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Julian the Apostate in the Guise of Marcus Aurelius: On Some Reasons for the False Attribution of a Quotation in Conrad Gessner's Bibliographical Handbook

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This article deals with the question of possible reasons for Conrad Gessner quoting an aphorism from Julian the Apostate's letter (Ep. 23, to Ecdicius, prefect of Egypt) under the name of Marcus Aurelius in the preface to his *Bibliotheca universalis*, the first European universal bibliography (1545). Basing on the articles in *Bibliotheca* devoted to the above-mentioned authors, we can conclude that Gessner was directly acquainted with Julian's letters (he obviously relied on the collection of Greek letters published by Aldus Manutius in 1499 under the title *Epistolae diversorum philosophorum, oratorum, rhetorum*), whereas no texts of Marcus (including fragmentary ones) were available to him by 1545. The topic of the search for a library and the question of how to treat the books written by religious opponents, which occupy a central place in Julian's letter to Ecdicius, must have attracted Gessner's attention, especially since the solution proposed by Julian turned out to be consonant with Gessner's thoughts expressed in *Bibliotheca*. Thus, the false attribution of the quotation, undoubtedly deliberate, was, on the one hand, to prevent possible reproaches from conservative readers for quoting an anti-Christian author, and, on the other hand, to draw attention of a competent reader to Julian's text.

Keywords: humanism, attribution, Neo-Latin handbooks, reading practices, information management, 16th century.

“*Bibliotheca universalis*” (1545) by Conrad Gessner, which laid the foundation for the European bibliography of printed books and universal bibliography in general,¹ and is mainly characterized by the reliability of information (including references to the sources

¹ On the history of Gessner's handbook see (Sabba 2012).

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used), begins with a bibliographical mishap. The preface to the book, which takes the form of a dedicatory letter (*epistola nuncupatoria*), contains a false attribution of an aphorism by Flavius Claudius Julianus (331–363), better known as Julian the Apostate, to another Roman emperor and a Greek-speaking author as well, Marcus Aurelius² (121–180) (Gessner 1545, 6a: see Fig. 1). This circumstance was noted by me in an earlier work but left without a detailed explanation (Sergeev 2021).

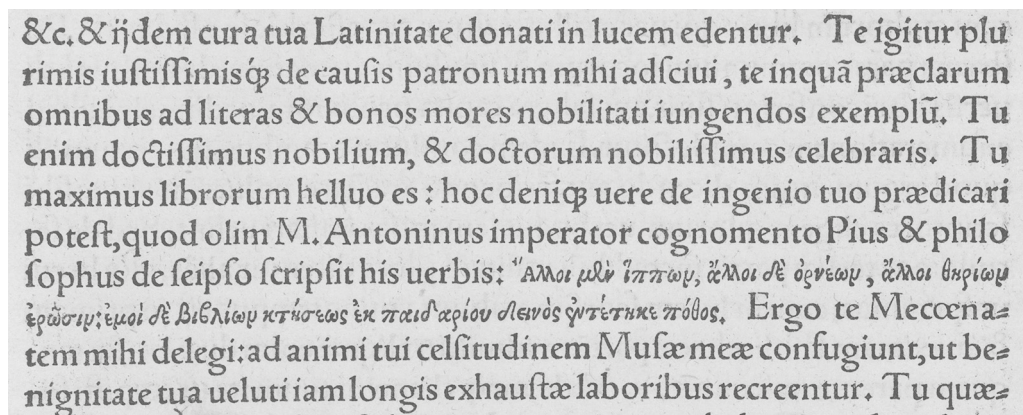


Fig. 1. Greek quotation from “Marcus Antoninus” in the preface to Gessner’s “Bibliotheca universalis” (Gessner 1545, 6a). Copy held at the Zentralbibliothek Zurich (shelfmark: DrM 3)

The genuine source of the aphorism was the beginning of Julian’s letter³ to the prefect of Egypt, Ecdicius, written in early 362 (Ep. 23): Ἄλλοι μὲν ἵππων, ἄλλοι δὲ ὀρνέων, ἄλλοι δὲ θηρίων ἐρώσιν: ἐμοὶ δὲ βιβλίων κτήσεως ἐκ παιδαρίου δεινὸς ἐντέτηκε πόθος (“Some men have a passion for horses, others for birds, others, again, for wild beasts; but I, from childhood, have been penetrated by a passionate longing to acquire books”).⁴ Apart from the fact that the quotation can be unambiguously traced back to the 4th century authority (on it see below), it should be noted that its very meaning comes in conflict with the statements about obsession with books preserved in the “Meditations” of Marcus Aurelius (who, by the way, referred to his reading experience in his letters to Fronto): ἄφες τὰ βιβλία: μηκέτι σπῶ (M. Aur. *Med.* 2. 2) (“Away with thy books! Be no longer drawn aside by them...”) or τὴν δὲ τῶν βιβλίων δίψαν ῥύψον, ἵνα μὴ γογγύζων ἀποθάνης (2. 3) (“But away with thy thirst for books, that thou mayest die not murmuring...”).⁵ Furthermore, in an episode in Lucian’s pamphlet “The ignorant book-collector” (22), in which the “emperor” (βασιλεύς) is most likely meant to be Marcus Aurelius, equating scholarship and education to the accumulation of books⁶ is expressly derided as erroneous.

² On the unusual wording of his name — “M. Antoninus imperator cognomento Pius et philosophus” — see our article quoted in the text.

³ Aphoristic openings are also encountered in Julian’s other letters, in which the source is often explicitly stated, e. g.: Ep. 26 (Ἡ μὲν παροιμία φησὶν Οὐ πόλεμον ἀγγέλλεις...); Ep. 43 (Μὴ λίαν ἦ κοινὸν τὸ προοίμιον Τὸν ἐσθλὸν ἄνδρα...); Ep. 45 (Ἡ μὲν παροιμία φησὶν Ἐμοὶ διηγοῦ σὺ τοῦμὸν ὄναρ...) etc.

⁴ Here and hereafter Julian’s letters — in the original and in English translation — are quoted from the edition (Wright 1923).

⁵ The text and English translation of the “Meditations” follow the edition (Haines 1916).

⁶ “The reason for your craze about books is patent, even if I in my blindness failed to see it long ago. It is a bright idea on your part (you think so, anyhow), and you base no slight expectations upon the thing

On the contrary, the bibliophilic sentiment was quite in keeping with Julian's literary image as a connoisseur of literature and a book lover, who repeatedly asked his correspondents to send or search for certain texts. Thus, for example, from Gaul during the military campaigns of 355–359⁷ he wrote to the philosopher Priscus (Ep. 2): τὰ Ἰαμβλίχου πάντα μοι τὰ εἰς τὸν ὁμώνυμον ζήτηι. δύνασαι δὲ μόνος, ἔχει γὰρ ὁ τῆς σῆς ἀδελφῆς γαμβρὸς εὐδιόρθωτα (“Hunt up for me all the writings of Iamblichus to his namesake. Only you can do this, for your sister's son-in-law owns a thoroughly revised version”); in 362, while in Antioch, he sought to obtain the text of a speech from the orator Libanius⁸ as soon as possible (Ep. 52): πέμπε δὴ τὸν λόγον καὶ τὴν ἱερὰν συμβουλήν, ἀλλὰ πρὸς Ἑρμοῦ καὶ Μουσῶν ταχέως (“So send your discourse⁹ and your ‘divine counsel,’ and do it promptly, in the name of Hermes and the Muses”); etc. The search for the library of George of Cappadocia, discussed in this article, fits well into this context.

The paradox of Gessner's error in attribution is that the article on Marcus Aurelius in “Bibliotheca” contained no evidence of Gessner's acquaintance with his texts (even fragments of them): the inaccessibility of Marcus Aurelius' texts made any citation from him in Greek in the preface an evident contradiction. Of course, *epistolae nuncupatoriae*, like other introductory paratexts, were usually compiled at the final stage of printing, so it can be assumed that the preface could have contained some new information, not included in the main text of the book. However, this version fails to be confirmed when we turn to the second edition of the handbook (Simmler 1555, 124a), for which Gessner prepared numerous additions. There is also no information about the source of the quotation or about the texts of Marcus Aurelius available or known to the compiler. Eventually, it was Gessner who was responsible for the first edition of the “Meditations”, published in his cousin's printing house in 1559 (Marcus Aurelius 1559): this fact makes the disguised quotation from Julian the Apostate's letter in the “Bibliotheca” all the more puzzling.

As I have shown earlier,¹⁰ unlike the texts of Marcus Aurelius, Julian's writings were familiar to Gessner by 1545; most probably he read the emperor's letters from the two-volume edition of Greek epistolography published by Aldus Manutius in 1499 (“*Epistolae diversorum philosophorum, oratorum, rhetorum*”)¹¹ in an easy-to-use and quick-to-browse in-quarto format (a nice copy of which is accessible at the National Library of Russia, shelfmark: 8.10.4.9a). The articles of the “Bibliotheca” on various authors, whose correspondence was included in this collection, provide details that undoubtedly testify to Gessner's close work with a copy of the book: it becomes especially evident from indications of the volume of printed text or from the listing of letters' headings following exactly the order of the Aldus' edition¹² (information not available in any reference literature

in case the emperor, who is a scholar and holds learning in especial esteem, should find out about it...” (Harmon 1921, 200–201).

⁷ Despite the eventfulness of these years, Julian did not cease his literary pursuits (Bowersock 1978, 43–44).

⁸ Julian took a keen interest in the speeches of Libanius (314 — ca 393) already in his youthful years in Nicomedia (Bowersock 1978, 27–28).

⁹ “For Aristophanes” (Lib. Or. 14).

¹⁰ Cf. (Sergeev 2021, 359–360).

¹¹ Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke: Nr 9367. On the manuscript sources of this edition, see (Sicherl 1997, 242–247); the history of the reception of the figure of Julian and his writings in Early Modern Europe is summarized in (Nulle 1959).

¹² See, for instance, about Aelianus: “Aeliani epistolia rustica Graece XIX extant, excusa ab Aldo Manutio cum reliquis variorum authorum epistolis. Folia sunt 5 in 4. Imitatur colloquia et epistolas rusticorum”

prior to “*Bibliotheca universalis*”). Of course, while leafing through the book and writing out the titles, Gessner could not pass over the beginning of the letter vividly portraying the feelings of a bibliophile. This very state of mind was not alien either to Gessner himself or to his patrons; that is why he made good use of Julian’s priamel in the dedication of the “*Bibliotheca*” to Leonhard Beck von Beckenstein (?–1575), a counselor to emperor Charles V.

The further text of the letter makes us suggest that Gessner did not confine himself to writing out the successful wording into his reader’s diary, but read the letter in its entirety. For our purposes it will also be useful to quote Julian’s epistle (Ep. 23) in full, in English translation:

Some men have a passion for horses, others for birds, others, again, for wild beasts; but I, from childhood, have been penetrated by a passionate longing to acquire books. It would therefore be absurd if I should suffer these to be appropriated by men whose inordinate desire for wealth gold alone cannot satiate, and who unscrupulously design to steal these also. Do you therefore grant me this personal favour, that all the books which belonged to George be sought out. For there were in his house many on philosophy, and many on rhetoric; many also on the teachings of the impious Galilaeans. These latter I should wish to be utterly annihilated, but for fear that along with them more useful works may be destroyed by mistake, let all these also be sought for with the greatest care. Let George’s secretary take charge of this search for you, and if he hunts for them faithfully let him know that he will obtain his freedom as a reward, but that if he prove in any way whatever dishonest in the business he will be put to the test of torture. And I know what books George had, many of them, at any rate, if not all; for he lent me some of them to copy, when I was in Cappadocia, and these he received back.

In addition to notable details illustrating Julian’s bibliophilic passion and the means for obtaining books at his disposal, the letter contains an important conclusion: in order not to jeopardize the good (*χρησιμώτερα*) books, the bad ones should be let to survive rather than destroyed; by the latter are meant the writings of the Christians (“Galilaeans”), despised by Julian: *πολλὰ δὲ ἦν καὶ τῆς τῶν δυσσεβῶν Γαλιλαίων διδασκαλίας; ἃ βουλοίμην μὲν ἠφανίσθαι πάντη, τοῦ δὲ μὴ σὺν τούτοις ὑφαιρεθῆναι τὰ χρησιμώτερα, ζητήσθω κάκεῖνα μετ’ ἀκριβείας ἅπαντα.*

A remark on the heterogeneous contents of the library of the deceased George of Cappadocia, the bishop of Alexandria (?–361), is also encountered in another letter of Julian (Ep. 38), written a little later in the same year 362; in it he entrusted the search for books to a certain Porphyrius, an Egyptian official:

The library of George was very large and complete and contained philosophers of every school and many historians, especially, among these, numerous books of all kinds by the Galilaeans. Do you therefore make a thorough search for the whole library without exception and take care to send it to Antioch...

(Gessner 1545, 5b); about Alciphron of Magnesia: “Alciphronis epistolas piscatorias rusticas et amatorias impressit Aldus Manutius cum reliquis variorum auctorum epistolis Graecis. Chartae sunt fere 4. Piscatorum epistolae 21 fictitiis nominibus inscribuntur... [a list of names follows — *M. S.*]” (Gessner 1545, 21b) etc.

Likewise emphasized, on the one hand, is the presence in the library, among others, of “Galilean” books, and, on the other hand, the need to deliver all the books without exception (πᾶσαν οὖν ἀθρόως ταύτην τὴν βιβλιοθήκην).

From a practical point of view, the writings of Christians may have been of some interest to Julian, who was working in 362 on his famous (but extinct) polemical work “Against the Galileans” (see Elm 2012, 300–306). In abstract form, however, the idea expressed in both letters — preserving the diversity of books for the sake of preserving the book heritage (which literally or metaphorically takes on the image of a library) — must have seemed particularly appealing to Gessner. Indeed, it found numerous echoes in the dedicatory letter that preceded his “Bibliotheca.” Responding to would-be critics in advance, Gessner elaborated on the question of why he included information on even unimportant and “barbaric” (i. e. medieval) authors in his handbook. In doing so, he considered two strategies for dealing with the abundance of books, each of which had antique predecessors (cf. Blair 2010, 14–22).

First, the usefulness, in one way or another, of every book was recognized: “Certe non raro quanquam barbari styli scriptores res cognitu dignas acri ingenio chartis mandarunt. Virgilius ex stercore Ennii legebat aurum, et Plinius dicitabat, nullum esse tam malum librum, qui non aliqua ex parte prosit” (“It was not uncommon for authors who wrote in barbaric style, but who had a keen mind, to report in books on things worthy of study. Virgil picked [specks of] gold out of Ennius’ garbage, and, as Pliny said, there is no book so bad that it is not at least partly useful. . .”) (Gessner 1545, 3b). Second, it was argued that the compilation of *compendia* could be the cure for the harmful diversity of books (“confusa et noxia illa librorum multitudo”): Gessner, in turn, did the groundwork for that, leaving further selection and censorship to other scholars and authorities:

Sed quomodo fieri possit ut confusa et noxia illa librorum multitudo circumcidatur, et in singulis disciplinis optima certaue volumina deligantur, quod Iustinianus imperator in Iure suo tempore fecit: et cum aliunde tu ex barbaris praecipue selectis quae insunt bonis, caetera seponantur: et arguantur authorum furta, ac millies repetita, tollantur: denique in posterum temere scribendi libido coerceatur, aliter in infinitum progressura: doctoribus deliberandum, regibus deinde et principibus perficiendum relinquo. Ego quod labore magis quam ingenio praestare potui, omnibus velut in campum eductis, eligendi copiam feci (Gessner 1545, 3b–4a).¹³

But how can this disorderly and pernicious abundance of books be pruned [like the crown of a tree], and the best and most reliable volumes be selected for each science (just as the Emperor Justinian did for the law) from all, but especially from barbarian books, in order to bring out what is only good in them, and to take away the rest; and at the same time to expose theft committed by [some] authors, and to eliminate thousandfold repetitions? And finally, for the future, how to restrain the desire for rash composing, which, otherwise, can spread to infinity? I leave the reasoning of these matters to learned men, and the decisions to kings and rulers. I, however, having shown myself rather in deed than in reasoning [about books], have presented all their diversity, bringing [books] as if in a field, for [further] selection.

¹³ On the treatment of fictions and erroneous opinions (i. e., information that could be discarded) in Gessner’s writings on natural history see, for example, Pinon 2005.

“Barbari scriptores” which Gessner mentioned several times, corresponded to “Ταλιλαῖοι” in the passages from Julian quoted above: both represented (from the authors’ point of view) bad literature, the preservation of which in the library seemed nevertheless justified. The same principle was applied in the “Bibliotheca” to the works of religious opponents: as Urs Leu has shown, Gessner had discussed in some detail the works of Catholic authors contemporary to him, including active denouncers of Protestantism; he even quoted from their works. On the contrary, the neglect of the works of Anabaptists had rather to do with the language criterion, as in the “Bibliotheca” only the books written in “learned languages” (Latin, Greek and Hebrew) could be listed (Leu 1990, 159–165).

The false attribution of the quotation to Marcus Aurelius was seemingly addressed to readers who held less tolerant views on the selection of “useful” authors and books and *a priori* could not allow Julian’s sayings to be cited in the dedicatory letter as exemplary ones. More attentive users of the reference book might have wondered about Gessner’s actual source, for the work of Marcus Aurelius was not available to the scholarly public at the time. For such a thoughtful reader, the quotation was intended to be an allusion to the text of Julian’s letter that expressed an idea of paramount importance for Gessner, i. e. that books and knowledge about them should have been preserved, no matter how unworthy or heretical their content might seem. This had to become the cornerstone principle of the “Bibliotheca”, which was a universal rather than selective bibliography (Zedelmaier 1992). Perhaps the emperor, who persecuted Christians, seemed too unlikely an ally for Gessner, but this very fact could only corroborate the justice of Pliny the encyclopedist: “nullum esse tam malum librum...”

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Юлиан Отступник под маской Марка Аврелия: о причинах ложной атрибуции одной цитаты в библиографическом справочнике Конрада Гесснера

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В статье рассматривается вопрос о возможных причинах атрибуции афоризма из письма Юлиана Отступника (Ер. 23, к Екдикию, префекту Египта) другому римскому грекоязычному автору — Марку Аврелию — в предисловии к первой европейской универсальной библиографии *Bibliotheca universalis* (1545) Конрада Гесснера. На основании статей «Библиотеки», посвященных упомянутым авторам, можно сделать вывод о непосредственном знакомстве Гесснера с письмами Юлиана; напротив, никакие тексты Марка (в том числе, во фрагментах) к 1545 г. ему доступны не были. Проведенное исследование показало, что Гесснер работал с письмами Юлиана по изданному в 1499 г. Альдом Мануцием сборнику *Epistolae diversorum philosophorum, oratorum, rhetorum*: отсюда он брал сведения об объеме текстов, заголовках писем и порядке их расположения. Тема поисков библиотеки и вопрос об отношении к книгам религиозных оппонентов (христиан) занимают центральное место в письме Юлиана к Екдикию и, несомненно, должны были привлечь внимание Гесснера. Решение, предложенное Юлианом, созвучно мыслям Гесснера, высказанным в предисловии к «Библиотеке» применительно к культурным реалиям XVI в.: селективной библиографии, включающей образцовые тексты, отобранные на основании языковых (гуманистическая латынь), религиозных (труды сторонников реформации) и иных критериев, он противопоставил универсалистский подход, последовательно примененный в алфавитном томе «Библиотеки». Таким образом, ложная атрибуция цитаты, несомненно осознанная, должна была, с одной стороны, предотвратить возможные упреки оппонентов в цитировании антихристианского автора, а с другой, обратить внимание сведущего читателя на текст Юлиана.

Ключевые слова: гуманизм, атрибуция, новолатинские справочники, практики чтения, управление информацией, XVI век.

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