Writing to survive: A commentary on Sidonius Apollinaris, Letters Book 7, volume 1: The episcopal letters 1-11

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General Introduction

Overture

The episcopal letters from the seventh book of the correspondence of Sidonius Apollinaris make for fascinating reading. Through the eyes of one of the protagonists – and a gifted author at that – the reader witnesses one of the major events in history: the fading away of the Roman Empire in the West. One can definitely do worse when it comes to a subject for a commentary. Moreover, the first full commentary had yet to be written, which made the task all the more fascinating.

This is a ‘slow’ commentary. As with ‘slow’ food, it takes its time to savour the abundantia Gallicana, the ‘full Gallic table’, which Sidonius provides. Sidonius is a rich and complex author – and he belongs to an era which is still only partly understood. Together, these factors form a source of misunderstanding. There is only one thing for it: a patient re-reading of the work, and a careful re-interpretation in the light of recent research (thankfully), and with some creativity of one’s own (hopefully). In that way, I hope to contribute towards a fuller enjoyment of the ‘taste’ of Sidonius’ correspondence. Nevertheless, I am fully aware of the fact that most users of this book do not want a ten-course meal. A commentary is a working instrument. It should primarily cater for the need of the researcher who wants specific information. Hence the layout of the lemmata which provide a translation and a concise interpretation to start with – the rest can be studied according to one’s needs. The General Introduction, the Introductions to the individual letters, and the Appendices address a variety of subjects from which, thanks to a clear subdivision, one can easily make a selection.

1 Sidonius revisited

1.1 Late Antiquity

The recent trends in the study of Sidonius form part of the wave of interest in – and, indeed, the invention of – Late Antiquity. Late Antiquity was fully established as a distinct period in its own right all but forty years ago with Peter Brown’s The World of Late Antiquity (Brown 1971). For several decades after that, the talk of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire was forcibly turned around to a story of change and continuity. Recently, however, the battle of ‘continuists’ versus ‘catastrophists’ has taken a new turn. The ‘fall of Rome’ is back again, witness such titles as The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization (Ward-Perkins 2005) and The Fall of the Roman Empire (Heather 2005). Ward-Perkins, as an archaeologist, stressed the dramatic disappearance of material comfort, and Heather, as a military historian, the

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1 Citation from Sidon. Ep. 1.2.6.
essential role of the barbarians in bringing the Western Empire down. Whereas the case for transformation is built typically on research into the history of religion and mentality, the case for radical change borrows its arguments from socio-economic history and archaeology. Chris Wickham’s much acclaimed study Framing the Early Middle Ages (Wickham 2005) seems to overcome this stalemate by widening the argument and taking into account regional differences. He argues that the world of Late Antiquity had elements of continuity as well as radical change: peasant societies and rural household economies saw the least change, whereas the form of the state – whose entire fiscal basis dissolved – saw the most. The developments in other areas – the aristocracies, urbanism and economic networks – differed widely depending on the regions in which they took place.2

1.2 Revival of interest

Against this background, there has been a clear-cut, if modest, revival of interest in Sidonius over the last thirty years, and a revaluation of the intentions and achievements of this Gallo-Roman aristocrat, high government official, poet, letter writer and bishop, who happened to live in this crucial age, at the end of Roman rule in Gaul. In the 1930s and 40s, two important books had already laid a sound foundation for further investigations, Courtenay Stevens’ Sidonius Apollinaris and his Age, from 1933, and Sidoine Apollinaire et l’esprit précieux en Gaule aux derniers jours de l’empire by André Loyen, published in 1943. They placed Sidonius in his historical context, wrote his biography, and defined his literary personality – be it with a debatable aesthetic bias. A third achievement of the time was William Anderson’s first volume of Sidonius’ Poems and Letters (books 1-2) in the Loeb edition (1936; completed in 1965 with a second volume, using his papers, by Semple and Warmington). In 1960 and 1970 Loyen, who dedicated much of his scholarly life to Sidonius, contributed an important three-volume edition with translation and notes in the Budé series.

The revival of Sidonius in the last three decades manifests itself in the increasing number of publications, and in their efforts to cast off traditional notions of irrelevance, insincerity, decadence – in short: ‘decline and fall’ – in order to establish the picture of a purposeful bishop and a competent artist.3 New editions and commentaries have appeared, as well as publications in the field of text criticism, of language and prosody, of literary tradition and style, of political and social history, and of the history of the church (the role of the bishop). For the correspondence we now have the excellent commentaries of Helga Köhler for book 1 (Köhler 1995) and of David Amherdt for book 4 (Amherdt 2001). Köhler has set the standard for a modern commentary on Sidonius; Amherdt is a worthy continuator with special interest in epistolary commonplaces and the conventions of amicitia. Jill Harries’ Sidonius

2 The concept of Late Antiquity, its periodization, and the problem of decline and fall are the subject of three recent articles, resp. by Edward James, Arnaldo Marcone, and Clifford Ando, which open the first issue of a new periodical in the field, the Journal of Late Antiquity (2008, pp. 20-30, 4-19, and 31-60). In my commentary I follow Bowersock et al. 1999: ix in the definition of Late Antiquity as ‘the period between around 250 and 800’; with Souter 1949, I will use the term ‘later Latin’ for, roughly, the period 200-600 (its archaizing elements reach even further back, to the second century, in authors such as Fronto and Apuleius).

3 Silvia Condorelli has written a useful reasoned survey under the title Prospettive Sidoniane. Venti anni di studi su Sionio Apollinare, 1982-2002 (Condorelli 2003).
1.3 Scope and aim of this study

This brings me to the scope and aim of my study. I will discuss the letters 1 to 11 of the seventh book of the correspondence. The point of the collection is that Sidonius divided book 7 into two parts, one to fellow bishops (1-11), and one to laymen and an abbot (12-18). The first part concentrates on the fall of Clermont, capital of the Auvergne, and on Sidonius’ role as its bishop. It can be studied as a coherent whole.¹

First and foremost, this is a traditional philological and literary commentary. The spadework for my corpus had simply not yet been done. I place Sidonius’ language, his prose style and his thought within the literary tradition which he assimilated, and compare him with contemporary authors as well as later ones. The subject also requires much background information on historical matters, church organisation, liturgy, etc., for which I was able to use a wealth of recent material. From this many-faceted approach conclusions are drawn about the message of these letters, about the function of form for Sidonius, about publishing as an ideological and political instrument, and about the existential choice of ‘writing to survive’. The ultimate aim of the present study is to contribute to the growing understanding of Sidonius as an author, and of his time.

In this commentary I have also tried to apply some results of modern research in linguistics and literary theory. The idea is to test their validity in a late antique text (this research is often primarily based on classical texts), and to try to enrich the traditional philological toolbox of the commentator. The reader will encounter remarks and analyses in the field of particles, of prose rhythm, of (epistolary) style, and of narratology and discourse linguistics.²

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¹ See below paragraph 5.4.3 The structure and meaning of book 7.

² The use of particles is commented on throughout; for prose rhythm see below section 6.3; for style, sections 5.6 and 6.2; for narratology, my comment on letter 2, introduction to sections 3-8. In the commentary there are some scattered remarks on pragmatics (topic and focus) and on word order. I feel that the understanding of Sidonius’ style would benefit greatly from systematic research in this field.
2 Life and works

2.1 Name

According to the incipit of the manuscripts, Sidonius' full name was Gaius Sollius Apollinaris Sidonius. However, in the 'addresses' and the bodies of the poems and letters only parts of it are used. The inscriptio of Carm. 9 to his friend Felix reads: … Sollius … Apollinaris … Sidonius. The inscriptiones of the letters contain only the name Sidonius, as does the inscriptio of Ep. 4.2 which is by Claudianus Mamertus. Sidonius is also used in 1.11.3 (vocative) and 1.11.4. Sollius occurs three times in the correspondence: 1.9.6, 5.17.9 (both in the vocative), and 9.15.1 (= Carm. 40.16). We do not find either Gaius or Apollinaris. Outside Sidonius' own writings the usage is also Sollius and/or Sidonius: Claud. Mam. Anim. praef. inscriptio Sollio Sidonio, and ibid. 1.1 Solli Sidoni; in Ruricius, Avitus and Gregory of Tours alternately Sollius and Sidonius.

The last name, Sidonius, was his official 'short' name (German: ‘Leitname’). From the second century AD the tria nomina system rapidly disappeared, and was, especially in the new nobility, replaced by an accumulation of names and derivations from the paternal as well as the maternal line. The last name designated the individual (it could be followed by a signum, ‘nickname’). For this system of ‘polyonomy’ see Heinzelmann 1976: 13-22, Cameron 1985: 171-77 and Salway 1994: 136-42.

The usual modern designation, Sidonius Apollinaris, dates from the thirteenth century, and became general through its adoption by Angelo Poliziano. This inversion of names was especially popular in the first and second centuries AD, e.g. Asinius Pollio – Pollio Asinius (Sen. Dial. 5.23), Cassius Dio – Dio Cassius. It is, as Sirmond says, praeter morem … saeculi Sidoniani. The same mistaken inversion is applied, e.g., when we say Claudianus Mamertus, instead of Ep. 5.2.1 Mamertus Claudianus (and Claudianus in the inscriptiones of Ep. 4.2 and 4.3).

2.2 Life

The main facts of Sidonius’ life are as follows:

5 November 429/32

Born in Lyon. The day is given in Carm. 20.1 f. Natalis noster Nonas instare Novembres / admonet. The year can be approximated from Ep. 8.6.5 adulescens adhuc nuper ex puero, i.e., in 449 he was between 17 and 20. His father, anonymous, had been praefectus praetorio Galliarum in 448/9, like his grandfather Apollinaris (who had embraced Christianity) in 408/9. His father, anonymous, had been praefectus praetorio Galliarum in 448/9, like his grandfather Apollinaris (who had embraced Christianity) in 408/9.

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6 The incipit of Carm. 4 in MFPT adds another name, Modestus: (Gaii F) Sollii Modesti Apollinaris Sidonii, which is also interpolated in the incipit of the Epistulae in C. Its status is uncertain. Sirmond (Migne 58: 443c), with much reserve, suggested a possible hint at it in Ep. 9.12.3 si forte digneris iam modestum potius quam facetum existimare.

7 See Dalton’s introduction, note 1, and Sirmond in Migne 58: 443c-d.

8 See Engelbrecht 1886: 534 f.

mother was from the family of the Aviti.

Educated by the *grammaticus* in Lyon, by the *rhetor* probably in Arles where his father resided. He attended lectures together with Claudianus Mamertus, and forged connections with important families in Narbonne, among others through his friendship with Felix.

452/55 Returned to Lyon. Married Papianilla, daughter of Eparchius Avitus from the Auvergne (*praef. praet. Gall.* 439); she was probably a distant relative on his mother’s side. The dowry comprised the estate of *Avitacum* on lake Aydat. Four children are known: a son Apollinaris, and the daughters Severiana and Alcima (twins?), and Roscia.10

1 January 456 In Rome. Recited the panegyric (*Carm*. 7) which he had been commissioned to compose to celebrate the consulate of his father-in-law who, launched by the Gallo-Roman nobility and with Visigothic support, had become emperor the year before. Rewarded with a statue in the ‘poets’ corner’ of the forum of Trajan. Avitus was forced to flee soon after, was defeated on 17 October by Ricimer and Majorian near Piacenza, for a short while became bishop of this town, died and was buried in the family shrine of St Julian in Brioude (near Clermont).

Late 458 Panegyric (*Carm*. 5) at the reception of Majorian and his troops in Lyon. Since 28 December 457 Majorian had been joint emperor with Leo. Gaul had opposed his candidature and favoured another candidate (the so-called *coniuratio Marcelliniana*; Sidonius probably kept his distance from this issue), but Majorian had reasserted his power. Finally in 461 Sidonius became comes. In that year Majorian was murdered.

Prolonged retirement in Avitacum. Devoted himself to literary activity together with *collegia* of friends in Bordeaux and Narbonne. Deepening of his Christian conviction under the direction of his friends Faustus, bishop of Riez, and Claudianus Mamertus. Baptized by Faustus.

Autumn 467 To Ravenna at the head of an Arvernian delegation to welcome the new emperor Anthemius (since that spring) and to draw attention to the difficulties the region was in as a result of the expansionist policy of the Visigothic king Euric.

1 January 468 Panegyric (*Carm*. 2) in Rome on the occasion of Anthemius’ consulate. Subsequent promotion to the rank of *patricius* and nominated *praefectus urbi*.

469 For political reasons not present at the trial in Rome of the former *praef. praet. Gall.*, his friend Arvandus, at which he should have presided. Arvandus had been accused of high treason by Gallic circles close to Sidonius.

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10 See Stevens 1933: 84 n. 8. Anderson 1: 254 n.1 ad *Carm*. 17.3 argues against the belief that Sidonius’ children included twins.
469/71 Appointed bishop in Clermont. The consecration probably brought on a severe illness (Ep. 5.3.3-4).\(^{11}\)

471-75 Fuelled the resistance in Clermont. In 473 introduction of the ceremony of the Rogationes (Ep. 7.1).

Mid 475 Surrender of Clermont to Euric on the basis of a treaty which had been initiated by the new emperor Iulius Nepos (since June 474). The Auvergne was exchanged for Provence. However, Provence was also overrun in the next year.

475-76 Exiled to Livia, near Carcassonne.

476/77 Pardoned, probably thanks to his friend Leo of Narbonne who at the time was one of the king’s ministers, and after having paid his poetical respect to Euric (Ep. 8.3). Reinstated as bishop.\(^{12}\)

486 (?) Death. Greg. Tur. Franc. 23 *cum iam terror Francorum resonaret in his partibus* (battle of Soissons 486/87). The last letter can perhaps be dated to 481. His successor Aprunculus died in 490.

His tombstone was discovered in 1991.\(^{13}\)


### 2.3 Works

An inevitable element of melancholy is present in Sidonius’ literary production. At times, he detects ‘the last traces of a vanishing literary culture’: 4.17.2 *vanescentium litterarum … vestigia*. Traditional as the thought of a *mundus senescens* (Ep. 8.6.3) may be, it was nevertheless an everyday reality for Sidonius and his friends that the knowledge of Latin,

\(^{11}\) Sidonius is totally silent on his consecration, despite the fact that it was unprecedented in Gaul for a prefect and patrician suddenly to abandon his high office and become a bishop in a relatively unimportant provincial town. Harries 1994: 16 has tentatively suggested connections with the dangerous Arvandus affair. As to the year, Stevens 1933: xiii says: ‘Autumn 469 (?)’, Loyen 1: xxii (with n. 2): ‘471’ (after having been cleric for some months), Harries 1994: 169: ‘probably not more than a year after his return [from Rome, AD 469]’. As to the illness, see Harries ibidem. Mathisen, however, in his review of Harries’ monograph (IJCT 3 (1996) 246-50) doubts the connection with the episcopacy.

\(^{12}\) The story told in Greg. Tur. Franc. 2.23 from his last years as bishop suggests opposition to him within the clergy of Clermont.

and Romanitas in general, was critically endangered. Yet melancholy is never allowed to get
the upper hand. There is a pervading sense of optimism-against-all-odds, a fundamental
tenacity and belief in the lasting significance of the past. He ‘will never tolerate mental
servility’: 7.18.3 numquam me toleraturum animi servitutem; with competent administrators ‘it
is reasonable to hope for better times ahead’: 3.6.3 fas est de cetero sperare meliora. More than
anybody else he is regarded by contemporaries as a cultural beacon, ‘the man who restores
time-honoured eloquence’, veteris reparator eloquentiae.¹⁴ His literary heritage must be
understood as an all out effort to turn the tide and preserve that which is essential for a new
age. As Rousseau 1976: 372 has rightly said: “… it is not a morbid sense of decline that seems
most characteristic [of Sidonius], but rather … adaptability, a willingness to risk change’.

His works include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Subdivision</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>469 AD</td>
<td>24 Carmina</td>
<td>1-2, 3-5, and 6-8 Panegyrici (with prefaces and dedications)</td>
<td>A selection from his early poetry. Fourteen more poems are included in the letters. After his consecration he tried to avoid writing poetry (Ep. 9.12.1).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>146</td>
<td>Epistulae</td>
<td>Appeared in instalments:</td>
<td>One further letter is by Claudianus Mamertus (Ep. 4.2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>469</td>
<td>Book 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dedicated to Constantius (prefatory letter Ep. 1.1).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>477</td>
<td>Books 2-7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dedicated to Constantius (final letter Ep. 7.18).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>479</td>
<td>Book 8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dedicated to Petronius.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>482</td>
<td>Book 9</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dedicated to Firminus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>A volume of contestationes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Liturgical texts. Have not survived. Originally attached to Ep. 7.3 (where see discussion).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

It is possible – though, in my opinion, not very probable – that Sidonius translated
Philostratus’ Life of Apollonius of Tyana. He sent it to his friend Leo, accompanied by Ep. 8.3,
in which he calls his contribution a turbida et praeceps et Opica translatio, ‘a wild, precipitate
and barbarian translatio’. Does translatio mean ‘copy’ or ‘translation’? Mommsen (followed by
already Sirmond – ‘copy’ in Greek, and Loyen ‘translation’ from the Greek, following Pricoco
1965.¹⁵

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¹⁵ See Mommsen in the introduction to Luetjohann’s edition p. xlix, and the argumentation for
‘transcript’ in Pecere 1986: 60 f. and 232 f. (nn. 228-33). For ‘translation’ see Loyen 3: 196 f. n. 5; Mascoli
2004: 161 also follows Pricoco. There is a survey of opinions in Kaufmann 1995: 45 n. 32. For Sidonius’
presumed knowledge of Greek, see below note 42 in section 3.4.2 Philosophy.
3 Historical and social context

3.1 Visigoths and Burgundians

3.1.1 The Visigoths

The presence of the Visigoths in Gaul had lasted for some sixty years when Sidonius embarked on the defence of Clermont. In the decade following 31 December 406, Gaul had had to endure the disrupting invasion first of Vandals, Sueves and Alans who had crossed the Rhine frontier on that last day of the year 406, and advanced all the way to the south, then, after the Vandals and Sueves had left southern Gaul for Spain in the autumn of 409, of the Visigoths. The Goths originally came from the Black Sea. After having defeated the emperor Valens at Adrianople in 378, a considerable number of them, merging with others into the people of the Visigoths, went westward under Alaric (their chief ca. 395-410), spent years in Italy, which ended in the sack of Rome in 410, entered Gaul and, after having served the empire by driving the Vandals out of Spain (416), were eventually settled as allies in Aquitaine in 418/19 with Toulouse as their capital. The deep impression all this made on contemporaries and the blow it struck to the Christian belief in God’s providence is well known from such works as Augustine's *De civitate Dei* and *De gubernatione Dei* by Salvian of Marseille.

Quieter times were to follow, though not for long. The Visigothic settlement developed into a kingdom with clearly expansionistic tendencies. After two abortive attempts by king Theodoric I to conquer Arles and Narbonne (in 425 and 436 respectively) and the defeat of Theodoric by the Roman general Aetius in 438, the Visigoths proved their strength by giving indispensable support to Aetius against the Huns in 451 in the battle of the Catalaunian Plains. In the short spell of the imperial rule of Avitus, Sidonius’ father-in-law, 455-56, whilst fighting under Roman orders, they established control over large parts of Spain. The year 458 saw a second Visigothic attempt to conquer Arles, and in 461 Theodoric II succesfully attacked Narbonne. King Euric (466-84) decisedly enlarged the scale and intensity of the expansion, aiming at a kingdom which was to range from southern Spain to the Loire, and which would be nothing less than a successor to the Roman Empire. Pillaging and...

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16 The year 419 has recently been defended by Schwarcz 2001. There has been much scholarly discussion about the exact nature of the ‘barbarian’ invasions, and the Visigothic settlement in particular. The question is whether the barbarians were alien to the Mediterranean culture and completely disturbed it, or whether they were only marginally different from the Romans they met, and integrated more or less quietly. In the case of the Visigoths, the discussion is about the nature of the *hospitalitas*, as the arrangement provided by the Romans was called, and the share they received, the *sortes Gothorum*. Did they get two-thirds of the territory, thereby upsetting the original population, or was it ‘only’ a share in tax proceeds? The latter solution was proposed in the 1980s by Walter Goffart and developed further by Jean Durliat. The issue it still undecided, although recent research tends to emphasize the upsetting nature of the *Landnahme* (see Heather 2005: 242 f., Ward-Perkins 2005: 14-16). Thus, the backdrop of Sidonius’ story is – to say the least – the experience of two generations of unrest and concessions, if not of outright trauma.
devastation in the Auvergne and Provence culminated in the annexation of the greater part of the Auvergne in 469-70 (the town of Clermont remained outside the conquered area, but was hard pressed for several years to come) and the seizure of Arles and Marseille in 473. Meanwhile a rescue army of the emperor Anthemius had been cut to pieces by Euric on the banks of the Rhône in 471.

The emperor Nepos (June 474 - 28 August 475, ruling from Italy, and 475-480, ruling from Dalmatia) took the initiative to negotiate and sent the quaestor Licinianus to Toulouse, who in 475, in cooperation with the foremost bishops of the region, reached a peace treaty according to which Euric surrendered Provence in exchange for the Auvergne – an outcome which disappointed Sidonius bitterly, and which is a dominating motive in the letters studied in this book. The exchange was to be of no avail as far as Roman rule was concerned. Already in 476, Provence was overrun by the Visigoths.


### 3.1.2 The Burgundians

In the 470s, after the Vandals in Africa and the Sueves in Spain, and at the same time as the Visigoths, the Burgundians carved out a kingdom for themselves within the Roman empire. In the vacuum left by the invasion of 406 by the Vandals, Sueves and Alans, the Burgundians had crossed the Rhine from the right bank and settled around Mainz. For a time they backed the Roman government by putting a stop to ulterior barbarian assaults. In 436, however, they attacked the empire themselves, but were crushed by the Huns, probably at the instigation of Aetius. In 443 the remainder left the Rhine and was established in Savoy, with Geneva as its capital. In cooperation with the Visigoths the Burgundians got as far as Lyon in 456. When they tried to go further south they met with varying success. The problems which led to the Rogation ceremonies which Sidonius writes about in *Ep. 7.1* may be a reflection of the capture of Vienne (471/2?). Their northern frontier is difficult to determine. Langres at least must have been within their sphere of influence, because in 483/4 they deposed its bishop. On the whole they supported the Roman cause, with some members of the royal house serving as *magister militum*. Their support against the Visigoths was essential for Clermont,

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17 Pelletier 2001: 145 f.
19 ‘The Burgundians differed from the Franks and Visigoths only in the degree of assimilation. Though we do not know why, Burgundians and Romans came together very quickly in the second half of the century’ (Elton 1992: 175).
though accepted with mixed feelings. In the autumn of 474 Sidonius went to the court of king Chilperic in Lyon to plead the cause of his uncles: it was not easy for the family to remain loyal to both Lyon and Ravenna.


3.2 The end of Roman Clermont

3.2.1 The town

After the prosperous development of cities in Gaul during the first two centuries of our era, the economic crisis of the third century caused a decrease in the population. The insecurity, which was brought about by the barbarian invasions of the second half of the century, caused the towns to restore their walls or to construct new ones. The walls surrounded only a limited area, the most populated and the easiest to defend (the castrum), which in most cases was the same as the ancient Gallic oppidum, and left out the less densely inhabited outskirts of the town (the suburbium), and with them in many cases the most important monuments, temples, theatres, amphitheatres, which in the course of time were abandoned and went to ruin. Toulouse with its walls which enclosed no fewer than a hundred hectares was an exception: the most important towns covered thirty, the majority no more than ten or fifteen hectares. The walled town of Clermont was very small indeed, comprising only three hectares, seven hundred inhabitants at the most. It is highly probable that a considerable part of its citizens lived outside the precinct.

3.2.2 The sieges

Headed by their bishop Sidonius, the people of Clermont withstood the yearly onrush of the Visigoths between 471 and 474. The backing of the Burgundians must have been vital to this prolonged resistance. The defence itself was weak and Sidonius could only count on his own moral leadership and the scarce assistance of some of his friends: helpful advice from the priest Constantius, food stocks from bishop Patiens of Lyon, and modest military successes of his brother-in-law Ecdicius. The Burgundians, however, had every reason to use Clermont as a barrier against the Visigothic agression, just as the Visigoths, in their turn, were keen to oppose the Burgundian expansion. Clermont was sandwiched between. Sidonius says about himself that nunc periculum de vicinis timet, nunc invidiam de patronis, ‘at

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20 See below, paragraph 3.2.2 The sieges.

21 Ep. 5.7.7. See Harries 1994: 231.

22 On the development of the cities and their churches in Gaul, see Griffe 3: 5-42 (for Clermont esp. 8, 13 f., 29-31) and Février et al. 1980: 399-421 (with a map of ancient Clermont on p. 414).

23 Ward-Perkins 2005: 48 f. mentions the resistance in Clermont, and later in Soissons, as examples that local action could achieve success. ‘But for most of the West the remilitarization of society came too late.’
one moment he is afraid of the danger from his neighbours [the Visigoths], at another of the animosity of his protectors [the Burgundians] (Ep. 7.11.1). It has been supposed that the military strength of the Visigoths was overrated, and that they were definitely not good at sieges.\textsuperscript{24} They managed to burn the crops and the houses outside the walls, but did, or could, not take the \textit{castrum} itself. Eventually, the war was decided at the negotiating table.

Loyen 2: xviii-xx provides a useful timetable of the war:

- 469 start of the Visigothic offensive (Euric breaks the \textit{foedus});
- 469-70 Aquitanica Prima almost totally overrun and the Auvergne surrounded (with the connivance of the Roman \textit{vicarius} Seronatus);
- spring 471 first attack on Clermont, repelled by Ecdicius; same year food help from Patiens after unsuccessful Roman expedition to counter the Visigoths on the banks of the Rhône;
- 472 second attack on Clermont, Ecdicius recruits reinforcements;
- 473 siege of Clermont, endured with the help of the Burgundians; in the ensuing winter the resistance is heartened by the arrival of the aged Constantius;
- 474 fourth, dangerous attack (Ep. 7.10.1): the new emperor, Iulius Nepos, promotes Ecdicius to the patriciate, but decides not to provide military help.

See also Stevens 1933: 130-60 and Harries 1994: 222-42.

\subsection*{3.2.3 The peace treaty}

The survey from the preceding paragraph continues as follows:

- spring 475 negotiations between Euric and Epiphanius, bishop of Pavia, and after that (May-June) with the four bishops Graecus of Marseille, Basilius of Aix, Faustus of Riez and Leontius of Arles (Ep. 7.6 and 7.7): the Auvergne is ceded to the Visigoths in exchange for Provence. The emotional repercussions on Sidonius were undoubtedly enormous, but, as Harries 1996: 39 sagely formulated: ‘as a bishop with nothing in the world left to call his own, he had no other choice’. However, as I have said earlier\textsuperscript{25}, Sidonius was not a naïve victim of his own conservatism. He foresaw that events were bound to turn out in favour of the new barbarian kingdoms. Therefore, he gambled on selling his life dearly, to be able to take as many as possible of the interests of his circle as well as his personal ideals into the future.

In the end, the detached historian will calmly rank this peace treaty, which at the time was so fiercely resisted, with many similar ones. The break-up of the Roman Empire was not only characterized by warfare and power struggles: political communication and diplomacy also played a vital role in the establishment of the new political kingdoms.\textsuperscript{26}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Elton 1992: 173 f. For the shifting of frontiers in Gaul, intrigue and diplomacy were more important than military force: Harries 1996: 33.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Section 2.3 Works.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Recently examined anew by Gillett 2003.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
3.3 Gallo-Roman aristocracy

3.3.1 Nobility threatened

The picture we get of the Gallo-Roman nobility in the second half of the fifth century under barbarian pressure is that of a tightly knit group of blue-blooded men and women, conservative in outlook, threatened in its means of existence; as a result they either compromised or moved.

Tightly knit, indeed. Prosopographical studies show that the Gallo-Roman nobility at this time reached an unprecedented degree of closeness. A look at the circle of moralists and literati confirms, likewise, that ‘almost every major writer from fifth-century Gaul can be placed within a single, well-defined nexus of family, social and religious relationships’ (Wood). More than in any other part of the empire, the nobles in Gaul were attached to traditional Roman values, presumably because of its long Roman past in combination with its increasingly isolated position. This conservative outlook, when confronted with inevitable change, created the characteristic tension which is so eloquently put into words by Sidonius. There was no escape. Sooner or later, economic instability and precarious safety forced everyone to decide on the future. The usual alternative was: compromising or moving. There was a ‘third way’: in the North, Aegidius and Syagrius did not compromise or move; they carved out a small kingdom for themselves. The great majority, however, adjusted themselves to hospitalitas and the barbarian overlords. The notorious cases of Arvandus and Seronatus (Ep. 7.7.2), though, cannot easily be ranged under the heading ‘compromise’. For them, as the highest placed Roman officials in Gaul, it was treason to deal with the Visigoths. A third category moved, either as emigrants or as exiles. In Sidonius’ writings we see the ‘secondary dislocation’ (after the first one at the time of the invasion) of men like Simplicius and Apollinaris (in the 460s from Nîmes to Vaison; Ep. 7.4.4), and Thaumastus who went from Narbonne to Vienne. In Ep. 7.7.6 he foresees the flight, not of isolated nobles, but of the entire population of Clermont (which did not take place); both Sidonius and Simplicius (Ep. 7.9) were sent into exile. After this involuntary ‘dislocation’, Sidonius’ attitude finally was also one of compromise: see the passage in Ep. 8.3.3 rex inclitus, ‘the renowned king’ (Euric!) who rules the West with his armies and his laws, and Carn. 34 (Ep. 8.9.5), e.g. v. 39 hinc, Romane, tibi petis salutem, ‘from here, Roman, you seek your salvation’.

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28 See my comment on Ep. 7.7.2 audebant se quondam fratres Latio dicere.
29 Heinzelmann 1976: 221 has pointed at the lack of a stabilizing intermediate layer between the nobility and the deprived majority of the population. More recent studies have characterized the economy of fifth century Gaul as relatively prosperous, but vulnerable (Drinkwater and Elton 1992: 107-64). As a proviso, Ward-Perkins warns against simplifications when writing about the complexity within late antique economy (CAH 14: 346).
31 The classic study on the subject of ‘strategies for survival’ is Mathisen 1993.
3.3.2 Social conventions and Christianity

The system of amicitia, patroni and clientes was as much alive as ever. It permeates the correspondence, and can be understood as part of the time-honoured system which goes back to the Republic, as this commentary will show time and again. Amor, caritas, officium, gratia, facilites, comitas – ‘close ties’, ‘mutual obligations’, ‘approachability’, etc. –, indeed, the whole vocabulary of social interdependency is there.\(^{32}\) In this ‘society dominated by pride, respect for class-feeling, and imperious good taste’\(^{33}\), these qualities henceforth take on a Christian, clerical garb which fits the aristocratic manners perfectly.\(^{34}\) Nevertheless, caritas with New Testament overtones has a more pastoral and democratic ring, and Christian, ascetic humilitas is a commitment to greater self-criticism than with respectful formulas alone. Is it embarrassment or showing-off when we see Sidonius (and others) extending self-criticism into apparent self-hate in cases like Ep. 6.1? In passages like Ep. 5.3.3-4, however, where he narrates that he fell dangerously ill after his consecration, there is a serious sense of human frailty and inadequacy which also accompanies his years as a bishop. We should not underrate the amount of emotion and ‘sentimentality’ in the late antique attitude to life. Conventionality and sincerity are not mutually exclusive.\(^{35}\) The blend of traditional – pagan – aristocratic values and Christianity, the profane and the religious, Rome and Jerusalem, which surprises the modern reader, was for the contemporaries simply their existential horizon and their raison d’être.

3.4 Intellectual life

Whereas the following remarks do not, of course, come anywhere near a panorama – be it ever so rough – of intellectual life in Gaul in the fifth century, their aim is to discuss a few aspects which are important with regard to this commentary and the picture of Sidonius which is sketched in it.

3.4.1 Theology

Theology is not the intellectual activity which springs to mind first when one writes about Sidonius. He did not contribute to systematic theology. On the other hand, his importance for the spread and deepening of the Catholic faith should not be underrated. We will come to that in the chapter on the Church (ch. 4).

Sidonius was not the only one not in the frontline of theological developments. For Gallic theologians in general the fifth century was an age of practical interventions rather than far-reaching theories. The controversy with Arianism was of prime importance as a corollary to

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\(^{32}\) Indispensable Hellegouarch 1963.

\(^{33}\) Dill 1899: 210.

\(^{34}\) See below, par. 4.3.1 Increasing power.

\(^{35}\) See Loyen 2: xxxv f., Rousseau 1976, Heinzelmann 1976: 233-46. I would stress the extravagant and ‘sentimental’ element in ‘a rotten and stinking heap of sinful earth’ (Ep. 6.1.1), ‘the loathsome quagmire of my conscience’ (Ep. 7.8.1), etc. These expressions resemble the baroque sentiment, and language, of pietism as seen exemplarily in Johann Sebastian Bach, e.g. St Matthew Passion (text by Picander), bass-recitative (28): ‘…er ist bereit, den Kelch, des Todes Bitterkeit zu trinken, in welchen Sünden dieser Welt gegossen sind und häßlich stinken, weil es dem lieben Gott gefällt’.
the Gothic expansion. Yet it scarcely engendered new ideas: most had been formed in the previous century. The christological debate and the outcome of the ecumenical councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451) had a very limited impact. In Sidonius’ immediate environment the nature of the soul was debated, and a great many of his episcopal colleagues participated in a council to maintain religious discipline regarding the issue of divine grace and human free will – a salient point in Gallican theology. I will discuss the latter two subjects in, respectively, paragraph 3.4.2 Philosophy, and section 4.4 The council of Arles in the early 470s.

For an overview of fifth-century Gallican theology see Luce Pietri in GC 3: 249-63 (with bibliography), and CHC 2: 30-37.

3.4.2 Philosophy

The words *philosophia*, *philosophus* and *philosophari* occur frequently in Sidonius’ correspondence. They designate a broad range of knowledge (‘culture’, ‘learning’), which Sidonius holds in high regard: in *Ep.* 4.1.4 *philosophia* makes the difference between barbarian and Roman. Of course it comprised philosophy proper. What did the latter amount to? Brittain 2001: 244 in a – as he admits himself – sceptical review of the evidence for philosophical culture in Sidonius’ correspondence, states: ‘First, in Sidonius’ circle, it was flattering to be associated with “philosophy”, whether or not one had knowledge of it. Second, one was expected to be conversant with the broad outlines of the history of the philosophical sects – to catch an allusion to Plotinus or a joke about Epicureans – and to favour “Plato”, that is, the form of Platonism approved by Augustine and Ambrose [i.e. Plotinian Platonism]. Third, … it is unlikely that knowledge of philosophy cut any deeper than was required by the (admittedly by then rather exacting) standard of the educated person of the late Roman Republic.’ There were a few exceptions. The most notable is Claudianus Mamertus with his *De statu animae*, which adopted the Platonist position of the incorporeality of the soul, against the orthodox Christian view. Another was Polemius, for whom Sidonius composed an epithalamium (*Carm.* 14-15) which is grafted on philosophical lore.

Sidonius excuses the use in this epithalamium of so many technical terms, *quae praefata pace reliquorum eloquentum specialiter tibi et Complatonicis tuis nota sunt*, ‘which are primarily familiar to you and your fellow-Platonists – with apologies to the remaining intellectuals’ (dedicatory letter sect. 1). I think this points to a nucleus of ‘specialists’ in Sidonius’ circle. Faustus certainly belonged to it, as is apparent from *Ep.* 9.9.12-16. He is complimented for having ‘enlisted Plato’s Academy in the cause of Christ’s church’, *ecclesiae Christi Platonis Academiam militare* (sect. 13). Faustus wrote the at first anonymous pamphlet *Quaeris a me* (*Ep.* 3), to which Claudianus reacted with *De statu animae*. Another is Leo, the future jurist, speech writer and minister of Euric, for whom Sidonius during his banishment prepared a

36 See my comment on 7.9.5 *quendam philosophorum*.
37 Discussed at length in Fortin 1959 and Brittain 2001.
38 Claudianus, too, is characterized as differing only in dress and religion ‘from his Platonic brotherhood’, *a collegio ... Complatonicorum* (*Ep.* 4.11.1).
copy (or translation?) of the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* by Philostratus. The figure of Leo takes us to the intellectual milieu of Narbonne where he was born – as was Polemius. The interest in Apollonius of Tyana proves the neo-Pythagorean bent – amalgamated with neo-Platonism and astrology41 – of members of this brilliant circle, which gathered round the erudite poet Consentius.42

Of Sidonius one can say that he much admired these learned friends, but that his prime interest was literary – his response to Claudianus’ *De statu animae* was notoriously belated as well as beside the point, because it was purely literary (Ep. 4.3).43

### 3.4.3 Literature

Mathisen 1993: 105-18 qualifies the pursuit of literary studies as a unifying element in Gaul against barbarism: ‘Gallo-Roman aristocracy went through a crisis ... aristocratic status became even more dependent on the sense of unity and elitism which came from an appreciation of classical literary culture’ (p. 105). Contemporaries had a lot to say about cultural decline, but ‘the literary circles of late Roman Gaul were in fact flourishing’ (p. 107). ‘Literary circles are attested, for example, in Arles, Marseilles, Narbonne, Bordeaux, and Lyons. These literary circles gave Gallic aristocrats additional opportunities to socialize and to demonstrate their unity of spirit’ (p. 111). ‘The publication process ... clearly was a collegiate undertaking ... Literary sponsors shouldered heavy burdens. Not only were they in charge of publicity, but they had editorial duties as well’ (p. 112).

Sidonius was extremely conscious of the power of literature, and the need to write it. A prodigious talent himself, he encouraged others to participate with the objective that, at least, *etsi … Latina iura ceciderunt, verba non titubant*, ‘although Roman sway has ended, its language does not falter’ (Ep. 4.17.2). It is as though language has the magic power of conjuring up a world which must not disappear. Making the most of the classical past, he manipulates the present and the future. Hence the profusion of linguistic means: the incantation must be all-encompassing to be effective.

### 4.1 Organisation

The episcopal letters of book 7 must be read against the background of the rules for, and the tensions in, the organisation of the church in Gaul. I have selected the aspects which elucidate the different situations in central and northern Gaul (for *Ep.* 5, 8, 9), and in the South-East (esp. for Mamertus in *Ep.* 1).

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40 See the discussion in section 2.3 *Works*.

41 Courcelle 1948: 243 f.

42 Loyen 1943: 78-83, Fortin 1959: 29 n. 1. Consentius and Claudianus Mamertus belonged to the few who were still familiar with Greek; Sidonius’ knowledge of it was probably limited. See Kaufmann 1995: 45 f. nn. 32 and 33.

43 For the philosophers whom Sidonius mentions in his work, see Hebert 1988.
In accordance with the system promulgated at the council of Nicaea, the metropolitan had a leading role in the church provinces (the impression we get from Sidonius is that they acted rather as *primi inter pares*). Among other things, their presence and initiative were required when a new bishop was chosen. In the difficult circumstances prevailing in central and northern Gaul, with a lot of vacancies, the remaining bishops had to make the best of it among themselves. We will see how Sidonius tried to adhere as closely as possible to the spirit of the rules, while improvisation made up for the rest.

In south-eastern Gaul the situation was different. The episcopal presence was still up to strength, and the bishops had room for territorial conflicts, whether or not they reacted to the instability caused by the Burgundian presence. The influence of the bishops of Rome was clearly felt: ‘The popes are keen to have some kind of central authority in southern Gaul, and use Arles to this end, but at the same time, the rights of individual metropolitan are to be respected.’ There was a long-lasting rivalry between Vienne and Arles concerning the primacy in the province of Viennensis. Vienne was its metropolis, but Arles had the prestige of being the residence for the emperor on a number of occasions in the fourth and fifth centuries, and of being the seat of the *praefectus praetorio Galliarum* and constituting the administrative centre of Gaul since 407 (or at least since 418). Its bishops had close connections with the highest authorities, worldly as well as spiritual. Although the synod of Turin, which was held in 398, had reached a compromise, this was questioned again and again in the course of the fifth century. In 450 pope Leo I returned to the settlement of Turin: the province was divided into a smaller northern (Vienne) and a larger southern metropolitan diocese (Arles). We will see in the biography of bishop Mamertus of Vienne how he participated in this border conflict.

### 4.2 Theology, monasticism, the saints, and liturgy

The most striking element in Gallican theology in Sidonius’ day is its Semipelagianism. Whereas, in general, Catholicism adhered to the Augustinian concept of predestination, Gaul preferred to allow for a fair measure of human cooperation in achieving salvation by means of man’s free will. I will return to this problem and the role played in it by Sidonius’ friend and mentor, Faustus of Riez. The debate had already been fierce in the first half of the century. It was refuelled by Faustus in the second half. Faustus was a former abbot of...

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44 For the division see Griffe 2: 113-17 (based on the *Notitia Galliarum*), with a map at the end of the volume. See also my Appendix A.

45 Norton 2007: 159.

46 Not including the town of Die (see *Ep. 1 Introduction*, section 3 Addressee).

47 See Griffe 2: 146-64 and Bowersock et al. 1999 s.v Arles.

48 In par. 4.4.1 on the agenda of the council of Arles Faustus was also involved in the debate on the nature of the soul (see par. 3.4.2 Philosophy) and wrote a letter on deathbed penitence (*Ep. 5*). A number of his sermons have been handed down (ed. Engelbrecht, CSEL 21, 1891). By some he has also been identified as the author of the sermons known as the *Collectio Gallicana* by Pseudo-Eusebius – a hypothesis which is challenged in recent research (see ed. Giorle, CC SL 21-21A, 1970).

49 The attacks of the Augustine-minded Prosper of Aquitania on John Cassian, who advocated free will (*Conl. 13*), and the indirect attack by Vincentius of Lérins on Augustine’s ideas (*Commonitorium*). See CG 3: 256 f.
Lérins, off the coast near Marseille. He is an example of the strong monastic tradition in Gaul and the influx of many abbots into the episcopacy. As a result, asceticism and the sensibility to man’s own contribution to salvation permeated the Gallican church. Besides Lérins and neighbouring islands, Marmoutier/Tours (St Martin) and the Jura were among the principal centres of monasticism.

Due to his religious education by Faustus and others, Sidonius, too, belongs to the pedigree of Lérins. He is in contact with this milieu and admires asceticism. When he is in Bourges for the election of a new bishop, he looks on the monks as a possible recruitment pool (Ep. 7.9.9). The letters 7.16 and 7.17 are proof of his direct involvement in the monastic world. Personally, he admires the man who, after the hardships of a period of monastic retirement, enters the episcopate and retains his ascetic attitude: Ep. 9.3.4 (about Faustus) nil ab abbate mutatus per sacerdotem, ‘you have not changed a bit as a result of your bishopric, after having first been an abbot’. Monkish spirituality is closer to his heart than learned theology, in which he does not feel competent: he refuses to write a work of exegesis (Ep. 4.17.3).

Another important element in the spiritual landscape of Gaul is the cult of the saints, and the function of relics and miracles, which were important to the elite as well as to the population. They lend profile and power to Sidonius’ resistance in Clermont. We will meet them several times.

Finally, Gallican liturgy provides a conspicuous contribution to the development of liturgy in general. Sidonius participated in it by introducing the Rogation days in Clermont, and by writing contestationes for the celebration of Mass. Both developments boosted communal faith, local patriotism and episcopal prestige – indispensable in an age of profound change.

4.3 The role of the bishop

4.3.1 Increasing power

The role of the bishop and the changes it underwent in Late Antiquity have enjoyed a huge amount of scholarly interest lately. The bishop, indeed, became a pivotal figure in society. As Rapp 2005 succinctly formulated: ‘The emperor, the holy man, and the bishop. They were the

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50 Among them Honoratus, founder of Lérins, 427 bishop of Arles; Eucherius of Lyon, bishop there in Sidonius’ youth; Hilary, young kinsman of Honoratus, to whom Honoratus sent his open letter De laude heremi, and who succeeded him as bishop of Arles in 429; Lupus of Troyes, Hilary’s brother-in-law, bishop from 427; Maximus, who succeeded Honoratus as the head of the Lérins community, but moved in his turn to the episcopate in Riez in 433; Faustus of Riez, who was to succeed Maximus, first at Lérins and in 461 in Riez. See for this list Harries 1994: 40 f. As early as the 350s, Martin of Tours had lived as a hermit on one of the isles in the Tyrrhenian Sea. One of the fathers of Western monasticism, John Cassian, had arrived in Marseille about 415, and founded the abbey of St Victor.

51 See below in par. 4.3.4 Sidonius’ church.


53 See the introduction of letter 1, sections 6 Rogations and 7 The cult of relics, and the introduction of letter 3, section 4 Contestatiunculae, celebrating the saints and martyrs.
most powerful and evocative figures in late antiquity. They provided practical leadership, moral guidance, and the dispensation of favours’ (p. 3). ‘It is, in fact, the bishop who occupies the middle ground between the two poles of secular and religious leadership’ (p. 6). I would say that Sidonius himself offers a prime example of this central role played by a fifth century bishop. His position is all the more interesting because it is atypical, inasmuch as he was at the head of a modest diocese, in an exposed position.

In recent scholarship concerning the role of the bishop, the emphasis has been on power structures in the empire, urban transformation, and spiritual authority. During the period of religious as well as political change in the empire in the fourth and fifth centuries, the bishops’ power increased because of their ever more central position and their personal wealth and/or piety. In a study mainly focused on the East, Brown 1992 has drawn attention to the almost insurmountable distance between the emperor and his subjects. The bishops provided authority on the local level: ‘It was … on the local level, as “controller of crowds”, responsible for the peace of the cities, that the bishops consolidated the advantages that they had first gained at the end of the fourth century’ (p. 148). Liebeschuetz 2001 added ‘the element of the running down of curial government, and its replacement by a much less tangible and less clearly defined form of oligarchy. In the West … notables came to be in charge … operating together with the count who represented the king, and with the bishop who in times of crisis often proved himself the real leader of his city. The bishop’s role in civic government was something quite new and unclassical. The position which he eventually achieved had not been sought by either Church or state; it had evolved as secular government in the city weakened, leaving a vacuum’ (p. 401). Brown 2002 emphasized the authority gained by the bishop as the protector of a society sinking into poverty: ‘Clergy and laity both stood on the same treacherous slope that tilted downward toward poverty’ (pp. 49 f.). Hence, the bishop’s authority could be enhanced by personal asceticism. This is one of the pillars of Rapp 2005 on ‘Holy Bishops in Antiquity’: ‘This book aims to assert and explain the importance of ascetic authority as the focal point at the intersection between spiritual and pragmatic authority’. Ascetic authority is thought of as being obtained by personal effort and a striving for perfection, between God-given spiritual authority, indepent of man, and pragmatic authority, acquired by public action for the welfare of others.

Perhaps ahead of his time, Heinzelmann 1976 already articulated most of these notions, while concentrating on Gaul and the social background of its bishops. The bishop is like a father and patronus to his flock; he is respected for his caritas towards the pauperes/humiliores, and for a certain amount of personal asceticism (pp. 157, 163, 170). Interestingly, these qualities conformed seamlessly to the ideal of the ‘good aristocrat’. Aristocratic qualities, after a nobleman’s conversio – or deepening of Christian practice –, were simply equated with eminently Christian qualities.54 ‘Damit war es der Aristokratie gelungen, auf dem Wege zu einer neuen, christlichen Gesellschaft ihre alten, traditionellen Tugenden mitzubringen und geltend zu machen, wodurch ihr Prestige bewahrt, ja gesteigert wurde’ (p. 208).

This was especially the case in Gaul. There, bishops were generally drawn from the local nobility, but in the course of the fifth century, as the isolation from the empire increased and career opportunities in the imperial service diminished dramatically, the haute volée, too,

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54 In Sidonius cf. e.g. Ep. 4.9.3 and 7.12.4.
aspired to the episcopal office. Families such as the Apollinares, Aviti and Gregorii, next to those of, e.g., Rusticus, Perpetuus and Simplicius, were to dominate the scene for a long time. This powerful position of the bishops in Late Antiquity remained intact well into the Middle Ages.\footnote{With special attention to Gaul, consult Heinzelmann 1976, Consolino 1979, Wes 1992, Mathisen 1993, and Bartlett 2001 (the latter for the difference with Italy). For episcopal families see Harries 1994: 185 f., GC 3: 233-35. For a similar survey I refer to Amherdt 2001: 17-21.}

### 4.3.2 ‘In search of Sidonius the bishop’

After what has been said about Sidonius’ understanding of his duties as a bishop – this mixture of class pride, Christian humility and a pastoral attitude so typical of the times – there is the unsatisfactory feeling that this description remains superficial. Can we come closer to the personality of this bishop who lived in such extraordinary circumstances? His decision to turn the fate of Clermont into a personal challenge was not the most obvious act for a nobleman who would have calculated his chances soberly. In the eyes of a great many of his contemporaries, it was also not the most promising strategy when it came to saving Romanitas – indeed one of his prime objectives. So, what made him tick? Obviously, a psychological interpretation is out of the question, but something can be said about his literary persona. The upheaval at the end of his administrative career and the beginning of his episcopacy marked him for the rest of his life: he is strangely silent about the causes of the change and how it took place, but he describes the consequences as shocking for his health and confidence (see above, section 2.2 Life). Consequently, Sidonius and Clermont formed much more than a rational union. It was a union for better and for worse. Much has been made of the political and military drive which this unleashed in him – and rightly so. What has perhaps not always received the attention it deserves, is the personal religiosity involved in it. In his pioneering article ‘In search of Sidonius the bishop’, Rousseau 1976 has demonstrated just how greatly faith contributed to Sidonius’ openness to the future, to his flair and flexibility. An increased awareness of personal deficiency and guilt made the certainties of the past less evident, and created a willingness to admit the unconventional. Eventually, it set free his capacity for practical enterprise: ‘His defence of Clermont was a religious exercise, as much as a civil or military one’ (p. 376).

### 4.3.3 Sidonius’ network

Some remarks about Sidonius’ network may serve as a first orientation regarding the character and extent of his relationships.\footnote{For easy reference, I discuss here also the family, and his lay friends and acquaintances. For a proper introduction see Loyen 2: xxviii-xxxiv (clerics) and Loyen 1943: 56-94 (laymen). Then also, of course, the prosopographies and monographs mentioned in the bibliography.}

Twenty-five bishops figure as addressees in Sidonius’ correspondence, nine of them in book 7. As some of them are represented more than once, the number of episcopal letters amounts to thirty-six, 25% of a total of one hundred and forty-six. Graecus of Marseille is honoured with no fewer than five letters, Lupus of Troyes receives four, Euphronius of Autun, Faustus of Riez, Fonteius of Vaison, and Principius of Soissons each get two. Lupus is the doyen of Gaul: ‘You oversee all the branches of our church’, Sidonius writes in the first letter of book
6. However, a closer look at this count makes it clear that the number of letters which are
dedicated to correspondents is certainly not the only and absolute indicator of their
importance to Sidonius. Patiens played an essential role in Sidonius’ life, at his *conversio* (as
Loyen supposes), as a model for the office of a bishop, and by lavishly supporting a famished
Clermont. Faustus was an even closer friend who baptized him and might be called his
theological conscience. Nevertheless, they receive only one and two letters respectively.\(^57\)

We know the dioceses of twenty-one of these bishops. They fall into two groups, a ‘northern’
connection, reaching from Nantes to Toul and Autun\(^58\), and a south-eastern cluster centred
on Provence. The South-West is conspicuously absent. For a map see Appendix A.

Then there are his lay friends, whom Loyen has called his ‘amis des jours heureux’, men
from the country as well as intellectuals, the men he visited at their estates, and with whom
he had a good time at dinners and in libraries – among them also the members of his family.
They can be divided into three groups: Auvergne (Clermont), Languedoc (Narbonne-
Nîmes), and Bordeaux. Within the scope of this book, I only mention Pontius Leontius, lord
of the manor of Burgus near Bordeaux, one of those who remained after the Visigothic
settlement (for the alternative which the Gallo-Roman nobility faced, see above at par. 3.3.1
*Nobility threatened*); Sidonius’ three uncles who, from their estates, all moved into safety East
of the Rhône (also there); Ecdicius, Sidonius’ brother-in-law, for his military exploits in
defence of Clermont; and Tonantius Ferreolus in Nîmes and Consentius in Narbonne as
paragons of literary devotion and talent.

Sidonius’ web of business and political acquaintances actually stretched much wider. We
have, e.g., count Arbogastes in Trier (*Ep. 4.17*); a certain Candidianus in Ravenna (*Ep.
1.8*); contacts with the administrations in Rome and in Lyon (Burgundians), which have remained
anonymous; and in Toulouse, at the Visigothic court, his invaluable friend Leo.\(^59\)

### 4.3.4 Sidonius’ church

After the volte-face made by Constantine towards religious tolerance and even outright
support for Christianity, it had become possible for the bishops to establish themselves with
a new church within the town walls, and thus to demonstrate the new order of things – the
Christian church and the secular state closely linked at the centre of power. Constantine
himself had started an enormous building programme of churches, in Palestine, Rome and
Constantinople. The minor centres only had to follow. The first cult places had been just
outside the ancient towns, in the Christian cemeteries. It is possible that some of these had
also served as primitive cathedrals, or else other sites in various *suburbia*. Now the church
entered the *castrum*. The first cathedral of Clermont was built under bishop Namatius (446-
462) and was, therefore, brand new when Sidonius took over the episcopate in 470. Its
dimensions were considerable. The walled town of Clermont was so small that Namatius’

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\(^57\) In addition, two members of the clergy, not bishops but priests, deserve special mention: Sidonius’
bosom friend Claudianus Mamertus (exchange of letters about *De anima*, *Ep. 4.2-3*) and Constantius
who opens and closes the collection of books 1-7 (*Ep. 1.1, Ep. 7.18*).

\(^58\) Ian Wood in CAH 14: 510: ‘... despite the crises in the Loire valley in the 460s, Sidonius continued to
number northern bishops and aristocrats among his correspondents’.

\(^59\) See also Stroheker 1948: 59.
successor Eparchius had to make do with a little house next to the church as a residence.\footnote{Interestingly, at Sidonius’ death there must have been a new one, large enough to receive \textit{cunctos cives} for the funeral repast (Greg. Tur. \textit{Franc.} 2.23) – or was it Sidonius’ own mansion? See Prévot and Barral i Altet 1989: 33.}

There was no room for a baptistry, and so the existing one outside the wall remained in use. This baptistry, along with several other churches and oratories and the Christian cemetery, was situated to the north-west of the \textit{castrum}, in a district which is probably the same as the \textit{vicus Christianorum} mentioned by Gregory of Tours.\footnote{For a description of the cathedral of Clermont see Greg. Tur. \textit{Franc.} 2.16 (cf. 1.33, 2.21 and 5.11). See Griffe 3: 30 f., Février et al. 1980: 412 and 414 and Prévot and Barral i Altet 1989: 27-40. On church building in general Monfrin in Pietri GC 3: 1011-74 (1059-70 ’Architektur und Anlage’); in Gaul Monuments 1995-98.}

This building activity was by no means unique. Despite political unrest and economic depression, a new wave of rich bishops invested in the splendour of their town and their office – and of Catholicism in general – by replacing former chapels with large churches or building new ones. In the episcopal letters of book 7 alone, we meet bishop Perpetuus of Tours who in the 470s built a new cathedral in honour of St Martin (Ep. 9), and Simplicius of Bourges who erected a church even before he became a bishop, in the best tradition of euergetism (Ep. 9 \textit{contio}). The building of a new church often went hand in hand with the acquisition of relics (Ambrose in Ep. 1).\footnote{See Matthews 1975: 341 f. about episcopal and lay benefactors, 345 about donations as a means of lending profile to Catholicism against Arianism; see Bowden 2001 on the costs and benefits of church building, donors and prestige.}

\section*{4.4 The council of Arles in the early 470s}

The council which was held in Arles sometime in the years 470-75\footnote{Modern scholars prefer an early date: Griffe (1966) indicates 470 or 471 (Griffe 2: 84 n. 44: ‘470 ou 471’, p. 145: ‘peu après 470’, p. 289: ‘vers 471’), Munier (1963) in Conc. Gall. 1: 159 (1963) says: ‘c.a. 470’, and Mathisen 1990 (appendix n. 11) accepts Munier’s date (for the argumentation of these scholars and the problematic identification of bishop Crocus, see my comment on 7.6.9 \textit{Crocum Simpliciumque}). A century ago, scholars favoured a somewhat later date, towards 475, arguing that the council took place before Crocus’ exile, but that the exile itself was more or less recent when, in 475, Sidonius wrote his letter 7.6 on the deplorable state of the church in Gaul (Krusch MGH AA 8: lvi ‘ante a. 475’, Duchesne 1: 130 n. 2, citing Krusch: ‘peu avant 475’). I think that a later date is problematic because of the capture of Arles, in 473, by the Visigoths (Loyen 2: xv f., with n. 1, and Wolfram 1988: 186). It is doubtful whether the synod could have taken place in these circumstances. An even later date, as proposed by Tillemont, \textit{Mémoires} 16: 423, ‘ca. 475 and not later than 480’, seems to be even less probable. Sirmond, \textit{Concilia antiqua Galliae} 1: 147, had opted for ‘ca. 475’.}

\footnote{The texts concerning the council can be found in the editions of Krusch (MGH AA 8, Berlin 1887), pp. 288-90 (the letter by Faustus) and 290-91 (the letter of Lucidus), and of Engelbrecht (CSEL 21, Vienna 1891), pp. 165 ff. Munier, in Conc. Gall. 1: 159 f., offers a synopsis and the lists of bishops in both letters. The same argumentation as used by Faustus, is applied by Ennodius in his \textit{Ep.} 2.19 (see Gioanni 2006: 185 f. n. 17.).}

is important for our study for several reasons: its agenda, the attendants, and episcopal chronology and hierarchy.
4.4.1 Its agenda

Bishop Faustus of Riez had found fault with one of the priests in his diocese, Lucidus, because of Lucidus’ ideas about the operation of God’s grace in the election or rejection of man, and the role of free will. Lucidus held that man cannot contribute to his own salvation and is entirely dependent on predestination. In Gaul, this question was debated throughout the fifth century. The monk Pelagius, who had taught in Rome in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, had denied original sin, and held that man can take the decisive step towards salvation of his own free will. Augustine had taken the opposite view and stressed predestination. In Gaul, with its strong monastic tradition (Lérins, Marmoutier, etc.), man’s own choice and effort quite naturally were thought very important, whilst God’s grace was presupposed and made them perfect. This midway position is commonly called ‘Semipelagianism’. As stated earlier, it was the prevalent opinion among Gallican theologians in Sidonius’ day.64

Faustus – himself a former abbot of Lérins – wrote a letter to Lucidus in which he summoned him to retract his views, Leontius, bishop of Arles, convened a considerable number of bishops, and at that synod Lucidus publicly and by letter renounced his opinion that alios deputatos ad mortem, alios ad vitam praedestinatos, ‘some are doomed to death, others predestined to life’ (MGH AA 8: 290). Afterwards, Faustus was to develop his own ideas in De gratia libri duo.

Thus, the agenda of the council is a testimony to the theological climate of the day in Gaul. With Duchesne 1: 131, however, I think the council had an ulterior function. What brought together a large number of bishops was not so much – or not only – the relatively limited question concerning Lucidus, as the need to consider the difficult political situation. Duchesne calls the Lucidus affair ‘little more than a pretext’. The really important thing must have been collegial consultation on how to meet the ever growing threat of the collapse of Roman sovereignty in the region.

4.4.2 Its attendants

The council was attended by no fewer than thirty bishops. Their names are known to us from the list of the twelve subscribers to Faustus’ letter, and the series of thirty bishops to whom Lucidus addressed his letter of retraction. The provinces in Arles’ direct sphere of influence are of course well represented (Viennensis, Narbonensis I and II, Alpes I and II), but there are also representatives from Lugdunensis I (Lyon, Chalon, Autun), Maxima Sequanorum (Besançon) and even Lugdunensis IV (Paris). Among the bishops are the following correspondents of Sidonius: Fonteius of Vaison (Ep. 6.7 and 7.4), Mamertus of Vienne (Ep. 7.1), Faustus of Riez (Ep. 9.3 and 9.9), Graecus of Marseille (Ep. 6.8, 7.7, 7.10, and 9.4), Basilius of Aix (Ep. 7.6), and Theoplastus of Geneva (?) (Ep. 6.5).

Sidonius himself, however, is not on the attendance list of the council. Whatever the reason for this (protocol: Arles not entitled to invite Aquitania?; military: the precarious situation of

64 See also above, in section 4.2 ‘Theology’. In 529, the council of Orange officially put an end to Semipelagianism. From then on, the Augustinian position was accepted as orthodox also in Gaul. See ODCC s.v. ‘Pelagianism’ and ‘Semipelagianism’, Chadwick 1955: 170-211, ‘The Pelagian Controversy and the School of Marseilles’, and Brown 1967: 340-407 at length on Pelagianism, predestination and Augustine’ role.
the defence of Clermont?), one thing is perfectly clear: he was not present at a meeting which touched the heart of his concern for Roman Gaul. For all his connections, Sidonius found himself outside the centre of power and experienced difficulty – perhaps insurmountable difficulty – in influencing the outcome of the conflict of interests. His influence – as far as we can see – was mainly indirect.\textsuperscript{65}

4.4.3 Episcopal chronology and hierarchy

The list of attendants is also a valuable document to assess the chronology, and the hierarchy, of the Gallican bishops. In an important article from 1990, ‘Episcopal Hierarchy and Tenure in Office’, Mathisen has made a strong case for the assumption that in lists like this one, the bishops figure in order of seniority (time in office), sometimes preceded by the bishop who hosts the council, the metropolitans or the Nestor of the meeting. Tenure of office was the most important factor to determine episcopal hierarchy (see \textit{Ep}. 6.3.1, 7.5.4, 7.6.10, 7.9.6); recently elected bishops had the lowest status (Mathisen 1990: 126 f.). As regards the addressees in my corpus, Mathisen’s approach results in this approximate succession (for easier reference, I mention also the correspondents who do not figure on the list of Arles (between \textless \textgreater brackets)):

1. Fonteius of Vaison, 449/50 (\textit{Ep}. 7.4)
2. Euphronius of Autun, 451 (\textit{Ep}. 7.8)\textsuperscript{66}
3. Mamertus of Vienne, ca. 451 (\textit{Ep}. 7.1)
4. Megethius of Belley (?), 451/63 (\textit{Ep}. 7.3)\textsuperscript{67}
5. Perpetuus of Tours, 458/61 (\textit{Ep}. 7.9)\textgreater
6. Graecus of Marseille, 451/63, closer to 463 (\textit{Ep}. 7.2, 7.7 and 7.10)\textsuperscript{68}
7. Basilius of Aix, 463/70, closer to 463 (\textit{Ep}. 7.6)
8. Agroecius of Sens, unknown (\textit{Ep}. 7.5)\textgreater

In the various introductions to the letters, sections Date, I confront Mathisen’s results with the opinions of other scholars.

5 Correspondence

5.1 Epistolography

5.1.1 A bird’s eye view

Letters are of all times, serving as a means of human communication. They are the vehicle \textit{par excellence} to bridge the physical distance between individuals or groups, and convey a message by which the sender sketches a picture of himself and hopes to influence the

\textsuperscript{65} See also my introduction to letter 3, section 3 \textit{Addressee}.

\textsuperscript{66} He heads Lucidus’ list of addressees, probably because he was felt to have an exceptional status on account of his age (Mathisen 1990: 128 f. and 139 appendix).

\textsuperscript{67} I think the early 460s are most likely; see the Introduction to letter 3, section 3 \textit{Addressee}.

\textsuperscript{68} In the Introduction of letter 2, section 3 \textit{Addressee}, I suggest that the second half of the 460s is more likely.
recipient. The occasion can be public as well as private. Depending on the degree of sophistication expected within the cultural setting of sender and recipient, a letter displays a varying amount of conscious literary elaboration. The author may also have in mind eventual publication, even though its primary aim is private. The letter definitely enters the domain of literature when it is published, either by its author or by posterity, often as part of a letter collection.

Letters in Antiquity covered a huge range of applications, from a short personal message to an elaborate theological treatise. As letters were integrated quite naturally in all kinds of social intercourse, letter writing was not considered to be a literary genre in its own right for a long time, and, consequently, no need was felt to theorize about epistolography. The practical side – the range of applications – was given precedence in the form of collections of examples tuned to the different situations in which a letter had to function: information, request for help, congratulations, recommendation, etc.\(^9\) The art of letter writing was taught in schools only because it was a useful preliminary exercise for ἠθοποιία, envisaging and depicting a character or situation. The theory of epistolography was little more than an appendix to some handbooks of rhetoric, viz. Demetrius’ Περὶ ἔρμηνειας 223-35, and, for the Latin world, the fourth century rhetor Iulius Victor’s *Ars rhetorica* 27.

Nevertheless, rhetorical style became hugely important for epistolography as polite manners were increasingly associated with an elaborate literary form. For Latin literature Pliny the Younger set the standard with his collection of *litterae curatius scriptae*, ‘especially carefully written letters’, self-contained little works of art. The collections of men like Fronto, Symmachus, Ausonius, Sidonius, Ennodius, and of Cyprian, Paulinus, Ambrose, Augustine and Jerome, each in its own way and to its own ends, used rhetorical stylization. In Late Antiquity, literary style went hand in hand with the cultivation of *amicitia* in élite milieus: the addressees did not expect less than to receive carefully crafted billets which befitted their standing, so much so, that, in the case of Symmachus, his short letters are often mere expressions of *amicitia*, without any other content – the medium had literally become the message.\(^{70}\)

\(^9\) The Τύποι Ἐπιστολικοί by Ps.-Demetrius of Phaleron (first cent. BC or AD) distinguished 21 types of letters, and the Ἐπιστολιμαῖοι Χαρακτῆρες by Ps.-Libanius/Ps.-Proclus (fourth/sixth cent. AD) as many as 41.

5.1.2 Epistolary characteristics

‘Zooming in’ after this bird’s eye view, I will now highlight some characteristics of letters which are especially important for late antique practice, with the focus on Sidonius. First I deal with the conventions of social intercourse in the letters; next I mention elements of language and structure. When discussing the examples, I have given special attention to Sidonius, although the characteristics are universal.

Private letters are amicorum colloquia absentium, ‘conversations between absent friends’ (Cic. Phil. 2.7). They reveal the mindset of their authors: minime ignarus, quod ita mens pateat in libro velut vultus in speculo, ‘I am well aware that the mind is as exposed in a book [viz. of letters] as the face is in a mirror’ (Sidon. Ep. 7.18.2). They take into account the propria personarum, ‘the individuality of their addressees’ (Cassiod. Var. 11 praef. 2).

Among recurring elements of polite social intercourse in Sidonius’ time are caritas, verecundia or pudor, and urbanitas. Caritas makes much of the addressee’s achievements, verecundia or pudor, inversely, finds excuses not to accept the addressee’s compliments, and urbanitas sets little store by the sender’s own talent.

The dispatch of letters is one of the social obligations (officia) that has to be fulfilled, because to receive a letter is among the addressee’s rights (iura) in the relationship (amicitia). The sender obeys the wishes of the recipient, the so-called iubes-pareo motif. A letter is a token of friendship: it is prompted by the recipient’s sympathy (amor quidem tuus suasit ut scriberem, ‘your love for me makes me write’, Symm. Ep. 5.51), and returns it (salutatone contentus, quae … contestatur affectum, ‘(please be) satisfied with my greeting, which gives evidence of my sympathy’, ibidem).

A letter should be short, clear and elegant (Iulius Victor advises brevitas, lux and gratia). Preferably, it has one subject (Sidon. Ep. 7.18.4 cum singulæ causæ singulæ ferme epistulæ finiantur, ‘as generally each letter deals with one subject’). Its style should have urbanus lepos, ‘polite elegance’ (Sidon. Ep. 8.16.3), its language should contribute to pressus sermo purusque, ‘a concise and natural tone of conversation’ (Plin. Ep. 7.9.8). In a collection variety is desirable: when Pliny says he has ordered the letters not chronologically, but ut quaeque in manus venerat, ‘as they came to hand’ (Ep. 1.1.1), this is belied by a carefully studied composition. Variety can be achieved especially by alternating the epistolary genera, with special attention for ‘light’ letters (Cic. Fam. 2.4.1 litteræ iocosæ, Iulius Victor 27 Halm p. 448 l. 21 in litteris cum familiaribus ludes).\footnote{Humour brightens serious subjects (1.9.8 si tamen tetrica sunt amoenanda iocularibus), but must be used with tact (2.12.3 [during the illness of his daughter] si iocari liberet in tristibus). Cf. Iulius Victor’ advice: ‘When you are lighthearted in your friendly letters, reckon with the possibility that they may be reread in sadder times’, and ‘A letter written to a superior should not be droll’; transl. Malherbe 1988: 65).}

Among recurring stylistic elements are proverbs, citations, Greek words, interjections (Sidon. Ep. 7.2.7 quid morer multis?, ‘to cut a long story short’), devout phrases (Sidon. Ep. 7.1.1 sub
ope Christi, ‘with Christ’s help’), and reservations (Sidon. Ep. 7.2.2 salva vestrarum aurium severitate, ‘with all respect to your severe ears’). 72

5.1.3 Sidonius and the art of letter writing

Sidonius’ correspondence is a model of polite and polished private letter writing of the kind I have sketched in the preceding sections. Yet he clearly put his personal stamp on the genre: he wrote longer and especially much more complicated letters than his predecessors generally did. For what reasons might he have done this?

With his litterae paulo politiores, ‘letters written with slightly greater care’, Sidonius elaborated on Symmachus and Pliny, as he remarked himself (Ep. 1.1.1; also 4.22.2 ego Plinio ut discipulus assurgo). His letters, however, are often longer, and the books contain fewer letters, as he states in the programmatic last letter of the first collection, 7.18.1 servans hoc sedulo genus temperamenti, ut epistularum producetur textus, si numerus breviaretur. A little further on, in 7.18.2 dictavi enim quaepliam hortando, laudando plurima et aliqua suadendo, maerendo paucia iocandoque nonnulla, he points at variety with regard to the several types: letters of admonition, praise, and advice, for sharing grief and merriment. Thus, while adhering to the traditional principle of variety, he felt the need to write longer letters which went contrary to this.

As for lux and gratia, transparency and elegance, in this respect, too, Sidonius developed his own standards. Elegance was taken to a level of exuberance and complexity which defied even contemporary readers. What looked transparent (or superficial) at a first and general reading sometimes suggested hidden intentions. Schoolmasters may have warned and friends may sometimes have wondered73, but Sidonius had it his own way. I suggest four reasons for this. First, a deeply felt need to defend the cause of Romanitas by taking Latin to the limits of its possibilities (his admirer Ennodius was to prove by his correspondence that even Sidonius had not reached these). 74 Second, the need to develop an expressive medium of the first order to curb his emotions as a result of the loss of a familiar and beloved world. The exuberant and the bizarre often confer an unmistakable sense of tragedy. Third, the inevitability of having to say things in an encrypted way because of the war which was going on. Finally – concurrent with all this seriousness – the urge to have a good time and enjoy himself and show off with language, puns, riddles, and improvisations. After all, a nobleman’s position among equals was also defined in terms of mastery of litterae – and Sidonius was equipped for that as few others were. 75 Thus, in more than one way, writing for

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73 Iulius Victor 27 Halm p. 448 l. 10 cavenda obscuritas. Ruric. Ep. 2.26.3 cuius lectio … prae obscuritate dictorum non accendit ingenium, ‘whose [i.e. Sidonius’] perusal does not appeal to my mind because of his obscure wording’.

74 For the literary ‘mission’ felt by the Gallic nobility in general, see Stroheker 1948: 31.

75 For the defence of Romanitas see above par. 3.4.3 Literature, and throughout the commentary; for rhetoric and emotions see especially the Introduction to letter 7.7, section 4 Style; for encryption see
him was writing to survive. His correspondence is his ‘autobiography’, a reflection of the history of the unsettled times he lived in.\textsuperscript{70} In section 6.4 Towards the definition of a style, I will take one further step, and introduce the notion of the reduction of reality and the concept of ‘formalized prose’ to account for all this in a fundamental way.

5.2 Manuscripts

5.2.1 Text constitution

The manuscript tradition of Sidonius’ correspondence comprises some 90 codices, of which 48 are considered by Loyen as most important for the constitution of the text. For an overview and appraisal, see fundamentally Luetjohann 1887: vi-xxii, and subsequently Mohr 1895: iii-ix, and Loyen 2: xlix-lvi (stemma codicum on p. liii). Luetjohann distinguished four families, represented respectively by C, F, P, and TML (to the latter Mohr added NV, Burke R), each with their distinctive lacunas and transpositions. Loyen based his text on these nine manuscripts, dividing them into two more comprehensive groups: PFC (plus the second hand in M: M\textsuperscript{2}) and LNVRTM. Like his predecessors, he considered L to be the most reliable, because the ‘ignorant’ copyist ‘has transcribed honestly, without trying to interpret or innovate’ (p. l). ‘If the first reading of N corresponds with the one in L, it is very likely that we are dealing with the original text’ (p. li). Because the group LNVRTM is very defective, the corrections and additions of M\textsuperscript{2} from the group PFC are valuable. The latter group is indispensable in the lacunas of the other, but is definitely less reliable. C in particular stands out for ‘a great number of unfounded readings’ (p. lii).

I use Loyen’s text with a few exceptions, listed at the end of this Introduction.\textsuperscript{77}

5.2.2 Order of book 7, letters 1 – 11

The manuscript tradition of book 7 presents serious lacunas and transpositions, which affect also the contiguous parts of books 6 and 8. Nevertheless, the traditional order of the letters in it has never been seriously questioned by either early (e.g. Savaron, Sirmond) or modern editors. Only a minor change was made by editors after Luetjohann by restoring the order of numbers 10 (to Graecus) and 11 (to Auspicius) according to the great majority of the below 5.4.2 Coded communication and allusive technique; for showing off in social intercourse see the Introduction to letter 7.2, section 6 Style.

\textsuperscript{70} For autobiography see the classic study by Georg Misch, Geschichte der Autobiographie I Das Altertum, Leipzig, 1907. Recently, e.g., Michael Reichel (ed.), Antike Autobiographien. Werke - Epochen - Gattungen, Cologne, 2005. Modern literary theory of autobiography – including aspects such as self-fashioning and self-presentation – has received much attention in studies of the Renaissance and the Early Modern period, e.g. Stephen Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning, Chicago, 1980, and recently Karl A.E. Enenkel, Die Erfindung des Menschen, Berlin, 2008. For the idea of letters as a reflection of their time, compare Fuhrmann 1994: 271-81, ‘Der Brief als Spiegel der Zeitgeschichte’ – to which I add that letters influence their time as much as they are a reflection of it.

\textsuperscript{77} I was inspired by Warmington’s famous admonitions in his introduction to Anderson 1: xiv: ‘... that a conservative critic is the wisest unless he is very expert indeed’, and ‘Sidonius is in need of explanation rather than emendation’.

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General Introduction - 5.2 Manuscripts
manuscripts (up till and including Luetjohann the traditional order had been: first the letter to Auspicius, then the one to Graecus, which is the order in the less reliable family of C).

A matter to be looked into, however, is the uncertainty as to the position of the crucial letters about the fall of Clermont, numbers 6 and 7. A look at their fluid position throughout the manuscripts (together with the problem that in some they are omitted) makes it clear that, from a codicological point of view, the traditional order is provisional (see Appendix C). The pattern found here and there in Luetjohanns’ manuscript families 2-4 even suggests that the letters 6 and 7 may have come after 11 and before 12. Mommsen (ibidem lii n. 1) concluded that the question of their original position remains open. However, I think that there is internal evidence in the letters 10 and 11 to corroborate their position at the end of the episcopal cycle (1-11), and with it the traditional order. This, in its turn, would strengthen the interpretation by Harries 1994 of 6-7 in relation to 5, 8 and 9. I discuss the matter below in section 5.4 *The structure of book 7*, and in the Introductions to the letters 10 and 11).

Mommsen formulated the hypothesis (p. xxv n. 1), that the omission of 6 and 7 may have arisen from deliberate suppression at an early stage in the transmission of the letters, because the content was not palatable to the Visigoths. The same might be true, he said, of letter 1 which is equally anti-Gothic. Due to the hypothetical discarding of the quire that contained letter 1, the letters 2, 3, 4 and the first half of 5, which in themselves are not, or not directly, offensive, also disappeared in this part of the manuscript tradition. Outside book 7, analogous reasons might have resulted in the defective representation of *Ep. 3.3* (Ecdicius’ triumph over a pack of Goths), 6.12 (Patiens bringing relief after Gothic devastations), 8.2 (Praise for maintaining Roman cultural standards against the victorious Goths), and 9.1 (Sidonius criticizes the shallow culture of his son Apollinaris, although he was held in high esteem by the Visigoths).

The hypothesis is a tempting one, even though it must needs remain a hypothesis. Apart from giving a plausible explanation for the omissions, it throws light on Sidonius’ mentality, who apparently, even after his return from exile, kept up his fighting spirit and deliberately included these letters in the revision he prepared for publication.

5.3 Classification and analysis

5.3.1 Classification

In the section on Epistolography (par. 5.1.1 *A bird’s eye view*, n. 69) we have seen that ancient theory distinguished between dozens of types of letters, from twenty-one to forty-one. This detailed description served a practical purpose: training pupils in letter writing. In modern research a tendency can be observed to generalize and create coherent groups of *genera*. The question is: according to which ordering principle? Different solutions have been proposed. However, an entirely convincing solution does not seem to have been reached yet.

In his introduction to the letters of Pliny, Sherwin White 1966: 42-45 opts for the categories which can be gleaned from Cicero and Quintilian, eight in all: public affairs; character sketches; patronage; admonitions; domestic; literary; scenic; social courtesy. Within these eight categories he creates twenty-six subdivisions. The ordering principle aims at practical usefulness; hence, it is somewhat unbalanced: a ‘character sketch’ is a specific theme, whereas ‘domestic affairs’ is unspecific, etc.
Also writing about Pliny’s correspondence, Gamberini 1983: 136-43 simplifies drastically. For his stylistic interpretation he needs only three comprehensive categories: letters occasioned by practical motives (e.g. sending a book or present, giving advice, recommendations), letters occasioned by social motives (e.g. providing news, courtesy notes, moral reflections, literary discussions), and letters corresponding to oratorical digressions (e.g. laudatory of people, descriptive of places). The important point in this attempt at classification is the fact that it is explicit in linking classification and interpretation.

In his study of Latin epistolography Cugusi 1983: 105-35 adheres very much to the ancient schoolmasters and presents a selection of seventeen types. His ordering principle is the ancient distinction between private and public letters, to which he adds a category ‘partly private, partly public’. Although Cugusi does not seem to have any abstraction in mind, his approach is clearly directed towards the communicative situation. Köhler 1995: 16-19 has applied this classification to the first book of Sidonius’ correspondence.

The most recent attempt at classification is also the most systematic one. It is the analysis of Sidonius’ correspondence by Fernández López 1994. First and foremost, it is innovative regarding its theoretical basis. Its point of departure is Roman Jakobson’s model of communication functions. Fernández López distinguishes between letters with:

1 a metalinguistic function: publication and introduction of works of literature,
2 a phatic function: greeting and communication,
3 an expressive function: congratulation and (public) salutation,
4 an impressive function: exhortation and admonition,
5 a declarative and poetic function: description.

She goes on to create no fewer than twenty-five subdivisions. Her model is applied by Amherdt 2001: 35-37 to the fourth book, with some modifications. In my opinion, Fernández López’s approach has all the pros and cons of consistent systematization: it is all-encompassing to the detriment of clarity. Nevertheless, its scope is impressive. I refer to her classification at the end of each ‘Epitome’ section in the introductions to the individual letters.

My corpus contains letters from all of her five groups. As the analysis will show, the majority of them, because of their complexity and scope, ultimately transcend the narrow bounds of any such group. For instance, letter 2 is a contrived application of a description (group 5) in the playful variant, but turns out to have all kinds of connections with the political, and indeed tragic, aspects of the book. The letters 5 and 8 are invitations with requests for help (group 3), but it is interesting to see how Sidonius manipulates this type of letter to promote his own solution instead of asking for advice, and, in the case of 8, almost not to invite the addressee. The central letters 6 and 7 on the crisis of Catholicism and of Clermont defy

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78 Gamberini’s useful – because detailed – study of the literary style of Pliny has been sadly underestimated (see, e.g., the cautious review by A.N. Sherwin-White in JRS 75 (1985) 315-16).

79 She is right to say that Cugusi’s category of ‘lettere d’arte’ for Pliny’s letters (p. 127) is a regression to positions in criticism which have proved to be unfruitful. See this Introduction, section 5.1 Epistolography, note 70.

80 Cugusi 1983: 107 mentions the ‘lettera scherzosa’ as an independent genus, Sherwin White 1966: 43 says ‘iocosus’ is about tone, not about content; it is not confined to a single category.
classification: request for help, description, invective? Categories disappear into the background, and individual solutions take over.

5.3.2 Analysis

In the referrals after each ‘Epitome’ section, I also mention Fernández López’s analyses of the letters. She has made a thorough study of all of them on the principle that they always obey the scheme: captatio, narratio, petitio, conclusio. Amherdt 2001: 33-34 applies the scheme with modifications and simplifications. With due respect for the author’s rigour, I have found her scheme too unbending to do justice to Sidonius’ flexible – indeed magisterial – application of the genre.  

Thus, in my analysis of the letters I have responded to their individuality rather than relied on an overall system.

5.4 The structure of book 7

5.4.1 Coherence

Following rhetorical precepts, Sidonius applies the principle of variation in his selection of letters. He entertains his readership with a variety of subjects and addressees, in letters of various length and belonging to different epistolary types. In recent years, however, scholars have become increasingly aware of the inner coherence in the books of letters: unity in diversity.

For book 1 Loyen 2: xi had already pointed out the fact that it is centred around Sidonius’ embassy to Rome in 467, one of the high points in his life. Köhler 1995: 17 f. has further explored this, and calls ‘die weltliche Machtstellung des Autors’ the common denominator of the book. In addition she is sensitive to the emotional tuning which results in a meaningful equilibrium between tension and relaxation. Küppers 2005 has taken this one step further by expressly relating this discussion to modern literary theory and its increasing interest in autobiography.  

To him, book 1 is about the greatness of Rome, the obligation for the nobility to participate in its continuation, and the importance of literature in helping to achieve this.

Giannotti 2001 has analysed book 3. Interestingly, she places it in the perspective of the first two books. Book 1, she says, is political, book 2 is about the ‘agiatezza aristocratica’, ‘home, sweet home’ during the phase of retirement 461-67. Both books are concerned with the aristocracy. In book 3 all of a sudden the war and Sidonius’ bishopric make their appearance. As a result the focus widens to the entire community, including the lower levels. Hence, the theme is ‘la raffigurazione dei tipi umani’ involved in the political and administrative crisis of the Auvergne (p. 35). In the composition Giannotti detects symmetries, mirroring and coupling.

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81 See Reed 1997: 181-82: Apart from a general pattern of opening-body-closing, ‘… epistolary conventions used in actual letters seem to resist a dispositio classification … There is no inherent formal relationship between the basic theory of epistolary structure and the technical teachings about rhetorical arrangement.’

82 For references see Küppers 2005: 256 n. 14. See note 76 above.
I think this way of looking at the letters is very promising. The analysis of the structure and message of book 7 which follows is not only undertaken for its own sake, but also to test the validity of this approach. Before we come to that, let us have a look at ‘coded communication’.

5.4.2 Coded communication and allusive technique

Reading Sidonius, one should not forget to read between the lines as well as to heed the arrangement of the letters. Sidonius uses ‘coded communication’ and ‘allusive technique’. In recent years, scholars have become more and more convinced of this idea.\(^{83}\) It is two-sided: the polished outside of the letters is deceptive, and the arrangement of the books of letters aims at more than variety alone. Both hide – or at least can hide – a political message. In this approach the attention paid traditionally to the chronology of the letters and their original addressees is completed by the attention given to Sidonius’ deliberate reworking and grouping at the time of publication: ‘Sidonius could exploit his “collected edition” to impose his version of events on posterity, while at the same time using more subtle techniques to explain and justify his actions to contemporaries’ (Harries 1994: 11).\(^{84}\)

In this section of her book, entitled ‘Decoding Sidonius’ (pp. 11-19), Harries inquires into hints at Sidonius’ consecration, about which he is conspicuously silent (see above, section 2.2 Life), into the importance of the allusive technique in the structure of book 8, and into the meaningful arrangement of book 7 – which is particularly important in the present study, and will be discussed below.

Zelzer 1995: 548 reached the same conclusion as Harries: ‘Hier liegt wohl der Schlüssel für das Verständnis der Briefsammlung des Sidonius: eine Darstellung der Geschichte seiner Zeit erschien ihm viel zu gefährlich in den politisch äußerst schwierigen Zeiten, in denen er sich letztlich mit dem arianischen Germanenherrscher Euricus arrangieren mußte; unter dem Deckmantel des Briefes konnte er jedoch der Nachwelt all das hinterlassen, was ihm am Herzen lag’ (repeated in Zelzer and Zelzer 2002: 404 f.).

I have accepted this line of research and applied it, among other things, to a possibly hidden message in letter 4, to the interrelationship between 5, 8, 9 and 6, 7 (with Harries), and to the function of 10 and 11. I have found it also indispensable when trying to explain the coherence of my corpus of episcopal letters as a whole. Nevertheless, there is a fundamental problem with this method, which calls for further discussion: it is difficult to determine what is ‘coded communication’ as intended by the author, and what is excessive subtlety on the part of the critic. Covering up and speculating are a dangerous combination. In an article which assesses the structure and meaning of book 8, Overwien 2009a makes an important

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\(^{83}\) If I am right, these scholars do not use the term ‘coded communication’ in the strictly system-theoretical way in which cognitive science does (where all communication is coded communication; see, e.g., Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, 2nd ed., Oxford, 1995, pp. 1-64), nor does it refer to full-scale encryption; they use it rather loosely of embedding a potentially unwelcome or dangerous message in a letter in a veiled way. ‘Allusive technique’ is the creation of an implicit message by the author through the selection and arrangement of the material.

\(^{84}\) Anticipated in ancient theory: Iulius Victor 27 Halm p. 448 l. 5-8 *lucem vero epistolis praefulgere oportet, nisi cum consulto clandestinae litterae fiant, quae tamen ita ceteris occultae esse debent, ut his, ad quos mittuntur, clarae perspicucae sint.*
contribution towards this discussion by taking up an extreme position: he argues, e.g., that Sidonius, when he uses apparently conventional examples, like Demosthenes and Cicero in letter 1, or when he sends a copy of Apollonius’ Life of Pythagoras (letter 3), conveys a message which is hidden in the biography of these men. Thus, almost everything can be a clue to a hidden message. For my part, I prefer to remain on the safe side. Sidonius himself said in 7.6.4 that he could not discuss Euric’s policy openly (nec … accusare nec … discutere permittendum est); nevertheless, he continued with an unmistakeably allegorical attack on that same sovereign. ‘Coded communication’, then, is certain, but in each case the reader’s imagination should be put to the test: ‘What if it is not coded?’ If a satisfactory explanation can be given without applying a hypothetical code, that explanation is best. This is to stress the essentiality of form as such in Sidonius: to degrade form to a cover is to misunderstand him – just as when one considers form as a meaningless adornment. I will come to that in chapter 6 Art is everything.\textsuperscript{85}

5.4.3 The structure and meaning of book 7

Book 7 of the correspondence forms a climax in Sidonius’ oeuvre. It contains everything he stood for, everything he loathed and everything he hoped for. It is his concise spiritual autobiography. In the political climate of the year of its publication, 477 AD, after the regime change from Romans to Visigoths, it was a provocation as well. It had always been Sidonius’ policy – as he gradually became convinced that political change was inevitable – to keep the pressure on and to preserve as many of his interests and ideals as possible. After the transfer of sovereignty and after having paid due homage to the new monarch, he published his correspondence, crowned by book 7 which is a manifesto of mental resilience and consistency.

The book has four focal points: political (the struggle to retain the Auvergne), social (the urge to preserve the values and influence of the nobility), cultural-literary (the effort to save Romanitas), and religious (the stand for Catholicism against Arianism; the pastoral care for the faithful). It consists of two parts: the first contains letters written to colleague-bishops (1-11), the second letters to laymen and a member of the lower clergy (12-18). Letter 18 closes the entire cycle of books 1 to 7.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{85} Let us remember that, prior to any supposedly ‘hidden message’, it was formality which led to allusive speech, cautious phrasing and elegantly leaving things unsaid (Shanzer and Wood 2002: 84); below in paragraphs 6.4.2 and 3, I will suggest a theoretical justification for this attitude. At the moment, ‘allusion’ appears to be an alluring concept in writing about epistolography: see Ilaria Marchesi, The Art of Pliny’s Letters. A Poetics of Allusion in the Private Correspondence, Cambridge, 2008.

\textsuperscript{86} Peter 1901: 155 has called the book a ‘Nachlese’, an ‘addition’, which it is in a way, though not as a supplement, but as a synthesis: ‘Von den Büchern IV-VII machen die ersten drei den Eindruck, als ob sie bestimmt gewesen seien, nach dem Vorgang des Plinius die erste Triade durch eine zweite zu erweitern. Sie bilden schon äußerlich insoweit ein Ganzes, als die Briefe an Geistliche in ein einziges, das VI. Buch zusammengefaßt sind, während jedes der drei folgenden eine Anzahl solcher enthält, innerhalb jedes derselben aneinander gereihet; es ist wohl auch das nicht zufällig, daß die Zahl der Zeilen von B. I bis III ebenso fällt, wie von B. IV zu VI, dann aber wieder stark steigt. Das VII. Buch würde dann eine Nachlese liefern wie VIII und IX, erst noch zwölf Briefe an Geistliche, aber in einem weniger geschäftsmäßigen Ton gehalten als die des VI., auch meist ausführlicher, darauf 6 an Laien.’
The content of the letters in relation to the four main themes, and the overall coherence, is as follows:

1 From the very outset the reader is confronted with the territorial provocation of the Visigoths. Clermont’s predicament is couched in allusions to pagan Roman literature (Lucan’s *Pharsalia*), the resistance, however, is fuelled in a Christian, pastoral way, by the introduction of days of prayer, *Rogationes*, and the procuration of relics. The conservative nostalgia of the literary élite and the modern sentiments of the people appear to be perfectly in tune.

2 An entr’acte: the lively story about probably the most assertive of Sidonius’ letter-bearers, Amantius. The bishop is very amused. But things are not as harmless as they appear. The letter is connected in many ways with the rest of the book. The keyword is *praestigiae*, ‘jugglery’, ‘deceit’. It is used in this letter to denote the innocuous jugglery of Amantius, but it recurs in letter 7 to incriminate the fraud committed by the bishops who have sacrificed the Auvergne. Secondly, there is a parallel with Simplicius, the nobleman whom Sidonius is going to appoint as bishop of Bourges in letters 5, 8 and 9, to remind the reader that *noblesse oblige*. Finally, the figure of Amantius is there as an embodiment of the theme of survival, which pervades Sidonius’ correspondence. Letter 2 may be humorous, but it offsets the serious keynote of the book as a whole.

3 This short letter accompanied a volume of *contestationes*, prayers for the Mass liturgy, written by Sidonius. Sidonius’ liturgical activity as a bishop aimed to heighten the morale of his faithful, as did the introduction of the *Rogationes*. Characteristically for the time, the letter has no trace of Christianity, but uses pagan examples.

4 The letter paints the ideal bishop in wartime: approachable and effective. The keyword is *communio*. We get a glimpse of an influential, anonymous opponent, and see Sidonius networking on behalf of his own family in the precarious political constellation of the Provence which was sandwiched between the Roman emperor and the Burgundians.

5 Together with nos 8 and 9, this letter serves as a frame to nos 6 and 7 about the fate of Clermont. The ‘frame’ introduces the future bishop of Bourges, Simplicius, a local nobleman, selected and installed by Sidonius. Sidonius must have felt akin to Simplicius: a bishopric in a threatened outpost, himself anti-Arian, open to the needs of the community, but also very much an aristocrat. The appointment clearly served the perpetuation of the power of the aristocracy, as much as it served the empowerment of Catholicism. These links are strengthened by the composition, viz. the letters 6 and 7 in between 5, 8 and 9. See Harries 1994: 16-17. In par. 5.2.2 on the order of the letters in the manuscripts, I have shown that the traditional order is not absolutely certain. If the letters 6 and 7 came after 11 and before 12, they would have constituted the climax of the episcopal letters, and the connection with the Bourges episode would be much looser. However, I have advanced internal arguments from letters 10 and 11 to support the traditional order.

6 The letters 6 and 7 form the heart of the book. They are addressed to two of the people who negotiated with Euric for a peace treaty which would surrender the Auvergne to the Visigoths. Letter 6 is a complaint about the decline of Catholicism in Gaul due to the
repression by the Visigoths. It begs to retain the Gallic population *ex fide*, ‘by virtue of faith’, if it cannot be retained *ex foedere*, ‘by virtue of the (existing) pact’.

7 This letter vehemently denounces the treacherous character of the peace treaty: it butchers not only Clermont, it butchers *Romanitas*.

8 Sidonius informs the addressee of his conclusion that Bourges wants Simplicius. He asks him for his advice. The addressees of nos 8 and 9 belong – with Sidonius – to the circle which promotes the cult of St Martin of Tours. The cult of the saints is a binding factor for a ‘new’ Gaul.

9 The letter is followed by the text of the speech which Sidonius had delivered in the cathedral of Bourges to announce his choice of Simplicius. The speech is a unique and forceful example of Sidonius’ oratorical talent. It concludes the triad of letters about Bourges as a sort of justification.

10 In an unpretending way, the short letters 10 and 11 close the first part of the book. Letter 10 functions as an attempt to appease bishop Graecus whom Sidonius had attacked ferociously in letter 7.

11 The letter thematizes the war and the fact that Sidonius is harassed by the Visigoths and the Burgundians. Its conclusion is again an implicit reference to Graecus, and the basically sound relationship between both men.

12 A fresh start: a *salutatio publica* for the former pretorian prefect of Gaul, Ferreolus. It is clear and perfectly right, Sidonius writes, that clerics should precede lay people, otherwise his addressee would have been granted the first letter of the book. His claim to honour is the battle against the Huns with Aetius, and the relief of Arles against the Visigoths.

13 Sidonius praises a father on account of his son, a promising priest who unites worldly excellence and religious zeal – the ideal of the Catholic nobleman.

14 After military prowess and religious excellence, this letter is about the ‘*res publica litterarum*’: the power of the pen to communicate over long distances and to bind intellectuals together. The human mind surpasses everything else.

15 Sidonius invites two members of the landed gentry to join him in the town of Vienne: ‘the church needs you’.

16 The letter is addressed to an abbot. Sidonius presents him with a hairy cloak, the habit of an ascetic.

17 The letter contains an epitaph in verse for the abbot Abraham, a typical specimen of the ‘holy men’ whom Gaul venerated. The nos 16 and 17 thus concentrate on spirituality and renunciation – the last words before the volume ends.

18 The conclusion, addressed to Constantius who had also been the recipient of the very first letter of book 1: *a te principium, tibi desinet*, ‘with you I began, with you I will end’. The letter looks back on the diversity of the collection, accounts for the different moods in which it was written and states Sidonius’ principle *numquam me tolerarum animi servitutem*, ‘I will never tolerate mental servility’.
5.4.4 Chronology of the letters

In dating the letters I rely on Loyen, whose chronology is the best we have so far. I have found his dating always plausible and helpful, as will become clear in the commentary. Of course, because Sidonius revised his letters for publication, establishing their chronology has its limitations. Köhler 1995: 9 is overtly sceptical: Loyen’s undertaking is ‘problematisch’. The important thing is the edited collection as we have it, she says; the dates of the original letters are of minor importance; and overestimating these dates may lead to patently false interpretations. Zelzer 1995: 549 n. 34 is also suspicious of Loyen’s chronology: it ‘beruht auf recht unsicheren Indizien’. Other scholars, however, are less sceptical of his results: Gualandri 1979: 3 thinks them a ‘sufficiente approssimazione’, and Amherdt 2001: 29 has no more than ‘un faible doute’. They both are conscious of the changes which the revision entailed.

The reason why I think it is important to insist on the dates, is that they remind us of the essential duality which makes any correspondence that is revised afterwards attractive, viz. the inherent tension between the original situation and the outlook created by the revision. Too much emphasis on the ‘second life’ of the letters easily reduces Sidonius’ correspondence to a massive pro-Rome-and-culture manifesto (which it also is!), whereas sensibility to their ‘first life’ can add to our perception of them as a complex phenomenon.

5.5 The letter’s beginning and end

5.5.1 Inscriptio and subscriptio

I first want to say something about the formulas with which Sidonius begins and ends his letters, and especially the episcopal ones.

- Inscriptio

The initial greeting formula, in- or praescriptio, is invariably of the type: Sidonius Constantio suo salutem (Ep. 1.1.1), and, in the letters to the clergy: Sidonius domino papae Lupo salutem (Ep. 6.1.1). It is the type used by Cicero who in his intimate private letters confined himself to the praecognomen of the addressee, strengthened with suus to express sympathy, and in the more formal ones employed a range of the full names plus titles, in accordance with the addressee’s dignity. After Cicero tradition went in two directions: the conservative one (e.g. Seneca and Pliny), and another which allowed certain innovations (e.g. Fronto). After Fronto, post-position of the sender’s name became increasingly common and finally all but standard. The Christian writers elaborated and changed all parts of the inscriptio. The sender stressed his humility (peccator, vilissimus, or humillimus), first simple titles were added to the name of the addressee (domino, fratri, etc.), then a wide variety of honorific epithets (beatissimo, sanctissimo, dilectissimo, etc.). The salutatio proper (salutem) in time changed beyond recognition.

In the fourth century Symmachus, a staunch defender of tradition, more than once expressed his distaste for the new fashions and his preference for the formam vetustatis, the usum

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89 The development of the salutatio formula sketched in this paragraph is based on Lanham 1975: 22-25.
simplicem of nomina sola, qualifying the additions as lenocinia aevi praesentis (Ep. 2.35.1 and 4.30.3). It is evident that Sidonius joined him in this; he adhered to tradition and the example of Cicero and Pliny. The greeting formula for his letters to his episcopal colleagues (books 6.1-12, 7.1-11, 8.13-15, and 9.2-11) adds a polite domino papae, but all the same is far removed from the florid openings of e.g. Augustine, or, indeed, his own correspondents like Claudianus Mamertus or Faustus.⁹⁰

- **Subscription**

The closing formula, subscriptio, is invariably: vale(te) (as in Pliny), and, in the letters to the clergy: memor nostri esse dignare, domine papa. In the latter, two tendencies combine: the gradual replacement of vale by longer formulas, in casu the wish to be remembered, and respectful phrasing which flowered in liturgy and bureaucracy. Generally speaking, the leave-taking force of vale had weakened since the Augustan period and a preference for longer formulas had come about. This is first seen in poetical letters, cf. e.g. Hor. Carm. 3.27.14 et memor nostri, Galatea, vivas, and Juv. 3.318 ergo vale nostri memor (note that in situations of leave-taking, the request to be remembered fits in quite naturally). In Christian prose Cyprian of Carthage (third century) pioneered this kind of extension, e.g. Ep. 10 opto vos, fortissimi ac beatissimi fratres, semper in Domino bene valere et nostri meminisse. Subsequent ecclesiastical writers may even be called virtuosi of the motif (cf. e.g. Ennod. Ep. 1.12).⁹¹

The verb dignari is the deferential way of approaching either the gods or the emperor. Hence it found its way into polite correspondence with ecclesiastical and other dignitaries, cf. e.g. Plin. Ep. 10.12.1 te [i.e. Trajan] rogo ut … exornare digneris. See TLL 5/1: 1140.84 ff., Köhler 1995: 316 ad Ep. 1.11.8 consulere dignare, and Rose 2005: 157 s.v. dignare.

In the closing formula as a whole there might even be a hint of reciprocity: ‘I have remembered you by way of this letter; so, now, remember me’. Cf., again from liturgy, Miss. Goth. 534 Rose p. 542 sanctorum … quorum a nobis facienda commemoratio est, ut et nostri memores esse dignentur, and Ambrosius’ usual closing phrase in his correspondence: vale et nos dilige quia nos te diligimus.

Finally, it is worth noting that domine papa echoes the domino papae of the inscriptio.

### 5.5.2 Opening sentences

The opening sentences of Sidonius’ letters are remarkable both for their variety and for their sophistication. Long or short, direct or indirect, engaging the addressee or pinpointing the subject matter – the variants are numerous and there are scarcely any repetitions. How do these opening sentences relate to the respective letters as a whole, and what do they tell us about Sidonius’ way of establishing contact with his addressees?

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⁹⁰ For the polite title dominus, used to address people with a certain authority, esp. ecclesiastics, see TLL 5/1: 1924.77 ff., O’Brien 1930: 83 and Fernández López 1982: 188 f. (note that it is also used in an affective way, for caritas). For papa to indicate a bishop, see TLL 10/1: 243.66 ff. and O’Brien 1930: 85 (only from the sixth century onward is it increasingly reserved for the pope of Rome, whereas its exclusive use was claimed as late as Pope Gregory VII (d. 1085). For the several words for ‘bishop’ in Sidonius, see Appendix E.

⁹¹ See Lanham 1975: 72 and Cugusi 1983: 60 with n. 82. For an overview of the development, Greek as well as Latin, see Cugusi 1993: 384-89.
To answer this question, one obviously has to look for a possible model in Pliny’s correspondence first of all. His opening sentences have been studied by Sherwin White 1966: 6-11, who distinguishes (1) somewhat standardized opening phrases which affirm the subject of the letter (eighteen sub-types in all, e.g. rogas, hortaris, gaudeo, torqueor, and also librum misisti, recepi litteras tuas), (2) specific statements which plunge right into the theme in a non-stylized way, and (3) general statements or proverbial remarks (in the last three books). Type 1 is found in about 40% of cases. In Sherwin White’s opinion this formality proves that this type of letter was consciously written (or revised) for publication. Whatever the case may be, a similar look at Sidonius’ correspondence results in a considerably lower percentage for type 1 (about 25%), whereas its diversity is much too great to speak of ‘standardization’. Type 2 is well represented, but, again, it is very heterogeneous. Type 3 does not exist. Consequently, for Sidonius the division which Sherwin-White advocates for Pliny does not seem fruitful.

The right question to ask with regard to Sidonius is not whether the opening sentence is stylized or not, but whether it is thematically linked to the content of the letter at all, and if so, how. In other words: how is the subject-matter introduced to the reader? In a first category (= there is a link with the theme of the letter) I distinguish opening sentences which state the subject directly, and those which introduce it indirectly. Openings in this category give precedence to the subject-matter by establishing the relationship with the addressee. In a second category (= there is no link) we are concerned either with civilities in the domain of amicitia, or conventional remarks about correspondence as such. Openings in this category focus primarily on the (affective) dialogue with the reader and the circumstances under which it takes place. I give an example of each of these four types to make clear what I mean:

- **1a Stating the subject directly**: 1.7.1 Angit me casus Arvandi nec dissimulo, quin angat, ‘I am distressed by the ill fortune of Arvandus, and I don’t make a secret of it that I’m distressed’, opens a letter which discusses the alleged treason by Arvandus, which concerned Sidonius personally.
- **1b Stating the subject indirectly**: 3.8.1 Veneror antiquos, non tamen ita ut qui aequaeorum meorum virtutes aut merita postponam, ‘I admire the ancients, but not so much as to underrate the qualities and merits of my contemporaries’, paves the way for a compliment to his addressee whom the state does not give the reward he deserves.
- **2a Civilities of amicitia**: 7.6.1 Sunt nobis munere dei novo nostrorum temporum exemplo amicitiarum vetera iura, diuque est quod invicem diligimus ex aequo, introduces a letter which treats the deplorable situation of the church in Gaul.
- **2b Remarks about correspondence**: 9.4.1 Viator noster ac tabellarius terit orbitas itineris itineris assueti spatium viarum regionumque, quod oppida nostra discriminat, saepe relegendo, heading a letter which sympathizes with the trouble the addressee appears to have had with some parishioners.

For the sake of convenience I have given short examples, but in all categories the opening sentence may also be of considerable length. The first sentence of 6.1 to bishop Lupus states its subject – praise of the addressee as an éminence grise and more than worthy of occupying the first place in this book of letters addressed to bishops – and does so with appropriate

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92 While admitting this (likewise focusing on Pliny), Gamberini 1983: 153-61 also directs our attention to the question whether or not the opening sentences establish a direct link with the addressee: this is often the case in ‘practical’ letters of his first category (see above 5.3.1 Classification).
circumlocutions. In the letters in which the first sentence announces the subject, one may find a tendency towards greater length for reasons of circumspection (2.4, recommendation to someone outside the inner circle of acquaintances), special attention required (6.2, the recommendation of a pious widow), or the opposite, teasing irony (5.5, his friend, the consummate literate Syagrius, has mastered ... a Germanic language). On the other hand, a concise opening sentence aims at clarity, immediateness, poincancy: the above cited example of 1.7 (political danger), and, e.g., 2.3 (congratulations), and 7.1 (the outbreak of war).

In the more ‘affective’ openings, not related to the content as such, the opening sentence tends to be longer, if it combines more than one element: amicitia and letter writing, plus, in some cases, even a hint at the subject (this might be called the ‘mixed type’). Compare such examples as 4.3 (ties of friendship and the sending of letters) and 7.10 (ties of friendship, the impossibility of coming in person, and the ongoing war).

The proportion for each of the categories shows a clearcut preference for stating the subject from the outset, 75%, be it in a direct or an indirect way. It would seem that Sidonius likes to get down to business fairly fast. This conclusion becomes even more convincing, when we see that in this group the direct type is the one most often used, viz. in two-thirds of these cases (55% of the correspondence as a whole), of which, in turn, more than one-third (20% on the whole) consists of concise sentences, i.e. simple main clauses (e.g. 5.19.1 Nutricis meae filiam filius tuae rapuit) or main clauses with one simple subordinate clause (e.g. 5.12.1 Quod rarius ad vos a nobis pagina meat, non nostra superbia sed aliena impotentia facit).

For a survey see Appendix D.

5.5.3 Modes of address

For ‘bishop’ Sidonius uses antistes, episcopus, papa, pontifex and (summus) sacerdos. He does not seem to have a preference for any one of these terms. Papa is used in direct address. Metropolitanus is used for the first bishop in the church province. See the statistics in Appendix E. The church at large, likewise, showed no preference, as Norton 2007: 141 f. remarked: ‘Considering all the attention paid to hierarchy in late antique society ... the church appears to have been remarkably relaxed (if confused) about its nomenclature as late as the fourth century. ... For the most part, references to bishops are to be found through generic titles – sacerdos, antistes, episcopus, hierius, episkopos. None of these titles carried any other connotation, and could be applied to the whole gamut of episcopal dignities. Similarly, “metropolitan” was a straightforward enough term, and is used at Nicaea as if perfectly understood and accepted by all.’

In the just mentioned appendix, the reader will also find a brief discussion of the phenomenon of indirect forms of address in the third person. In book 7 we meet such circumlocutions as 7.4.4 apostolatus vester and 7.8.1 corona tua, ‘Your Excellency’.

5.6 ‘You’ and ‘I’

In Sidonius’ letters the addressee can be spoken to either in the second person singular or plural. In 9.9.2 he writes: mitti paginam copiosam denuo iubes, ‘you ask me again for an eloquent letter’. In 7.2.2, however, it is: tubetis ipsi, ut aliquid vobis a me laetum copiosumque pagina ferat, ‘you ask me yourself that my letter should bring you something rich and
eloquent’. *Iubetis* is plural, but is meant for the addressee alone. This is the so-called ‘illogical’ *vos*.

For the explanation of this phenomenon in the second person plural, LHS 2: 20 is a representative of the former communis opinio that it is a *pluralis reverentiae*, which originated with the imperial administration, had fully developed in Symmachus’ correspondence, and remained a characteristic of the conventional style of letters and records well into the Renaissance. It was thought that the plural was used alternately, and without appreciable difference as regards content, with the second person singular.

Recent research, however, tends to distinguish between *tu* and *vos*, and reintroduces the sociative plural. Callu 1986 maintains that, for Symmachus at least, there is no question of interchangeability. Addressed to one person, *vos* is always used by Symmachus with a collectivity in mind (‘sociative’ use), be it the *pater familias* and his family, the *professores* and the *pontifices* who ‘connaissent … une solidarité pluralisante’, or the civil servants who take on ‘l’épaisseur d’un être collectif’ (p. 24). For Sidonius – he says – further investigation is necessary, because in his letters things sometimes seem to be different: some cases of the plural cannot be explained as ‘you and x’, especially in book 3 (e.g. 3.5.1 *morumque vestrorum* – 3.5.3 *moribus tuis*, see Loyen 2: 83 and 97). With this vacillation the medieval code of polite *vos* seems to announce itself: ‘Sidoine … s’efforce de résister à un pur vouvoiement de politesse, sans doute déjà perçu comme relevant d’une nouvelle structure sociale’ (p. 37 n. 94).

In a balanced survey of the evidence for ‘illogical’ *vos* – especially in the case of Symmachus –, Haverling 1995, illuminatingly, also takes into account ‘illogical’ *nos* (the so-called *pluralis maiestatis c.q. modestiae*). She opposes the view that the use of singular and plural in late antiquity is ‘determined by the rank of the person addressed according to anything resembling a fixed scale’ (hence no *pluralis reverentiae*; p. 353). She broadly supports Callu’s analysis of the ‘sociative’ character of many plurals, but at the same time stresses the presence of indisputable examples of ‘illogical’ *nos* and *vos*. Regrettably, she does not propose a solution for this problem.

The same is true of Zilliacus 2001: 490-93, ‘Die Anredeformen “Du” u. “Ihr”’, who describes the development as a gradual evolution from a *pluralis sociativus* to a *pluralis reverentiae*. The stage reached in the fifth century he calls the ‘gemischten Stil’, which is found in, among others, Symmachus, Sidonius, Avitus und Ruricius: ‘Personen … die dem Briefschreiber ferner stehen, wird der höfliche und zugleich kühlere Plural entgegengebracht’. However, that does not explain the use of singular and plural for one and the same person in the same letter.

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93 See Zilliacus 1953: 48-52 ‘Die Entwicklung des unlogischen Plurals im Lateinischen’ (with reference to earlier studies by Slotty who developed the theory of the ‘sociative’ and ‘affective’ first person plural, to replace the term ‘pluralis modestiae’; for the second person plural the ‘pluralis reverentiae’ is postulated for this usage since Symmachus – see below), and Haverling 1995.

94 For the upshot of the positions thus far, see Amherdt 2001: 188 ad 4.5.1 *vester*, who claims that, in the late antique authors we are concerned with here, the alternation singular-plural is most probably a question of style.
I suggest a fresh solution for the problem within the compass of my corpus. It builds on the suggestions to take into account the first as well as the second person, and to drop the idea of the plural as an indication of social rank. In my opinion, scholars have missed the point because they look for the solution in objective, social categories. The result is an excess of ‘sociative’ plurals and a remainder of ‘illogical’ cases. However, the ‘illogical’ cases disappear completely if we are prepared to consider the choice between singular and plural as a subjective, authorial one. The analysis of Sidonius’ use of the first and second person in my corpus shows – I think – that in both cases the difference between singular and plural is a difference in, respectively, ‘nearness’ and ‘distance’, viz. the figurative nearness or distance the author accords himself and the addressee concerning the actual situation. Put differently, it is a question of foreground and background, in which the plural provides for background, or ‘soft focus’ – to put it in photographic terms. What matters is the perspective in which the sender decides to present reality, the way in which he wants to influence the reader. As the author deems fit, ‘nearness’ and ‘distance’ result in nuances of directness/indirectness, activity/passivity, responsibility/non-responsibility, or certainty/doubt. Consequently, no pluralis reverentiae? If in a given situation the sender thinks it opportune to stress the importance of somebody’s office, he may decide on the ‘distancing’ second person plural for the sake of respectfulness, although always as a free choice, never from an objective hierarchical constraint. What is decisive is not the person or his office, but the dialogical situation.

It is time for some examples. The showpiece of those who claim insoluble cases of ‘illogical’ vos is Ep. 3.5.1 morumque vestrorum – 3.5.3 moribus tuis (see above). In the beginning of this letter Sidonius uses vester in ‘your principles’, whereas at the end he says tuus in – again – ‘your principles’. The explanation is that he begins by stating his own activity (first person: me, not nos) and that of a third person. The attention is not yet directed to the addressee, who remains in the background: morum vestrorum. Then the addressee is invited to act on behalf of the named third person; he is summoned and comes to the fore: moribus tuis, continued by te.

Indeed, this constant change of perspective is the norm. Let us take an example in the first person: in Ep. 10 the sender begins with invideo, a direct and emotional, ‘I am jealous’. This emotional tone is maintained throughout (sed quid de Amantio loquar?; ego istic … clausus … nequaquam satisfacere permittor; magno opere deposco, etc.). In sect. 2, however, he says: iniustitiae nostrae merita and ut excusatio nobis iusta non desit. When it comes to his shortcomings and his not having an excuse for them, he switches to a subdued nos.

One last example: in Ep. 2 Sidonius apologizes to Graecus for not having informed him correctly. He takes the full blame for this; therefore he writes in the first person singular. Graecus was duped and is in no way responsible; therefore he remains in the background, second person plural. Except once, the very first verb: oneras, consummatissime pontificum. Singular, because the spotlight is now on Graecus: ‘You flatter me, most consummate of bishops’.

For more detailed discussions, I refer to the respective entries in the Introductions to the letters, in the sections ‘You’ and ‘I’, and, for an overview, to Appendix I.
6 Art is everything

6.1 Intertextuality

One of the main objectives of this commentary is to place Sidonius’ prose within the Roman literary tradition. A look at Geisler’s ‘Loci similes auctorum Sidonio anteriorum’ shows two things: the similarities between Sidonius’ prose and that of earlier authors are many, but they are seldom specific. The detailed study of the episcopal letters of book 7 leads to the same conclusion. Consequently, it would be a dead end to study Sidonius’ prose on the assumption that it is a large-scale puzzle of references and allusions waiting to be solved. Even if tradition does pervade it, it is a mature tradition which has lost much of its individual elements, and has become an amalgam of stylistic and conceptual prima materia which is moulded by the author to suit the occasion. The artistry lies in either the grace or the poignancy with which the stylistic and conceptual mould meets reality. I will pursue below how this inverse movement (not reality seeks form, but form seeks reality) is possible, and how reality, far from being abolished, is enhanced in the process.

This amalgam of tradition is adjusted continuously with varying degrees of transparency, from overt citations to undifferentiated stylization. In many cases there is no specific stylistic model; more than once one is tempted to surmise one, though the formulation cannot be more specific than ‘this could be an echo of X’; in still other cases the author has zoomed in on a model only to apply his finds as ‘playful’, verbal spolia. Next, there are what we might call classic reminiscences: specific and meaningful echoes of the structure and/or the wording of a literary model. Finally, though few in number, literal quotations; in general, ‘raw’ quotations are avoided in favour of ‘digested’ references and paraphrases.

I will now give an overview of the intertextuality in my corpus, with a degree of comprehensiveness and certainty which inevitably diminishes en route from (more or less) literal quotations to possible echoes.

- Quotations. In the crucial seventh letter, Ep. 7.7.2, there is a quotation from Lucan’s Pharsalia, Luc. 1.427 f. Arvernique ausi Latio se fingere fratres, / sanguine ab Iliaco populi, which touches the essence of the letter. Additionally, there are two quotations which have a proverbial character, viz. 7.9.19 (the address in Bourges) domi habuit unde disceret, from Ter. Ad. 413, and 7.4.1 nos damus verba, vos munera, from Ov. Ars 2.166 cum dare non possem munera, verba dabam. Finally, in 7.9.21 Sidonius uses Psalm 43.2 in diebus antiquis to create an ‘antique’ atmosphere.

95 In Luetjohann’s edition; for the correspondence pp. 353-83.
96 See below section 6.4 Towards the definition of a style.
97 Brilliantly analysed by Gualandri 1979: 84 f. on the basis of Sidonius’ own words ‘furtiva lectio’, ‘reading for initiates’.
98 Gualandri 1979: 43 speaks of a ‘non banale utilizzazione dei classici’.
99 Pointed out by Harries 1994: 108 and 113 f. for biblical references, but pagan quotations are also rare. See my comment on 7.1.3 ad nova celer veterum Ninivitarum exempla decurrsti (end), where Harries is cited more at length.
- References/paraphrases. Sidonius retells the biblical stories which he inserts in his letters, often with one or more catchwords from the ‘original’. There are references in the important letter on the deplorable state of Catholicism (Ep. 7.6.4) to the gospel, Luc. 16.19-31, the poor Lazarus suffering ulceribus; to Exod. 5.6-21, the haughty Pharaoh and the Israelites who had to carry his building materials cum cophino (from Psalm 80.7); to Dan. 3.8-30, the three young men in the furnace (fornace) in Babylon; to Lament. prol., Jeremiah who lamented (planxit) the devastation of Jerusalem; and to 2 Kings 17.1-6, the annihilation of the northern kingdom of Israel by the Assyrian king who trampled (proculcet, from Luc. 21.24 and Apoc. 11.2) on the Holy of Holies. In the address in Bourges, again, Ep. 7.9, simony is condemned with reference to Act. 8.14-24, the story of Simon the magician (sect. 15); the praise of Sidonius’ nominee Simplicius is justified with John’s pedigree in Luc. 1.5 (sect. 17); Simplicius’ escape from prison is compared to the liberation of the apostles in Act. 5: 17-26; and his building activity is said to have surpassed that of Moses (Exod. 35-39) and of Solomon (1 Kings 6) (sect. 21).

- ‘Classic’ references. The grand opening of the book, Ep. 7.1.1-3, is a structural parallel to Lucan, Phars. 1.213-585, the capture of Rimini by Caesar, and the ensuing panic in Rome, applied to the sorry condition of Clermont and the disorientation in Vienne. When Sidonius complains Gothos in Romanum solum castra movisse: huic semper irruptioni nos miseri Arverni ianua sumus, he has in mind Lucan’s praeda furentum / primaque castra sumus and hac iter est bellis. Each successive stage is underpinned with textual similarities: the poor defence of Clermont (and of Rimini), the terrifying prodigia in Vienne (and in Rome), the flight of people and town council in Vienne (of people and senate in Rome), and finally the attempts to reconcile God (the gods). Likewise, though on a smaller scale, 7.7.2 creates a parallel between contemporary events and Roman history. It is a section which describes the bravery of Clermont and, through the reference to Sil. 11.173-82, compares it to the bravery of the Romans who can protect Capua. The structural parallel is supported by textual similarities. The phrase 7.1.4 cum … ignis recussus in tergum fugitivis flexibus sinuaretur (a recoiling snake) may be a distant echo of Verg. A. 11.653 f. (the retreating Camilla). Another reminiscence is created by 7.1.6 vestigia … amplectitur. Via Sedul. Carm. 65-67 it harks back to Vulg. Luc. 7.38 osculabatur pedes, and thus creates a parallel between the ruefulness of the sinful woman who anointed Jesus and the guilt and remorse of the people of Clermont. A clue to understanding the context is given in Ep. 7.2.1 ignorantiae … meae callidus viator imposuit through the reference to Mart. 3.57.1 callidus imposuit nuper mihi copo. The opening of the third letter seems to refer to Statius, and, hence, its addressee is implicitly compared with Statius’ addressee: 7.3.1 diu multumque deliberavi … an destinarem contestatiunculas, and Stat. Silv. 1 praef. diu multumque dubitavi … an hos libellos … dimitterem. The phrase 7.7.4 non primi comprovincialium coepistis esse, sed ultimi may be a reference to Vulg. Matth. 20.16 sic erunt novissimi primi et primi novissimi.

A special role is played by the references to comedy which consist in the situations described and, above all, in the archaic words used. This is especially the case in the lighthearted second letter, and is also seen in, e.g., 7.7.1 nugigerulus noster (from Pl. Aul. 525) – an allusion which for that letter creates the comic-tragic tension.

- Verbal ‘spolia’. The commentary will provide ample opportunity to evaluate more or less ‘learned’ reminiscences. Often one clearly cannot go beyond an assumption – the same applied to the contemporary reader. To mention only two extreme examples: 7.1.1
circumiectarum ... spatia tractumque regionum might refer to Stat. Theb. 4.173 laterum tractus spatioseque pectora, and 7.7.2 remorati sunt to Sil. 11.176 remorunt. Essentially, this type of intertextuality relies on the ear: verbal similarities which surface from a life-long immersion in the classical heritage on the part of the author. Hence, they gain in probability in proportion to the author’s familiarity with specific models as far as can be inferred from his work. In Sidonius’ prose the choice of words and phrases is influenced by the archaizing tendency of Apuleius and Fronto who re-introduced authors such as Plautus, Cato, and Varro. Terence – a favourite of Roman education – is also clearly present, and there are explicit traces of Sallust. In the sphere of epistolary themes and topoi Pliny the Younger and Symmachus are Sidonius’ preferred models. A wide range of poets contributes to the ‘look and feel’ of his letters, most of all Virgil, next Horace, Statius (especially the Silvae), Martial, Juvenal, Ausonius, Claudian, Ovid, Lucan, and Persius. Sidonius enjoyed a very modest popularity with posterity, but Sidonius was among his readers.

6.2 Style

Sidonius’ correspondence can be read as a masterclass in applied rhetorical ornatus. It is a riot of sound, and a maze of verbal and syntactic patterning. Stylistic features abound, so much so that the inadvertent reader might jump to the conclusion that depth is lacking. We will come to that in due time. For the moment, let us try to bring some order to this profuseness of stylistic means.

Sidonius has two main preoccupations: words and patterns, or formulated differently: sound and timing. The first has a tendency towards irregularity, density and complexity, the latter towards regularity, expansion and openness. His style is essentially bipolar. I choose my first examples – two from either category – from the short letter 7.10, just to show how many of these features are represented even on so small a scale.

(1) Take this one for a dense collocation of words: ego istic inter semiustas muri fragilis clausus angustias belli terrore contigui desiderio de vobis meo nequaquam satisfacere permittor, ‘I’m shut in here within the half-burnt confines of a fragile wall, and, by the menace of this war so close to me, am not allowed to satisfy my longing for you’. The meanings and the sounds of the closely packed nouns and adjectives interact with each other, and, by their complexity, suggest all the complexities of the situation.

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100 See Geisler’s introduction (pp. 351 f.) and index, and Köhler 1995: 23-25. Geisler lists direct borrowings from Virgil (nine times), Juvenal (four), Sallust and Lucan (two), and Terence, Cicero, Horace, Tacitus and Pliny the Younger (once each). Colton 2000 discusses influences from Virgil, Horace, Propertius, Ovid, Ausonius and Rutilius Namatianus, while Colton 1985 treats echoes from Martial. The influence of Statius’ Silvae has been treated by Morelli 1910, with special attention to the epithalamium. Pavlovskis 1973: 44-46 investigates Statius’ influence on Carm. 22, the description of a villa (followed on pp. 46-52 by a discussion of the influence of Pliny on Sidonius’ treatment of this theme). For Claudianus as a model, see Cameron 1970: 270-73. For a discussion of the canon which Sidonius himself draws up in his Carmina 9 and 23, see Schmidt 2000: 110 f.

101 Obviously, this analysis of Sidonius’ style is not about an isolated phenomenon. His prose has the essential traits in common with other late antique authors in their correspondence. Sidonius stands out for his virtuosity and versatility. Contemporaries looked upon him as their model. For the development, see above section 5.1 Epistolography.
A very frequent type of collocation is: *ut minus excusabiles excusaremur*, ‘so that I would have less excuse for excusing myself’ – the play on words. The difference with the preceding example is that, here, it is not meaning and sound, but wordform and sound. This type of collocation gives added density to the phrasing, and often, as here, provides an elegant conclusion to the sentence.

(2) Next an example of regular patterning: *quae sacrosanctis reserabuntur digitis, inspicientur obtutibus*, ‘(my letter) which your saintly fingers will touch, which your saintly eyes will examine’. Parallel *cola* – two, often three, sometimes more – are the stylistic feature *par excellence* to create regular, comfortable and often quite long stretches of text. The development of the thought is often minimal. The reader is carried along by the rhythm of the sentence.

A related type of patterning is seen in: *Arvernae forma vel causa regionis*, ‘the situation and the cause of the Auvergne’. *Forma* and *causa* are virtual synonyms. Doublets like this are also very common, and contribute to a slow, easy-going division of time.

Thus we have identified the two complementary movements in Sidonian prose: the driving force of jarring or neatly contrived collocations of words, which relies primarily on complexity and sound, and the ordering force of parallel or extended patterns, which relies above all on regularity and timing. On this basis I will now discuss a selection of stylistic phenomena to which special attention is given in the commentary. It will appear that at times there is a cross-over between categories.

In category (1) belong:

- *Archaisms, rare words, neologisms*: In the wake of Apuleius, late antique prose loves to replace the ordinary word with an archaic, rare or brand-new one. For Sidonius, too, the list is long (see Gualandri 1979: 173-81). Often, also, well-known words are employed with a new meaning or connotation. The joy of experimenting with words is evident on every page. The choice of words can be deliberately focused, as in letter 2, where a series of words from comedy creates the right atmosphere for the burlesque story told there.101 A related phenomenon, essential to Sidonius’ style, is the creation of new combinations of ordinary words, as, e.g., *Ep. 7.1.1 terminos suos … limitaverunt*, ‘they have extended their territory’. The effect must have been a mix of alienation and admiration.

- *‘Realistic’ metaphors*: Sidonius repeatedly applies metaphors, often very prolonged ones, veritable catalogues of words and images; the application of each element of the metaphor is explained. The imagery is often very down-to-earth (‘concrete’ and ‘realistic’, as Gualandri said), a tendency which is reinforced by the influence of drastic biblical imagery. For the spinning-out of the image, see, e.g., *Ep. 7.8.1*: Sidonius compares his behaviour to a river (*fluvius*); but not satisfied with that, the source and a tributary also appear (*fons, vena*); the stream should be *placidus* and *inoffensus*, but it is *spumosus, turbidus, caenosus, praeceps*. As to

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101 Gualandri 1979: 143 singles out the care for lexical choices as dominant in Sidonius, and traces it back to his attention for details: ‘In un autore che costantemente rivolge l’attenzione al particolare è inevitabile che il lessico assuma un’importanza preminente’.

102 Gualandri 1979: 105-42 devotes a chapter to metaphor which has very much shaped my understanding of the subject.
drastic imagery, nothing is left to the imagination in, e.g., Ep. 7.6.3: ‘I hope that some day the dung (stercora) of my soul will be cleared away by the mystic rake of your prayers (mysticis orationum rastris)’. I think it is important to point out that, although metaphorical language in Sidonius is very explicit, it is seldom primarily visual and immediate. One word calls for the next; rather than an image, it is an idea which is spun out. Sidonius’ metaphor is essentially a conceit. The prime example of how such a conceit can be put to effect is Ep. 7.7.3, the dramatic plight of the citizens of Clermont during the sieges, described in highly artificial iuncturae. The moving tension between the rhetorical conceit and personal tragedy is Sidonius at his best, an indissoluble union between reason and emotion.

- Variation technique and topos: I call ‘variation technique’ the rearrangement – the recycling even – of topical motives and sentences. E.g., the complex ‘road’ + ‘region’ + ‘distance’ is combined into Ep. 2.11.1 pro situ spatiisque regionum, or 7.1.1 spatio tractumque regionum, or 9.4.1 spatium viae regionumque. Ep. 7.2.7 adulescens, solus, tenuis, peregrinus, filius familias et e patria patre non solum non volente etc., returns as 7.9.21 iuvenis, miles, tenuis, solus, adhuc filius familias et iam pater. The number of examples could easily be extended. Sidonius relies heavily on this kind of ‘formular technique’, evidently to bring about a gratifying and reassuring recognition of the familiar.

- Word play, sound and rhythm: Combinations of words are to a large extent selected on such criteria as number of syllables (see Behaghel’s law, comment on 7.1.2 aut ambustam … pectoribus), assonance, alliteration, homoioteleuton, paronomasia (I have used Hagendahl’s classification of paronomasia, see comment on 7.1.6 et accidisse prius), parallelism, antithesis, chiasmus, hyperbaton104. The effect to the ear is a smooth and euphonic phrasing, balanced by the stimulus to the mind of sometimes wilful collocations. In such cases form prevails over clarity of meaning, as, e.g., 7.6.1 novo nostrorum temporum exemplo amicitiarum vetera iura, ‘an old friendship in a manner new to the times’ – but what is ‘new to the times’? The figures of style in this paragraph form a trait-d’union with the other movement I indicated in Sidonius’ style: patterning, because they constitute the basic material for the cola which are discussed below.

In category (2) belong:

- Sequences: The creation of strings of words (verbs, nouns, names, adjectives, or adverbs) in pairs or triads, and the coupling of these units in higher order pairs or triads (seldom strings of four), is called (tri)geminatio. The units are asyndetic, or, less often, syndetic or polysyndetic. Some examples of asyndetic sequences: $2 \times 2$: Ep. 7.9.15 personae temporis, provinciae civitatis, $2 \times 3$: 7.9.6 usu institutione facundia, privilegio tempore aetate, $3 \times 2$: 2.6.1 opportunus elegans, verecundus sobrius, parcus religiosus (et … praeditus). The latter example shows how a strict sequence can be followed (and rounded off) by a more relaxed unit. Asyndetic units in almost 50% of cases consist of nouns; adjectives take second position with 25%. Syndetic units of three, e.g. 7.4.2 melleas sanctas et floridas, are relatively rare; what we normally find are syndetic pairs. Polysyndetic sequences are naturally more emphatic and

104 An analysis of hyperbaton (discontinuity) in Sidonius is one of the desiderata in order to reach a proper assessment of his style. The working hypothesis would be: ‘Discontinuity developed from a pragmatic device to emphasize certain constituents into a stylistic device to mark boundaries in the sentence’ (Pinkster 2005).
less common, e.g. 3.13.2 loquax ipse nec dicax ridiculusque non laetus. For a survey, see Appendix F.

- **Isocolon**: Large tracts of Sidonius’ prose are determined by their structure of isocolon: parallel sequences of often short and rhythmical *cola*[^105], full of the figures of style which I have mentioned earlier under the heading ‘wordplay, sound and rhythm’. Isocolon can be considered as a further development of the sequences of individual words we have discussed in the preceding paragraph, e.g. the concise *Ep. 7.1.2 animositati nostrae tam temerariae tamque periculosae*. This phrase is immediately followed by the elaborate tricolon *aut ambustam murorum faciem \| aut putrem sudium cratem \| aut propugnacula vigilum trita pectoribus*. In a colometric analysis of the *contio* in Bourges (*Ep. 7.9.5-25; see Appendix G), I have shown that it is characterized by long stretches of isocolon, alternating with non-rhythmical paragraphs (category 1). Either technique has its distinct function: the colometric sections aim at verbal hypnosis of the audience, the ‘prosaic’ portions at (apparent) simplicity in bringing forward proofs and arguments.

- **Redundancy**: This is not so much a separate stylistic technique, as a characteristic of many of the sequences which we have discussed. It contributes to the broad wavelength of much of Sidonius’ prose. I mean the omnipresent doublets and triplets like *Ep. 7.1.2 inchoandis instituendisque, ‘by their inauguration and institution [viz. of the Rogation-ceremonies]’, 7.2.2 laetum copiosumque, ‘rich and eloquent’, 7.5.4 locum statumque, ‘position and standing’, and ibidem nullus … nominatus, nullus adhibitus, nullus electus est, ‘nobody has been named, introduced, chosen’. Most of these are virtual synonyms. I have cited the last example to show that it is sometimes possible to detect a certain differentiation; however, unequivocal distinctions are not the predominant motive.

- **Clausulae**: Sidonius attached great importance to careful rhythmical endings of clauses and sentences. He applies the *cursus mixtus*, with coincidence of accent and metre. See section 6.3 Prose rhythm.

So much for this introduction to the most important aspects of Sidonius’ style. I want to end by demonstrating that the way I distinguish between the broad categories ‘word/complexity’ and ‘pattern/regularity’ is in accordance with Sidonius’ own stylistic theory. He distinguishes between *mel*, ‘honey’, and *sal*, ‘salt’: *Ep. 4.16.1 paginam vestram, quae plus mellis an salis habeat incertum est*. The ‘salt’ is in the complex and contrived conceits of the wording, the ‘honey’ in the smooth and well ordered flow of the period: *8.10.1 stilum vestrum quanta comitetur vel flamma sensuum vel unda sermonum, ‘the glow of thought and the flow of language that accompany your writing’ (transl. Anderson). The same thought is expressed by 9.12.1 (*pagina lucida et salsa est, nec tamen propter hoc ipsum mellea minus. sed sermo dulcis et propositionibus acer*, ‘your letter is brilliant and stimulating, but none the less flowing for that; indeed, its style is sweet but also acute as to the ideas’. And in 4.3.3 Sidonius added, to differentiate further with regard to the structure of the period as he wants it to be: *dictio sic caesuratim succincta quod profluens, ‘that diction flows freely, though broken up into short...

[^105]: I use the word colon as shorthand for ‘rhetorical colon’ according to the definition of Habinek 1985: ‘Subdivision of sentence marked by anaphora, parallelism, or some other rhetorical device’. I will use *comma* for ‘short colon’ in a non-systematic way (Lausberg: 466). For an introduction to the principles of colometry since Eduard Fraenkel’s *Kolon und Satz* (1932), see Habinek 1985: 1-17. See further Lausberg: 359-74 and 461-67.
groups of words’ (transl. Anderson). Here we recognize the essentially colometric structure of his period.\textsuperscript{106}

6.3 Prose rhythm

To contribute to the study of prose rhythm in Sidonius, I have analysed all sentence endings\textsuperscript{107} in my corpus for the letters and the \textit{contio} respectively, on the lines laid out by Oberhelman and Hall.\textsuperscript{108} In Latin prose, from the third to the fifth century AD, the dominant rhythmical system for final clausulae was the so-called \textit{cursus mixtus}. This was an accommodation of the metrical clausulae of ‘classical’, Ciceronian prose to word-accent, i.e. to accentual clausulae. By the end of the third century, the \textit{cursus mixtus} had evolved into two distinct systems, a narrow one which comprised four metrical patterns (cretic-trochee, dicretic, cretic-tribrach and ditoochree) and the three accentual cadences under which they fell (\textit{cursus planus}: óooóó, \textit{cursus tardus}: óooóoo, and \textit{cursus velox}: óooooóó), and a richer one, adapted to the various stylistic inclinations of authors, which comprised metrical clausulae such as the paeon-trochee, the trochee-cretic, and the paeon-cretic, and among the accentual ones especially the \textit{trispondiacus} (óoooóóó).\textsuperscript{109} In the later articles under his own name, Oberhelman acknowledged precisely this second system, while at the same formulating severe statistical restrictions to make sure that an author intended to write \textit{cursus mixtus}.

The data which my analysis provides (see Appendix H) must be used with caution on account of the fact that they are based on a relatively small number of clausulae (210 in the letters, 83 in the \textit{contio}; Oberhelman 1991: 12 n. 18 requires at least 150 clausulae; the reliability of a sample of 50-100 is plus or minus 18-13%). On the metrical side, Sidonius uses predominantly the four ‘Ciceronian’ clausulae plus a variety of other ones, in the letters esp. the paeon (I and IV)-cretic and the paeon I-trochee, in the \textit{contio} the disponddee and the paeon I-trochee. On the accentual side, he applies the planus, tardus and velox, plus esp. the trispondiacus. The material stands Oberhelman’s tests for accentual and for metrical prose as such, but the required coincidence between the limited sets of four metrical clausulae and three types of cursus is not exactly high.\textsuperscript{110} Thus, Sidonius seems to apply the second, richer system of \textit{cursus mixtus}, but further research is needed to specify and corroborate this.

106 For Sidonius’ own poetics, see Loyen 1943: 129-34.

107 I.e. before full stop, semicolon, colon, question mark or exclamation mark.

108 Hall and Oberhelman 1984, Hall and Oberhelman 1986, Oberhelman 1988a, Oberhelman 1988b, Oberhelman 1991. Hall and Oberhelman did not examine Sidonius’ prose. Indeed, very little has been done for this author so far. An old study, Merchie 1921, examined the 146 endings of the letters (while applying the system of Henri Borneque, \textit{Les clausules métriques latines}, Lille, 1907), and reached the conclusion that Sidonius uses metrical clausulae, whereas the \textit{cursus} is of no importance. This conclusion is unsatisfactory as is shown by my material.


110 Accentual prose, standard \textit{cursus}: minimum value .600, Sidonius letters .676, \textit{contio} .795. Metrical prose, standard clausulae: minimum value .560 (safer .630), Sidonius letters .606, \textit{contio} .699. Metrical prose, all clausulae: minimum value .620 (safer .700), Sidonius letters .932, \textit{contio} .975. However, the required ‘high’ proportion of coincidence between the four standard metrical clausulae and the three standard types of cursus is barely reached, especially in the letters: letters .548, \textit{contio} .771. For a summary of the conditions see Oberhelman 1991: 18 f.
6.4 Towards the definition of a style

6.4.1 Mannerism?

The complex stylistic apparatus which is deployed by Sidonius and other late antique authors has repeatedly put modern readers off. Norden 1898: 638-40 judged that this prose was ‘oft bis zur völligen Unverständlichkeit verzerrt’, ‘wie ein schlammiger Strom alles mit sich fortraffend’, and condemned its ‘Spielereien’ and ‘Klingklang’. Auerbach 1958: 192 f. wondered at Sidonius’ lack of veracity. Sidonius tells ‘das Traurige und Jammervolle’ ‘mit Schmuckfiguren’: ‘Gewiß sind sie oft ausdrucksvoll aber welch ein Aufwand von Albernheit und Pedanterie steckt in ihnen’. In his analysis of Sidonius’ style Loyen 1943: 140 imagined himself in a ‘Musée des Horreurs’ (which, fortunately, did not prevent him from becoming one of the most brilliant and admirable Sidonian scholars of the twentieth century).

In more recent years rhetoric has made a comeback in the scholarly world, and the late antique aesthetic has gradually come to be regarded as an aesthetic in its own right. Michael Roberts’ *The Jeweled Style. Poetry and Poetics in Late Antiquity* (Roberts 1989) has been an original and much-discussed influence towards this revaluation. Taking his departure from the visual arts, Roberts has shown how also in literature late antique artists had a marked preference for effects of patterning over realistic representation. They strove for brilliancy, by juxtaposition and contrast of exhaustively detailed and contrived units, ‘magnifying the constituent parts at the expense of the whole’ (p. 55). I believe that Roberts’ contribution – if perhaps somewhat one-sided – is one of the most concise and significant introductions to late antique aesthetics – and what it should be valued for.

Nevertheless, the problem of categorization in stylistic history is still unresolved. Generally, the term ‘literary mannerism’ is preferred in the sense in which it was defined by Curtius 1948: 277 as ‘den Generalnenner für alle literarischen Tendenzen …, die der Klassik entgegengesetzt sind … In diesem Sinne verstanden ist der Manierismus eine Konstante der europäischen Literatur.’ In my opinion, the problem with the term is that it is too general. It comprises the extravagancies of ‘Asianism’ as well as the subtleties of ‘Alexandrinism’, the form of innocent doggerel as well as the content of pretentious hermetism, poetry as well as prose; Burck 1971 applied it to the Latin poetry of the first century AD, Delhey 1993: 23 thought it appropriate for Sidonius’ *Carmina*; etc., etc. Because of this vagueness I will generally avoid the term; when I do use it, it is in cases where the tension between content and form, life and literature, is most strongly felt by the modern reader, as when Sidonius

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111 In publications by such authors as Jacques Fontaine, Reinhart Herzog, Christian Gnilka and Isabella Gualandri (see Gualandri 1979).


113 For a useful discussion of the problem see Delhey 1993: 20-24.

wraps up a tragic reality in a contrived conceit (e.g. in letter 7; see its Introduction, section 4 Style).

6.4.2 Art and reality

What happens underneath, under the dazzling appearance of the devices of form and thought? Does anything happen? What about the relationship with reality? I would like to cite the excellent article by Franca Ela Consolino entitled ‘Codice retorico e manierismo stilistico nella poesia di Sidonio Apollinare’ (Consolino 1974). The definition of mannerism which she uses\(^\text{115}\) has, as it were, two layers: the first says that a weakened impact of reality is compensated for by a continuous tension brought about by the style; the second that form has become autonomous, and that the way the narrative is told is precisely what the narrative is about.\(^\text{116}\) With that, rather than limiting herself to the observation, that we are confronted with extraordinary stylistic means, she puts the fundamental question: what happens under the surface? what is at the root of it all? Her answer is: a decrease of reality and an increase of art. Thus, art is more about art than about anything else.

This is caused by the fact that a late antique poet could not but use the language of the classics; he was obliged to think in ‘classical’ terms, ‘even if the world in which he lived was far removed from the classical spirit. … The past became part and package of his work, despite the fact that is was too far away to be re-enacted’.\(^\text{117}\) The important conclusion is: ‘For Sidonius – for his art – there does not exist an autonomous reality which must use specific expressive means to become literature. On the contrary, there exist autonomous forms which must be filled; it may be an event from reality which fills them, or else a mythical exemplum, the results may be more or less felicitous, but the procedure remains invariable. Thus, rather than being a limitation, mannerism helps the poet compose.’\(^\text{118}\) This is a very precise description of the inversion of the roles of content and form in late antique literature. In the next paragraph I will try to account for this phenomenon without referring to the inadequate

\(^{115}\) Strictly speaking for the poems (she analyses Carmina 3 and 9), but the definition is generalized for the Epistulae on p. 459.

\(^{116}\) The first definition on p. 426: ‘Viene qui in luce un carattere fondamentale dello stile di Sidonio: venuta meno l’equazione efficacia-naturalezza, ad attirare l’attenzione del lettore è necessaria una tensione continua, realizzata dal ricorso ad artifici stilistici e retorici. La vivacità è ottenuta, per così dire, in seconda istanza: e questo è manierismo’; the second on p. 458: ‘… manierismo vuol dire rendere autonome le forme, fare che il modo della narrazione si ponga come oggetto di essa’.

\(^{117}\) Pp. 457-58: ‘Nella generale incertezza, l’unica lingua che un poeta anche non sprovvisto di ingegno, può parlare è quella dei classici, nata ad esprimere altre esigenze ed un’ altra Weltanschauung. Ed il nostro poeta è costretto a pensare in termini ‘classici’, anche se il mondo in cui si trova a vivere è lontano dallo spirito del classicismo. … Il passato viene coinvolto nell’opera del nostro autore e ne diventa parte integrante. Solo che esso è troppo lontano per essere riattualizzato.’

\(^{118}\) P. 459: ‘Non esiste per Sidonio – per la sua arte – una realtà autonoma che, a diventar fatto letterario, deve ricorrere a certi procedimenti espressivi. Esistono bensì delle forme autonome che vanno colmate: a colmarle può essere un fatto reale o un exemplum mitico, i risultati possono essere più o meno felici, ma il procedimento resta invariato. Più come limitazione, il manierismo viene così a porsi come aiuto al comporre e permette all’autore, in una poesia che solo di rado attinge a spunti realistici, una serie die variazioni su temi tradizionali.’
transplantation of the classical tradition, as Consolino does. This will entail a not unimportant modification of the second part of her definition of mannerism.

6.4.3 ‘Formalized’ prose

I was inspired by Paul Ricœur’s hermeneutics. According to Ricœur there is no direct access to the world and the self. It is always mediated by signs, symbols and texts. Hence, understanding the world and the self eventually coincides with the interpretation given to these mediating terms. That is the idea of his motto: Expliquer plus pour comprendre mieux, ‘to explain more in order to understand better’.

The crucial role of the text entails – among other things – a reassessment of rhetoric. In La métaphore vive (1975; English translation 1977: The Rule of Metaphor, which I refer to) Ricœur investigates how language creates meaning. From among rhetorical means he singles out the metaphor, ‘the transfer of the meaning of words’, as the essential instrument for this purpose. In the course of his study, this principle of ‘metaphoricity’ – creating new meanings by creating a friction between the ‘literal’ meaning and the context – is taken to the level of the sentence and of the statement as a whole, and appears to be the essence of the literary work – the poem in particular. ‘Metaphoricity’ is the suspension of the relationship between sense and reference in a work of art which precisely constitutes its unique, ‘untranslatable’ character. The literary work through the structure proper to it displays a world only under the condition that the reference of descriptive discourse is suspended. Or to put it another way, discourse in the literary work sets out its denotation as a second-level denotation, by means of the suspension of the first-level denotation of discourse.”119 Ultimately, the ‘detour’ of the poetical – ‘metaphorical’ – use of language is a heuristic instrument that opens new perspectives on reality (just as the ‘detour’ of models is a heuristic for new and more adequate scientific interpretations).120

For my purpose I want to retain two notions from Ricœur’s analysis of the poetical work of art: a) creative, ‘metaphorical’ language is an essential means to explore reality; b) the reality which is explored is inaccessible to direct description; meaning is created by suspending direct reference.

Strangely enough, Ricœur offsets this poetic function of language against its rhetorical function. Each is the other’s inverse, he says. The rhetorical function ‘seeks to persuade men by adorning discourse with pleasing ornaments’.121 I am afraid that here an opportunity is lost to understand the real nature of the essentially rhetorical works of art which we have discussed in the preceding paragraph. I propose to call them ‘formalized’ works of art. In the current study we meet them through the stereotyped and ‘manneristic’ prose which is predominant in epistolography.

I take it that – contrary to the poetic work of art which uses ‘metaphoricity’ to suspend direct, first-level reference to reality in order to create a heightened, second-level awareness of it – the ‘formalized’ work of art uses the whole gamut of rhetorical means to reduce the ordinary awareness of reality in order to make room for a different reality of its own.

119 Ricœur 1977: 221

120 Ricœur 1977: 239-46; see also Ricœur 1976: 66-68.

121 Ricœur 1977: 247
To explain what I mean I return for a moment to Consolino’s formulation: that in Sidonius’ art we are not dealing with autonomous reality which has to use certain means of expression to become literature. On the contrary, she says, there are autonomous forms which must be filled by reality. The first statement is parallel to Ricoeur’s definition of the poetic work of art. The latter shows very clearly that the formalized work of art is, in a way, the inverse of the poetical. However, in my opinion this can be phrased in an even more pertinent way: there are autonomous forms which reduce the impact of reality in order to create a reality of their own. This second-level reality is none other than the relationship with the reader.

The poetic approach thrives on the new and creative use of language; this results in a unique work of art which would lose its meaning if it were differently formulated (it is ‘untranslatable’). Form is manipulated in a unique and individual way to discover reality; the raison d’être of this kind of literature lies precisely in the new horizons which it opens; it is directed outward.

The formalized approach feeds on the stylistic and literary tradition which is taken to its limits, even to the point of becoming a newspeak for the in-crowd; this results in a reproducible work of art which in its essence is ‘community art’: it is not so much the individual author who writes; he writes as an exponent of the collective of the res publica litterarum. The impact of contemporary reality is reduced, because this kind of literature focuses on the listener or the addressee, on perpetuating the community; it is directed inward.

The incrowd character of the work of Sidonius and his contemporaries has often been pointed out. I hope, however, that my theoretical approach to the problem will help to avoid the negative connotation which often accompanies this observation. Formalized literature is not a genre of decline; it flowers wherever the socially unifying function of art is preferred to its individual heuristic potential. This is par excellence the case in epistolography. I think this could well be an explanation of the striking fact that letter writing underwent so few changes, both in the course of time (e.g., when one compares Antiquity and Early Modernity) and geographically (Latin vs. Greek and Byzantine epistolography).

My model also accounts for two other phenomena which literary criticism has tried to explain. Firstly, the either cryptic or seemingly empty character of many letters. In paragraph 5.4.2 of this Introduction I have discussed the theory of ‘coded communication’ which is brought forward by scholars to ‘decipher’ the message of these letters. Undoubtedly, the theory has proved its worth, though I have also pointed at its weakness, viz. the temptation to see hidden messages everywhere. The concept of formalized literature shows that this ‘vagueness’ is not primarily a conscious stratagem of the individual author who covers his traces, but, rather, a feature of this art form as such in which reality is reduced in favour of stylistic expressivity and closer contact with the reader.

Secondly, this kind of correspondence provides so little to ‘see’, has so little visual expressivity; on the other hand, it relies to a large extent on auditive, ‘musical’

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122 E.g. ‘una atmosfera di serra’ (Gualandri 1989: 528)

123 For the success of the correspondence of Sidonius (and of Symmachus) in the High Middle Ages, see Curtius 1948: 82 and Faral 1946. In the course of my commentary I will refer to some instances.
expressivity. The explanation which my model suggests is, again, the weakness of reality in it. The expression of this art form is, by definition, un-real, abs-tract; hence, it sides with the most abstract of all art forms, music, and much less with the concreteness of the visual.

6.5 Sidonius’ frame of mind

In the course of this introduction I have discussed a number of aspects of Sidonius’ frame of mind as I have come to see it during my study of his letters. It is inextricably bound up with his artistry, so much so that I venture to summarize his experience and outlook as ‘Art is everything’. His art – of the letters in the first place, but also of the poems – is community art, rooted in and directed at the wide circle of mutually dependent amici. Art is everything because relationship is everything. It fashions his thinking, determines his course of action, and, in the event, makes personal tragedy bearable.

Deeply imbued with tradition, Sidonius managed to face up to an uncertain future. Pen in hand. Writing to survive.

7 Future research

The modest, though promising revival of Sidonian studies in recent years would benefit greatly from a coordinated effort to create a series of commentaries on his complete oeuvre, backed by studies in specialized areas. Whereas historians have won their spurs in the study of Sidonius and his time, philologists and literary scholars still lag behind. There is a world to be won for the study of Late Antiquity through a better understanding of this crucial author. I am convinced that the application (and extension) of recent research in linguistics to Sidonius will result in an even better understanding of this author (and other late antique writers) than the traditional methods of investigation can yield on their own. The same is true of narratology. A combined effort to come to grips with late antique stylistics is the key to more adequate critical standards for the appreciation of late antique literature on its own conditions than is currently possible. In any case, the present author hopes to fulfill the promise which is implicit in the subtitle of the present study: ‘A Commentary on Sidonius Apollinaris, Letters Book 7. Volume 1’.

124 At first sight, this contention would seem to be contrary to the important phenomenon of ekphrasis: the transposition of the visible, especially works of visual art, to the medium of literature, aiming at ‘enargeia’, ‘vividness’. In Late Antiquity narrative was increasingly replaced by this kind of meticulous descriptions; Sidonius is an important exponent of this tendency. However, the point which I wish to make here is that these descriptions – no matter how detailed – ‘adjust the image of reality to an ideal model’ (Gualandri 1994: 321), and ‘are evidence of a strongly intellectualistic attitude’ (ibidem 337). Thus, they do not have visual immediateness; the visibility is indirect and essentially conceptual. For an introduction to ekphrasis see Elsner 2002; for ekphrasis in Late Antiquity Gualandri 1994, with bibliographical references.

125 Especially investigation into word order and prose rhythm in combination with pragmatics.