

Supplements to the ancestry of Sidonius Apollinaris

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Concerning the ancestry of Sidonius we can state, that the gens Sollia was of Gallic allobroges origin. They were dealing with handicrafts and trade, their centre was around Vienna in Gaul, and were connected with Greeks in southern Gaul and Lyon. For the first time their role in public life was of economic nature, there were a lot of libertinus in the archeological inscriptions. Later the gens Sollia got the dignities of *societas publicanorum* and the *seviri Augustales*, thus they set out on the path of social ascension. From libertinus they became Roman citizens of equestrian class. The sources are silent about the family's rise to the senatorial class. Presumably it happened at the same time, when the surname Apollinaris supplanted the name Sollius and the family relocated its centre around Lyon.

Keywords: gens Sollius, allobroges origin, libertinus, equestrian class, southern Gaul, Lyon.

Caius Sollius Modestus Sidonius Apollinaris (430–c. 482/490) was an aristocrat of Gallo-Roman origin. His family is known from the sources from the turn of the third-fourth centuries. By this time they were of senatorial rank. However, their family origins are unclear. Our sources including Sidonius himself are silent about it. According to Gregorius Turonensis¹ he came from the noblest family of senators of his age and Gaul, but if so, why cannot it better grasped in the source material? We look for the answer in the appearance of the name of the gens in the inscriptions.

The *nomen gentilicium* was undoubtedly Sollius. It was used in the recommendation of *De statu animae*² by Claudianus Mamertus, it appears fourth times in the works of Sidonius,³ and so Ruricius addressed him as well.⁴ This was the

¹ GREG. TUR. *Hist. Franc.* 21.

² CLAUDIANUS MAMERTUS, *De stat. anim. praef.* és 1, 1.

³ *Ep.* I, 9, 6; V, 17, 9; IX, 15, 1, v. 16; *Carm.* XXIII. 27–28.

⁴ RURICIUS, *Ep.* II, 23.

name given to him by Philomathius⁵ and Caecina Basilius.⁶ In his works to Consentius⁷ even Sidonius called himself by that name: „such an ordinary poet as you yourself know Sollius to be”,⁸ and „your ... Sollius”. Those who called him Sollius all were ahead of him in age, office, wealth and general esteem. This would suggest that his *gens* had not belonged or at least not for a long time to the most distinguished ones. However, this assumption is not true. This is what Philomathius proves when he calls him as „*domine Solli*”⁹ reflecting the favourite phrase of Sidonius, „*domine maior*”, which address concerned just the most prestigious persons. However, no one in the family wore this address. The rarity of Sollius shows a change in the use of the name. From the third century onwards, *cognomen* preceded *gentilicium*, so Apollinaris supplanted Sollius in the name usage of the family.

However, this may lead us closer to the roots of the family. We are not in an easy position to find their origin, because in connection with the Sollius, almost everyone cites the *genus* name of Sidonius. This name is of Celtic origin, it derives from Sollos/Sollus¹⁰ and can be traced back to the proto-Celtic noun **sūli* meaning ‘sun’.¹¹ Of its exact meaning Delamarre¹² just mentions, that it is in relation with light, day and the metaphor of the all-seeing eye. It can be linked to the Celtic goddess *Salis* (*Solis*, *Sulis*) as well, who was the „Celtic Athena” and the ophthalmologists¹³ were also under her patronage.

On the inscriptions the name of *Sollius* can be found from the first century everywhere, where were Celtic tribes, but it was the most common in Gaul.¹⁴ The Sollius ancestors of Gaul belonged to the *allobroges* migrating to Gaul in the 4-3. century BC.¹⁵ They were known for their militancy and trade. Caesar had already been supported by their troops. The control of the trade route of the river Rhône from the Greeks of Massilia came to their hands. The *allobroges* romanized quickly.

Two types of materials can be used to examine the genus name, namely the ceramic seals and the funeral offering documents, which are separated from each

⁵ *Ep.* V, 17, 9. *Philomathius*: Lyon *vicarius*, then *assessor*.

⁶ *Ep.* I, 9, 6. *Basilius*, *Fl. Caecina Decius*: in 458 and in 463–465 *praefectus praetorio Italiae*, in 463 *consul* and *patricius*.

⁷ *Consentius*: Narbonne *vir clarissimus*, *legatus*, *cura palatii*.

⁸ *Ep.* IX, 15, 1, v. 16. transl. by W. B. Anderson

⁹ *Sid.* *Ep.* V. 17, 9.

¹⁰ HOLDER 1896–1920, II. s. v. *Sollius*. BLANC-DESAYE 1975. 246. PWRE 3A s. v. ‘*Sollius*’ (p. 933).

¹¹ LAMBERT 2008. 89–101. The indo-European **suel* (‘sun’) and the Celtic **su-wli*, (‘well-see’)

¹² DELAMARRE 2003. s.v. *suli/soli*. 287.

¹³ Titus Sollius Genitor (SALLES 1982. 226), whose box, found in Antipolis (Antibes), contained ophthalmic drugs.

¹⁴ FORIER 2001. 482.

¹⁵ Cf. VIGIER 2011.

other. The name of Sollius can be seen on many ceramic seals.¹⁶ It cannot be decided whether it is a personal name or a genus name, so because of the narrowness and difficulties of dating these sources do not bring us closer to the ancestors.

The customers of the funeral and offer inscriptions were wealthy enough to leave behind memories made of expensive, permanent materials. They had also authority and civic self-awareness, so this memorabilia is more eloquent.

Most of the inscriptions of the *gens* are from the cities of Sidonius' correspondence. The correspondence and the captions overlap in one area. This suggests that Sidonius nurtured the relationships between the clan and the family. Based on this, Viennensis/Vienna was the centre of the clan, so we need to focus on this area. The earliest inscriptions date back to the second century.

The nomenclature of the sarcophagus of Demosthenianus¹⁷ clearly shows a Greek influence. It proves the relations with the Greeks of the province of Gaul. This sarcophagus was dedicated to Sextus Sollius Demosthenianus¹⁸ by his son, Sollius Olympiodorus, along with his mother, Theodotia Basilissa and his sister, Sollia Demostheniana.

The three names (*tria nomina*) of the head of the family consists of a typically Roman (Sextus), a Celtic (Sollius) and a Greek (Demosthenianus) element. The inscription shows the status of the first generation freedman/*libertinus* („*conlibertus*”), who gained civil rights, his wife *uxor*. The other members of the family have only two names. The mother bears the names Theodotia (the gift of the Gods) and Basilissa (Queen), which, despite its meaning, could have been a typical slave name. The children, on the other hand, received their father's *gentilicium*, presumably after their patrons. So the Sollius may have been originally their masters. The Greek names are *agnomens* and not *cognomens*. The mentioned sarcophagus¹⁹ stands out from the rest.²⁰ Its style includes Germanic and Greek elements. The frame follows a special form of *tabula ansatas*. On both sides stands a *pelta* reminiscent of the closure of the sarcophagi of the Greek tombs²¹ held by winged *geniuses*.²² The three names of the head of the family are also repeated in the motif system. The apotropaic elements show a Greek-Roman influence, the *peltas*, whose form comes from the army and reaches the Celts through the

¹⁶ CIL 13, 10001, 301k, 301f, 301g, 301h, 301m, 301d. *Sollos*: CAG-51-02, p 361. *Sollius f(ecit)*: CAG-54, p 175; CIL 13, 10001, 3011. CIL 7, 1336, 1087. CIL 7, 01336,1085b. AE 1891, 00024; CIL 7, 01334,54a-b-c; CIL 7, 01336,1085a; CIL 7, 01336,1086. etc.

¹⁷ CIL XII. 2181.: Sext(i) Solli Demosthenia/ni Sollia Demostheniana / filia patri pi-entissimo et / Thaeodotia Basilissa con/iux marito incomparabili et / Sollius Olym-piodoros con/liberto karissimo [3]

¹⁸ CIL 12, 02181 = ILN-05-02, 00318

¹⁹ Musée de Cologne, inv. 29, 1701;

²⁰ VASSILIKI-GASCOU 1996. 145-171.

²¹ Cf. the lekytosai of „Thanatos Painter”, e. g. Inv. 01.8080. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

²² BÉRETTA 1909. 444. – the spiral shape of the sides and the middle palmette refer specifically to this.

forms of the *oscillum* of Southern Italy. The two winged *geniuses* can also derive from Greek territory, who are iconologically related to any winged form of *apoteosis*, Eros or Thanatos, who serve to elevate the soul. Their shape is reminiscent of the putties of Dionysian scenes, and together with the *pelta*, shows a Greek cultural influence. Its quality signifies that its claimant was rich as it also has a figural image on it. Naming within the family was very eloquent: Olympiodoros and Demosthenes²³ were warlords, and the latter was a rhetor as well. It is not impossible, that the father, Demosthenianus was in contact with the army or with some public office. According to the inscription, Demosthenianus was a rich *libertinus* who was influenced by both Celtic and Greek culture.

Next to the inscription of Sollia Annia's husband, Lucius Marinus Italicensis²⁴ reads vertically: *Grammati*. The name of the wife refers to the unification of a Roman and a Celtic clan, Sollia, according to the traditional naming, may be the female form of her father's *gentilicium*, while Annia presumably represents the matrilineal line, a relationship with the *gens Annia*. In the name of the husband the *Italicensis* refers not to Italy, but to *Italica*, i. e. to *Baetica*. However, the name *Grammati* is disputed. We can not find this personal name anywhere,²⁵ but it may be a *signum*.²⁶ In this case Lucius Marinus Italicensis was rather a scribe, not a teacher. The place of his *agnomen*, meaning descent, and the place of his death are far apart. Based on his origins, he may have been also involved in trade, which he may have administered. That's how he or his family got to Vienna. His name, Marinus, connects him to the sea. It is possible, that he is also a *libertinus*. The symbol of his inscription *sub ascia dedicaverunt* goes beyond that. The name Claudianus, given to his son, salutes to the dynasty of Julius-Claudianus.

The participation in trade can be proven by an inscription from *Dea Augusta Vocontiorum*.²⁷ An interpretation of the inscription of Lucius Sollius Calendio connects him to shipping on Rhein and its trade.²⁸ His name is of *allobroges* origin, which shows the economic role of this branch of *gens Sollia*. His wife, Sollia Sabina, bore a name denoting the *gentilicium* of her husband and ethnicity. However, it cannot be solved, whether she was related to the Sabins or not. The *sub ascia dedicaverunt* can be seen on her inscription as well.

One more interesting supplement to the history of the *gens* can be added: the box of Titus Sollius from Antipolis. He was probably an ophthalmologist and as

²³ We also know several warlords as Olympiodoros, the son of Lampon in the Persian wars (Herodotos 9, 11), the *archon* of 287 B. C. fought against Kassandros and Demetrios Poliorkhetes. Demosthenes (B. C. 384-322) anti-Macedonian politician, rhetor, warlord.

²⁴ *Italicensis*: Italica = Baetica

²⁵ KAJANTO 83.

²⁶ SANDRINE 1994. 660-661.

²⁷ CIL 12, 1667; CAG-26, p. 322; SCHMIDTS 2011, 40; BROEKAERT 2013, 348

²⁸ RIBAS 2017. 78, 310.

such, he had a profession dedicated to Apollo.²⁹ He kept his own medicines in this box, but he could be a merchant pharmacist as well.³⁰

On an inscription from Vienne we can observe the first signs of the fact, that being rich – in this case on a female line – may lead to social uprise. The husband of Sollia Fida³¹ was Titus Cafatius Cosmus, whose name Cafatius could be Etruscan, or even Arabic. If the latter, he could originate from Syria.³² The Syrians were present in Lyon as traders.³³ From the middle of the first century a lot of freedmen (*libertinus*) arrived here, who worked in the imperial administration. They came from Hellenistic territories, and there were Greeks and of Eastern origin among them. Vigier supposes, that Cosmus (Cosmos) was Greek.³⁴ The personal name Titus is Roman and his names, similarly to Demosthenianus, demonstrate the process of Romanization. If they were the Greeks of the imperial administration, the relationship with them is already pointing towards political involvement. The wife was Celtic, possibly rich, and the husband had already got respect, *Vilvir Augustalis*. They belonged to the most distinguished members of the Senate. However, in the provinces their social status was that of the equestrian class. They were very rich, *libertinus* and occupied a place equivalent to that of the *decurio* in the city. Even in this context, everything suggests that the economic situation of the family was grounded in trade. They were faithful to the emperor and belonged to the *honestiores* and served in public offices. Their marriage shows a social rise beyond wealth. The situation was the same in the male branch.

During the rule of the Severus-dynasty, about 180–250, the *gens* was a landholder in the spa town, *Aquae*³⁵ (Aix-les-Bains) of lake Bourget. This *vicus* administratively belonging to Vienna was led by the board of *decemlecti*. The Sollius were respected enough to be chosen for the members of this board. The board chose its members from the elite, who were responsible for entertaining the urban citizens (like in Rome the *consul*, the *praetor*, the *aedilis*), for nurturing the imperial cult (*seviri Augustales*), and generally for the management of the city.

The sign of the rise of the families is the holding of public office. The name of C. Sollius Marculus³⁶ contains the most frequent Roman male name, a Celtic *gentilicium* and according to the analysis of Zeidler an „Inferenz-Onomastik“, i. e. a name, which shows connections among languages. The common name at the Romans, Marcus and the diminutive forms Marculus/Marcula meaning

²⁹ AE 1968, 289: T(iti) Soll(i) Genit(oris) / diarthod(on) // T(iti) Soll(i) Genit(oris) / thalassero(s) // T(iti) Soll(i) Genit(oris) / smecticum // T(iti) Soll(i) Genit(oris) / dialepid(o)s

³⁰ GRÜLL 2019.

³¹ CIL 12, 1900.

³² ALLMER 1860–1861, 313.

³³ ROUGÉ 1966, 305–306.

³⁴ VIGIER 2011, 197. Cf. Marcus Laelius Cosmus, who was an Italian merchant and directed the trade between Berenike and Rome during the rule of Tiberius. AST 2021.

³⁵ *Sollius Se[...]ius*: CIL 12, 02461. Vö. VIGIER 2011, 220.

³⁶ CIL 12, 02252.

'belonging to Mars' and denoting the Celtic *marcos* 'horse'³⁷ as well. The latter referred – if we look only at the iconography of coins – to the Celts. This phenomenon was frequent during the Romanization, when those names were transferred that were easily understood and transformed. The merchants, the army and the Roman equestrian class were tightly intertwined. According to his tomb inscription – „*librari(i) XL Galliar(um) / statio{i}nis Cular(onis)*” C. Sollius Marcus was an accountant or customs officer. The *statio* was an essential part of the provincial administration, led by a *beneficiarius* subordinate to the governors of the province. The *quadragesimae* was a sales tax imposed on the Gauls. From the rule of Augustus the *societas publicanorum* collected this tax. Its members were servants or *libertinus*, and generally was led by equestrians. During the rule of Commodus, from A. C. 177, the indirect taxes were collected by the state. Cularo was an important centre, this inscription was the first mention of the town. The office of *librarius* does not occur elsewhere in connection with tax collection. The *tabularius/dispensator* was the scribe, it was a higher position, mentioned mainly in connection with the army, a non-commissioned officer, with sacral duties. In this case, too, it may have had something to do with the *legions*, because the *statio*s were often under the control of the army. If we consider the members of his family, the *tria nomina* (three names) of his father refer to a Roman citizen, his wife – Attia Aurelia – came from the most prestigious family of Cularo,³⁸ then we can suppose a more authoritative official than a simple clerk. This could be raising the family tradition of commerce to a higher level,³⁹ or one of the first stages of career path. With him, the clan was not of senatorial rank yet, but he had gained authority. He was not a first generation *libertinus*, but rather of the equestrian class. However, one element of his tomb inscription is that while addressing the underworld Gods: *D(is) M(anibus)*, between the two letters there is a hatchet (*sub ascia dedicavit*). We could see a version of it on the inscription of Sollia Annia and C. Sollius Heliodorus⁴⁰ as well. This symbol got to Lugdunum (Lyon) from the East.⁴¹ Its spread can be attributed to the army, the veterans, and the clerks of the imperial administration. It can be assumed, that there was some kind of connection between them and the family. Definitely an atropaic sign, the interpretation of it is still debated. It may be interesting to reflect on Mazzocchi's theory⁴² who saw in it the symbol of *virī clarissimi*, i. e. the members of the senatorial class. It may be a privilege to use it, maybe connected to the *imperium* of the *magistrates*. If it was not the symbol of the senatorial class, on the basis of its origin, it could be the differentiating sign of those persons

³⁷ ZEIDLER 2011. 14.

³⁸ JOSPIN 2018.

³⁹ We know about another Sollius, having lower non-commissioned rank; e. g. M. Sollius Iulianus centurio in the third cohorts of the 6th legion, whose name is preserved in an inscription of the Hadrian's wall in Hare Hill. GOODBURN, R., ET AL. 1976. 381; or a graffiti of a cowhide tent: FRERE-HASSALL-TOMLIN 1987, 373.

⁴⁰ CIL 13, 1946.

⁴¹ COUCHOUD-AUDIN 1952, 36-66.

⁴² MAZZOCCHI 1739.

serving the state (veterans, officials). Some members of the *gens* were in a higher status than the *humiliores* and rose among the *honestiores*, so this symbol may express it.

Sidonius was born in Lyon, so we have to look for the inscriptions of the *gens* here. However, the inscriptions found in Lyon, do not reveal too much.

One exception is the inscription of C. Sollius Heliodorus,⁴³ who must be a respected person, as the member of *seviri Augustales*, appointed by the urban *curia* and had enough property to finance the costs of the imperial cult. Heliodorus is a Greek name meaning 'present of Helios' and can be basically translated as Sollius and Apollinaris.

The Greek naming was typical here, such was the name of Marcus Sollius Epaphroditus⁴⁴ which means the favourite of Aphrodite. We cannot exclude the possibility of his being a freedman (*libertinus*), as we have seen in case of Sollius Demosthenianus. All the Greek *cognomen* connected to the *gens* meant the relation with a pagan God. We can not date neither the inscription of Heliodorus, nor that of Epaphroditus, but both recommend the dead to the benevolence of *Dis Manibus*, therefore these were written after the death of Emperor Claudius, i. e. not earlier than the end of the first century. These names may also indicate that a branch of the *genus* made it a tradition to cultivate the cult of a god. This is also true of the name Apollinaris. However, we do not know whether these connected them to just the *lares familiares* or the board of *flamines*. In the name of Heliodorus perhaps there is a hellenization of the Celtic god of sun. At the same time belonging to the cult of Venus and Apollo of Epaphroditus and Apollinaris, it was also connected to the imperial cult through the dynasty of Julius–Claudius. If Helios goes back to Celtic origin, then through Aphrodite we found the vague signs of a mythological story basing the belief of Troian origin of the neighbourhood. Octavianus confessed himself to be the son of Apollo, and Caesar based the new story of origin with Venus Genetrix. This developed into the the myth of Troian origin besides the legend of Romulus. The cultic tradition of Arvernumians proudly confessing themselves as the Troians can be found in the letters of Sidonius.⁴⁵ The families of the *gens*, it seems, accepted this tradition.

In the written sources the Sollius were present from the first century. On the basis of their inscriptions the *gens* developed in accordance with the historical events of the *allobroges*. The basis of their rise was handicraft industry, especially trade, as evidenced by the clay seals (*siglinums*) and their connection to shipping. Their names were related mainly to the freedmen (*libertinus*), behind whom there were clans of craftsmen or merchants without inscriptions. In commerce the Greek merchants of Rhone delta and Massilia were ousted or assimilated by them. The Greek signums of *gens Sollia* show a strong cultural influence, perhaps a lasting coexistence. However, socially they were in higher status than their

⁴³ CIL 13, 1946.

⁴⁴ CIL 13, 11539.

⁴⁵ SID. Ep. II, 2, 19; VII, 7, 2: „Arvernorum, pro dolor, servitus, qui, si prisca replicarentur, audebant se quondam fratres Latio dicere et sanguine ab Iliaco populos computare.”

freedmen (*libertinus*), they had Roman civil rights and were rich having slaves and freedmen (*libertinus*). The *gentilicium* was taken over by them. The Romanization and commercial wealth led to a new career, in which Greek elements could also participate. Socially they belonged mainly to the equestrian class. It is proved by the fact, that they traded and were the members of *societas publicanorum*. In public life they started as municipal representatives and they got the local political role with the highest office attainable to equestrians (*praefectus praetorio*, *praefectus Urbi*). The office of *seviri Augustales* may mean wider and higher connections, preceded by the family's former sacral role and loyalty to the ruler. Besides the rise in municipal offices the move of the immediate family of Sidonius from the estate of Vienna (Vienne) to Lugdunum (Lyon) can be dated to the third century. This may have been due to dynastic relations. It is reflected in the disappearance of *gentilicium Sollium* and the appearance of the *cognomen Apollinaris*.

The surname Apollinaris corresponds to the Greek influence already mentioned. The cult of Apollo was relevant in Gaul. The coins represent Apollo in the third century in Gaul.⁴⁶ We know his cult in Lyon⁴⁷ as well. The family is also linked to Apollo by the Viennese inscriptions, among them there is an altar erected by Nattia Severa, daughter of Sollius.⁴⁸ We can suppose that one branch of the clan is closely connected to Apollo, so the family name Apollinaris can be explained. The Celtic Sollius and the Greek Apollo basically mean the same. Behind them the gods (Sulis, Apollo) are related to the light and cure. It can be assumed, that the same *gens*, the Sollius was a former Latinized Celtic, and the Apollinaris was a later, Latinized Greek version, which can explain, why they were used separately and why the latter dominated in the fifth century.

These put the name of Sidonius in a new context. It is not merely a Homeric name like his father supposed Alcimus name. Its meaning: the 'Phoenician', which is synonymous with rich. From a family history perspective this links our author to his merchant ancestors and to Greek and Syrian connections of Southern Gaul. In addition, the crosstalk pun is very characteristic of Sidonius. Its use as a pseudonym refers to the family's commercial relations and wealth, but also to purple, the divine sign (here in the sense of divine gift), and dignity.⁴⁹

We do not know exactly, if we do not interpret *sub ascia senatori* as a symbol of order, when the family got into the senatorial order, who was the *homo novus*, but it probably happened in the middle of the fourth century. Sidonius put it at the time of his great-grandfather.⁵⁰ However, this space is not filled by either the inscriptions, or the narrative sources. The analysis of the *genus* name only draws trends in family history. Although these are small supplements, but they may

⁴⁶ DT 3002; DT 3286A; DT 2260.

⁴⁷ SAVAY-GUERRAZ 2005, 55–60.

⁴⁸ CIL 12, 1810; CHORIER 1846, 323.

⁴⁹ We do not know from which time he used it, but it does not apply to the imperial purple, but rather to *laticlavius*, the senator's wide purple band.

⁵⁰ SID. *Ep.* I, 3, 1.

explain the merchants participating and maintaining the correspondence of Sidonius, his exceptional Greek knowledge, the surname Apollinaris and the poetic pseudonym Sidonius.

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ILN: *Inscriptions Latines de Narbonnaise* (I.L.N.)

MS *Manuscriptum*

PWRE: *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumwissenschaft*. Rev. Ed. Wissowa, G.-Kroll, W. Stuttgart, 1894–1978.

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