

Symmachus. Oration V. For Trygetius. 9 January 376.¹

Introduction

As Symmachus explains in *Ep.* 1.44, he had promised his friend Trygetius to support his request to have his son named praetor, and took the opportunity to thank the senate on behalf of his father, who had been living in voluntary exile. The only knowledge we have about Trygetius (*PLRE* I Trygetius 1) we owe to the letter of Symmachus, although Matthews 1967: 504 offers further speculation about the son (possibly the man now identified as *PLRE* I Trygetius 2) and other descendants, e.g., those now called Trygetius 1 and Trygetius 3 in *PLRE* II.

L. Aurelius Avianus Symmachus Phosphorius (*PLRE* I Symmachus 3) was prefect of the city in 364–365; Ammianus 27.3.3–4 provides a brief narrative about him and his successful tenure in office, *quo instante urbs sacratissima otio copiisque abundantius solito fruebatur*. During his term the reconstruction of the pons Valentinianus was begun, and the emperors nominated him to dedicate it upon its completion.² Some time later,³ in consequence of a remark he had made or was said to have made about refusing to sell his wine at the price demanded, a number of Romans burnt his house in Trastevere, whereupon he left Rome and remained away from the city until summoned by a commission from the senate. His son thanks the senate for the its support, using this opportunity to do so. Later in 376 he added his voice to his father's in a speech of thanks (*Oration* 4) for his father's designation as consul, probably for 377, although Avianus Symmachus died before holding the office.

Another topic evident in *Oration* 5 is relief at the accession of Gratian after his father's death, and expectation that prominent members of the senatorial class will find political life more rewarding and less unsettling in future.

1 . . . by your longing when we are away, by your testimony when we have come. And we do not dread ill will, which perceived and experienced what it benefitted my father when turned against him.⁴ He had given way indeed through modesty to the irresponsibility⁵ of a few men, and to return to you a better man, when free of cares he cultivated his spirit with letters. But the most distinguished order did not tolerate this for long: immediately as if from a long retirement you

¹ The date of this oration is specified by Symmachus himself in *Ep.* 1.44.2. 9 January is designated as *senatus legitimus* in the calendars of Philocalus (*CIL* I.1² 256) and Polemius Silvius (*CIL* I.1² 257); the latter adds *suffecti consules designantur sive praetores*.

² Dessau *ILS* 769 imp. Caesari d. n. | Fl. Valenti max. p. f. victori ac | triumphatori semper Aug. | s. p. q. R. | ob providentiam, quae illi semper | cum inlyto fratre communis est, | instituti ex utilitate urbis aeternae | Valentiniani pontis atq. perfecti, | dedicandi operis honore delato iudicio princip. maximor. | L. Aur. Avianio Symmacho v. c. ex praefectis urbi.

³ In 374 when his son was proconsul of Africa, according to Rougé 1961: 60.

⁴ Avianus Symmachus' absence from Rome.

⁵ Although *facilitas* is generally used in a positive sense, an easygoing nature can also be turned to a negative trait, or lack of involvement. Pabst translates *Leichtsinn* and *Callu* *faiblesse*, explaining that a few senators did not want to support the elder Symmachus, who was unwilling to cause a division in the senate.

begged him to be willing to return — I had rather said you ordered him, for when the senate asks, it earnestly commands.⁶

2 This seemed insufficient to those who made the announcement: especially noble men were dispatched to him as attendants and mediators of the public will. How great is this display of your longing, which wishes its service to seem almost to be a campaign! I believe that this was your opinion, that he somehow be summoned through the fetiales; only the sacred boughs and herbs were lacking.⁷ What you order is fixed indeed, *patres conscripti*, and cannot be refused, but he was summoned as if he could say no.⁸

3 Even to you, venerable emperor, has the substance of this praiseworthy action been ascribed. For he possesses a free state when during his reign something in the senate's power is enviable.⁹ For this reason you are great, for this reason you are splendid, because you prefer being first to being alone.¹⁰ Whatever good men attain is advantageous to your reign.¹¹ Once most men drew¹² . . . sighs, and as if to be loved were permitted only to emperors, they suppressed the merits of private men.¹³ To me, however, he seems truly the father of his

⁶ Cf. Or. 4.4 "your request is a decision".

⁷ Livy 1.32.5–14 describes the rite of the fetial priest in declaring war; he attributes the creation of this practice at Rome to Ancus Marcius. Livy's first mention of the fetiales, however, is earlier, during the reign of Tullus Hostilius, where the priest's duty is to ratify a pact with the Albans (Livy 1.24.4–9). The fetial, at the king's command, fetched the *sagmina* — *graminis herbam puram* — from the citadel, then, choosing another and touching his head and hair with the *verbena* (a branch of a sacred tree such as olive or laurel), he creates the *pater patratus*, who will pronounce the oath. The Albans had similar officiants. The pure herb is gathered roots and all, with some soil attached, so that the fetial priest carries a bit of Rome with him; the *pater patratus* is made a father to represent the father of the Roman people. It is fanciful to imagine that a treaty had to be entered upon to bring the elder Symmachus back to Rome, but the orator represents that level of solemnity, and in an atmosphere of effecting peace.

⁸ A complimentary observation on the senate's combination of power and courtesy, reminiscent of the praise of emperors.

⁹ Kelly 2013a: 280–282 offers parallels in thought and word to Pliny's *Panegyricus*, and observes that most of the praises here, e.g., about the status of the senate, the emperor as *pater patriae*, belong rather to a time in the high empire. Symmachus' task in 376 was as delicate as Pliny's had been, thus making Trajan's panegyrist an excellent model for how to praise a new ruler without undue criticism of the recent past.

¹⁰ This is a neat statement of the idea of *princeps* as *primus inter pares*, as well as of the *solus/unus–multi* dichotomy that dates at least as far back as Sulla's dictatorship (e.g., Cicero *Rosc. Am.* 22).

¹¹ *Saeculum*. See Or. 3.2 *novi saeculi spes*, and note, and just below where Symmachus uses the expression *securitas temporis tui*.

¹² Seeck has noted a lacuna in the text between *plerique* and *suspiria* and offers a clause to fill in the blank: "traxerunt olim plerique principum in inuidiam, si quisquam absens ciuium moueret suspiria *vel simile quid*".

¹³ Cf. Or. 4.5 for the sentiment.

country,¹⁴ under whom an excellent man does not fear to be praised. There exists even this mark of security in your time, that no one thinks he becomes lesser in the prince's estimation if he himself prefers another to himself. For what place is there for envy, when all are esteemed by you in just order?¹⁵

4 But more than enough about us now! Let us give some exertion and some time to Trygetius as well, a most distinguished and perfect¹⁶ man, who desires you to be begged and prevailed upon¹⁷ through me, that the tenth year from now see his son appointed to the performance of the praetorship. If one must consider good will, you ought to approve of a generous senator;¹⁸ if abilities, you can give him nothing more.

5 It is proper for me too to be considered in this business, I who am accustomed to give thanks, I who do not allow favors to be forgotten. Return favors are rightly placed where primary ones have flourished.¹⁹ Bind this man with a new debt, me with a doubled²⁰ one . . .

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¹⁴ Augustus was given the title *pater patriae*, which became standard for his successors (cf. Seneca *de Clementia* 1.14.2). But Juvenal 8.243–244 has a different opinion about that form of imperial pretension.

¹⁵ See Sabbah 1978: 338–339 on this passage and *Or.* 4.5, 9, 10, 13, and 14 on Valentinian. Kelly 2013b: 380 cites this whole section as indicating new appointments by Gratian: "certainly a speech of Symmachus from 9 January seems to refer to appointments (*Or.* 5.3)".

¹⁶ Although the primary meaning of *emendatus* is 'corrected', the word can also indicate a state where further correction is unnecessary, not only in silver Latin and later, but as early as Cicero *Brutus* 258 (*locutionem emendatam et Latinam*), *de Amicitia* 61 (*cum emendati mores amicorum sint*), Horace *Ep.* 1.16.30 (*cum pateris sapiens emendatusque vocari*).

¹⁷ There is a difference between *orare* and *exorare*, with the latter indicating acceptance of one's pleading; cf. Plautus *Casina* 42–43, *Miles* 1072, Terence *Hecyra* prologue 2 1–2 (*orator ad vos venio ... sinite exorator sim*), Cicero *Pro Rege Deiotaro* 9 (*cum facile orari, Caesar, tum semel exorari soles*).

¹⁸ The expenses of the praetorship were enormous and required years of advance planning, saving, and even selling of property. Rougé 1961: 66–67 discusses the financial constraints that Symmachus himself, not a very rich senator despite what seem extensive holdings, endured to finance his son's praetorship. Jones 537–542, 705–706 discusses the direct (e.g. animals, performers) and indirect (e.g. carved ivory invitations) of the praetorian games.

¹⁹ As Pabst has noted, Symmachus probably indicates the role of Trygetius in the recall of the orator's father.

²⁰ Callu writes that if Pabst is correct about Trygetius' assistance, the doubled debt thus is on behalf of the orator's father and his friend.

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