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Translation *vs* Decadence.
Revisiting Sidonius Apollinaris' *Ep.* 8, 3*

The third letter of Sidonius Apollinaris' book 8 poses one of the most complex and debated translation problems in Late Antiquity. Since controversial exegetical hypotheses have accumulated over the years, the purpose of this paper is twofold: briefly retracing them, so that they can be subsequently compared with the most recent theses advanced by some scholars since 2020, and introducing a new argument in support of one of these hypotheses (and, consequently, regarding the thorny question of Sidonius' knowledge of Greek). It is necessary, however, to start from a brief overview of Sidonius' *Ep.* 8, 3¹.

This letter certainly dates back to the end of 476 or, at the latest, to the beginning of 477², soon after Sidonius, bishop of Clermont-Ferrand, was exiled and imprisoned in *moenia Liuviana*, near Carcassone, because of the military and cultural campaign he had led against the Visigoths.

The addressee's name is Leo, and he was an aristocrat, a native of Narbonne. A *spectabilis uir*, he became a minister of King Euricus of the Visigoths. As we infer from this letter, Leo helped Sidonius to be pardoned by Euricus and freed from exile. He was a descendant of the rhetor Fronto, and is praised many times as a poet in other letters. He is also mentioned once as a jurist³.

Regarding the content, the epistle is a covering letter of a work that Sidonius had prepared on *The Life of Apollonius* by Philostratus⁴. Unfortunately this work is lost, and the only available information for it is based on this letter. As we know, Apollonius

* This article is a revised version of the paper *Challenging Decadence Through Translation. A Literary Example from Sidonius Apollinaris (ep. 8.3) and his work on Philostratus' Vita Apollonii*, presented at the International Conference *Translation and the Limits of Greek-Latin Bilingualism in Late Antiquity (AD 300-600)*, held at All Souls College and at Wolfson College in Oxford on 8 and 9 July, 2022. I wish to thank both the convenors of the Conference, Dr. Alison John and Dr. Alan Ross, for their warm welcome to Oxford, as well as Prof. Alfredo Casamento for accepting my article in this journal.

¹ The most vital and essential tool for any research on this author is now G. KELLY, J. VAN WAARDEN (eds.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Sidonius Apollinaris*, Edinburgh 2020, along with the website www.sidonapol.org, created by Joop van Waarden.

² G. KELLY, *Dating the Works of Sidonius*, in KELLY, VAN WAARDEN, *Edinburgh Companion*, cit., pp. 166-194: p. 187. See also *Sidoine Apollinaire*, texte établi et traduit par A. LOYEN, I. *Poèmes*, Paris 1960; II. *Lettres (Livres I-V)*; III. *Lettres (Livres VI-IX)*, Paris 1970: II, p. 216, number 3 and F.-M. KAUFMANN, *Studien zu Sidonius Apollinaris*, Frankfurt 1995, p. 62, note 93.

³ R.W. MATHISEN, *A Prosopography of Sidonius*, in KELLY, VAN WAARDEN, *Edinburgh Companion*, cit., pp. 76-154: p. 104, with further bibliography.

⁴ See now the critical edition by G. BOTER, Flavius Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii Tyanei*, Berlin-Boston 2022, with updated bibliography. See also A. CAMERON, *The Last Pagans of Rome*, Oxford-New York 2011, pp. 554-558.

was the famous Greek Neopythagorean philosopher from Tyana, in the Roman province of Cappadocia. He lived from 3 BCE to 97 CE according to the Greek sophist Philostratus, who, more than a century later, wrote *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, the first biography of him, which is also the most detailed source on his life, even though in novelistic form. As for the question of Apollonius' miracles, it will suffice here to mention that comparisons between Apollonius and Jesus became very common from the third century on, and that Apollonius started to be seen as a pagan counterpart to Jesus.

In terms of structure, in the first part (paragraphs 1-2) the letter contains an apology for the fact that *The Life of Apollonius* by Sidonius was hastily and badly written, and delivered late. Sidonius' justifications are the difficulties he experienced during his imprisonment, especially the fatigue caused by some duties imposed on him, and the noise at night from two old Gothic women living near his bedroom: *quibus nil umquam litigiosius bibacius uomacius erit* (ep. 8, 3, 2). The central part of the letter (paragraphs 3-5) consists in a series of suggestions to Leo to lay aside all his commitments and pay proper attention to the book. Leo, who seems to be very similar to Apollonius in most respects, is also praised in the conclusion (paragraph 6).

At the heart of this article is the most obscure and debated point of this letter. It is uncertain as to which text Sidonius had to work on, as well as the precise nature of the task assigned to him (ep. 8, 3, 1-2)⁵:

Apollonii Pythagorici uitam, non ut Nicomachus senior e Philostrati sed ut Tascius Victorianus e Nicomachi schedio excrpsit, quia iusseras, misi; quam, dum parere festino, celeriter eiecit in tumultuarium exemplar turbida et praecepta et Opica translatio. [...] Sane, cum primum reduci aliquid otii fuit, inpolitum hunc semicrudumque et, ut aiunt, tamquam musteum librum plus desiderii tui quam officii mei memor obtuli.

Thus, Sidonius writes that, complying with Leo's requirements (*quia iusseras*), he is sending him *The Life of Apollonius* (*Apollonii Pythagorici uita*), however not as the elder Nicomachus *excrpsit* it from the *schedium* of Philostratus, but as Tascius Victorianus *excrpsit* it from the *schedium* of Nicomachus.

Who are the two people involved here, in addition to Philostratus?

As is well-known, Virius Nicomachus Flavianus, called the Elder, or the father (334-394 CE), was the famous historian and politician from the Nicomachi, the influential family of senatorial rank, and from the pagan circle which also included Vettius Agorius Praetextatus and Quintus Aurelius Symmachus. Among other things, he was a consul in 394, under the usurper Eugenius, and committed suicide after Eugenius' death in the battle of the Frigidus⁶.

As for Tascius Victorianus, it is only known that he was a scholar and editor of texts, patronised by the Simmachi and Nicomachi. He edited the first ten books of Livy⁷.

⁵ Here and elsewhere the text follows Loyen's critical edition (see above, note 2). For a translation of this passage see below in this article.

⁶ J.R. MARTINDALE, *The Prosopography of the Late Roman Empire*, vol. I. A.D. 160-395, Cambridge 1971, vol. II. A.D. 395-527, Cambridge 1980: II, pp. 347-349.

⁷ MARTINDALE, *The Prosopography*, cit., II, pp. 1160-1161.

Due to the haste to obey Leo's wish (*dum parere festino*), the *turbida et praeceps et Opica translatio* made a *tumultuarium exemplar*. Further on, Sidonius adds that, after returning home, he nevertheless fulfilled his task, and sent the *liber* to his friend, even though it was *inpolitus, semicrudus et tamquam musteus*.

The ambiguity of many of these words has raised some questions to which, as mentioned earlier, there are a series of differing possible answers⁸.

The first question is related to the possibility of a Greek transcription. According to some experts, including Anderson⁹ and Cameron¹⁰, Sidonius may have worked on the Greek text of *The Life of Apollonius* by Philostratus, and may have been requested to make a simple transcription of it. It is unclear what role Nicomachus played in relation to Philostratus on the one hand, and what role Tascius Victorianus played in relation to Nicomachus on the other. According to Cameron, Nicomachus only had Philostratus' text (in Greek, of course), but had not translated it, while Victorianus made a copy of the Greek text owned by Nicomachus, and subscribed it with a formula such as *emendavi ego Tascius Victorianus de codice Nicomachi Flavianii senioris*¹¹. In each case, on the basis of this first hypothesis, all three works are considered to be in Greek.

It has also been thought, namely by Pricoco¹² and Loyen¹³, and, more recently, by Overwien¹⁴, that Sidonius worked on the Greek text but was requested to compile a piece of work in Latin from it. It would seem that this work was a translation, perhaps with possible reductions. In that case, therefore, the works of Nicomachus and Victorianus are considered to be in Greek, however the problem of identifying possible differences between their copies remains. According to Loyen, Victorianus' work may be an abbreviated version¹⁵. On the other hand, Sidonius' work is expected to have been a creative translation in Latin.

A third proposal has been advanced, first by Seeck¹⁶ and Mommsen¹⁷, and later

⁸ A good starting point for the study of the whole question, with a detailed review of the different points of view and the various arguments used in one way or another, is I. PRCHLIK, *Sidonius or Flavianus: By Whom Was Philostratus' Vita Apollonii Translated into Latin?*, in *GLP* 22, 2007, pp. 199-210, beginning with two of the first modern commentaries on Sidonius, the 16-17th century editions by Jean Savaron and Jacques Sirmond.

⁹ *Sidonius, Poems and Letters*, with an English translation, introduction, and notes by W.B. ANDERSON, I. *Poems, Letters, Books I-II*, Cambridge Ma.-London 1936; II. *Letters, Books III-IX*, Cambridge Ma.-London 1965 (completed by W.H. SEMPLE and E.H. WARMINGTON): II, pp. 404-405, note 5; but see, in the same note, Warmington, who prefers to align himself with TH. MOMMSEN, in CH. LÜTJOHANN (ed.), *Gaii SOLLII Apollinaris Sidonii epistulae et carmina*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi 8, Berolini 1887, p. 420.

¹⁰ CAMERON, *The Last Pagans*, cit., pp. 548-554; but cfr. A. CAMERON, *Paganism and Literature in Late Fourth Century Rome*, in A. CAMERON, M. FUHRMANN, P.L. SCHMIDT (éds.), *Christianisme et formes littéraires de l'antiquité tardive en Occident*, Vandroeuves-Genève 1977, p. 13, where Cameron took a diametrically opposed view.

¹¹ CAMERON, *The Last Pagans*, cit., pp. 553-554.

¹² S. PRICOCO, *Studi su Sidonio Apollinare*, in *Nuovo Didaskaleion* 15, 1965, pp. 69-150: pp. 71-98.

¹³ LOYEN, *Sidoine Apollinaire*, cit., III, pp. 196-197, note 5.

¹⁴ O. OVERWIEN, *Kampf um Gallien. Die Briefe des Sidonius Apollinaris zwischen Literatur und Politik*, in *Hermes* 137, 2009, pp. 93-117: pp. 98-100.

¹⁵ LOYEN, *Sidoine Apollinaire*, cit., III, pp. 196-197, note 5.

¹⁶ O. SEECK (ed.), *Q. Aurelii Symmachi quae supersunt*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi 6.1, Berolini, 1883, p. CXV.

¹⁷ MOMMSEN, cit.

by Pecere¹⁸, Prchlik¹⁹ and Mülke²⁰ (among many others²¹): Sidonius' passage may be proof (the only evidence we have) that Nicomachus had written a Latin translation of *The Life of Apollonius*. The next stage of this process, represented by Victorianus, might be in Latin as well, but it is uncertain in what form. The suggestion of an abbreviated version has been made several times, for example by Mazzarino, together with the idea of a possible deletion of the most pagan details²². Pecere believes that Victorianus made an edition of a text not officially published by Nicomachus²³. Finally, Prchlik reinvestigated a proposal put forward by Loyen and immediately rejected by himself, according to which Victorianus translated the *Life of Apollonius* into Latin again, after Nicomachus' translation²⁴. His own conclusion is that Victorianus' further translation may be due to the fact that «after his death by Frigidus Flavianus was punished with the *damnatio memoriae*. Of the fortune of his writings, then, we can only wonder»²⁵. As for Sidonius, it would appear that, in this case, he made a transcription of this last Latin version.

This wide range of opinions is due to the various choices concerning four different issues that should now be considered one by one.

First of all, the interpretation of the word *schedium*. It is used three times by Sidonius, here and in *ep.* 9, 7, 1²⁶ and 9, 16, 2²⁷. According to Pecere, in Sidonian use, *schedium* seems to be referring to the primary drafting of a text which has yet to be published, as is clear from *ep.* 9, 16, where the word indicates the material extracted from old papers (*chartulae*) in view of the publication of book 9 of his letters²⁸. For other scholars, the word means «manuscript» (Anderson²⁹ and Loyen³⁰), or «book» (Cameron³¹).

Secondly, the interpretation of the word *exscribere*. This verb is used by Sidonius for the work done by Nicomachus on Philostratus' *schedium*, and for the work by Victorianus on Nicomachus' *schedium*. It might therefore indicate both the act of simply copying

¹⁸ O. PECERE, *La tradizione dei testi latini tra IV e V secolo attraverso i libri sottoscritti*, in A. GIARDINA (ed.), *Tradizione dei classici. Trasformazioni della cultura*, Roma-Bari 1986, pp. 19-81; pp. 60-61.

¹⁹ PRCHLIK, *Sidonius or Flavianus*, cit., p. 207.

²⁰ M. MÜLKE, *Der Autor und sein Text. Die Verfälschung des Originals im Urteil antiker Autoren*, Berlin-New York 2008, pp. 236-243, and especially p. 238 (cf. B. BLECKMANN, *Eine Fragmentsammlung spätlateinischer Historiker*, *Histos* 16, 2022, pp. I-XXIX, note 9) and p. 242.

²¹ See for example P. DE LABRIOLLE, *La réaction païenne. Étude sur la polémique antichrétienne du I^{er} au V^e siècle*, Paris 1934, p. 457; N. ADKIN, *Apollonius of Tyana in Jerome*, in *SEJG* 39, 2000, p. 77, note 45; D. SHANZER, *The Cosmographia Attributed to Aethicus Ister as Philosophen- or Reiseroman*, in G.R. WIELAND, C. RUFF, R.G. ARTHUR (eds.), *Insignis Sophiae Arcator: Medieval Latin Studies in Honour of Michael Herren on his 65th Birthday*, Turnhout 2006, pp. 57-86; p. 81.

²² S. MAZZARINO, *Antico, tardoantico ed era costantiniana*, vol. I, Roma 1974, p. 457, note 148.

²³ PECERE, *La tradizione dei testi latini*, cit., pp. 60-61.

²⁴ PRCHLIK, *Sidonius or Flavianus*, cit., p. 202. The reference is to A. LOYEN, *Études sur Sidoine Apollinaire*, in *REL* 46, 1968, pp. 83-90.

²⁵ PRCHLIK, *Sidonius or Flavianus*, cit., p. 207.

²⁶ *Quidam [...] scribam tuum sine bybliopolam [...] copiosissimo [...] declamationum tuarum schedio emunxit.*

²⁷ *Si quod schedium temere iacens chartulis putribus ac ueternosis continebatur, raptim coactimque translator festinus excscripsi.*

²⁸ PECERE, *La tradizione dei testi latini*, cit., pp. 60-61 and 229-230, note 233.

²⁹ ANDERSON, *Sidonius*, cit., II, p. 405, note 6.

³⁰ LOYEN, *Sidoine Apollinaire*, cit., III, p. 86.

³¹ CAMERON, *The Last Pagans*, cit., p. 552.

(Anderson³², Cameron³³) and the act of revising or even translating (Seek³⁴, Mommsen³⁵, Prchlík³⁶, Mülke³⁷, Overwien³⁸). Indeed, from the three other occurrences of it, this verb means «to translate» in *ep.* 2, 9, 5³⁹ and «to copy» in *ep.* 7, 13, 5⁴⁰ and 9, 16, 2⁴¹. As very well illustrated by Pecere, «in *epist.* 8, 3, 1 e 9, 16, 2, siamo di fronte a un uso pregnante di *exscribere*; il confronto con *epist.* 2, 9, 5 [...] prova che in Sidonio il verbo assume quasi il significato di 'riscrivere' (traducendo); l'accento cade, infatti, sulla *notio reddendi*, più che sull'operazione concreta del copiare, che nel IV-V secolo era ancora una mansione tipica dei *librarii*⁴². A particularly complex issue is whether the syntax of the sentence, when contrasting Nicomachus and Victorianus, allows for two possible diverging interpretations of the verb *exscripsit*, even though it is used to refer to both of them. In other words, a question arises as to whether *exscripsit* may be interpreted as «translated» and/or «revised» for Nicomachus in relation to Philostratus and, at the same time, as «copied» and/or «revised» for Victorianus in relation to Nicomachus.

Thirdly, the interpretation of the word *translatio*. This word is used by Sidonius only on one other occasion in *ep.* 7, 1 for the transfer of the body of the martyr Ferreolus, but in his letters there are nine occurrences of the verb *transferre*. Only in four cases does it have something to do with writing, and can mean both «to translate» (*ep.* 2, 9, 5⁴³) and «to copy» (*ep.* 5, 1, 2⁴⁴; 5, 2, 2⁴⁵ and 9, 11, 6⁴⁶). Remarkably, in the passage from *ep.* 9, 16, 2 mentioned earlier, the word *translator* seems to be related to the act of copying⁴⁷. As a result, scholars are divided again between those who have attributed to Sidonius the role of a translator (Pricoco⁴⁸, Loyen⁴⁹ and Overwien⁵⁰), and those who have attributed to him the role of a simple transcriber from Greek (Anderson⁵¹, Cameron⁵²) or from a former Latin translation (Pecere⁵³).

³² ANDERSON, *Sidonius*, cit., II, pp. 404-405, note 5.

³³ CAMERON, *The Last Pagans*, cit., p. 548.

³⁴ SEECK, cit.

³⁵ MOMMSEN, cit.

³⁶ PRCHLÍK, *Sidonius or Flavianus*, cit., p. 205.

³⁷ MÜLKE, *Der Autor und sein Text*, cit., pp. 237-238.

³⁸ OVERWIEN, *Kampf um Gallien*, cit., p. 98.

³⁹ *Adamantius Origenes Turrano Rufino interpretatus [...] sic [...] ad uerbum sententiamque translatus ut nec Apuleius Phaedonem sic Platonis neque Tullius Ctesiphontem sic Demosthenis in usum regulamque Romani sermonis exscriperint.*

⁴⁰ *Ille [...] totam tuam temperantiam, religionem, libertatem, uerecundiam et illam delicatae mentis pudicissimam teneritudinem incunda similitudine exscripsit.*

⁴¹ See above, note 27.

⁴² PECERE, *La tradizione dei testi latini*, cit., pp. 232-233, note 230.

⁴³ See above, note 39.

⁴⁴ *Cui meis e pugillaribus transferre quae inseras non uacans.*

⁴⁵ *Huius lectioni nouitate laetatus excitatusque maturitate raptim recensendam transferendamque [...] petisti.*

⁴⁶ [...] *cum iamdiu ipse perueneris ad copiam transferendi.*

⁴⁷ See above, note 27.

⁴⁸ PRICOCO, *Studi su Sidonio Apollinare*, cit., pp. 73-98.

⁴⁹ LOYEN, *Sidoine Apollinaire*, cit., III, p. 197.

⁵⁰ OVERWIEN, *Kampf um Gallien*, cit., p. 98.

⁵¹ ANDERSON, *Sidonius*, cit., II, p. 404-405, note 5.

⁵² CAMERON, *The Last Pagans*, cit., p. 548.

⁵³ PECERE, *La tradizione dei testi latini*, cit., pp. 60-61 and 232-233, note 230.

Lastly, the interpretation of the word *Opica*. As this is the only occurrence in Sidonius, it is necessary to refer to the *TbIL*⁵⁴. The literal meaning of *Opicus* is *Oscus*, namely an ancient inhabitant of southern Italy, which implies the further meaning of «rustic, unrefined». In this case, Sidonius apparently wishes to belittle his own work, in order to apologise for executing it quickly and without proper attention. But, knowing Sidonius, this could also be a display of false modesty. However, according to Cameron, Sidonius used *Opica* «with particular reference to lack of knowledge of Greek» and «deliberately selected this word in a pleasingly learned evocation of his anxiety about the correctness of his Greek»⁵⁵. Anderson translates *Opica* as «barbarian»⁵⁶.

The problem presented by the interpretation of the word *Opica* is, in turn, closely related to the further question as to whether Sidonius knew Greek.

Sidonian scholarship tends to think he did have knowledge of this language⁵⁷, but there has been much discussion regarding the extent of this possible knowledge. The two scholars most inclined in favour of his abilities with Greek are Courcelle⁵⁸ and Pricoco⁵⁹, who both focus on *ep.* 4, 12, 1-2, where Sidonius and his son are portrayed while reading Terence's *Hecyra* and comparing it with its Greek model, Menander's *Epiteponte*⁶⁰. A large majority of scholars maintain a more cautious, if not quite sceptical, position, especially Isabella Gualandri. According to her, in Gaul, generally speaking, Greek culture was still very much alive, while in decline elsewhere in the West, and three of Sidonius' friends, Claudianus Mamertus and both the elder and younger Consentius from Narbonne⁶¹, were among the most passionate supporters of this interest in the Greek language. However, what can be learnt from Sidonius seems to be that he personally had nothing more than a scholastic knowledge of Greek, not extending beyond the use of handbooks. After first expressing these opinions in her classical *Furtiva lectio*⁶², Gualandri seems to have remained basically committed to them in her recent chapter in *The*

⁵⁴ *TbIL* s.v. *opicus*, vol. 9.2, p. 702, coll. 76-84 and p. 703, coll. 1-20.

⁵⁵ CAMERON, *The Last Pagans*, cit., pp. 550-551.

⁵⁶ ANDERSON, *Sidonius*, cit., II, pp. 406-407, with note 2.

⁵⁷ See e.g. A. LOYEN, *Sidoine Apollinaire et l'esprit précieux en Gaule aux derniers jours de l'Empire*, Paris 1943, pp. 26-30; KAUFMANN, *Studien zu Sidonius*, cit., p. 45, notes 32 and 33; D. AMHERDT, *Sidoine Apollinaire. Le quatrième livre de la correspondance: introduction et commentaire*, Bern-Frankfurt am Main 2001, p. 307; J.A. VAN WAARDEN, *Writing to Survive. A Commentary on Sidonius Apollinaris, Letters Book 7, I. The Episcopal Letters 1-11*, Leuven 2010; II. *The Ascetic Letters 12-18*, Leuven 2016; I, p. 18, note 42; S. CONDORELLI, *Improvisation and Poetical Programme in Sidonius*, *ep. 9.13*, in J.A. VAN WAARDEN, G. KELLY (eds.), *New Approaches to Sidonius Apollinaris*, with *Indices* on Helga Köhler C. *Sollius Apollinaris Sidonius: Briefe Buch I*, Leuven-Paris-Walpole 2013, pp. 111-132: pp. 122-123; S. SANTELLA, *Sidonius in Italy*, in VAN WAARDEN, KELLY, *New Approaches*, cit., pp. 47-59: pp. 56-57. For a general overview of the knowledge of Greek in the Late Antique West, see now A. JOHN, *Learning Greek in Late Antique Gaul*, in *CQ* 70.2, 2021, pp. 846-864: p. 847, note 7.

⁵⁸ «Le vain étalage d'érudition auquel il se plaignait ne doit pas faire oublier qu'il savait du grec» (P. COURCELLE, *Les lettres grecques en Occident, de Macrobe à Cassiodore*, Paris 1948², p. 238).

⁵⁹ PRICOCO, *Studi su Sidonio Apollinare*, cit., pp. 99-112.

⁶⁰ *Nuper ego filiusque communis Terentianae Hecyrae sales ruminabamus; studenti assidebam naturae meminens et professionis oblitus quoque absolutius rhythmos comicos incitata docilitate sequeretur, ipse etiam fabulam similis argumenti, id est Epitepontem Menandri, in manibus habebam. Legebamus pariter, landabamus iocabamurque et, quae nota communia sunt, illum lectio, me ille capiebat [...]*. For a commentary on this passage, see AMHERDT, *Sidoine Apollinaire*, cit., pp. 309-314. For an overview of the debate on it, see P. MASCOLI, *Sidonio Apollinare, Epistolario*, introduzione, traduzione e note, Roma 2021, pp. 21-22, note 26.

⁶¹ Their cases have been recently investigated by JOHN, *Learning Greek*, cit., pp. 857-863.

⁶² I. GUALANDRI, *Furtiva lectio. Studi su Sidonio Apollinare*, Milano 1979, pp. 145-163.

Edinburgh Companion to Sidonius Apollinaris, where, investigating Sidonius' literary knowledge, she wonders if he actually knew the Greek poets he mentions⁶³. The passage about Menander seems to provide strong evidence that, still towards the middle of the 5th century, at least an elementary level of bilingualism and a basic knowledge of Greek authors were not neglected by the higher aristocracy. Remarkably, as a conclusion of her article on the status of Greek teaching in Gaul in Late Antiquity, John writes: «For late antique Gallo-Romans [...] Greek remained a valuable and integral part of their education and literary endeavours»⁶⁴. But it is very likely that the knowledge of Greek was a social marker rather than a form of real bilingualism.

In the overall judgement of the question our letter may play a key role, but first we should address the vexed question of its interpretation, with the help of the most recent hypotheses which have appeared between 2020 and 2022.

If, as already seen, Sidonius restricted himself to copying a Greek text, it follows that the texts of Nicomachus and Victorianus were in Greek too, and that a Latin translation of Philostratus never existed. After all, in Nicomachus' milieu Greek was well known and practised, and there was no special need for translations. This idea has recently been followed by Schimdt⁶⁵, van Hoof and van Nuffelen⁶⁶, and, in *The Edinburgh Companion to Sidonius*, Mratschek⁶⁷. They briefly mention it in short passages, or while discussing different issues, and are all aligned with Cameron.

The hypothesis that Nicomachus translated Philostratus has also recently made a timid comeback, with Bleckmann⁶⁸. In his review on the work of van Hoof - van Nuffelen, who deny the possibility of a translation, Bleckmann considers this hypothesis again, although with a certain prudence. Worthy of particular attention, in his opinion, are Mülke's observations according to which the wording of the sentence, and namely the contrast between Nicomachus and Victorianus, can only testify to different Latin translations⁶⁹. For Bleckmann as well, Victorianus shortened Nicomachus' translation, and Sidonius likely shortened Victorianus⁷⁰, and the possibility cannot be excluded that this process took place on Latin – rather than Greek – texts, starting with Nicomachus' text⁷¹. In 2020, slightly earlier than Bleckmann, Mathisen also

⁶³ I. GUALANDRI, *Sidonius' Intertextuality*, in KELLY, VAN WAARDEN, *Edinburgh Companion*, cit., pp. 284-285, with notes 34 and 35. See also M. ONORATO, *Dal novum al notum. Gli anacreontei di Sidonio Apollinare*, in *BSL* 47, 2017, pp. 112-155; pp. 115-117; S. FOSCARINI, *Una pista lessicale nella prosa di Sidonio Apollinare: i grecismi*, in S. CONDORELLI, M. ONORATO (edd.), *Verborum violis multicoloribus. Studi in onore di Giovanni Cupaiuolo*, Napoli 2019, pp. 345-361; F.E. CONSOLINO, *Sidonius' Shorter Poems*, in KELLY, VAN WAARDEN, *Edinburgh Companion*, cit., pp. 340-372: p. 370, note 142.

⁶⁴ JOHN, *Learning Greek*, cit., p. 864.

⁶⁵ P. L. SCHMIDT, *Virius Nicomachus Flavianus*, in J.-D. BERGER, J. FONTAINE, P. L. SCHMIDT (Hrsgg.), *Handbuch der lateinischen Literatur 6.1, Die Literatur im Zeitalter des Theodosius (374-430 n.Chr.)*, München 2020, § 637.15.

⁶⁶ L. VAN HOOFF, P. VAN NUFFELEN, *The Fragmentary Latin Histories of Late Antiquity (AD 300-620): Edition, Translation and Commentary*, Cambridge 2020, pp. 50-53.

⁶⁷ S. MRATSCHEK, *Creating Culture and Presenting the Self in Sidonius*, in KELLY, VAN WAARDEN, *Edinburgh Companion*, cit., pp. 237-260: p. 247.

⁶⁸ BLECKMANN, *Eine Fragmentsammlung*, cit., pp. III-V.

⁶⁹ MÜLKE, *Der Autor und sein Text*, cit., pp. 236-243.

⁷⁰ MÜLKE, *Der Autor und sein Text*, cit., pp. 241-242.

⁷¹ BLECKMANN, *Eine Fragmentsammlung*, cit., pp. IV-V. He also points out that Köhler's authoritative translation of this passage (see below) may have been partially inspired by MÜLKE, *Der Autor und sein*

aligned himself with the idea that Sidonius had sent Leo «a revised version of Victorianus' revision of Nicomachus' translation of Philostratus»⁷², and van Waarden similarly claimed in the *Companion*: «I think the only real fit with Sidonius' known practice (the exchange of copies from one's library among friends, his (limited) knowledge of Greek, and his (likewise limited) philosophical skills) is that this was a Latin copy; I would rule out the existence of an independent translation»⁷³. Thus, even in the *Companion to Sidonius*, there are different theses, as proof of the difficulty of adopting a definitive position on this letter. Finally, the French scholar Nardelli⁷⁴, starting from a deep and sometimes aggressive critique of Cameron and of his endorsement by van Hoof and van Nuffelen, and relying, on the other hand, on Goulet's conclusions⁷⁵, has analysed the various «nœuds exégétiques» of this passage, to arrive at a new proposal and translation of the Latin text (p. 70):

Apollonii Pythagorici uitam, non ut Nicomachus senior e Philostrato, sed ut Tascius Victorianus e Nicomachi schedio exscripsit, quia iusseras, misi; quam, dum parere festino, celeriter exciuit in tumultuarium exemplar turbida et praeceps et Aethiopica (siue opinabilis) translatio.

La Vie d'Apollonios le Pythagoricien, non point de la façon de Nicomaque aîné sur Philostrate, mais selon que Tascius Victorianus tailla à sa mesure l'écrit de Nicomaque, j'ai fait partir à votre demande. Comme je forçais l'allure pour vous obéir, la reproduction désordonnée et abrupte et abyssinienne (*ou bien*: pleine d'idiosyncrasie) produisit promptement un apographe improvisé.

One of the biggest changes to the current text of Sidonius (for all other cases, of course, reference is made to Nardelli's article itself) is *Aethiopica*⁷⁶ or *opinabilis*⁷⁷ rather than *Opica*, which is «la pièce maîtresse dans l'arsenal de ceux qui postulent un Sidoine copiste grec zélé de Philostrate recopié ou remanié par Tascius Victorianus»⁷⁸. Ac-

Text, cit., p. 242, and that it does not rule out the possibility of a reference of Latin texts (H. KÖHLER, *C. Sollus Apollinaris Sidonius. Die Briefe*. Eingeleitet, übersetzt und erläutert. Stuttgart 2014, p. 246).

⁷² MATHISEN, *A Prosopography*, cit., p. 104, s.v. Leo.

⁷³ VAN WAARDEN, *Sidonius' Biography in Photo Negative*, in KELLY, VAN WAARDEN, *Edinburgh Companion*, cit., pp. 13-28: p. 18. In VAN WAARDEN, *Writing to Survive*, cit., I, pp. 9-10, a translation by Sidonius was considered to be «possible – though [...] not very probable».

⁷⁴ J.-F. NARDELLI, *Nicomaque Flaviens senior et la Vie d'Apollonios de Tyane: essai de résolution du témoignage de Sidoine Apollinaire*, *ExClass* 26, 2022, pp. 33-83.

⁷⁵ «On peut donc imaginer que Sidoine a volontairement produit une version plus neutre que celle de Nicomaque ou de Tascius Victorianus, atténuant la part de miracles et de magie dans la biographie d'Apollonios au profit d'une image plus pythagoricienne, offrant ainsi un portrait philosophique d'Apollonios dépouillé de tout trait susceptible de heurter les chrétiens» (R. GOULET, *Léon de Narbonne*, in *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques*, Paris 2005, IV, p. 89).

⁷⁶ «*Aethiopica* (= translatio à l'air étranger et tourmenté comme les Éthiopiens qui ne trouvent jamais le repos dans leur pays, façon emphatique de dire qu'elle a coûté à Sidoine un maximum de peine pour un résultat rude)» (NARDELLI, *Nicomaque Flaviens senior*, cit., pp. 64-65).

⁷⁷ «*opinabilis* (= translatio particulièrement idiosyncrasique de la part de Sidoine, peut-être parce qu'il s'agissait d'une version latine seconde par rapport à celle de Nicomaque où notre évêque a fait œuvre de rewriting christianisant)» (NARDELLI, *Nicomaque Flaviens senior*, cit., p. 64).

⁷⁸ NARDELLI, *Nicomaque Flaviens senior*, cit., p. 65. In the preceding pages the French scholar also investigates other possibilities, ranging from *opaca* (prior: a corr. ex i M²) MFP and *operosa*, to the idea of adding a *crux desperationis* before the word in question.

according to Nardelli, considering the inherent weaknesses of the defence of *Opica* either by the Anderson-Cameron exegesis or by the original semantics, poorly supported by glossing *opicus* as 'coarse', «l'apographie de la *Vita* grecque (Cameron, Van Hoof & Van Nuffelen) ne se maintient plus. Par profit de défaut, c'est le modèle de Mommsen qui s'impose»⁷⁹. Interestingly, one of the reasons for Sidonius' reluctance to mention clearly the nature of his work on Philostratus seems to Nardelli to be the long-standing Roman tradition of embarrassment before translinguistic undertakings (the Roman feeling that their language was inferior to Greek when it came to expressing technical concepts and illustrating high culture is, for instance, particularly well-illustrated by Gamberale in the case of Gellius⁸⁰).

All things considered – even in the absence of new conjectures, as intriguing as they are – it seems more likely to me as well that Nicomachus and Victorianus produced Latin versions of *The Life of Apollonius*, and that the work given by Sidonius to Leo was also in Latin. Consequently, following Loyen's critical edition as mentioned above⁸¹, I would propose to translate the most debated passage in the letter as follows (my translation is as literal as possible):

Since you had asked me, I have sent you the «Life» of Apollonius the Pythagorean not as Nicomachus senior transposed it from the manuscript of Philostratus, but as Tascius Victorianus transposed it from Nicomachus' one. In my haste to obey you, a tumultuous, hasty and rough transposition has quickly generated a hurried exemplar.

It is worth noting that *schedium* has been translated here as «manuscript». «To transpose», which I have proposed for *exscribere*, refers to a reworking or revision whose exact details are not clear, and allows us, in my opinion, to maintain the same ambivalence as in Sidonius. *Opica* has been interpreted as «rough». Finally, *translatio* here stands for «transposition» or «transcription», but from Latin, and – as it will be clearer soon – with a certain amount of creativity.

This conclusion has been arrived for several reasons, and on several grounds:

- as also believed by Pecere⁸², it is unlikely that Nicomachus, so famous for his literary activity and his engagement in politics, was only mentioned for transcribing a Greek text;
- in common with Bleckmann⁸³, I also believe that Sidonius, although perhaps hastily, may have executed some kind of impromptu work. My own impression is that some clues testify to the fact that Sidonius was personally involved in this process of transcription, maybe partially utilising his personal inventive – whatever might be the reasons for that: a 'less pagan' version? The difficult situation he was facing in that period? The need for a reduction of Philostratus' large work? His own taste for the well-known and usual «esprit précieux»?

⁷⁹ NARDELLI, *Nicomaque Flavian senior*, cit., p. 65.

⁸⁰ L. GAMBERALE, *La traduzione in Gellio*, Roma 1969, p. 118.

⁸¹ See above, note 5.

⁸² PECERE, *La tradizione dei testi latini*, cit., pp. 232-233, note 230.

⁸³ BLECKMANN, *Eine Fragmentsammlung*, cit., p. V.

- the metaphors *Opica*, *inpolitus*, *semicrudus* and *musteus* seem to refer to a work which is not quite finished, and would make more sense if they were not about simply copying, but about something more specific;
- the adjective *musteus* is particularly interesting in this list. As the words *ut aiunt* suggest, it is borrowed from someone else, namely Pliny the Younger, who uses it for a draft copy of his poems⁸⁴. Remarkably, Cameron himself writes: «the metaphor suits a new translation well enough» – even though, in order to support his own thesis of a transcription of a Greek text, he hastens to clarify «but would also suit any freshly written work in need of polishing»⁸⁵.

To these arguments, I would like to add a new reading of the final *pointe* of the letter (*ep.* 8, 3, 6):

Quid multis? Si uera metimur aestimamusque, fors fuit an philosophi uitae scriptor aequalis maiorum temporibus accesserit, certe par saeculo meo per te lector obuenuit. Vale.

Regarding this purpose, it is necessary to start from Loyen's translation⁸⁶:

Bref, si nous mesurons et apprécions bien la vérité, on peut se demander si, au temps des nos ancêtres, il s'est présenté, pour écrire la vie de ce philosophe, un écrivain qui fût à sa hauteur, mais ce qui est sûr, c'est que notre génération a trouvé en toi un lecteur à la mesure du sujet.

For the French scholar, *maiorum temporibus* is a temporal expression («au temps des nos ancêtres») and his translation is integrated with the words «pour écrire» and «du sujet», which are not present in the Latin text. However, an especially perplexing issue relates to the fact that, in Loyen's translation, Sidonius, while comparing past and present, seems to be questioning the abilities of ancient writers, and asking a question about the past (which he always respected). And the question, which sounds bizarre, is whether in the past there were writers of a stature to match Apollonius' life. Therefore, in my opinion, the *pointe* needs to be read in a different way, starting again from Anderson⁸⁷:

⁸⁴ *Adhuc musteum librum* (*ep.* 8, 21, 6). See GUALANDRI, *Furtiva lectio*, cit., p. 126, note 69 (also about *inpolitus* and *semicrudum*); PRCHLÍK, *Sidonius or Flavianus*, cit., pp. 202-203.

⁸⁵ CAMERON, *The Last Pagans*, cit., p. 549.

⁸⁶ LOYEN, *Sidoine Apollinaire*, cit., III, p. 86. This interpretation was already, approximately, that of O.M. DALTON, *The Letters of Sidonius*, Translated, with Introduction and Notes, Oxford 1915: II, p. 142: «Why pursue the subject further? Unless I am much at fault, it may be doubted whether our ancestors' days produced a biographer fit to write so great a life; but of this there is no doubt at all, that in your person our own times have produced a student worthy to peruse it». Among the most recent translations, aligned with Loyen's exegesis, are J. Bellès, *Sidoni Apollinar, Lletres*, III [Llibres VII-IX], introducció, text revisat i traducció, Barcelona 1999, p. 102: «Amb poques paraules, si mesurem i apreciem bé la veritat, és qüestionable si la vida d'aquest filòsof comptà en els temps dels nostres avantpassats amb un narrador de la seva categoria, però és indubtable que en el meu segle ha trobat en tu un lector de la mateixa vàlua»; and MASCOLI, *Sidonio Apollinare*, cit., p. 276: «Che dire di più? Se misuriamo e valutiamo la verità dei fatti, è dubbio se nei tempi antichi ci sia stato uno scrittore adeguato a raccontare la vita del filosofo, ma la nostra epoca ha ritrovato in te un lettore certo non inferiore».

⁸⁷ ANDERSON, *Sidonius*, cit., II, pp. 411-412.

I need say no more. If we weigh and reckon the truth of the matter, it comes to this: it may be questioned whether the philosopher's life has found a narrator on a level with the writers of our ancestor's time; but unquestionably this generation of mine has found in you a reader to match the subject. Farewell.

In this case *maiorum temporibus* is a dative depending on *aequalis* («on a level with the writers of our ancestors' time»), while it remains uncertain as to whether for Anderson *saeculo meo* («this generation of mine») is a time expression in the ablative case (with *uariatio*)⁸⁸, or a dative depending on *par*⁸⁹ (wholly consistent with the previous dative)⁹⁰.

Köhler's recent and authoritative translation can be placed on the same level as Anderson⁹¹:

Was bedarf es noch vieler Worte? Wenn meine Einschätzung und mein Urteil das Richtige treffen, dann hat die Vita diesen Philosophen vielleicht ein Autor auf gleicher Höhe mit der Autoren der Zeit unserer Vorfahren gefunden; sicher ist jedensfall, dass ihr in deiner Person ein Leser auf der Höhe meines Zeitalters entgentritt.

The interpretation that Anderson and, later, Köhler gave of *aequalis maiorum temporibus* opens up the possibility of a new reading, namely that here Sidonius is introducing the usual *topos modestiae* about his work. In other words, he was apparently unable to write anything worthy of comparison with the ancients since he worked hastily. And the *scriptor* «on a level with the writers of the ancestors' time» («auf gleicher Höhe mit der Autoren der Zeit unserer Vorfahren», with Köhler) might not be Philostratus, or Nicomachus and/or Victorianus, but Sidonius himself, as a transmission vehicle of that story for Leo. The life of such a figure as Apollonius would thus find, on one hand, a 'new' *scriptor* like Sidonius, who can only doubtfully be considered worthy of the ancient biographers, and, on the other hand, a 'modern' *lector* like Leo, totally worthy of that greatness.

⁸⁸ For the use of the ablative as a temporal expression in Sidonius, see *ep.* 1, 11, 7 *tamquam saeculo meo canere solus ualere*; 4, 3, 6 *ad extremum nemo saeculo meo quae uoluit affirmare sic ualuit*. For other instances in which *saeculum* is used by Sidonius in similar expressions, also with other adjectives, in order to indicate the times in which he lives, see *ep.* 2, 1, 1 *Catilina saeculi nostri*; 3, 3, 1 *saeculo tuo solus ferme mortalium es qui patriae non minus desiderii nasciturus quam gaudii natus feceris*; 3, 8, 1 *Brutus Torquatosque non parunt saecula mea*; 4, 9, 5 *praesenti saeculo imponitur*; 4, 11, 1 *damnum saeculi mei*; 4, 22, 2 *qui saeculo nostro si reminisceret*; 5, 8, 3 *quos nostra iudicia, saecula, loca fortunatos putant*; 6, 1, 1 *alter saeculi tui Iacobus*; 9, 9, 16 *saeculo praedicatus tuo, desiderandus alieno*; *carm.* 1, 23 *o Caesar, nostri spes maxima saeculi*; cfr. c. 5, 144-145 *et mundo princeps (sic saecula poscunt) Maiorianus erit*.

⁸⁹ For similar instances of *par* with the dative case in Sidonius, see especially *ep.* 4, 17, 1 *par ducibus antiquis lingua manueque*, and also *ep.* 1, 11, 10 *par honoribus persona geminatis*; 1, 11, 15 *secutus est fragor [...] par Camillano*; 4, 25, 5 *uir quamlibet magnis par tamen laudibus*; 7, 2, 7 *anni obiter thalamo pares*; 7, 2, 9 *fabulam Milesiae vel Atticae parem*. Cfr. 8, 15, 1 *Lupo parem Germanoque non imparem*; 8, 12, 6 *modo sit euentilando par animus impendio*. In *ep.* 5, 16, 4 the dative may be an independent dative of advantage: *concordia [...] quam parem nostris suisque liberis in posterum exopto*. As for the poems, see *carm.* 7, 560-561 *nec forte reare/ te regno non esse parem*; 9, 307 *dicendi arte noua parem uetustis*; 23, 96 *uitam fulminibus parem*; 23, 157 *Hellespontiaco parem Priapo*; 24, 96-97 *Cecropiae pares Mineruae/ mores*; 40, 48 *Homericaeque par et ipse gloriae*.

⁹⁰ Of course, following Loyer's interpretation, there would be a complete parallelism, since both *maiorum temporibus* and *saeculo meo* should be considered as temporal expressions in the ablative.

⁹¹ KÖHLER, C. *Sollius Apollinaris Sidonius*, cit., p. 249. The scholar seems to have read this passage as if it was based on a parallel between *aequalis* + dative (*maiorum temporibus*) and *par* + dative (*par saeculo meo*).

A schematic overview of the two parts of the whole sentence may help to focus on this idea:

<i>fors fuat an</i>	<i>certe</i>
<i>philosophi uitae accesserit</i>	[<i>philosophi uitae</i>] <i>obuenit</i>
[<i>per me</i>]	<i>per te</i>
<i>scriptor</i>	<i>lector</i>
<i>aequalis</i>	<i>par</i>
<i>maiorum temporibus</i> [dative]	<i>saeculo meo</i> [probably dative]

In line with Anderson's and Köhler's interpretation, all the words match each other, but a perfect match can only be obtained by supplying *per me*, ie. «thanks to Sidonius» – also somewhat suggested by the mention of *saeculum m e u m*.

If this idea is close to the mark, first of all, the final *pointe* might suggest that Sidonius' work, even though starting from a substantial transcription, was, in all probability, a personal transposition with reductions. Even though *impolitus*, *semicrudus* and *musteus*, this *liber* was an organisational work in terms of its content, and probably an ornamental work in terms of its language.

Secondly, if the expression *per te*, referring to Leo the *lector*, is indeed in parallel with an implicit and underlying *per me*, related to Sidonius *scriptor*, this would be consistent with the Sidonian tendency to talk about himself between the lines, and, especially at the end of a letter, to draw attention to his own value⁹².

Now, if Sidonius was a *scriptor* – here however within a modest range between transcription and revision – attention needs to be shifted, for a moment, to Leo as *lector*. His full name, Leo, is already inscribed within the noun *lector* itself, and this cannot have escaped the notice of Sidonius, who tends to engage in wordplay using the names of the people he loves or is close to, sometimes also inscribing their names in the words he is using to praise them⁹³. Now that the work is delivered, Leo should immerse himself in reading, as if he was setting out for a journey with Apollonius through the exotic lands he travelled. With the peace of the Christian faith which distinguishes Leo, he will find in Apollonius a man very similar to himself in terms of his numerous virtues.

Sidonius insists more than once on this parallel between Apollonius and Leo. In reference to this, political interpretations have been put forward regarding both the work done by Sidonius on *Vita Apollonii*, and the letter sent along with it.

Particularly worth mentioning is an article by Overwien, who reads the whole of book 8 as a series of political allusions aimed at supporting the fight of the Romans against the Visigoths⁹⁴. He also draws a distinction between 'good' Romans, who support the traditions, and 'bad' Romans, willing to cooperate with the enemy. According to him, this letter, behind the façade of a harmless document about a literary work,

⁹² Just to remain in the same book 8, see eg. the end of *ep.* 2 and *ep.* 5, on which F. GIANNOTTI, *Scrinia Arverna: studi su Sidonio Apollinare*, Pisa 2021, pp. 81-82 and 92-93 respectively.

⁹³ Some recent examples concerning Papianilla, a relative of his own wife Papianilla and wife of Tonantius Ferreolus, Sidonius' friend, and concerning Avitus, Sidonius' cousin, are in GIANNOTTI, *Scrinia Arverna*, cit., pp. 26-28.

⁹⁴ OVERWIEN, *Kampf um Gallien*, cit.

is a political document. Overwien espouses the notion of a translation from the Greek by Sidonius, and thinks that the evocation of Nicomachus and Victorianus, as aristocrats devoted to the cult of the Classics, for which they are held in high esteem by the Emperor Theodosius, implies a question as to whether Leo is supporting that tradition and those values. In addition, while inviting him to dedicate himself to the *Vita Apollonii*, Sidonius might be actually warning Leo to abandon his literary ambitions, because they are turning into support for Euricus' regime. At the same time, the parallel drawn between Apollonius' customs and those of Leo may be a form of advice. Leo should deal with the powerful just as Apollonius did. Apollonius' travels should especially suggest covertly that Leo keep away from the barbarian rulers. Finally, just as in the *Vita Apollonii*, the philosopher escapes imprisonment by the tyrant Domitianus, thanks to his wanderings, so Leo might implicitly be urged to free himself from metaphorical captivity by the tyrant Euricus. In this case, according to Overwien, the Sidonian translation, together with the covering letter, is an example of a 'militant' translation challenging the decadence faced by the Gallo-Romans. Although meritorious, Overwien's interpretation of the whole letter tends, in my opinion, to read too much into the text in order to prove the political background of Sidonius' work.

Also worthy of note is Mratschek's thesis⁹⁵. After being previously requested to write a historical work by Leo, in *ep.* 4, 22, Sidonius declined the invitation. According to Mratschek, his «shift of genre [...] and his sending Leo the manuscript of Philostratus were a skilful diplomatic ploy to avoid celebrating the conqueror Euric in historical writing». However it seems to me that there is not such a close connection between Leo's request for a historical work, as shown in *ep.* 4, 22, and the manuscript of Philostratus in this letter. Furthermore, sending Leo *The Life of Apollonius* is again a request from Leo, and not a decision made by Sidonius.

Thus Mratschek's thesis poses a further question, which has not been raised so far, concerning the reasons why Leo was interested in the *Vita Apollonii*. Can it be assumed that Leo wanted to enrich his knowledge and his library? Or that he wanted to promote access to an important text of the pagan culture in his *milieu*, if not in the court of the king Euricus? Since as far back as 1915 Dalton, in his introduction to *The Letters of Sidonius*, also presumed that Leo invited Sidonius to work on *The Life of Apollonius* «to occupy his mind by literary work» during his imprisonment⁹⁶. This will probably be another of the issues destined to remain unresolved.

Having strayed somewhat off-topic in order to better explain the final *pointe* and its possible political implications, it is now necessary to draw all the strands together, in order to determine whether this letter can make a contribution to the controversial issue of the knowledge of Greek and the spread of Greek works among the Gallic aristocracy around the fateful year 476, in an area which had fallen under the Visigoths.

If the correct interpretation is that all the work was based on a Greek text, maybe with a reworking by Sidonius, *ep.* 8, 3 may attest that the knowledge of Greek and the search for Greek works still had considerable prominence.

In the case of a Sidonian translation from Greek to Latin, one would be dealing with an aristocrat who knew Greek, and who translated it for the benefit of another

⁹⁵ MRATSCHEK, *Creating Culture*, cit., p. 247.

⁹⁶ DALTON, *The Letters of Sidonius*, cit., I, p. LV.

aristocrat who did not know it or did not know it well, but was interested in an important text of Greek culture, so a knowledge of Greek may still be relevant⁹⁷.

If the third hypothesis were to be true – as I believe –, namely the transposition from Latin to Latin, it would not be possible to determine whether Sidonius and Leo knew Greek, and if so to what extent, because in this case all the cultural mediation took place on the basis of Latin texts.

In order to leave no stone unturned, one last aspect to consider is that a letter linked to the Greek world displays some Grecisms: perhaps when Sidonius' work is defined as *Opica* and, above all, when he mentions Apollonius' long journeys to the East, *inter satrapas regum tiaratorum murrhatos pumicatos malobathratos*. As Gualandri has pointed out, two of these Grecisms are *hapax legomena*, and one, *murrhatos*, is employed in an unusual way (in this case it does not refer to potions made from myrrh). Moreover, they are gathered in clusters, as is usual with Sidonius, and they are mostly technical terms and, on this occasion, specifically intended to create an exotic atmosphere⁹⁸. For those who believe in the thesis of Greek transcriptions, these words may be a clue that Sidonius worked on a Greek text, and that Leo had learnt at least some basics of Greek and was able to understand those words. But, as Gualandri claims, they are not necessarily the clue to vast and thorough knowledge of the Greek language. However, in her opinion, this basic knowledge was already substantial, given the times⁹⁹.

This may be a good way to end this article, but, to conclude, focus should be definitively shifted to the importance of translation. Beyond any discussion, it is understandable that a long period of political and administrative instability, and of military conflict with the barbarian enemy, had resulted in a relative reduction in opportunities for learning the Greek language. If, therefore, the arguments I have attempted to propound here are correct, this letter may offer evidence of the decline in knowledge of Greek, and evidence of an increase in the use of translations. However, translations do not only mean a decline in the knowledge of a language of culture. They may also testify to the need for access to a text – and, together with the text, to an entire world. Additionally, they may indicate the wish for literary and cultural enrichment, and the challenge of saving a traditional culture in decline, and, in the absence of translations, averting the risk of its extinction.

⁹⁷ See MÜLKE, *Der Autor und sein Text*, cit., p. 238.

⁹⁸ GUALANDRI, *Furtiva lectio*, cit., pp. 146-147 and 161-162.

⁹⁹ GUALANDRI, *Furtiva lectio*, cit., pp. 145-146.

ABSTRACT

This article analyses a covering letter of a work that Sidonius Apollinaris had prepared on the *Vita Apollonii* by Philostratus for Leo, a learned man and a minister of Euricus, king of the Visigoths. It is not clear if Sidonius' work, now lost, was a Greek transcription, a Latin translation, or a Latin transcription. The various problematic questions posed by this letter are not dismissed here as pure doxography, but analytically reinvestigated in a critical and reasoned way, also in the light of the studies of the last few years, and with a new argument in support of the hypothesis that Sidonius did not produce a merely mechanical transcription, but a creative and personal one, of a former Latin translation. From a historical-literary point of view, this involves the equally complex question of the knowledge of Greek among the Gallic aristocracy around the fateful year 476. A possible reduced direct access to Greek books does not necessarily mean a decline of Greek literature, but may show the importance of gaining access to a culturally significant text through translation. In this respect, Apollonius of Tyana, a leading intellectual figure in the Greek pagan world, might even become a model for the Roman-Visigothic official Leo. For Sidonius, evoking a Greek work is a way to defend culture and avoid, or at least delay, the descent into oblivion of Greek literature and of a book which praises a pagan philosopher.

Questo contributo analizza la lettera di accompagnamento di un lavoro che Sidonio Apollinare preparò sulla *Vita Apollonii* di Filostrato per Leone, un suo colto amico, nonché ministro del re dei Visigoti Eurico. Non è chiaro se questo lavoro di Sidonio, oggi perduto, fosse una trascrizione dal greco o dal latino, oppure una traduzione dal latino. Le varie spinose questioni poste da questa lettera non sono qui liquidate come semplice dossografia, ma analiticamente riesaminate in modo critico e razionale, anche alla luce degli studi pubblicati negli ultimi anni e con una nuova argomentazione a sostegno della tesi che Sidonio fece una trascrizione non puramente meccanica, ma creativa e personale, di una precedente traduzione latina. Da un punto di vista storico-letterario, la lettera comporta l'altrettanto complessa questione della conoscenza del greco presso l'aristocrazia gallica intorno alla fatidica data del 476 d.C. Un eventuale accesso ridotto ai testi greci non sembra necessariamente implicare un declino nella conoscenza della letteratura greca, ma potrebbe rivelare l'importanza di potersi accostare a un testo culturalmente rilevante grazie alla traduzione. In questa prospettiva, una figura carismatica del modo pagano greco come Apollonio di Tiana può perfino diventare un modello per l'ufficiale romano-visigoto Leone, e l'evocazione di un'opera greca diventare per Sidonio un modo per evitare, o almeno ritardare l'oblio della letteratura greca e di un libro che loda un filosofo pagano.

KEYWORDS: Late Antiquity; Sidonius Apollinaris; *Vita Apollonii Tyanaei* translation; Nicomachus Flavianus; Tascius Victorianus.

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