



# SIDONIUS

## POEMS AND LETTERS

WITH AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION,  
INTRODUCTION, AND NOTES BY

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IN TWO VOLUMES

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POEMS

LETTERS, BOOKS I-II



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## PREFACE

THE present volume contains the first English translation of the poems of Sidonius. The task of translating the letters was originally assigned to the late Dr. E. V. Arnold. He had drafted a rough rendering, to which I have been repeatedly indebted for an apt word or phrase, but as he had not had time to consider fully the many problems presented by the Latin text, it seemed advisable to rewrite the translation. I would fain hope that its present form is such as would have met with his approval.

An attempt has been made, no doubt with indifferent success, to discover and express the whole meaning of every sentence. There is a comfortable doctrine, which has actually been propounded with reference to Sidonius, that when a writer is very hard to understand there is no need to translate him accurately. It is scarcely necessary to expose this fallacy, but one may remark that the many serious mistakes made by historians and biographers through failure to grasp the meaning of Sidonius show that no one can afford to despise conscientious verbal scholarship.

The translation, especially in the case of the poems, is accompanied by numerous explanatory notes; it would not have been intelligible without them. They have involved a good deal of pioneer work and many excursions into paths outside the

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regular beat of a mere Latinist. I cannot expect that they will completely satisfy either the specialist or the non-specialist reader; I do, however, cherish the hope that they will clear up some obscurities and that a few of them will be of some interest to students of history and to some other scholars.

Shortly before his death Professor L. C. Purser, who had once thought of publishing a commentary on the poems of Sidonius, most kindly put at my disposal the materials which he had collected. It is a melancholy pleasure to express my deep gratitude for a thoroughly characteristic act of generosity. Dr. W. H. Semple was good enough to read the proofs of the translation and of a large part of the notes. I am indebted to him for many acute and valuable observations; my obligations to him are by no means confined to the places where I have expressly acknowledged them.

W. B. A.

# INTRODUCTION

## I. HISTORICAL SKETCH:

FROM A.D. 406 TO THE "FALL OF THE  
WESTERN EMPIRE"

THE sources available for our knowledge of the fifth century are meagre and often obscure, and the attempts of modern historians to reconstruct the facts show marked divergences. Even if the facts were certain, it would not be easy to present in short compass the history of a period so confused, so full of intrigues and struggles in so many countries.

Gaul holds a position of special prominence not only in the career of Sidonius but in the story of the decline and fall of the western Empire. It is reasonable, therefore, to start our narrative at the end of the year 406, when four German peoples<sup>1</sup> (Asding and Siling Vandals, Alans, and Suevians) made an incursion across the Rhine, sacking Mainz, burning Trier, and spreading their depredations far and wide. The invasion of Gaul by the usurper Constantine from Britain in 407 may have checked them for a short time, but he soon allowed them to pursue their activities without serious opposition. In 409 they crossed the Pyrenees and occupied a large part of Spain. Meanwhile the Burgundians

<sup>1</sup> On the geographical situation of the various German peoples see Bury, *Later Roman Empire* I., pp. 99 f.

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had likewise moved across the Rhine from their territory on the upper Main, and in the end the Emperor Honorius, making a virtue of necessity, allowed them to remain in occupation of the province of Upper Germany (Germania Prima)<sup>1</sup> as *foederati*<sup>2</sup> (413).

We must now turn to the Visigoths, who were destined to play a leading part in the dissolution of the Empire. In 410 Alaric, their king, died, a few months after his capture of Rome. Athaulf, his successor, left Italy for Gaul early in the year 412, carrying off with him Placidia, sister of Honorius. After bringing about the fall of the new usurper Jovinus, who had started an insurrection in 411 and found many adherents, he made overtures to the Emperor, but as he refused to give up Placidia, nothing came of them. He then occupied Narbonne, where he married Placidia (414). Vigorous measures by the general Constantius made his situation in Gaul precarious; he therefore proceeded to Spain early in the following year, probably intending to found a Visigothic kingdom in the province of Tarraconensis, which had not been occupied by the previous German invaders. He was, however, assassinated at Barcelona; seven days

<sup>1</sup> Its capital was Worms (Borbetomagus).

<sup>2</sup> The *foederati* were the successors of the old client-peoples who had acted as buffer-states to protect the Roman frontiers. The ruler of a "federate" people received an annual subsidy, which in theory represented the pay of the soldiers at his disposal. When necessity compelled the Romans to admit foreign peoples into Roman territory with the status of *foederati*, the Roman land-owners had to surrender a certain proportion (generally one third) of their property to the new settlers.

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later the same fate befel his successor, and Wallia became king. Debarred from food-supplies by the Romans and foiled in an attempt to cross to Africa, Wallia came to terms, agreeing, in return for large supplies of corn, to restore Placidia and to make war upon the German invaders of Spain (416). On the first day of the following year Constantius married Placidia.

Wallia vigorously set about his task of conquering his "barbarian" neighbours. In their alarm they sought to make terms with Rome. The Asding Vandals and the Suevians seem to have gained recognition as "federates" of the Empire, but Wallia was left to work his will with the other two peoples. In a campaign of two years (416-418) he almost wiped out the Silings, and inflicted such grievous losses on the Alans that the survivors at last sought refuge with the Asdings in Gallaecia. The Vandal king Gunderic thus became "King of the Vandals *and* Alans," and handed down the title to his successors.

Then followed a momentous event. It was decided to allow the Goths to settle in Gaul as *foederati*. The lands assigned to them were the province of Aquitania Secunda (extending from the Loire to the Garonne) and adjacent portions of Narbonensis (including Toulouse) and of Novempopulana (west of Narbonensis). Thus began the Visigothic kingdom in Gaul. Wallia died soon after leading his people to their new abode, and Theodoric I reigned in his stead.<sup>1</sup> The same period saw the quelling of a

<sup>1</sup> The arrangements for the new settlers were completed under Theodoric. The Goths received remarkably favourable terms, as the Roman land-owners had to surrender two-thirds of their property to them.

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serious revolution among the Aremorians of Brittany.<sup>1</sup> In Spain, soon after the departure of the Goths, Gunderic, king of the Vandals and Alans, attacked and defeated the Suevians, and, although more than once defeated by Roman forces, ultimately triumphed and established himself in the southern province of Baetica, from which his successor Geiseric was soon to aim a blow at the very heart of Rome.

National feeling in Gaul, which boded ill for the future of the Empire, had been accentuated in the time of the usurpers Constantine and Jovinus, who had found many adherents in that country, and it was further heightened by the severe measures which Constantius took against the ringleaders of the insurgents. It was more than ever necessary to consolidate the loyalty of the Gallo-Romans. From this time dates the regular custom of appointing natives to the office of Praetorian Prefect of Gaul and to the other important official posts in the country. Another significant measure was the organisation in the year 418 of the Council of the Seven Provinces (*Concilium Septem Provinciarum*), in which leading men of the southern provinces met every year to discuss matters affecting the public interest and to make recommendations to the authorities. Among the provinces which sent representatives were

<sup>1</sup> The Aremorici inhabited the coast-land between the Seine and the Loire. The troubles in Britain in the later years of the Roman occupation caused many of its inhabitants to emigrate to Aremorica, which owes its modern name to them. In the fifth century *Britannus* is not infrequently used to denote a native or inhabitant of Aremorica (cf. Sidonius, *Epist.* III. 9. 2; more explicitly *Britannos supra Ligerim sitos*, I. 7. 5), and it is not always easy to determine the meaning of the word.

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Aquitania Secunda and Novempopulana;<sup>1</sup> thus the Roman inhabitants of the occupied lands were stimulated to retain their Roman feelings in their "barbarian" environment. The council met at Arles, which had now become the residence of the Praetorian Prefect, after Trier had been sacked not only by the Vandals but on two occasions by the Ripuarian Franks from the lower Rhine. Arles became a proud capital, and everything possible was done to make it a centre of Roman influence.

On the 2nd of July, 419, Flavius Placidus Valentinianus, the future Emperor, was born. His father, Constantius, was made a colleague in the Empire by Honorius on 8th February, 421, but died in the same year. He had worked hard, and with considerable success, to maintain the cohesion of the Empire in the West. On the 15th of August, 423, Honorius died. After two years of the usurper John, the boy Valentinian came to the throne as Valentinian III. For the first twelve years of his reign his mother Placidia acted as regent. From this time the disintegration of the Empire proceeds apace, despite the emergence of a great military leader in the person of Aëtius. The Goths, under Theodoric I, had turned longing eyes on the Mediterranean shores of Narbonensis. Early in the new reign they were hurled back by Aëtius from the walls of Arles to their own territory, where they remained comparatively quiet, but always a potential source of danger, for a few years. The "barbarian" peoples on the Rhine-frontier could not be trusted to keep the peace for long, and the Aremorici might

<sup>1</sup> For an enumeration of the Septem Provinciae see note on Sidonius, *Epist.* I. 3. 2.

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cause trouble again. Gaul thus made constant demands upon the vigilance of Aëtius. This fact, together with the enmity of Placidia and her partiality for less able supporters, prevented him from intervening in another sphere where his tried troops and his generalship were sorely wanted.

In the year 427 Count Boniface, governor of the diocese of Africa, on being summoned home to give an account of his actions, disobeyed and was proclaimed a rebel. Unable to cope with the forces sent against him, he took the fatal step of inviting the Vandals to come to his help from Spain.<sup>1</sup> King Gunderic lent a willing ear to this proposal, but died before he could carry it into effect (428). His successor Geiseric was only too glad to complete the preparations. In May, A.D. 429, the combined host of Vandals and Alans crossed the Straits of Gibraltar. The Imperial government came to terms with Boniface, but this reconciliation made no difference to the greedy schemes of the Vandals. Boniface, now entrusted with the defence of Africa, was no match for the enemy, and was eventually compelled, in the spring of 430, to shut himself up in Hippo Regius, which underwent a long siege.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile the Vandals made themselves masters of the valuable corn-lands of Tunisia. In this critical situation Placidia appealed to the eastern Emperor, Theodosius II, for help. His trusted general, Aspar, entered Africa with a combined force drawn from east and west, which perhaps succeeded in raising the siege of Hippo, but soon sustained a severe

<sup>1</sup> For a different account see *Cambridge Medieval History*, I., p. 409.

<sup>2</sup> It was in the course of this siege that St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, died.

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defeat (431 or 432) and was unable to prevent the capture of town after town by Geiseric. Soon almost every important place, with the exception of Cirta (the capital of Numidia) and Carthage, was in the hands of the Vandals. Not until the year 435 did relief come. Aëtius, with his formidable army, composed largely of Huns, seemed now in a position to turn his attention to Africa. Geiseric dared not challenge him. On the 11th of February, 435, a treaty was concluded, whereby the Vandals were allowed to retain, as *foederati* of the Empire, a part of the African diocese (probably the provinces of Mauretania Sitifensis and Numidia and the north-western corner of the old proconsular province). With a man like Geiseric such an arrangement could not be permanent. An unrestricted African dominion was his first and chief object. His covetous eyes were already fixed upon Carthage.

We must now return to Aëtius. In 428 he had driven the Ripuarian Franks back from the left bank of the Rhine. Another successful contest with the Franks seems to have taken place about three years later. In the interval he had conducted decisive operations against the Iuthungi and other troublesome peoples in Noricum and Rhaetia,<sup>1</sup> and he had been made generalissimo of the western forces of the Empire. In 432, the year of his first consulship, he was deposed from his command to make way for Placidia's favourite, Boniface, who was recalled from Africa. Thereupon he concluded a treaty with the Franks and marched against Boniface, but was defeated near Ariminum. Boniface died two months later, and was succeeded by his son-in-

<sup>1</sup> See Sidonius, *Carm.* 7. 233 f.

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law Sebastian. Aëtius betook himself to his old friends, the Huns, and returned to Italy with a large force. Placidia was compelled to reinstate him. The treaty with Geiseric in 435 enabled him to concentrate his attention once more upon Gaul. In that year the Burgundians, who seem to have been joined by Alani from Mainz, invaded the province of Belgica Prima (the district round Trier and Metz). About the same time the Ripuarian Franks descended upon the same province from the north, after taking Cologne, and Trier was captured for the fourth time in a quarter of a century. Matters were further complicated by a revolt of the oppressed classes (peasants and slaves) under one Tibatto. With the aid of a large force of Huns from Germany, Aëtius utterly routed the Burgundians and laid their lands waste (436). The Frankish invasion seems to have evaporated, and the capture of Tibatto quelled the insurrection of the Bagaudae, as they were called (437). But the Goths were quick to avail themselves of these disturbances, and once more invaded the Mediterranean fringe of Narbonensis. Litorius, the chief lieutenant of Aëtius, had had to subdue a revolt in Aremorica;<sup>1</sup> he now hastened southward and relieved the siege of Narbonne (437). After a short-lived peace, negotiated by Avitus (the future emperor), the Goths renewed their attacks on Roman territory, but Litorius in a series of battles drove them back. Near Toulouse, their capital, they turned at bay. Litorius was defeated and fatally wounded in a bloody battle. The Goths,

<sup>1</sup> Sidonius, *Carm.* 7. 246 f. For the subsequent events mentioned in this paragraph see vv. 295–315 and 475–480 of the same poem.

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though victorious, had suffered heavily, and were in a mood to listen to Avitus, who had just become Praetorian Prefect, when he proposed terms of peace. It is probable that the Goths were now recognised as a sovereign people (no longer *foederati*), and that their domains were increased by the cession to them of the whole of Novempopulana.<sup>1</sup>

This treaty was far from being the only blow which the Roman power and prestige sustained in that momentous year (439). Geiseric perfidiously seized Carthage and made himself complete master of the proconsular province. His ruthless expropriation of the land-owners, his drastic proceedings against the orthodox Church, and the other features of his conquest are related in all histories of the period and need not be dwelt upon here. Both Valentinian, who had now taken the reins of government into his own hands, and Theodosius, the eastern Emperor, were seized with consternation. Theodosius sent a powerful naval expedition to bring the Vandals to their senses, but it never got beyond Sicily, where it was delayed by Geiseric's diplomacy until trouble nearer home necessitated its recall. A treaty was then made (442), in which the best provinces of Africa were surrendered to the Vandals, though Geiseric undertook to supply Rome with corn and gave his son Huneric as a hostage. He was soon compelled by disturbances in his own realm, caused by his despotic conduct, to seek a further *rapprochement* with the western Emperor. He brought about the betrothal of Huneric to Valentinian's daughter,

<sup>1</sup> See Stein, *Gesch. d. spätröm. Reiches*, I. 482, n. 3. Most authorities assign this improvement in the Gothic status to an earlier date; see note on Sidonius, *Carm.* 7. 215 sqq.

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Eudocia, who was then six years old (445). Huneric (who was restored to his father at this time) was already married to a daughter of the Visigothic king, Theodoric I, but a charge of attempted poisoning was made a pretext for discarding her, and she was sent back to her father with her ears and nose cut off. From 442 to the death of Valentinian in 455 Geiseric kept the peace with the Empire, though this did not prevent him from encouraging the designs of the Huns on Gaul.

Meanwhile Aëtius had been active in Gaul, but the details of his operations are not very clear.<sup>1</sup> We learn that the Alani and the Burgundians, who had suffered grievously in the disaster of 436, at last had lands assigned them, in which they settled as *foederati*. One body of Alans found a home in the neighbourhood of Valence (440 or earlier), another, under King Goar, the old supporter of the usurper Jovinus, was settled near Orléans (442). In the following year the Burgundians received a permanent abode in Sapaudia (Savoy). It was apparently about this time that Roman troops were finally withdrawn from Britain. In 446 Aëtius obtained the signal honour of a third consulship. We have scanty details of another rising in Armorica, occasioned by the exactions of the Roman treasury. It began perhaps in 446, and lasted for some years; in the end the Armoricans gained a position of complete independence, nominally as *foederati*, and some other Celtic peoples who had joined them seem to have won the same privilege. Some time before 446 the Ripuarian Franks were once more flung back across the Rhine by Aëtius. Probably after this came the

<sup>1</sup> The account in this paragraph follows Stein.

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attempt of the Salian Franks under Chlogio to extend their territory to the Somme, and their defeat near Vicus Helenae.<sup>1</sup> In Spain the Suevians, under their king Rechiar, who had recently married a daughter of Theodoric, crowned their long-standing hostility by devastating the province of Tarraconensis, the great stronghold of the Roman Empire in Spain.

The approach of the half-century was darkened by the growing menace of the Huns under Attila. It was fortunate for Aëtius and for the Roman cause that the specious overtures of Attila were regarded with suspicion by Theodoric and that the mission of Avitus secured the support of the Goths. The bloody battle of the Mauriac (or Catalaunian) Plains, near Troyes, in which Theodoric lost his life, saved Gaul from the invaders (451). Aëtius, however, did not follow up his success. He persuaded the new Gothic king, Thorismund, to lead his warriors home, and Attila was enabled to withdraw with comparative ease, to ravage northern Italy and to threaten the existence of Rome until his death in 453. Before the end of this year Thorismund, who had renewed the old policy of Gothic expansion, was murdered by his brothers Theodoric and Frederic, and the former ascended the throne as Theodoric II. The new king had a tincture of Latin civilisation, gained partly through the teaching of Avitus,<sup>2</sup> and at the beginning of his reign he gave signal proofs of friendship. He resumed the "federate" status which his father had discarded, then he proceeded to Spain, where he quelled an anti-Roman peasant rising and induced his Suevian brother-in-law, Rechiar, to restore the

<sup>1</sup> Sidonius, *Carm.* 5. 212 sqq.

<sup>2</sup> Sidonius, *Carm.* 7. 495-498.

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province of Carthaginiensis to the Empire (454). The western Roman world was beginning to breathe more freely, when it was suddenly convulsed by the news that Aëtius had been murdered by his Emperor.

Whatever one may think of Valentinian's motives, the results of this deed were serious. The Goths became restless, the Salian Franks under Chlogio took Cambrai and extended their conquests to the Somme, the Ripuarian Franks and the Alamanni once more crossed the Rhine, and Count Marcellinus, who commanded in Dalmatia, declared himself independent of the western Empire. A conspiracy was formed, in which Petronius Maximus, a prominent noble who had filled the highest offices of state, joined forces with old followers of Aëtius, and on the 15th of March, 455, Valentinian met the fate which he had brought upon Aëtius in the previous year. With him died that loyalty to the dynastic principle which had protected his family for nearly a century. The Empire of the West now begins to fade away in a miserable succession of brief reigns. The first in this series of ill-fated princes was the Petronius Maximus who has just been mentioned. Little more than two months after his accession he was seeking flight before the approach of Geiseric, whom he had wantonly provoked. The furious crowd fell upon him, stoned him to death, and tore him limb from limb. The Vandals entered Rome three days later and plundered it for two weeks, returning at last to Carthage with immense booty and some very important captives, including Eudoxia, the widow of Valentinian, her two daughters, and Gaudentius, the younger son of Aëtius.

Petronius Maximus had made Avitus a *magister*