

Religion and empire in the mid-fourth century

HIST 328 Lecture 20

Continuity of non-Christian religion

- Overview of political history and religious policy
 - Dynasty of Constantine
 - Julian “the Apostate”
 - Return to Christian empire
- Religious ideas among non-Christians
 - 4th C philosophical trends: Neo-Platonism, theurgy
- Non-Christian religion and social history
 - Non-Christian aristocratic families
 - Non-Christian ritual and rural religion

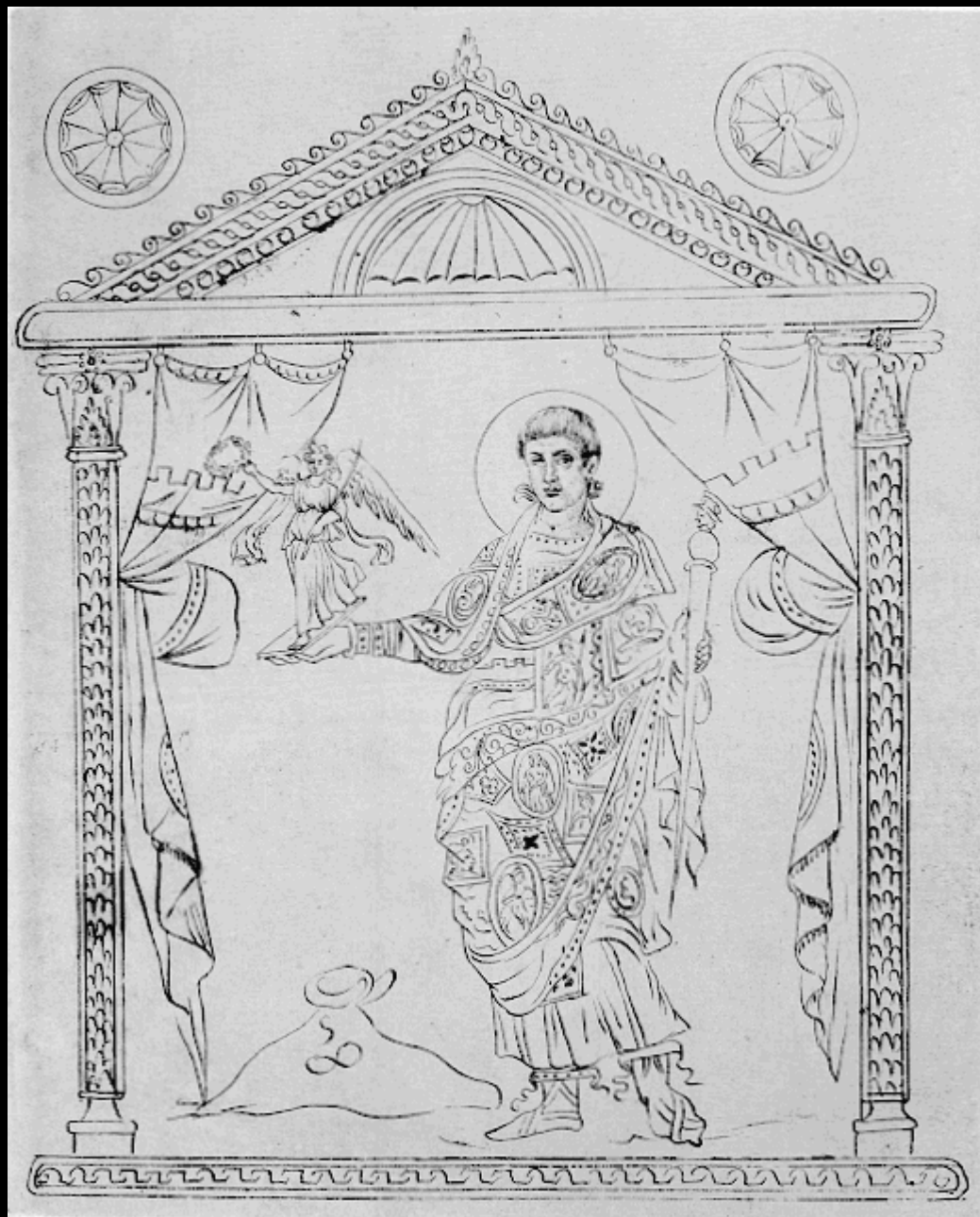
Chronology I: 337-363

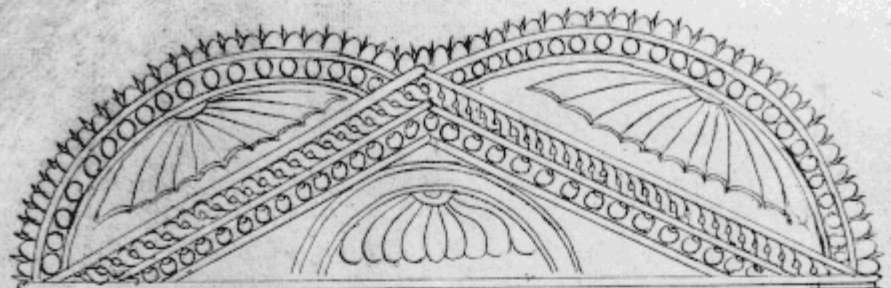
- Sons of Constantine
 - Constantine II, Constans, Constantius II
 - Constantine II 337-340
 - Constans 337-350
- Constantius II (337-361)
 - Augustus 337 over Eastern empire, then entire empire from 350; d. 361 of illness
 - Caesars: Gallus, Julian (great-nephews of Constantine)
- Julian (357-363)
 - Augustus 360; sole ruler 361; dies, Persia, 363

Constantius and the Church

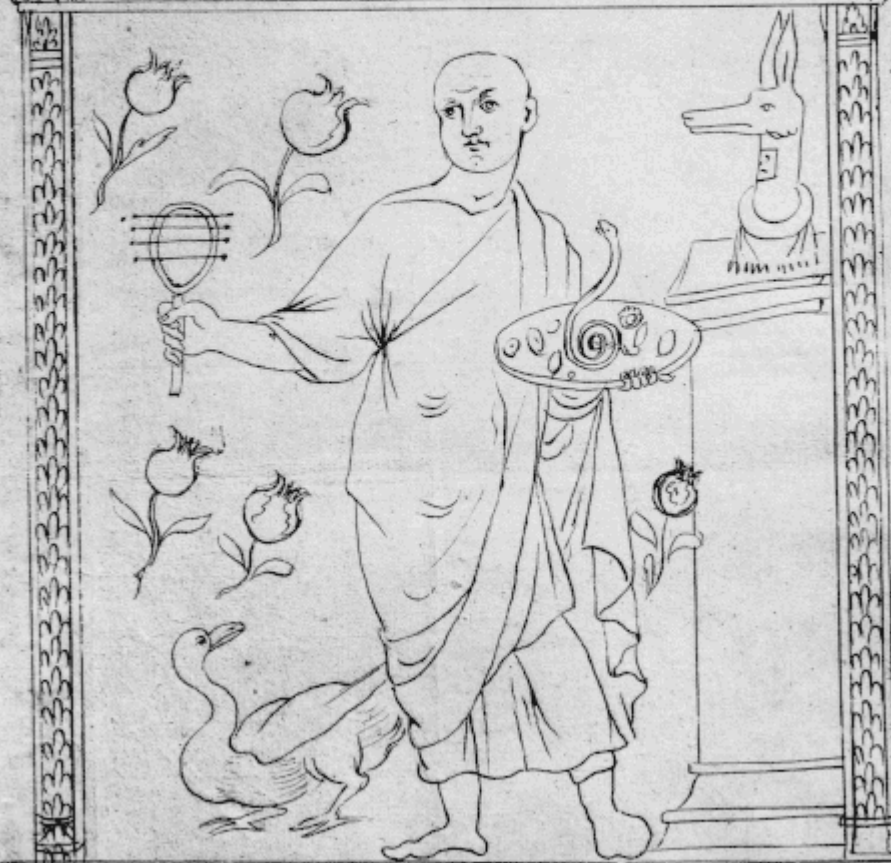
- Search for consensus
 - Church councils almost yearly in mid-4th C
 - Intransigent bishops (e.g. Athanasius) exiled to other half of empire (where they spread their views)
 - Growing theological divide between east and west
 - Series of creeds aimed at compromise
 - *Homoiousios* (of like substance), *homoios* (like)
- Ultra-Nicenes intransigent, see Constantius as “Arian”
 - Most Eastern bishops reject both Nicea and Arius’s original formulations
- Result: deep division, near chaos in church
- Julian takes advantage of situation!





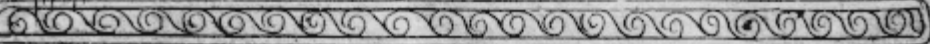


MENSIS NOUEMBER



*Castoribus postquam hunc arbor indubitanter
A que vix antea sicut conspiciatur ante*

*Attempitibus anteaque sicut hancque colit
Dumque sicut sicut sicut sicut*



FRONDIBUS A MISSIS REPETUNT SUAFRICORAMENSEM

“Paganism” 4th-5th C

- Non-Christian belief and ritual among elites
 - Adherence to traditional cults
 - Interest in neo-Platonic philosophy
- Non-Christian religion among masses
 - Some cities and villages revered their gods, others abandoned them
 - Temples in some locations long continued in operation, others were violently destroyed
 - E.g. Alexandria, 390s; Gaza, early 5th C
 - Stories told of mass conversions of rural populations down to late 500s and beyond

Julian: Programs and Impact

- Reactionary policies harked back to 2nd C
 - Rejected Christianization
 - Adopted style of rule of 2nd-century emperors (principate)
- Methods of post-Tetrarchic empire
 - Organized pagans in a “church”
 - Repressed Christian culture (edict against Christian teachers)
- Misguided failure
 - Regarded as weird and undignified
 - Tried to rebuild Jewish temple but stopped by weird fires
 - Best tactic: letting exiled Christian bishops go home and fight it out with their rivals!
- Grandiose invasion of Persia a disaster

Constantine vs. Julian



Consequences of Julian's reign

- Military and political
 - Loss of territory in the East
 - Weakening “barbarianization” or flexible adaptation?
- Religious/cultural
 - Hardening Christian attitudes towards non-Christians
 - Fear of a pagan emperor increased Christian militancy
 - End to hope of compromise over Trinity
 - Intransigent ultra-Nicenes return to East
- Move towards a fully Christian empire
- End of models of authority from Principate

Philosophy and “paganism”

- Major figures of late 3rd C
 - Plotinus
 - Porphyry
 - Iamblichus
- Julian and his circle
 - Students and successors of Iamblichus
 - Quest for contact with the divine, personal divinization
- Survival of Hellenic culture and religion
 - See e.g. Proclus at Athens (5th C)

Theurgy

- From Greek for “divine work”
 - *theos*, “god”, + *ergon*, “work”
- Use of ritual to achieve spiritual goals
- Consensus of late Greek philosophy: purpose is to achieve personal divinization
- Controversy: how?
 - Theurgists: ritual (Iamblichus)
 - Opponents: dialectic, contemplation only (Porphyry)
- Julian becomes an enthusiastic theurgist



Senatorial elite: religious conservatism

- Rome remains center of non-Christian religion
- Senatorial elite continues ancestral traditions
- Mid-4th C: continuity, tolerance, mixing
- Post-Julian: new atmosphere of tension?
 - Christians grow more aggressive
 - Do “pagans” go on the defensive?





ERINE DIODELUS ANDI ONTEACIMU LTIARRAS
EXQUIRNTA ACTANTUR IN SEMOALODINTIS
IUCHERACERAE DEHOC DE TARKEL LAMIO
IGNONIA NTIOMINISCUICHINCRACUGNACURNE
LESXINI NSOXTI XENTIRACULCHIAAAMADDO
CANDENTISUACCEXAMDIANI IKCOANUNQNDIT

Chronology II: 364-395

- Western emperors
 - Valentinian I, 364-375
 - Sons of Valentinian I
 - Gratian, 367-383 (b. 359, age 8 at accession)
 - Valentinian II, 375-392 (b. 371, age 4 at accession)
- Eastern emperors
 - Valens, 364-378
 - Procopius, 365-366: usurper, related to Julian
 - D. in battle at Adrianople, 378, against Goths
 - Theodosius I, 379-395
 - Spanish soldier, proponent of Nicene Christianity

Valentinian & Valens on religion

- Valentinian
 - Moderate, did not support any particular party
 - Retained some of Julian's laws limiting privileges of Christian clergy
- Valens
 - Seems to have taken up Constantius's policies in favor of non-Nicene party
 - Viewed by ecclesiastical historians as "Arian"
 - First emperor to vigorously enforce support for one side—initiated a trend that continued