

This introduction to, commentary on, and translation into English of the first book of letters by Quintus Aurelius Symmachus shows the leading orator and statesman of the fourth-century Roman Senate deeply engaged in conversation with the leading men of the empire. The book highlights the influence of the late Roman aristocracy that flourished in the century after Constantine and demonstrates that it did not become powerless in the face of the bishops and the new Christian elite. Shared goals united the late Roman elites far more than religion divided them, helping explain the relatively nonviolent and gradual conversion of the western Roman aristocracy. One hundred and seven letters—crafted to match the recipient's personality, status, and interest—discuss literature, religion, politics, and social life. They provide a unique window into the private lives of Rome's leaders, pagan and Christian, in late antiquity.

Michele Renee Salzman is Professor of History at the University of California at Riverside and University of California Presidential Chair. She is the author of two other books, *On Roman Time: The Codex-Calendar of 354 and the Rhythms of Urban Life in Late Antiquity* (University of California Press, 1990), *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy: Social and Religious Change in the Western Roman Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2002), and numerous articles; and is the General Editor for the Cambridge History of Ancient Mediterranean Religions.

Michael Roberts is Robert Rich Professor of Latin at Wesleyan University. He is the author of numerous books and articles on late Latin poetry, most recently *The Humblest Sparrow: The Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus* (University of Michigan Press, 2009). His *The Jeweled Style: Poetry and Poetics in Late Antiquity* (Cornell University Press, 1989) has recently been reissued in paperback. He is a member of the editorial board for the SBL Writings from the Greco-Roman World series.

The image used on the cover is taken from a photograph of the façade of the famous Celsus Library in Ephesus.

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