

The Date of Julian's *Letter to Themistius*

Scott Bradbury

EARLIER IN THIS century the date and context of Julian's *Letter to Themistius* were matters of considerable disagreement. Otto Seeck, Rudolf Asmus, and Augusto Rostagni argued that the letter was written after Julian's elevation to the rank of caesar on 6 November 355.¹ Johannes Geffcken and Joseph Bidez, on the other hand, preferred a date in 361, after the announcement of Constantius' death on 3 November 361 and before Julian's entry into Constantinople on 11 December.² The arguments of Bidez carried the day, and subsequent writers on Julian have accepted the later date. More recently T. J. Barnes and J. Vander Spoel, in an attempt to reconcile both dates, have proposed a new solution to the problem:³ on the basis of evidence to be discussed below, they offered the hypothesis that Julian had originally composed the bulk of the letter in 356, but that the last two paragraphs were appended and the letter dispatched several years later, sometime after the Paris uprising in February 360 and before the news of Constantius' death in November 361. Barnes and Vander Spoel were correct in finding the tone and contents of this important letter appropriate to 355/6, but their hypothesis that it was not sent until 360 or 361 is, in my view, inherently implausible and depends upon a questionable reading of Julian's text.⁴ I believe it can

¹ O. SEECK, *Die Briefe des Libanius* (Leipzig 1906 [hereafter *Briefe*]) 296, and *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt* IV (Berlin 1911 [hereafter *Geschichte*]) 470; R. ASMUS, *WKP* 31 (1914) 522; A. ROSTAGNI, *Giuliano l'apostata: saggio critico* (Turin 1920 [hereafter 'Rostagni']) 371–85.

² J. GEFFCKEN, *Kaiser Iulianus* (Leipzig 1914) 147f, and *Der Ausgang des griechisch-römischen Heidentums* (Heidelberg 1920) 287ff; J. BIDEZ, *La tradition manuscrite et les éditions des Discours de l'Empereur Julien* (Ghent/Paris 1929 [hereafter *Tradition*]) 133–41, and *La vie de l'Empereur Julien* (Paris 1930 [hereafter *Vie*]) 204–07.

³ "Julian and Themistius," *GRBS* 22 (1981) 187–89.

⁴ U. CRISCUOLO, "Sull' epistola di Giuliano imperatore al filosofo Temistio," *Koinonia* 7 (1983) 91 n.10, remains unpersuaded by their attempt to reconcile the earlier and later dates: "Codesta soluzione conciliativa nulla toglie alle articolate argomentazioni di Bidez." Similarly C. Prato and A. Fornaro, ed., *Giuliano Imperatore, Epistola a Temistio* (= *Studi e testi latini e greci* 2 [Lecce 1984]) viii–xii, without reviewing

be demonstrated that Julian wrote the *Letter to Themistius* not in 361, as has been assumed, but in 355/6, as Seeck and Rostagni maintained.

First, a few preliminaries. It emerges from Julian's letter that he had once studied with Themistius and that the two had remained correspondents.⁵ Further, it is apparent that the philosopher had recently written from Constantinople to congratulate the young prince on his political advancement and to urge him along the path to good rule. Themistius had reminded Julian that he has now abandoned the "philosophy of the portico for the philosophy of the open air," that is, for the active political life (262D: μεταβῆναι . . . ἐκ τῆς ὑποστέγου φιλοσοφίας πρὸς τὴν ὑπαίθριον). He had expressed approval of the superiority of the latter, citing Aristotle's definition of happiness as virtuous activity, and included for good measure an abusive comment on Epicurus' dictum (fr.551) λάθε βιώσας (255B). In panegyric fashion Themistius had compared Julian to Dionysus and Heracles, who were at once philosophers and kings (φιλοσοφοῦντες ὁμοῦ καὶ βασιλεύοντες) and had purged nearly all the earth and sea of the evils that infested them (253C). He had cited the names of philosophers famous for their success in combining the contemplative and the active lives (265C) and, finally, had invoked the names of the lawgivers Solon, Pittacus, and Lycurgus, claiming that men had a right to expect even greater things from Julian (262D).

Seeck reasonably characterized the lost letter of Themistius as a *protrepticus* to the new caesar. As he and Rostagni noted, the observation that Julian has left the "philosophy of the portico for the philosophy of the open air" makes no sense if the letter was composed in 361. Julian had by then spent nearly six years in Gaul. He had crossed the Rhine in three campaigning seasons, won major battles in the field, and had restored peace and order to a province that lay in ruins on his arrival. It would be inappropriate, if not offensive, for Themistius to refer in 361 to these conspicuous achievements as the "philosophy of the portico" and to imply that Julian is only now about to embark on the active life. On the other hand, it makes perfect sense for Themistius to write in this way in 355/6, during the period when Julian was recalled to Milan from his studies in Athens; for until his elevation to

the arguments for the earlier date, reject Barnes/Vander Spoel and maintain that Julian wrote the letter at the beginning of his reign as sole augustus, in late 361 or early 362.

⁵ At 257D Julian quotes from Plato's *Laws*, which he claims to have studied with Themistius; at 259C he alludes to the time when he began his education at Constantinople: ὅτε τῆς παρ' ὑμῖν ἡρχόμεν παιδείας; and at 260A he refers to letters that he had sent to Themistius in the past.

caesar he had been a mere student with little expectation of a share in imperial power.⁶

Moreover, as Rostagni noted (381), Julian alludes in his own letter to no event after 355/6. Julian takes Themistius to task at considerable length for encouraging a life of action for which he considers himself unfit. He emphatically denies, however, that he desires to avoid this life out of laziness, and in proof of this recounts a list of the labors (πόννοι) he has performed in preference to the “disengagement of Epicurus, the gardens, suburbs, and myrtles of Athens, and the humble house of Socrates.”⁷ Julian’s πόννοι consist of private social duties, all of which appear to belong to his youth in Asia Minor. He had come to the aid of a foreign sophist he hardly knew against a kinsman and friend (presumably Gallus). He had travelled out of the country for the sake of his friends. He had interceded with Araxius (who was probably *vicarius Asiae* at the time) on behalf of a man called Carterius. He had journeyed to Phrygia at a time when he was quite ill to assist a woman called Arete, who was suffering wrongs from her neighbors.⁸ Finally (τὸ τελευταῖον) he alludes to his summons to Milan in 354, where he was kept in suspense for six months while Constantius debated what to do with him, until the empress Eusebia successfully interceded on his behalf and he was allowed to return to Athens to study (259D–260A). If the letter was composed in 361 after he had become sole ruler of the empire, it is strange indeed that he makes no mention of his intervening achievements, such as the battle of Strasbourg, the restoration of Gallic cities, the sequence of victories over the Germans, the punitive expeditions across the Rhine, and finally the swift march from Paris to Sirmium.

Julian’s allusions to Themistius’ professional status also favor the earlier date. In arguing for the superiority of the contemplative life to political affairs, Julian asks:

And you yourself, may I ask, are you a ‘do-nothing’ because you are neither a general nor a public orator and because you do not rule

⁶ Geffcken, *Kaiser* 147, attempted to counter this argument with the ingenious but implausible suggestion that for philosophy we must understand “Glaubensbekenntnis.” The real point of Themistius’ remark, according to Geffcken, was that Julian now no longer had to worship the gods secretly (ὑπόστεγος φιλοσοφία) but could proclaim and practice his faith in a public and practical manner (ὑπαίθριος φιλοσοφία). The entire letter, however, is quite explicitly concerned with the relation between the θεωρηματικὸς βίος (ὑπόστεγος φιλοσοφία) and the πρακτικὸς βίος (ὑπαίθριος φιλοσοφία).

⁷ 259B: τὴν Ἐπικούρειον . . . ἀπραγμοσύνην καὶ τοὺς κήπους καὶ τὸ προάστειον τῶν Ἀθηνῶν καὶ τὰς μυρρίνας καὶ τὸ Σωκράτους δωμάτιον.

⁸ 259B–D. On Araxius, Carterius, and Arete see *PLRE* I s.vv.

over a province or city? No man of sense would say so. For it is in your power, by producing many philosophers (or, if not many, three or four), to confer more benefit on the lives of men than many kings put together.⁹

Julian addresses Themistius as if the latter were a philosopher *tout court* and therefore uninvolved in political life. Seeck and Rostagni rightly took this as an indication that the letter could not have been written in 361, because Themistius had held the post of proconsul of Constantinople under Constantius in 358/9.¹⁰ For Julian to have dismissed Themistius' important political activity in this way would be unthinkable in 361.

Among Rostagni's further arguments, two deserve particular mention. Julian's reference throughout the letter to *ὁ θεός*, never to *οἱ θεοί*, also favors the early date, for it is well-known that Julian began to fly his pagan colors openly on receiving the news of Constantius' death.¹¹ If the letter had been composed after Julian had become sole emperor, we should expect to find open declaration of pagan belief. In correspondence clearly dated to November 361, Julian expresses triumphant exultation and unambiguously credits the gods with the unexpected turn of events. This immediate and emphatic reaction is clear in a letter to Maximus:

We worship the gods openly, and the majority of the army that has followed me is god-fearing. We sacrifice oxen in public. We have repaid the gods with many hecatombs as thank-offerings. The gods command me to purify everything insofar as I am able, and indeed I obey them eagerly.¹²

In the *Letter to Themistius*, on the other hand, he studiously refers to a vague Supreme Diety.

Rostagni also pointed out (380) that Athens, where Julian was studying before his elevation to the rank of caesar, serves in the letter

⁹ 266A: σὺ δὲ αὐτὸς ἡμῖν ἄπρακτος εἶ, μήτε στρατηγῶν μήτε δημηγορῶν μήτε ἔθνους ἢ πόλεως ἄρχων; ἀλλ' οὐκ ἂν φαίη νοῦν ἔχων ἀνὴρ. ἔξεστι γάρ σοι φιλοσόφους πολλοὺς ἀποφήναντι, εἰ δὲ μή, τρεῖς ἢ τέτταρας μείζονα τὸν βίον εὐεργετῆσαι τῶν ἀνθρώπων πολλῶν ὁμοῦ βασιλείων.

¹⁰ Seeck, *Briefe* 298f, *Geschichte* 470; Rostagni 379.

¹¹ Rostagni 377. For allusions to the gods in several letters written before 361 see J. Bidez, ed., *L'Empereur Julien: Lettres* I.2 (Paris 1924) 10f. When the letters express genuine religious conviction, we must assume that they were carried by trusted couriers.

¹² *Ep.* 26.415C–D: θρησκευόμεν τοὺς θεοὺς ἀναφανδόν, καὶ τὸ πλῆθος τοῦ συγκατελθόντος μοι στρατοπέδου θεοσεβές ἐστίν. ἡμεῖς φανερώς βουθυτοῦμεν. ἀπεδώκαμεν τοῖς θεοῖς χαριστήρια ἑκατόμβας πολλάς. ἐμὲ κελεύουσιν οἱ θεοὶ τὰ πάντα ἀγνεύειν εἰς δύναμιν, καὶ πείθομαί γε καὶ προθύμως αὐτοῖς. For similar sentiments *cf.* *Err.* 28 (to his uncle Julian) and 29 (to Eutherius).

as an important point of reference both intellectually and chronologically. The active political life of the present is contrasted with a philosophical life in Athens that appears to lie in the recent past. At 253c Julian speaks of remembering fondly his “Attic conversations” (τῶν Ἀττικῶν διηγημάτων). The joy with which he returned to Athens in 355 to pursue his studies is contrasted with his discomfort at the pomp (ὄγκος) that presently surrounds him (260b).

Bidez never faced squarely the arguments of Seeck and Rostagni. For example, he evades the implications of Themistius’ reference to leaving the “philosophy of the portico for the philosophy of the open air” by observing merely: “Quant à l’objection principale de Rostagni et de Seeck, qui prétendent que l’*Epître à Thémistius* ne put être écrite qu’au moment où Julien entrait dans la vie publique en qualité de César, elle est tirée d’une interprétation du document qui n’est point du tout certaine. Avant d’en examiner la vraisemblance, il est prudent de voir si la lettre n’est datée par des témoignages assez sûrs” (*Tradition* 136). But there is in Bidez’s *Appendix* no further consideration of the views of Seeck and Rostagni; perhaps he deemed his own “témoignages assez sûrs” sufficient to establish the case for the later date.

Bidez says little about the absence of any allusion to events after 355 on the grounds that Geffcken had adequately dealt with the problem. Geffcken could not explain why Julian failed to enumerate his Gallic labors but thought he detected a reference to the years in Gaul in a passage at the beginning of the letter in which Julian describes himself as a man unfit for political life and “merely a lover of philosophy” (φιλοσοφίας ἐρασθέντι μόνον), continuing: “I remain silent about the fates that intervened and have kept this love of mine so far unfulfilled.”¹³ Geffcken asked what τύχαι had frustrated Julian’s study of philosophy if he wrote the letter just before or after his elevation to the rank of caesar. None, he concluded. Only the Gallic campaign had kept Julian from philosophy; consequently, the *Letter to Themistius* must have been composed after it.¹⁴ On Geffcken’s interpretation, all the events of the last six years are concentrated in the single word τύχαι. Julian’s remark, however, is merely one of a number of expressions of philosophical humility that are a prominent feature of his self-presentation. In the panegyric on the empress Eusebia, for example, he also describes himself as a lover of philosophy who has somehow fallen short of it.¹⁵ Similarly in the *Contra*

¹³ 254b: τὰς γὰρ ἐν μέσῳ σιγῶ τύχας, αἱ μοι τὸν ἔρωτα τοῦτου ἀτελεῖ τῶς ἐφύλαξαν. The phrase echoes Eur. *Or.* 16.

¹⁴ *Kaiser* 147.

¹⁵ *Or.* 2.120b–c. For other assertions of philosophical humility see *Ep. ad Them.*

Heracleium (235c–d) Julian speaks of his lack of progress in philosophy because of the external affairs that have engrossed him. These and other expressions bear witness to Julian's deep reverence for philosophy; but in his letter to Themistius he cannot mean to imply (as Geffcken's argument requires) that he would have mastered philosophy if only he had been given a little more time.

As to the argument that Julian composed the letter before Themistius filled the office of proconsul of Constantinople in 358/9, Geffcken simply comments (*Kaiser* 147): "Ferner durfte Julian dem Themistios wohl nicht mit Unrecht massgebende politische Tätigkeit absprechen, denn als Prokonsul von Konstantinopel hatte dieser doch, wenn er auch den Senat der Stadt auf 2000 Mitglieder ergänzte, kein Volk und keine Stadt im eigentlichen Sinne zu regieren." He does not explain why a proconsul of Constantinople did not rule the city "im eigentlichen Sinne."¹⁶ Bidez is equally unpersuasive in arguing (*Tradition* 136) that since Constantius had transformed the proconsulship of Constantinople into a prefecture on 11 December 359, and since Themistius did not fill this appointment until 384 under Theodosius, he held no office in 361 and it was therefore technically correct that Julian should address him in 361/2 as a man *μήτε στρατηγῶν μήτε δημηγορῶν μήτε ἔθνους ἢ πόλεως ἄρχων*. This argument ignores the context and general purport of Julian's remark, which appears at the end of a long section in which he takes Themistius to task for his definition of the *πρακτικὸς βίος*. Themistius had expressed approval for the active life in comparison with the philosophical life and had cited in support of his position Aristotle's definition of happiness as virtuous activity (263c, *τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν ἐν τῷ πράττειν εἶναι*). Julian responds that the *πρακτικὸς βίος* should not be defined strictly as a life in politics and he rejects the presumption that a man is not 'doing' (*πράττειν*) anything unless he is engaged in politics. According to Julian's reasoning, Socrates 'did' far more for mankind than Alexander.

Themistius had presented four men—Areius, Nicolaus of Damascus, Thrasyllus, and Musonius—as examples of philosophers who pursued successful, active lives in politics. Julian flatly rejects Themistius' interpretation of their careers, claiming that all four owed their reputations strictly to their intellectual activities and either took no part in politics or encountered difficulties when they did. Julian

254B, 266D. Note also *Ep.* 12, in which Julian claims that Priscus has made him a complete initiate in the philosophy of Aristotle, or "at any rate a thyrsus-bearer."

¹⁶ Libanius took a quite different view of Themistius' position in 358/9 (*Ep.* 40): οὐ σοι συγχαίρω μάλλον τοῦ τὴν πόλιν ἄγειν ἢ τῆ πόλει τοῦ παραδοῦναι σοι τὰς ἡνίας.

proceeds to challenge Themistius with the question (cited above): *σὺ δὲ αὐτὸς ἡμῖν ἄπρακτος εἶ, μήτε στρατηγῶν μήτε δημηγορῶν μήτε ἔθνους ἢ πόλεως ἄρχων*; It is implicit in his argument that Julian has a higher regard for Themistius' calling than does Themistius himself, for Themistius had praised the *πρακτικὸς βίος* (interpreted as political office) at the expense of the *θεωρηματικὸς βίος*. The context of the passage presumes that Themistius, like the other philosophers cited, is not engaged in political life either through political office or concourse with the emperor.

Themistius did, however, begin a distinguished political career precisely in the last years of Constantius' reign. Adlected to the senate in 355, he became in 357 or 358 proconsul of the eastern capital and thus governed the city and presided over its senate.¹⁷ Some years later, in 384, Themistius defended his involvement in politics against opponents who attacked him for accepting the urban prefecture under Theodosius (*Or.* 34). In this speech he alluded to aspects of his early political career, beginning with his embassy to Rome in 357:

I began to undertake this presidency [*sc.* of the senate?] from that time when you [senators of Constantinople] elected me to serve on an embassy to glorious Rome and dispatched me to the son of Constantine. I began to show concern for the people from that time when I restored the *annona*. I began to take forethought for the senate from that time when I expanded the register of senators from barely 300 to 2,000.¹⁸

Among his political activities, this last was without doubt the most significant, for it meant that Themistius was personally responsible for recruiting some 1,700 provincial aristocrats and *honorati* to the eastern senate. Although Themistius did not hold formal office in 360 and 361, his favor with the emperor Constantius continued unabated. An imperial rescript from 3 May 361 singled out Themistius for nomination to a new senatorial college formed to select praetors.¹⁹ Themistius' new career did not pass unnoticed by opponents, who

¹⁷ The denial of Themistius' proconsulship by G. Dagron, *L'empire romain d'Orient au IV^e siècle* (= *TravMém* 3 [Paris 1968]) 213–17, has been refuted by L. J. Daly, "Themistius' Refusal of a Magistracy," *Byzantion* 53 (1983) 171–89, who has put the traditional dating of the proconsulship (from 357 or 358 to late 359) on a firmer footing.

¹⁸ *Or.* 34.13: *ἐξ ἐκείνου τῆς προστασίας ταύτης ἠπτόμην, ἐξ ὅτου με πρεσβεύειν εἰς τὴν αἰοίδιμον Ῥώμην ἐχειροτονεῖτε καὶ πρὸς τὸν παῖδα ἐστέλλετε τὸν Κωνσταντίνου. ἐξ ἐκείνου προεκηδόμην τοῦ δήμου, ἐξ ὅτου τὸν κατάλογον τῶν ὁμογενῶν ἀντὶ μόλις τριακοσίων ἐπλήρουν εἰς δισχιλίους.* For an interpretation of this passage and a discussion of the political rôle of the proconsul of Constantinople see Daly (*supra* n.17) 164–212, esp. 182–89.

¹⁹ *Cod.Theod.* 6.4.12. For an interpretation of the rescript see Daly (*supra* n.17) 179f.

branded him a "sophist" and treated him as a "mercenary of philosophy" who had compromised his philosophical purity by involving himself in high politics. In three extant speeches from 359 (*Orr.* 23, 26, 29) Themistius answered these detractors.²⁰

Julian's challenge to Themistius makes no sense if Themistius had only recently relinquished one of the most prestigious political offices in the eastern empire and was embroiled in controversy over the appropriateness of his political involvement. In his letter Julian assumes that Themistius' rôle in society is to teach philosophy and to produce a small number of men molded by a deep philosophical training; there is no hint of Themistius' prominent political career. This is understandable if Julian wrote the letter in late 355 or early 356, when Themistius had recently become a senator at Constantinople but had not yet embarked on the activities outlined above. It is inexplicable if the letter was written in November-December 361.

What evidence, then, did Bidez regard as so persuasive that he permitted himself to dismiss such strong indications of an earlier date? First, he noted that *Vossianus graecus* 77, the most important of the manuscripts containing the Julianic corpus, distinguishes the works of the caesar Julian (Ἰουλιανοῦ καίσαρος) from those of the emperor Julian (Ἰουλιανοῦ αὐτοκράτορος). The *Letter to Themistius* appears in the *Vossianus* under the heading Ἰουλιανοῦ αὐτοκράτορος Θεμιστίω φιλοσόφῳ, evidence Bidez considered significant because the titles in the ms. are apparently correct in every other case (*Tradition* 136f). It would be imprudent not to take seriously Bidez's opinion in such matters; but long familiarity with the manuscript tradition bred confidence and strong conviction: Bidez maintained that no Byzantine editor could have invented such precise designations, that they were undoubtedly ancient, and that they may even have been used in the *editio princeps* of Julian's works.²¹

It remains debatable how far we should rely on the distinction in the *Vossianus* between the works of Julian as caesar and as emperor. A survey of the other principal manuscripts reveals many variations and confusions in these titles. The direct copy of *Voss.gr.* at Trinity College, Cambridge (O. 2.39=J), for example, preserves in its *πίναξ*,

²⁰ On the dating of these speeches see Dagron (*supra* n.17) 24f.

²¹ *Tradition* 3, 137. Bidez dated the *Voss.gr.* to the late twelfth or early thirteenth century (5-10); it and all subsequent MSS. including works of Julian derive from a lost tenth-century archetype. Because the textual tradition cannot be traced beyond the tenth century (102), Bidez conceded that it was impossible to say with certainty who had first collected and 'published' Julian's works, but he believed that Ammianus had an edition of the collected works (1-4).

or table of contents, the precise distinctions of the *Vossianus* but does not always repeat these in the titles of individual works.²² The *Marcianus*, the most important Julianic manuscript after the *Vossianus* and its copies, contains the *Caesars*, the three panegyrics written when Julian was caesar, and his consolatory letter on the departure of Salutius; here the copyist or his exemplar was content to refer the first four works to the emperor Julian, thereby getting three out of four wrong.²³ On the other hand, a number of mss. incorrectly attribute the *Hymn to King Helios* to the caesar Julian, and a number give the *Misopogon* the title Ἰουλιανοῦ αὐτοκράτορος καίσαρος ἀντιόχικος ἢ μισοπῶγων.²⁴ The list of such mistakes could easily be extended.

The confusions in the descendants of *Voss.gr.* and in other important manuscripts do not, of course, prove the titles in the *Vossianus* wrong, but the known vagaries of these late Byzantine copyists should make us wary of attaching undue importance to such precise distinctions. Indeed, Bidez himself did not regard the *Vossianus* as a derivative of an edition of Julian's collected works, but as a late compilation collected and copied at random.²⁵ The eight centuries separating Julian's death and the copying of the *Vossianus* offered ample opportunity for confusions of the sort that we can document in its descendants. If the tone and contents of the *Letter to Themistius* were compatible with the title Ἰουλιανοῦ αὐτοκράτορος, there would of course be no reason to question the title in the *Vossianus*. But if the tone and contents of the letter invariably support a date when Julian was caesar, it is unwise to reject this internal evidence in favor of the manuscript attribution.

Bidez's other arguments present less serious difficulties for proponents of the earlier date. At 263B Julian has finished one section of his argument and continues:

And, what is more, whether I have now judged correctly concerning these things or am partly in the wrong as to what is the appropriate course or am completely missing the mark, you will very soon instruct me.²⁶

Bidez took the phrase διδάξεις αὐτίκα μάλα in its most literal sense, that

²² Cf. the *Hymn to King Helios* and the *Letter to the Senate and People of Athens*, which lack any chronological indication (*Tradition* 15f).

²³ No title precedes the letter on Salutius; cf. *Tradition* 29.

²⁴ *Tradition* 54, 57f, 60–62.

²⁵ *Tradition* 27: “c'est manifestement une série de morceaux ajoutés l'un à l'autre au fur et mesure qu'on les découvrait.”

²⁶ 263B: καὶ περὶ μὲν τούτων εἶτε ὀρθῶς ἔγνωκα νῦν εἶτε ἐν μέρει σφάλλομαι τοῦ προσήκοντος εἶτε καὶ τοῦ πάντος διαμαρτάνω, διδάξεις αὐτίκα μάλα.

is, as an indication that Julian was anticipating a meeting with Themistius; he drew the conclusion that Julian wrote the *Letter to Themistius* after receiving news of Constantius' death in November and before his entry into Constantinople on 11 December 361.²⁷ It is clear from several passages in the letter, however, that the two men have been in correspondence with one another in the recent past (253c, 260A, 266A). Julian is replying to arguments presented by Themistius in his *protrepticus*; the phrase *διδάξεις ἀντίκα μάλα* does not allude to a meeting between the two men, but to the arguments that Themistius will make in his reply to Julian.

Bidez made much of the tone of Themistius' remarks to Julian—in, for example, the references to the efforts of Dionysus and Heracles in ridding the world of evils, and to the beneficial activities of Solon, Pittacus, and Lycurgus. He reasoned that Themistius was a prudent man who was able to watch emperors come and go because he steered clear of sensitive political areas and would not have spoken to Julian in this manner before the death of Constantius. Bidez questioned whether Themistius would be so imprudent as to treat Julian “comme un souverain absolument indépendant, appelé à régénérer le monde et à renouveler l'oeuvre des réformateurs politiques du temps jadis” (*Tradition* 138). In Bidez's view, far less was needed for the sycophants who surrounded the suspicious emperor to denounce an enemy to him. But to take Themistius' comments so seriously is to misconstrue the commonplaces of ancient panegyric.²⁸

Speeches in praise of Roman officials—governors, praetorian prefects, and others—were a literary stock-in-trade during the empire.²⁹ Because the surviving panegyrics praise emperors, we need not conclude that the *topoi* contained in them were reserved for the emperor alone. Many a provincial governor must have heard himself hailed as a new Solon or a new Lycurgus without fear that a jealous emperor would be offended. Menander Rhetor suggests comparisons of just this sort in his advice on how to praise Roman officials. In extolling a

²⁷ *Tradition* 137: Bidez apparently never noticed the serious chronological compression that his scenario involved. His theory presumes that after receiving news of Constantius' death on 3 November, Themistius wrote his *protrepticus* to Julian, who then wrote this long reply at Naissus before entering Constantinople on 11 December. P. Athanassiadi-Fowden, *Julian and Hellenism* (Oxford 1981) 90 n.7, noted the difficulty and hypothesized that the letter must have been written after Julian's entry into Constantinople.

²⁸ Rostagni (383) had already met a similar argument by Geffcken with the same observation: “Ragionare così significa dare troppo preciso valore ai luoghi comuni della retorica antica.”

²⁹ D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson, *Menander Rhetor* (Oxford 1981) xvi–xvii.

provincial governor's wisdom, for example (*προσφωνητικὸς λόγος*), the orator will have occasion to mention Demosthenes, Nestor, and the best lawgivers (*νομοθετῶν ἀρίστων*, 414.31ff). Now, who are the "best lawgivers" if not men like Solon and Lycurgus? In a speech of arrival (*ἐπιβατήριος λόγος*) to a governor, the orator will laud the man's justice, claiming that he will "rival Minos, imitate Rhadamanthus, compete with Aeacus"—all three famous lawgivers and judges (380.21f; *cf.* 379.16–18). In panegyric, at least, Roman officials clearly kept good company. Their families are compared to the Heraclids or the Aeacids (380.11ff). For his justice the governor can expect to hear himself compared to Aristides, Phocion, and various famous Romans. The temperate governor will be compared to Hippolytus and Diomedes (who wounded Aphrodite, revealing that his passions were not under her sway!). The courageous governor will hear himself likened to the two Ajaxes, Pericles, and Alcibiades. (414.31ff). Julian's elevation to the rank of caesar made him second only to Constantius and, since Constantius had no sons, the heir-apparent. He was being dispatched to a province overrun by barbarians and in desperate need of restoration. It was perfectly appropriate for Themistius to conjure up the names of great lawgivers like Solon, Pittacus, and Lycurgus and to invoke Heracles and Dionysus in the typically extravagant fashion of panegyric.

As we indicated at the outset, Barnes and Vander Spoel attempted to resolve the issue of dating by accepting 355/6 as an appropriate context for the composition of Julian's *Letter* while suggesting, for two reasons, that it was in fact sent when he was sole emperor, not when he was caesar.³⁰ First, they accepted the importance attached by Bidez to the title *Ἰουλιανοῦ αὐτοκράτορος* in the *Vossianus*. Second, they interpreted a sentence in Julian's penultimate paragraph as an explicit statement that the last two paragraphs were composed long after the rest of the letter. On the other hand they recognized the importance of the ambiguous references to *ὁ θεός* in the final two paragraphs, reasoning that if the letter had been written after Constantius' death, we could expect Julian to refer openly to the gods. They theorized that Julian wrote the letter in 356 but did not send it; sometime after the uprising in Paris in February 360, and before receiving news of Constantius' death in November 361, Julian appended the last two paragraphs and dispatched the letter in an effort to enlist the aid of an influential pagan philosopher in the East. It remains questionable, however, that after a five-year silence Julian

³⁰ Barnes/Vander Spoel (*supra* n.3) 187.

would resuscitate an old letter, append a paragraph recapitulating the main points, add a final paragraph containing a prayer for the future, then dispatch the letter with no other explanation—all at a time (between the usurpation and Constantius' death) when Julian's communications with the East were apparently interrupted (*cf. Ep. 26.415A–B*). Far from attempting to enlist anyone's aid, Julian proclaims unambiguously throughout the letter his own lack of fitness to rule and consistently argues against Themistius' opinions.

In support of their argument, Barnes and Vander Spoel emphasized Julian's penultimate paragraph, in which he recapitulates his letter:

But I must go back and conclude this letter, since it is perhaps longer than is called for. The main point in it is that I am not averse to a life in politics because I am avoiding work, or because I am pursuing pleasure, or because I am enamored with idleness and inactivity. On the contrary, just as I said from the beginning, since I am conscious of having neither sufficient training nor a superior nature, and moreover since I fear that I may bring reproach on philosophy, which, despite my love for it, I have not attained, and which in fact enjoys no good reputation in other respects among men nowadays, I wrote those things down *πάλαι*, and now (*νῦν*) I have freed myself from your reproaches insofar as I can.³¹

Although Barnes and Vander Spoel do not translate the passage, they clearly assume from the *πάλαι . . . καὶ νῦν* construction that the letter had been written “long ago” and that the last two paragraphs were a recent addition. Hence their conclusion that Julian composed the bulk of the letter in the winter of 355/6 and added these paragraphs years later. There is no break, however, between the last paragraphs and the rest of the letter. Further, if Julian is responding to a letter sent (on this interpretation) some five to six years earlier, would not the answer seem a bit outdated, assuming that Themistius could discern the purpose of Julian's rambling, tendentious argument?

Part of the problem lies with the meaning of *πάλαι*. Although it does mean ‘long ago’ in the sense of ‘many years ago’ or ‘many generations ago’, *πάλαι* is a flexible adverb that can refer to any time in the past; it can mean ‘recently’ or ‘just now’ (*cf. LSJ s.v. πάλαι II*). For example, to

³¹ 266C–D: ἀλλ' ἐπανιτέον εἰς ἀρχὴν καὶ συμπεραντέον τὴν ἐπιστολὴν μείζονα ἴσως οὖσαν τοῦ δέοντος. ἔστι δὲ ἐν αὐτῇ τὸ κεφάλαιον, ὅτι μήτε τὸν πόνον φεύγων μήτε τὴν ἡδονὴν θηρέων μήτε ἀπραγμοσύνης καὶ ῥαστώνης ἐρῶν τὸν ἐν τῇ πολιτείᾳ δυσχεραίνω βίον· ἀλλ', ὅπερ ἔφην ἐξ ἀρχῆς, οὔτε παιδείαν ἐμαντῶ συνειδῶς τοσαύτην οὔτε φύσει ὑπεροχὴν, καὶ προσέτι δεδιῶς, μὴ φιλοσοφίαν, ἧς ἐρῶν οὐκ ἐφικόμην, εἰς τοὺς νῦν ἀνθρώπους οὐδὲ ἄλλως εὐδοκιμοῦσαν διαβάλλω, πάλαι τε ἔγραφον ἐκεῖνα καὶ νῦν τὰς παρ' ὑμῶν ἐπιτιμήσεις ἀπελυσάμην εἰς δύναμιν.

Protagoras' suggestion that they continue their conversation another time, Socrates replies (*Prt.* 362A): ἀλλ', ἦν δ' ἐγώ, οὕτω χρὴ ποιεῖν, εἴ σοι δοκεῖ. καὶ γὰρ ἐμοὶ οἴπερ ἔφην ἰέναι πάλαι ὥρα, ἀλλὰ Καλλία τῷ καλῷ χαριζόμενος παρέμεινα ("So be it, if that is what seems best to you. Indeed it was long ago time for me to keep the appointment I mentioned, but I stayed as a favor to the handsome Callias"). "Long ago" clearly means here an hour or two ago, not years ago. In other instances πάλαι means 'for a long time' in a figurative sense. In the *Phaedrus*, for example, after Socrates has finished his second speech on the nature of love, Phaedrus exclaims (257C): τὸν λόγον δέ σου πάλαι θαυμάσας ἔχω, ὅσῳ καλλίῳ τοῦ προτέρου ἀπηργάσω ("I have for a long time been marvelling at your speech, at how much more beautiful you made it than the previous one"). The time frame of πάλαι here clearly does not extend beyond the very speech that Socrates has just delivered.

In classicizing authors of the fourth century, πάλαι retains this temporal flexibility. Julian uses πάλαι when referring to events of the mythological past, or the early empire, or a few years back.³² I find no instance in which Julian's time frame is a mere hour or two, but Libanius offers an apt parallel to the passage from the *Phaedrus* cited above. Some two-thirds through the *Epitaphius* on Julian (*Or.* 18.204), Libanius concedes that his audience appears eager to hear an account of the fateful Persian expedition. He continues, "Nor is it any wonder that for a long time you have been waiting open-mouthed for this part, for although you know the plain fact that he fell in the hour of victory, some of the details you have never heard, and others you have heard falsely" (καὶ θαυμαστὸν οὐδὲν εἰ πάλαι πρὸς ταύτην τὴν μερίδα κεχήνατε τὸ μὲν κεφάλαιον εἰδότες ὡς νικῶν ἐπιπτε, τῶν δὲ ἐν μέρει τὰ μὲν οὐδὲ ἀκούσαντες, τὰ δ' οὐχ ὡς ἔχει). The fictional audience has been waiting "for a long time," that is, since the beginning of Libanius' oration. In short, πάλαι in the *Letter to Themistius* need not mean 'long ago' in the sense of 'years ago'. Since it can refer to any time in the past, its meaning must be inferred from the context.

To what, then, does πάλαι τε ἔγραφον ἐκεῖνα καὶ νῦν τὰς παρ' ὑμῶν ἐπιτιμήσεις ἀπελυσάμην εἰς δύναμιν allude? There are two possible

³² *Ep.* 111.433B, the Jews living in bondage πάλαι in Egypt; 88.450D, oracles of Apollo delivered πάλαι; 88.451C, the ancients accustomed πάλαι to reading and writing down curses from the gods; 198.408C, tax remissions granted earlier in the empire (πάλαι) vs the present policy (νῦν); 82.444B, the distinction between a man's former cowardice (πάλαι) and his present courage (νῦν); 8, the old-time zeal (ἡ πάλαι προθυμία) of two former school companions whom Julian has not seen for three years and three months.

explanations. First, the reference may be to this letter alone. If he were looking back on the process of writing out the arguments of the letter, Julian might use the imperfect where English would naturally use the perfect.³³ One could translate: "I have been writing [lit. 'I was writing'] those things for a long time and now I have freed myself insofar as I can from your charges." The verb tenses would stress aspect, not tense. It can be objected, however, that the *πάλαι τε . . . καὶ νῦν* construction normally offers a neat contrast between past and present. It strains the normal use of the construction to translate it 'for a long time . . . and now'.³⁴ Furthermore, if Julian had meant *πάλαι τε ἔγραφον ἐκεῖνα* to refer to the arguments contained in this present letter, he would probably have written *ταῦτα*, not *ἐκεῖνα*.

Another and, to my mind, preferable interpretation lies ready to hand. In a footnote to his translation of this letter, Rostagni connected the phrase *πάλαι τε ἔγραφον ἐκεῖνα* with an occurrence of *πάλαι* at the beginning of the letter. At 253A–B Julian writes:

Even before (*πάλαι*) when I pondered that I ought to try to rival Alexander and Marcus and anyone else who has excelled in virtue, a kind of shudder would seize me and an awesome dread that I might seem to fall completely short of the valor of the former and that I might not achieve even a little of the consummate virtue of the latter. As I contemplated these things I persuaded myself to praise the contemplative life (*σχολήν*), and I gladly recalled those Attic conversations and I resolved to direct my song to you, my friends [*i.e.*, live a contemplative life with you philosophers]. . . . But now by your recent letter you have made my fear greater and you have shown the contest to be in every way more difficult. . . .

Rostagni assumed (117) that *πάλαι* in this passage and *πάλαι* in *πάλαι τε ἔγραφον ἐκεῖνα* both referred to a previous letter written by Julian to which Themistius' *protrepticus* was a response. Whether Julian is actually alluding to a letter here remains unclear, but Rostagni's instinct was fundamentally correct. His assumption, which he himself did not argue in detail, deserves to be elaborated.

It is apparent from several references in the letter that Themistius and Julian had been correspondents in the past. Julian refers to Themistius' *protrepticus* as "your recent letter" (253C, *τῆς ἔναγχος ἐπιστο-*

³³ Prato/Fornaro (*supra* n.4) 58 *ad* 30.17 point out that the epistolary expression *ταῦτα ἔγραφον* or one of its variants closes many of Julian's letters. The tense is normally, however, the aorist or the perfect. For examples of the imperfect see *Ep.* 11.425C; for the aorist, 32, 82.446B, 85, 96.374D; the perfect, 4.428B, 198.411B.

³⁴ Cf. *Ep.* 33 (to Hermogenes): *θεάσασθαι γάρ σε πάλαι τε ἠὺχόμεν νῆ τοῦς θεοῦς καὶ νῦν, ἀσμενέστατα ὅτι διεσώθεις ἀκηκῶς, ἤκειν παρακελεύομαι.*

λης). At 260A he asks Themistius to recall now the sorts of letters he had written to him from court in Milan in 354. At 266A Julian speaks of having freed himself insofar as he could from Themistius' reproaches (ἐπιτιμήσεις)—reproaches clearly made in response to statements contained in a previous letter or letters of Julian. The most likely explanation for *πάλαι τε ἔγραφον ἐκεῖνα καὶ νῦν τὰς παρ' ὑμῶν ἐπιτιμήσεις ἀπελυσάμην εἰς δύναμιν* is that Julian had previously written to Themistius a letter or letters in which he expressed his reservations about being made a caesar. We need not imagine that these communications were anywhere near the length of the present one. Many of the letters in the corpus are brief salutations and exchanges of literary pleasantries. Themistius responded with the *protrepticus*, in which he praised the superiority of the active life and exhorted Julian to shake off all thought of the contemplative life, which he implicitly equated with inactivity and leisure. Julian responded in turn with this long and detailed letter in which he both defends the contemplative life and emphatically rejects the implication that his preference for it has anything to do with a desire for leisure. He sums up in the penultimate paragraph the purpose of this letter and explains why he had written certain things in a previous letter or letters:

But I must go back and conclude this letter. . . . The main point in it is that I am not averse to a life in politics. . . . On the contrary, just as I said from the beginning, since I am [and have been] conscious . . . and moreover since I fear [and have been afraid] that I may bring reproach on philosophy. . . . *I wrote those things down previously [i.e., in my previous letter or letters] and now [by the detailed argument in this letter] I have freed myself insofar as I can from your charges [in the recent protrepticus].*

This interpretation removes the difficulties in the hypothesis of Barnes and Vander Spoel, who assume that “I wrote those things down long ago” refers to the bulk of this present letter and that “and now I have freed myself. . . .” refers to the last two paragraphs, allegedly added years later. On Rostagni's hypothesis, the *πάλαι τε* clause refers to a letter sent in the past, probably some months ago; the *καὶ νῦν* clause refers to the present letter. Julian uses *ἐκεῖνα* because he is referring to statements made in previous correspondence, statements that are further away in time and importance than the detailed arguments of this present letter. The variations in verb tenses in the final clause stress aspect more than tense. The imperfect *ἔγραφον* emphasizes the continuous process of writing out the previous letter(s); the aorist *ἀπελυσάμην* stresses that Julian has once and for all freed himself from Themistius' reproaches. All these matters would

presumably be as obvious to Themistius as they are obscure to us. In any event, interpretations based on reference to two letters or only one provide an adequate alternative to the hypothesis of Barnes and Vander Spoel.

There remains one important piece of evidence, previously unnoticed, that offers a precise context for the *Letter to Themistius* and confirms the arguments for the earlier date. Julian makes two main points in his reply to Themistius' *protrepticus*: first, that a ruler must be superior to his fellow men both in his habits and in his nature, and Julian feels superior in neither respect; second, that the philosophical or contemplative life is superior to the active life. These repeated expressions of anxiety should be taken at face value. They reflect the genuine misgivings of a young prince who has been intentionally shielded from any experience of high politics but has now been made the immediate subordinate of the emperor whom he held responsible for the murder of all his male kin. The entire argument of the *Letter* is an intellectual exercise justifying withdrawal from political life in favor of the contemplative life, that is, disengagement from the labors that now face him as caesar and a retreat to the life that he had known in Asia Minor and Athens between 348 and 355.

Even Julian himself would later look back with bemusement at his fears at the time of his elevation. In the panegyric to the empress Eusebia composed sometime after the empress' visit to Rome in 357, Julian reviewed the events of 355 and 356 (*Or.* 2.121B–123A):

When a good opinion of me was established in the emperor's mind, she rejoiced exceedingly and . . . bade me take courage, and not to deny the greatness of what was being given to me [the title of caesar] out of fear, and not to slight the urgent request of the man who was bestowing such great favors on me by using boorish and arrogant frankness. I obeyed, although it was in no way agreeable to me to support this burden, and besides I knew that it was very difficult to refuse. . . . Now when I consented, I had to change my mode of dress, and my attendants, and my habitual pursuits, and my very house and way of life for what seemed full of pomp (*ὄγκος*) and ceremony to one whose past had naturally been so modest and humble, and my mind was confused by the strangeness, though it was certainly not dazzled by the magnitude, of the favors that were now mine. For in my ignorance (*ὑπὸ ἀμαθίας*) I hardly regarded them as great blessings, but rather as powers of the greatest benefit for those who used them properly, but as harmful powers and the causes of countless disasters for many houses and cities when men used them badly. So I felt like a man who is altogether unskilled in driving a chariot, and is not at all inclined to acquire the art, and

then is compelled to manage a car that belongs to a noble and talented charioteer. . . . On all this then I reflected, taking counsel with myself by night, and in the daytime pondering it, and I was continually thoughtful and gloomy. Then the noble and truly god-like emperor lessened my torment in every way, and showed me honor and favor both in deed and word.

Here we have confirmation from Julian's own pen for the date of the *Letter*. In 355 Julian clearly dreaded his political elevation; insecure in the strange surroundings of the court and fearing for his physical safety, he yearned for an escape. In the *Letter*, as in *Oration 2*, he expresses apprehension at the disasters that routinely befell unworthy men who acceded to great power (257B–C). He complains in the *Letter* of the ὄγκος that presently surrounds him and contrasts with it his joy at returning to Athens in 355. *Oration 2* also describes his discomfort at the pomp of Constantius' court in the winter of 355/6 before he set out for Gaul. I have not quoted in full the analogy of the unskilled charioteer, which Julian develops at great length, but it clearly recalls the two analogies used in the *Letter*, where Julian likens himself to a man who has been having trouble enough navigating in the Propontis, but is told that he will have to set sail in the Aegean and Ionian Seas and then the Ocean itself (254C–255C). Later, at 262A, he compares himself to a man who has had trouble enough exercising at home simply for the sake of his health, then suddenly finds that he must compete in the stadium of Zeus at Olympia!

To summarize: we have seen that among Bidez's arguments, only one, the title in the *Vossianus*, cannot easily be explained away. But against the precise title Ἰουλιανοῦ ἀυτοκράτορος in the *Voss.gr.*, we may set our conclusions drawn from the tone of the *Letter*, its general argument, and its disputed passages, all of which favor the earlier date. The autobiographical evidence of *Oration 2* confirms the cumulative internal evidence of the letter and strongly supports the conclusion that Julian composed the *Letter to Themistius* soon after his elevation to the rank of caesar on 6 November 355, either in late 355 or in early 356.³⁵

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
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³⁵ I would like to thank the editors of *GRBS* for helpful advice in the preparation of this article.