

“IS IT POSSIBLE TO CONTROL THE CROWD?” LIBANIUS IN DEFENSE OF JULIAN AND AGAINST THE POPULATION OF ANTIOCH IN THE 4th CENTURY

Gilvan Ventura da Silva¹

Abstract

Regarding the recourse to humor and mockery as response mechanisms of a city's population to the performance of imperial power, an emblematic case of estrangement between a ruler and his subjects occurred in 362-363 during Emperor Julian's stay in the city of Antioch. Their estrangement was so intense that it led to the writing of an at least disconcerting work such as the *Misopogon*, a satirical text in which Julian harshly criticizes the *modus vivendi* of Antioch's inhabitants. As a result of this episode, two discourses written by Libanius, *To Antiochians, on the Emperor's anger* (Oration 16), and *The embassy to Julian* (Oration 15), attempt to reverse Antioch's difficult situation in face of Julian's anger. This article explores Libanius' reasoning about the controversy involving Julian and Antioch's inhabitants, in order to demonstrate how the sophist was committed to the emperor's proposal of reforming the *polis*.

Keywords

Late Antiquity; Antioch; Libanius; Julian; Crowd.

¹ Full Professor, Federal University of Espírito Santo, Vitória, Brazil. E-mail: gil-ventura@uol.com.br

Resumo

Quando tratamos do emprego do humor e do deboche como mecanismos de resposta da população urbana ao desempenho das autoridades romanas, um caso emblemático de estranhamento entre súditos e imperador é aquele que ocorre entre 362 e 363, em Antioquia, durante a estadia de Juliano na cidade. Esse estranhamento foi tão intenso que acarretou, num primeiro momento, a elaboração de uma obra no mínimo desconcertante como o *Misopógon*, texto satírico no qual Juliano tece duras críticas ao *modus vivendi* dos habitantes da cidade. Na sequência, como desdobramento do episódio, vem à luz dois discursos de Libânio, um deles intitulado *Aos antioquenos, sobre a ira do imperador* (Or. XVI) e o outro, *Embaixada a Juliano* (Or. XV). Ambos os discursos buscavam reverter a difícil situação na qual se encontrava Antioquia, alvo da cólera do soberano. Nesse artigo, pretendemos explorar os argumentos de Libânio sobre a controvérsia envolvendo Juliano e os antioquenos a fim de demonstrar como o sofista se encontrava comprometido com a proposta de reforma da *pólis* idealizada pelo imperador.

Palavras-Chave

Antiguidade Tardia; Antioquia; Libânio; Juliano; Multidão.

In the second half of the 4th century, Antioch was considered the most important city of the East after Constantinople. As Coele-Syria's leading center, Antioch stood out for its ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, with an increasingly large population that resulted from migrations of individuals from its *khora* and even from other regions of Syria-Palestine and Asia Minor, who often moved to the city in search of better life conditions and with the purpose of studying, bearing in mind the prestige of Libanius' *didaskaleion* (Saliou, 2000: 809). Antioch became a vibrant center with particularly enthusiastic festivals, games and spectacles, including the Kalends feast in January, to salute the arrival of the New Year, and the Maiuma festival in praise of Dionysus and Aphrodite, which was celebrated every three years for a period of 30 days.² Meanwhile, Christianization was in course in the work of religious leaders such as Meletius, Flavian and John Chrysostom, who were active in their efforts to reshape the beliefs and traditions of the *polis*. Their strategies to curb the attraction such festivals exerted on the pagan population included establishing an extensive calendar of celebrations to honor martyrs and saints. Yet, John Chrysostom's homilies show how deeply the festive *ethos* was rooted in the local population, as his sermons do not spare criticisms to the devotees who, during the *pompe* – the solemn procession in praise of their martyrs – ended up reproducing the behavior of the Kalends and Maiuma festivals by gathering into Dionysian parades and indulging in drinking, singing and dancing (Soler, 2010: 278).³ Finally, since Antioch was home to an active Jewish community, it was also the stage of synagogue-centered celebrations that reached into the streets, for instance in the *Rosh-Ha-Shanah* – the Jewish New Year – and *Sukkot* – the Feast of Tabernacles, when the sounds of trumpets and the rapture of the Jews could be heard and felt by all local bystanders (Silva, 2011: 49).

A consequence of Antioch's festive exuberance was its social fabric's ability to congregate known and unknown individuals, foreigners and

² An ancient tradition identified the Maiuma festival to be held in May, but recent researches indicate that it probably was held in October (Soler, 2006: 10).

³ One of the places most frequently attacked by John Chrysostom, in addition to the theater and the synagogue, was the agora – most likely the agora located in Epiphania, a neighborhood (as the available evidence suggests) built by Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BC). The colonnades avenue and the Forum of Valens were located in its vicinity (Downey, 1961: 621). In order to reach one of the churches where he officiated, John Chrysostom had to cross the agora (Mayer, 2012: 84) and be therefore in direct contact with the population. Such contact gave him sufficient reason not only to condemn the festivals and other civic activities, but also to censure the members of his congregation who, in the sight of all, practiced a behavior that equated them with pagans.

residents, Christian, Pagans and Jews on its streets and squares. Such social fabric emerged from a long-standing tradition in which life in the *polis* comprised a public dimension that not unfrequently prevailed over the private dimension. Episcopal leaders from the later period knew this reality quite well and attempted at all costs to reverse it by concentrating the priority of their discourses on the *oikos*, i.e. the family sphere, and the church as the primary *loca* for exercising Christian virtue.⁴ Considered from this perspective, even during its post-classical days, Antioch still preserved an emphasis on the public and collective sphere, which had been so lively in the urban settings of the Roman Empire during the previous period. Its urban plan was characterized by a broad, monumental set of pathways – such as the colonnades avenue, with numerous porticoes – and neighboring venues (such as agoras and forums). Antioch's urban plan accentuated and favored integration among its inhabitants, who routinely gathered to negotiate, talk and amuse themselves, and also to manifest their dissatisfaction at imperial policies, which led them to periodic episodes of protest and sedition. The mesh of social relations in the city, as its residents and visitors habitually gathered in its baths, at the theater, hippodrome, porticoes, churches and synagogues, in the agora, in taverns and at its gates, produced a continuous exchange of information, which, according to Petit (1955: 221), propitiated the emergence of a “public opinion” – despite the relatively modern connotation of this expression.⁵

⁴ In the Roman Empire, the distinction between the public and private dimensions was not characterized by the presently observed – or at least attempted – Cartesian rift between personal activities and public issues. Winterling's insightful study (2009) on the meaning of the ‘public’ and ‘private’ categories in the imperial society explains that although dictionaries do make a distinction between the *res publica* – the arena of the civic community – and the *domus* – the domestic realm –, these two fields frequently overlapped in such way that some households, especially among aristocrats, not rarely performed political functions, whereas some issues at first restricted to the interests of a family could suddenly become an object of public observation. Moreover, due to the exiguity of individual rooms in most Roman homes, where a private room was a privilege enjoyed only by the wealthiest, the individuals were compelled to integrate themselves to the street-based socialization networks, experiencing in the markets, taverns and public baths a close contact with their contemporaries and sharing with them values, aspirations, ideas and feelings (Funari, 2003, p. 89; Leguay, 1997, p. 23).

⁵ The idea of “public opinion” was not completely alien to Antiquity. Romans, for instance, considered to be *opinio* the judgement of an audience on particular topics. Cicero and Suetonius, on their turn, refer in their writings to a *popularis opinio* and a *communis opinio* (Lima Neto, 2016: 209). Farge (2011: 87) correctly points out that the population did not remain inert in relation to the maneuvers of the government, but produced and disseminated by their own means their evaluation of the political issues of their time, even when their declarations were denied “by the ruling powers as being ‘senseless’, or were frequently labeled as too instinctive to be reasonable”.

In any case, it is important to point out that even though the relations between Antiochians and imperial authorities, from an institutional standpoint, were mediated by the *boule*, i.e. the council in charge of administering the *polis*, in some cases these relations took up more direct and less mediated configurations, for instance during the solemnities of reception of and farewell to emperors and their representatives, when the crowd, preceded by the most prominent local citizens, gathered at the city gates with demonstrations of joy or sorrow, according to each case. As Liebeschuetz (1972: 209) notes, the acclamation of public authorities under the Empire was an indispensable feature of its political game, since each holder of a relevant position did nurture an expectation of being received with cheerful popular reactions upon entering a theater or walking on the city streets, and dealt with these manifestations as “genuine evidence of the feeling of the subjects, a mighty worry if the shouting was not sufficiently loud”. For instance, a downright silent reception of a province governor in a theater was not a good sign at all. A clear proof of the importance ascribed by the Roman State to the attitude of local spectators in the presence of imperial delegates is a law enacted by Constantine (C. Th., I, 16, 6), in November 331, recognizing for all individuals the right to openly salute “the most just and vigilant judges”, expressing without reservation or censure their satisfaction – or even their dissatisfaction – at the performance of province governors. In practical terms, such salutations were considered a criterion for the purposes of personal advancement in the administrative careers of the empire.

In addition to the acclaim staged when imperial authorities had direct contact with the population in the courts of justice, at the theater, the hippodrome and even in the streets and public spaces, local inhabitants could express their opinion about the way they were ruled by resorting to mockery or playfulness, circulating pamphlets or singing satirical songs (*asmata*) and verses (*anapestos*) with caustic criticism to the government (Ballabriga, 2009: 67), especially during the Saturnalia festival in December or the Kalends feast in early January.⁶ Both festivals were seen as irreverent celebrations that enabled a temporary subversion of the codes of conduct that ruled the social order, when hierarchical norms

⁶ In the cities of the Empire, the dissemination of politically-oriented criticism frequently included a set of props and accessories, including graphite paintings, posters and announcements at visible places (such as statue pedestals), wax tablets and papyri that circulated from hand to hand, and oral compositions. Such verses, libels and inscriptions were all means of expressing “a dissatisfaction, a revenge, an anonymous and clandestine response to a deed carried out by an individual in power, a circumstance seen as either unjust or immoral, and unbearable” (Crogiez, 1997: 227).

could be transgressed without major risks for the revelers, thus allowing the population to exercise its *licentia* or *parresia*, that is, to speak plainly to representatives of the ruling powers, including not rarely the emperor himself (Hawkins, 2012: 161). It is known that in some cities of the East, oral ridicule could be followed by music and frantic body movements, which certainly increased the level of corrosiveness. In Antioch, in moments of merriness and relaxation, the *komoi*, i.e. Dionysian parades where participants of both sexes exhibited themselves intoxicated with wine, were usually seen. The *choroi*, i.e. choirs of revelers grouped in circles of men, women and youth to sing and dance on the city streets and squares, especially at night (Soler, 1997: 327-8) were also quite popular. The chants on these occasions could include political contents, since the *komoi* and the *choroi* were also used to mock the public authorities.

Though the authorship of criticisms in these cases was not identified, and despite their unequivocally satirical tone, they must not be seen as peripheral or inefficacious demonstrations as one reflects on the level of communication between the government and the local population, since these collective mockery expressions allow to retrieve not only which topics or issues were particularly significant for the society, but also the degree of popularity of a particular decision, and the representations of the officials and rulers in power. It would also be misleading to assume that the individuals involved in mockery episodes always and plainly ignored what was said about them in the open squares, adopting an attitude of distance or superiority when confronted by the crowd, to whom a sordid, licentious or childish behavior was frequently ascribed.

Regarding the recourse to humor and mockery as responses of the population to the exercise of imperial power, an emblematic case of estrangement between a ruler and his subjects occurred in 362-363 during Emperor Julian's stay in Antioch. Their estrangement was so intense that it led to the writing of an at least disconcerting work such as the *Misopogon*, a satirical text in which Julian harshly criticizes the *modus vivendi* of local inhabitants. As a result of this episode, two discourses were written by Libanius, *To Antiochians, on the Emperor's anger* (Oration 16), and *The embassy to Julian* (Oration 15), in an attempt to reverse Antioch's difficult situation in face of the emperor's anger.

Julian was in Antioch for approximately eight months, from July 362 to March 363, after a brief stay in Constantinople, where he took part in the funeral rites of Constantius II, who died in November 361. His solemn entrance into the city occurred on July 18, on the second day of the Feast of Adonis, when the inhabitants mourned the death of the deity, and this special date was later mentioned by Ammianus Marcellinus (XXII, 9, 15)

as a bad omen. Even though Antioch at that point was undergoing a severe supply crisis as a result of a long drought that ruined its wheat harvest (Liebeschuetz, 1972: 126 ff.), the local crowd rushed to receive the emperor at the city gates, and gave him the honors of a living deity (Am. Marc., XXII, 9, 14). Julian was once more well received by locals gathered in a theater to salute him. However, shortly after, his relation with the city became conflicting for many reasons. First, his efforts to overcome the supply crisis were in vain, since Antioch's imported wheat from Chalcis, Hierapolis and Egypt – which used to be sold at a fixed price – became the object of speculation in the hands of middlemen. Blaming agricultural producers for the famine, traders decided to cross their arms and protest. The official control of bread prices as a means to provide some relief to the urban population did not have the desired effect, as the peasants of surrounding areas flocked to the city in the attempt to benefit from this decision (Bowersock, 1997: 100). Furthermore, the quartering of a large number of soldiers in Antioch only increased the demand for supplies. Finally, the campaign in Persia was considered to be a strategic mistake and lacked, therefore, popular support (Downey, 1961: 390 ff.). In addition to these conspicuously relevant economic and military variables, the 'noise' between Julian and Antiochians was aggravated by the emperor's religious policy, which led to several points of tension not only, as one would expect, with the supporters of Christianity, but also with Pagans (Kleinmann, 2008-2009: 69).

During his stay in Antioch, Julian undertook a true pilgrimage to local temples and sanctuaries as a token of reverence to civic deities such as Zeus, Demeter, Hermes, Pan, Ares, Calliope, Apollo, Isis and Tyche. A peculiar feature of Julian's devotion was his attachment to blood sacrifices, with the slaughter of a large number of victims that were promptly consumed by the soldiers of his entourage (Am. Marc., XXII, 12, 6) – a quite affronting attitude, considering the ongoing supply crisis. The imperial palace on the island of the Orontes was converted into a sanctuary with sacrificial altars around its gardens and under its trees, so the emperor could carry out slaughters more comfortably (Downey, 1961: 384). A contumacious critic of games and mime, Julian deliberately distanced himself from theaters and amphitheaters, and he even prohibited Pagan priests from attending spectacles and from being visited by actors, aurigas and dancers (*Ep.* 89b, 304). An Antiochian trait that deeply irritated Julian was the appreciation for dance and dancers. He rebuked local inhabitants more than once for practicing the *cordax*, a lascivious dance in praise of Artemis, which he judged to be obscene (Jul., *Misopogon*, 20; 30). With remarkable audacity, he discontinued imperial subsidies to Maiuma, as it seems, with the intention of safeguarding

public morality, since the *cordax* feast was well-known for its orgiastic rites (Soler, 2006: 39). Inclined to a rigorist and arrogant attitude, Julian presented himself in Antioch as a philosopher, avoiding contact with the local population at leisure venues, censuring local amusement options and accusing the population of indifference to the gods.

Once challenged, Antiochians did not take long to react. According to Gleason (1986: 108), in early January 363, during the Kalends festivities, popular annoyance at Julian became unbearable⁷ and the jesting atmosphere of the celebration provided locals with the pretext for a downright exercise of their satirical verve. The emperor was then compared to an ape, a midget, a bearded goat, and even to a *victimarius*, i.e. a butcher, on account of the plethora of sacrifices he promoted (Am. Marc., XXII, 14, 3). Despite his indignation at the outrageous behavior of the population, Julian avoided the recourse to force and preferred to respond to those insults by writing the *Misopogon*, a text in which he ironically justified his actions while bitterly censuring Antiochians for their frivolity and indiscipline. Literally translated as the “beard-hater”, the *Misopogon* was composed between the second half of January and the following month of February in 363, while the emperor was preparing for the campaign against the Persian Empire. The title of Julian’s work alludes to his ‘philosopher beard’, which was a source of stark irritation for locals. To give more publicity to the *Misopogon*, Julian had it posted at the Tetrapylon of the Elephants, a triumphal arch that most likely supported the figure of a biga or a quadriga pulled by elephants. The Tetrapylon of the Elephants was located at the center of the island surrounded by the Orontes River, at the intersection of the four gate streets near the imperial palace – a place frequently attended both by local inhabitants and foreign visitors (Saliou, 2009: 240-241).

On March 5th, 363, soon after publicizing the *Misopogon*, Julian left Antioch to fight the Sassanids. His departure foreshadowed a dark period for the city. One may evoke, in this regard, the example of Caesarea in Cappadocia, where immediately after the emperor’s rise to power,

⁷ Even though Van Hoof & Van Nuffelen (2011) disagree with the hypothesis of Gleason (1986), that the writing of the *Misopogon* would be linked to the Kalends festivities of 363, as criticism against Julian had been circulating since long before in the streets of Antioch, there is no doubt that the Kalends – considering that they did give cause to satirical manifestations against public authorities –, represented a most propitious opportunity for increasing the tension between Julian and the local population. There is no difficulty in admitting that Libanius (*Or.* XVI, 36), by mentioning local festivals characterized by ridicule, during which the Antiochians rudely attacked Julian, should be referring to the Kalends festival of January, as Gleason assumes.

Christians attacked the local temple of Fortune. In reprisal, Julian decided to eliminate Caesarea from the catalogue of cities and deprived it even from its name, which was obtained under the rule of Claudius, according to Sozomen (*Historia Ecclesiastica*, V, 4).⁸ To penalize Antioch for the disrespectful treatment he received from its population, Julian appointed Alexander from Heliopolis – known for an irascible and cruel character – as Syria's *consularis*, pondering that Alexander would be an adequate governor for such an insubordinate city. Julian also openly declared his intention of not returning to Antioch after the campaign in Persia, and to settle, instead, in Tarsus in Cilicia (Am. Marc., XXIII, 2, 3-4). The announcement of these decisions obviously caused a deep embarrassment to Antiochian *boule* members and to the rest of the population, who followed the emperor until the city gates with the vows of success in his campaign, while entreating him to be tolerant and compassionate with the city. Their pleas, however, did not move him. Since the emperor was obviously irritated, a commission of eminent locals, including Libanius, set out to accompany the imperial retinue in the hope of obtaining a conciliation hearing. Midway through the journey, conquered by fatigue, Libanius decided to return. But the other participants continued until the outpost of Litarba on the route to Beroea, where they were finally admitted into Julian's presence, though without being able to disincline him from the determination of no longer returning to Antioch (Pellizzari, 2015: 79). In the months that followed, Libanius sought to intervene in the imbroglio by writing two orations, one of them addressed to his fellow citizens (Oration XVI) and the other to Julian (Oration XV). In these orations, he reproaches, on the one hand, the population of Antioch for their bad behavior, and on the other, he beseeches the emperor to forgive the city.

Libanius' intervention is particularly relevant considering the position he started to enjoy after his new encounter with the emperor. Even though Libanius was included, in all fairness, among Julian's most loyal friends and partisans, it is important to point that the bond of friendship between

⁸ In his Oration XVI (14-15), Libanius describes Julian's attitude toward Caesarea in the following terms: "Just look at what happened there in Cappadocia. There a prosperous and famous city, that practiced eloquence and had often been the imperial winter residence, was erased from the number of cities, since its conduct was held to be too undisciplined for its position". Despite the philosopher-image adopted by Julian, which actually became one of the reasons for the tension between him and the Antiochians, it is important to point that in terms of behavior, the emperor was far from the philosopher-king's ideal postulated in the past by Plato. As Sidwell (2008) shows, in the narratives of Ammianus Marcellinus, the references to the emperor's anger – a long-standing *topos* of the imperial literature – became more frequent during Julian's government. This, in a way, is quite surprising.

the two was a recent event. In the days of his youth in Constantinople, Julian was linked to Ecebolius, a Christian mentor. When Julian was in Nicomedia, his master forbade him to attend the lessons of Libanius, who had been invited to teach in that city after an ill-fated professional experience in Constantinople. Despite the prohibition, Julian was an open admirer of Libanius' style and followed his lessons indirectly, by means of a messenger who briefed him on the sophist's teachings on a daily basis. It is surely not a coincidence that Julian's initial orations bear a strong formal similarity to those of Libanius (Cribiore, 2007: 142). One of the first times when the two met was in Nicomedia in 348 or 349. They did not meet again until the whims of imperial politics brought them once more together. When Julian entered Constantinople as Augustus in 362, Libanius received an invitation from his court to join the embassy that would offer the *aurum coronarium* to the new emperor on behalf of Antioch. Fearing an unfavorable reception, Libanius declined the invitation. As it seems, his refusal was due to the fact that the funereal eulogy he composed for his uncle Phasganius in 359 included a harsh invective against Julian's brother Gallus, who was executed for treason under the rule of Constantius II. But in July 362, with the arrival of Julian and his entourage at the Syrian frontier, Libanius was one of the members of the embassy to receive them. Worn out by his age and illness, he was not recognized at first sight. It was Julian's uncle, the homonymous *comes Orienti*, who warned him about the sophist's presence. Pleased at the opportunity to see Libanius once more, the emperor warmly welcomed him (Pellizzari, 2015: 71).

From this moment on, Libanius begins attending Julian's court and is invited to recite a welcoming panegyric to the new emperor on behalf of Antioch (Oration XIII). His eulogy, as it seems, does not have the expected impact, probably due to the ill will of some courtiers, such as Nicocles, Themistius of Byzantium, and Maximus of Ephesus (Wiemer, 2014: 203). Libanius is aware of such opposition and prefers to withdraw. He shuns even from attending the emperor's numerous sacrifices. The situation begins to change by intercession of Priscus of Epirus, a Neoplatonic thinker who reintroduces Libanius to the emperor's court in August 362. From this point until Julian's departure on March 5, 363, Libanius becomes one of the most influential figures of the government and a clear influx can be noticed in his writings, since he vehemently defends Julian's proposal of religious reform and praises him as an ideal emperor on account of his respect for the *paideia* and for ancient rites (Pellizzari, 2015: 73-74). Libanius is invited to recite another panegyric on January 1st, 363, before an audience of high-ranking dignitaries, including members of the Senate of Rome and Constantinople. This new panegyric

is a praise of Julian's consulate (Oration XII), in which Libanius portrays the image of a priest-emperor personally in charge of offering daily sacrifices to the gods, and exalts Julian's fondness for philosophy and his intention of restoring the essential Hellenistic rites, which he finds either to be neglected or even prohibited (Wiemer, 2014: 204).

In early 363, Libanius is already known for his free access to imperial power circles, and is called upon to intercede on behalf of the *polis* in the polemic involving Julian and the Antiochians. His intervention takes place, as mentioned above, by means of two orations: Oration XVI, *To the Antiochians, On the emperor's anger*; and Oration XV, *The embassy to Julian*. Although in the *corpus* of Libanius' discourses, Oration XVI now appears after Oration XV, it is considered to have been written before it, in the first half of April, approximately one month after Julian's departure. In the months that follow, Libanius dedicates himself to Oration XV, titled *Presbeutikos*, which is initially conceived as a eulogy to Julian's expected victory over the Persians. It seems that both orations were not officially recited, and were only known by the ones closest to their author: students, friends and family members (Van Hoof; Van Nuffelen, 2011: 181). In both discourses, Libanius strives to advance the urge of his fellow citizens and intercedes on behalf of Antioch, well aware of the deep discontent expressed by Julian without subterfuges in the *Misopogon*. Libanius' defense strategy is not one of pleading the city's innocence from offense against the imperial majesty; instead, he admits the at once arrogant and unruly character of Antiochians, whom he accuses of an utterly bad behavior. His reasoning reinforces, therefore, the view of a population under the yoke of *tryphe*, that is, of the unfettered pleasures resulting from lust and excessive inebriation, as the emperor himself admonished (Saliou, 2011: 160-161). Though Libanius does admit the interference of economic factors for the emergence of the conflict – since the wealthy ones ceased to supply the market to speculate with staple food (*Or.* XVI, 21) –, the most serious affront in his eyes is the local population's disrespectful attitude toward a just and pious sovereign, without anyone stepping forward in his defense. According to Libanius,

What has upset [the emperor] is that some of his subjects should be so filled with insubordination and so disrespectful, and should not scruple to attempt under his imperial constitution (*Basileia padious*), what they would never dare do even in a democracy that enjoys a greater license than is good for it. So, when such lampoons (*asmata*) were circulated in our city, who protested as if against impiety? Who went and administered a thrashing? Who felt any personal grief? Who said to his neighbor, "Come on! Let's stop them, arrest them, imprison them, execute them"? [...] We should have been the ones to demand their punishment, and such insolent scoundrels should have been executed before ever [Julian] learned of their enormities; "But", it is objected,

“they were only a handful”. Then all the more reason for punishing them [...]. “But they were rascals, beggars, criminals, cut-purses”. You have given another reason why this clique should have been broken up, if their misconduct was serious and substantial [...]. “Those who chased around with these stories were not citizens of ours”, I am told. Then their misconduct was in what they said, ours in what we permitted. If you can prevent anything and yet refuse to do so, it is tantamount to doing it: if you show no anger at wrong-doers, you thereby approve of their wrong-doing. [...] What reason could we ever give for not having done any of this? I shall be told, “We were afraid that, if we sought to put a stop to something that was accepted religious practice, we should be blamed for abolishing the holiday”. [...] I agree that some ridicule is part of some holidays, but it is light-hearted, easily borne and not uttered from unbridled mouths, for it is not directed against their equals [...]. But if my slaves were allowed to scrape together all the insults men can lay their tongues to and abuse me without restraint, using the holiday as their excuse, I would never have acknowledged the gods that enjoy such attentions. Hence men who had any regard for their city should have done away with this sort of thing long ago, and they should not have ignored the insults offered even to the sluggard Constantius. They should consider that, however weak an emperor’s character, his position at least deserves respect (*Or.* XVI, 28-38).

In these lines, Libanius refers to the jokes that circulated in the streets of Antioch involving Julian, particularly the jokes uttered in the context of the Kalends festival, characterized by an inversion of the social order and by a scathing criticism of the public authorities. In early 363, the main objects of irony among Antiochians were the measures adopted by the emperor, including not only economic decisions such as the control of prices, but especially religious decisions, since Julian – as mentioned above – did nurture the desire to make Antioch an emblematic city in his revival of paganism, and more than that, to convert it into a *hierapolis*, i.e., a city completely devoted to the gods. Such conversion would imply, in exchange, a renunciation of the *tryphe* and, thus, of feasts, games and amusements, which had become so innate to the Antiochians’ identity, as discussed in a recent article (Silva, 2015). For Libanius, the population overstepped their right to protest, as their offenses were aimed at the emperor’s majesty itself, and such behavior could not be tolerated even under a government considered to be unfair by all, as occurred with Constantius II. Despite the attempts of locals to evade this accusation by ascribing responsibility to a band of troublemakers and evildoers, Libanius is inflexible in his condemnation of the behavior of the entire population, which could not connive with such situation, not even under a pretext of preserving the sacredness of those festivals. In this regard, Libanius places himself in a position that challenges even the Hellenistic traditions, since he refuses to recognize that a religious excuse could be evoked to justify insolence against an emperor who “differs from the gods only by the fact that he eats the food of men” (*Or.* XVI, 18). For him,

the divine condition of a *basileus* supersedes the habits and customs of a *polis*, which *modus vivendi* must be completely reformed so it may deserve the leniency of its emperor, as the following excerpt shows. Libanius instructs the Antiochians on how to assuage Julian's anger:

What, then, is the cure [for the problems of Antioch]? Let us show ourselves to be really sorry and really grieved. Let us present our plea sorrowfully and decorously. In fact it is one of the charges against us that we display more arrogance than we should and that nothing can alarm our city [...]. Let us make the town assume an air of common distress and let a whole city imitate a household in its grief. Let us shut our theatre for a short time, and ask the dancers and actors here to let our neighbors too share the blessings they provide and leave us to pass the summer without amusements. Let us reduce the number of chariot races. Make them six instead of sixteen. This extravagant lightning, this indication of idle luxury, that hangs over the entrances to our baths – let us make it a fraction of what it is now. Let us pass sentence on ourselves, lest the emperor do it for us [...]. Even if the devotees of the theater complain, let us induce them to recognize the seriousness of the situation, and let no account be taken of those who disapprove. It would be disastrous to favor them to the detriment of the whole community, and to think more of humouring those who confessedly cannot endure an existence without their stage idols than of appeasing the emperor's wrath [...] (Or. XVI, 40-45).

Libanius vindicates a complete change in the lifestyle of Antioch's population, who should reduce, if not abandon, the hippodrome races and theater performances that are so dear to them. He also points at the excesses of an expensive local public lightning system, which, in his view, is conducive to profligacy, and opposes therefore one of the most unique features of Antioch: its nocturnal life. Differently from most ancient cities, the vicinity of the colonnades avenue, the Forum of Valens and the Epiphany Agora had night lights, a service in charge of a supervisor named *epimeletes*, who was responsible for collecting from local merchants the necessary fuel for the system. Antioch was thus famous for being active day and night, a characteristic that Libanius highlighted in an appreciative way in the *Antiochikos* (267), a panegyric he recited to the city in 356. But in the early months of 363, the situation was quite different. Antioch was plunged into an unprecedented crisis, which, according to Libanius, was a product of the impetuosity and arrogance of its population, who turned their backs to Julian – an emperor fond of philosophy and of the *paideia*, whose only fault was to seek, by all possible means, to curb the city's excesses in order to elevate its morality. Libanius recommends that his compatriots expiate their faults by contrition, decorum and retreat, behaving themselves precisely in the way envisioned by Julian, a leader capable of rescuing Antioch from *tryphe* and its snares, which had been strengthened under the rule of Constantius II.

Libanius addresses the emperor in his Oration XV, a discourse in which he takes a stand as a spokesperson on behalf of Antioch, with the following words:

What surprises me is that you are surprised at any disorderliness in the cities after their long experience under such a teacher [Constantius]. Was not everything full of confusion, incompetence and neglect? Was not law a dead letter and office bought and sold? [...] Virtue was out of fashion and it was a reign of pleasure, and rascals were able to get away scot-free. So what surprise is it that, with such free rein for wickedness, the conduct of the cities be somewhat tainted by the times? If pupils of bad teachers have no hope of becoming expert practitioners of eloquence, can the world retain any decency when a sluggard is on the throne? If flocks are ruined by the stupidity of their shepherds, are cities well-schooled by the incompetence of the emperors? [...] Why now do we call the world happy? Simply because an expert physician has come to tend it. We are glad, for he will alter the behaviour of the cities and improve it [...]. In the easy-going days of the past, Sire, we all of us lived a life of indiscipline. Now we have come under a firmer yoke, and we shall try to bear it. Pardon our petty faults and improve us so as to have no need of pardon (*Or.* XV, 67-70).

Here, Libanius postulates an ethical parallelism between rulers and cities. In his opinion, the excesses of Antioch's inhabitants are largely a result of the immoralities committed under the government of Constantius II, who is cited as a bad teacher for his inability to curb ineptness and venality among public officials, leading to a situation of frivolity and indiscipline in the entire population. From this perspective, Antioch could and should be pardoned, since it has been, in a way, contaminated by the bad character of Constantius II. But Libanius does not defend the innocence of the city. In any case, it is at least necessary to recognize a change of the times, for against the malady that now befalls the empire stands Julian, whom he salutes as the physician of the cities. Bearing in mind that the emperor's purpose is to heal Antioch's moral illness and bring back its well-being, Libanius defends his authority to intervene in the urban life.

In Libanius' eyes, Julian is not only capable of restoring the optimum condition Antioch experienced in former times, but also of enhancing it. One may ask what this means specifically. Considering the measures adopted by Julian in the field of religion, it seems that Antioch's enhancement should not be limited merely to an effort to revive Hellenism, but should also include a much more ambitious ideal: the reform of the *polis* and its conversion into a pious or saintly city devoted to asceticism and worship to the gods. For this reason, ordinary expressions of civic life such as games, feasts and spectacles should be redefined in conformity with the new ethical-religious parameters

pursued by the emperor.

In this regard, Libanius is doubtlessly supportive of Julian's aspirations. In his effort to explain to Antioch's inhabitants how to appease the emperor, he affirms: "it is not by prostrating yourselves on the ground, not by pleading with olive branches, not by presenting crowns, protestations, embassies, nor by sending an expert orator that you will assuage his wrath, unless you stop your present nonsense and surrender your city to Zeus and the other gods" (*Or.* XVI, 46). In this case, 'surrendering the city to Zeus and the other gods' does not mean to abandon Christianity and return to Paganism. Differently from what some authors assume,⁹ it is not possible to state that Antioch was already a predominantly Christian city in the mid-4th century. In this regard, it is enough to recall that Julian's entrance in Antioch occurred precisely on a day when the feast of Adonis was being celebrated. The 'surrender of the city' to the gods seems to suggest a change of attitude in the way individuals exercise their devotion, expressed by their adherence to sacrifices, compliance with asceticism, relinquishment of feasts and other amusements, and attendance to religious temples following Julian's personal example, and in agreement with his desire to extend such practices to the entire city. According to Soler (2006: 64), Antioch's reaction to Julian's attempt of a religious reform is "a complex mass-phenomenon, in which center one finds the festive exuberance, the Dionysian aspects of the city, which the emperor initially neglect[s], then despise[s]". Not that Antiochians are impious or treat the gods with indifference, or are ungrateful with a well-intentioned emperor.¹⁰ In reality, the city's inhabitants do not fit in the new standards Julian tries to force upon them, and resort to the usual mechanisms of irony, irreverence and the mass occupation of the streets, to resist any attempt of authoritarian imposition on their daily lives. In his *Ecclesiastical History* (III, 20), Theodoret of Cyrus provides additional evidence of how unpleasant Julian's action was for Antiochians, describing that when the news of the emperor's death reached the city, the crowd was struck with joy and celebrated it in the churches, in the *martyria* and in the theater. And in his letters, Libanius himself recollects that Antiochians did not

⁹ The assumption that Antioch was already a predominantly Christian *polis* in Julian's days is advanced by authors as Bowersock (1997: 105), Ballabriga (2009: 66) and Pellizzari (2015:79). But contemporary historiography tends to refute such interpretation, since Hellenism and Judaism continued to be active cultural forces in the city in the 4th and 5th centuries, while sharing the urban territory with Christianity.

¹⁰ For Hawkins (2012: 172), Julian was misunderstood as an emperor by the population of Antioch. For a considerably less one-sided evaluation of this episode, see Van Hoof & Van Nuffelen (2011).

hesitate to invade their streets with festive parades (*Ep.* 1220, 2 *apud* Soler, 2006: 58). Such behavior cannot be judged *a priori* as senseless, cruel or disrespectful, since, as Julia (1998: 229) affirms, at the end of the day, even the strangeness that emanates from the most disconcerting situations involving broad collectivities reveals “questions that the social body makes in regard to its own identity, and the alarms it sets out to invoke according to a lexicon of its own”. The inhabitants of Antioch were confronted by an emperor haunted by an idea of purity and spiritual elevation, and sought to react as they could, that is, by taking their Dionysian *komoï* and *choroï* to the streets and resorting to chants, dances and mockery as instruments to defend their values and traditions.

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