

Sidonius' prose rhythm: a supplement

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The Edinburgh Companion to Sidonius Apollinaris contains some chapters that aspire to be comprehensive surveys of subjects already well treated in scholarship, and others that represent an early stage of research where much more remains to be investigated. The chapter on 'Sidonius' prose rhythm' by Joop van Waarden and me (on pp. 462-75) is definitely in the latter category. The aim of this post is to supplement and illustrate the information given there, and to offer one or two afterthoughts.

The standard matrix in which Latin prose rhythm is understood in approximately the third to the fifth centuries is through the concept of *cursus mixtus*: that is a stage between the use of favoured metrical clause endings (*clausulae*) – a phenomenon introduced from Greek in the last centuries BC and most famously used by Cicero – and the accentual rhythms favoured in the Middle Ages, called *cursus* by scholars. A clause ending like *esse causaris* can be seen metrically, as a cretic followed by a spondee or trochee,* and rhythmically, as *cursus planus*: that is, a case where the last two accented syllables have two syllables in between them and one syllable following the second. By restricting the range of metrical *clausulae* and the word divisions used in them, *clausulae* could be guaranteed to create regular patterns with word accents as well. That is how it works in theory, but it should be noted that *cursus mixtus* is an anachronistic modern term and represents an attempt to codify a complicated reality.

In the first part of our chapter (p. 462-68), Joop van Waarden presents the results of an investigation into Sidonius' prose rhythm following a methodology for identifying *cursus mixtus* developed by Oberhelman and Hall. These results (presented in a table, pp. 474-75) are mixed: while the speech delivered at Bourges and enclosed with *Ep.* 7.9 presents a conventional *cursus mixtus*, the same cannot be demonstrated, at least in the Oberhelman/Hall methodology, in the rest of book 7, book 1 or book 9 – even though the proportion of conventionally metrical *clausulae* is rather high. In the second half of the chapter (pp. 468-73), I suggested that this statistical approach does not match the experience of reading Sidonius, who certainly uses artistic *clausulae* at various points. I chose instead to analyse ten sections of an indubitably *clausulated* letter in book 2 in order to see if one could identify Sidonius' approach.

The answer I offered is, first, that Sidonius' *clausulation* is much more at the metrical end of the metrical/accental spectrum: more like, say, Pliny the Younger than most of his contemporaries. I pointed out a number of features which

* In metrical *clausulae* the length of the final syllable is for practical purposes indifferent – I use spondee in describing the cretic spondee *clausula* solely for convenience (in fact, because for purposes of abbreviated notation the letter T is needed to represent tribrach).

reinforced this: the use in clausulae of elision with a preference for eliding the short syllable as in verse; the avoidance of metrical patterns reminiscent of verse, like the dactyl-spondee hexameter ending; the willingness to replace a long syllable with two shorts even though the regular *cursus* is thus avoided; and the willingness to use forms which are metrically correct clausulae but which do not create *cursus* (he is very fond of ending with a five-syllable word forming a cretic-spondee, for example). Secondly, it must be acknowledged that Sidonius shows variation in his use of metrical clausulae and does not employ them with absolute regularity. Some letters and passages are written with much less attention to rhythm, and in some highly artful passages – lists for example – metrical effects are simply secondary to dazzling wordplay and sequences of polysyllables.

In the original chapter, I included a table of the metrical and rhythmical patterns of my exemplary passage, *Ep.* 2.2.1-10. I thought it would be useful here to add my workings: a complete presentation of the passages with the clausulae and *cursus* as I interpreted them. The table and text follow, and I add some additional thoughts on Sidonian prose rhythm at the end.

Clausulae in *Ep.* 2.2.1-10

Key

C = cretic — ∪ —	S = spondee — —	T = tribrach, ∪ ∪ ∪
D = ditrochee — ∪ — ∪	P ¹ = paeon I — ∪ ∪ ∪	P ⁴ = paeon IV ∪ ∪ ∪ —
Dact = dactyl — ∪ ∪	Anap = anapaest ∪ ∪ —	Py = Pyrrhic ∪ ∪
(e) = elision		

Most common clausulae

CS = cretic spondee, — ∪ — — ∪	(e.g. esse cau saris)
CC = cretic cretic, — ∪ — — ∪ ∪	(e.g. mundus in canduit)
CT = cretic tribrach, — ∪ — ∪ ∪ ∪	(e.g. unda sed coquitur)
P ¹ S = Paeon 1 spondee, — ∪ ∪ ∪ — ∪	(e.g. urbe reti neri)
P ⁴ S = Paeon 4 spondee, ∪ ∪ ∪ — — ∪	(e.g. latera cli uorum)
CD = cretic ditrochee, — ∪ — — ∪ — ∪	(e.g. furfurem mentiuntur)
DactPy = dactyl pyrrhic, — ∪ — ∪ ∪	(e.g. climate loquar)

Cursus

I = ó ~ ~ ó ~	cursus planus (e.g. ésse causáris)
II = ó ~ ~ ó ~ ~	cursus tardus (e.g. múndus incánduit)
III = ó ~ ~ ~ ~ ó ~	cursus uelox (e.g. fúrfurem mentiúntur)

Semi-regular cursus

3 = ó ~ ~ ó ~	'trispondaicus' (e.g. úrbe retineri)
(variant?) 3+ = ó ~ ~ ~ ó ~ ~	(teténdit opifícium)

Irregular cursus

1 = ó ~ ó ~
5 = ó ~ ~ ~ ~ ó ~

Table

	Cretic spondee	Double cretic	Cretic tribrach	Cretic ditrochee	Paeon I spondee	Paeon IV spondee	Paeon I tribrach	Paeon I cretic	Dactyl pyrrhic	Cretic pyrrhic	Dactyl cretic	Other + ditrochee	Other	Total	Percentage
ó~ó~	1			1							1	1	1	5	4.2
ó~ó~~		1												1	0.8
ó~~ó~ (<i>planus</i>)	36				1				3	3		1	4	48	40.0
ó~~ó~~ (<i>tardus</i>)		14	6								2		2	24	20.0
ó~~~~ó~					6	7							1	14	11.7
ó~~~~ó~~							2	2					3	7	5.8
ó~~~~~ó~ (<i>velox</i>)	2			4	1							5	1	13	10.8
ó~~~~~ó~~	4				3							1		8	6.7
Total	43	15	6	5	11	7	2	2	3	3	3	8	12	120	
<i>Percentage</i>	35.8	12.5	5.0	4.2	9.2	5.8	1.7	1.7	2.5	2.5	2.5	6.7	10.0		

Epistula 2.2

Sidonius Domitio suo salutem.

1	Ruri me esse causaris, cum mihi potius queri suppetat te nunc urbe retineri. iam ver decedit aestati et per lineas sol altatus extremas	CS, I P ¹ S, 3 CS, I CS, I
5	in axem Scythicum radio peregrinante porrigitur. hic quid de regionis nostrae climate loquar? cuius spatia divinum sic tetendit opificium, ut magis vaporibus orbis occidui subiceremur.* quid plura?*	CT, II DactPy, I P ¹ T, 3+ P ¹ S, 5 Too short
10	mundus incanduit: glacies Alpina deletur et hiulcis arentium rimarum flexibus terra perscribitur; squalet glarea in vadis, limus in ripis,	CC, II CS, I CC, II CIb, I (e) CS, I
15	pulvis in campis; aqua ipsa quaecumque perpetuo labens tractu cunctante languescit, iam non solum calet unda sed coquitur 2. et nunc, dum in carbaso sudat unus	CS, I AnapS, I CS, I CT, II CD, 1
20	alter in bombyce, tu endromidatus exterius, intrinsicus fasciatus, insuper et concava municipis Amerini sede compressus	CC, II CT, II CD, III CS, I
25	discipulis non aestu minus quam timore pallentibus exponere oscitabundus ordiris: 'Samia mihi mater fuit.'* quin tu mage, si quid tibi salubre cordi, raptim subduceris anhelantibus angustiis civitatis et contubernio nostro averter insertus	CC, II CS, I Quotation P ¹ S, I CD, III CS, I
30	fallis clementissimo recessu inclementiam canicularem? 3. sane si placet, quis sit agri, in quem vocaris, situs accipe	P ¹ S, 5
	Avitaci sumus: nomen hoc praedio, quod, quia uxorium, patrio mihi dulcius.	DactC, 1 ∪— — ∪, 1 CC, II CC, 1
35	haec mihi cum meis praesule deo, nisi quid tu fascinum verere, concordia mons ab occasu, quamquam terrenus, arduus tamen inferiores sibi colles	DactIb, I CC, II CS, I — — — — ∪, I CS, 1
40	tamquam gemino fomite effundit, quattuor a se circiter iugerum latitudine abductos.	CS, I (e) CS, I (e)

	sed donec domicilio competens vestibuli campus aperitur,	P ¹ S, 3
	mediam vallem rectis tractibus prosequuntur latera clivorum	P ⁴ S, 3
	usque in marginem villae,	CS, I
45	quae in Borean Austrumque conversis frontibus tenditur.	CC, II
	4. balneum ab Africo radicibus nemorosae rupis adhaerescit,*	— ∪ — — ∪, 3
	et si caedua per iugum silva truncetur,	CS, I
	in ora fornacis	CS, I
	lapsu velut spontaneo	∪ — — — ∪ —, II
50	deciduis struibus impingitur.	P ⁴ C, 3+
	hinc aquarum surgit cella coctilium	CT, II
	quae consequenti unguentariae spatii parilitate conquadrat	CS, I
	excepto solii capacis hemicyclio,	— ∪ — ∪ ∪ —, 3+
	ubi et vis undae ferventis per parietem foraminatum flexilis plumbi meatibus implicita singultat.	P ⁴ S, 3
55	intra conclave succensum solidus dies	AnapPy, I
	et haec abundantia lucis inclusae,	CS, I
	ut verecundos quosque compellat	CS, I
	aliquid se plus putare quam nudos.	CS, I
	5. hinc frigidaria dilatatur,	DactD, III
60	quae piscinas publicis operibus extractas non impudenter aemularetur.	P ⁴ S, 3
	primum tecti apice in conum cacuminato,	CS, III
		— — ∪ — ∪ — —,
		III
	cum ab angulis quadrifariam concurrentia dorsa cristarum	CS, I
	tegulis interiacentibus imbricarentur,	CS, 5
65	ita ut ministeriorum sese non impediende famulatu tot possit recipere sellas,	P ¹ S, 3
	quot solet sigma personas,	∪ ∪ — —, I
	fenestras e regione conditor binas confinio camerae pendentis admovit,	CS, I
	ut suspicientum visui fabrefactum lacunar aperiret	P ¹ S, 3
70	interior parietum facies solo levigati caementi candore contenta est	CS (e), I(e) (or II?)
	6. non hic per nudam pictorum corporum pulchritudinem turpis prostat historia,	CC, II
	quae sicut ornat artem, sic devenustat artificem.	CT, II
	absunt ridiculi vestitu et vultibus histriones pigmentis multicoloribus Philistionis supellectilem mentientes.	DactD, III
		CD, III
75	absunt lubrici tortuosique pugilatu et nexibus palaestritae,	CS, III

	quorum etiam viventum luctas, si involvantur obsenius,	CC, II
	casta confestim gymnasiarchorum virga dissolvit.	CS, I
	7. quid plura?*	Too short
	nihil illis paginis impressum reperietur,	P ¹ S, III
80	quod non vidisse sit sanctius.	CC, II
	pauci tamen versiculi lectorem adventicium remorabuntur minime improbo temperamento, quia eos nec relegisse desiderio est nec perlegisse fastidio.	CS, 5
	iam, si marmora inquiras,	CC, II
	non illic quidem Paros Carystos Proconnesos,*	CS, I (e)
85	Phryges Numidae Spartiatae rupium variatarum posuere crustas	? DactD, 1
	neque per scopulos Aethiopicos et abrupta purpurea genuino fucata conchylio,	CC, II
	sparsum mihi saxa furfurem mentiuntur.	CD, III
	sed etsi nullo peregrinarum cautium rigore ditamur,	CS, I
	habent tamen tuguria seu mapalia mea civicum frigus.	CS, I
90	quin potius quid habeamus quam quid non habeamus ausculta.	CS, I
	8. huic basilicae appendix piscina forinsecus seu, si graecari mavis, baptisterium ab Oriente conectitur,	DactC, II
	quod viginti circiter modiorum milia capit.	CC, II
	huc elautis e calore venientibus	DactPy, I
95	triplex medii parietis aditus per arcuata intervalla reseratur.	P ¹ C, 3+
	nec pilae sunt mediae sed columnae, quas architecti peritiores aedificiorum purpuras nuncupavere.*	P ¹ S, 3 AnapD, III
	in hanc ergo piscinam	CS, 5
	fluvium de supercilio montis elicatum	CS, I
100	canalibusque circumactis per exteriora natatoriae latera curvatum,	CT, II
	sex fistulae prominentes leonum simulatis capitibus effundunt,	P ⁴ S, 3 P ⁴ S, 3
	quae temere ingressis veras dentium crates, meros oculorum furores,	CS, I
	certas cervicum iubas imaginabuntur.	AnapD, I CS, 5
105	9. hic si dominum seu domestica seu hospitalis turba circumstet,	CS, I
	quia prae strepitu caduci fluminis mutuae vocum vices minus intelleguntur,	AnapD, III
	in aurem sibi populus confabulatur;	∪∪— — —∪∪, 5
	ita sonitu pressus alieno	P ¹ S, 3
	ridiculum affectat publicus sermo secretum.	CS, I

110	hinc egressis frons triclinii matronalis offertur, cui continuatur vicinante tetrino cella penaria discriminata tantum pariete castrensi. 10. ab ortu lacum porticus intuetur, magis rotundatis fulta collyriis	CS, I DactC, II P ⁴ S, 3 DactD, III CC, II
115	quam columnis invidiosa monolithis. a parte vestibuli longitudo tecta intrinsecus patet mediis non interpellata parietibus, quae, quia nihil ipsa prospectat, etsi non hippodromus, saltim cryptoporticus meo mihi iure vocitabitur.	DactT, II DactPy, I P ¹ T, 3+ CS, I P ¹ C, 3+
120	haec tamen aliquid spatio suo in extimo deambulacri capite defrudans efficit membrum bene frigidum, ubi publico lectisternio exstructo clientularum sive nutricum loquacissimus chorus receptui canit, cum ego meique dormitorium cubiculum petierimus.	P ⁴ S, 3 — — ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪, 3+ CS (e), I CPy, I P ¹ S, 5

Notes

8) Scanning *subic-* (two shorts) rather than *subjic-* (long short)

9, 26, 78, 84) These are the four clausulae not counted in the table: the short interjection *quid plura?* (9 and 78), a quotation from Terence (26), and a case (84) where the possibility of pronunciation with Greek stress accents make it impossible to sure how Sidonius heard quantity and rhythm. If Greek accents were used, *Cárystos Procónnesos* (3+) would be the accentuations, but it is possible that he used the Latin penultimate rule in pronouncing one or both words.

46) Could *rupis adhaerescit* (irregular clausula) be a scribal correction of *rupis haerescit* (CS, I), since *adhaeresco* is far commoner than *haeresco*? However, the recent doctoral thesis of Giulia Marolla on Letters 5.1-10 (San Marino, 2021) points out a number of cases where apparently irregular clausulae might be understood as choriamb (— ∪ ∪ —) replacing cretic.

98) for *nuncupauere* Sidonius could have written the contracted form and come up with *purpurās nuncuparunt*: it is suggestive that he prefers a single-word cretic-spondee clausula to the combination of cretic-ditrochee and *cursus velox* that most of his contemporaries would have written in these circumstances.

Further thoughts

The reasons that Sidonius' practice of prose rhythm defied at least some attempts at statistical analysis lie partly in his own idiosyncrasies, above all in his use of a primarily metrical form of clausulation, against the general trend of the age. Deeper comparison to predecessors like the younger Pliny would be valuable. That said, he was certainly alert to the effects of accentual *cursus*: as mentioned above, Van

Waarden's analysis of Sidonius' one surviving piece of oratory produces a much better match with contemporary *cursus mixtus*.

More generally, statistical analysis of prose rhythm is questionable because the whole practice of clausulation is an artistic choice. Certainly, there are some authors who use it virtually everywhere: the panegyrists, the officials who drafted imperial legislation, Symmachus in his speeches and letters, Ammianus Marcellinus in his history. But for many other writers it can be an effect used in some places but not others, or a virtually subconscious practice that affects their style even when they are not consistently thinking about it.

Understanding prose rhythm can help us understand the artistry and meaning of Roman prose writers; it can also help us correct their texts. To do this, we need to gain an understanding of the habits of individual writers. This is a very wide-ranging intellectual project – and still in its very early stages.*

* I would like to add references to several publications that Van Waarden and I did not cite in our chapter in the *Companion*. T. Keeline and T. Kirby's '*Auceps syllabarum*: a digital analysis of Latin prose rhythm', *JRS* 109 (2019), 161-204 focuses on the period up to ca. AD 100, showing the potential of systematic electronic survey and incidentally demonstrating that the absence of set artistic clausulae does not imply an absence of attention to rhythm. Two articles by Michael Winterbottom provide interesting grounds for scepticism about the *cursus mixtus*: 'On Ancient Prose Rhythm: the Story of the Dichoreus', in D. Obbink and R. Rutherford (eds) *Culture in Pieces*, Oxford, 262-276; and 'The pleasures of editing', *Revue d'Histoire des Textes* 12: 393-413. I should also mention the ERC Consolidator Grant project of Peter Riedlberger (Bamberg) on the late antique constitutions, beginning in 2021: the project will embed systematic attention to the impact of prose rhythm into the editorial process, in a way likely to help beyond the texts under consideration.