JULIAN AND THE DECISION TO FIGHT: STRASBOURG, 357

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In the year 357, the armies of the Alamanni king Chnodomar crossed the Rhine and assembled just north of Strasbourg. Answering this challenge was the western empire's new Caesar, Julian (known to wider circles as Julian the Apostate). Ammianus Marcellinus, a primary source for details of Julian's Gallic campaign, tells us that Julian's forces were significantly outnumbered going into the battle. Despite this apparent disadvantage, however, Julian won a decisive victory, routing an enemy perhaps 35,000 strong (though there is debate as to whether or not this figure is plausible), while losing only 243 men.[1] This engagement, and particularly its outcome, raises a number of questions. First among them, and the principle concern of this paper, is why Julian would consent to pitched battle against such an overwhelming force.

To understand what motivated Julian to engage the Alamanni, we ought first to consider why he was victorious. Ammianus describes Julian's decision to fight as an act of

[1]Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire (A.D. 354-378)*, trans. Walter Hamilton (Suffolk: Chaucer Press, 1986), XVI.12.60.

bravery in the face of desperate odds.[2] This paper proposes, however, that Julian's position was hardly as desperate as Ammianus describes it. In fact, Julian had every reason to believe that he would defeat the Alamanni. Evidence suggests, furthermore, that he was even responsible for instigating the conflict.[3]

One way to begin this examination is to ask why Chnodomar would raise an army and seek a pitched battle against the Romans in the first place. Much has been learned about the Alamanni and the role they played in late antiquity over last few decades. In much of this research, particularly with respect to interpretations of primary source narratives, one finds little precedent for Chnodomar's actions. A more likely explanation is that Chnodomar was not the great threat he was portrayed to be, but rather was constructed as a literary figure to stand against Julian. The vilification of the Alamanni king and his German confederation, in other words, was largely an invention of Julian's polemicists. Julian's victory over the Alamanni was likely not the titanic struggle that both Ammianus and Libanius, another of Julian's chief contemporary polemicists, made it out to be. This should not, however, diminish the importance of Julian's decision to engage in battle. Just as important as his victory was the fact that Julian decided to fight in the first place, a fact historians too often marginalize. What this paper aims to show is that for Julian, neither the restoration of Gaul nor the defeat of the Alamanni were ends in and of themselves. Julian's campaign

[2]Ammianus, XVI.12.3.

[3] These claims are supported, both directly and indirectly, by the scholarship of J. F. Drinkwater, Hugh Elton and Shaun Tougher, among others. See generally J. F. Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome 213-496* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007); Hugh Elton, *Warfare In Roman Europe AD 350-425* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1996); and Shaun Tougher, *Julian The Apostate* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

became an act of personal liberation and political defiance aimed at his cousin, Emperor Constantius II.

One of the problems faced in the study of Julian is the volume of conflicting primary source material.[4] Though his reign was cut short after two years, Julian's actions and philosophies were the subject of many polemics, invectives, histories, and commentaries. Much of this material, as in the case of Libanius and Gregory of Nazianzus, is polarized around religion. As such, it is common to find in these works a heavy subjectivity that corrupts the historical accuracy of the document. Ammianus, while not entirely objective, is perhaps the most reliable of the ancient sources. He undoubtedly used creative license in describing the virtue of his patron, but was also quick to criticize his flaws, as in the case of his treatment of Christianity, or the trial of Paul 'the Chain.'[5] Still, Edward Gibbon wrote that Ammianus, along with a select few other historians, "deserved the singular praise of holding the balance with a steady and equal hand."[6] That said, Ammianus still needs to be interpreted with skepticism. Modern reinterpretations of Ammianus have shown that his representations of history are often times too

[4] Drinkwater wrote that, "we know more about [Julian's] activities here than those of any other Roman general since Julius Caesar." Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome*, 217.

[5] Paulus Catena was an imperial officer active in Gaul during Julian's campaign who was notorious for the allegedly sadistic and unpredictable execution of his duties in restoring orders after Magentius' revolt. Julian, shortly after becoming emperor, ordered him burned alive. Tougher, *Julian the Apostate*, 6.

[6] Edward Gibbon, "A Vindication of Some Passages In The Fifteenth and Sixteenth Chapters of *The History of The Decline and Fall of The Roman Empire* (London, 1779)," in *The English Essays of Edward Gibbon*, ed. P. A. Craddock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 299.

simplistic to be taken at face value.[7] Ammianus' storytelling ignores political complexities and reduces important figures to the sum of their actions, without seriously considering alternative motivations.[8] Discrepancy amongst these sources continues to provide the focus for many debates in scholarly circles. Polymnia Athanassiadi-Fowden, for instance, describes Julian as a loyal defender of the Empire, pure in faith and motivation.[9] Others, J. F. Drinkwater prominent among them, have cast Julian's intentions in a less noble light.[10]

Chnodomar's role leading up to and at the Battle of Strasbourg is a central problem taken up by these historians. That Chnodomar existed is accepted; he only seems to exist, however insofar as he relates to Julian and his Gallic campaign. Ammianus described him as "causing universal turmoil and confusion,"[11] but outside of the context of Julian's campaign, we find no significant mention of him. Accordingly, Drinkwater suggests that Chnodomar, "was as much a literary construct as a historical figure."[12] According to Drinkwater, "Ammianus makes Chnodomar Vercingetorix to Julian's Julius Caesar... He is magnified through his conflict with Julian, who needs a redoubtable foe."[13] Who was Chnodomar, and why did he raise an army to invade Gaul?

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[7] Timothy D. Barnes, *Ammianus Marcellinus and the Representation of Historical Reality* (London: Cornell University Press, 1998), 10.
[8] As in the case of his interpretation of Constantius' motivations solely with respect to his adversarial relationship with Julian.
[9] Polymnia Athanassiadi-Fowden, *Julian and Hellenism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 62-3.
[10] See generally Drinkwater; but also Adrian Murdoch, *The Last Pagan* (Sparkford: Sutton Publishing, 2003); and G.W. Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate* (London: Duckworth Publishing, 1978).
[11] Ammianus, XVI. 12.4
[12] Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome,* 237.
[13] Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome,* 236-237.

The Alamanni had a long standing relationship with the Empire by the fourth century. German settlers had been settling in Gaul for centuries, often living peacefully alongside the native Celts. Several emperors had even invited the Alamanni to settle within the imperial boundary to provide a breeding stock for recruits. There is simply no reason to believe that the Alamanni had become suddenly hostile and aggressive overnight.[14] Further evidence of this relatively peaceful cohabitation can be seen throughout Julian's own work. He frequently made use of this relationship to attack Constantius' loyalties, such as in his work, a *Letter To The Athenians*, wherein he chastises Constantius for being, "too much accustomed to providing for the barbarians."[15] Constantius was, in fact, very much in the habit of dealing with the Alamanni and other barbarians in a non-aggressive manner.[16] Nonetheless, continued German habitation west of the Rhine remained a thorn in Constantius' side. Not only was it a political embarrassment, but it left Italy, the ancestral core of the western empire, feeling exposed and vulnerable.[17]

The Gallic campaigns Constantius organized in 354-6 were to have been a display of military power intended to compel the Alamanni into a bloodless withdrawal back across the Rhine. Military engagement with the Alamanni, however,

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[14] Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome,* 227.

[15] Constantius had relied on the support of the Alamanni in putting down the revolt of Magnentius; Julian, *Letter To The Athenians*, trans. W. C. Wright (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 273.

[16] Constantius ended his 354 campaign by securing a number of peace and trade agreements with the barbarians, with very little actual fighting. Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome,* 228. Furthermore, the peace treaties Constantius offered the Alamanni at the end of the 354 campaign were ill received by the legions who felt both insulted and cheated. Robin Seager, "Roman Policy On The Rhine and the Danube In Ammianus," *The Classical Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (1999): 580.

[17] Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome,* 22.

was not one of Constantius' goals.[18] One of the key objectives of his plan was to have two armies -- one led by his *magister peditum* Barbatio, and a smaller one led by Julian -- meet on opposite sides of the Rhine south of Strasbourg in order to construct a bridge.[19] This bridge was to have served two important functions. In addition to expanding Roman military presence along the Rhine border region, it would expedite the withdrawal of Alamanni settlers out of Gaul. For reasons still debated, efforts to construct the bridge were unsuccessful.[20] Having failed at his bridge-building task, Barbatio and his army of 25,000 packed up and began to head home, a departure considered by Ammianus to be both cowardly and treacherous.[21]

According to Ammianus, the intention of the campaign was to, "squeeze [the Alamanni] into a narrow space by a pincer movement...and cut them to pieces," thereby relieving the Celts from barbarian "slaughter, pillage and fire."[22] Barbatio's departure meant that the pincer movement

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[18] Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome*, 229.

[19] The *magister peditum* ("master of the foot") was a military command created in the 4th century under Constantine. Distinct from the post of *magister equitum* ("master of the horse") the *magister peditum* commanded the infantry forces of his assigned praetorian prefecture. At the time of Barbatio's withdrawal, Julian was supported by Gaul's *magister equitum*, Severus- a seasoned officer "more to Julian's taste." See David Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay AD 180-395* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 501.

[20] Libanius attributes this failure to Alamanni efforts to destroy the bridge. He writes that the Alamanni sent logs down the Rhine and destroyed the bridge. Libanius, *Funeral Oration for Julian*, trans. A. F. Norman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), XVIII.49-51. Drinkwater suggests that it was more likely a case of sabotage, either by Julian or Barbatio, or possibly by both acting independently of one another. Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome,* 229-30.

[21] Ammianus, XVI. 11.11.

[22] Ammianus, XVI. 11.3, XV. 5.2.

Ammianus described was no longer possible. His departure, however, should hardly be considered a betrayal of his duties. There is no evidence that "cutting the Alamanni to pieces," as Ammianus so eloquently put it, was likely to have been Constantius' intent for the campaign. Ammianus' claims that Constantius ordered Barbatio to leave Julian and return east are likely true, however the act should not been interpreted as a slight against Julian and his efforts, but rather the expiration of a an operational mandate. Both generals had sent dispatches to the emperor claiming the Alamanni had destroyed the bridge. In the face of such hostility, it only made sense for Constantius to order Barbatio and his army of 25,000 to leave Alamanni territory before hostilities escalated. With his hands full in the east, the emperor had no intention of risking war in the west.[23]

Up until this point, Ammianus says little of Chnodomar or his alliance of kings. There had not been any significant pitched battles, nor had the Alamanni offered any real resistance beyond the occasional raid and skirmish. According to Ammianus, Chnodomar only created his alliance to exploit the opportunity presented by Barbatio's sudden withdrawal.[24] In his narrative, the Alamanni king saw an opportunity to drive the Roman forces out of Gaul, since the only opposition that remained was Julian's 13,000.[25] The problem with Amminaus' assertion, though, is its timing. In Ammianus' record, Chnodomar begins to mobilize the Alamanni and other Germanic tribes to capitalize on Barbatio's withdrawal. If that were the case, if Julian

[23] Constantius had to deal with recurring Sassanid hostilities on the empire's eastern front throughout his reign. Ammianus, XV. 13.1-4 In fact, in 358, Shapur II would invade Roman Mesopotamia, forcing Constantius to redistribute much of the divided Empire's military resources.

[24] Ammianus, XVI. 12.1.

[25] Ammianus, XVI 12.3.

suddenly found himself alone and isolated in the face of a united and suddenly territorially ambitious Alamanni confederacy, how do we understand what he did next?

Once Barbatio declared his intention to withdraw, Julian asked him for the use of seven boats with which to drive the Alamanni from their island camps scattered throughout the Rhine.[26] This action went beyond the authority invested in Julian for the Gallic campaign, as evidenced by Barbatio's burning the boats by way of response. As far as Barbatio was concerned, Julian was egregiously overstepping his mandate. Even without Barbatio's support, however, Julian was still able to raid the islands, slaughtering the inhabitants "without distinction of age, like so many sheep."[27]

From Chnodomar's perspective, Barbatio's withdrawal could have been interpreted as a sign of Constantius' unwillingness for war, and therefore a confirmation of earlier settlement agreements between the Alamanni and the emperor.[28] By raiding the villages, Julian demonstrated his unwillingness to honour those same agreements, or to even deal with the Alamanni on equitable terms, as the emperor had previously.

This departure from the imperial mandate was a fundamental turning point in the campaign. The moment Barbatio left the field, Constantius' authority over Julian was severed. The campaign became, in effect, Julian's campaign. In reaction to the Caesar's sudden aggression, Chnodomar, speaking on behalf of the allied Alamanni, ordered Julian to withdraw and leave the Alamanni settlers in peace.[29] No such attempt was made to settle with Barbatio, nor could there have been, as the alliance was not created until after he had begun

[26] Ammianus, XVI. 11.8.
[27] Ammianus, XVI. 11.9.
[28] Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate,* 71.
[29] Ammianus, XVI. 12.3.

his retreat. This is supported by Drinkwater when he suggests that the alliance only came about as a panicked reaction to Julian's unexpected aggression.[30] Ammianus wrote that the alliance was formed by the emboldened kings after Barbatio's defeat;[31] however, the attacks on Barbatio's army do not begin until after Julian's raid. Barbatio's forces were already returning home when they were set upon, and do not seem to have gone out of their way to provoke the Alamanni. Chnodomar's alliance was a consequence of Julian's aggression, and not some pre-existing organization bent on conquering Gaul.[32] This stands clearly in opposition to primary source treatments of Chnodomar as the instigating warmonger.

Even if we accept, however, that Chnodomar created his alliance as a defensive action to counter Julian's aggression, it does not explain why he chose to engage a Roman army in pitched battle. Traditionally, Alamanni warriors had just as often fought for Rome as against it. Most recently they had been employed by Constantius against the usurper Magnentius. When Julian claimed to have liberated slaves and spoil from the Alamanni, it was slaves and spoil taken by the Germans while serving the Roman Emperor. Even when the Alamanni did choose to fight against the empire or its people, it was often in the form of anonymous raiding, where it would have been difficult for the empire to directly punish those responsible. To fight a pitched battle, however, Chnodomar had to levy upwards of 20-25 percent of the Alamanni population.[33] An army of this size would have implied a collective cultural culpability for attacking the

[30] Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome*, 236.
[31] Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome,* 235.
[32] In consideration of both Julian's intelligence and hubris, probably not an unexpected consequence, though the sources say little on his motivations at the time.
[33] Elton, *Warfare In Roman Europe*, 73.

empire, and would have allowed the empire a clearer target for retaliatory action. Such a campaign would therefore have only been undertaken under the direst of circumstances. Ammianus asserts that Chnodomar was confident of an easy victory, and that it was Julian who found himself in a desperate position.[34] As Elton points out, however, barbarians -- the Alamanni in particular -- avoided pitched battles against the Romans whenever possible, adding, "[t]heir almost inevitable defeat when engaged in open battles makes this understandable."[35]

Ammianus explains the confidence of the Alamanni kings using two arguments. The first concerns the defeat of Barbatio's much larger force in Raetia. Ammianus wrote that, "[t]he recent flight of a Roman commander (Barbatio), who was superior in numbers and strength, served to fortify [Chnodomar's] belief in himself."[36] The claim that Barbatio was "defeated," however, appears to be greatly engineered, to the disparagement of one of Julian's chief adversaries. Barbatio was already withdrawing when he encountered trouble. According to Drinkwater, this trouble was likely no more than, "nuisance raiding on the rear of his column."[37] Still, it is plausible, perhaps even likely that Chnodomar was able to inflate their success for the sake of morale. The second explanation Ammianus uses is the size of Chnodomar's army, which he tells us was 35,000. The reliability of this figure has been questioned by a number of academics, Drinkwater among them, who would put the size of his army at not much more than 15,000.[38] In either case, the Germans did enjoy

[34] Ammianus, XVI. 12.3.
[35] Elton, *Warfare in Roman Europe*, 80.
[36] Ammianus, XVI. 12.4.
[37] Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome*, 230.
[38] Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome*, 237-8. There seems to be a general consensus when it comes to the size of Julian's army; estimates of between 13-15,000 seem likely. Ammianus, the source from which

numerical superiority, which could have contributed, at least in some small way, to the confidence of the Alamanni kings.

On the other hand, there is evidence to suggest that the morale of Chnodomar's army was in fact lower than Ammianus tells us. Given the lack of central authority throughout Alamannia, assembling raiding parties of more than 2,000 would have involved some degree of leadership and planning, and even these were uncommon.[39] These raids often targeted vulnerable areas along the Roman *limes*, and raiders could expect little resistance. Ammianus marginalises the effort it must have taken Chnodomar to assemble his army, ascribing to him a pre-existing king-like status over all the Alamanni.[40] The other kings are mentioned, but are treated like lieutenants in Chnodomar's army, with the exception of Serapio. Chnodomar's achievement is exceptionally impressive in consideration of the danger he was leading his people to. It would have been widely known that there was no easy victory over the Romans. What the kings were proposing was open battle with their backs to the Rhein, not the lightning raids to which they were accustomed. Evidence of this unease can be seen at the onset of the battle, when the infantry insisted the kings fight on foot, lest they abandon them should the battle turn ugly.[41] This fear proved warranted, as it would turn out that Chnodomar had in fact prepared an escape plan for just such an occasion. After his

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we get the number of 13,000, was involved in the organizational administration of the western army, and had access to troop records. He was even able to identify by name three of the four Roman officers killed at the battle. He names them as Bainobaudes, Laipso, Innocentius, and a tribune whose name he did not know. See Ammianus, XVI. 12.63. As no such records existed for the barbarians, some believe Ammianus' 35,000 lacks credibility.

[39] Elton, *Warfare in Roman Europe*, 72.

[40] Ammianus, XVI. 12.21.

[41] Ammianus, XVI. 12.34-5.

forces were routed, Chnodomar tried to reach a number of boats he had hidden further down the river, but was captured in the attempt.[42] The presence of this contingency suggests the kings were perhaps not as confident as Ammianus tells us.

As mentioned, with respect to the size of the Alamanni army, this discussion is unable to provide any new insight to the debate, and so we are forced to consider both currently accepted scenarios. The first position, argued by Drinkwater, contends that Ammianus' figures were unrealistic, and likely inflated to bolster the esteem of Julian's victory. Drinkwater proposes that Chnodomar's army was no more than a, "hastily assembled alliance of disparate Alamannic *regna*, with no tradition of combined operations..."[43] Even with the slight advantage of the 15,000 men he ascribes to them, the Alamanni could not have hoped to win an open battle against Julian's 13,000. Accordingly, Drinkwater turns Ammianus' version of events around, making Julian the confident aggressor to whom the Alamanni must desperately react.[44] In this scenario, there does not appear to be any reason for Julian to have questioned his chances of success. Given the comparative realities of the two armies' training, armament, and tactics, a pitched battle of comparable army sizes would almost certainly end in favour of the Romans. If, on the other hand, Chnodomar had been able to raise an army three times the size of Julian's, Chnodomar's seeking a pitched battle begins to make a little more sense.

Arguing on behalf of Ammianus, Hugh Elton accepts the figure of 35,000, given the ratio of warriors to non-combatants in Alamannic society of the mid-4th century. Both Elton and Drinkwater accept that between 20-25 percent of

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[42] Ammianus, XVI. 12.54.
[43] Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome,* 237.
[44] Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome*, 236.

the Alamanni belonged in the warrior class. Where their opinions diverge is in the total population of the Alamanni peoples available to fight, and the extent to which the kings were successful in levying these warriors. Given Ammianus' scenario, attributing any confidence to Julian going into the battle will take some work. In addition to the numerical disparity, Julian had a number of other challenges to overcome. Chnodomar's army had already crossed the Rhine and was deployed on favourable terrain as Julian's army approached. The Alamanni infantry had positioned themselves atop a rise. On the left flank -- where the fighting would be the fiercest -- were deployed the bulk of the German cavalry, with light infantry dispersed throughout as support. Also on the left, and now fighting on foot, was Chnodomar and a number of other *optimates*. On the right flank, anchored against a canal, the Alamanni had prepared an ambush by hiding amongst reeds and carefully constructed ditches.[45] Further adding to Julian's woes was the fact that he and his encumbered army were forced to march a distance of 34 kilometres in order to reach the battlefield.[46]

One way of appreciating Chnodomar's tactical advantages is by consulting Vegetius' *De Re Militari*. Written shortly after the events at Strasbourg, Vegetius' work was a collection of military wisdom handed down over generations. Ammianus tells us that Julian schooled himself in military tactics through the study of certain books, and so he would likely have been aware of much of this martial wisdom.[47] Additionally, he had with him at Strasbourg a talented and experienced *magister equitum* in the person of Severus. Between the two of them, they would have recognized the challenges that lay before them. Vegetius warned that, "good

[45] Elton, *Warfare in Roman Europe*, 82.
[46] Murdoch, *The Last Pagan*, 57.
[47] Ammianus, XVI. 5.9.

generals do not attack in open battle where the danger is mutual."[48] Julian seemed to have undertaken just that. Though he counselled that bravery was more important than numbers, Vegetius also added that terrain was more important than bravery. Chnodomar had the advantage of both numbers and terrain, and his warriors were not cowards. According to *De Re Militari*, battle under these circumstances should only be joined if the situation was sufficiently dire, or if the occasion was nonetheless advantageous.[49] Considering Julian seems to have instigated the conflict with the Alamanni, it seems unlikely that he felt forced into this battle. In fact, despite his numerical and geographical disadvantages, Julian entered the battle confident of victory. While saying this suggests an arrogance of Julian, which arguably is not entirely untrue, Julian's confidence can still be shown to have been justifiable.

In terms of discipline, armament, organization and strategy, Julian's army was far superior to his barbarian counterpart's. While he himself was still a relatively inexperienced general, Julian led some of the western empire's most effective fighters. In addition to the *palatine* guard that accompanied the Caesar to Gaul, Julian's army was composed of a number of experienced auxiliary units accustomed to fighting together.[50] These auxiliaries, most of them Germans themselves, were particularly effective against the Alamanni when paired with the heavily armed and armoured Roman legions. Julian's army was deployed in two rows of infantry. In the centre of the first line were three of his five legions, including the army standard.[51] These would have been the elite infantry of the army, often dressed in mail with greaves,

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[48] Vegetius, *Epitome of Military Science,* trans. N. P. Milner (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), III. 9-13.
[49] Vegetius, III. 26.
[50] An example of such a pairing are the Celtae and the Petulantes, distinct units that complemented one another in battle.
[51] Libanius, *Oration,* 139.

a helmet, and shield, and armed with both spear and sword.[52] To either side of the legions were two units of *auxilia*, holding the flanks. To the right of these were the bulk of the Roman cavalry, consisting of both light and heavily armoured cavalry, armed with spears and hand weapons.[53] To the left of the battle line was Severus' detached legion, deployed so as to defend against ambush and flank attacks. In the second row of infantry, the *Primani*, another veteran legion, were deployed behind the eagle. To either side of them were deployed the remaining *auxilia*.

On the other side of the battlefield, Chnodomar arrayed his infantry into wedged shape units, or *cunei,* designed to break through the Roman shield wall.[54] To the right, facing off against the Roman cavalry, was his own. Interspersed throughout were highly trained light infantry, whose job it was to attack the enemy cavalry from below while they were engaged with the friendly cavalry.

When Julian finally engaged Chnodomar's forces at Strasbourg, Adrian Murdoch, who accepts Ammianus' claim that Julian was heavily outnumbered, nonetheless wrote that Julian's victory was no great accomplishment. He wrote that Julian only "followed the manual to the letter."[55] According to Murdoch, it was the Alamanni's disorganization and lack of discipline that decided the battle. To a large extent, this is true, and is supported by Elton's assertion that "Barbarian command systems were not sufficiently sophisticated to be able to control more than a single body of soldiers at a

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[52] Vegetius, I. 20.
[53] Ammianus, XVI. 12.21.
[54] Ammianus, XVI. 12.19.
[55] Murdoch, *The Last Pagan*, 57. Concerning the size of the Almanni army, while Elton and Murdoch are both willing to accept Ammianus' figures, Drinkwater proposes a much lower estimate. See Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome,* 236-7.

time."[56] Even though he goes on to point out that each unit was often led by a number of *optimates*, not the least of whom was Chnodomar, a capable leader by Elton's estimation, the Alamanni regulars prevented their officers from being able to offer any tactical support.[57] By insisting that the kings and nobles dismount and fight in the front ranks, the Alamanni inhibited their ability to organize effective reserves and develop counter measures to Roman tactics. Though their infantry were heavily armed, the Alamanni had little armour beyond their shields.[58] Given this vulnerability, the Alamanni and their allies had to quickly engage the Roman lines and hope their superior numbers would add enough weight to the wedges to break through the shield wall. The Romans had a much more flexible army. As long as the shield wall of the *principes* held, the *auxilia*, who were almost universally trained and equipped with missile weapons, could advance and cause much damage to the unarmed German infantry.[59] Then, when the Alamanni were forced to commit to a full charge (as occurred at Strasbourg), the *auxilia* could retreat behind the safety of the wall. If the enemy flagged or retreated, the *auxilia* and cavalry could pursue, while the shield wall stood fast.

Ammianus wrote that when the two armies finally engaged, "[i]t was a meeting of equals."[60] The Alamanni had the advantage of size and strength, the Romans discipline and determination. It quickly became evident that the latter virtues were of the most benefit in battle. Though the Roman cavalry was soon put to flight, the legions holding the left flank easily repelled the attackers.[61] The cavalry, having retreated behind

[56] Elton, *Warfare in Roman Europe*, 82.
[57] Elton, *Warfare in Roman Europe*, 82.
[58] Elton, *Warfare in Roman Europe*, 69.
[59] Vegetius, III.14.
[60] Ammianus, XVI. 12.47
[61] Ammianus' account of the battle can be found in the *Res Gestae*,

the shield wall, rallied with the arrival of Julian and his bodyguard. Towards the centre of the battle, the Alamanni, reinforced by a unit of *optimates* led by a number of the kings, were able to break through to the *Primani* in the second line. The second shield wall held, and the Germans quickly fell prey to a pincer manoeuver against the exposed and immobile flanks of the wedge. Finding themselves in such a dangerous position, the Alamanni had no choice but to flee. Not having the benefit of their own shield wall, they were butchered from behind by the *auxilia* and the regrouped Roman cavalry as they fled.

As Murdoch put it, Julian had to do little more than obey common tactical wisdom.[62] He used his ranged *auxilia* to force Chnodomar into committing the bulk of his army earlier on, knowing that they would have a difficult time breaking through the *principes*. The only way to effectively penetrate the Roman line was to use the weight and momentum of the *cunei*, or wedge formation. Having kept his second line in position, Julian was able to use the *Primani* to halt the momentum of the wedge and allow the remainder of the front line to fall on the then exposed flank and rear of the wedge. Once the Alamanni were put to flight, they would have had nowhere safe to retreat, and could be dealt with in short order by the *auxilia* and cavalry. The tactical preparations made by Chnodomar were entirely negated by Julian's patience and ability to hold his units in formation. Severus' legion did not fall prey to the ambush on the left flank, and Chnodomar lost the advantage of the hill by being forced to charge Julian at distance, rather than from short range, as was Alamanni custom.[63] Julian lost two hundred and forty seven men in the engagement, whereas Chnodomar lost

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XVI.12.36-60.

[62] Murdoch, *The Last Pagan*, 57.

[63] Elton, *Warfare in Roman Europe*, 81.

between six and eight thousand, and was himself taken prisoner.

The crisis that led up to the battle of Strasbourg, and the battle itself, went far beyond the intended mandate of Constantius' Gallic campaign. Strasbourg was hardly the desperate stand Ammianus made it out to be, but rather a declaration of Julian's independence from Constantius. The moment the building of the Rhine-bridge failed, Julian broke free of Constantius' influence. After a life-time of close scrutiny and servitude, of having to school his anger, of having to hide his faith, Julian was let loose on the Alamanni. It was his turn to carry on the legacy of Caesar and Alexander, his turn to change a world that had denied him so much. He sympathized with the oppressed Celts of Gaul, and may very well have redirected much of his pent up anger on the Germans.[64] While waging his own war would have been psychologically liberating, other clues suggest that Julian's plans for the west were more calculated and enduring. Following his victory, for example, Julian set about to repair the damages caused by Constantine's sons. By his own account, along with that of Ammianus, Julian was able to lower peasant land taxes by almost two-thirds.[65] He made a point of demanding the release of thousands of Roman and Celtic prisoners held by the Germans. Between 356 and 358, furthermore, Julian rebuilt and re-supplied numerous forts and garrisons along the Rhine. Cities that had been abandoned for fear of barbarian raids were re-populated. While the extent of Alamanni raids in Ammianus' narrative was likely inflated, northern Gaul *had* been poorly governed by Constantine's

[64] We can see Julian's frustration in his satire, *Misopogon*; and more particularly in his address to Constantius. Julian, *Misopogon*, 443-447; *Letter To The Athenians*, 249-51.
[65] Tougher, *Julian the Apostate*, 34.

sons, and was in need of both military and economic attention.

Julian personally had much to gain by reclaiming his independence from Constantius. For one thing, his actions indebted the Celts to him. The Celts were enamoured by his modest habits, austere demeanour, and charismatic conviction, and Julian was eager to create an image of himself as a humble and earnest leader. When his army acclaimed him Augustus, for example, Julian wrote that it was only under great duress that he acceded to the will of his followers.[66] I have little doubt, however, based on his treatment of the Alamanni and in the tone of his own commentary recorded later on, that Julian almost certainly had the imperial throne on his mind when he went to war in 356, especially after Barbatio's withdrawal. After his victory at Strasbourg in 357 -- the only really significant battle of the campaign -- Julian became intoxicated with Hellenistic ambition and fervour, and this is reflected in the literature he would write over the coming years.[67] Moreover, beneath his blossoming political ambitions and his alleged call to duty, Julian no doubt still carried the psychological scars of his tragic childhood. Though it is not explicit in any of Julian's writings, revenge should not be excluded as another powerful motivation. Not only did Constantius have nearly Julian's entire family put to death during his infancy, he sent Julian to live in isolation at his estate in Macellum.[68] There, under the tutelage of the secretly ardent pagan philosopher Mardonius, Julian would

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[66] Julian, *Letter To The Athenians*, 283.

[67] The clearest example of this can be found in Julian's "To The Athenians," in *The Works of the Emperor Julian* Vol.II, trans. Wilmer Cave Wright (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 243-291.

[68] It should also be noted that Julian's brother, Gallus, was later executed by Constantius on the charge of treason. See generally Tougher, *Julian the Apostate*; and Athanassiadi-Fowden, *Julian and Hellenism.*

come to bifurcate the world into two spheres: one of Alexandrian Hellenism and glory, and the other of Constantius' new Christian hypocrisy.

Suffice to say, alone in the west, Julian was given the opportunity to attempt to control his surroundings as he never had before. In his own way, he believed in restoring the Empire. In part because a restoration of the ancient pagan order meant the complete destruction of Constantius', and by extension Constantine's, legacy. Before he could think of confronting Constantius in the east, however, he needed to secure his foundations in the west, and to do that, he needed to pacify the Germanic tribes and win over not only the Gauls and other provincials, but also the men of the western legions. To do that, he needed a victory. Julian's usurpation of the Gallic campaign and his aggression against the Alamanni provided him with the opportunity to write his own destiny for a change. In terms heavily steeped in Homeric allusion, Julian later described his decision to revolt as a means of ending his long Odyssey and returning home to reclaim his birthright.