CHAPTER FIVE

REBUILDING OF THE TEMPLE

Cyril had always lived under Christian emperors and, unlike his older colleagues, had not experienced persecution nor did he know what it was like to live in a world ruled by a non-Christian monarch. This would radically change in 361 when Julian – called the Apostate by Christians – became emperor. Julian wanted to turn back the clock and initiated a policy of dechristianization and repagani-
zation. Cyril was directly confronted with the emperor’s policy. In contrast to what one would expect, Julian did not revitalize the pagan cults in Jerusalem as far as we know, as he did in other parts of the empire, but he focused his attention on the desolate Temple Mount, which carried such symbolism for both Jews and Christians. He allowed the Jews, whom he considered as his natural allies in his efforts to dechristianize the empire, to rebuild their Temple. This posed for Cyril the threatening prospect that Old Jerusalem would take over again from the New Jerusalem, as founded by Constantine.

Julian had been appointed Caesar by Constantius II in November 355 to take care of affairs in Gaul, where things still had not calmed down after the defeat and death of the usurper Magnentius (353), and to put an end to the frequent barbarian invasions. During his years in Gaul he managed to end the Germanic military incursions and revealed himself as an able military commander who was pop-
ular with his troops. But Julian was not just a military man. Before becoming Caesar he had dedicated himself to his studies; he was a very literate person, well-versed in rhetoric and philosophy. In the course of his study of the pagan classics and philosophy, he became more and more interested in, and convinced of, the importance of the pagan cults, and began to doubt the Christian faith. It was

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1 On Julian, see e.g. Bidez, 1930; Bowersock, 1978; Hunt, 1998a. The monographs by Athanassiadi (1992) and Smith (1995) pay special attention to Julian’s philosophy and religiosity.
through the influence of the philosopher and theurgist Maximus, whose disciple Julian became, that he cast off his Christian beliefs probably as early as the beginning of the 350s and became an adherent of the pagan cults.\textsuperscript{2} So when Julian became Caesar he most likely had already left Christianity and returned in secret to the pagan practices. Wisely enough, he concealed his adherence to the old cults and kept pretending that he was a Christian.\textsuperscript{3} However, shortly after Julian heard the news of Constantius’ death, probably at the end of November 361, he took off his Christian mask and openly declared himself an adherent of Hellenism. To express his thanks for Constantius’ death, Julian worshiped the gods openly and sacrificed in public.\textsuperscript{4} Julian’s paganism was close to Neoplatonism and theurgical practices were essential to his worship of the gods. It was the Neoplatonist Iamblichus who had first emphasized magic and ritual in reverence for the gods, and Julian felt clearly attracted to the ideas of Iamblichan Neoplatonism. Ritual and sacrifices were central to Julian’s pagan religiosity and frequent sacrificing was an especially important means for him to get into contact with, and win the favor of, the gods. If we may believe the sources, Julian’s offerings were extravagant.\textsuperscript{5}

Soon after Julian had arrived in Constantinople on 11 December, and had buried Constantius with great solemnity, he started his reforms. To get rid of several of his predecessor’s partisans he organized the Chalcedon trials,\textsuperscript{6} reorganized the imperial court,\textsuperscript{7} reformed and attempted to strengthen the senate of Constantinople,\textsuperscript{8} strengthened the councils of the Greek cities by reducing the possibilities for exemption and by enlarging the number of those who qualified for

\textsuperscript{2} For Julian’s “conversion,” see e.g. Smith, 1995, 180–89.

\textsuperscript{3} Amm. Marc. 21.2.4–5.

\textsuperscript{4} Julian, Epist. 26, 415C. Cf. Ammianus Marcellinus (22.5.2) who reports that Julian came out with his paganism when in Constantinople.

\textsuperscript{5} Libanius (Orat. 24.35) reports that Julian sacrificed more in ten years than all the rest of the Greeks combined; cf. Amm. Marc. 22.12.6. He is also called a “bull-burner” (Greg. Naz., Orat. 4.77) and a “slaughterer” (Amm. Marc. 22.14.3). Ammianus Marcellinus (25.4.17) also remarks that had Julian victoriously returned from the Persian expedition, he would have sacrificed so zealously that there would have been a serious shortage of cattle.

\textsuperscript{6} Amm. Marc. 22.3.2; Lib., Orat. 18.153.

\textsuperscript{7} Amm. Marc. 22.4; Lib., Orat. 18.130.

\textsuperscript{8} Cod. Theod. 9.2.1; 11.23.2. Cod. Theod. 12.1.50 was especially aimed at the Christian priests who were exempted from curial duties, but who had now lost that privilege.