SYMMACHUS AND THE ORIENTAL CULTS

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The decline of late Roman paganism could hardly be said to have been an under-studied subject in the past, nor one which currently lacks appeal among late Roman historians: indeed, one has the impression that it is often through this, and the broader question of the 'conflict' between paganism and Christianity in the fourth century, that students of Roman history have acquired their interest in the late imperial period. This is all for the best: at the same time, it may be that in this, as in other aspects of late Roman history, there is a danger of 'over-familiarity' in the interpretation of well-known evidence. Research, it is fair to say, has sometimes been content to add refinement to accepted interpretations without questioning the general framework within which they were conceived. The interpretation of the works of Q. Aurelius Symmachus is a case in point. In assessing Symmachus, modern writers have been inclined to echo the opinion of his great editor, Otto Seeck, that an author of such limited talent was likely to find few readers apart from those interested in picking up a point here and there on matters which concerned them:[1] they have not been so quick to recognize that Seeck's comment was made to justify a meticulously detailed prosopographical and chronological introduction to Symmachus' works, precisely in order to make them accessible to such readers. Yet, for all the opinions expressed on Symmachus' literary style, little use has been made of this immensely rich material to produce a really convincing interpretation of Symmachus' correspondence in terms of its actual functioning in the society of its time. For it is against this background, and only against it, that the style and manner of this correspondence are to be understood.[2]

On the religious attitudes of Symmachus also, recent work has tended to entrench and intensify conventional opinions.[3] In addition, such work has, with some exceptions, been rather limited in scope, applying itself to the interpretation of a few documents, particularly of course the famous *Third Relatio* on the altar of Victory; and, this being a rather short, and on the whole explicit, document, it is not surprising that little of real originality has emerged.[4] Yet the possibilities of a fresh and independent survey of familiar evidence are illustrated by Alan Cameron's dispatch of Macrobius' *Saturnalia*—traditionally taken as a contemporary, or near-contemporary, document of the paganism of the age of Symmachus—to the fourth decade of the fifth century.[5]

The present article is an attempt to examine a particular facet of the place of Symmachus in late Roman paganism: his relations with the Oriental cults. This is a topic which has received its share of attention, and rightly so; for it is of obvious significance, for the understanding both of Symmachus himself and of the pagan movement of which he was a part. But it seems to me that a fresh study is needed—less, perhaps, in the hope of reaching novel conclusions, than of defining more closely

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[1] In *MGH*, auct. ant. VI, 1 (1883, repr. 1961), lxxiii; 'scriptorem ingenii tam pauperis pauci certe lecturi sunt, sed multi hic illic inspicient, ut singulas res excerpant'.

[2] See my article, 'The Letters of Symmachus', in J. W. Binns (ed.), *Latin Literature of the Fourth Century* (forthcoming).

[3] This is not to deny the interest, for example, of R. Klein, *Symmachus: eine tragische Gestalt des ausgehenden Heidentums* (Impulse der Forschung 2, 1971)—nor indeed the value of J. A. McGeachy's earlier dissertation, *Q. Aurelius Symmachus and the Senatorial Aristocracy of the West* (Chicago, 1942). See also B. Kötting, *Christentum und heidnische Opposition in Rom am Ende des 4. Jahrhunderts* (Gesellsch. z. Förderung der Westfälischen Wilhelms-Universität zu Münster 46, 1961).

[4] See for instance J. J. Sheridan, 'The Altar of Victory: Paganism's Last Battle', *L'Ant. Class.* xxxv (1966), 186-206. F. Paschoud, 'Réflexions sur l' idéal religieux de Symmaque', *Historia* xiv (1965), 215-35, is nothing if not vigorous, and embraces far more than the third *Relatio* in its onslaught—without, it seems to me, providing the real basis for a re-assessment. See als → is *Roma Aeterna* (1967), 71-109.

[5] 'The Date and Identity of Macrobius', *JRS* lvi (1966), 25-38.

than has so far been done the limits of the evidence upon which an important aspect of late Roman religious history can be interpreted.

I

It has long been agreed that we can talk of two traditions in the paganism of late Roman senatorial society: what may be summarily called the 'Roman' and the 'Oriental' traditions.[6] The 'Roman' tradition is most familiarly represented by the *Relatio* addressed by Symmachus in 384 to the Emperor Valentinian II. In this *Relatio,* which was submitted to the emperor as a public document by his *praefectus urbi,* Symmachus petitioned for the restoration of the altar of Victory to the senate-house at Rome, and of the traditional grants and immunities received from the state by the priestly colleges and Vestal Virgins—privileges only recently (in 382) withdrawn by Valentinian's predecessor, Gratian.

Symmachus' arguments appealed to a group of interlocking assumptions, sentimental and traditionalist as well as strictly religious. At their heart was a conviction familiar from centuries of Roman religious doctrine and practice—that, for the state to secure the continued support of the gods in its enterprises, it must duly offer them its support, expressed by the correct performance of public ritual.[7] For what was at issue was not simply the physical performance of the religious ceremonies (which in themselves need not have been financially prohibitive, given known levels of senatorial expenditure on public games)[8] but their performance at state expense; for only then were they valid. If Ambrose of Milan, replying to Symmachus' *Relatio*, found it easy to travesty his arguments by accusing Symmachus and his colleagues of trivial money-grubbing, recent writers seem to have found it surprisingly difficult to take them at their religious face value;[9] but that the issue was a properly religious one is clearly brought out by a passage of Zosimus, firmly emphasized by Baynes.[10] According to Zosimus (that is to say Eunapius, from whom the passage directly derives), the Emperor Theodosius, addressing the senate late in 394 after the defeat of the rebellion of Eugenius, exhorted the senators to abandon their hereditary paganism and turn to Christianity, and in support of his exhortation threatened to withdraw public support from the Roman cults. The senators protested, on the grounds that the cults would be invalidated by the removal of state support: μὴ κατὰ θεσμὸν . . . πράττεσθαι τὰ τελούμενα μὴ δημοσίου τοῦ δαπανήματος ὄντος (the religious implications of the passage are in no way undermined by its undoubtedly fictional historical context).[11] Since that time, said Zosimus, now commenting in his own person, the Roman empire had become the habitation of barbarians and was ruined, to the extent that it was now 'not possible to see where cities had been'—a consequence remotely foreshadowed by Symmachus in 384:

> 'quis ita familiaris est barbaris, ut aram Victoriae non requirat?' (*Rel.* 3, 3).

'Religion' in this context is thus conceived as the public performance of cult acts by the official priestly authorities—a performance which, as in the case of Cicero,

[6] See for example S. Dill, *Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire* (1899), 74 f.; G. Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*[2] (1912), 95 f.; and recently R. Klein, o.c. (n. 3), 16-46. For the development of the theme by D. N. Robinson and H. Bloch, see below, p. 180 f.

[7] This too is common ground; for instance W. Warde Fowler, *The Religious Experience of the Roman People* (1911), 169 f.; K. Latte, *Römische Religionsgeschichte* (1960), 211 f.

[8] Olympiodorus, *fr.* 44—a famous passage—mentions expenditures of 2,000 (the case of Symmachus in 401) and 4,000 pounds of gold.

[9] The allusion is to the 'economic' interpretation of Symmachus' motives, developed by McGeachy, o.c. (n. 3), 142 f. and Paschoud (n. 4), from the hypothesis of L. Malunowicz, *De Ara Victoriae in Curia Romana, quomodo certatum sit* (diss. Wilno, 1937), 108 f. See the critique of N. H. Baynes (reviewing McGeachy), *JRS* xxxv (1945), 175 f. [= *Byzantine Studies* (1955), 361 f.].

[10] *Byzantine Studies* 363.

[11] Zosimus iv, 59, 3. The historicity of Theodosius' visit seems to me gravely doubtful, despite the arguments of Alan Cameron, *Harvard Studies* lxxiii (1968), at 248-65.

was notoriously compatible with personal scepticism.[12] Yet apparently not for Symmachus, in several of whose letters Cicero's classic definition of *religio* – 'id est, cultus deorum' (*Nat. Deor.* 2, 8)–is clearly assumed. For example:

> 'convenit inter publicos sacerdotes, ut in custodiam civium publico obsequio traderemus curam deorum. Benignitas enim superioris, nisi cultu teneatur, amittitur' (*Ep.* i, 46).
> 'dii patrii, facite gratiam neglectorum sacrorum! miseram famem pellite!' (*Ep.* ii, 7).

(If the food shortage mentioned in the second of those letters can, as is quite possible, be located in 383 or 384, then Symmachus' remark could be interpreted, as it was by Seeck, as a specific reference to the effects of Gratian's measures of 382).[13]

It bears emphasis that the term *religio* in itself, presaged in classical usage, did not refer merely to the relations between men and the gods, but equally to those among men themselves. As defined by Festus, the *religiosus* was a man 'non modo deorum sanctitatem magni aestimans, sed etiam officiosus erga homines'; and it is precisely this secular sense which *religio* (and its synonyms, *officium, munus*) bears in Symmachus.[14] He used the term, almost exclusively, to signify the social and personal links between friends and colleagues, and in particular the dutiful performance of the obligations of *amicitia.* Thus in practical terms, *religio* can come to mean little more than a courteous exchange of letters. So, from innumerable cases:

> '. . . quaeso te, ut sicuti oratione mirabilis es, ita religione lauderis. faciet hoc crebritas epistularum tuarum' (*Ep.* iii, 22).
> 'liceat igitur mihi imitari erga te parsimoniam religionum, quibus iure amicitia confertur, et officium pium brevi pagina . . . persolvere' (*Ep.* vii, 129).
> 'perge igitur, ut iam facere dignatus es, et amicitiam munerare adfectu religionis et adsiduitate conloquii' (*Ep.* iii, 64).

On the basis of *religio*, then, one might say that men were 'bound' to the gods much as they were bound to each other, by the mutual exchange of obligations and services; and it was the renunciation of these obligations on the part of the state which, in breaking, as it were, the *amicitia* of the gods with men (in other words, the 'pax deorum'), seemed to Symmachus to be leading–and to Zosimus, to have led–to inevitable and disastrous consequences.

The second, the 'Oriental', tradition in late Roman paganism, is best known in the case of senators from inscriptions recording their initiations into the mystery rites of Magna Mater and Mithras: they come from shrines in the city of Rome and at Ostia, and in particular from the shrine of Magna Mater and Attis known as the 'Phrygianum', located on the Vatican.[15] By contrast with the 'Roman' tradition just summarized, the 'Oriental' tradition conveys an atmosphere of personal and emotional intensity. In the words of one inscription from the Phrygianum, a dedication of 374 by the senator Clodius Hermogenianus Caesarius, Magna Mater and Attis were the 'guardians of his mind and soul'. 'Diis animae suae mentisque custodibus aram dicavit': it is a statement of devotion perhaps the more telling for its simplicity and formulaic character.[16]

Such initiations also look to the future, and to the future life. For one devotee, his *taurobolium* and *criobolium* –his 'baptisms' in the blood of the bull and ram– had secured for him eternal rebirth.[17] The widow of the greatest of late senatorial pagans, Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, stated in her epitaph to his memory that in

[12] See Book ii of his *De Divinatione*, esp. (on augury) 70 f. The compatibility was achieved 'rei publicae causa communisque religionis' (28), cf. 70; 'retinetur autem et ad opinionem vulgi et ad magnas utilitates rei publicae mos, disciplina, ius augurium, collegi auctoritas'.

[13] *Symmachus*, cxix-xx.

[14] Festus, p. 348, 22 Lindsay; see E. Wistrand, 'Textkritisches und Interpretatorisches zu Symmachus', *Symbolae Gotoburgenses* lvi (1950), 87 f. [= *Opera Selecta* (Stockholm 1972), 229 f.].

[15] For the inscrs., see below, p. 182 f.; the Phrygianum, *Curiosum Urbis Romae* Reg. XIV, 'Transtiberem' (ed. A. Nordh, 1949, p. 95); 'Gaianum [cf. Dio lix, 14, 6] et Frigianum'.

[16] *CIL* vi, 499 (= *ILS* 4147).

[17] *CIL* vi, 510 (= *ILS* 4152); 'in aeternum renatus'. For the dedicant, below, p. 182.

guiding her initiations he had released her from the fate of death:[18] as for her late husband, she was convinced that he now lived in a shining heavenly palace.[19]

Seen in the context of such beliefs, these initiations might seem to have little to do with the performance of the state cults, as characterized above; indeed, the latest in a series of inscriptions from a Mithraeum at Rome makes the precise point, that the cult of Mithras is not dependent upon public financial support. According to this inscription, the priest 'antra facit, sumptusque tuos nec, Roma, requirit'—a remark which would gain added point if, as is often assumed though without direct evidence, it was made in the immediate aftermath of Gratian's measures of 382.[20]

Whether this is so or not, the assertion by this priest of the financial independence of his religion does raise the issue of the precise relationship between the 'public' and 'private' aspects of Mithras and Magna Mater, both of which functioned in the fourth century as personal initiation rites as well as officially sanctioned public cults. At least in the case of Mithras, the two aspects often went together. An inscription set up by the *ordo sacerdotum* to the senator Iunius Postumianus mentioned his public priesthood as *pontifex dei Solis* together with his personal priesthood of Mithras: he was 'pater patrum dei solis invicti Mithre'.[21] That the erection of the statue to Postumianus was supervised, and the dedication performed, by Flavius Herculeus, 'vir religiosissimus', no doubt reflects also upon the personal piety of the dedicatee.

It is likely enough, as this and other inscriptions suggest, that in the minds of the devotees themselves, the private and public aspects of their religion were not clearly delimited;[22] but equally, it is possible that in formal terms the relationship between the public and private versions of the cults of Mithras and Magna Mater was less intimate than such evidence might imply. In a dedication of the year 319, the presence of public priests at the initiation of an 'honesta femina' into the cult of Magna Mater is mentioned: 'praesentib(us) et tradentib(us) cc. vv. ex ampliss. et sanctiss. coll. xv vir. s.f.',[23] but the implication is not so clear as we might have hoped, that the priests were there in their official capacity as members of the college. It is true that the historic functions of the *quindecimviri* included, precisely, the supervision of foreign cults recognized at Rome, of which Magna Mater had for centuries been one.[24] From the mid-second century, the members of this college were involved with the administration of the provincial cult of Magna Mater, developed by conscious policy for the preservation of the emperors and the public good.[25] By process of syncretism, this cult had comprised a rite known as the *taurobolium*, and it seems already by 160 to have been the Vatican Phrygianum, rather than the old Palatine temple of Cybele, which was its point of reference at Rome.[26] But this earlier *taurobolium*, in so far as its nature can be inferred, was a bull sacrifice, though with ritually exotic elements possibly derived (if Clement of Alexandria is to be believed) from the Phrygian mysteries of Cybele.[27] It might be carried out on behalf of a community for the safety

[18] *CIL* vi, 1779 (= *ILS* 1259), vv. 22-5; 'tu me, marite, disciplinarum bono / puram ac pudicam sorte mortis eximens,/ in templa ducis ac famulam divis dicas:/ te teste cunctis imbuor mysteriis', etc.

[19] Jerome, *Ep.* 23, 3; 'non in lacteo caeli palatio, ut uxor conmentitur infelix, sed in sordentibus tenebris continetur'.

[20] *CIL* vi, 754 (= *ILS* 4269); see Baynes, *Byzantine Studies* 366 (the interpretation was already in *CIL*).

[21] *CIL* vi, 2151.

[22] For other cases of *pontifices Solis* who were also priests of Mithras, cf. *CIL* xiv, 2082 (Iunius Gallienus, late III C.); *CIL* vi, 846 (= *ILS* 4413; C. Caeionius Rufius Volusianus Lampadius, *PUR* 365-6); and, of course, Praetextatus (*ILS* 1259).

[23] *CIL* vi, 508 (= *ILS* 4146), mentioning the priest, Fl. Antonius Eustochius. The 'honesta femina' was called Serapias.

[24] G. Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*[2], 63 f.; 320 f.; 543: and in general H. Graillot, *Le Culte de Cybèle* (Bibl. de l'Ecole franç. d'Athènes et de Rome 107, 1912).

[25] Wissowa, 322 f.; see esp. J. Beaujeu, *La Politique Religieuse des Antonins* (1955), 312 f., and for inscriptions from the cult, *ILS* 4119 f. The involvement of the *XVviri* is clearly attested by *CIL* x, 3698 (= *ILS* 4175, Capua: A.D. 289), which explains *ILS* 4131 (Lugdunum: A.D. 160; cf. *ILS* 4140, 4184-5 for provincial 'sacerdotes quindecimvirales'): and on *CIL* xiv, 2790 (= *ILS* 4118, Gabii) a *XVvir* 'taurobolium movit' (*c.* 200; cf. *PIR* P 489).

[26] To judge by *ILS* 4131; 'vires excepit et a Vaticano transtulit'. It seems clear that the 'Vatican' in question was at Lugdunum, not Rome, but the inference is not impaired; see K. Latte, *Römische Religionsgeschichte* 353, n. 2; Beaujeu, 315-6. For the syncretism (of obscure origin), see F. Cumont, *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism* (1912), 227, n. 34; Graillot, 153 f.; Latte, 353 f.

[27] viz. the dedication of the 'vires' (testicles) of the bull; *ILS* 4127, 4129, 4131, etc. See Clement, *Protr.* ii, 15 (ed. *GCS*, 1972, p. 13), with P. Boyancé, 'Sur les mystères Phrygiens: "J'ai mangé dans le tympanon, j'ai bu dans la cymbale" ', *REA* xxxvii (1935), 161-4 [= *Etudes sur la Religion Romaine* (1972), 201-4].

of the emperors, or by an individual with a public or private end in view. If the latter, the quality of the religious satisfaction accruing to the individual remains unsure; but in any case, the ceremony cannot be assumed identical with that described by Prudentius for the later period, in which the devotee descended into a pit, to be sprayed though a grille with the blood of the slaughtered animal and emerge 're-born'.[28] The adaptation of the *taurobolium* (and *criobolium*) into an initiation rite without any 'public' application cannot be surely documented before the last decade of the third century; the senatorial altar dedications from the Phrygianum are the first, and effectively the only inscriptions to show it.[29]

In these circumstances it is by no means clear how we are to define the relationship between the earlier public cult (or cults) of Magna Mater and its more recent development into a personal initiation rite. Whatever the formal relationship, it is likely enough that, as in the case of Mithras, the two aspects often went together in the minds of their devotees;[30] but the weight of evidence from Rome, and overwhelmingly, the nature of the private dedications themselves, show that in this context the Oriental cults were intensely personal in their appeal, and had little to do with the Roman state religion. If a developed 'theology' were required, it could be provided by the notion supported by, among others, the Emperor Julian, that all gods, including those of the Classical pantheon as well as those involved in the initiations of the late pagans, were aspects, or functions, of the All-Powerful Sun;[31] for a well-known feature of the mystery cults was the manner in which they countenanced multiplicity of devotions. So Julian was an initiate of Mithras as well as in the ancient mysteries of Eleusis;[32] and Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, to modern eyes the exemplar of late senatorial paganism, was initiated into the rites of Hercules and Liber Pater, of Hecate, Sarapis, Cybele, and Mithras. He had received the mysteries at Eleusis, and was public priest of Vesta and Sol as well as *augur* and *quindecimvir.*[33] In Macrobius' *Saturnalia*, Praetextatus is attributed with a solar theology analogous to that of the Emperor Julian:[34] and according to his epitaph, on which his widow—herself a formidable initiate and a priestess—celebrated her husband's religious affiliations, Praetextatus had not only secured his own and her salvation; in addition, he was said to have devoted an erudite as well as religious mind to the complexities of the divine nature:

> . . . tu pius mystes sacris
> teletis reperta mentis arcano premis,
> divumque numen multiplex doctus colis.[35]

Praetextatus would have agreed with what Symmachus, in a very different context,

[28] For the description, *Perist.* x, 1011 f. (and below, n. 100); for 'rebirth', above, n. 17. Some accounts (e.g. *RE* VA, 16-21, s.v. 'Taurobolium'; Cumont, 66; Graillot, 155 f.) apply Prudentius' evidence unquestioningly to the second- and third-century *taurobolia*; but contrast Latte, 354 f. and esp., with full documentatic→ J. Rutter, 'The three phases of the Taurobolium', *Phoenix* xxii (1968), 226-49.

[29] The earliest is *CIL* vi, 505 (= *ILS* 4143), of A.D. 295 (the alleged case of the Emperor Elagabalus, Hist. Aug., *Elag.* 7, 1 is historically valueless). No other fourth-century *taurobolium* of any description is recorded from any other provenance than Rome, except two late inscrs. from Athens; *IG* iii, 1, 172 and 173—the second dated 387, the first, slightly earlier, claiming to be the first Athenian *taurobolium.* I would take the phrases 'taurobolium accipere/suscipere' on II/III C. inscrs. as being equivalent to the 'vires excepit' of *ILS* 4131; cf. 4128, 4136, 4139, etc.

[30] Graillot, *Le Culte de Cybèle* 168, detected a tendency for the public festival to be followed by a 'season' of taurobolic dedications: of 32 dated *taurobolia* (and *criobolia*) known to him, 12 were dated April/May (7 and 5 respectively), none during the actual festival (late March). In any event, the entry 'Initium Caiani' in the Calendar of 354 (*CIL* I² p. 314; 28 March) might suggest a link between the two aspects, and places the Vatican Phrygianum (above, n. 15) in relation to the public cult.

[31] See Julian's *Orations* iv and v, *To King Helios*, and *To the Mother of the Gods;* and on such ideas, A. D. Nock, *Sallustius: Concerning the Gods and the Universe* (1926), p. xlix f. One of the Roman inscrs. to Attis describes him as συνέχοντι τὸ πᾶν (*CIL* vi, 509, of 370).

[32] For Mithras, see esp. *Or.* iv. p. 130C (cf. Libanius, *Or.* xviii, 127); Eleusis, *Or.* v, p. 169A (cf. Eunapius, *V. Soph.*, p. 475/6).

[33] All from *ILS* 1259.

[34] *Sat.* i, 17, 1–23, 22.

[35] *ILS* 1259 (back), vv. 13-15. E. Groag was drawn to associate the XVvirate, in particular with culture and learning; *Zeitschr. Österr. Gymn.* lv, (1905), 733-4, cf. P. Boyancé, 'La science d'un quindécemvir au I^er siècle après J.-C.', *REL* xlii (1964), 334-46 [= *Etudes sur la Religion Romaine* 347-58].

said to the Emperor Valentinian: that it was not by one road alone that one could approach the ultimate mysteries of the Universe.[36]

II

The distinction, framed in these terms, between the 'Roman' and 'Oriental' traditions in late senatorial paganism, is common ground among historians of late Roman religion. The present article does not seek to question it: only to examine a particular use made of the distinction in order to divide late Roman pagans (as well as their 'paganism') into two groups, and to exploit the results in terms of a 'political history' of paganism, and especially of the pagan revival of the late fourth century. This approach, first suggested by D. N. Robinson in a paper of 1915 and further developed in two wide-ranging and influential articles by H. Bloch (1945 and 1963),[37] takes as its basis the religious affiliations of the leaders of the 'pagan party' of the 380's and 390's, and particularly of Symmachus himself, distinguishing his beliefs from those of his most famous pagan colleagues, Praetextatus (d. 384) and Virius Nicomachus Flavianus, the elder (d. 394). It is argued that, by contrast with these colleagues, Symmachus had no interest in the 'Oriental' cults, being possessed rather of an austere and exclusive allegiance to traditional Roman paganism. It was as such that he was the spokesman of the senate in the affair of the altar of Victory; but the pagan revival itself, in its more positive and vigorous aspects, is supposed to have 'centred on the Oriental cults'.[38]

The elaboration of this analysis by Bloch would begin by regarding the leader of the pagan party of the earlier 380's, not as Symmachus but as Vettius Agorius Praetextatus.[39] Praetextatus' personal connections with Julian (who had appointed him proconsul of Achaia),[40] as well as his initiations and solar monotheism, associate him with an 'activist' tradition of paganism, itself linked closely with an interest in the Oriental cults. It was under his patronage that Symmachus presented his *Relatio* to the court in 384; for Praetextatus was at Milan as praetorian prefect at the time, adding lustre to the insecure regime of Valentinian II, and was consul designate for 385.

Praetextatus' death at the end of 384 left Symmachus poised to assume leadership of the senatorial pagan movement; but instead of seizing the opportunity Symmachus, stricken by the loss of his friend and generally overcome by the troubles of his prefecture, asked the emperor to relieve him of the office of *praefectus urbi*.[41] In so doing, he yielded the initiative in the defence of paganism to Nicomachus Flavianus, another 'Orientalist' in his religious tastes; and it was Flavianus who assumed leadership of the pagan cause in the armed rebellion of Eugenius and Arbogastes against Theodosius, and died the death of Cato of Utica at the battle of the Frigidus (5/6 September 394).

The central assumptions in this presentation are first, that the 'Oriental' tradition in late paganism was in fact the more active and dynamic, its adherents prepared far more than those of the 'Roman' tradition to commit themselves to direct political action—the 'Roman' tradition is characterised as excessively formal and frigidly calculating, unable to engage the emotions of its adherents or to inspire them to the risks of action and defeat; and secondly, that Symmachus can be classified as exclusively a Roman traditionalist and so, in the context of the defeat of his cause,

[36] *Rel.* 3, 10; 'uno itinere non potest perveniri ad tam grande secretum'. The statement is of course diplomatic (below, p. 188); but for the philosophical context, with parallels, see P. Courcelle, 'Anti-Christian Arguments and Christian Platonism: from Arius to St. Ambrose', in A. Momigliano (ed.), *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (1963), 157 f.

[37] D. N. Robinson, 'An Analysis of the Pagan Revival of the Late Fourth Century, with Especial Reference to Symmachus', *TAPA* xlvi (1915), 87-101; H. Bloch, 'A New Document of the last Pagan Revival in the West, 393-394 A.D.', *HTR* xxxviii (1945), 199-244, and 'The Pagan Revival in the West at the End of the Fourth Century', in Momigliano, *Conflict* 193-218, esp. 202 f.

[38] Robinson, 87.

[39] For what follows, see esp. Bloch (1945), 203 f.

[40] Amm. Marc. xxii, 7, 6. In office, he obtained alleviation for the Greek mysteries from Valentinian's law against nocturnal sacrifices (*CTh* ix, 16, 7, 9 Sept. 364); Zosimus vi, 3, 2 f. For Praetextatus' career, see esp. A. Chastagnol, *Les Fastes de la Préfecture de Rome au Bas-Empire* (1962), 171-8.

[41] *Rel.* 10, 2-3. He had received a successor, Valerius Pinianus, by 25 February, 385; Chastagnol, *Fastes* 229.

characterized as a political and ideological failure. This interpretation of Symmachus has seemed only too congenial to the many critics of his literary style, and of his personality as suggested (perhaps misleadingly) by his nine hundred collected letters—these have been condemned as dull and uninformative, and as showing Symmachus' casual indifference to the political and social changes surrounding him.[42] Indeed, one suspects that earlier judgments of the personalities of the three leaders of late paganism have not been without their influence upon the interpretation here under review. For Gaston Boissier, for instance, Nicomachus Flavianus was already the activist of the movement, driven to political action by frustrated ambition. Praetextatus was its intellectual glory, Symmachus a pagan of a less colourful, more austere and studied, variety:[43] not the man, one might say to be inspired by passion for his religion or to inspire it in others.

Much in this general view provokes no reservation. None will dispute the designation of Praetextatus as the leading light of senatorial paganism—and indeed, of senatorial society at large. Symmachus' admiration of Praetextatus as a friend and colleague is amply conveyed even in the measured courtesies of his letters to him. The public sense of shock at his death, and Symmachus' own grief, are vividly communicated in a group of his *Relationes* to the court—a reaction confirmed by a disagreeably triumphant letter of Jerome.[44] Ammianus Marcellinus gives an account of Praetextatus as warmly respectful as of anyone in his history;[45] while in a later generation, Macrobius cast him as the intellectual and religious *doyen* of the group of 'nobles, and other learned men' whom he assembled for his *Saturnalia* (*c.* 430/440).[46]

Nor is there any particular reason to question the conclusion that, of the traditions of late paganism, the 'Oriental' was in itself the more emotionally engaged, the 'Roman' the more austere and impersonal. This is certainly the impression one would gain from Christian polemic, which notoriously devotes more of its attentions to Sarapis and Magna Mater than to Jupiter and Juno.[47] Yet the assumption that the more measured quality of Roman paganism leads it to be less active in a political sense is not to be taken for granted; and more important, the distinction between the two traditions, however convincing in its own terms, will only have practical historical applications if indeed it can be clearly shown that it actually was an issue among pagans themselves. In particular, it ought to be possible to demonstrate that, in the case of certain individuals, the 'Roman' tradition can be found in isolation, without its Oriental counterpart. This was certainly not true of Praetextatus himself, nor of the majority of senatorial pagans known to us from the late fourth century—indeed, Symmachus was thought by Robinson and Bloch to stand out precisely because he was so limited in his commitments. It is the central purpose of this paper to question whether after all it is as certain as is frequently assumed, that Symmachus was totally without interest in Oriental cults. The particular conclusion, which will in any case only replace accepted belief by an admission of ignorance, is perhaps of less significance: what matters more is that the problem offers an opportunity to review the evidence upon which an aspect of the religious history of late Roman society has been understood. It is in this respect that the article can perhaps with least risk of presumption invoke the name of Sir Ronald Syme: for no work has done more than his

[42] For an attempt to do justice, see my 'The Letters of Symmachus' (above, n. 2).

[43] *La Fin du Paganisme*[8] ii, 262 f. Praetextatus, the 'philosopher' was the 'décoration' (but for Boissier, no more) of the pagan party; Nicomachus Flavianus, a 'grand ambitieux déçu', 'au fond un mécontent' (266); Symmachus, a lover of the past, whose devotion 'avait quelque chose de plus calme que celle de beaucoup de ses contemporains' (270).

[44] *Rel.* 10-12, esp. 10, 2; cf. Jerome, *Ep.* 23, 3—at his death, 'urbs universa commota est'. But there is clearly a 'ceremonial' aspect to these public demonstrations of grief; cf. the case of Iunius Bassus, who died (after baptism) as *praefectus urbi* in 359; 'urbis perpetuas occidit ad lacrimas . . . flevit turba omnis matres puerique senesque', etc. (*AE* 1963, 239).

[45] xxvii, 9, 8 f.; cf. xxi, 7, 6.

[46] cf. *Sat.* i, 1, 1; 'nobilitatis proceres doctique alii'. At i, 17, 1 Praetextatus is described as 'sacrorum omnium praesul' and at the conclusion of his disquisition the company praises his 'memoria', 'doctrina' and 'religio'; 'hunc esse unum arcanae deorum naturae conscium' (i, 24, 1). For dating, above p. 175, n. 5.

[47] See for instance F. Cumont, 'La Polémique d'Ambrosiaster contre les paiens', *Rev. d'Hist. et de Litt. Religieuses* xiii (1903), 417-36, esp. 421 f.

to sharpen our appreciation of late Roman literary history and to challenge familiar assumptions as to its social context and ideological character.

III

The case sketched out by Robinson and developed by Bloch for separating Symmachus from his 'Orientalist' contemporaries in the pagan movement of the late fourth century, was based primarily upon an analysis of the epigraphic records of this movement. It is in their exploitation of this material that the value of these articles still lies: in particular, Bloch's *dossier* of the religious commitments of members of the pagan aristocracy of the years between about 370 and 390, assembled at the end of his article of 1945, is still the fullest and best-presented body of material for the study of the background to the pagan revival at the end of the fourth century.[48] But it is possible, in my view, to question the assumptions upon which the epigraphic analysis of the pagan movement was undertaken; and, in particular, to suggest that insufficient attention has been paid to the actual context and function of the inscriptions themselves. An inscription mentioning a 'religious fact' is not necessarily a 'religious inscription'; and this makes a difference to the way in which it is to be interpreted.

In order to establish fully the context of these documents we need, first, to survey them across the whole, rather than merely a part, of the chronological range which they represent: and second, to classify the inscriptions by type, with a view to establishing the precise quality of their religious content. For both these reasons, it will be appropriate to begin with the inscriptions from the Vatican Phrygianum, since they both provide the chronological point of departure for the involvement of members of the aristocracy in the mystery cults, and are the most purely 'religious' of all the documents in question; they thus present the issue of context in its clearest and most unambiguous form.[49] To these inscriptions can be added a second, more diffuse group of dedications from other, or else unknown, locations at Rome, recording initiations into the cult of Magna Mater and Attis;[50] and finally, there is a dedication from Ostia, which mentions the initiation of the senator C. Caeionius Rufius Volusianus Lampadius.[51]

The twenty-two inscriptions in these groups mention the names of nineteen male initiates.[52] Only six of these do not record official Roman priesthoods. One was a retired bureaucrat now settled at Rome who, it is tempting to conjecture, had failed to gain access to the exclusive circles of the aristocratic *collegia;* at least, one feels that his long inscription would have mentioned priesthoods, had it been possible to do so.[53] A second initiate without stated religious offices was a visitor from the east, whose western colleague in a joint dedication was *xv vir sacris faciundis* and *pontifex Solis.*[54] Of a third, nothing can be said as to whether he held such offices or not;[55] a fourth is a possible *vir inlustris* whose fragmentary inscription preserves only part of his name but does not look as if it went on to mention public priesthoods.[56] The other two are members of the Caeionian family whom one would have thought should, in principle, have been endowed with priestly office. Yet one of these inscriptions, commemorating the renewal of the *taurobolium* after twenty years, is dated 390, when the status of the official *collegia* must in any case be in question.[57] The other Caeionian, C. Caeionius

[48] *HTR* xxxviii (1945), after 244.

[49] *CIL* vi, 497-504 (cf. *ILS* 4143 f.), 30966; *AE* 1953, 237, 238.

[50] vi, 505-512, 30780.

[51] *AE* 1945, 55 with improvements at 1955, 180.

[52] I exclude from the count vi, 513; 'Virius Macarianus v.c. deam Cybeben p(ecunia) s(ua)', because of uncertainty as to its context.

[53] vi, 510 (= *ILS* 4152), the inscr. of Sextilius Agesilaus Aedesius (above, n. 17); on whom *PLRE* Aedesius 7. Cf. *CIL* vi, 31118; 'p.p. hierof. Hecatar.'.

[54] vi, 30780: Εἷς δεκαπέντε ἀνδρῶν, Φοίβου στεφανηφόρος ἱρεύς. See Mommsen, *Ges. Schr.* viii, 43, n. 1.

[55] vi, 507 (of 313), C. Magius Donatus Severianus; he was 'pater sacrorum invicti Mithrae, Hierophantes Liberi patris et Hecatarum'.

[56] *AE* 1953, 237, part of a dedication to Magna Mater and Attis by '[Sextius Rus]/TICVS V.C. [et inlust]/RIS PATER PA[trum dei in]/VICTI MITHR[ae]'. The restored identification with Sextius Rusticus Iulianus, *praefectus urbi* under Maximus (387/8), is not mentioned by Chastagnol, *Fastes*, 230-1; *PLRE* (Iulianus 37) suggests as a possible alternative Pontius Atticus (Atticus 3; cf. *CIL* vi, 31118). In any event, the designation *inlustris* should suggest a prefecture, and a date in the late fourth century; *RE* ix, 1, 1075 f.

[57] vi, 512 (= *ILS* 4154).

Rufius Volusianus Lampadius, is in fact known from other evidence to have been *pontifex Solis*; but his private inscription is only the brief dedication of a statue of Liber Pater which mentions the *taurobolium* (and rank of *praefectus urbi*) of the dedicant.[58] No special significance can be attached to the absence of reference to his public priesthood.

Four of the twenty-two inscriptions mention the names of women, one of them in a joint dedication with her husband,[59] another whose inscription accompanies her husband's in celebrating the *taurobolium* and *criobolium* undergone by both on the same day.[60] A third woman initiate is Sabina, daughter of C. Caeionius Rufius Volusianus, whose verse dedication mentions her knowledge of the mysteries of Magna Mater and Hecate;[61] the fourth is the lady whose initiation was performed in the presence of the members of the quindecimviral college, the significance of which was discussed earlier.[62]

Finally, it is worth noting that, of the nineteen male initiates mentioned in these inscriptions, as many as seventeen mention their public offices or ranks. Yet of these, twelve are given simply as *vir clarissimus* (in two instances, also as *inlustris*), only five as the holders also of active administrative posts: to take the highest positions attained by the initiates, they include two known *praefecti urbi*, two *vicarii* (one of them the former bureaucrat, whose career is set out at length) and a senator 'nobilis in causis'.[63] For only two of the senators who do not mention active political careers is an office definitely recorded from other sources. In both cases it happens to be the post of *consularis Numidiae*; but in one of these cases, that of the Caeionian, Alfenius Caeionius Iulianus Kamenius, it is likely that the governorship fell later than the date of the initiation.[64]

In general, one has a sense here of looking at a relatively 'non-political' group of senators; for one would not expect men who were prepared to describe themselves as *viri clarissimi* to have felt inhibitions against mentioning political appointments held by them.[65] In this, the group may be a typical sample of the political participation of the senatorial class in the fourth century. One should be careful not to over-simplify, in talking of a century during which the conditions of political life did change considerably; but it is clear, at least, that the participation of senators in government will tend to be over-represented in the surviving evidence, so much of which is precisely an outcome, in one way or another, of the public careers of those who are recorded by it. It is another reason, if one were needed, for taking the purely 'religious' dedications of senators separately from the inscriptions arising from their tenures of public office.

A second, much smaller, main group of inscriptions relating to the Oriental cults, from the private Mithraeum at Rome mentioned earlier, supports the impression so far gained. It presents a sequence of initiations performed between 357 and 376 by the senator Nonius Victor Olympius and his son, Aurelius Victor Augentius.[66] That all these inscriptions should mention only Mithraic priesthoods, to the exclusion of the possible membership of public *collegia*, is not at all surprising, in that they record initiations actually performed, and not received, by the senator and his son. They fully demonstrate the private character of the initiations, but are not in the first instance epigraphic records of the priests themselves. The priests are, however, described as *viri clarissimi.*

[58] viz. *AE* 1945, 55 + 1955, 180. For the pontificate, vi, 846 (= *ILS* 4413).

[59] vi, 509–the daughter (Rufia Volusiana) and son-in-law of C. Caeionius Rufius Volusianus Lampadius. See also below p. 191 and n. 99.

[60] vi, 501-2 (= *ILS* 4149-50).

[61] vi, 30966; Λαμπαδίου θυγάτηρ μεγαλήτορος, ὄργια Δηοῦς/καὶ φοβερὰς Ἑκάτης νύκτας ἐπισταμένη.

[62] vi, 508 (= *ILS* 4146); above, p. 178.

[63] *Praefecti*: C. Caeionius Rufius Volusianus Lampadius (in 365-6), above, n. 58; Clodius Hermogenianus Caesarius (374), vi, 499 (= *ILS* 4147). *Vicarii*: Sextilius Agesilaus Aedesius (Spain, *c.* 360), vi, 510 (= *ILS* 4152): Caeionius Rufius Volusianus (Asia, before 390), vi, 512 (= *ILS* 4154). 'Nobilis in causis'; Rufius Caeionius Sabinus, vi, 511.

[64] Ulpius Egnatius Faventinus (in 364/7), vi, 504 (= *ILS* 4153); Alfenius Caeionius Iulianus Kamenius, *AE* 1953, 238 (for dating, see below, p. 185, n. 69).

[65] An exception would be the anonymous 'v.c. et [inlust] ris' of *AE* 1953, 237–if indeed he was a prefect (above, n. 56).

[66] vi, 749-53 (= *ILS* 4267-8); above, p. 178. According to his grandson, Nonius Victor Olympius was 'caelo devotus et astris' (*ILS* 4269).

These groups of inscriptions, categorically 'religious' in their context and motivation, leave very little room for doubt as to what information, apart from the initiation itself, they may be expected to include. It is clear, and natural, that such inscriptions, mentioning private initiations, will normally also record the public priesthoods of the initiates: for most of the few exceptions, good reasons can be given. It is also usual to mention the political rank and offices of the initiate: again, the rarity of allusion to actual administrative posts (as distinct from the title *vir clarissimus*) probably reflects the fact that, in the context of their class as a whole, relatively few senators were politically active in the fourth century. In only a single case would we certainly have been mistaken to assume the lack of a political post from the failure of an inscription to mention it.

Problems of interpretation, extremely marginal in these cases, loom larger in another, and for present purposes more significant, category of inscriptions which mention 'religious facts': for, as we shall see when applying the argument to Symmachus, the crucial issue is what religious information need be provided on an inscription whose primary purpose was not itself a religious one. The second main category of inscriptions to be surveyed, shifting from intensely private to more public areas of activity, will therefore be of statue dedications made to senators by their clients among the corporations of Rome and the provincial communities of Italy and north Africa. These dedications, set up regularly in the private houses of senators but commemorating links of patronage forged during their tenures of official governorships, illustrate perfectly that delicate borderline between 'private' and 'public' which characterizes so much of late Roman senatorial life.[67] Since the present intention is to define the limits of what information may be included on such inscriptions and not to give a complete survey of the material, it will be enough to take groups of dedications to three pagan senators: (1) Alfenius Caeionius Iulianus Kamenius, *consularis* of Numidia before 381; (2) L. Aradius Valerius Proculus Populonius, *praefectus urbi* in 337-8 and 351-2; and (3) Q. Flavius Maesius Egnatius Lollianus Mavortius, *praefectus urbi* in 342. They are chosen for the quantity of material relating to them—in the last two cases conveniently set out in the notices of A. Chastagnol's *Les Fastes de la Préfecture de Rome au Bas-Empire* (1962).

(1) Alfenius Caeionius Iulianus Kamenius was honoured by two inscriptions from members of his official staff as *consularis Numidiae*. Apart from the names and offices of the dedicators, the inscriptions are practically identical in wording.

CIL vi, 1675 (with p. 855 and vi, 31902), cf. 31940; both Rome, Barberini Gardens:

> Kamenii. / Alfenio Ceionio Iuliano / Kamenio v.c., q(uaestori) k(andidato), praetori tri/umf(ali), vii viro epulonum, mag(istro) [*cf. 31940; mag. num(inum)*], / p(atri) s(a)c(rorum) summi invicti Mitrai, Iero/fante Aecate, Arc(hi)b(ucolo) dei Lib(eri), xv/viro s(acris) f(aciundis), tauroboliato D(eae) M(atris), / pontifici maiori, consula/ri provinciae Numidiae. / iustitiae eius provisioni/busq. confotis omnibus / dioceseos / [. .] Gentilis p.m.(?) Restutus cornicu/larius cum cartulariis officii statuam / in domo sub aere posuerunt.

A third inscription, from the Pomptine marshes (vi, 31902 = *ILS* 1264), is Kamenius' epitaph, set up after his death in 385, at the age of forty-two; the only political office added is the vicariate of Africa (381), and Kamenius' religious affiliations are given in an almost identical form.[68]

[67] See Chastagnol, *La Préfecture Urbaine à Rome sous le Bas-Empire* (1960), esp. 460 f.; L. Harmand, *Le Patronat sur les Collectivités Publiques, des Origines au Bas-Empire* (1957); and rather sketchily M. T. W. Arnheim, *The Senatorial Aristocracy in the Later Roman Empire* (1972), 143 f. Also (on Symmachus' letters) below, p. 191 f.

[68] It is sometimes thought that the epitaph, in which Kamenius' widow addresses him in a poem, was influenced by the epitaph of Praetextatus of a few months earlier (*ILS* 1259). Possibly; but the argument cannot apply to the substance of the epitaph, which is almost identical with Kamenius' earlier inscriptions.

All three inscriptions to Kamenius are notable, not only for their uniformity, presumably inspired by the recipient, but for the manner in which his 'Roman' and 'Oriental' priesthoods and initiations are mingled together without any attempt at separation or classification; but this is probably an aspect simply of the way in which the dedications are set out—to show a complete *cursus honorum* giving honours, both secular and religious, as they were acquired in strictly chronological order.[69] The political and social character of the dedications is defined by their location 'in domo' as well as by their actual content: they provide as clear an instance as possible, of the manner in which patronage acquired by a senator during his tenure of public office was subsequently carried over into private life. One may wonder whether the 'domestic setting' of the dedication has a bearing on the lack of inhibition with which the religious affiliations of Kamenius are listed (it is worth recalling that Kamenius' *taurobolium* and *criobolium* happen to be among those recorded from the Vatican Phrygianum);[70] but that he is in any case an exception among late Roman senators is quite clear. Apart from the epitaph of Praetextatus, in the case of no other pagan senator does there survive on a single monument so full a record of his religious allegiances. What is not clear is whether Kamenius was thus a historical rarity in the range of his religious beliefs, or merely an epigraphic one in that they happen to be recorded so completely. I would suggest that he is at least partly the second, and that the inscriptions in this category of dedications to senators by their clients are not necessarily a reliable guide to the religious commitments of their recipients.

(2) Among several inscriptions from the Caelian house of L. Aradius Valerius Proculus Populonius are two dedications, respectively by the Roman corporations of *suarii* and *confectuarii* (swine-drovers and slaughterers), and by the *ordo et populus* of Puteoli: the dedications arise from services performed by Proculus during his prefecture of Rome in 337-8. A third dedication gives no stated context; but all three can be illustrated by a single example, since the form of words does not differ substantially from one to the other.

CIL vi, 1690 (= *ILS* 1240), cf. 1691, 1694 (all Rome, Mons Caelius):

> Populonii. / L. Aradio Val. Proculo, v.c., / auguri, / pontifici maiori, / quindecemviro sacris faciundis, / pontifici Flaviali, / praetori tutelari, / legato pro praetore provinciae Numidiae, / peraequatori census provinciae Calleciae [*sc.* Gallaeciae], / praesidi provinciae Byzacenae, / [*further political offices and honours, to*] praefecto urbi vice sacra iterum iudicanti [337-8] , / consuli ordinario [340] / [*details of dedication*].

Other inscriptions to Proculus (cf. *CIL* vi, 1687-95) mention further such links of patronage, without adding more details as to the religious or political activities of their recipient.

These dedications differ from those to Kamenius in that, in their detailed accounts of Proculus' political and religious offices, only public, Roman priesthoods are mentioned.[71] Yet we should be unwise to take this for granted as the full range of Proculus' personal religious affiliations; for he happens to be known, by the chance of an inscription from his proconsulship of Africa, to have made restorations connected with the cult of Magna Mater and Attis at Carthage.[72] The precise context of the inscription is unfortunately not clearly established: in its least 'committed', and perhaps most likely, interpretation, Proculus will have restored a temple of Magna Mater and Attis.[73] In doing so, he might have conceived himself as acting in his public

[69] Thus providing, convincingly, a date later than 374 (cf. *AE* 1953, 238) for his governorship of Numidia. With his brother, Tarracius Bassus, Kamenius was accused but acquitted of *maleficium* under Valentinian (Amm. Marc. xxviii, 1, 27); the brother became *praefectus urbi* after Valentinian's death (?375/6; Chastagnol, *Fastes* 195-6).

[70] viz. *AE* 1953, 238: dated 19 July 374.

[71] One need only select for comment Proculus' priesthood of the imperial dynasty; see also *CIL* xi, 5283 (= *ILS* 6623, Hispellum; cf. *ILS* 705, v. 28 f.), Aur. Vict., *de Caes.* 40, 28 (Africa). See Latte, *Röm. Religionsgesch.* 366, n. 4.

[72] *CIL* viii, 24521.

[73] Chastagnol, *Fastes* 100, seems to go beyond the published evidence of context in describing the dedication as an 'autel'; see H. de Villefosse, *CRAI* 1897, 222-5.

capacity as *quindecimvir* as well as proconsul, in which case the dedication need not be significant evidence of Proculus' private religious tastes; but given what was said earlier on the complexity of the relationship between the public and private aspects of the cults of Magna Mater and Mithras,[74] it would clearly be ill-advised to exclude the possibility of a personal interest in this particular cult, and in its more intimate as well as its public version.

(3) The third example is that of Q. Flavius Maesius Egnatius Lollianus Mavortius, *praefectus urbi* in 342. The inscriptions in honour of this man provide an example of dedications made, not at Rome, but in towns of Campania, which he governed as *consularis* (*c.* 330).

> *CIL* x, 1695 (= *ILS* 1224a), cf. 1696, Puteoli; x, 4752, Suessa.
> Mavortii. / Q. Flavio Maesio Egnatio / Lolliano, c.v., q(uaestori) k., praetori ur/bano, auguri publico populi / Romani Quiritium, cons. albei / Tiberis et cloacarum, cons. ope/rum public(or)um, cons. aquarum, / cons. Campaniae, comiti Flaviali, / comiti Orientis, comiti primi ordinis et / proconsuli provinciae Africae, / regio portae triumphalis [*sc. of Puteoli*] patrono dignissimo.

Whether Mavortius, in addition to his public augurate, was interested in the mystery cults, is frankly unknown: the question at issue is whether such interests can be denied simply from the failure of his inscriptions to mention them. Mavortius certainly possessed an interest in wider aspects of the pagan religion; for he was none other than the former governor of Campania to whom Iulius Firmicus Maternus dedicated his work on astrology entitled *Mathesis,* having met and conversed with him in Campania. In concluding his work, the reading of which was to be confided to 'religiosi' and denied to 'profani ac sacrilegi', Firmicus Maternus addressed Mavortius in terms appropriate to his particular priesthood, the augurate: 'tu verus interpres, tu fidus custos, tu religiosus antistes'.[75] Maternus took the view that a prophet ought to live a chaste and blameless life; among other things, he should not take part in 'nocturnal sacrifices, public or private'.[76] Yet there is no particular reason to relate this comment, as is sometimes done, specifically to the mystery cults; and even if it were to be so connected, though an astrologer might be precluded from such involvement, an *augur* (to judge from surviving initiatory dedications) was not.[77] In any event, one factor is clear: that the inscriptions to Mavortius, being set up in public places at Puteoli and Suessa, were not likely to mention the private devotions, if they existed, of the senator honoured by them.

It is perhaps a measure of the distance now separating the senate from the emperors in political life, that inscriptions set up in honour of senators in an exclusively official capacity are so rare (the categories surveyed so far all involve, to a greater or lesser extent, the social prestige of senators as individual aristocrats). In 377, however, statues were erected at Rome and Constantinople in celebration of L. Aurelius Avianius Symmachus (the father of the orator), who had recently died as consul designate. On the inscriptions to these statues, which were set up by the senate in response to an imperial *oratio,* Symmachus' public career was detailed as well as his priesthoods, as *pontifex maior* and *quindecimvir sacris faciundis.*[78] There is no mention of an Oriental cult; but again, as in the case of Mavortius, the public context of the dedications would tell against the inclusion of such information, even if it were relevant of Symmachus as an individual—and whether this was so or not, is unknown.

[74] Above, p. 178.

[75] *Mathesis* viii, 33 (ed. W. Kroll and I. Skutsch, Teubner, ii, p. 361). For the meeting in Campania, i, praef. 2 f. Chastagnol, *Fastes* 115.

[76] *Mathesis* ii, 30, 1C (addressing the aspiring astrologer); 'numquam nocturnis sacrificiis intersis, sive illa publica sive privata dicantur': cf. *RE* vi, 2365. His later onslaught against the *taurobolium* (*De Errore Prof. Relig.* 27, 8 f.) need show no more than the usual knowledge of Christian polemic on these matters (below, p. 194).

[77] e.g. *CIL* vi, 503, 504, 505-6 (cf. 402).

[78] *CIL* vi, 1698 (= *ILS* 1257).

IV

It has been the purpose of these observations, not of course to argue that all of this group of senators were necessarily, like Alfenius Caeionius Iulianus Kamenius, initiates of Oriental cults, but to suggest that the epigraphic evidence does not in itself provide grounds for assuming that they were not. For in assessing the evidence of the inscriptions, it is necessary to consider the epigraphic as well as the religious conventions to which they were subject. Of the categories of dedications surveyed, ranged progressively along the scale from 'private' to 'public' in context, those in the first class–commemorating the actual initiations of senators–are sure evidence both for devotions to Oriental cults and for the Roman priesthoods which they normally mention together with the initiations. But conversely, in the other categories of inscriptions, the absence of reference to Oriental cults is not a conclusive guide to the personal attitudes of the senator involved, given a natural tendency in inscriptions of a more public nature and context to mention only public priesthoods. This tendency can itself be little more than a likely assumption, for if, as suggested earlier, the inscriptions commemorating their initiations seem to reveal a rather 'non-political' group of senators, then we cannot expect to find these senators often recorded on inscriptions of a more public nature: we thus lack controls from private sources, of the inscriptions in the later categories discussed above. The case of Caeionius Iulianus Kamenius, whose inscriptions recording patronage mention in full detail various Oriental initiations, which he is also known to have undergone from his epitaph and by direct evidence from the Vatican Phrygianum, may therefore be an epigraphic exception implying no criteria by which we can judge the beliefs of senators attested by more limited material. The dangers of arguing to negative conclusions from the silence of one particular body of evidence are well illustrated by the case of C. Caeionius Rufius Volusianus Lampadius, none of whose building inscriptions mentions any of the initiations which he is known from other sources to have received.[79]

Now, to apply these observations to the religious 'parties' invoked by Robinson and Bloch for the later fourth century, it is true that most of the pagans whose allegiances are under scrutiny are safely attributed with Oriental initiations as well as Roman priesthoods; but the initiations are established, for the most part, by reference to the private dedications–particularly from the Phrygianum–which, as we have seen, normally mention both. The point at issue, however, is the exclusion of Symmachus from the circles of Oriental initiates.

The case of Symmachus is to be taken together with that of his close associate Nicomachus Flavianus, if for no other reason than that the evidence for them both is precisely similar–namely the inscriptions to a pair of statues erected in the family house on the Mons Caelius by Symmachus' son (and Flavianus' grandson-in-law) Q. Fabius Memmius Symmachus:

CIL vi, 1699 (= *ILS* 2946):		*CIL* vi, 1782 (= *ILS* 2947):	
Eusebii.			
Q. Aur. Symmacho v.c.,		Virio Nicomacho Flaviano v.c.,	
quaest., praet., pontifici		quaest., praet., pont. maiori,	
maiori, correctori		consulari Siciliae,	364/5
Lucaniae et Brittiorum,	365	vicario Africae,	376/7
comiti ordinis tertii,	369/70	quaestori intra palatium,	389/90
procons. Africae, praef.	373/4	praef. praet. iterum, cos. ord.,	390 f.; 394
urb., cos. ordinario,	384; 391	historico disertissimo,	
oratori disertissimo,		Q. Fab. Memmius Symmachus v.c.,	
Q. Fab. Memm. Symmachus		prosocero optimo.	
v.c., patri optimo.			

[79] Above, nn. 57-9. For the building inscrs., Chastagnol, *Fastes* 168-9.

The allusion to Nicomachus Flavianus' lost *Annales* dedicated to the Emperor Theodosius, as a literary activity in parallel with Symmachus' oratory, has often been noted.[80]

According to these inscriptions, both Symmachus and Nicomachus Flavianus held the Roman priesthood of *pontifex maior,* with no mention in either case of an Oriental cult or initiation. Now in order to maintain the supposed distinction in the religious tastes of the two men, while conceding the precise similarity in the epigraphic evidence relating to them, Bloch remarks that 'the addition of any other sacred office possibly held by Flavianus would have upset the balance of the two inscriptions', and further that 'in an inscription set up in his [*sc.* Flavianus]' honour by someone else it was fitting to include in his *cursus publicus* only the *sacerdotia publica.* If Flavianus, e.g., was a *tauroboliatus* or a priest of Isis, Symmachus' son was under no obligation to mention these things. They were Flavianus' private affair which he could and undoubtedly did divulge in inscriptions set up by himself. Yet none has survived'.[81]

These observations, which are in themselves of course fully justified (and fundamental to the arguments presented above on the importance of the context of inscriptions), are nevertheless inconclusive to the point at issue, in that, taken in their own terms, they apply to precisely the same degree to Symmachus as they do to Flavianus. It is again clear, that is to say, that the surviving epigraphic evidence does not in itself provide criteria by which to distinguish the religious beliefs of the two men. These criteria, if they exist at all, must be derived from other sources: and again, as it happens, the dangers of arguing from an epigraphic silence are strikingly confirmed. As Bloch himself observes in support of his remarks just cited concerning Flavianus, an inscription survives in honour of Praetextatus, in a precisely analogous context to those celebrating Nicomachus Flavianus and Symmachus: it was found on the Aventine, apparently from the house of a son or other younger relative of Praetextatus, and was dedicated to him as 'parenti publice privatimq. reverendo'.[82] The inscription gives full details of Praetextatus' political career, and recalls his seven arduous embassies on behalf of the senate:[83] but there is no mention of any priesthood or initiation, public or private. We should not even be able to infer from this inscription alone whether Praetextatus was a pagan or a Christian.

The argument, then, for a distinction between the personal religious beliefs of Nicomachus Flavianus and Symmachus cannot be an epigraphic one, but must be derived from the literary evidence. It is an argument based, fundamentally, on the impression conveyed by two main sources: for Symmachus, the third *Relatio* and certain of his letters to private individuals; for Flavianus, the anonymous poem known as the 'Carmen contra Paganos' (or 'contra Flavianum') preserved on a single Paris MS and describing Flavianus' activities during the rebellion of Eugenius in 393/4.[84] The *Carmen* shows an apparent proliferation of Oriental allegiances in the case of Nicomachus Flavianus; the third *Relatio,* as we have seen, is an austere, limited statement of the ideals of Roman paganism.

But this is clearly an unfair contrast. The third *Relatio* must, above all, be seen in its context, formal and diplomatic. Its actual subject matter was the 'disestablishment' of the public cults by the Emperor Gratian: this, and not the separate issue of the survival of the Oriental religions, was the natural scope of the debate, and in these terms it was taken up by Symmachus. In addition, Symmachus was from a diplomatic point of view on the defensive against an aggressively Christian court, and so obliged for reasons of plain tact and diplomacy to make a limited, defensive case.

[80] *CIL* vi, 1783 (= *ILS* 2948), vv. 19-20; 'annalium, quos consecrari sibi a quaestore et praefecto suo voluit'—not sufficient to associate Flavianus with the *Historia Augusta*. To judge by Theodosius' recorded historical tastes (*Epit. de Caes.* 48, 11-12, cf. Augustine, *Civ. Dei* v, 26), the *Annales* are as likely to have been a work of Republican history.

[81] Bloch (1945), 210. But it must be emphasized that, in Bloch's view, the distinction is established by reference to the *Carmen contra Paganos* (below, p. 189).

[82] *CIL* vi, 1777 (= *ILS* 1258).

[83] 'legato amplissimi ordinis septies et ad impetrandum reb(us) arduis semper opposito'. For one of the embassies, Amm. Marc. xxviii, 1, 24 f.

[84] Mommsen, *Hermes* iv (1870), 350-63 [= *Ges. Schr.* vii, 485-98]; cf. *Anth. Lat.*², i, pp. 20-25.

But in particular, as has already been emphasized, Symmachus wrote the *Relatio* in his public capacity as *praefectus urbi,* speaking on behalf of the senate to the emperor who had appointed him. The document was, after all, classified as a *relatio*—that is, as an official report submitted to the emperor along with others on various aspects of public administration and concern to the government. Symmachus addressed the *Relatio,* 'ut praefectus vester . . . et ut legatus civium'.[85] Behind him, then, was the mandate of the senate in formal session; while to be a *legatus* of the senate was a public function, commemorated as such in the inscriptions of many a senator.[86] The tone of the third *Relatio* was thus determined, primarily by the nature of the case at issue, but also to some extent by its context and function as a diplomatic statement and, in formal terms, as a public document; it would be at best misleading to regard it, as is too often done, as a full statement of Symmachus' personal views. One can put the matter simply: would Praetextatus or Nicomachus Flavianus have in the circumstances made a different case?

It would be difficult to imagine a document more diverse from the *Relatio* in attitude, genre and sheer competence, than the *Carmen contra Paganos.*[87] The poem, an anonymous denunciation of an unnamed pagan prefect, and of paganism in general, provided grounds for Bloch to identify the religious affiliations of Nicomachus Flavianus; he is on its evidence accredited with interest in the cults of Vesta, Sol, Mithras, Magna Mater, Liber Pater, Hecate, Isis and Sarapis, and others more or less familiar in the religious affectations of late paganism.[88]

It is possible, in my view, to confirm the identification made by Mommsen of Nicomachus Flavianus as the prefect in question, against the rival claims of Gabinius Barbarus Pompeianus, briefly *praefectus urbi* in the winter of 408/9;[89] but we can perhaps be less than fully confident of the literal attribution to Flavianus of all the cults denounced by the *Carmen.* On any account, much in the poem is sheer rhetoric, at best of doubtful historical value; on the most rigorous interpretation, the circumstantial details of which we can be sure are limited to a few lines at the end of the poem, in which the author describes the actual events which took place during a visit made by Flavianus to Rome, for three months in the spring of 394.[90] On this interpretation, Flavianus will have conducted a restoration of the public cult of Magna Mater and Attis, together with the Megalensian Games and Floralia. In addition, a temple of Hercules at Ostia was restored and, at Rome, one of Venus—the first almost certainly, the second possibly, at the instigation of the younger Nicomachus Flavianus, Symmachus' son-in-law and *praefectus urbi* under his father's regime.[91]

On this, the most rigorous, reading of the poem, Flavianus will remain on a precisely level footing with Symmachus in his religious affiliations: for it happens that Symmachus' only reference to an 'Oriental cult' comes in a letter to Flavianus and concerns, precisely, the public cult of Magna Mater. Flavianus is evidently leaving Rome at the time of her festival, to Symmachus' disappointment:

> 'adornare te reditum, quod sacra Deum Matris adpeterent, arbitrabar: tu in Daunios iter promoves, nosque et patriam post tergum relinquis' (*Ep.* ii, 34).

Symmachus' allusion is less revealing than might appear in that, like that of the *Carmen contra Paganos,* it is specifically to the public cult of Magna Mater ('*nosque et patriam* . . . relinquis'). But in any event, on a less rigorous interpretation of the *Carmen*, there will be no harm in supposing Flavianus to have been an initiate into Oriental cults—so long as it is recognized that the contrast between the *Carmen* and the third *Relatio* is not valid evidence for a distinction between the personal beliefs of Flavianus and those

[85] *Rel.* 3, 2; 'gesta publica prosequor et . . . (civium) mandata commendo'. This was of course to some extent a 'front' which Symmachus probably expected to be penetrated; but it must be allowed to have influenced his manner of address.

[86] e.g. *ILS* 1243, 1257 (the elder Symmachus; 'multis legationibus pro amplissimi ordinis desideriis apud divos principes functo'), 1258 (above, n. 83), 1282 (cf. Zosimus v, 44-5), 1284, etc.

[87] See my 'The Historical Setting of the "Carmen contra Paganos" (Cod. Lat. Par. 8084)', *Historia* xix (1970), 464-79.

[88] Bloch (1945), 230, n. 69 and chart, after 244.

[89] *Historia* xix (1970), 466 f.

[90] *Sc.* after 'vidimus' (vv. 103-9); *Historia* xix (1970), 473 f.

[91] 'Cella Herculis', *AE* 1948, 127 (Bloch's 'New Document')—restoration by the *praefectus annonae* Numerius Proiectus: temple of Venus, *Carm. c. Paganos* 113-4, with *Historia* xix (1970), 477.

of Symmachus. Symmachus' apparent absence from the 'pagan revival' conducted by Flavianus is quite explicable in political terms: having in 388 supported Magnus Maximus by delivering a panegyric, with consequent embarrassment for himself, Symmachus refrained from direct involvement in a second rebellion against Theodosius.[92] Instead, he limited himself to the conduct of normal social relations with the regime of Eugenius, and with Flavianus himself.[93] This was evidently achieved without political compromise, and Symmachus was before long able to participate in the rehabilitation of the younger Flavianus, after the defeat of Eugenius.[94]

On the evidence so far, then, the contrast between Nicomachus Flavianus and Symmachus in matters of personal belief is inconclusive, and Symmachus' alleged lack of interest in Oriental cults remains unproven. One objection, the failure of Symmachus' letters to mention such cults, has still to be met; but first, it will be appropriate to conclude this stage of the argument with another illustration of the dangers of premature inference. This concerns Publilius Caeionius Caecina Albinus, *consularis* of Numidia between 364 and 367, and according to Bloch, Symmachus' only companion in his devotion to plain Roman paganism, to the exclusion of an interest in Oriental cults.

The argument here depends on a possibly over-literal interpretation of a famous allusion of Jerome, in which Albinus, as an old man, is imagined to be surrounded by his now Christian relatives–including a little grand-daughter charmingly (or perhaps not so charmingly) babbling 'Alleluia' on his knee:

> 'quis hoc crederet ut Albini pontificis neptis de repromissione matris nasceretur, ut praesente et gaudente avo adhuc linguae balbutiens 'alleluia' resonaret, et virginem Christi in suo gremio nutriret ut senex?' (*Ep.* 107, 1).

The reference to 'Albinus pontifex' is taken to be to a Roman priesthood held by him, perhaps as *pontifex maior.* Yet whether this is accepted or not (and Jerome's literary point did not oblige him to say more), the picture is not quite so simple: for the chance of an African inscription shows Albinus to have restored or dedicated a (Mithraic) cave at Cirta:

CIL viii, 6975 + p. 1842 (= *ILAlg* ii, 541);
speleum cum [sig]
nis et ornamen[tis]
Publilius Ceion[ius]
Caecina Albinu[s]

To use again the words of Jerome, Albinus will have dedicated a 'specu Mithrae et omnia portentuosa simulacra, quibus Corax, Cryphius, Miles, Leo, Perses, Heliodromus, Pater initiantur' (*Ep.* 107, 2, referring to the destruction of such a shrine at Rome by the *praefectus urbi* of 376/7).[95]

According to Bloch, this restoration of a Mithraic shrine was merely 'an action to strengthen paganism in general', not proving that Albinus was 'himself a worshipper of Mithras or of some other Eastern deity'.[96] But of course, this is precisely what it does prove. The inscription is a personal one, quite unlike the seventeen other inscriptions of Albinus, all of which commemorate building works and restorations carried out in his official capacity as *consularis Numidiae,* and mention the names of the Emperors Valentinian and Valens as well as his own as governor.[97] In his devotion to Mithras, Albinus is thus associated with other members of his family: for his father was C. Caeionius Rufius Volusianus Lampadius, *pontifex Solis*, tauroboliate and priest of

[92] *Historia* xix (1970), 478.

[93] e.g. *Epp.* ii, 83-5–recommendations for visitors to Milan during Flavianus' consulship of 394 (cf. ix, 119): compare the letters on the quaestorian games of 393; ii, 46, 76-8 and esp. 81 ('praeterea domino et principi nostro [*sc.* Eugenio] ... auro circumdatum diptychum misi'); v, 20-22, 59, etc.

[94] Seeck, *Symmachus* lxxi. Compare the case of Marcianus (below, n. 121).

[95] Chastagnol, *Fastes* 198-200. For another reference to a 'cave' of Mithras, *ILS* 4169 (above, p. 178).

[96] Bloch (1945), 213, n. 37.

[97] *PLRE* Albinus 8; cf. Chastagnol, 'Les consulaires de Numidie', *Mél. Carcopino* (1966), 224 f.

Hecate and Isis.[98] His mother was a priestess of Isis, two sisters initiates of Magna Mater and Attis (one of them also of Hecate);[99] and his brother was a tauroboliate whose initiation was renewed, after twenty years, in 390.[100]

V

In all the varieties of document surveyed so far, heavy emphasis has been laid on the necessity for a careful assessment, in their own terms, of context and function, and of the conventions to which they were subject, before they can be applied as historical evidence: for often, these conditions will limit the types of inference which can legitimately be drawn. This applies pre-eminently to the final argument which has now to be met; why it is that, if Symmachus was after all interested in Oriental cults, there should be no mention of them in any of his nine hundred collected letters to private correspondents. It is a serious question, but as so often with Symmachus, one of deceptive simplicity; for its answer cannot be undertaken in isolation, but must form part of a general assessment of the nature and function of the letters themselves, and of their mode of operation in the social and cultural conditions of their time. This is not the place to undertake such an assessment;[101] but briefly, I would argue that to expect such allusion in these letters involves a misapprehension of the function which, considered in their own working context, they were designed to satisfy.

It takes little reading of the letters of Symmachus to appreciate that they were concerned, above all, with the pursuit and exploitation of *amicitia;* that is, in practical terms, with the cultivation of influence with friends and contacts, and its use to acquire privileges for Symmachus' protégés (and himself), to assist their litigation, secure their exemption from governmental impositions, to achieve their professional advancement, particularly in the service of the imperial administration, and so on. On very many occasions, the letters convey a formal *salutatio,* without further content (but no doubt in many of the cases, with the thought of present or future benefit in mind).[102] It was to the maintenance of such relationships and their attendant social courtesies that Symmachus, as we saw, applied the terms *religio, officium, munus.*[103] As to their range of operation, the letters, so many of them addressed to men in office on behalf of protégés of Symmachus, reach across that crucially elusive borderline between 'public' and 'private' areas of activity which seemed earlier to characterize the inscriptions to senators recording their patronage of communities and corporations in Italy and Africa.

In this context, there is little room for deeply personal allusions or 'inner meanings' in the letters. The majority of Symmachus' correspondents are equipped with standard virtues which leave nothing to individual personality and least of all to religious tastes. The most formal among the letters have been aptly described as like visiting cards, conveying nothing but polite attentions.[104] That on so many occasions personal details were consigned to a separate *indiculum* or to the bearer of a letter for verbal exposition,[105] only emphasizes that the letters, as we have them, exist on a level of controlled formality which allows little scope, either for passing trivialities or the intensities of personal emotion. There is even an understanding in Symmachus that unpleasant news—illnesses, bereavements, distasteful political events—should be excluded from such letters so as not to distress a correspondent:[106] it is all in the interests of assuring an emotional and political 'equanimity' between Symmachus and his contacts, within which the cultivation of *amicitia* can be carried on without disturbance or dissension.

[98] Above, p. 182 f. and n. 58.

[99] Respectively *CIL* vi, 512 (= *ILS* 4154; Caecinia Lolliana); vi, 509 (Rufia Volusiana); vi, 30966 (Sabina; above, n. 61).

[100] *ILS* 4154; 'viginti annis expletis taurobolii sui', cf. *Carm. c. Paganos* 62; 'vivere cum speras viginti mundus in annis'.

[101] I have made some attempt to do this in my 'The Letters of Symmachus' (above, n. 2).

[102] e.g. vii, 42; ix, 35, 102; cf. v, 66, 6 etc.

[103] Above, p. 177.

[104] S. Dill, *Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire* (1899), 153.

[105] e.g. ii, 25; vi, 48; vii, 82 (*breviaria*): i, 46; ii, 38; ix, 116 (verbal exposition).

[106] e.g. i, 85; ii, 49; vi, 65; viii, 33.

The letters of Symmachus are thus not in any obvious sense a 'personal document' of their author. Even in the letters to Nicomachus Flavianus (Bk. ii) and Praetextatus (i, 44-55), the degree of personal involvement on Symmachus' part, though perceptibly greater, does not approach the intimacy which we should expect in the letters of close friends and associates. It is largely in the letters to Flavianus and Praetextatus that Symmachus' allusions to contemporary paganism are to be found. They concern, exclusively, the conduct of the Roman state religion and, in particular, the business of the college of *pontifices* of which Symmachus and these colleagues were members: what he fittingly describes, in a letter to Praetextatus, as 'pontificalis administratio'.[107]

In these letters, Symmachus is found writing of the performance of unusually elaborate ceremonies in honour of the gods,[108] or expressing his anxiety at the failure of the priests to expiate a portent seen at Spoletium.[109] He is worried at the negligence or absenteeism of priests and, in a famous expression, criticizes the tendency of Romans—he means senatorial priests—to seek favour with the court by staying away from the pagan altars: 'nunc aris deesse Romanos genus est ambiendi'.[110] In other letters, he mentions a meeting of the *pontifices* which had discussed a proposal by the Vestals to set up a statue in honour of Praetextatus,[111] and asks for the punishment of a Vestal Virgin whom a hearing of the college had found guilty of adultery.[112] He writes to a Vestal to obtain her assurance that she was not, as was rumoured, intending to give up her office before the stated term.[113] In a letter to his brother Celsinus Titianus, then *vicarius Africae* (and a *pontifex*), Symmachus commends to his protection a financial agent of the priestly college, sent out in connection with its estates in north Africa.[114]

More generally, Symmachus refers to the public festivals of Vesta, for which he is returning to Rome,[115] and of Magna Mater, for which Nicomachus Flavianus is failing to return.[116] On one occasion, he lightly reproaches Flavianus for imputing to him ignorance on 'caerimoniae deorum et festa divinitatis imperata'.[117] He suggests that a friend, Helpidius, should come to Rome for the festival of Minerva;[118] and, in a letter of interest from many points of view, expresses pleasure at the paganism of the local aristocracy of Beneventum.[119]

To this point, the paganism of the letters of Symmachus is at one with that of the third *Relatio*; yet it would, in my view, be equally misleading to regard them as necessarily giving full expression to Symmachus' personal attitudes in religious matters. That they should concern themselves only with public aspects of late Roman paganism is not a consequence of these attitudes, but of the general nature of the correspondence. The letters are a matter of 'administration', not encouraging the expression of personal sentiment except of the most formalized variety. The field of operation which determines their conventions is, in religious as in secular matters, a largely public one, in which it is difficult to imagine what part could be played by the private intensities of the Oriental cults.

[107] i, 51.

[108] i, 46 (cf. above, p. 177).

[109] i, 49; note his reference to 'rebus anxiis' and to Symmachus' own 'angor animi' in the circumstances.

[110] i, 51, referring to 'labantis patriae nuntius', cf. ii, 7, cited above, p. 177.

[111] ii, 36. Symmachus' reaction on this issue is notorious, and is exploited heavily by Bloch in favour of his 'narrow-mindedness' and obsession with tradition (art. of 1945, 217-8). But the situation was more complex than this: Symmachus was concerned not only with 'longae aetatis usus' but with 'condicio temporis praesentis' (ii, 36, 2). He was anxious to avoid offending 'sacrorum aemuli' but at the same time aware of the dangers of provoking 'ambitus' by the precedent—one suspects that he was only too aware of the contemporary condition of paganism. In the event a statue was erected, by the chief Vestal Coelia Concordia (cf. *CIL* vi, 2145 = *ILS* 1261), it is not clear whether at her own expense.

[112] ix, 147-8.

[113] ix, 108; 'quare officio pontificis, fide senatoris admoneor proferre conperta'.

[114] i, 68; 'effice, oro te, ut divinitus videatur oblatum tui honoris auxilium, et utriusque te sacerdotii antistitem recordare'—interpreted by Seeck, *Symmachus* CVI, n. 491 as an allusion to Titianus' priesthoods of Vesta (*sc.* as *pontifex maior*) and Sol. See *ILS* 1206, 1243, 1451; Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*[2], 522.

[115] ii, 59.

[116] ii, 34 (above, p. 189).

[117] ii, 53.

[118] v, 85.

[119] i, 3, addressed to his father (so before 377).

The point is well illustrated, paradoxically, by Symmachus' attitude to Christianity, as expressed in the letters. That it should be so rarely possible on the basis of the letters themselves to distinguish Symmachus' Christian from his pagan correspondents is a fact of the greatest importance, attesting as it does his success in maintaining a front of senatorial 'unanimity' and social cohesiveness at a time of great religious diversity within the upper class itself. This is an issue deserving of study in its own right; for the present, it will be sufficient to direct attention to the few letters in which Symmachus makes open reference to Christianity. In all cases, we shall find that they are concerned, not with issues of ideology or belief, but with the practical implications of Christianity, as it intruded upon Symmachus' conduct of his *amicitia*.

In two of his letters, Symmachus recommended bishops to friends, on both occasions asserting admiration for the bishop's personal merits as distinct from the question of his 'sect':

> 'commendari a me episcopum forte mireris. causa istud mihi non secta persuasit. nam Clemens boni viri functus officium Caesaream, quae illi patria est, conciliata maximorum principum pace tutatus est' (i, 64).
>
> 'habeant fortassis aliae commendationes meae interpretationem benignitatis; ista iudicii est. trado enim sancto pectori tuo fratrem meum Severum episcopum, omnium sectarum adtestatione laudabilem' (vii, 51).

In the first of these cases, the more explicit in detail, Symmachus conceded to his brother that his support of a bishop might occasion surprise; yet the bishop, he observed, was performing the traditional function of a man of public spirit, in defending the interests of his city at the imperial court.[120] The religious issue, that is to say, is in this letter rendered neutral by the practical, and very traditional, context of civic and personal patronage within which it functioned.

The same feature can be seen in Symmachus' group of letters (iii, 30-37) to Ambrose of Milan, his antagonist in the affair of the altar of Victory. Most of these letters concern the normal business of 'senatorial' *amicitia*—the exchange of favours of patronage, the recommendation of clients for protection and advancement.[121] In only one of the letters is there any hint at all of Ambrose's episcopal office, nor does this make any allusion to the religious difference between the two men. The letter involves the issue of episcopal jurisdiction which, Symmachus was afraid, was about to be deployed against a client of his own. Symmachus tried to dissuade Ambrose:

> 'sunt leges, sunt tribunalia, sunt magistratus, quibus litigator utatur salva conscientia tua' (iii, 36).

In another letter, to the younger Nicomachus Flavianus, Symmachus indulged in his most pointed comment against Christianity, in describing the involvement of a litigant in another case of episcopal jurisdiction:

> 'cogites, contra interventum tot antistitum quid possit, magis quam quid debeat, impetrari; neque enim iustitiae et innocentiae deferri plurimum potest, cum illis reverentia religionis opponitur' (vi, 29—notable for its rare use of *religio* in the sense of 'religion').

The sharpness of tone is evident, nor will any deny that Symmachus was in fact opposed to Christianity. What is significant, in this as in the letter to Ambrose, is that his hostility is not expressed as a matter of religious dissent, but of offence that his own activities as patron are frustrated by the exercise, as Symmachus sees it, of improper influence: the religious factor is thus absorbed, or 'secularized', by the terms of operation of the correspondence as a whole.[122] I would suggest that there is here a

[120] See my 'Symmachus and the Magister Militum Theodosius', *Historia* xx (1971), at 126-8.

[121] Note esp. iii, 32, on a point of etiquette (two proteges sent by Ambrose to Symmachus with only one letter between them) and 33, on behalf of Marcianus, in trouble after his support of Eugenius (as proconsul of Africa; *Carm. c. Paganos*, 86).

[122] cf. Symmachus' use of the metaphor of the 'mystagogue' in recommending protégés to a friend, e.g. ix, 9; 'in domus tuae sacrarium tamquam mystagogus induco'; cf. v, 64, vii, 45, iv, 40, ix, 64 (the first three cases to known Christians).

limitation imposed by the conventions and function of this correspondence which applies also to the question of paganism, and which makes the letters unfitted to express an interest, if Symmachus possessed it, in a matter so intensely personal as the Oriental cults.

VI

The conclusions to be drawn from this survey might appear negative, if historical reconstruction were a matter of assembling as many facts and hypotheses as possible on criteria of variable quality. Briefly and in summary, what has been frequently treated as cumulative evidence for the character of paganism in late Roman senatorial circles turns out, when examined more closely and in its respective categories, to possess conventions of manner and style, literary or epigraphic, which limit the inferences available to the historian. We ought not, for instance, whatever the personal views of their author, to expect the third *Relatio* or (in my view) the letters of Symmachus to mention Oriental mystery cults, any more than the public inscriptions of senators normally mention their initiations into these cults. For evidence of the initiations we depend, in nearly all cases, on the personal dedications of senators which record them: and the dangers of arguing from silence on this matter are shown by the senators C. Caeionius Rufius Volusianus Lampadius and Publilius Caeionius Caecina Albinus, whose personal dedications reveal an involvement in Oriental cults which is not mentioned in their public inscriptions.

It is of course a corollary of these remarks that the absence of an interest in these cults will scarcely ever, in the case of any particular senator, be capable of proof.[123] But this is precisely what we should expect of a matter so intimate, so deeply expressing an individual's sense of emotional privacy: these were, after all, 'mystery cults', for the knowledge only of initiates. Christian bishops might comment on the failure of their parishioners to be baptised;[124] but in this respect baptism, a matter bearing at least partly on the public standing of a Christian, was quite unlike an Oriental initiation. It is surely significant of the religious discretion of the pagan senators that, with the exception of the actual dedications of initiates, the most detailed accounts of the rituals of the Oriental cults are from Christian sources – notably Prudentius' description of the *taurobolium* and Jerome's list (cited earlier) of the titles of Mithraic grades of initiation.[125]

More generally, what emerges from this discussion is that the role of the Oriental religions in late senatorial paganism is still very much an open question. The inscriptions from the Vatican Phrygianum may even give an exaggerated impression of the prevalence of these religions among the aristocracy, rather as the public inscriptions of senators seem likely to over-represent the degree of political participation of senators at large in the fourth century. What we are unable to do is to relate these two categories of inscription to each other, to produce an accurate assessment of the incidence of such religious tastes among the pagan aristocracy in general, and of their significance in relation to the potential political 'activism' of its members.

On the most literal criterion, that of the actual tenure of office, the inscriptions from the Phrygianum did not give the impression of an unusually active group of senators. Yet in the conditions of the fourth century, the degree of participation of senators in the holding of public office would be a very literal criterion by which to judge the intensity of their political interest.[126] The question at issue is rather a different one: whether an interest in Oriental cults was more likely than devotion to

[123] An exception may be provided by *CIL* vi, 31118 (of 376), where three senators are listed, distinguished as 'v.c., xv v(ir) s.f.' (Turcius Secundus Asterius), 'v.c.' simply (Pontius Atticus), and 'v.c., p.p., Hierof. Hecatar.' (Sextilius Agesilaus Aedesius; above, n. 53). But the precise nature of the inscription is unclear.

[124] e.g. Ambrose of Milan, *Ep.* 79, 4 (*PL* 16, 1270), to Bellicius; Gaudentius of Brescia, *Praef. ad. Benivolum* 4 (*CSEL* 68, p. 3).

[125] Above, pp. 179 and 190: cf. *Carm c. Paganos*, 60, of the tauroboliate; 'sub terram missus, pollutus sanguine tauri', etc.

[126] So M. T. W. Arnheim, *The Senatorial Aristocracy in the Later Roman Empire* (1972), is a rather narrower treatment than the title might suggest.

the Roman state religion to inspire open opposition to the Christian emperors, and whether the pagans were themselves divided in these terms.

Posed in this way, I think that the question must be recognized as not capable of solution. That there should be no trace in Symmachus' letters of any difference of opinion between devotees of the 'Roman' and the 'Oriental' traditions will be of no significance, if it is accepted that the conventions of the letters provide good reasons for their not having mentioned Oriental cults at all. But it is clearly a most important consideration that the evidence for Symmachus' own lack of interest in Oriental cults is inconclusive: and it is worth noting, for the record, that there is nothing in the letters to Praetextatus suggesting other than the deepest respect for this great aristocrat,[127] nor in the letters to Nicomachus Flavianus suggesting other than total unanimity on public and personal matters.

It is significant, above all, that the terms on which the religious issue was fought out were, from the pagan point of view, those of the Roman state religion: so with the third *Relatio* of 384, so with the pagan revival of Nicomachus Flavianus a decade later, if emphasis is correctly laid on his restoration of the public cult of Magna Mater. The fate of the Oriental cults, and of the private devotions of senators, was, as implied by the priest of Mithras mentioned earlier, a rather separate issue.

The argument that the pagan revival of the late fourth century was inspired by the Oriental cults rather than the Roman state religion can, therefore, be little more than an *a priori* assumption not capable of development on the basis of the evidence from pagan circles themselves. To sustain the notion, one is reduced to the evidence which suggested it—the impression given by Christian polemicists, whose attentions are directed against the Oriental cults rather than the state religion. But that this should be so (and the tendency must not be exaggerated) may be an outcome of two factors: first, that the Oriental cults were from a Christian point of view the more exotically disgusting, easily held up to the ridicule of excessive emotional indulgence—particularly when a pagan argument against Christianity was its irrationalism; and second, that, as the Christians saw the issue, the battle was for the minds of men, and only in consequence of this for the public standing of Christianity. As such, it remains beyond documentation from the pagan side, whose main concern, it has been argued, was for the public standing of their religion. It was no doubt because of the terms of Christian polemic, and not because he had evidence unavailable to us, that Prudentius cast Symmachus with his pagan colleagues, as a devotee of the Oriental religions.[128]

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[127] cf. esp. *Ep.* i, 47; 'ingentem animum solitudine domas', with i, 45; 'si diis volentibus reconciliatae vires animi tui integraverunt vigorem', and the delicate reference to the 'pax deorum' in i, 48. See also above, p. 181.

[128] *C. Symmachum*, i, 624-30.