CHAPTER 2

Introduction

The heavy defeat which the Alamans had inflicted on a Roman army led by Charietto and Severianus called for a swift reaction. The magister equitum Dagalaifus was charged with the task to set things right. He proved to be the wrong man for warfare against the guerrilla-like tactics of the adversary, so that he was relieved by another experienced general, Iovinus, who twice caught a section of the Alamans’ forces by surprise and defeated them with ease. These successes were, however, only the preliminaries of a hard-fought battle in the open plain near Châlons-en-Champagne, which ended with a clear Roman victory. Valentinian was delighted and soon afterwards rewarded Iovinus with a consulship.

Sabbah 205–206 regards Ammianus’ description of Iovinus’ operations as an adaptation of the general’s official report. Details showing this are, for instance, the references to the information gathered by espionage, the precise numbers of victims on both sides, the ascription of partial setbacks to subordinates, and the explicit mention of the general’s excellent military virtues. All this is plausible, but it should be added that in an entirely different context Iovinus was called dux meriti celsioris by Amm. himself (25.8.11). Apart from this, whatever the provenance of the facts which he mentions, the historian is responsible for the words which he has written.

Qua clade cum ultimo maerore comperta The adjective expresses the high degree of alarm and dismay at the Roman headquarters in Paris; cf. ultima desperatio (16.2.1), compulsus ad ultimos metus (16.12.60). Valentinian seems to have been confident that the Alamannic invasions could be stopped without his personal interference. As is argued ad 26.5.8 Et circa, he only heard about the defeat of Charietto and Severianus around 1 November 365 while he was on his way to Paris from Milan, which he had probably left after 24 September 365 (Cod. Inst. 11.62 [61].3). Zos. 4.9.2–4 focuses on Valentinian’s anger at the detachment of the Batavi, whose flight had originated the rout of the Roman army.
correcturus sequius gesta Dagalaifus a Parisiis mittitur Cf. 26.5.9 Et Alamannis quidem occurrurum Dagalaifum pergere mature praecepti, qui vastitatis propinquioribus locis longius discesserant incruenti with the extensive note ad loc. See for corrige denoting putting right what has gone wrong, e.g. military reverses, the notes ad 17.13.26 correximus, 21.3.2 negotium, 25.4.25 quae omnia. Valesius’ correction of V’s text was inspired by 27.8.2 correcturum sequius gesta. Apart from eight instances in Apuleius, this comparative is rarely used, in contrast to securis, which in Amm. occurs more than twenty times; see the note ad 20.8.11 nec actum on the meaning of securis, and especially its connotation ‘wrongly’. For Dagalaifus see the notes ad 26.1.6 Dagalaifo, 26.4.1 silentibusque, and 26.5.2 et Dagalaifus. Valentinian sent Dagalaifus against the Alamanni at the end of 365; when exactly is hard to establish, but probably sometime in November. Amm. had already given the same information, but in a different context in 26.5.9, quoted above. However, he was quickly recalled, surely before 1 January 366, when he was inaugurated as consul together with the emperor’s son Gratian. Tomlin, 1973, 150, 495 has shown that, even though the first-known law of the consuls Gratian and Dagalaifus seems to date from 7 April 366 (Cod. Theod. 8.7.9; cf. Pergami, 1993, 321–323), there is no reason to suppose that Dagalaifus only entered the office of consul in March 366. This was later defended by Lorenz, 1997, 79–80. Nor is there any reason to suppose with Lorenz, 1997, 76, 78 and Drinkwater, 2007, 268 that Dagalaifus fought two campaigns against the Alamanni, one at the end of 365 and another one at the beginning of 366. Lorenz’ and Drinkwater’s suppositions are based on the date they give for the main Alamannic invasion, namely January 366: this date is wrong.

eoque diu cunctante causanteque diffusos per varia barbaros semet adoriri non posse Note Dagalaifus’ lack of confidence and conviction, which becomes manifest both in his hesitation and in his excuses, and which contrasts conspicuously with the prudent resolution of his successor Iovinus, who took advantage of the Alamanni being ‘scattered all over the country’. Unconventional tactics seemed to be needed to defeat them: a sort of guerrilla warfare and surprise attacks such as Charietto had applied in the 350s – see the note ad 27.1.2 Charietto – and to which Dagalaifus’ successor Iovinus also reverted. See for causari denoting excuses for not taking a particular action the note ad 25.3.3 eoque causante and for diffusos per varia the note ad 21.8.3 quo diffusi.