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

‘War and Self-irony’

Introduction

1 Overview

This is a letter of recommendation for a certain Petrus, the bearer of the letter. The introduction to the request is – as usual – complimentary about the addressee, the bishop of Toul. Sidonius sends his warmest greetings and apologizes for not being able to pay him a visit because of the desperate political situation. Because of this element of information about the actual state of affairs, the letter resembles the letters of ‘communication’ to which the previous letter, number 10, belonged. The letters 10 and 11 are in fact a pair which with hindsight – in the context of the edited collection – reflects briefly on the war.

I interpret both letters 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 Patronage by the bishop, and self-irony

This is one of a wide range of letters of recommendation which show us Sidonius, before and during his episcopate, intervening on behalf of all sorts of dependants and friends. Bishops gradually acquired an important role as protectors and arbitrators, an extension of current law practice and secular conventions. Harries 1994: 208-14 discusses this in some detail, and concludes: ‘patronage ... had acquired a Christian dimension’. A further point of this letter is hidden in its tail, in the words manente respectu nihilominus aequitatis, contra quam nec magis familiarium causas commendare consuevi. Sidonius begs his correspondent for intercession, though ‘always with proper respect for justice, which I am not in the habit of offending even when I recommend the causes of more intimate acquaintances’. Here he makes an allusion to his disgrace when he misjudged Amantius, as described in letter 7.2 to Graecus. Neither Sidonius nor Graecus had made a problem out of this, and they had been able to connive at Amantius’ success ‘contra aequitatem’. By putting the letter here, as probably the last item of the episcopal cycle, and thus creating overtones which originally did not exist, Sidonius charges his words with self-irony, and, while

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208 See the Introduction of letter 10, section 2 A special letter of salutation.

209 For context, see the General Introduction, sect. 4.3 The role of the bishop, esp. 4.3.1 Increasing power. For practical references to Sidonius, see also Amherdt 2001: 17 f. and 196.

210 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.
indirectly addressing Graecus again, tries to repair the bruised bonds of friendship which bind the two of them despite the disaster of the peace treaty (Ep. 7.7).

3 Address

The letter is addressed to the learned Auspicius, the fifth (Duchesne 3: 62) bishop of Tullum Leucorium (present-day Toul, dept. Meurthe-et-Moselle), one of Sidonius’ connections in northern Gaul, from the province of Belgica Prima (capital Trier). Auspicius is mentioned in Ep. 4.17.3, in a letter which is addressed to Arbogastes, at the time comes of Trier (see Amherdt 2001: 377 f.), who had asked Sidonius for a biblical commentary. Sidonius replied that his talents lay elsewhere, and that he had better consult such specialists as his own bishop, or Lupus or Auspicius, both of whom lived not far away (Lupus was bishop of Troyes): multo opportunius de quibuscumque quaestionibus tibi interrogantur incliti Galliarum patres et protomystae, nec satis positi in longinquo Lupus nec parum in proximo Auspicius, quorum doctrinae abundanti eventilandae nec consultatio tua sufficit, ‘on whatever questions, it is much more logical to address the famous fathers and initiates Lupus, who is not far away, and Auspicius, who is near; their learning is so abundant that even your consultation will not exhaust it’.

Furthermore, we have a letter in verse from Auspicius’ hand to the same Arbogastes (CC SL 117: 442-47). Auspicius congratulates Trier on this eminent leader (25 ff. congratulandum tibi est, o Trevirorum civitas, / quae tali viro regeris, antiquis comparabili), credits him with the merit of being a true Christian (32 Christi nomen invocat religioni deditus), but then warns him at length against the temptations of greed (cupiditas) to which he is exposed.


4 Date

Loyen dates the letter between 471 and 474, the years in which the Burgunds and the Visigoths collided over the supremacy in south-eastern Gaul (see sect. 1 conflictantium procella regnorum). He has a preference for the earlier years, ‘vers 472’, although he does not put forward any additional argument for this (Loyen 3: 215). It was written in Clermont.

Stroheker 1948: 204 # 298 s.v. Petrus dates the letter ‘um 473’, also without giving reasons. Kaufmann 1995: 183 f. argues in favour of the summer of 471. He connects the current letter with Ep. 9.9 because of the similar wording regarding the Burgundian-Visigothic conflict: 7.11.1 conflictantium procella regnorum, ‘the storm of conflicting realms’, 9.9.6 gentium concitatarum procella, ‘the storm of aroused peoples’. Letter 9.9 dates from the end of 471 (see Loyen 3: 218) and refers to the hostilities which may have taken place in the middle of the same year. I am not so sure, however, that the similarity in the choice of words ‘legt eine zeitliche Verwandtschaft nahe’. The rhetorical variation technique211 is much too dominant and persistent in Sidonius to draw easy conclusions from such similarities. The conflict – with the Burgundians backing Clermont, and the Visigoths opposing it – extended over the years 471 to 474 212, and the formulation of 7.11.1 nunc periculum de vicinis timet, nunc invidiam

211 See General Introduction, sect. 6.2 Style: ‘Variation technique and topos’.

212 See General Introduction, par. 3.2.2 The sieges.
de patronis, ‘sometimes he [the author] fears the danger from his neighbours, sometimes the jealousy from his protectors’, seems to envisage, not so much a one-off crisis, as a recurrent pattern of fighting and diplomacy.

5 Manuscripts

See the introduction to letter 10.

6 ‘You’ and ‘I’

The treatment of ‘you’ and ‘I’ is straightforward: first person singular for the sender, and second singular for the addressee. Both participate equally in the action. The use of nostri is conventional to designate the (bearer of the) message.

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 Auspicius, bishop of Toul.

Sect. 1: ‘I am very sorry that the ongoing war prevents me from undertaking a visit to you. I am kept busy by the kingdoms of both a threatening enemy and a jealous ally. Therefore, I must limit myself to a written proof of my friendship – which is in the best of traditions, anyway.’

Sect. 2: ‘May I recommend Petrus, the bearer of this letter, to you? He himself will explain his concern to you. Please help him – within the limits of what is justified, of course. You know I never recommend clients – not even those whom I know better – when this would be contrary to justice.’

Commentary

Section 1

Si ratio temporum regionumque pateretur, non per sola officia verborum amicitias semel initas excolere curarem.

ratio temporum regionumque, ‘consideration of our times and our places of residence’: i.e. the dangerous political and military situation, and the distance between our dioceses. For ratio + gen., ‘taking into account’, ‘consideration of’, and sometimes almost a circumlocution of the noun in the genitive itself, cf. e.g. Cic. Flac. 100 si provinciarum vos ratio (‘situation’) magis movet quam vestra, Plin. Nat. 37.10 per bella civilia absente ipso [= the emperor] signavere amici epistulas et edicta, quae ratio temporum (‘urgency’) nomine eius reddi postulabat, and in Sidonius e.g. 3.13.10 et si ad occulta familiarium publicanda temporis ratio (‘circumstances’)

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213 Fernández López 1994: 137 assigns this letter to subcategory 4.1 ‘Letters of recommendation’, and analyses it on pp. 137-48. For her method, see General Introduction, sect. 5.3 Classification and analysis.
sollicitet, and 7.2.4 agere cum singulis, prout aetatis ratio permitteret (see my comment ad loc.: ‘consideration of his age’, ‘his youthfulness’).

For tempora, ‘(political) setup’, ‘living conditions’, cf. e.g. 1.11.10 homo litium temporumque (‘politics’) varietibus exercitatis, 4.4.2 fiam locorum vestrorum et temporum gnarus, ‘let me know about your part of the country and how things stand’ (Anderson), and 4.5.2 de temporum statu (‘the present state of affairs’, Anderson) iam nihil ut prius consulo.

Ratio ... regionum (Loyen: ‘la distance’): the distance Clermont-Toul is considerable, 500 km. The travelling conditions to this region dominated by the Franks cannot have been completely safe or easy. Cf. 2.11.1 si nobis pro situ spatiisque regionum (‘our homes and the distance in between’) vicinaremur. The theme of distance is taken up in the main clause by discretos separatosque. Ratio regionum could also mean ‘the situation in our provinces’ (Dalton: ‘the state of our country’). As this is a duplication of ratio temporum, the first interpretation is preferable, although redundancy in doublets is a common stylistic convention (see General Introduction, sect. 6.2 Style: ‘Redundancy’. Anderson remains neutral: ‘the places in which we live’.

There are interesting parallels for si ratio ... pateretur in medical jargon for conditions of health and climate, cf. Cels. 2.10 at si morbi ratio patietur, 3.4 id ... coeli ratio patitur.

Troubled war times are a valid reason for not visiting someone, as in the parallel letter 7.10. More than a topos, this was the inevitable reality for people in the fifth century and later, see e.g. in the next generation Alc. Avit. Ep. 34 sed quia istud iam dudum per rationem temporum fieri posse cessavit, ‘but as this [= going to Rome] has long since ceased to be possible on account of the times’. At one moment war was the reason for Sidonius to suggest to a friend that they should stop even writing to each other, 9.3.1 dum sunt gentium motibus itinera suspecta, ‘as long as the roads are unsafe due to the peoples on the move’.

officia verborum, ‘the courtesy of correspondence’ (Anderson): See my comment on 7.2.10 oboedientis officium.

amicitias semel initas excolere, ‘to maintain relationships once they have been entered into’: Cf. e.g. Symm. Ep. 7.88 ut caritas semel inita ... proficiat. See my comment on 7.9.22 amicitias ... servat.

sed quoniam fraternae quietis voto satis obstrepet conflictantium procella regnorum,

fraternae quietis voto satis obstrepet, ‘confound all hopes of fraternal peace and quiet’ (Dalton): The metaphor concerns the forces of nature. The storm noisily disturbs the desired tranquillity, like the river in Amm. 15.4.4 hanc ergo paludem ... strependo ... annis irruptens et undarum quietem permeans, ‘the river [Rhine] bursts noisily into this swamp and disturbs the quiet of its waters’. At the same time quies is ‘peace’, ‘security’, cf. 5.7.7 seire vos par est nihil interim quieti fratrum communium ... nacuisse, ‘you ought to know that so far nothing has impaired the security of our common brothers’, 9.5.2 ut ... illos numeretur innocentia, nos quiete, totos securitate, ‘that he [Christ] may bestow guiltlessness on them, peace on us, freedom from fear on all’. 
Fratera quies is found only here, for the hoped-for peaceful contact between Sidonius and his correspondent. For Sidonius combining ordinary words into new phrases, see General Introduction, sect. 6.2 Style: ‘Archaisms, rare words, neologisms’.

For satis, ‘very much’, see my comment on 7.2.4 satis secundus.

conflictantium procella regnorum, ‘the storm of the clashing kingdoms’: Probably the Burgundians and the Visigoths on account of vicinis ... patronis below. See the Introduction to the current letter, section 4 Date, and General Introduction, section 3.1 Visigoths and Burgundians. For the formulation cf. 9.9.6 gentium concitatarum procella, ‘the storm of aroused peoples’; also 9.3.2 aemulantum invicem sese ... regnorum, and 7.1.1 regni minacis, ‘the threatening kingdom’ (with my comment).

Sidonius had used the metaphor of the storm of war earlier, in Carm. 7.215-17 variis incussa procellis / bellorum regi Getico tua Gallia pacis / pignora iussa dare est, ‘your Gaul, swept by various tempests of war, had to give sureties of peace to the Gothic king’ (about Gaul having given hostages to the Visigothic king Theodoric I). Procella is found of (civil) war since Cic. Cael. 59 quanta inpenderet procella mihi, quanta tempestas civitati, cf. also Sil. 11.91 sedes, ecce, vacat, belli viduata procella. The image of a storm is further applied by Sidonius to a ‘hail of beatings’, 3.13.3 inter alaparum procellas, and a ‘tempest of jealousy’, 9.16.3 (= Carm. 41.18), in the well known context of literary production (see my comment on 7.9.8 quorundam vos infamare conantum turbo). For images of nature in Sidonius, cf. the river in 7.8.1 (with my comment) and Gualandri 1979: 105-09.

saltim inter discretos separatosque litterarii consuetudo sermonis iure retinebitur, quae iam pridem caritatis obtentu merito inducta veteribus annuit exemplis.

inter discretos separatosque, ‘between men living apart and separated’: Both verbs are used indiscriminately by Sidonius when he applies the topos of distance between correspondents, see 2.11.1 sed animorum coniunctioni separata utrique porrectoribus terminis obsisit habitatio, 8.12.1 te magnis flagitatunm precibus, parvis separatum spatiis, multis expectatum diebus, 8.6.16 pro sodalibus fide iunctis, sede discretis, 9.5.1 etsi plusculum forte discreta, quam communis animus optabat, sede consistimus. For the doublet see General Introduction, sect. 6.2 Style: ‘Redundancy’.

litterarii consuetudo sermonis, ‘the habit of writing to each other’: For sermo, ‘letter’, ‘correspondence’, see my comment on 7.2.2 sermoni nostro. Sermo litterarius means the same, and is coined here by Sidonius, probably to emphasize the opposition between ‘talking by way of letters’ (which is still possible) and ‘talking in person’ (which is out of the question). The phrase is imitated, meaning no more than ‘letter’, ‘writing’, by e.g. Alc. Avit. Ep. 1. 29 ut directis litterarii sermonis officius alloquia illa captensis, Ennod. Ep. 2.17 ago nunc atque habeo gratiam, quod parvitatem meam litterarii sermonis visitatis affatu, Cassiod. Var. 10.2 sed quoniam ... litterarius sermo narrare plura non patitur.

Litterarius occurs three times in Sidonius’ correspondence, also in 2.10.6 litterariam curam (‘cultivation of literature’, Anderson), and 7.14.10 ego turbam quamlibet magnam litterariae artis (‘literary talent’, Anderson) expertem maxumam solitudinem appell.
**iure**, ‘by right’, is taken up by **merito** ‘deservedly’. One begins a friendship on intrinsic grounds of merit (**merito**), but once the friendship is established, one has to live up to its obligations (**iure**). Both of these words play an important role in Sidonius’ vocabulary, with regard to any claim people have to the exchange of letters, respect, rank, etc. For the ‘rights of friendship’ bridging a distance by correspondence, cf. a similar turn of thought in 4.1.5 precor, quoquo loci es, amicitiae iura inconcussa custodias longumque tibi eti sede absunmus, adsimus affectu, ‘I pray you – wherever you are – to keep the claims of friendship unshaken, and that we may be close through love, although we are far away through our place of residence (see Amherdt 2001: 90 ad loc.). Personal ‘merit’ forms the basis of the way in which people are ranked, e.g. when Sidonius compares himself to bishop Lupus in 9.11.8 cum satis tibi et quidem merito (quidnam enim simile?) in omnibus cedam, ‘in everything I completely and deservedly give precedence to you – for what is comparable to you?’ ‘Merit’ ‘rightly’ gets its recompense: 3.1.3 itaque tibi caelitus iure redhibetur tui facti meritum, ‘the merit of what you have done rightly gets its recompense from heaven’. Cf. 5.21.1 nunc vos parenti venitis heredes, quam iure, tam merito: heirs, not only by formal right, but also by intrinsic merit. The combination of **iure** and **merito** has a long tradition, ever since Catullus and Cicero, e.g. Cic. Dom. 2 iure ac merito laudare.

The words **iure retinebitur** have the same rhythm as 2.2.10 **iure vocitabitur** and 4.3.10 **iure venerabitur**. The metrical pattern of paeon I + cretic as well as the cursus óoooóoo (trispondaicus-plus) are rare in Sidonius (see Appendix H).

**iam pridem caritatis obtentu** ... **inducta**, ‘begun long ago for reasons of friendship’: On the topos of old friendship and its greater intimacy, see my comment on 7.6.1 sunt nobis munere dei novo nostrorum temporum exemplo amicitiarum vetera iura. For **caritas** as a synonym for **amicitia**, see the comment on 7.4.4 ut non habeat vestra caritas finem.

**Obtentu** + gen., ‘by reason of’, occurs nine times in Sidonius’ correspondence, e.g. 3.2.3 solius dilectionis obtentu abrupisti tot repagula, ‘you broke through all the obstacles for love alone’, 4.3.9 impactae professionis obtentu, ‘on account of the episcopate thrust upon me’, and 8.6.13 tui obtentu, ‘about you’. **Obtentu** in classical and later prose means ‘under cover of’, ‘on the pretext of’ (**obtendere**), but in the fifth century the meaning ‘on account of’, ‘thanks to’ (**obtinere**) appears alongside, and the ‘classical’ **obtentu** tends to lose its negative connotation (coming to mean ‘in order to’, ‘for the purpose of’), e.g. respectively Cassian. Conl. 2.26 debemus ... humanitatem atque adhortationem advenientibus fratribus caritatis obtentu (‘out of love’) similiter exhibere, and Fulg. Ep. 18.2 nostrae salutis obtentu, ‘with a view to our salvation’. This usage continues into the Middle Ages, cf. both Blaise and Niermeyer s.v. **obtentus I** and II.

For **inducere consuetudinem**, ‘to introduce a practice’, cf. already e.g. Cic. Rab. Post. 8 inducatur ... **consuetudo huius generis iudiciorum nova**, ‘let the new practice of this type of lawsuit be introduced’.

**veteribus annuit exemplis**, ‘is consistent with old examples’ (Loyen: ‘répond aux exemples antiques’): The tradition of writing letters among friends is based on old examples. Sidonius himself in Ep. 1.1 had mentioned Symmachus, Pliny and Cicero. For **vetera exempla**, ‘examples from the past’, cf. a long line of instances which refer back to the olden days, from Cic. Ver. 3.182 non me fugit iudices, vetera exempla pro fictis fabulis iam audiri atque haberi, to Symm. Or. 2 p. 326 l. 28 ecce exempla veterata saeculorum! For the slightly different **nova exempla**, ‘new
instances', see my comment on 7.1.3 ad nova … veterum Ninivitarum exempla, and 7.6.1 novo nostrorum temporum exemplo.

The reading annuit has been questioned: annuit L Luetjohann: annuit NVMTCFP Mohr Anderson Loyen Bellès. Anderson in his note ad loc. says: 'L is surely wrong even though adopted by Luetjohann. Perhaps ac novis vivit or eminuit, or nunc vivit?' Semple however retains annuit, and interprets: 'which is in harmony with the classical examples of friendship.' Finally, Warmington proposed annititur. Some caution is advisable, surely. The problem is that there is no support among the remaining seven occurrences of the verb in Sidonius' correspondence, and scarcely in other authors, for the verb annuere to mean, instead of the usual 'to support', 'approve of', something like 'to be consistent with', 'match'. Even TLL 1:791.4 ff. somewhat carelessly ranges our phrase under the head 'i.q. assentior, approbo, laudo'. A better match is proposed by OLD 2b: Mela 1.88 ibi a fugitivis, ut aiunt, condita (nomen famae adnuit) Phygelæ, ‘there, so they say, fugitives founded Phygelæ – the name is consistent with the story’. I take the current phrase to be an expressive trouvaille by Sidonius. The friends carry on an old tradition, their friendship ‘says ‘yes’’ to it, builds on it.

superest, ut sollicito veneratori culpam rarae occasionis indulgeas,

superest, ut, 'one thing remains to be done, viz.:' Only here in Sidonius is superest construed with ut. Elsewhere we read quod superest (6.9.3, 8.7.4), and several occurrences of restat ut and quod restat. Superest ut is found since the the first century AD. Pliny the Younger in his correspondence has a marked preference for it (seven instances), e.g. Plin. Ep. 1.1.2 (the volume of letters, which you asked me for, is ready) superest, ut nec te consilii nec me paeniteat obsequii.

sollicito veneratori, 'your devoted admirer': Sollicitus (class. 'worried', 'alarmed') means 'careful', 'sollicitous', 'interested' in later Latin. See Köhler 1995: 185 ad 1.5.1 sollicitus inquiris (she translates: ‘mit Interesse’; cf. her translation of 1.2.7: ‘aufmerksam’). Cf. Plin. Ep. 3.19.1 ff. (the adjoining estate is for sale) in his me multa sollicitant ... sollicitat primum ipsa pulchritudo iungendi, ‘there are many attractions in it for me ... the primary attraction is that it is adjacent’, and Sidon. Ep. 1.2.1 laudans in te tam delicatae sollicitudinis ingenuitatem, ‘I appreciate the honesty of your perceptive interest (viz. in the person of Theodoric)’. For the adjective sollicitus (fifteen times in the correspondence) in the great majority of cases the translation ‘inquisitive’, ‘curious’, ‘interested’ is perfectly suited (in phrases with inspicere, inquirere, rimari, etc.). See Blaise s.v. sollicitus 2 and Niermeyer s.v. sollicitus. Hence, the translations by Loyen ('tourmenté') and Bellès ('angoixat') (and Anderson’s ‘anxious’), though not outright impossible, are hardly idiomatic.

The noun venerator appears only here in Sidonius. It has its place among the polite formulas in later epistolography, e.g. Ennod. Ep. 3.20 veneratoris vestri adfinis mei Iuliani negotium Marcellini laborat, Conc. Gall. 2: 216 i. 36 venerator vester Sapaudus episcopus salutare praesumo. See also my comment on 7.3.2 venerabilis.

culpam rarae occisionis, 'the fault of visiting rarely': Culpa is also used for not coming in 7.5.3 poteritis praesentiam vestram potius excusare quam culpam (q.v.). Cf. the verb culpare for not writing in 8.9.1 litteras ... quibus silentium meum culpas, and 8.13.2.

Note the understatement in rarae, because Sidonius does not come at all. For the opposite, ‘visiting frequently’, compare 7.10.2 assiduitas praesentiae, with my comment.
Ocursio only here and in the paired letter 7.10.2 occursionis debitum. See my comment there.

quae quo minus assidue conspectus tui sacrosancta contemplatione potiatur, nunc periculum de vicinis timet, nunc invidiam de patronis.

quae codd. Luetjohann Mohr Bellès, qui coni. Anderson Loyen. Anderson (note 4 ad loc.) calls quae ‘practically impossible’. Bellès (note 143 ad loc.) thinks Anderson’s conjecture ‘reasonable’, and the personification of occursio, implied by quae, ‘somewhat artificial’, but nevertheless retains quae. I think he is right. To ignore the reading of all the manuscripts is reckless and unnecessary. Retaining quae means occursio is personified: ‘my visit is unable to get to see you, due to our neighbours as well as our protectors’. For a similar example of such a ‘harsh’ personification of a visit (occursio/occursus), cf. Alc. Avit. Ep. 2.40 p. 68 l. 24 etiamsi alia causa non esset, qua beatitudinem vestram litterario famulatu occursus meae devotionis expereter, ‘even if there was no other reason for the outreach of my devotion to call on your Blessedness by means of the mandatory letter’, lit. ‘the visit of my devotion called on your Blessedness by means of a letter’.

Assidue: note the opposition rarae ... assidue: coming only now and then v. permanent contemplation. The pair raritas – assiduitas is topical; see above on culpam rarae occurationis.

conspectus tui sacrosancta contemplatione potiatur, ‘enjoys the holy sight of your countenance’: The formulation may be an echo of Auson. Ep. (=27) 8.3 f. congressus igitur nostros pete; si tibi cura, / quae mihi, conspectu iam potiere meo, ‘therefore, come and visit me; if you are as eager as I am, you will soon enjoy the sight of me’. It points ahead to the elaborate prose of Avitus and Ennodius, cf. especially Alc. Avit. Ep. 3.93 p. 100 l. 15 iubar quidem conspectus vestri contemplatione non capimus, sed lucem serenitatis, quam ubique diffunditis, desiderio possidemus (which is to say: ‘I do not have the pleasure of seeing you in person, but writing to you is a reasonable alternative’; the intense glow of the man’s countenance which a visitor sees is experienced as a pleasant light in the distance), and, for conspectus, cf. Alc. Avit. Ep. 1.32 p. 63 l. 2 ut paradiso vestri conspectus inclusus ... vos videat, ‘to see you while one hides in the paradise of your countenance’ (= ‘while one is staying with you’), Ennod. Ep. 6.7 p. 218 l. 12 dum enim magitutinem vestram alloquor, votivo me aestimo non deesse conspectui, ‘as I write to your excellency, I feel that I am not far from the countenance I long for’.

For potiri in the sense of frui, uti, ‘to gain’, ‘acquire’, ‘come by’, see also 7.9.13 proprietate potiuntur, and my comment.

Sacrosancta is used in enallage: ‘your holy face’. For sacrosanctus of a bishop, see my comment on 7.1.6 sacrosanctae informationis, and compare 7.10.1 sacrosanctis ... digitis.

nunc periculum de vicinis timet, nunc invidiam de patronis.

The Visigoths (vicini) keep besieging Clermont, the Burgundians (patroni) are its allies, but always with their own interest of territorial expansion in mind and jealously (invidiam) watching out for any move Clermont might make on its own. This is Savarons’ interpretation, which is followed by modern scholars, cf. Anderson note 5 ad loc., Loyen 3: 193 n. 66 (cf. Loyen 2: xix n. 5), Kaufmann 1995: 183 f. and n. 540 (‘... scheinen seine [= Sidonius] Bedenken gegen die Burgunder ... größer gewesen zu sein als gegen die Westgoten’), Bellès 3 note 143 ad loc., who speaks of ‘opportunism’ on the side of the Burgundians. Harries 1996: 32 f. speaks of ‘confused and fluid situations’, and states that
‘although technically still Romanum solum..., Clermont could not hope for help from Italy and was, in reality, a Burgundian protectorate’.

Cf. 7.7.2 adversus vicinorum aciem, ‘against the offensive of their neighbours’, i.e. the Visigoths. See my comment there, and General Introduction, sect. 3.1 Visigoths and Burgundians.

The same elements can be seen in the letter to Felix from 471/72 AD, 3.4.1 sic aemulorum sibi in medio positi lacrimabilis praeda populorum, suspecti Burgundionibus, proximi Gothis, nec impugnantum ira nec propugnantum caremus invidia. The Clermontois are at the mercy of the competing Burgunds and Goths, suspect to the former, and near to the latter. The attacking Goths bear a grudge against them, the defending Burgunds do not trust them.

periculum de, ‘danger originating from’: It is first attested – side by side with periclitari de – in Ambr. Nab. 6.31 beatus qui de abundantia periclitatur? immo miserior iste fecunditatibus suis quam pauper, cui periculum de egestate est, ‘Is the person who runs a risk because of his wealth happy? No, he is unhappier because of his abundance than the poor man who runs a risk because of his poverty’. This is another instance of the preposition de superseding ab and ex, for which see my comment on 7.1.1 de nostra tantum obice, cf. Col. 5.9 si n<on> periculum a pecore habeat, Sal. Cat. 52.16 si periculum ex illis metuit.

sed de his ista haec: etiam multa sunt.

The manuscript tradition is ista haec etiam MTCFP: istaec etiam LN. Subsequent editors have chosen as follows:

sed de his ista: haec etiam multa sunt Luetjohann Anderson,
sed de his istaec: et iam multa sunt Leo Mohr Bellès,
sed de his istaec et iam multa sunt Loyen,

I propose to read sed de his ista haec: etiam multa sunt, ‘but let’s leave it at this; it is more than enough’. For the explication of ista haec, see my comment on 7.8.4 sed cur ego ista haec ineptus adieci?

For etiam as a marker of indignation or impatience, ‘that’s (about) enough’, ‘that’ll do’, see TLL 5/2: 949.53 f. and Kroon 1995: 95 (for the element of impatience compare Risselada 1993: 222-25). The phrase etiam multa sunt is attested only here.

On the colloquial nature of this kind of expression, see Köhler 1995: 182 ad 1.4.3 sed hinc quia istaec satis (‘als Überleitung zu einem anderen Thema’), and Amherdt 2001: 413 ad 4.18.5 sed quid hinc amplius. Cf. 8.6.10 sed de sodali deque me satis dictum. The phrase is the late antique variant of sed haec hactenus, e.g. Cic. Att. 5.20.9.

Section 2

interim Petrum, tribunicium virum, portitorem nostri sermonis, insinuo. interim, ‘meanwhile’, quasi parenthetically introduces the recommendation, which is technically the main subject matter of the letter. See my comment on 7.4.3 praeterea commendo gerulum litterarum.
Petrum, tribunicium virum, ‘Petrus who has the rank of a tribunus’: The nobleman Petrus is listed in Stroheker 1948: 204 # 298 and PLRE 2: 866 f. Apart from being mentioned here, nothing is known about him. He probably had served, at any rate nominally, as a tribunus et notarius, and hence had the intermediate senatorial rank of spectabilis. Originally a function of clerks, it had been considerably upgraded by a law of Gratianus and Theodosius I of AD 381. See LRE 1: 573-75: ‘The first and second on the list by seniority ranked equal with proconsuls, the remaining tribunes and notaries were equated with vicars, and the lower grade of domestici et notarii with consulars: all were thus senators’. By the early fifth century the corps had acquired many sinecure members. ‘The poet Claudian, who was a tribune and notary, is not likely to have done much serious secretarial duty, nor are the the various young nobles of the high Roman aristocracy who served in the corps. .... By the middle of the fifth century there were apparently a large number of wealthy men who bore the title of tribune and notary in the Western parts, but only thirty who were in active attendance at court.’ Köhler 1995: 170 on 1.3.2 cites Demandt who calls the function the ‘Eingangsposition für den Hofdienst von Söhnen einflußreicher Beamter’. See also Teitler 1985, esp. 19-21, 49-53 and 56-59. Incidentally, Sidonius’ father, who later was to be praefectus praetorio Galliarum, in his youth had served as one of the tribuni notariique (Sidon. Ep. 5.9.2, see LRE 2: 1235 n. 21). Sidonius himself may also have been a tribunus et notarius in 455-56 under Avitus; for the argumentum ex silentio see Mathisen 1979: 170.

portitorem nostri sermonis, ‘the bearer of this letter’: For the various designations of letter-bearers, see my comment on 7.4.3 gerulum litterarum.

insinuo, ‘I recommend’: See my comment on 7.4.1 insinuare. Cf. 6.3.2 commendamus apicum portitorem.

qui id ipsum sedulo exposcit, quique quid negotii ferat praesentaneo compendiosius potest intimare memoratu.

qui id ipsum sedulo exposcit, ‘who begs for exactly that’, viz. to be introduced. For sedulo, ‘insistently’, ‘earnestly’, with verbs meaning ‘to ask’, see my comment on 7.1.6 sedulo petens.

praesentaneo compendiosius potest intimare memoratu, ‘can tell (it) more succinctly himself’: The same in other words in 6.11.2 quae sit vero negotii sui series, ipse rectius praesentaneo coram narratione patefaciet, and 8.13.4 de cetero, quae ipsi fuerit isto causa veniendi, praesentaneo conducibilius idem poterit explicare memoratu. For this variation technique see General Introduction, sect. 6.2 Style: ‘Variation technique and topos’.

For praesentaneus, ‘present’, ‘at hand’ (from end of fourth century onward; see Souter s.v.; originally ‘immediately operative’, ‘prompt in effect’ (remedium, venenum; Seneca, Pliny the Elder, Suetonius)), cf. e.g. Symm. Ep. 1.24 en tibi libellos, quorum mihi praesentanea copia fuit. Anderson translates praesentaneo memoratu with ‘by word of mouth’.

Compendiosus was first used by Apuleius for ‘short’, ‘succinct’, Met. 6.30 compendiosum ... iter, and 11.22 compendiosa verba. In Sidonius it occurs only here.

Intimare, ‘to impress deeply (upon)’, ‘make familiar (with)’, hence also ‘to inform’, ‘tell’, occurs only once more in Sidonius, 8.15.1 ut promitterem tibi Attilae bellum stilo me posteris intimaturum, ‘to promise you that I would describe the war with Attila for posterity’. Its first two occurrences are in Apuleius, Pl. 2.5 cui fuerit fideliter intimata (virtus), and Mun. pr. Cf. also e.g. Ruric. Ep. 2.55 (Ruricius introduces the presbyter Maxentius) quia illic notos et amicos
habere se dicit, qui eum beatitudini vestrae possint in praesenti plenius intimare, ‘because he says that he has acquaintances and friends there, who can introduce him personally and more fully to your Blessedness’.

cui, precor, quod in vobis opis est intuitu paginae praesentis accedat,
cui, precor, ... accedat, ‘I beg you to give him’, lit. ‘that he may get’: For accedere + dat. ‘to come to appertain (to a person or thing)’, ‘be given (to)’, see OLD s.v. 15c. In Sidonius compare 3.5.1 quasi nil tibi quoque laudis aut gloriae accedat, 5.16.1 fratri etiam tuo Ecdicio ... honor patricius accedit, ‘your brother Ecdicius also gets the title of patricius’.

quod in vobis opis est, ‘every assistance you can give’: Similarly in another letter of recommendation, 6.5.1 qua potestis ope. Cf. Symm. Ep. 4.19 fac igitur, si quid in te opis est, ut adflictae domui pia temporum parcat humanitas. The phrase is relatively rare.

intuitu paginae praesentis, ‘from regard for this letter’ (Anderson): For intuitu + gen., ‘on account of’, see my comment on 7.9.21 intuitus parvulorum.


manente respectu nihilominus aequitatis, contra quam nec magis familiarium causam commendare consuevi.

manente respectu ... aequitatis, ‘subject to a proper respect for justice’ (Anderson): It is in the first place up to the person who recommends someone to weigh the pros and cons of the cliens and his cause. His integrity as a patronus is at stake, so he voices a reservation as to the eventual justice of the cause of the supplicant. Some examples of this: in 6.3.2 the reservation is about the juridical merits of the will the plaintiff possesses, merits, which still have to be assessed: hunc (= the plaintiff) eatenus commendare praesumo, etc., ‘I dare recommend him in sofar ...’ In 6.11.2 the author has a general feeling that he can trust the plaintiff’s (a Jew’s) cause: sane quia ... solent huiuscemodi homines honestas habere causas, etc., ‘because people of this kind usually have righteous causes’.

The sentence is crucial to our understanding of the function of the current letter within book 7. The reader remembers how Sidonius had been mistaken in trusting Amantius unconditionally. In 6.8.2 to bishop Graecus he had written: nec ob hoc dubito audita fideriter asserere, quia non parum mihi intumos agunt quibus est ipse satis intumus, ‘I don’t hesitate to guarantee with full confidence what I have heard, because the people with whom he is close are also close friends of mine’. The retractatio for this naïveté is the starting point for letter 7.2, to the same Graecus: Sidonius confesses he had believed veritati resultantia ... et diversa, ‘a tale utterly at variance with the truth’ (7.2.1). The reader of the current letter will remember the case of Amantius, and interpret what follows, contra quam nec magis familiarium causas commendare consuevi, ‘even when I recommend the cases of people more familiar to me, I’m not in the habit to do it unjustifiably’, as self-irony of the man who had ‘recommended unjustifiably’ Amantius who was connected with the circle of his intum! Inserted here at redaction, after the explosive letter 7.7 which found fault with Graecus for his presumed treason of the Auvergne, the letter acquires the additional layer of atonement and appeasement. See the Introduction to the current letter, section 2.