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**Ammianus Marcellinus and the Historical Geography
of the Balkans***

The parameters of the following discussion may be defined by the following observation of the British historian Arthur Marwick:

The geographical context in fact is something of a common-sense matter, well in keeping with the old amateur tradition in history, requiring no professional expertise to unveil its significance; indeed, professional expertise in the twentieth century often tended to obscure what had formerly been obvious: the dependence of history upon geography¹.

From his viewpoint as a critical historian, Marwick's statement is undeniable and points plainly to the connection between historical events and geography. His comments, however, may be considerably amplified by including a wider range of topics intrinsic to historical geography: frontiers, the migrations of populations, human geography². When seen in this light, the *History* or *Res Gestae* of Ammianus Marcellinus has much to offer. What I intend to explore in this paper is first, the impact of physical geography in Balkan history of the fourth century AD, particularly a previously ignored campaign preceding the great battle of Adrianople in 378. This discussion will then provide the

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1. A. Marwick, *The Nature of History* (New York, 1971), p. 138.

2. For further discussion see G. L. Gaile and C. J. Willmont, *Geography in America* (Columbus, 1989), pp. 157, 159, 171-72.

context for one of the above mentioned dimensions of historical geography, migrations and human geography, by an analysis of the Goths and their society and culture as they appear in the pages of Ammianus Marcellinus.

“Ethnic cleansing” and the forced removal of people from their homes: massacres of both unarmed civilians and soldiers; these brutalities, mentioned within the context of the Balkans, might seem to be taken from yesterday’s news. In fact, these events did take place in the Balkans, but in the era of the late antique world rather than only a few years ago, when a host of new peoples were beginning to enter the Balkan provinces of the Roman Empire. A contemporary observer to these events, one well informed on both the empire and its neighbors, as well as the classical tradition, was the historian and former soldier, Ammianus Marcellinus. Justly considered the last great Roman historian, one comparable in technique and ability to Sallust and Tacitus, Ammianus wrote an imperial history that stretched from the Emperor Nerva in AD 96 to the immediate aftermath of the defeat at Adrianople where the Emperor Valens was killed in battle³. The surviving narrative is arguably the most important, preserving as it does the famous reign of the Emperor Julian, “the Apostate”, the bitter struggle in Mesopotamia between the Romans and Persians, and lastly the entry of the Goths and other barbarian tribes into the Empire⁴. As a contemporary, Ammianus was familiar with this last event and should reveal to us much about his capacity to understand military events and how these might be interpreted within their geographical and topographical contexts. A test case of sorts may be found in the Roman and Gothic struggle for the strategic “junction” city of Augusta Trajana (the modern Stara Zagora in Bulga-

3. For the most recent treatment of Ammianus see J. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (Baltimore, 1989), a work anticipated by Matthews in “Ammianus Marcellinus”, in *Ancient Writers: Greece and Rome*, ed. by T. J. Luce, 2 vols. (New York, 1982), 2: 1117-38. Two valuable review-discussions of Matthews’ work are T. D. Barnes, “Ammianus Marcellinus and His World”, *CP* 88 (1993) 55-70, and G. Bowersock, rev. of Matthews, *JRS* 80 (1990) 244-50. Older works still useful include E. A. Thompson, *The Historian Ammianus Marcellinus* (Oxford, 1947), A. Momigliano, “The Lonely Historian Ammianus Marcellinus”, in *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 127-40, at 135-37 (first published 1974), and H. T. Rowell, “Ammianus Marcellinus, Soldier-Historian of the Late Roman Empire”, in *Semple Lectures*, I, (Cincinnati, 1967).

4. Noted e.g., by Thompson, *Historian Ammianus*, pp. 34-35.

ria) in the Roman province of Thrace, better known in late antiquity by its primitive name, Beroe or Beroea⁵. Despite the recent treatments of Thomas Burns, John Matthews, and Ulrich Wanke, the key role and place of Beroe in the Roman strategy for the defense of Thrace has remained overlooked.

I. The Struggle for Beroe

Beroe sat northeast of Philippopolis and was a key both to the passes leading north through the Haemus Mountains and the Roman road system that led east to the Black Sea and then northwards to the mouth of the Danube (see below Figure 1)⁶. That it was well known is attested by its listing in the *Itineraria Antonini Augusti* (2.31) and the *Tabula Peutingeriana* (8.2)⁷. It also figured in the Thracian campaigns of the Emperor Decius against the Goths in the mid-third century AD; it was the site of a Gothic victory in 251 that anticipated an even greater one at Philippopolis a short time later⁸. Beroe thus figured prominently in the first substantial Gothic invasions and would do so again in the even more decisive invasion of the fourth century detailed for us by Ammianus.

5. Amm. Marc. 27.4.12 lists Beroe as a city in Thrace; see also Amm. Marc. 31.9. On Ammianus' knowledge of Thrace and the area cf. Thompson, *ibid.*, p. 118 (who thinks Ammianus knew the area well) and P. J. Heather, *Goths and Romans, 332-489* (Oxford, 1991), p. 72 (who thinks he was less well informed). For a general overview of the city and its history see E. Oberhummer, s.v. "Beroia (3)", *RE* 3 (1897) 306-07 and A. H. M. Jones, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*², rev. by M. Avi-Jonah, et al. (Oxford, 1971), pp. 19, 24, 379, nn. 27, 28. The most recent and systematic survey of this region of the Roman world is U. Wanke, *Die Gotenkriege des Valens. Studien zu Topographie und Chronologie im unteren Donauraum von 366 bis 378 n. Chr.* (Frankfurt/Main, 1990), pp. 157-60 (for reference to Beroe).

6. Oberhummer, *ibid.*, refers to the strategic location of Beroe, emphasizing that it was a key to the Balkan passes.

7. See further W. Kubitschek, s.v. "Itinerarien", *RE* 9 (1916) 2308-63, and id., s.v. "Karten", *RE* 10 (1919) 2126-44. For further references to these itineraries see Wanke, *ibid.*, pp. 36, 51, 255.

8. Zos. 1.23, Amm. Marc. 31.5.16-17, Dexipp. *FGrH* 100 F22 with 2C: 309-10. See e.g., H. M. D. Parker, *A History of the Roman World From A.D. 138 to 337*², rev. by B. H. Warmington (London, 1958), pp. 160-61, 388-89, T. Mommsen, *The History of Rome. The Provinces, From Caesar to Diocletian*, trans. by W. P. Dickson, 2 vols. (London, 1886), 1:240-41.



Figure 1. The environs of Beroe with principal roads, a segment of Map 22, “Lower Moesia” (scale, 1:1,000,000), compiled by A. G. Poulter for the “Atlas of the Greek and Roman World”, forthcoming, reproduced with permission of Princeton University Press and the generous assistance of the project’s general director, Professor Richard J. A. Talbert. For further information and overview, see the project webpage at <http://www.unc.edu/depts/cl/atlas>. Among the symbols used here the hollow symbol means approximate location; a diamond is a road station; three dots identify a tumulus or similar site (a circle around these marks a cluster of such sites); a triangle is a villa or estate.

The Romans had allowed the Goths to enter the Empire in 376, literally as refugees fleeing the unrelenting attacks of the Huns and their confederates the Alans farther to the east⁹. Subsequent to their arrival in the Empire, the Roman commanders Lupicinus and Maximus began abusing the Goths in various ways, most notoriously bartering dogs —as food— in exchange for Gothic slaves (Amm. Marc. 31.4.9-10)¹⁰. These

9. Amm. Marc. 32.4, Eunap. F 37 (= *Exc. de Leg. Gent.* 5), in R. C. Blockley, *The Fragmentary Classicizing Historians of the Later Roman Empire. Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus*, 2 vols., text, trans., and commentary (Liverpool, 1983), 2: 53-55, 59-65. Momigliano, “Lonely Historian”, p. 134, notes that Ammianus was critical of the Roman treatment of the Goths. For a general discussion of these events see O. J. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, ed. by M. Knight (Berkeley, 1973), pp. 18-30.

10. For these commanders see A. H. M. Jones, J. R. Martindale, J. Morris, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, I: A.D. 260-395 (Cambridge, 1970), 519-20

details are well enough known and need not detain us. As if these Roman outrages were not enough, Lupicinus attempted to assassinate Fritigern, one of the Gothic leaders, at a banquet in his honor—a standard weapon in the Roman diplomatic bag¹¹—and at Adrianople there occurred simultaneously a spontaneous clash between Romans and Goths (Amm. Marc. 31.6.1-3). These events set into motion the Roman campaign to suppress the Goths which would lead to the defeat at Adrianople, the greatest Roman military disaster since Cannae. In this campaign, the strategic town of Beroe played a key role.

Recent discussions of the Adrianople campaign have stressed a Roman strategy of denying food to the Goths and of keeping them penned up in the Haemus Mountains and away from the fertile plains of Thrace¹². The Roman goal, then, ostensibly was to block the passes and wait for the Goths to succumb to hunger. However, either the Roman strategy was not executed effectively, or Ammianus and his modern commentators, as I will argue here, have not taken into account both the geography of the area or the nature of Gothic society. These suggest that other factors dictated the strategy of both sides. In the prelude to Adrianople, Ammianus reports that on several occasions Gothic raiding parties had gotten through the passes and entered the Thracian plain where they raided and pillaged widely (Amm. Marc. 31.9.3, 31.11.2). This should make us question whether the Roman aim was simply to hold the passes against the Goths. John Matthews, for example, has argued, following Ammianus' testimony, that the Romans were intent on blocking the passes and denying the Goths access to food supplies. Contrary to this, I would stress that the Romans were intent primarily on keeping the roads and networks of communications open—while denying these to the Goths—and then, secondly, trying to position their

(Lupicinus), 585 (Maximus).

11. Commented on by Thompson, *Historian Ammianus*, p. 100.

12. Mentioned also by Eunap. F 44 (= *Exc. de Sent.* 45), in Blockley, 2: 67. Matthews, *Ammianus*, p. 328, whose view on this is shared by T. S. Burns, "The Battle of Adrianople: A Reconsideration", *Hist.* 22 (1973) 340, and more recently in *Barbarians Within the Gates of Rome* (Bloomington, 1995), pp. 27-8. In the latter Burns notes that Beroe was a "key defense point" for the Romans but nothing else. Like Matthews he too makes no mention of the Roman roads in the area or that the Gothic wagons would have been slow moving to say the least.

military forces between the Goths and stores of provisions (see above Figure 1 that details the network of roads around Beroe). This analysis is, I think, borne out by the struggle between the Goths and Romans that occurred at Beroe.

The key factor that makes this argument attractive is Ammianus' casual references, the significance of which has gone unnoticed, that the Goths were moving their families and possessions with wagons¹³. Wagons were the typical means of transportation for steppe peoples, including also the Huns and Alans (Amm. Marc. 31.2.10, 18, respectively). Transportation by wagon was the slowest means of transit in the ancient world and that over open country and through fields must have been especially arduous and time consuming. Though this simple fact must have been known to both the Romans and the Goths it has escaped Thomas Burns, for example, who talks about the Goths having "freedom of movement" following the battle at Ad Salices in 377. Yet Ammianus describes long lines of Gothic wagons and how these could move rapidly or freely is not at all apparent¹⁴. Some simple calculations make this rather clear. The Gothic tribe(s) numbered some 70,000 people at this time: even at ten per wagon, a rather high figure it seems, that would produce 7,000 wagons. That such a number could move quickly seems a bit optimistic. Should the Goths, however, be able to penetrate the Empire and access its highways, then their movements would not only become easier but more rapid. Moreover, their ability to do so would be increased if they could seize the livestock posted at intervals along the roads. Surely the Romans could anticipate this and would seek to deny the Goths control of the roads and particularly critical junction towns such as Beroe. A close look at the struggle around this city will demonstrate that this in fact occurred.

Roman failure to cope with the flood of Gothic refugees, as well as cruelty and greed, led to the outbreak of war in summer 376. In a sequence that will likely remain obscure, the Roman commander Lupicinus executed a plot to wipe out the Gothic leadership in the region of the Scythian provinces. The chieftain Fritigern and a few others managed to escape, soon joining forces with two other chiefs, Sueridas

13. Reported by Amm. Marc. at 31.7.7, 12.3.11, 13.2, 15.5, 16.1.

14. Burns, "Battle of Adrianople", p. 341.

and Colias. These had recently clashed with the people of Adrianople, who were tiring, it appears, of their role as hosts to the Gothic clans awaiting transit to Asia Minor. These circumstances led to the battle at Ad Salices ("The Willows") in the Dobrudja, the delta region of the Danube. This was a bitterly fought battle that inflicted heavy loss on both sides. A week after the battle, Roman forces withdrew southwards to Marcinopolis, in the process drawing the Goths after them and deeper into the Empire¹⁵.

While the Romans had paid a high price for what were at best modest gains, they could remain hopeful if not confident. The Goths remained disorganized and, perhaps more importantly, contained north of the Haemus range and Marcinopolis. This situation seems evident by the return to Gaul of the general Richomeres, who had been lent to Valens by his nephew and co-ruler Gratian, perhaps to bring back reinforcements, but more likely to remain, thinking the crisis over¹⁶. A similar situation is perhaps more clearly seen in the area around Beroe. Here the general Frigeridus had established a strong defensive position. Ammianus suggests that Frigeridus, like Richomeres, had also begun to withdraw to his home station in Illyria when, in response to Gothic attacks, he wheeled about and inflicted a crushing defeat on a combined force of Goths and Taifali under Farnobius at Beroe¹⁷.

15. On the battle see Amm. Marc. 31.7, 8.1. It has sometimes been thought (e.g., Thompson, *Historian Ammianus*, p. 14, Rowell, "Ammianus Marcellinus", p. 287) that Ammianus visited the site as he refers to sun-bleached bones (31.7.16). His inspiration, however, for this description is literary rather than visual; see Virg. *Aen.* 5.864-5, Tac. *Ann.* 1.61. For a modern discussion see Burns, "Battle of Adrianople", pp. 339-40. Note also Blockley, *Classicizing Historians*, 1: 14, who refers to the Gothic Wars of 367-69 as a "series of skirmishes" (after Amm. Marc. 27.5). This, however, was not the situation in 376-78, as the Goths were in a much more desperate situation. On the location of Ad Salices in the Dobrudja see Wanke, *Gotenkriege*, pp. 145-47, 157-60, *pace* Heather, *Goths & Romans*, p. 144, who places the battle closer to Marcinopolis (so too T. G. Elliott, *Ammianus Marcellinus and Fourth Century History* [Toronto, 1983], p. 273, n. 7), trusting too much in the exactness of Ammianus' account.

16. Amm. Marc. 31.8.2, 12.4.

17. Amm. Marc. 31.9. Ammianus says that Frigeridus had returned to Thrace at Gratian's order. But at this time Gratian was engaged in a war on the Rhine with the Alamanni; his ability to be informed on affairs in Thrace and Illyricum would surely make it difficult for him to micromanage troops and commanders not directly under his command. Burns, "Battle of Adrianople", p. 340, makes no mention of Frigeridus' victory, while in his *Barbarians Within the Gates*, p. 27, refers to Frigeridus in Thrace, but does not elaborate. On

Ammianus' account of Frigeridus departing Beroe only to return and defeat his Gothic antagonists invites suspicion. In other places the historian repeats himself and gets things wrong and so it may be here¹⁸. Elsewhere we learn that Frigeridus suffered from gout so severely that it impeded his ability to move his troops. Additionally, we learn that another general, Saturninus, had established a series of defensive positions in the same general area of the Haemus mountains (which he later removed under Gothic pressure, this action contributing to the Gothic surge toward Adrianople)¹⁹. These considerations suggest that Frigeridus had not left Beroe but had in fact remained there all the while, denying the Goths any passage south into Thrace. This seems the likeliest interpretation, as Ammianus makes clear that it was the Goths who were threatening Frigeridus when he surprised them with a sudden attack. It is this defense that explains the battle that Ammianus reports between Frigeridus and the Goths. What this points to, then, is indeed the critical position that Beroe played in the Roman defenses.

That the Romans were employing a strategy of defending key junction towns like Beroe and their road network —thereby ensuring communications and transportation between the two halves of the empire— is reflected again in the career of Frigeridus. Ammianus reports that Frigeridus was subsequently replaced by Maurus (Amm. Marc. 31.10.21), whose qualities Ammianus reveals consisted of venality and unreliability: a pointed and stark contrast to Frigeridus. The historian seems more interested in making a character assessment of the two generals than in making clear the nature of the Roman strategy to contain the Goths. He does mention that Frigeridus was replaced as he was strengthening the defenses in the strategic pass at Succi (the modern Ihtiman, leading from western Bulgaria into Serbia). What he does not tell his reader is that this was the strategic pass connecting Thrace and

the Goths mixing with Huns, Alans, and Taifali, see Amm. Marc. 31.16.3, 9.3, and Heather, *Goths & Romans*, pp. 89-97. Such groupings had long been practiced and point not only to the fluidity of tribal groupings before these people entered the empire but the continuation of the practice afterwards.

18. Cf. the doublet at Amm. Marc. 31.11.1 with 31.12.1 (i.e., repetition of Valens' march).

19. Frigeridus' gout: Amm. Marc. 31.7.3; Saturninus' defense: Amm. Marc. 31.8.5.

the east with Illyricum and the west²⁰. This shows again, as in the case with Beroe, that the Romans were not attempting a vast territorial defense of the empire, but rather a pointed defense of key towns, roads, and passes. They would have appreciated, I think, the maxim of von Clausewitz, "He who defends everything defends nothing".

The replacement of the veteran but gouty Frigeridus seems to have had dire consequences for the Romans. There has been some suggestion that he was sacked; this seems Ammianus' opinion but it may be erroneous. After all Frigeridus was ill and may have finally been forced to yield his command after conducting a rugged defense of Roman positions from Beroe to Succii. There can be little doubt, however, that the change of command was both unfortunate and untimely. Maurus was not apparently a competent commander, whatever other qualities he may (or may not) have possessed, as the Goths were clearly able to breach the Roman defenses around Beroe. We are not informed as to what happened at Succii: perhaps Maurus had better luck here. But it is clear that the Romans had lost the initiative around Beroe as subsequent events show. Ammianus reports that the general Sebastianus won a small tactical victory over a Gothic force at Beroe that had established a fortified place where they were stockpiling booty and captives²¹. But this victory proved strategically to be of little significance as the Romans soon afterwards evacuated the area. Clearly the Roman defenses in the Haemus had collapsed: the defeat at Adrianople was just around the corner.

Ammianus' account of the Adrianople campaign is episodic and rhetorical: his abrupt shift in the action from the Dobrudja and Ad Salices to the Haemus and struggle for Beroe demonstrates the former; the evocative battle description of Adrianople, replete with scenes from Cannae, suggests the latter. Ammianus' historiographical aims cannot be ours, as much as we might like them to be. This means that he does not always address topics or provide the type of information (even if it could be acquired) that a modern historian would²². Yet this brief analysis

20. For its location see Wanke, *Gotenkriege*, p. 38, who lists it, by the name of Soneium, on the route between Serdica and Constantinople and provides bibliography. Its importance is also seen in its references in Amm. Marc. 21.10.2, 21.13.6, 22.2.1, 26.7.12.

21. See Amm. Marc. 31.11.1-4, Eunap. F 44 (= Blockley, 2: 67-69).

22. R. Syme, *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta* (Oxford, 1968), p. 95, comments on

suggests that Ammianus did take into account the influence of geography upon the events he recorded. Though his references may be brief and then without full comprehension, his remarks may be elaborated and a fuller account recovered. Less successful perhaps is his ethnography or human geography of the Goths, though that depicting these newcomers to Rome may not be as remote and farfetched as that relating the Huns. It is to this that we now turn.

II. Ammianus, the Goths, and Human Geography

Ammianus' history is famous for its portrait of the Huns and Alans that ostensibly gives perhaps the earliest known account of these people²³. A persuasive case, however, has been argued by Charles King that this portrait is greatly misleading and influenced by classical ideas of ethnography about barbarian peoples²⁴. For the Goths, no comparable account from Ammianus' *Res Gestae* has survived. When his narrative turns in book 31 to the Roman-Gothic Wars that began in the reigns of Valentinian I and Valens, the Goths appear without introduction or digression on their origins and customs. The treatment accorded the Huns and Alans suggests that a comparable discussion of the Goths must

Ammianus' views on the "facts" of history: Amm. Marc. 27.2.1, not all were worthy of the telling; 26.1.1, 30.5.10, the main features of events were enough. Cf. the inherent problems regarding the selection of evidence that these views of Ammianus pose for the modern investigator. Momigliano, "Lonely Historian", p. 135, observes that "his factual accuracy must not be taken for granted".

23. Cf. Thompson, *Historian Ammianus*, p. 119. Syme, *Ammianus & the Historia Augusta*, pp. 17-24, notes that Ammianus' digression on the Huns might date ca. 395, i.e., at the time of the great Hunnic invasion after the death of Theodosius I. For a different view on the Huns see Eunap. F 41 (= *Exc. de Sent.* 39, in Blockley, 2: 59, with discussion 2: 140, n. 90), and Priscus FF 1-2 (= Jord. *Get.* 24.123-26, *Exc. de Leg. Rom.* in Blockley, 1: 223-27, with discussion, 2: 379-80, nn. 1-9).

24. C. King, "The Veracity of Ammianus Marcellinus' Description of the Huns", *AJAH* 12 (1987 [1995]) 77-95, at 89; Maenchen-Helfen, *World of the Huns*, pp. 9-15, is also critical of Ammianus' portrait of the Huns, noting his hate for barbarians and the literary influences that shaped his work. But cf. A. Demandt, *Zeitkritik und Geschichtsbild im Werk Ammians* (Bonn, 1965), pp. 37-39, who rejects the view that Ammianus "hated" Germans. Matthews, *Ammianus*, p. 336-42, is more charitable in his assessment of Ammianus' Hunnic portrait. For the Latin literary tradition and Roman interest in the Germans, see E. A. Thompson, *The Early Germans* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 17-71.

have figured earlier in Ammianus' work. As we lack the first thirteen books of his history, we have many possibilities²⁵. It would seem most likely, however, that Ammianus would have introduced the Goths to his readers upon their entry into Roman imperial history, which would coincide with the Gothic invasions into the Balkans and Greece ca. 230 and afterwards (i.e., the era of the "Third Century Crisis"). By the time that Ammianus came to discuss the Goths and their great clash with Rome, they were already familiar to the Romans and less alien than the Huns and Alans to follow. Therefore, we can expect that what Ammianus would tell about them would be less foreign and farfetched than his stories of the Huns. While it is not possible to locate a Gothic digression in Ammianus' work, we can be rather certain that such a discussion would have been made. What does the historian reveal about the Goths?

In several places Ammianus identifies the Goths as an agricultural people who, if left alone, would have lived in village communities under the leadership of tribal leaders tending their fields and flocks. It would be anachronistic to imagine that the Goths were, even in the late fourth century, ruled by a single "ruler", be that a king or judge. Ammianus clearly states that "kings of the Goths" (*regibus*) had sent men to aid the usurper Procopius against Valens in 365, while the figure of the judge or *iudex*, mentioned by Ammianus as well as other writers, did not possess extraordinary authority²⁶. The relationship, as well as the interrelationship, of these has been discussed by P. J. Heather in his recent work, *Goths and Romans*. His analysis, however, particularly regarding Ammianus and the Gothic chieftains Sueridas and Colias can be profitably elaborated.

These two leaders have been introduced earlier as catalysts leading to the Gothic reaction to Roman treachery and misjudgment. Ammianus reports that Sueridas and Colias had been in Roman territory for some

25. Momigliano, "Lonely Historian", pp. 130-31, discusses the first thirteen books. Thompson, *Historian Ammianus*, p. 119, notes that Ammianus had elsewhere in his account given several treatments of the same people. This would suggest that he could have treated the Goths in several different passages and contexts. Cf. Amm. Marc. 15.10-11 (Gaul and the Gauls), 17.12.2-3 (Sarmatians), 22.15-16 (Egypt), and 23.6.1-75 (Persians and the Persian Empire).

26. For discussion see Heather, *Goths & Romans*, p. 98, n. 44.

time and had been assigned “winter” quarters near Adrianople²⁷. They were then notified by the Romans that they would be relocated across the Hellespont in Asia, at which they requested food, money, and two days time to prepare for the journey. The people of Adrianople, however, incited by their chief magistrate whose lands the Goths had been poaching, attacked the Goths who grabbed whatever tools and weapons were at hand and defended themselves. In the end the attacking Romans were routed: many citizens were killed or injured and the Goths claimed as spoil the weapons and armor left behind (Adrianople was also the site of a weapons factory for the Roman army so the Goths acquired quite a windfall). Afterwards Sueridas and Colias joined forces with Fritigern and undoubtedly many of their men fought what for them was a second battle of Adrianople.

What can be learned from this passage? First, Heather claims that Sueridas and Colias belonged to an unit of the Roman army. This interpretation cannot be correct. First, Ammianus refers to their people with the word *populus* —citizen or people— rather than the military term *miles*-soldier. Second, it is clear that when the Romans fell upon the Goths, they were not only stunned but weaponless —both strange reactions for a military unit. Rather than see these Goths as somehow rebellious soldiers, it seems instead that they were family groups or a tribe, perhaps one of the first to cross into Roman territory. The Romans were in the process of finding lands for these people, as well as areas where the men could be recruited for military service. As for Sueridas and Colias, their actions demonstrate that no one exercised authority over them, that they acted together, both in responding to the Roman order and attack and then making the decision to join Fritigern, another chief, in a concerted effort against the Romans. What this analysis demonstrates then is that the Goths, at this point, were “ruled” (a word like “governed” that should be used loosely) by chief men, i.e., Lat. *rex*, Goth. *reiks*, who ought probably to be seen primarily as war leaders rather in the figure of the Anglo-Saxon hero Beowulf. Clearly the idea of an unified kingship over an unified and organized tribe is simply

27. Amm. Marc. 31.6.1-3 states that they had been there *longe ante suscepti*, but such a phrase resists qualification. Note also that Ammianus’ phrasing reflects his own military background.

an anachorism, one that Ammianus both rejects and implies: rejects, as he is well enough informed to know that a number of men made decisions for the Gothic tribes; implies as he suggests that there were kings who in certain situations acted for all. I suspect that he perhaps knew the former was the more accurate, but was pulled by the lengthy tradition of Greco-Roman thought and historiography to imagine the latter.

That the Goths were an agricultural people is made clear by those passages in which Ammianus refers to the desire of the Goths to be allotted land to cultivate so as to support their families²⁸. These village communities appear to have been protected by stockades, as seen in the vain effort of the Gothic chieftain Athanarichus to resist Hunnic attack (Amm. Marc. 31.3.4-5). Elsewhere we learn that the Goths employed stockades in similar situations (Amm. Marc. 31.12.16) which suggests that this was a habitual practice. These passages and those attesting the use of fire-sharpened weapons in battling Roman soldiers (i.e., at Ad Salices in 377, Amm. Marc. 31.7.12) clearly point to a primitive agrarian based society. As noted above, the Goths also used wagons, the traditional means of transportation for steppe peoples, to carry their families and belongings and, in times of crisis, a sturdy means of defense when strengthened further with a stockade²⁹.

A sign perhaps of this primitive state, certainly in the mind of Ammianus, is a custom that he attributes to the Taifali, a Germanic tribe that joined the Goths during their war against the Romans³⁰. Ammianus relates that among the Taifali “boys couple with men in a union of unnatural lust” thus wasting the “flower of their youth”. He observes further that a young man may escape this “lewd intercourse” if he is able to catch a wild boar or kill a bear single-handed (Amm. Marc. 31.9.5). What lies behind this Taifali practice? When I first read this passage, it struck me as reminiscent of the ancient Macedonian custom that a man

28. Amm. Marc. 31.3.8, 4.8, 9.3, 5. See also Matthews, *Ammianus*, pp. 321-22.

29. Wagons: Amm. Marc. 31.8.1, 12.3, 11, 13.2; wagon cities: Amm. Marc. 31.7.5, 7, 15.5. Noted also, for example, by Matthews, *ibid.*, p. 327.

30. The identity of the Taifali is somewhat obscure. They are variously described as Gallic and Germanic; for the former, A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602*, 2 vols. (Norman, 1973), 1: 620, for the latter, M. Fluss, s.v., “Taifali”, *RE* 4, ser. 2 (1932) 2026-28. I take them to be Germanic following Fluss’ linguistic observations.

wore a halter, i.e., women's clothes, around his waist until he had killed in battle. Similar to this was another custom that a man could not recline at a symposium or drinking party until he had killed a boar in the hunt³¹. These customs of the ancient Macedonians anticipate those of the later Taifali and Goths. That is they reflect the customs of a primitive society in which ancient pastoral traditions remain vital to both the community and its values. What Ammianus ascribes to the Taifali reflects first of all his own inclination toward the rhetorical and his aim to demonstrate to the reader just how barbaric the Goths and their allies were. Hence the reference to homosexual unions and how these could only be avoided by an act of manliness. What he unintentionally reveals, however, is a fragment of the culture of these people and how it reflects the pastoral and heroic qualities of their societies.

The last point to mention is the general distinction between the Goths and Huns that Ammianus offers. His descriptions convey an idea of such animal fierceness and cruelty that the prospects of the Romans ever possibly finding some common ground with these new Balkan inhabitants seems quite remote³². Ammianus was clearly not an admirer of these foreigners and finds nothing exotic about them. But his perceptions contrast sharply with what he unconsciously reveals about the attitudes of the average Roman. This may be demonstrated in his account of the aftermath of the battle of Adrianople. Here the historian reports that local inhabitants and miners—that is Roman citizens—joined forces voluntarily with the Goths and helped them to consolidate their victory (Amm. Marc. 31.6.5, 6). Such cooperation and openness is an old Gothic characteristic, one seen earlier in the alliance with the Taifali and before that in their ability to assimilate other peoples and cultures in the steppe lands of the east³³.

Historical geography encompasses a wide range of subjects which find expression in the Roman world of late antiquity. The traditional definition of historical geography and its relationship to historical events within the context of land features and roadways, is evident in Ammia-

31. See, e.g., N. G. L. Hammond and G. T. Griffith, *A History of Macedonia*, Vol. 2: 550-336 B.C. (Oxford, 1979), p. 23.

32. See Momigliano, "Lonely Historian", p. 134.

33. Noted by Heather, *Goths & Romans*, pp. 89-97, who points out that Gothic grave finds show a combination of Germanic, Roman, and Sarmatian influences.

nus' compressed discussion of the Roman-Gothic struggle for Beroe. The more nuanced analysis of frontiers and their roles, as well as that of population migrations, in this instance that of the Goths and related peoples, is also noted by Ammianus, though the rhetorical element in his history tends to conceal these. Finally, human geography and the issue of culture and cultural attitudes to "others" also makes its way into Ammianus' work, though here the rhetorical element is even more striking.