

Christian Schäfer (ed.),
*Kaiser Julian 'Apostata' und die philosophische
 Reaktion gegen das Christentum,*
 Walter de Gruyter, Berlin and New York, 2008
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This volume on 'Emperor Julian the "Apostate" and the philosophical reaction against Christianity' is a collection of eleven papers, most of them read in October 2006 at a conference organized by the Department of Christian Philosophy and the Grabmann Institute at the University of Munich. The title of the volume coincides with that of the conference, as well as with that of the article by the editor, Christian Schäfer.

In his Introduction (pp. ix-xiii), the editor promises to fill a gap in the research on 'the intellectual reaction against Christianity at the time and in the milieu of the Emperor Julian' (p. x). The gap is the result of an overwhelmingly 'romantic' attitude to Julian, focusing on such unscholarly problems as his 'psychogram' (p. ix).¹ The same holds true, according to Schäfer, for the volume's broader topic, the intellectual confrontation between Christianity and Pagan thought, except that this field is characterized by 'ad-hoc statements' and 'disparate references' instead of a systematic picture of the conflict, in particular of its culmination in and around Julian. This had been the situation, then, which the present volume, described as 'a source of information in the form of a handbook', concentrating on 'Julian's programmatic apostasy as such' in a philosophical and intellectual-historical perspective (pp. x-xi), aims to improve.

The first and foremost task of the reviewer is to make it clear that the situation predating this volume has not been as gloomy as this², nor is this a handbook on Julian's apostasy or the conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the fourth century. Nevertheless, the volume contains some

¹ Julian's 'psychogram' as a favourite topic of 'French scholars' resurfaces in the contribution of M. Janka (p. 185) but there it refers specifically to the *Misopogon*, one of the most personal writings of the Emperor.

² See the Julian bibliographies of M. Caltabiano (in *Koinonia* 7 [1983], 8 [1984], and 17 [1993]), J. Bouffartigue (in *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques*, vol. 3 [2000]), or the more recent issues of *L'Année Philologique*.

important studies on various themes related to the Emperor's thought and/or to the intellectual history of his age. Moreover, as the participants were all invited from German universities – almost half of them from Munich – the volume 'gives a good insight into the state of research' (p. xiii) from the perspective of contemporary German classical scholarship only.³ The picture reveals a wide spectrum of interests with fascinating points of connection – which, unfortunately, have not been made explicit.

1. Jens Halfwassen's article 'Neuplatonismus und Christentum' (pp. 1–15) is a preliminary outline of the intellectual landscape of Late Antiquity by a renowned expert of the Platonic tradition. H. traces the development of two major types of reactions by Christian Platonists – he calls Christianity a 'Neoplatonically interpreted religion' (p. 2) – to the dilemma that the God of the Bible was to be identified both with Plotinus's all-transcending and unknowable First Principle, and with Intellect, Plotinus's second hypostasis. One solution (pp. 3–10), which eventually gained popularity in the Latin West, came quite paradoxically from Porphyry, one of the major adversaries of Christianity. Porphyry's own analysis of the relation between the One and Being – partly prompted by the interpretation of the *Chaldean Oracles*, the 'Bible' of the later Pagan Neoplatonists – in fact helped his adversaries to develop their Trinitarian theology in which three moments within God are compatible with divine unity (p. 8). The second solution is that of Ps-Dionysius and Eriugena (pp. 10–14) with their different ways to the same God: affirmative theology, *via negativa*, and the way of excellence that transcends both. H. places his subject matter in the perspective of Western Philosophy, including Hegel and Schelling. It is a pity, however, that he did not include Julian into his investigation.

2. In an exemplary introductory essay to the volume, Theo Kobusch considers the major points of debate between Christian and Greek philosophy ('Philosophische Streitsachen. Zur Auseinandersetzung zwischen christlicher und griechischer Philosophie', pp. 17–40). In this systematic presentation K. emphasizes the dialogue between the Pagan and Christian versions of Platonism. Based on an impressive amount of primary sources – including the most relevant one: Julian's *Contra Galilaeos* – K. discusses eight problems: reincarnation (in a literal or a metaphorical sense, pp. 17–20), belief (whether it is irrational or it is a pre-rational element necessary for rationality, pp. 20–23), the relation of theory

³ The picture is not complete: Klaus Rosen, for example, or Martin Wallraff, Christoph Riedweg, or, more recently, Ilinca Tanaseanu-Döbler are absent from it.

(philosophy) and praxis (religious activity and cult, pp. 23–26), the relation of tradition and innovation (cf. the contribution of Cürsgen below, pp. 27–30), education (the dilemma of elitism or ‘Platonism for the people’, pp. 30–32), whether there is an *a priori* knowledge of God (the problem of *koinai ennoiai*, pp. 33–36), the conflict between nature and freedom (pp. 36–38), and forgiving (also related to the problem of free will, pp. 38–40).

3. Christian Schäfer’s programmatic article (pp. 41–64) is a third comprehensive overview, which tries to grasp the essence of Julian’s intellectual milieu (encompassing Late Antiquity as a whole). The subtitle – ‘Die “Pseudomorphosen” des platonischen Denkens im magischen Zeitalter’ – summarizes the author’s results. These terms are borrowed from O. Spengler via H. Jonas and M. Erler (p. 47). Sch. mobilizes a wide range of authorities to underpin his claim that Julian’s age was neither a decline and fall, nor a transitory period or a new beginning but an age of Platonism (the idea is traced back to Heinrich Dörrie). Paganism, Christianity or Gnosticism are merely variations or subtypes – this is what Sch. calls *pseudomorphosis* – of the Platonic ‘form of thinking.’ There is much invention in the language (Christianity as the par excellence ‘logical’ religion, since Christ is ‘Logos’, p. 54) and in metaphors (hermit crabs in beer cans for intellectual movements, pp. 47, 48) reminding of the Neoplatonic texts themselves. There is also some unconventional way of quoting (‘an old professor of Greek, whose courses I liked, used to say...’, p. 53), and certain oddities in the references (an argument of Julian’s from *Ep.* 111 Bidez – quoted more than once in the volume! – identified as part of the *Hymn to the Sun*, p. 62). The bottom line is an emphasis of the Hellenic nature of Christianity (quoting Abaelard and Droysen, pp. 51–52, n. 29), not unlike in most contributions of this volume. It is a merit of the article to apply this basic idea to Julian, and the warning in the title of the last section – ‘While making distinction (pay) attention to what is common’ (p. 63) – is indeed to be kept in mind, especially concerning Julian who was raised as a Christian.

4. Dirk Cürsgen (‘Kaiser Julian über das Wesen und die Geschichte der Philosophie’, pp. 65–86) gives an account of ‘Julian’s idea of the essence and especially the history of philosophy’ as a counterpart (‘Gegenideal’) of Christianity (p. 65). C. focuses on the notion of innovation and identifies two kinds of it in Julian. One preserves the old by going back to the eternal truth, which is ever new (the ‘old new’, p. 85), as well as to the sources that communicate them, however ancient they may be. The other is called ‘absolute innovation’ (the ‘false new’, p. 85) which ‘equals to destruction’ (p. 86). The latter is Christianity, while the former is Philosophy – if understood properly. C’s

argument sometimes seems to be diverted by Julian's texts he is following, and some outdated – or at least certainly old – literature is apparently considered to be relevant (Strauss 1847, France 1896, Vollert 1899, Geffecken 1914).

5. Klaus Bringmann, the author of a recent historical monograph on Julian⁴, gives a concise overview of the Emperor's activity as a philosopher ('Julian, Kaiser, Philosoph', pp. 87–104). Starting with the interpretation of inscriptions from Asia Minor that demonstrate Julian's popularity there as a philosopher, B. discusses the Emperor's intellectual development from his conversion (in Asia Minor) to Neoplatonism (pp. 90–91) until his death. The major themes are his dispute with Themistius on the relation of philosophy and political activity (p. 92), his political philosophy implied in his *Second Oration to Constantius* (pp. 92–93); the role of philosophers (the followers of Iamblichus) in his ascent to power (95); his political theological program (96–97) based on the conviction that Christianity, with its denial of the gods, is the cause of the greatest evil: alienation from the divine ('Gottesferne', p. 96); his activity as sole emperor (98); his disillusionment with the people of Antiochia (where he stationed preparing for his Persian campaign in 362/363, p. 99); and his visit to a fellow Neoplatonist on his march to Persia (pp. 100–101). At this point we come back to the epigraphic material, this time near Antioch and on Julian's way to Persia. Since these inscriptions associate Julian with 'the one god', B. asks about the identity of this god. Joining E. Peterson⁵ he concludes (pp. 103–104) that monotheism in Late Antiquity had a supraconventional character and was a common feature of both Paganism and Christianity. He adds that in the case of Julian it was solar theology that resolved the contrast between unity and multiplicity in God.

6. Matthias Perkams sets out to answer the question whether Julian's political reflections can be seen as elements of a Neoplatonic political philosophy (p. 107) ('Eine neuplatonische politische Philosophie – gibt es sie bei Kaiser Julian?' pp. 105–125). Through an interpretation of the relevant texts – *Ep.* 89b Bidez (pp. 108–111), the *Second Oration to Constantius* (pp. 111–117), the autobiographical myth in *Against Heraclius* (pp. 117–120), and the *Letter to Themistius* (pp. 120–123) – P. concludes that what we find in Julian does not amount to a Neoplatonic political philosophy but is in fact a traditional doctrine, and 'Julian merely connected it with elements of Neoplatonic psychology' (p. 123). According to

⁴ Cf. his monograph *Kaiser Julian. Der letzte heidnische Herrscher*, Primus Verlag, 2004.

⁵ ΕΙΣ ΘΕΟΣ, Göttingen, 1926.

P., all elements of this traditional doctrine are present in Dio (Chrysostomus) of Prusa. This had in fact been the claim already of R. Asmus (1895) and, more recently, of S. Schorn (2008) whom P. follows against O'Meara (2003) and Curta (2005).⁶ P. may be right but he does not cite enough new evidence to make his argument convincing, nor does he take into account the fact that Julian was not only an individual with no time for philosophy (p. 107) but an Emperor surrounded by advisers, among them professional (Neoplatonic) philosophers.⁷ It would also have been interesting to read more about the contrast between the political ideas of Sopater (p. 113 ff.) and Dio.

7. Jan Opsomer, who has published widely on demiurgy (cosmogony) in the Platonic tradition, gives a philosophical analysis of Julian's statements concerning the beginning of the world. The title ('Weshalb nach Julian die mosaisch-christliche Schöpfungslehre der platonischen Demiurgie unterlegen ist', pp. 127–156) is a reference to Julian's conclusion, in his *Contra Galileos*, that the Biblical account of creation is far inferior to that of Plato's, explained in the *Timaeus*. O. gives a fresh reading not only of key passages of the *Contra Galileos* (pp. 127–134) but also of the Emperor's two major theological treatises: the prose hymns *To the Sun* (pp. 134–146) and *To the Mother of the Gods* (pp. 148–156). While taking into account the results of previous research, O. reads Julian's statements carefully, even taking side in problems of textual criticism (p. 128, n 5). He successfully attempts to harmonize the difficult terminology, and gives an – as far as possible – coherent picture of J's ideas on demiurgy. Placing the latter in their relevant – mainly Pagan Neoplatonic – context, O. concludes that Julian's apparently diverging statements go back to a more complete system which is undoubtedly that of Iamblichus.

8. In his article 'Konstruktion von Autorität: Julians Hymnen' (pp. 157–175) Martin Hose investigates partly the same works – *To the Sun* (pp. 160–171) and *To the Mother of the Gods* (pp. 171–175) – from a literary-critical point of

⁶ Cf. p. 111 with notes 27 and 28; R. Asmus, *Julian und Dio Chrysostomus*, Tauberbischofsheim, 1895; S. SCHORN, 'Legitimation und Sicherung von Herrschaft durch Kritik am Kaiser: zum sogenannten zweiten Panegyrikos Julians auf Kaiser Constantius (or. 2 [3] Bidez)', in T. Baier – M. Amerise (eds.), *Die Legitimation der Einzelherrschaft im Kontext der Generationenthematik*, Berlin, 2008, pp. 243–274; D. O'Meara, *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, Oxford, 2003; F. CURTA, 'Atticism, Homer, Neoplatonism, and Fürstenspiegel: Julian's Second Panegyric on Constantius', *GRBS* 36 (1995) 177–211.

⁷ Cf. the article of K. Luchner below.

view. He is interested in 'the rhetorical and especially argumentative strategies that endow the text with its persuasive dimension and thus with authority' (p. 158).⁸ In this fine analysis H. touches upon a number of interesting points: the genre, the 'Sitz im Leben' and the literary context of both works, as well as the major types of argumentation employed in them. Most importantly, H. offers some original and quite convincing interpretations of a number of passages, and together with Opsomer, he gives an important contribution to the understanding of both crucial works. In the course of the literary analysis H. sometimes touches on philosophical problems; here he relies on previous research, e.g. when he supposes, less convincingly, a sharp contrast between Julian's metaphysics and that of Iamblichus (pp. 168, 170).

9. Markus Janka's literary analysis focuses on Julian's satire *Misopogon* ('Beard-hater') ('*Quae philosophia fuit, satira facta est. Julians "Misopogon" zwischen Gattungskonvention und Sitz im Leben*', pp. 177–206).⁹ Janka recapitulates the well-known story of Julian's stay in Antioch (pp. 180–185); discusses the genre of the work (expressing a dissatisfaction with previous research, esp. Wiemer, 1998¹⁰) and gives a new, but not entirely perspicuous, structural analysis (pp. 185–195). By the help of the latter he defines the work as a reproduction of 'the – Greco-Roman – tradition of the skoptic-satiric way of speaking and writing (...) in a way that perfectly fits the situation' (p. 192). After close readings of the prologue (pp. 195–197) and of certain 'Platonic traces' (in chs. 6–7 and 12, respectively) (pp. 198–203), the author classifies the work according to the criteria of recent research on satire by G. A. Seeck (pp. 203–206).¹¹

⁸ Two more specific questions – (1) why J. addresses these two gods in particular, and (2) what kind of Christian polemic against these gods might have prompted the composition of these hymns – seem to me to be less central than suggested (p. 160).

⁹ Among the motivations of the author to re-read this work is its lasting impact on later generations (p. 179). Yet, the reception is not in the focus of the article (for references to it cf. pp. 177–179 and 205). Janka promises to shed some light on Julian's philosophically motivated reaction against Christianity (p. 179), but this seems to remain implicit.

¹⁰ 'Ein Kaiser verspottet sich selbst: literarische Form und historische Bedeutung von Julians *Misopogon*', in P. Kneissl – V. Losemann, *Imperium Romanum: Studien zur Geschichte und Rezeption – Festschrift für Karl Christ zum 75. Geburtstag*, Stuttgart, 1998, pp. 733–755.

¹¹ 'Die Römische Satire und der Begriff des Satirischen', *Antike und Abendland* 37 (1991), pp. 1–21.

10. Heinz-Günther Nesselrath ('Mit "Waffen" Platons gegen ein christliches Imperium. Der Mythos in Julians Schrift *Gegen den Kyniker Herakleios*', pp. 207–219) gives a clear and convenient interpretation of Julian's famous autobiographic myth (*Against the Cynic Heraclius* 227c–234c) in its proper context. Starting from the role of myths in Plato and the Platonic tradition (pp. 207–208), he first discusses the relevance and *Sitz im Leben* of Julian's invective, pointing out the similarities between Cynics and certain Christian movements (pp. 209–210). After an outline of the plan of *Contra Heraclium* (pp. 210–211), N. focuses on Julian's (Iamblichean) theory of myth (pp. 211–214). Turning to Julian's own autobiographic myth itself, he points out that not only Plato but also the Bible is to be supposed among its sources (pp. 217–218). One of the most interesting parts of the article is where N. argues that Julian, in his interpretation of the myths of Heracles and Dionysus, in fact wishes to show their affinity with the Gospels' stories about Christ (pp. 213–214).

11. Katharina Luchner focuses on the notion of 'philosophy' in Julian's letters ("Grund, Fundament, Maurewerk, Dach?" Julians φιλοσοφία im Netzwerk seiner Briefe'¹², pp. 221–252). L. examines Julian's correspondence with a view to the image – and especially the self-representation – of the Emperor as a learned philosopher in the circle of like-minded friends (pp. 221–222); in this way she hopes to find out what Julian – and the Pagan elite of the fourth century – meant by 'philosophy' (p. 223). She proceeds in two steps: first she presents the 'network character' of J's letters by focusing on his correspondents (pp. 225–230); second, she investigates three essential aspects of J's notion of 'true philosophy' (pp. 230–252): *philia* (friendship, pp. 230–238), *paideia* (education, pp. 238–245) and *eusebeia* (here: political-religious engagement, pp. 246–252). After the analysis of paradigmatic passages L. concludes that J's letters do not add anything to what we know about his philosophy from his other writings (p. 266) – at least not about its contents, since in his correspondence, the Emperor does not really enter into philosophical discussions. At the same time, his letters reveal the pragmatic, network-constituting function of philosophy as both the fundament and the highest aim – the 'roof' – of the three basic values that have been discussed.

It is an interesting common feature of the contributions that almost all of them, different as they are, emphasize the points of connection between

¹² "Base, foundation, edifice, roof?" – Julian's φιλοσοφία in the network of his letters'. The quotation is borrowed from Julian's *Epistle* 8, p. 15.9–10 Bidez (= *Ep.* 3, 441D Wright).

Paganism and Christianity. It is a pity that neither these nor other parallels are made explicit by the editor, not even in the footnotes.¹³ Nor are the indices really helpful since they only enlist the references – and only those in Julian! – (pp. 253–259) as well as the proper names, and these only from Antiquity (pp. 261–266).¹⁴ The references are not harmonized: some authors cite Julian according to Wright’s edition (in the Loeb Classical Library), others according to that of Bidez, Rochefort and Lacombrade (in *Les Belles Lettres*), but the indices simply follow the latter.¹⁵ A cumulative bibliography is also sorely missing, both because some references are deficient and because it would have been instructive and helpful for those interested in further readings. The names should also have been highlighted so that one is not at a loss when trying to find a reference in a previous, cumulative bibliographical footnote.¹⁶

Despite the editorial shortcomings, the volume is an important contribution to the scholarship on Julian and on the intellectual history of his time – not only does it represent the state of research on, and the prevailing attitude to, this field in today’s German scholarship, but, most importantly, it contains a number of good overviews and innovative studies on this field.

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¹³ For example, Julian’s solar theology, the identity of his ‘third demiurge’, his autobiographical myth, the date of his letter *To Themistius*, or Nietzsche’s description of Christianity as ‘Platonism for the people’ are discussed or at least touched upon by several authors. A rare instance of a cross reference being made explicit is n. 51 on p. 117.

¹⁴ ‘For reasons of economy’ (cf. p. 261)?

¹⁵ Thus, Cürsgen on p. 71 writes about Orations VI and VII of Julian, but nowhere does it become clear that these are not *In Themistium* and *Contra Cynicos* (*Les Belles Lettres*) but *Contra Cynicos* and *Contra Heraclium* (Loeb Classical Library).

¹⁶ E. g. try to find ‘Murdoch’ in n. 11, p. 180, when you are directed there from n. 25 p. 183.