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## **JULIAN THE APOSTATE'S RELIGIOUS POLICY AND *RENOVATIO IMPERII* *MORUMQUE* IN THE *RES GESTAE* OF AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS**

**ABSTRACT:** This article deals with Julian the Apostate's religious policy and its relationship with the renewal of both the Roman state and the morals of Roman society during the emperor's reign. Julian, who was a zealous follower of pagan religion, attempted to re-establish the old *cultus deorum* in the Christian-pagan society and to make paganism the Roman state religion. Ammianus, who witnessed Julian's reign, shows in his *Res Gestae* that the emperor did his utmost to renew equally the morals of society and condition of the state. In this article the author argues that – according to Ammianus – Julian's religious programme influenced neither his good moral conduct nor his secular policy. In the *Res Gestae*, the historian demonstrates that the imperial power as well as Julian's virtues were sufficient means to renew the morals of society and to restore and strengthen the state, whereas religion only accompanied the emperor's moves and did not influence them. This article was written with a view to presenting Ammianus' standpoint on this matter as it emerges from the *Res Gestae*; one that may seem contrary to how some modern scholars tend to accentuate the role played by pagan religion in the secular policy of the Apostate.

**KEY WORDS:** Roman historiography, Ammianus Marcellinus, Julian the Apostate, religious policy, moral and political renewal

The pagan reaction of Julian the Apostate (361–363) was the penultimate<sup>1</sup> attempt to revive and re-establish the old pagan religion (*cultus deorum*) in the Roman Empire. The process of reinstatement of *cultus deorum* continued throughout his reign and accompanied his intensive administrative, political and civil undertakings aimed at improving and maintaining law and order in the state. In his *Res Gestae*, Ammianus Marcellinus, who witnessed Julian's reign, presents him as a man and emperor of great virtue, an able administrator and legislator as well as a zealous reformer of the religious system, and a philosopher who kept on improving his mind and soul.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps this portrait of Julian and his activity (preserved in the historical tradition), in which the emperor's concern for public affairs accompanied his philosophical contemplation and devotion to the gods, gave birth to a tendency among some modern scholars to regard the emperor's religious orientation as a path to moral renewal or a means for it. Therefore, we may sometimes discover that Julian, as a Neoplatonic philosopher, wanted to regenerate Roman society and contribute to the restoration and strengthening of state power by means of *cultus deorum*. One may suppose that such a perception of the role of pagan worship in Julian's policies perhaps grows out of the strong belief preserved in the Roman historical tradition that *cultus deorum* had been a significant and consolidating factor in the moral and political life of the Roman community since its inception, the basis of public life (Korpanty 1988: 373) and one of the factors determining military and political power as well as the prosperity of the state (Śnieżewski 2000: 85); pagan religion, although of no value to the Romans, was nevertheless the very basis of their morality (Śnieżewski 2000: 84–85; Śnieżewski 2003: 28; Mleczek 2018: 18).

Therefore, in the context of Ammianus' account as well as that of the old Roman tradition and the opinions of some modern scholars, one may ask an important question: Did Julian, greatly zealous for the

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<sup>1</sup> The pagan reaction of Eugenius (the usurper in the West: 392 – 6 September 394 AD) was the last attempt to re-establish the old pagan cult in the western part of the Roman Empire, whereas the eastern one was governed by Theodosius I the Great, a Christian emperor. The whole conflict was ended on 6 September 394 AD (the battle on the Frigidus River) with the victory of Emperor Theodosius – this resulted in severe anti-pagan reaction of the Christian emperor.

<sup>2</sup> Libanios (*Or.* XVIII 128–156) presents a similar portrait of Julian.

re-establishing of the old *cultus deorum* in the state and the converting of Rome to pagan religion, aim to revive the former rank and role of the old beliefs in public life in the completely different realities of late antiquity when Christianity had clashed with pagan religion as such?<sup>3</sup> As Rohrbacher (2002: 251) rightly notes, the brevity of Julian's reign (361–363) has served to obscure (to some extent) important aspects of his religious programme and that is why they are difficult to assess. Moreover, considering how short Julian's reign was, the scholar argues that his ultimate religious goals and the chances of success for his religious programme are contestable issues to the same extent as any subsequent route for Christianity and paganism under his rule (cf. also Marcone 2019: 23; Marcone 2020: 326; Wiemer 2020: 208). As regards Ammianus, he makes no comments on the issues mentioned above, although his account of Julian's religious policy is, generally speaking, quite accurate (except for a few omissions).<sup>4</sup> Anyway, in his narrative, the historian clearly separates the problem of religion and the emperor's religious policy (*religio*) from his austere morals (*ethos*) and his moves towards the moral renewal of society, as well as his attempts to strengthen the state. Vogt (1993: 144) rightly notes that Julian's policies regarding *cultus deorum* were aimed at ensuring legal protection of pagan cults as well as at radical renewal of pagan faith (see also Ceran 1980: 94; Rohrbacher 2002: 250). Ceran (1980: 122) adds that these actions were both a necessity and a consequence resulting from the implementation of Julian's policy, which was primarily aimed at renewal of the state (*renovatio imperii*). In this paper, we try to consider Ammianus' attitude (as it emerges from his *Res Gestae*) towards the question asked above, aiming to present this historian's standpoint on the Apostate's religious

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<sup>3</sup> Pagan religious traditions were still popular mainly in the Western Empire (especially in Rome), whereas in the Eastern Empire Christianity was more popular than pagan religion (the eastern part of the Roman Empire was strongly Christianized) – cf. Ceran 1980: 100. One may suppose that Julian, as a shrewd and keen observer, was aware of this religious instability. For cultural and political changes in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD – cf. MacMullen 2003: 465–495.

<sup>4</sup> Ammianus fails to include in his *Res Gestae* some of Julian's actions connected with his pro-pagan (sc. anti-Christian) religious policy. In this article, we refer to Christian authors in order to point out these omissions and present the historian's standpoint and account in the broader historiographical context.

programme, its relationship with his secular policies, and the role played by pagan worship in his actions focused on both the moral regeneration of Roman society and the political renewal of the state (*renovatio imperii morumque*).

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In his comment on Julian's religious preferences,<sup>5</sup> Ammianus says that the future emperor was attracted to the worship of pagan gods from his very early boyhood (*a rudimentis pueritiae primis inclinior erat erga numinum cultum*<sup>6</sup> – XXII 5, 1). Julian's predilection for pagan beliefs increased over the course of time (as he grew older), but at first, he secretly performed only certain acts pertaining to divine worship, for example he used to pray to Mercury in the most extreme secrecy (*occulte Mercurio supplicabat* – XVI 5, 5). This caution on the part of the future emperor was caused by his fears, which – as one may suppose – resulted from the fact of pagan cults being officially banned<sup>7</sup> (XXII 5, 1): *paulatimque adolescens desiderio rei flagrabat, multa metuens tamen agitabat quaedam ad id pertinentia, quantum fieri poterat occultissime*. Then, after having been elevated to Caesar,<sup>8</sup> Julian also had to hide his true religious beliefs and perform pagan rituals secretly (XXI 2, 4–5): *haruspicinae auguriisque intentus et ceteris, quae deorum semper fecere cultores. et ut haec interim celarentur*. He officially feigned being a Christian<sup>9</sup> in

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<sup>5</sup> Julian was a follower of the Neoplatonic system developed at Iamblichus' philosophical school. Julian studied Iamblichus' doctrine thoroughly, although in his childhood and early youth he had been educated according to Christian patterns (but he had studied the pagan classics in his schooldays, too). There are no references to Julian's Christian education in Ammianus, but St. Gregory Nazianzen (*Or.* IV 23) says that Julian studied Christian philosophy (including Christian literature and the principles of Christian morality and faith).

<sup>6</sup> In this article we quote the Latin text according to Seyfarth 1968–1986: Bd. I–IV.

<sup>7</sup> In 353 AD, Constantius II (Julian's superior and relative) announced the edict wherein sacrificing to pagan gods and worshipping them were banned under penalty of death.

<sup>8</sup> Emperor Constantius II elevated Julian to Caesar on 6 November 355 AD. Julian's elevation to the Caesarship is thoroughly discussed in Ross 2016 (ch. "Julian's Elevation").

<sup>9</sup> The situation mentioned by Ammianus took place shortly after acclaiming Julian as Augustus (360 AD). Julian's personal and skilfully hidden apostasy from the Chris-

Vienna, although he actually dealt with *haruspicia*, *auguria* and other pagan practices used previously by worshippers of the gods (XXI 2, 4). The future emperor even visited a Christian church on the feast of Epiphany,<sup>10</sup> spending some time inside on solemn prayers (XXI 2, 4–5): *utque omnes nullo impediante ad sui favorem illiceret adhaerere cultui Christiano fingebat [...] feriarum die, quem celebrantes mense Ianuario Christiani Epiphania dictitant, progressus in eorum ecclesiam sollemniter numine orato discessit*. It is clear from Ammianus' account that at that time Julian already knew he had to either hide his liking for the old forms of worship or reveal it later, because he risked exposing himself to persecution by Constantius<sup>11</sup> if he were to disclose his preferences (illegal<sup>12</sup> at that time) too early. As Rike (1987: 40–42; also Ceran 1980: 83) aptly notes, Ammianus implies here (XXI 2, 4–5) that the popularity and strong position of Christianity, rather than anything unseemly in the nature of pagan cult itself, was the reason for concealment, the factor that prevented Julian from performing pagan rituals openly and legally. Rohrbacher (2002: 250) points out that the future emperor had privately abjured Christianity almost ten years before he came to the throne (cf. also St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* IV 30).

As regards Julian's actions on the political forum at that time, it is noteworthy that – in Ammianus' opinion – Caesar's religious beliefs

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tian religion took place earlier, after his return from Cappadocia (355 AD), when he acquainted himself with the writings of Iamblichus and was initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries – this hidden apostasy meant that Julian had probably followed these pagan practices since that time. By demonstrating his faithfulness as a Christian in Vienna (cf. Ceran 1980: 83), Julian tried to counteract any rumours and suspicions of his predilection for the pagan *cultus deorum*. In Browning's opinion (1978: 110, 162–163), Julian pretended to be a Christian until his position in Constantinople was strengthened.

<sup>10</sup> On 6 January (361 AD), the feast day of Epiphany (the Three Wise Men). This happened during Julian's stay in Vienna where he celebrated *quinquennalia* (the fifth anniversary of his elevation to Caesar was on 6 November 360 AD).

<sup>11</sup> Rosen explains (1997: 126–146) that Julian's cautious behaviour was caused not so much by his fear but rather by his growing into the act of apostasy. But considering Constantius' ban on pagan worship, fear also seems to be a convincing motivation of the young Caesar's behaviour (Ceran 1980: 82). Similar reasons to those pointed out by Ammianus are also mentioned by St. Gregory Nazianzen (*Or.* IV 30).

<sup>12</sup> On 19 February 356 AD Constantius II reissued the edict wherein sacrificing to pagan gods and worshipping them as well as participating in pagan rituals were banned under penalty of death.

(*cultus deorum*) were not the reason to begin civil war against Constantius (a Christian).<sup>13</sup> Ammianus, in his clearly apologetic account, draws attention to the fact that Julian, in separating political and religious motivations, took up arms against his Augustus and “a cruel friend” (*amicus cruens* – XXI 1, 2) because he (sc. Constantius) had abused his power (Rike 1987: 44; 46; similar opinion in Zosimos, *NH* III 9, 3; 5). The historian mentions that the “cruel deeds and vices of the emperor” (*probra quaedam et vitia* – XXI 10, 7), not Julian’s religious motivations, were the causes of the revolt (anyway, young Caesar might have had difficulty in gaining sole power if he were to prematurely disclose his religious beliefs – Browning 1978: 110; Ceran 1980: 82–83). Ammianus explains that the Gallic army that was under Julian’s command did not want to fulfil Constantius’ order and participate under the emperor’s command in a military expedition to the eastern front (XX 4, 2) – in this way, the soldiers were forced to abandon their favourite commander and their Gallic homeland (XX 4, 13). The ones unwilling to do so, as the historian says (XX 4, 14; 17; XXI 5, 9), were hungry for political upheaval and acclaimed Julian as Augustus.<sup>14</sup> Ammianus adds that it was not without significance that Julian started to be increasingly proud (*altius semet*

<sup>13</sup> Rosen (1997: 126–146) in discussing the development of Julian’s religious views says that his usurpation and apostasy were inseparably connected with each other, although the apostasy was not the reason for the usurpation. The scholar notices the relationship between Julian’s political and religious breakthrough at this decisive and difficult moment: in this political act, the young Caesar cut himself off from his Augustus (usurpation) and his religion (apostasy).

<sup>14</sup> Julian was acclaimed as Augustus by the Gallic army at Lutetia in 360 AD (during the reign of Constantius II) – XX 4, 14–18. Julian opposed the decision of the soldiers, but finally he was persuaded to endorse it. Ammianus claims that Caesar was reluctant to accept this acclamation because he considered it reckless and inappropriate, and regarded it as an incentive for a revolt (XX 4, 15). In his letter, Julian informed Constantius about what had happened (XX 8, 17), but the emperor did not accept this proclamation and persuaded Julian to be satisfied with the title of Caesar (XX 9, 4) – however, Julian’s soldiers did not accept Constantius’ decision and once again they unanimously confirmed Julian’s acclamation as Augustus (XX 9, 7). Eutropius (*Brev.* X 15) and Zosimos (*NH* III 9, 2) claim (like Ammianus) that Julian’s acclamation was the unanimous decision of the soldiers. Zosimos (*NH* III 9, 3) adds that Julian was indignant at this proclamation but he did not consider it wise to change what had happened.

*extollens* – XXI 10, 7) of his successes,<sup>15</sup> and the popularity and favour he enjoyed among his troops. Julian, according to the historian (XXI 5, 1; 7), although unwilling to accept this acclamation (cf. n. 14), finally decided to announce his usurpation openly in order to feel safer in this difficult political situation (considering that Constantius envied his successes, was afraid of his popularity and simply hated him – XX 4, 1–2), and to compel the soldiers to be loyal and encourage them to support him in his endeavour. But (apart from these political and military reasons) we find no mention in Ammianus that Julian wanted to pave the way for pagan beliefs. Ceran (1980: 82) explains that Julian did not want any future military conflicts to be of religious nature because he knew that the East, where he planned to begin the war against Constantius, was more Christianized than the West – therefore any thought of a victory for the pagan Augustus over the Christian emperor was hopeless. In this situation it was Julian's prudence that warned him not to stimulate Christian opposition in the East. Ceran (1980: 103) also argues that Julian was focused only on the political struggle which was to be devoid of any religious motivations (cf. also Bleckmann 2020: 97–123) that could unnecessarily stimulate religious fanaticism and determination; that is why he did not want his conflict with Constantius to be associated with any act of overt apostasy on his part.

A conspicuous change in Julian's attitude towards pagan religion took place after he came to the throne.<sup>16</sup> As Barnes (1998: 156) rightly

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<sup>15</sup> Julian was very successful in his administrative (XVIII, 3, 2–6) and military activity (XVI 12, 1–62; XVII 1, 1–14; 2, 1–4; 6, 1–3; 8, 3–5; 10, 3–10) in Gaul (the Gallic campaign: 356–361 AD). Julian celebrated the fifth anniversary of his elevation to Caesar (6 November 360 AD) officially wearing the insignia of Augustus (XXI 1, 4). At that time Julian was already determined to overtly oppose the emperor (XXI 1, 6) – the young Caesar was guided (among other reasons) by the desire to be safe in this difficult political situation (XXI 1, 3). Ecclesiastical historians have different opinions on the relationship between Julian's military successes and his elevation to Augustus, although (like Ammianus) they do not give any religious reasons for Julian's proclamation: Rufinus, *HE* X 27; Sozomen, *HE* V 2, 20–23; Theodoret, *HE* II 32, 6; Orosius, VII 29, 16; St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* IV 46. Zosimos, a pagan historian, also gives no religious reasons (*NH* III 9, 5).

<sup>16</sup> In November 361 AD. The emperor Constantius II died on 3 November 361 AD. Olszaniec (1999: 18–19) says that the moment of Julian's apostasy is a subject of polemics in literary research because there is no agreement among scholars as to when

points out, the death of Constantius removed all external constraints, so Julian could commence open avowal of paganism at once. Ammianus (XXII 5, 2) says that the emperor, free from any religious restrictions (*adesse sibi liberum tempus faciendi, quae vellet*), openly and legally revealed his religious desires and preferences: he ordered the opening of pagan temples, recommenced sacrifices to the gods and re-established the pagan cult<sup>17</sup> (*aperire templa arisque hostias admovere et restituere deorum statuit cultum*).<sup>18</sup> Julian completely and openly devoted himself to the old rituals and, as Vogt (1993: 144; also Olszaniec 1999: 142) claims, he made the reinstatement of paganism the most important goal of his reign. The emperor (Jul., *Ep.* 89, 453bc) clearly defined the purpose of his religious reforms as the preservation of traditional pagan religion (Barnes 1998: 156).

Ceran (1980: 85) notices that the first anti-Christian moves on the part of the new emperor were rather cautious and were to become more strict and more decisive only in the course of time. Therefore, Julian began to pursue different religious strategies to marginalize the role of the Christian religion (Rohrbacher 2002: 250), although at the very beginning of his reign the legal position of Christianity<sup>19</sup> was to remain intact for some time. The announcement of “plain and total decrees” (*decreta*

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exactly it took place. In our opinion, a convincing standpoint is that Julian sacrificed to the gods and re-established pagan cult (an overt apostasy) after Constantius’ funeral and after he had gained and strengthened sole power – cf. a similar opinion: St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* IV 52.

<sup>17</sup> In Ammianus’ opinion, the reasons for such a behaviour were merely personal and free of any political aspects. See similar standpoint in Seeck 1966: 205–248 (the fulfilment of the personal need for faith after apostasy, which was done consciously and after a thorough study of Christian doctrine); Rosen 1997: 126–146 (Julian’s total apostasy after his legal coming to the throne, the earlier period being the time of his intellectual development leading to the decision about apostasy); Libanios, *Or.* XVII 121–126. The restitution edict of pagan worship was announced in early 362 AD (e.g., in Alexandria on 4 February 362 AD), whereas in Constantinople it was announced earlier, probably in December 361 AD. It should be added to Ammianus’ account that this edict also legalized local city cults and the practices of soothsayers and astrologers. There are references to this emperor’s edict also in Libanios (*Or.* XVII 9; XVIII 126) and in Church historians: Socrates, *HE* III 1 and Sozomen, *HE* V 3, 16.

<sup>18</sup> Ceran (1980: 113) rightly notices that the restitution edict was the first attack of the new emperor on the strong position of Christianity in the Empire.

<sup>19</sup> More on Julian and his attitude towards Christianity cf. Neri 1985: 117–157.



*absoluta*)<sup>20</sup> guaranteed that the pagan religion would have an equal place with Christianity, and was – in Rike's opinion (1987: 47) – even an overt manifestation of the pagan restoration (XXII 5, 2): *planis absolutisque decretis aperire templa arisque hostias admovere et restituere deorum statuit cultum*.

In 361 AD, the emperor announced the edict<sup>21</sup> in which he proclaimed the freedom of all religious cults and allowed Christianity to be officially practised (Vogt 1993: 144),<sup>22</sup> although he himself was a follower of pagan worship. Equal rights for all Christian and pagan cults as well as religious tolerance became the foundation of Julian's new religious policy. Therefore, raising the old *cultus deorum* to the rank of a state religion was not connected with any attempts to persecute Christians or to uproot Christianity. Ammianus says (XXII 5, 3) that Julian even tried to reconcile feuding Christian bishops with their faithful; he also encouraged them in mutual tolerance and in freedom of religion: *dissidentes Christianorum antistites cum plebe discissa in palatium intromissos monebat civilius, ut discordiis consopitis quisque nullo vetante religioni suae serviret intrepidus*. Julian's tolerance<sup>23</sup> for Christianity and its equality with the pagan *cultus deorum*, as well as freedom of religion for Christians and the emperor's encouragement addressed to them, were far-sighted moves, not without benefits to the emperor himself: they were aimed at the reinstatement and consolidation of paganism (Bidez 1965: 416; Rike 1987: 47) as well as its victory over Christianity. In the light of Julian's

<sup>20</sup> Perhaps Ammianus means the decrees without sanction (this may testify to the moderation of the emperor in exercising his imperial power) – cf. Lewandowski 2001: 382, n. 27.

<sup>21</sup> Probably in December 361 AD or, maybe, at the very beginning of January 362 AD.

<sup>22</sup> Julian's edict on religious freedom was very similar to the Milan edict announced in 313 AD by Constantine the Great, in which he proclaimed freedom of religion in the Roman Empire – however, the difference was that Constantine was a supporter of Christianity whereas Julian, Constantine's successor, was a zealous follower of paganism.

<sup>23</sup> The problem of Julian's religious tolerance should be approached quite carefully: the emperor was a fanatical pagan, so genuine and profound tolerance was rather contrary to his religious attitude – cf. Furman 1970: 231; Ceran 1980: 115; St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* IV 85 (the emperor's hidden malice and religious hypocrisy).

religious policy it seems plausible (Ceran 1980: 115; 136, n. 13)<sup>24</sup> that the emperor announced the edict to fuel disputes and conflicts among Christians and thus prevent them from creating a strong anti-pagan front to oppose the recently revived and re-established old *cultus deorum*. Ammianus clearly explains (XXII 5, 4) that the emperor acted so firmly because he hoped that in future he would not need to fear an unanimity of Christian believers as religious freedom would intensify disagreement and conflicts among them: *quod agebat ideo obstinate, ut dissensiones augente licentia non timeret unanimantem postea plebem*. Julian hoped that freedom of religion and the abolition of all restrictions which could potentially consolidate Christians and encourage their unanimity, would help him break the unity among the followers of the Christian faith and cause their Church to collapse due to internal conflicts and disputes (Vogt 1993: 145), rather than due to any external repressions imposed by the emperor (cf. also Eutropius, *Brev.* X 16, 3). For that reason, Julian rejected overt persecutions of Christians (Rike 1987: 48),<sup>25</sup> as this policy could result in the consolidation of the pagan *cultus deorum* and its victory over Christian beliefs. One may agree with Rohrbacher (2005: 250) that Julian also allowed<sup>26</sup> exiled Christians (heretics) to return home because he hoped this would promote discord among different Christian sects and weaken the authority of the Christian Church.

<sup>24</sup> The tolerance edict is widely discussed by scholars. Part of them present a different standpoint from that discussed above: by announcing the tolerance edict, Julian wanted to prevent Christians from forming opposition to the restitution edict; he also wanted to gain popularity in Christian circles and to ensure for himself the opportunity to reign in religious peace, during which, he hoped, the pagan religion would revive itself (cf. Ceran 1980: 114–115; 136, n. 11; cf. also Di Maio 1989: 99–109).

<sup>25</sup> Rike (1987: 48) pays attention to the fact that Julian set about a quantitative solution to the difficulties faced by paganism (in addition to “religious freedom” and the lack of overt persecutions): he strove to make *cultus deorum* more popular and impose it on his subjects by the frequency and ubiquity of pagan rituals and by building pagan temples. Olszaniec (1999: 151) explains that Julian was an opponent of persecutions and the first emperor to demand a total spiritual conversion to the pagan faith (so his attitude was different from that of former pagan emperors). Therefore, as one may conclude, all repressions and persecutions based on religious violence must have been, in Julian’s opinion, unreasonable and contrary to the very essence of conversion.

<sup>26</sup> Julian’s decree regarding the dismissal of heretics from exile was not preserved. Julian probably announced it at the beginning of 362 AD.

It is worth mentioning that lifting the sentence of exile had another hidden purpose, one not mentioned by Ammianus but discussed by Socrates “Scholasticus” (the Church historian). Socrates explains (*HE* III 1, 48) that the recall of bishops (mostly orthodox) was Julian’s well thought out move. It was aimed at building up the image of “a good emperor”: Julian was to be presented as a clement, tolerant and gracious ruler in contrast to Constantius, his predecessor, who was cruel and instrumental in sending these heretics into exile. According to Ammianus (XXII 5, 4), Julian knew that by skilfully fuelling the mutual hostility of Christians towards each other (*feritas*)<sup>27</sup> and through breaking the internal unity of the Church he could effectively fight against the Christian religion and pave the way for pagan worship: *nullas infestas hominibus bestias ut sibi feralibus plerisque Christianorum expertus*. In Julian’s opinion, the overt persecutions and violent anti-Christian measures employed by former pagan emperors (mainly those who reigned in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD), were ineffective in his day. As the nearest future was to show, Julian’s policy of religious tolerance proved an effective method in fighting Christianity at least in certain cities (Ceran 1980: 127–129) and individual areas of the Empire (“a positive response to Julian’s religious policy” attested in epigraphy – cf. Wiemer 2020: 219): discord among Christians deepened, disputes and conflicts resulting from differences in religious beliefs and out of the personal ambitions of the Christian clergy increased. In consequence, the unity of the Christian church was weakened or even broken up; quarrels, divisions and disagreements spread among the people (St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* IV 75).

It is worth noting that in his attempt to explain the lack of overt and violent persecutions in Julian’s religious programme, Ammianus omits an important reason often pointed out by Christian authors and Church historians; he also seems not to notice that covert persecutions of Christians (or covert discrimination) did actually take place (he makes no explicit comments on them in the *Res Gestae*). Rufinus (*HE* X 33) claims that the emperor was a shrewd persecutor who learnt that acts of martyrdom did not exterminate Christians, but merely strengthened them and

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<sup>27</sup> This strategy was aimed at a subtle manipulation of the argument of hate (*feritas*), which was contrary to the essence of the Christian religion (sc. love of both a neighbour and an enemy) and therefore destructive to it. Cf. also Rike 1987: 48.

their sense of unity – hence, in comparison with his pagan predecessors, he attacked them more leniently. St. Gregory Nazianzen (*Or.* IV 57) underlines that it was the consolidating role of martyrdom in defence of the Christian faith that stopped Julian from starting “an overt war” against Christians. According to St. Gregory (*Or.* IV 58), the lack of overt persecutions was also a tricky stratagem of the cunning emperor: it was actually intended to strike Christians violently and, at the same time, to hide this violence and deceive his subjects over its use. Nevertheless, in St. Gregory’s opinion (*Or.* IV 94), the lack of overt persecutions did not release Julian from feeling guilty over the persecutions themselves. In discussing the Christian state of mind during Julian’s reign, Sozomen (*HE* V 2, 1) notices that the permanent fear felt at the possibility of real and bloody persecutions was more painful than any overt and actual persecutions would have been (in the author’s opinion this constituted “covert terror”). Sozomen (*HE* VI 2, 9) also argues that the lack of overt persecutions was merely Julian’s deceitful strategy: in this covert way the emperor threatened to launch a full-scale assault on Christianity on his return from the Persian campaign (cf. also Theodoret, *HE* III 16; Ceran 1980: 215). According to Sozomen (*HE* V 4, 9), Julian’s abstention from overt repressions and his alleged generosity towards Christians were simply beneficial devices to forward his aim of a conversion to paganism within the state. Orosius (*Hist.* VII 30) and Theodoret (*HE* III 15, 1) both share Sozomen’s opinion on Julian’s policy. They claim that the emperor did not attack Christianity through violent persecutions and torture, but he attacked it by “wearing a mask of reasonableness and treacherous generosity” and by “preparing subtle traps and snares” to trick Christians into apostasy and convert them to paganism.<sup>28</sup>

Julian, probably guided by a similar hidden motivation (that is the desire to break the internal unity of the Church), undertook to rebuild the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. His plan was connected with an attempt

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<sup>28</sup> According to present-day scholars, this opinion is shared by all Church historians: the lack of torture and overt persecutions does not testify to the lack of repressions, but gives evidence of the “treacherous and insidious cleverness” of Julian, who tried to make Christians turn away from their faith through tricks and rewards (sc. covert persecutions) rather than by force, fear and violence. – cf. Thélamon 1981: 281–309; Penella 1993: 31–43; Barcellona 1995: 53–83.

to rehabilitate the Jews (or Israel, in other words).<sup>29</sup> Ammianus does not mention *expressis verbis* the emperor's intentions, but he only explains that Julian wanted to commemorate his reign and bestow endless fame on it through the greatness of his public works (XXIII 1, 2): *imperii-que sui memoriam magnitudine operum gestiens propagare ambitiosum quondam apud Hierosolyma templum, [...] instaurare sumptibus cogitabat immodicis*. Julian's efforts to rebuild this shrine of Jewish cult ultimately ended in failure (XXIII 1, 3; cf. also St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* V 3–4; Rufinus, *HE* I 37–38; Socrates, *HE* III 20; Sozomen, *HE* V 22; Theodoret, *HE* III 15), but the cause of the restoration of the Temple given by Ammianus seems too superficial in the context of the Apostate's pro-pagan religious policy. It is difficult to agree with Ammianus that *imperii memoria* (XXIII 1, 2) was the only motivation of the emperor, a true religious enthusiast (Vogt 1993: 144), to undertake this anti-Christian venture (the historian gives no other reason, though). Rohrbacher (2002: 254) aptly remarks that Ammianus, in giving such a reason for Julian's undertaking, underplayed the anti-Christian elements of the entire plan, although, as Drijvers (1992: 19–26) says, he tried to give the most accurate description of the emperor's intentions. As one may infer from Julian's *Contra Galilaeos*, his attitude towards the Jews and their beliefs was, generally speaking, favourable (also Bradbury 2020: 267–292), whereas he considered the Galileans a sect, whose doctrine was only a fabrication and forgery of men composed by wickedness and concocted out of villainy (*Contra Galilaeos* I, frg. 1). Julian, as one may conclude (more cf. Riedweg 2020: 245–266), held a religion based on law (the Jewish religion) in high regard and the religious zeal of the Jews in great esteem (Vogt 1993: 145). Therefore, he was keen to rebuild their

<sup>29</sup> Vogt (1993: 145) explains that since apostolic times Christians claimed that they were “true Israel”. Their detachment from the Synagogue resulted in a theological conflict with the Jews (this is testified by works written *adversus Iudaeos* by Christian authors). Roman policy was absolutely hostile to the Jews as long as there was a danger of them establishing a Jewish state in Palestine – this could be the result of their faith in the special relationship between God and the Chosen Nation (that is, the Jews). After the unrest in Palestine had been suppressed, the Jews were treated with great tolerance in the Diaspora and even enjoyed privileges. Therefore Julian's attempt to rebuild the Jewish Temple was an act openly aimed at Christians and their religion (cf. more on Julian's motivations and his attempt in Marcone 2019: p. IV, ch. III “Il tentativo di ricostruzione del Tempio di Gerusalemme”).

cult shrine in order to enable them to perform their religious rituals according to the old Jewish tradition. Blanchetière (1980: 61–81), Drijvers (1992: 19–26) and Levenson (1990: 261–279) aptly underline that in this context the unsuccessful attempt to rebuild the Jewish Temple was a dramatic attempt to revive the moribund cult. Moreover, some scholars (Vogt 1993: 146) emphasize that Julian's religious strategy (sc. the restoration of the Temple) was not deprived of important anti-Christian overtones and was based on religious propaganda (Olszaniec 1999: 40): the emperor intended to challenge the important thesis of Christian apologetics, according to which the destruction of the Jewish Temple was a visible sign that the nation of Israel was abandoned by God. Furthermore, the restoration of this shrine might question the veracity of Jesus' prophecy (included in New Testament<sup>30</sup>) that the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed and never rebuilt. One may suppose (Lewandowski 2001: 437, n. 4) that Julian wanted to prove to Christians that their belief in eternal doom for the Jewish Temple was unfounded and thus to strike a blow against them (Rohrbacher 2002: 251); he also intended, in this way, to win the Jewish minority over to his anti-Christian policy. This motivation is given by St. Gregory Nazianzen (*Or.* V 3) who underlines that the emperor incited the Jews against Christians through rebuilding the Temple: he cunningly took advantage of the recklessness of the Jews and their aversion to Christians and also masked his evil plan with appearances of kindness towards Judeans. According to Rufinus (*HE* X 38), Julian's attempt to rebuild the Temple was a showdown between the Christian truth (see above) and the arrogance of both the Jews and pagans who wanted to refute this truth. Other Christian authors share Rufinus' view: they claim that Julian wanted to win the Jews over, discredit Christianity and refute Jesus' prophecy about the Temple in Jerusalem (Socrates, *HE* III 20; Sozomen, *HE* V 22; Theodoret, *HE* III 15). Anyway, the failure of Julian's venture disappointed the Jews

<sup>30</sup> The destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and no comments upon its restoration in the New Testament: *Mt.* 24, 1–2; *Mk* 13, 1–2; *Lk.* 21, 5–6. The destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (2 *Kgs.* 25, 1–8) and its restoration (*Jr.* 31, 38–40) are mentioned in the Old Testament. Vogt (1993: 146) suggests that Julian probably intended to prove that this important thesis included in the New Testament (sc. destruction of the Temple and no later restoration) was simply false.

and intensified the hostility of Christians towards them; as regards the emperor, he undertook no further attempts to rebuild the Temple.

Nevertheless, Julian kept on paving the way for pagan worship and manifesting his predilection for *cultus deorum*. Ammianus omits,<sup>31</sup> however, that Julian planned to create and organize the pagan church (Barnes 1998: 157; also Scrofani 2005: 195–216) with its own priesthood hierarchy, which could counterbalance the well-organized Christian Church (Vogt 1993: 144).<sup>32</sup> The historian makes no mention that the emperor intended to oppose the Christian organization with the pagan one – the latter still being widespread in social circles, although it was less popular than the former. He also does not seem to see that Julian was aware that pagan worship needed a strong institutional and moral support as well as common religious doctrine just as the thriving Christian religion had. We also find no mention that, paradoxically, the emperor decided to introduce to the pagan religion the best models from the Christian Church (Bielas 2001: 104; cf. also St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* IV 112).<sup>33</sup> The

<sup>31</sup> Ammianus' omissions may result from a conscious selection of historical material that he intended to include in his work. Moreover, Julian's religious policy is secondary to Ammianus (see below in this paper) – he does not seem to see or understand the importance of this item of Julian's religious programme (Julian's project of hierarchical pagan church based on Christian pattern probably was incomprehensible to the historian, a declared pagan), so he leaves it out. More on Julian's church project cf.: Ceran 1980: 164; Athanassiadi 1992: 185–186; Vogt 1993: 144; Nicholson 1994: 1–10; Barnes 1998: 157; Olszaniec 1999: 108–111; Bielas 2001: 107; Rohrbacher 2002: 251; García-Ruiz 2018: 227; Wiemer 2020: 237, 208 (“a revival of pagan worship” or, in fact, rather “an imitation of Christianity disguised as return to the ancestral religion”). Cf. also Iulianus, *Ep.* 43 [88]; 44[89]; 45 [89b]. More on Julian and Christianity cf. Neri 1985: 117–157.

<sup>32</sup> Julian adapted his own conceptions and those of Maximinus Daia and Iamblichus and many features of the Christian Church (they are discussed above) to create and organize unified and hierarchical pagan church.

<sup>33</sup> Koch (1928: 123–146) suggests that the Christian patterns and the almost pastoral letters that Julian addressed to pagan priests testify to a sizeable influence of Christian doctrine on the emperor's mind (cf. also Olszaniec 1999: 120–121). However, it should be clarified (Olszaniec 1999: 108) that Julian, while formulating religious and moral precepts for pagan priests, was faithful to the Neoplatonic tradition (Porphyrius, *De Abstinencia* II 34). As regards the organization of the pagan clergy, Julian, as Olszaniec (1999: 133) claims, was inspired by the actions of Maximinus Daia who had ruled several decades earlier. It is worth adding to Ammianus' account that Julian's plan to

historian, leaving out these important aspects of the Apostate's religious program, focuses on Julian's religious attitude and his cultic practices.

Thus, according to Ammianus (XXII 14, 3), Julian became a fanatical pagan priest and a true personification of religious zeal (this image of the emperor is also highlighted by Libanios in *Or.* XII 69, 80, 82, in which he focuses on the central role that the cultic practices occupied in Julian's moves – cf. also García-Ruiz 2018: 227). He killed a great number of sacrificial animals (which was an essential element of his piety – Smith 1995: 198) and carried sacred objects himself, but, according to Ammianus (XXII 14, 3), in spite of his religious zeal, he received the allusive nickname “a priest-slaughterer” (*victimarius*)<sup>34</sup> rather than “a priest” (*sacricola*): *itidemque victimarius pro sacricola dicebatur ad crebritatem hostiarum alludentibus multis*. Ammianus, in referring to the contemptuous nickname of the emperor (*victimarius*), implies (*victimarius* vs. *sacricola*) that Julian, the fanatical neo-pagan *pontifex maximus*, actually did not understand the essence of pagan cult as he attempted to manifest his pagan piety by means of excessive bloody sacrifices; the historian also seems to suggest that the reinstatement of such a form of paganism was a difficult and artificial process which was neither accepted nor understood in the days of Julian. One may agree with Olszaniec (1999: 152, 169) that the social climate was not the best for the Apostate's efforts to reinstate the old form of worship. Strongly opposing such moves, Christians were not willing to convert to paganism, while traditional pagans were disgusted at the excessive and fanatical cultic practices. Despite the emperor's encouragement, neither undertook religious activity nor participated in the religious ceremonies organized by him.<sup>35</sup> Julian as an emperor could officially impose (though with difficulty) *cultus deorum* as a state religion, but he was not able to restore either the rank or the function which the pagan worship had

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rebuild the pagan priesthood and institutional hierarchy was much broader than we can read in the *Res Gestae* – cf. Kotula 1965: 76–111; Ceran 1980: 164; Vogt 1993: 144; also St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* IV 111.

<sup>34</sup> This nickname clearly depreciated Julian because *victimarius* usually was a slave or a freedman (he killed animals which were to be sacrificed to the gods).

<sup>35</sup> E.g. XXII 14, 4 (the lack of the faithful; Julian was the only person who sacrificed to Jupiter). In other passages that refer to sacrifices, Ammianus also makes no mention of the emperor being accompanied by the faithful while sacrificing to the gods.



enjoyed in the republican or early imperial (the Principate) period. In the old days, *pontifex maximus* was held in the greatest respect because he was to some measure the personification of dignity and durability of the ancient religious tradition and a guardian of the only state religion, whereas Julian, fanatical *pontifex maximus* of the early 360s AD, laid himself open to ridicule and could expect neither appreciation of his religious zeal nor respect for his religious function.<sup>36</sup> The reinstatement not so much of pagan worship but rather of its former significance and social reach was no longer possible in the days of Julian. Pagan rites, which had been performed with godly diligence and considered an important element of public life and a means of maintaining decency in former days, were unable to regain their former significance in the times of the Apostate. Old pagan religious tradition was considered a normative value by most pagans, but “the ancestral religion meant different things to different people” (Wiemer 2020: 208), because different types of paganism were professed (Marcone 2020: 327). Paganism was an open and constantly changing religious system with no unifying centre, theological concepts and norms of behaviour that might bind all who participated in that religion (Cameron 2011: 26–27; Wiemer 2020: 208) – therefore, every Greco-Roman pagan community worshipped local deities and performed local pagan rituals “in an institutional framework of its own town” (Wiemer 2020: 208). Moreover, Julian’s complex and intellectual neopagan system,<sup>37</sup> which he intended to impose as the official religion, had very little in common with classical paganism – the emperor’s religion actually was a blend of doctrines that required a systematization of theology as well as particular moral teaching (Marcone 2020: 327). In

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<sup>36</sup> *Pontifex maximus* – this religious dignity of Roman emperors pointed to the protective function of the emperor towards all religions in the empire. Therefore, Julian’s overt manifestation of his pagan preferences could be controversial, because the emperor, who held the dignity of *pontifex maximus* and acted so unilaterally at the same time, defined himself explicitly and officially as a pagan priest and an advocate of pagan worship only.

<sup>37</sup> Julian’s Neoplatonic philosophical system was a set of doctrines (cf. De Vita 2011: 91–136) and constituted “a conscious syncretism which integrated Roman tradition into Iamblichian philosophical and religious thought world” (Barnes 1998: 158). Therefore, the emperor seemed to be a Neoplatonic neopagan rather than a restorer of the old traditional pagan worship (Barnes 1998: 156). More on Julian’s philosophical system cf. De Vita 2011: 139–314.

religious conditions in the days of Julian such a neopagan religion could neither be accepted nor understood and was not able to have (or regain) the same social reach as the old paganism had in former days.

Ammianus says that the emperor performed religious rites (XXII 14, 3) and sacrificed to Jupiter (XXII 14, 4), although he was sometimes mocked by the indignant subjects, as happened in Antioch<sup>38</sup> (*ridebatur enim ut Cercops; indignaretur* – XXII 14, 3). Similarly, the fanatical religious zeal of the emperor (Bidez 1940: 34–42) as well as the excess of sacrifices (*sine parsimonia*) were objects of ridicule because they were not understood by Julian’s contemporaries (both pagan and Christian) unwilling to take part in such ceremonies<sup>39</sup> (XXV 4, 17): *innumeras sine parsimonia pecudes mactans, ut aestimaretur, si revertisset de Parthis, boves iam defuturos*. The historian alludes to Julian’s religious zeal<sup>40</sup> and

<sup>38</sup> Religious problems were among the main causes of the emperor’s conflict with the inhabitants of Antioch – cf. Bidez 1940: 298–306; Browning 1978: 183–184; Bowersock 1978: 94–106; Athanassiadi 1992: 201–222. Other reasons of this conflict cf.: Ceran 1980: 179 (food crisis); 182 (military plans connected with the Persian expedition); 190 (excess of sacrifices); Zosimos *NH* III 11, 4–5 (Julian’s wisdom and strict lifestyle). Economic crisis in Antioch during Julian’s reign is discussed in Downey 1951: 312–321; the aspects of Antiochene crisis are also discussed in Marcone 2019 (part. III, ch. XIII “La crisi Antiochena”).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Olszaniec 1999: 166–169. Generally speaking, Julian’s pagan religious policy was not a success in Antioch (Amm. XXII 14, 1–2; Ceran 1980: 179, 190, 210).

<sup>40</sup> Rike (1987: 63) points out that Ammianus, in spite of his disapproval of excessive sacrifices, would have welcomed a legitimate reinstatement of the pagan cult as carried out by Julian, but on one condition: this reinstatement being guided by the key principle of *temperantia* (moderation). In a religious aspect, *temperantia* may be interpreted (on the basis of Ammianus’ remarks) as a truly modest and obedient attitude toward the worship of the gods and a more careful attention to local religious and moral conventions in those regions of the state, where *cultus deorum* was re-established. Julian however, as Ammianus disapprovingly says (cf. also XXII 12, 6: *crebritas nimia*), did not display such moderation in his actions regarding religion. Therefore, Ammianus not so much disapproves of the reinstatement of *cultus deorum*, as finds fault with the religious excess imposed on the subjects in such an ostentatious manner, immoderation accompanying the reestablishment of pagan rituals and sacrifices (XXV 4, 16–17), and the lack of respect for local conventions (e.g. XXII 13, 2) – cf. also Rohrbacher 2002: 190. Considering Ammianus’ religious moderation, Davies’ standpoint (2005: 232), in which he ascribes the undermining of Christianity and the enhancing of traditional rites to the historian, does not seem convincing. It is also worth pointing out that Ammianus does not accuse Julian of interfering in the sphere of his subjects’ morality (despite

his excessive sacrifices in the ironic *exemplum* of Marcus Aurelius who, being a Stoic, was (like Julian) a philosopher-emperor and a zealous follower of pagan worship: *Marci illius similis Caesaris, in quem id accipimus dictum*: οἱ βόες οἱ λευκοὶ Μάρκῳ τῷ Καίσαρι χαίρειν. / ἄν πάλι νικήσης, ἄμμες ἀπωλόμεθα.<sup>41</sup>

It is interesting to point out that the Christian authors also underline Julian's excess in sacrifices and share Ammianus' disapproval of such religious practices. According to Sozomen (*HE* V 1–2), Julian bathed himself so excessively in the blood of sacrificed animals that he underwent a kind of reverse baptism, which was the unquestionable proof of his overt apostasy. St. Gregory Nazianzen (*Or.* IV 52) shares Sozomen's opinion and claims that Julian based his reign on both bloody and bloodless old pagan sacrifices – this was the important aspect of his apostasy. St. Gregory (*Or.* V 22) emphasizes that Julian's religious zeal (and especially the excess of sacrifices and pagan rituals) was distasteful, quirky, and derogatory to the dignity of the Roman emperor.

Although Ammianus mentions Julian's innate piety (*ingenita pietas* – XXIII 5, 8), he admits that the emperor was rightly accused of being superficial and ostentatious in manifesting his *pietas*<sup>42</sup> (*cum ostentationis gratia vehens licenter pro sacerdotibus sacra* – XXII 14, 3). In Ammianus' opinion the emperor was superstitious rather than pious, which he considers one of his faults (*superstitiosus magis quam sacrorum legitimus observator* – XXV 4, 17): the historian deeply disapproves of this perversion of traditional pagan religion (*superstitiosus* vs. *legitimus observator*; *ostentatio*) manifested as ostentation and superstition (in ad-

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the lack of religious *temperantia*) through this ostentatious and excessive imposing of pagan practices upon them. More on Ammianus and Roman paganism – cf. Neri 1985: 71–116.

<sup>41</sup> XXV 4, 17: “White oxen greet Marcus, the emperor: / if you win again, we are lost” (trans. A.M.) – elegiac couplets in Ammianus; their author is unknown. More on similarities between these two emperors – see Hunt 1995: 287–298. Ammianus' disapproval of animal sacrifices could result from his religious attitude: the historian was a follower of the philosophical tradition of Porphyry who condemned animal sacrifices as irrational (perhaps he differed over this issue from Iamblichus, Julian's favourite philosopher) – cf. Barnes 1998: 161.

<sup>42</sup> Ammianus is not consistent here, whereas Libanios (*Or.* XVIII 127–129) emphasizes that Julian's piety was true, honest, deep and that it fully manifested in his behaviour.

dition to the excess of sacrifices ridiculed in XXII 14, 3 and XXV 4, 17 – cf. also Barnes 1998: 160, 162). As regards Julian's ostentatious piety and excess of sacrifices and rites, one may say that they were aspects of his religious propaganda (Olszaniec 1999: 49): they were aimed to consolidate pagans and encourage those Christians who had been forced to convert to Christianity to apostatize openly (the emperor's religious fanaticism was to be an encouragement to apostasy – Ceran 1980: 165). The emperor's excessive religious zeal was also one of the devices serving the main goal of his religious policy, which was a radical renewal of pagan worship (not a renewal of the state and society through it) and its transformation into a strong and wide current able to reach as many social circles as possible. Through this ostentatious manifestation of his *pietas erga deos* (sc. sacrifices to the gods, ceremonies, carrying sacred objects) Julian presented himself as a guardian of pagan orthodoxy (Vogt 1993: 144), but such behaviour was a form of anachronism: Julian tried to imitate the emperors of the early imperial period who had meticulously obeyed the requirements of the old religious tradition (Browning 1978: 130; Bowder 1978: 116–118). St. Gregory Nazianzen (*Or.* IV 114–119; V 22) regards the image of the pagan faith created by Julian as a caricature of theology based on noisy, senseless, immoral and purely external ostentation, in contrast to the Christian faith focused on the human soul and everything which is understood in a spiritual way – thanks to which Christianity serves to better bring up and improve the morals of people, whereas the proper sense of the pagan faith is not worthy of belief.

Emphasis on Julian's position as a priest emperor and a philosopher emperor<sup>43</sup> was also served by his long discussions with those philosophers who were his spiritual guides. Ammianus says that Maximus of Ephesus, a Neoplatonic philosopher and Julian's old teacher, was the emperor's favourite (Bowersock 1978: 65; Bowder 1978: 114; Olszaniec 1999: 88–92). In Ammianus' account (XXII 7, 3), we can read about Julian's enthusiastic and ostentatious reception of Maximus in the *curia* in Constantinople:<sup>44</sup> *exsiluit indecore et, qui esset, oblitus effuso cursu*

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Socrates *HE* III 1, 43–48 (sceptical attitude towards Julian's acting in accordance with true philosophy).

<sup>44</sup> Cf. similarly Libanios, *Epitaphios* 155–156; also *Or.* XVIII 155. Rike (1987: 62) points out that Ammianus (XXII 7, 4), quoting Cicero's words (*Cic., Arch.* 11, 26)

*a vestibulo longe progressus exosculatum susceptumque reverenter secum induxit per ostentationem intempestivam.* According to Ammianus (XXV 3, 23), Maximus (with another Neoplatonic philosopher, Priscus) accompanied Julian during the Persian campaign and was with the emperor in the final moments of his life, after the tragic end of the Battle of Ctesiphon<sup>45</sup>: *quibus ideo iam silentibus ipse cum Maximo et Prisco philosophis super animorum sublimitate perplexius disputans.*

Referring to Julian's religious policy, Ammianus (XXV 4, 20; XXII 10, 7) says that the emperor announced the edict wherein Christians were excluded from many positions which they could have obtained if they had converted from Christianity to paganism. The historian does not mention the emperor's intentions but, in fact, it was the next step to discriminate the followers of the Christian faith. In Julian's opinion, Christians, who were not the followers of *cultus deorum*, could not teach at schools. Julian underlined in his circular letter (*Ep.* 61) that it was highly inappropriate<sup>46</sup> for people who did not believe in the gods to teach literature praising, among others, pagan deities. The emperor's accusation was therefore clearly religious and not moral, although Julian officially put forward his argument under the pretext of maintaining good morals and craftily referred to teachers' honesty. The emperor explained that what a teacher taught had to agree with what he himself thought; otherwise he could not educate young people well. So, those who wanted to teach, should do so in accordance with their beliefs and, in addition, they should be of good character. The emperor argued that Christian teachers (including grammarians, rhetoricians and sophists) who taught the classics (e.g., Homer, Hesiod, Thucydides, Demosthenes) had to convert from Christianity to paganism to prove that they believed in what the

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in his commentary on Julian's behaviour towards Maximus (XXII 7, 3), shows his own critical attitude towards Julian's excessive respect for philosophers (especially for Maximus, whose position, as the scholar points out, was dominant – cf. Rike 1987: 77), and their excessive influence on the emperor (Barnes 1998: 160). More on Maximus, Priscus, and their influence on Julian's philosophical system cf. De Vita 2011: 139–314.

<sup>45</sup> More on Julian's Persian expedition and "la catastrofe giuliana" in the *Res Gestae* cf. Neri 1984: 35–45.

<sup>46</sup> Julian, by announcing this school law, demanded explicitness and clarity of Christian teachers' attitudes. The emperor claimed that the teachers who professed Christianity and yet taught about authors inspired by pagan faith, were dishonest and hypocritical (also: Julianus, *Ep.* 42) – cf. Bielas 2001: 109.

authors they discussed said about the gods; otherwise, they could not teach students at schools but should deal with the faithful in Christian churches (Ceran 1980: 150–151). In this way, Christian teachers were forbidden to teach grammar and rhetoric at high schools.<sup>47</sup>

Ammianus (XXV 4, 20–21) disapproves of Julian's school law and considers it cruel and unacceptable: *erat illud inclemens, quod docere vetuit magistros rhetoricos et grammaticos Christianos, ni transissent ad numinum cultum. illud quoque itidem parum ferendum*. In Ammianus' mind, the emperor's school law, which forbade Christians to teach, was "a cruel move" (*inclemens*) that "cast a shadow over the glorious career of the emperor" (*obnubilaret gloriarum multiplices cursus* – XXII 10, 6) and "deserved eternal silence" (*obruendum perenni silentio, quod arcebat docere magistros rhetoricos et grammaticos ritus Christiani cultores* – XXII 10, 7). Although Ammianus strongly criticizes Julian's action (like the Christian authors mentioned below) and regards it as a stain on his career, he omits the emperor's intentions and the main goal of his strategy. It has been rightly emphasized by present-day scholars (Hardy 1968: 131–143; Banchich 1993: 5–14) that Julian's school law, which forbade Christian teachers from teaching at schools, was a severe blow striking at one of the laws and privileges the Church had managed to secure for itself since its establishment.

The opinions of Christian authors on Julian's school law are similar in tone. Sozomen (*HE* V 18, 4) regards the Apostate's law as an example of a refined and very prejudicial (though not openly persecutory) policy toward Christians. Rufinus (*HE* X 33) claims that the emperor's decree was a violent, though actually not direct, attack upon Christians. St. Gregory Nazianzen (*Or.* IV 101) regards this school law as an evidence of

<sup>47</sup> Julian's school law (school edict) was announced on 13 June 362 AD: the law was aimed at forbidding Christian teachers from teaching (especially classical literature) at schools (cf. Vogt 1993: 145), whereas Christian students were allowed to study – cf. more in Marcone 2019 (part III, ch. XII "La legge sulla scuola"). Nevertheless, Christian authors misinterpret the emperor's edict: they claim that Christian students were excluded from education and that the study of literature was forbidden to them (Socrates, *HE* III 12, 16; Sozomen, *HE* V 18; Theodoret, *HE* III 4; Rufinus, *HE* I 32; X 33) – cf. Rohrbacher (2002: 254). In this situation, religious tolerance was maintained, but only theoretically, because Julian's school law actually initiated a new wave of discrimination against Christians and undoubtedly was an anti-Christian measure (more cf. Vössing 2020: 172–206).

the reckless emperor's tomfoolery and stupidity; he also blames Julian for groundlessly excluding Christians from education that included teaching and studying literature (poetry and rhetoric) and Greek culture. According to St. Gregory (*Or.* IV 103–108), education is not the property of the emperor but it is a common value for all: everyone has a right to enjoy it regardless of his religious beliefs; in this sense, education builds a bond of community between people that unites them in love (*Or.* IV 106). All actions that limit the freedom of education and prevent people from enjoying it, destroy this bond and do not allow individuals to reach a higher standard of living. St. Gregory (*Or.* IV 101), as a Christian, considers Julian's school law to be a groundless and unheard of move caused by the emperor's malice and perfidy as well as by the pagan demons which he was to serve. Anyway, it should be noted (Downey 1957–1958: 97–103; Ceran 1980: 156) that Julian's school law certainly was a new and unprecedented development in the educational sphere: it was the first indication of the imperial authorities' interference in the field of education, where hitherto full freedom had been guaranteed to everyone.

Ammianus does not mention,<sup>48</sup> however, that Christians were also excluded from major positions in the army – which was a form of covert and subtle persecution (Rufinus, *HE* X 33; St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* IV 64–65). The emperor claimed that these men, according to the Gospel, were not allowed to use a sword (that is, to kill others; indeed, they should love their enemies), hence, they did not belong in the army (Vogt 1993: 145). Therefore, Christians were excluded from the circle of the emperor's courtiers and especially from the ranks of his bodyguards (St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* IV 63), while Christian symbols disappeared from military banners<sup>49</sup> (St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* IV 66; cf.

<sup>48</sup> In his conscious selection of historical material, Ammianus omits those facts that might be contrary to his own image of Julian, whom the historian considers a model and personification of *princeps civilis* and whose rule he regards as a model of imperial power (*civile iustumque imperium*) based on justice and *civilitas*, and separate from the religious sphere of the emperor's activity. Excluding Christians from the army actually testified to the influence of Julian's religious policy on the social sphere of his rule and was simply unjust – therefore, as one may conclude, it was omitted by the historian.

<sup>49</sup> This refers mainly to the removal of *labarum* (a banner carried before the army) with the symbol of the Christian cross. According to Julian's order, the former pagan military symbols were reintroduced to the army.

also Olszaniec 1999: 146–150). The emperor appointed only pagans to serve as high officers in the army – he tried to win them over through honours and rewards in order to gain trusted and helpful men who could spread paganism within the army; soldiers were won over by taking advantage of their credulity and submission to the will of the emperor (cf. St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* IV 64; Socrates, *HE* III 13; Rufinus, *HE* I 32; Theodoret, *HE* III 3).

Ammianus also leaves out the fact<sup>50</sup> that Christians were excluded from major positions in the imperial bureaucracy (cf. Rufinus, *HE* X 33). Sozomen (*HE* V 8; 15, 13–14) and Theodoret (*HE* III 6, 5; 7, 11, 15, 18) mention that only Julian's subordinates were appointed to these vacant positions: these men persecuted Christians violently, in accordance with the hidden intentions of the emperor (cf. also Socrates, *HE* III 14). St. Gregory Nazianzen (*Or.* V 19) regards them as the most cruel and impious men who received their positions in bureaucracy as rewards for converting from their religion; he also adds that in such cases the emperor did not apply any consequences and did not punish these persecutors. The emperor also failed to prevent violent attacks carried out by pagans upon Christians or their Christian superiors in cities. For example, he applied no severe consequences after he had learnt of murders committed by pagans in Alexandria<sup>51</sup> (XXII 11, 3–11). Defending his favourite emperor (XXII 11, 11), as one may suppose, Ammianus says that Julian, having been informed of these murders, wanted to punish those guilty of the unlawful killings, but his advisers persuaded him to ease punishment and show his forgiveness; in consequence, the emperor announced an appropriate edict in which he strongly condemned such

<sup>50</sup> This move by the emperor testified to the effects of Julian's religious policies on the social and political sphere of his rule, and it was not just – therefore it was contrary to Ammianus' image of Julian (*princeps civilis*) and his righteous rule (*imperium iustum*) and, as one may conclude, that is why it was omitted by the historian. It is also worth noticing that Ammianus' comment (XXII 11, 3–11) on Julian's behaviour is clearly apologetic (XXII 11, 11).

<sup>51</sup> These anti-Christian disturbances broke out in Alexandria on 24 December 361 AD at the news of Julian coming to the throne.



violent attacks and warned that the most severe punishments would be applied if similar deeds were ever to occur in future.<sup>52</sup>

Ammianus also omits<sup>53</sup> to mention that Christians were consistently excluded from participation in public life: they were especially forbidden to manage provinces as governors. Rufinus (*HE* I 32) and Socrates (*HE* III 13) point out that the emperor explained that his decisions (as in the case of the military) were motivated by religious precepts, according to which Christians were forbidden to kill not only by using a sword but also by pronouncing death sentences in court. This “evasive demagogy” (Ceran 1980: 165) was also Julian’s method of persecuting Christians consistently and covertly (cf. also Hunt 1993: 108–113).<sup>54</sup>

However, according to Ammianus, there was no relationship between the reinstatement of *cultus deorum* (sc. the emperor’s anti-Christian policy) and the moral renewal of society or the emperor’s secular policy aimed at the restoration and strengthening of the state (Rike 1987: 75).<sup>55</sup> There are no references to such a relationship in the Christian sources, either. Rufinus (*HE*) is not interested in Julian’s secular policy; Sozomen completely removes any reference to the emperor’s secular actions from his *Ecclesiastical History* – the author focuses merely on Julian’s religious policy and his beliefs. Only Socrates (*HE* III 1, 48–60) briefly refers to the emperor’s secular policies and attempts to evaluate them. St. Gregory Nazianzen separates his evaluation of Julian’s reign from

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<sup>52</sup> Socrates (*HE* III 3) gives a similar account of Julian’s behaviour. Sozomen (*HE* V 9, 11–13) and Theodoret (*HE* III 7, 11; 15; 18) mention several situations in which pagans, following the emperor’s behaviour and taking advantage of his religious policy (the reinstatement of paganism), persecuted Christians (often violently) and did not suffer any consequences. Violence against Christians during Julian’s reign: cf. Teitler 2014: 76–89.

<sup>53</sup> This action of Julian also testifies (like the ones mentioned above) to the interference of his religious agenda in the field of his secular policies. It was unjust on the part of the Apostate and contrary to Ammianus’ image of his favourite emperor (*princeps civilis*) and his righteous rule, so it was omitted by the historian.

<sup>54</sup> More on Julian’s anti-Christian policy: cf. also in Marcone 2019 (part. IV, ch. II “La politica antichristiana”).

<sup>55</sup> It is worth noticing that Ammianus clearly separates *religio* (sc. pagan cult and rituals) from *ethos* (sc. moral virtues and good conduct) – the historian presents the same standpoint in his account of Julian’s actions, in which the personal *religio* of the emperor is not a means of regenerating social and state *ethos*.

his own opinions on the emperor's religious policy and makes no references to the relationship between these two spheres of Julian's activity. St. Gregory (*Or.* IV 74–75) briefly refers to the Apostate's secular actions and says (with a measure of irony and sarcasm) that Julian, “the best and the brightest head of state,” introduced a system of government free from unrest and war (“the golden age”);<sup>56</sup> the author mostly focuses on criticizing the emperor for not being able to estimate properly the position of the Christian Church during his reign and accuses him of a religious myopia that made him unable to see the strength and consolidating function of Christianity as well as to foresee the threat of removing it and introducing the old *cultus deorum*.

Julian, as has been rightly pointed out (Olszaniec 1999: 142; Rohrbacher 2002: 250), sought to re-establish pagan religion in the empire's social life. Therefore, there was no relationship between the Apostate's religious policy (*religio*) and the ethical side of his imperial power based on his generosity (*liberalitas*) and benignity (*benignitas*).<sup>57</sup> Ammianus underlines (e.g., XXV 4, 1) that these two virtues were the basis of the civil aspect of Julian's power (sc. his civil *ethos*), which he had over both pagan and Christian citizens regardless of their religious beliefs. Julian, as Ammianus emphasizes (XXV 3, 20), was “an honest son of the state” (*alumnus rei publicae frugi*), which means that despite his personal predilection for *cultus deorum* he felt responsible for the power of the state and the well-being of all of its inhabitants, regardless of their religion, although the reinstatement of paganism and the overt battle against Christianity became the main goal of his undertakings. The restoration of state authority by means of “deliberately archaizing” (Rohrbacher 2002: 261)<sup>58</sup> methods was also connected with the reinstatement

<sup>56</sup> St. Gregory in *Or.* V 19–23 openly stigmatizes Julian's rule as “power turned into tyranny,” and paints a subjective, prejudicially exaggerated and grotesque portrait of the emperor (*Or.* V 23) – on the contrary, Ammianus regards Julian as a good and legitimate ruler whose imperial authority is good for citizens and just.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. XXV 4, 1; 8; 15. Julian influences his subjects through his *ethos* (not *religio*): the emperor's *ethos* is expected to restore and maintain a proper *ethos* of society and the state during his reign. This is because the function of the emperor in the state is not only political (sc. historical) but also moral (sc. ethical, not religious) as well – cf. Mleczek 2018: 89.

<sup>58</sup> Ceran (1980: 118) says that Julian aimed at the *renovatio imperii* and sought to return to the times preceding the previous two centuries. That is why he strove to re-

of paganism; nevertheless, this process did not influence the nature of Julian's imperial rule. Therefore, one may say that his rule was actually non-religious in its essence: it was free from his religious likes and dislikes, separate from his personal predilection for the pagan faith and based only on Julian's virtues (that is, on his high moral code, which constituted the emperor's moral *ethos*).<sup>59</sup> Quoting Julian's words from his last speech<sup>60</sup> (XXV 3, 18), Ammianus states that the categorical rejection of legal and moral abuse (*licentia*) and the building of imperial power upon justice (*iustitia*) and clemency (*tranquilliora sc. clementia*) (Mleczek 2018: 68–69) constitute the means for the restoring and maintaining of a good condition of the state and a high moral level of its society. The historian adds that it is also very important to subordinate imperial rule to its sole purpose, which is the benefit and welfare of all people in the state (*oboedientium commodum et salus sc. liberalitas and benignitas*): *reputans autem iusti esse finem imperii oboedientium commodum et salutem ad tranquilliora semper [...] propensior fui licentiam omnem actibus meis exterminans, rerum corruptricem et morum*. One may conclude, from Julian's words, that *licentia* (an unjust and degenerated imperial power without any restrictions and without any legal and moral norms – Mleczek 2018: 127–182), and not the Christian religion, ruins the good condition of the state and lowers the moral level of its citizens (*licentia rerum corruptrix and morum*). Therefore, the rejection of *licentia* and the maintaining of *imperium iustum* (a just imperial power) (Mleczek 2018: 73–75; 97–106), and not the reinstatement of

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establish paganism; this pro-pagan policy was also connected with the emperor's efforts to revive republican customs from the time of the Antonines (cf. Ceran 1980: 101).

<sup>59</sup> In this moral code (briefly presented in XXV 4, 1), Ammianus refers to the emperor's *ethos*, not to his *religio* (the divorce between the moral and religious sphere is clear): *virtutes quattuor praecipuae, temperantia, prudentia, iustitia, fortitudo eisque accedentes extrinsecus aliae, scientia rei militaris, auctoritas, felicitas atque liberalitas* – therefore, as one may conclude from Ammianus' definition, *pietas erga deos* (piety), that is, *religio*, does not belong to this moral code – cf. Mleczek 2018: 62–75, 97–106.

<sup>60</sup> The speech of dying Julian (XXV 3, 15–21) shows his complete alienation from the gods and the culminating divorce between *ethos* and *nomos* – cf. Rike 1987: 61. Julian's *ethos* (especially *felicitas* as the result of mutual dependence of *fortuna*, *virtus* and *consilia bona*) – cf. Brodka 2009: 127–129.

*cultus deorum*, make it possible to improve the morals of citizens and the condition of the state itself.

When referring to the lawful conduct of his favourite ruler, Ammianus emphasizes (XXII 10, 2) that Julian's religious beliefs (sc. sympathy for pagans and antipathy towards Christians) never distracted him from truth and justice, that is, they never influenced his moral, civil and political *ethos*. Although the emperor knew the religious beliefs of parties in a suit, he did not take this into account while passing fair and truthful sentences in the court: *quid quisque iurgantium coleret, tempore alieno interrogans, tamen nulla eius definitio litis a vero dissonans reperitur nec argui umquam potuit ob religionem vel quodcumque aliud ab aequitatis recto tramite deviasse*. The historian points out that Julian's ability "to distinguish circumstances and people" (*rerum et hominum distinctio* – XXV 4, 8) was the important aspect of his justice, but it should be underlined that this ability was not connected with any tendency to differentiate between people on the basis of their religion (the emperor's antipathy towards Christians basically did not result in his departure from the letter of the law in their cases – Ceran 1980: 121). Julian's religious policy was (at least in the light of his programme) just and tolerant and, as we have pointed out above, was separate from the legal, civil and moral aspects of his rule. Therefore, as Ammianus shows in his account, there was no relationship between the religious policies of the emperor and the lawful nature of his rule (cf. also epigraphy – Athanassiadi 1992: 111). This means that Julian did not abuse his religious practices to influence his subjects or exert pressure on them in the legal, moral and civil spheres.<sup>61</sup> Ammianus, as it emerges from his *Res Gestae*, is completely indifferent to the religious aspect of imperial authority (Blockley 1975: 84; Matthews 1989: 113–114), so *religio* is not relevant to any estimation of the emperor and his rule.

When referring to the nature of Julian's rule, Więckowski (1930: 100–101; cf. also Slootjers 2006) says that the majority of his edicts were not connected with his religious policy and were aimed at the welfare of

<sup>61</sup> Ammianus, however, does not seem to see (or understand) that Julian's school law actually testified to the influence of the emperor's religious policy on the social and political sphere of his rule. The historian, as one may conclude from his account, does not seem to see the relationship between these facts, although he disapproves of this law and openly criticizes it (XXII 10, 7; XXV 4, 20 – see above).

both pagans and Christians: with both of them equally benefiting from a more flexible justice system than before, and a more even distribution of public financial burden between the various social layers. According to Ceran (1980: 90), upon gaining sole power, Julian began to work (like earlier in Gaul, where he proved to be a wise administrator, a fair judge and an implacable enemy of corruption) towards the improvement of the administration and judiciary (Amm. XXII 10, 7 – *iura quaedam correxit in melius*) and the well-being of the Empire's provincial inhabitants, and towards rising many cities to greatness (let us recall that such a secular policy accompanied the reinstatement of *cultus deorum*). Therefore, we can say that, according to Ammianus, the rule of law (sc. the emperor's political *ethos*), by which the historian understands the rejection of *licentia* (XXV 3, 18) and the basing of imperial power on justice (Mleczek 2018: 98–106), is an effective means to strengthen the condition of the state and to restore its power; promoting Neoplatonism and *cultus deorum* (sc. *religio*) is not a method and plays no role in this process. Ceran (1980: 103) explains that, as regards Julian, his justice should be understood as improving the rule of law in the state and the well-being of subjects through fair and reasonable administrative, judicial and tax policies, and his fight against corruption; also Więckowski (1930: 100–101) claims that Julian wanted to be a benefactor to his subjects by means of his imperial power.

Indeed, Ammianus, in his account of Julian's generosity (*liberalitas*), enumerates (XXV 4, 15) the imposing of extremely low taxes,<sup>62</sup> resignation from crown tax, equality in disputes between the tax authorities and private individuals and cancellation of long-term debts; in addition to this, the emperor never sought to increase his own wealth. Other authors share Ammianus' opinion on Julian's *liberalitas*. St. Gregory Nazianzen (*Or.* IV 75) approves of the tax reductions, the good selection of officials, the fight against thieves and the emperor's concern for the needs of his subjects. Zosimos (*NH* III 11, 3; 5) mentions the emperor's concern for cities (especially Antioch and his home town of Constantinople); Eutropius (*Brev.* X 16) mentions Julian's generous and just

<sup>62</sup> Julian's support for low taxation, which was an element of his financial policy, was an important aspect of his generosity (*liberalitas*) and resulted from a lack of greediness (*avaritia*) – according to Ammianus, the lack of *avaritia* was a very important virtue of the emperor – cf. Matthews 1989: 239–241; Mleczek 2018: 73–75 (*liberalitas*).

behaviour towards the inhabitants of the provinces, reductions in taxes and his moderate concern for the state treasury. Eutropius, like Ammianus, also underlines (*Brev.* X 16) that the emperor's behaviour towards everyone, regardless of his religious beliefs, was polite and based on *civilitas*<sup>63</sup> (*civilis in cunctos*). Most of these measures on the part of Julian, as Schmidt-Hofner (2020: 124–171) notices, were generally routine imperial responses to the needs of the subjects and the state itself (so the emperor as a reformer and lawgiver was not so innovative and proactive as in the religious area); these steps, as he implies, might have been utilized by Julian as propaganda aimed to convey an image of himself as a good ruler. Nevertheless, as the scholar underlines, Julian really was communicative towards his subjects. Anyway, in his account primarily focused on Julian's virtues and the lawful nature of his imperial power (the emperor's religious policy and beliefs are secondary to him – Matthews 1989: 114), Ammianus points out (XXV 3, 17–18) that the emperor's just rule based on his *civilitas* (*civile iustumque imperium*), that is, his political and civil *ethos*, and not his religion (*religio*), paves the way for political and moral revival because the power of the state is built by the *potestas* (just imperial power) of its ruler, not by his religion (*cultus deorum*).

One may conclude, from Ammianus' account, that Julian's secular policy was quite separate – in the political and civil sphere – from his religious programme. The emperor, an eager lover, propagator and renovator of *cultus deorum*, was an impartial, fair and moderate ruler in all the spheres of public life of the day (*civilia moderatius regens* – XXV 3, 17).<sup>64</sup> Ceran (1980: 92) gives a convincing explanation of this characteristic of Julian's rule and his secular policy. The scholar argues that the emperor aimed to break with the autocratic conception of the empire and the autocratic style of rule (sc. the “sacralization” of the emperor who in the Dominate period, according to Diocletian's innovation, was elevated to divine status: the emperor = *dominus ac deus*) and draw from

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Neri 1984: 4, 8 (*civilitas*).

<sup>64</sup> One should pay attention to the fact that this is Ammianus' version – it results from a conscious selection of historical material and is in accordance with the historian's model of Julian and his rule (*princeps civilis et legitimus* – *civile iustumque imperium*). Therefore, such an image of the Apostate and his secular policy may not necessarily reflect the real situation.

the political forms of the Roman republican period; according to which, imperial rule fits in with the concept of magistracy and has the rank of the highest and most prestigious public office in the state. These actions, as Ceran (1980: 92, 94–95) argues, resulted in the need to revive the autonomy of cities (also Dagron 1974: 73; Renucci 2000) – on the one hand, this process was connected with the revival of paganism and, on the other hand, with a fight against Christianity, whose strength did not seem to be appreciated by the emperor (this being a serious mistake in his religious policy). It is noteworthy that, in the light of such a secular policy, for Julian, his anti-Christian actions were not a means of exercising authority in a just manner, while his Neoplatonic religious orientation was not a method of effecting a moral regeneration of society. The emperor's religious policy was connected with his undertakings in other spheres of public life but it did not influence them. In his final speech (XXV 3, 17–18), Julian clearly pointed out to two factors that enabled him to restore and maintain the good moral and political condition of the state and to govern in a just manner. These factors enabled him to deserve the honourable title of a good and legitimate ruler (*princeps civilis et legitimus*) in Ammianus (Mleczek 2018: 62–75, 97–106) and to be esteemed also by modern scholars (Stein 1928: 263; Piganiol 1947: 145; Ceran 1980: 102–103).<sup>65</sup>

As we pointed out above, the rejection of lawlessness while governing in a just way in accordance with *civilitas* and aiming at the benefit and good of one's subjects constituted one of these factors. The other was the impeccable moral conduct of the emperor (moral *ethos*) who kept his spirit flawless (*animum immaculatum conservavi* – XXV 3, 17) and, as Ammianus says, zealously cultivated all his virtues to become a model ruler for his subjects<sup>66</sup> (XXV 4, 1): *cum enim sint, [...] virtutes*

<sup>65</sup> Rohrbacher (2002: 272–273), however, seems to be rather sceptical about the Apostate's rule.

<sup>66</sup> The belief in the moral function of the emperor within the state was common in the imperial period: Ammianus does not depart from this tendency in his account. It should be noted that the nature of Julian's rule is, in Ammianus' view, to some extent a conception of ideal imperial power (the historian, however, in spite of this idealization, points out some of Julian's mistakes: e.g., XXV 4, 16–21). Fontaine (1978: 31–65) points out that Ammianus in his account, which is not devoid of a clear idealization of Julian, presents him also as a man of many dilemmas, anxieties, fluctuations of mood

*quattuor praecipuae, temperantia, prudentia, iustitia, fortitudo eisque accedentes extrinsecus aliae, scientia rei militaris, auctoritas, felicitas atque liberalitas, intento studio coluit omnes ut singulas.* Therefore, according to Ammianus, the emperor's religious beliefs (*religio*) was a side and separate factor that bore no relation to his good conduct and the way he exercised power over his subjects. Ammianus also implies that the emperor's *religio* is not tantamount to his good moral conduct (*ethos*) and should not be used for either covering-up and justifying his offences or raising the value of his glorious deeds within the public forum.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, one may conclude from Ammianus' perception of the problem of religion and morality in the *Res Gestae* that *cultus deorum* and the emperor's philosophical and religious beliefs neither helped nor hindered Julian's efforts to govern the state in accordance with justice and *civilitas*. The Apostate's concept to rule as a philosopher emperor<sup>68</sup> was, as one points out (Rohrbacher 2002: 261; García-Ruiz 2018: 222–223), the only indication of the relationship between the religious and socio-political aspects of his activity in public life.

Ammianus emphasizes that the reinstatement of rituals connected with *cultus deorum*, especially the sacrificing of animals to the gods, sometimes resulted in bad moral attitudes (so it could not be a means for maintaining decency). The historian mentions, for example, the moral degeneration of

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and with a tendency to succumb to emotions; this portrait of the ruler composed of both idealized and fully human elements is, according to the scholar, one of the historian's greatest achievements.

<sup>67</sup> The actions of Constantius II, Valentinian and Valens are examples of the separate perception of *religio* and *ethos* in Ammianus. These emperors, although being Christians, committed the worst legal and moral abuse degenerating their imperial power into *licentia* and, in consequence of their bad conduct, became bad rulers (*principes mali*) – cf. Mleczek 2018: 106–194.

<sup>68</sup> Socrates (*HE* III 1, 56), in his commentary on the relationship between philosophy and Julian's behaviour, concludes that true philosophy and imperial power cannot coexist and are impossible to be combined in the actions of the ruler. Ammianus makes no comments upon this relationship; he underlines that Julian sincerely concerned himself with philosophical doctrines and combined his philosophical studies with an honest fulfilment of his state duties (XVI 5, 5–6). St. Gregory Nazianzen (*Or.* IV 74; 91) points out a clear coexistence of philosophy and imperial power in Julian's activity in the public forum, but he does not comment upon the possibility of combining them in the activities of the emperor.



soldiers in Julian's army that was to participate in the Persian military expedition (XXII 12, 6). Ammianus disapprovingly says (XXII 12, 6) that the soldiers gorged on sacrificial meat, drank and neglected the rules of strict military discipline during these shameful feasts. The army succumbed to gluttony, drunkenness, sloth and demoralization (Mleczek 2018: 362–363) instead of solidifying its strength and improving its military skills. In this way, rituals connected with *cultus deorum* (animal sacrifices) tainted the moral condition of the troops instead of improving it. Ammianus disapproves of the excess of ceremonies, rituals and sacrifices connected with *cultus deorum*. The historian says (XXII 12, 7) that all these religious rituals were extremely expensive and, moreover, contributed to the increase in the number of supposed diviners who benefited from divine practices and prophecies and drew fairly dark profits from their false profession. Rike (1987: 53; also Barnes 1998: 161) claims that the historian provides here (XXII 12, 6–7) three arguments against such a radical restoration of the old rituals (let us add: besides the moral degeneration mentioned above): the excessive number of Julian's sacrifices and the unprecedented cost burden as well as the limitless and lawless proliferation of diviners who were only really counterfeiters and could not be genuinely regarded as priests of the old cult.

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To sum up, in the light of Ammianus' account (as discussed above), accentuating the role played by pagan religion in the secular policies of the Apostate seems unfounded. Although in his account regarding Julian's religious policy, Ammianus omits some of the facts and sometimes leaves out the emperor's intentions or discusses them too superficially (see above), he clearly points out, however, that the emperor's religious programme and undertakings were connected with neither the purpose nor the manner in which he exercised power over his subjects. In Ammianus' opinion, Julian's religious and secular policies belonged to two separate spheres of his activity in the public forum. The emperor's religious position was of personal, not of political nature (Marcone 2020: 326). The Apostate's death was therefore tantamount to the fall of his attempts to re-establish paganism (Więckowski 1937: 27; Bielas 2001: 173) and not to renew the state or the morals of society by means of *cultus deorum*. Julian's efforts to revive the old pagan form of worship took place when

Christianity was already a dynamic and progressive force in comparison with still widespread paganism. Therefore, the religious climate that accompanied Julian's religious activity was different from that of the republican or early imperial (the Principate) period (in which paganism was the only and highly respected state religion). The reinstatement of pagan worship and rituals was an artificial attempt to revive a moribund cult no longer able to regain its former significance in state and public life, as it had once in olden days. One may conclude, from Ammianus' account (XXV 3, 17–18; XXI 2, 4–5), that Julian, as a sober and attentive observer, was aware of this religious situation, although he seemed not to see (or understand) that it was a consequence of the strong position of Christianity (actually marginalized in the *Res Gestae* and regarded as just another cult by Ammianus – see Davies 2005: 226–286), which was now basically impossible to be removed completely (or, at least, to be effectively weakened). In late antiquity, *cultus deorum*, although imposed by the emperor as officially approved (like Christianity) and as such clearly a privileged religion, was unable to regain its former authority, function and its ability to exert influence on the whole society. Therefore, pagan worship could no longer be a means of maintaining decency of such religiously diverse subjects. Roman society was heading for a new era.<sup>69</sup> in the days of Julian, *cultus deorum* was slowly becoming merely a religious throwback and one of the elements and symbols of an ancient pagan Roman tradition that was understood and preserved by increasingly less numerous circles of the faithful (mainly the narrow circle of the senatorial aristocracy in Rome who was strongly associated with the old pagan Roman tradition; cf. also Curran 2000). Julian probably knew that, in his day, the religious situation was based on “an unstable balance” (Brown-

<sup>69</sup> The establishment of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire and the exclusion of pagan cult from public life were the accomplishments of Theodosius I the Great (the emperor in the East: 378–395) and Gratian (the emperor in the West: 375–383). In 379 AD, emperor Gratian resigned his religious function as *pontifex maximus*, and emperor Theodosius did not accept this dignity at all. Therefore, in 379 AD, the culminating divorce between the empire and the old pagan religion took place, and in 381 AD Christianity (sc. Catholicism) was announced as a state religion – the Catholic Church was thus officially recognised as the basis of the state, while heretics and pagans were excluded from holding offices and positions in public life. These anti-pagan actions took place about eighteen years after Julian's death (363 AD), so relatively soon after his radical attempts to re-establish the pagan *cultus deorum*.

ing 1978: 159; Olszaniec 1999: 34–39) between a dynamic, possessive and even fanatical Christian faith and a still widespread, though inert, pagan cult (Więckowski 1937: 32). Even the events in Antioch (Ceran 1980: 179–180, 190) and also in other cities of the Empire showed that the radical reinstatement of the pagan cult, given such religious conditions, was impossible (regardless of the methods and means adopted) due to the lack of a proper social basis and acceptance; moreover, it met with the reluctance of Christians and the indifference or reserve of pagans (Olszaniec 1999: 168–169, 173–174). In such a situation, *cultus deorum* could only be the personal choice of the emperor, who “followed the voice of his internal vocation to be faithful to the gods who guarded the Roman Empire” (Bidez 1940: 93–101; Bielas 2001: 206), but it could not be an effective means of exerting influence on social and political life. In fact, Julian’s anti-Christian policies only had a polarizing effect on Christian-pagan relations (Drake 2000: 436; Stark 2006: 196; Cameron 2011: 34), and his intended “pagan revival” had no immediate or perceptible effect on imperial policy (Cameron 2011: 34). Ammianus points out in the *Res Gestae* that in the world of the gradual vanishing of the elements of ancient culture and the strengthening of the Christian faith (despite the internal difficulties in the Christian Church itself – Amm. XXII 5, 3–4; Ceran 1980: 127–128, 186–189; Rohrbacher 2002: 192–202), the emperor’s conduct based on justice and on strict accordance with the requirements of law as well as his high morals based on virtues are proper measures for the moral renewal of such a diverse and religiously unstable society. Through Julian’s behaviour, Ammianus demonstrates that the political, civil and moral *ethos* of the emperor (that is, the relationship between *princeps civilis et legitimus* and *civile iustumque imperium*), which is separate from his *religio*, is the unchanging and unquestionable foundation of the welfare of the state and the basis of the good moral condition of society;<sup>70</sup> it is also a reliable and effective means to maintain them. And, as Ammianus points out in his *Res Gestae*, this happens even in the days of great religious change and conflict between two very contrasting religions such as the moribund pagan *cultus deorum* and increasingly

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<sup>70</sup> According to Ammianus, the relationship between *princeps legitimus* and *civile iustumque imperium* is inseparable. This relationship is a solid foundation of the state and a safe support for citizens: Ammianus clearly separates the moral and political spheres of the emperor’s activity from his religious orientation – cf. Młeczek 2018: 106.

growing Christianity which, as the nearest future was to show, stood one step away from inevitable victory. But it should be stressed that Ammianus' image of Julian (*princeps civilis*) and his rule (*civile iustumque imperium*) presented in the *Res Gestae* is – to some extent – the historian's literary creation of his favourite emperor (who actually was a good ruler) and his secular policy. Such an almost ideal image of the Apostate and his rule results from a conscious selection of historical material and Ammianus' tendency to create and present his model of *princeps civilis* who righteously exercises his power based on *civilitas* and thus renews<sup>71</sup> both the Roman state and the morals of his subjects.

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. Mleczek 2018: 62–78 (Ammianus' model of *princeps civilis*: Julian); 81 (*rejuvenatio*); 97–106 (*princeps legitimus* and *potestas/imperium iustum*).

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