



## JOVIAN

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**JOVIAN** (Flavius Iovianus; b. in Singidunum [Belgrade] in 331 CE/d. in Dadastana, 17 February 364 CE), Roman emperor, r. 363-64 CE (Kienast, 1996, p. 326 with sources and literature; epigraphic references in *PLRE* 1, p. 461, s.v. Iovianus, no. 3; most extensively in *Diz. Epig.* IV/1, 1942, pp. 83-84). He held the position of *protector domesticus* “household guard” under the emperors Constantius II and Julian (q.v.), and at the time of his election as emperor was *primericus domesticorum* (*Hier. chron.* 2379; on the different terms in the sources, see *PLRE* 1, p. 461). After the death of Julian north of Toummara (Zosimus, 3.28.3) on the Tigris, i.e., south of present-day Sāmarrā (Iraq), he was elected as emperor on 27 June 363 CE (references in literary sources in *PLRE* 1, p. 461). He died on 17 February 364 CE on the way to Constantinople, in the little village of Dadastana on the border between Galatia and Bithynia. The emperor’s movements during his reign have been traced by O. Seeck (1919, pp. 213-14). The present article confines discussion to the events related to the Persian campaign of 363 CE.

Eyewitnesses to the campaign against the Sasanians were Ammianus Marcellinus, who provided the most detailed description of the events (ref. to Jovian: *Res Gestae* 25, chapters 5-10), and Eutropius, whose *Breviarium ab urbe condita* ends with the reign of Jovian (10.17-18). Other important primary sources are Zosimus (ref. to Jovian: *Nea Historia* 3.30-35 with the excellent commentary by F. Paschoud, 1979; useful, too, are the commentaries by S. Rebenich, apud Veh, 1990, pp. 328-31) and Johannes Malalas, whose description, however, is distorted by errors and anachronisms (13.26-27:



Jeffreys et al., 1986). Other Greek and Latin authors, whose works are in part translated into English, are mentioned in Dodgeon and Lieu, p. 237. An echo of various Christian sources (e.g., the so-called “Julian novel”) can be found in the historically useless account of Ṭabari, who, among other things, describes a fictitious meeting between Jovian and Šāpur II (ed., pp. 842.12-843.21; tr. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, pp. 62-64). Historically untenable is the report that Jovian had been elected on the advice of Šāpur II (thus Agapius of Hierapolis in the 10th century; Arabic text in *CSCO, Scriptores Arabici*. Ser. III. col. V, Beirut et al. 1912, p. 299.20-21). A splinter of historical information at the time of the peace treaty of 363 CE has been preserved by the Armenian tradition in the so-called “Epic Histories” (4.21; Garsoïan, 1989, p. 154 with comm., p. 292, n. 5).

R. von Haehling (1977) pointed out Ammianus’s biased description of Jovian’s ascent to the throne (not recognized by, among others, Solari and especially Soraci): Jovian is described as a second-rate compromise solution for the Roman emperor’s throne, who came to power after an election that was not properly conducted, and who could only rely on a minor segment of the army. Von Haehling (p. 350) mentions this—from Ammianus’s point of view—“fatal coincidence” (also Barnes, p. 141).

The biased view of our main sources, i.e., Ammianus and Zosimus, led to their contradiction of historical facts by mentioning the *retreat* of the Roman army after the election of Jovian as Roman emperor on 27 June 363 CE (Amm., 25.7.6; Zos., 3.30.2). Libanius (*Orationes* 18.267; but cf. Paschoud, pp. 207-8) speaks of the earlier victorious advance of Julian in June 363, and Eutropius (*Brev.* 10.16.2) mentions the “victorious return” of Julian (*romanesque victor*), although the withdrawal of the Roman army from before Ctesiphon and the retreat must have been obvious signs of defeat (cf. Wirth, 1978, p. 487). Ammianus most extensively describes the further retreat of the Roman army along the eastern shore of the Tigris, while Zosimus does so more briefly, agreeing with him and clearly diverging in part (for instance regarding the date of crossing the Tigris). Place names mentioned are Sumer (Sāmarrā; Amm., 25.6.8) and Dura (Dēr ‘Ara-bāyā? Amm. 25.6.9), which the Roman troops reached on 1 July 363 (cf. Paschoud’s comment, pp. 212-16). The skirmishes mentioned by Ammianus (25.6.1-7.11; tendentious, 25.7.1-3) are to show that the morale and fighting spirit of the Roman army were still intact (similarly evaluated by Soraci, p. 27 and elsewhere). The description of Šāpur II’s deliberations is equally tendentious (cf. Paschoud, p. 217, similar to Matthews,



p. 185; his tactically clever procedure is pointed out by Curran, p. 79 and Wirth, 1984, p. 360); the dispatch of Persian negotiators prompted Ammianus to underline Jovian's defeatism, and to assert (25.7.7-8) that the Roman troops could have reached safe territory within the four days of the peace treaty negotiations by advancing towards Corduena (ca. 150 km, which could not have been done even from a military point of view; Seeck, 1916, pp. 2007 and 2008 unhesitatingly accepted Ammianus's view; cf., however, Paschoud, p. 217 and Wirth, 1984, pp. 361-62). But even Ammianus and Zosimus had to point out how the Roman army was starved by the Persians' "scorched earth" strategy (*absumptis omnibus quae mandi poterant*, Amm., 25.7.4; further evidence from Ammianus is offered by Matthews, p. 186) and found itself in a helpless situation (cf. Zos., 3.30.5 and Eutropius, *Brev.* 10.17.1).

The peace treaty was concluded between the Roman and Persian negotiators after four days of talks; hence there was no hurried capitulation (appropriately noted in Matthews, p. 187). It was supposed to last for 30 years (Amm., 25.7.9a; see Chrysos, 1993, p. 171 n. 158). The text has only come down to us in fragments, and the information in the extant sources is not consistent. According to Ammianus (25.7.9), Šāpur II claimed the territories which his grandfather Narse had been forced to give up at the peace treaty of 298 CE. Ammianus mentions (25.7.9) the transfer of five trans-Tigritan regions: Arzanena, Moxoena, Zabdicena, Rehimena, and Corduena; their precise location and their borders have not yet been completely determined (see especially Dillemann, 1962; Grattarola, 1989; Winter, 1989, esp. p. 556). (Zosimus does not mention the Moxoena and uses other termini.) We also do not know which territories were still in Roman possession in 363 CE (see, e.g., Amm., 18.6.20). The river Nymphios (Armenian Kalirt, present-day Batman-Su) was to serve as the border between the Roman and Sasanian empires (as it did until the year 591). This implied that the area given up by the Persians in 298 CE west of the Nymphios river (Sophena, Ingilena, Sophanena) remained within the Roman sphere of influence (proper acknowledgement by Blockley, 1992, p. 27 as well as by Chrysos, 1993, p. 188). Ammianus mentions 15 strongholds, situated in the regions named, which had to be given up. Their localization proves to be very difficult (cf. Honigmann, pp. 3-9, who precisely describes the borders of 363 of them; Dillemann, pp. 218-20; and Blockley, 1984, p. 44, n. 41, and 1992, p. 184 n. 26).

With the abandoning of the city of Nisibis (extensively: Sturm, pp. 748-50 with many source references) and the fortress *Castra Maurorum* (according to Ball:



Seh Qubba, 90 km northwest of Mosul), Rome lost the eastern half of the Mesopotamian province. The inhabitants of Nisibis and Singara were allowed, according to Amm., 25.7.11, to freely re-settle on Roman territory, and so were the troops of the stronghold which was to be given up (cf. Blockley, 1984, p. 44, n. 42). The statement that Nisibis was only abandoned for 120 years, as Joshua the Stylite (chap. 7) asserts, is questionable according to Luther (p. 99; cf. Wirth, 1984, p. 366, n. 86). The cession of Singara, which was already in Sasanian hands since its conquest in 360 (thus Chrysos, 1993, p. 178), may now have been secured *de jure*. (Regarding a re-conquest by the Romans in the years prior to 363 CE, nothing is known; differently, Blockley, 1992, p. 28).

There are differences in opinion concerning the status of Armenia. According to Ammianus (25.7.12) no aid was provided to the Armenian king Arsaces, even when he asked for it. Chrysos (1993, p. 182) believes that the treaty contained a common declaration of intention to respect the neutrality of Armenia (cf. Chrysos, 1976, 32-36). But Zosimus 3.31.2, rather, describes the partition of Armenia ca. 387 into a Roman and a (much larger) Persian part, the so-called Persarmenia (thus according to Paschoud, p. 220). Libanius incorrectly speaks of a cession of the whole of Armenia (English text: Dodgeon and Lieu, p. 261; cf. Blockley, 1984, p. 36, and 1992, pp. 28-29). No arrangement was made in 363 CE about securing the Caspian Gates (q.v.)—thus correctly Blockley (1984, p. 37, as well as Chrysos, 1976, p. 30, n. 3, and 1993, p. 183), although Joannes Lydos (*De magistratibus* 3.52) reports that it was (differently, Seeck, 1916, p. 2009; see Wirth, 1984, p. 366, n. 89, and Clauss, p. 816).

Numerous Roman and Byzantine authors—among them Christians such as Agathias (*Histories* 4.25.7; text in Dodgeon and Lieu, p. 238)—criticized the emperor for having neglected the interests of the empire. Zosimus (3.32) even connects the decline of the Roman empire with the abandonment of Nisibis (cf. Chrysos, 1993, p. 166). But we might agree with those, for the most part Christian, authors who spoke of a “necessary peace,” like Hieronymos in his chronicle (*Hier. chron., ad annum 364*, p. 243: *rerum necessitas compulsus*; cf. Chrysos, 1993, p. 171, n. 57). Eutropius (10.17.1) also writes of a “necessary peace,” although he next calls it “infamous” (*pacem cum Sapore necessariam quidem, sed ignobilem fecit*; cf. Turcan, p. 885 with a different interpretation; further source references in Rebenich, p. 330, n. 73, as well as in Chrysos, 1993, pp. 166-67). Some authors, for the most part Christian, pointed out the distress of the Roman army. Tendentious, however, was the remark of the ecclesiastical writer Theodoret (*Historia ecclesiastica* 4.2.2), that Jovian had



made peace with the Persian king after the latter had sent food for the Roman soldiers and organized a market in the desert (cf. Paschoud, p. 221); Rufinus (his source?) in his *Historia ecclesiastica* 11.1 (GCS 9/2, ed. Th. Mommsen, Berlin, 1908, p. 1002) only mentions the Persians making the promise, not honoring it. Here the voices of Christian authors are heard seeking to exculpate the emperor from the reproaches of the traditional authors (cf. Paschoud, pp. 221-22, about the discussion in contemporary annalistic reports).

The bias of the ancient sources can be clearly felt. Ammianus already reproached the emperor (25.7.11) for having “without hesitation” delivered what was demanded of him (Turcan, 1966, in particular, is too dependent on Ammianus’s judgement). Libanius accused Jovian of being entirely responsible for the settlement with the Sasanians (*Or.* 18.278-80). The interpretation of the settlement as an “infamous treaty” must have begun early, as Wirth pointed out (1984, p. 385, n. 35). In modern descriptions this view has often been repeated; thus O. Seeck (1916, p. 2007) spoke of the “infamous peace with the Persians,” without considering that Jovian had inherited from Julian the disaster of the Roman army in June 363 CE (as is rightly pointed out by Wirth, 1978, p. 484). However, these sources also emphasize just as unilaterally the need to secure the reign by the emperor. In recent times a just appreciation has above all been voiced by Wirth (1984; with the agreement of Barnes, pp. 141-42; more cautiously, Demandt, p. 110 with n. 7).

Emperor Jovian, even before his return from Mesopotamia, dispatched envoys who were to present the results of the Persian campaign as successful. This is mainly reflected in coinage (well documented in Ehling, 1996). According to Bird (1986), Eutropius tried to encourage Emperor Valens (364-78 CE) to lead a campaign against the Sasanians in order to win back the territories lost in 363; and it has been said that Rufius Festus, in his *Breviarium rerum gestarum populi Romani*, written only a few months later, intentionally pointed out Rome’s previous successes against the Eastern opponent in order to show the emperor how easily the lost regions could be reconquered (reserved on this point is Amaut-Lindet, 1994, pp. XIX-XX). The Sasanians, for their part, immortalized the victorious result of their conflicts with Rome on the rock relief of ʿTāq-e Bostān (see Trümpelmann, 1963; Nicholson, 1983; see also [SASANIAN ROCK RELIEFS](#)).



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