

Condorelli, S. 2008. *Il poeta doctus nel V secolo d.C. Aspetti della poetica di Sidonio Apollinare* (Studi Latini, 65). Naples, Loffredo. 288 pp. Pr. €28.00 (pb). ISBN 9788875643126.

Slowly but unmistakably the poetry and prose of one of the key figures of late antique Gaul, Sidonius Apollinaris, are receiving the attention of scholars that they need and deserve. Condorelli's comprehensive study of Sidonius' poetics is a milestone in this cautious renaissance. She is the first to offer an integral treatment of this subject on the basis of an extensive knowledge of recent research, and she does so with admirable clarity of argument as well as with a wealth of detail. Among the assets of this work is its coverage of the poetry which is found in Sidonius' correspondence, in addition to the obvious attention given to his court poetry and his light verse, collected in the *Carmina*.

Roughly one quarter of the book is dedicated to the Panegyrics and their prefaces (*Carm.* 1-8), one half to the *carmina minora* 9-24, and the remaining quarter to the poems included in the correspondence. Each section is rounded off with a summary, and the book ends with a four-page overall conclusion. Impeccably worded, these conclusions, together with the introduction, contain the essence of Condorelli's understanding of Sidonius' poetry.

In the best tradition of Italian philology Condorelli develops her argument step by step in a process of close reading of the texts, while focusing on microscopic details and unraveling a subtle web of intertextuality. In his court poetry, she claims, Sidonius goes beyond the commonplaces of panegyric and the mere propaganda of power as seen in his model Claudian. He is himself politically involved. In the panegyric on Avitus (*Carm.* 6-7) he shows this by slightly toning down the obligatory optimism at the start of a new era; after all, Rome had just been sacked by the Vandals, and the last emperor had been brutally murdered. The panegyric on Majorian (*Carm.* 4-5) proudly claims a role for the poet in relation to the *princeps*. The art of the poet is indispensable to the glory of the monarch, though the latter is welcome to re-establish political equilibrium. In the panegyric on Anthemius (*Carm.* 1-2) the poet keeps his distance from this Greek stranger who is politely summoned to steer a Roman course. Thus, in the panegyrics the literary tradition is subtly manipulated to accommodate political actuality.

In the self-declared 'trifles', *nugae*, numbers 9-24 of the collection, the context changes from court ceremonial to merrymaking among equals. Condorelli analyzes the technical and structural diversity, and again the complex debt which these occasional poems owe to tradition—in this case mainly the neoterics filtered through Horace and Martial, plus Statius and Ausonius. She highlights the *novitas* which Sidonius claims for his light verse in the programmatic first and last poems (9.16 *non nos currimus aggerem vetustum*, 'I don't follow the old road', 24.5 *antiquus*

tibi nec teratur agger, (addressing the poem on its way to its addressees) 'don't walk the ancient road'). "La nuova via che Sidonio sceglie", she says, "è quella di una poesia che si nutre di occasioni legate ad un ristretto contesto, leggera, espressione di un *lusus* raffinato, ma comprensibile ormai solo a pochi *docti*" (186). One may doubt whether Condorelli does not limit Sidonius' scope too much, but she is surely right in characterising his art as "una *dictio* poetica che, mentre eredita palesemente le strutture espressive della tradizione, le svuota di senso, impiegandole con un significato addirittura opposto" (116). For instance, the above cited programmatic *carmen* 9 consists of a long and varied enumeration of the kinds of poetry which the author will *not* write, without turning into a positive alternative. The *lusus* is in the reversal of literary history *tout court*. Even in the poems written for specific occasions like a marriage, or in the description of a friend's manor, "l'occasione reale è alla base dell'operazione poetica . . . al tempo stesso, però, nella composizione prende il sopravvento la digressione, con il risultato che al contatto con la realtà, che è motivo ispiratore del carme, si sovrappone il procedimento efrastico, attraverso il quale il tema si dilata e la realtà 'viene meno' sotto il peso della dottrina poetica" (187).

As the bulk of the correspondence belongs to the second phase of Sidonius' life, when he was bishop of Clermont, some of the poems included in it give evidence of Christian inspiration. His "testamento poetico" (*Ep.* 9.16.3, 482 AD?) bids farewell to the juvenile *nugae*, and instead becomes a hymn to St Saturnine in Prudentian fashion. He suggests that his future as a poet lies in praising the saints. Because of his known activities as a liturgist and as a promoter of the cult of several other saints, I think it not impossible that Sidonius indeed developed in that direction, although this must remain speculation. Sidonius' Catholic stance, however, is beyond doubt. In his later years it became the driving force behind a *Romanitas* 'new style'. Condorelli rightly stresses that, like the poetry in the *carmina*, the poetry in the correspondence is firmly rooted in the Latin poetical tradition. But her generalization of this, viz.: "Sidonio fa della propria *doctrina* un ideale, un codice di comunicazione, espressione di quella sua forte identità culturale che, anche nella fase vescovile, resta una cifra distintiva, un baluardo, l'ultimo di fronte a un mondo in cui i Barbari, *gens aliena*, hanno ormai preso il sopravvento" (239), must be complemented with the 'twin bulwark' of Catholicism.

The vulnerability of this beautiful book lies in the fact that it relies heavily on the interpretation of textual detail and on the identification of allusions. It seems to me that Condorelli has not always escaped the danger of overinterpretation. For instance, in the final line of the panegyric on Avitus (*Carm.* 7.602) the poet says that the *saecula* ahead will be *fulva*. In an attempt to discover a political message Condorelli makes much of the fact that Sidonius uses *fulva*, rather than *aurea*, to describe this golden age: it will not be made of gold, it will only have its colour,

because the empire is in dire straits. Normally, however, *fulvus* is simply a convenient poetical alternative to *aureus*, e.g. Sil. 4.269 *fulvis donabere frenis*, 'I shall give you reins of gold'. This is exactly the kind of variation for variation's sake (apart from metrical convenience) to be expected from Sidonius, in whose style a rich variety of lexical choices is a dominant motif.

More in general, the book would have benefited from a discussion of the nature of intertextuality and of its limits. Condorelli seems to suggest that the literary scholar can simply enter into the mind of his or her object: "Sidonio intreccia un dialogo costante con i modelli della tradizione" (241), and presumed references are always "ben precisi", "non banali", and "sottili". I would suggest that her interpretation—coherent and monumental as it is—remains a modern construct, determined by its philological method and 'the eye of the beholder'. Ultimately, the merit of this study does not lie in the ingenious, though sometimes debatable web of allusions which it weaves, but rather in the good taste and intuition of Condorelli as a professional reader. This would have been brought into stronger relief if she had incorporated notions from books such as Hinds, S. 1998. *Allusion and Intertext* (Cambridge) and Edmunds, L. 2001. *Intertextuality and the Reading of Roman Poetry* (Baltimore).

Condorelli is a specialist of Sidonius' bibliography (2003. *Prospettive Sidoniane. Venti anni di studi su Sidonio Apollinare (1982-2002)*, *BStudLat* 33, 140-74). Again she provides a rich bibliography, although some important work on late Latin poetry and aesthetics from outside Italy is missing, especially Jean-Louis Charlet's contributions 1988. *Aesthetic Trends in Late Latin Poetry (325-410)*, *Philologus* 132, 74-85, and 1997. *Die Poesie*, in: Engels, L.J., Hofmann, H. (eds.) *Neues Handbuch der Literaturwissenschaft. Spätantike* (Wiesbaden), 495-564. Perhaps at the time of writing Formisano, M. 2007. *Towards an Aesthetic Paradigm of Late Antiquity*, *AntTard* 15, 277-84, was too recent a publication to be taken into account. Among Italian scholarship, Giardini, A., Silvestrini, M. 1989. *Il principe e il testo*, in: *Lo spazio letterario di Roma antica, 2: La circolazione del testo* (Rome), 579-613, is sorely missed because of its sagacious account of imperial panegyric (see esp. 610).

The title of the book promises aspects of Sidonius' 'poetics'. Condorelli applies the term in a broad sense to comprise the whole of Sidonius' models and inspiration, his stylistic and metrical technique, and his literary aims. Thus, rather than with a 'theory of poetry', the reader is presented with a critical reading of important stretches of Sidonius' poetic legacy and a reasoned assessment of its function in the social and ideological context of the artist. One could not wish for more. As it is, this study is an essential step forward in our understanding of Sidonius' poetry.

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