

## The Camels of Charles the Bald

This article investigates a previously neglected aspect of diplomatic relations between the Carolingians and the Umayyads of al-Andalus, the camels sent by Emir Muḥammad I to Charles the Bald, King of the West Franks, in 865. In addition to being placed within a diplomatic and historiographical context, the meaning of these animals needs to be understood within the traditions both of the donor and the recipient. The unusual nature of camels for both al-Andalus and Francia is explored. For both Muḥammad and Charles and their respective courts, camels would have been resonant of eastern monarchy, strengthening a claim to parity with other Islamic rulers for the former, while contributing to Charles' presentation of himself as a Solomonic king.

Keywords - Muslim Spain; Carolingian; Animals; Diplomacy; Gifts

“O you who say that there exist perfect works on history,  
You are related to camels which do not know what they are carrying”.

Nūr ad-Dīn ‘Alī b. Dāwūd b. aṣ-Ṣayrafī al-Jawharī (d.1495)<sup>1</sup>

In the year 865, Charles the Bald, king of the West Franks (843-877), received at Compiègne the envoys he had sent to Muḥammad I, the Emir of Córdoba (852-886), the previous year. The envoys came bringing “many gifts, that is, camels carrying letters and tents, and many kinds of cloth and many perfumes.”<sup>2</sup> These camels and the gifts they carried have been the subject of relatively little discussion. The Prophet Muḥammad is said to have compared camels to the Qur’ān, for they both require careful attention, but only limited attention has been paid to the camels the Prophet’s namesake sent the Frankish king.<sup>3</sup> By way of rectifying this omission, this discussion will begin by examining the immediate diplomatic context of this gift before considering the nature of our evidence for the camels. Finally, the significance of the camels for both Muḥammad and Charles will be addressed through an exploration of some of the relevant meanings of camels in their respective cultural backgrounds, in order to understand the role they played in Carolingian-Umayyad diplomacy.

### Diplomatic Context

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<sup>1</sup> F. Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Leiden, 1968), 74.

<sup>2</sup> Annals of St-Bertin (AB), *Les Annales de Saint-Bertin*, trans. F. Grat, J. Vielliard & S. Clémencet, ed. L. Levillain (Paris, 1964), “multis donis, camelis videlicet, lecta et papilionones gestantes, et cum diversi generis pannis et multis odoramentis”, 129.

<sup>3</sup> Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, 5031.

Charles the Bald had a long and often strained relationship with the Umayyad Emirate.<sup>4</sup> An earlier diplomatic exchange with Muḥammad's father, 'Abd al-Raḥmān II (822-852), where Umayyad envoys travelled to Rheims in 847 "to seek a peace", did nothing to prevent the Emir from supporting rebels against Charles' authority that same year.<sup>5</sup> Nor did it do much to stop 'Abd al-Raḥmān from launching an invasion of Carolingian territory in 852.<sup>6</sup>

The presentation of the camels in 865 was the final stage of a series of exchanges that began in 863 when Count Salomon of Urgell, Cerdaña and Conflent arrived in Córdoba and met Emir Muḥammad I.<sup>7</sup> Later that year, on the 25<sup>th</sup> October, Charles received "the legate of Muḥammad, king of the Saracens", who arrived with "many great gifts and with letters talking of peace and a treaty of friendship."<sup>8</sup> Charles sent the envoy back the next year, with envoys of his own. The return of these unnamed envoys in 865 was the occasion for the giving of the camels.

Both Charles and Muḥammad had good reason in the mid-860s to seek warm relations with the other. Charles had spent much of his career fighting to maintain his control of Aquitaine in the face of opposition from his nephew Pippin II (838-864).<sup>9</sup> As d'Abadal i de Vinyals argued, the Frankish king probably sent Count Salomon in a bid to persuade Muḥammad not to support the rebellion of Humfrid, the *marchio* of Septimania, who had seized Toulouse in August 863.<sup>10</sup> The situation was exacerbated by a force of Vikings which moved down the Charente into the Angoumois, where they killed Count Turpio in battle.<sup>11</sup> Early in 864 this group sacked Clermont. From 857 Pippin II had been allied with a different Viking host, based on the Loire. He saw his opportunity and in late 863 entered the Gironde with his allies and besieged Humfrid in Toulouse in early 864.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> A.A. El-Hajji, *Andalusian Diplomatic Relations with Western Europe during the Umayyad period: A. H. 138-366/A. D. 755-976; an historical survey* (Beirut, 1970), 132-133, P. Sénac, *Les Carolingiens et al-Andalus (VIIIe – IXe siècles)* (Paris, 2002), 107.

<sup>5</sup> AB, "pacis petendae", 53, Ibn Ḥayyān, *Crónica de los emires Alḥakam I y 'Abdarrāḥmān II entre los años 796 y 847*, ed. & trans. M. A. Makkī & F. Corriente (Zaragoza, 2001), 337, Eulogius, "Tertius Epistolae ad Wiliesindum" *Corpus Scriptorum Muzarabicorum*, 2, ed. J. Gil (Madrid, 1973), 497-503, 497.

<sup>6</sup> AB, 64.

<sup>7</sup> Aimoin, "Historia Translationis Sancti Vincentii Levitae et Martyris, ex Hispania in Castrense Galliae Monasterium", *PL*, 126, ed. J-P. Migne (Paris, 1852), col. 1011-1026, col.1018.

<sup>8</sup> AB, "legatum Mahomot regis Sarracenorum cum magnis et multis muneribus ac litteris de pace et foedere amicali loquentibus sollempni more suscepit", 104.

<sup>9</sup> S. Coupland, "The Coinages of Pippin I and II of Aquitaine", *Revue numismatique* 31 (1989): 194-222.

<sup>10</sup> R. D'Abadal i de Vinyals, *Els Primers Comtes Catalans* (Barcelona, 1958), 35.

<sup>11</sup> S. Coupland, *Charles the Bald and the defence of the West Frankish Kingdom against the Viking invasions, 840-877*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge (1987), 62.

<sup>12</sup> Coupland, *Charles the Bald and the defence of the West Frankish Kingdom*, 64.

Charles the Bald sent forces that year to crush Humfrid. These *missi* “accomplished little of what they had set out to do”.<sup>13</sup> This was not a situation likely to be improved by the invasion of an Umayyad army. Charles seems to have done his best to ensure that Córdoba did not intervene. The Umayyad envoy received in Senlis for a year before being dismissed.<sup>14</sup> By 865, Charles’ position had stabilized. The previous year had seen Pippin II captured, Humfrid flee to Italy and Aquitaine back under his control.<sup>15</sup> Continued good relations with Muḥammad would nonetheless have been desirable given the recent upheaval.

Similar considerations pertained in Córdoba. The year 863 saw Muḥammad’s son, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, lead an army into the Asturian territory of Álava.<sup>16</sup> The raid had progressed well until King Ordoño I (850-866) succeeded in ambushing them at the head of a gorge. The chronicler Ibn ‘Idhārī presents the outcome as a great victory for the Muslims, but subsequent events suggest a rather more contested result. Ibn ‘Idhārī notes that unusually in 864 there was no campaign at all because of the previous year’s campaign as it was necessary “to rest the army”.<sup>17</sup> Instead, Muḥammad unveiled a series of building projects in Córdoba including a *maqṣūra* in the great mosque.

In addition to the break in 864 as Muḥammad rested his army, the pattern of subsequent invasions indicates that the battle in 863 had touched a nerve. In a highly unusual concentration of attention, Umayyad armies attacked Álava in 866, 867 and 868.<sup>18</sup> Whereas normally the privilege of campaigning was spread among Muḥammad’s sons, the first two of these campaigns were led by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān. This suggests that Córdoba’s image had been damaged and Muḥammad was reasserting Umayyad prestige in the region and at home in general, and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān’s status in particular.

The need to deal with the Asturian king would have encouraged Muḥammad to cultivate good relations with Charles. The gifts of 865, including the camels, should therefore be interpreted as part of a genuine effort to please the Frankish king. This has an important bearing on how we interpret the intended meaning of the camels.

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<sup>13</sup> AB, “Missi regis Karoli parum pro quibus missi fuerant utilitatis agentes”, 105.

<sup>14</sup> AB 104, 114.

<sup>15</sup> AB 105, 113.

<sup>16</sup> Ibn ‘Idhārī, trans. J.A. Souto, “El emirato de Muḥammad I en el Bayān al-Mugrib de Ibn ‘Idārī”, *Anaquel de estudios árabes* 6 (1995): 209-247, 221.

<sup>17</sup> Ibn ‘Idhārī, “El emirato de Muḥammad I”, 221.

<sup>18</sup> Ibn ‘Idhārī, “El emirato de Muḥammad I”, 251, 252, 253.

## Hincmar's Camels

In this endeavour we are hindered by the existence of only one source for the camels, the solitary reference to the camels in the *Annals of St-Bertin*, at this stage compiled by Hincmar, Archbishop of Rheims (845-882).<sup>19</sup> In itself, the lack of an Arabic reference to this gift is unsurprising. Arabic sources rarely mention presents sent to non-Muslims, and the majority of the scarce notices are to Indian kings or Byzantine emperors.<sup>20</sup> There are no references in Muslim sources to the gifts sent by Hārūn al-Rashīd (786-809) to Charlemagne (768-814), or, in a parallel case, to China, forcing reliance on Frankish and Chinese sources respectively in those cases.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, the lack of any other allusion to the camels leaves us entirely dependent on Hincmar.

One of the most forceful personalities of the ninth century, Hincmar had been at the heart of politics in Charles' reign for more than twenty years in 865, and would remain a key figure into the regimes of his son and grandsons.<sup>22</sup> Hincmar's political views frequently appear in his annals.<sup>23</sup> It is through this partisan lens that we view the camels. Although the annals show signs of later authorial "correction", Hincmar appears to have added new entries each year, making them largely contemporary to the events they describe.<sup>24</sup> Apart from a tense period in 866-867, the Archbishop had a strong relationship with Charles in the 860s. The description in his annals of the meeting at Tusey in February 865 between Charles and his brother, Louis the German (843-876), is highly sympathetic to Charles.<sup>25</sup> This strongly suggests that Hincmar's account of Muḥammad's gifts was intended to be similarly flattering to the West Frankish king.

Hincmar plays up the resemblance of the gifts of 865 to those received by Charlemagne from earlier Muslim rulers. His annals were a direct continuation of the Royal Frankish Annals. Hincmar's use of the word *papiliones* for tents echoes the same usage in these earlier annals for tents given to Charlemagne. The first of these was plundered by

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<sup>19</sup> J.L. Nelson, "The Annals of St Bertin", *Charles the Bald: Court and Kingdom 2<sup>nd</sup>* ed., ed. M.T. Gibson & J.L. Nelson (Aldershot, 1990), 1-22.

<sup>20</sup> *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, trans. G.H. al-Qaddūmī (Cambridge MA, 1996), 62, 68, 72-75, 108-109.

<sup>21</sup> R.G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it: a survey and evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian writings on early Islam* (Princeton, 1997), 249-253, H. Bielenstein, *Diplomacy and Trade in the Chinese World, 589-1276* (Leiden, 2005), 359.

<sup>22</sup> On Hincmar's career see the essays in *Hincmar of Rheims: Life and Work*, ed. R. Stone & C. West (Manchester, 2015), particularly R. Stone, "Introduction: Hincmar's World", 1-43, 3-20.

<sup>23</sup> J.L. Nelson, "Hincmar's life in his Historical Writings" and C. Kleinjung, "To fight with words: the case of Hincmar of Laon in the Annals of St. Bertin", *Hincmar of Rheims: Life and Work*, ed. R. Stone & C. West (Manchester, 2015), 44-59, 60-75.

<sup>24</sup> M. Meyer-Gebel, "Zur Annalistischen Arbeitsweise Hincmars von Reims", *Francia* 15 (1987): 75-108.

<sup>25</sup> J. L. Nelson, *Charles the Bald* (London, 1992), 216.

Alfonso II of Asturias (791-842) from al-Andalus and presented to the Frankish king in 798, while the second came from Hārūn al-Rashīd in 807.<sup>26</sup> These are the only usages of the word *papiliones* in the *Royal Frankish Annals* and in Hincmar's annals. Elaborate cloths, tents and perfumes were hardly unusual in the repertoire of gifts in the Islamic world, and there is no need to assume that Hincmar fabricated these presents.<sup>27</sup> His description does suggest a deliberate parallel to the example of Charlemagne.

The camels might also have provided another point of comparison with Charles' revered grandfather and namesake. Although Hincmar presents them primarily as the bearers of less animate gifts, their special zoological status suggests an analogy with Abū l'Abbās, the elephant that arrived at Charlemagne's court in 802, sent by Hārūn al-Rashīd.<sup>28</sup> Abū l'Abbās has inspired a large body of historical work.<sup>29</sup> The Irish monk Dicuil in his *De mensura Orbis terrae*, written in 825, refers to the excitement the elephant caused among contemporaries.<sup>30</sup> Writing in the mid-880s, Notker the Stammerer (d.912) elaborated upon the matter at great length.<sup>31</sup>

Charles the Bald's reception of a camel could be seen as an imitation of this, both by Hincmar and other contemporaries. Many aspects of Charles' image appear to consciously recall his grandfather's reign.<sup>32</sup> The year before the arrival of the camels saw the first issuing of Charles "Gratia Dei Rex" coinage which strikingly resembled Charlemagne's coinage of 794-812.<sup>33</sup> It is by no means impossible that Charles specifically requested some sort of animal from Muḥammad, perhaps from the same envoy during his previous visit in 863.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Royal Frankish Annals, *MGH, SRG 6, Annales regni Francorum inde a. 741 usque ad 829, qui dicuntur Annales Laurissenses maiores et Einhardi*, ed. F. Kurze (Hannover, 1895), "Venit etiam et legatus Hadeffonsi regis Gralleciae et Asturiae, nomine Froia, papilionem mirae pulchritudinis praesentans", 117 and "id est papilionem et tentoria atrii vario colore facta mirae magnitudinis et pulchritudinis", 123.

<sup>27</sup> See for example, the *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, 87.

<sup>28</sup> *Royal Frankish Annals*, 117.

<sup>29</sup> R. Hodges, *Towns and Trade in the Age of Charlemagne* (London, 2000), 35-38, P.E. Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache: and other cultural clusters of a dark age* (New York, 2004), 60, 189-190, L. Nees, "El Elefante de Carlomagno", *Quintana* 5 (2005): 13-49, A.T. Hack, *Abul Abaz: zur Biographie eines Elefanten* (Badenweiler, 2011).

<sup>30</sup> Dicuil, *Liber de mensura Orbis terrae*, ed. J.J. Tierney (Dublin, 1967), 82-83.

<sup>31</sup> Notker the Stammerer, "Gesta Karoli Magni Imperatori" *MGH 12 Scriptores Germanicarum Nova Series*, ed. H. F. Haefele (Berlin, 1959), 59-65, S. MacLean, *Kingship and Politics in the Late Ninth Century: Charles the Fat and the end of the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge, 2003), 202-204.

<sup>32</sup> J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, "A Carolingian Renaissance Prince: The Emperor Charles the Bald", *Proceedings of the British Academy* 64 (1978): 155-184, 156.

<sup>33</sup> P. Grierson, "The 'Gratia Dei Rex' Coinage of Charles the Bald", *Charles the Bald: Court and Kingdom*, ed. M.T. Gibson & J. L. Nelson (Aldershot, 1990), 52-64.

<sup>34</sup> AB, 110.

## Thinking with Camels

The camel had significance beyond being an ersatz elephant. In order to understand the meaning of those sent by Muḥammad to Charles the Bald, the associations they would have prompted for both political actors need to be considered. From this, some idea of both the message Muḥammad aimed to convey and what Charles may have understood from his reception of this gift can be retrieved. Gifts acted as a means of communication, their nature signalling something of the nature of the gifter and their attitudes toward the recipient.<sup>35</sup> Great significance was attached to the meaning of animals in both Francia and al-Andalus.<sup>36</sup> What follows will retrace the journey of the camels by beginning in the world of al-Andalus, before crossing over to the land of the Franks. This structure is due to the limited overlap in ideas about camels in the two cultures, so that the same animal could have a different meaning in to an Umayyad or a Carolingian.

The precision of the transmission of ideas depends on a shared conception of meaning, something that may have been lacking here.<sup>37</sup> It is entirely possible that Charles would not have picked up any nuances in Muḥammad's gesture. As Philippe Buc has observed, this potential for instability to the meaning of diplomatic signals, which could be misunderstood accidentally or deliberately even by people from the same culture, was something contemporaries were aware of.<sup>38</sup> Hincmar himself records an incident in 869 when

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<sup>35</sup> The literature on medieval gift giving is extensive. J. Hannig, "Ars donandi: Zur Ökonomie des Schenkens im frühen Mittelalter", *Armut, Liebe, Ehre*, ed. R. van Dülmen (Frankfurt am Main, 1988), 11-37, A-J.A. Bijsterveld, "The Medieval Gift as Agent of Social Bonding and Political Power", *Medieval Transformations: Texts, Power, and Gifts in Context*, ed. E. Cohen & M. de Jong (Leiden, 2001), 123-156, A. Cutler, "Gifts and Gift Exchange in Aspects of the Byzantine, Arab and Related Economics", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001): 247-278 and "Significant Gifts: Patterns of Exchange in Late Antique, Byzantine, and Early Islamic Diplomacy", *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 38 (2008): 79-102, P.J. Geary, "Gift Exchange and Social Science Modeling: The Limitations of a Construct", and B.H. Rosenwein, "Francia and Polynesia: Rethinking Anthropological Approaches", in *Negotiating the Gift: Pre-modern Figurations of Exchange*, ed. G. Algazi, V. Groebner & B. Jussen (Göttingen, 2003), 129-140, 361-379, F. Curta, "Merovingian and Carolingian Gift Giving", *Speculum* 81 (2006): 671-699, J.L. Nelson, "The Settings of the Gift in the Reign of Charlemagne", *The Languages of Gift in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. W. Davies & P. Fouracre (Cambridge, 2010), 116-148.

<sup>36</sup> D. Sperber, "Pourquoi les animaux parfaits, les hybrides et les monstres sont-ils bons à penser symboliquement?", *L'Homme* 15 (1975): 5-34, N. Drocourt, "Les animaux comme cadeaux d'ambassade entre Byzance et ses voisins (VIIe-XIIIe siècle)", *Byzance et ses périphéries: Hommage à Alain Ducellier*, ed. B. Doumerc & C. Picard (Toulouse, 2004), 67-93, T. Buquet, "Animalia Extranea et Stupenda ad Videndum. Describing and Naming Exotic Beasts in Cairo Sultan's Menagerie", *Animals and Otherness in the Middle Ages: Perspectives Across Disciplines*, ed. F. García García, M.A. Walker Vadillo & M.V. Chico Picaza (Oxford, 2013), 25-34 and "Nommer les animaux exotiques de Baybars, d'Orient en Occident", *Les non-dits du nom. Onomastique et documents en terres d'Islam*, ed. C. Muller & M. Roiland-Rouabah (Beyrouth, 2013), 375-402. See also *Animals in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, ed. N.C. Flores (New York, 1996).

<sup>37</sup> On these problems A. Shalem, "Objects as Carriers of Real or Contrived Memories in a Cross-cultural Context", *Mitteilungen zur Spätantiken Archäologie und Byzantinischen Kunstgeschichte* 4 (2005): 101-117.

<sup>38</sup> P. Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual: Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory* (Princeton, 2001).

the meaning of presents given by Pope Hadrian II (867-872) to Lothar II (855-869) were interpreted entirely differently by both parties.<sup>39</sup> These problems of reception add to the complexity of early medieval diplomacy.

## Camels and Umayyad Spain

Camels were not particularly common beasts of burden in al-Andalus.<sup>40</sup> While camels were present in Roman Hispania and Visigothic Spain, their numbers seem to have dropped by the eighth century.<sup>41</sup> Of the camel remains that have been excavated from sites related to Muslim Spain, all date to the tenth century or later and the vast majority are from the twelfth century or later.<sup>42</sup> This tallies with documentary evidence that credits Abū ‘Āmir al-Manṣūr (981-1002) as the first Andalusī leader to import large numbers of camels from North Africa, with further arrivals under Almoravid and Almohad rule.<sup>43</sup> That camels could retain a hint of the other in Muslim Spain is indicated by the famous comment made by the last *taifa* king of Seville in 1091 to justify his invitation of the Almoravids to fight Alfonso VI (1077-1109), that he “would rather be a camel-driver in Africa than a swineherd in Castile”.<sup>44</sup> Camels were therefore not the obvious beast of burden for use in al-Andalus and Muḥammad must have deliberately chosen to employ them.

The most probable source for these camels is North Africa. The Umayyads maintained links with the Rustamids of Tahert and the Banū Midrār of Sijilmasa.<sup>45</sup> ‘Abd al-Wahhāb b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, Imam of Tahert (788-824), sent three of his sons to ‘Abd al-Raḥmān II in 822, while other Rustamids played a prominent role at court in Córdoba.<sup>46</sup> ‘Abd al-Raḥmān II gave ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s son and successor Aflaḥ (824-872) 100,000 dirhams for sacking the Aghlabid capital in 842.<sup>47</sup> This influence continued into Muḥammad’s reign,

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<sup>39</sup> AB, 155.

<sup>40</sup> T.F. Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain in the Early Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1979), 25.

<sup>41</sup> A. Morales Muñiz, J.A. Riquelme & C.L. von Lettow-Vorbeck, “Dromedaries in antiquity: Iberia and beyond”, *Antiquity* 69 (1995): 368-375, 369.

<sup>42</sup> J.A. Riquelme, “Premiers Restes Archéologiques de Dromadaire, *camelus dromedarius* linneo 1758, issus dans l’Espagne musulmane”, *L’Anthropologie* 98 (1994): 663-665.

<sup>43</sup> Morales Muñiz et al, “Dromedaries in antiquity”, 373.

<sup>44</sup> *The Poems of Mu’tamid, King of Seville*, trans. D.L. Smith (London, 1915), 30. On the *taifa* kings see D. Wasserstein, *The rise and fall of the party-kings: politics and society in Islamic Spain, 1002-1086* (Princeton, 1985).

<sup>45</sup> J.M. Abun-Nasr, *A History of the Maghrib* (Cambridge, 1971), 76-82.

<sup>46</sup> Ibn Ḥayyān, *Crónica de los emires*, 274, 315.

<sup>47</sup> A. Gaiser, “Slaves and Silver across the Strait of Gibraltar: Politics and Trade between Umayyad Iberia and Khārijite North Africa”, *Medieval Encounters* 19 (2013): 41-70, 43.

with regular communication between Córdoba, Sijilmasa and Tahert.<sup>48</sup> Andalusí sources present the Rustamid Muḥammad b. Aflaḥ (874-894) and the Midrārid al-Yasa' (882-909) as clients of Muḥammad.<sup>49</sup> With political communication came commercial transactions, with considerable trade taking place from North Africa to al-Andalus. Ibn Ḥawqal observed a trade in camels in Sijilmasa in the tenth century.<sup>50</sup> It seems plausible that this was already in existence in the ninth century. While there are no references to camels being given as gifts by these North African rulers to the Umayyads, other gifts were exchanged.<sup>51</sup> It is possible that the transfer of the animals from Muḥammad to Charles in 865 was not the first time these particular camels had formed part of a diplomatic gift, with Muḥammad simply switching from recipient to donor.

Camels had a particular connection to Arab ethnicity. They were ubiquitous in early Arabic literature.<sup>52</sup> Pre-Islamic Arabic odes usually contained a *waṣf al-jamal* or camel-theme, boasting about the merits of the poet's camel, or a *raḥīl*, wherein the excellence of a camel is demonstrated by its ability to brave of the dangers of the desert.<sup>53</sup> The generosity of a host was indicated by the slaughtering of camels in order to distribute the meat, as performed most famously by the hero and poet Imrū' al-Qays b. Ḥujr in his attempts to seduce young women.<sup>54</sup> These poems and stories were preserved and commented upon by later Muslim scholars, but we should be cautious in estimating the importance of this literary tradition for ninth-century Spain. The *waṣf al-jamal* and *raḥīl* went into sharp decline in Umayyad and 'Abbāsī odes, while tales of camel slaughtering became picturesque antiquities.<sup>55</sup>

That camels nonetheless retained their Arab affiliation is indicated by their use in *shu'ūbiyya* writing, a genre of polemic in which non-Arab Muslims attacked the high status of Arabs.<sup>56</sup> An early example by Bashshār b. Burd (714-783) argued for the superiority of the

<sup>48</sup> Gaiser, "Slaves and Silver across the Strait of Gibraltar", 57.

<sup>49</sup> P.M. Love Jr, "The Sufiris of Sijilmasa: toward a history of the Midrarids", *The Journal of North African Studies* 15 (2010): 173-188, 180.

<sup>50</sup> C. Pellat "Midrār", *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 6 (Leiden, 1991), 1038-1042, 1041.

<sup>51</sup> Ibn Ḥayyān, *Crónica de los emires*, 274.

<sup>52</sup> C. Pellat, "Ibīl", *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 4 (Leiden, 1971), 665-668.

<sup>53</sup> R. Jacobi, "The Camel-Section of the Panegyric Ode", *Journal of Arabic Literature* 13 (1982): 1-22, M. Sells, "The Mu'allaqa of Ṭarafa", *Journal of Arabic Literature* 17 (1986): 21-33, The eighteenth-century commentator Sir William Jones lamented of the Mu'allaqa of Ṭarafa b. al-'Abd, "it were to be wished that he had said more of his mistress and less of his camel", A.J. Arberry, *The Seven Odes: the first chapter in Arabic literature* (London, 1957), 78.

<sup>54</sup> "The Mu'allaqa of Imrū' al-Qays", *The Seven Odes: the first chapter in Arabic literature*, trans. A.J. Arberry (London, 1957), 61.

<sup>55</sup> Jacobi, "The Camel-Section", 8, 15, 20.

<sup>56</sup> G. Larsson, *Ibn García's Shu'ūbiyya Letter: Ethnic and Theological Tensions in Medieval al-Andalus* (Leiden, 2003).



poet's Persian ancestors over Arabs by writing "Never did my father sing a camel-song, trailing along behind a scabby camel".<sup>57</sup> In al-Andalus in the mid-eleventh century, the Basque Ibn García (d.1084) drew upon similar themes, celebrating his own "Roman" ancestors for "they were not Arabs, possessors of mangy camels".<sup>58</sup>

Despite the barbs of the *shu 'ūbīyya*, Arab ethnicity was a mark of privilege in early medieval al-Andalus.<sup>59</sup> High status Andalusi Arabs took pains to hide any non-Arab parts of their genealogies.<sup>60</sup> The eighth-century general al-Ṣumayl bewailed the thought of sharing power with Muslim non-Arabs.<sup>61</sup> Arab snobbery towards non-Arabs is demonstrated by the mockery inflicted upon Muḥammad b. Waḍḍāḥ (815-900) by the Arab scholar al-Khushanī for being the grandson of a native slave.<sup>62</sup>

'Abd al-Raḥmān I protected the Arab Ghālib b. Tammām after he murdered the Berber Ḥafṣ b. Maymūn over an argument concerning the relative merits of Arabs and Berbers.<sup>63</sup> The tenth-century Caliphs seem to have attempted to distance themselves from too close an Arab affiliation, but it could still have political consequences.<sup>64</sup> Umayyad genealogies stressed their Arab ancestry.<sup>65</sup> That almost all the Umayyads of the tenth century had blond hair and blue eyes, a legacy of several generations of Emirs who possessed mothers from Northern Spain or Gaul, was something of an embarrassment, with 'Abd al-Raḥmān III (912-961) dying his beard black.<sup>66</sup> The potential dangers of not looking Arab enough are suggested by the demands made by the Arab leader Ibn Jūdī during the turbulent 890s that the Umayyads surrender their power which rightfully belonged to the Arabs.<sup>67</sup> It is

<sup>57</sup> Bashshār b. Burd, *Selections from the Poetry of Baššār*, ed. & trans. A.F.L. Beeston (Cambridge, 1977), 50.

<sup>58</sup> *The Shu 'ūbīyya in al-Andalus: the Risāla of Ibn García and five refutations*, trans. J.T. Monroe (Berkeley, 1970), 24.

<sup>59</sup> M. Fierro, "Genealogies of Power in al-Andalus: Politics, Religion and Ethnicity during the Second/Eighth-Fifth/Eleventh Centuries", *Annales Islamologiques* 42 (2008): 29-55, 31.

<sup>60</sup> J.A. Coope, "Marriage, Kinship, and Islamic Law in al-Andalus: Reflections on Pierre Guichard's *Al-Ándalus*", *Al-Masāq* 20 (2008): 161-177, 168.

<sup>61</sup> Ibn al-Qūṭīya, *Early Islamic Spain: the History of Ibn al-Qūṭīya*, ed. & trans. D. James (London, 2009), 77.

<sup>62</sup> M. Fierro, "Bazi", *mawla* ' de 'Abd al-Raḥmān I y sus descendientes", *al-Qanṭara* 8 (1987): 99-118, L. Molina, "Un arabe entre maladies: Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Salām al-Juṣānī", *Estudios onomástico-biográficos de al-Andalus* VI (Madrid, 1994), 337-351, republished in English as "An Arab among Muwallads: Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Salām al-Khushanī", *The Formation of al-Andalus, 1: History and Sources*, ed. M. Marín (Aldershot, 1998), 115-128.

<sup>63</sup> Akhbār Majmū'a, *A History of Early al-Andalus: the Akhbār Majmū'a*, trans. D. James (London, 2012), 108.

<sup>64</sup> Fierro, "Genealogies of Power in al-Andalus", 35.

<sup>65</sup> D. Fairchild Ruggles, "Mothers of a Hybrid Dynasty: Race, Genealogy and Acculturation in al-Andalus", *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34 (2004): 65-94, 69, 77.

<sup>66</sup> Ibn Hazm, *The Ring of the Dove: A Treatise on the Art and Practice of Arab Love* (London, 1953), 61-62, G. Martínez-Gros, *Identité Andalouse* (Arles, 1997), 63-77, M.I. Fierro, *'Abd al-Rahman III: The First Cordoban Caliph* (Oxford, 2003), 38.

<sup>67</sup> Fierro, "Genealogies of Power in al-Andalus", 30. On the career of Ibn Jūdī, R. Marín-Guzmán, "Social and Ethnic Tensions in al-Andalus: Cases of Ishbīliyah (Sevilla) 276/889-302/914 and Ilbīrah (Elvira) 276/889-284/897 - the Role of 'Umar ibn Ḥafṣūn", *Islamic Studies* 32 (1993): 279-318, 307-308.

possible then that part of Muḥammad's purpose in sending Charles camels might have been to stress his own position as an Arab ruler to audiences within al-Andalus.

Muḥammad may also have been influenced by practice elsewhere in the Islamic world, where camels were regularly given as diplomatic gifts. The most complete remaining medieval Arabic catalogue of gifts is the *Book of Gifts and Rarities*.<sup>68</sup> The work survives in excerpted form in a single thirteenth-century manuscript, but was compiled in the late eleventh century by an anonymous Fatimid official using material from the ninth century on.<sup>69</sup> This is not to say that it is entirely accurate. *The Book of Gifts and Rarities* is filled with implausibly vast numbers or extravagant gifts.<sup>70</sup> It does however give some indication as to what sort of items were associated in the contemporary cultural imagination of elites with diplomacy.

Camels feature regularly in the catalogue, often as presents to 'Abbāsīd caliphs. In 858, al-Mutawakkil (847-861) was offered 200 female camels (*niyāq*) with their weaned young.<sup>71</sup> Most commonly, they appear as tribute from semi-independent governors of eastern provinces, as in the case of the Sāmānid emir of Transoxiana, Ismā'īl b. Aḥmad who sent Caliph al-Mu'taḍid (892-902) 49 camels in 893.<sup>72</sup> Pacer camels (*jammāzāt*) were particularly prized, with the 162 of them offered by 'Amr b. al-Layth (879-901), the Ṣaffārid ruler of Iran in 896 to al-Mu'taḍid being carefully distinguished from the 200 regular camels (*jimāl*) in the same group.<sup>73</sup> Bactrian camels stood out as diverting novelties, with the "large two-humped camels for breeding" not suffering in comparison with "an enormous elephant" when delivered to the Caliph al-Mu'tamid (870-892) by Mūsā b. 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Habbārī, the governor of Sind, in 884.<sup>74</sup>

Although some of these descriptions celebrate singular camels, the vast majority present camels as a multitude. In their numbers, they provide an impression of plenty, endless wealth represented by great herds of the valuable animals and their burdens. Some of the descriptions might suggest that the camels were chiefly important for their ability to carry gifts, as in a case in 892 when Abū al-Jaysh Khumārawayh b. Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn, the ruler of

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<sup>68</sup> M. Hamidullah, "Nouveaux Documents sur les rapports de l'Europe avec l'Orient Musulman au Moyen Âge", *Arabica* 7 (1960): 281-300.

<sup>69</sup> *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, 5-13.

<sup>70</sup> O. Grabar, "The Shared Culture of Objects", *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. H. Maguire (Washington DC, 1997), 115-129, 128.

<sup>71</sup> *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, 79.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* 98.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* 85.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 83-84.

Egypt, sent al-Mu‘taḍid “twenty camels loaded with money”.<sup>75</sup> Despite this impression, camels were important to the display of the other presents. The impressiveness of the camel testified to the spectacle of what it bore. Because of their role as the bearers of gifts, camels could become emblematic of the treasures they bore. An example chosen because the compiler seems to have known the official responsible shall suffice among many. In 1028/9, the Fatimid Caliph al-Zāhir (1021-1036) sent the Zīrīd ruler of Qayrawān, al-Mu‘izz b. Bādīs (1016-1062):

several Bactrian two-humped camels from Khurāsān that carried various howdahs, palanquins and litters made of ivory, ebony and sandalwood encased with gold and silver and topped with gold crescents, and its splendid curtains were of red velvet and linen voile with gold and other kinds and colours inside which were beautiful slave girls who were expert singers as well as charming dancers; plenty of handsome eunuchs with lovely faces, figures, and clothes.<sup>76</sup>

This passage is quoted at length to suggest the way that camels could form an integral part of the spectacle desired by the sender, serving to enhance and complete the ensemble. Al-Zāhir also sent a giraffe, which was so well received that the Maghrebi poet Ibn Rashīq celebrated it in verse as the “property of kings”.<sup>77</sup>

The impact of outlandish fauna is outlined in the account of the gifts sent by Ishāq b. Ziyād, the lord of Yemen, to ‘Izz al-Dawla (967-978), the Buyid ruler of Baghdad in 970, which included:

a huge female zebra, the size of a mule, having a round rump, and ears like those of a mule. Its entire body was striped in the most beautiful and wonderful way. It is said that the zebra came from a region in Abyssinia ruled by a woman. The distance between this and Baghdad is 1800 parasangs.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 86.

<sup>76</sup> *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, 105.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 107.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 102-103.

This passage summarises a number of ideas. The zebra's strange appearance attracted admiration, as did the distance it had to travel. Above all, its association with mysterious lands with unusual practices made it a striking gift.<sup>79</sup>

By giving camels to his Frankish neighbor, Muḥammad may also have been seeking to assert his status as a ruler by acting like those further East. 'Abd al-Raḥmān III proclaimed himself Caliph in 929, but even before that the Umayyads of Spain had pretensions to rival the 'Abbāsids.<sup>80</sup> Muḥammad's father, 'Abd al-Raḥmān II had indicated a complete lack of interest in eastern affairs in a letter to the Byzantine Emperor Theophilos (829-842) in 839/840, but his court was dominated by people such as the Persian polymath Ziryāb (d.857) who began his career in Baghdad before being feted in Córdoba.<sup>81</sup> Baghdad set the fashions of the Umayyad court and the 'Abbāsīd Caliph provided a potent model of rulership.<sup>82</sup>

The Chronicle of Michael the Syrian offers an example of camels being given as a gift to a Christian ruler by a ninth-century Caliph to a Christian ruler. Michael noted that in 841, while discussing a prisoner exchange, al-Mu'taṣim (833-842) sent Emperor Theophilos "fifty camel loads of princely gifts".<sup>83</sup> Michael the Syrian was Syrian Orthodox Patriarch in the twelfth century, so the value of his testimony depends upon its relationship with earlier sources. In his Chronicle, Michael attributes his material for the years 582-842 to the now lost Chronicle of Dionysius of Tell Maḥrē, himself Patriarch 818-845.<sup>84</sup>

Also dependent on Dionysius is the anonymous *Chronicle of 1234*, independently composed in the early thirteenth century.<sup>85</sup> The absence of any reference to al-Mu'taṣim sending Theophilos gifts in 841 in this Chronicle raises difficulties for Michael's account.<sup>86</sup> The *Chronicle of 1234* is often considered a better witness to Dionysius than Michael's

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<sup>79</sup> See M.W. Helms, *Ulysses' Sail: an ethnographic odyssey of power, knowledge, and geographical distance* (Princeton, 1988).

<sup>80</sup> F. Gabrieli, "Omayyades d'Espagne et Abbasides", *Studia Islamica* 31 (1970): 93-100, H. Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal: A Political History of al-Andalus* (London, 1996), 44, 49, 68, 84.

<sup>81</sup> Ibn Ḥayyān, *Crónica de los emires*, 294-298, C. Davila, "Fixing a Misbegotten Biography: Ziryāb in the Mediterranean World", *Al-Masāq* 21 (2009): 121-136.

<sup>82</sup> A.K. Bennison, "The Necklace of al-Shifā': 'Abbasid Borrowings in the Islamic West", *Oriens* 38 (2010): 249-273.

<sup>83</sup> Michael the Syrian, *Texts and Translations of the Chronicle of Michael the Great, Vol. 4 French translation of the Syriac Text of the Chronicle of Michael the Great, Part III*, trans. J. Chabot (Piscataway, 2009), 102.

<sup>84</sup> D. Weltecke, *Die 'Beschreibung der Zeiten' von Mōr Michael dem Grossen (1126-1199): eine Studie zu ihrem historischen und historiographiegeschichtlichen Kontext* (Louvain, 2003), 197-208. On Dionysius see R. Abramowski, *Dionysius von Tellmahre, Jakobitischer Patriarch von 818-845: zur Geschichte der Kirche unter dem Islam* (Leipzig, 1940).

<sup>85</sup> S.P. Brock, "Syriac Historical Writing: A Survey of the Main Sources", *Journal of the Iraqi Academy: Syriac Corporation* 5 (1979/1980): 297-326, reprinted in S.P. Brock, *Studies in Syriac Christianity: History, Literature and Theology* (Aldershot, 1992), 1-30, 17-18.

<sup>86</sup> Chronicle of 1234, CSCO 354 *Scriptores Syri* 154 *Anonymi Auctoris Chronicon ad A.C. 1234 pertinens* 2, trans. A. Abouna, int. J.M. Fiey (Louvain, 1974), 24.

Chronicle.<sup>87</sup> That said, both later chroniclers adapted Dionysius' material and there are places where the *Chronicle of 1234* abbreviates incidents discussed in greater length by Michael.<sup>88</sup> It is therefore still possible that Michael drew upon Dionysius in his description of the events of 841.

Even ignoring Michael, camels were frequently used by the Caliphs to display their power. During Muḥammad's reign, Caliph al-Mutawakkil had medals minted for distribution on a special occasion in Samarra in 855/856.<sup>89</sup> The design, which strongly echoes Sasanian seals, had a portrait of the Caliph on the obverse, and a camel with attendant on the reverse. The medals, of which only one survives in the Vienna Kunsthistorisches Museum, are very unusual in design, but suggest a contemporary use of camel iconography in a monarchical context.

In 758 a defeated rebel was paraded backwards on a camel from Khurāsān to the Caliph al-Manṣūr (754-775).<sup>90</sup> Al-Mu' taḍid had fifteen rebels paraded on camels in Baghdad in June 897.<sup>91</sup> As Rosenthal observed, the reference to a camel called "the Bactrian" used for a similar purpose in Baghdad in 904/905, suggests that a camel was permanently kept for the punishment of criminals.<sup>92</sup> Al-Amīn (809-813) had a lion carried to him, displayed on a giant camel.<sup>93</sup> Being forcibly paraded on a camel was a sign of infamy, possessing camels on which opponents could be paraded was a sign of the exercise of legitimate and lawful power.

The meaning of the camels as symbols of power and Muḥammad's generosity is also mirrored by the tents carried by the camels. Elaborate tents were a sign of power in the Caliphate. On his final journey, Hārūn al-Rashīd held court in a large tent in Ṭus in 809.<sup>94</sup> Sayf al-Dawla (945-967), the Ḥamdānid Emir of Aleppo, 'possessed a brocade tent that accommodated five hundred persons' in which he received Byzantine diplomats.<sup>95</sup> In al-Andalus, Muḥammad's status while travelling was indicated by the tents he stayed in. There

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<sup>87</sup> A. Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool, 1993), 90.

<sup>88</sup> Palmer, *The Seventh Century*, 90, R.G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others saw it: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian writings on early Islam* (Princeton, 1997), 418-419.

<sup>89</sup> P. Soucet, "Early Islamic Seals: Their Artistic and Cultural Importance", *Leaving no stones unturned: essays on the ancient Near East and Egypt in honor of Donald P. Hansen*, ed. E. Ehrenberg (Winona Lake, 2002), 237-259, 257-258.

<sup>90</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī Vol. 28: 'Abbāsīd Authority Affirmed: The Early Years of al-Manṣūr* A.D. 753-763/A.H. 136-145, trans. J. Dammen McAuliffe (Albany, 1995), 69-70.

<sup>91</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī Vol. 38: The Return of the Caliphate to Baghdad: The Caliphates of al-Mu' taḍid, al-Muktafī and al-Muqtadir*, A.D. 892-915/A.H. 279-302, trans. F. Rosenthal (Albany, 1985), 45-46.

<sup>92</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī Vol. 38*, 150 n.719.

<sup>93</sup> Al-Mas'ūdī, *Les Prairies d'Or*, 4, trans. C. Barbier de Meynard & A. Pavet de Courteille (Paris, 1965), 1074.

<sup>94</sup> D. Sourdel, "Questions de cérémonial 'Abbāsīde", *Revue des Études Islamiques* 28 (1960): 121-148, 128.

<sup>95</sup> *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, 113.

may also have been a sense of the generosity of a superior to an inferior.<sup>96</sup> In 971, al-Ḥakam II (961-976) sent tents to important North African leaders travelling to do homage to him.<sup>97</sup>

None of the above is mutually exclusive with a desire to impress and build good relations with Charles the Bald. Seeking to behave and be seen to behave in a manner befitting a Muslim ruler and a competitor to the Caliph could easily merge with a mission to emphasize Muḥammad's Arab heritage. In the camels then we might profitably detect Muḥammad aiming to fulfil his role as Emir and secure the external peace he needed.

## Carolingian Camels

Mastery of exotic animals had long been an established part of the role of a Carolingian monarch.<sup>98</sup> Alcuin (d.804) in a letter of 799 to Abbot Adalhard of Corbie (d.827), described Charlemagne as “the lion who reigns over all living creatures and wild beasts”.<sup>99</sup> A little over two decades after the arrival of the camels, Notker the Stammerer would depict Charlemagne reacting to the arrival of his elephant by sending dogs “of remarkable swiftness and fierceness” to Hārūn al-Rashīd.<sup>100</sup> Notker also portrayed Pippin III (751-768), Charlemagne's father, fighting a lion.<sup>101</sup> Walahfrid Strabo (d.849) performed a similar linking of royal power to the control of exotic animals in his *De imagini Tetrici* from 829. Addressing Louis the Pious (814-840), he said:

And should you wish it, lions too will leap, as is right,  
The bear, boar, panther, wolf, lynx and elephant,  
Rhinoceros, tiger will come, and tame dragons,  
They will share a common pasture with cattle and sheep.  
All the animals will be present, their quarrels put to rest,<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> M. Fierro, “Holy Places in Umayyad al-Andalus”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 78 (2015): 121-133, 131.

<sup>97</sup> J.M. Safran, “Ceremony and Submission: The Symbolic Representation and Recognition of Legitimacy in Tenth-Century al-Andalus”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 58 (1999): 191-201, 194-195.

<sup>98</sup> On the possession of exotic animals as a symbol of royal power more generally in medieval Europe, see T. Buquet, ‘Les animaux exotiques dans les ménageries médiévales’, *Fabuleuses Histoires des Bêtes et des Hommes*, ed. J. Toussant (Namur, 2013), 97-121, 114-116.

<sup>99</sup> Alcuin, *MGH Epistolae Karolini aevi*, 4, no. 181, 299-300, “leonem cunctis dominantem animantibus et feris”, 299

<sup>100</sup> Notker, “Gesta Karoli”, “canes quoque agilitate et ferocia singulares”, 64.

<sup>101</sup> Notker, “Gesta Karoli”, 80.

<sup>102</sup> Walahfrid Strabo, I have employed the edition in M.W. Herren, “The ‘De imagine Tetrici’ of Walahfrid Strabo: Edition and Translation”, *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 1 (1991): 118-139, “Si quoque deinde uelis,

Dominance of unusual animals and the taming of their savage natures clearly retained currency after Charlemagne's death.

It is worth thinking more about the ways in which camels specifically may have had meaning for a Frankish audience. The camels that arrived in 865 would have seemed exotic to the Franks who encountered them, in the sense that they were highly unfamiliar objects strongly evocative of a strange world that was both distant and fascinating.<sup>103</sup> "Exotic" in this sense should not be taken to include the sense of military and cultural superiority evident in early modern Western visions of the indigenous peoples they interacted with.<sup>104</sup> Memories of the Sack of Rome by Saracen pirates less than twenty years earlier would have been altogether too fresh for members of Charles the Bald's court for that sort of indulgence.<sup>105</sup> The power of Córdoba had been demonstrated by attacks on Frankish territory in 852, 856 and possibly 861.<sup>106</sup>

Part of the reason for the exotic nature of the camels was their unfamiliarity to Franks of the Carolingian period. There is considerable archaeological evidence for camels in Roman Gaul, where they were imported for both military and civilian use.<sup>107</sup> Camels also appeared in a Merovingian context. In 585 forces loyal to King Guntram of Burgundy (561-592) captured camels in the baggage train of the usurper Gundovald.<sup>108</sup> Gundovald had received considerable material support from the Byzantine Emperor, who may also have

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saltabunt rite leones,/Vrsus, aper, panthera, lupus, lince, elephanti,/Rinoceros, tigres uenient, domitque dracones./Sortiti commune boumque ouiumque uirectum./Omnia pacatis animalia litibus assunt," 126, 135.

<sup>103</sup> For a discussion of exoticism see V. Segalen, *Essay on Exoticism: An Aesthetics of Diversity*, trans. & ed. Y.R. Schlick (Durham NC, 2002) and T. Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism and Exoticism in French Thought*, trans. C. Porter (Cambridge Mass., 1993), 264-265.

<sup>104</sup> B. Schmidt, *Inventing Exoticism: Geography, Globalism, and Europe's Early Modern World* (Philadelphia, 2015), 14-18.

<sup>105</sup> "Life of Sergius II", *Liber Pontificalis* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2, ed. L. Duchesne (Paris, 1892), 86-105, 99, John the Deacon, "Gesta Episcoporum Neapolitanum", MGH SS rer. Lang. 1 *Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum saec. VI-IX*, ed. G. Waitz (Hanover, 1878), 424-436, 432, "Chronica Sancti Benedicti Casinensis", MGH SS rer. Lang. 1 *Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum saec. VI-IX*, ed. G. Waitz (Hanover, 1878), 468-478, 472, AB, 52-53, *Annales Fuldenses*, MGH SS rer. Germ. G.H. Pertz & F. Kurze (Hannover, 1891), 36, "Annals of Xanten", MGH SS rer. Germ. 12, ed. B. de Simson (Hannover, 1909), 1-39, 15-16.

<sup>106</sup> AB, 64, Ibn 'Idhārī, "El emirato de Muhammad I", 217, 220, al-Nuwayrī, *Textos dels historiadors àrabs referents a la Catalunya carolíngia*, trans. J.M. Millàs i Vallicrosa (Barcelona, 1987), 126.

<sup>107</sup> S. Lepete & J. Yvinec, "Présence d'espèces animales d'origine méditerranéenne en France du nord aux périodes romaine et médiévale: actions anthropiques et mouvements naturels", *Mouvements ou déplacements de populations animales en Méditerranée au cours de l'Holocène*, ed. A. Gardeisen (Oxford, 2002), 33-42, 37-38, F. Pigière & D. Henrotay, "Camels in the northern provinces of the Roman Empire", *Journal of Archaeological Science* 39 (2012): 1531-1539, 1535.

<sup>108</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum X*, MGH SRM I ed. B. Krusch & W. Levison (Hannover, 1951), VII.35, 355.

provided the camels.<sup>109</sup> The late seventh-century *Vita Eligii* depicts Bishop Eligius of Noyon and Tournai (d.660) travelling through Provence with a “pack-camel”.<sup>110</sup> Camel products may also have been available in early eighth-century Italy. According to the *Liber Pontificalis*, when visiting the Emperor Justinian II (685-695, 705-711) in 710, Pope Constantine (708-715) wore his customary hat made of camel hair.<sup>111</sup>

As in the Islamic world, camels appear to have been used to humiliate defeated political enemies. In 613, Chlothar II (595-629) paraded Queen Brunehildis on a camel before having her killed by tying her to a wild horse.<sup>112</sup> The Visigothic King Wamba (672-680) meted out similar treatment in 673 when he had the rebel Paul ride a camel “for nearly four miles” to Toledo, scalped and barefoot.<sup>113</sup> Criminals in the Byzantine Empire were placed backwards on camels and this practice may have reached the West as a means for rulers to mark their authority over particularly dangerous internal rivals.<sup>114</sup>

The evidence suggests that while camels were present in Merovingian Gaul, they were concentrated in the south and considerably fewer in number than in the Roman period.<sup>115</sup> This decline in the population seems to have continued into the Carolingian period. With the exception of the ones received by Charles the Bald, the only signs of camels after the seventh century in Gaul is the fragment of the left maxillary of a camel with an attached molar excavated near Lyons and dated to the mid-eighth to early-ninth centuries.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> On Gundobald’s war, see I. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450-751* (London, 1994), 90-100, B.S. Bachrach, *The Anatomy of a Little War: A Diplomatic and Military History of the Gundobald Affair (568-586)* (Boulder, 1994).

<sup>110</sup> “Vita Eligii Noviomagensis”, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SRM*, 4 (Hanover, 1902), 663-742 “camelum onerarium”, 702. On the *Vita Eligii* see M. Banniard, “Latin et communication orale en Gaule Franque: le témoignage de la Vita Eligii”, *The Seventh Century*, ed. J. Fontaine & J. N. Hillgarth (London, 1992), 58-86.

<sup>111</sup> “Life of Constantine”, *Liber Pontificalis*, I, ed. L. Duchesne (Paris, 1886), 392.

<sup>112</sup> Jonas of Bobbio, “Vita Columbani I”, 29, “The Continuations of the Chronicle of Fredegar”, c.42, 200, “Liber Historiae Francorum”, 40, *Quellen zur Geschichte des 7. und 8. Jahrhunderts*, ed. A. Kusternig (Darmstadt, 1982), ed. H. Haupt. On Brunehildis see J.L. Nelson, “Queens as Jezebels: The Careers of Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History”, *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London, 1986), 1-48, I. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450-751* (London, 1994), 126-136.

<sup>113</sup> Julian of Toledo, “*Historia Wambae Regis*”, ed. B. Krusch & W. Levison, *MGH SRM*, 5 (Hanover, 1910), 486-535, 525. On King Wamba and Paul see R. Collins, *Visigothic Spain, 409-711* (Oxford, 2004), 92-102.

<sup>114</sup> M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge, 1986), 50, 166.

<sup>115</sup> A. Dierkens, “Chameaux et dromadaires en Gaule mérovingienne: quelques remarques critiques”, *Hommages à Carl Deroux. V. Christianisme et Moyen Âge, Néo-latin et Survivance de la Latinité*, ed. P. Defosse (Brussels, 2003), 114-137 and “Chameaux et dromadaires dans la Gaule du très haut Moyen Âge: note complémentaire”, *La Méditerranée et le monde mérovingien: témoins archéologiques*, ed. X. Delestre, P. Périn & M. Kazanski (Aix-en-Provence, 2005), 241-245.

<sup>116</sup> J. Gisclon, E. Faure-Boucharlat, M. Lenoble & C. Olive, “Lyon, 54 Rue Pierre Audry”, *Vivre à la campagne au Moyen Âge: l’habitat rural du Ve au XIIIe s. (bresse-lyonnais-Dauphiné)*, ed. E. Faure-Boucharlat (Lyon, 2001), 525-563, 555.



That there was some familiarity with the idea of a camel in elite circles even in regions without access to physical specimens is implied by one of the riddles sent by the Anglo-Saxon Aldhelm (d.709) to King Aldfrith of Northumbria (685-705):

Once I was a consul, when the Roman horse-soldier controlled the sceptres of power with his dominion. Now my body supports the frightful burden of a hump, and a load of killing weight press on its large shape. I terrify swift herds of horn-footed horses who flee at once in fright with four-footed motion as they spy the mighty limbs of my ferocious body.<sup>117</sup>

That Aldhelm expected his audience to recognise a camel on the basis of this description and a somewhat laboured pun referring to the Roman general Camillus speaks to a relatively detailed level of knowledge. Aldhelm's riddles had a high circulation in Francia, being used in monasteries as a teaching text.<sup>118</sup>

Some members of Charles' court may have been familiar with camels from the illustrations that appear in a number of Carolingian Bibles and Psalters. Many of these, such as the camel in the frontispiece of Bamberg Staatsbibliothek Msc.Bibl.1, seem to be based on antique models.<sup>119</sup> The camels appearing in the Ashburnham Pentateuch (BNF MS nouv. acq. lat. 2334 fol.10v) were preserved in a sixth-century manuscript treasured in the eighth and ninth centuries.<sup>120</sup> Even for those in Charles' inner circle familiar with these images, the physical reality of the camels, the way they moved and their unique smell would have been striking. Their appearance in pictures of Biblical manuscripts may also have suggested a Biblical connection.

Others among the Franks may have encountered camels while on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis* has the Frankish Arculf complain about "the many

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<sup>117</sup> Aldhelm, "De metris et enigmatibus ac pedum regulis", *MGH Auct. ant.* 15, *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. R. Ehwald (Berlin, 1919), 33-206, "Consul eram quondam, Romanus miles equester, Arbiter imperio dum regni scepra regebat; Nunc onus horrendum reportant corpora gippi, Et premit immensum truculentae sarcina molis. Terreo cornipedum nunc velox agmen equorum, Qui trepidi fugiunt mox quadripedante meatu, Dum trucis aspectant immensos corporis artus", 145. I have used the translation in *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, trans. M. Lapidge & J.L. Rosier (Woodbridge, 1985), 92.

<sup>118</sup> *Variae Collectiones Aenigmatum Merovingicae Aetatus I*, ed. F. Glorie, CCSL 133a (Turnhout, 1968), 360-364.

<sup>119</sup> H.L. Kessler, *The Illustrated Bibles from Tours* (Princeton NJ, 1977), 5, 9-10.

<sup>120</sup> B. Narkiss, "Towards a further Study of the Ashburnham Pentateuch (Pentateuque de Tours)", *Cahiers Archéologiques* 19 (1969): 45-60, 53, "Reconstruction of some of the Original Quires of the Ashburnham Pentateuch", *Cahiers Archéologiques* 22 (1972): 19-38, 20-21, H.J. Van Ginhoven, "Le Miniaturiste du Pentateuque de Tours ou Pentateuque d'Ashburnham et sa méthode de travail", *Cahiers Archéologiques* 42 (1994): 65-74.

camels and horses” whose dung covered the streets of Jerusalem.<sup>121</sup> In the early eighth century Willibald left Jerusalem “with two camels and a mule”.<sup>122</sup> The pilgrim Bernard, who travelled through the Holy Land in the 860s, mentions that at Farama there was a depot where foreigners could hire camels to carry their baggage.<sup>123</sup> If any Jerusalem pilgrims were present, re-encountering these reminders of their journey to a foreign land on home soil may have been a strange experience for them as well.

Camels were a rare sight in Carolingian Francia. Those that arrived in 865 would have been highly unusual. The absence of camels from Carolingian Francia means that the most plausible sources for any knowledge Charles might have had about camels comes from written materials. Probably the best evidence for the state of mid-ninth-century Frankish knowledge of camels is to be found in the *De rerum naturis* of Hrabanus Maurus (d.856). The *De rerum naturis* is an encyclopaedia of knowledge compiled in the mid-840s and dedicated to Louis the German.<sup>124</sup> Hrabanus was accused by unnamed contemporaries a little unfairly of a lack of originality.<sup>125</sup> His writings on camels demonstrate the impact of both classical material as transmitted by the *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville (d.636), and of commentary on Biblical references to camels.<sup>126</sup> His influence on contemporaries is indicated by the large number of surviving manuscripts the *De rerum naturis*.<sup>127</sup>

Camels feature in a number of places in the work and occupy a large section of the chapter “On Cattle and Livestock”.<sup>128</sup> The first third of his material on camels is almost an exact quotation of Isidore on the subject:

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<sup>121</sup> Adomnán, “De Locis Sanctis”, ed. L. Bieler, CCSL 175 (Turnhout, 1965), 177-234, “plurima camelorum et equorum”, 185.

<sup>122</sup> Hygeburg, “Vita Willibaldi Episcopi Eichstetensis”, *MGH SS 15,1, Supplementa tomorum I-XII, pars III. Supplementum tomi XIII*, ed. O. Holder-Egger (Hanover, 1887), 86–106, “cum duobus camellis et uno mulo”, 100.

<sup>123</sup> Bernard, “Itinerarium”, *Itinera Hierosolymitana et descriptiones Terrae Sanctae bellis sacris anteriora & latina lingua exarata* 1.2, ed. T. Tobler & A. Molinier (Geneva, 1885), 308-320, 313.

<sup>124</sup> Hrabanus Maurus, *De rerum naturis*, PL 111, col. 9-614. On Hrabanus Maurus and the *De rerum naturis* see E. Heyse, *Hrabanus Maurus' Enzyklopädie 'De rerum naturis': Untersuchungen zu den Quellen und zur Methode der Kompilation* (Munich, 1969), R. Kottje, “Hrabanus Maurus – Praeceptor Germaniae”, *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 31 (1976): 534-545, M. Rissel, *Rezeption antiker und patristischer Wissenschaft bei Hrabanus Maurus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1976), *Hrabanus Maurus: Lehrer, Abt und Bischof*, ed. R. Kottje & H. Zimmermann (Wiesbaden, 1982). See also the anniversary volumes, *Hrabanus Maurus: Gelehrter, Abt von Fulda und Erzbischof von Mainz*, ed. F.J. Felten (Mainz, 2006), *Rabanus Maurus: Auf den Spuren eines karolingischen Gelehrten*, ed. H. Kotzur (Mainz, 2006).

<sup>125</sup> Hrabanus Maurus, *MGH Epp 5 Epistolae Karolini aevi III*, ed. E. Dümmler (Berlin, 1899), no. 39, 476-478, 477.

<sup>126</sup> On Hrabanus' use of Isidore see C. Cardelle de Hartmann, ‘Uso y recepción de los *Etymologiae* de Isidoro’ and F. Gasti, ‘Il Corpo Umano: Estratti Isidoriani nell’enciclopedia di Rabano Mauro’, *Wisigothica: after M. C. Díaz y Díaz*, ed. C. Condoñer & P.F. Alberto (Florence, 2014), 477-501, 503-520.

<sup>127</sup> W. Schipper, “Rabanus Maurus, *De rerum naturis*: A Provisional Checklist of Manuscripts”, *Manuscripta* 33 (1989): 109-118, R. Kottje, *Verzeichnis der Handschriften mit Werken des Hrabanus Maurus* (Hanover, 2012),

<sup>128</sup> Hrabanus, DRN, col. 211-212.

The camel takes its name from this, either from the Greek chamai meaning low and short, because camels lie down while they are being loaded, so they are shorter or lower; or from the Greek chamai (meaning hump) because they have a hump on their back. Most camels come from Arabia. Camels from other lands have one hump, but Arabian camels have two... The dromedary is a kind of camel, smaller in height but faster. From this it takes its name, for “race” and “speed” are called dromos in Greek. It is accustomed to travel one hundred Roman miles or more in a single day.<sup>129</sup>

One of the major ideas that emerges in the above passage is an association of camels with Arabia. The exotic nature of Hrabanus’ understanding of camels is reinforced by his discussion of their environment, noting that they come from the east, where they roam alongside rhinoceroses, leopards, basilisks and dragons.<sup>130</sup>

Camels could be connected not just to foreign lands but also to foreign peoples, something that becomes particularly clear as Hrabanus begins employing Biblical material in his discussion of camels.<sup>131</sup> That multiple exegetical interpretations of the camel were possible is indicated by Gregory the Great’s comment in his *Moralia on Job*, repeated by Hrabanus, “But in the Holy Scripture sometimes the camel is the Lord himself, and

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<sup>129</sup> Hrabanus DRN, “Camelis causa nomen dedit, sive quod, quando onerantur, ut breviores et humiles fiant, accumbant (quia graeci camai humile et breve dicunt) sive quia curvus est dorso. Camur enim verbo graeco curvum significat. Hos licet et aliae regiones mittant, sed Arabia plurimos: differunt autem sibi. Nam Arabici bina tubera in dorso habent, reliquarum regionum singula... Dromeda genus camelorum est minoris quidem staturae, sed velocioris, unde et nomen habet. Nam dromos Graece cursus velocitas appellatur: centum et amplius millia uno die pergere solet. Quod animal, sicut bos et ovis et camelus, ruminat. Ruminatio autem dicta est a ruma eminente gutturis parte, per quam dimissus cibus a certis revocatur animalibus”, col. 211. Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* 2, ed. W.M. Lindsay (Oxford, 1911), 12 1:35-36, ‘Camelis causa nomen dedit, sive quod quando onerantur, ut breviores, et humiles fiant, accubant, quia Graeci χαμαι humile, et breve dicunt; sive quia curvus est dorso. Camur enim verbum Graecum curvum significat. Hos licet et aliae regiones mittant, sed Arabia plurimos. Differunt autem sibi. Nam Arabici bina tubera in dorso habent, reliquarum regionum singula. Dromeda, genus est camelorum, minoris quidem staturae, sed velocioris. Unde et nomen habet. Nam δρόμος Graece cursus velocitas appellatur. Centum enim et amplius millia uno die pergere solet. Quod animal, sicut bos, et ovis, et camelus ruminat’.

<sup>130</sup> Hrabanus, DRN, col. 212.

<sup>131</sup> On Hrabanus’ exegetical methods, P. Le Maitre, “Les methods exégétiques de Raban Maur”, *Haut Moyen-Âge: Culture, Éducation et Société*, ed. C. Lepelley & M. Sot (Nanterre, 1990), 343-352.

sometimes it represents the Gentile people”.<sup>132</sup> The linking of camels with Gentiles had long been made.<sup>133</sup> Ambrose in his *Commentary on Luke* is representative:

The camel is a good image of the pagan races, because these people had grown hideous and degenerate in their superstitions. They had become, prior to their conversion, hideous as a camel, absurd in their manner of walking, deformed as regards their features.<sup>134</sup>

Hrabanus agreed with this, declaring that camels could be “the gentile people to be converted to the faith of Christ”.<sup>135</sup>

Referring to Isaiah 60:6-7:

6. The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the Lord. 7. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee: they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory.

Hrabanus quoted Jerome’s commentary on this passage:

Midian and Ephah are countries on the other side of Arabia, rich in camels, and the whole of the province is named Sheba, where the queen lived who came to hear the wisdom of Solomon.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Gregory, *Moralia in Job, I-X*, CCSL 143, ed. M. Adriaen (Turnholt, 1979), I.21, “In scriptum autem sacra aliquando cameli noue ipse Dominus, aliquando autem populus gentilis exprimitur”, 34-35. See also the discussions in J. Voisenet, *Bêtes et Hommes dans le monde médiéval: le bestiaire des clercs du Ve au XIIIe siècle* (Turnhout, 2000), 49-52, N. Harris, “The Camel in Medieval Literature: Perspectives and Meanings”, *Fauna and Flora in the Middle Ages: Studies of the Medieval Environment and its Impact on the Human Mind*, ed. S. Hartmann (Frankfurt am Main, 2007), 113-132, 117-119.

<sup>133</sup> Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, XIII.xvi.38, PL 76, col. 770, Isidore of Seville, *Commentary on Genesis*, PL 50, col. 978, Walafrid Strabo, *Commentary on the Four Gospels*, PL 114, col. 883.

<sup>134</sup> Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii Secundam Lucam*, CSEL 32.IV, ed. C. Schenkl (Vienna, 1902), “Et bene camelus pro gentili figuratus est populo; quia superstitionis deformitate degenerans, priusquam crederet populus nationum, belluinae speciem foeditatis, absurda vestigia, ora turpia praeferebat”, 428.

<sup>135</sup> Hrabanus, DRN, col. 211, “aut gentilem populum conversum ad fidem Christi”.

<sup>136</sup> Jerome, CCSL 74 *Commentary on Isaiah* Vol. 2, ed. M. Adriaen (Turnhout, 1963), “Madian et Epha regiones sunt trans Arabiam, fertiles camelorum, omnisque provincia appellatur Saba, unde fuit et Saba regina, quae venit sapientiam audire Salomonis”, 697, Hrabanus, DRN, “Madian et Epha regiones sunt trans Arabiam fertiles camelorum. Omnis provincia vocatur Saba, unde venit Saba regina ad Salomonem”, col. 212.

Jerome observed that “Kedar is the country of the Saracens, who in Scripture are called Ishmaelites. And Nebaioth is one of the sons of Ishmael”.<sup>137</sup> The meaning of the passage was that:

The conversion of the entire world, therefore, is being proclaimed by names that are familiar to the barbarian nations, who are Israel’s neighbours. For in this passage, Midian means “iniquity”, Ephah, “released”, or “pouring out”, Sheba “conversion” or “captivity”, Kedar, “darkness”, Nebaioth “prophecies”. The “herds of camels”, therefore, having been “released” from the chains of “iniquity” and “pouring out” their souls to God, shall cover Jerusalem with gifts, and all shall come from “captivity” and by “conversion” bringing the gold of faith and the frankincense of sacrifice.<sup>138</sup>

As well as predicting the future conversion of the Gentiles, this extended exercise in etymological analysis serves to link camels with the lands of the Saracens, and with great wealth.<sup>139</sup>

Jerome’s discussion of the camels in Isaiah 60:6 also features in Haimo of Auxerre’s (d.c.865) Commentary on Isaiah.<sup>140</sup> Camels also reappear when Haimo refers to them in the context of Isaiah 21:7, explaining that the “chariot of asses” and “chariot of camels” alluded to the two kingdoms of Cyrus the Great, noting that “The camel is the kingdom of the Medes,

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<sup>137</sup> Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah* Vol. 2, “Cedar autem regio Sarracenorum est, qui in Scriptura vocantur Ismaelitae. Et Nabaioth unus est filiorum Ismael”, 697, Hrabanus, DRN, “Cedar autem regio Sarracenorum est, qui Ismaelitae dicuntur, et in Nabaioth unus est filiorum Ismael”, col. 212.

<sup>138</sup> Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah* Vol. 2, “totius mundi conversio praedicatur. Madian quippe in hoc loco interpretatur iniquitas. Epha, resolutus, sive effundens. Saba, conversio, vel captivitas. Cedar, tenebrae. Nabajoth, prophetiae. Greges igitur camelorum, iniquitatis vinculis resoluti, et animas suas effundentes Deo, operient Hierusalem muneribus, et omnes de captivitate venient, et conversione sua, aurum fidei deferentes, et thus sacrificii”, 697, Hrabanus, DNR, “totius mundi conversio praedicatur. Mathan enim in hoc loco interpretatur iniquitas et Epha solutus vel fundens: Saba conversio vel captivitas. Cedar tenebrae: Nabaiot prophetiae. Greges igitur camelorum, id est, divitum et peccatorum, iniquitatis vinculis resoluti, et animas suas effundentes Deo, operient Hierusalem muneribus; et omnes de captivitate venient, et conversione sua aurum fidei et thus sacrificii deferent”, col. 212.

<sup>139</sup> On the impact of Jerome’s exegesis on the Saracens, J.V. Tolan, ““A wild man, whose hand will be against all’: Saracens and Ishmaelites in Latin Ethnographical Tradition from Jerome to Bede”, *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World: The West, Byzantium and the Islamic world, 300-1100*, ed. W. Pohl, C. Gantner & R. Payne (Farnham, 2012), 513-530.

<sup>140</sup> Haimo of Auxerre, “Commentary on Isaiah”, PL 116, col. 713-1086, “Madian et Epha regiones sunt trans Arabiam, abundantes camelis ac dromedariis, omnisque provincia appellatur Saba, de qua fuit et regina Saba, quae venit audire sapientiam Salomonis. . .Madian iniquitas interpretatur; Epha resolutus vel effundens; Saba, captivitas vel conversio. Greges igitur camelorum et dromedariorum, id est divites hujus saeculi et potentes, omnesque gentiles qui velociter ad Christi fidem venerunt, resolutis vinculis iniquitatis animas suas effuderunt Domino, et omnes revertentes de captivitate diaboli et suae conversationis munus Domino offerentes, id est per fidem puram quae per aurum designatur, et orationes mundas quae intelliguntur per thus”, 1034-1035.

which has always been the most powerful”.<sup>141</sup> Again camels are linked to a distant eastern land. A similar link between Saracens and camels can be perceived in the appearance of camels in the Stuttgart Psalter (Württembergische Landesbibliothek Stuttgart, cod.bibl.fol. 23 fol.119r), produced c.820 in Saint-Germain-des-Prés.<sup>142</sup> Here the camels help illustrate the selling of Joseph by Ishmaelites.

In his Commentary on Isaiah, Jerome made the connection between camels and Saracens explicit with reference to Jeremiah 49:28-33. This passage discusses an attack on Kedar and Hazor by King Nebuchadnezzar “Their tents and their flocks shall they take away: they shall take to themselves their curtains, and all their vessels, and their camels.” Jerome identified the Babylonian king’s victims as “the Ishmaelites, that is the nation of the Saracens”.<sup>143</sup> In support of this, he pointed to the resemblance between the two groups, among them that the Saracens “live in tents...[and] have herds of cattle and camels”.<sup>144</sup> Jerome attributed the survival of the Saracens to the fact that “in one day they are accustomed to flee through the desert waste with a hundred dromedary camels and thousands more”.<sup>145</sup>

This passage does not appear in Haimo’s work, nor in Hrabanus’ *De rerum naturis*. The latter exegete did however employ it in his Commentary on Jeremiah, which was dedicated to Emperor Lothar I (817-855).<sup>146</sup> Jerome’s focus on curtains and tents may help explain Frankish interest in these items as gifts from Muslim rulers as discussed above.<sup>147</sup> This suggests an identification of camels with Saracens, with the people being distinguished from all others in part by their possession of camels. Camels might therefore have been seen as a Saracen present par excellence. The world of biblical exegesis may seem to be a long distance from the political arena. In the Carolingian era this sort of scriptural analysis shaped not just the ideas of religious specialists, but were commissioned by kings and studied by

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<sup>141</sup> Isaiah 21:7 “And he saw a chariot with a couple of horsemen, a chariot of asses, and a chariot of camels; and he hearkened diligently with much heed”, Haimo, “Commentary on Isaiah”, “Camelus Medorum regnum est, quod semper fuit potentissimum”, col. 816.

<sup>142</sup> Stuttgart Psalter, *Digital Württembergische Landesbibliothek Stuttgart*, digital.wlb-stuttgart.de/sammlungen/sammlungsliste/werksansicht/?id=6&tx\_dlf%5Bid%5D=1343&tx\_dlf%5Bpage%5D=245, accessed 04/11/2016.

<sup>143</sup> Jerome, *CCSL 73 Commentary on Isaiah* Vol. 1, ed. M. Adriaen (Turnhout, 1963), “Ismaelitarum, hoc est, Saracenorum proprie gentem”, 208.

<sup>144</sup> Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah* Vol. 1, “quia habitant in tentoriis...et pecora camelorumque greges”, 208.

<sup>145</sup> Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah* Vol. 1, “eo quod dromedariis camelis centum et amplius millia uno die per vastam solitudinem fugere soleant”, 208.

<sup>146</sup> Hrabanus Maurus, “Commentary on Jeremiah”, PL 111, col. 793-1272, col. 793-798, “Ismaelitarum, hoc est Saracenorum, propriam gentem descriperit: Qui habitant in tentoriis...et pecora camelorum gregesque... eo quod dromedariis camelis centum et amplius millia uno die per vastam solitudinem fugere solent”, col. 1135-1136.

<sup>147</sup> See Hincmar’s Camels.

their courts.<sup>148</sup> Their impact on shaping the views of those who read them or listened to them being read was very real.<sup>149</sup>

Much of the impact of Charlemagne's elephant came from its singular nature. Einhard (d.840) made this point in his biography of Charlemagne, that this elephant was Hārūn's only elephant, adding to its unique status.<sup>150</sup> That the *Royal Frankish Annals* report its name, Abū l'Abbās, increasing the sense of its exceptional presence, identifying the elephant as a personality.<sup>151</sup> Charles the Bald's camels by contrast are plural and nameless. Although this reduces their individual impact, it does increase their resemblance to the camels encountered elsewhere in Frankish thought. Numerous and bearing gifts, they match Isaiah's multitudes of camels and Hrabanus' description of a Sheba "rich in camels". They suggest ideas of vast wealth, the tribute of the far corners of the world brought to Charles.

Exactly what Charles thought about the camels is hard to discern. Some hints that they featured in his repertoire of distinctive and important animals are to be found over the subsequent decade. Camels feature in two gifts, a magnificent throne and Bible, probably given by Charles to Pope John VIII (872-882) in 875.<sup>152</sup> Both throne and Bible feature portraits of Charles himself, as a reminder of the donor's power. A camel can also be identified among the many ivory decorations on the throne, marking the full range of the world encompassed by the possessor of the throne.<sup>153</sup> The San Paolo fuori le Mura Bible was produced at Rheims during Hincmar's tenure as Archbishop.<sup>154</sup> Among the illustrations on the frontispiece of the Book of Maccabees (fol.243v) is a depiction of Antiochus IV sacking

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<sup>148</sup> J.J. Contreni, "Carolingian Biblical Studies", *Carolingian Essays: Andrew W. Mellon lectures in Early Christian Studies*, ed. U. Blumenthal (Washington, 1983), 71-98, reprinted in J.J. Contreni, *Carolingian Learning, Masters and Manuscripts* (Aldershot, 1992), M. de Jong, "The Empire as *ecclesia*: Hrabanus Maurus and biblical *historia* for rulers", *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2000), 191-226, 195. See also the essays in the collected volume, *The Study of the Bible in the Carolingian Era*, ed. C.M. Chazelle & B. Edwards (Turnhout, 2003).

<sup>149</sup> M. de Jong, "Old Law and New-Found Power: Hrabanus Maurus and the Old Testament", *Centres of Learning: Learning and Location in pre-modern Europe and the Near East*, ed. J.W. Drijvers & A.A. MacDonald (Leiden, 1995), 161-176. On the long-term impact of this exegesis see M. Gabriele, "The Last Carolingian Exegete: Pope Urban II, the Weight of Tradition, and Christian Reconquest", *Church History* 81 (2012): 796-814.

<sup>150</sup> Einhard, "Vita Karoli Magni", *MGH, SRG 25, Einhardi Vita Karoli Magni*, ed. G. H. Pertz & G. Waitz (Hannover, 1911), "quem tunc solum habebat", 19.

<sup>151</sup> ARF, "nomen elefanti erat Abul Abaz", 117.

<sup>152</sup> M. Maccarrone, "La Storia della Cattedra", *La Cattedra Lignea di S. Pietro in Vaticano*, ed. M. Maccarrone (Rome, 1971), 3-70, 10, L. Nees, *A Tainted Mantle: Hercules and the Classical Tradition at the Carolingian Court* (Philadelphia, 1991), 151-152.

<sup>153</sup> P. Romanelli, "La Decorazione in Avorio", and K. Weitzmann, "The Iconography of the Carolingian Ivories of the Throne", *La Cattedra Lignea di S. Pietro in Vaticano*, ed. M. Maccarrone (Rome, 1971), 191-216, 194, 217-245, 234-236, Nees, *A Tainted Mantle*, 178-182.

<sup>154</sup> J.E. Gaehde, "The Bible of San Paolo fuori le mura in Rome: Its Date and Its Relation to Charles the Bald", *Gesta* 5 (1966): 9-21, Nees, *A Tainted Mantle*, 241.

Jerusalem, with his men loading plunder upon a dromedary.<sup>155</sup> While Antiochus was hardly a positive model of Biblical kingship, the picture does suggest an understanding of camels as the bearers of the fabulous treasures of mighty rulers.

Another plausible line of thought can be traced. As observed above, both Hrabanus and Haimo commented on the bearing of expensive gifts from Sheba by camels. The coming of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon is a plausible way in which the arrival of the camels bearing gifts from Córdoba could have been understood and presented by Charles. 1 Kings 10:2 and 2 Chronicles 9:1 both describe the Queen coming “with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones”. There was some interest in the Queen of Sheba in Frankish circles. Both Walahfrid Strabo, Charles’ tutor, and Hrabanus had commented on her, largely following the typological model of Isidore and Bede in suggesting that in her quest for wisdom from Solomon, she represented the Church learning from Christ.<sup>156</sup> A more straightforward reading is possible. The Queen of Sheba could stand in for a wealthy, powerful and exotic neighbour come to do honour to Charles’ might and wisdom, raising his court to be a New Jerusalem. Hrabanus associates Sheba with both Saracens and camels so a typological connection between Sheba and Muslim Spain might have been logical.<sup>157</sup>

Solomon was seen as a model for kingship. Both Charlemagne and Louis the Pious had been compared to him and Charles the Bald continued the family tradition.<sup>158</sup> Kershaw has described Charles’ regime as “the triumph of Solomonic kingship”.<sup>159</sup> The identification of Charles with Solomon began early, when Freulf of Lisieux dedicated the second volume of his universal chronicle to Charles’ mother, Judith (d.843), in 829. Freulf compared her to Bathsheba, mother of Solomon, “For it is fitting that you, venerable lady, instruct your only son, the king of our delight and the new world, mindful of Bathsheba who similarly

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<sup>155</sup> J.E. Gaehde, “The Pictorial Sources of the Illustrations to the Books of Kings, Proverbs, Judith and Maccabees in the Carolingian Bible of San Paolo fuori le Mura in Rome”, *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 9 (1975): 359-389, 384-389.

<sup>156</sup> Isidore of Seville, *Allegoriae quaedam scripturae sacrae*, PL 83, cols. 99-130, col. 113, Bede, *Quaestiones super Regum librum*, PL 93, cols. 429-456, col. 446. P.F. Watson, “The Queen of Sheba in Christian Tradition”, *Solomon and Sheba*, ed. J.B. Pritchard (London, 1974), 115-145, 115-117.

<sup>157</sup> Hrabanus, DRN, “Sarracenum est, qui Ismaelitae dicuntur”, “sunt trans Arabiam ferules camelorum, omnisque provincia uocatus Saba”, col. 211.

<sup>158</sup> For examples for Charlemagne and Louis the Pious, see Cathwulf, *MGH Epistolae Karolini aevi*, 4, 501-504, 503, Walahfrid Strabo, *De imagine Tetrici*, 126.

<sup>159</sup> P.J.E. Kershaw, *Peaceful Kings: Peace, Power, and the Early Medieval Political Imagination* (Oxford, 2011), 212.



instructed the most learned king of earlier centuries”.<sup>160</sup> The prophetic monk of Tours, Audradus Modicus, and Lupus, Abbot of Ferrières advised Charles to behave like Solomon to achieve wisdom.<sup>161</sup>

There is considerable evidence to suggest that Charles, with his impressive education, had intellectual interests.<sup>162</sup> Lupus of Ferrières described Charles as zealous for learning to Bishop Aeneas of Paris (858-870).<sup>163</sup> Direct engagement on his part with Biblical material pertaining to Solomon can be found in his questions to Hincmar of Rheims on lines from the Song of Songs which prompted Hincmar to write the *Ferculum Salamonis* in the early 850s.<sup>164</sup> In 869, the same decade that Muḥammad sent Charles the camels, Sedulius Scottus celebrated Charles’ acquisition of Lotharingia, describing him “holding the paternal sceptre, a peacemaker like Solomon”.<sup>165</sup> Heiric of Auxerre (d.876) addressed the *Vita Sancti Germani* to Charles in the 870s, calling him “our most wise Solomon”.<sup>166</sup> The image of Charles in the Bible of San Paolo fuori le mura (fol.192v) is strongly evocative of Solomonic imagery.<sup>167</sup>

All of these writers had their own particular reasons for encouraging Charles to see himself in the mould of Solomon. Solomon was associated with the support of scholarship and peacefulness. Many hoped for generous patronage from a learned king. Sedulius sought a bloodless regime change in his native Lotharingia.<sup>168</sup> The volume of these comparisons nonetheless would seem to suggest that Charles as Solomon was a reasonably consistent strand in court rhetoric. It seems not implausible that Charles and his court may have seen in the gift of the camels further confirmation of the West Frankish king’s Solomonic status, particularly in the context of peace-making with the Emir of Córdoba.

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<sup>160</sup> Freculf of Lisieux, *MGH Epistolae Karolini aevi*, 5, 319-320, “Decet enim dominam te venerabilem unicum erudire filium, nostrae iocunditatis et novi seculi regem, memor Bersabee, quae Ididam priscorum eruditiv sapientissimum seculorum regem”, 319.

<sup>161</sup> P.E. Dutton & H.L. Kessler, *The Poetry and Paintings of the First Bible of Charles the Bald* (Ann Arbor, 1997), 110-11, Lupus of Ferrières, *Correspondance*, 1, ed. L. Levillain (Paris, 1927) Ep. 46, 192-197, 196.

<sup>162</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, “A Carolingian Renaissance Prince”, 155-184, R. McKitterick, “Charles the Bald (823-877) and his library: the patronage of learning”, *English Historical Review* 95 (1980): 28-47 and “The Palace School of Charles the Bald”, *Charles the Bald: Court and Kingdom*, ed. M.T. Gibson & J. L. Nelson (Aldershot, 1990), 326-339.

<sup>163</sup> Lupus of Ferrières, *Correspondance*, 2, ed. L. Levillain (Paris, 1935), ep. 122, 186-188, “studiosissimo regni nostro”, 186.

<sup>164</sup> Hincmar of Rheims, *Ferculum Salamonis*, PL 125, col. 817-834.

<sup>165</sup> Sedulius Scottus, *Carmina*, CCCM 117, ed. I. Meyer (Turnholt, 1941), no. 12, 28, 51-53, “pacifier ut Salemon regia scepra tenens”, 52.

<sup>166</sup> Heiric of Auxerre, “Vita Sancti Germani”, *MGH Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini* 3, ed. L. Traube (Berlin, 1896), 428-517, “ut Salomoni sapientissimo”, 429.

<sup>167</sup> E.H. Kantorowicz, “The Carolingian King in the Bible of San Paolo fuori le mura”, *Selected Studies* (Locust Valley NY, 1965), 82-94.

<sup>168</sup> Kershaw, *Peaceful Kings*, 2-3.

## Conclusion

Camels did not go out of style and continued to be celebrated gifts to rulers into the tenth century. Widukind of Corvey reports that Otto I (936-973) “received many emissaries, namely from the Romans, Greeks and Saracens”.<sup>169</sup> Among the presents they brought were “animals never before seen by the Saxons; lions, camels, apes, and ostriches”.<sup>170</sup> It is possible that these camels were connected to the embassy sent to Otto by ‘Abd al-Rahmān III in 955/956, although the key source for this mission, the *Life of John of Gorze*, makes no reference to camels.<sup>171</sup> The sending of camels was not confined to the Saracens, as Mieszko I of Poland (d.992) is reported to have brought Otto III (983-1002) a camel in 986.<sup>172</sup>

When Muḥammad I sent camels to Charles the Bald in 865 his primary goal was the establishment of good relations with the Frankish king by sending him a gift that would please and impress him. Charles would have received them understanding this message. Both monarchs came from cultural backgrounds that treated unusual animals as worthy presents for the mighty. The specific significance of the camels was however very different. For Muḥammad, the camels represented a link to his Arab ancestry and a statement of parity with the other Islamic rulers of the age, most notably the Caliphate. Charles would have seen a link to a distant land of scripture, one which could be parlayed into his image as a Solomonic ruler.

For all of these important differences, common ideas emerge from very different sources. The importance of multiple camels as a sign of wealth and plenty is one. Perhaps the most striking is the way the camels served to help both rulers portray themselves after a significant eastern model of monarchy. Whether it was Muḥammad showing himself to be among the other rulers of the Islamic world in his ability to possess and dispose of camels, or Charles providing evidence for his role as the new Solomon, the camels provided a link to a distant but immensely important world beyond the Mediterranean.

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<sup>169</sup> Widukind of Corvey, MGH SS rer. Germ. 60, *Rerum Gestarum Saxonicarum*. ed. G. Waitz, K.A. Kehr (Hannover, 1935), “plurimos legatos suscipit, Romanorum scilicet et Graecorum Sarracenorumque”, 135.

<sup>170</sup> Widukind, *Rerum Gestarum Saxonicarum*, “animalia Saxonibus antea inuisa, leones et camelos, simias et strutiones”, 135.

<sup>171</sup> John of Saint-Arnoul, *La vie de Jean, abbé de Gorze*, ed. M. Parisse (Paris, 1999), 154-157, El-Hajji, *Andalusian Diplomatic Relations*, 213, 218, F. Valdés Fernández, “La Embajada de Otón a ‘Abd al-Rahmān III y la influencia Cultural de Constantinople sobre Córdoba”, *Madridier Mitteilungen* 50 (2009): 538-553.

<sup>172</sup> MGH SS rer. Germ. 72, *Die Annales Quedlinburgenses*, ed. M. Giese (Hanover, 2004), 476, Thietmar of Merseburg, MGH SS rer. Germ. N.S. 9, *Die Chronik des Bischofs Thietmar von Merseburg und ihre Korveier Überarbeitung*, ed. R. Holtzmann (Berlin, 1935), 140-141.