

Aurelius Symmachus: A Comprehensive Political Biography

Aurelius Symmachus was a prominent Roman senator, consul, and orator during the late 4th and early 5th centuries AD. He lived during a turbulent period in Roman history, marked by religious strife, political instability, and the decline of the Western Roman Empire. Symmachus' political career was characterized by his staunch support for the traditional Roman values and beliefs, as well as his opposition to the rise of Christianity within the Empire.

Early Life and Education

Symmachus was born around 340 AD into a wealthy and influential senatorial family in Rome. His father, Lucius Aurelius Avianus Symmachus, was a praetorian prefect and consul. Symmachus received a traditional Roman education, which emphasized rhetoric, philosophy, and law. He studied under the renowned grammarian and rhetorician Nicomachus Flavianus.



Q. Aurelius Symmachus: A Political Biography

by Cristiana Sogno

★★★★☆ 4.5 out of 5

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Political Career

Symmachus began his political career in the 360s AD. He held various positions in the Imperial administration, including quaestor, aedile, and praetor. In 373 AD, he was elected consul, the highest office in the Roman Republic. As consul, Symmachus delivered a famous speech in the Senate, in which he argued against the removal of the Altar of Victory from the Senate House.

Symmachus was a conservative senator who believed in the traditional Roman values and beliefs. He was a staunch supporter of the traditional Roman religion and opposed the rise of Christianity within the Empire. He argued that Christianity threatened the stability of the Roman state and the traditional Roman way of life.

Religious Controversy

In the late 4th and early 5th centuries AD, the Roman Empire was embroiled in a religious controversy over the role of Christianity within the state. Emperor Theodosius I had declared Christianity the official religion of the Empire in 380 AD, but many pagans resisted the new religion and clung to the traditional Roman beliefs.

Symmachus was one of the leaders of the pagan opposition to Christianity. In 384 AD, he wrote a letter to Emperor Valentinian II, in which he argued for the restoration of the Altar of Victory to the Senate House. The letter sparked a heated debate in the Senate and beyond.

The Christian bishop Ambrose of Milan emerged as the main opponent of Symmachus and the pagans. Ambrose argued that Christianity was essential for the salvation of the Roman Empire and that the traditional Roman religion was incompatible with the Christian faith.

Downfall and Death

The religious controversy reached a climax in 391 AD, when Emperor Theodosius I ordered the destruction of the Altar of Victory. Symmachus and the other pagans were forced to accept the supremacy of Christianity.

Symmachus continued to participate in politics after the Altar of Victory controversy, but his influence diminished. He died in Rome in 402 AD at the age of 62.

Legacy

Aurelius Symmachus is remembered as a defender of the traditional Roman values and beliefs. His political career was marked by his staunch opposition to the rise of Christianity within the Empire. He was a skilled orator and a leading figure in the pagan resistance to the new religion.

Aurelius Symmachus was a complex and controversial figure who played a significant role in Roman history during a turbulent period. His political career was marked by his staunch support for the traditional Roman values and beliefs, as well as his opposition to the rise of Christianity within the Empire. He remains a fascinating figure who embodies the challenges and contradictions of late Roman society.

Further Reading

- The Letters of Symmachus

- Aurelius Symmachus and the Senatorial Tradition
- Symmachus and the Crisis of the Late Roman Aristocracy



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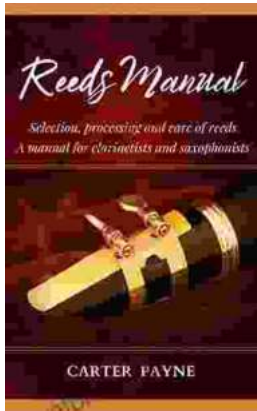
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