

ISIDORE OF SEVILLE – READER OF SOLINUS

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Abstract: This paper focuses on examining how in his *Etymologiae sive Origines* Isidore of Seville makes use of the lexis that describes marvellous phenomena. This lexis was borrowed to some extent from Solinus' *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*. This research therefore aims at checking the results of some previous studies which demonstrate the rationality of Isidore's approach by investigating the lexis in his work.

Keywords: lexis of the marvels, Isidore of Seville, Solinus

1. Introduction

The marvellous is a concept that has always been a constant subject of research in the history of mentalities and holds a privileged place in an approach to the history of the imaginary. At first sight, the concept has a familiar air and seems easy to define. However, if one takes a closer look, one can instantly notice that its features are not easily identifiable, as they seem to depend more on the subjective point of view of the one who contemplates a certain reality rather than on reality itself.

The difficulties appear even more numerous in the case of the medieval marvellous: various distances arise between today's researcher and his object of study, of which chronological distance is but the easiest to measure. Thus, the phoenix, the sirens, or the pelican that feeds his young on its blood, thereby keeping them alive, continue to be things of wonder and marvel, even for us, nowadays. It is however more complicated to find out which creatures/phenomena are marvellous for the medieval man, and, more importantly, which are the textual marks that allow us to state with a degree of certainty that a certain creature/phenomenon is marvellous for that man. While attempting to answer this question, we come to notice that texts are not of much help: for instance, the rabbit or the cat are often described with the aid of the same strategies by which the griffin or the basilisk are described.

The research conducted with the purpose of clarifying a definition of the marvellous did nothing but accumulate a great diversity of views, where focus shifts from one perspective to another. Thus, in Faral's (1913: 308) opinion, "the rarest curiosities, the most unexpected prodigia" are meant to astonish the viewer and fire his imagination. For Rousset (1956: 25), the marvellous is related to translating into a religious language the extraordinary manifestation, which in fact represents man's capacity to recognize in natural phenomena those portents that announce divine intention. Meslin (1984: 6-9) underlines the subjective character of the marvellous, which is distinctly circumscribed function of the epoch that attempts its definition; he places in this category any

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phenomenon felt as unusual and that bears a significance related to values considered to be absolute. Lecouteux (1998: 37) characterizes the marvellous as a vision of the universe in which imagination will not be fettered by reason or experience. Finally, to end this brief and fatally selective enumeration, since the number of studies in this field is enormous, we will quote Le Goff (2003: 468-469) who points to the fact that the marvellous questions the borders between the natural and the supernatural, being characterized by the wonder and admiration it generally awakens.

We thus notice several common nuances that allow us to restrict those phenomena that might be categorized as marvels: on the one hand, they transgress current norms, are unusual, extraordinary, while on the other they arouse wonder; their extraordinary, wondrous character is however dependent on a certain subjectivity; what is amazing for one individual, a geographical area or an epoch, might become common as soon as the viewer or his expectations are changed. This is the very reason why, in order to clarify such a situation to the best of one's abilities, Le Goff (1985: 17-39) underscores the need for a systematic study of the lexis that signifies those phenomena considered marvellous in the Middle Ages.

In this respect, two of our previous studies (Crivăț 2011 and 2013) examine this type of lexis in *The Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville. Our choice of text is hardly in need of justification: the Isidorian encyclopaedia was consulted, read, quoted and used until the end of the medieval period, its "mark" is still easily traceable both in theological treatises and in fiction, both in science texts and in science popularization texts.

A research such as the one we conducted can come up with a "map" of the marvels as it probably was at the beginning of the 7th century in a source which was fundamental for the scholarly culture of the Middle Ages. This would be a useful enterprise, since in this way the views of certain subsequent authors might be more accurately defined, by comparing them with this initial reference point.

The present paper is aimed at checking the conclusions of our previous research. As will be seen from the presentation we will endeavour to make, this research demonstrates that Isidore treats phenomena which sources usually present as extraordinary, and therefore as marvellous, from a perspective in which the principles of Christian theology are doubled by rationality. This latter feature of Isidorian thought, a feature that can be observed by investigating the lexis employed, was the main object of our previous research. We think that the investigation we are keen on might be conducted by comparing those contexts in which Isidore of Seville tackles phenomena explicitly considered to be marvellous with a text that was an important source for him; this will allow us to see to what extent the "degree of marvel" in certain realities is kept unchanged or, on the contrary, is significantly reduced.

2. The lexis of the monstrous and of the marvels in the work of Isidore of Seville

An investigation of the text of *The Etymologies* reveals that Isidore tackles those extraordinary realities that arouse wonder in two distinct manners and that this fact is supported by the lexis employed to designate and describe these realities.

In Book XI, *De homine et portentis*, which is to establish for the next centuries the medieval position in the field of “anthropology”, after examining the “normal, ordinary” human nature in the first two chapters, Isidore reserves the third chapter for a coherent systematic study of a category of beings designated by means of the lexical item *portentum* (with its derived adjective *portentuosum*) and its synonyms (*ostentum*, *monstrum*, *prodigium*); the next chapter of the aforementioned book is reserved for those beings resulting from various metamorphoses, known under the name of *transformati*. The author is thus engaged into an analysis of what he considers to be a category of the natural in general and of the human in particular, the category of the monstrous, treated by the encyclopaedist with a strategy which is to a large extent reflected in the lexis he uses. We have analysed this strategy as follows: by assigning a clearly defined theological status to monsters (since monsters are part of Creation and have clear-cut roles in it, that is they are supposed to better underline the will of an almighty God and to foretell future events), Isidore employs the scientific methods of the age in order to study this category of the natural. Since the “pilot-science” of the age was grammar, he makes use of etymology, gloss, comparison and analogy in an attempt (not always successful) to provide as rigorous a taxonomy as possible for a subject so difficult to classify. At the same time, we must deem as noteworthy his effort to create a scientific lexis for the monstrous which is characterized by precision and transparency and whose functionality we extensively investigated. All this points to an approach to the issue of the human and the monstrous, of the normal and the extraordinary from a perspective in which, as we said before, rationality is doubled by theology, in a very interesting synthesis, typical of this author of Late Antiquity (Crivăț 2011).

On the other hand, throughout *The Etymologies*, the author unsystematically uses derived forms of the root *mir-* (*mirus*, *-a*, *-um*; *mirabilis*, *-e*; *miror*, *-ari*; *admirabilis*, *-e*; *admiror*, *-ari*) as well as – to a lesser extent – derived forms of the root *stup-* (*stupeo*, *-ere*, *stupesco*, *-ere*, *stupor*, *-oris*, *obstupesco*, *-ere*) in order to name certain beings/phenomena seen as extraordinary.

An investigation of this lexis allowed us to notice the fact that there is a rather small number of occurrences of the root *mir-* and its derivations: all twenty books of *The Etymologies* contain only 14 occurrences of the adjective *mirus*, *-a*, *-um*, 8 of the adjective *mirabilis*, *-e*, 4 of the verb *miror*, *-ari*, 4 of the noun *miraculum*, *-i*, only one occurrence for the nouns *mirator*, *-oris* and *admiratio*, *-onis*, 2 occurrences for the verb *admiror*, *-ari*, which makes it a sum total of 34 occurrences; for *stup-* only 4 occurrences out of a total of 11 have the meaning of ‘wonder at something extraordinary’. Furthermore, a rough comparison with those treatises used as sources for *The Etymologies* – *Naturalis Historia* of Pliny the Elder (800 occurrences of *mir-*) and *De civitate Dei* by Saint Augustine (more than 300 such occurrences) – indicate that the Isidorian lexis designating marvellous phenomena is not only poor in occurrences but also austere: unlike Isidore, his predecessors make use of the noun *mirabilia*, the adjective *mirificus*, *-a*, *um*, and such adverbs as *mirè*, *mirifice*, *mirabile*, *mirabiliter*. More than that, we have shown that Isidore makes unsystematic use of this lexis: certain phenomena are characterized as marvellous, while other similar ones are not; an analysis of this situation brought us to the conclusion that, in such cases, the presence of the lexis of the marvels is due only to the pressure exerted by the scholarly source employed and

which identifies a phenomenon as marvellous. In some cases, Isidore only takes these contexts and makes use of them as such.

We noticed thus that most of the occurrences identified in Isidore (76%) refer to natural phenomena (14 occurrences) and human activities (12 occurrences), that is to those areas of knowledge that can be analysed with tools that are proper for rationality; this in fact confirms the conclusions we reached in a previous study on the issue of the monstrous.

Therefore, an investigation conducted in the lexis of *The Etymologies* shows us that only the monstrous, systematically and coherently treated in *Etymologies* XI, 3-4, can be considered to be a category of Isidorian thought. The restricted number of occurrences, the austerity and inconsistency in which Isidore makes use of the lexis that designates wonder at extraordinary phenomena gives us reason to believe that the marvellous is not a category of the thought of this encyclopaedist, who only confines himself to an unsystematic presentation of certain marvellous phenomena.

3. Isidore of Seville – reader of Solinus

3.1 Methodology

We have seen that some of the lexical occurrences that designate marvellous phenomena in *The Etymologies* can be explained by the fact that Isidore must have resorted to authors acknowledged as *auctoritates*. We know that this is a constant of medieval scholarly texts in general and of encyclopaedias in particular. As for Isidore, with him this is a fundamental practice he employs in writing his *Etymologies*; thus, he supports his encyclopaedic endeavour not only by explicitly quoting some of the authors that are acknowledged sources but also by extensively using a whole series of excerpts which are not necessarily homogeneous from the point of view of their textual typology: theological treatises or grammars, scholarly comments on ancient texts, literary texts of fiction or compiled works, textbooks and epitomes of ancient texts on various scientific issues (medicine, zoology, human anatomy, geography, mineralogy, etc.). Used *verbatim* or simplified, reproduced with minimal changes or paraphrased, often re-elaborated according to the needs of the target text, all these pieces coming from various origins, having various initial intentionalities and styles, get to be unified and leveled, making up a huge homogeneous text that will perfectly answer to the mainly grammatical finality expressed by the title of his work: *Etymologiae sive Origines*.

The questions we are about to pose now are the following:

- (i) If we bear in mind the fact that the Isidorian encyclopaedia is the result of a complex process of compiling and re-elaborating scholarly sources, what is the relation between these sources and *The Etymologies* with respect to the lexis of the marvels?
- (ii) Does a comparison between these sources and the contexts in which Isidore treats those phenomena explicitly named as marvellous confirm or invalidate our conclusions on Isidorian attitude towards the marvels, as was apparent from our previous analysis of the lexis?

Naturally, it is impossible for us to exhaustively research into all the sources present in *The Etymologies*. We shall therefore confine ourselves to analysing but one such source, namely *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* by Solinus (3rd century A.D.).

We have chosen to investigate this text in the first place because it is one of the most important sources of *The Etymologies*. A simple perusal of the index in which Mommsen (1895: 245-248) lists the passages that Isidore borrows from Solinus is conclusive: the encyclopaedist made use of as many as 302 passages from this work. Moreover, Solinus' work is a very important source for those very books of *The Etymologies* that discuss issues related to the natural: anthropology, zoology, cosmology, geography, mineralogy, agriculture; 280 out of 302 are in these books we mentioned. Therefore, we can say that they address the very area of knowledge in which the study of lexis indicates the location of those phenomena characterized by Isidore as marvellous.

On the other hand, the work of this author from the 3rd century A.D. is a compendium of unusual phenomena (which in their turn were selected from the encyclopaedia written by Pliny the Elder). In the dedication page, Solinus confesses his intention to note down those facts which, through their variety, are meant to chase boredom away in his readership (*uarietas ipsa legentium fastidio mederetur*): the description of famous geographical areas and of great movements of the sea (*inclitos terrarum situs et insignes tractus maris*), of exotic trees (*de arboribus exoticis*), of the appearance of distant peoples and their unusual customs (*de extimarum gentium formis, de ritu dissono abditarum nationum*). It is a project that reveals open interest for remarkable phenomena (*inclitos situs, insignes tractus, dissonus ritus*), clearly marked as exotic (*arbores exoticae, extimae gentes, abdita nationes*).

A final argument for choosing this work as subject of our research is that this text was received in the Middle Ages as a compendium of marvellous facts, as can be seen in the incipit and explicit formulae of many subsequent manuscripts that took it over: *Solini de mirabilibus mundi; explicit Solinus de mirabilibus mundi et situ terrarum et aquarum, C. Iulii Solini[...] de situ orbis terrarum et de singulis mirabilibus quae in mundo habentur* (Mommsen 1895: XXIX-LI). Although these manuscripts date from much later than Isidore's work, it is safe to assume that the marvellous/extraordinary character of the facts put down in Solinus' treatise could not have passed unnoticed by the encyclopedist.

Therefore, we believe we can pertinently answer the questions we posed if we analyse a text mainly devoted to gathering and treasuring extraordinary facts, a text which is at the same time one of the most important sources for *The Etymologies*: the way in which Isidore made use of such a source can only confirm the conclusions of the analysis we made on Isidorian lexis.

Out of the 302 passages taken over by Isidore from Solinus' work, we have retained only those that concomitantly observe two conditions: (i) The source-author explicitly names a certain phenomenon as marvellous; (ii) The source-author makes use of derived forms of the adjective *mirus*, -a, -um or of the verb *stupeo*, -ere. We have consequently employed the same strategy of analysis that we used in the case of Isidore.

As for the series of terms *portenta, ostenta, monstra, prodigia*, we know that Isidore does not employ Solinus' writings in order to elaborate on a theory on the categories of these extraordinary beings, rather he prefers to consult the treatise *De civitate Dei* by Saint Augustine to this effect.

We have also eliminated out of those contexts that observe the two aforementioned conditions the texts in which the verb *miror*, *-ari* is only used with the meaning ‘to wonder at’ in a secondary, figurative manner, and where the main meaning is ‘to like something, to be interested in something’, e.g. *Cervi [...] mirantur sibilum fistularum* ‘the stags like the sound of the flute’ (*Collectanea...*, 19, 11), *quod ingenium ita Romanae deliciae miratae sunt ut barbari psittacos mercem fecerint* ‘the ability [of parrots to speak] was so pleasing to the lovers of refinements from Rome that the barbarians made parrots a good object of trade’ (*Collectanea...*, 52, 45), or ‘to honour, to worship’ (e.g. *bovem mirantur, Apim vocant* – ‘they worship an ox named Apis’, *Collectanea...*, 32, 17).

The conditions we stated are thus fulfilled by a number of 24 contexts in which Solinus is a source for *The Etymologies* and in which he makes use of the lexical items that we have seen will also be of use for Isidore of Seville when he names marvellous phenomena: 20 contexts with the adjective *mirus*, *-a*, *-um* and its derived forms; 4 contexts in which derived forms of the verb *stupeo*, *-ere* are employed.

3.2 Derived forms of the root *mir-*

Only for 3 of these 20 contexts from Solinus containing derived forms of *mir-* does Isidore keep the reference to the marvellous character of the facts presented. We will analyse each of them.

Etymologies, XIII, 21, 15 and 20 refine on the information from *Collectanea...*, 38, 4-5, relating to the rivers Choaspis and Cydnus:

Hunc Cydnum alii praecipitari Tauro, alii deriuari ex alueo Choaspi tradiderunt. Qui Choaspes ita dulcis est, ut Persici reges, quamdiu inter ripas Persidis fluat soli, sibi ex eo pocula uindicauerint et cum eundum foret peregre, aquas eius secum uectitarent. Ex illo parente Cydnus **miram trahit suauitatem**. (*Collectanea rerum memorabilium*, 38, 4-5, emphasis mine, AC)

Choaspis Persarum fluuius, vocatus eorum lingua quod **miram aquae dulcedinem** habeat [...] Ex hoc amne quidam Cydnum Ciliciae fluvium derivari existimant. (*Etymologiae*, XIII, 21, 15)

Cydnum amnis Ciliciae e Tauro monte progrediens, **miram aquarum habens suauitatem**... (*Etymologiae*, XIII, 21, 20)

Is it important to notice that Isidore identifies as marvellous two rivers of Cilicia, due to the sweetness of their water, when Solinus only speaks of one of them. Is this because the encyclopaedist is keen on reenforcing the idea of marvel? We think not. *Collectanea...* mentions that “[The water of the river] Cydnus borrows its marvellous sweetness from its father Choaspes”, which means that in Solinus’ work the two rivers have identical properties. This is a detail which Isidore, respectful of his predecessor, wishes to preserve but, because he truncates the original passage and intersperses it with several other articles of encyclopaedias treating the two rivers, he ends up by resuming the information on water sweetness for each of these two rivers separately and he automatically symmetrically writes the two entries, only operating the slightest word order changes, such as is the case of the verb *habeo* – a change with no semantic or stylistic bearing on

the overall text – and introducing a minimal synonymic variation (*dulcedo/suavitas*); the adjective *mirus* remains unchanged, placed before the noun. On the other hand, for reasons unknown, Isidore omitted the data referring to the preference of Persian kings for the water of the Choaspis – which might have stirred some curiosity in the reader – and he might have considered necessary to compensate by underlining the marvellous character of this river. We therefore think that these two occurrences of the adjective *mirus* are not due to a special interest in the marvellous dimension of the object described but to the encyclopaedist's intention not to omit any information offered by the source-text which he considers to be significant.

In *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*, 37, 18, Solinus describes the *dionysias* stone by explaining that, if crushed and mixed with water, it will smell like wine and that – amazingly – this smell will in fact protect one from drunkenness:

Dionysias [...] si aquae mixtus conteratur, uinum fragrat et, quod in illo odore **mirificum est**, ebrietati resistit.

Isidore employs these data provided by Solinus in two distinct passages of the book *De lapidibus*:

Dionysius lapis [...] vocatur autem ita quia, si aquae mixtus conteratur, vinum fragrat, et quod in illo **mirum est**, ebrietati resistit. (16, 4, 7)

Dionysia [...] ex aqua trita vinum fragrat, et odore suo ebrietati resistere putatur. (16, 11, 8)

It is noteworthy that in the first quoted context the information provided in the source text is taken as such and the only change is in synonyms: *mirificus* is replaced with *mirus* (we should mention here that Isidore actually chooses not to employ *mirificus* and prefers to use *mirus* in those few cases when he chooses to make use of an adjective). *Mirum* has been excluded from the second paragraph referring to the stone; we duly noted the same inconsistency in various other cases when Isidore presents other marvellous phenomena and where he does not use Solinus' work to do so (Crivăţ 2013). On the other hand, the whole information is presented with certain reservations, as is indicated by the presence of the predicate *putatur* 'it is believed'. As previously mentioned (Crivăţ 2011: 269) such marks – which point to the author's reservations or reluctance to assume the accuracy of some information – are quite frequent in Isidore's work, especially in the passages on monsters and can be attributed to the rationality that Isidore wishes to imprint in his approach.

In *Etymologiae*, XII, 4, 19 Isidore describes the *scytale* snake:

Scytale serpens vocata, quod tanta praeifulget tergi varietate ut notarum gratia aspicientes retardet; et quia reptando pigrior est, quos adsequi non valet, miraculo sui stupentes capit.

This is an almost literal reproduction of Solinus' work, and Isidore's intervention is restricted to the mere insertion of the term *serpens* (which is symmetrical to the previous

and subsequent entries), to minimal changes in word order and use of different synonyms (*videntes – aspicientes; queo – valeo; quoniam – quia*). Here is Solinus' text:

Scytale tanta praeifulget tergi uarietate, ut notarum gratia uidentes retardet et quoniam reptando pigrior est, quos adsequi non quit, miraculo sui capiat stupentes. (*Collectanea...*, 27, 30).

Therefore the *scytale* snake, slow in its progress, captures his victims, paralysed/stupefied (*stupentes*) at his marvellous appearance (*miraculo sui*).

It is important to comment on the use of the noun *miraculum*. This noun is derived from the verb *mirari* with the aid of the mediative suffix *-culum* which indicates the element by which a certain process can be fulfilled; in classical Latin, *miraculum* has the meaning of 'surprising thing', of 'an element that arouses surprise, astonishment', as shown by Touratier (1994, 316). This meaning is used both in secular contexts and in divination contexts (TLL, s. v.). In late Latin, employed by Christian authors, the word acquires new meanings. With Saint Augustine – one of the main authors Isidore relies on – the word is defined as 'what happens against the usual course of nature' (*miracula quae contra naturae ursitatum cursum fiunt, De Genesi ad litteram*, VI, 14, 25). Here is another passage from Augustine:

Miraculum voco quidquid arduum aut insolitum supra spem vel facultatem mirantis apparet (*De utilitate credendi*, 16, 34) 'I name miracle any thing that seems difficult to accomplish or unusual and that surpasses the expectations or abilities of the one amazed [at it]'.

The famous trajectory of this word in Christian texts is well-known: *miraculum* will come to refer to those divine interventions made by Christ or by saints in order to transgress natural order: already in the hagiography of the 4th and 5th centuries the word is documented as designating a Biblical miracle (miraculous cures, resurrections, etc.).

Let us further look into the ways in which Isidore relates to this word. In the first book of the treatise *De Differentiis*, a grammatical work written around 600 (Díaz y Díaz 1982, 119), before *The Etymologies* – the dating of which still poses major problems and is judged to have been written around 615 (Díaz y Díaz 1982, 163, 174) – in paragraphs 395, 396, 397, Isidore discusses five terms belonging to ancient divination that have already been discussed by Cicero (*De nat. deor.*, II, 3,7; *De div.*, I, 42,93) and by a whole range of previous grammarians (e.g. Suetonius, Festus, Charisius, Fronto, Servius). Following these authors, he explains the meaning of the respective terms, that of indicating future events (e.g. *Portentum dicitur quod [...] aliquid portendere futurum uidetur*) and ends his explanation as follows:

Quinque sunt autem genera prodigiorum [...] id est, ostentum, portentum, prodigium, **miraculum**, monstrum [emphasis mine, AC].

In *The Etymologies* XI, 3, 1-4, discussing the status of monstrous beings, Isidore revisits the analysis of these terms and formulates it on the basis of the same etymological

premises, while viewing it from the theological perspective of Saint Augustine. There is, however, an important exception: *miraculum* has disappeared from the respective enumeration. We stated in a previous paper (Crivăț 2011: 273) that in *Differentiae*, a strictly grammatical work, Isidore probably wanted to offer a comprehensive inventory of the series of synonyms. Later, in his *Etymologies*, XI, 3, 1-4, starting from Saint Augustine (*De civitate Dei*, XXI, 8), he discusses the problem of existence and the theological foundation of the existence of monsters. In such a context, sensitive to those shades of meaning derived from Christian theology, he no longer mentions the term *miraculum* and chooses to exclude it from the series of terms that used to belong to pagan divination.

Miraculum is, consequently, a term also used in the Latin texts of pagan Antiquity – where it is employed with a secular meaning, and with a religious one, in the process of divination – as well as in Christian Latin texts, where it is specialized for the religious field. Isidore seems to be aware of this: with its initial, completely secular, meaning, the word appears in *The Etymologies* only in the passage about the *scytale* snake (in all three other contexts, independent of Solinus' work, from *The Etymologies* (II, 24, 12; VII, 5, 17; VII, 9, 1), *miraculum* is employed with the meaning it has in Christian Latin texts).

To come back to the question of the relation between Isidore's and Solinus' works, we should point to the fact that in *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* the noun *miraculum* is used 17 times, in 16 contexts, of which only 9 are the sources of *The Etymologies*. *Miraculum*, however, is eliminated from 8 of the 9 contexts and is only taken as such in the one referring to the *scytale* snake. We can attribute to the “pressure” exerted by the source the presence of the noun *miraculum* in this secular passage of natural history, as Solinus is one of those *auctores* whom Isidore consults extensively, as can be seen from the total sum of contexts employed in *The Etymologies* (as we were saying, there are as many as 302 contexts identified by Mommsen). Even so, Isidore could have completely eliminated this particular context, as we will see that he did in the other cases. Why didn't he make use of a synonym or a paraphrase for a word that had come to acquire such a markedly Christian significance, since he did make use of synonyms in other cases, when he replaced the much more commonplace words *videntes*, *queo*, *quoniam*? At this point we can advance a first hypothesis: the synonyms he employed to replace some words are as “neutral” as possible, they never bring extra-expressivity, nor do they “flatten” the meaning of the text (as Isidore does in many cases in order to unify and adapt, to provide a common line to the sources employed), they are simply commonplace and easy to use by an author familiar with the current strategies of compiling, a process that presupposes such equivalences by synonyms; however, it may be that *miraculum* could have benefited from more reflection: as in the present context the word means ‘amazing appearance’, its replacement would have meant selecting a noun from a paradigm (*aspectus*, *figura*, *species*, *habitus*, etc.) and identifying an adjective from the series *mirus*, *mirificus*, *mirabilis*, *admirabilis*, *stupendus*, etc. It is very likely that we can speak of a rather careless, hurried editing, which was not subsequently revised, since we do know that Isidore did not get to revise and correct his *Etymologies*.

We have thus come to the issue of the parts that Isidore eliminated deliberately, consciously, from Solinus' source-text. We shall first look at several significant contexts

related to *miraculum*. As previously stated, the word appears in nine passages taken over by Isidore from Solinus. Let us offer here a few examples.

While describing India, Solinus mentions the island Tylos (*Collectanea...*, 52, 49) saying that:

Terras omnes hoc miraculo sola vincit, quod quaecumque in ea arbor nascitur, nunquam caret folio ‘It alone surpasses all the other places by the amazing fact that no tree that springs on that soil will ever lose its leaves’.

This island is mentioned by Isidore in two places:

Tilen quoque arboribus foliam numquam carentem (14, 3, 5) ‘Tiles which never has leafless trees’; Tiles insula Indiae, virens omni tempore folia (14, 6, 13) ‘Tiles, island of India, with ever green leaves in any season’.

It is important to notice here that Isidore actually speaks about a fact qualified by Solinus as marvellous but which he, in his turn, hesitates to qualify similarly. The avoidance of the noun *miraculum* is understandable, for reasons presented above. But a different presentation, in other equivalent terms, would not have been impossible. He already had an example on his very desk, so to say: in *De civitate Dei* 21, 5, 1, a treatise that Isidore knows and uses especially for elucidating extraordinary phenomena, Saint Augustine mentions this island too, in an enumeration of phenomena qualified as *mirabiles res*, and for which he asks for an explanation from those who would not believe in the miracles (*miracula*) of the Scripture, under the pretext that they cannot be explained. Consequently, there are two important sources that present this phenomenon as marvellous, but Isidore is reluctant to describe it as such – and this is done deliberately, to our mind.

A similar situation is the one in which Isidore eliminates the word *miraculum* from the context about the mountain Athos:

Athos mons Macedoniae, et ipse altior nubibus, tantoque sublimis ut in Lemnum umbra eius pertendat, quae ab eo septuaginta sex milibus separatur (*Etymologiae*, 14, 8, 10).

In the source text, Solinus states that in the public place from Myrina, in the Isle of Lemnos, one can see the shadow of Mount Athos of Macedonia:

Praeterea oppidum Myrina, in cuius forum mons Athos in Macedonia umbram iacit. Quod non frustra inter **miracula** notaverunt, cum Athos a Lemno VI et LXXX milibus passuum separetur (*Collectanea...*, 11, 33) ‘Which not in vain was recorded amongst marvels since Athos is eighty-six thousand paces away from Lemnos’ [i.e. about 129 km, my explanation, AC]’.

Isidore records the phenomenon as such, but does not believe that he needs to qualify it as marvellous.

Not in all situations is it as obvious that Isidore intentionally excludes the qualification of a fact as *miraculum*.

For instance, *Collectanea...*, 2, 40 shows that the crickets around the Italian city Rhegium are dumb and that this phenomenon is to be found nowhere else in the world, a thing of marvel since the ones in the neighbouring area, Locri, are more “sonorous” than ordinary crickets:

Cicadae apud Reginos mutae, nec usquam alibi: quod silentium miraculo est, nec inmerito, cum vicinae quae sunt Locrensiū ultra ceteras sonent.

Isidore takes over in XII, 8, 10 only the information on the dumbness of the crickets near Rhegium: *Haec in Italia apud Reginos mutae sunt, nec usquam alibi*.

The qualification of this behaviour as being marvellous was eliminated together with all the data related to the opposite type of behaviour, which contrast would have underlined the marvellous character of the whole situation. Just as in the previously examined contexts, *miraculum* is employed here with the meaning of ‘thing that arouses wonder’, so it does not convey any meaning related to pagan divination. In spite of that, Isidore eliminates the whole information that contains the marvellous element. Of course, in this latter case, one can raise the objection that it is not because of the presence of the noun *miraculum* that he made this choice, but because the information was not interesting enough to have earned a place in his encyclopaedia.

It is not just the word *miraculum* that has been eliminated in the course of writing *The Etymologies*. A similar situation characterizes the adjectives *mirus*, *-a*, *-um* and *mirificus*, *-a*, *-um*.

Solinus uses *mirus*, *-a*, *-um* 17 times. Isidore employs the information of only five of such contexts and uses the adjective *mirus* only in the passages analysed above (XIII, 21, 15 and 20 referring to the sweet waters of the Cydnus and the Choaspes) whose source is *Collectanea...*, 38, 4-5. It is therefore our task to analyse the treatment that Isidore offers in his *Etymologies* to the other four passages left from *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*.

Collectanea..., 23, 7 shows that

in proximis Olisiponis equae lasciviunt mira fecunditate: nam aspiratae favonii vento concipiunt et sitientes viros aurarum spiritu maritantur ‘in the vicinity of the Portuguese city Olisipo the frolicking of mares is of marvellous fecundity: for they are with foal at the slightest breath of the Favonius [the zephyr] and they mate with the stallions in heat by the breath of the wind’.

This metaphoric way to say that mares conceive during spring was literally understood, so Isidore goes so far as to state in his *Etymologies*, 9, 5, 25, by defining bastard sons, that they

eosdem et Favonios appellabant, quia quaedam animalia Favonio spiritu hausto concipere existimantur ‘also bear the name Favonius since it is considered that certain animals conceive by absorbing the breath of wind inside’.

Solinus' *mira fecunditate* has been eliminated. Of course, we notice that Isidore did not quote all the context: he did not say what animals those were and, in any case, the whole passage refers to other types of relations, a context in which the encyclopaedist did not consider as interesting some information of "natural history" as is the information offered by Solinus. However, it is important to notice that Isidore also makes use of one of the verbs that suggest that he has reservations towards those facts, that the responsibility for the accuracy of these facts should be placed elsewhere: *existimantur*. We believe that, by wanting to present the information as credible through its rationality, Isidore eliminated the marvellous dimension of a conception perceived as unnatural and he also marked the fact that he was not the real author of the respective statement.

Collectanea rerum memorabilium, 27, 23, states that "there are many marvellous things one can say about the hyena" (*multa de ea mira*) and enumerates a whole range of such phenomena; among them is the fact that inside the pupils of its eyes there is a stone, *hyenia*, whose property is that of giving the ability to predict the future to the one holding it under his tongue. The data related to this stone are reproduced by Isidore in Book XVI, *On Stones and Metals*, but the information conveyed is not qualified as marvellous (*Hyaenia lapis in oculis hyaenae bestiae invenitur; qui si sub lingua hominis subditus fuerit, futura eum praecinere dicunt, Etymologies*, XVI, 15, 25).

It is true that the information about *hyenia* is extracted from the larger context of the marvellous qualities attributed to the hyena and that the mentioning of its marvellous character does not really appear in the context borrowed by Isidore, so we can say that the omission is not really blatant. On the other hand, it is again noticeable that the information (considered marvellous in the source-text) is presented by Isidore with auctorial reservation, as we have many times underlined above: *dicunt*. Last but not least, it is important to notice that the hyena is completely absent from Book XII of his *Etymologies, De animalibus*. Is it the case that this absence is due to the fact that Solinus tells so many *mira* about it?

The passage from *Etymologies*, XIV, 6, 15-16 devoted to presenting the Isle of Crete is based on the ample description offered by Solinus in *Collectanea...*, 11, 3-14. Isidore observes the order of the same "entries" found in Solinus and which actually are part of the description of a region: the various names of the island and their explanation, the geographic situation, *heuremata* (discoveries found in the described area), the nature with its riches, the flora, the fauna, the natural curiosities. Inside these entries, however, Isidore makes a selection of the subjects, significantly abbreviating and leaving out data that are not necessarily in conformity with the objectives of his encyclopaedia; thus, he eliminates the references to the local cults of various pagan deities (because his perspective is a Christian one) or he does not give as many details on the geographic location of the island (as he does not provide such details for any of the other islands he discusses).

The passage we will focus on is the one in *Collectanea...*, 11, 11-13 on the nature of the Isle of Crete; by comparing the text with the one in *Etymologies*, XIV, 6, 16, we notice that Isidore kept the references to the animals that can be found on the island (*capris copiosa, cervo eget, phalantos venenatos gignit*) or those that do not live there (*lupos et vulpes aliaque ferarum noxia nusquam gignit, serpens nulla, nulla noctua*) as well as the data on vegetation (*larga est vitibus et arboribus, alimos herba*); the

information on the *dactylus* stone does not appear here but is literally reproduced in the book *De lapidibus et metallis* (XVI, 15, 12). Isidore thus excludes from this passage only one context: *mira soli indulgentia*, which refers to the marvellous “good will” (that is fertility) of the soil. It is difficult to believe that the information was eliminated because it was dull, since the mentioning of the riches of an area is one of the obligatory entries in geographical description. Another possible explanation is that he eliminated it as redundant, since he had already mentioned the abundance of the grapevine and of trees (*larga est vitibus et arboribus*); however, this is not really the same as mentioning the “good will of the soil.” Therefore, bearing in mind the reservations shown by Isidore when he is about to qualify a thing as marvellous, we can only think that he eliminated this context just because it contains a reference to a marvellous characteristic.

Solinus devotes ample space to the description of Sicily (*Collectanea...*, 5, 1-27). In three distinct situations he draws explicit attention to the marvellous or at least unusual character of certain phenomena to be found in that area: in the first place, he talks about two amazing phenomena referring to the eruptions of Mount Etna: before it erupts, the volcano often lets out noises that are very similar to some subterraneous bellows. On the other hand, the flames mix with snow and the top of the mountain preserves its white colour, proper to the winter season. *Mirum hoc est*, says Solinus about the former and he introduces the latter by *nec illud minus [mirum]* (*Collectanea rerum memorabilium*, 5, 10). In the second place, he enumerates a whole range of *miracula fluminum* and points to the fact that in Sicily they appear to be extremely diverse (*fluminum miracula abunde varia sunt*, 5, 16, 17). In the third place he talks about the unusual character of the salt mines and of the various types of salt to be found in Sicily – it is true, however, that he does not employ a lexeme formed by means of the root *mir-* in this case – as can be noticed in the following: *Quanta in aquis, tanta in salinis novitas*.

In order to write the paragraphs on Sicily (*Etymologiae*, XIV, 6, 32-34) Isidore compiles more sources and leaves aside much of Solinus’ text; however, by comparing these texts, we can see that he takes Solinus’ text as a guideline and completes the same entries – like in the case of the Isle of Crete – that are part of the due description of an island. The detailed comparison of these texts – which we will not dwell upon here – shows that the encyclopaedist could not have been unaware of the information in *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*. However, none of the three marvellous, or at least curious, phenomena mentioned in the source text is to be found in the Isidorian text, although Isidore does mention the eruptions of the volcano (*Aethnae montis incendia*), the river Alpheus and the salt of Agrigent. It is nonetheless true that the selection made by the encyclopaedist is radical; however, at least for the last case, the paradoxical behaviour of the salt of Agrigent – which is marvellous in that, contrary to expectations, it dissolves in the fire and crackles when placed in water – appears as a *mirabilis res* with Augustine, too, in the same passage of *De civitate Dei* (21, 5, 1) which we have quoted with respect to the Isle of Tylos. Consequently, for this particular phenomenon we mentioned above, Isidore had two sources that describe it; both sources signal it as unusual or as marvellous, yet Isidore eliminates this qualification. It is possible that there is a different way to look at this: reading the same source, i.e. Solinus’ text, Augustine places the respective phenomenon among *mirabiles res* while Isidore contents himself to recording it with no comment.

As for the adjective *mirificus*, *-a*, *-um*, apart from the Solinian context 37, 18 – referring to the *dionysias* stone – which we discussed above, it is employed three more times in *Collectanea*.... In all of these situations, although Isidore made use of the information given there, the adjective was eliminated.

In the first passage we will analyse, Solinus describes the unicorn:

Sed atrocissimus est monoceros, monstrum mugitu horrido, equino corpore, elephanti pedibus, cauda suilla, capite ceruino. **Cornu e media fronte eius protenditur splendore mirifico**, ad magnitudinem pedum quattuor, ita acutum ut quicquid impetat, facile ictu eius perforetur. Viuus non uenit in hominum potestatem et interimi quidem potest, capi non potest. (*Collectanea*..., 52, 39-40)

In Isidore's work, *Etymologiae*, XII, 2, 12-13, most of the key elements that describe the creature are preserved, but the fact that it is characterized as marvellous is omitted:

Rhinoceron a Graecis vocatus. Latine interpretatur in nare cornu. Idem et monoceron, id est unicornus, eo quod **unum cornu in media fronte habeat** pedum quattuor ita acutum et validum ut quicquid impetierit, aut ventilet aut perforet [...] Tantaque autem esse fortitudinis ut nulla venantium virtute capiatur; sed, sicut asserunt qui naturas animalium scripserunt, virgo puella praeponitur, quae venienti sinum aperit, in quo ille omni ferocitate deposita caput ponit, sicque soporatus velut inermis capitur (*Etymologiae*, XII, 2, 12-13) [emphasis mine, AC].

According to the general strategy adopted in his encyclopaedia, Isidore chooses to mainly deal with the etymological aspect of the noun designating the unicorn (*Rhinoceron a Graecis vocatus. Latine interpretatur in nare cornu. Idem et monoceron, id est unicornus*). He reproduces information from Solinus' work when he starts describing the animal itself, keeping only what he considers to be "untainted" information: the data referring to the uniqueness of the unicorn's horn, its dimensions, its sharpness and strength that prevent anyone from capturing the unicorn. Yet he eliminates the detail related to its marvellous capacity to glow, a detail marked by the adjective *mirificus* in the source-text (*mirifico splendore*). He also eliminates the placement of this being in the category of the monstrous (since, as our previous papers show, *monstrum* is a word of divination, that has to do with foretelling the future). What comes next (the possibility of capturing the unicorn by the help of a maiden, according to a scenario borrowed from another source, *The Physiologus*) is, frankly speaking, much more marvellous than the amazing glowing of the horn. But Isidore is very careful about the possible theological significance of the elements of Creation: in *The Physiologus* the unicorn is "captured", that is it acquires a body, due to the Virgin. The theological significance is in no way commented upon (*The Etymologies* is nothing but an allegorical encyclopaedia), but Isidore takes his distance from the statement above by using a by now well-known strategy: he shows that the respective data do not belong to him, that he has the information from other authors "specialized" in zoology (*sicut asserunt qui naturas animalium scripserunt*).

Thus, if we compare it with its sources, the encyclopaedic information about the unicorn is clearly corrected according to that Isidorian rationality which we mentioned before: we are dealing with an essentialized description of a being considered to be part of the real animal world (let us not forget that the unicorn is not present in the chapter *De portentis* which also contains several monsters that are animals), a description out of which he eliminated the element of marvel – previously considered as such in one of the sources and which is in fact an unusual aspect in the world of hunters (the capture with the aid of a maiden) – which is only presented with the reservation of its having been quoted from *auctoritates*.

The second case is simpler. Solinus mentions that

Mittit India et calamos odoratos et multa alia **fragrantia mirifici spiritus suavitate** (*Collectanea...*, 52, 52) ‘India is the origin of some sweet-smelling rushes and many other herbs that give off fragrance marvellous through its sweetness’.

In *Etymologies*, 17, 8, 13 where he takes over information given by Solinus, Isidore eliminates the very term that qualifies as marvellous such a fragrance:

Calamus aromaticus [...] gignitur in India multis nodis geniculatus, fulvus, **fragrans spiritus suavitate**. [emphasis mine, AC]

In the last place, in *Collectanea...*, 19, 16, while giving a detailed description of the stag (19, 9-18), Solinus says that a whole range of medical remedies are due to this animal: it is because of the stag that man discovered the virtues of the *dictamnus* plant, that helps one expell arrows stuck in the flesh, as well as the *cinaris* plant, that acts against poisonous plants; also, the rennet taken from a deer killed in its mother’s womb is a wonderful remedy against poisons (*adversus venena mirificum est innulei coagulum occisi in matris suae utero*). Of these remedies, Isidore only retains *dictamnus*, while the rest of the medical information is left aside. As in some previous cases, we can imagine that this information was not considered interesting enough, but it is quite possible that it was excluded because of the marvellous character of some of it.

3.3 Derived forms of the root *stup-*

An analysis of the 4 contexts in which Isidore uses derived forms of the root *stup-* while employing information from Solinus’ work leads to similar results.

Only one of these contexts is incorporated completely in the encyclopaedia written by the bishop from Seville; in it all the lexical units that pertain to the lexis of the marvels are present. It is the very context we referred to above (XII, 4, 19), on the *scytale* snake, in whose presence victims are left paralyzed/ stupefied at its marvellous appearance (*miraculo sui*). It is common knowledge that the verb *stupeo*, *-ere* has both the meaning ‘to petrify; to petrify with surprise, to be stupefied’. Here, it obviously refers to the paralysis that the snake induces in his victims; on the other hand, *miraculum*, employed with the meaning ‘thing which arouses wonder’ sends to the figurative meaning of

stupeo, that of ‘stupefy’, which means that the coexistence of the two lexemes in the same context allows for reciprocal meaning enhancement. We interpreted the presence of this passage in *The Etymologies* as a “pressure” of the scholarly source whose text was fully reproduced, with the slightest of changes, as shown before.

Isidore takes from *Collectanea...*, 17, 8-9, that is from the passage where the appearance and habits of the panther are explained, only the description of the appearance of this animal and omits the whole part related to the way in which the panther hunts its victims that are paralyzed (with astonishment? – *stupidos*) at the sight of its fur (*Etimologii*, XII, 2, 8). Naturally, we can imagine that Isidore was not really interested in this information and that this is the reason why the respective passage does not appear in the encyclopaedia.

Collectanea..., 19, 11, shows that stags *stupent omnia* ‘wonder at all things’; although Isidore took as such the previous passage, *Mirantur autem sibilum fistularum. Erectis auribus acute audiunt, summissis nihil*, in which the verb *miror*, -*ari* was seen to have the meaning ‘to like’ rather than ‘to wonder at’, he no longer considered suitable or interesting to offer the information about the capacity that stags have to wonder at things. It is quite intriguing, since the text actually described animal behaviour and did not qualify a phenomenon as marvellous.

In *Etymologies*, XIV, 5, 13 a spring from the country of the Garamantes is described as cold during the day and hot during the night. In *Collectanea...*, 29, 1-4, Solinus largely described this phenomenon, underlining its marvellous dimension (*fonte miro*), the fact that it is unbelievable (*incredibile memoratu*); these characteristics do not “pass” into the Isidorian text; more than that, at the end of his paragraph, Solinus asks the following rhetorical question: *quis ergo non stupeat fontem qui friget calore, calet frigore?* But Isidore leaves aside the detailed description of the phenomenon and opts for a rather brief presentation of the natural phenomenon (more suitable to an entry of an encyclopedia, of course); he thus “flattens” the original text by eliminating the rhetorical question and the verb *stupeo*: *ubi est fons qui friget calore diei et calet frigore noctis* (*Etymologies*, XIV, 5, 13). The same phenomenon is treated by Isidore in Book XIII: *Apud Garamantes fontem esse ita algentem die ut non bibatur, ita ardentem nocte ut non tangatur* (*Etymologies*, XIII, 13, 10). This time, he most likely follows the line of Saint Augustine, *Apud Garamantas quemdam fontem tam frigidum diebus, ut non bibatur, tam fervidum noctibus, ut non tangatur* (*De civitate Dei*, 21, 5, 1), who places this phenomenon among the series of *res mirabiles* we previously quoted. Therefore, both Solinus and Augustine label this spring as marvellous, while Isidore opts for a neutral presentation, which eliminates the marvellous character from the text.

4. Conclusions

Comparing a relevant number of contexts has demonstrated that Isidore has reservations with respect to those phenomena presented by Solinus as marvellous. In the first place, there are many cases in which the encyclopaedist makes use of the data offered by his source text but chooses to systematically eliminate *only* those terms that qualify a certain phenomenon as marvellous; even so, after he has excluded the respective

label, he chooses to employ a specific mark by which he expresses his reservations or states that he is not the author of the information. We underscore this aspect that we have seen in three different situations: working with sources of great authority (Saint Augustine and Solinus) that qualify a certain phenomenon as marvellous, Isidore chooses to omit this label himself.

On the other hand, on certain occasions, he completely excludes certain passages which describe marvels. It is true that such cases are in themselves less relevant, since one might suppose that the information *as such* did not interest the encyclopaedist. But if we look at them from the perspective offered by the analysis of the first category of data, these situations become significant because it is very likely that the omissions are due to the author's desire to avoid mentioning those phenomena that might be qualified as marvellous.

We therefore feel confident to answer the questions posed at the beginning of this paper. Regarding the relation between *The Etymologies* and the *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* with respect to the use of the lexis of the marvels, we can safely say that Isidore is very selective and regularly eliminates the elements belonging to this kind of lexis. This analysis enabled us to check the conclusions that we drew in our previous research, since we attribute these reservations towards employing the lexis of the marvels to the constitutive rationality of the Isidorian encyclopaedic endeavour.

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APPENDIX

Contexts of the treatise *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* containing derived forms of the roots *mir-* and *stup-* with the meaning ‘marvellous’ which are used as sources in *The Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville. We have marked with “+” the passages in which Isidore preserves the qualification of a phenomenon as marvelous, and with “-” the contexts from which this label has been eliminated.

No.	Solinus, <i>Collectanea rerum memorabilium</i>	Isidore of Seville, <i>Etymologiae</i>	+ / -
1.	23, 7	IX, 5, 25	-
2.	19, 11	XII, 1, 18	-
3.	19, 16	XII, 1, 18	-
4.	17, 9	XII, 2, 8	-
5.	52, 40	XII, 2, 12-13	-
6.	27, 30	XII, 4, 19 <i>mir-</i>	+
7.	27, 30	XII, 4, 19 <i>stup-</i>	+
8.	12, 3	XII, 6, 11	-
9.	52, 41	XII, 6, 41	-
10.	2, 40	XII, 8, 10	-
11.	7, 27	XIII, 13, 5	-
12.	27, 46	XIII, 13, 8	-
13.	29, 1-2	XIII, 13, 10	-
14.	38, 5	XIII, 21, 15; XII, 21, 20	+
15.	52, 49	XIV, 3, 5	-
16.	29, 4	XIV, 5, 13	-
17.	56, 12	XIV, 6, 9	-
18.	11, 12	XIV, 6, 16	-
19.	11, 33	XIV, 8, 10	-
20.	5, 10	XIV, 6, 32-33	-
21.	34, 2	15, 1, 19	-
22.	37, 18	XVI, 4, 7; XVI, 11, 8	+ -
23.	27, 23	XVI, 15, 25	-
24.	52, 52	XVII, 8, 13	-

