



## Agathias and Cedrenus on Julian

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*The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 53, Parts 1 and 2. (1963), pp. 91-94.

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## AGATHIAS AND CEDRENUS ON JULIAN <sup>1</sup>

By AVERIL M. CAMERON

In a recent article,<sup>2</sup> Sir Maurice Bowra accepted the view of E. A. Thompson<sup>3</sup> that the Emperor Julian *did* receive a Delphic oracle before setting off for the East—the lines quoted by Theodoret (*HE* III, 21, p. 200, Parmentier, and again in the *Graec. Affect. Curatio*, PG 83, 1069),<sup>4</sup> and repeated by the eleventh-century Byzantine chronicler Cedrenus (I, p. 538, Bonn). When Cedrenus introduces the oracle he cites Agathias, the sixth-century historian: Ἰουλιανὸς δὲ μαντείαις καὶ θυσίαις καὶ ἐπωδαῖς δαιμόνων καὶ ἀπάταις φραζάμενος, ὡς φησὶν Ἀγαθίας, κατὰ Περσῶν ἐστράτευσεν, ὅτε καὶ χρησμὸν ἔλαβεν ἔχοντα οὕτως. . . . Bowra therefore assumed that Cedrenus took his oracle from Agathias, ‘who may well have got his information from Theodoret’ (o.c., p. 428). And he also speaks of ‘the occasion mentioned, in different ways’ by Theodoret, Agathias, and Cedrenus, as though the fact of Cedrenus’s having the oracle added something to the value of the story.

But not only does Agathias *not* take his information about the Emperor Julian from Theodoret, but *all* he says about Julian is that he was killed in Persia (IV, 25, p. 263, Bonn); and his sole reason for mentioning Julian at all is simply to give the immediate reason for the peace by which Jovian ceded Nisibis to Persia.

Are we to suppose then that there is a lacuna in the text of Agathias? It would hardly be good policy to do so on the strength of an uncertain citation. It would admittedly not be out of character for Agathias to provide us with more details about Julian, even though the passage in general (IV, 24, p. 258—29, p. 272) is about Sassanid kings, not Roman emperors. He goes into details, for example, about the accession of Sapor II (p. 261, 14 f.), but also about the story of Arcadius making Yazdgard the guardian of Theodosius (p. 264, 7). These passages are immediately before and after the few lines about Julian. But it is worth noting that the Arcadius story—the only digression about a *Roman* emperor—is derived from Procopius (p. 264, 18; cf. Proc. *BP* I, 2), whose history Agathias is avowedly continuing (p. 11, 7 f.). Once he can find in Procopius something about the Persian kings Agathias begins to use him as a source alongside his Persian material—i.e. from the reign of Yazdgard I onwards. Agathias’ account of this king lacks the Zoroastrian bias of the Arabo-Persian tradition, which knew Yazdgard as ‘the sinner’: at p. 265, 20, indeed he paraphrases Procopius *BP* I, 2, 8. Again, in the Arab and Persian writers, Vahram V appears as one of the most popular kings, largely because of his sympathies with the nobles and Zoroastrian clergy, whereas Agathias, p. 266, 4–8, paraphrases Procopius *BP* I, 2, 11, leading one to suppose that we can find the explanation for Agathias’ lack of the Zoroastrian-aristocratic bias of his Persian source in his having taken his notice of Vahram V from Procopius when he looked up the Arcadius story. He thus takes over from Procopius the mistake of putting in the reign of Vahram V the peace which belongs to the next reign. We might then have expected any further details about Julian to come from Procopius: for there is no indication in this section of Agathias’ work that he looked further afield for supplementary information than Procopius and the oral information which his Syrian friend Sergius evidently added to the material he brought from the Royal Annals of Persia, on which this section is ostensibly based.<sup>5</sup>

More important, there is no place for the inclusion of what was, as can be seen from its original appearance in Theodoret, a piece of Christian polemic. For it is with the ecclesiastical writers of the fourth century that the Christian working up of the story of Julian began,<sup>6</sup> and Theodoret only quotes the oracle in order to show up the falsity of the oracles in which Julian put his trust (cf. III, 21, 2). By the sixth century the Christianized versions of Julian’s death were well established (e.g. in the Syriac romance dated by

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Mr. R. Browning and Professor A. D. Momigliano for reading through a draft of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Εἴπατε τῷ βασιλεῖ, *Hermes* 87 (1959), 426–35.

<sup>3</sup> *CQ* XL (1946), 35–6.

<sup>4</sup> cf., however, Parke and Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle*<sup>2</sup> (1956), II, 233.

<sup>5</sup> cf. J. Suolahti, ‘On the Persian sources used by the Byzantine historian Agathias’, *Studia Orientalia* 13 (1947), for a preliminary discussion.

<sup>6</sup> cf. Th. Büttner-Wobst, *Philologus* LI (1892), 561 f.; also N. Baynes, *JRS* XXVII (1937), 22 f. = *Byzantine Studies* (1955), 271 f., with further references.

Nöldecke to this period,<sup>7</sup> and in Agathias's contemporary, John Malalas), yet the words in Agathias bear no trace of this anti-Julian propaganda.<sup>8</sup> And this is just what we would expect in a writer who eschews ecclesiastical history (not a word in Agathias of the great Ecumenical Council which was contemporary with the events he describes; contrast the account of the years A.D. 552–558 in Cedrenus I, 659 f.), and who, although a religious man, and apparently an upholder of orthodoxy,<sup>9</sup> follows Procopius in affecting a detachment (in language at least) from *res Christianae*.<sup>10</sup> Agathias in fact would have been highly unlikely to use Theodoret, for he saw himself as an historian of the classical school, like Procopius, whose work he continued—a follower in the tradition of Herodotus and Thucydides, and as such, far removed from the propaganda techniques of ecclesiastical history.<sup>11</sup>

We can in fact say something about Agathias's sources here. His account is tententious, but the bias lies only in the violent condemnation of the peace by which Jovian ceded Nisibis; he betrays no interest in Julian for his own sake. In the reign of Sapor II, says Agathias, Nisibis was ceded to Persia; for Julian had died in Persia and Jovian had to make this shameful peace in order to secure his rule (p. 263, cf. I, II, ξυθηκος τιθεται αγεννεις και ασχημονας). We must look for Agathias's source, therefore, to parallel examples of this bias, not to Christian polemic against Julian the Apostate.

There is reason to believe that his bias came to Agathias from his Syrian informant, Sergius.<sup>12</sup> This hypothesis would fit certain other signs of Syrian bias in the Sassanid excursus,<sup>13</sup> which is ostensibly,<sup>14</sup> and in the main really, derived from the official Royal Annals at Ctesiphon. It is supported by the resemblance between this passage and *ps.* Joshua Stylites, ed. Wright, p. 6, probably written soon after A.D. 518; the details about the death of Julian and the peace made by Jovian which we find in the Arabic chronicler Tabari<sup>15</sup> were plausibly shown by Nöldecke<sup>16</sup> to be derived ultimately from the Syriac sixth-century romance, so that we have to rule out any possibility of Agathias's having derived even the facts, let alone the *Tendenz*, from his Persian sources.<sup>17</sup> Further, of the many sources which deal with Julian's Persian expedition,<sup>18</sup> most fail to mention Nisibis at all, or at any rate fail to criticize the peace, but of those that *do* show bias, one

<sup>7</sup> ZDMG xxviii (1874), 263 f.

<sup>8</sup> Exemplified, e.g. by Theodoret, who calls Julian ἀλάστορ III, 19, 3; θεομισῆς III, 8, 1; cf. III, 15, 1; III, 16, 6. For further instances cf. Socrates *HE* III, 21, Greg. Naz. *Or.* v, 155; IV, 139. Geo. Mon. p. 544 f., de Boor, is a good example of a collocation of such epithets. Julian's standard appellation in later chronicles is ὁ παραβαρῆς (e.g. in Cedr. p. 536, 23; *ps.* Leo Grammaticus, p. 92 Bonn); *ps.* Mos. Chor. II, 70, even transcribes this into Armenian: Julian became a symbol of Anti-Christ; the versions of his reign and death to which the accounts of Theodoret and Cedrenus belong are clearly within this tradition.

<sup>9</sup> Religious arguments are for example decisive for Agathias when the question is of deciding alliances—III, 11, p. 165, 18; IV, 2, p. 208, 17; IV, 2, p. 210, 20; in battle God decides the issue—II, 22, p. 188, 10; III, 19, p. 182, 5; III, 9, p. 158, 4; II, 10, p. 84, 20. Agathias is preoccupied with the problem of divine justice—v, 5, p. 286; IV, 22, p. 255, 5. He speaks of orthodoxy as though accepting it himself—I, 2, p. 17, 8; v, 6, p. 289, 6.

<sup>10</sup> cf., e.g. Proc. *BP* I, 18, 15; I, 25, 31; II, 11, 14; *BV* II, 14, 7; II, 26, 17; that this is purely stylistic is shown by *BV* I, 20, 25, and especially *BP* I, 25, 10. In Agathias, cf. III, 24, p. 194, 6; III, 5, p. 146, 23. It is hoped to discuss in a future article the care needed in drawing conclusions about the religious beliefs of the writer from such affectations of style, with special reference to the works of Procopius and Ammianus Marcellinus.

<sup>11</sup> cf. A. D. Momigliano, in *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, ed. A. D. Momigliano (1963), 79–99, for a lucid exposi-

tion of the distinction between the new and specifically Christian forms of history and the classical tradition represented in the sixth century by Procopius (and Agathias), which remained untouched by the new developments.

<sup>12</sup> cf. IV, 30, p. 273. Agathias does not say specifically that Sergius was Syrian, but we may guess that he was from the signs of Syrian bias (see below) and from the fact of Agathias's having preserved a correct Seleucid date for the beginning of the Sassanid Empire (IV, 24, p. 259, 3). Nöldecke (*Gesch. der Pers. und Arab.*, 1879, 400) simply described Agathias's Sassanid king list as 'nach einem syrischen Gewährsmann' without further comment.

<sup>13</sup> Probably the hostile account of Sapor I (IV, 24, p. 259), and the account of Peroz (IV, 27, p. 266, with which compare *ps.* Josh. Styl., p. 8, Wright); certainly on Valash (cf. Nöldecke, *Gesch.*, etc., 134, n. 2; *ibid.*, n. 5; A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*<sup>2</sup>, 1944, 296, n. 4).

<sup>14</sup> IV, 30, pp. 273–4; II, 27, p. 125.

<sup>15</sup> Trans. Nöldecke, *Gesch. der Pers. und Arab.*, 59 f. Our knowledge of the contents of the Persian Royal Annals and of the Khvadhaynamagh (Persian Shahnameh = 'Book of Kings') for which they were a source has to be founded on Arabic and Persian chroniclers of the ninth century onwards.

<sup>16</sup> o.c. (n. 7), 291 f.

<sup>17</sup> The story of Julian does not appear in Firdausi, Eutychius or Quotaiba, who represent the pure Persian tradition, but only in the Arab writers. cf. Nöldecke, *Gesch.*, etc., 59, n. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Most collected by Büttner-Wobst, o.c. (n. 6).

group may well confirm that sixth-century Syria was rich in versions of the story; <sup>19</sup> the emphasis on Nisibis is only what one would expect from Syrian writers. <sup>20</sup> The alternative would be to suppose that Agathias knew of the hostility to the peace recorded in Ammianus Marcellinus xxv, 9, 1–12, and Zosimus III, 30 f., and reflected in *Suidas*'s notice s.v. Ἰοβιανός (= John of Antioch fr. 181, *Exc. de virt.* I, p. 201, 8–28, Büttner-Wobst). <sup>21</sup> But although Agathias covers the Persian wars with Rome he nowhere else shows any trace of the Roman accounts of the events narrated in his Persian source, and it would surely be attributing too much to him to suppose that he consulted, or remembered, a source of which he seems elsewhere to be completely ignorant, on a point about which perfectly good information lay ready to hand—that is, from his friend Sergius. <sup>22</sup> But it is quite clear that the rival candidates for the name of Agathias's source do not include Theodoret, who makes no mention whatever of Nisibis.

Agathias, then, could not have taken the oracle from Theodoret, for he did not mention it at all; nor would he have thought of looking to ecclesiastical writers for source material. How then did the citation originate? At what stage in the tangle of redactions and revisions of the material which reached Cedrenus in a very late form did Agathias's name first appear?

We can in fact discount Cedrenus altogether; for at this point (537, 20–538, 10) his narrative is simply a verbatim transcript (the differences are only trivial) of his *Hauptquelle*, the anonymous chronicle contained in Cod. Par. gr. 1712, a portion of which was kindly collated for me by B. Hemmerdinger. <sup>23</sup> The difficult question of Cedrenus's sources for the section immediately following (538, 10–539, 14) <sup>24</sup> is therefore irrelevant to the present question.

More can be said about the sources used at this point by the tenth-century chronicler of Cod. Par. gr. 1712. <sup>25</sup> His main source is the eighth-century chronicler Theophanes (Theophanes, pp. 52, 10–52, 19, de Boor = Par. gr. 1712 f. 93v = Cedrenus 537, 20–538, 5); but they differ in the introduction to the quotation of the oracle (Theophanes, p. 52, 19 f.). Here Par. gr. 1712 used the so-called *Építome*. <sup>26</sup> Compare the chronicle in Cod. Par. gr. 854, going under the name of Leo Grammaticus in the Bonn edition, <sup>27</sup> p. 94 :

<sup>19</sup> See Bidez, *Philostorgius* (GCS, XXI, Leipzig, 1913), CLI f. on the connection of Theophanes *AM* 5856, Jerome a. Abr. 2380, and the so-called Liber Calipharam (CSCO, *Script. Syr.* ser. III, t. IV, 104), from which can be restored the fragments of an Arian history written in the fourth century and used by Philostorgius. This accounts for the Artemii Passio 70 (Bidez, *ibid.*, 104), and for Zonaras XIII, 14 (cf. Bidez, *ibid.*, CII f. rebutting the theory of E. Patzig, *Byz. Zeit.* VI (1897), 322 f. that the common source of Zonaras and Cedrenus used Philostorgius, but showing the connection between that source and Philostorgius). The relevant section of the Liber Calipharam goes up to the seventh century: it is hardly impossible, however, that its Greek source had passed into Syria a century earlier. I am not arguing that Agathias is in any way to be connected with this nexus of writers; the Liber Calipharam indeed mixes Christian bias in favour of the orthodox emperor Jovian with its account of the peace to such an extent that it is forced to white-wash the unpopular affair so far as was possible. But we can see from this chain of chronicles as well as from the other clues that an emphasis on Nisibis with a high proportion of bias was just what one would expect in sixth-century Syria.

<sup>20</sup> cf., e.g. *Carmina Nisibena* of St. Ephraem (ed. Bickell, 1866), a contemporary of Julian and Jovian present in Nisibis at the time of Sapor's sieges (though the hymns stop before the ceding of the town); add also the songs of the Antiochenes ap. *Suidas* s.v. Ἰοβιανός.

<sup>21</sup> On the attribution of *Suidas*'s notice to Eunapius cf. de Boor, *Hermes* 20 (1885), 330; E. Patzig would attribute it to the 'Salmasian John of Antioch' (Progr. Leipzig, 1892, *Johannes Antiochenus und Johannes Malalas*); *Byz. Zeit.* II (1893), 593; *ibid.*, VI (1897), 327, and supposes that John of Antioch

used Ammianus (*Byz. Zeit.* VI, 328; *ibid.*, VII (1898), 585; *ibid.*, XIII (1904), 13), most recently followed by O. J. Maenchen-Helfen, *AJPh.* 76 (1955), 386, n. 16. But the ultimate source of much of this may be Eunapius—cf. W. R. Chalmers, *CQ* 1960, 152 f. In any case it is clear to what family *Suidas*'s notice belongs.

<sup>22</sup> J. Suolahti, o.c. (n. 5), 11 f. presses the words τὰ μὲν οὖν κατ' ἐκεῖνο τοῦ καιροῦ . . . πολλοῖς ἦδη τῶν προτέρων συγγραφέων ἱστορήται (p. 263, 14) to mean that Agathias derived what he says of Julian and Jovian from 'Roman sources'. In view of the extreme selectivity of the notice, and the comparative rarity among the many accounts of Julian and Jovian of bias against the peace, I am disinclined to regard Agathias's words as anything more than a sign that he was aware of the multitude of versions of the Julian story, certainly no indication that he followed one of them.

<sup>23</sup> On Cedrenus's use of this chronicle cf. K. Praechter, *Sitz. der Bayer. Akad. d. Wiss., Philos.-philol.-hist. Klasse*, 1897, Bd. II, H. I, 1–107.

<sup>24</sup> For which cf. Patzig, *Byz. Zeit.* VI, 322 f., Praechter, o.c. (n. 23).

<sup>25</sup> Bibliography in G. Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica* I<sup>2</sup> (1958), 501, s.v. *Ps. Symeon*.

<sup>26</sup> For fundamental discussions of this thorny problem see E. Patzig, *Byz. Zeit.* III (1894), 470 f.; also D. Serruys, *Byz. Zeit.* XVI (1907), 1 f. cf. Moravcsik, o.c. (n. 25), 515 f., s.v. *Symeon*. The lost *Építome* is represented primarily by Symeon Magister, *ps. Leo Grammaticus* and Theodosius Melitenus. For the use of it by Cod. Par. gr. 1712 cf. Praechter, o.c. (n. 23).

<sup>27</sup> This chronicle cannot be regarded as the same as that preserved in Cod. Par. gr. 1711 under the name of Leo Grammaticus and is therefore to be distinguished as *ps. Leo*.

Ἰουλιανὸς δὲ μαντείας καὶ θυσίαις καὶ δαιμόνων ἀπάταις φραζόμενος κατὰ Περσῶν ἔστράτευσεν ὅτε καὶ χρησμὸν λέγεται λαβεῖν ἔχοντα οὕτως. . . .

Thus out of two versions of Julian's receiving this oracle (in Theophanes and in the *Epitome*) only one contains the citation of Agathias,<sup>28</sup> and that only when represented by Par. gr. 1712, and hence by Cedrenus, though both accounts probably derive ultimately from Theodoret through the medium of Theodore Lector.<sup>29</sup> Praechter suggested that *ps.* Leo Grammaticus represents a shortened version of the *Epitome*; <sup>30</sup> if so, the Agathias citation might have been in the tradition at quite an early stage, and omitted by *ps.* Leo, surely more likely than that it should have been inserted by the tenth-century chronicler of Par. gr. 1712.

Unless the citation is a simple mistake or corruption there seem to be only two possible explanations. First, it is just possible that the compiler of the *Epitome* remembered a *phrase* of Agathias's from some lost epigram or from the Δαφνικά; for ἀπάταις φραζόμενος is striking enough, and would be seen to have a special suitability for Julian.<sup>31</sup> Such an explanation would at least account for the memorable language of the *Epitome* as opposed to the rather dull style of Theophanes *ad loc.* Or, second, the phrase ὡς φησὶν Ἀγαθίας might refer simply to the bare fact that Julian campaigned in Persia. But the place for a reference to Agathias would surely have been under Jovian rather than his predecessor: and it seems very odd that a chronicler should have gone to Agathias, who was outside the chronicle tradition and had little or nothing to add either to Imperial biography, which was what interested the chroniclers, or to the much-told story of Julian's Persian expedition.

But we can at least draw one conclusion—that Cedrenus did not obtain his version of the oracle story from a reading of Agathias. Nor can the statements of Byzantine chroniclers be used as though they had independent value for fourth-century history; their value is only as good as their sources.

<sup>28</sup> To the Theophanes version belongs also George Monachus *genuinus* p. 544, 90, de Boor, and Muralt's George Monachus; for though the MS used by Muralt (Cod. Mosquensis olim CCLI et hodie 406) is interpolated from the *Epitome*, p. 448 (the oracle) represents George *genuinus*.

<sup>29</sup> De Boor at Theophanes, p. 52, 19 f., cites the *Excerpta Barocciana*, i.e. the unedited fragments of Theodore Lector's *Historia Tripartita*, surviving in Cod. Baroc. 142.

<sup>30</sup> He lacks the words ἐπρωδαῖς . . . καὶ also. cf. Praechter, o.c. (n. 23), 56. So also Theodosius Melitenus, ed. Tafel (1859), 68, 4-7, *ps.* Polydeuces (Pollux), ed. Hardt (1792), 382.

<sup>31</sup> For ἀπάτη and its cognates in the context of Christian polemic cf. Theodoret III, 7, 1; IV, 24, 3; and esp. V, 22, 1. Cedrenus, p. 539, 2, makes Julian call the pagan gods ἀπατεῶνος (cf. Philostorg. VII, 15; Artemii Passio 69), and compare Zonar. XIII, 13, 10, οἱ μὲν οὖν οὕτως ἀπατηθῆναι φασὶ τὸν Ἰουλιανόν. Magnus of Carrhae, ap. Malalas, p. 328 f., uses ἀπατηθεῖς twice of Julian within the space of a few lines, though in rather a different sense. For φραζόμενος in a metaphorical sense cf. Clem. Alex., *Strom.* III, p. 47, 15, Stählin, and II, p. 483, 27. In Theodoret, IV, 12, 2; V, 5, 2; V, 21, 13.

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#### <sup>21</sup> **The Date of Ammianus Marcellinus' Last Books**

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