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Waning Imperium: Valentinian I's Projection of Power

**by
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HIS 490 Honors Thesis**

**Department of History
Providence College
Spring 2021**

This thesis is dedicated to both my parents who have always and will always support me and to my friends who have patiently listened to me talk incessantly about this thesis for the past year.

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Introduction

In 363, the political hierarchy of the Roman Empire was plunged into chaos.¹ After embarking on an ambitious invasion of the Sassanid Persian Empire, the Emperor Julian was killed in battle not far from the walls of the Persian capital of Ctesiphon, marking the end of the seventy-year Constantinian Dynasty. Julian's reign, during which he attempted to both expand the empire and restore paganism to prominence, had been one of radical conservatism. After his death, the army was suddenly stranded deep inside Persian territory without a leader. Taking matters into their own hands, the soldiery proclaimed a senior staff officer, Jovian, as Augustus. His reign, however, would prove short. Although he was able to conclude a peace deal with Persia and extricate the army from foreign lands, he died in Ancyra after reigning for only eight months.

Then, Valentinian, a relatively unknown military officer from Pannonia, ascended to the imperial throne during a time of crisis and discontinuity. Under pressure from the army, he appointed his brother Valens as his co-emperor. The brothers split the empire between them; Valentinian would govern the west and Valens the east. Although they both held the title of Augustus and were thus technically equals, there was no doubt that Valentinian was the senior partner. As the historian Ammianus Marcellinus writes, "Valens proved more like an obsequious

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all dates are AD.

lieutenant” (Amm. Marc. 26.4.3; *in modum apparatoris morigerum*).² With the appointment of Valens, Jovian became the last emperor to rule both east and west, and, as Matthew Errington argues, the beginning of the Valentinian dynasty marks a more formal administrative separation of east and west.³ Exemplifying the political separation of East and West, the two brothers would never meet again after departing for their separate imperial spheres. While this study will focus mostly on the Western Empire and Valentinian, some attention will also be paid to Valens in the east.

When discussing the Late Roman Empire, several points must be noted before moving forward. First, despite still being called the **Roman** Empire, Rome was no longer the empire’s central, permanent capital. Rather, the capital was wherever the emperor happened to be—neither brother ever actually set foot in the city during their reigns.⁴ However, Ammianus Marcellinus, the most complete literary source of the period, wrote his history in Rome, thus providing us with a substantial amount of information regarding occurrences in the city.⁵ Therefore, the city will feature heavily in parts of this thesis. Second, religion and religious difference had now become a very important part of the Roman world. No longer was Rome an empire run by pagans for pagans; Christianity had been legalized and was the personal creed of both Valentinian and Valens. Paganism remained strong however, especially within the city of Rome.⁶ In addition, Christians

² Unless otherwise stated all translations of Ammianus come from: Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, trans. Walter Hamilton, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 1986).

³ R M Errington, *Roman Imperial Policy from Julian to Theodosius* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 1.

⁴ Errington, *Imperial Policy*, 2.

⁵ Matthews, John, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 8–9.

⁶ Matthews, *The Roman Empire*, 425.

were divided into competing Nicene and non-Nicene factions. Religious policy would thus be an important aspect of both brothers' reigns.

While there is a substantial body of scholarship that touches upon Valentinian, there is no recent comprehensive work focusing solely on his reign.⁷ Before discussing the modern scholarly works, however, it is impossible to not mention the *Res Gestae* of Ammianus Marcellinus. The last in a long tradition of Latin historians, Ammianus' history, written sometime during the 380s and early 390s, is our most comprehensive primary source for the reign of Valentinian. Ammianus, a pagan, sought to investigate both the good and bad qualities of each of the emperors he examined, even criticizing Julian the main protagonist of his work.⁸ This approach is readily apparent in his sections on Valentinian. For example, Ammianus praises the emperor's religious policies, vigor, and, most prominently, his generalship, but lambasts his temper, greed, and cruelty (Amm. Marc. 30.7-9).

Like all historians, Ammianus' text does have biases. Many of his sources for Valentinian's reign came from the senatorial elite of Rome, which, as pointed out by Andreas Alföldi colored his portrayal of events at Rome.⁹ Despite this, Ammianus' account is generally a balanced assessment leading to a diverse range of modern interpretations on Valentinian. Alföldi wrote the first modern work which appears in English covering Valentinian's reign. In *A Conflict of Ideas in the Late Roman Empire* (1952) he argued that Valentinian was an excellent emperor and most

⁷ Jan Willem Drijvers, "Decline of Political Culture: Ammianus Marcellinus' Characterization of the Reigns of Valentinian and Valens," in *Shifting Cultural Frontiers in Late Antiquity*, ed. D Brakke et al. (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), 86.

⁸ Ammianus, a pagan, saw the pagan Julian as the ideal emperor and philosopher.

⁹ Andreas Alföldi, *A Conflict of Ideas in the Late Roman Empire: The Clash between the Senate and Valentinian I*, trans. Harold Mattingly (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 41.

of negative interpretations of him come solely from Ammianus' biased work.¹⁰ More nuanced accounts followed. John Matthews in *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (1989) used other primary sources, such as inscriptions, to create a balanced image of Valentinian as emperor. In addition, his work focuses on the Roman Empire as a whole, and his analysis of nearly every section of Ammianus is invaluable. François Paschoud (1992) argued that Ammianus purposefully besmirched Valentinian to make his hero Julian look better, a view which was then rebutted by Hans Tietler (2007).¹¹ Jan Willem Drijvers in "Decline of Political Culture: Ammianus Marcellinus' Characterization of the Reigns of Valentinian and Valens" (2012) argues that Ammianus viewed the post-Julianic period as one of intense corruption, exemplified by the provincial officials of Valentinian and Valens.¹² As can clearly be seen from these accounts, there is a great deal of scholarly debate surrounding the character and reign of Valentinian. This is explained well by Daniël den Hengst, who eloquently writes:

Where Valentinian is concerned, the contrasts between positive and negative qualifications are much sharper [than other emperors], so that the reader, following the different stages and aspects of his career as an emperor, gets the impression of looking through a kaleidoscope at an image which shifts with every turn of the cylinder.¹³

In the end, den Hengst concludes that Ammianus' view of Valentinian was positive, a view with which I agree. Ammianus, however, made his opinion somewhat ambiguous so that the reader could form his or her own judgement of Valentinian.¹⁴

¹⁰ For an example of Ammianus' hyperbolizing Valentinian's vices see his description of Valentinian's bears in 29.3.9).

¹¹ Drijvers, "Decline of Political Culture", 86–87.

¹² Drijvers, "Decline of Political Culture," 87.

¹³ Daniel Dan Hengst, "Valentinian as Portrayed by Ammianus: A Kaleidoscopic Image," in *Imagining Emperors in the Later Roman Empire* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2018), 259.

¹⁴ Den Hengst, "a Kaleidoscopic Image", 267-268.

In addition to these sources which focus specifically on Valentinian and Ammianus, several other secondary sources have been important in situating the reigns of Valentinian and Valens within a wider historical context. These include Peter Heather's *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, which also provides great detail on North African affairs, R. Malcom Errington's *Roman Imperial Policy from Julian to Theodosius*, and *Contested Monarchy: Integrating the Roman Empire in the Fourth Century AD*, a collection of essays on the period. Several smaller, more specific articles also shed light on the reigns of the Pannonian brothers. An example is "Valentinian I, *christianissimus imperator*? Notes on a passage of the *Passio Pollionis*" by Harjnalka Tamas. This article looks at a small section of a Pannonian hagiography which describes Valentinian as *christianissimus imperator*.¹⁵ Tamas concludes that this title shows that the people of Pannonia had a very positive view of Valentinian, despite having an incredibly negative view of his corrupt governor of the province, Sextus Claudius Petronius Probus who, argues Tamas, is subtly referenced in the work. Among others, I will be using an article which discusses Valentinian's role in ecclesiastical affairs, and another on the coins of Valentinian and Valens which will greatly aid in my quest to show that the brothers were obsessed with establishing dynastic legitimacy.

In terms of primary sources, there are several literary sources in addition to Ammianus which I will be using. The late 5th century historian Zosimus, writing after the fall of the Western Empire, was biased by his paganism and fanatically believed that the Christianization of the empire led to its demise; however, parts of his work can still be used to supplement Ammianus. In addition, we have the ecclesiastical histories of Socrates Scholasticus, Sozomen, and Rufinus of Aquileia, but all of these have strong biases towards their favored Christian creed. In addition, several other primary sources can supplement Ammianus. The Theodosian and Justinianic Codes, collections

¹⁵ "Most Christian Emperor"

of late Roman laws, are useful in determining Valentinian and Valens' legislative agenda. Also, I will also briefly make use of several inscriptions and the writings of St. Augustine.

Combining these sources, I will argue that the reign of Valentinian I is marked by two main themes. First, as the founder of a new dynasty, Valentinian was obsessed with legitimizing his reign and safeguarding it for future generations. Second, because of poor subordinates and poor communication, he was unable to adequately govern the provinces leading to instability and chaos.

I hope to add two aspects to the scholarly discussion of the reigns of Valentinian and Valens. Most scholars have individually pointed out that it was important for the brothers to cement their legitimacy and their budding imperial dynasty. I plan to show that this was not merely an important concern, but rather one of the central goals of their reigns. Second, I will demonstrate that their power was sharply limited in practice. Because of communication difficulties across a large empire, local magistrates were able to amass a tremendous amount of power. As seen multiple times throughout Valentinian's reign, a corrupt or poor appointment could lead not only to headaches, but to actual wars. This forced Valentinian to be naturally reactive in his policies as opposed to proactive. Romanus, the *comes Africae*, provoking the Firmus Revolt in North Africa, and the general Marcellian murdering king Gabinius of the Quadi at a dinner party serve as two examples of unnecessary conflicts which Valentinian was then forced to confront. Ammianus, who was no friend of non-Romans, wrote of the latter incident that: "on this occasion they had what for barbarians was a just ground for complaint." (Amm. Marc. 29.6.1; *et erat (ut barbaris) ratio iusta querellarum*).

To make my argument, I will split this study into three chapters. The first will discuss Valentinian as emperor. How did his election come about and how did he conduct himself as

emperor? How did he try to legitimize his new dynasty? Primarily, this chapter will focus on Valentinian himself and disregard much of what occurred in the provinces.

The second chapter will look at events in North Africa during Valentinian's reign. Although historically a stable part of the empire, North Africa was rocked by two separate incidences during Valentinian's reign.¹⁶ The first was the struggle between the citizens of Lepcis Magna and the *comes Africae* Romanus at the court of Valentinian. Although mostly occurring during Valentinian's reign, this was a long and drawn-out affair, beginning during the reign of Jovian and not concluding until after Valentinian's death. Second was the revolt of Firmus, also sparked in part by Romanus, which forced Valentinian to send his best general, Theodosius, to North Africa with a substantial force to confront him.

The third chapter will look at Valentinian's religious policy, affairs in Rome, and Valentinian's reception in his home province of Pannonia. I hope that through this examination I will present old sources in new ways as well as generate new ideas for discussion within the scholarly community.

¹⁶ Peter Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History of Rome and the Barbarians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 275.

CHAPTER ONE

Legitimacy and Stability

The reign of Valentinian was in danger of becoming out of hand before it had even begun. About to give his first address to the soldiery after being proclaimed Augustus on February 16, 364, a mutiny nearly arose. “As he [Valentinian] stretched out his arm to command a hearing, a deep murmur arose. The centuries and maniples began to heckle, and the whole body of cohorts obstinately insisted that a second emperor should at once be nominated,” writes Ammianus, “it looked as if what began as murmur among the dissatisfied army would end in violence” (Amm. Marc. 26.2.3-4).¹⁷ Over the previous year, two emperors who had ruled without a colleague had died in office without a clear succession plan. Both instances could easily have led to a power vacuum and dynastic crisis, and the army was determined to not allow this opportunity to present itself again.¹⁸

Valentinian reacted to the potential mutiny quickly by delivering a powerful speech promising to accede to their demands and take a co-emperor. His personal charisma in this moment

¹⁷ *Eoque (ut expeditius loqueretur), brachium exsertante, obmurmuratio gravis exoritur, concrepantibus centuriis et manipulis cohortiumque omnium plebe urgentium destinate, confestim imperatorem alterum declarari. ... Dein ex susurris immaniter strepentis exercitus, cieri tumultus violentior apparebat*

¹⁸ Errington, *Imperial Policy*, 21.

of crisis quelled the soldiers and prevented violence from breaking out. A similar strength of character was seen throughout Valentinian's reign, repeatedly proving himself to be a strong leader and general to those around him.¹⁹ However, as seen from the near violence immediately following his accession, there was always the potential of disorder bubbling over from beneath the surface if he showed a hint of weakness. This led to Valentinian's obsession with legitimacy and his work to secure and consolidate his young dynasty.

Consolidating Power: 364-366

The need for the new dynasty to solidify its legitimacy was apparent from the very beginning. Ammianus reports the military brass were unified in choosing Valentinian, "by divine inspiration, Valentinian was unanimously chosen as a man who possessed the necessary qualifications" (Amm. Marc. 26.1.5; *Valentinianus, nulla discordante sententia, numinis adspiratione caelestis electus est*). However, Valentinian being chosen as emperor should be seen as puzzling, and Cristian Olariu has argued that the unanimity asserted by Ammianus should be questioned.²⁰ Other candidates, such as Equitius and Januarius, were seemingly more qualified to assume the imperial purple. Ammianus claims that these two were rejected because the former came from a rustic, uncultured background, and the latter was too far away to quickly assume the throne (Amm. Marc. 26.1.4-5). Valentinian, however, also came from a rural provincial background, hating "the well-dressed, the educated, the rich, and the highly born" (Amm. Marc. 30.8.10; *bene vestitos oderat et eruditos et opulentos et nobiles*), and although not far away he was

¹⁹ Valentinian spent most of his reign ruling from Gaul.

²⁰ Cristian Olariu, "Datianus, Valentinian and the Rise of the Pannonian Faction," *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte* 54, no. 3 (2005): 351.

also not present at his own elevation to the throne (Amm. Marc. 26.1.4).²¹ Additionally, his position as *tribunus scholae secundae scutariorum* was not a high-ranking one. Olariu argues that the unanimity of Valentinian's election was an example of factional.²² There were three main political factions during this period, the Constantian faction (the followers of Jovian), the Julianic faction, and the Pannonian faction, of which Valentinian was member. At this point, because the Pannonian group was the weakest of the three, Valentinian could have been an ideal compromise candidate.²³ Additionally, as Olariu argues, Valentinian's rustic background gave the impression that he could be easily controlled.²⁴ Because his own election was tenuous, Valentinian faced a crisis of legitimacy from the very beginning; make one wrong move and the very people who bestowed the empire upon him could take it away. Luckily for Valentinian, his powerful opening speech to the soldiers gave him room to maneuver.

Valentinian's appointment of his brother Valens as co-emperor makes much more sense when considered through the lens of legitimacy. Within days of his elevation, the emperor called the army's highest-ranking men to counsel to advise him on the selection of a co-emperor. After a period of silence, Dagalaif, a cavalry commander, spoke up: "Your highness, if you love your kin you have a brother, but if you love the state look carefully for a man to invest with the purple" (Amm. Marc. 26.4.1; *'si tuos amas' inquit. 'imperator optime, habes fratrem; si rem publicam, quaere quem vestias'*). Valentinian, annoyed by this response, ignored Dagalaif's advice and officially appointed his brother as co-emperor on March 28, about a month after his own elevation.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid. 351, 353.

²³ Ibid. 353

²⁴ Ibid.

This was a decision made with dynastic principles in mind. As John Matthews writes: “the trouble with choosing the ‘best man’, as Valentinian realised, was that it left too many disappointed candidates; the advantage with brothers is that no one can question that this is what they are.”²⁵ Malcolm Errington concurs with Matthews’s assessment of Valentinian’s choice.²⁶ Were he not Valentinian’s brother, Valens would not have been an obvious selection. As Noel Lenski says of Valens: “he was not handsome, he was not educated, he was not well born, he was not charismatic, he was not particularly brave, and he was not especially intelligent.”²⁷ Additionally, he did not have any high-ranking military credentials to recommend him as Valentinian had.²⁸ Zosimus records that “he [Valens] had been accustomed to a life of ease and, when of a sudden he received his realm, he could not sustain the administration” (Zos. 4.4). Although technically equal, there was a clear hierarchy with Valentinian as the superior Augustus (Am. Marc. 26.5.1). Regardless of the credentials of the brothers, their accession would prove to be a watershed moment in Roman history. Valentinian’s brief time as sole emperor was the last time that the Eastern and Western halves of the Roman Empire were united under a singular ruler.²⁹

Even after Valens had been elevated, the brothers continued their attempts to create a bulwark of legitimacy around themselves. According to St. John Chrysostom, Charito, Jovian’s widow, feared that actions would be taken against her or her young son, Varronian (Joh. Chrys.

²⁵ Matthews, *The Roman Empire*, 190.

²⁶ Errington, *Roman Imperial Policy*, 21.

²⁷ Noel Lenski, *Failure of Empire: Valens and the Roman State in the Fourth Century AD* (Berkeley, 2002), 1.; Lenski is drawing on Ammianus in making this claim, mainly his obituary in 31.14.

²⁸ Lenski, *Failure of Empire*, 52.

²⁹ Errington, *Roman Imperial Policy*, 21.

Ad vid iun. 4). Her fears did eventually come to pass. Although Varronian was allowed to live, an eye was gouged out to prevent him from being able to assume the throne (Joh. Chrys. *In. epist. Ad Philip.* 15.5). While cruel actions of this nature were not uncommon, the brothers' fear of usurpation and revolt was so strong that they did not hesitate to gouge out the eye of a defenseless child to secure their position.

However, Valentinian and, to a lesser extent, Valens attempted to shore up their legitimacy through less unsavory means as well mainly through the issuing of a barrage of new laws in the years 364-365. As noted by Sebastian Schmidt-Hofner, 364-365 yielded nearly four times the number of *constitutions*—laws which had general force throughout the Empire—than average.³⁰ Schmidt-Hofner also makes note of the crisis of legitimacy faced by the young dynasty; the brothers had few imperial credentials and were attempting to replace the seventy-year-old Constantinian dynasty.³¹ The public nature of imperial legislation helped to grant the brothers legitimacy. Schmidt-Hofner writes: “the receipt and posting of an imperial edict in a city was a public event: one went to the place where it was published, uncovered one’s head, bowed or even threw one’s self to the ground, and read the documents.”³² The ceremonial aspect of legislation created an opportunity for imperial propaganda, an opportunity quickly seized by the brothers. Some of the laws issued by Valentinian and Valens, such as one providing for the resettlement of veterans, did not have legal precedent, although veterans had been well taken care of in the past.³³

³⁰ Sebastian Shmidt-Hofner, “Ostentatious Legislation: Law and Dynastic Change, AD 364-365,” in *Contested Monarchy: Integrating the Roman Empire in the Fourth Century AD* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 67.

³¹ *Ibid.* 68.

³² *Ibid.* 72

³³ *Ibid.* 70-71.; *Cod. Theod.* 7.20.8.

Laws of this nature were issued to ensure the loyalty of the army: “by this means, and by the honorific gesture that the edict signified—the *merita* of the soldiers are explicitly emphasized—the new emperors sought to secure the allegiance of a group of men on whose loyalty everything depended, especially in the first months of their rule.”³⁴

Some laws, however, not only had legal precedent, but were a direct affirmation of an already existing practice. One such law was passed to appease the Senate which remained a powerful force within the Empire. Addressed to Symmachus, the urban prefect, the law confirmed that the property of those condemned to death would pass to their heirs, unless they were executed for treason (*Cod. Theod.* 9.42.6). Although technically a new law, it merely confirmed an existing privilege, and Schmidt-Hofner argues that this shows that “legislation served communicative rather than legal ends.”³⁵ These efforts by the brothers to shore up their legitimacy, however, did not mean that dissent did not occur, most notably the eastern revolt of Procopius in 364.

Procopius was a relative of Julian from a noble family in Cilicia, and upon Julian’s death there were rumors that he had nominated Procopius as his successor (*Amm. Marc.* 26.6.1;3).³⁶ Ammianus reports that Procopius remained hidden and lurked in the shadows of Constantinople; absorbing all the gossip regarding Valens’ cruelty and rapacity, he waited for the perfect chance to seize power for himself (*Amm. Marc.* 26.6.6-10). This chance presented itself when Valens, journeying to Syria, dispatched forces to confront the Goths in Thrace. These troops spent two days in Constantinople. Procopius convinced these legions to join him, thereby launching his bid for the throne (*Amm. Marc.* 26.6.11-14).

³⁴ *Ibid.* 73.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 77.

³⁶ Cilicia is located in southeastern Turkey.

Procopius' rebellion created a dilemma for Valentinian; he had just reached Paris to prepare to campaign against the Alamanni when word of the revolt reached him. Ammianus tells us: "he was in much doubt how best to suppress Procopius' coup before it gathered strength, especially since he did not know whether Valens was still alive or whether Procopius' attempt was the result of Valens' death" (Amm. Marc. 26.5.9).³⁷ We see here the difficulty of communication between East and West; it was very difficult for Valentinian to determine the true nature of the revolt without being there himself. This was a fact which Procopius exploited by sending out fake messengers, announcing in the East that Valentinian had died, thereby weakening Valens' claim to the throne (Amm. Marc. 26.7.3).³⁸ After spending a great deal of time reflecting on his course of action, Valentinian concluded that "Procopius was his own and his brother's enemy, whereas the Alamanni were enemies of the whole Roman world," and thus he remained in Gaul (Amm. Marc. 26.5.13; *hostem suum fratrisque solius esse Procopium, Alamannos vero totius orbis Romani*). However, Valentinian did strengthen the military presence in Illyricum and Africa as a precautionary measure in case Procopius attempted to invade the West (Amm. Marc. 26.5.11;14). Although Procopius' revolt eventually ended in failure, the danger it posed further shows the fragile nature of the new regime and how a crafty rebel could manipulate truth and take advantage of the distance between the emperors.

³⁷ *Super appetitu vero Procopi, antequam aduisceret, reprimando, curis diducebatur ambiguis, ea potissimum ratione sollicitus, quod ignorabat utrum Valente superstite, an extincto, memoratus imperium affectarat*

³⁸ Matthews, *The Roman Empire*, 198.

Holding Power: 367-369

The Alamanni would be the main Germanic threat confronted personally by Valentinian throughout his reign. During Julian's reign as Caesar—the term for the junior emperor in Late Empire—he had resoundingly defeated the Alamanni on multiple occasions, most notably at the Battle of Strasbourg in 357 (Amm. Marc. 16.12). However, by the time Valentinian arrived, the West had not been directly ruled by an emperor since 361, and the situation had deteriorated. Ursatius, the *Magister Officiorum* in Gaul, had goaded the Alamanni into renewing hostilities with the Empire:

Hac ex causa solito infestius moti. Cum legatis eorum, missis ad comitatum, certa et praestituta ex more munera praeberi deberent, minora et vilia sunt attributa, quae illi suscepta, furenter agentes ut indignissima proiecere.

the reason for their exceptional hostility was that the envoys whom they sent to Roman headquarters to receive the regular gifts that they had come to expect were fobbed off with smaller and cheaper presents, which they thought unworthy of them and threw away in a rage. After rough handling by Ursatius, master of the offices, a cruel and passionate man, they went home with an exaggerated account of the matter and roused their savage countrymen to revenge the insulting treatment they had received.

(Amm. Marc. 26.5)

Unfortunately, this would become a common theme in Valentinian's reign: an incompetent official creating an unnecessary conflict which the emperor would then be forced to deal with. Valentinian was forced to react to events as they happened rather than be proactive in confronting potential problems. In this instance, Valentinian, residing in nearby Paris, was able to defeat the Alamanni due to the skill of his general Jovinus in what would be the first of many such victories (Amm. Marc. 26.5, 27.1-2).

In 367, Valentinian fell seriously ill, and the tenuous nature of his power was on full display. Although the emperor still lived, the army was already discussing who would be his replacement. At a secret meeting, the Gallic officers proposed Rusticus Julianus, while others—

Ammianus does not specify who—supported Severus, the *Magister Peditum*.³⁹ In the end, Valentinian recovered and, realizing the precariousness of his position, immediately raised his son Gratian, still only a child, to be his co-emperor (Amm. Marc. 27.6). During this episode, Valentinian showed a troubling tendency to reward those who appealed to his vanity. After Valentinian gave his speech, Ammianus tells us that: “Eupraxius, a native of Mauretania Caesariensis, who was master of the records, gave a lead by shouting: 'The family of Gratian deserves this honour.' He was at once promoted to the quaestorship, an office in which he set an example of noble independence which wise men should follow” (Amm. Marc. 27.6; *Eupraxius (Caesariensis Maurus) magister ea tempestate memoriae, primum omnium exclamavit: “Familia Gratiani hoc meretur” statimque promotus quaestor multa et prudentibus aemulanda bonae fiduciae reliquit exempla*). While in this instance Eupraxius proved to be a noble official, Valentinian set a clear example that flattery would lead to promotion and power during his reign.

That Valentinian was frightened for the continuation of his dynasty after his death is apparent when examining coins from his reign; many of those found in France bear Gratian’s image.⁴⁰ These coins, issued in the wake of Gratian’s elevation as co-emperor, were meant to send a clear message to any Gaul who supported a different candidate: the succession had already been resolved. Interestingly, Valentinian also tried to exert the supremacy of the Western Empire through his eastern coinage. J.W.E Pearce writes that the emperor “was careful that the solidarity of the Roman empire should be marked by uniformity of coinage in West and East, and that, to

³⁹ “Master of Foot”

⁴⁰ J. W. E Pearce, “AES Coinage of Valentinian I: The Evidence from Hoards,” *The Numismatic Chronicle and Journal of the Royal Numismatic Society* 8, no. 1/2 (1948): 72.

show where the leadership lay, this uniform coinage should follow western types.”⁴¹ Despite this initiative, Valentinian was powerless to enforce these goals, and the eastern mints were often reluctant to follow them, as evidenced by a lack of bronze Gratianic coins.⁴² Notably, we have almost no bronze coins of Gratian struck in Antioch.⁴³ Valentinian’s inability to get his own mints to issue coins conforming to his standards shows his inability to properly project his power. He had no means of enforcing his prescriptions on these Eastern mints, and thus they had license to act however they pleased.

Despite frustrations like the minting of proper coinage, Valentinian continued to prove himself a competent commander, conducting another successful campaign against the Alamanni in 368. After organizing the assassination of the dangerous King Vithicabius, Valentinian, alongside Gratian, led a large army across the Rhine and deep into Germania. There he defeated a large enemy force, although he was almost killed in the leadup to the battle (Amm. Marc. 27.10).

At around the same time as these successes, the emperor also found a reliable general.⁴⁴ Rightly being concerned over a *barbarica conspiratione* (barbarian conspiracy) which “reduced the provinces of Britain to the verge of ruin,” Valentinian sent a substantial force to Britain (Amm. Marc. 27.8.1-3; *nuntio percellitur gravi, qui Britannias indicabat barbarica conspiratione ad ultimam vexatas inopiam*). Theodosius the Elder, the father of the future emperor Theodosius, was eventually assigned the command. This “barbarian conspiracy” posed a serious threat to Roman

⁴¹ Ibid. 66.

⁴² According to Pearce, bronze coins were more useful for propaganda purposes because they were the only coins minted at every mint and bore the same images (66-67).

⁴³ Ibid. 68.

⁴⁴ The exact sequence of events is disputed; see Roger Tomlin, “The Date of the Barbarian Conspiracy,” *Britannia* 5 (1974): 303–9.

interests in both Britain and Gaul and prefigured what was to come in the years ahead. In the past, the Germanic tribes had rarely united, and, when they did, the confederations were short-lived. Peter Salway argues that, although he is unnamed, there must have been a powerful, charismatic chief who was able to cause the various tribes to set aside their differences and launch a concerted campaign.⁴⁵ The extent of the damage and rebuilding is corroborated in the archaeological evidence as well, although it is difficult to date all of it to 367.⁴⁶ Making matters worse, the Romans had to deal with treachery as well. The *Areani*, a native force tasked with gathering intelligence about threats beyond the British frontier rebelled, although the extent is not clear (Amm. Marc. 28.3.8). Salway suggests that they may have given true intelligence to the barbarians and false information to their Roman commanders.⁴⁷ Although seemingly a small inconvenience, this would have taken precious time away from the already outmatched Roman garrisons. In addition, many deserted from the Roman garrison forces in the chaos, and many of these took up banditry in the undefended countryside. Others deserted by declaring that they were on leave, but the effect was the same.⁴⁸

Entering the fray, Theodosius did an admirable job restoring order and quickly relieved Londinium, “almost before it could have hoped for rescue” (Amm. Marc. 27.8.8; *quam salus sperari potuit recreatam*). He refrained from any additional plundering although it was well within his ability to do so. Ammianus claims that Theodosius “restored everything to its owners except for a small part which he distributed to his exhausted troops” (Amm. Marc. 27.8.8; *Eisdemque*

⁴⁵ Peter Salway, *Roman Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 376.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 380.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 377

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 379

restituta omni praeter partem exiguam, impensam militibus fessis). Then, after reflecting deeply as to how to proceed to pacify the rest of the island, he settled upon a plan of “promising immunity to deserters who returned to the colours and summoning many others who were dispersed in various places on furlough.” (Amm. Marc. 27.8.10; *Denique edictis propositis, impunitateque promissa, desertores ad procinctum vocabat, et multos alios per diversa libero commeatu dispersos*). Following this proclamation, a trickle of men began to flock back to Londinium. That Theodosius offered immunity to these deserters, who themselves played a part in plunging Britain into chaos, suggests the dire nature of the situation. Only if the situation were truly dire would Theodosius have pardoned their banditry. The weakness of the Roman state allowed these men to behave however they wished with no consequence. To conclude the first phase of the campaign, Theodosius sent for two competent officials to govern the province under him (Amm. Marc. 27.8.10).

Having secured Londinium and the south coast, Theodosius turned his attentions to the rest of the island. Utilizing guerilla tactics “he routed and put to flight various tribes, whose burning eagerness to attack anything Roman was fanned by the belief that they could do so with impunity. He completely restored towns and forts which had suffered a series of calamities” (Amm. Marc. 28.3.2; *fusis variis gentibus et fugatis, quas insolentia nutriente securitate, aggredi Romanas res inflammabat, in integrum restituit civitates et castra, multiplicibus quidem damnis afflictis*).

One final difficulty would confront Theodosius’ British campaign: the agitation of the banished Valentinus, the brother in-law of the infamous Maximin.⁴⁹ Ammianus writes of Valentinus that, “like the beast of prey he resembled he could not keep quiet, but embarked on a fresh career of mischief nursing a particular grudge against Theodosius, whom he looked upon as the only

⁴⁹ Maximin’s role in the Roman purge will be discussed in chapter 3.

obstacle to his wicked designs” (Amm. Marc. 28.3.4).⁵⁰ Taking advantage of the chaos, Valentinus worked with other exiles and bribed soldiers to join him, although their ultimate goal is unclear. Theodosius’ agents were able to root out the plot, and Valentinus and his co-conspirators were executed (Amm. Marc. 28.3.5-6). Ammianus writes glowingly of how Theodosius completely restored and rebuilt the province, but “some historians suggest that the subsequent reconstruction of the British diocese by Theodosius the Elder may have marked the beginning of the end of Roman rule in the far north, where British tribal leaders were perhaps entrusted with the security of territories now denuded of Roman garrisons.”⁵¹ Regardless, Theodosius’ campaign should still be viewed as a major success. As Salway says:

even discounting a strong element of panegyric in the account [Ammianus wrote during the reign of Theodosius’ son], the military achievement was a great one. This was not just success in the field but ranged from the initial and accurate analysis of the situation, through the rebuilding of a demoralized and disintegrating army into part of a force that went on to victory, and was rounded off by the replanning and physical reconstruction of the defensive system of Britain.⁵²

In this light, Theodosius’ successes serve as an example of how resilient Roman forces remained when commanded by a competent, loyal official. In the same vein, this particular example serves as a foil for the many instances in which a crisis was managed inadequately. There is a strong correlation between Roman success and the competency of imperial officials.⁵³ Once Valentinian made his appointment, he was forced to trust that his appointee would handle the situation correctly; unless the theater was close to Gaul, he was powerless to do anything else.

⁵⁰ *quietis impatiens ut malefica bestia, ad res perniciosas consurgebat et novas, in Theodosium tumore quodam, quem solum resistere posse nefandis cogitationibus advertibat*

⁵¹ Michael E Jones, *The End of Roman Britain* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1996), 245.

⁵² Salway, *Roman Britain*, 382-383.

⁵³ For a negative example, see Romanus in chapter 2.

CHAPTER TWO

The Outsize Effect of Romanus, *Comes Africae*: A Case Study

In 363, the Roman citizens of the city of Lepcis Magna, the capital of the Roman province of Tripolitania, were in danger. The native Austorians were raiding the surrounding countryside, so the citizens appealed to Romanus for aid. Newly appointed as the military commander of North Africa, the *comes Africae*, Romanus would be harshly criticized by Ammianus. Unfortunately, the citizens would be sorely disappointed by Romanus' actions, or lack thereof. Instead of aiding the beleaguered citizens, Romanus, "would not take the field unless he were furnished with abundant supplies and 4,000 camels... and after bamboozling them for about forty days, the count departed without having made any effort to do anything whatever" (Amm. Marc. 28.6.5-6; *non nisi abundantiam commeatu aggesto, et camelorum quattuor milibus apparatis, castra firmabant esse moturum...dissimulanter diebus ibi quadraginta consumptis, nullo temptatio, inde discesserat comes*). This initial incident set off a protracted legal struggle between Romanus and his allies on one side and the Tripolitarians on the other. Both sides presented conflicting narratives and interpretations of the Austorianic raids to Valentinian, making it difficult for him to adjudicate between the two narratives because of his dearth of reliable information. The Lepcian affair illustrates the freedom of action held by local magistrates at the expense of imperial power; able

to obfuscate the emperor's view of the situation, Romanus had the ability to act as he pleased to the detriment of the Empire.

Although North Africa was a normally stable, profitable region of the Roman Empire, it was also the scene of another disturbance during the reign of Valentinian: the revolt of Firmus, also involving Romanus.⁵⁴ A local Moorish succession crisis that should have been, at most, a peripheral issue was transformed by Romanus' personal loyalties into a revolt led by Firmus, the son a recently deceased Moorish petty king. Firmus' rebellion exposed many facets of the Late Roman state, such as tribal politics but, while touched upon, those issues are largely outside the scope of this study. Instead, I will focus principally on the build-up to the revolt, in which Romanus used his connections at Valentinian's court to back Firmus into a corner, leaving him no choice but to rebel, as well as the subsequent arrest of Romanus once the general Theodosius arrived in North Africa. Romanus' involvement in the sparking of the Firmus Revolt is the perfect example of how a local official could have a great effect on the military calculations and decisions of the emperor.

The Lepcis Affair

A fair amount of secondary scholarship exists on the Lepcis affair. John Matthews believes that Ammianus' work, our only literary account of the affair, is biased in favor of the townsfolk principally because his words echo two inscription. However, upon examining the Latin of both Ammianus (28.6.28) and the inscriptions in question (IRT 475, 526), I do not see

⁵⁴ Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 275.

the same “uncanny echo” as Matthews.⁵⁵ “It would be naive for a modern reader of Ammianus to attribute blame or distribute imputations of wickedness among the various participants in this unhappy business,” writes Matthews, “once the first steps were taken, all were trapped in a cycle of violence and retribution beyond any of their powers to control.”⁵⁶ While it is fair to argue that Ammianus is clearly in support of the Tripolitanian position, Matthews leaves several key details out of his argument in his attempt to distribute blame equally among all the parties involved, including the entirety of Remigius’ involvement, Romanus’ blackmail of Palladius, and the letter found by Theodosius which implicated Palladius in Romanus’ corruption.⁵⁷

Peter Heather also extensively discusses the Lepcis affair, but he does so with a focus on long term trends. Unlike Matthews, Heather seems to accept Ammianus’ account. In analyzing the evidence, Heather argues that the entire affair shows that the imperial government could not make effective decisions without accurate provincial information.⁵⁸ Similarly important however is to not overstate the significance of “Lepcisgate” (as he calls it), since corruption is an endemic part of human government in all times and places.⁵⁹ While this is true, I would argue that Romanus’ corruption, while normal, placed considerable strain on the ability of the empire to function properly in Tripolitania; this was not mere extortion or greed. Other scholars, such as Malcolm Errington, also touch on the Lepcis affair and seem to mostly accept Ammianus’ account, although they analyze it in much less detail. B.H. Warmington writes the most

⁵⁵ Matthews, *The Roman Empire*, 387. Inscriptions taken from: J.M Reynolds and J.B. Ward Perkins, eds., *Inscriptions of Roman Tripolitania*, 1952.

⁵⁶ Matthews, *The Roman Empire*, 387.

⁵⁷ These will all be discussed later in the chapter.

⁵⁸ Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 103–4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 102–3.

comprehensive secondary analysis of the Lepcis affair, and it is to his work that this chapter is most indebted.

The Austorianic raids in 364, occurring before Jovian's death and being more penetrative than usual, originally sparked the scandal.⁶⁰ Despite their severity, Romanus refused to come to the Tripolitarians' aid without first receiving "abundant supplies and 4,000 camels" (Amm. Marc. 28.6.5). While at first blush the demand for camels may seem exorbitant, John Matthews argues that these camels were essential to combat the mobility of the Austoriani and that, therefore, Romanus' demands were not excessive.⁶¹ In contrast, Peter Heather points out that the local garrison forces were already quite mobile, although they were not necessarily suited for a major engagement.⁶² I am more inclined to agree with Heather. If the local troops were there specifically to control the local tribesmen, it would be strange if they did not have the basic resources to accomplish this very job. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine how 4,000 camels would suddenly have transformed Romanus' force into a formidable army.

However, there is some debate as to whether the citizens were even obligated at that time to supply Romanus. A law from the 320s which was reaffirmed by Valentinian states: "Tiberianus, having regard for the ability of each place, decided on certain lands upon which the duty should be imposed to carry grain to the border" (*Cod. Iust.* XI.60.1; *Imperatores Valentinianus, Valens, Gratianus. Tiberianus ad possibilitatem singulorum quorumque locorum intuens statuit certas*

⁶⁰ Errington, *Roman Imperial Policy*, 72.

⁶¹ Matthews, John, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*, 1989, 384.

⁶² Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 276.

possessiones, quae ad litem frumenta conveherent).⁶³ Warmington also cites this law along with others from the Theodosian Code which indicate that it was the responsibility of the local landowners to supply the local garrison forces, the *limes*.⁶⁴ But this system seems to be illogical. How could the citizens furnish supplies to Romanus when those very supplies had just been stolen? According to Ammianus, the Tripolitarians themselves made this argument: “they declared that after all that they had suffered from burning and looting they could not meet such prodigious demands, even to recoup their tremendous losses” (Amm. Marc. 28.6.6; *sufficere se posse post vastationes et incendia ita enormibus instrumentis remedia quaerere damnorum immanium*).

Because it is illogical to suggest that the citizens of an affected area needed to supply the *comes ad hoc*, it appears more likely that these supplies were meant as part of regular taxation and stored in one or more central locations. Two juxtaposed laws in the Theodosian Code support this reading. Both were issued by Valentinian after the Lepcis affair had begun and were addressed to Dracontius, the *vicarius* who, after Diocletian’s governmental reforms, was responsible for a single diocese.⁶⁵ The timing and addressee of these two laws serve as evidence that they were issued in direct response to the incident at Lepcis.⁶⁶ They read thusly:

Omnes, qui per Africam opulentas desertasve centurias possident, ad integrum professionis modum necessitati publicae satisfaciant.

All possessors of rich or abandoned centuries of land throughout Africa shall satisfy their compulsory public services to the full measure of tax declarations.

(*Cod. Theod.* XI.1.10)

⁶³ B.H Warmington, “The Career of Romanus, Comes Africae,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 49, no. 1 (1956): 56. The translation is my own.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 56.

⁶⁵ Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, eds., *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁶⁶ Warmington, “The Career of Romanus,” 57.

Pro loco ac proximitate possessionum annona ad limitem transvehatur. Quae iussio haut difficile capit effectum, si tabularii metu praesentium tormentorum a consuetis fraudibus arceantur.

The payments of taxes in kind shall be conveyed to the frontier in accordance with the situation and proximity of the landholdings. This order takes effect without difficulty, if the registrars through fear of ever-present torture may be kept from their customary fraudulent practices.

(*Cod. Theod.* XI.1.11).⁶⁷

Both laws appear to be attempts to better enforce the collection of taxes in kind throughout the African provinces. Warmington speculates that Dracontius probably sent his own report to Valentinian, and it is from here that the law's warning to the "registrars" originates, as Dracontius may have laid part of the blame at the feet of these lower officials. Even if Dracontius' claim were true, Warmington argues that the Tripolitani could still have claimed that Romanus did nothing to protect them. This would explain why Romanus resorted to corruption at court to defend himself.⁶⁸

Another law, issued by Julian in 357, is issued against a *comes Africae* who illegally took from the supply stores, implying that these military taxes were in fact stored in one or more central locations and not collected *ad hoc*.⁶⁹ The law also, however, specifies that the supplies are to be furnished "in accordance with the situation and proximity of the landholdings." This implies that, at the very least, the taxes of local landowners were to be used for their own defense, not for the defense of distant reaches of Roman Africa. Using this specific law, I will go further than Warmington and argue that Romanus did in fact act illegally in making his demands for "abundant supplies and 4,000 camels" (*Amm. Marc.* 28.6.5). The law states: "hereafter, supplies cannot be

⁶⁷ Translation Taken from: Clyde Pharr, trans., "Codex Theodosianus" (Princeton University Press, 1952).

⁶⁸ Warmington, "The Career of Romanus," 57.

⁶⁹ *Cod. Theod.* VII.4.3.

thus appropriated without the authority of the vicar, unless the vicar is notified in writing by the count and is informed of the number of subsistence allowances and to whom they must be issued, and unless he decrees that this must be done” (*Cod. Theod.* VII.4.3; *hoc de cetero citra vicarii arbitrium fieri non potest, si vicarius comitis scriptione conventus didicerit, qui numerus annonarum et quibus debet erogari, atque id fieri oportere censuerit*). Ammianus, however, did not report that Romanus followed this proper channel. Rather, “he would not take the field unless he were furnished with abundant supplies and 4,000 camels” (*Amm. Marc.* 28.6.5). I do not think that Romanus followed the proper protocols of this law for several reasons. First, the ire of Ammianus and the citizens of Lepcis seems directed principally at Romanus. Dracontius, the *vicarius*, mentioned briefly by Ammianus, does not receive the same hostile treatment as Romanus.⁷⁰ Immediately before Dracontius is mentioned, Romanus and his kinsman at court, Remigius, are referred to as “partners in extortion” (*Amm. Marc.* 28.6.8; *affinem suum vel rapinarum participem*). Surely if Romanus’ demands were sanctioned by Dracontius, he would have received some of the same hostile treatment. Secondly, as discussed above, the *vicarius*’ stores were levied as part of the tax system and were not meant to be acquired by either the *comes* or the *viacrius ad hoc*, as Romanus attempted to do. Finally, the section of the Justinianic Code cited earlier, specifically mandates that *grain (frumenti)* be supplied by local landholders, not livestock, and certainly not 4,000 camels (*Cod. Iust.* XI.60.1). Thus, based on these laws Romanus did not have the legal right to demand “abundant supplies and 4,000 camels” (*Amm. Marc.* 28.6.5) from the citizens.

Regardless of these legal niceties, the fact remains that Romanus did nothing to help his constituents. Instead, “after bamboozling them for about forty days, the count departed without

⁷⁰ *Amm. Marc.* 28.6.8

having made any effort to do anything whatever” (Amm. Marc. 28.6.5; *dissimulanter diebus ibi quadraginta consumptis, nullo temptatio, inde discesserat comes*). As might be expected, the Tripolitanians did not take kindly to Romanus’ lack of action, sending two envoys, Severus and Flaccian, to Valentinian as part of the ritual surrounding his accession. The Tripolitanians followed the appropriate protocols for petitioning the emperor on behalf of a beleaguered city.⁷¹ Romanus, however, resorted to corruption to protect himself. As soon as the *comes* heard that Severus and Flaccian had been sent to Valentinian, he immediately moved to intercept:

Quibus compertis, Romanus, misso equite velocissimo, magistrum officiorum petit Remigium, affinem suum vel rapinarum participem, ut provideret imperatoris arbitrio cognitionem huius negotii Vincentio vicario sibi que deferri. Venerunt in comitatum legati, aditque principe, verbis quae perpepsi sunt ostenderunt: obtulerunt decreta, textum continentia rei totius. Quibus lectis cum neque relationi officiorum magistri, faventis Romani flagitiis, nec contraria referentibus crederetur

Romanus sent a horseman at top speed to the master of the offices Remigius ...telling him to see that the investigation of the matter was referred by imperial decree to himself and the vice-prefect Dracontius. The envoys reached the court, had an audience with the emperor, and made a verbal report of their sufferings supported by an official document setting out the whole course of the affair. The emperor read it, but refused to give credence either to the report of the master of the offices, who sought to put Romanus’ misconduct in a favorable light, or to that of the envoys who asserted the opposite

(Amm. Marc. 28.6.8-9).

Two things about this passage are notable. First is the Latin grammar chosen by Ammianus. The use of ablative absolutes “*Quibus compertis*” (“and with these things having been learned”) and “*misso equite velocissimo*” (“sending for a most swift horse”) emphasize the assertiveness and haste of his actions. Additionally, Romanus does not merely send for a swift horse, *equite veloce*, but a *most* swift horse *equite velocissimo*; the use of the superlative emphasizes his desire to counter the Tripolitanians as quickly as possible. Second, is the fact that Romanus asked Remigius

⁷¹ Matthews, *The Roman Empire*, 385.

to petition that the investigation of the affair be given to Romanus himself as well as Dracontius, a clear conflict of interest; Romanus would never find himself guilty of wrongdoing.

Valentinian himself was unsure how to respond to the conflicting messages he received. On the one hand, the residents of the province were bringing serious charges of negligence against Romanus, but Remigius, his trusted *Magister Officiorum*, was simultaneously vouching for the same official. The *Magister Officiorum* was one of the most important positions within the imperial bureaucracy at this time, lower in rank than only the praetorian prefects themselves.⁷² Valentinian ended up siding with neither. Ammianus reports: “He promised a full inquiry, which, however, was put off, as such things often are, when advantage is taken of their being occupied with more important business to hoodwink the holders of supreme power” (Amm. Marc. 28.6.9; *promissa disceptatio plena dilata est eo more, quo solent inter potiorum occupationes ludi potestates excelsae*). It was at this point that the emperor both reaffirmed the law issued to Tiberianus which was discussed earlier and issued the two laws to Dracontius. This very well could have been the end of the affair had the Austoriani not attacked again. Hearing of the second attack, Valentinian finally decided to send Palladius, a notary, to pay the African troops and assess the situation (Amm. Marc. 28.6.10-12).

Unfortunately for the Tripolitarians, Palladius did not provide the relief they were hoping for. Romanus, seeing the danger Palladius posed, quickly devised a scheme to blackmail him, instructing the local commanders to allow Palladius to keep some of the money he was meant to deliver (Amm. Marc. 28.6.16). Before Palladius even arrived, the Austoriani attacked once more, this time daring to besiege Lepcis itself. In response, the Tripolitarians again sent emissaries, Pancratius and Jovinus, to Valentinian (Amm. Marc. 28.6.15-16). Once he arrived, Palladius was

⁷² Hornblower and Spawforth, *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*.

given a tour of the destruction by two local dignitaries, Erechthius and Aristomenes. Ammianus reports what transpired next:

Quibus aperte cuncta monstrantibus, luctuosis provinciae cineribus visis revertit, Romanumque ut desidem increpans, relaturum se cuncta verissime, quae viderat, minabatur ad principem. Atque ille ira percitus et dolore, se quoque mox referre firmavit, quod missus ut notarius incorruptus, donativum militis omne in quaestus averterit proprios. Qua gratia flagitiorum arbitra conscientia, cum Romano deinde Palladius concordabat, reversusque ad comitatum, arte mendaciorum impia Valentinianum fefellerat, Tripolitanos frustra queri commemorans.

He returned and reproached Romanus for his inactivity, threatening to give a true account of all he had seen to the emperor. Romanus in a furious passion retorted that he too would shortly make a report to the effect that the supposedly incorruptible notary had diverted to his own pocket all the money intended for the troops. The result was that Palladius, with such a load on his conscience, acted thenceforth in concert with Romanus, and when he returned to the court misled Valentinian by a wicked lie to the effect that there was no substance in the complaints of the people of Tripolis.

(Amm. Marc. 28.6.19-20)

After hearing this report from Palladius and believing that the Tripolitarians had intentionally misled him, Valentinian turned his ire onto the Tripolitarians. Pancratius had died on his mission to Valentinian, and Palladius “was sent back to Africa with Jovinus...with instructions to look into the credentials of the second mission also” (Amm. Marc. 28.6.20; *Ideoque rursus ad Africam cum Iovino... ut cum vicario ipse merita legationis quoque secundae spectaret*). In addition, Valentinian immediately decreed that Erechthius and Aristomenes were to have their tongues cut out for allegedly lying to Palladius, and therefore to the emperor, about the events in the province (Amm. Marc. 28.6.20).

Realizing that his victory was nigh, Romanus, through the agency of his friend Caecilius and one of his other attendants, coerced the Tripolitarians, “whether by bribery or fraud is not clear, to lay all the blame on Jovinus, and assert positively that they had given him no instructions to report as he had to Valentinian” (Amm. Marc. 28.6.21; *per quos-incertum pretio an fallaciis-circumventi municipes omnes gravabant Iovinum, destinatus asserentes nihil eorum mandasse,*

quae docuerat principem). This is certainly one of the stranger parts of the saga, as even Ammianus admits that he is not sure how Caecilius managed this since the townspeople were not on good terms with Romanus. Perhaps the connection between Caecilius and Romanus was kept hidden causing the townsfolk to readily accept Caecilius' bribes. Or, as I think more likely, Jovinus had political enemies in the town who, since the worst of the raids seemed to have passed, saw an opportunity to rid themselves of a rival. Unfortunately, we will probably never know for certain. We do, however, know that Romanus' ploy worked, and "Jovinus was driven by fear for his life to confess that he had lied to the emperor" (Amm. Marc. 28.6.21; *Iovinus ad salutis suae discrimen confiteretur se imperatori mentitum*). Once this report reached Valentinian, he decreed that Jovinus, along with others, including Ruricius, the provincial governor who had reported on the raids, were to be put to death (Amm. Marc. 28.6.22).

This should have been the end of the affair were it not for a strange twist of fate. Ammianus puts it quite poetically: "By this remarkable outcome Tripolis, the victim of both domestic and external calamities, was reduced to silence. But she was not left without champions. The ever-open eye of Justice was on the watch, and the last curses uttered by the envoys and the governor had their effect" (Amm. Marc. 28.6.25; *Hoc memorando fine externis domesticisque cladibus vexata, conticuit Tripolis, non indefensa, quia vigilavit Iustitiae oculus sempiternus, ultimaeque legatorum et praesidia dirae*). After Theodosius arrived in Africa to suppress the Firmus Revolt in 372, he had Romanus arrested and, when going through Romanus' papers, found a letter which stated: "the disgraced Palladius sends you his greetings, and wishes you to know that the only reason for his disgrace was that in the affair of Tripolis he uttered a lie to the sacred ear of majesty" (Amm. Marc. 28.6.26; *Salutat te Palladius proiecticius, qui non aliam ob causam dicit se esse proiectum, nisi quod in causa Tripolitanorum apud aures sacras mentitus est*). After this discovery

was reported, the affair was finally concluded. Erechthius and Aristomenes came out of hiding, tongues intact. Palladius committed suicide to avoid punishment. Caecilius, after being tortured, confessed to inducing the townspeople to lie. Somewhat surprisingly, however, neither Caecilius nor Romanus were put to death.

The circumstances behind Romanus' arrest but subsequent lack of punishment are somewhat murky. Warmington postulates several different reasons for Romanus' arrest. The first is due to his sparking of the Firmus revolt, but he quickly dismisses this possibility because "it was not a common policy of the Emperors to disgrace a general for a mistake which caused a revolt," which certainly seems to be a very light-handed imperial response.⁷³ Additionally, there is no report in any source that Romanus was removed as an attempt to placate Firmus, and, regardless, his arrest did not stop the rebellion.⁷⁴ Warmington's second possibility is that Romanus was arrested for general corruption and extortion, as attested to by Ammianus.⁷⁵ He again dismisses this general corruption as the cause of his arrest, but strangely does not explain why this is the case.⁷⁶ Warmington believes his third hypothesis to be the most likely: a change in the factional makeup of Valentinian's court. In 373, after Firmus' revolt began, Romanus' chief ally was Remigius, a Gaul, who was replaced by the Pannonian Leo, a close ally of Maximin who conducted sorcery trials at Rome (see chapter 3). Maximin then began investigating the now-retired Remigius causing him to commit suicide (Amm. Marc. 30.9.11-12). Warmington argues that this event

⁷³ Warmington, "The Career of Romanus," 61.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Amm. Marc. 27.9.2; 29.5.6.

⁷⁶ Warmington, "The Career of Romanus," 61.

happened after the arrest of Romanus, and the planned prosecution of Remigius, even if justified, was possibly factionally motivated.⁷⁷

The question then becomes why was Romanus never punished? Again, this is unclear from the sources. We do know that Remigius and Palladius committed suicide, but, contrarily, Romanus was still free and fighting to protect his name during the reign of Gratian.⁷⁸ It seems most likely that Romanus either found a more powerful defender or already had another at the imperial court, perhaps Valentinian himself. However, I believe the evidence tying Romanus and Valentinian together is too circumstantial to draw any real conclusions.⁷⁹ Regardless of the lack of legal consequences, Romanus' case provides a quintessential example of corruption in the Late Roman state, and the ability of individual magistrates to paralyze the response of the central imperial administration.

In conclusion, because of the actions of Romanus and the complicity of others at court, Tripolitania suffered much more severe damage than it would have otherwise. Valentinian, deliberately misled by corrupt officials, was unable to efficiently administer the province. Had he truly known what was going on, not only would the citizens of Lepcis have possibly been in safer hands, but the later revolt of Firmus might never have even happened as Romanus, one of the revolt's instigators, might not have had any authority over the region. The Lepcis scandal shows the extent of the freedom possessed by local magistrates in far-flung corners of the empire and how difficult it was for Valentinian to discipline a corrupt official if he was denied accurate information.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 62.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 64.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 62-64.

The Firmus Revolt

Romanus' second contribution to North African politics was the sparking of the revolt of Firmus which began in 372 in the province of Mauretania.⁸⁰ Firmus' revolt required much more attention from the central imperial government than the Lepcis affair because of his greater military threat and popular support, as evidenced by his ability to actively fight pitched battles as opposed to the hit and run tactics of the Austoriani.⁸¹ Valentinian was forced to send Theodosius to quell the uprising. Romanus' actions, which caused the revolt, again shows the power wielded by local magistrates and their ability to significantly affect the decision-making of the highest powers of the state.

The rebellion itself was closely connected with tribal politics. The death of Nubel, a powerful Moorish chieftain, led to a succession crisis and the assassination of one of Nubel's sons by concubinage, Zammac, by the legitimate Firmus (Amm. Marc. 29.5.2). In this far-flung section of the Roman Empire, local tribes and chieftains were able to hold considerable local power, in conjunction with the Roman state: "at one and the same time they guaranteed their own loyalty to the Roman power, and, through their control of the attitude of their tribesman, the peace of the province," and, writes Matthews, "this was a relatively un-Romanised part of the empire, where native culture and social structure survived and exercised great influence on the life of the Roman province."⁸² Nubel himself was a vital cog within this system.⁸³ Ammianus reports that Zammac had close personal ties with Romanus himself, prompting the *comes* to

⁸⁰ Modern day Algeria and Morocco

⁸¹ Matthews, *The Roman Empire*, 375.

⁸² Matthews, *The Roman Empire*, 371-372.

⁸³ Jan Willem Drijvers, "Ammianus on the Revolt of Firmus," in *Ammianus after Julian: The Reign of Valentinian and Valens in Books 26-31 of the Res Gestae* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 136.

vigorously attack Firmus, his friend's assassin, at court. Again, Romanus' kinship with Remigius was a crucial factor:

Utque rumores distulerant assidui, navabatur opera diligens in palatio, Romani quidem relationes, multa et aspera congerentes in Firmum, libenter suscipi recitarique principi, in earum favorem concinentibus multis, ea vero, quae contra Firmus saltuis tuendae gratia docebat crebro per suos, accepta, diutius occultari; Remigio...affine amicoque Romani, inter potiores imperatoris necessitates haec velut minima et superflua, non nisi opportune legi posse adservante.

vigorous measures were taken to make sure that the reports of Romanus, which heaped up many serious charges against Firmus, should be gladly received and brought to the knowledge of the emperor; and many voices united in supporting them. But, on the contrary, the arguments which Firmus through his friends frequently presented in his defence for the purpose of saving his life, although they were received, were long concealed; for Remigius... declared that amid the more important and pressing business of the emperor such trivial and superfluous communications could not be read until opportunity offered.

(Amm. Marc 29.5.2)⁸⁴

Realizing that Romanus' intrigues prevented him from adequately defending himself before the central government, Firmus felt he had no choice but to revolt (Amm. Marc. 29.5.3). If he could not make his case within the established structures of the empire, he would have to do so outside of it.

Upon closer analysis, the revolt of Firmus was avoidable. Similarly to his father, it seems as though he was an active part of the Roman imperial system, possibly even having a connection with local Roman troops.⁸⁵ "Were it not for Romanus' support of Zammac," writes Jan Willem Drijvers, "his extreme zeal to revenge Zammac's death and his machinations at court through his friend Remigius to prevent Firmus from presenting his case, the conflict would

⁸⁴ All translation from Ammianus regarding Firmus are taken from: Ammianus Marcellinus, *Ammianus Marcellinus*, trans. John C Rolfe, vol. 3, 3 vols., The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938).

⁸⁵ Drijvers, "Ammianus on the Revolt of Firmus," 135.

perhaps not have got out of hand.”⁸⁶ In the end, however, the conflict did get out of hand, and Firmus received a great deal of support. It took Theodosius two years to finally put the revolt down.⁸⁷ Zosimus also briefly touches upon the revolt of Firmus, claiming that the Mauritians had crowned Firmus emperor due to Romanus’ corruption (Zos. 4.16). Because it is unlikely that Ammianus and Eunapius, Zosimus’ main source for the period, used each other’s works, this serves as corroboration of Romanus’ corruption.⁸⁸

Drijvers argues that the revolt “was a warning that the stability of the African provinces depended on the proper functioning of the administration and due respect being paid to the leaders of provincial opinion,” a stability that had proven impossible under the authority of Romanus.⁸⁹ While it could be argued that Romanus was justly leveraging his power to avenge the assassination of his friend, this argument misses the point. Regardless of the moral culpability which may or may not be placed on Romanus’ shoulders, the revolt of Firmus serves as the preeminent example of how the actions of local officials could cause unnecessary, costly wars.

Not only was Firmus’ revolt avoidable, so too was some of the support he was able to garner, specifically that of the schismatic Donatists. St. Augustine, attempting to persuade the Donatist bishop of Cherchell to return to the Orthodox fold, writes: “I have not spoken concerning your bishop of Rusabiccari who is cited as having contracted the safety of his people with Firmus, so that the gates were opened to him and the Catholics were given into devastation”

⁸⁶ Ibid. 136.

⁸⁷ Ibid.; Errington, *Imperial Policy*, 73.

⁸⁸ Matthews, *The Roman Empire*, 161; 172.

⁸⁹ Errington, *Imperial Policy*, 73.

(Ep. 87.10; *Neque de Rusicayensi episcopo vestro, qui cum Firmo pactus perhibetur incolumitatem suorum, ut ei portae aperirentur, et in vastationem darentur Catholici*).⁹⁰ The bishop of Rusabiccari and other Donatists were driven to support Firmus for several reasons. Valentinian had shown his support for the Catholic cause by legislating against re-baptism, a critical part of Donatist theology (*Cod. Theod. XVI.6.1*). This law was not merely for show; Augustine, in a separate anti-Donatist work, concedes that Romanus punished (the Donatists would prefer the term persecuted) recalcitrant Donatists: “Macarius, Taurinus, and Romanus on behalf of unity either with judicial or executive authority did whatever against their [the Donatists] obstinate madness. It is agreed that they acted according to the laws” (*C. Lit. Petil. 3.29; Macarius vero et Taurinus et Romanus quidquid vel iudiciaria vel executoria potestate aduersus eorum obstinatum furorem pro unitate fecerunt, secundum leges eos fecisse constat*). Certainly, Romanus’ persecutions would have given the Donatists motivation to support Firmus’ rebellion.

W.H.C. Frend also believes that Ammianus provides evidence for Donatist support because of Augustine’s writings and Ammianus’ claim that Firmus sent “Christian bishops” with a peace embassy (*Amm. Marc. 29.5.15; Christiani antistites*). According to Frend, it would only make sense for these bishops to be Donatists.⁹¹ Matthews, on the other hand, disagrees that the Donatists were a significant base of support for Firmus. In his view, Frend’s statement that the bishops sent by Firmus were Donatists is mere speculation and the charge against the bishop of

⁹⁰ The translations of Augustine are my own.

⁹¹ WHC Frend, *The Donatist Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 73.

Rusabiccari must “be considered within Augustine’s polemical purpose.”⁹² Matthews, however, does not take into account Augustine’s admission that Romanus, and others, actively persecuted Donatists as well as Valentinian’s legislation against them. Although not going into much detail, Errington supports the view that the Donatists were, at least to some extent, in support of Firmus.⁹³ Drijvers elucidates the wider historiography and concludes that there is simply too much source material tying together Firmus and the Donatists to argue away all links between them. However, along the same lines as Matthews’ objections, care must be taken in assigning too much significance to their involvement.⁹⁴ I tend to take a middle ground between these views. Because of Romanus’ active hostility to the Donatists, in this case a hostility that was supported by Valentinian, it would make sense that Firmus, who did not persecute Donatists, would receive some support from them.

Regardless of its overall influence on the revolt, Firmus’ Donatist support shows how carefully Valentinian needed to tread in pursuing his religious policy. If pursued too vigorously, as done by Romanus, it could push otherwise loyal Roman citizens into the arms of rebels, but, if pursued not vigorously enough, Valentinian’s religious vision would not come to fruition.⁹⁵ Thus, the emperor had a fine line to walk, and the Donatist support of Firmus is yet another example of the difficulties he had in fully projecting his power into the provinces.

⁹² J. F. Matthews, “Mauretania in Ammianus and the Notitia,” in *Aspects of the Notitia Dignitatum: Papers Presented to the Conference in Oxford, December 13 to 15, 1974*, ed. R Goodburn and P Bartholomew (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1974), 178.

⁹³ Errington, *Imperial Policy*, 73.

⁹⁴ Drijvers, “Ammianus on the Revolt of Firmus,” 138.

⁹⁵ See chapter 3 for a wider analysis of Valentinian’s religious policy.

Conclusion

The career of Romanus as *comes Africae* can be illustrative of many different aspects of the Late Roman Empire: corruption, local politics, and the proper procedure to petition the emperor. However, the high level of independent authority Romanus was able to wield is striking. Through his crafty use of court connections, Romanus was able to conceal from Valentinian the true situation in Africa on more than one occasion, hindering an appropriate central response and exacerbating local problems. Throughout this study, many other local officials have been and will be discussed, some corrupt and some not, but none make quite the same impression as Romanus who “was detested for his brutality, and especially for his keenness to outdo the enemy in ravaging the provinces” (Amm. Marc. 27.9.2; *saevitia morum multis erat exosus, hac praecipue causa, quod superare hostes in vastandis provinciis festinabat*). Although many officials do not make the same impression as Romanus, he is the exception which proves the rule. Romanus is evidence that, if he wanted, a corrupt official in a remote corner of the Empire could wield tremendous, unchecked power. Valentinian did not hold the true power in these regions; rather, his power was contingent on and beholden to the imperial officials stationed there.

Chapter 3

The Church, the Eternal City, and the *Christianissimus Imperator*

The city of Rome, the once glorious imperial capital, was plunged into chaos in the early 370s. In one of the most highly debated moments of Valentinian's reign, Maximin, the emperor's pro-prefect from Pannonian, and Leo, his fellow Pannonian, spearheaded a political witch-hunt and purge in the city. Ancient privileges, such as senators being protected from torture, were temporarily lifted as part of a power struggle between Senate and Emperor. (Amm. Marc. 28.1.24-25). As just one example, a lawyer named Marinus "was accused of having employed black art to win the hand of Hispanilla, and Maximin after a perfunctory survey of the evidence condemned him to death" (Amm. Marc. 28.1.14; *Quem ut ausum Hispanillae cuiusdam, artibus pravis, affectasse coniugium, transeunter indiciorum fide discussa, supplico letali damnavit*). According to Ammianus, many others perished in a similar manner for similar reasons. More than any other moment in Valentinian's reign, Ammianus' biases and those of his sources are of supreme importance in the analysis of these shocking trials. One of Ammianus' main sources, Nicomachus Flavianus, was a Roman aristocrat and senatorial partisan which, according to Andreas Alföldi, explains Ammianus' pro-senatorial account.⁹⁶ Other scholars, such as John Matthews and Daniel

⁹⁶ Alföldi, *A Conflict of Ideas*, 3.

Dan Hengst, have pushed against Alföldi's thesis and claim that there is merit to Ammianus' account. The truth probably lies somewhere in the middle.

However, the purge was not the only example of chaos befalling the Eternal City during Valentinian's reign. Thanks to Ammianus, we are lucky to have a wealth of information about the happenings in the city. He records several instances of urban riots—some were severe enough to force the urban prefect himself to flee the city. Even the local officials, let alone Valentinian, were powerless to stop these spontaneous outbursts of violence, some of which came about because of mere rumors. The most dramatic example of unrest occurred in 367 when Christians fought in streets and churches over who would become bishop of Rome. To put it simply, Rome during Valentinian's reign was a cauldron of chaos with the possibility of violence always simmering just below the surface. This violence could bubble over at any given moment, sometimes instigated from below and sometimes by Valentinian himself.

While Ammianus' account of Roman affairs shows a Roman senatorial class in opposition to Valentinian, the same is not true in other parts of the Empire. Hajnalka Tamas analyzes a reference of Valentinian as *Christianissimus Imperator* ("Most-Christian Emperor") in the *Passio Pollionis*, a Pannonian hagiography of a 3rd century martyr written after Valentinian's death in the late fourth century. This is the only recorded instance of Valentinian being given this title, and its usage in the *Passio* shows that Valentinian was viewed fondly in Pannonian memory while, paradoxically, his governor, Petronius Probus was vilified.⁹⁷

It is also important to briefly consider Valentinian's relationship and policies towards religion. According to Ammianus, Valentinian's policy was a sort of laissez-faire pragmatism: "he

⁹⁷ Hajnalka Tamas, "Valentinian I, 'Christianissimus Imperator'? Notes on a Passage of the 'Passio Pollionis,'" *Vigiliae Christianae* 68, no. 1 (2014): 83–84; 86.

took a neutral position between opposing faiths, and never troubled anyone by ordering him to adopt this or that mode of worship. He made no attempt to fasten his own beliefs on the necks of his subjects, but left the various cults undisturbed as he found them” (Amm. Marc. 30.9.5; *inter religionum diversitates medius stetit, nec quamquam inquietavit, neque ut hoc colereter, imperavit aut illud: nec interdictis minacibus subiectorum cervicem ad id, quod ipse coluit, inclinabat, sed intemeratas reliquit has partes ut repperit*).⁹⁸ Because Valentinian was fortunate enough to have inherited a Western Empire that was mostly united behind Nicene Christianity, he was able to allow ecclesiastical affairs to play out on their own.⁹⁹ The same was not true of Valens, who inherited a plethora of competing Christian creeds. Although he tried to remain pragmatic, in practice he favored the non-Nicene homoians, who were the majority in the East—although even they were by no means united.¹⁰⁰ Thus, as history is written by the victors, Valentinian is remembered positively by the orthodox historians while Valens is given much harsher treatment.¹⁰¹

The Church and the Troubles of the Urban Prefects

Although Rome was no longer the splendid imperial capital it had once been, it still retained an important role in the empire as evidenced by Valentinian’s early attempts to secure the loyalty of the Senate (see chapter 1). The *praefectus urbi* (urban prefect) was the city’s most important

⁹⁸ See also: Errington, *Imperial Policy*, 189.

⁹⁹ Although when he did try to intervene dogmatically, it tended to cause problems. See the Donatist support of Firmus in chapter 2.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 175-188.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 188-189.

official, essentially serving as governor.¹⁰² Throughout Valentinian's reign, sporadic bouts of violence would erupt within the city, oftentimes as a response to the actions of the *praefectus urbi*. The actions of Lampadius (365-366) occasioned one such riot. Because he had sent officials to steal material for building projects instead of using the public treasury:

Cum collecta plebs infima domum eius prope Constantinianum lavacrum iniectis facibus incenderit et malleolis, ni vicinorum et familiarum veloci concursu a summis tectorum culminibus petita saxis et tegulis abscississet. Eaque vi territus ipse, primitiis crebrescentis seditionis in maius, secessit ad Mulvium pontem... unde accensorum iracundiam pauperum, damna deflentium crebra, aegre potuit celeri vitare digressu

a mob of the lowest canaille attacked his house near the baths of Constantine with torches and firebrands, and would have set it alight if his neighbours and servants had not rushed to the spot and repelled the attackers by pelting them from the roof with stones and tiles. Lampadius himself had fled in panic at the first sign of trouble to the Mulvian Bridge... His rapid flight barely saved him from the fury of enraged and impoverished people who had continual losses to deplore

(Amm. Marc. 27.3.8-10).

Additionally, it seems as though this was not a singular occurrence as unrest was prevalent throughout Lampadius' prefecture (Amm. Marc. 27.3.8).

Lampadius was not the only prefect harassed by the Roman mob. Even Symmachus, "a man of the most exemplary learning and discretion," was not spared (Amm. Marc. 27.3.3; *inter praecipua nominandus exempla doctrinarum atque modestiae*). Unfortunately for Symmachus, his house was burned down because of "a story, invented without a shred of evidence by some worthless ruffian, that Symmachus had said that he would rather use his wine to quench lime-kilns than sell it at the reduced price that the people had hoped for" (Amm. Marc. 27.3.4; *quod vilis quidam plebeius finxerat, illum dixisse sine indice ullo vel teste, libenter se vino proprio calcarias extincturum, quam id venditurum pretiis quibus sperabant*). Not only was his house burnt down

¹⁰² Alföldi, *A Conflict of Ideas*, 18.

because of a rumor, it was burnt down because of a rumor contrary to what the people *hoped* for. Unlike in the case of Lampadius, this riot did not occur because he had behaved inappropriately in office; it was merely because he had, *allegedly*, made an unpopular decision. It is important to remember that Ammianus' sources for these events were likely high-class Romans who disdained mob action and had every motivation to exaggerate. However, I would argue that Ammianus' account still has merit for two reasons. First, it is difficult to exaggerate arson. Second, Ammianus seemed to have some sympathy for the lower class when he wrote that they "had continual losses to deplore," and therefore, while he may have looked down on them, he did not wish to paint them as monsters (Amm. Marc. 27.3.10; *damna deflentium crebra*).

Although all these events were destructive, the bloodiest came about because of religious tension. Coming out of a period of schism, the Roman church was conflicted over the successor of Liberius after his death in 366. This conflict was "not about any article of faith or heresy, but simply this, who ought to obtain the episcopal chair" (Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 4.29).¹⁰³ Damasus, who eventually won the conflict, is portrayed in the ecclesiastical sources as the true heir of St. Peter while his rival, Ursinus, is villainized. The church historian Rufinus of Aquileia writes that Ursinus:

unable to accept his being preferred to himself, became so unhinged that with the aid of some naive, inexperienced bishop, whom he persuaded, and a riotous and unruly gang which he got together, he forced through his ordination as bishop in the Basilica of Sicininus, overturning in his path law, order, and tradition.

(Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 11.10).¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ All translations of Socrates are from: Socrates Scholasticus, *The Ecclesiastical History of Socrates, Surnamed Scholasticus, or the Advocate : Comprising a History of the Church, in Seven Books, from the Accession of Constantine, A.D. 305, to the 38th Year of Theodosius II., Including a Period of 140 Years*, trans. Henri De Valois and Edward Walford (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044020888988&view=1up&seq=8..>

¹⁰⁴ All translations of Rufinus are from: Rufinus, *The Church History of Rufinus of Aquileia: Books 10 and 11*, trans. Philip R Amidon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

This conflict quickly turned violent and was beyond the control of the Viventius, the prefect; “Viventius, unable to end or abate the strife, was compelled by force majeure to withdraw to the suburbs,” writes Ammianus, “It is certain that in the basilica of Sicininus, where the Christians assemble for worship, 137 corpses were found on a single day, and it was only with difficulty that the long-continued fury of the people was later brought under control” (Amm. Marc. 17.3.12-13).¹⁰⁵ Rufinus agrees that there was violence, writing that “the places of prayer ran with blood” (Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 11.10). However, Rufinus has his chronology confused, erroneously claiming that Maximin was prefect at the time. Fortunately, Rufinus’ error helps to corroborate Ammianus’ characterization of this infamous official. Rufinus calls Maximin a “misguided man” whose conduct led “even to the torture of clerics” (Rufinus, 11.10). Having an additional ancient source claim that Maximin was unnecessarily cruel bolsters Ammianus’ potentially hyperbolic account of the Roman witch-hunt. In the end, Viventius, powerless to do anything to influence the situation, pragmatically supported Damasus who had already won, and Ursinus was exiled.¹⁰⁶

Valentinian supported Viventius’ pragmatism. Hearing news of Damasus’ victory, Valentinian made his priorities clear in a letter to the new urban prefect, Praetextatus. The emperor wrote: “it will be ordered that it be pronounced for Damasus, so that each and all recognize it, whereby unity must be protected with zeal,” making it clear that Valentinian accepted Damasus’ victory as a *fait accompli* (Collectio Avellana 6, *Damaso eam iubebit aperiri, ut singuli*

¹⁰⁵ *nec corrigere sufficiens Viventius nec mollire, coactus vi magna, secessit in suburbanum. ... Constatque in basilica Sicinini, ubi ritus Christiani est conventiculum, uno die centum triginta septem reperta cadavera peremptorum, efferatamque diu plebem aegre postea delenitam*

¹⁰⁶ Errington, *Imperial Policy*, 117.

universique cognoscant, quo unitas studio sit colenda).¹⁰⁷ The extent of Valentinian's pragmatism is accentuated by the violent nature of Damasus' victory. The first document in the *Collectio Avellana*, a collection of letters relating to ecclesiastical affairs from the fourth and fifth centuries, recounts Damasus' bloody campaign, in which he bribed and roused the gladiators, gravediggers, and charioteers—the dregs of Roman society—to violence (*Collectio Avellana* 1).¹⁰⁸ While it is impossible to ascertain the exact veracity of this document's account, it is noteworthy that none of the church historians, who support Damasus, deny that he massacred his opponents. Regardless, there was bloodshed. Valentinian and his officials, realizing that their options to intervene were limited, did not raise a hand to restrain or check the violence, rather they simply supported whoever emerged victorious.

Valentinian was also faced with religious discord in other parts of the Empire. Although the Western Empire was heavily populated by Nicene Christians, Auxentius, the Bishop of Milan, was an Arian. When the orthodox Hilary of Poitiers accused Auxentius of heresy, Auxentius denied it, leading to a trial. Valentinian's imperial officials, who served as the judges, found it impossible to determine who was telling the truth. In the end, Auxentius was acquitted and Hilary exiled.¹⁰⁹ Traditionally, it was believed that the bishops themselves presided over the trial and the imperial magistrates were merely observing, but Timothy Barnes persuasively argues that it was in fact the magistrates who were the judges, providing an interesting insight into the legal relation

¹⁰⁷ This translation is my own.

¹⁰⁸ For analysis of the origins of this document see Malcolm R Green, "The Supporters of the Antipope Ursinus," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 22, no. 2 (1971): 531–38.

¹⁰⁹ Timothy D Barnes, "Valentinian, Auxentius, and Ambrose," *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte* 51, no. 2 (2002): 227–237.

between church and state.¹¹⁰ While the Valentinian's government generally allowed the church to run itself, he and his officials did have a certain legal authority over religious disputes.

After Auxentius' death in 374, there was again the possibility of bloodshed over ecclesiastical succession. Fighting broke out in the city, and Ambrose, the provincial governor, entered the basilica to restore order. After calming the people, those present unanimously agreed that Ambrose himself should receive the bishopric. At first, he refused the honor, and the matter was referred to Valentinian who "regarding the universal consent of the people as the work of God authorized the bishops to ordain him; declaring that he was manifestly chosen of God to preside over the Church, rather than elected by the people" (Socrates, *Hist. eccl.*, 4.30). According to Scholasticus, Valentinian himself recognized that he was unable to tamper with the situation—it was in the hands of the people and God. However, according to Sozomen, Valentinian was pleased with the elevation of Ambrose (Sozom. 6.24), but the emperor was primarily reacting to the events in Milan, not orchestrating them.

The Purge of Rome

While Valentinian was often forced to react to events, as in Milan, the Roman witch-hunts of 370-371 provide a rare example of the emperor being proactive. Traces of Valentinian's personal involvement can be found in the Theodosian Code, in which he decreed that:

quia nonnulli ex ordine senatorio maleficiorum insimulatione adque invidia stringebantur, idcirco huiusmodi negotia urbanae praefecturae discutienda permisimus. Quod si quando huiusmodi inciderit quaestio, quae iudicio memoratae sedis dirimi vel terminari posse non creditur, eos, quos negotii textus amplectitur, una cum gestis omnibus praesentibus adque praeteritis ad comitatum mansuetudinis nostrae sollemni observationi transmitti praecipimus.

¹¹⁰ Barnes, "Valentinian", 229-230

Because some persons of the Senatorial order were touched by the hateful accusation of practicing magic, we therefore entrust to the prefect of the City the trial of such cases. But whenever a trial of this kind occurs, which, it is believed, cannot be decided or completed by the judgement of the aforesaid court, We [sic] command that those persons who are involved in any connection with the case, together with all the records, present and past, shall be transmitted to the imperial court of Our Clemency for the customary enforcement

(*Cod. Theod.* 9.16.10).

According to Ammianus, the saga was begun by Maximin who had risen to become the bureaucrat in charge of the Roman grain supply. The prefect at the time, Olybrius, was informed that an organ-maker, wrestler, and soothsayer had allegedly attempted to poison a former vice-prefect and his wife. However, because Olybrius was ill, the jurisdiction was transferred to Maximin. Ammianus, in his typical anti-Maximin prose, writes that Maximin: “thus won an opportunity to do harm, and gave free scope to the innate cruelty of his savage heart, like wild beasts in the amphitheatre when they escape by breaking through the bars of their cages” (*Amm. Marc.*28.1.10; *accepta igitur nocendi materia, Maximinus effudit genuinam ferociam, pectori crudo affixam, ut saepe faciunt amphitheatrales ferae, diffractis tandem solutae posticis*). In his investigation, Maximin then discovered that some nobles had allegedly hired a professional criminal. It is at this point that, according to Ammianus, Maximin, advocating harsher punishments, reported these happenings to the emperor (*Amm. Marc.* 28.1.10). In response, Valentinian:

efferatus, ut erat vitiorum inimicus acer magis quam severus, uno proloquio, in huius modi causas, quas arroganter proposito maiestatis imminutae miscebat, omnes quos iuris prisci iustitia, divorumque arbitria, quaestionibus exemere cruentis, si postulasset negotium, statuit tormentis affligi.

who was passionate rather than rigorous in his antipathy to wrongdoing, issued in a rage a general ordinance to cover cases of this kind, which he arbitrarily identified with the crime of treason, and decreed that all who were exempted from torture by early legislation and the decrees of former emperors should be put on the rack if the situation required it

(*Amm. Marc.* 28.10.11).

In addition, he gave Maximin the power of a pro-prefect and assigned Leo, a notary and “a grave-robbing brigand from Pannonia,” to work alongside him (Amm. Marc. 28.1.12; *bustuarium quondam latronem Pannonium*). Taking Ammianus’ narrative at face value, the two men initiated what can only be described as a purge: “too great a mass of mischief was on the boil, and low and high were confounded in a new wave of unbridled madness. It was quite clear that men’s chief fear at that time was not a trial at law but a complete suspension of legal proceedings” (Amm. Marc. 28.1.15; *tot calentibus malis, et novo furore, sine retincaulis imis summa miscente, cum iustitum esse, quod timebatur, non iudicum, aperte constaret*).

The obvious question raised by this purge is why? As seen in chapter 1, Valentinian worked early in his reign to pass laws favorable to the senatorial elite, but they must have perceived him as a monster after these events. According to Alföldi, Ammianus sides with the senators not because they were necessarily innocent but because their traditional rights and privileges were being trampled upon.¹¹¹ John Matthews notes that Ammianus never claims that those charged are innocent; he merely rails against the ruthlessness of the investigators.¹¹² For example, he protests the innocence of Hymetius who employed a soothsayer for illegal rituals. In fact, Ammianus actually notes that a paper “in Hymetius’ hand was found asking him to carry out a solemn rite of intercession that God would soften the emperor’s heart towards the writer. The last part of the document contained some criticism of the greed and cruelty of Valentinian” (Amm. Marc. 28.1.20; *manu scriptum Hymetii, petentis ut obsecrato ritu sacrorum sollemnium numine, erga se imperatores delenirentur. Cuius extima parte quaedam invectiva legebantur in principem ut avarum et truculentum*). Alföldi remarks of this instance that an attempt to artificially sway the

¹¹¹ Alföldi, *A Conflict of Ideas*, 41.

¹¹² Matthews, *The Roman Empire*, 214.

mind of the emperor using magic would be considered a capital crime and high treason.¹¹³ Hymetius' trial also makes clear the power struggle between Senate and Emperor. Valentinian, instead of condemning Hymetius to death himself, referred the case to the Senate, hoping that they would pronounce the same sentence. Instead, they sentenced Hymetius to exile, greatly angering the emperor (Amm. Marc. 28.1.23). However, Hymetius' conviction still makes clear that some portions of the Roman elite did engage in the illegal practices because sought by Maximin.

The question then becomes how many accused and executed were guilty and how many were arbitrarily purged. Daniel Den Hengst argues that hundreds of men and women of senatorial rank were executed during the purge.¹¹⁴ With that many Romans killed, it is hard to argue that this was not a witch-hunt of some sort; it is difficult to believe that all of those killed were guilty. Notably, Maximin, not Valentinian, is Ammianus' main villain, and Rufinus similarly comments on his cruelty (Rufinus 11.10). Maximin, however, continued to be promoted by Valentinian after this incident, eventually becoming the prefect of Gaul.¹¹⁵ Thus, I conclude that Maximin took the political purge further than Valentinian intended, but not to such an extent that he angered the emperor. Maximin's actions, with or without Valentinian's assent, provided a way for the emperor to project his power into Rome, thus being a rare instance where Valentinian managed to control a province, albeit bloodily.

¹¹³ Alföldi, *A Conflict of Ideas*, 76.

¹¹⁴ Daniel Dan Hengst, "Valentinian as Portrayed by Ammianus: A Kaleidoscopic Image," in *Imagining Emperors in the Later Roman Empire* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2018), 260.

¹¹⁵ Matthews, *The Roman Empire*, 214.

Pannonia and the Death of Valentinian

While Ammianus' account makes it clear that the Roman elite did not approve of Valentinian's rule, there is some evidence to suggest that Valentinian was popular among common citizens elsewhere in the empire. In the *Passio Pollionis*, a Pannonian hagiography about the life of the martyr Pollio, Valentinian is posthumously referred to as *Christianissimus imperator* (most Christian emperor), which while a common title in later times, was not yet in official use.¹¹⁶ In the *Passio*, Valentinian and Probus, Pollio's imperial prosecutor, are the only named lay people in the entire work. Hajnalka Tamas argues that this Probus is himself not from the third century, but rather is a portrait of Petronius Probus, Valentinian's wildly unpopular praetorian prefect of Illyricum.¹¹⁷ Considering Probus' depredations in Illyricum, it is logical that Probus and Valentinian would be contrasted within the *Passio* especially if there was not an extant record of the official who killed Pollio. By painting Probus as a villain while discreetly praising Valentinian, the author is making clear that he thought fondly of the emperor even while he hated the emperor's deputy.

In analyzing the relationship between Valentinian and Probus within the *Passio*, it is worth taking a closer look at the career and deeds of Petronius Probus. The scion of a wealthy Roman, senatorial family, Probus accrued immense power for himself as well as an expansive patronage network, holding estates throughout the Empire (Amm. Marc. 27.11.1). He was also perpetually hungry for office, and when he did not hold an official position, he "languished like a fish out of water" (Amm. Marc. 27.11.3; *ut natantium genus, elemento suo expulsum, haud ita diu spirat in teris, ita ille marcebat absque praefecturis*). Interestingly, Ammianus claims that he was forced to

¹¹⁶ Tamas, "Valentinian I, 'Christianissimus Imperator'? Notes on a Passage of the 'Passio Pollionis.'"

¹¹⁷ Tamas, "Valentinian I", 93-94. Pannonia was a part of Illyricum.

further pursue political office by: “the lawless behavior of his countless dependents, whose excessive greed could never be satisfied in an innocent way, and who thrust their master into public life so as to be able to gain their ends with impunity” (Amm. Marc. 27.11.3; *quas ob iugi familiarum licentia, capessere cogebatur, numquam innocentium per cupiditates immensas, utque multa perpetrarent impune, dominum suum mergentium in rem publicam*). Although this avaricious system of patronage could be dangerous, the great landed families were able to use it to build immense prestige for themselves in a system of power separated from the imperial government. As John Matthews argues, this allowed these families to survive even when the Western Empire ceased to exist.¹¹⁸

Probus’ role as praetorian prefect of Illyricum was one of his highest appointments and one which he exploited to the fullest. Believing that Valentinian desired that every penny was to be squeezed out of the provinces, he brutally taxed the people (Amm. Marc. 30.5.5-6). Ammianus vividly provides a description of Probus’ devastation:

optimatum quosdam ultimorum metu exagitatos, mutare compulit sedes, et flagitium ministrorum amaritudine quidam expresi, cum non suppeteret quod daretur, erant perpetui carcerum inquilini: e quibus aliquos, cum vitae iam taederet et lucis, suspendiorum exoptata remedia consumpserunt

members of the upper classes changed their place of residence. Others, squeezed by the harsh demands of the officials to a point where they could pay no more, became permanent inmates of prisons; and some of these grew tired of the light of day and found a welcome relief by hanging themselves

(Amm. Marc. 30.5.6).

Like Romanus’ actions in Africa, Probus was able to hide the extent of his depredations from Valentinian, who, although characterized as greedy, “might perhaps have spared Pannonia if he had heard earlier of these deplorable methods of raising money, which came to his notice only

¹¹⁸ Matthews, *The Roman Empire*, 278.

when it was much too late” (Amm. Marc. 30.5.7; *parsurus tamen fortasse Pannoniis, si haec ante ingemiscenda compendia comperisset, quae nimium sero tali didicit casu*). Again, we see a provincial official acting as *he* saw fit, and Valentinian, kept in the dark, was unable to project his imperial authority. Despite Probus’ excesses, as seen from the *Passio*, common Pannonians still maintained a degree of respect for their hometown emperor.¹¹⁹ Although it is difficult to corroborate this evidence in other parts of the Empire, it seems as though provincials could disassociate the emperor from the corrupt officials who served him, a theory which certainly merits future research.

Somewhat poetically, Valentinian’s reign came to a close in his homeland. Angry that a Roman fortress was being erected in their homeland just north of the Danube, the king Gabinius of the Quadi headed a delegation to protest the construction. Marcellian, who happened to be the official in charge, “with feigned friendliness invited Gabinius and others to dinner. But as his unsuspecting guest was leaving he had him murdered, a most infamous violation of the sacred laws of hospitality” (Amm. Marc. 29.6.1-5; *ut assensurus humanitate simulata cum aliis ad convivium corrogavit, quem digredientem post epulas, hospitalis officii sanctitate nefarie violate, trucidari securum fecit*).¹²⁰ Unsurprisingly, this assassination led to war with the Quadi and the Sarmatians; both tribes flooded across the Danube in force.

Realizing that Pannonia was in crisis, in 375 Valentinian and his army marched from Gaul to deal with the situation. Interestingly, he did not react strongly to the events which had sparked this war: “it was expected that he would at once punish the officers whose disloyalty or withdrawal had exposed the flank of Pannonia. Once he arrived, however, he became so lukewarm that he

¹¹⁹ Tamas, “Valentinian I”, 95.

¹²⁰ Marcellian is the son of Maximin who was also operating in Pannonia at the time.

made no inquiry into the murder of king Gabinius, and took no serious steps to discover whose neglect or slackness it had been that had led to the infliction of such wounds on the Roman state” (Amm. Marc. 30.5.1-3).¹²¹ Eventually, the Quadi came to Valentinian to come to terms to end the war, and Valentinian reacted angrily to their entreaties. However, Ammianus tells us that “he gradually grew calmer and was adopting a milder tone when he was struck as if by lightning. His breathing and speech were obstructed, and a fiery flush overspread his face. Then his pulse failed and he was drenched in a deadly sweat” (Amm. Marc. 30.6.3; *Paulatimque lenitus, et ad molliora propensior, tamquam ictus e caelo, vitalique via voceque simul obstructa, suffectus igneo lumine cernebatur; letali sudore perfusus*). Quickly, his attendants removed him from the negotiations, and shortly thereafter, at fifty-four years old, Valentinian breathed his last (Amm. Marc. 30.6.6).

Conclusion

As seen in Rome, Pannonia, and in his dealings with the Church, Valentinian spent his reign desperately trying to exercise some form of authority over his unruly subjects. While at times, such as the Roman witch-hunt, his efforts proved moderately successful, in others he was forced to accept a *fait accompli*. Forced to constantly react to events, it was difficult for Valentinian to be proactive throughout the Empire. Instead, he formally ratified decisions which had already bypassed him, such as Ambrose’s accession to the bishopric of Milan. Always futilely grasping for the initiative, it was nigh-on impossible to use his *imperium* to control the disparate parts of his empire.

¹²¹ *mox iudices damnari iussurus, quorum perfidia vel secessione Pannoniarum nudatum est latus: cum illuc venisset, ita intepuit, ut neque in Gabinii regis inquireret necem, neque iniusta rei publicae vulnera, quo sinente vel agente segnius evenissent curatius vestigaret*

CONCLUSION

Valentinian I's eleven-year reign was one of striking contrasts. His victories over the Alamanni and other tribes cemented his reputation as a strong military leader, but his inability to control the wider empire damages his reputation. Ammianus in Valentinian's obituary, claims that "the personal exploits of a man of such quick understanding and long military experience were undoubtably numerous" (Amm. Marc. 30.7.11; *ipsum quoque satis constat, ut erat expeditae mentis usuque castrensis negotii diuturno firmatus, egisse complura*). Ammianus goes on to list a plethora of Valentinian's good and bad qualities, but one statement in particular stands out: "while he punished even trivial offences in the rank and file, he allowed grave faults in their superiors to grow unchecked, and often turned a deaf ear to the complaints brought against them. This led to disturbances in Britain, disaster in Africa, and devastation in Illyricum" (Amm. Marc. 30.9.1).¹²² It is difficult to summarize the greatest of Valentinian's defects any more concisely. While he strove to govern a united, prosperous, and strong empire, he was blinded to the true affairs of state by his officials. Thus, while Valentinian had the trappings of a strong emperor, he was left hamstrung by the inadequacies of the men he appointed.

¹²² *quod cum gregariorum etiam levia puniret errata, potiorum ducum flagitia progredi sinebat in maius; ad querellas in eos motas aliquotiens obsurdescens: unde Britannici strepitus et Africanæ clades et vastitas emerit Illyrici*

The question now becomes: could Valentinian have prevented this? Sometimes Valentinian inherited officials, such as Romanus, from past administrations. Other times, he appointed these men himself, but is it fair to assume that he was fully aware of their defects at the time of their appointments? Once they arrived in their provinces, they found it simple to hide their depredations from Valentinian who was powerless to fix problems he did not know existed. Valentinian's reign shows that some officials placed loyalty to others higher than their loyalty to the emperor. Remigius felt obligated to his kinsman Romanus, Romanus felt obligated to avenge the assassination of Zammac, and Probus felt obligated to use his station to protect his clients. These conflicting loyalties worked against Valentinian's attempts to project his power throughout the Empire.

The only way to truly determine whether Valentinian could have better controlled his officials is further research. Did other fourth and fifth century emperors in both East and West have similar problems? How did they deal with the endemic corruption? Did their *imperium* extend past provincial borders? Investigating these questions will help to better illuminate the role and power of the Emperor in Late Antiquity and will uncover their methods for controlling a sprawling pre-modern empire. In addition, these questions can provide valuable insights into the proper relationship between the head of state and his or her subordinates, a relationship which needs further exploration in light of the ever-expanding bureaucracies of modern democracies.

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