



## WHO WAS SIDONIUS' CORRESPONDENT SIMPLICIUS? AN IDENTIFICATION PROBLEM IN THE *LETTERS*\*

### ABSTRACT

This article presents, as a case study, the various inconsistencies which occur in the prosopographical entries concerning Simplicius, one of Sidonius' most frequent addressees. Through the exegesis of passages of letters addressed to him (Epist. 3.11, 4.4, 4.7, 4.12, 5.4) and of passages believed to concern him (Carm. 24.89; Epist. 2.9 and 5.7), it argues for a revision of the common identification of Simplicius as brother of Apollinaris and Thaumastus, and for a re-evaluation of the sources which supposedly lead to this conclusion. Some cautionary remarks on the unchecked use of prosopography as a tool are followed by a hypothesis concerning the identity of this addressee of Sidonius.

**Keywords:** Sidonius Apollinaris; letter collections; late Latin epistolography; prosopography; fifth-century Gaul; Simplicius

In a recent contribution significantly called 'Sidonius' people', Mathisen has vividly portrayed the extent and range of the people who populated this author's world, and compiled a new prosopography of Sidonius' network of contacts, with a total of 518 entries, of which 368 are drawn exclusively from the *Letters*.<sup>1</sup> Mathisen's prosopography is a landmark of scholarship on Sidonius that addresses old questions and poses new ones for future researchers. As Mathisen maintains, although much has been written on Sidonius' family members, there are still ambiguities in the standard prosopographical accounts of some. In what follows I offer a re-evaluation of passages commonly thought to concern Simplicius, one of Sidonius' most frequent addressees, in order to shed light on his identity and to reconsider widespread assumptions about him. Next, I make some cautionary remarks on the unchecked use of prosopography as a tool for the commentator and the historian; and I conclude with a hypothesis on Simplicius' identity.

### STATE OF THE QUESTION

The mentions of the addressees Apollinaris and Thaumastus as *germani* in Sid. *Epist.* 5.6.1 and 5.7.1 are unanimously accepted as evidence that the two were brothers by blood. The widespread view until recently was that they were Simplicius' brothers, and that the three of them were Sidonius' uncles (**family tree 1**);<sup>2</sup> but Mathisen has

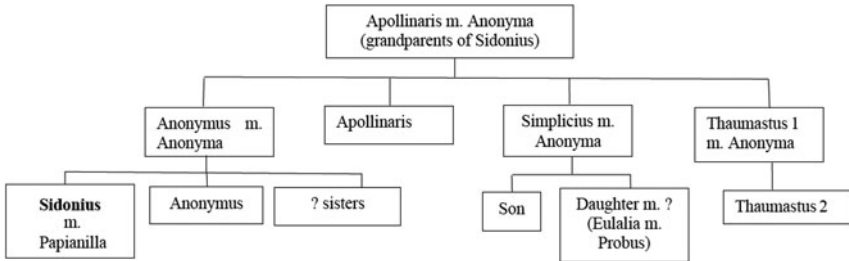
\* My warm thanks to Gavin Kelly and Stefania Santelia for numerous improvements and learned comments, and also to Silvia Condorelli and Joop van Waarden who offered feedback on previous versions of this paper. I will not go through my arguments here, but on the choice to drop the *cognomen* Apollinaris, because Sidonius did not go by this name in his time, see G. Marolla, 'The names of Sidonius' addressees and the manuscript tradition of the *Letters*', *Mnemosyne* (forthcoming).

<sup>1</sup> R.W. Mathisen, 'Sidonius' people', in G. Kelly and J.A. van Waarden (edd.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Sidonius Apollinaris* (Edinburgh, 2020), 29–165, at 31–2.

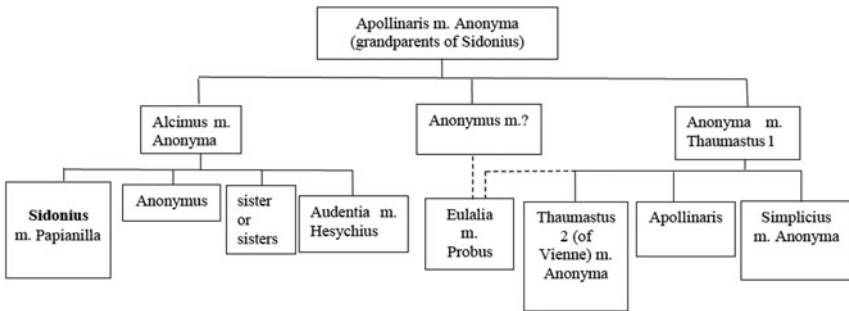
<sup>2</sup> Probably arising from Loyen's edition, on which more below. See e.g. the following recognition in prosopographical tools; on Apollinaris: K.F. Stroheker, *Der senatorische Adel im spätantiken*

recently argued that the evidence in the letters leads rather to the inference that the three of them were Sidonius' cousins (**family tree 2**).<sup>3</sup>

The following family trees are based on these two different reconstructions of Sidonius' family.



1. Simplified family tree from *stemma* 14 in *PLRE*<sup>4</sup>



2. Family tree based on Mathisen (n. 1)

Since Mathisen argues that Sidonius' father was probably named Alcimus and that one of his sisters was Audentia, I included them in the family tree. Audentia is also the wife of Hesychius and mother of Avitus of Vienne according to his reconstruction.<sup>5</sup> As stated before, the most relevant difference between the two interpretations is represented by the nature of the kinship between Sidonius and the younger Thaumastus (of Vienne), Simplicius and Apollinaris. As is shown by the second family

*Gallien* (Tübingen, 1948), 145; *PLRE* 2.113–14; *PCBE* 4.161–3; F.-M. Kaufmann, *Studien zu Sidonius Apollinaris* (Frankfurt, 1995), 278. On Simplicius: Stroheker (this note), 219; *PLRE* 2.1015; *PCBE* 4.1818; Kaufmann (this note), 348. On Thaumastus: Stroheker (this note), 223; *PLRE* 2.1062; *PCBE* 4.1867; Kaufmann (this note), 351. See also P. Mascoli, *Gli Apollinari. Per una storia di una famiglia taroantica* (Bari, 2010), 47–8.

<sup>3</sup> Mathisen (n. 1), 58–9 and his new prosopographical entries 80–1 (Apollinaris); 122 (Simplicius); 123 (Thaumastus). See also D. Amherdt, *Sidoine Apollinaire: Le quatrième livre de la correspondance: Introduction et commentaire* (Bern, 2001), 69.

<sup>4</sup> *PLRE* 2.1317.

<sup>5</sup> This family-tree combines the arguments in Mathisen (n. 1), 57 (on the name of Sidonius' father) and 59–60 (on Sidonius' sisters). In Mathisen's prosopography (n. 1), 134 and 145, the father is still mentioned as Anonymus 8 (Alcimus?) and the sisters as Anonymae 1.

tree, Mathisen believes that they are all, together with Eulalia, Sidonius' cousins,<sup>6</sup> and his theory has great appeal, although, as will be explained in the following section, I would leave Simplicius out of the 'cousins group'.<sup>7</sup> As far as Apollinaris and Thaumastus 2 are concerned, Mathisen maintains that the mention of Apollinaris as *frater* in Sid. *Epist.* 5.3 may have the exact meaning of *frater patruelis*, hence of 'cousin', in light of Sidonius' definition of Eulalia as *soror*, by virtue of what the author calls *patruelis, non germana fraternitas* (*Epist.* 4.1.1). It seems likely that Thaumastus 2 was older than Apollinaris and older than Sidonius, as can be inferred from *Epist.* 5.6.1 *pro iure uel sanguinis uel aetatis reuerenda familiaritate complector*, '[Thaumastus] whom I favour with respectful familiarity having regard both to kinship and to age'. Taking the genitive with the wrong noun, Mathisen quotes only part of the sentence in *Epist.* 5.6.1 (*quem pro ... aetatis reuerenda familiaritate complector*) and therefore translates 'by reverent familiarity of age' arguing that the letter testifies that Sidonius and Thaumastus 'were of the same generation'.<sup>8</sup>

Chronology may provide one with more elements in favour of the identification of Thaumastus 2 and Apollinaris as cousins of Sidonius. The last thing we know of Sidonius' grandfather, who had been *praefectus praetorio Galliarum* in 408/9, is that he had taken part in the usurpation of Jovinus in 411. As can be gathered from *Epist.* 5.9.2, Sidonius' father started off his career by serving as *tribunus et notarius* under Honorius, that is, before 423, and later became *praefectus praetorio Galliarum* under Valentinian III (448–449).<sup>9</sup> Sidonius himself is believed to have been born between 429 and 432, and it would be reasonable to assume that his father was born by around 405 in order to have been *tribunus et notarius* under Honorius, to have been more than twenty years old when Sidonius was born, and to have reached the height of his career in 448, aged over forty. As will be detailed later, we know that Apollinaris was involved in an incident at the Burgundian court in 474–475, since it was whispered that he had been inciting the population of Vaison to turn on the Burgundians. Assuming that Apollinaris and his older brother Thaumastus are Sidonius' uncles would mean that they are of the same generation as Sidonius' father. By 474, the time of the incident, both would have been about seventy, and the chances of both brothers (and perhaps a third brother, if Simplicius is counted) having survived to have an active involvement in politics were perhaps not so high, given contemporary life expectancy.<sup>10</sup> After all, it is not impossible, but it does seem unlikely, if one thinks that Sidonius, who died in his

<sup>6</sup> Being the sons of Sidonius' paternal aunt and of Thaumastus 1, according to Mathisen (n. 1), 59.

<sup>7</sup> Eulalia's kinship will be further discussed in the following sections. According to Mathisen (n. 1), 59, she was the daughter of an anonymous uncle or the daughter of the elder Thaumastus 1 and sister of Thaumastus 2, Simplicius and Apollinaris. For this reason I signalled both in the family-tree, although in Mathisen (n. 1), 92 only the latter kinship is mentioned.

<sup>8</sup> Mathisen (n. 1), 59. It is also useful to point out that, in the new prosopographical entry on Thaumastus, his anonymous spouse (recently deceased at the time *Epist.* 5.6 was written) is wrongly identified as his mother rather than as his wife: see Mathisen (n. 1), 128 s.v. 'Anonyma 7'.

<sup>9</sup> See J.A. van Waarden, 'Sidonius' biography in photo negative', in G. Kelly and J.A. van Waarden (edd.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Sidonius Apollinaris* (Edinburgh, 2020), 13–28, at 19.

<sup>10</sup> Mortality after the age of sixty was as high as infant mortality: R.P. Saller, 'Men's age at marriage and its consequences in the Roman family', *CPh* 82 (1987), 21–34, at 30 n. 25, 31 n. 27; W. Scheidel, 'Demography', in W. Scheidel, I. Morris, R.P. Saller (edd.), *The Cambridge Economic History of the Graeco-Roman World* (Cambridge, 2007), 38–86, at 38–41.

early or mid fifties,<sup>11</sup> is believed to have been feeling old age approaching at forty-five years, and he laments having reached old age at around fifty.<sup>12</sup>

### THE LETTERS SENT TO SIMPLICIUS

To Simplicius, Sidonius addresses *Epist.* 3.11, 4.7, 5.4 and, together with Apollinaris, 4.4 and 4.12. In all the letters addressed to him he is studiously portrayed as a prominent representative of the author's restricted social elite. *Epist.* 4.7 configures itself as a playful commendation letter for the bearer, whose *rusticitas* brightens the addressee's *urbanitas*, while it can be argued that *Epist.* 3.11 and 5.4 should be read together. *Epist.* 3.11 is, at first glance, a letter of congratulations for the marriage of the addressee's daughter, in which Simplicius' role as an ideal father is sanctioned by a very select circle of judges.<sup>13</sup> *Epist.* 5.4 is a complaint about Simplicius and his children's epistolary silence, modelled on Symmachus' conventional complaints about his addressees' silence. There must have been a rift between the author and Simplicius and Apollinaris, and tensions could have been caused by Sidonius' siding with the *praefectus praetorio Galliarum* Arvandus against his own friends and family, who were formally charging Arvandus of *maiestas*.<sup>14</sup> In light of this information, it does not seem an unfair speculation that *Epist.* 3.11 already bears traces that Sidonius was starting to be shunned by not being written to.

The convoluted prose and formal pleasantry of *Epist.* 3.11 hides a complaint about a distressing snub, which is ultimately what the letter is about: Sidonius has not been personally informed by Simplicius of the marriage of his daughter. The letter starts with the mention of *tanta sinisteritas*, 'so great a misfortune', which prevents them from meeting in person (*Epist.* 3.11.1):<sup>15</sup>

Sidonius Simplicio suo salutem

etsi desiderium nostrum sinisteritas tanta comitatur ut etiam nunc nostris inuidearis obtutibus, non idcirco is es,<sup>16</sup> uirorum optime, de cuius moribus lateant celsa memoratu.

Sidonius to his dear Simplicius

Although such misfortune follows my longing to meet that you are still denied to my sight, most excellent of men, you are not the sort of person whose memorable peaks of virtue may escape me.

<sup>11</sup> J.A. van Waarden, "Il tempo invecchia in fretta": la biografia di Sidonio Apollinare nella sua corrispondenza', *InvLuc* 40 (2018), 187–98, at 194.

<sup>12</sup> For instance in *Carm.* 41, 45–6 (*Epist.* 9.16) *nam senectutis propiore meta | quicquid extremis sciamur annis*, 'as the cusp of old age draws nearer, the closer I get to my last years'.

<sup>13</sup> *Epist.* 3.11.1.

<sup>14</sup> G. Marolla, *Sidonius: Letters Book 5, Part 1. Text, Translation and Commentary* (Edinburgh, 2023), 97–110. Arvandus was twice *praefectus praetorio Galliarum* from 464 to 468; on his trial and the political consequences that might have befallen Sidonius, see J. Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fall of Rome* (Oxford, 1994), 159–66; van Waarden (n. 9), 22.

<sup>15</sup> The noun, which appears to be a Plinian coinage, is later attested exclusively in Sid. *Epist.* 1.5.1 and in this letter. If in Pliny *sinisteritas* means 'lack of manners' (*Ep.* 6.17.3, 9.5.2), in Sid. *Epist.* 1.5.1 and 3.11.1 it could be translated as 'misfortune'. For the occurrence of *sinisteritas* in Sidonius, see F. Giannotti, *Sperare Meliora: Il terzo libro delle Epistulae di Sidonio Apollinare* (Pisa, 2016), 208.

<sup>16</sup> Similar expressions (negative adverb + *is* + *es*, followed by *ut* or the relative pronoun) are exclusively attested in Cicero: e.g. *Cat.* 1.22 *neque enim is es, Catilina, ut ...*; *Fam.* 5.12.6 *neque enim tu is es qui quid sis nescias*; *Top.* 72 *neque enim tu is es quem nihil nisi ius civile delectet*.

Sidonius chooses not to provide context. The addressee is therefore supposedly aware of the circumstances which are only hinted at, and it seems legitimate to wonder if Arvandus' trial may be counted among the adversities causing them to be apart, but even more if that may be the reason for Simplicius' silence. The impossibility of meeting is no excuse for not being in touch and for not sharing such important news as the marriage of one's daughter, as Sidonius points out, and that would be especially true should the two be closely related. Once the distracting floweriness of the prose has been absorbed, it appears that the author is in fact piqued for being neglected. While all their peers shared and enthusiastically commented upon the news ('all our countrymen, and the most prominent citizens ... unanimously praise you'),<sup>17</sup> Sidonius has not been informed by his addressee. At the end of the letter, he apologizes for his *garrulitas* and *loquacitas*, as is customary in letters of complaint about the lack of an answer from the addressee (*Epist.* 3.11.2):

igitur dona uenia litteras primas, quas ut necdum mittere desidia fuerat, ita ueeor ne sit misisse garrulitas. carebit sane nostrum naeuo loquacitatis officium si exemplo recursantis alloqui impudentiam paginae praesentis absolueris.

Forgive me then for being the first to write, although not having done that by now would have been an act of idleness, yet I fear that my writing to you may be taken as garrulity. My courtesy will be free from the blemish of loquacity if you will absolve this page from the charge of impudence with the exemplary punishment of a letter in return.

The same concepts are invoked in *Epist.* 5.4, although in a less conciliatory tone, since he imagines that Simplicius might shut the door on the letter and, therefore, on its sender.<sup>18</sup> It seems legitimate to infer that, although Sidonius' letters may be following standardized expressions of complaint for a delay in correspondence, Simplicius' silence is intentional and may be an act of retaliation.

There is no element in the three letters addressed to Simplicius alone which would allow the reader to infer that he is a relative. Even in the straightforward opening line of *Epist.* 5.4.1, when Sidonius demands his attention, the lack of an 'owed salutation' (*salutatio mihi debita*) from Simplicius is ascribed 'to a fault in friendship but even more to reserve'.<sup>19</sup> Let us now consider the two letters addressed jointly to Simplicius and Apollinaris: *Epist.* 4.4, a commendation letter for the bearer, and 4.12 in which Sidonius asks the two to resend a letter which had got lost in delivery. In both 4.4 and 4.12, Simplicius' name precedes that of Apollinaris in the heading and in the text (4.12.2), a choice which can be ascribed to an age difference between the two.<sup>20</sup> Also in *Epist.* 7.4.4, addressed to Bishop Fonteius, Simplicius is mentioned before Apollinaris, when the two are described, with a show of affection as *uerissimi*

<sup>17</sup> *Epist.* 3.11.1 *cuncti nostrates idemque summates uiri optimarum te ... consono praeconio prosequuntur.*

<sup>18</sup> *Epist.* 5.4.1.

<sup>19</sup> *Epist.* 5.4.1 *quod non recepi scripta qui miseram, imputo amicitiae, sed deputo plus pudori.* Loyen conjectures the word *non* before *imputo*; however, leaving the transmitted reading is a sensible choice, since not answering is a fault in friendship. On this passage, see A. Loyen, *Sidoine Apollinaire: Correspondance, Livres 1–5* (Paris, 1970), 179 and Marolla (n. 14), 135.

<sup>20</sup> Thus Kaufmann (n. 2), 348, who believes that the order of the names is proof that Simplicius is Apollinaris' older brother and that Simplicius is younger than Thaumastus, although the second point seems unsupported by evidence.

*domini* of Sidonius' soul.<sup>21</sup> Even though the expression is undoubtedly intimate, Sidonius probably derives it from Symmachus, who calls Virius Nicomachus Flavianus *pectoris mei dominus* in *Epist.* 3.86.2; moreover, Stilicho is called with similar words of affection in *Symm. Ep.* 7.104.2 and 8.29.<sup>22</sup>

Sidonius' *Epist.* 7.4.4 is often mentioned because of a useful piece of information: when the Visigoths attacked the region of Nîmes, presumably after 469, Simplicius is said to be living in close proximity—or likely together with—Apollinaris in Vaison.<sup>23</sup> Sidonius rejoices at the news that Fonteius, bishop of Vaison, has 'extended the abundant patronage of his apostleship' to Simplicius and to Apollinaris 'through endless intercession' (*intermina intercessio*) and, should the news not be truthful, he urges him not to waste time and to start showing them his affection (*caritas*).<sup>24</sup> Loyen tentatively suggested that the passage might be related to the diplomatic incident of *Epist.* 5.6 and 5.7, when Apollinaris is suspected of collaboration with Julius Nepos against the Burgundians (474–475), and is said to have had a role in inciting the population of Vaison in favour of the new emperor.<sup>25</sup> Accepting Loyen's suggestion, Harries believes that Sidonius is thereby asking Bishop Fonteius to protect both Thaumastus and Apollinaris from the accusations by virtue of his influence at the Burgundian court.<sup>26</sup> It cannot be inferred for certain whether Simplicius and Apollinaris need the bishop's intercession and support to escape a thorny situation (as Harries implies, relating the request specifically to the incident with Julius Nepos), or if Sidonius refers to the fact that they have recently moved to Vaison and wishes them to be included in Fonteius' network so that they can profit from his influence as bishop. The request for protection seems, however, moderate and customary if read in light of the author's taste for affectedness in writing his commendations. If one compares it to the hurried tone of *Epist.* 5.6, it does not seem that cogent that the two letters may concern the same episode. However, one may wonder if Fonteius' support and network of contacts would have been needed in preparation for, or during, Apollinaris' attempt to turn the people of Vaison against the Burgundians.

The fact that Simplicius and Apollinaris fled and probably lived together explains why the two received letters jointly; however, these are the only elements which

<sup>21</sup> On this letter, see J.A. van Waarden, *Writing to Survive: A Commentary on Sidonius Apollinaris, Letters Book 7. Volume I: The Episcopal Letters 1–11* (Leuven, 2010), 237–8.

<sup>22</sup> For this expression and for its presumably Greek origin, see P. Brugisser, 'L'appellation δεσπότης μου τῆς ψυχῆς dans la lettre P. Strasb. III 286', *MH* 46 (1989), 231–6, at 234–6; A. Pellizzari, *Commento storico al libro III dell'Epistolario di Q. Aurelio Simmaco* (Pisa and Rome, 1998), 237.

<sup>23</sup> 469 is not a specific *terminus post quem*, as is pointed out by van Waarden (n. 21), 217, but it is an unproblematic date.

<sup>24</sup> *Epist.* 7.4.4 *illud quoque mihi inter maxima granditer cordi est, quod apostolatus uestri patrociniū copiosum uerissimis dominis animae meae, Simplicio et Apollinari, intermina intercessione conferre uos comperi*. Moreover, note the following mention of the whereabouts of the addressee Fonteius, *istic, id est in Vasionensi oppido*. See Harries (n. 14), 33; van Waarden (n. 21), 240–1 in particular for the convincing possibility that the last sentence of the passage is a gloss. See also Mathisen (n. 1), 81, 122. For *caritas* as 'devotion to relatives and close friends' in Sidonius, see S. Fascione, *Gli 'altri' al potere. Romani e barbari nella Gallia di Sidonio Apollinare* (Bari, 2019), 105–11.

<sup>25</sup> A. Loyen, *Sidoine Apollinaire: Correspondance, Livres 6–9* (Paris, 1970), 214 n. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Harries (n. 14), 213. See also van Waarden (n. 21), 215–17, who suggests that, should Loyen be right in connecting *Epist.* 7.4 to the incident at the Burgundian court, the letter might be dated between the autumn/winter of 474 and the beginning of 475.

would suggest that the two could be related and Sidonius does not openly mention any information on the nature of this relationship. In the prosopographical entries dedicated to Simplicius and, consequently, in commentaries and studies citing him, he is said to be a brother to Apollinaris and Thaumastus, and thus either a further uncle or a cousin of Sidonius.<sup>27</sup> The following discussion is aimed at proving that this kinship is not demonstrable in light of the passages usually mentioned as evidence. This assumption, however, is not in earlier studies: Semple already considered Simplicius to be 'a certain friend' of Sidonius,<sup>28</sup> and, before Mathisen, Stevens believed Apollinaris and Thaumastus to be Sidonius' cousins, while he thought Simplicius was a friend of Apollinaris, not a relative.<sup>29</sup>

#### AN OVERVIEW OF PROSOPOGRAPHY ENTRIES

In *PLRE* and *PCBE*<sup>30</sup> there are letters mentioned as evidence of the kinship as three brothers of Simplicius, Thaumastus and Apollinaris, widely accepted so far, deserving, therefore, of an in-depth analysis.<sup>31</sup> In *Epist.* 2.9 Sidonius lavishly describes the delights of his sojourn as a guest in the properties of Ferreolus and Apollinaris, *inter agros amoenissimos, humanissimos dominos* (2.9.1).<sup>32</sup> In *PLRE* 2 (s.v. 'Simplicius 8') the following passage is mentioned as proof of the fact that Simplicius is uncle to Sidonius and brother of Apollinaris and Thaumastus (*Epist.* 2.9.3):<sup>33</sup>

igitur mane cotidiano partibus super hospite prima et grata contentio, quae nam potissimum antierius edulibus nostris culina fumaret; nec sane poterat ex aequo diuisioni lancem ponere uicissitudo, licet uni domui mecum, alteri cum meis uinculum foret propinquitatis, quia Ferreolo praefectorio uiro praeter necessitudinem sibi debitam dabat aetas et dignitas primi inuitatoris praerogatiuam.

Every morning, then, a first pleasant dispute arose between the two sides over their guest, as to which of the kitchens would first smoke for our meals; nor was it possible to be impartial by alternation. Though one is my kinsman, the other has a family tie with my wife. Since, in addition to our relationship, Ferreolus is of prefectorian rank, his age and dignity gave him the right to be the first to invite me.

This passage testifies in no uncertain terms that Apollinaris is Sidonius' kinsman and that Ferreolus is his wife's relative. The two engage in an amusing daily dispute over who should have the pleasure of Sidonius' company first, and the whole letter is but a long description of the leisurely activities of the merry brigade, who spend their time between sumptuous banquets, good reads and dense conversations, as is

<sup>27</sup> See notes 2 and 3 above.

<sup>28</sup> W.H. Semple, *Quaestiones exegeticae Sidonianae. Being New Interpretations of Difficult Passages in the Works of Apollinaris Sidonius* (Cambridge, 1930), 29–33.

<sup>29</sup> C.E. Stevens, *Sidonius Apollinaris and his Age* (Oxford, 1933), 140, 151. Furthermore, Simplicius is mentioned as a non-identifiable relative, and Simplicius and Apollinaris are generally said to be Sidonius' kinsmen in W.B. Anderson, *Sidonius Letters Books 3–9* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1965), 78, 179. Stevens (this note) and Anderson (this note) are mentioned by Løyn (n. 19), 223 n. 32, who is followed by Giannotti (n. 15), 205.

<sup>30</sup> *PLRE* 2.1015 s.v. 'Simplicius 8'; *PCBE* 4.1818–19 s.v. 'Simplicius 8'.

<sup>31</sup> E.g. Mathisen (n. 1), 58, 122.

<sup>32</sup> In *Epist.* 2.9.1 the distance between the two estates is said to be too tiring for a man on foot but manageable on horseback.

<sup>33</sup> Also in Kaufmann (n. 2), 348.



summarized by Sidonius in *Epist.* 2.9.4 *a deliciis in deliciis rapiebamur*. One example of their pastimes may suffice: in *Epist.* 2.9.5 Sidonius relates that they had examined at length Rufinus' translation of Origen and had wondered why the latter had been condemned as a 'perverse writer to be guarded against'.<sup>34</sup> *Epist.* 2.9 can be considered as an indulgent self-portrait of fifth-century Gallic aristocracy, and yet Simplicius is never mentioned anywhere in the letter, and there is not even a passing reference to any of Apollinaris' brothers.

*PLRE* also mentions *Carm.* 24.89 *hunc pronus prope patrum saluta* as evidence of the fact that Simplicius is one of the three 'uncles'.<sup>35</sup> This verse, however, exclusively concerns Thaumastus, who is mentioned a few lines earlier among the close friends and relatives Sidonius exhorts his *libellus* to visit.<sup>36</sup> Loyen believes that the two Thaumasti mentioned in *Carm.* 24 are father and son, hence uncle and first cousin of Sidonius,<sup>37</sup> and that would actually seem the most obvious interpretation of the passage, though not certain beyond reasonable doubt. Loyen's opinion on the issue has become widely accepted.<sup>38</sup> As stated earlier, Mathisen<sup>39</sup> has recently maintained that the *senior* in the *carmen* is Thaumastus the Elder, uncle of Sidonius, while his son Thaumastus the Younger is the *iunior* mentioned, brother to Apollinaris, hence cousin of Sidonius. Although Mathisen's suggestion seems appealing, the fragmentary information we have, unfortunately, does not allow us to decide with any degree of certainty. Giannotti has recently suggested that *prope* should go with *pronus* instead of *patrum*; therefore, she translates 'quasi prono in un inchino saluta questo zio' and has defended the traditional interpretation according to which Simplicius, Thaumastus and Apollinaris would have been brothers.<sup>40</sup> And yet, whatever kinship one reads into that passage, it is certain that in those verses, as in the whole of *Carm.* 24, Simplicius is never mentioned, and there are no elements which would suggest any kind of allusion to him despite the mention in prosopographies.

A fundamental step in the prosopographical overview concerns the entry on Simplicius in *PCBE* 4,<sup>41</sup> where he is immediately identified as brother of Apollinaris and Thaumastus in light of the mention of *fratres communes* in *Epist.* 5.7.7, a pamphlet against slanderers at the Burgundian court. Sidonius reassures the addressee Thaumastus

<sup>34</sup> *Epist.* 2.9.5 *scaeuus cauendusque tractor*.

<sup>35</sup> *PLRE* 2.1015 s.v. 'Simplicius 8'; also Kaufmann (n. 2), 348.

<sup>36</sup> *Carm.* 24.84–9 *exin tende gradum Tribusque Villis | Thaumastum expete, quemlibet duorum: | quorum iunior est mihi sodalis | et collega simul graduque frater: | quod si fors senior tibi inuenitur, | hunc pronus prope patrum saluta*. W.B. Anderson, *Sidonius: Poems and Letters Books 1–2* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1936), 325 believes that the name Thaumastus entails a wordplay and translates the passage as follows: 'Thence wend your way at the Three Manors and visit Thaumastus—either of the two Wonders: the younger is my bosom-friend and also my colleague and in standing my brother; but if you chance to find the elder, bow low and salute him as almost my uncle.' For a linguistic commentary, see S. Santelia, *Sidonio Apollinare: Carme 24*. *Propempticon ad libellum* (Bari, 2002), 118–19. Mathisen (n. 1), 58 follows Anderson (this note).

<sup>37</sup> A. Loyen, *Sidoine Apollinaire et l'esprit précieux en Gaule aux derniers jours de l'Empire* (Paris, 1943), 74–5 as in *PLRE* 2.1062 s.v. 'Thaumastus 1'; *PCBE* 4.1867 s.v. 'Thaumastus 1'.

<sup>38</sup> Loyen (n. 37), 75 n. 108: 'Il est curieux qu'Anderson encore se trompe sur les deux Thaumastus. Thaumastus *senior* est le *patruus* de Sidoine (c. 24, 89), sensiblement plus âgé que lui (*Ep.* V, 6); il appartient à la même génération que Tonantius Ferreolus (*Ep.* I, 7, 4). Thaumastus *iunior* est le camarade de Sidoine et son cousin germain (c. 24, 85–6): *frater* est synonyme de *frater patruelis*'.

<sup>39</sup> Mathisen (n. 1), 58–9.

<sup>40</sup> F. Giannotti, 'Nota sul *Propempticon ad libellum* di Sidonio Apollinare (*carm.* 24, 84–89)', *BStudLat* 51 (2021), 169–77, at 175–6.

<sup>41</sup> See *PCBE* 4.1818–19 s.v. 'Simplicius 8' and *PCBE* 4.161 s.v. 'Apollinaris 3'.



by reporting that the poisonous accusations of informers 'have done no damage to the serenity of our common brothers in the mind of our common protector'. The same passage is also cited in Mathisen's prosopography,<sup>42</sup> and it seems reasonable to assume that these entries are modelled on the succinct biographical note on Simplicius in Loyen's edition.<sup>43</sup> In the *PCBE* 4 entry, by virtue of the same mention, Simplicius is also said to have been accused of treason together with Apollinaris.<sup>44</sup> In this case too, however, Simplicius is mentioned neither in the passage nor anywhere in the letter, and no evidence of his possible involvement in Apollinaris' slander can be gathered from the two letters that give an account of the episode (*Epist.* 5.6, 5.7). In *Epist.* 5.7 it seems very unlikely that *fratres* could indicate specifically a number of *fratres patruales*, of cousins. Sidonius is wont to use the noun *frater* with the meaning of either Christian or lay brotherhood;<sup>45</sup> furthermore, the presence of the plural and of the adjective *communes* leads one rather to think that Sidonius refers to a group of friends which is shared by Thaumastus and him, and which includes his cousin Apollinaris. And yet, although the people involved may include friends and family, it is not possible to identify any of them.

As stated earlier, in *Epist.* 5.6 Sidonius offers his help should the news that Apollinaris is encountering disfavour at the Burgundian court be truthful. The only brother mentioned in the letter is Thaumastus, who is worried for Apollinaris, while the secret contrivance against Burgundians is reported to be only Apollinaris' (*tuo machinatu*). The one reference to others who may be implicated in the slander is found when Sidonius asks the addressee to let him know (*Epist.* 5.6.2) *si quid hinc tibi tuisque suspicionis incutitur*, 'if any suspicion is thrown upon you and yours'; however, there is no mention of Simplicius, and no way to identify any of the family members or close friends the noun 'yours' implies.

The information on Simplicius in the prosopographies most likely derives from Loyen's edition,<sup>46</sup> in which the kinship is said to be certain; and yet, in his previous monograph on Sidonius, Loyen had put a question mark next to that kinship twice, thus flagging its being a supposition.<sup>47</sup> So far, the only evidence detectable is that Apollinaris and Simplicius lived together or close to each other, and that Sidonius addresses letters to both. It is likely that they were related but there is no element to infer how. Moreover, it does not seem probative—as stated in *PLRE*<sup>48</sup>—that another case of joint addressees in the collection concerns brothers. *Sacerdos* and *Iustinus* receive *Epist.* 5.21 jointly because Sidonius asks them to part with their uncle's shared 'poetic inheritance'.<sup>49</sup>

It does not seem correct to identify Simplicius as one of three brothers (whether they are Sidonius' cousins or his uncles) on the basis of the interpretation of passages in which he is never mentioned, let alone to gather he was slandered alongside

<sup>42</sup> Mathisen (n. 1), 58 n. 197.

<sup>43</sup> Loyen (n. 19), 236 n. 22.

<sup>44</sup> Also in *PCBE* 4.163 s.v. 'Apollinaris 3'; *PCBE* 4.1867 s.v. 'Thaumastus 1'.

<sup>45</sup> E.g. in *Epist.* 4.18.2, 5.17.6, 6.2.2, 7.17.4.

<sup>46</sup> In his 'Notes complémentaires' to Book 5, Loyen (n. 19), 234 n. 5 writes: '*fratrum communium* désignant Apollinaris et Simplicius'.

<sup>47</sup> Loyen (n. 37), 74 and 185 s.v. 'Simplicius'.

<sup>48</sup> *PLRE* 2.1015 s.v. 'Simplicius 8'.

<sup>49</sup> And he does so quite resolutely, one may add, since *Epist.* 5.21 ends with a sort of *fulmen in clausula*, a not uncommon literary device in closing remarks of Sidonian letters: *patrimonia tenete, date carmina*.

Apollinaris. One cannot arbitrarily rule out the possibility that he *was* Apollinaris' brother, but neither can one pretend that any passage demonstrates this kinship.

#### AN ALTERNATIVE THEORY ON THE IDENTITY OF SIMPLICIUS

Given the lack of evidence, there is a range of alternative possibilities which may be equally worthy of consideration. For instance, a different interpretation is given by Fernández López,<sup>50</sup> who asserts that Simplicius, the father of the bride in *Epist.* 3.11, is the same man whose election as bishop of Bourges<sup>51</sup> is supported by Sidonius and mentioned in *Epist.* 7.8 and 7.9. Fernández López, however, excludes the possibility that he is the same Simplicius to whom the complaint for the interruption of letter exchanges (*Epist.* 5.4) is addressed. The more cautious approach in van Waarden's commentary seems preferable.<sup>52</sup> While Simplicius in *Epist.* 3.11 might be identifiable with the candidate of Bourges, the impossibility of a certain identification owing to lack of evidence cannot be overcome.<sup>53</sup>

By way of example, I will consider an alternative theory concerning Simplicius' identity. As the opening section of this contribution explains, there has probably been a rift between Apollinaris, Simplicius and Sidonius, since neither of them has been answering his letters for quite some time. The epistolary silence, in both *Epist.* 5.3 and *Epist.* 5.4, is not due to forgetfulness nor is it ascribable to a customary delay—as often in Symmachus<sup>54</sup>—instead, in *Epist.* 5.4 (just like in *Epist.* 5.3) Simplicius knowingly refuses to write back.

In *Epist.* 5.4.1 Sidonius explicitly mentions whom he deems to be responsible for the silence. He first states that it is to be imputed to those who wronged him (*reos meos*), who are to be found not far from the addressee, that is, Simplicius' sons. The author then remarks (*Epist.* 5.4.2) that the certainty of being the object of affection empowered them not to answer him, and he shows that his resentment is real and that he has taken offence in the protracted silence of Simplicius, but mainly of his sons. There is no reason to believe that those mentioned in this letter are not grown-up sons, old enough to take a stand against Sidonius, refusing to answer him. Sidonius' calling in question Simplicius' *patria auctoritas*, after having tried to contact them without getting an answer for some time, makes clear that this is a sort of *ultimatum*: resorting to the father may be a decisive way to end the rift, appealing to his authoritativeness.

<sup>50</sup> M.C. Fernández López, 'Sidonio Apolinar, humanista de la antigüedad tardía: su correspondencia', *Antigüedad y Cristianismo* 11 (1994), 11–291, at 64 n. 26. Giannotti (n. 15), 206 summarized the *status quaestionis* of the debated identification of this addressee.

<sup>51</sup> *PLRE* 2.1015 s.v. 'Simplicius 9'.

<sup>52</sup> Van Waarden (n. 21), 392–3; Giannotti (n. 15), 206 is of the same opinion.

<sup>53</sup> As for the Simplicius who happens to be briefly mentioned in *Epist.* 7.6.9, and about whom there is no information available, van Waarden reaches the same prudent conclusion.

<sup>54</sup> See Pellizzari (n. 22), 188; Alan Cameron, 'Were pagans afraid to speak their minds in a Christian world? The correspondence of Symmachus', in M.R. Salzman, M. Sághy and R. Lizzi Testa (edd.), *Pagans and Christians in Late Antique Rome: Conflict, Competition, and Coexistence in the Fourth Century* (Cambridge, 2015), 64–111, at 77–8. For the topos of epistolary silence in Pliny the Younger, see R. Gibson and R. Morello, *Reading the Letters of Pliny the Younger: An Introduction* (Cambridge and New York, 2012), 145.

Could it be possible that the haughty *fili* in *Epist.* 5.4 are Apollinaris and Thaumastus, and that therefore Simplicius is their father? In terms of distribution of letters in the book it would be fitting to find two letters on this family's epistolary silence (*Epist.* 5.3 and 5.4) followed by two letters in which it seems that the waters cleared and that Sidonius is in good terms with the cousins Apollinaris and Thaumastus (*Epist.* 5.6 and 5.7).<sup>55</sup> It would make sense that a letter on protracted epistolary silence to Apollinaris would be followed by a letter to Simplicius complaining for the silence of his sons and exhorting him to intervene by virtue of his *patria auctoritas*. It would also be plausible that letters were addressed jointly to father and son, and that the father's name would precede that of the son. However, as much as it would be tempting to consider Simplicius as Apollinaris' and Thaumastus' father, the passage on the two Thaumasti in *Carm.* 24 poses a serious problem. Unless one accepts Anderson's theory,<sup>56</sup> the mention is an insurmountable obstacle. If, as is broadly accepted, those mentioned in *Carm.* 24 are Thaumastus the Elder and a namesake son who is like a *frater* to Sidonius, hence his cousin, it is impossible that Simplicius could be Thaumastus' and Apollinaris' father.

But if Simplicius was not father to Apollinaris and Thaumastus, he may have been father to Eulalia. It has been suggested, in fact, that Eulalia, whose marriage with Probus (the brother of Magnus Felix) is mentioned in *Carm.* 24.94–5 and in *Epist.* 4.1, could be identified with Simplicius' unnamed daughter, whose marriage is praised in *Epist.* 3.11.<sup>57</sup> In this letter, Sidonius asserts that all the leaders of their land (3.11.1 *cuncti nostrates idemque summates uiri*) praised Simplicius as *pater familias*. He also asserts that these men's high opinion of him is confirmed by the choice of an excellent son-in-law, and by the way in which he brought up his daughter. The mention of the highest nobility of Gaul, the way in which Sidonius lauds the newly-wed couple as well as Simplicius and his daughter's father-in-law as *parentes ambo uenerabiles* would be appropriate for a high-rank marriage such as that of Eulalia with Probus. As stated earlier, in *Epist.* 4.1, Eulalia is said to be Sidonius' *soror patruelis*, so she is certainly his cousin.<sup>58</sup> The assumption that Eulalia is Simplicius' daughter would therefore lead one to suggest that Simplicius is Sidonius' uncle on his father's side and not his cousin, as Apollinaris and Thaumastus probably are; he would therefore be uncle of Sidonius, of the younger Thaumastus and of Apollinaris, as can be seen from **family tree 3** below.<sup>59</sup>

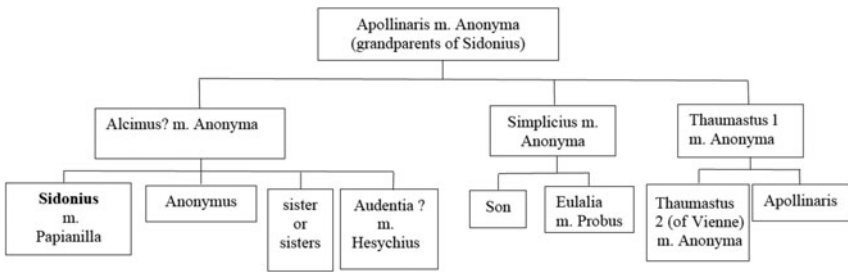
<sup>55</sup> The presence of *Epist.* 5.5, concerning a different theme and addressee, might testify that some time had passed. It also constitutes a fitting interlude, which helps in the shifting of tone going from complaints on epistolary silence to letters in which peace is restored in the family. See Marolla (n. 14), 170–1.

<sup>56</sup> The elder Thaumastus and the younger Thaumastus in *Carm.* 24 being Thaumastus and his younger brother Apollinaris; however, an Apollinaris is already mentioned in Vorocius (*Carm.* 24.53), and is called with a show of affection 'our Apollinaris'.

<sup>57</sup> *PLRE* 2.418 s.v. 'Eulalia': 'her father was possibly Simplicius, who had an (unnamed) daughter of whose marriage Sidonius approved; Sid. *Ap. Ep.* 3.11.1–2'; see also *PLRE* 2.910 s.v. 'Probus 4'; *PLRE* 2.1317 *stemma* 14; Kaufmann (n. 2), 348; Giannotti (n. 15), 206; Santelia (n. 36), 122–4.

<sup>58</sup> This is proof—according to Mathisen (n. 1), 59—that the use of *frater* in relation to Apollinaris should be considered as an abbreviated form for *frater patruelis*.

<sup>59</sup> There is no way of knowing whether either or both Simplicius and Thaumastus 1 could be brothers to Sidonius' father or brothers-in-law, being married to his sisters. For Mathisen's theory that Thaumastus 1 is, in fact, married to Sidonius' paternal aunt and that, for this reason, he is said to be 'almost a *patruus*' in *Carm.* 24.89, cf. n. 6 above.



### 3. Family tree based on the theory that Simplicius is an uncle to Sidonius, Thaumastus 2 and Apollinaris

In connection with Simplicius possibly being Eulalia's father, one last element deserves attention. The similar phrasing and tone of Sidonian complaints on epistolary silence addressed to Magnus Felix,<sup>60</sup> to Apollinaris and to Simplicius may lead to further speculation. As argued above, the reason for the voluntary silence which Felix, Apollinaris and Simplicius share, and which in the case of Felix lasted many years,<sup>61</sup> may have been the Arvandus affair. Similarities between these letters include Sidonius' reiterated *garrulitas* contrasting with the firm refusal of an answer; his fear for the condition of the other's health (cf. *Epist.* 3.7 and 5.3); and his pointing out how unfair it is that his course of action is pious, while Felix, Apollinaris and Simplicius are showing no respect for old bonds of friendship and kin, and not acting as one would expect them to.<sup>62</sup> It seems also fair to assume that, should Eulalia be Simplicius' daughter, it would be possible that Eulalia and her husband Probus, the brother of Magnus Felix, could be the haughty *fili* who disrespect Sidonius by not answering him in *Epist.* 5.4. Sidonius would have wronged both his own and the family of Magnus Felix by siding with Arvandus, and involvement of Probus in the epistolary silence of Magnus Felix seems probable.

## CONCLUSION

If Eulalia was Simplicius' daughter, the daughter who was praised along with her husband for outdoing her own parents (*Epist.* 3.11.2 *quod uos filii transierunt*) would now be strongly criticized presumably together with her brother or her husband, not only with the usual coded reprimands for the forgetfulness in replying to Sidonius' letters; more to the point, the two of them would be portrayed as malevolent and conceited offenders against Sidonius. The image of Simplicius the *praestantissimus*

<sup>60</sup> Who was Probus' brother, hence Eulalia's brother-in-law.

<sup>61</sup> Sidonius writes to Magnus Felix in *Epist.* 4.10.1 *erumpo in salutationem licet seram, domine meus, annis ipse iam multis insalutatus*. Similar complaints to Magnus Felix for being ignored are also in *Epist.* 3.4.2 and 3.7.1. See Marolla (n. 14), 97–102.

<sup>62</sup> Sidonius tells Magnus Felix that he has been punished for obscure offences in *Epist.* 3.4.2 *licet apertis ipsi poenis propter criminum occulta plectamur*, while he has been acting piously. Cf. *Epist.* 5.3.4 (*fit a nostra parte quod pium est*); moreover, he is the one offended in *Epist.* 5.4.2 (*contractae apud nos offensae amaritudinem*).

*pater familias*,<sup>63</sup> whose educational skills are enhanced in *Epist.* 3.11, would be rejected and denied when, at the end of *Epist.* 5.4, Sidonius calls upon the same *patria auctoritas*, exhorting Simplicius to admonish his offspring, rectifying their misconduct. Simplicius' identity as an uncle to the younger Thaumastus, to Apollinaris and to Sidonius would also be coherent with the evidence that Apollinaris and he were relatives close enough to combine their households in a moment of political turmoil.

Who was Simplicius then? With the fragmentary information we have, it is impossible to determine with absolute certainty. One may legitimately argue that assuming that Simplicius' daughter is identical with Eulalia is not any different than inferring that Simplicius is a brother to Apollinaris and to Thaumastus. And yet this is just one of the possible alternative hypotheses suggested here as exemplary. In this case acknowledging the limits of prosopographical research and embracing the uncertainty of an identification, which was already signalled in editions, seems the only valid conclusion that can possibly be reached.

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<sup>63</sup> *Epist.* 3.11.1.