

<CLARUS> CONFIRMED? PLINY, *EPISTLES* 1.1 AND SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS*

It is a truth universally acknowledged that the addressee of Pliny's first letter – and thus the dedicatee of the first book or the entire collection – is C. Septicius Clarus, a knight of perhaps Transpadane origin who would later rise to the office of Guard Prefect under Hadrian (and receive the dedication also of Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars*).¹ It is something of an embarrassment, however, that the *cognomen* Clarus is not found in Pliny's manuscripts here. The reader of Schuster's Teubner text (revised by Hanslik) or Zehnacker's new Budé will find the witness of the manuscripts faithfully reflected in the texts of letter 1.1 printed in both these editions, which give writer and addressee simply as C. PLINIVS SEPTICIO SVO S.² The reader of the standard Oxford Classical Text will find a bolder text, since Mynors prints C. PLINIVS SEPTICIO <CLARO> SVO S., with notice in the apparatus criticus that the supplement of CLARO belongs to Barwick, and a suggestion that it may be justified by comparison with letter 1.15³ – where indeed the fuller nomenclature Septicius Clarus is preserved in the letter heading of two of Pliny's most important manuscripts (B and F).⁴

The preservation of Clarus in the heading to 1.15 and the omission of a *cognomen* for Septicius in the heading to 1.1 appear to be an accident. The majority of Pliny's manuscripts, it is true, preserve only one name for each correspondent in the letter heading. However the pair of manuscripts already mentioned (B and F) erratically preserve some double names of correspondents in Books 1 and 3–5, as far as letter 5.6 (where both give out, by apparent coincidence). These can be supplemented from the letter headings in two late manuscripts and the 1508 Aldine (as far as Book 4), as well as from the indexes preserved in B.⁵ These indexes

* I wish to thank Rhiannon Ash, Michael Reeve, Chris Whitton and the anonymous referee for very helpful comments and revisions incorporated below. Translations of Pliny are taken or adapted from B. Radice or P.G. Walsh; of Sidonius from W.B. Anderson.

¹ SHA *Hadr.* 9.5; R. Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford, 1958), 778–9; id., 'Correspondents of Pliny', *Historia* 34 (1985), 324–59, at 343 (= *Roman Papers V* [Oxford, 1988], 440–77, at 461); A.R. Birley, *Onomasticon to the Younger Pliny* (Munich and Leipzig, 2000), 88 s.v. Septicius (Clarus).

² M. Schuster and R. Hanslik, *C. Plini Caecili Secundi Epistularum libri novem* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1992); H. Zehnacker, *Pline le jeune: lettres livres I–III* (Paris, 2009). Both note that SECVNDO, rather than SEPTICIO, is found in both B and F (two manuscripts that play a role in the argument below). (*Ad Secundum* is likewise found in the index to B – for which also see below.) Secundus is of course the *cognomen* of Pliny himself; for an account of the process of corruption here from Septicius Clarus to Secundus Clarus to Secundus, see K. Barwick, 'Zwei antike Ausgaben der Pliniusbriefe?', *Philologus* 91 (1936), 423–48.

³ R.A.B. Mynors, *C. Plini Caecili Secundi Epistularum libri decem* (Oxford, 1963), ad loc.: 'Claro add. Barwick (coll. 1.15)'. The reference is to Barwick, (n. 2), 426–7.

⁴ For a brief account of Pliny's complex manuscript tradition and its separate nine-book and ten-book traditions, see the *praefatio* to Mynors' Oxford text (n. 3); and L.D. Reynolds (ed.), *Text and Transmission: A Survey of the Latin Classics* (Oxford, 1983), 316–22.

⁵ See the tabulation of the evidence provided by F.E. Robbins, 'Tables of contents in the MSS. of Pliny's letters', *CPh* 5 (1910), 476–87, at 480.

cover the first five books and list addressees and opening words separately from the text of the letters, with substantial provision of double names in Books 3–5 alongside sparser fare in Book 1 (where single names predominate) and none at all in Book 2 (where single names alone are catalogued).⁶ The existence of such indexes can be traced back to the late fifth or early sixth century, since one is found in Pliny's earliest manuscript, New York Pierpont Morgan Library M.462.⁷ This fragmentary manuscript, the ancestor of B and F, preserves the end of Book 2 (2.20.13–14), followed by an index for the whole of Book 3 (with double names for addressees), then the text of that book as far as 3.5.4 (with single names in the letter heading, whether *gentilicium* or *cognomen*). We can be certain, then, that the Septicius given in our manuscripts for letter 1.1 was found – somewhere – in many early texts accompanied by a second name. The holder of that double name was, as a result, open to fairly precise identification by readers. Whether that double name was present originally in the letter heading itself, in some author-compiled index (only, or as well) or an index that was the work of early critics working from the author's text is unclear (along with the answer to the question of whether the indexes prefaced each book individually or the whole nine books collectively).⁸

But what that missing name might be really does matter. Scholarly edifices are built on Pliny's apparent dedication of his *epistulae* to his fellow north Italian, and speculation is routinely offered as to why Pliny did not choose instead some more eminent senator or consul of the day.⁹ The base of these edifices is not usually thought more than normally liable to subsidence. The *gentilicium* Septicius is rather rare, and Septicius Clarus is the only holder of that *gentilicium* addressed by Pliny in the collection.¹⁰ Or so we must at least suppose, since double names are – for reasons given above – missing for Books 2 and 6–9 of the letters. Witness here is Septicius himself. On the two further occasions when 'Septicius Clarus' apparently reappears as an addressee in Pliny, in fact we again find Septicius alone in the

⁶ For a complete transcription see *ibid.*, 476–8, replicating the earlier work of E.T. Merrill, 'The codex Riccardianus of Pliny's letters', *AJPh* 16 (1895), 468–90 (where a full collation of the MSS. is provided); see also T. Stangl, 'Zur kritik der briefe Plinius des jüngern', *Philologus* 45 (1886), 642–79. Birley (n. 1), 21, n. 39, rightly notes that 'Not much is said by the editors or by Sherwin-White in his *Commentary* about this invaluable aid to identifying many of the people in Pliny'.

⁷ See Reynolds (n. 4), 317–18. For a complete transcription, see E.A. Lowe and E.K. Rand, *A Sixth-century Fragment of the Letters of Pliny the Younger* (Washington, DC, 1922), 24–5, and the plates of the manuscript reproduced at the end of that volume.

⁸ The evidence of the Pierpont Morgan fragment suggests that at a fairly early stage, at least in the ten-book branch of the tradition, double names were confined to the index, with single names appearing in the letter heading. Evidence from patterns of preservation elsewhere in the correspondence suggests that the single name preserved most frequently (but not invariably) in the letter heading was the *cognomen* (see Robbins [n. 5], 480). As for the ultimate source of the double names, it is hard to see who would have had the interest or knowledge to supply this information between the early second century and our first manuscript – other than Pliny himself.

⁹ See e.g. A.N. Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny: A Historical and Social Commentary* (Oxford, 1966), 85, on 1.1. Sherwin-White here makes no comment on the omission of Clarus by the manuscripts but, in dealing with Septicius' brother-in-law Erucius Clarus in 1.16 he is moved to comment 'The *cognomen*, missing in the MS., is not in doubt' (122).

¹⁰ See also *Ep.* 2.9.4, where one C. Septicius, hailed as an exemplary old friend of Pliny's, is named as *auunculus* to a Sextus Erucius whose father is Erucius Clarus (and where the use of the *praenomen* Sextus suggests that the son's *cognomen* was also Clarus; cf. Sherwin-White [n. 9], 157). Presumably this is Septicius Clarus, although the *cognomen* shared with the other two must be fortuitous.

letter heading, since the letters are to be found towards the end of the collection, at 7.28 and 8.1. In theory this might be some Septicius other than Clarus.¹¹

Nevertheless evidence for the supplement of Clarus based on something other than prosopographical plausibility may now be uncovered in an unlooked-for source. The late fifth-century letter writer and poet Sidonius explicitly modelled his collection on that of Pliny,¹² and adduces Plinian precedent for adding a ninth (and final) book of private letters to his collection, in a letter to his friend Firminus at *Epist.* 9.1.1:

addis et causas, quibus hic liber nonus octo superiorum uoluminibus accrescat: eo quod Gaius Secundus, cuius nos orbitas sequi hoc opere pronuntias, paribus titulis opus epistulare determinet.

You add some reasons why this ninth book should be annexed to the eight earlier ones, pointing out that Gaius Secundus, whose tracks you declare me to be following in this work, completes his collection in the same number of parts. (trans. W.B. Anderson)

In theme, and certainly in his highly complex and elaborate style, Sidonius often reveals himself to be poles apart from Pliny and the earlier writer's studied simplicity of language.¹³ Nevertheless, his imitation of Pliny often reveals itself in rather formal ways, in the sense that – beyond importing Plinian tags into his letters – Sidonius is particularly interested in imitating (or alluding to) the mechanics or architecture of Pliny's collection.¹⁴ For instance, in addition to his citation of Plinian precedent for a ninth book, it is surely no accident that, at 147 letters, the nine books of Sidonius contain exactly one hundred letters fewer than the 247 letters to be found in the first nine books of Pliny. (The ancient indexes to Pliny, mentioned above, must have made such formal imitation relatively easy. Letters could easily be counted up,¹⁵ and are even consecutively numbered in the index for Book 4 in B.¹⁶)

One possible imitation of Pliny can be discovered in Sidonius' allusion to the addressees of the earlier writer's opening letter of Book 1 and closing letter of Book 9. The closing letter from Sidonius Book 9 is addressed to Firminus, the man who

¹¹ Internal cross-references linking the Septicius who is the addressee of *Ep.* 1.1, 1.15, 7.28 and 8.1 are not especially evident or strong. However, the use of a Septicius as opening addressee in two books at either end of the collection (1.1, 8.1) does suggest that the same man is involved in these instances at least.

¹² See e.g. Sid. Apoll. *Epist.* 1.1.1 (cf. Plin. *Ep.* 1.1.1), 1.1.3 (cf. Plin. *Ep.* 1.10.11), 1.1.4 (cf. Plin. *Ep.* 1.1.2), 1.2.10 (cf. Plin. *Ep.* 1.1.2, 6.16.12), 7.18.1 (cf. Plin. *Ep.* 1.1.1, 1.1.2); also 2.10.5, 4.3.1, 4.22.2 (cf. Plin. *Ep.* 5.8), 8.10.3, and see E. Geisler's collection of *loci similes* in *MGH*, AA 8.353–83 (supplemented by M.C. Fernández López, *Sidonio Apolinar, humanista de la antigüedad tardía: su correspondencia* [Murcia, 1994], 269–74); also J.D. Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fall of Rome AD 407–485* (Oxford, 1994), 7–10.

¹³ See I. Gualandri, *Furtiva lectio: studi su Sidonio Apollinare* (Milan, 1979), 79–80.

¹⁴ See further R.K. Gibson, 'Pliny and the letters of Sidonius' (forthcoming).

¹⁵ In this connection, note that the highly influential F stops – with apparent deliberateness – after 100 of Pliny's letters (i.e. at the end of 5.6), although it also drops the indexes of the BF family; see Reynolds (n. 4), 318.

¹⁶ Cf. the transcription at Robbins (n. 5), 477. The manuscript of Fronto likewise preserves – somewhat erratically – tables of contents for individual books of letters, whether in the form of a list of opening words (*Ad M. Caesarem* 4 and 5, *Ad Anton.* 1) or a list of (largely) double names of addressees plus opening words (*Ad Amicos* 1 and 2). For possible lists of addressees in Sidonius' own letters, see *Epist.* 8.16.1.

had encouraged Sidonius to add a ninth book in imitation of Pliny (see above). In this final letter (9.16), Sidonius takes care to remind us that, while Book 9 is dedicated to Firminus, the preceding eight are dedicated to Constantius (a priestly friend from Lyon).¹⁷ Constantius had, of course, been the addressee of the very first letter of the collection in Book 1. Sidonius, who was a notorious punster and player of jokes on the names of his addressees,¹⁸ may be suspected here, as he ends his collection with a letter to Firminus, of reminding us that the collection began with a letter to Constantius. For those who take the hint, the reward is a small witticism: Sidonius begins with a letter to the 'constant one' (Constan[tius]) and ends with a letter to the 'firm one' (Firm[inus]), a comment no doubt on the steadfastness of both his old friends and of Sidonius himself (and of the reader who has made it with them through the collection).

Yet there are signs that Sidonius is also thinking very much of Pliny. He explains in his final letter how he has put book nine together in a furious haste of transcription from odd letters left lying about at random. The moment of this transcription is identified rather precisely and with notable elaboration as winter, prior to the month of February and the arrival of the west wind with its fertilizing rains (9.16.2).¹⁹ It is not uncommon to end a poem or a work with the going down of the sun and the dying of the light – as famously in Virgil's first *Eclogue* and in the tenth as the whole collection comes to an end.²⁰ But it must be of particular interest that Pliny's own final letter in Book 9 also ends with an emphasis on winter and darkness. The proximate cause for this in Pliny is that he has been asked for an account of how he spends his time in winter at the Laurentine villa.²¹

¹⁷ Sid. Apoll. *Epist.* 9.16.1 (to Firminus): *si recordaris, domine fili, hoc mihi iniunxeras, ut hic nonus libellus peculiariter tibi dictatus ceteris octo copularetur, quos ad Constantium scripsi ... sponsio impleta est ...* ('If you remember, my Lord and son, you had urged that this ninth book specially dedicated to you should be added to the other eight, which I had inscribed to Constantius ... my promise is now fulfilled ...').

¹⁸ See e.g. the play on secundus/Secundus (in reference to Pliny) in *Epist.* 4.3 (cf. 4.8.3), and on tacitus/Tacitus in 4.22; see also n. 23 below for Pliny's puns on names. For ancient interest in names and their potential significances, 'even in the highest genres of literature', see A.J. Woodman and R.H. Martin, *The Annals of Tacitus Book 3* (Cambridge, 1996), 491–3.

¹⁹ Sid. Apoll. *Epist.* 9.16.2: *... tempore hiberno nil retardatus, quin actutum iussa complerem, licet antiquarium moraretur insiccabilis gelu pagina et calamo durior gutta, quam iudicasses imprimentibus digitis non fluere sed frangi. sic quoque tamen compotem officii prius agere curavi, quam duodecimum nostrum, quem Numae mensem vos nuncupatis, Favonius flatu teporo pluvisque natalibus maritaret* ('nor did I let the wintry season hinder me from carrying out your orders, although the amanuensis was delayed by the cold which prevented the page from drying ... etc etc ... But even so I strove to fulfil my obligation before the West Wind with its warm breath and native rains should arrive to fertilise the month that we call the twelfth and you call Numa's month').

²⁰ For the related use of the motif of 'death' as a (common) device for literary closure, see D.H. Roberts, F.M. Dunn and D. Fowler (eds.), *Classical Closure: Reading the End in Greek and Latin Literature* (Princeton, NJ, 1997), 58, 115–16, 117–18, 218, 230.

²¹ Plin. *Epist.* 9.40.1–3 *quid ... hieme permutem ... multumque de nocte vel ante vel post diem sumitur ... quae frequens hieme ... habes aestate hieme consuetudinem; addas huc licet ver et autumnum, quae inter hiemem aestatemque media, ut nihil de die perdunt, de nocte parvolum acquirunt* ('what ... I change in winter ... utilize the hours of darkness before dawn or after dusk ... as is frequent in winter. ... So now you know my routine in summer and winter; to these you can add spring and autumn, the seasons lying between them, since they lose none of the daylight, and they appropriate little from the hours of darkness').

The addressee of Pliny's final letter here is one Fuscus Salinator,²² where – given Pliny's own fondness for playing on names²³ – there is no doubt some link between the drawing in of winter's gloom, the closing of the collection and the darkness suggested by Fuscus' own name. Sidonius is clearly playing an internal game by addressing his first and last letters to Constantius and Firminus. Is he also playing a game with Pliny's letters, by addressing his final letter to a man who shared with Fuscus an initial F in his name?

If so, this is only half the game. For what did Sidonius find in the heading to his manuscript of Pliny's first letter, or in the accompanying index like the one preserved from within a few decades of Sidonius' death for Book 3? Was it already abbreviated to Septicius alone? Did it preserve the fuller nomenclature of Septicius Clarus? Or was Septicius supplemented by some other *cognomen*?²⁴ Arguably he found Septicius Clarus there, since this may be seen to be the source of Sidonius' own play on names. Just as Pliny begins his collection with a Clarus and playfully ends it with a Fuscus (as Alessandro Barchiesi and Ilaria Marchesi have shown²⁵) so Sidonius, it will now be seen, begins his with a Constantius and ends it with a Firminus – a playful reference to his epistological model. And both Pliny and Sidonius have their witticisms: Pliny, in the formulation of Marchesi, tracks a path from the brightness of dawn in letter 1.1 to the darkness of evening in letter 9.40, while Sidonius – preserving the same play on names beginning with C and F – places an emphasis on steadfastness and firmness of purpose. One may add that, if Pliny's play on words emphasizes the unity of his collection as it moves from dawn to dusk (at least for the attentive reader), then it would appear that Sidonius is affirming a similar unity for his own letter collection (the attentive reader must now go back to letter 1.1 and look for signs of this unity).

This is hardly final proof that Clarus was to be found at the head of Trajanic manuscripts of letter 1.1. But it does strongly suggest that, in the late fifth century, Sidonius found it somewhere in his copy of Pliny.

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²² Letter headings at *Ep.* 7.9, 9.36 and 9.40 preserve only Fuscus, but he is identified more fully as Fuscus Salinator in the bodies of two letters in Book 6 (6.11 and 6.26).

²³ *Ep.* 7.3 is addressed to one [Bruttius] Praesens, where the subject of the letter is *iusta causa longioris absentiae, non perpetuae tamen* (7.3.2 'a reasonable excuse for a prolonged absence, but not for an indefinite one'). *Praesens* has been *absens* too long, as it were. An even more complex example is found in letter 4.27, where Pliny writes to Pompeius Falco about the poetry of Sentius Augurinus, in a book where Pliny has announced his own rise to an augurship (4.8) and where Augurinus' own poetry is about Pliny himself, but C. Plinius Secundus says he has forgotten the 'secundus uersus'. Chris Whitton points out to me that 8.24 to Maximus ends with a pun on the addressee's name: *neque enim periculum est ne sit nimium quod esse maximum debet* ('There is no danger that what should be of the greatest importance goes too far'). For other examples, see R. Morello and R.K. Gibson, *Reading the Letters of Pliny: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 2012), ch. 2.

²⁴ Of course Sidonius may have found Secundus there instead of Septicius (see n. 2 above); but this does not affect the argument here, since Secundus *Clarus* creates a play with *Fuscus Salinator* quite as well as does Septicius Clarus.

²⁵ I. Marchesi, *The Art of Pliny's Letters* (Cambridge, 2008), 249–50, developing A. Barchiesi, 'The search for the perfect book: a PS to the new Posidippus', in K. Gutzwiller (ed.), *The New Posidippus: A Hellenistic Poetry Book* (Oxford, 2005), 320–42.