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JULIAN AND THE FRANKS AND VALENTINIAN I
AND THE ALAMANNI: AMMIANUS ON ROMANO-GERMAN
RELATIONS

Introduction

The general contention of this paper is that the Germanic peoples settled on lands immediately to the east of the Rhine posed no real threat to the territorial integrity of the Roman Empire¹. This is not new; in recent years a number of historians – for example Goffart, Whittaker and Miller – have attempted to correct ancient and modern misconceptions of barbarian aggression². However, it must be said, they have enjoyed remarkably little success. Like the ancients, we still seem to need the German ›bogyman‹³.

Those who have attempted to understand the Germans have approached the question of their relationship to the Roman world in various ways. The particular argument advanced here is that, as far as Gaul was concerned, the ›German threat‹ was an imperial artefact – an indispensable means of justifying the imperial presence and imperial policies in the west, and of maintaining provincial loyalty to the Empire. Many instances of Roman ›difficulties‹ with Germans may, therefore, be re-interpreted as Roman manipulation of German society for imperial purposes⁴. Viewed in this light, Ammianus' account of Valentinian I's dealings with the Alamanni is a classic of its type. To understand what was actually happening one needs only to adopt the now standard approach to Ammianus, which is to concentrate on his description of events while eschewing his analysis of them⁵.

1 Full details of all the works cited are given under ›References‹ at the end of this paper. I must thank Wolf Liebeschuetz and Nick Henck for reading and commenting on earlier drafts. The penultimate version was written at the Fondation Hardt, Geneva. I am indebted to the British Academy, the Fonds National Suisse de la Recherche Scientifique and all the staff at the Fondation for supporting my stay there. This version was read to the Oxford Late Roman seminar in 1995. I have to thank Roger Tomlin and all who participated for their very constructive response.

2 GOFFART 1980 (esp. ch. 1); WHITTAKER 1994; MILLER 1996 (esp. 159f.: deploring the way in which historians continue to hawk ›old chestnuts about a Europe full of restless tribes constantly itching to be somewhere else, preferably at someone else's expense and with as much attendant violence as possible‹).

3 I have borrowed and adapted the phrase ›Frankish bogeyman‹ from NIXON and RODGERS 1996: 137.

4 See DRINKWATER 1996 for a preliminary attempt at such an analysis.

5 Thus, most recently, PASCHOUD 1992, esp. 70f. A handy summary of the development of Ammianus-studies, with particular reference to Ammianus' ›impartiality‹ and ›reliability‹, is given in ELLIOTT 1983: 3 ff. Though the earliest modern scholars were invariably disposed to put great trust in the *Res Gestae*, it was recognised that the work contains problems, and, stimulated by the publication of THOMPSON 1947, much recent research has subjected a number of its aspects to close examination. However, as Elliott's references to other works, his own approach and subsequent major

However, the task of teasing out the truth about Romano-German relations from Ammianus is not always just one of reading between the lines. Close study of his description of the so-called rebellion of Silvanus in Gaul in 355 gives cause to claim that, contrary to common belief, he was quite capable of suppressing or altering even factual information for his own purposes⁶. In other words, we have to accept that in certain places Ammianus' narrative is substantially unreliable⁷. In such cases we can only reconstruct events as best we can. There are similar grounds for believing that a second instance of Ammianus' distortion of the truth is to be found in his depiction of Julian's earliest contact with the Franks in 355/56, examined first here.

Julian and the Franks

Julian was proclaimed Caesar by Constantius II in Milan on 6th November, 355. On 1st December he set out for Gaul. According to Ammianus Marcellinus, on reaching Turin: ›... he was unnerved by a grim report which had recently been communicated to the imperial court but had been deliberately kept secret so as not to upset current arrangements. For it stated that Cologne, an important city in Germania Secunda, had been forced by barbarians, in great strength, after an unremitting siege, and had been destroyed (*pertinaci barbarorum obsidione reseratam magnis viribus et deletam*)⁸. Later in Ammianus' narrative it appears that these ›barbarians‹ were Franks⁹.

Modern studies of Julian's activities in Gaul accept Ammianus' account of the loss of Cologne without question¹⁰. The very brevity of his reference – in the manner of an emergency military despatch – reinforces the impression that the fall of so major a city was a great disaster for the Roman west. Cologne had retained its early imperial importance. In the reign of Constantine I it had been provided with a rare facility – a permanent and defended bridge across the Rhine; and throughout the fourth century it accommodated the forward command-headquarters of the Roman defence of the river – being in effect the military extension of the civilian sub-capital at Trier¹¹. That it had succumbed to Germanic siege would have been a clear sign of

publications (especially, MATTHEWS 1989) demonstrate, the current tendency is to accept the bulk of Ammianus' factual information, while making allowance for ›bias‹ and ›prejudice‹ (personal, religious, etc.) in his use of this material. One of the aims of this paper is to show that while in some contexts this is clearly a very valid approach, in others one must frankly accept that it is Ammianus' basic narrative which is defective.

6 DRINKWATER 1994.

7 Thus *contra* SABBAAH 1978: 407: ›Il n'y a guère dans les *Res gestae* de graves omissions perceptibles‹.

8 Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, ed. CLARK 1910/1915 (henceforth AM) 15.8.18f. (freely translated); cf. Julian, *Epistula ad Athenienses* 279B, Libanius, *Oratio* 18.46.

9 AM 16.3.1f. MATTHEWS 1989: 581 (Index) has Cologne taken by the Alamanni, without further explanation. I take this to be a slip of the pen. The inscription discussed by GRÜNWARD (below n. 11) explicitly locates Frankish-controlled territory opposite Cologne.

10 E. g. JULIAN 1926: 171ff., 190; BIDEZ 1930: 135, 142; BROWNING 1975: 76, 82; CRUMP 1975: 115; BOWERSOCK 1978: 36ff.; HEINEN 1985: 235; MATTHEWS 1989: 81, 88; DEMANDT 1989: 96; WHITTAKER 1994: 63.

11 For the first-to-third century importance of Cologne see DRINKWATER 1983: 130; cf. ID. 1987: 143ff., 228. For the bridge and bridgehead see *Panegyrici Latini* 7(6). 13.1–5 (Galletier), with GRÜNWARD 1989.

the desperate state of Gallic defences in the period following the fall of Magnentius, and a flattering measure of Julian's success in eventually restoring order there. The question at issue is whether the fall of Cologne took place precisely as Ammianus describes it.

Unease about the reliability of his account is prompted by the recollection that this occurs in that section of his history which, as he himself conceded, was virtually a panegyric on Julian¹². It increases when one reflects that a report that a city of the size and strategical and tactical importance of Cologne had been scientifically beleaguered and captured by the massed forces of fourth-century western Germans, and in particular by Franks, hardly rings true. The Franks were, compared with the Alamanni, by far the weaker of the Rhineland peoples whom the Empire faced at this time. It took them another century and massive imperial debilitation before they were able to capture Cologne again¹³. Suspicion that the incident deserves closer investigation is confirmed by the recollection that in other important respects the reliability of Ammianus' version of events in Gaul shortly before Julian's Caesarship is, to say the least, open to question – again, it would seem, as a result of his unusually close personal interest in the reputations of the principal actors in the drama¹⁴.

In summer 355, Ammianus' patron, the *magister equitum* Ursicinus, had been sent to Gaul, accompanied by Ammianus as a member of his personal staff, to suppress the rebel Silvanus. In December of that year, as we have seen, Ammianus' hero Julian entered the country. Ammianus' account – or, rather, lack of it – of Ursicinus' activity after the destruction of Silvanus and his allies and before the arrival of Julian has provoked curiosity and debate. Ammianus' assertion that the barbarians then raided Gaul far and wide without opposition (*nullo renitente*) immediately precedes his description of Julian's promotion to Caesar, and prepares the reader for the subsequent news of the disaster at Cologne. It may therefore safely be seen as constituting the first half of a literary device by which he sought to magnify Julian's achievement in pacifying Gaul¹⁵. On the other hand, it is clear that the same remark does very little for Ursicinus' reputation. One is bound to ask how and why one of the most experienced and successful of Constantius' generals could have allowed the west to fall into such a state. Camille Jullian sought to explain both the gap in Ammianus' story and Ursicinus' apparent failure to stem the barbarian attacks of later 355 by proposing that both men were temporarily recalled from Gaul at this time: therefore Ammianus had nothing to record and Ursicinus had done

12 AM 16.1.3; cf. MATTHEWS 1989: 468ff.

13 Cologne fell to the Rhineland Franks between 454 and 459, and then became the centre of the first important Frankish kingdom: ZÖLLNER 1970: 31; JAMES 1988: 56f. The historical weakness of the Franks is discussed in DRINKWATER 1996: 22ff. On the »weakness of barbarian siege capability« see now ELTON 1996: 82ff.

14 DRINKWATER 1994. Though Wolf Liebeschuetz has reminded me that such partisanship is a common feature of Latin historiography, I feel that Ammianus distinguishes himself from Sallust, Livy and Tacitus by the way in which he openly favours his heroes, and exalts or protects their reputations.

15 AM 15.8.1.

nothing to be ashamed of¹⁶. Although the silence in Ammianus' narrative may be understood in terms of his concept of history, in particular of his indifference to campaign-history, the continued presence of Ursicinus in Gaul is now accepted, and therefore his apparent negligence remains to be explained¹⁷. We should also note Ammianus' deliberate conveying of the impression that the fall of Cologne was a catastrophe, not only in itself but also in the way in which it immediately burdened Julian with increased difficulties and responsibilities: after it ›he was often heard to mutter in complaining tones that he had gained nothing more than to die in harness‹¹⁸. This raises questions as to Julian's initial role as Caesar – executive commander-in-chief or mere figurehead? – and hence as to Constantius' aims in sending his cousin to the west in the first place – perhaps to meet his death in battle¹⁹? In general, therefore, it appears that closer examination of the context and causes of the fall of Cologne in 355 might help to illuminate an important but still very obscure episode in Roman and Gallo-Roman history.

Franks and Alamanni had caused great trouble in the middle years of the third century, but had been brought more or less under Roman control by its end. In any event, we hear very little of them under Constantine I and Constans²⁰. The situation was changed by Roman civil war. In 350, the usurper Magnentius overthrew Constans, and soon took his forces into Italy and the Balkans. Constantius II defeated him at the battle of Mursa in 351, and threw him back into Italy. In 352, Constantius' own invasion of Italy drove Magnentius back into Gaul, where he was defeated and killed in 353²¹. However, before Magnentius' death there was serious Alamannic raiding over the Rhine, and his Caesar and brother, Decentius, was even defeated in battle²². One source tradition claims that Constantius sought to distract

16 JULIAN 1926: 170.

17 For the first point I am, again, indebted to Wolf Liebeschuetz. For Ursicinus' continued presence in Gaul see FRÉZOULS 1962: 674ff., PLRE (see n. 21): 985, MATTHEWS 1989: 38, 81. It should be noted, however, that FRÉZOULS (1962: 676) and SABBAAH (1978: 465) considered that Ammianus was deliberately hiding Ursicinus' discomfiture.

18 AM 15.8.20 (*ut occupatior interiret*).

19 The *communis opinio* is that, after his unhappy experience with Gallus, Constantius had learned: ›that a Caesar's functions must be representative, and nothing else. Not only must the civil authority be kept out of his hands. He must exercise no real military authority either‹ (BROWNING 1975: 72). For a different view, see BOWERSOCK 1978: 34f.: ›Julian had full authority as Caesar, was glad of it, and used it‹. As will be seen below, I prefer the former. Cf. AM 16.11.3 for the ›rumour‹ that, whatever his position, Constantius sent Julian to Gaul in the hope that he would meet his death in the wars there.

20 The most serious Frankish and Alamannic raids into Gaul occurred after the death of Aurelian (275), but the situation appears to have been stabilised relatively quickly by Probus (276–82). There was a series of clashes with the Franks under the Tetrarchy and early in the reign of Constantine I, but in all of these Rome clearly enjoyed overwhelming superiority, and many may indeed have been engineered for Roman purposes. After Constantine's bloody campaign of 313, the Franks virtually disappear from view for over a generation. See ZÖLLNER 1970: 11ff.; DRINKWATER 1996: 22f. Maximian campaigned against the Alamanni in 289, and Constantius I fought off serious raids by them at the end of the third or the beginning of the fourth century. However, thereafter, as in the case of the Franks, we hear little of them until the 350s: Pan. Lat. 2(10).6.1ff., 3(5).7.2, 7(6).6.3f.; Eutropius, Breviarium 9.23; cf. BARNES 1982: 61.

21 A. H. M. JONES, J. R. MARTINDALE, J. MORRIS, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, I, 1971: 532.

22 AM 16.12.4.

Magnentius and divide his strength by giving these people written permission to attack Gau. While this accusation is undeniably derived from Julian and is therefore bound to be hostile to Constantius, it is far from implausible. As Constantius moved westwards in 351/2, he will have come into direct contact with Alamannic tribes between the upper Danube and the upper Rhine. Ready to use any means to bring down a usurping regime, he may well have been rash enough to promise them land within the Empire in return for their making life difficult for his enemies²³. The extent to which these efforts undermined the usurpers is indicated by a revolt against Decentius in his capital, Trier, led by Poemenius. Though this was eventually crushed, and Decentius regained control of the city and its mint, Poemenius managed to escape²⁴. Shortly afterwards, the fates of both Magnentius and Decentius were sealed when Constantius entered Gaul.

In the nature of things, even if the Alamannic attacks had been contrived by Constantius, it would have been easier for him to turn them on than to turn them off. However, whatever its origins, Constantius did his best to deal with the problem. Almost immediately, a very able general, Silvanus, was despatched as *magister peditum* to take charge of the military situation in Gaul. Silvanus came of a distinguished military family which, though Frankish in origin, had a long history of service to the Empire. He had initially followed Magnentius, but had deserted him at Mursa, giving Constantius the opportunity for victory²⁵. He must have known the Rhine well, and he was loyal; Ammianus tells us that he did a good job²⁶. That the Alamannic danger was being brought under control is indicated by Constantius' bloodless campaign of 354, and by what appears to have been a joint campaign by Silvanus and Constantius in 355²⁷.

There was, however, a price to be paid for the disruption caused in Gaul by the initial revolt of Magnentius, the Alamannic attacks, the revolt of Poemenius and Decentius' reaction to it. In particular, it would appear that Trier and its region suffered severe damage in 352/3²⁸. This was caused by, and itself accelerated, the movement of the imperial administration from the city, which reduced the need for it to be specially protected. Magnentius had deserted it for Italy; his junior successor there, Decentius, would have had a smaller court and fewer resources, and was forcibly excluded for a while by Poemenius, who was just a local rebel; Constantius II did not venture northwards; his most senior representative, Silvanus, took up residence in Cologne. Trier's declining influence – the withering of its links with the

23 Libanius, *Oratio* 18.33ff.; Zosimus, *Historia Nova* 2.53; Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.1. Ammianus' report of the high confidence of the Alamanni before the battle of Strasbourg and of their formal demand (16.12.3) that Julian »depart the lands that they had won by valour and the sword«, taken with Libanius' (*Oratio* 18.33, 52) charge that such insistence was based on a written agreement (so, on a *foedus*) with Constantius II, is highly suggestive. It is significant that written material was later produced by Julian in his discrediting of Vadomar (AM 21.3.4ff.): what Constantius was known to have done once could later be usefully deployed against him.

24 AM 15.6.4; HEINEN 1985: 233; GILLES 1989: 384.

25 On Silvanus, see generally DRINKWATER 1994; on the date of his appointment see WIGG 1991: 26.

26 AM 15.5.4.

27 354: AM 14.10.1ff.; 355: AM 16.2.4, with JULLIAN 1926: 166 and n. 1 (possibly a two-pronged campaign down the Rhine, like that of 356: AM 16.2.4?).

28 HEINEN 1985: 233; for the damage suffered by rural sites at this time see VAN OSSEL 1992: 74, 93.

administrators and soldiers who directed and executed Roman power in Gaul – was reflected in the use of the coins produced by its mint. Recent work has identified a rapid shrinkage in the area of diffusion of the issues of the Trier mint from c. 350, culminating in the closure of that mint after the fall of Silvanus in 355²⁹.

As far as the imperial civil and military establishment in Gaul was concerned, therefore, it seems likely that Trier had ceased to be a viable base before Constantius II took over the country. Cologne was used as an alternative. However, in the summer of 355 this city was closely involved in the supposed usurpation of Silvanus, and its suppression by Ursicinus. In this context, Ursicinus' actions immediately subsequent to the murder of Silvanus are very significant. We may assume that he was now *de facto* imperial viceroy in Gaul – until formally relieved by Constantius or his deputy, effectively responsible for its defence³⁰. Thanks to Silvanus and Constantius, Ursicinus did not have to deal immediately with any sort of barbarian-crisis. Some indication of the restoration of order may be seen in the fact that he and his small retinue do not appear to have been obliged to take raiding Alamanni or Franks into account on their journey to Cologne to meet Silvanus, and that directly after Silvanus' fall Ursicinus was able to arrest the rebel's accomplices and send them for interrogation, presumably in Milan³¹. Yet Ursicinus was not in an enviable position. First, he was physically isolated, with very few trustworthy followers in an area he did not know. Secondly, he must have been constantly on the defensive against both the followers of the man he had just shamefully betrayed, and an emperor who had already once accused him of treason, who was bound to remain uneasy about his loyalty because of the necessary secrecy and hence ambiguity of his recent dealings with Silvanus, who was anyway soon to complain about the misuse of public funds in Gaul, and who was never, by promoting him from *magister equitum* to *magister peditum*, to make him the full successor of Silvanus in Gaul (this promotion went to Barbatio)³². It appears that Ursicinus decided to move from Cologne. He could not, of course, remove to Trier – by late 355 not only still badly damaged but also now dangerously compromised, since its champion Poemenius had supported Silvanus, and had been executed for it³³. Rather, which is the main argument of this section, Ursicinus now decided to move his headquarters and most of the forces he commanded, including the main strength of the Rhine garrisons, westwards, to winter in the vicinity of Rheims, where Julian joined him, and his successor as *magister*, Marcellus, early the following year³⁴.

29 WIGG 1991: 205f.

30 So FRÉZOULS 1962: 674f.; cf. MATTHEWS 1989: 38.

31 AM 15.5.24, 15.6.1f. (cf. 14.5.8 Paul's job was to take the supposed supporters of Magnentius to the imperial court for interrogation).

32 On Ursicinus' duplicity see DRINKWATER 1994; for the suggestion of embezzlement, see AM 15.5.36, FRÉZOULS 1962: 676; and for Ursicinus' failure to gain promotion, see FRÉZOULS 1962: 679f. FRÉZOULS comments usefully on Ursicinus' difficulties in the wake of Silvanus' disloyalty, but does not develop his arguments, and makes too much of Silvanus' Germanness.

33 AM 15.6.4.

34 AM 16.2.8. For Ursicinus' rank in relationship to Marcellus and Julian, see FRÉZOULS 1962: 680f. BLOCKLEY (1980: 475) explains the paralysis noted below as a result of the somewhat earlier arrival of Marcellus and the failure of Ursicinus and Marcellus to cooperate in the defence of Gaul.

Given current circumstances, Ursicinus' move was entirely pardonable; but it signalled an effective military down-grading of the Rhineland and, worse still, was until summer 356 followed by complete inaction: the military and political difficulties of his position seem to have paralysed Ursicinus' generalship³⁵. It is likely that it was only then that the Alamanni, previously frustrated by Silvanus and Constantius, seized the opportunity granted to them and, insisting on their earlier agreement, began to occupy land on the left bank of the Rhine³⁶. It was probably also then that the inhabitants of the Trier-region, north and south of the Mosel, feeling neglected by the imperial authorities, turned to self-help – to emergency hill-top refuges and, when even these failed them, to the services of the ex-desperado, Charietto³⁷. And it is therefore arguable that, late in 355, Cologne, now defended by no more than a token garrison, fell to purely adventitious raiding by the Franks. In other words, these did not take Cologne by siege, nor did they make any serious attempt to hold on to it – it was simply too big. Rather, they lived up to their name – the ›bold‹/›impudent‹ ones, and just forced their way into a virtually open city, no doubt all the while astonished by their own success³⁸.

By late – 355, therefore, the situation in Gaul was again very messy but not in fact (as we now move to consider Constantius' thinking in sending Julian to Gaul) desperate. Julian and Ammianus grossly exaggerated the importance of the loss of Cologne to disparage the *res gestae* of Constantius II and glorify those of his successor. The Franks posed no real threat. Their capture of Cologne did not mark a catastrophic Roman defeat, but simply resulted from their exploitation of current Roman weakness: it was not the ancient equivalent of the fall of Singapore in 1942. As events were to show, once the Franks met a serious Roman response, they left the city and submitted with little resistance³⁹.

The Alamanni were, as ever, the more important problem, especially now that, whether by invitation – explicit or implied – or not, they had moved to settle on the Roman side of the Rhine. On the other hand, such settlement should not automatically be seen as signifying an intention to migrate *en masse* deep into Gaul: a *Völkerwanderung*. The lesson of medieval and modern history is that though western Germans like to straddle the Rhine, when given a free rein they tend to settle no more than c. 200 km west of it⁴⁰. However, more important is the fact that they had

35 Cf. VAN OSSEL 1992: 73: although in the end there was no total collapse, the political and military turmoil which accompanied the rise and fall of Magnentius appears to have led to the abandonment of a large number of rural sites in the Rhineland.

36 Julian, Ad Ath. 279A–B, Libanius, Oratio 18.34, AM 16.11.8. Again (cf. above n. 22) the very high Alamannic morale at this time would make sense if the Alamanni believed that the Roman withdrawal which allowed them to settle was reward for their previous attacks on Magnentius and Decentius. Cf. STROHEKER 1975: 35 – the *foedus* agreed between Constantius and the Alamanni in 352 had led to uncontrollable settlement by 355.

37 GILLES 1985: 63f. (destruction-horizons of 353–55); ZOSIMUS 3.7.1ff.

38 ZÖLLNER 1970: 1 (›mutig, ungestüm, frech‹); DRINKWATER 1996: 23. I owe the idea of a skeleton-garrison to the Oxford Late Roman seminar.

39 AM 16.3.2. Cf. ELLIOTT 1983: 251 and n. 9: ›so far as one can learn from Ammianus about this recapture it was effected by walking into a deserted town‹.

40 See Julian and Ammianus on Germanic settlement over the Rhine in 355–7: Ad Ath. 279A–B; 16.11.8. What they describe – a settled zone c. 33 miles wide, fronted by a security strip c. 100 miles

been brought into line once in recent months, and could presumably be brought into line again, and this time without the commitment of significant additional resources. For it must be remembered that the manner in which Ursicinus had dealt with Silvanus, though underhand, had at least spared the west the horrors of another civil war. Silvanus' army was intact and, purged of Silvanus' main allies, now obedient to Constantius II and his representatives. We may assume the same for the civil administration in Gaul. The current neglect of the Rhine frontier had been caused not by military weakness or defeat, but by irresolute leadership, itself the understandable outcome of a very delicate political situation. However, once Constantius had decided what to do, all this could change⁴¹.

Late in 355, Constantius finally grasped the nettle. He would remain in Milan, to guard Raetia and the passes into Italy, always the principal danger-spots as far as the western Empire was concerned, especially in respect of the Alamanni, whose third-century attacks on Italy could never be forgotten. As far as Gaul was concerned, recent happenings there will have made the emperor realise that he could not continue the experiment of delegating substantial powers to men who were not of the imperial family. Despite his bad experience with Gallus, in November 355 Constantius was forced to recall Julian and make him Caesar⁴². This was without doubt an uncomfortable expedient for both parties, given the way that Constantius had benefited from, if he had not been responsible for, the great massacre of 337, in which most of Julian's immediate family had perished, and given the problems that were bound to arise if Julian, quickly married to Helena, fathered a male heir before Constantius⁴³. In the short term, however, Constantius could take comfort in Julian's youth and experience, in the fact that he exercised no real power in his own right, but was firmly under the control of the new military *magister* and praetorian prefect who were sent to replace Ursicinus and his staff, and in the expectation that, on past form, it would not take long to bring Gaul back to normal, after which Julian might safely be removed from proximity with the western army. In the same vein, because he was not giving him direct responsibility and not sending him into conditions of extreme danger, Constantius cannot be charged with using Julian's promotion as a way of sending him to his death.

The first year's campaigning, in 356, showed what could be accomplished with relatively little effort – including the virtually bloodless recapture of Cologne. It was only in 357 that things started to go wrong for Constantius when Julian, sensing the opportunity offered by Marcellus' disgrace, Ursicinus' departure and Severus' weakness, built up his military reputation, and hence his power-base, by picking quarrels with Alamanni and Franks alike⁴⁴. Later, as no doubt he did at the time, he

wide – would have given the Germans control of an area not far removed in size and location from current Germanophone settlement west of the river: in the Netherlands, western Germany, Lorraine, Alsace and Switzerland. Cf. HEINEN (1985: 324) on the centuries-long failure of Germanic culture to penetrate a significant distance west of the Rhine.

41 As FRÉZOULS (1962: 683) remarks, Constantius must in the end be credited with a sensitive treatment of Ursicinus – not punished, but retained in post and eventually sent back east.

42 Cf. DRINKWATER 1994: 576.

43 Cf. DRINKWATER 1983: 357f.

44 FRÉZOULS (1962: 683) notes that it seems likely that Ursicinus replaced Marcellus in Gaul for some months in 357, until the appointment of Severus in the summer of that year.

justified his actions by reference to the supposed horror of the Gallic situation – including the fall of Cologne – which required that the barbarians be chastised with a heavy hand, and this explanation was readily adopted and amplified by his admirers, including Libanius and Ammianus Marcellinus.

Valentinian I and the Alamanni

Ammianus depicts Valentinian I as a great warrior-emperor, renowned most of all for his exploits – as a campaigner and builder of military defence-works – against the Alamanni⁴⁵. However, it can be argued that this characterisation is open to question, and that Valentinian's dealings with the Alamanni were more complex than is usually believed.

As we have seen, after the turmoil that they caused during the third-century ›crisis‹, we hear remarkably little of the Alamanni until the mid -350s, when they were encouraged by Constantius I to harry the regime of the usurper Magnentius⁴⁶. After the fall of Magnentius in 353, Constantius first attempted to calm the situation in co-operation with his *magister equitum* in Gaul, Silvanus. However, again as we have seen, after Silvanus had been killed for disloyalty, the emperor was forced to rely ever more on his new Caesar, Julian. Julian's unforeseen military and political skills enabled him to master and exploit the Alamanni, and to prepare the way for his own proclamation as Augustus in Paris early in 360. Though he left Gaul in 361, and died during his invasion of Persia in 363, the Alamanni remained quiet during the short reign of Jovian from 363 to 364, and the accession of Valentinian I and his brother Valens in 364. It was not until early 365 that we hear of them making serious trouble once more; and even then, according to Ammianus, the renewal of their attacks was caused by a Roman decision to make unilateral changes to an agreed *foedus*, resulting in smaller New Year's gifts for the Alamanni⁴⁷.

The fact that the Alamanni did not become a major problem immediately after Julian's death – as is so often assumed⁴⁸ – is of great importance for understanding and assessing Valentinian's work in Gaul, especially during his early years there. Above all, it must be accepted that when, in 364, Valentinian exercised his prerogative as senior emperor to choose the west as his sphere of influence, he did not do so because he knew that the western provinces were currently enduring, or would shortly face, major barbarian invasion⁴⁹. The reasons for his decision to move westwards must be sought elsewhere, most probably in the brittleness of internal Roman politics and in the need for all emperors to secure the loyalty of the western armies⁵⁰. Yet even then, Valentinian's confidence appears to have been high. He did

45 Cf. MATTHEWS 1989: 207, with ALFÖLDI 1946 and PASCHOUD 1992.

46 For a summary of these and the following events, see KUHOFF 1983: *ad locc.*

47 AM 26.5.7; 27.1.1.

48 So Zosimus 4.3.4; cf. JULIAN 1926: 234 and DEMOUGEOT 1979: 105, with DEMANDT 1989: 112. The invasions reported at AM 26.4.5 look forward to events of the joint reign and, as PASCHOUD (1992: 75) suggests, imply some sort of punishment for the ill treatment of the friends of Julian.

49 So *contra*, for example, DEMOUGEOT 1979: 105 and MATTHEWS 1989: 205.

50 Cf. Jovian's anxiety about the west, and his measures to secure northern Italy and Gaul upon his accession in 363: AM 25.8.8ff., 25.9.8, 25.10.6ff.

not hurry hotfoot to Gaul and the Rhine frontier, but moved from the Danube to northern Italy. He remained undisturbed when the Alamanni first disputed Roman revision of the treaty, leaving the matter to local generals⁵¹. In fact, he did not arrive in Gaul until very late in 365, presumably in response to the continuation of the Alamannic troubles, but still showing no signs of his treating these as an emergency. In this respect it is significant that from Milan he headed for Julian's old capital, Paris, on the margin of the affected region, and did not deviate from his route when news came that the Alamanni had inflicted a major defeat on his commanders⁵². The first stage of Valentinian's conflict with the Alamanni should therefore be regarded as a relatively low-key affair, a matter of police-work rather than all-out war.

Now that Rome's military reputation had to be restored, one would expect to see immediate action to punish the Alamanni, led by the new emperor, who needed to confirm his credentials as a soldier; but what followed was quite different. Valentinian simply completed his journey to Paris, and sent another general, Dagalaifus, against the Alamanni⁵³. Moreover, when Dagalaifus proved unable to defeat the Alamanni, and was recalled by Valentinian, he did not suffer for his failure but, on the contrary, was given the immense honour of being appointed consul for 366, having as his colleague the emperor's own son, Gratian⁵⁴. The explanation for this strange behaviour perhaps lies in its political context⁵⁵.

Ammianus tells us that the news of Roman defeat at the hands of the Alamanni reached Valentinian on the same day (around 1st November 365) as that of the revolt of Procopius against Valens in the east⁵⁶. Valentinian sent Dagalaifus against the Alamanni and, which is more important, made much of this confrontation in announcing that he would not move back east to help in the war against the usurper. He is supposed to have been persuaded by his counsellors and deputations from the Gallic communities not to expose Gaul to a barbarian attack by leaving the country, and to have reconciled himself to this difficult decision by appreciating that, while Procopius was merely the enemy of himself and his brother, the Alamanni were the enemies of the whole world⁵⁷. The Alamannic enemy was, in fact, defeated in the course of the following year, 366, when another general, Jovinus, was sent against them, cut them to pieces in three campaigns, and so won himself the consulship for 367⁵⁸.

51 AM 26.5.4ff., 27.1.2ff. Ammianus' double treatment of these events makes his story difficult to follow: see BAYNES 1928: 222f.

52 AM 26.5.8. Hence *contra*, for example, PIGANIOL 1972: 193, DEMOUGEOT 1979: 106: that it was news of this defeat that brought Valentinian to Gaul. Piganiol cites BAYNES 1928: 222; but at 223 n. 2 Baynes expressly states that it was only the news of the renewed trouble with the Alamanni that caused Valentinian to leave Milan.

53 AM 26.5.9, 27.2.1; PIGANIOL 1972: 194.

54 AM 27.2.1.

55 NAGL (1948: 217) puts Dagalaifus' campaign very early in 366, when he faced renewed attacks over the frozen Rhine. In this case, his being honoured, after failure, with a *postponed* consulship with Gratian appears even more remarkable. Here, however, I follow PIGANIOL 1972: 194.

56 AM 26.5.8.

57 AM 26.5.12f.

58 AM 27.2.1ff.; 27.2.10.

All this is very suspect. In particular, it is odd that the Alamanni were slippery and invincible during Procopius' rebellion but relatively easy to put down after the west had received news of the rebel's defeat (in May 366)⁵⁹. Valentinian's excuse for not helping his brother – the priority of the state's affairs over a family-matter – closely resembles that given by Claudius II for not proceeding against the usurper Postumus in 268, and might be regarded as a convenient piece of moralising⁶⁰. It is significant that Symmachus, in a speech delivered early in 369, seems defensive about Valentinian's early activities in Gaul, making him reach the Rhine quickly and (as Ammianus was to do in his turn), presenting the emperor's refusal to help Valens as the sacrificing of personal pride to the needs of the state⁶¹. This suggests that the western court, realising the sensitivity of the situation, took pains to put, and keep, in circulation an old but reliable excuse for Valentinian's refusal to accept the obligations traditionally due to a blood relative. We may infer from all this that late in 365 Valentinian had no intention of returning east, and that to avoid such a return he and his counsellors prolonged and exaggerated the significance of what was really only a minor frontier-skirmish⁶².

It is likely that the emperor's mind was made up by his appreciation of the preponderance of internal over external dangers. Above all, he must keep the western armies on his side. The revolt of Procopius will have shaken the new and still very much untested regime. We need to visualise Procopius' rebellion as it might have appeared when it was enjoying its early successes – not, as Ammianus would have it, the last desperate gamble of a pathetic and unworthy successor to Julian, but the promising debut of the true heir – through his relationship with Julian and his association with Constantius II's widow and daughter – to the throne of Constantine⁶³. The power of the old dynasty was indeed to be demonstrated again almost two generations later, when the western usurper, Constantine III, took the names *Flavius Claudius* and called his sons ›Constans‹ and ›Julian‹⁶⁴. It is no wonder that, as soon as was decently possible after the suppression of Procopius, Valentinian gave Constantius II's only child to Gratian in marriage⁶⁵. In November 365, therefore, he would anyway have thought twice about taking troops to the east, to be directly reminded of their Flavian loyalties.

In addition, he cannot have felt completely confident about his own position in the west, where the memory of Julian and his achievements will have been especially strong. The western establishment's ambivalence towards the new dynasty was, in

59 Cf. AM 27.2.10.

60 DRINKWATER 1987: 33.

61 Oratio 1.14, 17f.

62 CRUMP (1975: 49) came close to this interpretation, but continued to believe in the authenticity of the Germanic threat. I find a striking resemblance between the basic sentiment, if not precise expression, of Ammianus' reports of Valentinian's apology at Paris (26.5.13: *hostem suum fratrisque solius esse Procopium, Alamannos vero totius orbis Romani*) and Dagalaifus' earlier advising him not to choose Valens as his colleague at Nicomedia (26.4.1: *si tuos amas ... habes fratrem, si rem publicam, quaere quem vestias*). It may be that Ammianus took the ›official line‹ on the events of 365, which showed Valentinian in a good light, and transposed this back to 363, when, as events were to prove, the new emperor ignored the public weal. Cf. PASCHOU 1972: 74.

63 Cf. MATTHEWS 1989: 199f.

64 SEECK 1900: 1028f.

65 In 374, when Constantia was still only about twelve years old: AM 21.15.6, 29.6.7.

fact, to manifest itself in 367, when Valentinian's illness provoked intense speculation as to a successor, and led to the unprecedented promotion of Gratian directly to the rank of Augustus⁶⁶. In 365, a precipitate departure from the west might compound the uncertainty caused by Procopius' rebellion by signifying Valentinian's lack of confidence in Valens' ability to deal with the usurper, and so create a political vacuum which others – acting either for Procopius or themselves – might be eager to fill.

There were also practical considerations. Events in the east were moving so quickly that Valentinian was unable to form a clear picture of the success of either party: a reckless campaign might lead to his own defeat, or leave him the irreconcilable enemy of a nascent Flavian dynasty⁶⁷. His best course, therefore, was to stay put, and hold firm: to take limited measures in Africa and Illyricum to prevent the revolt from spreading, but otherwise to trust in his brother⁶⁸. On the other hand, despite his eschewing of distant undertakings, in such a state of flux it would have been unwise for him to commit himself to a major campaign against a purely local enemy – no matter that he had used the supposed ferocity of this enemy to excuse his continued sojourn in Gaul. Valentinian's eyes were on the east, not the Rhine, and so he remained, alert but apart from the military affairs of the west, in Paris⁶⁹.

The Alamanni were also useful at a later date. In the period 364–66, as we have seen, Valentinian I had to consolidate his position in the west and play a very cautious game in respect of the usurpation of Procopius. In 367 his energies had been even more diverted by his own serious illness, the consequent political uncertainty at court, and great unrest in Britain, which he eventually had to send count Theodosius to put down⁷⁰. By 368, therefore, Valentinian, unlike his junior partner, Valens, still had to prove his military mettle. In short, he was desperately in need of a victory, and the more so because of a sneak Alamannic raid on Mainz⁷¹. All this must surely help explain the great set-piece Alamannic campaign of 368, designed to enhance and project the martial image of both Valentinian and Gratian who, though still only a child, was in the imperial train⁷². It is significant that in the course of this campaign Valentinian went out of his way to demonstrate his personal courage⁷³.

It may also be argued that Valentinian's subsequent frenzy of fortification-building may be interpreted in the same way. It was not a measured response to the Alamannic threat, which was, and remained, relatively small, but rather a means of demonstrating imperial activity, and therefore of justifying the imperial position and the emperor's call on imperial resources of money, materials and manpower. It certainly found favour in the imperial establishment, and among modern historians, but as a means of securing peace on the Rhine frontier and in Gaul it is open to crit-

66 AM 27.6.1ff.

67 MATTHEWS 1989: 198; SEECK 1913: 51.

68 Africa: AM 26.5.14; Illyricum: AM 26.5.11, 26.7.11f.

69 So already, though much less positively, SEECK 1913: 24.

70 AM 27.6.1ff.; 27.8.1ff.

71 AM 27.10.1ff.

72 AM 27.10.6ff.

73 AM 27.10.10f.

icism⁷⁴. Rome's barbarian neighbours were clearly stung by this sort of activity, and reacted accordingly. For example, the Alamanni were greatly distressed by Roman attempts to construct fortifications on the Neckar, which they regarded as such an act of bad faith that they attacked and defeated the Roman workforce⁷⁵. Equally illuminating is the way in which Valentinian's obsession with the building of fortifications brought him into conflict with the Alamannic king Macrianus⁷⁶. Valentinian made one attempt to break Macrianus by force, enlisting the help of the Burgundians. But there was no reward for encouraging the Burgundian advance to the Rhine. Poor co-ordination allowed Macrianus to escape, and embittered subsequent Romano-Burgundian relations: the enterprise was a complete failure. A second attempt to destroy Macrianus fared similarly⁷⁷. In the end, needing to move at once to the Danube, where the Quadi and Sarmatae, similarly disturbed by his frontier-policy, were causing trouble, Valentinian had to make peace with Macrianus, and in doing so considerably increased the German's standing among his own people⁷⁸.

Massive fortifications – and dirty tricks – were not necessary, indeed were counterproductive, in dealing with the Alamanni. It may be argued that Valentinian's efforts to break them only made the situation worse⁷⁹. What we seem to be in the presence of here is the notorious inability of a super-power, however much it invests in defensive or offensive hardware, to come to grips with vastly inferior political and military systems, and its ability, through efforts grossly disproportionate to the threat that these powers pose, actually to increase the power of its enemies.

Conclusion

I hope that I have demonstrated that there is at least some reason to distrust Ammianus' description and analysis of Romano-German relations. I am sure that it can be shown that he consistently exaggerates the willingness and ability of Franks and Alamanni to cause serious trouble for the Empire. However, I must return to an admission made at the beginning of this paper, and conclude by conceding inconsistency in my own approach. As far as Julian is concerned, I have chosen to reject as untrue specific elements of the rich ›circumstantial detail‹, as Matthews has called it, of Ammianus' narrative, and have instead proposed an alternative story very different from that found in the *Res Gestae*⁸⁰. With regard to Valentinian I, on the other

74 Cf. ALFÖLDI 1946: 15: »Il développa en même temps le système de fortifications de la zone frontière qu'il rendit imprenable: conception stratégique grandiose et de proportions jusqu'alors insoupçonnées: forteresses imposantes renforcées par des soubassements contre les mines, réseaux d'attrapes, murs massifs; lignes ininterrompues de fortins, donjons entre les grands camps militaires; système de points d'appui avancés sur le territoire ennemi, installations défensives raffinées dernière la ligne principale«. On this see DRINKWATER 1996: 27f.

75 AM 28.2.6ff.

76 AM 28.5.8ff.

77 AM 29.4.2ff.

78 AM 30.3.3ff.

79 It may be significant that Ammianus (28.2.10) associates a sharp increase in brigandage in Gaul with the failure of Valentinian's efforts on the Neckar – perhaps an indication that his policy of unremitting aggression against the Alamanni was producing an unwelcome crop of deserters from the Roman army.

80 MATTHEWS 1989: 228.

hand, I have taken Ammianus' details more or less as they stand, and have sought simply to place them in a wider historical context.

I would defend this approach on the grounds that we need to be aware of, and react to, Ammianus' authorial strategy. In short, when dealing with his account of the actions of those individuals – in particular, Ursicinus, Constantius II and Julian – about whom he had exceptionally strong personal feelings, we must be alert for significant distortion and ready to correct what Ammianus says. Elsewhere, on the other hand, when considering later rulers and people with whom Ammianus was less directly involved, and whom he was ready to treat as crude foils to Julian, we can feel more confident about his narrative. For, in such cases, Ammianus tended to report events as he found them in his sources, manipulating his readers' impressions of these people by ›ses reticences et ses insinuations‹⁸¹. The justification of such a methodology is that it makes the *Histories* consistent about the low level of the ›Germanic threat‹, both internally and with regard to other evidence in this respect, and reveals the Franks and the Alamanni as victims as much as oppressors.

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81 For an illuminating instance of Ammianus' treatment of a point of detail see MARIÉ 1984: 233 and n. 157; for a more general study of his methodology in this respect see PASCHOUD 1990, esp. 70f., 83.

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