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Author(s): Scott Bradbury

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JULIAN'S PAGAN REVIVAL AND THE DECLINE OF BLOOD SACRIFICE

SCOTT BRADBURY

"This is the chief fruit of piety: to
honor the divine in the traditional
ways."

Porphry *Ad Marcellam* 18

IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN A PARADOX that in a predominantly pagan empire the Emperor Julian (A.D. 360–363) did not meet with immediate success in his efforts to revive paganism. Contemporary pagans felt uneasy with Julian's attempt to make the gods live again in the public consciousness through the rebuilding of temples, the revival of pagan priesthoods, the restoration of ancient ceremonies, and most importantly, the revival of blood sacrifices. Historians have long pointed out that Christian emperors had permitted other elements of pagan festivals to continue while forbidding blood on the altars, since blood sacrifice was the element of pagan cult most repugnant to Christians. Thus, blood sacrifice, although linked to the fate of pagan cults in general, poses special problems precisely because it was regarded as the most loathsome aspect of cult and aroused the greatest amount of Christian hostility. The present article explores Julian's motives in reviving public blood sacrifices and the reasons for his apparent failure to mobilize immediate, strong support. By "public," I mean not only sacrifices in public cults, but more generally, sacrifices conducted in the public eye. My principal interest is in what we might call "normative" public paganism in the larger towns and cities of the Eastern Empire in the fourth century A.D. Asia Minor, Syria, and Greece figure prominently in the discussion, since these regions were for Julian the heartland of Hellenism, the regions that could be counted on to respond to the call for a pagan revival, and they are also the regions where we find clustered much of the evidence about sacrifice in the Roman imperial period. I begin by setting out the debate within Neoplatonism about the desirability of sacrifices and Julian's own place in the debate. I then examine the status of sacrifices in the cities of the Greek East in the generation before Julian's reign and contemporary reaction to Julian's conduct during the pagan revival. Finally, I examine

The following works will be cited by the author's name: P. Debord, *Aspects sociaux et économiques de la vie religieuse dans l'Anatolie gréco-romaine* (Leiden 1982); R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York 1986). Works of the Emperor Julian are cited in the edition of J. Bidez (ed.), *L'Empereur Julien: Oeuvres complètes* 2 vols (Paris 1963–72).

one of the principal reasons for the decline of sacrifice in the fourth century, namely the decline and redirection of the *euergesia* that had played a crucial role in funding pagan cults.

I. SPIRITUAL SACRIFICE IN LATE PAGANISM

In one sense, the prominence of blood sacrifice in Julian's pagan revival is predictable, since the act of sacrificial killing remained, even in the fourth century, emblematic of the whole complex of pagan belief and cult. The Neoplatonist tradition in which Julian was nurtured was divided, however, on the issue of blood sacrifice. Hellenism, like Judaism, had a long and well-established tradition of criticism of the dominant sacrificial system.¹ Philosophers had long disapproved of attempts to buy the gods' favors with ostentatious offerings and had stressed the importance of approaching the altars with a pure heart.² These gentle reproofs, which had never seriously threatened sacrificial customs, acquired new force and meaning in late antiquity and prompted the development within Neoplatonism of an intellectual justification for sacrifice. We find this debate articulated most clearly in the works of Porphyry and Iamblichus.

Although keenly interested in sacrifices in his youth, Porphyry's years with Plotinus (262–268) brought about a profound reorientation of his spiritual life and led him to call into doubt the utility of conventional cult, including blood sacrifice. In the *Letter to Anebo*, composed between 263 and 268, he rejected in a dismissive, even mocking, tone the elements of "low-brow" religion, the daemonology, occult practices, and sacrifices that had been so conspicuous in his early works, the *Philosophy from Oracles* and *On the Return of the Soul*.³ Soon after 270, he composed *On Abstinence* to persuade a fellow pupil of Plotinus that abstinence from animal flesh was essential for spiritual as well as bodily health.⁴ He devotes all of Book 2 of *On Abstinence* to the problem of sacrifice, since meat eating and blood sacrifice had been so closely interwoven in Greek culture. In earlier periods, social, political, and religious groups in a Greek city almost invariably met

¹On the moral critique of sacrifice in Judaism, see G. B. Gray, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament: Its Theory and Practice*² (New York 1971) 41–54; F. Young, *The Use of Sacrificial Ideas in Greek Writers from the New Testament to John Chrysostom* (Philadelphia 1979) 57–66.

²On worship with a pure heart, cf. Cic. *Nat. d.* 2.71, with the parallels assembled by A. S. Pease, *M. Tulli Ciceronis De Natura Deorum* (Cambridge, Mass. 1958) *ad loc.*; Philostr. *VA* 1.10–11 (on need for purity of spirit and inadequacy of opulent offerings).

³The *Philosophy from Oracles* contained a section "On Sacrifices" in which he used the evidence of oracles to corroborate sacrificial practices. For an example of his technique, see Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* 4.9.2, with G. Wolff, *Porphyrii de Philosophia ex Oraculis haurienda reliquiae* (Berlin 1856) 112–121.

⁴On the date and purpose of the treatise, see J. Bouffartigue and M. Patillon, *Porphyre: De l'Abstinence* 1 (Paris 1977) xviii–xxxvii.

and feasted under the aegis of a divinity to whom the meat consumed at the feast had first been offered in sacrifice.⁵ The intimate connection between sacrificial rites and feasting on roasted meats was perfectly obvious to all. As Aristotle wrote, "some associations appear to be formed for the sake of pleasure, for example, religious guilds and dining-clubs, which are unions existing for the purpose of sacrifice and companionship" (θυσίας ἔνεκα καὶ συνουσίας: *Eth. Nic.* 8.9.5, 1160a, 19–20). Comic poets could expect a laugh from portrayals of the gods' indignation at the brazenness with which mortals contrived sacrifices for their personal benefit (*Men. Dys.* 447–453), and to be "fond of sacrifice" (φιλοθύτης) might imply piety, but it could equally well imply gluttony (*Ar. Vespae* 81–84). Although mocked in comedy, these customs were taken seriously. Greeks possessed technical terms for meat that had not been butchered in the conventional sacrificial system and cautionary tales warned of the dangers of its consumption.⁶

Porphyry is sensitive to the possible criticism that his rejection of meat eating undermines sacrificial customs. Consequently, he stresses that he is not encouraging the abolition of civic cult (*De abst.* 1.27.1; 2.3–4, and esp. 33), but this special pleading cannot mask the fact that Book 2 of *On Abstinence* offers the most sustained attack on sacrificial practices to survive from antiquity.⁷ Porphyry presents various arguments—mythological, philosophical, daemonological—against blood offerings, but at the heart of the matter lies the notion of spiritual sacrifice, an idea best documented among early Christians, since they felt more antipathy for blood sacrifice than any other religious group in the Roman Empire. They opposed not only blood sacrifices, but all forms of material sacrifice, including incense and fruit and vegetable offerings. They did not, however, reject the *idea* of sacrifice. On the contrary, they trumped all other religious groups by proclaiming that Christ's sacrifice was the supreme and perfect sacrifice that would make all other sacrifices, those of both Jew and Gentile, unnecessary and void. Furthermore, they showed unparalleled creativity in their spiritualizing interpretations of what constituted an appropriate

⁵G. Berthiaume, *Les Rôles du mâgeiros* (Lyons 1982) *passim*, esp. 81–93. Romans, on the other hand, ate more pork and beef than Greeks and did not observe so strictly that the meat be sacrificed and shared with a god prior to consumption. On the pervasiveness of sacrifice in the affairs of all types of social organizations in the Hellenistic and early Roman period, see H.-J. Klauck, *Herrenmahl und hellenistischer Kult* (Münster 1982).

⁶Lane Fox 70; cf. F. Sokolowski, *Lois sacrées de l'Asie Mineure* (Paris 1955) 84 (regulations for cult of Dionysus Bromios at Smyrna with prohibition on worshippers eating meat that has been improperly sacrificed [second century A.D.]).

⁷The argument, however, is not original. Nearly 80% of Chapters 5–32, roughly the first half of Book 2, appear to have been cut and pasted from Theophrastus' *On Piety* (now lost). See J. Bouffartigue and M. Patillon, *Porphyre: De l'Abstinence* 2 (Paris 1979) 4.

sacrifice. Fourth-century Christian writers routinely employ the traditional language of sacrifice, both to combat pagan and Jewish sacrifices and to redirect the faithful to the bloodless, spiritualizing sacrifices of Christianity.⁸

Like Christians, all religious groups pursuing a higher pagan spirituality accept the idea that spiritual sacrifice is superior to material sacrifice. The exact meaning of spiritual sacrifice varies depending on whether the phrase is being used in a more or less restricted sense. In its most restricted sense, it refers to immaterial sacrifice, for example, the sacrifice of pure thoughts. In a less restricted sense, it may be used of a tendency to value the inner spiritual state of the worshipper and to devalue the material objects offered in sacrifice. In its broadest sense, it can even refer to a hierarchy of material sacrifices, some of which are considered more "spiritual" than others. Thus, for example, Porphyry puts forth the common argument that different sacrifices are appropriate to different levels of divinity and that the higher gods are best worshipped with spiritual sacrifices: to the High God, he claims, we should offer only pure thoughts conceived in deep silence; to the intelligible gods, pure thoughts uttered in prayers and hymns; to the visible gods, inanimate objects like barley, honey, fruit, and flowers; to the daemons, blood sacrifices or nothing at all (*De abst.* 2.34).

The view that spiritual sacrifice alone is appropriate to the higher gods is common coin among religious groups pursuing a higher pagan spirituality. At their most austere, the philosophers espouse an ideal of worship that is severely intellectual, but in more compromising moments, they merely stress the superiority of immaterial sacrifice within a hierarchy of acceptable sacrifices. Most acceptable are pure thoughts, followed by spoken prayers, hymns, incense, fruit and vegetable offerings, and finally, invariably in last place, blood offerings. Neoplatonists, Neopythagoreans, and Hermetists all accept this hierarchy of sacrifices and all consider blood sacrifices to be least desirable—they should be employed only to placate daemons or should be avoided altogether (*De abst.* 2.36.5, 37.5). Among material sacrifices, incense is considered to be the most spiritual and is most highly prized. These views were not confined to the realm of theory. For example, the mysteries that developed within Neoplatonism do not appear to have employed blood offerings; their sacrifices consisted of incense, perfumes, herbs and sacred stones, accompanied by incantations.⁹ Neopythagoreans

⁸On spiritual sacrifice in early Christianity, see R. J. Daly, *Christian Sacrifice: The Judaeo-Christian Background before Origen* (Washington, D.C. 1978); Young (above, n. 2); E. Ferguson, "Spiritual Sacrifice in Early Christianity and Its Environment," *ANRW* II.23.2 (1980) 1152–89.

⁹J. Bidez, "Note sur les mystères néoplatoniciens," *RBPh* 7 (1928) 1477–81, at 1481: "Quant aux sacrifices sanglants, il semble que, dans ces mystères, on se soit abstenu d'en offrir à la divinité."

were equally scrupulous in these matters. Apollonius of Tyana practised only bloodless cult, refusing even to be present at blood sacrifices. He composed a work *On Sacrifices* (now lost) and was critical of cities like Athens that were fond of sacrifice (*philothutai*) and adjusted their ceremonies in order to decrease expenditures.¹⁰ Apollonius could claim to be upholding the genuine teaching of Pythagoras, who was alleged in late antiquity to have promoted moderate, bloodless sacrifices and a frugal, meatless diet.¹¹ Hermetists too accept this hierarchy of sacrifices and stress the superiority of spiritual sacrifice with its implicit rejection of meat eating.¹²

It is perhaps not surprising that groups pursuing a higher pagan spirituality avoided blood cult. What is more surprising is the evidence for the proliferation of bloodless sacrifices in some traditional civic cults in the Roman imperial period. Nearly a half century ago, Martin Nilsson called attention to the parallels between pagan and Christian liturgies in late antiquity, citing the appearance within various cults of a daily divine service in addition to the traditional annual festivals and the increasing prominence in pagan cult of incense, lamps and hymns. In this religious milieu, claimed Nilsson, "animal sacrifice was not the dominating rite."¹³ Nilsson later argued that caches of lamps in temples, epigraphical testimonia, and literary evidence all supported the contention that lamps were much more common in liturgical use in the Roman period than previously.¹⁴ Incense too came into greater use in this period.¹⁵ Its exotic fragrances could dramatically heighten the solemnity of religious rites, and yet it was inexpensive if used in small quantities (cf. Tert. *Apol.* 30.6) and proved a perfect

¹⁰ Philostr. VA 1.31–32 (refusal to be present at blood sacrifices and use of incense); 4.11 (bloodless sacrifices at Ilium); 4.19 (arranging sacrifices, libations and prayers for the Athenians); 6.41 (arranging sacrifices for the towns of the Hellespont). Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* 4.12.1 mentions Apollonius' *Περὶ Θυσσιῶν*.

¹¹ Porph. *Vita Pyth.* 34–35 outlines Pythagoras' diet, stressing frugality rather than strict vegetarianism. Pythagoras would on rare occasions eat sacrificial meat; ch. 36 claims that he normally offered bloodless sacrifices, but occasionally offered a cock or a suckling pig. There was a tradition that Pythagoras once sacrificed an ox, but the "best authorities" identified it as an ox of dough. It was thus a surrogate victim. Cf. Iambl. *De Vita Pyth.* 11.54 (advice to the women of Croton on importance of one's spiritual state and moderate, bloodless sacrifices produced with one's own hands); 21.98 (libations and sacrifices of incense within the Pythagorean community); 24.107 (exhortation to most accomplished students to avoid blood sacrifices and consumption of meat); 28.150 (advice to "hearers" and "civic" followers to employ blood sacrifice only rarely).

¹² Ascl. 41; CH 13.16. On ritual in a Hermetic context, see G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes* (Cambridge 1986) 142–150.

¹³ M. P. Nilsson, "Pagan Divine Service in Late Antiquity," *HTThR* 38 (1945) 63–69, at 65.

¹⁴ M. P. Nilsson, "Lampen und Kerzen im Kult der Antike," *Opuscula archaeologica* 6 (1950) 96–111.

¹⁵ On incense in the Greco-Roman world, see E. G. Atchley, *A History of the Use of Incense in Divine Worship* (London 1909) 41–77.

"everyday" sacrifice. Of the various forms of spiritual sacrifice, hymnody is the best attested.¹⁶ Amateur and professional choruses proliferated in a variety of cults, but the epigraphical evidence is richest at Claros and Didyma. Among these inscriptions, the most remarkable is a late-third-century oracle of Apollo from Didyma, in which the god reveals his own interest in a more spiritualized form of cult:

[Hapless mortals], what concern have I with bountiful hecatombs of cattle and [gleaming] statues of rich gold and images worked in bronze and silver? The immortal gods indeed have no need of possessions nor of any business with which [mortals] cheer their minds Some of you have remembered to sing a hymn in my sanctuaries even beforetimes, whenever the prophet was about to bring forth an oracle from the inner shrine I rejoice over every song [whenever it is performed] but it is a much better thing, in my view, when someone sings an old-fashioned song¹⁷

Louis Robert remarked of Apollo's preference for spiritual cult: "C'est la marque d'une évolution de la pensée religieuse dans le grand sanctuaire oraculaire et de préoccupations répandues à cette époque dans la philosophie."¹⁸

Under the empire, daily divine service employing bloodless sacrifices is attested in cults of Zeus, Asclepius, Dionysus, Isis, and Hecate.¹⁹ At Teos in the reign of Tiberius, for example, an inscription prescribes that "every day at the opening of the temple of Dionysus 'Patron of the City' hymns are to be sung by the priest, the ephebes, and the priest of the boys. At the opening and closing of the god's temple, the priest of Tiberius Caesar shall pour libations, burn incense, and light the lamps, [all of which will be paid for] from the god's temple funds."²⁰ At Stratoniceia in the late second or early third century, the city ordered that the statues of Zeus and Hecate, which stood in the Council Chamber and which were famed for their "good deeds of power," be honored with choral hymns to be sung daily. Every day a chorus of thirty well-born children was to be led to the Council Chamber, robed in white and crowned with olive, to sing a hymn to Zeus and Hecate.²¹ At Epidaurus an inscription from the second or third century records a daily service consisting of libations of wine, the lighting

¹⁶On spiritual sacrifice and pagan liturgical music, see J. Quasten, *Music and Worship in Pagan and Christian Antiquity*² (Eng. tr.; Washington, D.C. 1983) 51–57.

¹⁷*Didyma* 2.217, with R. Harder, "Inscripfen von Didyma Nr. 217 Vers 4," in *Navicula Chiloniensis* (Leiden 1956) 88–97. Further references to hymns in daily cult in R. MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven 1981) 166, n. 9.

¹⁸L. Robert, "Trois oracles de la théosophie et un prophète d'Apollon," *CRAI* (1968) 568–599, at 597. See also the brilliant historical reconstruction in Lane Fox 219–222.

¹⁹Nilsson (above, n. 13) 63–69.

²⁰Sokolowski (above n. 6) 28; L. Robert, *Études anatoliennes* (Paris 1937) 20–37.

²¹*IK Stratonikeia* 1101, lines 7–17 (= Sokolowski [above, n. 6] 69); A. Laumonier, "Notes sur une inscription de Stratonice," *REA* 36 (1934) 85–87; Robert (above, n. 20) 516–523.

of lamps, and the offering of incense, but the text is too fragmentary for us to understand the details.²² In this context, we might cite also the practice of praying at dawn and dusk to King Helios, attested in the imperial period among a variety of religious groups.²³ In an inscription from Oenoanda, for example, Apollo prescribes as an official rite of the city that the inhabitants pray at dawn to "all-seeing Aether," their eyes fixed on the Eastern sky.²⁴

In the minds of more spiritual worshippers, bloodless cult is in no way deficient—it is to be preferred. Blood sacrifice is best avoided because it involves the worshipper with evil daemons, to whom are attributed not only natural disasters, but also violence and psychological turmoil in people's lives (*De abst.* 2.38). But Porphyry goes further, making the astonishing argument that much of traditional civic religion is to be attributed to the deception of daemons. Deceived by the daemons, the inhabitants of the cities sacrifice in the mistaken belief that they are propitiating the gods (2.40). The daemons intend to convert us away from the gods to worship of themselves; for they wish to be gods, asserts Porphyry, and their leader wishes to be the Supreme God (2.42.2). They delight in sacrifices not merely for the honor they are shown, but because they are fed by the smoke and the vapors of sacrifice.²⁵ They lurk in public spaces, in private houses, even in our very bodies. The prudent man, if he takes Porphyry seriously, will not then be neutral on the issue of blood sacrifice (2.43.1). Avoidance of sacrifices and sacrificial meats is fundamental to the personal care of the soul; the man who does not purify his soul draws the daemons like a magnet, or, as Porphyry would say later in the *Letter to Marcella*, he makes his soul a "dwelling place for the wicked daemon" (19).

It is important to remember the rhetorical purpose of *On Abstinence*. Porphyry was attempting to persuade a friend that he could not, as a philosopher, dispense with vegetarianism, but strict vegetarianism was not

²²F. Sokolowski, *Lois sacrées des cités grecques. Supplément* (Paris 1962) 25.

²³Many parallels are assembled in F. J. Dölger, *Sol Salutis* (Münster 1925, *Liturgiegeschichtliche Forschungen* 4–5) 1–60 and A. J. Festugière, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* 4 (Paris 1954) 245, n. 3.

²⁴*Marinus Vita Procli* 21 says that Proclus prayed to the sun three times a day; cf. *Proc. Theol. Plat.* 2.11 with commentary *ad loc.* in H. D. Saffrey (ed.), *Proclus, Théologie platonicienne* 2 (Paris 1974) 121, n. 11. *Jul. Ep.* 89b.302a encourages pagan priests to pray to the gods at least at dawn and dusk, preferably thrice daily; cf. *Ep.* 98.401b. On the inscription from Oenoanda, see L. Robert, "Un Oracle gravé à Oinoanda," *CRAI* (1971) 597–619; Lane Fox 168–177.

²⁵A Christian commonplace, cf. *Athen. Leg.* 26; *Origen C. Cels.* 8.60; *Sent. Sext.* n. 564; *Euseb. Praep. Evang.* 5.2; *Firm. Mat. Err. prof. rel.* 13.4; *Arnob. Adv. nat.* 7.23; *Lactant. Div. inst.* 2.17 claims that the daemons hide themselves in temples and attend sacrifices in order to attach themselves to people: *ut alliciant facile in templis se occultant et sacrificiis omnibus praesto adsunt*. At *De abst.* 2.43.2 Porphyry concedes that blood sacrifice to propitiate the daemons may be necessary for cities.

necessary for the average person (1.27.1). In the *Letter to Marcella*, composed after 300, Porphyry does not seem so much hostile as indifferent to traditional cult. Although he maintains that the chief fruit of piety is to honor the divine in the traditional ways, he adds that God neither wants nor needs such worship: "tears and supplications do not move God, sacrifices do not honor God, numerous votive offerings do not adorn God . . ." (*Ad Marc.* 18–19, cf. 23). Nonetheless, the arguments of *On Abstinence* were in the public domain and offered endless weapons to Christian critics of pagan cult, particularly Eusebius in the composition of the *Preparation for the Gospel*.

In the 320s, Iamblichus would take aim at the criticisms advanced by Porphyry in the *Letter to Anebo* and *On Abstinence*. Behind the most obvious points of contention, however, lay a deeper, more fundamental disagreement between Iamblichus and Plotinus over the significance of cultic ritual. Porphyry had absorbed from Plotinus a conception of the human soul and its capacities that made traditional cult, including sacrifice, inconsequential in comparison to personal care of the soul. In a bold metaphor intended to express its purity and impassibility, Plotinus claimed that the higher part of Soul (νοῦς), the true essence of a human being, never actually "descends." It remains always "above" and retains its capacity to enjoy unmediated contact with the Intelligibles.²⁶ In slightly different Platonic language, Porphyry also advanced the view that νοῦς is always present to itself, focused upon itself, and humming away with noetic activity, even if we, the composite self, are "forgetful" and mired in the realm of matter.²⁷ Cult mattered little in comparison to the care of the soul. Thus, when Amelius, a pupil who was fond of sacrifices (φιλοθύτης) and visits to temples, asked the master to accompany him, Plotinus put the youth off with the enigmatic quip that "they [the gods] ought to come to me, not I to them" (*Porph. Vita Plot.* 10).

In the view of Iamblichus, Plotinus and Porphyry had seriously undervalued cultic ritual because they overvalued the ability of the individual human soul to achieve union with the divine realm.²⁸ Iamblichus states

²⁶On Plotinus' view of the undescended soul and its implications for cult, see C. de Vogel, "Plotinus' Image of Man: Its Relationship to Plato as well as to Later Neoplatonism," in G. Verbeke (ed.), *Images of Man in Ancient and Medieval Thought* (Louvain 1976) 147–168; C. G. Steel, *The Changing Self: A Study on the Soul in Later Neoplatonism: Iamblichus, Damascius and Priscianus* (Brussels 1978) 34–38; H. D. Saffrey, "La Théurgie comme phénomène culturel chez les Néoplatoniciens (IV^e–V^e siècles)," *Koinonia* 8 (1984) 161–171, at 165: "Ainsi pour Plotin, point n'est besoin d'intermédiaires ni de théurgie pour aller à dieu, l'âme seule le peut par ses propres forces, elle n'a besoin ni de salut, ni d'aides surnaturelles ni de rites religieux."

²⁷*De abst.* 1.39.1–2.

²⁸On Iamblichus' critique of Plotinus' "undescended soul," see Steel (above, n. 26) 38–45. The importance of Iamblichus' view of the soul for understanding his attitude

flatly in Book 2 that intellectual activity by itself is unable to secure the worshipper union with divine beings. The source of union with the gods is not human intellectual effort:

Intellectual understanding does not connect theurgists with the gods . . . rather, it is the perfect accomplishment of ineffable acts, religiously performed and beyond all understanding, and it is the power of ineffable symbols comprehended by the gods alone that establishes theurgical union In fact, even if we are not thinking, the symbols themselves of their own accord perform their own work; and the ineffable power of the gods to whom these symbols elevate us recognizes by itself its own images. It is not awakened to this by our thinking.

(Iambl. *Myst.* 2.11)

Even if we are not engaged in intellectual activity, the symbols manipulated by the theurgist, whether the words or material objects of a religious rite, can bring about union with the gods whenever the gods are “awakened” by recognition of their symbols (συνθήματα), the traces of their own divinity here on earth. Cultic ritual is thus essential even for the philosopher.

Iamblichus shares Porphyry's views on the hierarchical structure of the cosmos. He accepts, for example, that different kinds of sacrifice are appropriate to different levels of divinity, but he places a much higher value on the material realm and consequently rejects the notion that material sacrifices, specifically blood sacrifices, are destined only for the lower gods. God illuminates the entire universe, argues Iamblichus, including the material realm, which is not evil and should not be reviled. Moreover, there exists a cosmic sympathy, or rather, a “friendship and likeness” (φιλία καὶ οἰκείωσις) between God or the gods as creative forces and their creations, whether immaterial or material (5.7–9). This friendship and likeness results from the fact that the gods have deposited traces or symbols (συνθήματα) of themselves in their creations, including material objects like sacrificial animals. When these objects are manipulated in the appropriate way by the theurgist, they may, for reasons unknown to mortals, “awaken” the gods and draw them into one's presence (5.10). Or, to use another image, the objects manipulated by the theurgist become purified receptacles for the reception of god (5.23). Even a blood sacrifice, transformed by purifying fire, has the capacity to draw the gods to the sacrificer. Furthermore, Iamblichus echoes the common pagan assumption that the gods themselves gave humans their traditional rites, and it is by the symbols in these rites that the gods are “awakened” and drawn into the worshippers' presence (5.25). Thus, to allow sacrifices to lapse is willingly to forego the manifestation of the gods, knowingly to banish the gods from one's life. In addition, Iamblichus has nothing but disdain for the commonplace that daemons feed on sacrificial

toward theurgy has been stressed by G. Shaw, “Theurgy: Rituals of Unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus,” *Traditio* 41 (1985) 1–28, at 13–16.

victims. The nourishment, perfection, and illumination of beings, he argues, work from the top down in the cosmic hierarchy, not from the bottom up. Nothing in the cosmic hierarchy depends on what is beneath it. Gods do not depend on daemons for nourishment and perfection, nor is it conceivable that daemons could depend on mortals. The idea that daemons need and are nourished by blood sacrifices is patently absurd (5.10).

Julian himself was clearly conversant with the philosophical debate over sacrifice. He was acquainted with the long dispute over the appropriateness of vegetarianism and its implications for sacrificial customs (*Or.* 9.191c). He was aware of the Pythagorean objection that sacrifice caused the animals pain and torment (*Or.* 8.174a). Furthermore, he rejected the argument that Diogenes was impious, in that he failed to frequent the temples and to worship at statues and altars. Diogenes, claims Julian, possessed none of the usual sacrifices, incense, or libations, or the money to buy them. He offered the gods the most precious of possessions, the dedication of his soul through contemplation (*Or.* 9.199b). Nor did Julian invariably approve of lavish public cult. On the march eastward in 363, he saw sacrificial victims and billows of incense everywhere about Batnae, a scene that should have delighted him, but the Neoplatonist desire for withdrawal and seclusion asserted itself. He confesses to Libanius that it all seemed like overheated zeal and alien to a spirit of true piety. Worship of the gods, he claims, should take place in quiet seclusion away from busy public spaces *Ep.* 98.400c–d; cf. *Misop.* 344d). It is possible, in fact, to imagine Julian promoting a pagan revival without blood sacrifice. We should not underestimate his capacity for innovation. His views on the nature of the pagan priesthood, for example, were a marked innovation on conventional practice.²⁹ He might well have pursued the tradition exemplified by Porphyry, arguing that blood sacrifice was a “recent” and wrong-headed innovation and that it was necessary to “restore” a pristine, bloodless cult.³⁰

Julian himself offers no intellectual justification for the revival of sacrifices, but in Sallustius’ *Concerning the Gods and the Universe* we find an example of the sort of explanation and justification current in Julian’s inner circle. In chapters 15–16 of this compendium of pagan belief, Sallustius stitches together a rather disjointed series of observations on sacrifice, all of which have parallels in Book 5 of *On the Mysteries*. It comes as no

²⁹O. Nicholson, “The ‘Pagan Churches’ of Maximinus Daia and Julian the Apostate,” *JEH* 45 (1994) 1–15.

³⁰*De abst.* 2.5–10, 29 for myths supporting the idea that sacrifice was from its inception wrong-headed and criminal, the product of anger, fear, or ignorance. It is often connected with the end of a golden age (Hes. *Theog.* 535–616; Ovid *Met.* 15.111–142). On the tensions and anxieties produced by sacrificial killing, see W. Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1983).

surprise that all of these views derive from the Iamblichean tradition. He begins by noting the commonplace that God has no needs or emotions; hence, we sacrifice for our own benefit, not God's. But he quickly moves to Iamblichus' principal argument when he claims that God's providence extends throughout the universe and can be enjoyed by whatever has been prepared by "fitness" (ἐπιτηδειότης) to receive it. Fitness, he explains, is achieved through "imitation and likeness" (μίμησις καὶ ὁμοιότης). For this reason, temples are a copy of heaven, altars of earth, images of life, prayers of the intellectual element in us, magic symbols of the ineffable powers on high, plants and stones of matter, and sacrificial animals of the irrational life within us. The gods gain nothing from all these things, but we may gain union (συναφή) with them.

Sallustius drops the argument there and begins chapter 16 on a new tack. He states two conventional arguments (both also used by Iamblichus): first, since everything comes from God, we should repay God with first fruits of our possession in the form of votive offerings, and second, prayers divorced from sacrifices are only words, while prayers with sacrifices are animated words, the word giving power to the life and the life animation to the word (cf. *De myst.* 4.3; 5.26). His third and most important argument reverts to the theurgic explanation that he had raised in chapter 15. The happiness of anything, claims Sallustius, consists in its appropriate perfection, and the appropriate perfection of anything is union (συναφή) with its cause. The union of mortals with their cause, which is God, can only happen through imitation or likeness with some intermediary agent bringing the two together. Sallustius does not, however, have in mind the union of νοῦς with the Intelligibles. He has in mind the likeness of two forms of life (ζωή), that is, of mere human life with the perfect, divine life, achieved through the intermediary of a third form of life, namely the living sacrificial animal. All of the argument here derives directly or indirectly from Iamblichus' discussion in *De Mysteriis*.³¹ We can feel confident that Julian himself was schooled by his own spiritual guides in these and similar arguments.³²

II. SACRIFICE UNDER JULIAN'S CHRISTIAN PREDECESSORS AND THE PAGAN REVIVAL

For the nineteen months of Julian's reign, a haze of sacrificial smoke hung over the Roman world, much of it generated by the emperor himself. Ammianus complains that he "drenched the altars with the blood of an excessive number of victims, sometimes slaughtering a hundred oxen at a

³¹For commentary, see A. D. Nock, *Sallustius: Concerning the Gods and the Universe* (repr. Hildesheim 1966) lxxxiii–lxxxvi.

³²On Julian and his philosophical masters, see J. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (Baltimore 1989) 115–129.

time, with countless flocks of various other animals Moreover, the ceremonial rites were excessively increased at an expense that was hitherto unusual and burdensome" (22.12.6–7). In the elogium, Ammianus again deplores the slaughter of "countless herds without regard to expense" and characterizes Julian as *superstitiosus magis quam sacrorum legitimus observator* (25.4.17). Libanius too must concede that in sacrificing every day Julian did not follow the dictates of convention (νόμων ἀνάγκαι) and further that he spent huge sums of money (Or. 12.80; 18.170). But this begs an important question. What convention (νόμος) does Libanius mean and how, in Ammianus' view, would a *legitimus observator* honor the gods? Do they have in mind the convention of a timeless Classical past or pagan convention as they had actually experienced it under the reigns of Constantine and his sons? What exactly was sacrificial convention or custom in the Greek East during the fourth century A.D.?

Historians of the period are well acquainted with the difficulty of answering this question. If we consult pagan literary sources to take the pulse of sacrificial rites in the period, we will be tempted to pronounce the patient near death, since pagan sources are strangely reticent on the topic of sacrifice, and virtually no Greek inscriptions attesting pagan cult survive from the fourth century apart from the reign of Julian.³³ Christian apologetic constantly inveighs against sacrifice, but its timeless quality makes it extremely unreliable for the historian trying to determine actual practices at a specific point in time. Moreover, when sacrificing pagans do reappear in the hagiographical sources of the fifth and sixth centuries, they are no longer proud civic notables orchestrating the cults of their native cities. By that period they are constrained, irrespective of social status, to sacrifice discreetly, if not in total secrecy.³⁴ They are not representatives of the normative public paganism in which we are primarily interested.

³³On the decline of epigraphy, see R. MacMullen, "The Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire," *AJP* 103 (1982) 233–246; *id.*, *Corruption and the Decline of Rome* (New Haven 1988) 1–15. For attestations of cult, see L. Robert, *Hellenika* 4 (Paris 1948) 55–57, on a governor boasting of sacrificing to Zeus in the caves of Cretan Ida and ending his epigram with a prayer to preserve "my emperor" with all the immortals. Robert assumes that the inscription belongs to Julian's reign. Cf. J. Reynolds, "Inscriptions of Roman Tripolitania: A Supplement," *PBSR* 23 (1955) 124–147, at 139, on a man from Ghirza who sacrificed 51 bulls and 38 goats at the tomb of his father. The inscription is "unlikely to be earlier than the middle of the IV cent." Dedications of altars in the fourth century are infrequent, but cf. IG II² 4841/2 (=SIG³ 907).

³⁴On the survival of pagan cult practices in the fifth and sixth centuries, see M. J. Maspero, "Horapollon et la fin du paganisme égyptien," *BIAO* 11 (1914) 164–195; R. Rémondon, "L'Égypte et la suprême résistance au christianisme (V^e–VII^e siècles)," *BIAO* 51 (1952) 63–78; W. E. Kaegi Jr., "The Fifth-Century Twilight of Byzantine Paganism," *CIMed* 26 (1966) 243–275; F. R. Trombley, "Paganism in the Greek World at the End of Antiquity: The Case of Rural Anatolia and Greece," *HTHR* 78 (1985) 327–352; K. W. Harl, "Sacrifice and Pagan Belief in Fifth- and Sixth-Century Byzantium," *PastPres* 128

The failure of our pagan sources to mention sacrifices can be attributed largely to Christian intolerance and the fierce denunciations of sacrifice found in the anti-pagan legislation of Christian emperors. These laws, issued first by Constantine and reissued by his sons, were aimed predominantly at sacrifices conducted in public and were intended to create an atmosphere or climate of opinion in which people would consider it "imprudent" to sacrifice.³⁵ It is hardly surprising that discreetly conducted private sacrifices appear sporadically in late antique sources, since Christian officials could not hope to intrude so far into the private realm, at least not without mobilizing charges of magic. They could, however, hope to determine what would be normative and socially acceptable in public spaces. Julian, Libanius, and Eunapius all make clear that to sacrifice in the public eye under Christian emperors was to exercise "boldness" and "daring." To recapture some sense of Julian's personal experience, no source is more revealing than his own letter concerning Pegasius, the bishop of Ilion who apostatized and was made a priest in the pagan revival (*Ep.* 79). As Julian travelled westward to court in late 354, he visited Ilion with bishop Pegasius as his tour guide. Surprised to find the altars "still lit, almost ablaze," the young prince cautiously tested the bishop's views, "What does this mean? Do the people of Ilion offer sacrifices?" Pegasius conceded that the locals did honor Hector with sacrifices and likened this practice to the honors paid to Christian martyrs, but there was more evidence of Pegasius' good faith. The bronze statue in the little temple of Hector was well-oiled and gleaming, and the great statue of Achilles in the forecourt of Hector's temple had suffered no harm. It was with eagerness, claims Julian, that Pegasius unlocked the temple of Athena Polias to reveal the statues safe and in good order, nor did he hiss at daemons or make the sign of the cross, as Christians usually did in such circumstances. Most significant, however, was their visit to the temple of Achilles. Julian had previously been informed that Pegasius had pulled the hero's tomb to pieces, but it turned out to be in good repair and Julian carefully observed how Pegasius approached it with reverence. Pegasius had destroyed no temples, argued Julian; he had merely "thrown down a few stones as a blind so that he might preserve the rest."

Julian's account reveals what might well greet the visitor in some pagan sanctuaries: temples closed and under the supervision of the bishop, stripped of their treasures and statuary, even their doors and columns. This account lends credence to the evidence of Libanius and Eunapius. As

(1990) 7–27; P. Chuvin, *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans* (Cambridge, Mass. 1990); F. R. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization, ca 370–529* (Leiden 1993).

³⁵On the vexed problem of the origin and effect of anti-pagan legislation, see now my "Constantine and the Problem of Anti-Pagan Legislation in the Fourth Century," *CP* 89 (1994) 120–139 (with bibliography).

Libanius said of a friend's uncle who continued to offer sacrifices under Constantius, "despite the law which banned it and the death penalty inflicted on any who dared to do so, he yet went his way through life in the company of the gods, and he laughed to scorn that evil law and its sacrilegious enactor."³⁶ Eunapius was impressed with the rare example of Anatolius, the *PPO Illyrici* (357–360), who went to Athens around 359, "sacrificed boldly and visited all the temples."³⁷ It emerges from Eunapius that under Theodosius public sacrifices were risky and all but non-existent in Sardis. In the *Vitae Sophistarum* he describes the case of Iustus, a Roman nobleman who constantly visited the temples and who was keenly interested in all forms of divination. Appointed Vicar of Asia under Theodosius, he arrived in Lydia, found the governor to be a like-minded pagan, and set about building "makeshift altars at Sardis—for there were none there — and wherever a vestige was to be found he set his hand to the remains of the temples with the ambition of rebuilding them." He offered sacrifices in public (δημοσίᾳ) and on one occasion, after a public sacrifice, staged a test of the divinatory powers of the city's intellectuals, a demonstration actually attended by Eunapius.³⁸

The reports of smashed altars should not surprise us. They were early targets of Christian violence because they received the blood of slaughtered victims, and they were after all easier to smash than temples. When Julian restored altars in Antioch, the Christian populace promptly threw them down again.³⁹ The reports of the destruction of sanctuaries, the conversion of temples into churches, and the theft of temple property are also relevant here, because they reveal the extent to which the physical setting of pagan cults could be disrupted or destroyed.⁴⁰ Julian himself observed closely how cities had treated their temples when he came to power, reserving imperial

³⁶Lib. Or. 1.27; cf. Or. 30 *passim*, esp. 17–19; Ep. 1351.3.

³⁷Eunap. VS 10.6.8: θύσας δὲ θαρσαλέως καὶ περιελθὼν τὰ ἱερὰ πάντα, ἢ θεσμός ἱερὸς ἐκέλευεν

³⁸Eunap. VS 23.4.2–3: βωμούς τε ἀνέστησεν αὐτοσχεδίου ἐν Σάρδεσιν (οὐ γὰρ ἦσαν αὐτόθι) PLRE I s.v. Iustus 2 points out that Iustus probably held office under Theodosius, for Chrysanthius, who died ca 396/7, was an old man when Iustus came to Sardis. For the governor of Lydia, see PLRE I s.v. Hilarius 10.

³⁹Jul. Misop. 361b; cf. Lib. Or. 17.7 for the overthrow of altars after Julian's death.

⁴⁰References in RAC s.vv. *Heidenverfolgung* and *Christianisierung (der Monumente)*, with F. W. Deichmann, "Frühchristliche Kirchen in antiken Heiligtümern," JDAI 54 (1939) 105–136; G. Fowden, "Bishops and Temples in the Eastern Roman Empire A.D. 320–435," JThS NS 29 (1978) 53–78. Cf. Lib. Ep. 712, on a pagan priest named Bacchius "stealing back" a statue of Artemis stolen from her shrine; 757 for Bacchius' restorations of shrines in Tarsus and heavy exactions from men who were apparently accused of despoiling temple property. The circumstances are obscure, but Libanius' defense is characteristic. Bacchius should be lenient with Aemilianus (otherwise unknown) since he "was not one of the aggressors (ὀβριζόντες) though he could have been, had he wished."

patronage for those who had treated them well (Lib. Or. 18.129). In many places, there was a settling of scores against Christians who had despoiled shrines under Constantius II. Libanius was kept busy interceding on behalf of acquaintances, old friends, and even his own family members who were now being attacked for transgressions committed under Constantius.⁴¹ Libanius' defense of two young cousins who had converted temples into a house is typical: "they acted in conformity with the policy adopted by the emperor of the day. I do not approve of it, but anyway such things were legal at the time" (Ep. 1364.7).

Such examples do not of course prove that public blood sacrifices had been completely abandoned in Eastern cities, but they do reveal the demoralizing and intimidating atmosphere that existed in many areas, particularly in larger towns and cities. Moreover, they should make us hesitate to assume, as some scholars do, that pagans continued to sacrifice largely without worry or interference. To sacrifice publicly in urban areas was to run a risk, and we must question whether pagans would have considered the risk worth taking. Imperial legislation with its harsh denunciations of pagan cult and its fierce threats of retaliation in effect "dared" people to do in public what some people occasionally did in private. Eunapius obviously considered it provocative that Anatolius and Iustus engaged in blood sacrifice in full, public view. Iustus even asked the local philosophers to divine the future in the entrails of sacrificial victims. That could be construed as high treason. The atmosphere of various towns and cities was by no means uniform, since some places, like Carrhae (Harran) and Gaza, had virtually no Christian presence and became famous for adherence to traditional religion.⁴² They may well have felt confident enough to sacrifice in public. Apamea too "continued to honor Zeus at a time when there were penalties for honoring the gods" (Lib. Ep. 1351.3), which presumably means that they conducted public sacrifices under Constantius. But those places were not, in my view, the norm.

Julian had counted himself a Hellene for nearly ten years by the time the uprising in Paris in February 360 made him a full Augustus. He and his confidants had worshipped the gods in secret, for the suspicious Constantius would have interpreted such activities as evidence of a plot against the throne. Although he now possessed the rank of Augustus, Julian continued to feign devotion to Christianity (Amm. 21.2.4), since an underdog usurper

⁴¹Cf. Ep. 724, concerning a man who had made a habit of buying up temple spoils. The magnificent house that resulted from this practice understandably aroused envy. Cf. Epp. 763; 819.

⁴²On Carrhae's pagan character, note Egeria's comment after her visit of 385: *In ipsa autem civitate extra paucos clericos et sanctos monachos, si qui tamen in civitate commorantur, penitus nullum Christianum inveni, sed totum gentes sunt* (Peregr. Egeriae 20.8). On Gaza, see Trombley (above, n. 34) 188–222.

stood to gain little and to lose much by a public conversion to the old religion. Lacking a cohesive spirit and shared sense of purpose, pagans would not have known how to react to such an announcement. Christians, on the other hand, would have been galvanized by the threat of persecution (cf. Lib. Or. 18.121–125). At Constantius' death, however, Julian began to sacrifice lavishly and publicly, as he explains in a letter to Maximus:

We worship the gods openly, and the majority of the army accompanying me is god-fearing. We sacrifice in public. We have offered many hecatombs to the gods as thank-offerings. The gods order me to purify everything insofar as I can, and I for my part obey them very eagerly. For they say that we shall reap great rewards for our labors, if only we do not lose heart. (*Ep.* 26.415c–d)

In his brief reign as sole Augustus from November 361 to June 363, Julian expended great energy restoring temples, rebuilding altars, restoring cult statues, and reviving, as well as inventing, ancient ceremonies.⁴³ Nor was he content to sacrifice only at the regular festivals of the gods. At the rising and setting of Helios-Mithras, he offered blood sacrifices (apparently birds for divinatory purposes) in the garden of his palace, a practice which he expected pagan priests to follow as well.⁴⁴ He would busy himself about the preparations, collecting firewood (!), wielding the knife, opening the birds, and inspecting their entrails. Indeed, blood sacrifice was so conspicuous a part of Julian's piety that the Antiochenes dubbed him slaughterer (*victimarius*) rather than priest (*sacricola*, Amm. 22.14.3).

But why did Julian focus so keenly on blood sacrifice within the pagan revival? Why not conduct the pagan revival with perfectly adequate and far less controversial cult forms such as processions, prayers and hymns, incense, candles and lamps? The students of Iamblichus had provided him with the intellectual justification for blood sacrifice, but politics, as much as piety, moved Julian in this direction. In the religious environment of the fourth century, blood sacrifice was confrontational. It was the element of traditional cult that Christians absolutely could not abide. It enticed the daemons who clung to the flesh of slaughtered victims, but more importantly, it remained in the Christian imagination a constant reminder of the tortures inflicted on them by the persecutors. During the Great Persecution, for example, Maximin Daia ordered provincial and civic officials to insure that all citizens sacrifice and pour libations, that they "taste the polluted sacrifices" and that "everything set out for sale in the market be polluted with libations from the sacrifices." Guards were to be set at the entrances to public baths in order to "pollute with abominable sacrifices those who were washing there" (Euseb. *De martyr. Palaest.* 9.2). Even

⁴³Lib. Or. 18.126; 1.119; Amm. 22.12.6.

⁴⁴Lib. Or. 1.121; 18.127; 12.80–82 mentions inspection of the entrails of birds at the altar in the palace garden.

in the absence of physical coercion, sacrifice could be used to alienate and discomfort Christians. Lactantius claims that Maximin ordered that only sacrificial meat be served at his table and thus "anyone who had been invited to dinner would depart sullied and impure" (*De mort. persec.* 37.2). Although Julian disapproved of blatant physical coercion of Christians, he was not above subtler forms of coercion. His constant presence at smoking altars and his habit of holding audiences in sanctuaries beside the cult statues were designed to politicize religious issues and to confront Christians with a stark choice.⁴⁵ They could not recoil from the altars and expect the emperor's patronage.

Julian's frustration at his contemporaries' failure to match his own zeal is well-known (*Ep.* 84.429; *Misop.* 361d–362b). Few polytheists shared the young emperor's spirit of confrontation. In earlier periods of antiquity, communal feasting on sacrificial meat had proclaimed and reinforced the community's solidarity. To reject sacrificial meat was to reject full participation in the community.⁴⁶ In the religiously "mixed" communities of the fourth century, communal feasting on sacrificial meat could hardly reinforce solidarity, it could only create division. The bonds of family, class, and culture mattered more to such people than religious controversy. Moreover, the use of sacrifice as an instrument of discrimination, if not persecution, could invite reprisals if the regime did not last. Consequently, prudent people appear to have adopted a "wait-and-see" attitude, a policy whose wisdom was confirmed when the news of Julian's sudden death arrived from the Eastern front. Other developments in civic life also made it difficult to revive large-scale sacrifices, for the decline in sacrifice in the fourth century was not due solely to Christian hostility or pagan desire to avoid religiously divisive customs. It resulted in part from a shift in patterns of euergetism and a decline in the ability and willingness of civic notables to fund the traditional festivals as they had done in earlier periods.

III. THE FUNDING OF PUBLIC CULTS: EUERGETISM AND PAGAN PRIESTHOODS

As Ramsay MacMullen has written of *philotimia*: "No word, understood to its depth, goes farther to explain the Greco-Roman achievement."⁴⁷ The gods were among the most conspicuous beneficiaries of *philotimia*, particularly of the heavy spending of the priests themselves. Traditionally, festivals

⁴⁵Lib. Or. 18.121, 161–163, 167–168.

⁴⁶On the political implications of vegetarianism, see M. Detienne, "La Cuisine de Pythagore," *Archives de sociologie des religions* 29 (1970) 141–162; *id.*, "Culinary Practices and the Spirit of Sacrifice," in M. Detienne and J.-P. Vernant (eds.), *The Cuisine of Sacrifice among the Greeks* (Chicago and London 1989) 1–20.

⁴⁷R. MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations* (New Haven 1974) 125.

of the gods in Greek cities had been funded from three different sources: sacred funds, civic funds, and private benefaction.⁴⁸ Within the chaotic finance systems of Greek cities, sacred funds represented an unusually stable and reliable source of revenue, but revenue whose use was in theory restricted to sacred purposes, such as the construction and repair of temples, the funding of festivals (including the sacrifices) and the payment of the temple personnel. Civic magistrates were charged with overseeing the proper use of the gods' revenues. Rents from temple lands and revenue from the authorized sale of temple property were insufficient, however, to cover upkeep of the sanctuary and the funding of festivals. Thus, it was conventional for cities to allocate part of their own civic funds to defray part of the cost of festivals (including the sacrifices) and to pay temple personnel. A. H. M. Jones judged that the majority of sacrifices at the festivals were paid for out of public funds.⁴⁹ This combination of civic and sacred funds, however, still fell short of the sums necessary to stage the elaborate festivals often connected with the most prominent shrines and cities.

The religious life of the cities relied heavily on private benefaction, particularly on the euergetism of the priests themselves.⁵⁰ By the Hellenistic and Roman periods, priesthoods in Greek cities, as at Rome, had become assimilated to civic magistracies.⁵¹ Social prestige and an ability to shoulder the considerable financial burdens were the most important criteria in the selection of pagan priests, who usually served for a year, sometimes for a fixed number of years. Priesthoods "for life" were not uncommon, and a few were hereditary, either by ancient custom or because the same family held the priesthood through successive generations. As we noted above, among the sources of civic revenue, sacred funds were unusual for their stability and reliability. In theory these funds were the property of the god, but cities frequently found creative ways to tap them. No practice reveals more clearly the economic aspects of priestly appointments than the outright sale of priesthoods, attested in Asia Minor (particularly Ionia) from the fourth century B.C. to the second century A.D. By selling a priesthood and then awarding the priest's salary from a combination of civic and sacred funds, cities might effectively tap sacred funds for secular purposes.⁵² But the sale of priesthoods was merely the formalization of the well-attested process of "pollicitation," by which a notable's "promise"

⁴⁸ A. H. M. Jones, *The Greek City from Alexander to Justinian* (Oxford 1940) 227–235; Debord 51–75.

⁴⁹ Jones (above, n. 48) 228.

⁵⁰ On euergetism, see P. Veyne, *Bread and Circuses*, tr. Brian Pearce (London 1990) 70–200.

⁵¹ "Priest" (ἱερεύς) in Greek has a wide range of meaning. I am not concerned here with soothsayers, diviners, or the lower echelons of the temple personnel.

⁵² Jones (above, n. 48) 228.

of a specific benefaction might, after negotiation, lead to the bestowal of a prestigious office. Pollicitation preceded the granting of priesthoods as well as secular offices, as we see in inscriptions in which a notable boasts of having bestowed benefactions "in accordance with his promise."⁵³

Epigraphical evidence from the Hellenistic period through the third century A.D. records the wide variety and stupendous scale of benefaction in which priests might engage: the construction or repair of public and sacred monuments; the funding of festivals, including grants to the citizens of money, oil, wine, grain, perfumes, and unguents; the funding of sacrifices by remitting to the city or private worshippers the hides, animal parts, taxes, and fees rightfully owed to the priest; the feasting of the magistrates or, in some cases, the whole citizenry; the provision of entertainment, such as singers, actors, horse races, and gladiatorial combats.⁵⁴ Priests and priestesses derived conspicuous benefit from the possession of priesthoods, since lavish expenditure on the gods was traditional, it built up the religious and social life of the community, and, as Peter Brown has pointed out, it was well suited to deflect the envy of one's peers.⁵⁵ Moreover, the priest as sacrificer had a conspicuous role in the religious life of the early empire. Numerous reliefs of the period depict the Roman emperor engaged in a conventional sacrificial ritual. As Richard Gordon has argued, the focus of the reliefs is not the act of sacrificial killing, but the emperor himself dressed as a priest and engaged in the ceremony of sacrifice. The focus is thus on the emperor in a ceremonial role as sacrificer and benefactor. The sacrifices depicted on these reliefs, argues Gordon, become "paradigms or exemplars of public sacrifice throughout the empire . . ."⁵⁶ In this ideology of benefaction, the emperor's act of sacrifice is the act of benefaction *par excellence*, in imitation of which provincial élites make their own sacrifices and benefactions.

If social prestige had been the only benefit to accrue to civic notables, priesthoods might nonetheless have been less attractive since they could involve huge expenditures. Accordingly, cities made considerable efforts to make these posts desirable by providing them with an income to help defray costs. Priests were often awarded stipends from civic funds and/or sacred funds. They received exemption from a variety of other liturgies and were awarded fees and taxes from sacrifices or mystery initiations.⁵⁷ They also had rights to parts of the sacrificial animals and a portion of

⁵³On pollicitation, see Veyne (above, n. 50) 89–90, 136–138.

⁵⁴Epigraphical testimonia in Debord 72–75.

⁵⁵P. Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass. 1978) 35–36.

⁵⁶R. Gordon, "The Veil of Power: Emperors, Sacrificers and Benefactors," in M. Beard and J. North (eds.), *Pagan Priests: Religion and Power in the Ancient World* (London 1990) 199–231, at 208.

⁵⁷Debord 68–70.

other kinds of sacrifice such as fruit or vegetable offerings. It appears that of the various forms of income available, the most significant and most reliable was that derived from the public sacrifices funded by the city.⁵⁸ The parts of the sacrificial victims awarded to priests would normally be sold to retail butchers. Hence, it was important that the city itself faithfully meet its obligations. Sacred laws carefully spelled out who was required to offer what sacrifices, imposing fines on those who were derelict.⁵⁹ The city also put pressure on private cult associations and private citizens to offer sacrifices.

The system of funding public festivals through a combination of sacred funds, civic funds, and private benefaction lasted well into the third century, despite the rise of serious competitors for the largesse of civic benefactors, particularly the festivals of the imperial cult and agonistic festivals. The imperial cult quickly became one of the most dynamic cults in Asia Minor (and elsewhere), if we measure dynamism by a capacity to attract competitive zeal and financial resources.⁶⁰ The similarities among these festivals—imperial, agonistic, and divine—were greater than their differences: they all employed the processions, sacrifices, banquets, distributions, and contests that had come to be a central feature of Greek culture and sustained a characteristically Greek style of civic life. These various festivals would continue so long as civic finances permitted and, in particular, so long as the “sheer willingness” (MacMullen’s phrase) of the notables to fund them held firm. However, the third century’s drastic economic decline, accelerated by military anarchy and barbarian invasions, dealt a serious blow to this style of civic life. Although the impact of these factors varied from region to region, it is clear that when prosperity began to return under the Tetrarchs, resources were much reduced and the scale of public and private

⁵⁸Debord 69.

⁵⁹F. Sokolowski, *Lois sacrées des cités grecques* (Paris 1969) 33, 159, 168 (stipulating which groups must sacrifice); *id.* (above, n. 22) 90 (regulating the voluntary contributions “required” of citizens and fines for failure to comply); *Inscr. Ilion* 5, 10 (fines imposed on those who fail to sacrifice). These issues are best illustrated by the lengthy inscription from Oenoanda commemorating the institution of an agonistic festival under Hadrian. It prescribes in detail the sacrifices to be offered not only by various civic officials, but also by the rural villages in the city’s territory. Those who fail to meet their obligation must pay a fine of 300 drachmas. See M. Wörle, *Stadt und Fest in kaiserlichen Kleinasien. Studien zu einer agonistischen Stiftung aus Oenoanda* (Munich 1988) 12, lines 70–88.

⁶⁰Debord 213: “Le culte impérial se pose très vite en concurrent—et en concurrent averse—des cultes traditionnels de la cité”; S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge 1984) 130: “The imperial cult . . . was probably the most important cult in the province of Asia”; S. Mitchell, “Festivals, Games, and Civic Life in Roman Asia Minor,” *JRS* 80 (1990) 183–193, at 190: “The age of the Severans opened the flood-gates to a new tide of agonistic foundations which matches the spate of public building which had transformed the cities of the eastern provinces between the reigns of Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius.”

spending had to be cut back. In some of the areas that had suffered invasion, civic life was seriously disrupted. The sack of Athens in 267, for example, proved "catastrophic" and "defines clearly the end of the ancient city and its transition to the status of a minor provincial town . . . with life disrupted to such an extent that the old pattern could never be resumed."⁶¹ Nearly all the monuments that greet the modern visitor to Ephesus were restored or rebuilt in the fourth century.⁶²

Scholars will continue to dispute the "crisis" of the third century, but it appears that this period witnessed significant changes in the traditional style of Greek civic life.⁶³ The virtual disappearance of epigraphic evidence after ca 260 makes it difficult to judge the extent of the change, but financial restraints and a shift in civic values led to the decline of many priesthoods in this period. As we have seen, however, festivals could not be staged on the scale that had become traditional without the active participation of the local notables who filled the priesthoods. Paganism was thus forced into "decline" for reasons that had little to do with "belief" or "faith." Its financial base was undermined. When Maximin Daia attempted to stage a pagan revival during the Great Persecution, he recognized the importance of priesthoods and took steps to make them once again prestigious and attractive. Every town and city was to have a priest, over whom there stood a provincial high-priest to be selected from those who were "most distinguished in public life and conspicuous in performing every kind of public service" (Euseb. *HE* 8.14.9). Like an imperial governor, the high-priest was granted a bodyguard of soldiers. Lactantius corroborates Eusebius' account, while providing us with further details:

[Maximin] went on to adopt the novel practice (*novo more*) of appointing high-priests (*sacerdotes maximos*), one for each city from among its leading citizens. These were to make daily sacrifices to all their gods, and with the support of the long-established priests they were to make sure that the Christians did not construct buildings or assemble either in public or private; further they were to have power to arrest Christians and compel them to sacrifice or hand them over to the magistrates. Nor was this enough; he set individuals of even higher rank over each province to be, as it were, pontiffs (*quasi pontifices*), and he ordered that both these new classes of priests should move around adorned in white cloaks.

(*De mort. persec.* 36.4–5)

⁶¹ A. Frantz, *The Athenian Agora 24: Late Antiquity, A.D. 267–700* (Princeton 1988) 3.

⁶² C. Foss, *Ephesus after Antiquity* (Cambridge 1979) 46–95 reveals a long list of buildings restored or rebuilt in fourth-century Ephesus: the stadium, Church of the Virgin Mary, bishop's palace, theater, gymnasium, baths of Constantius, library of Celsus, baths of Scholastica, nymphaeum of Trajan, hydreion facing the Temple of Domitian, nymphaeum rebuilt by the Proconsul Caelius Montius, and, on Foss's hypothesis (51, n. 9), the governor's palace.

⁶³ See, for example, the recent essays in J. Rich (ed.), *The City in Late Antiquity* (London and New York 1992).

What was novel about Maximin's conduct was the systematic imposition of such a hierarchy on the cities of the Greek East, and, if Lactantius is to be trusted, the granting to priests of broad powers over the religious life of the community. Maximin's priests were not being assimilated to the church's hierarchy, as has been suggested; they were being assimilated to civic magistrates with political power and social prestige.⁶⁴ The *Martyrdom of St. Theodotus* recounts how Theotecnus, governor of Galatia, offers during the Great Persecution to make Theodotus "high-priest of Apollo" with the right to appoint subordinate priests and to enjoy wealth and civic honors, including enhanced powers of patronage, access to local officials, and embassies to the emperors.⁶⁵ A contemporary inscription from Stratoniceia offers a glimpse of what Maximin hoped to achieve. After their year as priest of Zeus Panamaros and priestess of Hecate, and after experiencing an imperial visit to the area, a brother and sister boasted of their descent from

priests and high-priests and Asiarchs of the temples at Ephesus [They] performed priestly duties throughout the whole year with reverence (εὐσεβῶς) toward the gods, with munificence (φιλοτείμως) toward men, providing oil for the baths for thirty-four days during the procession and festival of the Panamareia . . . not only for citizens and foreigners, but also for the soldiery staying there They feasted all the councillors and citizens, overlooking none of the mysteries during the entire year and neglecting no sacrifice or any monthly banquet, also providing with munificence and greatness of spirit (φιλοτείμως καὶ μεγαλοψύχως) donatives for the men and women of every rank and age who took part in the procession⁶⁶

The inscription is wholly characteristic of earlier patterns of *euergesia*, but uncharacteristic of the fourth century. With his death in 313, however, Maximin's revived pagan priesthood and indeed almost all mention of civic notables as priests of the gods in the Eastern provinces disappear from our sources.⁶⁷

Pagan priesthoods declined not only because civic notables were less willing and able to spend, but also because civic and sacred funds were no longer

⁶⁴Rightly noted by Nicholson (above n. 29) 5–6.

⁶⁵*Martyrium S. Theodoti* 23, in F. de' Cavalieri (ed.), *I martiri di S. Teodoro e di S. Ariadne* (Rome 1901, Studi e Testi 6) 75. The authenticity of the account is defended by S. Mitchell, "The Life of St. Theodotus of Ancyra," *AnatSt* 32 (1982) 93–113.

⁶⁶*IStratonikeia* 310 (=SIG³ 900). Brown ([above, n. 55] 51) remarked of Stratoniceia that the third century "does not appear to have happened" there.

⁶⁷A. Wardman, "Pagan Priests in the Later Empire," in M. Henig (ed.), *Pagan Gods and Shrines in the Roman Empire* (Oxford 1986) 257–262. For a catalogue of Julian's priests, see P. Athanassiadi-Fowden, *Julian and Hellenism* (Oxford 1981) 185–186. On high priests of provincial assemblies and their connection to the imperial cult, see A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (Oxford 1964) 764–765.

available to help defray the cost of private benefaction. Constantine confiscated temple funds to help finance his own building projects, particularly in Constantinople, and to obtain bullion for minting a stable currency. He was primarily interested in hoards of gold and silver, but he also confiscated temple landholdings. He and his successors confiscated the wealth, both landholdings and movable goods, of municipalities as well, which consequently suffered chronic financial problems in the fourth century.⁶⁸ Thus, all three sources of funds for the orchestration of traditional festivals—sacred funds, civic funds, and private benefaction—were severely reduced in the fourth century. Euergetism did not disappear in the fourth century, but it became, like other manifestations of power and wealth, increasingly confined to a tiny clique of rich *curiales* (*principales*), former imperial officials (*honorati*), and provincial governors.⁶⁹ Virtually all the epigraphical instances of *euergesia* in the fourth and fifth centuries concern the activities of provincial governors.⁷⁰ Public works of the period bear the governor's name, and building is one of the most important themes in inscriptions honoring governors.⁷¹ Legislation dealing with public works is routinely addressed to imperial officials, either governors or their superiors.⁷² Relatively few stones attest instances of curial *euergesia*.⁷³

In the keen competition for the reduced resources available, not all the traditional festivals, or perhaps, not all the *elements* of the traditional festivals (sacrifices, ἀγῶνες, distributions of money, oil, etc.) could be funded. Our sources do not allow us to plot the decline of particular festivals, but in general terms we can assert that agonistic competitions retained enormous

⁶⁸R. Delmaire, *Largesses sacrées et res privata: L'aerarium impérial et son administration du IV^e au VI^e siècle* (Rome 1989) 641–645 (confiscation of temple funds), 645–657 (confiscation of municipal funds).

⁶⁹For the transfer of “la manie du bâtiment” from *curiales* to provincial governors and *honorati*, see P. Petit, *Libanius et la vie municipale à Antioche au IV^e siècle après J.-C.* (Paris 1955) 291–293 and 318–319. For the building activities of powerful bishops, see P. Brown, “Art and Society in Late Antiquity,” in K. Weitzmann (ed.), *An Age Of Spirituality: A Symposium* (New York 1980) 17–29.

⁷⁰E.g., *IK Ephesos* 621 on Artorius Pius Maximus, Proconsul of Asia 287/98 and honored as εὐεργέτης by the city of Ephesos for the restoration of the Imperial gymnasium; 1312 on L. Caelius Montius, Proconsul of Asia 340/50 (σωτήρα τὸν ἀγνότατον καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν εὐεργέτην); *ICret.* 4.312 honoring Petronius Probus, *PPO Illyrici*, as τὸν εὐεργέτην καὶ σωτήρα τοῦ ἔθνους (Gortyn, after 371); *SEG* 29.1070 honoring Flavius Palmatus, *consularis Cariae*, as τὸν ἀναεωρὴν καὶ κτίστην τῆς μητροπό(λεως) καὶ εὐεργέτην πάσης Καρίας (Aphrodisias, A.D. before 536).

⁷¹Robert (above, n. 33) 60.

⁷²Jones (above, n. 67) 758; cf. *CTh* 15.1 (*De operis publicis*), city councils are mentioned only twice in fifty-three laws on public works. These laws are routinely addressed to imperial officials.

⁷³Robert (above, n. 33) 109: “on a normalement recours à la poésie pour glorifier un gouverneur ou—le cas est devenu beaucoup plus rare—un généreux citoyen.”

appeal and that the priesthoods of the imperial cult and the agonistic festivals proved to be more attractive than those of traditional gods. It antagonized Julian that at Antioch the richest *curiales* were more widely known and talked about for theatrical shows and horse races than Solon was for his meeting with Croesus!⁷⁴ Julian deplored the shift in the focus of civic life away from the sanctuary to the theater and hippodrome, a shift which he and other pagan moralists denounced with the language of "impiety." What they were describing was a secularization of civic life. In the second half of the fourth century, moralists, both pagan and Christian, thunder away at the mania of their contemporaries for mimes and farces, horse races and chariot races, and worst of all, wild beast fights.⁷⁵ Secularization of the festivals was accelerated by the hostility of Constantine and his sons toward pagan cult, which resulted in the decline of the prestige of traditional priest-hoods, diminished resources, and the gradual disappearance of the priestly knowledge necessary to conduct sacrificial rites. As Julian complained to one of his priests: "Show me a genuine Hellene among the Cappadocians. For I observe that, as yet, some refuse to sacrifice, while others, although they are willing, lack knowledge of how to sacrifice" (*Ep.* 78).

This passion for spectacles and ἀγῶνες did not, of course, begin in the fourth century.⁷⁶ By Julian's day, however, the balance of sacred and secular elements in the festivals had shifted, partly because of Christian pressure, partly because of an internal development within paganism itself. Consciously or unconsciously, the cities and their benefactors gravitated toward ceremonies and entertainments that were religiously neutral, at least until Julian brought everyone up short.⁷⁷ The exasperated Antiochenes wondered why the emperor could not be content with the frequent festivals in Antioch which could be enjoyed by the entire population, not just pagans (*Misop.* 346c). Before Julian reintroduced sacrifices, people presumably continued to eat meat at festivals, but the meat was no longer the product of the old sacrificial system, nor was it provided free of charge by a civic benefactor. It was simply slaughtered and set out for sale like meat at any other time of the year. If this hypothesis is correct, it helps to explain

⁷⁴*Misop.* 342c. Note also John Chrysostom's vivid tableau of a civic benefactor in John Chrys. *De inani gloria* 4–6, with commentaries by L. Robert, *Hellenika* 11–12 (Paris 1960) 569–576; A.-M. Malingrey, *Sur la vaine gloire* (Paris 1972, Sources Chrétiennes 188) 74–80.

⁷⁵*Lib. Or.* 35.17–18, linking together dicing, horse-racing, and impiety toward the gods; Aug. *Contra Acad.* 1.2 (386 A.D.), *Conf.* 3.2 (Augustine's own passions for the theater); 6.8 (Alypius' "madness" for gladiatorial shows);

⁷⁶Cf. *SIG*³ 850 (Antoninus Pius praising a benefactor for not engaging in the "usual practice" of courting "instant popularity" through "spectacles, distributions and prizes for contests"); Philostr. *VA* 4.2, 8, 21–22, 27, 32 (impiety of contemporary society).

⁷⁷On fourth-century ceremony, see S. McCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1981).

why the discontinuation of blood sacrifice did not cause disruption and upheaval. Feasting and good cheer continued to be part of the festivals, but without the sacrificial rite that proved so controversial. Such are the social and religious developments that lie behind Julian's well-known description of his disastrous visit to the shrine of Apollo at Daphne:

I hastened there from the temple of Zeus Kasios, thinking that at Daphne, if anywhere, I should enjoy the sight of your wealth and public spirit (φιλοτιμία). And I imagined in my own mind the sort of procession it would be, like a man seeing visions in a dream, beasts for sacrifice, libations, choruses in honor of the god, incense, and the youths of your city there surrounding the shrine, their souls adorned with all holiness and themselves attired in white and splendid raiment. But when I entered the shrine I found there no incense, not so much as a cake, not a single beast for sacrifice. For the moment I was amazed and thought that I was still outside the shrine and that you were waiting the signal from me, doing me that honor because I am supreme pontiff. But when I began to inquire what sacrifice the city intended to offer to celebrate the annual festival in honor of the god, the priest answered, "I have brought with me from my own house a goose as an offering to the god, but the city this time has made no preparations."

(*Misop.* 361d-362b)

The Antiochenes, it appears, had spent their money on horse races, not on Apollo's festival (*Lib. Or.* 15.19).

IV. CONCLUSION

Blood sacrifice was a central rite of virtually all religious groups in the pre-Christian Mediterranean, and its gradual disappearance is one of the most significant religious developments of late antiquity. Sacrifice did not decline according to any uniform pattern, since there was a wide diversity in local customs and the impact of imperial and episcopal authority varied from region to region and city to city. Moreover, it is important in considering these matters to distinguish between public and private sacrifices. In many of the larger towns and cities of the Eastern empire, public blood sacrifices were no longer normative by the time Julian came to power and embarked on his pagan revival. Public sacrifices and communal feasting had declined as the result of a decline in the prestige of pagan priesthods and a shift in patterns of euergetism in civic life. That shift would have occurred on a lesser scale even without the conversion of Constantine, but it was accelerated by the hostility of the Christian court toward pagan cult. It is easy, nonetheless, to imagine a situation in which sacrifice could decline without disappearing. Why not retain, for example, a single animal victim in order to preserve the integrity of the ancient rite? The fact that public sacrifices appear to have disappeared completely in many towns and cities must be attributed to the atmosphere created by imperial and episcopal

hostility. Most polytheists, in my view, did not think it worth the risk to conduct sacrifices in public under Christian emperors.

DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICAL LANGUAGES
AND LITERATURES
SMITH COLLEGE
NORTHAMPTON, MASSACHUSETTS 01063