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STEFAN REBENICH – HANS-ULRICH WIEMER (eds.), *A Companion to Julian the Apostate* (Brill's Companions to the Byzantine World 5). Leiden – Boston: Brill 2020. xiv, 481 pp. – ISBN: 978-90-04-41456-3 (€ 188.00)

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As this volume makes abundantly clear, the emperor Julian (Caesar from 355, sole Augustus from 361 to 363) continues to exert a strong fascination. In the modern world, this is perhaps most famously demonstrated by Gore Vidal's best-selling novel *Julian* (1964) and Henrik Ibsen's play *Emperor and Galilean* (1873), which was recently staged at the National Theatre London (2011), starring the celebrated actor Andrew Scott as Julian. As the title of Ibsen's play indicates, one of the reasons for the continued fame of Julian is the fact that he was the last pagan Roman emperor, and sought to withdraw the imperial support given to Christianity and the Church by his uncle Constantine 'the Great' (and by the sons of Constantine, Julian's cousins, most notably Constantius II) and to promote paganism. Since Julian had been brought up a Christian he earned the epithet of 'The Apostate' from his Christian detractors, and is commonly identified by it. Julian is thus a figure of great academic interest as well as one who elicits more popular responses, so a hefty book devoted to him is to be welcomed.

As the editors tell us in the "Preface" and "Acknowledgements", the volume is one of Brill's *Companions to the Byzantine World* and was encouraged by the series' Managing Editor, WOLFRAM BRANDES. It was planned from 2012 and led to a conference in 2015 in Munich, the contributions of which form the basis of the final volume (most of the papers are included, with a couple of omissions and a couple of additions). Just as with the conference, all the contributors are male. Including the editors, twelve individuals feature in the *Companion*. Five are based in Germany, two in Switzerland, two in the UK, one in Belgium, one in Italy, and one in the USA. The editors, STEFAN REBENICH and HANS-ULRICH WIEMER, set out their approach to Julian in the "Introduction", as well as contributing a separate chapter each. The thirteen chapters are supported by five maps and one family tree. There are no illustrations, bar the colour cover image of both sides of a solidus of Julian from Antioch, depicting the bearded emperor on the obverse and a victorious soldier on the reverse. The book has

a final bibliography, subdivided into four discrete sections: Life, Writings, Julian in Literary Sources, and Non-Literary Sources. Each of these features subsections. In addition, each chapter includes its own bibliography of material not found in the final bibliography.

Critical for understanding the concept and scope of the volume is the “Introduction: Approaching Julian” (Chapter 1, pp. 1–37) by the editors. Establishing why Julian is a fascinating and a polarising figure, they move on to provide an overview of trends in modern scholarship on Julian. Noting the tendency to approach Julian biographically they eschew this for a different approach, choosing to place the focus on Julian’s roles and actions. They declare that the authors in their volume ‘deal with Julian as writer and emperor, as legislator, religious reformer, Neoplatonic philosopher and commander, and with the reactions his deeds provoked among contemporaries and posterity’ (p. 29). This approach dispenses with coverage of Julian’s youth, character and apostasy (p. 28). They are sensibly keen to put Julian in context, to show that he is not incomparable to other later Roman emperors, though they also observe that he is not an ordinary emperor either. They assert that the volume is ‘very much a historians’ guide to Julian’ and refrains from interpreting his writings ‘for their own sake’ (p. 29). Their “Introduction” concludes with a section on ‘Editions, Translations, Resources’.

Given the remit of the volume there is no chapter dealing with Julian’s origins, family and history prior to becoming Caesar to Constantius II in 355. This feels jarring in what is supposed to be a *Companion* providing comprehensiveness. From the “Introduction” we leap immediately to “Julian’s Philosophical Writings” (Chapter 2, pp. 38–63), by HEINZ-GÜNTHER NESSELRATH. The first text to be treated is Julian’s *Letter to Themistius*, revealing that there is in the volume a chronological plan, since it is associated with Julian becoming Caesar in 355. The ensuing chapters track the course of Julian’s life through particular aspects and actions, ending up with his death in Persia (Chapter 10), and then moving on to contemporary and later responses to Julian, up to the present day. NESSELRATH provides a very useful survey of the letter (which is indeed ‘a most revelatory document of Julian’s thinking’, p. 41), the invectives against the Cynics, and the hymns to the gods (‘the most important witnesses for Julian’s religious thinking’, p. 51). He does reflect on Julian’s personality, rather at odds with the approach favoured by the editors. Julian as Caesar is the focus of Chapter 3 by PETER J. HEATHER, “The Gallic Wars of

Julian Caesar” (pp. 64–96) (the title no doubt recalling the Gallic Wars of Julius Caesar). Presumably we are meant to be focusing on Julian’s actions as soldier and commander in Gaul, but as HEATHER recognises, it is difficult to separate Julian’s military activities from the political context, namely Julian’s relationship with his cousin Constantius. This brings us to Julian’s ‘usurpation’ of 360, acclaimed Augustus by his troops in Paris, and HEATHER does see a religious aspect to the Caesar’s political ambitions. In the chapter he particularly engages with JOHN DRINKWATER’s views on the Alamanni and their settlement status and power, and challenges his arguments. For HEATHER, the Alamanni were a serious threat that had to be dealt with, and Constantius II was having to put them back into the bottle after having released them against Magnentius. Less usefully HEATHER continues to echo the negative rhetoric of pro-Julian sources concerning Constantius, referring several times to agents of the emperor as his ‘henchmen’, and asserting the paranoia of the emperor. Chapter 4 keeps the focus very much on Julian and Constantius and the usurpation: BRUNO BLECKMANN’s “From Caesar to Augustus: Julian against Constantius” (pp. 97–123). Less clear cut in its aims than other chapters in the volume, this chapter also inevitably overlaps with HEATHER’s, and can express differences of opinion, e.g., rejecting the notion that religion was a key factor in Julian’s opposition to Constantius. Of course, in a volume of this kind overlaps and contradictions will arise, but they are laid bare starkly as these chapters sit next to one another. BLECKMANN’s contribution does feature stimulating comments, such as on Julian’s recklessness and his attempting to achieve a position akin to that which emperor Constans had held when sharing the empire with his brother Constantius II.

With Chapter 5 we move into the sole reign of Julian as Augustus, in one of the most rewarding and thought-provoking (and longest) chapters in the collection, SEBASTIAN SCHMIDT-HOFNER’s “Reform, Routine and Propaganda: Julian the Lawgiver” (pp. 124–171). Engaging with the notion of Julian as a reformer, he shows that most of Julian’s measures were generally routine imperial responses, and that it was primarily in the arena of religion that Julian was innovative and proactive. Further however, he demonstrates how Julian utilised his legal pronouncements as propaganda to convey an image of himself, underlining forcefully Julian’s identity as a communicator, demonstrated of course by his numerous writings. Notably, he doesn’t agree with NEIL MCLYNN’s interpretation of Julian’s ‘school edict’, that it was dealing with a specific case and was not part of Julian’s religious policy. This famous element of Julian’s reign is addressed exclu-

sively in Chapter 6, “The Value of a Good Education: The School Law in Context”, by KONRAD VÖSSING (pp. 172–206). Thus the issue of overlap between chapters resurfaces, and we confront the relationship of Julian and Themistius again too (interestingly he wonders if Julian by challenging Themistius was questioning the education of Constantius II). Like SCHMIDT-HOFNER, VÖSSING takes issue with NEIL MCLYNN’s understanding of the ‘school law’, and also argues that it applied to all teachers, not just to those funded by city councils, and that it was an anti-Christian measure. He wonders if Christian teachers would have had to sacrifice in order to demonstrate that they weren’t Christians, though perhaps if teachers did have to sacrifice Julian was really trying to encourage pagans to embrace this religious rite. Chapter 7, “Revival and Reform: The Religious Policy of Julian” (pp. 207–244), continues the examination of Julian’s religious measures. This chapter is by one of the editors, HANS-ULRICH WIEMER, so naturally has added interest. He rejects the notion that Julian’s project was doomed to fail. He is alert to the value of epigraphy for examining reaction to Julian, commenting that it ‘attests a positive response to Julian’s religious policy in widely scattered areas of the empire’ (p. 219). Unlike VÖSSING, he thinks the ‘school law’ did just apply to publicly financed teachers. On the question of Julian’s ‘pagan church’ (the idea that Julian looked to the example of the Christian church as a model for his organisation of paganism and its priesthood) he argues that this is just Gregory of Nazianzus’ presentation of Julian’s measures, though he does accept the authenticity of Julian’s letter to the high priest Arsacius, which had been thrown into question by PETER VAN NUFFELEN. On Julian as high priest he comments that the closest parallel for this is Julian’s uncle Constantine himself, and observes “Constantine clearly was Julian’s unconfessed role model” (p. 237).

Chapter 8 by CHRISTOPH RIEDWEG maintains the focus on religion: “Anti-Christian Polemics and Pagan Onto-Theology: Julian’s *Against the Galilaeans*” (pp 245–266). In what is the most specialised chapter in the volume, highlighting Julian’s philosophical theology, RIEDWEG reminds us how little we know about this text of Julian, from fragments of it in Cyril of Alexandria’s refutation. Julian’s text discussed Judaism too, and “Julian and the Jews” is the subject of Chapter 9 (pp. 267–292), by SCOTT BRADBURY. This engaging and clear chapter of course addresses Julian’s project to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, but opens in an arresting way, with the meeting of Julian and Jews at Tarsus as described by the Syriac *Julian Romance*. BRADBURY deals with Julian’s attitude to the Jews expressed in

his *Against the Galilaeans*. He also considers what Jews made of Julian's project, as well as how Ammianus Marcellinus conceals the significance of it. He then turns to the responses of Gregory of Nazianzus and Ephrem as well as the sixth-century *Dialogue* of Pseudo-Caesarius, raising the issue of the reception of Julian. Chapter 10, by NEIL MC LYNN, brings us to "The Persian Expedition" (pp. 293–325), and thus Julian's death. MC LYNN sets the scene well, then offers a comparison of how the authors Ammianus, Libanius and Zosimus narrate the course of the expedition. He seems to suggest that an assault on Ctesiphon could have been undertaken, and emphasises what really undid the expedition was Julian's death, usefully considering whether the Persians really did have the upper hand. He rather downplays the notion of the plan that Sebastianus and Procopius would rejoin forces with Julian. His bald assertion that Procopius was Julian's 'heir presumptive' (p. 311) rather takes one aback, as does his conclusion that 'Julian's Persian war should be given some of the credit for the empire's freedom from civil war during the next twenty-five years' (p. 323); perhaps he considers the attempted usurpation of Procopius too minor an affair. While the chapter provides food for thought, a contextualisation for Roman and Persian affairs prior to Julian's expedition and an assessment of what Constantine I and Constantius II had planned and achieved would have been useful.

With Julian dead, the final three chapters turn to responses to him. Chapter 11 by ARNALDO MARCONE considers "Pagan Reactions to Julian" (pp. 326–359). We are offered an overview of Julian and the reign before we focus on Libanius, the reaction to Julian in Antioch, Themistius (again), Ammianus, and Eunapius and Zosimus. MARCONE's opening contributes some arresting observations and contrasts. Unlike WIEMER he buys into the notion of the 'pagan church'. He emphasises Julian's tendency to talk about himself (p. 332), a fact which makes one think that Julian is indeed perfect subject matter for the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, with its trend of self-obsession demonstrated by social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Less compellingly MARCONE asserts that Julian would never have visited Rome (p. 331); this seems too definite a stance, for who knows what Julian would have done if he had survived the Persian expedition. One wishes that Himerius had also crossed MARCONE's radar in his review of pagan responses to Julian (Himerius does get a section in the "Bibliography" at iii.7, but there is no index entry for him). MARCONE does however rightly note the interest of Julian's comments in his *Caesars* on the reasons for the conversion of Constantine (p. 356). Chapter 12 by

PETER VAN NUFFELEN takes us to the flip-side of MARCONE's chapter, focusing on "The Christian Reception of Julian" (pp. 360–397). This chapter makes for one of the strongest in the volume, being clear, incisive, nuanced, and very useful. VAN NUFFELEN organises his chapter in three main sections, considering the development of Christian responses through polemic, historiography and hagiography. He highlights how stories about Julian originated, spread and developed. There is also an illuminating section on issues relating to Julian's letters, touching on the question of how these were utilised and how some were fabricated, though he acknowledges that his earlier argument that the letter to the high priest Arsacius was a Christian fake has been challenged. Key Christian responses he considers are those of Gregory of Nazianzus and Ephrem, but he also turns to later hagiography, and provides a very useful appendix listing 'Confessors and Martyrs Sub Iuliano', which he confesses may not be complete but hopes will encourage further interest (pp. 382–392). VAN NUFFELEN also supplies an epilogue touching on Christian responses in the middle ages, both east and west. He makes some valuable general points too, observing that the Christian reception of Julian was not necessarily black and white but could be nuanced ('it is crucial to understand that both its extent and complexity are generated by a more positive view of Julian that continued to circulate', p. 361), and asserting that the way to begin the study of Julian is through reception.

This brings us neatly to the final chapter, Chapter 13, by the other editor STEFAN REBENICH, the subject of which is "Julian's Afterlife: The Reception of a Roman Emperor" (pp. 398–420). The chapter demonstrates ably the value of looking at the reception of Julian, observing that 'these debates on the emperor illustrate moments of great importance in European intellectual history' (p. 398). The chapter is clearly structured, considering five phases of the reception of the emperor: the middle ages, the early modern period, the Enlightenment, the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Julian's reign may have been short, but his afterlife is long. As REBENICH notes, the rediscovery of Ammianus at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century provided a new way of thinking about Julian, evinced for instance by Lorenzo de' Medici, though as remarked by VAN NUFFELEN the Christian response could be less clear cut anyway. As REBENICH acknowledges, the subject of the reception of Julian is a vast topic, so he can only provide some key individual cases, and has to omit some aspects, namely Julian in the visual arts and music.

Reflecting on the volume as a whole, one cannot help but feel some frustration. It is a reasonable idea to concentrate on roles and actions, but the collection seems not to attain this completely. Most of the focus is on religion, at the expense of other aspects of Julian. On Julian as soldier and commander, this is split between two chapters, on Gaul and Persia, but even then we don't get a good sense of the military role and actions of Julian as other issues come to the fore. Although many of the chapters deal with texts by Julian there is little impression of him as an author. Of Julian's texts, his panegyrics are given short shrift, and the consolation on the departure of Salutius even more so. Greater attention could have been devoted to Julian's activities in Gaul, not just the campaigns and his relations with Constantius. In relation to his activities as Augustus the trials at Chalcedon were deserving of sustained comment, as was the whole Antioch episode. As noted already, it feels very strange not to have a chapter devoted to Julian's family and his youth prior to becoming Caesar: his family role and education as a student are surely important. Equally, his conversion, part of his youth, is an odd omission, in a volume featuring 'Julian the Apostate' in its title (and it would have allowed for greater consideration of Julian's knowledge of Christianity). While much attention is devoted to famous controversial aspects of Julian's plans, such as the question of the 'school law' and the 'pagan church', others are neglected such as the infamous bull coinage. As observed, a coin adorns the cover of the book, but coinage is only briefly discussed in the volume. One wonders if a thematic approach would have been more rewarding. Certainly other aspects of Julian merit attention, such as those relating to gender concerns, e.g., his beard, and his relationships with women and men (MARK MASTERSON's work on Julian and Salutius comes to mind). It seems that gender is a blind spot of the volume in more ways than one. One also has the impression that some important modern commentators get less recognition than they deserve, such as ROWLAND SMITH for his significant take on Julian in his monograph *Julian's Gods*, and MARÍA PILAR GARCÍA RUIZ, for her work on panegyrics by Julian and Claudius Mamertinus. In addition, given that the volume is in the series Brill's *Companions to the Byzantine World*, the reception of Julian in Byzantium deserved more than just brief paragraphs in a couple of chapters. One cannot but feel that opportunities have been missed.

Nevertheless, there is much to admire and be inspired by in the volume. Further, several of the contributors in the volume are not often published in English, so for the Anglophone audience this is a great boon, and will

ensure that important work is more accessible; it is clear from various comments in the volume that much effort has gone into the translating of chapters into English. As indicated in comments on individual chapters, there are excellent discussions in the volume, and it is evident that debates about the interpretation of Julian and his actions will continue. The volume will be a good resource for teaching. I will be recommending it to my students as it will give them access to varied and up to date opinions on Julian (though they will need to beware slips with dates which do occur several times, e.g., we are told that Julian went to Athens in 353 (p. 372), was proclaimed Caesar in November 360 (p. 333), that the battle of Strasbourg was in 361 (p. 99), and that Julian was acclaimed Augustus in Paris in 361 (p. 112)). They will also have to navigate the rather tortuous bibliography, which must have tortuous to compile too. I found the volume also served both to consolidate and inspire my own views of Julian. For instance, the tendency of Julian to refer to Constantine in his communications made me wonder if this was not just in order for Julian to criticise his Christian uncle but also a way for him to emphasise his own legitimacy, as nephew of the famous emperor. What emerges particularly from the volume, and is engaged with explicitly by some contributors, is the sense that images of, and ideas about, Julian were communicated quickly and widely, but were also responded to rapidly within his own lifetime. While the shortness of Julian's reign is often lamented as it makes it difficult to assess the effect of his activities, it does provide an illuminating case study of how swiftly an emperor could communicate and engage with his subjects and equally how swiftly they could respond to him. We have reason once again to be thankful for the comparative richness of sources we have for the study of this most remarkable emperor.

#### **Keywords**

Emperor Julian