

BMCR 2021.03.20

Lo specchio del modello. Orizzonti intertestuali e Fortleben di Sidonio Apollinare

Marco Onorato, Anita Di Stefano, *Lo specchio del modello. Orizzonti intertestuali e Fortleben di Sidonio Apollinare*. Napoli: Paolo Loffredo, 2020. Pp. 488. ISBN 9788832193336 €38,50.

Review by

Francesco Montone, Polo “Pietro Aldi”, Grosseto.

The year 2020 has been very important as far as studies on Sidonius Apollinaris are concerned: the publication of the important *Edinburgh Companion to Sidonius Apollinaris*, edited by G. Kelly and J. V. Waarden and that of *Lo specchio del modello*, by M. Onorato and A. Di Stefano, are two important steps for a deep knowledge of the Late Antique author. *Lo specchio del modello* collects the studies presented at the international conference held in Messina on October 4th and 5th, 2018. There are two important sections: one about intertextuality in Sidonius and one about the *Fortleben* of the Galloroman writer. This book, as well as the *Edinburgh Companion*, comes out after 40 years of multiple studies about Sidonius—in this regard A. Di Stefano and M. Onorato can correctly speak of “aetas Sidoniana”; especially I. Gualandri with *Furtiva lectio: Studi su Sidonio Apollinare* (Milan 1979) and R.

Mathisen^[1] with his studies encouraged scholars of the next decades to investigate intertextuality in this author.

Above all the present volume has the merit of investigating the use of *imitatio* by Sidonius from different and interesting points of view. In the introduction of the first section of the book (“*Velut de quodam speculo formatum: l’interstualità sidoniana tra teoria e prassi*”), M. Onorato underlines the greater incidence of intertextual phenomena^[2] (the *furtivae lectiones*, by the definition of I. Gualandri) in Sidonius, compared to writers such as Martial, Statius, Claudian and Ausonius. Sidonius challenges the perspicacity of the Gallo-Roman aristocratic circle and of his *sodales*, who must have been able to appreciate his linguistic inlays, understandable to the modern interpreters only thanks to a meticulous investigation.

Two studies analyze the function of the myth in Sidonius’ *carmina*. F. E. Consolino, “A confronto con la tradizione: Sidonio, il mito e la struttura dei carmi,” effectively demonstrates through the analysis of numerous mythological scenes present in *carmina* 5, 7, 11, 15, and 22 that the use of myth influences the macrostructure of Sidonius’ components; moreover, myth provides readers with a key which let them get a correct interpretation of the illustrated events.

The article of M. J. Falcone (“*Agnita virgo...crimine: Alcune considerazioni sulla presenza del mito di Medea in Sidonio*”) investigates, on the other hand, references to the myth of Medea in Sidonius’ *carmina* (2, 493–494; 9, 65–75; 11, 68; 23, 272–276 and especially 5, 126–147). What is so interesting is the analysis of the fratricide of Medea in the panegyric to Majorian (*carm.* 5, 126–147). The goddess Africa reports to her husband a speech of Aetius’ wife. This woman, a foreigner, is, from the very beginning, compared to Medea even

before Sidonius initiates the simile, while Aetius is represented as Jason, as an insecure and fearful man, destined to be outclassed by the future emperor Majorian, whose glory is already shining.

Two studies give new interesting readings of *carmen* 2 and *carmen* 15. J. H. Lobato (“Phoenix and Aurora in Sidonius’ *carm.* 2: A self-Representational Metaphor?”) suggests a metaliterary reading of two scenes from the “Panegyric to Anthemius”: the description of the kingdom of Aurora (*carm.* 2, 407–435) and the myth of the Phoenix (*ibid.*, vv. 416–417). The Kingdom of Dawn, as unreal as it seems, becomes the embodiment of the fictional universe made by the poet and in a wider sense by literature itself. The reference to the myth of the Phoenix would symbolize the rebirth of poetry under a new aesthetic paradigm.

The study of M. Onorato (“Il filosofo, la tessitrice e la cortigiana: echi neoplatonici e sperimentalismo di genere nell’epitalamio sidoniano per Polemio e Areneola”) in the first part focuses on the close relationships between the *epithalamium* of Polemius and Araneola, on the one hand, and Claudian’s panegyric for Mallius Theodorus and Capella’s *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, on the other. The strain of wedding poetry not only has strong repercussions on the linguistic side, but also influences the reuse of various models (including Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Propertius and Persius); Polemius and Sidonius’ *sodales*, imbued with Neoplatonism, would have been able to grasp the most hidden philosophical references; at the same time, the fusion between epithalamic conventions and more disengaged hypotexts would have been appreciated by readers with an eminently literary background.

An anthropological reading of *carm.* 9, 159–167 is made by R. Santoro, “Ricerche letterarie e metaletterarie del cibo nell’opera di Sidonio Apollinare.”

In the passage there is the topos of the “monster’s meal”. The scholar notes that the poet, while recalling the most important adventures of Ulysses, points out that sometimes the hero risks ending up like a ‘shipwrecked man’ and ‘proud meal’ of monsters. The presence of the topos is demonstrated by the particular use of words like *voro*, *vomo* and *ructo*; the “monster’s meal” can be also found in two other Sidonius’ texts: *carm.* 9, 110–113 (Sidonius recalls the cannibal banquet of Thyestes) and *carm.* 16, 26–30 (Jonah in the belly of the whale remains a meal that is not actually consumed and badly digested).

The study of S. Santelia, “Not only Ovid: intertextuality games in Sidonio Apollinare *carm.* 12,” traces new literary echoes in Sidonius’ poem 12, in addition to the Ovidian references (Sidonius complains about the impossibility of writing poetry because he lives surrounded by Burgundians and feels like Ovid in exile, although he lives in his own home). The scholar notes that the first literary attestation of the connection between Giants and barbarians present in *carm.* 12 is in Mart. *epigr.* 8, 49 (50); the same topos appears also in the panegyric for Maximian of Mamertino (*Pan. Lat.* 2 [10], 4, 2–3), and then in Claud. *carm. min.* 53. Sidonius wants to denounce, through literary *lusus*, the situation he lives in: he writes (although he affirms that his Muse is silent), since poetry is an act of freedom. To the interesting observations carried out by Santelia we can add that Sidonius finds his situation similar to Ovid’s condition for another reason too: poem 12 alludes to a satirical text, which some malicious people believed to have been written by him; because of it he has risked a punishment by the emperor Majorian; in letter 1,11, he says that he managed to clear himself, claiming not to be the author of that composition, unlike Ovid, exiled to Tomi for an *error* and a *carmen* (*Trist.* 2, 207).[\[3\]](#)

Two studies are dedicated to Sidonius' epistles. A. Peltari ("The rhetor Sapaudus and conflicting literary models in Sidonius Apollinaris and Claudianus Mamertus") examines two letters, one by Claudianus Mamertus (*epist.* 2), the other by Sidonius (*epist.* 5.10), addressed to the same recipient, Sapaudus, probably a rhetoric teacher in Vienne. From the comparative analysis of the letters it is clear that Claudianus Mamertus had read Sidonius' *epistula*, that he approved the recent rhetorical models, and that he wanted to try to disprove the theses of his prestigious friend through a letter to the same address. The consideration that Sidonius already enjoyed among his contemporaries was therefore evident.

M. Zoeter's study ("Death of the Poet: A commentary on Sidon. *epist.* 8. 11") examines epistle 8, 11, where Sidonius writes to Bishop Lupus about the violent death of Lampridius (rhetor and poet at the court of the Visigothic king Euricus), killed by his slaves. The letter works as an independent letter and also as a part of book 8: on the one hand astrology and all forms of divination are condemned; on the other hand, the writer carries out a subtle critique of the Visigothic kingdom in the book, inviting readers to preserve Romanitas.

The second section, very original, is introduced by a few pages ("Introduzione. Per il *Fortleben* di Sidonio: alcune riflessioni") where Anita Di Stefano takes stock of the studies carried out and the new research perspectives on Sidonius' fortune. Sidonius is a model for writers such as Ennodius, Venantius, Jordanes, Avitus of Vienne, and Gregory of Tours; he is also well known to humanists such as Politianus, Ermolaus Barbarus, and Ioannes Baptista Pius Bononiensis; for Di Stefano new discoveries could come from studies on the libraries of other humanists or from the erudition of the 17th–19th centuries.

The next two studies are very interesting because they analyze the different approach to Sidonius' production by Avitus of Vienne and by Venantius Fortunatus. The essay by L. Furbetta, ("*Inter facundiae paternae delicias*. Interferenze mnemoniche, testi e intertesti sidoniani nell'opera di Avito di Vienne: sulle orme del 'modello'"), underlines the debts of Avitus of Vienne towards Sidonius, examining in the first place the *De spiritalis historiae gestis*. The study then focuses in particular on *carm.* 1, 170–174 by Avitus of Vienne, compared with *carm.* 11, 131–133 by Sidonius, on echoes and reprisals from Sidonius' *carmina* 2 and 7 in Avitus of Vienne's *carmina* 1–4. Sidonius and he shared the same culture and society; we can see traces of Sidonius in all his production.

Venantius Fortunatus' attitude towards Sidonius is quite different, as shown in the fine essay by S. Condorelli, "Sidonio e Venanzio Fortunato"; the two authors, even though they both lived in Gaul, one in the 5th, the other in the 6th century, faced very different situations; while Sidonius witnessed the settlement of the first Roman-barbarian kingdoms, Venantius, *peregrinus*, arrived in Merovingian France, in the kingdom of Austrasia. If Venantius often takes up phrases of classical and Christian authors, the references to Sidonius' work seem sporadic, although he is certainly familiar with it; in Venantius' opinion, Sidonius is a model of a world now lost.

Two studies are dedicated to Sidonius' *Fortleben* during the Renaissance. A. di Stefano ("Il commento a Sidonio di Giovan Battista Pio: il testo 'forzato'") analyzes the commentary present in Sidonius' *editio princeps* of 1498. The notes to Sidonius' text often become an opportunity for linguistic, semantic, and historical dissertations or discussions with rival scholars, not at all functional to the understanding of the author; the interpretation of the text is

‘forced’, according to a typical tendency of Renaissance’s philology, in the direction of an inexhaustible display of erudition. There are interesting observations of Pius, anyway, when he underlines some echoes of Plautus and Apuleius present in Sidonius; according to the scholar, he seems almost to be attempting an intertextual reading *ante litteram*.

The study of E. Wolf, “La notice de Pietro Crinito (1474-1507) sur Sidoine Apollinaire dans le *De poetis Latinis*,” pp. 451–459, is dedicated to another humanist, Pietrus Crinitus, and in particular to the short biography of Sidonius in the *De poetis Latinis*. If Crinitus correctly places the birth of Sidonius in Auvergne and not in Bordeaux, he states, however, that Flavius Nicetius would have been a *grammaticus* and teacher of Sidonius, unfounded information. Crinitus in 1491 copied one of Sidonius’ manuscripts (*Florentinus Laurentianus plut. 90 sup. 8*). It is curious that in the dispute started by Politianus (who knows Sidonius’ books well), the humanist who affirmed that it was not necessary to look only at Cicero as a stylistic model took the side of philologists who opted for Cicero’s linguistic purism.

Very suggestive also is the conclusive intervention of the Messina conference, by J. Van Waarden (“Fifty Years of Sidonius Scholarship in the Mirror,” pp. 461–480); he takes stock of the critical approaches of the second half of the 20th century and their influence on Sidonian studies; he suggests studying the author with new methods of research, according to the approach to ancient texts offered by the cognitive sciences or the narratological method (an example is the innovative analysis of Sidonius’ letters by M. Hanaghan, *Reading Sidonius’ Epistles*, Cambridge 2019) or by the one suggested by Formisano, which points out analogies between late antiquity and the contemporary age.[\[4\]](#)

This volume, thanks to its various and original approaches to Sidonius' books, will be an important reference for the scholars of Late Antiquity in coming years.

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Notes

[1] See especially R. Mathisen, *Roman aristocrats in barbarian Gaul: strategies for survival in age of transition*, Austin 1993.

[2] See now also I. Gualandri, *Sidonius' intertextuality*, in G. Kelly & J. Van Waarden, *The Edinburgh Companion to Sidonius Apollinaris*, Edinburgh 2020, pp. 279-316.

[3] See F. Montone, *I rapporti del poeta tardoantico Sidonio Apollinare con l'imperatore, con i barbari foederati...e con Ovidio*, "Salternum" 18, 32-33, 2014, pp. 29-36 (cited by Santelia, p. 175).

[4] M. Formisano & T. Fuhrer, (ed.), *Décadence: "Decline and Fall" or "Other Antiquity"?*, Heidelberg 2014. For other observations on *Lo specchio del modello* see my more extensive Italian review ("Bollettino di Studi Latini", 50. 2, 2020, pp. 836-839).

