

Summary

My dissertation will take the form of a full and systematic commentary on Sidonius Apollinaris' 6th book of Letters accompanied by a study on the so-called "letter of mediation" in Late Antiquity. The commentary will contain an overall introduction to Sidonius and his epistolography, an introductory essay for each letter covering historical and literary context as well as overall style, and finally a lemmatized and detailed commentary covering the text itself, rhetorical figures, linguistics, and details not included in the introductory overview. It is my aim to provide not only a sense of these letters as literature, but also as sources and evidence of historical transactions, and thereby use them to illuminate the episcopal and aristocratic culture of 5th century Gaul.

The letters contained in the 6th book are mostly letters of mediation, and it thus makes sense to make a detailed study of the genre in order to attain a better understanding of the context in which they were written. This will contain a diachronic account of the classical Latin epistolographers, i.e. Cicero, Plinius the Younger, and Fronto, Sidonius' stated models, detailing the various conventions and commendatory strategies they employed as well as the transactional role of the letter of mediation in the Roman system of patronage. Having established this classical foundation, I will move on to a synchronic depiction of the letter of mediation in Late Antiquity. I will here consider Greek as well as Latin letters, pagan as well as Christian. The authors here considered will include Libanius, Basil the Great, Symmachus, and Ruricius of Limoges, to name but a few. Documentary letters conserved on papyrus will also be taken into consideration in order to establish a non-literary baseline to facilitate the interpretation of the literary letters and highlight their virtuosity. A concluding chapter on the letter of mediation in the "Long" Late Antiquity, drawing on the letters of Avitus and the Merovingian *Formulae* among other things, will serve to show how the epistolary conventions survived and adapted to the new social environment created by the collapse of Roman rule.

It is my intention throughout to highlight the sort of cases championed by the authors of these letters and the strategies employed by them in order to ensure the cooperation and benevolence of the recipient. I hope hereby to show whether any given particular strategy was associated with a specific type of client or benefactor, and whether the literary conventions and the favours requested changed along with the radical upheavals in societal structure from the time of Cicero to the time of Avitus. Even a negative result, in the form of almost total continuity, would be interesting, as it would showcase the force of literary tradition.

The results of this investigation will then be brought bear in the commentary on Sidonius. A fuller appreciation of the letter of mediation will greatly facilitate the interpretation of the act of self-representation or self-fashioning that the publication of his correspondence constitutes. It will make it clear where he follows convention and where he deviates from it, where he imitates a predecessor and where he pointedly contrasts with a model, all of which would have been clear to the learned among his contemporary audience.

Keywords: Late Roman Gaul, Sidonius Apollinaris, Epistolography, Letters of Mediation