

Symmachus. Oration VII. ante a. 388.¹ Pro Synesio

Introduction

Chastagnol discusses this case more than once. He notes (1986: 78) that this speech shows how a candidate for *adlectio* had to have a sworn advocate (*precator* §1, *petitor* §2), who testified as to the candidate's suitability, and who ran the risk of being sued for false testimony if the new senator turned out badly (§2). In addition two sponsors (*testes*) also came on behalf of the person. Although Synesius' father, Sextius Rusticus Iulianus, was a senator already, he had been made one himself by *adlectio*, and thus was a new senator; the son had probably not been born into the clarissime, and thus had to apply for admission on his own (Chastagnol 1992: 285). See also Sogno 2006: 25–26, Pabst 285–286.

1 That I am present as an advocate rather than a witness for the son of Julianus² the most distinguished man³ my especial friend, let no one think that it was attended to because of want of confidence in the man, since I considered, patres conscripti, that I ask you for good faith with no lesser reverence than the rest of men. I wish to give my oath and by Hercules I ought to have taken on the part of giving testimony, if I had not accepted a request from one whose familiarity to you demands encomiasts rather than people on oath against your hesitation.

2 So let my free choice of service be suspect to no one one: being about to ask that a new senator be added to our dignity, I have an immediate penalty, if I am joined to an unworthy man, and that penalty is not single in number and kind, if by one action I am the author of an injury to myself and accused of injury to you. Thus I would have you believe it was not because of my caution but because of peace of mind for the man I sponsor⁴ that I came to prefers this duty. While he had an abundance of "swearers," and while he was sure of his own merit, he summoned as advocate one whom another would have kept as witness. Yet do not think me actually freed

¹ Seeck CCXI says that since Symmachus says that Synesius' father Julianus is still alive, the oration must have been delivered before the father's death in 387 or 388; Chastagnol 1986: 78 a little before 387. *PLRE* I s.v. Synesius 1 says the date must have been earlier than 376, making that the date of publication of orations. Cf. Sogno 26 "likely that they were all delivered during Gratian's reign, ... That at least seems to be the case of the oration on behalf of Synesius, the son of Rusticus Julianus." See further Sogno 28–30 with notes.

² Ammianus 27.6.1–2 expressed an unfavorable judgment of Sextius Rusticus Iulianus 37 (*PLRE* I Iulianus 37, q.v.), writing that he was as greedy for blood as a wild beast, and displayed this trait *cum proconsulari potestate reget Africam* (371–373). He lived until after the usurpation of Magnus Maximus, who named him prefect of the city (387/8), and died in that office. He became *magister memoriae* under Valentinian I in 367 (Ammianus 27.6.1), and Symmachus would have met him at Trier not much later. Errington 2006: 134 discusses the difference in affect between his tenure as a mild urban prefect and the cruelty that attended his term as proconsul of Africa, and how an appointee of Magnus Maximus would have served that usurper well by cultivating support in Rome.

³ The abbreviation *c. u.* indicates *vir clarissimus*, designation of a senator.

⁴ Callu's understanding of the passage is correct: *securitate suscepti* is parallel to *mea cautela* and *suscepti* is masculine. See L&S s.v. *suscipio* II.B.2.

from the situation of those on oath. But when it is a question of a friend's affair, I consider that a judgment will be made of us as well.

3 I remember how much care the friendship of individuals costs me, nor am I so prodigal of public dignity that I would pay a contract of personal favor by one that is foreign. I do not mention the praiseworthy successions of our offices: I do not wish the senate to intervene for my debt, for both things are repugnant, that a future colleague not be evaluated on his own merit and that his sponsor be made whole from public resources. How much more honorably do I say, that Synesius ought to be chosen for the senate not because he is joined to me in friendship, but that he is friendly to me because he is worthy to be chosen!

4 The father of this young man was long ago admitted as a senator, and attained this on his merits; since dignity inborn belongs to felicity, dignity conferred belongs to virtue. The rest of his ancestors from the past were approved by you at the time when he himself was chosen. The credibility of my oration does not depart from testimony, does it? Consider that I am under oath, because I proclaim what you can acknowledge. Nor would someone say without cause that Synesius contributes more honor than his father, to whom even this has been added, that from the same house he is now the second to be admitted. For the offspring of a family extends as much higher toward nobility the farther it recedes from the estate of new men . . .

5 . . . for fear. The piety of an anxious house hangs about him, but he demands of himself whatever the kindness of all has opened up for him.⁵ Now I see, Iulianus, the reasons for your well considered gentleness: with such a son you are secure rather than remiss.

6 This, however, I do not fear, *patres conscripti*, that someone think the only son of a not impoverished father is unequal to senatorial duties. I wish that fate had preserved his brother as well for the senate! What remains now for the other would be enough for both.⁶ In fact my Synesius believes that all his resources were taken from him with his brother, but the condition of nature is that when things divided are reunited they are increased. And, good gods, how much does the frugal household daily increase! Since, as you all know, often want of means or plenty comes from one's character. Unless perhaps you think praise of this sort unsuitable, clearly parsimony is to be counted among one's goods⁷ for a senator who appropriates the minimum for his private use and reserves more for public use.

7 We save the rest for the witnesses to add carefully: I must beware of speaking more copiously so as not to seem to expatiate not so much in the self-confidence of a pleader as in the

⁵ As Pabst notes, it is not possible to understand the circumstances of this observation. The context is probably not the loss of Synesius' brother, as that is mentioned in the next section.

⁶ Cf. §8: adequate financial resources were essential to a person being considered for *adlectio*, and, as a rule, required of those born to the status, although there could be exceptions: see *Oration 8*.

⁷ Cf. Cic. *Parad.* 6.3: *non intellegunt homines quam magnum vectigal sit parsimonia*. Nazarius disparaged the quality, at least as it applied to public display (*P.L.* 4.35.4). Claudius Mamertinus, however, praised Julian's private frugality as a method of increasing income for public use (*P.L.* 3.10.3); Pacatus would similarly praise Theodosius (*P.L.* 2.14.4, 2.20.5).

carelessness of one who is not on oath. We rely on two men, Euresius⁸ and Avitus⁹, viri clarissimi: if everyone could equal their scrupulousness, no one would [have to] give oaths. But to the former of these although eloquent I could excuse from speaking: it suffices as a vote for our petition that he is the uncle of the petitioner; in fact a man who has often held office, who has given much attention to the state, sought for his own family everything which he earned. And to be sure my friend Avitus, the most noble of orators, will help the case with no lesser influence, because distinction is gotten from friends as well as from relations; in the latter there is dignity of birth, in the former evidence of integrity; that part recommends his family, this his life.

8 I beg and beseech you now, patres conscripti, not to allow unequal ranks to exist so long in one house. This is what all parents strive most to obtain, that those who follow be more illustrious. To Synesius nature has given a good character, his father the best training, fortune appropriate resources¹⁰: for the young man still "new"¹¹ this one and most important ornament remains, of which you will be the authors.

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⁸ Found in *PLRE* I although this passage is the only known mention of him.

⁹ Avitus in *PLRE* I; the only known mention of him.

¹⁰ As Sogno 2006:68 writes, "the ideal prerequisites". Cf. *Ep.* 3.3.2 to Iulianus Rusticus, describing the merits of Flavius Philippus (*PLRE* I Philippus 8): *plus habet laudis in moribus magisque probitate conspicuus est, quam fortunae muneribus gloriatur.*

¹¹ In the Republican sense of *novus homo*.

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