

# REVISTA CICSA

serie nouă



**XI/2025**

Consiliul Științific/ Scientific Board:

Prof. Dr. Paolo **Carafa** – Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

Prof. Dr. Carol **Căpiță** – University of Bucharest, Romania

Prof. Dr. Miron **Ciho** – University of Bucharest, Romania

Assist. Prof. Dr. Emna **Ghith-Hmissa** – University of Sousse, Tunisia

Prof. Dr. Andreas **Gutsfeld** – Université de Lorraine (Nancy 2), France

Prof. Dr. emer. Antal **Lukacs** – University of Bucharest, Romania

Prof. Dr. Ecaterina **Lung** – University of Bucharest, Romania

Prof. Dr. emer. Gheorghe-Vlad **Nistor** – University of Bucharest, Romania

Dr. Cristian Eduard **Ștefan** – Institute of Archaeology „V. Pârvan”, Bucharest, România

Prof. Dr. Christoph **Uehlinger** – Universität Zürich, Switzerland

Dr. Mădălina **Vârtejanu-Joubert** – Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales  
(INALCO), Paris, France

Prof. Dr. Anton Carl **van Vollenhoven** – North-West University, South Africa

Lect. Dr. Daniela **Zaharia** – University of Bucharest, Romania

Comitetul de Redacție/ Editorial Board

Florica (**Bohîlțea**) **Mihuț** – University of Bucharest

Diana **Pavel** – University of Bucharest

Mădălina-Teodora **Comănescu** – Site Administrator

ISSN 2457 – 3809

ISSN – L 2457 – 3809

<https://cicsaunibuc.wordpress.com/revista/revista-online>

## Cuprins/ Contents

### Studii/ Studies

#### A. Papers of the International Colloquium on “Epistolography, knowledge, and the Ancient World”, Bucharest, October 3-4, 2025

|  |         |
|--|---------|
| Carlos HEREDIA CHIMENO – Letters from a Broken Republic: Cicero’s Correspondence and Constitutional Transgression (91–79 BCE) .....  | 5-17    |
| Florentina NICOLAE – The Silence of Men, reflected in “Heroides”, the imaginary letters of love written by Publius Ovidius Naso.....   | 18-25   |
| Lorenzo MONACO – L’immagine delle campagne daciche traianee e di Decebalo in Plinio il Giovane, <i>Ep.</i> , 8. 4. 2.....  | 26-38   |
| Jörg VON ALVENSLEBEN – Fronto’s letter <i>De nepote amisso</i> as lament, self-consolation and self-reflection.....  | 39-49   |
| Giovanni TAGLIALATELA – Die Verwirklichung des quintilianischen Lehrideals in Fronto Pädagogische Tugenden und Lehren durch Briefe.....  | 50-68   |
| Mariana BODNARUK – Inscribing Senatorial Authority: Epigraphic Epistles and Senatorial Legislation from Constantine I to Theodosius I.....   | 69-89   |
| Ethan CHILCOTT – <i>Varietas</i> in the <i>Variae</i> : Erudition and Audience in Cassiodorus’ <i>Epistles</i> ...90-113   |         |
| Lorenzo MONACO – <i>Licet interdum confabulationis tale conuiuium doctrinae quoque sale conditur</i> : Jerome’s letters to Marcella, and biblical exegesis in epistolary form..... | 114-127 |
| Titas SARKAR, Letters of Obligation: Debt, Trust and Moral Economy in the Lekhapaddhati.....   | 128-140 |

#### B. Papers of the 13<sup>th</sup> annual session of CICSA, “Circulația persoanelor, a bunurilor și a ideilor (din Preistorie în Antichitatea Târzie)”/ ‘Movement of persons, goods, and ideas (from Prehistory to the Late Antiquity)’, Bucharest, April 25-26, 2025

|  |         |
|--|---------|
| Ioana-Teodora STAN – The Panathenaic amphorae: an instrument for the propagation of Athens’ discourse and a subject of symbolic conflict.....  | 141-150 |
| Ana-Maria BALȚĂ – When distance is not an obstacle. Several preliminary considerations on <i>Liberalitas</i> coin types of <i>Nikopolis ad Istrum</i> and <i>Marcianopolis</i> ..... | 151-166 |

Aurelia PARASCHIV, Alexandra-Clara ȚÂRLEA – Roman glass vessels in funerary contexts from Tomis and Callatis. A reassessment of older publications.....167-194

### C. Interpretări și analize/ Interpretations and Analyses

Darius COVACIU – The ecclesiastic status of the see of Tomis between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries. Reading notes on Ionuț Holubeanu’s research.....195-211

### D. Recenzii și prezentări de carte / Reviews and Book Presentations

Sergiu Popovici, *Cultura Usatovo. Arheologia funerară a unei societăți din epoca bronzului*, Târgoviște, Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2023, 475 pag., ISBN 978-606-537-623-6 – Elena FERARU.....212-214

Anthony A. Barrett și John C. Yardley, *The Emperor Caligula in the Ancient Sources*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2023, 203 pag., ISBN 978-0-19-885457-9 – Andreea Luisa MIHAL.....215-218

Eckart Frahm, *Assyria. The Rise and Fall of the World’s First Empire*, New York, Basic Books, 2023, 528 pag., ISBN: 9781541674400 – George Cătălin ROBESCU .....219-221

Daniel Unruh, *Talking to Tyrants in Classical Greek Thought*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2023, VIII+272 pag., ISBN 978-1-78962-123-5, ISBNe 978-1-78962-426-7 – Ioana-Teodora STAN....  
.....222-224

Daniela Zaharia, Vladimir Crețulescu (coords), *Sensibilități, obsesii, fobii și istoriile lor neașteptate / Sensitivities, Obsessions, Phobias, and Their Intriguing Histories*, 2024, Editura Universității din București, 282 pag., ISBN: 978-606-16-1499-8 – Cristina POPESCU.....225-227

Plutarh, *Vorbele de duh ale spartanilor*, traducere din greaca veche, studiu introductiv și note de Liviu Mihail Iancu, ilustrații de Mihail Coșulețu, București, Editura Humanitas, 2024, 200 pag., ISBN 978-973-50-8647-3 – Florica (BOHÎLȚEA) MIHUȚ.....228-231

### E. Rezumate teze de licență și disertație/ Abstracts of Bachelor and Master Theses

Maria-Irina SOCOLAN – *A Comparative Analysis of Mithraic Imagery: The Regional Adaptation of the Tauroctony in Dacia*, (abstract of the Bachelor’s Thesis, 2025).....232-245

**Cronica activității CICSA, anul 2025**, Florica (BOHÎLȚEA) MIHUȚ.....246-247

# *Varietas* in the *Variae*: Erudition and Audience in Cassiodorus' Epistles

Ethan CHILCOTT

Corpus Christi College, Oxford

<https://www.doi.org/10.31178/cicsa.2025.11.7>

**Abstract:** Cassiodorus' *Variae* has been the centre of a range of scholarly debates, particularly with regard to the nature and originality of its encyclopaedic passages. This paper argues that these passages were not falsified ornamentation but part of Cassiodorus' original chancery rhetoric, this style being influenced by 'jewelled' contemporary literary aesthetics. On the basis of a catalogue of these digressive references and disquisitions, it is shown that Cassiodorus modified the appearance, content, and length of these passages based on a letter's original audience and context. This is illustrated by the interpretation of patterns in letters to the major constituent groups that received the *Variae*'s letters, including Roman senators, Ostrogoths, the kings of Germanic successor states, the Roman court at Constantinople, and the clergy. The paper concludes by offering comments on potential future research directions, the study's implications for Cassiodorus' role as *Quaestor*, and the ends to which he compiled the *Variae*.  
**Keywords:** Cassiodorus, *Variae*, epistolography, Ostrogothic Italy, encyclopaedism.

Upon his retirement from political life, Cassiodorus Senator curated a selection of his career's correspondence into the *Variarum Libri Duodecim*, unknowingly setting a number of snares for future historians in the process.<sup>1</sup> The text is challenging on a number of fronts, not least because Cassiodorus' prose is dense and its meaning often obscure. The editorial process which transformed 468 letters and edicts into *formulae* for the use of future palatine officials had the unfortunate side effect of excising much contextual and chronological information. Since the majority of the letters were composed not in Cassiodorus' name but on behalf of his Ostrogothic patrons, the agencies and identities involved are difficult to discern. The letters' interpretation also starkly differs depending on whether one centres their original chancery context, or their function when they were placed in the *Variae* up to thirty years later. This host of ambiguities has provided the fodder for a vast and dense body of scholarly literature, one rarely in agreement even on

---

<sup>1</sup> For an introduction to the *Variae*, see Giardina 2005; Barnish 1992, xviii-xxx; Macpherson 1989; Gillett 1998. For a commentary (albeit not fully published) see Giardina *et al*, 2014-2016. For the *Variae* as *formulae*, see Praef. 14; Conso 1982, 284-85. On their stylistic novelty, see Barnish 1992, xxiii-xxv; Pieroni 2009, 141-142; Bjornlie 2012, 199-206. On the collection's historical reliability, see Giardina 2005, 39-40; Barnish 1992, xxx-xxxii; La Rocca 2010, 3-4. Citations from the *Variae* will not contain the collection's name herein and will take the form 'book.letter.passage'.

fundamental subjects such as the extent of the letters' editing, the influence of the nominal addressor in their content, and Cassiodorus' actual intentions for the work.

Herein, we will attempt to resolve two issues that have led to much scholarly head-scratching. The first is the nature of the *Variae*'s encyclopaedic excursuses, a novelty in the ancient chancery tradition. These passages, termed digressions since first catalogued by Helmut Nickstadt, run the gamut of classical learning and often sideline the epistles' administrative function.<sup>2</sup> As with many features of the *Variae*, their interpretation remains contested. Åke Fridh adhered to the early modern tradition of seeing them as contrived ornamentation, or, in his own words, 'torrents d'érudition vaniteuse'.<sup>3</sup> Alternatively, the diversity of the subject matter addressed has led the passages to be linked to the ancient encyclopaedic tradition by Shane Bjornlie, whose extensive bibliography on the *Variae* centres the notion that the digressive material was randomly placed within a programmatic, and potentially falsified, whole.<sup>4</sup> The studies of Bettina Pferschy, Paolo Pieroni, and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill take the opposite tack; by highlighting the situational use of these passages to reinforce an epistle's communicative purpose thematically, intertextually, or even tonally, they have undermined even the use of the term 'digression'.<sup>5</sup>

The second issue is the 'phantom' stylistic variety for which the collection is named. In the *Variae*'s preface, Cassiodorus explains that he adopted more than *unum stilum* since he had to address *personas varias* – those *multa lectione satiatis*, *mediocri gustatione suspensis*, and *litterarum sapore ieiunis*.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, he had to address kings (*regibus*), potentates (*potestatibus aulicis*), and the humble (*humillimis*) in different ways. Yet all attempts to verify this stylistic variety, or its adjustment per audience, have been stymied: lexicon, syntax, meter and rhythm are stable throughout.<sup>7</sup> The typical conclusion that Cassiodorus was simply aping classical precepts is profoundly unsatisfying. His other works, from *De anima* to *De orthographia*, demonstrate that he could tone down his prose when the occasion called for it. Instead, it should be considered that Cassiodorus did not conceive of style in explicitly classical terms. His suggestion that the types of speech are to be tailored to the intellectual capacity of the audience, rather than the rhetor's intent,

---

<sup>2</sup> Nickstadt 1921, 8-10.

<sup>3</sup> For Fridh's characterisation of the digressions, which draws heavily from Nickstadt, see Fridh 1956, 17-19.

<sup>4</sup> "It would seem that the logic of how and when Cassiodorus included digressive material depended more on the programmatic nature of the encyclopaedic tradition than on criteria internal to individual letters." Bjornlie 2015, 296. See also Bjornlie 2009, 2014, and 2015.

<sup>5</sup> See particularly Pieroni 2009, 146-51, but also Pferschy 1986; Wallace-Hadrill 143-49.

<sup>6</sup> Praef. 15-17.

<sup>7</sup> See O'Donnell 1979, 87; Barnish 1992, xxxii; cf. Barnish on letters' 'learnedness' Barnish 2001, 367.

is drawn from Augustine, not Cicero or Quintilian.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, his clausulae prioritise rhythm over meter, exhibiting a *cursus mixtus* that is distinctly Late Antique in its fashion.<sup>9</sup>

It is thus no surprise that his 'digressive habit' is best contextualised within the aesthetics of later Latin literature. The poetics favoured by Cassiodorus' contemporaries, termed the 'Jeweled Style' by Michael Roberts, favours strings of short, articulated, and self-contained constructions.<sup>10</sup> The style often characterised by digressions varied in subject matter but designed to produce thematic or semantic unity.<sup>11</sup> Its aesthetics were particularly influenced by panegyric, the genre in which Cassiodorus had proved himself worthy of the quaestorship.<sup>12</sup> It is this aesthetic, influenced particularly by panegyric and ekphrasis, the hallmarks of Roberts' literary jewellery – strings of antitheses, rhetorical ekphrasis, and frequent paradoxes – have regularly been identified as central to the *Variae*'s style.<sup>13</sup> Nor is the influence of such aesthetics on the *Variae*'s digressions a mirage produced by the 'variety' of the documents involved: even individual epistles use chains of apparently tangential subject matter to reinforce their intended message.<sup>14</sup> Yet studies of the *Variae*'s style have rarely made the connection with Roberts' work, even after such a link was first proposed by S.J.B. Barnish in the 1990s.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps because of the supposedly political nature of the text, and the certainly political focus of many of its analyses, there has been no enthusiasm for taking up 'jewelling' as a hermeneutic for the text's various learned references and digressions. Doing so would invite us both to at last treat shorter references and longer excursuses ('citations' and 'disquisitions', in Bjornlie's terminology) as part of the same aesthetic phenomenon, and to reconsider the tailoring of these 'jewels' to different audiences.<sup>16</sup>

These invitations are to be taken up herein, but in order to do so it was necessary to produce a new catalogue of Cassiodorus' disquisitions and citations.<sup>17</sup> The latter had been ignored in

---

<sup>8</sup> Bjornlie 2012, 190-91.

<sup>9</sup> See Oberhelman 1982, 127-28, especially n36.

<sup>10</sup> For the aspects of the style most applicable to Cassiodorus, see Roberts 1989, 49-55.

<sup>11</sup> This was concluded by the editor of a re-evaluation (and recapitulation) of Roberts' work; see Kaufmann 2023.

<sup>12</sup> See Romano 1978.

<sup>13</sup> Kołtunowska 2021, 107-108, cf. Roberts 1989, 63-64. On the use of these devices, also Kakridi 2005, 28-30.

<sup>14</sup> Letter 2.14 invokes animals, plant life, and Roman history in an arranged series; 3.47 combines geological, zoological, and historical trivia; 8.20 uses both medicine and the weather; many more examples can be found.

<sup>15</sup> Barnish 1992, xx: "Connoisseurs would have seen his letters as studded with rhetorical conceits and figures like a meadow jewelled with flowers." These very connoisseurs, Cassiodorus' senatorial peers, and their literary arts are frequently described using the metaphors of jewels and flowers (e.g. 1.13.1, 11.1.8).

<sup>16</sup> Bjornlie identified these as symptoms of the same encyclopaedic phenomenon. Bjornlie 2015, 294.

<sup>17</sup> This catalogue, found in the appendix, is based on the 396 letters in books I-V and VIII-XII. I have excluded the two books of entirely anonymised *formulae*, since this analysis centres the identity and status of the recipient. Word counts are included as a means of relative comparison, not concrete analysis.

previous, digression-focused catalogues, but are fundamental parts of the same aesthetic phenomenon.<sup>18</sup> The interpretation of this catalogue, and Cassiodorus' use of the 'Jeweled Style', merits more than a short article, but even an initial survey is highly revealing. By cross-referencing this catalogue with the cultural, political, and ethnic identities of his letters' recipients, it quickly becomes clear that Cassiodorus differentiated both the use and content of his encyclopaedic references on the basis of audience. The patterns therein appear not only reflect Amal political ideologies, but also a set of social and diplomatic protocols. By surveying such relationships between learned ornamentation and audience, we learn much about the social horizons of Ostrogothic Italy and about Cassiodorus' function in, and aptitude for, the office of *Quaestor*.

### Senators and the Senate

We will begin with the senatorial aristocracy (*Viri Illustres*) and the Senate, respectively the group most frequently addressed in the *Variae* and the single most frequent addressee.<sup>19</sup> While his palatine position may simply have been oriented towards such an audience, the letters to the aristocracy may have been deemed most suitable for display: the type of learned references identified above is disproportionately received by both the Senate and its members.<sup>20</sup> Such a propensity to direct ornamentation towards this group appears to have been motivated by the intersection of Roman and senatorial status. That the determiner was not merely the former is suggested by the higher rate of 'jewelling' to *Illustres* Romans than to those not of this status;<sup>21</sup> that it was not merely *Illustris* status is proven by the significantly lower rate of ornamentation in letters to Ostrogothic *Illustres* when compared to Roman ones.<sup>22</sup>

Although we should not be surprised that Cassiodorus felt that the fruits of a liberal education were most appropriate for men of his order, there are certain peculiarities in the character of these passages.<sup>23</sup> For instance, while the majority of the longer-form disquisitions were directed to *Illustres* Romans, not one of the three-dozen longest 'digressions' is found in the thirty-eight

<sup>18</sup> Prior catalogues ignored shorter references to learned material; Pferschy's was criticised on this basis (Pieroni 2009, 142n5) but the same could be applied to the other catalogues: Nickstadt 1921, 8-10; Kakridi 2005, 64n174.

<sup>19</sup> On these titles and their relationship to senatorial participation in Ostrogothic Italy, see Radtki 2016, 122-128.

<sup>20</sup> 110/396 letters surveyed contained 'jeweling', creating a baseline through the ten books of 27.8%. *Viri Illustres* received such content in 36/110 letters (32.7%) and the Senate did in 16/38 (42.1%). *Viri Spectabiles* received such material in 10/42 letters (23.8%). For *Viri Clarissimi* the sample size is too small to be worth evaluation.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. footnote 19. The Senate received 'jeweling' in nearly half of the letters addressed to them, whereas other Italo-Roman group addressees - local *possessores*, provincial populations, and government bureaus - sit at about one-fifth.

<sup>22</sup> See Appendix. Gothic *Illustres* receive such references in 2/18 letters (11.1%); Roman *Illustres* in 34/92 (37.0%).

<sup>23</sup> Liberality was often all that continued to distinguish this class; see Neri 2010, 34-35.



letters to the Senate body itself.<sup>24</sup> Such passages were apparently inappropriate, a protocol that cannot be attributed to the verbal economy required of an address read to a group – letters to other groups as well as edicts feature longer excursuses.<sup>25</sup> This reticence is better credited to the intellectual hierarchy inherent in performative erudition. While the king (given voice by Cassiodorus) could confound the general public with an edifice of specialised prose, he could not risk intellectually outmatching the prickly egos of the Senate or – perhaps worse – erring and appearing unsuitably ‘Roman’ in learning.

Correspondence with the Senate therefore relied on shorter references, with the stock material determined by a letter's tone. Disciplinary notices lack the type of natural or philosophical references that served to assert Theodoric's common *paideia* with the Senate, using historical examples to condemn or encourage behaviour instead.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, notifications to the Senate of palatine promotion – often paired in the *Variae* with the individual's letter of appointment – are remarkably consistent in their thematic deployment of natural science. These establish an acceptable panoply of referential material for such occasions. References to historical senators appear primarily in such letters, as do references to Latin literary figures.<sup>27</sup> These paired appointment letters also constitute roughly two-thirds of botanical and agricultural metaphors in the collection.<sup>28</sup> There is little consistency in the meanings of such metaphors, undermining any sense they constitute part of a concrete and specific political theology based upon natural law.<sup>29</sup> Commonality is found in the stock from which they were drawn, since the letters primarily serve to reaffirm the historical and intellectual continuity of the senatorial community.

The consistency of the material deemed appropriate for the Senate is emphasised by the absence of the type of zoological references one finds elsewhere in the *Variae*.<sup>30</sup> Other collective recipients are not so spared: despite constituting a more modest sample size, two edicts and three

---

<sup>24</sup> The boundary between a short citation and a long disquisition is subjective, but if we peg the latter at around one hundred words we are left with thirty-nine disquisition, roughly matching Kakridi's forty digressions.

<sup>25</sup> E.g. 11.40 (edict) and 12.22 (to a provincial body). On the oral recitation of certain letters, see Barnish 2001.

<sup>26</sup> E.g. 3.31.4, where 'Theodoric' invokes legendary figures to express his displeasure to the Senate. See Appendix B.

<sup>27</sup> Historic senators: 1.27.5, 8.22.3. Virgil: 5.4.6, 11.1.15. Symmachus: 11.1.20.

<sup>28</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>29</sup> E.g. the sun could be senators (1.13.3, 6.14.2) or the king (6.23.2). Seeds could be individuals themselves (2.15.1, 3.6.2, 3.29.1) or royal gifts (3.29.1). Sources of water could be offices (8.21.2, 10.12.1) or families (2.15.1). Cultivation could be the task of the monarch (1.12.3, 6.14.1) or the aristocracy (6.11.2).

<sup>30</sup> The single exception is 1.13, an early letter which (rather condescendingly) compares appointee to racehorses, *muta animalia* that are hastened by praise. A senator is never again likened to, or exhorted to behave as, an animal.

letters to provincial groups feature such discussions.<sup>31</sup> Cassiodorus' habit of comparing the lower echelons of society to animals may explain why he abstains in senatorial correspondence; provincials are often encouraged to look towards animals for models of behaviour, but never *Viri Illustres*.<sup>32</sup> Animals are also frequently used in discourse about criminality. Murder is condemned by suggesting that animals knew better, or – suggesting a certain inconsistency – has its punishment mitigated on the basis that animals killed for their mates.<sup>33</sup> Released prisoners are told that they might improve themselves by looking to beasts as models.<sup>34</sup> A man of curial rank who kills a colleague is condemned to live as an animal, while an embezzler is compared to a chameleon.<sup>35</sup> The wretched amongst humanity were to look to animals for improvement, while transgressors were seen to imitate the worst of beastly behaviour. These associations are to be kept in mind as we move onto letters directed to the *Variae*'s second major group of recipients: Italy's Ostrogoths.

## The Goths

Fourteen of the seventy-one letters directed to Gothic recipients contain learned references of the type identified.<sup>36</sup> This rate, roughly one-in-five, is well below the rest of the collection – this phenomenon is best illustrated by the aforementioned disjunction between the treatment of Gothic and Roman *Illustres*.<sup>37</sup> No Goths receive any references to literature, astronomy and philosophy are absent, and botanical metaphors, so popular with the Senate, appear only in a joint address to a Goth and an *Illustris* Roman.<sup>38</sup> Instead, Gothic addressees receive a disproportionate number of the collection's medical references.<sup>39</sup> More significant, in light of the previous discussion, is that

<sup>31</sup> Edicts: 9.2.1-6, 9.18.1. To provincial groups including Romans: 2.19.2-3, 3.48.4-5, 12.24.2-6.

<sup>32</sup> For the lower echelons of society being likened to animals, see 1.21.3, 3.51.10, 9.3.5. For animals as positive role models for provincials, see 3.48, 8.3.1, 9.2.5-6. This mitigates Cassiodorus' avoidance of derogatory terms for the lower classes; Neri 2010, 20-22.

<sup>33</sup> The unwillingness of animals to kill their king is used to condemn murder in 2.14 and 2.19, while the tendency for animals to do just this to protect their mates is used to justify a lightened sentence at 1.37.2.

<sup>34</sup> 11.40.

<sup>35</sup> 3.47.4, 5.34.2.

<sup>36</sup> Identified onomastically or through context. This does not necessarily reflect an individual's personal identification, and this article will not engage in the heated debate regarding the porousness of ethnic boundaries in Ostrogothic Italy (see Amory 1997). For our purposes, Cassiodorus' perception of the audience is key.

<sup>37</sup> See Appendix A. Nearly half of the *Variae*'s *Viri Spectabiles* were Goths, which, in light of the treatment of *Illustres* Goths, explains the paucity of *Spectabiles* in our catalogue.

<sup>38</sup> 5.39.1.

<sup>39</sup> The longest disquisition to a Goth, a medical discourse in 10.29, may be explained by the frequency of medicine in letters to Goths. The perceived appropriateness of medicine for such an audience somewhat undermines Bjornlie's suggestion that the letter was inexplicable and thus falsified; Bjornlie 2009, 167-70.

half of letters to Goths in the catalogue make use of zoological material.<sup>40</sup> As to other audiences, such references underline the violence associated with animals – but with Goths, they do so with positive connotations, exhorting them to behave as animals.

This is best illustrated by the deployment of birds, since this discourse differs significantly along ethnic lines.<sup>41</sup> *Variae* 8.31 proffers *turdi* (thrushes), *sturni* (starlings), and *palumbi* (woodpigeons) as models of behaviour for the civilised Roman, since they are musical and sociable flocking birds; nightingales too raise their young in urban environments, as Roman *curiales* ought.<sup>42</sup> The letter continues to contrast these birds with the predatory and violent nature of solitary *accipitres* and *aquilae*, thoroughly unsuitable behavioural models for Roman provincials. It is therefore striking that these very birds of prey are used as positive role models for Goths and their rearing practices. A young Ostrogoth reaching the age of maturity is granted his legal autonomy on the basis that, like an eagle, he has finally learned to hunt on his own.<sup>43</sup> Cassiodorus, in the guise of Theodoric, presents solitude and violence as markers of Gothic adulthood. Another epistle exhorts the Gothic people as a whole to educate their children in the martial manner of *accipitres*, since these birds push their young from the nest to teach them self-sufficiency.<sup>44</sup> These comparisons are not strictly limited to birds, of course. Elsewhere, the military education of young Goths is compared to the wrestling of young bulls or the play-fighting of puppies – a stark contrast with the spiritual terms in which Cassiodorus discusses Roman *paideia* throughout the *Variae*.<sup>45</sup> The lessons to be taken from animals by Romans and Goths are not just different, but opposite.

The emphasis on education and socialisation in such passages hints at the strategy involved. Amal Italy was marked, ideologically at least, by a strict division of labour along ethnic lines: Italo-Romans were entrusted with the bureaucracy, and Ostrogoths the military.<sup>46</sup> This entailed not just strict social boundaries between the ethnic groups, but also that each faced an entirely different set of educational requirements. Cassiodorus, as the mouthpiece of government, was tasked with delineating and reinforcing these borders. Exhortations towards the behavioural models of violent and resourceful animals, and a refusal to engage on matters of literature or

---

<sup>40</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>41</sup> There have been numerous attempts to trace Cassiodorus' zoological knowledge to specific sources, but the *Variae*'s use of animals shows genuine textual parallels only with Ambrose's *Hexameron*; Zumbo 1993, 196-97.

<sup>42</sup> 11.31.2-3, 7. On this letter and its presentation of urbanism, see Wallace-Hadril 2025, 115-6.

<sup>43</sup> 1.38.2.

<sup>44</sup> 1.24.3.

<sup>45</sup> 1.40.1.

<sup>46</sup> Heydemann 2016, 24-29.

science, highlighted and reinforced the expectations of ‘Ostrogothic culture’ under the Amals. There are other hints at such intentions, most prominently Cassiodorus’ regular association of the Goths with the god Mars – he even refers to them as *Martium Geticus populus*.<sup>47</sup> This deity is absent elsewhere in the collection, and such an association may have been a sanctioned formulation of Theodoric’s system.

None of these letters present a Gothic education negatively, of course – nor would it have been obvious how Cassiodorus’ utilisation of such references differed between groups until the *Variae* was published. Yet one does get the impression that Cassiodorus believed, to some extent, his own propaganda. A lower intellectual assessment of Goths is hinted at by two letters to Gothic *saiones*, which use identical analogies involving overburdened birds to explain the limitations of donkeys on the *cursus publicus*.<sup>48</sup> The analogy is facile, and there is no other occasion upon which Cassiodorus uses animals as a didactic tool to explain the behaviour of other animals - or plants to explain plants, *et cetera*. The effort employed, as the cognitive expectation of the audience involved, was minimal.

## Diplomacy

Ethnic boundaries were not the sole determiners of how Cassiodorus differentiated his learned ornamentation; geographic ones also played a role. Cassiodorus’ remit as *Quaestor* extended to communications beyond Italy’s borders, and the *Variae* features a range of diplomatic correspondence both to the imperial court at Constantinople and to the warlords that had carved up the remains of the Roman West (all of whom, be they Franks, Burgundians, Vandals, or otherwise, he terms ‘barbarians’). These epistles were not devoid of the jewelled aesthetics of Cassiodorus’ domestic correspondence, but they use such passages in a way modified somewhat to serve geopolitical ends.

The twenty-one letters to representatives of the Eastern Empire are remarkable in that they are characterised by the complete absence of learned ornamentation. This can hardly be a coincidence, when one-in-four letters surveyed contained such jewellery and other diplomatic letters were not so reticent.<sup>49</sup> Religious anxieties, particularly after the closure of the schools of

---

<sup>47</sup> 10.31.2. Other associations of the Goths with Mars include 1.24.3, 5.23.1, and 8.10.11.

<sup>48</sup> 4.34.3, 5.5.3

<sup>49</sup> See Appendices A and B.

Athens in 529, could explain the lack of certain topics (e.g. philosophy or mythology) but cannot explain the absence of more innocuous references. Rather, the hierarchical implications of erudite displays are again the most plausible explanation. The letters to the emperors (and empress, in Theodora's case) of Constantinople are the only communications in the entire *Variae* directed to a recipient of a higher notional political status than the sender, and the Amals continued to derive political legitimacy from the East's tacit acknowledgment well into the reign of Athalaric.<sup>50</sup> Assertion of common *paideia* would be simply inappropriate, let alone the construction of intellectual dominance found in certain letters. Additionally, one must suspect that Cassiodorus – or indeed his masters – suspected that his innovations in the chancery style would be an unwelcome novelty in already-tense diplomatic exchanges.

Letters to the West's various 'barbarian' warlords were not concerned with such niceties. Several letters include elaborate set-pieces not present in letters to the East - ekphrases of diplomatic gifts, for instance, which could devolve into ostentatious displays of learning.<sup>51</sup> Such letters present Theodoric as more Roman than, and thus superior to, his Germanic peers – projecting his vision of Ostrogothic Italy's role in foreign affairs just as internal correspondence had mirrored his domestic political ideologies.<sup>52</sup> These hierarchies could often be implicit. In two letters to distant tribes (one on the Baltic littoral), Cassiodorus ignores the apparent language barriers to craft elaborate descriptive passages related to the letters' diplomatic content.<sup>53</sup> One of these even contains a direct reference to Tacitus as its source, although Cassiodorus' choice to refer to the writer as Cornelius can only have decreased the accessibility of the reference.<sup>54</sup> The recipients, even if the letters were translated, could not have been expected to appreciate the ekphrasis or understand the literary reference. The letters construct a dynamic wherein Theodoric's privileged Roman knowledge subordinates the recipient's ignorance of 'civilised' affairs.

Such a hierarchy is more explicit in a rather inflammatory epistle to Gundobad, King of the Burgundians and former *Magister Militum*.<sup>55</sup> The letter is primarily occupied with a description of two gifts from Theodoric to Gundobad, a water clock and sundial – emblems of Roman *scientia*

---

<sup>50</sup> E.g. 8.1.

<sup>51</sup> E.g. 4.1, 5.1.

<sup>52</sup> This policy is the subject of a chapter in Hans Ulrich-Wiemer's recent monograph; see Ulrich-Wiemer 2023, 232–78.

<sup>53</sup> 5.1 and 5.2.

<sup>54</sup> 5.2.2.

<sup>55</sup> 1.46. The letter's patronising tone is highlighted by its pairing with a letter (1.45) directing Boethius to procure the devices, which involves a substantial foray into mathematics and astronomy.

– in a perhaps condescending but largely inoffensive manner. Cassiodorus then asserts that without Theodoric’s benevolence, Gundobad would be left to tell time by hunger pangs alone – the habit of animals (*beluarum ritus*).<sup>56</sup> The derogatory nature of this evocative phrase is evidenced by its reuse later in the *Variae* to describe the depravity of war-torn Gaul in the aftermath of the battle of Vouillé.<sup>57</sup> There is little doubt that Cassiodorus was aware that Gundobad was by all accounts rather well-read, and had as much experience living amongst the Romans as Theodoric.<sup>58</sup> The comment serves merely to present Gundobad as subordinate to the ‘Romanised’ Theodoric, who envisioned himself as the *primus inter pares* in a Germanic ‘family of kings’.<sup>59</sup>

In domestic letters, Cassiodorus had reinforced the educational hierarchy that placed Romans above Goths by likening the latter to beasts. In letters abroad, he employed this same tactic to subordinate a Burgundian to a Goth but displayed his capacity for restraint in letters to Constantinople. The perceived intellectual hierarchy underpinning his deployment of learned jewels was thus identical to the political hierarchy avowed by Theodoric, in which Ostrogothic Italy sat first among the Germanic kingdoms, but was itself still dwarfed by the Roman Empire.

## The Clergy

Cassiodorus’ tailoring of learned references to his audience is particularly evident in the seventeen letters to members of the clergy.<sup>60</sup> Here, religious anxiety (or perhaps the perceived reading experience of priests and bishops) led him to omit all references to philosophy, natural history, science, or any other potential display of classical *paideia*.<sup>61</sup> Yet unlike the letters to the East, in which Cassiodorus seems to have been limited by political exigency, the senator was not entirely content to leave these letters unadorned. In two of these letters, he uses scriptural references in a manner unattested elsewhere and analogous to his habitual use of history and natural science.<sup>62</sup> In one, ‘Athalaric’ tactfully reminds Pope John II of the condemnation of Simon Magus as part of an

---

<sup>56</sup> 1.46.3.

<sup>57</sup> 5.39.1.

<sup>58</sup> On this letter’s relationship with Gundobad’s background, see Shanzer 1996, 242-44.

<sup>59</sup> Ulrich-Wiemer 2023, 235-43.

<sup>60</sup> These are 1.9, 2.8, 2.18, 3.7, 3.14, 3.37, 4.24, 4.31, 4.44, 8.8, 8.24, 9.5, 9.15, 10.34, 11.2, 11.3, 12.27.

<sup>61</sup> Religious anxieties in the *Variae* are hinted at by Cassiodorus’ fear his scientific excursions might be seen as omen-seeking; 12.25.7. Denominational divisions, economic competition, or ongoing conflict between the church and state could also be blamed; see Bjornlie 2012, 248-251; La Rocca and Tantillo 2017, 31-34; Moorhead 1983, 116-20.

<sup>62</sup> There are occasional Biblical references in long scientific digressions (e.g. 2.40.2-16, 8.20.1, 8.33.3-8, and 12.25.2-7), but they rarely appear alone, nor are they used in a manner analogous to the letters to the clergy.

effort to address an ongoing controversy over simony in the Roman church.<sup>63</sup> Where senatorial reprimands employed Roman history, ecclesiastical ones invoked the Bible. The consciousness of Cassiodorus' code-switching is even more apparent in the other letter, which compelled a bishop to restore his city's aqueduct.<sup>64</sup> There are many similar letters in the *Variae*, and the Amals' ideological emphasis on infrastructure renewal is well-studied.<sup>65</sup> The others underline the king's command by dwelling upon architecture, geometry, history, or the scientific and healing properties of water; on only this occasion did Cassiodorus choose a biblical example to emphasise his point.<sup>66</sup> He concludes the letter by informing the bishop that by restoring the aqueduct he would be acting in the model of Moses, drawing water from a stone to aid those under his care.<sup>67</sup> There is no comparable use of a biblical story as an exhortation to action anywhere in the *Variae*. Cassiodorus' assertion that he matched his stylistic adornment to the reading that the recipient would understand rings true.

## Gender

We can alight only briefly on the issue of gender in the *Variae*, since the vast majority of the collection consists of letters written by one man, on behalf of another, and towards a third. Six letters written on behalf of women, and a further three were written to a woman in a man's name.<sup>68</sup> All nine letters lack substantial ornamentation – but since the sample overlaps heavily with the letters to the East, interpreting this is rather difficult. A letter written for the famously learned Amalasuintha mentions extensive scriptural readings, but not her own.<sup>69</sup> Rather, she praises the scriptural expertise of her co-ruler, and eventual murderer, Theodahad, thereby setting up his discussion of the Book of Kings in the subsequent letter. This is clearly designed to emphasise Theodahad's erudition, but the allusion itself praises Amalasuintha's economy with words.<sup>70</sup> Likewise, another letter written in Cassiodorus' name praises the queen for handling affairs *silentiose* despite speaking Greek, Gothic, and Latin.<sup>71</sup> We cannot know whether these letters

---

<sup>63</sup> 9.16.11.

<sup>64</sup> 4.31.

<sup>65</sup> On the subject of infrastructure renewal in the *Variae*, see Fauvinet-Ranson 2006.

<sup>66</sup> E.g. 2.39, 5.38, and 7.6.

<sup>67</sup> 4.31.2.

<sup>68</sup> Women to women: 10.1, 10.3, 10.8, 10.10, 10.21, 10.24. Men to women: 4.37, 10.20, 10.23.

<sup>69</sup> 10.3.5. For an extended but speculative discussion of Amalasuintha's education, see Vitiello 2017, 42-77.

<sup>70</sup> 10.4.6.

<sup>71</sup> 11.1.18.

reflect a genuine taciturnity on Amalasuintha's part. It seems more likely that Cassiodorus was merely parroting cultural expectations of women; on the two occasions when Theodahad and his queen, Gudeliva, sent paired letters to Theodora, the letter between women is noticeably shorter.<sup>72</sup> Even while writing their correspondence, Cassiodorus evidently prized women's restraint of their voices.

### Some Conclusions

Although we have at last seen definitive proof that Cassiodorus tailored the *Variae*'s various citations and disquisitions to their audience, this does, perhaps, raise more questions than it answers. Future research might examine additional contextual determiners of learned references, as well as discern if and how separate audiences were in receipt of differing literary devices; they might also examine whether Cassiodorus' familiarity with a recipient might play a role in 'digression'. Certain principles have nonetheless been established here that lay the groundwork for such inquiry. It can be said for the first time that this content was not placed randomly, nor should we continue to entertain the notion that Cassiodorus falsified the letters' jewelled ornamentation during the editing process.<sup>73</sup> Case studies of individual passages have long argued that digressions played a fundamental role in the letters' original communicative strategy, but it has now been demonstrated that the decision to deploy such encyclopaedic passages (and their subject matter) was influenced by the political and social exigencies of their initial composition. It is profoundly unlikely that Cassiodorus could or would consciously retroject so much material in such a patterned manner. Not only would the insertion of an untested stylistic innovation have produced inappropriate chancery *formulae*, but there is ample evidence for the *Variae*'s rushed composition – a hastiness which Cassiodorus himself acknowledged.<sup>74</sup> Instead of contriving such theories, we must appreciate that the strategic use of jewelled ornamentation highlights Cassiodorus' aptitude for his role as the Amals' chief publicist - and may explain why he continued to act in the capacity of *Quaestor* when he held the offices of *Magister Officiorum* and *Praefectus Praetorio*.<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup> The pairs are 10.20 and 21, 10.23 and 24.

<sup>73</sup> This is not to say that Cassiodorus did not embellish any letters, but there is no evidence for a wholesale project of rewriting. The letters to Boethius, for instance, have often been seen as suspiciously long – but their content is directly analogous to other substantial disquisitions to less-famous figures such as Consularius (3.52) and Argolicus (3.53).

<sup>74</sup> Praef.2-5. On the various other hints at the hastiness of the editing process, see Barnish 1992, xvii.

<sup>75</sup> Gillett 1998, 41-43.



The principle that we must treat Cassiodorus as more competent than has typically been supposed extends to interpreting the stylistic theory avowed in the *Variae*'s preface. The senator describes style as something to be moderated based upon an audience's capacity to understand it. Contemporary literati had a particular taste for jewelled ekphrastic and encyclopaedic ornamentation, the very thing that Cassiodorus adjusted based on his audience. There is every reason to believe that Cassiodorus identified letters which used more extensive ornamentation or addressed more intellectually complex material as those of a higher style (for readers *multa lectione satiatis*) and those with minimal literary jewellery or less obscure subject matter as those of a lower style (for those *litterarum sapore ieiunis*).<sup>76</sup> The epistemic hierarchies this would imply are certainly present in the *Variae*. Many of the subjects most frequently addressed in senatorial correspondence are identical with those presented as desirable for aristocratic intellectuals in *De anima*, the *Variae*'s 'thirteenth book'.<sup>77</sup> Knowledge of philosophy, music, astronomy, the environment, and even botany (*potestates uirentium herbarum*) are accorded spiritual profundity.<sup>78</sup> Conversely, knowledge of animals is never presented as desirable and such creatures appear only as a senseless foil for human rationality – it does not take a particularly refined soul to understand a soulless creature, it seems.<sup>79</sup> That such hierarchies are shared between the two works lends greater clarity to Cassiodorus' thought, as well as strengthens the case to see this 'jewelling' as a distinctly Cassiodoran chancery conceit.

All these conclusions serve to remind us of the care with which we must distinguish the Cassiodorus who composed the documents from the Cassiodorus who edited them.<sup>80</sup> As *Quaestor*, his job was to deploy his erudition to reinforce the Amals' various policies and ideologies – the ethnic division of labour, the barbarisation of diplomatic rivals, and the rulers' self-presentation as philosopher-kings. This study produces no evidence, however, to support the longstanding theories that these were the ends towards which Cassiodorus compiled his letters.<sup>81</sup> Rather, the very publication of the *Variae* punctured much of this propaganda by arrogating letters once circulated as the speech of kings in order to illustrate Cassiodorus' role in stylising them. Similarly, the

<sup>76</sup> Praef. 15.

<sup>77</sup> *De anima* is announced in the *Variae*'s second preface and described as its thirteenth book at *Exp. Ps.* 145.28.

<sup>78</sup> *De anima* 1, 4, 15.

<sup>79</sup> Compare the characterisation of *beluarum ritus* (*Variae* 1.46.3 and 5.39.1) with the markers of evil at *De Anima* 12.

<sup>80</sup> As highlighted by Gillett, who does, however, underplay the genuine literary novelty of the *Variae*, presenting their style as "character of much quaestorial and other official palatine writings". Gillett 1998, 41-44.

<sup>81</sup> Similar conclusions can be found at Gillett 1998, 46n35 and Giardina 2005, 31-32, *contra* Barnwell 1992, 168-69; O'Donnell 1979, 85; Momigliano 1955, and others.

collective study of the letters undermines the frequent assumption that they reflect either a genuine oral discourse between Cassiodorus and the Amals, or a program insisted upon by Theodoric and his successors.<sup>82</sup> All of the personas assumed by Cassiodorus, including that of himself as *praefectus praetorio*, display a suspiciously similar interest in contemporary literary aesthetics and utilise learned references in a similarly patterned manner. This is explained most easily if we assume that the *Quaestor* (hired, we must remember, for his literary prowess) was given the order that a letter was to communicate and was then left to craft the text in a culturally, aesthetically, and ideologically appropriate manner.<sup>83</sup>

All studies of the *Variae*, it seems, inevitably finish with a few comments on the collection's purposes. The analysis herein endorses Cassiodorus' assertion that the letters were to serve as *formulae* for future bureaucrats, but it does so in a manner that reveals what made these model letters worthy of circulation. The senator had produced a self-consciously novel chancery style by integrating contemporary literary aesthetics into bureaucratic documents, and as we have seen this could be adjusted to serve a variety of political and social purposes. The *Variae* publicised this achievement, which would resound differently with each of the collection's two primary audiences.<sup>84</sup> One, made up of stylistically-challenged bureaucrats, would select models from the collection to ease their work, imbibing a range of encyclopaedic learning in the process. With the models selected on the basis of the headings provided (the recipient's name, title, and office), their jewelled ornamentation would be appropriate for their recipient.<sup>85</sup> The second audience, Cassiodorus' fellow literati, were to appreciate his fusion of senatorial *paideia* and bureaucratic function, something not to be taken for granted in an era when Italy's most blue-blooded aristocrats increasingly eschewed public office. His injection of the sort of literary jewels typically produced by aristocratic *otium* into the labour of his bureaucratic *negotium* justified his invocation of the letters as a *speculum mentis*, a *topos* drawn from the private senatorial epistolary tradition.<sup>86</sup> Despite being framed as an act of intellectual euergetism, then, the compilation of the *Variae* was just as intertwined with senatorial self-publication and self-promotion as any other aristocratic

<sup>82</sup> For a recent reiteration of the former theory, see Wallace-Hadrill 2025, 119-31. For the latter, Devecka 2016, 211.

<sup>83</sup> That Cassiodorus' tastes underpinned the use of such content is further suggested by the increased tendency for longer-form disquisition in the letters he drafted in his own name; see Sirago 1992, 131.

<sup>84</sup> On two audiences for the *Variae*, one concerned with *otium* and the other *negotium*, see Bjornlie 2012, 201-203.

<sup>85</sup> In editing the collection for use as *formulae*, he excised dates, quantities, appended documents, *breves*, and even the names of minor *dramatis personae*, leaving the recipient's name, office, and status as the heading.

<sup>86</sup> Pref. 10.

display of benevolence. Just as Symmachus had restored the Theatre of Pompey so that its visitors and his peers and clients might glorify him, so too did Cassiodorus expect the users of his chancery model to identify their profit – and their style – with his name.

## Bibliography

- Amory, P. 1997, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489–554*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barnish, S. J. B. (trans.). 1992, *Cassiodorus: Variae*, translated with notes and an introduction, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Barnish, S. J. B. 2001, “Sacred Texts of the Secular: Writing, Hearing, and Reading Cassiodorus' *Variae*”, in *Studia Patristica*, 38, 362–70.
- Barnwell, P. S. 1992, *Emperor, Prefects & Kings: The Roman West, 395–565*, London: Duckworth.
- Bjornlie, S. (trans.). 2019, *Cassiodorus: The Variae. The Complete Translation*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bjornlie, S. 2009, “What Have Elephants to Do with Sixth Century Politics? A Reappraisal of the ‘Official’ Government Dossier of Cassiodorus”, in *The Journal of Late Antiquity*, 2/1, 143–71.
- Bjornlie, S. 2012, *Politics and Tradition Between Rome, Ravenna and Constantinople: A Study of Cassiodorus and the Variae, 527–554*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bjornlie, S. 2014, “Audience and Rhetorical Presentation in the *Variae* of Cassiodorus”, in *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 92/1, 187–207.
- Bjornlie, S. 2015, “The Rhetoric of *Varietas* and Epistolary Encyclopedism in the *Variae* of Cassiodorus”, in *Shifting Genres in Late Antiquity*, edited by M. L. Shaw, 15–30, London: Routledge.
- Conso, D. 1982, « Sur le sens de 'formula' dans les *Variae* de Cassiodore », in *Revue de Philologie de Littérature et d'Histoire Anciennes*, 56, 265.
- Devecka, M. 2016, “White Elephant Gifts: Classicism in Ostrogothic Policy and in *Variae* 10.30”, in *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 9/1, 195–217.
- Fauvinet-Ranson, V. 2006, *Decor civitatis, decor Italiae: monuments, travaux publics et spectacles au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle d'après les Variae de Cassiodore*, Bari: Edipuglia.
- Fridh, Å. 1956, *Terminologie et formules dans les Variae de Cassiodore: études sur le développement du style administratif aux derniers siècles de l'antiquité*, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell.
- Giardina, A. 2005, *Cassiodoro politico*, Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider.
- Giardina, A., Cecconi, G. A., Tantillo, I., and Oppedisano, F. (eds.). 2014, *Flavio Magno Aurelio Cassiodoro Senatore: Varie*, vol. II, Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2015a. *Flavio Magno Aurelio Cassiodoro Senatore: Varie*, vol. III, Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2015b. *Flavio Magno Aurelio Cassiodoro Senatore: Varie*, vol. V, Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2016. *Flavio Magno Aurelio Cassiodoro Senatore: Varie*, vol. IV, Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider.

- Gillett, A. 1998, "The Purposes of Cassiodorus' *Variae*", in *After Rome's Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History*, edited by A. C. Murray, 37–50, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Halporn, J. W. (trans.), with an introduction by M. Vessey. 2004, *Cassiodorus: Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning (Institutiones and De Anima)*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Heydemann, G. 2016, "The Ostrogothic Kingdom: Ideologies and Transitions", in *A Companion to Ostrogothic Italy*, edited by J. Arnold, S. Bjornlie, and K. Sessa, 15–46, Leiden: Brill.
- Hodgkin, T. (trans.). 1886, *Cassiodorus: The Letters of Cassiodorus (Variae)*, London: H. Frowde.
- Kakridi, C. 2005, *Cassiodorus Variae: Literatur und Politik im ostgotischen Italien*, Munich: K. G. Saur.
- Kaufmann, H. 2023, "Digression, Variety and Unity in (Late) Latin Poetry", in *A Late Antique Poetics?: The Jeweled Style Revisited*, edited by J. Hartman and H. Kaufmann, 115–28, London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Kołtunowska, A. 2021, "Wybrane listy Kasjodora (*Variae*, ks. I–V) – materiał dygresyjny jako narzędzie retoryczne", in *Człowiek w kulturze*, 31/1, 94–109.
- La Rocca, C. 2010, "Cassiodoro, Teodato e il restauro degli elefanti di bronzo della Via Sacra", in *Reti Medievali Rivista*, 11/2, 25–44.
- La Rocca, C. and I. Tantillo, 2017, "Corredi, corpi e reliquie nelle *Variae* di Cassiodoro. La competizione tra re e vescovi per le risorse del sottosuolo", in *Acquérir, Prélever, Contrôler: les Ressources en Compétition (400–1100)*, edited by V. Loré, G. Bühner-Thierry, and R. Le Jan, 21–42, Turnhout: Brepols.
- Macpherson, R. 1989, *Rome in Involution: Cassiodorus' Variae and Their Literary and Historical Setting*, Poznań: Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu.
- Momigliano, A. 1955, *Cassiodorus and the Italian Culture of His Time*, in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 41, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Moorhead, J. 1983, "The Last Years of Theodoric", in *Historia: Zeitschrift für alte Geschichte*, 32/1, 106–20.
- Neri, V. 2010, "Il lessico sociologico della tarda antichità: l'esempio delle *Variae* di Cassiodoro", in *Studi storici*, 51/1, 5–52.
- Nickstadt, H. 1921, *De digressionibus quibus in Variis usus est Cassiodorus*, Marburgi Chattorum.
- Oberhelman, S. M. and R. G. Hall. 1984, "A New Statistical Analysis of Accentual Prose Rhythms in Imperial Latin Authors", in *Classical Philology*, 79/2, 114–30.
- O'Donnell, J. J. 1979, *Cassiodorus*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Pferschy, B. 1986, *Cassiodorus Variae. Individuelle Ausgestaltung eines spätromischen Urkundenformulars*, in *Archiv für Diplomatik*, 32.
- Pieroni, P. 2009, "Il rapporto tra digressioni e contesto nell'epistolario di Cassiodoro: un'ipotesi per *Variae* 12, 14", in *Rivista di cultura classica e medioevale*, 51/1, 141–52.
- Radtki, C. 2016, "The Senate at Rome in Ostrogothic Italy", in *A Companion to Ostrogothic Italy*, edited by J. Arnold, S. Bjornlie, and K. Sessa, 121–46, Leiden: Brill.
- Roberts, M. 1989, *The Jeweled Style: Poetry and Poetics in Late Antiquity*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Romano, D. 1978, "Cassiodoro panegirista", in *Pan*, 4, 5–35.

- Shanzer, D. 1996, "Two Clocks and a Wedding: Theodoric's Diplomatic Relations with the Burgundians", in *Romanobarbarica*, 14, 225–58.
- Sirago, V. A. 1992, "Italia e Italianità nelle *Variae* di Cassiodoro", in *Hestiasis: studi di tarda antichità offerti a Salvatore Calderone*, vol. 4, 129–62, Messina.
- Vitiello, M. 2017, *Amalasuintha: The Transformation of Queenship in the Post-Roman World*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Wallace-Hadrill, A. 2025, *The Idea of the City in Late Antiquity: A Study in Resilience*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wiemer, H.-U. 2023, *Theodoric the Great: King of Goths, Ruler of Romans*, translated by J. Noël Dillon, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Zumbo, Antonino. 1993, "Sugli *excursus* zoologici nelle *Variae* di Cassiodoro", in *Cassiodoro: Dalla corte di Ravenna al Vivarium di Squillace, Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi - Squillace, 25-27 ottobre 1990*, edited by Sandro Leanza, 191-98 Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino.

## Appendix A: Learned References in the *Variae* by Group

| Recipient                | Number of Letters      | # with Learned References |
|--------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>Total</i>             | 396 (+ 72 in formulae) | 110 (+ 20 in formulae)    |
| Germanic Monarchs/Tribes | 13                     | 5                         |
| Clergymen                | 17                     | 2                         |
| Edicts                   | 9                      | 3                         |
| Goths                    | 65                     | 13                        |
| Provincial Groups        | 31                     | 5                         |
| <i>Saiones</i>           | 15                     | 5                         |
| Senate of Rome           | 38                     | 16                        |
| The Roman East           | 21                     | 0                         |
| <i>Vir Clarissimus</i>   | 9                      | 4                         |
| <i>Vir Spectabilis</i>   | 42                     | 10                        |
| <i>Vir Illustris</i>     | 110 (19 Gothic)        | 36 (2 Gothic)             |

**Appendix B: Catalogue of Learned References ('Jewels') in the *Variae*****Key:**

|      |                                   |    |                         |
|------|-----------------------------------|----|-------------------------|
| ( )  | Probable but unlisted titles.     | I  | <i>Vir Illustris</i>    |
| *    | Gothic Recipient                  | MO | Magister Officiorum     |
| C    | <i>Comes</i>                      | P  | <i>Patricius</i>        |
| Cl   | Clarissimus                       | PP | Praefectus Praetorio    |
| Cons | <i>Consul</i>                     | PU | <i>Praefectus Urbis</i> |
| CP   | <i>Comes Privatarum</i>           | Q  | <i>Quaestor</i>         |
| CSL  | <i>Comes Sacrarum Largitionum</i> | S  | <i>Vir Spectabilis</i>  |
| D    | <i>Dux</i>                        | VA | <i>Vice Agens</i>       |

| Letter    | Recipient                     | Description  | Words |
|-----------|-------------------------------|--|-------|
| 1.2.7     | Theon S                       | Excursus on purple dye production.                                 | 217   |
| 1.3.4     | Cassiodorus (the Elder) I, P  | Allusion to Cicero.  | 20    |
| 1.5.1, 3  | Florianus S                   | Medical analogy.   | 46    |
| 1.6.2     | Agapitus I, PU                | Description of geological materials.                               | 24    |
| 1.10.3-7  | Boethius I, P                 | Extended discourse on arithmetic and astronomy.                    | 352   |
| 1.12.3    | Eugenitus, I, MO              | Botanical analogy in praise of candidate.                          | 14    |
| 1.13.1, 3 | Senate                        | Compares the Senate to flowers/jewels, candidate to the sun.       | 65    |
| 1.20.5    | Albinus I, P and Avienus I, P | Music-related etymology.   | 27    |
| 1.21.3    | Maximianus I, and Andreas S   | Various animals as behavioural exemplars.                          | 47    |
| 1.24.3    | All Goths*                    | Reference to Mars, exhorts the Goths to raise children as raptors. | 69    |
| 1.27.5    | Speciosus                     | Catos as historical exemplar.                                      | 5     |
| 1.30.5    | Senate                        | Historical etymology of bellum.                                    | 61    |
| 1.31.3-4  | Roman People                  | Likens the voices of the Roman people to the cithara.              | 39    |

|           |                                       |   |     |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|---|-----|
| 1.35.2-4  | Faustus I, PP                         | A long series of nautical/fish/weather based hypotheticals are used to underline the unacceptability of Faustus' behaviour. | 178 |
| 1.37.2    | Crispianus                            | Behaviour of various as exemplars.  | 49  |
| 1.38.2    | Boio S *                              | Behaviour of eagles as exemplar.  | 38  |
| 1.39.2    | Festus I, P                           | Reference to the Odyssey.   | 33  |
| 1.40.1    | Osuin* I, C                           | The nurturing of animals and fire are used to encourage military training.  | 44  |
| 1.45.2-11 | Boethius I, P                         | Prolonged excurses on mathematics, astronomy, and mythology to explain two mechanical devices.                              | 597 |
| 1.46.1, 3 | Gundobad                              | Briefer discussion of the same mechanical devices, with a reference to the habits of animals.                               | 63  |
| 2.2.5     | Felix, I                              | Botanical metaphor as part of praise of appointee.  | 12  |
| 2.3.3-7   | Senate                                | Muses, Cato, the arrangement of time all invoked to praise the appointee.   | 52  |
| 2.14.2-4  | Symmachus (I), P                      | Various animals, plants, and other natural phenomena are invoked as part of praise of Symmachus.                            | 232 |
| 2.15.1    | Venantius I                           | Similarities to plants and natural springs are invoked in praise of the candidate.  | 36  |
| 2.19.2-3  | Goths and Romans at Ports and Borders | The familial devotion of birds is used as an exemplar.  | 51  |
| 2.22.1    | Festus                                | Homeric allusion.   | 19  |
| 2.28.1    | Stephanus,                            | Horses and the procedure at public games are used to highlight right proceedings.   | 21  |
| 2.32.2    | Senate                                | Ornate description of swampland to be drained.  | 49  |
| 2.39.2-12 | Aloisius, Architect                   | While ordering the restoration of baths, the wondrous medical properties of water are expounded.                            | 625 |
| 2.40.2-16 | Boethius I, P                         | Elaborate excurses on philosophical, musical, and other natural phenomena.  | 996 |
| 3.4.1     | Clovis                                | Streams flowing together are used as an analogy of peoples commingling.   | 22  |
| 3.6.1-2   | Senate                                | A metaphor involving the multiplication of harvest is used to praise the Decii.   | 20  |

|             |                                     |   |     |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|---|-----|
| 3.12.1      | Senate                              | Nature invoked in praise of an appointee.   | 17  |
| 3.25.2      | Simeon CI, C                        | Brief discussion of applicable metallurgic procedure; cf. 1.2.  | 10  |
| 3.29.1      | Argolicus I, PU                     | Agricultural metaphor for the king's role.  | 27  |
| 3.31.4      | Senate                              | Historical figures are invoked to underline the unprecedented poor behaviour of the senate in a disciplinary letter.  | 25  |
| 3.46.1      | Adeodatus                           | Medicine as a metaphor for justice.   | 31  |
| 3.47.2-5    | Faustus I, PP                       | A range of natural phenomena followed by a comparison to a salamander mark the exile of a criminal/   | 198 |
| 3.48.2, 4-5 | Goths and Romans of Verruca         | Urchins, gulls, and other birds are used to highlight the necessity of restoring a fortress.  | 177 |
| 3.51.3-11   | Faustus I, PP                       | This confirmation of a charioteer's salary involves a history of the games, an ekphrasis of the circuit, and comparisons of arena crowds to animal behaviour. | 416 |
| 3.52.2-8    | Consularis I                        | A long discussion of the development of geometry and the history of surveying accompanies an order to find a surveyor.  | 348 |
| 3.53.2-5    | <i>Apronianus</i> I, CP             | A water surveyor is sought for Rome, and the letter includes a prolonged excursus on the history and methods of water surveying.                              | 204 |
| 4.1.3       | Hermanfrid, King of the Thuringians | Ekphrasis of horses delivered by Hermanafid as a gift.  | 62  |
| 4.31.2      | Bishop Aemilianus                   | Scriptural analogy.   | 45  |
| 4.34.3      | Duda* <i>Saio</i>                   | Historic kings used to justify present policy.  | 16  |
| 4.36.2      | Faustus I, PP                       | Comparison of a passing army to a river.  | 41  |
| 4.47.5      | Gudisal* <i>Saio</i>                | Analogy involving animals to explain constraints on the cursus publicus.  | 33  |
| 4.50.4-7    | Faustus, I, PP                      | Description of an eruption of Mount Vesuvius.   | 217 |
| 4.51.3-12   | Symmachus I, P                      | A long discussion of the history and mythological context of theatre performances.  | 503 |
| 5.1.1-2     | King of the Warni                   | Another letter with extended description of gifts, with references to mythology.  | 132 |
| 5.2.2-3     | Haesti                              | Allusion to Tacitus.  | 79  |



|             |   |   |     |
|-------------|---|---|-----|
| 5.4.5-6     | Senate                                    | Botanical metaphor in praise of a candidate, plus a Virgilian allusion.   | 82  |
| 5.5.3       | Mannila* <i>Saio</i>                      | Analogy involving animals to explain constraints on the <i>cursus publicus</i> .  | 5   |
| 5.17.2-4    | Abundantius I PP                          | History of sailing, involving Egyptian mythology.   | 33  |
| 5.21.3      | Capuanus S                                | Virgilian allusion, for the appointment of a director of a bureau of notaries.  | 17  |
| 5.23.1      | Abundantius I, PP                         | Mars is referenced in the context of Gothic training.   | 21  |
| 5.33.2      | Wiliticanus* D                            | Doves as a behavioural exemplar.  | 26  |
| 5.34.2-3    | Abundantius I, PP                         | Embezzler is compared to a chameleon.   | 136 |
| 5.38.2      | Possessores Near Ravenna                  | A discussion of the properties of water, similar to others in letters about aqueducts.  | 62  |
| 5.39.1, 3   | Ampelius I, and Liuvrit* S                | Animal behaviour, agriculture, and medicine are all invoked to highlight issues in the governance of Ostrogothic Spain.               | 34  |
| 5.42.1-12   | Maximus I, Cons                           | A description of circus games, with a history of the event and discussion of related ethical quandaries; includes Virgilian allusion. | 629 |
| 8.3.5       | People of Rome                            | Reference to Trajan as a model of rulership.  | 7   |
| 8.9.8       | Tuluin* <i>Illustris</i> ( <i>Comes</i> ) | A reference to a Gothic legendary figure, Gensimund.  | 45  |
| 8.10.11     | Senate                                    | Uses Romulus and Mars to represent the Romans and Goths.  | 7   |
| 8.12.4-5, 7 | Arator I                                  | A history of letters involving animals, mythology, and references to Cicero is used in praise of the candidate.                       | 72  |
| 8.13.4-5    | Ambrosius I, Q                            | Compares the candidate to Pliny, and Athalaric to Trajan.   | 29  |
| 8.14.1      | Senate                                    | Agricultural analogy for the king's role.   | 17  |
| 8.16.7      | Opilio I, CSL                             | Seeds used metaphorically to represent senatorial families.   | 11  |
| 8.19.1, 5   | Senate                                    | The curia as a fertile field and a meadow; allusion to Cicero.  | 42  |
| 8.20.1, 3   | Avienus I, PP                             | Medicine and weather used to illustrate good rulership.   | 38  |

|             |  |  |     |
|-------------|--|--|-----|
| 8.21.2      | Cyprianus I, P   | Compares a senator's vitality to a flowing font, similar to other water-based comparisons.   | 19  |
| 8.22.1, 3   | Senate   | References to the Olympic tradition and historical senatorial families.  | 33  |
| 8.27.1      | Dumerit* Saio, and<br>Florentianus, Vir<br>Devotus and<br>Comitiacus | Medicine used to illustrate justice.   | 20  |
| 8.30.1-3    | Genesius S   | Description of sewers and water supply to a city, discussing water's properties.   | 68  |
| 8.31.1-3, 5 | Severus S  | Birds are used to represent appropriate and inappropriate civil behaviour; description of Bruttium using mythological allusions.   | 196 |
| 8.32.1-3    | Severus S  | Extended ekphrasis on the topography and mythology related to Scyllaceum.  | 185 |
| 8.33.3-8    | Severus S  | Similar to the prior two letters to Severus, this letter contains an extended discussion of the topography and culture of Lucania. | 394 |
| 9.2.1, 5-6  | Edict  | Medicine and the behaviour of birds are used to illustrate correct governance.   | 135 |
| 9.3.1-5     | Bergantinus I  | Nature's principles are used to justify the opening of mines; miners are compared to moles.  | 283 |
| 9.6.3-6     | <i>Primiscrinus</i>  | An ekphrastic description of healing springs at Baiae.   | 243 |
| 9.9.2       | Goths and Romans<br>of Dalmatia                                      | Analogy for union between the Goths and Romans using reed pipes.   | 18  |
| 9.15.11     | John   | Scriptural allusion to Simon Magus.  | 11  |
| 9.22.3      | Paulinus (I?), Cons  | Discussion of the ancient Decii and use of seeds as a metaphor for senatorial families.  | 55  |
| 9.23.2      | Senate   | Seeds of senatorial families again evoked.   | 19  |
| 9.25.5, 10  | Senate   | Metaphors involving fields and literature, as well as reference to historical senators.  | 57  |
| 10.4.6      | Senate   | Explicit naming of a biblical book (Kings) - only such reference in the <i>Variae</i> .  | 11  |
| 10.11.2     | Maximus I  | Another letter of promotion using references to ancient senatorial families.   | 9   |

|              |                                  |  |     |
|--------------|----------------------------------|--|-----|
| 10.29.2-4    | Wisibad*                         | Disease symptoms and water's healing properties are discussed while granting medical leave.  | 299 |
| 10.30.1-7    | Honorius I, PU                   | Discussion of the characteristics and history of elephants.  | 461 |
| 10.31.2      | All Goths*                       | Goths linked to the god Mars.  | 2   |
| 11.1.9,19-20 | Senate                           | References to Galla Placidia, Symmachus, and a series of otherwise unknown Gothic figures.   | 99  |
| 11.6.6       | Johannus, Cancellarius           | Pouring water as a metaphor for literary prowess.  | 28  |
| 11.10.1-3    | Beatus Cl                        | Description of another set of healing springs.   | 184 |
| 11.14.1-5    | Gaudosius, Cancellarius          | Encomia of the region of Como.   | 268 |
| 11.35.1-2    | Edict                            | Reference to ancient Olympic contests.   | 18  |
| 11.36.2-3    | Anatolicus, Cancellarius         | Astronomical excursus.   | 131 |
| 11.38.2-5    | Johannus, Canonicarius           | An excursus on the history and etymologies related to the book.  | 248 |
| 11.39.1-4    | Vitalianus Cl, Cancellarius      | A tax remittance is linked to the history of Rome's urban development.   | 199 |
| 11.40.2-5    | Indulgentia                      | Criminals given clemency have their captivity compared to Pluto's realm and are encouraged to look to a range of animals as behavioural exemplars. | 150 |
| 12.3.1       | Saiones* Assigned to Cancellari  | Justice compared to medicine, again.   | 29  |
| 12.4.1-2     | Canonicarius of Venetia          | Excursus on wine, its production, and the various accoutrements required to consume it.  | 355 |
| 12.5.8       | Valerianus S                     | Virgilian allusion.  | 30  |
| 12.12.1-5    | Anastasius, Cancellarius         | Prolonged discussion of the foods produced in Lucania et Bruttium, with mythological reference.  | 190 |
| 12.14.1-5    | Anastasius, Cancellarius         | Another discussion of Lucania et Bruttium's history and animals.   | 304 |
| 12.15.1-5, 7 | Maximus, Cancellarius            | An encomium of Squillace, involving its topography and mythology.  | 325 |
| 12.20.4      | Thomas and Peter, Cl and Arcarii | Discussion of the Sack of Rome, 410 CE.  | 62  |

|                |                             |   |     |
|----------------|-----------------------------|---|-----|
| 12.22.1, 3-5   | Provincials of Istria       | An encomium of Istria, similar in character to letters 12.14, 15.                                   | 201 |
| 12.24.2-6      | Tribuni Maritorium          | Prolonged excursus on the local tradition of seafaring.   | 310 |
| 12.25.2-7      | Ambrosius I, VA             | Excursus to Cassiodorus' assistant on cosmic order using astronomy, agriculture, weather, and more. | 395 |
| 12.28.2, 7, 10 | Edict (Liguria and Aemilia) | A rare reference to a specific scriptural figure (Joseph), appearing twice.                         | 179 |