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## Christian criticism of pagan religious and magical practices in *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville – an outline

### Abstract

*Etymologiae* was Isidore of Seville's most well-known work. This volume included a number of issues that reflected ancient knowledge adjusted to the changing realities of then contemporary world. The terms defined there were grouped in twenty books, which in turn were divided into chapters. Definitions of individual magical professions were included in Book VIII *The Church and sects* in chapter nine (*Magicians*). One could find there explanations of terms such as: magicians, necromancers, hydromancers, *divini*, *incantatores*, *harioli*, astrologers, *sortilegi*, *salisatores*, haruspices, augurs or *pythonissae*. Isidore believed that magical professions had one thing in common: they were all related to the work of demons. The main research problem of this article has been formulated as follows: to what degree can one talk about a coherent and consistent Christian critique of pagan religious and magical practices in Isidore's *Etymologiae*? The aim of this article is to present Christian critique of pagan religious and magical practices in the Sevillian's most famous work. The following methods are applied in this work: historical investigation, comparison and philosophical analysis.

**Keywords:** Isidore of Seville, magic, magicians, magical professions, Roman law

### Isidore of Seville: life and works

Isidore of Seville (approx. 560–636)<sup>1</sup> was a theologian, historian, encyclopaedist and father and doctor of the Church. He came from an influential and affluent Spanish-Roman family who first lived in Cartagena and then (due to the invasion of the Byzantines on the south of the Iberian Peninsula) moved to Seville. Isidore had three siblings: Leander, Fulgentius and Florentina. Both his brothers were bishops (Leander – of Seville and Fulgentius – of Astigi). Florentina, in turn, became a nun.<sup>2</sup> Isidore lost his parents quite early in his life. His oldest brother<sup>3</sup> assumed responsibility for his upbringing and education<sup>4</sup> and after his death Isidore took over the bishop's capital.<sup>5</sup>

The Sevillian had an opinion of an outstanding speaker and preacher. He participated in a number of synods that took place in Spain and presided over the sessions of the IV Council of Toledo. He took actions intended to raise the clergy-men's intellectual and moral standards. He took effort to open bishop's schools in Seville, Toledo and Zaragoza and opened his own library and scriptorium. Apart

- 1 For extensive reading on the life of Isidore of Seville see J. Fontaine, *Isidore de Séville. Genèse et originalité de la culture hispanique au temps de Wisigoths*, Turnhout 2001; T. Krynicka, *Izydor z Sewilli*, Kraków 2007; M.C. Díaz y Díaz, *Introducción general*, in: J. Oroz Reta, M.-A. Marcos Casquero (eds.), *San Isidoro de Sevilla. Etimologías. Edición bilingüe*, Madrid 2004, pp. 1–258; A. Ledzińska, *Gramatyka wobec sztuk wyzwolonych w pismach Izydora z Sewilli. Origo et fundamentum liberalium litterarum*, Kraków 2014, pp. 25–48; F. Drączkowski, s.v. *Isidore of Seville: Encyklopedia Katolicka*, Vol. VII, Lublin 1997, coll. 619–621 along with literature cited there.
- 2 For more on Isidore's family see J. Fontaine, P. Cazier, *Qui a chasse de Carthaginoise Severianus et les siens? Observations sur l'histoire familiale d'Isidore de Séville*, in: M. del Carmen Carlé (ed.), *Estudios en homenaje a Don Claudio Sánchez Albornoz en sus 90 años*, Vol. 1, Buenos Aires 1983, pp. 349–400 (reprint in: J. Fontaine, *Tradition et l'actualité chez Isidore de Séville*, London 1988), pp. 349–400; M.C. Díaz y Díaz, *Introducción...*, pp. 100–103.
- 3 Leander was bishop of Seville before 580. He was an active and influential clergyman. During his ambassadorship in Constantinople he made friends with papal emissary Gregory (later Pope Gregory the Great), who devoted his work *Moralia in Job* to him. Under Leander's guidance, sons of Visigoth king, Hermenigild and Rekkared, converted from Arianism to Catholicism. See *Introduction*, in: S.A. Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach, O. Berghof (eds. and trans.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, Cambridge 2006, p. 7.
- 4 Isidore most likely received education at a monastic and Episcopalian school under Leander's guidance. For more on Isidore's education see: A. Ledzińska, *Gramatyka wobec sztuk wyzwolonych...*, pp. 29–37; P. Riché, *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West: Sixth through Eighth Centuries*, Columbia 1976, trans. J.J. Contreni from *Education et culture dans l'Occident barbare, 6e–8e siècle*, Paris 1962, p. 289ff.
- 5 F. Drączkowski, s.v. *Izydor z Sewilli*, coll. 619; P. Smoliński, s.v. *Izydor z Sewilli*, in: A. Maryniarczyk et al. (eds.), *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii*, Vol. 5, Lublin 2002, p. 156.

from that, he kept correspondence with Sisebut, king of Visigoths.<sup>6</sup> His contemporaries admired his knowledge and intellectual attributes. The breadth of his knowledge was impressive.<sup>7</sup> He drew on pagan authors and Fathers of the Church alike. He knew well Martial's *Epigrams*, Tertullian's *On the Spectacles* or Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*.<sup>8</sup> He left behind works<sup>9</sup> on dogmatic,<sup>10</sup> exegetic,<sup>11</sup> historical<sup>12</sup> and didactic matters.<sup>13</sup>

*Etymologiae* is the most famous work of the Sevillian. It comprises the following twenty books: I. *Grammar*;<sup>14</sup> II. *Rhetoric and dialectic*;<sup>15</sup> III. *Mathematics*;<sup>16</sup> IV. *Medicine*;<sup>17</sup> V. *Laws and times*;<sup>18</sup> VI. *Books and ecclesiastical offices*;<sup>19</sup> VII. *God, angels and saints*;<sup>20</sup> VIII. *The church and sects*;<sup>21</sup> IX. *Languages, nations, reigns, the*

6 See F. Drączkowski, s.v. *Izydor z Sewilli*, coll. 619.

7 Starowieyski concludes: "Isidore did not know Greek and the numerous Greek words included in *Etymologiae* come second-hand. He learned his knowledge of Greek literature also from church grammarians and writers who, in turn, due to their own lack of knowledge of Greek, often relied on other writers". See M. Starowieyski, *Obraz literatury klasycznej pogańskiej w dziełach Izydora z Sewilli*. Part II. *Literatura rzymska*, "Meander" 1975, No. 30, p. 30. Isidore's knowledge of Hebrew was limited to names mentioned by Jerome. See P. Riché, *Education and Culture...*, p. 302; *Introduction*, in: *The Etymologies...*, p. 7, footnote 16.

8 See *Introduction*, in: *The Etymologies...*, p. 7.

9 The list of Isidore's works was drawn up by his pupil and friends, Braulio of Zaragoza in his *Renotatio librorum Isidori*. Braulio's *Renotatio librorum Isidori* was attached to Isidore's treaty *De viris illustribus*.

10 They include, for example: *Sententiarum libri tres* (PL 83.537–738); *Contra Iudaeos ad Florentinam sororem* (PL 83.449–537).

11 They include, for example: *Allegoriae quaedam Sacrae Scripturae [De nominibus legis et evangeliorum]* (PL 83.97–130); *De ortu et obitu Patrum* (PL 83.129–156); *Mysticorum expositio sacramentorum, seu quaestiones in Vetus Testamentum* (PL 83.207–424); *Liber numerorum qui in Sanctis Scripturis occurrunt* (PL 83.179–200).

12 They include, for example: *Historia Gothorum, Vandalorum, Sueborum* (PL 83.1057–1082); *De viris illustribus* (PL 83.1081–1106); *Chronika* (PL 83.1017–1053).

13 They include, for example: *Etymologiae* (PL 82.73–728); *De differentiis verborum* (PL 83.9–70); *De natura rerum* (PL 83.963–1018).

14 Isid. *etym.* 1: *De grammatica*.

15 Isid. *etym.* 2: *De rhetorica et dialectica*.

16 Isid. *etym.* 3: *De mathematica*.

17 Isid. *etym.* 4: *De medicina*.

18 Isid. *etym.* 5: *De legibus et temporibus*.

19 Isid. *etym.* 6: *De libris et officiis ecclesiasticis*.

20 Isid. *etym.* 7: *De deo, angelis et sanctis*.

21 Isid. *etym.* 8: *De ecclesia et sectis*.

military, citizens, family relationships;<sup>22</sup> X. Vocabulary;<sup>23</sup> XI. The human being and portents;<sup>24</sup> XII. Animals;<sup>25</sup> XIII. The cosmos and its parts;<sup>26</sup> XIV. The earth and its parts;<sup>27</sup> XV. Buildings and fields;<sup>28</sup> XVI. Stones and metals;<sup>29</sup> XVII. Rural matters;<sup>30</sup> XVIII. War and games;<sup>31</sup> XIX. Ships, buildings and clothing;<sup>32</sup> XX. Provisions and various implements.<sup>33</sup> The division was made by Braulio of Zaragoza – Isidore’s pupil and friend, to whom the author sent his work for corrections. The first three books covered disciplines of seven liberal arts (*artes liberales*):<sup>34</sup> *trivium* and *quadrivium*.<sup>35</sup>

*Etymologiae* was also known as *Origines*<sup>36</sup> (hence its alternative name: *Etymologiarum sive Originarum libri XX*). It might have even borne the name *Origines* in the first place, as evidenced by a dedication letter from Sisebut king of Visigoths.<sup>37</sup> It also features in Braulio’s correspondence.<sup>38</sup> Starowieyski believes that *Origines* reflects well an important subject of Isidore’s interest, that is “creators, thus who invented a given philosophical school, grammatical sign, who first coined a certain phrase, who invented a letter, metric system or literary genre.” Among the Sevillian’s “discoverers,” “mythical characters mix with historical figures: nymph

22 Isid. *etym.* 9: *De linguis, gentibus, regnis, militia, civibus, affinitatibus*.

23 Isid. *etym.* 10: *De vocabulis*.

24 Isid. *etym.* 11: *De homine et portentis*.

25 Isid. *etym.* 12: *De animalibus*.

26 Isid. *etym.* 13: *De mundo et partibus*.

27 Isid. *etym.* 14: *De terra et partibus*.

28 Isid. *etym.* 15: *De aedificiis et agris*.

29 Isid. *etym.* 16: *De lapidibus et metallis*.

30 Isid. *etym.* 17: *De rebus rusticis*.

31 Isid. *etym.* 18: *De bello et ludis*.

32 Isid. *etym.* 19: *De navibus aedificiis et vestibis*.

33 Isid. *etym.* 20: *De mensis*.

34 More of liberal arts in the works of Isidore of Seville in: A. Ledzińska, *Gramatyka wobec sztuk wyzwolonych...*, pp. 152–171.

35 See L.A. Hernando Cuadrado, *La gramática en las «Etymologiae» de San Isidoro*, “Miscelánea Comillas. Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales” 2013, Vol. 71, p. 328.

36 More on the titles of Isidore’s most famous work in: M.C. Díaz y Díaz, *Introducción...*, pp. 170–174; R. Schmidt, “*Origines*” oder “*Etymologiae*”? *Die Bezeichnung der Enzyklopädie des Isidor von Sevilla in den Handschriften des Mittelalters*, in: A. Hofmeister, U. Scheil (eds.), *Festschrift für Adolf Hofmeister zum 70. Geburtstage am 9. August 1953 dargebracht von seinen Schülern, Freunden und Fachgenossen*, Halle 1955, pp. 223–232.

37 See J. Fontaine, *Cohérence et originalité de l’étymologie isidorienne*, in: F. Rodríguez, J. Iturriaga (eds.), *Homenaje a Eleuterio Elorduy S.J.*, Bilbao 1978, pp. 142–144.

38 See M.C. Díaz y Díaz, *Introducción...*, pp. 170–171.

Carmenta<sup>39</sup> is as real for Isidore as Sappho or Pindar.<sup>40</sup> However, as works on his volume progressed, he focused most on the etymology of terms.<sup>41</sup> This is also why he decided to title his work *Etymologie*.<sup>42</sup>

The Sevillian “was interested in the word as such, its origin, use, meaning and interpretation.”<sup>43</sup> The following stages in the Isidorean process of etymological defining may be distinguished:

- defining a term;
- analysis of the term (the word itself, to discover what it includes or its origin, or the meaning of its relationship with other, especially Greek, words,);
- explanation of the relationships of the term with the designate;
- explanation of linguistic ways of understanding the term.

When it comes to the two latter stages, the knowledge of ancient realities, which also accommodated history of the word and history of the defined object, was fundamental.<sup>44</sup>

Isidore is included in the generation of the “last Romans” and at the same time the first creators of the medieval culture.<sup>45</sup> Rudiments of ancient scholarship recorded in his *Etymologiae* are a unique source of history of the ancient culture, and in the Middle Ages they served as “the only and universally accepted encyclopaedia.”<sup>46</sup> Isidore adjusted the ancient culture in it to his contemporary reader. Thus, he

39 Carmenta (Latin *Carmentis*) was a nymph from whom Italy received the Latin alphabet. She was called *Carmentis* because she sang songs (*carmina*) about the future. Before she arrived in Italy she had been called Nicostrate. See Isid. *etym.* 1.4.1.

40 M. Starowieyski, *Obraz literatury klasycznej*..., p. 31.

41 Isidore defined etymology as “the origin of words, when the force of a verb or a noun is inferred through interpretation”. See Isid. *etym.* 1.29.1: *Etymologia est origo vocabulorum, cum vis verbi vel nominis per interpretationem colligitur*.

42 See M.C. Díaz y Díaz, *Introducción*..., pp. 171–172.

43 M. Starowieyski, *Obraz literatury klasycznej*..., p. 31.

44 See L.A. Hernando Cuadrado, *La gramática en las «Etymologiae»*..., p. 329.

45 More on this in: В.И. Уколова, Античное наследие и культура раннего Средневековья (конец V – середина VII века), Москва 1989, pp. 196–199 (Ukolowa W.I., *Antyczne i kultury wczesnego Średniowiecza (koniec V – pierwsza połowa VII wieku)*, Moskwa 1989, pp. 196–199); A. Garcia Gallo, *San Isidoro jurista*, in: M.C. Díaz y Díaz (ed.), *Isidoriana, Estudios sobre San Isidoro de Sevilla en el XIV Centenario de su nacimiento*, León 1961, p. 133; J. Fontaine, *Isidore de Seville et la culture classique dans l'Espagne wisigothique*, Paris 1959, pp. 807–830.

46 See A. Dębiński, M. Jońca, *Słowo wprowadzenia*, in: A. Dębiński, M. Jońca (eds.), *Izydor z Sewilli. O prawach*, Lublin 2021, p. 12.

reconciled ancient material with the Christian world-view.<sup>47</sup> Dębiński believes that: “*Etymologiae*, created in the Andalusian Seville, gained immense popularity; its fame quickly crossed the borders of the Iberian Peninsula and spread throughout the Christian world. This work was re-written, translated, interpreted, commented on and copied by other authors. *Etymologiae* gained an unquestionable position of a basic textbook of medieval schools; it was the most read book after the Bible.”<sup>48</sup>

### Magic and magicians in *Etymologiae*

Knowledge on magic professions may be found in Book VIII of *Etymologiae*, *The Church and sects*.<sup>49</sup> It comprises eleven chapters. The ninth one is devoted to magicians.<sup>50</sup> The concept of “magicians” is used there in a broad meaning. It refers to magicians of various kinds. It includes diviners, healers and others, as well as Persian priests, first of whom was Zoroaster,<sup>51</sup> pharaoh’s magicians,<sup>52</sup> Circe,<sup>53</sup> *malefici*, condemned by Roman law<sup>54</sup> and wise men from the East<sup>55</sup> referred to in Matthew’s Gospel.<sup>56</sup>

Interestingly, the chapter *De magis* only addresses magicians in its first ten paragraphs. Its further parts describe other characters that deal with secret arts, such as necromancers<sup>57</sup> or hydromancers<sup>58</sup> (the latter were introduced as knowledgeable in

47 See E.C. Криницына, Исидор Севильский как правовед: от римского права к латинскому богословию, „Вестник РГГУ. Серия История. Филология. Культурология. Востоковедение” 2011, Vol. 14, p. 209 (E.S. Krinicyna, *Isidor Sewilskij kak prawowied: ot rimskogo k łatinskomu bogosłowiju*, “Więstnik RGGU. Serija Istorija. Filologija. Kulturologija Wostokowiedienije” 2011, No. 14, p. 209).

48 A. Dębiński, *Wiedza o prawie w ujęciu Izydora z Sewilli*, “Studia Prawnicze KUL” 2022, No. 1, p. 129.

49 Isid. *etym.* 8. *De ecclesia et sectis*.

50 For a reflection on the meaning of the very title of this chapter and the term (*magi*) used in it see: W.E. Klingshirn, *Isidore of Seville’s Taxonomy of Magicians and Diviners*, “Traditio” 2003, No. 58, pp. 61–65.

51 Isid. *etym.* 8.9.1.

52 Isid. *etym.* 8.9.4.

53 Isid. *etym.* 8.9.5.

54 Isid. *etym.* 8.9.9.

55 Isid. *etym.* 8.9.25.

56 See W.E. Klingshirn, *Isidore of Seville’s ...*, pp. 63–64.

57 Isid. *etym.* 8.9.11.

58 Isid. *etym.* 8.9.12.

a particular kinds of divinations – *genus divinationis*).<sup>59</sup> Then other professions and practices are characterized<sup>60</sup> (the term *magi* is used only once there).<sup>61</sup>

The Bishop of Seville presents the history of magicians in *Etymologiae*. The first one was Zoroaster<sup>62</sup> who operated in Persia. Many centuries later, when Hippocrates gained fame in the field of medicine,<sup>63</sup> Democritus developed magical arts in Greece.<sup>64</sup> Then, (relying on Lucan's testimony<sup>65</sup>) the Sevillian explains what they were also highly developed among Assyrians, where future was told from the entrails of animals (haruspices), from flights of birds (augurus) or by means of astrology.<sup>66</sup>

According to Isidore, the knowledge of magical arts, through the instruction of the evil angels, "held sway over the entire world for many centuries."<sup>67</sup> Haruspex, augury and necromancy were invented to gain knowledge about the future<sup>68</sup> and about hell.<sup>69</sup> The demons summoned by the magicians deceive human eyes by means of insidious tricks. They make people see things not the way they really are.<sup>70</sup> The Sevillian believed that the threat is real and tangible. The skills of magicians advanced to such a point that they even countered Moses and turned staffs into serpents<sup>71</sup> and water into blood.<sup>72</sup> However, their actions were not miracles, but illusion-involving trickery (*praestigia*).<sup>73</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Isid. *etym.* 8.9.13.

<sup>60</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>61</sup> See W.E. Klingshirn, *Isidore of Seville's ...*, p. 65.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Apul. *apol.* 26.1–3. See also: Isid. *etym.* 8.9.1.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Plin. *nat. hist.* 30.1–2. Pliny believed that magic combined three arts which had the greatest impact on human minds. It originated from medicine and then relied on religion and astrology.

<sup>64</sup> See Isid. *etym.* 8.9.2.

<sup>65</sup> See Lukan, *Phars.*, 6.427–429.

<sup>66</sup> See Isid. *etym.* 8.9.2.

<sup>67</sup> See Isid. *etym.* 8.9.3: *in toto terrarum orbe plurimis saeculis valuit*. See also: Plin. *nat. hist.* 30.1: *in toto terrarum orbe, plurimisque seculis valuit*.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Cic. *de div.* 1. 1: *scientiam rerum futurarum*.

<sup>69</sup> Isid. *etym.* 8.9.3. Isidore lists magical arts after Lactantius, only omitting astrology. Cf. Lact. *div. inst.* 2.17 pr.: *Eorum inventa sunt astrologia et aruspicina et auguratio, et ipsa quae dicuntur oracula, et necromantia...*; see also W.E. Klingshirn, *Isidore of Seville's...*, p. 68.

<sup>70</sup> See Lact. *div. inst.* 2.15. Cf. Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 26.

<sup>71</sup> See *Exod.* 7.10–12.

<sup>72</sup> See Ibidem 7.20–22.

<sup>73</sup> Isid. *etym.* 8.9.4. They were invented by Mercury and their name derived from the fact that they cause a different perception of certain events. Activities observed in real life turn out to be an illusion. See Isid. *etym.* 8.9.33.



The Sevillian believes the origins of magical arts to lie in the activity of the devil. He is not alone in this view, because even among the pagan circles the activity of magicians was thought to be based on a power gained from demons.<sup>74</sup> The magician's most important task was to win over a supernatural aider called with the Greek term *paredros*<sup>75</sup> (literally: "one who sits next to"). These could be demons, ghosts of the dead,<sup>76</sup> or gods. The "collaboration" was not, as a rule, ad hoc. A *pere-dos* bound themselves with the magician for life. Without him a magician could not be effective.<sup>77</sup> The author of *Etymologiae* often times accuses magicians of summoning demons,<sup>78</sup> and he calls magical practices the "art of demons" (*ars daemonum*), which is an effect of a harmful relationship of people and evil angels.<sup>79</sup> For this reasons, a Christian should avoid anything related to it and condemn and reject any kind of magical activity.<sup>80</sup>

The bishop of Seville lists a few examples of magical practices. Circe, described by Homer in his *Odyssey*, who changes companions of Odysseus (Ulysses) into beasts, he calls *maga famosissima*. He mentions activities of Arcadians who made offerings to their god and whoever consumed this was turned into the a wolf.<sup>81</sup> He also refers to Virgil's *Aeneid*, which mentions a certain sorceress.<sup>82</sup> She could use her spells to soothe minds and to bring hard cares, to make the water of rivers stand still, to turn the stars back, and to raise ghosts of the dead.<sup>83</sup> The last skill links her with the Biblical woman of Endor, who summons the ghost of prophet Samuel at the request of Saul.<sup>84</sup> Isidore also includes the god Mercury in the groups

<sup>74</sup> See P. Wygralak, *Stanowisko Kościoła wobec idolatrii i magii na terenach Galii i Hiszpanii w późnej starożytności chrześcijańskiej (VI–VII w.)*, Poznań 2011, p. 133.

<sup>75</sup> The Latin equivalent of this word was *spirytus familiaris*.

<sup>76</sup> Especially ghosts of people who died prematurely or a sudden death. It was believed that because they could not experience the joy of earthly life or have children, they were filled with jealousy, hatred and a desire to cause harm to the living. This is why they were keen to help the magicians. Ghosts of convicts were exceptionally appreciated (e.g. those beheaded or crucified) and also of defeated gladiators. See A. Wypustek, *Magia antyczna*, Wrocław 2001, pp. 314–315.

<sup>77</sup> See A. Wypustek, *Magia...*, pp. 313–314.

<sup>78</sup> Isid. *etym.* 8.9.10.

<sup>79</sup> See Isid. *etym.* 8.9.31.

<sup>80</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>81</sup> Isid. *etym.* 8.9.5. See also Plin. *nat. hist.* 30.2.

<sup>82</sup> See Vergil, *Aen.* 4.487–491; Isid. *etym.* 8.9.6.

<sup>83</sup> Isid. *etym.* 8.9.6.

<sup>84</sup> Isid. *etym.* 8.9.7. See also: 1 *Sam.* 28.7.



of specialists in summoning ghosts of the dead. He describes his magical skills by using quotations from Prudentius's *Libri contra Symmachum*.<sup>85</sup>

### The concept of a magician and types of magicians

The author of *Etymologiae* believes magicians as those who are usually called *malefici* "because of the magnitude of their crimes."<sup>86</sup> The Roman law was certainly inspiration for constructing this "definition". It is because the same phrase may be found in two anti-magical regulations of the Theodosian Code. In Constantius II's constitution intended for the people (*ad populum*) in 357, magicians were listed next to other representatives of forbidden professions: haruspices, augurs, seers, Chaldeans, astrologers and fortune-tellers. It provides that "because of the magnitude of their crimes" they are commonly called "evildoers" (*malefici*).<sup>87</sup> The 358 law of the same emperor also lists magicians (haruspices, fortune-tellers, augurs, and astrologists) as a group that commit crimes.<sup>88</sup> It mentions "the custom of the common people", according to which a magician is often called an evildoer (*maleficu*).<sup>89</sup>

Isidore then moves on to a detailed description of magical practices. He defines necromancers as those who use incantations to bring the dead back to make them tell prophecies and to answer what is asked for.<sup>90</sup> The blood of the dead is used for this procedure. It is interesting that even in the times of Isidore demons were strongly believed to like blood. Whenever necromancy was practiced, blood was mixed with water to summon them easier. The bishop of Seville derives the term "necromancer" from Greek words *nekrós* and *manteía*. *Nekrós* in Greek means "dead" and *manteía* – "fortune-telling."<sup>91</sup>

Isidore believed hydromancy<sup>92</sup> to be related to necromancy. He understands the former as calling up "the shades of demons" (*umbrae daemonum*) by gazing into

<sup>85</sup> See Prudent, *contr. Symm.* 1.90–91; 1.93; 1.96–98; Isid. *etym.* 8.9.8.

<sup>86</sup> Isid. *etym.* 8.9.9.

<sup>87</sup> See C.Th. 9.16.4.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. M. Jońca, *Przestępstwo znieważenia grobu w rzymskim prawie karnym*, Lublin 2013, pp. 161–162, footnote 351.

<sup>89</sup> C.Th. 9.16.6: *si quis magus vel magicis contaminibus adsuetus, qui maleficus vulgi consuetudine nuncupatur*.

<sup>90</sup> See Aug. *de civ. dei.* 7.35.

<sup>91</sup> Isid. *etym.* 8.9.11.

<sup>92</sup> See Aug. *de civ. dei.* 7.35.

water. All this to get information about the future from them.<sup>93</sup> The name hydromancers (who, by the way, were also to use blood) derives from water,<sup>94</sup> and their secret art was born in Persia.<sup>95</sup> Isidore quotes here the words of Varro on the existence of four types of divination: from earth, from water, from air and from fire. Hence the names: geomancy (*geomantia*), hydromancy (*hydromantia*), aeromancy (*aeromantia*) and pyromancy (*piromantia*).<sup>96</sup> However, save for hydromancy the Sevillian does not describe the other three in more detail. The next group of magicians are *divini*. This term means “filled with god” (*deo pleni*). The author of *Etymologiae* believes they pretend to be filled with divine inspiration and forecast what is to come for people.

He emphasises that there are two types of divination: art, craft (*ars*) and madness (*furor*).<sup>97</sup> He borrows this division from Cicero, who divides divination into natural and artificial.<sup>98</sup> However, Isidore replaces Cicero’s word *natura* with the noun *furor*. This manoeuvre testifies that Isidore of Seville knew two classifications of divination: Varro’s (four kinds of divination) and Cicero’s (two kinds of divination). The taxonomy of the author of *Etymologiae* is in line with Cicero’s vision. He divides *divini* based on two categories: demonic inspiration (*furor*) and technical skills (*ars*). He then distinguishes their three further sub-groups. The first covers fortune-tellers who demonstrate the greatest demonic inspiration (*incantatores, harioli*), and the third one is composed of those who demonstrate most *ars* (astrologers, *sortilegi, salisatores*). Isidore places haruspices, augurs, and *pythonissae* among them. It is a mixed group. *Pythonissae* demonstrate demonic inspiration while haruspices and augurs operate solely by technical skills.<sup>99</sup>

The author of *Etymologiae* calls *incantatores* those who work using words (spells).<sup>100</sup> *Arioli (harioli)* offer sacrifices to pagan deities in exchange for a *responsa* (an answer for a question, advice or prophecy) from demons.<sup>101</sup> Their activity has a long tradition. Cicero lists them next to haruspices, augurs, fortune tellers (*vates*)

<sup>93</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>94</sup> Isid. *etym.* 8.9.12.

<sup>95</sup> Isid. *etym.* 8.9.13.

<sup>96</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>97</sup> Isid. *etym.* 8.9.14.

<sup>98</sup> See Cic. *de div.* 1.6.11: *Duo sunt enim divinandi genera, quorum alterum artis est, alterum naturae.*

<sup>99</sup> See W.E. Klingshirn, *Isidore of Seville’s...*, p. 71.

<sup>100</sup> Isid. *etym.* 8.9.15.

<sup>101</sup> See Isid. *etym.* 8.9.16. See also: P. Wygralak, *Stanowisko Kościoła...*, p. 85.

and those who interpret dreams.<sup>102</sup> He also mentions them a few times in his treaty *Concerning Divination*. From there, we learn about a belief that if human souls were afforded free and unrestricted independent movement, without reason and knowledge, they could enter the state of arousal either during a prophetic frenzy or during sleep.<sup>103</sup>

*Etymologiae* calls haruspices “observers of the hours” because their task is to watch over people’s time discipline. They also tell the future by examining the entrails of animals.<sup>104</sup> A certain Tages is said to have first given haruspices’ art of divination to the Etruscans.<sup>105</sup> According to an ancient tale, when a certain farmer ploughed his field, Tages jumped out of the soil unexpectedly, dictated the principles of haruspices’ divination and died the same day. The Romans translated these books from Etruscan to their own language.<sup>106</sup>

Augurs deal with reading various signs, mostly from the flight and calls of birds. Isidore juxtaposes them with auspices. He reminds us that auspices owned their name to the “observations of birds” (*avium aspicium*), while *auguria* to “bird calls” (*avium garria*). Similarly, the etymology of the word *auguria* may be derived from *avigerium*, that is, how “birds behave” (*avis gerit*).<sup>107</sup> There were two kinds of auspices: one related to the sense of sight, the other to the sense of hearing. Sight focused on the flight of birds, hearing on their calls.<sup>108</sup> *Auguria* were invented in Phrygia.<sup>109</sup> Isidore of Seville then lists *pythonissae*, whose name derives from Pythian Apollo,<sup>110</sup> believed to be the inventor of divination.<sup>111</sup>

Isidore believes astrology to the most “scientific” forms of divination and thus the least prone to interference from demons. He identifies a few classes within it: *genethliaci*, *mathematici*, *horoscopi*, *magi* and experts in “hours” astrology (if we are

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102 Cic. *de nat. deor.* 1.55.

103 Cic. *de div.* 1.4.

104 Isid. *etym.* 8.9.17.

105 Isid. *etym.* 8.9.34. See also Cic. *de div.* 2.50.

106 Isid. *etym.* 8.9.35. and Cic. *de div.* 2.50.

107 Isid. *etym.* 8.9.19.

108 Isid. *etym.* 8.9.20.

109 See Isid. *etym.* 8.9.32. Cf. Cic. *de div.* 1.92; Isid. *etym.* 8.9.32: *Auguria autem avium Phryges primi invenerunt*.

110 Isidore derived *Pythios* – Apollo’s nickname – from the fact of the deity killing a large serpent (Python) in Delphi – Isid. *etym.* 8.11–54–55.

111 Isid. *etym.* 8.9.21.

to take into account the definition of haruspices proposed by Isidore).<sup>112</sup> He places *sortilegi* and *salisatores*, who foretold the future by examining texts, next to them.<sup>113</sup>

Astrologers owned their name to telling future from the stars (*asteres*),<sup>114</sup> *genethliaci* on account of their examinations of nativities.<sup>115</sup> They devised horoscopes of people according to the twelve zodiac signs and attempted to predict the characters, actions, and circumstances of people by the course of the stars at their birth, or even events that are to happen in their life.<sup>116</sup>

The common terms “mathematicians” (*mathematici*)<sup>117</sup> was still used to refer to astrologers in the time of Isidore. The noun *constellationes* was an important term associated with their activity; it referred to how stars were aligned at the moment of one’s birth.<sup>118</sup> *Horoscopi* dealt with a similar activity; they analysed the hour (*hora*) of man’s birth to predict events in his future.<sup>119</sup>

Astrologers were originally called magicians. Isidore reminds us that it is this term that may be found in the history of magicians from the East,<sup>120</sup> described in the Gospel, who predicted the birth of Christ.<sup>121</sup> Later on they were only referred to as mathematicians (*mathematici*).<sup>122</sup> It is a problematic matter, which is why the Sevillian explains that practicing astrology was allowed only until the times of the Gospel. After Christ was born no one had the right to do horoscopes.<sup>123</sup> There was no need to gaze at the sky anymore because the Saviour was born and God’s promise was finally fulfilled.<sup>124</sup>

112 See Isid. *etym.* 8.9.17.

113 See W.E. Klingshirn, *Isidore of Seville’s ...*, p. 72.

114 Isid. *etym.* 8.9.22.

115 See Aug. *de doctr. christ.* 2.21.32.

116 Isid. *etym.* 8.9.23.

117 See Aug. *de doctr. christ.* 2.21.32.

118 See Isid. *etym.* 8.9.24; Aug. *de doctr. christ.* 2.22.33.

119 Isid. *etym.* 8.9.27.

120 Matt 2.1–2. See also: J. Salij (ed.), Św. Tomasz z Akwinu, *Ewangelia Ojców Kościoła*, Poznań 2001, pp. 31–36.

121 See Tert. *de idol.* 9.3.

122 Isid. *etym.* 9.25).

123 See Isid. *etym.* 8.9.26; Tert. *de idol.* 9.4.

124 See P. Wygiałak, *Stanowisko Kościoła...*, p. 81.

Other kinds of fortune-tellers described by Isidore are *sortilegi*<sup>125</sup> and *salisatores*. The former used false sacred scriptures (especially the so-called “lives of the saints”) and told future by analysing them.<sup>126</sup> *Salisatores* told future on the basis of leaps of certain body parts.<sup>127</sup> The use of amulets, magical symbols and other “magical” object is also condemned by the bishop of Seville. He reminds his readers that even physicians do not approve of them.<sup>128</sup>

## Conclusions

Isidore devotes the entire chapter nine in his Book VIII of *Etymologiae*, that is *The Church and sects*, to magicians. However, only 11 paragraphs (out of the total of 35) address magicians *sensu stricto*. The remaining 24 paragraphs include information on other magical professions. In his work, the bishop of Seville uses works of both pagan and Christian authors. His source base relies on the works of Pliny the Elder, Augustus, Tertullian, Lactantius and Cicero.

Irrespective of the adopted taxonomy, all professions described by Isidore had one thing in common: their demonic origin. The bishop of Seville consistently emphasized that all supernatural effects invoked by practising magical arts have their source in forbidden contacts between man and demons. Those effects that are only a crafty illusion deserve equally severe condemnation as a form of deceit. None of the behaviours described above are befitting a good Christian.

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<sup>125</sup> For extensive reading on the emergence and evolution of the term *sortilegus* see W.E. Klingshirn, *Inventing the sortilegus: Lot Divination and Cultural Identity in Italy, Rome, and the Provinces*, in: C.E. Schultz, Paul B. Harvey Jr. (eds.), *Religion in Republican Italy*, “Yale Classical Studies” Cambridge 2006, No. 33, pp. 137–161.

<sup>126</sup> Isid. *etym.* 8.9.28.

<sup>127</sup> Isid. *etym.* 8.9.29.

<sup>128</sup> Isid. *etym.* 8.9.30.

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## Chrześcijańska krytyka pogańskich praktyk religijnych i magicznych w „Etymologiach” Izydora z Sewilli – zarys problematyki

### Streszczenie

Najbardziej znanym dziełem Izydora z Sewilli były *Etymologie*. Dzieło zawierało wiele zagadnień odzwierciedlających antyczną wiedzę dostosowaną do zmieniających się realiów ówczesnego świata. Zdefiniowane tam pojęcia zostały pogrupowane w dwudziestu księgach, które z kolei podzielono na rozdziały. Definicje poszczególnych magicznych profesji ujęto w księdze VIII zatytułowanej *O Kościele i sektach* w rozdziale dziewiątym (*O magach*). Można było tam odnaleźć wyjaśnienia takich terminów jak: magowie, nekromanci, hydromanci, *divini*, *incantatores*, *harioli*, astrologowie, *sortilegi*, *salisatores*, haruspikowie, augurowie czy *pythonissae*. Zdaniem Izydora magiczne profesje łączyło jedno: wszystkie były powiązane z działalnością demonów. Główny problem badawczy artykułu został sformułowany w brzmieniu: w jakim zakresie w „Etymologiach” Izydora z Sewilli można mówić o spójnej i konsekwentnej chrześcijańskiej krytyce pogańskich praktyk religijnych oraz magicznych? Celem artykułu zatem jest ukazanie chrześcijańskiej krytyki pogańskich praktyk religijnych



i magicznych w najsłynniejszym dziele Sewilczyka. Zastosowano metody: historyczną, porównawczą i filologiczną.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Izidor z Sewilli, magia, magowie, magiczne profesje, prawo rzymskie

#### CYTOWANIE

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