

Unlike his predecessors in Latin historiography of the grand style, Ammianus Marcellinus has been underrepresented in English translation. In this paper I compare the four full English versions produced over the past four centuries (Holland, 1609; Yonge, 1862; Rolfe, 1935-39; Hamilton, 1986) in order to discover how their methodologies (1) disclose each translator's valuation of Ammianus' style as an effective vehicle of his historiography, and (2) reveal each translator's understanding of the needs of his readership. Further discussion considers the extent to which contemporary historical and cultural circumstances influence the character of each translation. I end with some comments on the relative merits of the various available versions and outline what I regard to be the desirable qualities of a 21st century translation of the *Res Gestae*.

Before moving to stylistic analyses of a representative passage in Latin and in its English versions, I begin by considering the aesthetic and theoretical challenges to such an undertaking. Ammianus' Latin prose style will ever be a stumbling block for readers and translators alike because of its highly wrought idiosyncrasy: not only is it unclassical, but it also has virtually no contemporary generic comparators. To add to these problems, most modern evaluations have been confounded with prejudices about cultural decline in late antiquity. The attitude of Gibbon in the 18th century set the standard: he could praise the historical content of his "accurate and faithful guide" while simultaneously deploring his "coarse and undistinguishing pencil" (*Decline and Fall*, Ch. 25 and 26). In the 20th century, however, the view of Ammianus' literary merit improved and Gibbon's contradictory judgement underwent inversion (cf. Norden, *Die antike Kunstprosa*, 1923, and Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 1950). Once Ammianus' stylistic virtues were acknowledged, the scope of rhetorical distortion in his reportage began to be recognised. This has given rise in recent years to more constructive scholarship on Ammianus' style (e.g. Fontaine, "Le Style d'Ammien", 1992). Such sympathetic criticism provides the basic aesthetic criteria for my comparison of Ammianus' translators. In formulating my final judgement on which versions come closest to conveying the total substance of Ammianus' language, however, I employ Raffel's technique of "syntactic tracking" (*The Art of Translating Prose*, 1994). This approach (which has been applied fruitfully to studies of Herodotean and Thucydidean translation [Willett, *Arion* 7.2, 1999 and 8.1, 2000]) is based on the premise that syntax is the single most essential characteristic of prose style in any tongue, since prose, as distinguished from verse, is fundamentally discursive in its progress. Therefore translations that attempt to parallel the syntactic movement of the original are those which convey the original's sequence of thought most closely, and thus bring the translator's readers closest to the rational gaze of the original author.

In putting Raffel's technique to work on Ammianus' translators, I have chosen a passage both well known in its own right and particularly illustrative of the historian's idiom. His description of the accession of the usurper Procopius at Amm. Marc. 26.6.15-16 is often adduced as evidence for Ammianus' fascination with the gestural, nonverbal communication of prescribed ceremonial, of his predilection for grotesque imagery, and of his tendency to characterise historical personages in theatrical terms. In addition to the linguistic challenges it poses for his translators, then, it also presents them with the problem of relating a time-specific ideological question (i.e. that of fourth century imperial legitimacy) to their own contemporary audiences. The results of my comparative approach prove occasionally surprising, but will be valuable to those who contemplate a new English Ammianus.