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*A COMPANION TO*  
ISIDORE  
OF SEVILLE



*Edited by*

ANDREW FEAR & JAMIE WOOD

BRILL

# Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition

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# A Companion to Isidore of Seville

*Edited by*

Andrew Fear

Jamie Wood



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## Isidore of Seville: Historical Contexts

*Santiago Castellanos*

“Do not forget our little brother Isidore,”<sup>12</sup> This was the wish expressed by Leander, the bishop of Seville, to his sister Florentina as she made her profession in a nunnery. Afterwards the phrase came to form part of a work dealing with the moral and ascetic training of nuns, which Leander composed specifically for Florentina. The “little brother” was Isidore of Seville. This chapter aims to place Isidore in his historical context by looking at the way he fulfilled his role as a bishop, as the author of a series of literary works, and via his social, political, and religious legacy. It must be conceded, as in previous treatments of Isidore, that in reality we know very little about his personality or the history of his life. Nevertheless, it is possible to engage with his thought and examine the influence that he exercised during his episcopate (c.600/602–636).

Isidore was the bishop of an important city in Hispania, Hispalis (the modern Seville), in the first third of the 7th century A.D. This was a period when the Catholic Church was beginning to enjoy a period of political hegemony, which had begun in the previous generation when the *regnum Gothorum* under Recared (586–601) converted from Arianism to Catholicism. This is not to say that prior to this, during the late Roman and earlier Visigothic periods, Catholic bishops had not exercised important power and influence in Hispania, but this new alliance with the monarchy gave the clergy a whole new level of authority, and Isidore was to reap the benefits of this new dispensation.

### 1 Leander of Seville and the Formation of Isidore’s World

In the same paragraph of the *De institutione uirginum*, Leander remarks to his sister Florentina that she had left the region where she was born in her early youth, “the land where they expelled its citizens, and settled foreigners to the

1 This paper is part of the research project HAR2013-47889-C3-3-P, funded by the Economy Office of the Spanish government. I am very grateful to Andrew Fear for translating the text into English.

2 Leander, *De institutione uirginum* 3: “nec iunioris fratris obliuis caris.” For more on these topics, see the chapters by Purificación Ubric Rabaneda and Pedro Castillo Maldonado in the present volume.



loss of its honour, lost its fertility.” Where was this region? We are given the answer by Isidore, who in his short biographical sketch of Leander makes it clear that the family hailed from *Carthaginiensis* and also reveals that their father was called Severian.<sup>3</sup> The foreigners to whom Leander refers as having occupied *Carthaginiensis* were none other than the imperial Roman/Byzantine troops who took control of the south-east of Hispania during the civil war between Agila and Athanagild, in the middle of the 6th century, a war which came to an end after the triumph of the latter, who then became the rulers of the *regnum Gothorum*. The state of our knowledge does not allow us to ascertain the first origins of the family: Leander says that Florentina was born in *Carthaginiensis*, but this does not necessarily mean that this was also true of Severian. Indeed, some scholars have suggested that the family’s origins lay in Africa. However, upon careful assessment of the available evidence it is impossible to make any statement with certainty on this matter. The reference to *Carthaginiensis* obscures any firm clue about the family’s origins.<sup>4</sup> Afterwards Severian, his wife, Leander, Fulgentius (who was soon to become bishop of Écija), and Florentina (who took monastic vows) settled in Baetica, the most southerly of the Spanish provinces. It is quite possible that Isidore was born in Seville. Sometime before 579 Leander became bishop of Seville, and it is from this time that we are able to trace his political, religious, and intellectual career more clearly.<sup>5</sup>

3 Leander, *De institutione uirginum* 31, for the reference to the region occupied by foreigners; Isidore, *De uiris illustribus* 28: “genitus patre Seueriano, Carthaginiensis prouinciae Hispaniae.” See the chapter on Leander by Purificación Ubic Rabaneda elsewhere in this volume for more on this topic.

4 In favour of the family’s origin being in Carthaginiensis, Ursicino Domínguez del Val, *Leandro de Sevilla y la lucha contra el arrianismo* (Madrid: 1981), 21. For the possibility of an African origin, Roger Collins, *La España Visigoda, 409–711* (Barcelona: 2005), 159. For the political context in which Leander’s family left the region of Cartagena for *Hispalis*, see Luis A. García Moreno, “La Andalucía de San Isidoro,” in *Actas II Congreso de Historia de Andalucía*, vol. 3 (Córdoba: 1994), 555–79. For Leander and his influence on Isidore, see Jamie Wood, “A Family Affair: Leander, Isidore and the Legacy of Gregory the Great in Spain,” in *Isidore of Seville and his Reception in the Early Middle Ages*, eds Andrew Fear and Jamie Wood (Amsterdam: 2016), 31–56.

5 It is not certain that his mother’s name was Turtur, despite the opinion of Jacques Fontaine, *Isidore de Séville. Genèse et originalité de la culture hispanique au temps des Wisigoths* (Turnhout: 2000), 89–90. She was perhaps abbess of the monastery to which Florentina belonged, José Carlos Martín, “Isidoro de Sevilla: su familia, su vida, su producción escrita,” in *Escritos medievales en honor del obispo Isidoro de Sevilla* (Turnhout: 2017), 14–53, esp. 23. It has been suggested that Leander and his family were supporters of the Byzantine occupation. This is the view of Jacques Fontaine and of Pierre Cazier, “Qui a chassé de Carthaginoise Sévérianus et les siens? Observations sur l’histoire familiale d’Isidore de Séville,” in *Estudios en Homenaje*

Isidore tells us that Leander's career flourished during the reign of Reccared, which allows us to suppose that he died before December 601, the date of Reccared's own death. It is impossible to know how precise Isidore wishes to be here, but in any event we can assume that Leander died c.600/601, perhaps even in 602.<sup>6</sup> Isidore records some of the works written by his brother, singling out two polemical works against Arianism which have sadly not survived. The first was *Against the Doctrines of the Heretics*, written in two books, and the second was a smaller work titled *Against the claims of the Arians*. Leander wrote other works such as the *De institutione uirginum et de contemptu mundi*, which he dedicated to his sister; letters; and homilies, including the famous homily delivered at the Third Council of Toledo, which will be referred to below.<sup>7</sup> As regards the exile which Isidore mentions Leander endured, this is most likely the journey that Leander made to Constantinople. Like many other events in Leander's life, we know neither the date of this journey nor the date of his return to Hispania. Pope Gregory the Great would later dedicate his *Moralia in Job* to Leander, and its dedicatory preface states that the journey was made "for reasons concerning the faith of the Visigoths." It is clear that Gregory and Leander met and became friends in Constantinople, one being there as the papal envoy to the imperial court and the other there for "reasons of faith." The majority of modern commentators believe that these "reasons" were the war which had broken out in 579 in *Hispania* between King Leovigild and his son. Leovigild was an Arian, while Hermenegild had converted to Catholicism,

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*a don Claudio Sánchez Albornoz en sus 90 años* (Buenos Aires: 1983), 353. However, the disdain expressed towards the "foreigners" who had occupied Carthaginiensis makes this difficult to believe, even though years after leaving this region he was forced to travel Constantinople to negotiate for imperial support for Hermenegild. A more likely scenario is that proposed by Abilio Barbero, "El conflicto de los Tres Capítulos y las iglesias hispánicas en los siglos VI y VII," in *La sociedad visigoda en su entorno histórico* (Madrid: 1992), 136–67, especially 161, using the text sent to Florentina as evidence for Leander's hostility to the empire. There is much to commend the caution of María Adelaida Andrés Sanz, "Leandro de Sevilla," in *La Hispania visigótica y mozárabe. Dos épocas en su literatura*, ed. Carmen Codoñer (Salamanca: 2010), 63–68, which has been reiterated with respect to both Leander and Isidore by Isabel Velázquez, *Latine dicitur, vulgo vocant. Aspectos de la lengua escrita y hablada en las obras gramaticales de Isidoro de Sevilla* (Logroño: 2003).

- 6 Isidore, *De viris illustribus* 28: "Floruit sub Recharedo, uiro religioso ac principe glorioso." For these dates, Jacques Fontaine, *Isidore de Séville. Genèse et originalité*, 91 and 113, and *Isidore de Séville et la culture classique dans l'Espagne Wisigothique*, 2nd ed. (Paris: 1983). For the date of Reccared's death, see *Laterculus regum Visigothorum* 28. The possibility of 602 depends on the *Epitaphium Leandri, Isidori et Florentinae*, Martín, "Isidoro de Sevilla," 37.
- 7 Isidore, *De viris illustribus* 28: "duos aduersus haereticorum dogmata libros" and "opusculum aduersus instituta arrianorum," the passage makes it clear that these were written "in exilii sui peregrinatione."

though it is unclear whether he did this prior to the war or during it. Leander's journey to the imperial court under such circumstances suggests that it stemmed from a need to seek imperial support for Hermenegild's cause. Recent investigations into this affair appear to show that the emperor did indeed promise some sort of help but that this came to nothing, as shortly afterwards Leovigild was to pay him a substantial number of *solidi*. If we believe Gregory the Great, Leander returned shortly before the death of Leovigild, which occurred in 586.<sup>8</sup>

According to our sources, Hermenegild's conversion to Catholicism would have taken place around 579. Our Iberian sources make no mention of it. Both John of Biclar and Isidore describe Hermenegild as a *tyrannus*, or usurper. In his *De viris illustribus* (there is nothing in his *Historia Gothorum*) Isidore notes the role his brother played in the conversion of the Goths, but he makes no mention of Hermenegild, let alone that Leander was implicated in his revolt. John of Biclarum probably made a cryptic reference to Leander's opposition to Leovigild. But he also initiated the practice of presenting Hermenegild as a usurper and thus says nothing about his relationship with Leander. Up to 580 Leovigild was seeking forms of a liturgy that would allow Catholics to convert to Arianism, which suggests that religious issues had become part of the conflict. Outside the Visigothic kingdom Hermenegild was seen as a martyr of the Catholic Church. For this reason Gregory of Tours, for example, champions the Frankish princess Ingund, Hermenegild's wife, and Gregory the Great praises Leander himself. Ingund was the daughter of Brunhild and Sigibert, and thus had Visigothic blood, given that Brunhild was the daughter of King Atanagild and Gosvint, who was married to Leovigild. John of Biclar seems to imply that

8 Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, praefatio. For relations between Gregory and Leander, see Leandro Navarra, "Interventi di Leandro di Siviglia negli sviluppi storice e religiosi della Spagna visigotica: aspetti positivi e limiti," *Studi Storici Religiosi* 4 (1980), 123–34; Josep Vilella, "Gregorio Magno e Hispania," *Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum* 33 (1991), 167–86; Pablo C. Díaz, "Gregorio Magno y el reino visigodo. Un conflicto de poderes," in *Gregorio Magno, l'impero e i "regna"*, ed. Claudio Azzara (Florence: 2008), 59–80; and Wood, "A Family Affair." For the differing possibilities and interpretation of our sources regarding Leander's voyage, see Santiago Castellanos, *Los Godos y la Cruz* (Madrid: 2007); Luis A. García Moreno, *Leovigildo. Unidad y diversidad de un reinado* (Madrid: 2008), 118; and Margarita Vallejo, *Hispania y Bizancio. Una relación desconocida* (Madrid: 2012), 249ff. Leovigild paid the Byzantines 30,000 *solidi*, according to Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum* 5.38. Bishop Licinianus met Leander on his return from Constantinople, as he records in 595 in a letter addressed to Gregory the Great, but we cannot give a precise date for their encounter, Licinianus, *Epistola* 1. In an entry dating to 584/585, John of Biclarum, *Chronicon* 77, gives a heading which refers to Leander's "splendour": "Leander Ispalensis ecclesie episcopus clarus habetur." García Moreno, *Leovigildo*, 22–23, n. 15, has suggested that, like other headings in John's *Chronicle*, it is likely that this compliment refers to his opposition to Leovigild.

Gosvinth was to blame for the war when he says that it began as a domestic dispute. He places a phrase in the ablative which appears to speak of action on the part of Gosvinth's faction which grammatically is best interpreted as showing that he is blaming the group that had supported the *factione Gosuinthe regine tirannidem assumens*. In Merovingian Gaul, Gregory of Tours does mention Hermenegild's conversion, as did Gregory the Great, writing in Rome. Both of these authors were writing towards the end of the 6th century, shortly after the conflicts they describe and of which they were direct contemporaries. On the other hand, it is clear that in the *regnum Gothorum* itself that care was taken to pass over this event in silence, something found in all our key sources (council *acta*, John of Biclar, and Isidore) written during or after Reccared's reign.<sup>9</sup> Hermenegild's presence in Seville and his association with Leander cannot be doubted if we trust the testimony of Gregory, who makes this clear in the above-mentioned passage from his *Dialogues*. Gregory states that he knew (*cognouimus*) about these events from many (*multorum*) who visited him *ab Hispaniarum partibus*. Given the friendship the two had formed in Constantinople, Gregory's source was probably Leander.

We can see Leovigild's hand in the religious dimension of the conflict, as in his council of 580 he sought to build bridges that would allow the conversion of Catholics to Arianism, and he conflicted with the Catholic bishops, conflicts which would later be presented as anti-Catholic persecution on his part.<sup>10</sup> During the reign of Reccared and the conversion of the kingdom to Catholicism

9 Isidore, *De viris illustribus* 28: "ut etiam fide eius atque industria populi gentis Gothorum ab arriana insania ad fidem catholicam reuerterentur." On the dating of the beginning of the revolt and Hermenegild's conversion to 579, see García Moreno, *Leovigildo*, 112, *contra* the later date proposed by Roger Collins, "¿Dónde estaban los arrianos en 589?" in *Concilio III de Toledo. XIV Centenario* (Toledo: 1991), 211–22. For Ingund's role, Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum* 5,38. For that of Leander, see Gregory the Great, *Dialogi* 3,31. For a grammatical and historical reading of the passage, García Moreno, *Leovigildo*, 102–03. For the support of Brunhild, Ingund's mother, for Hermenegild and the broader European and Mediterranean context in which these events took place, see Walter Gof-fart, "Byzantine Policy in the West under Tiberius II and Maurice: The Pretenders Hermenegild and Gundovald (579–585)," *Traditio* 13 (1957), 73–118. For relations between the Merovingian world, Leovigild, Hermenegild, and Reccared, see Castellanos, *Los Godos y la Cruz*, 11ff, 269ff, 295ff. It is only at the end of the 7th century that Valerio of Bierzo, an eccentric author opposed to the church hierarchy, refers in his *De uana saeculi sapientia* 6 to Hermenegild as a kind of martyr, the first such reference in Spain.

10 The main texts are John of Biclarum, *Chronicon* 57, s. a. 580; Isidore, *Historia Gothorum* 50 and 55; Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum* 5,38 and, later in the 7th century, the *Vitas Sanctorum Patrum Emeretensium*, especially book 5. For an evaluation of the documents and the main historiographic theories concerning them, see: Castellanos, *Los Godos y la Cruz*, 69ff.

after the Third Council of Toledo in 589, letters written by Gregory to Leander show once again their friendship and the level of influence Leander enjoyed, even during the reign of Reccared, who, we must remember, had been an enemy of Hermenegild, and thus presumably of Leander, in the civil war. Nevertheless, there was a political realignment after Hermenegild's defeat upon the accession of Reccared in 586, and Leander went on to hold powerful political influence, which reached its peak at the Third Council of Toledo in 589 and in the *Homily* that he delivered to the king, bishops, and leading lay members of the royal court.<sup>11</sup> When Leander died, at a date that cannot be fixed with certainty but which, as we have seen, can be placed between 599 and 602, Catholicism was the official religion of the Visigothic kingdom and Hermenegild remembered simply as a usurper, *tyrannus*, with both his conversion to Catholicism and any hint that Leander had taken part in his uprising buried in silence. Leander's younger brother, Isidore, succeeded him as bishop of Seville.

## 2 Isidore as an Author in a Cultural Context

This is, perhaps, the most well-known aspect of Isidore's life. He was the author of a whole series of writings in different genres, including *historiae*, a chronicle, letters, poetry, lexicographical studies, the compilation of the knowledge of the past and present eras, works on religious and political morality, and ecclesiastical and monastic discipline. He enjoyed a long episcopate which ran from around 600/602 until his death in 636. I will not give a full list of his literary output here, but rather a small selection from it. The essential detailed discussion of his works and life is that of Manuel C. Díaz y Díaz in his introduction to the *Etymologiae*.<sup>12</sup> Isidore's friend Braulio, the bishop of Saragossa, wrote a *Renotatio librorum domini Isidori*, a short resumé of Isidore's works. Braulio and Isidore knew one another personally, perhaps since 625/626, and kept up a long correspondence, although we only have some of the letters that they exchanged.<sup>13</sup>

11 For the details and interpretation of Gregory's letters to Leander, see Vilella, "Gregorio Magno," and Díaz, "Gregorio Magno."

12 Manuel C. Díaz y Díaz, "Introducción general," in *San Isidoro de Sevilla, Etimologías*, trans. José Oroz Reta and Manuel A. Marcos Casquero, 2 vols (Madrid: 1982–83), 1:1–257. See now Martín, "Isidoro de Sevilla."

13 On the date of the possible first meeting and the correspondence between Braulio and Isidore, see now the new edition (and introduction) of the letters, by Ruth Miguel Franco and José Carlos Martín, *Braulionis CaesarAugustani Epistulae et Isidori Hispalensis*

Just as the date of Isidore's letters has been re-evaluated, similar debates have begun concerning the dates of Isidore's other works. This is most striking with regard to the *Sententiae*, a work for which Cazier and Fontaine have proposed a late date, around 633, while Martín Iglesias suggests c.614/615, using as evidence the use that Sisebut made of this work in his hagiography of Desiderius of Vienne, the *Vita Desiderii*, his problems with Brunhild, and the final triumph of Chlothar II. The *Sententiarum libri tres* deals with matters of religion and morality but also focuses on the correct way to exercise political power, forming a guide to how, in Isidore's opinion, a king should conduct himself.<sup>14</sup>

Martín Iglesias has also suggested that Isidore's first work—or at least one of the first—was his *De viris illustribus*, on the grounds that it makes no mention of the death of Eutropius of Valencia, who played a key role at, for example, the Third Council of Toledo; nor does it mention the deaths of Maximus of Zaragoza or John of Biclaram. He also argues convincingly that the early dating of the *De viris illustribus* is shown in the way that the works of authors from the 6th and 7th centuries that Isidore cites in other, probably later, works are not found in the *De viris illustribus*. It is therefore likely that the *De viris illustribus* was written prior to the *Etymologiae*, *De natura rerum*, and *De ortu et obitu patrum*, which have normally been seen as the first of Isidore's works.<sup>15</sup>

From the correspondence between Braulio and Isidore we can see that Braulio had no access to the text of the *Etymologiae* until the beginning of the 630s, despite having asked for a copy from at least 625/626. The *Etymologiae* took a long period to write and edit. They were begun at the beginning of Sisebut's reign (612), and a first version dedicated to the king began to circulate towards the end of his reign, c.620 (Sisebut died in 621), but Isidore continued to work on them until around 632/633. The work is often, and with good reason, referred to as an "encyclopedia," as it gathers together an enormous

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*epistulae ad Braulionem. Braulionis Caesaraugustani Confessio uel professio Iudaeorum ciuitatis Toletanae*, CCSL 114B (Turnhout: 2018), 25\* (for the date of the first meeting: 625/626). See in addition José Carlos Martín, ed., *Scripta de uita Isidori Hispalensis episcopi*, CCSL 113B (Turnhout: 2006), 73ff and 65ff. Martín's edition of the *Renotatio* is essential for its revision of the traditional chronology assigned to Isidore's works, for example by José Antonio de Aldama, "Indicaciones sobre la cronología de las obras de s. Isidoro," in *Miscellanea Isidoriana* (Rome: 1936), 57–89.

14 Pierre Cazier, "Les *Sentences* d'Isidore de Séville et le I<sup>ve</sup> Concile de Tolède: Réflexions sur les rapports entre l'Église et le pouvoir politique en Espagne autour des années 630," *Antigüedad y Cristianismo* 3 (1986), 373–86, and his edition of the *Sententiae*, *Isidorus Hispalensis Sententiae*, CCSL 111 (Turnhout: 1998). See now Martín, *Scripta*, 70–71.

15 José Carlos Martín, "El catálogo de los varones ilustres de Isidoro de Sevilla (CPL 1206): contenidos y datación," *Studia Historica. Historia Antigua* 31 (2013), 129–51.



amount of data over a wide-ranging field of subjects, including botany, mathematics, rhetoric and grammar, and religion. Originally the work was dedicated to King Sisebut (612–21), as shown in the dedicatory preface of the first edition, which has been preserved in various manuscripts. But its final version was dedicated to Braulio. We ought not to read the reference made to Isidore in Braulio's *epistula* 11 as an indication that he had commissioned the work from him. However, it is clear that in 632/633 he reminded him that it had been seven years since he had asked to see it, and in the *Renotatio*, written after the deaths of Isidore and Sisebut, Braulio was proud to claim that he had commissioned the work ("he had it copied at my request"). Years later, when Ildefonsus of Toledo wrote his *De viris illustribus* he appears in his chapter on Isidore to have accepted Braulio's version of events. When Braulio finally obtained a copy of the *Etymologiae* he saw it was not divided into books, but by themes. He quickly altered this and divided the work into books.<sup>16</sup>

Isidore dedicated his *De natura rerum* to King Sisebut at the same time as the king in turn dedicated to the bishop of Seville his own *Carmen de eclipsibus solis et lunae*, a work written in hexameters that deals with lunar eclipses. The long list of Isidore's works could have been arranged in broad thematic groups, a view recently championed by Codoñer, Andrés, and Martín, and which is followed in this chapter. Thus, we encounter pedagogic works, such as *De natura rerum* or the first book of the *Differentiae*; those dealing with biblical exegesis, such as the *Proemia*, *De ortu et obitu patrum*, *Allegoriae*, and *Liber numerorum*; works on monastic discipline, like the *Regula monachorum*; works on ecclesiastical discipline, such as the *De ecclesiasticis officiis* and his revision of the *Collectio Hispana* of church councils; works in the defence of religious orthodoxy, such as the second book of the *Differentiae*, the *De fide catholica contra*

16 I accept here the dates proposed by Ruth Miguel Franco and José Carlos Martín in their new edition of the *Epistolarium* of Braulio, cited in n. 13. Braulio's request for the *Etymologiae*, ep. 11 (in the enumeration of Ruth Miguel Franco and José Carlos Martín, dated now post-631). In *Ep.* IV (normally dated to c.632/633), Braulio complains to Isidore that he asked for the work seven years ago (as Martín and Miguel Franco explain, this would have been during their first personal meeting in 625/626); after this, Isidore, when he finally sent Braulio a copy of the *Etymologiae*, told him he was sending the text and hoped he would correct it, as he found himself in poor health and had not been able to finish revising it (*Ep.* V, dated to c.632–33). On the long period of the *Etymologiae*'s composition, see Díaz y Díaz, "Introducción," 172–74, and Martín, *Scripta*, 79–80 and 258–59 (and also his views, *contra* Díaz y Díaz, on the role played by Sisebut). Braulio's pride is expressed in the phrase *quia rogatu meo fecit*, Braulio, *Renotatio* 44, which Martín believes probably suggests that Braulio is referring to the copies that he made of the text (*Scripta*, 78), and therefore my translation of the sentence. See also Ildefonsus, *De viris illustribus* 8. On the *Etymologiae*, see the chapter by Jacques Elfassi in the present volume.

*Iudaeos*; and, of course, historical works, such as the *De viris illustribus*, *Chronica*, *De origine Gothorum, Vandalorum et Sueuorum*, and, in a certain fashion, the *De haeresibus*. Regarding the letters attributed to him, at least seven appear to be authentic: the six sent to Braulio and the one, preserved in some manuscripts, sent to Sisebut along with the *Etymologiae*. The authenticity of the letter sent to Heladius of Toledo remains doubtful.<sup>17</sup>

Isidore's main historical work is the *Historiae*, in which he deals with the Visigoths, Sueves, and Vandals. The most consulted and influential section of this is indubitably the first section, the *De origine Gothorum*, customarily cited as the *Historia Gothorum*. The work has come down to us in both a long and a short version, and there has been a long debate over which of the two is the earlier, with different theories proposed. At present the majority of scholars appear to believe that the short version is the earlier of the two and that the two versions can be dated to 621 and 626, respectively. Isidore finished the first version shortly after the death of Sisebut; at the end of it he suggests that the king had been poisoned. The final chapters of the second version were written during the life of King Suintila and eulogise him above all because he finally expelled imperial troops from Spanish soil. As we shall see in the following section, seven years later, at the Fourth Council of Toledo, Isidore was to show himself to be much less of an enthusiast for this king. The *Chronicle*, like the *Historiae*, was written in two versions, one produced in 615 and the other in 625/626. In both, Isidore's principal aim was to show that the Visigoths were central to God's plans for mankind and superior to the Romans and other peoples.<sup>18</sup>

17 Carmen Codoñer, María Adelaida Andrés Sanz, José Carlos Martín, "Isidoro de Sevilla," in Codoñer, *La Hispania visigótica*, 139–55, with references to the best editions of each of these works; María Adelaida Andrés Sanz, Carmen Codoñer and José Carlos Martín, "Isidorus Hispalensis ep.," in *La trasmissione dei testi latini del Medioevo. Medieval Latin Texts and their Transmission*, 2 vols, eds Paolo Chiesa and Lucia Castaldi (Florence: 2004–05), 274–417. These studies differ, especially on matters relating to the dating of Isidore's works, with the traditional point of view as articulated in Aldama, "Indicaciones." See also Pierre Cazier, *Isidore de Séville et la naissance de l'Espagne catholique* (Paris: 1994). For details and bibliography on these works, the essential point of reference remains Díaz y Díaz "Introducción," especially 116ff. For the letters, see Martín, *Scripta*, 263–64.

18 Following the chronology proposed by José Carlos Martín, "La Crónica Universidad de Isidoro de Sevilla: circunstancias históricas e ideológicas de su composición y traducción de la misma," *Iberia. Revista de la Antigüedad* 4 (2001), 199–239. See also his edition of the *Chronicle* in *Isidori Hispalensis Chronica*, CCSL 112 (Turnhout: 2003). For Isidore's histories, see the edition and commentary of Cristóbal Rodríguez Alonso, *Las Historias de los Godos, Vándalos y Suevos de Isidoro de Sevilla* (León: 1975), and Luis A. García Moreno, "¿Por qué Isidoro de Sevilla quiso escribir una segunda versión de su *Historia gothorum*?" in *Famille, violence et christianisation au Moyen Âge. Mélanges offerts à Michel Rouche*, eds



Isidore died in 636. Concerning his death we have a text written by one of the clergy of Seville, Redemptus, *Obitus beatissimi Isidori Hispalensis episcopi*, which formally is a letter written to a bishop or abbot but in fact takes on the form of a work of hagiography. This tells us that as he was dying, Isidore called on the bishops John of Elepla and Eparcius of Italica, two sees very close to Seville, to administer the rite of penance to him in the church of San Vicente. The subject of the text is the confession, penance, and death of Isidore, and it gives us a date for that death: 4 April 636.<sup>19</sup>

### 3 Isidore as Bishop in Social, Religious, and Political Contexts

If Leander predeceased Reccared, who died in December 601 and was succeeded by his son, Liuva II, Isidore would already have been bishop of Seville when the new king began his reign. Until his death in 636 Isidore was not only, as we have just seen, a prolific author, but he also participated directly in important affairs of state. This section will attempt to reconstruct his political biography as much as possible in terms of this participation, and also to examine the core

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Martin Aurell and Thomas Deswarte (Paris: 2005), 387–408; and Isabel Velázquez, “La doble redacción de la *Historia Gothorum* de Isidoro de Sevilla,” in *L'édition critique des oeuvres d'Isidore de Séville. Les recensions multiples*, eds María Adelaida Andrés Sanz, Jacques Elfassi, and José Carlos Martín (Turnhout: 2008), 91–126. On Isidore's potential support for the Goths, Jocelyn N. Hillgarth, “Historiography in Visigothic Spain,” *Settimane di Studio* 17 (1970), 261–311; on provincials in Hispania following Roman traditions, Marc Reydellet, *La royauté dans la littérature latine de Sidoine Apollinaire à Isidore de Séville* (Rome: 1981), 514–16; and on a form of synthesis, Suzanne Teillet, *Des Goths à la nation gothique: Les origines de l'idée de nation en Occident du ve au VIIe siècle* (Paris: 1984), 473–75, 494 ff. On the ideal of *breuitas* which runs throughout these historiographical works of Isidore, Jamie Wood, “*Breuitas* in the Writings of Isidore of Seville,” in *Early Medieval Spain: A Symposium*, eds Alan Deyermond and Martin J. Ryan (London: 2010), 37–53; and on his conception of historiography, Jamie Wood, “*Religiones* and *gentes* in Isidore of Seville's *Chronica maiora*,” in *Post-Roman Transitions. Christian and Barbarian Identities in the Early Medieval West*, eds Walter Pohl and Gerda Heydemann (Turnhout: 2013), 125–68. See also Wood's chapter in the present volume.

- 19 This differs from a funerary inscription, a metrical epitaph which is only extant in the manuscript tradition which refers to the place where Leander, Florentina, and Isidore were interred, Díaz y Díaz, “Introducción,” 98. See also Pedro Castillo Maldonado, “La muerte de Isidoro de Sevilla: apuntes de crítica histórico-hagiográfica,” *Habis* 32 (2001), 577–96. For its possible recipients, the characteristics, and edition of the Latin text, see: *Obitus beatissimi Isidori Hispalensis episcopi* in Martín, *Scripta*, 279ff. On the written memory of Isidore, see: Michael J. Kelly, “The Politics of History-Writing. Problematizing the Historiographical Origins of Isidore of Seville in Early Medieval Hispania,” in Fear and Wood, *Isidore of Seville*, 93–110.

principles of his religious, social, and political beliefs. The period during which he held his episcopate and wielded influence was the product, in political terms, of the recent conversion of the *regnum Gothorum* to Catholicism in which his brother had played a key role. It is this author's view that to a great extent Isidore followed in his brother's footsteps, with regard to both his hostility to Byzantium and his belief that there should be an active role for the episcopate to play in political matters and the religious and social decision-making process of the elite of the *regnum*. Aspects of these elements of his episcopate will be examined below.

The efforts of Leovigild's family to consolidate themselves as a ruling dynasty came to an end with the success of the coup d'état led by Witteric in 603, which led to the overthrow of Liuva II. If we are to believe the hagiographic *Fathers of Mérida*, the new king (603–10) had previously participated in the uprising in Mérida against Mazona and in the finally against Reccared himself c.587–88. Isidore was no great supporter of Witteric, judging by his comments on the king in the *Historia Gothorum*. Therefore, this short and negative biographical sketch of Witteric was more or less reproduced in texts of the post-Visigothic era, such as the *Chronica Byzantia-arabica* of the mid-8th century. It is clear that Isidore wrote not a single word about the foreign alliances that Witteric engineered with Chlothar II of Neustria, Theudebert II of Austrasia, or the Lombard Agiulf against Theuderic II of Burgundy, who in the end refused to marry Witteric's daughter, Ermenberg. The reign of Gundemar, though very short (610–12), shows us that Isidore was one of the signatories to the so-called *Decretum Gundemari*, which established the metropolitan status of Toledo over the province of *Carthaginensis*. From the letters of the governor of Narbonensis, Bulgar, we learn that during Witteric's reign there were wars, about which Isidore says nothing, being fought between the Visigoths and Franks in the south of Gaul.<sup>20</sup>

20 *Vitas sanctorum partum Emeritensium* 5. Broader contexts are covered in E.A. Thompson, *The Goths in Spain* (Oxford: 1969); Abilio Barbero and Marcelo Vigil, *La formación del feudalismo en la Península Ibérica* (Barcelona: 1978); Luis A. García Moreno, *Historia de España Visigoda* (Madrid: 1989); Roger Collins, *Visigothic Spain, 409–711* (Oxford: 2004); Pablo C. Díaz, "La Hispania visigoda," in *Hispania tardorromana y visigoda*, eds Pablo C. Díaz, Clelia Martínez Maza, and Francisco Javier Sanz Huesma (Madrid: 2007), 259–611; Javier Arce, *Esperando a los árabes* (Madrid: 2011). Isidore mentions Witteric in *Historia Gothorum* 58; see also the *Chronica Byzantina-arabica* 3. On Ermenberg and Witteric's foreign policy, Fredegar, *Chronicon* 4.30–31. On the wars between the Visigoths and the Franks, attested in Bulgar's letters, José Orlandis, *Semblanzas visigodas* (Madrid: 1992), 97ff.

Sisebut (612–21) and Isidore seem to have had a close relationship. As we have already seen, the king dedicated his poem on lunar eclipses to Isidore, and the bishop of Seville repaid the compliment with his *De natura rerum* and the first edition of the *Etymologiae*. A close reading indicates that the words Isidore used to describe Sisebut's reign in the *Historia Gothorum* and the *Chronica* suggest that he wished his readers to evaluate it in a positive manner. Isidore gives a favourable judgement of the king's military policy. Here he singles out Sisebut as *clarus* and gives details about his campaigns against the peoples of the north of the Iberian Peninsula. He also alludes to the king's campaigns against the imperial army, which, since the war between Agila and Athanagild in the middle of the 6th century, had occupied coastal areas in the east and south of the peninsula. Although both Witteric and Gundemar had also recently campaigned against the Byzantines, Isidore states that Sisebut defeated imperial forces twice and leads us to understand that he had opened negotiations about exchanging prisoners. Isidore ended the short version of the *Historia* with the death of Sisebut, which he says was due to illness or poisoning. As has already been said, it is this version that probably circulated after the death of the king at the beginning of 621, and afterwards Isidore worked on extending the *Historia* (the so-called long version), which ended in 626 with an account of the reign of Suinthila, celebrating his success in expelling the Byzantines.<sup>21</sup>

Isidore's views on the king's policy towards his Jewish subjects, on the other hand, are not so positive. On occasion, such as in his *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, Isidore praises certain aspects of Judaism, such as its preservation of the tradition of reading scripture in synagogues. He had, however, no qualms—indeed, rather the opposite—in asserting that it was a religion of deicides. This can be seen in his *De fide catholica contra Iudaeos*, which was probably written at the beginning of Sisebut's reign. The work, which was dedicated to his sister Florentina and educational in its intent, makes clear the deicidal aspect of Judaism which, as is well known, was one of the foundations for hostility towards the Jews in the Middle Ages and beyond. As has been suggested by several authors, we ought to recognise the profound influence that eschatological thinking had on Isidore's ideas here, especially after the Persians captured Jerusalem in 614, and the Jews' role in the city's fall. When he was compiling his *Chronicle* in 615 Isidore makes scant reference to the topic in the life of Sisebut: "he converted the Jewish subjects of his kingdom to the faith of Christ." However, in both the short version of the *Historia Gothorum*, which ends with Sisebut's death, and the long version, which continues to the reign of Suinthila,

21 Isidore, *Historia Gothorum* 61, and *Chronica* 415.

Isidore criticises the conversion of the Jews to Catholicism by force “but without understanding.” Careful reading of the text shows that the force of Isidore’s criticism is not that the Jews were converted per se, but that this was done by force, adding that it should have been undertaken “for reasons of faith.” What is clear is that Sisebut’s actions mark an increase in hostility toward the Jews in the *regnum Gothorum*, reinforcing decisions taken in the reign of Reccared. It was in this way that the king was to take action against “the accursed perfidy of the Jews.” A law promulgated at the beginning of his reign and following the precedent of the late Roman Empire forbade Jewish masters from continuing to own Christian slaves. Proselytising by Jews was to be punished by death and the confiscation of belongings. Isidore’s dislike of this policy probably centred on his disapproval of king’s intervention in religious matters, and it is certainly the case that at times the king did intervene forcefully in this field. We can see this in the letters he sent to Bishop Eusebius of Tarragona and Bishop Caecilius of Mentesa, rebuking the former for his love of the theatre at a time when he was dealing with the appointment of the next bishop of Barcelona (which belonged to the province of Tarraconensis, of which Eusebius was the metropolitan bishop), and the latter for his intention to retire in order to pursue a monastic career.<sup>22</sup> Isidore was certainly no friend of the Jews and criticises Sisebut’s excesses not so much because of his actions towards them but rather because he took what Isidore considers to be a despotic attitude, on the grounds that he had not taken advice from his bishops (and certainly not from Isidore) when making decisions on this matter.

Isidore’s direct intervention in collective decisions made by the bishops of the realm can be seen not only in his participation in the council of Gundemar but his role in the Second Council of Seville, held in 619. Church councils, especially after the conversion of the *regnum* to Catholicism under Reccared, had

22 Isidore, *De ecclesiasticis officiis* 1.10.1. For the *De fide catholica contra Iudaeos*, see the study and translation of Eva Castro Caridad and Francisco Peña Fernández, *Isidoro de Sevilla. Sobre la fe católica contra los judíos* (Seville: 2012). See also: Isidore, *Chronica* 416 and *Historia Gothorum* 60—the key words are “sed non secundum scientiam [...] potestate [...] fidei ratione.” The letters to Eusebius and Caecilius are numbers 6 and 1, respectively, in *Epistulae Wisigothicae*. The laws referred to are *Lex Visigothorum* 12.2.13 and 12.2.14, while at 12.2.14 there is a justification and exposition of the concept of “Ebreorum execranda perfidia.” On eschatology and the potential influence of the situation in Palestine, García Moreno, *Hispania*, 148–52; Díaz, “La Hispania,” 401; Vallejo, *Hispania*, 331ff; on anti-Jewish feeling in the Visigothic kingdom, along with relevant bibliography, see: Raúl González Salinero, *Las conversiones forzadas de los judíos en el reino visigodo* (Madrid: 2000), and his chapter in the present volume. In addition, see Wolfram Drews, *The Unknown Neighbour. The Jew in the Thought of Isidore of Seville* (Leiden: 2006). On Isidore’s views in relation to the law, see the chapter by Andrew Fear in this volume.

become a mechanism for making political as well as ecclesiastical decisions. This can be seen in the fact that the prelates dealt with, *inter alia*, matters concerning the regulation of a variety of institutions, social relations, and the role of church property in the wider community. The council in Seville followed Roman tradition closely. This, in this author's opinion, can be attributed to the influence of Isidore and is seen in its formal arrangements and its references to traditional legislation. It is worth noting the presence at this council, held with a province-wide remit for the province of *Baetica*, of Sisisclus, the "rectore rerum publicarum," and Suanila, the "rectore rerum fiscalium," i.e. senior secular functionaries of the *regnum*. The Council touched on various matters, including boundaries between dioceses which were to be returned to their former state, having previously been lost to the Byzantines and only recently recovered by the Visigoths. Other concerns were simple territorial disputes, such as that between Fulgentius of Ecija (Isidore's brother) and Honorius of Cordoba. Various points were made about ecclesiastical discipline, including an establishment of the correct episcopal hierarchy in the province. There was also a debate with an easterner who in the eyes of the assembled clergy was an acephalic heretic of the Monophysite tradition. This debate finally concluded with his recognition of Catholic Orthodoxy as defined by the Council.

In 622/624, during the reign of Suintila, a further council, the third, was held in Seville. This was excluded from the *Colección Canónica Hispana*, a compilation of late- and post-Roman conciliar acts that were collated in various recensions during the course of the 7th century and of which Isidore is thought to have been one of the main editors. The result was that its *acta* have not survived, and we only have allusions to them in other council records. At this meeting of 622/624, where Isidore's would have been the decisive voice, Bishop Martianus of Écija was condemned for defaming the king, Suintila, consulting a soothsayer about the king's life, and holding inappropriate relations with women, including a slave. The Council's delegates deposed Martianus, appointing his accuser, Aventius, in his place. The story of Martianus's redress was a long one and only came to an end after Isidore's death when, at the Sixth Council of Toledo in 638, Martianus was finally restored to his see. In 633, at the Fourth Council of Toledo, where Isidore was again likely the most influential participant, Aventius's machinations ought to have been clear and Martianus restored to his episcopal rank. But he was not. Given these facts it appears that Isidore remained hostile to Martianus throughout his life and that it was only after his death that the bishop was able to recover his see.<sup>23</sup>

23 For the new role which the councils came to play after Reccared's conversion, Castellanos, *Los Godos y la Cruz*, and for them and for the later councils, Rachel Stocking, *Bishops*,

As had happened in the case of the deposition of Liuva II by Witteric in 603, Sisebut's dynastic plans came to nothing. He had planned to pass power on to his son, Reccared II, who in any event only remained on the throne for a short time. In 621 Suinthila (621–31) came to power. Suinthila had been one of Sisebut's generals, and military actions features strongly in what we know of his reign. He campaigned, for example, against the Basques in the north. His most well-known exploit was his victory over the Byzantines, resulting in their final expulsion from Hispania. Isidore praised this victory at great length, although we must not forget that the final version of his *Chronicle*, like that of the *Historia Gothorum*, came to a close in 626, just before the expulsion of the Byzantines but still in Suinthila's reign. The fragments concerning Suinthila which were added to the *Chronicle* are, like the rest of the text, scanty. In the *Historia Gothorum*, despite the brevity imposed by its genre, Isidore's comments are eulogistic. He underlines that Suinthila occupied the lands the imperial troops had managed to retain and was the first king to rule over all *Spania*. Isidore, who wrote this account in 626, wished to promote the notion that under Suinthila the *regnum* of the Visigoths had reached its apogee: if the kingdom had attained religious unity with Reccared, it now achieved territorial unity under Suinthila. It was with this event that Isidore decided to end the *Historia Gothorum*—an apotheosis which continues in Chapters 63–65, where he praises the king's campaigns and his virtues, such as his sharing the throne with his son Reccimer. This was another attempt to set up a dynastic succession in the manner attempted by both Reccared, who had succeeded his father and sought to pass on power to his son, and Sisebut. Isidore's writing shows that he was happy with the intended succession of Reccimer, describing him as “worthy to accede to the kingdom.” In any event, Suinthila's family did not remain in power long. In 631, a coup devised in Narbonensis and led by Sisenand was successful. This Gothic magnate enjoyed the support of the Frankish king Dagobert. He paid for this with a substantial amount of gold: first in the form of a *missorium* which had once been given to the Goths by Aetius, and later with a further 200,000 *solidi*. A Frankish army commanded by Abundantius and Venerandus penetrated as far as Saragossa, where Sisenand was proclaimed king. Fredegar, a Frankish chronicler, justified the coup by implying

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*councils, and consensus in the Visigothic Kingdom, 589–633* (Ann Arbor: 2000). For a detailed discussion of the case of Martianus, Rachel Stocking, “Martianus, Aventius, and Isidore: Provincial Councils in Seventh Century Spain,” *Early Medieval Europe* 6 (1997), 169–88. A recent work on the councils of the Visigothic kingdom provides a bibliography of previous discussions: Pablo. C. Díaz, “Concilios y obispos en la península ibérica (siglos VI–VIII),” *Settimane di Studio* 61 (2014), 1095–158, esp. 1119–20 on the formal arrangements and content of the Second Council of Seville.



that Suinthila had proven to be a bad king, stating that he had provoked all the magnates of his kingdom.<sup>24</sup>

#### 4 Conclusion

In the middle of the 8th century, the author of what is now called the *Mozarabic Chronicle of 754* stressed the importance of the council called in Toledo during the third year of Sisenand's reign, and noted the presence of Isidore and Braulio.<sup>25</sup> This was the Fourth Council of Toledo, held in 633, at which Isidore played an important role. The council dealt with a disparate series of matters, and Isidore's influence on it is clear. Its condemnation of Suinthila and recognition of Sisenand, who, as has been shown, came to power by force, deposing his predecessor, is particularly striking. Isidore had obviously changed his public stance on Suinthila, which was now very different from what he had written in 625/626 in the second edition of the *Historia Gothorum*. In some ways its canons firmly reflect the themes prevalent in Isidore's earlier works, such as opposition to the Jews, ecclesiastical discipline, and ethics. The Toledan council of 633 was to present, with the blessing of his colleagues, a summary of Isidore's thought on a wide variety of subjects. There are fulsome views on the behaviour of bishops, clergymen, and even monks. However, the council also dealt with the question of the Jews, banning them from holding offices and from owning slaves (cc. 65 and 66). These canons discuss the conversion of the Jews but assert that, despite the actions of Sisebut, Jewish rites continued to be practised, and they exhorted bishops to investigate this problem and force those concerned to convert to the true faith. The verb used here, *coerceat* (c. 59), leaves no doubt about what is intended and contradicts a previous canon which proscribes the use of force as a means of converting Jews (c. 57). Apart from the Jews, another important preoccupation of the council was the

24 Isidore, *Chronica* 416B and 417; *Historia Gothorum* 62: "[...] urbes residuas, quas in Spaniis Romana manus agebat, proelio conserto obtinuit [...] totius Spaniae intra oceani fretum monarchiam regni primus idem potitus"; 65: "[...] et regni successione dignissimus." See also Fredegar, *Chronicon* 4.73. For a discussion of the ideological content in Isidore's passages about Suinthila, Jamie Wood, *The Politics of Identity in Visigothic Spain: Religion and Power in the Histories of Isidore of Seville* (Leiden: 2012), 176–79. On the background of Suinthila's reign and the coronation of Sisenand, Luis A. García Moreno, "La oposición a Suintila: iglesia, monarquía y nobleza y en el reino visigodo," *Polis* 3 (1991), 13–24.

25 *Chronica Muzarabica* 17: "[...] constante adhuc Ispalense Ysidoro episcopo uel in multis iam libris fulgente mirifice [...]" in *Continuatio Isidoriana Hispana. Crónica Mozárabe de 754*, ed. José Eduardo López Pereira (León: 2009), which corrects his previous *Crónica Mozárabe de 754. Edición crítica y traducción* (Zaragoza: 1980).

ownership of slaves and control of freedmen. There are various canons dedicated to these matters. Perhaps the most striking of the bishops' views here is that which insists, under Isidore's influence, that the obligations that its freed slaves owed to the Church "would never die" (c. 70, on ecclesiastical freedmen).

The most notable canon of the Fourth Council of Toledo is probably number 75. This summarises Isidore's views on monarchy and attempts to put into practice his demand for episcopal participation in the election of the monarch. The council of 633 was perhaps the high point of Isidore's direct participation in the political life of the *regnum Gothorum* and the culmination of his religious, cultural, and social thinking. The idea of a kingdom united by its Catholic faith and monarchy with a secure territory, the ideological grounding of which Isidore had earlier expounded in his *Laus Spaniae*, combined with the direct participation of bishops in the running of its affairs, is clearly visible at every turn in the *acta* of the Council—and in a great number of Isidore's other writings.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The text known as *De laude Spaniae* is the beginning of Isidore's *Historiae*. In this text, Isidore offers a hyperbolic elegy of *Spania*, focussing on the country's geography and natural resources. He provides *Spania* with a feminine persona, which enabled him to play with the image that, having been dominated by Rome, she was finally conquered by the Goths. On Isidore's historiographical production, see the chapter by Jamie Wood in this volume. An edition of the text of the council can be found in Gonzalo Martínez Díez and Félix Rodríguez, *La colección canónica hispana, v. Concilios hispanos: segunda parte* (Madrid: 1992). See also Stocking, *Bishops*; Díaz, "Concilios," 1121ff. On the attitude of Isidore towards the monarchy, see the chapter by Andrew Fear in this volume.



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