

The Authorship of *De Diis et Mundo*: Old Problem, New Solution

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ΠEPI ΘΕΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΚΟΣΜΟΥ (*De diis et mundo*) is a small work (only eighteen pages of text in A. D. Nock's edition),¹ which is usually treated as something of a compendium of the of Neoplatonic theosophy, an attempt to form a coherent and non-contradictory doctrine of Late Roman 'paganism', addressed to the educated adherents of the old cults who did not have specific philosophical training (Sall. *De diis* 1, 13). Some thematic and textual parallels between *De diis* and emperor Julian's *Against Heraclius* (*Or.* 7.222c–d, cf. *De diis* 3.4) and *To the Mother of the Gods* (*Or.* 5.165–171, cf. *De diis* 4.7–10) led scholars to the idea that the treatise might have been somehow connected with the reign of the Apostate. Thanks to F. Cumont, Sallustius' work became known as a 'pagan catechism', a summary of the foundations of the teaching of the new pagan 'church' created by the Apostate,² a kind of positive supplement to the emperor's anti-Christian treatise *Contra Galileos*.³ Over the past century, this hypothesis has become almost universally accepted.⁴

¹ Sallustius: *Concerning the Gods and the Universe* (Cambridge 1926)

² F. Cumont, "Salluste le philosophe," *RevPhil* 16 (1892) 49–56, at 54–55.

³ U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, "Die Griechische Literatur des Altertums," in K. Krumbacher et al., *Die griechische und lateinische Literatur und Sprache* (Berlin 1907) 3–238, at 206.

⁴ G. Rochefort, "Le περί θεῶν καὶ κόσμου de Saloustios et l'influence de l'Empereur Julien," *REG* 69 (1956) 50–66, at 52, and *Sallustius. Des dieux et du monde* (Paris 1960) xiv; G. Downey, "The Emperor Julian and the Schools," *CJ* 53 (1957) 97–103, at 99; G. Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate* (Cambridge 1978) 86; A. Smith, "The Pagan Neoplatonists' Response to Christianity,"

At the same time, most scholars overlooked the fact that some of the treatise's ideas clearly contradict the philosophical constructions of Julian himself. For example, according to the Apostate (and Iamblichus)⁵ evil is immanent to the sensual plane of existence: "evil, exiled from the gods, now moves on earth; and in the oracles the gods often call the earth refuse, and exhort us to escape thence," καὶ διὰ τῶν λογίων οἱ θεοὶ σκύβαλον αὐτὸ πολλαχθῶ καλοῦσι, καὶ φεύγειν ἐντεῦθεν [πολλαχθῶ] παρακελεύονται (Jul. *Or.* 5.175b–c, transl. W. C. Wright; cf. *Or.* 2.90a).⁶ At the same time, the author of *De diis* believed that all the Universe, including the perceptible world, was invariably good (*De diis* 7, cf. 9). In his view, evil as such did not exist and was essentially the absence of good (12).⁷ Moreover, *De diis* criticized the Egyptians' conception of the gods, whereas Julian was an admirer of the pagan cults of the Nile valley.⁸ Finally, the treatise does not raise several of the major themes of Julian's philosophy: there is not a single word about the

The Maynooth Review 14 (1989) 25–41, at 33; P. Athanassiadi, *Julian: An Intellectual Biography* (London 1992) 154, and "Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination: The Testimony of Iamblichus," *JRS* 83 (1993) 115–130, at 122; J. Bouffartigue, *L'Empereur Julien et la culture de son temps* (Paris 1992) 597, and "Saloustios (5)," *DPhA* 6 (2016) 91–95; V. Vacanti, *Sallustius. Gli dei e il mondo* (Turin 1998) 11, 16; G. Ventrella, "Per l'attribuzione a Saturnino Secondo Salustio della Ὑπόθεσις metrica dell'Edipo a Colono," *RevPhil* 82 (2008) 405–418, at 413; J. Stenger, *Hellenische Identität in der Spätantike: Pagane Autoren und ihr Unbehagen an der eigenen Zeit* (Berlin 2009) 321; O. Nicholson, "Myth," *The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity* (Oxford 2018) 1051.

⁵ Iamb. *De myst.* 3.13, 31; 4.7.

⁶ In another hymn Julian stated that the Sun-God fills the entire cosmos with its goodness, which one could see as a contradiction to his belief in the existence of evil as a separate entity. However, the emperor only reported that the God's blessing reaches even the lowest planes of the Universe. It enhances them, but only temporarily (*Or.* 4.144d). Thus, their innermost essence remains unchanged. There is then no contradiction.

⁷ Athanassiadi, *Julian* 158–159.

⁸ Nock, *Sallustius* XLIX; Athanassiadi, *Julian* 159. For evidence of Julian's interest in Egyptian cults see Amm. Marc. 22.14.6; T. Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis Aegyptiacae* IV (Bonn 1924) 538 ff.

emperor's solar theosophy,⁹ no criticism of contemporary Cynics, and most importantly no explicit criticism of Christianity.¹⁰ As observed by I. Tanaseanu-Döbler, "Salutius' compendium of Neoplatonic religiosity would not have fitted into Julian's ideal classroom."¹¹ All this casts serious doubt on the widespread idea that *De diis* was created as the 'official catechism' of the emperor's new 'pagan church'. The only thing that can be stated with certainty is that the author was somewhat influenced by the emperor's writings. This provides the *terminus post quem* but does not prove that the work had any connection with Julian's reign and reforms.

In fact, the only solid argument in favor of the idea that the treatise was written in Julian's time is the name of its author. The notion that *De diis* was composed by one of the Apostate's associates was firmly established by the beginning of the twentieth century. Soon the polemic on its authorship was reduced to a discussion of the two most obvious candidates:¹² Flavius Sallustius,¹³ *Praefectus Praetorio Galliarum* in 361–363, consul 363; and Saturninius Secundus Salutius, a close friend of emperor Julian, *Praefectus Praetorio Orientis* in 361–365 and 365–366/7.¹⁴

The identification of the author with Flavius Sallustius was

⁹ The author did not use or even did not know Julian's hymn "To King Helios" (*Or.* 4) dedicated to Salutius, in which the essence of the emperor's solar theology was set forth.

¹⁰ P. Célérier, "Saloustios, philosophe julienien qui ne cite pas Julien," *L'ombre de l'empereur Julien: Le destin des écrits de Julien chez les auteurs païens et chrétiens* (Nanterre 2013) 89–104, at 89–90.

¹¹ I. Tanaseanu-Döbler, "Religious Education in Late Antique Paganism," in *Religious Education in Pre-Modern Europe* (Leiden 2012) 97–146, at 126.

¹² They were earlier thought to be the same person. E.g. E. Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen* III.2 (Leipzig 1868) 664–665 n.3; G. Murray, *Five Stages of Greek Religion* (Oxford 1925) 217–218.

¹³ *PLRE I* (Cambridge 1971) 797–798 "Sallustius 5"; Bouffartigue, *DPhA* 6 (2016) 95–96 "Saloustios (6)."

¹⁴ *PLRE I* 814–817 "Secundus 3"; R. von Haehling, *Die Religionszugehörigkeit der hohen Amtsträger des Römischen Reiches seit Constantins I* (Bonn 1978) 64–66; S. Olszaniec, *Prosopographical Studies on the Court Elite in the Roman Empire* (Toruń 2013) 356–372; Bouffartigue, *DPhA* 6 (2016) 91–95.

already proposed by Cumont, who, however, did not explain the reasons for his choice in favor of the *PPG*.¹⁵ Later, an argument in favor of this was added by R. Étienne, who considered a passage from the poem of Ausonius praising the rhetor Alcimus Aletheus (*Salustio plus conferment libri tui quam consulatus addidit*: Auson. *Prof.* 2.23–24) as a confirmation that the consul was engaged in literary activity and therefore *must have been* (sic) the author of the treatise. Developing his thought, he suggested that Sallustius' consulship was a reward for the composition of *De diis*.¹⁶ Even though Étienne's concept had a few supporters,¹⁷ it did not become widespread. As G. W. Bowersock noted, Étienne misunderstood Ausonius, who was not talking about the works of the consul himself, but rather about some "books" (probably panegyrics) of Aletheus that glorified Sallustius.¹⁸ In general, except for the fact that Sallustius was a high-ranking official of Julian, the sources report nothing that could directly or indirectly confirm the connection of the author of *De diis* with this Sallustius.¹⁹

The second and by far the most popular candidate for the role of the author of the treatise is Saturninius Secundus Salutius. A seemingly compelling argument in favor of attributing *De diis* to the *PPO* are the references to Salutius' love of history (Eunap. *V.Soph.* 7.5.9), rhetoric, and philosophy. Julian mentioned that although Salutius was of Celtic origin, he was "worthy to be counted among the most distinguished Greeks ... for your consummate skill in oratory; in philosophy too you are thoroughly versed, a field wherein the Greeks alone have attained the highest rank," ἄνδρα εἰς τοὺς πρώτους τῶν Ἑλλήνων τελούντα ... κατὰ ῥητορείαν ἄκρον καὶ φιλοσοφίας οὐκ ἄπειρον, ἧς Ἕλληνες μόνοι τὰ κράτιστα μετεληλύθασι (*Or.* 8.252a–b). Moreover, the emperor

¹⁵ Cumont, *REG* 16 (1892) 52; cf. A. Piganiol, *L'empire chrétien, 325–395* (Paris 1947) 154.

¹⁶ R. Étienne, "Flavius Sallustius et Secundus Salutius," *REA* 65 (1963) 104–113.

¹⁷ E.g. the most influential *PLRE* I 796 "Sallustius 1."

¹⁸ Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate* 125.

¹⁹ Bouffartigue, *DPhA* 6 (2016) 91–95.

dedicated a hymn “To King Helios” (*Or.* 4.157) to Salustius,²⁰ which seems to confirm that the latter had at least some interest in theology. Another argument in favor of identifying the author of the treatise with the *PPO* was put forward by J. Rinaldi, who noted that the mentions of Tyche (*De diis* 9.7) and Cybele (*De diis* 4) might indicate that the treatise was composed in Antioch, a city where the cults of these goddesses were especially popular, and where Salustius resided in 362–early 363.²¹ At this point, the attribution of *De diis* to the *PPO* is a historiographical *locus communis*.²²

²⁰ J. Dillon mistakenly writes that this work was dedicated to Flavius Sallustius: “The Theology of Julian’s *Hymn to King Helios*,” *Itaca* 15 (1999) 103–115, at 103. Julian wrote the hymn for the celebration of the day of Sol Invictus at the end of December 362 (*Jul. Or.* 4.131d), shortly after the composition of the *Caesares* (157c), which, in turn, were compiled at the Saturnalia of 362. See R. Sardiello, *Giuliano Imperatore. Simposio I Cesari* (Lecce 2000) vii–ix. Already on 5 March 363, i.e. less than three months after the publication of his *Caesares*, Julian embarked on a Persian campaign (*Amm. Marc.* 23.2.6). As the emperor himself testified, the addressee had read and highly appreciated *Caesares* (*Or.* 4.157c). As winter sailing in the Mediterranean Sea was virtually nonexistent, the emperor’s work and Sallustius’ review could not have been transported from Antioch to Gaul and back again in time. See A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire I* (Norman 1964) 402–403; R. Duncan-Jones, *Structure and Scale in the Roman Economy* (Cambridge 1990) 7–29; P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison 1992) 9–10.

²¹ G. Rinaldi, “Sull’identificazione dell’autore del Περὶ θεῶν καὶ κόσμου,” *Koinonia* 2 (1978) 117–152, at 135–136.

²² E.g. G. Rochefort, “La démonologie de Saloustios et ses rapports avec celle de l’empereur Julien,” *BAGB* 16 (1957) 53–61, and *Sallustius XII–XXIII*; Rinaldi, *Koinonia* 2 (1978) 117–152; J.-L. Desnier, “Salustius – Salustius,” *REA* 85 (1983) 53–65; Athanassiadi, *Julian* 159 ff. and *JRS* 83 (1993) 122; Vacanti, *Sallustius*; R. D. Giuseppe, *Salustio. Sugli dei e il mondo* (Milan 2000); D. J. O’Meara, *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford 2003) 19; K. Rosen, *Julian: Kaiser, Gott und Christenhasser* (Stuttgart 2006) 269; Stenger, *Hellenische Identität* 320 ff.; J. Lössl, “Julian’s ‘Consolation to Himself on the Departure of the Excellent Salustius’: Rhetoric and Philosophy in the Fourth Century,” in N. Baker-Brian et al. (eds.), *Emperor and Author: The Writings of Julian the Apostate* (Swansea 2012) 61–74, at 63; R. Cribiore, *Libanius the Sophist: Rhetoric, Reality, and Religion in the Fourth Century* (Ithaca 2013) 218; S.

However, some scholars were right to note that all arguments in favor of identification with Salustius are indirect.²³ In other words, the ultimate conclusion on the question of the authorship of *De diis* has not yet been reached.

Nevertheless, there are some hints in the text that may lead to a clue to this problem. First of all, there are reasons to believe that *De diis* was not written in Antioch. The cults of Tyche-Fortuna and Cybele, the Mother of the gods, were widespread in all corners of the empire, and therefore can hardly help to localize this text.²⁴ At the same time, the treatise has unambiguous references to a very different part of the Roman world. Arguing that idols are the personification of life, the author declares that for this reason they are often crafted in the shape of animals, τὰ δὲ ἀγάλματα τὴν ζωὴν—καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ζῴοις ἀπείκασται (*De diis* 15). There was only one region in the Mediterranean where statues of sacred animals were common: Egypt. Thus, he was clearly aware of the peculiarities of the traditional cults of the Nile valley. One may assume that he had visited Egypt or even lived in the region. At the same time, there is no evidence that Saturninius Secundus Salutius and

Tougher, “Julian the Apologist: Christians and Pagans on the Mother of the Gods,” in R. Flower et al. (eds.), *Rhetoric and Religious Identity in Late Antiquity* (Oxford 2020) 67–82, at 81; J. R. Stenger, *Education in Late Antiquity: Challenges, Dynamism, and Reinterpretation* (New York 2022) 97.

²³ E.g. Haehling, *Die Religionszugehörigkeit* 65: “Ob er mit dem Verfasser ... ‘dem Katechismus der heidnischen Reaktion’, gleichzusetzen ist, läßt sich nicht einwandfrei entscheiden”; E. C. Clarke, “Communication, Human and Divine: Saloustios Reconsidered,” *Phronesis* 43 (1998) 326–350, at 349: “It must be admitted that the link remains one of probability rather than certainty”; Bouffartigue, *DPhA* 6 (2016) 96: “l’identification de l’auteur ... à Saloustios-Salustius n’est nullement certaine”; R. Brendel, “Detlef Melsbach. Bildung und Religion. Strukturen paganer Theologie in Salustios’ *Περὶ θεῶν καὶ κόσμου*,” *ByzZeit* 113 (2020) 1102–1111, at 1107: “Daher erscheint mir die Praxis der RE und der PLRE, Salustios in einem eigenen Eintrag unabhängig von Salustius und Secundus zu behandeln, auch weiterhin die sinnvollste zu sein.”

²⁴ Although they were indeed quite popular in Antioch. See B. Garstad, “The Tyche Sacrifices in John Malalas: Virgin Sacrifice and Fourth-Century Polemical History,” *ICS* 30 (2005) 83–135.

Flavius Sallustius ever visited Egypt.

Moreover, *De diis* hints that it may have been written long after the death of the Apostate. Arguing for the necessity of blood sacrifices,²⁵ the author reports: “living animals are sacrificed by the blessed among men today and were sacrificed by all the men of old ... Concerning this subject I have said enough,” ζῶα θύουσιν ἄνθρωποι, οἳ τε νῦν εὐδαίμονες καὶ πάντες οἱ πάλαι ... Καὶ περὶ μὲν τούτων ἱκανά (*De diis* 26, transl. Nock). If this was written under Julian, the author’s statement that in his time sacrifices were offered only by the “blessed” seems to make little sense. Down to the end of the fourth century, blood sacrifices (mostly private) remained a common element of pagan cult in many regions of the empire,²⁶ and during the reign of the Apostate sacrifices were

²⁵ Sallustius clearly did not support the views of Porphyry, who argued against blood sacrifice, claiming that the gods only require sacrifices of incense or words. The author of *De diis* followed Iamblichus, who gave animal sacrifice a crucial position in his system of theurgy. He thought that “prayers separated from sacrifices are only words, prayers with sacrifices are ‘ensouled’ words, the word giving power to the life and the life ensouling the words,” αἱ μὲν χωρὶς θυσιῶν εὐχαὶ λόγοι μόνον εἰσὶν, αἱ δὲ μετὰ θυσιῶν ἔμψυχοι λόγοι, τοῦ μὲν λόγου τὴν ζωὴν δυναμοῦντος τῆς δὲ ζωῆς τὸν λόγον ψυχούσης (*De diis* 16). On Sallustius’ attitude toward sacrifice see T. C. Krulak, “Θυσία and Theurgy: Sacrificial Theory in Fourth- and Fifth-Century Platonism,” *CQ* 64 (2014) 353–382, at 361–364. On his borrowings from Iamblichus see Rinaldi, *Koinonia* 2 (1978) 144–145.

²⁶ The problem of the significance of blood sacrifices for fourth-century paganism is a topic of long scholarly debate. See e.g. S. Bradbury, “Julian’s Pagan Revival and the Decline of Blood Sacrifice,” *Phoenix* 49 (1995) 341–356. In fact there is no evidence that Porphyry’s views on the futility of blood sacrifice gained any popularity among pagans. For the continuation of blood sacrifice in Late Antiquity see e.g. K. W. Harl, “Sacrifice and Pagan Belief in Fifth- and Sixth-Century Byzantium,” *P&P* 128 (1990) 7–27; F. R. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization* (Boston 2001), esp. I 1–97; M. R. Salzman, “The End of Public Sacrifice: Changing Definitions of Sacrifice in Post-Constantinian Rome and Italy,” in J. Wright Knust et al. (eds.), *Ancient Mediterranean Sacrifice* (New York 2011) 167–184, esp. 177; G. Deligiannakis, “Late Paganism on the Aegean Islands and Processes of Christianisation,” in L. Lavan et al. (eds.), *The Archaeology of Late Antique “Paganism”* (Leiden 2011) 311–346, at 319.

All this forced the followers of the ancient gods to conceal their true attitude to the new faith. Henceforth the pagans allowed themselves to criticize Christianity only in the form of vague allusions. In the treatises of Proclus Diadochus and his pupil Marinus of Neapolis (middle to second half of the fifth century) the Christians are already referred to only metaphorically: “the non-sober neighbors” (μὴ νήφοντες γείτονες), “the godless” (ἄθεοι), “those moving things not to be moved” (κινεῖν τὰ ἀκίνητα), etc.³² Somewhat similar allusions are found in the early-sixth-century *Vita Isidori* by Damascius Scholarchus,³³ about whom Photius wrote: “our holy religion is visibly the object of frequent attacks on his part, although not frank attacks, and of a disguised malevolence,” τῆς ἱερᾶς ἡμῶν, εἰ καὶ δειλιώση καὶ λαθραιοτέρᾳ κακοφροσύνη, ὅμως οὐκ ὀλιγάκις φαίνεται καθυλακτῶν εὐσεβείας (*Bibl. cod.* 181, transl. R. Pearse). The author of *De diis* followed the same trend: there is not a single direct reference to Christians and Christianity in his work. However, Sallustius undoubtedly had Christians in mind when speaking of godlessness (ἀθεία, *De diis* 18–19).

Therefore, the author of *De diis* probably lived after the ban of blood sacrifices and may have been in some way connected with Egypt. This suits one particular Sallustius of the fifth century. His biography is preserved in the *Vita Isidori*. According to Damascius, this Sallustius was a Syrian, who had initially pursued a career as a rhetor. Having earned a reputation as an expert on Demos-

into prison (Dam. *V.Isid.* 45B, ed. P. Athanassiadi). According to Augustine, soon after 410 a certain pagan author wrote a refutation of *De civitate Dei*, but did not dare to make it public out of fear of possible reprisal (Aug. *De div. D.* 5.26). After 412 Eunapius decided to rewrite his historical work, removing the fiercest outbursts against Christians (Phot. *Bibl. cod.* 77). On the dating of Eunapius' *Historia* see M. A. Vedeshkin, “The Date of Eunapius' *Vitae Sophistarum* and the Establishment of the Martyr Cult in Menouthis,” *Antichthon* 56 (2022) 226–235.

³² H.-D. Saffrey, “Allusions antichrétiennes chez Proclus: le diadoque platonicien,” *RSPH* 59 (1975) 553–563.

³³ E.g. *V.Isid.* 43E, 45B, 108, 113I, 118B.

thenes,³⁴ he left his mentor Eunoios and moved to Alexandria, where he continued to study the art of eloquence (*V.Isid.* 60). Sometime later he turned to philosophy. Having gained fame as an outstanding philosopher, he joined the court of the Western Roman pagan warlord Marcellinus, the virtually independent ruler of Dalmatia from 454 to 468 (69D).³⁵ Contrary to the opinion of E. J. Watts, the philosopher did not end his life at Salona.³⁶ After the assassination of his patron, he was teaching in Athens. This came to an end when he quarreled with the scholarch Proclus over their pupil Zeno (67–68).³⁷ Accompanied by the young philosopher Isidore, Sallustius once again moved to Alexandria (60),³⁸

³⁴ He is probably identical with the eponymous author of scholia to Demosthenes and Herodotus mentioned in the *Suda* σ 60 (IV 315 Adler); I. V. Denisova, “Салустий - афинский философ и софист V в.,” *Проблемы истории, филологии, культуры* 1 (2023) 181–195, at 186. M. di Branco, *DPhA* 6 (2016) 96–100 “Saloustios (7),” denies the possibility that it was the same Sallustius, but does not provide any argument.

³⁵ P. MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords* (Oxford 2002) 15–68.

³⁶ E. J. Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria* (Berkeley 2006) 105. *Contra*, Denisova, *Проблемы истории, филологии, культуры* 1 (2023) 191.

³⁷ The reasons for this quarrel are unclear. Perhaps the rupture between Sallustius and the scholarch was caused by the Syrian’s pedagogical manner. He believed that only a chosen few could philosophize and consistently discouraged young men from studying any kind of philosophy. According to Damascius, his master accordingly separated those who were sincerely devoted to philosophy from the rest of the students (*V.Isid.* 66A, E–F). In A. I. Szoka’s view, Sallustius attempted to turn Zeno away from philosophy which caused the break with Proclus: “Salustios – Divine Man of Cynicism in Late Antiquity,” in M. K. Dziewanowski et al. (eds.), *Divine Men and Women in the History and Society of Late Hellenism* (Cracow 2013) 113–122, at 120. E. V. Afonasin believes that the conflict erupted over an academic dispute about the meaning of virtue and piety: *Философская история Платоновской Академии. Тексты и исследования* (St. Petersburg 2022) 94. Watts discusses the idea that the quarrel with Sallustius may have led to Proclus’ temporary exile from Athens (Marinus *V.Procl.* 15) but admits that this is unlikely: *City and School* 105–106.

³⁸ I. V. Denisova erroneously dates the relocation of Sallustius and Isidore to Alexandria between 485–489: *Проблемы истории, филологии, культуры* 1

where he remained at least until the early 480s.³⁹ His further fate

(2023) 189). In 481 Sallustius had already left Athens and was in the capital of Egypt (see below). Presumably the error arose from confusion of Isidore's first (470s) and second (485) visits to Attica. On the chronology of Isidore's travels see Watts, *City and School* 115 n.15.

³⁹ Sallustius' stay in Alexandria in 481–482 is confirmed by a report of his meeting with the poet, philosopher, and adventurer Pamprepius of Panopolis. A. M. Szoka and I. V. Denisova erroneously assume that this encounter took place in Athens between 473 and 476, when Pamprepius was teaching at a grammar school there and studying philosophy under Proclus (Malch. fr.23 Blockley, cf. Rhetorius' horoscope 117): Szoka, in *Divine Men and Women* 116; Denisova, *Проблемы истории, филологии, культуры* 1 (2023) 189. According to Damascius the meeting took place at a time when Pamprepius was at "the height of his power" (μέγιστον ἤδη δυναμένῳ ἐντυχῶν, *V.Isid.* 66A). As is known, before 477 Pamprepius was an obscure grammarian (Rhet. 114). His star rose after he moved to Constantinople, where he won a victory in a philosophical debate on the properties of the soul, after which he was honored with acquaintance with the *magister militum* Illus, who declared the grammarian "the most learned of all the teachers of Constantinople" (*V.Isid.* 77D) and granted him a pension (Malch. fr.23). The peak of Pamprepius' career fell in 479–484, when, through the patronage of his benefactor, he obtained the posts of *quaestor*, patrician, and honorary consul (Johan. Ant. fr.234.3 Mariev/303 Roberto; Rhet. 117). It was about this period of Pamprepius' life that Malchus wrote "he had great power" (fr.23). Rhetorius' horoscope indicates that Pamprepius visited Egypt at age 41, hence 481 or early 482 (Rhet. 117). During his trip he visited Alexandria, where he met with local followers of traditional cults, persuading them to support Illus, who allegedly plotted to restore pagan worship in the empire. Damascius reports that the leaders of the pagan community of Alexandria considered Illus' venture a gamble and gave Pamprepius the coldest welcome (*V.Isid.* 113f–R), and that his teacher Isidore distrusted Pamprepius and avoided communicating with him. It seems reasonable to assume that the meeting between Sallustius and Pamprepius mentioned by Damascius took place at the same time. For the reconstruction of Pamprepius' biography see J. R. Asmus, "Pamprepius, ein byzantinischer Gelehrter und Staatsmann des 5. Jahrhunderts.," *ByzZeit* 22 (1913) 320–347; M. Salamon, "Pamprepiusz z Panopolis – pisarz, profesor, polityk, obrońca pogaństwa w cesarstwie wschodnim," in M. Salamon et al. (eds.), *Studia classica et byzantina: Alexandro Krawczuk oblata* (Cracow 1996) 163–195; E. Livrea, "The Last Pagan at the Court of Zeno: Poetry and Politics of Pamprepius of Panopolis," in A. de F. Herederoet al. (eds.), *New Perspectives on Late Antiquity in the Eastern Roman Empire* (Newcastle 2014) 2–30; R. Fichera,

is unknown.⁴⁰ As one can see, the candidacy of Sallustius corresponds to the time (after the ban on pagan sacrifices) and possible place (Egypt, namely Alexandria) of the composition of *De diis*.⁴¹

It is important to note that the idea of attributing *De diis* to Sallustius the Syrian was entertained by E. Zeller. Nevertheless, he ruled out any possibility of this on the grounds that the treatise was written by a Platonist, whereas Sallustius was a Cynic.⁴² This thesis was subsequently repeated in one way or another by successive generations of historians.⁴³ To judge from the testimony of Damascius, Sallustius did indeed imitate ancient Cynics in many ways. He often traveled barefoot (*V.Isid.* 66B–C) and ate only raw food (66D). According to Simplicius, who probably heard about Sallustius’ oddities from his mentor, the Syrian tried to determine his body’s ability to resist pain by holding a burning ember on his

“Divining to Gain (or Lose) the Favour of Usurpers: the Case of Pamprepius of Panopolis,” in K. C. Choda et al. (eds.), *Gaining and Losing Imperial Favour in Late Antiquity: Representation and Reality* (Leiden 2019) 219–240; M. McEvoy, “A Pagan Philosopher at the Imperial Court: The Case of Pamprepius,” in E. Anagnostou-Laoutide et al. (eds.), *Eastern Christianity and Late Antique Philosophy* (Leiden 2020) 261–279.

⁴⁰ The hypothesis of Szoka and Denisova, that in the late 480s Sallustius returned to Athens where he became tutor to Damascius and then to Simplicius, is groundless (Szoka, in *Divine Men and Women* 119–120; Denisova, *Проблемы истории, филологии, культуры* 1 [2023] 189). Their arguments are based only on the fact that Damascius communicated with Sallustius. However, this communication may well have taken place in Alexandria. As is shown above concerning 481/2, Sallustius lived in the Egyptian capital. At about the same time or a little earlier, the young Damascius came to Alexandria to study rhetoric. See P. Hoffmann, *DPhA* 2 (1994) 541–593 “Damascius”; P. Athanassiadi, *Damascius: The Philosophical History* (Athens 1999) 20 ff.; Watts, *City and School* 205 n.3.

⁴¹ There was another philosopher Sallustius in the fifth century but there is almost no information about him, only that he died in 423: Marcellinus Com. *Chron.* A.D. 423.4.

⁴² Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen* III.2 664 n.3.

⁴³ Cumont, *REG* 16 (1892) 52, 54; Nock, *Sallustius* CI; Rochefort, *Sallustius* XI; Clarke, *Phronesis* 43 (1998) 349; Bouffartigue, *DPhA* 6 (2016) 91–95. So far as I know, the only scholar seriously considering the possibility is Denisova, *Проблемы истории, филологии, культуры* 1 (2023) 186–88.

thigh (*In Epict.* 14.40, p.266 Hadot). Finally, Sallustius was known as a mocker, always harassing his colleagues and students with tricky questions and sardonic remarks (*V.Isid.* 60, 66A).

At the same time, the Late Antique admirers of Antisthenes' doctrine were not necessarily god-mockers.⁴⁴ For example, the Cynic Asclepiades was a devoted admirer of the Heavenly Goddess and always carried a statue of her with him (*Amm. Marc.* 22.13, cf. *Jul. Or.* 7.224d) and was considered a pagan 'saint' (*Symm. Ep.* 5.31). One of the participants of the Saturnalia feast described by Macrobius, the Egyptian Cynic Horus, was known to be an expert in the religious customs of his homeland (*Sat.* 1.7.3, 14–16).⁴⁵ According to the *Vita Isidori*, Sallustius himself was no stranger to theosophy. Not only did the Syrian philosopher boldly defend his religious views in disputes with Christians (66A), but he was also known as a specialist in the "things divine" among the Alexandrian pagan intellectuals.⁴⁶ Sallustius' engagement with theosophy is indicated by Damascius' report that he "called a true belief about the gods a fifth virtue" (66A).⁴⁷ This idea is remarkably

⁴⁴ However, among Cynics earlier in the fourth century there were still some who mocked myths and ancient religious rites. See e.g. the polemic of emperor Julian with the Cynic Heraclius and his companions (*Jul. Or.* 6, 7). On this dispute see J. Bouffartigue, "Le cynisme dans le cursus philosophique au IV^e siècle. Le témoignage de l'Empereur Julian," in M.-O. Goulet-Cazé (ed.), *Le cynisme ancien et ses prolongements* (Paris 1993) 339–358; R. Smith, *Julian's Gods: Religion and Philosophy in the Thought and Action of Julian the Apostate* (London 1995) 49–90; A. Marcone, "The Forging of an Hellenic Orthodoxy: Julian's Speeches against the Cynics," in *Emperor and Author* 239–250; H.-G. Nesselrath, "Julian's Philosophical Writings," in S. Rebenich et al. (eds.), *A Companion to Julian the Apostate* (Leiden 2020) 38–63, at 43–51.

⁴⁵ Szoka, in *Divine Men and Women* 114–115.

⁴⁶ This is evidenced, in particular, by an anecdote about an exchange between Sallustius and Pamprepicus, who pestered the Syrian with questions about how the gods relate to men, and received the answer: "Everyone knows that I have not yet become a god, nor you a man," οὐκ οἶδεν, ὡς οὐτ' ἐγὼ πάποτε θεὸς ἐγενόμην οὔτε σὺ ἄνθρωπος (66A, transl. Athanassiadi).

⁴⁷ In addition to the four cardinal Platonic virtues (wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice). See Athanassiadi, *Julian* 175 n.153.

consonant with the views of the author of *De diis*, who regarded God-worship as a complement to and derivative of Plato's four virtues: ch. 10 of the treatise provides an outline of the essence of the doctrine of virtue, and the final section concludes that the pursuit of virtue leads the soul to God.

Moreover, as pointed out by M. di Branco, neither Damascius nor Simplicius directly called Sallustius a Cynic.⁴⁸ Damascius only reported that he “philosophized in a cynic manner” (κυνικώτερον δὲ ἐφιλοσόφει) or was a “cynicizer” (κυνίζων) (*V.Isid.* 66A–B). Sallustius did indeed adhere to some Cynic practices, which, however, does not necessarily imply that he was a stranger to Platonism. As mentioned above, the Syrian philosopher had taught for some time at the Academy (66G, 68), and therefore was well acquainted with the curriculum of the Athenian Neoplatonists, which also included the works of Iamblichus,⁴⁹ who was abundantly quoted by the author of *De diis*. It would be more appropriate to call Sallustius not a pure Cynic but a Cynicizing Platonist.⁵⁰ In other words, not only was the Syrian interested in theosophy but he also had the necessary competence to compile a Neoplatonic ‘handbook of pagan piety’. At the same time, Sallustius’ fascination with Cynicism may provide an answer to the question of the reasons behind the absence of criticism of this school in *De diis*. Contrary to emperor Julian, who despised the

⁴⁸ Di Branco, *DPhA* 6 (2016) 96–100.

⁴⁹ On the exceptional role of Iamblichus for the Athenian Neoplatonists of the fifth and sixth centuries see Watts, *City and School*, esp. 91–92; C. Steel, “Proclus,” in L. Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge 2010) 630–653; I. Tanaseanu-Döbler, *Theurgy in Late Antiquity: The Invention of a Ritual Tradition* (Göttingen 2013) 186 ff.; M. Marcos, “Iamblichus’ Epistles, Fourth-Century Philosophical and Political Epistolography and the Neoplatonic Curricula at Athens and Alexandria,” *CQ* 68 (2018) 275–291.

⁵⁰ See J. R. Asmus, “Der Kyniker Sallustius bei Damascius,” *NJbb* 25 (1910) 504–522, at 521–522; E. J. Watts, “Doctrine, Anecdote, and Action: Reconsidering the Social History of the Last Platonists,” *CP* 106 (2011) 226–244, at 239 n.94; P. Janiszewski, K. Stebnicka, and E. Szabat, *Prosopography of Greek Rhetors and Sophists of the Roman Empire* (New York 2014) 214.

contemporary Cynics, Sallustius of Syria was an admirer of this line of philosophical thought.

Considering the connection between Sallustius the Syrian and the Athenian Neoplatonists, one cannot help but notice obvious parallels between some provisions of *De diis* and the works of Proclus. Both the author of the treatise (12) and the scholar considered evil to be nothing more than the absence of good.⁵¹ Furthermore, unlike the first generations of Neoplatonists, both philosophers denied the possibility of complete liberation of the soul from the bonds of this world.⁵² Besides that, they held the same notion on the problem of the eternity of the Universe (*De diis* 7.1–2; Proc. *De aet. mund.* 6.2, 15, 17.1, ed. Lang-Marco).⁵³ Finally, Proclus and the author of *De diis* had mostly identical views on the doctrine of the twelve intra-cosmic gods divided into triads: the first—the cosmos-creating gods: Zeus, Poseidon, Hephaestus; the second—the cosmos-animating goddesses: Demeter, Hera, Artemis; the third—the harmonizing gods: Apollo, Aphrodite, Hermes; the fourth—the guardian gods: Hestia, Athena, Ares (*De diis* 6). As noted by A. F. Losev, both the arrangement of the triads

⁵¹ See 230 above. For a selection of testimonies on the problem of theodicy in Proclus see J. Phillips, *Order from Disorder: Proclus' Doctrine of Evil and its Roots in Ancient Platonism* (Leiden 2007) 23–42. Cf. Nock, *Sallustius* LXXVII–LXXIX, C n.12. See also J.-M. Narbonne, “Matter and Evil in the Neoplatonic Tradition,” in S. Slaveva-Griffin et al. (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism* (London 2014) 231–244, at 239–242.

⁵² A. Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition: A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism* (The Hague 1974) 58.

⁵³ It is noteworthy that after the publication of Proclus' treatise in support of the eternity of the cosmos, this problem became the object of fierce polemics between pagan and Christian intellectuals. Aeneas of Gaza, Zacharias of Mytilene, Procopius of Gaza, and finally John Philoponus tried to refute Proclus' arguments. Proclus' position was defended by the Alexandrian and Athenian Neoplatonists Ammonius, Olympiodorus, and Simplicius. See E. J. Watts, “Winning the Intracommunal Dialogues: Zacharias Scholasticus' *Life of Severus*,” *J ECS* 13 (2005) 437–464, and *City and School* 227–229, 236–246, 251–258; R. Sorabji, “Waiting for Philoponus,” in A. Marmodoro et al. (eds.), *Causation and Creation in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge 2015) 71–93.

and the explanation of the functions of the individual gods in the works of Sallustius and Proclus are very much the same:⁵⁴ “Proclus found nothing better than to fully use for himself all this twelve-stage classification of Sallustius in its entirety, and even literally, though in a different order and with a different terminology.”⁵⁵ In other words, Losev thought that one of the most prominent thinkers of antiquity was intellectually dependent on the author of a crash course of pagan theology. The opposite seems more probable, as Sallustius the Syrian taught at the Academy of Proclus in late 460–470s and must have had at least some familiarity with the works of the scholar.

Thus, there are good reasons to think that the creation of *De diis* had nothing to do with emperor Julian’s attempt to revive traditional cults. It could possibly have been written a century later by Sallustius of Syria, an Alexandrian Neoplatonist who was quite fond of some practices of the Cynic school and had been a member of the circle of Proclus. It can be assumed that *De diis* was composed to encourage the educated pagans who already lived in a predominantly Christian environment, and to promote the preservation of the traditions of pagan worship and ancestral customs.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ On the direct parallels between the theologies of Proclus and Sallustius see in detail A. F. Losev, *История античной эстетики VII* (Kharkiv 2000) 427–436; Vacanti, *Sallustius* 63–65 nn.42–45. Cf. Denisova, *Проблемы истории, филологии, культуры* 1 (2023) 188.

⁵⁵ *История античной эстетики* 436: “Прокл не нашел ничего лучшего, как полностью использовать для себя всю эту двенадцатиступенную классификацию Саллюстия и целиком, и даже буквально, хотя и в другом порядке, и с другой терминологией.” Cf. A. Lecerf, “Iamblichus and Julian’s ‘Third Demiurge’: A Proposition,” in E. Afonasin et al. (eds.), *Iamblichus and the Foundations of Late Platonism* (Leiden 2012) 177–201, at 198.

⁵⁶ It is tempting to assume that the composition of the treatise may have been somehow connected to one of the attempts to restore paganism in the Roman Empire of the second half of the fifth century. Three of these are known from the account of Damascius. The first was related to the activities of the Western emperor Anthemius, allegedly a crypto pagan, who planned to restore the ancient cults (*V.Isid.* 77A). The second was connected to the activities of the philosopher and statesman Severianus, who supposedly

However, it is important to note that while attributing this work to the fifth-century Sallustius is an attractive alternative to the traditional identification, the text in question cannot be precisely dated on the basis of the available evidence, so all attempts to determine the exact time of its composition and identify its author are inevitably circumstantial.

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planned to realize a pagan revival during the reign of Zeno (115A). And finally, the third was the rebellion of Illus and Pamprepus. Given the contempt with which Sallustius the Syrian treated Pamprepus, he would hardly be involved in the latter affair. See Asmus, *Njbb* 25 (1910) 521; R. von Haehling, “Damascius und die heidnische Opposition im 5. Jahrhundert nach Christus,” *JbAC* 23 (1980) 82–95; R. Kosinski, *The Emperor Zeno: Religion and Politics* (Cracow 2010) 154–165. Too little is known about Severianus’ plot to draw any conclusions. The possibility of a connection between Sallustius’ work and the plan of Anthemius seems more promising. None of the contemporary Western authors reported the adherence of the emperor to ancient cults (see MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords* 53). The story of Anthemius’ paganism could have been taken as gossip spread by some of the Alexandrian pagans, if not for several aspects of his internal policy that indirectly testify in favor of Damascius’ report. Anthemius clearly preferred adherents of ancient cults in making appointments to the highest offices. For example, the pagan senator Messius Phoebus Severus received the titles of patrician and consul and held the office of *Praefectus Urbi*, while another pagan, the ruler of Dalmatia, Marcellinus, became a *comes* and a patrician (*V.Isid.* 69; Marc. Com. *Chron.* A.D. 468; Hydat. *Chron.* A.D. 466). Since Marcellinus was a patron of Sallustius the Syrian, the connection between *De diis* and Anthemius’ plans seems plausible.