

Gavin Kelly/Joop van Waarden (eds.): *The Edinburgh Companion to Sidonius Apollinaris*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2020. XVIII, 838 p., 1 map. £ 195.00. ISBN: 978-1-4744-6169-6.

The volume *The Edinburgh Companion to Sidonius Apollinaris* collects contributions of experts on Sidonius Apollinaris and late antique history and literature. It achieves the yet challenging goal of giving a holistic and in-depth view of all we know or might want to know about the fifth century author, influencing the new directions of study on the topic and giving inputs to new approaches. The book guides the reader into the flourishing of studies on Sidonius developed in the last decades and further promoted by the international project *Sidonius Apollinaris for the 21st century*, co-organised by the editors Gavin Kelly and Joop van Waarden; this involves an international group of scholars in the massive effort of providing a series of commentaries on the works of Sidonius.

The originality of the book lies in its being an interdisciplinary *summa* of studies on Sidonius under any possible aspect (his life and works, the historical, cultural and social context, his role as a bishop, his language and style, the manuscript tradition and the reception of his oeuvre from Late Antiquity to the present days), at the same time opening new perspectives and possible paths of research. This seek for completeness is unprecedented; the miscellaneous volumes *New Approaches to Sidonius Apollinaris*<sup>1</sup> and *Présence de Sidoine Apollinaire*<sup>2</sup> already collected valuable contributions on Sidonius, but addressed more specific topics; the cross-cutting approach used in the *Companion* and the continuous interlacing of established knowledge and new insights make the reviewed book an indispensable reference for scholars working in the field.

This approach is already evident in the first section of the volume, on “Sidonius’ Life, the Characters in his Work, and its Dating”. The contributions deal with the difficulty of distinguishing reality and literary dimension in Sidonius’ texts as well as of outlining an accurate framework of his life, chronology and social network despite the partiality of the perspective expressed

1 J. van Waarden/G. Kelly (eds.): *New Approaches to Sidonius Apollinaris*. Leuven 2013 (*Late Antique History and Religion* 7).

2 R. Poignault/A. Stoehr-Monjou (eds.): *Présence de Sidoine Apollinaire*. Clermont-Ferrand 2014 (*Caesarodunum* 44/45 bis).

in the works. Joop van Waarden analyses “Sidonius’ Biography in ‘Photo Negative’” (13–28); he tries to identify the real facts beyond the rhetorical architecture by deliberately ignoring the author’s own words and comparing what we know from other sources, what we lack, and what Sidonius decided to omit. The profile shaped by contemporary and sixth century sources is quite consistent with the image emerging from Sidonius’ own writings. Nonetheless, the vast majority of information about Sidonius’ familiar background, his career and the fifth century political context has been deliberately omitted by him; this silence, according to van Waarden, is part of a self-conscious strategy which creates cultural memory for posterity by cutting off some relevant, but troublesome, aspects, as well as the result of a subconscious process, which deletes traumatic events by actively forgetting them. Ralph Mathisen (“Sidonius’ People”, 29–75) investigates to what extent Sidonius’ poems and letters give an accurate account of the social fabric of late antique Gaul; he provides a survey of the people mentioned by the author who had been living between the fourth and the fifth century AD (445 persons, 308 named and 137 anonymous, plus 73 groups of unnamed individuals). The attempt of creating a digital database dividing prosopographical entries into categories (place of origin, ethnicity, social status, etc.) is challenged by the performative dimension of the works and by the author’s decision of including or excluding people or details in the depiction of his own world. The latter appears predominantly populated by Roman, Nicene, male, privileged Gallic individuals. Those who stood out for office holding, literary culture or family ties with the author were worthy to be mentioned in Sidonius’ pages, and this element by itself eloquently discloses the aristocratic, extremely elitist perception of his reality. Gavin Kelly (“Dating the Works of Sidonius”, 166–194) offers an insight into the chronology of Sidonius’ poems and letters, which is important for understanding their meaning as literary constructs and historical sources as well as for reconstructing the editing phases and context of circulation of the works. The panegyrics for Avitus and Majorian circulated independently before being collected with the panegyric for Anthemius and their respective prefaces; however, we do not know whether these poems, like the *carmina minora*, were gathered by Sidonius, and, if so, when the author decided to put them together for publication; in any event, none of the poems can be dated after 468–469 AD. Dating the letters is particularly difficult, since they were extrapolated from their original context by the author and re-styled to take on different meanings at the time of publication; book 1 of Sidonius’ Letters might have

circulated independently from other books, and then included in a seven book collection, which was later implemented with books 8 and 9. These could be approximately dated basing on letter 9.12, written in 479, which, according to Kelly, would not be in contrast with Sidonius' epitaph, collocating the author's death to the same year. In fact, dating the epitaph to 479 on the basis of the formula *Zenone consule*, probably the result of an interpolation, is problematic, as noted by van Waarden (15) and Mathisen (63); in addition, the description of the praised man only partially coincides with what we know about Sidonius' life. He had never been *rector militiae* (v. 4), nor being praised for giving rules to the barbarian *furor* (v. 7: *leges barbarico dedit furor*) would have been consistent with the author's strategy of self-representation in the last books of the letter collection; thus, in my opinion, the analysis of the text suggests that the profile delineated would more appropriately fit the description of Apollinaris, Sidonius' son, and would leave less room for considerations on the dating of Sidonius' death.

Section 2, "Sidonius in his Political, Social, and Religious Context" deals with the historical background of Sidonius' works, highlighting how it impacted the author's worldview. Michael Kulikowski ("Sidonius' Political World", 197–213) outlines the political situation framing Sidonius' life, assessing its relevance for the author's perception of his own age as senescent, near to death. He witnessed the abrupt succession of seven western emperors, the legitimacy of institutions and office being constantly questioned and violated. Gaul and its aristocracy were often left apart in the palace games, and this sharpens Sidonius' feeling of dyscrasia between the perduring power of the Empire as a symbol and the effective weakness of the imperial institutions. Sigrid Mratschek ("Sidonius' Social World", 214–236; "Creating Culture and Presenting the Self in Sidonius", 237–260) shows that the society depicted by Sidonius is just partially coinciding with the description of the reality surrounding him. Sidonius lives in a world in transformation, where the traditional Roman values and Christian virtues merge into a new aristocratic ethic system, and the Gallo-Roman elites are forced to reconsider their position and privileges due to the increasing power of the barbarians. The author engages in the creation of cultural identity through the allusive connection with the age of Pliny and Trajan. His works assert his vision of the cultural and political values of the Roman past across the Gothic provinces of Gaul; in particular, Sidonius conceives the letter collection as a gallery of portraits of Gallo-Roman aristocrats living according to the true

principles of *Romanitas* in a world experiencing the end of the Western Roman Empire. Lisa Kaaren Bailey (“Sidonius and Religion”, 261–275) focuses on Sidonius the bishop, analysing his approach towards religion. In his extant works, Sidonius’ self-representation cuts off aspects concerning his pastoral vision; since the letters are more concerned with the social and political implications of being a catholic bishop of aristocratic origin in fifth century Gaul, theological speculations are completely absent. Nonetheless, Bailey underlines how profoundly religion influenced the author’s way of seeing religious virtue as the utmost of the perfect aristocratic lifestyle, and his interpretation of the sin as an explanation for suffering (including the presence of the barbarians in Gaul).

Section 3, “Sidonius’ Work in its Literary Context” offers an insight into Sidonius’ approach to the literary genres and into how his works can be read in the context of the literary culture of his time. Isabella Gualandri’s essay “Sidonius’ Intertextuality” (279–316) focuses on the use of intertextuality in Sidonius’ works. Sidonius was an extremely learned reader, and his erudition clearly emerges in his poems and letters, which are full of references to the authors of the Latin literary past. Identifying textual, thematic and structural echoes is crucial for understanding Sidonius’ works and the aristocratic culture of his time. Even if allusions are not always intentional, they offer an insight into Sidonius’ way of reading classics, influenced by late antique school practices, and into his approach towards different literary genres; Sidonius’ poems and letters continuously call for readerly collaboration, and this is telling of the audience’s expectations, reading skills and literary knowledge. In “Sidonius’ Panegyrics” (317–340), Annick Stoehr-Monjou reads the panegyrics as complex texts, where the context of oral delivery, the rules of prose panegyrics and the features of epic poetry merge into an original piece of political communication; the *princeps* is styled as an epic hero acting in a dimension where rhetoric and real events overlap, which perfectly met the expectation of the intended audience. Franca Ela Consolino (“Sidonius’ Shorter Poems”, 341–372) investigates whether Sidonius uses new literary forms in the *carmina minora* or tends to find original solutions within the canonised genres. The texts are characterised by the co-existence of different genres within the same poem; the metrical and structural choices testify Sidonius’ perfect knowledge of the rules set by literary tradition as well as the tendency to find his own original solution within them. Roy Gibson (“Sidonius’ Correspondence”, 373–392) reads Sidonius’ Letters

focussing on the distinctive features of the collection with respect to the previous epistolary tradition. Epistolography has very few set rules and can be seen as a ‘non-genre’, characterised by the intrusions of elements of other literary forms. Sidonius demonstrates full awareness of the potentialities of the chosen genre; he offers to the readers one of the few self-consciously realised collections in letter writing tradition. He is the first letter writer proposing a canon of epistolographers, and shapes his own collection following his declared epistolary models, Pliny and Symmachus; this choice represents a breaking point in the history of the literary genre, making Sidonius’ collection differ from the Christian fourth and fifth century correspondences. Gibson points out that the strategy of self-representation and arrangement criteria of the work have been equally influenced by Pliny’s and Symmachus’ influence from the beginning of the collection. In my view, however, the first book of the collection is far more ‘symmachan’ than ‘plinian’ for themes and self-fashioning; acknowledging the possibility of its independent circulation, one may infer that in an early editorial phase Sidonius adjusted his self-representation on Symmachus’ precedent, and only in a second moment included book 1 in a wider structure which emulated Pliny’s narrative arch.

Section 4 (“Sidonius’ Language and Style”) offers a linguistic and prosodic analysis of Sidonius’ poems and letters; as far as the linguistic and metrical choices are concerned, the author is conservative and subversive at the same time, playing with the rules and their infraction; the main feature of Sidonius’ language and style is a perfect knowledge of the tradition and a self-willed tendency to idiosyncrasy. As stated by Étienne Wolff in the chapter “Sidonius’ Vocabulary, Syntax, and Style” (395–417), Sidonius’ style is artificial, mannerist, characterised by plays on words and sounds, deeply conditioned by intertextuality, by the aesthetic of accumulation in sentences and words, and the continuous oscillation between research of symmetries and regularity and sudden, abrupt variations. His lexical choices are influenced by the expressive potential that their sound, rhythm or allusive background can evoke. Whereas the style is “everything but the degree zero of writing” (415), rules of morphology and syntax are scrupulously correct, and generally close to classical norm. Joop van Waarden (“‘You’ and ‘I’ in Sidonius’ Correspondence”, 418–439) takes into account the apparently inconsistent use of singular and plural forms in addressing the recipients of the letters, where a single addressee can be spoken to either in the second person singular or plural. Van Waarden interprets the attested forms of ‘illogical *vos*’ in terms

of figurative nearness or distance between the person in question and the author; the singular, more familiar and direct form puts a person in the foreground, stressing his/her involvement in a certain situation, while the plural creates distance, making the interlocutor receding in the background of the communicative event. However, the use of singular and plural forms does not fit into patterns, because it is influenced by matters like the social position of the addressee, the age or rank of the interlocutors. Silvia Condorelli (“Metrics in Sidonius”, 440–461) offers a survey of the metres used by Sidonius, evaluating his adherence to prosodic rules and the reasons for his metrical choices. Sidonius’ prosody and metrical technique is accurate and in line with the tradition. The interest in technical aspects of verse composition and the use of Horatian metres, which are unusual in Late Antiquity, reveal his profound erudition and a perfect command of metrical rules, deriving from his readings and school education, as well as from practice within his circle of learned friends. Joop van Waarden and Gavin Kelly (“Prose Rhythm in Sidonius”, 462–473) analyse the use of prose rhythm in Sidonius to assess whether the sentence endings in his works are metrical, follow the word accent or are characterised by the *cursus mixtus*. The results achieved by applying Oberhelman and Hall’s method to Sidonius’ prose show that no recurring patterns in sentence endings, whether metrical or accentual, can be identified; the only exception is represented by the speech included in letter 7.9, where the *cursus mixtus* technique is consistently used. The coexistence of different rhythmic systems in sentence endings is not casual; Sidonius adapted the prose style to the genre practiced and the intended audience of his texts with self-awareness.

Section 5 provides an overview of “The Manuscript Tradition and the History of Scholarship”. Franz Dolveck’s study “The Manuscript Tradition of Sidonius” (479–507) offers an assessment of Sidonius’ manuscript tradition, proposing a new classification of its over hundred witnesses. The chapter ambitiously aims to open new potential path of research for future editors by proposing a new *stemma codicum* to be perfected in the future with a much more extensive collation of the witnesses. The element used for classification is not the presence of *lacunae*, the order of the works or whether the witnesses contain the letters and/or the poem, as it was in Lütjohann’s MGH edition, but the transmission of Ausonius’ *Caesares* with Sidonius’ texts. Sidonius’ scholarship from the *editio princeps* in 1473/74 to Lütjohann’s edition is the subject of Luciana Furbetta’s study “Sidonius Scholarship:

Fifteenth to Nineteenth Centuries” (543–563). Sidonius has been focus of a continuing editorial and exegetic activity. After the *editio princeps*, Pio’s commented edition influenced scholars working during the following two centuries. Von der Woueren, Savaron and Sirmond show constant interest for Sidonius’ literary sources, the presence of *loci similes* and internal parallels. Both Sirmond and Baret present a critical edition with a historical introduction, aiming at reading Sidonius’ works in his cultural and historical context; their activity anticipates the edition by Lütjohann (1887), which is the first modern scientific critical edition of Sidonius’ complete work. Silvia Condorelli (“Sidonius Scholarship: Twentieth to Twenty-First Centuries”, 564–617) gives an overview of the most recent scholarship on Sidonius from the early 20th century up to 2017; the listed studies (more than 500) are grouped by topic, and each entry has a short abstract. The reference list also includes Eastern European scholarship, mentioning works in Hungarian, Polish and Russian. Roger Green, “Translating Sidonius” (618–627) proposes a survey of the existing translations of Sidonius’ works from the 18th century to the 21st century, offering an insight into how Sidonius was read through the centuries. The interest of De Sauvigny’s translation, far from being accurate, lies in how an intellectual living in the time of the French revolution perceived the turbulent events of fifth century Gaul as “one of the most important revolutions that happened in Gaul” (619). Baret’s translation (1887) is characterised by an alteration of the order of texts according to a chronological principle; letters are classified by the conjectured date, and the collection of poems opens with the poetic epistle to Felix. The difficulty of bringing out the features of Sidonius’ style through translation emerges in the more accurate 20th century translations by Dalton, Anderson and Loyen: Dalton keeps some figures of Sidonius’ style, but his preference for short sentences alters the readers’ perception of the peculiarities of Sidonius’ prose. Anderson tries to imitate the complexity of Sidonius’ style by adopting an archaic style, especially in the panegyrics; this is however misleading, since Sidonius has not a particular affection for archaism. Loyen is not very attentive to the author’s style, but he is accurate. Finally, in the 21st century, Hernández Lobato’s translation of poems tries to replicate Sidonius’ precision, the taste for conceptual and sound games, the combination of words, the use of oxymora and paradoxes. In conclusion to his paper, Green offers two translations of his own, one in prose and the other in verses, of *carm.* 5, vv. 21–30.

The last part of the volume, entitled “Readers of Sidonius from Antiquity to the Present”, shows how the reception of Sidonius throughout the centuries has influenced posterity in its view of Late Antiquity and of Sidonius’ world. Ralph Mathisen (“Sidonius’ Earliest Reception and Distribution”, 631–642) deals with the circulation of Sidonius’ writings within his circle and their early reception in the years following the author’s death. We know that the works were copied by the friends and recipients of Sidonius’ letters, and this progressively contributed to the circulation of the texts in late fifth and sixth century Gaul; both Ruricius of Limoges and Gregory of Tours read and alluded to Sidonius’ letters, and the index and arrangement of the *codex Sangallensis* 190, the only witness for Ruricius’ Letters which also contained a selection of Sidonian letters, might be seen as evidence of the existence of a copy of the work in Ruricius’ archive. Tina Chronopoulos (“Glossing Sidonius in the Middle Ages”, 643–664) investigates the reasons for Sidonius’ fortune in the twelfth century by analysing the marginal and interlinear glosses to Sidonius’ works in the twelfth century manuscript London BL MS Royal 4B. IV. (B), which contains Sidonius’ Letters and Poems as well as William of Malmesbury’s collection of biographical sketches. Sidonius was no curriculum author in medieval schools, but his letters were used as templates for bureaucrats and as a “glossographic treasure trove” (645). The glosses and annotations in B are the work of an individual with excellent knowledge of the Letters, of Latin classics and late antique authors; they do not derive from a commentary for schools, but they are conceived as support for private reading of the text. Jesús Hernández Lobato (“Sidonius in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance”, 665–685) outlines the reception of Sidonius from Middle Ages to Renaissance. Sidonius is included in Alexander Neckam’s literary canon and his style influenced literary theories since the twelfth century, as emerges from Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s treatise and Alan de Lille’s considerations in his *Anticlaudianus*. Petrarca and Coluccio Salutati had a good knowledge of Sidonius’ Letters; the latter particularly appreciated his prose, and some of his writings have a distinctive Sidonian flavour. After Poliziano, who is an enthusiastic reader of late antique texts and constantly quotes Sidonius as source for linguistic, lexical and literary issues in the *Miscellaneorum centuria prima* and *secunda*, Giovan Battista Pio identifies Sidonius as expression of the richness of non-classical Latinity, opposing a new literary canon comprising archaic and late antique authors to the Ciceronianism prevailing in the contemporary scholarship. Joop van Waarden’s analysis of “Sidonius Reception: Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries” (686–704) steps

into the 16th century, when Sidonius was considered an example of learning, a source of witty quotations, and a historical source. These aspects continue affecting Sidonius' reception in France until the turning of the 19th century; his increasing fame after Sirmond's and Savaron's editions is testified by the flourishing of forgeries, by the use of his figure to legitimate the nobility of the lineage of the dukes of Polignac, or by Du Bois' attempt to justify absolutism on the basis of Sidonius' praise of the emperors. On the other hand, intellectuals in Germany and Britain seem more concerned with the stylistic features of Sidonius' texts, which nevertheless are considered an important historical source on the late Roman Empire and on the barbarians. Filomena Giannotti ("Sidonius Reception: Late Nineteenth to Twenty-First Centuries", 705–729) scrutinises the reception from the 19th century to present. The idea of Sidonius as a sophisticated, decadent poet prevails in the 19th century, as emerging from Haysman's words, and still in the period between the two World Wars, the works by Buchan, Graves and Derème reflect this opinion. The image of Sidonius as one of the last Romans living in a dying Empire is the *fil rouge* emerging from the novels written between the end of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st: Marcel, Pears and Montebello's characters, inspired to the historical figure of the fifth century author, are near to the profile resulting from Sidonius' own self-representation; the understanding of Sidonius as symbol of human resistance in a period of crisis is evidence of the persistence of Sidonius' legacy, and of the immortality of his words and ideological message.

The *Epilogue* is dedicated to the "Future Approaches to Sidonius" (730–736), from editing to works on late antique history, literature and material culture, mentioning commentaries and translations which are yet to come, proposing the application of new methodologies to the study of Sidonius. The volume concludes with the list of bibliography and indexes. The list of known facts of Sidonius' life (annex to Joop van Waarden's "Sidonius' Biography in Photo Negative", 26–28), the prosopography from fourth century onwards and the geographical appendix attached to Mathisen's chapter on people in Sidonius ("A Prosopography of Sidonius" 76–154, "Sidonius' Places: A Geographical Appendix" 155–165), the "Statistics of the clausulae in Books 1, 7 and 9" (in appendix to the article on prose rhythm, 474–475), the "Census of the Manuscripts in Sidonius" (508–542) at the end of Dolveck's study and Condorelli's reference list of Sidonius' scholarship up to 2017 (566–617), add further value to this thought-provoking book.

Although Sidonius is one of the most studied authors of Late Antiquity, many questions are still unanswered (when did Sidonius die? How did he live his religious beliefs? What are the editing phases of his collections?), much still needs to be done, like a new *constitutio textus*, the implementation of a linguistic approach to the text, an in-depth analysis of how Sidonius internalised his *fontes*. Sidonius filled his works with details concerning his universe – his friends and enemies, the family, his readings, the beloved homeland. However, his colourful, multifaceted production is deprived of chronological references, of information about the author's own life and relatives, of vivid and realistic geographic descriptions. Everything in Sidonius' writings is rhetoric and literature, and aims at shaping the author's own existential experience as symbol of what being Roman means, leaving to the future generations a cultural message. The multiple approaches proposed in the *Companion* catch the complexity of Sidonius' production; they unveil the man beyond the literary construct, deconstruct and analyse in detail the rhetorical architecture, and show how the transmission and the reception of the texts over the centuries impacted on our way of reading them in the 21st century. In conclusion, Sidonius wanted his texts to become a monument immortalising the values he believed in, his cult of the past and his fights for the future. By addressing new questions, the *Edinburgh Companion* writes another chapter of the fortune of Sidonius' works and of their legacy to our world.

---

Sara Fascione, Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen  
Institut für Altertumswissenschaften  
sara.fascione@klassphil.uni-giessen.de

**www.plekos.de**

Empfohlene Zitierweise

Sara Fascione: Rezension zu: Gavin Kelly/Joop van Waarden (eds.): The Edinburgh Companion to Sidonius Apollinaris. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2020. In: Plekos 22, 2020, 421–430 (URL: [http://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2020/r-kelly\\_van-waarden.pdf](http://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2020/r-kelly_van-waarden.pdf)).

---