AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS AND ANCIENT HISTORIOGRAPHY, BIOGRAPHY AND CHARACTER PORTRAYAL

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The aim of the present investigation is briefly to analyse Ammianus’ precursors in historiography, biography and related genres in an attempt to record the biographical elements in their works. Against this background the genres in question will be defined. The next step will be to analyse the Res Gestae of Ammianus in terms of these definitions in order to determine in which aspect of his work the so-called biographical element is comprised.

Ammianus Marcellinus, the last of the greater Roman historians, was born in about A.D. 330 from Greek descent. From approximately 379 he lived at Rome where he spent about thirteen years in writing the thirty one books of his Res Gestae, covering the period from Nerva (A.D. 96) until the death of Valens (378). Only the last eighteen books have survived, and by virtue of these Ernst Stein has described Ammianus as ‘das grösste literarische Genie . . . das die Welt unseres Erachtens zwischen Tacitus und Dante gesehen hat.’ 1 Much has been said about various aspects of his work but his portrayal of character i.e. the biographical element in his Res Gestae has received relatively little attention.

The question regarding the origin of biography allows of so much speculation that no answer can be regarded as final or complete. 2 Our information concerning Greek and early Roman biography is too scanty and provides no satisfactory basis for conclusions about the origin and early development of this genre. The view that Greek biography originated during the fourth century B.C. does not take into account the large number of Greek literary works of the fifth century which have been lost. Momigliano is quite correct in stating ‘Any account in verse or prose that tells us something about an individual can be taken as preparatory to biography’. 3 However, this carries us back far earlier than the actual origin of biography.

On closer examination unmistakable elements of biography become evident especially in Greek historiography. The Greek historian is concerned primarily with political and military events and not with individuals; he is concerned with states and the decrees of councils and national assemblies while individuals serve their states—such as Miltiades, Themistocles and Pericles. But as

2. For basic literature on this subject see the standard work of F. Leo, Die griechisch-römische Biographie nach ihrer literarischen Form, Leipzig, 1901. Also A. Dihle, Studien zur griechischen Biographie. Abh. Göttingen, phil. hist. Kl. 3.37, 1956, and especially the more recent work of A. Momigliano, The Development of Greek Biography, Harvard, 1971: in his extensive ‘Select Introductory Bibliography’ further works are listed (p. 110).
Momigliano aptly remarks: 'No history, however bent on emphasizing collective decisions, can manage to get rid of the disturbing presence of individuals: they are simply there' (p. 40). This is however not confined to a mere 'presence', for in the fourth century the individual comes prominently to the fore. Eminent leaders such as Lysander, Agesilaus and Alexander the Great have to be portrayed as personalities in their own right. Hence characterisation of individuals and the analysis of motives become more refined and subtle.4

Whereas neither biography nor autobiography existed as independent literary genres in Greece during the fifth century B.C., it has nevertheless been convincingly shown by H. Hofmeyr that several biographies are in reality contained in the historical work of HERODOTUS (c. 485-431).5 It might therefore be alleged that biographical works were at any rate known by the fifth century B.C.6 It is not, however, before the Hellenistic era that biography was acknowledged as a genre in its own right by the distinctive appellation Bios.7

While there are clear indications of an interest in biographical detail in the writings of Herodotus, THUCYDIDES (c. 460-400) is labelled as the least biographical of historians.8 Since he is primarily interested in war and politics, the individual is of importance to him only in as much as his actions were for the common weal or detriment. For this reason character portrayal in his work is strictly limited.9 Nevertheless we have in the formal portrayal of Themistocles (I.135-138) a remarkable phenomenon: Leo regards it as 'den ersten eigentlich biographischen Bericht' (p. 86); Dihle calls it a biographic excursion and thus sees it as a 'Vorform' of biography,10 and Field finds in it a precursor of the epilogue.11 Whatever the case may be, the biographical element is unmistakable, specifically in the description of Themistocles' life-history, in so far though as it is functional.

A name which is inseparably linked with the development of biography is that of EURIPIDES (c. 485-406). In his tragedies the individual, the complex personality, the psychological development of a character appear for the first time. In the epilogue on the dead in the Hiketides (860-917) the personalities of the men are unfolded in a remarkable way by their conduct and by the

4. Cf. C. Wachsmuth, Einleitung in das Studium der alten Geschichte, Leipzig, 1895, 209; he points out that during the Hellenistic period a start was made 'auch in der Historiographie die einzelnen Persönlichkeiten schärfer zu zeichnen; die Charakterschilderungen werden häufiger und eingehender.'


6. A. Momigliano, op. cit., 32. Cf. also his remark on p. 102: 'Among the less conspicuous products of the new historical curiosity of the fifth century B.C. I place biography.'

7. F. Leo, op. cit., 86, is of opinion that the word Bioς with its underlying meaning of ancient 'biography' was first used by Euripides.

8. Momigliano, op. cit., 64.

9. Cf. H. D. Westlake, Essays on the Greek Historians and Greek History, New York, 1969, 23: 'Thucydides . . . is normally rigorous in excluding biographical detail . . . he gives no information about the private lives or personal habits of contemporary leaders unless . . . political or military situations were manifestly affected thereby.'


description of their association with their fellow beings. ‘Die Männer “sind” nicht einfach tapfer, genügsam höflich usf., sondern sie “üben” diese Tugenden bewusst in ihrem Lebenslauf . . .’. In other words Euripides does not merely create a static portrait as in the formal epilogue, a portrait made up of a series of unchanging qualities illustrated by examples. He looks at their course of life in its entirety without examining the separate incidents in detail. Thus the poet's epilogue occupies an intermediate position between the 'static' epilogue and the biography. It corresponds to a large extent with biography for the totality of actions and incidents are taken into consideration, but as in the epilogue it is still primarily concerned with the qualities of characters as such, and the extent of the interlocking of 'Werk und Leben, Leistung und Schicksal' as found in biography is as yet absent.

The fourth century B.C. is of the utmost importance for the development of biography. Some scholars, amongst whom Albrecht Dihle, maintain that the history of biography commences with PLATO'S (c. 429–347) portrait of Socrates. In his Apologia he gradually ceases to state explicitly the important qualities by which the nature of Socrates might be described. The portrait of his master is disclosed by his thoughts and actions, by his doctrine and his life, i.e. by means of his way of life as a whole. It is in this that the biographical element in the portrait of Socrates lies, namely that life in its totality is concerned, and not only a number of isolated qualities.

The next to play a part in the development of biography and related genres was ISOCRATES (436–338), one of the most renowned of Attic orators. In his Evagoras (c. 365), a panegyrical on the deceased king of Salamis, he in a certain sense transposes into prose what Pindar had written in poetry. It is an encomium (ἄγικώμιον, laudatio) which depicts Evagoras as the ideal ruler and monarch. Although a chronology is maintained, it is nevertheless a static portrait and therefore not biography depicting the entire course of life: the author is not so much interested in the life, fortunes and meaning of Evagoras as in a catalogue of virtues of an ideal figure, illustrated by selected incidents and deeds, and in the portrayal of an 'Idealbild' of a ruler.

In XENOPHON (c. 430–354) an interesting development takes place, and Momigliano states on p. 47: 'Xenophon especially must be regarded as a pioneer experimenter in biographical forms.' He takes over from Isocrates the form of the encomium and modifies it: presumably Isocrates' Evagoras was the model for his Agesilaus—an encomium in which the deceased Spartan king is idealised as the perfect ruler. In the first section (chronological survey of events) the

15. Op. cit., 20. This view is, however, refuted by Momigliano who finds that 'biography and autobiography existed one hundred years before Socrates' death', (op. cit., 17).
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biographical element is very strong. In the second, however, a detached systematic survey of Agesilaus’ virtues is given. Character and incidents are thus still separated. In the Anabasis, after disaster has befallen Cyrus, Xenophon gives a character portrait of the king (I.9), and at a later stage the five murdered officers are treated likewise (II. 6). Concerning these portraits F. Leo says: ‘Diese Skizzen sind sehr merkwürdig als die ersten Beispiele des ausgeführten biographischen Epilogs in der Historie.’ The character sketch of Cyrus is in reality no less than an encomium, not only because of the exalted diction, but especially because it is inherently nothing but a series of brilliant qualities. His virtues are indeed illustrated by suitable incidents or anecdotes, but the portrayal of his life remains secondary and the product is in fact a static portrait—an ‘Idealbild eines Herrschers.’ The necrology on the murdered officers is, however, not an encomium for it contains elements of both ψόγος and ἔξοπλος; vices and virtues are recalled. The possibility cannot be excluded that Xenophon has in mind the necrology of Euripides in his Hiketides (860–917). Statement of a quality is regularly followed by an illustration, and the impression is that the generals are depicted rather as representative types. Xenophon is not concerned with the entire course of life (biography), but with separate qualities (necrology). Momigliano regards his Cyropaedia as ‘Xenophon’s greatest contribution to biography’ and as ‘the most accomplished biography we have in classical Greek literature.’ It is not, however, the true story about a real person, and because of the mixture of fact and fiction it may not strictly speaking be regarded as biography.

In pursuing the development of the biography and related genres in Roman literature, the first author we should mention is CORNELIUS NEPOS (c. 99–24 B.C.), a contemporary of Cicero’s. His De Viris Illustribus is a collection of biographies in which mainly renowned Greeks and Romans are compared. Nepos was fully aware of the difference between ‘historia’ and ‘vita’, i.e. between historiography and biography.

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17. F. Leo, op. cit., 87. The encomia are discussed on pp. 88–91. A. Dihle, op. cit., 24, regards these portraits as ‘biographische Exkurse’ and therefore as ‘Vorform’ of the biography. He speaks of (dem) grossen Nachruh on Cyrus and ‘die Nekrologe’ on the officers.
18. Cf. expressions such as φιλιππότατος, φιλοθρήστατος, πιστότατος. Momigliano, however, does not regard this portrait of Cyrus as an encomium, but rather as the portrayal of a certain type of man, op. cit., 52.
20. Cf. Anab. II. 6.5–6: An action of Clearchus is mentioned and immediately followed by: ταῦτα ὧν φιλοσοφίαν μοι δοκεῖ ἄνδρας ἔργα εὑναι.
22. Ibid., 55, 56. This does not mean, however, that no element of fiction whatsoever may be found in biography. Momigliano proceeds to show that Xenophon in his Anabasis is also a precursor of autobiography, although he tries to conceal this by writing in the third person (pp. 57–62). The rôle of Aristotle, Aristoxenus and of the Peripatetic School in the development of Hellenistic biography is analysed in his fourth chapter (pp. 65 sqq.).
24. In his prologue to Pelopidas he declares: ‘vereor ne non vitam eius enarrare sed historiam videar scribere.’

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For the historian TACITUS (c. A.D. 55–115) the personality of the emperor is the focal point of his narrative. The depiction of the emperors alternates with the description of incidents in such a way that a picture of the personality gradually grows from the narrative. To our knowledge Tacitus was the first historian to introduce an epilogue (necrology) or final evaluation. His writings, however, reveal a definite development in this respect: in his Historiae the death of an emperor is followed as a rule by an epilogue with some biographical details. It is not a complete summary of all the positive and negative qualities of the deceased but rather a concise view of the emperor’s nature, mostly concluded by a shrewd observation. In the first six books of the Annales there is one necrology only i.e. that on Tiberius (VI.51), and in the remaining extant books it is never again used. Tacitus’ Agricola is very close to real biography: this short treatise was written in appraisal of his father-in-law Agricola as an expression of filial duty. As to its literary nature there is no complete consensus: in a certain sense we have a mixture of historiography and biography, and as early as 1874 Andresen posed the theory that the central part, originally part of a report on the invasion of Britain, was later inserted into the short biography. Against this Gudeman pointed out that the Agricola had been composed in exact accordance with the rhetorical rules for the biographic encomium. Whatever the case may be, the remarkable and for our purpose important point is that he nowhere gives a description of character, but his character is revealed by the description of the life and fortunes of his father-in-law, so that the reader on completing the treatise has a clear picture of Agricola as the type of the ideal general. Tacitus is therefore of the utmost importance for this investigation because elements of both necrology and biography—i.e. the revealing of character by means of the description of incidents—are found in his works, and Ammianus was strongly influenced by him in this respect.

In a discussion of Roman biography, however, it is the name of SUETONIUS (c. 69–140 A.D.) in particular which is inseparably connected with this literary genre. F. Leo begins his well known work on biography with these words: ‘Antik ausgedrückt, in der römischen Geschichtsschreibung ist durch Sueton die Biographie an die Stelle der Historie getreten’ (p. 1). This means that from Suetonius the nature and course of life of a character is of primary importance and that historical events are of secondary concern. As an historian he is of bad

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25. The indirect portrayal of Tiberius in Ann. I–VI was examined and analysed by the author in his M.A. thesis (Pretoria, 1967).
26. Cf. Galba, Hist. 1.49; Otho, II.50; Vitellius, III.86.
27. The ‘necrologies’ on Augustus (1.9) and Germanicus (II.73) are given indirectly by means of popular report.
28. Agr. cap. 3: ‘hie interim liber honoris Agricolae socii mei destinatus, professione pietatis aut laudatus erit aut excusatus.’
30. Gudeman’s English edition, 1899, and German edition, 1902. Cf. Menander’s Περί ἐπιστηκτικῶν: the 6 parts are: 1) introduction 2) the hero’s birth, parentage, and education 3) personal traits and virtues 4) achievements 5) comparison with others (συγκρισις), and 6) epilogue.
“repute for in his *De Vita Caesarum* he divides the qualities, actions and experiences of the emperor ‘kategorienweise in Rubriken und Unterrubriken’. This is a mechanical arrangement for there is no mutual connection or logical sequence. By the separation of parts which belong together the total image becomes confused and the author is furthermore uncritical in collecting his material. Nevertheless his biographies of the emperors became renowned chiefly because they satisfied the public demand, and the form of his work was destined to exert an unmistakable influence in centuries to come. Leo (p. 2) distinguishes between ‘Erzählung’ (narrative) and ‘Beschreibung’ (description) in the writings of Suetonius: the man’s descent and life until he becomes emperor is narrated; this is followed by a description of his character and course of life, forming as it were a comprehensive parenthesis, after which the narrative is resumed when his death is reported. Hence it follows that description of character generally precedes the death of an emperor, as in the case of Caesar, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius and others. Only with regard to Nero and Domitian does it follow by way of an epilogue. To sum up: Suetonius is not primarily concerned with the actions and experiences of the emperors (historiography), but with their nature and their course of life (biography). Whilst Ammianus is primarily interested in the actions and experiences, he nevertheless adopts from Suetonius his interest in character but especially the use of the epilogue.

We must also take into account the rôle of PLUTARCH (c. A.D. 46-120) in the development of biography. Although his so-called *Parallel Lives* deal exclusively with men who made history, he is constantly aware of the fact that his work belongs to a different genre, and he states explicitly that he is not writing history. According to Plutarch the difference between βίος and ιστορία lies in content rather than in form: ιστορία records the πράξεις of nations and men whereas βίος portrays the ηθος. Plutarch’s method is to refer to the character or certain qualities of his hero from time to time in the course of his narrative while adhering to a framework of a biographical scheme. The portrayal of character is however to a large extent intertwined

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32. Against this view cf. Steidle, *op. cit.*, 87.

33. Leo (op. cit., 3, 7) tries to establish a pattern or scheme in the twelve biographies, but there are so many ‘exceptions’ that one can at best note broad guiding lines. Leo’s theory as to the so-called Peripatetic Biography which culminates in the work of Plutarch, and the Alexandrian or literary Biography which flourished with Suetonius, are not relevant for the purpose of this investigation. This theory is questioned by amongst others D. R. Stuart (op. cit., 229 sqq.), W. Steidle (op. cit., 6) and A. Momigliano (op. cit., 87).

34. After Suetonius such biographies as may have been written may have been written were presumably of poor quality, else more works would have survived. Cf. K. Rosen, *Studien zur Darstellungskunst und Glaubwürdigkeit des Ammianus Marcellinus*, Diss. Heidelberg, 1966; Bonn, 1970, 5.


36. The elements of this scheme are according to Leo (p. 180): 1) γένος and youth 2) ηθος 3) πράξεις 4) death.
with the actions, personality thus being disclosed in an indirect way. This method of characterisation is also freely applied by Ammianus and in my opinion this belongs to the biographical element in his work.

For the sake of completeness three historiographers should be mentioned briefly. In his Historiae POLYBIUS (c. 203–120 B.C.) provides the reader with basic information concerning his major characters rather than allowing personality to be revealed by actions. He provides formal character portraits of leading figures in the form of digressions. His epilogues have a didactic nature and are often a means of moralising, while a strong encomiastic tendency is frequently revealed. Such tendencies are not at all prominent in the necrologies of Ammianus. In the same way as SALLUST (86–c. 34 B.C.) in his portrayal of Catilina and Jugurtha, of Marius and Sulla, of Caesar and Cato, Ammianus too introduced biographical elements into his historiography by alternating the portrayal of character with the course of his history. VELLEIUS PATERCULUS (c. 19 B.C.–A.D. 31) is not only in the habit of providing biographical detail about a person on his first appearance but some characters are also accorded epilogues, and the possibility cannot be ruled out that Ammianus was influenced by this too.

For the sake of clarity the findings of the foregoing analysis may be summarised as follows: Elements of biography and related genres have been pointed out in the works of a number of Greek and Roman authors—authors who may in a certain sense be regarded as precursors of Ammianus although all did not necessarily influence him directly. It was shown that a number of biographies were contained in the Historiae of Herodotus. Traces of a biographic element were found in Thucydides' description of Themistocles' life although only those aspects are reported which were functional for his historiography. In the epilogue mentioned, Euripides takes up a position between the necrology where qualities of characters are primarily concerned, and biography, since he takes into consideration their lives and fortunes as a whole. In his portrayal of Socrates Plato gradually abandons the direct mention of isolated qualities, and the portrait of Socrates is revealed through the totality of his life and actions. Isocrates' laudation of Evagoras is pure encomium, a static portrait and no biography which would have included the entire life. In the first part of Xenophon's encomium on Agesilaus the biographic element is particularly strong, but the laudation of Cyrus is pure encomium, a series of brilliant qualities. The epilogue on the murdered officers is no encomium but a

38. E.g. Scipio jr. XXXI. 30.4. Cf. the portraits of Aratus, IV. 8; Hannibal, IX. 22; Philopoimen, X. 21.
39. E.g. Kleomenes, V. 39.6 and Attalus, XVIII. 41. Cf. the remark of C. P. Jones, op. cit., 88: 'Polybius had distinguished biography from history as a field closer to formal laudation, in which the writer was bound to magnify the actions of his subject.'
40. Sulla, II. 17; Pompeius, II. 29; Cato, II. 35; Drusus, II. 97.
41. Pompeius, II. 53; Cicero, II. 66; Cassius and Brutus, II. 72.
necrology: positive and negative traits are mentioned and illustrated. While Nepos writes biographies, we find in the historiography of Tacitus concise necrologies containing some biographical details, and also a biography of Agricola in which his life and fortunes as such reveal his personality. In his biographies of the emperors Suetonius is not so much concerned with the historical actions and experiences of the emperor, but rather with his nature and life: occasionally a character sketch takes on the form of a necrology. Plutarch deliberately writes biography, and except for direct references to character within the framework of a biographical scheme, the portrayal of character is to a large degree interspersed with descriptions of actions. Polybius provides the reader with biographical details in an un-biographical way, while his necrologies reflect a strong encomiastic tendency. The works of Sallust too contain biographical elements as shown by the mingling of personality with history. Lastly, Velleius Paterculus provides biographical information within his history and also employs necrology.

Against this background our next step is to attempt as far as possible a more specific definition of the genres or aspects of the genres in question, namely historiography, biography, encomium (laudatio) and necrology (epilogue). In an attempt to fit such concepts into a system or a scheme it must be kept in mind that an absolute division or classification is impossible. Because of a certain measure of overlapping one can at most lay down norms as an aid in the identification of certain elements. For instance the writer of biography or of an encomium uses various possible methods in accordance with his aim and the demands of his material, and not under compulsion of a scheme.

1. HISTORIOGRAPHY
Without going into detail classical historiography may be defined in general terms as follows: It is primarily concerned with events related to the state or empire, to war and political parties, to important decisions or reforms of rulers or ruling bodies. Owing to the fact that these matters came to centre more and more around individual leaders, especially during the Hellenistic period and the Principate, character portrayal attained greater importance within historiography. Therefore the age-old difference between history and biography faded and it became an intricate problem to distinguish between the elements of these two genres.

2. BIOGRAPHY
The nature of this genre cannot be summed up in a nutshell. It may however be described in general terms. All biography arises from an interest in the individual. As shown by the name itself, biography is essentially the description

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42. Authors such as Plutarch (Alex. 1.2 sq.; Nic. 1.5 sq.; Gaius 2.5), Polybius (10.21.5 sqq.) and Nepos (16.1) were clearly aware of the difference between historiography and biography.
43. A. Momigliano (op. cit.), introduces this problem in his Preface. On p. 6 he says: 'Nobody nowadays is likely to doubt that biography is some kind of history.'
of a life, usually that of an important figure. Therefore historiography which centres around persons is not yet biography, but only comprises biographical elements. In biography we find not only narrative and description, but also explanation and interpretation, for the task of any biographer is to interpret his information: through his writings he conveys knowledge about and holds up an image of a person to his reader—in the words of D. R. Stuart this image ‘must necessarily be cast in the mould of his own brain; his words alone form the material in which the effigy is bodied forth.’ Against the background of the survey of the Greek and Roman writers above, the general nature of biography may therefore be described as follows: the biographer is concerned not with separate incidents or isolated qualities but with a man’s life in its entirety. He does not merely describe a person’s nature, but by means of the totality of his actions and experiences, i.e. by the portrayal of his life the essence of his personality is depicted. Or to put it in a different way: the aim of biography is to disclose the nature or ἡθός of a person by means of selected actions which reveal his character. This is the reason why pithy anecdotes are characteristic of good biography. Since character is reflected by the totality of deeds and experiences it is a distinctive feature of biography that a man’s qualities are often presented by way of sententiae (γνώμαι).

3. ENCOMIUM

Essentially the ἔγκωμιον is a eulogy, an exaltation and idealisation of a certain person. Such a eulogy often occurs in historiography and there is a marked similarity between this and the biography of a famous personage. In both biography and encomium deeds of important persons are recorded so as to reveal their virtues through their deeds. Sometimes we find hybrid forms when a work may be regarded as either biography or encomium as far as form and contents are concerned, e.g. the Agricola of Tacitus. Generally speaking,

45. A. Dihle, op. cit., 11.
47. Cf. also A. Dihle, op. cit., 11 and 15 where he sees the biographical interpretation of a personality as ‘eine Deutung ihres Wesens aus der Gesamtheit des Tuns und Lassens.’
48. A. Momigliano, op. cit., 11: ‘But this seems to be the paradoxical character of biography: it must always give partem pro toto; it must always achieve completeness by selectiveness.’
49. Cf. the remarks in Plutarch, Nic. 1.5 and Galba 2.5; so too Polybius 10.21.5 sqq. According to Aristotle (Nic. Eth. 1103 a 17 and 1104 a) it is not merely a case of virtues being disclosed by actions, but it is through deeds that ethical virtue comes into being.
50. Polybius had already observed (8.10.6) that encomium begins where fear and bias influence the historian: ἐξ ᾗ ἴστορίας μὲν ὀδηγός ἔχειν αὐτοῖς συμβαίνει διάθεσιν τὰς συντάξεις, ἔγκωμιον δὲ μᾶλλον.
51. W. Steidle, op. cit., 129 does not agree with Leo who distinguishes between the two genres. Steidle regards this as ‘Vorurteil’ on the part of Leo and states ‘dass beide Formen überhaupt nicht getrennt werden können und dass das Enkomion gar nichts anderes als die Beschreibung eines Lebens unter Hervorhebung grosser Gesichtspunkte sein will und ist.’ I cannot agree with Steidle’s opinion that the ψάγος is a form of negative encomium (p. 130).
however, the encomium differs from biography in that only brilliant qualities and achievements of a man are recorded and illustrated by biographical data. The aim of a writer of an encomium is to create an idealised image of a man by means of amplification, and for this reason exaggeration of the laudable and suppression of negative qualities are regarded as permissible techniques. Unlike biography the encomium is not mainly concerned with a man’s life as such, but much rather with the accentuation of his brilliant achievements and illustrious qualities. Notwithstanding many illustrations a static, one-sided picture is created in an encomium, composed of a series of unchanging qualities. The writer of an encomium has certain presuppositions regarding the elements of which goodness and greatness are composed, and these elements are demonstrated accordingly by examples from the life and nature of the person concerned. The influence of the Greek ἐυκόμανος on the later form of the laudatio funebris—a eulogy by the son of the deceased and later more generally a eulogy in honour of any highly placed person—can hardly be denied.

4. NECROLOGY
The necrology, elogium, or epilogue presents a static picture composed of a series of unchangeable qualities, which are often illustrated by separate incidents or isolated events. Up to this point this definition also holds good for the encomium. The essential difference is however that the subject of the encomium is the praiseworthy and illustrious qualities of a person, whereas a necrology is not concerned only with positive aspects: along with ἔχαιρος we find ψόγος. Although the necrology also contains biographical information, it is not biography.

Against the background of the preceding definitions it is now our task to determine Ammianus’ position with regard to biography. What exactly is his position with regard to the history of the Roman Empire (Reichsgeschichte) on the one hand, and ‘imperial biography’ (Kaiserbiographie) on the other? Generally speaking and in the light of available information the development of the Roman annalistic historiography culminated in the Annales of Tacitus, and on the model of Suetonius imperial biography became fashionable. Ammianus, however, being primarily interested in important and extraordinary events,
does not follow this fashion in his Res Gestae but chooses his genre independently.\textsuperscript{56} This does not mean that he tries to avoid elements of imperial biography in writing the history of the Roman Empire, for it is well known that, especially in ancient historiography, the characters of leading personalities naturally came into relief and to a certain extent became the focal point of events.\textsuperscript{57} Because of the fact that elements of both the history of the Roman Empire and biography of the emperors are to be seen in the Res Gestae, there are two possible standpoints: on the one hand there are those who agree with W. Klein in saying that Ammianus writes the history of the Empire and not of the emperors: ‘Die Person der Kaiser tritt immer nur dann in den Vordergrund, wenn ihre Geschichte mit der des Reichs zusammenfällt.’\textsuperscript{58} Against this view Samberger (p. 431) concludes ‘dass die Persönlichkeit des Kaisers im Mittelpunkt der ammianischen Geschichtsschreibung steht’, and she goes even further by regarding the history of the emperors as the framework within which the historical events in the Roman Empire are recorded.\textsuperscript{59} These two views bring us no closer to the answer but confront us with the basic question: does the work of Ammianus relate more closely to historiography or to biography? In other words: is Ammianus primarily concerned with characters and only in the second place with historic events, or vice versa? To my mind O. Seeck shares with others the more correct mean view when he states: ‘Das Werk Ammians will einerseits . . . Reichsgeschichte sein, anderseits strebt es auch nach einer Annäherung an das Schema der Kaiserbiographien.’\textsuperscript{60} Against the background of the three opinions just mentioned the position may be summarised as follows: it is my belief that the Res Gestae is primarily a history of the Empire. It must be added immediately, however, that Ammianus, just as his great predecessor Tacitus, never for a moment forgets that human conduct which is largely responsible for events, results from and is governed by the personality of the actor. Seeing that the emperor in person is inseparably integrated with this history, and his life interwoven with the history of the Empire, there is naturally a strong tendency toward a history of the emperor (Kaisergeschichte).\textsuperscript{61} The influence of the imperial biography (Kaiserbiographie) is unmistakable,\textsuperscript{62} yet it


\textsuperscript{57} On this theme we have an excellent study by Christa Samberger, ‘Die “Kaiserbiografie” in den Res Gestae des Ammianus Marcellinus. Eine Untersuchung zur Komposition der ammianischen Geschichtsschreibung’, Klio 51, 1969, 349-482.

\textsuperscript{58} W. Klein, Studien zu Ammianus Marcellinus, Klio-Beiheft 13, Leipzig, 1914, 19, 56.

\textsuperscript{59} Samberger, op. cit., 480: ‘Es ist nicht so dass Ammian im Rahmen einer Reichsgeschichte in erster Linie . . . über die Taten der Herrscher schreibt, sondern im Rahmen einer Kaisergeschichte ist in den Res Gestae Schauplatz des historischen Geschehens das römische Reich in seiner ganzen Ausdehnung . . .’

\textsuperscript{60} R.E. I, 1848.

\textsuperscript{61} Samberger (op. cit., 409) says there is ‘in den Res Gestae des Ammian bei weitem mehr Raum für die Tendenz zur Kaisergeschichte, als in den Annaalen des Tacitus . . .’

\textsuperscript{62} Cf. K. Rosen, op. cit., 83, 180, 181.
may not be assumed categorically that the *Res Gestae* consists of a series of biographies of emperors or that character portrayal is the main object.

The tendency toward biography is thus undeniable, but *what exactly is this 'biographical element'?* According to O. Seeck it is to be found in the epilogues. Friedrich Leo likewise concludes that Ammianus' 'Elogien' reflect the nature of the historical biography: the form of these 'Elogien' shows a marked similarity to that of the encomium as prescribed in handbooks of rhetoric. The preceding narrative renders the inclusion of actions amongst virtues unnecessary. As was shown earlier the important difference between the encomium and the epilogue is that both elements of praise (ἐπαινούς) and censure (ψάχνος) occur in the latter which makes an encomium a χαρακτηρισμός—and this is according to Leo what the historical biography essentially is. The opinion of W. Klein is that the practice of a historiographer to portray his heroes in a 'besonderen Abschnitt' should not necessarily be regarded as the biographical element, but he agrees with Leo in stating that only the form and not the tenor of Ammianus' character portrayal is biographical. In her remarkable study of the 'Kaiserbiographie' in the *Res Gestae* C. Samberger takes a view directly opposing Seeck: she concludes that the qualities brought to light in the course of the narrative are basically the same as those recorded in the necrology and 'Es ist also verfehlt, die Elogien als das biographische Element der ammianischen Geschichtsschreibung losgelöst vom historischen Bericht zu betrachten, wie es bei Seeck geschieht.' I entirely agree with Samberger in her criticism of Seeck, yet she offers no answer to our question. As stated earlier Ammianus is in the first place historiographer and not biographer: he is primarily concerned with the recording of events whereas the character portraits which grow from the course of his narrative are in reality byproducts of his description of these events. We have seen that biography is the portrayal of a man's nature by means of the totality of his actions and experiences. I have shown elsewhere to how large an extent Ammianus reveals his characters in an indirect way by means of dramatic representation through their words and conduct. In the portrayal of the eight characters selected, the most frequently used of all the methods is portrayal by actions, followed by verbal characterisation. Thus, in the light of these findings, I am convinced that the biographical element in the work of Ammianus lies especially in this technique of indirect portrayal of characters.

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63. According to W. Klein (op. cit., 27) this tendency is not always equally strong; he believes Ammianus writes 'im ersten Teil seines Werkes mehr "Biographie", im letzten mehr Reichsgeschichte'.

64. *R.E.* I, 1848: 'An die biographische Form erinnern die Charakteristiken, welche A. beim Tode jedes Kaisers giebt, mit ihrer regelmässigen Einteilung ...'. The most important epilogues are those on Constantius (21. 16. 1–19), Julian (25. 4. 1–27), Valentinian (30. 7. 1–9. 6) and Valens (31. 14. 1–8).

65. F. Leo, *op. cit.*, 238.


This view is corroborated by Ammianus' keen interest in the individual and by the fact that his narrative is built around persons; furthermore, as in biography praise and censure of qualities occur alternately throughout his narrative. However, the entire life of a character from birth to death is not described, for Ammianus as historiographer is bent on information which is functional within his description of events.

But a question yet to be answered remains: what is the relationship between Ammianus' epilogues and biography? Why does Seeck refer to the ‘biographische Form’ of the epilogues, while Leo calls it ‘biographischer Anhang’ and Ensslin uses the term ‘biographische Abschnitte’? Should the biographical element not rightly be sought in the necrologies? Before this question can be answered the general characteristics of the epilogues in the Res Gestae must be stated briefly: Unlike a normal digression the necrology is organically connected with the history for the simple reason that it in great part comprises elements intertwined with the preceding narrative. The author comes forward personally as it were, and directly and explicitly gives a well-considered assessment of the emperor's qualities. The aim of the necrology is not merely to please the reader by a character portrait in the biographical tradition, but to enable him to evaluate the emperor from the list of virtues and vices adduced. The necrology provides a static portrait comprising a list of qualities with no chance of indicating development or change, a picture composed of innate or acquired traits of character. Apart from its summarising function the epilogue fulfils a supplementary rôle by giving the author the opportunity of adding aspects of the personality which have for some reason or other not been revealed in the narrative, thus drawing as complete a picture as possible. Whereas neither the epilogue nor the narrative provides a complete picture, we have here in reality the two mutually complementary components of the total image of the character as depicted by one and the same author. Thus, while the epilogue provides a useful summary as well as a necessary addition of qualities, the preceding narrative provides the indispensable background, both by qualifying and by expanding the range of 'static' characteristics mentioned in the epilogue.

Now the question is why the biographical element cannot be sought in the epilogues. The inclusion of necrologies in Ammianus' history gives proof of a biographical interest in the individual, but the reasons why it cannot be regarded as the biographical element in the Res Gestae are the following: whereas the biography is an indirect portrayal of the character or a person by

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68. Generally speaking Ammianus occupies a position between Thucydides (personality on the background) and Suetonius (personality the focal point).
69. R.E. I, 1848.
73. This is the main theme of part II of my dissertation (pp. 83–172).
means of his total life and experiences, qualities are recorded in the epilogue which are isolated and detached from his life, and details taken from his life are added only by way of illustration. In a biography a man’s character and life story are merged, whereas an epilogue is a detached digression on the qualities of the deceased. Only in its form does the epilogue show a similarity to the pattern of the rhetorical biography: the age, descent, course of life and physical appearance of the deceased are briefly mentioned along with the extensive treatment of virtues and vices. There is also a marked similarity to the epilogue scheme used by Tacitus. The biographical element is thus limited to the biographical details comprised of a few short introductory and concluding remarks, whereas the larger and most important part of the epilogue, i.e. the recording of bona and vitia, does not contain any biographical element. The arguments in favour of the view that the biographical element lies in the epilogues are therefore not at all convincing. The epilogue does comprise a (limited) biographical element, but cannot be regarded as the biographical element in the work of Ammianus.

For the sake of completeness the question may further be raised whether the so-called biographical element should not be sought in the formal character portraits. These portraits resemble the epilogues in being digressions in which the writer records the qualities of a character directly and formally when he enters the scene or shortly after he has made his appearance. The drawback of this technique is that the author in effect deprives the character of the possibility of growing gradually and in a natural way from the narrative. It should be noted that there is no division between positive and negative qualities. Since only traits of character are given and no further biographical details are added, the formal portrait can certainly not be regarded as the biographical element in the Res Gestae.

The summary of qualities in the epilogues resembles the encomium but only as far as the treatment of virtues (ἐπαινεῖται) is concerned. Since the vices (ψυχωτα) are also discussed, the epilogue as a whole cannot be regarded as an encomium. That the necrologies of Ammianus were influenced by the ἔγκριμον is however no foregone conclusion. Only the epilogue on Julian with its subdivision of virtues into the four main groups, shows a marked influence of this genre, as against the epilogues of Constantius, Valentinian

74. C. Samberger (op. cit., 392) criticises the view that the necrologies comprise the biographic element in the Res Gestae. She believes that the epilogue—with the exception of that on Gallus—is no detached biography but merely a survey of the bona and vitia which had already emerged from the narrative (cf. pp. 393, 5). But she does not take into account all the complementary along with the summarising function of the epilogue: she regards only the forma as complementary (p. 393).


76. Formal character portraits as a method of direct character portrayal were discussed at greater length in the author’s dissertation (pp. 26-30). Note especially the portrayal of Julian (16.1.1-5), Gratian (27.6.15 and 31.10.18-19), Procopius (26.6.1), and Eutherius (16.7.4-8).

77. Cf. W. Klein, op. cit., 25, as to the influence of the encomium.
and Valens which are neither laudatory nor damning. No doubt Ammianus was well-acquainted with the form of the encomium for he writes a true encomium in his praise of Eutherius (16.7.4–8), and from a comparison with the necrologies it transpires that there is but a very slight possibility that they could have been directly influenced by the encomium. The division of qualities into bona and vitta was generally known from rhetoric, and one may assume that Ammianus' regard for order made him decide on this form of treatment.

In the light of the preceding discussion the position of Ammianus with regard to biography, the epilogue and the encomium may be summed up as follows: Although Ammianus is in the first place a historiographer, unmistakable elements of biography are found in his writings. This appears not only from the fact that the historical events centre around the figure of the emperor, but especially from the way in which character portrayal is merged with the narrative: the character is not depicted directly, but through the description of the subject's way of life, his experiences, actions and achievements, his personality is revealed to a large degree in an indirect way of means of his words, deeds and reactions. Detached from the narrative we find epilogues and formal portraits in which static pictures are presented in a direct and formal way. The scanty biographical details contained in these, provide insufficient grounds for regarding the necrology or the formal portrait as such as the biographical element in the writings of Ammianus. Even though the treatment of virtues in the epilogues resembles the encomium, it is highly improbable that his epilogues in full were directly influenced by the encomium.

78. It has all the components of the encomium: genus, disciplina, natura, mores, res gestae.
79. Cf. in general L. F. Field, op. cit., App. II, Encomium, the Laudatio Funebris and Biography, pp. 95 sqq.
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