CHAPTER 1

Sidonius' World

As a young man in the 440s and 450s Sidonius enjoyed all the traditional markers of the Roman elite: a noble birth, a classical education, a good marriage, privilege, and wealth.[1] By his death in the mid to late 480s the great secular Gallo-Roman aristocrat of his age was a bishop.[2] Barbarians likely lodged in his villa.[3] They certainly occupied his see, Clermont. His wife's father had been murdered shortly after becoming emperor.[4] The last Roman emperor in the West was dead, and the next generation inspired Sidonius with little confidence that his belletrism would continue in the family, or even the Gallo-Roman aristocracy. Documenting accurately this fascinating period was not Sidonius' aim – he checked himself from writing history.[5] If he was, as McLynn claims "Fifth Century Gaul's … great historian *manqué*," this miss is of his own making.[6] Events during the

[1] The exact date of Sidonius' marriage to Papianilla, the daughter of Fl. Eparchius Avitus is unclear. Loyen (1970a: x) suggested that Sidonius was twenty, Stevens (1933: 19) proposes a slightly later date. For two later assessments of Sidonius' life see Gregory of Tours 2.22 and Gennadius of Marseilles 92, neither of which may be relied upon with any certainity; Gregory manipulates Sidonius as a source when it suits him and on occasion misreads his meaning, for an example of which see Moorhead (2007: 331), and for detailed analysis Furbetta (2015c). Gennadius' account may be a later insertion as it does not feature in the earlier manuscript tradition, for which see Schaff and Wace (1892: 401) and more recently Chronopoulos (2010: 242).

[2] For the date range for Sidonius' death see pp. 7–8.

[3] The term "barbarian" is used throughout when a more specific name is unsuitable or as (as here) to maintain Sidonius' focalisation.

[4] Avitus' exact cause of death is unclear, see pp. 4–5.

[5] Sidonius explicitly rules out writing history in *Ep.* 4.22.1, 5 which was addressed to Leo, a Visigothic adviser. In that epistle, as elsewhere, he cites Pliny the Younger (henceforth Pliny) as his major epistolary model and compares Leo to Tacitus by using Pliny's remarks in *Ep.* 6.16.21–22, which was addressed to Tacitus; for an analysis see Ash (2003: 211–215), for the influence of Pliny on Sidonius see especially pp. 14–15, 176–178. Rousseau (1976: 360) argues that Sidonius considered writing generally more dangerous than reading.

[6] McLynn (1993: 354). According to Matthews (2000: 34) "Sidonius is never easy to use. On the one hand, there is the risk of over-literal interpretation of what he intends metaphorically; on the other hand, his metaphorical language is precise if one can find the key to it."

last decades of Roman power in the West demanded that Sidonius control meticulously how he presented himself to the outside world.

The struggle for survival and relevancy consumes Sidonius' epistles as they respond to specific circumstances.[7] Barbarians are both condemned and praised, and secular literature is depicted as a key part of his daily life, even after he became a bishop who could not quite keep his promises to stop writing poetry.[8] At every point the complexity of Sidonius' persona is enhanced, as the political pragmatist who deals with barbarians as the situation demands or allows, and as the bishop who never jettisoned his classical *paideia*.[9]

Sidonius' fascinating life, with all its ups and downs, becomes the raw material which he develops into rich and engaging narratives; characters are brought to life, dramatic events heightened, moments reworked, and dialogue condensed. Ultimately his epistles' pseudo-biographical treatment of his life draws to an end as the death of his persona matches his own. The epistles draw the reader into his world which is filtered by his repeated concerns for Latin literary culture and the Roman governance of Gaul.

Vita

In the late fourth century large numbers of barbarian groups began to migrate west. In 407, in response to the growing threat of these groups and Roman disengagement from the north-western sphere of the Empire, the usurper Constantine III tried to wrestle control from the imperial authorities.[10] Sidonius' grandfather Apollinaris followed Constantine III's son and general Constans II into Spain as a prefect.[11] Prior to the siege of Arles in 411 Apollinaris was demoted, and was either put to death or returned to his native Lyon.[12]

[7] Harries (1994: 11).
[8] Hebert (1988) and Overwien (2009: 93–113). See p. 55.
[9] In *Ep.* 9.6.2, for example, Sidonius includes references to Charbydis and Ulysses in his remarks to Ambrosius, another bishop, in praise of newlyweds.
[10] Drinkwater (1998) offers a detailed assessment of the evidence and events. See also Fanning (1992: 288).
[11] *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* (1971–1992; henceforth PLRE) "Apollinaris 1." Zosimus *Nova Historia* 6.4: See Drinkwater (1998: 288) and Mascoli (2002: 184). Sidonius had many relatives with the name Apollinaris, including an uncle (PLRE "Apollinaris 2") and son (PLRE "Apollinaris 3").
[12] Zosimus *Nova Historia* 6.13. Drinkwater (1998: 288) suggests that Apollinaris could have been executed after joining Jovinus' revolt. Dalton (1915: clxi) offers that Apollinaris returned to Lyon

There some twenty years later Apollinaris' grandson Gaius Sollius Modestus Sidonius Apollinaris was born.[13] Throughout the 440s, as Roman and barbarian forces clashed with one another, Sidonius received a traditional Roman education.[14] At about twenty years of age he married Papianilla, the daughter of the Gallo-Roman noble and general Eparchius Avitus.[15] In 451 a coalition of Roman and barbarian forces, made up primarily of Visigoths and Alamanni, defeated Attila's Hunnic horde at the battle of the Catalaunian Plains. At around this time Sidonius attended the Visigothic court as a Roman envoy.

In 454 the influential Roman general Aëtius was murdered by the Emperor Valentinian III.[16] In response Valentinian was himself killed.[17] His death marked the end of the Theodosian dynasty's rule in the West.[18] The new emperor, an ambitious senator named Petronius Maximus then married one

although this is not explicit in any primary source. For this claim he cites Fauriel who merely mentions that Apollinaris was from Lyon, Fauriel (1836: 67, 99). In the absence of any clear evidence, Apollinaris' return to Lyon must remain a mere probability; see Mascoli (2001: 131) and (2010: 13–17). For a clear account of these events see Kulikowski (2000: 332–340).

[13] The month was November, but the exact year is unknown. Sidonius indicates the month in *Carm.* 20.1–2. His date of birth can be approximated by *Ep.* 8.6 v.5 where Sidonius refers to himself as an *adulescens* when describing events that took place in 449: Stevens (1933: 1), Anderson (1936: xxxii), Dill (1910: 187), and Harries (1994: 36).

[14] The educational system in Gaul was eventually affected by the collapse of Roman rule but this happened well and truly after Sidonius had already achieved his education, see Mohrmann (1955: 13), Mathisen (2005: 6–9), and Judge (2010: 260). Sidonius' education was based on the key classical and secular texts which had formed the mainstay of the Roman education system from the first century. Sidonius *Ep.* 6.1, Dill (1910: 188), and Hooper and Schwartz (1991: 287). Van Dam (1998: 151) argues that this education system fostered "reverence for the past." See also Anderson (1936: xxxiv) and Kaster (1997: 89–92). Gaul was renowned for the quality of education on offer in its major cities; see Borius (1965: 17). Mathisen (1999: 29) argues that an author's use of classical allusions can be considered evidence of their education, but Sidonius also alludes to authors he is unlikely to have studied, such as Sallust; for which see Engelbrecht (1890: 495). As Max (1979: 227) argues, Sidonius was certainly familiar with the *Bellum Catilinae*.

[15] Loyen (1970a: x–xi). Stevens (1933: 19) dates the marriage to 452 or later. Krause (1991: 543) provides multiple examples of aristocratic men marrying in their early twenties in Late Antique Gaul. In *Ep.* 9.6 Sidonius approves of the behaviour of a young man who left his lover and married (*Ep.* 9.6.2) "intactam … tam moribus natalibusque summatem quam facultatis principalis" (a chaste woman … foremost in character and birth and with a princely fortune). Sidonius hardly fits the unnamed protagonist, but his approval of the man's wife resonates with his marriage to Papianilla, whose birth was impeccable and wealth considerable. Translations are largely my own except where noted otherwise and with the exception of Anderson and Warmingtons's loeb editions which I have borrowed from and adapted freely.

[16] For a detailed assessment of this period see Stickler (2002: 70–83); see also Twyman (1970: 480ff); for Valentinian's likely motivation see Oost (1964: 25).

[17] Moss (1973: 771) and Roberto (2017: 776). For Aëtius' early career see Wijnendaele (2017: 468–482).

[18] Kulikowksi (2012: 46) notes the problems this then caused for subsequent emperors to assert their legitimacy. See also Gillet (2003: 94–95) and Szidat (2010: 239).

of Valentinian's daughters, probably Eudocia, to his own son.[19] This act likely cancelled the agreement that Valentinian had struck with the Vandal king Geiseric to marry Eudocia to his heir Hunneric. Partly as a consequence the Vandals sacked Rome in May 455 in the lead up to which Petronius Maximus was himself killed.[20]

On 9 July 455 Sidonius' father-in-law Avitus was proclaimed emperor in Gaul after securing the support of the Visigothic king, Theodoric II, whereupon he marched to Rome accompanied by Visigothic bodyguards.[21] On 1 January of the following year Sidonius delivered a panegyric for Avitus. At its end Sidonius optimistically asserted (*Carm*. 7.600–601): "felix tempus nevere sorores / imperiis, Auguste" (the Fates have spun a fortunate span for your rule, Emperor). Events thwarted this panegyrical longing for stability. The Eastern Emperor Leo never recognised Avitus as Augustus in the West. Precisely what happened next is unknown; John of Antioch claims that Rome's bankruptcy prevented Avitus from paying his Visigothic guards who in turn left Rome to pursue their interests in Spain.[22] The barbarian potentate Ricimer forced Avitus to flee the city after which he died in circumstances which are unclear in the sources – although his successor Majorian may well have also been involved.[23]

[19] O'Flynn (1983: 92–94) argues that there may have been some hesitancy to follow through on the promise to Geiseric to marry Eudocia to his son. Szidat (2010: 34) claims that Petronius' ascension was not considered an usurpation at the time. The situation is clouded somewhat by the fact that Valentinian had another daughter, Placidia, and the sources are unclear as to whether she was already married to Olybrius by 455, for discussion of which see Connant (2012: 27–28).

[20] Merrills and Miles (2010: 116–119) and Roberto (2017: 779). See pp. 22, 113–114, 187–188.

[21] For a detailed consideration of the evidence for Avitus' reign see Mathisen (1985: 326–335) and Burgess (1987: 336–340). The sources differ as to the precise date of Avitus' acclamation as Emperor; see *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, 15 vols (1877–1919; repr. 1961), AA Auctores Antiquissimi 9. 304; Loyen (1970a: xi) and (1942: 54), Burgess (1987: 336), and Kulikowski (2008: 336) all favour 9 July.

[22] John of Antioch fr. 202, to which may be added support from later sources including Zosimus and John Lydus, for discussion of which see Roberto (2017: 775–801) who argues that Avitus' decision to melt down Roman statues was critical to his removal from office. Stroheker (1970: 53–54) puts the blame on Avitus' inability to rule rather than the trying circumstances.

[23] Avitus died in either 456 or 457, after which Sidonius never again mentioned him by name in any of his works. For a considered analysis of subtle references to Avitus in the remainder of Sidonius' corpus see Mathisen (1979: 165–171) and Rousseau (2000: 253). MacGeorge (2002: 188–197) offers a careful and considered analysis of the evidence. Hydatius 176 (183) focused on the removal of Avitus' Visigothic guards but does not explicitly blame Ricimer or Majorian for his death. Victoris Tonnennsis a. 456 and the *Continuatio Haunensis Prosperi* 1383 maintain that Ricimer defeated Avitus, who was then ordained as a bishop. The Anonymous *Gallic Chronicle of 511* states that Majorian killed Avitus. The most detailed account is John of Antioch fr. 202: "Ἐπιθέμενοι δὲ αὐτῷ κατὰ τὴν ὁδὸν, Μαιουρῖνος τε καὶ Ῥεκίμερ, εἰς τέμενος φυγεῖν κατηνάγκασαν,

Sidonius somehow managed to extricate himself to the relative safety of Gaul, where he next appears in the historical record in 459 delivering a panegyric to the Emperor Majorian who had journeyed to Gaul to placate unrest among the Gallo-Roman nobility.[24] The panegyric did enough to spare Sidonius' life, and even, so it seems, to spare Gaul from the worst of its tax burden.[25] For the next decade Sidonius lived in Gaul and likely held local office; very little is known about this period of his life.[26]

In 461 Ricimer had Majorian killed.[27] His replacement Libius Severus ruled until his own death in 465 whereupon an interregnum existed until the Eastern Roman Emperor Leo appointed Anthemius as the Emperor in the West in 467.[28] Sidonius journeyed from Gaul to Rome to make some sort of representation to the new emperor, the specifics of which cannot be determined from our extant sources.[29] There his efforts at Anthemius' court won him the honour of delivering a panegyric on 1 January 468

ἀπαγορεύοντα τῇ ἀρχῇ, καὶ τὴν βασίλεον ἀποδυσάμενον στολήν. Ἔνθα οἱ περὶ Μαιουρῖνον οὐ πρότερον τῆς πολιορκίας ἀπέστησαν, πρὶν ἢ λιμῷ πιεσθεις τὸν βίον ἀπέλιπε … οἱ δέ φασι ὅτι ἀπεπνίγη" (When Majorian and Ricimer attacked him on the road, they forced him to flee to sanctuary, give up his rule, and remove his imperial robe. Then Majorian's men did not withdraw from the siege until drained by hunger he lost his life … others say that he was strangled). Max (1979: 225) notes "there is so much obscurity in the history immediately following the deposition [of Avitus] … that scarcely anything certain can be advanced concerning it." Börm (2013: 102) considers both Ricimer and Majorian to have been involved but notes the lack of clarity regarding the specifics of Avitus' demise. Accounts that assert a single version of events, such as Loyen's (1970a: xiii) must be treated with scepticism. Oost (1964: 23–4) ascribes Majorians' rise in part to his connections to Aëtius.

[24] During the intervening period the shadowy Marcellan conspiracy occurred about which little can be deduced with any certainty from our sources. Sidonius mentions it briefly in *Ep.* 1.11.6. Mathisen (1985: 333–334), Courcelle (1948: 168), and Köhler (1995: 308–309). See also Jiménez Sánchez (2003: 119–125).

[25] Harries (1994: 5, 86). For the significant expenditure problems Majorian faced see Oost (1970: 232). Sidonius may have exaggerated the danger that he faced. See *Carm.* 4.11–12.

[26] Some, such as Loyen (1970a: xvii), Styka (2011: 303), and Mratschek (2013: 253–254), have sought to characterise this period as Sidonius' "retirement" or "withdrawl" from politics, but Sidonius likely remained involved in local political activities.

[27] Loyen (1970a: xvi–xvii), for which see Hydatius 205 (210): "Maiorianum de Gallis Romam redeuntem … [Rechimer] fraude interfecit" (Ricimer deceitfully killed Majorian as he was returning to Rome from Gaul) and Marius, Bishop of Aventicensis, *Chronica* 461: "deiectus est Mariorianus de imperio in civitate Dertona a Recemere patricio, et interfectus" (Majorian was removed from power in the city of Dertona by the patrician Ricimer, and then killed).

[28] Harries (1994: 142–145), MacGeorge (2002: 235–236), and O'Flynn (1991: 125).

[29] *Ep.* 1.9.5: "[dum] aliquid de legationis Arvernae petitionibus elaboramus" (When I will detail the particulars of the Arvernian embassy's petitions). If Sidonius has been sent by the *concilium septem Galliarum* one would expect to see *Arelate* rather than *Arvernae*. Zeller (1905: 15) argues that Sidonius went to Rome both as an ambassador of the *Arverni* and as he was summoned by the emperor, and probably, as a representative of the *concilium septem provinciarum*.

to mark the new emperor's first consulship.[30] Sidonius' performance was rewarded with the office of prefect of Rome.[31]

That year was a turning point in Sidonius' life: his friend Arvandus was tried and convicted on charges of treason.[32] Sidonius managed to avoid presiding over the case (which as urban prefect should have been his responsibility) but could not avoid his close ties to Arvandus irrevocably damaging his standing in Rome.[33] He returned to Gaul and there took up ecclesiastical office as the bishop of Clermont in late 469 or early 470. It is difficult to know what to make of Sidonius' election as the bishop of Clermont; he himself has very little to say about it, other than it was forced upon him, but scholarship should be very wary of taking that claim at face value. Augustine said as much about his own episcopacy, and by Sidonius' time it had become de rigueur to disavow any worldly ambition to become a bishop.[34] At the same time, opportunities for further advancement in his secular career had surely become very limited.[35] A bishopric, even of a relatively unimportant see like Clermont, offered an enduring status and some level of protection.

A year or so after Sidonius took up his episcopacy the Visigothic king Euric I began to harry Clermont each summer.[36] Euric had murdered his older brother Theodoric II (453–466) for the Visigothic throne.[37] Theodoric

[30] Sidonius *Carm*. 2. Lynette Watson (1998: 179–180) favours Harries' interpretation (1994: 144) that the panegyric was delivered as part of a Gallic diplomatic mission to ascertain Anthemius' intended policy towards the defence of Gaul, over Sivan's assertion (1989: 92) that they sought a reduction in sentence for their fellow Gallo-Roman noble Arvandus, who had been found guilty of treason. Sidonius was the last Gaul to hold this office, and the first to do so in over fifty years, Wickham (2005: 160–161).

[31] *Ep*. 1.9.6. Loyen (1970a: xvii–xix)

[32] For a detailed analysis of the likely process see Pietrini (2015: 304–322).

[33] Stevens (1933: 103), Loyen (1970a: xxi), Teitler (1992: 309–312), and Harries (1994: 158–166). Arvandus' trial is described by Sidonius in *Ep*. 1.7 for which see pp. 10, 67, 76, 143–147.

[34] Augustine *Ser.* 355.1.2. See for example Sidonius' remarks at *Ep*. 3.1.1 and 6.1.1.

[35] *Ep*. 3.1; 5.3. Harries (1992b: 169–173). Mathisen (1993a: 103–104) argues that movement into the church "offered Gallic aristocrats the opportunity to pursue local interests, to maintain their class consciousness and collegiality and to satisfy their desire for public office … [while preserving] their won *Romanitas* in the face of the ever more conspicuous barbarian presence." The advancement of Sidonius' secular career through the 460s was far from certain. Episcopal office on the other hand offered far more stability and, if used judiciously, significant influence.

[36] The term "besieged" is often used to cover the initial period of skirmishes between 471 and 472, followed by the famine of 473–474; for this and the influence of modern French historiography on understanding Euric's confrontation with the Arverni see Delaplace (2012: 278).

[37] *Chronicorum Caesaraugustanorum Reliquae* 466: "His diebus Theodoricus rex Gotthorum a suis interfectus est et Euricus frater eius Gotthorum rex efficitur" (In those days Theodoric king of the Goths [Theodoric II] was killed by his own and Euric, his brother, was made king of the Goths). According to the *Chronica* of Marius the Bishop of Aventicensis, in 455 the Gothic regal brothers had broken out into war: 455.2 "Et ingressus est Theodoricus rex Gothorum Arelatum cum fratribus suis in pace." Marius himself ascribes the murder of Theodoric II by Euric to 467: "Eo anno interfectus

had himself only become king after killing Thorismund (451–453), their father's heir and their older brother.[38] As Anthemius' position deteoriated in the early 470s Euric aggressively sought to expand the Visigothic kingdom of Toulouse into the last remnants of Roman Gaul.[39]

Sidonius and his brother-in-law Ecdicius led the response, ultimately to no avail. In 475 a treaty, negotiated without Sidonius' involvement or approval, ceded Clermont to Euric.[40] Sidonius was arrested and imprisoned by the king, perhaps because of his refusal to temper his condemnation of the treaty and his political support for the Burgundians who had acted as a check against Visigothic expansion.[41] In time, however, Sidonius altered his behaviour towards Euric. He wrote to Leo, a Gallo-Roman adviser of the king, and included in the letter strong statements in praise of Euric.[42] With Leo's intervention Sidonius was released to return to his see. There he died at some point during the reign of Zeno (476–491) probably in the mid 480s.[43]

est Theodoricus rex Gothorum a fratre suo Euthorico Tholosa" (In that year Theodoric king of Visigoths was killed by his brother Euric in Tolosa). See Kulikowski's (2008: 339–342) detailed analysis of Sidonius' depiction of Avitus and diplomatic mission in *Carm.* 7, which argues that a dispute had arisen between Frederic (another son of Theodoric I), who had been in command of Visigothic forces in Spain, and Theodoric in Gaul. King (1972: 3) offers that Euric murdered Theodoric in part owing to their different attitudes towards the Romans arguing that the latter was prepared to work with them while the former was not.

[38] See Hydatius 148 (156). Their father was Theodoric I.

[39] Gillet (1999: 33–35) shows that Euric's aggression towards Roman Gaul only really began in the 470s; see also Delaplace (2015: 241–247). Kulikowski (2012: 31–34) rightly maintains that barbarian groups had *reges* well before they established clear kingdoms in Western Europe which only really began in the late fifth century. Ferreolus, the praetorian prefect of Gaul managed to come to terms with Thorismund in 451 after the defeat of Attila, for which see pp. 3, 120, 129. Theodoric seems to have largely continued Thorismund's approach.

[40] For Ecdicius' role see Sarti (2011: 109) and Drinkwater (2013: 60–61), who elsewhere (2001: 143) shows that few Gallic nobility took up arms. Dill (1926: 5) took this as an indication of the "absence of military virtue" among the Gallo-Roman population. Whittaker (1993: 1996) claims that Sidonius "led the defence of the town." Harries (1994: 227) offers that Sidonius was "the leader of the Clermont resistance." Sarti (2011: 91) states that Sidonius "assumed a military command himself." Barcellona (2013: 15) notes that "[assunse] la difesa della sua diocesi" ([he assumed] the defence of his diocese). Similar claims appear in Dewar (2013: 93). These claims rely solely on Sidonius' own evidence, which is our only source for his involvement. Gregory of Tours (2.22) does not mention Sidonius' role in the defence against the Visigothic attack, but instead focuses on Ecdicius' command of the town's defences. This could be however because of Gregory's concerted effort to focus on Sidonius' holy acts over his more mundane and pragmatic activities, for which see Furbetta (2015c: 1–12). The Auvergne was the last place of Roman power in "middle Gaul," see Stroheker (1965: 199). It had only resisted Visigothic expansion, if Sidonius can be believed, because the Burgundians acted as a counterbalance, see *Ep.* 3.4.1, 7.1.1. For a critical treatment of Sidonius' evidence for this period, see Delaplace (2012: 272–274).

[41] Allen and Neil (2013: 46).

[42] *Ep.* 8.3.3. Harries (1996: 43).

[43] Sidonius' epitaph is housed in the *Musée Bargoin*. For its discovery and analysis of the incomplete text see Prévot (1993: 229–233) and (1999: 77–79). A more complete text of the epitaph survived in

In his early adult years Sidonius served the Roman state and Gaul as an ambassador. In time his political career led to higher offices and eventually transitioned into his episcopacy.[44] Sidonius carefully positioned himself as Roman control of the Auvergne became part of the Visigothic kingdom of Toulouse. While it was feasible, he looked to enlist the Visigoths under Theodoric II as allies for the Roman state, but as the situation changed under Euric, his role as a bishop provided ongoing position and rank.

Sidonius' Epistolography

Through his correspondence and position in Gallo-Roman society Sidonius knew a wide range of important people.[45] He wrote to monks, other bishops, laymen, fellow aristocrats, priests, and political advisers.[46] His acquaintance with this wide and eclectic mix of people was not the product of some haphazard endeavour. Rather, Sidonius understood the importance and utility of *amicitia*.[47] His literary output, especially his letters, developed and promoted a carefully construed persona, as a learned, sophisticated and influential Gallo-Roman aristocrat, and later, as the pious and humble bishop of Clermont.[48]

The theorist L. Stanley considered epistolary exchange a form of gift exchange:

> There is the gift of the letter itself, but more importantly there is what it metonymically stands for and symbolised about the ongoing social bond between writer-giver and addressee-reciever … the letter as gift always has … obligatory and constraining reciprocity.[49]

the margin of one manuscript and was printed in Luetjohann's 1887 edition (1887: 6). The last line of that text stated that his death occurred during the reign of the Emperor Zeno, which ended in 491. Recently another version of the epitaph has come to light in a privately held manuscript, for which see Furbetta (2014: 135–157). The text of that version may limit Sidonius' death to Zeno's consulship (479) rather than reign. Mathisen (2013: 223) dates Sidonius' death to approximately 485.

[44] The role of bishop was political as well as religious. Sirks (2013: 88) compares the behaviour of bishops as mediators to that of Roman patricians.

[45] Sidonius' period saw intense political and military activity, as a procession of emperors, generals, office holders, and kings paraded across the historical stage. Some of these feature in the rich character sketches and detailed anecdotes of his epistles, for which see Chapter 3.

[46] Dalton (1915: clx–clxxxiii).

[47] Wood (1992: 9–10): "Gaul as seen through the letter collections of Sidonius Apollinaris and his acolytes of the following generation is dominated by the exercise of *amicitia*." Mathisen (1989: 1): "In late Roman Gaul, the bonds of friendship were extremely important."

[48] Daly (2000: 19–29), Frye (2003: 191), and Russell (1994: 150), who says, "The Gallo-Roman episcopacy was the last operative administrative remnant of Roman dominion in Gaul." Rousseau (1976) is a detailed study of the effect of Sidonius' episcopal role on his self-fashioning.

[49] Stanley (2011: 140). Conybeare (2000: 19–30) includes gift giving as part of "a wider nexus of communication" (19) that also included Late Antique epistolary exchange, but Stanley (2011) goes

Sidonius collated and circulated his letters.[50] This irrevocably changed their impact, enhancing the socio-cultural value of the "letter as gift," memorialising the addressee for posterity, and turning each addressee into the public reader, not as in private unpublished communication, the sole intended reader.[51] Collectively the epistles constructed a literary circle of like-minded Gallo-Roman aristocrats and clergy drawn around Sidonius' persona, who appears well connected and at ease among the rich, powerful, and learned. This circle was focused on Sidonius, whose self is fashioned in some way or another by every epistle, but it also linked and promoted each addressee to Sidonius' contemporary readership and posterity.[52]

Knowing who the addressee was and when the epistle was written may allow the reader to complete the hermeneutic journey from text to context and back. This context is often obfuscated by Sidonius who tells us just enough so that we may follow along but not enough that we may easily interrogate his narratives. Our ignorance is not necessarily our fault, but it is certainly our problem if we expect Sidonius' epistles to tell us more about his world than he is willing to disclose.

Sidonius' *Epistles* and Their Scholarship

Sidonius' contemporaries looked to him as a leading figure in the literary landscape of Late Antique Gaul (which flourished despite its self-deprecation), his epistles were admired in the middle ages as literary models worthy of emulation, and were widely read and taught by leading humanists.[53] Much of the vitriol levelled at Sidonius' works in the twentieth century may tell us far more about trends in literary criticism than it can about Sidonius' literature.[54]

further in thinking about the epistolary communication as the actual gift exchange, rather than the epistle itself as the gift. For consideration of epistolary exchange by Cicero and Seneca as a gift exchange see Wilcox (2012: 10–12).

[50] See Appendix II. For a full discussion of which see pp. 170–184.

[51] Despite his affected disregard for what posterity may think about his epistles *Ep*. 8.4, 10, 13; 9.6, 9, 14, 16.

[52] On the hierarchy of epistolary exchanges see Stanley (2011: 14).

[53] For a detailed study of Sidonius' influence on certain humanists see Hernández Lobato (2014). Juan Vives, tutor to Mary Tudor, for example, listed Sidonius as one of only eighteen authors suitable for her to read. See F. Watson (1912: 245), and Perkins (2007: 21).

[54] For a representative example one may point to the introduction of the Loeb edition "[Sidonius] succeeds in writing three "poems" [the panegyrics] which for prolonged inspidity, absurdity, and futility would be hard to beat. It is often very difficult to see what he means – all the more difficult because he means so very little … It is pathetic to think that such mouldy antiquarianism was considered a worthy tribute:" Anderson (1936: liii–liv). Cf. Champomier (1938: 52).

The characters, times, and events of his world are innately bound up in the epistles and their narratives. Historical and literary approaches are interdependent; neither can complete the hermeneutic journey on their own, nor should they try.[55] This is a problem that confronts the genre. The epistolary theorist Reinhard Nickisch asserted:

> Für den Literaturwissenschaftler … ist die Beachtung der » historischen Dimension « unverzichtbar wenn seine Interpretationen nicht essentielle Elemente und Aspekte eines solchen [literarischen] Briefes verfehlen sollen.
>
> For the literary scholar … observance of the 'historical dimension' is indispensable if his interpretations are not to miss the essential elements and aspects of such (literary) letters.[56]

The "historical dimension" is critical to reading the rich literary dynamics and context of Sidonius' ornate Latinity. *Ep*. 1.7, for example, provides an account of the trial of Arvandus, who as the Praetorian Prefect of Gaul tried to negotiate with the Visigoths independently of Rome ca. 468, and was subsequently arrested and brought to Rome for trial.[57] Sidonius does not provide extensive details of the case.[58] If Sidonius had wanted to do so, he most surely would have – the suggestion that he was incapable of communicating clearly no longer enjoys the acceptance it once did.[59] So we are left with an account that does not aspire towards historical veracity; the events were in any case all too recent and still politically sensitive.[60] Instead Sidonius makes the story of Arvandus all the more exciting by narrating the present as the moment when Arvandus had been sentenced to death but was yet to be executed (see chapter 3) manipulates the climax of the story to focus on his own involvement (chapter 5), and creates a rich character sketch of Arvandus (chapter 4), all the while appearing as a reliable and wise friend (chapter 2) The readers' knowledge that Arvandus was subsequently spared the death penalty is a spoiler that is otherwise forgotten.[61]

[55] A similar trend is discernible in Plinian scholarship. Marchesi (2015: 4) notes "the wider reorientation of Pliny studies that has been underway for the last fifteen years and has seen the shift in focus from (crudely put) socio-historical data-mining campaigns to a more explicitly literary engagement with Pliny's texts." The parentheses are original. Harries (1994: 2) clearly outlines the importance to the historian in analysing "the political aspects of Sidonius' literary technique."

[56] Nickisch (1991: 238).

[57] Köhler (1995: 231–232).

[58] Stevens (1933: 106); Teitler (1992: 312) is more forgiving, noting "Sidonius' letter leaves many questions unanswered."

[59] Van Waarden (2013a: 5) calls rightly for "relegating the case against Sidonius to the archives of the history of scholarship."

[60] See pp. 65–66.

[61] Sivan (1989: 93n51) and Teitler (1992: 310–311).