

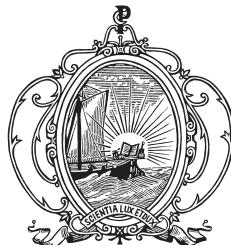
# NEW APPROACHES TO SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS

*edited by*

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with Indices on Helga Köhler,

*C. Sollius Apollinaris Sidonius: Briefe Buch I*



PEETERS  
LEUVEN – PARIS – WALPOLE, MA  
2013

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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

# CREATING IDENTITY FROM THE PAST: THE CONSTRUCTION OF HISTORY IN THE LETTERS OF SIDONIUS<sup>°</sup>

Sigrid MRATSCHEK

### 1 THE TOPIC: AN ALLUSIVE AUTHOR

Sidonius Apollinaris is an ‘extraordinarily allusive author’. His letters are more creative than has been recognized, less concerned with retelling than with recalling history. For example, in his letter of 475 about the fall of Clermont-Ferrand (7.7) he presents himself as a contemporary witness of an epochal change. Yet the letter cannot be read as an autobiographical document. Drawing on epic and history for patterns from the past – Troy, and the indomitable resistance of a Decius – Sidonius develops methods and concepts for visualizing and reconstructing history in different ways. His evocation of literary role models prompts his audience to engage in discourse with past voices that are made relevant in the present. A commentary that bridges the gap between historical facts and intertextuality can provide insight into new features of Sidonius’ *persona* and into his persuasive communicative powers.

### 2 PROBLEMS INTRINSIC TO A SIDONIUS COMMENTARY

#### 2.1 First Principles

‘It is worth asking (1) whose text is elucidated, (2) for whom, (3) by whom, (4) where, and (5) why.’<sup>1</sup> What is true of any commentary, ancient

<sup>°</sup> This chapter profited greatly from the stimulating discussion among all participating in the Sidonius workshop hosted by NIAS at Wassenaar in January 2011. It is gratefully dedicated to my teacher in Roman literature, Michael von Albrecht (Heidelberg). The subject was studied in depth in the context of my project for a Visiting Fellowship at All Souls College, Oxford, in 2012, and has been presented at the *Visiting Fellows Colloquium* at All Souls College and the *Late Roman Seminar* of the Oxford Centre for Late Antiquity at Corpus Christi College. – Translations of Sidonius are based on Anderson. Unattributed translations are my own.

1. Most (1999) viii. See discussion in the introduction above, pp. 8-11.

or modern, will apply equally to our comprehensive commentary on Sidonius. With a linguistically difficult, non-classical author like Sidonius there is no difficulty in defining ‘for whom’ (2) the commentary is intended, or ‘by whom’ (3) it is written: for an international and interdisciplinary expert readership, and by an international and interdisciplinary research team. Ideally, division of labour would reflect the number of genres concerned – letters, panegyrics, *carmina minora* – and of interests. ‘Where’ (4) the commentary has its origin depends on the locations of the contributing scholars and their institutions. The remaining questions concern the historical *persona* of the author (1), and the purpose of the commentary (5).

## 2.2 Sidonius’ Personality and Place in History

Sidonius Apollinaris was a man of diverse talents. In his works we encounter him as a sophisticated and subtle aristocrat, successful politician and combative bishop, in exile, at court, in his exclusive circle of friends, and in a private tutorial with his son, as an imaginative poet using ideas from pagan mythology, as a composer of imperial panegyrics and elaborately crafted letters. With Sidonius we are dealing with constantly changing situations and different perspectives. A man prominent in such diverse roles on the stage of history might seem typical of the age of transition between Antiquity and the Middle Ages. But the very manner in which the general opinion about him has been destabilized by the splendid work of scholars such as Jill Harries makes it all the more important to look at the manner in which he gave himself such an apparently solid *persona* – so solid indeed, that we have believed him far more than we should have.<sup>2</sup> An analysis of Sidonius’ ‘coded communication’, that is, decoding the message of his letters as embedded in rhetorical ciphers (manifested in examples from the past and their visualization), and thus providing clues for an understanding of his contradictory *persona* and the construction of his ‘self’, has not yet been undertaken.<sup>3</sup> As to his place in history, the key point is made by Sidonius himself (*Ep.* 4.22.5, to Leo):

*praecipue gloriam nobis parvam ab historia petere fixum, quia per homines  
clericalis officii temerarie nostra, iactanter aliena, praeterita infructuose,*

2. Harries (1994) 11–19: ‘Decoding Sidonius’. On Sidonius’ and Roman identity in a changing Gaul, see Woolf (1998) 248–49. Sidonius’ career and the networks associated with his circle have been meticulously analysed by Mathisen, e.g., 1991b, 1993, 2003a, and in the older biography by Stevens (1933).

3. Egelhaaf-Gaiser (2010) 261 and 266 characterizes Sidonius’ personality in the sphragis as a ‘hochkomplexes Vexierbild’, a highly complex trick image with competing *personae*, contrasting Harries (1992) 300: ‘Behind the shifting façade and the distortions of

*praesentia semiplene, turpiter falsa, periculose vera dicuntur ... ilicit, scriptio historica videtur ordine a nostro multum abhorrere, cuius inchoatio invidia, continuatio labor, finis est odium.*<sup>4</sup>

The politician declines to write contemporary history; the bishop refuses obdurately to write theology.<sup>5</sup> Not even the influential *consiliarius* Leo at the court of the Visigothic king, who secured Sidonius' release from captivity, nor Firminus, the *doctus auctor* to whom he dedicated the last volume of the Epistles, could persuade him otherwise.<sup>6</sup> Here Sidonius is in good company: the historian Tacitus declares he 'will not remain silent' about the disastrous pass to which the state has come, yet in his *Histories* he never actually reaches his own period.<sup>7</sup> We all know that Sidonius saw himself, in his capacity as a writer combining patronage of the arts with politics, as a successor of Pliny the Younger – *ego Plinio ut discipulus assurgo* (*Ep.* 4.22.2).<sup>8</sup> Like Pliny, he preferred modern poetry (*nugae temerariae*) to the well-trodden road (*agger vetustus*) of historical topics.<sup>9</sup> And yet it is to Sidonius that we owe much of our

rhetoric was a set of coherent beliefs'. Note also the discussion of his controversial personality in Heather (1999) 366, and Wolfram's reference to Sidonius' 'words ... full of contradiction' (2001) 189; further Kitchen (2010) 66: 'various, even contradictory, sentiments'.

4. 'But the chief reason why I am firmly resolved to seek but small glory from historical writing is this – for men of the clerical profession it is foolhardy to record our own affairs and arrogant to record those of the outside world: our account of things past is profitless, that of things present is only half-complete; and while it is shameful to utter falsehoods, it is dangerous to tell the truth ... Well, then, historical writing seems very ill suited to our cloth: enmity dogs its beginning, toil its continuation, hatred its conclusion.' Cf. *Ep.* 8.15.1. See Harries (1994) 19 and Náf (1995) 133–34. Pliny's judgement is similar (*Ep.* 5.8.12): *graves offensae, levius gratia*, 'serious offence, small thanks'.

5. Sidon. *Ep.* 4.17.3, writing to Arbogast, a *comes* at Trier, rated writing theology (*de paginis ... spiritualibus*) as showing off (*iactantia*). See Harries (1994) 18 and Náf (1995) 160–61.

6. Sidon. *Ep.* 4.22.1 *principere te ... ut epistularum curam iam terminatis libris earum converteremus ad stilum historiae*, 'that you enjoined me, with my books of letters now completed, to turn to the composition of history'; 8.15.1, cf. 9.16; Ennod. *Ep.* 1.8.1.

7. Tac. *Ann.* 14.64.3 *tum publicae cladis insignia fuisse. neque tamen silebimus ...*, '... was then a symbol of public calamity. Nevertheless, ... I shall not pass it by in silence' (translation J. Jackson, Loeb, modified). He is referring here only to the deceased emperors of the Julio-Claudian dynasty and the Flavians!

8. First and foremost R.K. Gibson (2012 and 2013) and in this volume, chapter 11. On the era of Trajan as an ideal in Late Antiquity, see Cassiod. *Var.* 8.3 *ecce Traiani vestri clarum saeculis reparamus exemplum*, 'see, we are reviving the glorious example of your Trajan for the ages'. See Mratschek (2008).

9. Sidon. *Carm.* 9.16–18 *non nos currimus aggerem vetustum / nec quicquam invenies ubi priorum / antiquas terat orbitas Thalia*, 'I am not running over the old road; you shall find here no place where my muse treads in the antique ruts of my predecessors'. Sidonius goes on to describe the 'old road' as historical topics. He dedicates a papyrus roll of poems in hendecasyllabi to the praetorian prefect of 469, his school friend Magnus Felix (*Carm.* 9.9). See Schetter (1992). On *agger vetustus*, see Gerbrandy in this volume (pp. 63 and 73), holding a different view.

knowledge of Gaul in Late Antiquity. The works of those, however, who did write contemporary history, such as Sulpicius Alexander and Renatus Profuturus Frigeridus, have not survived.<sup>10</sup> What motives lay behind Sidonius' programmatic rejection of historiography?

### 2.3 A Career of Peaks and Troughs

One explanation probably lies in the rapid alternation of political success and failure, in the ups and downs of Sidonius' biography, the career patterns that recur in a frustrating sequence in all four phases of his life, both before and after becoming bishop of Clermont, as discussed below.<sup>11</sup> A comprehensive commentary taking them all into account would demonstrate that Sidonius' own world in a sense mirrored the political history of Gaul and its rapidly changing regimes, with Sidonius now player in the game, now the ball.<sup>12</sup> As a scion of Gaul's top-level aristocracy, which included both his father and his grandfather, who, in the office of *praefectus praetorio Galliarum* (448/49 and 408 respectively), had governed the western empire from Britain to Spain, Sidonius was predestined to become a politician. In 452 he married Papianilla, the daughter of Eparchius Avitus, who likewise had been *praefectus praetorio Galliarum*, not to mention *magister militum*, and three years later became Roman emperor. Sidonius himself, who at the apogee of his career joked that, with Christ's help, he had been made prefect of Rome for his sense of style,<sup>13</sup> is a classic example of the interaction of literary culture and politics.

Towards the end of the fourth century, the historian Ammianus saw panegyric as the *historiography* of the future.<sup>14</sup> The form was perfected a century later by Sidonius, as an instrument of his political career. His four eulogies of three emperors and a king mark the peaks between the troughs of that career.<sup>15</sup> In 455 he followed his father-in-law to Rome, there reciting a

10. Mentioned by Greg. Tur. *Franc.* 2.9.

11. A recent publication uses the letters of Book 1 as basis for an overview of Sidonius' political activity: see Küppers (2005). On the network of his family's contacts see Mathisen's numerous publications, e.g., Mathisen (1981), included in Mathisen (1991b) 13–27, with stemma on p. 27, and more recently an overview in Mascoli (2010).

12. Sidon. *Ep.* 5.17.6 *mox bipertitis, erat ut aetas, acclamationibus efflagitata profertur his pila, his tabula*, 'thereupon we raised a two-fold clamour demanding according to our ages either ball or gaming-board'. Sidonius was one of the 'ball players'.

13. Sidon. *Ep.* 1.9.8 *igitur cum ad praefeturam sub ope Christi stili occasione pervenimus*, 'so since I have, with Christ's help, been promoted to the Prefectship by the timely use of my pen'. Cf. 9.16.3 (*Carm.* 41) v. 30.

14. Amm. 31.16.9 *ad maiores ... stilos*, 'to grander ways of writing', seen by most interpreters as a panegyric, cf. Kelly (2007); seen as historiography in epic style by Rosen (1982) 41–48 and Mratschek (2007) 269–70.

15. See Loyen (1942), Rousseau (2000), and recently Chenault (2012) 111, 130 Table A: honorific inscriptions, and Brolli's contribution to this volume, chapter 7.

panegyric on the latter's consulship (*Carm.* 7), and being honoured for it with a bronze statue in the Forum of Trajan; in 456, following the fall of Avitus, he returned to his native land and in 458 composed a panegyric (*Carm.* 5) hailing the new emperor, Majorian, who then invited him as a *comes* into the inner circle of the court at Arles (*Ep.* 1.11.13); in 468, after being appointed to head a delegation of the Arverni to Rome, he delivered a panegyric for the second consulship of the emperor Anthemius (*Carm.* 2) and was rewarded with the urban prefecture (468) and the rank of *patricius*; and the year 477, last but not least, found Sidonius, a prisoner at the court of the Visigothic king, writing a short panegyric to Euric (*Ep.* 8.9.5: *Carm.* 34) and soon afterwards returning to his diocese in the Auvergne, a free man.

## 2.4 The Silence of Sidonius and his Communicative Strategies

Less easily explained than Sidonius' rise to power are the turning-points in his life about which he remained stubbornly silent – the six years after the Vandalic campaign and the execution of Majorian in 461, likewise his consecration as a bishop, and the motive that drove him to switch from a political career to one in the church; it may have been a failed attempt to collaborate with the Goths (467/68).<sup>16</sup> There was no precedent for a prefect of Rome exchanging his high office of state for the bishopric of a minor provincial city like Clermont-Ferrand (Augustonemetum); and it remains a mystery whether (as with Ambrose of Milan or Paulinus of Nola) it was because of his high standing in the political arena that he was appointed bishop of the Arverni in his wife's home town – or because he was politically sidelined. Whatever the case, the Arvandus scandal and Sidonius' publicly declared withdrawal from political life were followed by his re-emergence in about 470 as a combative bishop and champion of Clermont; for four years at least he defended 'his' city against the Visigothic king, Euric. After the capitulation of Clermont (475), the fourth and final phase of his life – beginning with his exile to Liviana, near Carcassonne, and ending at the court of the Visigothic king in Burdigala (Bordeaux) – reveals him finally once again in Clermont as bishop.

It is particularly noteworthy that the turning-points in Sidonius' life went hand in hand with new directions in his literary output. He had finished writing poetry just after he was consecrated bishop. However, this new orientation does not mean that he discarded the classical

16. Sivan (1989), Harries (1992) and (1994) 16 conjecture involvement in the Arvandus affair. Opposing views from Mathisen in his review of Harries, *IJCT* 3 (1996) 246–50, and Rousseau (1976).

cultural heritage entirely. What he aimed to achieve by his renunciation of ‘pagan’ poetry was to perform for his audience different social roles and lifestyles adopted one after the other.<sup>17</sup> After the fall of Clermont, Sidonius gave up his role as an organizer of the Gallic resistance, replacing it with strategies of communication and of publication of his letters, in an attempt at exerting influence in a new way on the high aristocracy and the episcopate on the one hand, and the new rulers and their collaborators on the other.<sup>18</sup> It was during his period of political impotence that the tradition of classical high culture – its discourses, rhetorical ciphers and media strategies impenetrable except to the élite in Gaul, and perhaps Rome – became, for Sidonius and his peers, the sole criterion of their *nobilitas*.<sup>19</sup> For the Gallic aristocracy, as Van Waarden comments in *Writing to Survive* (2010), writing became a ‘survival strategy’.

A reading of the letter written immediately before the occupation of Clermont will trace and analyse Sidonius’ concepts, providing an interpretative key to this demanding author. It will also indicate to what extent the correspondence allows us to infer criteria for a comprehensive commentary, and what such criteria might be.

### 3 LETTER 7.7: BACK TO ROME’S ROMANTIC ORIGINS

#### 3.1 Historical Setting

The topic is the peace treaty of summer 475, providing for the cession of Auvergne to the Visigoths in exchange for Provence.<sup>20</sup> The letter was addressed to bishop Graecus of Marseille, who was acting on the Roman side, along with bishops Basilius of Aix, Leontius of Arles, and Faustus of Riez as chief negotiators with king Euric, while the *princeps*, Julius Nepos,

17. Egelhaaf-Gaiser (2010) 275, for example, notes echoes of Horace and references to the poems inserted in the *sphragis* of the correspondence (9.16); cf. in this volume, Stoehr 3.3.1, p. 150. For poems written after 469, see also Sidon. *Ep.* 8.11.3 and 9.13.2; cf. 9.12.3.

18. In Mommsen’s view, only Sidonius’ first book of letters to Constantius was edited as early as 469.

19. Sidon. *Ep.* 8.2.2 *nam iam remotis gradibus dignitatum, per quas solebat ultimo a quoque summus quisque discerni, solum erit posthac nobilitatis indicium litteras nosse*, ‘for now that the old degrees of official rank are swept away, those degrees by which the highest used to be distinguished from the lowest, the only token of nobility will henceforth be a knowledge of letters’. See Mathisen (1988) and (1993) 105–18, Gemeinhardt (2007) 492–93, and Mratschek (2002) 48.

20. See Demandt (2007) 211 and Jiménez Garnica (1999) 108; detailed accounts in Wölfel (2001) 189–91, Stein (1928) 585, and Van Waarden (2010) 11. On dating the letter and the treaty with the Visigoths to mid 475, see Mathisen’s contribution in this volume, p. 222.

was in Italy.<sup>21</sup> The initiative for the peace talks came from the emperor, who had sent the quaestor Licinianus to Toulouse to confer with Euric. Graecus was an imperial envoy, a cultivated man and recipient of periodic correspondence from Sidonius, who would heap such compliments on him as *flos sacerdotum, gemma pontificum, scientia fortis, fortior conscientia* (*Ep.* 9.4.2). To Graecus, Sidonius chooses to characterize his compositional talent – which had helped him to secure the urban prefecture – with the *topos* of modesty, as a *stilus rusticans* (*Ep.* 7.2.1).

But Sidonius was neither a traumatized victim nor just a humble writer allowing his emotions free rein.<sup>22</sup> His letter is not to be read purely as a historical document. It is also an artful piece of rhetoric demonstrating its writer's capacity to respond creatively to the looming events. When *his* city and the Auvergne are to be sacrificed to the interests of Rome in the peace treaty of 475, and handed over to the Visigoths, Sidonius bursts out wrathfully: 'Our enslavement is the price paid for the safety of others' (*Ep.* 7.7.2). He had fought for Rome 'out of love for the State', *amore rei publicae*,<sup>23</sup> and now he finds himself 'amidst an unconquerable, yet alien people'.<sup>24</sup> However, the politically emotive slogan *servitus* is followed up, not by a call for resistance, but by a scholarly allusion to Lucan's *Pharsalia* (1.427-28): *Arvernique ausi Latio se fingere fratres, / sanguine ab Iliaco populi.*<sup>25</sup> The heroic past of the Arverni, who under Vercingetorix led the Gallic revolt against Rome, and inflicted

21. Sidon. *Ep.* 7.7.4 *per vos legationes meant; vobis primum pax quamquam principe absente non solum tractata reseratur, verum etiam tractanda committitur*, 'you are the channel through which embassies come and go; to you first of all, although the emperor is absent, peace is not only reported when negotiated, but entrusted to be negotiated', 7.6.10 *tu sacratissimorum pontificum, Leontii, Fausti, Graeci, urbe, ordine, caritate, mediis inveniris; per vos mala foederum currunt, per vos regni utriusque pacta condicionesque portantur*, 'you are surrounded by those most holy pontiffs, Leontius, Faustus, and Graecus; you have a middle place among them in the location of your city and in seniority, and you are the centre of their loving circle; you four are the channels through which the unfortunate treaties flow; through your hands pass the compacts and stipulations of both realms'. See Harries (1994) 235–37 and Kaufmann (1995) 206–19. Cf. Heinzelmann (1982) 618 and Mathisen (1982) 374–75 (= (1991b) 375–76).

22. Comparable with Paulinus of Pella: see McLynn (2009), esp. 63. On the deployment of emotions, see below p. 267.

23. Sidon. *Ep.* 7.7.2 *facta est servitus nostra pretium securitatis alienae* (my translation). See Overwien (2009b) 93. On the 'love for the State' note the palindrome ROMA – AMOR (*Ep.* 9.14.4: *Carm.* 38) cited by Henke (2007) 218–20.

24. Sidon. *Ep.* 8.2.2 *in medio sic gentis invictae, quod tamen alienae* (my translation).

25. Luc. 1.427–28: 'The Arverni dared to think of themselves as brothers of Rome, people from Trojan stock', Sidon. *Ep.* 7.7.2 *Arvernorum ... servitus qui ... audebant se quondam fratres Latio dicere et sanguine ab Iliaco populos computare*, 'the servitude of the Arverni who dared once to call themselves "brothers of Latium" and counted themselves "a people sprung from Trojan blood"'. Neil McLynn pointed out to me the difference between *dicere* in Sidonius and  *fingere* in Lucan: it is based on the identification of Sidonius with the peoples of the Arverni, whereas Lucan, a poet of Spanish origin,

Caesar's only defeat on him, at Gergovia in 52 BCE, is here expunged from the cultural memory in favour of a dubious genealogy representing the Arverni as descended from a Trojan hero. Real history is supplanted by a myth of Roman domination. It has been suggested that the Lucan quotation is central to the letter.<sup>26</sup> But what was the hidden message it carried?

### 3.2 Invoking Identity and Doomsday Atmosphere

The hexameters quoted from Lucan referring to the Trojan origins (*sanguis Iliacus*) of the Arverni serve primarily to create Gallic identity, by styling the indigenous population, and in particular the Arverni and the besieged population of Clermont, as 'brothers' and allies of Rome. It has been pointed out, rightly, that this myth of Gallo-Roman identity, tracing back and legitimizing its history to Rome and Troy, had not been invented by Sidonius, but in fact dated back to the Roman Republic, persisting from Cicero's time up to that of the Burgundians and medieval rulers.<sup>27</sup> The allusion made the besieged Arverni and their leader, Sidonius, into reflections of Aeneas and his Trojan host. In the context of contemporary historical events, however, the associated imagination becomes ambivalent. The quoted verses evoke the courage and the moral superiority of *pius Aeneas*, whose flight and odyssey eventually led to a new foundation and to the victory of Rome:<sup>28</sup> the historic responsibility rested on him<sup>29</sup> as it does now on Sidonius, the champion of Augustonemetum. Yet at the same time, against the backdrop – on the stage of real history – of the imminent fall of Clermont, the Lucan lines recall the nightmare scenario of the fall and burning of Troy.<sup>30</sup> They remind the reader that the capture of Troy-Clermont was

distanced himself from the fictitious aetiology of the Gauls. On the quotation see Harries (1994) 188 and Sivonen (2006) 75.

26. Van Waarden (2010) 53 and Harries (1994) 188.

27. Van Waarden (2010) 348. In my view not incompatible with Harries' ((1994) 298) interpretation as 'recast history'.

28. History shifts its focus from Troy to Rome, from the ancestors to the later generations. See the prooemium of Verg. A. 1.1 and 7 *Troiae ... ab oris - altae moenia Romae*, 'from the shores of Troy – the walls of Rome', 4.393 (*pius Aeneas*). Cf. Ov. Met. 13.623–31 (623–24) *non tamen eversam Troiae cum moenibus esse / spem quoque fata sinunt*, 'and yet the fates did not permit Troy's hopes to perish with her walls', (626–27) *de tantis opibus praedam pius eligit illam* (sc. Aeneas), 'of all his great possessions, he dutifully chose that portion' (translation G.P. Goold, Loeb); 14.605–608: apotheosis of Aeneas as *pater Indiges*.

29. Verg. A. 8.731 (on the shield of Aeneas) *attollens umero famamque et fata nepotum*, 'uplifting on his shoulder the fame and fortunes of his children's children' (Vergil translations are by H.R. Fairclough, Loeb).

30. For example, Verg. A. 2.624–25 *tum vero omne mihi visum considere in ignis / Ilium*, 'then, indeed, methought all Ilium sank in flames', 660 *periturae ... Troiae*, 'the wreck of Troy', 705–706 *et iam per moenia clarior ignis / auditur propiusque aestus*

only made possible through guile (or treachery): the peace treaty agreed between Goths and Romans symbolizes the ‘Trojan horse’.<sup>31</sup> Just as the Arverni are styled into ‘brothers of Latium’, so also the Goths are deliberately styled as *hostes publici* (7.7.2), ‘public enemies’. A technical term that originally denoted a ‘traitor’ within the community, *hostis publicus* here refers either specifically to Seronatus, vicar of the *Septem Provinciae*, who was collaborating with the Goths, or more generally to the breach of the *foedus* with Rome by the Visigothic king, Euric, in 469.<sup>32</sup>

In alluding to the Arverni as descended from the Trojans, shortly before Clermont was surrendered in June 475, Sidonius was indeed expressing his worst fears. Their situation recalled the image of Troy in flames, the archetype of all conquered cities: *inopia, flamma, ferrum, pestilentia* – hunger, fire, violence and epidemics (7.7.3). These concomitants of invasion and plunder are brought graphically and vividly alive for the reader, bishop Graecus. Sidonius’ visualization of the consequences of this ‘famous peace’ (*inclitae pacis*) is surrealistic to the point of achieving an alienation effect. Survivors, already reduced to eating the grass sprouting from the walls, suffer poisoning or die of starvation. Like the skin of a corpse, their hands display a sheen that is ‘greenish from hunger’ – and of the same shade (*fame concolor*) as the ‘luxuriant vegetation’ (*viridantia*), from which they plucked.<sup>33</sup> Sidonius uses a further reminiscence of Lucan (6.110-13; 4.412-14), to point to Caesar’s besieging of Dyrrachium – and outdoes it, to bizarre effect, in his use of inimitable word-plays and imagery. Those defending Clermont are depicted as victims of the negotiations, before Sidonius spells out his appeal to Graecus, the four negotiators’ spokesman. His central message – ‘You should be ashamed of this peace treaty ... for it is neither useful nor honourable’ – is placed at the dramatic centre of the letter.<sup>34</sup> This was the only time that Sidonius ever wrote down the ‘hard truth’ (*veritatis asperitas*)<sup>35</sup> about the history of his age. His exile at Liviana and his consistent rejection of all forms of historiography – summed up in

*incendia volvunt*, ‘and now through the city more loudly is heard the blaze, and nearer the flames roll their fiery flood’, Ov. *Met.* 13.408 *Ilion ardebat*, ‘Troy was in flames’.

31. Verg. A. 2.252 *Myrmidonum dolos*, ‘the wiles of the Myrmidons’, 259-60 *illos patefactus ad auras / reddit equis*, ‘the opened horse restores them to the air’.

32. For the ugly portrait of Seronatus (*PLRE* 2, pp. 995–96) as ‘a Dracula’, see Sidon. *Ep.* 2.1.1 with Van Waarden (2010) 356, Teitler (1992), and Kitchen (2010) 62–63. On the breaking of the alliance: Wolfram (2001) 191, Stein (1928) 578–79, and Loyen vol. 2, xviii.

33. Sidon. *Ep.* 7.7.3 *quae indiscretis foliis sucisque viridantia saepe manus fame concolor legit?*, ‘(poisonous grasses) which being green, with nothing to distinguish their leaves or sap, were often plucked by a hand that starvation had made as green as they?’

34. Sidon. *Ep.* 7.7.4 *pudeat vos, precamur, huius foederis, nec utilis nec decori*.

35. Sidon. *Ep.* 7.7.4 on the particularist interests of the southern Gallic bishops.

the parallelism of *turpiter falsa, periculose vera* – were the outcome, and supply an explanation for his decision to keep his distance.

### 3.3 The Self-Styled Hero

Sidonius, then, stages his own drama of Clermont so as to reflect the disaster and the heroes' flight from Troy, but this is not all. Another allusion later on makes it quite clear that the Goths could not be identified with the Greeks. Sidonius also incorporates echoes of Silius Italicus' *Punica* (11.173–82).<sup>36</sup> Here, the writer assumes the role of Decius, whose exhortation not to hand over the town of Capua to Hannibal made him an exemplar of Roman resistance – in vain: *haec vana aversas Decius iactavit ad aures. / ast delecta manus iungebat foedera Poeno* (181–82).<sup>37</sup> Decius' appeal fell on deaf ears; the chosen body of envoys agreed to peace terms with 'the Carthaginian'. Sidonius pins all his hopes on finding Rome's negotiator, bishop Graecus, more receptive to his appeal, and at the same time extends a courteous apology for the 'harsh truth':<sup>38</sup> this is the cultivated Gallic *grand seigneur* contrasted with the archaic figure of Decius.



Fig. 1. Decius Magius of Capua opposing Carthaginian domination.  
From S.D. Mirys et al., *Figures de l'histoire de la république romaine* (Paris, 1799).

36. As Van Waarden (2010) 350–51 has persuasively shown.

37. 'Such was the appeal that Decius made in vain to deaf ears. The chosen body of envoys made a treaty with the Carthaginian' (translations of Silius are by J.D. Duff, Loeb – here modified). On the historical events see Lancel (1998) 114–15.

38. Sidon. *Ep.* 7.7.4 *veniabilis sit, quaesumus, apud aures vestras veritatis asperitas, cui convicii invidiam dolor eripit*, 'may the harsh truth be pardonable on your ears, we beg you – the fact of our grief removes from our words the odium of mere abuse'.

Members of the élites (like Sidonius himself, his audience, and bishop Graecus) took pains to advertise their culture by alluding to figures from Greek and Roman mythology or history, and all educated people were expected to recognize such allusions and to respond in kind. Decius, a citizen of some standing in Capua, was known elsewhere as Decius Magius (fig. 1). The story of the fall of Capua and the disastrous treaty with Hannibal had been related by Livy in *Ab urbe condita* (23.10). Livy, universally accepted as the historian of republican Rome and freedom, had been the source used for Silius' *Punica*, and now provided Sidonius with thematically suitable patterns on which to construct a role model.<sup>39</sup>

In 396 Symmachus, who owned a complete Livy, had sent copies of some later books (presumably 103-108) containing information on 'the early histories of Gaul' to a cultured Gallic aristocrat named Protadius.<sup>40</sup> Symmachus says elsewhere that ca. 400 Protadius was spending his time between Trier and Quinque Provinciae, i.e. Aquitania and Narbonensis;<sup>41</sup> and there will certainly have been other copies in Gaul, which was a major centre of rhetorical education – unless one assumes that Sidonius had had access to a copy of Livy in the Roman libraries during his urban prefecture. It is not impossible that Protadius and Sidonius had also owned some of the early books, for the surviving late antique copies contain nothing later than the first five decades:<sup>42</sup> the Decius episode is in Book 23. Sidonius not only quotes numerous Livian passages verbatim,<sup>43</sup> but also mentions him in the same breath as Cicero, Vergil,

39. On similar topics such as Trojan origin, Roman *patria* and *libertas* in Livy, cf. Feldherr (2009) 412–13.

40. Symm. *Ep.* 4.18.5 *priscas Gallorum memorias deferri in manus tuas postulas. revolve Patavini scriptoris extrema, quibus res Gai Caesaris explicantur, aut si inpar est desiderio tuo Livius, sume ephemeridem C. Caesaris deceptam bibliotheculae meae, ut tibi muneri mitteretur*, 'you beg that the early history of Gaul be presented to you: open the later parts of Padua's author where the deeds of Gaius Caesar are told or, if Livy cannot match your desires, take Caesar's own journal extracted from my library to be sent to you as a present'. See Cameron (2011) 523–26, esp. 525, and *PLRE* 1, Protadius 1, pp. 751–52.

41. Symm. *Ep.* 4.30 *tu non iisdem sedibus inmoraris, dum aut Treviros civica religione aut Quinque Provincias otii voluntate commutas*, 'you don't stay in the same home, as you change between Trier out of a sense of civic duty and Quinque Provinciae out of your wish for leisure'. The passage in which Rutilius (Rut. Nam. 1.541–42; 551–53) mentions his wish to visit Protadius refers to the year 417. This is long after Symmachus' letter, which cannot be dated later than 402, and is therefore irrelevant here.

42. Cameron (2011) 524.

43. Livy allusions in Sidonius: Sidon. *Ep.* 1.11.6 (Liv. 8.3.2); 4.25.2 (Liv. 2.30.2); 7.9.21 (Liv. 34.7); 8.16.4 (Liv. 1.18.1); *Carm.* 2.483 (Liv. 1.1.9); 7.58 (Liv. 1.55.5). See Geisler (1887) 356, 371, 382, 395.

and Terence.<sup>44</sup> However, it is only in his poetry that he cites the Flavian epic poet Silius Italicus.<sup>45</sup> In all probability Sidonius had read both writers, the historian's early decades and the poet; he may even have had them in his own library. But why did he then choose Silius, the poet, as the model for 'his' Decius and *alter ego* in a letter written in prose?

Comparison of the hypotexts, Livy and Silius Italicus, can shed light on the problem. Let us take Decius first. Decius, the respected citizen of Capua in the *Punica* (11.158), was known in Livy (23.10.3) as Decius Magius. The epic poet Silius, whose elder son was called 'Decianus',<sup>46</sup> deliberately omits the *gentilicium* Magius, and in the age of Sidonius, a prominent member of the 'Decian clan', called Flavius Caecina Decius Maximus Basilius, was living in Rome.<sup>47</sup> This creates a link to the Republic's national heroes – for the name of the Decii had acquired symbolic value, having been made famous among the *exempla maiorum* by the voluntary, sacrificial deaths among those who bore it (fig. 2).<sup>48</sup>

In fact, however, Decius of Capua did not belong to the family of the Decii. Decius was an Oscan first name (*praenomen*), Dekis, corresponding to the Roman Decimus, and also recorded in Oscan inscriptions in and around Capua: Velleius Paterculus (2.16.2) boasted about his famous ancestor Decius Magius, *Campanorum princeps*, on his mother's side, bearing witness to this tradition.<sup>49</sup> A second point: the structure of the narrative reveals a fundamental difference. In Livy, it is *after* the conclusion of the

44. Sidon. *Carm.* 23.145–47 *quid vos eloquii canam Latini, / Arpinas, Patavine, Mantuane, / et te ... Terenti?*, 'why should I sing of you, famed for Latin eloquence, man of Arpinum, man of Padua, man of Mantua, and you ... Terence?' In Sidonius' catalogues of major classical authors the *Patavina volumina* (*Ep.* 9.14.7 and *Carm.* 2.189) were listed.

45. Silius allusions in Sidonius: Sidon. *Carm.* 5.336–37 (Sil. 5.194; 6.705); 5.342–43 (Sil. 10.354; 12.200); 5.414 (Sil. 3.365; 9.622); 5.594 (Sil. 2.333); 7.335 (Sil. 8.32); 18.7 (Sil. 8.526–27); 22.26–27 (Sil. 13.332); 22.31 (Sil. 7.196–97); 22.72–73 (Sil. 7.194–95).

46. L. Silius Decianus, *suff.* 94 (*Mart.* 8.66); see Alfoldy (1999) 296 and Fröhlich (2000) 11, who considers Sil. 11.123–26 to be the poet's allusion to his and his son's consulate.

47. On the virtues of the Decian clan (*Deciana sc. familia*) and of Sidonius' contemporary Flavius Caecina Decius Maximus Basilius, praetorian prefect of Italy under Majorian (458 CE), again under Severus (463–65), and consul in 463, see Sidon. *Ep.* 1.9.2. Cf. most recently Cameron (2012) 150–53, Fig. 4: The Decii, and 170–71. Maybe Sidonius was still in contact with Italian aristocrats: cf. Mathisen (2003b).

48. On the *mortes Deciorum*, see Sidon. *Carm.* 7.69. P. Decius Mus the Elder, *cos.* 340 BCE, ensured the Roman victory over the Latins in the battle of Vesuvius by his spontaneous self-sacrifice (*devotio*) during the Sabine War (Livy 8.9); his son sacrificed himself at the battle of Sentinum in 295 (Livy 10.28). According to Cic. *Tusc.* 1.89, a grandson even followed suit at Asculum Apulum. On the Decii, *genus acre virum*, cf. Verg. *G.* 2.167; A. 6.824. See Hölkenskamp (2011) 42, 50, 208, CAH 7<sup>2</sup>, 2 (Index), and F. Münzer, s.v. Decius nos 15–17, *RE* IV.2 (1901) cols 2279–86.

49. On Velleius, see von Ungern-Sternberg (1975) 50 n. 73. Cf. Salomies (1987) 101–102, and F. Münzer, s.v. Magius, *RE* XIV.1 (1928) cols 438–39.



Fig. 2. Peter Paul Rubens, Decius Mus preparing for death (*devotio*), 1616/17. Liechtenstein, The Princely Collections, Vaduz–Vienna.

treaty that Decius proclaims his demands, but in the Silius account, no decision has yet been taken at the time Decius makes his speech.<sup>50</sup> Third: as a result, the speech and the portrait of Decius take on a dominant role in the epic poem. Both admirably fit Sidonius' self-portrait as a 'modern Decius', believing himself capable, through obduracy and an uncompromising attitude (*asperitas* and *horrida virtus*)<sup>51</sup> of even now influencing the decision on the treaty. Fourth: it is the Roman goddess Fides, the embodiment of faithfulness and of the honouring of treaties, whose personification plays a key part in the *Punica*. The work has even been seen as an 'epic for Fides'.<sup>52</sup>

In spite of his ecclesiastical office as bishop, Sidonius identifies himself and his *persona* with the role-model function of Decius, using intertextual roleplay in the style of ethopoeia. But what does he gain from convergence with his identification figure? The parallels between the two appeals are unmistakable. Both are based on a fictitious aetiology linking to earliest history (*prisca*).<sup>53</sup> Sidonius and Decius alike invoke the Trojan blood (*sanguis Dardanius*) in their veins and allegiance to Rome in combat with a 'barbarian foe'. The town of Capua was thought to have Trojan origins,<sup>54</sup> and Decius traced his ancestry to Capys, legendary founder of

50. Sil. 11.160-88 (Decius' speech); 190 (treaty). Cf. Liv. 23.6.1-23.7.3 (treaty); 23.7.5-6 and 23.10.7-8 (Decius' speech).

51. Sil. 11.202, 205.

52. Von Albrecht (1964) 55-62, esp. 55: 'Epos der Fides'.

53. Sidon. Ep. 7.7.2 *si prisca replicarentur*, 'if earliest history were recalled'.

54. Sil. 11.30-31 *Dardana ab ortu / moenia*, 'walls of Trojan origin'.

Capua, son of Assaracus and grandfather of Aeneas, and emphasized that he was related to Aeneas' son, Iulus.<sup>55</sup> Yet the glaring contrast between the common Trojan origin of the Arverni and the people of Capua on the one hand, and the uncivilized, almost brutish way of life of the Carthaginians on the other, is meaningful beyond the mere building of identity.<sup>56</sup> The treachery of a city that shares common Trojan descent with Rome is a particularly repugnant offence against Fides.<sup>57</sup> Silius (11.30-32) asks: 'Who would believe that walls of Trojan origin would be allied with the barbarian tyrant of the Numidians?'<sup>58</sup> The portrait of the antihero Hannibal, depicted by Silius as the bloodthirsty leader of 'barbarian' peoples, devoid of all sense of right and wrong,<sup>59</sup> is the appropriate counterpart for Sidonius' opponents – in his letters, Euric, the Visigothic king; in the panegyrics, the Vandalic king, Geiseric.<sup>60</sup> But Decius' breast was armed with 'loyalty': *armatumque fide pectus* (11.206). In Sidonius, Silius' simile depicting the encounter between the adversaries crystallizes into an analogy:<sup>61</sup> in the same way as Decius, the incarnation of Roman *fides*, confronts Hannibal, incarnation of Punic *perfidia*, so too the Gallo-Roman Sidonius, likewise the incarnation of *fides*, confronts the 'barbarian' king Euric.

The anger simmering in the Decius speech finds an echo in Sidonius' appeal to Graecus. For Decius, shared descent is an essential reason for Capua and Clermont to stand by Rome in its hour of need. For Sidonius, the Arverni are 'Latium's brothers' (*fratres*) by virtue of their shared descent, and accordingly must remain loyal to Rome. The stance taken by *Decius, Capuae decus* (Sil. 11.158), is lent prominence by the etymological

55. Sil. 11.177-79 *ille ego sanguis / Dardanius, cui sacra pater, cui nomina liquit / ab Iove ducta Capys, magno cognatus Iulo*, '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'.

56. Sil. 11.180-82 *ille ego semihomines inter Nasamonas et inter / saevum atque aequantem ritus Garamanta ferarum / Marmarico ponam tentoria mixtus alumno?*, '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?'

57. Bernstein (2009) 395–96.

58. *Dardana ab ortu / moenia barbarico Nomadum sociata tyranno / quisnam ... credat?* (my translation).

59. Sil. 11.183-84 *ductoremque feram, cui nunc pro foedere proque / iustitia est ensis solaeque e sanguine laudes?*, 'shall I put up with a leader, whose sword now usurps the place of justice and sworn agreements, and all whose glory is derived from bloodshed?' See Burck (1984) 8 and Tipping (2010) 66–67; based on Greek sources, see von Ungern-Sternberg (1975) 39–40.

60. On comparing Hannibal to Geiseric, see Sidon. *Carm.* 5.342-46; on the peoples from Africa 5.336-37.

61. On the only comparison in Book 11 (v. 252, cf. vv. 163-256), see von Albrecht (1964) 78.

associations between the name and the ethical quality, anaphora and word-play. It is thus no accident that Decius' *decus* is mirrored in Sidonius' negation of the treaty: *huius foederis nec utilis nec decori* (*Ep.* 7.7.4).<sup>62</sup> Decius here insists that the purity of Trojan blood must be preserved from 'mixture' with the blood of barbarian *semihomines*.<sup>63</sup> Sidonius' riposte takes the racist outburst to the extreme, with a horrifying vision of the future in the form of a voluntarily chosen *damnatio memoriae*: without *Roman* descendants, the Arverni are in danger of losing their glorious ancestors, not merely their history and their values. Their deeds too are expunged from the collective memory of future generations.<sup>64</sup>

After an introductory triple anaphora (*hi sunt, qui*), and confronting the prospect of defeat, both Sidonius and Decius remind their audience of the successes of their fellow-citizens in the recent past (*recentiora*): Sidonius, bishop and champion of Clermont, recalls how the Arverni had in 470 fought stoutly for the independence of their city, repeatedly defending Clermont, with the assistance of Ecdicius, son of the emperor Avitus, against the Visigoths;<sup>65</sup> Decius invokes the rescue of Capua by its own efforts in the First Samnite War in 343 BCE.<sup>66</sup> Retrieved from the collective memory, history is reconstructed on patterns suggested by reflection

62. 'This useless and dishonourable treaty'. Likewise Sil. 11.168–69 *nam laeta fovere / haudquaquam magni est animi decus*, 'to court the prosperous is by no means the ornament of a noble mind'.

63. See above n. 56. Cf. Claud. *Bell. Gild.* 1.189–93 *Mauris clarissima quaeque / fastidem datur. media Carthagine ductae / barbara Sidoniae subeunt conubia matres; / Aethiopem nobis generum, Nasamona maritum / ingerit; exterret cunabula discolor infans*, 'each disdained noble matron is handed over to the Moors. Taken into the middle of Carthage these Sidonian mothers undergo marriage with barbarians. [Gild] thrusts upon us an Ethiopian as a son-in-law, a Nasamon as a husband. The discoloured child terrifies its cradle'. On the numerous cases of intermarriage, see Mathisen (2009) 145–48 and 154–55.

64. Sidon. *Ep.* 7.7.5 *non enim diutius ipsi maiores nostri hoc nomine gloriabuntur, qui minores incipiunt non habere*, 'soon our ancestors will no longer glory in the name of ancestor when they are ceasing to have descendants'. Located in the *atria* of aristocratic villas, the *imagines* were reminders of the standards set by previous generations – implicitly exhorting emulation. See Flower (1996) 220–21. For an opposing view, see Loyen vol. 3, 191 n. 36.

65. Sidon. *Ep.* 7.7.2 *si recentia memorabuntur, hi sunt, qui viribus propriis hostium publicorum arma remorati sunt*, 'if recent events be brought to mind these are the men who by their unaided strength checked the arms of the common enemy'. While Ecdicius' troops never laid siege to the Goths within their camp, he did succeed in forcing them to withdraw to a hilltop (*Ep.* 3.3.3–4); see Van Waarden (2010) 352–53.

66. Sil. 11.173–75 *hi sunt, qui vestris infixum moenibus hostem / deiecere manu et Capuam eripuere superbis / Samnitum iussis*, 'these are the men who dislodged the enemy established in your city and rescued Capua from the tyranny of the Samnites'. Thus I also found Decius Mus is first mentioned as a military tribune in the First Samnite War (Liv. 7.34–35).

on the life experience and reading of the recipient – and deployed as a strategy to influence the mediator between Romans and Visigoths. This sophisticated hybrid, alive with the tension between the imagined past in epic literature and the real historical situation of the contemporary present, is the means by which the author declares his own perspective.

### 3.4 ‘Decoding Sidonius’: The Appeal by the Bishop

The historical context in which Livy and Silius place the episode is the aftermath of the Roman defeat at Cannae in 216 BCE. It was followed by rebellion in several Italic cities aiming to cut ties with Rome and cooperate with Hannibal. In Silius, the catalogue of cities culminates with the defection of Capua.<sup>67</sup> This enables Sidonius to reinforce his appeal with some telling new aspects that the highly literate Graecus would easily decode: the impending fall of Clermont-Ferrand appears in the same light as the fall of Capua, the consequence of Rome’s bitterest defeat throughout history. In each case a delegation (from Capua – from southern Gaul) agrees peace terms with a ‘barbarian’ general (Hannibal – Euric),<sup>68</sup> while a resistance fighter (Decius – Sidonius) calls for defiance with slogans like ‘slavery’ and ‘abandonment of our oldest allies and blood relatives’.<sup>69</sup> A further analogy to the Capuan legation is that in the *concilium* – whether the *Concilium septem provinciarum* at Arles, a meeting with Euric, or something else<sup>70</sup> – the special interests of the southern Gallic bishops were at stake: the proposal was to cede the Auvergne to Euric, benefiting Provence.<sup>71</sup> In Silius, a similar delegation, headed by a

67. Liv. 23.1 and 7 and Sil. 11.1-27. See Crawford (1992) 52.

68. Liv. 23.7.1 *legati ad Hannibalem venerunt pacemque cum eo his condicionibus fecerunt*, ‘the legates came to Hannibal and made an alliance with him on these terms’ (translations of Livy from F.G. Moore, Loeb), Sil. 11.190 *ast delecta manus iungebat foedera Poeno*, ‘the chosen body of envoys made a treaty with Hannibal’.

69. Liv. 23.7.5 *superbam dominationem miserabilemque ... servitutem*, ‘the haughty rule ... and the wretched servitude’, 23.7.6 *malum facinus, quod a vetustissimis sociis consanguineisque defecissent*, ‘their evil action in having revolted from their oldest allies and men of the same blood’. Sil. 11.194-96 *adeste, / ... dum me duce dextera vindex / molitur facinus. procumbat barbara pubes*, ‘rally round me ... , while the arm of vengeance achieves a deed worthy ... of me as leader. Lay these barbarous soldiers low’, 11.31 Hannibal as *barbaricus Nomadum tyrannus*, ‘barbarous tyrant of Numidians’. For fetters and prison, a fitting symbol of the alliance, see n. 74.

70. One cannot be sure that *concilium* refers to the Council of the Seven Provinces (Van Waarden (2010) 368 *et al.*); it could just as easily be a generic word for ‘a meeting’ and it was not a standing body (kind advice from Ralph Mathisen).

71. Liv. 23.7.1-2 (advantages for Capua) ... *ne quis imperator magistratusve Poenorum ius ullum in civem Campanum haberet, neve civis Campanus invitus militaret munusve faceret; ut suae leges, sui magistratus Capuae essent*, ‘that no general or magistrate of the Carthaginians should have any authority over a Campanian citizen, and that no

Vibius Virrius, was sent to the senate of Rome and played the role of the Gallic *concilium*.<sup>72</sup> The Capuans expected to be privileged over the other Italian cities, but when the senate refused to assist them, the Capuan envoys surrendered and made a treaty with Hannibal.<sup>73</sup>

Sidonius, slipping into the mantle of Decius, also confronts his colleague Graecus of Marseille with the fate he expects for himself after the capture of the city: Decius, a fiery invocation of lost freedom on his lips, was arrested and exiled to Carthage.<sup>74</sup> Sidonius perhaps foresaw his own punishment as a defeated person, and may even have revised this letter to reflect a foreshadowing of his exile. The well-read Graecus will certainly have known Fides' famous scene in the *Punica*, on the Capuans' secession from Rome, in which Silius has her express his own view in gnomic form: *castam servate Fidem*.<sup>75</sup> The exhortation by Fides, who looked down from heaven to reawaken the collective memory of Decius and proclaim to all the importance of honouring alliances, is addressed to Graecus too.<sup>76</sup>

Campanian citizen should be a soldier or perform any service against his will; that Capua should have its own laws, its own magistrates'. Cf. Sidon. *Ep. 7.7.4 et, cum in concilium convenitis, non tam curae est publicis mederi periculis quam privatis studere fortunis*, 'and when you come together into the council you are less concerned to relieve public dangers than to advance personal interests'. See Harries (1994) 235 and Stein (1928) 585.

72. Sil. 11.64-65 *ergo electa manus gressu fert dicta citato. / antistat cunctis praecellens Virrius ore*, 'therefore a chosen body made haste to carry the message. Their chief was Virrius, an eloquent speaker'.

73. One of the consuls should always be a citizen of Capua (Sil. 11.59-63, 125-26). For the result see Sil. 11.120-21 *referent haec inde citati / mixta minis et torva trucis responsa senatus*, 'then the envoys took back this threatening message in haste to Capua, and reported the grim reply of the angry senate'; 11.190 (n. 68). See von Ungern-Sternberg (1975) 29-31 and 59-60.

74. Liv. 23.10.6-7 *qui (sc. Decius Magius) cum manente ferocia animi negaret lege foederis id cogi posse ... vociferans: "habetis libertatem, Campani, quam petitis; foro medio, luce clara, videntibus vobis nulli Campanorum secundus vinctus ad mortem rapior"*, 'while with undaunted spirit Magius was saying that by the terms of the treaty he could not be compelled to do that ... shouting: "You have the freedom you wanted, Campilians. Through the middle of the market-place, in broad daylight, before your eyes, I, who am second to no one of the Campanians, am being hurried away in chains to my death"', Sil. 11.247-50 "*necet ocius*", *inquit*, "... *catenas, / foederis infasti pretium. sic victima prorsus / digna cadit Decius*", '(Decius) said: "Put on the fetters with all speed ... the just reward for this ill-starred alliance. Thus falls Decius forthwith as a worthy victim".

75. Sil. 13.281-85 *despectat ab alto / sacra Fides agitatque virum fallacia corda. / vox occulta subit, passim diffusa per auras: / "foedera, mortales, ne saevo rumpite ferro, / sed castam servate Fidem"*, 'the goddess Loyalty looked down from heaven and troubled their traitorous hearts. A mysterious voice was heard and filled all the air: "Ye mortals, break not your oaths with the sword, but keep faith unstained"'. See von Albrecht (1964) 52-60, 206, 208, and Burck (1984) 45.

76. Sil. 13.280-81 *nunc menti Decius serae redit, et bona virtus / exilio punita truci*, 'now, too late, they remember Decius and his noble courage, punished by harsh exile'.

The Sidonius letter's closing lines 'translate' the intellectual discourse with the classical authors into clear text. Emulating Decius, Sidonius urges the delegation to press in the Gallic *concilium* for the prevention of the surrender of Clermont, averting 'such a shameful peace': *statum concordiae tam turpis incidite* (7.7.5). Like Decius – alone in Capua in showing greatness (*solum ... Capuae decus*)<sup>77</sup> – Sidonius goes alone to face the negotiators. Three times, using the anaphora *vos/vobis*, he appeals to the decision-makers. A 'new Cicero', with the famous *quousque* he assumes the role of *pater patriae*, to defend his country and deliver it from the public enemy (Catiline and the Allobroges).<sup>78</sup> In a different letter (2.1.1), significantly, he caricatures Seronatus, who collaborated with the Goths (7.7.2), as a *Catilina saeculi nostri*.<sup>79</sup> A triple anaphora for emotive effect, *adhuc*, makes clear that it is not too late for action – even for unconventional, not to say paradoxical survival techniques (7.7.5): *adhuc ... obsideri, adhuc pugnare, adhuc esurire delectat!*<sup>80</sup>

Using the form of a *peroratio*, Sidonius appeals to those holding responsibility, presenting a sombre vision of the consequences of their action in ratifying the treaty:<sup>81</sup> if they do this, their ancestors can no longer take pride in their name as Romans, a name no longer borne by younger contemporaries. These are on the brink of growing up as Visigoths, without history and without any prospect of their memory being honoured.<sup>82</sup> Passivity would place the envoys of Julius Nepos, among them Leontius, a metropolitan, and bishop Graecus, on equal footing with the Visigoths, and would thus bring about the most 'barbarian' of all possible solutions:<sup>83</sup> all other territories, including his own lands in southern Gaul, could then

77. Sil. 11.158.

78. Compare the rhetorical question in Cic. *Catil.* 1.1 *quo usque tandem abutere, Catilina, patientia nostra?* with Sidon. *Ep.* 7.7.5 *at quousque istae poterunt durare praestigiae?* 'how long will this jugglery be able to continue?' Cf. Sidon. *Ep.* 7.7.2 (Seronatus and the Goths as *hostes publici*).

79. Mathisen (1991a) 30.

80. 'It is a joy to us still to endure siege, still to fight, still to starve.'

81. As for the changing mood of the collection, Gibson (in this volume, pp. 212–14) noticed a change to darker subject matter and a bleaker tone in Sidonius' seventh book, esp. in *Ep.* 7.6–7.

82. See n. 64. Present tense *incipiunt* signals that 'acculturation' has begun already. The same fate is suffered by Hannibal in Capua (Sil. 11.418–26): see Tipping (2010) 76.

83. Sidon. *Ep.* 7.7.5 *si vero tradimur ..., invenisse vos certum est quid barbarum suaderetis ignavi*, 'but if we are surrendered, it is indeniably you who devised the barbarous expedient which in your cowardice you recommended'. Cf. Küppers (2005) 269, which claims the intention for Book 1 to be Sidonius' acknowledgement of the *dignitas* of the nobility and the obligation to engage in politics for the good of Rome. I here prefer Loyen's reading of *barbarum* as neuter, although an interpretation as masculine (see Van Waarden's commentary, p. 374), referring to Euric, also makes sense.

expect suppression (*servitus*), while the Auvergne alone was threatened by death and complete destruction, *supplicium* (7.7.6).<sup>84</sup> In this case there is no ‘healing’ – the combined metaphors of a collapsed structure and a disease that Livy had already used to characterize contemporary political disorder.<sup>85</sup>

This marks full circle. In a final twist Sidonius reverts to the thinking with which the letter began, thus giving it a ring structure. The letter is also framed by emotions, initially mixed (*laeta et tristia*), full of pathos (*dolor nimius*) at the end.<sup>86</sup> Allusion to ‘the Trojan blood’ of the Arverni is shown by the recurrence of the term *sanguis* and the use of sharp antithesis to be a dual appeal by bishop Sidonius to his colleagues on behalf of the refugees and emigrants:<sup>87</sup> first, to at least ‘guarantee survival to the people (*sanguis as pars pro toto*), even if freedom (*libertas*) must perish’; and second, not to close the city gates to guests (*hospitibus*) when in Clermont they are being opened even to the enemy (*hostibus*).<sup>88</sup> A chiasmus combined with paronomasia is the rhetorical highlight of the peroration. The letter is thus no ‘epitaph of the Western Empire’, but a plea submitted by the defender of Clermont *against* the peace treaty and *for* ‘his’ city and adopted homeland, the Auvergne.<sup>89</sup> After the ‘shameful

84. *Supplicium* in the sense of ‘execution’ ranks above the suicide (*ianua mortis*) of the ‘Stoic martyr’ as the ultimate consequence for Decius (Sil. 11.187–88). Cf. von Albrecht (1964) 77.

85. On the diseased State, compare Sidon. *Ep.* 7.7.6 *si medicari nostris ultimis non valetis*, ‘if you cannot save us in our extremity’, with Liv. *praef.* 9 *haec tempora, quibus nec vicia nostra nec remedia pati possumus*, ‘the present time, when we can endure neither our vices nor their cure’ (translation B.O. Foster, Loeb), and Sil. 11.166 *dum ... medicina vulnera poscunt*, ‘while ... their wounds call for treatment’. See Chaplin (2000) 200–201.

86. Sidon. *Ep.* 7.7.1 and 7.7.6. On Sidonius as a satirist and humorist, see Kitchen (2010) 53–66.

87. The bishops were at the *concilium*, or could be contacted by Graecus of Marseille. On the antithesis between ‘survival of the people’ (*sanguis vivat*) and ‘perishing freedom’ (*moriitura libertas*), and the town gates ‘open to the enemy’ (*aperitur hostibus*) and ‘closed for the guests’ (*clausus ... hospitibus*), see n. 88.

88. For *sanguis* as *pars pro toto*, cf. Sidon. *Ep.* 7.7.6 *ut sanguis vivat, quorum est moritura libertas; parate exilibus terram, capiendis redemptions, viaticum peregrinaturis. si murus noster aperitur hostibus, non sit clausus vester hospitibus*, ‘(a prayer that) the blood of those whose liberty is doomed may still survive; provide land for the exiles, ransom for the captives-to-be, and aid for the refugees on their way. If our walls are opened to admit our foes, let not yours be closed to exclude your friends’. The personification of ‘freedom dying’ has attracted controversy: seen by Harries (1994) as rhetorical hyperbole, linked by Mathisen (1984) 167 (= (1991b) 9) to the exiling of Sidonius and the flight of his son Apollinaris before Euric. But these views are not necessarily incompatible.

89. Statement of Stevens (1933) 160. So the letter is not written ‘after the surrender of Clermont’ (Harries (1994) 235), but facing the surrender of Clermont, and revised afterwards.

peace' (*misera ... sub pace condicio*)<sup>90</sup> of 475 Euric was acknowledged as ruler of Gaul from the Pyrenees to the Loire and the Rhône,<sup>91</sup> and Sidonius never wrote to Graecus again.<sup>92</sup>

#### 4 CONCLUSION: THE LITERARY CONSTRUCTION OF HISTORY

The letter anticipating the fall of Clermont shows Sidonius to have been an 'extraordinarily allusive author'.<sup>93</sup> Familiarity with the canon of famous authors and artists being a valuable indicator of status, élite education encircled a core bank of imagery in a complex network of allusions, literary references, and artistic commentary, inaccessible to the less educated.<sup>94</sup> Scholars are therefore wrong to criticize Sidonius as a mere imitator with a naïve pleasure in concrete terms and political practice.<sup>95</sup> On closer examination Sidonius' references to the past are in no way as transparent as they seem to be: 'they project everything to do with Sidonius himself and his personal experiences in a way that suggests they are viewed behind a mask or in a mirror'.<sup>96</sup> Sidonius' letters, although seemingly offering snapshot-like aperçus of their author's 'intimate space',<sup>97</sup> also initiate discourses with the past, building up a communicative network among author, addressee, and the letters' topic or subject (here the

90. Sidon. *Ep.* 7.7.1.

91. Sidon. *Ep.* 7.6.10 (to Basilius): unfortunate treaties (*mala foederum*), compacts and stipulations of both realms (*regni utriusque pacta condicionesque*); 3.1.5 (471); 7.1.1 (473): borders such as Rhône and Loire. On the 'treaty' with Nepos (Ennod. *Vit. Epif.* 81-94) and its aftermath, see Heather (2010) 339, Mitchell (2007) 206–207, Wolfram (2001) 191, Collins (2000) 113–14, and Stein (1928) 585.

92. Loyen vol. 3, 217–18 n. 4, dating Sidon. *Ep.* 9.4 not later than 473, inserted it into the chronological chain of letters to Graecus written before *Ep.* 7.10 and 7.7 – perhaps a polite inclusion of an old letter to a prominent colleague which he had retrieved from the episcopal archives for the series of letters (2–11) to the bishops in Book 9. The inclusion of an earlier letter to Graecus in Book 9 also could suggest that Sidonius had not received any more letters from Graecus after 7.7. That is, Graecus (or both) had perhaps cut off correspondence, but Sidonius was trying to pretend that nothing had changed.

93. What Kelly (2008) convincingly demonstrated of Ammianus: see p. 5 with reference to Barnes (1998) 198.

94. See above n. 19. For the libraries and the refined taste of the aristocracy see Stirling (2008) 141, McLynn (2009) 73–74, and Mratschek (2008) *passim*.

95. G. Krapinger, s.v. Sidonius Apollinaris, DNP 11 (2001) col. 523: 'Weder in seinen Briefen noch in den Gedichten entfernt sich Sidonius ... weit von seinen Vorbildern ..., dazu ist seine Freude am Konkreten, Anschaulichen und Politisch-Praktischen zu ausgeprägt.' (Neither in his letters nor in the poems does Sidonius depart ... far from his models ...; his pleasure in concrete terms, visible, political and practical is too strong for that to happen.)

96. Küppers (2005) 260. See already Harries (n. 3).

97. Morello and Morrison (2007) Editors' Preface vi.

Arverni) as the three participants; and on this network of relationships the message's success depends.

The letter is no more a historical report than any other. Nor is it an autobiographical document.<sup>98</sup> It reshapes history to meet present needs, calling on the epic repertoire of classical *exempla* or images from mythology when necessary.<sup>99</sup> The creation of new identities ran parallel with a mythification process in the course of which the *civitas* and *memoria* of the besieged Arverni were revalued upwards and received pagan knowledge that was unobtrusively adapted to current trends.<sup>100</sup> Addressed to Graecus, the letter is a means of exerting influence; revised and published from the perspective of exile, it becomes a medium of identity creation for the benefit of Sidonius' aristocratic friends and for posterity. *Exempla* such as Decius emerge as vehicles of Sidonius' views of history. A recent observation on the historiography of the early empire applies similarly to the adaptation of historical fact in Sidonius' letters: 'The interactions between epic and historiography are highly complex and require a long view of Latin literature'.<sup>101</sup>

Sidonius' letters demonstrate that during the epoch of the break-up of the Roman empire political communication and diplomacy played as significant a role as armed conflict.<sup>102</sup> But they do not convey the unified political message from Sidonius memorializing the 'mental resistance' shown by the Gallic aristocracy.<sup>103</sup> That message is typical rather of the focusing-in on the capture of Clermont-Ferrand that determines the author's perspective and actions in the eighth book. What Sidonius actually does is to adopt a different literary technique each time, a different genre, new strategies of opinion-forming and visualization, and allusions tailored to the addressee and to the expected reception of his self-image.<sup>104</sup> His letters were written 'as reasons, people, or situations prompted' (*Ep.* 1.1.1).<sup>105</sup> In this he resembles prominent Christian

98. On the opposing conclusion, see Küppers (2005) 277.

99. Sidon. *Ep.* 7.7 (above), *Carm.* 7.17-40 (catalogue of the gods). See also Cameron (1970) 193 and Sivonen (2006) 86-93.

100. On the shaping power of memory, see Hose (2002).

101. B.J. Gibson (2010) 37. Similarly Levine and Nelis (2002).

102. Gillett (2003).

103. See Overwien's attractive stand in 2009b.

104. Opposing view from Peter (1901) 151. Allusions: from exact quotation of a literary model to cautious paraphrase or elegant silence vis-à-vis the ineffable; genres: from classics to Bible passages; visualization: from *ekphraseis* of artworks, e.g. the paintings in the villa of the Pontii, to metaphor and allegory; see Delhey (1993) and Mratschek (2008) 373-74; cf. Hernández Lobato (2010b) on the poem in Sidon. *Ep.* 2.10 (*Carm.* 27).

105. Sidon. *Ep.* 1.1.1 *si quae mihi litterae paulo politiores varia occasione fluxerint, prout eas causa, persona, tempus elicuit.*

intellectuals – Augustine, Jerome, Paulinus of Nola – whose practice in their sermons and correspondence was to adjust language and style to fit the audience, and who thus created a network for successful communication with diverse social groups.<sup>106</sup> Their use of dossiers and methods of archiving provide another clue.<sup>107</sup>

It may be, accordingly, that a key to the understanding of this challenging writer will emerge from intertextual analysis of *all* the letters in a comprehensive commentary.<sup>108</sup> Preliminary studies prompted by Gualandri's *Furtiva lectio* (1979) and Eigler's *Lectiones vetustatis* (2003) already exist in several selective commentaries.<sup>109</sup> A full commentary could bridge the gap between the hard facts of event history, manuscript tradition, archaeology and the soft skills that help us to decode the rhetorical culture of *paideia* among the cultivated élite of Late Antiquity,<sup>110</sup> made up of allusion, intertextuality and representational performance. A cultural studies approach of this nature, reflecting both the real-life environment of the social actors and their discourses on the role-models of their past, will compile a broad-based complex of collective constructions of meaning that would do justice to the creativity of the historical Sidonius and also to the communicative power of his ‘jewelled style’.<sup>111</sup> It will answer the essential questions that a commentary is expected to answer, about the *persona* of the author (1) and the underlying meaning of the text (5) as a whole.

Sidonius' biography, his friends and associates have been studied in depth in standard works of Harries, Mathisen, and Stevens. But now, as John Henderson declares, ‘the time of epistoliterarity is come’.<sup>112</sup> For this reason too, in a comprehensive commentary, analysis of *coded communication and allusive technique* is no less important for the interpretation of the literary construction of history and of the cultural atmosphere of Gaul than are the essential prosopographical and historical investigation

106. Kitchen (2010) 53, 55, and 66. Sidonius' (*Ep. 9.3.5*) choice for the consecration of the church in Lyon was Faustus of Riez, because he followed a middle path between pulpit oratory and that of the forum (*inter spiritales regulas vel forenses*): see Mratschek (2002) 398–407.

107. See Mathisen in this volume, chapter 12.

108. Suggested by Harries (1994) 11–19 and Zelzer (1995) 548.

109. Cf., e.g., the commentaries by Amherdt and Köhler, and the relevant complete list on Van Waarden's website [www.sidoniusapollinaris.nl](http://www.sidoniusapollinaris.nl).

110. Even in non-Greek provinces: see Brown (1992) 37 and 41.

111. After Roberts (1989a). See further Loyen (1943) and most recently Elsner (2004).

112. Henderson in his review of Mascoli (2010), *BMCR* 2011.04.38. Köhler (1995) 6–7 and Küppers (2005) 255 too, regard a literary and epistolographic analysis of the corpus of letters as a desideratum.

of the letters and poems.<sup>113</sup> It is facets of this *paideia* that carry the knowledge of the past forward, make it available to the historical present, and govern the intellectual to-and-fro of communication between the author and his audience. Apart from what they tell us about Sidonius the politician, they may open up future areas of research on the intellectual (e.g., for Roy Gibson, Overwien, or myself).<sup>114</sup> As Sidonius' letter has shown here, patterns of paradigmatic heroism, references to classical authors of different genres, and aesthetic concepts deriving from the visual arts are emphatically not mere 'art for art's sake', but essential indicators in the process of understanding the text. The ancients' definition<sup>115</sup> of *phantasia* bases it on the persistence of perceived images in the psyche even after the removal of the perceived objects: φαντασία is the process of reflection necessary to retrieve them from the memory.

113. On the three-way relationship between canon development, intertextuality and memory, cf. Egelhaaf-Gaiser (2010) 258.

114. R.K. Gibson (2012 and 2013) and in this volume, chapter 11, Overwien (2009b), and a concise overview in Mratschek (2008).

115. Aug. *Conf.* 10.8.12-13: 12. ... *lata praetoria memoriae, ubi sunt thesauri innumarabilium imaginum de cuiusquemodi rebus sensis inventarum* ... 13. *haec omnia recipit recolenda, cum opus est, et retractanda grandis memoriae recessus et nescio qui secreti atque ineffabiles sinus eius ... nec ipsa tamen intrant, sed rerum sensarum imagines illic praesto sunt cogitatione reminiscentis eas*, '12. ... the spacious palaces of my memory, where the treasures of innumerable images are, brought in from things of all sorts perceived by the senses ... 13. All these does that great recess of the memory and I know not what secret and inexpressible hiding places receive, to be recollected, when necessary, and reconsidered ... Nor yet do the things themselves enter in; only the images of the things perceived are there in readiness, for thought to recall' (my translation). Cf. Arist. *De an.* 3.3.429 a 4-5, esp. 3.2.425 b 23-25 τὸ γάρ αἰσθητήριον δεκτικὸν τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ ἀνεύ τῆς ψλῆς ἔκαστον. διὸ καὶ ἀπελθόντων τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἔνεισιν αἰσθῆσεις καὶ φαντασίαι ἐν τοῖς αἰσθητήριοις, 'for each sense-organ is receptive of the object of perception without its matter. That is why perceptions and imaginings remain in the sense-organs even when the objects of perception are gone' (translation D.W. Hamlyn (Oxford<sup>2</sup>, 1993)); cf. the Commentary of Thom. Aqu. *ad loc.* (translation R. Pasnau (New Haven, 1999) 305). See also Sorabji (1992) 213 and Voigt-Spira (2002) 34–35.