

EXSILIUM HOMINUM IGNORANTIA EST. HONORIUS AUGUSTODUNENSIS AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY

JOSÉ MIGUEL DE TORO
UNIVERSIDAD CATÓLICA DE LA SANTÍSIMA CONCEPCIÓN
CHILE

Date of receipt: 13th of September, 2018

Final date of acceptance: 27th of November, 2018

ABSTRACT

During the twelfth century, Honorius Augustodunensis wrote a number of encyclopaedic works. In *Imago mundi* (circa 1110) he presents the system of the cosmos based on the traditional authorities of the early Middle Ages. By contrast, in *De animae exsilio et patria* (circa 1140), he proposes an updated educational curriculum for his time, influenced greatly by the arrival of the Greco-Arab knowledge in Europe. An analysis of these works reveals the evolution of Honorius' thinking, with two particular points of interest emerging: 1) that Honorius, rather than reacting to the twelfth century Renaissance, in fact contributed to it through his divulgation works, and 2) that new knowledge was already beginning to spread across the Holy Roman Empire during the first half of the century.¹

KEYWORDS

Honorius Augustodunensis, 12th century Renaissance, Liberal arts, Holy Roman Empire, Encyclopaedism.

CAPITALIA VERBA

Honorius Augustodunensis, Duodecimi saeculi renovatio, artes liberales, Sacrum Romanum Imperium, encyclopaedismus.

1. Introduction

From the final 30 years of the eleventh century onwards, a large-scale philosophical and scientific movement began to emerge in Western Europe, which has come to be considered a ‘Renaissance’. Driven by a new, less allegorical and symbolic view of nature, medieval knowledge experienced renewal across a wide range of disciplines related to the material world.² The new thinkers or ‘intellectuals’ played an important role in this renewal process, which would culminate in the incorporation of the complete works of Aristotle during the thirteenth century.³ These masters dedicated themselves to learning, abandoning the cloisters for the increasingly developed urban centres of scholarship.⁴ The boldest set out in search of new knowledge and debate, travelling to the Iberian Peninsula, the south of Italy and other centres dotted around the Mediterranean, where disciplines concerning the natural world were thriving under Arab influence. A legion of Greek, Hebrew and Arabic translators⁵ produced and circulated a considerable number of ancient and modern treatises on natural philosophy, mathematics, medicine, astronomy, astrology and alchemy.

It is during this period that Honorius Augustodunensis is traditionally considered to have lived. One of the most enigmatic figures of the medieval West, he consciously concealed himself behind long-lasting anonymity.⁶ Although history is unclear as to his birthplace, his academic career, or whether he eventually became

1. This article is part of FONDECYT research project number 11160240, CONICYT, Government of Chile, entitled “Restoration of knowledge in the medieval West: the influence of encyclopaedism in twelfth century historical writing”.

2. On the abundant bibliography that exists on this subject, some general works of especially useful are Haskins, Charles Homer. *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927 (foundational work, with an essential role in spreading the concept); Brooke, Christopher. *The Twelfth Century Renaissance*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1969; Benson, Robert L.; Constable, Giles; Lanham, Carol D., dirs. *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982; Swanson, R.N. *The Twelfth-Century Renaissance*. Manchester-New York: Manchester University Press, 1999; Verger, Jacques. *La Renaissance du XIIe siècle*. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1999. See also the essay of Le Goff, Jacques. “What did the Twelfth-Century Renaissance mean?”, *The Medieval World*, Peter Linehan, ed. London: Routledge, 2001: 635-647.

3. For the limits of the paradigmatic change due to the introduction of Aristotelian physics in Europe, see Franklin-Brown, Mary. *Reading the World. Encyclopedic Writing in the Scholastic Age*. Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012: 52-54. She shows well enough the survival of the symbolic tradition and its coexistence with the description of the properties of things, the core of the Aristotelian method.

4. Riché, Pierre; Verger, Jacques. *Des nains sur des épaules de géants. Maîtres et élèves au Moyen Âge*. Paris: Tallandier, 2006: 83-117. See also the classic work of Le Goff, Jacques. *Les intellectuels au Moyen Âge*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1985 (published for the first time in 1957).

5. Martínez Gázquez, José. *The Attitude of the Medieval Latin Translators Towards the Arabic Science*. Florence: SISMELE-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2016: 20. This author counts several dozen translators working actively on Arabic texts alone between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries.

6. A very good summary of the few things that we know about the life of Honorius in Garrigues, Marie-Odile. “L’œuvre d’Honorius Augustodunensis: Inventaire critique”. *Abhandlungen der Braunschweigischen Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft*, 38 (1986): 7-136, 39 (1987): 123-228, and 40 (1988): 129-190. See also Flint, Valerie. *Honorius Augustodunensis of Regensburg*. Aldershot: VARIORUM. Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1995.

