

SUMMARY

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Episcopal Self-Fashioning: Sidonius Apollinaris and the Episcopal Election in Bourges AD 470

The episcopal election in Bourges AD 470 was a high point in Sidonius Apollinaris' career as a bishop. Soon after his own election he was called upon to provide a solution for the complex situation created by the vacancy of the metropolitan see in Bourges. This office was hotly contested by clerics, monks and lay candidates. The town did not even succeed in drawing up a shortlist. The situation was further complicated by the Visigothic presence and the Arian faction. Sidonius managed to impose the candidate of his choice, a local grandee.

In this paper, I will look at Sidonius' description of the events with Stephen Greenblatt's idea of literary 'self-fashioning' in mind in order to gain insight into the interplay between the correspondence and its social and historical setting.

I will evaluate the procedure and its original aims on the basis of a fresh analysis of Sidonius' own testimony (*Ep.* 7.5, 7.8 and 7.9). When Sidonius afterwards revised and published his correspondence in different political circumstances, the selection and arrangement of the letters created new overtones. By means of the procedure, and by the choice of the candidate, Sidonius aimed to develop the profile of the bishop as being the key player in the community, with the anti-Arian *honorati* forming the backbone. Once embedded in the structure of book 7 of the correspondence, this message acquired clear political overtones. All in all, Sidonius seized the opportunity of this election to enhance his complex persona as a bishop, a politician and a literate person, intent on preserving as many of his interests and ideals as possible, while at the same time being conscious of having to adapt to a new era.