

Van Waarden, J.A. 2009. *Writing to Survive. A Commentary on Sidonius Apollinaris, Letters Book 7, I: The Episcopal Letters 1-11*. PhD thesis, University of Amsterdam. 514 p. Promotor: prof.dr D. den Hengst, University of Amsterdam; copromotor: prof.dr J. den Boeft, Free University Amsterdam.

This dissertation is a commentary on a group of letters which Sidonius Apollinaris, a late fifth-century bishop of Clermont, wrote to a number of fellow-bishops in Gaul. The letters are all concerned, directly or indirectly, with the state of war between 470 and 475 in Clermont, a Roman bastion defended in vain by Sidonius against the advancing Goths. For Sidonius correspondence was ‘writing to survive’.

The commentary proper is preceded by an introduction, which deals first with the life and work of Sidonius, the historical, social and intellectual context, and the increasingly important role of the bishop. A separate investigation into the Council of Arles in the early 470s provides insight into the episcopal hierarchy of that time. A further section is about epistolography, about ‘decoding’ Sidonius’ letters, and about the structure and meaning of Book 7.

Then language and style of the correspondence are analysed. The analysis covers problems which range from intertextuality to prose rhythm. It is suggested that Sidonius’ style should be defined as ‘bipolar’, built on the alternation of—and the tension between—irregularity and regularity. The section “‘You’ and ‘I’” tackles the problem that in one and the same letter the recipient can be addressed with *tu* and *vos*; likewise the sender is either *ego* or *nos*. The interpretation breaks new ground: the choice between singular and plural by the sender is subjective, and is a matter of foreground and background.

Finally, an attempt is made at a comprehensive view. To define Sidonius’ prose as ‘mannerism’, as is often done, turns out to be unsatisfactory. Rather, it is suggested, we should speak of ‘formalized prose’ and ‘community art’, aiming at establishing contact with the addressee.

The main part of the thesis provides each letter, and the speech which is included in the collection, with a detailed commentary. The traditional philological-historical approach is broadened by applying modern views from the field of linguistics and literary theory to this late antique text. The book concludes with appendices and a comprehensive bibliography.

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