A Remark on the Problem of Originality of Isidore of Seville

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Originality of Isidore of Seville could be designated as a "hard problem" of Isidorian studies. Although many a student of Isidore works understand, feel and guess the originality of them, its articulation continues to be problematic. H. Dressel in 1874 tried to define Isidore's originality[1] and F. Gasti in 1998 quoted him with approval[2]. J. Hillgarth wrote in 1983 that the understanding of Isidore as unoriginal passive compiler is disproved[3], but in 2012 J. Wood had to proof Isidore's active and reflective approach to the sources[4].

The key aspects of the study of Isidore's originality were defined in 1960 during the colloquium on the topic[5]. As J. Fontaine observes, originality of Isidore consist of some kind of unity of personality and its spirit that is manifested in his attitude to the books and culture. The first important aspect of originality is a special author's cultural unity, the other one is his special stylistic and esthetic traits[6].

Though the participants of the colloquium were aware of the fact that the difference between the Modern and Classical "originality" exists and that they try to apply the Modern concept to the text of Late Antiquity[7], the reflection on this difference is rather brief. At the same time, the understanding of this difference may help to modify the way the problem of Isidore's originality is formulated[8]. It is necessary to make a brief and simplified sketch of the relation between originality and authorship in the way to clarify the problem.

The notion of originality is associated to that of the modern authorship. As M. Woodmansee and P. Jaszi observe, the Romantic poets of the 18th cent. understood the author's work as original, i.e. not an "variation, imitation, or an adaptation and certainly not a mere re-production…"[9]. The author as a personality seems to take his final shape in the 18th century, too. Even the Renaissance authorship did not stress the personal responsibility of the author for his work. Being a craftsman, he followed the rules and strategies of writing and his goals are correlated with his audience. Being inspired, he had a passive role as well[10].

M. Foucault in his famous critics of the author related the view of the author as a personality with the understanding of him as a principle of unity and a field of coherence – stylistic, doctrinal etc[11]. Were

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[1] Dressel, H. *De Isidori Originum fontibus*, Rivista di Filologia e d'Instuzione classica, Vol. 3, 1874, p. 208.

[2] Gasti, F. *Antropogia di Isidoro. Le fonti del libro XI delle Etimologie,* Edizioni New Press, 1998, p. 120.

[3] Hillgarth, J. N. *The position of isidorian studies. A critical review of the literature 1936–1975* in Studi medievali, Vol. 24, Fasc. 2, 1983, p. 893.

[4] Wood, J. *The Politics of Identity in Visigothic Spain. Religion and Power in the Histories of Isidore of Seville*, Brill, 2012, p. 92.

[5] Primer coloquio. La originalidad de Isidoro in Diaz y Diaz (ed.) *Isidoriana,* Centro de estudios "San Isidoro", 1961, pp. 509-523.

[6] Primer coloquio... pp. 509-511.

[7] Primer coloquio... pp. 509-510.

[8] It should be noted, however, that Isidore was not unique in his attitude to the literature tradition and the "originality problems" of the same kind appears in the study of other intellectuals of the Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages. Vd. e.g. Sanchez Prieto A. B. *Authority and authorship, tradition and invention, reading and writing in early medieval compilation genres: the case of Hrabanus Maurus' De institutione clericorum* in De Medio Aevo, Vol. 5/2, 2016, pp. 179-240.

[9] Jaszi, P. Woodmansee, M. Introduction in Jaszi P. Woodmansee M. (eds.) *The Construction of Authorship: Textual Appropriation in Law and Literature*, Duke University Press, 1994. p. 3.

[10] Woodmansee, M. *The Genius and the Copyright: Economic and Legal Conditions of the Emergence of the 'Author'* in Eighteenth-Century Studies, Vol. 17, No. 4, Special Issue: The Printed Word in the Eighteenth Century, 1984, pp. 427-428.

[11] Foucault, M. *Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?* in Foucault, M. Dits et écrits, Gallimard, 1994, Vol. 1, p. 801.

unity and coherence the main traits of the "author-function" of Late Antiquity? M. Foucault uses *De uiris illustribus* of Jerome to point the main features of the author (however, without the strict reference). At the same time, the students of the question note that the conceptual coherence was not the main criterion of authorship attribution for Jerome[12].

R. Chartier argues that the author presented in the Middle Ages as well, but if M. Foucault thought that the distinction between anonymity and author's text represented the difference between scientific and literary discourses, R. Chartier relates the medieval authorship to the notion *auctoritas*[13]. This kind of the "author-function" seems to go back to times of Antiquity[14]. Consequently, Isidore's understanding of the authorship follows this general tendency of his times. He uses the author to mark the unity of tradition (*traditio apostolica, secta* etc.[15]) or some kind of knowledge (mathematics, astronomy etc.)[16]. *Auctor* may have at least two possible kinds of relation to this unity. Firstly, the tradition begins with the *auctores* (here *principes* may serve as the synonym[17]) or they substantially contribute to it (Isidorian etymological definition is relevant here: *auctor ab augendo* (*etym.* 10, 2))[18]. Thus, *auctor* possesses etiological character[19]. Secondly, the word *auctores* or the name of one of them refers to the special kind of discourse[20], the *auctor* carries the *auctoritas* of the tradition to pronounce something inside it.

According to Isidore, not only the figure of *auctor* was involved into the process of writing, but also that of *scriptor* and *compilator*. The special rank of the author is stressed by Isidore in the chapter of *De ecclesiasticis officiis* dedicated to the writers (*de scriptoribus*) of the Scripture. After the list of the writers of different books of the Scripture Isidore notes that the only author of it is the Saint Spirit[21].

Naturally enough, Isidore could not estimate his own contribution to the tradition (or better he could not identify his name with the tradition) and therefore he did not describe his own function as "author-function". Moreover, the reference to the *auctores* in the prefaces to Isidorian works allows him to be included into the discursive unity of tradition. As a result, the reader has to dispute not

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[12] Hulley, K.K. *Principles of Textual Criticism Known to St. Jerome in Harvard Studies* in Classical Philology Vol. 55, 1944, p. 107.

[13] Chartier, R. *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Stanford University Press, 1994, p. 58.

[14] Averintsev, S. *Authorship and Authority* in Literary Epochs and Types of Artistic Consciousness, Nasledie, 1994, pp. 105-125.

[15] E.g. Isid. *etym.* 8, 5, 69: "*alia haereses sine auctore*"; Isid. *etym.* 8, 6, 6: "*nomina ex auctoribus, ut platonici...*" Isid. *de eccl. off.* praef.: "*Ea quae in officiis ecclesiasticis celebrantur partim sanctarum scripturarum auctoritate partim apostolica traditione uel consuetudine uniuersalis ecclesiae statuta repperiuntur. Quorum quidem primordia repetentes quibus exorta fuerint, ut praediximus, auctoribus referamus.*"

[16] E.g. Isid. *etym.* 4, 3, 1: "*Medicinae autem artis auctor ac repertor apud Graecos perhibetur Apollo.*" Isid. *etym.* 3, 25, 1: "*Astrologiam Iosephus auctor adseuerat*".

[17] Isid. *de eccl. off.* 2, 12: "*principes uel auctores*". Cf. Averintsev. *Authorship...* pp. 105-106. The same word could have the meaning of creator (vd.: Isid. *diff.* 2, 33 (*auctor* = God)) or the chief (vd. Isid. *in Exod.* 38, 3: "*...caput, hoc est, auctor est diabolus*").

[18] The word *auctor* is often used to designate a member of Roman literature tradition, e.g. Isid. *diff. 1, praef.*: "*Sic que ex his consuetudo obtinuit pleraque ab auctoribus indifferenter accipi, quae quidem quamvis similia videantur, quadam tamen propria inter se origine distinguuntur*".

[19] Averintsev. *Authorship...* p. 110.

[20] Cf. Foucault. *Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?* p. 798.

[21] Isid. *de eccl. off.* 1, 12, 13: *Hii sunt scriptores sacrorum librorum diuina inspirations loquentes... Auctor autem earundem scripturarum spiritus sanctus esse creditur; ipse enim scripsit qui per prophetas suos scribenda dictauit*.

with Isidore himself but with the tradition or at least with his interpretation of it[22]. This presupposes a competent reader.

As M. Irvine observes, Isidore's principles of text-making are similar to that of *compilator* defined in *etym. 10, 44*[23]:

> *Conpilator, qui aliena dicta suis praemiscet, sicut solent pigmentarii in pila diuersa mixta contundere, hoc scelere quondam accusabatur Mantuanus ille uates, cum quosdam uersus Homeri transferens suis permicuisset et conpilator ueterum ab aemulis diceretur. Ille respondit: "magnarum esse uirium clauam Herculi extorquere de manu".*

This definition is similar to Macrobius's attitude to writing[24]. Isidore adds a quotation from Jerome, which is a part of argument that an imitation and borrowing of the text and ideas does not mean plagiarism[25]. Both authors belonged to the trend of writing associated with reading and quoting, that existed in the Latin West at least since the 5th century. As A. Pelltari notes, both Jerome and Macrobius understood the literary work as an interpretation on preexistent text, seeking hidden and secondary meanings[26]. At the same time, this kind of writing dissolved individual authorship in favor of "*auctores*"[27]. It was supposed that writers and readers could identify quotations and changes in them[28]. Macrobius in his description of writing quotes Seneca (*ep*. 84, 8) and changes his text substantially. While Seneca means that reading provides the material for the original text, Macrobius speaks about the mixture of quotations[29].

Thus, the function of the *compilator* of this kind[30] is rather similar to that of active and "full-knowing" reader (as J. Pucci designates him) and it is supposed to be addressed to the same kind of

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[22] Cf. Isid. *de eccl. off.* ep. missoria: *Itaque, ut uoluisti, libellum de genere officiorum ordinatum misi, ex scriptis uetustissimis auctorum ut locus obtulit commentatum. In quo pleraque meo stilo elicui, nonnulla uero ita apud ipsos erant admiscui, quo facilius lectio de singulis fidei auctoritatem teneret. Siqua tamen ex his displicuerint erroribus meis paratior uenia erit, quia non sunt referenda ad culpae meae titulum, de quibus testificatio adhibetur auctorum.* The essential part polemics on predestination in Carolingian times was the question of the interpretation of Isid. *sent.* 2, 6, 1 ("*Gemina est praedistinatio…*").

[23] Irvine, M. *The Making of Textual Culture: 'Grammatica' and Literary Theory 350-1100*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 242-243.

[24] Macr. *Saturn.* 1, 1, 5-9: *Apes enim quodammodo debemus imitari, quae uagantur et flores carpunt, deinde quicquid attulere disponunt ac per fauos diuidunt et sucum uarium in unum saporem mixtura quadam et proprietate spiritus sui mutant. Nos quoque quicquid diversa lectione quaesiuimus committemus stilo, ut in ordinem eodem digerente coalescat. Nam et in animo melius distincta seruantur, et ipsa distinctio non sine quodam fermento quo conditur universitas in unius saporis usum uaria libamenta confundit, ut, etiamsi quid apparuerit unde sumptum sit, aliud tamen esse quam unde sumptum noscetur appareat: quod in corpore nostro uidemus sine ulla opera nostra facere naturam… Ex omnibus colligamus unde unum fiat ex omnibus, sicut unus numerus fit ex singulis. Hoc faciat noster animus: omnia quibus est adiutus abscondat, ipsum tamen ostendat quod effecit: ut qui odora pigmenta conficiunt ante omnia curant ut nullius sint odoris propria quae condientur, confusura videlicet omnium sucos odoraminum in spiramentum unum. Vides quam multorum vocibus chorus constet: una tamen ex omnibus reddetur. Aliqua est illic acuta aliqua gravis aliqua media, accedunt viris feminae, interponitur fistula: ita singulorum illic latent voces, omnium apparent, et fit concentus ex dissonis.*

[25] Hier. *qaest. in Gen*. Praef.

[26] Pelltari, A. *The Space that Remains. Reading Latin Poetry in Late Antiquity*, Cornell University Press, 2014, p. 43.

[27] Williams, M. H. *The Monk and the Book. Jerome and the Making of Christian Scholarship*, The University of Chicago Press, 2006, p. 107.

[28] Vd. Pucci J. *The Full-Knowing Reader: Allusion and the Power of the Reader in the Western Literary Tradition*, Yale University Press, 1998, pp. 64-69. (the case of Macrobuis), Birkin, M. *"Tractans de mysterio legis…" (Isid. Hisp. De eccl. off. II.5.17): About the role of the quoting in the works of Isidore of Seville* in Filosofia, Yazyk, Kultura, Vol. 3., 2012, p. 268 (some examples from Visigoth culture).

[29] Pelltari. *op. cit.* pp. 25-27.

[30] There are more types of compilations and, consequently, more functions of their authors. A. Pelltari, for instance, turns to Aulus Gelius as an unreflective compiler. Pelltari. *op. cit.* p. 28.

reader[31]. The tradition of active reading that J. Pucci argues to go back to Plato supposed that it was the function of reader to bring forth the meanings of the text, not that the text had its own independent meaning[32]. *Compilator* could "play" with *auctores*, choosing the words of this or that one (S. Averintsev describes the functioning of the authors in Antiquity as a polemics between them[33]), omitting and quoting[34].

If compilation of quotations and the expression of sense through it was conditioned by the "rules" of writing, it could not be said that Isidore lacked creativity or imagination. Nor his attitude to the sources should be interpreted as a passive collecting of the quotations with weak or inexistent correlation between them[35]. If the process of writing is very similar to the process of reading, the creation of the novel sense is conditioned not by the making the new text, that manifests it. The meaning of the text is to be created by active reader. Thus the strategies of making of the new sense should be allusive (or intertextual). It should be noted that the word *allusio* (that has connotations of the game) in its interpretative exegetical sense (to denote hidden level of reference in the Scripture) was firstly and widely used by Cassiodorus[36], who wrote in a compiling way, too.

As W. Law observes, there were different layers of meaning and understanding of the texts in the 7th century Latin West[37]. I argue that the same could be said about the texts of Isidore of Seville. The text of a *lemma* (in *diff. I* or *II* or in *etym.*) or *sententia* (etc.) can be understood (1) as it is or (2) in its relation to the others *lemmae / sententiae* or (3) in the context of its source-texts and changes of them[38].

Isidore used the quotations in several ways. Some quotations are made without any changes (thought sometimes the omissions are significant[39]), while some are mixed in a new phrase. Isidore never says the reason of it[40], since the reader's function to make sense of the text. The quotation has not only informative dimension (which is to be expected in the "scholar" work), but also a symbolical one. For example, while Isidore explains the role of eloquence by quotations from Cicero[41] it is significant for the reader who guesses it. Moreover, as R. Kastler observes, it was important to make a connection between the presence and the tradition, to renew the *auctores*[42]. S. Averintsev notes that the making of cultural "semiotic" and normative (or paradigmatic in a Platonic sense?) reality

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[31] Vd. e.g. Irvine. *op. cit*. p. 243.

[32] Pucci. *op. cit.*, pp. 53-82. Vd. Starr, R.J. *The Flexibility of Literary Meaning and the Role of the Reader in Roman Antiquity* in Latomus, Vol. 60, Fasc. 2, 2001, pp. 433-445. Aspects of the theory of the role of the reader vd. Fluck, W. *The Role of the Reader and the Changing Functions of Literature: Reception Aesthetics, Literary Anthropology, Funktionsgeschichte* in European Journal of English Studies, Vol. 6/3, 2010, pp. 253-271.

[33] Averintsev. *Authorship…* pp. 121-122.

[34] Vd. e.g. Gardini, N. *Lacuna. Saggio sul non detto*, Einaudi, 2014, pp. 83-92.

[35] The position well expressed by Dressel, who argued against it. Vd. Dressel, H. *op. cit.* p. 208.

[36] Pucci. *op. cit.,* pp. 52-53.

[37] Law, V. *Wisdom, Authority and Grammar in the Seventh Century: Decoding Virgilius Maro Grammaticus*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 3-4.

[38] The problems of theory in analyzing of the relations between source-text and quotations in the Roman literature are reviewed in: Hinds S. *Allusion and intertext. Dynamics and appropriation in Roman poetry*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 17-51.

[39] For example, quoting Augustine's words (*ciu.* 19, 4) on the virtues in *etym.* 3, 24, 6 Isidore omits Augustine's doctrine on them.

[40] As J. Fontaine observes, we cannot differ between reflective and unreflective changes. Vd. Primer coloquio... pp. 521-522.

[41] Isid. *diff.* 2, 37. Cf.: Cic. *opt. gen.* 4; Cic. *inu.* 1, 1; Cic. *de Orat.* 3, 142.

[42] Kaster, R. *Macrobius and Servius: Verecundia and the Grammarian's Function* in Harvard Studies in Classical Philology Vol. 84, 1980, p. 231.

sometimes in contrast to the "real" one was one of the main activities of intellectuals in Late Antiquity[43]. Isidore's compilation should fit this trend.

The elements of structure of Isidore's text could possess rather deep meaning, too. C. Sánchez Martínez has shown the sophisticated twofold instrument of *etymologia* in Isidore's encyclopaedic work[44]. I think that the notion of *origo* in *de ecclesiasticis officiis* has not only structural or legitimizing meaning, but also is correlated to the exegetical and contemplative practice (the article on the question will appear). In some cases the structure of *lemmae* is suggestive[45]. The other important point is the complex relations between Isidore's works and their model texts, hypertexts, as G. Genette has designated them[46].

Concerning the peculiarity of Isidore's ideas and concepts, it could be said that there are waste fields of his texts that seem to have very little creative element (even in quotations and structure). However, it is hard to imagine a person that is creative (having competence and interest) in all the topics of Isidorian encyclopaedia. So, it is possible that there are parts of Isidore's texts that possess less layers of meanings than the others or simply they are not yet open to the reader. In addition, it is easy to find contradictions in Isidore's texts[47], but the manifestation of the author's doctrine was not the main aim of the texts of Antiquity. They were made rather to change the reader that just to inform[48], therefore the addressee was especially considered[49] as well as the task of the text (consolation, admonition etc.[50]).

To write the text for Isidore was mostly to make an imitation, variation and re-production, i.e. the things that are contrary to the Modern concept of authorship. But the notion of originality is not only the main feature of the Modern authorship, but, as M. Foucault notes, it is also a key value for the traditional history of ideas. Original, that is "appeared for the first time" is "highly valued", another is ordinary, derive, sometimes going so far as to repeat it word for word, from what has already been said"[51]. However, it seems that the attitude to the idea only on the level of wording was questioned during the last 50 years. If the text is basically an open structure, then merely formulation does not tell us very much about the originality of the idea. The relation between the words and ideas seem to be rather problematic and manifold, too (there the waste research on intertextuality could serve as an example). Thus the very opposition of original / derivative should not be taken for granted and Isidorian studies may help to reflect it better.

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[43] Averintsev, S. *Poetika rannevizantiyskoy literatury [= The Poetics of Early Byzantine Literature],* Azbuka-klassika, 2004, p. 166ss.

[44] Sánchez Martínez, C. *La etimología latina. Concepto y métodos. Tesis doctoral,* Universidad de Murcia, 2000, pp. 247-248.

[45] For example, the order of *lemmae* in Isid. *diff.* 1, 18-29 includes the four virtues (explicitly mentioned in diff. 1, 27) and their subdivisions.

[46] Genette, G. *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré*, Seuil, 1982, pp. 5-6. Similar phenomenon is studied in terms of imitation which reveals a complex web or relations and types of imitation, too. Vd. West, D., Woodman, T. (eds.) *Creative Imitation and Latin Literature*, Cambridge University Press, 1979.

[47] The difference between the attitude to the eloquence and Classical culture in Isid. *sent. 2 29; 3, 13* and in the first three books of *Etymologiae* may serve as an example.

[48] Vd. Lotman, Y. *Inside the Thinking Worlds*, Yazyki russkoy kultury, 1996, p. 36-45. The application of the understanding of the text in Late Antiquity as a therapy and not as a teaching vd. Donato, A. *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy as a Product of Late Antiquity*, Bloomsbury, 2015.

[49] Isid. *de eccl off.* 2, 5, 16-17.

[50] Vd. e.g. Mart. Brac. *form.* 2: "*Sermo quoque tuus non sit inanis, sed aut suadeat aut moneat aut consoletur aut praecipiat*".

[51] Foucault, M. *Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*, trans. by A.M. Sheridan Smith, Pantheon Books, p. 141. The English translation is referred since the quotations are in English.