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

van Waarden, J.A.

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Letter 4

‘Communio, or the Ideal Bishop-patronus in Times of War’

Introduction

1 Overview

This is a letter of recommendation. Letters of this kind make up about one sixth of the collection, and are spread almost evenly over the nine books (except that there is none in book 1 and twice the average in book 6). The genre is very flexible and adapts to a range of circumstances (Fernández López 1994: 136). Here it is used to convey a political message. Characteristically, the path for the recommendation is cleared in the introductory section by complimenting the addressee, in this case bishop Fonteius. The letter, however, goes far beyond the recommendation of its bearer, which emerges only at the very end. After the introduction the author seemingly takes a sidestep, to what in fact becomes the main section. In an allusive way it treats the political intrigues concerning Sidonius’ family and Fonteius’ indispensable role in them. It states the central theme of communio, ‘being helpful’, of a patron towards his protégé. It invokes the bishop’s communio in the struggle for life of the Gallo-Roman élite – a message which at the time of writing was narrowly focused on the interests of Sidonius’ family; when published some years later, however, after the defeat, it acquired the broader scope of portraying the ideal bishop in times of war. As such, it was both an appeal to his colleagues … and a self-portrait: a lesson in approachability versus aloofness, moral and political responsibility versus arrogant indifference.

2 Date

Loyen 3: 214 opted for a date between 471 and 475, probably 474 AD. He argued that the letter is later than the one Sidonius wrote to Fonteius not long after he himself became bishop (Ep. 6.7), a letter for which he thought 471 a plausible date. It is also later than the events of 471, which brought Sidonius’ uncles Simplicius and Apollinaris together in Vaison (see sect. 4). In that year the Visigothic offensive towards the Rhône had compelled Apollinaris to leave his estate in Nîmes and take refuge with his brother Simplicius in Vaison.

The terminus ante quem is somewhat more complex. Can we surmise, with Loyen, that there is a link with the problems which culminated for the family in 474, described by Sidonius in Ep. 5.6 and 5.7? Let us examine this matter. These letters are addressed to the same uncle Apollinaris and another brother of his, Thaumastus. The brothers were accused of having sided with the new Roman emperor Julius Nepos (25 June 474 – 29 August 475) in order to hold the town of Vaison for him, which was claimed, however, by the Burgundians.¹⁶⁰ The

¹⁶⁰ Stevens 1933: 210 even went so far as to assume a Gothic conquest of Provence in 473, which would explain ‘why Nepos was able to make what was really a very favourable treaty with Euric … and … gives a real motive for the supposed intrigues of Apollinaris at Vaison.’ For the tricky situation, see
Burgundian king Chilperic did not recognize Julius Nepos, who, on his part, tried to reinforce Gallic resistance and bring about a settlement. For that reason, in the winter of 474, he sent the quaestor Licinianus, who brought with him the document elevating Sidonius’ brother-in-law Ecdicius to the rank of patricius; meanwhile he was anxiously awaited by Sidonius himself to bring relief to Clermont, in what were to be its last months under Roman rule (Ep. 3.7). The political situation was all the more complicated for the family because the Burgundians, now obviously frustrated by the brothers, were indispensable for the survival of Clermont against the Visigoths (for the ambiguous situation of Clermont, cf. Ep. 3.4.1 suspecti Burgundionibus, proximi Gothis).

If Loyen is right – as he may well be, and as Harries accepts without comment – the current letter is, among other things, an appeal to Fonteius to intercede, or continue to intercede, in favour of Apollinaris and Simplicius at the Burgundian court. In the autumn of 474 Sidonius himself had gone to Thaumastus in Vienne (Ep. 5.6.1), and possibly afterwards to the court in Lyon (he appears to have first-hand information about the influence of the queen on her husband with regard to the situation, Ep. 5.7.7), to sort matters out.

Nobody will have suspected that the dénouement was perhaps no more than half a year away. In May-June 475 the peace with the Visigothic king, Euric, would result in the banishment of Sidonius and strengthen Roman rule in Provence, if only for one more year.

The above caused Loyen to conclude that the letter was most probably written in 474. One might be more specific and say: autumn/winter 474, or even the beginning of 475.

The date according to PLRE 2: 114 s.v. ‘Apollinaris 2’ is ‘after 469’, which is as unproblematic as it is unspecific.

For the historical developments, see General Introduction, par. 3.2.2 The sieges. For the Gallic aristocracy looking after itself, with or without the central administration in Ravenna, and its relocation under pressure of the war, see sect. 3.3 Gallo-Roman aristocracy, and for the Burgundian policy, sect. 3.1 Visigoths and Burgundians.

3 Addressee

The addressee is Fonteius, bishop of Vasio Vocontiorum (now Vaison-la-Romaine, dept. Vaucluse), in the church province of Viennensis. He is probably identical with the Fontedius presbyter, who was present at the councils of Orange in 441 and Vaison in 442. He is mentioned as bishop for the first time in a letter by pope Leo of 3 May 450, and after that in one from 452 and another from 464.

Like Mamertus of Vienne (Ep. 7.1), Graecus of Marseille (Ep. 7.2, 7.7 and 7.10), Megethius of Belley (?) (Ep. 7.3), Basilius of Aix (Ep. 7.6) and Euphronius of Autun (Ep. 7.8), he witnessed the proceedings of the council of Arles, in the early 470s, which rebuked the priest Lucidus for his ultra-orthodox views on predestination and free will. In the list of addressees of Ludicus’ letter of retractation he figures in a prominent third position, undoubtedly because of his seniority. His name is not among the co-signatories of the letter of Faustus which led up to the council, though this may well be due to the precarious manuscript tradition of this letter.

Harries 1992: 305 f.: ‘it therefore became unacceptable in Burgundian eyes for Romans resident in the Rhône corridor to have dealings with the emperor in post.’
list. For the council, and the question of episcopal hierarchy, see General Introduction, sect. 4.4 The council of Arles in the early 470s.

He is also the addressee of Ep. 6.7, in which Sidonius, evidently only recently a bishop (thus in 470 or 471), begs him to protect clericalis tirocinii in nobis reptantia rudimenta, 'the babylike efforts of my clerical beginnings' (sect. 2). This letter proves that the family of the Apollinares and Fonteius entertained a long-standing relationship: 6.7.1 domesticae familiaritatis, and te familiae meae ... semper patronum fuisse.

There are no traces of Fonteius' origins and family, which must have been distinguished. PLRE 2: 205 has only one namesake, Fonteius Litorius Auxentius, member of the Roman aristocracy, praefectus urbi ca. 425/50.

See Duchesne 1: 262, Kaufmann 1995: 310 # 46.

### 4 Communio

The letter contains an implicit political message from Sidonius, during what were to be the last days of Roman rule in Clermont, winter 474-75, about the situation in Vaison, a territory dominated by the Burgundians and coveted by the Visigoths, where the Gallo-Roman nobility dreamed of having things their own way by strengthening the traditional ties with Rome. See below, chapter ‘Date’.

The letter focuses on family matters which specify the political upheaval, the actual or alleged rebellion against Burgundy by his uncles. The message is one of solidarity with his family and their political ideals. As overt support was evidently impossible, it is expressed by not criticizing the conduct of his uncles. At the same time political wisdom leads him to choose the path of diplomacy and invoke the support of the bishop of Vaison to continue to intercede on their behalf.

Consequently, the letter is also a statement about the authority of the bishop. His sphere of influence is by no means confined to spiritual matters; he is an indispensable political instrument in furthering the interests of his diocese and a wide range of acquaintances. The current letter illustrates the transfer and extension of traditional terms of patronage to political intervention (thus Harries 1994: 213 n. 23).161

It is vital to those dependent on the bishop – in this case the family of the Apollinares – to be sure of easy access to him. That is why the ideal patronus is praised for his communio, ‘ease of associating with people’, ‘benevolence’. The concept is central to this letter. The keyword communio occurs twice, and is supported by beneficium, munificentia (sect. 1), blanditiae, comitas (2), patrocinium, intercessio (4). The person in need of help longs for intimacy: coram posito, artis ... fovere complexibus (2), familiaritate sociamur (3). The summit of social correctness is to extend one’s patronage generously: etiam longe positorum incitare in se affectum (3). In section 3 the opposite attitude in a patronus is defined as severus, asper, rigidus. A person who behaves like that overestimates himself (turgescat).

161 Rousseau 1976: 365 has emphasized a change in the uses of patronage. A charity and concern more open to the common man ‘was able … to modify (if not undermine) the dependence and control on which patronage had traditionally rested’. Though not – in my opinion - very much to the point in this case, Rousseau’s view is correct regarding the changing – more pastoral - role of the bishops in their towns in general.
Sidonius expatiates on this opposite choice for the high and mighty: to be aloof instead of condescending, to subjugate the weaker party instead of gaining his respect, and to show no interest in people who live far away and are of no direct use. I suggest that he had a particular person in mind, who thwarted his interests or the interests of the family as a whole. The criticism is anonymous, meaning that the person was of particular importance and that is was dangerous to mention him, either at the time of writing or of publication. See below, the comment which introduces section 3.

However that may be, the message Vindicius had brought Sidonius about Fonteius’ support for the uncles was more than welcome. The political state of flux of which they were a part, and Sidonius’ intervention in it by addressing the bishop of Vaison, is the main theme of this letter, ‘wrapped up’ in the envelope, as it were, of the recommendation of its bearer.

By later publishing the letter in this particular place in the collection, Sidonius changed its scope. He made it into a portrait of the ideal bishop in times of war, as part of the mosaic of his views on the final struggle of Clermont.

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’

Throughout this letter Sidonius refers to himself in the first person singular, except in sect. 1 nos damus, and in sect. 3 submittimur and sociemur. The use of nos in sect. 1 to designate the author should either be explained as necessary to balance vos which follows immediately, or the plurals indicate the typical roles of client and patron, respectively. In sect. 3 the sentence resembles a saying: ‘we can more easily (= it is easier to) associate with friendly people’, thus the plural generalizes, or, again, it indicates belonging to a group, viz. the group of bien-pensant aristocrats.

Fonteius is always vos and second person plural. Although he is the centre of interest, the plural prevents the reader from getting too close.

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

7 Epitome

To Fonteius, bishop of Vaison.

Sect. 1 - 2a: ‘From now on, I hesitate to recommend somebody to you, because you are such a lavish patron and I have little to remunerate you for it. Take Vindicius who has just returned from you with a load of help. He keeps mentioning everywhere that you fully deserve your high position. You are so affable, he says, and so responsive. Yet this in no way detracts from your stature as a bishop.’

Sect. 2b – 4a: ‘On hearing that, I become enthusiastic and long very much to see you as soon as possible. To be honest: I know how it feels to be treated dismissively. One has to put up with it, but I do not see how the person in question can justify his superciliousness. I much prefer a patron who includes even distant relations in his circle. I am especially grateful to
you for being told that you keep lending support to my dear Simplicius and Apollinaris.
Please keep it up, or, should the message be incorrect, start doing so soon.’

Sect. 4b: ‘The bearer of this letter has some business in Vaison for which he needs your help.
Please exert your influence on his behalf.’\(^{162}\)

**Commentary**

**Section 1**

**Insinuare quoscumque iam paveo**

*Insinuare quoscumque*, ‘to introduce, recommend no matter whom’: For *insinuare* see my comment on 7.2.2 secundo *insinuatum*.


Sidonius plunges in *medias res*. The first word announces a letter of recommendation, which it is, although it will become apparent that it contains more than just a recommendation. The statement of the theme is followed by civilities. This is what I have called the ‘mixed type’ of opening sentences. For an analysis of opening sentences in Sidonius’ correspondence, see General Introduction, sect. 5.3 *Classification and analysis*.

*iamb paveo*, ‘from now on I recoil’: Dalton’s translation is perfectly clear: ‘I am getting quite afraid of introducing people to you.’ To complete the thought, one may add: ‘... after what I have heard from Vindicius, living proof of your generosity.’ *Pavere* is more forceful than *timere*, see my comment on 7.1.3 *pavenda mansuetudo*.

*Insinuare paveo* may be a hint for insiders at Verg. A. 2.228 f. *tum vero tremefacta novus per pectora cunctis / insinuat pavor* - what Gualandri 1979: 45 n. 34 has called a ‘pura eco verbale’.

*quia commendatis nos damus verba, vos munera*;

*nos damus verba, vos munera*, ‘I provide with words, you with gifts’: This is an allusion to Ov. *Ars* 2.166 (‘as a poor poet’) *cum dare non possem munera, verba dabam*, ‘not being able to give presents, I gave words’. See General Introduction, sect. 6.1 *Intertextuality*.

*Nos damus verba*, of course not from *verba dare* in the sense of ‘to deceive’, ‘impose upon’, but as an antithesis to (*damus*) *munera*. The *verba* are those of the letter and the recommendation contained in it. Cf. for *verba*, meaning correspondence, in a comparable antithesis, 5.3.3 *cum non habeam opera pro pomis, spargo verba pro foliis*, ‘(like a barren tree) not having works as fruit, I scatter words as leaves’ (Anderson): the author writes letters instead of the books he

\(^{162}\) This is a letter of recommendation, which Fernández López 1994 discusses and analyses on pp. 135 ff. in the subcategory 4.1, together with – as far as my corpus is concerned – Ep. 7.11. For her method, see General Introduction, sect. 5.3 *Classification and analysis*.  

Letter 4 - Section 1 185
cannot produce. See also 7.10.2 *ut interim remittatis occulsionis debitum vel verba solventi*, 'excuse me for not coming for I at least pay my duty of words' (= 'write you this letter').

Note the plural *nos* to designate the author; it should either be explained as necessary to balance *vos*, or the plurals indicate the typical roles of client and patron, respectively. See Introduction, section 6 'You' and 'I'.

The *munera* are the *munera amicitiae*, the acts of fulfilment of a relationship. See e.g. Ov. *Tr*. 4.5.23 f. teque, quod est rarum, praesta constanter ad omne / indeclinatae munus amicitiae, '… be available for any service of unswerving friendship', by which Ovid asks for help. Fonteius is addressed as a *patronus*, who uses his influence to help his relations.

Note that in late antiquity, e.g. in Symmachus and Sidonius, the ritual of correspondence itself may be seen as the fulfilment of the obligations of *amicitia*, e.g. Symm. *Ep*. 4.25 (after a preceding *litteras tuas* *amicitia munia* (et passim), Sidon. *Ep*. 8.14.8 *Megethius clericus, vestri gerulus eloquii ... quia tuorum apicum detulit munera, meorum reportat obsequia*, 'because the cleric Megethius, the bearer of your words, has brought the gift of your letter, he carries the respect of mine back'. See also General Introduction, par. 5.1.2 *Epistolary characteristics*.

tamquam non principalitas sit censenda beneficij

*tamquam non ... sit censenda*, 'as if it is not to be thought', vividly introduces an objection against something which is patently not the case (see OLD s.v. *tamquam 5*): 'It is absolutely not a matter of course, that you have gone so far as to actually help us and Vindicius. Quite the contrary, the mere fact of your admitting my letter-bearer is the best I could expect.' This and what follows is in the best tradition of hyperbolic compliments and self-denigration in correspondence. The vivid phrasing is the same as in *Ep*. 7.8.4 *sed cur ego ista haec ineptus adieci, tamquam darem consilium qui poposci?*, 'but why am I so insipid as to add this, as if I'm giving advice instead of asking for it?', and the series of objections in *Ep*. 7.14.6 *tamquam non sit eminentior visus aquilarum*, etc., 'as if the eyesight of eagles is not more excellent'. It suggests spoken language and stems from a debating context, e.g. Sen. *Ep*. 82.4 *quid deinde prodest secessisse? tamquam non trans maria nos sollicitudinum causae persequuntur*, 'what then is the advantage of retirement? As if the real causes of our anxieties do not follow us across the seas!' (transl. R.M. Gummere, ed. Loeb).

*principalitas ... beneficiij*, 'a supreme kindness' (Anderson), 'the height of privilege' (Dalton). For the gen. *inversus*, see my comment on *Ep*. 7.1.5 *orationum frequentia*. For the frequency of nouns in *–tas*, see on 7.1.2 *animosati nostrae*.

The word *principalitas*, 'superiority', 'pre-eminence', occurs nowhere else in Sidonius. It has a wide range of applications. It is usually found in a theologico-philosophical context, e.g. Tert. *Praescr*. 31 *ad principalitatem veritatis et postertatem mendacitatis disputandum*, '… the priority of the truth …', is a linguistic t.t. in Isid. *Orig*. 1.28 *nam quod genus in principalitate* ('headword') *est, id esse solet in diminutione* ('diminutive'), and means 'majesty' where the emperor Theodosius is addressed in Faustin. *Fid*. 34 (fourth cent.) *piissimum vestrae principalitatis ... imperium*, '… Your Highness'. For *principalis*, see my comment on 7.6.10 *concordia principalis*.

quod a me peccatore digressis sanctae communionis portio patet

*a me peccatore digressis*, 'for people who come from me, a sinner': The idea of *peccatore* is opposed to *sanctae*. It is the way in which Sidonius defines himself, four times in all, in his
correspondence with bishops: Ep. 7.6.4 nec nobis (= Sidonius) peccatoribus hic accusare nec vobis (= the bishop) sanctis hic discutere permisset est, ‘and in these circumstances I, a sinner, may not lodge a complaint; neither may you, a saint, open an enquiry’. Cf. also 6.1.2 and 9.2.3. The politeness of the noble and the due humility of the clergyman coincide, in the same spirit as in Ambr. lob 4.6.22 quodsi vix sanctus dicit, quid ego dicam peccator?

sanciae communionis, ‘your saintly openness’: For sanctus as a common epithet of bishops, see my comment on 7.2.4 sancti Eustachii.

For communio, ‘(ease of) associating with people’, ‘pleasant manner’, ‘benevolence’, see TLL 3: 1966.53 ‘translate i.q. comitas, liberalitas, humanitas’, with examples from Sidonius, Avitus and Ennodius. It is used for persons in authority, as a recommended and admired check and balance to their power and its inherent aloofness. It is all-important in social intercourse that the distance which is prescribed by rank be overcome every time someone approaches somebody for that person to be assured (again) that he belongs to the amici. The paradox of communio is that, whereas it might be expected to decrease the prestige which comes from keeping one’s distance, if properly managed it heightens one’s standing. For this complexity of rank, distance and nearness, cf. e.g. Sidon. Ep. 2.3.1 (to his friend Felix who has received the title of patricius) invenis ... qualiter honorum tuorum crescat communione fastigium, ‘you find ways of enhancing your eminent rank by approachability’, and Ennod. Ep. 5.22 potiorum sublimitas communione geminatur, ‘the elevation of the mighty is doubled by approachability’. Further cf., as another case of communio in a bishop, 9.11.10 (to bishop Lupus) quae laetitia tua sancta quaeque communio, ‘in view of your sanctified sense of humour and geniality’ (Anderson), and, esp. for the tension between auctoritas and communio, 1.11.12 (about the emperor Majorian at a banquet) Augustus, ut erat auctoritate servata, cum se communione dedisset, ioci plenus, ‘the Emperor, though he always kept his dignity, was full of merriment when he engaged in conviviality’. This tension can also be exploited in a demagogic way by people who are keen on questioning authority. See my comment on 7.9.11 rigidos ob austeritatem non habent caros; blandi apud eos communione vilescunt.

The word communio recurs in sect. 2 praedicat ... quae procedunt de temperata communione blanditias. As has been argued in the introduction, surrounded as it is by cognate vocabulary, we can safely consider it the keyword in this letter, which is about approachability versus aloofness, moral and political support versus arrogant refusal.

portio patet, ‘a share (in your benevolence) is open’, i.e. ‘contact with you is possible’: For portio cf. e.g. Ep. 4.21.3 igitur Arverni si portionem tui saltim vicissim iure sibi vindicant, ‘so if the Arvernians rightly claim your presence in their turn’. The alliterating iunctura portio patet has been forged for this occasion. It is a contamination with aditus patet, ‘the door is open’, cf. Nep. Milt. 8.4 sed in Miltiade erat cum summam humanitas tum mira communitas, ut nemo tam humilis esset, cui non ad eum aditus pateret. Compare also the personal use of patere in e.g. Amm. 15.3.3 Constantius ... patebat insidiantibus multis, and often.

testis horum est Vindicius noster, qui segnus domum pro munificentiae vestrae fasce remeavit,

Vindicius also figures in Ep. 5.1.2 commendo Vindicium necessariam meum, virum religiosum et levitiae dignitati, quam nuper adeptus est, accommodatissimum, ‘I recommend my client Vindicius, who is devoted to our church and perfectly suitable for the office of deacon which he has recently received’. This letter is dated by Loyen to the end of 470, or the beginning of
471, which consequently is the terminus post quem for the current letter (see Introduction, ch. ‘Date’). This means that Vindicius at that time had just become a deacon. The deacons, ranking below the priests only, were in charge of the temporal affairs of the church, in close collaboration with the bishop. See Griffe 3: 89 ff. Members of the clergy were among the wide range of letter-bearers employed by Sidonius. See Kaufmann 1995: 244 n. 747 and Amherdt 2001: 172 ad Ep. 4.4.1 Faustinus. In my corpus we also have the lector Amantius, who took care of the letters 2, 7 and 10.

noster, ‘our’, of the letter-bearer also Ep. 7.2.2 tabellarii nostri, 7.7.1 nugigerulus noster. Cf. 5.17.10 Epiphanius noster, Sidonius’ secretary. For this case of inclusive, and familiar, noster, ‘between you and me’, see my comment on 7.2.2 tabellarii nostri.

qui segnius ... remeavit, ‘who has returned more slowly than usually’ or ‘... too slowly for me (because I was worrying about his return in the dangerous times we are in)’: Vindicius is portrayed as slowly plodding his way back from Vaison to Clermont, weighed down by the immense load of munificence he has received. Behind this topical phrase (see below), we are meant to assume a lot of facts which Sidonius only hints at. Apart from the support Vindicius himself may have received, he conveyed the message concerning the support given to the family of the Apollinares by bishop Fonteius, and the diplomatic fencing match, which took place at the highest level and of which this was only the tip of the iceberg. His role will have been to elucidate further Sidonius’ intentions to Fonteius, and to take back in his memory, probably along with a letter, that part of the answer which was too dangerous to write down. On this function of messengers, see e.g. Symm. Ep. 3.30 and Sidon. Ep. 9.3.2, and cf. Ep. 5.17.5 nullus sermo qui proderetur, nulla persona quae proderet, about the danger of being betrayed at that time: ‘not a word which could be passed on, nobody who could betray you’.

pro munificentia vestrae fascie, ‘because of the burden of your munificence’: Causal pro is already pre-classical and classical, but does not occur often, e.g. Pl. Truc. 230 quin ... pro infrequente eum mittat militia domum, ‘to send him home on account of his unsatisfactory service’. Later Latin shows a certain predilection for it, e.g. Gen. 27 oderat Esau Iacob pro benedictione, ‘Esau hated Jacob because he had received the blessing’, Peregr. Aeth.. 5.10 pro aetate aut imbecillitate occurrere ... non poterant. See KS 1: 516, TLL 10/2: 1434.7 ff.

Fascis, sg. ‘burden’, occurs three times in the letters, also 5.20.3 fasci ... tributario, ‘the burden of taxation’, and 8.15.2 operis arrepti fascie, ‘the immensity of the work I had undertaken’ (Anderson). To be weighed down by munificence, munificentiae fascie, is almost an oxymoron, which Sidonius duly deploys, see General Introduction, sect. 6.2 Style.

The letters of recommendation, the reputations at stake in them, the money available, or the actual services done - any of these or all together constituted the metaphorical baggage with which a traveller made his journey. In Ep. 7.2.3 nihil est enim viatico levi gravius, ‘nothing is heavier than a light load’, the protagonist is under way without any recommendation whatsoever and without money - a heedless action. In the current letter the reverse is the case: Vindicius brings home a load of help.
quoquo loco est, constanter affirmans,
‘who, wherever he may be, resolutely affirms’ (Anderson), ‘et partout où il passe, il va proclamant’ (Loyen). After his return Vindicius tells everybody who wants to hear it – and principally his patron Sidonius, as described in sect. 2 below – about Fonteius’ kindness.

quoquo loco est: Compare the variant with gen., 4.1.5 quoquo loci es.

cum sitis opinione magni, gradu maximi, non tamen esse vos amplius dignitate quam dignatione laudandos.

opinione, ‘(good) reputation’, e.g. Q. Cic. Pet. 36 magnam adfert opinionem, magnam dignitatem cotidiana in deducendo frequentia, Sidon. Ep. 1.1.4 contenti versuum … opinione, ‘content with the success of my poetry’. See Mossberg 1934: 1 ‘pro fama vel gloria usurpatum’, with references for Sidonius. An apposite adjective marks the meaning ‘bad reputation’, e.g. Sidon. Ep. 1.11.2 me sinistrae rumor ac fumus opinionis adflavit.

gradu, ‘rank’, ‘position’, e.g. Ulp. Dig. 47.9.12.1 si humiliore loco sint vs. si in aliquo gradu id fecerint, about a different penalty for arsonists, ‘if they are of humble origin’ vs. ‘if people of a certain rank have committed it’. It is quite often used of a priest’s or a bishop’s office, e.g. Pont. Vita Cypr. 5.1 (third cent.) ad officium sacerdotii et episcopatus gradum, Sidon. Ep. 4.25.4 in quo seu gradu seu ministerio (viz. of archdeacon).

amplius dignitate quam dignatione, ‘more because of your rank than because of your condescension’: Amplius (quam), ‘to a greater degree (than),’ ‘more fully or intensely’, instead of plus, since Cato Agr. 146.1, cf. e.g. Sen. Ep. 6.5 quia homines amplius oculis quam auribus credunt, and often in Sidonius, e.g. 1.7.13 aliquid nunc amplius quam vivere timet, 7.6.6 ampliusne suae gentis an suae sectae. See TLL 1: 2012.70 ff.

The paronomasia dignitas - dignatio (Hagendahl class 3, see at 1.1.6 accidisse … accessisse) first appears in Paul. Nol. Ep. 49.12 who opposes huius saeculi dignitate to dei dignatione, ‘Würde dieser Welt … Würdigung durch Gott’ (transl. M. Skeb, Paulinus von Nola, Briefe, Fontes Christiani, Freiburg, 1998: 1031). Cf. Euseb. Gallic. Hom. 2 1. 110 (on the incarnation of Christ) ita est pro nostra salute misericors humiliata maiestas, ut tamen non adimeret dignatio dignitatem, ‘his majesty has mercifully stooped down for our salvation, in such a way that his condescension did not take away his dignity’.

The wordplay is used in an entirely different way by Salv. Gub. 5.59 altiores sunt ceteris dignitate et aequales dignatione, ‘they are higher than the rest in rank and equal in merit’, about authorities who must be obeyed because of their higher rank (dignitas), but are at most equal to their subjects in the regard they deserve (dignatio).

Section 2

praedicat melleas, sanctas et floridas, quae procedunt de temperata communione, blanditias;

praedicat, ‘he praises’, ‘extols’: In Sidonius’ correspondence it occurs no fewer than eleven times, e.g. in the clear opposition Ep. 2.1.3 in convivio praedicat, in cubiculo damnat.

melleas, sanctas et floridas, ‘sweet, holy and artful’: The triad respectively describes the nature of the utterances, the person of the bishop who produced them and the style in which
they were couched, but the adjectives are actually interchangeable (see below), an example of variation technique, for which see the General Introduction, sect. 6.2 Style.

The figurative use of melleus, ‘honey-sweet’, ‘delightful’, is an Apuleian innovation: Met. 6.6 aces melleis modulis suave resonantes, ‘birds sang sweetly with honeyed notes’, Fl. 4 omnis voculae melleus modulator, ‘a honey-sweet crooner’. Mel as a quality of style was already applied by Cic. Or. 32, where he thought Xenophon’s style too ‘soft’ for the robust conditions of a court: sermo … ille quidem melle dulcior sed a forensi strepitu remotissimus. Petronius thought it necessary to warn against the excesses of modernism in his day, as taught by the rhetoricians, Petr. 1.3 mellitos verborum globulos, ‘honeyballs of phrases’ (transl. Leeman 1963: 480). In Late Antiquity, however, it was one of the prime stylistic qualities, see General Introduction, sect. 6.2 Style. See also Amherdt 2001: 372 ad 4.16.1 plus mellis an salis. Sidonius uses melleus four times, in the late seventh and eighth books only, not in the narrow, technical sense of speech and style only, but of mentality as expressed by words, meaning ‘affable’, ‘diplomatic’, as opposed to ferocissimum (7.12.3), piperata (8.11.7), salsa (9.12.1).

The adjective floridus is a hapax in Sidonius, but he uses flos, ‘bloom’, often enough, meaning artful, ornate discourse, cf. e.g. 8.9.1 litteras … plenas nectaris florum margaritarum, ‘a letter full of nectar, flowers, pearls’. This quality was appreciated greatly in Late Antiquity. Cicero already criticized a total lack of floribus, ‘rhetorical ornamentation’: Cic. Brut. 233 in huius oratione … erat … nullus flos … neque lumen ullum. Rhetorical ornatus requires a tasteful ornamentation verborum sententiarumque floribus, ‘with lively touches of words and turns’ (de Orat. 3.96). See Leeman 1963: 124. For Sidonius and Late Antiquity, see Amherdt 2001: 126 f. ad 4.3.2 eloquii florae.

blanditias, ‘gracious utterances’: The word summarizes Fonteius’ ingratiating behaviour, his heartening utterances and – implicitly – the gratifying results of his diplomacy. The noun again is a hapax in Sidonius, but blandimentum, blandiri and blandus are well represented, cf. e.g. 9.11.8 conviciis tuis illis cuncta sane blandimentorum mella vincentibus, ‘those “reproaches” of yours which actually surpassed the quintessence of honeyed charm’ (transl. after Anderson), 8.10.4 male blandientis eloquii, ‘a falsely flattering eloquence’ (Anderson), and 7.9.11 blandi apud eos communione vilescunt, ‘kind people are despised by them because of their affability’, q.v. my comment. Blanditiae are a means to an end, i.e. to win a cliens for one’s circle as a patronus. See Hellegouarch 1963: 213 ff. for blanditiae in the context of canvassing and networking by politicians: ‘Les blanditiae s’adressent à des gens qui sont, ou tout au moins que l’on traite comme des amici, presque comme des supérieurs.’ Note that for Sidonius blanditiae does not have the evil connotation of ‘bootlicking’, which it had e.g. for Cicero. In Cic. de Off. 2.32 ff. it does not belong to the means which are recommended to win people over (see Nemo 1998: 328 f.).

The exact collocation melleas blanditias is without precedent, but cf. Sidonius’ own blandimentorum mella, cited above, and the imitation in Ennod. Ep. 9.23 communioines et blandimentorum tuorum mella.

temperata communione, ‘balanced, restrained approachability’: Sidonius has, once again, forged a unique combination. It indicates an attitude which is neither unnecessarily aloof nor too popular, which preserves the indispensable auctoritas, like e.g. Tac. Ann. 13.2.1 (about Seneca) comitate honesta, ‘by his dignified courtesy’. For temperatus, cf. e.g. Cic. Att. 9.11.2 homo … temperatus et prudens, ‘a poised and prudent man’, Apul. Met. 4.32 temperatam.
formositatem, ‘subdued beauty’ (of Psyche’s sisters). In Sidonius cf. 9.3.6 his de causis temperavi stilo, ‘for these reasons I have restrained my pen’, i.e. I have written briefly.

Blanditia and communio are related concepts, see the previously cited passage from Ep. 7.9.11.

The entire sentence is like a summary of the system of values according to which Sidonius lived. Style had become life, and life style. This mentality was there to stay, see e.g. a century later Ven. Fort. Ep. (Carm.) 5.1.2 f., answering a letter from bishop Martinus: Martinus’ letter has brought water to a barren land, wine to a thirsty pauper. It is gemina dicendi fruge congesta, condita sale, melle perfusa, permixta blanditie cum vigore, ‘it unites both fruits of style, it is flavoured with salt, sprinkled with honey, its grace mixed with vigour’. It is arte compacta ... flore confecta, ‘composed with art ... written with charm’. It is ariditatem meam conloquii vestri temperaturus imber, ‘the shower of your words which will balance my dryness’. It is brimful of sancta caritate, ‘holy love’.

For this ‘jewelled style’, see Roberts 1989: 48 ff.

nec tamen ex hoc quicquam pontificali deperire personae, ex hoc, ‘because of this’, viz. because of the kind behaviour described in the preceding sentence.

deperire + dat., ‘to be lost to’, ‘be deducted from’: Cf. e.g. Plin. Nat. 33.59 (auro) rerum uni nihil igne deperit, ‘gold ... does not suffer any loss by fire’, Tert. Apol. 1 quid hic deperit legibus?, ‘what do the laws lose by this?’ The other occurrence of the verb in Sidonius, Ep. 1.11.4 deperit risu, ‘is dying with laughter’, is not comparable.

Notice the indirect speech


quod sacerdotii fastigium non frangitis comitate, sed flectitis.

sacerdotii fastigium, ‘the high dignity of priesthood’: Cf. Ep. 2.3.1 honorum tuorum ... fastigium, about the patriciate. Cf. Cypr. Ep. 55.8.2 ad sacerdotii sublime fastigium cunctis religionis gradibus ascendit, of an ecclesiastical career.

non frangitis ... sed flectitis, ‘you do not break ... but you bend’: The opposition frangere - flectere is found since the Augustan era: Ov. Ars 2.179 f. flectitur obsequio curvatus ab arbore ramus; / frangis, si vires experire tuas, ‘a branch on a tree bends if handled patiently, but you break it if you apply force’, and Liv. 2.23.15 Servilius ... concitatos animos flecti quam frangi putabat cum tutius tum facilius esse, ‘... to soothe the emotions instead of opposing them’. In Christian authors since Augustine, e.g. Catech. Rud. 20 flectamur facile, ne frangamur, ‘let us be flexible, lest we break’. For the idea see panegyric literature, e.g. Claud. Paneg. Hon. VI (= 28) 63 f. publicus hinc ardescit amor, cum moribus aequis / inclinat populo regale modestia culmen, ‘the
love of the public is kindled, when a reasonable character and modesty make royal state 
stoop to the people’.

Notice the alliteration fastigium – frangitis – flectitis.

quibus agnitis sic inardesco, ut tum me sim felicissimum iudicaturus,

inardesco, ‘I get excited’: The same enthusiastic reaction to favourable information about a 
bishop-amicus is seen in 8.13.2 quarum (i.e. your actions) relatione succensus … ad solvenda 
officia procurro, ‘I have become excited by the account of your behaviour, and immediately 
start doing my duty’ (i.e. write this letter). Letter 8.13 is in any case also similar in its 
argumentation to the current letter. For a discussion of variation technique, see General 
Introduction, sect. 6.2 Style.

The first person present inardesco is very direct, and is actually only found here and a few 
times in Augustine. It might be a recollection of his personal, even emotional tone, e.g. Conf. 
11.2 et olim inardesco meditari in lege tua. The heightening of the emotional tone is sustained 
throughout in the sections which follow, and should be interpreted as a signal of the 
importance Sidonius attaches to what he has to say, or can only hint at.

ut … me sim felicissimum iudicaturus, ‘that I will find myself happiest’: Cf. Ep. 7.8.1 
felicissimum mediocritatibus meae statum pronuntiarem, ‘I would call my modest person happiest’, 
in a similar context: ‘if we could meet in person’. The formulation is reminiscent of 
philosophical literature when it muses on true happiness, e.g. Sen. Ep. 43.3 tunc autem felicem 
esse te iudica, cum poteris in publico vivere, ‘well, consider yourself to be happy when you can 
live in public’, Lact. Inst. 3.8.12 quem nos felicissimum putabamus, quia malo caruit, Hier. in 
Eccles. 4.2 f. feliciores iudicavi mortuos quam viventes.

cum mihi coram posito sub divina ope contigerit tam securum de deo 
suo pectus praesumptiosis, artis tamen fovere complexibus.

‘when I will be near you and, with God’s help, have the privilege to embrace you; as you are 
so certain of your God, this may be arrogant, but I will do it all the same, and tightly.’

For the topos of longing to visit one’s correspondent see Cugusi 1983: 77. In my corpus see 
also 7.8.1 (I would be very happy) si nobis haberentur quam territoria vicina tam moenia, ‘if our 
towns were as near to one another as our dioceses’, 7.10.1 invideo felicitati consuetudinariai 
portitoris, a quo contigit saepius vos videri, ‘I am jealous of the happiness of the usual letter-
bearer, who as it happens has met you more than once’, 7.11.1 (we would meet more often) si 
ratio temporum regionumque pateretur, ‘if the circumstances and the distance permitted’.

Sometimes the author decides to intensify the message by explicitly describing his longing 
for bodily contact, as he does here and in 7.8.1, where Sidonius says he is jealous of the letter 
itself, quae sacrosanctis reserabuntur digitis, inspicientur obtutibus, ‘which will be opened by 
your saintly fingers, read by your eyes’. Cf. e.g. Cic. Fam. 3.11.2 complexus igitur sum 
cognitione te absentem, epistulam vero osculatus etiam ipse mihi gratulatus sum, ‘thus in your 
absence I have embraced you in my mind, but I have kissed your letter and also 
congratulated myself because of it’.  

At the time of writing it was difficult for Sidonius, or at least not opportune, to go to Vaison. Letter 4.4, addressed to the same men we will encounter in the current letter (sect. 4), namely the uncles Simplicius and Apollinaris, and letter 4.6, addressed to Apollinaris alone, both dating from 471/72, confirm this in guarded terms. Behind the conventionalism of both letters there is a hidden critique of the Visigothic menace (the vis maior of 4.4.2?), which more than once interrupted normal social intercourse, see Amherdt 2001: 168 and 194 f. in his introductions to the letters. It was dangerous on the road to Vaison, and – we might add – it was not safe to visit his controversial family. One also had to reckon with the rival Burgundians, hence Sidonius’ advice to the brothers prout tempora monent ... deliberare, ‘to think twice in accordance with the situation’ (4.4.3).

In the current letter Sidonius seems to hint at the desirability of his visiting Vaison, which he may have hoped would again be possible, despite the latest political developments. Meanwhile, he warmly thanks Fonteius for his invaluable assistance on the spot. See the Introduction, ch. ‘Communio’.

coram posito, ‘present’, ‘personally’: Positus, ‘residing’, ‘finding oneself somewhere’, is frequent in later Latin. For Sidonius cf. e.g. 1.5.1 Romae positus, and 4.17.3 nec satis positus in longinquuo ... nec parum in proximo, with Amherdt 2001: 394 ad loc. Coram positus is found since Ambr. Off. 1.1.10 velut coram posito praetendit hoste, in Sidonius in Ep. 3.9.2, 5.7.1, 6.4.2, 7.14.12. See also Engelbrecht 1886: 466.

The words are thematic here. Communio and nearness are essential to social intercourse, especially in times of war. The opposite is the patronus described in sect. 3 who does not care about longe positorum ... affectum, ‘the love of people who live far away’.

sub divina ope, ‘with God’s help’: The phrase itself, though rare (only Claud. Mam. Anim. 1.17), is synonymous with a whole range of pious expressions, like 1.5.1 sub ope ... dei, and 2.2.3 praesule deo. For this kind of interjections, see my comment on 7.1.1 sub ope Christi. Cf. the comparable context of longing to visit a friend in the letter cited above, 4.4.2 videre vos sub ope Christi quam maturissime ... cupiens.

securum de deo suo pectus, ‘your heart which is certain of its God’: The believer trusts in God, who guarantees his well-being. An illustrative example is Cypr. Demetr. 20 de deo suo semper anima secura, because God, even in the worst of cases, will remain his help and stay. Cf. Aug. Catech. Rud. 25 securus es enim deo, quia non mutatur, Ennod. Opusc. 3 p. 368 l. 22 f. Hartel (bishop Epiphanius speaks:) quo socio adhibito deo nostro securus spondeo etc., ‘if I may take him with me, I am sure of the help of our God, and I promise you’. For Sidonius, the underlying suggestion is that, although circumstances are bad, Fonteius can overcome them because of his special relationship as a bishop with God.

pectus ... fovere complexibus, ‘to give you a firm hug’: Again parallel 4.4.2 stat sententia ... complectendis pectoribus vestris quamilbet longum officium deputare, ‘I am determined to devote a visit, no matter how long, to press you to my heart’. For ‘to embrace’ as an emphatic ‘to meet’, cf. e.g. Symm. Ep. 1.11.2 neque enim patiar decipi, quos opto complecti. See Hellegouarc’h 1963: 215 ‘amplecti-complecti: Ces deux verbes qui appartiennent eux aussi au vocabulaire de l’amour et de l’affection s’emploient de même pour désigner la sollicitude ou l’attention apportées à un ami ou à un client. ... Amplecti est fréquemment employé avec la valeur de colere et diligere; quant à complecti, il est souvent accompagné d’un complément à l’ablatif avec la valeur de français “entourer” dans les expressions du type “entourer d’affectation”.

For \textit{pectus} and \textit{amicitia}, cf. 2.4.1 \textit{amicitarum tuarum ... avidissime sinibus infertur}, ‘is very eager to be received in the bosom of your friendship’ (Anderson), and Symm. Ep. 3.66 \textit{nosse dignarist quanta sit in d.m. Flaviano pectoris mei portio. amicitiam adventantis amplectere, ut duos obliges, ‘You want to know how much of my heart is in my lord Flavianus? Embrace his friendship on arrival, to oblige both of us.’

\textit{licet praesumptiosis, artis tamen}, ‘though presumptuous, nevertheless close’: CL reads \textit{praesumptuis}, but C\textsuperscript{2} corrected \textit{u} to \textit{i}. The adjective is still recent in Sidonius’ days, who uses it relatively often (five instances). See TLL 10/2: 973.61 ff. Cf. Engelbrecht 1886: 471, Mossberg 1934: 82, and see my comment on 7.3.2 \textit{praesumptioni}.

In our case it emphasizes the alleged spiritual inferiority of the author to his correspondent, an influential bishop, just as 7.6.1 to bishop Basilius: \textit{tu patronus: quamquam hoc ipsun praesumptiose arroganterque loquar; namque iniquitas mea tanta est, ut mederi ... vix ... queat, ‘you are my patron: but even that is presumptuous and arrogant to say, for I am desperately wicked’.


The overall atmosphere is characterized by an intensified expression of \textit{amicitia}. The density of its vocabulary points to Sidonius’ special concern.

\textbf{Section 3}

This section poses the question why the opposite of Fonteius – a mighty, but aloof person – is here portrayed at such length and with so much personal involvement from Sidonius. In the context of the letter I take this to be meaningful. The alternative would be a rather lame rhetorical set piece, to balance the praise of the good \textit{patronus} in the negative. Is there a clue as to whom Sidonius meant? Harries 1992: 300 thought the passage ‘a healthy corrective’ to ‘the grovelling humility deemed appropriate by the new bishop Sidonius to the aged and formidably saintly Lupus of Troyes (Ep. 6.1)’. The humility in 6.1 is extraordinary indeed – to modern ears, at least – and Lupus at times was quite demanding (Ep. 9.11), but what could be the benefit for Sidonius to let the doyen of Gallic bishops down in public, at publication, and what, indeed, could have made Sidonius think of \textit{him} in particular, when writing about the delicate situation in Vaison? I think the bishop, or other dignitary, in question cannot be identified, but we clearly have to think of someone with indubitable authority who thwarted the interests of Sidonius and his family.

For the letters as ‘coded communication’ (Shanzer and Wood 2002: 84), see General Introduction, par. 5.4.2 \textit{Coded communication and allusive technique}.

\textit{accipite confitentem: suspicio quidem nimis severos et imbecillitatis meae conscius aequanimiter fero asperos mihi; accipite confitentem}, ‘hear my confession’, suggests a colloquial situation, as e.g. Ambr. \textit{in Psalm. 118 Serm. 1.13 accipe dicentem Evam praecaracrationis suae autorem fuisse serpentem, ‘listen how …’. Cf. Ep. 5.13.4 \textit{vis accipere quid sentiam?}, ‘do you want to know what I think?’, 9.9.9 \textit{proinde accipe, quid super scriptis tuis ... censeamus, ‘listen therefore what is my opinion of your book}."
severos ... asperos, ‘severe … harsh’: Severus and asper are often in each other’s proximity as virtual synonyms. If a distinction is made, asper can be a stand-in for ‘nimium severus’, see Quint. Inst. 11.1.90 (you can avoid offence by using an euphemism, for instance) si ‘asperum’ dicas ‘nimium severum’, cf. Vell. 2.89.4 senatus sine asperitate nec sine severitate lectus, ‘the composition of the senate was revised without harshness and not without severity’. In our sentence the distinction, if any, is minimal. See General Introduction, sect. 6.2 Style, for this variation technique.

For asper + dat., ‘harsh towards’, cf. e.g. Tib. 1.9.20 asperaque est illi difficilisque Venus.

imbecillitatis meae consici, ‘aware of my weakness’: Imbecillitas is used by Sidonius only here of inferiority by way of urbanitas. In the same vein already Plin. Ep. 4.18.1 accidit hoc ... imbecillitate ingenii mei. This aristocratic savoir vivre is strengthened by Christian emphasis on human frailty, like Cypr. Dom. Orat. 26 admonemur infirmitatis et imbecillitatis nostrae. This is to be expected, especially from a member of the clerical order. For formulations of human frailty, cf. also e.g. Cic. Off. 1. 90 rerum humanarum imbecillitatem, Sen. Dial. 3.20.3 animi imbecillitatis sibi conscii.

sed, quod fatendum est, hisce moribus facilius humilitate submittimur quam familiaritate sociemur.

sed, quod fatendum est, ‘but to be honest’: (Sed) quod fatendum est was first (frequently and almost exclusively) written by Augustine, e.g. Ep. 194.18. In Sidonius we have also 3.1.2, 4.22.1, 7.6.6, 8.4.3. Cf. especially the variant in 4.22.1 sed, quod fatendum est, facilius audeo huiusmodi suspicere iudicium quam suscipere consilium. See General Introduction, sect. 6.2 Style. In our case the phrase underlines the mood of making a confession, introduced by Sidonius with accipite confitentem.

hisce moribus ... sociemur: It is preferable, with Anderson, to take hisce moribus as dat. and humilitate and familiaritate as abl. modi: ‘I must admit that I am more ready to bow in humility before such characters than be linked with them in intimacy.’ This is more natural than Loyen’s solution (hisce moribus as abl.): ‘de pareilles manières ont plus facilement pour effet de nous abaisser dans l’humilité que de nous attacher dans l’amitié.’

For hisce, see my comment on 7.1.3 harumce.

Mores is a central notion in the correspondence. It denotes a person’s character as apparent from his conduct: the combination of moral principles and social behaviour. Evaluating a person’s mores is a constant concern. Mores often is the set of positive qualities which is expected of the nobleman in cases like 3.5.1 vir spectabilis morumque vestrorum suspector admiratorque Donidius, ‘Donidius, vir spectabilis and a great admirer of your personality’, in a letter which is meant to pave the way for a business transaction. At other times it is the negative conduct of political opponents in 5.7.6 his moribus obruunt virum ... praestament, ‘by adopting this attitude they try to overwhelm an excellent man’.

For the generalizing, c.q. defining, character of the plurals submittimur and sociemur, see on sect. 1 nos damus verba.

As regards the reading sociemur, the MSS are divided as follows: sociamur MCP; sociemur M⁺ (e supr. lin.): sotiemur F. Luetjohann, Anderson, Loyen and Bellès preferred sociamur. I follow Mohr in printing sociemur. Mohr argued (p. xxxii) that ‘vix est credible coniunctivum
interpolator i debet’, and referred for this subjunctive to Ep. 3.7.4 etsi barbarus in hiberna concedat, mage differunt quam relinquunt … formidinem, ‘even if the barbarians retire to their winter quarters, they [= the defenders of Clermont] rather suspend than (possibly) get rid of their fear’. Luetjohann, indeed, proposed to normalize the manuscript reading there to relinquunt, but Anderson and Loyen retained the subjunctive (Anderson: ‘would not throw off’). On the analogy of this, there is no problem to retain the modal flavour of sociemur here: ‘I could be associated with him in intimacy’.

in summa, viderit, qua conscientiae dote turgescet, qui se ambientibus rigidum reddid;

in summa, ‘in short’, as also Ep. 1.11.17 and 5.13.4. After accipite and quod fatendum est, it continues to suggest the liveliness of spoken language.

viderit, ‘let him judge’: This idiomatic use of the fut. ex. / coni. perf., second or third person, expresses that one leaves a controversial point to others (‘I don’t care what they think’), after which one gives one’s own opinion (here: ego tamen). Cf. e.g. Cic. de Orat. 2.235 quid sit ipse risus … viderit Democritus, ‘what laughter actually is, is for Democritus to decide’, and Vulg. Matth. 27.24 (Pilate:) innocens sum a sanguine iusti huius: vos videritis, ‘my hands are clean of this man’s blood; see to that yourselves’ (‘I’m not interested in what you are going to do or your motives for it. In any case, I’m not responsible for it.’). See KS 1: 149, Ernout-Thomas 251 f., Blaise 1955: 141. In Sidonius, cf. 8.9.3 interim tu videris quam tibi sit … lemma placitumur, ‘meanwhile it is for you to judge how far the theme is likely to please you’.

qua conscientiae dote turgescet, ‘how extraordinary a character he can boast of’: For the phrase conscientiae dos, cf. one further occurrence, Ennod. Ep. 4.9 nullis adiutus conscientiae dotibus. Ennodius knew his Sidonius.

Conscientia in Sidonius has connotations ranging from ‘(Christian) conscience’ (often) to ‘character’, ‘personality’. Cf. e.g. 5.3.3 ego autem, infelicis conscientiae mole depressus, about the ‘unhappy conscience’ of Sidonius, brooding over his spiritual inaptitude for the episcopate, and 1.9.1 quod habet huic eminenti scientiae conscientiam superiorem, ‘because his eminent talent is even surpassed by his personality’. One might say, conscientia is the inner side of mores, as defined above. It can be complemented by, or opposed to, nouns like fama, e.g. Sen. Ben. 6.42.2 male agit, qui famae, non conscientiae gratus est, Plin. Ep. 1.22.5 nihil ad ostentationem, omnia ad conscientiam refert, Sidon. Ep. 4.17.3 consummatissimum virum cunctarumque virtutum conscientia et fama iuxta beatum, ‘… blessed with an excellent character and the credits for it too’. See TLL 4: 366.3 ff.

Dos + gen., (metaphorical) ‘gift’, ‘talent’, occurs since Ov. Met. 5.583 f. ego rustica dote / corporis erubui, ‘like any peasant girl I blushed at the gift of my beauty’. Cf. Sidon. Ep. 1.4.1 macte esto … fascibus partibus dote meritum, ‘congratulations on the office you have won due to your great merits’, 2.6.1 his morum dotibus praeditus ut etc., ‘he has the tactfulness to, etc.’ Notice the all but synonymy in these cases of conscientia, merita and mores. Cf. also 9.9.12 his animi litterarumque virtutem conscientia praeditus, ‘endowed with these talents of mind and culture’.

Turgere/turgescere is used in this metaphorical sense of all kinds of emotions, like anger, pride and their causes. Cf. e.g. Cic. Tusc. 3.9 sapientis animus semper vacat vito, nunquam turgescit, nunquam tumet, with abl. ibid. 3.18 corque meum pentum turgescit tristibus iris. Sidonius has also Ep. 7.9.14 natalibus turget, ‘he prides himself on his lineage’.
ambientibus rigidum, ‘unresponsive towards people who ask for his assistance’: For ambire, ‘seek the favour of a patronus’, cf. e.g. 1.9.3 erga expediendas forinsecus ambientum necessitates, ‘... the needs of place seekers outside the family circle’, 4.25.5 laudare non ambientem, ‘praise one who is not obtrusive’. See also my comment on 7.5.1 ambiendi sacerdotii.

For rigidus, cf. 7.9.11 rigidos ob austeritam non habent caros, ‘they do not like strict people because of their austerity’.

Sidonius questions the moral right of a patronus to offend somebody who appeals to him. A good patronus even cares about people outside his direct circle of acquaintances, etiam longe possiorem ... in se affectat affectum, as the argument continues.

I do not think Anderson and Loyen are right in creating an opposition between ambientibus, ‘near associates’, ‘entourage’, and longe possiorem. There does not seem to be a conflict between the interests of insiders and outsiders. Sidonius has been treated in an aloof way by this man. It is humiliating that he is powerless to do anything about it. All the more does he therefore appreciate Fonteius’ intercession, who has an open mind and admits also distant applicants (Clermont – Vaison!).

Note the soundplay of dental consonants in dote turgescat, and of r and d in rigidum reddit.

tamen morum illius aemulator esse praeelegerim,

morum illius aemulator, ‘a follower of his attitude’: Convention demands that doing good and cultivating one’s relations should be mutual, cf. e.g. 3.13.2 aemulator accepti (sc. beneficii).

praeelegerim vulgo: plegerim codd. The old conjecture, which is already in Sirmond, is generally accepted. The verb praeliger, ‘to prefer’, occurs also in Ep. 8.13.3 qui cum sit gente Iudaicus, fide tamen praeeleget censeri Israelita quam sanguine. There the MSS also waver: praeelegit L, praeelegit M. The verb is found since Lucif. (d. ca. 370) Athan. 1.34 l. 34, who cites psalm 131.13 as elegit dominus Sion, praeelegit eam in habitationem sibi. For the turn of the sentence, cf. e.g. Claud. Mam. Anim. 2.9 (CSEL 9 p. 138 l. 1) faxint tamen isti ...: ego vero praeelegerim ... reici, ‘let them do as they like: I however would prefer to be rejected’. See Engelbrecht 1886: 462 and 470 f.

qui etiam longe possiorem incitare in se affectat affectum

longe possiorem ... affectum, ‘the attachment of people who live far away’, or alternatively ‘... who are outside his direct sphere of interests’: The first connotation prevails in e.g. 6.12.2 longe possiorem ... angustias (immediately preceded by transit in alienas provincias vigilantia tua) and 8.13.2 (to the bishop of Nantes who spreads his range of action to) longus constitutus (even in Clermont), the second in 2.4.3 dignus es ut domus tuae celeberrimam disciplinam etiam procul positorum petat ambitus, ‘it is no more than you deserve if the aspirations even of total strangers should seek a place in a family so famous’ (Anderson).

The topos harks back to the Greeks. Cf. e.g. Isocrates who, in social relations, distinguishes between the ‘bad’ (φαῦλοι) and the ‘good’ (σπουδαῖοι): Isoc. ad Demon. 1 οἱ μὲν γὰρ τοὺς φίλους παρόντας μόνον τιμῶσιν, οἱ δὲ καὶ μακρὰν ἀπόντας ἀγαπῶσιν, ‘the first category honour their friends only when these are present, the second love them also when they are
far away'. In Sidonius, it is the topos of the ideal *patronus* who is able to entertain a large web of relations. Not distance, but quality is decisive for the relation: 6.12.1 (You do not only give subvention to people you know, but) *usque in extimos terminos Galliarum caritatis indagae porrecta prius soles indigentum respicere causam quam inspicere personas*, ‘you have the habit to spread the net of your charity [= patronage] to the farthest confines of Gaul, and to consider the case of who needs you, not his person’, 7.14.1 (It would be a shame if) *virum omnium litterarum vicinantibus rusticis quam institutis fieri remotioribus notiorem*, ‘a man versed in literature should be better known to the rustics in his neighbourhood than to qualified persons farther away’. Cf. 7.5.5 *quia terminus potuerit poni vestrae quidem regioni, sed non potuerit caritati*, ‘there may be a limit to your territory, but not to your love [= effectivity as a *patronus*].

For *longe positus*, cf. e.g. Cypr. Ep. 45.2.2 *fratres longe positos ac trans mare constitutos*, and above on sect. 2 *coram posito*.

For *affectus*, ‘sympathy’, in its context of social relations, see my comment on 7.2.9 *ut quibus impendimus studium praestemus affectum*.  

*incitare in se affectat*, ‘tries to win for himself’: For *incitare affectum* there are a couple of attestations in later Latin, fifth cent. and later, e.g. Leo M. Tract. 34 l. 176 (CC SL 138) *non solum non inhibemus, sed etiam incitamus affectum*. Cf. Tert. Spect. 15 *incitamenta … affectus*.

Notice the paronomasia *affectat affectum* (Hagendahl class 3, see on 1.1.6 *accidisse … accessisse*) to round off the section.

**Section 4**

*illud quoque mihi inter maxima granditer cordi est,*  

*illud quoque ... inter maxima*, ‘this one especially among your great favours’: *Illud* refers to what follows, cf. 9.3.7 *sed et illud amplerctor*.

*Quoque* does not express addition, but highlights one of several instances, e.g. Quint. *Inst.* 1.8.15 *id quoque inter prima rudimenta non inutile demonstrare*, and Sidon. *Ep.* 8.5.2 *illud quoque supra cetera agnoscat*. Normally in these cases *id/illud quoque* is postponed, and *alia/cetera* etc. precedes, as in Liv. 27.38.10 *et inter alia id quoque movit praetorem*, V. Max. 2.2.2 *inter cetera obtinendae gravitatis indicia illud quoque magna cum perseverantia custodiebant*, Amm. 27.7.7 *inter reliqua id quoque suspendi debet*. See LHS 2: 485 ‘spätlateinisch … auch steigernd’, to which I would allow a wider range of applications on account of the above cited examples.

*granditer cordi est*, ‘I am very grateful’: For *granditer* see my comment on 7.2.3 *granditer frugi*. The phrase is attested nowhere else.

*quod apostolatus vestri patrocinium copiosum verissimis dominis animae meae, Simplicio et Apollinari, intermina intercessione conferre vos comperi.*  

*apostolatus vestri patrocinium copiosum*, ‘abundant patronage by your Excellency’: According to Harries 1994: 213 n. 23 this sentence is an illustration of ‘the transfer and extension of traditional terms of patronage’ on the widening diplomatic role of the bishops,
which ranged from negotiating with Euric in 475 AD to interceding on behalf of individual citizens.

Apostolatus as a title of address, ‘your Apostolic Eminence’, is used also in 6.4.1 apostolatui tuo (to Lupus) and 6.7.1 apostolatus tui (also addressed to Fonteius). See O’Brien 1930: 2 f. and 164 ‘... reserved exclusively for pope and bishops’, late fifth-sixth centuries. See also General Introduction, par. 5.5.3 Modes of address. The fact that Sidonius twice attributes the same title to Fonteius as to the incomparable Lupus, singles him out as a vital link in Sidonius’ contacts. Actually, he is the prop and stay of the entire family: te familiae meae validissimum in Christo semper patronum fuisse reminiscor (6.7.1).

For other cases of patrocinium, ‘patronage’, see 7.1.7 and 7.2.9.

Copiosus, ‘abundant’, ‘great’, with abstract nouns in the sphere of protection is not found before the fourth cent. The context is ecclesiastical, cf. Filastr. 93.8 Heylen p. 260 in tanta copiosa clementia ac liberalitate (about Christ), and Sacr. Leon. (sixth cent.) p. 308 Muratorius subsidia copiosa iustorum, p. 402 patrocinia copiosa iustorum.

Sidonius uses grand words: copiosum, followed by verissimis, intermina. The sentence consists of one long string of nouns and adjectives. To the reader the message is driven home that what is described here is really important.

verissimis dominis animae meae, Simplicio et Apollinari, ‘those two veritable possessors of my heart, Simplicius and Apollinaris’ (Anderson): Verissimus occurs only here in Sidonius. Verissimus dominus is used twice only by Augustine, about God, Aug. in Psalm. 115.6 filius ... verissimo domino verissimum debet famulatum, and ibid. 139.11, but I feel that the nuance in our phrase is quite different, viz. more intimate, for which function of dominus see my comment on 7.2.1 consummatissime pontificum. Sidonius uses dominus for the same uncles in 4.12.2 a dominis Simplicio et Apollinare redeuntem; cf. 2.9.1 inter ... humanissimos dominos, Ferreolum et Apollinarem, resp. relative and uncle of Sidonius. Domini animae meae as a whole has an intimate ring. There is one parallel only, Peregr. Aeth. 19.19 unde si deus noster Iesus iussisset et venero in patria, legitis vos, domine animae meae, where Aetheria addresses the nuns, the future readers of a book she has acquired: ‘thus, if our Lord Jesus grants me to return home, you’ll read it, ladies of my heart’. To sum up, I think that the exceptional expression verissimis dominis animae meae is very informal and intimate.

Simplicius and Apollinaris were the youngest of four brothers. The name of the eldest is unknown, then came Thaumastus, Simplicius and Apollinaris. They were the sons of Apollinaris sr., who was praefectus praetorio Galliarum in 408-409 AD. The eldest, anonymous brother was Sidonius’ father; he was praefectus praetorio Galliarum himself in the years 448-49.

Stroheker 1948 discusses them as nrs. 362 and 387, with a family tree in the appendices. See Kaufmann 1995: 278 # 5 ‘Apollinaries’ and 348 # 105 ‘Simplicius’ for further reference.

It is apparent from the current letter that they lived together in Vaison, away from a direct Visigothic threat, in the Burgundian sphere of influence. Apollinaris came from Nîmes, where he possessed a country estate, Vorocingus. See Harries 1994: 33. He perhaps had been forced to give it up under Visigothic threat (see Loyen 2: 219 n. 34). Several letters are dedicated to them, separately as well as together. The letters 5.6 and 5.7 are relevant for the problems that arose around the presumed betrayal of Vaison to the Roman emperor. See Introduction, ch. ‘Date’.
intermina intercessione conferre vos comperi.

**intermina intercessione**, ‘through endless intervention’: As so often we are confronted with a new Sidonian iunctura (see General Introduction, sect. 6.2 Style). In accordance with the context, which balances worldly politeness with spiritual phrasing, both *interminus* and *intercessio* have two connotations.

*Interminus*, ‘endless’, ‘infinite’, was introduced by Apul. *Mun. 1* stellærum ... *intermino lapsu*, 37 interminum ... tempus. In Christian writers it is said of the celestial paradise, e.g. *Aug. Ep. 91.6 sancti et fideles dei ... intermina aeternitate florebunt*. See also Engelbrecht 1886: 448.

*Intercessio*, ‘action of standing surety’, ‘guarantee’, or, more general, ‘intervention in affairs’ is a classical juridical term, e.g. *Gel. 14.2.7 testium intercessione*. The term was applied in Christian usage to the act of intercession with God by Christ and the saints, e.g. *Miss. Goth. 433 beatus ille martyr, quaesomus, domine, pia nos intercessione commendet*, ‘may that blessed martyr ... recommend us by his intercession’.

Characteristically the *cliens*, alias the believer, would have this intercession forever, cf. e.g. *Liv. 37.54.17 hoc patrocinium ... universæ gentis perpetuum vos praestare decret*, ‘it befits you to guarantee forever this protection of an entire people’, and *Miss. Goth. 389 intercessione[m] martyris tui Sixti perpetuam nobis misericordiam benignus inponde*, ‘through the intercession of your martyr Sixtus graciously have mercy upon us forever’ (for the durability of the saint’s praesentia, see Brown 1981: 86 ff.).

*conferre*, ‘bestow’, is not otherwise used in conjunction with *patrocinium*, but rather *Liv. 37.54.17 hoc patrocinium ... vos praestare decret*, *Cic. Orat. 120 suscipere*, and more often *Tac. Dial. 4.1 exercere*.

si verum est, rogo, ut non habeat vestra caritas finem; si falso est, peto, ut non differat habere principium.

Whence this doubt about Fonteius’ intervention? Is it feigned, as a form of politeness? Or is the intervention really so unexpected that Sidonius cannot believe his ears? Or is he afraid Fonteius might dodge this tricky affair? However, it would be unwise to hurt the feelings of this important ally. I think that what Sidonius expresses here is surprise. The awkwardness in the formulation is caused by the rhetorical constraint of having two clauses which are parallel in wording, but opposed in meaning. For a similar parallelism, cf. e.g. *Ennod. Ep. 1.16 Hartel p. 28 l. 5 ff. si ficta sunt quae scribis ...; si vera sunt etc.*

**ut non habeat vestra caritas finem**, ‘that there may be no end to your love’: In later Latin *ne* is superseded by *ut non*. In Sidonius see *Ep. 3.12.5 vide ut vitium non faciat in marmore lapidicida*, and 4.13.3 obsecro ac moneo, ut ... non ... fidat ... nec ... credat. The phenomenon is treated in LHS 2: 535 and 643 f.

*Habere finem* is classical, e.g. *Lucr. 5.826 finem aliquam pariendi debet habere*. Love should be endless, whether erotic or spiritual, e.g. *Prop. 2.15.29 f. errat, qui finem vesani quaerit amoris: / verus amor nullum novit habere modum*, *Zeno 1.36.11 caritas autem finem non habet*.

*Caritas*, together with its near-synonym *amor*, is the word for the active, affective manifestation of *amicitia* in social and political relations: ‘esteem’, ‘appreciation’, ‘cordiality’. See Hellegouarch 1963: 146 ff. On *amicitia* and epistolary usage, see General Introduction, par. 5.1.2 Epistolary characteristics.
non differat habere principium, ‘to lose no time in making a beginning’ (Anderson): Differre + inf., with and without negation, in Sidonius Ep. 3.1.3 nec diu distulit ... opulentare, 4.25.4 differebant laudare, 6.9.1, 8.2.1, 9.7.5. It is already found in Hor. Carm. 4.4.21 quaerere distuli, Liv. 27.24.1 ne differret ... accipere.

The circumlocution habere principium, for ‘to begin’, is called forth by the preceding habere finem. Normally it means ‘to have a beginning’, like e.g. Apul. Pl. 1.7 (the elements) habere originem atque principium. A comparable phrasing is Sidon. Ep. 6.4.3 ne iurgii status ... talem descendat ad terminum, quale coepit habere principium.

The two parallel clauses conclude the paragraph about the Apollinares perfectly. Now it is time for the recommendation.

praeterea commendo gerulum litterarum

praeterea, ‘one more thing’, politely assigns the modest status of a corollary to the recommendation, which is technically the main subject matter, cf. e.g. 4.6.4 interim ad praesens apicum oblator damna sibi quaepiam ... inficta suspirat, ‘meanwhile the letter-bearer is currently weighed down by a loss inflicted upon him’, and 5.1.3 interea necessitatem praefati portitoris insinuo, ‘meanwhile I commend the above mentioned letter-bearer’s problem to your attention’. See also 7.11.2 interim ... insinuo.

commendo, ‘I recommend’: This is the typical situation in such letters of recommendation: after introductory compliments to the addressee, the bearer of the letter is recommended for some quality of his own. Compare e.g. 5.1.2 commendo Vindicium necessarium meum, 8.13.3 commendo Promotum gerulum litterarum.

gerulum litterarum, ‘the bearer of this letter’: Sidonius uses a variety of terms for the messengers who delivered his letters and memorized additional information (see Ep. 9.3.2). Most frequent are gerulus (thirteen times) and portitor (seven times). Gerulus in most cases, as here, is defined by a gen., cf. 2.11.2, 6.6.1, 6.10.1, 8.13.3 litterarum, 3.9.2 epistularum, 4.5.1 apicum meorum, 5.16.1 codicilorum, 6.5.1 votivi ... officii, 8.14.8 vestri eloquii. Cf. Grupe 1887: 481 s.v. tabellarius, and Amherdt’s additions, p. 206, ad 4.6.4 apicum oblator.

The letter is not unequivocal as to the identity of the letter-bearer. It is possible, but by no means certain, that it was Vindicius. For this uncertainty we may compare Ep. 4.6 which introduces a priest Faustinus, who had taken a message concerning Sidonius’ family to the addressee and brought an answer back. The answer is discussed at length, and then, at the end, the apicum oblator is mentioned for an affair of his own. The possible link between Faustinus and the letter-bearer is not made explicit. Hence Amherdt 2001: 195 – ‘Sidoine recommande Faustinus’ – should have been more cautious.

In defence of identifying Vindicius as the bearer of this letter, one might call to mind the fact that it was an advantage to be able to use more than once a messenger who could be trusted (see my comment on 7.10.1 consuetudinarii portitoris). In this case especially, in such precarious diplomatic circumstances, the proven excellence of Vindicius would be invaluable. On the other hand, Vindicius had just come back with a ‘load of services’ (sect. 1 munificentiae vestrae fasce), which makes is less probable that he went back immediately with yet another request.
cui istic, id est in Vasionensi oppido, quiddam necessitatis exortum

istic, id est in Vasionensi oppido, ‘there, viz. in the town of Vaison’: The question is whether id est in Vasionensi oppido is a gloss or not, as suggested by the ever critical Mohr (p. xxxii). On balance, as we will see, the case for id est in Vasionensi oppido is weak and Mohr’s suspicion was not exaggerated. Nevertheless, the arguments against it are not sufficient proof that it should be deleted. I retain the phrase, as others have done, with a fair measure of doubt.

It was Mohr who created unrest, with the argument that the bishop to whom the letter is addressed does not need to be told that he lives in Vaison! Anderson, however, defended the manuscript reading, arguing that Sidonius and his contemporaries constantly used istic in the sense of ‘here where I am’. In the present passage it is used in its classical sense, ‘there where you are’; thus Sidonius guards against a serious misunderstanding by adding in Vasionensi oppido (note 2 ad loc.). Loyen made no remark, Bellès 3: 36 n. 40 kept the manuscript reading, but with some doubt (‘é possible’).

Indeed, there are some awkward questions to be put. Above all, concerning style: Could not Sidonius have used an unambiguous demonstrative pronoun instead of istic, and avoided this tiresome circumlocution? What is actually the stylistic value of id est in Vasionensi oppido, if it is original?

Second, concerning vocabulary: Is it true that istic on its own cannot be used for ‘there where you are’ in Sidonius without creating ambiguity? And what about id est? Is it found elsewhere in Sidonius?

Let us start with vocabulary. The outcome of an examination of the thirteen instances of istic in Sidonius’ prose is: nine times ‘here’ (where I am, in this town, on this spot, in this letter), once ‘there’ (on the spot where I then found myself; 9.14.6), once ‘here/there/on the spot’ (neutral; 2.2.19) and once ‘there’ (where you are, to Sidonius’ correspondent Lupus in Périgueux; 8.11.14). The last instance is pretty similar to the current letter. Sidonius is about to finish his letter, tells Lupus that it has become rather long, but only because of his affection for him, and then continues: tu interim, si quid istic cognitu dignum, citus indica, saltem ob hoc scribens, ut etc., ‘in the meantime, if there is anything in your place worth knowing about, be quick and notify me …’ (Anderson). The conclusion is that ‘there where you are’ is quite acceptable without further explanation. Even the neutral ‘on the spot’ is enough for the current letter. Sidonius has talked at length about Simplicius and Apollinaris and their problems in Vaison. When reading on, Fonteius’ thoughts are still there, and he will have no problem in correctly locating Vindicius’ (?) problems istic.

Even so, an explanation after istic remains possible. Could it be in the form of an id est-clause? Id est-clauses are found throughout the correspondence (sixteen instances), most frequently in book 1 (five occurrences), none in 2, and one or two each in the books 3-9. If we consider the time of writing, there is a preference for it in the earlier years, up till 471 (eight occurrences). This means that id est-clauses belong to Sidonius’ repertory. Now for the stylistic question: how were they applied? In all cases we find a more detailed explanation, a further development of a line of thought, an addition to provide couleur locale, or the like. The id est-clause adds something essential to the thought; it is never there to prevent misunderstanding, as a kind of first aid in an emergency. Our case is certainly the weakest instance of all – and in the peroration at that!
Finally we might examine in Vasionensi oppido. Is the adjective, instead of a genitive, idiomatic? As a matter of fact, it is. Sidonius wrote 5.6.2 oppidum Vasionense, to his uncle Apollinaris on the presumed treachery. Cf. 1.8.2 Caesenatis ... oppidi, 9.16.3 Mytilenaei oppidi, and, for his own Clermont, 7.5.3 oppidum Arvernun.

All in all it is tempting to consider id est in Vasionensi oppido as a gloss, and we can make a reasonable case for its improbability, but this does not prove that it is spurious.

**quiddam necessitatis exortum sanari vestrae auctoritatis reverentiae pondere potest.**

*quiddam necessitatis exortum,* ‘a problem that has come up’: For this use of necessitas, cf. Ep. 5.1.3 interea necessitatem praefati portitoris insinuo. See Mossberg 1934: 34: it is accurately differentiated by Sidonius from necessitudo, ‘bond’, ‘amicitia’.

*Exoriri,* ‘to come about’, ‘begin’, is often associated with negative concepts, such as immanitas, discordia, cura, suspicio, discardium (see OLD s.v. 5, TLL 5/2: 1576.36 ff.).

*sanari,* ‘to be cured,’ ‘put right’: Cf. e.g. Caes. Gal. 7.29.5 incommodum, and again such negative notions as discordia, avaritia, simultas (see OLD s.v. 2b). Sidonius offers no other instances.

*vestrae auctoritatis reverentiae pondere,* ‘the weight of the respect for your authority’: For the reading reverentiae the situation is as follows: reverentiae codd. (reverentiae MCF, reverencie P), Mossberg, Fernández López, Bellès: reverentiaeque coni. Luetjohann, item Mohr (‘an reverenda?’), Anderson, Loyen. I retain the manuscript reading because of the explanation by Fernández López 1994: 254 who considered vestrae auctoritatis a gen.obj. depending on reverentiae, ‘respect for your authority’. Sidonius, indeed, knows reverentia with gen.obj., e.g. Ep. 1.9.5 reservata senioris consularis reverentia, ‘with due respect for the elder consular’. For the rare pondus reverentiae, cf. Iulian. (first half fifth cent.) in lob 16 l. 99 nunc vero, ut conscientia me attollit, ita reverentiae divinae pondus inclinat, ‘… the weight of the awe of God bends me down’.

Belles’ solution looks attractive. He took auctoritas reverentiae as an asyndeton: ‘de la vostra autortat i del vostre prestigi’. Asyndeta of nouns in Sidonius, however, are always triple, e.g. 7.9.3 partium seditiones studia varietates, and seven more times. Following this line of argument, Luetjohann’s correction auctoritas reverentiaeque is preferable. Cf. Ep. 9.11.5 reverentiae tuae meritorumque ratio, ‘consideration for your venerable character and high merits’ (Anderson).

An alternative explanation is offered by Mossberg 1934: 44 ff., who took vestra reverentia, ‘Your Eminence’, as a title, cf. e.g. Symm. Ep. 8.25 spondeo … reverentiae tuae, and often since the fourth cent. Although this would be very much in line with late antique idiom, the difficulty of the hyperbaton vestrae … reverentiae seems unsurmountable in this case because of the two successive gen.sg.fem. auctoritas reverentiae. The hyperbaton adduced by Mossberg in comparison, 6.2.4 pontificalis auctoritate censure, does not solve this specific problem. See also General Introduction, sect. 5.5.3 Modes of address.

Notice the sound p – p in pondere potest. The lack of a proper metrical clausula at the end of the letter is striking, as Sidonius is generally very careful with his use of the metrical and rhythmical clausulae (see General Introduction, sect. 6.3 Prose rhythm, and Appendix H). It
looks as though here he prefers the *cursus*, i.e. the *tardus óooóo, pôndere pótest*, to the dicretic which he might have created by writing *reverentiae potest pondere* (which, however, would have resulted in the unusual *medius óóóoo*). See my comment on 7.6.1 *efficacia queat*. 