Between God and Man:
The Great Adventure in Common
(Isidore of Seville’s De ortu et obitu Patrum*)

Entre Dios y el hombre: la gran aventura en común
(De ortu et obitu Patrum de Isidoro de Sevilla)

Tatiana Krynicka
University of Gdańsk
Gdańsk, Poland
tatiana.krynicka@ug.edu.pl
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0538-4205

Abstract: In his De ortu et obitu Patrum, Isidore of Seville elaborates a collection of stories that engage the reader in living the experiences of the characters presented and encourage him to identify with them and imitate them. Following the ways of the biblical heroes, the Sevillian comes to know the One who has called all of them into existence as beings created for co-existence and pro-existence, i.e. to live with and for others. Isidore does not write a history of sinners, but of saints, who become friends of God by building a community with other humans and filling the world with his praise. According to him, both his heroes and his readers are relational beings, open to God and to other creatures, in need of them to achieve their fullness.

Resumen: En su De ortu et obitu Patrum, Isidoro de Sevilla elabora una colección de relatos que implican al lector en la vivencia de las experiencias de los personajes presentados y lo animan a identificarse con ellos e imitarlos. Siguiendo el camino de los héroes bíblicos, el santo padre sevillano llega a conocer a Aquel que los ha llamado a todos a la existencia como seres creados para la convivencia y la proexistencia, es decir, para vivir con y para los demás. Isidoro no escribe una historia de pecadores, sino de santos, que se hacen amigos de Dios construyendo una comunidad con otros humanos y llenando el mundo de su alabanza. En su perspectiva de las cosas, tanto sus héroes como sus lectores son seres relacionales, abiertos a Dios y a las demás criaturas, necesitados de ellos para alcanzar su plenitud.

1. SOURCES AND MODELS OF *DE ORTU ET OBITU PATRUM*

In the Sevillian’s world, the Bible was the primary source of theological reflection, providing knowledge of God’s existence and attributes, as well as of his attitude to the world and the man he had created. In addition, its words used to become material for learning to read and write; while pondered in prayer, they united oneself with God; when analyzed, they introduced oneself into the secrets and truths of faith; as assimilated, they served to describe one’s own journey towards salvation; while commented on, they taught how to take a broader view of the world — and of the text that conveys an image of that world. Learning them was the pinnacle of intellectual formation — *culmen scripturarum*: “knowledge” and “knowledge of the Bible” were synonymous in that epoch. Therefore, Isidore’s writings,

---


which served as compendia of theological, grammatical, and natural knowledge, provided new information and decent entertainment, sometimes became Latin and Greek textbooks\(^8\), and also introduced the reader into reading of the Scripture\(^9\). The canon, content, genre affiliation, and history of the composition of inspired books invariably formed the circle of Isidore’s research interests\(^10\).

Among the great and magnificent works that Isidore left as legacy, the learned bishop of Toledo, Ildefonsus, mentions “the book on the birth and death of the prophets” (*librum de ortu et obitu prophetarum*)\(^11\). In Braulio of Zaragoza’s *Renotatio*, this treatise appears under the title *On the Birth and Death of the Holy Fathers* (*De ortu et obitu Patrum*)\(^12\). It is one of Isidore’s early works, which reached readers shortly after his election to the episcopal see of Seville in 602\(^13\).

The Bible undoubtedly provides the basic and most obvious hypotext of *De ortu*. In the preface, Isidore explicitly mentions it as the prototype of his treatise (*De ortu*, praef. 5). Moreover, when reporting the events described in the Holy Scriptures, he includes biblical quotations and refers to its content throughout the entire work. We are, therefore, dealing with all the most important determinants of intertextuality\(^14\). In addition, Isidore also draws information


\(^{9}\) Cf. María Adelaida Andrés Sanz, “Bibliothecam compilavit: La Bible d’Isidore de Séville”, *Connaissance des Pères de l’Église* 142 (2016) 42–44 (37–50); Wielgus, Badania, 73.


\(^{11}\) Cf. Ildefonsus, *De viris illustribus*, 8, 6–15.


about the characters presented, and the biblical world in
general, from the works of many Christian authors who
practise Scripture exegesis. They draw from it inspiration to
compose poetic works as well as examples to illustrate the
arguments presented in moral-ascetical, practical-ascetical,
dogmatic-polemical treatises, letters, speeches and writings
revealing the fate and legacy of persons of merit in the
history of the Church; they also translate related studies by
Greek scholars. The list of works featured in the analysed
treatise testifies the exceptional well-reading of the young
Sevillian. There is an exceptionally complex relationship
between the Bible and De ortu. As the preface makes clear,
the Sevillian is not directing his work at people who do not
know the Holy Scriptures (De ortu, praef. 4–7). The references
to Abraham being a “voluntary exile” (6,1), Jacob being “his
mother’s favourite, his brother’s deceiver” (8,1) and Simeon
being “a defender of violated chastity” (13,1) can only be
understood by someone familiar with the biblical account of
these characters. Note that the reader who will not be able
to grasp the provided information is discreetly encouraged
by the author of the treatise to reach for the Scriptures and
fill in the gaps in biblical knowledge. Thus, he reports on
events known to his recipient, among other reasons, to
help him consolidate his knowledge thereof, while the
reading of the treatise is by no means intended to replace
personal acquaintance with the inspired text, but only to
help systematise and consolidate the knowledge taken
from it. Familiarity with the Scriptures makes it possible
to assimilate the treatise and makes the reading of it more

---

attractive. In short, reading the treatise must be accompanied with familiarisation with the Scriptures\textsuperscript{16}.

It should be noted that when talking about the origins and birth, deeds, positions held, and death circumstances of the heroes, Isidore discusses topics that were touched upon by the creators of the lives of the saints, referring to ancient biographers, and therefore he refers to the tradition of hagiographic writing\textsuperscript{17}. Moreover, he seems to be guided by the goals pursued by hagiographers. Similarly to them, he educates the reader, showing him, above all, the individuals that he can and should take as a model. The exceptions are Adam and Reuben — figures unconditionally present in any complete biblical history: the former became the first parent not only of sin but also of the human race (1,1: \textit{protoplasta} [\textit{\ldots} princeps generis et delicti]), while the latter, despite his unworthy behaviour, remained the son of Jacob and the father of one of the twelve tribes of Israel (12). Moreover, unlike objective inspired authors, Sevillian generally only portrays the heroes’ exemplary qualities and deeds. He does not talk about Judah’s relationship with Tamar (Gn 38,6-26)\textsuperscript{18}, Moses’ doubt (Nb 20,2-13), Aaron’s consent to the casting of the golden calf (Ex 32,1-6), Elijah’s escape (1 Kings 19) or the “depression crisis”\textsuperscript{19} of the broken Jeremiah (Jr 20,14-18). Writing about Jephthah sacrificing his daughter, Isidore emphasizes that he acted in such a way as not to defile himself with the disgrace of perjury.


\textsuperscript{17} Cf. \textsc{chaparro gómez}, “Introducción”, 41-42; Isabel \textsc{velázquez soriano}, \textit{La literatura hagiográfica. Presupuestos básicos y aproximación a sus manifestaciones en la Hispania visigoda}, León, Fundación Instituto Castellano y Leonés de la Lengua, 2007, 86-87.

\textsuperscript{18} Note that this difficult-to-interpret, extremely controversial event was commented on by the Church Fathers in exceptionally rare occasions. Cf. Wojciech \textsc{kamczyk}, “Juda i Tamar (Rdz 36, 6-26) w alegorycznej egzegezie Zenona z Werony”, \textit{Śląskie Studia Historyczno-Teologiczne} 51/1 (2018) 43 (42-63).

\textsuperscript{19} As Paul \textsc{beaucamp} puts it, cf. “Prorok”, in X. \textsc{léon-dufour} (red.), \textit{Słownik teologii biblijnej}, transl. by K. Romaniuk, Poznań, Pallottinum, 1994, 785.
(30: fidelis in promissis [...] ne pollueretur labe periurii, pollicitam sponsionem complevit). The Sevillian does not mention that the Mosaic law strictly forbade the sacrifice of human beings; he does not question — together with Ambrose, whose acquaintance is betrayed in this passage — the meaningfulness of the oath of the chief; he does not speak — as he does in the Sententiae — about the inadmissibility of keeping the oath by which Jephthah undertook to commit an act of wickedness; nor does he warn against swearing, which is reserved to God, but notices, on the contrary, that swearing always exposes a man to breaking a given promise. The mention of Thomas’s disbelief in what he has heard is balanced by words of his fidelity to what he has heard (73: audiendo incredulus, videndo fidelis); the cause for praise is the sincere sorrow of Peter, who renounced the Lord even though he loved Him (67,2: amator Domini atque negator [...] negando lapsus, lacrimando purificatus).

2. ISIDORE’S HEROES: TRIUNE GOD AND HIS FRIENDS

Following the fate of the biblical heroes, Isidore comes to know the One who, in the world he created, has called them all into existence, has set a goal for each of them, and accompanies each of them on the paths they take to achieve it. According to the Church doctrine, the Triune God himself is the realisation of Relationship. In undertaking the work of creation, he thinks of establishing a relationship with his creatures, being the most extraordinary in the universe the one he wants to establish with the most perfect among all creatures — the man,

21 Cf. Ambrosius, De officiis I 50, 255: Nam de lephte quid dicam, qui immolavit filiam [...] quo votum impleret [...]? Melius fuerat nihil tale promittere quam promissum solvere parricidio.
whom he filled with the breath of life (Gn 2,7). The creation of man was preceded by a kind of trinitarian consultation and decision23:

“Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves” (Gn 1,26-27).

Thanks to this, the man since the beginning, in the very act of creation, is someone and not something, a person capable of knowing himself, controlling himself, voluntarily offering himself to others and creating community with other people24, open and relational25. He is God’s idea and design, he is a person created out of love — and for a loving relationship, first and foremost with the Creator himself26. When, through the fault of men, this relationship is destroyed, he sends his son so that he renews it in an act of salvation, drawing all to himself from the height of the cross (Jn 12,32). The open arms of the crucified God-Man become the most perfect image of the Father’s adoration and uncompromising brotherhood, both of them henceforth inseparable and indivisible27. Moreover, by revealing himself to the man in the world, the invisible God calls us to discover him by being in the space of the world and therefore to have a relationship with other creatures, a relationship which, seen from this perspective, also acquires a metaphysical and transcendent dimension. Created out of love, the man is not only able to cry out Amor, ergo sum28, but

is also expected to fulfill the mission that God has entrusted to him mission of filling the cosmos with this love\textsuperscript{29}.

Isidore’s vision of the relations between the Creator, the world he created and the mankind is in fact very congruent with the related above modern theologians’ views related above. The world of the treatise analysed is a densely inhabited space. The drama of salvation is unfolding before the reader’s eyes, with successive scenes ultimately featuring two main protagonists — God and (a specific, individual) Man. Nevertheless, none of the accompanying characters are incidental. God-pleasing Abel becomes unpleasant to Cain: a brother murders his own brother, who becomes the first tormented righteous man (2). The Jews repay Jeremiah, who preached to them the word of their God, with cruelty and stoning; grateful for the miracles he performed, the Egyptians surround his tomb with exceptional veneration \textit{post mortem} (38). Daniel, an illustrious descendant of priests and kings from the tribe of Judah, is abducted to Babylon after the destruction of Jerusalem. Faithful to God, he receives the gift of prophecy. Famous for his virtues and miracles, “full of the fortitude of a brave spirit”, he emerges victorious from many trials, winning respect even from pagan rulers. He dies in a foreign land and is buried in a royal cave, remaining —despite the “glory that covers him”— “a lonely captive” (40). Job —a wealthy, generous alms-giving king—, having lost everything, including his children and the understanding of his wife and friends, does not lose his godly faith, and is rewarded by the One whom he praised even in the midst of affliction (24, 1). The wonderful daughters become the reward and proof of the change of fortune:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Post noctem enim tristitiae Diem genuit, post fetores ulcerum Casiae frangitiam edidit, post abiectionem Cornu in unctionem regni promeruit et tibiam in accentu laudis adsumpsit} (24, 2).
\end{quote}

While presenting great biblical patriarchs, judges, kings, prophets, and Christ’s disciples Isidore mentions 26 women. Mothers and grandmothers, sisters and daughters, wives and

\textsuperscript{29} Cf. Smuniewski, \textit{Wspólnota}, 43.
widows participate in different important events, support men on their way to salvation, as well as lead them to moral degeneration and suffer because of that. It is worth noting that the stories of women who contributed to the fall of a man are often reduced by Isidore to a mention of some of their qualities. He does not make them subjects of sentences, but introduces them to the story, using different case syntaxes. We read that Samson forgot his chosenness, deceived by the greed of an alluring woman (avartia inlecebrosae mulieris, ablativeus causa / 31, 2). The prophet Ahijah foretold Solomon that he would depart from God’s commandments because of women from foreign nations (per mulieres gentium alienigenarum, the cause is expressed by a noun in the accusative with the preposition per / 34, 2). That is what happened, as the king squandered God’s wonderful gifts, corrupted by their love (amore depravatus femineo, ablativeus causa / ibid.). The first man — Adam desecrated the sanctity of Paradise by touching the tree of life, scarred by the words spoken by the woman, to which he gave obedience (in the original succinct yet eloquent lingua pollutus feminea, ablativeus causa / 1, 2). Perhaps the use of similar solutions betrays not only Isidore’s pursuit of brevity but also his way of looking at the world. Doesn’t the absence of Eve, whose influence on Adam had tragic consequences for humanity, prove that, according to the Sevillian, the man is responsible before God for everything, including the woman?

Ancient philosophers already described man as ζῷον πολιτικὸν, animal sociale — a being who cannot achieve his fullness without others, especially those closest to him — relatives, friends, fellow citizens30. Being a reader of the Bible, Isidore is aware that the life of an individual is not just coexistence, but pro-existence — living for others31. The human attitude is never an indifferent value, not only in relation to the

immediate environment but also in the history of humanity as a whole. The sin of the first parents is still lamented by their descendants, subjected to torment and death because of Adam and Eve’s fall (1, 2). Noah’s obedience also saved his sons (4) — and, as the reader of the treatise knows, all mankind. Melchizedek, the ark builder’s first-born son, through the blessing of his pious father became the first priest of the Most High. He passed on the grace he had received, which surpasses all earthly goods (cf. 22; 23, 2), by blessing Abraham and by founding the first city after the Flood — Jerusalem (5). It will become the symbol of the Church — the heavenly community of the saved, and many centuries later Death on the Cross and Resurrection of the Son of God, the most important events in the history of salvation, will take place here32.

Friends of God become builders of the community of saints: Abraham is the first among believers and the father of nations (6, 1); his son Isaac, out of fear of God, shows complete obedience to his parent, even to the point of being ready to die (7). The saints perform great miracles (35, 1; 36, 2; 37, 1; 40, 1; 67, 3-4; 68, 3; 71, 3). At the same time, they bring in no less miraculous relationships with their fellow human beings: patience, graciousness, forgiveness (7; 10, 2; 33, 1-2), hospitality (9; 24, 1), resourcefulness (16; 19), generosity (24, 1). In a world full of cruelty and contempt for individuals and nations, they give bread to the poor and provide burial for the dead, like the exiled Tobias:

Tobi filius Ananihel, ex tribu Neptalim, de civitate Cibihel, quae est in regione Galilaeae. Hic captivus ductus a Salmanasar rege Assyriorum in Nineve. Vir in timore Dei summus, in opere magnificus, In misericordia glorias, in exsequiarum curis devotus; qui, dum mortuos sepeliret et inopes pasceret, caecitate luminis caruit et post tenebras, reseratis oculis, lumen claritatis promeruit. Iacet in Nineve sepultus in pace (58)33.

33 Discussed with more details in Tatiana Krynicka, “Perswazyjne, komunikacyjne i rekreacyjne elementy traktatu Izydora z Sewilli De ortu et obitu Patrum”, Vox Patrum 79 (2021) 209 (201-216) (https://doi.org/10.31743/vp.10819).
Thanks to the wisdom received from God, his friends study the law (20) and create the alphabet (60), rebuild Jerusalem and renew worship (61), govern (34, 1) as well as anoint rulers (32), provide them with spiritual care (46; 53-55) and advise them, interpret dreams and predict the future (10, 2-3; 40, 2). Through the valour with which the Lord arms them, they defeat the enemies of their people (17-18; 25, 3-4; 26, 1; 27, 1-2; 29; 31, 1; 62-63) and stop the people from insulting the Lord, removing God’s wrath from them (28; 38, 1; 39). They proclaim Christ to the inhabitants of the far corners of the world, teaching orally (67, 3; 68, 2; 69; 72-76; 85) and writing down his teachings (69; 71, 2-3; 75; 81-82). They delight those around them with the splendour of virtue (76, 1); by their example, they attract loved ones (81; 84) and fellow believers to the service of the Lord (82). They defeat the world and its powers, earthly rulers and idols (59, 2). When they fall, they show repentance and submission: Jacob deceives his brother, but gives in to his anger and their mother’s requests, abandoning his father’s home and becoming an exile (8, 1); Obadiah leaves the service of the idolater king Ahaziah and becomes a disciple of Elijah and a prophet (44); the persecutor of the Church, Saul, changes into the apostle of the nations, Paul (68, 1). They communicate God’s judgements to their brethren (25, 5; 45, 1-2; 46) and persistently intercede with him, as Moses did — a model of God’s servant and leader of the people, portrayed in a uniquely elaborate passus, constructed from segments of similar structure and abounding in homoioteleutons and alliterations:

„in regendo populo vigilans,
in corrigendo vehemens,
in amando ardens,
in sustenendo patiens,
qui pro subiectis Deo se
interposuit consulenti,
obposuit irascenti” (25, 1)\textsuperscript{34}.

\textsuperscript{34} For more details see KRYNICKA, “Perswazyjne”, 205-208.
3. **THEATRUM MUNDI: A MAN BETWEEN ANGELS AND ANIMALS**

In *Etymologiae*, we read that, in order to announce the will of the Lord to individuals and peoples, angels come from heaven to earth (VII 5, 1.5). In *De ortu*, an angelic retinue accompanies the stranded exile Jacob (8, 1). The prophet Malachi receives his name, which Isidore translates as *angelus domini*, because every prophecy he utters is immediately confirmed by an angel descending from on high (52). The angel announces the birth of John the Baptist (65, 1). Mary talks to the angel at a crucial moment of her life, namely during the annunciation. In four skilfully refined, rhythmic, connected by **grammatical rhymes** and conjunctions *et* sentences, the Sevillian talks about how she received explanations from Gabriel as to the mystery of the incarnation and, through him, gave her consent to accept the will of the Creator:

- salutationem ab angelo acceptit.
- et mysterium conceptionis agnovit.
- partus qualitatem inquirit.
- et contra legem naturae obsequii fide non renuit (66, 2)\(^3^5\).

The colourful biography of David, chosen by God and anointed by the prophet to reign over Jephthah’s son, is full of extraordinary twists and turns. With the sweetness of playing the zither, he drives away the evil spirit away; without the sword he kills the lion and the bear (33, 2). We also meet also other heroes of the treatise, surrounded by animals alongside with humans and angels. Samson kills a roaring lion and extracts a honeycomb from its mouth; having set fire to the tied tails of the foxes, he kindles a fire in the land of the Philistines and finally slays a thousand enemies with an ass’s jaw (31, 1). Wild animals devour children insulting Elisha (36, 2). Thanks to God’s inspiration, Daniel murders a monstrous dragon

---

worshipped by Babylonians; thrown into the pit, he calms the rage of lions and boldly feasts among roaring predators (40, 1). Obedience to God’s verdicts is taught to Jonah by the whale, which swallows the reluctant prophet and then throws him off as he prays to the Lord for rescue (45, 1). Mostly animals accompany Noah in the treatise, the builder of the saving ark.

serpentibus sociatur et bestiis nec terretur; cui ferae colla submittunt, alites famulantur. Namque avem misit, redeuntem sustenuit, sed perfida fraude corvi decipitur, merito columbae gestantis ore ramum paciferum educitur. Reseratisque foribus arcae, bestias cuncta animantia per septem dies abire permittens (4, 1-2).

The protagonists of *De ortu* —like Isidore and his contemporaries— live a life blended with the natural world. Unlike the ancient literati, they do not seek in it an escape from the turmoil and anxiety of human affairs or consolation in the face of their evanescence, although they are not at all devoid of sensitivity to its charms. They perceive nature as the work of God, which the Creator entrusts to man so that, knowing it and ruling over it, he may move towards holiness. Man, chosen by God and obedient to him, is given by him authority over nature. The Creator gives Solomon the wisdom that allows him “to know the order of the world and the powers of the elements, the habits of animals and the thoughts of men” (34, 1); Noah “does not perish in the violent waves of the flood, he is not afraid of the roaring winds and thundering heavens” (4, 1). Thanks to the power obtained from God, Moses torments the oppressors of Israel with scourges, and after leaving Egypt, he leads the people through the sea, in the wilderness he turns bitter waters into fresh ones and extracts water sources from the rock, providing Israelites with water as well as edibles: in Isidore’s account, it was he, not God, who “filled the place where they camped with birds intended for food” (25, 2-4). His successor, Joshua stops the sun and halts

---


the course of the Jordan (27, 1). At the words of the prophet Samuel, “clouds gather and rains fall” (32, 1). The drought and the downpour are caused by Elijah’s prayer (35, 2); his disciple Elisha makes the waters of Jericho fertile (36, 2); both prophets are able to part the waves of the Jordan (35, 2; 36, 2). The power over nature granted by the Creator allows man to control life and death. God’s servants change the fate of barren women (36, 2), raise the dead (35, 2; 36, 2; 67, 3; 71, 3), and avoid death themselves like Enoch and Elijah (3; 35, 3).

Departing from God, the lord of creation, created in the image of God, turns into a groaning labourer (1,2: operarius gemens), terrified in the face of elementary disasters, diseases and death that plague him (25, 2). By deviating from the right paths, he changes the splendour of the garden of Eden into spiked bushes of wasteland (1,2: terram squalentem), transparent streams into streams of blood (25, 2); he leads to the defiling of the beauty of all creation, to the loss of its original innocence:

innocuum ferro nondum sanguine maculato prostravit, quum adhuc innocens ferrum cruoris humanum facinus non haberet (2).

In a world tarnished by sin, it is a desert what becomes the new Paradise, understood as a place of encounter with God. The sky, the stones, the sheep, the silence of the starry nights and the solitude teach Amos, “shepherd, farmer and gatherer of the fruit of the sycamore, prophet not by birth but by vocation”, to listen so that he can hear the Lord (43, 1-2)38.

In Isidore’s perception, nature is not only the stage on which the great drama of salvation is played out, but also a witness and a participant to man’s struggle with evil. Since the creation of the world, the history of humanity has been unfolding in the shadow of the Amorite Mamre’s oak. Adam was buried in a cave nearby (6, 3), while Abraham hosted the Trinity in a tent pitched near it (6, 2; cf. Gn 18,1-15). During the reign of Emperor Constantius, as recounted by Jerome, and read by Isidore, even pagans surrounded the tree with great

reverence, enclosing it with a wall and paying to it solemn, pious tributes (6, 4)\textsuperscript{39}. Landscapes are also very much part of the fate of some of the characters. While showing to the reader the original happiness of Adam, Isidore does not talk about the beauty of holiness lost by his grandparents but focuses on the charms of the Garden of Eden. Its description makes up almost a quarter of the entire story about Adam and Eve (6 out of 26 lines in the cited edition / 1, 1). The reward of the pious Lot is not only to host angels and be saved from annihilation, but also to live in an exceptionally beautiful area, “where the trees yield balsam oil and a great number of dates” (9).

Let us note that it is worth considering why the reader of the Sevillian’s treatise needs information about what the world is like, somewhere he will never reach. Posing this question seems to be as legitimate as possible. Humans may turn to the Lord and his saints anywhere, but as the beings whose existence has been inscribed in time and space, we find it easier to seek God in places once hallowed by the presence of God’s great servants, because it is precisely there that God’s marvellous interventions in the history of mankind have occurred. This is why the pilgrim heads for the Holy Land\textsuperscript{40} and the reader imagines it, i.e. creates an image of it in the likeness of the objects of the surrounding world known to him thanks to his sensory perception. Isidore mentions trees, streams, rocks, as well as man-made edifices (46; 47, 3; 54) so that the elements of the reality inhabited by the viewer become the building blocks with which he forms the image of the distant lands described in the De ortu. Providing essentially superfluous “landscape” information, Isidore stops to look at the described scenery and find a momentary respite after the hard work of writing, as well as provides the reader with some kind of illustrations, the viewing of which does not so much complements the message of the text as provides entertainment.

\textsuperscript{39} Cf. Hieronymus, Liber de situ et nominibus locorum Hebraicorum, PL 23, 907A; 936C.

\textsuperscript{40} Cf. José Orlandis Rovira, “Las peregrinaciones en la religiosidad medieval”, Príncipe de Viana. Anejo 2-3 (1986) 610 (607-614); Guriewicz, Kategorie, 76-78.
4. **ISIDORE’S MODUS SCRIBENDI: HISTORY OF JONAH**

The Sevillian elaborates a collection of stories that are moving, engaging in experiencing the fates of the characters presented and encouraging readers to identify with them and follow their example. The lives he composes are concise, yet artful and colourful\(^{41}\). He does everything to make their protagonists memorable to his recipient, so that they accompany him in everyday life, also after the reading\(^{42}\). The originality of the *De ortu* author’s writing is demonstrated by the chapter on Jonah. Rebellious against the judgments of God, who sends him to save from destruction the pagan Nineveh hostile to Israel, the lost and depressed prophet finds comfort in the shadow of the ivy and learns compassion for the world, grieving as it withers away. A reader who wants to trace the genesis of the chapter will probably not be surprised by the choice of sources (the Book of Jonah and the commentary on it written by Jerome), but will be surprised noticing how Isidore, by summarising the biblical text and referring to Strydonite, who commented on it, creates a completely different story. Well, in the Scriptures, the history of Jonah is first and foremost the tale about the prophet’s attitude towards a foreign people, and more broadly about Israel’s relationship to the gentiles and the universalism of salvation\(^{43}\). The erudite Hieronim, commenting on this small book, written in a clear and simple language, although stunning in its beauty\(^{44}\), explains its content according to the literal, tropological and mystical sense\(^{45}\). As befits a disciple

---


of grammarians\textsuperscript{46}, “all-encompassing” scholars\textsuperscript{47}, and a prince of versatile biblical exegetes\textsuperscript{48}, he contemplates, among others, the symbolic meaning of the prophet’s life (\textit{Commentarius in Ionam} I 1, 2), the omnipotence of God, for whom nothing is impossible, because it surpasses the deities described by pagan poets (ibid., II 2, 3); he writes about various names of the plant in the shadow of which Jonah hid (ibid., IV 6) and notes the fact that “exceptional individual events cannot form a universal law” (ibid., VII). In his commentary, Nineveh becomes a symbol of the Church, her conversion leading to the rejection of Israel, causing Jonah, grieving over the fate of his people, to avoid the mission entrusted to him\textsuperscript{49}. Meanwhile, Isidore creates a poetic story\textsuperscript{50} about a man chosen, but rebellious and lost, from whom, despite everything, the calling of the One does not turn away, but even when his envoy fails, he carries out his plan, saving Jonah, the sailors, the inhabitants of Nineveh, humans and animals\textsuperscript{51}. He is a God who punishes injustice but also protects any life at risk, benevolent and merciful\textsuperscript{52}.

In presenting Jonah (45), Isidore resorts to different ways of organising the text. In the account of \textit{ortus} and \textit{vita}, we observe the predominance of the persuasive function. We can distinguish two parts here. In the beginning, the Sevillian refers to the fate of the hero shown in the first three chapters of the Book of Jonah from his birth to his arrival in Nineveh.

\textsuperscript{46} Cf. Ludwik \textsc{Gładyszewski}, “\textit{Wstęp patrystyczny}”, in \textsc{Hieronym, Komentarz do Księgi Jonasza}, transl. by L. Gładyszewski, Kraków, WAM, 1998, 33-34; Augustyn \textsc{Eckmann}, “Hieronim ze Strydonu. Nauka w służbie rozumienia i interpretacji Pisma świętego”, \textit{Ateneum Kapłańskie} 71 (1979) 422-424, 429.

\textsuperscript{47} Cf. E. \textsc{Elorduy} “San Isidoro. Unidad orgánica de su educación reflejada en sus escritos”, en \textit{Miscellanea Isidoriana}, Romae 1936, 293-294.


\textsuperscript{49} Cf. \textsc{Gądecki}, “\textit{Wstęp biblijny}”, 32; \textsc{Gładyszewski}, “\textit{Wstęp patrystyczny}”, 48-50.

\textsuperscript{50} Cf. \textsc{Chaparro Gómez}, ad \textit{De ortu} 1, 175, n. 116.


\textsuperscript{52} Cf. \textsc{Gądecki}, “\textit{Wstęp biblijny}”, 28-29.
The description of the origin is more detailed than in many other chapters, as it includes an explanation of the meaning of the prophet’s name\textsuperscript{53}, but at the same time remains extremely concise and coherent. The author uses three appositions, the third one is accompanied by a genitive adjective and two short relative and adjectival sentences with an identical construction model (relative pronoun as a subject + personal form of the verb \textit{esse} as a verb + prepositional group, i.e. a preposition and a noun being a proper name — as a circumstance of the place):

\textit{Jonas, columba et dolens, filius Amathi, qui fuit de Geth, quae est in Opher (45, 1)}.

Isidore presents the beginning of Jonah’s work in nine extremely concise sentences. In the first, fifth and sixth of these, two names in each appear next to the verb. Similar syntactic structures, that consist of a single verb combined with few (one to three) names, are used in spoken language. It is easier for the recipient to grasp the main point of such an utterance, and understanding it is quicker and more efficient than assimilating extended sentences\textsuperscript{54}. Considering that contemporaries admired Isidore’s oratorical abilities and mentioned the stunning beauty of his sermons\textsuperscript{55}, we can assume that also in \textit{De ortu} we find traces of homilies composed by him\textsuperscript{56}, unfortunately not preserved, or formulas which could have been used by clergy to prepare their own

\textsuperscript{53} The basic minimum knowledge of the \textit{De ortu} characters’ pedigree includes their father’s name, in the case of characters living before the Flood, their order after Adam, and after the Flood, their descent from one of Noah’s sons, in the case of the descendants of Joseph’s sons, their belonging to one of the twelve generations. Quite often, Isidore also reports on the place of their birth. Cf. Tatiana \textsc{krynIcka}, \textit{De ortu et obitu Patrum: Izydora z Sewilli encyklopedia sławnych postaci biblijnych}, Gdańsk, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2021, 20-23.


\textsuperscript{55} Cf. \textsc{Braulio}, \textit{Renotatio librorum domini Isidori} 5-7; \textsc{Ildefonsus}, \textit{De viris illustribus} 8, 1-5.

\textsuperscript{56} Cf. \textsc{Díaz y Díaz}, “Introducción”, 109-110.
sermons\textsuperscript{57}. Noteworthy are the numerous alliterations (single and multi-syllabic, occurring in nearby and distant words), through which the Sevillian embellishes the text, provides it with a musicality, and —by accumulating the -r-, which builds terror and tension— highlights the word periclitari\textsuperscript{58}:

\begin{quote}
  ad genti\textit{um} praeconia mitti\textit{tur} [...] propter quem periclitatur na-
  vis, sed sors latent\textit{em} repperit (45, 1).
\end{quote}

Sentences from the second to the fourth are undeveloped and jointless, their condensation increases due to the fact that the role of subjects is fulfilled by the participles which possess the verbal characteristics. Let us note that they were created from verbs acting as predicates in the preceding segments, thanks to which the fragment gains additional dynamism. Isidore immerses the recipient in a stream of rapid development of events, in which the episode smoothly passes into the next episode; after the completion of the action, the next action begins. When presenting the fate of Jonah, he uses a gradation whose elements are connected not by the semantic closeness of the verbs that compose them, but by the increasingly deeper disregard for God’s commands that marks the hero’s attitude and is expressed in the actions described by the above verbs. The prophet disobeys the Lord’s command, runs away from him, and finally falls asleep during the storm caused by his rebellion. Placing at the top of the enumeration the static dormit, the verb that in addition is a predicate of a dynamic subject fugiens, has the meaning of a paradox that surprises the recipient, sharpens his attention, and makes him aware of the madness of a similar conduct:

\begin{quote}
  missus contemnit, / contemnens fugit, / fugiens dormit (45, 1).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{57} The existence of similar formulas in the Sentences is pointed out by M. Birkin, “Social’nye funktsii episkopskoj propovedi v Toledskom korolevstve v nacale VII veka (po dannym sochinenij Isidora Sevil’skogo),” in Oleg V. Aurov (ed.), Teologiâ i politika. Vlast’, Cerkov’ i tekst v korolevstvah vestgotov (V-nacalo VIII veka), Moskva 2017, 154.

\textsuperscript{58} Cf. Lucylla Pszczołowska, Instrumentacja dźwiękowa, Wrocław, Ossoli neum, 1977, 53.
Due to the use of numerous words possessing verbal characteristics, i.e. finite and infinitive formations (verbs in personal forms, participles and deverbatives, which make up 7 of the 8 lexemes found here), sentences from the seventh to the ninth are exceptionally rich in content. In addition, they remain strongly integrated with each other: the seventh with the eighth thanks to the subject in common (cetus), and at the sound level due to the use of alliteration, homoioptotons and homoioioteleutons; the seventh with the ninth — because of the similarity of the sonance of the opening words (cetus, reiectus) and their predicates (devoravit, praedicavit):

*Cetus abiectum devoravit,*

*orantem revomuit,*

*reiectus praedicavit subversionem* (45, 1).

In the second part of the tale, we read about the events that took place after the conversion of the Ninevites, shown in chapter 4 of the Book of Jonah. The pace of the narrative slightly slows down through the use of conjunctions, the first of which juxtaposes the content of the whole with the content of the preceding passages, while the next three connect the subsequent sentences. The sentences are knitted together by the null-subject (Jonah), at that they are also united by a similarity of structure: in each of them, the verb governs the object, which is accompanied by the genitive adjective. In the first and the second sentences, Isidore uses the chiastic order: (1) verb – object – adverb, (2) object – adverb – verb. In the third and fourth sentences, the object and the genitive adjective are common to both sentences, in the fourth sentence they appear implicitly, and the genitive adjective in each is determined by an adjective expressed by the present participle of the active side. In an effort to equalise the length of the segments, the Sevillian introduces the circumstantial subito in the last sentence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sed</th>
<th>contristatur</th>
<th>in poenitentia</th>
<th>urbis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Et</td>
<td>invidet</td>
<td>salutis</td>
<td>gentium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etiam</td>
<td>gaudet</td>
<td>umbraculo</td>
<td>hederae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Et</td>
<td>dolens</td>
<td>[umbraculo]</td>
<td>[hederae]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>aresentis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Subito sed contristatur in poenitentia urbis.*
Using this solution, he focuses his readers’ attention on the words *umbraculo hederae*, in a way making it easier for them to find rest with Jonah in the shadow of the ivy that provides refreshment, and thus leading them to sympathize with the prophet’s joy and sorrow:

*Sed contristatur in poenitentia urbis et saluti gentium invidet; gaudet etiam hederae virentis umbraculo et dolens subito arescentis* (45, 2).

As we can see, Isidore’s account of Jonah’s life is extremely vivid. By stimulating the imagination, engaging the memory, and activating the empathy, he makes the reader imagine the character portrayed, identify with him in the hardships of human struggle, juxtapose his or her own life with his life, and, together with him, turn with trust to the salvation-bringing God. Meanwhile, in the factual, emotion-free, ornamentless description of the *obitus*, the communicative function dominates. Isidore ties the whole story together when, based on Jerome’s commentary, he both shows the origin of Jonah, the son of the widow of Zarephath, brought back to life by Elijah, and talks about the place of his burial. He uses the syntax of *accusativus cum infinitivo* and four relative adverbal clauses, the first and second of which are extended adjectives of the predicative part of the ACI logical predicate, the third is a second-degree dependent clause and determines the subject in the second relative clause, and the fourth determines the noun from the third sentence. The pace of the speech is slower as it requires more effort to understand, especially as the signalling of the beginning of successive elements relative pronouns not only order the whole passage, but can, as it seems, create some ambiguity (*cuius* occurs immediately after *Helias*, but refers to *filium*, as well as *quem* does):

*Tradunt Hebraei hunc esse filium viduae, quem a mortis resuscitavit Helias, cuius sepulcrum in quodam urbi Geth vici demonstraretur, quod est in secundo miliario Saphorim in itinere quo pergitur Tiberiadim* (45, 2).
5. **DE ORTU ET OBITU PATRUM: THE HOLY SCRIPTURES REINTERPRETED**

Biblical discourse is a linguistic creation, determined by the historical, cultural, and socio-political reality of the author and the recipient. However, thanks to its unique relevance to human existence, the Bible invariably exceeds the text, becoming a category that models reality, gives meaning to its fragments, and shapes the identity of the reader. Its reading leads people belonging to different epochs and cultures to make new attempts at self-definition, interpreting their fate, their place in the world and the purpose of existence. By reading the Scriptures, Isidore also brings them up to date and provides a continuation of the biblical discourse. He tells the story as it has already been told, *refert relata*, but the work he proposes is neither a summary, nor a cento, nor a paraphrase, but a new reading and approximation, which only at first glance will appear as an ordinary biblical vademecum of Christian conduct or a shortened elaboration of the history of salvation for school use\(^59\).

The key he applies to understanding of the biblical history is the mystery of Christ — the culmination of God’s work, anticipated by the Old Testament characters, lived out by the New Testament characters, making sense of the author’s and his reader’s life struggles\(^60\). The deed of Judah, who gave birth to great kings, continues in the history of the people named after him. He extended his dominion over it until the coming of the descendant, who eclipsed the famous ancestor. This descendant is Christ — the full of splendour, young lion of the

---


house of Judah, the hope of the nations born from the virgin womb— the most important figure in the history of salvation (11). At first glance, the Son of God is the Great Absent in the analysed writing: Isidore did not devote a separate chapter to him — to the surprise of such an insightful researcher as José Carlos Martín-Iglesias. In fact, however, his presence permeates the narrative, for in him “all the values of the Old Testament take on meaning [...]. He fills them and infinitely surpasses them”62. Isaac, who showed such great respect to his father that he willingly approached, without resisting death, the altar on which he was to be sacrificed, foreshadowed in a way the saving work of Christ (7: *in figura Christi*). The passion of the Lord that was to take place was portrayed by Aaron offering blood sacrifices (26, 1). Enlightened by God, king Solomon wrote down the rules of conduct, the laws of nature and —closing this enumeration on a gradation basis—the mysteries (*sacramenta*) of Christ and the Church (34, 2). The prophet Ezekiel was called Son of Man, and this title announced the coming of Jesus (39: *in typo Christi*). They did not experience death, but returned to heaven—that is, to the place from where the progenitor Adam was once expelled—: Enoch, free from stain, far from fatal connections with the world (3), and the prophet Elijah, taken up on a fiery chariot (35, 3). They remain in the flesh but will regain their mortal nature at the end of time, to perform mighty signs in order to herald the second coming of Christ the Judge, to command in the battle against the Antichrist, to be resurrected by the Lord, with him to defeat the enemies of the Church, and to reign in eternal glory.

According to the famous maxim *in Vetere Novum latet et in Novo Vetus patet*, the history of the redemption remains an unclosed reality. The basis for bringing biblical events closer is the awareness that, grafted by baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection, belonging to the Church in which the same Holy Spirit who spoke through the prophets is at work63, the

---

63  The Nicene-Constantinople Symbol was extremely well known to Isidore and his readers. Under the decision of the III Synod of Toledo (589),
author and the recipient of the treatise are participants in this ongoing, never-ending story. They are inscribed in the world of *De ortu*, i.e. in the reality that began in the act of creation shown in the *Book of Genesis* and the first chapter of the treatise (1), which, nevertheless, did not end with the death of Titus, the hero of the last chapter (85), but lasts until the final implementation of God’s plan with the arrival of Christ as the King, whose reign will last forever (35, 3). It is a historical space in which the action of the Holy Spirit is still being realised, the space of the Church. The events that compose it, the fates of its protagonists scattered in time and space, are united into one, permeating the whole by the presence of the Son of God. It is precisely into this presence that Isidore introduces his reader when he describes the history of humanity seen from the perspective of the grace whose fullness we have received in him (Jn 1, 6). The way to the encounter with God leads here through the communion of God with men, which is Christ in the flesh; man’s encounter with God leads to communion with the Trinity, which in turn unites him with his brothers.

The world of the treatise is therefore not a distant space, enclosed in the pages of the Bible, because it keeps lasting *hic et nunc*. *Hodie*, Isidore affirms (27, 2), *usque hodie* (10, 3), the tomb of Joseph is to be seen near the Samaritan city of Neapolis, formerly called Sycim (10, 3), today called Tell Balata, as well as the monument to Joshua in Timnat-Serach, lying on the northern slope of Mount Gaash, in the land belonging to the tribe of Dan, which today is located in Spain became the first country where it was recited during every Sunday mass, just before the *Our Father*. Cf. Diaz y Diaz, “Introducción”, 27; Piotr Roszak, *Mozarabowie i ich liturgia. Chrystologia rytu hiszpańsko-mozarabskiego*, Toruń, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2013, 131.

near the city of Nablus (27, 2). Isidore breaks the illusion of immersion in biblical history. He authenticates the story of the life and death of a particular character, whose statue can still be admired, as well as the narrative as a whole, as he brings the reference point into the reader’s world. The map he draws is intended to lead to the imagination of still-existing places that remember biblical protagonists, and —similarly to many medieval maps known to us— to the contemplation of the great works of the Spirit of God, the author of the history of salvation, in which the Sevillian, his heroes and his readers, intended and unintended, participate. The latter include, let us note, the philologist bending over the text of the treatise today.

The treatise’s readers —like its protagonists— live and act in the real world, facing the evil around them and their own weakness, but Isidore is not interested in the mechanisms of sin. He does not create a history of sinners, but of saints, i.e. of individuals realising the ontological bond inscribed in human existence by virtue of the act of creation in the image and likeness of God (Gn 1,26-27). He makes the audience aware that they too belong to a community of creatures that God calls into relationship — with himself and with each other. The model of holiness promoted in the treatise is in a sense elitist: it is the holiness of eminent individuals, patriarchs, priests, leaders of the people, kings, prophets, and apostles. However, he is surprisingly close to each of his readers, for it can be realised by anyone who imitates the famous protagonists of salvation history, that is, by anyone who confidently walks towards God and towards others along the paths of his desires, talents, and goals. The latter come from the Creator, who has equipped us with them and given them to each of us, like to the biblical heroes — so that

---

68 Bosak identifies Timnat-Serach with the ruins of Chirbet Tibna or the village of Kafir Haris. Cf. Wszystkie miejsca, II, 2585.
70 Cf. Gaudium et Spes 32.
we choose for ourselves and carry them out courageously. Everyone’s life, regardless of gender, ethnicity, age, or social status, is a variant that implements the same invariant of holy life, i.e. a man living in friendship with God who sanctifies him, a man who —like his Creator— is never alone. In his desire for communion, in his openness to relationships, the man is most fully a creature in the image of God, an individual who builds the unity of the humanity and unites the whole created world in praise of the Creator.

---


74 Cf. Lumen Gentium 1; Choromański, “Osoba”, 82.