'Those same cursed Saracens': Charlemagne's campaigns in the Iberian Peninsula as religious warfare

Samuel Ottewill-Soulsby*

Sidney Sussex College, Sidney Street, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire CB2 3HU,

United Kingdom

While it is well known that many of Charlemagne's wars had a strong religious element, Frankish campaigns against the Muslims of Spain in his reign have generally been understood as secular exercises in power politics. This paper presents evidence contemporary to Charlemagne's reign to argue against this, using a diverse range of sources to conclude that many observers of the Frankish invasions of the Iberian Peninsula understood them as religious wars aimed both at defending of Christian communities in Francia and protecting and expanding the worship of Christianity in Spain. Further, although the prosecution of these wars were politically opportunistic, the sources suggest that Charlemagne and his court encouraged interpretations of these campaigns in religious terms and that they might be considered examples of religious war.

Medieval literary depictions of Charlemagne's invasions of Spain portrayed them as religious wars. This is due in part to the deep influence of *The Song of Roland*, for nowhere is the spirit

of conflict between Christians and non-Christians more bluntly articulated than in the words of the *chanson*'s hero: 'Pagans are in the wrong and Christians are in the right.'[1] Charlemagne's invasion in 778 of al-Andalus became with hindsight part of a struggle between Christians and unbelievers. From the late eleventh century Charlemagne's name was associated with crusading in the Holy Land, in accounts such as the *Descriptio qualiter Karolus magnus*, which presented the Frankish emperor liberating Constantinople and Jerusalem, to the invocation of his memory in Robert the Monk's description of Pope Urban II's sermon at Clermont.[2] In the mid twelfth-century *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, Charlemagne's wars in Spain were magnified in scope and employed to encourage holy war in Spain and the cult of St James.[3]

Moving out of the realms of medieval epic, scholars in the past have described Frankish campaigning in Spain in the reign of Charlemagne as religious, but their arguments

---

*E-mail: sgo27@cam.ac.uk

[1] The following abbreviations are used in this paper: ARF: 'The Royal Frankish Annals', in *Annales regni Francorum inde a. 741 usque ad 829, qui dicuntur Annales Laurissenses maiores et Einhardi*, ed. F. Kurze. MGH, SRG 6 (Hanover: Hahn, 1895); ARF (Revised): 'The Revised Royal Frankish Annals', in *Annales regni Francorum inde a. 741 usque ad 829, qui dicuntur Annales Laurissenses maiores et Einhardi*, ed. F. Kurze. MGH, SRG 6 (Hanover: Hahn, 1895); CC: R. d'Abadal i de Vinyals, ed., *Els diplomes Carolingis a Catalunya*. Catalunya carolíngia, 2. 2 vols. (Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 2007); CCSL: Corpus Christianorum Series Latina; Epp.: Epistolae; LSE: P. Saint-Roch, ed., *Liber sacramentorum Engolismensis*. CCSL 159C (Turnhout: Brepols, 1987); LSG: A. Dumas and J. Deshusses, eds., *Liber sacramentorum Gellonensis*. CCSL 159A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981); MGH: Monumenta Germaniae Historia; SRG: Scriptores rerum Germanicarum; SS: Scriptores.
G.J. Brault, ed. and trans., *The Song of Roland: an Analytical Edition, II* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), 64, 'Paien unt tort e chrestïens unt dreit.'

[2] R. Morrissey, *Charlemagne and France: a Thousand Years of Mythology*, trans. C. Tihanyi, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 50–3; M. Gabriele, *An Empire of Memory: the Legend of Charlemagne, the Franks, and Jerusalem before the First Crusade* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); C. Sweetenham, ed. and trans., *Robert the Monk's History of the First Crusade: Historia Iherosolimitana* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 80.

[3] W.J. Purkis, *Crusading Spirituality in the Holy Land and Iberia, c.1095–c.1087*,(Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2008), 153–7; J. Stuckey 'Charlemagne as Crusader? Memory, Propaganda and the Many Uses of Charlemagne's Legendary Expedition to Spain', in *The Legend of Charlemagne in the Middle Ages: Power, Faith and Crusade*, eds. M. Gabriele and J. Stuckey (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 137–52 (139–43). On Pseudo-Turpin see G.M. Spiegel, *Romancing the Past: the Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 55–98.

have been generally abandoned.[4] Opposition to regarding Charlemagne's wars in Spain as in any way faith-based, either in motivation or presentation, has generally emerged from two places. The first comes from historians writing on the eighth and ninth centuries who, compellingly, point to a paucity of evidence in the relevant Frankish sources. The second is a challenge of definitions, articulated by scholars working on the crusades, such as Erdmann and Mayer, who argue that the wars of Charlemagne were primarily wars of the state, which may have had the support and blessing of religious figures such as the pope and been fought in the name of protecting or expanding Christendom, but were executed as part of the duties of a king.[5]

While these might be good grounds for not labelling Charlemagne's campaigns crusades, it is more problematic to exclude them from the category of religious warfare. The wars of states and kings can very easily become wars of God and vice versa. Crusading scholarship has been concerned with defining the limits of its field, from the narrow interpretation of Mayer to the broader categorisation of Riley-Smith, with considerable debate on the nature and origins of medieval Christian religious warfare.[6] For the purposes of

---

[4] E. Delaruelle, 'Essai sur la formation de l'idée de croisade', *Bulletin de de Littérature Ecclésiastique* 42 (1941): 24–45; M. Rouche, *L'Aquitaine, des Wisigoths aux Arabes, 418–781: naissance d'une region* (Paris: École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1979), 130. See also A. Hämel, 'Französische und spanische Heldendichtung', *Neue Jahrbücher für Wissenschaft und Jugendbildung* 4 (1924): 37–48 (40–1).

[5] C. Erdmann, *The Origin of the Idea of the Crusade*, trans. M.W. Baldwin and W. Goffart (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 98; H.E. Mayer, *The Crusades*, trans. J. Gillingham (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 16.

[6] Mayer, *Crusades*, 313; J. Riley-Smith, *What Were the Crusades?* 3rd edn. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); J.A. Brundage, 'Holy War and the Medieval Lawyers', in *The Holy War*, ed. T.P. Murphy (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1976), 99-140; E. Hehl, 'Was ist eigentlich ein Kreuzzug?', *Historische Zeitschrift* 259 (1994): 297–336; C.J. Tyerman, 'Were there Any Crusades in the Twelfth Century?', *English Historical Review* 110 (1995): 553–77; P. Partner, 'Holy War, Crusade and *Jihād*: an Attempt to Define Some Problems', in *Autour de la première croisade*, ed. M. Balard (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1996), 333–43; J. Riley-Smith, 'Erdmann and the Historiography of the Crusades, 1935–1995', in *La primera cruzada, novecientos años después: el Concilio de Clermont y los orígenes del movimiento cruzado*, ed. L. García-Guijarro Ramos (Madrid: Garcia-Guijarro Ramos, 1997), 17–29; J. France, 'Holy War and Holy Men: Erdmann and the Lives of the Saints', in *The Experience of Crusading*, vol. 1, *Western Approaches*, eds. M. Bull and N. Housley, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 193–208 (207); J. Flori, 'Pour une redéfinition de la croisade', *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 47 (2004): 329–50; T. Deswarte, 'La "guerre sainte" en occident: expression et signification', in *Famille, violence et christianisation au moyen âge*, eds. M. Aurell and T. Deswarte (Paris:

this essay, a war can be considered religious when one of the major stated or implied aims of the parties involved is the protection and propagation of their faith.[7] This does not preclude other motivations such as the acquisition of resources; indeed, it would be a strange war that only had one cause.

This essay reopens the question of Charlemagne's wars in Spain.[8] It will ask if there is any evidence for religious motivations for Carolingian military activity in the Iberian Peninsula or justification on the grounds of faith. In particular, it will look to see if these wars were presented or justified in terms of protecting Christians or Christian institutions, or expanding the Christian world by converting or driving Saracens out of Spain. It will also ask if contemporaries to these campaigns understood them as religious matters.

Charlemagne's wars: the Carolingian campaigns in al-Andalus, 778–814

For much of his reign, Charlemagne was in the happy position of being able to choose whether to intervene militarily in the Iberian Peninsula. While a certain amount of low level raiding can be detected, and more probably took place, there was only one large scale Andalusi invasion, that of 793.[9] This was the result of Umayyad political instability, as 'Abd al-Raḥmān I and his successors attempted to secure their control of Muslim Spain. It was

---

Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2005), 331–44. J. Riley-Smith, 'The Crusading Movement and Historians', in *The Oxford History of the Crusades*, ed. J. Riley-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1–12; G. Constable, 'The Historiography of the Crusades', in *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, eds. A.E. Laiou and R.P. Mottadeh (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2001), 1–22; and C. Tyerman, *The Debate on the Crusades, 1099–2010* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 221, summarise the debate with differing interpretations.

[7] Erdmann, *Origin of the Idea of the Crusade*, 3.

[8] On the question of Holy War within the Iberian Peninsula, see A. P. Bronisch, *Reconquista und Heiliger Krieg: die Deutung des Krieges im christlichen Spanien von den Westgoten bis ins frühe 12. Jahrhundert,* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1998). See P. Henriet's critique and Bronisch's response in 'L'idéologie de guerre sainte dans le haut moyen âge hispanique', *Francia* 29 (2002): 171–220; and '"Reconquista und Heiliger Krieg": eine kurze Entgegnung auf eine Kritik von Patrick Henriet', *Francia* 31 (2004): 199–206.

[9] On low level raiding, see Ermold the Black, *Poème sur Louis le Pieux: et épitres au roi Pépin*, ed. Edmond Faral (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1932), 22–7. See also below, the account of the warrior John. On the invasion of 793, ARF (Revised), 95; 'The Annals of Lorsch', in *Annales et chronica aevi Carolini*, ed. G. Pertz. MGH, SS 1 (Hanover: Hahn, 1826)*,* 35.

complicated by the civil wars that erupted in 788 and 796 after the deaths of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān

and his son Hishām I respectively.[10] This granted Charlemagne the initiative in his military

expeditions.

The sources generally explicitly associate Charlemagne with all the major Frankish

expeditions. After 778 Charlemagne led none of these armies himself, but his authority was

behind all of them. Characteristic is the account in the *Annals of Lorsch* for 796 which has

Charlemagne managing three separate wars, concentrating on Saxony with Charles the

Younger while sending his other sons Pippin and Louis the Pious to fight the Avars and the

Saracens respectively.[11] As king of Aquitaine it was natural that Louis should lead many of

the forces that marched into Spain, but Charlemagne's role as the head of the empire was

acknowledged, most notably following the fall of Barcelona in 801, when Louis sent his

father captives and booty in his honour.[12]

One recent biography of Charlemagne has argued that 'although religion was used as

an excuse for attacking Avars, it appears not to have been a consideration in the various

dealings Charlemagne had with the peoples of Spain.'[13] The doubts of McKitterick and others

about the role of faith in Carolingian incursions in al-Andalus are by no means

unwarranted.[14] The earliest descriptions of Charlemagne's invasion of Spain in Frankish

historical narratives as motivated by religious concerns are mid ninth-century accounts. In the

Astronomer's *Life* of Louis the Pious, Charlemagne decides to brave 'the difficult passage

---

[10] Roger Collins, *The Arab Conquest of Spain 711–797* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 201–3; Ibn Ḥayyān, *Crónica de los emires Alḥakam I y ʿAbdarraḥmān II entre los años 796 y 847 (Almuqtabis II–1)*, eds. and trans. M.A. Makkī and F. Corriente (Zaragoza: Instituto de Estudios Islámicos y del Oriente Próximo, 2001), 15–19.

[11] 'The Annals of Lorsch', 37.

[12] Ermold the Black, *Poème sur Louis*, 46–50. For discussion of this and other similar displays, see M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 375–8.

[13] R. McKitterick, *Charlemagne: the Formation of a European Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 133

[14] See for example, Collins, *Arab Conquest*, 215; E. Tremp, 'Zwischen Paderborn und Barcelona. König Ludwig von Aquitanien und die Auseinandersetzung des Karlsreichs mit dem Islam', in *Am Vorabend der Kaiserkrönung: das Epos 'Karolus Magnus et Leo Papa' und der Papstbesuch in Paderborn 799*, eds. P. Godman, J. Jarnut and P. Johanek, (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2002), 283–99.

over the Pyrenees and go to Spain in order, with Christ's help, to aid the Church, which suffered under the harsh yoke of the Saracen'.[15] Sources closer to the event, including both recensions of the Royal Frankish Annals, the Annals of Lorsch and Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne*, make no mention of any such considerations.[16] The men who ambushed the Franks at Roncesvalles were not Muslims, but Basques.[17]

Charlemagne was clearly pragmatic in his wars in Spain, dependent on the opportunities and resources available, prosecuting them according to the demands of military necessity. He entered the Peninsula having been invited by the Muslim ruler of Barcelona, Sulaymān b. Yaqẓān al-A'rābī, and Charlemagne and his son Louis, the king of Aquitaine, were to ally with other Muslim powers in the Upper March with no sign of any religious qualms.[18] Frankish military activity was linked to specific moments of Umayyad political confusion. But if the exercise of Carolingian military force in the Peninsula was in practice hard-headed, this does not mean that it was explained and understood entirely in secular terms.

The very absence of religious language in the accounts of the Spanish wars is curious. The moral legitimacy of war conducted by Christians was well established.[19] Augustine argued in his *City of God* that those who fought 'by God's authority' committed no sin.[20]

---

[15] The Astronomer, 'Vita Hludowici imperatoris', in *Thegan, Die Taten Kaiser Ludwigs. Astronomus, Das Leben Kaiser Ludwigs*, ed. E. Tremp. MGH, SRG 64 (Hanover: Hahn, 1995), 286: 'Statuit Pyrinei montis superata difficultate ad Hispaniam pergere laborantique ecclesiae sub Sarracenorum acerbissimo iugo Christo fautore suffragari.'

[16] Einhard, 'Vita Karoli magni' in *Einhardi Vita Karoli magni*, eds. G.H. Pertz and G. Waitz. MGH, SRG 25 (Hannover: Hahn, 1911), 12; 'Annals of Lorsch', 31; A. Christys, 'Crossing the Frontier of Ninth Century Hispania', in *Medieval Frontiers: Concepts and Practices*, eds. D. Abulafia and N. Berend (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 35–53 (42); Collins, *Arab Conquest of Spain*, 215.

[17] ARF (Revised), 51.

[18] ARF, 48. Royal Frankish Annals (ARF), *MGH, SRG 6, Annales regni Francorum inde a. 741 usque ad 829, qui dicuntur Annales Laurissenses maiores et Einhardi*, ed. F. Kurze, (Hannover: Hahn, 1895), 48.

[19] On just war, see F.H. Russell, *The Just War in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 16–28.

[20] Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 33 (1.21). On Augustine's thought see, for example, P. Brown, 'St Augustine's Attitude to Religious Coercion', and 'Religious Coercion in the Later Roman Empire: the Case of North Africa', in idem, *Religion and Society in the Age of St Augustine* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), 260–78, 301–30; and D.A.

According to Einhard's biography of Charlemagne, the *City of God* was Charlemagne's favourite book.[21] Gregory the Great justified war 'for the sake of enlarging the *res publica* in which we see God worshipped, so that the name of Christ spreads in every direction through the subject nations, by preaching the faith'.[22] Carolingian conflict with their other non-Christian neighbours was frequently articulated and justified on the grounds of faith.[23]

The long Saxon wars are explicitly characterised in religious terms.[24] Einhard says of the Saxons 'they had to abandon the cult of demons and … receive the sacraments of the Christian faith and religion.'[25] The Royal Frankish Annals report the Franks triumphing with God's help and record the Saxons taking an oath in 777 'to maintain Christianity and faithfulness to King Charles'.[26] In the same year, a poem attributed to Paulinus of Aquileia, active in the Frankish court, celebrates the conquest and forced conversion of the Saxons and assures Charlemagne a place in heaven as reward.[27] The Avar campaigns are recorded in

Lenihan, 'The Influence of Augustine's Just War: the Early Middle Ages', *Augustinian Studies* 27 (1996): 55–94.

[21] Einhard, 'Vita Karoli magni', 29.

[22] Gregory, *Gregorii I Registri.* MGH Epp. 1 (Berlin: Hahn, 1891), 93 (1.73): 'Quae et bella vos frequenter petere non desiderio fundendi sanguinis, sed dilatandae causa rei publicae, in qua Deum coli conspicimus, loquitur, quatenus Christi nomen per subditas gentes fidei praedicatione circumquaque discurrat.'

[23] J.L. Nelson, 'Kingship and Empire', in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought*, ed. J.H. Burn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 211–25 (215); R. Stone, *Morality and Masculinity in the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 74–5. On religious warfare before the Crusades, see J. Gilchrist, 'The Papacy and War against the "Saracens" 795–1216', *International History Review* 10 (1988): 174–97; P. Buc, 'La vengeance de dieu: de l'exégèse patristique à la réforme ecclésiastique et à la première croisade', in *La Vengeance, 400–1200*, eds. D. Barthélemy, F. Bougard and R. Le Jan (Rome: École française de Rome, 2006), 451–86; T. Deswarte, 'Entre historiographie et histoire: aux origines de la guerre sainte en occident', in *Regards croisés sur la guerre sainte: guerre, idéologie et religion dans l'espace méditerranéen latin, XIe–XIIIe siècle*, eds. D. Baloup and P. Josserand (Toulouse: CNRS-Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, 2006), 67–90 (73–4).

[24] Y. Hen, 'Charlemagne's Jihad', *Viator* 37, (2006): 33–51, discusses this although his views on the adoption of Islamic practices of *jizya* by Charlemagne should be treated with great caution.

[25] Einhard, 'Vita Karoli magni', 10: 'ut etiam cultum daemonum dimittere et Christianae religioni se subdere velle promitterent'.

[26] ARF, 'cum Dei adiutorio', 46, 66, 'nisi conservarent in omnibus Christianitatem vel fidelitatem supradicti domni Caroli regis' 48.

[27] Paulinus of Aquileia, *Karolingische Taufpfalzen im Spiegel hofnaher Dichtung: Überlegungen zur Ausmalung von Pfalzkirchen, Pfalzen und Reichsklöstern*, ed. K. Hauck, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), 62–5. For the attribution to Paulinus, D. Schaller, *Studien zur lateinischen Dichtung* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1995), 313–31; see also M. Garrison, 'The Franks as the New Israel?: Education for an Identity from Pippin to

similar fashion, with panegyrics such as the anonymous 'King Pippin's victory over the Avars', emphasising the religious nature of the war.[28]

A hardening of views has been traced over the course of the ninth century.[29] Pope Leo IV told Emperor Louis II of Italy in 852 that war against enemies of the faith was a Christian act, in the context of increasing Saracen pressure for 'Whoever meets death steadfastly in this fight the Heavenly Kingdom will not be closed to him.'[30] Audradus Modicus, the prophetic monk of Tours, recorded in his Book of Revelations, written in 853, a dream he had in which St Martin of Tours helped Charles the Bald 'to free Spain from the infidel'.[31] Paschasius Radbertus, the Abbot of Corbie, in his Commentary on Matthew 24:14 written in the 850s said of the Saracens:

> They were wickedly seduced by some pseudo-apostles, disciples of Nicholas so to speak, and composed for themselves a law from the Old as well as the New Testament, and so perverted everything under the cult of one God, unwilling to agree with us or with the Jews in any respect … they had taken upon themselves, by God's just judgment, the Spirit of Error, perhaps, as many think, Antichrist will be taken up by them.[32]

Charlemagne', in *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*, eds. Y. Hen and M. Innes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 114–61 (149).

[28] P. Godman, ed., *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance* (London: Duckworth, 1985), 186–91.

[29] Christys, 'Crossing the Frontier', 43; K. Leyser, 'Ends and Means in Liudprand of Cremona', in *Communications and Power in Medieval Europe: the Carolingian and Ottonian Centuries*, ed. T. Reuter (London: Hambledon, 1994), 125–42.

[30] Leo IV, Epistolae, in MGH, *Epistolae Karolini aevi III*, eds. E. Dümmler and others (Berlin: Hahn, 1909), 601 (ep. 28): 'in hoc belli certamine fideliter mortuus fuerit, regna illi celestia minime negabuntur'. Gilchrist, 'Papacy and War against the "Saracens"', 174–197.

[31] Audradus Modicus, *Book of Revelations*, trans. by P.E. Dutton, in *Carolingian Civilization: a Reader*, ed. P.E. Dutton. 2nd edn. (North York: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 355 (Revelation 11).

[32] Printed in B.Z. Kedar, *Crusade and Mission: European Approaches Toward the Muslims* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 205: 'seducti a quibusdam pseudoapostolis, ut ita loquar, Nicholai discipulis, propriam sibi tam ex veteri testamento, quam ex novo condiderunt legem, ac si sub unius Dei cultu, nec tamen nobiscum nec cum Iudeis quippiam sentire volentes, omnia perverterunt … quia primum iusto Dei iudicio susceperunt spiritum erroris, ut multi putant, suscipiendus est Antichristus.'

By contrast, the late eighth and early ninth centuries may seem to be free of these sentiments, with little evidence for the Franks engaging in religious warfare with Muslims.

Understanding Frankish perceptions of Muslims is a problematic issue.[33] It is not this paper's intention to argue that Charlemagne knew Islam as a religion, still less that he was opposed to it due to the particular nature of Islam as a faith. The earliest Western Latin lives of Muḥammad appeared in Spain in the ninth century.[34] A more intensive interest in condemning specifics of the faith of the Saracens is identifiable in the writings of Eulogius and Paul Alvar of Córdoba in the commentary on the Martyrs of Córdoba in the 850s.[35] Eulogius attacked Muslim practices such as the call to prayer from muezzins and displayed familiarity with Qur'ānic suras in his *Memoriale sanctorum.*[36] All of these developments post-dated Charlemagne's reign. The only Eastern Christian source known to have been potentially available was the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, which was translated before 727, probably at the monastery of Corbie by Peter the Monk. While later highly influential, it seems to have had a limited role in shaping Frankish perspectives of Saracens under Charlemagne.[37]

---

[33] On Western depictions of Saracens, see E. Rotter, *Abendland und Sarazenen: das okzidentale Araberbild undseine Entstehung im Frühmittelalter* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986); N. Bade, 'Muslims in the Christian World Order, Comprehension and Knowledge of the Saracens in two Universal Histories of the Carolingian Empire', *Millennium* 10 (2013): 293–310.

[34] K.B. Wolf, 'The Earliest Latin Lives of Muhammad', in *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, eds. M. Gervers and R.J. Bikhazi, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), 89–101.

[35] K.B. Wolf, 'Christian Views of Islam in Early Medieval Spain', *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam*, ed. J.V. Tolan, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 85–108; C. Valenzuela, 'The Faith of the Saracens. Forms of Knowledge of Islam in the Christian Kingdom of the Iberian Peninsula until the 12th century', *Millennium* 10 (2013): 314–30.

[36] Eulogius, 'Memoriale Sanctorum', in *Corpus scriptorum Muzarabicorum*, vol. 2, ed. Juan Gil (Madrid: Instituto Antonio de Nebrija, 1973), 399.

[37] M. Laureys and D. Verhelst, 'Pseudo-Methodius, Revelationes: Textgeschichte und kritische Edition. Ein Leuven-Groninger Forschungsprojekt', in *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages*, ed. W. Verbeke, D. Verhelst and A. Welkenhuysen (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988), 112–36 (114); P.J. Alexander, 'The Diffusion of Byzantine Apocalypses in the Medieval West and the Beginnings of Joachimism', in *Prophecy and Millenarianism: Essays in Honour of Marjorie Reeves*, ed. A. Williams (Harlow: Longman, 1980), 55–106 (65–7). On the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, see G.J. Reinink 'Ps.-Methodius: a Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam', *The Byzantine and early Islamic Near East: 1 – Problems in the Literary Source Material*, eds. A. Cameron and L.I. Conrad, (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1992), 149–87; M.W. Twomey, 'The *Revelationes* of Pseudo-Methodius', in *Source of Wisdom: Old English and Early Medieval Latin Studies in Honour of Thomas D. Hill*, eds. C.D. Wright, F.M. Biggs and T.N. Hall (Toronto: University of

Contemporary Frankish sources show little sense of Islam, making reference to it only in passing. Alcuin records in a letter of 786 that two Anglo-Saxon synods condemned clerics covertly breaking fast as 'hypocrisy and Saracen'.[38] Also revealed in Alcuin's letters is Charlemagne's interest in the *Disputatio Felicis cum Sarraceno* written by Felix the Adoptionist Bishop of Urgell, the title of which might suggest some debate with the beliefs of the Saracens, but there is no evidence that either Alcuin or Charlemagne ever read it.[39] Alcuin's comment to his king in connection to this affair, that he had once seen a debate with a Jew, implies that he placed both Jews and Saracens in the same category.[40] But Charlemagne did not need to have read or even to have heard of the Qur'ān in order to wage religious war on those who treated it as the word of God. All that was required was the identification of those who did as non-Christians.

The Frankish sources never use the word 'Muslim'. What they did use, however, were the words 'infidel' and 'pagan'. This classification was not precise, as in the case of one charter's use of the phrase 'heretic or infidel', but all these terms firmly indicate that the people the Franks fought in al-Andalus were not Christian.[41] The most common vocabulary appears to be at the first glance primarily ethnic, with repeated usage of 'Saracen', 'Agarene' and less frequently 'Moor'. Firstly, the terms Saracen and Agarene were not devoid of religious baggage. Frankish etymologists followed the example of Isidore of Seville, who derived these names from those of Sarah and Hagar, the wife and slave of Abraham respectively.[42] They accused the 'Saracens' of adopting the name of Sarah to hide their

---

Toronto Press, 2007), 370–86 (381). For a comparison of developments in Syria and Spain, see J.V. Tolan, 'Réactions chrétiennes aux conquêtes musulmanes: étude comparé des auteurs chrétiens de Syrie et d'Espagne (VIIe–IXe siècles)', *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 44 (2001): 349–67.

[38] Alcuin, 'Epistolae', in MGH, *Epistolae Karolini aevi II*, ed. E. Dümmler (Berlin: Hahn, 1865), 19–29 (22: ep. no. 8): 'quia hypocrisis et Saracenorum est'.

[39] Alcuin, 'Epistolae', in MGH, *Epistolae Karolini aevi II*, ed. Dümmler, 284–5 (ep. 172).

[40] Kedar, *Crusade and Mission*, 25.

[41] CC, 2: 310: 'ipse super ereticos sive Sarracenos infideles'.

[42] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologia*, *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX*, ed. W.M. Lindsay, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), IX.ii.6, 57. R.W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 18.

shameful true descent from Hagar who, in Augustine's view, symbolised the 'earthly city' of sin.[43] When Carolingian commentators used these terms, they came with a rich set of pejorative religious associations.

Secondly, the use of these names needs to be understood in the text in which they are set. Ethnic labels frequently acquire religious connotations, as in the way the terms 'Arab' and 'Muslim' have become erroneously synonymous in some circles of twenty-first century discourse.[44] When a Carolingian writer uses an expression such as 'the faithless Saracen people', or 'the enemies of the Christians named Saracens', it seems reasonable to suppose that part of their definition of Saracen included the concept of not being a Christian.[45] The Frankish pilgrim Willibald, in his account of his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, said of the 'pagan Saracens' that they 'wanted to destroy the Christian Church'.[46] Bede drew upon Pliny to describe the Saracens as worshippers of Venus, the morning star.[47] Saracens were grouped with other non-Christians, as in Pope Zacharias' letter to Boniface bemoaning the tribulations of 'Saracens, Saxons and Frisians'.[48] It should be noted that there are no references in Carolingian sources to Christian Saracens.

The letter of Pope Leo III to Charlemagne in 812 about pirates who had attacked Lampedusa may be taken as a case study. Throughout the letter, Leo refers to the raiders

The theme of Arab descent from Hagar and Ishmael can be traced from the first century, see F. Millar, 'Hagar, Ishmael, Josephus and the Origins of Islam', *Journal of Jewish Studies* 44 (1993): 23–45.
[43] Augustine, *City of God*, 15:2.
[44] See N. Paley, 'The Khalil Gibran International Academy: Diasporic Confrontations with an Emerging Islamophobia', in *Islamophobia/Islamophilia: beyond the politics of enemy and friend*, ed. A. Shryock, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 53–75 (70)
[45] 'The Continuations of the Chronicle of Fredegar', *Quellen zur Geschichte des 7. und 8. Jahrhunderts*, ed. A. Kusternig, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1982), ed. H. Haupt, 'gentem perfidam Saracinorum', 284, CC, 2.ii, 'inimicissima christianitati', 412.
[46] Hygeburg, 'Vita Willibaldi Episcopi Eichstetensis', *MGH SS* 15,1, *Supplementa tomorum I-XII, pars III. Supplementum tomi XIII,* ed. O. Holder-Egger, (Hanover: Hahn, 1887), 86–106, 'Illam aecclesiam christiani homines sepe conparabant ad paganis Sarracinis, qui illi volebant eam destruere', 95.
[47] Bede, 'Expositio Actuum Apostolorum', in Bede, *Opera exegetica 2*, eds. M.L.W. Laistner and D. Hurst. CCSL 121 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1983), 6–104 (36: VII:43): 'Significat autem luciferum cuius culti Sarracenorum gens ob honorem Veneris erat mancipata'. On Bede's depiction of Saracens, see K.S. Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 125–38.
[48] Zacharias, 'Epistolae' in *S. Bonifatii et Lulli epistolae*, ed. M. Tangl. MGH Epp. Selectae 1 (Berlin: Apud Weidmannos, 1916), no. 60, 120–125, 'Saracinorum, Saxonum vel Fresonum', 123.

using the ethnic label 'Moors'.[49] But the entire account is one which makes it very clear that

the Moors are not Christian and are in opposition to Christians. He describes them as 'the

most impious' ('nefandissimi') and as 'haters of God' ('Deo odibiles').[50] Leo celebrates the

response of the Byzantine navy based in Sicily saying 'and with Christ's mercy they killed all

the wicked Moors, so that not a one was left alive'.[51] The narrative is one in which the Moors

are portrayed as enemies of God and their defeat comes about with the aid of Christ.

Charlemagne did not need to conceive of Islam as a faith in order to wage holy war

upon its adherents. War against 'pagans' can be understood as religiously inspired.[52] Few

would deny that the later Northern Crusades in the Baltic were holy wars, despite being

directed at pagans.[53] Nor is it immediately obvious that those who participated in the crusades

to the Holy Land were particularly au fait with the fine details of Islam.[54] We might compare

this to Carolingian campaigning against the pagan Saxons. Charlemagne's careful destruction

of the Irminsul, a key cultic site, implies a deliberate policy of breaking existing Saxon

beliefs by targeting religious centres.[55]

Religious war against the Saracens before Charlemagne

There is evidence that the Carolingian wars with the Saracens were interpreted as religious

from before the time of Charlemagne. The so-called *Chronicle of Fredegar* is one of the

---

[49] E. Dümmler and others, ed., *Epistolae Karolini aevi (III)*. MGH, Epp 5 (Berlin: Hahn, 1999), 96–7 (no. 6): 'Mauri', 'Deo odibiles'.
[50] Dümmler and others, ed., *Epistolae Karolini aevi (III)*, 96.
[51] Dümmler and others, ed., *Epistolae Karolini aevi (III)*, 96: 'Et Christo miserante totos illos iniquos Mauros occiderunt, ita ut nec unum ex eis vivum reliquerunt.'
[52] R. Bartlett, 'Reflections on Paganism and Christianity in Medieval Europe', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 101 (1999): 55–76.
[53] On these crusades, see W.L. Urban, *The Baltic Crusade* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1975); idem, *The Prussian Crusade* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1980); and E. Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades* (London: Penguin, 1997).
[54] See, out of a lengthy bibliography, P. Sénac, *L'image de l'autre: l'occident médiéval face à l'islam* (Paris: Flammarion, 1983), 22–4; M. Bennett, 'The First Crusaders' Image of the Muslims: the Influence of Vernacular Poetry?', *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 22 (1986): 101–22; J.V. Tolan, 'Muslims as Pagan Idolaters in Chronicles of the First Crusade', in *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. M. Frassetto and D. Blanks, (New York: Macmillan, 1999), 97–117.
[55] ARF, 35.

earliest sources in Western Europe to notice the Arab Conquests, attributing them to divine displeasure at the heretical tendencies of the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius and discussing Muslims primarily in military terms.[56] The eighth-century *Continuations* to the chronicle also refer to Saracens, in the context of the invasions of Francia in the time of Charles Martel. The *Continuations* portray the incursions of 'the faithless Saracen people' as a threat to Christian life in Gaul:[57]

> After they had burned the churches and massacred the people, they moved on to Poitiers; where they set fire to the church of St Hilary – it pains me to say – and decided to destroy the church of the most blessed Martin.[58]

In the narrative Charles protects Tours and the other Christian buildings of Francia by defeating the Saracens in battle with 'Christ's help'.[59] Later his taking of the city of Avignon from Muslim forces is compared to the fall of Jericho to Joshua.[60] Saracen armies are shown to be targeting Christian sites and individuals. Charles intervenes in their defence and triumphs with divine aid in the manner of a biblical hero. The Old Testament reference plays to a wider depiction by writers of the time of the Franks as 'a chosen people', modelled on the Israelites.[61] Comparisons with Old Testament figures are very common in texts discussing Carolingian conflict with Saracens.

In the eighth and ninth-century record, Charles Martel is generally depicted as a devout warrior, with more attention being paid to the conquest of Frisia than his exploits

---

[56] 'The Chronicle of Fredegar', in *Quellen zur Geschichte des 7. und 8. Jahrhunderts*, ed. A. Kusternig, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft , 1982), 232; Wolf, 'Earliest Latin Lives of Muhammad', 85; R.G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: a Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997) , 216–18.
[57] 'Continuations of the Chronicle of Fredegar', 284: 'gentem perfidam Saracinorum'.
[58] 'Continuations of the Chronicle of Fredegar', 284–6: 'ecclesiis igne concrematis, populis consumptis, usque Pectavis profecti sunt; basilica sancti Hilarii igne concremata, quod dici dolor est, ad domum beatissimi Martini evertendam destinant.'
[59] 'Continuations of the Chronicle of Fredegar', 286: 'Christo auxiliante'.
[60] 'Continuations of the Chronicle of Fredegar', 290: 'in modum Hiericho'.
[61] Garrison, 'Franks as the New Israel?', 114–61.

against Muslims, which are often passed over quickly in neutral terms.[62] The *Continuations* are unusual in their narrative. The only similar portrayal of Charles Martel's wars against the Saracens is to be found in the *Earlier Annals of Metz*, which derives its account from the *Continuations*.[63] *The Continuation of the Chronicle of Fredegar* from 721 to 768 was overseen by Charles' brother, Count Childebrand, and Childebrand's son Nibelung.[64] Different parts of the *Continuation* have been associated with the coronation of Charles' son, Pippin III in 751, and those of Pippin's sons, Charlemagne and Carloman in 768, but the exact timing of composition is unclear.[65] A date before 786 is suggested by a notice of Nibelung being dead by that year.[66] The large number of manuscripts containing the *Continuations* suggests a wide distribution.[67] Unsurprisingly, they are very pro-Carolingian, presenting the dynasty's rise to power in a positive light.[68]

The influence of Childebrand and Nibelung and their close family relationship to Charles and Pippin probably means that the *Continuations* can be considered broadly representative of how the family wanted Charles Martel's campaigns to be understood.[69] Childebrand was with Pippin when Charles died in 740, suggesting some level of closeness.[70] He also participated in Charles' taking of Avignon, beginning and leading the siege until

---

[62] U. Nonn, 'Das Bild Karl Martells in den lateinischen Quellen vornehmlich des 8. und 9. Jahrhunderts', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 4 (1970): 70–137.

[63] The Earlier Annals of Metz, in *Annales Mettenses priores*, ed. B. De Simson. MGH, SRG 10 (Hanover: Hahn, 1905), 27: 'Ibique ecclesiis Dei igne concrematis pluribusque Christianis interfectis, usque ad Pictaven urbem profecti sunt. Basilicaque sancti Hilarii igne concremata, ad beatissimi Martini ecclesiam subvertendam summo conamine proficisce contendunt. Contra quos Carolus princeps iuxta urbem Pictaven aciem construxit, et super eos invocato Christi auxilio intrepidus irruit et eos cum rege eorum usque ad internitionem delevit.'

[64] 'Continuations of the Chronicle of Fredegar', 300: 'Usque nunc inluster vir Childebrandus comes, avunculus praedicto rege Pippino, hanc historiam vel gesta Francorum diligentissime scribere procuravit. Abhinc ab inlustre viro Nibelungo, filium ipsius Childebrando, itemque comite, succedat auctoritas.'; P. Fouracre, *The Age of Charles Martel,* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), 7.

[65] R. Collins, 'Deception and Misrepresentation in Early Eighth Century Frankish Historiography: Two Case Studies', in *Karl Martell in seiner Zeit*, eds. J. Jarnut, U. Nonn and M. Richter (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1994), 227-247; R. McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 138.

[66] McKitterick, *History and Memory*, 140.

[67] *Quellen zur Geschichte des 7. und 8. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Kusternig, 33–8.

[68] R. Collins, *Die Fredegar-Chroniken* (Hanover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2007), 94.

[69] R. McKitterick, 'Political Ideology in Carolingian Historiography', in *Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*, eds. Hen and Innes, 162–74 (166).

[70] 'Continuations of the Chronicle of Fredegar', 292.

Charles could join the army.[71] As the fall of Avignon is early in the *Continuations*, Childebrand can probably be linked to the composition of the section pertaining to it. This does not necessarily mean that the Christian language used reflects the spirit of the actual campaign, but it is how one of the leaders wanted it to be understood.

The narratives of Carolingian annalists were sophisticated and the earlier material they used was chosen carefully to send a message.[72] The *Earlier Annals of Metz* (806) were also produced by the Carolingian inner circle and are probably to be linked with the monastery of Chelles and Charlemagne's sister Gisela.[73] The composers of the *Earlier Annals of Metz* selected events found in their source materials which reflected well on the Carolingians, a tendency which is particularly pronounced when dealing with the period before the coronation of Pippin.[74] The inclusion of the *Continuations*' account of Charles Martel's victories over Saracens is therefore a deliberate choice by the compilers. It is suggestive that the two sources which depict Charles' Saracen wars in the most strongly religious terms can be very tightly connected to the ruling dynasty. The *Continuations* and the *Earlier Annals of Metz* provided a context in which fighting the Muslims of Spain was an act in the defence of the Christian world, something to be celebrated by the pious.

Pope Hadrian I and the Saracens in Spain

---

[71] 'Continuations of the Chronicle of Fredegar', 288.

[72] M. Innes and R. McKitterick, 'The Writing of History', in *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation*, ed. R. McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 193–220 (211–13); R. McKitterick 'Constructing the Past in the Early Middle Ages: the Case of the Royal Frankish Annals', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 7 (1997): 101–29 (115).

[73] J.L. Nelson, 'Gender and Genre in Women Historians of the Early Middle Ages', in *L'Historiographie médiévale en Europe*, ed. J.-P. Genet (Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1991), 156–60; McKitterick, *History and Memory*, 125; McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 61–5; cf. P. Fouracre and R.A. Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography, 640–720* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 339–40; on the relationship between the Annals and the Continuations, see Fouracre, *Age of Charles Martel*, 78; Y. Hen, 'The Annals of Metz and the Merovingian Past', in *Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*, eds. Hen and Innes, 175–90 (177).

[74] Hen, 'Annals of Metz', 187–9.

Charlemagne's invasion of Spain was of especial interest to the papacy. Having learnt of Charlemagne's plans for war in al-Andalus, Pope Hadrian I wrote a letter to the king on the 17 April 778 that is crucial for understanding the papal position.[75] The pope expresses 'great tribulation and distress' at the news that 'the people of the Agarenes, contrary to God, want to make war on you and enter your territories'.[76] He encourages Charlemagne with the certainty of divine support as 'the Lord our God never allows such events to occur, nor the blessed Peter, prince of the Apostles':[77]

> As for us, most sweet son and great king, we pray constantly for the mercy of our Lord God with all our priests, our religious monks, all our clergy and our people as a whole, so that the unspeakable people of the Agarenes submits to you, and prostrates themselves under your feet and they cannot prevail against you.[78]

The Saracens are compared to the Pharaoh and his men, drowned in the Red Sea according to the Book of Exodus 'because they did not believe in God … our Lord God … will deliver [the Agarenes] into your hands', a clear indication that victory would go to Charlemagne because of the faith of he and his men.[79] The Franks would triumph through 'confidence in the Lord Almighty'.[80]

That Hadrian believed that Charlemagne was about to be invaded by Saracens rather than vice versa might be a sign that the pope's information was garbled or the king deliberately portrayed himself as under attack. In the same passage Hadrian says 'we implore

---

[75] P. Sénac, *Les Carolingiens et al-Andalus (VIIIe – IXe siècles)* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2002), 53.

[76] W. Gundlach and others, eds. *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini (I).* MGH, Epp 3 (Berlin: Hahn, 1892), 588 (Codex Carolinus, no. 61) 'magna exinde tribulatione atque afflictione', 'Agarenorum gens cupiunt ad debellandum vestris introire finibus'.

[77] Gundlach and others, eds. *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini (I),* 588 (Codex Carolinus, no. 61): 'sed nequaquam dominus Deus noster talia fieri permittat nec beatus apostolorum Petrus princeps.'

[78] Gundlach and others, eds. *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini (I),* 588 (Codex Carolinus, no. 61): 'incessanter pro vobis cum omnibus nostris sacerdotibus atque religiosis monachis et cunctum clerum vel universum populum nostrum domini Dei nostri deprecamus clementiam, ut ipsam necdicendam Agarenorum gentem vobis subiciat et vestri eam substernat pedibus, et minime prevalere adversus vos valeant.'

[79] Gundlach and others, eds. *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini (I),* 588 (Codex Carolinus, no. 61): 'quia, sicut populus Pharaonis demersus est in Mari Rubro, eo quod non crediderint Deo, ita et in hac vice dominus Deus noster per intercessiones beati Petri apostoli in vestris eos tradat minibus.'

[80] Gundlach and others, eds. *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini (I),* 588 (Codex Carolinus, no. 61): 'quia Dominus omnipotens confidentes'.

incessantly, day and night, the majesty of God … to expand your kingdom', suggesting he anticipated the Franks taking territory in Spain with divine support.[81] He ends the letter predicting that 'an angel of God Almighty will precede you'.[82]

It could be observed that a belief and desire for divine support are common themes for those fighting wanting to win and by themselves are not a particularly striking statement on the nature of this specific conflict. The language of the letter, however, bears a distinct resemblance to the 'Missa pro principe' in the Bobbio Missal.[83] Only four year earlier, Hadrian had performed litanies for Charlemagne's war against the Christian Lombards.[84] The concept of the Carolingians fighting wars to defend the faith was one which had been encouraged by popes such as Stephen II in their correspondence with Pippin, when Rome was threatened by the kings of the Lombards.[85] The Franks were asked to aid St Peter who, Pippin was reminded, held the keys to 'eternal bliss and the … fruits of paradise'.[86] As Rome was 'the head and mother of all the Church of God', in protecting the see of St Peter, the Franks would be protecting Christendom as a whole.[87] Stephen was presenting the Franks with a war sanctioned by St Peter and fought for the faith.

That this was an idea familiar to Charlemagne becomes evident in some of his letters to the papacy. They suggest that it was a concept applied to enemies who were not directly threatening the city of Rome itself. In a missive of 791, the Frankish king asked Hadrian for

---

[81] Gundlach and others, eds. *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini (I)*, 588 (Codex Carolinus, no. 61): 'Et sicut indesinenter die noctuque ante confessionem eiusdem Dei apostoli Domini deprecamus maiestatem, ut vestrum dilatet regnum, ita nos faciat de vestra sospitate et exaltatione regni vestri semper in Domino exultare.'

[82] Gundlach and others, eds. *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini (I)*, 588 (Codex Carolinus, no. 61): 'ut angelus Dei omnipotens vos praecaedat'.

[83] On which see M. Garrison, 'The *Missa pro principe* in the Bobbio Missal', in *The Bobbio Missal: Liturgy and Religious Culture in Merovingian Gaul*, eds. Y. Hen and R. Meens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 187–205.

[84] McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, 358.

[85] W. Ullmann, *The Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages: a Study in the Ideological Relation of Clerical to Lay Power* (London: Methuen, 1955), 65; T.F.X. Noble, *The Republic of St Peter: the Birth of the Papal State, 680–825* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1984), 77.

[86] Gundlach and others, eds. *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini (I)*, 487 (Codex Carolinus, no. 4): 'aeternae beatitudinis consors paradysi fructu'.

[87] Gundlach and others, eds. *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini (I)*, 504 (Codex Carolinus, no. 11): 'sancta omnium ecclesiarum Dei mater et caput'. See also 491 (no. 7) and 504 (no. 10).

'the sacrifice of your prayers' and expressed his confidence that God would subjugate the rebellious peoples of the exterior by the 'arms of faith' as wielded by the Franks. Charlemagne here draws a direct connection between papal prayer, military victory and the expansion of Christendom. Nowhere is the link between Roman pontiff, Frankish king and the fighting of religious wars to defend and expand the faith more explicitly stated than in a letter written in 796, by Alcuin to Leo III, on behalf of Charlemagne:

> It is for us, in accordance with the help of divine guidance, outwardly to defend by force of arms the Holy Church of Christ in all places from the incursion of pagans and the ravages of infidels, and inwardly to fortify her with our confession of the Catholic faith. It is for you, most holy father, raising your hands to God with Mass, to aid our armies, and to that end with you as intercessors and with God as guide … and the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be renowned through all the world.[88]

This leaves the question of whether either the papacy or Charlemagne saw the wars in Spain as another example of the partnership outlined by Alcuin and Charlemagne. In 776 Hadrian had written a letter to Charlemagne to deny allegations that he had been involved in the selling of Christian slaves to Saracens.[89]

Letters to Frankish rulers from popes from Gregory III to Hadrian I are preserved in the *Codex Carolinus*, which survives only in a single late ninth-century manuscript, but was probably compiled on Charlemagne's orders in 791.[90] Of the 99 letters in this collection the one concerning the invasion of Spain in 778 is unique. Hadrian offered to intercede with God through prayer for Charlemagne's success in several letters. Sometimes this was linked to

---

[88] Gundlach and others, eds. *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini (I)*, 137–8 (Codex Carolinus, no. 93).

[89] Gundlach and others, eds. *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini (I)*, 585 (Codex Carolinus, no. 62).

[90] D. Jasper and H. Fuhrmann, *Papal Letters in the Early Middle Ages* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 104.

war against specific enemies, most notably the Saxons.[91] Often, papal prayers were targeted to 'make you victorious over all barbarian nations'.[92] Most common are prayers for very non-specific purposes, general requests for the security of Charlemagne and his kingdom.[93] It is not just the specificity of the intercessory services in 778 that is unusual. The Old Testament language employed in the letter is unique in the *Codex Carolinus*. While arguing from absence is dangerous given the preservation rates of early medieval letters, this letter nonetheless suggests that Hadrian thought the war in Spain was an enterprise of particular importance.

There are obvious dangers in taking the letter of 778 as evidence for Charlemagne's perception of the Roncesvalles campaign. He and Hadrian had a comparatively close working relationship but it was still subject to stress.[94] We lack most of the Carolingian letters to the bishop of Rome. Nevertheless Charlemagne had been intending to visit Rome that year, as indicated by a letter from Hadrian and so was probably in particularly close contact with the pope.[95] Hadrian's missive seems to have been written in response to one from Charlemagne and it is likely that, as in the case of 791, the Frankish king had requested the pope's prayers. The letter of 778 does suggest that Hadrian understood Charlemagne's wars in al-Andalus as an extension of Frankish campaigning for the faith.

Liturgies of war

---

[91] Gundlach and others, eds. *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini (I)*, 570 (Codex Carolinus, no. 50); 574 (no. 52); 607 (no. 76).

[92] Gundlach and others, eds. *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini (I)*, 589 (Codex Carolinus, no. 59): 'victorem te super omnes barbares nations faciat'; 604 (no. 73); 626 (no. 89).

[93] Gundlach and others, eds. *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini (I)*, 572 (Codex Carolinus, no. 51); 586 (no. 60); 590 (no. 63); 602 (no. 72); 605 (no. 74); 611 (no. 79); 622 (no. 85); 623 (no. 87); 632 (no. 92); 633 (no. 94).

[94] See, for example, J.L. Nelson, 'The Settings of the Gift in the Reign of Charlemagne', in *The Languages of the Gift in the Early Middle Ages*, eds. W. Davies and P. Fouracre, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 116–48.

[95] Gundlach and others, eds. *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini (I)*, 586 (Codex Carolinus, no. 60).

Charlemagne's patronage of the liturgy is well known, forming a major part of his efforts to ensure the practice of correct worship throughout his realms.[96] The earliest manuscript containing the so-called eighth-century Gelasian Sacramentary is the *Sacramentary of Gellone*.[97] It was probably ordered by Bishop Hildoard of Cambrai and produced at Meaux in the last decade of the eighth century.[98] One of its unusual features is the inclusion of a 'Mass on the departure of the troops for those who are going to battle', intended for the soldiers themselves.[99] Those participating in the Mass ask God to 'bring victory to the most faithful Christians and protect the loyal people of the Franks, while using Your might to lay low the infidel people in war'.[100]

This sort of mass is unusual, but another example can be found in the manuscript known as the *Sacramentary of Angoulême*, copied around 800 in a script from south of the Loire, in the form of a 'Mass for the king on the day of battles against the pagans'.[101] This service asks for God to intervene to ensure that 'the Christian people have no danger of loss to the infidels'.[102] Both Masses beg for divine support for a Christian king and his army going to war, or on the battlefield itself, against a non-Christian enemy; the battle is to be understood in religious terms, fought to protect the Christian people against 'the infidel barbarians'.[103] Both Masses employ references to the Old Testament, asking for help similar

---

[96] R. McKitterick, 'Royal Patronage of Culture in the Frankish Kingdoms under the Carolingians: Motives and Consequences', *Settimane di Studio*, 38, (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1992), 93–129 (99–103); Y. Hen, *The Royal Patronage of Liturgy in Frankish Gaul to the Death of Charles the Bald (877)*. Henry Bradshaw Society, Subsidia 3 (London: Boydell Press for the Henry Bradshaw Society, 2001).

[97] Hen, *Royal Patronage of Liturgy*, 59.

[98] C.R. Baldwin, 'The Scriptorium of the Sacramentary of Gellone', *Scriptorium* 25 (1971): 3–17 (8, 15).

[99] LSG, 431: 'Missa in profectionem hostium ęontibus in prohelium'.

[100] LSG, 431: 'refferant triumphantes dum fidelissime Christiane fidaei Francorum gentem protegis, dum infidelium gentium tua potential bella prosternis.'

[101] LSE, 358, 'Missa pro rege in die belli contra pagano'.

[102] LSE, 358: 'ne plebs Christiana per infidelium discrimine nullum possit habere dispendium'.

[103] LSG, 431: 'gentium infidelium barbarorum'. On the language employed, see M. McCormick, 'Liturgie et guerre des carolingiens à la première croisade', in *'Militia Christi' e Crociata nei secoli XI–XIII* (Milan: Vita e pensiero, 1992), 209–240 (224–6).

to that received by Moses, David and Gideon.[104] The comparison of the Franks to the

Israelites evokes a sense of the Franks as God's chosen people, their ethnicity and identity

defined by their faith, threatened by pagans.[105]

There are grounds for associating the enemies in question with the Iberian Peninsula.

The *Sacramentary of Gellone* arrived at Gellone in Septimania in the first decade of the ninth

century, probably with the aristocratic founder of the monastery, Count William of Toulouse,

when he retired there in 807, for a note on the manuscript calls it 'the book of William of

Gellone'.[106] William had spent most of his career fighting on the Spanish March, and was

instrumental in seizing Barcelona in 801.[107] The Sacramentary of Angoulême appears to have

been present at the monastery of Angoulême from the early ninth century.[108] For both

Gellone in Septimania and the *Sacramentary of Angoulême* in Aquitaine, the non-Christians

most likely to be faced on the battlefield in the first decade of the ninth century were

Muslims.[109] That services against pagans could be directed at Saracens is suggested by the

example of the *Sacramentary of Arles*, which had a military Mass inserted into the

manuscript in the mid-ninth century.[110] This Mass is almost identical to that in the

Sacramentary of Angoulême and was inserted almost certainly in response to Muslim raids in

842, 850 and 869.

---

[104] LSG, 431; LSE, 358. On the use of Old Testament references in the liturgy, see E. Ewig, 'Zum Christlichen Königsgedanken im Frühmittelalter', in *Spätantikes und Fränkisches Gallien: gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, ed. H. Atsma (Munich: Artemis Verlag, 1976), 3–71 (42).

[105] E.H. Kantorowicz, *Laudes Regiae: a Study in Liturgical Acclamation and Medieval Ruler Worship*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), 56; Garrison, 'Franks as the New Israel?', 114–61.

[106] Baldwin, 'Scriptorium', 16–17: 'Gellonis Willelmi liber'.

[107] Astronomer, 'Vita Hludowici', 298, 316; Ermold the Black, *Poème sur Louis le Pieux*, 18; see also J.P. Salrach, 'Guillaume et Barcelone: la formation de la Marche Hispanique', 25–44, and A. Dubreucq, 'Guillaume de Toulouse et la politique carolingienne en Aquitaine, d'apres les sources narratives', 183–205, in *Entre histoire et épopée: les Guillaume d'Orange (IXe–XIIIe siècles)*, ed. L. Macé (Toulouse: Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, 2006).

[108] LSE, viii–ix.

[109] McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, 348.

[110] M. McCormick, 'A New Ninth-Century Witness to the Carolingian Mass against the Pagans (Paris, B.N. lat. 2812)', *Revue Bénédictine* 97 (1987): 68–86 (77).

The text of liturgies often remained very conservative, with many Masses changing very little from the time of the late Roman Empire. This creates a natural doubt over the significance of the specific language employed by them.[111] In the case of the military Masses, their rarity is a pointer towards their importance. Most eighth-century Gelasian sacramentaries do not contain a military Mass. In many of those that do, such as the Bobbio Missal, there is evidence that they were added later.[112] This suggests that where military Masses are found, they were not copied by rote, but deliberately added as a useful and necessary service and expected to be performed.[113] That the 'liturgy of war' was employed on Carolingian campaigns is well attested: the most famous example comes from Charlemagne's letter to his wife Fastrada in 791, asking for her to organise liturgical processions to ensure victory for Pippin over the Avars.[114] Its survival as a formula indicates that someone thought it was worth preserving as a model for future use.[115] Pope Leo III performed Mass at Paderborn before the Frankish army campaigned against the Saxons.[116]

The extent to which these particular masses can be linked to the Carolingian dynasty itself is uncertain, but they refer to Frankish kings in their texts, the 'sword of the Lord and of the most famous king of the Franks', and asking God to 'grant your servant, the king, victory'.[117] They may have been performed for Louis prior to a campaign in al-Andalus. He

---

[111] G. Tellenbach, 'Römischer und Christlicher Reichsgedanke in der Liturgie des frühen Mittelalters', in idem, *Ausgewählte Abhandlungen und Aufsätze.* 5 vols. (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1988–96), 2: 343–410 (346); J.L. Nelson, 'Ritual and Reality in the Early Medieval *Ordines*', in eadem, *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London: Hambledon, 1986), 329–40 (333–4).

[112] Garrison, '*Missa pro principe* in the Bobbio Missal', 187–205.

[113] McCormick, 'New Ninth-Century Witness', 70.

[114] Charlemagne, 'Epistolae', in MGH Epp. IV, *Epistolae Karolini aevi (II)*, ed. E. Dümmler and others (Berlin: Apud Weidmannos, 1905), 528–9; A.M. Koeniger, *Die Militärseelsorge der Karolingerzeit: ihr Recht und ihre Praxis* (Munich: Lentner, 1918); M. McCormick, 'The Liturgy of War in the Early Middle Ages: Crisis, Litanies, and the Carolingian Monarchy', *Viator* 15 (1984): 1–23 (9); D.S. Bachrach, *Religion and the Conduct of War c.300–1215* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), 36.

[115] McCormick, 'Liturgy of War', 14.

[116] McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, 350.

[117] LSG, 431: 'Gladius domini et clarisimi Francorum regis illi'; LSE, 358: 'da victoriam servo tuo regi illi.' On kingship in Frankish liturgy see Y. Hen, 'The Uses of the Bible and the Perception of Kingship in Merovingian Gaul', *Early Medieval Europe*, 7, (1998): 277–89 (286–8), and M. McCormick, 'The Liturgy of War from

certainly held a grand service to celebrate his capture of Barcelona.[118] William of Toulouse was a cousin of Charlemagne and frequently advised Louis on military matters in the March.[119] William placed the monastery of Gellone under the control of Benedict of Aniane, Louis' friend and adviser. That the king of Aquitaine remembered William is indicated by a grant he gave to Gellone in 807 which refers to him as one, 'who became the most famous count in the hall of our father, the Emperor Charles'.[120] The *Sacramentary of Angoulême* has been connected directly to Louis' Aquitainian court and may have been a gift from him.[121] These Masses suggest that their compilers saw war against the Saracens as a kingly occupation and something performed to protect the Christian people and faith against non-Christians.

Charter evidence

The charter record provides further evidence for a religious dimension to the presence of the Franks in the Iberian Peninsula. There are two charters issued by Charlemagne granting land in the Carolingian territories in Septimania, largely inhabited by Goths, to people from elsewhere in the Peninsula, referred to as '*Hispani*', who had fled Muslim rule. Neither survive in their original form, but are preserved in charters reconfirming existing grants by Charlemagne's successors.[122] The first was probably issued around 780, shortly after the Roncesvalles campaign.[123] Text from it can be found in charters granted by Louis the Pious in 815 and Charles the Bald in 844, so the recipients were probably the ancestors of the men

Antiquity to the Crusades', in *The Sword of the Lord: Military Chaplains from the First to the Twenty-First Century*, ed. D.L. Bergen (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 45–67 (52).

[118] Astronomer, 'Vita Hludowici', 320; Ermold the Black, *Poème sur Louis,* 46.

[119] Astronomer, 'Vita Hludowici', 298; Ermold the Black, *Poème sur Louis*. 46.

[120] *Cartulaires des abbayes d'Aniane et de Gellone,* 2, no. 249, , ed. L. Cassan & E. Meynial, (Montpellier: J. Martel, 1900-1910), 'qui in aula genitoris nostri Caroli Augusti comes exstitit clarissimus', 209-210.

[121] McCormick, 'New Ninth-Century Witness', 77.

[122] R. d'Abadal i de Vinyals, 'Introducció als apèndixs I, II, III, IV i V', CC, 2, 399-411, 400-408.

[123] CC, 2: 412.

whose holdings were confirmed on those occasions. In 781 Charlemagne appointed his three-year old son, the future Louis the Pious, king of Aquitaine, and this charter would reflect a moment in the reorganisation of the new Carolingian territories in Septimania.[124] The second can be dated to after 801, probably shortly after Louis captured Barcelona from Muslim forces and is preserved in Charles the Bald's 844 charter.[125] Both charters were produced in the context of recent conflict with Muslims, concerning newly acquired lands needing to be controlled.

The language employed in the charters is interesting. Charlemagne portrays his reception of these refugees from the Iberian Peninsula as both an act of mercy and of justice, for the beneficiaries of his generosity are fleeing 'the unjust and cruel yoke of oppression, put on their shoulders by the Saracens'.[126] In the second charter, Charlemagne describes his lands as 'a refuge' from this 'cruel yoke … withdrawing from the power of the Saracens'.[127] The reason for this oppression is the religion of the refugees, for the Saracens are 'the enemies of the Christians'.[128] Charlemagne is therefore acting as a protector of Christians in his acquisition of territory in the Iberian Peninsula. Indeed, the first charter contains no reference to Goths, *Hispani* or Franks, stressing the common Christian identity of the Carolingians and the refugees, who were 'received in the unity of faith'.[129] This common identity made them

---

[124] ARF, 56; Astronomer, 'Vita Hludowici', 296. On settlement see, C. Duhamel-Amado and A. Catafau, 'Fidèles et aprisionaires en réseaux dans la Gothie, des IXe et Xe siècles: le mariage et l'aprision au service de la noblesse méridionale', in *La royauté et les élites dans l'Europe carolingienne (début IXe siècle aux environs de 920)*, ed. R. Le Jan (Lille: Centre d'histoire de l'Europe du Nord-Ouest, 1998), 438–65; C.J. Chandler, 'Between Court and Counts: Carolingian Catalonia and the *Aprisio* Grant, 778–897', *Early Medieval Europe* 11, (2002): 19–44.

[125] CC, 2: 415.

[126] CC, 2: 412:, 'iniquam oppresionem et crudellisimum jugum, quod eorum cervicibus inimicissima Christianitati gens Sarracenorum imposuit'.

[127] CC, 2: 415: 'crudellisimus jugum inimicissime christiani nominis Sarracenorum evitantes and [nos] fecere confugium et eandam civitatem [nostro] tencie libenter condonunt seu tradiderunt, et ab eorundum Sarracenorum potestate'.

[128] CC, 2: 412, 415: 'inimicissima Christianitati', 'inimicissime Christiani'.

[129] CC, 2: 412: 'nostra receptos sicut in unitate fidei'.

the shared enemy of the Saracens, against whom both king and newly landed warriors would fight.

Despite these differences, the two charters are very similar, repeating much of their material, and are the only charters of their type. It is probable that all grants of this kind contained much the same message, of a Christian king intervening in Spain to save the faithful, and of Saracens as the enemies of all Christians. Both of these charters were preserved in a cartulary in Barcelona in the thirteenth century, the *Libri Antiquitatum*, kept in the Arxiu Capitular de Barcelona, suggesting that they remained valuable as title to the possession of land.[130] That the confirmations by Louis the Pious and Charles the Bald seem to have been prompted by the beneficiaries indicates that later generations were not concerned with the preservation of the charters unless they were directly relevant to their control of the property.[131] It is possible that more charters of this type were issued by Charlemagne which have not survived.

Charlemagne was sending a message to landed men of the Spanish March. The role of beneficiaries in prompting grants could be complex and the king's recognition may reflect their importance and the closeness of their relationship.[132] As a group, Charlemagne was to protect them from the impositions of his own counts, as the text of a charter referring to an investigation in 812 into complaints made by these *Hispani* demonstrates.[133] This care suggests that the *Hispani* had a key role in Charlemagne's strategy for managing and

---

[130] CC, 2: 412, 415, *Recueil des actes de Charles II le Chauve, roi de France*, I, ed. A. Giry, M. Prou & G. Tessier, (Paris: Impr. nationale, 1943), no. 46, 128.

[131] CC, 2: 412, 415. On the reissue of charters, see J. Semmler, 'Iussit … princeps renovare … praecepta. Zur verfassungsrechtlichen Einordnung der Hochstifte und Abteien in die karolingische Reichskirche', in *Consuetudines monasticae: eine Festgabe für Kassius Hallinger aus Anlass seines 70. Geburtstages*, eds. J.F. Angerer and J. Lenzenweger (Rome: Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, 1982), 97–124; E. Screen, 'The Importance of the Emperor: Lothar I and the Frankish Civil War', *Early Medieval Europe* 12 (2003): 25–51.

[132] Screen, 'Importance of the Emperor', 32.

[133] CC, 2: 312–14. The charter is preserved in a twelfth-century Narbonne cartulary, BNF MS lat. 1101 3.f.8. See J.R. Davis, *Charlemagne's Practice of Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 104-105.

defending the March.[134] The audience for these charters was not limited to those in the March. The act of issuing a royal diploma was a political statement indicating the authority of the king making the grant. It was also a public declaration, for charters were generally very elaborate and large-scale productions, presented in front of the royal court as a performance.[135]

This was probably the case for another charter granted by Charlemagne, dated to March in a year between 795 and 797, copied into the Cartulary of Narbonne in the twelfth century.[136] It was issued at Aachen and sealed with Charlemagne's ring, at the prompting of Louis, suggesting a significant Carolingian interest in the charter. Charlemagne received a letter from Louis in which it was recorded that a warrior named John had:

> fought a great battle against the heretic or infidel Saracens in the country of Barcelona, that he overcame at the place they call *Ad Ponte*, and he killed the aforesaid infidels and took the spoils from them.[137]

John was rewarded with 'an abandoned estate in the country of Narbonne', for his faithful service.[138] Charlemagne and Louis were clearly pleased with John's prowess at killing Saracens. For the purposes of this charter at least, the use of 'heretic' and 'infidel' suggests that Saracens were defined by their lack of Christian faith, and that the defeat of infidels was something to celebrate in and of itself.

The charters need to be used with some care. That their rhetoric does not necessarily match reality is suggested by the Arabic sounding names of some of the settlers whose rights

---

[134] Chandler, 'Between Court and Counts', 19–44.

[135] G. Koziol, *The Politics of Memory and Identity in Carolingian Royal Diplomas: the West Frankish Kingdom (840–987)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 58.

[136] CC, 2: 310. E. Mühlbacher convincingly narrowed the possible years to 795, 796 or 797, opting for 795: *MGH Diplomata Kar. 1: Pippin, Karlmann und Karl der Große*, ed. E. Mühlbacher, (Hanover: Hahn, 1906), 241.

[137] CC, 2: 310: 'ipse super ereticos sive Sarracenos infideles nostros magnum certamen certavit in pago Barchinonense, ubi superavit eos in locum, ubi dicitur Ad Ponte, et occidit de iam dictos infideles et cepit de ipsis spolia.'

[138] CC, 2: 310: 'in pago Narbonense villare eremum'.

Charlemagne protected in 812, including 'Zoleiman', 'Zate the Soldier', and possibly 'Mauro'.[139] Nonetheless, they suggest that from the early 780s Charlemagne portrayed his wars in Spain as in aid of protecting Christians against a common non-Christian enemy: religion was an important factor.

Alcuin, Charlemagne's court and the Saracens

The exploits of Charlemagne's warriors in Spain were not just celebrated in charters. Around 790, Alcuin wrote a letter to the 'blessed teacher and devout father' Colcu, who resided in Northumbria.[140] Before discussing insular matters, Alcuin began by describing how, through the mercy of God, 'in the lands of Europe, the Church has peace, is perfected and grows'. The cause of this success is indicated indirectly, as Alcuin lists peoples like the Saxons and the Frisians that 'are converted to the faith of Christ', including other peoples such as the Avars, the Bavarians and the Slavs who have been tamed.[141] In each case 'the same king', Charlemagne, and his army are named as the agent responsible for bringing this satisfactory set of affairs to pass.[142] The implicit message is that Carolingian arms are securing and expanding Christendom. Alcuin ends this list of triumphs with the news that:

> Also the leaders and captains of the most Christian king took many parts of Spain
> from the Saracens, 300 miles by the coast. But alas, unfortunately, those same cursed
> Saracens (who are also Agarenes) exercise total dominion over the greatest part of
> Africa and Asia.[143]

---

[139] CC, 2: 313. On the rhetoric in these charters, see M. Zimmermann, 'Le concept de marca Hispanica et l'importance de la frontière dans la formation de la Catalogne', in *La marche supérieure d'al-Andalus et l'occident chrétien*, ed. P. Sénac (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 1991), 31.

[140] MGH, *Epistolae Karolini aevi (IV)*, ed. Dümmler and others, 32 (no. 7): 'Benedicto magistro et pio patri Colcu'. On Colcu see D.A. Bullough, *Alcuin: Achievement and Reputation* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 276–7.

[141] MGH, *Epistolae Karolini aevi (IV)*, ed. Dümmler and others, 32 (no. 7): 'ad fidem Christi conversi sunt'.

[142] MGH, *Epistolae Karolini aevi (IV)*, ed. Dümmler and others, 32 (no. 7): 'idem rex'.

[143] MGH, *Epistolae Karolini aevi (IV)*, ed. Dümmler and others, 32 (no. 7): 'Etiam et ejusdem Christianissimi regis duces et tribuni multam partem Hispaniae tulerunt a Saracenis, quasi trecenta milia in longum per

In the context of this letter Colcu was clearly meant to understand this line as part of a wider expansion of Christian power in Europe. In a letter from 796 Alcuin explained that 'all the world is divided into three parts; Europe, Africa and India.'[144] When he wrote to Colcu, Alcuin was thinking on a global, not just a European level, with two-thirds of the world in Saracen hands.

The idea of the Carolingians fighting to defend and extend the Christian world appears frequently in Alcuin's work. He depicted missionary endeavour and Carolingian power working together in Frisia in the *Life of Willibrord*.[145] In 799, he mourned the deaths of Eric of Friuli and his father Gerold while at war with Croats and Avars respectively, celebrating them as 'most courageous men, who guarded the borders of, and also increased the size of, the *Christiani imperii*'.[146] Alcuin was greatly concerned about the conversion of defeated peoples such as the Saxons and he wrote to senior Franks about his fears that the Avar wars were not being fought for the right reasons or in the correct manner.[147] A letter to a friend was not necessarily the platform to express royal policy. The primary purpose of the letter was that Alcuin needed someone to assist him in his affairs in Northumbria and its opening, with its good news and grand affairs, was clearly meant to be heartening and impressive.[148] But the significance of Alcuin's own particular views may not have been inconsiderable.

---

maritima. Sed heu, pro dolor, quod idem maledicti Saraceni (qui et Agareni) tota dominantur Africa et Asia majore maxima ex parte.'

[144] MGH, *Epistolae Karolini aevi (IV)*, ed. Dümmler and others, 124 (no. 81): 'Totus orbis in tres dividitur partes.' K. Leyser, 'Concepts of Europe in the Early and High Middle Ages', in *Communications and Power in Medieval Europe: the Carolingian and Ottonian Centuries*, ed. Reuter, 1–18 (7).

[145] M. Alberi, 'The Evolution of Alcuin's Concept of the *Imperium Christianum*', in *The Community, the Family and the Saint: Patterns of Power in Early Medieval Europe*, eds. J. Hill and M. Swan (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 3–18 (5); Alcuin, 'Vita Willibrordi archiepiscopi Traiectensis', in *Passiones vitaeque sanctorum aevi Merovingici (V)*, ed. W. Levison. MGH, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum 7 (Hanover: Hahn, 1920), 81–141.

[146] MGH, *Epistolae Karolini aevi (IV)*, ed. Dümmler and others, 310 (no. 1857?): 'viri fortissimi, qui terminos custodierunt, etiam et dilataverunt, Christiani imperii'.

[147] Alberi, 'Evolution of Alcuin's Concept of the *Imperium Christianum*', 3; MGH, *Epistolae Karolini aevi (IV)*, ed. Dümmler and others, 143–4 (no. 99); 156–9 (no. 111); 159–62 (no. 112); 163–6 (no. 113).

[148] MGH, *Epistolae Karolini aevi (IV)*, ed. Dümmler and others, 33 (no. 7).

There is evidence for the Frankish king listening to Alcuin on policy, responding to Alcuin's criticism of hard-line approaches aimed at converting the Saxons.[149] Charlemagne also entrusted Alcuin with a variety of matters concerning Spain, particularly in response to the rise of Adoptionism within the Peninsula.[150] Alcuin composed a letter on behalf of the Frankish bishops to their counterparts in the Spanish hierarchy.[151] His letters show him co-ordinating the anti-Adoptionist campaign with figures like Benedict of Aniane and Bishop Leidrad of Lyons, and include a list of responses to heretical challenges and questions to be used in the field.[152] He was also responsible for the *Liber Alcuini contra haeresim Felicis* and *Contra Felicem Urgellitanum episcopum libri septem* criticising the Adoptionist Bishop of Urgell.[153] In 799, Alcuin led the debate with Felix.[154] When Charlemagne wanted a copy of Felix's *Disputatio Felicis cum Sarraceno* it was to Alcuin he turned.[155] In his writings to Colcu, Alcuin may hint at a religious understanding of Carolingian expansion in Spain.

Alcuin was not the only major intellectual figure at Charlemagne's court to comment on the Saracens. In 796 Theodulf, bishop of Orleans, composed a poem for the Frankish king. In his celebration of Charlemagne's achievements, Theodulf proclaims that:

The heathen peoples come prepared to serve Christ;

You call them to Him with urgent gestures.

---

[149] MGH *Capitularia regum Francorum* I, ed. A. Boretius, (Hanover: Hahn, 1883), no. 26, 71–72; MGH, *Epistolae Karolini aevi (IV)*, ed. Dümmler and others, 157–9 (no. 110); Hen, 'Charlemagne's Jihad', 43–4; I. Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe, 400–1050* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 85–6; Stone, *Morality and Masculinity*, 74.

[150] On the Adoptionist crisis, see J.C. Cavadini, *The Last Christology of the West: Adoptionism in Spain and Gaul, 785–820* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 71.

[151] Alcuin, 'Epistola episcoporum Franciae', MGH, *Concilia*, II.1, *Concilia aevi Karolini*, ed. A. Werminghoff, (Berlin & Leipzig: Hahn, 1906), 142-157.

[152] Alcuin, 'Epistolae', in MGH, *Epistolae Karolini aevi II*, ed. Dümmler, 330–3 (no. 200); 335–6 (no. 202); 337–40 (no. 204); 345–6 (no. 208).

[153] Alcuin, *Liber Alcuini contra haeresim Felicis*, ed. G. B. Blumenshine (Vatican: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1980); Alcuin, 'Contra Felicem Urgellitanum episcopum libri septem', *Patrologia Latina,* 101, *Alcuini Opera Omnia,* (Paris: Garnier fratres, 1851), cols. 119–230.

[154] E.P. Colbert, *The Martyrs of Córdoba (850–859): a Study of the Sources*, (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1962), 80.

[155] Alcuin, 'Epistolae', in MGH, *Epistolae Karolini aevi II*, ed. Dümmler, 284–5 (no. 172).

Behold the Huns with their braided hair come to Christ,

Once fierce savages, now humbled in the faith.[156]

In the same year Pippin of Italy and Eric of Friuli had sacked the Ring of Avars.[157] Theodulf

was not alone in composing on the theme of Frankish arms spreading the faith beyond

Christendom by armed might, as the poem 'King Pippin's victory over the Avars', from the

same year demonstrates.[158] More unusual is Theodulf's continuation, where he requests:

Let them be accompanied by the Arabs.

Both people have long hair:

One of them plaits it; may the other let it flow loosely.

Córdoba, send swiftly your long-amassed treasure

To Charlemagne who deserves all that is fine!

As the Avars come, the Arabs and Nomads should come too,

Baring neck and knee before the king's feet.

They were no less barbarous and fierce than the Huns,

But He who conquered them will conquer these peoples too.[159]

Here Theodulf is suggesting that the Saracens of Spain be treated in the same way as the

Avars. He presents both as possessed of a savage nature, as demonstrated by their outlandish

coiffure. This nature can be tamed and corrected by Carolingian military force. The reference

---

[156] Theodulf, 'Ad Carolum regem', in MGH, *Poetae Latini aevi Carolini (I)*, ed. E. Dümmler (Berlin: Hahn, 1881), 484 (no.25): 'Adveniunt gentes Christo servire paratae, Quas dextra ad Christum sollicitante vocas. Pone venit textis ad Christum crinibus Hunnus, Estque humilis fidei, qui fuit ante ferox'. I have used Godman's translation in *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, 153.

[157] ARF, 98. On the Avar campaigns see W. Pohl, *Die Awaren: ein Steppenvolk in Mitteleuropa 567–822, n. Chr.* (Munich: Beck, 1988), 308–22.

[158] 'De Pippini regis victoria avarica', in MGH, *Poetae Latini aevi Carolini (I)*, ed. Dümmler, 116–17.

[159] Theodulf, 'Ad Carolum regem', 484: 'Huic societur Arabs, populus crinitus uterque est, Hic textus crines, ille solutus eat. Cordoba, prolixo collectas tempore gazas Mitte celer regi quem decet omne decens. Ut veniunt Abares, Arabes Nomadesque venite, Regis et ante pedes flectite colla genu. Nec minus hi, quam vos, saevique trucesque fuere, Sed hos qui domuit, vos domiturus erit.' Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, 153.

to the treasure of Córdoba matches the vast wealth accrued by the Franks from their victories over the Avars, an additional incentive to invade Spain.[160]

Above all, Theodulf argues in the poem that the Saracens need to be converted 'to serve Christ' just as the Avars were 'humbled in the faith'. The defeat of the Arabs by the Franks would be a conquest by God, with victory achieved by divine blessing. The poem's conception of Charlemagne's wars against non-Christian peoples is a religious one, in which campaigns are fought in part to convert them to Christianity. This is military activity in the service of Christ. It is important to note that Theodulf was not being purely hypothetical in his poem. 796 was the first year after 778 that the Frankish annals record an expedition into al-Andalus, taking advantage of the disputed accession of al-Ḥakam I in Córdoba.[161] Subsequent years saw further campaigning.

Whether his poem reflects the way people at Charlemagne's court thought is unclear. Theodulf was convinced that his poem could influence Charlemagne, declaring 'Let Theodulf's Muse sing, In order to cheer kings and charm magistrates'; but poets are rarely the best assessors of the significance of their own work.[162] The transmission of Carolingian poetry is poor, with verses often surviving in single manuscripts alone.[163] Theodulf anticipated a large audience for the poem, saying 'May this poem-epistle race among jest and jokes, may it often be touched by every hand';[164] and his work was probably performed at court. The poem ends by depicting the assembled courtiers listening to it, with Theodulf mocking different figures with varying levels of affection.[165] We should probably imagine an

---

[160] See T. Reuter 'Plunder and Tribute in the Carolingian Empire', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 35 (1985): 75–94.

[161] ARF, 100; 'Annals of Lorsch', 37, Ibn Ḥayyān, *Crónica de los emires Alḥakam I y 'Abdarraḥmān II*, 15–19.

[162] Theodulf, 'Ad Carolum regem', 488: 'sonet Theodulfica Musa, Quae foveat reges, mulceat et proceres.'

[163] M. Garrison, 'The Emergence of Carolingian Latin Literature and the Court of Charlemagne (780–814)', in *Carolingian Culture*, ed. McKitterick, 111–40 (114).

[164] Theodulf, 'Ad Carolum regem', 483: 'Ludicris haec mixta iocis per ludicrs currat, Saepeque tangatur qualibet illa manu'; Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, 151. On the audience for Latin poetry, see R. McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 227–32.

[165] Theodulf, 'Ad Carolum regem', 486–9.

inner circle, including the king, already aware of the contents of the poem and in on the joke.[166] If so, Charlemagne was not displeased with Theodulf's call for the conversion of the Arabs, and it might have reached a reasonably wide selection of the Frankish elite.

Charlemagne and the Visigothic Church

The most direct evidence that Charlemagne was interested in war against Saracens on religious grounds comes from a letter written in his name and sent to the Adoptionist Archbishop Elipandus of Toledo in around 794.[167] The Frankish king had long been interested in the Visigothic Church. He had co-operated with Pope Hadrian I in the sending of Bishop Egila in 780 to al-Andalus on a reform mission, which went embarrassingly wrong when Egila embraced the heresy of Migetius.[168] Charlemagne was deeply concerned by the presence of the Adoptionist heresy among the Christians of al-Andalus and supported Elipandus' theological opponents in the Iberian Peninsula.[169]

Charlemagne's letter to Elipandus came in response to letters sent by the archbishop to the king and to the Frankish bishops as a whole.[170] It differs from a similar letter sent by Hadrian in that it concerns itself less with doctrinal specificities.[171] It is nonetheless a learned, point by point rebuttal of Elipandus' letter, with a strong undercurrent of irony. Throughout Elipandus and the other Adoptionist bishops are exhorted to renounce their heresy and return to 'the still loving mother Church'.[172] Referring to the Saracens of al-Andalus, the letter says

---

[166] D. Schaller, 'Poetic Rivalries at the Court of Charlemagne', in *Classical Influences in European Culture, A.D. 500–1500*, ed. R.R. Bolgar, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 151–7 (154).

[167] Charlemagne, in MGH, *Concilia aevi Karolini*, ed. A. Werminghoff. MGH Concilia 2.1 (Hanover: Hahn, 1906), 157–64.

[168] Colbert, *Martyrs of Córdoba*, 59.

[169] Colbert, *Martyrs of Córdoba*, 67.

[170] Elipandus , 'Epistula ad Carolum Magnum', in *Corpus scriptorum Muzarabicorum*, vol. 1, ed. J. Gil (Madrid: Instituto Antonio de Nebrija, 1973), 93–6.

[171] Hadrian I, in MGH, *Concilia aevi Karolini*, ed. Werminghoff. MGH Concilia 2.1: 122–130 (no. 19); Cavadini, *Last Christology*, 77.

[172] MGH *Concilia aevi Karolini*, ed. Werminghoff. MGH Concilia 2.1: no. 19, 157-164, 163, 'adhuc enim pia mater ecclesia'.

that 'the inner servitude of the Devil is worse than external servitude to enemies', a theme

developed by the observation that 'you are afflicted by a double sorrow, the deceit of the

devil in the heart and the slavery of servitude to the enemy in body'.[173] The end of Saracen

rule must wait for the end of Adoptionism as liberation from secular oppression must follow

liberation from that of the Devil. Charlemagne notes that 'before this offence' the Christians

of al-Andalus were 'in our prayers in all the churches our realm' in order that 'with God's

help we would save you from worldly bondage'.[174] The Frankish king offers temporal aid as

an incentive to return to Catholicism.

It is unclear how real a prospect this was. It is probable that the real audience for this

letter was the other bishops, particularly those in Frankish territory who had received a letter

from Elipandus. Charlemagne was reasserting his credentials as a Christian monarch while

also legitimising his own involvement within the Spanish Church. Charlemagne may have

been excusing his lack of intervention in the Peninsula on the grounds of Spanish heresy. It is

notable that Elipandus' letter contains no hint that he would welcome Frankish 'liberation'.

There is no evidence of any particular persecution of the Archbishop of Toledo by the

Muslim rulers of al-Andalus.[175]

As was often the case when Franks and the Christians of Spain came into contact,

they may well have been talking past each other. Frankish intervention in the Adoptionist

crisis in Spain generally contained fundamental misunderstandings about the theological

positions held by their Spanish opponents.[176] Nonetheless, the letter is interesting for the

---

[173] MGH *Concilia aevi Karolini*, ed. Werminghoff. MGH Concilia 2.1: 162 (no. 19), 'Peius fiat interius diaboli servitium quam exterius gentis inimicae'; 'vobis affligimur merore, diabolica fraude deceptis in corde et inimica servitute oppressis in corpore'.

[174] MGH *Concilia aevi Karolini*, ed. Werminghoff. MGH Concilia 2.1: 162 (no. 19), 'Ante igitur quam huius sepedicti scandali a vobis oriretur offensio, duplici caritate, sicut praediximus, dileximus vos, id est in orationibus nostris per omnes regni nostri ecclesias habuimus socios et, vestri memoriam cotidie facientes, itidem quoque et Deo auxiliante voluntatem habuimus vos liberare a servitio secularis necessitatis secundum temporis oportunitatem et vestri consilii adhortationem', 162.

[175] Collins, *Arab Conquest of Spain*, 222.

[176] Outlined in Cavadini, *Last Christology*, 73–80, 87–9, 93–102, 105–6.

implication that as early as 794 Frankish invasions of al-Andalus might be justified on the grounds of liberating Spanish Christians. It also suggests that Charlemagne expected his audience to view the rule of non-Christians over Christians as oppression, with no specifics about why it was oppressive except on grounds of faith.[177] Whether or not Charlemagne anticipated leading a war of liberation in al-Andalus, the idea was one he wanted communicated to the Christian community in Spain.

Ermold the Black and the capture of Barcelona, 801

The last piece of evidence to be considered here is considerably later than the others. In 826–8, Ermold the Black wrote his *In honorem Hludovici imperatoris* with the aim of persuading the Emperor Louis to restore him from his exile in Strasbourg for unspecified offences.[178] The first book of the poem focuses on Louis' capture of Barcelona in 801. Ermold discusses some complex themes in his work, with questions about the justice of this war. The siege of Barcelona is preceded by an account of a Christian warrior, Datus, who, blinded by his rage at the cruelty of Andalusi raiders, accidentally causes the death of his own mother in his furious attempts to fight the Saracens, before eventually finding peace in a monastery.[179] During the siege itself the motivations of the Franks are repeatedly challenged by the articulate defenders, most notably by one Durzaz, who asks 'O cruel people, spread throughout the world, why are you attacking our holy forts, why are you stirring up our pious people?'[180] Clearly the reasons for the war were important to the poet.[181]

---

[177] N. Daniel, *The Arabs and Medieval Europe* (London: Longman, 1975), 46.

[178] P. Depreux, 'Poètes et historiens au temps de l'empereur Louis le Pieux', *Le Moyen Âge* 99 (1993): 311–32.

[179] Ermold the Black, *Poème sur Louis*, 22–6.

[180] Ermold the Black, *Poème sur Louis*, 34: 'O gens dura nimis, latum diffusa per orbem,/Cur pia castra quatis, inquietasque pios?'

[181] Cf. K. Leyser, 'Warfare in the Western European Middle Ages: the Moral Debate', *Communications and Power in Medieval Europe: the Gregorian Revolution and Beyond*, ed. T. Reuter (London: Hambledon, 1994), 189–204 (190).

Ermold justifies the siege partly on the grounds of Saracen raiding, presenting Barcelona as 'a haven for Moorish bandits'. One of the most interesting moments of the poem occurs when Louis has gathered his host and is preparing to march on Barcelona, when he gives his assembled men a speech:

> Then the offspring of wise Charles spoke as follows: 'Take this advice to heart, nobles. If this people loved God and pleased Christ with anointing of holy baptism, there would have to have been peace between us, and peace would have persisted, for we would have been united in the worship of God. But it remains a despicable people, rejects our salvation, and follows the commands of demons. Thus the piety of almighty God, who has been merciful to us, is going to hand over that people to our service. Let's go right now; let's hasten immediately to the walls and towers, O Franks, and may your old strength revive your spirits.'[182]

The impression Ermold wants to give is that this war is being fought on Christian grounds. A recurring theme in the poem is emphasising Louis' *pietas* and the incident confirms this quality in Ermold's narrative.[183]

He was not writing a history and his poem should not be viewed in that way.[184] Ermold was writing something he thought would be received well by Louis and his courtiers. Whether it was is unclear, as there is little evidence for Ermold's career after this point and the poem does not seem to have inspired subsequent imitation. Even as evidence for court

---

[182] Ermold the Black, *Poème sur Louis*, 30: 'Tum soboles Caroli sapienti haec edidit ore:/ Accipite hoc animis consilium, proceres./ Si gens ita Deum coleret, Christoque placeret,/ Baptismique foret unguine tincta sacri,/ Pax firmanda esset nobis, pax atque tenenda,/ Conjungi ut possit relligione Deo./ Nunc vero execranda manet, nostramque salutem/ Respuit, et sequitur daemonis imperia./ Idcirco hanc nobis pietas miserata Tonantis/ Servitii famulam reddere namque valet./ Nunc nunc actutum muros properemus et arces,/ O Franci, et redeat pristina vis animis!' I have used T.F.X. Noble's translation, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious: the Lives by Einhard, Notker, Ermoldus, Thegan, and the Astronomer* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), 135.

[183] P. Depreux, 'La *pietas* comme principe de gouvernement d'après le *Poème* sur Louis le Pieux d'Ermold le Noir', in *The Community, the Family and the Saint*, eds. Hill and Swan, 201–24 (204); A. Encuentra Ortega, 'Luis el Piadoso, un Eneas cristiano en el poema laudatorio de Ermoldo', *Latomus: Revue D'Études* 64 (2005): 445–55 (446).

[184] P. Godman, *Poets and Emperors: Frankish Politics and Carolingian Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987) 111.

perceptions in the 820s it should be treated cautiously, still more so for the start of the century. The poem would have been performed in front of an audience which included figures who took part in the siege, some of them named.

There was clearly interest in al-Andalus at this point. Around the time that Ermold composed his poem, Louis sent a letter to the Christians of the city of Mérida, which was in revolt against the emir of Córdoba, 'Abd al-Raḥmān II.[185] In it, the Frankish emperor offered military backing and a generous tax regime under his rule.[186] The capture of Barcelona in 801 was an important moment in Louis' past as his record of conquests compared unfavourably to that of his father's, and he seems to have been sensitive to the nature of its portrayal.[187]

Conclusion

The practice of early medieval history often involves the parsing of meagre evidence.[188] Few of the sources discussed above are entirely unproblematic and alone would not signify much. In aggregate they are more compelling. Much of the primary material in question can be linked to the Carolingian dynasty. The *Continuations of Fredegar* and the *Annals of Metz* were commissioned and overseen by favoured members of the family. The charters granted in Septimania were issued and confirmed by Charlemagne and his descendants. The letter to Elipandus was written in Charlemagne's name. Less securely connected, but nonetheless with plausible links, are the liturgies for war against the pagans, which can be associated with Count William and the court of Louis. The works of Alcuin, Theodulf and Ermold, while not

---

[185] J.P. Conant, 'Louis the Pious and the Contours of Empire', *Early Medieval Europe* 22 (2014): 336–60.

[186] Einhard, in MGH, *Epistolae Karolini aevi (III)*, ed. K. Hampe. MGH Epp. 5 (Berlin: Hahn, 1899), 115–16 (ep. 12).

[187] M. De Jong, *The Penitential State: Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814–840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 150.

[188] J.L. Nelson, 'Gendering Courts in the Early Medieval West', in *Gender in the Early Medieval World*, eds. L. Brubaker & J.M.H. Smith, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 185–97 (196).

necessarily representative of Carolingian conceptions of Spain, were produced by court insiders or by aspirants to that status.

Similar themes emerge and are elaborated on in several of the sources. Saracens are portrayed as a threat to Christian people and institutions in the *Continuation of Fredegar* and the *Annals of Metz,* the charters issued by Charlemagne and his letter to Elipandus, all of which depict Saracens attacking Christians. In the face of this danger, Frankish kings and their armies stand against pagans and infidels, from Charles Martel's victories over the Saracens, to the kings leading Christian peoples into battle, fortified by the liturgy beforehand, to Charlemagne protecting refugees from Spain, or Alcuin's depiction of the same king defending and expanding the borders of Christendom in the face of Saracen resistance.

Certain ideas emerge in only some of these sources. The Franks are seen as God's chosen people in material such as that concerning Charles Martel and the liturgical works, but the connection is not made elsewhere. For sources with a non-Frankish audience, such as Charlemagne's charters or the letters to Elipandus and Colcu, this connection would have been less appropriate. Specific reference to forcible conversion of the Saracens appears only in the poetry of Theodulf and Ermold. This may reflect the variety of approaches current at the time. The Carolingian world was not an ideological monolith and differences of opinion were certainly possible. If we accept that a number of Franks, with the encouragement of the dynasty, saw Carolingian campaigns against al-Andalus as religious in nature then we need to explain the difference from the presentation of similar wars such as those against the Saxons and the Avars where the religious language is far more dominant and present in nearly every source. One explanation for the rectitude of sources such as the Royal Frankish Annals and Einhard's biography of Charlemagne to describing the war in Spain in religious may simply be the relative lack of success the Franks had in the Peninsula.

The depiction of the battle of Roncesvalles shows that it was a deeply traumatic moment, made particularly galling that 'this deed could not be avenged … because the enemy had so dispersed that not even a rumour remained as to where they might be sought.'[189] The details about Roncesvalles added to the Royal Frankish Annals in its Revised version suggests an initial move to lessen the impact of the disaster by avoiding mentioning it in the first recension. The Revised Royal Frankish Annals say that 'to have suffered this wound shadowed the king's view of his success in Spain'.[190] Writing 70 years later, the Astronomer, a member of the court of Louis the Pious who composed a biography of Louis shortly after the Emperor's death in 840, remarked that he did not need to repeat the names of the fallen, so well were they known.[191] While it avoided a fiasco on the scale of Roncesvalles, with the exception of the fall of Barcelona, the wave of campaigning that began in Spain in 796 was not particularly successful. The first decade of the ninth century saw frequent Carolingian invasions, with failed attempts to take Huesca, Tarragona and Tortosa.[192]

Lack of success in any war was bad enough. Even more embarrassing was a failed religious war, with the implication of divine disfavour. The Saxon wars may have continued for much of Charlemagne's reign, but most individual years in which the Frankish army was on the move could be convincingly portrayed as successful. One hypothesis might be that Charlemagne's initial campaign in Spain in 778 had much of the character of his wars in Saxony and Avaria, with religious rhetoric and papal blessing, all of which was quickly forgotten in the wake of catastrophe.

In the campaigns in Spain, the Frankish king should be seen as having a pragmatic world-view, in which Christian devotion, political necessity and military opportunities co-

---

[189] Einhard, 'Vita Karoli magni', 12–13: 'Neque hoc factum ad praesens vindicari poterat, quia hostis re perpetrata ita dispersus est, ut ne fama quidem remaneret, ubinam gentium quaeri potuisset.'
[190] ARF (Revised), 51: 'Cuius vulneris accepti dolor magnam partem rerum feliciter in Hispania gestarum in corde regis obnubilavit.'.
[191] The Astronomer, 'Vita Hludowici', 288.
[192] The Astronomer, 'Vita Hludowici', 322, 326, 330; ARF, 127.

existed. But the evidence indicates that Charlemagne wanted to be perceived as fighting a war of religion in Spain by at least some audiences, and that many important individuals connected to his court did understand these campaigns in this way. The wars in Spain should therefore be understood in the same light as Charlemagne's other wars against non-Christians, with the same religious framework and rhetoric.

Samuel Ottewill-Soulsby is a doctoral student at Sidney Sussex College, University of Cambridge, where he is the Osborn Research Student. He is currently working on a thesis on 'Carolingian Diplomacy with the Islamic World' under the supervision of Prof. Rosamond McKitterick.