13

THE STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL: 355–66

When he promoted his cousin to the rank of Caesar, Constantius appears to have feared that he might just have promoted an eccentric to very high office. Julian lived as an ascetic, had perhaps too great an interest in Greek philosophy, and hated the trappings of office. It is perhaps not surprising that Constantius desired that Julian be cut off from his existing friends, only one of whom was allowed to join the four servants and 360 guardsmen who made up the new Caesar's entourage.[1]

Julian may indeed have been eccentric, but his brand of eccentricity was a by-product of the centralizing urges of Constantius and his predecessors. Constantius' brand of bookish Christianity may be seen as a force inspiring others to take a simpler, more emotional approach to their faith. Constantius' effort, through the closure of the temples to stifle public polytheism, enhanced the appeal of alternative forms of worship, some of which did indeed attract the young Julian.

At the same time as he encouraged (albeit unintentionally) the rise of alternative practices in religion, Constantius failed to maintain Rome's ability to dictate the pace of events along its frontiers. As we have seen, the image of the empire as a fortress resonated in the discourse of the second century AD; by the end of the century the walls of this fortress were in nearly as serious a state of disrepair as they had been in the reign of Gallienus. Allowing himself to be distracted by his passion for imposing unity on the church, Constantius contributed to the failure of Roman hegemony through his inability to bring the Persian war to an end. The difficulties of Constantius were subsequently compounded by the ambitions of Julian. Feeling the need for a massive military success – a success on a scale that was beyond the capacity of his army to win – Julian embarked upon a catastrophic invasion of Persia. After his death in battle, his successor would surrender critical territories to Persia in an effort to save himself and his army. The result was the end of Diocletian's frontier system in the east; the collapse in the east would be compounded by the failure of Valens' effort to assimilate a large Gothic population within the empire fifteen years later. A contributing factor in Valens' activity was a perceived manpower shortage that was aggravated

by difficulties in securing domestic recruits, stemming in part from a shift away from the strong central control of government that was a feature of Constantinian government to domination by vested interests that controlled the court. The disasters suffered by Julian and Valens initiated the progressive military failure of the Roman Empire, the emergence of successor states in western Europe, and the loss of Roman control over the western part of the empire in the second half of the fifth century.

The control of religion

Constantius had a deep interest in shaping the discourse of the church; it may be that he thought that the terms of the Nicene Creed were too imprecise to create the order that he sought, or that he wanted to centralize the government of the church as he did that of the imperial administration. In a world where the notion that church and state might be separate was unheard of, it was not, perhaps, an unreasonable desire, even if it was to prove an impractical one. Constantius was stuck with the problem that, however much he wanted to govern the church, he still had to rely on bishops to do the work, and he could not ignore their thoughts.[2] Hence his solution to whatever problems he saw (aside from removing bishops whom he felt to be disobedient) was to support the promulgation of longer and more detailed creeds by ecumenical councils. Unlike his father, he appears to have lacked the diplomatic skill needed to enforce these decisions. To be fair, Constantine had the advantage in that he was seen by many Christians as a savior, sent by God to preserve the church in the wake of the persecutions of the early fourth century. In no part of the empire did he have to deal with a Christian hierarchy entrenched in its position by a long period of imperial favor. Constantius may well have appeared to bishops in the west as an interloper, inserting himself into church affairs in a way that neither his father nor his brothers had done.

With the appointment of Julian to Gaul, and Sapor licking his wounds after yet another failure before the walls of Nisibis, Constantius devoted himself to the promotion of his faith. In the spring of 357 he went to Rome for the first time since he had become Augustus. Celebrating a triumph, removing both the altar and statue of Victory from the Senate House, he installed an obelisk at the Circus Maximus. The removal of the altar was a strong statement that Christians should not be forced to participate in events where sacrifices would take place. The installation of the obelisk must be taken as a repetition of the "obelisk diplomacy" of his father, this time in reverse. It was a symbol of unity between the new seat of the dynasty and the ancient capital. Constantius left after a stay of only a month for northern Italy.[3] It would be the last time that a reigning member of the dynasty visited the city.

While Constantius was in Rome, a group of western bishops assembled at Sirmium to promulgate a compromise creed that would be acceptable to bishops of both east and west.[4] The centerpiece of this document was a plea for Christians to stop using controversial terminology – especially the word *ousia* in Greek, which was rendered in Latin as *substantia* (and in English, "substance," the issue being the physical nature of Christ and whether he was of the identical – as held in the Nicene Creed – or similar "substance" to the Father).[5] Constantius would have none of it: he promulgated an edict attacking the bishops who had met at Sirmium.

Although he might condemn bishops who said things that he did not like, Constantius had learned that he could not convene the bishops of the west and east at a single council. In the thirty years since Nicaea, the number of Christians had expanded enormously, local traditions had become more firmly entrenched, and the burst of enthusiasm that had greeted Constantine had been transformed into cynical manipulation of the imperial power. Foes of Constantius like Hilary of Poitiers would complain that church doctrine was now made in the palace rather than by bishops.[6] As Hilary would put it, the *occidentes* had a true understanding of the gospels and did not require dialectic to know the faith. The Nicene Creed, supported by Ossius, was good enough.[7]

In order to defuse the controversy, Constantius summoned two councils, one for the western bishops at Ariminium, the other for eastern bishops at Seleucia on the Calycadnus in 359. In summoning the council of Ariminium he instructed the bishops to ignore the bishops of the east and to arrive at a definition of the faith that suited them.[8] He even went so far as to offer a framework for compromise, suggesting a creed that left out the dread word *ousia* that he had supported so strongly two years earlier. Valens of Mursa presented the model creed. It was not a success. Many western bishops detested Valens as a toady of the emperor; any gesture toward compromise in which he was involved would not readily be trusted. Thus, when the council – consisting of four hundred bishops – convened, it issued a statement maintaining the supremacy of the Nicene Creed while excommunicating Valens and two of his associates.[9] When the council, as it had been instructed, dispatched ambassadors to tell Constantius of their decision, they found themselves delayed at Sirmium for months. Constantius was (inconveniently) on campaign against the Sarmatians.[10] The long delay, during which time the members of the synod were forbidden to leave Ariminium, resulted in a significant change of heart. The ambassadors revoked the condemnation of the Pannonian bishops and agreed to the substance of the creed originally proposed by Valens.

The situation at Seleucia was no less fraught. In this case a faction of bishops led by Basil of Ancyra insisted upon a version of the creed that used terminology evocative of the doctrines of Arius. They were resisted by Acacius of Caesarea, who led the fight for a creed like that proposed by Valens to

the Council of Sirmium. In the end, ambassadors for both parties went off to present their case to Constantius, who had moved on from the Balkans to Constantinople at the end of 359.[11] Constantius met in person with the ambassadors and, on December 31, elicited agreement to the creed agreed upon in the west. In January he convened yet another council of bishops, this time in Constantinople, to promulgate the new creed throughout the empire (and exile the recalcitrant).[12] He may well have thought that he had unified the church by careful management. If so he was very wrong: micromanaged councils arriving at predetermined solutions could not alter the fact that the Christian church was even then too large and complex an institution to be controlled by the will of a single man. Constantius simply missed the point that there were too many different kinds of Christians, too many different ways of reading scripture.

As Constantius persisted in his desire to create a unified church, he also persisted in his efforts to abolish the outward forms of traditional cult. On February 19, 356, he issued an edict that imposed a capital penalty upon those who "offered sacrifice or cultivated the images of the gods."[13] This was followed, in early December, by a sweeping edict against all manner of divination, and when, it seems, the praetorian prefect, Taurus, asked about the application of this edict he was told,

> It is our pleasure that temples in all places and in all cities be closed and that access should be forbidden to all persons so that the freedom to sin be denied to all debased mortals. We also wish everyone to abstain from sacrifice. If someone should, by chance, do something of this sort, that person is to be smitten with the avenging sword. We order that the property of those who are executed be confiscated to the treasury, and that governors of provinces be similarly punished if they neglect to prosecute these crimes.
>
> (*CTh.* 16.10.4 [also in *CJ* 1.11.1])[14]

While the buildings themselves remained intact, and while priests might still oversee the property, rites involving sacrifice, both public and private, ceased. As Libanius makes clear, the impact of this edict upon polytheists was profound. They could no longer practice their faith as they had for a millennium. This was an act more far-reaching than any that Constantine had enacted, and marked a final break with the Constantinian program. For while Constantine had enabled debate and had made it possible for Christians to act in public as never before, he had not done so by attacking the foundations of polytheist cult. As was the case with his policy toward the church, Constantius was prescribing as well as proscribing behaviors on the part of his subjects in a way that is evocative of the tetrarchs. Through his actions, he reinforced tendencies among both polytheists and Christians to find new ways to practice their faith.

Constantius lived as ascetic an life as was possible amid the grandeur of the imperial palace; he was sexually abstemious and was a frugal diner.[56] But it was Julian who would raise asceticism in public office to new heights. In 356, his frugal mode of existence may have been seen as a signal to the world that he was a man of immeasurable restraint who would not follow Gallus down the path to ruin. One of the important features of asceticism was that it defied confessional definition: to a Christian he might indeed have appeared to be especially devout, especially since he seems to have had a profound knowledge of Christian texts. Only a very few people would have known that he had very different interests, and it may not be extreme to view this very limited group as a sort of "pagan underground" that was deeply offended by the extreme policies of Constantius.[57]

How did Julian, the outwardly Christian ascetic prince, become the inwardly polytheistic potential rebel? This remains a compelling question, despite the fact that Julian's reign was marked by catastrophic failure and appears to be of little consequence for the history of economy, social structures, art, or letters. For all that the conversion of Julian was a vastly less significant historical event than the conversion of his uncle, he struck contemporaries like Ammianus and Libanius as a vital figure in their lifetimes. That he should seem so to those who knew him or observed him from no very great distance, suggests that he struck a chord in the collective consciousness of his age. The champions of lost causes may often achieve greater sympathy than the victors.[58]

The intellectual odyssey of Julian may be traced, with the aid of Julian's own voluminous writings, in some detail. After murdering the other male members of their family, Constantius had given Julian and Gallus over to the care of Eusebius of Nicomedia, who entrusted Julian's education to a eunuch named Mardonius. In later life, Julian looked back to the few years that he spent with Mardonius, who, as a *grammatistês*, was charged with teaching him his letters by following a traditional curriculum that involved

reading Homer, as a golden period of childhood.[59] Mardonius taught him for four years. At the age of eleven, Julian was placed under the care of Bishop George of Cappadocia, who had him educated, along with Gallus, on his estate at Macellum near Caesarea in Cappadocia. Julian later claimed that the period was something of a nightmare, that he was cut off from learning.[60] It is a loaded comment – while there was plenty of learning to be had at Macellum, of a decidedly Christian sort, there also appears to have been plenty to read of a non-Christian variety. Although George was, in the eyes of some, a most unpleasant man (Ammianus compares his conduct to that of a snake), he appears to have had an excellent library.[61] He seems to have taken this library with him to Alexandria in 356 – and, after his murder by a mob in 361, Julian wrote saying that he knew the books well and wanted the library intact.[62] Eunapius, for what it is worth, says that Julian amazed his Christian tutor with his command of dialectic.[63]

In 348, Julian returned to the capital, where he studied with the polytheist Nicocles and the Christian Hecebolius.[64] Both men would remain close to him, with Hecebolius leaving the church after Julian became sole emperor (he rejoined after Julian's death), and the people of Antioch recognizing Nicocles as a valuable intermediary to the emperor when Julian was annoyed with them. At the same time, Julian attended lectures by another polytheist, Themistius, with whom he seems later to have quarreled, at least in part because Themistius believed that Christian and non-Christian could coexist in harmony.[65] Up to this point it is fair to say that Julian's education revealed that Themistius was right: issues other than religion were of primary importance to educated people. Quarrels between Christians were a more serious problem than quarrels between educated men of either form of belief. For Julian this would all change within three years.

In 350–51 Julian went to Pergamon, where he studied with the philosopher Aedesius, who had once been a pupil of Porphyry's former student and antagonist, Iamblichus.[66] By this point it appears to have been well known that Iamblichus' followers claimed that their master had achieved special contact with the divine. Eunapius said that the tradition was so strong that he did not wish to add to it with hearsay.[67] So it may be presumed that by 350 it was taken as fact that, although Iamblichus disclaimed the ability imputed to him by his servants of being able to float ten feet in the air while taking on a golden hue as he prayed, he had communicated with spirits that he raised from two springs before the eyes of his followers.[68] So too, Eunapius says, he saw that he was about to follow a road along which a corpse had been taken for burial (contact with a corpse being a long-standing source of pollution) and avoided it.[69]

Although Aedesius seems not to have discussed his own divine inspiration, Eunapius says that when he had sought an oracular dream, the god wrote the response on his hand in hexameter verse as follows:

> On the warp of the spinning of two fates lies the thread of your life's work. If you wish the towns and cities of mortals, your fame will be deathless, shepherding the divinely given impulse of young men. If you should tend the course of sheep and bulls, then you shall have hope for yourself to be among the immortal gods. This does the woven fate ordain for you.
>
> (Eunap. *VS* 464–65)

The result of this message was that Aedesius gave up his career and retired to a family farm in Cappadocia, until entreaties of his former pupils compelled him to take up teaching once again. Upon returning to Pergamon, Aedesius had left his farm to a relative of his named Eustathius, who would himself, after a time, acquire a great reputation and marry a woman named Sosipatra, who had a very powerful soul and communed with the gods. Sosipatra herself was a witness to the divine links of another philosopher who moved into the orbit of the family, a man named Maximus. It transpired that one of her male relatives, Philometor, was in love with her, and cast a spell upon her to win her love in return. Sosipatra confessed her conflicted emotions to Maximus, who discovered the source of her illness through his "sacrificial lore" *(sophia thutikê)*, and cast a spell upon Philometor to overcame the one that he had cast upon Sosipatra, enabling the two of them to resume friendly discourse. It proved no bad thing for Philometor; Sosipatra is said to have seen him in an accident, and to have sent servants to rescue him.[70]

The stories surrounding this group of people, who were from the wealthiest and best-connected families in Pergamon, were no doubt in the air when Julian arrived to learn from Aedesius. Aedesius recommended to Julian that he devote his attentions to Maximus and three others, a philosopher named Priscus, then at Athens, and two who had remained in Asia, Chrysanthius and Eusebius. Chrysanthius appears to have been very chary of discussing theurgy with the imperial prince, but not so Eusebius, who recommended that Julian make the acquaintance of Maximus.[71] It was through his association with Maximus that Julian became aware that he could no longer be a Christian. With Maximus as his guide, Julian was initiated into what he described as the mysteries.[72]

In the complex intellectual matrix of the 350s, the decision to follow a person who could be a personal guide to the divine was hardly unusual – the letter of Paphnutius shows us a man seeking a special unity with the Christian God that he could not find in church. The life of the ascetic, whether polytheist or Christian, promised something vital that was not to be found elsewhere. In most cases it made little difference for one's public career, if a person were so placed as to be able to pursue one, if one were Christian or not. It is, however, wrong to see Julian's experience solely in this context. He was the emperor's cousin, and, by 351, he was the half-

brother of the reigning Caesar. For him to abandon the religion of his family was a major act of rebellion: he knew it, and so did those who were around him. Had it been otherwise, he would not have needed to keep his decision secret.

Constantius could not object to a person associating with non-Christians, and actually had frostier relations with many Christians than he did with many polytheists. But Constantius also regarded the safety of his throne as dependent upon the favor of the Christian God: while he could allow others to follow whatever faith their conscience called them to, he could scarcely allow such freedom to a member of his own family.[73] By converting secretly, Julian protected himself, and his friends – and he put them at risk if Constantius should learn what happened. While there may have been no active "pagan underground" opposing the Christian emperor on confessional grounds prior to 350, the conversion of Julian created a group of people who might have wished Constantius dead. It is perhaps no accident that the conversion of Julian occurred on the eve of the campaign against Magnentius, when Constantius' future may have seemed uncertain. In later years it also seems that Julian's Pergamene friends formed a sort of emotional support network.[74] Given the close family connections within this group, the tight links between teacher and student, Julian may have felt as if he was joining a family that was a good deal more supportive than his own, as well as a new religion. He may have escaped detection because the ascetic life of the pious Christian was outwardly indistinguishable from that of the pious polytheist, save only that the one went to church while the other prayed in private to the traditional gods or, prior to 356, made offerings at the temples. So long as Julian observed Christian rites in public, his ascetic style of existence would have seemed to a mark him a very good Christian.

Julian in Gaul

Constantius appointed Julian because he felt that he needed a family member in Gaul; he otherwise had no great expectations of him. He neither knew him very well nor seems to have trusted him. At best, he might have hoped that Julian would have learned from the example of his brother that he was supposed to be a figurehead.[75] Such was not the ambition of Julian, who gradually forged for himself a place in government that seems to have been very different from anything that Constantius would have expected. Although Julian began with no reporting lines that ended in his palace, he was able, within a very few years, to so insinuate himself into the fabric of government that he was de facto ruler of one-third of the empire. If the job had been better defined, it is possible that Julian would never have been able to succeed as he did, but, as the job had no actual definition other than to be family representative in Gaul, Julian was able to use every victory by himself, every misstep by his rivals, to define a position that suited him.

In the wake of the Persian attack, Constantius sent to Julian asking for drafts of troops to assist in the next summer's campaign against Persia.[107] Despite what Julian was later to say – suggesting that this was a plot to weaken him – it was a necessary action on Constantius' part if he hoped to be able to undertake any sort of offensive action.[108] Julian, who was once again wintering at Paris, had, however, decided that it was time to act upon his dreams. He would use the troop transfer to foment revolt among his soldiers. In February or March 360, the *notarius* Decentius arrived with Constantius' instruction that Julian should dispatch four full units of infantry and three hundred men from every other unit under his command. Julian was now ready to act; his later contention that events were driven by the enthusiasm of his soldiers is given the lie by his own impossibly convoluted account of what happened.[109] The first point that he does not address in this account (and the key to the story) is why there were any troops marching through Paris in the first place. Neither he nor Ammianus provides the crucial information that could make sense of the troop movement – that is where the men were coming from. He simply says that the two units that were to play the crucial role in his proclamation were in a town near Paris. The problem is that Paris was far south of the main areas of Roman military occupation, and the main east–west road ran well to the north of the city. There is no obvious reason why troops who were thought to be on the verge of mutiny should have been brought anywhere near his headquarters. Nor is there any obvious reason why he should have thought their acclamation of him as Augustus would have resonated with the rest of the army unless preparations had already been made to ensure its support. Julian's desire to portray events in Paris on the evening that the Celtae and Petulentes

proclaimed him Augustus as the result of bungling by Constantius' officials betrays a desire to obfuscate the considerable advance planning that must have taken place.[110]

The cousins spent the next summer in very different ways. Julian campaigned again on the Rhine, this time against the Franks.[111] The Franks do not seem to have been able to muster much in the way of opposition, and as one the ostensible causes of the mutiny of the winter was that the troops feared for the safety of their families, who they claimed would be at the mercy of the barbarians if they were sent east, it gave Julian a chance to demonstrate his sympathy with their plight – perhaps no bad thing, as he must already have been planning to lead this army east the next year. By the end of the summer he was consulting the gods with the aid of Oribasius, a man named Euhemerus of Libya, and a person identified by Eunapius only as the "hierophant from Greece."[112]

Constantius' summer was less successful. Without reinforcements from the west, and, indeed, now threatened from the west, he dared not risk a decisive battle. He had reason to be thankful that Sapor had reverted to a more traditional strategy of attacking cities in the hope of drawing him out. The Persians contented themselves with the capture of the minor fortress city of Bezabde, and the destruction of Singara, a more serious blow.[113] Constantius waited for Sapor to retire before putting on a military demonstration of his own, during which he recaptured Bezabde.[114]

While these operations were under way, Julian and Constantius kept open lines of communication. Shortly after his proclamation, Julian sent Eutherius, the eunuch who was his *cubicularius*, and Pentadius, with a letter in which it appears that Julian suggested that he should keep the title of Augustus in the west, while retaining the rank of Caesar in the east.[115] This was essentially a reprise of the settlement at Carnuntum in 308, with Julian assuming the role of Constantine. Although it appears from his writings that he had no love for Constantine, he may nonetheless have had the historical imagination to see himself as a sort of reverse Constantine who would move outwards from Gaul to capture the empire, and restore the worship of the gods to its pristine form.[116] In November he issued what was no less than a direct challenge to Constantius on this matter when, openly rejecting Constantius' order that he renounce the title Augustus, he celebrated massive games in honor of the beginning of his fifth year in power at Vienne.[117] Here he took the title Augustus openly, and coins minted in Gaul would have his image on them with that title – sometimes sharing space with Constantius, sometimes not.[118]

At the same time that he challenged Constantius by using the title Augustus, Julian sought to conciliate the opinion of the bishops of Gaul, whom he allowed to meet at Paris toward the end of the year.[119] There was little affection in this group for the result of the council at Constantinople, something that is reflected in the writings of the driving force behind this

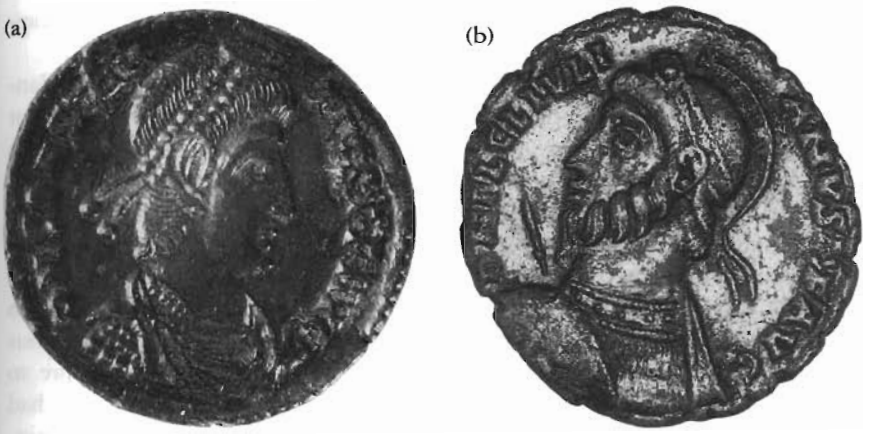

Plate 15 Constantius II and Julian. Julian's break with Constantius was marked by his abandonment of Constantius' image, in favor of a portrait with a beard on coins issued to celebrate his vicennalia at Lyons in 361; the style was adopted by the Rome mint in the summer of 361. (a) Constantius II. *Credit*: *RIC* Constantius II, Siscia 350 (332–49); author's collection, photo courtesy of Classical Numismatic Group. (b) Julian. *Credit*: *RIC* Julian, Rome 329 (361). KM 1991.2.910. Photo courtesy of the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan.

meeting, Hilary of Poitiers, who had recently returned from exile in the east.[120] He had written at some length describing Constantius as the Antichrist. The most vehement section of this book appears to have been written just after the proclamation of Julian, and he continued writing in this vein after the death of Constantius, and after Julian had revealed himself as a polytheist.[121] There can be little doubt but that his experience with the bishops of Gaul in 360 would help shape Julian's policy toward the bishops of the east a year later. Julian would have every reason to think that the hatred of Christian for Christian, as it was manifested among those who had involved themselves deeply in the Trinitarian controversy, was far stronger than their latent distaste for polytheists.

As the winter of 360–61 turned into the spring, Julian began to move west. First he took an army into the land of the Alamanni, where he obtained the surrender of a king named Vadomarius (who duly entered Roman service). The capture of Vadomarius provided Julian with the opportunity to claim that he had come into possession of letters that Constantius had written the Alamannic ruler asking him to attack Gaul.[122] The campaign also placed Julian in the Black Forest, from whence he could move rapidly to the headwaters of the Danube a few months later. In the meantime, Constantius could only wait at Edessa, fearful of another invasion by the Persians.[123] Sapor had his army ready to attack, but, in the end, declined to do so (bad omens were

said to be the reason).[124] By the time that the threat of invasion had evaporated, Julian had seized control of the Balkans.[125]

Julian's campaign in the late summer of 361 was a masterpiece of planning. Taking a small army down the Danube on boats, he occupied the major garrison cities as far as Sirmium without a battle.[126] At the same time, a second force, under the command of his *magister equitum*, Nevitta, had advanced out of the area of modern Switzerland into the central Balkans.[127] The second phase of the campaign saw Julian leave the Danube and march to Naissus, where his troops linked up with those of Nevitta. All seemed to be going very well until two legions that had been dispatched from Sirmium to occupy Italy from the east mutinied at Aquileia.[128] It was a dangerous moment, for if Julian allowed himself to be distracted by the failure to occupy Italy, he would lose the momentum of the eastward advance: he had to rely on a third army, which he dispatched from southern France, to eliminate opposition before he moved on. Julian thus paused for some weeks, sending letters to various cities of the east attacking Constantius for what he claimed to be faithless conduct toward himself.[129] It was then that he got very lucky. In early December he received news that Constantius had died on November 3 in Cilicia, while marching to contend for the empire. Julian was now sole Augustus.

The restoration of the gods

There is no more striking aspect of Julian's regime than his effort to reinstitute the public cult of the gods. When Julian learned of Constantius' death, he wrote a letter to his mentor, Maximus of Ephesus, that appears to have been intended for a general audience. In it he takes care to refute the basic charges of Constantius – that he had seized the throne and held high officials hostage – and then expands upon the theme of his own contact with the traditional gods, which he had already introduced into the correspondence that he had sent to various cities from Naissus. In this case he tells Maximus,

> I call as my witness Zeus, I call great Helios as my witness, I call powerful Athena as my witness, and all the gods and goddesses how, as I descended from the land of the Celts to Illyricum, I trembled for you. I asked the gods, not daring to do this myself, for I did not have the courage to see or to hear anything so terrible as one might imagine would be happening to you, but I used others. The gods revealed plainly that some troubles beset you, but nothing terrible or that any impious councils were effected.[130]
>
> As you see, I pass over many great events, that you may know most of all, how, all at once, I have perceived the presence of the gods. . . . I worship the gods openly, and the great part of the army

> that follows me is full of piety. I sacrifice oxen in public; we have given thanks to the gods with numerous hecatombs. The gods command me to purify everything that I can, and I obey them with zeal. They say that they will give me great rewards if I am not remiss.
>
> (*Ep.* 26 [Bidez], 415a–d)

To Eutherius he wrote, this time in private:

> I live, having been saved by the gods. Offer sacrifice as thank-offerings on my behalf to them. You will sacrifice not for one man, but for all the true believers (Hellenes).
>
> (*Ep.* 29 [Bidez], 382c)

Ammianus dates Julian's open avowal of devotion to the gods to the time after he arrived at Constantinople, but in this he is surely wrong.[131] Julian's *Letter to the Athenians* is an openly polytheist document, making it plain that he worships the traditional gods, and that letter was written when Julian thought that battle loomed in his future. If he were to die fighting, Julian seems to have resolved that he should do so as what he was, and his fears for Maximus suggest that the importance of his philosophic friends had become known in the east. The sudden death of Constantius after Julian had proclaimed his allegiance could have no other effect than to confirm his belief that he was chosen to restore their worship, and that by doing so he would, as he wrote to Maximus, go on to greater glory.

Ammianus' error about the date at which Julian proclaimed his faith may be explained by the fact that, to the eyes of the average inhabitant of the empire, the change would perhaps not have been so obvious until February. It was then that his image appeared on coins with a philosopher's beard.[132] The break with the clean-shaven dynasty was obvious and accompanied a new phase in Julian's activity, one in which he not only avowed his own faith, but sought to change that of his subjects. Julian would not deny that the God of the Christians existed. Nor would he deny, even when attacking the memory of Constantine, that Jesus could be found among the gods (albeit in the company of Pleasure and Incontinence).[133] It is obvious from his conduct at Antioch in 362 that he also believed in the intercessory power of martyrs, since he plainly thought that the presence of the remains of Babylas was silencing the oracle at the Castalian spring.[134] Acceptance of the fact that Christ might be divine and that the Christian God, who was, after all, the God of the Jews – whose rites Julian respected – was not extraordinary for a polytheist of the fourth century, especially one connected with Neoplatonic thinkers.[135] What would be extraordinary was Julian's effort to alter the social place of Christianity in the empire as a whole by returning the Christian God to his proper place among the divinities.[136] In doing so,

his methods were the aggressive methods of Constantius rather than those of Constantine.

Although Julian felt that he had a special relationship with the gods, one stemming from his particular philosophic training, he does not appear to have thought that his way was the only way to honor the gods. It would therefore be wrong to suggest that Julian was trying to impose a specific form of worship upon his subjects.[137] The error inherent to such a supposition is demonstrated by the fact that there were at least three quite distinct features of Julian's own religious practice. One aspect was his devotion to the theurgic school of Iamblichus, another was his interest in the cult of Mithras, the third was his (large-scale) indulgence in sacrificial cult. So great was Julian's interest in Mithras that he appears to have had a Mithraeum built on the grounds of the palace at Constantinople, and the best explanation of a remarkable series of coins depicting a bull on the reverse with two stars overhead is that it was intended to be evocative of Mithraic beliefs.[138] Such was Julian's indulgence in large-scale sacrifice (even in a time of food shortage at Antioch in the winter of 362–63) that Ammianus thought it excessive.[139] Julian's interest in theurgy likewise aroused the irritation of Ammianus, who thought that the philosophers with whom he surrounded himself gave advice that was contrary to logic and custom.[140] When Julian tried to organize provincial cult with strict guidelines for the priesthood so that it might more efficiently compete with the church, at least one philosopher, Chrysanthius, who was appointed a provincial priest, did as little as humanly possible.[141] When Julian arrived in Syria several months after he began to appoint these new provincial high priests, he found that the priest who attended the great temple of Apollo was an old man who could offer a goose when the emperor arrived expecting to witness a hecatomb of cattle.[142]

Despite the evident failure of the effort, Julian's attempt to create provincial high priests who would organize the worship of the gods is perhaps the best testimony both to the eccentricity of his thought and to the difficulty inherent in organizing local institutions on an imperial scale. It was hard for Julian to ensure that the men he appointed as priests would do what he wanted them to do. It was also hard to make appointments at the local level that were congenial to all. There exists a fragment of a letter to an official who appears to have beaten a man who had been appointed to a priesthood at Miletus. Julian is not pleased and forbids the official to bother the man again for three months – but he also allows that the official, who is plainly Christian, may have had a point.[143] In another letter, Julian defends his appointment of the bishop of Troy as a provincial priest on the grounds that he had actually met the man, and was impressed by the fact that he was maintaining the local tourist attractions (including the temple of Athena).[144] In writing to a man named Theodorus, whom he appointed high priest of Asia, he stresses that men to be appointed must be of good character – and admits that people may have forgotten the rites that had been handed down

Plate 16 (a) Julian's new image with a full philosopher's beard. (b) The standard reverse type of Julian was a bull. *Credit*: KM 1987.11.9. Photo courtesy of the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan.

from the gods.[145] To Arsacius, whom he appointed priest of Galatia, he writes to say that the restoration of the old faith is not coming along as well as he had hoped. To help, he recommends that the priest set up benevolent foundations to help the poor: in this way he will be able to compete with the charity offered by the church.[146] He may have been surprised that there was no great upsurge of support for traditional cult; he was certainly disappointed in the results of his efforts. Thus he wrote to the philosopher Aristoxenos that he was pleased that he had greeted him at Tyana – proving that he was a Hellene (by which he means both a true believer in the old gods, as well, in this case, as a civilized person), among the Cappadocians.[147] To Arsacius he wrote saying that "Hellenism [here simply the worship of the gods] is not making the progress that I desire, because of those who profess it."[148]

There were other disappointments as well. At times it appears that people whom Julian regarded as his friends did not get on very well, and that Julian's displays of affection for these friends, especially Maximus, were thought by others to be excessive.[149] While he was at Antioch he received a letter from a woman named Theodora, a devout polytheist who was the high priestess of some divinity. She had earlier written to Maximus complaining that she thought that another of Julian's philosophic friends, Seleucus, was blackening her reputation with the emperor. Julian assured her that this was not so, but, since she had written attacking Seleucus, he would confess that he was angry with her for harboring Christians in her house. In his view people devoted to the gods ought to start by looking after

their own houses if they hoped to convert others.[150] She was not the only one susceptible to such a rebuke: Julian had appointed her son, Thalassius, as high priest in Syria, and his house was filled with Christian slaves.[151] Many polytheists were unwilling to break their connections with Christian friends, and Themistius, whose lectures he had once attended, appears to have angered Julian by suggesting that polytheist and Christian could live in peace with each other.[152] It must be conceded that Julian was himself inconsistent. He invited the Christian sophist Prohaeresius of Athens, with whom he had studied, to write an account of his rise to power. Prohaeresius refused.[153] He also invited his former schoolmate, Basil, a Christian, to court. Basil also refused to come.[154]

If Julian was not satisfied with the progress of polytheism in the few months after the death of Constantius, he appears to have become even less satisfied with the response of Christians. He had no one but himself to blame for his troubles, and this may also explain why many polytheists were lukewarm at best about his espousal of the gods. In December 361, his former tutor, George of Cappadocia, had returned to Alexandria from the court of Constantius, whom he had accompanied on his final journey. Possibly laboring under the misapprehension that his former ward bore him some goodwill, he made an offensive remark about the temple of the Genius of Alexandria (he asked how long this tomb should be allowed to stand).[155] In the wake of actions taken by the *dux* of Egypt, a man named Artemius, who was immediately recalled by Julian after the death of Constantius, this seemed an open threat. Artemius had quartered soldiers in the Sarapeion, the great shrine of Serapis at Alexandria, and attacked the crowd that had gathered to protest.[156] George's comment was taken, not unreasonably, as a precursor to a similar act of impiety. A crowd of polytheists murdered him and two of his associates in the street.[157] Julian's response was to suggest that the people of Alexandria had good reason to hate George because of what Artemius had done at the Sarapeion, and that when they suspected him of planning a similar outrage, they killed him. This, he said, was wrong – they should have allowed him to punish George for his crimes.[158] The failure to do more than lecture the Alexandrians on their behavior could be read as a declaration that any who attacked Christians would be safe.

Alexandria was not the only place where people might have had the impression that it was "open season" for Christians if they wished it. Sozomen states that Julian refused to receive embassies from cities that were Christian. This included Nisibis, from whence an embassy was dispatched to ask for aid against a threatened Persian attack in 362.[159] He told them that, since they refused to reopen their temples, he would not help. This decision may provide the background for a series of poems that Ephraim wrote attacking him.[160] As for Caesarea in Cappadocia, another strongly Christian city, he expressed anger that the people had destroyed their temple of Apollo, confiscated church property, ordered priests to be enrolled in the army, registered women

and children for the capitation tax, and told the city that it must rebuild its temple.[161] The language of Sozomen's description echoes a letter that Julian sent to Edessa and may well derive from the text of a letter from Julian that is now lost. In the letter to Edessa, he wrote,

> I have behaved towards the Galileans with such moderation and humanity that none of them has suffered violence, been dragged into a temple, or been constrained by ill treatment to any other action against their will. However, those of the Arian church, swollen with their wealth, have assailed the followers of Valentinian, and have dared such things in Edessa as never occur in a well-governed city. Therefore, since the most admirable of their laws enjoins them to renounce their property so that they may pass more readily into the kingdom of heaven, associating our efforts in this regard to those of their saints, we order that all the goods of the church of Edessa shall be confiscated, the money is to be given to the soldiers, and the lands are to be handed over to our domains. Thus, being poor, they will be wise, and they will not be deprived of the kingdom of heaven, for which they still hope. I order all the inhabitants of Edessa to abstain from sedition and violence, lest, troubling our clemency, you shall pay the penalty for disturbing the state and be sentenced to the sword, exile, and the flame.
>
> (Jul. *Ep.* 115 Bidez)

Aside from the blatant irony of the emperor's teachings about poverty, what is perhaps most striking about this letter is the way that he suggests that the troublemakers are Arians. In this he appears to be adopting the rhetoric of Athanasius and the western bishops, who would assert, in a most skillful and cynical way, that those who had been favored by Constantius must be Arians. Here, as in the letters that he wrote advising Arsacius, the influence of his Christian upbringing shows most clearly. Those polytheists who had trouble with Julian may have recognized the fact that his understanding of religion had a remarkably Christian flavor to it.

Julian would further defend his actions by claiming that Christians should be grateful to him for being more lenient to them than Constantius had been. In a letter to the people of Bostra he professes to be surprised that the leaders of the Christian community are not more grateful to him, since, unlike Constantius, he did not massacre communities of "heretics," which he accuses Constantius of doing in Samosata, Cyzicus, and other places.[162] In this same letter he blames internecine Christian violence (not without reason) upon the priesthood and invites the people of Bostra to expel the local bishop. His further statement that they should not then assault the rank-and-file members of the church looks, in context, less than sincere.[163]

There is little evidence to suggest that Julian's duplicitous policies fooled anyone, and a city like Constantina in Palestine, which had been transformed into a city from being a village, would not have forgiven its reduction in status to village once again, nor its attachment to the territory of strongly polytheist Gaza.[164] Nor were his efforts to sow dissension among the Christians by allowing bishops to return to their cities inevitably successful. Athanasius returned to Alexandria, claimed the episcopal seat vacated by the death of George, and began dispatching his supporters to other cities of the east. Julian, at first, ignored him, and when a Christian embassy came to Constantinople to discuss problems in the city, he had sent it to Chalcedon where he could ignore it.[165] Later he realized that Athanasius had once again become the focal point for the Christian community and challenged Julian by baptizing some women who were members of important polytheist families.[166] He ordered Athanasius to go into exile once again, asserting that when he had said that exiled bishops could return to their native cities, he did not mean that they could resume their former positions.[167] But the damage was done, and by the time that he reached Antioch on May 12, 362, the city was in the throes of heated factional disputes.[168] The one thing that seemed to unite Christians at Antioch was the presence of the polytheist emperor.

Julian's policies toward the Christians, which also included the promulgation of an edict banning them from teaching traditional literature, seem, for the most part, to have backfired. The attitude of Themistius and of people like Ammianus, who felt that Christians and polytheists could coexist, was more prevalent. Ammianus, in fact, condemned the edict banning Christians from teaching in the strongest possible terms.[169] Julian's efforts to reach out to the Jewish community, which included the reconstruction of the temple at Jerusalem, in an effort to prove that Christ, who had predicted the destruction of the place, was a false prophet, likewise failed when some sort of natural disaster halted construction.[170]

Julian's incongruity with the views of the mass of his subjects was matched by a failure to appreciate the importance attached to the ceremonial of the imperial office. When he arrived at Constantinople, he had dismissed the bulk of the palace staff.[171] He behaved in public with what seemed to people to be a lack of the appropriate dignity, and he angered people of all sorts when he tried to strengthen civic government by forcing men who had qualified for exemptions from curial duties onto town councils.[172]

Antioch, Persia, and catastrophe

When Julian came to Antioch, he planned to invade the Persian Empire the next summer. He may have felt that a striking success against the Persians would give him the authority to succeed in his religious policies; he may also have felt that he required some activity that could unite the staff that

it has control over the security of its borders. By surrendering Nisibis, Jovian had shattered Rome's hegemonic position in the Near East. The words of Bishop Ephraim stand as poignant testimony to the personal tragedy of the people who were losing their homes:

> A wonder! By chance the corpse of the accursed one,
> Crossing over towards the rampart met me near the city!
> And the Magus took and fastened on a tower
> The standard sent from the east,
> So that this standard-bearer would declare to the onlookers
> That the city was slave to the lords of that standard.
> Glory to the One Who wrapped the corpse in shame!
> I wondered, "Who indeed set a time for meeting
> When corpse and standard-bearer both at one moment were present?"
> I knew it was a prearrangement, a miracle of justice
> That when the corpse of the fallen one crossed over,
> The fearful standard went up and was put in place to proclaim
> That the evil of his conjurors had surrendered that city.
> For thirty years Persia had made battle in every way
> But was unable to cross over the boundary of that city;
> Even when it had been broken and collapsed, the cross came down and saved it.
> There I saw a disgraceful sight:
> The standard of the captor set up on the tower,
> The corpse of the persecutor laid in a coffin.
>
> (*Hymn in Jul.* 3.1–3, trans. McVey)

Valentinian and Valens

Although his position as emperor was secured by the preservation of his army, and the presence of much of the senior military staff of the empire in his train, Jovian felt the need to return to Constantinople as fast as he could. He also had to do something with the corpse of his predecessor. As Tarsus had been prepared to be Julian's capital upon his return from Persia, and Julian appears to have expressed the desire to be buried there, Jovian decided to honor his request.[211] The task of burying Julian was left to Procopius, who appears to have had no interest in contesting Jovian's election; his willingness to take the larger part of the army to accomplish this task was a powerful demonstration of his acquiescence, as was his subsequent withdrawal to an estate in Cappadocia.[212] It is also a powerful indication of Jovian's ability to reconcile diverse groups to his regime. He took further steps in this direction when he had himself portrayed without a beard, a clear sign that he rejected Julian, and declared that he wished for there to

be peace in the church, a sign, perhaps, that he would eschew the interventionist policies of Constantius.[213] There too he summoned Athanasius to join him, another indication that he intended to pursue a course that would end the divisions that had racked the empire in recent decades.[214] At the same time, he reaffirmed the validity of the Nicene Creed, an act that was well designed to win him popularity in the west. While he sought to bring peace to the church, he also attempted to improve his reputation by dispatching messengers throughout the empire claiming that the Persian expedition was a success: a campaign that is echoed on coins proclaiming the "victory of the Romans."[215] Whatever happened, he had to introduce himself to his subjects as a man bringing peace where there had been chaos, and victory even where there was none.

Jovian needed to be secure in the east, as news from the west may have been disturbing. Immediately after his return to Roman territory, Jovian had recalled Lucillianus, the former *magister equitum* of Illyricum and his father-in-law – living in retirement after his defeat by Julian – to government, sending him to the west as *magister militum et peditum*.[216] Lucillianus appears to have decided that Jovinus, who had been left as *magister equitum* in Gaul by Julian, was a potential threat, and sought to replace him with the Malarichus who had, years earlier, denounced the machinations against Silvanus.[217] When Malarichus turned the job down, Lucillianus (who was accompanied by, among others, a tribune named Valentinian) had gone to Rheims himself. There he was murdered in a mutiny, and the situation was only saved when Jovinus made a timely demonstration of loyalty to the new regime.[218] It was the action of Jovinus that saved Valentinian's life, and he appears to have returned to the east to let Jovian know what had transpired. The fact of the matter was that Jovinus was the real power broker in Gaul and, despite his demonstration of loyalty, would need to be handled with care.

Leaving Antioch in the autumn, Jovian made his way toward Constantinople, reaching Ancyra by January 1, where he assumed the consulship with his young son, Varronian, who cried throughout the ceremony. Ammianus saw this as a prophetic event.[219] Jovian died six weeks later, on February 17, 364. The official story was that he had been asphyxiated by a coal fire in his bedroom at Dadastana, a place on the border between Galatia and Bithynia.[220] Ammianus thought that he had been murdered, and that it was suspicious that there was no investigation into his death.[221] Zosimus says that he killed himself.[222]

It took a few days for the general staff to agree on a successor. When Salutius, who was once again offered the job, once again rejected it, the assembled marshals, after rejecting a relative of Jovian who was too far away, decided upon another relatively junior officer, the very Valentinian who had recently escaped with his life from Gaul.[223] On February 26, 364, Valentinian, who had been in Ancyra, was presented to the army at Nicaea, which duly acclaimed him emperor, after some protest. After the formal act

of acclamation, the soldiers demanded that the new Augustus select a colleague.[224] Valentinian demurred for the moment, but a month later, now at Constantinople, he rejected the advice of a senior staff officer, Dagalaifus, that he seek his colleague outside of his own family, and had his brother, Valens, declared Augustus on March 28.[225]

After recovering from a severe illness and determining that they were not the victims of a magical assault, the brothers traveled together in the summer of 364 to Naissus, where they would make division of the dioceses of the empire between them.[226] They confirmed the structure of the empire as it had been under Constantius, divided into three great prefectures, one consisting of Gaul, Britain, and Spain, the second of Italy, Illyricum, and Africa, the third of the east. Valentinian, "by whose will the business was accomplished," would retain direct control over the two western zones, Valens over the eastern.[227]

Procopius and the end of the Constantinian dynasty

The brothers were right to be concerned; the house of Constantine had held power for a very long time, and there remained, in some quarters, a deep attachment to the departed dynasty.[228] When Valentinian and Valens parted company, never to see each other again, in the late summer of 364, their regime was already at risk. Procopius had taken flight and would soon be ready to try and reassert the claims of hereditary monarchy.

It appears that the emperors, in the course of the investigation of the alleged magical assault upon their persons, had decided to take action against major supporters of Julian. Maximus of Ephesus had been arrested and sent into exile, and it is likely that this is the context of an attempt mentioned by Zosimus to arrest Procopius.[229] The soldiers sent to seize him failed, and Procopius was able to flee to the Crimea. From there he made contact with potential supporters at Constantinople. His previous connections with the bureaucracy gave him the access to disgruntled individuals that he needed, and the access to information that was necessary, if he was to succeed.

As Procopius plotted, Valens passed through Constantinople on his way to Antioch. With Valens safely clear of the city, and two regiments from Thrace in transit, Procopius made his move. It was September 28, 365, when Procopius entered the city and went to the baths named for Constantine's sister, Anastasia.[230] The spot was well chosen: the association with the house of Constantine resonated with the dynastic claims that Procopius would make, and it was a place that Procopius could use as his headquarters until the palace and senate house could be secured. Both were duly occupied without resistance, and Procopius rapidly set about forming a new government. Nebridius, the praetorian prefect, and Caesarius, prefect of the city, were arrested, being replaced by two men who had served under Julian, and the commander of the garrison of Thrace, a man named Julius, was