Julian, Imperial Legacy, and the Sasanian Campaign

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The guiding motive and expected outcome of Julian's fatal campaign against the Sasanian Empire have long been difficult issues for studies in the emperor's reign. Head (1976: 158-159) questions, "Did he imagine that he might in fact conquer Persia? Or did he anticipate that the campaign would be similar to raids across the Rhine,[1] designed to strike terror in the hearts of the enemy but not to result in permanent occupation of territory?" Head favors the latter explanation, noting that the avid historian emperor was too familiar with the centuries of war between the Roman and Persian empires and knew of the many Roman defeats that had been suffered as the result of overly ambitious campaigns. On the other hand, for an emperor renowned for his appreciation of earlier Pagan antiquity, the desire to emulate or at least follow in the tradition of previous emperors and generals that had fought successfully in the East could not have been far from his mind. As Gardner (1978: 315) points out, "The thought of Alexander was ever with him, and many ages seemed to witness his deeds … At the same time, he did not neglect the less encouraging memories – those of Caesar, the younger Gordian, and Valerian."

Fortunately, as an emperor who authored a prolific literary corpus, much of which has survived to modernity, his works contain insights into his own ideas about Persia and his predecessors. One such work, written perhaps a few months before his campaign into Persia,[2] Julian's satire, the *Caesars*, provides both an entertaining and insightful glimpse into how the emperor perceived his imperial predecessors, particularly in regard to their foreign policies with Persia. While not entirely sufficient for solving the problem behind Julian's motive and goals for the campaign, the *Caesars* sheds considerable light on how Julian judged the roles of his predecessors in handling Persia, particularly Alexander the Great (despite the fact that he was not a Roman emperor), and how they shaped Julian's conception of where he factored into their legacy. As Athanassiadi (1981: 199) observes, "Perhaps the *Caesars* contains, if not a definitive answer to the enigma of the disastrous Persian campaign, at least a plausible explanation of it." Accordingly, an analysis of his treatment of Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Augustus, Trajan, Valerian, Constantine, and Marcus Aurelius can illustrate the criteria by which Julian judged imperial successes and disasters and how these may have played a role in his own intentions for the Persian campaign.

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[1] These were waged in 358 and 359 CE and in large part played into Julian's popularity prior to becoming emperor.

[2] Wright (1913: 343) dates the work to 361 CE, written in Constantinople, but Athanassiadi (1981: 197) dates the work to December, 362 CE for the Saturnalia festival that began on December 21. The latter dating would place the work only about four months prior to the beginning of Julian's invasion of Persia in April, 363 CE.

The desire to emulate the past military exploits of Alexander the Great, termed the *imatatio Alexandri*, was common throughout nearly all periods of the Roman Empire. A number of Roman generals and emperors launched campaigns against the Parthian and Sasanian empires in an effort to capture the glory of the famous Greek hero while simultaneously dealing with Rome's most powerful rival to the East. The disastrous campaign of Crassus in 53 BCE, which resulted in the famous triumvir's death, and Mark Antony's near-fatal war only a few decades later both serve as examples of poorly planned and poorly executed campaigns that were too greatly motivated by this motif in proportion to the military risk involved in such an aggressive invasion.[3] Julius Caesar himself was assassinated prior to a planned campaign against the Parthians, but as his biographer Suetonius (*Jul*. 7.1) notes, the Roman dictator from his early adulthood had long aspired to match the deeds of Alexander, and one wonders what would have been the result if the campaign had been carried out. Likewise, beyond the *imatatio Alexandri*, the *imitatio veternae Halladis* was a rather similar tactic of representing the Persians as the invading aggressor. Although Augustus attempted no conquest of the Parthian Empire, Shayegan (2011: 338-7) points out, "faced with an eastern foe who was increasingly associated with the ancient Persians… Augustus exploited the Persian Wars parallelisms… the Persian Wars motif implied neither the indispensable conquest of the East nor any fusion with it, *but rather the successful defense of the West against eastern aggression*."

In terms of more successful western campaigns of aggression, the emperor Trajan, whom Bennet (1997: 230) notes connected himself with Alexander's lineal descent, did managed to conquer a far greater portion of the Parthian Empire, increasing the Roman Empire to the historic height of its territorial control, which extending all the way to the Persian Gulf. Nevertheless, the Roman occupation of the territory was short-lived[4] and the emperor himself died of poor health before finishing his eastern campaigns. The Parthian Empire was still a formidable enough opponent in the early 3rd century to make for considerable campaigns by Caracalla, who likewise was a passionate admirer of Alexander (cf. Xiphilinus, 329.21-330.21; Herodian, 4.8.1-3), but who ultimately failed to achieve any lasting conquest of the Persian East prior to his untimely assassination. From these examples, it should be clear that throughout the early Roman Empire's history, Persia made for a continuous rival to the East, and the *imiatio Alexandri* and *imitatio veternae Halladis* offered a nostalgic justification for repeated wars waged with Rome's Near Asian rival. The ultimate result of these comparisons, according to Shayegan (2011: 340) was "the equation of the Arsacids with the Achaemenids, which was prompted by Roman political exigencies and possibly inspired by the simultaneous Achaemenid reminiscences within the Arsacid empire, led to the identification of the Romans with the ancient Greeks."

By the time of the Sasanian Empire's emergence in the 3rd century CE, however, Roman supremacy over her eastern rival was beginning to wane and the new Iranian empire embraced a symbolic framework that was nostalgically Achaemenid. As Canepa (2010: 563) explains, "Scholarship is largely in agreement that … the early Sasanians counted the Achaemenids as ancestors" and constructed several monuments to attach themselves with

[3] As Shayegan (2011: 338) notes, "the triumvirs of the Republic" during conflicts with Persia commonly made use of "the Alexander myth."

[4] The emperor Hadrian's first act following succession was to abandon much of the indefensible and too remote territories gained in Mesopotamia.

the earlier sites of the Achaemenid Empire." Canepa notes, however, "they had imperfect knowledge of them and did not set out to recreate the Achaemenid empire." The connections made with the past were largely symbolic, just as the Romans' imitation the ancient Greeks and Alexander likewise was, but the rise of military conflict further fueled comparisons to the past. Up through the 3rd and 4th centuries, the Romans frequently made allusions to the Persian Wars and Alexander the Great to describe the military situation with their Sasanian rival. As Shayegan (2004: 120-1) notes, the Roman literally representations of the campaign of Shapur II against Constantius II in the 4th century, which asserted that "Ardaxsir and Sabuhr II" were making claims "to former Achaemenid territories, were in fact Roman constructs owing to the exigencies of the *imitatio*." Shayegan further notes that it is no small coincidence that our "two most trusted sources reporting on the Sasanians' Achaemenid claims, Dio and Ammanius, were composed in the immediate aftermath of periods of intense Alexandrophilia (at least in literary circles) in Rome, and both authors were in the close entourage of emperors of whom the *imitiatio* is reported, namely Alexander Severus and Julian."

The 3rd century CE saw a decline in Roman military power and the rise of Persian military power in the wake of the new Sasanian Empire that was far more self-determined than its Parthian predecessor. Shortly after Ardashir I's establishment of the new Empire, his son Shapur I succeeded in killing the Roman emperor Gordian, capturing the emperor Valerian – an unprecedented event of Roman humiliation – and compelling the emperor Philip the Arab into unfavorable peace terms.[5] These victories were so spectacular for the young Sasanian Empire that Shapur I was featured on a rock relief with the three emperors, trampling Gordian, taking Valerian by the hand, and receiving the submission of Philip the Arab. As Canepa (2010: 579) notes, Shapur I "boldly carved [the] rock relief directly in the center of the four Achaemenid tombs, in the space underneath the tomb of Darius I and the tomb attributed to Artaxerxes I." The days of Roman supremacy over its eastern foe had come to an end.

The Roman Empire endured a very long period of civil war during the 3rd century, which Sasanian emperors, such as Shapur I, exploited. After the stabilization achieved under Diocletian and the subsequent Christianization of the empire under Constantine, however, the Roman emperors were once more turning an ambitious eye to a Persian conquest. As Fowden (2006: 377) notes, "For the emperor Constantine, the east was both a goal and a return. By the end of his reign, victory over the Persian Empire was 'what he had still to achieve,'[6] but his motivations for eastern conquest were complex. Strategic concerns about Rome's eastern provinces were joined with a vision of a universal Christian empire in an intimate marriage of interests that has perplexed commentators both ancient and modern." Before this strange and rather new Roman ambition could be carried out, however, Constantine died of illness. While Julian the Apostate certainly had no interest in creating a universal Christian empire, it is not hard to imagine that part of his ambitions to invade Persia had originated from the desire to follow up and surpass his predecessor's plans. For Julian, however, who was seeking to unite Rome under its previous Pagan religions and

[5] Rubin (199) notes that Philip was required to pay 500,000 denarii on the spot and a large annual indemnity.

[6] Eus. VC 4.56.1.

traditions, another symbolic justification was needed, for which a reconnection with Alexander the Great was most apt.

When Julian came to power, he was on the brink of civil war with Constantine's last successor, Constantius II, whom already noted above, was connected with the *imitatio veternae Halladis* during Shapur II's recent campaigns. Julian had gained popularity in the Western Empire for his campaigns waged in Gaul and Germany, but when the emperor returned to Constantinople, following Constantius II's convenient death before a civil war broke out, he had less support in the Eastern Roman Empire. Julian no doubt had in his ambitions the goal of solidifying the Eastern Roman Empire as he had done with the Western, and Athanassiadi (1981: 192) argues the Sasanian expedition was "conceived as a solution to Julian's political problems." Even before his ascension as emperor, however, Julian in his literary works was concerned with the threat of the Sasanian Empire and saw the struggle between the two empires in terms of a previous, nostalgic struggle between the Hellenic East and Achaemenid and Arsacid West.

In his second panegyric composed in honor of Constantine, Julian frames the new emperors situation with Persia with a double motif of Alexander conquering the East and the Parthians being a rebel state opposed to Macedonia and Rome. Julian states:

> Πέρσαι τῆς Ἀσίας ἀπάσης πάλαι κρατήσαντες καὶ τῆς Εὐρώπης τὰ πολλὰ καταστρεψάμενοι, μικροῦ δέω φάναι τὴν οἰκουμένην ἅπασαν περιλαβόμενοι κύκλῳ ταῖς ἐλπίσιν, ἐπειδὴ τὴν ἀρχὴν ὑπὸ Μακεδόνων ἀφῄρηντο, τῆς Ἀλεξάνδρου στρατηγίας ἔργον γενόμενοι, μᾶλλον δὲ παίγνιον, χαλεπῶς φέροντες [πρὸς] τὸ δουλεύειν, ὡς ἐκεῖνον ᾔσθοντο τετελευτηκότα, τῶν διαδόχων ἀποστάντες Μακεδόσι τε εἰς τὴν ἀντίπαλον δύναμιν αὖθις κατέστησαν καὶ ἡμῖν τὸ λειπόμενον τῆς Μακεδόνων ἀρχῆς κατακτησαμένοις ἀξιόμαχοι διὰ τέλους ἔδοξαν εἶναι πολέμιοι (I.17c-17d).[7]
>
> The Persians, having long ago conquered all of Asia and subdued a large portion of Europe, I can nearly say appear to have grasped at in their full ambitions the entire inhabited world, when they were deprived of their rule by the Macedonians and became an achievement for Alexander's generalship, even more like a sport. Nevertheless, they endured their slavery badly, so that when they learned that he had died, revolting from his successors they once again placed their strength into opposition against the Macedonians and when we took over what remained of the Macedonian Empire, they were regarded by us as enemies needing to be fought against until the very end.

Shayegan (2011: 362-3) observes about Julian's historic comparisons, "By associating the neo-Persian power with the Arsacid realm, Julian's discourse clearly implies that the Sasanians ought to be regarded as subjects to Macedonia, and by consequence, with Rome assuming the Seleucid heritage, of Rome. What is more, it suggests that the Sasanian imitation of the Persians of old was merely an artifice aimed at concealing the dynasty's true (Parthian) origin, in order to evade its due allegiance to Rome. Thus, it seems that the identification of the Sasanians with the Arsacids was construed as a means to represent the former as rebels against Rome, whereas their association with the Achaemenids was

[7] All citations of Julian are to Wright Loeb. All translations are my own.

perceived as bestowing legitimacy upon their claim of 'resuming what was theirs of old.'" Here the double motif, on the one hand, uses Alexander to establish that the Macedonians, and the Romans by extension, had rightfully conquered the Persian territories, and, on the hand, uses the comparison of the current empire with the Parthians to undermine thes Sasanian Empire's own symbolic propaganda that connected them with an Achaemenid past. That a second Alexander could reestablish the previous Macedonian control would not seem to be an unlikely suggestion in Julian's assessment of the situation.

At the beginning of the 363 CE, Julian, now in the place of emperor himself, had to deal with the same Persian adversary of which he had warned Constantine. As a general emperor who had previously strengthened Rome's borders on the West and as a religious emperor seeking to reconnect Rome with previous Pagan traditions, Julian had both a strategic and ideological motive to invade the Sasanians. But what was the goal and expected outcome of the campaign? His predecessor Constantine had sought to establish a universal Christian Empire, and could Julian envision the same for an empire based on Greco-Roman traditions and philosophy? Or could Julian be merely waging a terror campaign to keep the Sasanians outside of Rome's eastern borders? His goal in the campaign extended at least as far as capturing the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon. Ctesiphon's perilously close proximity to Roman boarders could have served as a temporary strike, but further capturing the capital could decapitate the central power of the empire. Julian's goal may no longer be scrutable from the sequence of events that happened following the invasion, since the disastrous outcome of the campaign cut short whatever plans he did have.[8] Yet Julian's literary works may offer some clue for at least plausibly explaining his motive. Athanassiadi (1981: 196-7) argues, based on Julian's writings, that he was "falling increasingly under the domination of one idea: the defeat of Persian" and "having fallen under the spell of one major idea, he at first set out to prove that this was not the dream of a madman, but a reasonable ambition which had fired many a predecessor of him."

Julian's perceived relation between himself and his predecessors can be gleaned through an analysis of his *Caesars*. As Matthews (2007: 137-8) explains, "The *Caesars* was written while Julian was in the heat of preparations for the Persian campaign, and Trajan and Alexander reflect his preoccupations – Alexander being imported also to give expression to Julian's Hellenism, to associate Roman with Greek triumphs over the Persian Empire." Julian's evaluations of many of the other emperors, as will be shown below, likewise reflect upon how his Persian campaign was thought to be rooted in an imperial tradition. First, however, Alexander's inclusion in the satire must be examined. Alexander was not a Roman emperor, so his presence reveals that Julian likewise thought of himself as a leader following in a Hellenic tradition. Nevertheless, there is a tension between the Romans and the Greeks revealed through Alexander's taunts of Julius Caesar. In a competition to judge who was the greatest emperor, Alexander says to Caesar:

> Εἰ δὲ τὸ Περσῶν κρατῆσαι μικρὸν νομίζεις καὶ τὸ τηλικοῦτον ἔργον διασύρεις, ὀλίγης πάνυ τῆς ὑπὲρ τὸν Τίγρητα ποταμὸν ὑπὸ Παρθυαίων βασιλευομένης χώρας, ἔτη πλέον ἢ τριακόσια πολεμοῦντες, λέγε μοι, δι' ἣν αἰτίαν οὐκ ἐκρατήσατε; (II.324c).

[8] Julian died in the siege of Ctesiphon before the capital could be captured.

> But if you deem it a small feat to conquer the Persians and disparage so great an achievement, explain to me the reason why you Romans, after more than three hundred years of fighting, did not conquer any small territory beyond the Tigris
> River, still ruled by the Parthians?

Here, Julian once more represents the Sasanians as the Parthians, as in his second panegyric to Constantine, which once again represents them as rebels rather than rightful owners of their empire. Nevertheless, Alexander points out that the Romans had never been able to subdue these rebels in the same way that he had conquered the Persians. Julian, as an emperor drawing from both a Greek and Roman legacy and as one who was reestablishing old Pagan traditions could envision himself as the perfect Greco-Roman blend to achieve what Alexander had conquered but likewise to subdue to it in the manner of the Romans.

Julian's depiction of Julius Caesar is likewise highly significant. First, Julian has Caesar stress his triumph in civil war:

> εἰ δὲ Ἀλέξανδρος οὐτοσὶ τολμᾷ, τίνα τῶν ἔργων τῶν ἐαυτοῦ τοῖς ἐμοῖς ἀξιοῖ παραβαλεῖν; ἴσως τὰ Περσικά, ὥσπερ οὐχ ἑορακὼς ἐγηγερμένα μοι τοσαῦτα κατὰ Πομπηίου τρόπαια; (II.320c).
>
> But if this Alexander is so audacious, which of his achievements does he deem worthy to compare to mine? Perhaps his Persian campaign, as if never having seen such
> trophies that I amassed defeating Pompey!

Julian too had come to power through the demise of a rival, yet unlike Caesar, he had managed to obtain power peacefully. Very much like Caesar, however, Julian was renown for his conquests in Gaul and Germany. Julian has Caesar boast of his campaigns in the West over Alexander's in the East:

> καὶ τοὺς Ἑλβετίους σιωπῶ καὶ τὸ τῶν Ἰβήρων ἔθνος. οὐδενὸς ἔτι τῶν Γαλιτικῶν ἐπεμνήσθην, πλεῖν ἢ τριακοσίας ὑπαγαγόμενος πόλεις, ἀνδρῶν δὲ οὐκ ἐλάσσους ἢ διακοσίας μυριάδας (II.321a).
>
> I need say nothing about the Helvetians and the race of the Iberians. I have yet to recall anything of my campaigns in Gaul, where I conquered more than three hundred cities and
> not less than two million men.

Caesar, however, had perished before he could carry out his planned invasion of the Parthians. Julian, on the other hand, as a possible reincarnation of both Alexander and Caesar, could achieve both a western and eastern conquest in the reestablishment of a new Greco-Roman imperium.

Julian did not perceive his campaign, however, as a mere act of conquest. The motivation for the war needed to be legitimate and be derived from a higher ideal. Julian emphasizes this in Alexander's justification of his invasion:

> Πέρσαι δὲ πανταχοῦ καλῶς καὶ φρονίμως παρεσκευασμένοι πρὸς τὴν ἡμετέραν ἀλκὴν ἐνέδοσαν.ἐπεὶ δὲ οὐ τοῦ πράττειν ἁπλῶς, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ τὰ δίκαια πράττειν ἄνδρα ἄριστον καὶ βασιλέα προσήκει μεταποιεῖσθαι, ἐγὼ μὲν ὑπὲρ τῶν Ἑλλήνων τοὺς Πέρσας ἀπῄτησα δίκην (II.324a)

> The Persians, although on all occasions well and skillfully equipped, surrendered to my valor. And since it behooves the best man and king to model himself not only by achievements, but also by the justice of those achievements, I took justice on behalf of the Greeks upon the Persians.

Alexander uses this rationalization to justify how he had subdued Thebes and Athens. Likewise, Julian's campaign was controversial and the new emperor needed to rationalization his mobilization of the empire towards the foreign invasion. By framing the campaign in terms of taking justice against Persian wrongdoing, Julian could envision himself as avenging the many Roman defeats that had been inflicted by the Sasanians in past centuries, as well as punishing them as Parthian 'rebels.'

Julian also had to pose the reasonable question of whether the campaign was prudent. When he has Augustus speak in the satire, an emperor renown for his longevity and stability, he states:

> Ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν ἐμφυλίων στάσεων τὴν Ῥώμην ὀρῶν εἰς
> ἔσχατον ἐλαύνουσαν πολλάκις κίνδυνον, οὕτω διεθέμην
> τὰ περὶ αὐτήν, ὥστε εἶναι, εἰ μὴ δι' ὑμᾶς, ὦ θεοί, τὸ λοιπὸν
> ἀδαμαντίνην. Οὐ γὰρ ταῖς ἀμέτροις ἐπιθυμίαις εἴκων
> ἐπικτᾶσθαι πάντως αὐτῇ διενοήθην, ὅρια δὲ διττά, ὥσπερ
> ὑπὸ τῆς φύσεως ἀποδεδομένα, Ἴστρον καὶ Εὐφράτην
> ποταμοὺς ἐθέμην (II.326c).
>
> Seeing that Rome was being led to the furthest extremity of danger from repeated civil wars, I thus administered her affairs so that she will be strong for all time, unless you very gods intervene. For I did not, giving way to endless ambitions, determine to extend her empire at all costs, but established two boundaries, arranged as though by nature itself, the Danube and the Euphrates.

A proper campaign could not be about mere temporary spoils. Julian uses Augustus to voice the legitimate concern about obtaining sustainable borders. Julian had accomplished this in the West, but the proper boundaries implied by the *imatatio Alexandri* included Persia itself, which the rebellious Parthians had disrupted. Julian thus could be advancing beyond Augustus and extending a border, which in its poor arrangement had been the result of continues wars between the two empires, to its proper lengths.

This boundary had been achieved temporarily by the emperor Trajan. Just as Julian was reuniting a country that had languished from civil war and internal conflict, Trajan likewise boasts of how his career pushed Rome out of a state of decadence:

> ὦ Ζεῦ καὶ θεοί, τὴν ἀρχὴν παραλαβὼν ναρκῶσαν ὥσπερ
> καὶ διαλελυμένην ὑπό τε τῆς οἴκοι πολὺν χρόνον ἐπικρατησάσης
> τυραννίδος (II.327c).
>
> Oh Zeus and other gods, when I was put in charge of this empire, it was in a sort of lethargy and disordered from a long period of tyrannical rule at home.

Likewise, Trajan frames his campaign in terms of avenging acts of Persian aggression and insolence. The old emperor also explains that, even though he was unlike the youthful Alexander, he did not allow his age to impede him from his goal:

> Πρὸς Παρθυαίους δέ, πρὶν μὲν ἀδικεῖσθαι παρ' αὐτῶν,
> οὐκ ᾤμην δεῖν χρῆσθαι τοῖς ὅπλοις· ἀδικοῦσι δὲ ἐπεξῆλθον
> οὐδὲν ὑπὸ τῆς ἡλικίας κωλυθείς, καίτοι διδόντων μοι τῶν
> νόμων τὸ μὴ στρατεύεσθαι (II.328a).
>
> Against the Parthians I deemed it unnecessary to make use of weapons until wrongdoing was first inflected by them; but when they did do wrong, I set out against them, not at all hindered by old age, even when the laws would have granted
> me peace from fighting.

Unlike Trajan, however, Julian was in his early thirties, about the same age as Alexander at the end of his campaigns. Trajan's campaign failed to obtain a lasting conquest due to his untimely death, but Julian had enough youth and age to achieve what the elder *princeps* had been unable to carry to fruition.

Although Julian mocks and his derogatory towards Constantine in the *Caesars*, he nevertheless recognized that he had inherited his situation with Persia from the former emperor. Constantine, who was famous for restoring stability and old borders, considers himself superior to Trajan for likewise restoring peace at home, but also regaining lost territories:

> Τραϊανοῦ δὲ τοῖς μὲν κατὰ τυράννων ἀνδραγαθήμασιν εἰκότως ἂν προτιμηθείην, τῷ δὲ ἦν οὗτος προσεκτήσατο χώραν ἀναλαβεῖν ἴσος ἂν οὐκ ἀπεικότως νομιζοίμην, εἰ μὴ καὶ μεῖζόν ἐστι τὸ ἀνακτήσασθαι τοῦ κτήσασθαι (II.329c).
>
> With regard to Trajan, I should naturally be placed before him on account of same glorious exploits against tyrants, and should likewise be deemed, not unreasonably, his equal for taking back the territory that he acquired, if it is not a greater deed to regain than it is to gain.

One prominent territory that Constantine had failed to regain, however, was Trajan's Persian conquests, and the emperor had been planning to regain these territories before his death. Julian, his successor, likewise saw it as his duty to reconquer the land that Alexander had won for the Greeks, that Trajan had won back from the Parthian rebels, and that he himself would incorporate into a new Greco-Roman imperium.

The *Caesars* climaxes in a judgment over who is the best emperor. After having the various other emperors boast about their policies and conquests, however, Julian depicts the philosopher emperor Marcus Aurelius in the most humble tone:

> ὦ Ζεῦ καὶ θεοί, λόγων οὐθὲν δεῖ καὶ ἀγῶνος. Εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἠγνοεῖτε τάμά, προσῆκον ἦν ἐμοὶ διδάσκειν ὑμᾶς· ἐπεὶ δὲ ἴστε καὶ λέληθεν ὑμᾶς τῶν ἀπάντων οὐθέν, αὐτοί με τιμᾶτε τῆς ἀξίας (II.328c).
>
> Oh Zeus and other gods, I have no need of words and contest. For if you did not know all of these matters, it would be necessary for me to teach you

such things. But since you all know and nothing of my deeds is hidden from you, you may honor me according to what I deserve.

Despite Aurelius having the shortest and least argumentative speech, the gods judge him the best emperor. Julian, who was passionate for Stoic philosophy, no doubt saw himself likewise in the tradition of Aurelius. This does not mean, however, that Julian would be an armchair philosopher. Aurelius had likewise waged many wars, but conquest was not his chief motive. By identifying himself foremost with Aurelius, Julian would be a philosopher emperor reestablishing the old virtues of the Roman Empire.
Julian no doubt knew that there were many risks, however, in his ambition campaign. Accordingly, Julian grants a scene to the captured emperor Valerian depicting his unfortunate fate:[9]

> Ἐπὶ τούτῳ παρῆλθεν εἴσω Γαλλιῆνος μετὰ τοῦ πατρός, ὁ μὲν τὰ δεσμὰ τῆς αἰχμαλωσίας ἕχων, ὁ δὲ στολῇ τε καὶ κινήσει χρώμενος μαλακωτέρᾳ ὥσπερ αἱ γυναῖκες. Καὶ ὁ Σειληνὸς πρὸς μὲν ἐκεῖνον·
> "Τίς οὗτος ὁ λευκολόφας,
> Πρόπαρ ὃς ἡγεῖται στρατοῦ;"
> ἔφη, πρὸς δὲ τὸν Γαλλιῆνον·
> "Ὃς καὶ χρυσὸν ἔχων πάντη τρυφᾷ ἡύτε κούρη."
> Τούτω δὲ ὁ Ζεὺς εἶτε τῆς ἐκεῖσε θοίνης ἐξεβάτην
> (II.313b-313c).
>
> Next entered in Gallienus[10] alongside his father,[11] the latter who was still dragging the chains of his imprisonment and the former who was strolling in the dress and weak gate of a woman. Then Silanus said to the second:
> "Who is this with the white crest who leads from the front of the army?"[12]
> And towards Gallienus he said,
> "Who is the one wearing gold in the full daintiness of a maiden?"[13]
> But Zeus ordered them both to depart from the banquet.

Valerian's folly disqualifies him from even being considered at the banquet. Julian derides both Valerian and his son for being effeminate (as he also does with Constantine). Julian's stoic values are set in opposition to these defects. Julian's campaign would draw from the best of his imperial successors, achieving the conquests of both Alexander and Caesar, consolidating an empire like Augustus, fulfilling what Trajan was unable to complete due to

[9] Curiously, Julian does not have Gordian appear in the satire. This is somewhat ironic, since Julian's ultimate fate would be like Gordian's, dying in his Persian campaign. His absence is not so odd, however, since the satire skips over a number of the 3rd century emperors due to the rapid nature of their successions and short-lived reigns.
[10] Gallienus was murdered following Valerian's capture in an unsuccessful attempt to end civil war and consolidate his power.
[11] I.e. Valerian.
[12] Euripides, *Phoenissae* 120.
[13] A slightly altered form of *Iliad* 2.872. This line makes fun of Nastes, a Trojan who carried gold into battle and was slain by Achilles. Valerian is equated with this figure to mock his foolishness.

old age, and regaining the territories that Constantine had not. But ultimately, Julian would be a new philosopher emperor in the tradition of Marcus Aurelius, in possession of a new Greco-Roman empire reborn in the best of traditional Pagan religion and philosophy.

Despite Julian's derogatory treatment of Valerian, however, he fared little better. As Athanassiadi (1981: 193) points out, "In all senses the Persian campaign was a failure." Due to the poor planning and over-ambitious nature of the campaign, scholars have disputed what Julian's motives and expected outcome could have been. This debate may never be resolved, but a look at the emperor's owns writings does offer a glimpse into his intentions. Julian highlights the strengths and weaknesses of each of his imperial predecessors. Julian had matched many of Julius Caesar's achievements in Gaul and Germany, but he needed to consolidate his power in the East. As an avid admirer of Alexander, matching Alexander's achievements in conquering the East must have been appealing. Julian was not merely a second Alexander, however, and also had fashioned himself in the virtues of other previous emperors, most notably Marcus Aurelius. A new Greco-Roman Empire, combining the strength of both traditions and ruling over the old territories taken from the Achaemenids but lost to the Parthians, could have been his ultimate vision. This theory can at least be supported through analyzing certain passages in his *Caesars*. The Sasanian Empire, nevertheless, had every intention of keeping its Iranian heritage and resisting western invasion. The Sasanians' goal seems to have been more realistic, as Julian's new Empire was never actualized in the wake of his own death and fatal campaign.

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