

5. 2. 54–57

tu disce patrem, quantusque negantem
 fluctibus occiduis fessusque Hyperione Thylen
 intrarit mandata gerens quantusque potens
 mille urbes Asiae sortito rexerit anno.

Line 55 cannot be construed and is clearly corrupt; it contained some description of Britain, one of the provinces in which Vettius Bolanus served. One line of emendation is to take *nigrantem* from Avantius and *fessoque* from Calderini.⁶ Against this (1) the construction *nego* with dative (“resist”), which is both recherché and favored by Statius (see Vollmer on 3. 1. 124), is likely to be right; and (2) it is hardly natural to say that waves (even “sunset” waves) turn something black: it is true that Statius is fond of associating Britain and the waves around it with “darkness” (see 3. 5. 20, 4. 4. 62), and therefore if *nigrantem* were transmitted we should be inclined somehow to retain it, but that is a far cry from awkwardly introducing it by conjecture. Another line is to adopt Vollmer’s *fesso usque*,⁷ but what kind of ablative is this? Other approaches are even more unsatisfactory; a new one is called for. So I propose *negantem* / *fluctibus occiduo fissis Hyperione*: Britain which resists the waves cleft by the setting sun (see *Theb.* 4. 283 *occiduum Titana*, 5. 477 *occidui . . . cubilia Phoebi*). *Fissis* was easily corrupted to *fessus*; *occiduo* was corrupted either through simple attraction or because of a misplaced correction, *-is*, intended for the termination of the next word; and *que* was added because the apparent metrical lengthening *fessūs* was unpalatable to the scribe, as it was to the scribes of Vergil at *Aeneid* 1. 668 and 6. 254.

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6. Favored, e.g., by L. Håkanson, *Statius’ “Silvae”* (Lund, 1969), p. 128.

7. The persistent attribution of this to Calderini is an error: see L. C. Martinelli, “Le ‘Selve’ di Stazio nella critica testuale del Poliziano,” *SIFC* 47 (1975): 169.

THE THEME OF LITERARY DECLINE IN LATE ROMAN GAUL

The last years of the Roman Empire in the west typically have been characterized in modern times by the words “decline and fall.” In Gaul, as elsewhere, these words are justified, at least in a political sense. On the last day of 406, groups of Burgundians, Suevi, Vandals, and Alans crossed the Rhine unopposed. In 418, the Visigoths were settled in Aquitania. Other peoples soon followed, such as the Franks and Alemanni, not to mention the Huns and their allies. Around 486, Syagrius, the last Roman holdout in Belgica, was defeated by the Frank Clovis.¹

The conclusions of this study at earlier stages were presented at the meeting of the Association of Ancient Historians at Madison in May 1983 and at the meeting of the Classical Association of the Midwest and South at Minneapolis in April 1985. This version has greatly benefited from the many useful suggestions of the Editor.

1. For the historical developments, see O. Seeck, *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt*, vol. 6 (Stuttgart, 1920); J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. 1 (London, 1923); E. Stein,

The word "decline," at least, also has been applied regularly to the literary culture of late Roman Gaul. Nearly every modern writer on the subject takes it for granted that a qualitative literary decline occurred. It has been asserted, for example, that the Gallic writers themselves saw their culture "disappearing," and that they had a "negative attitude" manifested by an inability to adapt their culture to the needs of the times.² The period has been described as exhibiting "continual cultural decay," as well as both "a rapid movement of decline" and "a failure of mental energy"; it has been called a "sterile age."³ Some modern writers also suggest that the Gallic writers of late antiquity viewed literature as a mere amusement.⁴

Nor is it difficult to understand how this impression has arisen; much of the evidence for it seems to come from the works of the Gauls themselves, who repeatedly decried the cultural decline of their age. Sidonius Apollinaris (fl. 455–85), a Lyonesse aristocrat and bishop of Clermont, did so in several notable passages, which will be quoted *in extenso* to illustrate the theme.⁵ Around 470 he wrote to his young friend Hesperius, for example (*Epist.* 2. 10. 1), "consider this, that the multitude of the slothful has grown to such an extent that unless some very few indeed rescue the undiluted purity of the Latin language from the blight of base barbarisms, in a short time we shall be mourning its decay and death: thus, all the purple garb of the discourse of the nobility will be discolored by the carelessness of the mob." To his friend Namatius he wrote (*Epist.* 8. 6. 3 [ca.

Geschichte des weströmischen Reiches vom römischen zum byzantinischen Staate (284–476 n.Chr.), vol. 1 (Vienna, 1928); and K. F. Stroheker, *Das senatorische Adel im spätantiken Gallien* (Reutlingen, 1948), all *passim*.

2. So N. Chadwick, *Poetry and Letters in Early Christian Gaul* (London, 1955), p. 296, and A. Loyer, *Sidonius Apollinaire et l'esprit précieux en Gaule aux derniers jours de l'Empire* (Paris, 1943), p. 55, respectively.

3. See C. E. Stevens, *Sidonius Apollinaris and His Age* (Oxford, 1933), p. 81; S. Dill, *Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire*² (London, 1899; repr. New York, 1958), pp. 438–39; and T. R. Glover, *Life and Letters in the Fourth Century* (Cambridge, 1901; repr. New York, 1968), p. 11.

4. See E. S. Duckett, *Latin Writers of the Fifth Century* (New York, 1930), pp. 12–13; Stevens, *Sidonius Apollinaris*, pp. 14, 78–81; Chadwick, *Poetry and Letters*, p. 303; and Loyer, *L'esprit précieux*, p. 166 (who sees the Gallic literature as "escapist," "puerile," "pedantic," and "superficial"). E. Auerbach, *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, trans. R. Manheim (Princeton, 1965), p. 258, describes the Gallic litterati as "hopelessly cut off from reality" and asserts that their "style could surely have had no appeal even for an elite." See also F. J. E. Raby, *A History of Secular Latin Poetry in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1934), pp. 76, 84. For the suggestion that western Roman aristocrats gave their attention to literature at this time to show their superiority to the barbarians, see Loyer, *L'esprit précieux*, p. 53; Stroheker, *Senatorische Adel*, p. 65; A. Momigliano, "Cassiodorus and the Italian Culture of His Time," *PBA* 41 (1955): 216; and J. Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court A.D. 364–425* (Oxford, 1975), p. 85.

5. For the works of Sidonius, see A. Loyer, ed., *Sidonius Apollinaire*, vol. 1: *Poèmes* (Paris, 1960), and vols. 2–3: *Lettres* (Paris, 1970); for Claudianus Mamertus, see A. Engelbrecht, ed., *Claudianus Mamerti Opera*, CSEL 11 (Vienna, 1885); for Alcimius Ecdicius Avitus, see R. Peiper, ed., *Alcimi Ecdicii Avitii Viennensis Episcopi: Opera Quae Supersunt*, MGH:AA 6.2 (Berlin, 1883); for Ruricius, see B. Krusch, ed., *Ruricii Epistulae*, MGH:AA 8 (Berlin, 1887), pp. 299–350, and A. Engelbrecht, ed., *Ruricii Epistularum Libri Duo*, CSEL 21 (Vienna, 1891), pp. 349–450; for Ennodius, see F. Vogel, ed., *Magni Felicis Ennodi Opera*, MGH:AA 7 (Berlin, 1885), and W. Hartel, ed., CSEL 6 (Vienna, 1882); for Paulinus of Périgueux, see M. Petschenig, ed., *Paulini Petrocordiae Quae Supersunt*, CSEL 16 (Vienna, 1888); for Faustus of Riez, see B. Krusch, ed., *Fausti Aliorumque Epistulae ad Ruricium Aliosque*, MGH:AA 8 (Berlin, 1887), pp. 265–98, and A. Engelbrecht, ed., *Fausti Reiensis praeter Sermones Pseudo-Eusebianos Opera*, CSEL 21 (Vienna, 1891); and for the letters of Constantius of Lyons, see R. Borius, ed., *Constance de Lyon: Vie de saint Germain d'Auxerre*, Sources Chrétiennes 112 (Paris, 1965), pp. 112–17. The dates cited for Sidonius' letters usually are those suggested by Loyer.

470]), “who nowadays, stimulated to match the deeds of our ancestors, would not prove to be most lacking in energy, or who also, striving to match their words, would not be most infantile? For the ruler of the ages implanted more in past times the virtues of arts such as these, which nowadays, like worn-out seeds, have lost their vigor in the world’s present old age and demonstrate only rarely in anyone, and this in the few, anything marvelous or memorable.”⁶

Of the work of Remigius, bishop of Rheims, Sidonius said (*Epist.* 9. 7. 2, 4 [ca. 471/72]), “it has been proclaimed by the assent of all that nowadays few things like this could be written. Indeed, there is hardly anyone, or no one at all, whose efforts would be assisted by [talents such as yours]. . . . What more? There does not now exist the eloquence of a living man that your learning could not overcome and surpass without the least effort.” In a letter to the rhetor Sapaudus of Vienne, he wrote (*Epist.* 5. 10. 4 [ca. 476/77]), “thus, if anyone, emulating you, has a liking for Latin learning, he desires to be included in your circle. . . . But nowadays, few have a care for such studies.” And in a letter to the same man, the priest and philosopher Claudianus Mamertus wrote (*Epist. ad Sapaudum*), “there has occurred ever since the times of our ancestors a discarding of the good arts and a rejection of the cultivation of the intellect, by which alone humanity outshines the beasts. . . . I see, in fact, that for the Romans, Roman speech is a matter not only of neglect but even of disgrace. . . . But such things give cause to admire you . . . , for you, one and alone in our Gaul, are equal to your occupation.”

Nor do reports of the imminent demise of Gallic culture stop here. In the early sixth century, Avitus of Vienne described one of his poems as a work “that sings by preserving the length of the syllables, which few understand” (*Carm.* 6 prol.). And at the very end of the century, Gregory of Tours noted in the preface to his *History of the Franks* that “with the study of liberal learning disappearing or rather dying in the Gallic cities . . . many often lament, saying ‘woe to our times, for the study of literature is lost to us.’”

Hitherto, these Gallic assertions of a dying culture have been taken at face value to mean that the Gauls themselves believed that their own literary culture was in rapid decline. Several potential problems with this interpretation, however, have been insufficiently appreciated. One must take into account, first of all, the conventional *pudor* of any writer at any time. When, for example, Sidonius questions whether he is “a writer equal to [those of] the times of our ancestors” (*Epist.* 8. 3. 6), must one necessarily take this as an acknowledgment of “decline”?⁷ The “decline” also took an awfully long time: even though the sources suggest it was well underway by the mid-fifth century, it was still going strong circa 600. Furthermore, in the very period when Gauls were lamenting the

6. Sidonius here echoes the Christian topos of the aging world; note the claim of Cyprian of Carthage, in the middle of the third century, that “senuisse iam mundum, non illis viribus stare quibus prius steterat, nec vigore et robore eo valere quo antea praevalerat. . . . deficit . . . in artibus peritia” (*Epist. ad Demetrianum* 3, *PL* 4:546).

7. Similar deprecations of his literary ability abound, as when Sidonius refers to his *animi . . . vota destituta litteris* (*Epist.* 9. 15. 1 *carm.* 53), or to his *frequentia barbarismorum* (*ibid.*, 9. 11. 6). When he asserts (*Epist.* 4. 3. 10) that his own literary efforts do not even meet the standards of the rabble-rousers of the forum, who *illitteratissimis litteris vacant*, he is in fact making an artful allusion to Pliny, who with a like modesty had stated (*Epist.* 1. 10. 9), *scribo plurimas, sed illitteratissimas litteras*. Nor should

decline of their literary culture they were producing more literary works than at any time in their entire history. From the fifth century alone there survive well over three hundred letters written by over forty Gauls. Poetry, theological tracts, sermons, monastic rules, saints' lives, chronicles, dialogues, a law code, works on grammar and education, a comedy, and a biographical dictionary are known to have been written, most of them still extant.⁸

Finally, one can only note the Gauls' own inconsistency in their descriptions of the decline. If at some times they could wonder whether they measured up to the standards of the past, at others they could compare their literary efforts to those of their ancestors. Sidonius, for example, could say of a long-dead Gallic writer (*Epist.* 5. 5. 1), "the culture of his descendants, especially in this regard, has degenerated not even in the least from his level." He also could refer to the literary skill of his friend Leo as being every bit as good as that of a famous ancestor (*Epist.* 8. 3. 3): "[your skill] is poured into your breast through succeeding generations from your forefather Fronto."⁹

At the same time that they spoke of cultural decline, the Gauls also saw themselves as the preservers of classical literary culture. Sidonius himself was described by Claudianus Mamertus as the "restorer of the old eloquence" (*De statu animae* prol.). The only good Gallic writers were those who followed established classical norms. Claudianus also suggested (*Epist. ad Sapaudum*) that "whoever in recent times has written anything worthy of memory" had used as his models writers such as Naevius, Plautus, Cato, Varro, Gracchus, Chrysippus, Fronto, and Cicero.

Nor did the Gauls use each others' works as specific examples of the decay and decline of which they so often spoke. Even if an individual author such as Sidonius could be appropriately circumspect when describing his own literary efforts, he would enthusiastically eulogize the works of his friends. Gallic writers customarily were likened to the great authors of the past. To his friend Tonantius, Sidonius wrote (*Epist.* 9. 13. 1), "I confess, indeed, that your opinion of my verses is . . . so laudatory that you believe me to be comparable to some of the most select poets, and even preferable to many." The Gauls compared each other to Homer, Pindar, Varro, Vergil, Horace, Pliny, Tacitus, Fronto, and Apuleius.¹⁰ No shrinking violets here.

But if the literary circles of late Roman Gaul were in fact flourishing, and if the Gauls trumpeted the excellence of each others' literary works, how then are

one suppose that Sidonius really believed that his Lyonesse confreres were "uneducated persons who were hardly better than barbarians" (Auerbach, *Literary Language*, p. 256) merely because he once referred to them as *rustici* (*Epist.* 7. 14. 1) in order to make a rhetorical point. Note, likewise, Ruricius of Limoges' modest description of his own work (*Epist.* 1. 4. 2) as "suited not for praise but for vituperation on account of the ineptness of its rusticity."

8. For the Gallic literary output of this period, see P.-M. Duval, *La Gaule jusqu'au milieu de Ve siècle* (Paris, 1971), pp. 663-826, and E. Dekkers and A. Gaar, eds., *Clavis Patrum Latinorum*² (Turnhout, 1961), nos. 427-536, 957-1079, and passim. Note also Sidonius' disclaimer (*Epist.* 1. 11. 7), "as if I were the only person of my times who could write verse."

9. A view echoed by Claudianus in his letter to Sapaudus: "a manifold learning, having arisen among your ancestors, has coalesced in you"; see also Sid. Apoll. *Epist.* 8. 11. 2.

10. Sid. Apoll. *Epist.* 4. 3. 2 (Fronto, Apuleius, Varro, Pliny); 5. 17. 1 (Vergil, Homer); 4. 22. 2 (Tacitus); 8. 11. 7 (Horace, Pindar); 9. 15. 1 *carm.* 26, 47-49 (Homer, Pindar, Vergil). Sidonius, at *Epist.* 4. 3. 6-7, also compares Claudianus to no fewer than thirty-eight Greek and Latin scholars.

their claims of literary decline to be interpreted? One possible answer is to be found by reading these assertions more closely. Recall that to Hesperius, Sidonius had written of "the very few indeed" who were to rescue the Latin language. Who were these "very few"? Why you and I, of course. To Namatius, he had written that only "very few" in the modern day wrote anything memorable. Who were these "very few"? Again, you and I. To Remigius, he had written that "hardly anyone" could write as well as he. To Sapaudus, he wrote that "the few" who had a fondness for literature desired to be included among his friends. And to this same Sapaudus, Claudianus Mamertus wrote (*Epist. ad Sapaudum*), "I would have entombed a kind of death of these studies with a tearful, as it were, epitaph, if you yourself had not revived them," and he asked what could be the cause if "any noble aspired not to the renewal but even to the learning of any discipline without you alone?"

Similar sentiments are seen in a comment of Sidonius to Faustus of Riez (*Epist.* 9. 9. 16): "but this [intellectual activity can be pursued] in these times only under the supervision of your knowledge or through the virtue of your learning. For who could follow your lead with an equal step—you, to whom alone has been granted the ability to teach better than you learned?" To Arbogastes, count of Trier, Sidonius likewise could write (*Epist.* 4. 17. 2), "thus, the glory of Roman speech, if it exists now anywhere at all . . . , resides in you. . . . I greatly rejoice that at least in your illustrious breast vestiges of our vanishing culture remain. . . . You will learn that the learned surpass the rustics to the same extent that men surpass the beasts."¹¹ All these descriptions of cultural decline have one thing in common: at the same time that they discuss literary decline, they also stress the sense of superiority shared by the select few who continued to partake in classical culture.

Modern critics commonly have taken the Gallic descriptions of literary decline to mean that a qualitative decline had occurred, that the Gauls believed that their own literary efforts were somehow worse than those of the past. But if this was the case, it is curious that the Gallic writers never name a single specific example of this kind of decline. The Gauls more specifically may have been responding, rather, to a true quantitative decline, at least in the number of those who participated in the classical culture. Such a numerical decline would be attested by the Gallic litterateurs' own claims of how few they were. It also could explain Claudianus' assessment of the "decline" (*Epist. ad Sapaudum*), that "in our age it is not the talent [for literature] that is lacking but the study [of it]." The decrease would have resulted, in part, from the contemporary retrenchment in the Gallic educational system. There simply were not as many schools or teachers as there had been in the fourth century.¹² Nor, perhaps, were there as many aristocrats left with the leisure or wherewithal to pursue literary interests.

11. Auerbach, *Literary Language*, p. 257, describes this particular passage as "horrifying and grotesque," although Sidonius merely was repeating a sentiment that dates back to the fourth century B.C.: Claudianus Mamertus had used the same topos in the letter to Sapaudus cited above. Note also Sidonius' reference (*Epist.* 8. 3. 3) to the Visigothic adviser Leo's use of "those poetic meters so completely familiar to you alone"; and see his *Epist.* 4. 3. 6.

12. For the condition of the Gallic schools, see H.-I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*³, trans. G. Lamb (New York, 1956), pp. 456–58; P. Riché, "La survivance des écoles publiques en Gaule au Ve siècle," *MA* 63 (1957): 421–36; and Matthews, *Western Aristocracies*, pp. 347–48.

To be interpreted properly, the repeated Gallic claims of cultural decline must be examined in their social and historical context. One must take into account the extent to which literary pursuits shored up the sagging morale of Gallo-Roman aristocrats who were faced on all sides by the decline of Roman imperial authority and the rise of Germanic power.¹³ Many aristocrats had lost much of their land and social influence. The withdrawal of the Roman government also meant the loss of the opportunity to hold imperial office. Some aristocrats, of course, were able to remain local potentates by gaining episcopal office, but there were far more aristocrats than there were available episcopal sees.¹⁴ In the past, land, influence, and office had been the means by which aristocrats could assert their status.¹⁵ But now that the opportunity to employ these means was lost or limited, the status of some aristocrats seems to have become increasingly dependent on the sense of superiority they derived from the appreciation of a classical literary culture that they shared with their fellow aristocrats.¹⁶

The pursuit of literary interests, of course, always had been one mark of good Roman aristocrats and helped to occupy their senatorial *otium*.¹⁷ In an earlier age, literary activities also had been the means by which a new man like Ausonius could become a member of the aristocracy; in fifth-century Gaul, however, such endeavors became a means by which someone born an aristocrat could remain one. They provided an arena in which all could continue to participate on equal terms.¹⁸ In such a context, Sidonius could write to his otherwise-undistinguished friend Philagrius (*Epist.* 7. 14. 10), "you delight in the company of the learned; I call a crowd, however large, that is lacking in literary learning the greatest solitude."

The increased importance of culture as a determinant of aristocratic status can be seen, for example, in Sidonius' letter to Hesperius, where he equates educated

13. For the acquisition of western land by the barbarians, see W. Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans A.D. 418-584: The Techniques of Accommodation* (Princeton, 1980), passim. For the problems caused for aristocrats by the barbarian settlement in Gaul, see R. Mathisen, "Emigrants, Exiles and Survivors: Aristocratic Options in Visigothic Aquitania," *Phoenix* 38 (1984): 159-70.

14. For the appropriation of episcopal office by Gallic aristocrats, see Stroheker, *Senatorische Adel*, pp. 71-75, and Mathisen, "Emigrants," pp. 168-69.

15. For the conventional attributes of aristocratic status in the later Roman Empire, see C. Lecrivain, *Le sénat romain depuis Dioclétien à Rome et à Constantinople* (Paris, 1888), passim; J. Sundwall, *Weströmische Studien* (Berlin, 1915), passim, and *Abhandlungen zur Geschichte des ausgehenden Römertums* (Helsingfors, 1919), pp. 178-308; Stroheker, *Senatorische Adel*, p. 70; A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284-602: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey* (Norman, Okla., 1964), p. 523; A. Chastagnol, *Le sénat romain sous le règne d'Odoacre* (Bonn, 1966), passim, and "L'évolution de l'ordre sénatorial aux IIIe et IVe siècles de notre ère," *RH* 244 (1970): 305-14; P. Arsac, "La dignité sénatoriale au Bas-Empire," *RD* 47 (1969): 198-243; M. T. W. Arnhem, *The Senatorial Aristocracy in the Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 18-19; and Matthews, *Western Aristocracies*, pp. 1-31.

16. Although it is not the intention of this study to consider the particular writing style of these Gallic writers, one might at least wish to consider the possibility that the Gallic litterateurs even helped the "decline" along, in one sense, by affecting an obscure literary style intelligible only to those versed in current Gallic literary usages. Note the description of Sidonius' style by Auerbach, *Literary Language*, p. 258, as "a game for the initiate," which "only a small clique could appreciate"; for similar comment, see P. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity from Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad* (London, 1971), pp. 130-31. On Gallic literary "preciosity," see Loyer, *L'esprit précieux*, passim; on Ruricius' style, see also H. Hagendahl, *La correspondance de Ruricius* (Göteborg, 1952), passim.

17. For senatorial pursuit of literary interests, see esp. Matthews, *Western Aristocracies*, pp. 1-12, and note Ammianus Marcellinus' assertion (14. 6. 1) that the prefect Orfitus was "educated in the splendor of liberal studies less than befitted a nobleman."

18. This conclusion is contrary to that of Loyer, *L'esprit précieux*, pp. 64-65, who sees in Gaul a literary caste-system, in which only the highest-ranking nobles participated fully in literary life.

speech with the purple raiment of emperors and high officials. In his letter to Philagrius (*Epist.* 7. 14. 7), Sidonius asserted that “by universal judgment the dignity, virtue, and preeminence of knowledge are acclaimed, and through its ranks one ascends to the highest peak of accomplishment.”

Later in the fifth century, a classical education could be seen as a means by which a young aristocrat might reaffirm his aristocratic status. Around 485, Ruricius, bishop of Limoges, wrote to Sidonius’ friend Hesperius, who had become the rhetor responsible for educating Ruricius’ sons (*Epist.* 1. 3. 5–6), “surely, in the midst of such great confusion in the world, they would lose their nobility if they did not have you as an example.” And in the early sixth century, Magnus Felix Ennodius could write to the teacher of one of his young Gallic relatives (*Dict.* 8. 4), “it is allowed to you alone to grant or to restore the nobility of our ancestors.”¹⁹

But the best evidence for the new role of literary interests in late Roman Gaul comes, again, from Sidonius, in a letter to another friend (*Epist.* 8. 2. 2): “because the imperial ranks and offices now have been swept away, through which it was possible to distinguish each best man from the worst, from now on to know literature will be the only indication of nobility.” This sentiment is conveyed implicitly in a letter of Sidonius to his friend Syagrius (*Epist.* 5. 5. 1) where he refers to one of the latter’s ancestors as a man “to whom his literary ability would have granted recognition, if his imperial offices had not done so.” This individual had had the opportunity for secular advancement; most of Sidonius’ friends did not, and as a result had to seek solace in their literary activities as a substitute.²⁰

Far from being an amusement, the pursuit of literary interests in late Roman Gaul had become a serious business. Gallic litterati expended an inordinate amount of energy on the writing and evaluation of their literary works. They paid particular attention to the maintenance of their epistolographic ties, which allowed isolated aristocrats to remain in touch.²¹ In the later part of the fifth century, bishop Ruricius of Limoges could write to bishop Censurius of Auxerre (*Epist.* 2. 51): “nor does it matter whether [our correspondence] occurs from necessity or from personal preference, as long as those who esteem one another communicate reciprocally among themselves and as long as a true conversation of their minds and senses links those whom spatial distances separate in body.”²²

Gallic writers continually encouraged each other to publish and circulate their works.²³ To bishop Lupus of Troyes, Sidonius wrote (*Epist.* 9. 11. 9), “for whom

19. See also Ennod. *Dict.* 9. 5, where the teacher is described as the “libertatis index, boni testimonium sanguinis, ingeniorum lima.”

20. For the similar importance of office and literary skills, note also the report that Sidonius excelled “in the varied spheres of literature and imperial service” (Sid. Apoll. *Epist.* 8. 6. 2) and the letter in which Auspicius, bishop of Toul, said (ca. 470) to Arbogastes, count of Trier, “you surpass your official rank with your illustrious intellect” (*MGH:Epist.*, 3:135–37, no. 23 = *MGH:Poetae Latini*, 4.2:614). Sidonius also indicated, however, that official rank was to be preferred to literary pursuits and encouraged aristocrats who still had the opportunity to hold office to do so: he advised his friend Eutropius, later praetorian prefect of Gaul, not to become “entangled in the teachings of Epicurus,” but to hold public office (*Epist.* 1. 6. 5).

21. The Gauls continually bombarded each other with demands for letters: see Sid. Apoll. *Epist.* 3. 7; 4. 2, 5, 10, 12, 14; 5. 4; 6. 3, 6, 10; 8. 9, 11, 14; 9. 7, 9, 11.

22. See also Sid. Apoll. *Epist.* 7. 14. 2.

23. Encouragement to publish: Sid. Apoll. *Epist.* 2. 10. 2–4, 4. 15, 9. 14; Paulinus of Périgueux *Epist. ad Perpetuum*; Uranius *Epist. ad Pacatum* (*PL* 53:858–66); Gennad. *De vir. ill.* 80; Victorius *Epist. ad*

would you yourself not arouse to the rashness of composition?—you, who encourage the talents of all literary men, not to mention my own, even if they seek to remain concealed.” It was understood, moreover, that certain responsibilities went along with such encouragement, as Claudianus Mamertus of Vienne made clear to Sidonius around 469 (*De statu animae* praef.): “now . . . remember that you share the responsibility for the production of the work that you order to be published. . . . Accordingly, protect and defend your position, for if I run any risk because of the writing of this work, you do so because of its publication.”

Once their works had been published, Gallic authors could be certain of receiving effusive praise from their fellows and reassurances that they were still accepted in aristocratic circles. Small matter that the Gauls at times candidly admitted that they might not be the most impartial judges of each other’s works, as when the rhetor Paulinus of Périgueux wrote to bishop Perpetuus of Tours (*De vita s. Mart.* prol. [ca. 480]), “you believe to be good what you choose to be good, and you admit into Your Devotion’s fraternity even those poorer writers whom you read.”²⁴ Sidonius even could go so far as to deprecate his own works in order to raise the self-esteem of a friend (*Epist.* 1. 9. 7): “certainly, I advise you . . . never to compare this rubbish [of mine] to the hexameters of your Clio. Indeed, set beside yours, my poems deservedly would be compared . . . to the wailings of the composers of epitaphs.”

It would appear, then, that in late Roman Gaul participation in literary pursuits came to play an even larger role than before as a determinant of aristocratic status. The importance of this criterion of aristocracy was reinforced by assertions that the supposed decline in literary culture was being forestalled by the select few who preserved and appreciated this culture. Literary accomplishments and acceptance in a literary circle now could give enduring recognition to an aristocrat otherwise stricken by adversity. As Sidonius wrote to the Spaniard Fortunalis, whom he consoled for his misfortunes (*Epist.* 8. 5. 1), “nor indeed is your familiarity with literature so slight that you do not deserve to have something of yourself survive, through this very letter, after you are gone. The glory of your name shall live on. . . .”

The Gauls’ descriptions of cultural decay, therefore, should not be used as evidence that they believed that their own voluminous works were lacking in quality. The real significance of the topos of decline is made clear instead by Sidonius in his letter to Hesperius (*Epist.* 2. 10. 6): “apply yourself, therefore, and the ignorant mob will not lessen the value of literary inclinations for you, for it has been ordained by nature that in all the arts the glory of learning is more valuable by however much it is more rare.”

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Hilarum (PL Supp. 3:380); Faustus *Epist. ad Leontium*; and Constantius of Lyons *Epist. ad Patientem*. Requests for copies of each other’s works: Sid. Apoll. *Epist.* 1. 11. 1–2, 2. 10. 1, 4. 18. 3, 5. 1. 2, 5. 17. 1–2, 5. 21. 1, 7. 3, 7. 9, 8. 11. 2, 8. 12. 4, 9. 12. 1, 9. 13. 2; Ruric. *Epist.* 1. 4, 1. 11, 2. 18–19; Constantius of Lyons *Epist. ad Censurium*.

24. For similar remarks, see Sid. Apoll. *Epist.* 3. 14. 1, 8. 16. 5, 9. 13. 1. For reassurances that works will be well received, see Sid. Apoll. *Epist.* 9. 7. 5, 9. 14. 8.