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The influence and use of Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*

Аннотация. Статья посвящена такой дискуссионной проблеме, как использование в «Этимологиях» Исидора Севильского в качестве источника «Естественной истории» Плиния Старшего — напрямую или косвенным образом. Типология источников, использованных Исидором, рассматривается в соответствии с классификацией Фонтена [Fontaine 1960: 149]: 1) источники, установленные благодаря параллельному тексту; 2) источники, установленные без обращения к письменным текстам; 3) свидетельства предыдущих источников об аналогичном предмете изложения, которые, вероятно, не использовались Исидором; 4) тексты, косвенным образом относящиеся к тексту Исидора и содержащие идентичную с его трудом лексику. Анализируются прямые заимствования из Плиния, косвенное использование его текста, а также предположительное заимствование, если источник не упоминается. Рассматриваются приемы работы Исидора с источниками посредством сравнения отдельных текстов. Творческий метод Исидора при написании «Этимологий» обозначается термином *conflatio*. Изложенное позволяет сделать вывод, что Исидору «Естественная история» была известна и что он использовал ее в качестве источника, хотя он использовал этот материал лишь по необходимости.

Ключевые слова: Плиний Старший, «Естественная история», Исидор Севильский, «Этимологии», использование литературных источников, краткое изложение текста, использование выбранных мест, техника выбранного текста, conflatio, оригинальность Исидора Севильского

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The influence and use of Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*

Abstract. This article discusses the controversial subject of the use — whether direct or indirect, through intermediary sources or *excerpta* — of Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*. The types of sources used by Isidore are analysed according to the classification established by Fontaine [1960: 149]: 1) sources documented thanks to a specific parallel text; 2) sources used in a non-literal way; 3) evidence from previous sources on the same subject, which Isidore probably did not use himself; 4) texts that, without having a direct relationship to a passage in Isidore, contain a string of words identical to those used by him. On the basis of various examples, some direct mentions of Pliny, other indirect uses and possible direct uses are analysed, even if the author is not mentioned. We also consider how Isidore works, through a comparison of some texts. Here, the technique called 'conflatio' is claimed as a form of work of Isidore when composing his *Etymologies*. In the conclusion, we defend Isidore's knowledge and use of Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*. It is likely that Isidore had Pliny's entire work in his library, even if he used it only in a timely manner for what he needed. We also discuss the actual need to carry out an in-depth, systematic study of this issue.

Keywords: Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, use of literary sources, text summary, use of the *excerpta*, techniques for selecting texts, *conflatio*, Isidore's originality

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Introduction. Issues surrounding the use of literary sources in Isidore of Seville

In the old, initial studies on the literary sources used by Isidore of Seville, e. g. [Dressel 1874; Brehaut 1912], etc., we read how he made great use of Pliny's *Naturalis Historia.* We are told that Isidore knew the work well and had a copy in his famous library. However, despite the suggestions made by Jacques Fontaine (1959) in his unsurpassable thesis *Isidore de Séville et la culture classique dans l'Espagne wisigothique*, this idea went on to change substantially.

For many years, Fontaine's works [Fontaine 1959; 1960; 1961] represented a benchmark for research into Isidore's literary sources. Without a doubt, the suggestions he made, which I will now review briefly, have guided subsequent studies due to their methodological innovation, and thus helped to advance research[1]. However, thanks to this progress, other researchers have started to identify and unravel some problems related to the rigorous application of Fontaine's methods. I refer here to studies such as those conducted by Kindermann [2005], Berno [2010], Naas [2012], Breternitz [2016] and, in particular, Jacques Elfassi[2].

Fontaine established four types of sources used by Isidore of Seville[3]:

1) sources documented thanks to a specific parallel text;

2) sources used in a non-literal way;

3) evidence from previous sources on the same subject, which Isidore probably did not use himself;

4) texts that, without having a direct relationship to a passage in Isidore, contain a string of words identical to those used by Isidore.

Fontaine also established a difference between a direct and indirect source based on two basic criteria:

1) Isidore names the author, proving that he is quoting second hand;

2) the older the author, the less likely that Isidore would have a copy of his work in his library.

As Elfassi has suggested in various studies [Elfassi 2009; 2014a; 2014b; 2015], these considerations, which are valid as a starting point for research, have led some scholars to either assume that Isidore was not aware of some previous sources or accept them without further detail. Although it is not our aim to focus on specific examples, we can confirm that a "hypercritial" analysis of Isidore's texts was embarked upon to identify his understanding of sources, and the understanding and use of pagan authors in particular. Elfassi questions how scholars have tackled Isidore's knowledge of Quintilian, Martial and Pliny the Elder in particular. To this we should also add Varro (*De lingua latina*) and Nonius Marcellus (*De compendiosa doctrina*).

Although there are good studies about Isidore's library, I think further studies should be done about his uses of sources. For example, Rodríguez-Pantoja [1995:

[1] See, for example, [Oroz Reta 1987; Guillaumin 2010; 2011; Martín 2013].

[2] See [Elfassi 2009; 2011; 2014a; 2015]. I would like to thank my colleague and friend Dr. Elfassi for giving me access to the unedited study he completed for his professorship, in which he tackles the issue of Isidore's sources, and in particular the pages devoted to Pliny the Elder [Elfassi 2014b].

[3] I take this scheme fundamentally from [Elfassi 2015: 60–61], who takes it, in turn, from [Fontaine 1960: 149].

18–19] states that Isidore is indirectly aware of Nonius, and Fontaine [1983] is of the belief that Varro was not present in Isidore's library.

We should also explore another kind of indirect source, which may also have been part of the author's cultural heritage but may not have left its mark obviously in his work. This may be what happened with Vitruvius, probably at times through indirect sources, such as Palladius and Caetius Faventinus, although I think he may well make use of Vitruvius directly at times [Velázquez 1997].

Although traditionally it has been questioned that Isidore of Seville made direct use of Pliny the Elder, for example, by Fontaine, [1959: 749], in his edition of *De natura rerum* [1960: 42] the scholar seems to suggest the opposite or at least hint at it.

In fact, Fontaine thinks that the last chapter of this book, *De partibus terrae*, must have only be written by Isidore once he had read the second book of *Naturalis Historia*. However, the lack of references to Pliny in this book and in other chapters of *De natura rerum*, may mean that Isidore only had access to Pliny's work once he had started writing both books — *De natura rerum* and *Etymologiae* — and that he then added references to Pliny in them.

Indirect use of Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*

1. In *Etym*. 12.2. 20 Isidore states the following:

> Isid. *Etym*. 12.2. 20: *Linces dicit Plinius Secundus extra unum non admittere fetum* (Pliny says that lynxes do not bear more than one offspring[4]).

But Pliny makes no such statement. This is 'fake news', taken either from an intermediary source or invented by Isidore himself. It may be that there was a lost source that included this erroneous statement which Isidore had used, but I believe that what may have happened was much simpler: a quote from memory that Isidore attributes to the man he believes holds *auctoritas* when it comes to knowledge about nature and the animal kingdom in particular. Isidore may have just believed that Pliny surely wrote about this and did not bother to check further.

This seems to confirm Fontaine's suggestion that direct mention of the author's name presupposes that Isidore used him either second hand or indirectly.

2. One other explicit mention of Pliny is also clearly an indirect reference:

> Isid. *Etym*. 12.2.28: *Lycisci autem dicuntur, ut ait Plinius, canes ex lupis et canibus, cum inter se forte miscuntur* (Dogs born from the chance mating of wolves with dogs are called *lycisci*, as Pliny says).

The passage is directly derived from:

> Servius, *Eclog*. 3.18: *Lycisci sunt, ut etiam Plinius dicit, canes nati ex lupis et canibus cum inter se forte misceatur*.

[4] For the translations into English of Isidore's passages, see [Barney et al. 2006].

It is also true that *lycisci* does not appear in Pliny[5] and is only attested in Gloss. 5.370.2: *lycisca canis ex lupo et cane datus*).

We should consider this piece of fake news within the context. Isidore is writing about lynxes and is summarising Solinus. At the end of the paragraph he adds the reference to Pliny, perhaps because he wants to complete the information and extrapolate the details Pliny gives on lions, even though this too is false (Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 8.43: *... semel ... edi partum ... uolgum credidisse uideo*).

> Isid. *Etym*. 12.2.28: *Lincis dictus quia in luporum genere numeratur bestia maculis terga distincta ut pardus, sed similis lupo; unde et ille lúkos, iste lincis. Huius urinam conuertere se in duritiam pretiosi lapidis dicunt, qui lyncurius appellatur, quod et ipsas linces sentire hoc documentum probatur: nam egestum liquorem harenis, in quantum potuerint, contegunt inuidia quadam naturae, ne talis egestio transeat in usum humanus. Linces dicit Plinius Secundus extra unum non admittere fetum* (The lynx is so called because it is reckoned among the wolves (*lupus*) in kind; it is a beast that has spotted markings on its back, like a pard, but it is similar to a wolf; whence the wolf has the name *lýkos* and the other animal, '*lynx*.' People say that its urine hardens into a precious stone called *lyncurius* (tourmaline). That the lynxes themselves perceive this is shown by this proof: they bury as much of the excreted liquid in sand as they can, from a sort of natural jealousy lest such excretion should be brought to human use. Pliny Secundus (cf. *Nat. Hist.* 8.43) says that lynxes do not bear more than one offspring).
>
> Solin. *Collect.* 2.38: *ln hoc animalium* (sc. *luporum*) *genere numerantur et lynces, quarum urinas coire in duritiem* (var. *-ciam*) *pretiosi calculi fatentur qui naturas lapidum exquisitius sunt persecuti. Istud etiam ipsas lynces persentiscere hoc documento probatur, quod egestum liquorem ilico arenarum cumulis quantum ualent contegunt, inuidia scilicet ne talis egeries transeat in nostrum usum* (This type of animals (wolves) also comprises lynxes, whose urine crystallizes into precious gems — as reported by those who claim to have studied the nature of stones thoroughly. It has been proven that lynxes are very much aware of this on account of the following evidence: they cover up the liquid with heaps of dirt immediately after urinating; that is, they do so to the best of their abilities so as to preclude the excrement from passing on to our service).

Despite this, the properties of lynx urine, which forms a precious stone called *lyncurium* (based on a popular etymology), reveals that Isidore could indeed have read this interesting fact directly in Pliny:

> Plin. *Nat. Hist*. 8.137: *lyncum umor ita redditus, ubi gignuntur, glaciatur arescitue in gemmas carbunculis similes et igneo colore fulgentes,*

[5] Pliny (8.148) talks about the crossing of dogs with tigers: *E tigribus eos Indi uolunt concipi et ob id in siluis coitus tempore alligant feminas.*

> *lyncurium uocatas atque ob id sucino a plerisque ita generari prodito. nouere hoc sciuntque lynces et inuidentes urinam terra operiunt, eoque celerius solidatur illa* (The water of lynxes, voided in this way when they are born, solidifies or dries up into drops like carbuncles and of brilliant flame-colour, called lynx-water (*lyncurium*) which in the origin of the common story that this is the way in which amber is formed. The lynxes have learnt this and know it, and they jealously cover up their urine with earth, thereby causing it to solidify more quickly)[6].

3. There is no mention of snakes in Pliny either. Once again, Isidore takes this from Servius:

> Isid. *Etym*. 12.4.43: *Dicit autem Plinius, si creditur, quod serpentis caput, etiam si cum duobus euaserit digitis, nihilominus uiuit* (And Pliny says, if it may be believed, that if a snake's head escapes with only two inches of its body, it will still live).
>
> Serv. *Georg*. 3.422: *Nam, ut dicit Plinius, serpentis caput etiam si cum duobus euaserit digitis, nihilo minus uiuit*.

4. In this book, there are other mentions of Pliny on animals that do not suggest a direct consultation of the *Naturalis Historia.*

> Isid. *Etym*. 12.2.9: *Nam Plinius dicit animalia cum acutis unguibus frequenter parere non posse; uitiantur enim intrinsecus se mouentibus catulis* (Hence Pliny says that animals with sharp claws are unable to give birth many times, for they are injured by the cubs moving inside the womb).
>
> Cf. Plin. *Nat. Hist*. 8.43: *Semel autem edi partum, lacerato ungulum acie utero in enixu, uolgum credidisse uideo* (But I notice that there used to be a popular belief that the lioness only bears a cub once, as her womb is wounded by the points of its claws in delivery).

Here, Pliny is referring to lions. I believe that Isidore may be aware of this through Pliny or even Gelius 13.7.1–6, who talks about this topic and follows Pliny, and he extends its use to refer to all animals which may have long, sharp claws.

5. Another example:

> Isid. *Etym*. 12.2.11: *Leopardus ex adulterio leaenae et pardi nascitur et tertiam originem efficit; sicut et Plinius in Naturali Historia dicit, leonem cum parda, aut pardum cum laena concumbere et ex utroque coitu degeneres partus creari, ut mulus et burdo* (The leopard (*leopardus*) is born from the cross-mating of a lioness and a pard, and yields a third breed. So also, Pliny in his *Natural History* says a lion mates with a female pard, or a male pard with a lioness, and from either union this mixed-breed offspring is created, just like a mule or hinny).

[6] Text and translation: [Rackham 1997].

But Pliny says no such thing; what he does say, when he writes about lions and leopards, is that Africa produces various hybrid species.

> Plin. *Nat. Hist*. 8.42: *Magna his* (sc. *leonibus*) *libido coitus et ob hoc maribus ira. Africa haec maxime spectat inopia aquarum ad paucos amnes congregantibus se feris. Ideo multiformes ibi animalium partus, uarie feminis cuiusque generis mares aut ui aut uoluptate miscente* (Sexual passion is strong in this species, with its consequence of quarrelsomeness in the males; this is most observed in Africa, where the shortage of water makes the animals flock to the few rivers. There are consequently many varieties of hybrids in that country, either violence or lust mating the males with the females of each species indiscriminately).

J. André, the editor of Book 12 [André 1986], suggests that this passage may have a link to the following passage from Solinus:

> Solin. *Collect.* 17, 11: *Quorum* (sc. *pardorum) adulteris coitibus degenerantur partus leaenarum et leones quidem* procreantur, *sed ignobiles.*

6. Some of these references demonstrate that Isidore did not check Pliny's work himself but read Servius or Solinus. The Sevillian bishop makes use of other late encyclopaedias, including Solinus and Aulus Gelius above all, and the commentaries on Servius and Virgil. He also uses scholia and excerpts, and St Ambrose of Milan's *Hexaemeron*.

This reason makes it easy to understand Fontaine's suggestion that the greater the difference in time between Isidore (in the 7th century) and his source (in this case, Pliny in the 1st century), the less likely it is that he used this source directly. This argument is a weak one, however, if we remember that Isidore makes use of Virgil, Martial, Lucan and even Servius.

Despite the above, I think that explicit mentions of Pliny by Isidore[7] should not be dismissed as citations from memory. Isidore remembers a paragraph or phrase and believes he read it in Pliny, although he did not have it at hand at the time to check. We obviously have no idea whether Isidore wants to make a personal statement or include a memorised phrase, the origin of which is unclear or he is unsure of, and so he mentions Pliny as an unquestionable text of authority and reference. I do believe, however, that great familiarity with *Naturalis Historia* lies behind his work.

Direct use of Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*?

1. In other examples, the references do suggest direct use of Pliny:

> Isid. *Etym*. 12.6.45: *Torpedo uocata eo quod corpus torpescere faciat, si eam quisque uiuentem tangat. Narrat Plinius Secundus: "Ex Indico mare torpedo etiam procul et e longinquo,*

[7] In those cases in which we can be sure that the reference is not from other authors who mention Pliny.

> *uel si hasta uirgaque adtingatur, quamuis praeualidos lacertos torpescere, quamlibet ad cursum ueloces alligare pedes". Tanta enim uis eius est ut etiam aura corporis sui adficiat membra* (The 'electric-ray' (*torpedo*) is named because it makes the body become numb (*torpescere*) if anyone touches it while it is alive. Pliny Secundus recounts (cf. *Natural History* 32.7): "From the Indian Ocean the electric-ray, even if it is far distant, or if it is touched with a spear or stick, numbs one's muscle, no matter how strong it is, and fetters one's feet, no matter how swift they are." Its force is such that even the aura of its body weakens the limbs).

> Plin. *Nat. Hist*. 32.7: *Quid? non et sine hoc exemplo per se satis esset ex eodem mari torpedo? Etiam procul et e longinquo, uel si hasta uirgaue attingatur, quamuis praeualidos lacertos torpescere, quamlibet ad cursum ueloces alligari pedes?* (But surely, even without this example, evidence enough by itself could be found in the electric-ray, which also is a sea creature. Even at a distance, and that a long distance, or it if it is touched with a spear or rod, to think that the strongest arms are numbed, feet as swift in racing as you like are paralysed!)[8].

As André suggests [1986: 208, note 397], by not transcribing the first phrase Isidore makes an error. He has, without a doubt, read too quickly or in not enough detail, has "extracted" mistaken information from the first phrase. *ex eodem mari*, that is, 'which also comes from the sea', and this leads him to state that 'it comes from the Indian Ocean'.

2. In what follows, Isidore writes about cuttlefish:

> Isid. *Etym*. 12.6.46: *Sepia dicitur quia sepibus interclusa facilius capitur; in coeundo obscenum genus; ore enim concipit sicut uipera. Cuius atramento tanta uis est ut lucernae addito Aethiopas uideri ablato priori lumine quidam tradant* (The cuttlefish (*sepia*) is named because it is more easily caught when it is hemmed in by enclosures (*sepes*, i. e. *saepes*). It is a disgusting species with respect to coition, for it conceives in its mouth as do vipers. There is so much strength in its black ink that some say that when it is placed in a lamp, with the light first removed, people appear to be Ethiopian).

Without a doubt, this passage also is taken straight from Pliny:

> Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 32.141: *Sepiae atramento tanta uis est ut in lucerna addito Aethipas uideri ablato priore lumine Anaxilaus tradit* (The ink of the cuttlefish has so great power that Anaxilaus reports that poured into a lamp the former light utterly vanishes, and people appear as black as Ethiopians).

[8] Text and translation: [Jones 2000].

Isidore prefers to avoid mentioning the Greek author's name here and substitutes the expression *Anaxilaus tradit* by *quidam tradant*.

3. Another explicit mention can be seen in the following:

> Isid. *Etym*. 12.6.63: *Animalium omnium in aquis uiuentium nomina centum quadraginta quattuor Plinius ait, diuisa in generibus beluarum, serpentium communium terrae et aquae, cancrorum, concarum, lucustarum, peloridum, polipporum, solearum, lacertorum et lulliginum et huic similia; ex quibus multa quodam naturae intellectu ordinem temporum suorum agnoscunt, quaedam uero in suis locis sine mutatione uagantur* (Pliny says there are 144 names for all the animals living in the waters, divided into these kinds: whales, snakes common to land and water, crabs, shellfish, lobsters, mussels, octopuses, sole, Spanish mackerel (*lacertus*), squid, and the like. Of these, many recognize the order of their seasons by a kind of natural understanding, while some [wander in their places without change]).

In this example, Isidore seems to be reading the Index of Pliny's work and some other passages and adapting them:

> a) Plin. *Nat. Hist*. 1.32.53: *animalium omnium in mari uiuentium nomina CLXXVI.*
>
> b) Plin. *Nat. Hist*. 32.142: *Peractis aquatilium dotibus non alienum uidetur indicare per tota maria, tam uasta et tot milibus passuum terrae infusa extraque circumdata mensura, paene ipsius mundi quae intellegatur, animalia centum quadraginta quattuor omnino generum esse eaque nominatim complecti, quod in terrestribus uolucribusque fieri non quit* (Now that I complete my account of the natural qualities of aquatic plants and animals, it seems to me not foreign to my purpose to point out that, throughout all the seas which are so numerous and spacious and come flooding into the landmass over so many miles and surround it outside to an extent which might be thought of as almost equal to that of the world itself — there are one hundred and forty-four species in all; and that they can be included each under its own name, a thing which, in the case of creatures of the land and those which fly, cannot be done).
>
> c) Plin. *Nat. Hist*. 9.71: *Has intellegi ab iis causas seruarique temporum uices magis miretur si quis reputet quoto cuique hominum nosci uberrimam esse capturam sole transeunte piscium signum* (Their understanding these reasons and their observing the changes of the seasons would seem more surprising to anybody who considers what fraction of mankind is aware that the biggest catch is made when the sun is passing through the sign of the fishes).

If we look at the context here, Isidore mentions Pliny explicitly a number of times in just a few lines of Book 12 of his *Etymologiae*, which deals with animals. It is very likely that for this subject he did refer directly to the *Naturalis Historia*, combining this source with other passages taken from Solinus and Servius.

As Gasti [2010: 40] notes, in Book 12 Pliny is cited directly 6 times, and Isidore's work is probably indirectly dependent on Pliny in at least 45 other places in the text.

4. In Book 13 of *Etymologiae*, which deals with the world and its parts (*De mundo et partibus*), there are several passages in which Isidore follows Pliny directly, apparently with no intermediary author in between them. The following passage of Isidore includes two almost consecutive passages of Pliny:

> Isid. *Etym.* 13.12.3: *Aquarum elementum ceteris omnibus imperat. Aquae enim caelum temperant, terram fecundant, aerem exhalationibus suis incorporant, scandunt in sublime et caelum sibi uindicant. Quid enim mirabilius aquis in caelo stantibus?* (The element of water rules over all the rest, for water tempers the sky, makes the earth fertile, gives body to the air with its exhalation, ascends to the heights, and claims the sky for itself. Indeed, what is more amazing than water standing in the sky?)
>
> Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 31.1.1: *Hoc elementum* (sc. *aqua*) *ceteris omnibus imperat.*
>
> Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 31.1.2: *scandunt in sublime et caelum quoque sibi uindicant... Quid esse mirabilius aquis in caelo stantibus?*

In Gasparotto's edition of this book [Gasparotto 2004], he notes at least 23 references to Pliny and 25 to Solinus. This ratio leads us to believe that the use of Pliny is not limited to indirect references. Researchers do not tend to question the use of Solinus as they do of Pliny. In Book 13, in particular, the references to both are very balanced.

5. In Book 16, which tackles stones and metals, Isidore makes considerable use of Pliny, in particular his Books 31, 34, 36 and 37. In addition, we find frequent references to Pliny's Books 21, 33, 35 and some references to 7, 9, 18 and 20. In many cases, cross-checking the texts unveils a direct link between both authors.

This is proved by a careful reading of the copious notes on the sources found in the most recent edition of this book [Féans Landeira 2011]. However, this scholar assumes Fontaine's hypothesis [Fontaine 1961: 21] as already established, without querying it; that is to say, he considers Pliny as an ultimate or distant source, so much so that between the distant source and Isidore "the hypothesis of one or several intermediaries prevails," as well as the relevant role of the "patristic screen." He further adds, "thus, once the idea of a basic work has been eschewed, scholars look for handbooks, compilations, summaries and abstracts, anthologies, florilegia, etc., hence, Isidore would get to know Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* through a summary that may or may not have served as a handbook of mineralogy or botany" [Féans Landeira 2011: lvix–lx].

Oroz Reta [1987] devoted a monographic study to the presence of Pliny in Book 16 of the *Etymologiae*, emphasising several passages with obvious textual parallels, such as the description of various kinds of marble, e. g., *ophite* (Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 36.55–56 and Isid. *Etym*. 16.5.4), *basanites* (Plin. *Nat. Hist*. 36.58 and Isid. *Etym*.

16.5.6), *coralliticus* (*Plin. Nat. Hist*. 36.62–64 and Isid. *Etym*. 16.5.9–11)[9]. The author points out that there are at least 270 passages where Pliny's influence can be detected. Some of these are almost identical. Thus, à propos of *onyx* or *alabastrites*:

> Plin. *Nat. Hist*. 36.60: *Quem cauant et ad uasa unguentaria quoniam optume seruare incorrupta dicatur*.
>
> Isid. *Etym*. 16.5.7: *Cauant enim hunc ad uasa unguentaria quoniam optime seruare incorrupta dicitur*.

Nevertheless, Oroz Reta, like Féans Landeira years later [2011], deems that the differences between Pliny's original texts and Isidore's hint at the existence of textual collections or formulae, the *excerpta*, so frequently found in the Middle Ages [Oroz Reta 1987: 296]. This idea, almost systematically upheld by most scholars and pundits, prevails in a "hypercritical way" — as Elfassi [2014] argues — even though as yet no actually proper and accurate analysis of the data has been carried out. That is true even in the case of Oroz Reta's work, despite the fact that, right after discussing the use of the *excerpta*, he delves into one of the key concepts any scholar should assume in order to analyse the use of the *Naturalis Historia* in both Pliny and Isidore — or the use of any source whatsoever by the author — to wit, the synthesising and summarising character of the *Etymologiae*, which qualifies it as reductionist in kind.

We can see one example here:

> Isid. *Etym*. 16.3.9: *Gypsum cognatum calci est; et est Graecum nomen. Plura eius genera; omnium autem optimum lapidi speculari; est enim signis aedificiorum et coronis gratissimus* (Gypsum (*gypsum*) is related to limestone; it is a Greek term. There are many varieties, and the best of all is from *specularis lapis* (i. e. a kind of transparent stone). It is most pleasing for the molded figures and cornices of buildings).

The passage also appears in *Etym*. 19.10.20 and corresponds to some phrases taken from a much longer paragraph from Pliny.

> Plin. *Nat. Hist*. 36.182–183: *Cognata calci res gypsum est. Plura eius genera. Nam et e lapide coquitur, ut in Syria ac Thuriis, et e terra foditur, ut in Cypro ac Perrhabeia; e suma tellure et Tymphaicum est. Qui coquitur lapis non dissimilis alabastritae ese debet aut marmoroso. In Syria durissimos ad id eligunt cocuntque cum fimo bubulo, ut celerius urantur. Omnium autem optimum fieri compertum est e lapide speculari squamamue talem habente. Gypso madido statim utendum est, quoniam celerrime coit; tamen rursus tundi se et in farina resolui patitur. Vsus gypsi in albariis, sigillis aedificiorum et coronis gratissimus* (There is an affinity between lime and gypsum, a substance of which there are several varieties. For it can be produced from a heated mineral, as in Syria and Thurii; it can

[9] See also [Velázquez 2003: 303] for balanites, Isid. *Etym*. 16.15.10 and Plin. *Nat. Hist*. 37.149.

> be dug from the earth, as in Cyprus and Perrhaebia. There is also that of Thymphaea, which is stripped from the earth's surface. The mineral that is heated ought to be like onyx marble or crystalline limestone. In Syria the hardest stones possible are selected for the purpose and are heated along with cow dung so that the burning may be accelerated. However, it has been discovered that the best kind is prepared from specular stone or from stone that flakes in the same way. Gypsum, when moistened, should be used instantly, since it coheres with great rapidity).

Here, Isidore has restricted himself to just selecting the basic information that he needs from his source. In Book 16, he describes vulgar or common stones (*de lapidibus uulgaribus*) in a somewhat irregular classification that includes very diverse items. In 19, he writes of materials that are used in construction (*De constructione*) and lists them: different types of stones, sand, lime, *tegulae* (tiles), and also *gypsum* and its types.

The selection of phrases taken from Pliny is clearly in line with Isidore's aim to provide only the basic information on each material and explain the meaning of its name.

6. The same is true of Book 19, which deals with ships, buildings and clothing. Some passages demonstrate a direct dependence on Pliny. I transcribe here two different passages where, in my opinion, we can see this dependence.

> a) Isid. *Etym*. 19.17.15: *Purpurissum ex creta argentaria; cum purpuris pariter tinguitur bibetque eum colorem celerius lanis. Praecipuum est tamen aliud quod adhuc uaso rudibus medicamentis inebriatum; proximum est egesto eo addita creta in ius idem, et quotiens id factum est eleuatur bonitas. Pretiosissimae purpurae causa est quod hysgino maxime inficitur rubeaque* (The 'purple pigment' (*purpurissum*) is made from silversmiths' chalk; this chalk is dyed with murex and soaks up the color in the same way that wool does but more quickly. Nevertheless, the superior pigment is something else that has been soaked in a vat with rawdye-stuffs, and the next best is when silversmiths' chalk is added to the dye liquid once the first batch has been removed. The quality diminishes each time this is done. The origin of the most precious purple (*purpura*) is what is colored with *hysginum* (i. e. the dark red pigment from the plant called *hýsgē* in Greek) and with *rubea* (i. e. *rubia*, the red dye from madder root).

> Plin. *Nat. Hist*. 35.44–45: *E reliquis coloribus, quos a dominis dari diximus propter magnitudinem pretii, ante omnes est purpurissum. Creta argentaria; cum purpuris pariter tinguitur bibetque eum colorem celerius lanis. Praecipuum est primum feruente aheno rudibus medicamentis inebriatum; proximum egesto eo addita creta in ius idem, et quotiens id factum est, eleuatur bonitas pro numero dilutiore sanie.* (45) *Quare Puteolanum potius laudetur quam Tyrium aut Gaetulicum uel Laconium; unde pretiosissimae purpurae. Causa est quod hysgino maxime inficitur rubiaque cogitur sorbere.* (Among the remaining colours which because of their

high cost, as we said, are supplied by patrons, dark purple holds the first place. It is produced by dipping silversmiths' earth along with purple cloth and in like manner, the earth absorbing the colour more quickly than the wool. The best is that which being the first formed in the boiling cauldron becomes saturated with the dyes in their primary state, and the text best produces when white earth is added to the same liquor after the first has been removed; and every time this is done the quality deteriorates, the liquid becoming more diluted at each stage).

b) Isid. *Etym*. 19.17.2–3: *Colores aut nascuntur aut fiunt: nascuntur ut Sinopis, rubrica, Paritonium, Melinum, Eretria, auripigmentum; ceteri finguntur aut arte aut permixtione*. (3) *Sinopis inuenta primum in Ponto est: inde nomen a Sinope urbe accepit. Species eius tres: rubra et minus rubens et inter has media* (Colorings either occur naturally or are manufactured. They occur naturally, as for example, red ochre, red earth, *Paraetonium, Melinum, Eretria*, and gold-coloring. The others are manufactured either by artifice or by mixture. (3) Red ochre (*sinopis*) was found first along the Black Sea, whence it takes its name from the city Sinope. There are three kinds: red, less-red, and something between these two).

Plin. *Nat. Hist*. 35.30: *Sunt autem colores austeri aut floridi utrumque natura aut mixture euenit. Floridi sunt -quos dominus pingenti praestat- minium, Armenium, cinnabaris, chrysocolla, Indicum, purpurissum; ceteri austeri. Ex omnibus alii nascuntur, alii fiunt. Nascuntur Sinopis, rubrica, Paraetonium, Melinum, Eretria, auripigmentum. Ceteri finguntur*.... (31) *Sinopis inuenta primum in Ponto est: inde nomen a Sinope urbe... species sinopidis tres: rubra et minus rubens atque inter has media* (Some colours are sombre and some brilliant, the difference being due to the nature of the substances or to their mixture. The brilliant colours, which the patron supplies at his own expense to the painter, are cinnabar, *Armenium*, dragon's blood, gold-solder, indigo, bright purple; the rest are sombre. Of the whole list some are natural colours and some artificial. Natural colours are sinopis, ruddle, *Paraetonium*, *Melinum* Eretrian earth and orpiment; all the rest are artificial, and first of all those which we specified among minerals, and moreover among the commoner kinds yellow ochre, burnt lead acetate, realgar, sandyx, Syrian colour and black…. (31) there are three kinds of Sinopis, the red, the faintly red and the intermediate).

7. In Book 19, we see numerous passages from Pliny in passages that discuss painting and colours. We could say that Pliny is used as a benchmark for the history of materials, lists and the characteristics of some of them, and Isidore follows him literally. The complete descriptions given by Pliny on each type are summarised and simplified by Isidore.

Either we find the actual intermediary sources, as is the case on numerous occasions — especially with Servius, and above all Solinus for Pliny, St. Agustin and other Christian sources, or we find the famous *excerpta*. Were it otherwise, I deem

it gratuitous and untenable to assume that Isidore did not make direct use of Pliny in a passage that bespeaks textual connections, formal resemblance, sometimes even thematic affinities, but for which we cannot detect any intermediate sources.

The way Isidore summarises could very well stem from *excerpta* gathered previously from Pliny, but may also demonstrate a personal reading of Pliny's entire work and subsequent use of whatever he needs for his text. We are unable to prove either of the two, unless we should come across the *excerpta* that correspond to Isidore's selection. I do think that this selection must exist, and may have been carried out by Isidore himself or perhaps prepared for him by his helpers in his *scriptorium.* It would have been drawn up using entire works, or at least some of the books of these on account of their subject. It is very likely that Isidore owned the full versions of these, especially the last seven (31 to 37).

8. Guillaumin[10] holds similar views as Oroz Reta [1987] regarding the sources used by Isidore and the indirect use of Pliny with regards to Book 20 of the *Etymologiae*. Pliny's presence in this book seems perfunctory, despite some obvious textual coincidences the scholar detects. He only finds seven entries that might mirror Pliny, regarding *farina* (flour), *axungia* (a type of cooking animal fat), *mel* (honey), *rosa* (rose), *faecula* (fecula*), salsugo* (brine), *muria* (a type of honey), and *fictillia* (ceramics) in chapter 3, *De uasis escariis*. Other passages might be added to the list, for at least Isidore may have used them, albeit indirectly. Consider, for instance, a reference to a type of bread called *spungia*, Isidore's unique innovation to designate a soft, sodden bread that Pliny discusses in *Nat. Hist*. 18.105 using the term *Parthicus* or *aquaticus*, but "*quoniam aqua trahitur ad tenuem et spongiosam inanitatem*." Isidore may have been inspired by Pliny's description to use the term *spungia* [Velázquez 2003: 382–383].

The influence of Pliny in Book 20 of the *Etymologiae* seems perfunctory; maybe Isidore did not handle it directly, he may or may not have had access to it, or he just found it uninteresting, thus resorting to other sources. By and large, the use of Pliny is much more prominent elsewhere, in such Books as 16, 12 or 19. Notwithstanding, scholars have absolutely eschewed the idea that Isidore does not resort to a single source, yet that does not prove he would only have had access to anthologies or *excerpta* of his sources, nor that he could have gotten some of those sources (almost) in full, thereby he or his associates being in charge of the actual textual selection.

Rohr's discussion [2017: 55–60], however fleeting, of Pliny's influence over chapter 13 of the *Etymologiae* is far more compelling. His remarks deal with chapters devoted to time, such as *De tonitruo*, but Pliny's influence can also be traced back to *De Natura rerum*, insofar as these chapters have never been discussed by Solinus or any other compilator in late antiquity. Rohr unequivocally upholds Isidore's direct usage of Pliny.

Lastly, let us not forget that Guy Serbat [1986] had already endorsed the direct usage of Pliny by Isidore.

[10] Guillaumin [2011: 15, note 2] points out that readers should not expect too much of this work, after the "mise au point" by Serbat [1986]. I assume he believes that the work deals with Book 16 of the *Etymologiae*, rather than Book 20, which is the one Guillaumin discusses in his essay. My assumption is that the chapter is indeed quite useful and he should have referred to it accordingly. His remarks on the use of the sources by Isidore — which owes in turn to Fontaine in both cases — are quite similar too.

How Isidore worked

Isidore's working methodology often involved the "juxtaposition and addition of various sources". I believe this is clear in the case of Book 19. In the section dealing with building, constructions, materials, colours, etc. there is constant use of Pliny, Vitruvius and Caetius Faventinus. The former is often referred to via Faventinus, but I believe that others are referred to directly. This combination of sources reflects the way in which Isidore worked, selecting phrases from various sources, requiring a close manipulation of the sources. Some scholars believe the opposite, given Isidore's *breuitas* and his simplification of ideas in order to provide general and complete information. Sometimes he definitively works quickly and his choice is not correct. He even makes mistakes and writes misleading text.

1. An example can be seen here. On the topic of mosaics (*de lithostrotis*) he writes the following:

> Isid. *Etym*. 19.14: *Lithostrota sunt elaborata arte picturae paruolis crustis ac tessellis tinctis in uarios colores. Teselli autem a tesseris nominati, id est quadratis lapiliis per diminutionem* (Mosaics (*lithostrotum*) are crafted by the art of making pictures with small chips and cubes tinted in various colours. Cubes (*tessella*) are named from blocks (*tessera*), that is, from square stones, by forming a diminutive).

A similar passage can be found in:

> Isid. *Etym*. 15.8.10: *Pauimenta originem apud Graecos habent elaborata arte picturae; lithostrota paruulis crustis ac tessellis tinctis in uarios colores*. (Pavements (*pauimentum*) that are worked out with the skill of a picture have a Greek origin; mosaics (*lithostrota*) are made from little pieces of shell and tiles colored in various hues).

The source for the latter is without a doubt this one:

> Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 36.184: *Pauimenta originem apud Graecos habent elaborata arte picturae ratione, donec lithostrota expulere eam. Celeberrimus fuit in hoc genere Sosus, qui Pergami stratuit quem uocant asaroton oecon, quoniam purgamenta cenae in pauimentis quaeque euerri solent uelut relicta fecerat paruis e tessellis tinctisque in uarios colores* (Paved floors originated among the Greeks and were skilfully embellished with a kind of paintwork until this was superseded by mosaic. In this latter field the most famous exponent was Sosus, who at Pergamum laid the floor of what is known in Greek as 'the Unswept Room' because, by means of small cubes tinted in various shades, he represented on the floor refuse from the dinner table and other sweeping, making them appear as if they had been left there).

The mention of the *paruulis crustis* seems to have been taken from another closely related passage by Pliny. This suggests that Isidore read it closely with a view to selecting parts and then combining both passages:

> Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 36.189: *Lithostrota coeptauere* iam *sub Sulla*; *p a r u o l i s certe c r u s t i s exstat hodieque quod in Fortunae delubro Praeneste fecit* (Mosaic came into use as early as Sulla's regime. At all events, there exists even to-day one made of very small cubes which he installed in the temple of Fortunae at Palestrina).

2. At times, it has been suggested that the author was not able to prepare a "*conflatio*" of sources; that is, he was not able to create a new passage using passages that he selected and copied from elsewhere. In many cases it is clear that the text is just the result of a juxtaposition of passages and/or phrases, but at other times we do see evidence of reworking. Sometimes it is just a case of mere summaries and other times we see modifications with a view to providing a more clear and concise explanation, offering information through the origin of words. To be more precise, the author's method consists of arguing and demonstrating the validity of the terms that he uses, the authenticity of the etymologies he proposes, through the explanations he offers. His sources, whether they are explicit or not, are for Isidore the authentic *auctoritates* on the subject at hand in each case.

Conclusion

There are many references to Pliny in Isidore's work and not just in the *Etymologiae*, but also in other books, such as his *Differentiae*, *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, *Chronica*, *Historia Gothorum* (at least in Books 1–2, 5–10, 12, 15–16, 18–21, 25 and 29–37 [Elfassi 2015: 64].

Guillaumin [2011: 16–17] has suggested that Isidore must have had long extracts of the *Naturalis Historia*, but, as Elfassi [2015: 65] rightly asks: Why long passages of the work and not the whole thing? The reason behind Guillaumin's proposal is ultimately based on the hypercritical tendency to assume that Isidore had limited knowledge of sources in a restrictive and "ultra-safe" way.

We should add here that Isidore of Seville made use of all the sources of information available to him to in order to attempt his *Etymologiae*, an encyclopaedic work that tackles all areas of knowledge and shows what these were in Hispania of the 6th–7th centuries. The study of Isidore of Seville's possible library has been undertaken on a number of occasions, using the hypercritical approach I have mentioned before.

Without a doubt, Pliny must have been an author of reference for the *Etymologiae*, alongside Varro and Solinus, Suetonius' *Prata* and Servius, since we can see many of the subjects dealt with by Isidore in Pliny, such as animals, plants, biological and physiological aspects relating to humans, instruments, objects, etc.

I think it is essential that we continue researching the sources that Isidore of Seville used and his complex methodology of extracting, summarising, and adapting them. I deem it vital that we update the data and combine them with other reports of the period, since he was a prime witness to it[11]. We need to find the textual link that allows us to establish the indirect or direct dependence on these texts, but we also need to approach the following questions in a comprehensive way:

[11] Regarding these issues in connection primarily to lexical innovations, see Velázquez 2003.

a) The type of sources used for each topic, whether these be lists, notes or histories. Is the proposed etymology from the same author and / or passage or another source, or is it offered as an innovative suggestion.

b) Collective use of passages and books, as we have seen in Book 19 and 12 regarding the use of Pliny.

c) The location of passages in the work of every author who serves as source, overtly in chapter 16, where Isidore rearranges the material and concocts a personal composition that he could hardly have devised had he not had access to the full book[12].

d) Case-by-case study of the process of preparation, selection and, where applicable, adaptation of passages.

e) Combination of authors and where they appear and analysis of the elements that appear and those that are avoided.

This affects the internal study of Isidore's work, but I would like to finish with a final comment that I believe is of importance.

If Isidore makes use of Pliny, Solinus, Vitruvius, Servius, Gelius and Faventinus, as well as the Christian authors (and St. Augustine especially), it is because these are authors of encyclopaedic works. Their work is in line with Greek-Latin tradition and gathers together the knowledge of each period in a descriptive, generalist way. The nature of their works is that of a "compendium of knowledge" with a clear didactic aim. Of course, we will not enter into certain aspects in some different examples, for instance Vitruvius.

A final thought.

Isidore was the last great encyclopaedic author of the ancient world, and he and his sources became the benchmark sources of reference for the Middle Ages, especially the group consisting of Pliny, Solinus and Isidore, whose works initiate a great didactic and cultural tradition.

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[12] Regarding this and despite its brevity, Féans Landeira's [2011] Introduction is particularly compelling.

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