

Reflections on the Bourse HiSoMA

As a PhD candidate at the University of California, Riverside, specializing in late antiquity, the Bourse HiSoMA was an amazing experience that has enabled me to advance my dissertation research while contributing to an international academic community. It not only allowed me to use sources that I would have otherwise not have had access to, but also introduced me to a thriving academic community based in Lyon. In this short reflection I will summarize some of what the Bourse HiSoMA allowed me to accomplish during May 2021.

In my dissertation, “Landscapes along the Fifth-Century Rhône,” I propose that the landscape within which an author lived and wrote shaped the author’s experiences and thus the author’s written works. By comparing the literary uses of a landscape with the landscape’s physical properties and archeological evidence, it is possible to discern 1) how an author’s experience in a place was impacted by the local landscape and 2) how an author mentally organized his local landscape. While in Lyon, I applied this approach to a study of Sidonius Apollinaris, a fifth-century aristocrat, bishop of Clermont-Ferrand, and native of Lyon, whose collection of nine books of letters have survived.

HiSoMA was the perfect place for me to carry out this research for many reasons. First, I was able to walk in the footsteps of Sidonius Apollinaris, which gave me first-hand experience of the major features of Lyon’s landscape that Sidonius describes. This took me from the Cathedral of Saint-Jean, site of the fifth-century episcopal complex, to the vestiges of the old church of Saint-Just where Sidonius celebrated early morning vigils. This first-hand experience of Lyon’s topography and landscape has enriched my research by deepening my understanding of fifth-century Lyon. Second, the *Bibliothèque HiSoMA* and the *Bibliothèque de Maison de l’Orient et de la Méditerranée* are amazing research tools for scholars of antiquity. In addition to being excellent places to work, they provided access to archeological and epigraphic resources that would have been otherwise difficult for me to acquire. It was extremely convenient to have literary, epigraphic, and archeological sources together in these two nearby libraries.

I spent the first three weeks of my time with HiSoMA comparing archeological data, Lyon’s landscape, and Sidonius’ letters while also drafting a chapter of my dissertation. In this chapter I argue that Sidonius mentally organized fifth-century Lyon’s urban space primarily according to its religious landscape. During the last week of May, I concluded the Bourse HiSoMA by preparing and presenting these results at a virtual seminar for HiSoMA.

Finally, none of my research would have been possible without the people who make up HiSoMA. Everyone with whom I interacted, scholars, staff, and librarians, were all encouraging, supportive, and patient with my poor French. I would like to thank Aurore Bereziat, Sophie Reysset, and Pascale Jouanna for organizing so much of my travels and for helping me navigate the ever-changing regulations regarding travel during Covid. I would like to thank Stephan Gioanni for his support and letters of invitation (without which travel would have been impossible). A special thanks goes to Patrice Fauer not only for his mentorship and assistance in preparing my lecture for the virtual seminar, but also for sharing resources with me prior to my arrival in Lyon, for inviting my wife and myself into his home, for showing me the local landscape, and so much more.

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