

## Stilicho: Barbarian Blood in a Roman Heart

Born to a German father and Roman mother, Flavius Stilicho held together the crumbling Western Roman Empire on behalf of his nephew, young Emperor Honorius. Yet, in the eyes of his contemporaries, he was nothing but a barbarian general usurping power in Rome. Even today, much of the scholarship on Stilicho maintains a similar perspective, focusing primarily on his status as barbarian. Michele Renee Salzman's 2006 article "Symmachus and the 'Barbarian' Generals" categorized Stilicho as one of the barbarians and refers to him several times as such. Ralph W Mathisen (2006) uses the example of Stilicho in his article on the legal status and citizenship of barbarians in Rome. Though Ian Hughes' 2010 book on Stilicho does address Stilicho's Roman blood, marriage, and behavior, its title, *Stilicho: The Vandal Who Saved Rome*, reveals the contemporary bias toward understanding Stilicho within a barbarian framework.

In this paper, I will argue that if historians wish to truly understand Stilicho's actions, they must keep in mind that Stilicho considered himself to be a Roman. First, I show how Stilicho's father's position as an officer in the Roman army, his mother's probable status as a Roman aristocrat, Stilicho's marriage to the emperor's niece, and the special treatment he received all gave him reason to consider himself entirely Roman. Next, I argue that Stilicho lived up to the example of Roman virtue set by Vergil in his *Aeneid*, and avoided the characteristic vices contemporary Roman writers had ascribed to the barbarians. Finally, I explain how Stilicho's actions as general, his administration of the empire, and his submission to death all indicate that Stilicho made every effort to live up to his understanding of Roman duty.

If Stilicho's life is not examined through the lens of his devotion to Rome, historians today will continue to perpetuate the same misunderstandings and prejudices that caused people of the past to misinterpret him. Scholars must recognize Stilicho as the Roman that he was.

#### Bibliography

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