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The Audience of Ammianus Marcellinus and the Circulation of Books in the Late Roman World

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Abstract: Since the late nineteenth century, studies of Ammianus' audience have reached widely divergent conclusions. Research has focused on two opposed theses: while some scholars have seen the pagan senatorial aristocracy as the audience of the *Res Gestae*, others have assigned that role to the imperial bureaucracy. However, in thinking that a work could reach—or target—exclusively the members of a specific social group, the prevalent views on Ammianus' audience contradict what we know about the circulation of books in the late Roman world. In contrast to previous research, this study proposes a new approach based on an analysis of the information available on book circulation in Ammianus' time. This analysis shows that the audience of the *Res Gestae* was most likely socially diverse.

Keywords: Ammianus Marcellinus, Historiography, Late Roman audience, Book circulation, Late Roman readers, Late Roman social networks

I Introduction

The *Res Gestae* of Ammianus Marcellinus is the last surviving large-scale history of the Roman Empire written in Latin. Published in Rome at some point between late AD 389 and mid-391,¹ the work originally covered Roman history from the

1 On the date of publication of the *Res Gestae*, see e.g. Naudé (1984), 70–94; Matthews (2008), 22–27; Cameron (2012), 337–358; Kulikowski (2012), 81–83. For the alternative view that Ammia-

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accession of Nerva down to the battle of Adrianople in 31 books. Its total extension must have nearly doubled the extant portion, in which the historian narrates in detail the political and military events of his active lifetime from AD 353 to 378. Ammianus adorns his text with all the devices of classical historiography and especially with numerous digressions, where he expatiates on a wide range of topics. Despite his self-proclaimed Greek identity, Ammianus opted to write in Latin, a remarkable choice considering the widespread attitude of linguistic and cultural self-sufficiency among many of the Greeks of his time.² Furthermore, Ammianus writes in an original, complex, and artistic prose style, crammed with archaisms, metaphors, poetic images and literary allusions.³ Ammianus' monumental history was thus a challenging text that demanded from its contemporary readers great attention and a breadth of knowledge, quite different from the brief historical epitomes of Eutropius, Aurelius Victor, and Festus.

Both Ammianus' choice to write in Latin and the distinctive features of the *Res Gestae* pose the problem of the work's (real and authorial) audience.⁴ Since the late nineteenth century, scholars have devoted a great deal of attention to the issue, reaching sharply different conclusions. Research has focused on two opposed theses: while some authors have seen the pagan senatorial aristocracy as the audience of the *Res Gestae*, others have assigned that role to the imperial bureaucracy. Despite their different conclusions, the studies of Ammianus' audience have shared a similar methodology, namely, to search in the text of the *Res Gestae* for clues as to the identity of its intended audience. Nevertheless, the complete absence of any clear authorial statement about whom the historian wanted or expected to read his work sets clear limits to what can be achieved in this way.

The only conclusion supported by the internal evidence in the *Res Gestae* is that Ammianus targeted a cultivated audience able to read Latin. The historian gives indeed only sparse hints of how he conceived of his audience. In 14.6.2, for instance, he considers the possibility that foreigners not living in Rome could read his work (*peregrinos ... haec lecturos forsitan*). In 16.7.9, he anticipates the

nus published his work in instalments, the last books appearing in 395, see Sabbah (1997), 89–116 and (2003), 53–54.

2 See Rochette (1997), 69–83. See also Ross (2016), 6. The exception was late Roman Egypt, where Latin was intensely studied, as is illustrated by Claudian and other poets capable of writing in that language; see Cameron (1970), 19–21.

3 Recent research has demonstrated the central role of intertextuality in the construction of Ammianus' discourse and its complex layers of meaning see Salemmé (1987), 353–357; Barnes (1990), 59–92; Vanhaegendoren (2006), 495–504; Kelly (2008); Stenger (2014) 223–248; Hose (2015), 81–96.

4 On the distinction between real and authorial audiences, see Rabinowitz (1977), 121–141.

possible objections a learned reader could present. In 26.1.1 and 28.1.15, he defends himself against criticism from future readers of his work by omitting from his narrative some details that may be deemed irrelevant. Finally, in 31.5.10, Ammianus does not even rule out that his work could have no readers at all.

Both the sophisticated literary allusions and the encyclopaedic nature of the digressions in the *Res Gestae* confirm that Ammianus wrote with a learned audience in mind, who could decode the subtle references to classical authors and appreciate the wealth of additional information only tangentially related to the narrative of historical events. Furthermore, the frequent use of Greek terms and the inclusion of extended Greek quotations indicate that Ammianus expected his readers to have at least some knowledge of that language.⁵ It is important to bear in mind that learned readers could be found across the upper classes of late Roman society and not only among senators and bureaucrats. Moreover, if, as seems most likely, Ammianus wrote in Rome, he wrote not only for the inhabitants of the city. The non-parochial character of its content is one of the central features of the *Res Gestae*.⁶ Beyond these simple deductions, the text cannot provide a more precise identification of its audience.

The very different conclusions reached by scholars confirm that internal evidence alone will not take us far in identifying Ammianus' audience. What is more, in thinking that a work could reach—or target—exclusively the members of a specific social group, the prevailing views of the identity of the audience of the *Res Gestae* contradict what we know about the circulation of books in the late Roman world. In contrast to previous research, this study proposes a new approach based mainly on an analysis of the information available on book circulation in Ammianus' time. This evidence indicates that Ammianus' audience (both real and authorial) was most likely socially heterogeneous and not composed exclusively of members of any social group. The secondary place assigned to the internal evidence in the *Res Gestae* may seem polemical but I believe this approach will afford a fresh perspective to a much-debated issue.

As a starting point, the next section of this paper presents a brief critical survey of previous scholarship on Ammianus' audience. In what follows, an analysis of the circulation of texts in the late Roman world will show that Roman authors could not exercise any control over who would read their works and that the social composition of the literary public was typically diverse. Finally, an

⁵ On Ammianus' use of Greek, see Kelly (2013), 67–79. See also the detailed analysis in Ross (2016), 207–218. Ross is inconclusive on the matter of whether Ammianus expected his readers to understand Greek.

⁶ As Momigliano (1978), 61 remarked, the non-parochial character of historical writing was one of the preconditions of the success of historiography in the ancient world.

examination of the evidence about ancient authors who seem to have known Ammianus' work will strengthen the case for a socially mixed audience of the *Res Gestae*.

II Overview of past research

In the late nineteenth century, the German historian Otto Seeck was the first to connect Ammianus with the late Roman senatorial aristocracy. Considering that during his stay in Rome Ammianus would have been a *protégé* of Symmachus and his circle of likeminded aristocrats, Seeck inferred that this group of pagan senators with intellectual and literary concerns would have been the privileged recipient of the *Res Gestae*, a work that shared their antiquarian interests and pagan beliefs.⁷ Seeck argued that Book 25 was the originally planned ending of the *Res Gestae*, but the applause of his pagan friends Libanius, Symmachus, and Praetextatus convinced Ammianus to continue writing. Seeck's arguments based mainly on his interpretation of Symmachus' Letter 9.110. This epistle lacks the name of its addressee, but from its content Seeck deduced it might have been written to Ammianus. Despite the absence of any direct proof, Ammianus' connection with the circle of Symmachus became the prevailing orthodoxy in Ammianean scholarship until the mid-twentieth century and was accepted in many important studies of this period, such as those of Ensslin and Alföldi.⁸ In his fundamental book of 1947, Edward Thompson accepted the idea that Ammianus had a close relationship with Symmachus and other leading members of the senatorial aristocracy.⁹ Thompson saw, however, Ammianus as writing for a wider Roman audience, and, following the evidence of Libanius' Letter 1063, he thought that the historian's recitations were widely attended, and that the *Res Gestae* achieved popularity "among upper and middle class Roman circles."¹⁰

Alan Cameron criticized Seeck's thesis in an article published in 1964.¹¹ The British historian noted several arguments that made the identification of the recipient of Symmachus' Letter 9.110 with Ammianus unlikely. The historian, for instance, never mentions Symmachus in his work, in spite of many opportunities, and presents a rather negative image of his father. Moreover, Cameron drew attention to the numerous passages of the *Res Gestae* in which Ammianus harshly

⁷ Seeck (1894), 1845–1851. See also (1906), 481–539.

⁸ Ensslin (1923), 8–9; Alföldi (1952) 41, 65–76.

⁹ Thompson (1941/1943), 130–134; (1947), 15–16.

¹⁰ Thompson (1947), 17–19.

¹¹ Cameron (1964), 15–28. See also Selem (1971/1972), 1–50.

criticized the Roman aristocracy and claimed this made it hard to believe in a friendly relationship between the historian and some of the leading members of the Senate. Further developing this line of argument, Cameron devoted much of his later work to destroy the romantic image of a senatorial pagan reaction against Christianity in the late fourth century, separating Ammianus definitely from the aristocratic circle presented by Macrobius in the *Saturnalia*.¹²

Wolfgang Seyfarth again approached the issue of Ammianus' audience in an article published in 1969.¹³ The German philologist—author of the standard critical edition of the *Res Gestae*—accepted Cameron's arguments and rejected the idea of a connection between Ammianus and the circle of Symmachus. Seyfarth compared Ammianus' learned style with that of the *Historia Augusta* and concluded that the historian wrote for a more select and educated audience than the author of this collection of apocryphal imperial biographies. Seyfarth was, however, rather vague about the specific composition of Ammianus' learned audience. It seems that he saw elements of the Roman Senate as constituting at least part of Ammianus' audience. A similar, unspecified senatorial audience is assumed by Blockley in his important study of 1975.¹⁴

In his book of 1978, Guy Sabbah approached the problem of Ammianus' audience from another perspective. The French scholar focused on analysing Ammianus' conceived or intended audience (“c'est son auditoire tel qu'il se le représente, tel qu'il le construit”).¹⁵ For Sabbah, Ammianus wrote chiefly with an audience of inhabitants of the city of Rome in mind, as indicated, among other potential clues, by his use of the first person plural *vidimus* when referring to features of the city landscape. Moreover, for Sabbah, Ammianus wrote for a sophisticated and highly educated elite audience with a good knowledge of literary conventions and forms and capable of decoding his frequent classical quotes, allusions, proverbs, and maxims.

The German historian Klaus Rosen presented a completely different picture of Ammianus' audience in 1982.¹⁶ He emphasized the moralistic and didactic nature of the *Res Gestae* and argued that the work presupposes an audience capable of understanding Greek. Both features indicate, in his opinion, that Ammianus' recitations were likely attended above all by Greek students living in Rome with the intention of mastering the Latin language to gain access to the imperial

¹² See e.g. Cameron (1977), 1–40 and (2011), *passim*.

¹³ Seyfarth (1969), 449–455.

¹⁴ Blockley (1975), 17.

¹⁵ Sabbah (1978), 507–539.

¹⁶ Rosen (1982), 35–41.

bureaucracy. Rosen further argued that the military and political content of Ammianus' work was of special interest for these future imperial officials, and connected these foreign hearers with the *peregrini* mentioned at the beginning of the first excursus on Rome (14.6.2). Rosen did not limit the audience of the *Res Gestae* to this small group; on the contrary, he saw it broadly composed of those members of the Theodosian imperial bureaucracy that had literary interests. Cameron, R. L. Rike, and John Matthews also considered this probable, based on chronological grounds and on the positive presentation of Theodosius the Elder in the *Res Gestae*, that Ammianus recited his work before members of the imperial court during Theodosius' stay in Rome in AD 389.¹⁷

In his 1991 doctoral dissertation, James Kearney argued that Ammianus wrote his historical work thinking of the immediate upper class Roman audience in front of whom he recited it. More precisely, he contended that “the *Res Gestae* is indeed Romano-centered, that reference to the Urbs is pervasive, that in choice of themes and of material, as well as manner of presentation, the live Roman audience is a crucial factor in Ammianus' work.”¹⁸ On the contrary, in his doctoral dissertation and in an article published in 2000, Robert Frakes presented further arguments in favour of the thesis that the imperial bureaucracy represented the main audience of the *Res Gestae*.¹⁹ He began by differentiating between the “actual” audience of this work (the people who actually read it or heard it recited) and its “intended” audience, the group at which Ammianus aimed his text. He argued that internal evidence makes it possible to identify the imperial bureaucracy as Ammianus' intended audience. More precisely, he claimed that a prosopographic study of all individuals mentioned in the *Res Gestae* shows the clear preponderance of civil administrators as protagonists of Ammianus' text, suggesting that the historian expected his readers would be interested in the workings of the late imperial administration at a very detailed level. In a similar way, Frank Wittchow maintained that the central role of officials and their communications with the emperor in the stories included in the *Res Gestae* indicates Ammianus' intention to reach this group with his work. Moreover, the issues to which the historian dedicates more attention (for instance, *paideia* and the “metaphysics of power”) would be of particular interest to members of the bureaucracy.²⁰ More recently, David Rohrbacher held the same view, arguing that the style and content

¹⁷ Cameron (197), 259–262; (2012), 355; Matthews (2008), 9; Rike (1987), 135. For the latter (Rike *ibid.*, 136–137), Ammianus also wrote for a senatorial pagan audience.

¹⁸ Kearney (1991), xi.

¹⁹ Frakes (1991); (1998), 378–381; (2000), 392–442.

²⁰ Wittchow (2001), 365–386.

of the famous digressions on Rome confirm that Ammianus wrote with an audience of imperial officials in mind.²¹

Although most recent studies agree in seeing the imperial bureaucracy as the main audience of the *Res Gestae*, the traditional view of a senatorial audience still has adherents. In a recent paper, for instance, Javier Guzman Armario claims that the *Res Gestae* reflect the interests and point of view of the senatorial aristocracy and that the historian was almost a “prisoner” of this audience he needed to please.²² Guzman Armario explains the absence of any direct reference to this group in the *Res Gestae* arguing that Symmachus and many of his friends needed to keep a low profile during this period because they had supported the usurper Magnus Maximus.

As can be seen from this brief review of the scholarship on the subject, the predominant view shifted from one that sees Ammianus addressing members of the senatorial aristocracy to that of an audience composed mainly of imperial officials. In his important book on Ammianus, Gavin Kelly challenged this consensus. He argued that the notion of “intended audience” is not a particularly helpful one for a work such as the *Res Gestae*. In his opinion, Ammianus intended to create a “canonical historical account” for posterity, and, inasmuch as the historian thought of a contemporary audience, he seems to have expected it to be diverse.²³ In the same vein, Dariusz Brodka saw Ammianus as addressing the cultural elites of the empire in general and not any specific group.²⁴ More recently, Alan Ross contended that Ammianus wrote for a general western audience, to which he desired to present a new account of Julian’s reign.²⁵

I think these scholars touched a key point that deserves further discussion; however, they did not present a developed set of arguments to argue this case. Brodka only mentioned the idea, whereas Kelly and Ross discussed it briefly.²⁶ Moreover, they argued only from internal evidence.

The fundamental problem with the discussed theses on Ammianus’ audience is that the senatorial aristocracy and the imperial bureaucracy were not the clearly defined and differentiated groups that some scholars seem to assume. On the contrary, it is a well-known fact that, as a result of the reforms introduced by Constantine in the early 320s, the traditional boundaries between senators and high officials had become increasingly blurred, with both groups gradually

²¹ Rohrbacher (2007), 468–473.

²² Guzmán Armario (2006), 427–438.

²³ Kelly (2008), 153, 179–183.

²⁴ Brodka (2009), 29.

²⁵ Ross (2016), 22–24.

²⁶ Kelly (2008), 182.

merging into one imperial elite, the *clarissimate*.²⁷ Indeed, high ranking military men and administrators accessed the Senate, both of Rome and of Constantinople, regularly, and were even often awarded with the ordinary consulate, the traditional culminating point of a senatorial career. The flip side of this process was the growing participation of aristocrats in the imperial bureaucracy. The best-known example is Petronius Probus, a descendant of one of the most distinguished Roman families that found it not below his dignity to hold the office of Praetorian Prefect four times, but there were many others. The traditional senatorial *cursus honorum* tended thus gradually to merge with the bureaucratic career.

As Cameron argues, there was still a “distinction between run-of-the-mill senators and the old aristocracy.”²⁸ Certainly, Symmachus and other scions of families with long pedigrees viewed themselves as a group within the senate which deserved preeminence over newcomers. That does not mean, however, that they constituted a separated social group clearly differentiated from all other *clarissimi*. Differences in prestige tended to be gradual and for the Roman elites there were many other sources of prestige besides lineage, as is illustrated by Ammianus’ harsh remarks on Julian’s choice of Nevitta as ordinary consul for the year 362. The officer of Frankish ancestry was neither by his birth, his political career, nor his military achievements, a suitable choice. Furthermore, he was rude and uneducated, *inconsummatum et subagrestem*.²⁹ These four attributes were clearly for Ammianus the main sources of prestige in Roman society.

Ammianus uses a diverse vocabulary to describe late Roman elites, prioritizing—as is typical of his florid style—variety over precision. He employs terms like *clarissimi*, *honorati*, *senatores*, *nobiles*, *potentes*, *summi*, *ingenui*, *optimates*, etc. Of course, each one of these has its own peculiar shade of meaning, most being vague and not describing a group that can be precisely delineated.³⁰ Ammianus

27 The bibliography on this issue is vast. See specially Jones (1964), 523–552; Arnheim (1972), 49–102; Löhken (1982); Schlinkert (1996).

28 Cameron (2011), 11.

29 21.10.8. Julian had criticized Constantine for admitting barbarians to the consulate. However, those elevated by Constantine were, in Ammianus’ opinion, far superior to Nevitta: *nec splendore nec usu nec gloria horum similem, quibus magistratum amplissimum detulerat Constantinus*. On this passage, see Szidat (1977), 113–115.

30 Ammianus applies the word *senator* only to persons formally admitted to the assemblies of Rome or Constantinople (21.12.24, 22.7.6, 26.6.5, 28.1.16, 28.1.29, 28.1.54, 29.1.17) and not only to designate the traditional Roman aristocracy. He also uses regularly the words *nobilitas* and *nobilis* to designate the Senate and its members (See e.g. 14.6.21, 14.6.24, 16.10.13, 21.10.7, 21.12.24, 28.1.46). However, as rightly indicated by de Jonge (1977), 315–316, the term *nobilis* could be applied to individuals from many different groups, including *clarissimi*, *honorati* and decurions.

uses the official term *clarissimus* only rarely.³¹ To describe the imperial elites he uses more frequently the less precise term *honorati*. As A. H. M. Jones remarked, this word means strictly those who have received an *honor* or *dignitas*, the term includes thus senators and other lesser officials, i.e. both *clarissimi* and *perfectissimi*.³² A brief review of the most important passages in which Ammianus utilizes this term indicates that in his view this group had a mixed composition.³³

Ammianus applies the term *potentes* to high imperial functionaries in passages in which he criticizes their corruption and greed (16.8.11, 18.5.1, 27.7.8, 28.6.17, 29.5.43, 30.4.1). The terms *summi* and *divites* are, in turn, used in contrast with *infimi* and *pauperes* to indicate the fundamental division between rich and poor in late Roman society (*summi/infimi*: 19.9.2, 31.5.14; *divites/pauperes*: 15.3.3). Ammianus uses the term *optimates* generally to designate non-Roman nobles, but he applies also occasionally the term to high officials in the imperial court (30.3.3, 30.5.6, 31.10.15). Finally, Ammianus also uses the word *ingenuus* to designate members of the elite. He employs the term not in its technical meaning of “freeborn” but rather to indicate a wellborn person (14.5.6, 14.6.21, 18.6.10, 20.7.4). In a famous passage, the historian uses this word to indicate his own social standing (19.8.6).

31 Den Boeft, et al. (2008), 60. In 28.1.27, it is employed to refer to some prominent Roman senators, whereas in 26.6.18 it is applied to members of the Constantinopolitan senate. However, in the latter passage it seems to be used in a general sense contrasting the most distinguished oriental senators and the less important ones, the *ignobiles*

32 Jones (1964), 1221 n. 11. Senators are sometimes distinguished from other *honorati*, see Cod. Theod. 9.30.1. *Honorati* can include both civilian and military officials, see Cod. Just. 11.20: *Omnes honorati seu civilium seu militarium*.

33 In 22.7.1, Ammianus uses the term *honorati* to designate the senators and members of the imperial court that took part with Julian of the procession accompanying the new consuls Nevitta and Mamertinus upon taking office. In 27.6.5, he applies the word to the high-ranking officials surrounding Valentinian, whereas in 14.5.3 it indicates a specific group in Gallus’ entourage different from nobles and military men (*siquis enim militarium vel honoratorum aut nobilis inter suos*). In 22.9.16 and 22.14.4 it designates the members of the imperial court. Ammianus includes thus both members of the Senate and high imperial officials among the *honorati*. At 29.1.24 it describes the distinguished men accused in the wake of the discovery of Theodorus’ alleged conspiracy. In 29.2.13 it designates a group of men of high rank, including former consuls. In 31.7.17 it indicates the men of distinction among the slain in the battle of *Ad Salices*. In other passages, however, the historian is less consistent in his use of the word. In 14.1.6 it seems to designate the Antiochene elite as the target of Gallus’ spies. In a well-known passage describing the cruel rule of the Caesar Gallus in Antioch, Ammianus presents a description of the late Roman social hierarchy: *Latius iam disseminata licentia onerosus bonis omnibus Caesar nullum post haec adhibens modum orientis latera cuncta uexabat nec honoratis parcens nec urbium primatibus nec plebeiis* (14.7.1). According to Ammianus, the late Roman social ranking was composed of the *honorati*, the *curiales* and the plebeians. The first group must thus include all the members of the imperial aristocracy above curial level, i.e. both *clarissimi* and *perfectissimi*. Some imperial constitutions present a similar tripartite description of the late Roman social order: see Cod. Theod. 9.31.

To sum up, it is difficult to think that Ammianus intended to reach exclusively either senators, or imperial officials with his work, because these were part of one and the same social sector, the *clarissime*. There were no clear boundaries separating senators and high ranking bureaucrats, both groups were clearly mingled. What is more, the scholars that see Ammianus writing for the imperial bureaucracy project into his thinking a modern concept for which there is no clear equivalent in his vocabulary.

III The circulation of books in Ammianus' time

As the overview just presented indicates, the debate on Ammianus' audience took little notice of developments in the study of book circulation in antiquity. Indeed, the traditional theses about Ammianus' real or intended audience contradict what we know about how literary texts circulated in the late Roman Empire. As the following brief review of the subject will show, it is difficult to believe that Ammianus could have written only for senators or public officials, or that only they would have read the *Res Gestae*. My aim in this section is not to present new insights into the circulation of books in the late Roman world but rather to apply what is already well known to the study of Ammianus' audience.

To begin, I should state the obvious: the publication of texts in antiquity was quite different from that of the post-Gutenberg era.³⁴ The printing press made possible the mass dissemination of texts on a scale that was inconceivable in the Greco-Roman world, in which the reproduction of written works depended on scribal book production, i.e. on the manual labour of copyists. In the Classical world, the publication of a work (ἔκδοσις, *editio*) meant, therefore, something completely different from what it meant after the introduction of the press, namely, that the author had released a final and official version of his text allowing it to be freely copied by anyone interested.³⁵ Once a Roman author had decided for publication, he produced some copies of his work for distribution among close friends. Depending on the means at his disposal, the author could produce such copies personally or delegate the task to copyists who could be his slaves or free men hired for that purpose. Slaves trained as scribes were common

³⁴ See Hedrick (2011), 175–185.

³⁵ On book publication and circulation in the Roman world, see in general van Groningen (1963), 1–17; Kenney (1982), 15–22; Starr (1995), 83–93; Potter (1999), 29–36; Haines-Eitzen (2000), 77–104; Dortmund (2001); Johnson (2004); Iddeng (2006); Winsbury (2009), 86–91; Johnson (2010), 84–90; Hurtado and Keith (2013), 74–76; Schipke (2013).

in wealthy households,³⁶ and rich friends could help making their own copyists available, as Atticus frequently did for Cicero.³⁷ Given the high cost of scribal reproduction, the number of copies originally produced by the author for the first distribution of his work must have been generally very low, in many cases probably only one or two. Important persons, such as the influential senator Regulus in the first century AD, or the powerful Praetorian prefect Strategius Musonianus in the fourth, could mobilize a significant group of copyists to ensure the wide dissemination of a work in which they had a particular interest, but these were exceptional cases.³⁸

Once the author had distributed the first copies of his work, each copy could be lent to others, read aloud to family and friends, and serve as a model for further copies, gradually growing the work's audience. The text circulated first among the friends of each person who had received a copy and then among their friends and so on. In other words, books circulated as gifts and loans "in a series of widening concentric circles determined primarily by friendship."³⁹ Friends and interested readers played consequently the decisive role in the reproduction and transmission of literature. In his Letter 1.14, Symmachus gently reproaches Ausonius for not having sent him a copy of his poem *Mosella*, which is enjoying great success in Rome. He claims, however, that he has been able to read it. As Cameron argues, he must have obtained a copy from someone in Ausonius' mailing list.⁴⁰ Circulation depended thus ultimately on the interest a text generated. If a book attracted attention, it could quickly "go viral" (as Ausonius' poem did) and reach a wide audience; if it did not, it would go unnoticed never reaching more than a handful of readers, i.e. its author's friends. As Bernhard van Groningen emphasized, "Ce phénomène de distribution et de diffusion est la διάδοσις. Elle dépend uniquement de l'intérêt personnel des lecteurs; elle est arbitraire; elle n'a rien de systématique."⁴¹

As it is well known, the idea of copyright was completely unknown in antiquity. Once a work was released for circulation, it became common property that could be freely reproduced by anyone. In fact, to provide copies of a title to

36 See Symm. *Ep.* 1.24.1, 2.35.1, 5.85.2, 5.86.1.

37 See Cic. *Att.* 12.40 and Corn. Nepos, *Att.* 13.3–4. See also Sommer (1926), 389–422; Dortmund (2001), 226–284.

38 See Plin. *Ep.* 4.7.2 and Lib. *Ep.* 345.1 and *Or.* 1.111–113. The recent editors of Cyril's work against Julian estimate that the patriarch only produced six exemplars for the first distribution of his text. See Riedweg, Brüggemann and Kinzig (2016), cxvii–viii.

39 Starr (1987), 213.

40 Cameron (2011), 439.

41 Van Groningen (1963), 3.

an interested friend was common practice among members of the Greco-Roman cultural elite. Consequently, after publication, the author lost all control over his work. This was clearly stated by Symmachus in reply to Ausonius' complaints about the divulgence of one of his poems: *cum semel a te profectum carmen est, ius omne posuisti, oratio publicata res libera est*, "Once a poem has left you, you have abandoned all rights. Words made public are free property."⁴² The distribution of a work without its author's consent was a common phenomenon.⁴³ As Harry Gamble remarks, the circulation of unauthorized copies is so frequently given as the reason for publication that it became almost a *topos*.⁴⁴ Roman authors were thus perfectly aware that after publication they could have neither influence over how their material circulated nor control over the readers into whose hands their text might fall. As Rex Winsbury emphasizes, a published text had been "let loose into the chancy world of peer-to-peer circulation between persons unknown, in places unknown."⁴⁵

The writings of Augustine and Jerome provide the most abundant information regarding book circulation in Ammianus' time. Both Christian authors took care to place good copies of their works with well-positioned friends to whom they referred those who wanted to transcribe their own copy. Augustine's early writings were distributed in this way with the help of his friend and wealthy patron Romanianus.⁴⁶ Later in life, Augustine organized in the library of Hippo a collection of his works to serve as a repository for those interested in copying them, as mentioned by Possidius in his biography.⁴⁷ Jerome's Roman friends Paula, Eustochium, Pammachius, Marcella and Domnio assisted him in a similar way.⁴⁸ Likewise, when Augustine and Jerome wanted a work, they simply requested it from a friend that might have it or from the author.⁴⁹ Symmachus and his friends did the same.⁵⁰ For anyone, one of the simplest ways to obtain a book was to request it from its author. For instance, to read the works of a writer as famous as

⁴² Symm. *Ep.* 1.31.2. Translation from Salzman (2011), 72. See also McGill (2009), 229–232; (2012); Peltari (2011).

⁴³ See e.g. Arr. *Epict. diss.* 1.1, Jer. *Ep.* 47.3, 84.10, 124.1, and August. *Retract.* 39.

⁴⁴ Gamble (1995), 118.

⁴⁵ Winsbury (2009), 91.

⁴⁶ See e.g. August. *Ep.* 27.4; 31.7. Other friends provide similar help in *Ep.* 174, 231.5–7, 1*A.2; 2*.2. See the discussion in Gamble (1995), 132–137. See also Weidmann (2012), 431–433. On Romanianus, see Brown (2012), 153–154.

⁴⁷ *Vit. Aug.* 5.18.10. To give his readers an overview of the holdings of the library of Hippo, Possidius appended a list of Augustine's works (*indiculum*) at the end of his biography.

⁴⁸ See e.g. Jer. *Ep.* 47.3, 49.4, 85.3, 126.2.

⁴⁹ See e.g. August. *Ep.* 31.8; Jer. *Ep.* 10.3.

⁵⁰ See e.g. Symm. *Ep.* 1.24; 4.18.5.

Jerome, the wealthy Spaniard Lucinius had no other resource than to initiate a correspondence with him and send six copyists across the Mediterranean Sea to Bethlehem to produce the desired copies for him.⁵¹

It is remarkable that there are so few references to the book trade in the writings of Ammianus' contemporaries. Undoubtedly, most readers had access to a work through copies made privately from originals borrowed from a friend or from a public library. Presumably, booksellers only participated in the distribution of consecrated works for which there was a sufficiently high and steady demand that could not be met effectively only through social contacts. There was, however, no opposition between "book trade" and the private production of books; on the contrary, both were complementary. As William Johnson observed, terms like "book trade" and "bookseller" are anachronistic when applied to the Roman world, because there was no fundamental division between booksellers and scribes, both activities being described by the Latin word *librarius*.⁵² Roman "bookshops" are thus better described as "scribal shops" that performed multiple functions.⁵³ They could sell copies made in advance or make copies on request from originals provided by the interested customers.

From the first part of this brief overview emerge two conclusions relevant in the context of this study. First, ancient authors had no control whatsoever over the circulation of their published works. This means that they could not effectively target a specific social group as their audience. In fact, the only way in which an author could control who would read his work was not to publish it and to give copies to the desired readers with the express instruction not to circulate them. However, Roman authors were as a rule interested in reaching as large an audience as possible. Although they did not profit financially from the reproduction of their works, a large audience brought them fame and prestige that could help in furthering their social and political ambitions. Symmachus seems to allude to this fact in his famous *dictum* in a letter congratulating Ausonius on his appointment to the consulship: *iter ad capessendos magistratus saepe litteris promovetur*, "often the path to obtaining office is advanced through literature."⁵⁴ Second, since books circulated mainly as gifts and loans among persons connected by ties of friendship or acquaintance, circulation patterns tended to reproduce the usual structure of social networks in the Roman upper strata, and these networks typically connected different elite groups. For instance, in a recent

⁵¹ See Jer. *Ep.* 71.5, 75.4.

⁵² Johnson (2004), 158–160. According to Cameron (2011), 438, by late antiquity the terms *librarius* and *bibliopola* were applied to both booksellers and copyists.

⁵³ Johnson (2004), 159.

⁵⁴ Symm. *Ep.* 1.20.1. Translation from Salzman (2011), 56.

study of Libanius' social network, Isabella Sandwell demonstrated that the great Antiochene orator was immersed in a wide-ranging network that extended across the eastern empire and linked people across bounded groups such as the imperial bureaucracy or the civic elite.⁵⁵ Even a glance at other Late Antique letter-collections, such as, for example, those of Augustine or Symmachus, confirms the heterogeneous composition of elite social networks in this period.

After publication, an author could help make his work known by giving public recitations. In 392 Libanius wrote a congratulatory letter to a fellow citizen of Antioch named "Markellinos" who was living in Rome.⁵⁶ Travelers arriving from there (τῶν ἐκεῖθεν ἀφικνουμένων) had informed Libanius of the great success his correspondent had obtained at public readings of parts of an unspecified work. Libanius' letter specifically refers to public recitations (ἐν ἐπιδείξει) of a work in prose that could be divided into several parts (συγγραφὴ εἰς πολλὰ τετμημένη). Libanius commends Markellinos for his achievement and encourages him to continue exposing more parts of his text in literary gatherings (σύλλογοι). The recipient of this letter has commonly been identified with the author of the *Res Gestae*, taking into account the coincidence of names, the fact that the date of the letter fits well with the chronological evidence on the time of writing of the *Res Gestae* and, finally, the many hints that indicate that Ammianus had an Antiochene origin.⁵⁷ Fornara, Barnes, and Bowersock have questioned this identification,⁵⁸ but their arguments cannot be considered conclusive, as Matthews rightly contends.⁵⁹ Moreover, as Kelly argued, many of Fornara's arguments lose their force if we assume that Libanius had no clear idea of what Ammianus had done.⁶⁰ Although the issue cannot be resolved definitively with the information available, in my opinion, the evidence is in favour of the identification with Ammianus. However, even if the identification is rejected, Libanius' letter proves the continuity of the practice of literary recitations in late fourth-century Rome and suggests that Ammianus may possibly have given public readings. Besides, scholars have traditionally seen in the style of some passages of the *Res Gestae*

⁵⁵ Sandwell (2007), 133–147. See also Bradbury (2014), 220–240.

⁵⁶ *Ep.* 1063.

⁵⁷ Henri de Valois was the first to identify Libanius' addressee with Ammianus (see Valois' preface reprinted in Wagner and Erfurd 1808, lxxvi–vii). The identification is accepted by, among others, Thompson (1947), 18; Blockley (1975), 9; Sabbah (1978), 245–248; Barceló (1993), 17–23; Cameron (2012), 355; Demandt (2013), 372–393. Kelly (2008), 111–114 offers a careful and balanced discussion of the issue.

⁵⁸ Bowersock (1990), 244–250; Fornara (1992), 328–344; Barnes (1993), 57–61; (1998), 54–58. Fornara's arguments are accepted by Kulikowski (2012), 79–102.

⁵⁹ Matthews (1994), 252–269. See also Sabbah (1997), 89–116.

⁶⁰ Kelly (2008), 113

evidence indicating that they were meant to be delivered orally.⁶¹ Similarly, Kelly points out that various features of the *Res Gestae* suggest that Ammianus recited this text. In 14.6.2, for example, Ammianus characterizes his work both as a text (that will perhaps be read in the future – *haec lecturos forsitan*) and as a speech (*oratio*).⁶²

Matthews assumed that the travellers from whom Libanius had received the news of Ammianus' successful public readings would be members of Theodosius' court returning from Italy to the East in 391 after the conclusion of the military operations against the usurper Magnus Maximus.⁶³ It is an unnecessary inference. Theodosius marched to Constantinople, where the vast majority of his officers and courtiers must surely have accompanied him. Besides, the traffic of persons between Rome and Antioch—two of the largest and most important cities of the empire—must have been relatively common, so the literary news of the ancient capital would not have needed a special occasion to reach the city on the banks of the Orontes. Consequently, there is no particular reason to suppose that Ammianus' public recitations would have been attended mainly by imperial officials.

The public recitation of literary works had a long tradition in Roman society. The distinguished senator Asinius Pollio was credited with its introduction at the time of Augustus, although it is more likely that he only formalized and made fashionable an older practice.⁶⁴ Recitations were one of the central features of the literary life of the capital during the high Roman Empire, as illustrated by the frequent references to this practice in the letters of Pliny the Younger and the works of other contemporary authors.⁶⁵ Although references to formal public readings are less frequent in the works of late Roman writers, recitations seem to have retained their importance throughout the fourth and fifth centuries.⁶⁶

Since the Augustan age, two types of recitations were common, those given to a small group of friends in order to get comments on a work not yet finished, and those in front of a larger audience that sought to make known a text that had

61 Momigliano (1974), 1393–1407 thought that the excursus on eastern lawyers in Book 30 was “written for public lecture at Rome.” Blockley (1975), 72 thought the same of the story of king Pap. See also Syme (1968), 11.

62 Kelly (2008), 114. See also Lizzi Testa (2004), 35–36 and Kelly (2013), 67–79.

63 Matthews (1994), 254.

64 On the practice of recitation in Rome, see Funaioli (1914), 435–446; Friedländer (1922), 225–230; Dalzell (1955), 20–28; Carcopino (1977), 270–279; Quinn (1982), 75–180; Binder (1995), 265–332; Dupont (1997), 44–59; Parker (2009), 186–229. For a detailed study of all the evidence regarding the oral delivery of literature to mass audiences, see Wiseman (2015).

65 See e.g. Plin. *Ep.* 1.13; 2.19.1; 3.18; 6.15.2–4; 8.12.1–2.

66 On the recitations in Late Antiquity, see Cavallo (2006), 151–156. See also Agosti (2012), 377–380.

already reached a more final form. The tone of Libanius' letter indicates that his correspondent had given recitations of this second kind. The size of the assembled audience and its reaction to the work were the main criteria to measure the success of a public reading. Authors mobilized, therefore, their friends and acquaintances to guarantee an audience as numerous and well-disposed as possible.⁶⁷ As a result, the composition of the audience tended to be socially diverse and to resemble the author's social network. Hence, the possibility that Ammianus gave public readings of his work in Rome further indicates that the audience of the *Res Gestae* was most likely socially heterogeneous, resembling his own network of friends and acquaintances in the capital.

Since the majority of the traditional assumptions about Ammianus' biography have been convincingly questioned as unreliable,⁶⁸ we know little about his social connections both in Rome and in Antioch. The only indisputable relationship that emerges from his text is that with his admired commander, Ursicinus. Beyond that, it is only possible to identify some probable connections from references to individuals who were likely informants for facts included in his history. Note that Ammianus himself declares he has interrogated those participating in the events he narrates (*interrogando versatos in medio*, 15.1.1). To identify possible informants, Kelly presents the following criteria:

- (1) when an individual's actions, for which that individual is the only possible source, are described;
- (2) when an individual is eulogised;
- (3) when high offices he will later hold are listed, especially those held after the terminus of the history in 378;
- (4) when his activities are described in surprisingly abundant detail.⁶⁹

I sum up his findings in the following table:⁷⁰

Possible informants of Ammianus		
Name	Position	Passages of the <i>Res Gestae</i>
Philagrius	<i>notarius</i>	21.4.2–6
Eutherius	<i>praepositus sacri cubiculi</i> of Julian	16.7.4–7
Teutomeres	<i>protector domesticus</i>	15.3.7–9
Laniogaisus	<i>tribunus</i>	15.5.17

⁶⁷ See e.g. Plin. *Ep.* 8.12.2.

⁶⁸ See Kelly (2008), 104–158.

⁶⁹ Kelly (2008), 145.

⁷⁰ Kelly (2008), 141–151.

Table 1: (continued)

Possible informants of Ammianus		
Name	Position	Passages of the <i>Res Gestae</i>
Abdigildus	<i>tribunus</i>	18.6.12
Discenes	<i>tribunus</i> and <i>notarius</i>	19.9.9
Sophronius	<i>notarius</i> , prefect of Constantinople	26.7.2
Syagrius	<i>notarius</i> , prefect of Italy, consul	28.2.5–9
Hypatius	prefect of Rome, prefect of Italy	29.2.16
Aurelius Victor	prefect of Rome	21.10.6
Praetextatus	prefect of Rome, prefect of Italy	22.7.1–6, 27.9.8–10
Eupraxius	prefect of Rome	27.6.14, 27.7.6, 28.1.25

Not surprisingly, the evidence indicates that Ammianus had connections to individuals belonging to different social groups, including both the senate and the bureaucracy. Even these possible connections illustrate thus the usual diversity of social networks among the Roman elites. We do not know for sure if Hypatius, Aurelius Victor, and Eupraxius were still alive by the time Ammianus published his *Res Gestae* (Praetextatus was certainly dead). In any case, they were the typical kind of influential acquaintances to whom an ancient author would send a copy of his work in the hope they would help it circulate by recommending it or, perhaps, by sending copies to their own friends.

Could the stern critic of senatorial corruption that wrote the digressions on Rome be in friendly terms with some leading members of the senate? He could be. We cannot deduce from the tone of these digressions that Ammianus was completely detached from the senatorial class.⁷¹ As argued by Ross, the historian adopts in these passages a “light-hearted satirical persona” whose criticism owes more to the literary traditions of Roman satire than to personal experience or feeling.⁷² Note that Ammianus does not only criticise the senatorial aristocracy, he also censures the way of life of the Roman plebeians. Nor does he refrain from criticizing the imperial bureaucracy in other passages of his work (e.g. 28.1.5–6). Besides, learned readers—or hearers—were well versed on the conventions of satire and would have known to take the content of Ammianus’ excurses with a grain of salt.

⁷¹ Pace Cameron (1964).

⁷² Ross (2015), 356–373.

To summarize, the available knowledge about book circulation in the Roman world makes it difficult to think that a literary text would found readers exclusively within a small social group such as the members of the Roman senate or the imperial officials. On the contrary, it is more likely that audiences tended to be socially diverse, reflecting the heterogeneous character of the social networks of Roman elites through which books circulated. As the next section will show, the evidence of contemporary authors that seem to have read Ammianus confirms the mixed composition of his audience.

IV Readers of the *Res Gestae*

The only Late Antique author that mentioned Ammianus by name and quoted from his work is the grammarian Priscian. He was a professor in Constantinople in the late fifth and early sixth centuries and did not belong to the eastern senate nor was he a member of the bureaucracy.⁷³ Priscian's monumental *Institutiones Grammaticae* (almost 1000 pages in Keil's edition)⁷⁴ are full of quotations from Roman authors introduced to illustrate all sorts of grammatical topics. Ludwig Jeep argued that much of Priscian's erudition was second-hand, derived from earlier grammarians, above all, from Flavius Caper, who flourished in the second century AD. Priscian only quotes a few authors later than Caper, the great majority of them also grammarians.⁷⁵ Indeed, Ammianus and Flavius Vegetius were the only Late Latin non-grammarians quoted by Priscian and it seems certain that he knew them from first-hand.⁷⁶

Priscian is the only ancient reader of Ammianus whose identity we know for certain. However, echoes of the *Res Gestae* in the works of other Late Antique authors (Jerome, Claudian, the author of the *Historia Augusta*, Olympiodorus of Thebes, and Cassiodorus) have commonly been considered to prove that they also read Ammianus' work.⁷⁷ The evidence for an influence of Ammianus on Cassiodorus, the author of the *Historia Augusta*, and Olympiodorus is very thin. In the nineteenth century, different scholars claimed that Cassiodorus had used Ammia-

⁷³ *Inst. Gramm.* 9.51. On Priscian's life, see Helm (1954), 2328–2330; PLRE II: 905; Kaster (1997), 346–8; Geiger (1999), 606–610.

⁷⁴ Hertz and Keil (1961).

⁷⁵ Jeep (1908), 12.

⁷⁶ *Inst. Gramm.* 3.21. As Priscian quotes a sentence from the beginning of Book 14, the first extant, and as he quotes Vegetius from the first book of his work, it has been commonly argued that the first part of the *Res Gestae* would have been already lost by then. See Jeep (1908), 21–22.

⁷⁷ See e.g. Kelly (2008), 182; Guzmán Armario (2001), 115–145.

nus' historical work. Their arguments were later developed by Peter Heather who argued that Cassiodorus used Ammianus for his lost *Gothic History* and that this can be recognized in Jordanes' derived account in his *Getica*.⁷⁸ In a similar way, Ronald Syme and Anthony Birley recognized echoes of Ammianus in the *Historia Augusta*.⁷⁹ Given how little we know about the mysterious author of this collection of imperial biographies, however, this fact is of no great significance for the study of Ammianus' audience. Finally, Thompson postulated an influence of Ammianus in the work of the Greek historian of the fifth century Olympiodorus of Thebes. Thompson's thesis is based only on the fact that "in scale and in the inclusion of a great number of disquisitions on geographical, social, and other more or less kindred subjects, the works of Ammianus and Olympiodorus were curiously alike." Since Olympiodorus most likely could read Latin, for Thompson, the best explanation is that he had read Ammianus' historical work.⁸⁰ In any case, the evidence of Priscian indicates that Ammianus' work was known in the East until at least the sixth century.

The cases in which the parallels with Ammianus are most convincing are those of Jerome and Claudian. Together with the author of the *Historia Augusta*, they are the only contemporaries who seem to have known the *Res Gestae*. Theodor Birt identified a close resemblance between some passages of Claudian's poems and the *Res Gestae* and assumed that the poet had attended Ammianus' recitations in Rome.⁸¹ This seems, however, unlikely, since Claudian arrived in Rome most probably at the end of 394, that is, at least a couple of years after the likely publication of Ammianus' history, and, at the beginning of 396, he was already at the imperial court in Milan.⁸² Birt recognized an influence of Ammianus on *In Rufinum*. 1.322ff., 2.358ff., 510, *In Eutropium* 1.339 and *De Consulato Stiliconis* 1.288ff., works composed between AD 397 and 400. For Otto Maenchen-Helfen, the most convincing parallels are found in Claudian's description of the

78 Von Sybel (1858), 31–36; Mommsen (1909), 421 n. 3; Heather (1989), 103–128; (1991), 24–25 and 51–52; (1993), 317–353; (1998), 114.

79 Syme (1968), 53–71; (1970), 102; Gilliam (1972), 125–147; Birley (1991), 53–58; Guzmán Armario (2001), 121–122. Cameron (2011), 743–782 has recently proposed to date the *Historia Augusta* to c. 380, which would make Ammianus' influence impossible. The use of the *Res Gestae* by the author of the *Historia Augusta* has been the subject of a recent detailed analysis by Rohrbacher (2016), 135–150, 197–198.

80 Thompson (1944), 43–52. See also (1947), 19 n. 6; Blockley (1975), 16 n. 49 and Baldwin (1980), 212. Thompson's thesis of Ammianus' influence on Olympiodorus has not received much attention in later scholarship on the Greek historian; see e.g. Matthews (1970); Gillett (1993); Treadgold (2004); Van Nuffelen (2013); Stickler (2014).

81 Birt (1892), ix.

82 See Cameron (1970), xv–xvi.

Huns in *In Rufinum* 1.323–331 that seems patterned on Ammianus' famous excursus on them in 31.2.1–11.⁸³ Ammianus' influence on this passage was accepted by Cameron who suggested also that Claudian used the historian's account of the revolt of Firmus for his *De bello Gildonico*.⁸⁴ In his opinion, Claudian had a copy of the *Res Gestae* in his bookshelf.⁸⁵

Maenchen-Helfen recognized further echoes of Ammianus' description of the Huns in several works of Jerome, the earliest being the *Adversus Iovinianum* written in 393.⁸⁶ David Rohrbacher and Christa Gray identified further resemblances with passages of the *Res Gestae* in Jerome's *Vita Malchi* written in 391/392.⁸⁷ Jerome must thus have read Ammianus' work shortly after its publication, while he was living in Bethlehem immersed in his "career" as an ascetic monk and Christian intellectual. As Maenchen-Helfen suggested, Jerome must have had a copy of the last books of the *Res Gestae* in his library.⁸⁸ It is difficult to think that Jerome would have bought his copy in Bethlehem. He must have received it from his Roman friends. This is not surprising because his correspondence shows how he remained well informed of the latest literary developments in Rome.⁸⁹ Jerome's access to a copy of the *Res Gestae* is a perfect illustration of how a text could circulate through ties of friendship to reach in a short time persons with whom the author had no personal connection.

It is evident that this group of potential readers of the *Res Gestae* has a heterogeneous social composition that does not reflect the traditional theses on Ammianus' audience. This is particularly clear in the cases of Ammianus' near contemporaries Jerome and Claudian, two provincial parvenus who had achieved fame and recognition through their intellectual pursuits and belonged neither to the traditional senatorial aristocracy nor to the imperial bureaucracy.

83 Maenchen-Helfen (1955), 393–394. See also (1973), 10–11 and 69–70; Richter (1974), 362–363; Guzmán Armario (2001), 115–145.

84 Cameron (1970), 333–334. See also (1968), 390–391.

85 See Cameron (1970), 347–348.

86 Maenchen-Helfen (1955), 384–399. Maenchen-Helfen recognizes an influence of Ammianus' description of the Huns in *Comm. in Is.* 3.7.21–22; *Ep.* 60.17, 77.8; *Adv. Iovinian.* 2.7.

87 Rohrbacher (2006), 422–424; Gray (2015), 30–32. On the dating of the *Vita Malchi*, see Gray (2015), 5–6.

88 Maenchen-Helfen (1955), 395. Cameron (2012), 352–355. Many years earlier, Jerome (*Ep.* 10.3) had requested from a friend a copy of the historical work of Aurelius Victor.

89 Cameron (1965), 111–113 argued that Jerome read Claudian's *In Eutropium* shortly after its publication.

V Concluding thoughts

The argument of the present paper can be summarized briefly. From the text of the *Res Gestae*, it can only be deduced that Ammianus wrote for an educated audience capable of reading Latin and of appreciating his florid style and his use of a wide range of Classical literary devices. However, the internal evidence in the *Res Gestae* can be complemented with that provided by other sources, because we have relatively abundant information about the circulation of books in Ammianus' time. This evidence indicates that books circulated mainly through ties of friendship according to the interest they generated. Consequently, authors could not control who would read a published work. Audiences tended to be diverse, including individuals from different origins and trajectories, because they tended to reproduce the composition of elite social networks and typically cut across social groups such as the senatorial aristocracy or the imperial bureaucracy. Since the *Res Gestae* must have circulated in this way, the traditional theses about Ammianus' intended or real audience should be rejected. Doubtless, many early readers (and hearers) of the *Res Gestae* would have belonged either to the imperial bureaucracy or to the senatorial aristocracy, but many others would have been persons lower on the social ladder, such as, for instance, curials, army officers, professors, teachers, low ranking clerks, scribes, etc. Ammianus wrote for senators, for imperial officials, and for educated people from other social sectors. The evidence provided by Libanius' letter 1063 and by the echoes of the *Res Gestae* in the works of Claudian and Jerome strengthens this assumption.

Of course, what is true of Ammianus' *Res Gestae* is also true of all Roman historiography and of almost all types of Roman literary texts, at least of those written in the main literary languages, Latin and Greek. Given the ways in which books circulated in the Roman world, the audience of a published text could not be composed of a socially homogeneous group. Because Roman authors were well aware of this fact, it is difficult to believe they would have intended to target specific groups. The only way in which an author could determine who would read his work was to publish it and to give copies only to trusted friends with the specific instruction not to distribute them. Even in this way, however, they always ran the risk of unauthorised publication. All this does not mean that Ammianus wrote with no particular audience in mind, it means that he most likely conceived his readers as members of the learned elite and not as aristocrats or bureaucrats, modern categories with no precise equivalents in his own vocabulary.

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