

Orosius condemns Roman warfare and victories and stresses their negative outcomes, the human suffering. L. calls this critique of war, conquest and victory ‘proto-postcolonial discourse’. However, L. shows how Orosius’ seemingly post-colonial and pacifistic critique of Rome is soon replaced by the alliance of Christianity and Roman imperial authority. For Orosius the Christian present is better than the pagan past, and, to display this, he subverts the Roman glorified past with a mass of intertextual allusions to Graeco-Roman literature and argues that the miseries of the pre-Christian past were the punishments inflicted by the Christian God. While Orosius painstakingly lists the terrible cost for the conquered peoples during the Republic, he evades the evils of empire after the birth of Christ. Orosius’ postcolonialism becomes mismatched with his Christian political theology that propagates the Christianised Roman empire in salvific terms. As L. states, after all the *Historiae* is ‘in fact a deeply conservative text, investing heavily in the existing political status quo combined with the ostensibly orthodox version of Christianity’ (p. 117); and his ‘fervent reaction against war, and his anti-colonial stance and pacifism are, in the end, strategies in arguing against pagan historiography’ (p. 120). That goal fulfilled, Orosius moves forward with Christian imperialism.

The tension between anti-colonial discourse and Christian imperial universalism is most plain in the narrative of the sack of Rome. The concept of human sin is fundamental in Orosius’ retributivist theology in which humans are the cause of disasters: the Christian God interferes as divine judge in human affairs. War is the consequence of pagan disbelief while peace is the reward for Christian belief. The sack of Rome needs to be explained as an anomaly in an otherwise incessant peace. Thereby Orosius downplays the sack, stressing its mildness to the extent that it is represented as a peaceful non-event, omitting the violence and slaughter, portraying the attacker Alaric as the Christian ally of Rome, mocking the inhabitants of Rome as only desiring entertainment, luxury and theatres, and obscuring the fact that the city was besieged three times over two years and suffered heavily from famine. Alaric’s Goths are minimised into mere tools of God who chastises pagan Rome. In Orosius’ eschatological view, Rome is a threshing-floor on which the unworthy and irreligious are winnowed away.

L.’s volume is a wise and balanced book, filled with intellectual depth and intensive discussion. Every sentence is well-thought out and clearly formulated. Her analysis of Orosius’ ‘proto-postcolonial’ discourse and its subsequent deconstruction is thought-provoking and inspiring.

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## STUDIES ON SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS

GIANNOTTI (F.) *Scrinia Arverna. Studi su Sidonio Apollinare*. (Studi e Testi di Storia Antica 29.) Pp. 264. Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2021. Paper, €26. ISBN: 978-88-467-6240-5.

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This volume crowns 20 years of G.’s publishing activity on Sidonius Apollinaris, which includes landmarks in commentary (*Sperare meliora* on *Epist.* 3 [2016]) and reception (‘Sidonius Reception: Late 19th to 21st Centuries’, in: *Edinburgh Companion to*

*Sidonius Apollinaris* [2020]). It contains her most recent work combined with one early piece – revised in light of the latest developments wherever necessary. Chapters 1–7 deal with Sidonius’ oeuvre, Chapters 8–9 with his reception. In this way, Sidonius’ *scrinia Arverna* and their seven plus two books of letters are elegantly mirrored by the layout of G.’s own *scrinia Senensia*. A bird’s-eye view of these chapters may give an impression of her lines of research and fine-grained strategy. I add some marginal notes to start the discussion or point out related publications (English translations are mine).

Chapter 1, ‘Affinità uditive’, carefully mines the farewell poem of the *carmina minora* (*Carm.* 24) for its intertextuality in the footsteps of S. Santelia in her commentary (2002). In parallel, G. develops a stimulating thread of argument about sound effects throughout the poem. It is worth investigating whether her results can be generalised for the existence of a specifically Sidonian sound.

Chapter 2, ‘*Pronus prope o prope patrum?*’, takes up the vexed prosopographical issue, in *Carm.* 24.89 *hunc pronus prope patrum saluta*, of the exact family relationship between Thaumastus senior, to whom this line refers, and Sidonius: is he Sidonius’ paternal uncle (as commonly thought) or the husband of Sidonius’ aunt (*prope patrum* ‘almost a paternal uncle’, as recently argued by R. Mathisen in the *Companion*, pp. 58–9)? The question reverberates through the correspondence as there is a trio of frequent correspondents – Thaumastus, Apollinaris and Simplicius – who are either Sidonius’ uncles (including Thaumastus senior, as usually held) or his cousins (including Thaumastus junior, according to Mathisen). This, in turn, is consequential for the interpretation of contemporary family strife and politics. Again weighing up all arguments, G. returns to the traditional position, taking *pronus prope* together (‘bowing almost to the ground’), thus leaving an unadulterated *patrum* for Thaumastus. The discussion is certainly not closed as G. Marolla, in a forthcoming article (*CQ* 72 [2022]), is to defend a new hypothesis concerning the family tree, albeit considering Thaumastus to be a paternal uncle.

Chapter 3, ‘*Levigata pagina*’, studies *Carm.* 28 in *Ep.* 3.12, Sidonius’ epitaph of his grandfather, one of sixteen poems included in the letters. G. thinks that, once a bishop, Sidonius saw his letters as a means of nevertheless publishing some poetry. One could also argue the opposite that – given the frequency of verse in elite correspondence – his restraint is conspicuous, at least in Books 1–7 (Books 8 and 9 contain almost half of the items, and longer pieces at that). The family question resurfaces because of lines 1–2 *Serum post patruos patremque carmen | haud indignus avo nepos dicavi* ‘Late, after my uncles and father, not unworthy, I, as his grandson, have dedicated a song to my grandfather’, where G. chooses to connect *post patruos patremque* not with either *serum* or *carmen* but with *haud indignus avo*, making Sidonius pay the compliment that, like himself, his uncles and father lived up to the grandfather’s standing. Apart from the fact that this is a rather complacent sort of compliment, this interpretation begs the question why the reader of the epitaph is left in the dark which of three alternatives to choose. The most intuitive solution for the unprepared reader seems to me the link with *serum*, which – contrary to what G. thinks – is an unequivocal compliment to the second generation, paraphrased: ‘here finally, after everything my uncles and father have already done to honour grandfather, is my poem’.

Chapter 4, ‘*Mens et gloria non queunt humari*’, investigates aspects of letters 4.4, 4.11 and 4.19 as a complement to D. Amherdt’s commentary on Book 4 (2001). Especially important is what to me seems the definitive interpretation of one of Sidonius’ most intricate finales, making it into a smashing accolade for the letter bearer: 4.4.3 *porro autem cum vir bonus ab omnibus censeatur, non est homo peior, si non est optimus* ‘anyway, as he is considered first rate by everybody, there exists no one worse if *he* is

not the best'. Linguistically, this gets two things right that are ignored in other translations: the initial position of the first *est* ('exists', not copula) and the use of *si non* (not *nisi*), which stresses the negation, meaning: 'it is impossible that this man should *not* be the best'.

In the next three chapters G. turns to Book 8, which still awaits a full commentary. Chapter 5, '*Litteras nosse*', is devoted to the second letter, culminating in the famous maxim: *tam remotis gradibus dignitatum . . . solum erit posthac nobilitatis indicium litteras nosse*. G. usefully points out that the complexity of the letter's wording reflects its message of cultural sophistication. She opens up a discussion that merits being broadened beyond Sidonius, whether the last stance of *litteras nosse* was an elitist affair only (thus R. Schwitter, *Umbrosa lux* [2015]) or rather concerned the entire Latin-speaking community. While the race for exclusivity is undeniably a dominant concern for the likes of Sidonius, G.'s is a timely warning that this bias should not distort our picture of education in society as a whole.

Chapter 6, '*Vivet in posterum nominis tui gloria*', firmly establishes the link of letter 8.5 with the theme of cultural excellence as opposed to the hidden political purport claimed for this book by O. Overwien (*Hermes* 137 [2009], 93–117). A series of valuable interpretative notes – for instance, on the relationship with Pliny's correspondence and, again, sound effects – provides a rounded picture of this letter.

Chapter 7, '*Notizie da un mundus senescens*', on 8.6, is a sophisticated in-depth investigation of the successive changes in Sidonius' attitude towards the 'other' – in this letter represented by the Visigoths and the Saxons – and of the complexities of late-Roman identity. In addition to the already overcrowded bibliography on this issue of the last few years, it might nevertheless have been useful also to involve T.L. Meurer's *Vergangenes verhandeln* (2019), in particular pp. 215–32 for Cicero as a biographical and political parallel (and similarly Caesar), which would have deepened the discussion with Overwien on the balance between culture and politics in Book 8. But then, it is perhaps for a future comprehensive commentary of Book 8 to establish the full picture. This would certainly also bring out the military and political reality which – more than cultural conservationists like Sidonius would admit – was in large measure one of common ground between Romans and 'barbarians' (recently, e.g., R. Mathisen, 'The End of the Western Roman Empire in the Fifth Century CE', in: J.W. Drijvers and N. Lenski [edd.], *The Fifth Century: Age of Transformation* [2019], pp. 137–56).

Chapter 8, '*Il y a un revival de Sidoine*', is an enlarged version of G.'s chapter on reception in the *Companion*, enriched with poetry by Laurent Tailhade, Pierre Louÿs, Tristan Derème, Georges Saint-Clair, Claude Lopez-Ginistry, Vico Faggi, Jesús Pardo and Claudio Pasi. Together with Chapter 9, '*Je suis le miroir à la fin de la décadence*', which investigates the Canadian author Jean Marcel's magical mirror effects reflecting Sidonius and the end of Empire, these pieces worthily conclude a volume of essays that is carefully researched, informative and convincing. In combination with a generous bibliography and a detailed index, it is a distinctive addition to the competitive field of literature on Sidonius and his times.

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