

## **A MAGISTER NAVIGANDI CHOSEN IN THE MIDDLE OF THE TEMPEST: JOVIAN AND ENTROPY (363 – 364)<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

This article explores the Roman imperial context between 363 and 364. It aims to present an interpretative key that allows the analysis of the scarcely studied period of Emperor Jovian's government. For this purpose, the authors propose the use of the concept of entropy, found in Political Science, and carved out by means of the information found in various ancient sources which narrate the development of Jovian's actions, such as the ones written by Ammianus Marcellinus, Zosimus, Libanius, and Paulus Orosius. Following this itinerary, the authors search for the particularity of the political and military process which took place in the second half of the fourth century and propose a concept that can be useful for future studies on the Late Antiquity.

### **Keywords**

Entropy; Jovian; Fourth Century; Late Antiquity.

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## **Resumo**

O presente artigo explora o contexto imperial romano entre os anos de 363 e 364 d.C. Objetiva-se aqui apresentar uma chave interpretativa que possibilite uma análise do pouco estudado governo do Imperador Joviano. Para tal, os autores propõem a utilização de uma categoria encontrada na Ciência Política, a entropia, lapidada pela mediação do conteúdo encontrado em diversas fontes antigas que narram o desenrolar das ações de Joviano, tais como as escritas por Amiano Marcelino, Zósimo, Libânio e Paulo Orósio. Com esse itinerário, busca-se conhecer diversas particularidades do processo político-militar da segunda metade do século IV d.C. e a proposição de uma categoria interessante para futuros estudos a respeito da Antiguidade Tardia.

## **Palavras-chave**

Entropia; Joviano; Século IV d.C.; Antiguidade Tardia.

On the 26th of June 363<sup>4</sup>, emperor Julian took his last breath in the middle of an unfortunate military campaign against the Persian Empire. Wounded in the battlefield while his troops advanced to *Corduena*, the *augustus* was carried to his tent and did not survive. This event, as well as emperor Julian's image, is soaked in controversy. The myriad of versions of the story which mention the instrument and the responsible for the blow that caused the death of the emperor, such as the ones found in Ammianus Marcellinus (*Rerum Gestarum*. XXV. 3, 6), Libanius (*Orationes*. XVIII. 269-274), Paulus Orosius (*Historiarum Adversum Paganos*. VII. 30, 6) and Zosimus (*Ἱστορία Νέα*. III. 29, 1), is a clear example of that. In any case, the death of Julian and its various versions are not the most important topic of this article; the focus is rather on the events that followed the death of the emperor, which are also surrounded by various and even conflicting narratives.

Before we get to the main topic of the article, it is necessary to know some important elements of the critical situation opened by this imperial death. We have already mentioned that Julian was conducting a military campaign against the Persians. Such attack counted on impressive numbers, as David Hunt indicates in his book *Julian*: "Julian himself headed the main advance down the Euphrates, an army 65,000 strong accompanied by some 1000 transport vessels which assembled in Callinicum;" (Hunt, 2007: 74). Further to this main force, the expedition also counted on a second division under the command of Procopius and Sebastianus, which opened a second front with the aid of Arsaces of Armenia from the Tigris River. After the first phase of military victories in minor skirmishes up to the walls of Ctesiphon, the emperor decided to cross the Tigris River to unite his army and gave order to burn the ships after the crossing (Ammianus Marcellinus. *Rerum Gestarum*. XXIV. 7, 4). That was the beginning of a period of hardship for Roman troops, weakened by famine and by Persian attacks during their attempts to move forward. That was the chaotic picture in which the death of Julian took place and in which the election of the new emperor was decided.

This event gave rise to one of the most delicate moments of the political and military history of the fourth century. The interesting point is that, despite the gravity of that context, little has been written about it by researchers of the Late Antiquity. From the classic *Later Roman Empire* by A. H. M. Jones to the contemporary *Imperial Tragedy* by Michael Kulikowski, the rise of Jovian and the short period of his government

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<sup>4</sup> Most dates mentioned in this article refer to the Common Era, so we decided to eliminate the indication CE from the text. Nevertheless, all dates before Christ will show the abbreviation BCE.

received minimal attention. Even more detailed analyses, as observed by John Curran in *From Jovian to Theodosius*, fail to enlighten the character of Jovian and his government. Facing this fact, we decided to endeavor this research in order to understand Jovian's character and the various versions of the process of the rise and consolidation of his power.

The starting point of our enterprise seems very clear to us: the death of Julian, as a result of a wound inflicted to him in the battlefield. However, the scope of our object of study is defined not only by the death of the emperor and the rise of a new one, but also by circumstances such as the impending difficulties of that military campaign and imminent defeat, the absence of a successor appointed by the emperor<sup>5</sup>, the absence of male family members able to take the command of the empire, and the possible existence of groups competing for the government of the territories of the Roman empire. On the other end, the final line we draw on our object of analysis is the death of Jovian, when his actions cease and a new complex process for the choice of a new emperor starts. Among the documental sources which contain records of this period, we decided to focus our analysis on Ammianus Marcellinus *Rerum Gestarum*, as the author was present in the campaign against Persia and retired from public life after the defeat. His works comprise 31 books, of which only the last 14 came down to us. The narration of events related to Jovian is found on book 25. Despite the importance of Ammianus' work, it deserves a comparison with other documental sources in order to reveal points of convergence and divergence, especially with Zosimus *Ἱστορία Νέα*, a work written between the end of the fifth century and the beginning of the sixth century, which offers important details and descriptions of Jovian's time as emperor.

Before starting our analysis of these materials, it is necessary to present the conceptual key we have used: the concept of entropy. For this purpose, we recall the work of an important Brazilian political scientist, Renato Lessa, who uses a very interesting image to think about the first years of Brazilian Republic, proclaimed in 1889. According to Lessa, in his book *A Invenção Republicana* [*The Republican invention*]:

the idea [of entropy], inspired by its use in the field of thermodynamics, indicates the measure of disorder contained in a system. Such disorder, within a given

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<sup>5</sup> In relation to the problem of the lack of a successor appointed by Julian, the sources present some discrepancies. Ammianus Marcellinus says that, despite all rumors about Procopius, the emperor did not appoint anyone, not even in the last moments before his death, leaving this choice open (Ammianus Marcellinus. *Rerum Gestarum*. XXV. 3, 20). On the other hand, Zosimus affirms that the emperor secretly gave the imperial toga to Procopius during the expedition to Persia (Zosimus. *Ἱστορία Νέα*. IV. 4, 2), which could be interpreted as a sign of the emperor's appointment.

system, increases at the same rate of the possibilities of combination and non-differentiation among the elements comprised in that given system (Lessa, 2015: 98).

The concept of entropy seems to us a useful tool to understand systems characterized by a certain level of disorder. Lessa adopts it as means to analyze a particular moment in Brazilian history in which monarchical power structures were abandoned and uncertainty marked the social and political scene. We decided to use the same concept to rethink about the period starting from the death of Julian, which was characterized by uncertainty in the context of late imperial Rome. The war, the end of the Constantinian dynasty, and the possible presence of factions disputing political and military power in the Roman empire indicate not only disorder, but also the existence of open possibilities of combination in the void of power left after Julian's death. Other to these two factors – disorder and possibilities of combination – there is also a third factor to be considered: non-differentiation among the elements that compose the system, which is clear when we consider the events related to the election of the new emperor, in a process marked by discussions, appointments, a refusal and a compromise. All this was followed by Jovian's attempt to establish himself as legitimate emperor with his family, and to take control of the unstable Roman political and military system.

Now, after presenting the historical period, the main primary source, and the theoretical basis adopted for this research, we can proceed with the analysis of our sources about Jovian's time as Roman emperor.

As we know, Julian “had no heir, either in the camp or elsewhere, and the campaign army had no natural leader” (Kulikowski, 2019: 32). On the 27<sup>th</sup> of June, the day after Julian's death<sup>6</sup>, the *duces* of the army gathered to start the discussions in order to appoint a new emperor. At this stage we find the first major controversy about the figure of Jovian as we compare contradictory narratives about the debates regarding the imperial succession. Let us consider the account given by Ammianus Marcellinus, who was both a historian and a military: he was part of the group of the *protectores domestici* and served in the campaign of Persia in 363 (Trombley, 2005: 17). According to him,

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<sup>6</sup> For further information about the death of Julian and the various versions about it, we suggest the article *Considerações sobre memória e morte do Imperador Juliano nos testemunhos de Libânio e Amiano Marcelino (século IV d.C.)* written by Margarida Maria de Carvalho and Luciane Munhoz de Omena (2016).

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Discissique studiis turbulentis Arintheus et Victor et e palatio Constanti residui de parte sua quendam habilem scrutabantur, contra Nevitta et Dagalaifus proceresque Gallorum virum talem ex conmilatio suo quaeritabant.

They were divided into turbulent factions, for Arintheus and Victor, with the other survivors of the palace officials of Constantius, looked around for a suitable man from their party; on the other hand, Nevitta and Dagalaifus, as well as the chiefs of the Gauls, sought such man among their fellow-soldiers (Ammianus Marcellinus. *Rerum Gestarum*. XXV. 5, 2).

Marcellinus relates that the process of election of the new emperor took place in a situation of tension between the partisans of Constantius II, Arintheus and Victor, and the Gaul nobleman (*proceres Gallorum*), Nevitta and Dagalaifus. It is important to remember that Julian had a great part of his military career in Gaul, after being sent there as *caesar* in 355. Thus, Marcellinus presents a scene in which the groups that supported the last two emperors disputed the right to acclaim the next political leader. One can also notice in the passage above that there was no agreement about the candidates in this first moment.

Marcellinus' narrative (*Rerum Gestarum*. XXV. 5, 3) continues, saying that the position was offered to Salutius, who promptly refused it, due to his poor health condition and chronic illness. This means that the meeting risked getting back to the starting point, and Marcellinus says that:

Inter has exiguas ad tantam rem moras, nondum pensatis sentiis, tumultuantibus paucis, ut in rebus extremis saepe est factum, Iovianus eligitur imperator, domesticorum ordinis primus, paternis meritis mediocriter commendabilis. erat enim Varroniani notissimi comitis filius, haut dudum post depositum militiae munus ad tranquilliora vitae digressi.

During this delay, which was slight considering the importance of the matter, before the various opinions had been weighed, a few hot-headed soldiers (as often happens in an extreme crisis) chose an emperor in the person of Jovianus, commander of the household troops, who had claims for some slight consideration because of the services of his father. For he was the son of Varronianus, a well-known count, who not long since, after ending his military career, had retired to a quieter life (Ammianus Marcellinus. *Rerum Gestarum*. XXV. 5, 4).

According to him, the election of Jovian, *primus ordinis domesticorum*<sup>7</sup>, was the result of the action of a few agitators (*pauci tumultuantes*). In face of a deadlock, some unquiet soldiers would have chosen an almost unknown

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<sup>7</sup> According to A. H. M. Jones, Jovian achieved the position of *primicerius domesticorum* at the age of 32, and it was very unlikely that it could have happened if "his father had not been a *comes domesticorum*" (Jones, 1964: 135). Due to his position, Jovian was responsible for taking the remains of Constantius II to Constantinople in 361 (Ammianus Marcellinus. *History*. XXI. 16, 20).

figure, on the sole basis of the success of his father, Varronianus. This is precisely one of the characteristics of the concept of entropy presented by Lessa: the absurdity of “a dramatic arena, inhabited by a plurality of meanings, and actors who carry and establish these meanings without any certainty about the effects of the actions they engender” (Lessa, 2015: 98). In this sense, we have the dramatic situation of the lack of an emperor in the middle of a campaign in foreign lands, and a group of soldiers imposing their will, which was not necessarily shared by the other actors. This version of the events, however, stumbles on information provided by other sources and by historiographical works produced *a posteriori*.

In *The Roman Empire in Late Antiquity*, Hugh Elton says that “*Flavius Jovianus* was born in 331, of a military family, and served as a *protector domesticus* under Constantius II and Julian” (Elton, 2018: 119). It means that Jovian was familiar to the imperial power and that he had served in a military division very close to the emperor. This picture of Jovian is quite different from the one offered by Marcellinus. Why? Peter Heather offers an answer to this question in *Ammianus on Jovian: History and Literature*: he says that in the view of Ammianus “Jovian was not a legitimate, divinely chosen Roman emperor, but the lucky recipient of a chance promotion” (Heather, 2005: 95). This version contradicts most of the other sources of information about this event<sup>8</sup>. Themistius relates that the decision of the soldiers in favor of Jovian was doubtless (Themistius. *Orationes*. 5, 65d); authors of the Christian tradition, such as Socrates (*Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία*. 3, 22) and Sozomen (*Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία*. VI, 3), and an author of the pagan tradition, Zosimus (*Ιστορία Νέα*. III. 30, 1), go further: they say that the election of Jovian was quick and both Zosimus and Sozomen affirm it was unanimous.

These accounts of the events present two points in common: first, the election/acclamation of Jovian by the soldiers, and second, the importance of his father’s reputation for his rise as emperor. On the other hand, there is a clear dissonance between Marcellinus’ text and most of the other sources regarding the image of Jovian. Heather provides an important explanation for this particularity of Ammianus’ narrative: he says that, since Julian is the great hero of Ammianus’s work, his successor should be presented as his counterpoint. This means that “Jovian had to be sufficiently incompetent, and hence illegitimate, for Ammianus to be able to pin upon him the entire blame for the disastrous end to Julian’s Persian campaign” (Heather, 2005: 101). For this reason, we must be cautious about

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<sup>8</sup> We find in Eunapius a reference to Jovian saying that he did not have the necessary qualities to become emperor, but he was acclaimed emperor not for his qualities but because of his father’s reputation. (Eunapius. *Fragmenta*. 29, 1, 5).

the descriptions offered by Marcellinus, mostly the ones related to the figure of Jovian. Nevertheless, we cannot deny the importance of this source for the study of the events of the year 363, for it contains details that cannot be found in any other source – not only because the author was directly involved in the campaign, but because of his work of research, selection and elaboration of the information gathered during that time.

After his election as new emperor by the officers in the middle of a complicated situation and his presentation to the soldiers, Jovian started his government in a delicate situation which required him to prevent contingent disorder. Zosimus (*Ἱστορία Νέα*. III. 30, 2) underlines that, after Jovian's rise, the main preoccupation of the new emperor was to go back home as soon as possible. Marcellinus follows the same path (*Rerum Gestarum*. XXV. 5, 8), but emphasizing the dramatic scene in which a *Ioviani*<sup>9</sup> standard bearer (*signifer Iovianorum*) deserts the Roman army and goes over to the Persian side – indicating the risk of disaggregation of the Roman army from one of the divisions that were closer to the emperor.

Both historians – Ammianus and Zosimus – offer similar descriptions of the episodes of the military campaign that followed the election of the new emperor. They say that the Romans were attacked by the Persians while they were preparing their retreat, with some differences: Ammianus (*Rerum Gestarum*. XXV. 6, 2-4) says that it happened when the Romans were preparing their march towards the fort in Suma and Zosimus (*Ἱστορία Νέα*. III. 30, 2) affirms that it occurred when the Romans arrived there. Let us see the description provided by the first author:

Proinde egredi iam coeptantes adoriuntur nos elephantis praeviis Persae, ad quorum fremitum accessumque terribilem equis inter initia turbatis et viris, Ioviani et Herculiani occisis beluis paucis, cataphractis equitibus acriter restiterunt. Dein legiones Ioviorum atque Victorum laborantibus suis ferentes auxilium, elephantos duo straverunt cum hostium plebe non parva, et in laevo proelio viri periere fortissimi, Iulianus et Macrobius et Maximus legionum tribuni, quae tunc primas exercitus obtinebant.

But when we accordingly were just beginning to leave, the Persians attacked us, with the elephants in front. By the unapproachable and frightful stench of these brutes horses and men were at first thrown into confusion, but the Joviani and Herculiani, after killing a few of the beasts, bravely resisted the mail-clad horsemen. Then the legions of the Jovii and the Victores came to the aid of their struggling companions and slew two elephants, along with a considerable number

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<sup>9</sup> *Ioviani* and *Herculiani* “were specialized legions of the field army in the fourth century and they headed the list of Palatina legions in Notitia [Dignitatum]” (Jones, 1964: 53). Zosimus credits the creation of these units to Diocletian and Maximian and the names of the legions as references to Jupiter and Hercules, respectively associated to these emperors (Zosimus. *Ἱστορία Νέα*. III, 30, 3).



of the enemy. On our left wing some valiant warriors fell, Julianus, Macrobius and Maximus, tribunes of the legions which then held first place in our army (Ammianus Marcellinus. *Rerum Gestarum*. XXV. 25, 6, 2-3).

Three aspects of the Persian attack can be foregrounded: the use of elephants, the role of the *Ioviani* and *Herculiani* in preventing the victory of the Persians, and the death of Roman soldiers symbolized in the loss of the tribunes Julianus, Macrobius and Maximus. This means that even if the problem of the lack of an emperor was solved, the Persian campaign had reached at a critical point. The surrounding disorder was far from being under control.

The heroic action of certain legions and the death of tribunes show the resistance of the Roman army, while the use of elephants reveal not only the superiority of the military power of the Persians, but also the fear they inspired in a weakened army. Vegetius (*Epitoma Rei Militaris*. III, 24) relates that the cry and the physical aspect of the elephants were the main reasons to use them in the battlefield. In any case, the author makes clear that the first impact caused by those huge creatures was something of the past, since in the Late Antiquity they were easily defeated. This was confirmed by the narration, as it mentions that the animals were killed by the Roman units.

Entropy, instability, had reached an unreasonable level in the middle of a war in foreign territory with an army that was weakened by famine and tiredness, led by a recently acclaimed emperor who was not well-known by the members of the troops. Even if the problem of political and military leadership was solved, there was a delicate process of withdrawal of troops to be managed under constant incursions of the Persians. The situation did not change in the days that followed the episode in which the Roman army advanced towards the Tigris River under the attack of the Persians.

Once again, there are discrepancies about the order of the events narrated by ancient historians who related what happened in the days that followed the military action of Jovian. Zosimus (*Ιστορία Νέα*. III. 5) affirms that the Romans used skins to build bridges<sup>10</sup> to reach the other side of the river, and even after that, the Persians continued their incursions, while starvation grew among the troops. Ammianus (*Rerum Gestarum*. XXV. 6-7) says that, due to the Persian threat, to the rumors that Roman frontiers were near, and to the insistence of armed men, about 500 Gaul and German experienced soldiers were chosen to cross the river, but bridges made of

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<sup>10</sup> Zosimus' brief description of the bridge made from skins recalls a machine described by the anonymous author of *De Rebus Bellicis*: the *ascogephyrus* (*De Rebus Bellicis*. XVI, 1-5).

animal skin (*pontes caesorum animalium coriis*) could not be built because of the water level and the growing starvation among the legionaries. Even if we tend to believe that the Romans failed in their attempt to cross the river, which corroborates the necessity to accept the terms in which peace was established in the following days, we cannot affirm that Zosimus' version was completely illusory. In any case, both authors make clear that the army was reduced to a miserable state under the Persian besiege.

This is the situation in which negotiations towards peace took place. All the authors of ancient sources agree that the Persians took the initiative for the peace settlement by sending Surena (accompanied by at least one Persian nobleman) to make their proposal. However, while Marcellinus (*Rerum Gestarum*. XXV. 7, 5-11) indicates an interval between the presentation of the proposal and its acceptance, Zosimus (*Ἱστορία Νέα*. III. 31, 1) only says that the peace settlement was reached with the acceptance of the terms proposed by the Persians and that Salutius and Arintheus were sent as emissaries to conclude the agreement with the Persians. Following this second account of the facts, we have the impression that the proposal of peace was promptly accepted, while in the first one the author insists not only on the development of a negotiated peace, but also in the decision in favor of it as expression of the influence of a group that feared the possible rise of Procopius (Ammianus Marcellinus. *Rerum Gestarum*. XXV. 7, 10-11). In any case, both authors agree that the result of the negotiations was extremely unfavorable to the Romans, which was an unprecedented event.

This peace agreement is the most cited event of Jovian's government in the primary sources we have examined (considering the events that had the active participation of the emperor). Themistius (*Orationes*. V. 66a), Paulus Orosius (*Historiarum Adversum Paganos*. VII. 31, 1), Eunapius (*Fragmenta*. 29, 10) and Sozomen (*Ἐκκλησιαστική Ἱστορία*. VI, III) emphasize the fact that the agreement was disadvantageous for the Romans, though most of them admit it was necessary, considering the disastrous outcome of the campaign organized by Julian. Among some Christian authors, such as Sozomen, the responsibility for the acceptance of such unfavorable terms of the peace agreement is given to Julian. Comparing it to Marcellinus account, one can notice a totally different judgement in relation to the figure responsible for this important military and diplomatic defeat in Roman history. At this point, one could ask: how was this defeat stated on the *foedus*?

Zosimus (*Ἱστορία Νέα*. III, 31, 1-2) relates that peace was agreed for a period of thirty years, in which the provinces of Zabdicene, Corduene, Rehimena

and Zelena, were left for the Persians. He also says that Nisibis was given up to the Persians, but in this case, according to the author, with the permission to withdraw the Roman population from there. At last, because of the agreement, the Persians took power over a major part of Armenia. Ammianus (*Rerum Gestarum*. XXV, 7, 9) gives his version of the facts saying that Shapur II demanded five Roman regions that had been conquered by Maximian by the end of the third century: Arzanene, Moxoene, Zabdicene, Rehimena e Corduene with fifteen forts. Furthermore, Shapur II demanded also Nisibis, Singara and Castra Maurorum, allowing the Roman population to withdraw from Nisibis and Singara, and the Roman troops to leave the forts (Ammianus Marcellinus. *Rerum Gestarum*. XXV, 7, 11). The author also says that one of the conditions for the agreement was that the Romans could not offer help to Arsaces, king of Armenia (Ammianus Marcellinus. *Rerum Gestarum*. XXV, 7, 12).

We notice some differences between the versions of the episode given by these two authors. According to Zosimus, four provinces were given to the Persians, other than Nisibis; while Marcellinus mentions five provinces and Nisibis, Singara and Castra Maurorum. There is divergence also about the possibility to withdraw Roman population from Nisibis only or from other cities too. Nevertheless, the texts present elements in common: the loss of territories that had been conquered long before by the Romans, the demand for non-interference in the question of Armenia, the 30-year term agreement, and the unfavorable position of Jovian in relation to Shapur II. As we read in the article “Como fazer um tratado com os persas? Uma análise do processo de negociação da paz entre romanos e persas em 363 d.C.” [“How to reach an agreement with Persians? Analysis of the process of negotiation of peace between Romans and Persians in 363 CE]:

the loss of strategic territories on an extremely important frontier and the inclusion of a humiliating clause scratched even more the Roman tradition of conceding peace after the *deditio*, *supplicatio* and *deprecatio* of opponents (Gonçalves; Tavares, 2019: 42).

This break in tradition is affirmed in various texts. From Ammianus, who put the burden of guilt on Jovian, to Sozomen, who blamed Julian, many ancient authors considered the event a defeat, with few exceptions, such as Themistius. According to Peter Heather and David Moncur, in *Politics, Philosophy, and Empire in the Fourth Century*, on the 1st of January 364, when Jovian received the consulship accompanied by Varronian, his son, the great orator pronounced a discourse in which he offered “an account of the topic which was entirely in line with the demands of the ruling regime. Jovian’s coinage makes it clear that the new emperor proclaimed the peace with Persia as a victory” (Heather; Moncur, 2001: 151). Themistius

(*Orations*. V, 66a) affirms that the Persians, as they knew about the acclamation of Jovian, put down the arms and looked to the Romans with respect, allowing a comparison to Epaminondas.

As we can see, there are various divergent and even contradictory versions of the proposition and acceptance of the peace agreement. However, it is possible to notice that all sources agree about the fact that Rome reached a peaceful relationship with Persia in 363. In our opinion, this means that in terms of entropy, Jovian managed to reduce the level of instability in the Roman political and military system. If the *foedus* was a shameful defeat or a victory, it is less important than the fact that it served to put an end to a situation that consumed huge resources and the lives of many men. Unpredictability would be also reduced with the acceptance of the peace agreement: the main external challenge was finally removed, even if temporarily. At this point, it is important to remember that after the withdrawal of the Romans, the Persian question would reopen only after the death of Jovian, when Shapur II felt released from the obligation to fulfill many of the terms of the peace agreement established with the emperor. This is one more piece of evidence that Jovian acted to stabilize the political and military order of the empire, and, to a certain extent, he succeeded in this objective by accepting an agreement which was clearly unfavorable to the Romans.

After the traditional exchange of hostages and the ratification of the *foedus* with sacred formulas, Jovian started the process of withdrawal of the Roman troops from the Persian territory. After the return of messengers and officers back to Roman territories and the appointment of trustworthy men to occupy key positions (as Lucillianus, father-in-law of the emperor), the long and hard process of evacuation of Nisibis started under Bineses, a Persian nobleman (Ammianus Marcellinus. *Rerum Gestarum*. XXV, 9, 1-6). The population resisted the order of evacuation, but Jovian remained unmoved (Zósimo. *Ιστορία Νέα*. III, 34, 1). At the same time of the return of the troops and the evacuation of the civil population to imperial territories, Procopius took the remains of Julian to Tarso, where the dead emperor was buried. (Ammianus Marcellinus. *Rerum Gestarum*. XXV, 9, 12). After this event, Procopius is not cited by documental sources until he starts the usurpation against Valens in 365 (Ammianus Marcellinus. *Rerum Gestarum*. XXVI, 6, 14).

The emperor Jovian and his group continued their march returning to imperial territories. After some days in Antioquia, he went to Tarso, where he visited the tomb of Julian. It was during this itinerant period, even before arriving in Antioquia, that Jovian started the reversion of the

religious policy imposed by Julian. According to Themistius (*Orations*. V, 68a), the new emperor proved to be more tolerant:

He quickly declared a 'peace of the church', decisively repudiating Julian's anti-Christian policy, while signaling that he would favour neither the Nicenes nor their homoian opponents, although he was a Nicene himself" (Kulikowski, 2019: 34).

One more element of instability was removed by Jovian: religious dispute. As we learn from the accounts of the period, Jovian reversed the religious actions of his predecessor. The new *augustus* intended not only to favor the Christians, but also to start a process of pacification with other religious faiths, in a clear effort to reduce internal disputes.

As Jovian left Tarso, he received worrying news from Gaul. Lucillianus, Jovian's father-in-law and trustworthy man, had been assassinated in *Ciuitas Remorum* (modern Reims) by soldiers who believed in rumors that Julian was still alive – rumors probably spread by Iovinus, *magister equitum* (Ammianus Marcellinus. *Rerum Gestarum*. XXV, 10, 7). Seniauchus, the tribune, was killed too, and the other tribune, Valentinianus, was saved with the intervention of Iovinus, who took control of the troops immediately after the incident and swore loyalty to the emperor. The episode was a clear demonstration of power from the part of an officer - Iovinus – that had not accepted his replacement, revealing his dubious attitude: he kept his position and influence and, at the same time, swore his loyalty to the emperor. The event can be interpreted as a perturbation in the progressive stabilization aimed by Jovian, but the fact is that the problem was solved by local actors, discharging the emperor of any effort or action.

The news from Gaul took place as Jovian arrived in Ancyra, where he assumed the consulship on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 364, with his son Varronian, who was a child. In that occasion, Themistius (*Orations*. V) pronounced the discourse we mentioned previously in this article. After little more than a month of local actions during his way, Jovian died in the night on the 17<sup>th</sup> February in Dadastana.

There are many versions about the *causa mortis* of the emperor. Initially, Marcellinus (*History*. XXV, 10, 13) lists three possibilities: 1) smell of lime in the bedroom, 2) smoke produced by burned charcoal, or 3) an indigestion after a meal. Sozomen (*Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία*. VI, 6) presents a version that corroborates the hypothesis presented by Marcellinus. Orosius (*Historiarum Adversum Paganos*, VII, 31, 3-5), blames the high temperature and the lime used in the bedroom, while Socrates

(*Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία*. III, 26) agrees with the possibility of an indigestion mentioned by Marcellinus. Zosimus (*Ιστορία Νέα*. III, 35, 3) cites an illness that would have put an end to the life of the emperor. Nevertheless, it is possible to add to these versions of accidental death the suspicion mentioned by Ammianus himself:

cumque huic et Aemiliano Scipioni vitae exitus similis evenisset, super neutrius morte quaestionem conperimus agitatam.

The end of his life was like that of Scipio Aemilianus, but so far as I know no investigation was made of the death of either (Ammianus Marcellinus. *Rerum Gestarum*. XXV, 10, 13).

It is widely known that in 129 BCE, as we read in the book of Adrian Goldsworthy (2016: 149) *In the name of Rome*, “Scipio was found dead in his house (...). Soon, rumours abounded that he had been poisoned”. According to Appian (*Bella Ciuilia*. I, 20), suspicion fell on his wife, Sempronia, on some foreigners, or on Scipio himself, as he could have committed suicide. By comparing Jovian’s death with the death of this important republican figure, Marcellinus suggests the possibility of death by assassination. John Chrysostom (*Homilies on Phillipians*. XVI, 169) mentions an emperor that died by poisoning, and even if he does not say the name of the emperor, the episode can be associated with Jovian. There is a more explicit reference to the episode in a fragment by Eunapius (*Fragmenta*. XXIX, 1, 30-35), where the author says that the emperor ate a poisonous mushroom.

The question raised by the possibility of assassination of Jovian is interesting because it suggests a process of rejection of this figure or even a possible usurpation in course. Some elements corroborate this possibility, such as the actions of Iovin that resulted in the death of Lucillianus, the sudden disappearance of Procopius, who could be moving in the Roman empire<sup>11</sup>, and the hypothetical assassination of Jovian. However, the available clues do now allow us to go further than mere conjecture.

The point here is that the death of Jovian inaugurates a new process of imperial succession, in which, again, different factions presented their candidates. At this point, one can say that even if Jovian was not able to confer a dynastic orientation to the empire, he could keep control of other elements of instability during his short period in the government of the

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<sup>11</sup> It is important to keep in mind that Procopius reappeared in 365 in Constantinople, where he actually deflagrated the usurpation against Valens after the appointment of the latter as co-emperor by Valentinian I (Ammianus Marcellinus. *Rerum Gestarum*. XXVI, 6).

empire. The intricate Persian question, the acceptance of an emperor who did not belong to the Constantinian dynasty, and the religious question were solved by Jovian. If entropy reached a critical level with the death of Julian, the successor of Jovian could be chosen in a more stable situation, both in relation to internal and external matters.

Marcellinus offers an interesting image to depict the acclamation of Jovian:

quod si gravis quidam aequitatis spectator in ultimo rerum spiritu factum criminatur inprovidē, nauticos idem iustius incusabit, amisso perito navigandi magistro, saevientibus flabris et mari, quod clavos regendae navis cuilibet periculi socio commiserunt.

But if any onlooker of strict justice with undue haste blames such a step taken in a moment of extreme danger, he will, with even more justice, reproach sailors, if after the loss of a skilled pilot, amid the raging winds and seas, they committed the guidance of the helm of their ship to any companion in their peril, whoever he might be (Ammianus Marcellinus. *Rerum Gestarum*, XXV, 5, 7).

Ammianus, a detractor of the figure of Jovian, compares his election to the one made by sailors in danger who lose their helmsman (*magister navigandi*) and choose a peer to take control. We think this image proposed by the historian is interesting, though we use it in a different sense. We believe that in the middle of the tempest (high level of entropy) in which Julian's campaign against Persia proceeded until his death, Jovian presented himself as a helmsman able to take his crew out of danger (despite the losses) and deliver the ship in a better condition than the one in which he had received it. This emperor, usually eclipsed by the Constantinian and Valentinian dynasties, played an important role in keeping the political and military organization in the fourth century.

Uncertainty about the circumstances of Jovian's death makes him like his antecessor, Julian, since there are different accounts on the moment and causes of the death of the latter, too. Conversion to Christianity and/or the continuity of the pagan rhetorical tradition seem to be important aspects to be taken into consideration in terms of form and content of the narratives of Late Antiquity used for this research. The concept of entropy, that has not been much used in Classical Studies, helped us to understand how some decisions taken by Jovian, such as the acceptance of a peace agreement unfavorable to the Romans, allowed him to reestablish a more stable and manageable situation after the void in power resulting from Julian's death. Revisiting ancient narratives about the rise, actions and death of Jovian, a scarcely known emperor, seemed to us a fertile path to follow and encourage new studies about the processes of acclamation and

maintenance of the emperors who governed the Roman Empire in the fourth century.

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