

JULIAN'S APOSTATES: CONVERSION TO PAGANISM IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FOURTH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT. The article delves into the issue of apostasy among the citizens of the Roman Empire during the brief reign of Julian. It provides an overview of the tactics employed by the emperor to convert his Christian subjects to paganism and evaluates their success across different strata of late Roman society, including the bureaucracy, military, Christian clergy, intellectual elite, and common people. It is concluded that Julian's efforts at returning the Roman Empire to paganism were far more successful than it has traditionally been thought.

KEYWORDS: Late Antiquity, Late Roman Empire, emperor Julian, Apostasy, Paganism, Conversion.

After the end of the age of persecution, Christianity quickly spread throughout the provinces of the Roman Empire and neighboring kingdoms and tribes. Thanks to the efforts of preachers and the support of the authorities, by the second half of the fourth century the new faith had become dominant in the Empire, and the pagan cults, whose rights and privileges were increasingly restricted by Christian *augusti*, lost a significant part of their adherents. It would be wrong, however, to think that the process of Christianization went smoothly. The history of the fourth – sixth centuries is full of examples of reversion to paganism. The constant reference of Late Antique ecclesiastical and secular legislation to apostasy is eloquent testimony to the fact that ancient cults remained an attractive alternative to the new faith: articles dealing with apostasy were included in the rules of the Councils of Elvira, Ancyra, Nicaea, and Carthage (*Syn. Elv. Sap. 1; Syn. Anc. Can. 1–9; Syn. Nic. Can. 10–12; Syn. Cart. Can. 45(54–55)*), the canons of Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa (*Bas. Caes. Can. 7; 73; 81; Greg. Nyss. Sap. 2–3*), decretals of popes Siricius

and Innocentius (*Sir. Ep.* 1.3; *Inn. Ep.* 17.5)¹, as well as in the civil law codes of the Later Roman Empire (*CTh.* XI.39.11; XVI.7.1–7; *CJ.* I.11.10)².

The reasons for apostasy were diverse. Some were inducted into paganism through the study of classical literature and philosophy³. Others switched to the altars of the gods to curry favor with idolatrous patrons⁴, or simply out of disillusionment with the new doctrine and the Church⁵. Moreover, against the backdrop of the barbarian invasions of the late fourth and fifth centuries, there were some cases of apostasy motivated by the belief that the calamities of the Rome originated from the neglect of the ancient rites⁶. In particular, there are not a few examples of Christians turning to paganism in the sources illuminating the brief reign of emperor Flavius Claudius Julianus, better known as Julian the Apostate.

Although modern scholars have repeatedly noted the facts of the apostasy of Julian's subjects, this case has not yet received a special study. Those who have referred to it have usually confined themselves to listing the names of known apostates of Julian's reign, sometimes accompanying it with remarks that it was only the sly careerists who turned to paganism. According to a common academic opinion, they promptly abandoned the ancient cults as soon as the throne of the Roman empire was occupied by the Christian *augustus* Jovian⁷. In other words, the problem of the apostasy of the citizens of the Empire in 361–363 was treated only superficially. In this article I will attempt to fill this historiographical gap by analysing Julian's actions to convert his subjects to paganism, describing the forms and methods of this policy, and presenting an overall assessment of its results.

¹ On the problem of apostasy in the Canon law, see Hornung 2016.

² On apostasy in Late Antique law codes, see Baccari 1979; Saggiaro 2007; Coccocia 2008.

³ See Athanassiadi 1993, 12; Watts 2000, 73–74 and especially Vedeshkin 2019, 348–363.

⁴ On the apostates Leucadius and Marcianus mentioned in *Carmen contra paganos* (*CCP.* 78–83), see Coşkun 2004, 169–174; Vedeshkin 2016, 76–79.

⁵ The anonymous poem *Carmen ad quendam senatorem* tells of a certain senator who repented of his baptism and returned to the veneration of the Great Mother (*CAS.* 6–20) and Isis (*ibid.* 21–34). See Begley 1984; McLynn 2015. According to Augustine, African peasants returned to paganism out of disgust with the mutual cruelty of the Catholics and Donatists (*Aug. Ep.* 20*.20 [CSEL. 88. P. 105]).

⁶ *E.g.*, the polemic of Nilus of Sinai with Apollodorus (*Nil. Ep.* I.75(72)). On the complaints of the western pagans that the failures of Rome were the result of the prohibition of ancestral cults, see Salzman 2015; Vedeshkin 2018, 156–158.

⁷ *E.g.*, Seeck 1897, 330; Bowder 1978, 103; O'Donnell 1979, 61; Pack 1986, 294; Bringmann 2004, 92; Schöllgen 2004, 71; Kahlos 2007, 44; Hahn 2011, 112; Wiemer 2020, 222.

Julian began his reign by proclaiming complete religious tolerance⁸. However, the emperor himself openly favoured traditional cults and did all he could to encourage the citizens of the empire to follow his example. Both the emperor's admirers and his critics claimed that although avoiding open coercion⁹, he had gradually drawn his subjects towards paganism. According to Libanius, Julian did not want to punish the Christians, but to convince them of the truthfulness of the old faith (Lib. *Or.* XVIII.121–123). This was echoed by Gregory of Nazianzus: "He [Julian] did not, like other fighters against Christ, grandly enlist himself on the side of impiety, but veiled his persecution under the form of equity; and, ruled by the crooked serpent which possessed his soul, dragged down into his own pit his wretched victims by manifold devices" (Greg. Naz. *Or.* VII.11–12, trans. by C. G. Browne and J. E. Swallow)¹⁰. At the beginning of the fifth century, Paulus Orosius reported that Julian induced people to apostasy not by torture but by rewards (Oros. VII.30.2), and a few decades later Socrates of Constantinople stated that the emperor had "induced many to sacrifice, partly by flatteries, and partly by gifts" (πολλοὺς δὲ καὶ κολακείαις καὶ δωρεαῖς ἐπὶ τὸ θύειν προετρέπετο – Soc. III.13, trans. by A. C. Zenos).

The emperor declared that he preferred to have all state and court offices held by his coreligionists (Jul. *Ep.* B83/W37¹¹. Julian, however, was not entirely determined to dispense with the services of all the Christian officials who had once

⁸ Early in his reign Julian issued decrees restoring state support for paganism while proclaiming complete freedom to practice all forms of Christian worship and allowing exiled bishops to return from exile. See, e.g., Amm. XXII. 5. 4; Theod. *HE.* III.4(2); Soz. V. 5; Soc. III. 5; Philost. VII. 4; *Chron. Pasch.* 362. Cf. Joh. Chrys. *In Bab.* II. 22. See Marcos 2009 for more details.

⁹ The emperor condemned violence in matters of faith. In his writings he showed not hatred for Christians, but deep regret that some of his subjects had abandoned their paternal cults. See Jul. *Ep.* B83/W37; B61c/W36; B114/W4 – the numeration of the emperor's letters is given according to the editions of Bidez-Cumont (B) and Wright (W). Cf. Lib. *Or.* XVIII.121–124; Eutrop. X.16. In the Christian texts of the 4th–5th centuries one can even feel some resentment against the 'persecutor' who deprived the faithful of the martyr's crown: see, e.g., Greg. Naz. *Or.* IV.58; Joh. Chrys. *In Bab.* II.22; *In Juvent.* 1.

¹⁰ οὐδ' ἐν ἴσῳ τοῖς λοιποῖς χριστομάχοις μεγαλοψύχως ἀπογραφόμενος εἰς τὴν ἀσέβειαν, ἀλλὰ κλέπτων τὸν διωγμὸν ἐν ἐπιεικείας πλάσματι, καὶ κατὰ τὸν σκολιὸν ὄφιν, ὃς τὴν ἐκείνου κατέσχε ψυχὴν, παντοίαις μηχαναῖς ὑποσπῶν τοὺς ἀθλίους εἰς τὸ ἑαυτοῦ βάραθρον. Cf. Greg. Naz. *Or.* XVIII. 32.

¹¹ Church historians have reported that Julian issued a decree which forbade Christians to occupy the office of *iudex* (Ruf. *HE.* I(X).32; Soc. III.13, cf. Soz. V.18). On the expulsion of Christians from the court, see Greg. Naz. *Or.* IV.63.

served under Constantine and Constantius II. In hopes that he could convince them to abandon the “Galilean superstition” and embrace the ancestral gods, Julian ardently preached to his entourage and influenced it with “the witchery of his words, and his own example” (πάντας δὲ τῇ γοητεία τῶν λόγων καὶ τῷ καθ’ ἑαυτὸν ὑποδείγματι – Greg. Naz. *Or.* VII.11, trans. by C. G. Browne and J. E. Swallow). According to Libanius, “not every man who was not yet a friend of Zeus was a foe of his, for he did not rebuff those he thought he could convert in time, and by the charms he exercised on them he began to lead them on, and, despite their initial reluctance, he revealed them later congregating around the altars” (Lib. *Or.* XVIII.125, trans. by A. F. Norman)¹².

It seems that an important, but by no means the sole, argument in favor of “congregating around the altars” was the opportunity to retain one’s position or to get a promotion¹³. Two years after the death of the emperor Gregory of Nazianzus recalled that in the reign of Julian, there was only “one road to the office” – apostasy (Greg. Naz. *Or.* V.19)¹⁴. At the turn of the fourth century, this was confirmed by Asterius of Amasea: “When the famous king... granted great honors to those who wanted to do so (i.e., to make sacrifices – M.V.), how many, left the Church, and ran to the altars? How many, taking upon themselves the lure of state honors, were caught up with him in his apostasy? (Aster. Amas. *Hom.* III.10[468–469], trans. by M. A. Vedeshkin)¹⁵. The question was a rhetorical one – the cases of apostasy were quite numerous.

One notable apostate was Julianus the Elder, who was the emperor’s maternal uncle (Philost. VII.10; Theod. *HE.* III.12–13(8–9); *Pass. Artem.* 23). During Constantius’ reign, Julianus held some offices in the provincial administration but did not advance to higher ranks. However, when his nephew ascended to the throne, Julianus’ career took off, and he was appointed *Comes Orientis* in early 362. In this role,

¹² ...ὃ πάντα τὸν οὐπω Διὶ φίλον. οὐς γὰρ ᾤετο τῷ χρόνῳ μεταθήσειν οὔτ’ ἀπήλαυνε κατεπάδων τε ἐνήγε τὴν πρώτην τε ἀναινομένους περὶ βωμοὺς ὕστερον χορεύοντας ἔδειξε. For example, Caesarius, the brother of Gregory of Nazianzus, remained at the court for some time even after rejecting the emperor’s offer to renounce Christianity (Greg. Naz. *Or.* VII.11–14), which had troubled his relatives (Greg. Naz. *Ep.* 7(17)). According to Libanius, Julian was personally responsible for the conversion to paganism of *comes Felix*. See *infra*.

¹³ For the time of the composition of *Or.* V see, Elm 2012, 465–477.

¹⁴ Cf. Greg. Naz. *Or.* IV.11; VII.12.

¹⁵ “Ὅτε γὰρ ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐκεῖνος ὁ τὸ προσωπεῖον... τοῖς τοῦτο βουλομένοις ποιεῖν πολλὰ προετέθη τὰ χρέα, πόσοι τὴν ἐκκλησίαν ἀφέντες ἐπὶ τοὺς βωμοὺς ἔδραμον; πόσοι δὲ τὸ τῶν ἀξιωματῶν δέλεαρ εἰσδεξάμενοι μετ’ ἐκείνου κατέπιον τὸ τῆς παραβάσεως ἀγκιστρον;

he successfully restored local pagan cults and temples of the region¹⁶. He also played a part in the closure of Antiochian churches and the confiscation of their property at the end of 362 (Philost. VII.10; Theod. *HE*. III. 12–13[8–9]; Soz. V. 7–8), thus earning a reputation as a fierce persecutor in the later Christian tradition (Theod. *HE*. III.11(7); Soz. V.7–8; *Pass. Artem.*; *Pass. Bonos.*; *Pass. Theodoret.*)¹⁷. While it is unclear when Julianus converted to paganism, he did so before his nephew became the sole *augustus*. In a letter the Apostate sent to his uncle shortly after receiving news of Constantius II's death, he referred to him as a fellow believer (Jul. *Ep.* B28/W9)¹⁸.

Another prominent apostate at Julian's court was Felix (Lib. *Or.* XIV.36; Philost. VII.10; Theod. *HE*. III.12(8)). After Julian was proclaimed co-ruler of Constantius, Felix, who had previously held the post of *notarius*, was included in the *caesar*'s retinue. According to Ammianus, Felix accompanied Julian throughout his stay in Gaul¹⁹. His later career suggests that the official supported the usurpation of 360 – in the new government Felix acquired the office of *comes sacrarum largitionum*²⁰. His conversion probably occurred only after Julian had openly professed his paganism – early in 363 Libanius stated that Felix had become a “friend of the gods” not so long ago (Φῆλιξ ...θεοῖς δὲ νεωστὶ φίλος – Lib. *Or.* XIV.36). Subsequently, the *comes* participated in the closing of the Great Church of Antioch at the end of 362 (Philost. VII.10; Theod. *HE*. III.12–13[8–9])²¹.

¹⁶ At the end of 362 the emperor commissioned him to restore the temple of Apollo in Daphne (Jul. *Ep.* B80/W29). On Julianus' participation in the restoration of the cult of Asclepius in Aegina, see Lib. *Ep.* F625/B147; F695; on his encouragement of the festivals in honour of Artemis in Tarsus (ibid. F712/B181); cf. *Pass. Artem.* 23. The numeration of Libanius' letters is given according to the editions of Foerster (F), Norman (N), and Bradbury (B).

¹⁷ On Julianus, see. PLRE I, 470 (Julianus 12); Haehling 1978, 181 (11. Iulianus); Petit 1994, 138 (156 Julianus II). On his image in hagiography, see. Teitler 2017, 85–89; 114–117. However, according to Woods, the persecutor of Bonosus and Maximilianus was not the emperor's uncle, but his namesake, the commander of the legions of the *Ioviani* and *Herculiani* (Woods 1995a, 51–54; 1995b, 61).

¹⁸ Bowersock 1978, 62–63. On the time of the composition of this letter, see Furman 1970a, 237, note 1.

¹⁹ At the end of 360 Constantius II “recommended” Julian to appoint Felix to the post of *magister officiorum* (Amm. XX. 9.5).

²⁰ He took office before 9 March 362. See, CTh. IX.42.5.

²¹ On Felix, see. PLRE I, 332 (Felix 3); Petit 1994, 107 (111 Felix II); Olszaniec 2013, 168–172 (Felix 1).

The emperor also converted his friend Helpidius (Theod. *HE.* 12(8); Philost. VII.10; *Pass. Bas. Anc.* 9), a former official of Constantius II who oversaw Julian's actions in Gaul. Soon after Julian became the sole *augustus*, Helpidius was appointed *comes rerum privatarum* and became one of the most influential courtiers²². Soon he became known as an ardent pagan – Libanius praised him for his “zeal for a deity” (τῆ δὲ περὶ τὸ θεῖον σπουδῆ – Lib. *Or.* XIV.35) – and his enthusiastic enforcement of Julian's anti-Christian policy. The followers of the new faith recalled Helpidius' participation in the closure of the Great Church of Antioch (Theod. *HE.* III.12(8); Philost. VII.10) and the persecution of the presbyter Basil of Ancyra (*Pass. Bas. Anc.* 9; 12–13)²³. P. Petit has suggested that the conversion of Helpidius occurred even before Julian became the only ruler of the Empire. In support of his theory, the scholar referred to Libanius' letter written at the end of 358, in which the sophist stated that Helpidius' friendship with Julian had a beneficial effect on him. Libanius believed that the official had acquired “virtue” through his association with *caesar* (Lib. *Ep.* F35/N38). It is likely that by “virtue” he meant paganism²⁴. Petit's hypothesis is confirmed by one of Libanius' speeches, in which the rhetor declares that Felix had only recently become a “friend of the gods”. Libanius makes this observation while listing Julian's closest companions: Maximus, Priscus, Helpidius, and Felix (Lib. *Or.* XIV.32–36). Of these four only Helpidius and Felix were proselytes, so the apostasy of the *comes rerum privatarum* occurred before that of the *comes sacrarum largitionum*²⁵.

The best-known apostate of Julian's reign was Domitius Modestus, one of the most prominent statesmen of the mid-fourth century. By the end of Constantius' reign, he had already risen to the rank of Comes Orientis. In 359 he became infamous for organising the notorious Trial of Scythopolis, whose victims included numerous members of the East Roman elite²⁶. Despite his dubious reputation Julian favoured Modestus. In the autumn of 362 Julian appointed him *praefectus* of Constantinople. The official most likely owed this advancement to the timely renunci-

²² On Helpidius' influence at court, see Lib. *Ep.* F758/N95; F796/B156.

²³ A discussion of the authenticity of *Pass. Basil.* is beyond the scope of this paper. For a historiography of the question, see Busine 2019, 265, n. 10.

²⁴ Petit 1994, 90.

²⁵ On Helpidius see PLRE I, 415 (Helpidius 6); Haehling 1978, 142 (n. Elpidius); Petit 1994, 89–90 (84. Elpidius II); Olszaniec 2013, 217–222.

²⁶ On his involvement in the organisation of the trial, see Amm. XIX.12.6. On the trial itself, see Sandwell 2005, 114–116; Heyden 2010, 310–311; Vedeshkin 2018, 197–198, and works listed in Barnes 1998, 91, n. 70.

ation of Christianity. However, it cannot be ruled out that even before 361 Modestus had harboured some sympathies for the ancient cults. This is alluded to in Libanius' letter written in 362, in which the rhetor congratulated his friend on the newfound opportunity to worship the gods he had long honoured (Lib. *Ep.* F804/B74). The information from Libanius' correspondence of the second half of the 350s generally supports the hypothesis of Modestus' crypto-paganism. In his letters to the apparently Christian official, Libanius repeatedly referred to the ancient gods and even admonished his friend by the name of Zeus, which would seem rather inappropriate if Modestus were a sincere follower of the new faith²⁷.

The list of pagan neophytes was to be completed by Seleucus, a long-time friend of the emperor²⁸. On Julian's accession he was elevated to the rank of *comes*²⁹ and appointed high priest of Cilicia. Seleucus was involved in the restoration of pagan worship in the province entrusted to his pastoral care (Lib. *Ep.* F770/N92; F771; Jul. *Ep.* B86/W32). In 363 he joined Julian's retinue, where he remained until the emperor's death³⁰. The information that the priest was once a Christian is derived from an account by Palladius of Helenopolis. The hagiographer claimed that the deaconess Olympias was the daughter of a former *comes* Seleucus and the granddaughter of the ἑπαρχος (i.e., *praefectus praetorio*) Ablabius, a famous courtier of Constantine I (Pall. *Laus.* 56(CXLIV))³¹. Considering that we know only one Seleucus who held a prominent position in the middle of the fourth century, the friend of

²⁷ See Lib. *Ep.* F200/N70; F220/B71; F617/B73; F624. For an alternative view, see Sandwell 2011, 258–259. On Modestus, see PLRE I, 608 (Domitius Modestus 2); Dagron 1974, 242–244; 246–247; Petit 1994, 165–172, 200 (Modestus); Van Dam 2002, 106–135. Al. Cameron has hypothesised that Modestus was the subject of an anonymous poetic invective *Carmen ad quendam senatorem*, mocking a former consul who was first a pagan, then baptised and finally reverted to ancient cults (Cameron 2011, 326–327). This assumption seems dubious. Firstly, the whole setting of CAS indicates that the setting of the poem was Rome, not Antioch or Constantinople, as the scholar had suggested (see McLynn 2015, 233–234). Secondly, prior to his consulship, Modestus had once again converted to Christianity (see *infra*, note 100).

²⁸ They had known each other since at least 353; see Lib. *Ep.* F13/B23.

²⁹ In the summer of 362 Libanius mentions that Seleucus obtained some court office (Lib. *Ep.* F734/B155). On Seleucus becoming *comes*, see Pall. *Laus.* 56(CXLIV); *V. Olymp.* II; Malal. who called him ἑπαρχος (i.e., *praefectus*), confused Seleucus with his father Ablabius (Malal. *Fr. Tusk.* [PG. 85, col. 1812]).

³⁰ Seleucus took part in the Persian campaign (Lib. *Ep.* F802/N98; F697/B129; F1508/N142).

³¹ Cf. *V. Olymp.* II; Malal. *Frag. Tusk.* (PG 85, col. 1812 – 1816).

Julian is the most likely candidate for the role of Olympias' father. The deaconess' kinship with the prefect could only run through the Seleucus line – for Olympias' maternal grandfather lived at least until 361³², while Ablabius was murdered in 337³³. The prefect was an ardent Christian and surely brought his heir up in the same faith³⁴. At the same time, John Chrysostom mentioned the daughter of Seleucus came from an “impious house” (ἐξ ἀσεβοῦς οἴκου – Joh. Chrys. *Ep. ad. Olymp.* 2.5(8.5)). The archbishop could hardly call Ablabius “impious.” His righteousness was praised by both Athanasius of Alexandria and the emperor Constantine (Athanasius *Fest. Ep.* IV. 5; *Sirm.* I). Therefore, it was not the whole family of Olympias but only her father, who was “impious.” Judging from the correspondence between Julian and Libanius, Seleucus was already a convinced pagan by the mid-350s. It seems that Ablabius' son converted to paganism somewhere between 337 and 361. Seleucus' conversion, therefore, had little to do with his friend's accession to the throne – in Libanius' letter to Seleucus, written in late 361, the rhetor expressed his enthusiasm for Julian's efforts to restore pagan worship (Lib. *Ep.* F697/B129). Judging by the tone of his letter, Libanius knew that his correspondent supported the new emperor's religious policy³⁵.

The cases of apostasy by officials and courtiers were hardly limited to these examples. But the identity of the other proselytes is not known³⁶. In any case, there is

³² PLRE I, 818.

³³ See Chausson 2002, 210–211; Burgess 2008, 18–19; 28–31; 40–41.

³⁴ See PLRE I, 818–819 (Seleucus 1).

³⁵ The kinship of Ablabius, Seleucus, and Olympias is discussed in detail in Vedeshkin 2022.

³⁶ Some scholars have suggested that the proconsul of Asia, Dulcitius was converted to paganism during Julian's reign (Malcus 1967, 108; von Haehling 1978, 140; Schöllgen 2004, 71). The only argument in favour of this hypothesis is the evidence that the official who got his post in the reign of Constantius II did not retire under Julian. This information is insufficient to call Dulcitius an apostate. First, there were quite a few pagans among the officials of Constantius II (see von Haehling 1978, 527). Some of them continued their service under Julian. See PLRE I, 7 (Acacius 8); 50 (Fl. Amachius); 106–107 (Aristophanes); 174–175 (Calliopius 2); 237–238 (Cyrillus 1); 583 (Maximus 19); 797 (Sallustius 5); 814–817 (Saturninius Secundus Salutius 3); 973 (Ulpianus 3). Secondly, no evidence has survived that the proconsul ever professed Christianity. It cannot be ruled out that Dulcitius, as, indeed, any other official of Julian, whose paganism has not been reliably documented in the sources covering the reign of Constantius II, was a proselyte. On Dulcitius see. PLRE I, 247 (Dulcitius 5); Petit 1994, 84–85 (79. Dulcitius III). The hero of the anonymous *Carmen ad quendam senatorem* (Rosen 1993) is sometimes also recorded as an apostate of Julian's

little doubt that under Julian, a considerable part of the “governing class” converted to paganism. Remarkably, some of them had switched faiths under Constantius II, when apostasy offered no obvious political advantages and could even be potentially dangerous for the pagan neophyte. Overall, Julian succeeded in filling the central and provincial administrations of the empire with his co-religionists – not a single Christian official is known to have remained in service³⁷.

Julian placed great emphasis on converting the military, realising that their discontent could jeopardise his plans to restore paganism and even his own security (Greg. Naz. *Or.* IV.63). Initially, he was cautious about openly declaring his religious beliefs to the soldiers who had appointed him *augustus*, fearing the possible backlash³⁸. Until his final break with Constantius, Julian was careful enough to hide his true colours from his subjects (Amm. XXI.5.1; 5.3) and to continue to behave as a faithful son of the Church (ibid. XXI.2.3). It seems, however, that he had overestimated the Christian piety of his soldiers. A large part of them came from regions where the new religion was not yet firmly rooted and were at best nominal Christians³⁹ or outright pagans⁴⁰. The victorious commander, who had shared the hardships of military life with his comrades-in-arms, enjoyed great prestige among his soldiers and officers. There is no record of his “Gauls” expressing any disapproval after the emperor openly professed his paganism in the summer of 361⁴¹. In a letter

reign. Unfortunately, the events described in the poem cannot be dated. The apostasy of the hero of the invective could have taken place any time after 312 and before 395 (Boxus, Poucet 2010). In other words, the hypothesis that a “certain senator” was one of the officials “seduced” by Julian can be neither confirmed nor refuted.

³⁷ See von Haehling 1978, 537–539; Bowder 1978, 103.

³⁸ See, Theod. *HE.* III.3(1); Tomlin 1998, 31–32; Shean 2010, 288.

³⁹ Western armies were drafted from Gallic peasantry, the barbarian *laeti*, and Germanic mercenaries, among whom even a generation later it was not easy to find a Christian, see e.g., Sulp. Sev. *V. Martin.* 13–14; *Dial.* III.8; Bowder 1978, 94–95; Jones 1986, 137; Tomlin 1998, 24–25; Lee 2008, 227; Shean 2010, 291.

⁴⁰ Sauer 1996; Tomlin 1998, 28, n. 60.

⁴¹ In an epistle to the Athenians written in the summer of 361 Julian had already openly declared his paganism, see Jul. *Ep. ad Ath.* 280d; 282d; 284b–c. For the date and place of the composition of this letter, see Mark 2012, 77; with bibliography at 88, n. 9–10. *Cf.* the references to ‘gods’ in a letter written during the campaign against Constantius (Jul. *Ep.*

to his former mentor Maximus of Ephesus, written in the early autumn of the same year, Julian claimed that the majority of his army worshipped the gods and performed the ancient rites (Jul. *Ep.* B26/W8). The conversion of the troops serving under Julian in Gaul thus seemed to go smoothly. Subsequently, the “Gauls” proved to be ardent followers of the ancient cults. During their winter stay in Antioch, the soldiers of the legions of *Celti* and *Petulani* enthusiastically participated in the religious ceremonies of their emperor (Amm. XXII. 12.6). Moreover, the regiments of *Divitenses* and *Tungricani* previously stationed on the Rhine Limes⁴² remained loyal to paganism even after the death of Julian⁴³.

The conversion of the Eastern armies was a far more difficult matter. Christianity was better established in the East than in the West, and the proportion of recruits from these areas who followed the new faith was higher than in the Gallic armies. Moreover, the soldiers who had previously served under Constantius II had no sympathy for the new *augustus*, whom they regarded, with good reason, as an apostate and a rebel. Therefore, Julian had long hesitated to make attempts to convert the eastern legions. Their de-Christianisation only began after the emperor had consolidated his power and averted the potential danger of military revolt (Amm. XXII.11.1–2)⁴⁴.

The Christian soldiers were allowed to profess their faith openly⁴⁵. At the same time, the *augustus* was slowly inducting his newly won troops into paganism (Lib.

B19/W73; Bidez, Cumont 1922, 24–25), and the accounts of Libanius and Socrates that Julian had started to restore pagan cults on territories he controlled during the civil war (Lib. *Or.* XVIII.114–117; Soc. III.1).

⁴² On them, see Tomlin 2008, 155.

⁴³ Cf. Amm. XXVI.6.12–13 and XXVI.7.17.

⁴⁴ On Julian's participation in Constantius' funeral and the organisation of the Chalcedon trials in relation to his efforts to reduce opposition within the eastern army, see Greg. Naz. *Or.* V.16–17; Kaegi 1967, 250–255; Blockley 1972, 449–450; Bowersock 1978, 66–70.

⁴⁵ The Christian writers claimed that Julian deprived their co-religionists of the opportunity to serve in the elite regiments of the army (Soc. III. 13; Joh. Ant. *Fr.* 204, ed. Mariev), or even prevented their enlistment altogether (Ruf. *HE.* I(X).32; Theod. *HE.* III.8(4)). This is refuted by the reports of contemporaries (see Greg. Naz. *Or.* IV. 65; Aug. *Enarr. in Psalm.* 124. 7), including the emperor himself (see *infra*). Accounts of the purging of the guard regiments from Christians seem to be based on a misinterpretation of the edict which reduced the corps of *domestici* to fifty men (*CTh.* VI.24.1). Even though many of those dismissed were followers of the new faith, several Christians remained in the corps, including their commander *primicerius* Jovian (see Lenski 2002b, 274–245). Several Christians are known to have held high ranks in Julian's army, see e.g., PLRE I, 461 (Iovianus 3); 462–463

Or. XVIII.167). This process began with the replacement of Christian banners with insignia bearing images of gods and heroes (*Greg. Naz. Or.* IV.66; *Soz.* V.17). Even such insignificant changes caused some unrest among the soldiers. The hagiographic tradition preserved the story of the execution of Bonosus and Maximilian, the standard-bearers of the *Ioviani* and *Herculiani*, who refused to comply with the commander's order and remove the Christian symbols from their banner (*Pass. Bonos.*)⁴⁶.

The climax of the emperor's efforts to promote paganism came in January 363⁴⁷. The *Augustus*, who had just taken up another consulship, took a new oath from his troops, followed by the traditional distribution of the *donativus*. This time the ritual was changed. Before receiving the gift, the soldiers had to throw a few grains of incense on the altar of Mars. Although some of the Christian warriors refused to take part in the ceremony, sensing the emperor's intentions, many offered the sacrifice, often without realizing that they were departing Christianity (*Greg. Naz. Or.* IV.82–83; *Lib. Or.* XVIII. 168–170; *Soz.* V.17; *Theod. HE.* III.16(12); *Theoph. Chron.* 5854). According to Christian authors, Julian's actions angered some legionaries among the followers of the new faith who had previously made a similar "technical" apostasy out of simple-mindedness. The soldiers realised that they had unwittingly become apostates and demanded that the emperor allow them to confess their faith through martyrdom. Their requests were not granted. The troublemakers got away with the charge of the disciplinary offense and were exiled (*Greg. Naz. Or.* IV.84; *Theod. HE.* III.17(13); *Soz.* V.17)⁴⁸. A few days later⁴⁹ a new outbreak of discontent followed – the Christian soldiers of the *schola gentilium* conspired to kill

(Iovinus 6); 443 (Hormisdas 2); 812–813 (Sebastianus 2); 957–959 (Victor 4); Haehling 1978, 540. As was shown by Lenski, the tales of the future emperors Jovian, Valentinian, and Valens being repressed for their confession of Christianity are a product of the later myth-making. See Lenski 2002b.

⁴⁶ Some scholars do not recognize the authenticity of the events covered in *Pass. Bonos. Pro* – cf. Woods 1995a, with historiography, 27, n. 6; 1995b; *contra*, see Hahn 2004, 173–174; den Boeft *et al.* 2005, 193–194; Cameron 2011, 105–106. On the identification of the *comes* Julianus from *Pass. Bonos.* see. Woods 1995a, 51–54; 1995b, 61.

⁴⁷ On the date, see Gleason 1986, 109.

⁴⁸ The same events were recounted by Ammianus, who reported the exile of the *tribuni* of the *schola scutarii* Romanus and Vincentius (*Amm. XXII.11.2*). Cf. *Theod. HE.* III.17(13). Woods does not rule out that the exile of the *tribuni* may not have been linked to the discontent of the Christian soldiers stationed at Antioch (Woods 1997a, 276).

⁴⁹ On the date, see Peeters 1924.

Julian. Their plans became known to the emperor, after which he had eight of them sent into exile and the two instigators, Juventinus and Maximinus, executed⁵⁰.

This evidence seemingly proves the failure of Julian's religious policy and confirms the futility of his attempt to win over the soldiers of the eastern army to paganism. At the same time, all the expressions of discontent mentioned above came from the elite *Palatini* regiments of the army⁵¹, that is, from the part of the military

⁵⁰ According to John Chrysostom and Theodoret, several Christian soldiers insulted the emperor during the feast. This was reported to Julian, who ordered the arrest of the loudmouths. After fruitless attempts to induce them to paganism, the emperor ordered the execution of the instigators of the criminal talks Juventinus and Maximinus (Joh. Crys. *In Juvent.* 2–3; Theod. *HE.* III. 15(11)). John Malalas told a different version of the same story. According to him, the two Christian soldiers were sentenced to death, not for drunken chatter, but for the public criticism of the emperor and his policies (Malal. XIII. 19(327)). This evidence is inconsistent with Julian's well-known reluctance to multiply martyrs (see note 9 above). There may have been more serious offenses committed by these soldiers. Some idea of the real reasons for the execution may be given by Libanius' recollection that ten soldiers planned to kill the emperor during a parade. The plot failed after one of the conspirators let slip their intentions (Lib. *Or.* XVIII.199). Although scholars have more than once tried to reconcile the information given by Christian authors with the testimony of the sophist (e.g., Norman 1969, 413, n.b; Hahn 2004, 173), the identification of the martyrs with the conspiratorial leaders was precluded by Libanius' account that Julian had granted the evil-doers a pardon (Lib. *Or.* XV. 43; XVI. 19; XVIII. 199; *Ep.* F1120/N113; see Teitler 2013, 285–286). A solution to this problem was suggested by T. Barnes, who drew attention to the fact that Libanius subsequently said that the emperor had forgiven the “eight” who had raised their swords against him (Lib. *Ep.* F1120/N113). Therefore, the number of conspirators reduced from “ten” to “eight.” Consequently, two malefactors (Juventinus and Maximinus) were in fact executed. Libanius, who was always happy to stress the mercy of his emperor, did not think it necessary to mention this. In other words, Libanius' information does not contradict the reports of Christian writers. Juventinus and Maximinus were executed, but not as 'martyrs for the faith,' but rather as criminals accused of conspiring to assassinate the emperor (Barnes 1998, 53). Woods suggests that the remaining eight soldiers escaped by committing apostasy (Woods 1997b, 349). This is confirmed by the account of Chrysostom who reported that the comrades of Juventinus and Maximinus earned their pardon by offering a sacrifice (Joh. Chrys. *In Juvent.* 2).

⁵¹ Bonosus and Maximilianus served in the privileged legions *Cornunti-Ioviani* and *Cornunti-Herculiani* respectively (on their status see, for example, Soz. VI. 6); Romanus and

that had been most exposed to the propaganda of the new faith by the previous emperors⁵². The sources, however, make no mention of any unrest among the ordinary units of the field and frontier armies that formed the core of the armed forces of the empire. Although there were of course many convinced Christians among them, they did not seem to offer any active resistance to the emperor's religious policy⁵³. The pagans⁵⁴ supported it, and those who had no firm religious convictions accepted the faith professed by their ruler, for, as Gregory of Nazianzus stated, part of the soldiers "knew no other law than the will of the emperor" (νόμον ἕνα γινώσκον μόνον, τὴν τοῦ βασιλέως βούλησιν – Greg. Naz. *Or.* IV.64, trans. by C. W. King)⁵⁵. In other words, most of the legionaries were quite at ease with the new religious course.

The emperor's overt preference for paganism objectively increased its appeal to ordinary soldiers and especially to officers, who were doubtless aware that by converting and inducing their subordinates to paganism they could win the sovereign's favor⁵⁶. The spread of paganism was also facilitated by Julian's support of those willing to worship the gods. Theodoret reported that, although many were caught in the emperor's webs out of "ignorance," there were some who "in their eagerness for the money made light of their salvation, while another group abandoned their faith through cowardice" (ἄλλοι δὲ τῶν χρημάτων ὀρεγόμενοι τῆς σφετέρως κατωλιγώρησαν σωτηρίας. ἕτεροι δὲ δειλία προὔδωκαν τὴν εὐσέβειαν – Theod. *HE.* III.16(12), trans. by B. Jackson)⁵⁷.

The army's conversion was secured by frequent feasts at which the emperor fed his soldiers with sacrificial wine and meat. Ammianus recalled that in the months preceding the Persian campaign, Julian "drenched the altars with the blood of an excessive number of victims, sometimes offering up a hundred oxen at once, with

Vincencius were the commanders of the first and second *scholae* of the *scutarii*; and Juveninus and Maximinus were the *candidati* of *Scutarii Gentili* (Malal. XIII. 19(327); Woods 1997a, 283–284; 1997b, 347–348).

⁵² On the Christian piety of Constantius' guard, see Lib. *Lib. Or.* XVIII.94; Zos. III.3.2; cf. Theod. *HE.* III.3(1).

⁵³ On the subordination of Christians in the army of the Apostate to military discipline, see e.g., Aug. *Enarr. in Psalm.* 124.7.

⁵⁴ On the pagans in Constantius' army, see Ephr. *C. Jul.* III.10–12.

⁵⁵ Cf. Jones 1963, 24–25.

⁵⁶ On the forcing of soldiers to offer sacrifices see. Greg. Naz. *Or.* IV.64; *Chron. Pasch.* 363; Theoph. *Chron.* 5855; cf. Bidez 1913, 232; Whitby M., Whitby M. 1989, xvi; Mango *et al.* 1997, lxxx–lxxxi).

⁵⁷ See Joh. Chrys. *In Bab.* II. 23; *In Invent.* 2; *Chron. Pasch.* 363; Theoph. *Chron.* 5855.

countless flocks of various other animals, and with white birds... to such a degree that almost every day his soldiers, who gorged themselves on the abundance of meat, living boorishly and corrupted by their eagerness for drink, were carried through the squares to their lodgings on the shoulders of passers-by from the public temples, where they indulged in banquets..." (Amm. XXII.12.6, trans. by J. C. Rolfe)⁵⁸. The extraordinary number of sacrifices, for which Julian was criticized even by some pagans⁵⁹, was also due to the emperor's hopes that a full stomach would eventually prevail over the religious feeling of his troops. The expectations of the *august* were quite justified – according to Libanius, after a few months of this diet soldiers "hastened of their own free will to their altars competing with their fellows with offerings of incense" (ἐκόντας ἐπὶ τοὺς βωμοὺς θέοντας καὶ διαμαχομένους ὑπὲρ τοῦ λιβανωτοῦ – Lib. Or. XII.90, trans. by A. F. Norman). The effectiveness of the emperor's actions in attracting the army to the ancient cults was recognized even by his opponents, namely Gregory of Nazianzus, who, while noting that only part of the army "fell," generally agreed that this part was significant (Greg. Naz. Or. IV.64–65).

The fragmentarily preserved letter of Julian to Libanus, written in Hierapolis in March 363, provides indirect evidence of the success of the imperial efforts. Describing the beginning of the Persian campaign, the emperor noted: "Many of the Galilean soldiers have turned to my side..." (Πολλοὶ στρατιῶται προσῆλθόν μοι τὴν Γαλιλαίων... – Jul. Ep. B98). The next two lines (about seventy characters) of the manuscript are lost⁶⁰. According to D. E. Furmann, the emperor went on to say that many soldiers in his army had converted to paganism⁶¹. This reconstruction seems plausible – it is supported by the optimistic tone of the letter and by the very fact

⁵⁸ ...tamen sanguine plurimo aras crebritate nimia perfundebat, tauros aliquotiens immolando centenos, et innumeros varii pecoris greges, avesque candidas terra quaesitas et mari, adeo ut in dies paene singulos milites carnis distentiore sagina, victitantes incultius, potusque aviditate corrupti, umeris impositi transeuntium, per plateas ex publicis aedibus, ubi vindicandis potius quam cedendis conviviis indulgebant, ad sua diversoria portarentur...

⁵⁹ Amm. XXII.14.3; XXV.4.17; Epit. de Caes. 43.7; Joh. Chrys. *In Bab.* II.19(103)). On the great scale of the sacrifices, see also Lib. Or. XII.87; XIV.69; XVII.9; XXIV.35; Amm. XXII.12.7; Joh. Chrys. *In Bab.* II. 15(80); Prud. *Apoth.* 455–464; Soc. III.17.

⁶⁰ Bidez, Cumont 1922, 159.

⁶¹ Furman 1970b, 241, n. 8.

of the existence of the lacuna. It appears, that the Christian scribe did not dare to copy this "impious" account⁶².

Even though the sources do not name the soldiers and officers who converted to paganism, the identity of some of them can be established with a high degree of probability. The most obvious candidate for the role of the apostate commander is Procopius, a kinsman of Julian. Under Constantius, he was a *notarius et tribunus*, and after Julian ascended the throne, was made *comes* and placed at the head of an army assigned to divert the Persians from the route of the main advance of the Romans. A year and a half after the death of the Apostate, Procopius raised a mutiny against emperor Valens and was eventually executed⁶³. Although the exact degree of kinship between the emperor and the commander is unknown, it seems that Procopius was related to Julian by the side of the latter's mother, Basilina⁶⁴, who came from a pious Christian family⁶⁵. It is probable that Procopius, like Julian, was brought up in the new faith. The hypothesis that he converted to paganism is indirectly confirmed by the rumor that *augustus* called Procopius his heir before setting out on the march against the Persians (Amm. XXIII.3.2; XXVI.6.2; Philost. IX.5; Zos. IV.4.2)⁶⁶. Even if these were mere rumors, it is impossible to imagine that anyone could have believed that Julian had bequeathed the throne to one of the "impious Galileans." Moreover, the hypothesis of the apostasy of Procopius is supported by the remark of Ammianus, who stated that when making an oath of loyalty to the usurper, the legions who had once served under Julian swore loyalty to

⁶² Cf. with the lacuna at the end of Jul. *Ep.* B89a/W20. Here the text also breaks off immediately after the emperor begins to discuss Christianity (Wright 1923, 61, n. 2; Furman 1970b, 228, note 9).

⁶³ On Procopius, see. PLRE I, 742–743 (Procopius 4); Grattarola 1986; Lenski 2002a, 98–115.

⁶⁴ Grattarola 1986, 84; Lenski 2002a, 69.

⁶⁵ Basilina, and therefore the family of Procopius, were relatives of Eusebius of Nicomedia. See Amm. XXII.9.4. On the Christian piety of Basilina herself, see. Pall. Dial. XIII; Phot. Bibl. 96.

⁶⁶ Modern scholars are more inclined to the view of Ammianus, who considered this a "false rumour" (Amm. XXVI. 6. 2; see Wiebe 1995, 9–10; Lenski 2002a, 69–70; den Boeft *et al.* 2007, 130). But in this case Zosimus seems to be a more reliable source. Most of his work is a paraphrase of Eunapius' History, which was partly based on the notes of Oribasius, Julian's court physician and confidant (Chalmers 1960, especially 155–156; Fornara 1991; Liebeschuetz 2003, 183, 188), who may have been aware of the emperor's plans which were unknown to Ammianus.

him in the name of Jupiter (Amm. XXVI.7.17)⁶⁷. These soldiers knew the *comes* from the recent Persian campaign and must have had at least some information about his religious sympathies.

Another apostate officer could have been none other than famous historian Ammianus Marcellinus. The hypothesis that this “miles et graecus” had converted to paganism under Julian was presented by T. Barnes, who noted that for someone who had never belonged to the ranks of the “faithful,” the historian was all too familiar with Christian terminology. The scholar persuasively demonstrated that of all the pagan authors of the fourth century, only Julian the Apostate himself demonstrated a similar awareness of the new doctrine and Church affairs⁶⁸. Overall, this idea well explains both Ammianus’ complicated attitude toward the new faith and his resignation under Jovian⁶⁹. Moreover, the evidence of Ammianus’ family ties also speaks in favor of Barnes’ hypothesis. More than a hundred years ago, upon examining the lineages of the members of the corps of *protectores domesticorum* (in which Ammianus served in his younger days), J. Gimazane concluded that they all were the sons of high-ranking officials and generals. Based on these observations, he supposed that the father of the historian might have been a certain Marcellinus, who held the post of *comes Orientis* in the late 340s⁷⁰. This was likely the same Marcellinus who was listed among the judges at the trial of Photinus at the Council of Sirmium in 351 (Epiph. *Adv. Haer.* 71). If so, he was doubtless a Christian⁷¹. It seems quite plausible that Marcellinus’ son was raised in the new faith. Therefore, at some point in his life, the historian must have departed from Christianity and converted to paganism. If it is the case, it seems reasonable to assume that it happened during the reign of the apostate emperor.

Thus, in less than two years, the emperor converted a considerable and perhaps even a larger part of the army. Those troops serving under him in Gaul converted to paganism in the summer–autumn of 361, and the eastern legions were attracted to the ancient cults by the emperor during their nine-month stay in Antioch. In some cases, the conversion of the soldiers occurred under pressure from their commanders, but the bulk of the troops became apostates voluntarily.

⁶⁷ Testati more militiae Iovem invictum Procopium fore. Cf. the Christian oaths which legionaries took under Constantius (Amm. XVII.13.34).

⁶⁸ Barnes 1998, 79–94, especially 82–83.

⁶⁹ For arguments that in the reign of Jovian Ammianus suffered a loss of his military career for his excessive involvement in Julian’s activities, see Woods 2000, 704–705.

⁷⁰ Gimazane 1889, 24–27. This conclusion has recently found additional support in Barnes 1998, 59ff.

⁷¹ PLRE I, 546 (Marcellinus 7).

There are some isolated examples of the apostasy of the members of the Christian clergy. The most famous among the renegade clerics was Bishop Pegasus of Troas (Jul. *Ep.* B79/W19; *Pass. Bas.* 9; 10), mentioned in Julian's correspondence and the *Martyrdom of Basil of Ancyra*. The bishop was an old acquaintance of the emperor who had met him during his second exile in Asia Minor. According to Julian's recollections, even at that time, unlike most of the ministers of the new faith Pegasus was open-minded, tolerant, and even sympathetic towards the traditional cults of his city (Jul. *Ep.* B79/W19). After Julian's accession, Pegasus renounced Christianity and joined the ranks of a renewed pagan priesthood⁷². References to other apostate clergymen, Bishop Heron of Thebes and the Antiochian presbyter Theoteknus, were preserved in the anonymous *Arian History*⁷³. Finally, according to the Syriac *Julian Romance*, some clerics of Carrhae-Harran also renounced Christianity⁷⁴.

The most straightforward explanation of their apostasy is to recognize Pegasus, Heron, Theoteknus, and the priests of Harran as cynical nihilists who had betrayed their faith out of conjectural considerations. At the beginning of his reign Julian abolished the privileges and immunities of the Christian clergy⁷⁵ and confirmed the preferences of the pagan priesthood, after which the opportunists, who were numerous in the ranks of the Christian clergy⁷⁶, hastened to adjust to the new religious course of the empire. However, the motives of the apostate-clergymen who converted to idolatry should not be reduced solely to the search for momentary acquire. Julian's correspondence has led some scholars to label Pegasus, who considered pagan heroes to be as worthy of veneration as Christian martyrs (Jul. *Ep.*

⁷² On Pegasus, see Pietri, Destephen 1999, 783–785; Schöllgen 2004.

⁷³ The common source for Philost. VII.13; *Chron.* Pasch. 363; Theoph. *Chron.* 5855. See Bidez 1913, 232.

⁷⁴ Sokoloff 2017, 269; 468. It is possible that by recounting the apostasy of the Christians of Harran, the author was trying to explain the extremely durable preservation of pagan cults in that city. On the local pagan cults of the 4–6th cc., see Green 1992, 54–73; on the Syrian *Julian Romance*, see Muraviev 1999.

⁷⁵ On the immunities of the clergy, see Elliott 1978, 326–336; Testa 2001, 125–144. On the abolition of these privileges of the Church under Julian, see Vedeshkin 2018, 202.

⁷⁶ Julian himself suggested that Pegasus converted to Christianity and became a bishop because he was “ambitious for power” (Jul. *Ep.* B79/W19). For other examples of such fake conversions to Christianity, see Athan. *Hist. Ar.* 73; 78; *Apol. ad. Const.* 28.

B79/W19), a follower of a kind of syncretic faith, half Christian, half pagan⁷⁷. The emperor himself thought that the bishop was a secret pagan⁷⁸ who used his position to protect the temples from overly fanatical Christians⁷⁹. If so, Julian's accession might have given Pegasus a chance to reveal his true colours. Although almost no details of the apostasy of Heron and Theoteknos survive, it is known that they converted to paganism during the visit to Antioch (Chron. Pasch. 363), the city where the imperial court stayed at the time. The apostasy of the Harranian priests also occurred during the emperor's sojourn in their city. As noted above, Julian was very active in promoting paganism and could win over some clerics who were not particularly staunch in their faith (or avaricious) with his arguments.

There is also an account of the apostasy of one intellectual. Socrates reported that the emperor had converted his former teacher, the sophist Hecebolius of Constantinople⁸⁰. Although under Constantius, he seemed to be a zealous Christian (Soc. III.1; 13; Lib. Or. XVIII.12), shortly after the ascendancy of his pupil the rhetor converted to paganism (Soc. III.13). Socrates described Hecebolius as a sly opportunist, trying to secure the affection of the new ruler. However, we cannot exclude the possibility that the apostasy of Hecebolius might have had another motive. Early in his reign, Julian issued a law, which banned Christians from holding the posts of municipal

⁷⁷ See Heather, Moncur 2001, 56, n. 33; Drake 2002, 405–406; Schöllgen 2004; Kahlos 2007, 47; Ward-Perkins 2008, 393–394; Athanassiadi 2015, 41–42. An alternative view was defended by Armstrong, who argued that Pegasus was a sincere Christian at the time of his first meeting with Julian (Armstrong 1984, 14–15).

⁷⁸ When Pegasus was bishop, it was rumored that he secretly worshipped Helios (Jul. Ep. B79/W19). The crypto-paganism of a member of the highest clergy is, of course, unlikely, but still possible. Some bishops were accused of being “Hellenes” as late as the sixth century (Evagr. HE. V.18; Iohan. Eph. HE. III.29). In favour of the crypto-paganism of Pegasus see Bonner 1984, 352; Kahlos 2007, 47; Fowden 2008, 542.

⁷⁹ “And if in those past days, whether because he was ambitious for power, or, as he has often asserted to me, he clad himself in those rags in order to save the temples of the gods, and only pretended to be irreligious...” (δὲ ἐν ἐκείνοις τοῖς χρόνοις εἴτε δυναστείας ὀρεγόμενος, εἶθ', ὅπερ πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἔφη πολλάκις, ὑπὲρ τοῦ σώσαι τῶν θεῶν τὰ ἔδη τὰ ῥάκια ταῦτα περιαμπέσχετο καὶ τὴν ἀσέβειαν μέχρις ὀνόματος ὑπεκρίνατο – Jul. Ep. B79/W19, trans. by W.C. Wright).

⁸⁰ On the apostasy of Hebebolius see Kinzig 1993, 92–105, esp. 103; Kahlos 2007, 44, n. 130.

rhetors and *grammatici*⁸¹. The imperial edict placed Christian teachers in a position of having to choose between their religions and their profession. Julian's former teacher might have chosen the latter. This interpretation of Hecebolius' apostasy is supported by the entry in the *Suida* lexicon, underlining the connection between the rhetor's actions and the School Edict (*Suida*, μ 201, ed. A. Adler, III, 325)⁸². The emperor's former tutor was hardly the sole teacher to desert his faith for the sake of a career. The fact that Socrates recounted this case is most likely due not to the exclusivity of the event itself, but to its localization – Hecebolius taught in Constantinople, a city whose history was of particular interest to Socrates⁸³.

The emperor's literary activities may have had some influence on the religious choices of the educated classes. At the end of 362 Julian composed an anti-Christian treatise, *Against the Galileans*. Libanius stated that many pagans were impressed with this work (*Lib. Or.* XVIII.178). Even more than half a century later, in polemics with the Christians, they relied on Julian's text, boasting that no one had been ever able to refute the emperor's judgments or find any flaw in them (*Cyr. Al. C. Jul. Pr.* 4)⁸⁴. Though afterward some Christian authors declared that the arguments of the Apostate were rubbish, and his work was consigned to absolute oblivion (*Soc.* III.23; *Joh. Chrys. In. Bab.* II.2), the vehemence with which the apologists of the new faith argued with Julian indicates that his treatise acquired considerable popularity⁸⁵. The influence of the emperor's treatise was recognized by Cyril of Alexandria, who noted that Julian "is disturbing many with these, having caused no small amount of injury. Indeed, fickle, and credulous persons are easily falling into his arguments and are becoming fresh prey for the demons. And somehow now

⁸¹ For sources on Julian's 'school edict' see Bidez, Cumont 1922, 69–75; the historiography devoted to this legislative initiative is extraordinarily extensive. The main works are listed in Teitler 2017, 172, n. 3.

⁸² However, it is possible that the authors of the lexicon merely reinterpreted the Socratic text which was the main source for the article (see Kinzig 1993, 103, n. 52). A connection between the apostasy of Hecebolius and the "School edict" was suggested by Bonner (1984, 353), who, however, did not mention the testimony of the *Suida*.

⁸³ Udal'tsova 1982, 14; Urbainczyk 1997, 15.

⁸⁴ One late source relates an account of a conversation between Patriarch Cyril and some unnamed "philosopher" who boasted that all Alexandrians were reading Julian's work (Evetts 1904, 432–433). This legendary encounter reflects the church authorities' deep concern about the influence of anti-Christian literature on Alexandrian society. On the literary aspect of Cyril's struggle against paganism, see Watts 2006, 202; Allen 2015, 180–181; on his *Contra Iuliani*, see Wilken 1999.

⁸⁵ See Russell 2002, 191, 238, n. 4–5.

and then even those who are firm in the faith are being thrown into a disturbance” (Cyr. Al. *C. Jul. Pr.* 3–4, trans. by M. R. Crawford)⁸⁶. In other words, even seventy years after the death of the Apostate, his writings were still troubling the minds of some Christians. During the emperor’s lifetime, this text must have had an even greater impact on its readers – the author’s lofty position added additional weight to his reasoning.

For the general population, the social aspect of Julian’s religious policy seems to have been the strongest argument in favor of paganism. *Augustus* well understood that the resources received by the Christian communities during the reign of Constantine and his heirs allowed the Church to attract the masses through charity⁸⁷. The emperor began the struggle for the souls of his subjects by depriving the Church of its revenues and immunities⁸⁸, thus limiting the clergy’s ability to influence the poorest segments of the population. At the same time, Julian took efforts to strengthen the economic position of the pagan cults: the temples reclaimed their estates⁸⁹, and the priesthood acquired fiscal and liturgical privileges as well as some generous subsidies from the treasury (Jul. *Ep.* B84/W22; Soz. V.3). The emperor ordered priests to open hospitals and hospices, to distribute alms, and to protect the persecuted (Jul. *Ep.* B89b)⁹⁰. Moreover, state support enabled the ministers of the ancient cults to spend considerable resources on religious ceremonies⁹¹ and the distribution of sacrificial meat among the poor (Lib. *Or.* XXX.19). As a result of this policy, the influence of paganism on the poorest layers of the society must have strengthened. It’s difficult to estimate whether this plan was successful or not. The accounts of the apostasy of ordinary citizens are either too lapidary or too obscure. The sources give only one example of this kind of apostasy – a certain young man of the *ordo curialis* of Beroe, i.e., a representative of a social group that cannot be counted among the lower layers of the Roman society (Theod. *HE.* III.22(17)).

One way or another, Julian’s attempts to convert his subjects to paganism bore fruit. The success of his policy was visible even in such an important center of

⁸⁶ κατασεείει δὲ δι’ αὐτῶν πολλοὺς καὶ ἡδίκηκεν οὐ μετρίως. Οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἑλαφροὶ τε καὶ εὐπάροιστοι πίπτουσι ῥαδίως εἰς τὰ αὐτοῦ καὶ γλυκὺ τοῖς δαιμονίοις γίνονται θήραμα.

⁸⁷ See Jul. *Ep.* B84/W22/Φ39; B89b.

⁸⁸ See *supra*.

⁸⁹ See *Hist. Aceph.* VII.9; *CTh.* V.13.3. Cp. *CTh.* X.1.8; Delmaire 1989, 643.

⁹⁰ Cf. Theoph. *Chron.* 5854.

⁹¹ See, e.g., Lib. *Ep.* F710/N83; F712/B181.

Christianity as Antioch. The conflict between the city's population and the emperor has been repeatedly used to illustrate the total failure of Julian's religious policy⁹². When the emperor arrived in the Syrian capital in mid-July 362⁹³, it displeased him to find that most of the locals were Christians⁹⁴. However, only six months later, Libanius was pleased to note that the religious atmosphere in his hometown had begun to change. According to the sophist, an astonishing change was occurring right before his eyes as the population transformed "from mere swine into human beings" (εὖ δὲ ποιῶν καὶ τὸν ἄλλον μεταρρυθμίζεις ὄχλον – Lib. *Or.* XII. 91, trans. by A. F. Norman). Of course, he gave no figures capable of shedding light on the change in the ratio of "swine" (i.e., Christians) and "humans" (pagans). This evidence of the apostasy of some segments of Antioch's population is borne out in his letter to Julian, written in March 363: "Sacrifices were performed to the goddess in the theatre, and many people have come over to our side, so that the applause rings loud and the gods are invoked in that applause" (Lib. *Ep.* F811/N100, trans. by A. F. Norman)⁹⁵. It seems that the nine-month stay of the Apostate in the city whose inhabitants were referred to by pagans as "enemies of the gods" (Lib. *Ep.* F1220/N120) had at least some influence on the religious sympathies of the population of the Syrian capital.

In other, less Christianized regions the effect of this policy might have been even stronger. A year after Julian's death Gregory of Nazianzus was bitter to admit that many "did not resist even for a little while... but for the sake of temporary gain, or court-favour, or brief power, these wretched fellows bartered away their own salvation!" (οὐδὲ πρὸς ὀλίγον ἀντισχόντες... ἀλλὰ προσκαίρου κέρδους, ἢ θεραπείας, ἢ δυναστείας μικρᾶς, οἱ δειλαιοὶ τὴν ἑαυτῶν σωτηρίαν ἀπεμπολήσαντες – Greg. Naz. *Or.* IV.11, trans. by C. W. King). A quarter of a century later Jerome recalled that during a brief period of this "tender persecution," many fell "of their own free will" (Juliano... blanda persecutio fuit inliciens magis quam impellens ad sacrificandum, in qua multi ex nostris voluntate propria corruerunt – Hieron. *Chron.* 362.1). He was echoed by Rufinus of Aquileia: "he [Julian] ruined almost more people by rewards,

⁹² This was stated by nearly every scholar who has ever written about Julian or Late Antique Antioch. However, they overlooked the fact that the reaction of the Syrian capital to Julian's initiatives was unrepresentative – in its political, economic, and religious status Antioch stood out sharply from that of the bulk of provincial cities. See Liebeschuetz 2015, 343.

⁹³ See Amm. XXII. 9. 15; den Boeft *et al.* 1995, 177–180.

⁹⁴ E.g., Jul. *Misopog.* 360–363.

⁹⁵ ἀλλὰ καὶ ταῖς ἐπὶ σκηνῆς χάρισι καὶ τέθυται ἐν θεάτρῳ τῇ θεῷ καὶ μετετάξατο παρ' ἡμᾶς οὐ μικρὸν μέρος, ὥσθ' ἢ τε βοῆ λαμπρὰ θεοὶ τε ἐν τῇ βοῇ καλοῦνται. δηλῶν δὲ ὁ ἄρχων ὡς χαίρει τῇ τοιαύτῃ βοῇ μείζω ταύτην ἀπὸ πλειόνων προκαλεῖται

honors, flattery, and persuasion, than if he had proceeded by way of force, cruelty, and torture” (non vi, neque tormentis, sed praemiis, honoribus, blanditiis, persuasionibus, maiorem pene populi partem, quam si atrociter pulsasset, elisit – Ruf. *HE*. I(X).32(33), trans. by P. R. Amidon). In other words, between 361 and 363, the cases of apostasy were quite numerous.

The sincerity of the religious choice of the pagan neophytes is, of course, impossible to assess. One may assume that at least some of them were quite sincere in their conversion, while others left the Church moved by the *Zeitgeist* or the wish for the momentary advantage. Even ardent advocates of the pagan restoration had some doubts that all the new converts turned to the paternal religion out of their hearts' call. In the early summer of 362, the emperor himself urged his followers to put aside their mistrust and be more lenient towards their new co-believers: “For if we drive away those who come to us of their own free will, no one will be ready to heed when we summon” (εἰ δὲ τοὺς αὐτομάτους ἰόντας ἀπελαύνομεν, οὐδεὶς ὑπακούσεται ῥαδίως παρακαλοῦσιν – Jul. *Ep.* B79/W19, trans. by W. C. Wright). A year later, Libanius asked Alexander, the *consularis* of Syria, not to be surprised if “one of those who has recently sacrificed thinks what he has done is terrible, and once again praises abstinence from sacrifice. In public they obey you when you advise them of the best path and they approach the altars, but at home one's wife, her tears and the night bring about a change of heart and drive them from the altars” (Lib. *Ep.* F1411/B98, trans. by S. Bradbury)⁹⁶. In just a few months Libanius' fears proved to be true.

Shortly after Julian's death, some of the pagan converts suddenly “repented” of their apostasy. As early as the beginning of 364, Themistius mentioned that those who had recently made sacrifices on altars could now be found in Christian churches. From his point of view, such persons were *coturni*, the “new Theramenes,” those who revered the imperial purple more than the deity itself⁹⁷ and switched their religion faster than Eurypius changes its tide (Them. *Or.* V.67D–68A)⁹⁸. Among the “Theramenes” were loyal conformists, those who had regarded the emperor as the supreme religious authority, as well as outright opportunists. In the ranks of the latter was Julian's former teacher Hecebolius, who, on learning of the death of his regal student, started to repent, crawling in dust in front of one

⁹⁶ ...εἴ τις τῶν ἄρτι τεθυκότων δεινόν τε ὁ ἔδρασεν ἐνόμισε καὶ πάλιν ἐπαινεῖ τὸ μὴ θύειν. ἔξω μὲν γὰρ σοὶ πείθονται τὰ ἄριστα συμβουλευόντι καὶ προσέρχονται βωμοῖς, οἴκοι δὲ γυνή καὶ δάκρυα καὶ νύξ μεταπίθει καὶ τῶν βωμῶν ἀποσπᾶ.

⁹⁷ Cf. Soc. III.13.

⁹⁸ Cf. Them. *Or.* XII.156D.

of Constantinople's churches (Soc. III.13)⁹⁹. Domitius Modestus turned out to be another "weathercock"¹⁰⁰. We may suppose that Julian's relative Procopius also departed from paganism. The coins minted during his usurpation bore Christian symbols¹⁰¹. It would not be fair to say, however, that all of Julian's converts were that unscrupulous. Quite a few neophytes stayed true to paganism even after the death of their emperor. Loyalty to the religion of their late leader was retained by at least part of the army (Amm. XXVI.7.17)¹⁰², the emperor's friends Seleucus and

⁹⁹ For more details see. Kinzig 1993, 97–101.

¹⁰⁰ In describing Modestus' participation in the persecution of the Nicaeans of Edessa, Rufinus referred to him as a pagan (Ruf. *HE*. II(XI). 5). This led some scholars to a conclusion that Modestus had converted to Christianity a second time only a few years after the death of Julian. See, e.g., PLRE I, 608. However, in a letter from 365, Libanus reproached Modestus for no longer wanting to hear about the "Cilician god" (i.e., Asclepius) (Lib. *Ep.* F1483). We can suppose that the rhetor wrote these words knowing that the official had once again become a Christian. Moreover, Gregory of Nazianzus reported that at the time of his meeting with Basil of Caesarea, Modestus was an "Arian" (Greg. *Naz. Or.* XLIII.48). The confrontation between the prefect and the bishop dates to 370 or 372 (Rousseau 1994, 351–353), while the persecution of the Nicaeans of Edessa to 373 (*Chron. Edess.* XXXI (a. 684)) or 375 (Lenski 2002a, 257). Thus, adopting both accounts leads to the paradoxical conclusion that after 370 (or 372?) Modestus renounced Christianity for a second time. Therefore, one of the authors was mistaken in assessing the religious sympathies of the dignitary. Gregory may have known about the prefect's views from the words of Basil, who corresponded with Modestus and met him personally at least twice (see Van Dam 2002, 116–122, 128). At the same time, neither Rufinus nor his supposed source Gelasius (see Wallraff 2018) was intimately acquainted with the courtier. It seems that Rufinus was simply unaware of the fact that Modestus had returned to the Christian fold after the death of Julian.

¹⁰¹ RIC IX. Pl. XV.17. Procopius' propaganda, however, combined both Christian and pagan elements. Although his coins bore Christograms, the image of the usurper was stylized to give him a resemblance to Julian. It can be assumed that Procopius was hesitant to openly declare his religious preferences for fear of alienating potential supporters among both pagans and Christians. For the "pagan factor" in Procopius' usurpation, see den Boeft *et al.* 2007, 136.

¹⁰² Christian historians have reported that immediately after Julian's death the whole army returned to the fold of the Church (Ruf. *HE*. II(XI). 1; Theod. *HE*. IV.1–2(1–2); *Chron. Pasch.* 363). These data contradict the memoirs of Ammianus, who tells that immediately after the accession of Christian Jovian the army offered sacrifices and performed divinations (XXV. 6. 1). On the loyalty of the *Divitenses* and *Tungrikani* to paganism, see *supra*.

Helpidius¹⁰³, and, if we follow Barnes' hypothesis, the soldier-historian Ammianus Marcellinus.

It would have been almost impossible to assess the success of the Apostate's efforts to promote paganism if we were not aware of the activities of another religious reformer of that era, namely Constantine I, whose policy of Christianization is regarded to be successful. Like his nephew, the first Christian *augustus* tried to occupy the highest posts with his co-religionists. Eusebius of Caesarea mentions that the emperor preferred Christians to governors and tolerated pagans only if they did not perform sacrifices. According to the historian, after Julian had achieved sole authority over the empire, he even started to demand the compulsory baptism of all the provincial officials who held posts higher than that of ἡγεμῶν (Euseb. *V. Const.* II. 44). Therefore, in his effort to win the members of his administration to Christianity, Constantine used the same methods as his nephew Julian, such as giving rewards and high offices¹⁰⁴. Yet Constantine never succeeded in staffing the administration with his co-believers. Contrary to the testimony of Eusebius, Constantine had to give in to the religious predilections of the imperial elite and, up to the last years of his reign, tolerated pagans even in the highest offices¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰³ Some mentions of the gods in the letters which Libanius wrote to them in 364–365 hint that they remained pagans after 363 (see *Ep.* F1473/N140; F1508/N142; F1120/N113; F1180/N125). Von Haehling's idea that Helpidius eventually abandoned paganism (von Haehling 1978, 142), is unjustified: Philostorgius mentioned that Helpidius was called a 'priest' until the end of his life (Philost. VII.10, *cf.* Nic. Call. X.29 (PG 146, col. 529D; 532A); see Olszaniec 2013, 221, n. 1035). As for the *comites* Julianus and Felix, they did not get a chance to testify to the sincerity of their conversion – both had perished before the death of their *augustus*, which gave Christian authors an opportunity to gloss over the details of the apostates' demise, *cf.* Greg. Naz. *Or.* V.2; Jon. Chrys. *De Bab.* II. 17; 22; *Laud. Paul.* IV; *Exp. in Ps.* CX. 4; *Hom. in Matth.* 4.1; Soz. V.8; Theod. *HE.* III.13(9); Philost. VII.10; Theoph. *Chron.* 5854; *cf.* Amm. XXIII.1.5. *Cf.* the gloating descriptions of the deaths of the former clerics Heron and Theoteknus – sources cited in note 73, *supra*.

¹⁰⁴ On Constantine's granting of honorary offices for converting to Christianity, see Epiph. *Adv. Haer.* 10(30).11; Euseb. *V. Const.* IV.54.

¹⁰⁵ E.g., Lollianus Mavortius (PLRE I, 512–514 (Lollianus 5)) and Felicianus (following Malalas, the authors of PLRE I call him a Christian (ibid. 331), but *cf.* Athanassiadi 1991, 276; Lenski 2016, 216–217). On Constantine's personnel policy in general, see von Haehling 1978, 513–521.

Constantine also attempted to convert the army to his faith. According to Eusebius, he ordered the soldiers to attend worship every week and was himself “their instructor in prayer” (Euseb. *Laud. Const.* 9; *V. Const.* IV.18–20). But Eusebius himself made it clear that even a decade after the emperor had begun to promote the new faith¹⁰⁶, numerous soldiers stubbornly refused to convert to Christianity (*V. Const.* IV. 19–20). Therefore, Constantine’s progress in bringing the army to the Church was not as great as his Christian panegyrist would have us believe. Zosimus recalled, that during his visit to Rome (most likely on the twentieth anniversary of his reign) the “fear of the soldiers” forced the emperor to participate in the pagan rite of ascension to Capitol (*Zos.* II. 29). Although the dating and historicity of this anecdote are disputed¹⁰⁷, the sympathies of Constantine’s soldiers for traditional cults are confirmed by the *Theodosian Code*: as late as in 326 the veterans addressed the emperor with the words “*auguste Constantine, dii te nobis servant*” (*CTh.* VII.20.2)¹⁰⁸. This shows that, despite the purposeful and long-lasting propaganda of Christianity, a considerable part of the army remained loyal to the paternal gods¹⁰⁹. Thus, although Constantine had more time than Julian to convert his officials and soldiers, the achievements of the uncle were more modest than those of the nephew.

It is noteworthy that not all the citizens of the empire who joined the Church in the days of Constantine and his sons converted only out of a sincere conviction of the truth of Christ’s teachings. Not a few subjects of the first Christian emperors were baptised only to obtain some official position or to join the clergy, thereby relieving themselves of the burden of municipal and state liturgies (*Athan. Hist. Ar.* 73; 78; *Apol. ad. Const.* 28). Even Eusebius mentioned that some converted only to win favor with the *augustus*: “there was also an unspeakable deceit on the part of those who slipped into the Church and adopted the false façade of the Christian name” (εἰρωνεῖαν τ’ ἄλεκτον τῶν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν ὑποδυσμένων καὶ τὸ Χριστιανῶν ἐπιπλάστως σχηματιζομένων ὄνομα – Euseb. *V. Const.* IV.54, trans. by Av. Cameron and S. G. Hall). Self-interested careerists were no fewer among the converts of Constantine than among the pagan neophytes of Julian.

To sum up, we have no reason to believe that Julian’s attempts to revive paganism were less effective than Constantine’s policy of Christianizing the empire. At

¹⁰⁶ Constantine had been publicly declaring his belief in One God since at least 314, see *Optat. App. V.* The Christian symbols first appeared on his coins no later than 315 (see Lenski 2016, 9).

¹⁰⁷ On this incident, see Moralee 2018, 125, n. 61 with bibliography.

¹⁰⁸ On the dating of the edict, see Lenski 2016, 344, n. 17 with bibliography.

¹⁰⁹ See Jones 1986, 81.

the same time, Constantine was promoting the new doctrine for almost a quarter of a century, and Julian ruled the empire for a mere 20 months. In fact, during his brief reign, Julian accomplished more than his uncle: he fully staffed the state administrations with his co-religionists and succeeded in converting a considerable and perhaps even a larger portion of the army, ordinary citizens, intellectuals, and even some members of the Christian clergy. In other words, we have every reason to believe that Julian's attempt to return the empire to paganism failed, not because his reforms were the initially doomed ambition of a romantic idealist detached from the reality of his age, and not because the ancient cults were destined to perish in a struggle with Christianity, but only because of the tragic accident that cut short the life of the restorer of paganism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Some of the ideas expressed in this paper were presented in my article in Russian published in *Vestnik drevney istorii* (*Journal of Ancient History*) 81.4.

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