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**Ennodius and the Late Antique Letter**

Since Jacques Sirmond's edition of 1611, the corpus of Magnus Felix Ennodius' writings has been deemed to contain 297 items called letters divided into nine books. This division has generally been accepted by scholars, despite its having little to do with Ennodius' own intentions or the corpus as it was transmitted down to the ninth century. But the convenience the Sirmondian scheme affords to the unwary reader has had an unfortunate effect on the appreciation of Ennodius' letters both as examples of a particular literary genre and as part of the larger world of rhetoric-imbued Late Antique verbal communication (cf. Kennell, *Magnus Felix Ennodius* [2000], 13-21). For more than a century, Peter's verdict, that Ennodius' letters are modeled on the "flatter, more colorless letters of Symmachus," not the more erudite and facile Sidonius Apollinaris, and are nearly devoid of content and personal qualities, has stood essentially unchallenged (*Der Brief in der römischen Literatur* [1901], 163-68; cf. Cugusi in *Lo spazio letterario* [1989], 2:379-419; Gruber on Ennodius, *Der Neue Pauly* [1997], 3:1046-47), though the forthcoming edition and translation by Gioanni for *Sources chrétiennes* and Schröder's *Habilitationsschrift* will improve the situation greatly.

This paper will reconsider how Ennodius' letters may be defined, the variety of functions they perform, and the ways in which they accord with the principles of letter-writing set down in Chapter 27 of C. Iulius Victor, *Ars Rhetorica* (Giomini/Celentano 1980; cf. Celentano *RFIC* 122 [1994]: 422-35). In addition to making the problems inherent in Sirmond's classification manifest, individual letters will be analyzed in order to demonstrate what has long been regarded as empty rhetoric is in fact practical and significant. The sketchiness of Iulius Victor's epistolographic precepts clearly presupposes a firm grounding in general rhetoric; thus, they articulate only what is peculiar to or more suitable for the more intimate medium of the letter.