



Mapping Liturgical Identity in Early Medieval Iberia and Beyond

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the seventh century, as Visigothic kings struggled to forge political consensus within their realms, Nicene Christianity became a critical means of conceptualizing, organizing, and integrating the Visigothic kingdom. In this context, royal and ecclesiastical elites began to address the question of liturgical orthodoxy and liturgical diversity on a kingdom-wide, rather than a local, scale. Although scholars have long recognized the importance of the Christian liturgy in Visigothic political discourse, they often treat liturgical ritual as a tool for Iberian actors, as a mechanism to achieve religious unity instead as a nuanced practice with its own contested history. In this essay, I explore how the Iberian bishop Isidore of Seville (b. 600-636), a prominent contributor to Visigothic royal ideology, both embraced and elided liturgical diversity in his writings to accomplish his ideological aims. Specifically, I analyze how Isidore deployed geography to draw a liturgical map of the universal Christian church and to highlight the orthodoxy of Iberian practices. Through his discussions of the Mass and Offices in the *Etymologiae*, *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, and the *Sententiae*, Isidore articulated both a dynamic vision of the universal church and the Iberian churches' privileged place within it.

ESSAY

Looking out across the liturgical landscape of early medieval Iberia, communion and harmony might not have been the first impression one received. Similar to other areas in the early medieval Christian world, the liturgical rites and religious customs practiced across the peninsula were extremely diverse. In the most basic liturgical performances of the mass and offices, the content of readings and chants could differ from region to region and from church to church. Regional Iberian liturgies exhibited ritual differences as well, ranging from “smaller” details, such as whether candles were lit or blessed on certain feasts, to sacramental rites, such as whether Christian initiates were immersed once or thrice in baptismal waters.¹ Iberian liturgies may have made claims to widespread Christian harmony, but these liturgies were not necessarily in harmony with one another.

For the most part, the peninsula-wide liturgical diversity of Iberian religious communities was not a particularly urgent concern of Iberian bishops in the sixth century. Although some sixth-century church councils offered liturgical reforms on a provincial level, and sixth-century bishops might have expressed suspicion of the rituals of neighboring regions, most communities had complete faith in the orthodoxy of their particular interpretations of the liturgy.²

Changes in Iberian politics, however, made liturgical diversity problematic in a way it had not been before. Throughout the seventh century, Visigothic kings and their allies

¹ Fourth Council of Toledo, canons 9 and 6, in *La colección canónica hispana*, ed. Gonzalo Martínez Díez and Félix Rodríguez, vol. V (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto Enrique Flórez), 195, 189-93.

² Famously described as “micro-Christendoms” in Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000*, 10th Anniversary Revised Edition (Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2013), 359.

turned to a number of tactics to forge political consensus and to establish their own authority among the Iberian elite, including military force,³ the oath of loyalty,⁴ and new ideologies of royal power.⁵ Increasingly, Iberian kings and elites who were invested in the successful integration of their kingdom also turned to the Nicene church as a means of conceptualizing and organizing their kingdom(s). Monarchs and ecclesiastics might have clashed over the scope of a king's religious responsibilities, but political and religious identity often went hand in hand.⁶ Although we can never assume that all Visigothic clerics and intellectuals associated religious cohesion with the cohesion of the kingdom, we can confidently assert that a significant number of influential clerics believed that cohesive religious consciousness was an effective way to integrate diverse regions, independently-minded cities, and recalcitrant nobility.

Many Iberian bishops, including Isidore of Seville (b. 600-636) and Ildefonsus of Toledo (b. 657-667), recognized that the correct practice of the Christian liturgy had the potential to unify and integrate the polities and communities of early medieval Iberia, and liturgy was a recurring focus for episcopal reformers over the course of the seventh century. Whether or not Isidore, Ildefonsus, and other reformers were successful in effectively conceptualizing and executing liturgical reform is open to

³ For the Visigothic army, see Amancio Isla Frez, *Ejército, Sociedad y política en la Península Ibérica entre los siglos VII y XI* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2010).

⁴ For Visigothic oaths, see Dietrich Claude, "The Oath of Allegiance and the Oath of the King in the Visigothic Kingdom," *Classical Folia* 30 (1976): 4-26.

⁵ For the development of Visigothic royal ideology, see Pablo C. Díaz and Maria R. Valverde, "The Theoretical Strength and Practical Weakness of the Visigothic Monarchy of Toledo," in *Rituals of Power from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Frans Theuvs and Janet L. Nelson (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 59-93; Maria R. Valverde Castro, *Ideología, simbolismo y ejercicio del poder real en la monarquía visigoda: un proceso de cambio* (Universidad de Salamanca, 2000), 125-283.

⁶ Abilio Barbero de Aguilera, "El pensamiento político visigodo y las primeras unciones regias en la Europa Medieval," *Hispania. Revista Española de Historia* 115 (1970): 245-326; Díaz and Valverde, "The Theoretical Strength and Practical Weakness," 75-81; Marc Reydellet, *La royauté dans la littérature latine, de Sidoine Apollinaire à Isidore de Séville* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1981), 505-97; Rachel Stocking, *Bishops, Councils, and Consensus in the Visigothic Kingdom, 589-633* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 59-88, 132-38, 174-91; Valverde Castro, *Ideología, simbolismo y ejercicio del poder real*, 195-215, 243-54.

debate.⁷ But religious practice in general, and the Christian liturgy in particular, was a critical site for the articulation, production, and actualization of Christian orthodoxy in early medieval Iberia.

To understand the integrative potential and challenges of the Christian liturgy, however, we, like Isidore and other seventh-century bishops, must look beyond the Iberian Peninsula. The question of liturgical diversity was a means of relating a Christian community to other Christian communities, and of carving out a fully articulated place in the larger Christian church. For some Iberian bishops, this was not only a Visigothic issue – it was also an issue in the universal Christian church. The liturgical variety across Christendom might seem disconnected from religious and political debate within the Iberian kingdoms. Yet the two were intimately related. Communities frequently articulate their boundaries by contrasting themselves against other elements of their social milieu, and religious, political, or ethnic “others” serve as useful foils to create a distinct group of insiders. But, although a society can define itself *against* the larger structure of which it is a part, it also defines itself by claiming a place *within* that structure.⁸ Moreover, social definition not only presupposes a place within a larger system, but it can also generate a strong desire to be a member of a larger group. No matter how favorably Iberian churches might compare with those in other kingdoms, it was unthinkable that they would not be united with other Christians under the mantle of the Christian church.

⁷ See Molly Lester, *The Word as Lived: The Practice of Orthodoxy in Early Medieval Iberia, c. 500-711* (Ph.D. Dissertation: Princeton University, 2017), Ch. 4.

⁸ See David Seidl, “The Basic Concepts of Luhmann’s Theory of Social Systems,” in *Niklas Luhmann and Organization Studies*, ed. David Seidl and Kai Helge Becker (Malmö: Copenhagen Business School Press, 2005, 2006), 21-53.

Isidore of Seville was particularly interested in placing Iberian churches in the larger cosmic order, and one way he accomplished this was by mapping liturgical similarity and difference across the Mediterranean world. For Isidore, the liturgy was one way of articulating a vision of Christendom grounded in geography, a vision in which liturgical similarities knit disparate regional Christians together into the body of Christ. In Isidore's vision of the Christian world, Iberian churches (or perhaps even a "Visigothic" church) took their place in the universal church through shared liturgical practices. But they also distinguished themselves through different practices. Isidore consistently used liturgical variations unique to Iberia to advance a claim to be the most orthodox Christian community in Christendom, a first among equals abroad. It was their shared practices, according to Isidore, that proclaimed Iberians orthodox Christians. It was their different practices that proclaimed them the most orthodox Christians.

Despite Isidore's keen interest in cosmology and universalism, modern scholarship on Isidore's ecclesiological definition of the Christian church is surprisingly slim.⁹ This dearth of scholarly investigation is perhaps due to the fact that Isidore's definition and discussion of the universal church across his corpus varied according to a text's purpose and audience. Among other things, Isidore conceptualized the universal church as an institution within which the Holy Spirit was able to distribute its gifts, performing the sacraments within the aegis of the church and fruitfully drawing Christians together as one.¹⁰ The Church guided its members in good living and good works, helping its

⁹ See Attilio Carpin, "Elementi di ecclesiologia isidoriana," *Sacra Doctrina. Rivista trimestriale di scienze religiose*, Bologna 47 (2002): 5-54, esp. 13-24; Santiago Montero Herrero, "L'idee ecumeniche di Isidoro di Siviglia," in *L'Ecumenismo Politico Nella Coscienza Dell'Occidente*, ed. Luciana Aigner Foresti, et. al (Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 1998), 397-403; Angelo Valastro Canale, "Ecclesia como universitas: notas sobre una definición Isidoriana," *Actas II Congreso Hispánico de Latin Medieval (León, 11-14 de noviembre de 1997)* 2 (1998): 881-86.

¹⁰ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* VI.xix.41, in *Etimologías; Edición Bilingüe*, trans. Jose Oroz Reta and Manuel-A. Marcos Casquero (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1982), 614; and *Sententiae* I.xv, in *Isidorus Hispalensis Sententiae*, ed. Pierre Cazier, CCSL 111 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 52-54.

members who “live[d] wrongly” towards a better life.¹¹ It was also an agent of universality. Isidore had rejected any sort of ecumenical vision based on political forms of unity, and he worked especially hard to uncouple the destiny of Christianity from the Roman (now eastern Roman) empire.¹² But Isidore’s vision of the world as divided among regional kingdoms did not mean he completely discarded the idea of universality that was the providential destiny of mankind.¹³ To paraphrase Santiago Montero Herrero, ecumenicalism might be sought not by political unification, but by the actions of the Church and classical Christian culture.¹⁴ It was the Church which called all diverse little churches and individual Christians, saints and sinners alike, to love of God,¹⁵ and bound regional churches together into a single body of Christ.

One of the most striking aspects of the universality of the Christian Church in Isidore’s works was its spatial presence throughout the known world.¹⁶ In the encyclopedic *Etymologiae*, for example, Isidore explained the universal, catholic nature of the Church by emphasizing its wide presence in the world: “‘Church’ (*ecclesia*) is a Greek word that is translated into Latin as ‘convocation’ (*convocatio*) because it calls everyone to itself. ‘Catholic’ (*catholicus*) is translated as ‘universal’ (*universalis*) after the term καθόλου, that is ‘with respect to the whole,’ for it is not restricted to some

¹¹ Isidore of Seville, *Sententiae* Lxvi.3: Sancta ecclesia catholica sicut male viventes in se patienter tolerat, ita male credentes a se repellit. In Cazier, 55.

¹² Santiago Montero Herrero, “L’idée ecumenique di Isidoro di Siviglia,” and Reydellet, *La royauté dans la littérature latine*, 556-57.

¹³ Manuel Albaladejo Vivero, “El Conocimiento Geográfico en las ‘Etimologías’ Isidorianas: Algunas Consideraciones,” *Iberia* 2 (1999): 203-11, 205.

¹⁴ Montero Herrero, “L’idée ecumenique di Isidoro di Siviglia.” For more on Isidore’s worldview, see M. Hermann, “Zwischen heidnischer und christlicher Kosmologie. Isidore von Sevilla und seine Weltanschauung,” *Analecta Cracoviensia* 34 (2002): 311-28.

¹⁵ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* VIII.i.i, in Oroz Reta and Marcos Casquero, 686; *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis* I.i, in Isidore of Seville, *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, ed. Christopher M. Lawson, CCSL CXIII (Turnhout: Brepols, 1989); *Isidore of Seville: De Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, trans. Thomas L. Knoebel, Ancient Christian Writers 61 (New York: The Newman Press, 2008), 4.

¹⁶ For Isidore’s interest in geography, see Albaladejo Vivero, “El Conocimiento Geográfico,” and S. Montero Díaz, “San isidoro y la ciencia geografica,” *Revista de la Universidad de Madrid* 1 (1940): 124-42.

parts of regions, like a small association of heretics, but is spread widely throughout the entire world (*totum terrarum orbem*) [...].”¹⁷ This geographical characterization of the Church’s universality echoed Book I of the *Sententiae*, a moral meditation addressing the internal and external challenges of a Christian life.¹⁸ As Isidore explained in the *Sententiae*, “the catholic church, just as it extends throughout the world, thus it constructs one society (*societate*) of peoples.”¹⁹ Just as the church needed a history, so it also needed a place.

To articulate the global extent of the Christian community, and the relationship between that community and the Iberian churches, Isidore frequently turned to the rituals of the Christian liturgy. The liturgy’s utility for discussing Christian universalism is most evident in *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, a pastoral text written around 615 in response to a request from his brother Fulgentius, bishop of Écija. Although *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis* was meant to explain the origins of Iberian liturgical rites, Isidore infused his descriptions with a strong sense of universality. In the preface to the text, for example, Isidore expressed a desire to speak of the offices that were “the established custom of the universal church.”²⁰ Within these offices, Isidore claimed that certain features of certain liturgical rites were universal, and that they were performed the same way throughout the entire world. Whether these statements were true is extremely dubious.

¹⁷ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* VIII.i.i: “Ecclesia Graecum est, quod in Latinum vertitur convocatio, propter quod omnes ad se vocet. Catholica, universalis, καθόλου, id est secundum totum. Non enim sicut conventicula haereticorum in aliquibus regionum partibus coartatur, sed per totum terrarum orbem dilatata diffunditur.” In Oroz Reta and Marcos Casquero, 686; trans. in *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephen A. Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 173.

¹⁸ Although the text has been traditionally dated between 600 and 615, Pierre Cazier has convincingly argued that the *Sententiae* was written during the late 620s or early 630s. See Cazier, x-xix.

¹⁹ Isidore of Seville, *Sententiae* I.xvi.6: “Ecclesia vero catholica sicut per totum mundum extenditur, ita et omnium gentium societate construitur.” In Cazier, 56.

²⁰ Isidore of Seville, *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis* preface to Book I: “Ea quae in officiis ecclesiasticis celebrantur partim sanctarum scripturarum auctoritate partim apostolica traditione vel consuetudine universalis ecclesiae statuta reperiuntur.” In Lawson, 1; trans. Knoebel, 29.

But Isidore believed, or at least claimed to believe, that some ritual practices were common to the larger Christian world. And given the pastoral purpose of the text, it was likely that the basis for Isidore's discussion was rites and customs practiced in Iberia.

Isidore's declarations of the widespread nature of a particular practice varied in their specificity. Sometimes, Isidore used a variation of the simple formula that "the church celebrates X." For example, in his description of the fast of the first day of November, Isidore stated that the church had received this custom from scripture and celebrated a universal fast.²¹ At other moments, Isidore was clearer in the widespread nature of a practice. "The universal church which is found in the pilgrimage of mortality," he wrote, "does this [standing to pray on Lord's day], looking forward at the end of time to what was first indicated in the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is *firstborn from the dead* (Col I.18)."²²

Moreover, he often accompanied these declarations of universality with a spatial qualification. Some are scattered among his discussion of the divine Offices, such as when he told Fulgentius that "the custom of [Matins] has become strong throughout the entire world (*universum mundum*)."²³ Most of these notes in *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, however, appeared within Isidore's description of the Mass. "The order of the Mass and the prayers, by which the sacrifices offered to God are consecrated," Isidore wrote,

²¹ Isidore of Seville, *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis* I.xl. In Lawson, 46-47.

²² Isidore of Seville, *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis* I.xxiv.2: "Hoc agit universa ecclesia quae in peregrinatione mortalitatis inventa est, expectans in finem saeculi quod in domini nostri Iesu Christi corpore praemonstratum est, qui est *primogenitus a mortuis* (Col I.18)." In Lawson, 27; trans. Knoebel, 48.

²³ Isidore of Seville, *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis* I.xxiii.1: "Sique ex illo (Christ's birth of a virgin) per universum mundum eiusdem celebrationis [Matins] invaluit consuetudo." In Lawson, 27; trans. Knoebel, 47.

“was first instituted by Peter. This celebration is realized in one and the same way throughout the entire world (*universus orbis*).”²⁴ Within the Mass itself, the sacrifice “is offered [among other reasons] for the repose of the faithful departed or to pray for them, because this is maintained throughout the whole world (*totum orbem*). The Catholic church holds this everywhere (*ubique*).” The sacrifice was also “[in] the universal church, [always] received by those fasting [...]. Thus, this custom [receiving body and blood before other food] is observed throughout the whole world (*universam orbem*).”²⁵ In these statements, Isidore implicitly placed the rites practiced in Iberia in the same breath as those practiced across the entire Christian community. As Iberian Christians and priests celebrated Mass, sang hymns, and fasted, they were doing so alongside all Christians.

But this implied universality of a number of practices both unconsciously and deliberately elided the staggering diversity of Christian liturgy across space and time. Although the basic ritual structure of the Mass and the Offices seems to have been relatively similar across the early medieval Christian world, almost every region of the former western Roman empire possessed a distinctive collection of liturgical practices which were constantly evolving. Gallican liturgies, for example, eventually came to be heavily influenced by the Roman liturgy,²⁶ while Old Hispanic liturgy was originally

²⁴ Isidore of Seville, *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis* I.xv.1: “Ordo autem missae vel orationum, quibus oblate deo sacrificia consecrantur, primum a sancto Petro est institutus; cuius celebrationem uno eodemque modo uniuersus peragit orbis.” In Lawson, 16-17; trans. Knoebel, 39.

²⁵ Isidore of Seville, *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis* I.xviii.11: “Sacrificium pro defunctorum fidelium requie offerre vel pro eis orare, quia per totum hoc orbem custoditur, credimus quod ab ipsis apostolis traditum sit; hoc enim ubique catholica tenet ecclesia [...]. Hoc enim in mysterio tunc factum est quod primum discipuli corpus et sanguinem domini non acceperunt ieiuni. Ab universa autem ecclesia nunc a ieiunis semper accipitur [...] et ideo per universam orbem mos iste servatur.” In Lawson, 22; trans. Knoebel, 42.

²⁶ See Yitzhak Hen, “Rome, Anglo-Saxon England and the Formation of the Frankish Liturgy,” *Revue bénédictine* 112 (2002): 301-22, and Cyrille Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy: An Introduction to the Sources*, rev. and trans. William G. Storey and Niels Krogh Rasmussen, with the assistance of John K. Brooks-Leonard (Washington D.C.: Pastoral Press, 1986), 61-239. For the Roman liturgy in general, see Josef

closely linked with Gallic liturgy, but came to develop its own unique features and quirks.²⁷ British and Irish Christians developed unique, eclectic iterations of liturgical practices and retained liturgical features that had long ago fallen out of date on the continent, such as their system for calculating Easter and *Vetus Latina* versions of some biblical books.²⁸ As eastern Christians circulated in the west, and the Byzantine empire forcefully inserted itself into the western Mediterranean in the first half of the sixth century, eastern liturgies might have complicated this already intricate mosaic of western liturgical rites.²⁹ Moreover, regional liturgies varied within themselves as well: Frankish and Iberian church councils, for example, reveal continued episcopal attention to liturgical reform within distinct kingdoms or dioceses,³⁰ and the overwhelming impression of Irish and British liturgies is that localities markedly diverged from one another in worship.³¹

Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite, its Origins and Development*, trans. Francis A. Brunner, rev. Charles K. Riepe (New York: Benziger Bros., 1959). For the Frankish liturgy, see Yitzhak Hen, "Unity in Diversity: The Liturgy of Frankish Gaul before the Carolingians," in *Unity and Diversity*, 19-30.

²⁷ For the Old Hispanic liturgy, see William Chatterley Bishop, *The Mozarabic and Ambrosian Rites: Four Essays in Comparative Liturgiology*, ed. C. L. Feltoe (London: Mowbray, 1924); *El canto mozárabe y su etorno: Estudios sobre la música de la liturgia viejo hispánica* (Madrid: Sociedad Española de la Musicología, 2013); *Estudios sobre la liturgia mozárabe*, ed. Juan Francisco Rivera Recio (Toledo: Disputación Provincial, 1965), particularly José Janini, "Roma y Toledo: nueva problemática de la liturgia visigótica," 33-53; *Hispania Vetus: Musical-liturgical manuscripts from Visigothic Origins to the Franco-Roman Transition (9th-12th centuries)*, ed. Susana Zapke (Bilbao: Fundación BBVA, 2007); Jordi Pinell, *Liturgia hispánica* (Barcelona: Centre de Pastoral Litúrgica, 1998); and Germán Prado, *Historia del rito mozárabe y Toledano* (Burgos: Abadía de Santo Domingo de Silos, 1928).

²⁸ For the early medieval Irish and British liturgies, see Catherine Cubitt, "Unity and diversity in the early Anglo-Saxon liturgy," in *Unity and Diversity*, 45-57; Jane Stevenson, "Introduction," in F.E. Warren, *The Liturgy and Ritual of the Celtic Church*, 2nd edn., ed. Jane Stevenson (Wolfeboro, NH: Boydell Press, 1987), ix-cxxviii, esp. xxxvii-xxxix, xxxii-xxxv, and liii-xcvi.

²⁹ For possible eastern influences on western liturgies, see Joseph H. Crehan, "The liturgical trade route: East to West," *Studies* 65 (1976): 87-99; Peter Jeffery, "The Earliest Oktoechnoi: The Role of Jerusalem and Palestine in the Beginnings of Modal Ordering," in *The Study of Medieval Chant: Paths and Bridges, East and West*, ed. Peter Jeffery (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 147-209; and Johannes Quasten, "Oriental influences in the Gallican liturgy," *Traditio* 1 (1943): 55-78.

³⁰ For Frankish reforms, see Yitzhak Hen, *The Royal Patronage of Liturgy in Frankish Gaul to the Death of Charles the Bald (877)* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2001).

³¹ Stevenson, "Introduction."

Liturgical differences could range from readings to aspects of rites to calendars. For example, the early medieval Roman rite did not include a reading from the Old Testament, as opposed to almost all of the other western traditions. Ritual actions within a service could also vary. Roman priests completed the distinct act of placing consecrated bread within the Eucharistic chalice,³² and Iberian Christians had long grappled with debates over the number of immersions performed in baptism. These differences might appear small to a modern reader, especially when compared to the broad similarities across the western liturgies, but a perceived deviation in procedure could spark anxiety over the efficacy, or even the orthodoxy, of a service.

Although Isidore did not know the particulars of every regional liturgy in the early medieval world, he was probably familiar with enough of them to recognize distinctive features. Southern Iberia traditionally had very strong social, cultural, and economic connections with north Africa, and Isidore had contact with bishops and clerics in neighboring Byzantine territories in the southern peninsula. At the Second Council of Seville in 619, Isidore and his fellow bishops denounced a Syrian bishop from the Byzantine lands as a heretic while the Syrian bishop was present.³³ Moreover, Isidore is thought to have been involved in a massive codification of Greek, African, Gallic, and Iberian church councils after the Fourth Council of Toledo.³⁴ If so, Isidore would have had ample opportunity to observe different practices as recent as the late sixth century. Isidore's contemporary knowledge of liturgy, paired with a historical

³² John F. Romano, *Liturgy and Society in Early Medieval Rome* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), Ch. 1.

³³ Seville II, canon 12. In *Concilios Visigóticos e Hispano-Romanos*, ed. José Vives (Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto Enrique Flórez, 1963), 171-72.

³⁴ See *La Colección Canónica Hispana*, ed. Gonzalo Martínez Díez, vol. 1: *Estudio* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto Enrique Flórez, 1966).

knowledge of older liturgical rites, had most likely provided him with a nuanced understanding of liturgical universality and liturgical localism.

Despite his claim that Iberian rites mirrored those performed in other Mediterranean churches, Isidore did not avoid all dissimilarities; instead, he carefully compared certain differences in which he made it clear that he preferred the Iberian version. In the *Etymologiae*, for example, he made clear that he considered the “Greek” date of Easter incorrect and problematic, a remark which also spoke to his consistent desire to denigrate Byzantine Christianity.³⁵ Isidore’s regionalization of particular rites could be more specific than the broad characterizations of East and West. While discussing chants of the mass, Isidore explained that “the African regions (*Africanis regionibus*) only [chant alleluia] on Sundays and the fifty days after the resurrection. On the other hand, among us, following the ancient tradition of the Spains (*Hispaniarum*), the alleluia is chanted always except for fast days or during Lent. For it is written, ‘His praise shall continually be in my mouth [Ps. 33(34):2].’”³⁶

While Isidore highlighted some variations between the liturgies of Iberia and other regions, he avoided some regionalisms that were distinct to Iberia. One particular prayer in Isidore’s description of the sequence of the Mass prayers (the *illatio* prayer) appears to have been a unique Hispano-Mozarabic development, the equivalent of which would have been the preface prayer of the Roman rite.³⁷ But unlike his commentary on alleluia

³⁵ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* VI.xvii.19. In Oroz Reta and Marcos Casquero, 602.

³⁶ Isidore of Seville, *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis* I.xiii.3: “In Africanis autem regionibus non omni tempore sed tantum dominicis diebus et quinquaginta post domini resurrectionem alleluia cantatur pro significatione futurae resurrectionis et laetitiae; verum apud nos secundum antiquam Hispaniarum traditionem, praeter dies ieiuniorum vel quadragesimae, omni tempore cantatur alleluia; scriptum est enim: *Semper laus eius in ore meo*.” In Lawson, 15; trans. Knoebel, 38.

³⁷ Isidore of Seville, *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis* I.xv.2. In Lawson, 17. Also, see Knoebel, 40, n. 14.

chants, Isidore was silent on the probable Iberian origin of the prayer. This could have been due to ignorance of other liturgies, but it is more likely that Isidore's silence on the regional nature of the prayer might have been a strategy to legitimate it within the scope of the universal church.

Even as he continued to edit his texts throughout his life, Isidore continued to dodge particular topics that could disrupt his proposed ecclesiological vision. Claiming universality for practices simultaneously advanced a vision for how the church should (and could) work, and papered over real and serious differences. Indeed, in *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, Isidore claimed that the material of the first book concerned the “origins and causes of the offices that are celebrated in common by the church,” presenting them as unquestionably universal when, in reality, some were still open to interpretation.³⁸ Given that divergence from an established formula had the potential to be spiritually harmful, it is easy to understand why Isidore was anxious that there be one correct way to do certain rites. But Isidore was always careful to weigh whether rigid interpretations of particular rituals were worth the social harm they might cause.

Altogether, in comparison to its neighbors, both historical and contemporary, Isidore intended the Visigothic kingdom to shine as a beacon of correct Christianity. But for all its exemplary religious history, and for all its orthodox belief and practice, the newly envisioned Visigothic church was still a part of something much bigger than itself. It was only one member of an enormous number of communities making up the body of Christ – an exemplary member, to be sure, but a member none the less. Isidore did not,

³⁸ Isidore of Seville, *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis* II. preface: “Quoniam origenes causasque officiorum quae in communi ab ecclesia celebrantur ex parte aliqua explicuimus.” In Lawson, 51; trans. Knoebel, 67.

and probably did not want to, detach the Iberian church from this context. He wanted to embed it within the Christian Church's history and its present reality. Iberia, although a bastion of correct and pious practice, was only one tile in the brilliantly diverse mosaic of the universal Christian Church.

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