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## LATE ANCIENT *COLLEGIA POETARUM* ACCORDING TO SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS

**SUMMARY:** The paper discusses the image of *collegia poetarum* in 5<sup>th</sup> c. Gaul, as presented in the poetry of Sidonius Apollinaris, one of the leading poets of the period. Thanks to his poetic works we have access to the information on the writings of a number of important authors, whose literary efforts have been lost, as well as to numerous facets of literary life in 5<sup>th</sup> c. Gaul.

**KEYWORDS:** *collegia poetarum*, Sidonius Apollinaris, Petrus, Domnulus, Lampridius, late ancient poetry

The tradition of literary circles (*collegia poetarum*) in Rome started with the beginning of written Roman literature, i.e. second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC. It is connected with Livius Andronicus, the first Latin poet, albeit of Greek origin. He was an author of translations and adaptations of Greek epic and dramatic poetry as well as the author of the first Latin choral ode (*carmen saeculare*) written for the *ludi saeculares* celebration in 207 BC. Let me quote the account of Festus the grammarian, who thus describes this first testimony proving the existence of organized literary life in Rome:

*Cum Livius Andronicus bello Punico secundo scripsisset carmen quod a virginibus est cantatum, quia prosperius res publica populi Romani geri coepta est, publice attributa est ei in Aventino aedis Minervae, in*

*qua liceret scribis histrionibusque consistere ac dona ponere in honorem Livi, quia is et scribebat fabulas et ponebat.*<sup>1</sup>

The most famous Roman literary circle, which flourished at the time when Roman literature was already a well-developed phenomenon, was the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC philhellenic circle of Scipio Africanus the Younger; chief representatives of this circle were Publius Terentius Afer, the satirist Caius Lucilius, the philosopher Laelius the Younger and the prominent Greek Stoic philosopher, Panaitios of Rhodes. Conversely, the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC is the time when the revolutionary circle of neoteric poets appears on Roman literary stage. These poets broke with earlier literary traditions and models and its main representatives were celebrated poets: Valerius Cato, Helvius Cinna, Licinius Calvus, Marcus Furius Bibaculus, Varro Atacinus and, first and foremost, the most popular (and the single one whose works are preserved) Caius Valerius Catullus.

The most important among Roman literary circles was, undoubtedly, the circle of Maecenas, a friend and political cooperator of Augustus. Maecenas himself was a pragmatic creator of Augustan cultural policy (31 BC-14 AD) and he managed to convince the greatest of Roman poets: Vergilius Maro and Quintus Horatius, but also others, among them the elegist Propertius and lesser poets such as Lucius Varius Rufus, Plotius Tucca, Quintilius Varus, Valgius Rufus. Domitius Marus and others to support Augustus' political programme.

But the circle of Maecenas was not the only centre of artistic and critical creativity in Augustan Rome. Its rival group was concentrated around Messala Corvinus, the admirer of Theocritus' idyllic muse. The most important poets gathered around Messala were great elegiac poets Albus Tibullus and Publius Ovidius Naso. The second independent circle was created by Asinius Pollio, a neoteric-style poet, tragedian, historian and Atticizing orator. In his circle prominent figures included former neoteric poet Helvius Cinna as well as Lucius Varius Rufus (*de morte*, *Thyestes*) and Aemilius Macer. In these artistic salons literary life flourished and new aesthetic attitudes were formed. Their activity was decisive for defining the cultural space of the Augustan period and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Festus, *Grammatici Latini*, p. 333.

the salon's approval was what decided about the success and career of a new, debuting author.

In the present paper I would like to concentrate on presenting the organized artistic life in southern Gaul in 5<sup>th</sup> c. AD. It was a crucial moment for ancient Roman culture, endangered by destruction with repeated waves of barbarian incursions. The attitude of the people, who were manifesting their need to preserve and keep their Roman cultural identity, was of great importance for the survival of the Roman culture, endangered as it was by the waves of destructive barbarian incursions. The attitude of the people and their apparent will to keep and preserve their Roman identity, were of great importance for the survival of the ancient tradition in European culture.

In 5<sup>th</sup> c. AD the southern province of Gaul, *Galia Narbonensis*, kept its Roman character for a long time, despite the turbulent changes, brought about by the barbarian invasions (Klein 1991: 352-380). The western part of *Gallia Narbonensis*, together with its capital Narbo, was adjoined to the Visigoth kingdom of Aquitaine in 462 AD, and the rest of it in 475-6 AD. This part of southern Gaul was colonized by Rome already in 120 BC and was soon Romanized. The *Provincia Romana*, with a capital located in Narbo, was created there. Roman culture in this area was merged with the Greek one, present there for ages, especially in Massilia (Marseille).<sup>2</sup>

Roman settlements and cultural centres in *Nemausus* (Nîmes), *Vienna* (Vienne), *Tolosa* (Toulouse) *Arelate* (Arles), *Arausio* (Orange) were developing fast. After Julius Caesar had annexed the entire Gaul to the Roman empire, new Gallic provinces were created: *Aquitania*, *Lugdunensis*, *Belgica* with the centres in *Lugdunum* (Lyon), *Burdigalia* (Bordeaux), *Remi* (Reims) and *Augusta Treverorum* (Trier). When a major part of Gaul was conquered by the barbarians, Roman culture and administration lasted the longest in *Gallia Narbonensis* and in a part of the Lyon province: in Auvergne, which until 475 was defended by bishop Sidonius Apollinaris.

The end of 4<sup>th</sup> c. and then 5<sup>th</sup> c. is the period of large literary productivity in Roman Gaul. The majority of authors come from the southern,

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Courcelle 1943 : 224ff.; see also Menteyer 1908: esp. 37-70; Sivan 1978: 35-36.

most thoroughly Romanized part of Gaul; our main source of information concerning them is Sidonius Apollinaris (430-486), a notable poet and epistolographer, who was also the prefect of Rome and the bishop of Auvergne. Belonging to local aristocracy, gifted and well-educated in classical Greek and Latin literature, he enjoyed great popularity among the officials, higher clergy and the landowners of the region. He cultivated friendships, writing numerous letters and occasionally poems dedicated to his friends, many of whom were also intellectuals and writers (Nellen 1981). Their works have been almost entirely lost, which is why the testimonies of Sidonius Apollinaris are of special importance for the study of Gallo-Roman culture of the 5<sup>th</sup> century (Mathisen 1981: 95-109).

Sidonius Apollinaris is an author particularly characteristic of the period. He is a true *litteratus homo* from the end of the Roman culture. His works give us information about intellectual life in southern Gaul in the 5<sup>th</sup> c.: both in large urban centres such as Arles (called *The Gallic Rome*), Bordeaux, Lyon, Vienne, Narbonne, as well as in the private estates of Gallo-Roman aristocracy, where the specific “villa culture” has developed. North of the Alps authors such as Horace, Vergil, elegiac poets of the Golden Age, empire-age satirists are widely read; Lucan, Statius and Claudianus are also popular, together with gnosis, Neoplatonist philosophy and ever-flourishing Ciceronian rhetoric. At the same time, however, a new and specific style, marked by mannerism, develops in this region.

The image of literary life in Gaul, which we get from the works of Sidonius Apollinaris, is first and foremost marked by the importance of the above-mentioned important urban centers of political and cultural life, with a broad tradition of the literary and the intellectual. It is not possible to characterize them all in the short scope of this paper.

I will therefore use, as an example for presenting the quality of literary life in Southern Gaul in 5<sup>th</sup> c., the circle of poets congregated at the court of Emperor Majorian. (457-461) in Arles (Arelate). Emperor Majorian established his court in Arles at the beginning of the year 460. The presence of a ruler added imperial splendor to the city. Since the time of Constantine, Arles played a leading role in Gaul, alongside the imperial Trier. The city has become the center of politics, economy

and culture. Emperor Majorian was eager to see Sidonius Apollinaris among the regular visitors at his court. He was impressed by the poetic fame of Sidonius, his outstanding intellectual culture and satirical verve. Sidonius Apollinaris' preserved literary legacy includes 24 occasional poems, assembled in a separate collection, and nine books of letters. His other works – hymns on the Christian martyrs and the sermons recited before the people, called *contestatiunculae* – were either lost or, possibly, never published by the author himself. It is also known from Sidonius' own letters that he was working on a translation of Flavius Filostratus' *Life of Apollonios of Tyana*. The prose part of Sidonius' oeuvre consists of nine books of letters, containing 146 items, the majority of which was written between 470-480. These were rediscovered many centuries later, in the years 1451-1455, by an Italian humanist Enoch d'Ascola. The bulk of the letters were originally part of Sidonius' everyday correspondence; nevertheless, they were carefully preserved and gathered by their author; moreover, before the publication they were embellished and stylized, thus becoming what was known at the time as *accurate* or *curatius scriptae litterae*, so called artistic letters. The term describes correspondence which was destined to be published and publicized. The division of the letters into nine books alludes to a similar division of Plinius' correspondence. The bombastic and grandiose style dominates in the collection, with its characteristic abundance of epithets; we may also observe the tendency towards formalistic verbalism, similar to the one known from Sidonius' poetry. The texts are filled with excurses and prosopopoeias; there are also numerous speeches, anecdotes and parables with certain satirical qualities. It should be noted that Sidonius' literary culture functions, in a way, in two aspects: one of them has to do with erudition and educational practice, the other with certain social attitudes. The first aspect is realized by the copious usage of the means of expression learnt during the grammatical and rhetorical education. Of special importance here is the efficiency in using traditional mythological motifs, erudite metaphors, hyperboles, periphrases, puns etc. The second aspect is created by evoking in the poems the atmosphere of a literary salon with its elegant conversations between subtle and cultivated interlocutors, whose erudition and grace are meant to dazzle and astonish the audience. Sidonius' writings are

the mirror for the classical culture, read and perceived through the lens of the profound education.

Sidonius also had friends among the important imperial courtiers. He was thoroughly supported by Petrus, the emperor's personal secretary (*magister epistularum*), himself a renown poet. Among his numerous duties he would find time to devotedly pursue his literary interests, and although his works did not survive until the modern times, it is certain that he should be counted among the most important writers of the period. Sidonius proves the publication of Petrus' prosometric letters which enjoyed widespread popularity in Gaul, Italy and also Spain (*Epistula* IX 13, 5; *Carm.* V 568).

Among the court poets those especially liked by the emperor included, beside Sidonius Apollinaris and the aforementioned Petrus the secretary, also Domnulus, Severianus and Lampridius. The first of them, Domnulus, was of African descent, but he had stayed in Gaul for quite some time and he was known to be a man of great and diverse knowledge (*Epist.* IX 15, 37). He settled in Arles where he keenly listened to the sermons of St. Hilary, who was the bishop of this city until 449. According to Sidonius, Domnulus was a questor there (*Carm.* XIV 15 [preface I]). Today we could judge him not by his poems, of which none are preserved, but rather by his fame as noted by Sidonius Apollinaris (*Epist.* IV 25).<sup>3</sup> According to him, Domnulus was one of the best educated men of the period. Sidonius mentions him often, both in the context of his rhetorical skills (*Epist.* IX 13, 4) and his fame as a poet (*Epist.* IX 15, 1). Sidonius ranks Domnulus together with poets such as Leo of Narbonne and Consentius Junior, who were also believed to be renowned scholars in Greek literature. Domnulus combined rhetorical and poetic skills with deep philosophical interest and gained such prominence in this area that he was quoted as an arbitrator in subtle metaphysical questions. Sidonius made him an addressee of a very interesting letter (IV 25), dated probably at the beginning of 470, in which he explains to Domnulus certain intriguing details related to the election of a new bishop in the city of Cabillonum (Chalon-sur-Saône) (Williams 1967: 48-51).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. also Cavallin 1955: 49-66.

About Severianus we know even less. According to Sidonius he was a poet and a prose writer; his poetry, probably epic, was marked by grandiose sublimity, while his prose resembled that of Quintilianus as far as its expressiveness is concerned: *Praestantem tuba Severianum, // Et sic scribere non minus valentem // Marcus Quintilianus ut solebat* (Carm. IX 315-317).<sup>4</sup>

The third of the poets, Lampridius, was one of the most famous characters in Gaul's literary life in 5<sup>th</sup> c. (La Penna 1995b: 211-224). Originally from Bordeaux, he came to Arles on request of Majorian; to do so, he left the famous grammatical and rhetorical school in his home town. He was a professor there as well as an important poet, continuing the artistic traditions of Ausonius and Paulinus of Nola. The Bordeaux school was a worthy rival of similar centers of intellectual and cultural life in Milan and Aquileia. It is enough to take a book of Ausonius to see what sort of professors taught in Bordeaux and how many of the Gallo-Roman youths would study both ancient and contemporary poets there. Sidonius Apollinaris, who knew Lampridius ever since he was a young man, would not hesitate to compare him to the two greatest masters of Greek and Roman poetry, Pindar and Horace: *Eum ire censes post Horatianos et Pindaricos cynos gloriae pennis evoluturum* (Epist. VIII 11, 7). Lampridius, in a separate letter addressed to him by Sidonius Apollinaris, was subtly praised already in the first lines, where his poems are said to be full of nectar, flowers and pearls. *Cum primum Burdigalam veni, litteras mihi tabellarius tuus obtulit plenas nectaris, florum, margaritarum, quibus silentium meum culpas et aliquos versuum meorum versibus poscis, qui tibi solent per musicum palati concavum tinnientes voce variata quasi tibiis multiforatilibus effundi* (Epist. VIII 9, 1). The cited fragment, apart from the respect for Lampridius' poetry, also refers to his elegant poetic appeal to send him the poems of Sidonius. The form in which he framed his request is, according to Sidonius, very proper for the rendition of Lampridius' poetic art, full of musical effects.

Sidonius returns to praising his friend's literary talent in the latter parts of the letter VIII 11. The comparisons meant to render Lampridius' art are more tangible here. In the following chapters we are dealing

<sup>4</sup> Cf. also Epist. IX 15, 1, Carm. v. 37: *Severianus ista rhetor altius*.

with a phenomenon atypical for Roman literary critique: an overall assessment of the literary production of a poet whose oeuvre is lost. This assessment includes both the metric and generic criteria, together with the aesthetic ones and the valuation of the contents. Sidonius' opinion refers to a concept of special importance for ancient art of writing, namely the idea of imitating literary models. This statement is worth to be quoted *in extenso*:

*De reliquo, si orationes illius metiaris, acer, rotundus, compositus, excussus; si poemata, tener, multimeter, argutus, artifex erat. Faciebat siquidem versus oppido exactos tam pedum mira quam figurarum varietate: hendecasyllabos lubricos et enodes, hexametros crepantes et cothurnatos, elegos vero nunc echoicos, nunc recurrentes, nunc per anadiplosin fine principiis conexos. Huc, ut arreptum suaserat opus, ethicam dictionem pro personae, temporis, loci qualitate variabat, idque non verbis qualibuscumque, sed grandibus, pulchris, elucubratis. In materia controversiali fortis et lacertosus; in satirica sollicitus et mordax; in tragica saevus et flebilis, in comica urbanus multiformisque, in fescennina vernans verbis, aestuans votes; in bucolica vigilax, parvus, carminabundus; in georgica sic rusticans multum, quod nihil rusticus. Praeterea quod ad epigrammata spectat, non copia sed acumine placens, quae nec brevius disticho neque longius tetrasticho finiebantur, eademque cum non pauca piperata, mellea multa conspiceres, omnia tamen salsa cernebas. In lyricis autem Flaccum secutus nunc ferebatur in iambico citus, nunc in choriambico gravis, nunc in alcaico flexuosus, nunc in sapphico inflatus. Quid plura? subtilis, aptus, instructus, quaque mens stilum ferret eloquentissimus, prorsus ut eum iure censeris post Horatianos et Pindaricos cygnos gloriae pennis evoluturum. [...] Scribebat assidue, quamquam frequentius scripturiret. Legebat etiam cessanter auctores cum reverentia antiquos, sine invidia recentes, et, quod inter homines difficillimum est, nulli difficulter ingenii laude cedebat (Epist. VIII 11, 5-8).<sup>5</sup>*

In the quoted statement of special importance is Lamprodius' incredible mastery in grasping various literary techniques. He is both a gifted orator and a good poet. Already the first two sentences underline the general features of his literary style. In rhetoric, he is characterized by his expressiveness, which might even be called impetuosity: he

<sup>5</sup> Cf. also Brožek 1996 : 113-114; Styka 1999: 43-61.



is *acer*, and the same quality is ascribed to him also in poem IX, 314: *acrem Lampridium*. Sidonius also praises him for the free and artistically full expression, calling him *rotundus*. This seemingly trivial term is in ancient literary critique often marked as serious and important. Its meaning is best defined by Horace's words in *Ars poetica*, stressing the preeminence of Greek literature when compared with the Roman: *Graius ingenium, Graius dedit ore rotundo // Musa loqui, praeter laudem nullius avaris* (Horatius, *Ars poetica* 323-324).

The expression *ore rotundo loqui* is related to the demand of formal perfection, required from Roman writers. It is an equivalent of the Greek term *to strongyllon*, defining a statement which is artistically polished, lacking nothing and having nothing in excess<sup>6</sup>. The fact that Sidonius stresses *rotundus* as an aesthetic quality of Lampridius' poetry seems to point at the fact that he views his oeuvre as a perfect one, in which both the poetic and prosaic genres have achieved faultlessness of form and content. Other features of Lampridius' rhetorical style are *compositus* and *excussus*. The first of these describes the harmony in constructing speeches, while the second designates its artistic finish. The Latin participle *excussus* means, in literary context, *well-researched, analysed in detail, well thought-out*; this goes well together with a main rule of artistic decorum, based on knowledge and rational thought<sup>7</sup>.

The evaluation of the artistic worth of Lampridius' speeches is not, however, the dominant part of Sidonius' statement. The main direction of Apollinaris' aesthetic and literary account is Lampridius' poetry, set in metric and generic-stylistic categories. Sidonius stresses strongly the varied character of Lampridius' work; it is characterized by subtle grace (*tener*), polimetricity (*polimeter*) and ingenious artistry (*argutus artifex*). Its formal variety is always accompanied by careful crafting of each poem, visible in the proper choice of metre and of poetic figures (*tam pedum mira quam figurarum varietate*). This poetic technique provides each poem with a generically proper choice of euphonic rhythm: the smoothness and fluency of iambic poetry, sonority and pompous

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Brink 1971: 348.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Cicero, *Orator* 21, 70: *Sed est eloquentiae sicut reliquarum rerum fundamentum sapientia*.

solemnity of epic, whining repeatability of elegiac poems. Apollinaris tries to find a feature defining the power of the poems' expressiveness. He speaks of Lampridius' power of argument (*in materia controversiali fortis et lacertosus*), which might have to do with epic contents, stresses the sincerity and audacity of the author's satirical works (*in satirica sollicitus et mordax*), underlines the raw grandiosity and moving character of his tragedies (*in tragica saevus et flebilis*) as well as the refined comic power and variety of his comedies (*in comica urbanus multiformisque*).

According to Sidonius, Lampridius is youthfully sensual in fescennine verses (*in fescennina vernans verbis, aestuans votis*), vigilant, laconic and melodious in bucolic (*in bucolica vigilax, parvus, carmin-abundus*) and in his poems on agriculture he can describe the farmer's work in a detailed and convincing way, even though he himself is not a man of the country (*in georgica sic rusticans multum, quod nihil rusticus*). In his epigrams he is a master of subtle culminating point, which is not, however, deprived of satirical acumen<sup>8</sup>. Finally, his lyric odes, metrically based on Horace, are full of subtle refinement and they prove that thanks to his advanced poetic proficiency the Aquitanian poet is worth being set above the greatest poetic masters, Horace and Pindar. The great number and variety of literary forms used by Lampridius, both prosaic and poetic, certainly proves that the standards of the literary life in South Gaul were rather high. The aesthetic and literary judgements of Sidonius Apollinaris are surely not only proof of friendly courtesy; more likely they seem to be a result of a deep and thoughtful evaluation of a literary authority, which Lampridius certainly was for this generation of Gallo-Roman writers.

Petrus, Domnulus, Lampridius, Severianus and Sidonius Apollinaris himself were indisputably the most prominent poets at Majorian's court in Arles and, as Sidonius emphasises, they got there due to the emperor's own initiative; it was the ruler himself who brought them all together to his Gallic capital: *Quos undique urbium ascitos imperator in unam civitatem [...] contraxerat* (*Epist.* IX 13, 4). The poets were literarily active not only at the court, where their presence added to the

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Munari 1958: 131ff., cf. also Bernt 1968: 7ff.

prestige of the emperor; they were also popular among the citizens, who were interested in literary culture and in poetic recitations.

One day a citizen of Arles and a lover of poetry invited the aforementioned poets, together with Sidonius, to an elegant supper, during which the new collection of poems by Petrus, the emperor's secretary, was presented. For Sidonius and his friends the reading of these poems became an impulse to present improvised poetic praises of Petrus' work (La Penna 1995a: 3-34; Roberts 1995: 91-111; Guillaume-Coirier 2000: 44-53). When the host was preparing fish sauce, the poets cast lots among themselves, ascribing each other a metre in which each of them should improvise a laudatory poem. Such a decision was a show of *urbanitas morum*: since it was believed that the comparison of the poetic talent is easiest if one deals with poems by various authors, composed on the same topic but also in the same meter, the choice of polymetry was meant to spare humiliation and shame to those of the poets whose work would be deemed the weakest. The participant, after all, meant the whole game rather as entertainment than a true *certamen poeticum*.

The story of the meeting is related by Sidonius in letter IX 13, addressed to his friend Tonantius Ferreolus: *suscipe libens, quod temporibus Augusti Maioriani, cum rogatu cuiusdam sodalis ad cenam conveniremus, in Petri librum magistri epistularum subito prolatum subitus efudi, meis quoque contubernalibus, dum rex convivii circa ordinandum moras nectit oxygarum, Domnulo, Severiano atque Lampridio paria pangentibus [...]. Id morae tantum dum genera metrorum sorte partimur. Placuit namque pro caritate collegii, licet omnibus eadem scribendi materia existeret, non uno tamen epigrammata singulorum genere proferri, ne quispiam nostrum, qui ceteris dixisset exilius, verecundia primum, post morderetur invidia. Etenim citius agnoscitur in quocumque recitante, si quo ceteri metro canat, an eo quoque scribat ingenio* (Epist. IX 13, 4-5).

True to his *urbanitas*, Sidonius never mentions the results of the competition; of four poems presented only his, sent to Tonantius twenty years after the event, was preserved. The poem is composed in Anacreontic dimeters, a meter very rare in Latin poetry, and it proves the ease and lightness of Sidonius' poetic diction: it is a real gem of

post-neoteric gracefulness, shining with colors, showing off with sounds and scents, filled with the charm of poetry. Sidonius calls his companions to a charming party at the end of the day, a party under the patronage of the genius of poetry. Let the songs resound among sophisticated dishes, goblets of wine and dances: *Celebremus ergo, fratres, // Pia festa litterarum. // Pergat diem cadentem // Dape, poculis, choreis // Genialis apparatus* (Epist. IX 13, 5, carm. v. 9-14).

Amongst the lavish, sometimes exaggerated praises of Petrus' poetry, Sidonius describes the joy of meeting, the banqueting beds adorned with linen coverings and purple, the splendour of the table, the baskets of colourful flowers, air fragrant with scents of incense and expensive perfumes, the shining candelabra and glittering lamps emitting pleasant fragrances, the tripods, amphorae and chalices of Falernian wine, the rose crowns; he recalls the sound of bronze flutes, Corinthian harps, pipes and trumpets, accompanied by the dancing of mad Maenads. All these form, it seems, a catalogue of motifs present in the poetry of Petrus, who, according to Sidonius, is second to none in both poetic art and rhetoric flair and whose literary works are received with applause by well-educated readers: *Date carminata socco, // Date dicta sub cothurno, // Date quidquid advocati, // Date quidquid et poetae // Vario strepunt in actu: // Petrus haec et illa transit. /.../ Sed in omnibus laborans // Et ab omnibus probates // Rapit hinc et inde palmam, // Per et ora docta fertur* (Epist. IX 13, 5, carm. v. 82-95).

Having presented a catalogue of ingenious poetic motifs, recalling the sensuous world of pagan poetry, Sidonius in the final part of the poem unexpectedly rejects the traditional sources of poetic inspiration: the fonts of Hippocrene and Aganippe, Apollo, the processions of Muses or Athena; he bids them to stay away from Petrus; poetry, of which the only patron is God: *Procul hinc et Hipocrenen // Aganipicosque fontes // Et Apollinem canorum // comitantibus Camenis // n Abigamus et Minervam // Quasi praesulem canendi; // Removete ficta fatu: // Deus ista praestat unus* (Epist. IX 13, 5, carm. v. 96-103).

Despite this chastising, one could say, provision, the feast went on into the night; among refined poetic games and wordplays accompanied by good wine nobody was afraid that tomorrow, possibly, a barbarian might come, destroy the carefully set table, break the fragrant

lamps and smash the poet's lyre. It is, indeed, a charming picture of *otium* filled with literary *humanitas*: Rome exists, Muses speak, the illusionary world rules supreme over the real one.<sup>9</sup>

The general image of literary culture in southern Gaul shown here, as well as the representation of the life of *collegium poeticum* in Arles proves that the intellectual and literary life of this region in the time of the barbaric invasions was rich and impressive. This life had one dominant aim: to keep the existence of the Roman culture, despite the growing political dangers (Mascoli 2001: 131-145; Fontaine 1957: 208-215). The *collegia poetarum* were active: they organized a meeting devoted to composing poetry, recitations and rhetorical declamations and philosophical debates, which took place in the refined atmosphere of a literary salon to which only the educated elite had entry. One cannot help but be fascinated by high intellectual culture of these people, many of whom held high-ranking state offices. For them cultivating literary interests became not only the form of pleasant entertainment, individual self-cultivation and fostering the bounds of friendship, according to the Roman *otium* tradition; in many cases, they were the way of manifesting their *Romanitas* and their attachment to the culture of old.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. André 2006: 63ff. The scholar, presenting the synthesis of the *otium* culture in the works of Sidonius, suggests at least one risky and, in our opinion, wrong concept; according to him, in Sidonius' work the dominating forces are Horatian aesthetics and Augustan lyricism, which seems mistaken especially in the light of post-neoteric character of the majority of Sidonian poems and also his letters. Cf. also Consolino 1979.

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