

maerendo pauca: Lament in the Letters of Sidonius Apollinaris

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*This thesis explores the reasons and intentions behind the collation and publication of Sidonius Apollinaris' letters. I examine the presence of lament within the collection and suggest that it offers a new framework for understanding his letters as a trauma narrative. I argue that Sidonius compiled his letters as an act of lament in response to traumatic events and that they function as a form of eulogy to the Western Roman Empire. In the first chapter, entitled *formatio*, (the act of shaping, forming, or fashioning) I address the formation of Sidonius' letters into a collection - how and why he might have fashioned them as he did. I discuss his letters within the context of Late-Antique Epistolography, as well as the wider historical events which served as backdrop and impetus. I consider current scholarly views along with Sidonius' stated intentions for publication and suggest a new focus for looking at his work. In Chapter 2, entitled *maeror*, (mourning, grief, lamentation) I present the key emotive elements within his letters alongside Classical and Christian Literature. I address this new perspective of viewing Sidonius' letter collection through the lens of the structure of the biblical Lament Psalms. Chapter 3, entitled *laudatio* (commendation, praise, eulogy, panegyric) further explores the ways in which Sidonius' letters functioned as a form of lament, but focusses on the more positive elements of praise, hope and confidence. I argue that Sidonius' oft upbeat tone, which has been attributed to Plinian imitation, contributes to the notion of his letter collection functioning as a lament, a praise, panegyric, or eulogy to a 'lost' Rome.*

Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

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Prologue

Setting the Scene

Sidonius is seated in his study, plume in hand, strokes slowly forming across the page. He concentrates. He begins his letter to his friend Constantius with a quote from Virgil.

A te principium, tibi desinet

With thee begun, with thee 'twill end.¹

A weary smile crosses his face. He has been compiling his letter collection for quite some time now. Two years? Three? He continues.

I send you the work you sought...

He recalls his initial letter to his friend. The one he had placed at the beginning of the first two books. How long ago was that? Five years now? Seven? The events of recent years have pressed him into continuing, completing, fleshing out more volumes. He has fished out files and folders laden with inked parchment. Copies laboured over by *amanuenses*. Or did he copy them out by hand himself? He is old now. Or at least, he feels old. And weary. He recalls the first letter.

My honoured Lord, you have this long while been pressing me... to collect all the letters making any little claim to taste that have flowed from my pen ... and to revise and correct the originals and combine all into a single book.²

He returns to his final letter. And pauses. Perhaps there will be more volumes? There are many more letters and much to say, to share. He has had to select very carefully. By no means an easy feat. But he brushes this off, makes it seem as if the work was completed hastily and thrown together. A mere trifle for a man of his literary renown. The thought makes him smile.

As a matter of fact, the present specimens, being few in number and indeed of little importance, have been quickly finished off – although, when once my mind had been set to work I found the urge to write as strong as ever.

He hadn't had the heart to write for a while. For quite some time in fact. But it returned, this impulse, this need to write, reshape, compile.

¹ Ep. 7.17

² Ep. 1.1

I have written some exhortations, a great deal of praise, a certain amount of advice, a few laments, and a good number in jest.

A selection of styles and subjects. Mere trivialities? Diversions? Why has he collated these variegated themes into one volume?

A sigh. He is nearing completion.

So I commend to your judgment the varied feelings of my heart...

Introduction

Little did Sidonius Apollinaris know as he penned the words of the final letter of Book 7 of his letter collection, that he and his words would become synonymous with the fall of the Western Roman Empire in the minds of future generations. It is possible that he might have been pleased to know that his writings would attain a place of historical prominence, but, as he tells us in his letters, his aim was not to write history. This thesis addresses the question of Sidonius' motives in the formation of his letter collection. There has been much conjecture over this subject and Sidonius' letters have been mined extensively for clues as to his intentions as well as for the trail of historical breadcrumbs he left us. Although he strongly asserted that he was not inclined to write history, there is some indication in his letters that he was fully aware of himself as *auctor*, as wielding the authority of the stylus, as he says, no less skilfully than the ancient generals could wield the sword.³ The breadcrumbs he dropped, figuratively speaking, were substantial and, when reassembled, form our most significant historical source for fifth-century Gaul.⁴ The images he crafted in words would fashion and shape our understanding and perception of his times. He would have known his version of events would survive through his writings. But, if as he tells us, his intention was not to write history, what was it he set out to do, and why?

As a highly skilled and complex author, Sidonius' motives and intentions would have been manifold and many of them have been expertly examined in recent years. Even with the revival of interest in his works, which consist of poetry and letters collated by Sidonius himself, scholars have encountered the multifaceted nature of Sidonius' historical and literary persona, yet he remains something of an enigma.⁵ It is difficult to unpick the strands of literary threads woven throughout his work, which rely so heavily on the influence of Classical literature, upon whose shoulders Sidonius' work rests.⁶ While it is essential to understand Sidonius' letters in the context of Late-Antique epistolography (which I discuss in Chapter 1) and the larger corpus of Classical Literature and Late-Antique Literature (which I discuss in Chapter 2), I argue that Sidonius compiled his letters as way of processing the trauma he was experiencing.

3 *Ep.* 4.17 paraphrase (although here Sidonius was referring to Arbogast) based on translation by Alexander Callander Murray, *Rome to Merovingian Gaul, A Reader*, (Toronto: Higher Education University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2008), p. 255.

⁴ Sigrid Mratschek, "Creating Identity from the Past: The Construction of History in the Letters of Sidonius" in *New Approaches to Sidonius Apollinaris*, eds. Johannes A. van Waarden and Gavin Kelly (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), pp. 251-252.

⁵ Johannes A. van Waarden, *Writing to Survive, A Commentary on Sidonius Apollinaris Letters Book 7, Volume 2: The Aesthetic Letters 12-18*, (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), p. JVV– Writing to Survive Vol 2. p. 2.

⁶ M.P Hanaghan, *Reading Sidonius' Epistles*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 19.

Born into a Gallo-Roman family of senatorial aristocracy around 429/32 Gaius Sollius Apollinaris Sidonius (otherwise known to us as Sidonius Apollinaris) followed the path of his forebears in the form of an illustrious career.⁷ Where his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather each attained the position of praetorian prefect of Gaul, Sidonius outshone them in becoming Prefect of Rome in 468. With his aristocratic upbringing, Sidonius undertook the standard schooling for a young man of his time, although it has been argued that this was already an antiquated education, representative of a world which had passed.⁸ Here too he proved exceptional and became well known for his literary talents, publishing a collection of 24 poems around 469. He made an advantageous marriage to Papianilla, the daughter of Eparchius Avitus, and was given the estate of *Avitacum* as part of the dowry. When his father-in-law Avitus was proclaimed emperor by the Goths in 455, Sidonius accompanied him to Rome and composed a panegyric for him, for which he was rewarded with a bust in the Ulpian Library in the Forum of Trajan.⁹ Despite Avitus' forced abdication and death in suspicious circumstances, Sidonius remained actively influential in civic affairs, also composing a well-received panegyric for the Emperor Majorian. After a somewhat disappointing end to his public career, however, in which he became implicated in the Arvandus affair in 469, he returned to Gaul and lived in effective retirement until his appointment to the bishopric of Clermont around 469/71. Around the time of his consecration as bishop, Sidonius foreswore the writing of poetry and compiled a collection of his letters, possibly those which comprised Books 1 and 2 in his final collection. The onset of war with the Visigoths saw Sidonius leading a resistance through four successive years of siege. The region of Auvergne, however, was ceded to the Visigoths as the result of a treaty negotiated by four fellow bishops on behalf of the emperor Nepos in exchange for the return of Provence. As a principal figure of opposition, Sidonius was sent into exile to Livia, near Carcassonne. From exile, he began the process of compiling his epistles into a larger collection, incorporating those from the earlier volumes.

In Chapter 1 I argue that the timing of this act of compilation is crucial to the formation of Sidonius' epistolary collection. His motives for the compilation of these letters would have differed from his reasons for their initial composition, although both would have been heavily edited prior to circulation. The thematic structure of Sidonius' letter collection reveals that he compiled these particular letters as a narrative, a way to process his memories and assign meaning to his life in light of traumatic events. Although they are not arranged in strict chronological order as a modern person might, we can understand his collection as a form of

⁷ Johannes A. van Waarden, *Writing to Survive, A Commentary on Sidonius Apollinaris Letters Book 7, Volume 1: The Episcopal Letters 1-11*, (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), p. 4.

⁸ C.E. Stevens, *Sidonius Apollinaris and his Age*, (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1979, c1933), p. 18.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

biography.¹⁰ The story Sidonius recounts is still one which is linear, beginning with an almost idyllic description of aristocratic life, then building to a crescendo (or crisis) with the fall of Clermont and Sidonius' exile, followed by his reinstatement and return.¹¹ The key moment of trauma and the genesis of the collection was when Sidonius' world had been utterly turned upside-down. He had been sent into exile, his property confiscated and had personally witnessed the end of Roman rule in Gaul. His letters then testify to a period of depressed mood and inactivity. He felt despondent and unable to engage in any of his habitual study.

Sidonius paints his exile as a *peregrinatio*, a sojourn, which could also be translated as 'journey' or 'pilgrimage.'¹² Gibson views Books 1-9 as a journey from constancy to firmness, with a play on words on the names Constantius (the constant one) and Firminus (the firm one) in deliberate imitation of Pliny's letters to Clarus (light) and Fuscus (dark). These two names reflect an intentional narrative arc, a movement from light to darkness, dawn to dusk.¹³ Although Sidonius' final letter of Book 9 ends with the image of winter, he alludes to the coming of spring, ending on a note of Christian hope.¹⁴ By themselves the dedicatory epistles to Constantius of Books 1-7 form a frame around the letters collated during Sidonius' time in exile and the period immediately following.¹⁵ Along with the dedicatory epistles of Books 8 and 9, these letters serve as a frame around Sidonius' memories which reflect a kind of journey or pilgrimage. The process of editing and assembling his letters could be depicted as a pilgrimage, a journey through Sidonius' memories leading up until that point.

In Chapter 2 I explore the emotive elements that relate to the trauma Sidonius experienced as a result of war, betrayal, and exile and the ways in which writing was his natural recourse and response to emotions. In Chapter 3 I explore the emotive elements of nostalgia and hope and how they relate to his memory of Gallo-Roman life. While many of Sidonius' emotions embody the tropes and *topoi* of Classical and Late-Antique Literature (which are discussed in Chapter 2) I agree with Joop van Waarden's assessment that "We should not underrate the amount of emotion and 'sentimentality' in the late antique attitude to life. Conventionality and sincerity are not mutually exclusive."¹⁶ The History of Emotions remains a relatively recent but broad field of study, the inclusion of which is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, I do analyse

¹⁰ Roy Gibson, "On the Nature of Ancient Letter Collections," *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 102 (2012): p. 57.

¹¹ Hanaghan, *Reading Sidonius' Epistles*, p. 48.

¹² *Ep.* 4.22.4, *Ep.* 4.10.1; Sara Fascione, "Finding Identities on the Way to Rome," in *Paths of Knowledge, Berlin Studies of the Ancient World, Interconnection(s) Between Knowledge and Journey in the Greco-Roman World*, eds. Chiarrà Ferella and Cilliers Breytenbach, (Berlin: Edition Topoi, 2018), pp. 178-9.

¹³ Roy Gibson, "Pliny and the Letters of Sidonius: From Constantius and Clarus to Firminus and Fuscus," *Arethusa*, Vol. 46 (2) (2013): pp. 338-339.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 354.

¹⁵ Jill Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fall of Rome, AD 407-485*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 8.

¹⁶ van Waarden, *Writing to Survive, Volume 1*, p. 16.

Sidonius' emotions with the awareness that they represent the different emotional communities of which Sidonius was a part.¹⁷ My principal argument, however, is that Sidonius formed his letter collection as a narrative means of processing trauma. David Konstan states that "Human beings are reason-seeking creatures, and we embroider our elementary sensations with narratives that provide them with a context."¹⁸ He argues that emotions relating to the process of grief in the ancient world were understood as something that can be grappled with and processed through reasoning. He describes the affect of loss as being transient, but something which depends on the beliefs we hold around it. Consolation literature, he argues, provides a place in which to address those beliefs.¹⁹ While not strictly consolation literature (which is usually written to another person who has experienced loss), I argue that Sidonius' letters helped him to address his beliefs surrounding the recent losses he had undergone.

Instead of using Classical or Late-Antique Literature as a framework, I analyse Sidonius' letters through the lens of the Lament Psalms of the Hebrew Bible to demonstrate how his collection functioned as a lament. I discuss how the Psalms were an important form of ancient religious poetry which served as a means for both communal and individual grieving. J.F. Dickie presents the structure of the Lament Psalms as a framework for processing trauma, emphasising that creating a written account "uncovers the effects of trauma...and creates mechanisms of survival, recovery and resilience."²⁰ She notes that this type of trauma therapy assists in the biological healing of the brain.²¹ Forming a narrative through the process of writing "gives the victim a voice" and "the reconstruction of the trauma story allows the memory to be reclaimed, along with the associated emotions."²² Much like the recent tragedy of flight MH17, where the aeroplane was painstakingly pieced back together as a way to reconstruct events and understand what had happened, Sidonius pieced together his memories through editing and arranging his letters as a way to make narrative sense of his experiences. Both situations involve a complex combination of the political and personal. Likewise, Sidonius mourned the greater political situation in Roman Gaul as well as his personal losses.²³

¹⁷ See Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2006).

¹⁸ David Konstan, "Understanding Grief in Greece and Rome," *Classical World*, Vol. 110 (1), (2016): p. 23. pp. 3-30.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.23.

²⁰ June Frances Dickie, "The Intersection of Biblical Lament and Psychotherapy in the Healing of Trauma Memories," *Old Testament Essays*, 32, 3 (2019): p. 886.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 885.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 891.

²³ Mariecke van den Berg, "Bones Talking Back: Theology and Public Mourning after the Crash of Flight MH17," *Journal of European Society of Women in Theological Research*, 27 (2019): p. 175.

I began this thesis with the somewhat risky endeavour of presenting a fictionalised account of Sidonius in the process of composing his final letter of Book 7 to Constantius. I did this in order to highlight Sidonius as a real person, not simply as a historical figure. It is tempting for the scholar to remain removed from their subject in an attempt to retain analytical integrity, however, it is impossible for the scholar to be entirely objective and not inject some portion of themselves into their analysis. Being aware of this, I have presented my own depiction of Sidonius in the prologue, highlighting the emotions he himself chose to share.

Note: I have used Anderson's translation of Sidonius' epistles throughout this thesis except where otherwise indicated.

Chapter 1

fōrmātiō f (genitive **fōrmātiōnis**); third declension

The act of shaping, forming or fashioning

Sidonius and Late-Antique Epistolography

Sidonius Apollinaris' letters belong to the period of Late-Antiquity (roughly 300 - 600CE), which has come to be regarded as the 'golden age of epistolography.'²⁴ During this time there was a sharp rise in the production of letters followed by a significant decrease in the sixth century. Allen and Neil point out that, in comparison to the third century, from which only some 900 letters survive, there remain over 9000 letters from the fourth and fifth centuries.²⁵ After this time epistolary output did not increase to such levels again until the later Middle Ages.²⁶ In forming his collection, Sidonius stated that he was following the example of Symmachus and Pliny the Younger.²⁷ He also mentions Cicero, signalling that he was conscious that he was continuing the long-held tradition of Classical epistolography.

The craft of Late-Antique letter-writing was largely built on the Graeco-Roman tradition which had its roots in rhetoric. For the Ancient Greeks, beautiful speech was an integral part of life and the ability to speak well was seen as a gift from the gods. Thus, eloquence was the primary goal of Greek and Roman education, paving the way for a public career.²⁸ Letters, therefore, were mostly written by the educated elite, the aristocratic classes, who were wealthy enough to send missives by private means.²⁹ Jill Harries described the letters and poetry sent between the aristocracy as being useful in that they "greased the wheels of friendship" and fostered social connections.³⁰ According to Ralph Schwitter, the exchange of letters in Classical and Late-Antiquity has been largely viewed as a form of intellectual banter among the elite. He suggests

²⁴ Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil, *Greek and Latin Letters in Late Antiquity: The Christianisation of a Literary Form*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 1.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁶ Cristiana Sogno and Edward J. Watts, "Epistolography," in *A Companion to Late Antique Literature*, ed. Scott McGill and Edward J. Watts (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 2018), p. 390.

²⁷ *Ep.* 1.1.1

²⁸ Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature of the Latin Middle Ages*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953), pp. 63–64.

²⁹ Allen and Neil, *Greek and Latin Letters in Late Antiquity*, p. 49.

³⁰ Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fall of Rome*, p. 4.

that although it was a means of artistic expression, it was also a form of aristocratic competitiveness, vying for social and political influence.³¹

Individual letters in Late-Antiquity could be addressed to one person as a means of personal or official communication, but letters were often circulated, serving as a source of literary entertainment.³² Adolf Deissmann distinguished between the private letter and the literary epistle, but Allen and Neil caution against categorising letters into strict genres, as they could be quite fluid in form.³³ While Sidonius' letters were addressed to individuals, he would have composed them with a larger audience in mind, aware that his letters were copied and circulated. The purpose of individual letters, however, would have differed somewhat from an intentionally self-collated letter collection. The question was one of intended audience and how this might have shaped the selection and style of letters. Whether or not Deissman's rigid view that the epistle was merely a form of artful literature is entirely correct, letters were transformed into literature when they left the private sphere through publication.³⁴

Sidonius compiled his collection of 147 letters over a number of years. The dates are somewhat disputed, but it is generally agreed that the first two books may have been in circulation as early as 469. Sidonius later incorporated them into a volume of seven books during or just after his exile in Livia in 475-77. At a later stage he added two final books, echoing the nine-book structure of Pliny the Younger. Each was written by him (with one exception) and compiled into a single volume containing nine books. As mentioned above, Sidonius understood and even expected that the original letters would have been copied and passed on from one person to another. Mathisen refers to this process as "chain publication."³⁵ The circulation of individual letters, however, differed from the self-publication of a formal corpus. This process involved the acts of selecting and editing, thereby consciously creating a work for posterity.³⁶ Mathisen points out that the term 'publication' is a "slippery word, with its modern resonances of mass production, publishing houses and book stores."³⁷ He asserts that a formal process of publication as we understand it today did not exist in Late Antiquity.

³¹ Raphael Schwitter, "Rival Friends: Sidonius Apollinaris and Literary Competitiveness in Late Antique Gaul," *Journal of Late Antiquity*, Volume 13, Number 1, (2020): p. 73.

³² Allen and Neil, *Greek and Latin Letters in Late Antiquity*, p. 144.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-6.

³⁴ van Waarden, *Writing to Survive, Volume 1*, p. 30.

³⁵ Ralph W. Mathisen, "The 'Publication' of Latin Letter Collections in Late Antiquity," in *Zwischen Alltagskommunikation und literarischer Identitätsbildung: Studien zur lateinischen Epistolographie in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter*, ed. George Michael Müller, (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2018), p. 65.

³⁶ Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fall of Rome*, p. 4.

³⁷ Mathisen, "The 'Publication' of Latin Letter Collections in Late Antiquity," p. 64.

Although literary style was an essential element of original individual letters, the process of selection, editing and arrangement into a collection significantly changed their final form. Gibson suggests that the best way to understand Sidonius' letter collection is as an artistic unit, which he describes as "a unit of composition and potential bearer of meaning and significance."³⁸ This thesis explores the meaning and significance behind the formation of Sidonius' letter collection and how it functioned as a whole. My question relates to Sidonius' motivation for the compilation of his letter collection: why did he create it and how did it function? While it may not have been an explicit or conscious intention, I argue that what Sidonius crafted functions as a form of lament. This hypothesis can sit comfortably side-by-side with established theories such as self-presentation for posterity or the representation of an idealised Rome.

The Western Roman Empire

The broader historical context of the Western Roman Empire in the fifth century formed the backdrop to the events leading up to Sidonius' arrangement of his correspondence. What was the condition of the Western Roman Empire at the time and how did it relate to Sidonius' letter collection? This opens up the debate over the narrative of the 'rise and fall' of the Roman Empire, which traditionally has been said to have ended with the deposition of the 'last' Roman Emperor in 476CE. The question of whether or not the Western Roman Empire 'fell' has changed focus in recent decades, with views generally dividing into the categories of 'continuity' or 'catastrophe;' with one arguing for slow transformation and the other for sudden disastrous collapse. The arguments frequently centre around either economic or military conditions.³⁹ Chris Wickham, on the other hand, proposes a combination of continuity and change, acknowledging that the Roman territories in the West did collapse, but that it was a far more gradual process from 400 – 700CE, rather than a sudden event in the fifth century.⁴⁰ The emphasis on continuity, catastrophe, or something in between, is relevant here in that Sidonius' act of letter collation was a direct response to the events taking place around him, which were, in turn, symptomatic of the wider situation in the West; that is, the 'barbarian' encroachment on territories in the Western Roman Empire.⁴¹ Although Wickham offers no clearcut explanation for the disappearance of the Western Roman Empire, he acknowledges that frontier invasion was

³⁸ Roy Gibson, "Reading the Letters of Sidonius by the Book" in *The Edinburgh Companion to Sidonius Apollinaris*, eds. Johannes A. van Waarden and Gavin Kelly, (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), p. 197.

³⁹ van Waarden, *Writing to Survive*, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400-800*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 12.

⁴¹ Chris Wickham notes that: "The word 'barbarian' is loose, and has negative connotations, but *barbarus* was the standard Latin term for non-Roman peoples in the fifth century," in *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, p. 80.

one major factor. Still, he asserts that “No one saw the western empire as ‘falling’” in the fifth century.⁴² Jill Harries’ view, however, is diametrically opposed to this, insisting that Sidonius “did perceive the fall of Rome clearly.”⁴³

Stevens referred to Sidonius as “the last of the Romans in Gaul,” who witnessed “the swift decay of culture” taking place around him.⁴⁴ Regardless of whether or not Sidonius could accurately be considered a conscious witness to the catastrophic end of Rome, he was deeply affected by the barbarian encroachments. The Roman Gaul in which Sidonius grew up had been subjected to barbarian skirmishes since the early fifth century when a wave of Germanic invaders swept across the Rhine in 406/407. This was followed by a Visigothic invasion after their sack of Rome in 410; an event which caused alarm to sound throughout the Western Roman Empire on account of the symbolic importance of the city of Rome.⁴⁵ By the time of Sidonius’ birth in 429/32 the imperial administration had long since withdrawn to Italy and Roman Gaul had become a patchwork of territories ceded to a host of barbarian tribes.⁴⁶ The Visigoths, the most important of these tribes to Sidonius’ story, became allies of the empire as *foederati* in 418/19 and were granted territory in Aquitaine for their assistance in fighting the Vandals in Spain. They established the first independent kingdom within Roman Gaul basing their capital at Toulouse. Sidonius had first-hand experience of the Visigothic alliance through positive personal dealings with Theoderic II.⁴⁷ It was also the Visigoths who accompanied him to Rome with his father-in-law, Avitus, who had been proclaimed Emperor in 455. As Semple wrote, though technically allies, they were connected to Rome by “very slender ties of temporary self-interest,” and “were ultimately destined to abolish Roman authority in Gaul.”⁴⁸ Harries suggests that although Theoderic’s reign had been relatively peaceful, there would still have been Gothic warlords engaging in violent incursions of plunder.⁴⁹ By the time of Sidonius’ appointment to the bishopric in 469/71, Gaul had repelled the invasion of the Huns in 451 and Rome had been sacked yet again, this time by the Vandals in 455. Elton wrote that by 469 “the Romans gave up. One either held all of Gaul or none of it...and, as far as the emperor in Italy was concerned, Gaul

⁴² Chris Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome, A History of Europe from 400 to 1000*, (New York: Penguin, 2010), pp. 78-79.

⁴³ Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fall of Rome*, p. v.

⁴⁴ Stevens, *Sidonius Apollinaris and his Age*, p. 18.

⁴⁵ Chris Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome*, pp.23-24.

⁴⁶ David Frye, “Bishops as Pawns in Early Fifth-Century Gaul,” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 42 (3) (1991): p. 350.

⁴⁷ *Ep.* 1.2

⁴⁸ W.H. Semple, “Apollinaris Sidonius, a Gallo-Roman Seigneur,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 50 (1967): p.141.

⁴⁹ Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fall of Rome*, p. 125.

had been lost in 461,” with the death of Majorian.⁵⁰ Thus, despite treaties made and concessions granted, the various barbarian tribes rendered Sidonius’ world one of instability and sudden change brought on by ongoing violence and territorial threats.

Sidonius’ world came under the direct attack of Euric, Theoderic’s successor, who had grasped the throne through fratricide. He was, according to Stevens, “one of the most conspicuous figures of the century,” along with the Vandal King, Geiseric.⁵¹ Euric lay siege to Sidonius’ see of Clermont for four successive years from 471. During these years, Sidonius encouraged the populace of Clermont to withstand the privations and hardships brought on by annually recurring siege. Though he believed that Roman power could be preserved in Gaul through the careful maintenance of treaties with the barbarian tribes, in this instance, his faith was disappointed.⁵² In his letters he pleaded for help from his fellow bishops, enumerating the sufferings of the people of Clermont only later to express his sense of betrayal as the same bishops negotiated a treaty with Euric in 475, ceding the whole of Auvergne to the Visigoths in exchange for Provence, which later fell back into Visigothic hands. Thus, Sidonius and the people of Auvergne had been sacrificed in order to secure peace elsewhere. According to Semple “Sidonius and his Arvernians, by the decision of the Empire, ceased to be Romans.”⁵³ Sidonius, recognised as an ongoing and active opponent of Euric, was then sent, embittered and disillusioned, into exile. As Michael Hanaghan succinctly sums up: “Rome falls, the Visigoths take Clermont, as the events in the back-ground seep into Sidonius’ epistles.”⁵⁴

When and Where

“Thus,” writes van Waarden, “the backdrop of Sidonius’ story is – to say the least – the experience of two generations of unrest and concessions, if not of outright trauma.”⁵⁵ It was onto this backdrop of trauma that Sidonius was sent into exile at Livia, near Carcassonne, and from there he began the process of compiling his letters. The time and place – immediately following the fall of Clermont and subsequent exile in Livia – are crucial to understanding Sidonius’ motives for collating his epistles into a single collection. Collectively, they provide an image of the life Sidonius had lost and a description of events leading up to his exile as well as

⁵⁰ H. Elton, “Defence in fifth-century Gaul” in *Fifth-Century Gaul: A crisis of identity?*, eds. John Drinkwater and Hugh Elton, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 172-173

⁵¹ Stevens, *Sidonius Apollinaris and his Age*, p. 92.

⁵² Jill Harries, “Sidonius Apollinaris, Rome and the Barbarians: A Climate of Treason?,” in *Fifth-Century Gaul: A crisis of identity?*, eds. John Drinkwater and Hugh Elton, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 301.

⁵³ Semple, “A Gallo Roman Seigneur,” p. 155.

⁵⁴ Hanaghan, *Reading Sidonius’ Epistles*, p. 188.

⁵⁵ van Waarden, *Writing to Survive, Volume 1*, p.10.

his life following his return and reinstatement as bishop of Clermont. Loyen somewhat downplayed how difficult the experience of exile would have been for Sidonius, suggesting that, apart from the “*souffrances morales*” of the loss of homeland and diocese, his lot not would not have been very hard.⁵⁶ Dalton echoed this opinion noting that Sidonius seemed “to have undergone no great physical hardships, since his chief complaint is that he suffered from the chattering of two repulsive Gothic hags outside his window.”⁵⁷ Dalton does, however, refer to 475 as being, for Sidonius, “the darkest year of his life”⁵⁸ and Sidonius’ letters from that period are filled with expressions of despair. The significant trauma from the culmination of these events would have played a key role in the formation of his collection.

As was standard in Late-Antique epistolography, Sidonius did not date his letters or arrange them in a strict chronology. This presents a certain challenge to the historian attempting to place individual letters within a specific timeframe. Mathisen suggests that one way of doing this is to identify markers which indicate known events. But, he says, “this method is fraught with difficulty,” because even these indicators can be ambiguous.⁵⁹ He notes that an obsession with dates is a modern fixation and considers scholarly attempts to reorganise letters chronologically as “doing a kind of violence to a corpus.” Like Loyen, who referred to the discussion of chronology as “*aride*” but still important for the historian,⁶⁰ Mathisen acknowledges that chronologies themselves remain essential.⁶¹ In Hanaghan’s view, too much attention has been paid to the “where” and “when” of Sidonius’ epistles.⁶² Hanaghan is referring, however, specifically to attempts to date individual letters and the way in which Sidonius’ writings have been mined for historical information as a whole. He suggests that “scrounging around to find out more about Sidonius and his world... [is] in vain.” Instead, he emphasises a narratological approach, insisting that a focus on location and chronology “has no bearing on the story Sidonius is telling.”⁶³ Sidonius’ epistles are, Hanaghan reminds us, not an account of the fall of the Western Roman Empire so much as “the account told as Sidonius wanted to tell it.”⁶⁴ The timing and location are, however, essential to understanding the driving force behind Sidonius’ motives for assembling his letters and thereby telling the story he wished to tell.

⁵⁶ A. Loyen, *Sidoine Apollinaire, Tome II Lettres* (Paris : Société d’Édition Les Belles Lettres, 1970), p. xxi.

⁵⁷ O.M. Dalton, *The Letters of Sidonius I*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915), p. xlv.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xlv.

⁵⁹ Ralph Mathisen, “Dating the Letters of Sidonius,” in *New Approaches to Sidonius Apollinaris*, eds. Johannes A. van Waarden and Gavin Kelly (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), p. 233.

⁶⁰ Loyen, *Sidoine Apollinaire, Tome II Lettres*, p. xxiv.

⁶¹ Mathisen, “Dating the Letters of Sidonius,” pp. 221-222.

⁶² Hanaghan, *Reading Sidonius’ Epistles*, p. 11.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Sidonius' letters were compiled into one volume of 9 books. Mathisen opines that the view that the volumes were collated in three stages (Books 1-2, Books 3-7, and Books 8-9) is somewhat oversimplified, but that it is generally agreed that Books 1 and 2 were collated and circulated around the time of Sidonius' appointment to the Bishopric 469/70.⁶⁵ Mathisen refers to the withdrawal from secular politics to sacred appointment as "The 'great watershed' in Sidonius' life."⁶⁶ Though precise dates are uncertain, most scholars concur that Books 1-7 would have been edited and compiled around the time of Sidonius' exile in 475-77 but published (or circulated) some time after his reinstatement and return to Clermont in 477. It is likely that he had at least some portion of his letters with him in exile and so would have been able to undertake significant editing from Livia. It is also possible that the letters relating to the correspondence with other bishops in Book 7 were held in his archives in Clermont and so would not have been added until Sidonius' return.⁶⁷ Whether the assembling, editing, and arrangement of his letters took place entirely in Livia, or whether they were concluded from Clermont, it was this period of exile and confinement which formed the genesis of the collection as a single volume. Books 8 and 9 were added later, possibly as an addendum, possibly in intentional imitation of Pliny the Younger (as suggested by Gibson) somewhere from 479-82.⁶⁸

Sidonius' motivations for collation

At some point after his years of exile, Sidonius was pardoned and restored to the bishopric of Clermont, around 476-7.⁶⁹ Pardon and partial restoration came after Sidonius spent two months in waiting and supplication at the Visigothic court in Bordeaux. His cause was supported by his friend Leo, who had become one of Euric's advisers.⁷⁰ Restoration was incomplete, however, as it was only his position as bishop which he recovered; his property remained effectively confiscated. Sidonius wrote about this period of exile and waiting in bitter tones to his friend Lampridius, who had succeeded where Sidonius had not in currying favour with Euric.⁷¹ Apart from his sense of bitterness and injustice, what stands out is his sense of despair. His letters from this period are laden with heavy emotions over his situation, the main result being a disinterest in life and, in particular, his disenchantment with and discontinuation of writing. This predicament was solved, according to Stevens, by the intervention of "kindly friends, realizing

⁶⁵ Mathisen, "Dating the Letters of Sidonius," pp.225-226.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 228 and 242.

⁶⁸ Gibson, "Reading the Letters of Sidonius by the Book," p. 200; A Loyer, *Sidoine Apollinaire Tome II*, p.x; Mathisen, "Dating the Letters of Sidonius," p. 249.

⁶⁹ van Waarden, *Writing to Survive, Volume 1*, p. 7.

⁷⁰ *Ep.* 8.3.1

⁷¹ *Ep.* 8.9

that his peace of mind would be restored if only he could find new interests,” and they “proposed various literary works that he might undertake.”⁷² Sidonius, however, roundly rejected the suggestion of these literary projects, such as the writing of history.⁷³ Instead, he decided to undertake the “humbler tasks” of editing and compiling his epistles.⁷⁴

Sidonius began his letter collection with a dedicatory letter to Constantius, who was most likely bishop of Auxerre and author of the *Life of Germanus*.⁷⁵ Writing to Constantius, he stated that he owed the formation of Books 1-7 to his friend’s insistence and that his aim was to follow the example of Symmachus and Pliny the Younger.

Diu praecipis, summa suadendi auctoritate ... ut si quae mihi litterae Paulo politiores varia occasione fluxerint, prout eas causa persona tempus elicuit, omnes retractatis exemplaribus enucleatisque una volumine includam, Quinti Symmachi rotunditatem, Gai Plinii disciplinam maturitatemque vestigiis praesumptuosius insecturus

You have this long while been pressing me ... to collect all the letters making any little claim to taste that have flowed from my pen on different occasions as this or that affair, person, or situation called them forth, and to revise and correct the originals and combine all into a single book. In so doing, I shall be following, though with presumptuous steps, the path traced by Quintus Symmachus with his rounded style and by Gaius Plinius with his highly developed artistry (*Ep.* 1.1.1)

Sidonius clearly states his intentions for compiling his letters in this initial dedicatory letter. First, he was spurred on to write at the behest of his friend; secondly, he wished to emulate notable authors of Latin letter collections, in particular Pliny the Younger. He repeated this last aim in *Ep.* 4.2.22, saying “To Pliny I yield homage as a pupil,” and this idea is echoed in *Ep.* 9.1.1 noting that his friend Firminus believed him to be following in Pliny’s tracks. Sidonius’ insistence that he wrote at the urging of his friends is also a repeated theme in his work, stating in a later letter to Constantius, “I send you the work you sought.”⁷⁶ In the dedicatory letter in Book 8 Sidonius wrote that it was his friend Petronius’ aim “to further the reputation of your friends at every opportunity... Hence it is that you desire even my Arvernian book-cases to be

⁷² Stevens, *Sidonius Apollinaris and his Age*, pp. 167-168.

⁷³ *Ep.* 4.22; *Ep.* 9.2; *Ep.* 8.15

⁷⁴ *Ep.* 4.22.1

⁷⁵ van Waarden, *Writing to Survive, A Commentary on Sidonius Apollinaris Letters Book 7, Volume 2*, p. 253.

⁷⁶ *Ep.* 7.18.1

ransacked.”⁷⁷ Adding to his letter collection is a “command” with which he “shall comply” *itaque morem geremus iniunctis*. To Constantius, Sidonius later explains in his closing letter of Book 8 that he had promised “the illustrious Petronius that I would quickly finish off the current work in a few letters,” and that he “chose that the work of correction should be his and the and the honour of the final issue yours.”⁷⁸ In the opening letter to Book 9, it is another friend, Firminus, who demands that Sidonius’ “pen should break though the bounds set by my former letters and should advance into further regions.”⁷⁹ The closing letter to the final collection repeats that Sidonius added book 9 at the urging of Firminus and that it was a “promise fulfilled” *sponsio impleta est*.⁸⁰

When he compiled his letter collection Sidonius was also conscious of future generations. He refers to his writing as an endeavour “to produce something that posterity can read.”⁸¹ By this he was referring to well-written literature rather than the creation of a historical record.⁸² This was penned in the context of his letter to Johannes, whom he praised as a “reviver, promotor, and champion” of Latin and for “delaying the extinction of literary culture.”⁸³ Sidonius makes frequent humble protestations concerning how his writing will be received by posterity, but Hanaghan notes that these are literary affectation which should be read alongside his carefully crafted self-presentation and “attempts to insert his work within the classical canon.”⁸⁴ Sigrid Mratschek cautions that when it comes to Sidonius’ stated intentions for the collation of his letters “we have believed him far more than we should have.”⁸⁵ The difficulty is that despite Sidonius’ clear statements surrounding his motivations for forming his letter collection, there is no way to absolutely know his true intentions.

Stevens seems to have taken Sidonius’ stated intentions at face value, attributing his motivation for the formation of letter collection to his friends’ exhortations because they saw “the great witness of a vanished age ... slipping out of life without a record of what he had done.”⁸⁶ This would imply that Sidonius’ friends wished him to form a sort of autobiography from his letters. Allen and Neil suggest that his letters are autobiographical in the sense that they are deliberately

⁷⁷ Ep. 8.1.1

⁷⁸ Ep. 8.16.1

⁷⁹ Ep. 9.1.1

⁸⁰ Ep. 9.16.1

⁸¹ Ep. 8.2.3

⁸² Ep. 8.2.3

⁸³ Ep. 8.2.1

⁸⁴ Michael Hanaghan, “Sidonius Apollinaris and the Making of an Exile Persona,” in *Mobility and Exile at the End of Antiquity*, eds. D Rohmann, J. Ulrich and M. Vallejo Girvés, (Peter Lange, 2018), p. 265.

⁸⁵ Sigrid Mratschek, “Creating Identity from the Past,” pp. 249-250.

⁸⁶ Stevens, *Sidonius Apollinaris and his Age*, p. 168.

self-fashioning, intended to present Sidonius in the most favourable light.⁸⁷ Van Waarden highlights Sidonius' correspondence as being "his 'autobiography', a reflection of the history of the unsettled times he lived in."⁸⁸ Gibson, on the other hand, posits that antique-letter collections were not created strictly for the purpose of historical narrative or biography, which can be difficult for modern readers to understand.⁸⁹ According to Gibson, Sidonius' emphasis on thematic rather than chronological order is more representative of an artistic design in imitation of Pliny.⁹⁰ This does not, however, preclude Sidonius' work from offering biographical or historical information and, indeed, Gibson notes that it was an established ancient assumption that letter collections also contained biographical or historical narrative.⁹¹ Of Pliny's letters, Gibson concedes that they do yield historical and biographical information, but that the onus of extracting an autobiographical narrative is on the reader.⁹²

Mratschek favours the idea of self-fashioning over strict biography, arguing that Sidonius meticulously constructed his own image for posterity through literary allusion. His literary persona is multifaceted and complex, portraying both himself and the world around him precisely as he wished to present them.⁹³ Hanaghan also considers Sidonius' letters as "a dynamic exercise in self-fashioning," which he says was intended to protect and promote his position as bishop.⁹⁴ Both Hanaghan and Mratschek echo van Waarden's view that Sidonius' letter collection served as a survival tool, with Hanaghan arguing this was Sidonius' "battle for relevancy and survival"⁹⁵ and Mratschek describing Sidonius' letters as a "survival strategy," for elite Roman culture "establishing oases of romanitas."⁹⁶ Van Waarden presents this idea of "writing to survive" as both the title of his commentary on Book 7 and as Sidonius' motto.⁹⁷ The compilation of Books 1-7, according to van Waarden, are "a manifesto of mental resilience and consistency" to all Sidonius held dear – his writing and his community of *amici*, his literary circle.⁹⁸

⁸⁷ Allen and Neil, *Greek and Latin Letters in Late Antiquity*, p. 51.

⁸⁸ van Waarden, *Writing to Survive*, Volume 1., p. 34

⁸⁹ Gibson, *On the Nature of Ancient Letter Collections*, p. 70.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁹³ Sigrid Mratschek, *The Letters of Sidonius Apollinaris*, p. 313.

⁹⁴ Hanaghan, *Reading Sidonius' Epistles*, p. 56.

⁹⁵ Hanaghan, *Reading Sidonius' Epistles*, p. 20.

⁹⁶ Sigrid Mratschek, *The Letters of Sidonius Apollinaris*, p. 309.

⁹⁷ van Waarden, *Writing to Survive*, Volume 2, p. 252.

⁹⁸ van Waarden, *Writing to Survive*, Volume 2, p. 22; and Volume 1, p. 66.

Both Hanaghan and van Waarden emphasise the notion that Sidonius' letters experienced a sort of second life when they were arranged into a collection. Hanaghan sees Sidonius' epistles as becoming "to some degree fictional" in this moment of reorganisation and editing.⁹⁹ Van Waarden notes that the second life of Sidonius' letters in their revised form appear to be a "massive pro-Rome-and-culture manifesto," which, he adds, it actually is.¹⁰⁰ He points out that the letters in themselves are inherently complex and that the final compilation should be understood as a transformed entity. Kelly and van Waarden characterise Sidonius' collection as a deliberate "defence of Roman elite culture" in the face of his personal sufferings during "the last gasps of the western Roman Empire."¹⁰¹ One aspect of this defence is Sidonius' account of the fall of Clermont, and his defiant depictions of Euric as aggressor. The other factor of this defence is Sidonius' literary style, which Kelly and van Waarden describe as one of "unrivalled ornateness."¹⁰² Michel Banniard recognises Sidonius' writing as an act of combative engagement on behalf of *Romanitas*.¹⁰³ Mratschek acknowledges that Sidonius' "letters are more creative than has been recognised" with his aim as the revival and continuation of classical culture, through the means of evoking the past through memory and intertextuality.¹⁰⁴ According to Harries, Sidonius' letter collection was formed to be a "compensation for the loss of Rome" which would be his "legacy to future generations."¹⁰⁵

Dalton embraced Sidonius' own explanation that he had compiled his collection at the behest of his friends. He concluded that they would have done so out of concern for his mental state in exile. Sidonius' stated intentions may very well have been sincere, but his letters and persona are far more complex than can be exhaustively analysed in this thesis. As van Waarden wrote, true knowledge of Sidonius is notoriously elusive and we cannot presume to fully understand his intentions or motivations. He also notes that "a psychological interpretation is out of the question,"¹⁰⁶ however, he also conjectures that Sidonius' act of letter collation may have been a coping mechanism, "an expressive medium of the first order to curb his emotions as a result of

⁹⁹ Hanaghan, *Reading Sidonius' Epistles*, p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ van Waarden, *Writing to Survive, Volume 1*, p. 44.

¹⁰¹ Gavin Kelly and Johannes A. van Waarden, "Introduction," in *New Approaches to Sidonius Apollinaris*, eds. Johannes A. van Waarden and Gavin Kelly (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), p. 3.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁰³ M. Banniard, "La Rouille et la Lime: Sidoine Apollinaire et la Langue Classique en Gaule au Ve Siècle," in *De Tertullien aux Mozarabes*, L. Holtz et al. eds., (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes 1990), p. 7.

¹⁰⁴ Sigrid Mratschek, "The Letters Collection of Sidonius Apollinaris," in *Late Antique Letter Collections: A Critical Introduction and Reference Guide*, eds. Cristiana Sogno, Bradley K. Storin, Edward J. Watts, (Berkley: University of California Press, 2016), p. 310.

¹⁰⁵ Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fall of Rome*, p. 242.

¹⁰⁶ van Waarden, *Writing to Survive, Volume 2*, p. 2; and *Volume 1.*, p. 24.

the loss of a familiar and beloved world,”¹⁰⁷ a means of making “personal tragedy bearable.”¹⁰⁸ Harries also recognises that Sidonius’ writing at this time was part of a process of acceptance, a form of mental readjustment to the new circumstances in which he found himself.¹⁰⁹ Hanaghan also sees Sidonius’ epistles as a response “to the dramatic changes that took place in his world over the course of his life” and argues that we cannot really know Sidonius or his intentions – we can only see what Sidonius allows us to see.¹¹⁰ It is important to take into account the story that Sidonius intentionally presented from his own perspective. I concur with Loyen that the formation of the letter collection offered Sidonius a sense of consolation in that this was the key moment of trauma when his known world had disintegrated.¹¹¹ I argue that the collation of his memories was a means of processing and making sense of his situation. In Chapter 2 I will explore the emotive elements present in Sidonius’ letters and demonstrate how his collection functioned as a form of lament.

¹⁰⁷ van Waarden, *Writing to Survive, Volume 1*, p. 33.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

¹⁰⁹ Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fall of Rome*, p. 238.

¹¹⁰ Hanaghan, *Reading Sidonius’ Epistles*, pp. 18-19.

¹¹¹ Loyen, *Sidoine Apollinaire, Tome II Lettres*, p. xxii.

Chapter 2

maeror m (genitive **maerōris**); third declension

mourning, grief, lamentation

As the above title suggests, this chapter explores the elements of emotion that relate to the grief which Sidonius experienced as a result of the fall of Clermont and his subsequent exile. These emotions do need to be considered within the context of Late Antique Epistolography, recognising that they represent not only Sidonius' emotions and reactions, but were also to some extent an echo of Classical Literature. In *From Tristia to Gaudia*, Bronwen Neil compares the themes in Ovid's *Tristia* and the writings of seventh-century Pope Martin I. From these she identifies ten *topoi* common to Classical and Christian exilic literature:

1. self-righteousness;
2. negative attitude towards the native inhabitants;
3. stress on physical suffering;
4. lamenting betrayal by erstwhile friends back home;
5. veiled criticism (of the person or people who sent him into exile);
6. requests for visitors and for material support in the form of books etc;
7. complaints of social and cultural isolation among barbarians;
8. actively seeking an amelioration of punishment;
9. hope of revenge on his enemies;
10. fear of death alternating with desire of death;

Neil identifies two further elements of Classical exilic literature, which she says are not represented in Christian exilic literature:

1. the apparent fear of losing familiarity with Latin; and
2. servile flattery of imperial rulers.¹¹²

Sidonius' epistles certainly contain elements of the first ten, but they also appear to be the exception in Christian literature with his panegyrics hailing both Roman emperors and Visigothic rulers and his frequent lamentations of what he viewed as the decline of Latin in Roman Gaul. The inclusion of these *topoi* served a dual purpose. First, it is possible they were intended to provoke a specific response from readers at the time,¹¹³ and secondly (and more

¹¹² Bronwen Neil, "From Tristia to Gaudia" in *Martyrdom and Persecution in Late Antique Christianity*, ed. J. Leemans, (Leuven: Peeters, 2010) p. 183.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p.182.

certainly), they were part of the integral intertextual nature of Sidonius' writings, reflecting how deeply he valued Latin literature. However important it is to recognise the presence of these *topoi* in Sidonius' epistles, they do not necessarily relegate Sidonius' emotions to the status of mere pathos.¹¹⁴ As van Waarden affirms:

*We are faced with a literary work where life and self-representative projection form an inextricable whole. In it a pervasive allusiveness, a constant alternation of elements of fake modesty, irony, humor and secrecy, an ambivalence sustained between tragic events and aristocratic contempt, seriousness and skill, life and art, constitute the message and shape the person of the author. However, it is always a "real" life that transpires and invites us to participate in the emotions evoked.*¹¹⁵

The Lament Psalms

Instead of examining Sidonius' letters through the framework of Classical or Late-Antique Literature, I propose to look at the emotive elements in his letters through the lens of the Lament Psalms of the Hebrew Bible, a form of ancient religious poetry with which Sidonius was familiar. Some of the major emotive themes in Sidonius' letters echo those of the Lament Psalms, which I will use as a framework to demonstrate how his letter collection functioned as a lament, a means by which he processed the traumatic situation in which he found himself. The book of Psalms holds a significant place in the literary genre of ancient religious poetry, with similarly structured laments both inside the Bible (e.g. the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations) and in other ancient cultures of the Near East (e.g. the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh).¹¹⁶ From the third millennium B.C.E. this type of religious poetry served as an important form of communal and individual expression, with the Lament Psalms later being embraced by the Christian church.¹¹⁷ Sidonius' letters make mention of the Psalms as an important part of Late-Antique religious life. In a poem celebrating the erection of a church in Lugdunum, he exhorts boatman (among others) to "raise the psalm" *sic, sic psallite, nauta vel viator*.¹¹⁸ He emphasises the role of the Psalms in religious life in his epitaph to the bishop of Vienne, Claudianus

¹¹⁴ Cf. Sigrid Mratshek, "Creating Identity from the Past," p. 267.

¹¹⁵ Loosely translated from Italian: Joop van Waarden "Il tempo invecchia in fretta": la biografia di Sidonio Apollinare nella sua corrispondenza," in *Invigilata Lucernis* 40 (2018), p. 188: Un'osservazione metodologica preliminare non sembra inutile: siamo di fronte a un'opera letteraria dove vita e proiezione auto-rappresentativa formano un insieme inestricabile. In essa una allusività pervasiva, un costante alternarsi di elementi di finta modestia, ironia, umorismo e segretezza, un'ambivalenza sostenuta tra vicende tragiche e sprezzatura aristocratica, serietà e bravura, vita e arte, costituiscono il messaggio e modellano la *persona* dell'autore. Però, è sempre una vita «reale» che trapela e che ci invita a partecipare alle emozioni evocate.

¹¹⁶ Edward L. Greenstein, "Lamentation and Lament in the Hebrew Bible," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, ed. Karen A. Weisman, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 70.

¹¹⁷ Hermann Gunkel, *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction*, Translated by Thomas M. Horner, (U.S.A.: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 4.

¹¹⁸ *Ep.* 2.10.4 (translation O.M. Dalton)

Mamertus, by highlighting that Claudianus had been a choirmaster “skilled to chant psalms” *psalmorum hic modulator et phonascus ante alteria*.¹¹⁹ Claudianus Mamertus holds a doubly important role in that he encouraged Sidonius to initiate the Rogations, the prayers undertaken by Sidonius and the inhabitants of Clermont during the years of Visigothic siege. The Rogations, Sidonius tells us, were ceremonial prayers in which “we fast, we pray with tears, we chant the psalms”¹²⁰ *ieiunatur oratur, psallitur fletur*, which Anderson more specifically translates as “prayer, fasting, psalmody and lamentation.”¹²¹ In this three-day religious ceremony, Sidonius represents himself as a serious religious leader, one who clearly understood the role of communal prayer and lament.¹²² Mamertus also holds an important place in Sidonius’ letters as the author of the sole letter not written by Sidonius. Notably, Sidonius’ intentional inclusion of this epistle in his collection contains a portrayal of himself as an active religious man with extensive biblical knowledge:

cum scripturarum caelestium mysteria rimaris, quo te studiosius imbuīs, eo doctrinam ceteris copiosius infundis

When you search the mysteries of the heavenly scriptures, the more diligently you steep yourself in them, the more plentifully you shower instruction on others (*Ep.* 4.2.3)

Sidonius would likely have been aware that the greater part of the book of Psalms is made up of individual songs of lament.¹²³ Highly educated and accomplished in literature, he may also have been cognisant of their literary structure. I do not intend to put forward an argument that Sidonius incontestably intended his letters to follow the literary structure of the individual Lament Psalms. What he does explicitly tell us is that he intentionally followed Pliny in the formation of his letter collection, as has been thoroughly examined by Gibson. However, recognising that his biblical knowledge was extensive (despite his occasional protestations of ignorance which are more indicative of humility tropes than anything else)¹²⁴ I suggest that his collection (intentionally or otherwise) does reflect the thematic structure of the Lament Psalms, demonstrating that the act of collation was in effect an act of lament for Sidonius, such as he conducted communally in Clermont by means of the Rogations.

¹¹⁹ *Ep.* 4.11.6 (translation O.M. Dalton)

¹²⁰ *Ep.* 5.14.3 (translation O.M. Dalton)

¹²¹ *Ep.* 5.14.3 (translation Anderson)

¹²² Lisa Kaaren Bailey, “Sidonius and Religion” in *The Edinburgh Companion to Sidonius Apollinaris*, eds. Johannes A. van Waarden and Gavin Kelly, (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), p. 265.

¹²³ Gunkel, *The Psalms*, p. 33.

¹²⁴ Hanaghan, *Reading Sidonius’ Epistles*, p. 19.

The role of the communal Lament Psalms (and by inference, the Rogations) was to collectively present to God the suffering and affliction being endured by a community, with acts of repentance and contrition, pleading for God relieve them from their suffering. This gave the people a place for the expression of their emotions during times of distress as well a source of hope and motivation in believing that a deity might hear and come to their aid.¹²⁵ The individual Lament Psalm was conventionally written in the first person and characterised by a heightened expression of suffering.¹²⁶ The principal element of the Lament Psalm was what Greenstein refers to as the cry in Hebrew of '*eikh*,' ("Alas!"), which he translates literally as: "how can it be?"¹²⁷ The individual Psalm of Lament, therefore, functions precisely as a means of processing and coming to terms with suffering. The Lament Psalms follow a specific, but often fluid structure, each containing some, if not all, of the following elements:

1. Expression of grief and suffering
2. Complaint, expression of anger against enemies ('*eikh*?' "how can it be?")
3. Entreaty or petition for help/justice from enemies
4. Expression of praise/confidence/hope/trust in God for help/the future¹²⁸

While many of the Lament Psalms possess all or most of the above elements, many do so loosely, containing what could be described as "mood swings," alterations of mood back and forth from lament and anger to expressions of confidence or praise.¹²⁹ The structure of the Lament Psalms is therefore not strictly linear with an expression from grief to anger, then petition to praise. There can be mood swings which reverse back from praise to lament or anger. The essential element of these psalms, however, is that the psalmist expresses himself because he believes that God will hear him. Sidonius' letters, unlike the Lament Psalms, were not written directly as an expression of lament to God, but instead purposed for publication, his hearers being his contemporary readers and those in posterity. In this sense he ensured himself what has been referred to as "a certainty of hearing."¹³⁰ Neither do Sidonius' letters move in a strict linear fashion through the themes of the Lament Psalms. Instead, like many of the Psalms, he moves back and forth from grief to anger and hope as it fits the story he is telling.

¹²⁵ Gunkel, *The Psalms*, p.2.

¹²⁶ Greenstein, "Lamentation and Lament in the Hebrew Bible," p. 68.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹²⁸ Gunkel, *The Psalms*, pp.34-35.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹³⁰ Frederico G. Villaneuva, "An 'Uncertainty of Hearing': A Study of the Sudden Change of Mood in the Individual Lament Psalms," (Ph.D., thesis, University of Bristol, 2007).

Psalms 55 typifies this structure of lament:¹³¹

Entreaty for aid:

- ¹ *Listen to my prayer, O God,
do not ignore my plea;*
² *hear me and answer me.*

Expression of grief and suffering on account of enemies:

- My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught*
³ *because of what my enemy is saying,
because of the threats of the wicked;
for they bring down suffering on me
and assail me in their anger.*

Expression of grief and suffering:

- ⁴ *My heart is in anguish within me;
the terrors of death have fallen on me.*
⁵ *Fear and trembling have beset me;
horror has overwhelmed me ...*

Petition for justice:

- ⁹ *Lord, confuse the wicked, confound their words,
for I see violence and strife in the city.*
¹⁰ *Day and night they prowl about on its walls;
malice and abuse are within it.*
...

- ¹⁵ *Let death take my enemies by surprise;
let them go down alive to the realm of the dead,
for evil finds lodging among them.*

Expression of hope and trust:

- ¹⁶ *As for me, I call to God,
and the LORD saves me.*

Mood swing from expression of suffering to hope:

- ¹⁷ *Evening, morning and noon
I cry out in distress,
and he hears my voice.*

¹³¹ Psalm 55, The New International Bible.

¹⁸ *He rescues me unharmed
from the battle waged against me,
even though many oppose me.*

...

Complaint and further description of enemies:

²⁰ *My companion attacks his friends;
he violates his covenant.*
²¹ *His talk is smooth as butter,
yet war is in his heart;
his words are more soothing than oil,
yet they are drawn swords*

...

Declarations of trust and hope:

²³ *But you, God, will bring down the wicked
into the pit of decay;
the bloodthirsty and deceitful
will not live out half their days.
But as for me, I trust in you.*

Sidonius' letters contain all of the above elements and, like the Lament Psalms, do not follow them in a strict linear fashion. The individual letters move back and forth between the themes of grief, complaint, petition, and hope. The overall structure of his letter collection also reflects this thematic shifting but does so in a roughly chronological progression which ends on a note of hope, faint though it may be.

Sidonius and grief

Sidonius' expressions of grief are not confined to the trauma associated with war, betrayal, and exile, but his natural impulse seems to have been to respond by writing. The concepts of grief and lament appear to be mostly absent in Books 1 and 2 with the notable exception of Epistle 2.8 to a certain Desideratus on the death of a woman named Philomatia. Sidonius begins his letter immediately declaring that he is in the throes of the deepest grief:

maestissimus haec tibi nuntio

I write to you in the greatest grief (*Ep.* 2.8.1)

While Sidonius' own grief and tears remain freshly acute, Philomatia's father requests that he write an elegy for her tombstone:

parentis orbatu nenia funebrem ... incisam planctu prope calente dictavi

at the request of her bereaved father, I composed a funeral dirge ... almost before the violence of my grief had abated (*Ep.* 2.8.2)

While it was to be expected that Sidonius, as a celebrated poet, would be requested to compose elegies, this does not detract from the likelihood that writing was his preferred way of responding to grief (or indeed other situations and emotions). As mentioned above, the death of Claudianus Mamertus, the bishop of Vienne, provoked an outpouring of grief in Sidonius, prompting him to write a lengthier epitaph in his letter to Mamertus' great nephew, Petreius. He states:

angit me nimis damnum seculi mei nuper erepto avunculo tuo oculis nostris

I am deeply grieved at the loss which my generation has sustained by the removal of your uncle Claudianus from our eyes (*Ep.* 4.11.1)

His feelings are so intense, in fact, that even recalling Mamertus in his writing appears to both exacerbate and calm his grief.

sed quid dolorem nostrum moderaturi causis potius doloris fomenta sufficimus? Ergo... nenia condidimus tristem luctuosamque

But why, hoping to calm my grief, do I go on supplying fuel to the flame of it? So then ... I have composed this sad and mournful dirge (*Ep.* 4.11.6)

Referring to his resolution to discontinue writing poetry on his appointment to the bishopric, he confesses that the writing of the elegy is arduous, but essential. For Sidonius, writing remains his sole solution and refuge.

propemodum difficultatem, nisi quod animum natura desidiosum dolor fletu gravidus accendit

The work has been in a sense laborious, for my disuse of composition was making it a difficult task, except that my natural indolence was quickened by my tear-burdened grief. (*Ep.* 4.11.6)

Sidonius collated and published Books 1 and 2 around the same time he became bishop of Clermont around 469. While not a period of outright grief, Sidonius' appointment to the bishopric represented a significant shift in his life, a transition from civic service and aristocratic *otium* to religious calling. Harries describes this period of withdrawal from public to religious

service as immediately following “the most traumatic upheaval of his life.”¹³² He felt the weight of his new role as a heavy and serious responsibility, so much so that he claimed it brought him:

vi februm nuper extremum salutis accessi utpote cui indignissimo tantae professionis pondus impactum est

I have lately been brought almost to death’s door by the ravages of fever, as might well happen to one on whose totally unworthy shoulders has been thrust the burden of such a high calling (*Ep.* 5.3.3)

While Sidonius’ letters do contain the requisite humility tropes, here he directly attributes the physical manifestation of illness to the anxiety brought on by substantial changes in his life. The assembling of his letters into Books 1 and 2 were an innate response to a season of emotional upheaval, a coping mechanism, as well as a way to preserve the past and render it meaningful.

The trauma of war

As discussed in Chapter 1, the dates of individual letters are often difficult to pin down precisely unless there are specific markers that give an indication of events which we can date. Neither are the letters arranged in clear chronological order. This, however, does not detract from the overall progression of linear time throughout the collection and Sidonius appears to have deliberately sorted his letters into intentional themes.¹³³ The theme of the threat of war with the Visigoths looms large with Sidonius’ first letter in Book 3, denoting a significant change in tone and topic, shifting attention to the plight of Clermont and the wider region of Auvergne during “the time of hostilities.”¹³⁴ From this point on, the remaining letters in the collection were authored by Sidonius the bishop.¹³⁵ This shift of theme is notable in that barbarians are the subject of eight of the first nine letters of Book 3. Sidonius has moved on from the *otium* and *negotium* of Books 1 and 2, to *bellum* at the start of Book 3. This appears to be an intentional structural and thematic choice, marking the specific point of crisis where Sidonius felt the need to restart (or continue) his story.¹³⁶ Harries points out that between Books 2 and 3 there is no clear separation of dedicatory letters indicating either end or beginning. The final letter of Book 7, she argues, decisively serves as the end point of his letter collection (before the later additions of Books 8 and 9), but although Books 1 and 2 do fit seamlessly into the collection, they represent an earlier part of Sidonius’ life and were likely circulated separately. From exile,

¹³² Referring to the Arvandus affair - Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fall of Rome*, p. 15.

¹³³ Gibson, “On the Nature of Ancient Letter Collections,” p. 69.

¹³⁴ *Ep.* 3.3.1

¹³⁵ Mathisen, “Dating the Letters of Sidonius,” p. 226.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

however, Sidonius made the decision to include them in a larger collection and may have re-edited them to suit his purposes at the time.

The first letter of Book 3 opens with a petition for imperial aid, addressed to Avitus, a relative of the emperor Avitus.¹³⁷ Dalton dates this letter to 472, whereas Anderson sets the date to around 471, and Mathisen suggests that it could have been anywhere from 470/71.¹³⁸ Regardless of specific dates, its contents inform us that it was written when the Visigoths had:

broken through the frontier of their ancient possessions and ... [were] advancing the borders of their violent appropriation towards the Rhone and the Loire with all the valour – or brute force which they can command. (*Ep.* 3.1.5)

This could have been written in anticipation of the Visigothic siege of Clermont or after it had commenced in 471. Either way, Sidonius, after his appointment to the bishopric in 470/71, was operating in a role of leadership over his community and had good reason to be alarmed. In his letter he petitions Avitus, who he says stands between the Visigoths and the Empire, to “devise more peaceful measures.”¹³⁹ He spends the majority of the letter referring to their familial ties, upbringing, as well as Avitus’ connection to Auvergne over which Sidonius refers to himself as being “the reputed head.”¹⁴⁰ Sidonius uses these as the foundation for his appeal:

We entreat of you to extend your protection to our community equally with the church (*Ep.* 3.1.4)

Mathisen dates the remaining letters of Book 3 to extending possibly to 475, with Sidonius in exile and Auvergne ceded to the Visigoths. He dates Epistle 3.2 addressed to Bishop Constantius of Lyon (to whom he dedicated Books 1-7) which depicts the citizens of Clermont suffering the ravages of seasonal siege, to around 473 or 474.¹⁴¹ To them, Sidonius writes, Constantius’ presence brings great comfort, and he paints Constantius (also the instigator of the rogations) as expressing grief for the people of Clermont as he was confronted with evidence of destruction:

What tears you shed, as if you were the father of us all, over buildings levelled by fire and houses half-burnt! How you lamented the fields buried under the bones of the

¹³⁷ W.B Anderson and E.H. Warmington, *Sidonius: Poems and Letters II* (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1963), p. 3.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3; and Mathisen, “Dating the letters of Sidonius,” p. 239.

¹³⁹ *Ep.* 3.1.5

¹⁴⁰ *Ep.* 3.3.2

¹⁴¹ Mathisen, “Dating the letters of Sidonius,” p. 239.

unburied! ... finding the city made desolate no less by civic dissension than by barbarian assault. (Ep. 3.2.1-2 Anderson)

Constantius' visit restored morale to the populace and "returned the people to their harmony" by encouraging unity.¹⁴²

Throughout Books 3 to 7 Sidonius continues to pen his petitions for aid and his descriptions of the dire situation in Clermont as a result of recurring sieges. To his brother-in-law, Ecdicius, he describes the "savage baseness"¹⁴³ of the Visigoths and, recounting Ecdicius' successful repulsion of the Visigoths at Clermont, he pleads with him to return to their aid saying he hoped:

to convince you more deeply of the desire of your friends, whose hearts are sick with waiting for you

begging Ecdicius to:

consent to the petitions of your townsmen [to] hasten at once to sound a retreat back to your native town.¹⁴⁴

This was, as Sidonius told his kinsman Apollinaris, "a time of general fear" *ne tempore timori publici*,¹⁴⁵ but with the seasonal withdrawal of the Visigoths, the Arvernians were able to "abate their fear for a time" *timor potuit aliquantisper ratione*.¹⁴⁶ In reality the anxieties of war were, however, ever-present as Sidonius continued to plead their cause in writing against "the race of treaty-breakers" *foedifram gentem*.¹⁴⁷ Sidonius informs Felix that:

even if the barbarian retires to winter quarters, the heart only suspends and would not throw off a terror which has once struck deep in its roots (Ep. 3.7.2)

In another letter to Felix which Sidonius tells him is written in "great anxiety" *granditer anxius exaravi*, he outlines their plight:

The armed bands of the tribes that surround are terrifying our town ... so we are set in the midst of two rival peoples and are become the pitiable prey for both... we are spared neither the fury of our invaders nor the malignity of our protectors (Ep. 3.4.1)

¹⁴² Ep. 3.2.2

¹⁴³ Ep. 3.3.7

¹⁴⁴ Ep. 3.3.9

¹⁴⁵ Ep. 4.6.2

¹⁴⁶ Ep. 5.6.1

¹⁴⁷ Ep. 6.6.1

Hemmed in by the Visigoths and the Burgundians, these were, Sidonius concludes to Felix, “times of distress.”¹⁴⁸ So much so that the population of Clermont faced severe starvation. Sidonius complains in his letter to Graecus that the people: “ripped the herbage from the cracks in our walls and took it away for food.”¹⁴⁹ Although support was given in the form of supplies of grain from Patiens, to whom Sidonius expressed “limitless thanks” *perquam gratias ago*,¹⁵⁰ the city of Clermont continued to be exposed to the trauma of war. In Epistle 7.10 Sidonius informs Graecus, the bishop of Marseille, of the conditions of Clermont under siege, explaining that he is unable to leave the city:

I, personally, shut in here within the half-burnt confines of a fragile wall, am totally debarred by the menace of a war close at hand from satisfying my longing for you. I only wish that the shape and condition of Auvergne were such as to give me less excuse for excusing myself. (*Ep.* 7.10.1)

He ends expressing a faint hope that “peace should restore freedom to come and go”¹⁵¹ however, in his letter to Bishop Mamertus, his outlook remains somewhat bleak, reporting:

we have little confidence that our reckless and dangerous courage will be supported by our hideously charred walls, our palisades of rotting stakes, our battlements worn by the breasts of many a sentinel. (*Ep.* 7.1.2)

But he adds a faint mention of hope:

solo tantum invectarum te auctore rogationum palpamur auxilio

our only comfort is in the aid of the Rogations which we introduced on your advice (*Ep.* 7.1.2)

This communal act of lamentation involved prayer, weeping, and chanting of the psalms. Demonstrations of contrition were performed:

festa cervicum humiliatarum et sternacium civium suspiriosa contubernia

¹⁴⁸ *Ep.* 3.4.2

¹⁴⁹ *Ep.* 7.7.3

¹⁵⁰ *Ep.* 6.12.8

¹⁵¹ *Ep.* 7.10.2

where penitential sighs are heard from all the congregation, where heads are humbly bowed, and forms fall prostrate (*Ep.* 5.14.3 Dalton)

Dalton translates this as “a festival of tears,” which was in essence a petition for help directed towards God, instilling hope for deliverance and thereby increasing morale in the besieged population of Clermont.¹⁵²

The trauma of betrayal

Sidonius’ unleashes his personal grief and anger in Epistle 7.7 to Graecus, which is his reaction to the peace treaty concluded with Euric. Sidonius experiences this as a deep betrayal on the part of Rome and the negotiating bishops after having withstood four years of devastating siege. Here he speaks “the harsh truth” *veritatis asperitas* to Graecus, mingling grief with complaint. Again, he enumerates the sufferings of the people of Clermont and expresses outright anger at the peace treaty which effectively handed Auvergne to the Visigoths.¹⁵³ They have, he asserts, been “jettisoned” *facta iactura est*¹⁵⁴ and their “freedom bartered for the security of others” *facta est servitus nostra pretium securitatis alienae*, or as Dalton translated, “our enslavement was made the price of security for a third party.”¹⁵⁵

Van Waarden writes, “In the end, the detached historian will calmly rank this peace treaty, which at the time was so fiercely resisted, with many similar ones,” but, he also points out, “The emotional repercussions for Sidonius were undoubtedly enormous.”¹⁵⁶ It was, according to Stevens, “a confession of failure,” on the part of Rome, ceding Auvergne to the Visigoths in exchange for Provence.¹⁵⁷ Graecus had been one of the four bishops negotiating on behalf of the Emperor Nepos, along with Basilius of Aix, Faustus of Riez and Leontius of Arles.¹⁵⁸ In an earlier letter to Basilius, Sidonius had written:

per vos mala foederum currunt

You four are the channels through which the unfortunate treaties flow (*Ep.* 7.6.10)

pleading with him on behalf of:

populos Galliarum, quos limes Gothicae sortis incluserit

¹⁵² *Ep.* 5.14.3 (Dalton)

¹⁵³ *Ep.* 7.7.4

¹⁵⁴ *Ep.* 7.7.3

¹⁵⁵ *Ep.* 7.7.1 Anderson and Dalton

¹⁵⁶ van Waarden, *Writing to Survive, Volume 1*, p. 14.

¹⁵⁷ Stevens, *Sidonius Apollinaris and his Age*, p. 159.

¹⁵⁸ van Waarden, *Writing to Survive, Volume 1*, p. 14.; *Ep.* 7.6.7

those peoples of Gaul who are enclosed within the bounds of the Gothic domain (*Ep.* 7.6.7)

Here Sidonius was principally addressing his concern for the continuation of the catholic faith in the face of Visigothic Arianism. Epistle 7.7 to Graecus is a reflection more of Sidonius' emotions than an accurate account of historical events.¹⁵⁹ He opens his letter in bitter tones, immediately exposing his state of sadness:

ioculariter animus exercere laeta et tristia sustinere

I should be sending ... a further instalment of jocular chatter, if one and the same mind could simultaneously indulge in hilarity and endure sorrows (*Ep.* 7.7.1)

Sidonius lauds the Arvernians for their resistance of the Visigoths, recounting their bravery:

who by their unaided strength checked the arms of the common enemy

and who:

though besieged within their walls, felt no fear of the Goth¹⁶⁰

Sidonius hits home to Graecus that it is these people who call themselves 'brothers to Latium' and counted themselves 'a people sprung from Trojan blood,'" whom the newly formed treaty has betrayed.¹⁶¹ He emphasises their loyalty and "love for the State"¹⁶² crying out in complaint and disbelief:

hoccine meruerunt inopia flamma, ferrum pestilentia, pingues caedibus gladii et macri ieuniis proeliatore?

Is this our due reward for enduring want and fire and sword and pestilence, for swords fed fat with gore and warriors emaciated with hunger? (*Ep.* 7.7.3)

He openly admonishes the bishops:

pudeat vos, precamur, huius foederis, nec utilis nec decori ... parum in commune consulitis

We pray that you and your colleagues may feel ashamed of this fruitless treaty ... you are not acting for the common weal (*Ep.* 7.7.4)

¹⁵⁹ van Waarden, *Writing to Survive, Volume 1*, p. 336.

¹⁶⁰ *Ep.* 7.7.2

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

and brands them as traitors:

*non tam curae est publicis mederi periculis quam privatis studere fortunis ... facientes
iam non primi cpmprovincialium coepistis esse, sed ultimi*

You are less concerned to relieve public dangers than to advance personal interests; and having done this ... you are now beginning to be not the first, but last among the members of your province (*Ep.* 7.7.4)

He labels their actions as:

invenisse vos certum est quid barbarum suaderetis ignavi

A barbarous expedient, which in your cowardice you recommended (*Ep.* 7.7.5)

Sidonius remains unrepentant for his anger, viewing his grief as a more than sufficient justification:

convicii invidiam dolor eripit

my distress must take all colour of abuse from what I say (*Ep.* 7.7.4 Dalton)

He ends fixedly unapologetic for his emotions, laying the blame for events on the bishop:

*sed cur dolori nimio frena laxamus? quin potius ignoscite afflictis nec imputate
maerentibus ... sane si medicari nostris ultimis non valetis, saltem hoc efficite prece
sedula, ut sanguis vivat, quorum est moritura libertas*

Why do I give free rein to my grief? Nay, pardon the afflicted and do not blame the mourner... if you cannot save us in our extremity, at least secure by unceasing prayer that the blood of those whose liberty is doomed may still survive (*Ep.* 7.7.6)

He also pleads that they would aid possible exiles, refugees, and captives created as a result of the handover. That the outcome Sidonius foresees for Auvergne of torture and servitude does not eventuate, is irrelevant.¹⁶³ This letter was doubtless carefully constructed at the time of composition and likely later edited, but this does not diminish the authenticity of the emotions he expresses. Rather, it gives his grief and anger greater weight, as his emotions were probably heightened in exile as he relived his experiences through editing letters.

¹⁶³ *Ep.* 7.7.6; van Waarden, *Writing to Survive*, Volume 1, p. 15.

The trauma of exile

The themes of grief and complaint are most notably present in Sidonius' letters written during or concerning his exile. Sidonius' removal to the fortress of Livia near Carcassonne was "on the pretext of some duty,"¹⁶⁴ the details of which we are not informed.¹⁶⁵ Despite the bishops having arrived at what they may have seen as a successful deal with the Visigoths, Sidonius' active role of resistance must have made his removal from Clermont a matter of course for Euric. His confinement within the walls of Livia would have been no small alteration. Instead of a sense of defeat resulting from military conquest, Sidonius nursed feelings of disbelief and shock at what he strongly viewed as betrayal. As Stevens put it, "There is no doubt ... that his spirit was broken."¹⁶⁶ The letters about the time of exile convey the depths of Sidonius' grief. In Epistle 4.22 to Leo, he describes a sense of despair. As well as feeling ill physically, his spirits are depressed, having lost the desire to read or write:

dolor peregrinatio nova nec usui lectio vetus ... nec in praesentibus rei tantum, quantum in futuris spei locatum, postremo languor impedimento iamque vel sero propter hunc ipsum desidia cordi

My new sojourn in foreign parts is painful, my old reading is profitless to me... and I find less reality in the present than hope in the future; lastly, ill health hampers me ... this in itself inclines me to inactivity (*Ep.* 4.22.4)

He apologises to Faustus for his lack of correspondence from exile. One reason he offers for "having restrained my pen" is his state of mind:

mens nostra domesticis hinc inde dispendiis saucia iacet; nam per officii imaginem vel ... hoc relegatus varius quaquaversum frangor angoribus quia patior hic incommoda peregrini, illic damna proscripti.

my mind itself is wounded and prostrated by personal troubles on every side; for I have been driven from my own soil ... and in my banishment from it I am broken by diverse tortures at every turn, since I suffer here the distresses of an alien (*Ep.* 9.3.3)

There is the double element of grief and petition in this letter as he asks Faustus to pray for him:

that the lord may be my portion ... when not an inch of earth remains mine (*Ep.* 9.3.4)

¹⁶⁴ *Ep.* 9.3.3

¹⁶⁵ Stevens, *Sidonius Apollinaris and his Age*, p. 162.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

He again uses the verb *frangere* in his letter to Felix, attributing his infrequent correspondence to feeling broken:

frequentiam veteris officii servare non audens, postquam me soli patrii finibus eliminatum peregrinationis adversa fregerunt

I had not the courage to keep up my once frequent correspondence when I was ousted from my native soil and broken with the hardships of a sojourn in an alien land (*Ep.* 4.10.1)

At some point near the end of Sidonius' exile, he wrote to Chariobaudus, who attempted to aid his cause before Euric:¹⁶⁷

sollicitudines ipsas angore succiduo concatenatas

this chain of anxieties which is one continuous torture to me (*Ep.* 7.16.1)

Perhaps Sidonius' most emotive letter from this period of exile is Epistle 8.9 to Lampridius, his fellow poet and friend. As Sidonius explains, he has spent two months in Bordeaux awaiting an audience with Euric, whom he has seen only once.¹⁶⁸ This letter could also suggest an element of petition for aid or justice, as Sidonius is at Euric's court in Bordeaux precisely for the purpose of petitioning for the return of his property. The elements of grief and complaint are here heightened, underscoring Sidonius' distress at the loss of his property. For him this served as the final blow at the end of his exile, though he was restored to the bishopric of Clermont.

Lampridius has, Sidonius tells us, requested that he write some poetry. What he produces resembles a panegyric of sorts to Euric, which he may have wished Lampridius to use on his behalf to the king.¹⁶⁹ Harries describes Sidonius as receiving this request for poetry "with his usual expressions of reluctance."¹⁷⁰ While this may have represented a humility trope to some small degree, Sidonius' circumstances and the emotions he expressed around this poem strongly suggest that he was, by this stage, no longer reluctant to write but in fact needed to.

In requesting a poem, Sidonius feels that Lampridius is bidding him "to make music." He depicts Lampridius as dancing and "relieved of all care" having had his property restored to him. Sidonius, on the other hand, represents himself as a poet metaphorically and inextricably caught in the nets of emotion:

¹⁶⁷ van Waarden, *Writing to Survive*, Volume 2, p. 24.

¹⁶⁸ *Ep.* 8.9.5

¹⁶⁹ Stevens, *Sidonius Apollinaris and his Age*, p. 167.

¹⁷⁰ Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fall of Rome*, p. 240.

nosti enim probe laetitiam poetarum, quorum sic ingenia maeroribus ut pisciculi retibus amiciuntur; et si quid asperum aut triste, non statim sese poetica teneritudo a vinculo incursi angoris elaqueat

their spirits are immeshed by sorrows as fish by nets; if anything harsh or distressing occurs, the poetic sensibility does not readily free itself from the agonising entanglement. (Ep. 8.9.2)

Again, he insists that a sense of anxiety affects his ability to write:

As for me, my anxiety absolutely forbids me to make the content of my poetry different from the content of the life I lead.

He contrasts their situations:

ago laboriosum, agis ipse felicem; ago adhuc exulem, agis ipse iam civem

I am afflicted, you fortunate, I still an exile, you are now a citizen (Ep. 8.9.3)

His poetry is:

quas inter animi supplicia conscripsimus

written amid mental tortures (Ep. 8.9.4)

Again, he uses simile to describe the emotive tone of his writing:

persuadebis mihi, quia cantuum similes fuerint olorinorum, quorum est modulatio clangor in poenis: similes etiam chordae lyrae violentius tensae, quae quo plus torta, plus musica est

you will convince me that they were like the songs of swans, whose cry is more tuneful in moments of agony, and like a lyre-string strung more forcibly than is wont, which is the more musical the more it is tensed. (Ep. 8.9.4)

Yet, perhaps ironically he concludes that:

nam non invideo magisque miror

I feel no envy but rather wonder (Ep. 8.9.5)

He also claims that he is:

dum nil mereor precesque frustra impendo

an innocent sufferer lavishing my prayers in vain (Ep. 8.9.5)

which reflects another category of Lament Psalm, the Psalm of Innocence, in which the psalmist expresses incomprehension and credulity at his suffering and strongly seeks justice or remission on that basis.¹⁷¹ Sidonius ends his letter with a colourful simile of Lampridius at ease as a victorious charioteer:

*quod recenseas otiabundus nostrumque sudorem ac pulverem spectans veluti iam
coronatus auriga de podio*

There you have the poem for you to read as you take your ease, watching me struggle in the dust and sweat, while like a charioteer who has already won his crown you view the contest from the grandstand. (*Ep.* 8.9.6)

He insists that he will not be offering any more poetry to Lampridius:

*de reliquo non est quod suspiceris par me officii genus repetiturum, etiamsi delectere
praesenti, nisi prius ipse destiterim vaticinari magis damna quam carmina*

For the future, there is no reason for you to suspect that I intend to repeat this kind of offering, however pleased you may be with the present one—certainly not until I have ceased dreaming of misfortunes rather than poems. (*Ep.* 8.9.6)

While Sidonius expresses a sense of anger and injustice in this letter, he is not directing personal invective against Lampridius. Indeed, he later lavishly mourns Lampridius' death when he was murdered by his slaves (*Ep.* 8.11). His anger and disbelief are directed against his overall circumstances, but he does have the political presence of mind to depict Euric in a favourable light in his poem in the hope of gaining favour in order to have his property restored. Whether or not Sidonius' poem ever came to the ears of Euric, he credits Leo with his release.¹⁷² Like Lampridius, Leo succeeded in stirring him to take up his pen again, though Sidonius later recalled in a letter to Leo how difficult this was for him during exile. He tells Leo that although he has sent him the requested copy of the life of Apollonius, he was only able to work in a hurried fashion:

making a wild precipitate barbarian transcription (*Ep.* 8.3.1)

explaining that:

*nam dum me tenuit inclusum mora moenium Livianorum, cuius incommodi finem post
opem Christi tibi debeo, non valebat curis animus aeger saltim saltuatim tradenda
percurrere, nunc per nocturna suspiria, nunc per diurna officia distractus*

¹⁷¹ Gunkel, pp. 35-6.

¹⁷² *Ep.* 8.3.1 (Anderson)

So long as arrest within the walls of Livia kept me a prisoner ... my heart was sick with anxieties and harassed by sighs at night and by obligations during the day, so that I was unable, even with occasional spurts, to get quickly through the work I had to consign to you. (*Ep.* 8.3.1)

His somewhat reluctant return to writing in this manner appears to have aided in motivating him to undertake his own project. After a time, he returned to his natural recourse of writing as a way to process his emotional turmoil.

Chapter 3

laudātiō

f (genitive laudātiōnis); third declension

commendation, praise

eulogy, panegyric¹⁷³

In Chapter 2 I examined the emotive themes of suffering, complaint and petition in Sidonius' letters, outlining the trauma he experienced as a result of war, betrayal and exile. In this chapter I will view his letters through the lens of the fourth element of the Lament Psalms, the expression of praise, hope and confidence. Although the psalmist directed their declaration of praise or hope as a statement of trust or confidence in God, I will expand this theme in a different direction where it concerns Sidonius' letters. He does declare that he ultimately relies on Christian hope in the face of adversity, however, his expression of praise is directed towards Rome. In a sense, this praise of Rome is a continued lament, but over what Sidonius views as the decline of Roman influence. Whether or not this was actually the case, in effect he intentionally included letters which recalled and memorialised the life and culture which he perceived as lost. The title of this chapter reflects this idea, in that *laudatio* means both 'praise' and 'eulogy,' with the origin of 'eulogy' in Classical Greek εὐλογία literally meaning 'good words,' or 'good or fine language' being made up from εὖ 'good' and λογία 'words.'¹⁷⁴ I argue that Sidonius collated the letters which focus on these laudatory aspects of his past as a means of eulogising and speaking good words about a "lost" Rome. The editing and inclusion of these more positive letters would have given Sidonius a further means of processing his life in light of recent traumatic events. The overall formation of a written narrative would have enabled him to assign meaning and recover from a sense of loss.¹⁷⁵

Otium and negotium

The "good words" Sidonius chose to speak primarily concern the life, lifestyle, and culture that he had lost. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, Sidonius edited and published his first collection of letters (consisting of Books 1 and 2) upon becoming bishop around 469. While this was not in any way an unusual act for a highly educated member of the Roman aristocracy, it could very well have been undertaken as an act of memorialisation, a way to remember the life he had just left behind when he moved into a drastically different career and calling. In this instance, during

¹⁷³ Lewis, C.T., Short, C., *A Latin Dictionary*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1917), p. 1042.

¹⁷⁴ Robert Scott and Henry Stuart Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. Roderick McKenzie, 7th edition, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1882) p. 605.

¹⁷⁵ Dickie, "The Intersection of Biblical Lament and Psychotherapy in the Healing of Trauma Memories," p. 888.

and after exile, Sidonius would not only have been looking to put together a list of grievances and petitions as an expression of recent hardship, but he would likely have been wanting to paint a fuller picture of the life he had known. As Harries suggested, in some ways Sidonius' collection resembles a politician's memoir, with his careful selection of subjects intended to present him "in the most favourable light."¹⁷⁶ While his choices would have been very deliberate and intentional and he may have aimed to justify his past actions, this does not preclude the formation of the letter collection serving as a way to process trauma. The act of remembering and memorialising his past was an important part of processing and accepting the current circumstances in which he found himself.

In what Michael Kulikowski calls the most nostalgic letter in the collection,¹⁷⁷ Sidonius informs his friend Namatius that from the time he was a young man he was "mingling with the crowd of cloaked officials" and so was "next to those who were next to the consul."¹⁷⁸ He was limited to standing because of his age but he was permitted to be in close proximity because "my rank entitled me to some prominence."¹⁷⁹ This rank was an inherited one of wealth and senatorial nobility. Mathisen describes him as belonging to "the most blue-blooded family of late Roman Gaul" and moving in "the most exalted circles of senatorial aristocracy."¹⁸⁰ In Epistle 1.3 Sidonius reminds us of this heritage, a long lineage of Gallo-Roman aristocracy. He mentions that his father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and father-in-law:

won the distinctions of the pretorian and city prefectures and Masterships at court and in the army (*Ep.* 1.3.1)

This upbringing of privilege was integral to Sidonius' self-perception and self-presentation in his letters,¹⁸¹ but this did not mean that the life of a Gallo-Roman aristocrat consisted solely of a leisurely life of *otium*; it also brought with it the responsibilities of *negotium*. Both are central themes and features in Sidonius' collection, representing the life that he had known and valued. As Judith Hindermann points out, *otium* does not necessarily signify mere idleness, but instead refers to the luxury of time for reading, reflection and composition.¹⁸² Indeed, Hindermann argues that the notion of *otium* in Sidonius' letters actually unifies the concepts of leisure and the

¹⁷⁶ Harries, "Sidonius Apollinaris, Rome and the Barbarians: A Climate of Treason?," p. 299.

¹⁷⁷ Michael Kulikowski, "Sidonius' Political World" in *The Edinburgh Companion to Sidonius Apollinaris*, eds. Johannes A. van Waarden and Gavin Kelly, (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), p. 197.

¹⁷⁸ whom Stevens informs us was a "Gallo-Roman naval officer of the Visigothic King Euric," Stevens, *Sidonius Apollinaris and his Age*, p. 418.

¹⁷⁹ *Ep.* 8.6.5

¹⁸⁰ Ralph Mathisen, "Sidonius People," *The Edinburgh Companion to Sidonius Apollinaris*, eds. Johannes A. van Waarden and Gavin Kelly, (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), p. 29.

¹⁸¹ Hanaghan, *Reading Sidonius' Epistles*, p. 23.

¹⁸² Judith Hinderman, "At Leisure with Pliny the Younger, Sidonius's Second Book of the Epistulae as a Book of Otium," *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 13 (1) (2020): p. 94.

writing of literature, the one providing for and enabling the other.¹⁸³ Sidonius' theme of *otium* was not confined to literary *amicitia* (the exchange of letters and poetry between the aristocratic elite) but also encompassed the pleasure of spending time in company.¹⁸⁴ His letters abound with poetic and detailed descriptions of villas, their grounds and bathhouses. In his letters to Domitus and Donidius, Sidonius describes in lengthy detail the gatherings at his own estate of Avitacum and at the properties of Ferreolus and Apollinaris.¹⁸⁵ He writes that at his friends' estates he has:

tempus voluptuosissimum exegi

spent the most delicious time (*Ep.* 2.9.1)

As well as the descriptions of meals, naps and bath houses they:

whiled away the hours with no lack of witty and humorous conversation (*Ep.* 2.9.9)

Literary pleasures were also to be enjoyed as much as games and conversation at these gatherings. Sidonius mentions an abundance of books:

you might have imagined yourself looking at the shelves of a professional scholar (*Ep.* 2.9.4)

The image of the aristocrat at leisure is epitomised in the depiction of literary discussions and debate taking place while:

all and sundry occupied themselves according to their individual tastes (*Ep.* 2.9.5)

These social gatherings were part of the lifestyle of the Gallo-Roman elite and were both an honour and an obligation. Sidonius presents Ferreolus and Apollinaris, with their properties situated side-by-side, as amicably competitive in their desire to entertain their guests. The invitation to these two neighbouring properties was contingent upon status, Sidonius mentioning that Ferreolus':

rank, age and standing ... gave him a prior right to invite me (*Ep.* 2.9.3)

The aristocratic *otium* he describes in these two letters is one of languid social leisure, but also involved intellectual entertainment as well as sport. Sidonius makes frequent mention of sports and games throughout his letters. In Epistle 4.4, he reminisces about these activities with Simplicius and Apollinaris:

¹⁸³ Judith Hinderman, "At Leisure with Pliny the Younger," p. 109.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

¹⁸⁵ *Ep.* 2.2 and *Ep.* 2.9.

Cumque abhinc retro iuvenes eramus, in pila in tesseris, saltibus cursu, venatu natatu sancta semper ambobus

in the bygone days of our youth we contended in ballgames and dicing, jumping and running, hunting and swimming (*Ep.* 4.4.1)

In Epistle 5.17, he recounts a similar scene of aristocratic *otium* which involved conversation, banter, and storytelling under a shady tree, followed by ball and board games. Sidonius claims:

sphaerae primus ego signifier fui, que mihi, ut nosti, non minus libro comes habetur

I was the leading champion of the ball; for, as you know, ball no less than book is my constant companion (*Ep.* 5.17.6)

On the death of Lampridius, Sidonius attributes to his friend the values of aristocrat *otium*. As well as participating in dice and ball games, Lampridius:

fatigabat libenter, quodque plus dulce, libentius fatigabantur. scribebat assidue ... legebat etiam incessanter auctores cum reverentia antiquos

enjoyed bantering, and – what is more likeable – he enjoyed even more being bantered in return. He wrote constantly ... he was also an incessant reader, reading the old writers with reverence (*Ep.* 8.11.8)

Sidonius' attachment to his memories of aristocratic life balance *otium* with *negotium*, emphasising *otium* in Book 2, but beginning the letter collection with a vivid portrayal of his public career in Book 1.¹⁸⁶ With father, grandfather and great-grandfather having held the position of praetorian prefect of Gaul, Sidonius was destined to follow suit, and indeed, he outshone them, attaining the rank of Prefect of Rome in 468. He viewed participation in public life with a certain *noblesse oblige*, unabashedly chiding his friend Eutropius (who later did become praetorian prefect of Gaul in 470)¹⁸⁷ for his apparent reluctance to take up what Sidonius saw as his duty. He states that his main reason in writing to Eutropius is:

to draw you out from the depths of your domestic calm and to invite you to take up the duties of the Palatine imperial service (*Ep.* 1.6.1)

He insists that the obligation of the aristocrat is two-fold:

¹⁸⁶ Hinderman, "At Leisure with Pliny the Younger, p. 112.

¹⁸⁷ Ralph Mathisen, "A Prosperpography of Sidonius," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Sidonius Apollinaris*, eds. Johannes A. van Waarden and Gavin Kelly, (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), p. 94.

A man of your birth must needs cultivate his reputation just as diligently as his farm
(*Ep.* 1.6.3)

Sidonius outrightly labels Eutropius' lack of zeal as "wickedness" *noxae*, and warns him not to:
let yourself be entangled in the tempting snares of luxury (*Ep.* 1.6.5)

Writing this letter as he himself enters the city of Rome, Sidonius hails the capitol as:

domicilium legum, gymnasium litterarum, curiam dignitatum, verticem mundi, patriam libertatis

the home of laws, the training-school of letters, the assembly-hall of high dignitaries,
the head of the universe, the mother-city of liberty (*Ep.* 1.6.2)

Sidonius' frequent mentions of the city of Rome reveal his idealised vision of Rome, the Roman aristocracy and their place within the Empire.¹⁸⁸ Sara Fascione illustrates Sidonius' journey to Rome in Epistle 1.5 as a pilgrimage, a journey towards Roman identity, of *Romanitas*.¹⁸⁹ She describes his journey as "a path through the memory of the past to Rome," as he writes about key literary locations of Rome's history, travelling "through time, from the idealized past to the present."¹⁹⁰ Sidonius paints his arrival in Rome in the language of a pilgrim arriving at their holy destination:

Roma conspectui ... ubi priusquam vel pomoeria contingerem, triumphalibus apostolorum liminibus adfusus omnem protinus

Rome burst upon my sight ... but before allowing myself to set foot even on the outer boundary of the city I sank on my knees at the triumphal thresholds of the Apostles (*Ep.* 1.5.9)

Although the letters from this period had been written long before Sidonius' exile, their inclusion in the overall collection would have been a deliberate decision on Sidonius' part. While he may have collated and published the letters of Books 1 and 2 prior to the fall of Clermont, it is quite likely that he re-edited (or at the very least reviewed) them from exile. The presence of these letters indicates a mood of reminiscence and the need to recall better times.

¹⁸⁸ Harries, "Sidonius Apollinaris, Rome and the Barbarians: A Climate of Treason?," p. 300.

¹⁸⁹ Fascione, "Finding Identities on the Way to Rome."

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

Romanitas

To Sidonius, Latin literature and language were of supreme importance and were inextricably linked to Roman identity, particularly that of the Roman aristocrat.¹⁹¹ In his letters Sidonius both praises *eloquentia* as one of the highest virtues and openly laments what he perceives as its decline. For him, Latin was the embodiment of Roman culture. Living in multilingual Roman Gaul during the fifth century, Sidonius keenly felt the encroachment not only of the barbarian peoples but also of their languages. The collation and publication of his letter collection was one means of fighting for *Romanitas*.¹⁹² Van Waarden writes that Sidonius made “saving Romanitas ... one of his prime objectives.”¹⁹³ He did this through repeated exhortations in his letters to his friends to continue cultivating their Latin reading and composition. This was a means of countering cultural change, though he frequently lamented that the Latin language was already in its death throes.

Sidonius’ emphasis on *eloquentia* stemmed from his aristocratic education, which was perhaps already antiquated, as it represented a culture which was (arguably) in decline itself.¹⁹⁴ The intertextual nature of Sidonius’ writings attests to the value he placed on Classical literature, the most notable being the thematic and structural influence of Pliny the Younger on the formation of his collection.¹⁹⁵ His letters contain numerous allusions and references to other authors of Classical Antiquity; so many, in fact, that this poses an almost “information overload” according to Isabella Gualandri.¹⁹⁶ She points out that Sidonius’ love and knowledge of literature was so vast that it is difficult to distinguish between his intentional and unconscious references.¹⁹⁷ Indeed, it was this love and knowledge of Latin and Latin literature that Sidonius sought to preserve above all. As van Waarden writes, to Sidonius, “It is as though language has the magic power of conjuring up a world which must not disappear.”¹⁹⁸ In collating his letters, Sidonius found a way to both defend and preserve *Romanitas*.

His dismay over the decline of Latin does not concern the Latin spoken at the ground level but rather the *eloquentia* of the Gallo-Roman elite.¹⁹⁹ While it may be a trope to lament the decline of “pure” Latin, Sidonius’ language fixation reflects the depth of his attachment to Roman

¹⁹¹ Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fall of Rome*, p. 25.

¹⁹² Kelly and Johannes A. van Waarden, “Introduction,” in *New Approaches to Sidonius Apollinaris*, p. 3.

¹⁹³ Joop van Waarden, *Writing to Survive, Volume 1*, p. 24.

¹⁹⁴ Stevens, *Sidonius Apollinaris and his Age*, p. 18.

¹⁹⁵ See Gibson, “Reading the Letters of Sidonius by the Book,” and Gibson, “Pliny and the Letters of Sidonius.”

¹⁹⁶ Isabella Gualandri, “Sidonius’ Intertextuality,” in *The Edinburgh Companion to Sidonius Apollinaris*, eds. Johannes A. van Waarden and Gavin Kelly, (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), p. 279.

¹⁹⁷ Gualandri, “Sidonius’ Intertextuality,” p. 281.

¹⁹⁸ van Waarden, *Writing to Survive, Volume 1*, p. 19.

¹⁹⁹ Banniard, “La Rouille et la Lime,” p.4.

literary culture. In his letter to Hesperius he expresses his fear that Latin is deteriorating and will disappear:

nisi vel paucissimi quique meram linguae Latiaris proprietatem de trivialium barbarismorum robigine vindicaveritis, eam brevi abolitam defleamus interemptamque; sic omnes nobilium sermonum purpurae per incuriam vulgi decolarabuntur

unless there are at least a modest few like yourself to defend the exact use of the language of Latium from the rust of vulgar barbarisms, we shall in a short time be lamenting its extinction and annihilation, so sadly with all the bright ornaments of noble expression, be dulled by the slovenliness of the mob (*Ep.* 2.10.1)

He concludes with an imperative, emphasising the importance of preserving the “purity” of Latin expression:

igitur incumbe, neque apud te litterariam curam turba depretiet imperitorum

To work then, and do not let the cultivation of literature lose its value in your eyes because of the multitude of the ignorant (*Ep.* 2.10. 6)

In Epistle 5.5 Sidonius expresses both amusement and concern that Syagrius has undertaken to learn one of the Germanic languages in order to better communicate with the Burgundians. He presents Latin as the superior language of high culture, contrasting it to the Germanic of Burgundy.²⁰⁰ Their language, he writes, is improved when spoken by a Roman:

aestimari minime potest, quanto mihi ceterisque sit risui, quotiens audio, quod te praesente formidet linguae suae facere barbarus barbarismum ... et quamquam aequae corporibus ac sensu rigidi sint indolatilesque, amplectuntur in te pariter et discunt sermonem patrium, cor Latinum

You have no idea what amusement it gives me, and others too, when I hear that in your presence the barbarian is afraid to perpetrate a barbarism in his own language ... and although the people are stiff and uncouth in body and mind alike, they welcome in you, and learn from you, their native speech combined with Roman wisdom (*Ep.* 5.5.3)

Despite the overall humorous tone of the letter, Sidonius stresses to Syagrius the cultural necessity to cultivate his Latin on an ongoing basis:

²⁰⁰ Tim Denecker, “Language Attitudes and Social Connotations in Jerome and Sidonius Apollinaris,” *Vigiliae Christianae*, 69 (2015): p. 412.

restat hoc unum, vir facetissime, ut nihilo segnius, vel cum vacabit, aliquid lectioni operis impendas custodiasque hoc, prout et elegantissimus, temperamentum, ut ista tibi lingua teneatur, ne ridearis, illa exerceatur, ut rideas.

Only one thing remains, most clever of men: continue with undiminished zeal, even in your hours of ease, to devote some attention to reading; and, like the man of refinement that you are, observe a just balance between the two languages: retain your grasp of Latin, lest you be laughed at, and practice the other, in order to have the laugh of them (*Ep.* 5.5.4)

In his letter to Namatius, Sidonius boasts of his own achievements, highlighting his value of literature and politics. His focus is on the past, preoccupied with nostalgic memories of his life:

plurimos iuvenum nec senum paucos vario genere dictandi militandique, quippe adhuc aevo viridis, ipse sim supergressus

I have actually surpassed, in the two distinct métiers of literature and public service, most of the younger generation and not a few of the veterans (*Ep.* 8.6.2)

But he views the world as irrevocably altered, paralleling his own weariness and aging:

per aetatem mundi iam senescentis lassatis veluti seminibus emedullatae parum aliquid hoc tempore in quibuscumque, atque id in paucis, mirandum ac memorabile ostentant

but now, in an era when the world is growing old, these arts have lost the power of germinating, they are exhausted, they produce little that is remarkable or memorable in anyone, and even that only in a few (*Ep.* 8.6.3)

Sidonius echoes this theme of the passing of era in his letter to Sapaudus, commenting that:

quia pauci studia nunc honorant

Nowadays there are but few who hold literature in honour (*Ep.* 5.10.4)

In Epistle 8.2 Sidonius bestows the highest praise to grammarian and friend Johannes for single-handedly saving Latin from destruction. Sidonius lauds him for:

aboleri tu litteras distulisti, quarum quodammodo iam sepultarum suscitator fautor assertor concelebraris, teque per Gallias uno magistro sub hac tempestate bellorum Latina tenuerunt ora portum, cum pertulerint arma naufragium

delaying the extinction of literary culture, for you are acclaimed as its reviver, promoter, and champion when it lay more or less buried, and through the length and breadth of Gaul

you stand alone as the teacher who amid the storms of war has enabled Latin speech to gain a haven of refuge, although Latin arms have suffered shipwreck (*Ep.* 8.2.1)

Perhaps the most striking and illuminating lament regarding *Romanitas* is Epistle 4.17, Sidonius' letter to Arbogast, which probably dates to the period immediately following his exile.²⁰¹ In this letter he bewails the decline of Latin along with the decline of Roman power, illustrating how he viewed the two as inextricably linked, with Latin as the embodiment of Roman culture. There are hints of resignation in his tone, as this letter was likely written not long after his return to Clermont. He had returned to his calling, but now lived under the authority, not of Rome, but of a barbarian ruler. A letter from Arbogast, the Frankish count of Trier, was warmly received because, although a stranger to Sidonius, his Latin was eloquent, and his letter written according to convention. Indeed, Sidonius expresses surprise and delight that although Arbogast is multilingual (which Sidonius possibly was not),²⁰² his Latin is flawless:

Quirinalis impletus fonte facundiae potor Mosellae Tiberim ructas, sic barbarorum familiaris, quod tamen nescius barbarismorum

though you drink from the Moselle, the taste of the Tiber is in your mouth; and so you are an intimate of barbarians, yet your speech commits no barbarisms (*Ep.* 4.17.1 Murray)

Sidonius extols his Latin, declaring his skill in expression as comparable to the generals of Classical Antiquity:

par ducibus antiquis lingua manuque, sed quorum dextera solebat non stilum minus tractare quam gladium

in eloquence and valor you equal the ancient generals whose right hands could wield the stylus no less skilfully than the sword (*Ep.* 4.17.1 Murray)

Despite acknowledging what he perceives to be the decline of *Romanitas*, Sidonius does exhibit an element of hope. In Arbogast's literary abilities, he glimpses the potential long-term survival of Latin literary culture, stating that:

Quocirca sermonis pompa Romani, si qua adhuc uspiam est, Belgicis olim sive Rhenanis abolita terris in te resedit, quo vel incolumi vel perorante, etsi apud limitem [ipsum] Latina iura ceciderunt, verba non titubant. quapropter alternum salve

²⁰¹ Alexander Murray, Callander, editor and translator. *Roman to Merovingian Gaul, A Reader*, (Toronto: Higher Education University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2008), p. 255.

²⁰² Sempere, *A Gallo Roman Seigneur*, p.139 says: "I am inclined to doubt whether he had any real knowledge of Greek."

repensens granditer laetor saltem in illustri pectore tuo vanescentium litterarum remanisse vestigia, quae si frequenti lectione continuas, experire per dies, quanto antecellunt beluis homine, tanto anteferri rusticis institutos.

The Roman tongue has long been effaced from Belgic and Rhenish lands; but if its splendor has anywhere survived, it is surely with you; though the authority (iura) of Rome has collapsed on the frontier, as long as you live and preserve your eloquence, the language does not falter... I rejoice that traces of our vanishing literary culture remain in your illustrious breast; continue your assiduous studies (*Ep.* 4.17.2 Murray)²⁰³

Hope

Sidonius' expressions of *laudatio*, of praise and speaking "good words" were not limited to *Romanitas*, to memorialising the life he had known. His letters evince distinct elements of hope. It is a multifaceted hope, expressing what van Waarden calls "optimism against-all-odds."²⁰⁴ As discussed in Chapter 2, the structure of the Lament Psalms moves through the expressions of suffering, complaint, petitions for justice, to declarations of praise and hope. The Psalmist was often subject to "mood swings," moving back and forth between the different themes. The expression of praise and hope is not necessarily the end point of a linear progression in the lament but can be present throughout. Sidonius' work likewise manifests the presence of hope, a certain optimism-against-all-odds woven throughout his letters. This was hope in the face of adversity, which Sidonius expresses before, during and after the fall of Clermont.

From early mentions of Visigothic aggression and encroachment, Sidonius' petitions for help exhibit a certain level of hope and confidence for a positive outcome. His letter requesting aid from Avitus confidently declares that although the Visigoths were advancing, Avitus' authority would provide a resolution.²⁰⁵ Hope is also evident in his letters to Ecdicius and Constantius in Book 3, in his descriptions of how their respective arrivals in Clermont during the years of siege infused morale and confidence into the populace.²⁰⁶ To Constantius he declares:

deus bone, quod gaudium fuit laboriosis cum tu sanctum pedem semirutis moenibus intulisiti!

Merciful God, what a joy it was to the harassed folk when you set your sacred foot within our half-demolished walls! (*Ep.* 3.2.1)

²⁰³ *Ep.* 4.17.2 translation by Alexander Callendar Murray, *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul*, p. 255.

²⁰⁴ van Waarden, *Writing to Survive, Volume 1*, p. 8.

²⁰⁵ *Ep.* 3.1.5

²⁰⁶ *Ep.* 3.2 and *Ep.* 3.3

He reminds Ecdicius of the jubilation of the population of Clermont upon his arrival in their city:

Hinc iam per otium in urbem reduci quid tibi obviam processerit officiorum plausuum,
fletuum gaudiorum, magis temptant vota conicere quam verba reserare ... hic licet multi
complexibus tuorum tripudiantes adhaerescerent, in te maximus tamen laetitiae popularis
impetus congregabatur

Next you proceeded to make your way back leisurely fashion to the town. What a
procession went out to meet you – what homage and plaudits, what tears and rejoicings!
... Then, though as many, they danced for joy, hugged your followers in a close embrace,
still the main impact of the popular exultation was concentrated upon you (*Ep.* 3.3.5-6)

Even in his letters expressing anger and complaint, there exists an element of hope. In Epistle 7.6 to Basilius he rails against the absence of bishops in Auvergne, whose sees were left vacant after they had died. Sidonius despairs that this will spell the end of the Catholic church, declaring:

*quid enim fidelibus solacii superest, quando clericalis non modo disciplina verum etiam
memoria perit ... profecto intellegitis, quanti subrepti sunt, episcopi, tantorum vobis
populorum fidem periclitaturam.*

What comfort is left to the faithful when not only the teaching of the clergy but even the
memory of them perishes? ... you will certainly realise that with each removal of a bishop
you will have the faith of a people put in jeopardy (*Ep.* 7.6.9)

This letter is both a complaint to Basilius as well as a plea, attributing the situation to the four
bishops engaged in negotiations with Euric. His request for aid demonstrates that despite a degree
of despair at the situation, he holds hope that it can be remedied.²⁰⁷ This stands in sharp contrast to
his letter to Graecus (*Ep.* 7.7) in which he voices anger and disbelief, struck by the betrayal at the
bishops' role in ceding Auvergne to the Visigoths. The result was naturally anger and shock as he
was sent into exile. From there (as has been discussed in chapter 2) Sidonius experienced
despondence and manifests a state of deep depression, declining to undertake the writing projects
proposed to him by his friends. But a certain level of hope is shown by Sidonius' act of letter
compilation. While this was an expression of lament born out of grief, the act of compilation itself
was a manifestation of hope. The activity of processing his memories and recent events suggests
that he understood the necessity to come to terms with his circumstances. His presence in
Burgundy to petition Euric for the return of his lands shows a degree of acceptance of the situation.
Although his lands were not restored, he recovered his calling and returned to Clermont, acutely

²⁰⁷ van Waarden, *Writing to Survive, Volume 1*, p. 274.

aware that he was no longer a Roman under Roman rule, but the subject of a Visigothic kingdom with Euric as his new overlord.

Sidonius' positive portrayal of Euric in Epistle 8.9 indicates that he had come to terms with his current position and was determined to make the best of it. This was not, however, a sign of defeat. Rather, Sidonius retained a sense of determined defiance even though he had displayed outward deference. This remained Sidonius' sole positive portrayal of Euric. His other references to Euric are far from complimentary or sympathetic, presenting him instead as a ruthless aggressor and the enemy of orthodox Christian doctrine. Using biblical allusion in his letter to Basilius, Sidonius refers to Euric as Pharaoh and the Visigoths as the Babylonian and Assyrian oppressors, while he paints the Auvernians as the Israelites suffering in slavery and exile.²⁰⁸ Euric's aggression, Sidonius tells Basilius, is aimed at Catholic Christianity as well as Auvergne itself.²⁰⁹ Regardless of the reality of the Euric's treatment of Catholic Christians before or after the fall of Clermont, Sidonius' concerns were genuine.²¹⁰ His less than positive portrayal of Euric and his stance against Arianism signified a continued defiance as well as hope. Thus, while Sidonius had acknowledged Euric as his new ruler, he continued to fight by means of his pen.

Sidonius professed that his ultimate hope, however, was not in the survival of *Romanitas* or Catholicism, but was expressed through Christian hope, which emphasised the promise of life after death. In the same letter to Basilius, Sidonius refers to his hope in eternity in the face of the present trials:

quibus ego praesentum futurarumque beatitudinum vicissitudinibus inspectis communia patientius incommoda fero

When I consider these alternations of present and future joys I bear more patiently our common afflictions (*Ep.* 7.6.5)

In an earlier letter to Graecus, Sidonius offers sympathy for recent hardships, advising him to look to the hope of heaven and to recall Christ's suffering as an example:

quantumlibet nobis anxietatum pateras vitae praesentis propinet affliction, parva toleramus, si recordamur, quid biberit ad patibulum qui invitat ad caelum.

However much the affliction of this present life tenders to our lips cups of anxiety, we endure but little, if we recall what was drunk on the cross by Him who invites us to Heaven (*Ep.* 9.4.3)

²⁰⁸ *Ep.* 7.6.4

²⁰⁹ *Ep.* 7.6.6

²¹⁰ van Waarden, *Writing to Survive, Volume 1*, p. 276.

In a letter to Principius, Bishop of Soissons, Sidonius again links the notions of present suffering with the hope of life after death and highlights the harmony that will be experienced by diverse nations in heaven:

*orate, ut optabili religiosoque decessu vitae praesentis angoribus atque onere perfuncti
... quia secundum promissa caelestia, quae sponderunt filios dei de nationibus
congregandos...*

pray that when, by a happy death in the faith, we are released from the anguish and the burden of this present life For according to the heavenly promises, which have given assurance that the sons of God shall be gathered from out of the nations (*Ep.* 9.8.2)

For Sidonius, who had recently experienced great suffering through the trauma of war, betrayal, and exile, he recognised that his hope was in eternity, but he would nevertheless leave behind a record through his writings. He had forsworn the frivolous writing of poetry but declared:

*modo tempus est seria legi, seria scribe deque perpetua vita potius quam memoria
cogitari nimiumque meminisse nostra post mortem non opuscula sed opera pensanda*

But now it is time for serious reading and serious writing; one should think about life eternal rather than posthumous renown, and never forget that after death it will be our deeds, not our screeds, that will be weighed in the balance (*Ep.* 8.4.3)

In his final letter of Book 9, Sidonius returns to poetry, recounting the achievements of his life and chiding himself for the frivolous writing of his youth. He pays homage to the martyr Saturninus and praises other saints whose writings, he says, have sustained his hope:

*Post Saturninum volo plectra cantent,
quos patronorum reliquos probavi
anxio duros mihi per labores
auxiliatos,
singulos quos nunc pia nuncupatim
non valent versu cohibere verba;
quos tamen chordae nequeunt sonare,
corda sonabunt*

After Saturninus I would have my quill sound the praises of the other patrons whom I have found to be helpers in my hard struggles when my heart was troubled.

These my grateful words cannot now fit by name within the limits of verse; but though my harp cannot sound their names, my heart shall ever sound their praise (*Ep.* 9.16.3)

It could be said that his own writing, as well as that of others, was Sidonius' hope. He found solace, comfort, and pleasure through the shared expression of written thoughts and ideas. Though an act of lament, the creation of his letter collection was itself an expression of hope, memorialising the past and preserving his memories. The writer of the Lament Psalms expressed a hope of being heard by God. Sidonius' hope of being heard, however, was in his future readers.

Confidence

A te principium, tibi desinet

With thee begun, with thee 'twill end (*Ep.* 7.18.1)

Sidonius concludes Book 7 with a letter to Constantius, to whom he dedicated Books 1-7. The later additions of Books 8 and 9 seem to be afterthoughts, but there is much evidence to suggest that they were planned additions based on the structure of Pliny the Younger's epistolary collection of nine books.²¹¹ Irrespective of Sidonius' reasons for the added volumes, he intended this letter to Constantius to appear as a type of ending, even if it did not function as the true conclusion. In his dedicatory letter to Constantius in Book 1, Sidonius spelled out his motivations for the compilation of his letters. His intention was to follow in the footsteps of the writers he admired, in particular Pliny the Younger and Symmachus.²¹² Primarily, however, he attributed his labour of letter collation to the urgings of his friend, Constantius. As discussed in this thesis, the preparation of his letters for publication involved a process of deliberate and careful selection. In editing – 'purging' and – 'polishing' *defaecandas ... limandasque* – Sidonius says that he was aided by Constantius and Petronius.²¹³ He designed his letter collection with posterity in mind and was very aware that it was risky and could provoke criticism in his own lifetime, acknowledging to Constantius:

Porro autem super huiusmodi opusculo tutius conticueramus, contenti versuum felicius quam peritius editorum opinione

It would have been safer, though for me never to have said a word about a petty work of this sort and to have been content with the reputation I won by my published verses (*Ep.* 1.1.4)

²¹¹ See Gibson, "Reading the Letters of Sidonius by the Book," and Gibson, "Pliny and the Letters of Sidonius."

²¹² *Ep.* 1.1.1

²¹³ *Ep.* 1.1.2; 8.16.1

Despite this awareness, Sidonius remained determined and unafraid, editing his letters accordingly, as he informed Petronius:

sicut adhibendam in conscription diligentiam, ita tenendam in editione constantiam. demum vero medium nihil est: namque aut minimum ex hisce metuendum est aut per omnino conticescendum

For I am firmly convinced that it is as necessary to keep a stout heart in publishing as it is to take pains in writing. In short, there is no middle course; we must either refuse to fear such critics or be silent altogether in all circumstances. (*Ep.* 8.1.3)

The emotions Sidonius either allowed or wrote afresh into the final version were entirely conscious and intentional inclusions, but he refused to be put off by “the timid” considering him reckless or “the stout-hearted” calling him outspoken *nam ut timidi me temerarium, ita constantes liberum appellant*.²¹⁴ As he strongly asserted at the end of his closing letter to Constantius in Book 7:

et si me uspiam lectitavisti in aliquos concitatiores, scias volo Christi dextera opitulante numquam me toleraturum animi servitutem

And if in your reading you have anywhere found me rather vehemently roused against some persons, I would have you know that with the help of Christ’s right hand I will never tolerate servility of spirit (*Ep.* 7.18.3)

As well as containing anger and a strong sense of defiance, the emotions of joy, grief, and distress were also consciously inserted into Sidonius’ collection. This intentionality also applied to the choice of thematic arrangement. In his closing letter of Book 7, Sidonius outlines these themes and indicates awareness that he has laid his emotions bare:

commendo igitur varios iudicio tuo nostril pectoris motus, minime ignarus, quod ita amens pateat in libro velut vultus in speculo. dictavi, enim quae paim hortando, laudando plurima et aliqua suadendo, maerendo pauca iocandoque nonnulla

So I commend to your judgment the varied feelings of my heart, being well aware that the mind is as fully exposed in a book as the face in a mirror. I have written some exhortations, a great deal of praise, a certain amount of advice, a few laments, and a good number of jests (*Ep.* 7.18.2)

²¹⁴ *Ep.* 7.16.3

In the final letter of the collection, Epistle 9.16 to Firminus, Sidonius' concern is the opinion of his friend. Here Sidonius falls back on his oft used modesty *topos* of minimising the quality of his work and claiming hurried writing as the cause. He expresses relief that Firminus has previously assured him that he has enjoyed his work. While these kinds of remarks were typical of Late-Antique epistolography and although Sidonius exhibits a certain awareness of his skill, there is every reason to suppose that he genuinely suffered from the affliction of insecurity over the quality of his writing familiar to authors across the ages. His parting image in this final epistle is a wintry one of himself surrounded by scattered and crumbling letters, the *amanuensis* struggling to transcribe with frozen ink.

In this concluding letter we see that Winter is not coming. It has already been upon him for quite some time. Now he looks to and notes the coming of Spring, ending on a note of hope.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have examined the emotive elements in the letters of Sidonius Apollinaris, demonstrating how the act of collating his epistles into a corpus functioned as lament. I argued that his letter collection served as a means by which he processed the trauma he experienced as a result of political upheaval within fifth-century Roman Gaul. I suggested that the emotive elements in his letters resemble those within the biblical Lament Psalms and used them as a framework to explore this idea.

In Chapter 1 I analysed the formation of Sidonius' letters into a collection, situating both Sidonius and his work into their historical setting. I discussed his letters in the broader context of Late-Antique epistolography, looking at the historical background and significance of ancient letter writing. Sidonius' letters, although addressed to private individuals, were not necessarily private documents, but were intended to be shared, passed around and enjoyed by a community of close-knit intellectual elite. I looked at the structure and formation of his letter collection and suggested that the political events taking place around him served as an impetus for the collation of his larger collection of letters. I demonstrated this idea through the wider historical lens of the situation in the Western Roman Empire and Roman Gaul, narrowing it down to Sidonius' personal experience of the fall of Clermont. The timing of and circumstances leading up to the collation of his letters were key to understanding their genesis. It is no coincidence that Sidonius chose to undertake this task from a place of exile following a period of suffering. I considered the motives Sidonius gave for publishing his letters, being urged to do so by his friends and wishing to follow in the footsteps of the writers he admired. I outlined scholarly opinions that his act of letter collation was a complex and self-conscious literary endeavour, concluding with my own view that Sidonius edited his letters as a way to process and makes sense of his situation.

In Chapter 2 I presented an analysis of Sidonius' letters in the context of Classical and Christian Literature, focussing on his expressions of emotion. His letters contain all the *topoi* of Classical and Christian exilic literature, but I instead examined them through the lens of the biblical Lament Psalms, arguing that even though his writing followed the formulae of Classical Literature, in practice his collection functioned as a lament. Although Sidonius' most likely did not collate his letters as conscious act of lament, I established his awareness of biblical lament in the form the Lament Psalms and highlighted the elements common to both. I then analysed the emotions in his letters which equate to three of the four themes in the structure of the Lament Psalms, drawing out the emotions expressing grief and suffering, anger and complaint, followed

by petitions for aid and justice. I arranged these themes as they apply to the trauma Sidonius experienced through war, betrayal and exile.

Chapter 3 examined the presence of the fourth theme of the Lament Psalms in Sidonius' letters, the expression of praise, hope and confidence. While the Psalmist addressed their expression of praise, hope or confidence to or in God, Sidonius directed his sense of praise to a "lost" Rome. For Sidonius, this expression of praise functioned as a form of lament or eulogy, nostalgically recalling the life and lifestyle he had lost. I analysed four specific aspects of this nostalgia: Sidonius' nostalgia regarding the *otium* and *negotium* of his aristocratic life in civic and personal; the value he placed on *Romanitas*, the *eloquentia* of Latin and Latin literature; his Christian hope and, finally, the sense of defiant confidence he expressed in the future.

I suggest that this exploration of the emotive elements within the letters of Sidonius Apollinaris could benefit from a more in-depth analysis encompassing the History of Emotions in the context of Late-Antique lament.

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