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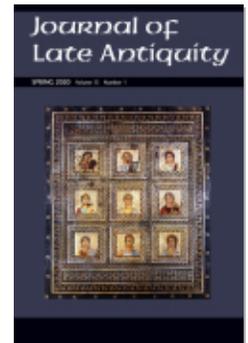
## Leisure and the Muses in Sidonius Apollinaris

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## Leisure and the Muses in Sidonius Apollinaris

The works of Sidonius Apollinaris long have been the subject of interest in historical and theological studies, for he documents the life of the Gallo-Roman elite in a time of social and political upheaval.<sup>1</sup> However, his role as a Latin-writing author of poems and letters, who follows and transforms the Roman literary tradition, has only recently been appreciated. The aim of the conference “Muse und Muße bei Sidonius Apollinaris,”<sup>2</sup> which was held 12–13 January 2018 at the University of Basel, Switzerland, thus was to focus on the “literary” Sidonius. Revised versions of eight of the papers presented at the conference are collected in this special issue. In the following pages we introduce the issue’s theme and then offer an overview of its individual contributions.

The two terms *Muße* (leisure) and *Muse* (Muse), near homonyms in German, open up a field of interpretation that covers the themes of inspiration, production, and reception of literature in Late Antiquity. In Sidonius’s letters and poems, leisure and the Muses are closely connected; each promotes the other, manifesting themselves as part of the Greco-Roman and Christian traditions. Writing in Gaul in a time of political tensions, Sidonius faced the question of whether he needed undisturbed leisure to write his poems, *encomia* and letters like his predecessors and what role the Muses would play in his various writings of different literary genres. In his time *otium* was a privilege of the elite, who represented themselves as being unaffected by prevailing uncertainty and instability while they enjoyed an undisturbed *otium* in the

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<sup>1</sup> Compare the comprehensive bibliography dating back to the fifteenth century on the Sidonius project’s website <https://sidonapol.org/918-2/>.

<sup>2</sup> The English title of this special issue has been slightly altered from the German to read: “The Muses and Leisure in Sidonius Apollinaris.”

timeless setting of their suburban estates.<sup>3</sup> Using literary motifs and narratives appears to be a way of reassurance of Sidonius's values and his self-portrayal as a poet.<sup>4</sup> The Muse(s) thereby play an important role for him as they symbolize creativity and at the same time the long literary tradition to which he was committed. After the beginning of Greek literature in the eighth-seventh centuries BCE,<sup>5</sup> the Muses were still being invoked in late antique literature more than a thousand years later. Although Christian authors such as Paulinus of Nola, Lactantius, Augustine and Boethius rejected the Muses as deities and replaced them with other instances of inspiration, the Muses continued to exist as synonyms for poetry and often were integrated into Christian contexts by allegorization.<sup>6</sup>

In his letters and poems Sidonius invokes the Muse(s) many times in various ways, jesting, asking them for help, and even rejecting them. In one letter his patron Caecina Basilius<sup>7</sup> casually (*heia!*) asks Sidonius to show his old muse again by composing a panegyric for Anthemius, who is about to start his second consulate: "Hey, Sidonius, my dear friend . . . I want you to reveal (*exseras*) your old Muse to indulge a new consul."<sup>8</sup> The verb *exserere*, which not only means "to get out," "to show," and "to let hear," but also "to undress," forms a double entendre in relation to a Muse as a female figure.<sup>9</sup> This fits the subsequent image of the poem as a play (*hoc ludo*), which, according to the patron, could also be helpful in serious matters. With the *vetus Musa* Basilius alludes in particular to Sidonius's previous poetic compositions, including imperial panegyrics for Avitus and Majorian which Sidonius delivered in the years 456 and 458.<sup>10</sup> Sidonius responds to Basilius's request and composes another *panegyricus* (*Carmen* 2) for which he subsequently was rewarded with the office of *praefectus urbi*. In *Carmen* 12 though Sidonius lets his *Musa iocata*, his "joking muse" (lines 20–21), remain silent in the face of the invasion of Lyon by the Burgundians, and instead of a cheerful *epithalamium* he laments satirically about barbarians who smell of butter and garlic. The Muse here is not only an inspiring divine figure, but also Sidonius's energetic ally in the fight against illiteracy and barbarism.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the papers of Van Waarden, Dell'Anno, Hindermann and Hanaghan in this volume.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Stähle in this volume; Mratschek 2017, 313–22.

<sup>5</sup> Both Homeric poems start with an invocation of the Muses and Hesiod introduces the idea of inspiration by the Muses at the beginning of his *Theogony*.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Lact. *Div. Inst.* 1.5.10; Paul. Nol. *Carm.* 10.19–28; 15.30–33; Aug. *Retract.* 1.3.2; Boeth. *Cons.* 1.1.7–11; Schindler, Moormann, and Deckers 2013, 196–201; Schlapbach 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Köhler 1995, 269.

<sup>8</sup> Sid. *Ap. Ep.* 1.9.5–6: *Heia, inquit, Solli meus . . . exseras volo in obsequium novi consulis veterem Musam.*

<sup>9</sup> Neger, forthcoming.

<sup>10</sup> For Sidonius's *panegyrici* cf. Stoehr-Monjou (2020).

At the beginning of his poem addressed to bishop Faustus (*Carm.* 16.1–6), however, the author turns away from Apollo and the Muses and appeals to the Holy Spirit for help and inspiration (*magis ille veni nunc spiritus, oro v. 5*).<sup>11</sup> As these few examples show, the Muse(s) appear in Sidonius’s writings in different guises.<sup>12</sup> Because they symbolize creativity which belongs to one’s leisure time, they sometimes also are at odds with Sidonius’s political and professional activity to which he is committed as a member of the elite.

Sidonius’s literary work is characterized by another concept, the duality of leisure and work, or *otium* and *negotium*. The question of how to spend one’s free time properly has occupied many prominent Roman authors—Horace, Cicero, Seneca and Pliny the Younger being among them<sup>13</sup>—and was picked up and explored by Christian authors.<sup>14</sup> The authors before Sidonius who devoted themselves to the subject understood very different things by *otium*, depending on the genre of their literary works. The meaning of *otium* ranges from the negatively connoted “idleness” to the *otium honestum*, “honorable retirement,” after a fulfilled political and military career. *Otium* is also associated with concepts such as “freedom,” “idyll,” and “happiness,” and it often is opposed to *negotium*, that is, occupation and professional commitment.<sup>15</sup>

In his offices as prefect of Rome 468 (*praefectus urbi*) and bishop in the Auvergne,<sup>16</sup> Sidonius led a life full of *negotium* and enjoyed quite a lot of *otium* in the traditional senatorial manner. However, his career was interrupted by political upheaval such that he was forced into a kind of involuntary *otium*: his exile in Livia near Carcassonne in the years 475 till 476.<sup>17</sup> In 476/77 he was pardoned and reinstated as bishop. He had experienced a similar change of fortune earlier in his life, having achieved great public success when he was invited to recite his panegyric (*Carm.* 7) for his father-in-law Avitus in Rome on 1 January 456 and was rewarded with a statue.<sup>18</sup> In the years between 461 and 465, after the emperor Majorian whom he also praised

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Schlapbach and Mratschek in this volume.

<sup>12</sup> In addition to the passages mentioned, also e.g. in Sid. Ap. *Carm.* 5.568, 6.30, 10.17, 13.35, 14.6, 22.12, 22.20; *Ep.* 1.9.6–7, 4.3.9, 5.17.1, 5.17.9, 5.21.1, 8.11.3; cf. André 2009.

<sup>13</sup> André 1962; Hasebrink and Riedl 2014; Eickhoff, Kofler, and Zimmermann 2016; Hindermann 2016; Wiegandt 2020.

<sup>14</sup> For the Christian transformation of *otium* and its adaption to the monastic lifestyle Schlapbach 2013, 363–68.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Harter 2016, who differentiates eight contexts in which the term is used in Roman letter literature. For Sidonius’s concept of *otium* see André 2006 and Hindermann in this volume.

<sup>16</sup> Sidonius became bishop between 469 and 471. For Sidonius’s biography cf. Stevens 1933, Harries 1994. In contrast to previous biographies which ignore the performative and manipulative character of Sidonius’s self-statements, Van Waarden (2020) questions Sidonius’s self-representation.

<sup>17</sup> For Sidonius’s self-presentation in exile, cf. Hanaghan 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Sidon. *Carm.* 8.7–10; *Ep.* 9.16.3 v. 25–28; Hanaghan 2017, 273–74.

(*Carm.* 5) was murdered, Sidonius had to spend a long period of *otium* on his estate Avitacum.

As Sidonius's life moved between positions of power and powerlessness, he experienced firsthand the change between *negotium* and *otium* and through his personal experiences intermingled in a multifaceted way the classical motif of opposition between leisure and occupation. His letters contain both positive representations of *otium* but likewise orders to his friends to interrupt their *otium* and turn to *negotium*.<sup>19</sup> Within his competitive network of learned friends, Sidonius tried to navigate the question of poetic inspiration and spending one's leisure time in a meaningful way.<sup>20</sup>

The first three articles in this special issue are devoted to the theme of the Muses. In her "The Silence of the Muses in Sidonius Apollinaris (*Carm.* 12–13; *Ep.* 8.11): Aphasia and the Timelessness of Poetic Inspiration," Sigrid Mratschek investigates Sidonius's conspicuous reference to the silence of the Muses and Apollo. She argues that this statement signifies neither a general decline of poetry in Late Antiquity nor a lasting silence on the poet's own part. A psychological approach instead is used to show that Sidonius, in discourse with the changing voices of the Muses, created a series of self-portraits (as petitioner of Majorian; as host to the Burgundians; as a human suffering deeply after the murder of Lampridius) that proves instrumental for explaining his well-crafted *persona* in relation to his world. It is paradoxically the "silence of the Muse," the trope for the poet's loss of speech, that most clearly displays the gamut of the emotions of the poetic *persona*. Using his allegory of the "silent Muse" and the literary technique of allusion, Sidonius evokes a multi-layered world of imagery that enables him to overcome his traumatic experience and to turn his readers into spectators who are alert and responsive to the troubles of their epoch.

Karin Schlapbach reads Sidonius's *Carmina* 9 and 12 as a poetics of uncertainty and cognitive displacement. The citation *veriora nomina Camenarum* (*Ep.* 5.2.1) in her article's title associates the Muses in more than one way with education and knowledge. Sidonius places himself in a learned tradition that disposes of the mythic-cultic conception of the ancient divinities of inspiration in favor of their rational explanation as personified *artes*, then eliminates the idea of personification, along with the traditional names of the Muses. This does not mean of course that poetic inspiration and talent are absent from Sidonius's poetry, but rather that their role is more elusive than simply serving as the cultural baggage acquired through a traditional education in the *artes* and poetic canon. Schlapbach accordingly puts into perspective the ostentatious

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Sidon. *Ep.* 2.2, 2.14. Cf. Hindermann in this volume.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Schwitter in this volume.

display of culture and erudition in some of the poems by drawing attention to the ways in which culture and erudition are undermined and deflated.

Ann-Kathrin Stähle shows that in Sidonius's *Carmina*, Apollo Musagetes, the leader of the Muses, not only serves as a figure of inspiration, but also as a sort of substitute, both for the poet singing praises and for the princeps being praised. Through Apollo, the poet thematizes his general handling of the panegyric. The title of Stähle's article, "Apollo Apollinaris," references the divine scene of Apollo and Dionysus developed in *Carmen* 22, which is designed by the poet in such a way that Apollo embodies the *homo privatus* Sidonius and Dionysus acts as the poet's *alter ego*, a *homo politicus*. That Apollo stands allegorically for Sidonius is reinforced by the fact that the poet was once nicknamed Phoebus and that his cognomen "Apollinaris" is etymologically derived from Apollo.

In his paper "Rival Friends: Sidonius Apollinaris and Literary Competitiveness in Late Antique Gaul," Raphael Schwitter explores the intertwined issues of poetic inspiration and of spending one's time in leisure. He examines the meaning of *studia litterarum* pursued in *otium* and illuminates the status that poetic competition and literary rivalry had within late antique peer groups. In the friendship groups of Ausonius, Symmachus or Sidonius Apollinaris, aristocratic competition was played out primarily in demanding literary short-form compositions which were authored during *otium*. Despite its context of competitiveness, the agonistic coloring of late antique *nugae* literature is scarcely perceptible in the texts. This is, however, the result of the transmission of what were once occasional pieces in the medium of the book and the resulting semantic reorganisation such a new medium provides. In deliberate contrast to the common interpretation of "small literature," *nugae*, as the expression of artfully learned playfulness (*lusus*), Schwitter's reading recalls the competitive context of the initial production and reception and thus achieves a clearer understanding of the significance and function of his poems as an aristocratic mode of interaction.

The next four contributions are devoted to the theme of leisure in Sidonius. The spatial location of *otium*, the villas, play a central role as well as the relationship between space and time in the constitution of *otium*. In her article "At Leisure with Pliny the Younger: Sidonius's Second Book of the *Epistulae* as a Book of *Otium*," Judith Hindermann interprets Sidonius's second book of letters as a book of leisure and analyzes his interplay with Pliny the Younger. For Sidonius, one of the important elements of *otium* is the life and daily routine in the villa. In his *Epp.* 2.2 and 2.9, Sidonius first addresses the spatial and then the temporal sequence of an ideal day in the *otium* of the villa. Another aspect of leisure is the role of one's wife in studying and producing literature (*Ep.* 2.10). In addition, Sidonius reflects on his idea of *otium* by coining new expressions (*otiositates*, *otium fuliginosum*) within the semantic

field of leisure (*Ep.* 2.14). The close connection between *otium* and *negotium* is shown by the positioning of the second book and the intratextual connection of the letters in the first three books.

In his article “Competing at *Otium*? A Juxtaposed Reading of Sidonius’s Baths,” Michael Hanaghan demonstrates how Sidonius engages in competitive aristocratic display by inviting the reader to compare the magnificence of the baths at his villa, Avitacum in *Ep.* 2.2 and *Carm.* 18 and 19, with the extravagance of Pontius Leontius’s baths (*Carm.* 22), and contrasts them with the shoddy, makeshift bath of his uncles, Apollinaris and Ferreolus (*Ep.* 2.9). Direct contrast to the baths of his uncles, informed by the conception of juxtaposition, shows how Sidonius uses his baths to display his *paideia* and political importance, something which his uncles’ bath is unable to do for its owners. The conclusion offers a socio-historical rationale for the juxtaposition of the baths by presenting the epistolary dynamic as evidence of Sidonius’s embrace of his wife’s family, from which he inherited his own estate Avitacum.

Laila Dell’Anno examines *Carm.* 22 from a different perspective, looking at the description of the villa as “an ecphrasis of *otium*.” At the center of Sidonius Apollinaris’s *Carm.* 22 is a 100-verse ecphrasis of his patron Pontius Leontius’s castle in southern Gaul. The poetic digression produces a vivid description which not only places the castle’s architectural beauties before the reader’s eyes, but also reproduces the perception of timelessness characteristic of leisure. Starting from a conception of *otium* as a chronotopos, that is, a phenomenon of space and time, she analyzes how the poet extends the use of the ecphrastic technique to achieve what could be called an “ecphrasis of *otium*.”

In his article “*Amicitia*, *Otium* and the Chronotope of Sidonius’s Correspondence,” Joop Van Waarden refers to Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the “chronotope” and the various forms of time and place that define narrative and biography. This concept is here applied to time in epistolary *amicitia*, with an excursus on *otium*. In Sidonius’s highly crafted letter-collection, aimed to be an effective ego-document, the “envelope” of *amicitia* essentially transcends mere politeness. It lays bare the instability that is at the root of constantly negotiating support as well as the elusiveness of the present between an idealized past and an uncertain future. In seeking to alter the course of events, the ambiguity of time is Sidonius’s only weapon. As a letter writer, Sidonius occupies a transitional position as the endpoint of Roman senatorial epistolography and the beginning of early medieval letter-collections.

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