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# AMMIANUS AND THE GREAT TSUNAMI\*

By GAVIN KELLY

Hoc nouatore adhuc superstite, cuius actus multiplices docuimus et interitum, diem duodecimum Kalendas Augustas, consule Valentiniano primum cum fratre, horrendi terrores per omnem orbis ambitum grassati sunt subito, quales nec fabulae nec ueridicae nobis antiquitates exponunt.

16. Paulo enim post lucis exortum, densitate praeuia fulgurum acrius uibratorium, tremefacta concutitur omnis terreni stabilitas ponderis, mareque dispulsum retro fluctibus euolutis abscessit, ut resecta uoragine profundorum species natantium multiformes limo cernerentur haerentes, ualliumque uastitates et montium, tunc, ut opinari dabatur, suspicerent radios solis, quos primigenia rerum sub immensis gurgitibus amendauit. 17. Multis igitur nauibus uelut arida humo conexis, et licenter per exiguas undarum reliquias palantibus plurimis ut pisces manibus colligerent et similia, marini fremitus, uelut grauati repulsam, uersa uice consurgunt, perque uada feruentia insulis et continentis terrae porrectis spatiis uiolenter illisi, innumera quaedam in ciuitatibus et ubi reperta sunt aedificia complanarunt, proinde ut, elementorum furente discordia, inuoluta facies mundi miraculorum species ostendebat. 18. Relapsa enim aequorum magnitudo, cum minime speraretur, milia multa necauit hominum et submersit, recurrentiumque aestuum incitata uertigine, quaedam naues, postquam umentis substantiae consenuit tumor, pessumdatae uisae sunt, exanimataque naufragiis corpora supina iacebant aut prona. 19. Ingentes aliae naues extrusae rabidis flatibus culminibus insidere tectorum, ut Alexandriae contigit, et ad secundum lapidem fere procul a litore contortae sunt aliquae, ut Laconicam prope Mothonen oppidum nos transeundo conspeximus, diuturna carie fatiscentem.

While this usurper [Procopius] yet lived, whose various deeds and whose death I have described, on 21 July in the year in which Valentinian was consul for the first time with his brother [A.D. 365], fearsome terrors suddenly strode through the whole circle of the world, the like of which neither legends nor truthful ancient histories tell us.

16. Slightly after daybreak, and heralded by a thick succession of fiercely shaken thunderbolts, the solidity of the whole earth was made to shake and shudder, and the sea was driven away, its waves were rolled back, and it disappeared, so that the abyss of the depths was uncovered and many-shaped varieties of sea-creatures were seen stuck in the slime; the great wastes of those valleys and mountains, which the very creation had dismissed beneath the vast whirlpools, at that moment, as it was given to be believed, looked up at the sun's rays. 17. Many ships, then, were stranded as if on dry land, and people wandered at will about the paltry remains of the waters to collect fish and the like in their hands; then the roaring sea as if insulted by its repulse rises back in turn, and through the teeming shoals dashed itself violently on islands and extensive tracts of the mainland, and flattened innumerable buildings in towns or wherever they were found. Thus in the raging conflict of the elements, the face of the earth was changed to reveal wondrous sights. 18. For the mass of waters returning when least expected killed many thousands by drowning, and with the tides whipped up to a height as they rushed back, some ships, after the anger of the watery element had grown old, were seen to have sunk, and the bodies of people killed in shipwrecks lay there, faces up or down. 19. Other huge ships, thrust out by the mad blasts, perched on the roofs of houses, as happened at Alexandria, and others were hurled nearly two miles from the shore, like the Laconian vessel near the town of Methone which I saw when I passed by, yawning apart from long decay. Ammianus Marcellinus 26.10.15–19

With this striking and bravura narrative of the earthquake and tsunami of 21 July A.D. 365 Ammianus Marcellinus ends Book 26 of his *Res Gestae*. Though displaying many of the features characteristic of Ammianus — daunting linguistic variation, brilliant observation of detail, a dazzling and blurred sequence of discrete pictures — this passage

\* I am indebted to Dr Emily Black for her advice on geology, and to the wisdom of those who have kindly read and commented on earlier versions: among others, Mark Berry, Averil Cameron, Richard Duncan-Jones, Ted Kenney, Chris Kraus, Sophie Lunn-

Rockcliffe, Michael Reeve, Roger Tomlin, and Michael Williams. I am grateful to the editor and to the Journal's learned and perceptive readers for recommending significant improvements.

also stands out from the main body of the narrative.<sup>1</sup> Most notably, the historian distorts chronological sequence: an event which occurred before Procopius' usurpation in September A.D. 365 is not narrated until after his capture and execution by Valens in the following year. It is also given a prominent position at the close of a book. Ammianus' perspective goes far beyond the normal limits of historiographical propriety — indeed is little short of omniscience. Finally, the tale of incredible events stands out for concluding with the historian's own personal testimony. Though Ammianus famously included lengthy accounts of his military adventures in earlier portions of his history, first person interventions in the later books are exceptional and always calculatedly striking.<sup>2</sup>

Few studies of Ammianus have made much of this passage, other than as evidence of the historian's movements.<sup>3</sup> Other studies have not hesitated to take Ammianus as a beginning, but they have on the whole been targeted in other directions: the reality of what appears to have been one of the larger earthquakes to hit the Eastern Mediterranean in historical times and a correspondingly major tsunami-wave,<sup>4</sup> and how the other sources (which are predominantly Christian) misrepresented a localized disaster as universal cataclysm, and turned a natural event into (what is implied to be) a divine response to political events. (This tendency, which is of course widely characteristic of historical analysis in Late Antiquity, is here called 'providentialism'.<sup>5</sup>) Despite any inferences the reader may make from the historical focus and wide range of sources of Section I, this is a literary study, principally concerned with understanding Ammianus: I believe that, although obviously set apart from the text as a 'purple passage', the description of the tsunami is a representative (indeed consciously self-representative)

<sup>1</sup> With ten different words for the waters, Ammianus surpasses in elaborate variation the nine synonyms of *mare* in the opening of Catullus 64. On Ammianus' descriptive technique, see M. Roberts on the *aduentus* of Constantius ('The treatment of narrative in late antique literature: Ammianus Marcellinus (16.10), Rutilius Namatianus, and Paulinus of Pella', *Philologus* 132 (1988), 181–95, at 183): 'the effect is of a series of brilliantly eye-catching but discrete visual impressions, which in part by their very brilliance deter the reader from trying to piece together the individual scenes into a coherently ordered whole.'

<sup>2</sup> See Section III below.

<sup>3</sup> See for example E. A. Thompson, *The Historical Work of Ammianus Marcellinus* (1947), 13, and J. F. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (1989), 14–17. Matthews also (192) has a brief appreciation of the passage in the context of the structure of Book 26. C. Lepelley, 'Le présage du nouveau désastre de Cannes: la signification du raz de marée du 21 juillet 365 dans l'imaginaire d'Ammien Marcellin', *Kôkalos* 36–37 (1990–91) [1994], 359–74, offers a literary interpretation of the tsunami as presaging Adrianople. F. Jacques and B. Bousquet, 'Le raz de marée du 21 juillet 365', *MEFRA* 96 (1984), 423–61, have some pertinent observations at 450–1. The only other discussions of its literary purpose and merits I have found are G. Sabbah, *La méthode d'Ammien Marcellin* (1978), 555–8, an enigmatic comment from R. B. Steele, 'Ammianus Marcellinus', *Classical World* 16 (1922), 18–24, 27–8, at 20, and before that the unflattering remark of Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–88, ed. D. Womersley, 1995), ch. 26, 1.1023 n. 1: 'Such is the bad taste of Ammianus, that it is not easy to distinguish his facts from his metaphors.'

<sup>4</sup> Bibliography concerned with the realities of the event can be found in E. Guidoboni (with A. Comastri and G. Traina, trans. B. Phillips), *Catalogue of Ancient Earthquakes in the Mediterranean Area up to the 10th Century* (1994) (a supplemented and corrected translation of the catalogue in E. Guidoboni (ed.), *I terremoti prima del mille in Italia e nell'area*

*mediterranea* (1989), which also has several relevant articles). See also N. N. Ambraseys, C. P. Melville and R. D. Adams, *The Seismicity of Egypt, Arabia and the Red Sea: a Historical Review* (1994), 22–4; G. Waldherr, 'Die Geburt der "kosmischen Katastrophe". Das seismische Großereignis am 21. Juli 365 n. Chr.', *Orbis Terrarum* 3 (1997), 169–201; D. Kelleat, 'Geologische Belege katastrophaler Erdkrustenbewegungen 365 AD im Raum von Kreta', in E. Olhausen and H. Sonnabend (eds), *Naturkatastrophen in der antiken Welt: Stuttgarter Kolloquium zur historischen Geographie des Altertums* 6, 1996 (1998), 156–61; S. Stiros, 'The AD 365 Crete earthquake and possible seismic clustering during the fourth to sixth centuries AD in the eastern Mediterranean: a review of historical and archaeological data', *Journal of Structural Geology* 23 (2001), 545–62; S. Price, T. Higham, L. Nixon, and J. Moody, 'Relative sea-level changes in Crete: reassessment of radiocarbon dates from Sphakia and West Crete', *BSA* 97 (2002), 171–200. See these last two items for more comprehensive bibliography.

<sup>5</sup> For articles discussing the sources and their providentialist tendencies, see especially Jacques and Bousquet, op. cit. (n. 3) and M. Henry, 'Le témoignage de Libanius et les phénomènes sismiques de l'Ve siècle de notre ère. Essai d'interprétation', *Phoenix* 39 (1985), 36–61. See also G. J. Baudy, 'Die Wiederkehr des Typhon. Katastrophen-Topoi in nachjulianischer Rhetorik und Annalistik: zu literarischen Reflexen des 21 Juli 365 n.C.', *JAC* 35 (1992), 47–82; M. Mazza, 'Cataclismi e calamità naturali: la documentazione letteraria', *Kôkalos* 36–37 (1990–91) [1994], 307–30; Lepelley, op. cit. (n. 3); Waldherr, op. cit. (n. 4). Providentialism is narrowly defined by F. Paschoud, 'Justice et providence chez Ammien Marcellin', *Hestiasis. Studi di tarda antichità offerti a Salvatore Calderone vol. I* (1986), 139–61, at 139: 'the conception according to which the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of religious commands has as a rapid, necessary and plainly visible consequence either punishment or reward.'

piece of writing. Still, neither realities nor the other sources for the tsunami should be shunned. Whether based on textual sources or archaeological investigations, there is as much debate on this event as on any other earthquake of antiquity. It would be limiting not to form some sort of view as to the relationship between historical reality and Ammianus' representation;<sup>6</sup> it also helps in the more relevant project of identifying the relationship of Ammianus' text to the other texts which survive and give accounts of the tsunami.

Whilst Ammianus' description is that of an observant and well-informed contemporary, and he neither refers directly to nor has even demonstrably read any of the other, mainly Christian, sources which survive (most are in any case of a later date), his relationship to those sources deserves more attention than a passing 'cf.'. He may not allude to any other extant accounts, but he *does* allude both to stories and to particular providentialist interpretations found more expressly in those other texts. Ammianus' narrative is not merely distinct but consciously differentiated from these, and the passage provides a visible example of the manipulative fashion in which Ammianus alludes to his sources. I shall propose that Ammianus alludes to fabulous stories which are now preserved only in two ninth-century authors, Theophanes and Georgius Monachus (George the Monk).<sup>7</sup> Whether or not my proposal that Ammianus was aware of their original common source is accepted, it will be seen that the greater authority of his performance comes from eschewing or toning down the more incredible details of other accounts. This is not to say that Ammianus does not make the tsunami a metaphor for human events: the tsunami has plausibly been identified as a portent for the Gothic invasions which reached their climax at the Battle of Adrianople in A.D. 378 and ended Ammianus' history.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, I believe that he alludes to and corrects the tendency of other, Christian, texts to see the disaster as a divine response to the reign of Julian the Apostate. But the universalizing nature of his treatment makes the metaphor at once less blatant and more satisfying and meaningful than in other authors.<sup>9</sup> The aims of credible writing and providentialism here complement rather than contradict each other. The passage, and the contrast with other narratives, is complicated by Ammianus' declaration of autopsy, which proclaims his own authority as an eyewitness.<sup>10</sup> The combination of autopsy and metaphor makes the tsunami a representative symbol not just for Ammianus' Julian, but for the *Res Gestae* (and Roman history) as a whole.

# I. 21 JULY A.D. 365: REALITIES AND PROVIDENTIALISM

The power and scale of the earthquake of A.D. 365 have been subjected to a scholarly magnifying-glass. Some archaeologists have seen an almost universal disaster, responsible for destruction from Palestine to Sicily, or even as far as Spain.<sup>11</sup> These conclusions fail to consider either the limitations and nuances of the sources or seismic plausibility, and conflate a number of separate events which can be dated, with varying degrees of precision, to the A.D. 350s and 360s (seemingly a period of 'seismic crisis' in the Eastern Mediterranean).<sup>12</sup> Geological studies of the period, partly relying on the aggrandizing assessments of the archaeologists, have made equally ambitious claims. Since source criticism and geological typology suggest that the disaster of A.D. 365 had its epicentre

<sup>6</sup> The main focus of Section I below.

<sup>7</sup> Section II below.

<sup>8</sup> See Lepelley, *op. cit.* (n. 3).

<sup>9</sup> Section IV below.

<sup>10</sup> Section III below.

<sup>11</sup> See for examples and rebuttals Jacques and Bousquet, *op. cit.* (n. 3), 424–5, and n. 20 below.

<sup>12</sup> The theory of a Mediterranean earthquake of an extent not just unusual but unimaginable can only be rescued by positing a chain of earthquakes with various epicentres (see A. Di Vita, 'Sismi, urbanistica

e cronologia assoluta: terremoti e urbanistica nelle città di Tripolitania fra il I secolo a. C. e il IV d. C.', in *L'Afrique dans l'Occident romain*, Collection de l'École Française de Rome 134 (1990), 425–94, at 466–74). However, for this period we have records and archaeological evidence of major and distinct earthquakes in mainland Greece, Sicily, Cyrenaica, and Palestine, as well as three Bithynian earthquakes in A.D. 358, 362, and 368 (Guidoboni, *op. cit.* (n. 4, 1994), 257–77, nos 147–56).



near Crete,<sup>13</sup> they have identified with it the tectonic uplift of Western Crete in Late Antiquity. This was an event of great magnitude, which in some places raised the shoreline by up to nine metres.<sup>14</sup> However, a recent reassessment of the radiocarbon data from locations across Western Crete has shown that the uplift very probably occurred at a later date.<sup>15</sup> As a result the salutary caution already present in a number of studies may have to be taken further, though the range of possibilities remains wide.<sup>16</sup> A tsunami which threw a boat nearly two miles inland is likely to have been the result of a major earthquake; it may, but need not, have been 'a seismic event of vast proportions'.<sup>17</sup> It is clear that there was significant destruction in Crete: buildings at Gortyn were flattened, and similar and dateable evidence comes from Eleutherna and Kisamos.<sup>18</sup> Nowhere else offers quite the same certainty. Earthquake damage in Cyrenaica, for example, can be dated impressively close to A.D. 365, damage in Corinth much less securely so.<sup>19</sup> But most other attempts to pin destruction on the earthquake of A.D. 365 (notably in Algeria, Cyprus, and Sicily) seem implausible and weak.<sup>20</sup>

It is worth restating what *can* be argued with certainty. The earthquake struck Crete close to the end of the night of 21 July and was felt as day broke at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, though it would have been well into the morning everywhere by the time the tsunami-waves at the shores had lost their potency.<sup>21</sup> If not destructive over a vast area, the earthquake may nevertheless have been *felt* at great distances: this would help explain why the sources inflated it into a worldwide phenomenon.<sup>22</sup> Comparison with later Mediterranean earthquakes would suggest that such an earthquake could have been felt in Italy and Sicily, Egypt and Syria.<sup>23</sup> Sozomen (*HE* 6.3) describes how the Alexandrians of his own day called a yearly commemorative festival 'the birthday of the earthquake', which implies the city having experienced more than distant shocks.<sup>24</sup> But above all, the tsunami, a rare occurrence in the Mediterranean, must have fed the legend of the worldwide earthquake, by ensuring that reports from widely-scattered localities (besides Methone and Alexandria, Sicily and Epidaurus in Dalmatia are named by Jerome) entered the historical record. Tsunami-waves move fast and low across open sea (typically 600–900 km/h); so at Alexandria, 600 km from Crete, the retreat of the sea might have occurred about an hour after the earthquake. Ammianus describes how men could pick up 'fish and similar things' from the sea bed: Theophanes and George the

<sup>13</sup> See Jacques and Bousquet, *op. cit.* (n. 3), 441–3; E. Guidoboni, G. Ferrari and C. Margottini, 'Una chiave di lettura per la sismicità antica: la ricerca dei gemelli del terremoto del 365 d. C.', in Guidoboni, *op. cit.* (n. 4, 1989), 552–73.

<sup>14</sup> See for example, P. A. Pirazzoli *et al.*, 'Historical environmental changes at Phalasarna Harbor, West Crete', *Geoarchaeology* 7 (1992), 371–92; Kelletat, *op. cit.* (n. 4); Stiros, *op. cit.* (n. 4).

<sup>15</sup> Price *et al.*, *op. cit.* (n. 4), 180–95.

<sup>16</sup> e.g. Guidoboni, *op. cit.* (n. 4, 1994); Ambraseys *et al.*, *op. cit.* (n. 4).

<sup>17</sup> Guidoboni, *op. cit.* (n. 4, 1994), 271. Guidoboni ascribes to it a strength of X–XI on the EMS (European macro-seismic) scale, as great as any other earthquake in antiquity. The force of tsunamis can generally be correlated to the size of the earthquake that generates them. See E. Bryant, *Tsunami: The Underrated Hazard* (2001), 15.

<sup>18</sup> See Guidoboni, *op. cit.* (n. 4, 1994), 272–3; Stiros, *op. cit.* (n. 4), 558–9.

<sup>19</sup> See L. Bachielli, 'A Cyrenaica earthquake post 364 A.D.: written sources and archaeological evidence', *Annali di Geofisica* 38 (1995), 977–82. On mainland Greece, see R. M. Rothaus, *Corinth, the First City of Greece: an Urban History of Late Antique Cult and Religion* (2000), 18–21; Stiros, *op. cit.* (n. 4), 559.

<sup>20</sup> Earthquake damage in North Africa is detached from the event of A.D. 365 by C. Lepelletier, 'L'Afrique du nord et le prétendu séisme universel du 21 juillet 365', *MEFRA* 96 (1984), 463–91; that at Sounion on Cyprus by Guidoboni, Ferrari and Margottini, *op. cit.*

(n. 13), 570–1. On Sicily, contrast A. Di Vita, 'La villa di Piazza Armerina e l'arte musiva in Sicilia', *Kôkalos* 18–19 (1972–1973), 251–63, at 256–7, with R. J. A. Wilson, *Sicily under the Roman Empire* (1990), 185–7, who argues for an earthquake in A.D. 363/4 as well as the tsunami of A.D. 365 (cf. E. Guidoboni, A. Muggia and G. Valensise, 'Aims and methods in territorial archaeology: possible clues to a strong fourth-century A.D. earthquake in the Straits of Messina (southern Italy)', in W. McGuire *et al.*, *The Archaeology of Geological Catastrophe* (2000), 45–70).

<sup>21</sup> This assessment reconciles Ammianus, who puts the earthquake just after dawn, and Theophanes, who puts it in the night. It may be over-interpretation to note that Ammianus was probably resident at Antioch at the time, where sunrise is over twenty minutes earlier than Alexandria, and where a distant earthquake felt under cover of darkness further west might have been felt shortly after dawn.

<sup>22</sup> As well as Ammianus, see e.g. Jerome, *Chron.* a.366, *Comm. in c. xv Isaiae* 5, *Vita S. Hil.* 40, Theophanes AM 5859, the biographer of Athanasius (*PG* 25.ccx), and George the Monk (560–1).

<sup>23</sup> The earthquake of 8 August 1303 was felt in Venice and did damage in Alexandria and Acre; that of 12 October 1856 was felt from Italy to Lebanon, and that of 27 August 1886 from Italy to Syria and Egypt (Guidoboni, Ferrari and Margottini, *op. cit.* (n. 13), 556–8).

<sup>24</sup> The stories contained in Theophanes and George the Monk (see Section II below) also imply an earthquake of some force in Alexandria.

Monk also imply a protracted reflux. The period between waves could plausibly have been half an hour or more.<sup>25</sup> In shallow harbours, such as Alexandria's, the sea's return would have been particularly terrifying, with the tsunami multiplying enormously in height as it moved more slowly into the shallows and beyond.<sup>26</sup> Comparative evidence makes it quite credible that its force could have tossed ships inland.<sup>27</sup> It is also notable that later waves often cause as much destruction as the first.<sup>28</sup>

The event's impact on the imagination is clear from the number of independent sources which mention it, including several written before Ammianus completed his *Res Gestae* in about A.D. 390. Some are chronicles: the *Consularia Constantinopolitana*,<sup>29</sup> Jerome's *Chronicle* (early A.D. 380s), the *Consularia Italica*, and the Alexandrian *Index of Festal Letters of Athanasius* (which survives in Syriac translation).<sup>30</sup> Jerome also refers to the worldwide earthquake in his *Life of Hilarion* (40) and in his *Commentary on Isaiah* (15.5). A number of other prose authors allude to the tsunami or mention it in passing: two panegyrics of Valens by Themistius (*Or.* 7.86b, from winter A.D. 366–367, and *Or.* 11.150cd, from A.D. 373),<sup>31</sup> possibly Libanius' speech *On Avenging Julian* (*Or.* 24.14),<sup>32</sup> a travel narrative of John Cassian (*Conferences* 11.3, *SC* 54, 102–3).<sup>33</sup> There are narratives in the Church historians of the A.D. 440s, Socrates (*HE* 4.3–4) and Sozomen (*HE* 6.3), the latter focusing on Alexandria. A late sixth-century Coptic text attaches the event to a miracle of Athanasius.<sup>34</sup> A ninth-century biography of Athanasius (*PG* 25.ccx) brings independent and valuable testimony of destruction on Crete, and two other novel testimonia, both with Alexandrian focuses, are found from a similar period: Theophanes (*AM* 5859) and George the Monk (560–1 (462M)). There are also many derivative narratives, here passed over.<sup>35</sup>

One can, if one wishes, sift with care through this diverse range of sources to reach a rational and scientifically plausible account of the events of that morning. But sifting may remove what is most characteristic of late antique understanding, and the possibility or hope of reaching firm conclusions should not lead us to ignore error, imprecision, and distortion. Generalization of local events into wider catastrophe is a natural development in ancient historiography, which is inevitably dependent (even in the best scenario) on the collation of a few localized and scattered witnesses. And as with battles, historiographical representation of earthquakes almost invariably resorts to conventional descriptions, taken over from earlier disasters.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps the most important element of 'late antique understanding' is the belief that natural disasters reflect divine anger and act as responses to or warnings of events in the political sphere. Such theological and providentialist argument, both polytheist and Christian, becomes particularly prominent in the religious vicissitudes of the fourth and fifth centuries A.D.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>25</sup> On tsunami dynamics, see Bryant, *op. cit.* (n. 17), ch. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Local geography also leaves Methone prone to tsunami damage, according to Henry, *op. cit.* (n. 5), 42.

<sup>27</sup> For example, in the Chilean earthquake of 1868, a tsunami threw the American warship *Wateree* and the Peruvian warship *America* 3 km inland (Bryant, *op. cit.* (n. 17), 52).

<sup>28</sup> For behaviour of tsunamis at coasts see Bryant, *op. cit.* (n. 17), 32–7.

<sup>29</sup> The entry for A.D. 365 was published in about A.D. 370. See R. W. Burgess, *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia Constantinopolitana* (1993), 196. Significantly, this earliest explicit narrative mentions only the sea passing its boundaries, not the earthquake.

<sup>30</sup> *Nova Patrum Bibliotheca* VI.1, p. 15, now *SC* 317, p. 269.

<sup>31</sup> The first of these passages was adduced by Henry, *op. cit.* (n. 5), 41 and n. 17. The comparison of Procopius to Typhon is also found at 90a, and at 93a he is compared to a raging torrent.

<sup>32</sup> Libanius may make fleeting reference to the tsunami in the middle of a list of other regrettable

consequences of Julian's death: ὁ φόβος γῆν τε ἔσειε καὶ θάλασσαν ('fear shook both earth and sea'). But the context is troubling, and it might be possible to explain this phrase metaphorically. On *Or.* 18.292–3 see below, p. 147.

<sup>33</sup> He describes having seen salt marshes in the eastern Nile Delta in A.D. 399, which had been created by a great tsunami. Two other possible reflections of this earthquake can be found in *HA Gallieni duo* 5 (an anachronistic fiction) and Zosimus 4.18 (a story displaced by chronological error).

<sup>34</sup> T. Orlandi (ed.), *Constantini episcopi urbis Siout Encomia in Athanasium duo* (CSCO 349/Copt. 37) (1974), 1.22–5, 27. See Mazza, *op. cit.* (n. 5), 318–20.

<sup>35</sup> See Jacques and Bousquet, *op. cit.* (n. 3), 456–61 for a list mentioning all sources except Themistius and Bishop Constantine's Encomium (see n. 34). The only error is to see the anonymous biographer of Athanasius as exclusively following Socrates (p. 458).

<sup>36</sup> On ancient perceptions of earthquakes, see G. Traina, 'Terremoti e società romana: problemi di mentalità e uso delle informazioni', *ASNP* 15 (1985), 867–87.

<sup>37</sup> See n. 5 for Paschoud's definition of providentialism.

Representations of the tsunami of A.D. 365 accordingly reflect contemporary political anxieties. The Constantinian dynasty had reached its climax in Julian, whose unexpected apostasy and vigorous promotion of traditional cults had stirred up religious tensions. His reign had ended with his death in the disastrous Persian campaign of A.D. 363; his successor Jovian signed a yet more disastrous treaty, and swiftly died. The next emperor, Valentinian, soon elevated his brother Valens to equal rank as Augustus and left him to govern the East. It was in A.D. 365, the second year of their reign, that the great tsunami struck. Barely two months later came the usurpation of Procopius, whose lack of personal distinction was made up for by his links to Julian and the Constantinian dynasty. Only in the following year did Valens managed to defeat and kill him. The revolt of Procopius, and the life and death of Julian, are the two major political subtexts of fourth- and fifth-century A.D. accounts of the tsunami.<sup>38</sup>

Procopius' usurpation began on 28 September A.D. 365, in the Anastasian Baths in Constantinople. Legitimate imperial proclamations took place in the morning, but Procopius held the ceremony at crack of dawn, a compromise between keeping up appearances and presenting his rule as a *fait accompli*.<sup>39</sup> Ammianus had other ways of mocking his legitimacy, and did not stress the timing; some authors, however, drew attention to it. Themistius drew a parallel between Procopius' emergence from a shadowy existence and his dawn proclamation, and the great triple-wave: both were 'begun at night but rendered great in the daylight' (*Or.* 7.86b).<sup>40</sup> For the *Consularia Constantinopolitana*, the two main events of the year, starkly juxtaposed, are the tsunami and the emergence of Procopius, referred to as 'the night-time bandit (*latro nocturnus*) and public enemy'. Socrates, another Constantinopolitan, meaningfully juxtaposes the two events (*HE* 4.3), erroneously placing the tsunami after the usurpation, and implies a connection between natural disaster and political crisis by concluding that 'while this was going on (τούτων δὴ γενομένων), neither state nor church was at peace' (4.4).<sup>41</sup> (Socrates therefore also implies a relationship between the tsunami and the Arian sympathies which made Valens a villain to Catholic posterity, especially since his death at Adrianople could be providentially interpreted as divine punishment.<sup>42</sup>)

The first source obviously and indisputably to imply a connection between the earthquake and tsunami of A.D. 365 and the emperor Julian is Jerome's *Life of Hilarion* (40). He writes of 'the earthquake over the whole world, which happened after Julian's death, [when] the sea advanced beyond its bounds, as if God threatened an inundation again or all things were returning to the ancient chaos, and ships were left hanging on the side of mountains'. The calming of the great tsunami follows the saint's flight from Palestine under Julian, and is paired with his killing of a dragon — the metaphor would be obvious even without the explicit mention of Julian's death.<sup>43</sup> Sozomen, writing in the A.D. 440s, appears to rely on Alexandrian oral tradition, as he tells only of the earthquake's effects in that city, and dates the event to Julian's reign (*HE* 6.3). '... From what I have heard, it was either during his reign, or when he was Caesar, that suffering befell the Alexandrians.' The sea retreated and returned, throwing boats on to rooftops. Sozomen then bewails the continual earthquakes, drought, and plague that afflicted the Empire under Julian. The error in dating may or may not be deliberate — insincerity is

<sup>38</sup> Baudy, op. cit. (n. 5), has gone as far as to see the tsunami of A.D. 365 as unalloyed providentialism, a fiction arisen because of its aptness for mythologizing the usurpation of Procopius and the reign of Julian. Baudy's conspiracy theory requires a double forgery of Constantinopolitan and Alexandrian records, and astonishing credulity in the contemporaries Jerome and Ammianus. He is correct, however, about the susceptibility of almost all the literary sources to providentialist readings.

<sup>39</sup> See F. Kolb, *Herrscherideologie in der Spätantike* (2001), 98–9, for the characteristics of a legitimate proclamation.

<sup>40</sup> Καίτοι τίνα οὐκ ἐπέπληξε ... ὁ κατακλυσμὸς ἐκεῖνος καὶ ἡ ζάλη καὶ ἡ τρικυμία, ἅωρι μὲν ἄρξαμένη, πολλὴ δὲ ἐν ὥρᾳ κατασκευασθεῖσα, ὅτε θεοὶς ἐχθρὸς ἀνθρώπου ἐν ὑπογραφῆως ἀεὶ μοιρᾷ διαβιούς ἐκ τοῦ

μέλανος καὶ τῆς καλαμίδος ἐτόλμησεν εἰς νοῦν ἐμβαλέσθαι τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἡγεμονίαν. ('And who wasn't struck ... by that deluge, the surf and the triple wave, begun at night but rendered great in the daylight, when a man hateful to the gods, who'd always lived in the position of scribe, dared from the ink and the quill to put into his mind the domination of the Roman Empire.') See Baudy, op. cit. (n. 5), 52–8, for a striking denial of this text's reference to the tsunami.

<sup>41</sup> Similarly Jerome's *Chronicle* postpones it until after the death of Procopius in A.D. 366.

<sup>42</sup> See N. Lenski, *Initium mali Romano imperio: contemporary reactions to the Battle of Adrianople*, *TAPA* 127 (1997), 129–68, at 150–2.

<sup>43</sup> cf. Eusebius, *VC* 3.3, where Constantine represents the persecutor Licinius as a dragon.



suggested both by his self-conscious inexactness and by the fact that he could have got the correct date from Socrates, one of his main sources. What is important is that Sozomen thought that it *should* have been in the Apostate's reign that God manifested such anger. The identity of the text which suggested such a move is revealing. Sozomen had already openly referred to and refuted (*HE* 6.1–2) the *Funeral Oration* of Julian's polemically pagan admirer Libanius. His description of continuous earthquakes and famine and plague (λιμός and λοιμός, *HE* 6.3) is more surreptitiously filched from a passage where Libanius' point is very different (*Or.* 18.293).<sup>44</sup> Libanius had listed the disasters that had befallen the Empire since Julian's death (*Or.* 18.286–90), including the financial difficulties of temples, the mistreatment of philosophers and rhetoricians, the neglect of curial duties, and every type of barbarian preparing to invade. He continued (292–3):

Earth, at least, was duly aware of her loss and has honoured our hero with fitting mourning. Like a horse tossing its rider, she has destroyed ever so many cities — in Palestine many, in Libya all. The greatest cities of Sicily lie in ruins, as does every city in Greece except one: Nicaea the lovely is laid low, and our loveliest of cities is shaken and can have no confidence for the future. 293. Such is the honour paid him by Earth, or if you would have it so, by Poseidon: but from the Seasons have come famine and plague, afflicting man and beast alike, as though it is not right that creatures upon earth should flourish once he has departed.<sup>45</sup>

This does not represent a single earthquake, and was almost certainly written before 21 July A.D. 365.<sup>46</sup> Some of these events, including the Nicaea earthquake of 2 December A.D. 362 and the Palestinian one of 18–19 May A.D. 363, are to be dated to Julian's reign and are thus to be seen as Earth's anticipation of his death. Others are best dated after Julian's death and are to be interpreted as responses to it.<sup>47</sup> Imprecise chronology was advantageous for Libanius — he could speak of a *worldwide* series of disasters, to represent the whole earth's grief — but his imprecision enabled Sozomen to snatch his pathetic fallacy. Sozomen united earlier earthquakes with the great disaster of A.D. 365 and used them to represent the situation during, rather than after, Julian's reign. Not only Sozomen is influenced by Libanius' association of a series of earthquakes. Modern scholars have been encouraged by this more than any other text to believe in a single and massive seismic event in this period, which is dated, following Ammianus and various chronicles, to 21 July A.D. 365.<sup>48</sup>

When Libanius is read correctly, as declaring that Julian's death was presaged and responded to by abundant earthquakes, he reflects the seismic reality of the period. He also reflects a blatantly providentialist view of the place of natural catastrophe in political narratives. The idea that natural events warn of or respond to political events is not exclusive to Late Antiquity: even Thucydides had seen the Peloponnesian War as a period remarkably abundant in earthquakes and eclipses (1.23.3–4).<sup>49</sup> There is, however, an indication of an intellectual climate particularly ready for such an earthquake and such an idea in the fact that Libanius portrayed earthquakes as showing divine grief for Julian *before* what appears to have been the greatest earthquake of the age, in July A.D.

<sup>44</sup> Sozomen's use of Libanius is noticed by Jacques and Bousquet, *op. cit.* (n. 3), 449 n. 106, 452 n. 118, and Mazza, *op. cit.* (n. 5), 318.

<sup>45</sup> Trans. Norman.

<sup>46</sup> The passage was dissociated from the great tsunami by Henry, *op. cit.* (n. 5), and by Jacques and Bousquet, *op. cit.* (n. 3), 428–36. All other evidence suggests a date at the start of A.D. 365, and Libanius' failure to mention the great tsunami confirms that 21 July is a *terminus ante quem* (see H.-U. Wiemer, *Libanios und Julian* (1995), 261–8).

<sup>47</sup> Henry, *op. cit.* (n. 5), 44–60, suggests that the earthquakes of Libanius, *Or.* 18.292 *must* have taken place before Julian's death, and she is followed by Guidoboni, *op. cit.* (n. 4, 1994), 259–62. The assumption is that Libanius and others saw earthquakes

exclusively as portents. But earthquakes can also function as nature's responses following human events, and these earthquakes come in a list of events *subsequent* to Julian's death. Jacques and Bousquet, *op. cit.* (n. 3), 424–37, therefore seem correct to suggest that the earthquakes described by Libanius belong in the years A.D. 362–4.

<sup>48</sup> See n. 46.

<sup>49</sup> The passage embarrasses those commentators who perceive him as the father of scientific history (S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides vol. 1* (1997), ad loc.). For a convincing demonstration of Ammianus' sharp practice with the eclipse in A.D. 360 (20.3) in order to create an omen, see T. D. Barnes, *Ammianus Marcellinus and the Representation of Historical Reality* (1998), 102–6.

365.<sup>50</sup> The passage, with Sozomen's much later response to it, demonstrates perfectly how the widespread but limited disaster of A.D. 365 could have come to be considered global. They also show that the public religion of the Roman Empire is central to the debate about how to integrate natural disasters into the historical narrative.

There is no such blatant providentialism in Ammianus, and it would be an easy mistake to dissociate the 'lonely historian' from such approaches altogether, just as he has often been denied any firm polytheist feeling. Ammianus is precise in timing and dating, and clear in differentiating the various phases of earthquake, reflux, and return of the waters. His narration could be used uncorroborated to achieve a theory on the epicentre, force, and timing of the event which would differ little from one that took the full sweep of the evidence into consideration. I mentioned above the danger that sifting through the sources might sift out what was characteristically late antique, and Ammianus is at particular risk from an anachronistic and sanitized reading. Although he easily surpasses the rest in terms of accuracy, comprehensiveness, and scientific plausibility, he nevertheless stands next to Libanius as a foundational text for those arguing for a massive earthquake, with his claims of the uniqueness of the event and his description of fearsome terrors striding through the circle of the world (*horrendi terrores* summon up the Greek association of φόβος with earthquakes). The initial shocks make the whole earth shake, and Ammianus avoids mention of any precise localities until Alexandria and Methone: he therefore allows, although significantly he does not impose, the inference of a global catastrophe and of universal earthquake damage. In the context in which Ammianus was writing — when Jerome, for example, had recorded a worldwide earthquake — the inference would be an easy one to draw. On the other hand, the very brevity and vagueness of the description of the earthquake ('tremefacta concutitur omnis terreni stabilitas ponderis', 26.10.16), as opposed to that of the tsunami, could be used to reach an opposite conclusion.<sup>51</sup>

Such manipulation — allowing a conclusion to be drawn — is not unprecedented in Ammianus, and provides a strong argument for a contextualized reading of the 'lonely historian', and against being dazzled by how easily he surpasses other authors in literary ambition and complexity. After all, not only does Ammianus (like all other sources) generalize from localized events into a seemingly worldwide catastrophe: he also generalizes under the influence of tradition, by having his earthquake preceded by a thunderstorm (26.10.16). He had done exactly the same with the Nicomedia earthquake of A.D. 357 (17.7.2–3), in each case apparently following the theory that earthquakes arise from raging winds becoming trapped in the innermost parts of the earth, to which he refers in his digression on the subject (17.7.11).<sup>52</sup> It will be seen below (Section IV) that though providentialist approaches may not be blatant, Ammianus' narrative does, in fact, engage the natural disaster with political events.

## II. AMMIANUS' SOURCES AND PERSPECTIVE

Ammianus' narrative of the tsunami is notable for brilliant observation of detail. But the brilliant details are unlocated, and the observation has no obvious source: no credible witness could have seen the abyss uncovered and the underwater mountains and valleys sunlit for the first time, and survived. Two big questions provoked by the text, at least until the closing sentence, are 'who is seeing all this, and from where?'

An answer can begin from the premise that Ammianus, like many other ancient historical writers short of comprehensive evidence, generalizes from such local detail as he does possess. Like many of the accounts, Ammianus includes a detail from

<sup>50</sup> Libanius may later use the tsunami in such a way in his speech *On Avenging Julian* (see n. 32).

<sup>51</sup> Lepelley, op. cit. (n. 20), 363 n. 3.

<sup>52</sup> One of Ammianus' sources for the digression, Pliny's *Natural History* (2.192), reveals that this is why thunderstorms so often precede earthquakes.

Alexandria, of ships being thrown on to the roofs of houses.<sup>53</sup> Alexandria was the largest city to be affected by the tsunami, and the digression on Egypt suggests that he had visited it (22.16). One could blithely cite his Thucydidean claim to have worked on the basis of autopsy and interviews (15.1.1), and leave the matter there. However, comparison of Ammianus with some of those other Alexandrian narratives will show the probability of a textual relationship; not merely the detail of the ships cast inland, but significant inspiration throughout the whole passage can be attributed to a Greek source with an Alexandrian focus. More precisely, I shall postulate that this text is the ultimate common source of Theophanes and George the Monk.

This is not a conventional piece of source criticism. It is not concerned with finding a name to attach to the common source (there is no reason to assume that a name should have survived). In particular, no wider textual relationship is proclaimed. The stages by which a portion of text, plausibly written in Greek soon after A.D. 365 and in an Alexandrian context, found its way into two ninth-century chroniclers are unknowable and of no great concern: the case is simply that certain similarities of phrasing and information argue that such a text stands behind the others. But it is worth emphasizing that texts like this certainly existed. The Golenischev Papyrus gives us fragments of a world-chronicle, full of Alexandrian detail, written very shortly after Ammianus, which appears to be related to other, extant chronicles.<sup>54</sup> The recent translators of Theophanes, Mango and Scott, identify a local chronicle of Alexandria as the source of a number of other references to the city (including earthquakes) at later dates: the tsunami story could have reached the text of Theophanes via this or a similar intermediary.<sup>55</sup> As far as concerns Ammianus, I am as much interested in his divergences from this proposed source as in the similarities. If the relationship is accepted, it will also have to be accepted that he has corrected and transformed the source. If readers prefer to think of Ammianus alluding to, correcting, and transforming an Alexandrian oral tradition similar to what percolated through to later authors, I shall not complain overmuch.

My argument begins with the suggestion that a common source ultimately underlies the narratives of Theophanes and George the Monk. George, who sometimes follows Theophanes, is obviously not doing so here. He has a significant quantity of additional or variant material, as well as a better understanding in places. Nor is it likely that he is following Theophanes' immediate source, as he has dated the event, wrongly and imprecisely, to the reign of Gratian: the two texts are plausibly cousins, not siblings.<sup>56</sup> Table 1 illustrates the contents of each description.

George's narrative has considerably more detail. Some of this may be authentic (see (f) in the table); other parts are more likely to be padding out of his source (g). He has also joined the A.D. 365 event with a Bithynian earthquake of A.D. 368 or 369 (i). The similarities reside in two stories (a–e, h). The first is set in Alexandria and tells of the effects of the tsunami and the casualties caused by people failing to flee. The second (where the similarity is less pronounced) is found clearly in Theophanes, with only reflections in George. It is a tale of sailors whose boat landed on the bottom of the Adriatic when the sea disappeared, and was refloated when the sea returned.

The first of these two stories, about events at Alexandria, shows some variations. Theophanes puts events in an illogical order. He begins with ships being thrown into the courtyards, then he moves on to those who were leaving because of the earthquake but saw that the water had retreated and ran to plunder the boats which were on dry

<sup>53</sup> The other sources with an Alexandrian focus are, in chronological order, the *Index of Festal Letters of Athanasius*, Sozomen, Bishop Constantine's *Encomium of Athanasius*, Theophanes, and George the Monk.

<sup>54</sup> A. Bauer and J. Strzygowski, *Eine alexandrinische Weltchronik. Text und Miniaturen eines griechischen Papyrus der Sammlung W. Golenischev* (1906).

<sup>55</sup> C. Mango and R. Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (1997), lxxviii–lxxx.

<sup>56</sup> George's earthquake and tsunami is unquestionably that of A.D. 365, mingled with an earthquake at

Germe in Bithynia (Guidoboni, op. cit. (n. 4, 1994), no. 156) which Socrates places in A.D. 368 or 369 and which could be identifiable with the Nicaea earthquake of 11 October A.D. 368. That George misdates the event to the reign of Gratian may be the typical confusion of the Byzantine chronicler when faced with multiple Augusti. By the time of the Germe earthquake, Gratian had been proclaimed Augustus by his father. An alternative source of confusion could be Gratian's consulate of A.D. 366, the year to which Theophanes (like a number of other sources) misplaces the tsunami.

TABLE 1. NARRATIVES OF THEOPHANES AND GEORGE THE MONK COMPARED.

Theophanes AM 5859	Georgius Monachus 560–561 (462M)
<b>Date</b> In the eighth Indiction (365) [but AM 5859 = 366: the account follows the suppression of Procopius]	In these times [the reign of Gratian]
<b>(a)</b> There was a great earthquake in the night throughout all the world, so that in Alexandria . . .	There was a great and fearful earthquake, so that in Alexandria . . .
<b>(b)</b> Ships were carried over the walls into courtyards and on to roofs.	–
<b>(c)</b> When the sea retreated the ships remained on dry land.	The sea retreated and ships were found lying as if on dry land.
<b>(d)</b> People who had been fleeing the earthquake then ran to loot the ships . . .	People came to look at the wondrous sight . . .
<b>(e)</b> But the sea returned and covered them all.	But the sea returned beyond its normal extent and drowned 50,000 people. Some of the ships moored there were covered by the waters . . .
<b>(f)</b> –	. . . and others, found in the river Nile, were thrown inland, up to 180 stades. There was destruction in Crete, Achaea, Boeotia, Epirus and Sicily, and many ships were thrown 100 stades on to mountainsides.
<b>(g)</b> –	There was worldwide devastation including in Africa and the British isles. [cf. Theophanes (a)]
<b>(h)</b> Sailors reported that, while sailing in the Adriatic, their ship was caught up and then rested on the sea bed; after a short time the water returned again and refloated them.	In some seas, including the Adriatic and the Aegean, waters retreated as though forming a wall, and dry land appeared. Ships were found floating, and those resting on the bottom were raised again by the revival of the waters.
<b>(i)</b> –	There were continuous earthquakes including at Germe in Bithynia [A.D. 368 or 369].

land. The waters returned and drowned them. The suggestion is that one wave threw the boats ashore, then another later wave killed the plunderers. More than one destructive wave is likely in a tsunami;<sup>57</sup> but it does not make sense that those fleeing the *earthquake* (possibly an hour before the tsunami) would have been struck by the fact that boats were inland. The most plausible explanation is that his source had ships lifted by the wave and left on dry land (ἐπὶ ξηρᾶς) by the wave as the ‘headline’ to the account. Only then did its main narrative begin with the initial reflux found in all the other sources: the sea’s retreat left boats in the harbour, which was now dry (τὰ πλοῖα ἐπὶ τῆς ξηρᾶς). Theophanes seems to have confused the headline narrative, describing the final effects, with the fuller one. George the Monk has events in their true order. The harbour was drained by the reflux; people were drawn by the sheer wonder of the sight of the sea’s disappearance and the ships left *as if* on dry land (ὥς ἐπὶ ξηρᾶς); consequently they were drowned.

<sup>57</sup> Bryant, *op. cit.* (n. 17), *passim*, e.g. 161–2.



In my view the close verbal parallels of (a–e), detailed in Table 2, demonstrate that Theophanes has muddled the context, although those at the beginning are obviously too formulaic to prove a common source. The one major contradiction between the stories (Theophanes' looters against George's wondering spectators) can then be explained as differing choices of alternative explanations in the source.<sup>58</sup>

TABLE 2. VERBAL PARALLELS IN THE ACCOUNTS OF THEOPHANES AND GEORGE THE MONK.

Theophanes AM 5859	Georgius Monachus 560–1 (462M)
(a) Σεισμός δὲ γέγονε μέγας καθ' ὅλης τῆς γῆς ἐν τῇ ἡ' ἰνδικτιῶνι ἐν νυκτί, ὥς καὶ ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ ...	Κατ' ἐκείνους δὲ καιροὺς σεισμός μέγας καὶ φοβερώτατος γέγονεν, ὥς ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ ...
(b) ['headline' about ships tossed inland]	–
(c) ὑπαναχωρησάσης δὲ τῆς θαλάσσης ἔμεινεν ἐπὶ ξηρᾶς [sc. τὰ πλοῖα]	ὑποχωρῆσαι μὲν τὴν θάλασσαν ἐπὶ πολὺ, τὰ δὲ πλοῖα ὥς ἐπὶ ξηρᾶς εὗρεθῆναι κείμενα.
(d–e) οἱ δὲ λαοὶ ἐκ τῆς πόλεως φεύγοντες διὰ τὸν σεισμόν, θεωρήσαντες τὰ πλοῖα ἐπὶ τῆς ξηρᾶς, εἰς ἀρπαγὴν τῶν ἐν τοῖς πλοίοις φορτίων ἐπήλθον, καὶ ἐπιστρέψαν τὸ ὕδωρ πάντας ἐκάλυψεν.	πλήθους δὲ λαοῦ συνδραμόντος εἰς θέαν τοῦ παραδόξου θαύματος, καὶ τοῦ ὕδατος πάλιν ὑποστρέψαντος καὶ ἐκβεβηκότος μακρότερον τοῦ συνήθους τόπου, κατεποντίσθησαν ἀνθρώπων μυριάδες ἐ, καὶ τὰς μὲν ἐκεῖσε προσορμιζούσας ναῦς τὸ ὕδωρ κατεκάλυψεν . . .

This is followed in Theophanes with the tall story of the mariners who survived their ship landing on the bottom. A version of this story recurs in George's narrative, though the details are cumulatively suggestive rather than individually clinching. First the change of scene to the area of the Adriatic and the Aegean coincides with the move to the Adriatic in Theophanes. Next the waters disappeared as if there were a wall on one side and water on the other, and the sea bed appeared — again reminiscent of Theophanes' boat landing on the sea bed. Finally he mentions boats sitting on the bottom (καθίσαντα, cf. Theophanes καθίσαι) and being refloated by the return of the waters. More telling than any of these individual details is the way in which the two accounts, for all their differences, preserve the same order of events.

The distance between the two versions should not be underestimated. Plainly they do not share a source unmediated, but they do tend to complement each other. Theophanes said that the disaster was worldwide (a), whereas George later in his narrative gives a lengthy and over-comprehensive list of places throughout the known world affected by the earthquake and tsunami (f–g). George omits the boats which were thrown over the walls in Alexandria and which have led Theophanes to confusion, but gives other examples of vessels being thrown inland at a more logical point in the narrative.

The basic similarities between Theophanes and George on the one hand and Ammianus on the other should be obvious to the reader. Rebuffat noted the likeness in discussing his collection of the sources (which does not mention George the Monk). His insight is important, even if not couched as a source critic would have done: Theophanes appears to follow Ammianus, but he has detail absent from him.<sup>59</sup> Such detail is

<sup>58</sup> Theophanes, trans. Mango and Scott: '(a) In indiction 8 there was a great earthquake by night throughout the whole world, so that in Alexandria [(b) ships moored to the shore were lifted high up over the top of tall buildings and walls and were carried within [the city] into courtyards and houses]. (c) When the water had receded, they remained on dry land. (d) The people fled from the city because of the earthquake but when they saw the ships on the dry land they went up to them to loot their cargoes. (e) But the returning water covered them all.' George:

'(a) In these times there occurred a great and very fearsome earthquake to the extent that at Alexandria (c) the sea disappeared for a long time and boats were found lying as if on dry land. (d) And a multitude of people ran to see the unexpected wonder, (e) and when the water turned around and came back further than its accustomed place, 50,000 people were drowned; and some of the ships moored there the waters covered . . .'

<sup>59</sup> R. Rebuffat, 'Cuicul, le 21 juillet 365', *Antiquités Africaines* 15 (1980), 309–28, at 322.



plentiful, and it is, of course, impossible that Ammianus acted as a direct source for Theophanes.<sup>60</sup> Ammianus' description, for all its observation, is less precisely located; the relationship if anything looks as though it should work the other way round. But if the *ultimate* common source of Theophanes and George (which, I repeat, I refrain from attempting to identify) was written close to the time of the tsunami, Ammianus could have known of it. The effects of the tsunami in Alexandria and, more distantly, the story of the ship landing on the bottom, and the many casualties surprised by the sea's return all appear in some form in Ammianus, though his account is less detailed, and might almost be alluding to and correcting Theophanes and George.

The similarities begin with some comparatively minor details in the setting of the accounts. The tsunami is placed after the death of Procopius in both Ammianus and Theophanes. But Ammianus corrects this misplacement with the words 'hoc nouatore adhuc superstite' (26.10.15). Plenty of other factors could explain why Ammianus moved this report to the end of the book, but it does not tarnish his literary brilliance to think that its displacement in a source might have been a contributing factor. His correction, after all, is slightly wrong, as Procopius' usurpation had not actually begun at the time of the tsunami. The very words with which the report is introduced, 'horrendi terrores per omnem orbis ambitum grassati sunt subito' (26.10.15), find parallels in the two ninth-century sources (καθ' ὅλης τῆς γῆς (Theophanes), φοβερώτατος (George)). Ammianus places the earthquake just after dawn, whereas Theophanes has it in the night. This is not a serious divergence, as I mentioned above (n. 21), and is explicable by varying time zones or the long duration of the tsunami's effects.

More significant, and less formulaic, are the similarities in the passage that follows. Ammianus describes the retreat of the sea (26.10.16):

... mareque dispulsum retro fluctibus euolutis abscessit, ut resecta uoragine profundorum species natantium multiformes limo cernerentur haerentes, ualliumque uastitates et montium, tunc, ut opinari dabatur, suspicerent radios solis, quos primigenia rerum sub immensis gurgitibus amendauit.

... And the sea was driven away, its waves were rolled back, and it disappeared, so that the abyss of the depths was uncovered and many-shaped varieties of sea-creatures were seen stuck in the slime; the great wastes of those valleys and mountains, which the very creation had dismissed below the vast whirlpools, at that moment, as it was given to be believed, looked up at the sun's rays.

The science-fictional quality of this description may blind us to its originality. It is a remarkable choice to focus on the paradox of swimming things lying in the mud and to imagine that there should be a concealed and inhabited other world of mountains and valleys under the water. Ammianus preserves the universalizing nature of his narrative by not adopting the perspective of a viewer in a particular port. This does not mean that his narrative does not suggest viewers. They are undoubtedly assumed in the word *cernerentur*;<sup>61</sup> the personification with which the underwater valleys and mountains looked up (*suspicerent*) at the sun also raises the same problem of the viewer. The problem is partially answered in the parenthetical phrase *ut opinari dabatur*. However much concealed behind the passive voice, the suggestion of *cernerentur* and *ut opinari dabatur* is that people had seen the depths of the sea uncovered, in which case it is obvious to think of the sailors in Theophanes who landed on the sea bed.

<sup>60</sup> Apart from the impossibility of Ammianus being available in Byzantium as late as the ninth century, Theophanes would have needed to combine him with another detailed source: plainly any source which had the details in Theophanes would also have those which could be found in Ammianus.

<sup>61</sup> The reading of our main manuscript, V, is *cernebantur*, and though *cernerentur*, the reading of Gelenius (G), may represent the lost Hersfeldensis (M), it is as likely to come from Accursius' edition (A). The indicative is supported by S. Blomgren, *De sermone*

*Ammiani Marcellini quaestiones variae* (1937), 56–7, on the analogy of 21.6.9, where Ammianus has used the indicative in a result clause. In this case, however, a later subordinated verb (*suspicerent*) is in the subjunctive, and whereas one might be unsurprised at an author forgetting the subordination in a long sentence, one should not expect it to be forgotten and then remembered later in the sentence. Easier to suppose that *cernerentur* has been corrupted to *cernebantur* because of the nearby *dabatur*.

This is not the only possible interpretation of the passage. An alternative paraphrase might run thus: 'the sea disappeared and firstly (from the shore), marine animals were seen writhing in the mud, secondly (in the open sea) mountains and valleys beheld the sun's rays for the first time — so one might believe.' The narrative does not, therefore, presume viewers in the midst of the sea. There are two problems with this alternative interpretation. Firstly, the words *resecta uoragine profundorum* imply only with difficulty that the creatures were seen only near the shore. Secondly, a weak translation of *ut opinari dabatur*, 'one may believe', which takes *dabatur* as impersonal, as equivalent to *licebat*, is certainly not impossible;<sup>62</sup> however, it does miss out on a nuance achieved by taking *dabatur* naturally, as the passive of a verb of giving, 'it was given (by some one or some people) to be believed'. That an agent is implied is certainly supported by the usage elsewhere in the *Res Gestae*, which suggests a sense roughly on the lines that 'people inferred from (possibly) dubious sources'.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, my suggestion that Ammianus alludes to the sailors later found in Theophanes is confirmed by what follows, an image of boats landing on the bottom as if on dry ground, and people wandering around picking up fish and the like ('multis igitur nauibus uelut arida humo conexas, et licenter per exiguas undarum reliquias palantibus plurimis ut pisces manibus colligerent et similia', 26.10.17), until the sudden return of the waters.

I would argue that Ammianus has based his narrative of events in 26.10.16 on the two stories of which versions are found in Theophanes and George. He begins with the tale of the sailors allegedly landing on the bottom of the sea, from which he distances himself. It is no longer placed in the Adriatic; the sailors are no longer explicitly mentioned; the words 'ut opinari dabatur' refer obliquely to the story and suggest its dubiety. The ships of this story are melded with those in the harbour at Alexandria, grounded as if on dry land ('uelut arida humo', which looks like a calque of the Greek ὡς ἐπὶ ξηρᾶς, found in George and close to Theophanes' ἐπὶ ξηρᾶς).<sup>64</sup> The people who are wandering on the bottom to collect fish 'et similia' match those in Theophanes plundering the boats in the harbour and those in George watching the wondrous sight. The sudden return of the waters in Ammianus killed and covered many thousands of men ('milia multa necauit hominum et submersit'). It is hardly surprising to find a precise figure, 50,000, in George the Monk: κατεποντίσθησαν ἀνθρώπων μυριάδες ἑ. This could be a fiction of George's or an intermediate source, but it is quite conceivable and indeed probable that Ammianus deliberately rejected suspect precision in his source. Ammianus then describes the resulting shipwrecks in a way that further casts doubt on any stories about boats landing on the sea bed, and the waters returning and refloating the ships without harm to their crews.

Some ships, after the anger of the watery element had grown old, were seen to have sunk, and the bodies of people killed in shipwrecks lay there, faces up or down. (26.10.18)<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup> TLL s.v. *do*, 1689.48–81.

<sup>63</sup> Ammianus uses *ut opinari dabatur* and related forms (e.g. *ut intellegi datur*) in many places: 16.10.11, 19.2.31, 21.14.5, 22.9.11, 24.8.5, 26.1.7, 28.2.8, 30.5.18, 31.13.12. The conventional translation is a weak one: for 26.10.16, 'as one might well believe' (Rolfe), 'wie man glauben darf' (Seyfarth), 'come si poteva ritenere' (Selem), 'pouvait-on penser' (Marié), 'one must suppose' (Hamilton). But *dabatur* should imply a donor. At 16.10.11 Constantius' statuesque behaviour and restraint were 'signs of no mean endurance, one was given to think, which had been bestowed uniquely on him' ('patientiae non mediocris indicia, ut existimari dabatur, uni illi concessae'). This refers obliquely but unmistakably to individuals ('spin doctors') who interpreted Constantius' actions. Similarly (30.5.18) the night before his death, Valentinian in a dream 'saw his absent wife sitting with disordered hair and dressed in mourning clothes: one was given to think (*aestimari dabatur*) that this was his

*fortuna* about to leave'. One might interpret this as the narrator's hesitant deduction, but a reference to a source is likelier. What the emperor saw on the last night of his life needs a witness. Constantius had a dream which he told his *proximi* (21.14.2), which was thought to be his *genius*. Julian on the eve of his death (25.2.3) also saw his *fortuna*, the *genius publicus*, leaving him with veiled head, and Ammianus' source for this information is openly if inexactly expressed: 'ut confessus est proximis'.

<sup>64</sup> *Arida humus* occurs in Sallust, *Jugurtha* twice, in Statius, *Thebaid* and Apuleius, *De mundo*. In these places it refers to dry (e.g. desert) earth. Nowhere else in Latin is it used in this sense of dry land as opposed to sea. For the noun *arida* as a calque of ξηρά, see TLL s.v. *aridus*, 569, 38–56.

<sup>65</sup> The reference to bodies floating face-up and face-down recalls the true information recorded by Pliny (*HN* 7.77), that men's corpses tend to float supine, and women's prone.

It is only at the end of his account that Ammianus moves from a succession of vivid and imprecise pictures to specific locations. He tells us that boats were flung on to the roofs of houses in Alexandria, the detail with which, by contrast, Theophanes begins the story: an irony, if much of the prior narrative has been Alexandrian events disguised. The final image is more precise, more close up, and more authoritative. Ammianus had seen a Laconian vessel thrown nearly two miles inland near Methone. Unlike George's report of ships thrown 100 stades on to the sides of mountains, this figure can be given credence.

If Ammianus is indeed referring to stories which are the ancestors of those found in Theophanes and George, as parallels in the narrative suggest and linguistic similarities seem to confirm, it is not the relationship of dependence familiar from much source criticism. Ammianus' relationship is one of allusion and manipulation. He uses the fanciful story that boats landed on the sea bed without crediting it, or localizing it — contrast the astonishing but veracious detail of the boat cast inland near Methone, backed up by his own testimony. He also turns Alexandrian material into something of much more general application. Those contemporaries who observed the source of the stories would have seen that they had been appropriated in order to express a forceful and novel imagery. The narrative was wrested away from its origins, to become, paradoxically, at once more rational and more universalizing.

Such a redeployment of his 'sources' is entirely characteristic of Ammianus. Most studies in the fifty-five years since E. A. Thompson's revisionist book of 1947 have rejected source criticism as significant in understanding Ammianus, partly perhaps in duty to fashion, but also because the historian's obvious and obtrusive independence complicated matters. It was all very well to spot the similarities to Zosimus or Libanius on the Persian expedition, but then the historian's divergences from the common tradition could as easily be cited.<sup>66</sup> If Ammianus had been a more slavish follower of sources, traditional *Quellenforschung* might have worked better.<sup>67</sup> A more fruitful approach, yet to be fully appreciated by subsequent scholarship, was suggested in Guy Sabbah's *La méthode d'Ammien Marcellin* (1978). Sabbah believed in Ammianus as a documentary historian, who took advantage of the bureaucratic culture of the fourth century A.D. in constructing his historical discourse. Equally importantly (and perhaps more successfully), he illustrated the extent to which Ammianus alludes to a wide range of his contemporaries for particular details or techniques of representation — Julian, Libanius, Themistius, Mamertinus, Eutropius, and Pacatus, to name just a few. But Ammianus' historical discourse is so well constructed that none of these influences are ever detectable for too long. Moreover, he often contradicts the sources before him. Just as investigation of his allusive technique shows both a zeal for *contaminatio*, and a habit of forcibly altering the meaning of what he alludes to, so his use of sources is both complex and violent: indeed the best context in which to understand Ammianus' deployment of sources is as part of his intertextuality in general.<sup>68</sup> For example, when describing the great obelisk which Constantius II erected in Rome, Ammianus claims that it was Constantine who had first planned to move it from Egypt to Rome (17.4.13). An official inscription in hexameter verse, carved on the obelisk itself, disagrees, declaring that it was designated for Constantinople by Constantine but that his son had decided to send it to Rome (*ILS* 726). It would be obvious to rule out Ammianus'

<sup>66</sup> As they are by Thompson, op. cit. (n. 3), 29–31, and C. W. Fornara, 'Julian's Persian expedition in Ammianus and Zosimus', *JHS* 111 (1991), 1–15.

<sup>67</sup> Traditional *Quellenforschung* can be exemplified by the proposal of Otto Seeck ('Zur Chronologie und Quellenkritik des Ammianus Marcellinus', *Hermes* 41 (1906), 481–539) that Ammianus showed the conflation of a 'Thucydidean' Roman source and an eastern 'Annalistic' source: a proposal admirably debunked by Thompson, op. cit. (n. 3). The firmest current supporter of the application of traditional source criticism to Ammianus can only argue his position with allowance for the historian's independent spirit (F. Paschoud, 'Valentinien travesti, ou: De la

malignité d'Ammien', in J. den Boeft, D. den Hengst and H. C. Teitler (eds), *Cognitio Gestorum* (1992), 67–84).

<sup>68</sup> Looking at Tacitus' adaptation of such texts as the *Res gestae diui Augusti*, the *Senatus consultum de Pisone*, and the speech of Claudius, Woodman similarly argues that source criticism should be treated as intertextuality (C. S. Kraus and A. J. Woodman, *Latin Historians* (1997), 97–102). Whilst fewer inscriptional source texts survive for Ammianus, there are many more panegyrics, letters, invectives, and laws extant that may have influenced him — indeed Ammianus could offer insights into how historians in earlier periods used documents.

knowledge of the poem, but careful examination shows that similarities between the poem and his description of the obelisk's erection go beyond the fortuitous. The conclusion must be purposeful repression, varying visible to different readers:<sup>69</sup> similarly here, except that the source that is manipulated, altered, and contradicted is one reconstructed from neglected later chronicles rather than one more conventionally available. Some may find such a reconstruction hard to accept, or that the facts are explicable in other ways. But one consequence will stand in any case, that Ammianus offers a dramatized, rhetorical, and elusive account of the tsunami, which nevertheless maintains for modern readers the semblance of comprehension and balance, in contrast to other sources.

### III. AUTOPSY AND THE HISTORIAN

This contrast between Ammianus and other sources is matched by the way the historian concludes the narrative and the book with his own eyewitness testimony, in the claim that when he had later passed near the town of Methone, he had seen a ship which had been tossed nearly two miles inland and which yawned apart from long decay. The reader passes from ships to a ship to the rottenness of the ship's timbers; from Laconia to Methone to Ammianus; from things seen from uncertain perspectives by undetermined viewers, to something seen from the authoritative perspective of the historian. Ammianus makes a display of his particular ability to provide an authoritative account.

It can be expected that the presence of autopsy in ancient historians is related to their claim to particular authority in describing their own period. Unusually, the first person narratives in the earlier part of Ammianus' surviving books blend long and thrilling personal memoir into classical historiography, and scholars have concluded that a writer who tells us more about himself than any extant Latin historian save Caesar (a different case), and does so in a strikingly individual fashion, can and should be approached from a biographical standpoint.<sup>70</sup> But his self-revelation is in fact limited and calculated. In the surviving books the only highlights are his participation in the suppression of the usurper Silvanus in A.D. 355 (15.5), the Persian invasion of A.D. 359 (18–19), and the Roman invasion of Persia in A.D. 363 (23–5). It is only in the Persian War of A.D. 359 that Ammianus narrates in the first person singular, and even then selectively: on entering Amida, Ammianus mingles into the mixed crowd of soldiers, citizens, and visitors (18.8.13), and thereafter a 'we', which does not permit a distinction between his actions and those of the Romans in general, is used until he escapes the city's sack (19.8.5). In Julian's Persian expedition, Ammianus' occasional and uninterventionist first persons plural allow no firm conclusion about his role, and appear to contribute little more than a generalized demonstration of the historian's authority in a climactic portion of his work.<sup>71</sup> The autobiographical fragment from the end of Book 26 which is under consideration here is more typical of the brief glimpses of the historian in the later books (29.1.24, 29.2.4, and in generalized fashion 30.4.4); it can also be compared to the various moments in digressions where he describes what he claims in Herodotean style to have seen on his many travels across the Empire.<sup>72</sup>

Just as Ammianus' narrative technique relies on sharp focus on particular details, giving the illusion of a greater picture, so there is also a similar illusion in his account of

<sup>69</sup> See G. A. J. Kelly, 'The old Rome and the new: Ammianus Marcellinus' silences on Constantinople', *CQ* 53 (2003), 588–607, at 603–6. See also Sabbah, *op. cit.* (n. 3), 349–50.

<sup>70</sup> Ammianus is a prime example for the examination of autopsy in Classical historiography by J. Marincola, *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography* (1997). Some have found comparison with later Greek authors fruitful: N. J. E. Austin, 'Autobiography and history: some later Roman historians and

their veracity', in B. Croke and A. M. Emmett (eds), *History and Historians in Late Antiquity* (1983), 54–65, compares Ammianus' use of autobiography with that of Procopius, and to a lesser extent that of the fragmentary historians Olympiodorus of Thebes and Priscus of Panium.

<sup>71</sup> cf. Eutropius' parenthetical mention of his participation in the same campaign ('cui expeditioni ego quoque interfui', 10.16).

<sup>72</sup> e.g. 14.4.6, 17.4.6, 22.8.1, 23.6.36.



himself. He relates his experiences in absorbing detail (including some which do not reflect well on himself, such as the deception of Silvanus or his escape from Amida), and it is easy to forget the light and shade in the participation of the eyewitness-narrator, and what he does not let his readers know. In the extant books we hear nothing of his parentage; his birthplace; his precise social status; whether he was married; what rank he held in the Persian expedition or indeed any time after A.D. 359 — and though origins and status might have figured in the lost books, it seems improbable that his later career did. The biographical possibilities of this passage are even less productive than the rest; nonetheless the biographical nugget is all that most studies of Ammianus have extracted from it.<sup>73</sup> Some time after A.D. 365, Ammianus had been to Methone, on the southern Peloponnese: the likeliest means for him to have passed by (*transeundo*) this part of the Greek mainland was, as Matthews suggests, by sea, perhaps on the way to Italy and Rome.<sup>74</sup> But nothing else can be gained from such speculation.

Much is to be gained, however, by identifying patterns in the autobiographical and autoptic passages which cut across the varying levels of the author's participation in his work. I shall touch on two in particular, which can, broadly defined, be found in almost all the autobiographical material. Momigliano aptly called Ammianus the lonely historian — a reference to the difficulty of finding a milieu into which to place him, but potentially multivalent.<sup>75</sup> One of the reasons that the tag has stuck is that many of Ammianus' self-representations show him in small groups, or alone. A constant and connected theme is the danger in which he finds himself. So in the Persian war of A.D. 359, he is repeatedly separated from his comrades. Ordered to take a weeping child found on the roadside home to Nisibis, he barely evades capture on the way back to his comrades (18.6.10–13); later he leaves his wounded friend Verinianus to the mercy of the attacking Persians and flees for the city of Amida (18.8.11); finally when Amida is sacked he slips out through a postern-gate with two Roman soldiers of lower rank, leaving his fellow *Protectores* to be captured (19.9.5–12, 19.9.1). Ammianus' last two interventions in the narrative of the *Res Gestae* come in Valens' treason trials: 'we saw many sentenced after cruel tortures' (29.1.24); 'to speak truthfully at that time we were all crawling about as if in Cimmerian darkness, fearing terrors equal to those of Sicilian Dionysius' party-guests' (29.2.4).<sup>76</sup> It is fitting that the last sight Ammianus allows us of himself is so murky. N. J. E. Austin suggested that late antique historians included autobiographical narratives in order to identify the history of their own lifetimes particularly with themselves.<sup>77</sup> To take this argument a step further, Ammianus' level of open participation in the action may relate to the existence or non-existence of other sources: certainly his most involved accounts are those where he was one of very few or the only possible source.<sup>78</sup> He always gives particular attention to the chances that permitted his own survival and his own unique testimony. Personal descriptions also act as authorial statements.

Another constant is that autopsy coincides with reference to literature of the past, a sometimes complementary and sometimes rival form of authority. This reference can take a relatively simple form — Ammianus and his companions taking comfort from a *dictum* of Cicero while journeying to join and betray Silvanus (15.5.23). At other times it is more complex, as when Ammianus is trapped inside Amida, and the teichoscopy, the battle over the body of King Grumbates' son, the plague, and the *Doloneia* of the Gallic legions all contribute to making the siege a curious re-enactment of the Trojan

<sup>73</sup> See n. 3 above.

<sup>74</sup> Matthews, op. cit. (n. 3), 17, and Henry, op. cit. (n. 5), 39. Methone was on the sea route from Asia Minor to the West (Henry, 43 n. 22, cites Procopius, *Wars* 5.7.28, 32).

<sup>75</sup> A. D. Momigliano, 'The lonely historian Ammianus Marcellinus', *ASNP* n.s. 3.4.4 (1974), 1393–407 (reprinted in *Sesto contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico* (1980), 142–57).

<sup>76</sup> 'Addici post cruciabiles poenas uidimus multos' (29.1.24); 'namque ut pressius loquar, omnes ea

tempestate uelut in Cimmeriis tenebris reptabamus, paria conuiuis Siculi Dionysii pautantes' (29.2.4).

<sup>77</sup> Austin, op. cit. (n. 70), 64.

<sup>78</sup> I do not speak only of literary sources, though herein lies an explanation of the difference in involvement between (for example) Ammianus' distant autopsy of the Persian campaign of A.D. 363, well covered in many other works (Libanius, Eunapius, Magnus of Carrhae), and the greater vividness of the Silvanus affair (on the frontier and restricted to Cologne).



War.<sup>79</sup> This practice has fed the tendency of modern scholars to cast doubt on Ammianus' veracity in autobiographical passages.

The example which best brings together the historian's peril and solitude, the melding of the personal and the literary statement, and the obsession with relating personal experience to past literature — and the case which has incidentally been most controversial among modern scholars — comes in Book 18, in the run-up to the Persian invasion of A.D. 359.<sup>80</sup> Ammianus went on a secret mission to his old acquaintance Jovinianus, the pro-Roman satrap of Corduene. Jovinianus sent him with a single mute attendant to some high cliffs from where (18.6.21), 'were not human eyesight fallible, even the smallest object would have been visible up to fifty miles away'.<sup>81</sup> On the third morning, Ammianus saw the horizon filled with innumerable columns of men, with the Persian king at their head, glittering from the brightness of his clothing, and on his right King Grumbates of the Chionitae, an old man with wrinkled limbs, and on his left the king of the Albani. The information on the arrival and route of the Persian army must have made this a vitally important mission — and the uniqueness of Ammianus' testimony is characterized by the looming landscapes and reinforced by the silence of his travelling companion. But the danger to the Roman Empire is only implied: the author presents the army on the horizon as a tableau. He deliberately elides his role as an eyewitness with that of historian by filling his ecphrasis (so it can justly be called) of the Persian army with details that he could not possibly have seen. The elision of the two roles is confirmed by what follows (18.6.23):

How long, storied Greece, will you tell us of Doriscum, the town of Thrace, and armies counted column by column within enclosures? When we from caution, or, to speak more truthfully, from fear, exaggerate nothing except what has been shown trustworthy by witnesses neither unsure nor uncertain.<sup>82</sup>

The army of Xerxes, notoriously put by Herodotus at over five million men, is summoned up as an exemplum for the magnitude of the invasion and the extraordinary nature of the sight. But although the exemplum is deployed in support of Ammianus' eyewitness description, it is also deplored as belonging to the realm of story, as *fabulosa*: Herodotus had been impugned for as long as he had been depended on, and Ammianus fits comfortably into both traditions. In other places history will confirm that what appeared fabulous was in fact true. The Gothic invasion will lead him to conclude that the common view of posterity (including, in Book 18, himself), that the vastness of the Persian host described by Herodotus belonged to the realm of fable, must now be corrected (31.4.7–8). The exemplum and its comparandum can reinforce each other.

The description of the tsunami merits comparison with the view of the Persian army from the height for a number of reasons. Ammianus' solitude on a dangerous mission admittedly takes up the theme of the historian's escape from perils in a way that his autopsy of the tsunami (which describes and confirms the result rather than the event itself) could not. And yet it is entirely characteristic that Ammianus' personal testimony appears in the midst of the perils of others. And though no precedent is named, the narrative of the tsunami is equally concerned with precedent. It is no coincidence that our narrative, which ends in autopsy, should begin in a statement that similar terrors had been recorded in neither story (*fabulae*) nor truthful ancient history (26.10.15). In other circumstances, experience has the potential to confirm the truth behind *fabulae*: such is the case with the second appearance of the example of Xerxes'

<sup>79</sup> 19.1.2, 19.1.9, 19.4.3, 19.6.7.

<sup>80</sup> Modern scholarly doubts begin with M. Büdinger, *Ammianus Marcellinus und die Eigenart seines Geschichtswerkes* (1895), 28, who called the passage a 'Fantasiestück'. See F. Paschoud, "'Se non è vero, è ben trovato': tradition littéraire et vérité historique chez Ammien Marcellin", *Chiron* 19 (1989), 37–54, at 41–53, and works cited there.

<sup>81</sup> 'Nisi oculorum deficeret acies, ad quinquagesimum usque lapidem quoduis etiam minutissimum

apparebat' (cf. 16.10.14). Contrast Rolfe's translation: 'unless one's eyesight was impaired, even the smallest object was visible at a distance of fifty miles.'

<sup>82</sup> 'Quo usque nobis Doriscum Thraciae oppidum et agminatim intra consaepta exercitus recensitos Graecia fabulosa narrabis? cum nos cauti uel, ut uerius dixerim, timidi nihil exaggeremus praeter ea quae fidei testimonia neque dubia neque incerta monstrarunt.'

vast army in Book 31, or when Ammianus fled from Amida — he saw a distant troop of Persians appear so suddenly that he was led by the example to reconsider ancient myth, and conclude that the so-called *Spartoi* had not sprung from the earth but appeared as he had seen these Persians appear, with antiquity typically exaggerating in its fabulous manner ('uetustate rem fabulosius extollente', 19.8.11).<sup>83</sup> When precedent is lacking and the event is unique, when the underwater mountains and valleys look on the sun's rays for the first time, autopsy becomes an alternative form of confirmation.

After all, one of autopsy's principal functions in classical historiography, begun with Herodotus and reduced to absurdity in Lucian's *True History*, is to assert the truth of wonders. This process may explain why Ammianus, in describing the view from the height, appears to claim that from fifty miles away he saw the bright clothing of Sapor and the wrinkled limbs of King Grumbates. It may also explain more generally why significant challenges to Ammianus' reliability as a historian have come in those passages where he describes events that he himself has seen and participated in.<sup>84</sup> In the description of the tsunami, Ammianus openly refers to the revelation of wonders ('inuoluta facies mundi miraculorum species ostendebat', 26.10.17), among which are the ship tossed inland near Methone. But the confirmation that comes from deployment of autopsy can also be associated with the other wonders described, and even the manner of the description. In the view of the Persian army from the height there is an ecphrastic quality, both in the focus on the historian as viewer, the rush from detail to detail, and the way in which what is described goes beyond the eyewitness view to a narrator's view. Likewise in the narrative of the tsunami, the succession of fleeting images, moving beyond what one person — or any persons — could possibly see, helps to stretch the force of the *mirabilia*. The fact that autopsy is used to confirm wonders encourages Ammianus to test his autopsy's potency with a sensational and wonder-filled description.

Though the use of autopsy in this passage can profitably be compared to that elsewhere in the *Res Gestae*, this instance differs significantly by occupying the final position in a book. It is a final position, moreover, which has been intricately manufactured: the narrative of the tsunami has been postponed by nearly a year until after the death of Procopius and the punishment of his supporters, and the autopsy has been carefully left until the end of the passage.

Ammianus shows himself capable elsewhere of considerable artistry in his closural devices: they often look suggestively to the future. The end of Book 19 (and thus of the first surviving hexad) offers a useful parallel.<sup>85</sup> Ammianus closes with apparent nonchalance with two annalistic notices (19.12.19–20). The first, Livian in language and in style, is of the birth of a child at Daphne near Antioch, with two mouths, two sets of teeth, a beard, four eyes and two very small ears. Ammianus proclaims in tones of regret that such events were formerly reported and expiated, but now pass unnoticed. The story of the following books will be of a divided state and of civil war.<sup>86</sup> Or one may point to the ending of Book 29 in the construction of a Portico of Good Outcome (*Boni Eventus*), near the temple dedicated to the same deity: the immediately preceding text has told of the successes of the young Theodosius.<sup>87</sup> The same suggestiveness exists here — the tsunami undoubtedly seems portentous — and is increased by the combination of the final position and autopsy, a trick not used elsewhere. Indeed the only other place in which Ammianus closes a book with the first person comes at the end of the work, where in a brief sphragis the former soldier and Greek boasts of the truthfulness of his work and urges his successors to write in the grand style (31.16.9).<sup>88</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Ammianus tends to associate the fabulous with Homer (22.16.10, 23.6.53, 27.4.3) and Herodotus (18.6.23, 23.6.7, and perhaps also 31.13.19, though more obviously a reference to Homer).

<sup>84</sup> Paschoud, op. cit. (n. 80), 39, claims that narratives of personal experiences are *more* prone to be distortions of the truth. F. Paschoud, 'Utrum in Amidae obsidione narranda Ammianus veritati magis an argutis commentis studuerit', in *Loquela vivida. Donum Natalicium Nicolao Sallmann* (1999), 81–6, pursues the argument.

<sup>85</sup> On arrangement in hexads, see Barnes, op. cit. (n. 49), 23–6.

<sup>86</sup> On these annalistic notices, see Barnes, op. cit. (n. 49), 92–3.

<sup>87</sup> For a discussion see Sabbah, op. cit. (n. 3), 557–8.

<sup>88</sup> The first person is admittedly used for an organizational purpose at the end of Book 28 (6.30), to refer forward. At the end of some books, avoidance of the first person may have been purposeful (e.g. Book 18).

The personal statement at the close of Book 26 — compared by John Matthews to the signature on a painting — could also be called a sphragis.<sup>89</sup> That possibility, together with the ominous subject matter and universalizing narrative, suggests that the interpretation of Ammianus' narrative of the tsunami will be as open to providentialist or metaphorical readings as the other sources.

#### IV. THE DEATH OF JULIAN AND THE SHIPWRECK OF THE STATE

Ammianus' introduction of autopsy, I have suggested in Section III, should be seen not as simple factual revelation, but as an essential part of his claims for the authority of his work. Whether dealing in central historical events or apparently minor details, autopsy provides a reason why his version of his own times should become canonical. It is not coincidental that claims of autopsy occur when the testimony they can offer is unique: nor is it surprising if in other places they are used to demonstrate superiority over rival accounts. Such, I believe, is the case with the narrative of the tsunami, where, in the passages preceding his claim of autopsy, he follows and transforms a source more closely represented by the much later works of Theophanes and George the Monk (Section II). What follows will focus on the effects of the transformation which Ammianus wrought on this and on other contemporary portrayals of the tsunami, especially on those providentialist readings which tie the tsunami to political events such as the death of Julian and the usurpation of Procopius (described in Section I). Ammianus' reformulation of the stories later found in Theophanes and George is partly corrective — so the narrative is endowed with a fine sense of timing and suspense, and the sailors' explicit claims to have landed on the bottom and been refloated are left out — but he also shifts the account away from specifics, towards the unique and the universal.

On other occasions where Ammianus uses his personal testimony to confirm wondrous sights (*mirabilia*), there is, as I showed above, a concern with precedent. The tsunami is above all shown to be unprecedented. Neither fables nor truthful ancient histories had come up with the like. But one may suggest, even if one has no doubts about the scale and strength of the disaster of A.D. 365, that such things had been known before, and that Ammianus knew it. It seems likely, though not certain, that he had read Herodotus and Thucydides, both of whom recount tsunamis.<sup>90</sup> Thucydides in particular links the tsunami to the preceding earthquake with ostentatious rationalism (3.89). Ammianus uses the Elder Pliny as a source for the excursus on earthquakes which follows his description of the earthquake at Nicomedia in A.D. 358 (17.7.9–14), and Pliny states that inundations often follow on earthquakes (2.200).<sup>91</sup> In that excursus, Ammianus (17.7.13) refers, as Pliny had (2.206), to destruction of the towns of Helice and Bura in the fourth century B.C. by an earthquake-related inundation. If Ammianus' account is compared to those of later authors who talk of the tsunami as an unprecedented event, he is far more learned, far more accurate in his obvious understanding of what happened and in what order, and also far more in control of his material. The tsunami's uniqueness is consciously overstated.

Appropriately for an 'unprecedented' event, the human beings in Ammianus' narrative are entirely ignorant of what is going on. The battle of the elements unleashed is powerfully personified ('elementorum furente discordia', 26.10.17): it is the earth and sea which are the subjects of the sentences ('omnis terreni stabilitas ponderis', 'mare dispulsum' (16), 'marini fremitus' (17), and 'aequorum multitudo' (18)). In contrast to

<sup>89</sup> Matthews, *op. cit.* (n. 3), 192.

<sup>90</sup> Hdt. 8.129; Thuc. 3.89. See T. C. Smid, 'Tsunamis in Greek Literature', *G&R* 17 (1970), 100–4. For doubts as to Ammianus' knowledge of Herodotus and Thucydides, see C. W. Fornara, 'Studies in Ammianus Marcellinus II: Ammianus' use and knowledge of Greek and Latin literature', *Historia* 41 (1992), 420–38, and, on Herodotus, H. C. Teitler,

'Visa vel lecta? Ammianus on Persia and the Persians', in J. W. Drijvers and E. D. Hunt (eds), *The Late Roman World and its Historian: Interpreting Ammianus Marcellinus* (1999), 216–23.

<sup>91</sup> P. de Jonge, *Philological and Historical Commentary on Ammianus Marcellinus Book XVII* (1977), ad loc.

the personification of the elements, the people caught up in the disaster are rendered in oblique cases and are presented as puppets, wandering ('palantibus plurimis') unaware of what they were doing or why, deprived of motivation or purpose, and altogether passive. When they are killed they are given the dehumanizing epithet of 'exanimata . . . corpora', bodies with the life removed. It seems likely (not least from some of the stories attached to this event) that Mediterranean populations had sufficient experience or folk-knowledge of tsunamis to know to run away inland rather than on to the sea bed; it is probable too that some of those who were sighted walking on the sea bed were sailors whose ships had run violently aground near the shore, and who therefore had no choice in the matter. But Ammianus focuses entirely on the most hapless victims imaginable, those who thought that when the sea disappeared it would never come back. Theophanes describes crowds in Alexandria running to plunder boats left aground when the sea vanished; Ammianus has people wandering around harvesting fish. The tsunami's uniqueness is underlined by this and a number of other paradoxical images which belong to the tradition of ἀδυνατά. He describes the uncovering of mountains and valleys beneath the sea, where swimming things are stuck in mud, and where men walk around on the sea bed. He ends with boats perched on the roofs of houses (the use of a verb, *insido*, which more normally refers to birds is no coincidence).<sup>92</sup> The topos is well expressed in Vergil's *Bucolics* (1.59–60):

ante leues ergo pascentur in aethere cerui,  
et freta destituent nudos in litore pisces . . .

Sooner shall the nimble stag graze in air and the seas leave their fish bare on the strand . . .<sup>93</sup>

Ἀδυνατά are not supposed to be possible: so as a symbol of the unprecedented nature of the tsunami they serve well. But traditionally they coincide with the mention of some other occurrence, which, it is proposed, is even less possible.<sup>94</sup> For Vergil's Tityrus, the impossible would happen before he forgot the face of the young man who had saved his land. In Ammianus no other such event occurs (it appears), but the very absence of an object of comparison increases the impression of the significance and numinousness of the tsunami.

The disaster is not only made unique, but also, in several senses, universal. The earthquake shakes the whole world. Until the very end, the narrative is geographically unfixed; not only are no place-names given, but the perspective constantly shifts. Ammianus presents a series of fragmentary and changing images. Some are the product of imagination: the otherworldly landscape existing under the waves, or, a brilliant detail, the paltry remains of the waters ('exiguas undarum reliquias') — no other author mentioned the puddles left behind by the vanishing sea. Other images, such as the boats run aground in mid-sea or in harbour, imply sources, but transform them. It is almost impossible to tell the fragments apart or know through whose eyes the reader is seeing them. Attention is drawn to the concept of seeing, but the point from which things are seen seems constantly to change. Seeing is always put in the passive — *cernerentur*, *uisae sunt* — and who sees is never mentioned (indeed, as I suggested in Section II, it is visibly suppressed). So the tsunami has universal applicability.

The features of this narrative that I have detailed up to now all go to suggest the possibility of meanings beyond the literal: the portrayal of the tsunami as a worldwide event, the use of autopsy, the carefully manufactured final position in the book, the other sources' habit of using the earthquake and the tsunami as divine signs or warnings. The complexity of the writing may rule out simple allegory, or a single obvious and unsubtle purpose, of the sort that can be detected in many of the other sources. But as in

<sup>92</sup> See *OLD* s.v. *insido*, 1b. Ammianus elsewhere shows a fondness for the irregular perfect form *insidi* rather than *insedi*, though the choice of the form at this point has the advantage of making perfectly clear that the verb is *insido* not *insideo*.

<sup>93</sup> Trans. Fairclough / Goold.

<sup>94</sup> For other uses of this commonplace see e.g. R. G. M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace Odes Book I* (1970), ad *Carm.* 1.2.9. In that poem Horace, like Ammianus here, 'describes his flood not as a quaint possibility but as something that has actually happened'.



the case of the amazing stories discussed in Section II above, the possibility must be considered that Ammianus alludes to the perceptions others had of the tsunami: in particular those who tied it to Procopius' revolt, and to Julian.

The principal concern of Book 26, to the end of which Ammianus moves the tsunami, has been civil war. With its position concluding the book and with its portrayal of a battle of the elements, it is easy to see the tsunami as a symbol summarizing the human war, particularly when the introductory words are not 'in the previous year', but 'when this usurper was still alive . . . in the first consulship of Valentinian and his brother'.<sup>95</sup> Three emperors are mentioned in one sentence. After the narrative that so closely followed Julian from Books 22–25, we are back in a world like that of the books on Constantius, where the narrative needs to follow more than one emperor and necessarily illustrates their divisions. Procopius was indeed alive, but had not actually begun his usurpation, on 21 July A.D. 365: the minor error of chronology may be a deliberate imprecision, to imply the simultaneity of Procopius' usurpation and the tsunami — Socrates makes the same change to chronology, with the same effect. The humans caught in the battle of the elements certainly recall the victims of the civil war, who despite innocence suffer from cruel reprisals in the passage immediately preceding the tsunami (26.10.6–14).<sup>96</sup>

This comparison, however justifiable, may be hard to draw any further, and the tsunami seems likely to signify something beyond a brief civil war: Ammianus claims to be describing astonishing events for which there are no precedents. And far more noticeable than the minor chronological blurring by which it is suggested that Procopius had already usurped in July A.D. 365 is the tsunami's postponement to a position after the war and at the end of the book. Placed before the civil war in the text it might have been read uncomplicatedly as a portent or symbol of that war. I shall suggest two additional and connected interpretations.

The starting point for a wider and more significant interpretation should be the detail given prominence both by autopsy and by its climactic position: after the ships tossed to the shore, there is a close-up on the particular fate of one ship, which Ammianus saw, yawning from long rot (' . . . ut Laconicam prope Mothonen oppidum nos transeundo conspeximus, diuturna carie fatiscentem', 26.10.19). As often in personal descriptions, he includes a Vergilian allusion, in this case to the storm in *Aeneid* I (120–3):

iam ualidam Ilionei nauem, iam fortis Achatae,  
et qua uectus Abas, et qua grandaeuus Aletes  
uicit hiems; laxis laterum compagibus omnes  
accipiunt inimicum imbrem rimisque fatiscunt.

Now the stout ship of Ilioneus, now of brave Achates, and that wherein Abas sailed and that of aged Aletes, the storm has mastered: with side-joints loosened, all take in the hostile flood and yawn with cracks.

There is only one word in common, but the use of *fatisco* for ships' timbers is extremely rare.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, one possible interpretation of the word *diuturnus* is as an advertisement and acknowledgement of the allusion.<sup>98</sup> The ship is in sharp focus and yet the allusion suggests its potential multivalence. It is tempting to see a commonplace of ancient thought and interpret this rotten ship as a metaphor for the state, whether in the context of the struggle between the rival emperors of Book 26 or more widely.

<sup>95</sup> See the excellent but brief discussion of the tsunami as symbol in Sabbah, op. cit. (n. 3), 555–8, which has strongly influenced this present analysis.

<sup>96</sup> Sabbah, op. cit. (n. 3), 556.

<sup>97</sup> Ammianus also alludes to Ovid, *Tristia* 5.12.27–8, 'correcting' an allusion to this same passage of Vergil: 'uertitur in teneram cariem rimisque dehiscit / siqua diu solitis cumba uacauit aquis' ('if any barque has long been out of its accustomed waters, it turns to soft decay and gapes with cracks').

Ovid's allusion to Vergil recalls the etymology of *fatisco* from *fatim hisco* (see Servius ad *Aen.* 1.123).

<sup>98</sup> That is to say, beyond its literal meaning, that the boat had been rotting for a long time, *diuturnus* also implies the antiquity of the image of the yawning boat. Meta-textual markers of this sort are more commonplace in discussions of Latin poetry (see the influential S. Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext* (1998), ch. 1).



Such a temptation is increased by the presence of the theme elsewhere in this part of the *Res Gestae*. For example, in the interregnum before Valentinian's appointment at the start of Book 26, Ammianus uses the metaphor of the helmsman of the ship of state (26.1.5): 'diebusque decem nullus imperii tenuit gubernacula' ('and for ten days no one held the steering-ropes of the Empire'). And when Procopius' revolt is introduced, there is said to have been a false rumour that Julian had named him as his heir on his death-bed (26.6.3).<sup>99</sup> 'placere sibi Procopio clauos summae rei gerendae committi' ('that it was his wish that Procopius be entrusted with the helm of the state').<sup>100</sup> In the main Ammianus restricts this metaphor to a narrow portion of the work: as well as these two examples in Book 26, there are three items of interest in Book 25 (though Constantius also compares himself to a helmsman in his last speech, at 21.13.10). Both this concentration and usage imply a link between the effects of the tsunami on the ship and of Julian's fall on the state. In particular, the three metaphors in Book 25, which follow Julian's death, portray him as the ideal helmsman. Firstly, in his obituary the boldness of his invasion of Persia is defended by a comparison to a shipwrecked sailor returning to sea: Julian, by contrast, could not be blamed, as he had never known defeat (25.4.27).<sup>101</sup> Secondly, shortly afterwards there follows the risible elevation of Jovian, on which Ammianus remarks (25.5.7):

quodsi grauis quidam aequitatis spectator in ultimo rerum spiritu factum criminatur improuide, nauticos idem iustius incusabit, si amisso perito nauigandi magistro, saeuientibus flabris et mari, clauos regendae nauis cuiilibet periculi socio commiserunt.

But if any onlooker of strict justice with undue haste blames such a step taken in a moment of extreme danger, he will with more justice reproach sailors, if after the loss of a pilot skilled at navigation, amid the raging winds and the seas, they have committed the helm which rules their ship to any companion in their peril, whoever he might be.

Thirdly, towards the end of that book, in a meditation prompted by the treaty by which Jovian surrendered Nisibis, Ammianus uses the same familiar metaphor to repeat the contrast between the experienced Julian and his untried successor (25.9.7).

Tu hoc loco, Fortuna orbis Romani, merito incusaris, quae diffiantibus procellis rem publicam, excussa regimenta perito rei gerendae ductori, consummando iuveni porrexisti.

In this instance you are justly blamed, Fortune of the Roman world: when the gusts were blowing the republic this way and that, you offered up the rudder, which had been shaken away from a leader tried in governing, to an unfinished youth . . .

Polemical denigration of Jovian's legitimacy is endemic in both the structure and content of the narrative of his reign, and in the second of these three cases it is arguably reinforced by an allusion, detectable despite the cliché, to a famous image of democracy in Plato's *Republic* (488a7–e2), of an untrained and squabbling crew claiming their right to hold the helm.<sup>102</sup> Ammianus plainly viewed not merely Jovian but also Valentinian and Valens as less competent helmsmen.<sup>103</sup> The concentration of nautical metaphors

<sup>99</sup> To be distinguished from other rumours which Ammianus does *not* explicitly deny, that Julian had given Procopius a purple cloak, or advised him before the Persian expedition to claim the Empire if the situation arose (23.3.2, 26.6.2).

<sup>100</sup> Linguistic similarities suggest that both passages, though undeniably cliché, allude to Cicero's *Pro Sestio*: cf. 20 'clauum tanti imperi tenere et gubernacula rei publicae tractare' ('to hold the helm of so great an empire and guide the rudder of the republic'), an allusion noted by Lindenbrog ad 26.1.5. Cf. also 46 'hanc rei publicae nauem, ereptis senatui gubernaculis fluitantem in alto' ('this ship of the republic, tossing about on the deep with the helm torn from the senate'), a parallel identified by H. Michael, *De Ammiani Marcellini studiis Ciceronianis* (1874), 27.

<sup>101</sup> 'Et cum sciamus adeo experimenta quosdam referre improuidos, ut bella interdum uicti et naufragi repetant maria, et ad difficultates redeant quibus succubere saepissime, sunt qui reprehendant paria repetisse principem ubique uictorem.'

<sup>102</sup> On Ammianus' denigration of Jovian see P. Heather, 'Ammianus on Jovian: history and literature', in Drijvers and Hunt, op. cit. (n. 90), 105–16 and N. Lenski, 'The election of Jovian and the role of the late imperial guards', *Klio* 82 (2000), 492–515. For identification and interpretation of the allusion to Plato, see Barnes, op. cit. (n. 49), 141.

<sup>103</sup> For contemporary use of the image of the helmsman see e.g. Claudian, *IV Cos.* 59–62 (quoted in n. 112) and 419–27.

after the death of Julian, then, suggests a ship in trouble after it has been taken over by inadequate helmsmen. These metaphors, combined with the ship thrown violently aground in the tsunami narrative, support Guy Sabbah, when he thinks of the whole battle of the elements as standing for Julian's reign.<sup>104</sup>

This is a tempting and interesting reading also because it associates Ammianus with the rhetoric evident in those other texts which interpret the earthquake and tsunami as being, in some way, a divine response to Julian. Some of these are Christian (Jerome in his *Life of Hilarion* and, later, Sozomen, who misdated the tsunami to Julian's reign), but not all. I showed at the end of Section 1 how Sozomen's inspiration for the passage came from Libanius' *Funeral Oration* (Or. 18.292–3), which, although written before the tsunami of A.D. 365, saw in other earlier earthquakes both divine warnings of and grief at Julian's death. Subsequently in *On Avenging Julian*, Libanius was to portray the death of Julian, and more specifically the failure to punish it, as leading to divine anger and a variety of disasters afflicting the Roman Empire. The earthquake and tsunami may be among these (the language is ambiguous),<sup>105</sup> but the greatest disaster, and the one which enables Libanius to take his argument further, is Adrianople.

Julian is almost as central to Ammianus' historical argument as he was to Libanius', and their assessments of contemporary history fundamentally coincided, even if Libanius was less guarded and subtle, and gave space to imagined conspiracies. The Gothic influx, Adrianople, and the death of Valens are given even greater importance by Ammianus, and are the sole focus of his last book. I remarked earlier how the narration of the tsunami after the civil war of A.D. 365–366 encourages the reader to interpret it as more than just a portent of that war: and if the tsunami is seen to portend Adrianople, as argued by Claude Lepelley, it will be found to strengthen rather than weaken the links to Julian. Lepelley has made a persuasive case for seeing the tsunami as an omen of the flood of Gothic invaders pouring into the Empire.<sup>106</sup> As a breach of established boundaries which engenders destruction, depopulation, and belief in divine anger, the tsunami is a perfect warning sign for the invasions. Moreover, not only Ammianus but also many of his contemporaries (for example the panegyrists Pacatus and Claudian) used violent natural forces, such as inundations or storm waves, as obvious metaphors for barbarian attacks.<sup>107</sup> Portents in Ammianus' work can occur long in advance: there are warnings of Julian's death from the middle of Book 22.<sup>108</sup> There is no lack of portents for Adrianople. Though the last book is particularly dense in omens, Valens' doom seems implied from early in the last hexad (Books 26–31). At 27.4.4, in an apparently innocuous digression on the geography of Thrace, Ammianus mentions the Scordisci, 'from whose savageness the Roman state was often troubled and after many military misfortunes finally lost a whole army with its commander'.<sup>109</sup> The defeat is that of M. Porcius Cato (cos. 114 B.C.). Neither Ammianus' source Festus, nor Festus' source Florus (also known to Ammianus), nor any other source, suggests that Cato had been killed. The alteration serves an exemplary purpose as an omen of the defeat and death of Valens at Adrianople, and is followed by a passage describing what will be the theatre of war at the end of the *Res Gestae*.<sup>110</sup> Valens, as Ammianus lets us know at another point, was being saved for disaster in Thrace (29.1.15).

There is no contradiction between the tsunami signifying both the calamity that befell the state with the death of Julian and that which was to come at Adrianople. The

<sup>104</sup> Sabbah, op. cit. (n. 3), 556. He describes Julian as 'fidèle au dieu solaire', presumably implying a (some-what fanciful) connection to the sun's rays touching the sea bed.

<sup>105</sup> See n. 32.

<sup>106</sup> Lepelley, op. cit. (n. 3), 364–6.

<sup>107</sup> cf. Amm. 31.5.12, where *inundare* is used of the Teutones and Cimbri, a republican comparandum for Adrianople. Pacatus (3.3) describes the situation at the start of Theodosius' reign: 'barbaris nationibus Romano nomini quasi quodam diluuiio superfusus', and Claudian speaks of the same period in *IV Cos*

49–51: 'cum barbaries . . . mixto turbine gentes iam deserta suos in nos transfunderet Arctos'. Nautical metaphors can also be found in Themistius (see below nn. 111–13).

<sup>108</sup> Lepelley, op. cit. (n. 3), 366–7, lists signs warning of Julian's demise.

<sup>109</sup> ' . . . quorum asperitate post multiplices pugnarum aerumnas saepe res Romana uexata postremo omnem amisit exercitum cum rectore.'

<sup>110</sup> M.-A. Marié, *Ammien Marcellin Histoire Tome V* (1984), 28–9 and ad loc.

same combination of metaphors which I argue is implicit in Ammianus, of helmsman and inundation representing respectively political leadership and the barbarian threat, can be paralleled in contemporary panegyric. Themistius uses a metaphor of the helmsmen in a storm to describe Gratian and Theodosius' responses to the Gothic threat in the early A.D. 380s (*Or.* 15.194d–195d). They had taken over the helm 'when a tidal wave [had] mounted from every quarter, the sea boiling this way and that, and the ship's sides already labouring' (195a).<sup>111</sup> Times of calm might permit lower ranks to steer, but the situation called for the utmost skill (195b). And indeed some of the seas had already been stilled (194d). Claudian saw Theodosius (no need to mention Gratian when he wrote in A.D. 398) as having saved the ship of state against the barbarian threat and having prevented universal shipwreck (*IV Cos.* 59–62).<sup>112</sup> Claudian's use of this imagery two decades later suggests that it may have been widely used. Whether or not Ammianus was aware of Themistius' speech, he would certainly have been familiar with this assessment of Theodosius' success.<sup>113</sup> However, if he alludes to it, he appears, by making Julian the good helmsman, to dissent.

Ammianus' logic is simple: Julian's heirs were not his equals,<sup>114</sup> and Adrianople was a crisis of leadership. Such, for example, is the suggestion of a number of parallels between the Battle of Strasbourg, at the central point of the *Res Gestae*, and Adrianople, at its end: Julian's caution would have been salutary at Adrianople.<sup>115</sup> More generally, Julian's appearances in the books following his death suggest a deterioration in leadership under his successors. When the Empire's frontiers come under attack in the West, Ammianus is fond of implicitly or explicitly contrasting Julian's ability to defeat and cow the barbarians: so a mention of the Pannonian brothers' hostility to the memory and friends of Julian is followed immediately by the announcement of barbarian attacks on Gaul, Pannonia, Britain, Africa, and Thrace and a threat of renewed war from Persia (26.4.4–6). Tellingly, these attacks in fact occurred over the entirety of the two brothers' reigns, rather than immediately and simultaneously.<sup>116</sup> Praise of Julian's successes in Gaul haunts Valentinian (see, for example, 29.4.2) and even infiltrates his obituary (30.7.5). Most striking is the start of Book 27 (27.1.1):

Dum per eorum orbem haec, quae narrauimus, diuersi rerum expediunt casus, Alamanni post aerumnosas iacturas et uulnera, quae congressi saepe Iuliano Caesari pertulerunt, uiribus tandem resumptis licet inparibus pristinis, ob causam expositam supra Gallicanos limites formidati iam persultabant.

While throughout the Orient the changing course of events was developing as we have narrated, the Alamanni, after the sad losses and wounds which they had suffered from their frequent battles with Julian Caesar, having at last renewed their strength (which did not yet equal its old vigour), were already, for the reason explained above, overleaping the frontiers of Gaul, inspiring fear.

These are, of course, the first words to follow the tsunami. The juxtaposition, which the break between books may obscure, is demonstrably calculated: no strictly chronological

<sup>111</sup> τρικυμίας ἀπανταχόθεν ἐπιγεγμένης καὶ ζεούσης τῆς θαλάσσης ἔνθεν καὶ ἔνθεν καὶ τῶν τοίχων ἥδη πεπονηκότων (trans. Heather and Moncur).

<sup>112</sup> Nulla relictā foret Romani nominis umbra  
ni pater ille tuus iamiam ruitura subisset  
pondera turbatamque ratem certaue leuasset  
naufragium commune manu.

This passage follows swiftly on from that quoted in n. 107 above, which implied that the barbarians were a flood. For another ship of state metaphor see *In Ruf.* 1.275–7.

<sup>113</sup> K. Rosen notes an interesting parallel between Themistius, *Or.* 15.197a and Amm. 31.5.14 (see

'Wege und Irrwege der römischen Gothenpolitik in Ammians 31. Buch', in den Boeft *et al.*, op. cit. (n. 67), 85–90, at 86).

<sup>114</sup> See e.g. 26.10.8: 'nec similes eius nec supparet.'

<sup>115</sup> See R. C. Blockley, 'Ammianus Marcellinus on the Battle of Strasbourg: art and analysis in the *History*', *Phoenix* 31 (1977), 218–31, and ch. 8 of my forthcoming book, *Autopsy and the Art of Allusion in Ammianus Marcellinus*. Strasbourg ended Book 16, which would have been exactly in the middle of the original thirty-one books of the *Res Gestae*.

<sup>116</sup> R. S. O. Tomlin, 'Ammianus Marcellinus, 26.4.5–6', *CQ* 29 (1979), 470–8.

narrative would have placed these two events beside each other.<sup>117</sup> It is also extremely revealing. The vivid image of leaping over frontiers links tsunami and barbarian attacks. The application of the tsunami to Julian is confirmed. He is made to stand for the territorial integrity of the Empire, and a causal link is suggested between his death and the misfortunes which follow it.

It was not only through his successes over the Alamanns in Gaul that Julian was identified with territorial integrity. The preservation of the frontiers can be given a more mystic flavour. In his obituary, it was a sign of Julian's *felicitas* that 'after he had left western regions, and as long as he was on earth, all the tribes were still and at rest, as if some divine wand throughout the world were soothing them' (25.4.14).<sup>118</sup> Ammianus has enshrined the view of Julian as bringer of peace into the structure of the *Res Gestae*, and he strives to make the Empire appear not only territorially untouched by invasion but also peaceful within its borders. In fact, full civil war had only been prevented by Constantius' death, and for some time after it his supporters in Aquileia were besieged by Julian's forces: this episode is carefully narrated (21.10–11) before Constantius' death at the end of Book 21, and thereby subtly dissociated from Julian's sole rule.

A fruitful comparison can be made between the shape of Ammianus' micro-narrative of the tsunami and that of his grand narrative of the Roman Empire with Julian at the centre. His work was grandiose and comprehensive. Although he admitted the impossibility of complete detail in writing history (14.12.29–34, 26.1.1), Ammianus, more than any other Roman historian, aspired in his work to represent the whole Empire across time and throughout all its provinces. In his allusions to the literature and history of the past, he united Greek and Latin learning,<sup>119</sup> and, in digressions more detailed than any since Herodotus, he attempted to embrace a description of the whole world.<sup>120</sup> The narrative of the tsunami, likewise, describes disaster across the whole world. Both narratives focus on a particular, discrete period of time. Describing the tsunami, Ammianus lingers in detail on the brief period, which must in reality have been little more than half an hour, when the sea disappeared, and he fills the scene with characters who seem not to expect the sea's return. Similarly the figure of Julian is central to the *Res Gestae*: he dominates the middle books from 15 to 25 and in his sole reign, from Book 22 to the fourth chapter of Book 25, is the sole and constant focus of the narrative — and one may wish to include in the comparison the calculated way in which Julian is portrayed as having kept the internal peace of the Empire during his reign as sole Augustus. This period of time is massively expanded and covered in far greater detail than what surrounded it, though it occupied a minuscule amount of time compared to the span of the overall work. The tsunami ends with a suggestive flood and a shipwreck, and the work closes with a leaderless Empire and the barbarians flooding in.

I do not think it is just an idle play on words to call this passage a *mise en abyme*. It not only speaks of Ammianus' view of the human condition, but also depicts the purpose and shape of the work as a whole.<sup>121</sup> At the same time the chaotic glimpses of appropriated and harshly manipulated sources are resolved by the historian's steady gaze. He wrenches the particular into the general, and the meaningless into his image of the Roman Empire. The historian's personal presence at the end can rightly be called a signature or a sphragis.<sup>122</sup> If the ship he sees is a metaphor for the battered and divided

<sup>117</sup> One may compare Libanius (and contemplate the possibility of allusion). He juxtaposes invasions or threatened invasions by Scythians (Goths), Sarmatians, and Celts, 'and every barbarian tribe that rejoiced to live under treaty' (*Or.* 18.290) with the earthquakes that portended and responded to Julian's death (292–3). The Alamann (Libanius' 'Celtic') attacks, from early in A.D. 365, have already been referred to at 26.5.7. The fact that the book begins at this point can therefore be seen as carefully engineered, and typical of Ammianus' altered use of chronology in the last hexad.

<sup>118</sup> 'Et postquam ex occidua plaga digressus est, et quoad fuit in terris, quievere nationes omnes immobiles ac si quodam caduceo leniente mundano.'

<sup>119</sup> C. J. Classen, 'Greek and Roman in Ammianus Marcellinus' *History*, *Museum Africum* 1 (1972), 39–47.

<sup>120</sup> T. Mommsen, 'Ammians Geographica', *Hermes* 16 (1881), 602–36.

<sup>121</sup> See Sabbah, *op. cit.* (n. 3), 556.

<sup>122</sup> See n. 89.



Roman commonwealth, Ammianus' autopsy clearly again identifies the history of his times with himself: he has seen the wreck of the state with his own eyes.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Ammianus Marcellinus is an author cherished by historians, treated decently by textual scholars, and neglected by literary Latinists. Indeed the supposed failure of his literary pretensions has sometimes seemed to be viewed as a guarantee of his historical reliability. The subtlety and complexity of this passage suggests that intertextual approaches more familiar from verse texts and from earlier Latin literature can justly be applied to Ammianus, and that complexity and evasiveness are more his characteristics than honest plain-speaking. Such complexity, incidentally, is not favourable to those who see Ammianus as religiously uncommitted. This study has also employed, albeit in unconventional fashion, a neglected type of intertextuality, in reconstructing a source shared by Theophanes and George the Monk. The value of this type of criticism (particularly if all material is not considered the shards of a monolith) is greatly underestimated. So, it may be added, is the value of Byzantine sources for the fourth century A.D.

Watching tsunamis is perilous, and the safest course is to flee uphill and inland. Ammianus' description of the great tsunami implies that peril, and reading it is daunting and difficult: he moves from image to image and seemingly tries to pull out every stop in swift succession. The reader is easily dazzled, and flight must be tempting. Ammianus has not just a 'before and after' of the events which changed the face of the world, but shows in detail what other narratives flee from: the moment in between, when the sea disappeared, and men walked among the puddles collecting fish from the bottom.

To the reader who has not sought safety in flight, I suggest that the combination of autopsy, allusiveness and the universalizing elements of the description invites a metaphorical interpretation, and that the tsunami mirrors Ammianus' grand narrative of the Roman Empire: it is linked to his portrayal of Julian and portends the barbarian invasions that end the *Res Gestae* — and helps in turn to link the two. However, *mise en abyme* demands not only pleasure at the reflection of the whole in the part (and vice versa), but also consideration of what appears to jar.<sup>123</sup> The tsunami does not merely match, but seems to hint pessimistically beyond the end of the *Res Gestae* (as it were, washing past fixed frontiers). And the mixture of the two metaphors which I have used to explain the symbolism of the tsunami, the helmsman in Book 25 and the inundation at the end of Book 26, does not quite work. Though plenty of passages of the *Res Gestae* can be found to support the idea that the lack of leaders of Julian's calibre was the cause of disaster, not even the best helmsman could have saved a ship in the shallows from the effects of the tsunami. The possibility that fate might overwhelm virtue is not absent from the *Res Gestae*, and the tension needs to be acknowledged rather than suppressed.

If this passage is accepted as a representation of Ammianus' work as a whole, it might gently be argued that it serves as a demonstration of the work's unity. A lazily upheld scholarly convention has often thought of the last six books (26–31) as an afterthought, but, by implying both an idea of the overall shape of the work and also a

<sup>123</sup> It has been said of *mise en abyme* that 'there is a two-way movement . . . , from the work as a whole to the section within it and back from that section to the reading of the work as a whole, in a hermeneutic circle that eventually more-or-less settles into equilibrium

or the denial of equilibrium'. D. Fowler, 'Epic in the middle of the wood: *mise en abyme* in the Nisus and Euryalus episode', in A. Sharrock and H. Morales (eds), *Intratextuality: Greek and Roman Textual Relations* (2000), 89–113, at 109.



connection between Julian at its centre and Adrianople at its climax, this narrative argues for the work's essential unity.<sup>124</sup>

My comparison of Ammianus to the other sources certainly favours him in terms of both historical accuracy and literary merit. But the differentiation is not merely a subjective modern view. Even if the chances of survival mean that no particular text can be shown to have been alluded to by Ammianus, his description of the tsunami nevertheless relates to those of others, whether by allusion to the stories they contain, or by the way he matches their providentialist application of a natural event to Procopius' revolt and Julian's death. But in both cases, Ammianus corrects what he finds inadequate, and therefore the tsunami is also representative of his work in displaying, in a way visible to contemporaries, the superiority of his expertise, both narrowly and generally, and the control exercised over his sources and his characters.

Such is Ammianus' reputation, however, that the very fact that he is engaged with what I have called 'providentialist' approaches may be most striking to some readers. I should rather stress the complexity of his engagement: he certainly connects the tsunami to Procopius and Julian and presents it as an omen of defeat at Adrianople, but this abundance of separate meanings deters readers from seeing naïve polemic. And he elides providentialism with metaphor, so that the relationship between portent or symbol and political events is not explicitly portrayed as causal. Hence the contradictory conclusions of modern scholars both on providentialism and on the general question of Ammianus' fairness. For Paschoud, Ammianus 'prudently keeps his distance from the providentialist ideological debate which is developing precisely in the age when he produces the extant part of his work'.<sup>125</sup> But the case of the tsunami demonstrates that his apparent distance does not preclude his participation in the providentialist debate between, and among, pagans and Christians. There are parallels with the conclusions drawn by Barnes on a related subject: 'When he expresses explicit opinions about Christianity and Christians, Ammianus assiduously tries to appear to deliver a balanced verdict. That does not entail, as has so often been maintained, that he had a realistic and even-handed attitude.'<sup>126</sup> A lesson to draw: if we choose to think of Ammianus as the 'lonely historian', as difficult to place, as 'an honest man in an age of fraud and fanaticism',<sup>127</sup> it is because he meant us to do so.

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<sup>124</sup> The traditional view that Books 26–31 were written later is found for example in R. Syme, *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta* (1968), 9–16, and most recently restated by G. Sabbah, 'Ammien Marcellin, Libanius, Antioche et la date des derniers livres des *Res gestae*', *Cassiodorus* 3 (1997), 89–116. My own diffident suggestion would carry more conviction if the representation of a unified work culminating in Adrianople occurred in the 'earlier' part of the work (14–25). More forceful arguments have been and will be made for the point of view that Ammianus conceived and wrote as a unity a history from Nerva to Valens. See for example Matthews, op. cit. (n. 3), 17–27; C. W. Fornara, 'The prefaces of Ammianus

Marcellinus', in M. Griffith and D. Mastronarde (eds), *Cabinet of the Muses: Studies in Honor of T. G. Rosenmeyer* (1990), 163–72.

<sup>125</sup> Paschoud, op. cit. (n. 5), 158.

<sup>126</sup> Barnes, op. cit. (n. 49), 87. Barnes' argument against the likes of Matthews, op. cit. (n. 3), that Ammianus was a militant pagan, who consistently but subtly attacked Christianity and its adherents, seems to me capable of correction on minor details, but fundamentally right. Barnes' reception has been mixed — which testifies to Ammianus' success.

<sup>127</sup> R. Syme, review of A. Demandt, *Zeitkritik und Geschichtsbild im Werk Ammians* (1965), *JRS* 58 (1968), 215–18, at 215.