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

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Letter 3

‘A Contribution to Liturgy’

Introduction

1 Overview

• Purpose

In this letter Sidonius further develops the self-portrait he has created in letter 1, of a competent bishop who is engaged in managing his town and community through ritual. To the aspects of days of fasting and the veneration of the town’s patron saints, he now adds the contribution he has made to liturgy, in the form of a volume of prayers for the mass (now unfortunately lost). He involves his addressee, bishop Megethius, in the propagation of these prayers, and even seems to suggest that his colleague is a Christian man of letters himself, who shares his concern for developing liturgy. In an indirect way this letter is a small, but precious testimony to the development of Gallican liturgy.

It is striking, and very characteristic of Sidonius and his circle, that a pious text like these prayers, couched in typically Christian idiom, is accompanied by a letter which is entirely worldly in its comparison of Megethius with Apelles and other pagan artists, as well as in its overall atmosphere of aristocratic savoir vivre.

• Genre

This letter accompanies the dispatch of a literary work of art, a very common type of letter, which implicitly honours the addressee and asks – or pretends to ask – for his judgement and possible corrections. It is an intermediate form between the epistolary preface and the ordinary letter, from which the custom developed to add it as a preface to the work itself, to obtain recognition from the addressee or even subvention: the letter turns from information into prooemium, with a host of topical turns of phrase, e.g. the recusatio: the author did not want to publish the work, but does so only because his correspondent insisted on it. See Janson 1964: 106, Cugusi 1983: 131 f. ‘lettere prefatorio-dedicatorie’, and Van Dam 2008. Morello 2003 has pointed at the ‘art of saying nothing’ in cover letters of Pliny – evasive display which suggests the existence of a large number of still unpublished works (p. 202) and aims at ‘creating desire and delaying gratification’ (207). She opposes it to the specificity of Statius’ prefaces (201). While the present cover letter of Sidonius is full of polite display, it is at least specific about the content of the literary present: contestationes. The commentary discusses at some length this characteristic element of Gallican liturgy. It contends also that this cover letter was probably influenced by Statius.

2 Date

Loyen 3: 37 and 214 n. 3 dates the letter to Clermont, ‘between 470 and 477, preferably at the end of the period (476-477)’, because of the fact that the publication of a contribution to liturgy is ‘more logical’ at that time than at the beginning of Sidonius’ bishopric.
3 Addressee

Bishop Megethius has left only the faintest of traces. It has been thought he may have been bishop of Civitas Equestrium (Belley, east of Lyon). If so, he must be the same person as Migetius, bishop of Belley, who is mentioned in Sainte-Marthe’s Gallia christ. 2: 357. This Migetius is no more than a name there, the third in order on Belley’s list of bishops. (Not until the fourth, Vincentius, who is known to have been present at the synod of Paris in 552, does Sainte-Marthe provide more substantial information.) Duchesne 1: 16, in his discussion of the earliest times of Besançon and the suffragan see of Civitas Equestrium, does not even mention Megethius, but begins with Vincentius, ‘le premier évêque certain’. According to Griffe 2: 119 and 135 the diocese of Belley was not created before the sixth century, when, together with Genève, Besançon and Lyon, it got its share of the territorium Equestre. He does not mention Megethius. In view of this, it seems best to refrain from speculation as to his diocese, although Mathisen 1990: 137 felt confident enough to write ‘Besançon’ without more ado.

We have two related pieces of information which flesh out the bishop’s profile: the section of co-signatories in the letter of Faustus to the presbyter Lucidus on predestination and free will, which was discussed at the council of Arles of about 470/75 AD, and the list of addressees of the reply by Lucidus. Megethius figures in both. In the list of addressees he is eleventh out of a total of thirty bishops, which proves his relative seniority. The ninth place is taken by Sidonius’ spiritual mentor, Faustus of Riez, who became bishop ca. 460 AD (not later than 462; see Kaufmann 1995: 305). The twelfth place is occupied by Graecus who was ordained somewhere between 464 and 467 (see my Introduction to letter 2, section ‘Addressee’). My cautious conclusion is that Megethius became bishop in the early 460s (Mathisen 1990: 137 ‘451/463’). Thus, he had been in office for ten to fifteen years, when Sidonius dedicated his contestations to him. For the council, and the question of episcopal hierarchy, see General Introduction, sect. 4.4 The council of Arles in the early 470s.

By co-signing the letter of Faustus, Megethius appears to have been one of those mainstream clerics in Gaul, who, regarding the question of predestination and free will, steered a midway course between Pelagianism and Augustinianism. For the religious climate in Gaul,
and the council of Arles in particular, see General Introduction, sect. 4.4 The council of Arles in the early 470s.

From the names of participating bishops, mentioned above, to which should be added such men as Leontius of Arles, who presided over the council, and Patiens of Lyon, it is evident that with Megethius we are at the heart of Sidonius’ ecclesiastical relationships with south-eastern Gaul. And it was in south-eastern Gaul, under the primacy of Arles, that the important decisions were made. The chairman of the synod of Arles under discussion, and three of its participants, Basilius, Faustus and Graecus, were among the most influential members of the clergy, and in May or June 475 were to conclude (or had concluded) the peace treaty with Euric, which is so bitterly opposed by Sidonius in Ep. 7.7, where he has a go at them: *quod utique saepe diuque facientes iam non primi comprovincialium coepistis esse, sed ultimi*, ‘by doing this often and over a long period, instead of being the first of colleagues, you have now become the last’ (sect. 4).

We see that Sidonius had the relationships that mattered most; at the same time, however, his position was weak. As bishop of a modest diocese in Central Gaul he operated on the sidelines of the centre of gravity, Provence. He was not present at synods like the one in Arles. In most cases he could only exert his influence upon decisions by silent, personal diplomacy and through his pen. It is all the more remarkable how well he managed to survive in the turmoil of the times.

Megethius may have had a special interest in liturgy, as Sidonius sends him the volume of *contestationes*. The men may have shared a practical approach to their office, thinking that they should guide their community with ritual and devotion, rather than emphasize theology (see letter 1 on the *Rogationes* and the saints Ferreolus and Iulianus).

The Megethius of this letter is of course not the same as the Megethius of Ep. 8.14.8 *Megethius clericus, vestri gerulus eloquii*, who acted as a letter-bearer between Sidonius and Principius, bishop of Soissons, and to whom there is one further reference in the correspondence, 9.8.1 *gerulus antiquus*.

For Megethius, see the entry in Kaufmann 1995: 325 # 68.

4 Contestatiunculae, celebrating the saints and martyrs

The letter accompanies a parcel containing a volume of *contestationes*, which Sidonius modestly names with the diminutive *contestatiunculae*. In the ancient, pre-Carolingian, Gallican liturgy, *contestatio* or *contestatio missae*, ‘(prayer of) proclamation’, also called *immolatio* (missae), ‘(prayer of) sacrifice’, is the designation of the first element of the eucharistic prayer or ‘canon’ of the Mass. It begins with some variant of the formula ‘*Vere dignum et iustum est …*’, ‘It is truly worthy and just, right and salutary for us to give thanks to you always and everywhere, holy Lord, almighty Father, eternal God’, and then celebrates at length the saint or martyr of the day. It is followed by the Sanctus. Possibly, it was preceded by some form of introductory dialogue between the priest and the people. In the later Roman missal, the prayer in question is called *praefatio*, and the introductory dialogue, which contains the words ‘*Sursum corda*’ – ‘*Habemus ad dominum*’, ‘Let our hearts be lifted high.’ – ‘We hold them before the Lord’, has become standard.

The ancient Gallican rite is conspicuous for the variety and flexibility of the elements of the Eucharist. Hence, most scholars prefer to speak of a succession of eucharistic prayers, instead
of a fixed *canon missae*, which was to be the outcome of the Roman freezing of the tradition which culminated in the Missale Romanum of 1570. The *contestatio* or *immolatio* is the most comprehensive of these prayers. According to Rose 2005: 199, ‘the *immolationes* are among the greatest treasures of the Gothic Missal, with individual texts for each Sunday and feast-day. On the feast-days of saints and martyrs they became exuberant hymns of praise, celebrating the great deeds of the saints in rich colours, and constituting a fascinating heritage of Gallic literary skill.’ She goes on to cite Porter 1958: 48, who described the composition of Masses in Gaul and Spain as ‘a recognized literary activity’ that did not develop in this manner anywhere else.

There has been a lot of unnecessary speculation about the meaning of the term *contestatiuncula*. TLL 4: 688.66 tries to do justice to it with ‘i.q. brevis oratio’, ‘short prayer’. ‘Prayer’ is right, ‘short’ is definitely not.154 We also find ‘treatise’ (Dalton), ‘discourse’ (Anderson), ‘preface’ (Loyen, see Loyen 3: 189 n. 12). and ‘sermon’, ‘homily’ (which Bellès ad loc. suggests as an alternative). All these speculations can be safely discarded, because they do not take into account the specific character of the ancient liturgy of Gaul.155

Especially, the *contestatio* is not to be confused – as many have done, even Loyen loc. cit. – with the *praefatio (missae)*, which is an altogether different part of the Gallican Mass. The Gallican *praefatio* is an innovation characteristic of Gaul (late fourth or fifth century): an introductory speech to the Mass as a whole, with an outline of the character of the Sunday or the festival, and an exhortation to prayer (Griffe 3: 170 f., Rose 2005: 198).

Now for Sidonius’ *contestatiunculae*. Greg. Tur. Franc. 2.22 tells an anecdote about Sidonius, *quod* – Gregory says – *in praefatione libri, quem de missis ab eo compositis coniunximus, plenius declaravimus*, ‘which I have told at greater length in the preface to the book which I edited of the *missae* written by him’. It is generally accepted (see e.g. Loyen loc. cit. and Harries 1994: 220 n. 54) that Sidonius’ *contestatiunculae* were – in Harries’ words – ‘if not themselves the *Missae* edited by Gregory, … an early attempt at the form.’156 One should not think of the *missae* as regular masses in the modern sense of the word, but as (a collection of) liturgical prayers. For this see the analysis of the word *missa* by Mohrmann 3: 351-76 (originally *VigChr* 12 (1958) 67-92). Such authors as John Cassian and Benedict of Nursia employ it in the general sense of ‘unités de prière, constituées par des lectures, chant de psaumes, oraisons’ (p. 368). Cf. Blaise s.v. ‘oraison (à la fin d’un office ou d’une unité liturgique)’. The word *missa* is altogether absent from Sidonius’ writings.


155 Already Mabillon in his reconstruction of Gallican liturgy had shown the way (Jean Mabillon, *De Liturgia Gallicana libri III*, Paris, 1685 (PL 72, col. 99 ff.)): 1.3.17 *In his missalibus Gallicanis occurrut primo loco praefatio, quae est prima liturgiae pars, veluti adhortatio ad populum; ... Quinto, contestatio, alias immolatio missae, et ut apud Mozarabes, illatio, nobis modo praefatio, in qua fideles sursum corda se habere contestantur; and again in 1.4.5 ... primaevum morem Gallicanum, in quo contestatio in usu erat ad significandam quam hodie vocamus missae seu canonis praefationem.*

My conclusion is that, basically, Sidonius sent his correspondent Megethius a collection of contestatio-prayers, in fact a literary homage to a whole range of saints and martyrs. Allowing for the fact that the contestatio is the most comprehensive, though by no means the only prayer in the liturgy which thematizes the character of the day, I would suggest that the volume may have contained liturgical prayers in a broad sense, larger liturgical units which were concerned with the proprium of the Sunday or the feast day of the saint. That would also account for Gregory’s broader term missae.

It is probable that Sidonius’ liturgical production, perhaps boosted by Gregory’s publication, became part of the Gallican patrimony, and is now interwoven with the prayers of the Gallican and Mozarabic missals. An intriguing sample of what this might look like can be found in the comparison of the praise of St Saturninus, respectively in its poetic form in Carm. 41.61-76 (= Ep. 9.16.3) and in its liturgical guise, the Inlatio (the ‘Spanish’ synonym of contestatio) of the mass In Natale Sancti Saturnini Episcopi, in the Mozarabic missal (PL 85: 156b-157a; see Appendix B). (I thank Dr Helga Köhler for this suggestion.)

An example of the fruitfulness of the contestatio-prayer for Gallic Christian literature in general is the mid-fifth century diptych by Pseudo-Hilary, Metrum in Genesin and Carmen de evangelio ad Leonem papam, a poetic bible paraphrase of creation, fall and redemption modelled on this liturgical element.\(^\text{157}\)

For context, see further General Introduction, sect. 4.2 Theology, monasticism, the saints, and liturgy. For the contestationes/missae in the compass of Sidonius’ oeuvre, see General Introduction, sect. 2.3 Works. For further reading regarding this aspect of Gallican liturgy, see Hänggi and Pahl 1968: 461 ff., and GdK 4: 154 ff. (both with bibliography).

5 Manuscripts

This letter figures in MFPC, and is missing in LNVTR. For the manuscript tradition, see General Introduction, sect. 5.2 Manuscripts.

6 ‘You’ and ‘I’

The author first speaks about himself in the first person singular, up to and including transmisi, the moment of sending the parcel. The ensuing pangs of conscience are described in the first person plural; the sender becomes an anonymous, proverbial ‘one’. His correspondent, however, is addressed throughout in the second person singular, which makes him very much ‘present’ and the dominating figure of this letter.

For a comprehensive discussion of the use of the first and second person, see General Introduction, section 5.6 ‘You’ and ‘I’.

7 Epitome

To bishop Megethius.

‘I have pondered long and seriously whether or not to send you, at your request, the volume of liturgical prayers I have written. I have finally decided to comply with your wish, so here

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they are. It feels like an impertinence, like adding water to the sea or presenting Apelles with a brush. I am afraid it is up to you to pardon me, when you, an excellent critic, are confronted with my chattering. I can’t help writing all the time, although I publish little. It’s like dogs: they may not always bark, but snarl they do.\footnote{Fernández López 1994 assigns this letter to her subcategory 1.1 ‘Publication of his own letters’, and analyses it on pp. 34-42. She considers the collection of \textit{contestationes}, which this letter accompanied, as a volume of letters, not as liturgical matter (p. 34 n. 2). This interpretation is not tenable, as is shown below in the commentary on \textit{contestatiunculas}. The current letter belongs to subcategory 1.3.2 ‘Mere introduction of a non-epistolary work’ (pp. 65-69), like e.g. \textit{Ep. 8.3} which accompanied a parcel with the \textit{Vita} of Apollonius of Tyana. For Fernández López’ method, see General Introduction, sect. 5.3 Classification and analysis.}

**Commentary**

**Section 1**

\textit{Diu multumque deliberavi},

\textbf{diu multumque}, ‘long and seriously’: The phrase has a long history, starting with Pl. \textit{Mos}. 85 \textit{recordatus multum et diu cogitavi}. A close parallel is the dedication of Cic. \textit{Orat}. 1 \textit{utrum difficilius aut maius esset negare tibi saepius idem roganti an efficere id quod rogares diu multumque, Brute, dubitavi}. There we already have the topical hesitation concerning the request of a friend to write something. Cf. also, not topical, Plin. \textit{Ep}. 10.31.2 \textit{quod ego cum audissem, diu multumque haesitavi, quid facere deberem}. However, I believe that the current phrase may have been directly modelled on the opening sentence of Statius’ dedicatory letter of the first book of his \textit{Silvae} (thus already Savarone): Stat. \textit{Silv}. 1 praef. \textit{Diu multumque dubitavi ... an hos libellos ... dimitterem}. Both are dedicatory letters; for the importance of Statius’ prose prefaces with regard to Sidonius’ dedications, see Pavlovskis 1967: 545-67. More in general, Sidonius admired Statius’ \textit{Silvae} (as well as his epic poetry), as is apparent from \textit{Carm}. 9.226-29 and \textit{Carm}. 22 postf. 6; see General Introduction, sect. 6.1 Intertextuality.

As it can be reasonably argued that Stat. \textit{Silv}. 1 praef. is Sidonius’ model for the opening sentence, we have a possible clue as to which aspect of his relation with Megethius he draws on in this letter. The first book of the \textit{Silvae} is dedicated to L. Arruntius Stella, a friend of Statius and Martial, and a poet himself. Thus Statius sends his volume of poetry to a poet for assessment. Now, Stella occurs in Sidonius’ literary files, for in \textit{Carm}. 9.267 he is mentioned in a catalogue of eminent poets. Sidonius, therefore, was aware of Stella’s identity and qualifications. When dispatching his volume of liturgical prayers, he may intentionally have selected the reminiscence of Statius to address Megethius as being engaged in the same pursuit as he was himself, in this case the development of liturgy. In the main part of the letter he elaborates on this mutuality by talking about ‘carrying water to a river’ and ‘presenting Apelles with a brush’. Accordingly, Megethius would be one of a number of clerics in Gaul who, in the fifth century, were intent on strengthening the church and its local impact, by promoting liturgy and writing liturgical texts themselves. For this aspect of the
Gallican church in Sidonius’ days see General Introduction, sect. 4.2 Theology, monasticism, the saints, and liturgy.

For Sidonius’ technique of imitation, and what Gualandri has styled a ‘non banale utilizzazione dei classici’ (Gualandri 1979: 43 et passim), see General Introduction, sect. 6.1 Intertextuality. Undoubtedly, both Sidonius and Megethius, as bishops, regarded this as the most acceptable form for their literary ambitions.

For another possible reference to Statius’ Silvae, see my comment on 7.9.4 quam … credas.

The linguistic aspects of this collocation of a duration adverb and a quantifier – diu multumque - are treated by Pinkster 1971: 131.

deliberavi, ‘I have pondered’: For the first person singular of the sender, see Introduction, section 6 ‘You’ and ‘I’.

quamquam mihi animus affectu studioque parendi sollicitaretur,

quamquam mihi animus … sollicitaretur, ‘although my mind was urged on’ (Anderson): Mihi is a dativus sympatheticus, interchangeable with a genitive or a possessive pronoun, but with more ‘warmth’ to it, especially used of living beings and the body. An early example of the phrase is Pl. Merc. 388 animus mihi dolet. See LHS 2: 94 ff. The assertion ‘Im Spätlatein ist dieser Dat. selten’ (p. 95) is questionable for at least Symmachus and Sidonius, cf. e.g. Symm. Ep. 1.11 tunc mihi animus ab aegritudine remigravit, 9.72 at mihi animus gliscit gaudio, and Sidon. Ep. 7.6.9 tantorum vobis populorum fidem periclitaturam, ‘that the belief of so many of your faithful will be endangered’, Carm. 7.497 f. quo prisca Maronis / carmine molliret Scythicos mihi pagina mores, ‘that those strains of Virgil’s ancient page … might soften my Scythian ways’ (Anderson).

Animus affectu is Luetjohann’s conjecture, which is followed by Anderson and Loyen. The MSS have animo affectus. Mohr tried animi affectus studio quoque. The manuscript reading does not seem tenable. Luetjohann’s transposition supposes a simple dittography and makes good sense.

Animus … sollicitaretur is found in medical, not to say ‘psychotherapeutical’, jargon, e.g. Cels. 3.22 tum a negotiis abstinendum est, omnibusque rebus, quae sollicitare animum possunt, ‘one should refrain from anything which could trouble one’s mind’, and is in general used for whatever occupies someone, including in a cheerful way, e.g. Symm. Ep. 7.35 animum meum Campani litoris commemoratione sollicitas.

Quamquam in later Latin is construed indiscriminately with a subjunctive, as here, or an indicative. See LHS 2: 602 f. The proportion in Sidonius’ prose, with finite verbs, is twenty-five times subjunctive, fifteen indicative. In my corpus we have 7.5.3 quamquam Senoniarum caput es, 7.6.1 quamquam hoc ipsum praesumptiose … loquar, and 7.6.6 quamquam sit … terribilis.

affectu studioque parendi, ‘sympathy and (hence) the desire to do as you ask’: Affectus and studium belong to the vocabulary of amicitia, affectus being the basic attitude of attachment, and studium its practical realization. See my comment on 7.2.9 ut quibus impendimus studium praestemus affectum. Writing is a sign of affection and essential in maintaining social relationships, cf. Sidon. Ep. 9.3.1 granditer, quod diserte scribitis, eloquium suspicimus, quod libenter, affectum, ‘I am impressed by your eloquence because you write so well, and by your love because you give it gladly’.
Parenidi belongs to the so-called *iubes - pareo* motif. For a treatment of this and the *officia* of friendship (writing letters as a social obligation; the addressee has ‘ordered’ the letter, the author ‘obeys’), see General Introduction, par. 5.1.2 *Epistolary characteristics*.

an *destinarem*, *sicuti iniungis*, *contestatiunculas*, quas ipse dictavi.

**destinarem**, ‘send’: The meaning ‘to send’ (= *mittere*, *mandare*, *dirigere*) is found first with personal objects (e.g. Suet. *Gal*. 16.2), then, from the fifth century onward, with impersonal objects. Among the earliest instances of the latter are Ps. Athan. *Lucif.* Ep. 4 l. 33 (CC SL 8: 309) (fourth cent.) *qui solet tam necessaria quam epistulas ... destinare*, and Aug. Ep. 223.1 *quod commonitorium ... dignatus es destinare*. For Sidonius, cf. Ep. 1.7.3 *captus destinatusque pervenit Romam*, ‘he was arrested and dispatched to Rome’, 6.9.1 *destinatamque non ad me epistulam* (nuance of ‘destined for’), and 7.12.2 *salutationem tibi publicam destinaturus*, ‘preparing to send you a public salutation’. See TLL 5/1: 759.84 ff. ‘i.q. mittere, dirigere’.

**sicuti iniungis**, ‘as you order’: *Sicuti* occurs eleven times in the letters, against twenty-nine times *sicut*, without appreciable difference in context, whether the next word begins with a vowel or not. Compare e.g. *sicuti iniungis* and 7.14.8 *sicut inferior*. There is the subtle difference in rhythm. The same is true mutatis mutandis of *veluti* (sect. 2), cf. e.g. 3.13.9 *velut exundantis* and 7.8.1 *veluti ex saluberrimo*. See earlier, on sect. 1 *sicuti iniungis*.

For *iniungere* and the duties of *amicitia*, see my comment on 7.2.10 *iniungit*. Cf. 7.17.3 *ut iniunxeras*.

**contestatiunculas**, ‘insignificant liturgical prayers’: As I argued in the introduction to this letter, section ‘*Contestatiunculae*’, this indicates a collection of *contestatio*-prayers and other similar elements of the mass. The word *contestatio* means originally ‘plea’, ‘proclamation’, see Blaise s.v.: ‘attestation de la grandeur de Dieu, de la Sainte Trinité, préface’. See Bernard in GC 3: 1077 for *contestatio* as a Christian borrowing from juridical language (*contestari* = ‘to open a process’): ‘“plea” for the saint or feast in question’; p. 1079 for points of contact between official jargon and the prayers of the eucharist, esp. the *contestatio*.

Fernández López 1994: 34 n. 2 was not right in interpreting *contestatio* as ‘letter’, with a reference to Ennodius’ presumed use of the noun: ‘*contestatiunculas*, término ... que Ennodio, seguidor de Sidonio, utiliza para obra epistolar.’ A simple look at the text suffices to conclude that *contestatio* in Ennodius is always ‘expression’, ‘statement’, in most cases of sympathy between *amici*, and, indeed, expressed by way of correspondence, but never as a term for correspondence itself: *Ep*. 1.1.7 *amoris contestatio*, ‘témoignage d’affection’ (Gioanni, ed. Budé, 2006), 1.23.1 *contestatione sermonis*, ‘by expressing it (viz. one’s sympathy) in a letter’, 2.3.4 *contestationem diligentiae meae*, 2.12.2 *ad contestationem diligentiae*, 4.24.1 *contestationi maeroris*, 6.33.3 *cum contestatione maeroris per paginas indicati*, ‘with an expression of regret, extended through this letter’ (notice *contestatio* and *pagina* side by side, meaning different things).

*Contestatiuncula* in its diminutive form is a hapax (on hapax legomena as neologisms in Sidonius see Gualandri 1979: 173-81). It is the usual polite modesty, or *urbanitas*, of belittling one’s own achievements. See Köhler 1995: 115 ad 1.1.4 *opusculo*, a usage which is found from Cicero onward, and is omnipresent in late antique and medieval correspondence. For the ending –*unculus*, of modesty, cf. e.g. Plin. *Ep*. 6.17.1 *indignatiunculam, quam ... cepi*, Amm. 27.11.1 *iuste an secus, non iudicioli est nostri*, Salv. *Ep*. 7.5 *opiniunculam mean*. In Sidonius we
have 1.4.3 declamatiunculas, 2.2.11 cenatiunculam, 2.9.6 narratiunculae, 6.4.1 latrunculos, 7.2.6 virgunculae, 9.14.2 quaeitiunculis - none of them denoting modesty, but rather belonging to polite conversation in general, or expressing condescension. See also General Introduction, par. 5.1.2 Epistolary characteristics.

quas ipse dictavi, ‘which I have written myself’: By stressing his authorship, Sidonius shows himself conscious, and proud, of the special place this work has in his Œuvre as a contribution to contemporary liturgical developments. There is a slightly odd inconsistency between the (faux-)modest diminutive contestatiunculae and the pride conveyed by ipse dictavi.

The verb dictare originally means ‘to dictate’ to a scribe, cf. e.g. Cic. Att. 2.23.1 epistulam ... mea manu scriptam, opp.: haec dictavi ambulans, and Plin. Ep. 9.36 cogito ... notarium voco ... dicto. Then a second meaning develops, ‘to formulate’, ‘to compose’, ‘to write’, e.g. Hor. Ep. 1.10.49 haec tibi dictabam, which becomes widespread in late antiquity. See TLL 5/1: 1009.75 ff. In medieval Latin this is the usual meaning, with a further development towards ‘writing poetry’, ‘versify’, German ‘dichten’, ‘Dichtung’; see Curtius 1948: 86 and Niermeyer s.v. dictare. In Sidonius the notion of composing is also predominant, e.g. Ep. 1.11.1 quod ... dictasse praesumptiosum fuisset, publicasse autem periculosum, 7.9.2 dictandi ... materiam, ‘ideas for writing’.

The collocation ipse dictare occurs three times in Sidonius’ letters, and is always emphatic. The first instance is Ep. 1.7.10 (Arvandus, when confronted in court with a letter) se dictasse proclamat. respondere legati ...constaret quod ipse dictasset, ‘Arvandus claimed that he had written it. The delegates anwered that it must be certain that he himself was the author’. The conclusion that Arvandus, and nobody else, is the author leads to his condemnation. Then there is 4.17.1 Eminentius amicus tuus ... obtulit mihi quas ipse dictasti litteras litteratas, ‘Your friend Eminentius has handed me the literary letter which you have written yourself’. Its addressee, Arbogastes, is praised by Sidonius for his eminent contribution to the Latin language and to Roman culture in general, apparent from his stylish letter, written in distant and barbarous Trier. The words quas ipse dictasti underline the compliment: others have long given up, but you are still able to write such a letter.159

What about our own text? By adding ipse, Sidonius self-consciously proclaims his authorship of the volume of prayers. The statement is enhanced by the rhythmical sentence ending, which is quantitative (cretic + spondee) as well as accentual (cursus planus). See General Introduction, sect. 6.3 Prose rhythm.

vicit ad ultimum sententia, quae tibi obsequendum definiebat.

vicit ... sententia, ‘the idea prevailed’: The phrase, with vincere used absolutely, is found in the context of a debate in the senate (‘opinion’, ‘motion’), e.g. Cic. Phil. 8.1.1, Plin. Ep. 2.12.1,

159 I reject the interpretation that the letter in question has been written by hand by its author, which is how Anderson and Bellès translate here: ‘a letter written by your own hand’. I have found no certain proof for dictare as the physical act of writing earlier than Bernard of Clairvaux Ep. 304, 307, and 310 (on his deathbed) haec ipse dictavi, sic me habens, ut per notam vobis manum agnoscatis affectum (PL 182: 514b-c). The classical verb for this is of course scribere (Cic. Att. 8.12.1 scripseram ipse eas litteras, as opposed to 5.17.1 hanc epistulam dictavi sedens in raeda; Ulp. Dig. 28.5.9.1 sive ipse scripsit sive scribendum dictaverit).
and of a discussion between the emperor and his counsellors (‘point of view’, ‘idea’), e.g. Amm. 24.7.2.

*definiebat*, ‘stated’: *Definire* + a.c.i. here has the juridical connotation of laying down a rule, cf. e.g. Julian. Dig. 24.2.6 *definium est … nullam habere licentiam uxores … migrare*. *Sententia* as agents of *definire* is unusual, but cf. Cic. Amic. 58 altera sententia est quae definit amicitiam *paribus officiis ac voluntatibus*, ‘there is a second opinion which defines friendship …’, and Amm. 15.12.4 *ebrietate …, quam furoris voluntarium speciem esse Catoniana sententia definitit*. Cf. some cases of abl., e.g. Ambr. Fid. 1.5 in dialectica *disputatione …, quae philosophorum sententia definitur non adstruendi vim habere, sed studios destruendi*, ‘… which is defined in the maxims of philosophers as having …’.

The choice of the dignified verbs *vincere* and *definire* may express self-irony. Obviously, Sidonius felt no real objection to sending this volume.

*igitur petita transmisi.*

*transmisi*, ‘I send’: The verb *transmittere*, as a more sonorous alternative to *mittere* ‘to send’, is current in Sidonius’ letters, esp. of sending a poem or book (1.11.1 *petis tibi … satiram … transmitti*, 4.8.4 *poposcesisti, ut epigramma transmitterem*, 9.13.2 *ut Horatiana incola formatos Asclepiades tibi quospiam … transmittam*, cf. e.g. Salv. Ep. 8.1 *legi libros quo transmitteristi*) or a present (7.16.2 *nocturnalem cucullum … transmisi*). This meaning is first found Pl. *Epid.* 463 and then from Virgil onward. See Köhler 1995: 292 ad 1.11.1 for the topical character in epistolary literature of sending something at someone’s request.

The perfect tense of *transmisi* is usual in letter writing. The author places himself in the reader’s position, for whom the composition of the letter belongs to the past. Hence my translation ‘I send’. See KS 1: 156 f., Thraede 1970: 99 n. 149, Zelzer 1997: 328. Cf. e.g. Plin. Ep. 3.13.1 *(sending his Panegyric) librum … misi exigenti tibi*. Some parallels in Sidonius are Ep. 8.3.1 *Apollonii Pythagorici vitam …, quia iusseras, misi* (in fact a highly interesting and exact parallel, because that book, like the *contextatiunculae*, gives evidence of Sidonius’ involvement in religious writing and has not been transmitted either; see General Introduction, sect. 2.3 *Works*), and 8.6.18 *Varronem logistoricam, sicut poposceras, et Eusebium chronographum misi*.

*Transmisi* instead of simple *misi* may have been chosen here on account of the rhythm: the clausula *(po)ita transmisi* is of the same type as *ipse dictavi*, discussed above, which is one of the commonest types in Sidonius.

The verb recurs below, when the gift is interpreted in the metaphors *fluminibus aquas, silvis ligna transmittere*.

Note the short sentences which make for a lively dialogue, including rhetorical questions.

*et quid modo dicemus? grandisque haec oboedientia?*

Rhetorical questions are commonplace in epistolography, imitating *sermo cotidianus* to suggest intimacy and liveliness. See Cugusi 1983: 45 and General Introduction, par. 5.1.2 *Epistolary characteristics*.

*et quid* …?, ‘well, what …?’: Sidonius has two more instances of *et quid*, 1.11.13 *post quae ille: et quid faciemus his, inquit, qui te lacesse?*, ‘… but what shall we do …?’, and 6.1.1 *et quid nunc ego dignum dignationi huic, putris et fetida reatu terra, respondeam?*, ‘well, what shall I
answer ...?’. According to LHS 2: 480 et heading questions in later Latin authors like Tertullian, Arnobius and Sidonius serves to introduce an impatient objection to the opponent’s position. To be more precise, one should say that et does two things: (1) it acknowledges the preceding statement, and (2) either opposes it or asks about its consequences. Here is how it works: in the example from 1.11.13 the emperor and Sidonius each have dealt some teasing blows; then the emperor breaks off and says (I paraphrase): ‘That’s all very funny, but what shall we do now with your opponents?’ (breaks off and opposes). In 6.1.1 Sidonius has extolled the merits of his correspondent, bishop Lupus; then he writes (again in paraphrase): ‘That is so incredibly impressive: what shall I answer?’ (asks for consequences).

In our case the question is about the next step to take: ‘I have sent you the book. So far so good. But what shall we call this attitude of mine?’ See TLL 5/2: 890. 68 ff. and Mossberg 1934: 31 f., who also discusses <et> quaenam and ecquis/etquis, and the textcritical problems involved. For the ‘presentational’ function of the connector et in general, see Kroon 1995: 106 f., and my comment on 7.1.4 et vere.

**grandisne haec oboedientia?** ‘is this a fine example of obedience?’ (Anderson): For oboedientia as a social obligation, cf. 7.2.10 oboedientis officium, and my comment ad loc. For the iubes – pareo motif, see General Introduction, sect. 5.1.2 Epistolary characteristics.

**puto, grandis est; grandior impudentia tamen.**

**impudentia**, ‘shamelessness’: The code of courtesy to which the members of the aristocracy adhered in their correspondence prescribed depreciation of one’s own achievements, while at the same time extolling those of the amicus and refusing his indulgence. It is a regular part of dedications. An instructive example is Carm. 40.50-55 (= Ep. 9.15.1), where sending a poem is played down as loquacitatis impudentiam, accompanied by all the appropriate topos of compliance and modesty. Its omnipresence favoured a host of synonyms, e.g. audentia (9.11.9), arrogantia (e.g. 2.10.4), iactantia (e.g. 1.9.8), praeumptio (below sect. 2) and temeritas (below). This form of modesty is particularly characteristic of Christian writers, which may have reinforced this social code in Sidonius the bishop. See General Introduction, par. 3.3.2 Social conventions and Christianity.

For the wording with grandis, compare 4.4.10 grandis audacia, 4.9.1 humanitas grandis grandiorque sobrietas.

Note the rhyme oboedientia – impudentia, which is a characteristic aspect of Sidonius’ ‘bipolar’ style. See General Introduction, sect. 6.2 Style: ‘Wordplay, sound and rhythm’.

**hac enim fronte possemus fluminibus aquas, silvis ligna transmittere;**

Sending the contestatiunculae to a competent man like Megethius is as superfluous (and even offensive) as bringing water to the sea. For the topical turn of thought, cf. e.g. Cic. *Fam.* 9.3.2 sed quid ego nunc haec ad te, cuius domi nascentur, γλαυκ’ εἰς Ἀθήνας, ‘though, why do I tell you this as you know it perfectly well yourself? It’s carrying coals to Newcastle’, and Plin. *Ep.* 3.13.5 sed quid ego haec doctissimo viro?, ‘though, why do I say this to you, a consummate man of letters in your own right?’

**hac enim fronte**, ‘with the same impudence, indeed’: Frons in the sense of ‘cheek’, ‘insolence’, is mainly poetical and later Latin, cf. e.g. Aug. *Civ.* 3.30 qua igitur fronte quo corde,
qua impudentia qua insipientia vel potius amentia illa diis suis non imputant, et haec nostro imputant Christo? Cf. also the explicit combination with the notions of boldness and shamelessness in e.g. Hier. adv. Pelag. 2.10 ut durae frontis impudentia conteratur, Ps. Aug. Serm. 289.4 fronte impudentissima. See TLL 6/1: 1357.83 ff.

Sidonius has one more occurrence of the figurative use of frons; however, this conveys the notion of ‘severity’, or perhaps ‘arrogance’, rather than ‘impudence’: Ep. 8.9.2 Catonianum superciliosae frontis arbitrium. See Mossberg 1934: 38 f. Beside the turn hac fronte, see also hoc more, ‘in this way’, in similar contexts, e.g. Ep. 9.2.2 (if I should write things that men like Jerome, Augustine and Origen have done incomparably better) hoc more tu et olorinis cantibus anseres ravos …iure sociaveris, ‘you might just as reasonably join the honking of geese with the song of swans’ (Anderson).

Enim, ‘indeed’, ‘really’, ‘you will agree’: The use of enim implies that the person one is speaking to will be of the same opinion. It occurs in dialogue in comedy, and later on in discourse types which ‘although perhaps not dialogical in a strict sense, can still be said to have some dialogical “traits”’ - thus Kroon 1995: 178.

fluminibus aquas, silvis ligna transmittere, ‘to take water to the rivers, wood to the forests’, i.e. ‘carry coals to Newcastle’: Proverbs and locutions are common in the epistolary style, cf. Cugusi 1983: 96 ff. In Otto 1890: 323 # 1649 silva 1, we find Hor. Sat. 1.10.34 (the poet is told in a dream not to write Greek verse) in silvam non ligna feras insanius (cited twice by Jerome), and Ov. Am. 2.10.13 quid folia arboribus ... addis?, Pont. 4.2.13 mittere ad hunc carmen frondes erat addere silevis. The parallel with this letter by Ovid is particularly close because of the theme, sending a poem to a fellow poet, his friend Cornelius Severus, and because of its analogous development (lines 7-14):

carmina sola tibi memorem testantia curam
   non data sunt: quid enim quae facis ipse darem?
quis mel Aristaeo, quis Baccho vina Falerna,
   Triptolemo fruges, poma det Alcinoo?
fertile pectus habes interque Helicona colentes
   umerius nulli provenit ista seges.
mittere ad hunc carmen frondes erat addere silevis.
   haec mihi cunctandi causa, Severe, fuit.

‘It’s only verse I’ve not given you, witness to your thoughtful attentions. Why indeed give you what you yourself compose? Who’d give Aristaeus honey, Bacchus Falernian wine, Triptolemus grain, or send apples to Alcinous? You’ve a fertile mind, and of those who plough Helicon, no one produces a richer crop. To send verses to such, would be adding leaves to the woods. That’s the reason for my delaying to do so, Severus’ (transl. A.S. Kline, 2003, at www.grtbooks.com, last accessed 13 March 2008).

Ausonius did it his way as he wrote to Symmachus, 27.12.39-42 (brushing aside his request for a treatise) ego te docebo, docendus adhuc ...? ... eadem opera et Musas hortabor ut canant, et maria ut effluant et auras ut vigeant et ignes ut caleant adhuc, ‘shall I teach you? I have still to be taught myself. … I might as well urge the Muses to sing, the waves to flow, to winds to blow and the fire to give heat’. See the discussion in Bruggisser 1993: 269 f. Cf. Ennod. Ep. 1.2.4 hac fiducia provocassen ventos ad flandum, ad cursum flumina, Faustum meum ad facundiam, for attaining the (nearly) impossible. Bellès 3: 33 n. 31 a.l. further signalled imitations in
Pierre d’Auvergne (twelfth century) Ep. 2.12 ligna ad silvam deferre, and 4.17 Minervam docere vel ligna ad silvam vel aquam ad flumina sive mare deferre (PL 189: 202a, 337d). For proverbs in letters, see General Introduction, par. 5.1.2 Epistolary characteristics.

Transmittere echoes earlier (petita) transmisi.

hac enim temeritate Apellen peniculo, caelo Phidian, malleo Polyclitum muneremur.

hac enim temeritate, ‘with the same recklessness, indeed’, parallels hac enim fronte. Both clauses are parallel explanations of what the oboedientia, alias impudentia, of presenting Megethius with the book really amounts to: (1) redundancy towards nature (fluminibus, silvis), (2) redundancy towards culture (Apelles, Phidias, Polyclitus). In other instances of this topos the representation, not by its supreme artists, as here, but by its patron deities, as in the examples cited above: Bacchus, the Muses, etc. We have here a manifestation of the well known dualism natura – doctrina, which in Sidonius recurs in different variations, for which see my comment on 7.9.18 certat natura doctrina.


Apellen peniculo, caelo Phidian, malleo Polyclitum, ‘Apelles with a brush, Phidias with a chisel, Polyclitus with a mallet’: The painter Apelles and his brush are not elsewhere cited as an example (cf. Plin. Nat. 35.81). The sculptor and engraver Phidias and his chisel figure in Mart. 4.39.4 Phidiáci tóreuma caeli (also 6.13.1 and 10.87.16). For the sculptor and bronze caster Polyclitus and his hammer, cf. Prud. Perist. 10.269 f. forceps Mironis, malleus Polycliti / natura vestrum est atque origo caelitum, ‘Miron’s tongs and Polyclitus’ hammer are the substance and source of your heavendwellers’ (transl. Thomson, ed. Budé). To Prudentius’ mind, the studios of the Greek artists were the cradle of the gods of this ‘foolish nation’, gentibus stultis (268). Sidonius has no such aversion to the pagan past.

Similar standard lists of artists are seen in e.g. Mart. 4.39 (Myron, Praxiteles, Scopas, Phidias, Mentro) and Stat. Silv. 2.2.64 ff. (Apelles, Phidias, Myron, Polyclitus). This is the only mention made of these artists in Sidonius’ letters. Two of them figure in Carm. 23.505 f. (statuas imaginisque) quantas nec Polycletus ipse finxit / nec fit Phidiaco figura caelo (there in the company of Mentor, Praxiteles and Scopas). The latter passage is a compliment on the taste of the host and the high standard of the sculpture present in his house. In our phrase the suggestion is that to give these artists an instrument they can handle better than any one else, is an insult - and in the real world, that to present a creative man like Megethius with a book in his own line, is likewise offending.

With respect to fluminibus aquas, silvis ligna (a superfluous act) the phrase is a climax, also in the relation bicolon – tricolon.

As the comparison of our phrase with Carm. 23.505 f. shows, pieces of ‘encyclopedic’ knowledge like this can be made to function in different contexts. Bookish knowledge without pretension to artistic insight (see Courcelle 1948: 237, Hebert 1988: 520 f.) is put to
effect in a mosaic of sound and rhythm. For the aspect of ‘sequence’ in Sidonius’ style, see General Introduction, sect. 6.2 Style.

Sidonius does not hesitate to write a letter with a strong pagan flavour to accompany a pious book of prayers for the mass. For him, indeed, the antithesis is not between pagan and Christian, but between Roman and barbarian. For this problem, see General Introduction, par. 3.3.2 Social conventions and Christianity.

Section 2

dabis ergo veniam praesumptioni, papa sancte, facunde, venerabilis,
dabis ergo veniam, ‘so, you will no doubt forgive’: For the use of the second person ind. fut. to issue a directive in situations in which one has reason to be confident that the addressee will comply, see KS 1: 144, LHS 2: 311 and Risselada 1993: 169-78. I give some examples: Cic. Fam. 5.12.10 tu interea non cessabis, de Orat. 1.23 dabis hanc veniam, and in Sidonius Ep. 2.2.20 nam redeundi moram tibi ipse praestabis, ‘for I am sure you yourself will take the liberty to stay as long as you like’, 2.12.1 sed dabis veniam quod ... venire dissimulo, ‘but you will excuse me that I decline your invitation’, 8.5.1 ibis et tu in paginas nostras, ‘welcome in my collection of letters’ (compare Catullus’ invitation).

To avoid all misunderstanding, ergo recapitulates the precarious situation sketched just before by the author: the author cannot act contrary to the desires of the addressee, the risk is all on the correspondent’s side. For this use of ergo, see Kroon 1995: 369: ‘ergo functions as a signal that essentially given (of inferrable) information is being (re)activated, in order to avoid any possible misunderstanding between the discussion partners’.

praesumptioni, ‘presumption’: The noun is a hapax in the letters, the adjective praesumptiosus occurs five times. For its topical character, see above on sect. 1 impudentia, and see Köhler 1995: 106 on 1.1.1 vestigiis praesumptiosis. It is often combined with excuses for one’s talkativeness, as here below. Cf. the phrase already cited above, Carm. 40.52 (= Ep. 9.15.1) loquacitatis impudentiam, and e.g. 9.11.9 ecce habes litteras tam garrulas ferme quam requirebas; quamquam sunt omnes, si quae uspiam tamen sunt, loquacissimae. namque in audentiam sermocinandi quem non ipse compellas?

papa sancte, facunde, venerabilis, ‘holy, eloquent and venerable bishop’: For sanctus as a common epithet of bishops, see my comment on 7.2.4 sancti Eustachii. Our passage is the only time Sidonius uses it in the vocative in conjunction with papa.

Facunde: Megethius’ eloquence will contrasted with Sidonius’ presumed garrulity, cf. the famous formulation in Sal. Hist. 4 fr. 43 Maur. loquax magis quam facundus, cited by Quintilian, Gellius and Isidorus. A somewhat different interpretation could be ‘learned’, syn. peritus, doctus, a development in late Latin, cf. Köhler 1995: 292 ad 1.11.1 disertissime, where the scholion goes: ‘sapientissime, unde disertus sapiens’. See TLL 6/1: 161.58 ‘fere i.q. eruditus’, with a very limited number of cases, e.g. Auson. Ep. (= 27) 13.10 facundo de pectore. This development continued into the Middle Ages, see Niermeyer s.v. ‘learning, knowledge, culture’. One might think of the ensuing doctissimo as favouring the latter meaning.

Venerabilis: See O’Brien 1930: 122 ff. ‘(Gr. αἰδέσιμος) Attribute for both ecclesiastics and laymen: to bishops chiefly, often to the pope, sometimes to lower clergy, to laymen and laywomen, and also to the emperor.’ In Sidonius’ letters of a bishop e.g. 8.14.1 papa

For the titulature of bishops, and its social and political implications, see General Introduction, sect. 4.1 Organisation and par. 5.5.3 Modes of address.

For the tricolon sancte, facunde, venerabilis with an increasing number of syllables, cf. e.g. 7.2.7 solus tenuis peregrinus, 7.6.10 urbe ordine caritate. This is Behaghel’s ‘Gesetz der wachsenden Glieder’ on the smallest possible scale; see my comment at the end of 7.1.2 sed animositati nostrae.

quae doctissimo examini tuo naturali garrulitate deblaterat.

doctissimo examini tuo, ‘subject to your expert judgement’: Examen is the same as censura (e.g. 7.9.1): ‘textual correction and/or literary judgement, preceding publication’. See for a useful discussion of this phenomenon Köhler 1995: 112 ad 1.1.3 tuaeque examinationi has litterulas ... commisi. It had a triple function: the practical need of correction because of the inevitable mistakes made during the process of copying, paying a compliment to the person who is invited to undertake the emendation, and creating favourable circumstances for the spread of the literary work in question with the help of the person addressed. An early example of this practice is Cic. Att. 15.1a.2 Brutus noster misit ad me orationem suam … petivitque a me ut eam … corrigerem ante quam ederet.

Indeed, attention is called to textual details in such requests as Plin. Ep. 1.8.3 rogo … ut particulas (‘details’, and not only the general idea, viz. of a speech) qua soles lima persequaris (note the lima, ‘polishing file’, which is the conventional designation of the process), Auson. Lud. (= 26) 13 ff. (dedicatory poem) pone obelos igitur … / … / et correcta magis quam condemnata vocabo, / apponet docti quae mihi lima viri, Sidon. Carm. 9.332 ff. germanum tamen ante sed memento / doctrinae columen, Probum advocare, isti qui valet exarationi / destrictum bonus applicare theta, ‘but remember first to call in that pillar of learning, your brother Probus, who is able, with all his kindness, to attach a stern obelus to this scribbling’ (Anderson), cf. id. Ep. 9.11.6 (the addressee is very competent; a copy by his hand is not marred by) aut distinctionum raritas aut frequentia barbarismorum, ‘a deficiency of punctuation or an accumulation of barbarisms’ (Anderson) (flaws in interpunction as well as errors on word level).

Book production had always comprised these elements, after the actual copying: distinctio (word division, punctuation, etc.), emendatio (revision of the text), adnotatio (corrections and annotations in the margin, indicated by the obelus and other signs). See RE 3: 961 f. As industrial book production declined in Late Antiquity, the focus came to be on the continuing production in private households. ‘Editions of the “classics” were published on the initiative – and in the houses – of the last members of the educated aristocracy: An example is the edition of the complete works of Livy by the Symmachi and Nicomachi families. The production and dissemination of Christian books was based on the same mechanisms, once the new religion was institutionalized. … The majority of patristic works, such as those by Jerome and Augustine, were published within the authors’ circle, and distributed through a network of friends and connections, within which copies were also produced privately’, according to DNP 2: 814 (transl. BNP).

Yet, the preface just mentioned from Ausonius, shows that the social corollary of the textual correction as such, important though it was, was the strengthening of the relationship and
the paving of the way for the circulation of the poem: nam primum est meruisse tuum, Pacate, favorem (5).

Edition and correction became themes of letter writing in their own right, see Fernández López 1994: 33 ff., in book 7 alone the letters 3, 9, 17 and 18.


Doctissimo: Education, learning is what is expected from a friend (in the examples above: Ausonius: docti … viri, Sidonius: doctrinae columen). See also my comment on 7.2.10 qui indocto negotium prolixitatis iniungit, for the juxtaposition with writing at length, below garrulitas. For doctus and praesumptio, cf. Carm. 9.337 nec doctis placet impudens poeta. For intellectual life in Gaul in Late Antiquity, see General Introduction, sect. 3.4.

Doctissimo examini is opposed to naturali garrulitate. For the opposition doctus - naturalis, see my comment on 7.9.18 certat natura doctrinae.

naturali garrulitate, ‘with innate chattiness’: For garrulitas, see my comment on 7.2.10 garrulitate.

deblaterat, ‘chatters’: The verb is rare and archaic. Sidonius has one more instance, Ep. 1.8.2 et tu istae mihi … deblateras?, ‘and do you talk this balderdash to me?’ (Anderson). It is revived in later Latin and occurs in Pl. Aul. 268, Lucil. apud Non. 96.8 Marx (Lindsay p. 136), Gel. 1.2.6, 9.15.10. See Mannheimer 1975: 160, and for a discussion of archaisms in Sidonius, Gualandri 1979: 163 ff.

The subject of deblaterat is the abstract noun praesumptio, like consuetudo ... conscribat in the next sentence. For this phenomenon, see my comment on Ep. 7.1.3 foro cubilia collocabat ...

habet consuetudo nostra pro ritu, ut, etsi paucam edit, multa conscribat,

habet consuetudo nostra pro ritu, ‘in my daily life I follow this rule’: Habere pro ritu is found nowhere else. I think of consuetudo as general and ritus as specific. For consuetudo, and the general syntactical idea, cf. 5.11.1 est enim consuetudinis meae, ut eligam ante, post diligam. Ritus occurs three times in the correspondence, also 4.20.1 ritu atque cultu gentilicio, ‘custom’, ‘way’, and 8.6.15 superstitoso ritu, ‘custom’, or possibly ‘ritual’. Loyen’s translation ‘c’est chez nous une habitude religieusement observée’ seems to read too much into ritus.

Sidonius often uses pro + noun instead of a predicative noun, e.g. 7.2.2 sit ... pro causa, ... erit .... pro sarcina, q.v. See also 1.2.4 quod servet istam pro consuetudine potius quam pro ratione reverentiam, ‘that he (i.e king Theodoric) attends that service (i.e. morning prayers) as a matter of routine rather than of conviction’.

The phrase is opposed to canibus innatum, acquired versus natural behaviour. See above on doctissimo and naturali.

etsi paucam edit, multa conscribat, ‘though I publish little, I write a lot’: This is the pointed style found also in e.g. Ep. 1.2.4 audit plurima, paucam respondet, 8.11.7 paucam piperata, mellea
multa, cf. e.g. Sen. Ben. 7.1.4 sic in hoc studio multa delectant, paucus vincunt. For writing and publishing, cf. Ep. 1.11.1 dictasse praeuniusum fuisset, publicasse autem periculosum.

The emphasis is on conscribat (as it will be on hirriant in the comparison), that is on the apologizing side: the habit does not produce excellency, as one might expect of a literate, but – ironically - a lot of trash. It is absolutely out of the question to publish anything which is not approved by an external authority, cf. Plin. Ep. 3.15.1 petis ut libellos tuos in secessu legam examinem, an editione sint digni. Sidonius stays a gentleman right to the end!

Edit unconsciously prepares the reader for the simile with barking dogs which follows, for edere, apart from ‘to publish’, also means ‘to utter’, esp. edere latratum, ‘to bark’ (Plin. Nat. 7.22), et sim. (I thank Dr. Helga Köhler for this suggestion.)

veluti est canibus innatum, ut, etsi non latrant, tamen hirriant.

veluti: For veluti/velut see earlier, on sect. 1 sicuti iniungis.

innatum, ‘innate’, parallel to pro ritu, ‘as a habit’: See above, on habet consuetudo nostra pro ritu.

etsi non latrant, tamen hirriant, ‘though they don’t bark, they do gnarl’: Dogs are always audible, if not barking out loud, then gnarling inwardly. Whimpering like dogs is a conventional simile for producing a lengthy and tedious piece of writing, e.g. Symm. Ep. 1.23.4 sed cur ego diutius sermonis pauper obganno?, ‘but why do I whimper any longer in my poor conversational tone?’ (gannire, (of dogs) ‘whimper’, ‘snarl’, etc.). Or for an endless invective, in Ennod. Opusc. 2.49 quid praefatum incessitis canina loquacitate?, ‘why do you assail this man with the garrulity of a dog?’.

Sidonius extends the metaphor of ‘gnarling’ for prolixity, to include ‘barking’ for a writer’s creative output. The connotation of canis for him is neutral. In the correspondence it occurs five times: three times in the context of hunting (3.3.2, 4.9.2, 8.6.11), once (7.14.5) as a paragon of velocitas. In his poetry it is found three times: once of hunting (Carm. 5.93), twice in connection with the Herculean labours (Carm. 9.99, 13.12). As both the notion of jealousy and of faithfulness (see below) are obviously absent from our context, what remains is a mood of uneasiness and (of course ceremonious and playful) self-depreciation, emphasized by the littera canina in the concluding latrant and hirriant.

Loyen 1943: 99 goes in the same direction, interpreting it in the context of urbanitas and belittling oneself (although – one might object - there is no question of young dogs) : ‘lui-même n’est qu’un bavard, qui jappe à tort et à travers, semblable à ces jeunes chiens qui n’ont même pas la force d’aboyer.’

Therefore, I here rule out the notions of fierceness, jealousy, or, for that matter, fidelity, which elsewhere may be associated with canis, caninus, latrare, and the like. The adjective caninus, which occurs twice in Sidonius’ poetry, has overtones of wildness (Carm. 9.31 Cyrus suckled by a bitch) and jealousy (Carm. 41.9 f. (= Ep. 9.16.3) musstitans quam quam chorus invidorum / prodit hirritu rabiem canino). For latrare, of jealous people, see my comment on 7.9.8 linguarum, sed humanarum, latratus. A positive connotation can be found in Ambr. Hex. 6.17 (with reference to Is. 56.10): quid autem de canibus loquar, quibus insitum est natura quadam referre gratiam, et sollicitas excubias pro dominorum salute praetendere?