.* 1.5, where water is prominent in 88-89 and 97-98. Suddenly there is land measured by – Sarmatians! These ultimate outsiders from Scythia have now, pacified after a few generations, become farmers in the Rhineland.³⁵

At this point Ausonius crosses yet another border, a provincial one between Germania Superior and Gallia Belgica Prima. The sight of Neumagen on the Moselle is greeted with *Purior hic campis aer ... lumine purpureum*, a direct allusion to Vergil’s Elysian fields (*Aen.* 6.640 *largior hic campos aether et lumine vestit/purpureo*). Light, blessed light, after the entwined *selva oscura* of the Hunsrück! This escape from the hellish and dark stage of the journey to the heavenly one is evoked by a now destroyed monument, probably a magnificent construction like Trier’s Porta Nigra, whose remains were still visible in the 17th c. in Neumagen on the Moselle.³⁶ Ausonius channeled both Horace’s home-coming and Aeneas traversing the underworld. By this point we have heard *twice* about Roman fortifications and walls, which only become good things in a deteriorating world.³⁷ Writing after the Sack of Rome, Rutilius Namatianus would talk about how even in her distant past Rome had deserved to be girt by fortifications.³⁸

³¹ Amm. Marc. 28.2.1 and 30.7.6.

³² HOSIUS 1926, 25.

³³ There is troubled coloring from Vergil, *Aen.* 6.325 *inops inhumataque turba*.

³⁴ See Introduction, above, p. 13 for oscillation between past and present.

³⁵ They must be *laeti*. On six attested settlements of Sarmatians in Gaul, see BACHRACH 2008, 172.

³⁶ WYTTEBACH & TURNER 1839, 26-28.

³⁷ See BUTLER 1959, 29 for Neumagen on a map of places that were walled after 260 CE. MAU (2021, 20, 47 and 49-71) notes how globalization has now caused an increasing interest in wall-building. There is no discernible political affinity between wall-building states (*ibid.*, 58). All types are involved. For walls after barbarian invasions in the 3rd c., see FERRARI 2022, 52-55.

³⁸ *De reditu suo* 2.39-40 *iam turn multiplici meruit munimine cingi/ sollicitosque habuit Roma futura deos*.

III. Tum Verus Habebere Limes

I will continue to pursue this meditation on rivers and borders with Ausonius. He was very much a political poet, close to emperors (Valentinian I and Gratian) and to the court. He was in fact an *Anywhere* who wrote with great feeling and *Sehnsucht* about being a *Somewhere*.³⁹ He makes a good anchoring focalizer for examining the fate of northwestern *limes*. I will start with the Rhine in his *Mosella*, but will then end with his (veiled and implicit) treatment of the Danube in the *Gratiarum Actio*. I will introduce a few poorly understood passages in the latter to make some new suggestions about Gratian's journey eastwards to bring help to Valens at the Battle of Adrianople.

Ausonius started to perorate at *Mos.* 418, where the personified Rhine enters the virtual masque to join forces with the Moselle. Ausonius mentioned the Neckar too because it had been the location of a recent victory of Valentinian I's against the Alamanni.⁴⁰ Here the poet foretells a time when the Franks will tremble and the river god Rhine will be considered a *true limes*:

Accedent vires, quas Francia, quasque Chamaves,
Germanique tremant: tunc *verus habebere limes* (435).

The expression *verus limes* is virtually unparalleled and requires comment. I outlined three possible states for borders above.⁴¹ "Then you will be considered a *true limes*" makes clear that the Rhine was in some sense *not* a *true limes* at time of writing.⁴² It was experienced as permeable by the Romans, and would need to become the panegyric minatory *limes*, "with teeth" as it were, to make the barbarians tremble.⁴³ The *vires* ("Kräfte") were men, troops to defend the Rhine. "Dann wirst Du als wahrer Grenz-wall gelten."⁴⁴ It is not impossible that we hear a hidden word-play where *vires* make a *verus limes*. These bold prophetic lines constitute the climax of the *Mosella*, but not its end, which retreats from the thrust towards the Rhine frontier to the Garonne and is far more subdued (*Mos.* 438-483).

³⁹ Terminology borrowed from GOODHART 2017.

⁴⁰ SHANZER 1998a, 230-231 for the dating (after 369, 370, or 371) with edits from after 378; SHANZER 1998b. *Modo* is the "tell".

⁴¹ See above, p. 161.

⁴² The archaeology of the text makes it impossible to know for sure, but I would suspect that *Mos.* 435 fits the period after Ausonius' consulship in 379 better than ca. 369.

⁴³ I stand by my interpretation in SHANZER 1998b, 300.

⁴⁴ Translated by GRUBER 2013, 87.

Outre Rhin

The empire and its promoters intermittently spoke of expanding the *limes*, of bulging belligerently into *Barbaricum*. The panegyrist of 289 had expressed such sentiments: *quidquid ultra Rhenum prospicio, Romanum est*.⁴⁵ In 369 at Valentinian I's behest, Ausonius had made a joyful noise in *Epigram* 28.8 *nec Rhenum Gallis limitis esse loco* ("nor does the Rhine count as a frontier for the Gauls"), envisaging Roman expansionism beyond the border.⁴⁶

Trans Danubian

The other *limes*, starring in *Epigr.* 28 and its brother-poem (*Epigr.* 31), was the personified Danube; its news was that the Goths had been conquered (*victos*). The event referred to involved a treaty concluded by Valens in 367 – in the middle of the river "in no man's land" – with Athanaric that was recounted in *Amm. Marc.* 27.5.9.⁴⁷ Herwig Wolfram's reaction was deflationary and sober: "One can hardly speak of a Roman victory in this peace, or of a Gothic military defeat in the military sense."⁴⁸ We might also need to reconsider the river as "no man's land". For when the event was recalled in *Amm. Marc.* 31.4.13, it was presented not as a universal protocol, but as a controlling demand of Athanaric's that could plausibly have created strife (*simultas*).⁴⁹

IV. Revisiting Adrianople and Its Aftermath

Let us now fast forward to what is often seen as a *dies fatalis* for Rome, the Battle of Adrianople on the 9th of August, 378. This was a point of no return for Professor Demandt: "Seitdem war die Grenze offen, der Feind im Land."⁵⁰ I will begin with Valens' perilous situation in late 377 and then

⁴⁵ *Pan. Lat.* 289 7.7 *Licet Rhenus arescat tenuique lapsu uix leues calculos perspicuo uado pellat, nullus inde metus est: quidquid ultra Rhenum prospicio, Romanum est.*

⁴⁶ SHANZER 1998a, 209 for the dating.

⁴⁷ As DEMANDT (above, p. 40) puts it: "mitten auf der Donau, also paritätisch im Niemandsland, jeder mit seinem Gefolge auf einem Schiff".

⁴⁸ WOLFRAM 1988, 368.

⁴⁹ *Quibus, ut communi rei conducere uidebatur, repudiatis et, quid capesserent, anxii Athanaricus paria pertimescens abcessit, memor Valentem dudum, cum foederaretur concordia, despexisse affirmantem se religione deuinctum, ne calcaret solum aliquando Romanum, hacque causatione principem firmare pacem in medio flumine coegisse. Quam simultatem ueritus ut adhuc durantem ad Caucalandensem locum altitudine siluarum inaccessum et montium cum suis omnibus declinauit Sarmatis inde extrusis.*

⁵⁰ See DEMANDT, above, p. 41.

introduce evidence from Ausonius to try to put together a different composite narrative about Gratian's role in the battle and its aftermath.

En Route

Even after Diocletian's reforms and the establishment of mobile field armies there were constant problems in sending troops on time to where they were needed. Valens had to summon help from different parts of the empire against the Goths in 377 and 378.⁵¹ Gratian responded but was delayed and himself delayed.⁵² The Lentienses, when they heard that he was headed to Thrace, opportunistically seized the chance to attack Rhaetia in February 378. Ammianus (31.10.3 *loquendo effusior* and 31.10.20) knew that idle talk had cost lives.⁵³ But Gratian achieved a victory against them on his way east and followed up with an unnecessary (dilatory? distracting?) incursion across the Rhine.⁵⁴ *Nec Rhenum ...* The Rhine and Danube borders had both, so Ausonius, been subdued ("pacified") in one year.⁵⁵

Gratian, however, was still in Trier on 1 June 378.⁵⁶ He marched east towards the Norican-Pannonian *limes*.⁵⁷ Details of his itinerary are provided by Amm. Marc. 31.10.20: he made for Illyricum via Felix Arbor (Kastell Arbon in Switzerland, near Lake Konstanz) and Lauriacum on the Danube (Lorch). Then Amm. Marc. 31.11.6 picks up Gratian's route eastwards down the Danube from Lauriacum.⁵⁸

Dum haec aguntur in Thraciis, Gratianus docto litteris patruo, qua industria superaverit Alamanos, pedestri itinere praemissis impedimentis et sarcinis, ipse cum expeditiore militum manu, permeato Danubio, delatus **Bononiam**, Sirmium introiit, et quadriduum ibi moratus, **per idem flumen** ad Martis castra descendit, febribus intervallatis afflictus: in quo tractu Halanorum impetu repentino temptatus, amisit sequentium paucos.

While this was going on in Thrace, Gratian informed his uncle by letter of the energy with which he had overcome the Alamanni. He sent his bulky and heavy baggage ahead on foot, and himself, with a more lightly armed band of soldiers,

⁵¹ Including Armenia (Amm. Marc. 31.7.2).

⁵² FORTINA (1953, 61) speculates that matters might have been different had Gratian arrived on time. See also LENSKI 2002, 356 and 366.

⁵³ Compare DEMANDT 2008, 88 for the western barbarians taking advantage of Julian's Persian campaign to attack the whole western front and *ibid.*, 97 for the Lentienses' uprising in 378.

⁵⁴ Amm. Marc. 31.10.7-17.

⁵⁵ Ausonius, *Grat. Act.* 2.7 *Testis est uno pacatus in anno Danuvii limes et Rheni*. LENSKI (1997, 130-141) is rightly skeptical.

⁵⁶ FORTINA 1953, 69, n. 38 citing *CTh.* 1.15.9.

⁵⁷ See LENSKI 2002, 366 for "boats down the Danube".

⁵⁸ DRIJVERS & TEITLER (2019, 122-123) give 835 km and estimate a week's journey.

after traveling down the Danube⁵⁹ having been conveyed as far as **Bononia**, entered Sirmium and, having stayed there for four days, went downstream **on the same river** to Martis Castra, afflicted by intermittent bouts of fever. In that area he was put to the test by a sudden attack of Alans and lost a few of his soldiers.

In the interest of concision, I will summarize the problems related to this itinerary rather than reproduce a scholarly blow-by-blow of who got what wrong or failed to take account of what. First, Ammianus did not express himself as clearly as he might have done, for the phrase *per idem flumen* might lead one to think that he thought Sirmium lay on the Danube.⁶⁰ It does not, and there is no evidence in his corpus that he thought it did. Second, there are, confusingly, *two* places called Bononia in the area. The westernmost is on the Danube and corresponds to modern Banoštor (Serbia).⁶¹ The second Bononia lies to the east and is identified with modern Vidin in Bulgaria.⁶² We need to decide between the two, and, if we identify Bononia with modern Vidin, we would have to posit either an error of Ammianus' or a corruption in the transmission of his text.⁶³ The path of least resistance is to choose Banoštor as the point of disembarkation to march south: Ammianus had mentioned it and Sirmium in one breath in Book 21.⁶⁴ Gratian then delayed for four days in Sirmium on a pressing journey, and there is no evidence that he returned to Bononia-Banoštor.⁶⁵ We might then posit a stage on foot of at least a day from Sirmium to the Danube, say at Singidunum.⁶⁶ Thence Gratian would have travelled downstream to Viminacium and eventually to Bononia-Vidin in Bulgaria, and thence on foot to Castra Martis,⁶⁷ an intermediate stage, where he was attacked by Alans. The strangeness here is that, even if Bononia-Vidin is not explicitly mentioned,

⁵⁹ Ammianus uses the verb both for "to cross" or "traverse" (21.13.2; 26.8.4; 28.5.1) as well as for "to travel on or down" (22.8.13; 23.6.11; 24.2.22). He must intend the river-journey from Lauriacum to Bononia.

⁶⁰ DRIJVERS & TEITLER 2019, 122: "down the Danube to Sirmium" sounds vague, but at p. 123 they note that Gratian must have disembarked at the place they identify as "Bononia".

⁶¹ TALBERT (2000, 21B4) has it as "Malata".

⁶² LENSKI (2002, 366, n. 34) thought the sequence in Ammianus' geography confused, and that it should be Sirmium (Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia) and then, 342 km further east, Bononia (Vidin, Bulgaria) by boat, and then (on foot) as far as Martis Castra. He did not discuss Sirmium's location. FORTINA (1953, 62) cannily omitted Bononia.

⁶³ I had toyed with emending the text to read *dilata*, "postponing Bononia (sc. Vidin, his real destination), he entered Sirmium (instead)".

⁶⁴ Amm. Marc. 21.9.6 *cum uenisset Bononiam a Sirmio miliario nono disparatam*.

⁶⁵ Pace DRIJVERS & TEITLER 2019, 123.

⁶⁶ Would or could Gratian have sailed down the Sava? That would have required more organization.

⁶⁷ See HEATHER 1991, 143; TALBERT 2000, 21E6 and now: WILKES et al. 2024. LENSKI (2002, 334) identifying it with Kula in Dacia Ripensis, intends the same place.



© Nikolas Hächler. Information on the course of Roman roads was kindly provided by Anne Kolb and Ursula Kunnert

it seems nonetheless required as the closest disembarkation point for Castra Martis.⁶⁸ Ockham's razor warns us against multiplying entities, but in this case, it seems unavoidable.

Reaching Adrianople

But is this the default or even a reasonable itinerary for reaching Adrianople? As Nikolas Hächler's map above shows, one would have expected Gratian to disembark at Viminacium and march southeast on the Via Prima via Naissus, Serdica, and Philippopolis to Adrianople.

Instead he ended up in Castra Martis, right at the edge of highland that would have been difficult terrain for his army. I will return to this point later, but Castra Martis is the furthest east we can place Gratian, and there he was still about 450 km distant from Adrianople.⁶⁹ While Drijvers and Teitler make a convincing argument for a later absolute dating for Gratian's travel, they do not address the question of whether his itinerary as described by Ammianus is the itinerary of an emperor who wanted to come to

⁶⁸ This is what DRIJVERS & TEITLER (2019, 123) must do.

⁶⁹ DRIJVERS & TEITLER (2019, 123) agree.

the aid of his colleague as fast as possible.⁷⁰ Valens (fatally) did not await the arrival of Gratian with his Western army⁷¹ and perished with two-thirds of his soldiers at Adrianople.⁷²

Gratian's Western Panegyrist

Now Ausonius had been appointed consul for 379, the year after Adrianople (August 9, 378). So, when he delivered his delayed *Gratiarum Actio* before Gratian⁷³ in September, 379,⁷⁴ it was against the background of Valens' grim defeat in the East. Ausonius adverted to Gratian's troubles in late 378: he was *districtus maximo bello, adsultantibus tot milibus barbarorum, quot Danuvii ora praetexitur*.⁷⁵ But he minimized Adrianople with a vague allusion to *a contumelia belli patruus vindicatus*.⁷⁶ There is really no acknowledgement in this consular speech of that most inauspicious day of the Roman calendar.⁷⁷ 378 CE might seem not to have lived on in infamy.

While in line with Lenski's observations about early responses to Adrianople, Ausonius is extreme in his suppression and reduction of the defeat and in his boastful solipsism. Could nothing rain on his parade? Needily and endlessly grateful? Tone-deaf? Self-absorbed? Just poorly informed? Or is there some way of reading beneath the surface to help work out his limitations and intentions?

I will pull at a loose thread or two. The very beginning of the *Gratiarum Actio* (2.8-9) detailed the triumphal titles of Gratian that Ausonius did not need to expand on. Cascading *praeteritiones* about matters military ruled, and Ausonius used cryptic language to hive off what he proposed omitting: *sed alia est ista materia et suo parata secreto*. The latter phrase has proved

⁷⁰ Their primary interest is chronology, not geography. DRIJVERS & TEITLER (2019, 124) keep Gratian in Trier through 1 June 378 and have him resuming his journey to Thrace in early July. They place him in Castra Martis on 2/3 August 378, 18-19 days away from Adrianople.

⁷¹ Amm. Marc. 31.12.4-7.

⁷² Amm. Marc. 31.13.18; DEMANDT, above, p. 41: "vernichtend geschlagen und fiel".

⁷³ I see no reason to assume that Gratian was not present, as does SIVAN (1993, 119), citing PEIPER (1886, ciii), who says that Gratian had entered Gaul, but hadn't reached Trier. Peiper was over-reading the *mox* of *Grat. Act. 7.34 sed Treveri principis beneficio et mox cum ipso auctore beneficia*. Why not just an allusion to a celebration following the speech? PASTORINO (1971, 341) disambiguates by translating *mox* as "oggi".

⁷⁴ BAGNALL et al. 1987, 20-21. Gratian was back in Trier by the 14 September 379: SEECK 1919, 252.

⁷⁵ *Grat. Act. 9.42*. Elections for consulship held in Sirmium "while Gratian was busy with a major war, with as many thousands of barbarians attacking, as adorn the shore of the Danube." GREEN (1991, 538) notes that this is the one reference to the barbarian threat.

⁷⁶ *Grat. Act. 2.7*: "His paternal uncle avenged of the insult he suffered in war." LENSKI (1997, 146) saw here an allusion to an historiographical tradition that blamed Valens.

⁷⁷ GIBBON 1907, 312. Amm. Marc. 31.12.10 noted the date.

hard to translate and to unpack.⁷⁸ Let us hold on to the military *alia materia* and introduce a second passage.

Ausonius ended his speech on a high note with rhetorical pyrotechnics that repay closer attention. He began with mythically swift steeds such as Pegasus and Cyllarus in *Grat. Act.* 18.81. He then addressed Gratian:

Tu, Gratiane, tot Romani imperii limites, tot flumina et lacus, tot ueterum intersaepta regnorum ab usque Thracia per totum, quam longum est, latus Illyrici, Venetiam Liguriamque et Galliam ueterem, insuperabilia Rhaetiae, Rheni imperua,⁷⁹ Sequanorum inuia, porrecta Germaniae, celeriore transcurso, quam est properatio nostri sermonis, euoluis, nulla requie otii, ne somni quidem aut cibi munere liberali, ut Gallias tuas inopinatus illustres, ut consulem tuum, quamuis desideratus, anticipes, ut illam ipsam, quae auras praecedere solet, famam facias tardiozem. hoc senectuti meae, hoc honori a te datum. *Gratiarum Actio* 18.82 (Prete 1978 Teubner)

You, Gratian, unroll more swiftly than I can rush in my speech, so many boundaries of the Roman Empire, so many rivers and lakes, so many borders of ancient kingdoms, all the way from Thrace, through the whole length of the coast of Illyricum, Venetia, Liguria, and ancient (= Cisalpine) Gaul, the unconquerable peaks of Rhaetia, the inaccessible regions of the Rhine, the uncharted lands of the Sequani,⁸⁰ the broad plains of Germania. All with no rest or relaxation, not even to sleep,⁸¹ nor enjoyment of the bounty of food, so as unexpectedly to brighten your own Gallic provinces, so as to anticipate your consul, however much you were longed for, so that you could render Rumor herself a bit of a laggard, she who normally out-speeds the breezes.

He accelerated towards his finish line as if – in sympathetic mimicry – time were short. The conceit is that Gratian's travel was as fast as Ausonius' speech. We have mentioned the intellectual seductions of maps and swoop-

⁷⁸ *Grat. Act.* 2.9 *sed alia est ista materia et suo parata secreto, cum placuerit signanter et breviter omnia quae novimus indicare, nec persequi, ut qui terrarum orbem unius tabulae ambitu circumscribunt aliquanto detrimenti magnitudinis, nullo dispendio veritatis.* The image is of a map. PASTORINO (1971, 331) annoyingly skips “et suo parata secreto.” EVELYN-WHITE (1921, 225) tries: “but that is another theme and one which will be treated in its own separate place.” This excessively flat and literal interpretation of *secerno* seems implausible. The expression regularly overwhelmingly refers to a private or secret place. SIVAN (1993, 122) follows Evelyn-White and sees the promise of a separate work. GREEN (1991, 541) suggests “in private”. The expression recurs in *Grat. Act.* 3.12 *sui muneris peculiare secretum.* The running *praeteritio* continues at *Grat. Act.* 13.62 *quamquam me istam dixerim seposuisse materiam et in tempus aliud reservare.*

⁷⁹ *Acclivia* PASTORINO 1971, 364; *vadosa* PEIPER 1886 and EVELYN-WHITE 1921, 268; SCHENKL (1883, 29) rightly daggars *accolas*, but mentions *aquosa* [banal and not an impediment] and suggests *fortasse acclivia*.

⁸⁰ Around Besançon? A way of talking about “Provincia Maxima Sequanorum”.

⁸¹ Compare Mamertinus, *Pan.* 362.13.3 and 14.3 for the sleeplessness and reduced *otium* of the emperor.

ing arrows above.⁸² This bravura sentence is a textual equivalent of such modern images. The verb *evolves*, which means “to unroll” or “unfurl”, is a metaphor that suggests that Ausonius was imagining the unfurling of a map. Let’s read this passage with *Grat. Act. 2.9* on Gratian’s military achievements:

sed alia est ista materia et suo parata secreto, cum placuerit signanter et breviter omnia quae novimus indicare, nec persequi, ut qui terrarum orbem unius tabulae ambitu circumscribunt aliquanto detrimenti magnitudinis, nullo dispendio veritatis.

But that is different material and ready for separate [or “secret”] treatment, when it will be our pleasure to note clearly and briefly all that we know, but not to pursue it in detail – like those who compass the orb of the earth within the confines of one picture⁸³ with some loss of impressive scale, but with none of truth.

The imperial progress is a rhetorical theme familiar from historiography and panegyric. Julian’s almost supernaturally swift journey to Constantinople upon the death of Constantius II in *Amm. Marc. 22.2* is an excellent parallel. Ammianus compared the magical winged chariot of Triptolemus (22.2.3) and, like Ausonius, included an allusion to *fama*, rumor, speech.

qua re cognita post exemptos periculorum aestus et bellicarum sollicitudinum turbas in immensum elatus iamque uaticiniis credens et celeritatem negotiis suis aliquotiens profuisse expertus edixit iter in Thracias motisque propere signis emensa decliuitate Succorum Philippopolim petit, Eumolpiada ueterem, alacri gradu sequentibus, quos duxerat, cunctis. 3 aduertebant enim imperium, quod ereptum ibant cum ultimorum metu discriminum, praeter spem ordinario iure concessum. utque solet **fama** nouitates augere, properabat exinde sublimior uti quodam **Triptolemi curru**, quem ob rapidos circumgressus | aeriis serpentibus et pinnigeris fabulosa uetustas imponit, perque terras et maria formidatus nullis obstantibus moris Heracleam ingressus est Perinthum. 4 quo apud Constantinopolim mox comperto | effundebatur aetas omnis et sexus tamquam demissum aliquem uisura de caelo.

On learning this, and being now saved from the fret of dangers and the throes of war’s anxieties, he was hugely elated. And now believing in the prophecies, and knowing by experience that speed had often been helpful to his enterprises, he ordered a march into Thrace, quickly broke camp, and passing the slope of Succii, made for Philippopolis, the ancient Eumolpias, followed with eager step by all who were under his command. 3. For they perceived that the throne, which they were on their way to usurp in the face of the greatest dangers, had beyond their hope been granted to him by the ordinary course of law. And as rumour is wont to exaggerate all novelties, he hastened on from there, now raised still higher, as though in some chariot of Triptolemus, which the poets of old, because of its swift

⁸² See Introduction, above, pp. 11-12. For a nice example, see CORNELL & MATTHEWS 1982, 209.

⁸³ Same idea in Jerome, *Ep. 123.13.1* *Quasi in brevi tabella latissimos terrarum situs ostendere volui*.

turnings, represented as drawn through the air by winged dragons; and dreaded by land and sea and opposed by no delays, he entered Heraclea, also called Perinthus. 4. When this was presently known at Constantinople, all ages and sexes poured forth, as if to look upon someone sent down from heaven.⁸⁴

Mamertinus' *Gratiarum Actio* to Julian also featured similar and even more extravagant material in a different context.⁸⁵

Ausonius' conceit was that Gratian had come flying back from the East for his consular speech in Gaul.⁸⁶ The emperor is imagined as speeding from the confines of the empire, over its borders, rushing as fast as Rumor itself, all the way from Thrace to visit Gaul (Trier). The journey was more than mythological and also magically swift. Was it here that Ausonius perhaps discreetly accommodated his separate and perhaps secret (*suo secreto*) treatment of Gratian's military successes?⁸⁷

Ab usque Thracia

It is worth examining the virtual *itinerarium*.⁸⁸ Seeck envisaged a route over the Splügen Pass and the Upper Rhine to Basel and thence into Alsace's Rhine Valley.⁸⁹ Fortina recommended caution about Seeck's reconstructed details, but noted that Gratian had been in Sirmium (Pannonia Inferior) in February before returning to Gaul and to Trier by September.⁹⁰ I, however, am more interested in the *starting point*, namely the phrase *ab usque Thracia*. What precisely is intended? Roger Green saw a reference to Constantinople, whither Gratian supposedly continued "after Adrianople".⁹¹ But the source cited simply has Gratian setting out for Eastern Rome.⁹² As far as I can see, there is no unambiguous, non-circular evidence that Gratian ever travelled further east than *Martis Castra*, which

⁸⁴ ROLFE 1982, vol. 2, 189 and 191.

⁸⁵ Mamertinus, *Pan.* 362. 6.2-8.3 with translation and commentary of NIXON & RODGERS 1994, 403-407. 8.2 alludes to Triptolemus' chariot: *Tu puerum, inuentorem serendi, draconum alitum curru uolantem semina in terras sparsisse iactasti*.

⁸⁶ See AUSONIUS 1886, civ.

⁸⁷ See above, p. 174.

⁸⁸ HEATHER (1991, 149) has no interest in Gratian's trip west. DEMANDT (2008, 100) elides Gratian's return to the West completely.

⁸⁹ SEECK 1919, 252.

⁹⁰ FORTINA 1953, 65.

⁹¹ GREEN 1991, 554. But John of Antioch Fr. 210 Mariev (= 185 Müller) in MARIEV 2008, 376-377 says nothing about visiting Adrianople. Green must have meant "after the *bat-tle* of Adrianople".

⁹² John of Antioch MARIEV 2008, 376-377 says that Gratian *set out for* Constantinople (italics mine) after he heard of Valens' death. SEECK (1919, 250) puts Gratian in Constantinople in Fall 378, but the evidence is circular, since the only other testimony beside John of Antioch is – Aus. *Grat. Act.* 18.82!

seems to be in Dacia Ripensis.⁹³ His location when he heard of Valens' death is unclear.⁹⁴ Thracia, of course, is an umbrella term that included where the Battle of Adrianople (Edirne) had been fought.⁹⁵ Did Ausonius, that most geographical and topographical thinker, wish to leave his audience with the impression that Gratian had visited Thrace⁹⁶ and attended to what needed to be attended to there? A panegyric gift of *suggestio falsi*? This area is a real historical lacuna.⁹⁷

Dying in Battle

That something needed attention was clear. Libanius said a thing or two about the *pax deorum* in his *Oratio 24 de ulciscendo Iuliano*. Emperors slain in battle needed to be avenged.⁹⁸ He would have despised the disloyal Christian *Schadenfreude* of *De mortibus persecutorum* 5.2.⁹⁹ Sivan thought that Ausonius elided the purpose of Gratian's mission in the East.¹⁰⁰ Not entirely, I insist. He initially reduced vengeance (which of course had not been properly exacted) to a minimizing and inaccurate *a contumelia belli patruus vindicatus*. Subsequently he (quite unjustifiably) praised Gratian's *pietas* in avenging Valens: *quam in ulciscendo patruo probas*.¹⁰¹

Responding to Adrianople

There is no single snapshot of the aftermath of Adrianople – only individual focalizers and first responders. As Lenski has carefully outlined for us, it took time for it to become fixed as the canonical catastrophe it even-

⁹³ See above, p. 171. I am grateful to Roger Tomlin for pointing me to MAENCHEN-HELFEN 1955, 389 and to the *Notitia Dignitatum*, which places Bononia, Dorticum and Ratiaria, all in Dacia Ripensis (*Or.* 42, Dux Daciae Ripensis, 13, 14 and 38). They are on the Danube to Martis Castra's north and east. FORTINA (1953, 63) has Gratian far from the battle and then retreating to Sirmium.

⁹⁴ See HEATHER 1991, 149 for Victor's route to find Gratian in Zosimus 4.24.3: Macedonia, Thessaly, Moesia, Pannonia. DEMANDT (2008, 99) puts him in Sirmium.

⁹⁵ Also *Thraciae* in Ammianus, where it is used 32 times in the plural (LLTA). Amm. 27.4.12 includes Philippopolis, Eumolpias, and Beroea.

⁹⁶ The term is rather vague, for four Diocletianic Thracian provinces (Thracia, Rhodope, Haemimontus, and Europa) formed the diocese of Thraciae.

⁹⁷ It is covered in a few lines by HEATHER (1991, 149).

⁹⁸ *Or.* 24.8 Jovian did not avenge Julian; 24.10 neither did Valentinian and Valens, 24.27 (of Julian). WIJNENDAELE (above, p. 83) condemns Roman reprisals for Adrianople.

⁹⁹ The fate of Valerian when captured by Shapur. Both the author of the *Mort.* and Libanius (*Or.* 24.19) knew about distressing Persian depictions of defeated Roman emperors.

¹⁰⁰ SIVAN 1993, 120.

¹⁰¹ *Grat. Act.* 8.39: the first in a sequence that included *beneficia* to Valentinian II and to Ausonius himself!

tually became.¹⁰² Ausonius clearly fits in as a minimizer. Rufinus would subsequently see the battle as the beginning of future evil for the Roman Empire.¹⁰³ Gibbon, working from his faithful guide Ammianus, thought its “fatal consequences” far surpassed Cannae’s.¹⁰⁴ But this, as we shall see, is not the modern way of reading Ammianus’ verdict in 31.13.18.¹⁰⁵

constatque uix tertiam euasisse exercitus partem <Nec ulla>¹⁰⁶ annalibus praeter Cannensem pugnam ita ad internecionem res legitur gesta, quamquam Romani aliquotiens reflante Fortuna fallaciis lusi | bellorum iniquitati cesserunt ad tempus et certamina multa fabulosae neniae fleuere Graecorum. (ed. Seyfarth)¹⁰⁷ Periiit autem hoc exitu Valens ...

It is clear that barely one third of the army escaped. Nor is any battle¹⁰⁸ in the annals, aside from the fight at Cannae, said to have been fought to destruction in such a way, although the Romans sometimes, fooled by trickery when the winds of fortune blew in the wrong direction, retreated for a while from war against greater forces¹⁰⁹ and the mythical dirges of the Greeks have wept for many a military contest. Valens too perished in this disaster ...

So Ammianus. There is at least one patent lacuna in the text and some oddness about the logic of *quamquam* and what occasions were intended when the Romans were defeated and refrained for a while from fighting foes who outnumbered them.¹¹⁰ Wolfram tried to read Ammianus’ comparison to Cannae as signaling a “hope for recovery” that “was entirely justified”.¹¹¹

¹⁰² LENSKI 1997, 129-168.

¹⁰³ HE 11.13 *Quae pugna initium mali Romano imperio tunc et deinceps fuit.*

¹⁰⁴ GIBBON 1907, 314.

¹⁰⁵ WARD-PERKINS (2005, 38 and 40) may be an exception, but he does not address the question of recovery.

¹⁰⁶ AMMIANUS et al. (1978, 194) reports that the lacuna was noted by Clark; Accursius supplied a necessary *Nec ulla*, which was accepted by SABBAGH (2021, 558, n. 52).

¹⁰⁷ AMMIANUS et al. 1978, 194.

¹⁰⁸ LEWIS & SHORT 1879, s.v. ‘res’ G.

¹⁰⁹ I am not satisfied with ROLFE 1982, vol. 3, 483: “yielded for a time to ill success in their wars”. *Iniquitas* can have a numerical sense (like *inaequalis*, but verging into disadvantageous or adverse), which is how I take it here. The alternative is to read it in a moral sense (like *iniustus*). See SZANTYR. “inīquitās, -ātis f.” In: Thesaurus Linguae Latinae Online, vol. 7, 1, pp. 1636-1639. Berlin / New York 1955 [https://tll-degruyter-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/article/7_1_11_iniquitas_v2007].

¹¹⁰ The moral *iniquitas* of one’s enemies creates just wars (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 4.15), but wars are also unfair in their outcomes (Ps.-Quit. *Decl. Maior*. 13.8 for those enslaved). Ammianus here may intend the word more neutrally in the sense of a war in which the Romans were outnumbered by their foes. LENSKI (2002, 355) sees 200,000 Gothic men, women, and children as “not beyond reason”.

¹¹¹ WOLFRAM 1988, 128. The same line is followed by Jan DEN BOEFT, Daniël DEN HENGST, Hans C. TEITLER & Jan Willem DRIJVERS. Philological and Historical Commentary to Ammianus Marcellinus’ *Res Gestae* [http://dx-doi-org.uaccess.univie.ac.at/10.1163/2589-5877_stoa0023.stoa001.amo-eng2].

While I cannot assess whether the Roman Empire could have recovered, I find such optimistic readings of Ammianus' intent unsustainable. No unqualified allusion to *Cannae* ever leaves a good taste in readers' mouths.¹¹² I doubt that Wolfram and others¹¹³ are interpreting 31.13.19 correctly and I see no positives, even implicit ones, here: the whole paragraph is about how illustrious men perished.¹¹⁴

One has only to look at Ammianus' framing of Book 31 and use literary common sense. Ammianus had already foreshadowed Adrianople in 27.5.7 *rem publicam funeribus perpetuo deflendis affligeret*. He began his final book with portents (31.1.1-5), he adverted to the *orbis Romani perniciēs* (31.4.6), to the death-bearing torches of the Furies (31.5.4) and the *commune exitium*. It is true that he sets the record straight on the previous parallels (31.5.11-17), but he also noted that men had by his days become degenerate (31.5.14 *solutioris vitae mollitie*). Even though Spain had been recovered after a similar disaster during the Second Punic War (211 BCE), both Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio Calvus and Valens were burned and unburied (31.13.17).

As part of the aftermath of the battle, after failing to capture Adrianople (31.15) the Goths pushed ahead to Constantinople. There we hear (31.16.6) that a naked Saracen warrior clad only in a loincloth terrified them by jumping into their midst, killing a Goth and drinking his blood. This portent-like horror succeeded in discouraging the invaders and supposedly saved Constantinople. Ammianus had spoken of the horrors of barbarians drinking blood on previous occasions in the distant past.¹¹⁵ This episode doesn't display the Roman defenders in a particularly positive light, but it is a good example of Demandt's "homeopathy".¹¹⁶

Finally a philological argument *ex silentio*. Ammianus uses no consolatory topoi whatsoever at the end where they might be expected. When he compared Valens' and Decius' fates, he noted that even Marcus Aurelius would have had trouble relieving the woes of the state without assistance (31.13.12-13). He clearly said in 31.5.14 that the empire after Marcus Aurelius would be enervated by a soft lifestyle and moral degradation. At 31.5.17 he notes the Goths' long quiescence after Claudius Gothicus and Aurelian. Ammianus ended his *Res gestae* by hoping that his continuators would forge their tongues to (even) higher styles, implying that epic and

¹¹² See, for one, Ausonius, above, pp. 164-165.

¹¹³ Also DEMANDT 2008, 97: "auch Hoffnung".

¹¹⁴ LENSKI (1997, 162) believes that Ammianus implies 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."

¹¹⁵ Amm. Marc. 27.4.4. on drinking human blood from skulls; Amm. Marc. 4.9. the blood-thirsty Odrysae who knife one another for potable blood, if no convenient enemies are available.

¹¹⁶ See DEMANDT, 2016 and above, p. 21, n. 100.

tragedy might be required (31.16.9). None of this suggests anything less than an extremely bumpy future. When trying to pin down the point of view of a sophisticated author (if it isn't transparent), one adduces *comparanda* whose intention is clear. To hear the rhetoric of recovery, by contrast, one has only to go to Rutilius Namatianus, *De reditu* 1.115-140. Ammianus could have explicitly said that what did not kill one made one stronger.¹¹⁷ He did not. I rest my case.

Lenski noted how responses started out optimistic and how the first ones gloss over Adrianople until 382.¹¹⁸ Ausonius patterns as a particularly shameless suppressor of evidence. But I also wonder whether some sort of Easter egg may lie hidden in the virtual map of the *Gratiarum Actio*. The implications of "Thracia" as disinformation are clear. The other details of Gratian's return west might repay more expert attention than mine. What was happening the whole length of Illyricum, in Venetia, in Liguria, in Cisalpine Gaul, in Rhaetia, etc.? ¹¹⁹ Was this simply the standard route westwards, or was Gratian avoiding trouble? Green dismissed the possibility of campaigns.¹²⁰

Rutilius Namatianus began his *De Reditu in mediis rebus* ("mid-conversation") with *Velocem potius reditum mirabere, lector*, "You would do better, dear reader, to wonder instead at my swift return." Those words could apply (out of context!) to Gratian. Was there no political or military substrate, and was Ausonius simply showing that Gratian did not always have to set a record as a *cunctator maximus*? That he was capable of bestirring himself when required? Otherwise, one might be forgiven for thinking that Gratian had been doing his best to miss his appointment at Adrianople.

Demandt has outlined the long history of the Rhine-Danube *limes* for us in elegantly small compass. The wind in his sails and the swish of his narrative are infectious. Ammianus, the soldier-historian, left us, I argue, with a dark final frame.¹²¹ Ausonius, the poet-panegyrist, did not have that luxury. I hope to have brought Ammianus into a productive conversation with Ausonius.

¹¹⁷ E.g. Rut. Nam. *De red.* 1.129 *quae mergi nequeunt nisu maiore resurgunt* and 140 *ordo renascendi est crescere posse malis*.

¹¹⁸ Theodosius' Gothic Peace. See LENSKI 1997, 139-140 and 143-144. Themistius was very negative; likewise Pacatus, who "plays up the miserable state of the empire".

¹¹⁹ GREEN (1991, 554) notes laws that placed him in Thessalonica (*CTh.* 13.1.11), Aquileia (2 July: *CTh.* 10.1.12), and Milan (*CTh.* 16.5.5). The dates (from SEECK 1919, 250-252) are Tricciana (= Ságvár, Hungary, 5 April *CTh.* 11.36.26), Aquileia (2 July, 5 July), Milan (31 July, 3 August), Tres Tabernae (on the Via Appia, 4 August).

¹²⁰ GREEN 1991, 554.

¹²¹ Despite the relief that Julius' slaughter of other Gothic troops and settlers (31.16.8) might seem to bring. He was *salutaris* and *velox*, while Valens (31.14.7) was *cessator et piger*.

V. A River Runs through It: the Last Word with the Danube

Now Professor Demandt's topic, the politics of the Romano-German *limes*, is largely delineated by the Rhine and the Danube. So I will end with a set of poems that illustrate and exemplify tensions in politics and how they were geographically framed. While the Rhine-Danube *limes* faced northwards to *barbaricum* and can look unitary, it was defended by different emperors with different sets of interests, West and East. The Rhine was the West's problem, but the Danube concerned both colleagues.

In or soon after 369, Ausonius used his political imagination to evoke the thrilling image of Pater Danubius raising his happy head¹²² in Donauschingen to compliment Valentinian I and Gratian on their victories over the Suebi and on the right bank of the Rhine, and to convey the news to Valens, the *cura secunda* of the gods, downstream on the lower Danube frontier:

AD FONTEM DANVVII IVSSV VALENTINIANI AVGVSTI.

Illyricis regnator aquis, tibi, Nile, secundus

Danuuius laetum profero fonte caput.

saluere Augustos iubeo, natumque patremque,

armiferis alui quos ego Pannoniis.

nuntius Euxino iam nunc uolo currere ponto,

ut sciat hoc superum cura secunda Valens,

caede, fuga, flammis stratos periisse Suebos

nec Rhenum Gallis limitis esse loco.

quod si lege maris refluus mihi curreret amnis,

huc possem uictos inde referre Gothos. (Ausonius, *Epigram* 28 Peiper = 3 Green)

AT THE SOURCE OF THE DANUBE BY COMMAND OF THE AUGUSTUS VALENTINIAN

Monarch of the Illyrian waters, second only to you, O Nile,

I, the Danube, raise my happy head from my head-waters.

I send greetings to the *Augusti*, both son and father,

whom I raised among warlike Pannonians.

I now wish to run as a messenger to the Euxine Sea

so that the second [or "next"] protégé of the gods, Valens,

may know that the Suebi have been thrown headlong and perished

in battle, flight, and flames,

and that the Rhine now no longer serves the function of a *limes*.

If my stream could run in the opposite direction according to the law of the sea's tides,

here I would be able to tell how the Goths had been conquered there. (Ausonius, *Epigr.* 28 Peiper = 3 Green)

¹²² River gods emerge from their waters when they feel safe. See Claudian, *6 Cons. Hon.* 159-160 for the Eridanus (personified Po) raising his head to see Alaric off across the Julian Alps.

This triumphant poem celebrated a now supposedly aggressive Rhine border. The Danube is here a *messenger*. But this was not the end of the story. The ill-starred and insecure Valens might well have bridled at being called a *cura secunda*, Ammianus would paint an emperor consumed by rivalry who resented his nephew's military successes (31.12.1).

But Ausonius gave us a chance to imagine yet another Danubian bulletin, news from the East, in a second, obviously paired, epigram that responds in ring-composition:

XXXI AD FONTEM DANVVII IVSSV VALENTINIANI AVGVSTI.

Danuuius penitis caput occultatus in oris

totus sub uestra iam dicione fluo:

qua gelidum fontem mediis effundo Suebis,

imperiis grauidas qua seco Pannonias,

et qua diues aquis Scythico soluo ostia ponto,

omnia sub uestrum flumina mitto iugum.

Augusto dabitur sed proxima palma Valenti:

inueniet fontes hic quoque, Nile tuos. (Ausonius, *Epigr.* 31 Peiper = 4 Green)

I, the Danube, whose head was once hidden in the most remote regions,

now flow completely under the dominion of both of you –

where I pour forth my icy head-waters in the midst of the Suebi

and where I cut off the Pannonian provinces that are pregnant with emperors.

and where, rich in waters, I debouch into the Scythian Sea –

I subject all rivers to your yoke.

The next palm of victory, will however be given to Valens Augustus:

he will discover your sources too, O Nile!

The second poem begins in the West with an allusion to the formerly mysterious source of the Danube.¹²³ First the river is presented as the emperors' subject (2),¹²⁴ and then as bringing his own subjects (6) to the empire. Its fourth verse, however, needs attention. Green saw the Danube as splitting or dividing Pannonia Superior and Inferior and remarking that the confluence of the Danube and the Drava is "close to Sirmium". He seems to suggest conquests beyond the northern bank of the Danube, so that it was "no longer a boundary, and that Pannonia included its northern bank."¹²⁵ He thus read it as making a point like that about the Rhine's now aggressive border in *Epigr.* 28.8.

This cannot be right. The Danube does not actually split or divide Pannonia Superior and Inferior. It constitutes their northern boundary. *Secare* thus cannot mean "to divide" here, but rather "to split off".¹²⁶ The river seems to be seen as "cutting off" ("midwifing"?) Pannonian provinces that

¹²³ SHANZER 1998a, 206-207.

¹²⁴ Meaning that of the whole imperial college, West and East.

¹²⁵ GREEN 1991, 380.

¹²⁶ LEWIS & SHORT 1879, s.v. 'seco' B.

are pregnant with emperors, perhaps – dare I say? – in a sort of Later Roman Caesarian section.¹²⁷ It subjugates all its tributaries to the imperial yoke.¹²⁸ This Danube, head waters now Roman, is a *limes* that is steady in its course. At the end Ausonius depicts the river-god as vindicating the disrespected Valens¹²⁹ by promising him the discovery of the source of the Nile.

Both epigrams were composed by a poet who looked Rhine-wards from his post at Trier. Ausonius mentioned the Danube twice in his *Mosella*: home to the *mustela* in *Mos.* 106 and its heretofore unknown source in *Mos.* 424 in the peroration. He must have been aware of Valens' virtual ownership of its lower reaches and its folk and therefore concentrated on "his" Western emperors' own strategic Rhine.

The two epigrams make clear how the long Danubian *limes* was split between West and East. Ausonius knew this, for he paid some attention to his focalization and Valens' point of view. While the mighty Danube acknowledges his political subjection to all the *Augusti*, he condescends to address only the Nile, not the shorter Rhine. Some synergy might have been preferable to pure fluvial protocol!

Ausonius as panegyrist did his best to minimize Adrianople in 379. His Danubius of 369 should have functioned as a barrier, but after 376 broke under ineluctable pressure from the Goths in the East and would never really come under Roman control again.¹³⁰ Ausonius' hopes for the Rhine in *Mos.* 435 must be the last hurrah that doesn't ring blatantly hollow about Roman power on the Rhine, for he couldn't have known that Gratian in 378 would be the last Roman emperor to campaign across the Rhine.¹³¹

¹²⁷ Italy is described as *gravida imperiis* in Verg. *Aen.* 4.229, but Ausonius is doing far more with the imagery of birthing legitimate emperors. Compare Jerome, *Ep.* 133.9 for Britain as the *fertilis provincia tyrannorum*.

¹²⁸ A panegyric exaggeration. Slightly more of the tributaries (ca. 97) flowed in from the right bank (in Roman territory). About 94 flowed in from the left (*barbaricum*) and were certainly not aggressive campaign venues of Valens. See LENSKI 2002, 320 for Valens' campaigns of 367 and 369. The accounts in Amm. Marc. are worse than underwhelming. Amm. Marc. 27.5.2 Valens crossed the Danube in 367; 27.5.4 he achieved nothing. In Amm. Marc. 27.5.6 he crossed at Novodunum in 369 (= Noviodunum in TALBERT 2000, 22 F3 Noviodunum and <https://pleiades.stoa.org/places/216900>) and concluded a peace with Athanaric and exchanged hostages. Hardly a glorious victory. My fluvial figures come from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_tributaries_of_the_Danube.

¹²⁹ I disagree with GREEN (1991, 379) who asserts that there is no condescension in *cura secunda. Sed dabitur proxima* is a clear riposte. All these attitudes originate with Ausonius.

¹³⁰ DEMANDT 2008, 98, citing Syme on the empire's geopolitical wasp-waist that lay between the Adriatic and the Danube.

¹³¹ DEMANDT 2008, 97.

And after the death of Theodosius in 395, relations between West and East would turn into the Cold War that enabled Alaric's Sack of Rome.¹³²

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¹³² Helpful term from WIJNENDAELE, above, p. 88.

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