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Sidonius Apollinaris' Pagan Vision of Ancient Roma Bellatrix in Christian Rome

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SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS' PAGAN VISION OF ANCIENT ROMA BELLATRIX IN CHRISTIAN ROME

Sidonius Apollinaris was born in Lyons c. 430. His father was *prefectus pretorii* in Gaul. He received a good classical education, especially in grammar, literature and rhetoric, in Lyons and in Arles¹. He published several poems and wanted to be considered as a poet². He married Papiannilla a daughter of Senator Eparchius Avitus. His father-in-law had good relationships with two kings of Visigoths, Theodoric I (418-451) and his successor Theodoric II (453-466). The Visigoths kept peace with Rome as allies (*federati*) of the Empire. On July 9th 455, Avitus was proclaimed *Emperor of the West* in Arles. In such circumstances, young Sidonius started his career in public activity.

1. ROMA BELLATRIX IN THE PANEGYRIC IN HONOUR OF AVITUS

Sidonius received a proposal to pronounce a panegyric in honour of the new Emperor at the ceremony of his enthronisation in Rome on January 1st 456. He accepted such an honourable proposal and according

¹ Sidonius Apollinaris in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Oxford 1997, p. 1498.

² See Sidoine Apollinaire, *Poèmes*, ed. André Loyen, Paris 2003, vol. I. There is the Latin text and a French translation with commentary. For the bibliography concerning Sidonius, see W.J. Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris and Fall of Rome AD 407-485*, Oxford 1994.

to the tradition of that time pronounced his panegyric (*Carmen VII*)³. He started with a vision of the old City of Rome symbolized by a Matron who comes to the assembly of gods. Sidonius introduces his listeners to the divine choir:

“One day, the Father of gods looked from heaven (ab aethere) on the earth; his look gave strength to all beings; one sign made by his head heated the universe. Tegeaticus Arcas, i.e. Hermes flew away quickly to invite gods for a divine assembly (...). You, Tonantus’ brother, have come the first”⁴. And then, other gods and goddesses started to come: Phorcus accompanied by nymphs, Glaucus, Proteus, Liber, Mars, Tiryntius, Venus, Ceres, Diana, Iuno, Pallas, Cybele, Saturnus, Cynthia, Phoebus, Pan, several Fauni and Satyri, Castor, Pollux, Perseus, Vulcanus and Tiphus. The gods took their sites. The Father, i.e. Jupiter sat down on his throne and opened the extraordinary meeting. Then the Matron (old Lady) symbolizing Rome appeared and started to approach slowly, she was full of sorrow, her head sank, her eyes were turned down, her hairs was drooping from her head. She kneeled down before Jupiter the Righteous and said:

“Holy Father, I take you as a witness of my divine power which I possessed a long time ago as Rome; now I am crashed and deprived of my high destiny; I am very humiliated; my small house cannot keep any more the gravity of its roof and the walls cannot resist to the thunderstorm”⁵.

That is an allusion to Rome’s political situation in the second half of the fifth century. In this context, the Matron remembers the time of glory in the past:

³ E. Gibbon, *Histoire du déclin et de la chute de l’Empire Romain*, (trans. M.F. Guizot), Paris 1983, p. 1048 : «Cette composition fait peu d’honneur à son génie et à sa véracité (...). Avitus se livrait à tous les plaisirs de la voluptueuse Italie».

⁴ See Sidoine Apollinaire, *Poèmes*, VII, 15-20. English translation by the author of this article (J.G.). See A. Loyen, *Recherches historiques sur les Panégyriques de Sidoine Apollinaire*, Paris, 1956, p. 35-42.

⁵ Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmen VII*, 50 (*Testor; sancte parens, te numen et il-lud quicquid Roma fui, summo satis obrupta fato inuideo abjectis ; pondus non sustinet ampli culminis arta domus nec fulmen vallibus instat*).

“The blade of my lance terrified the territory of Libya, I put three times my yoke on the perfidious Carthaginian; the river Ganges in India, Phase in Colchide, Araxe in Armenia, Ger in Ethiopia, Tanais in the country of Gets were trembling before my Tiber [...]. Oh, how big my power was, when Sylla, Asiatic Scipio, Curius, Paulus, Pompeius imposed peace on Tigrane, on Antioch, on Pyrrhus, forcing them to abdication, sending them to exile [...]. Caesar installed the signs of victory among the Brits, repelled the Scots, the Picts and the Saxons. He was looking for more enemies, but he did not find them”⁶.

In this vision, we notice the old conception of *Roma bellatrix* present in Latin literature since the third century before Christ (*carmina triumphalia*)⁷. As we know, “Rome was regularly represented as a personified warrior divinity, clad in a short tunic which left one breast bare, helmed and carrying a spear or sceptre”⁸. There is a similar vision by Naevius (264-194) presented a similar vision in his *Belli Punici Carmen*, composed to glorify the taking of Agrigentum in Sicily by the Romans (262). We can see such a vision in the *Annales* by Ennius (239-169)⁹.

Sidonius, as every Latin poet, was inspired by Cicero’s (106-43) theory of rhetoric¹⁰ and by his orations¹¹, maybe by other Latin writers such

⁶ Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmen* VII, 70-90, (transl. J.G.).

⁷ J. Grzywaczewski, *The passage from Romanitas to Christianitas according to Sidonius Apollinaris*, in *Studia Patristica*, XLVIII (2010) 295.

⁸ L. Watson, *Representing the Past, Redefining the Future: Sidonius Apollinaris’ Panegyrics of Avitus and Anthemius*, in: M. Whitby (dir.), *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, Brill 1998, p. 187, note 14. See R. Rees, *Latin Panegyric*, Oxford 2012.

⁹ R. Pichon, *Histoire de la littérature latine*, Paris 1930, p. 99 : «Ennius est le modèle de Virgile parce qu’il a, le premier à Rome, conçu l’idée de la vraie épopée». Virgil took many phrases from *Annales* by Ennius.

¹⁰ See Cicero, *De Oratore*, Book I-II, (transl. E.W. Sutton), Oxford – Harvard 1967.

¹¹ Cicero, in *Pro Lege Manilia*, 3: “It is a war in which the glory of the Roman people is at stake; that glory which has been handed down to you from your ancestors, great indeed in everything, but most especially in military matter”(transl. perseus.uchicago.edu/.../search3torth ?). Cicero said to Caesar: “You subdued nations countless in numbers”(Pro Marcello, 1, transl. ibidem). See *Post Reditum ad Populum* (ibidem).

as Statius (45-96)¹², Pliny (61-112)¹³, Ausonius (310-394), Nazarius (IV cent.) and Claudianus (370-404). They wrote panegyrics on Emperors, and they glorified the Roman Empire.

The Matron symbolizing Rome, being conscious that her time of glory was over, declares:

“In old times, the whole world was too small for me, now there is no security even inside the city walls of Rome”¹⁴. It was true. Jupiter, impressed by this complaint, tries to console her: “Indeed, it is strange that you have been defeated, but it will not be strange when you start to gain and conquer again. I am going to give you advice on how to do it”¹⁵.

The intervention of gods in Rome’s history is typical in Latin poetry. In *The Aeneid* by Virgil (70-19) we can find something like *pre-existence of Rome* in divine plans; Rome is the city of those who should dominate the world¹⁶. Nazarius in his panegyric on Constantine (321) expressed his conviction that Rome had been established for eternity according to divine plans¹⁷. That was a general opinion among Roman citizens.

Jupiter promises to give Rome a new Emperor from Gaul, whose name is Avitus (455-456):

“I destined Avitus to go forward according to your law, o Rome. In his brilliant family there have been illustrious men since many generations

¹² Publius Papinius Statius, *The mighty Equestrian Statue of the Emperor Domitian*, in *Silvae*, Book I, (transl. A.S.Kline, www.poetryintranslation.com).

¹³ P. Roche, *Pliny’s Praise :The Panegyricus in the Roman World*, Cambridge 2011. See *Panegyric on Trajan*.

¹⁴ Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmen* VII, 95, (transl. J.G.).

¹⁵ Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmen* VII, 135, (transl. J.G.).

¹⁶ Virgil, *Aeneid*, I, 235 : “You promised once, a progeny divine, of Romans, rising from the Trojan line. In after times should hold the world in awe, and to the land and ocean give the law” (transl. J. Dryden), London 1903. *Ibidem*: I, 259-295; VI, 790-805; XII, 140-150; 155-170; 565-570.

¹⁷ Nazarius, *Panegyric of Constantine*, VI, 6, (transl. E.V. Nixon, B. S. Rodgers), *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors. The Panegyrici Latini*, Oxford 1994, p. 350-351: “Rome has been established and founded for eternity”. *Ibidem*, VII, 3: “God the ruler of things regards us from high (...), yet divinity winds its way in when it explores the whole; it cannot happen that since the divine will bestow upon us”. The Latin text by R. Mynors.

(...). He will conquer Libya for you (for the fourth time) and submit it to your authority; he will organize an expedition to recover Pannonia which has now been lost since many generations. Have confidence in his military actions. O, how many nations is he going to submit to your law by the shock of the (Roman) eagles²¹⁸.

The point of this panegyric was: Avitus as a descendant of an old Roman family will not only will be able to expel enemies, but to also to recover many countries which had been lost since a long time. Having experience in political matters¹⁹, he will restore the position of Rome in the world. The theme of conquering the world was characteristic for all panegyrics pronounced on Emperors²⁰. Listeners were probably conscious that such a consolation was only a poetical conception. In spite of the political situation, Sidonius had to follow the rhetorical rules concerning panegyrics: every Emperor should be presented as a hero in military matters and as a messenger of gods or of a divinity.

In fact, the proclamation of Avitus to be Emperor did not bring any success; he was not approved by Greek Emperor Leon; people of Rome did not trust him because of his friendship with the Barbarians; he had enemies in the Roman army. Several months after his enthronisation, Avitus was dethroned by Majorianus²¹ – *comes domesticorum* (October 456) with the help of Ricimer – *magister utriusque militiae*, a famous

¹⁸ Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmen* VII, 150 and 585, (transl. J.G.).

¹⁹ Emperor Petronius Maximus nominated Avitus in 455 *magister utriusque militiae* in Gaul and later delegated him to Toulouse to discuss military matters with the Visigoths. See A. Krawczuk, *Poczet cesarzy rzymskich. Dominat*, Warszawa 1991, p. 537.

²⁰ Julian the Apostate, *Oration I: On Constantius*, 31 : “Such were the trophies and victories that you left behind you in Asia, and you led your troops to Europe in perfect condition, determined to fill the whole world with the monuments of your victories” (transl. W.C. Wright, www.tertullian.org/fathers/julian_apostat).

²¹ A. Loyen, *Introduction to Sidonius' poems*, op. cit., p. XII : «L'empereur d'Orient s'était refusé à reconnaître Avitus comme son collègue. Aussi le règne de l'empereur gaulois sombra-t-il bientôt sous la coalition du *comes domesticorum* Majorien, du *magister utriusque militiae* Ricimer et de l'aristocratie italienne (...). Le 17 octobre 456, Avitus, privé du secours de ses alliés wisigoths, était battu à Plaisance, dépouillé de ses attributs impériaux et contraint d'accepter un évêque».

emperors-maker and master of the Roman Empire in the West during a part of the Vth century²².

2. ROMA BELLATRIX IN THE PANEGYRIC IN HONOUR OF MAJORIANUS

On April 1th 457, Julius Valerius Majorianus, born in Gaul c. 420, was proclaimed Emperor²³. He had great experience in military matters. Constantinople attributed him only the title of *caesar*, refusing him the title of *augustus*²⁴. Sidonius left Italy and went to Gaul. After the battle with Burgundians, he was asked by Peter, a secretary (*magister epistularum*) of Majorian to pronounce a speech in honour of the new Emperor. Sidonius accepted this proposal and pronounced his panegyric in Lyons in 458. He started his panegyric with the vision of *Roma bellatrix* (*Carmen V*):

“Rome, the warrior-goddess (Roma bellatrix), had taken her seat. Her breast was uncovered, on her plumed head was a crown of towers, and behind her, escaping from under her spacious helmet, her hair flowed over her”²⁵.

This time, Rome is presented not as a poor old woman deploring her situation, but as a powerful goddess dominating the world.

“So when she had seated her on the throne in the midst, all lands flocked to her at once. Provinces display their several fruits ; the Indian brings ivory, the Chaldean nard, the Assyrian jewels, the Chinaman silk, the Sabaean frankincense; Attica brings honey, Phoenicia palms, Sparta oil, Ar-

²² See G. Lucam, *Ricimer, un barbare au service de Rome*, Paris 1986 ; G. Lucam, *L'Agonie de Rome : un barbare maître de l'Occident 455-472*, Klincksieck-Paris 1992.

²³ E. Gibbon, op. cit., p. 1051 : «Ses lois, toutes remarquables par une empreinte originale dans les pensées et dans l'expression, peignent fidèlement le caractère d'un souverain qui aimait ses peuples et qui partageait ses peines, qui avait étudié les causes de la décadence de l'Empire».

²⁴ A. Krawczuk, op. cit., p. 545 : «Nie ulega wątpliwości, że Leon nie uznał go za współwładcę».

²⁵ Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmen V*, 15, (transl. W. B. Anderson), London 1936 (1963), (www.archive.org/.../poemsletterswith01sidouoft/poemsletter)

cadia horses, Epirus mares, Gaul flocks and herds, the Chalybian arms, the Libyan corn, the Campanian wine, the Lydian gold, the Arab amber, Panchaia myrrh, Pontus castory, Tyre purple, and Corinth bronzes ; Sardinia offers silver, Spain ships and the thunderstone, for there the flashing Levin-bolt stains the rocks, and the fertilizing wrath of the gods impregnates the heated flint”²⁶.

This image of the nations bringing their gifts to Rome should remind listeners the time of Roman glory in the past. Romans have always been proud of their role the world²⁷. They believed that their military and political position was a gift granted by Italian (pagan) gods. We can see this image of Rome in many works by Latin authors. We notice that Sidonius wanted to follow the Roman tradition in poetry. Glorification of Roman’s past should give hope to people in the time of crisis.

According to A. Loyen, in Sidonius’ presentation of Rome as the principal world power there are references Roman poets, especially to the panegyric by Claudius Claudianus (370-408) in honour of Olibrius and Probinus²⁸. We can also notice references to other *carmina* of this poet, for example to his panegyric in honour of Emperor Honorius²⁹.

²⁶ Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmen* V, 40-50, (transl. W.B. Anderson).

²⁷ Many Latin authors wanted to be considered as continuators of Tranquilius Suetonius (69-122), the author of the work *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars* (M. Brożek, *Historia literatury łanińskiej*, Kraków 1976, p. 460).

²⁸ Claudius Claudianus, *Panegyricus dictus Probino et Olybrio consulibus*, I, 80-85 : «Impetus horribilisque Metus, qui semper agentem proelia cum fremitu Romam comitantur anhelio, sive petat Parthos seu cuspide turpet Hydaspem. His ligat axe rotas, hic sub juga ferrea nectit cornipedes rigidisque docet servire lupatis, ipsa, triumphatis quae possidet aethera regnis, adsilit innuptae ritus imitata Minervae».

(www.curullo.org/Claudian/index.html).

²⁹ Claudius Claudianus, *Panegyric on the Sixth Consulship of Emperor Honorius*, XXVIII, 104 : ”Happy father to enter heaven with no fear for the future ; he knew that you were to succeed him. With what joy he looks down from above and sees his glory enhanced by your exploits. Europe and Africa were alike threatened by foes; from Mount Atlas fierce Gildo; Alaric from Peuce’s savage isle (...). But for your, Sire, cause, linked as it is with the general safety, doubles your warlike fame; the same victory that has restored peace to the world” (uchicago.edu).

There are similar points in the *Oration* by Aurelius Symmachus' (342-403) in honour of Valentinian³⁰.

The procession of nations was interrupted by a representative of Africa who came to complain about the Barbarian invasion:

“I come, a third part of the world, unfortunate because one man is fortunate. This man, son of a slave-woman, has long been a robber ; he has blotted out our rightful lords, and for many a day hath melded his barbarian scepter in my land, and having driven our nobility utterly away this stranger loves nothing that is not mad. O slumbering energy of Latium! He makes scornful boast that thy walls yielded to his cunning. Will you not then brandish the spear? Will you not grieve for me, even though you too have been captured?”³¹.

With this complaint, Sidonius was probably alluding to the attack by the Vandals in Northern Africa in 430 and maybe to their attack on Rome in 455. *Roma bellatrix* promises to help Africa suffering under Barbarian occupation: “Curb your long plaint, my faithful one. Majorian shall be your avenger commissioned by heaven” (*vindex tibi nomine divum Mairianus erit*)³². So, Majoran is going to expel the enemies in the name of pagan gods. In fact this glorious Emperor was killed by Ricimer in August 461 while going to Rome³³. The idiom *nomine divum* is typical of that time. It was a reference to a *Divinity* without precision, whether this Divinity was pagan or Christian. Emperor Constantine and Licinius in their *Edict of Milan* spoke about a *divinity in heaven* (*divinitas in sede*

³⁰ Aurelius Symmachus, *To Valentinian* (25 February 368), *Oration* I, 15 : «You had attained the most exalted rank of affairs and the summit of the Roman name while you were in the midst of so many provinces» (transl. in www.uvm.edu/.../Symmachus...). See ibidem 16-17.

³¹ Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmen* V, 55, (transl. W.B. Anderson).

³² Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmen* V, 350, (transl. W.B. Anderson).

³³ A. Loyen, *Introduction to Sidonius' poems*, op. cit., p. XVI : «Majorien, désireux de regagner sa capitale et de reprendre en main l'Italie, était cerné sur la route par les troupes de Ricimer et assassiné (août 461)».

coelesti) and about the *Supreme Divinity (summa divinitas)*³⁴. Majorian used the term *divinitas* without precision in his letter to the Senate³⁵.

3. A MEETING OF ROMA AND AURORA IN THE PANEGYRIC IN HONOUR OF ANTHEMIUS

Ricimer pushed Severus to be Emperor of the West (561), even if he had neither qualities for such a duty, nor authority among people; he did not have any power in the army. The country was emerged in wars and disorder. Ricimer killed Severus in 465. One year later, Leo, Emperor of the Greek part of the Empire, nominated in agreement with Ricimer a new Emperor for the West (March 25th 467). It was Anthemius, belonging to the imperial family in Constantinople. He came to Rome with two Greek armies. His daughter Alipia was obliged to marry Ricimer, whose crimes were generally known³⁶. In spite of it, he obtained the honorific title of *patricius Romanus*. Anthemius was proclaimed Emperor on May 12th 467. Sidonius received the proposal to pronounce a panegyric in his honour. He pronounced it on the 1st January 468. Anthemius appreciated it and granted Sidonius the title of *patricius Romanus* and nominated him Prefect of Rome (*praefectus Urbi*)³⁷.

In his third panegyric, Sidonius applied the same method as he did before. He based his speech on pagan and mythological items. The central point of the panegyric is the meeting of old *Roma bellatrix* with the Gre-

³⁴ Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum*, 48. In English in *Translations and Reports from Original Sources of European History*, Philadelphia 1907, vol. I, p. 28-30 (gbgm-umc.org/umw/bible/milan.stm).

³⁵ E. Gibbon, op. cit., p. 1051 : «Votre choix, pères conscrits, et la volonté de l'armée m'ont fait votre empereur. Puisse la toute Puissante Divinité diriger les entreprises et les événements de mon administration à votre avantage et à celui du public».

³⁶ The position of Ricimer in the Western Empire may be compared to the position of other men with German origin, like Stilichon or Arbogast (see P. Veyne, *L'Empire Gréco-Romain*, Paris 2005, p. 724-728).

³⁷ J. Rougé, *Les institutions romaines*, Paris 1969 (1991), p. 82 : «*Praefectus Urbi*. Doté de pouvoir de police, le préfet a à sa disposition un corps militaire chargé du maintien de l'ordre, les trois cohortes urbaines numérotées de X à XII qui, forte de cinq cents hommes étaient casernées avec les prétoriens».

ek goddess Aurora, Tithon's wife (*Tithonia coniunx*). Her Greek name was Eôs. She represented Constantinople. Sidonius probably chose this Greek goddess because Anthemius was a Greek. In Sidonius' composition, *Roma* went to India to Aurora's kingdom. Aurora welcomed her with respect and asked her: "O head of the world, why do you visit my kingdom? What are your commands?"³⁸.

Such a question sounds ironical, because *Roma* went to Aurora to ask for help, not command anything. *Roma* reminds her old position by saying what she is not ask for:

"I come not that Araxes, mastered by me, may have to flow beneath a bridge forced upon it, nor that in the ancient manner the Indian Ganges may be drunk from an Italian helmet, nor that a consul, ranging through the fields of tiger-haunted Niphates, home of archers, may triumphantly despoil Artaxata by the Caspian Sea. I do not now beg (*non precor*) for the realm of Porus, nor that these arms may thrust a battering ram to shatter Erythrae on the bank of the Hydaspes. I am not hurling myself against Bactra, nor are the gates of Semiramis' town laughing to hear our trumpets starting the fight. I crave not the palaces of Persian kings, nor is word being passed in camp of mine to march on Ctesiphon. This entire region we have yielded up to thee"³⁹. The list of lost cities and countries is quite long.

Roma was not asking what was impossible, i.e. to recover her lost territories. Roman citizens of that time did not think about the restoration of the Empire. They wished to protect the city of Rome and maybe Italy; but they did not know how to do it. Finally, Rome presents her request:

"If haply it pleases thee to lay old grievances to rest, grant me Anthemius. In these lands let Leo be emperor (*augustus*), and long may he reign! But let my laws be in the hands of him whom I have asked of thee; and let the star of her deified father rejoice that Euphemia his daughter is

³⁸ Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmen* II, 435, (transl. W.B. Anderson). In Latin : «Quid, o caput mundi, mea regna revisis ? Quidque jubes» (ed. E. Loyen, op. cit., p. 20).

³⁹ Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmen* II, 440-445, (transl. W.B. Anderson).

robed in the purple of her ancestors ! Add also a private compact to our public one: let a parent who is Emperor be blessed by having his daughter wedded to Ricimer. Both shine with the lustre of high rank; in her I will have a royal lady, in him I will have a man of royal blood⁴⁰.

Aurora, i.e. Constantinople, accepted this request and presented herself ready to cooperate with *Roma* called Reverend Mother (*Sancta Patrens*) for the safety of the Roman Empire⁴¹.

It seems that Sidonius, using the poetical method, expressed perfectly the deplorable situation of Rome and the desire of the people: the best way for Italy to be secure was a connection and cooperation with Greece; what's why *Roma* asked: *grant me Anthemius, let Leo be principal Emperor*. Indeed, Emperor (*augustus*) Leon Ist wanted to help Italy fighting against Germanic tribes⁴². Anthemius' presence in Rome guaranteed a union with Constantinople. People hoped that Ricimer, honoured by the marriage with Anthemius' daughter Alipia, would remain faithful to the Roman Empire. In fact, he did not.

Sidonius was probably ashamed to pronounce such an oration; and his listeners were probably ashamed to listen to it. The speaker was not only obliged to follow rhetorical rules, but also to adapt his speech to the tremendous political situation. Anthemius, in spite of his political experience and connection with Constantinople, was unable to do anything for Italy. He was killed by the Barbarians, fighting with Ricimer against Rome⁴³.

⁴⁰ Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmen* II, 480-485, (transl. W.B. Anderson).

⁴¹ Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmen* II, 515 : "Come, take him, Reverend Mother, although I have great need of a mighty and unconquerable leader, provided that you will now show yourself more kindly, and so we may better wield the reins in joint control" (transl. W.B. Anderson).

⁴² J. Brosse, *Histoire de la chrétienté d'Orient et d'Occident*, Paris 1995, p. 64.

⁴³ Ricimer attacked Rome together with his nephew Gundobad. Anthemius tried to flee secretly from the city, but Gundobad's soldiers killed him (July 11th 472). Men who were later established as emperors: Olibrius (472), Glicerius (473-480), Julius Nepos (474-475) and Romulus Augustulus (475-476) had neither qualities, nor possibility to do anything for saving Rome. See A. Krawczuk, op. cit., p. 550-567.

4. THE PAGAN CHARACTER OF SIDONIUS' LITERARY CONCEPTIONS

We notice that Sidonius' literary conception of Rome presented in his panegyrics was purely pagan. It wonders a little, if we take into consideration that this poet lived in the middle of the Vth century (c. 430 – 486). We know, in that time the Roman Empire was almost Christianized. Since Constantine the Great (277-337), all emperors were Christians, maybe except Julian the Apostate (332-363). There is no doubt that Avitus, Majorian and Anthemius were Christians. It is sure that Sidonius himself was also a Christian. He became Bishop of Augustonemetum (now Clermont-Ferrand) just before the fall of the Empire (471). He did not write theological books, but he passed to history as a very good pastor of his flock. The faithful of his diocese deplored his death⁴⁴. According to the document called *Notitia Galliarum* there were in Gaul at the beginning of the Vth century about 120 dioceses divided in eight ecclesiastical provinces⁴⁵. There were thousands of churches and hundreds of monasteries. Why are there no Christian elements in Sidonius' panegyrics? Why did he keep the old pagan vision of *Roma bellatrix*, without trying to christianize this vision?

It seems that the pagan character of Sidonius' poetical conceptions can be explained by two factors.

The first one: in the Antiquity, since the Apostolic time until the fall of the Roman Empire (476), the education system was quite well developed; rich people had teachers for their children at home; there were also public and private schools in cities⁴⁶; all of them followed the old Greek and Roman programs. Pupils and students, in spite of their reli-

⁴⁴ Grégoire de Tours, *Histoire des Francs*, II, 23, trad. R. Latouche, Paris 1999, p. 111: «Une multitude d'hommes et de femmes et également d'enfants, vint à lui en pleurant et en disant : Pourquoi nous délaisses-tu, bon pasteur, à qui nous abandonnes-tu comme des orphelins?».

⁴⁵ É. Griffé, *La Gaule chrétienne à l'époque romaine. L'Église des Gaules au I^{er} siècle*, Paris 1996, p. 113-117.

⁴⁶ H.I. Marrou, *L'Histoire de l'éducation dans l'Antiquité. Le monde romain*, Paris 1948 (1981), p. 115 : «Au IV^e siècle, nous rencontrons un peu partout des écoles,

gion, worked on classical literature⁴⁷. Teachers, in spite of their religion, explored literary and mythological figures. Such a method was generally accepted by the whole population⁴⁸, as we can see in one of Saint Basil's writings⁴⁹. Christian parents provided Christian education to their children within their families; they did not think about a *Christian education program*⁵⁰. All the bishops and Church Fathers have received such an education. They knew antic literature, mythology, elements of history, rhetoric and philosophy; and they were introduced into the Christian doctrine, life and spirituality⁵¹. Thanks to such a method, people had both, classical education and Christian faith. Scholars agree that "although Sidonius was a Christian and became a bishop, in the material and form of the greater part of his verse he followed the classical literary tradition"⁵². He lived and worked as many people of his rank.

The second factor: because Sidonius wanted to be considered as a poet and an orator, he was obliged to follow poetical and rhetorical rules. Because he pronounced his panegyrics in honour of the empe-

schola publica ou *municipalis*, en grec *politikos thronos*, entretenues, plus ou moins régulièrement, par le budget municipal, *salario publico*».

⁴⁷ H.I. Marrou, *L'Histoire de l'éducation dans l'Antiquité. Le monde grec*, Paris 1948 (1981), p. 243 : «La haute culture hellénistique, fidèle à la tradition archaïque, reste fondée sur la poésie, non sur la science; l'éducation est orientée vers la transmission du patrimoine littéraire représenté par les grands chefs-d'oeuvre».

⁴⁸ H. I. Marrou, *L'Histoire de l'éducation...Le monde romain*, op. cit., p. 134 : «L'adoption par les chrétiens des écoles grecques ou latines est un exemple remarquable d'une telle osmose : parce qu'ils vivaient dans le monde classique, les chrétiens des premiers siècles ont accepté comme naturel la catégorie fondamentale de l'humanisme hellénistique».

⁴⁹ S. Basil, *Address to young men on the right use of Greek literature*, I, 7: "After this, we are to receive those words from pagan authors which contain suggestions of the virtues. But since also the renowned deeds of the men of old either are preserved for us by tradition, or are cherished in the pages of poet or historian, we must not fail to profit by them" (ed. F.M. P ad e l f o r d; www.tertullian.org/.../basil_literature01).

⁵⁰ P. Riché, *Éducation en Occident barbare*, Paris 1962 (1995), p. 15 : «Nous voulons constater que le christianisme n'a pas voulu modifier l'école antique ni transformer le Romain que l'âme antique habite encore».

⁵¹ H.I. Marrou, op. cit., p. 134 : «L'homme cultivé selon la norme classique pouvait à son gré devenir orateur ou philosophe, opter pour l'action ou la contemplation (...) il peut aussi recevoir le baptême, devenir chrétien».

⁵² L. Watson, *Representing the Past...*op. cit. p. 184.

rors, he had to explore the ancient vision of *Roma bellatrix*, presented by many Latin poets since the time of Nevius, Ennius, Virgil, until the time of Claudianus, Statius, Ausonius, Symmachus, Nazarius, Claudianus Mamertinus and others. All poets while speaking about Rome and her emperors used old pagan terms such as *divinitas* or *numen*. Pacatus Drepanius, who was probably a Christian⁵³, in his panegyric on Theodosius (381) spoke about *fortuna* and *fatum* which gave power to the Emperor⁵⁴. He used the term *deus* several times, but in the sense of somebody's *personal divinity*⁵⁵. He spoke about pagan gods, for example Jovis Capitulinus (9, 5), Herclules (4, 5; 16, 5), and alluded to Apollo and Artemis (4, 5).

It is to be added that there were also Christian panegyrics. We know for example *De laudibus Constantini* by Eusebius (+ 339)⁵⁶. The author tried to show the relationships between the Emperor and the Divine Logos. There are many similar elements in Eusebius's *laudatio Constantini*. We know the *Funeral Orations* of Ambrose (*De obitu Valentiniani consolatio* (392) and *De obitu Theodosii oratio* (395)⁵⁷, but their authors were bishops. The *Oration* by Ausonius (+ 394) titled *Thanksgiving to*

⁵³ Pacatus Drepanius, *Panegyric of Theodosius*, in: E.V. Nixon, B. S. Rodgers (ed.), *In Praise of Later Roman Empire*, Oxford 1994, Introduction, note 7, p. 439: "Pacatus says nothing about his personal beliefs". Some scholars suppose that he was a Christian, see commentary to the Panegyric, 3, 2, note 7, p. 450.

⁵⁴ Pacatus Drepanius, *Panegyric of Theodosius*, op. cit. 8-9, p. 458-459.

⁵⁵ Pacatus Drepanius, op. cit. 6, 4: "To you alone, Emperor, let that secret be disclosed, along with the *god* who is your consort" (p. 455). Ibidem: "Do the reminding or, just as the *Fates* are said to sit with their writing tablets near that *god* who shares in your majesty, are you served by some force" (18, 4; p. 468). See also 4, 5 (p. 453); 30, 1 (p. 490); 39, 4 (p. 507). Commentary to the Panegyric, 4, 5, note 17: "It is noteworthy that Pacatus seems to receive the expression of the personal divinity of the emperor" (p. 453).

⁵⁶ Eusebius, *Praise of the Emperor Constantine*, (transl. A. C. McGiffert), in: Ph. Shaff, H. Wace (dir.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Massachusetts 1999, series II, vol. I, p. 581-610. He said among others: "Our Emperor, God's friend, acting as interpreter to the Word of God (Logos), aims at recalling the whole human race to the knowledge of God (ibidem, 2, p. 583).

⁵⁷ S. Ambrose, *De obitu Valentiniani Consolatio*, (Text and Translation by Th. Kelly), Washington 1953 (1968); *Sancti Ambrosii Oratio de obitu Theodosii*, (Text, Translation, Introduction by M. D. Mannix), Washington 1925.

Emperor Gratian can be considered as a christianized panegyric. The author followed antic rhetorical rules; he made references to the Roman past and mentioned Jupiter (*Iovem optimum maximum*)⁵⁸, but while speaking about God he presented the Christian conception of Divinity⁵⁹.

Generally, until the end of the Roman Empire it was not accepted for methodological reasons to introduce Christian elements into public speeches, and especially into panegyrics on Emperors. Sidonius as a classical Roman poet, involved directly into politics, followed the old Roman tradition in rhetorical matters. His poetical vision of *Roma bellatrix* shows a connection between antique culture and Christian religion. Christians were proud of Rome's former position in the world. They appreciated their Latin heritage, especially their poetry. The fact that it was based on mythology was not an obstacle to them, because they considered mythological elements not as a matter of belief, but as literary items which expressed nostalgia for the past and hope for the future.

Sydoniusza Apolinarego pogańska wizja *Roma Bellatrix* w chrześcijańskim Rzymie Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia wizję *Roma bellatrix* u Sydoniusza Apolinarego. Jest to dawna wiza Rzymu; znajdujemy ją i łacińskich poetów jak Newiusz, Eniusz, Cyceron, Stacjusz, Pliniusz, Auzoniusz, Nazariusz, Symmach. Rzymianie chlubili się swymi podbojami; rozumieli je nie jako okupację (w znaczeniu negatywnym), lecz jako dominację, która niesie ludziom wyższą kulturę i cywilizację. Sydoniusz prezentował

⁵⁸ Ausonius, *Thanksgiving for the Consulship, Thanksgiving for the Consulship*, XX, 2, (transl. Hugh G.E. White), LCL, London 1921, vol. II, op. cit., XX, 12, p. 253.

⁵⁹ Ausonius, *Thanksgiving for the Consulship*, op. cit., XX, 4, p. 231 : « He who is Ruler of heaven and of mankind grant that you may excel those ancient (Menelaus, Uliesses and Nestor (...)). Ibidem, XX, XVIII, p. 266: "Convertar ad Deum, aeterne monium genitor, ipse non genite, opifex et causa mundi, principio antiquior, fine diuturnior". Ibidem, p. 260: "Supremus ille imperii et conciliorum tuorum Deus conscius et arbiter et auctor".

ową wizję w swych panegirykach na cześć cesarzy: Awitusa, Majoriana i Antemiusza. W pierwszym panegiryku *Roma bellatrix* symbolizowana jest przez sędziwą niewiastę (miasta w języku łacińskim mają rodzaj żeński). Przychodzi ona na zgromadzenie bogów pod przewodnictwem Jowisza, by prosić o pomoc przeciw najeźdźcom. Jowisz zapowiada, że pomoc ześle poprzez nowego cesarza, czyli Awitusa. Podobny motyw pojawia się w panegiryku na cześć Majoriana; tym razem Afryka prosi Rzym o pomoc. Rzym obiecuje przyjść z pomocą poprzez Majoriana, który ma wypędzić barbarzyńców. W trzecim panegiryku Roma spotyka się z grecką boginią Eos. Ta obiecuje pomoc poprzez Antemiusza, cesarza pochodzenia greckiego, który właśnie przybył z Konstantynopola. Zapowiedzi zwycięstwa nie sprawdziły się, bowiem Rzym, pomimo wysiłków cesarzy, padł na skutek wewnętrznego rozkładu.

Jest rzeczą godną odnotowania, że chrześcijanin Sydoniusz wygłaszał owe panegiryki na cześć chrześcijańskich cesarzy, a mimo to odwoływał się do mitologicznych bóstw, nie próbując chrystianizować mitologicznych wizji. Wynikało to stąd, że pomimo chrystianizacji, szkoły rzymskie bazowały na dawnym klasycznym programie, który był mocno zakorzeniony w mitologii. Dla chrześcijan w V wieku bóstwa mitologiczne nie stanowiły przedmiotu wiary, lecz przede wszystkim służyły jako motyw literacki.