

Stefan Rebenich, Hans-Ulrich Wiemer (eds.), *A Companion to Julian the Apostate* [= Brill's Companions to the Byzantine World 5]. Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2020, xvi + 481 pages, maps, ISBN 978-90-04-41456-3 (hardback), 978-90-04-41631-4 (e-book).

Julian's reign as the sole *Augustus* of the Roman Empire lasted less than two years but almost two millennia after his death he remains one of the most popular figures of Late Antiquity. This is arguably caused by the achievements and failures he was able to squeeze into his life of 32 years, not only as a prolific writer and a philosopher-soldier-emperor but also as a religious policymaker. *A Companion to Julian the Apostate*, divided into 13 chapters, each written by experts on their field, takes on the emperor by focusing on the areas Julian showed activity, presenting a vivid and objective picture of his complex personality and actions "as writer and emperor, as legislator, religious reformer, Neoplatonic philosopher and commander" (p. 29).

The introductory chapter by Stefan Rebenich and Hans-Ulrich Wiemer (pp. 1–37) does exactly what it promises: the themes that are about to be tackled by the subsequent chapters are introduced, the methodology of the whole work is declared, and editions and resources for the primary sources are discussed.

In the second chapter, 'Julian's Philosophical Writings' (pp. 38–63), Heinz-Günther Nesselrath offers a summary of Julian's philosophical works: *The Letter to Themistius* (pp. 39–42), *Against Heraclius the Cynic* (pp. 43–47), *Against the Uneducated Cynics* (pp. 47–51), *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* (51–55), and *Hymn to King Helios* (pp. 55–62). The most captivating part of the chapter consists of the author's brief treatment of how Julian's three-layered Neoplatonic worldview differed from the those of other Neoplatonists, including Iamblichus, one of his teachers, according to which Helios is the most important part and not the One (p. 61).

In the third chapter, 'The Gallic Wars of Julian Caesar' (pp. 64–96), Peter J. Heather traces Julian's footsteps in Gaul as *Caesar* and his military operations there, on a year-by-year basis, from 355 to 361. The high point of the whole chapter is the author's argument countering that of John F. Drinkwater, who claims in his *The Alamanni and Rome 213–496 (Caracalla to Clovis)* (2007) that Julian's Alamannic War was a war of pure aggression and until that time the Alamanni had been happy, tax-paying subjects of the empire. Heather refutes this hypothesis and goes on to defend his view, which takes up considerable part of the chapter, arguing why the Alamanni were a real threat for the empire, even if regional (p. 87).

In the fourth chapter, 'From Caesar to Augustus: Julian against Constantius' (pp. 97–123), Bruno Bleckmann tackles the period of Julian's usurpation (February 360–November 361), his motives and actions (pp. 106–115), with a conclusion that the usurpation was premeditated but the civil war had no religious connotations (pp. 120–121).

In the fifth chapter, 'Reform, Routine, and Propaganda: Julian the Lawgiver' (pp. 124–171), Sebastian Schmidt-Hofner declares that, in contrast to the contemporary view, "Julian was an active reformer only in very few areas of government; most of his innovative measures emerged out of reactions to specific cases, and the majority of his legislation routinely repeated existing legal rules and practice" (p. 128). The whole chapter is dedicated to strengthening this conclusion, by individually putting Julian's legislations

under focus. These concern the municipalities, their *curiae* and *curiales* (pp. 131–137), taxes and public service obligations (pp. 137–144), “corruption and the imperial service” (pp. 144–149), appeals in court and private law (pp. 149–155), and religion (pp. 155–162).

In the sixth chapter, ‘The Value of a Good Education: The School Law in Context’ (pp. 172–206), Konrad Vössing tackles the so-called “School-law” of Julian with its effects upon teachers (pp. 181–183) and schools (pp. 183–185), which is followed by a discussion of the primary sources for the law itself (pp. 185–188). In the rest of the chapter Julian’s aims and the feasibility of the law are put under scrutiny. The chapter successfully deciphers the ambiguous terms used in the primary sources concerning the law while remarkably pursues the obstacles stood in Julian’s way.

In the seventh chapter, ‘Revival and Reform: The Religious Policy of Julian’ (pp. 207–244), Hans-Ulrich Wiemer opens his chapter by declaring that the Greco-Roman paganism “a dead religion that has long ceased to have advocates or adherents” (p. 207). While I am ignorant of how the author reached this conclusion so surely unless he has had a special and dependable way of finding out everyone’s religious beliefs, there is evidence that speaks to the contrary,¹ including one that is pointed out by the author of the thirteenth chapter.²

After this brief introduction, the author moves closer to discuss Julian’s religious policy, but he first gives a background of Christianity and the traditional Greco-Roman religion before Julian, with an emphasis on the former’s rise and the latter’s decline (pp. 209–214). The author accepts the traditional hypothesis that there was “a crisis” in the third century,³ through which he tries to explain the decline of “paganism as a religious system” (p. 211). He then treats subjects such as restoration of the priests, sacrifices, temples, and other privileges of the traditional faith under Julian (pp. 214–224). His reforms in this field are also discussed, together with Julian’s so-called “Pagan church”, an analogy, the author documents, that should rather be attributed to Gregory of Nazianzus (pp. 226–227). Lastly, Julian’s personal involvement in all these policies is examined, which, the author notes, that they make him ironically resemble his uncle Constantine I (pp. 236–237).

The chapter ends with a curious sentence: “A glance at the way Christianity developed under Arab rule in what had once been the Roman Orient suffices to evoke a whole range of possibilities that never became realities” (p. 239). This offered analogy, I assume,

¹ See, for instance, the short documentary ‘The Greeks who Pray to Zeus: VICE INTL (Greece)’ (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBpNu4_TP9w&ab_channel=VICE [retrieved 06.10.2021]). On Reddit, a website designed primarily for discussion, there are “subreddits”, or forum boards, called */r/paganism* (<https://www.reddit.com/r/paganism/> [retrieved 14.10.2021]) and */r/pagan* (<https://www.reddit.com/r/pagan/> [retrieved 14.10.2021]) with tens of thousands of active members, including but not exclusive to, those who follow the traditional Greco-Roman religion.

² As pointed out in the thirteenth chapter by Stefan Rebenich (p. 418), there is a religious society called “The Julian Society” that defines itself “a non-denominational Pagan Religious Order” (<http://www.juliansociety.org/> [retrieved 14.10.2021]).

³ There have been some convincing points raised as to whether there was a “third-century crisis” at all and what does “a crisis” should even mean. See, L. de Blois, ‘The crisis of the third century A.D. in the Roman Empire: A modern myth?’. In: L. de Blois, J. Rich (eds.), *The Transformation of Economic Life under the Roman Empire*. Amsterdam: Gieben, 2002, 204–217; W. Liebeschuetz, ‘Was there a crisis of the third century?’. In: O. Hekster, G. de Kleijn, D. Slootjes (eds.), *Crises and the Roman Empire*. Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2007, 11–20.

should aid one in their contrafactual thinking of “How would have Christianity fared, had Julian not died early in his reign?”. It appears to me that it fails in at least one regard, however, since I cannot see how such an analogy, that puts two Abrahamic and monotheistic religions (Islam and Christianity), similar to each other in several respects, could serve us to imagine the possibilities of a Christianity under a polytheistic religion that has with its adversary next to nothing in common.

In the eighth chapter, ‘Anti-Christian Polemics and Pagan Onto-Theology: Julian’s *Against the Galilaeans*’ (pp. 245–266), Christoph Riedweg focuses on the emperor’s fragmentary treatise against Christianity, with which he raised ontotheological issues with it, such as the illogical aspect of the creation of the world within the Mosaic context (pp. 249–253). Inconsistencies in Julian’s account are noted too, for instance, his negative portrayal of Jahwe as a revengeful and zealous god and then his respect for the same (pp. 253–256). John’s account of Jesus and his divinity (pp. 256–259) and Plato’s *Timaeus*’ influence on shaping up Julian’s attack on Christianity (pp. 259–262) are among other themes that are treated by the author.

In the ninth chapter, ‘Julian and the Jews’ (pp. 267–292) by Scott Bradbury, Julian and his relationship with the Jews based on his surviving writings and correspondence is examined. Since much of our knowledge on Julian’s views on Judaism is owed to his *Against the Galilaeans*, this chapter alludes to the fragments of the work many times as well. His so-called and probably forged *Letter to the Community of the Jews* is also discussed (pp. 279–280). This is followed by Julian’s project of rebuilding the Temple Mount (pp. 280–282), a theme that is undertaken with the history of the city of Jerusalem from 70 to Julian’s day. The chapter concludes with the Christian reaction to it, limited to those recorded between the fourth and sixth centuries, particularly the writings of Gregory of Nazianzus and Ephrem the Syrian (pp. 282–289).

In the tenth chapter, ‘The Persian Expedition’ (pp. 293–326), written by Neil McLynn, Julian’s Persian expedition is sketched and analyzed primarily through the accounts of Ammianus Marcellinus, Zosimus, and Libanius. His anabasis (pp. 300–309), the battle before Ctesiphon (pp. 309–317), and the retreat to the Roman border during which the emperor lost his life (pp. 317–323), besides the possible reasons for destroying the ships that had been accompanying the army (pp. 312–316), are all put under close inspection.

In the eleventh chapter, ‘Pagan Reactions to Julian’ (pp. 326–359) by Arnaldo Marcone, the research encompasses pagans who interacted with the emperor in one way or another. These range from well-known contemporaries such as Oribasius (pp. 328–329), Libanius (pp. 335–340), Themistius (pp. 342–346) to those who wrote about him after his death, such as Eunapius and Zosimus (pp. 350–357). One conclusion that can be drawn from this chapter is that not all pagans were fanatical supporters of the emperor and his policies, and that some even distanced themselves from Julian during his reign.

In the twelfth and penultimate chapter, ‘The Christian Reception of Julian’ (pp. 360–397), Peter van Nuffelen, after emphasizing Julian’s importance not merely for the “Western civilization” but also for “Syriac and Arab culture” (p. 360), examines the legacy of Julian within Christian circles. He does this in three phases. First, Julian according to Gregory of Nazianzus and Ephrem the Syrian is discussed (pp. 362–368), next, Julian in Socrates’, Sozomen’s, and Theoderet’s church histories is treated, in whose

lifetime the picture of “a persecutor” and “a failed philosopher” was well established by his enemies (pp. 368–376), and finally, Julian in the hagiographical tradition is handled (pp. 376–382). The chapter ends with a list of the martyrs who were allegedly killed under Julian’s reign (pp. 382–392).

In the last chapter, ‘Julian’s Afterlife. The Reception of a Roman Emperor’ (pp. 398–420), Stefan Rebenich takes on the image and influence of Julian after his death, excluding the visual arts and music, starting from the Middle Ages (pp. 399–402), which is followed up by his portrayal in the early modern ages (pp. 402–407), the Enlightenment (pp. 407–413), the 19th century (pp. 413–416), and finally, the 20th century (pp. 416–418). He successfully demonstrates how his memory was preserved, spoiled, and transformed for various goals. Unfortunately, however, his reception is only limited to western Europe. One would like to learn a bit about his reception in Persia/Iran as well, given the fact that he undertook a great expedition there.

A Companion to Julian the Apostate is a successful entry to the vast Julianic literature. It not only succeeds in bringing the latest research about Julian up to date, but it is also successful because it does this in a way that is friendly to those who are new to the studies concerning the emperor and his period. Its rich bibliography (pp. 421–472), divided into multifarious categories such as his campaigns, youth, law, could be a reason by itself that justifies its existence.

The language and style adopted are clear throughout, even for the first and eleventh chapters, which are translated from German and Italian (?), respectively, to English. A few French and German citations that are left untranslated in the thirteenth chapter may be bothersome for those who speak neither French nor German and yet want to fully enjoy a book about Julian without consulting elsewhere.

The book in general suffers only from minor problems, limited to a few chapters, as has been noted in their due place above. Here, a couple more could be added to these, related to the language and style used. First is the rather problematic usage of the outdated phrase “Western civilization” by Wiemer on p. 207, which today inescapably comes with a baggage of traditional yet invalid claims on the western superiority over the east with respect to fields such as law, rationalism, liberty, etc. Such archaic notions better fit the books written in the early 1900s.⁴

Next, a couple of words should be said regarding the unfortunate title, *A Companion to Julian the Apostate*, a style of address/insult originally given by his contemporary and near-contemporary Christian adversaries. As such, the title sounds like a book that deals with Julian’s religious policy from a partisan Christian perspective. Such a sensationalist title and style of address would perhaps be fitting for a popular history/fiction book. I think that if the label “the Apostate” should be used, it should only be used within quotation marks to emphasize the distance and objectivity of a work and its author(s) to the label. Why this style of address without quotation marks was chosen as the title for

⁴ On the issue why the phrase is misleading, see Kwame Anthony Appiah’s ‘There is no such thing as western civilization’ which argues for the opinion that “The values of liberty, tolerance and rational inquiry are not the birthright of a single culture” (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/09/western-civilisation-appiah-reith-lecture> [retrieved 14.10.2021]).

an academic book published in 2020, which is luckily a practice not adopted by the other authors (excluding the first and thirteenth chapters) in their respective chapters, remains a mystery to me.

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