Sidonius Apollinaris Writes Himself Out:
Aut(hol)ograph and Architext in Late Roman
Codex Society

It was Ernest Stein who dubbed Sidonius Apollinaris “the last Latin poet and prose-writer of antiquity”. Stein also pointed up the historical value of the account given by Sidonius of “the fall of the [Roman] empire in the West” and, as he saw it, the merely accessory role of Christianity in his work as a publishing writer.¹ Recent scholarship on Sidonius has created a favourable context in which to reassess these reputedly terminal-Roman and incidental-Christian facets of his œuvre.² This essay looks again at Sidonius’ letter collection, with an eye to the textual and bibliographic whole(s) therein finally composed. It begins, after other recent studies, at the place where Sidonius first appears to be about to make an end of his last work, the Epistularum libri.³ It finds its focus in Book 9 of that work, specifically in the articulation between the book’s two parts, the former of which is preoccupied with the modalities of Christian discursive performance and production, whereas the latter replaces both writer and reader within an horizon of expectations projected from Rome as centre at once of empire and of “literary” value.⁴ In an effort to explain certain


1 Stein (1959) 370 –371 (546 –547 in the original German edition of 1928): “Sidoine Apollinaire […] est […] pour nous le dernier poète et prosateur latin de l’Antiquité. Car d’une part, ses œuvres, contemporaines de la chute de l’Empire d’Occident, reflètent cet événement avec une vivacité saisissante; d’autre part, s’il est chrétien et a même fini évêque, Sidoine, à la différence de ceux qui viendront après lui, appartient encore à l’Antiquité par sa culture, sa manière de vivre et sa conception du monde; aussi le christianisme joue-t-il dans son œuvre un rôle au fond accessoire […] [I]l est aussi, par ses œuvres en prose, le dernier représentant notable de l’art épistolier de l’Antiquité et, parmi les Latins, probablement le plus sympathique depuis Pline le Jeune.” Sidonius was already the last man standing in Dill (1899). The traditional picture was nuanced by Stevens (1933) and has since been reframed in Anglophone scholarship by, among others, Rousseau (1976), Drinkwater/Elton (1992), Mathisen (1993), Harries (1994 and 1996), and Heather (2005). Sidonius is still a limit-figure of choice for latertgoing narratives of classical Latin literature: see now van Waarden (2010 –2016) and, for a dissenting sense of irony, Kitchen (2010).

2 Van Waarden/Kelly (2013), the first fruits of a major international collaboration, offers a view of the field. See, too, Poignault/Stoehr-Monjou (2014).

3 See now esp. Mratschek (2017), a fine-grained account of Sidonius’ construction of his literary persona in the Epistularum libri; Egelhaaf-Gaiser (2010). For the œuvre as a whole, Loyen (1943) and Gualandri (1979) remain fundamental.

4 Quotation marks around “literary” here and below are a reminder that the historical relationships of the modern discourse of “literature” to earlier totalizing discursive formations, including those de-

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110643503-007
features of Sidonius’ self-presentation in the later and especially the last of the *Epistularum libri*, above all his fondness for aut(hol)ographic idioms and poses, we speculate about the emergence in the later Roman period of new forms of literate mentality and sociality facilitated by the use of books in codex form. Without venturing on the issue of how reliance on the codex in the transmission of written knowledge influenced the development of European Christianity after the end of the Roman Empire in the West, we suggest that this writer’s final dispositions for his œuvre were an attempt to draw a line between longstanding Roman habits of conferring over texts and an emergent, mainstream practice of what may be thought of (using a term of Gérard Genette’s) as the Christian *architext*.

1 Sidonius Writes Out His Letters (*Epistularum libri* 7 – 9)

Sidonius first appears to make an end of his *Epistularum libri* with Book 7, the redaction of which André Loyen dated around the year 477. The last letter of that book, addressed to Constantius, who had received the dedicatory first letter of Book 1, evokes the author’s process in compiling his letters:

_A te principio, tibi desinet. Nam petimum misimus opus raptim relectis exemplibus, quae ob hoc in manus paauca venerunt, quia mihi nil de libelli hulusce conscriptione meditanti hactenus incustodita nequeunt inveniri._

What began with you, will end with you [cf. Vergil, *Eclogae* 8,11]. I send you the work that you requested, after cursorily reading over the copies, few of which came to hand, since I had no thought of composing a book of this kind and so pieces that I had not previously made a point of keeping are not to be found.

In *Epistulae* 1,1 to Constantius, Sidonius had named Pliny as a model for his collected correspondence. Recent research has confirmed the artfulness of this emulative project. Granting that, we are more likely to notice how distinctly un-Plinian Sidonius

---

5 There can be no secure, single dating of any individual item within the Sidonian epistolary corpus: Kelly (forthcoming). Dating the redaction of component books or sets of books is not an exact science either: Harries (1994) 2 – 10 sets a base-line for conjecture. See also Mathisen (2013). What chiefly matters for this essay is the apparent relative chronology of the (later) books of the *Epistularum libri*.


7 Sidonius Apollinaris, *Epistulae* 1,1,1 (2 L.): Gai Plinii disciplinam maturitatemque vestigiis praesumptuosis insecutur. See now Mratschek (2008), Gibson (2013a), part of a special issue on “Pliny the Younger in Late Antiquity”, and Gibson (2013b). Also pertinent, for the Plinian manner, are Marchesi (2008), Gibson/Morello (2012), esp. ch. 8 (“The grand design: How to read the collection”), and Bodel

---
can also be. The fussy reflexiveness of the epilogue-like *Epistulae* 7.18 is a case in point, flagrantly contrasting as it does with the art-concealing art of Pliny’s performance as his own epistolographic redactor. And there is more, much more, from Sidonius in this vein.

The close of Book 7 turns out to be the first of two false endings on the way to a nine-book collection matching Pliny’s. Book 8 (dated by Loyen [1970] XXIV to 479) opens with a letter identifying its addressee, Petronius, as instigator of a further search through the author’s “Arvernian letter-cases” (*scriinia Arverna*) for a handful of letters “to crown a completed work with a sort of fringe for its margin” (8,1,1 [82 L.]: *opus [...] explicitum quodam quasi marginis sui limbo coronatura*). Translators wrestle with that last phrase. While Sidonius’ sense of the easily metonymizable marginal spaces of a book can be paralleled in classical writers, no-one before him seems to have driven the idiom as hard as he does when extending the series of his *Epistularum libri*. A second epilogue at the end of Book 8 rededicates the enlarged collection to Constantius, not a moment too soon as it turns out, since, the author informs his friend, the newly transcribed text of the letters has now run up against the margins set by the spindles of the book-roll(s) containing it (8,16,1 [127 L.]: *iam venitur ad margines umbilicorum*). Given that these collected *Epistulae*

---

8 Marchesi (2015b) 226: “Pliny’s collection of letters offers itself as a text that, while obsessing on the circumstances and mechanics governing the production, circulation and consumption of other texts, shies away from the *Urszene*, the primal scene of its own making as a book.” Sidonius is less squeamish. See also Gibson (2013a) 352 (note 43).


10 Was *coronatura* meant to suggest *coronis*, the curved line used by scribes to mark the ends of books or sections of text in rolls and codices? For examples of elaborate, fringe-like *coronides* running vertically down the left- and right-hand margins of late antique papyrus codices of Homer, see Schironi (2010) nos. 42–43. In the sole surviving fragment of a codex of Pliny’s *Epistulae* from the time of Sidonius (New York, Pierpoint Morgan Library M.462, written in Italy towards the end of the fifth century: Reynolds [1983] 317) the end of Book 2 is marked by leafy tendrils running horizontally across the page: Lowe/Rand (1922) Plate 1; contextualized by Gibson (2014) 40–46.

11 See *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, s.v. *margo* 2; *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, s.v. *margo* 3b. Both Claudian, *De raptu Proserpinae* 1.269 and Boethius, *De consolatione philosophiae* 1.1/4 have *margo* meaning the edge of a piece of fabric, a usage that may have recommended *limbus* to Sidonius as a synonym for a book’s edge. None of the five instances of *margo* in Pliny’s *Epistulae*, however, refers to the edge of a book-roll.

would have gone abroad quired in codexes, the spindles in question can only ever have been figurative, a conscious archaism of the kind favoured by Sidonius, albeit in this case no more than a slight stirring of the otherwise dormant metaphor of *volumina* as routinely used of spine-hinged books in late antiquity.\(^{13}\) Perhaps the easiest way to account for Sidonius’ “marginal” rhetoric at this point is by assuming that Books 1–7 had already circulated widely as a single-volume codex.\(^{14}\) Be that as it may, the marginal tic reappears in the first letter of Book 9 (dated by Loyen [1970] XXIV to 482), whose addressee, Firminus, is credited with pointing out that the Plinian model dictated nine books in total. If any copy of an unpublished item now came to hand, writes the in-demand, hands-on author-editor, he would “promptly add it to the margins of the eighth book” (9,1,4 [131 L.]: *libri marginibus octavi celebriter addemus*).

Those margins were duly filled as well. The proportions of Sidonius’ ostensibly improvised Book 9 match those of its predecessors.\(^{15}\) There too, contrary to Pliny’s more discreet closing style, he book-ends with a purpose-made, self-declared epilogue. This third leave-taking, addressed to Firminus, is more elaborate than the first and second, consisting of an 84-line poem (21 Sapphic strophes) bracketed by passages of prose. The opening prose passage pays tribute again to Constantius, held up as a model of eloquence for his “public discourses” (9,16,1 [178 L.]: *tractatus publicis*).\(^{16}\) Next Sidonius recalls how, as soon as his duties as bishop of Clermont permitted, he had begun compiling matter for a ninth book. The terms that he uses for the process bizarrely suggest that he was his own secretary. Any stray composition that he found lying around, he says, he would “speedily” write out, “working furiously and urgently as a copyist” (9,16,2 [178 L.]: *raptim coactimque*).

---

\(^{13}\) Each of Pliny the Younger’s books of letters “would originally have occupied a single papyrus roll of moderate length, and this was no doubt the form in which they circulated in his day, even if parchment codices were already in use”: Bodel (2015) 23. Given the prevalence of codex-use by the fifth century, Sidonius presumably read Pliny’s *Epistularum libri* in a single codex containing Books 1–9, there being no positive evidence (despite what we might like to infer, as e.g. Gibson [2013a] 355 [note 48]) that he knew Book 10.

\(^{14}\) See *Epistulae* 1,1,1 (to Constantius) (2 L.): *Diu praecipis, domine maior [...] ut, si quae mihi litterae paulo politiores varia occasione fluxerint, prout eas causa, persona, tempus elicuit, omnes retractatis exemplaribus enucleatisque uno volumine includam* (emphasis added).

\(^{15}\) Sidonius appears to envisaged the successive books of his *Epistulae* as matching units, fit to circulate initially by themselves in separate, multi-quire codexes, before being gathered into a collection that would run to seven, eight and finally nine *libri* containable within the covers of a single, more ample codex.

\(^{16}\) What were these *publici tractatus*? By the mid-470s Constantius was a presbyter of the church at Lyon. Beyond his association with Sidonius, his modern literary fame depends on his authorship, ca. 480, of the *Vita sancti Germani*. It is clear from that work and Sidonius’ characterizations of him that he had received a traditional rhetorical education, and so may have been known for orations delivered in non-ecclesiastical settings. At *Epistulae* 7,18,4 his reading is presented as exclusively “sacred”, but the terms of 9,16,1 suggest a culture of literary emulation more in keeping with the general tenor of *Epistulae* 9,12–16. See Loyen (1970) XXXI–XXXIII; Kaufmann (1995) 294.
We are free to infer that the poem transcribed into this letter was one of the stray items in question, although it is as likely that Sidonius composed the verses expressly for their present setting as it is unlikely that he dispensed with the services of a trained copyist in the production of his book, whatever preliminary work he may personally have done in marking revisions on loose copies of old letters (probably on papyrus) and putting them in order.¹⁸

The poem in *Epistulae* 9,16 charts the course of Sidonius’ career as a performer in poetry and prose, with its twin Roman-imperial high-points marked by the erection of a bronze statue of him in the Forum of Trajan (the reward for a poem recited in 456 in praise of his father-in-law, the Gallic emperor Avitus) and his appointment as prefect of the city of Rome by the emperor Anthemius in 468.¹⁹ Since then, he states, he had channeled his artistic energies into letter-writing, for fear that worldly renown as a poet might compromise his probity as a member of the Christian clergy (9,16,3 [181,55 – 56 L.]: *clerici ne quid maculet rigorem / fama poetae*). Were he now to resume writing poetry, he says, it would be to sing the praises of Christian martyrs, beginning with Saint Saturninus of Toulouse. Strictly interpreted, the verses in which he makes that claim ought to be the last that Sidonius wrote before undertaking the hagiographical poem that, to the best of our knowledge, he never composed.²⁰ His *ultima verba* as a poet would then have been transcribed (by his own hand in the first instance, if we read him literally in these serial epilogues) in the outermost “margin” of his finished epistolary œuvre, separated from the book-ending *Vale* to Firminus by a single sentence of prose appended to save the decorum of a collection of prose letters (with, from Book 3 onwards, occasional inserted verse) that is then held, in its last breath, to a standard prescribed by Horace for poetry (and pottery).²¹

---


¹⁸ The work of the trained copyist (here called *antiquarius*) is described, in the same almost surreal style as the author’s own act of transcription, in the second half of the long sentence at *Epistulae* 9,16, 2 (178 L.): *Licet antiquarium moraretur insiccabilis gelu pagina et calamo durior gutta, quam iudicasses imprimentibus digitis non fluere sed frangi.* In Sidonius’ milieu the copying of books was typically done by a scribe retained or commissioned for the purpose by the prospective owner or donor, who might also be the author. As shown by Santelia (2000), when Sidonius mentions *bibliopolae* (*Epistulae* 2,8,2; 2,9,4; 5,15,1 [62; 64; 198 L.]; 9,7,1 [143 L.]) he means such household retainers or other hired hands with the skills needed for producing finished books, not commercial booksellers of the sort attested in the earlier imperial period (e.g., by Pliny, *Epistulae* 9,11,2, for Lyon); so already Marrou (1949). Pace Gibson (2013a) 353, we know of no booksellers in Lyon or other cities of Gaul in the mid- to late fifth century.

¹⁹ On this poem and the letter as a whole in relation to Sidonius’ lifelong project as a Latin writer, see Egelhaaf-Gaiser (2010) and Mratschek (2017) 319 – 323.


²¹ *Epistulae* 9,16,4 (182 L.): *Redeamus in fine ad oratorium stilum materiam praezentem proposito semel ordine terminaturi, ne, si epilogis musicis opus prosarium clauserimus, secundum regulas Flacci,*
The last item in Sidonius’ *Carmina*, a collection probably issued in 469 and marking the end of his civil or secular career, had been a propempticon or *envoi* for the volume (*Carmen* 24). The last letter of the *Epistularum libri* can be read as a *renvoi* for the same body of work, in the dual sense of a text that redirects attention to Sidonius’ poetic œuvre and at the same time purportedly sets it aside. The not-so-paradoxical doubleness of the gesture accords with every other indication we have of this author’s intents with regard to his “literary” posterity. Sidonius the bishop drew a line between, on the one hand, the poetry that he had collected by 469 and, on the other, a prose epistolographic œuvre (with verse insertions) made up of texts reworked and collected, if not in every case originally composed, after that date. While in later years he implicitly deprecated his own collected poetry, he never condemned, still less attempted to expunge it. In the end, the *Epistularum libri* metaphorically incorporates the *Carmina* with the same notionally autograph stroke of the pen that puts them lightly under erasure. Writing himself out to the last, if only in his reader’s mind’s eye, Sidonius wrote nothing off that he had previously reissued as part of larger, composite textual wholes.²² And yet, as we shall see, there was both more and less of this author in his last book than testamentary self-validation.

## 2 The Aut(hol)ographic Ego: Sidonius’ Last Book and Late Roman Codex Society

### 2.1 “nulli incognitus et legendus orbi”

Book 9 of Sidonius’ *Epistularum libri* is a work of two ideologically incommensurable halves. The last five items (*Epistulae* 9,12–16) are all addressed to laymen and in every case have a direct or implicit bearing on the propriety of a cleric’s composing poetry, an issue that would come into particularly sharp focus in the culminating let-

*ubi amphora coepit institui, urceus potius exisse videatur* [cf. Horace, *Ars poetica*, lines 21–22]. *Vale.* (emphasis added). According to Mratschek (2017) 321, “Sidonius [...] has conceived his epistolary collection in conformity with the instructions of the classical handbook of poetic composition”, while for Pelttari (2016) 331 this “final reference to Horace again draws attention to the author’s combination of styles, tones, and genres” and for Egelhaaf-Gaiser (2010) 290 “[die] Strategie, die – ohnehin flexiblen! – Gattungsgrenzen des literarischen Briefs immer weiter zu dehnen, hat nun offenbar im letzten Brief ihre definitive Grenze erreicht.” On any reading, the *regulae Flacci* were now called upon to endorse a claim to final artistic unity that was more ambitious, in its embrace of different formal genres, than any that Horace can be supposed to have upheld. The locution *opus prosarium*, which Sidonius may have coined, appears again in a prominent position, contrasted with his poetic output, at the end of Book 3 (*Epistulae* 3,14,1).

²² Mascoli (2004a) provides an alternative analysis of the economy of the Sidonian œuvre, starting from what was ultimately excluded from it. See also van Waarden (2010) 8–10.
ter of the collection. Only the first and shortest of the preceding letters in this final sequence does not also contain transcribed verses composed by Sidonius himself, and in constituting that exception lays down the Lesbian rule of the subseries as a whole.

*Epistulae* 9,12 answers a request from Oresius for new poems by Sidonius. He declines, explaining that the composition of poetry ill befits a cleric and that he himself had given it up “at the outset of [his] religious profession” (*Epistulae* 9,12,1 [160 L.]: *ab exordio religiosae professionis*), an event dated some twelve years earlier (*Epistulae* 9,12,2 [161 L.]: *in silentio decurri tres olympiadas*). Rather than disappoint his correspondent, however, Sidonius undertakes to send him such letters as he may now be able to find, written before he became a bishop (*Epistulae* 9,12,3 [161 L.]: *ante praesentis officii necessitatem*) and containing verse.

*Epistulae* 9,13 offers a variation on the same theme. Tonantius has asked for some Asclepiads to recite at a banquet. Sidonius obliges him with a 28-line impromptu effusion in that metre, explaining why he cannot any longer produce verse to order (!), entreats his youthful correspondent to occupy his time at table instead with edifying tales (*Epistulae* 9,13,3 [163 L.]: *religiosis [...] narrationibus*), and throws in for good measure a longer poem in Anacreontic dimeters that he had written twenty years earlier for a celebration at the court of the emperor Majorian.

*Epistulae* 9,14 encourages the young Burgundio’s literary ambitions, predicts an admiring audience for him one day at Rome, and feeds his curiosity about palindromic verses by supplying a set that Sidonius had previously composed, along with two reversible one-liners not composed by him, the first of which reinforces the Rome-ward train of thought (*Epistulae* 9,14,4 [171 L.]: *Roma tibi subito motibus ibit amor*).

*Epistulae* 9,15 to Gelasius makes up for *Tonantius* (9,13) and the final one to Firminus (9,16) by coyly granting a request for a gift of iambics, delivered in the form of an extended *recusatio* commending other poets from Sidonius’ circle as better qualified than him for such performances.

As an ensemble, the terminal run of five letters teasingly corroborates the claim made by their author in the framing items (*Epistulae* 9,12 and 16) to have hung up his lyre at the moment of his religious ordination and, apart from one or two minor lapses, not taken it down since.

The figure finally cut by Sidonius in the early 480s was appreciably reshaped with respect to that of the politician-poet honoured as early as 456 when, in his words, “Trajan, son of Nerva, saw an everlasting statue, with my titles on it, set up between the authors of the double [Greek and Latin] library” in the forum named for that emperor at Rome.²³ True to another Horatian principle, the perennity of Sidonius’ literary œuvre would far outstrip that of its bronze counterpart. It would not be an image of him at Rome but circulating copies of his writings (the *Epistulae* 9,16,3 (180,25–28 L.): *Cum meis poni statuam perennem / Nerva Traianus titulis videret, / inter auctores utrisque fixam bybliothecae*. Another reference to this bronze statue in *Carmen* 8,7–8. Chenault (2012) 111–112 argues that “the honour surely owed as much to Sidonius’ nobility as to his poetry”, before conceding that, for this period, “it would be idle to draw too firm a line in classifying and individual as a ‘political’ as opposed to a ‘literary’ figure.” On nostalgia for the cultural heritage of the Trajanic era in Sidonius’ milieu, Mratschek (2008). Full discussion of this Roman scene in Sidonius’ verse autobiography in Egelhaaf-Gaiser (2010) 279–283.

²³ *Epistulae* 9,16,3 (180,25–28 L.): *Cum meis poni statuam perennem / Nerva Traianus titulis videret, / inter auctores utrisque fixam bybliothecae*. Another reference to this bronze statue in *Carmen* 8,7–8. Chenault (2012) 111–112 argues that “the honour surely owed as much to Sidonius’ nobility as to his poetry”, before conceding that, for this period, “it would be idle to draw too firm a line in classifying and individual as a ‘political’ as opposed to a ‘literary’ figure.” On nostalgia for the cultural heritage of the Trajanic era in Sidonius’ milieu, Mratschek (2008). Full discussion of this Roman scene in Sidonius’ verse autobiography in Egelhaaf-Gaiser (2010) 279–283.
rum libri, rather than the Carmina) that guaranteed his immediate posthumous renown as an author. The Roman idea of a “literary” career had been inextricably associated with the city of Rome for as long as there had been anything like a Roman “literature” in Latin. That symbolic connection survived the political reorganization of the later empire. It is still the axis on which Book 1 of Sidonius’ letters turns. In his last letters, as in one of the reversible verses quoted in Epistulae 9,14, Rome again comes suddenly into view, if only for the length of a valediction. Within a few years of their compilation, other verses would be incised on Sidonius’ tomb, in the city of Clermont where he had been bishop for a decade and a half. Fragments of that epitaph have been unearthed, which confirm the accuracy of a medieval transcription of its text into the margin of a copy of his works. Besides commemorating Sidonius’ services to the people of Clermont, the inscription prophesied his lasting fame as an author. He had, it declares, “written” things that were “to be esteemed in all ages to come”, and was “known” and “to be read” by everyone, everywhere (nulli incognitus et legendus orbi). We might say that the future imagined in these lines was broadly faithful to Sidonius’ own vision of his “literary” posterity, now adapted to a world that had ceased to have Rome for its symbolic centre and in which traditional distinctions of discursive genre no longer mattered.

It is worth asking, with Stein’s and other historians’ terminal placings of our author in mind: How far did Sidonius himself already go, despite the emphatically Roman accents of the terminal letters of Book 9, in envisaging such a post-Rome, post-genre “literary” world? The evidence to be reviewed below suggests that he gave it a long, hard, critical look.

24 Mascoli (2004b) notes the silence of Gallo-Roman writers of the next generation concerning the Carmina.
25 Farrell (2002); Feeney (2016); Woolf (2003) 221: “Written for an imperial people, Latin literature had become temporarily tangled around a single place, and subsequent generations had, if only metaphorically, to live there.”
27 Küppers (2005).
29 Epitaph for Sidonius Apollinaris, Lines 10–11.17 (VI Lütjohann): Haec inter tamen et philosophando, / scripsit perpetuis habenda seclis. / [...] / nulli incognitus et legendus orbi. As observed by Mascoli (2004b), “Il referimento alla filosofia va inteso non in senso stretto (Sidonio non si è mai professato filosofo) ma nel senso più ampio di amore per la sapienza e per gli studi umanistici”. On the (supra-) generic sense of philosophia in Sidonius’ own usage, see further at note 84 below.
2.2 Constructions of Episcopoliterarity

For the earlier and greater part of Book 9 of the Epistularum libri (9,1–11) we see and hear nothing of Sidonius the poet. Nor, after the reference to Pliny in the book-opening letter to Firminus (Epistulae 9,1,1), do we encounter anything to remind us of the amenities of the city of Rome, the administrative infrastructure of Rome’s empire, or the traditional pursuits of Roman men of letters. The writer’s company in these ten letters (Epistulae 9,2–11) is demographically distinct from the poetizing coterie of the collection’s closing sequence. Every addressee (one of them, Faustus of Riez, being the recipient of two letters) is identified in the salutation as a bishop (papa).30 Plausible dates of original composition range from the early 470s, within a few years of Sidonius’ episcopal consecration, to the present time of publication (early 480s). A spirit of literary recusatio pervades several of these letters as it will the subsequent poetizing batch, but with a difference: there is in this episcopal sequence less of the playful bad faith that classicizing poets exhibit when declining, in verse, to write poetry. Instead, discernible amid the usual distractions and platitudes of later Roman “epistoliterarity”,31 there are signs of a recognition by the writer of horizons of authorship beyond those within which the totality of his Epistularum libri (and Carmina) would by the end of this book have been composed and left to aftertimes.

Inserted before the final, sphragis-like or “sign-off” subseries of Epistulae 9,12–16, with its adroitly Horatian closing bid for the unity of an artistic œuvre distributed between (multigeneric) poetry and prose, Sidonius’ final decade of ecclesiastical letters delineates a field of Latin “literary” activity in which he himself would stake no claim. At the same time, it makes a spectacle of material and mechanical processes of book production that, while never far from view in his Epistularum libri, are nowhere so dramatically realized as in this last book.

Epistulae 9,2 to bishop Euphronius announces the emergent property of the subseries: a kind or kinds of writing that others may execute, but not Sidonius. (There is an obvious structural parallel with the author’s refusal in 9,12 to write any new poems.) Euphronius has requested that Sidonius compose a work that, the latter confesses, “for a person of [his] contemptible abilities, would be as hard to complete as rash [for him] to begin” (9,2,1 [132 L.]: opus, quod ab extremitate mea tam difficile completur quam imprudenter incipitur). The genre of the commissioned work is not specified but the examples of Jerome, Augustine and Origen are passed in cautionary review, each marked off by an epithet denoting a characteristic excellence or specialization (9,2,2 [132 L.]: Hieronymus interpres, dialecticus Augustinus, allegoricus Origenes). Apparently either Euphronius’ commission or Sidonius’ interpretation of it was broad enough to em-

---

30 There is a parallel sequence of letters to bishops in the first of the three “terminal” books of Sidonius’ Epistulae (7,1–11), where it is followed by a further series of letters (12–17) to Christian ascetics, one of which contains an inserted poem in elegiacs in praise of the cosmopolitan holy man Abraham. For a commentary on Book 7 under a title that catches the tragic spirit of much contemporary scholarship on Sidonius, see van Waarden (2010–2016).

31 The coinage is John Henderson’s, originally used in respect of Cicero’s Epistulae and since generalized by students of ancient and later ancient letters: Henderson (2007).
brace an array of genres, disciplines and/or styles. We could imagine a multifaceted opus prosa-rium comparable to Epistularum libri, but of distinctly Christian inspiration. “New cleric and old sinner” that he was, “light in knowledge (scientia) but heavy of conscience (conscientia)” (9,2,3 [133 L.]), what could Sidonius do but excuse himself?

Epistulae 9,3, the first of two letters to bishop Faustus (of Riez), poses again the challenge for Sidonius of performing in a literary genre or genres suitable to a Christian cleric. (We will consider this important text in more detail below, alongside 9,9, the other letter to Faustus.) After that, the tension is relaxed for the space of a few letters.

Epistulae 9,4 to bishop Graecus is the merest courtesy. In passing, the writer reworks the play on scientia-conscientia (a familiar one with him), to his correspondent’s advantage.

Epistulae 9,5 and 9,6, as likewise 9,8 and 9,10, are other small tokens of pastoral collegiality, providing background ecclesiastical ambience and acting as buffers between the longer, more highly charged letters that fall beside and among them (9,3,7,9,11). This is episcopoliterary vari-etas. Had Pliny been a bishop, he might have aimed for similar effects.

Epistulae 9,7 and 11 form a book-centred (and, with 9,9 between them, book-centring) dou-blet:

Epistulae 9,7 to bishop Remigius (of Reims) sets up 9,11 to Lupus. It is also, by virtue of its addressee, a counterpart to 9,14 to the young Burgundio in the later, poetic subseries. Remigius would at the time have been one of the youngest bishops in Gaul; he lived long enough to bap-tize Clovis. Before presenting the venerable Lupus of Troyes as a hard-to-impress patron, critic and potential reviser of his epistolary work in 9,11, Sidonius here styles Remigius the representa-tive of a coming generation of clerical literary producers. He first recounts how, through an unnamed intermediary whose methods are shrouded in mystery, he had obtained a copy of Remigius’ declamationes. He then lists in minute but abstract detail the rhetorical qualities that he so admired in his young colleague’s work. There is no sign that the orations in question were religious in character.32 Indeed, Sidonius comes close to accusing their author of excessive pride in his own eloquence, before granting that Remigius’ conscience might in fact be as well ordered as his prose, and begging not to be deprived of the future fruits of his literary talent, which by implication will be works of religious instruction. Sidonius is one, he assures his correspondent, who knows how to praise what is well written, even when he is unable to com-pose praiseworthy works of his own (9,7,4 [144 L.]: qui bene scripta laudamus, etsi laudanda non scribimus). The conclusion reverts to the cloak-and-pen manner of the opening. If Remigius holds out on him, threatens Sidonius, he may have to mount a special operation to seize his writ-ings (5). To such imaginative lengths will this writer go to lay his hands on texts of a kind that he will not himself produce!

Epistulae 9,11 to bishop Lupus (of Troyes) will bridge the ecclesiastical sequence to the po-etico colloquies of 9,12–16. Addressed to the longest serving bishop in Gaul, it concerns a “pre-sentation” copy of a single book of Sidonius’ Epistulae that the author had sent to Lupus, appar-ently for onward transmission to a third party to whom it had been promised – but who, because Lupus has held on to it, was still waiting to receive the gift. If Lupus would now have an additional copy made, perhaps incorporating his own critical revisions to the text, and send that on to the third party, then, jokes Sidonius, the latter would be sure to prize the parchment codex as an author’s holograph (9,11,6 [157 L.]: autholo-graphas membranas), so perfect would its finish be.

32 See above (note 16) for a similar uncertainty about the publici tractatus attributed to Constantius, presbyter of Lyon, and below (note 90) for the missae, contestationes or contestatiunculae of Sidonius himself.
The bookish letters to Lupus and Remigius, like those to Faustus to which we shall return below, are in one sense commonplace enough. Tales of books passing from hand to hand, often under cover of epistolary texts such as these that we now find ourselves reading many centuries later, are standard fare in ancient epistolary collections. The sort of people who exchanged highly artificial letters were likely also to share an interest in books by third parties, living or dead, and, as authors themselves, could be expected to take an interest in each others’ “literary” productions, whether finished or still in draft. Pliny’s Epistulae canonized such expectations for Latin epistoliterarity. Later Latin writers followed in their fashion. Sidonius would have found plenty of examples of both the matter-of-fact and the melodramatic “book transmission narrative” in the collected correspondence of his more notable predecessors, such as Ausonius, Paulinus of Nola, Symmachus and Jerome. Colourful instances of the same mini-genre(s) can likewise be found amid the disparate epistolary remains of his fellow mid-to late fifth century Gallo-Roman literati, the majority of them already clerics at the time of writing.

Epistoliterarity, episcopoliterarity. Plus ça change...

Yet alteration, we know, there was. The material conditions of book transmission in the Roman empire changed significantly between the late first and late fifth centuries CE. Most obviously, whereas the books cherished by Pliny, Tacitus and Suetonius were produced (on the Greek model) as papyrus rolls, their equivalents in Sidonius’ library would have been spine-hinged codices (essentially a Roman invention), most of them made of parchment. So gradual was this change of preference in the form of text-container over the three centuries or so that it took to occur, there is barely a sign in our ancient sources that anyone noticed it in progress. It is possible, even so, that the late antique ascendancy of the codex as standard medium not only for legal documents, accounting, record-keeping, reference and information-handling of all sorts but also for the transmission of the “higher” kinds of literate discourse (poetry, epistolography, oratory, grammar and rhetoric, history, philosophy, science) was in fact registered at the time, at least in some of those discourses, by figures of thought and language that still catch the eye but whose potential interest has not yet been fully appreciated.

---

Scholars have long been attracted by the hypothesis that the “codex revolution” could have had a significant, even transformative, impact on the cognitive and cultural experience of readers in the later ancient world. Less often considered is the difference that the diffusion of the codex as text-container could have made to the sense that members of the Roman hyperliterate elite, specifically those who thought of themselves as authors, had of themselves as writers. Two distinctive features of the codex form were likely to have counted in this respect: (1) its handiness and (2) its capacity. Whereas the ordinarily two-handed process of unfurling a book-roll left the reader with no hand free for a pen, the peruser of a codex could, if he or she chose, comfortably write over, between the lines, or in the margins of its text(s). Hence, (1) a codex-written text was always physically an “open” text, lending itself to emendation and/or annotation, to a degree that the roll-written text typically was and did not. Moreover, whereas a “literary” work long enough to be copied

36 Already Roberts (1954) 203: “The adoption of the codex may be seen as one small symptom of a profound psychological change, one easier to sense than to describe, that begins to be evident in the third century A.D. and that marks the transition from the ancient to the medieval world.”
37 Harris (1991) 78–79.
38 Cavallo (1999) 83, 88: “The codex, which could be held in one hand, left the other one free, freeing the reading process as well [...] Freeing one hand from the task of holding the book enabled the reader to use it to write, hence to make annotations in the margins of the pages of the codex. The practice of writing in a book as one read arose with the codex [...] The codex provided readers with other spaces to write on: entirely or partially blank pages, endpapers and the inside surfaces of bindings could be used for notations of all sorts” (emphasis added). Cf. Johnson (2009) 267: “Without implying direct cause and effect, we can see that medieval characteristics such as the rise of scriptoria, renewed encyclopedism, and the habit of extensive marginal annotation can be located within the series of changes we associate with the transition to codex form” (emphasis added). For the rarity of ancient visual representations of figures writing in book-rolls (as distinct from wax tablets, used for drafting and school exercises), see Birt (1907) 197–209, Marrou (1938) 148–153. However idealizing, images in late antique and early medieval mosaics and book-art of evangelists writing directly in bound codices reflect a new practical reality. Even so, it appears to have remained standard practice for members of the civil and clerical elites to dictate their compositions, including even marginalia: Dekkers (1952); Arns (1953) 37–51; Cameron (2011) 489–492.
39 McNamee (2007) 29–30: “Whether annotations came from an antigraph or from dictation, the act of making notes – indeed, of writing anything in a papyrus roll – required a dexterity not called for in classrooms and libraries today [...] It remains an open question [with respect to roll-based book-use] whether people past their schooling – other than scholars – were in the habit of adding notes as they read.” See also Johnson (2010) 185–192. Some of the best “literary” evidence for the habit of annotation in codexes in late antiquity is provided by Jerome and Augustine. Jerome consistently uses the idiom ex latere addere/adnotare for his marginal comments in biblical books, either made in his own hand or (more likely) a copyist’s: Arns (1953) 71–72. Augustine refers twice in his Retractiones 2,13 and 32 (100,4; 116,5 Mutzenbecher) to notes that he had dictated and that had subsequently been copied out by others de frontibus codicis, i.e. from the margins of a copy of the biblical text in question. Frontes was the usual term for the edges of a papyrus roll: Birt (1907) 236; Thompson (1912) 47. For Augustine’s annotations on the Book of Job (Retractiones 2,13), see now Trenkler (2017).
into two or more rolls might be composed in a modular fashion answering to its division between roughly equal lengths of parchment (“books” in the sense of tomoi or “sections”)⁴⁰ but would not exhibit any more demonstrable external unity as a whole than was imparted to it by the book-box or book-case in which the rolls were stored, a work that extended over several quires of a codex, or that was compiled serially quire by quire or codex by codex (as a letter-collection might be in late antiquity), could still be divided into “books” of roughly equal length and yet appear complete as a unitary bound artifact. Hence, (2) the codex format held out prospects of compositional closure and totalization that the roll format by nature did not.⁴¹ To transpose these material and technical affordances into terms applicable to Sidonius’ situation as he wrapped up his Epistularum libri in the early 480s: the multi-quire codex was more invitingly encompassing than any single-object Latin poetry book in the time of Horace or letter book in the time of Pliny could have been, and hence more likely to trigger fantasies of final aut(hol)ographic perfection.

We have seen how, in a marked departure from Pliny, Sidonius makes an exhibition of the physical, material processes by which his letters were compiled into Epistularum libri. We have seen him working the “margins” of his serially terminal books, as if filling them by acts of his own writing hand, in one case anachronistically imagining the space available for his text as marked off by the spindle of an old-fashioned book-roll.⁴² (Needless to say, no copyist with a freshly prepared papyrus roll, let alone any ordinary reader of a roll-written text, would ever literally have written to a limit so irresistible. Writing hard up against a physical book-end is essen-

---

⁴⁰ Thompson (1912), 45: “Although the authors themselves may not originally have divided their writings into separate portions to suit the ordinary length of a conveniently-sized roll, yet the practice of the scribe would eventually react on the author.”

⁴¹ From the point of view of the reader, Cavallo (1999) 86–87, quoting and expanding on Petrucci (1995): “The codex brought together in one container [...] a series of organic textual units (one or more works by the same author; a miscellany of homogeneous writings), or disparate units (different works, which might even make up what has been called a ‘library without a library’). This means that the codex brought about a profound change in both the notion of a book and the notion of total reading. The notion of a book, which was no longer immediately connected to a work, came to coincide with an object that might contain writings of a quality and a quantity that were no longer controlled by definite conventions; the notion of a total reading [which in a roll-based book culture would have embraced, at most, the several rolls of a single, compositionally unified work] came to imply a reading that, in order to be total, had to be extended to cover the content of an entire codex, even if that book, as was usually the case, contained more than one work.” For the author, Irigoin (1989) 8: “Avec le triomphe du codex, les auteurs ne semblent pas avoir immédiatement tiré parti des possibilités que leur offrait la forme nouvelle prise par le livre, mais ils le feront assez vite. Je ne crois pas que le passage d’un mode de composition à l’autre, qui représente un véritable saut et non une lente évolution, ait jamais été étudié pour lui-même” (emphasis added). See now Grafton/Williams (2006); Vessey (2012a) 30.

⁴² As noted by van Waarden (2016) 33 (note 83), the word codex (in fact, codices) appears only once in the whole of Sidonius’ œuvre, apparently as the last available synonym in a sentence that also includes libri and volumina (Epistulae 2,9,4 [64 L.], describing the library of Tonantius Ferreolus).
tially a hazard or luxury of codex book culture.\footnote{\textit{New constraints placed on scribes by the technique of book-making in quires for codexes: Turner (1977) 73–74.}} It would be easier to dismiss such quirks as merely another confirmation of Sidonius’ notorious préciosité, did they not fall on the curve of a more general grapho- and bibliotropism in the self-stylings of Latin authors from the late fourth century onward.\footnote{\textit{Vessey (2002 and 2014); Squire (2017) on Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius. For fuller discussion of the special case of Cassiodorus, see Troncarelli (1998), Vessey (2004) and Ferrari (2011).}} Trend-spotting should of course always be checked by local analysis. In the case of coterie productions such as Sidonius’ \textit{Carmina} and \textit{Epistulae}, we might be tempted to correlate the prevalence of autographic imagery with the absence in his time and region of any commercial book trade.\footnote{So Santelia (2003–2005) 29, for whom Sidonius and his kind were ‘‘‘\textit{Condannati}’– per così dire – a vivere in un mondo in cui commercio librario, tabernae librariae e ‘venditori di libri’ sono ormai sola un ricordo’’. But note the caution of Cameron (2011) 437: “[T]here is little evidence that even in the first and second centuries serious [...] readers were able to obtain more than a fraction of their needs by walking into a bookshop”. See further Starr (1987) 219–223.} The question would remain: Why, even under those conditions, would a writer of Sidonius’ rank and social pretensions deliberately elide the difference between gentleman author and hired book-producer?\footnote{While Pliny was ready to depict himself with his writing-tablets, even when out hunting (\textit{Epistulae} 9,36,6), he meticulously observed the distinction of roles between authors of books, such as he was, and personnel employed in their material production. See, e.g., \textit{Epistularum liber} 9,36,2 (550 Kasten): \textit{Cogito, si quid in manibus, cogito ad verbum scribenti emendantique similis, nunc pauciora, nunc plura, ut vel difficile vel facile componi tenevere potuerunt. Notarim voco et [...] quae formaveram, dicto; abit rursusque revocatur rursusque dimittitur.}} In answering that question we may also begin to account for the distinctly un-Plinian flavour of much of the book-play in Sidonius’ \textit{Epistularum libri}.

The adjective \textit{autholographus} in the letter to Lupus of Troyes (9,11,6 [157 L.]: \textit{authographas membranas}), if that conjectural reading is right,\footnote{The manuscripts variously have \textit{autolographas}, \textit{autulographas}, \textit{autolografas} (sc. \textit{membranas}). The present reading is the emendation of Gufstaffson (1882) 114: “Potuit sane Sidonius et \textit{holographas} et \textit{autographas} et \textit{idioraphas} scribere, sed cum in A et H sit \textit{aut olographas}, haud scio an novum verbum \textit{autholographas} Sidonius posuerit.”} is a hapax. It is followed a few lines later by the unusual \textit{zothecula}, used elsewhere (as by Pliny, \textit{Epistulae} 5,6,38, describing the furniture of his Tuscan villa) to denote a small chest or cabinet, but now by Sidonius (as also at \textit{Epistulae} 8,16,3) as an exotic alternative to the customary Latin words for “book-case” or “letter-case”, \textit{armarium} and \textit{scrinium}. The train of thought at this point skirts gentle reproach of Lupus, even as it remedies the offence that the latter had urbanely affected to take on discovering that the book of Sidonius’ \textit{Epistulae} that he had recently received was in fact intended for onward transmission by him to a third party.\footnote{\textit{Epistulae} 9,11,6 (157 L.): \textit{Illud his iunge, quod, si quid ibi [sc. in the copy of a book of Sidonius’ letters that Lupus has received from him] vel casualiter placet, tu per consilium meum lectitas, ille [sc. the person to whom Sidonius had promised this presentation copy] quandoque per beneficium}} In the time that he has had the book in
his book-case, one might allege (suggests Sidonius), Lupus could have committed it to memory. Meanwhile, the other party awaits the promised work, which he could yet have the good fortune to receive in a copy improved by Lupus’ critical revisions!⁴⁹ This scenario, set forth hypothetically by a surrogate author taking Sidonius’ place (9,11,5 [156 L.]: Dixisset alius), appears to be a fanciful version of Sidonius’ own usual practice in the publication of his Epistularum libri.⁵⁰ A complete copy of the part-work in question, in a parchment codex (membranas) produced under the author’s direction, would be entrusted to an associate. The latter would critically peruse it (elsewhere recensere; cf. here 9,11,2 [155 L.]: rigor censurae tuae in litteris; also here 9,11,6 [157 L.]: percurrere, tractare) and make corrections, where necessary, either by marking and annotating the original in his own hand or, if he was having the book read aloud by a secretary, by dictation. The reviewer would then return the marked-up and annotated manuscript to the author, so that the latter could take account of the proposed emendations ahead of the production of one or more final, “presentation” or “publication” copies. The enabling conceit of Sidonius’ apology to Lupus in Epistulae 9,11 is the suggestion that his fellow churchman might, contrary to the normal logic of authorial publication, arrange directly for the copying-out (transferre) of a presentation copy improved by his own critical revisions. There is no reason to think that Sidonius ever intended the elderly Lupus to act as his reviser in this case, although he may have flattered himself that his fellow bishop would want to

⁴⁹ Leaning on William H. Semple in Anderson (1965) 555, I understand the crucial passage between Aio and acceperit (see previous note) as follows: “I say this [sc. that you, Lupus, have had plenty of time to get this work copied out again and sent on to the other party] as if [contrary to fact] he [the ultimate recipient] would not regard any copy that he received [from you], and that you had previously gone over critically, as if it were an original authorial parchment [since it would be so immaculate].”

⁵⁰ As noted ad loc. by Loyen (1960 – 1970), Sidonius had sent what is now Book 8 for correction (correctionis labor) to Petronius, who was thereby assigned notional responsibility for the quality of the final text, while the honour of its publication (honor editionis) redounded to Constantius, to whom it would be dedicated. Constantius had been reviser for the “original” collection (Books 1 – 7 as it became), as we learn from the dedicatory letter (Epistulae 1,1,3 [3 L.]): Sed scilicet tibi [Constantio] parui tuaeque examinationi has non recensendas (hoc enim parum est) sed defaecandas, ut aiunt, lindsayaque commissi, scins te immodicum esse fautorum non studiorum modo verum etiam studioso-rum. Whether or not seriously meant in every case, the procedure whereby an author submitted his manuscript for final, pre-publication revision by a friend was perfectly “classical”: Janson (1964) 107; 141 – 143; Starr (1987) 213; Johnson (2010) 45 – 62. For the publishing habits of Sidonius and other later Latin authors, see Bardy (1949), with the refinements of Marrou (1949); Santelia (2003 – 2005) and esp. Santelia (2003) 247 – 249.
have a copy made for his own use before passing the work on as requested. The politely joshing fiction of a *recensio Lupiana* compounds the fantasy of an aut(hol)ographic edition of one or more books of Sidonius’ *Epistulae* that we have seen at other moments in the publication history of this collection. It is perhaps best construed as a micro-drama made possible by the literally and/or imaginatively “hands-on” quality of textual interactions among elite collaborators in a society, now, of spine-hinged books.

### 2.4 Paratextualities of the Codex

Sidonius’ generation of Latin readers-and-writers was by no means the first to manifest signs of what might be called “codicographic ego”.⁵¹ Pen-on-page correction and annotation of “literary” and other texts had of course been a part of Greek and Roman bibliographic culture for centuries before that, variously performed by professional and amateur scribes, professional scholars, teachers and their students, authors and their friends. Patchily represented by our written sources, largely invisible in the monumental record, the forms of such activity have ordinarily had to be inferred by modern researchers from chance finds of papyri. From the late fourth century CE onward, however, the “literary” archive offers a substantial new body of evidence: statements inserted in codex-form manuscripts of classical and Christian Latin works, and preserved in the later tradition, to the effect that “I (Name) checked this text against its exemplar (or another copy)”, sometimes with the added information that the task of collation and correction had been carried out with the assistance of a second (named) party, and perhaps with a mention too of the time or place in which the work had been done.⁵² Since there was nothing fundamentally novel about the text-checking process reported in these *subscriptiones*, we need to explain their sudden proliferation. Also to be accounted for is the high rank of many of the individuals named. What we are seeing in such cases, according to Alan Cameron, is “gentlemen playing the role of correctors without being professional scholars.”⁵³ So, to rephrase a question already posed above, why did these *later* Roman gentlemen “sign off” by name on the correctness of texts that passed through their hands, when the younger Pliny and his peers apparently never felt impelled to do so?

---

⁵¹ The phrase is calqued on “bibliographic ego”, applied to a sixteenth-century virtuoso of the printed codex of an author’s (his own) collected works, Ben Jonson, by Loewenstein (1985).
⁵² Texts of *subscriptiones* in manuscripts of classical and post-classical, non-Christian Latin authors edited by Jahn (1851) and, more accessibly, Zetzel (1981) 211–227. Cameron (2011) 420–497 is now the muster-point for all students of these texts and their (still uncollected) equivalents in manuscripts of Christian works; the line taken below follows that sketched in my review of that work, Vessey (2012b). On habits of textual collation in late antiquity, see also Petitmengin/Flusin (1984) 249–251.
⁵³ Cameron (2011) 473.
The habit of checking a text and then attesting its correctness by a written statement in one’s own hand originated in Roman legal procedure. *Subscriptio* in that sense was a routine device of documentary authentication long before it was transferred to the “literary” domain. Roman legal documents traditionally took the form of wooden tablets (*tabulae*), multiples of which were known as *codices.*\(^{54}\) An individual vouching for the accuracy of the covering text of a testament, contract or other legal instrument drawn up in Latin might subscribe it with a phrase such as *legi, contuli* or *recognovi.*\(^{55}\) The same or similar terms appear in the subscriptions of imperial rescripts, and in the formulas appended by the parties to legal proceedings for which official transcripts or *acta* were produced – including, in the later empire, acts of church councils.\(^{56}\) The attestations ([*re*]legi, [*de*]scripsi, *recensui, emendavi, contuli, correti, *distinxi, adnotavi*, etc.) appended in copies of Sallust, Livy and other classical and post-classical Latin authors made at Rome and elsewhere from the turn of the fourth into the fifth century onward were an extension of this documentary idiom.\(^{57}\) As Cameron points out, “by the end of the fourth century almost everyone concerned with writing, copying and checking books would have had dealings with the law, bureaucracy, and church.”\(^{58}\) The subscribers of these manuscripts used a style of legitimation associated with the codex as a legal-documentary form to affirm the authenticity of “literary” texts transmitted in codices.\(^{59}\) In doing so, we may suppose, they meant to assert their own agency and personal title within a Roman socio-political order ultimately underwritten by the emperor himself as supreme human judge and lawgiver.\(^{60}\)

That high-society “recensions” of classical Latin authors could be mistaken by scholars in our own time for engines of a pagan rearguard against Christianity is the less surprising, given how self-consciously these late antique subscribers repurposed the luxury commodities of elite Roman “literary” culture, converting them by a few strokes of the pen into quasi-legal instruments. Such moves are intelligible as a

---

\(^{54}\) Meyer (2004) 22: “Tabulae were smallish rectangles, often of wood, itself usually (but not always) hollowed out and coated with wax into which letters were incised with a stylus. They could be hung on walls, or two, three, or more of these could be folded together or stacked to form diptychs, triptychs, or polyptychs, and these multiples could be called a *codex* or *codices*. The material (or medium) could eventually shift from being wood and wax, or bronze, to parchment or papyrus, but even so these documents would continue to be called *tabulae*, and when necessary folded, bound with string, and sealed. Sets of wooden tablets were also commonly called *tabellae*, *codicilli*, *pugillares*, and, at times, *libelli* (“little books”).” For the shifting sense of *codex* over time, van Haelst (1989) 14–17, and for the evidence of the jurists, Roberts/Skeat (1983) 30–34.


\(^{57}\) Cameron (2011) 460 – 461.

\(^{58}\) Cameron (2011) 465.

\(^{59}\) Could the practice have originated with the first transcriptions of such texts from roll to codex, as if for assurance of successful re- mediation?

\(^{60}\) From an abundant literature, see esp. Matthews (2000); Kelly (2004); Millar (2006).
reaction by members of a patrician class – Christians and “pagans” alike – to the
general instrumentalization of classical *paideia* in the service of the empire from
the time of Diocletian forward.⁶¹ In a world in which anyone with a decent grammatical
and rhetorical education could henceforth expect to be upwardly socially mobile,
the few with surplus resources to expend on the careful copying of curricular (and,
*afortiori*, non-curricular) texts would have had a clear interest in proclaiming their
superior “critical” acumen, if only to each other. There would also have been mount-
ing competition for prestige from *novi homines* making civil-service careers for them-
selves on the basis of a strictly vocational, literally “hands-on” training in the *ars no-
taria*.⁶²

While in no sense professional scholars, the gentlemen who “collated” and sub-
scribed late antique codices did, then, have something to play for. The aim of their
game was not so much text-checking as name-checking, and the key names to be
checked were their own. Paradox or not, the best illustration of the thinking behind
the Roman codex *subscriptiones* may be the panel of the diptych of the *vicarius urbis
Romae* Rufius Probianus in which that dignitary is shown pointing with a pen to his
own name inscribed in monumental capitals, in the vocative case, on a papyrus
roll (!). Flanking shorthand-writers, with styluses and tablets in hand, record the pro-
ceedings over which he presides as the emperor’s judicial surrogate.⁶³ Not unlike that
of Sidonius’ *Epistulae* 9.11 to bishop Lupus, the partly fanciful scene on this ivory
panel bespeaks a larger Roman drama of men with pens and books. Where Henri-
Irénée Marrou once glumly diagnosed the terminal decline of classical *paideia* into
a “culture dominated by scribes”, we may now need to recognize a distinctively
(late) Roman-imperial mentality and sociality of the codex.⁶⁴

In short, if Sidonius’ ambiguity “hands-on” authorial book-making in his
*Epistularum libri* looks and sounds rather un-Plinian, the difference is perhaps
most economically explained as a reflex of the long-term shift to the codex in the

---

⁶¹ Cameron (2004) 344: “A new sort of elite began to emerge [...]. *Paideia* ceased to be the natural hallmark of a hereditary elite, and became instead a passport to a job in the imperial service, a qualification that could be acquired by hard work.” Prosopography in Nellen (1981).


⁶³ Reproduction and commentary in Matthews (2000) 14–15, who dates Probianus’ vicariate “in the very late fourth or in the first decade of the fifth century” and marks the presence behind his throne of “the ceremonial inkstand representing his judicial authority.” Nees (2002) 169 makes the important point that “the diptych is the exception that proves the rule [in iconography] that ancient authors are not physically engaged in writing, for the Roman official is really not writing but instead using the ‘secretary mode’ to represent words addressed to him by his once and future audience, PROBIANE FLOREAS (‘Probianus, may you flourish’).” We may take it for a sign of the times that Probianus should be presented in the “secretary mode”.

⁶⁴ Marrou (1956) 312–313 (“The Teaching of Shorthand”).
working media and media ideologies of Rome’s empire, an historical development partly concealed by the surface continuity of “literary” genres (such as that of the Roman letter-book) over centuries. How far book-ways already characteristic of Christian religious communities before the imperial sanctioning of Christianity could have contributed to that development remains a subject of scholarly debate. Evidence abounds, in any case, for the instinctive and deliberate adaptation of the media of Roman empire to specifically Christian ideological and institutional ends in the Constantianian and Theodosian eras, as indeed also in earlier times. The “literary” evidence embraces inter alia all texts from the fourth and fifth centuries traditionally claimed by the theological discipline of patristics and printed in collections like Migne’s, including the works of Sidonius Apollinaris. As a glance at any of those corpora suggests, accessory texts such as tituli or indexes, prefaces, dedicatory letters, prologues and epilogues – paratexts of every kind – played a crucial role in setting readerly and writerly assumptions, adumbrating ideology, forging and reinforcing networks of influence.

A case in point. Some decades before Sidonius dusted off his letter (Epistulae 9,11) reminding Lupus to forward those authographas membranas to a third party, two guidebooks of biblical exegesis composed by Eucherius, bishop of Lyon, Lupus’ sometime confrère in the southern Gallic monastic community of Lérins, attracted epistolary accusés de réception from three other clerics, each of whom had been given an opportunity by Eucherius to have the texts in question copied for their own use. We have their letters to him, because they were paratextually incorporated into the manuscript tradition of his works. One of them, from a priest Rusticus, went so far as to paragon Eucherius with Vergil, predicting his everlasting fame and projecting an imaginary library of sacred texts as a supersessionary analogue to the kind of well-equipped library of “worldly writings” (mundiales scripturae) that he now recalled, perhaps somewhat disingenuously, as a memory from his youth.

Such moments of free-ranging bibliocritical reflection, with or without punctual reference to books newly copied out, are frequent in our actual library from this region and time. Gallo-Roman monastic and ecclesiastical milieux of the early and mid-fifth century were prolific in initiatives, at all scales and across genres, for the elaboration and articulation of systems of written media in the service of what were then still more or less experimental (Christian) styles of thought and living. The supplement to Jerome’s catalogue De scriptoribus ecclesiasticis produced by

66 For approaches to Roman paratexts in non-Christian settings, Jansen (2014).
68 Text below, note 81; Vessey (2001); Santelia (2003).
Gennadius of Marseille is merely one of the more salient of these bibliocritical interventions. Although there is no sign that their paths ever crossed, Sidonius was Gennadius’ contemporary. By the 460s, if no earlier, he was moving in the company of monk-bishops of Lérins such as Faustus, bishop of Riez, to whom he addressed a poem of thanks for favours received (Carmen 16).\(^{69}\) His circle of friends included the priest Claudianus Mamertus, brother of the bishop of Vienne and author of a work *De statu animae* dedicated to Sidonius as prefect emeritus of the city of Rome, refuting opinions of the corporeal nature of the soul promulgated by none other than Faustus.

With associations like those, and the reputation as a poet that he enjoyed before turning bishop himself, Sidonius could be counted upon to offer rich material for latterday study of the evolving forms and ideals of Latin (Christian) literate activity in late antiquity, were he ever to express himself on the subject. And so he does, notably in connection with the two major “literary” figures of his acquaintance just mentioned. His *Epistulae* 4,3 is addressed to Claudianus Mamertus in person, fulsomely praising the *De statu animae* and a hymn of his, while *Epistulae* 4,11 to Petreius eulogizes Claudianus after his death in verse and prose, commemorating his mastery of intellectual-professional disciplines, roles and genres, and of a *triplex bybliotheca* of Roman, Greek and Christian writings (*Epistulae* 4,11,6 [137,4–5 L.]). Faustus, for his part, is the recipient of *Carmen* 16, the only piece of programmatically Christian poetry in the whole of Sidonius’ œuvre. The bishop of Riez is, as we have seen, also the addressee of two of the most substantial letters in all the *Epistularum libri*, both of them falling in the first half of Book 9. To that pair of letters (*Epistulae* 9,3 and 9), especially the latter, in which Sidonius’ aut(hol)ographic ego rides off in new directions, we now turn.

3 From Author to Architext (*Epistulae* 9,3 and 9 to Faustus)

3.1 Waiting for Faustus

*De Sidonio Faustus optime meritus erat*, an editor of Faustus of Riez for the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* once wrote, probably in gratitude.\(^{70}\) Without the figure of him that Sidonius traced, Faustus would have virtually no historical personality for us now. Yet this was a man who in his own time earned one of the longest notices in Gennadius’ *De scriptoribus ecclesiasticis*, matched only by those devoted to such

---


\(^{70}\) Krusch (1887) LVII.
other ascetic masters as Cassian of Marseille, Rufinus of Aquileia and Evagrius of Pontus.⁷¹ In addition to the reasons for esteeming Faustus that he could have shared with Gennadius or any other contemporary, Sidonius may have had him to thank for his baptism; that at least is the construction usually put on an autobiographical passage in Carmen 16 (123,83 – 84 L.). By the time Sidonius went back to the archives to scrape up – as he would have us believe – the few last items to bring his Epistularum libri to the full Plinian measure, the two men’s acquaintance would in any case have been of long date. A former abbot of Lérins, leading bishop, the most eminent Gallic theologian of his day, author of substantial treatises De spiritu sancto and De gratia dei and of widely circulated (and already collected?) letters of spiritual direction, Faustus could have been expected, and might himself have expected, to appear before Book 9 in the roll-call of Sidonius’ published correspondence. Books 6 and 7 alone offered an unbroken sequence of 23 bishops as addressees. (Not a single one of those, however, was hailed as any kind of author.)

Even if Sidonius had once felt some awkwardness in being the dedicatee of a De statu animae directed against Faustus, the death of Claudianus Mamertus (475) would have left him time to insert a choice of letters to the bishop of Riez in a seven-book edition of his Epistulae. A more plausible reason for his delay in name-checking Faustus was that the latter had been one of the negotiators for the emperor Julius Nepos in the making of the treaty with Euric by which, in 475, the Auvergne – in the defence of whose capital, Clermont, its bishop had been so staunch – was ceded to the Visigoths.⁷² It would be understandable if Sidonius felt a certain coolness towards his old benefactor in the aftermath of that betrayal, and did not rush to pay him compliments in the volumes of letters that he issued upon his return from exile in Aquitaine, probably in 477. In the event, by withholding any epistolary tribute to Faustus until the last book, he also reserved the opportunity for a high-stakes encounter (not to say showdown) with the one other major “literary” figure from his own place and time, besides himself and Claudianus Mamertus. Placed and timed as they are in the Epistularum libri, the letters to Faustus now invite two, complementary literary-historical readings. They propose an alternative to the model of the Roman vir litteratus as Christian philosopher, priest, teacher and publishing writer that Sidonius had set forth in his prosimetric eulogy of Claudianus in Epistulae 4,11. And they are a foil to the monument of Sidonius himself as retired Roman poet, free-wheeling epistolator and recusing Christian author.

The first sentence of Epistulae 9,3 after the salutation establishes the character of Faustus as a “literary” performer. He has commended himself to Sidonius as much by the eloquence of his writing (9,3,1 [134 L.]; quod diserte scribitis) as by the spontaneity of the affection that he has shown towards him. Correspondence between the two men has evidently been routine. Why then is this the only specimen of it so far?

⁷¹ Gennadius, De scriptoribus ecclesiasticis 11 (Evagrius); 17 (Rufinus); 62 (Cassian); 86 (Faustus).
⁷² Harries (1994) 237; Wood (see in this volume pp. 301–315).
As if in reply to that question, reasons are immediately given for their not exchanging any more letters at present. The first two have to do with the political tensions of the moment and uneasy state of Sidonius’ conscience. The third and most compelling reason is Sidonius’ high regard for the elegance and ornaments of Faustus’ style, as exemplified by the letter to which he was now replying. This, we are told, was characterized by the same fluency that Sidonius had witnessed many times before in the bishop’s orations, whether premeditated or extemporized, and that was so conspicuously on display in a speech that he had delivered for the dedication of a church at Lyon, when he steered “as it were a middle course between the rules of spiritual and forensic usage” (9,3,5 [136 L.]: te inter spiritales regulas vel forenses medioximum quiddam contionantem), whatever that is supposed to mean. In the face of such eloquence, claims Sidonius, he is struck dumb. Emulation is excluded from the start. Only as a charitable critic is the ascetical Faustus now called upon to pronounce—severely, without holding back, non [...] censendi continentissimus (9,3,7 [137 L.])—on Sidonius’ artless productions. If he would send the present letter back corrected, its writer would be thrilled. Such a critic’s crossings-out would be cause for rejoicing, the lines left untouched having met with his approval. Clearly, there were exceptions to the rule of restricting epistolary traffic in dangerous times.

Should such passages be taken any more—or less—seriously than the rest of the Epistularum libri? If Epistulae 9,3 were all that we heard of Faustus from Sidonius after Carmen 16, its contents could be swallowed with the usual grain of salt. There is more to come, however, and sublimer yet.

3.2 Postscript: Sidonius Rides Out

Epistulae 9,9 is a tour de force. In Book 9, only the terminal letter to Firminus comes close to it for dramatic impact. At first glance, and as the letter falls open on the page of the Budé edition, it runs to just a few lines. Faustus had expressed regret at a lapse of correspondence. Sidonius disclaims responsibility. His previous missive to the bishop of Riez had very opportunely (aptissime) failed to reach him at Apt(!), sparing its author the critical censure (recensere again) that it would have merited. Feints and finesses of Gallo-Roman episcopoliterarity. Although it drags Sallust’s Catiline along with it, the ensuing excuse for brevity is no less predictable: Sidonius has nothing to write about. Vnde aue dicto mox vale dicimus (2 [147 L.]).

False ending at the mid-point of Sidonius’ (final) book-ending book.

---

73 *Epistulae* 9,3,5 (136 L.): *Tertia est causa vel maxuma, exinde scribere tibi cur supersederim, quod immane suspicio dictandi istud in vobis tropologicum genus ac figuratum limatisque plurifariam verbis eminentissimum, quod vestra quam sumpsimus epistula ostendit* (emphasis added).
74 Sidonius took the phrase *medioximum quiddam* from the *De statu animae* of Claudianus Mameritus! Courcelle (1974) 193 (note 40).
75 Pricoco (1965) laid the foundation for all subsequent readings of this letter.
Epistulae 9,9,3–16 is an immense postscript or subscriptio. Sidonius was on the point of folding up his letter. Then “Faustus” fell into his hands: Venisti, magister, in manus meas (3 [148 L.]). An emissary from the bishop of Riez, travelling to Britain, had been held up for several weeks in Clermont by strife in the surrounding region. After the visitor had gone on his way, Sidonius learned that he had writings by Faustus concealed in his bags. Not to be denied, he set off in hot pursuit and rode the man down before he was more than a few days’ journey away. The book-chase ends in a scene of dictation that is at the same time a stunning instance of the Sidonian genus tropologicum ac figuratum:

Epistulae 9,9,8 (149–150 L.): Quid multa? Capti hospitis genua complector, iumenta sisto, frena ligo, sarcinas soluo, quaesitum volumen invenio, produco, lectito, excerpto, maxima ex magnis capitata defrustans. Tribuit et quoddam dictare celeranti scribarum sequacitas saltuosa compendium, qui comprehendebant signis quod litteris non tenebant.

To cut a long story short, I embraced the knees of my captured guest, stopped the horses, tied up their bridles, undid his baggage, and, finding the book that I wanted, got it out, read and re-read it, excerpted it, picking out the greatest of its great chapters. I also benefited from the nimble alacrity of the scribes who, following my hasty dictation, secured by signs what they could not get hold of in letters.

It is (almost) pure fantasy. Not a single detail of the narrative need be literally true or even verisimilar for these lines to achieve their expressive effects. Is it any wonder that Erich Auerbach threw up his hands at such attempts by Sidonius to “capture the truth and even the concrete reality of things in a mesh of rhetorical figures”?⁷⁶ To ventriloquize Auerbach: How remote in its syntax and cognitive-affective impact is Sidonius’ tale of a roadside book-heist from anything we find in Pliny’s letters? Yet though we may not believe a word of it, we are bound to admit that Sidonius in this postscript to Faustus has found something to write about. If the ultimate subject of most of Pliny’s anecdotes turns out to be Pliny himself, writer of renown in a Rome-centred world, what might Sidonius’ subject be here on the road to post-Roman Britain?

Addressing himself to the author of the freshly transcribed text, the highwayman proceeds to critical judgment on his booty (manubiis meis):

Epistulae 9,9,10–11 (150 L.): Legimus opus operosissimum, multiplex, acre, sublime, digestum titulis exemplisque congregatum, bipertitum sub dialogi schemate, sub causarum themate quadripartitum. Scripseras autem plurima ardenter, plurapomposa; simpliciter ista nec rustice; argute illa nec callide; gravia mature, profunda sollicitae, dubia constanter, argumentosa disputatorie, quaedam severe, quaepiam blande, cuncta moraliter lecte, potenter eloquentissime. Itaque per tanta te genera narrandi toto latissimae dictationis campo secutus nil in facundia ceterorum, nil in ingenii facile perspexi luctu politum.

⁷⁶ Auerbach (1965) 258.
It would be folly to try to translate such a passage into any natural language. It is also probably futile to look for the work that it describes in any library outside the imagination of a Jorge Luis Borges or C. Sollius Apollinaris Sidonius. Before taking up this superlatively supposititious opus Faustianum, let us take a step back for the sake of getting it into perspective.

A statue of Sidonius Apollinaris stood at the focal point of Roman “literary” fame, in the Forum of Trajan, framed by the duplex bybliotheca of Greek and Latin authors. As far as this author was concerned, none of his past honours as poet or statesman needed to be repudiated. As bishop of Clermont, however, he had come to take a different view of the world and his place in it from the one proclaimed in his imperial panegyrics. By the beginning of the 480s, he was writing and revising self-consciously at the actual as well as figurative limits of his lifetime’s œuvre as a verbal artist. For the first part of Book 9, as we have noted, he did so without any reference to obvious markers of Roman polity. At the risk of breaching in advance the literary decorum asserted at the end of Epistulae 9,16, the internal postscript of Epistulae 9,9,3–16 shows him at the farthest imaginative point of his writerly career and at full stretch. Like the manuscipral author who appears at other places in Book 9, the dramatic character postscripted or subscribed as “Sidonius” to Epistulae 9,9 is bold enough to follow the course of a text as far as it will take him in the space that his medium allows. Faustus of Riez had despatched a copy of a work of his to Britain, a former Roman province where the writ of emperors had ceased to run. Sidonius had been obliged to “follow after” the bishop’s emissary (9,9,7 [149 L.]: insecutus) for part of his journey north from Clermont. Having intercepted him, and thanks to the ancillary “following-power” of a flying copy-squad (9,9,8 [149–150 L.]: scribarum sequacitas), he had been able to take possession of a work that might otherwise forever have eluded him. And so, “having followed [the author] through all genres of discourse across the whole of a most expansive field of composition” (9,9,11 [150 L.]: per tanta te genera narrandi toto latissimae dictationis campo secutus), he was at last in a position to declare that nothing could improve upon the work in question, unless Faustus himself were to come and recite it vivavoce, an eventuality that the “prologue” to this narrative has already ruled out.

In the end, the epistolator’s tropologically transcribing hand is too recognizable in the writing-out and writing-up of this opus operosissimum multiplex (etc.) for us to regard its latterday attribution to the saintly bishop of Riez as anything better than philologically wishful thinking. Despite the repeated efforts of scholars to pin down the mystery work described by Sidonius, no solution has held up.⁷⁷ To read

⁷⁷ State of the question in Pricoco (1965) 133–140, who in his turn proposed identifying the opus operosissimum with the De spiritu sancto of Faustus. The arguments by Neri (2011) in favour of the putatively Faustian De ratione fidei run up against the problem that classical uses of operosus in relation to texts always imply exceptional labour and diligence on the part of their author, a burden not likely to be felt by the author of a catechetical summary that fills barely seven pages in a small-format modern edition (Faustus of Riez, De ratione fidei, ed. Engelbrecht). It will not do to translate opera-
the book-chase of *Epistulae* 9,9,6–11 as fabulation does not, however, mean denying the passage all historical interest. Constrained with what follows at 12–15, and in the context of Sidonius’ paratextually self-censoring, emulative, recusatory writing-out of his own multigeneric opus (prosarium) in the later books of the *Epistularum libri*, the pseudo-Faustian masterpiece may yet appear to modern readers as the plenary signifier that its original transcriber made it out to be.

### 3.3 Following Faustus (Up To a Point)

The later paragraphs of the letter seek to encapsulate the ideal content for which the earlier description of an opus operosissimum sought to specify the form or forms. Persisting with the imagery of conquest and possession used in the previous scene, Sidonius first works up the figure of the beautiful captive woman in Deut 21:11–13 as an allegory of the Lady Philosophy, who, after being shaved, stripped and bathed, is taken by Faustus as his spiritual bride and life-companion. Sidonius forces the biblical figure further than previous exegetes had, almost to breaking-point. He then runs through a sophomoric list of Greek philosophers and philosophical schools, in order to establish that Faustus’ personal style of philosophizing was nothing like any of theirs and at the same time manifestly superior, since it destroyed their arguments and, on behalf of the “church of Christ” (ecclésiae Christi), affirmed “the inexpressible wisdom of God the Father together with the everlastingness of the Holy Spirit” (9,9,14 [151 L.]: in effabilem dei patris asserere cum sancti spiritus ae ternitate). Anyone who stood against the orthodox Trinitarian “doctrine and sense of Christianity” (9,9,15 [152 L.]: Christiano dogmati ac sensui) would now be outwitted by Faustus. The postscripted letter ends by declaring the bishop of Riez the only man of his time empowered to perform such feats, and recycles ideas from the finale of *Epistulae* 9,3 to predict the fame in aftertimes that his life and teachings would secure for him.

As Salvatore Pricoco showed half a century ago, Sidonius’ limning of Faustus as Christian “philosopher” in *Epistulae* 9,9 was designed to make a diptych of sorts with his earlier portrayal of Claudianus Mamertus in *Epistulae* 4,11, the accolades heaped

---

*sissumum* as “molto impegnativo”, as Neri does. Santelia (2012) 43 notes “la difficoltà di dirimere certezza la questione”. We could always conjecture that the summary *De ratione fidei* is the outcome of Sidonius’ roadside excerpting of a longer work, otherwise lost. But does such literal-minded detective work get us anywhere with this author?

78 Pricoco (1965) 123–133.

somewhat indiscriminately upon the unidentified *opus operosissimum* balancing those bestowed no less freely on Claudianus’ anti-Faustian *De statu animae* in *Epistulae* 4,3,2–4.\(^8\)\(^0\) Reusing the rare word applied by the bibliophile priest Rusticus to author-images displayed in Roman libraries,\(^8\)\(^1\) we could say that Sidonius was creating a pair of contrasting but broadly compatible verbal autotypes or models of the Christian intellectual as one whose performance would challenge comparison with the “classics” of ancient Graeco-Roman culture, embodied in *Epistulae* 9,9 by the Greek philosophers passed there in review: Speusippus with his head down, Aratus with his head back, Zeno with furrowed brow, and so on. For this portrait-gallery Sidonius must have relied on the written or visual record of a decorative program like the one recalled by Rusticus, unless he was copying directly from works of art in a house familiar to him.\(^8\)\(^2\) The array of “classics” lined up to be matched or excelled by Claudianus in *Epistulae* 4,3 is considerably more diverse than the canon rolled out for Faustus. Empaneled there are not only Greek philosophers but also cliques of Greek and Latin performers in a variety of other disciplines. Finally, in pride of place, at the close of the section praising the *De statu animae*, ahead of that praising Claudianus’ hymn, comes a select crew of Greek and Latin Christian writers, with, as local representative, the same Eucherius of Lyon hailed earlier by Rusticus as autotypical Christian author. We are reminded again that Sidonius and Gennadius, continuator of the Hieronymian *De scriptoribus ecclesiasticis*, were contemporaries.\(^8\)\(^3\) Gennadius, as appears from his terminal notice on himself, was a prodigious aggregator of textual resources in support of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. “Claudianus” and “Faustus” are likewise primarily devices of omni- or supradisciplinary totalization for Sidonius (as too, we may suspect, was “philosophy”).\(^8\)\(^4\) His *genus tropologicum ac figuratum scribendi* coopts the lives, persons and works identified by those proper names, in the interest of a higher-order construct of Latin Christian learning or “let-

\(^{80}\) Pricoco (1965) 121–123.


\(^{82}\) Hebert (1988).

\(^{83}\) Eucherius was himself the author of a miniature catalogue of Christian men of letters in his *De contemptu mundi* (cf. PL 50, 718–719 [Eucherius of Lyon, *De contemptu mundi*]). In the remote background of all such late antique Latin attempts to order the resources of intellectual, liberal or broadly “literary” culture, whether prosopographically by exemplary persons or taxonomically by disciplines, lie the figure and work – or at least the memory – of Varro, named by Sidonius in *Epistulae* 4,3,1. For the influence of Varro’s *Libri disciplinarum* in the milieu of Sidonius and Claudianus, Shanzer (2005). More generally, Vessey (2014).

\(^{84}\) Pace Courcelle (1974) 182–195, who is nonetheless clear that Sidonius’ philosophical styling of Faustus was mere flattery, encouraged by the fondness of the monks of Lérins for presenting their ascetical Christianity as a superior species of philosophy.
ters”. While Sidonius credits many of his correspondents with “literary” prowess and prospects, he writes only two of them up at length as authors. And by the early 480s and the compilation of Book 9, only the auspiciously named figure of Faustus was still actively in play.

What did that figure portend but “living works of singular and saving doctrine” (doctrinae salutaris singularisque vict[ur]a oper[a]), such as the bishop of Riez was supremely well equipped to produce and Sidonius himself in Book 9 of the Epistula-rum libri steadily disclaimed attempting? How better to capture the immeasurable promise of such works in their multifarious totality than with a phrase such as opus operosissimum, complemented by the barrage of epithets that follows in Sidonius’ unsolicited review of a book destined for readers in faraway Britain? The theorist who devised the nowadays indispensable notion of the paratext, Gérard Genette, also furnishes us with a generic name for the otherwise nearly ineffable object described there in such blinding detail by Sidonius. It is the architext, a materially non-existent, transcendent (“literary”) text that gathers up in itself all the possibilities for and conceivable interrelationships between texts of every kind, whether assignable to genres recognized by classical, classicizing or other genre-systems, or not. As an instance of the genre of ungeneric texts Genette cites Dante’s Commedia. Combining that hint with hints dropped by Sidonius himself, and taking advantage of long hindsight, we might now read the book-trailing subscriptio to Epistulae 9,16 as a pre-authorizing, pre-authenticating paratext for the architext capable of generating in time all (our) post-Roman, Christian, western “literature(s)”. In doing so, however, we would also need to reckon with the manifest evidence of Sidonius’ desire to place his own “literary” œuvre and posterity, if that were possible, outside such an all-embracing future dispensation.

Even without benefit of latterday theoretical models, we should in any case be struck by the (a)symmetry of the scene made by Sidonius with a book of Faustus in Epistulae 9,9 and the scene made soon afterwards in Epistulae 9,11 with a book of Sidonius by Lupus of Troyes, in Sidonius’ telling (as discussed above). According to the surrogate author whom Sidonius has speak on his behalf, Lupus had been assigned personal property in a volume of Sidonius’ letters: palam videtur [...] tibi trans-missas proprietas, cui usus absque temporis fixi praescriptione transmissus est (9,9,6 [157 L.]). The legalistic language at this point is of a piece with the accompanying conceit of an eventual onward transmission by Lupus of aut holographas membranas ambiguously attributable to him or Sidonius. In the codex society within which, we

85 Above, note 79. There is an echo here of Sidonius’ earlier tribute to Claudianus’ unica singularis-que doctrina et in diversarum rerum assertione monstrabilis at Epistulae 4,3,5 (117 L.; emphasis added). For Sidonius’ disclaimers, see esp. Epistulae 9,2 and 7, summarized above.
87 Dante was a central reference for the Romantic-era theorizing of “literature” as that term was subse- quently to be understood. For both Auerbach (1946) and Curtius (1948) the Commedia was the key-stone of western literature. See Darras (2002).
have argued, such Roman gentlemen clergy moved, the act of supervising the copying (and with it, possible correction) of a text was associated with forms of paratexting that were liable to blur the lines between authorship and other modes of property in a work. From Constantius (Epistulae 1,1 and 7,18) to Firminus (Epistulae 9,1 and 16), the texts of Sidonius’ Epistularum libri are placed under the quasi-proprietary supervision of trusted accomplices. Without ever compromising its total unity, Sidonius consistently presents his late-career opus prosarium as a work of many, more or less authorial hands.

Now let us consider once more, against that background, the copying of the pseudo-Faustian opus operosissimum, as stylized by Sidonius. The first point to underline is that Faustus did not entrust his book to Sidonius for critical review, nor give him any charge with respect to it. Nothing, we are invited to think, could have been further from his thoughts! Nearly a fifth of the postscript to Epistulae 9,9 (3–5) is taken up with Sidonius’ guesses as to why he had not been allowed to set eyes on the work in question. The violence with which he and his posse of stenographers duly lay hands on the new publication (9,9,5 [148 L.]: his quos edidissetis libellis) is, we might say, dramatically proportionate to the shock of the original authorial denial of access, their roadside copying session a grotesque parody of the ideal process of textual recension and transmission among members of the Roman elite. No longer the leisured gentleman critic with pen ceremoniously poised or secretary at hand to strike out an infelicitous phrase here, add a punctuation mark there or insert a marginal note, the intrepid outrider (and writer-out) in Epistulae 9,9 scrambles to get down as much as possible of the purloined volume, dictating to several assistants at once, omitting whole sections of the exemplar. As repeated forms of the verb sequi implicitly assimilate his activity as book-chaser (7) and book-peruser (11) to the auditory-manual sequacitas of his amanuenses in converting spoken words into symbols (8), the always précieux persona of the Sidonian autholographic text-producer teeters on the edge of farce. Sidonius will follow the auspicious (“Faustian”) future-text of Christian doctrina so far, but no further.

How in fact would any such opus operosissimum normally be transmitted? Or to put the same question in terms less prejudiced by the special case that we have been considering: How, from this time forward, would the transmission processes for Christian (and non-Christian) works differ from those previously in use in late Roman codex society? The issue is relevant not only to the complex history of texts attributed or attributable to Faustus of Riez but also more generally to the textual legacy of fifth-century Gallo-Roman monastic-clerical culture.⁸⁸ Codex society of an essentially late Roman-imperial kind was there to stay. Styles of codex literacy and sociality would continue to evolve.⁸⁹

---

⁸⁸ Vessey (2013) seeks to place the homiletic œuvre of Faustus and his Gallic associates in a broader narrative of developing practices of Christian textual (re)production.

⁸⁹ Petrucci (1995) is fundamental for the western scene from the fifth century forward.
4 Epilogue: Writing Out Sidonius

Modern enthusiasts for Sidonius like to quote Jill Harries’ observation that “our view of his entire literary course might be different, had his book of Missae survived.”⁹⁰ As part of the larger enterprise of going “in search of Sidonius the bishop” that was launched four decades ago by Philip Rousseau, recent attempts to recover or, failing that, imaginatively reconstruct elements of this author’s pastoral and liturgical “literary” output are still timely.⁹¹ Literary historians nonetheless have a continuing responsibility to mark the limits provisionally set for an author’s reception by his (or her) strategies of self-presentation and publication, if only so as to be able to make sense of the wider reception histories within which all such individual writerly Nachleben are necessarily implicated from the start. In the case of Sidonius, the stakes for a correct assessment are raised by awareness of his privileged position in our customary chronologies of the passage from Roman to post-Roman, western (Christian) European culture. If on this point, despite the boom in Sidonian studies since the 1990s, Stein’s now nearly century-old summary judgments need little updating, that may be because few if any Latin writers of late antiquity were more effective in executing their own testamentary provisions than the one who signed off with a line from Horace at the end of the last of his Pliny-parallelling Epistularum libri.

The part of Stein’s thumbnail account of Sidonius that is now most likely to provoke resistance is his view that Christianity played, at bottom, a merely accessory role in his œuvre as a writer.⁹² Advocates for Sidonius the bishop and those who claim him for an avant-garde of Latin Christian poets will appeal to the many places in his letters where pastoral and theological concerns are to the fore, to the evidence (such as it is) for his biblical erudition and knowledge of other Christian writers, and to his poem of thanks to Faustus of Riez (Carmen 16). Only when pushed too hard do such arguments lose their force. There is no point in doubting Sidonius’ “seriousness” as a Christian in his later years.⁹³ The more pertinent question for literary historians has to do with the influence of distinctively Christian textual practices on his sense and positioning of himself as a writer, the precise issue on which Stein pronounced. The conclusion of the present essay must be that considerations of specifically Christian “literary” œuvre and system certainly did weigh on Sidonius as he neared the limits set for him by his Plinian epistolary model and strove to give definitive shape to his career and output as a Latin poet and prosateur – and that

⁹⁰ Harries (1994) 220.
⁹² Above, note 1.
⁹³ Sidonius Apollinaris, Epistulae 8,4,3 (90 L.): Sed, quod fatendum est, talibus studiis anterior aetas iuste vacabat seu, quod est verius, occupabatur; modo tempus est seria legi, seria scribi deque perpetua vita potius quam memoria cognitari nimiumque meminisse nostra post mortem non opuscula sed opera pensanda (emphasis added).
he determined at that point deliberately to exempt himself, so far as he could, from the workings of any system for the future (re)production of a corpus of scriptores ecclésiastici. While we may suppose that he would have accepted with good grace his appearance in an early supplement to Gennadius’ catalogue and in due course in the Patrologia Latina, we can also conjecture that he would take satisfaction in seeing that, besides the collected Carmina and Epistulae to which he applied the ultima manus, the latest edition of the Clavis Patrum Latinorum sets down nothing under his name besides certain glosses on the Epistulae, the earliest of which their nineteenth-century editor thought might have been composed not long after the writer’s own time.

A Sitz im Leben for such early glossing of Sidonius is suggested by a text conveniently to hand. Dedicating the last book of his Epistulae to Firminus, Sidonius had cast doubt on the enthusiasm of his own son, Apollinaris, for undertakings of the sort (Epistulae 9,1,5). (Imagine having Sidonius for a father!) It seems that in the course of time the younger Apollinaris came, like other wayward children, to appreciate the spiritual legacy of his parent. A letter from Ruricius, bishop of Limoges – upon whom Sidonius had formerly relied to procure calligraphic services (Epistulae 5,15,1) – notifies Apollinaris that a copy of Sidonius’ writings that he, Ruricius, had commissioned from his librarius or bybliopola, at Apollinaris’ request, was now ready. Glancing over the work, Ruricius confesses in his letter, he had experienced some difficulty on account of the author’s language.⁹⁴ He therefore looked forward to putting into execution a scheme proposed by Apollinaris, whereby the two men would be fellow interpreters of the work of their shared “lord and father”.⁹⁵ There is no need

---


⁹⁵ Ruricius, Epistulae 2,26, (366,19 – 21 D.): Hunc ergo [sc. Sidonium nostrum], si Dominus piae definitioni vestrae tribuet ut fautor effectum, vobis prae sentibus percenses festino et efficis discipulos de magistro. I read vestrae here with the sole manuscript (against nostra, a conjecture of Engelbrecht adopted by Demeulenaere) but follow the vulgate of earlier editions (as reported by Engelbrecht: Ruricius, Epistulae 2,26 [411,7 E.]) in reading tribuet ut fautor effectum for the manuscript’s tribuetur fautor effectum. Engelbrecht and Demeulenaere attempt to straighten out the passage by inserting a comma after fautor, at the cost of what I take to be its underlying sense, namely that Apollinaris has proposed that he and Ruricius read the work together. The translation in Mathisen (1999) 184 – 185 labours here and at other points, and is followed by Mascoli (2004) 177 and Santelia (2003 – 2005) 23 – 25. To construe the letter as a whole it is essential to see that the first sentence quoted in note 94 above does not state that Ruricius has received back from Apollinaris a work of Sidonius that he, Ruricius, had sent to Apollinaris to be copied (a scenario that, as the other commentators recognize, would be hard to explain) but that Ruricius has put the work out for copying at Apollinaris’ request. Sublimitati vestrae is a dative of advantage with transcribendum, the indirect object of dedissi (namely a copyist engaged by Ruricius) being tacitly understood. Whatever may have prompted Apollinaris to have his father’s work re-copied, that he could have asked Ruricius to act as intermediary with a book-maker and at the same time proposed that the two of them go over (recensere) the text of...
to suppose that the manuscript in question was of some now lost work of Sidonius. The natural inference is that it was either the *Carmina* or, more likely, the *Epistulae*, and that Ruricius and Apollinaris meant to sit down together at the next opportunity and puzzle over the most recondite passages of this masterpiece from the recent past. As Ruricius put it to Apollinaris, “What could be more fitting than that you should be the expositor of your father’s eloquence, who can more easily recite all that he wrote from the page of your heart than from the parchment of a codex?” These are still the old Roman idioms and poses of cultural transmission in a codex society. One purpose of Ruricius’ letter, and of the collection in which it was transmitted, may have been to keep them current in a new age of the Christian architext.

**Bibliography**

**Primary Sources**


Epitaph for Sidonius Apollinaris = Christian Lütjohann (ed.), *Gai Sollii Apollinaris Sidonii epistulae et carmina* (MGH.AA 8), VI.


Eucherius of Lyon, *De contemptu mundi* = Jacques Paul Migne (ed.), *Epistola paraengetica ad Valerianum cognatum de contemptu mundi et saecularis philosophiae* (PL 50), Paris 1865, 711–726.


Ruricius, *Epistulae* 2,26 =


Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmina* =


Sidonius together is easily credited, and consistent with the codex-based sociality of this late to post-Roman milieu.

96 Ruricius, *Epistulae* 2,26 (366,25–28 D.): *Quid enim iustius, quam ut ipse sis paterni interpres eloquii, qui universa, quae ille conscripsit, non tam de codicis membrana, quam de cordis potes pagina proferre?*


Sidonius Apollinaris, *Epistulae* 6–9 =


**Secondary Literature**


Auerbach (1965): Erich Auerbach, *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages* (Bollingen Series 74), Princeton.


Gustafsson (1882): Fridolf Vladimir Gustafsson, *De Apollinari Sidonio emendando*, Helsingfors.


Teitler (1985): Hans Carel Teitler, *Notarii and Exceptores. An Inquiry into Role and Significance of Shorthand Writers in the Imperial and Ecclesiastical Bureaucracy of the Roman Empire (From the Early Principate to C. 450 A.D.)* (Dutch Monographs on Ancient History and Archaeology 1), Amsterdam.


Van Waarden/Kelly (2013): Johannes Alexander van Waarden and Gavin Kelly (eds.), *New Approaches to Sidonius Apollinaris* (Late Antique History and Religion 7), Leuven.


