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

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Letter 7

‘The Downfall of Clermont’

Introduction

1 Overview

Stevens famously called this letter ‘the Epitaph of the Western Empire’. He wrote: ‘Sidonius was never so great as when he stood out thus as champion of his people and of their Roman inheritance. It was the moment of his life, and he used it well. For in this letter he has written the epitaph of the Roman Empire’ (Stevens 1933: 160). This is a sweeping and moving statement and it may seem plausible with hindsight, but is it what Sidonius really wanted to convey to Graecus and later readers?

Let us analyze the letter in greater detail. Its key words and concepts are as follows:

1) freedom v. slavery

This is the principal theme which frames the whole of the letter.

- 2 servitus (twice)
- 6 servitium
- 6 libertas

Clermont is about to lose its freedom and become subject to a foreign power.

2a) solidarity v. treason

A second theme colours the main theme. It defines freedom as man’s belonging to the Roman res publica. The commonwealth is characterized by solidarity. Some, however, betray it to the barbarians.

- 2 fratres Latio
- 2 amore rei publicae
- 2 Seronatum barbaris provincias propinantem
- 2 res publica
- 5 quid barbarum suaderetis ignavi.

Clermont acts in the great tradition of solidarity with the commonwealth, others, like Seronatus and the present negotiators, betray it.

2b) common cause v. egotism

The third theme is related to the second. Some make great sacrifices for the common cause, others harm it out of selfishness.

- 2 viribus propriis – hostium publicorum arma
- 4 publicis periculis – privatis fortunis.

Clermont sacrificed life and good for the common cause, the negotiators think only of their private gain, to the detriment of others.
We may conclude from this survey that Sidonius did not envisage the downfall of the Western Empire as such. His focus was on Clermont and the Auvergne, about to lose its freedom despite its solidarity with the Empire and its heroic self-sacrifice. The Empire does not so much fall down – that is the case with Clermont –, but it betrays its essential mission of embodying and warranting freedom. It lets traitors go unpunished, its representatives do little more than further their own interests, and the emperor is conspicuous by his absence (sect. 4 *principe absente*).

Given these circumstances, Sidonius cannot but speak with sarcasm and anger of *pax* and *concordia*. This peace is *inclita*, ‘marvellous’ (sect. 3), this concord *turpis*, ‘a shame’ (5), he says. The word ‘concord’, which embodies the essence of the Roman commonwealth, when applied to a treaty with the barbarians, is abused and prostituted.

For a moment, Sidonius suggests there is still a glimmer of hope that the outcome can be altered (sect. 5 *consilio, quo potestis, statum concordiae tam turpis incidite*). But he knows better: the treaty will not be undone (6 *si medicari nostris ultimis non valetis*), and the letter ends on a note of resignation (6 *saltem hoc efficite ... ut sanguis vivat, quorum est moritura libertas*). All that will be left of proud Clermont is a bunch of fugitives in a safe haven ... protected by their traitors (6 *parate exulibus terram* and *non sit clausus vester (sc. murus) hospitibus*).

The spirit of the letter is Roman and patriotic. There is little or nothing in it of the devout Christianity the reader has encountered in many of the preceding letters. It forms a pair with letter 6. Letter 6 thematizes the threat to the *Catholica* in Gaul, letter 7 the threat to *Romanitas*. Together they constitute the core of book 7. If letter 6 is a marvel of graphic representation of the woes of Gaul, letter 7 is an incredibly direct expression of the emotions involved.

**2 Business as usual?**

After having defended Clermont with unflagging energy for four seasons (471-74), Sidonius had not been able to improve his strategic position in the war with the Visigoths. The central government in Ravenna decided that the Auvergne was lost, and staked everything on retaining Provence. Bishop Epiphanius of Pavia was instructed accordingly, and in the autumn of 474 (Harries 1994: 237) or the spring of 475 (Loyen 2: xx) paved the way for the final negotiations between Euric and a deputation of four other bishops, among whom Graecus (Harries 1994: 237 ‘start by late autumn 474’, Loyen 2: xx ‘negotiations spring 475, treaty May/June’). See General Introduction, par. 3.2.2 *The sieges*.

The situation would seem utterly chaotic to any reader of Sidonius’ letters so far. One might also be surprised that Amantius kept up his practice of going to Marseille – taking with him this letter from Sidonius – when Clermont’s fall was imminent. How about his safety and the chance to return? And did the inhabitants of Clermont venture to invest their money at this highly insecure moment?

The one plausible answer seems to be that Sidonius’ alarming picture reflects not so much the historical reality as his own frustration – and intentions. In all probability, there was no economic crisis in Southern Gaul before the seventh century (see Hitchner 1992). The region continued to provide for most of its own needs, and import luxury items or goods designed to supplement local production. As ties with Rome weakened, it became more and more self-reliant.
Loyalty to Rome shifted to loyalty to the region under Visigothic rule. Changing economical conditions strengthened secessionist tendencies: ‘In political terms, the historic regionalism of the south Gallic economy contributed, in the less secure conditions of the fifth century, to a weakening of allegiance to Roman government on the part of both curial and senatorial aristocrats, the primary landholders in the region. That is, in the face of increased Roman taxation and erosion of customary property and labor relations, the benefits of a less complicated economic life under peaceful barbarian rule may have been very attractive’ (Hitchner 1992: 130).

By mid 475 even Clermont had probably already adjusted itself to the de facto situation. As I have argued in the General Introduction (par. 5.4.3 The structure and meaning of book 7), Sidonius had done the same, but chose to keep the pressure on right to the end, in order to save whatever he could of Romanitas for the future social and cultural framework. His emotions are no less real for that. He is to be considered a great man, exactly because of this combination of stark emotionality and clever purposefulness.

3 Key words

- Servitus and libertas

Sidonius’ analysis in this letter defines the situation essentially as a conflict of servitus and libertas. These are central Roman notions. Libertas is the essence of being Roman, servitus concerns foreign nations. As Cicero had said, Phil. 6.19 aliae nationes servitutem pati possunt, populi Romani est propria libertas, ‘other nations can be slaves, the Roman people are inherently free’. Consequently, if Roman Clermont is brought into a position of servitus, its integrity is violated.

Harries 1996: 41 has pointed out the appropriateness of Sidonius’ use of these abstract terms in these circumstances, and at the same time the fickle basis for his policy of calculated conservatism: ‘While fully aware of the confused political realities outlined above, Sidonius’ underlying determination to negotiate the best deal possible for Clermont in the 470s could not be made explicit (or not often) and therefore expressed itself through the rhetoric of confrontation between Roman “freedom” (libertas) and barbarian “enslavement” (servitium). But not all the Arverni could be counted on to support Sidonius’ notion of freedom. Sidonius, like other bishops, had to cope with a pro-Arian (or pro-Gothic) party in his ranks and suffered the further pain of seeing at least one Arvernian friend, Calminius, fighting openly on the Gothic side (Ep. 5.12).’

In the end, paradoxically, the notion of libertas was to be inherited and exploited by the barbarian successor states. See Gioanni 2006: lxxxix n. 458 (definition of libertas as ‘legal certainty’, ‘a civilisation based on written law’), and cf. e.g. how the Ostrogothic king Theodoric granted ‘libertas Romana’ to his supporters: Ennod. Opusc. 3.122 (Theodoric decided) ut illis tantum Romanae libertatis ius tribueret, quos partibus ipsius fides examinata iunxisset.

- Praestigiae

This letter is delivered to Graecus by the tradesman Amantius, as letter 2 had been years ago. In book 7, Amantius’ dramatic function is being a laughing stock as well as a secretly admired mirror-image. He is associated with merrymaking – which can turn into sarcasm. In letter 2 he was the jolly praestigiator invictus, the ‘successful swindler’ (7.2.8). Letter 7 is the...
absolute counterpart of letter 2. In Sidonius’ own words, it is one of those he has written
maerendo instead of iocando, ‘downcast’ instead of ‘elated’ (7.18.2 dictavi … maerendo pauca
iocandoque nonnulla). The letter begins by reminding Graecus briefly of their former
lightheartedness: ‘Here is Amantius again. I should like to crack a few jokes through him,
but my pleasure is spoilt’ (7.7.1). Barely introduced, the praestigiator invictus disappears into
the background, and bishop Graecus and his lot come to the fore with their questionable
praestigiae, the political ‘swindling’ of 7.7.5. No more merrymaking about the praestigiae of a
simple trader, but a severe reproof at the address of the responsible Eminences at whose
hands praestigiae turn into crime. Reading letter 7 one is reminded, by Sidonius himself, of all
the pleasures, now lost, of easier and brighter days.

4 Style

In this letter Sidonius demonstrates a level of directness that singles it out among the rest. As
the drama of physical and psychological warfare reaches its climax, the author chooses his
rhetorical means with extreme selectivity from those which hit home most forcefully. And, as
always, the most effective are the least expected ones.

Some have been deceived by appearances, like Kaufmann 1995: 210: ‘Der einzige Brief des
gesamten Corpus, der von rhetorischer Künstelei frei ist und die Gefühle seines Verfassers,
nicht gebrochen durch wohlklingende Phrasen, zum Ausdruck bringt.’ On the contrary, as
we will see, the letter is full to the brim with artful rhetorical turns, and it relies on some
ingenious allusions to previous writers, so much so, that Gualandri 1979: 29 seemed almost
disappointed because the ‘filter’ of literature – in her opinion – blurred the serious,
underlying facts: ‘L’abito letterario si interpone ... a far da filtro tra la pagina e la realtà, così
che talora l’urgenza di sentimenti ispirati da fatti dolorosi e spesso tragici ne viene attutita.’

In my opinion, the urgency is rather enhanced by the clever selection of means by Sidonius.
For one thing, it counteracts expectations: great emotions, grand style. No grand style here,
and no polite circumlocutions. The addressee is caught off guard. He must have been
stunned at the directness of the reproaches to himself – and undoubtedly they strained the
limits of what was socially acceptable. On the other hand, the sender never loses control. If
the addressee expects the reproaches to develop into a wild invective he can discard easily,
he is again deceived. The calculated stream of arguments and emotions is based on
assumptions about the cultural foundations of the Roman empire which the author and the
addressee share. And it is worded in such a way that it pays the addressee the compliment of
a stylistically polished and literarily demanding whole, which he cannot reasonably refuse.
Thus, Sidonius keeps close to his friend and opponent – and hits hard.177

And what about the plethora of ‘rhetorical turns’? As the commentary will show, at the
deepest level, utterly refined and contrived artistry is marshalled to try and bridge the abyss
of war and loss of perspective. The manneristic tension of rhetorical conceit and personal
tragedy serves to cope with, and convey, an otherwise unwieldy experience. This tension is,

177 This is certainly one of the instances Sidonius refers to at the end of this book, which is also the end
of the first letter collection: Ep. 7.18.3 et si me uspiam lectitavisti in aliquos concitatiorem, scias volo Christi dextera
opitulante numquam me toleraturum animi servitutem, ‘and if here and there in this book you have seen me
angry with some people, I want you to know that – with Christ’s help – I will never tolerate slavery of
conscience’.
in the end, a faithful portrait of Sidonius’ own ambivalence about reason and emotion. For this problem, see General Introduction, sect. 6.2 Style and par. 6.4.1 Mannerism?.

5 Position

The traditional order of the letters of book 7 makes it plausible that this letter and the previous one were deliberately set in a frame by the author, consisting of a first letter on the Bourges episode (5) and, after the Clermont letters (6, 7), two more on Bourges (8, 9). For this issue – and a caveat as to the order –, see General Introduction, par. 5.2.2 Order of book 7, letters 1-11.

6 Addressee

The addressee, Graecus of Marseille, ranks first among Sidonius’ correspondents. No less than five letters are dedicated to him. The men shared each other’s ups and downs in the episcopate. In 475 AD Graecus, together with the bishops Basilius, Leontius and Faustus, was entrusted by the emperor Julius Nepos with the task to negotiate with king Euric about the ‘question Clermont’. That Graecus of all people should have agreed with the disastrous solution which came up, made him for once the object of Sidonius’ unconcealed wrath. For Graecus’ career, see further the introduction to letter 7.2, ch. ‘Addressee’.

7 Date

According to Loyen, the letter was written in Clermont towards June 475, when the negotiations about the surrender of the Auvergne were coming to an end (Loyen 3: 214). Harries 1994: 235 dates the letter ‘several months’ after the one to Basilius, Ep. 7.6, which, in its turn, she had dated ‘late in 474’.

8 Manuscripts

This letter figures in MFC, and is missing in LNVTR. The omission, like the one of letter 6, may have arisen from deliberate suppression at an early stage in the transmission of the letters, because the content was not palatable to the Visigoths. See General Introduction, par. 5.2.2 Order of book 7, letters 1-11.

9 ‘You’ and ‘I’

The first person singular garrirem (sect. 1), for the sender, stands on its own in this letter. The first person plural is used throughout, mostly inclusive, of Sidonius and his fellow Arverni, with the possible exception of the last section, where laxamus (‘I let myself go too much’) is used for one person. Sect. 1 nugigerulus noster is standard idiom for the letter-bearer. As to the second person, there is no direct tu for the addressee in the letter. Most instances of the plural are best seen as inclusive, of Graecus and his fellow negotiatiors (see especially below on sect. 4 non primi comprovinciadium), with the possible exception of the last section, where the ignoscite (‘forgive me’) and (murus) vester (‘your town’) might be Graecus and Marseille, respectively. The emotions of the letter are projected onto two groups, Sidonius with his fellow-townsmen and the bishops-negotiators. The personal element between sender and addressee remains as subdued as possible (cautious plurals ignoscite, vester).
For a comprehensive discussion of the use of the first and second person, see General Introduction, sect. 5.6 ‘You’ and ‘I’.

10 Epitome

To Graecus, bishop of Marseille.

Sect. 1 – 3: ‘Here is Amantius again to hand you this letter. Formerly, that would have been an occasion for merriment. But not now. I am so depressed by the fate of Clermont. The war is over, but we are the worse for it. It is shocking that we are to be slaves for the sake of the freedom of others. We, of all people, who once were proud to be brothers of Rome and scions of Troy. We, who during the last years warded off the enemies of the commonwealth all by ourselves; who fought as soldiers and commanders at the same time, but you enjoyed the successes, we the setbacks; who brought to court the traitor Seronatus – however, the state shrank from executing him. Is this the reward for our hardship? Is this what we have suffered and died for?’

Sect. 4 – 5: ‘You should be ashamed of this disgraceful treaty. Everyone who is involved has to report to you. You are responsible for the decisions which are being taken, in the absence of the Emperor. But you neglect the public interest, and promote your private concerns. How long is this deceit going to last? Soon, our forebears will have no offspring to be proud of. As you are in the position to negotiate, take action to cancel this horrible treaty. We are prepared to fight on. If, however, we are going to be handed over to the enemy, it was because you told them how.’

Sect. 6: ‘Clearly, it is of no avail to give free rein to my grief. Rather, I beg you to understand the exceptional case of the Auvergne: for us, extradition means death. If you cannot take our side, and our liberty is over and done for, please, save our lives. Provide us with a safe conduct and admit us into your town.’ 178

Commentary

Section 1

Ecce iterum Amantius, nugigerulus noster, Massiliam suam repetit,

Ecce iterum Amantius, ‘Here again Amantius …’: The deacon Amantius, who earned a living as a go-between, trading in the harbour of Marseille for his fellow townsmen in Clermont, more than once took letters from Sidonius with him. He is mentioned in the letters 6.8, 7.2, 7.10 and 9.4. As we have seen in the introduction to 7.2, Sidonius treats him with slightly mocking bonhomie. His bravado, which more than compensates for his modest social status, tickles the bishop’s sense of humour. Amantius’ presence provides a bit of comedy, which acts as a counterpoint to the desperate situation Sidonius finds himself in. In

178 Fernández López 1994: 112 assigns this letter to subcategory 3.2.2 Civil salutatio publica, and analyses it on pp. 113 ff. For her method, see General Introduction, sect. 5.3 Classification and analysis.
describing his adventures in 7.2, Sidonius chose to use vocabulary from Plautus and Terence. See my commentary there passim. The same is the case here.

On the type of sentence we have here, so-called ‘presentational’, which introduces a new element in the discourse, see Rosén 1998, esp. p. 735 for ecce, and cf. e.g. Ov. Met. 2.496 f. ecce Lycaonae proles ignara parentis / Arcas adest.

nugigerulus noster, ‘our dear peddler’: Nugigerulus is a hapax in Sidonius, and apart from the glossographers, who were at odds with it, e.g. Isid. Orig. 10.192, (‘nil gerens’, ‘turpis nuntius’, etc.), is found only one more time in Pl. Aul. 525 ubi nugigerulis res soluta est omnibus, ‘once you have paid all those sellers of trumpery’. The allusion should not be missed. Again, right from the start of the letter, comedy is in the air – or so it seems. See General Introduction, sect. 6.1 Intertextuality.

Sidonius, of course, plays on the usual gerulus litterarum, for a letter-bearer, e.g. 2.11.2 and often. The element nugi- adds the usual self-deprecatory touch, by describing the letters as ‘trifles’, ‘nonsense’. Cf. Ep. 3.14.1 meas nugae sive confectas opere prosario seu poetarum stilo cantilenosas, ‘my trifles, whether written in prose or singing in verse’. Nugae, though, is used mainly of light verse, beginning with Catul. 1.4 meas ... nugas. In the Sidonian corpus Ep. 0.14.1, 4.8.5, 4.18.3, 9.13.6, and Carm. 8.3, 9.9 are about poetry. Pliny, Symmachus and Ausonius use the word in the same way of verse only. Of Christian-inspired occasional verse, Paulinus of Nola in his Ep. 28.6 meas nugas. But cf. e.g. Ennod. Ep. 2.20.1 nugas meas about letters.

Massiliam suam, ‘his beloved Marseille’, where he constantly returns as a merchant, where he had made his fortune and found his wife. He is based in Clermont. See letter 7.2.

The place of the negotiations between Euric and the four bishops is unknown. I suppose it was Euric’s capital, Toulouse, as had been the case regarding the preliminary talks with Epiphanius (see Ennod. Opusc. 3.85). Was Sidonius so certain that Amantius would meet Graecus in Marseille, and that the bishop would have time to spare for him, as he was involved in the negotiations? Or is this a signal that the negotiations were definitively finished? That would leave even less room for Sidonius’ faint hope in this letter that the outcome could be reversed: sect. 5 statum concordiae tam turpis incidite, ‘break this infamous peace at any cost’ (Dalton).

aliquid, ut moris est, de manubiis civitatis domum reportaturus, si tamen cataplus arriserit.

ut moris est, ‘as is his habit’: One can trust him for that, callidus viator (7.2.1) as he is.

de manubiis civitatis, ‘from the booty captured from that town’: His ‘booty’ is the profit gained from his trade in the harbour of Marseille, but it alludes also to the way in which he got his wife and her money, as described in letter 7.2. There, Sidonius has pictured Amantius’ successes as a kind of triumphant, profitable military campaign against the town. See my comment on 7.2.4 introitus. For the phrase manubiae civitatis, cf. Flor. Epit. 1 p.14 l.4 de manubiis captarum urbium templum erexit.

si tamen cataplus arriserit, ‘if only an incoming ship brings something profitable’: The text constitution has caused a lot of trouble. The manuscripts have tamen aut cataplus CM: aut om. F, expunxit M1. Luetjohann postulated a lacuna: si tamen <…> aut cataplus arriserit, which was
followed by all subsequent editors. For the ensuing conjectures, see Loyen’s critical apparatus, and Warmin ington’s additional note in the Loeb edition, 2: 613. I fail to see why the excellent reading of F and M should not be the original one, and propose to retain it. If necessary, one might think of the word aut in CM as having intruded from a marginal gloss explaining cataplus.

Cataplus, ‘the arrival of a ship’, ‘its putting into port’: This grecism, from κατάπλους, with the same meaning, is also found Cic. Rab. Post. 40 cataplus ille Puteolanus (a happy emendation by Turnebus), Mart. 12.74.1 dum tibi Niliacus portat crystalla cataplus, ‘as a ship from Egypt brings you crystal ware’, Auson. Ordo (= 24) 126 f. (about Narbonne) et quidquid vario per flumina, per freta cursu / advehitur, toto tibi navigat orbe cataplus, ‘whether transported by river or by sea, everything from the whole world is brought to you by ship’, Sidon. Ep. 6.8.1 (also about Amantius) quotiens cum pecunias quorum piam cataplus recentis nundinas adit, ‘whenever the cargo of a recently arrived merchantman comes into the market and he goes to the sale with other people’s money’ (Anderson) (q.v. Sirmond who cites ancient glosses: cataplus est adventus navium), and Anth. 719e.67 SB (formerly 910) quidquid confort medicis Lagea (‘Egyptian’) cataplus.

From the sixth century, cataplus takes on the meaning of catab(o)lus, ‘harbour’, ‘quay’, cf. e.g. Greg. Tur. Franc. 4.38 advenientibus ad cataplum Massiliensium navibus transmarinis, ‘ships from overseas arriving in the port of Marseille’. See Vercauteren 1926.

Gualandri 1979: 159 with n. 53 has it as one of the grecisms from daily life. That is why postulating influence from Martial in such cases (e.g. Green commenting on Ausonius and referring to Martial: ‘perhaps the source of the word here’) is debatable.

Arriserit, ‘to smile on somebody’: Of luck, a favourable opportunity, etc., cf. e.g. Petr. Sat. 133.3 quandoque mihi fortunae arriserit hora, Plin. Ep. 1.24.2 si modo adriserit pretium, ‘if only the price suits him’, Cassiod. Var. 3.44 cum tempus navigationis arriserit, ‘when the right moment has come to leave port’.

per quem ioculariter plura garrirem,

per quem, ‘through him’: The letter-bearer meets the addressee in person, cf. 7.10.1 (about Amantius, again) consuetudinarii portitori, a quo contigit saepius vos videri. The letter he hands him is, according to the conventions of epistolography, a ‘conversation with an absent person’, e.g. Cic. Att. 8.14.1 quasi tecum loquor. See Cugusi 1983: 73 f. and General Introduction, par. 5.1.2 Epistolary characteristics.

ioclariter ... garrirem, ‘I would chat playfully’: More humorous episodes in the vein of Ep. 7.2 could be expected from Sidonius, were it not for the tragic circumstances.

The word ioculariter suggests a context of banter, as e.g. in comedy (Ps. Mar. Victorin. 6.56.2 in comedisis ioculariter dicta) and in epistolary literature, when correspondents playfully challenge each other (e.g. Auson. Ep. (= 27) 14a l. 1 f. expectaveram, ut rescriberes ad ea, quae dudum ioculariter luseram). It is found since the first century AD (Plin. Nat. 22.80) and fits in with the later, archaising tendency which favours adverbs in -(i)ter. Cf. Amherdt 2001: 120 ad 4.3.1 Latialiter, and cf. 7.2.3 granditer, 7.9.19 proverbialiter, 7.9.20 multipliciter.

For the importance of humour in Sidonius and in letter writing in general, see General Introduction, par. 5.1.2 Epistolary characteristics and 5.1.3 Sidonius and the art of letter writing.
The first person singular *garrirem*, for the sender, is the only one in this letter. See the Introduction, section 9 ‘You’ and ‘I’.

si pariter unus idemque valeret animus exercere laeta et tristia sustinere.

**exercere laeta**, ‘to have a great time’: *Exercere*, ‘to indulge in’, ‘exercise’, of feelings, positive as well as negative, e.g. Liv. 42.1.12 *ira ... non ... in magistratu exercenda*, Tac. Ann. 15.60 *si amicitiam familiari congressu exercuissent*. Our author Ep. 7.9.22 *inimicitias ... exercet*, ‘he is at odds’. *Exercere laeta* here only, but cf. Arnob. Nat. 5.1 *neque ... laetitias exerceretis*, ‘you would not indulge in festivity (for the gods, on public holidays)’, Hier. *in Os. 1.2 non sabbati exercere laetitiam*, ‘not celebrate sabbath’, Cassiod. Var. 3.39.2 *exercitibus laetitia* *publicam*, ‘celebrate a public holiday’.

**tristia sustinere**, ‘to be unhappy’: Cf. Hier. (Paschalis) Ep. 100.15.1 *tristitiam et laetitiam aequali animo sustinentes*, ‘enduring unhappy and happy events with equanimitiy’. The more usual (but late) phrase has a noun: *tristitiam (-as) sustinere*, Fulg. Rusp. *ad Tras. 3.23*, Cassiod. Var. 4.42.

For kindred phrases in Sidonius, cf. 1.7.13 *extrema quaequae ... sustinet*, ‘he endures the worst’, 2.1.1 *duo nunc pariter mala sustinent Arverni tui*, 9.3.2 *sustinet inimicitias*, 2.12.3 (during the illness of his daughter) *si iocari liberet in tristibus*. For the topos, cf. e.g. Cic. *Att. 5.5.1 nec iocandi locus est, ita me multa sollicitant*.

That humorous writing and sad circumstances cannot be combined, is stated by Sidonius even more pointedly in Ep. 9.3.3, when he, whilst probably in exile, and when asked for *litteras ... ioco lepidas vel stilo cultas*, answers that doing so would give evidence of ‘a stylistic lapse of character’: *porro autem quidam barbarismus est morum sermo iucundus et animus afflictus*, ‘it is indeed, so to speak, a moral barbarism to combine pleasant discourse with a distressed mind’. Cf. 2.12.3 (during the illness of his daughter) *si iocari liberet in tristibus*. For the topos, cf. e.g. Cic. *Att. 5.5.1 nec iocandi locus est, ita me multa sollicitant*, Symm. Ep. 1.101.2 (a social event and mourning cannot be combined) *qui fieri potest, ut os unum contrariss adfectionibus induamus?*, 3.21 *neque enim fas sinit laeta officia obire lugentes*.

Note the chiasmus in *exercere laeta et tristia sustinere*.

**siquidem nostri hic nunc est infelices anguli status**, siquidem, ‘because’: The reader is left to formulate for himself the conclusion of the preceding irrealis. It is: ‘I am not going to jest now’. Then siquidem continues: ‘... because the situation is so wretched.’ A similar transition, though without ellipsis, is found in 3.4.1, where Sidonius says he has written the letter in an anxious mood, *oppidum siquidem nostrum *gentium arma terrificant.*

**hic**, ‘this’, ‘thus’: I.e. ‘so bad’. It anticipates the subordinate clause which follows, *cuius ... condicio*. See LHS 2: 413.

**nostri ... infelices anguli status**, ‘the situation in our ill-fated corner’: Said of Clermont-Auvergne. Sidonius’ beloved Clermont is a remote corner, surrounded by enemies, a victim of its strategic position as well as its own tenacity. The theme recurs time and again, see e.g. 3.1.4 *invidiosi huius anguli* (note the similar wording), 3.4.1 *oppidum ... nostrum ... arma terrificant*, 7.1.1 *nos miseri Arverni*. For status, see my comment on 7.1.3 *statu urbis exanito*. 
cuius, ut fama confirmat, *melior* fuit sub bello quam sub pace condicio.

**ut fama confirmat**, ‘as rumour has it’: As Bellès 3: 45 ad loc. n. 73 has rightly remarked, Sidonius has no doubt been informed unofficially about the peace conditions, but prefers a somewhat vague phrase.

**melior**, ‘better’: The manuscripts have *minus* CM: *minor* M*: melior* F. Luetjohann wrote *minus* <tristis>, Mohr <misera> *minus* (followed by Anderson and Loyen). Warmington suggested *mitior* or *mollior*, Bellès preferred M*’s correction *minor*.

Bellès translates *minor* as ‘més lleu’, i.e. ‘lighter’, ‘easier’. Although very attractive from a palaeographic point of view, it seems impossible to impose this sense on *minor* here. *Condicio* is just ‘situation’, neutral, and consequently a *condicio minor* is a less favourable situation. Cf. e.g. Cassian, c. Nest. 3.12 *quamlibet condicio cuiusquam aut locus minor sit, virtus tamen fidei nescit inminui*, ‘however much lower somebody’s situation and status may be …’.

Like Bellès, I prefer to stay close to the manuscript tradition. I propose to follow the scribe of F, who uses his critical faculty, as above in *si tamen cataplus arriserit*, though, for all that, it is not certain that his *melior* is closer to the original text. But can we be sure of that with *misera minus*?

**sub bello ... sub pace**, ‘during the war ... (now) in peace’: *Sub bello* is not attested elsewhere, but *sub pace* is: Man. 1.13, id. 2.584, Stat. Ach. 1.817, Claud. Paneg. Hon. VI (= 28) 307. As so often, the stylistic urge to form a parallelism creates its own idiom. See General Introduction, sect. 6.2 *Style*.

**Section 2**

**facta est servitus nostra pretium securitatis alienae.**

‘Our slavery is the price paid for the safety of others.’

It is, among other things, with this situation in mind that Ward-Perkins 2005: 54 ff. wrote about ‘selling out the provincials’. Settling Germans in the Empire cost the central government nothing, the provincials everything. ‘The imperial government was entirely capable of selling its provincial subjects downriver, in the interests of short-term political and military gain. ... Sidonius’ opposition to this policy of appeasement proved correct ...’ (p. 56).

Sidonius’ succinct phrase admirably formulates the essence of his reproach concerning Clermont’s *condicio*: ‘the freedom of others comes at the price of our bondage’.

**facta est**, ‘has become’: The verb is in first position, because the sentence is a function of the preceding one, to which is has a causal-explicative relation (see Marouzeau 1953: 50). ‘This peace is even worse for us than war was. *As it happens*, we have been sacrificed for others.’

**servitus**, ‘slavery’: See the introduction to this letter, section 3 *Key words*: ‘Servitus and libertas’. In a comparable situation, in Zos. Hist. 5.29.9, the senator Lampadius criticizes the act of cowardice by the senate to accept Stilicho’s proposal to buy off Alaric with the words: ‘*non est ista pax sed pactio servitutis*, ‘that is no peace, but agreeing to slavery’.

**pretium securitatis**, ‘price for safety’: The exact collocation is Sidonius’ own, but cf. e.g. Flor. Epit. 3.1.9 (Jugurtha bribes a Roman army) *addito etiam turpi foedere in pretium salutis*, ‘adding
an outrageous treaty to the price he paid for his safety’, and Tac. Hist. 2.47.1 *nimis grande vitae meae pretium*, ‘too great a price for my life’.

**Arvernorum, pro dolor, servitus, qui, si prisca replicarentur,**

**Arvernorum ... servitus:** Repeats and reinforces *servitus nostra*: ‘the slavery of the Arvernians of all people - too bad!’

**pro dolor,** ‘shocking’: The interjection is used at moments of great emotion; see my comment on 7.6.8 pro dolor.

**si prisca replicarentur,** ‘if past events were recalled’, is parallel to the following *si recentia memorabuntur*, ‘if recent events are to be brought back’. The irrealis creates a praeteritio: ‘if I/they were to recall … *quod non*’, but the point is made all the same.

*Replicare* (literally ‘to unroll a scroll’) is encountered in the figurative sense of ‘to recall’, ‘bring back into memory’, since Apul. *Met.* 3.1.5 *haec identidem mecum replicans*. In Sidonius this use is also found in *Ep.* 4.11.4 *plura replicare superforaneum statuo*, ‘I think it superfluous to enlarge upon this’, and 7.9.15 *virum, cuius in consequentibus raptim vita replicabitur*, ‘the man whose life will be told briefly in what follows’. See the analysis of Mossberg 1934: 85 ff.

**audebant se quondam fratres Latio dicere et sanguine ab Iliaco populos computare.**

The Arverns, like the Romans, believed they originated from Troy. See Gualandri 1979: 20 with note 69 in her discussion of Gallo-Roman aristocratic self-awareness. The source of this phrase is Luc. 1.427 f. *Arvernique ausi Latio se fingere fratres, / sanguine ab Iliaco populi*, ‘the Arverns dared to think of themselves as brothers of Rome, people from Trojan stock’, in the catalog of Gallic tribes which rejoiced at the departure of Caesar’s army to Italy. Cf. Sidon. *Carm.* 7.139 f. *est mihi, quae Latio se sanguine tollit alumnam, / tellus clara viris*, ‘I have a land which carries its head high as sprung from Latin blood’ (Anderson), words which Juppiter uses to characterize the Auvergne, native country of Sidonius’ mother (see Harries 1994: 34) and of the emperor Avitus, his father-in-law. In the same vein Sidonius writes about a lake in his country estate of Avitacum (Aydat, south of Clermont), that his forefathers there used to imitate the boat race Aeneas had organized for his Trojans off the Sicilian coast: *Ep.* 2.2.19 *nam moris istic fuit senioribus nostris agonem Drepanitanum Troianae superstitionis imitari*, ‘for here it was the traditional custom of our elders to imitate the contest of Drepanum in the mythical tale of Troy’ (Anderson). (Note, by the way, that this evidently belonged to the past. In Sidonius’ generation no such extravagances were possible any more.) See General Introduction, sect. 6.1 *Intertextuality*.

Harries 1994: 188 has pointed out that Sidonius prefers not to signal the heroic Arverian resistance against the Romans in the past, culminating in the defeat of Veringesorix inflicted on Caesar at Gergovia in 52 BC. [For their pride in this respect in the Augustan era, see Strab. *Geogr.* 4.2.3.] Rather does he bring to the fore their mythic blood ties with the Romans and the Trojans. ‘History was recast by Sidonius in terms of this legendary kinship, because only thus could the past be made to serve the needs of the present.’ The same already in Harries 1992: 298: ‘For this purpose, history was rewritten: the Arverns were not the people of Veringesorix but “brothers to Latium”’.
Commentators of Lucan generally think that he mistook the Arverni for the Haeduī, see Getty 1940: xlii and Wilson Joyce 1993: 287 f. s.v. Aeduī. The latter: ‘The two groups were rivals, with the Aeduī being more inclined to side with Rome, the Arverni to pull away from Rome. ... In 121 [BC], the Aeduī asked Rome for support against the Arverni and Allobroges, and received the title frater consanguineique.’ The suspicion of a mistake is as old as the marginal note of the scholiast: errasse hic poeta videtur. nam Aedui sunt ab Iliaco sanguine (Comm. Bern. 1.428 Usener). Yet things are a little bit different.

Another scholiast of Lucan, commenting on the same passage, underlines the connection with Troy and Rome of, precisely, the Arverni: Alverni a quodam Troiano nominantur. de his Cicero in Scauriana: ‘inventi sunt qui etiam fratres populi Romani vocarentur’ (Cic. Scaur. 45c, ed. Clark). See Luiselli 1978: 91. And let us remember that a similar pretension is recorded of the Burgundians, who maintained their Roman character well into the sixth century; already Amm. 28.5.11 wrote: (a letter of the emperor Valentinian to the Burgundi 370 AD) gratanter ratione gemina principis acceptae sunt litterae: prima quod iam inde temporibus priscis subolem se esse Romanam Burgundi sciunt, dein quod etc., ‘they were glad to receive the emperor’s letter for two reasons: first, because the Burgundians know since time immemorial that they descend from the Romans ...’. The same claim of Roman descent (subolem se esse Romanam), the same mythical distance (iam inde temporibus priscis). See Riché 1962: 56, 227.

The claim of Roman brotherhood and Trojan descent is a typical feature of the Gallo-Roman identity. It testifies to the high degree of Romanization of the upper echelons, traditionalistic and attached to the old Roman ideals. One only has to think of the conspicuous presence of this motif in the Panegyrici Latini, e.g. 5.2.4, 8.21.2, and compare it with Amm. 15.9.2 ff. on the origin of the Gallic tribes. See Lassandro 2000, esp. pp. 14-19.


Thus Sidonius probably represents an authentic belief which has its roots in Antiquity and flowered in the Middle Ages. He does not ‘recast history’, as Harries supposes, but testifies to the world view of much of the Gallic elite of his days, or what remained of it.

audebant, ‘dared’, ‘went so far as to’: Claiming Roman descent was a matter of local pride, and it intensified as external pressure was brought to bear on Romanitas. See Frye 2003: 194 f. Wolfram 1988: 184 in comparison adduced the nobility in the Ebro valley. Like the leading class in the Auvergne, they offered obstinate resistance to the barbarian conquest, and saw themselves as Romans. It should be added that even the barbarians did not hesitate to employ the same rhetoric, if necessary, cf. e.g. Sidon. Carm. 7.501 f. (the Visigothic king Theodoric declares his love for Rome) testor, Roma, tuum nobis venerabile nomen / et socium de Marte genus, ‘I swear, Rome, by your name which I revere, and by our common descent from Mars’.
See my comment on 7.6.2 ecclesiasticas caulas for the suggestion of Fo 2002: 158 ff., that that passage is to be interpreted in connection with the Trojan descent of the Arverni, mentioned here.

The fratres Latio-motif recurs in Petrarca, who weaves it into his notorious gibe at Sidonius in the preface to the Epistolae familiares. How does Sidonius dare to criticize Cicero! As follows: ‘Atque hoc Sidonius ausus est! Alvernus orator non Latio se fingere fratrem, ut ait ille (quod ipsum satis erat audaciei), sed aemulum et (quod est gravius) irrisorem’, ‘This Arvernian orator does not simply imagine himself, as he says, a brother of the Latin orator, which would be audacious enough, but he assumes the role of a rival, and, what is worse, of a scoffer’ (transl. James H. Robinson, Petrarch: The First Modern Scholar and Man of Letters, New York, 1898). For the misunderstanding involved on Petrarca’s part, see Köhler 1995: 106 f. ad 1.1.2 nam de Marco Tullio silere melius puto.

se … populos computare, ‘to consider themselves as people’: The plural populi is ‘people’, ‘folk’ (see my comment on 7.6.7 populos … orbatos, with a choice of Christian parallels). It is attested as early as Enn. Ann. 1.3 latos populos, ‘people worldwide’ (cf. Verg. A. 1.225), and Pompon. Com. 105 populis voluntas haec enim et vulgo datast. Cf. also Greg. Tur. Franc. 5.49 ab Arvernis populis, ‘from the people of Clermont’.

Computare instead of putare, ‘to think’, ‘consider as’, with double acc., is a later development. Among the earliest instances from the second and third century AD are Claud. Dig. 36.1.80(78).9 eo auctiorem hereditatem computari, and Cypr. Mort. 26 patriam nos nostram paradisum computamus, ‘we think of paradise as our home’. It is found repeatedly in Sidonius, e.g. 1.2.5 quem puerile computat gestare thecatum, ‘he thinks it childish to carry it (viz. the bow) in a case’ (see Köhler 1995: 144 ad loc.). See also 7.9.17 praestantissimum computavit, ‘he considered it a singular distinction’.

si recentia memorabuntur, hi sunt qui viribus propriis hostium publicorum arma remorati sunt;

Now follows a complex tripartite statement. Three paragraphs, marked by an anaphora: hi sunt qui ... hi sunt qui ... illi ... (variation in the third member), each of them with a second, subsidiary member, which elaborates on it: cui saepe populo ... de quorum tamen sorte ... quem convictum deinceps ... In the first section the elaboration is positive, in the other two it is negative, as follows:

(1) Hi sunt qui ... hostium publicorum arma remorati sunt etc. Themes: initiative, no fear. The people of Clermont by themselves have delayed the enemy. They did not fear the Goths. Quite the contrary, they often terrified them.

(2) Hi sunt qui ... tam duces fuere quam milites etc. Themes: responsibility, no profit. The soldiers of Clermont were their own commanders as well. However, they did not profit from the responsibility they took. Only you did.

(3) Illi ... Seronatum ... non timuerunt legibus tradere etc. Themes: loyalty, deception. Clermont handed the traitor Seronatus over to you, but in vain.

There is an instructive parallel to this enumeration in Silius Italicus’ Punica, which hitherto has gone unnoticed. In it Decius exhorts the citizens of Capua not to surrender to Hannibal, but to remain loyal to the Romans. He brings to the fore the qualities of the Romans, their
initiative and fearlessness, their unselfishness and adherence to the law. He underlines his appeal by stating his own inevitable loyalty, because of the Trojan blood in his veins. It harnesses him, he assures his audience, against all kinds of barbarians. His plea, however, is in vain. Capua concludes a treaty with the barbarian.

The parallel is striking, be it that the roles of the brave guys are interchanged – in Silius the Romans, in Sidonius Clermont. One may venture to say that Sidonius, inspired by Silius, freely styled his own drama of Capua – Clermont. The general climate of loyalty to Rome, Trojan descent, fighting for what one is worth, the barbarian enemy, the uselessness of it all, the inevitable treaty, and even the rhetorical figure used (anaphoric hi sunt qui), are the same. Also note the curious quasi-parallel between remorati sunt and remorunt (Sil. l. 176). The passage is:

Sil. 11.173-82: ‘hi (sc. Romani) sunt qui vestris infixum moenibus hostem deiecere manu et Capuam eripuer e superbis Samnitum iussis; hi sunt qui iura dedere terrore expulso Sidicinaque bella remorunt. quos fugitis socios? quosve additis? ille ego sanguis Dardanius, cui sacra pater, cui nomina liquit a love duxta Capys magno cognatus Iulo, ille ego semihomines inter Nasamonas et inter saevum atque aequantem ritus Garamanta ferarum Marmarico ponam tentoria mixtus alumno?’

And 189 f.: haec vana aversas Decius iactavit ad aures. ast delecta manus iungebat foedera Poeno.

“…These are the men who dislodged the enemy established in your city and rescued Capua from the tyranny of the Samnites. These are the men who, when that menace was driven out, gave you a constitution and put an end to the fighting of the Sidicini. Compare the allies whom you are deserting with the new allies whom you are gaining. Shall I, with Trojan blood in my veins, I, to whom Capys of old, the kinsman of great Iulus, bequeathed his sacred rites and his name derived from Jupiter – shall I consort with half-human Nasamonians and Garamantians, as cruel and savage as wild beasts, and pitch my tent cheek by jowl with a native of Marmarica?” … Such was the appeal that Decius made in vain to deaf ears. The chosen body of envoys made a treaty with Hannibal’ (transl. Duff, ed. Loeb).

Silius enjoyed a very modest popularity with posterity, but Sidonius was among his readers. Passages from his poetry resemble Silius (from Carm. 5, 21 and 22; see Geisler’s loci similes in Luetjohann’s edition; see DNP 11: 523). He even mentions him in his catalogue of poets, Carm. 9.260 non Marsus, Pedo, Silius, Tibullus, which is exceptional, for, as Reynolds and Marshal 1983: 389 said: ‘no one mentions Silius by name in the next 500 years except Sidonius’. See General Introduction, sect. 6.1 Intertextuality.

This is not to say that the parallel Silius – Sidonius is exclusive. There is a fair measure of convention – and indeed of understandable human emotion – in the description of a town which is about to be handed over to the enemy. I bring to mind the story of the surrender of Nisibis by the emperor Jovian in 363 AD, as told in Amm. 25.9. The inhabitants received orders to leave the town, but (sect. 2) manus tendentes flentesque orabant, ne imponeretur sibi necessitas abscedendi, ad defendendos penates se solos sufficer e sine alimentis publicis affirmantes et
milite satis confisi affuturam iustitiam pro genitali sede dimicaturis, ut experti sunt saepe. et haec quidem suppliciter ordo et populus precabantur, sed ventis loquebantur in cassum imperatore, ut fingebat alia metuens, periurii piacula declinante. ‘With tears and outstretched hands they begged that they might not be compelled to depart, declaring that they alone, without aid from the empire in provisions and men, were able to defend their hearths, trusting that Justice herself would, as they had often found, aid them in fighting for their ancestral dwelling-place. But supplicantly as the council and people entreated, all was spoken vainly to the winds, since the emperor (as he pretended, while moved by other fears) did not wish to incur the guilt of perjury’ (transl. Rolfe, ed. Loeb).

hi sunt qui, ‘they are the ones who’: There is a marked increase in the use of this phrase in later Latin. It occurs 11 times till 200 AD, against 88 times between 200 and 500 AD (CLCLT 6). Taking into account the larger size of the latter corpus (2,3 times as large as the classical period), the relative frequency is 1: 3,5. In Sidonius it is the backbone of Ep. 5.7.

viribus propriis, ‘on their own’: The Arvernians have always blocked the Visigoths with their own forces. Viribus returns, mirrored, as the violence of the enemy in sect. 5 qui non potuimus viribus obtineri, ‘we who could not be subdued by their force’.

The opposition proprius (= privatus) – publicus has also been thematized by the author in the previous letter (see my comment on 7.6.3 privati ... publica), and recurs in this letter in sect. 4 non tam curae est publicis mederi periculis quam privatis studere fortunis, ‘you (= the bishops) do not care about the public welfare: you put your own interests first’. The idea is clear: Clermont knew its duty and has selflessly supported the public cause. With the bishops, it is the other way round.

hostium publicorum, ‘enemies to the public cause’: The Visigoths are designated as enemies to the res publica. The state should have dealt with them (publicorum), but failed to do so. Cf. Tac. Hist. 1.84.3 [Otho on Vitellius and his supporters] sic fit, ut hinc res publica, in<de> hostes rei publicae constiterint. The phrase ties into the central notion of res publica in this letter. Besides, it reminds the reader – perhaps on purpose – of the ominous t.t. hostis publicus, ‘traitor to the country’, a traitor within the citizen body.

cui saepe populo Gothus non fuit clauso intra moenia formidini,
Corresponds exactly to the second part of the clause: ipse fieret oppugnatoribus positis intra castra terrori.

non fuit ... formidini, ‘did not frighten’: Cf. 7.1.6 non fuere ... ostenta formidini, with my comment. Though they were confined to the town (intra moenia; here clearly the city walls, though moenia commonly denotes buildings: see my comment on 7.1.3 scaenae moenium publicorum) and practically at the mercy of their opponents, the citizens of Clermont were not afraid.

cum vicissim ipse fieret oppugnatoribus positis intra castra terrori.

fieret ... terrori, ‘terrified’: The phrase owes more to rhetorical parallelism than to historical truth. As far as Sidonius’ account in his correspondence goes, the soldiers of Clermont never beleaguered the Goths in their camp. What comes nearest to it, is the successful, if modest, sally by his brother-in-law Ecdicius which once caused the Goths to retire from the plain to a hilltop, Ep. 3.3.3 ff. For its date see Stevens 1933: 202.
**positis intra castra**, ‘being in their encampment’: The suggestion is: though sheltered in their camp from danger, the Goths felt nevertheless afraid of the counter-attacks of the people of Clermont. For *positus*, ‘residing’, ‘finding oneself somewhere’, see my comment on 7.4.3 *coram posito*.

**hi sunt, qui sibi adversus vicinorum aciem tam duces fuere quam milites**;

**adversus vicinorum aciem**, ‘against the offensive of their neighbours’: The neighbours are the Visigoths, as in 7.11.1 *nunc periculum de vicinis timet, nunc invidiam de patronis*. See my comment ad loc. Cf. 3.4.1 *proximi Gothis* (said of the people of Clermont). There is some confusion among translators. Loyen’s ‘quand il fallut livrer bataille en formations rapprochées’ is certainly wrong, Dalton’s ‘even when closely beset’ is no better, even Anderson’s ‘in facing the enemy host at their gates’ is not wholly correct.

**sibi ... tam duces ... quam milites**, ‘who were their own commanders as well as soldiers’: They provided both the commanders and the soldiers by playing both roles. The reproach is, of course, that *Rome* should have provided the commanders. The motif ultimately goes back to Hom. II. 3.179 (Agamemnon) ἀμφότερον, βασιλεὺς τ’ ἄγαθος κρατερὸς τ’ αἰχμητής, ‘both a good king and a strong soldier’, a line which was a favourite line of Alexander the Great’s, who recognized himself in it (Plut. Mor. 1.331c). In Tib. 1.1.79 *hic ego dux milesque bonus*, the poet applies it to his capacities for making love. It is a standard argument in the mouth of commanders: they can command because they also know how to obey (already Xen. Anab. 1.3.15 (Klearchos recommends himself) ἵνα εἰδήτε ὅτι καὶ ἄρχεσθαι ἐπίσταμαι, ‘that you may know that I can also obey’). Sidonius may have been inspired by such passages as Sal. Cat. 20.16 (Catilina canvassing) vel imperatore vel milite me utimini, ‘make use of me either as your commander-in-chief or as a simple soldier’ (cf. also Tac. Hist. 4.66.2), and Luc. 9.401 f. *si quo fuerit discrimine notum, / dux an miles eam*, ‘if it makes any difference whether I go as the commander or as a soldier’: Cato exhorts his soldiers by saying that they will see him enduring all the hardships they endure: he will be a general and soldier in one (cf. also Luc. 7.87 f.). In Amm. 24.6.15 (see Den Boeft et al. 2002: 195 ad loc.), the Emperor Julian is praised by his soldiers, because *ignoratus ubique dux esset an miles*, ‘nowhere could it be told whether he was the commander or a soldier’. The compliment Sidonius pays the people of Clermont is the greater because, unlike Agamemnon, Catilina, Cato and Julian, as soldiers they are the ones who surpass themselves by taking the lead.

**de quorum tamen sorte certaminum si quid prosperum cessit, vos secunda solata sunt,**

‘but, whatever success accrued from the outcome of their (or: these) battles, the triumph benefited you.’

**de quorum ... sorte certaminum**, ‘from the outcome of these battles’: Cf. Verg. A. 12. 54 *at regina nova pugnae conterrita sorte*, ‘the unexpected turn the combat had taken’, Gel. 6.3.31 nam gladiatori ... pugnae haec proposita sors est aut occidere ... aut occumbere, ‘... this possible outcome of the fight’, Amm. 27.10.14 *aequataque parumper proeliorum sorte*, ‘... the chances of battle’. Both Anderson (‘their arms’) and Loyen (‘ces rencontres’) leave out *sorte* in their translations, Bellès correctly: ‘de la sort dels seus combats’.
Alternatively, one might think of translating: ‘if any of the fights for their life was successful’ (quorum ... sorte: the life of the Arvernians), but the equation certaminum si quid = si quod certamen is doubtful. Yet cf. Liv. 21.53.7 prospero ... certamine, 26.4.3 proelia ... prospera.

si quid prosperum cessit, ‘if anything succeeded’: Sidonius prefers the adjective in construing cedere, ‘to turn out’, ‘result’, instead of the far more common adverb (Nep. Timoth. 4.6 prospere cesserunt, et passim). See Ep. 4.24.6 si quid adversum cesserit amico, ‘if anything untoward should happen to my friend’ (Anderson), 5.3.2 eum ... aut certe non gavisurum comptatis prosperis aut tristem, si diversa cesserint, non futurum, ‘that he will surely not be glad when he receives good news, or sad if things have gone differently’. For the adjective after quid instead of the gen. part., see Löffstedt 1956, 1: 136 ff. For prosperum, see also my comment on 7.9.22 adversis ... dubiis ... prosperis.

vos, ‘you’, i.e. the rest of Gaul, the empire, and ultimately the central government, represented in this case by Graecus.

solata sunt, ‘benefited’: (Cont)solarī, ‘to help’, ‘benefit’, is later Latin. In Sidonius one finds Ep. 4.11.4 (the priest Claudianus Mamertus) nudos opevento consolabatur, ‘provided the naked with clothing’, 6.1.1 (bishop Lupus) dignus, qui omnes consoleris infirmos, ‘worthy to attend to all the sick’, 6.12.2 (bishop Patiens) in hoc curae tuae latitudo diffonditur, ut longe postorium consoletur angustias, ‘... that you help out your distant relations in trouble’, 7.17.3 (Volusianus) tu ... discipulos eius aggredere solari, ‘try to help his disciples’. See my comment on 7.2.7 and 7.6.9 solacium. See the discussion in Mossberg 1934: 68 f.

si quid contrarium, illos adversa fregerunt.

Note the careful pairing of synonyms: prosperum, secunda, and contrarium, adversa. Rhetoric is the author’s second nature. It helps him to forge his emotions into a political weapon in the most effective way.

illos adversa fregerunt, ‘the setbacks ruined them’, i.e. the Arvernians. Frangere, ‘to exhaust’, ‘wear out’, ‘break down’, of adversities, hard labour, illness etc. Cf. e.g. Ambr. in Psalm. 1.24.5 neque secunda extollant neque adversa te frangant.

illi amore rei publicae Seronatum barbaris provincias propinatam non timuerunt legibus tradere,

amore rei publicae, ‘out of love for the commonwealth’: The expression is not often encountered, cf. Cic. Sul. 87 sed ut ad sceleratorum poenam amore rei publicae sum adductus, sic ad salutem innocentium voluntate deducor, ‘but just as love for the commonwealth motivates me to punish the criminals, …’ (note the corresponding context of punishing a traitor), and four times in Tacitus.

Sidonius manipulates the concept of res publica to formulate a devastating criticism of the central government. Here, first, it is ‘the commonwealth’, ‘the constitutional state’, the ideal of security and legal certainty under Roman sway. It is the ideal Clermont trusted in. Then, in the subordinate clause which follows, quem convictum res publica vix praesumpsit occidere, res publica suddenly means ‘the central government’ (see below), which does not live up to the law and lets its subjects down. The central government is at odds with the state, whose well-being it should guarantee.
Seronatum barbaris provincias propinantem, ‘Seronatus who was busy handing over his provinces to the barbarians’: Seronatus ca. 469 AD had been one of the most important officials in southern Gaul, possibly vicarius septem provinciarum, vice-governor for the south of Gaul, or else governor of Aquitanica Prima or senior finance official of the region. His was a policy of intensified contacts and cooperation with the Visigoths. Because of that, he had been brought to trial in Rome at the instigation of the conservative elements in the Gallic nobility, especially the Auvergne. In Rome he may have had considerable support, because his condemnation and execution did not take place immediately. Our only source is his opponent Sidonius, who paints an ugly portrait of him in Ep. 2.1 and 5.13. Sidonius finds him exsultans Gothis insultansque Romanis, ‘fond of the Goths, insulting the Romans’ (2.1.3). Before siding with Sidonius in condemning Seronatus, it is wise to put the accusation into the perspective Wolfram 1988: 187 indicated, ‘that much of what strikes us as high-level politics and Romano-Gothic animosity was in reality a function of intergroup rivalries within Gaul’s leading stratum’. One should remember that the praefectus praetorio Arvandus, in similar circumstances, could count on Sidonius’ prolonged support (Ep. 1.7).


As to barbaris, note the telling opposition barbaris ... propinantem – legibus tradere, ‘the barbarians ... the laws ...’.

As to provincias, the provinces under his rule were Vienensis, Narbonensis I and II, Novempopulana, Aquitanica I and II, and Alpes Maritimae, together the diocese of the Septem Provinciae (see Notitia Dignitatum, LRE: 1452). The Septem Provinciae were governed by a vicarius under the ultimate responsibility of the praefectus Galliarum (see LRE: 373 f.). According to Sidonius, Seronatus mocked the authority of the praefectus (2.1.3 inludens praefecti) and let the Goths in at the expense of the residents (2.1.3 inplet cotidie silvas fugientibus, villas hospitibus). Roman law was replaced by Gothic law (2.1.3 leges Theudosianas calcans Theudoricanasque proponens).

Propinantem, ‘making a complimentary present of’ (OLD 1c, with examples from Ennius, Terence and Apuleius). But Gualandri 1979: 121 f. is right, I think, that propinare here is more than a synonym of porrigere alone. Sidonius loves, what she calls, the ‘gioco d’elaborazione’, retaining and elaborating on a metaphor. The metaphor in case – ‘to give someone to drink’, ‘to drink to somebody’s health’ – is present in its entirety in 2.1.1, where it is sarcastically said of Seronatus, that he has returned ut sanguinem fortunasque miserorum, quas ibi ex parte propinaverat, hic ex asse misceret, ‘to make here one draught of the blood and the fortunes of the wretched inhabitants, after a good taste of such refreshment in the other place’ (Anderson). There is something of Dracula to the Sidonian Seronatus.

non timuerunt, ‘did not hesitate’: Opposed to vix praesumpsit (see below). The Gallic resistance is brave, the government weak-kneed.

legibus tradere, ‘to hand over to justice’: The only parallels for this phrase are Quodv. Serm. 2.5 ad iudicem quasi cum reo venistis, sed innocentem legibus traddistis, and Cassiod. Var. 1.30.2 ut, si cuiuspiam senatoris famulus in ingenui caede fuerit fortasse versatus, eum tradat legibus impetitum.
quem convictum deinceps res publica vix praesumpsit occidere.

res publica, ‘the state’, pregn. ‘the central government’, ‘the administration’, cf. e.g. 1.11.6 (interregnum Avitus-Maiorianus) vacante aula turbataque republica. The important defendants had to justify themselves in Rome, like Arvandus who was tried in the senate (Ep. 1.7).

praesumpsit, ‘dared’: The verb is frequent in later Latin in various constructions, see Mossberg 1934: 80 ff. With an infinitive, as a synonym for audere, cf. 3.3.9 facere praesumpsit, and 5.3.3, 6.3.2, 6.9.2, 8.11.13, 9.4.1, 9.11.1. See TLL 10/2: 958.75 ff. ‘i.q. insolenter audere’, and 961.5 ff. ‘i.q. confidenter audere’.

**Section 3**

The section is divided into three rhetorical questions, of which the middle one is the longest:

- hoccine meruerunt inopia, flamma ... macri ieiuniis proeliatores?
- propter huius tam iniclita pacis expectationem ... manus fame concolor legit?
- pro his tot tantisque devotionis experimentis ... facta iactura est?

All three of them express the feelings of bitter disappointment, that all sufferings and losses have been made pointless by the treaty. The first one sums up the diverse problems Clermont faced, famine, fire, killing, pestilence. The second one highlights famine and its consequences. The third one summarizes the other two.

Gualandri 1979: 40 ff. has given particular attention to this heavily laboured passage. Bellès in his note 76 ad loc. even calls it ‘un dels exemples més clars del preciosisme de Sidoni’.

hoccine meruerunt inopia, flamma, ferrum, pestilentia,

hoccine meruerunt, ‘is this the reward?’: Hoccine is found in the comedians and after that in the archaizing authors of the second century AD. Especially noteworthy in our context is its typical use in a moralizing, reproachful way, e.g. Ter. Andr. 236 hoccinest humanum factu aut inceptu? hoccinest officium patris?, Front. 235.26 (= De nepote amissio 2.3) hoccineullo modo aequum aut iustum fuit? ... hoccinefato decerni debit? ... hoccineest recte fari? The suffix -ne here instead of num, as in Fronto (see Van den Hout 1999: 129 ad 48.7).

Sidonius is the only one among his contemporaries to use it, and this is the only phrase in his work. Actually, after Augustine who had a certain predilection for it in lively questions, e.g. c. Iulian. op. imperf. 4.90.4 hocine [sic] est respondere? hocine disputare est? hocine postremo vel sobrietatis habere respectum?, it almost completely disappeared.

For meruerunt, cf. e.g. Luc. 8.651 hoc merui, coniunx, in tuta puppe relinqui?, ‘is this my reward ...?’; Mart. 14.211.2 hoc meruit tunicam qui tibi, saeve, dedit, ‘is this what he gets in return ...?’.


For fire and sword in war, cf. e.g. Verg. A. 10.231 f. nos / praecipitis ferro Rutulus flammaque premebat, Liv. 7.30.15 omnia ferro ignique vastata. For Sidonius, because of the enumeration, cf. esp. Carm. 7.248 ff. (Scythian horsemen in the Auvergne) qui proxima quaeque / discursu,
flammis, ferro, feritate, rapinis / delebant, ‘who destroyed everything near them with raid, fire, sword, atrocity and pillage’.

The burning down of the crops was a standard technique to starve the enemy into surrender. It was one of the big problems in Sidonius’ day, for which he had to rally help from abroad. See 6.12.5 (to Patiens) quod post Gothicam depopulationem, post segetes incendio absumptas peculiari sumptu inopiae communi per desolatas Gallias gratuita frumenta misisti, ‘(it is your merit that) when the crops had been consumed by fire you sent free supplies of corn through all the devastated Gallic lands at your private expense to relieve the public destitution’ (Anderson).

Dearth and pestilence are seen together in Liv. 4.20.9 pestilentia inopiaque frugum. The plague accompanies a siege in literature ever since Thuc. 2.47-54. Hence its being mentioned here must be handled with more caution than shown by Kaufmann 1995: 213 n. 647, who straightaway concluded: ‘Ep. 7.7.3 ist der einzige Beleg für einen Pestausbruch.’

pingues caedibus gladii et macri ieiuniis proeliatores?
From the first part of the sentence two words, inopia and ferrum, are developed in this highly sophisticated and evocative conceit.

pingues caedibus gladii, ‘the swords satiated with slaughter’: The gladii are personalized, on a par with proeliatores. The meaning of pingues shifts from ‘besmeared’, ‘dripping’ (cf. e.g. Juv. 3.247 pingua crura luto, ‘legs besmeared with mud’, Sidon. Carm. 7.260 pingus ... sanguine ... lorica, ‘armour dripping with blood’, cf. Verg. A. 4.62 pingus ... aras) to ‘satiated’, ‘fertilized’, a term originally from agriculture, and metaphorically used of battlegrounds, soaked and fertilized with blood and corpses (e.g. Hor. Carm. 2.1.26 f. sanguine pinguior / campus, cf. Verg. G. 1.491 f. bis sanguine nostro / Emathian et latos Haemi pinguescere campos), and hence, as if of persons, ‘well fed’, ‘fat’, ‘stuffed’ (cf. Luc. 7.317 (Pompeius) quanto satiavit sanguine ferrum, ‘with how much blood Pompey fattened his sword’).

It is not impossible that there is a distant echo – pointed out by Gualandri 1979: 124 - of biblical language, Is. 34.6 gladius Domini repletus est sanguine, incrassatus est adipe. For Sidonius’ love of ‘drastic’ metaphors, see General Introduction, sect. 6.2 Style.

macri ieiuniis proeliatores, ‘the warriors exhausted for lack of food’: The same conceit-like opposition of macer to pinguis is exploited by Sidonius in Carm. 7.454 f. (of the Goths) squalent vestes ac sordida macro / linea pinguescunt tergo, ‘tarnished and greasy are the linen garments on their lean backs’ (Anderson). In Ep. 8.10.2 macer and ieiunare are combined in a metaphor from agriculture: (a dry, unpromising subject) velut arida caespitis macri glaeba ieiunat, ‘grows starved on parched lean soil’ (Anderson). Indeed, macer, like pinguis, has firm roots in agriculture: Colum. 3.12 pinguissimam et laetissimam (sc. terram) luxuria, macram et tenuem ieiunio laborare, ‘... poor soil suffers from shortage’.

ieiunium for once in Sidonius means ‘lack of food’, ‘starvation’. The remaining seven occurrences in the correspondence all indicate ritual fasting, e.g. 6.2.1 non minus se ieiuniis quam cibis pauperes pascit, ‘no less does he feed the poor with food than himself with fasting.’ The opposition of ieiunia with pinguis is applied to Christian fasting in Carm. 16.108 insertis pinguis ieiunia psalmis, ‘you make rich your fasting by inserting psalms’.
Gualandri’s conclusion is: ‘Ne resulta un gioco tutto concettoso e cerebrale, in violento contrasto col contenuto drammatico dell’episodio’ (p. 41). I think it misleading. Quite the contrary: this contrast is the heart of the matter. In Sidonius at his best, artifice is the benchmark for emotion, the bizarre mirrors the tragic, in a socially acceptable, because literally stylized, way.

**propter huius tam inclitae pacis expectationem avulsas muralibus rimis herbas in cibum traximus**,  
**huius tam inclitae pacis**, ‘this wonderful peace’: *Tam* is Luetjohann’s amendment of *tamen* codd. *Tam* can be interpreted as an indicator of irony or sarcasm, cf. below sect. 5 *concordiae tam turpis*.


**avulsas muralibus rimis herbas in cibum traximus**, ‘we tore the grass from the cracks in the walls to eat’: The motive of the eating of herbs and grasses in an extreme situation, during a campaign or siege, is well known. Here it is nicely visualized by the words *muralibus rimis*, which take us to the walls of beleaguered Clermont. These *murales rimae* refer back to the decrepit state of the walls and their desperate defenders in 7.1.2 *ambustam murorum faciem aut putrem sudium cratem aut propugnacula vigilum trita pectoribus*.

For this motive, and its context of heroism, cf. e.g. Suet. Caes. 68.2 (Caesar’s troops) *famem et ceteras necessitates, non cum obsiderentur modo sed et si ipsi alios obsiderent, tanto opere tolerabant, ut Dyrrchina munitione Pompeius viso genere panis ex herba, quo sustinebantur, cum feris sibi rem esse dixerit amoverique oculis nec cuiquam ostendi iussert, ne patientia et pertinacia hostis animi suorum frangerentur*, ‘They bore hunger and other hardships, both when in a state of siege and when besieging others, with such fortitude, that when Pompey saw in the works at Dyrrchium a kind of bread made of herbs, on which they were living, he said that he was fighting wild beasts; and he gave orders that it be put out of sight quickly and shown to none of his men, for fear that the endurance and resolution of the foe would break their spirit’ (transl. Rolfe, ed. Loeb). Cf. also Sen. Ep. 17.7 *exercitus … vixerunt herbarum radicibus et dictu foedis tulerunt famem*.

The same in poetic terms by (again! see above sect. 2 *audebant se quondam fratres Latio dicere*) Lucan: 6.110-13 (Caesar at the siege of Dyrrchium):

... *cernit miserabile vulgus*  
*in pecudum cecidisse cibos et carpere dumos  
et foliis spoliare nemus letunque minantis  
vellere ab ignotis dubias radicibus herbas*.

‘Caesar saw his wretched men lying on the ground to eat the food of beasts, plucking the bushes, rifling the trees of their leaves, and culling from strange roots suspicious plants that threatened death’ (transl. Duff, ed. Loeb).

For the added motive of the incidental toxicity of the grasses, which is also incorporated by Sidonius, see below.
In Luc. 4.412-14 we have the eating of grasses which grow in the encampment itself. As in Sidonius, it is a last and desperate measure, when everything has been tried:

... spoliarat gramine campum
miles et attonso miseris iam dentibus arvo
castrorum siccas de caespite volserat herbas.

‘The soldiers had robbed the field of its grass; and, when they had nibbled the blades close with starving teeth, they had torn the withered tufts from the sods that formed the camp’ (transl. Duff, ed. Loeb).

The motive of eating poisonous herbs survived into the vitae of saints, cf. Sulp. Sev. Mart. 6.5 f. (a priest who keeps Saint Martin company on the isle of Gallinaria) hic aliquandiu radicibus vixit herbarum: quo tempore helleborum, venenatum, ut ferunt, gramen, in cibum sumsit. sed cum vim veneni in se grassantis vicina iam morte sensisset, inminens periculum oratione repulit statimque omnis dolor fugatus est. Heroism is succeeded by saintliness.

The collocation muralibus rimis, ‘the cracks in the walls’, is found only here. For the adjective cf. 3.7.4 a muralibus excubiis ... receptui canere, ‘to retreat from their posts on the walls’. Cels. 2.33.2 herba muralis is a species of plant growing on walls (see TLL 8: 1669.49 ff.).

In cibum traximus, ‘we used as food’: Note the emotion conveyed by the use of the first person. Sidonius has completely identified himself with the cause of Clermont. The collocation is unique. Trahere in/ad, ‘to take as’, ‘use as’, is found in phrases like trahere in exemplum, ‘to use as an example’, cf. Ov. Met. 244 f. ille ... spinas ... / traxit in exemplum, and trahere in sententiam, ‘to coin as a maxim’, cf. Sen. Con. 9.2.21 omnia ... verba in sententias trahere. Cf. synonymous sumere in/ad, e.g. Quint. Inst. 7.2.35 (causas) quas (reus) in argumentum sumet, Novatian. Cib. Iud. 7.3 in cibum sumitur. The choice of traximus, instead of sumpsimus, here may have been influenced by the cognate avulsas.

crebro per ignorantiam venenatis graminibus infecti,

As we have seen, this motive probably stems from Lucan. It enhances the miserable picture we get of the defenders. Not only are they condemned to eating grass, the grasses are often poisonous, without their knowing it. They are victims, not only of their Gothic neighbours and of Roman insouciance, but also of nature.

venenatis graminibus infecti, ‘poisoned by toxic grasses’: Cf. e.g. Verg. A. 7.341 Gorgoneis Allecto infecta venenis, and metaphorically e.g. Lucif. Non parc. 31 CC SL 8 p. 254 l. 10 apud tuam infectam venenis Arrianae dogmatis conscientiam, ‘towards your mind which has been poisoned by the venom of the Arian doctrine’.

quae indiscretis foliis sucisque viridantia saepe manus fame concolor legit?

The author pursues his description, and now zooms in on the colour green. Green was the colour of the grasses they ate, toxic or not, and green was the colour of their emaciated hands with which they gathered them. Here we meet again a mannered conceit, characteristic of this paragraph: the succulent grass with its green leaves and the hand fame concolor, ‘coloured the same from starvation’. The play is on the equivocal meaning of viridans, green
of life, green of death. On detailed description and mannerism, see General Introduction, sect. 6.2 Style and par. 6.4.1 Mannerism?

indiscretis foliis sucisque, ‘with nothing to distinguish their leaves or sap’ (Anderson): All of the grasses were green, the healthy as well as the noxious. Cf. the distinction in medicine, Cels. 2.21 mali ... suci, 2.25.2 quicquid boni suci est.

viridantia, ‘green’, is less common than viridia, and mainly poetical, cf. e.g. Lucr. 2.33 viridantis ... herbas, Culex 50 viridantia graminia, but also Plin. Nat. 8.117 hedera ... viridante. Sidonius uses both forms indiscriminately in his correspondence, three times viridans, 4.20.2 viridantia saga, ‘green coats’, 7.6.8 herbosa viridentium altarium latera (q.v.), four times viridis, e.g. 5.17.4 pars caespite in viridi sed floribus odoro consederamus, ‘some of use sat down on the green grass, which was fragrant with flowers’. The same for his poetry. Rhythm and metre seem to decide the choice.

Green is the colour of growth and vigour, Suet. Ves. 5.4 arbor ... vidirior ac firmior resurrexit and passim, but also of poor health, ‘pale’, ‘yellowish’, Greek χλωρός, e.g. Ciris 225 f. viridis ... pallor / aegroto tenuis suffundit sanguine venas, ‘a livid pallor covers your delicate skin with diseased blood in the veins’, synonymous with pallidus, cf. Verg. A. 3.217 f. pallida semper / ora fame, ‘their faces are always pallid with hunger’. Cf. Sidon. Carm. 16.122 livida defuncti si pauperis ossa virescant, ‘although a green hue is spreading over the livid remains of a deceased pauper’.

manus fame concolor legit, ‘(the green grasses which) were plucked by a hand that starvation had made as green as they’ (Anderson): Manus legit is a bold: the hand is personalized. The focus, amid all the turmoil of war, is on this telling detail - highly rhetorical so as to be highly moving. Cf. the starving inhabitants of Clermont touching somebody: Ep. 3.3.5 digitis lusescentibus, ‘with livid fingers’, and also Carm. 2.180 f. ferretque venenum / pallida ... lictoris dextra, ‘when the pale hand of the executioner reached (Socrates) the poison’.

Concolor, ‘having the same colour’, ‘matching’, occurs mainly in poetry since Verg. A. 8.82 f. candida ... cum fetu concolor albo / ... sus, ‘a white sow with her piglet white like she’. Of pale complexion, Stat. Silv. 4.7.16 pallidus fessor redit erutoque concolor auro, ‘the mine worker returns, pale like the gold he has dug up’. Gualandri 1979: 42 f. has discussed the spectrum of its application in Sidonius, which ranges from the reflection of sunlight on a gilt ceiling (Carm. 27.10 = Ep. 2.10.4) to the pallor of death and sorrow (comes Victorius at the death bed of the monk Abraham, Ep. 7.17.1 supra vultum propinqua morte pallentem dolore concolor factus. Gualandri concludes: ‘Non vi è quindi situazione che non conceda lo sfoggio del preziosismo, stilistico e concettuale’ (p. 43). On the preoccupation of late antiquity with colour, see Roberts 1989: 76 ff. and passim.

Looking back on the section so far, we have a perfect example of what Roberts 1989: 12 defined as literary excellence, as understood in late antiquity: ‘It is just this combination of regularity of outline, and brilliance and variation in detail, that the period most prized. A poet won admiration for skill in handling such restricted virtuoso passages and consequently sought to incorporate such passages into his work.’ But that is only part of the truth. Rather than being a virtuoso passage for its own sake, its cool beauty strangely matches the ugly facts it describes. Reasoned artistry is marshalled to master a repulsive reality. The
manneristic tension of rhetorical conceit and personal tragedy engenders a ‘surrealistic’ work of art. This tension is, in the end, a faithful portrait of Sidonius’ ambivalence regarding reason and emotion. For this problem, see General Introduction, sect. 6.2 Style and par. 6.4.1 Mannerism?.

pro his tot tantisque devotionis experimentis nostri, quantum audio, facta iactura est.

tot tantisque, ‘so many and so great’, was especially dear to Cicero, for whom it is attested no fewer than twenty times. Among other authors, cf. especially, akin to our phrase, Plin. Pan. 21.1 nonne his tot tantisque meritis novos aliquos honores, novos titulos merebare?, ‘did not you deserve new honours and titles for these numerous and impressive merits?’ In Sidonius also Carm. 7.20 tot tantique petunt simul Gigantes. Elsewhere in Sidonius the plural tanti, standing alone, is synonymous with tot, e.g. 7.6.9 tantorum … populum fidem, ‘the faith of so many people’.

devotionis experimentis, ‘proofs of devotion’, ‘loyalty’: For devotio, see my comment on 7.1.6 qua devotione placatus. The phrase is construed like 7.1.4 post virtutum experimenta (q.v.), cf. 6.8.1 (Amantius) creditoribus bene credulis sola deponit morum experimenta pro pignore, ‘… the tested experience of his character’ (Anderson). Cf. e.g. Tac. Germ. 28.4 Ubii … experimento fidei super ipsam Rheni ripam collocati, ‘… because of their proven loyalty’. The collocation is found one more time in the fourth cent. translation by Hegesippus of Flav. Jos. Hist. 2.2 quo devotionis nostrae detur experimentum.

nostri … facta iactura est, ‘we have been jettisoned’: Nostri vulgo: nostri codd. The lapse in the codices is easily explained as a result of the preceding experimentis. Nostri is certainly correct, and is a gen.obj. dependent on iactura. Mossberg 1934: 45 also reads nostri, but adduces it as an example of two genitives, together defining one noun (i.e. experimentis). It is one of his rare mistakes.

By its first position, and by the insertion of quantum audio, which delays the introduction of verb and subject, nostri is strongly emphasised. Both Anderson and Loyen in their translation neglect this fact.

iactura, ‘the action of throwing overboard’, ‘jettison’, to relieve a ship in case of emergency, e.g. Cic. Off. 3.89 quaecumque si in mari iactura facienda sit, equine pretiosi potius iacturam faciant an servuli vilis. Clermont is thrown overboard to relieve the empire. See also Ep. 7.9.3 iudicii sui faciens plebs … iacturam, ‘the people have sacrificed their right to decide’.

quantum audio, ‘as I am informed’: A polite – perhaps ironical – way to state something that is certain. Cf. 2.1.4 si nullae, quantum rumor est, Anthemii principis opes (it is sure the emperor will not come to help, but Sidonius deferentially concedes the possibility), 8.6.2 praeconio, quantum comperi, immenso, ‘with extraordinary approval, if I am well informed’ (Sidonius has received a flattering critique, but wonders whether his ears have deceived him). Quantum audio belongs to the idiom of comedy, e.g. Pl. Mil. 166, only to surface again in the fifth cent. in Sulp. Sev. Dial. 1.12.2. After him we find it in Ruricius, Ennodius and Gregory of Tours.
Section 4

pudeat vos, precamur, huius foederis, nec utilis nec decori.

pudeat vos, ‘be ashamed’: This vos and the following ones are real plurals. Sidonius through Graecus harangues all four of the bishops. See the discussion of the first and second persons in this letter, above in sect. 1 ioculariter … garrire.m.

The phrase with coni. adh. + personal pronoun is not very common. For a parallel with genitive, Salv. Gub. 7.23 pudeat vos, Romani ubique populi, pudeat vitae vestrae.

precamur, ‘we pray’: The plural includes the author and the people of Clermont. The semi-interjection precor also 4.1.5, 7.11.2, and 8.6.17. Parataxis instead of a final clause is often found with verbs like obsecro, quaeso, oro, amabo. Compare, a few lines down, veniabilis sit, quaeumus. See LHS 2: 472 and 529 f.

nec utilis nec decori, ‘neither effective nor appropriate’: Utilis and decorus stem from rhetorical and ethical theory and practice. Utilitas is that which is in the interest of the cause (see Lausberg: 126 ff., 174, 510 f.), here especially the utilitas publica/communis (cf. e.g. Her. 2.13.20 ex aequo et bono ius constat quod ad veritatem et utilitatem communem videtur pertinere). Decorum (πρέπον) is that which is ‘in accordance with the person of the speaker, his subject and his audience’ (Leeman 1963: 32; see further Lausberg: 144 f., 507 ff.), here especially with the moral requirements of the situation. Decorum here is close to honestum, ‘that which is morally honourable’, καλόν. Can it have been chosen because of the preceding pudeat? See the discussion about utile and honestum in Cic. Off. book 3.

Utilitas and decor/honestum are inextricably bound up with each other, as Cic. Off. 2.9 contends. They may coincide, Lact. Opif. 2.8 adeo miro modo consentit utilitas cum decore, or stand in a hierarchical relation, Ambr. Off. 2.3.14 liquet igitur id quod decorum est, semper esse utile.

per vos legationes meant;

‘Via you the delegations come and go’: This is shorthand for 7.6.10 per vos mala foederum currunt, per vos regni utriusque pacta condicione/ pata portantur (q.v.). Even between letters Sidonius takes care to vary his diction: meant v. currunt, portantur. For this variation technique, see General Introduction, sect. 6.2 Style.

For meare per, ‘to travel via’, cf. e.g. Lucr. 6.777 multa meant inimica per auris, ‘much which is harmful enters through the ears’.

vobis primum pax quamquam principe absente non solum tractata reseratur, verum etiam tractanda committitur.

According to Stevens 1933: 208 f. this implies ‘that there was an embassy of the Four Bishops who merely ratified the convention made by Epiphanius, and perhaps drew up specific terms for it. … Here the sense of the words seems to be that Graecus is responsible for drafting the terms of a treaty: it is not at all implied that Graecus is the originator of a peace, it is rather implied that he is not.’ See also comment on 7.6.10 about the treaties.
pax, ‘(peace) treaty’, ‘(peace) conditions’: Cf. e.g. Prosp. c. Coll. 6.1 (about a reprehensible compromise) ut adhuc nobis de iniquissima huius foederis tui pace tractandum sit, ‘so that we still have to negotiate the utterly unfair conditions of this peace treaty of yours’.

quamquam principe absentе, ‘despite the absence of the Emperor’: The Emperor Julius Nepos (474-75) had remained in Italy and left the negotiations to the four bishops. All modern historians agree upon the rationale behind this decision. Stevens 1933: 158 thought it understandable that Nepos preferred securing the ‘wealthy and contiguous Provence’ to the ‘distant and isolated’ Auvergne. ‘By doing so, he would at least ensure his own security.’ Harries 1994: 236 f. wrote: ‘When Julius Nepos became emperor, he had more pressing problems on his mind than the fate of Clermont’, followed by a detailed analysis of the political situation in Gaul. See Ward-Perkins’ commentary cited at sect. 2 facta est servitus nostra.

As far as family matters were concerned, this emperor was looked upon gratefully by Sidonius, because he had advanced his wife’s brother Ecdicius to the patriciate, probably to strengthen the indigenous forces in the conflict with the Visigoths. Sidonius wrote 5.16.2 hoc tamen sancte Iulius Nepos, armis pariter summus Augustus ac moribus, ... absolvit, ‘however, Julius Nepos, an Emperor who is supreme in arms [sic!] as well as character, has settled this correctly’. Cf. 8.8.4 sub iusto principe. More in general, however, the theme of ‘imperial neglect’ was often heard in Gaul: see Mathisen 1993: 17-26 on Gallic isolationism – a trend which Sidonius opposed.

Apart from psychological considerations, the absence of the Emperor need not have had practical consequences, as the imperial praesentia accompanied his officials and delegates even in his absence. See e.g. Cod. Theod. 2.1.3 (interpr.) in omnibus personis, quas etiam praesentiae nostrae dignitas comitatur, ‘in all persons who are accompanied by the dignity of our presence’, viz. persons who act as my (the emperor’s) plenipotentiaries.

tractata ... tractanda, ‘once negotiated … still to be negotiated’: The outlines of the treaty have been established by Epiphanius. The four bishops negotiate the details.

For tractare, ‘negotiate’, ‘decide upon’, cf. e.g. Hist. Aug. Tac. 12.1 pace<m> ac bella senatu auctore tractanda, Tac. Ann. 12.60.4 C. Oppius et Cornelius Balbus primi Caesaris opibus potuere condiciones pacis et arbitria belli tractare, ‘… were the first to be able to decide issues of peace and war’. Compare the noun tractatus in 7.6.6 tractatum consiliorumque successum, with my comment.

reseratur, ‘is made known’, ‘disclosed’, cf. e.g. Ov. Met. 15.145 augustae reserabo oracula mentis, ‘I will unfold the secrets of the heavenly mind’. It is initially a poetic verb. Sidonius uses it eleven times in his correspondence, its meaning ranging from ‘to open’ (literally), via ‘to make known’, ‘disclose’, to weakened ‘to inform’, ‘tell’. See Köhler 1995: 215 ad 1.5.11 cetera laborum meorum molimina reserabantur, ‘I will tell you the other problems of my undertaking’ (by the way: the results of the embassy to the emperor in which Sidonius participated AD 467).
veniabilis sit, quae sumus, apud aures vestras veritatis asperitas, cui convicii invidiam dolor eripit.

veniabilis, ‘pardonable’. Occurs five times in the letters, also 4.11.3 culpa veniabilis erat, once in book 8, twice in book 9. It is found since the fourth century, see Amherdt 2001: 290 ad 4.11.3. For the suffix –bilis in late authors see Amherdt 2001: 199 ad 4.6.1 culpabiles.

apud aures vestras, ‘to your ears’: Apud aures is not very common. It occurs since Tac. Agr. 44.5 quod augurio votisque apud nostras aures ominabatur, ‘what he hoped and prayed for, and predicted to my ears’, and Ann. 4.29.3 quaedam contumacious quam tum apud aures superbas, ‘some things too insolent to be safe when heard by (Tiberius’) easily offended ears’. For later authors compare e.g. Fro. Ep. 7.5 (to Antoninus Pius) ne quid loci malignis hominibus adversus me apud aures tuas pateat, ‘that you may not lend your ear to …’, Symm. Rel. 21.7 apud aures enim sacras locum postea non habebit, ‘it will not be well received by Your Majesty afterwards’.
The context is often one of speaking with the emperor or other dignitaries. Cicero wrote in auribus, e.g. Ver. 7 in auribus vestris. The phrase belongs to the repertory of epistolary politeness, cf. 7.2.2 salva vestrarum aurium severitate (q.v.).

Vestras most probably refers to Graecus alone, as Anderson saw (note 2 ad loc.).

veritatis asperitas, ‘the harsh truth’: For the gen. inversus, see my comment on 7.1.5 orationum frequentia. For the phrasing, cf. Ambrosiast. in Tim. 2.4.4 quia veritas illis aspera videbitur, Aug. Ep. 33.3 aspera veritate. That truth is bitter (but healthy) is one of Jerome’s favourites, e.g. Hier. adv. Pelag. 1.26 veritas amara est; cf. Aug. Ep. 247.1 veritas et dulcis est et amara. Already Cic. Att. 3.17.3 cave vereare ne … veritas acerba sit, ‘do not shrink from telling me the unpleasant truth’.

convicii invidiam, ‘the odium of mere abuse’ (Anderson), ‘the risk of being judged abusive’: Cf. 7.6.3 sub vanitatis invidia causam prodere veritatis, ‘to speak the truth at the risk of being thought arrogant’, with my comment.

The thought is proverbial: veritas odium parit, ‘man makes enemies by speaking the truth’. See Ter. Andr. 68 obsequium amicos, veritas odium parit, which was cited many times, from Cic. Amic. 89 and Quint. Inst. 8.5.4 to Hier. adv. Pelag. 1.26 and Aug. Ep. 82.31, with all variants in between. See Otto 1890: 368 s.v. veritas 3 and Otto 1968: Register s.v. veritas.

Invidia is a key word in Sidonius, also in the sense of jealousy, e.g. 1.2.1 regni … invidia. Jealousy, criticism, prejudice, partisanship play a dominant role in his world, from literary criticism to Gallic factions. See General Introduction, sect 3.3 Gallo-Roman aristocracy.

The sharp criticism which follows has been introduced, and somewhat softened, only by this one sentence, which is a far cry from the usual practice of extreme and verbose politeness.

parum in commune consulitis;
‘You do not care enough for the common cause.’

This, and what follows, is probably the most straightforward utterance Sidonius ever made in his correspondence. It must have hit hard. Actually, Sidonius was aware of the fact that his pen at times could be sharp, cf. 3.9.1 stilus … officiosus in titulis, asper in paginis, ‘my pen … respectful in the salutation, biting in the main part of a letter’.
For *in commune consulere*, cf. 3.12.3 (about Sidonius himself and a second party) *in commune consului*, ‘I acted in the interest of both’ (Anderson), and 7.9.3 (about the several parties in Bourges) *neque enim valuissemus aliquid in commune consulere*, ‘for I would not have been able to take a decision in the interest of all’. Thus already Ter. *Andr.* 548 *id te obsecro in commune ut consulas*, ‘I beg you to act in the interests of both sides’. In Sidonius, *in commune* concerns two sides (5.16.4 ‘both households’, 9.9.1 ‘we mutually’), or the whole (7.14.1 ‘collectively’, opp. *singuli quiique*). For the range of meanings *in commune* can have, see TLL 3: 1976.63 ff. See also Mossberg 1934: 66 ff.

In our case, the collective interests of the Empire, which should include the Auvergne, are opposed to the private concerns (*privatis ... fortunis*) of the four bishops, which exclude it. For *in commune v. privatus*, cf. e.g. *Oros.* *Hist.* 1.2.16 *apud Athenienses ... imminente periculo ... ubi necessitas incubuit, postpositis privatis causis atque odiis in commune consulitur*, ‘... private interests and conflicts are deferred, and people are united for the common good’.

*et, cum in concilium convenitis, non tam curae est publicis mederi periculis quam privatis studere fortunis;*

*et*, ‘namely’, introduces a more detailed statement to explain further *parum in commune consultis.*

**concilium**, ‘meeting’: Viz. of the provincial council of Provence, or what may have remained of the *Concilium Septem Provinciarum*. The word is unspecific enough to admit both Loyen’s interpretation (p. 191 n. 36), ‘l’assemblée des évêques négociateurs’, and Anderson’s (n. 4 ad loc.), who thinks of the *Concilium Septem Provinciarum*, to which Aquitanica prima belonged, or of the assembly of the bishops in the provinces. One might even think of the peace negotiations proper. However, as the parallel formulation of 1.3.3 *si ... in concilium veneris* (cf. 1.6.4 *concilii tempore*) refers to the *Concilium Septem Provinciarum* (see Köhler 1995: 174 ad loc.), I prefer taking it here in the same way. The bishops must have had regular meetings with (delegates of) the convention concerning the peace process. For the provincial assemblies, see LRE 763-66. In his chapter on Sidonius’ portrayal of Avitus as an envoy, Gillett 2003: 112 mentions the passage in passing for the pitfalls which threaten an ambassador.

**publicis ... periculis**, ‘the danger the state is in’: Cf. e.g. *Cic.* *Catil.* 3.7 *de periculo publico* (the conspiracy of Catiline), Liv. 2.52.7 *sed fervidi animi vir, ut in publico periculo ante, sic tum in suo, ... periculum audacia discussit*, ‘... as earlier in the danger to his town, then likewise in the danger to himself ...’.

**mederi**, ‘to heal’, ‘solve’: This is cited by Gualandri 1979: 116 n. 40 as one of many evocative metaphors in Sidonius. See, however, my comments on 7.6.1 *mederi de lapsuum eius adsiduitate*, and 7.5.3 *reficiamur*. In verbs like *mederi, consolari, reficere*, and *recreare*, the metaphor is scarcely felt as such: they tend to mean simply ‘to help’. For *mederi periculis*, cf. *Cic.* *Fam.* (Lentulus) 12.15.4 *neque imminenti Italiae urbique nostrae periculo, ... mederi, cum facile possent, voluerunt.*

**privatis ... fortunis**, ‘your own interests’: Apart from all kinds of possible personal interests, such as influence, money, career, they give preference to their own Provence, to the detriment of Sidonius’ Auvergne.
Promoting one’s own interests at the expense of the community is as condemnable as it is ineradicable. Lawgiver and preacher alike strive to contain it, cf. e.g. Cod. Theod. Novell. 10 quod plurimi respuant, qui domesticis tantum compendiais obsequentis bonum commune destituant, and Max. Taur. Serm. 26 l. 8 nec rem publicam gerere criminosum est, sed ideo agere rem publicam, ut rem familiaris potius augeas, videtur esse damnumile.

Again we have the thematic opposition publicis – privatis (see at sect. 2 viris propriis). Note the parallelism adjective – infinitive – noun.

quod utique saepe diuque facientes iam non primi comprovincialium coepistis esse, sed ultimi.

quod utique saepe diuque facientes, ‘as you have, without doubt, adopted this attitude repeatedly and over a long time’: Quod refers to the preceding non tam ... fortunis, their neglect of the common cause, and their egotism. Saepe diuque perhaps suggests that, even before the actual negotiations had begun, the four bishops had been considering a pro-Gothic policy. That would explain their being chosen for the embassy and their off-hand treatment of the question.

The collocation saepe diuque occurs only in Hor. Ep. 1.13.1 docui te saepe diuque, and Aug. in Psalm. 6.13 saepe diuque flentem.

non primi comprovincialium ... sed ultimi, ‘not the first among colleagues in your provinces, but the last’: For Sidonius, they have disqualified themselves. From the most important and respected bishops, they have become the least respectable ones. Loyen 3: 191 n. 36, followed by Bellès 3: a.l. n. 78, explains ultimi differently. The bishops are primi in prestige, ultimi in time. They will have no successors, once Euric has taken over (see Euric’s church policy in 7.6.7). Sidonius says as much in the sentence which follows about the maiores of the Gallo-Romans, who will have no minores. For the preoccupation with rank among bishops, see my comment on 7.5.4 honoris vestri praerogativam and 7.6.10 ordine.

Finally, one can possibly surmise an allusion to Matth. 20.16 sic erunt novissimi primi et prumi novissimi, ‘thus will the last be first, and the first last’ (cf. Matth. 19.30). That would be the only, flitting, signal of Christian language in this letter. The Vetus Latina as well as the Vulgata have primi – novissimi in this text. By his formulation – ultimi instead of novissimi – Sidonius adapts it to his own idiom, for he generally prefers ultimus to novissimus (only 3.3.4 quos novissimos agmini non ignavia sed audacia fecerat). Cf. Iuvenc. 3.549 ultima praeteriti capient vix praemia primi.

Savaron and Sirmond had a different explanation in mind. According to them the clause is only about Graecus. His diocese, Marseille, had been the second most important (primi comprovincialium) in the province of Arles. As the other towns of the province had been annexed by either the Visigoths or the Burgundians, only Marseille was left (ultimi).

However, the second person plural in this passage must be a real plural, which follows from the words about the consultations of the bishops, cum in concilium convenitis, ‘when (the four of) you gather for a meeting’ (see Loyen 3: 191 n. 36). Secondly, Graecus cannot be blamed for annexations which were the result of sheer military aggression, and had nothing to do with current or past negotiations. Finally, blowing up an ecclesiastical province cannot logically be said to be in the interest of its second most important diocese.
Comprovincialis, ‘colleague’, is the t.t. for a fellow bishop in a province, found since the fifth cent., e.g. Conc. Gall. 1: 114 l. 12 episcopo sine metropolitano vel epistula metropolitani vel tribus comprovincialibus non liceat ordinare, ‘let it not be allowed to a bishop to ordain without the metropolitan or a letter from the metropolitan or three provincial colleagues’.

coepistis esse, ‘you have become’: Equivalent to facti estis. Cf. Prop. 4.4.74 hic primus coepit moenibus esse dies, ‘this day became the anniversary of our town’, which is not pleonastic, as OLD s.v. coepi thinks it is. See my comment on 7.1.2 coepit initiari. For the phrasing, cf. 4.4.1 cum esset amabilis prius, coepit modo esse venerabilis.

Section 5

at quousque istae poterunt durare praestigiae?

This is Sidonius’ *quoque tandem?*, without any restraint: ‘Say, how long can this jugglery possibly last?’

at quousque, ‘well, how long?’: This *at* is traditionally called ‘pathetic’, expressing strong emotions; see KS 2: 84 f., TLL 2: 995.1 ff. See, however, the reconsideration of the phenomenon in Kroon 1995: 357 ff. (359 f. about ‘indignant and irritated’ questions). ‘Instead of expressing irritation or indignation …, *at* can better be taken as marking a reaction to the observed fact that someone is (still) not behaving as he is expected to do’ (p. 360). Compare her opinion about *at* in exclamations: it is ‘interactional’, precluding possible objections from the reader (‘occupatio’) (p. 358). In Sidonius’ letters, cf. 4.1.4 at qualium, deus bone, quamque pretiosorum (sc. mandatorum), ‘but what marvellous precepts they were!’, 4.3.4 at vero in libris tuis iam illud quale est, ‘yet how well done this is in your books!’.

*At quousque* is attested nowhere else. Impatient *quoque* occurs also, up to four times, in Ep. 8.8.1. In epistolography in similar contexts e.g. Cic. Att. 15.22 *quoque ludemur?*, Symm. Ep. 2.35 *quoque ... verba blaterabimus?*, Ennod. Ep. 2.6 *quoque tantum licebit absentiae?*

istae ... praestigiae, ‘those dirty tricks’: *Istae* has its full negative force. For *praestigia*, ‘trick’, ‘deceit’, cf. 7.2.8 *praestigiator*, ‘juggler’. The tricks consist in the unreliable, pro-Gothic attitude of the negotiatiors, who have sacrificed the Auvergne.

The choice of the word *praestigiae* is crucial to our understanding of this letter. It is the only instance of the noun in Sidonius, as is the case with *praestigiator*. The reader of letter 7 will remember the conspicuous word from letter 2, and vice versa. As I have contended in the introduction to letter 2, section 1 *Overview*, that letter is a kind of distorting mirror, which captures and puts into perspective the grim war and its participants. In it, the juggler is the letter-bearer Amantius, in letter 7 it is bishop Graecus himself. The *praestigiae* in letter 2 – private and played by a subordinate – could be looked upon with a smile, but here, in the full light of world politics and episcopal responsibility, they are utterly condemnable. Amantius remains *invictus*, the bishop ends up as *ultimus*. The petty tradesman in love, who brings his newly acquired possessions to Clermont, and the mighty, but distant, bishop, who sells out the Roman possessions in Clermont, form a telling pair, to the lasting shame of the latter.

poterunt durare, ‘can last’: Cf. Hyg. Astr. 4.3 (of life at the pole) *quare magis his locis nemo potest durare*, ‘… can see it through’, Sen. Dial. 12.18.4 *Marcum blandissimum puerum, ad cuius
The future tense marks the impatient question (see above).

non enim diutius ipsi maiores nostri hoc nomine gloriabuntur, qui minores incipiunt non habere.

enim, ‘because’: If the betrayal does not stop, the Gallo-Roman tradition handed on from generation to generation will be done for.

maiores ... minores, ‘our forebears ... (their) posterity’: There is no future for Clermont – and not for the bishops either, for that matter (they have overplayed their hand; see above at non primi comprovincialium ... sed ultimi) – if the treaty with Euric is concluded. Maiores nostri has its usual meaning, ‘our ancestors’, found since Cato Agr. praef. 1 - a meaning we are prepared for since the reference to the glorious past in sect. 2, si prisca replicarentur. They may be the oldest generation still alive, but we can also imagine Sidonius conjuring up the ancestors, the people who used se quondam fratres Latium dicere et sanguine ab Iliaeco populos computare (sect. 2), and letting them participate in this crucial moment.

This is the opinion of Dalton, Anderson and Bellès. I think it preferable to Loyen’s solution ‘supérieurs’ v. ‘inférieurs’. That would be a totally unexpected use of maiores nostri, and of minores as well. Moreover, who could these superiors and subordinates be? Senior and junior bishops? That would be completely at variance with the theme of the letter, the legacy of Rome (while letter 6 is about the threat to catholicism). The emperor and his subjects? But Julius Nepos has just been seen to be only distantly involved in the proceedings. He cannot be the focal point of the reasoning here. Therefore, the simplest solution for maiores – minores is the best. They are the people of Clermont, in the past and in the future – if there is a future.

For the future tense with maiores, cf. Cic. Planc. 52 quae tibi ultro pater et maiores tui ... dicent., ‘that is what your father and forefathers will tell you spontaneously’. For the position between two generations, Ov. Tr. 4.10.55 ut ... ego maiores, sic me coluere minores, ‘as I admired the older (poets), the next generation admired me’.

hoc nomine, ‘this name’: The name, and honour, of being maiores, old and venerable. There are no maiores, if there are no minores. Dalton translates: ‘the name of Rome’, but I cannot see how hoc could refer to a notion as distant as sect. 2.

incipiunt ... habere, ‘are going to have’, ‘will soon have’: For this periphrastic future tense see my comment on 7.6.3 incipit imminere. Stylistically, it here provides variety after the straightforward future gloriabuntur.

Gualandri 1979: 20 n. 70 suggested a comparison of this passage with 8.6.3 licet quis provocatus nunc ad facta maiorum non inertissimus, quis quoque ad verba non infantissimus erit?, ‘yet who, if challenged in these days to match our forefathers’ achievements, will not prove a sluggard, and who confronted with their words will not be like a speechless child?’ (Anderson). She supposed the same fatalism, the feeling of living per aetatem mundi iam senescentis, to be present here. This, however, is not the point in our phrase. The point here is the loss of function of the ancestors, whereas in 8.6.3 it is the feeling of not coming up to the mark of the children.
quapropter vel consilio, quo potestis, statum concordiae tam turpis incidite.

vel consilio, quo potestis, ‘at least with all the diplomacy you possess’, ‘with all possible inventiveness’: For vel = saltem in later Latin, see LHS 2: 502, Blaise s.v. vel 6.

For consilio, quo potestis, cf. e.g. 6.5.1 laborem peregrinantum qua potestis ope humanitate intercessione tutamini, ‘… with might and main …’, Aug. c. Iulian. op imperf. 5 PL 45: 1443.45 cum illud iustum esse, qua potestis voce, clametis, ‘… at the top of your voice …’. As is seen in these examples, the relative clause often precedes the noun, but cf. e.g. Arnob. Iun. in Psalm. 62 l. 36 arte qua potes quasi astutus eripias, ‘as shrewdly as possible …’. An alternative translation is: ‘in consultation, the (only) means you have (to put an end to it)’: potestis sc. incidere, ‘you can cancel it’. Diplomacy is the only possibility you have to reach your goal, as armed resistance for you is out of the question. Translators, however, prefer to take potestis absolutely: ‘by counsel, in which you have the power’ (Anderson), ‘en agissant … sur le Conseil où vous avez du pouvoir’ (Loyen), ‘amb el vostre consell, que us dóna autoritat’ (Bellès). I find this less helpful, because in such cases posse takes an acc. int. obi., like plus, tantum, aliquid. See OLD s.v. possum 8a. Note that Loyen thought of a consultative body (of the bishops? or the Concilium septem provinciarum?).

statum concordiae, ‘the formal treaty’, lit. ‘the legal status of the agreement which has been reached’: Also found in 6.2.3 in omnem concordiae statum promptius a feminea parte descensum est, where Sidonius, when trying to mediate between a presbyter and a pious matron, found to his surprise that ‘the woman had the greater readiness to reach some sort of agreement’. Cf. 6.4.3 iurgii status, ‘(the situation of) this quarrel’, again of a juridical procedure. For status, ‘legal force’, see Heumann-Seckel s.v. status a. For the several connotations it has in Sidonius, see my comment on 7.1.3 statu urbis exinanito.

Concordia is the agreement reached between the negotiators and Euric, cf. 7.6.10 amicitiae concordia principalis, ‘the essence of the agreement on the alliance’, and my comment ad loc.

tam turpis, ‘so disgraceful’: If anything, the treaty is disgraceful because Rome stoops to barbarians. In this ‘patriotic’ letter, even the word concordia itself comes into play. Concordia is at the root of the Roman res publica. Applied to a treaty with the barbarians, it is defiled. Thus, it is with the utmost sarcasm that the author writes it down here. For the function of tam in this connection, as an indicator of irony/sarcasm, see above on sect. 3 huius tam inclitae pacis.

Neither the collocation status concordiae, nor concordia turpis occur outside Sidonius, but cf. Cic. Phil. 7.9.9 cur igitur pacem nolo? quia turpis est, Cic. Att. 7.18.1 quoad sciremus utrum turpi pace nobis an miserò bello esset utendum.

adhuc, si necesse est, obsideri, adhuc pugnare, adhuc esurire delectat.
The anaphora provides pathos, together with the masochistic paradox of revelling in suffering. Cf. 7.13.3 *ieiuniis delectatur*, ‘he enjoys fasting’.

si vero tradimur, qui non potuimus viribus obtineri, invenisse vos
certum est quid barbarum suaderetis ignavi.

*qui non potuimus viribus obtineri*, ‘we who could no be taken by force’: The force is the force of the barbarians who time and again had tried to capture the town. It mirrors sect. 2 *viribus propriis*, the force of the Arvernians themselves.

*Obtinere*, ‘to conquer’, ‘overcome’, also with personal obj., is later Latin, cf. e.g. Rufin. *Clement*. 1.62.6 nam si ex eruditione aliqua disputans obtinerem vos sapientes et eruditos ... nunc autem cum, ut dixi, nos imperiti vos sapientes convincimus et superamus, ‘if I should defeat you because I am educated …, but now as we beat and overcome you in our ignorance …’, 3 Reg. 20.23 sed melius est ut pugnemus contra eos in campestribus, et obtinebimus eos, ‘let us fight them in the plain; then we will defeat them’.

*invenisse vos certum est quid barbarum suaderetis ignavi*, ‘it is certain that it is you who thought of the advice for the barbarian, cowards’: Shackleton Bailey 1982: 169 f. discovered the correct interpretation of this phrase: ‘*barbarum* is not neuter (‘the barbarous expedient” *vel sim.*) but masculine, as in 3.7.4 *etsi barbarus in hiberna concedat*. Translate: “It is certain that you have discovered what advice to give the barbarian in your cowardice,” i.e., it is you who have shown him how to conquer us.’ In footnote 2, he adds: ‘Rather, “what to say by way of persuading him (to make peace)”.’ This fits in seamlessly with *qui non potuimus viribus obtineri*: ‘We could not be taken by force, but now we have been defeated, by your treacherous machinations’. For *suadere alqm.*, ‘to counsel someone’, I refer to KS 1.103 and LHS 2: 33; cf. e.g. Apul. *Met*. 9.25 *uxorem eius tacite suasi ac denique persuasi*.

Mommsen, too, had seen that *barbarum* is masculine, but his guess *adiuvaretis* is less happy. We can safely eliminate Anderson’s ‘the barbarous expedient’ and Loyen’s ‘la solution la plus barbare’.

Note the full, contemptuous force of *ignavi* at the end of the sentence, in the clausula.

**Section 6**

*sed cur dolori nimio frena laxamus?*

*sed cur ...?*, ‘but why ...?’: Cf. 7.8.4 *sed cur ego ista haec ineptus adieci?* For this kind of phrase, with which the author pretends to interrupt himself, see my comment on 7.10.1 *sed quid de Amantino loquar?*

*dolori*, ‘distress’, refers back to sect. 4 *dolor*. After giving vent to his anger, Sidonius now wisely swallows his own words. Here, towards the end, the tone gets – in the words of Gualandri 1979: 41 n. 24 – ‘più semplice e grave, di una rassegnata tristezza’.

*frena laxamus*, ‘I give free rein’: *Frena* and *freni* are both used as plural of *frenum*, *frena* perhaps being originally the poetic variant, see OLD s.v. *frenum*. The metaphor of giving free rein to emotions is topical, cf. e.g. Plin. *Ep*. 5.21.6 *sed quid ego indulgeo dolori? cui si frenos remittas, nulla materia non maxima est*, Claud. *Rapt. Pros*. 3.179 ff. *hanc adgressa Ceres, postquam*
suspiria tandem / laxavit frenosque dolor: ‘quod cernimus’ inquit / ’excidium?’.. Cf. Sidon. Ep. 4.11.7 lacrimis habenas ... laxavi, ‘I gave free rein to my tears’ (see Amherdt 2001: 301 f. ad loc.), and similarly 8.6.9 vel silentio lora laxare vel stringere frena garritui, ‘either to give silence a free rein or to put a strict curb on my garrulity’ (Anderson).

For the use of the first person plural laxamus, see the analysis on sect. 1 ioculariter … garrirem.

quin potius ignoscite afflictis nec imputate maerentibus.

The sentence again calls for sympathy, as had already been the case in sect. 4 convicis invidia dolor eripit, ‘my sorrow takes the sting out of what would otherwise be called abuse’. The message is emphasized by being stated twice, in a positive (‘forgive us’) as well as in a negative (‘do not blame us’) way.

It once more defines the inhabitants of Clermont as the victims of Roman Realpolitik. At the same time, it diplomatically cedes the initiative to the stronger party, and, by maximizing the consequences for the underdog, aims to get as profitable a solution as possible.

quin potius, ‘rather’: The thought is: ‘Wailing any longer is no use. Forgive me for all this fuss, and help us rather.’ See OLD s.v. quin 2b and 3c ‘emphasizing an objection’. Cf. 7.8.4 quin potius, with my comment, for a different logical connection. See also, for different logical connections, 7.6.4 and 7.8.1, with my comment. The situation here is of the same type as in 7.8.4. The author corrects himself, after a rhetorical question like 2.10.4 sed quorsum ista? quin potius etc., or 2.2.11 quid haec tibi ... ? quin potius etc. Neither Cicero nor Symmachus in their correspondence use this stylistic device of a rhetorical question followed by quin potius, but Pliny does: Plin. Ep. 3.13.5 sed quid ego haec doctissimo viro? quin potius illud etc., 6.8.9 quamquam quid denuntiationibus et quasi minis ago? quin potius, ut coeperam, rogo des operam

ignoscite afflictis nec imputate maerentibus, ‘forgive our embarrassment and do not blame our gloominess’: Cf. e.g. Ep. 5.7.7 quod principaliter medetur afflictis, ‘this is especially helpful in our distressing situation’, and 2.13.5 nec fedellerunt futura maerentem, ‘his gloomy anticipations did not go unfulfilled’ (Anderson) - both phrases used in situations of political tension. For the use of virtual synonyms, like afflictis and maerentibus, see General Introduction, sect. 6.2 Style.

namque alia regio tradita servitium sperat, Arverna supplicium.

For all rhetorical purposes, the pathos is sublime: any other region would incur slavery, but we Arvernians will be butchered. Historical reality was different. Stevens 1933: 161: ‘Events proved, however, that this forecast was much exaggerated: indeed, Euric saw that only by conciliation could his dream of a Gallic kingdom be realized: Clermont was not destroyed, and there is no record of its inhabitants being punished.’ The mandate of comes Victorius was extended, which turned out favourably for the Catholics. Only the leaders were discarded: Ecdicius went into exile, Sidonius was taken captive and isolated.

namque, ‘for’: For a discussion of this variant of nam, see my comment on 7.1.1 namque odiis.

sperat, ‘can expect’: For sperare, ‘to anticipate’, ‘expect’, cf. e.g. Cic. (Metellus Celer) Fam. 5.1.2 te tam mobili in me meosque esse animo non sperabam, ‘I had not expected that you would be so unreliable towards me and my environment’, Verg. A. 4.419 hunc ego si potui tantum sperare dolorem, ‘if I could have foreseen this great sorrow’.
Arverna, scil. regio, cf. 6.4.1 in Arvernum regionem, 9.9.3 territorium Arvernum.

sane si medicari nostris ultimis non valetis,

sane, ‘be that as it may’, ‘but okay’: Cf. 2.2.3 (why don’t you leave the stifling town, and join us here in my country estate?) sane si placet, quis sit agri in quem vocaris situs accipe, ‘well, that’s up to you (= sane), but let me tell you, if you don’t mind, what the place is like you’re being invited to’.

medicari, ‘to help’, ‘save’: With dat., cf. 2.7.2 aegritudini, 3.3.9 exspectationi aegrescenti, with acc., 4.14.3 res humanas vitasque. For the (weak) medical metaphor, see earlier at sect. 5 non publicis mederi periculis. One might say, that the bishop-doctors neglected public health, and were at a loss to assist the patient in extremis.

nostris ultimis, ‘in our extremity’: Cf. e.g. Verg. A. 2.446 f. his se, quando ultima cernunt, / ... parant defendere telis, ‘… as they see their end is near …’, Luc. 10.467 f. cogunt tamen ultima rerum/ spem pacis temptare ducem, ‘the commander was forced by his desperate plight to try and make peace’, Sen. Con. 2.4.4 nuntiatum est in ultimis esse filium.

salmem hoc efficite prece sedula, ut sanguis vivat, quorum est moritura libertas;

prece sedula, ‘by your urgent plea’: They will have to ask Euric humbly for leniency. Note that Sidonius obviously is not in a position to do so himself. Cf. 2.5.2 precem sedulam (a petition in a law suit), 9.6.4 precem sedula (a prayer to God). We find the collocation only once before Sidonius, Ps. Aug. Quaest. test. 112.16 quia ignotum erat ei, quare sic postulat sedula prece, and not often after him. Sedulus, ‘attentive’, ‘painstaking’, ‘sincere’, classical of persons, then also with abstract nouns since the first cent., e.g. Fron. Ag. 1 fides sedula, Apul. Met. 2.30 industriam sedulam. Cf. Sidon. Ep. 1.4.1 spectata sedulitas, ‘proven diligence’.


Sanguis vivat is a striking collocation. Its hidden dynamic becomes apparent if one looks back to section 2, where the lineage of the Arverni was nothing less than sanguine ab Iliaco, now condemned to servitus (here moritura libertas). The circle is complete.

est moritura libertas, ‘whose freedom is about to die’: Cf. extrema libertas in 2.1.4 (to Ecdicius) te exspectat palpitantium civium extrema libertas, ‘the agonizing freedom of the citizens eagerly expects you’. Again, boldly formulated. People die for freedom, but here freedom itself dies. The personification may derive from Tac. Ann. 1.74.5 manebant etiam tum vestigia morientis libertatis.

Harries 1994: 236 soberly commented: ‘These were fine phrases, but what was the reality behind them? Sidonius knew well enough that the “freedom” of Clermont had depended to a great extent on protection afforded by the Burgundians, and that, sooner or later, the precarious independence of Clermont, poised as the city was between the two barbarian powers, would have to be sacrificed.’ Sidonius knew well enough how to compromise. What he probably really resented was that he and his town ‘were excluded from the talks and no attempt was made by the negotiators to win safeguards for the Arverni and their bishop – an omission, which, for a time, would cost Sidonius dear.’ Mathisen 1984: 167, however, had
taken a much less detached position: ‘That this was no rhetorical exaggeration is demonstrated not only by Sidonius’ own subsequent exile, but also by the flight in 479 of Sidonius’ son Apollinaris and the comes and dux Victorius (so appointed by the Visigoths) to Rome in order to escape the wrath of the Visigothic king Euric (466-484).’ His judgement rests on a detailed analysis of aristocratic options under Visigothic pressure, which were either emigration (if not exile), or adaptation (if permitted). Some had to face execution, and quite a few economic ruin. See General Introduction, sect. 3.3 Gallo-Roman aristocracy.

parate exulibus terram, capiendis redemptionem, viaticum peregrinaturis.

Note the careful, tripartite structure. In the third member the word order is inverse. The sentence, in its restraint, is suggestive of the incredible misery of a population which is forced to leave hearth and home. One is again reminded of Ammianus’ description of the conquest of Nisibis, which I introduced for comparison earlier, at sect. 2 si recentia memorabantur. This time, see Amm. 25.9.5-6. Sidonius himself graphically described the throngs of prisoners created by Seronatus in Ep. 5.13.3 (see Chadwick 1955: 325).

parate, ‘prepare’: The emphatic imperative to finish and draw conclusions is also seen in 3.7.4 mandate perniciter ... palpate nos prosperis, ‘write soon ... comfort us with good tidings’. See Giannotti 2000: 164 ad loc.: ‘Quanto all’imperativo, va rilevato che talora Sidonio vi ricorre in concise sententiae per caricarne il messaggio di urgenza e di pathos.’

capiendis redemptionem, ‘ransom for the captives’: Capiendis, ‘those who will be taken captive’: for the gerundivum functioning like a part. fut. pass. in later Latin, see LHS 2: 394 See Harries 1994: 216 f. more generally on the role of the church in ransoming prisoners.

viaticum, ‘provision’, ‘travelling allowance’: The word also 5.7.3 qui invident ... viatica veraedariis, and 7.2.3 nihil est enim viatico levi gravius.

peregrinaturis, ‘refugees on their way’ (Anderson): From peregrinari, ‘to travel’, ‘go abroad’. Sidonius also invites a correspondent to help travellers in 6.5.1 laborem peregrinatum qua potestis ope humanitate intercessione tutamini. The part. fut. of this verb is rare, cf. e.g. Aug. Serm. 305A and Ennod. Ep. 8.33.

si murus noster aperitur hostibus, non sit clausus vester hospitibus.

The letter’s conclusion is a dignified doublet, with opposition and chiasmus noster aperitur – clausus vester, and paronomasia hostibus - hospitibus.

With respect to content, it is reminiscent of the passage in 2.1.4 si nullae ... Anthemii principis opes, statuit ... nobilitas seu patriam dimittere seu capillos, ‘if the Emperor Anthemius has no resources, then our nobility has resolved to give up either its country or its hair’ (Anderson). The ruling emperor, indeed, has finally sacrificed the Auvergne. The inhabitants have no choice but to leave the town, patriam dimittere. If ever the alternative, dimittere capillos, to enter the clerical order, had been possible, under the new administration there is no future for Catholicism – at least in Sidonius’ view. That is the mood in which we are taken to the next letter, where the ordination of Simplicius in Bourges will remind us of the frailty of Catholic hierarchy.