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

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Letter 10

‘War and Appeasement’

Introduction

1 Overview

‘Small but meaningful’ might be said about this letter. It is a polite letter of salutation to bishop Graecus with an apology for not coming in person, but within this narrow scope it is also about the great themes of war and individual appeasement. Sidonius briefly indicates his desperate position in the crumbling town of Clermont, and solicits Graecus’ favour.

I interpret this letter, and the next, as structural elements in book 7, small building blocks in Sidonius’ political construct. In addition, this is an argument in favour of the traditional order of the letters in this book.

2 A special letter of salutation

Illuminatingly, Fernández López 1994: 98 has placed the current letter with four others in a sub-section of the large group of letters of salutation, which is called by her ‘letters of communication’. In these letters the greetings are combined with information about the drawbacks of the turbulent years 471-76. This information remains succinct, because the author conforms to the custom that letters of salutation are short.

Because of the introduction of politics this letter forms a pair with the next, 7.11, a letter of recommendation (see also the introduction there). They both thematize the desperate political circumstances of the time as a backdrop for interrupted visits and personal worries. Thus, the traditional subject matter of these most basic types of letters is charged in passing with the explosive political reality (in the current letter the author is inter semiustas muri fragilis clausus angustias, he cannot come belli terrore contigui, the Arvernae forma vel causa regionis makes it absolutely impossible, the fault is the Arvernians’ own because of iniustitiae nostrae merita, but there is hope si commeandi libertas pace revocetur).

In an unpretentious way the letters 7.10 and 11 bring to a conclusion the cycle of the first half of the seventh book, and once more strike a note of danger and misery, complaining about the unresolved state of affairs for the Auvergne. This unpretentiousness appears to have a deeper layer which proves that Sidonius deliberately put these older letters here at the end when he revised and published his correspondence. As to 7.10, its addressee is bishop Graecus. Together with Graecus Sidonius had made merry over the escapades of Amantius

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204 For epistolography see the appropriate section 5.1 in the General Introduction.

205 The order of the letters of book 7 is subject to doubt; see General Introduction, par. 5.2.2 Order of book 7, letters 1-11. On codicological grounds alone it cannot be ruled out that the letters 10-11 did not round off the cycle, but came before 6-7. However, my interpretation of 10 and 11, and the added ‘layer’ they were meant to get at publication, may be seen as an internal argument in favour of the traditional order of the letters.
Then he had heaped unheard-of reproaches on the same bishop because of the betrayal of Auvergne in the peace negotiations (7.7). Now, finally, he reaches out to this friend-in-spite-of-everything. He sketches his own unenviable situation, finds fault with himself and his fellow Arvernians, expresses his intention to re-establish frequent contact, and gives the future peace the credit for paving the way for renewed travelling. Peace (who knows?) for the Auvergne, peace between the opponents Graecus and Sidonius. Political and private interests coincide. Originally (in 474?) written to remain on friendly terms with Graecus whose attitude was all-important to Sidonius’ future, now, with hindsight, in the edited volume, the letter becomes a cautious attempt at appeasement (see also below on 2 si commeandi libertas pace revocetur).

3 For comparison

Letters 10 and 11 closely resemble Ep. 3.4, from 471/72, to Sidonius’ friend Felix, in layout as well as in content. In 3.4, after having mentioned the letter-bearer, Sidonius describes the desperate plight of Clermont, which is surrounded by enemies on all sides: oppidum siquidem nostrum quasi quandam sui limitis obicem circumfusarum nobis gentium arma terrificant. Both its allies, the Burgunds, and its aggressors, the Goths, greedily eye the town for a chance to annex it: sic aemulorum sibi in medio positi lacrimabilis praeda populorum, suspecti Burgundionibus, proximi Gothis, nec impugnantum ira, nec propugnantum caremus invidia. He interprets the misery as a punishment, although he does not know for what crime: licet apertis ipsi poenis propter criminum occultum pactamur. But it does not prevent him from expressing his understanding of the interests of his addressee: neque enim huiusmodi pectore sumus, ut ... non agi prospere vel ubicumque velimus.

Likewise, in 10 and 11, the bad situation of Clermont, the different, but no less dangerous, interests of Burgunds and Visigoths, the fault which may lie on the side of Clermont, and a certain amount of confidence in the peace process – and of sympathy for other people’s interests inherent in it – find expression in an atmosphere of appeasement.

4 Addressee

The addressee is Graecus, bishop of Marseille, one of the pillars of the church of (southern) Gaul at the time. Also addressed to him are the letters 6.8, 7.2, 7.7, and 9.4. See the introduction to 7.2, section 3 Addressee.

5 Date


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6 Manuscripts

The usual order of this and the next letter has long been: letter 10 (to Auspicius) and 11 (to Graecus). Even Luetjohann followed the vulgata in this respect, although of all four families of manuscripts only the first – and generally least trusted – (C) has this order. Hence, Leo and Mommsen suggested that the inverse order was most probably the original one. Mohr applied this suggestion in his edition, and subsequent editors have all adopted this sequence, which I also follow: first 10 (formerly 11) to Graecus, then 11 (formerly 10) to Auspicius. See General Introduction, sect. 5.2 Manuscripts.

6 ‘You’ and ‘I’

The letter is written in the first person singular and plural for the author, and the second person plural for the addressee. The author and his fate are in the limelight (‘I am jealous’, ‘I am locked in here’, ‘I will visit you as soon as possible’). However, when it comes to the cause of the misery, the first person plural almost imperceptibly creeps in. For a moment the author retreats into a sort of anonymity: he is guilty, but the guilt is a collective one. ‘The problem is Clermont’, he says. ‘If the situation was not so serious, we (= I) would have had a better excuse (minus … excusaremos). However, we (the people and I) have sinned (iniustitiae nostrae); paradoxically that is the best excuse we (nobis) have.’

The addressee, on the other hand, remains in the background during the whole of the letter (plural). He is not responsible and, indeed, almost invisible: apart from two personal pronouns (1 vos, de vobis) and one verb (2 remittatis), he is not expressly mentioned, even where that might have been functional, e.g. in section 1 ‘your fingers/eyes’ (which I long for), or section 2 ‘your aversion’ (because of my visits).

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

7 Epitome

To Graecus, bishop of Marseille.

Sect. 1-2: ‘I am jealous of this letter and its bearer because they will be in your company, whereas I myself am confined to the town of Clermont which is falling to pieces. If only I had not such a good excuse for not visiting you! I’m afraid that it is a punishment for our trespasses. I miss you sadly. Let us hope that peace will come and permit me to go as I please. Then I will visit you so often that you will become fed up.’

206 In the introduction to Luetjohann’s edition, resp. p. xxvi and lii.

207 On p. 98, Fernández López 1994 assigns this letter to subcategory 2.2 ‘Letter of communication’ (greeting and description of the current circumstances). She analyses it on pp. 99-102. For her method, see General Introduction, sect. 5.3 Classification and analysis.
Commentary

Section 1

Invideo felicitati consuetudinarii portitoris, a quo contigit saepius vos videri.

consuetudinarii portitoris, ‘our familiar letter-bearer’: This is the only instance of the adjective consuetudinarius, ‘usual’, in Sidonius. A common adjective in the Middle Ages (see Niermeyer s.v.), it is found since ca. 400 AD, viz. Sulp. Sev. Dial. 1.14.2 interim bestia ad consuetudinarium illud cenea tempus occurrit. It is usually applied to things, not to persons, as here. In fact, this is the only known instance of the adjective defining a personal noun, cf. TLL 4: 553.25.

For the several terms for ‘letter-bearer’ see my comment on 7.4.3 gerulum litterarum. Here the lector Amantius is meant, the usual messenger between Sidonius and Graecus, known from 6.8, 7.2 and 7.7. He also brings letter 9.4. For him see my comment on 7.2 which relates an episode from his life.

More letters begin, like this one, with mentioning the messenger, cf. 3.4.1 Gozolas ... defert litteras meas, 4.5.1 iterat portitorem salutationis iteratio. Gozolas ..., 7.7.1 ecce iterum Amantius, nugigerulus noster, Massiliam suam repetit, and (this time the other man’s messenger) 9.8.1 litteras tuas reddidit gerulus antiquus. Note the adjective antiquus, synonym with consuetudinarius, and the words iterate and iterum. Confidence was essential for this task; therefore, familiarity with the messenger was important. See Caltabiano 2001 who remarks that, for maximum security and competence, the bishops in Augustine’s time recruited their letter-bearers from the different ranks of their own presbyterium. Amantius was a lector in Clermont.

a quo contigit saepius vos videri, ‘who, as it happens, has met you several times’: Contigit LNT edd.: contingit MCFP. All editors rightly prefer the perfect contigit, which has the authority of L, backed by NT. We have here a specific statement about the past (‘he has met you before several times’), not a general one (‘he meets you regularly’).

Nevertheless, a quo contigit ... vos videri is a rather unusual construction. For impersonal contingit, ‘it happens’, ‘comes about’, with inf., cf. e.g. Cic. Arch. 4 (Archiam) celeriter antecellere omnibus ingeni gloria contingit, ‘it soon happened that Archias surpassed everybody else in the renown of his talent’. For the passive infinitive with impersonal verbum finitum, see my comment on 7.9.2 aptari. LHS 2: 353 cites Ov. Ep. 11.91 f. tunc demum pectora plangi / contingit, ‘then only I could beat my breast’ (‘aus metrischer Bequemlichkeit’), and later authors such as Claudianus Mamertus (also with fas est, iustum est) and Salvian. For videri cf. e.g. Macr. Sat. 1.15.5 Romulus ... initium cuiusque mensis ex illo sumebat die quo novam lunam contingisset videri.

Anderson’s translation ‘who has had the privilege of seeing you frequently’ seems to suggest that he interprets the current phrase as ‘cui contigit ut vos videret’ – which is quite possible.

For reasons of style, it deserves attention that in the first section of this letter the passive diathesis is dominant: videri, reserabuntur, inspicientur, permittor, iudicaremur.
sed quid de Amantio loquar, cum ipsas quoque litteras meas aemuler,

sed quid ... loquar, ‘though, why speak ...?': With sed quid? the author interrupts and corrects himself. The phrase is an imitation of colloquial language, which abounds in epistolary literature, cf. e.g. Cic. Att. 4.19.2 sed quid plura? coram opinor reliqua, ‘but why write more? The rest I want to tell you face to face’, Plin. Ep. 8.14.24 sed quid ego similis docenti? cum discere velim, ‘though, why do I behave like a teacher? Whereas I would love to learn’. In Sidonius’ prose the phrase occurs eight times, but only here is the continuation a cum-clause of the same type as in the above cited fragment of Pliny. Cf. in book 7 similar phrases with sed cur (7.7.6, 7.8.4, marking the end of the letter, see Köhler 1995: 227 ad 1.6.5 sed quid plura). For this literary device in general see Amherdt 2001: 46, and on sermo cotidianus Cugusi 1983: 78.

cum ... aemuler, ‘seeing that I am jealous’, ‘when I am jealous’ (Anderson): Cum ‘introduces a circumstance which supports the action of the main verb’ (OLD 6): ‘Why talk about being jealous of the bearer, as I am even jealous of the letter itself?’

Aemulari, used in malam partem, ‘to envy’, originally took a dative, but gradually the accusative became equally possible, to begin with Prop. 2.34.19 ipse meas solus ... aemulor umbras (Heinsius proposed meae ... umbrae, which is accepted by several recent editors).

Sidonius has aemulari nine times, always with accusative. For a person to be jealous of a thing (instead of a person), is relatively unusual, cf. TLL 1: 975: in Sidonius only here and 9.9.14 neque te satis hoc aemulari, quod per gymnasia pingantur ... Speusippus Aratus, ‘you do not burn with envy at the thought of those paintings all over the gymnasia ... showing Speusippus [and] Aratus’ (Anderson).

quae sacrosanctis reserabuntur digitis, inspicientur obtutibus?

Correspondence is about being near to one another, absentes praesentes (Cugusi 1983: 73), through the medium of the letter and its bearer. Through them one can, as it were, see and touch one another, cf. e.g. Cic. Fam. 3.11.2 complexus igitur sum cogitatione te absentem, epistulam vero osculatus etiam ipse mihi gratulatus sum, ‘therefore, I embraced you in thought from afar, but when I kissed your letter I also congratulated myself’ (see Thraede 1970: 45), and Paul. Nol. Ep. 11.4 nisi ... eligas tabellarios, quorum oculis nos videas et ore contingas, ‘unless you select letter-bearers to see me with their eyes and touch me with their mouth’.

The motif is still alive. Compare, e.g., the last stanza from the poem entitled ‘Voor wie dit leest’ (‘To the reader’) by the Dutch-American poet Leo Vroman (from: Gedichten, vroegere en latere, Amsterdam, 1949)

Lees dit dan als een lang verwachte brief,
en wees gerust, en vrees niet de gedachte
dat U door deze woorden werd gekust:
ik heb je zo lief.

(‘So read this as a long-expected letter, and be at ease, and do not fear the thought that you have been kissed by these words: I love you so much.’ [my translation])

sacrosanctis, ‘holy’: Of priests, see my comment on 7.1.6 sacrosanctae informationis, and compare 7.11.1 sacrosancta contemplatione.
reserabuntur, ‘will be opened’: Reserare usually has a complement like urbem, fores, portas. For the later use (since ca. 400 AD) of opening a letter (by breaking its seal), as here, cf. in Sidonius 6.9.1 cum pagina, quam miseratis, reseraretur, and e.g. Rufin. Hist. 11.22 statim ut prima epistulae pagina reserata est, ... clamor a nostris immensus adtollitur, cf. Paul. Petric. Mart. 2.72 ff. and Greg. Tur. Franc. 9.41.

obtutibus, ‘eyes’: The plural is post-classical. The concrete meaning ‘eye’ (classical: ‘the action of looking’, ‘gaze’) developed probably in the fourth century AD, cf. e.g. Amm. 20.3.12 videri nostris obtutibus constitutis in terra, ‘[the celestial bodies] seem [to rise and set] to our eyes from a terrestrial perspective’, Symm. Ep. 9.72 (a vivid description) unde factum est, ut nostris quoque obtutibus (‘before our eyes’), qui procul agimus, quaedam gestorum facies subderetur. For Sidonius (seven instances, of which three plural) see e.g. Ep. 8.11 gemino obtutu eluminatus (‘blind in both eyes’), and cf. – for the context of ‘presence by correspondence’ – 3.11.1 etsi desiderium nostrum sinisteritas tanta comitatur ut etiam nunc nostris invidearis obtutibus, ‘although my longing is accompanied by such ill luck that my eyes are not allowed to see you even now’.

et ego istic inter semiustas muri fragilis clausus angustias belli terrore contigui desiderio de vobis meo nequaquam satisfacere permittor.

Note the very dense collocation of words, the hyperbata and the adjectives which alternate between pre- and postposition. As I have argued in the General Introduction, sect. 6.2 Style, by its complexity the wording suggests all the complexities of the situation.

et, ‘however’, ‘would you believe it?’: It introduces a new stage in the development, in this case the indignant conclusion of the author that he cannot go as he pleases, whereas his letter and its bearer are allowed to do what is denied to him. For a similar indignant exclamation, see Prop. 2.8.2 eripitur ... cara puella: et tu me lacrimas fundere, amice, vetas? For et in Sidonius cf. e.g. 4.14.2 et nunc ... dicas velim, choosing a new line of thought: ‘be that as it may’, and 6.1.1 et quid nunc ego ... respondeam?, marking a moment of uncertainty after an overwhelming introduction. For this function of et on the ‘presentational’ level, see Kroon 1995: 70 and 106 f.

istic = hic, ‘here’ in Clermont. See my comment on 7.1.6 populus iste.

inter semiustas muri fragilis clausus angustias, ‘shut in within the half-burnt confines of a fragile wall’ (Anderson). Semiustus is attested one more time in Sidonius, also of Clermont, when he thanks Constantius for having come to its rescue, 3.2.1 deus bone, quod gaudium fuit laboriosis cum tu sanctum pedem semirutis moenibus intulisti! ... quas tu lacrimas ut parens omnium super aedes incendio prorutas et domicilia semiusta (‘the half-burnt premises’) judisti!

Compounds with semi- are dear to Sidonius, who often forges new adjectives with it (Gualandri 1979: 177). For the deplorable state of the town during the sieges, see letter 7.1.2 ambustam murorum faciem aut putrem sudium cratem aut propugnacula vigilum trita pectoribus (see my comment ad loc.). Cf. 3.3.3 e semirutus murorum aggeribus.

Semiustas ... angustias: This type of enallage, in which the adjective defines an abstract noun, is among Sidonius’ favourite iuncturae, discussed by Gualandri 1979: 139, who rightly acknowledges, not its originality (this use of the enallage is not new), but the salient effects (‘risultati di violente ed audaci personificazioni’) which Sidonius manages to create with it. For the grammatical benefits of abstract nouns and genitivus inversus (they allow of more
attributes without awkward accumulation with et or -que), see my comment on 7.1.2 animositati nostrae and 7.1.5 orationum frequentia.

Clausus: Sidonius is confined to the town, the roads are blocked by the enemy. Compare his friend Claudianus Mamertus, who writes in similar circumstances: 4.2.1 quippe revisionis (‘seeing you again’) potestas multis modis et miseri perinde causis intercluditur.

belli terrae contigui, ‘the menace of a war close at hand’ (Anderson): The siege of Clermont by Euric is evidently in its last phase, as Loyen commented ad loc. n. 62. Contiguus, ‘near’, ‘adjacent’, is not elsewhere attested with bellum, but is probably evoked by the presence of muri, for it is frequently used for adjacency of houses, walls etc., cf. e.g. Ov. Met. 4.57 (Pyramus and Thisbe) contiguis tenuere domos, and Amm. 24.4.19 muri contiguum latus.

desiderio de vobis meo ... satisfacere, ‘to satisfy my longing for you’: The quite unprecedented phrase desiderium de vobis instead of desiderium vestri may be explained by the presence of meo, and the undesirability of *desiderio vestri meo. Desiderium de is found in the Middle Ages in such authors as Aelred of Rievaulx (twelfth century) Serm. 1.5 desiderium quod sancti patres nostri habuerunt de primo adventu Domini nostri, and Albert Behaim (thirteenth cent.) Brief- und Memorialbuch, Epp. spt. MA, 73, p. 269 l. 17 tuam siquidem epistulam recepi honorifice, sicut decet; et plene intellexi, quantum habes desiderium de mea persona, ut <tecum> esset. For the extension of the use of the preposition de in later Latin, see my comment on 7.1.1 de nostra tantum obice.

Correspondents long (often in vain) to see each other (Cugusi 1983: 77), cf. e.g. Cic. Fam. 2.11.1 mirum me desiderium tenet urbis, incredibile meorum atque in primis tui, and in Sidonius e.g. 3.11.1 et si desiderium nostrum sinisteritas tanta comitatur, ut etiam nunc nostris invidiaris obtutibus, and 6.1.2 colloqui salutaris tui ... indigentiam patiens.

Satisfacere desiderio is found since V. Max. 6.4 quorum ex abundanti copia ... quod magis desiderio satisfaciat quam satietati abundet hauriamus. The synonym satiare is also used, e.g. Caes. Arel. Sern. 151.1 si temporis necessitatis permits, fratres carissimi, non solum semel in anno, sed etiam secundo vel tertio vos visitare voleramus, ut et nostra simul et vestra desideria de conspectu vestro satiare possimus (note, as a corollary to the discussion of de above, that de conspectu vestro is probably an adjunct of satiare, not a complement of desideria).

atque utinam haec esset Arvernae forma vel causa regionis, ut minus excusabiles excusaremur!

If the situation of the Auvergne had been better, Sidonius could have travelled and would have had no excuse for writing instead of coming. He suggests that this is not a polite (and hence debatable) refusal, but that he is truly unable to come. For the topos see my comment on 7.5.5 poteritis praesentiam vestrar potius excusare quam culpam.

atque utinam to introduce a wish since earliest Latin, see TLL 2: 1078.67; also Ep. 7.2.1.

Arvernae forma vel causa regionis, ‘the situation and the cause of the region of the Auvergne’: Forma and causa are virtual synonyms, with status as a third term, meaning ‘situation’, ‘state’, ‘condition’, ‘circumstances’, all three of them also with a possible juridical connotation, resp. ‘jurisdiction’, ‘cause’, ‘legal position’, etc. For this type of doublet see General Introduction, sect. 6.2 Style: ‘Redundancy’.
**Section 2**

*sed, quod est durius, per inustitiae nostrae merita conficitur, ut excusatio nobis iusta non desit.*

**quod est durius,** ‘what is even worse’: *Durus,* ‘hard to bear’, ‘difficult’, ‘distressing’, e.g. *Verg. G.* 1.146 *durus ursgens in rebus egestas,* *Sen. Dial.* 1.6.6 *multa ... dura toleratu.* In Sidonius cf. *9.14.1 nihil enim est durius, quam cum praesentes amici dividuntur communione languoris,* ‘nothing is more distressing than for two close friends to be separated by their common illness’, cf. *5.10.4 quod est gravius.*

**per inustitiae nostrae merita,** ‘on account of our injustice’: Sidonius tends to see the suffering of Clermont as a punishment for its sins, whatever they may be, cf. *3.4.2 licet apertis ipsi poenis propter crimnun occulta plectamur,* ‘although we are visited with evident punishments for unknown crimes’. The phrase *per inustitiae nostrae merita* has thematic significance. It refers back to the opening letter of book 7, where the Rogationes are
introduced in Clermont, and the population does penance for its sins following the example of the people of Vienne who have escaped the poena of destruction by it (see comment on 7.1.5 supplicia praedicis, remedia promittis). Thus correctly Gualandri 1979: 49 n. 49, after Rousseau 1976: 375 with note 113. Loyen’s translation ‘par la vertu du sort injuste que nous subissons’ is incorrect, because iniustitia (only here in Sidonius) does not mean ‘unjust treatment’ (that would be iniuria).

Per merita + gen. is a Christian idiom, e.g. Cypr. Ep. 69.12.2 aliter pectus creditens abluitur, aliter mens hominis per fidei merita mundatur, and Hier. in Ezech. 14.46 per merita virtutum. In most cases the genitive has a positive connotation (fidei, virtutum, also pietatis, misericordiae, oboedientiae, etc.), not a negative one, as here (which results in an oxymoron), but cf. the neutral one in Ambr. in Psalm. 38.36.4 ut unusquisque operum merita dignae adipiscatur sortis examine, vel iustus in requie vel impius in aerumna. Compare the somewhat different expression 7.6.6 ob virtum merita, q.v. comment.

Nostrae denotes Sidonius and his fellow Arvernians, as does nobis in the subordinate clause. See Gualandri 1979: 49 n. 49. Sidonius accentuates, among others, his own guilt and responsibility, and his humility. As we have seen in the introduction to this letter, this has an added importance in connection with bishop Graecus, viz. to apologize inobtrusively for his fierce criticism of Graecus’ role in the peace negotiations.

For self-deprecation and Christian humility see General Introduction, par. 3.3.2 Social conventions and Christianity, and 4.3.2 ‘In search of Sidonius the bishop’.

excusatio nobis iusta non desit, ‘we do not lack a just excuse’: Iusta (non) is an adnominatio with the preceding iniustitia. Whenever possible, Sidonius eagerly seizes the opportunity to play with this word, see 1.11.13 praeter iuris iniuriam, ‘short of offending the law’ (Anderson), 4.24.8 iuste reposcit propter iniuriam. For more examples of word play in general in Sidonius see Grupe 1887: 467 f. s.v. lusus in verbis. See General Introduction, sect. 6.2 Style: ‘Word play, sound and rhythm’.

This time, the author says, he unfortunately has an excusatio iusta, a valid excuse. Cf. 4.10.2 excusatio for being slow in writing, and above at excusabiles.

quocirca salutatione praefata, sicut mos poscit officii, magno opere deposco, ut interim remittatis occusionis debitum vel verba solventi

salutatione praefata, ‘having greeted you first’: Cf. 5.15.1 officii sermone praefato, Symm. Ep. 9.15.1 salutationis honore praefato, Alc. Avit. Ep. 2.40 p. 68 l. 28 ut debitum est, salutatione praemissa. For the duty of salutatio, cf. e.g. 4.3.1 salve tibi debitum, 4.23.2 saluatorium officium, Symm. Ep. 4.23.2 salutationis officium de more persolvens mutuum munus exposco, Ennod. Ep. 1.23 salutationis debita. See Bruggisser 1993: 9, Amherdt 2001: 44, and General Introduction, sect. 5.1.2 Epistolary characteristics.

For praefatus as a ‘real’ passive, ‘having been pronounced’, in this type of utterance, see TLL 10/2: 651.30 ff.

sicut, ‘as’: For the form see my comment on 7.3.1 sicuti iniungis.

magno opere deposco, ‘I earnestly request you’: Cf. 4.23.3 magnopere deprecens ... ut ignoscas. The collocation magn(o) opere – deprecere is unique to Sidonius, but magnopere with verbs meaning ‘to request’ in general is well known, as early as Nov. Com. 77 magno opere
quaesiverunt (first century BC). Sidonius uses deposcere no fewer than eight times, of which six times in the scheme of an exchange of favours. Cf. in other authors e.g. Symm. Ep. 4.32.2 (above) and 8.15 nunc vice salutationis repensa operam tuam curamque deposco, Ennod. Ep. 1.23 domine mi, salutationis debita solvens precor, ut ... pagina ... responsa meretur, id. 3.9 domine, ut supra, salutationis honorificentiam solvens rogo, ut frequenti me epistularum vestrarum relevetis alloquio. Once the duty of salutation has been performed, one is entitled to ask a favour in return, be it an action, a letter in response or (as here) permission not to pay a visit.

interim, ‘for the time being’, ‘for a while’.

occurionis debitum, ‘the duty of paying a visit’: The duty – or at least the desirability – to visit an amicus is topical, cf. e.g. Cic. Fam. 16.8.2 office ... ut ad nos firmus et valens quam primum venias. Compare Apul. Flor. 17 quippe non prompte veniam impertire rarenter adeundi adsiduitatem etus requirentis est, ‘for not to forgive immediately when receiving only occasional visits, is to be expected from someone who wants them constantly’. For Sidonius cf. e.g. 4.4.2 per hunc salutem dico, videre vos sub ope Christi quam naturissime, si per statum publicum liceat, cupiens, with comment Amherdt 2001: 180 f. ad loc. See Cugusi 1983: 77. In the next letter, 7.11.1 superest, ut sollicito veneratori culpam rarae occurionis indulgeas, not coming often enough appears to be a culpa: ‘it remains for you to pardon your anxious admirer for the fault of visiting you so rarely’.

Occursio, a rare noun, appears in the fourth century (once in Augustine, once in Jerome), is found next (for the first time meaning ‘visit’, ‘arrival’) in Sulp. Sev. Dial. 1.21.3 gaudet salutationibus, inflatur occurionibus (v.l. occurius), and twice in Sidonius, h.l. and in 7.11.1 culpam rarae occurionis (cited above), to continue in the sixth century (once in Ennodius, four times in Cassiodorus, once in Eugippius). The use of this rare word in two successive letters, this and the next one, is a good argument that Sidonius intended them to form a pair. For the synonym occurus, see Carm. 23.441 occurus, comitus unus idem, and the v.l. occurus for 7.2.4 crebro occurus excoller viceinos (see my comment ad loc.).

vel verba solventi, ‘because I pay at least my due of words’: For vel see OLD 6 ‘at any rate’, ‘even if only’. Cf. 1.11.1 grammaticum vel salutanti, ‘even if he has only visited the grammaticus’. Anderson translates, somewhat differently: ‘even though I pay you nothing but words’.

Verba solvere is new, but compare Sen. Ep. 7.10 dicta tria ... ex quibus unum haec epistula in debitum solvet, duo in antecessum accipe, ‘three maxims, of which this letter pays you one as its debt, and you may take two more in advance’. Sidonius loves this shorthand for ‘keeping the promise to do something’, cf. 9.3.3 (Sidonius is not in the mood to) solvere modo litteras ... politiores. Cf. also 2.2.16 (in the ekphrasis of his villa, after having described the main building) sed quia tibi, sicut aedificium solvi, sic lacum debeo, quod restat agnosce. For verba of correspondence, see my comment on 4.3.1 damus verba.

nam si commeandi libertas pace revocetur, illud magis verebor, ne assiduitas praeasentiae meae sit potius futura fastidio.

si commeandi libertas pace revocetur, ‘suppose the liberty to travel will be restored by the peace’: When writing the letter, Sidonius envisaged the possibility that the peace might at least have one advantage: free communication. This may be interpreted as an encouragement to Graecus to continue the peace process in the interest of his supporters. In this small-scale
letter of communication, there is no room for more on the subject – and no need for it: a word is enough to the wise.

Eventually, it turned out that, after the peace treaty, maintaining a correspondence – let alone travelling in person – still had not become much easier. See 9.5.1 (from 476/77 AD) (we would write more frequently) nisi quod per regna divisi a commercio frequentiore sermonis diversarum sortium iure revocamur; quae nunc saltim post pacis initam pactioem quia fidelibus animis foederabantur, apices nostri incipient commeare crebri, quoniam cessant esse suspeci, ‘but for one thing – we live in different realms and are thus prevented from more frequent contact by the rights of conflicting governments. But now at least, on the conclusion of the peace-treaty, they will be leagued together in loyal harmony, and our letters will begin to pass in quick succession, seeing that they cease to be under suspicion’ (Anderson).

The peace is the central subject between Sidonius and Graecus, also at the time of the publication of the letters. The letter, which was originally a sign of Sidonius’ trust in Graecus that things might still come right for the Auvergne, acquired a different function when published with the letters in this order after the big clash of 7.7. Now Sidonius wanted it to be read as a cautious overture and a gesture of appeasement. In the same way, letter 9.4 to Graecus, published a few years later (but already written during the sieges of Clermont), would, in its definitive context in the collection of letters, foster the bruised ties with such warm compliments as flos sacerdotum, gemma pontificum (9.4.2). (For the problem of the order of the 6-7 and 10-11 see the Introduction of this letter, section 2 A special letter of salutation.

Commeare, of persons as well as letters, also 9.4.1 cum reliquis commeantibus (‘travellers’) and 9.5.1 apices nostri incipient commeare crebri (cf. Cic. Att. 8.9.3 crebro enim illius litterae ab aliis ad nos commeant). Libertas + gen., ‘freedom, opportunity to do something’, only here in Sidonius.

Commeandi libertas is answered, by way of a chiasmus, by assiduitas praesentiae: travelling + change v. permanence + domesticity.

For revocare, ‘to restore (to a previous condition)’, see e.g. V. Max. 4.1 haec oblivio ...labentem civitatis statum in pristinum habitum revocavit. Cicero had used revocare libertatem of restoring republican freedom after tyranny, e.g. Cic. Phil. 14.20 memoria tenent me ante diem XIII[1] Kalendas Ianuarias principem revocandae libertatis fuisse.

assiduitas praesentiae, ‘my constant visits’: The sender applies the topos of boring – because too frequent – visits to himself in the socially correct way: he is afraid he will be a nuisance. Inversely, of course, one assures one’s amicus that he is welcome and not in the way at all, e.g. 4.21.6 sicque omnes praesentiae vestrae voluptas, quod tamen nullum satias cepit, ‘everybody was delighted at your presence, nobody got enough of it’, 6.4.2 opportunitas praesentiae tuae; cf. Ennod. Ep. 7.8.1 nec satietatem de praesentia tua ... pateris subvenire.

For assiduitas (and its opposite raritas, ‘infrequency’), cf. 1.7.3 pati de occurrentum raritate suspicionem, de adsiduitate fastidium, (‘Arvandus) was suspicious if only few accosted him, but annoyed if he was constantly buttonholed’, and e.g. Symm. 3.44.2 adsiduitas litterarum mearum. The noun is also used on its own: 3.3.9 adsiduitatem tuam, ‘your continuous presence’. Finally, compare – again – the next letter: 7.11.1 (the wars prevents me) quo minus assidue conspectus tui sacrosancta contemplatione potiatur, ‘to see your Holiness regularly’, assidue). In other writers cf. e.g. Apul. Flor. 17 adsiduatatem eius (= adeundi), cited earlier at occisum debitum.
sit ... futura fastidio, ‘will bore you’: Fastidio at the end has focus: the attention is directed towards the boredom the constant visits will cause, as a polite way to underline their intensity. For the topical use of fastidium, ‘aversion’, on account of a letter which is verbose, attention which is too much felt, etc., cf. 2.2.7 quia eos nec relegisse desiderio est nec perlegisse fastidio, and also (cited earlier) 1.7.3 pati ... de adsiduitate fastidium, plus 5.4.2 quoddam patiuntur de nostra sedulitate fastidium. In other writers cf. e.g. Symm. Ep. 8.51.1 adsiduitatem scriptorum meorum tibi esse fastidio prope adserit raritas tua.