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Carson Greene April 8, 2022

Emperor and Magician: The Religious Views and Magical Practices of Julian the Apostate

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Abstract

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Reigning from 361 to 363 CE, Flavius Claudius Julianus has best been remembered as 'Julian the Apostate' for being the Roman Empire's last pagan emperor. The primary aim of this thesis is to bring coherence to Julian's religious views and practice of ancient magic, which ancient philosophers called theurgy. Ultimately, while many of his theological beliefs were esoteric and rather unique when compared to the other traditional pagan cults of the empire, Julian's writings demonstrate that the religion and philosophy he espoused were actually part of the continuum of late antique Neoplatonic philosophy that was widespread across the eastern half of the Mediterranean. Additional focus is also given to the influence of early Christianity on Julian's attempted pagan revival and how the emperor's religious policies affected different religious groups in the empire. Finally, Julian's legacy in Renaissance Italy is examined alongside the country's resurgent interest in Neoplatonism and Hermeticism during the fifteenth century.

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Introduction

When the Roman army in Gaul proclaimed Flavius Claudius Julianus emperor in 360 CE, he invoked the war goddess Bellona through secret rites in order to ask her for aid in his coming civil war with the Christian emperor Constantius.[1] While Ammianus writes that Julian was still worshiping his gods secretly at this point, Julian himself tells us in a letter he wrote to the Neoplatonic theurgist and philosopher Maximus that his army had joined him in sacrificing to the gods while marching east.[2] Such an image of Rome's last pagan army marching on Constantinople in order to restore the empire to its true faith, all while being led by a prince learned in magic and the unspoken rituals of his people's ancestral gods, is certainly a romantic image and even conjures to mind the thought of a holy war that could have exploded across the Mediterranean. There was no great civil war between Julian and Constantius, however. Instead, Constantius suddenly died while marching west to meet his usurper on the battlefield.[3] And so, Julian entered Constantinople without opposition, formally casting aside his mask of Christianity, and began what he hoped would be a pagan revival movement across the Roman Empire. The reign of Julian the Apostate had begun.

Despite only reigning as sole emperor for around eighteen months, from November 361 to June 363, Julian has become a figure of both admiration and scorn, with his memory casting a great shadow over late antiquity and Constantine's legacy. Since the 19th century, writers and artists have transformed Julian into a romantic figure, a lone rebel struggling to preserve the traditional ways of the classical world against the rising tide of a new religion. While this is

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[1] Ammianus Marcellinus, *History, Volume II: Books 20-26*, trans. J. C. Rolfe. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940), 109. XXI.5.1.
[2] Julian, Letter 8: "To Maximus, the Philosopher," in *Letters. Epigrams. Against the Galilaeans. Fragments*, trans. Wilmer C. Wright (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923), p. 25.
[3] Ammianus, *History, Volume II: Books 20-26*, 171. XXI.15.2-3.

certainly an arresting view of Julian, it is not an accurate one. Julian was neither the servant of evil Christian historians made him out to be, nor was he the hero of tradition his pagan admirers portrayed him as. He was, if anything, a complicated man who had an incredible knowledge of the different religions of the Mediterranean as well as their associated magical and occult traditions.

The plethora of extant sources on Julian, both those written by the emperor himself and his contemporaries, is a blessing and a curse. Given Julian's role as Rome's last pagan emperor and the final ruling member of the Constantinian dynasty, his place in the historiography is a complex one to say the least. As the description of Julian's march east demonstrates, major contradictions on Julian's life exist in the surviving primary sources. How then, can one hope to achieve an accurate and holistic picture of Rome's last pagan emperor? It is easy enough to paint his life in broad strokes. Julian's early life was marked with great instability as he journeyed across the Mediterranean, being educated by pagan and Christian teachers alike, all while under the watchful eye of Constantius' regime. When he was elevated to the rank of Caesar in 355, he demonstrated remarkable talent as a military leader, defeated a far larger Alamanni host at the Battle of Strasbourg in 357 and shortly thereafter completely secured all of Gaul. After Julian became the empire's sole Augustus in 361, his reign was one of great innovation in terms of religious legislation, but was cut short by an ill-timed Persian expedition in 363.

I aim not to provide a comprehensive overview of Julian's life. Instead, my goal is to analyze arguably the most important facet of Julian's life, his religious beliefs and how they influenced his rule. Julian was not just seeking to revive the traditional Roman state religion. In fact, the emperor was synthesizing mainstream elements of Greco-Roman pagan cults with elements of early Christianity as well as magical practices that had their roots in the religions of

ancient Egypt and the Near East. The result was a wholly new pagan henotheism based around the worship of Helios.

The largest obstacle to Julian's planned pagan revival was the fact that traditional Roman state religion was largely made up of disparate cults, with no central authority. In order to remedy this, Julian used his knowledge of Christianity and its priesthood to create his own hierarchy of pagan priests that were all subordinate to his ultimate religious authority. All of this is to say that Julian's religious beliefs and his magical practices were extraordinarily unique and therefore worthy of analysis, as they have often been misinterpreted or miscategorized within the wider cultural landscape of the Mediterranean.

The scholarly study of magic has changed considerably over the past forty years, with many "new wave" scholars challenging the old assumption that magic was merely a usurpation and aberration of public religion.[4] In 1951, E.R. Dodds even went as far as to label Iamblichus' *On the Mysteries*, a very detailed text on the practice of theurgy, as a "manifesto of irrationalism."[5] This idea that ancient magical practices were very primitive and illogical pervaded the scholarship of the early twentieth century. Now, modern scholarship has begun to view magic and religion as inextricably linked to one another, with each encompassing private and public forms of worship. This fundamental shift in approach has also created new avenues of research that explore Greco-Roman magic's heritage from the religious traditions of Egypt, along with the divinatory practices of ancient Syria and Mesopotamia.[6] My research into the

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[4] Scott B. Noegel, Joel T. Walker, and Brannon M. Wheeler, introduction to *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World*, ed. Scott Noegel, Joel Walker, and Brannon Wheeler (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019), 2.
[5] E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1951), 287.
[6] Noegel, Walker, and Wheeler, introduction to *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World*, 2-3.

nature of Julian's magical and religious practices is largely a continuation of these new methods of study. I aim to trace the origins of the emperor's eclectic and unique belief system, how it related to his public displays of piety, and how these practices influenced writers and historians' memories of Julian.

In an attempt to avoid any ancient biases pervading my work, I have adopted my own syncretic approach in my analysis of Julian and his religion by using three different kinds of primary sources. First are the extant writings of the emperor himself, second are the writings of Julian's pagan contemporaries, and third are the works of the ancient Christians who wrote about the Apostate. While these three kinds of sources make up the bulk of the historiographic material I will be looking at, consideration has also been given to certain pagan sources that preceded Julian, particularly the works of Plato and Iamblichus. In my final chapter, I also move beyond the world of late antiquity and analyze works from the Medieval and Renaissance eras in order to show how Julian's legacy and religious innovation survived in various occult circles.

When investigating Julian's religious and magical practices, it is also crucial to keep in mind that many of his surviving works espouse many of the key tenets of Neoplatonism. Neoplatonism was a continuation of Platonic philosophy that was heavily inspired by the *Timaeus*. Modern scholars generally date the philosophy's origin to the philosopher Plotinus' decision to move to Rome in 245 CE.[7] While in the modern world there often exists a strict dichotomy between rational philosophy and religion, this was not the case in the ancient world. Many recent scholars have noted that Neoplatonism had a particular bend towards mystical thinking, given its concern with metaphysics and Gnosticism.[8] When analyzing Neoplatonism, it is crucial to keep in mind that there was no strict division between rational philosophy and

[7] Pauliina Remes, *Neoplatonism* (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), 1-4.
[8] Remes, *Neoplatonism*, 7.

theology in the ancient world. Instead, many Neoplatonists saw their theurgic rituals as extensions of their philosophy. Julian was no different and viewed his own magical practices as part of his piety and philosophical inquiries.

I also feel it necessary to give a brief explanation of the word "pagan" here. Traditionally, the word 'pagan' has been associated with ideas of ruralness.[9] In his analysis of the term, H.C. Teitler writes that "the word *paganus*, which originally meant 'countryman,' 'villager,' 'rustic,' came to mean 'heathen.'"[10] Before the triumph of Christianity, *paganus* also connoted "civilian." Because many early Christians labeled themselves as a *miles Christi,* "soldier of Christ," they naturally used a term for civilian to denote non-Christians. Of course, in the eastern half of the empire, non-Christians, would have called themselves *Hellenes,* which they used to identify not just their religious heritage, but their linguistic one as well, since many citizens of the eastern half of the empire were native Greek speakers.[11] Julian and his fellow Neoplatonists certainly thought of themselves as *Hellenes.* For the modern scholar, the term "pagan" has remained problematic not only because non-Christians never thought of themselves as "pagans," but also because Christians frequently used the term in a derogatory fashion. To that end, James O'Donnell has proposed to use the term "traditionalist" when referring to non-Christians as a compromise for the term "polytheist" as well, because in his words, "nobody ever thought of himself as a polytheist until some other person began to make a large fuss about monotheism."[12]

When I first learned of the term's origin and controversial history, I was hesitant to use "pagan" as I did not want to show any bias towards Julian and his fellow Neoplatonists.

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[9] H.C. Teitler, *The Last Pagan Emperor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 25.
[10] Teitler, *The Last Pagan Emperor*, 25.
[11] James J. O'Donnell, *The End of Traditional Religion: Pagans and the Rise of Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 160-163.
[12] O'Donnell, *The End of Traditional Religion*, 164.

However, given the secular nature of modern research, it seems that the term pagan has lost its potency and as such has become accepted vocabulary within this area of study.[13] As such, I use the term 'pagan' to refer to the diverse group of religious movements that did not fit into the Abrahamic categories of Christianity and Judaism.

Before proceeding on to the summary of the rest of this work, I feel it is also necessary to clarify my use of the term "Greco-Roman." While it is true that this term can be viewed as an appropriation and reduction of the complex cultures and histories of the ancient Mediterranean, I use "Greco-Roman" in a broad sense to refer to the continuity of Greek and Roman religious cultures which Julian and his fellow Neoplatonists were engaging with.

In chapter One, I analyze the nature of Julian's youth and how his education shaped his character. I particularly focus on Julian's court at Constantinople and Antioch while preparing for his Persian expedition. In this chapter, I also investigate the violence that occurred between Christians and pagans and the emperor's subsequent responses as well as the pushback Julian's attempted pagan restoration was met with, using his *Misopogon* and various letters of his as a guide.

Chapter Two is a close analysis of Julian's polemic *Against the Galileans*. The goal of this chapter is not just to summarize Julian's understanding of Christianity. Rather, I use *Against the Galileans* as a basis for deducing the emperor's own pagan onto-theology as well as his understanding of Neoplatonic philosophy. I begin with a brief overview of the history of anti-Christian polemics before Julian's reign, namely Celsus' *On the True Doctrine* and the extant fragments of Porphyry's *Against the Christians*. Regarding Julian's theology, I focus on his exegesis of the creation myths in Plato's *Timaeus* and Genesis as well as his attempt to

[13] Stefan Rebenich, "Julian's Afterlife. The Reception of a Roman Emperor," in *A Companion to Julian the Apostate* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020), 417.

reorganize the Roman pagan priesthood into a strict hierarchy. In this chapter, I also offer explanations of Julian's understanding of theurgy based on his interpretation of Abraham's place in Genesis. Additional consideration is given to Julian's infamous school edict which forbade Christians from teaching the traditional Greek canon of literature and how the views expressed in his polemic influenced his policies regarding Christians. I conclude by placing *Against the Galileans* within the context of the larger Neoplatonic corpus of late antiquity.

In Chapter Three, I expand on Julian's magical and theurgic practices that are hinted at in *Against the Galileans*. I begin by analyzing recent scholarship's treatment of ancient magic and assigning it several distinguishing characters. I then proceed to my analysis of Julian's own magical operations by primarily relying on the emperor's orations *Hymn to King Helios, To the Cynic Heracleios*, and *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*. Using these works, I explore Julian's relationship with theurgy and how it influenced his greater theological cosmology as well as his attempted empire wide pagan restoration. Using Eunapius' *Lives of the Philosophers*, I also examine the emperor's relationship with the theurgist Maximus, how he was trained in the practice, and his involvement with the mystery cult of Mithras. I then analyze how Julian's understanding of magic and other mystical rites influenced the large-scale sacrificial rituals he performed. I also look at Socrates Scholasticus' claims of the human sacrifice that occurred during Julian's reign and how Christians came to associate sacrificing with *goeteia*, witchcraft. I conclude this chapter, by using Julian's own theology as a basis, that religion and magic were inextricably linked to one another and that the emperor and his contemporaries saw their magical operations as extensions of mainstream religious rituals.

Finally in Chapter Four, using Ammianus as a guide, I look at the ramifications of Julian's death and the subsequent magic trials that occurred under the emperors Valentinian and

Valens. Because this chapter is largely concerned with the memory of Julian, I also explore Julian's connections to Hermeticism and how his religious beliefs subsequently came to be associated with Hermetic principles in Renaissance Italy. I conclude the chapter by briefly analyzing Julian's memory in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Chapter I: Helios Rising, The Education of Julian and the Emperor's Court at Constantinople and Antioch

He gathered together wisdom of every kind and displayed it—poetry, oratory, the various schools of philosophy, much use of Greek and not a little of Latin, for he interested himself in both. On the lips of every man of sense was the prayer that the lad should become the ruler of the empire, that an end be put to the ruin of civilization, and that there be put in charge of the troubled world one who knew how to cure such ills.[14]

—Libanius

The Heritage of an Imperial *Paideia*

When analyzing Julian's writings and religious views, it is crucial to understand the kind of education the emperor received while he was a young man as well as the nature of his youth. Julian was born in 331 at Constantinople, the son of Julius Constantius, who was the half-brother of Constantine I. Both men shared Constantius Chlorus as a father, but had separate mothers. After Constantine's death on 22 May 337, the army declared that it would only accept the joint rule of his three sons, Constantine II, Constans, and Constantius II. The three new emperors were proclaimed on 9 September of the same year and immediately went about consolidating their authority. While historians cannot be exactly sure who ordered the murder of Julius Constantius and his family, it seems likely that as Julian claimed, Constantius ordered the murder of the future emperor's father along with seven other relatives. Julian and his older brother Gallus were spared only because of their young age.[15]

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[14] Libanius, "Oration 18. Funeral Oration Over Julian," in *Selected Orations, Volume I: Julianic Orations*, trans. A. F. Norman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 293. R529.
[15] G.W. Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 21-23.

Witnessing the brutal murder of his father by a Christian emperor likely had a lasting impact on the young Julian and very well might have played a role in his conversion to paganism around his twentieth year. Whatever the case may be, Julian and Gallus were sent off to the care of their maternal grandmother in Bithynia. Here, their education was overseen by the Arian bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia and another tutor named Mardonius. It was the latter of these two who instructed Julian in the pagan classics such as Homer's *Iliad* and Hesiod's *Theogony*.[16] Mardonius was a eunuch of Scythian origin who according to Julian himself, had originally been hired to instruct his mother in the Greek classics.[17] Mardonius was evidently quite dear to Julian and Libanius describes him as the "guardian of his [Julian's] virtue."[18] Julian lived at his maternal grandmother Basilina's estate in Bithynia until 342, when Constantius decided to send the two princes to the imperial estate Macellum in Cappadocia.[19] Here, by his own account in his *Letter to the Senate and People of Athens*, Julian was living under virtual house arrest:

> For we lived as though on the estate of a stranger, and were watched as though we were in some Persian garrison, since no stranger came to see us and not one of our old friends was allowed to visit us; so that we lived shut off from every liberal study and from all free intercourse, in a glittering servitude, and sharing the exercises of our own slaves as though they were comrades. For no companion of our own age ever came near us or was allowed to do so.[20]

Being in such isolated conditions for six years left Julian with nothing save books to keep him occupied. Thus, while we do not have much specific information from this time, we can assume that Julian busied himself from his twelfth to his eighteenth year consuming copious amounts of

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[16] Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, 23-24.
[17] Julian, *The Misopogon*, in *Orations 6-8. Letters to Themistius, To the Senate and People of Athens, To a Priest. The Caesars. Misopogon*, trans. Wilmer C. Wright (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913), 461. 352A-C.
[18] Libanius, "Oration 18. Funeral Oration Over Julian," 285. R529.
[19] Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, 25.
[20] Julian, *Letter to the Senate and People of Athens*, in *Orations 6-8. Letters to Themistius, To the Senate and People of Athens, To a Priest. The Caesars. Misopogon*, trans. Wilmer C. Wright (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913), 251. 271C-D.

both Christian literature and the pagan classics. This is confirmed by Eunapius who writes that Julian "had their [Christian] books so thoroughly by heart that they fretted at the scantiness of their erudition, since there was nothing that they [Julian's Christian tutors] could teach the boy."[21]

In 348 Constantius deemed that Julian and Gallus were no longer a threat to his regime and had them returned to Constantinople. Here, Julian was briefly under the tutelage of Nicocles and Hecebolius. The former was a pagan rival of Libanius and the latter was a Christian who converted to paganism after Julian became emperor.[22] According to Libanius, during this brief stay in Constantinople, Julian completely surpassed his peers in their lessons of rhetoric and the "princeliness of his nature" was becoming so well known that Constantius had the prince exiled again in order to preserve his own imperial legitimacy.[23] This resulted in Julian being moved to Nicomedia where Libanius was teaching at the time. Apparently Hecebolius had made Julian swear an oath that while in Nicomedia, he would neither become a pupil of Libanius nor attend his lectures. This however, did not stop the industrious young Julian from having Libanius' lectures copied so that he could study them in private.[24]

Constantius elevated Gallus to Caesar of the eastern provinces in 351 in an attempt to secure those borders from Sassanid threat while he dealt with civil wars in the west. Around this time Julian left Nicomedia to study under the Neoplatonic philosophers of western Asia Minor.[25] He first traveled to Pergamum where he studied under Aedesius, who was also the teacher of

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[21] Eunapius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, trans. Wilmer C. Wright (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), 429. P473.
[22] Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, 27.
[23] Libanius, "Oration 18. Funeral Oration Over Julian," 287.
[24] Libanius, "Oration 18. Funeral Oration Over Julian," 287-289.
[25] Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, 28.

Maximus of Ephesus.[26] Aedesius would prove to be an important part of Julian's intellectual milieu as he was, in his own youth, the student of Iamblichus, and as such taught the Iamblichan interpretation of Neoplatonism.[27] As I shall demonstrate in the following chapters, Julian's works can not only be considered part of the Neoplatonic continuum of intellectual discourse, but he was also particularly inspired by Iamblichus' mystical philosophy espoused in *On the Mysteries*. During 351, Julian also became acquainted with the theurgist Maximus of Ephesus who was ultimately responsible for the apostasy which history would remember him for. Libanius described the day of Julian's conversion in his twentieth year as "the start of freedom for the world."[28] Julian himself also dated his conversion to occurring in 351 while he was nineteen years old, writing in 362, "you will not stray from the right road if you heed one who till his twentieth year walked in that road of yours, but for twelve years now has walked in this road I speak of, by the grace of the gods."[29] In his introduction to *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*, G.W. Bowersock describes Julian's pagan zeal as such:

> He turned to paganism with the zeal of a convert, and his view of paganism was conditioned by his Christian upbringing. He was the sort of pagan that Christians conjured up. He, and he alone of all the eminent pagans of late antiquity, wanted to turn paganism into the very thing that the Christians most feared and fought. It is highly unlikely that he would ever have nourished such a desire had he been a pagan from birth.[30]

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[26] Eunapius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, trans. Wilmer C. Wright (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), 429-431.
[27] Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, 28.
[28] Libanius, "Oration 12. To the Emperor Julian as Consul," in *Selected Orations, Volume I: Julianic Orations*, trans. A.F. Norman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 55. 12.34.
[29] Julian, "Letter 47. To the Alexandrians," in *Letters. Epigrams. Against the Galilaeans. Fragments*, trans. Wilmer C. Wright (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923), 149. 434D.
[30] G.W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1990), 6.

Bowersock succinctly summarizes the importance of Julian's conversion and makes it clear that Julian was extraordinarily unique even compared with the earlier philosopher emperor Marcus Aurelius.

By early 355, Julian, with the help of the empress Eusebia, was able to travel to Athens where he would continue his education in rhetoric until he was made Caesar of Gaul in November of that year.[31] In Athens he made the acquaintance of three important individuals: the Neoplatonic theurgist Priscus, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Basil of Caesarea. Priscus was also a pagan pupil of Aedesius who was teaching in Athens by the time of Julian's arrival.[32] Eunapius describes him as such:

> He was of a too secretive disposition, and his learning was recondite and abstruse; moreover, his memory was extraordinarily good, and he had collected all the teachings of the ancients and had them ever on his tongue. In appearance he was very handsome and tall, and he might have been thought uneducated, because it was so hard to induce him to engage in disputation, and he kept his own convictions hidden as though he were guarding a treasure, and used to term prodigals those who too lightly gave out their views on these matters.[33]

Strictly speaking, it seems that Julian was never a student of Priscus, but rather the two were friends.[34] This friendship persisted after Julian was appointed Caesar by Constantius as evidenced by the correspondence the two shared. As further evidence for his interest in Iamblichan Neoplatonism and theurgy, Julian wrote:

> τὰ Ἰαμβλίχου πάντα μοι τὰ εἰς τὸν ὁμώνυμον ζήτει.
>
> Seek for me all the [works] of Iamblichus to the namesake.[35]

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[31] Rowland Smith, *Julian's Gods: Religion and Philosophy in the Thought and Action of Julian the Apostate* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 30.
[32] Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, 29.
[33] Eunapius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, 461.
[34] Smith, *Julian's Gods*, 31.
[35] Julian, "Letter 2. To Priscus," in *Letters. Epigrams. Against the Galilaeans. Fragments*, 5. The Greek text is from the Loeb edition, the English translation is my own work.

Here, Julian is obviously asking for the works of Iamblichus, though the presence of τὸν ὁμώνυμον makes it unclear whether Julian is referring to his own namesake or emphasizing Iamblichus. If he is referring to his own namesake, then Julian is likely also requesting from Priscus the works of one Julianus, who lived during the second century CE and composed the *Chaldean Oracles*, the foundational doctrine of theurgy.[36] Alternatively, Julian could also be requesting Iamblichus' commentary on the *Chaldean Oracles* or other works addressed to Iamblichus. Whatever the precise scope of Julian's literary request may be, it is abundantly clear from his correspondence that he never lost interest in Neoplatonism and theurgy even as he began to climb the imperial hierarchy. Further, the fact that he also made acquaintance with both pagans and Christians alike while in Athens, suggests that Julian's literary endeavors were the product of a mixing of pagan and Christian intellectual traditions. Julian's eclectic use of both pagan and Christian philosophies could also be partly attributed to the intellectual climate of the Athenian Academy, wherein pagans and Christians alike would often learn from the same professor. An example of religious intermingling is the Greek Christian rhetorician Prohaeresius who taught both Gregory Nazianzen and Basil, but did little to incorporate overtly Christian elements into his classroom, instead preferring to teach the pagan classics as was tradition.[37]

Julian's Court at Constantinople and Antioch

After learning of Constantius' death and entering Constantinople unopposed, Julian first set about honoring his predecessor with all the proper funeral rituals in order to help legitimize his own position as sole augustus of the empire.[38] In December 361, the new emperor established

[36] For further information on Julianus, see Chapter 2.
[37] Edward Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 63.
[38] Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, 65.

a military tribunal at Chalcedon led by the newly promoted praetorian prefect Salutius Secundus, in order to exile or execute the surviving loyalists of Constantius' old regime.[39] Julian himself did not sit as a presiding judge at trials, likely in an attempt to recuse himself from any ruling that "was unjust, yet politically desirable."[40] Julian describes his own absence in a letter he wrote to the a former prefect of Egypt named Hermogenes in that same month:

> But since he is now one of the blessed dead, may the earth lie lightly on him, as the saying is! Nor should I wish, Zeus be my witness, that these others should be punished unjustly; but since many accusers are rising up against them, I have appointed a court to judge them.[41]

Ammianus makes it abundantly clear that in his view, not all the trials carried out were carried out impartially and that there were political motives behind the tribunal.[42] After he concluded the Chalcedon trials to further solidify his rule, Julian's reformations at the court of Constantinople would hint at his unique pagan asceticism.

Upon seeing the state of the court at Constantinople, Julian immediately dismissed the barbers and eunuchs, in an attempt to not only lessen the bureaucracy and reduce corruption, but also create a ruling government that more closely matched his philosophic ideal. Ammianus claims that this class of government workers frequently stole from temple treasuries and provincial granaries as well as hosted lavish banquets at a massive public expense.[43] Julian also references his disciplining of the court in his *Against the Galileans*.[44] Spending much of his life as a bookish student before becoming emperor, Julian naturally found the court which

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[39] Ammianus Marcellinus, *History, Volume II: Books 20-26,* trans. J. C. Rolfe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940), 191-193. XXII.3.1-2.
[40] Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, 66.
[41] Julian, "Letter 13. To Hermogenes, formerly Prefect of Egypt," in *Letters. Epigrams. Against the Galilaeans. Fragments*, 33. 390A-B.
[42] Ammianus Marcellinus, *History, Volume II: Books 20-26,* 193. XXII.3.2.
[43] Ammianus Marcellinus, *History, Volume II: Books 20-26,* 199. XXII.4.3-5.
[44] Julian. *Against the Galileans*, trans. R. Joseph Hoffman (Amherst: Prometheus Press, 2004), 92. 43A.

Constantius had fostered to be abhorrent, and cut down on it to not only ease the economic burden on Constantinople, but also to create an environment that was more tolerable to his asceticism. Julian's reforms of administration, the army, justice, and the post were in many ways very Constantinian because they came from a deep sense of the traditionalism he felt. Thus, in many ways Julian's reforms were decidedly late Roman as opposed to being indicative of an Antonine Roman empire.[45]

Gregory of Nazianzus asserts that Julian purged the court of Constantius' many followers because they were Christian.[46] And yet, around this same time Julian recalled many Christian bishops from exile and invited many of them to his court.[47] Around this same time, Julian also passed a series of edicts and decrees with the hopes of restoring Hellenic paganism to its former position of prominence in the empire. There is some confusion as to when exactly Julian issued these laws. Ammianus' narrative seems to suggest that it was only after he reached Constantinople that Julian openly started practicing his pagan beliefs and enacting laws that reflected his hopes for a pagan restoration:

> But when his fears were ended, and he saw that the time had come when he could do as he wished, he revealed the secrets of his heart and by plain and formal decrees ordered the temples to be opened, victims brought to the altars, and the worship of the gods restored.[48]

By his own admission Julian had begun openly making sacrifices with his army after being proclaimed Augustus in Gaul. With this in mind, Bowersock hypothesizes that Julian actually

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[45] Polymnia Athanassiadi-Fowden, *Julian and Hellenism: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 97.
[46] Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration 4: First Invective Against Julian*, trans. Roger Pearse, accessed March 1, 2021. https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/gregory_nazianzen_2_oration4.htm. 4.64.
[47] Ammianus Marcellinus, *History, Volume II: Books 20-26,* 203. XXII.5.3.
[48] Ammianus Marcellinus, *History, Volume II: Books 20-26,* 203. XXII.5.2.

issued his edicts of religious toleration while encamped at Naissus, after Constantius' death but before he reached Constantinople.[49]

Julian issued his famous school edict on 17 June 362 and shortly thereafter departed for Antioch, where he would spend the rest of his rule before departing on his fated Persian expedition.[50] Julian traveled to Antioch by way of Anatolia, and visited many temples and pagan supporters along the way. Julian also used the traditional title of pontifex maximus in order to begin his reorganization of the pagan priesthood.[51] There was already an imperial precedent for this when fifty years before the reign of Julian, the Tetrarch Maximin Daia had used the title of pontifex maximus to appoint provincial high priests who could in turn appoint local priests.[52]

While at Antioch, Julian contented himself with preparing his army for its invasion of the Sassanid empire and continuing in his attempt to effect a pagan religious restoration. During his stay, as evidenced by the *Misopogon*, Julian's strict and unique form of asceticism also met some major resistance from Antioch's frivolous citizenry. Several passages from the *Misopogon* demonstrate just how devout Julian was to his Hellenic religion, as he remarks how he often preferred the solace of the temples to partaking in the public fanfare of religious festivals.[53]

Between the Divine and Mortal Realms: Julian's Theocratic Monarchy

With Julian's rule secure and his plans for a pagan restoration well underway by the summer of 361, I will now turn to how he justified his emperorship within the metaphysic of his pagan cosmology as well as how he responded to violence between Christians and pagans in his

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[49] Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, 70.
[50] Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, 83-85. For further information on Julian's school edict of 362, see chapter 2.
[51] Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, 85.
[52] Smith, *Julian's Gods*, 111.
[53] Julian, *The Misopogon*, 445. 346B-C.

empire. With regards to Julian's justification of his monarchy, one only needs to turn to his retelling of the origins of Quirinus in *Hymn to King Helios*:

> Now do you wish me to bring forward a still greater proof that the founder of our city was sent down to earth, not by Ares alone, though perhaps some noble daemon with the character of Ares did take part in the fashioning of his mortal body, even he who is said to have visited Silvia when she was carrying water for the bath of the goddess, but the whole truth is that the soul of the god Quirinus came down to earth from Helios; for we must, I think, believe the sacred tradition. And the close conjunction of Helios and Selene, who share the empire over the visible world, even as it had caused his soul to descend to earth, in like manner caused to mount upwards him whom it received back from the earth, after blotting out with fire from a thunderbolt the mortal part of his body. So clearly did she who creates earthly matter, she whose place is at the furthest point below the sun, receive Quirinus when he was sent down to earth by Athene, goddess of Forethought; and when he took flight again from earth she led him back straightway to Helios, the King of the All.[54]

In this passage Quirinus, the god of the Roman people is the deified form of Romulus. Athanassiadi-Fowden analyzes this as an autobiographical passage in which Quirinus is acting as a double for Julian and therefore the emperor uses the myth as a proclamation of his own theocratic monarchy. Further, in the above passage, Quirinus is sent to the earth by Helios and Athene, two gods which Julian placed highly in his pagan henotheism. Thus, using Athanassiadi-Fowden's interpretation, since Julian's double is guided to earth by Helios and Athene, one can deduce that the emperor saw his reign as the result of divine will on the part of the gods.[55] *Hymn to King Helios* is ultimately a crucial work for understanding many of Julian's theological and magical principles, but I will explore these further in the third chapter.

An example of the relationship between pagans and Christians in Julian's empire can be found in Alexandria when the city became subject to intense rioting in December 361 after the Arian bishop, George of Cappadocia was murdered.[56] While Julian clearly admonished the

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[54] Julian, *Orations 1-5*, trans. Wilmer C. Wright (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913), 423-425. 154C-D.
[55] Athanassiadi-Fowden, *Julian and Hellenism*, 176-177.
[56] Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, 80.

pagans of the city for the unlawful murder of George, he did not deem it necessary to take any major punitive action against Alexandria. This is likely because in a letter addressed to the city in January 362, he considered George an "enemy of the gods" and even admits that "he deserved even worse and more cruel treatment."[57] Julian's extremely mild response to the tumultuous religious climate of Alexandria helps illustrate that while his edict of toleration might have theoretically guaranteed religious plurality throughout the empire, pagans were the favored class of citizens. Interestingly though, Sozomen writes in his *Church History* that George was just as hated by some Nicene Christians in Alexandria because he tried to force them to worship according to Arian customs.[58] Given this, it is possible that some Christians also took part in the lynching of George.

The edict of toleration however, would prove to create another alarming situation for the emperor in February 362, when the orthodox bishop Athanasius, who had been driven into exile during Constantius' reign, returned to his post at Alexandria. Athanasius' return did not create division in the Christian community in Egypt as Julian might have hoped. The Nicene bishop instead went about uniting Christians across the empire against Julian.[59] The emperor first responded to this threat by writing to the prefect of Egypt, Ecdicius:

> I swear by mighty Serapis that, if Athanasius the enemy of the gods does not depart from that city, or rather from all Egypt, before the December Kalends, I shall fine the cohort which you command a hundred pounds of gold. And you know that, though I am slow to condemn, I am even much slower to remit when I have once condemned. *Added with his own hand.* It vexes me greatly that my orders are neglected. By all the gods there is nothing I should be so glad to see, or rather hear reported as achieved by you, as that Athanasius

[57] Julian, "Letter 21. The Emperor Julian Caesar, most Mighty Augustus, to the People of Alexandria," in *Letters. Epigrams. Against the Galilaeans. Fragments*, 63-65. 379C-380A.
[58] Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Philip Schaff, accessed March 12, 2022, https://www.ccel.org/ccel/s/schaff/npnf202/cache/npnf202.pdf. IV.30.
[59] Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, 90-91.

> has been expelled beyond the frontiers of Egypt. Infamous man! He has had the audacity to baptise Greek women of rank during my reign! Let him be driven forth![60]

Compared to Julian's response to the murder of George of Cappadocia, this letter to Ecdicius is significant for two reasons. Firstly, he is not merely verbally admonishing the Prefect and is instead threatening him with a significant fine. Second, his order to have Athanasius expelled from Egypt seems to go against the tenets of his edict of toleration. Bowersock asserts that Julian's edict was specifically worded to allow Christian bishops to return to their country, but not necessarily their former ecclesiastical seats.[61] In addition to threatening Ecdicius over the expulsion of Athanasius, Julian's public letter to Alexandria is also quite striking compared to his treatment of the mob rule which decided the fate of George:

> I am overwhelmed with shame, I affirm it by the gods, O men of Alexandria, to think that even a single Alexandrian can admit that he is a Galilaean. The forefathers of the genuine Hebrews were the slaves of the Egyptians long ago, but in these days, men of Alexandria, you who conquered the Egyptians—for your founder was the conqueror of Egypt—submit yourselves, despite your sacred traditions, in willing slavery to men who have set at naught the teachings of their ancestors. You have then no recollection of those happy days of old when all Egypt held communion with the gods and we enjoyed many benefits therefrom. But those who have but yesterday introduced among you this new doctrine, tell me of what benefit have they been to the city? Your founder was a god-fearing man, Alexander of Macedon, in no way, by Zeus, like any of these persons, nor again did he resemble any Hebrews, though the latter have shown themselves far superior to the Galilaeans.[62]

Julian once again takes no action in this letter, which he wrote in October 362 from Antioch, to punish the people of Alexandria for allowing Athanasius to return to power. Instead, he appeals to the city's Hellenistic heritage and attacks Christianity as a religion inferior to the paganism

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[60] Julian, "Letter 46. To Ecdicius, Prefect of Egypt," in *Letters. Epigrams. Against the Galilaeans. Fragments*, 143. 376A-C. This letter has been dated to October 362 and therefore would have been written from Antioch. With reference to Greek women, Julian uses the word Ἑλληνίδας, which indicates that he was likely referring to pagan women. See also Wright's footnote 4.

[61] Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, 91.

[62] Julian, "Letter 47. To the Alexandrians," in *Letters. Epigrams. Against the Galilaeans. Fragments*, 145. 443B-C.

that had traditionally been practiced in the city. Thus, Julian urged the Alexandrians to avoid the teachings of Athanasius by returning to the old religion. Julian's encouragement of the pagan communities in these letters further emboldened the pagan communities across the empire to carry out acts of violence against Christians. Julian was quite aware of these events and even praised those who burned the Christian sepulchers at Emessa in his *Misopogon*.[63]

In both his letters to Ecdicius and to the Alexandrians, Julian is very concerned with the threat Christianity posed not only to his pagan cosmology, but also how it damaged the traditional social fabric of the Roman empire. He develops the two lines of thinking further in *Against the Galileans*. However, his anti-Christian polemic is far more complex than these letters and will be analyzed in the following chapter, along with the emperor's school edict.

[63] Julian, *Misopogon*, 475. 357C-D.

Chapter II: Anti-Christian Rhetoric and Neoplatonic Thought in *Against the Galileans*

The time has come for me to say for the benefit of all how I discovered beyond any doubt that the stories of the Galileans are the inventions of deceivers and tricksters. For these men seduce people into thinking that their gruesome story is the truth by appealing to the part of the soul that loves what is simple and childish.[64]

—Flavius Claudius Julianus

Composition and Purpose of *Against the Galileans*

Primarily composed as an anti-Christian polemic, Julian's *Against the Galileans* is one of his most perplexing works. *Against the Galileans* is not only the emperor's critical arguments against Christianity as a religion, the work also contains crucial insights into Julian's own theological and philosophical views at the time of its composition. Julian likely wrote the original text during his winter stay at Antioch in the winter of 362/363 CE. The text in its entirety has not survived, and the historian Rowland Smith theorizes that it was likely outlawed by either a Theodosian law in 448 or the emperor Justinian in 529. The only extant pieces of *Against of Galileans* have survived as quotations in Cyril of Alexandria's refutation from some time during the 430s.[65] In the fragments that have survived, Julian has three primary arguments against Christianity. Firstly, he views the myth of creation found in Genesis as unsatisfactory compared to Plato's description of the origin of the universe in the *Timaeus*. Second, Julian addresses several pieces of the Old Testament which he sees as contradictory to one another.

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[64] Julian. *Against the Galileans*, trans. R. Joseph Hoffman (Amherst: Prometheus Press, 2004), 91.

[65] Rowland Smith, *Julian's Gods: Religion and Philosophy in the Thought and Action of Julian the Apostate* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 190.

Finally, Julian uses his broad knowledge of the New Testament and primarily the Gospel of John to attack the claim that Jesus was divine. Despite the pieces that have survived, large parts of the polemic have been lost, based on evidence from fragments 39A-42E of the work where Julian states his intention to cover all the primary teachings of Christianity.[66] While it is difficult to accurately estimate the original size of *Against the Galileans*, if Julian did in fact set out to disprove all aspects of Christianity, then it is clear that this was not intended as an intellectual hobby. Rather, he intended *Against the Galileans* to be a serious intellectual work, which supports the theory that Julian wanted to be seen as a philosopher as well as an emperor. It is important to note that by the fourth century, many philosophers had steered away from the more rational elements of Plato and Aristotle's writings and instead turned towards the more esoteric and mystical writings of Plato such as the *Timaeus* and *Parmenides*. Neoplatonism was further complicated as some philosophers began incorporating theurgy into their practices. Julian was very much a part of this Neoplatonic tradition and as evidenced in his writing, often preferred the magical over the rational. Given this, it would be incorrect to apply modern conceptions of philosophy and religion when analyzing Julian and the other Neoplatonic writers.

While his arguments are sometimes opaque and difficult to follow, Julian nonetheless shows his reverence for earlier Neoplatonic thinkers in *Against the Galileans*. In composing his work, the emperor draws upon the works of the earlier anti-Christian polemicists Celsus and Porphyry. Further, Julian repeatedly cites and shows his reverence for the philosopher and theurgist Iamblichus who was very influential on the evolution of Neoplatonism. It is clear that Iamblichus had a massive impact on Julian's own philosophy and his interest in the more arcane disciplines of Neoplatonism including magic and divination. Other evidence in the text suggests

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[66] Christoph Riedweg, "Anti-Christian Polemics and Pagan Onto-Theology: Julian's *Against the Galileans*," in *A Companion to Julian the Apostate* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020), 246.

that Julian was simultaneously appropriating ideas from Christian theology into his own pagan cosmology. Ultimately, the knowledge of both Christian and pagan thinkers from which Julian draws in the composition of *Against the Galileans* shows that he was actively participating in the intellectual discourse of the 4th century in at least the eastern half of the Mediterranean.

The Tradition of Anti-Christian Polemics Before the Time of Julian

Before fully analyzing Julian's *Against the Galileans*, it is first crucial to understand the anti-Christian polemicists who came before him as well as the religious environment of the empire during the second and third centuries. I have already stated that Julian was keenly aware of the works of both Celsus and Porphyry. And like *Against the Galileans*, Celsus and Porphyry's works only survive in the form of quotations provided by other authors.[67]

Celsus' *On the True Doctrine*, composed circa 185, has remained easily accessible thanks to his opponent Origen of Alexandria's liberal quotations of the work in his refutation.[68] In his work, Celsus is chiefly concerned with the teachings of second century Christians as well as the life of Jesus. During Celsus' time, there was a great deal of syncretism occurring between traditional Roman paganism and Christianity, which often resulted in the two religions borrowing ideas from one another.[69] The idea that Christianity plagiarized many of its ideas from early Hellenic thinkers, primarily Plato, permeates Celsus' polemic. Like Julian, Celsus also does not strictly adhere to one philosophical movement. Instead, he incorporates both Platonic and Stoic philosophies into his arguments as well as history and religion.[70] As for the polemic itself,

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[67] R. Joseph Hoffman, introduction to Celsus' *On The True Doctrine*, trans. R. Joseph Hoffman (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 29.
[68] Hoffman, introduction to Celsus' *On The True Doctrine*, 29.
[69] Jeffrey W. Hargis, *Against the Christians: The Rise of Early Anti-Christian Polemics* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 41.
[70] Hoffman, introduction to Celsus' *On The True Doctrine*, 29-30.

Celsus demonstrates his wide knowledge of Platonism in the eighth section of *On The True Doctrine* where he criticizes the Christian conception of God.

> They have not read Plato, who teaches us in the *Republic* that God (the Good) does not even participate in being. It is true that all things are derived from the Good, as Plato says; but it is also clear that God made nothing mortal. This God of philosophers is himself the underivable, the unnameable; he cannot be reached by reason. Such attributes as we may postulate of him are not the attributes of human nature, and all such attributes are quite distinct from his nature. He cannot be comprehended in terms of attributes or human experience, contrary to what the Christians teach; moreover, he is outside any emotional experience.[71]

Celsus argues that an omnipotent and omniscient god as the Christians conceptualize could not possibly have any features associated with the physical world, since based on Plato's theory of forms, the physical world is inherently imperfect. Celsus uses this as the base of his argument where he rejects the logos of Christ as humanity's savior since he believes that an omnipotent god would not need to send his son to save humanity and instead could correct the sins of the world by himself.[72] Thus to further support this argument, Celsus asserts his belief that Jesus was not divinely conceived and instead was the illegitimate son of Mary and a Roman soldier named Panthera.[73]

Similar to Julian, Celsus was also concerned with the intellectual character of many Christians. And as such, a central tenet of his polemic questioned the legitimacy of a religion whose members consist of the lowest ranking classes of the empire: "wool workers, cobblers, laundry workers, and the most illiterate country bumpkins."[74] Of course, one must always remember that Celsus was writing nearly two centuries before Julian, during a time before

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[71] Celsus, *On The True Doctrine*, trans. R. Joseph Hoffman (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 103-104.
[72] David Neal Greenwood, "Julian's Use of Asclepius: *Against the Christians*," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Vol. 109 (2017): 492.
[73] Celsus, *On The True Doctrine*, 57.
[74] Celsus, *On The True Doctrine,* 73.

Christianity had penetrated the upper ranks of Roman society. Thus, in *Against the Galileans*, Julian had to focus his attacks on the moral character of Christians rather than their low rank within society since he himself was raised in the Constantinian imperial family. Further, Julian deliberately chose to use the term "Galilean" instead of Christian in his work to draw attention to the religion's localized and lowly origin.

Composed in the final decades of the 3rd century, Porphyry's *Against the Christians* responded to a Christianity that was much more widely accepted than it was during Celsus' time and the polemic even concedes that the religion had gained a permanency within the empire.[75] Porphyry's work was not only unique for this rhetorical shift away from Celsus, he was also the first anti-Christian polemicist to have actively studied the Bible and as a student of Plotinus, he was already an established philosopher by the time he composed *Against the Christians*.[76] Given this, Porphyry stood above his contemporary intellectuals and his complex arguments against Christianity and eloquent writing style made his fellow pagans admire him and his Christian opponents fear him. Unfortunately, none of Porphyry's opponents quoted his work in such great length as was the case with Origen's *Contra Celsum* and as a result, nearly all of *Against the Christians* has been lost. What has remained is extremely fragmentary and only survives as quotations from Christian sources as well as in the form of indirect reference to Porphyry's arguments.[77] Further, the actual size of the polemic has been a subject of much debate with Lactantius claiming that *Against the Christians* was only three books long while Eusebius and Jerome stated that it was as many as fifteen books in length.[78] Whatever the length of *Against the*

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[75] Hargis, *Against the Christians: The Rise of Early Anti-Christian Polemics*, 64.
[76] Robert M. Berchman, *Porphyry Against the Christians* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2005), 2.
[77] Berchman, *Porphyry Against the Christians*, 118-119.
[78] Berchman, *Porphyry Against the Christians*, 4. It should also be noted that Porphry's polemics were not a unitary work and did not gain the title of *Against the Christians* until around 1000 CE (see Berchman, 5).

Christians might have been, it is clear that Porphyry's arguments frightened many Christian authors, as much of Augustine's *City of God* and *Harmony of Gospels* were responses to Porphyry's *Philosophy from Oracles* and his other literature.[79]

While it is difficult to follow Porphyry's exact line of argumentation from the surviving fragments of his work, it appears that in many ways *Against the Christians* was a continuation of the arguments made by Celsus. He also wrote that Jesus' disciples were deceitful magicians and because of this the Gospels were contradictory and unreliable. This is where the similarities between Celsus and Porphyry end though. While Celsus' work dealt primarily in philosophical arguments against Christianity, Porphyry was far more concerned with the religious nature of Christianity than the philosophy against it. This is because Christianity had become much more public and widespread in the third century and Porphyry likely realized that the religion had become a permanent fixture of the empire. With this in mind, Porphyry used his extensive knowledge of the Bible to underline what he saw as Christians' misunderstanding of the Old Testament and the contradictions found in the New Testament. Additionally, as a student of Plotinus, elements of Neoplatonism can be found in Porphyry's works, such as *Philosophy from Oracles* where he tries to blend traditional Hellenic religion with Greek and Roman philosophy.[80] This shift from a philosophical to a religious focus in the evolution of anti-Christian polemics was especially important, since Julian's *Against the Galileans* was undoubtedly a continuation of Porphyry as evidenced by his often mystical arguments regarding creationism and metaphysics as well as his repeated references to Iamblichus and theurgy.

One final point of context must be made regarding Porphyry before analyzing Julian's polemic. Porphyry composed *Against the Christians* during the reigns of Diocletian and

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[79] Berchman, *Porphyry Against the Christians*, 4.
[80] Hargis, *Against the Christians: The Rise of Early Anti-Christian Polemics*, 70-72.

Maximian after the end of the "crisis of the third century."[81] This was a time of political anarchy for the Roman Empire marked by climate change, plague, invasion, and civil war. This tumultuous period also led to a major shift in Rome's religious landscape as Christianity and other cults like Mithraism gained an increased number of converts. The emperor Aurelian was able to restore the empire during his short reign from 270 to 275 and attempted to unify Rome's many disparate religions by introducing the cult of the Sol Invictus. The cult of the Sol Invictus marked a shift in Roman religion away from the polytheistic tradition of distinct cults to a more syncretic henotheism with Aurelian's Unconquered Sun being at the top of this new hierarchy.[82]

This shift towards a solar henotheism in the later Roman Empire had major implications for Julian's *Against the Galileans* given the unique nature of the Apostate's own paganism. As one will see in the following sections, Julian created his own hierarchy of gods and priests in an attempt to unify all of the pagan cults in the Roman Empire. The major difference between Aurelian and Julian is that the latter centered his religion around a reimagination of the similar solar deity Zeus Helios, and used many Platonic concepts for explaining the origin of the universe. Julian's devotion to Zeus-Helios is not surprising given the already established precedent for solar worship in the late Roman Empire. Aurelian, in the latter half of the third century, expanded the solar centric cult of Sol Invictus. Constantine I, before his conversion to Christianity, was a devotee of Apollo Helios and the coinage he issued had the inscription "Sol Deus Invictus."[83]

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[81] Berchman, *Porphyry Against the Christians*, 3.
[82] Hargis, *Against the Christians: The Rise of Early Anti-Christian Polemics*, 67-68.
[83] Clyde Pharr, "Constantine and the Christians," *The Classical Outlook*, Vol. 16 (1922), 57-58.

Julian's Critique of Genesis and Interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus*

Despite the fact that some of Julian's arguments against Christianity are rather esoteric and consist of obscure exegeses, it is still an impressive intellectual work as it demonstrates the emperor's command of both Greek and Christian literature as well as a keen knowledge of the Neoplatonic philosophers across the Mediterranean during the two centuries before his reign. Following in the footsteps of Porphyry, Julian had a deep understanding of both the Old and New Testament and frequently cited Biblical passages in his polemic. In some respects, Julian's Christian upbringing and education were major factors in the composition of *Against the Galileans* as it was during these formative years that the Apostate gained his intimate knowledge of the Bible. During his education at Nicomedia and then at Constantinople and Athens, Julian also gained his love for traditional Greek literature and philosophy, which he uses constantly in his arguments against Christianity.[84]

After giving his opening remarks and setting out his goals in writing *Against the Christians*, Julian first critiques the Book of Genesis and explains why he believes its creation myth is insufficient compared to Plato's *Timaeus*. However, before directly citing the *Timaeus*, Julian uses general Platonic principles in his analysis of the myth of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. In fragments 75B and 89B, Julian argues that this story is "a complete fable" because an omnipotent god would not leave humans in an incomplete condition.[85] Fragment 89B is also significant in and of itself, as it shows Julian's knowledge of Gnostic texts when he asserts that "the serpent [was really acting as] benefactor of the human race."[86] While this

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[84] Smith, *Julian's Gods*, 24-25.
[85] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 94-95. The translation of *Against the Galileans* I draw all of my quotations from was made by R. Joseph Hoffman in 2004. For publication information, see footnote 1 in this paper.
[86] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 95. See Hoffman's footnote 284 for Julian's reference to the Testimony of Truth.

opening salvo from Julian is not nearly the most impressive piece of his polemic, it more or less serves as an outline for the structure of most of Julian's arguments in *Against the Galileans*. In this structure, Julian quotes or paraphrases a passage from the Bible, then cites from classical Greek literature to disprove whichever Christian myth or argument he is writing about in a given fragment. During most of his lines of argument, the emperor will also either reference other Neoplatonic philosophers or support his argument with an exegesis. For the most part this strategy was successful with both Christian and pagan thinkers. Libanius wrote that Julian's polemic was superior to Porphyry's *Against the Christians* and the Christian apologist Cyril believed that *Against the Galileans* was not only a monumental pagan work but also nearly irrefutable.[87] Modern scholarship also praises *Against the Galileans* as being "well-articulated Neoplatonic theory."[88]

Following this initial argument concerning the Garden of Eden, Julian then attacks the entire creation myth found in Genesis. In fragments 49A through 49C, he gives an abbreviated quotation from Genesis 1.1-1.17 wherein it is described how God created and separated Heaven and Earth. In Julian's eyes, this story is quite insufficient for an omnipotent god:

> as Moses tells the tale, God is creator of nothing without a body; he merely organizes and shapes the stuff that already exists—since the words "And the Earth was unseen and without form" must mean that God thought of wet and dry stuff as original matter, and this means that God is simply the shaper of this matter.[89]

Any story concerning the origin of the universe or other similar metaphysical concepts would have been of great interest to Julian as a Neoplatonic writer, since Neoplatonists based their own

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[87] Libanius, "Funeral Oration Over Julian," *Selected Orations, Volume I: Julianic Orations,* trans. A. F. Norman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 397; Cyril, *Address of the Blessed Cyril, Archbishop of Alexandria, to the very pious emperor Theodosius, devoted to Christ*, trans. Roger Pearse, accessed August 23, 2021, https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/cyril_against_julian_00_address.html.
[88] Smith, *Julian's Gods*, 191.
[89] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 97.

conceptions of the universe on the works of Plato and Aristotle. Given that Julian was particularly influenced by the Iamblichan branch of Neoplatonism, it is not surprising he relied nearly exclusively on Plato's *Timaeus* for his refutation of Genesis' creation myth. In explaining the origin of the universe, Neoplatonists would often turn to the *Timaeus*, in which Plato describes the universe as a divine living entity, perfectly created by the Demiurge.[90] Given this idea, it is unsurprising that Julian found Genesis to be so unsatisfactory.

In his counterarguments Julian is very concerned with the Platonic concepts of the Demiurge and the creation of the universe. Thus, he gives a lengthy quotation of *Timaeus* 41A-C before providing his own exegesis of the text. Julian's explanation of Plato's creation myth was similar to other Neoplatonic interpretations.

> Plato calls those things which are visible by the name of gods: sun, moon, the stars, and the heavens—but he regards them merely as images of the invisible gods. The sun which we see with our eyes is a likeness of the intellectual principal, the invisible sun; and so the moon we see with our eyes, and the stars: these are likenesses of the intelligible. Clearly Plato knows of intelligible and unseen gods who are immanent within and exist alongside the creator, and proceeded or originated from the creator himself.[91]

In sections 41A-C of the *Timaeus*, the character Timaeus explains to Socrates how the Demiurge brought the five generations of gods into being and the roles which the Demiurge assigns them.[92] As the passage continues the Demiurge explains to the gods that they must create and nurture mortals in order to make the universe whole.[93] Julian interprets this passage as meaning that the gods are subservient to the Demiurge and as such are each in charge of a different region or city.

Because of this interpretation, Julian, echoing Celsus, is very critical of the fact that the god presented in Genesis is only concerned with the Hebrews. Given that Julian's own

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[90] Pauliina Remes, *Neoplatonism* (London; New York: Routledge, 2014), 77-78.
[91] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 99.
[92] Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Donald J. Zeal, in *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 1244. 41A-C.
[93] Plato, *Timaeus*, 1244-1245. 41D.

philosophical beliefs are so rooted in Neoplatonism and the belief that the perfect Demiurge made the universe, the idea that an omnipotent god only cares for one group of people would in many ways be incompatible with the emperor's own theology.

> Yet, if he is the God of all alike, the shaper of everything, why did he overlook us? Is it not preferable to think that the God of the Hebrews is not maker of the whole cosmos with power over it all, but only, as I have suggested, a god of limits, whose dominion is bounded on all sides.[94]

Continuing from this quotation regarding Mosaic anthropogony, Julian briefly moves into the New Testament where he cites Jesus and Paul as also confirming that Yahweh is exclusively the god of Israel and of the Hebrews. One of the main tenets of Platonic philosophy was the "unconditional and unchanging goodness of the divine" and as Julian saw it a supreme creator could not only care for one group of people without neglecting the rest of the world.[95] Julian concludes his arguments against Mosaic anthropogony by stating that the god of the Old Testament was only given the lands of Judea and therefore cannot be the Demiurge.[96] During his explanation of this, Julian also sheds light on his own henotheistic cosmology. He writes, "our authorities maintain that the fashioner of the universe is both the common father and the lord of all that exists, while the gods of nations and the gods who protect cities have been delegated specific responsibilities by him."[97] Ultimately, it seems that Julian does not set out to disprove the existence of the Hebrew god in the same way that Celsus does. Rather, Julian argues that while the Hebrew god exists, he could not possibly be the Demiurge.

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[94] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 101-102.
[95] Riedweg, "Anti-Christian Polemics and Pagan Onto-Theology: Julian's *Against the Galileans*," 253.
[96] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 100-101.
[97] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 102.

Julian further reinforces his belief that Yahweh could not be the Demiurge with his critique of Exodus and the Ten Commandments. Citing Exodus 20.5 in his exegesis, Julian writes that Yahweh's jealousy is proof that as a god, he is not all powerful nor the only god:

> For if God is indeed jealous, it must follow that all other gods who are worshipped receive honor to spite him, and all people who worship these other gods defy the will of God. Well, then, how is it that he is not able to restrain the nations if his jealousy demands that other gods, besides himself, should not be worshipped?[98]

The argument Julian makes in this passage is quite simple. If Yahweh was omnipotent then he would simply be able to stop people from worshiping other gods. Secondly, Julian seems to see that the Exodus 20.5 passage, "for I am the Lord your God, a jealous god, repaying sins of fathers upon children up to the third and fourth generation to those who hate," is a contradiction of the monotheistic tenet of Christian theology.[99] In fragment 159E, Julian attacks the Christians of his time, stating that if Yahweh is jealous then they should not also worship his son, Jesus. Regarding the substance of *Against the Galileans*, this exegesis further illustrates how the theology of the Bible was ultimately incompatible with Julian's Hellenism and his own solar henotheism. This incompatibility is a major feature of the laws and edicts which Julian passed during his reign in an attempt to bring about a pagan revival. Interestingly though, Julian will later praise Yahweh when comparing Hebrew religious rites to Christian ones.

Julian's New Henotheism: Asclepios Against Jesus

Following his mention of Jesus in his critique of Genesis and Exodus, Julian attacks Jesus repeatedly throughout the rest of his polemic. Beginning at 200A, the emperor once again reveals

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[98] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 110.
[99] *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and Other and Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included Under that Title*, ed. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wight (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 65. Exodus 20.5.

facets of his own pagan theology. He writes that Asclepios, a Greek god associated with medicine and healing, is the extant son of Zeus-Helios and a gift to humanity who healed miraculously.[100] Asclepios was a god with a long-standing tradition in Greek religion, having first been mentioned in Homer's *Iliad*. However, in many traditional myths, he is presented as being born mortal who only experienced divine apotheosis after being struck down by Zeus.[101] Julian's myth regarding the god of healing seems to be his own invention and draws obvious parallels to Jesus' conception. David Neal Greenwood argues that Julian's Asclepios was meant to be the "pagan antagonist of Christ" and borrows from many of the ideas of the core Christian logos.[102] Though Julian's reimagining of Asclepios's creation myth as the son of Zeus-Helios might have been Julian's own invention, he was certainly not the first to oppose the god of healing to Jesus. When criticizing the miracles of Jesus, Celsus also cites Asclepios and claims him to be a superior god of healing, citing his shrines across the eastern Mediterranean.[103] Asclepios was a very prominent god during Celsus' time, having played a major role in the Second Sophistic as the subject of Aelius Aristides' *Sacred Tales*. As an attentive student of Greek literature, Julian would have likely noticed the frequent usage of Asclepios dating back to Homer's time.

Julian's own description of the god of healing says, "Asclepios appeared in the shape of a man, alone, at Epidaurus … He came to Pergamon, to Ionia, to Tarentum, and thereafter to Rome. He also traveled to Cos, and then to Aegae. Thereafter he was manifest everywhere."[104] All of these locations listed by Julian were sites of the major temples and shrines to Asclepios,

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[100] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 115.
[101] Mabel Lang, *Cure and Cult in Ancient Corinth: A Guide to the Asklepion* (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1977), 6.
[102] Greenwood, "Julian's Use of Asclepius: *Against the Christians*," 499.
[103] Celsus, *On the True Doctrine*, 69.
[104] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 115.

whose worship was very widespread throughout the Mediterranean world. It seems that by listing all of these locations, Julian was criticizing the fact that Jesus only performed his miracles in a small geographic area. Celsus was also critical of this in *On the True Doctrine*.[105] Julian was so convinced of Asclepios' miracles that he even recounts in a later passage in *Against the Galileans* where that the god has personally cured him: "With God my witness, I know when I have been ill, Asclepios has cured me by proffering remedies."[106] This argument, which seems illogical by modern standards, would have been quite strong in the ancient world since everyone believed in miracles. Additionally in this reference, Julian might also be comparing the miracles of Jesus to the miracles of Asclepios, though it is never made explicitly clear.[107]

One of Julian's inspirations for incorporating certain Christian ideas into his own theology could possibly be found in a letter he wrote to a pagan priest in either late 362 or early 363. In this letter he describes a visit to Ilios where a Christian named Pegasius showed him the shrines of Hector and Achilles and told him that the Christian population of Ilios revered ancient heroes in the same way that they revered their martyrs.[108] Hoffman writes that this meeting with Pegasius first gave Julian the idea to use religious syncretism in his plan to restore the traditional Greek religion.[109] If this is indeed the case, then by positioning Asclepios as Jesus' pagan antagonist, Julian was using the same tactics in his pagan restoration which Christians first used to gain so many converts to the new religion.

Julian's use of Asclepios ultimately shows the emperor's imagination at work in an attempt to formulate a new pagan religion that would be a direct foil to Christianity. In many

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[105] Celsus, *On the True Doctrine,* 68-69.
[106] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 122.
[107] Julian, 122. See Hoffman's footnote 379.
[108] Julian, *Letters. Epigrams. Against the Galileans. Fragments*, trans. Wilmer C. Wright (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1923), 51.
[109] Julian*, Against the Galileans*, 135. See Hoffman's footnote 440.

ways, this new henotheism would not have been possible without Julian's sweeping knowledge of Christianity and the Bible since he synthesizes concepts found in the New Testament with traditional Platonic metaphysics to create his own onto-theology. Of course, Julian's new pagan religion never took root since he was killed in 363, and probably also because it was so radically different from the disparate cults which had traditionally been the pillars of Greek and Roman religion. And yet, Asclepios played a role in Julian's portrayal after his death with Libanius comparing the emperor favorably to the god of healing in his funeral oration he composed for Julian.[110] Even though his Hellenic revival failed, the evidence from Libanius suggests that Julian's pagan theology left a lasting impact on at least his fellow pagan intellectuals.

Julian Against Jesus and the New Testament

Celsus devotes a significant portion of *On the True Doctrine* to his criticism of Jesus' life and the doctrine of salvation. His arguments however, were not based on any first hand knowledge of Biblical scripture and he had instead constructed them from second-hand accounts and observations of the Christian community. Julian, in sharp contrast, displays a wealth of knowledge of both the Gospels as well as the Pauline epistles in the surviving fragments of *Against the Galileans*. This intimate knowledge of the New Testament undoubtedly came from Julian's education during his youth at Nicomedia, Constantinople, and Athens.

Beginning with the Gospel of John, Julian first attacks its opening verse at fragment 262C, arguing that the "Word," which John later calls Jesus, does not align with Moses' account of Creation since he makes no mention of Jesus in his books.[111] According to Hoffman, Julian, like Porphyry, preferred using the literal meaning of texts as opposed to allegorical

[110] Libanius, "Funeral Oration Over Julian," 469.
[111] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 126.

interpretations and as such used this method when building his exegesis for both the Old and New Testament.[112] Given this, it is no surprise why Julian was so critical of the New Testament interpretation of Old Testament prophecy since he believed that none of the Hebrew prophets foretold the birth of Jesus.

After his initial critique of John, Julian then turns to the inconsistencies among the Gospels and the Pauline epistles. Julian writes that of the apostles, John was the only one who directly referred to Jesus as being God or the "Word of God."[113] He uses this premise to then attack the verse of John 1.18, "No man has seen God at any time but the only begotten son of God, the one who is in the bosom of the Father, he has revealed him."[114] Julian states that this conception of God is logically inconsistent as Jesus cannot be God if no one has ever seen God, concluding that, "But if the only begotten son is one thing and God the Word is something else, as I have heard it said by some of the members of your sect, then it seems that not even John was foolish enough to declare that Jesus was God."[115]

One of the major reasons why Julian considered the doctrine of John so offensive to his philosophical and theological principles was that in his eyes, John's account was not only inconsistent with itself, but that John also never fully developed his theology concerning the divinity of Jesus.[116] Ultimately, for Julian the major flaw in Orthodox Christian theology is that, based on his own understanding of Platonic metaphysics, neither the god described by Moses or Jesus himself could be the demiurge of the universe.[117] Interestingly, as will be explored in the next subsection, Julian never denies or attempts to disprove the existence of Yahweh. He is

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[112] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 128. See Hoffman's footnote 408.
[113] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 133.
[114] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 134.
[115] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 134-135.
[116] Riedweg, "Anti-Christian Polemics and Pagan Onto-Theology," 258.
[117] Riedweg, "Anti-Christian Polemics and Pagan Onto-Theology," 259.

instead content to conclude that Moses' god is not the demiurge, but instead the god of only the Hebrew people. In regards to Jesus, while Julian is very dubious of his divinity and immaculate conception, he never makes an attempt to disprove any of his miracles, writing instead that "he accomplished nothing worth mention—that is, unless one should think that healing a cripple and a few blind men, or driving the demons from possessed men in wayside villages like Bethsaida and Bethany count as mighty works!"[118] I have already written about Julian's belief in the miracles of Asclepios and this belief concerning Jesus suggests that in the emperor's mind, the world was a place where such supernatural acts were not only possible but not uncommon either. This sentiment echoes Celsus who equates Jesus' miracles to spells performed by Egyptian sorcerers and tricksters.[119]

Julian's Analysis of Abraham and the Impact of Iamblichan Theurgy on his Polemic

One of the most esoteric sections of *Against the Galileans* can be found beginning at fragment 356C, where Julian seemingly defends Abraham and the other Hebrew Patriarchs for their use of sacrifice and divination. Julian had some sympathy for Abraham because he interpreted several passages in Genesis, which describe Abraham's worship of Yahweh, as being similar to descriptions of traditional Hellenic and Roman sacrifices.

> For you have nothing in common with Abraham, who built altars to God and worshiped him with sacrifices on those altars with burnt offerings. Like the Greeks, Abraham was accustomed to offer sacrifice daily, and he shared with us Greeks the custom of telling the future from shooting stars. And for significant things he learned to augur from the flight of birds, hiring a servant in his house who was expert in the reading of signs.[120]

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[118] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 116-117.
[119] Celsus, *On the True Doctrine*, 59-60.
[120] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 140.

Since Julian was trying to bring about a restoration of the traditional Greek and Roman cults, he would have seen Abraham's sacrifices and augury as a rational practice. Augury had long since been an integral part of Roman state religion and many believed that the practice dated back to the mythical time of Romulus and Remus and the founding of the city. In essence, in his attack against Christianity, Julian is highlighting the fact that one of the major figures of the Old Testament practiced the same pre-Christian traditions of the Roman state. The emperor bases his interpretation of Abraham's sacrificial rites and divination through birdsign on chapter 15 of Genesis.

> Then he brought him outside and said to him, "Look up to the sky, and number the stars, if you will be able to count them." And he said, "So shall your offspring be." And Abram believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Then he said to him, "I am the God who brought you out of the country of the Chaldeans so as to give you this land to possess." But he said, "O Master, Lord, how shall I know that I shall possess it?" And he said to him, "Take for me a heifer three years old and a female goat three years old and a ram three years old and a turtledove and a dove." And he took for him all these and divided them in the middle and placed them facing one another, but he did not divide the birds. And birds came down on the carcasses, their cut halves, and Abram sat together with them.[121]

Further evidence for Julian's sympathy for the Jewish religion as well as his esoteric irrationalism can also be earlier in *Against the Galileans* in fragment 351A wherein he attributes Greek theurgy and ancient Hebrew rites to the same source.

> With the gods as my witnesses I count myself among those who avoid the festivals of the Jews. But I venerate without hesitation the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for they were members of a sacred race, the Chaldeans, learned in the arts of divination, who became acquainted with the rite of circumcision during the time of their wandering among the Egyptians. And the Jews worship a God who has always been gracious towards me, as he was always gracious to Abraham and those who, like Abraham, worshiped him. He is a great and powerful God, to be sure, but he is no God of yours.[122]

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[121] *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included Under that Title*, 14. Genesis 15.
[122] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 139.

Upon a first reading, this passage might seem wildly out of place in *Against the Galileans*, since up to this fragment, Julian has repeatedly called passages in the Old Testament fables and claimed that the writings of the Hebrews are insubstantial compared to those of the Greek canon. However, the progenitor of theurgy was one Julianus, who lived sometime during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, and composed the *Chaldean Oracles* in hexameter, which were purportedly utterances from various gods. Additionally, Neoplatonic and theurgic tradition claim that Julianus was the son of a Chaldean philosopher by the same name and that both father and son were powerful magicians.[123] Therefore, after Neoplatonists incorporated theurgy into their philosophy, they also claimed a heritage based on ancient Chaldean and Mesopotamian tradition even if the *Chaldean Oracles* were only composed in the late second century CE. While Julian never explicitly links Abraham to theurgy, Jeffrey Siker in his article, "Abraham in Graeco-Roman Paganism," asserts that many Greek and Roman authors associated Abraham with theurgy and astrology based on chapter 15 of Genesis.[124] In his explanation, Siker also highlights the connection Celsus makes between the Jewish people and Egypt and their magical heritage as well as Origen's refutation. When discussing the origins of the Jewish people Celsus writes that their lineage is one of sorcerers and dark obscurity.

> They have tried in their holy books—shamefully I may add—to trace their genealogy back to the first offspring of sorcerers and deceivers, invoking the witness of vague and ambiguous utterances concealed in dark obscurity.[125]

In his refutation of this passage, Origen equates the "sorcerers" Celsus mentions to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and defends them thusly:

> In any event, it is clear that the Jews trace their genealogy back to the three fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Their names are so powerful when linked with the name of

[123] Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 283-285.
[124] Jeffrey S. Siker, "Abraham in Graeco-Roman Paganism," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period Vol. 18,* no. 2 (1987): 193.
[125] Celsus, *On the True Doctrine,* 79.

> God that the formula 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' is used not only by members of the Jewish nation in their prayers to God and when they exorcise daemons, but also by almost all those who deal in magic and spells.[126]

Here, Origen explicitly connects Abraham and the other Hebrew patriarchs to magic and illustrates that some Romans would even use Abraham's name in certain spells. Siker points out that in the magic formula Origen describes, Abraham's name is listed before Isaac and Jacob's, possibly indicating that Abraham's name was the most powerful when performing an invocation.[127] Accordingly, based on his interpretation of Genesis and his familiarity with earlier Greek and Roman writings, Julian might have in fact viewed Abraham and the other Jewish patriarchs as being descended from a Chaldean lineage and being practitioners of magic in their own right.

One of Julian's most influential mentors was the theurgist Maximus, who was himself a pupil of Aedesius, the direct successor of Iamblichus.[128] In his book *The Greeks and the Irrational*, E.R. Dodds contends that Iamblichus' major work on theurgy, *On the Mysteries*, is a "manifesto of irrationalism" in which the author asserts that salvation "is found not in reason but in ritual."[129] This religious irrationalism pervaded throughout nearly all of Julian's writings and Ammianus, one of the emperor's admirers, even condemns him for his obsession with Maximus and his disregard of traditional religious practices in favor of his own rituals.[130]

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[126] Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 209. Book IV, Chapter 33.
[127] Siker, "Abraham in Graeco-Roman Paganism," 202-203.
[128] Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists* [and] Eunapius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, trans. Wilmer C. Wright (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), 427.
[129] E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1951), 287.
[130] Ammianus Marcellinus, *The History*, trans. J.C. Rolfe (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University, 1950), 209.

Iamblichan theurgy however, was not an agreed upon practice by all the Greek philosophers of the 4th century. Eusebius of Myndus warned Julian to stay away from Maximus, referring to him as a "theatrical miracle-worker."[131] Even before Julian's time, Iamblichus faced opposition to his magical practices primarily from his contemporary Porphyry. While Porphyry certainly influenced the style of Julian's *Against the Galileans* in terms of argumentation, he was deeply critical of the practice of theurgy, as evidenced in his *Letter to Anebo* and *On the Return of the Soul*. Ultimately, Porphyry believed it was only useful to those who could not philosophize.[132] Iamblichus, on the other hand, wrote *On the Mysteries* as a response to Porphyry's attitudes toward the mystical art and claimed that theurgists could learn and know aspects of the universe which ordinary philosophers could not.[133] In fact, it was only under Julian's patronage that theurgy became briefly fashionable, with Julian appointing several prominent theurgists to positions in his new pagan priesthood and making Maximus "a theurgic consultant to the imperial court."[134]

Iamblichus suggests in *On the Mysteries* that Neoplatonists often divided magical practice into practical and theoretical modes of theurgy.[135] Although modern scholars debate how exactly Iamblichus envisioned these two modes of theurgy, Roland Smith described these two methods in his work, *Julian's Gods: Religion and Philosophy in the Thought and Action of Julian the Apostate*.

> In the sensible world, theurgy provided a means to affect *daimones* in virtue of the 'sympathies' inherent in material objects; but directed at a higher level, it could lead to a union of the soul with noetic entities, and it was for that above all that Iamblichus will have prized it.[136]

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[131] Eunapius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, 435.
[132] Smith, *Julian's Gods*, 105.
[133] Smith, *Julian's Gods*, 106.
[134] Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 288.
[135] Smith, *Julian's Gods*, 106.
[136] Smith, *Julian's Gods*, 107.

According to Ammianus, during Julian's campaign against Sassanid Persia, arguments often arose between the army's soothsayers, who would read omens. through augury, and Julian's own theurgic friends over how to interpret various mystical signs.[137] Based on these disagreements, it seems that in Julian's view, his theurgic friends could commune with divine entities in a way which soothsayers could not. Given this, much of Julian's sympathy for Abraham and the other Hebrew patriarchs comes from their Chaldean lineage and the emperor might have even believed that they had some knowledge of theurgy even though there is no direct evidence for this.

Given the fact that Julian placed such an emphasis on the importance of ancient tradition in religion, it is no wonder that one of his major criticisms of Christianity was the simple fact that at the time of *Against the Galileans*, the religion was less than three centuries old. Further, Julian also dismisses the idea held by some that Christianity was a new sect of Judaism since in his view Christians practiced none of the traditional Jewish rites: "So you who perform the rites which God has always hated, as we know from Moses and the prophets, you nevertheless refuse to sacrifice animals at the altar."[138] The god which Julian is referring to in this passage is Yahweh and he is criticizing the Christians for disregarding the Jewish sacrificial traditions. It is not exactly clear what Julian means when he writes "the rites which God has always hated" as Hoffman notes that Julian seems to ignore the Christian belief in Jesus' sacrificial death.[139] This idea ties into Julian's harsh critique of the Christian synthesis of Greek and Jewish culture found towards the beginning of his polemic.

> These Galileans have accepted not a single admirable or important belief from those that we Greeks hold; nor any from those imparted by Moses to the Hebrews. They have instead taken on the mold that has grown up around these nations like powers of evil—denial of the gods from Jewish recklessness; and from us laziness and superstition as a consequence

[137] Smith, *Julian's Gods*, 107.
[138] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 137.
[139] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 137. See Hoffman's footnote 445.

> of our way of life. This, they say, should be considered the most excellent way of revering the gods.[140]

It is clear that Julian believed one could gain theological wisdom from both Greek and Hebrew wisdom, though he of course held Hellenic religion in much higher regard. Throughout the rest of *Against the Galileans*, Julian shows a particular ire against the Christian appropriation of Greek literature and the belief he articulates in his polemic seems to have played a major role in the passing of his school edict.

Julian's School Edict and Answer to Christian Martyrdom

There is ample evidence throughout *Against the Galileans* that Julian not only opposed Christianity on philosophical grounds, but also saw it as a moral threat to the fabric of Roman society. As such, Julian enacted many novel edicts during his brief rule in an attempt to stop the growth of Christianity and effect a pagan revival. Much like Celsus, Julian also saw Christianity as being morally dubious and called into question the types of people the religion attracted, primarily citing 1st Corinthians as evidence.[141] Celsus, as I have already discussed, had nowhere near the same knowledge of the New Testament and his discussion of Christian morality is primarily based on observations in a time before the young religion had taken root in the upper echelons of Roman society and still appealed mainly to people who were considered lower-class. In sharp contrast, Julian reigned over a Christianized Roman Empire where Christians were not only well-educated but also occupied many positions of power. This made it necessary for Julian not only to be well versed in Christian literature for his pagan reforms to succeed, but also ruled

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[140] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 92. For Julian's reference to Greek "laziness and superstition," see Hoffman's footnote 271.
[141] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 123.

out many of the traditional methods of religious persecution that had been practiced before the reign of Constantine.

In his treatment of Christianity, Julian introduced three important changes to the Roman government. The emperor enacted the first of these just after his arrival at Constantinople in December of 361, which guaranteed religious toleration across the empire for both Christian and pagan cults as well as granted amnesty for all Christians exiled during Constantius' Arian regime.[142] While this policy of amnesty towards Christians might seem strange at first given that one of Julian's main goals was to restore the traditional Roman religion, Ammianus states explicitly in his *History* that Julian's purpose in this edict was to create dissension amongst the Christian priesthood.[143] Evidence for this line of thinking in the edict can also be found in fragment 205E of *Against the Galileans*, where Julian criticizes the multitude of sects within Christianity and the history of violence between them.[144]

Greek and Roman pagan cults historically had always been disparate and never followed a strict unity or hierarchy like Christianity. And yet, Julian, in another display of his great imagination, attempted with his second edict to create a hierarchical pagan priesthood that would play an integral role in the administration of his empire. Around February 363, he addressed an imperial letter to the pagan priest Theodorus, granting him "the office of governor of the temples of the East."[145] Julian's intention with this appointment was for Theodorus and other governor priests to oversee the appointment of lesser priests, the restoration of temples, and the

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[142] Smith, *Julian's Gods*, 208.
[143] Ammianus Marcellinus, *The History*, 203. Book XXII, Chapter 5; Smith, *Julian's Gods*, 212.
[144] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 117.
[145] Julian, "To Theodorus, on his Appointment as High Priest and Guardian of the Temples," trans. Joseph R. Hoffman, in *Julian's Against the Galileans* (Amherst: Prometheus Press, 2004), 153.

organization of festivals and sacrifices in their jurisdiction.[146] While Julian had hoped that this fundamental change to the pagan priesthood would lead to a widespread resurgence of belief and adherence to Rome's traditional religion across the empire's cities, it was met with more resistance than the emperor had thought it would.

> The young, excitable emperor demanded that devotees of traditional religion think about their obligations to the gods in a new way. In the past, pagans could follow their own spiritual paths without specific requirements that they attend or sponsor any particular festival or event. Julian now required that his subjects become systematically and regularly involved in cultic activity, but he left it to his overwhelmed priests to figure out how to make this happen without compelling obedience.[147]

While this ultimately failed, Julian's attempt at creating a hierarchy of pagan priests in some ways parallels his organization of a henotheistic pagan religion centered around Zeus-Helios that also failed to take root. In both instances, Julian was modeling his systems at least somewhat on pre-existing Christian models, likely with the hope that he could replicate for his own pagan religion the success Christianity had in its spread and acceptance across the empire.

By far, Julian's most impactful edict was his infamous school law, issued early in the summer of 362. This law forbade Christian teachers from teaching Greek rhetoric, literature, and philosophy.[148] Even Ammianus, who was one of Julian's greatest admirers, described this law as "inhumane" and wrote that it "ought to be buried in eternal silence."[149] Julian's political intentions with this edict are quite clear. Firstly, by excluding Christians from teaching classical literature, Julian was attacking the non-pagan "gatekeepers of the later Roman social and economic system."[150] Another key part of this edict was the emperor's clarification that students

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[146] Edward Jay Watts, *The Final Pagan Generation* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 112.
[147] Watts, *The Final Pagan Generation*, 112-113.
[148] Smith, *Julian's Gods*, 212.
[149] Ammianus, *The History,* 257. Book XXII, Chapter 10.
[150] Watts, *The Final Pagan Generation*, 114.

of Christian parents could still attend the lectures of pagan teachers: "For it is not reasonable to shut out boys who are still too ignorant to know which way to turn….It is proper to cure them, even against their will, as one cures the insane."[151] Thus, by upsetting the empire's social order through excluding Christian teachers from their profession while still allowing Christian youths to attend schools and lectures, Julian hoped to foster a new generation of pagan intellectuals while slowly eroding Christianity's presence in the upper levels of the Roman economy and society. The Belgian historian Joseph Bidez wrote that this edict marked a shift away from a policy of universal religious toleration and moved the empire towards a pagan theocracy and a "bloodless persecution" of Christians.[152] Watts seems to be in agreement with Bidez, writing that "the emperor was not proscribing a set of beliefs, but he was very clearly establishing a legally preferred category to which only those who believed in the pagan gods could belong."[153] The other innovation of this law lies in the simple fact that by not physically persecuting Christians in the same manner as Diocletian and other emperors had, Julian was able to avoid Christian martyrdom which only seemed to strengthen the religion in the face of earlier persecutions.

When he began writing *Against the Galileans* in the winter after enacting his school edict, Julian elaborated further on his reasons for preventing Christians from teaching Hellenic literature.

> And if you can be happy with reading your own books, why nibble at the learning of the Greeks? It would seem better to keep men away from philosophy than from the eating of sacrificial meat … Yet I suppose you know better than I what effects your writings, as distinct from ours, will have on one's intelligence. For in studying yours no man would ever achieve ordinary goodness, let alone virtue, whereas from ours a man might become better than before, even if he had been born with no natural aptitude for excellence. A man

[151] Smith, *Julian's Gods*, 199. Smith used Bidez's translation of the emperor's correspondence when quoting Julian. Bidez, *Epistulae 36* (Paris, 1922).
[152] Smith, *Julian's Gods*, 212.
[153] Watts, *The Final Pagan Generation*, 114.

> who has such aptitude and has added to it the benefit of our writing—that man is a gift of the gods to mankind: such a man can light the fire of knowledge, can write a constitution, rout his country's foes in battle, travel bravely to ends of the earth and back again, like the heroes of old.[154]

This passage alone shows that Julian did not have just political motives when he enacted his school. He saw the Bible and other Christian literature as being completely inferior to the classical Greek literature he treasured so highly and by extension, the emperor also felt that the two were incompatible with one another.

Against the Galileans as a Work of Neoplatonic Literature

While never intended to be a work of Neoplatonic philosophy, *Against the Galileans* still reveals much about Julian's understanding and interpretation of this branch of philosophy in the arguments he made against Christian doctrine. An analysis of the work shows that Julian was eclectic in his philosophical heritage. The rhetorical strategy he employs in his polemic is reminiscent of Porphyry's *Against the Christians*, while his understanding of Greek religion and theurgy is based heavily on the works of Iamblichus. Even though both authors are considered Neoplatonists by modern scholars, Porphyry and Iamblichus were very much opposed to one another in matters of religion. Celsus' influence is also very apparent in *Against the Galileans* as the spirit of Julian's attacks is reminiscent of those found in *On the True Doctrine*. Julian's broad range of influences is not only indicative of his deep knowledge of Greek philosophical literature, but it also suggests that Julian was a Hellenic apologist and one of his main grievances against Christianity was the religion's appropriation of Hellenic culture.[155]

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[154] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 121.
[155] Hargis, *Against the Christians*, 93.

Despite his broad knowledge of earlier Neoplatonic thinkers, any influence from Plotinus, the founder of Neoplatonism, is noticeably lacking in *Against the Galileans*. While Hoffman comments on Plotinus' influence, Smith argues that there is little evidence which suggests that Julian was familiar with Plotinus' *Enneads*.[156] A possible explanation could be that Julian's references were to very general and broad Neoplatonic concepts that he likely learned from the writings of Porphyry or Maximus. Moreover, since *Against the Galileans* only survives in Cyril's quotations, references to Plotinus and his *Enneads* might have existed in now lost fragments. Whether or not Julian had any knowledge of Plotinus does not change the fact that in addition to being an anti-Christian polemic, *Against the Galileans* is fundamentally a Neoplatonic text which highlights the emperor's predilection for the more mystical and irrational elements of Neoplatonism.

[156] Smith, *Julian's Gods*, 40. The *Enneads* is generally considered a foundational text in the Neoplatonic school of thought. Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 93-94. See Hoffman's footnotes 275-278.

Chapter III: Julian the Theurgist

Then an old woman, who had lost her sight, on inquiring who had entered and learning that it was the Caesar Julian, cried out that he would repair the temples of the Gods.[157]

—Ammianus Marcellinus

Defining Magic

I have already discussed at length many of Julian's own religious beliefs based on the text of *Against the Galileans*. The primary aim of this chapter is not to expand on Julian's relationship with early Christianity. Rather, using a combination of his letters, orations, *Hymn to King Helios*, and *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* as guides, I plan on exploring Julian's connection with the ancient magical practice known as theurgy, as well as his knowledge of other mystical and occult traditions. Of course, one must proceed with caution when dealing with terms such as magic. Modern scholars have long struggled to provide a single succinct definition for magic. This very well might be an impossible task given the multi-faceted nature of magic and its lack of any consistent dogma. I hope to avoid this issue by analyzing magic and its associated practices through the lens with which Julian and contemporaries viewed it.

It is still necessary, however, to assign magic several defining traits before proceeding. Emile Durkheim never defines magic in his monograph, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life.* He does however, establish a criteria for distinguishing magical practices from religion. Foremost, Durkheim asserts that mainstream religious views are held by a "defined collectivity" and the rites associated work to further bind the community together. Magic, in sharp contrast, possesses no such binding qualities and that the relationship between the magician and his

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[157] Ammianus Marcellinus, *History, Volume I: Books 14-19,* trans. J. C. Rolfe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950), 175. XV.22.

followers is often "accidental and transitory," because unlike a priest, the magician's followers are more akin to clientele than devout worshippers.[158] Regarding the specific qualities of magic, like religion, it also contains beliefs and dogmas, but these are often more rudimentary since magic often pursues "technical and utilitarian aims." Further, magic is often scorned by mainstream religion as many of its ceremonies and rituals, which frequently mirror those of mainstream religion, profane traditional holy symbol.[159] Of course, magicians in the ancient world, most of all Julian, did not see their beliefs and practices as profane. Magicians in the ancient Mediterranean believed that their knowledge was handed down by the gods themselves.[160] This idea of the magician's art being divinely inspired is perfectly encapsulated in Lucian's satire *The Lover of Lies*, wherein the character Eucrates describes that when he was sailing up the Nile, he met a temple scribe from Memphis who spent twenty-three years in a underground sanctuary, learning magic from Isis herself.[161] Even though Lucian wrote *The Lover of Lies* as a satire of supernatural belief, this scene still provides an accurate representation for not only secretive nature magical initiatory rites, but also the involvement of the divine.

In the introduction to *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome*, Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark support the Durkheimian criteria, writing that when sacrifices or rituals "unite the community they are religious, whereas magical operations serve to distance the operator or practitioner from his fellow men."[162] This criterion seems to suggest that despite

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[158] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, translated by Carol Cosman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 42-43.
[159] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 41-42.
[160] Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, translated by Franklin Philip (Cambridge, MA; London, England: Harvard University Press, 1997), 92.
[161] Lucian, *The Lover of Lies*, translated by A.M. Harmon (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), 371-373. Sections 33-34.
[162] Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, introduction to *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), xii.

whatever prevailing attitudes a given community might have towards magic, it is also intrinsically linked to religion. Given this, there is also the spatial aspect of religion to consider. Jonathan Z. Smith argues that magical practices occur in the space between the domestic religion that occurs primarily in homes and at burial sites and state religion that is performed in public temples. Smith further writes that in terms of the geographic landscape of the Mediterranean and near east, the imperial projects of Persia, Macedonia, and Rome all served to displace large numbers and led to the "total cessation of native kingship."[163] These factors resulted in cross-cultural exchange on a massive scale that gave rise to entirely new and unique religious formations in which magic could flourish. With all this in mind, I hope to provide a clear analysis of Julian's greater magical and religious beliefs and how they came into being.

Theurgy Between Paganism and Christianity

As a reader of Iamblichus, Julian was particularly enthusiastic about theurgy, a kind of magic that was influenced by Neoplatonic philosophy with its origins tracing back to the second century CE. I have already written on the history of theurgy and how Julian's practice of it influenced his interpretation of the Old Testament. Now, I will examine theurgy's place in the religious landscape of the wider Mediterranean world as well as its impact on Julian's pagan theology. In Attic and Koine Greek, the word theurgy appears as θεουργία and directly translates to mean 'divine work.'[164] In a broader sense, theurgy can also mean "'working on the gods' or 'making the gods work"' and was viewed as a higher form of magic performed by certain philosophers and priests.

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[163] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Here, There, and Anywhere," in *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Late Antique World*, ed. Scott Noegel, Joel Walker, and Brannon Wheeler (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019), 33.
[164] The romanized form of θεουργία appears as *theourgia*.

One of the most common forms of theurgic practice involved making the statues of gods move and talk.[165] Such elaborate rituals were designed to establish a connection between the practitioner and the god or gods they wished to commune with. It should also be noted that in the ancient world, in pagan circles at least, theurgy was viewed as a higher form of magic than *goeteia* and its practitioners were generally thought to be far more reputable than those who peddled their magical skills at fairs and festivals.[166]

Theurgy though, was not just practiced exclusively by pagan philosophers of late antiquity. Many Christians also sought to incorporate elements of theurgy into their own religious practices. Their approval of the practice was two fold. Firstly, theurgists used the more vulgar elements of magic for religious means, i.e. contacting *daimones* and gods. And second, much like the Christian clergy, theurgists were also concerned with and worked towards the salvation of the human soul. Thus, in many ways Christianity already contained within itself many of the same core religious ideologies espoused by the pagan Neoplatonists. Additionally, elements of theurgy that at first seemed foreign to Christians, were quickly changed to become more palatable, such as how *daimon* came to be synonymous with angel in certain contexts. It is because of reasons such as these that early Christian thinkers like Synesius of Cyrene and Augustine of Hippo sought a middle ground between Christian mysticism and pagan theurgy.[167] These two bishops are especially important to understanding the syncretism that occurred

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[165] Georg Luck, "Witches and Sorcerers in Classical Literature," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 101.
[166] Luck, 149. *Goeteia* roughly translates to 'witchcraft' and often connotated fraud or deceit. See Luck, 99.
[167] Valerie Flint, "The Demonisation of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity: Christian Redefinitions of Pagan Religion," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 288-289.

between Christianity and paganism as Synesius was a student of the Neoplatonist astronomer Hypatia and Augustine's acquaintance with Manichaeism is well documented in his *Confessions.*

When analyzing miracles or other similar divine acts on a macrocosmic level, there largely appears to be little difference between the outcomes of religious procedures and magical operations. Any attempt to separate Christianity from magic is further complicated when one considers that many priests often gave protective amulets and charms to the faithful.[168] Ultimately, Christianity did not sever its ties with pagan theurgy until the emperor Justinian closed the Neoplatonic academy in Athens, then led by Damascius, one of the last late antique opponents of Christianity.[169]

Julian's Initiations into Theurgy and the Cult of Mithras

Eunapius writes in his *Lives of the Philosophers* that an excitable young Julian first learned about theurgy from his teacher Eusebius of Nicomedia when the latter recounts a story wherein the theurgist Maximus made a statue of the goddess Hecate smile and miraculously set the torches in her hands ablaze. While this story was meant to serve as a warning to Julian, it in fact had the opposite effect on the prince:

> However, when the sainted Julian heard this, he said: "Nay, farewell and devote yourself to your books. You have shown me the man I was in search of." After saying this he kissed the head of Chrysanthius and started for Ephesus. There he had converse with Maximus, and hung on to him and laid fast hold on all that he had to teach. Maximus persuaded him to summon thither the divine Chrysanthius also, and when this had been done the two of them barely sufficed to satisfy the boy's great capacity for acquiring this kind of lore.[170]

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[168] Luck, "Witches and Sorcerers in Classical Literature," 158.
[169] Luck, 158.
[170] Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists* [and] Eunapius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, trans. Wilmer C. Wright (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), 435. Section 475. Chrysanthius was a philosopher associated with the school of Iamblichan Neoplatonism and a pupil of Aedesius at Pergamum.

Eunapius makes it clear that Eusebius had a low opinion of Maximus and refers to the kinds of rituals he performed as μαγγανεῖαι καὶ γοητεύουσαι.[171] The use of this particular phrase on Eusebius' part is likely meant to connote that the rites performed by the likes of Maximus were fundamentally acts of deception and trickery. Eusebius even goes a step a further and calls magicians like Maximus θαυματοποιῶν.[172] The use of *thaumatourgos* is particularly interesting and has several different possible meanings. Wright gives its definition in the context of Eunapius as meaning 'conjuror' and this generally makes sense given the content of Eusebius' speech as *thaumatourgos*, much like *goeteia*, connotes deception in the passage it appears in. However, *thaumatourgos* can also mean 'miracle-worker' and is broadly applicable to shamanic figures like Pythagoras, as well as religious teachers such as Jesus of Nazareth. In his assessment of the word, Luck writes that the *thaumatourgos* occupied an important place in ancient religion as their miracles were often "demanded by those ready to be converted."[173] If we apply this definition to Eunapius' account, then Maximus was an incredibly powerful and convincing *thaumatourgos* as Julian didn't even need to witness his miracle before converting.

Maximus ultimately became a lifelong friend and mentor to Julian and his theurgic practices briefly flourished when the young emperor became sole Augustus in 361. Julian was so attached to Maximus that, according to Ammianus, the theurgist accompanied him on his fated Persian expedition and was even with the emperor on his deathbed where they discussed matters of the soul in Julian's final moments.[174]

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[171] Eunapius, 432. μαγγανεῖαι καὶ γοητεύουσαι roughly translates to 'magics and witchcrafts.'
[172] Eunapius, 432. Θαυματοποιῶν has several different possible meanings, but in this context it likely means 'conjurer.' Its romanized version is *thaumatourgos*. See Luck, 101.
[173] Luck, "Witches and Sorcerers in Classical Literature," 101.
[174] Ammianus Marcellinus, *The History II*, trans. J.C. Rolfe (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University, 1963), 501. XXV.3.23.

Sometime after meeting Maximus, Julian learned of a hierophant in Greece who was learned in the mysteries of Mithras and the hereditary priest of Demeter. Eunapius writes that Julian was quickly inducted in the cult of Mithras just before being named Caesar in Gaul.[175] The Mithraic mysteries would later play a crucial role in Julian's own religious writing, as the god plays a central role in the theology of *Hymn to King Helios* and *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*. Given Julian's proclivity towards secretive magical and religious initiations, he was undoubtedly part of more mysteries and cults than just Maximus' theurgy and the cult of Mithras. As the very name suggests, mystery cults were by no means open to the public and were only open to those who were already learned in magic.[176]

Returning to the matter of Julian's knowledge of theurgy, in his extant writing, the word θεουργία only appears once, in his Oration 7. *To The Cynic Heracleios*:

> ἰδοῦ γὰρ ἔγωγε πολλῶν ἤκουσα λεγόντων ἄνθρωπον μὲν τὸν Διόνυσον, ἐπείπερ ἐκ Σεμέλης ἐγένετο, θεὸν δὲ διὰ θεουργίας καὶ τελεστικῆς, ὥσπερ τὸν δεσπότην Ἡρακλέα διὰ τῆς βασιλικῆς ἀρετῆς εἰς τὸν Ὄλυμπον ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς ἀνῆχθαι τοῦ Διός.
>
> See there, for I heard many saying Dionysus was a man since he was begot from Semele, but [became] a god through theurgy and mystery, just as the lord Heracles for his kingly virtue was led up to Olympus by Zeus the father.[177]

Julian ultimately denies this story of Dionysian anthropogony as being false. Nevertheless, it still reveals much as to how the emperor conceptualized theurgy as a magical operation. In this tale, Dionysus begins his life as being entirely mortal and is only able to achieve divine apotheosis through actively using theurgy and mystery. As I have already stated, theurgy was a form of magic which the operator invoked in order to commune with the gods. Iamblichus expanded on

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[175] Eunapius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, 437-439. Section 476.
[176] Luck, *Witches and Sorcerers in Classical Literature*, 100.
[177] Julian, *Orations 6-8. Letters to Themistius, To the Senate and People of Athens, To a Priest. The Caesars. Misopogon*, trans. Wilmer C. Wright (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913), 108-109. 219A-B. The Greek text is from the Loeb edition, the English translation is my own work.

theurgy's use further in *On the Mysteries*, writing that its ultimate goal was to reconnect the human soul with its divine origin:

> So then, even as that which comes to be participates in being in a manner proper to becoming, and body in the bodiless in a corporeal manner, so too on occasion do physical and material entities in the realm of generation participate in immaterial and aetherial bodies superior to nature and generation in a disorderly and inharmonious manner.[178]

Julian was very influenced by Iamblichus and used his doctrines as guides in formulating his own theology in his struggle against the rising tide of Christianity.[179] Therefore, in his oration Julian seems to be implying that Dionysus was using Iamblichan theurgy because by actively using magic he was able to permanently return his soul to its original divine nature. This story is also important for a second reason. Julian writes that Dionysus was able to achieve apotheosis by his own means, whereas Heracles was reliant on Zeus for his transcendance. This facet of his oration shows us that theurgy, and by extension other magical practices, were active as opposed to the passive nature of prayer. Iamblichus further reinforces this idea in Book IX of *On the Mysteries,* writing that theurgy was one of two possible methods for someone to contact their "personal daemon."[180] He also adds that theurgy is a superior method of contacting the divine compared to other magical procedures such as using horoscopes.[181]

Julian does not end this account of Dionysus' origins as being an invention. Instead, he goes on to write that it was Dionysus' mother Semele who was "wise in sacred things" and therefore possessed the knowledge to bring about the birth of a new god. Further, Semele was not only able to foresee Dionysus' creation but also knew the proper rituals to expedite his

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[178] Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, trans. Emma C. Clark (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 67. I.18.54.
[179] John M. Dillon, introduction to *On the Mysteries*, trans. Emma C. Clark (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), xxvii.
[180] Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, 327. IX.1.273.
[181] Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, 327. IX.1.273

birth.[182] Throughout this section of his oration, it is clear that Julian believed one could connect with the divine through theurgy and mystery rites, i.e. two different kinds of magical operations. It is also noteworthy that Julian attributes Semele's magical knowledge to her Phoenician heritage, implying that the emperor, and by default other magical practitioners, believed theurgy had its roots in ancient near eastern civilization. This idea of theurgy drawing on older and diverse forms of magical practice is reinforced in Luck's assessment of the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*:

> The *PGM* and the Neoplatonist theurgists represent, in my opinion, the most advanced, the most scholarly and sophisticated type, the product of a long tradition transmitted through several ancient civilizations, possibly only in the great melting pot of Egypt. But the distant ancestor of this sophisticated Greco-Egyptian *magos* is still the humble, despised travelling *shaman* we have identified in Heraclitus and Plato.[183]

Even though Luck does not explicitly mention a Phoenician connection here, he makes it clear that theurgy had quite a diverse legacy and while its origins might have been rooted in *goeteia*, it was amongst the most respected magical traditions by the time Julian was born.

King Helios and Julian's Cosmology

One of Julian's most difficult to comprehend works is undoubtedly his *Hymn to King Helios Dedicated to Sallust*. This hymn not only blends multiple genres but also contains an explanation of the emperor's universal cosmology as well as hints at his knowledge of mystery cults and rites. Before analyzing the text directly, we must first understand what audience Julian intended *Hymn to King Helios* for, along with its place in the literary corpus of late antiquity. Its very title suggests a common lineage with the Homeric hymns of archaic Greece. And yet, by the

[182] Julian, *Orations 6-8. Letters to Themistius, To the Senate and People of Athens, To a Priest. The Caesars. Misopogon*, 113-115. 220D-221C.
[183] Luck, *Witches and Sorcerers in Classical Antiquity*, 108.

fourth century BCE, many such hymns were written in lyric whereas *The Hymn to King Helios* was written in prose. There is also the matter of the hymn's dedication to consider. Julian wrote the hymn ΠΡΟΣ ΣΑΛΟΥΣΤΙΟΝ, 'for Sallust,' thus indicating that he did not intend the text to be used by a mystery cult. Finally, the hymn as a whole was much longer than the Homeric hymns that predated it, suggesting that Julian never intended it to be read publicly. Given this evidence, Joseph Azize suggests that *Hymn to King Helios* should be considered a philosophical treatise for the purpose of modern analysis.[184] While it does seem that Julian intended his *Hymn to King Helios* to have a literary intent, the Neoplatonic theurgists saw no major division between philosophy and religion, unlike the dichotomy modern scholars have created between the two fields.

Sallust was praetorian prefect of the Orient during Julian's reign and even accompanied the emperor on his Persian expedition. He was also a philosopher in his own right according to Eunapius and composed his own treatise titled *Concerning the Gods and the Universe.*[185] Julian echoes similar sentiments as Sallust regarding the importance of myths in *To the Cynic Heracleios*. Both believe that while the gods are certainly real and capable of interacting with humans, myths are also important, because even though they might not be true, they can still reveal important truths.[186] Azize notes that because Julian dedicates his hymn to Sallust, he wanted to align his own mode of thinking with Sallust's.[187]

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[184] Joseph Azize, *The Phoenician Solar Theology: An Investigation into the Phoenician Opinion of the Sun found in Julian's Hymn to King Helios* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005), 19-20.
[185] Eunapius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, 453.
[186] Julian, *Orations 6-8. Letters to Themistius, To the Senate and People of Athens, To a Priest. The Caesars. Misopogon*, 119. 222C-D; Sallustius, *Concerning the Gods and the Universe*, trans. A.D. Nock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 18. III.
[187] Azize, *The Phoenician Solar Theology: An Investigation into the Phoenician Opinion of the Sun found in Julian's Hymn to King Helios*, 16-17.

Julian believed that his own purpose in writing *Hymn to King Helios* was theological in nature and thought that the contents of his work was "of the greatest importance for all things 'That breathe and move upon the earth,' and have a share in existence and a reasoning soul."[188] The emperor then proceeds in explaining why he is devoted to Helios and why this solar deity rules over the other gods in Julian's henotheistic hierarchy. In terms of Julian's theurgic practices, his description of Helios' place in the wider cosmology of the universe is most helpful:

> Accordingly his light has the same relation to the visible world as truth has to the intelligible world. And he himself as a whole, since he is the son of what is first and greatest, namely, the Idea of the Good, and subsists from eternity in the region of its abiding substance, has received also the dominion among the intellectual gods, and himself dispenses to the intellectual gods those things of which the Good is the cause for the intelligible gods. Now the Good is, I suppose, the cause for the intelligible gods of beauty, existence, perfection, and oneness, connecting these and illuminating them with a power that works for good. These accordingly Helios bestows on the intellectual gods also, since he has been appointed by the Good to rule and govern them, even though they came forth and came into being together with him, and this was, I suppose, in order that the cause which resembles the Good may guide the intellectual gods to blessings for them all, and may regulate all things according to pure reason. But this visible disc also, third in rank, is clearly, for the objects of sense-perception the cause of preservation, and this visible Helios is the cause for the visible gods of just as many blessings as we said mighty Helios bestows on the intellectual gods.[189]

In *Against the Galileans*, Julian's understanding of Platonic metaphysics can also be analyzed in relation to his critique of the Mosaic anthropogony in Genesis. Here, his own metaphysical conception of the universe is explained in relation to his own onto-theology and not directly tied to other religious texts or concepts. Julian's cosmos is threefold in nature: the lowest level is the physical realm, followed by the noetic realm inhabited by the gods. Finally, at the highest level of Julian's cosmology is a fundamentally unknowable realm that is the Good. He writes that while Helios occupies the second realm, he still rules over the other gods since he has been

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[188] Julian, *Orations 1-5*, trans. Wilmer C. Wright (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913), 353. 130B.
[189] Julian, *Orations 1-5*, trans. Wilmer C. Wright, 363. 133A-D.

appointed that position by the gods. In this cosmology, the noetic realm presumably contains knowledge that ordinary people would not have access to but is still attainable if someone knows the proper rites and procedures. This then, would have been the purpose of Julian's theurgy, to access this divine knowledge and thereby cause his soul/mind to transcend the physical realm in which he was born.

There has also been considerable scholarly debate over whether or not *Hymn to King Helios* is fundamentally a Mithraic text or a continuation of the solar theology that began during the reign of Aurelian. Throughout the hymn, Julian makes repeated references to his involvement in the mystery cult of Mithras. This is especially noteworthy at 147D-148A when Julian reveals that Helios and Oceanus are the same entity and ends this revelation with a rhetorical question: "Shall I tell you? It were better indeed to keep silence; but for all that I will speak."[190] Such a sentiment of Julian having access to knowledge that the reader does not, runs throughout the work with the emperor even claiming that he came to understand astrology without ever reading a book on the subject.[191] In 150D, Julian writes that the inhabitants of Emesa believe that "Monimos is Hermes and Azizos Ares."[192] The most Mithraic part of this section lies in Julian's use of the word πάρεδροι in describing the relationship of Hermes and Ares to Helios. Πάρεδροι most closely means 'assessor' or 'sitting beside,' and in the context of Mithraism, Cautes and Cautopates are the πάρεδροι of Mithras. Based on this, and Julian's claim to borrow Phoenician theology in this passage, one could argue that he is equating Hermes and Ares to Cautes and Cautopates. However, it is also important to note that in the same passage Julian is also

[190] Julian, *Orations 1-5*, 405. 148A.
[191] Julian, *Orations 1-5*, 353-355. 130D-131A.
[192] Julian, *Orations 1-5*, 413. 150D. Emesa was also important because it had a large temple of the sun god Baal. See Wright's footnote 1 on 413.

borrowing from the theology of Iamblichus.[193] Rowland Smith points out that Iamblichus was largely indifferent to Mithraism and that there are no other passages in *Hymn to King Helios* that explicitly equate Helios and Mithras as being interconnected divinities.[194] Thus, if anything, Julian's metaphysical narrative in *Hymn to King Helios* is a continuation of Platonic thought and Iamblichan ideas surrounding theurgy.

The Hymn to the Mother of the Gods and Julian's Role in the Roman State Religion

Sometime before 12 May 362, while still at Constantinople, Julian detailed in a letter that he was acting as pontifex maximus and the prophet of Didymaean Apollo.[195] Julian was clearly not only practicing theurgy and worshiping the Hellenic gods for his own benefit, but also saw it as his role to restore the Roman empire to its true religion and guide its citizens away from Christianity. In the same letter, Julian admonishes an official for supposedly allowing a priest to be assaulted and punishes him accordingly. This is certainly one of Julian's more vitriolic letters as he accuses this same official of secretly associating with "the bishops and elders of the Galilaeans" and ordering the priest to be beaten.[196]

Similar sentiments of Julian's envisioned role for himself as the restorer of Rome's true religion seem to be at the very heart of *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*. Whereas in *Hymn to King Helios*, Julian espouses his love for eastern religions and his own theurgic practices, *Hymn*

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[193] Julian, *Orations 1-5*, 413. 150D.
[194] Rowland Smith, *Julian's Gods: Religion and Philosophy in the Thought and Action of Julian the Apostate* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 157-158.
[195] Julian, *Letters. Epigrams. Against the Galilaeans. Fragments*, trans. Wilmer C. Wright (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923), 47. Letter 18: "To An Official."
[196] Julian, *Letters. Epigrams. Against the Galilaeans. Fragments*, 47. Letter 18: "To An Official."

to the Mother of the Gods has a much more political purpose.[197] The central divinity in this Julianic hymn is Cybele, an important Roman goddess who despite her Phrygian pedigree, still held a very high place in the Roman pantheon. In the opening section of *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*, Julian goes into great detail in describing the manner in which the Roman Republic obtained the statue of Cybele from the king of Pergamum and how the goddess subsequently aided the Romans in their struggle against Hannibal in the Second Punic War.[198] While there are certainly elements of Neoplatonic and Iamblichan influence in this hymn, Julian is clearly far more concerned with Cybele's role in the pagan restoration he was attempting to bring about. Smith also points out that before Constantine's Christian edicts, Cybele was associated with the well-being of emperors and the empire as a whole. Thus, if Julian was to affirm his role as the *Restitutor Sacrorum*, then he needed his reign to be associated with Cybele.[199]

In her assessment of the work, Athanassiadi-Fowden states that the two primary themes of *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*. The first is Julian's defense of "Hellenism as a systematic theology which, having absorbed all the wisdom of the Orient, still bears the hallmarks of its Greek origin." Julian's second purpose is to explain *Romanitas* as a "synthesis of ancient traditions handed down to the Roman people by the gods."[200] Thus, even Julian's reimagining of Roman state religion takes on a unique and mystical aspect. This is further evidenced in sections 175B-C of *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* wherein Julian once again relies on Platonic metaphysics to explain his cosmology:

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[197] Smith, *Julian's Gods: Religion and Philosophy in the Thought and Action of Julian the Apostate*, 177.
[198] Julian, *Orations 1-5*, 445-449. 159C-161D.
[199] Smith, *Julian's Gods: Religion and Philosophy in the Thought and Action of Julian the Apostate*, 177-178.
[200] Polymnia Athanassiadi-Fowden, *Julian and Hellenism: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 141.

> For this reason then the ordinance forbids us first to eat those fruits that grow downwards in the earth. For the earth is the last and lowest of things. And Plato also says that evil, exiled from the gods, now moves on earth; and in the oracles the gods often call the earth refuse, and exhort us to escape thence. And so, in the first place, the life-generating god who is our providence does not allow us to use to nourish our bodies fruits that grow under the earth; and thereby enjoins that we turn our eyes towards the heavens, or rather above the heavens.[201]

This passage firstly shows Iamblichus' tripartite division of the universe which pervades across nearly all of Julian's writings. More importantly though, by explicitly mentioning Plato in his *Hymn to the Mother of Gods*, Julian is emphasizing the classical roots of his newly reformulated pagan religion.[202]

The Sacrificial Rites of Julian and Maximus

Arguably the most public piece of evidence of Julian's devotion to his pagan gods were the constant public sacrifices he performed. This was a defining element of his religion. In a letter he wrote to Maximus while on his march to Constantinople in November of 361, he detailed how both he and his army had begun worshiping the Greek gods openly:

> I worship the gods openly, and the whole mass of the troops who are returning with me worship the gods. I sacrifice oxen in public. I have offered to the gods many hecatombs as thank-offerings. The gods command me to restore their worship in its utmost purity, and I obey them, yes, and with a good will.[203]

This passage raises one of the most important questions historians have wrestled with in chronicling the life of Julian. When exactly did the emperor begin to openly practice paganism? Wright notes that Julian composed this letter while encamped at Naissus, in modern day Serbia, before he reached Constantinople and solidified his role as sole Augustus.[204] Ammianus claims

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[201] Julian, *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*, in *Orations 1-5*, 489-491. 175B-C.
[202] Athanassiadi-Fowden, *Julian and Hellenism*, 143.
[203] Julian, *Letters. Epigrams. Against the Galilaeans. Fragments*, 25. 415C-D. Letter 8: "To Maximus, the Philosopher."
[204] Julian, *Letters. Epigrams. Against the Galilaeans. Fragments*, 21. See Wright's chronology.

that Julian did not openly profess his religion until after securing his control of the empire.[205] Whatever the case may be regarding the exact date of Julian's profession of the pagan gods, it is clear from his letter to Maximus that he viewed sacrificing as an integral part of his faith. It is also clear from this letter alone that when Julian did sacrifice, he did so in massive quantities, since one hecatomb referred to a hundred head of cattle.

This sacrificing only increased after he reached Constantinople and Ammianus further details such sacrificing in Antioch while the emperor prepared for his campaign against the Sassanids:

> Nevertheless, he drenched the altars with the blood of an excessive number of victims, sometimes offering up a hundred oxen at once, with countless flocks of various other animals, and with white birds hunted out by land and sea; 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 that deserved punishment rather than indulgence; especially the Petulantes and the Celts, whose wilfulness at that time had passed all bounds.[206]

Ammianus goes on to tell us that along with these elaborate sacrifices that Julian personally performed, he also ordered diviners, haruspices, and augurs to search for signs of good fortune for his approaching invasion of Persia.[207] It is clear that Ammianus thought these actions of Julian were excessive to say the least. He also condemned the emperor because these rituals had the secondary effect of causing the army in Antioch to lose its discipline. Given the nature of Julian's character, it would be quite easy to write these sacrifices off as the most outward sign of his pagan fanaticism. Indeed, even Ammianus describes these rituals as such in his obituary of the emperor, writing that "if he had returned from the Parthians, there would soon have been a

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[205] Ammianus Marcellinus, *History*, trans. J. C. Rolfe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940), 203. XXII.5.1-2.
[206] Ammianus, *History*, 267. XXII.12.6.
[207] Ammianus, *History*, 267-269. XXII.12.7.

scarcity of cattle."[208] However, there is another aspect to consider when analyzing Julian's sacrificial devotion.

It is well known how attached Julian was to Maximus, and how influential the latter had been on the emperor's theurgic practices. This might also have extended to the manner in which Julian sacrificed. In his biography of Sosipatra, Eunapius writes that the woman had been put under a love spell by a certain Philometor and asked Maximus to help her find a solution.

> "Do you exert yourself on my behalf," she added, "and so display your piety." When he had heard this, Maximus went away puffed up with pride as though he were now associating with the gods, because so wonderful a woman had put such faith in him. Meanwhile Philometor pursued his purpose, but Maximus having discovered by his sacrificial lore what was the power that Philometor possessed, strove to counteract and nullify the weaker spell by one more potent and efficacious.[209]

Traditionally in the Roman empire, sacrifice was an integral part of the state religion, and thereby a sanctioned practice wherein state appointed officials would carry out these rites in public temples. Returning to Smith's spatial divisions of religion and magic, sacrificial rites, beginning with the pan-Babylonian school of thought, would have most traditionally occupied the sphere of "There," since in sacrifice, priests would have acted as intermediary between the gods and the greater mass of citizens.[210] In this passage from Eunapius though, Maximus' use of sacrifice moves away from the sphere of state religion and towards Smith's domain of "Anywhere," the space between domestic and state religion where magical practice occurs.[211] Firstly, he performs his sacrifices in a private space as opposed to a public temple, and secondly, Maximus does with the intent of not only receiving divine wisdom from the gods, but also with the hopes of counteracting another spell.

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[208] Ammianus, *History*, 511. XXV.4.16.
[209] Eunapius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, 413.
[210] Smith, "Here, There, and Anywhere," 28.
[211] Smith, "Here, There, and Anywhere," 31-33.

While Julian certainly carried out many sacrifices as a function of the state, Libanius writes in his *Funeral Oration Over Julian*, that communing with the gods through sacrifice was also a very private affair for the emperor.

> But since it was not easy for the emperor to go from the palace to the temples every day, and yet continued intercourse with the gods is a matter of the greatest moment, a temple to the god who governs the day was built in the middle of the palace, and he took part in his mysteries, initiated and in turn initiating. He also set up altars to all the gods separately, and his first task on rising from his bed was to associate with our lords by means of sacrifice, in which he was more assiduous even than Nicias.[212]

Here, much like Maximus, Julian removes the state function of sacrificing, thus turning it into a personal religion of sorts. It is also noteworthy that Libanius writes that Julian used this private temple to perform his mystery rites as well. Based on this, it seems that Julian was synthesizing traditional elements of Roman sacrifice with the magical elements of the mystery cults he was involved in. This is also confirmed by Libanius:

> So far then did he extend the limits of his zeal in this matter, since he desired first to restore the lost rituals once again to their original position, and secondly to add fresh ones to the traditional rites. His continence inspired in him this confidence, and because of his control over sensual pleasure it was possible for him to have his bedchamber next door to a temple, for nothing of his behaviour during the night was unworthy of such neighbours.[213]

Julian's letters, as well as Ammianus' account, would have one believe that the emperor sacrificed in public primarily as an act of devotion to his gods as well as to win the devotion and approval of his troops. Both of these aspects were certainly true. However, based on the manner and purpose for why Maximus sacrificed as well as Libanius' description of Julian's asceticism, it is clear that Julian likely saw his sacrificing as an extension of his theurgic practices. He wanted to not only commune with the gods, but grow closer to them as well. Julian accomplished this by not only inventing new forms of ritual, but also by literally sleeping in the room adjacent

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[212] Libanius, *Funeral Oration Over Julian*, trans. A. F. Norman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 361. Section 127.
[213] Libanius, *Funeral Oration Over Julian*, 363. Section 128.

to his private temple, a house of the gods. Indeed, Libanius thought that these sacrifices performed by Julian were so potent, that they served to greatly weaken the Sassanids since through these rights, the emperor had won back the affection of the war god Ares for his army.[214]

We now return to Iamblichus' explanation of theurgy's purpose, to return the mortal soul to its divine origin. Another way of viewing Julian's piety can be summarized in the Babylonian maxim, "as above, so below."[215] In this cosmology, the above serves as a metaphor for the divine, and the below is the mortal realm. In ancient Babylonia, sacrifices and other kinds of ritual would be performed with the goal in mind of bringing the mortal realm ever closer to the divine.[216] At its basic level, Julian's inventive sacrificial practices were just an extension of this Babylonian theology which supports the fact that magic was syncretic in nature and that theurgy derived from a complex lineage of more ancient religious practices.

Julian's elaborate and unique pagan sacrifices did not only attract the attention of his pagan biographers, but his Christian ones as well. Socrates Scholasticus writes in his *Church History* how evidence of human sacrifice was found by a bishop in Alexandria during the reign of Julian:

> A great disturbance occurred at Alexandria in consequence of the following circumstance. There was a place in that city which had long been abandoned to neglect and filth, wherein the pagans had formerly celebrated their mysteries, and sacrificed human beings to Mithra. This being empty and otherwise useless, Constantius had granted to the church of the Alexandrians; and George wishing to erect a church on the site of it, gave directions that the place should be cleansed. In the process of clearing it, an adytum of vast depth was discovered which unveiled the nature of their heathenish rites: for there were found there the skulls of many persons of all ages, who were said to have been immolated for the purpose of divination by the inspection of entrails, when the pagans performed these and such like magic arts whereby they enchanted the souls of men.[217]

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[214] Libanius, *To the Emperor Julian as Consul*, trans. A. F. Norman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 89-91. XII.89-91.
[215] Smith, "Here, There, and Anywhere," 28.
[216] Smith, "Here, There, and Anywhere," 28.
[217] Socrates Scholasticus, *Church History*, trans. Philip Schaff, accessed December 13, 2021, https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.html. III.3.

Ultimately, in Socrates' account the pagan population of Alexandria becomes outraged at the Christians' attempt to purify the shrine of Mithras and kills George by ripping him from limb to limb and burning his corpse along with a camel.[218] Regardless of the historicity of this account, it still tells us several important details about the relationship between sacrifice and magic. Firstly, Socrates notes that this discovery of evidence of human sacrifice not only occurred during the reign of Julian, but also these sacrifices were purportedly dedicated to Mithras, a god in whose cult Julian was extensively involved. Given that he was a Christian historian, Socrates' assessment of Julian was far less laudatory than those of Ammianus or Libanius. Thus, given that these human sacrifices were dedicated to Mithras, Socrates could be suggesting that such rituals were more frequent during Julian's regime and possibly even secretly endorsed by the emperor, given his affiliation with Mithras. However, while Socrates might be suggesting these things in his historical account, the story of human sacrifice appears to be a fifth century invention by Christians in an attempt to strengthen their position against pagans.[219] This sentiment seems to be supported in Julian's response to the murder of George:

> When ye could not endure the sight of such a foul desecration, but attempted to defend the god from sacrilegious hands, or rather to hinder the pillage of what had been consecrated to his service, in contravention of all justice, law, and piety, dared to send armed bands against you. This he probably did from his dreading George more than Constantius: but he would have consulted better for his own safety had he not been guilty of this tyrannical conduct, but persevered in his former moderation toward you. Being on all these accounts enraged against George as the adversary of the gods, you have again polluted your sacred city; whereas you ought to have impeached him before the judges.[220]

In this letter which Socrates claims is the emperor's response to the violence, Julian is clearly outraged at the Alexandrian mob killing George unlawfully, but still places much of the blame

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[218] Socrates Scholasticus, *Church History*. III.3.
[219] David F. Buck, "Socrates Scholasticus on Julian the Apostate," *Byzantion* 73, no. 2 (2003): 308-309.
[220] Socrates Scholasticus, *Church History*. III.4.

on George. Julian recognizes the temple as being a sacred space but says the mob polluted Alexandria since they lynched George instead of bringing him before a court. Socrates further reinforces Julian's connection with the Mithraic religion when he describes how he "had ordered the impression of a bull and altar to be made on his coin."[221] Once again, this is partly an invention by Socrates. While it is true that Julian had Mithraic tauroctony on some of his coinage, he never included an altar on any of the images and this detail was likely included by Socrates in order to emphasize the emperor's obsession with sacrificing.[222]

Secondly, in his description of the Mithraeum, Socrates directly equates sacrificial rites with magical practices. Even though theurgy was often considered a more tolerable magical practice by many late antique Christians, Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea still admonished against any practice of contacting *daimones* in his *Proof of the Gospel* and says that true Christians should avoid any such sorcery.[223] As a practitioner of Iamblichan theurgy, one of Julian's chief goals would have been contacting *daimones* for the purpose of gaining divine revelations. Therefore, it seems that a central thrust of Socrates' attack was not only a condemnation of human sacrifice, but also of pagan magic as a whole.

Bridging Magic and Religion

As this chapter has demonstrated, Julian was quite eclectic when it came to his magical and religious proclivities. While he certainly saw himself as a champion of the traditional Roman gods, Julian was by no means practicing his pagan religion in the same manner as the emperors that preceded Constantine. The influences of Iamblichan theurgy and Neoplatonic mysticism

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[221] Socrates Scholasticus, *Church History*. III.17.
[222] Buck, "Socrates Scholasticus on Julian the Apostate," 312.
[223] Flint, *The Demonisation of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity*, 315-316.

helped Julian create a cosmology that, while certainly influenced by the pre-Christian religious practices of the empire, was largely unique and henotheistic in nature. It was this plethora of influences that led to Julian's magical practices being inseparable from the religious rituals he carried out. Indeed, while some modern scholars have tended to categorize magic as an aberration of mainstream religious beliefs, Julian and his pagan contemporaries certainly never thought of it this way. Even when Julian was involved with mystery cults that revolved around secret doctrines only their initiates and hierophants had access to, he never saw the rites he was performing as an aberration of his pagan faith. Rather, given his traditional role as Pontifex Maximus of the empire, he likely thought of his involvement with such cults as part of his sacred duty to gain knowledge of the gods so that he could better lead the Roman people. Ultimately, even though many of his critics cite Julian as an easily excitable young man who was easily swayed by elaborate ceremonies, he was still an incredible innovator in late antique paganism who had a thorough grasp of multiple theological and magical practices.

Chapter IV: Helios Falling, The Death And Legacy of Julian

Why then, you gods and immortal powers, did you not bring it to pass? Why did you not make mankind happy in its knowledge of you, and him the author of their happiness? What fault had you to find in his character? Which of his actions did not meet with your approval? He erected altars, built temples, worshipped in magnificence gods and heroes, air and heaven, land and sea, fountains and rivers. He took up the fight against those who had fought against you.[224]

—Libanius

The Walls of Ctesiphon

After the initial success of his advance into Persia, Julian and his army camped at Coche to rest before the planned assault against the Sassanid capital Ctesiphon. From this point, Julian decided to ignore the advice of his senior officers and ordered a vanguard to cross the Tigris under the cover of night. A fierce battle ensued and the Roman army was ultimately successful in securing the eastern bank of the river.[225] With both sides of the river secured, Julian had the rest of his army ferried across the Tigris so that he could begin his prolonged siege of the capital. At this point the Romans enjoyed further success, decisively defeating a Persian army outside Ctesiphon's wall and, according to Ammianus, Julian's army killed twenty-five hundred Persians while only losing seventy men.[226]

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[224] Libanius, "Oration 18. Funeral Oration Over Julian," in *Selected Orations, Volume I: Julianic Orations*, trans. A. F. Norman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 469. Section 281.
[225] Ammianus Marcellinus, *History*, trans. J.C. Rolfe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940), 457-459. XXIV.6.2-6.
[226] Ammianus, *History*, 465. XXIV.6.15.

Ever confident in his own destiny, Julian at this point decided to sacrifice ten bulls to Mars, hoping to confirm his victory in the war. However, Ammianus writes that Julian's final sacrifice was met with dire omens:

> Fully convinced that similar successes would follow these, he prepared to offer many victims to Mars the Avenger; but of ten fine bulls that were brought for this purpose nine, even before they were brought to the altar, of their own accord sank in sadness to the ground; but the tenth broke his bonds and escaped, and after he had been with difficulty brought back and sacrificed, showed ominous signs.[227]

However, shortly after this sacrifice, Julian and his generals realized the sheer magnitude of Ctesiphon's fortifications and came to understand that winning a siege was a near impossibility. Thus, the overconfident emperor made the fateful decision that would ultimately doom his campaign. Unwilling to listen to his generals who called for a retreat, Julian instead decided to burn his army's ships and march further into the interior of the Sassanid Empire.[228] Julian however, quickly realized that his strategic position was untenable given that there was no sign of the Armenian king Arsaces and the Roman general Procopius arriving with reinforcements from the North. The emperor's weak position was further compounded by the fact that the Persians had devastated their own land as part of a scorched earth strategy. Given the realities of the situation, Julian ordered the army to break camp on 16 June 363 and retreat by way of Corduena.[229]

It was on this retreat that Julian was fatally wounded after seeing two dreadful omens. First, he saw the figure of a god "with veil over both head and horn of plenty, sorrowfully passing out through the curtains of his tent" and later that night he saw a shooting star.[230] This

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[227] Ammianus, *History*, 465-467. XXIV.6.17.
[228] Ammianus, *History*, 469. XXIV.7.4. Ammianus explains that Julian's decision to destroy his army's primary mode of transport was to free 20,000 soldiers who were previously tasked with maintaining the fleet.
[229] Ammianus, *History*, 473. XXIV.8.2-5.
[230] Ammianus, *History*, 487. XXV.2.2-5.

shooting star was particularly troubling to the soothsayers and they advised Julian to avoid battle at all costs. The young emperor however, did not heed their warnings and when the Roman rearguard was attacked by a Persian ambush, Julian rushed to the battlefield without his armor and a cavalryman's spear pierced him in the ribs.[231]Julian died late in the night of 26 June 363, surrounded by Maximus and his other close advisors. With Rome's last pagan emperor dead, it finally seemed that Christianity would be uncontested in its triumph over the Roman world. What followed Julian's death would be a succession crisis so tumultuous that it would not only reverse all of the territorial gains made during the Persian expedition, but also begin to unravel all the religious policies the late emperor had put into place.

On 27 June, the Roman commanders of the cavalry and infantry gathered to decide who the next emperor would be. Initially, they ultimately settled on Sallust, but the Praetorian Prefect declined the purple pleading old age and illness.[232] After this first upset in the succession, the officers decided that given their situation, the primary consideration should be the safe deliverance of the army back to Roman territory. Thus, the generals decided that they would decide who would become the next emperor only after they successfully reached safe territory. And yet, in another upset to the succession, Ammianus records that a group of "hot-headed soldiers" decided to go ahead and raise Jovian to the rank of emperor on the basis that he was the commander of the household guard.[233] While Jovian immediately continued the retreat after being crowned, the Roman army was eventually surrounded by the Sassanids. In exchange for safe passage back to Roman territory, the Persian envoy offered a quite humiliating peace treaty:

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[231] Ammianus, *History*, 493. XXV.3.6.
[232] Ammianus, *History*, 519. XXV.5.3. This is the same Sallust who authored *Concerning the Gods* and to whom Julian dedicated his *Hymn to King Helios*. Like Julian, Sallust was also a pagan philosopher though it is unclear if he would have continued the Apostate's religious policies.
[233] Ammianus, *History*, 519. XXV.5.4.

> Now the king obstinately demanded the lands which(as he said) were his and had been taken from him long ago by Maximianus; but, in fact, as the negotiations showed, he required as our ransom five provinces on the far side of the Tigris: Arzanena, Moxoëna, and Zabdicena, as well as Rehimena and Corduena with fifteen fortresses, besides Nisibis, Singara and Castra Maurorum, a very important stronghold.[234]

Jovian accepted these terms and while there was peace for a time and the Roman army was granted safe passage, the empire's eastern frontier was greatly compromised. Such was the defining moment of Jovian's reign. But by February 364, he would be dead and the Christian Valentinian would be unanimously proclaimed emperor by the army at Nicaea.[235] What follows in this chapter is an account of Julian's legacy within the late Roman empire and the persistence of his ideas and philosophies up through the Renaissance as well as his role in the development of various occult philosophies.

Magic and Madness: The Reign of Valentinian and Valens

On 8 July 369, Valentinian issued a law addressed to the urban prefect Olybrius in which he specified that even those belonging to the senatorial class could be tortured.[236] By essentially allowing all Romans to be tortured, regardless of class, the emperor had established a perfect precedent for Maximinus to begin his sweeping trials against practices of magic across Italy. Ammianus described Maximinus' heart as being filled with "natural cruelty" and claimed he had the nature of "wild beasts."[237] Even before the grand magic trials begin which account for a major section of Book XXVIII of Ammianus' *History*, the historian says that Maximinus was

[234] Ammianus, *History*, 533. XXV.7.9.
[235] Ammianus, *History*, 575. XXVI.2.3.
[236] John Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (London: Duckworth, 1989), 212-213.
[237] Ammianus, *History*, 93. XXVIII.1.10.

already suspicious of magic and had already put to death a necromancer for fear of being betrayed.[238]

The trials for magic and adultery which gripped Italy during Valentinian's reign over the western empire had their origins in a trial where a former deputy governor named Chilo, claimed that he and his wife had been poisoned. The accused were an organ builder, a wrestler, and a soothsayer. The trial initially languished because the prefect of Rome, Olybrius, was too sick for the legal proceedings to continue. This delay led Maximinus to appeal to Valentinian and the emperor ruled that all such cases of magic, poisoning, and similar practices should be tried as treason, thus giving his prefect permission to torture and execute indiscriminately.[239] Further, as a result of the initial accusations made by Chilo, Maximinus submitted a report to Valentinian which indicated that certain members of the Senate in Rome were guilty of multiple crimes, foremost of which were adultery, magic, and soothsaying. Alarmed by this report, the western emperor immediately promoted Maximinus to the vice prefect of Rome.[240] The ultimate result of Maximinus' trials were the executions of nine senators and the exile of three others.[241]

Interestingly, both Valentinian and Valens did not overly concern themselves with the legislation regarding traditional religion. Rather these trials against magic were directed against both pagan and Christian practices that had long been considered forbidden by the Roman state.[242] Thus, Valentinian's trials against magic in the western Roman empire were not meant to be a reversal of some of Julian's more esoteric pagan practices. This is further supported by the

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[238] Ammianus, *History*, 91-93. XXVIII.1.7.
[239] Ammianus, *History*, 93-95. XXVIII.1.8-13.
[240] John Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court, A.D. 364-425* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 56-57.
[241] Edward Jay Watts, *The Final Pagan Generation* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 182.
[242] Watts, *The Final Pagan Generation*, 182.

fact that even though they were Christian emperors, Valens and Valentinian did nothing to repeal Julian's religious legislation and even restored pagan temples in Greece and North Africa.[243] Libanius also comments on the religious liberties which the brothers granted in his *Oration 30. To the Emperor Theodosius, For the Temples*:

> I make no mention here, but after his [Julian's] death in Persia, the performance of sacrifice lasted for some little time until, after some untoward incidents, it was banned by the two imperial brothers [Valens and Valentinian], an exception, however, being made in the case of offerings of incense. This particular exception has also been confirmed by a law of your own, so that we do not so much lament what we have lost as show gratitude for the concession we have obtained.[244]

While the so-called imperial brothers did nothing to either restore the religious status quo of Constantius' empire or destroy Julian's legacy, a second series of magic trials initiated by Valens three years later would lead to the death of one of Julian's closest mentors and create an atmosphere of fear and terror in the eastern provinces.

In 372, a poisoner of low birth named Palladius and a diviner of horoscopes, Heliodorus, were summoned to the court of the praetorian prefect of the East in order to answer for crimes of defrauding the treasury. What followed was not a simple interrogation over financial theft. Instead, when bidden to speak, Palladius "uncoiled an endless cable of crimes."[245] He told his accusers that a plot was in motion whereby a group of conspirators led by the ex-governor Fidustius, had, by means of divination, determined that Theodorus would succeed Valens and that they had already informed Theodorus of this. At this point in his account, Ammianus describes Valens as being not a particularly bright emperor, who unleashed his "monstrous savagery" everywhere in an attempt to secure his throne.[246] In many ways, Ammianus' rhetoric

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[243] Watts, *The Final Pagan Generation*, 182-183.
[244] Libanius, *Oration 30. To the Emperor Theodosius, For the Temples*, in *Selected Orations Volume II*, trans. A. F. Norman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 107. 30.7.
[245] Ammianus, *History*, 191. XXIX.1.6.
[246] Ammianus, *History*, 193. XXIX.1.10-11.

in these sections is so powerful that his account of the magical crimes for which people were arrested distracts his readers from the fact that Valens was the subject of the initial conspiracy.[247] Perhaps his most impressive account of these crimes can be found in his description of the form of divination the first group of conspirators used to determine Valens' successor:

> When we then and there inquired, 'what man will succeed the present emperor'?, since it was said that he would be perfect in every particular, and the ring leaped forward and lightly touched the two syllables ΘEO, adding the next letter, then one of those present cried out that by the decision of inevitable fate Theodorus was meant. And there was no further investigation of the matter; for it was agreed among us that he was the man who was sought."[248]

Ammianus' vivid descriptions of this ritual suggest that the historian might very well have had a more intimate knowledge and even association with certain magical practices than most people. Thus, since Ammianus was recording contemporaneous events in his history, he might have felt endangered by Valens' persecution of alleged magicians. This idea is further supported by the fact that Ammianus was a native of Antioch and by his vitriolic descriptions of Valens. Thus, given the scope of these persecutions, if Ammianus was not directly involved, he almost certainly knew someone who was. Interestingly, the aforementioned prophecy did come true, it was not Theodorus who succeeded Valens, but rather the Christian Theodosius.

Valens, however, was not appeased by just the deaths of the original conspirators. He soon expanded his punitive net to all those who had heard the oracle. These trials eventually reached Maximus, Julian's theurgic mentor, who confessed to hearing the oracle of imperial succession but had not told anyone else on the basis of his philosophic principles. In Valens' eyes, Maximus was part of the treasonous crime even though he was not involved in any way.

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[247] Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*, 220.
[248] Ammianus, *History*, 205-207. XXIX.1.32. See XXIX.1.29-31 for further descriptions of the divination ritual employed by the conspirators.

And so, Festus, proconsul of Asia, had him beheaded at Ephesus in 372.[249] After the death of the famous theurgist, Valens' trials continued to expand at an alarmingly rapid rate, with Ammianus writing that many innocents were put to death along with the guilty. The historian records that paranoia was so rampant in the eastern provinces that citizens had their entire libraries burned out of fear.[250]

While Valens and Valentinian never actively worked to undo Julian's recalibration of Rome's religion, the trials of 369 and 372 demonstrate that many of the more esoteric religious and magical practices that briefly flourished under Julian were no longer tolerable in a post-Julianic Roman empire. The death of Maximus is in many ways the epitome of this shift in thinking. Even for those who did not involve themselves in the more destructive magical practices, it was still dangerous to be any sort of philosopher given the quasi-magical/religious connotations of philosophy. Eunapius' description of Maximus' death in his *Lives of the Philosophers* is even more detailed and highlights the empire's multi-faceted religious landscape. He also writes that Maximus was implicated in Valens' magic trials because he had heard the oracles regarding the eastern emperor's successor, but Valens could not put the theurgist to death because he had refuted every charge brought against him at the trial and "had so precisely foretold all that was happening."[251] It is unclear here exactly which events Maximus correctly predicted. Nevertheless, the fact that Eunapius gives Maximus such powers of divination in his narrative further reinforces the idea that philosophers were not merely trained in modern ideas of rational thought but also skilled users of magic and in the case of Valens' trials, *goeteia* as

[249] Ammianus, *History*, 213. XXIX.1.42.
[250] Ammianus, *History*, 217. XXIX.2.4.
[251] Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists* [and] Eunapius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, trans. Wilmer C. Wright (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), 459. Section 480.

well.[252] Eunapius' account concludes much the same as Ammianus' history, but with the additional detail that Maximus was beheaded by Festus because his accusers in Antioch could not bear to carry out the sentence themselves.[253] Whatever the nature of Maximus' execution and torture, its occurrence along with the widespread paranoia over practices that had a brief flourishing during Julian's reign is proof enough that Julian's religious policies would not last.

Julian And Hermes Trismegistus' Legacy in Renaissance Italy

When writing on Julian's association with the esoteric magical and religious practices of antiquity, it is also necessary to discuss Hermeticism's place in the landscape of late antiquity. Much like magic, Hermeticism can also be difficult to assign a single, concise definition given its transmission and transmutation up through the twentieth century. Broadly speaking, Hermeticism refers to a set of texts called the Hermetic Corpus purportedly authored by the mythical Hermes Trismegistus. Hermes Trismegistus, of course, never existed. Rather he is a combination of the Egyptian god Thoth and the Greek deity Hermes. In pharaonic Egypt, Thoth was represented as an anthropomorphic figure with the body of a man and the head of an ibis. He was the god of wisdom who was attributed with having invented writing and therefore the patron god of scribes. Hermes has his roots in Homer's *Iliad* where he is described as a messenger for the other Olympian gods and was patron to merchants and thieves. The key linking factor for

[252] *Goeteia* roughly translates to "witchcraft" and was largely associated with harmful and destructive magical practices in the ancient world. See Chapter III for further details on *goeteia* and its associated connotations.

[253] Eunapius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, 459. Eunapius' account also suggests that Valens' court had Maximus executed in Asia because they found him guilty of nothing in Antioch.

Thoth and Hermes was that in their respective theologies, they were both responsible for guiding souls to the afterlife.[254]

Hermes Trismegistus as a god has his origins during the Ptolemaic dynasty when elements of Greek and Egyptian culture became syncretized. The epithet "Thrice-Greatest" likely refers to his multifaceted nature as the god of language, writing, religion, and astronomy, among other arts. The figure of Hermes Trismegistus is complicated by the fact that the Egyptian priest Manetho, who lived during the third century BCE, recorded that there were in fact two figures with the name Hermes. The first was the god Hermes-Thoth who transcribed his teachings in hieroglyphics during the mythical ante-diluvian era. After the Flood, Thoth's writings were translated into Greek by a living Hermes who was the son of Agathodaimon and the father of Tat.[255] Even before the arrival of Trismegistus in the Hellenistic era, the Greeks already associated Thoth with magic. This is evidenced in Plato's *Phaedrus*, wherein along with numbers and writing, Thoth also invented astronomy.[256]

Analyzing the contents of the thirty-six surviving books of the Hermetic Corpus is too lengthy a task for this thesis alone. Suffice it to say that the Hermetica's core doctrine concerned itself with the discovery of divine truth and shared many tenets with the Neoplatonic philosophy with which Julian was so intimately acquainted.[257] While Julian never makes any mention of the Hermetic Corpus, he is certainly aware of Hermes Trismegistus in *Against the Galileans*:

> It is also to be marked that God does not in later times show concern only for the Hebrews, and that while caring for all nations he gave the Hebrews no special privileges or gifts, while giving us benefits far surpassing theirs. Consider the example of the Egyptians who

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[254] Florian Ebeling, *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus: Hermeticism From Ancient to Modern Times*, trans. David Lorton (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2007), 3-5.
[255] Ebeling, *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus*, 6-7.
[256] Plato, *Phaedrus,* trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, in *Complete Works,* ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 551. 274D.
[257] Ebeling, *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus*, 12.

> manage to count a few wise men among their ranks, claiming proudly the successors of Hermes—that Hermes who visited Egypt in his third epiphany.[258]

Regarding Hermes Trismegistus' dual nature in antiquity, Julian here seems to be referring to both Thoth-Hermes' divine and mortal forms since he directly references the god's multiple manifestations. This passage also highlights the syncretic nature of Hermes Trismegistus because Julian writes that while the god had his origins in Egypt, he was also a benefactor to the Greeks. In his commentary on *Against the Galileans*, R. Joseph Hoffman notes that Hermes Trismegistus "had special status among the Neoplatonists, and hence is important to Julian as a theological cipher."[259]

While Julian never assigns him the epithet of "Thrice-Greatest," Hermes also plays an important role as a divine cipher in *The Caesars*. In the introduction to his satire on the former rulers of Rome, Julian claims that the work is not the product of his own creativity, but "an invention of Hermes."[260] Throughout the rest of the satire, Hermes repeatedly appears to deliver important information about the character of the different emperors which Julian is chronicling. However, perhaps Hermes' most important appearance can be found in final lines of the satire:

> "As for thee," Hermes said to me, "I have granted thee the knowledge of thy father Mithras. Do thou keep his commandments, and thus secure for thyself a cable and sure anchorage throughout thy life, and when thou must depart from the world thou canst with good hopes adopt him as thy guardian god."[261]

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[258] Julian. *Against the Galileans*, trans. R. Joseph Hoffman (Amherst: Prometheus Press, 2004), 112. 176A-B.
[259] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, trans. R. Joseph Hoffman (Amherst: Prometheus Press, 2004), 112. See Hoffman's footnote 342.
[260] Julian, *Orations 6-8. Letters to Themistius, To the Senate and People of Athens, To a Priest. The Caesars. Misopogon,* trans. Wilmer C. Wright (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913), 347. 307A.
[261] Julian, *Orations 6-8. Letters to Themistius, To the Senate and People of Athens, To a Priest. The Caesars*, 415. 336C.

Here in his address to Julian, Hermes is very much acting in the traditional role of Trismegistus and Thoth-Hermes. That is to say that in his final words given to the emperor, he confirms that he has given his follower secret knowledge regarding the nature of the gods and even provides Julian with further instructions for worship. Throughout *The Caesars*, Hermes appears to have all the traditional traits of a Hellenic god. This however, does not rule out the possibility that by invoking Hermes, Julian was also invoking his "Thrice-Great" form. In his own analysis of the history of Hermeticism, Florian Ebeling concludes that by late antiquity, Hermes Trismegistus' dual nature was almost irrelevant and that writers would invoke both his divine and human form to suit their philosophies.[262]

As already discussed in the third chapter, Iamblichus' *On the Mysteries* was hugely influential on Julian's understanding of theurgy and Neoplatonism. When composing this work, it seems that Iamblichus conducted his own research into the Hermetic Corpus and ultimately deemed that Hermeticism was synonymous with Egyptian theology.[263] This is largely because Iamblichus used the Hermetic Corpus to prove the Egyptian origin of theurgy and undermine Porphyry's position against the mystical art. Based on this, Fowden concludes that Julian and the other disciples of Iamblichus were not invoking Hermes Trismegistus in their writings, but instead the older, Hermes Logios.[264] Therefore, since Julian makes no other reference to Hermeticism in his extant writings, it is possible that he came to the same theological conclusions as Iamblichus.

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[262] Ebeling, *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus*, 8.
[263] Ebeling, *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus*, 19-20.
[264] Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 201. See also Julian's *Oration 7. To the Cynic Heracleios* 237C.

Outside of Julian's writing, a far more explicit reference to Hermes Trismegistus can be found in Book XXI of Ammianus' *History* wherein he describes the omens of Constantius' death. Citing two senarii from Menander wherein the comic poet describes how each person is assigned a *daimon* at birth, Ammianus writes that Hermes Trismegistus, along with Plotinus and Apollonius of Tyana "ventured to discourse on this mystic theme."[265] This quote not only shows Ammianus' familiarity with the Hermetica, but also reveals that Hermes Trismegistus was not an obscure Greco-Egyptian deity, but quite widespread across the Mediterranean.

Even in late antiquity, Hermes Trismegistus was not just popular among pagan scholars. In Book II of *Against Julian*, Cyril of Alexandria quotes no less than three works of the Hermetic Corpus and attributes them all to Hermes Trismegistus.[266] In his analysis of *Against Julian*, Fowden asserts that Cyril regarded Julian as one of Hermes Trismegistus' leading disciples and took "malicious delight" in invoking the Hermetica in his refutation of *Against the Galileans*.[267] Given the dual nature of Hermes Trismegistus, it would have been a simple matter for Christian apologists to reconcile his mystical texts with their own faiths by acknowledging only his mortal form. Additionally, Cyril's extensive quotations from the Hermetica helped Hermes Trismegistus to be recognized in later Syriac and Byzantine traditions as a prophet who foretold the birth of Christ.[268]

After the fall of the western Roman empire, Hermeticism was largely forgotten until the fifteenth century. The esoteric philosophy resurfaced in 1460 when Cosimo de Medici's agents

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[265] Ammianus, *History*, 169. XXI.14.5.
[266] Cyril, *Against Julian. Book II*, trans. Roger Pearse, accessed February 18, 2022, https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/cyril_against_julian_02_book2.htm. Section 22, 29-31. The three works attributed to Hermes Trismegistus Cyril references are: *To His Spirit*, *To Asclepius*, and *Detailed Commentary to Tat*.
[267] Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, 180.
[268] Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, 180.

sent him copies of the Corpus Hermeticum from the Greek speaking East. The Florentine lord immediately asked the priest Marsilio Ficino to translate the texts into Latin. The first translations were completed in 1463. Ficino had already been tasked by Cosimo with translating Plato's dialogues into Latin and given his patron's passion for the preservation and translation of classical Greek literature, Ficino naturally became acquainted with a vast array of writings from antiquity, including Julian's.[269]

As well as being a priest, Ficino was also a physician and in 1493 completed his medical treatise *Libri de Vita*. It is important to note that in the Medieval and Renaissance eras it was quite commonplace for authors to include astrological information in their works as, much like in antiquity, there was not yet a clear distinction between magic and science. The work was intended for students of medicine who were prone to melancholy from over exerting themselves in their studies. In his treatise, Ficino speculates that students were under the influence of Saturn because of the planet's associations with contemplation and hard abstract study. However, Saturn was also associated with melancholy. Therefore, Ficino recommended that students surround themselves with the elements associated with the life-giving celestial bodies Jupiter, Venus, and Sol.[270] At several points in his work, Ficino refers to these celestial bodies as the "three-graces," a term he borrowed from Julian's *Hymn to King Helios*:

> For it is evident that the planets, as they dance in a circle about him, preserve as the measure of their motion a harmony between this god and their own movements such as I shall now describe; and that the whole heaven also, which adapts itself to him in all its parts, is full of gods who proceed from Helios. For this god is lord of five zones in the heavens; and when he traverses three of these he begets in those three the three Graces.[271]

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[269] Ebeling, *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus*, 59.
[270] Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 62-63.
[271] Julian, *Orations 1-5*, trans. Wilmer C. Wright (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913), 400. 146C-D.

A major part of Hermeticism's resurgence in the Renaissance was in large part due to its association with Neoplatonism. As I have discussed in previous chapters, Julian's works can definitely be considered part of the Neoplatonic corpus of late antiquity. Therefore, it is quite possible that when Ficino was making Latin translations of Greek texts, he came across Julian's works and incorporated some of the emperor's theological and mystical principles into his own writing.

The Tragic Hero of a Dying Religion

As already discussed in this chapter, Julian perished on the retreat of a campaign that in hindsight seems to have been doomed from its very start. Ammianus tells us that the young emperor ignored the ill omens at every turn. In fact, the Sassanid empire was quite strong under the rule of Shapur II and the defeats which the Romans suffered under Constantius had left the eastern army largely demobilized and its morale low. What's more, by the time Julian reached Ctesiphon, Procopius had not arrived with reinforcements from Armenia.[272] Indeed, based on the early successes of the campaign, Julian might have ultimately triumphed if his only goal was to secure the eastern borders, instead of destroying the Sassanid hegemony, as Libanius suggests.[273] To the modern historian, Julian's failed Persian expedition in many ways mirrors Napoleon's doomed invasion of Russia in 1812. Both emperors had either unrealistic or ill-defined war goals. Each monarch fought against an enemy who occupied a vast geographic region and was more than willing to use Fabian tactics instead of engaging in pitched battle. Of course, one must also remember that while Napoleon survived his disastrous war, his Grande Armee perished.

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[272] G.W Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 106-114.
[273] Libanius, "Oration 18. Funeral Oration Over Julian," 279. R521-R522.

Julian on the other hand, lost his life at Maranga, but his army managed to survive its retreat to Roman territory.

While Julian's reign was a short one, his policies and surviving writings certainly inspired both awe and fear in his successors. Even though Valens and Valentinian never sought to extinguish all remnants of the traditional pagan religions in their empire, one cannot help but wonder if the brother emperors' persecution of the magic practices that experienced such a flourishing during Julian's brief rule were at least partially aimed at removing any of the last surviving vestiges of the Apostate's regime. But even these sweeping persecutions were not enough to destroy Julian's legacy. His work would be partially rediscovered in the fifteenth century as part of Cosimo de Medici's patronage of Neoplatonic philosophy.

Even within the past century, Julian has been reimagined as a romantic figure and model of an enlightened monarch who fought against an encroaching Christian theocracy. Within the canon of American literature the emperor serves as the protagonist of Gore Vidal's 1964 novel *Julian*, wherein the author uses Julian's life and reign to present his own critique of modern Christianity. Nearly two decades later, John M. Ford published his fantasy novel *The Dragon Waiting* in 1983 which centers around an alternate Europe in which Julian did not die in 363 and paganism triumphs over Christianity. Ultimately, while it is certainly entertaining to imagine Julian as a romantic figure, a tragic hero fighting for the survival of a dying world, this was not the true character of the emperor, and instead just the end result of seventeen centuries of his afterlife.

Conclusion

It is truly spectacular that so many of Julian's letters and other writings have survived. In many ways his imperial regime was one of deep irony, the last ruling member of Constantine's dynasty was the Roman empire's last pagan emperor. He was a fervent convert who sought to fight against Christianity not by persecuting the adherents of the young religion with fire and iron, but by organizing the disparate cults of Hellenism into a coherent hierarchy with himself serving as pontifex maximus. Though even the religion which Julian so fanatically and enthusiastically followed was not the same state religion which pre-Constantinian emperors were born into. Rather Julian's paganism was a new henotheism that was born of a synthesis of Christian theology, Neoplatonic philosophy, and classical Hellenism.

Due to the sheer scope of Julian's writings, and the subsequent seventeen centuries of scholarly reception of one of Rome's most controversial emperors, I chose to limit my research into just focusing on Julian's magical/religious views. The keen reader will notice that I have not even directly referenced *To The Uneducated Cynics* or his *Letter to Themistius the Philosopher*. That is not to say that I feel my research is incomplete. Rather, it is to show the sheer number of directions in which Julianic studies can proceed. Regarding Julian's reception in the immediate centuries following his death, *The Julian Romance*, written in Syriac, deserves its own analysis entirely given its great length and importance to the development of Syriac studies. Ultimately though, I hope that by focusing my thesis on bringing coherence to Julian's magical and religious views, I have been able to distill one facet of the emperor's complex life.

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