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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

CAROLINGIAN EMPERORS RARELY make an appearance in American electoral politics. In light of this scarcity, when in March 2016 "a white nationalist radio host" made a comparison between Charlemagne and then presidential candidate Donald Trump, a journalist writing for the *Washington Post* felt obliged to explain to their readers that the former was "the Holy Roman Emperor who tried to drive Muslims out of Europe."[1] While this interpretation of Charlemagne could hardly have been better designed to raise the blood pressure of historians of the Carolingian period, the depiction of the emperor as the dedicated enemy of Muslims is one with a pedigree that stretches all the way back to the high middle ages.[2] Epic poems of the eleventh century featured Charlemagne fighting Saracens in Spain and the Holy Land, teaching them with the sword that "pagans are wrong and Christians are right."[3] In 1190 the men gathered in Messina for the Third Crusade sang of Charlemagne "brave and strong and full of mettle" and of his wars in southern Italy against "Saracens, that race of vilest breed."[4]

It was romance of this sort that inspired Alfred Rethel, when commissioned to create a series of frescoes depicting the life of Charlemagne to ornament the newly restored Coronation Hall in the Rathaus of Aachen, to paint *The Battle of Cordoba* (fig. 1.1), which he completed in 1849/50.[5] In the fresco Charlemagne sweeps in from the left across a Spanish battlefield,

1. Miller, "Donald Trump Jr."

2. Morrissey, *Charlemagne and France*, 71–76; Stuckey, "Charlemagne as Crusader," 144, 147.

3. *Chanson de Roland*, "Paien unt tort e chrestïens unt dreit," line 1015, 151.

4. *The Song of Aspremont*, 16, 25; van Waard, *Études sur l'Origine*, 263.

5. Von Einem, "Die Tragödie."

FIGURE 1.1. Alfred Rethel, *The Battle of Cordoba*, oil on paper, on canvas, 61×71 cm, Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf, inv.-no. 4456, (c) Kunstpalast. Photo: Horst Kolberg.

leading his victorious army on a charging horse, while driving cringing Saracens before him in flight. Behind the king, a bishop raises a cross, while in the far corner a banner in black, red, and gold can be observed.

If this was all that was to be said about Charlemagne and Islam, then we could allow the depiction of Charlemagne as an uncomplicated foe of Muslims to stand unchallenged. Having performed copious research on the historical Charlemagne, Rethel was well aware that this was not the case. By his own admission he understood that in his depiction of *The Battle of Cordoba* he was "supplementing the fact with the legend."[6] Unlike the correspondent for the *Washington Post*, Rethel knew that Charlemagne the fighter of Muslims was only part of a much more complicated historical reality. Rethel's premature death in 1859 prevented him from completing

6. Ibid., "aus der Sage das Faktum ergänzt," 310.

FIGURE 1.2. Alfred Rethel, *Charlemagne Receives the Embassy of Hārūn al-Rashīd*, graphite, ink, white and gold highlights, 665×512 mm. SKD Kupferstich-Kabinett Dresden, C 1897–83. Photo: Herbert Boswank.

his Aachen fresco cycle. The surviving drafts for the remaining frescoes in the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen in Dresden show us the other subjects he intended to include. In one of the sketches (fig. 1.2) Charlemagne sits on the left of the composition, enthroned and crowned in his Aachen palace, while Arab ambassadors kneel before him in the centre.[7] The envoys came on the orders of the ʿAbbāsid caliph, Hārūn al-Rashīd. Included in the depiction is the extraordinary gift sent by the caliph, the elephant named Abū al-ʿAbbās, who arrived in Charlemagne's court in 802. Had they been finished, the full cycle of frescoes would have attested to the range of the Frankish ruler's dealings with the Islamic world.

Charlemagne's interactions with the Islamic world would loom large in the minds of many German rulers in the nineteenth century. The surviving oil paintings commissioned in 1852 for the Maximilianeum in Munich in honour of King Maximilian II of Bavaria include Julius Köckert's

7. Ibid., 311.

FIGURE 1.3. Julius Köckert, *Harun al Raschid Receives the Envoys of Charlemagne*, oil on canvas, 354×195 cm. Maximilianeum Munich.

depiction of Hārūn al-Rashīd receiving Charlemagne's envoys (fig. 1.3).[8] Arrayed with paintings on subjects such as the Battle of Salamis and the founding of Saint Petersburg, Köckert's work reflects the word-historical significance attributed to Frankish relations with the caliphate.[9]

By contrast, the painting of the envoys from al-Andalus who came to Paderborn in 777 on the walls of the Imperial Palace at Goslar fits this diplomatic activity into the story of the German nation. Hermann Wislicenus, commissioned to carry out the fresco cycle in 1877 on behalf of the fledgling Second Empire, perceived Charlemagne to have placed upon his people a duty of protecting and spreading the Christian faith to the world, a global task that had perhaps hindered the development of the Germans as a nation.[10] The Muslim ambassadors, complete with camels, reflected that mission. The old empire, much like the new one, was witnessed and watched by the world.[11]

Charlemagne was not the only Carolingian to communicate with the caliphs. His father, Pippin III, had done so before him and his son Louis the Pious would do so after him. Nor were these diplomatic relations confined to the ʿAbbāsids in the East. War against the neighbouring

8. Weigl, "Das Maximilianeum in München," 87–88.
9. *Verzeichniss der Gemälde*, 6.
10. Arndt, *Die Goslarer Kaiserpfalz*, 20–26, 33.
11. Pohlsander, *National Monuments*, 243.

Muslims of al-Andalus in the Iberian Peninsula was punctuated by peace, with envoys routinely crossing and re-crossing the Pyrenees. Never easy, diplomacy between the Carolingians and the Umayyads of Córdoba was nonetheless an indisputable fact of an early medieval reality alien to the imaginations of holy warriors, whether they belong to the twelfth century or the twenty-first.

This book is about the world revealed by Rethel's sketch. It is intended to examine the reasons why Charlemagne and his family sometimes made common cause with Muslim rulers and what the consequences of these dealings were. It is also intended to bring those Muslim rulers more fully into the foreground and understand their motivations for involving themselves with the Franks, to make them more than the supporting cast in the background of the story of Charlemagne. The chapters that follow will consider both the physical practicalities of this diplomacy and the mentalities of the people involved.

They must also reckon with the connection between Rethel's sketch of Aachen and his painting of Córdoba by examining the impact of warfare between Muslims and Franks in the period on their diplomacy. Although both parties could be fascinated by the culture of the other, these relations were not motivated by high ideals or by a deep commitment by the participants to respecting and celebrating diversity. In recent years, Carolingian diplomacy with the Islamic world has been employed as a counter to ideas of medieval narrowmindedness and intolerance. The construction of often misleading parallels between the Carolingian empire and the European Union means that conversations about Frankish contact with al-Andalus and the caliphate have been shaped by modern agendas.[12] The 2003 exhibition in Aachen which focussed on Abū al-ʿAbbās the elephant sought to present Charlemagne's regime, in the words of one commentator, as a "model of tolerance and multiculturalism."[13]

While appealing, this image has its own historical problems. To anyone familiar with the brutality of Charlemagne's campaigns in Saxony, or the intimate terror of the letters he wrote late in his life as he contemplated the fires of hell for his inability to ensure that all of his subjects were Christian, such a depiction of a tolerant empire seems risible at best and cynical at worst.[14] Carolingian relations with the Islamic world went hand in hand

12. McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 1–7.

13. Wood, *The Modern Origins*, 318–319; see the exhibition catalogue, Dressen, Minkenberg and Oellers, *Ex Oriente*.

14. Rembold, *Conquest and Christianization*, 49–53, 75–84; Nelson, "The Voice of Charlemagne."

with conflict and violence, being normally dictated by pragmatism and opportunism. As the first chapter of this book will show, Franks and those Muslims they dealt with often viewed each other with suspicion and hostility. The people involved in these relations possessed that combination of practicality and imagination characteristic of successful politicians in any era. Many of the individuals we will encounter were noble in rank rather than in behaviour. Those amongst them who held themselves to higher standards frequently appal a modern reader most when they were acting at what they regarded as their most moral.

Carolingian diplomacy with the Islamic world has long been the subject of interest, beginning with the work of Jean Barbeyrac in 1739.[15] The past century saw an intensification of scholarly literature addressing the matter. Amongst the most important has been Francis W. Buckler's *Harunu'l-Rashid and Charles the Great*, published in 1931, which argued that Carolingian relations with the Islamic world could be understood as part of an alliance system between the four great powers of the Mediterranean at the time. In his view, realising that they shared common enemies in the Byzantines and the Umayyads of al-Andalus, the Carolingians and the ʿAbbāsids allied with each other against these opponents. Córdoba and Constantinople responded by coming to their own mutual arrangement, thus forming an alliance system. Although far from universally accepted, this argument was to be highly influential for subsequent scholars, providing a clear and satisfying answer to the problem of what interest Aachen and Baghdad could have had in each other.[16] We will return to this alliance system in due course.

Work on the Carolingians and the ʿAbbāsids did not cease with Buckler. Fruitful scholarship has linked their relationship with Frankish interest in the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and with Charlemagne's plans for his imperial coronation in 800.[17] The famous elephant sent by Hārūn al-Rashīd and arriving in Aachen in 802 has been the subject of much attention.[18] Nor have relations with the Umayyads been entirely neglected, with Abdurrahman Ali El-Hajji's monograph of 1970 providing useful discussion.[19]

15. Barbeyrac, *Histoire des anciens traitez*, 341–342. See Cobb, "*Coronidis Loco*," 53, 70.

16. For recent usage, see El-Hibri, "The Empire in Iraq," 281; Borgolte, "Experten der Fremde," 965; Nelson, *King and Emperor*, 89.

17. Schmid, "Aachen und Jerusalem"; Borgolte, *Der Gesandtenaustausch*; Grabois, "Charlemagne, Rome and Jerusalem"; Bieberstein, "Der Gesandtenaustausch."

18. Hodges, *Towns and Trade*, 35–38; Brubaker, "The Elephant and the Ark"; Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache*, 60, 189–190; Nees, "El Elefante de Carlomagno"; Hack, *Abul Abaz*; Albertoni, *L'elefante di Carlo Magno*; Cobb, "*Coronidis Loco*."

19. El-Hajji, *Andalusian Diplomatic Relations*.

Philippe Sénac has written multiple books and articles addressing both Carolingian diplomacy with the ʿAbbāsids and the Umayyads, while the year 2014 saw the publication of an enormous volume on Charlemagne and the Mediterranean.[20] The subject of early medieval diplomacy as a whole has also recently seen a revival.[21]

Given the apparent glut of scholarship, it is reasonable to ask why another volume on Carolingian diplomacy with the Islamic world is necessary. This book seeks to address two issues with existing approaches to the subject that have substantially hampered the ability of modern historians to understand exactly what was going on in this diplomatic activity. The first of these problems is the privileging of the Carolingian perspective. This is a consequence of the fact that the overwhelming majority of the source material that directly mentions diplomatic relations between the Carolingians and Muslims was produced in Latin by people connected to the Frankish world, with particular attention going to texts from the Carolingian court.[22] As a result relations have been understood via the narrative that the Carolingians wished to portray. It has also ensured that the vast majority of the modern academics to approach the subject have been specialists in the history of Western Europe. Most of the work done has considered very carefully the role of the Franks in these proceedings, trying to place these relations in the context of Carolingian affairs.[23]

Consequently, the roles and interests of Muslim rulers have taken a back seat in earlier discussion. Rather than engaging with the ʿAbbāsid caliphs or Umayyad emirs as historical actors operating within their own context, they have been treated as an inert fixture in the landscape. This is especially notable in depictions of the ʿAbbāsids, who acquire elements of the Oriental Despot, possessing absolute power in their eternal realms.[24] These Oriental states are apparently trapped outside historical processes

20. Sénac, *Musulmans et Sarrasins* and *Les Carolingiens et al-Andalus*; Segelken and Urban, *Kaiser und Kalifen*.

21. Shepard and Franklin, *Byzantine Diplomacy*; Barnwell, "War and Peace"; Gillett, *Envoys and Political Communication*; Drocourt, "Christian-Muslim Diplomatic Relations"; Hilsdale, *Byzantine Art*.

22. Drews, "Karl, Byzanz und die Mächte des Islam."

23. Grabois, "Charlemagne, Rome and Jerusalem"; Bieberstein, "Der Gesandtenaustausch," 159–169; Collins, *Charlemagne*, 152.

24. See, for example, Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism*. For commentary, see Turner, *Weber and Islam* and *Marx and the End of Orientalism*; Mårtensson, "Discourse and Historical Analysis," 303; Lockman, *Contending Visions*, 14, 46–48. See also Valensi, *The Birth of the Despot*.

of change or contingency. While few modern historians would use the same terms, many of these assumptions on the nature of the ʿAbbāsid state remain present amongst Carolingianists. The caliphs in particular are presumed to be almighty potentates, with vast resources at their absolute command. The influence of the *Arabian Nights* and a series of somewhat literary biographies on Hārūn al-Rashīd can be detected here.[25] Few of the historians in question appear to have consulted any of the ʿAbbāsid histories.[26]

The reason for this neglect is that the Arabic sources very rarely refer to the Franks even in passing. This does not mean they cannot be employed to create a clearer view of their diplomatic relations. This book uses texts from the caliphate to build up a picture of the domestic political challenges faced by the Muslim monarchs who communicated with the Carolingians and the strategies with which they responded to them. The objective here is to comprehend both the environment and the patterns of behaviour that encouraged Muslim communications with the Carolingians, thereby providing a much fuller understanding of their practice of diplomacy as a whole.[27]

These sources also provide some of the tools necessary to address the second problem bedeviling the study of Muslim relations with the Carolingians, which is the lingering shadow of Buckler's alliance system. Recent scholarship rarely makes direct use of the thesis except to refer to it as a significant historiographical work.[28] Yet the impact of Buckler's book persists. The alliance system remains an important shorthand for Carolingianists who are not otherwise concerned with the subject, one that is frequently passed on to students. If nothing else this book seeks to make explicit in print the arguments against Buckler's hypothesis to lay it to rest once and for all.

Exorcising the lingering spectre of the alliance system opens possibilities that have not yet been fully appreciated. One of the consequences of Buckler's model is that it prioritised hard military realpolitik as the explanation for diplomatic relations between Muslims and Franks. The ʿAbbāsids and the Carolingians were hostile to or at war with Córdoba and Constantinople

25. Bosworth, "Translator's Foreword," xviii; El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography*, 19. Among the better specimens in English are Palmer, *Haroun Alraschid*; and Philby, *Harun al Rashid*.

26. But see the use made of these sources by Drews in his fascinating *Die Karolinger und die ʿAbbāsiden*.

27. On the importance of this, see Lebow, *A Cultural Theory*, 1–4.

28. Yet see El-Hibri, "The Empire in Iraq," 281; Borgolte, "Experten der Fremde," 965; Nelson, *King and Emperor*, 89.

at the same time. It was therefore assumed that it made sense for both to find a powerful ally who shared their geopolitical priorities in order to place additional military pressure on their common enemies. Removing the alliance system allows the consideration of other possible incentives for diplomatic relations beyond the geostrategic. Another advantage of fully moving past Buckler is that it makes it easier to understand Carolingian relations with the caliphate and Córdoba on their own terms. The Carolingians did not interact with the Umayyads in the same way or for the same reasons as they did with the ʿAbbāsids. Placing both as part of a shared alliance system flattens the dramatic differences in the dynamics between the different powers.

Further, by going beyond the alliance system, which prioritises political activity at a state or empire level, it becomes easier to consider the role of non-state actors. Powerful figures on the frontier between Francia and al-Andalus were frequently capable of acting autonomously. Marcher lords communicated with their peers on both sides of the frontier, waging war or making alliances as suited their interests. Some engaged with external rulers, as did other groups such as Christian populations in al-Andalus making contact with Carolingian monarchs. These relations could and often did set the pace for both Aachen and Córdoba, as the courts there sought to catch up with unfolding events.

A final benefit of rejecting the legacy of the alliance thesis is that it enables discussion of Carolingian relationships with other Muslim states at other times. Buckler's thesis was limited in its geography to the ʿAbbāsids and Umayyad al-Andalus and confined in its chronology to the late eighth and early ninth centuries. But there were other Islamic powers operating in the Mediterranean, most notably the Idrīsids and Aghlabids of western North Africa and the fledgling city-states established in southern Italy such as Bari and Taranto. Bringing them into our picture provides a much more complete understanding of the circumstances in which diplomacy between Muslims and Franks became desirable and when it did not.

It is this set of considerations that inspired the writing of this book and drives its fundamental argument and approach. Doing so involves working with an unusual range of material. The entire source base that directly refers to Carolingian diplomacy with the Islamic world is slender. To say that the Frankish material is the largest is to make a statement about how small the Arabic evidence is, rather than an indication that the Latin corpus is particularly copious. Excepting one or two lucky breaks, we lack the ambassadors' letters and reports, the complete formal treaties, and the bills for accommodation and feeding that are the bread and butter

of people working on diplomacy in the modern or even the late medieval period. That one of the most detailed accounts of ʿAbbāsid diplomacy in the period is provided by Ibn Khurradādhbih concerning Caliph al-Wāthiq's embassy in 842 to the Gates of Alexander to check the state of the defences against Gog and Magog speaks volumes.[29] In his valuable monograph Philippe Sénac demonstrated the extent to which one can go with this source base.[30]

One of our strongest allies in responding to this problem is context. By understanding the circumstances in which rulers operated—the opportunities available to them, the limits to their resources, and the risks they faced—we can explain the otherwise apparently meaningless movement of ambassadors and armies. The sources may not tell us why envoys were sent to a distant court, but the wider picture they paint of both domestic and foreign issues provides the backdrop within which we can make sense of diplomatic behaviour. Such a method is hardly revolutionary, but it is worth being explicit about it. One of the consequences of this approach is that large sections of this book will be concerned with reconstructing the immediate context. In these passages diplomatic relations may appear to fade from view. A peripatetic approach is essential in order to establish the political and military background in which decisions were made.

Amongst the factors to be considered here are the internal politics of the states involved. On a basic level, the domestic situation of a polity shapes the resources available to its ruler, particularly those necessary to raise armies and maintain them in the field, as well as the time and energy the ruler can spare for each issue.[31] Instability within may incentivize a ruler to avoid external conflict with other powers, encouraging diplomatic activity in order to reduce the number of problems they face. Said division could also create more diplomatic actors, as rivals for the throne or border lords seeking stability reached out to their neighbours for aid. The internal geography of a polity also had an impact on the decisions made by rulers. Early medieval monarchs usually had a core area where the majority of their resources lay. In the case of the ʿAbbāsids, that area was the great river basins of Iraq, where the capital city of Baghdad was located.[32] While the centre of a Carolingian ruler's power shifted depending on the individual, generally the region between the Seine and the Rhine formed the heart of

29. Zichy, "Le voyage de Sallām"; van Donzel and Schmidt, *Gog and Magog*.

30. Sénac, *Les Carolingiens et al-Andalus*.

31. On the need to build domestic consensus for foreign policy, see Farnham, "Impact of the Political Context," 443.

32. Lassner, *The Shaping of ʿAbbāsid Rule*, 15–16; Berger, "Centres and Peripheries."

the Frankish realm and was bitterly contested by rival Carolingians.[33] The Umayyad core territory was the Guadalquivir river valley, the most fertile and densely populated part of the Iberian Peninsula, with good communications to North Africa.[34] Successful early medieval rulers prioritised securing and protecting these core regions over other challenges, including external invasion of more peripheral areas which could be recovered later with the resources of the centre.

This context is important to keep in mind, because it helps explain otherwise baffling decisions in the realm of foreign policy, in which rulers may appear to miss obvious external opportunities or dangers.[35] Examples of this tend to cluster around civil wars. Emir al-Ḥakam I of Córdoba (r. 796–822) allowed the Carolingians to take Barcelona in 801 because in the long run it was more important for him to defeat his uncles who were at that time leading armies in the Guadalquivir basin with the intention of overthrowing him.[36] From the 860s Charles the Bald (r. 840–877) was in a stronger position in dealing with his Umayyad counterparts than he had ever been before, but he concentrated on the renewed opportunities to acquire key Carolingian territories in Lotharingia and Italy from his family members instead.[37]

As a result of an investigation of the evidence following this approach, this book argues for a new vision of Carolingian relations with the Islamic world. First, Frankish monarchs did not deal with all Muslim rulers as part of a grand system. Rather, each power was engaged with on its own terms. Carolingian relations with the ʿAbbāsid Caliphate were motivated by very different concerns to that with Umayyad al-Andalus, which shaped their distinct characteristics.[38] Frankish interest in the ʿAbbāsids was driven primarily by domestic concerns and vice versa. That is to say, the most pressing reason for interaction between Aachen and the caliphate was to help the monarchs involved solve problems they were facing within their own territories and the key audience for this activity was a domestic one.

Engaging in foreign relations in response to challenges at home may seem like a slightly odd idea. To engage in foreign diplomacy for a domestic audience seems to confuse two distinct spheres of political activity.

33. Nelson, "Kingship and Royal Government," 385–386.

34. Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*, 37.

35. On the importance of the domestic context to foreign policy decisions, see Levy, "Domestic Politics and War"; Russett, "Processes of Dyadic Choice," 270.

36. See pp. 178–179.

37. Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, 220–251.

38. For another example of different types of diplomacy carried out with different partners, see Lee, "Treaty-Making," and Whitby, "Byzantine Diplomacy."

Further, it contradicts a long school of historical thought stretching back to Ranke that subordinates domestic to foreign politics.[39] It may be particularly unintuitive in this case because ʿAbbāsid-Carolingian diplomacy was immensely expensive in terms of the gifts sent and the lives of diplomats. Very few Frankish envoys returned alive from a trip to the caliphate.

However, this sort of behaviour is familiar in modern politics.[40] Political leaders facing trouble at home today seek to boost their authority with images of themselves engaged in major diplomacy with high-status world figures such as the president of the United States or the pope. Such displays communicate to a domestic audience that the individual in question is taken seriously by powerful global leaders and that they are fulfilling their function as the protector of their subjects' interests. Less quantifiably, it also separates and elevates leaders above their subjects or opponents by placing them beyond their audience's experience.

Early medieval rulers could not travel in the same way that their modern counterparts so readily do. Instead, they brought the glamour of far-off places and the admiration of their kings to their courts via elaborate gifts, delivered by foreign diplomats and displayed with grand ceremony. In doing so, they associated the magic of these evocative lands with themselves, while honouring the members of a court privileged enough to encounter distant wonders via the munificence of their monarch.[41] This book will show that the primary motivation for ʿAbbāsid-Carolingian diplomacy was the desire of caliphs and kings to secure their domestic position by accruing prestige through their dealings abroad. The diplomacy took place at times when the respective rulers had specific reason to want to bolster their status at home, and when they were engaged in similar contacts with other distant and wealthy neighbours. This is not to say that it was the only reason, with the Franks' genuine interest in Christians within the caliphate and especially Jerusalem playing a part, but that domestic considerations were the driving force for ʿAbbāsid-Carolingian diplomacy.

In order to distinguish this from other forms of diplomacy, we might call this "prestige diplomacy."[42] This type of diplomacy is defined by its purpose and its domestic audience. It is normally engaged in with rulers

39. Ranke, "Das politische Gespräch" and "Die grossen Mächte." For a historiographical review, see Simms, "The Return of the Primacy"; Otte, "The Inner Circle," 8–9. See also the essays in Mulligan and Simms, *The Primacy of Foreign Policy*.

40. For bibliography, see Fearon, "Domestic Politics," 290.

41. Helms, *Ulysses' Sail*.

42. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, 83–96.

who are far away, to add to the impressiveness of the contact and to minimize any danger that this activity might jeopardize the political interests of the monarch involved. These rulers or the territories they oversee are familiar enough to the domestic audience in question to be meaningful but distant enough to avoid being controversial. They are also sufficiently wealthy to be able to send impressive gifts, which are the most tangible tokens of the exercise. This is an episodic form of diplomacy. While previous encounters might flavour future engagements, continuity is not essential. Provided both parties feel that they stand to gain through an association with the other, discussions are relatively free of content and therefore do not depend on regular interaction. Instead relationships can be revived periodically according to the interests of the participants. Prestige diplomacy can strengthen a shaky ruler or prepare the ground for a potentially controversial action. It will probably not save a regime in crisis on its own.[43] It will therefore not be a priority for a desperate monarch fighting for survival. Nor, given its expense in the early medieval period, is it likely to be indulged in by a regime that feels absolutely secure.

Carolingian diplomacy with Córdoba looked very different to that with the caliphate. Unlike the safely distant ʿAbbāsids, the Umayyads shared a long frontier with the Franks. This offered hope for Frankish territorial expansion, as the acquisition of cities like Girona and Barcelona demonstrates. On the other hand, the Carolingians found that making extended conquests in al-Andalus was unusually challenging, largely because of the heavily fortified nature of the cities of the Ebro river valley which defied easy capture. This meant that the Franks had to get used to permanently having a powerful neighbour on their southern border, one that could send armed forces to raid and cause serious damage over the frontier. The same considerations applied to the Umayyads, who faced an aggressive power to their north who could not be easily cowed or managed. Both parties had the clear capacity to harm each other. The situation was complicated by the participation of other actors, including powerful border lords, or interest groups such as Christians in al-Andalus, who were capable of conducting their own diplomatic relations with each other, or with Aachen and Córdoba.

There were times for Carolingian and Umayyad rulers when good relations with the other was desirable, generally because they were distracted

43. Cf. Koziol's enlightening comments on ritual: "ritual could not make a weak king strong or create a consensus where there was none . . . rituals could amplify currents; they could not create them" (*Begging Pardon and Favor*, 307).

by other matters, or because their position at that point in time was in some way weakened. This made diplomacy necessary in potentially being the difference between valuable peace and devastating invasion. Diplomacy offered channels by which unexpected clashes on the frontier could be smoothed over, and through which knowledge about the position and intentions of one's neighbour could be acquired and considered. These contacts might not always be effective, but they were always a potentially useful tool to be employed.

This form of diplomacy might be categorized as "frontier diplomacy." This is not to say that there is no overlap between these two categories. Rulers accrued prestige at home for successful frontier diplomacy. Elaborate gifts could also be exchanged in such relations. But frontier diplomacy works in very different ways to its prestige-based counterpart. It is directly concerned with managing relations with a formidable neighbour, with domestic audiences being an entirely secondary consideration. Often there is an ambiguous "frontier zone" between these neighbours, inhabited by powerful local figures through whom monarchs have to act but who have their own priorities and activities. Although the immediate importance of frontier diplomacy may wax and wane with the power and aggressiveness of the neighbour, the mechanisms that support it, including information gathering, tend to be continuous. The sending of envoys and messengers will be at least semi-regular. It will be engaged in by regimes that are concerned about their border regions. Rulers who feel secure in their frontier, or whose power and authority do not realistically stretch there, will be less invested in such activity.

It is from this distinction between Carolingian relations with Córdoba and the caliphate that the second major theme of this book emerges, which is the importance of the Carolingian-Umayyad relationship. Fundamentally, the ʿAbbāsids and the Carolingians were a sideshow to each other, an expensive means of acquiring political capital in times of uncertainty. Diplomacy with each other was occasionally useful but never a necessity. Relations between Aachen and Córdoba were a very different matter and this means that we have to pay considerably more attention to integrating the Iberian Peninsula into the wider history of early medieval Europe.

Early medieval al-Andalus has frequently been perceived as isolated from its neighbours across the Pyrenees, with 711 and all that serving to divide the Iberian Peninsula from Western Europe.[44] This in part reflects the complex array of new types of sources in a different language required

44. Burns, "Muslim-Christian Conflict," 238.

to approach Muslim Spain. These sources are often focused on Córdoba itself and not particularly interested in frontiers or foreign lands. The intricacies of Iberian historiography, shaped by debates generated by the unique history of the peninsula in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, has also encouraged a certain insularity.[45] Much interest in Carolingian affairs in Spain has been based in Catalonia, where superb scholarship has been produced next to work designed to legitimate modern ideas of a long-standing Catalan identity.[46] This book aims to cross the Pyrenees by reintegrating the Carolingians and the Umayyads in each other's history. Umayyad policy in the northern peninsula was shaped by the presence of their Frankish neighbours. Precisely because of the danger they posed, Córdoba paid attention to the Carolingians in a way that they did not with the other Christian kings on their border.

Al-Andalus normally plays a relatively small part in histories of the Carolingian empire, often limited to a quick mention of Charlemagne's disastrous Roncesvalles campaign. Beyond that the Umayyads are generally an occasional menace at most. As this book will demonstrate, from the late eighth to the mid-ninth century, the Umayyads were in fact a crucial consideration for all rulers of the West Frankish kingdom. The capacity of Córdoba to cause trouble and undermine Carolingian rule by invading, or by supporting rebels in the Spanish March and Aquitaine, meant that Frankish monarchs always had to keep a watchful eye on their southern frontier. This does not mean that al-Andalus was always their highest priority but that the potential danger posed by the Umayyads ensured that they were a constant factor that needed to be taken into account in political calculations.

As the nature of the above discussion perhaps suggests, Carolingian relations with the Islamic world were complicated. The motivations that prompted it to take place and its characteristics differed depending on the actors involved and the context in which they operated. This is a much messier picture than the neat one provided by Buckler by necessity. Early medieval diplomacy, like all diplomacy, was intricate in its reality. Rulers, lords, and diplomats frequently had to improvise in the face of rapidly changing events.

Because of the importance of context for understanding these diplomatic relations, the majority of this book is arranged geographically and

45. Linehan, *History and the Historians*.

46. D'Abadal i de Vinyals, *Els Primers Comtes Catalans*, 3; Bisson, "The Rise of Catalonia," 128; Jarrett, *Rulers and Ruled*, 1–2; Chandler, *Carolingian Catalonia*.

within most of the chapters a rough chronology is observed. The first chapter is different, because it examines the mechanics of Carolingian diplomacy with the Islamic world. This involves investigating ambassadors, their retinues and routes, and the way they were received, but it also means being concerned with the ideas that the participants had of each other and the way that diplomacy with each other was perceived.

The following chapter moves east in order to deal with Carolingian diplomacy with the caliphate. Relations with the ʿAbbāsids have traditionally dominated scholarly work on Frankish contact with Muslim rulers. Drawing upon Arabic sources, the chapter begins by dismantling the idea of an alliance system pitting the ʿAbbāsids and the Carolingians against the Byzantines and the Umayyads. It then proceeds to characterize relations between Aachen and the caliphate as "prestige diplomacy," with special attention paid to the elephant Abū al-ʿAbbās. Finally, it considers the role played by Christians in the Holy Land in the framing of this relationship.

The importance of Umayyad relations with the Carolingians is indicated by the need for two chapters to do the subject justice. The first of these examines diplomacy between Córdoba and the Franks until 820, a period when the latter were normally more powerful than the former and thus generally, although not always, in possession of the political and military initiative. The expansion of both powers from the 770s brought them into close contact, prompting a greater engagement between them, although relations were often hostile. The challenges of diplomacy in the 810s receive particular attention.

The next chapter follows the changing patterns of Carolingian-Umayyad diplomacy after 820. The importance of Frankish dealings with al-Andalus are suggested by the disaster of 826–829 and its aftermath. Challenging internal politics weakened the ability of Carolingian rulers to be aggressive in the Iberian Peninsula. The consequences for relations with the Umayyads are discussed with reference to Charles the Bald. The chapter ends by considering the lack of contact between the Carolingians and the Umayyads in the tenth century, arguing that the weakened state of the West Frankish kings made them an irrelevance to Córdoba.

The fifth chapter shifts perspective to the Central Mediterranean in order to consider a theatre where the Carolingians came into close proximity with the Islamic world and yet little to no diplomacy took place. This helps illustrate the choices made by Frankish and Muslim rulers when they did decide to engage in diplomatic relations. The chapter begins by examining North Africa, where Charlemagne at the height of his power and Mediterranean ambition made contact with the rulers of Ifrīqiya.

While this demonstrates that Carolingian interests stretched further than often thought, it proved to be the product of an extremely brief moment, ending before the reign of Charlemagne did. A different set of dynamics pertained in Italy, where, in an environment characterized by complex relations, conditions combined to ensure no diplomacy took place between Louis II (r. 844–875) and the Muslim city-states of Bari and Taranto. Lacking the power of the Umayyads and posing a threat to Louis's interests, the city-states were instead the targets of the emperor's sustained hostility.

What follows in the remainder of the chapter is designed to provide the background necessary for the subsequent chapters to be fully understood. This begins with a brief discussion of the use of the term "diplomacy," the broad geopolitical context in which this diplomacy took place, introducing the principal states involved and the circumstances that brought them into contact. Finally, the chapter ends with an examination of the major categories of sources relied upon for the study, with a particular emphasis on the Arabic material.

Diplomacy

In his celebrated *Diplomacy* (1939), the diplomat Harold Nicolson defined diplomacy as "the management of relations between independent states by the process of negotiation."[47] It follows from this description that diplomacy is a tool or technique employed to fulfil political objectives; as Nicolson commented, "not an end but a means; not a purpose but a method."[48] As this definition suggests, the study of diplomacy has traditionally focused on interactions between sovereign states, something that is problematic in the early medieval period, where autonomous political power was considerably more diffuse.[49] Relations between the Carolingians and Muslim border lords on the Spanish March surely constitute diplomacy, even if very few of the lords could plausibly be described as ruling a state.[50] In response to this difficulty, in his study on relations in the fifth century, Andrew Gillett preferred to refer to the "formalised management of relations among authorities."[51] In his book, he eschewed the

47. Nicolson, *Diplomacy*, 4–5.

48. Nicolson, *The Congress of Vienna*, 164–165.

49. Ruggie, "Continuity and Transformation," 274. On medieval states, see Reynolds, "The Historiography of the Medieval State"; Davies, "The Medieval State"; Reynolds, "There Were States."

50. On the participation of non-state actors in international diplomacy, see Osiander, "Sovereignty, International Relations."

51. Gillett, *Envoys and Political Communication*, 4.

employment of the word "diplomacy" as anachronistic, preferring "political communication," meaning by this "formal contact between parties of various levels of authority concerning public matters."[52]

Gillett was writing about a political environment in which many of the actors involved at least paid lip service to the overarching authority of the Roman emperor. Much of his book is concerned with embassies to rulers from their subjects. The landscape of the eighth and ninth centuries this book is concerned with was very different. This political communication is largely between powers who were not just de facto beyond each other's authority but understood to be independent and separate. For all the grandiose claims made by Frankish panegyrists for the respect felt by Hārūn al-Rashīd for Charlemagne, none could seriously propose the latter's sovereignty over the former. For all the capacity of the emir of Córdoba to raid his Frankish neighbours, at no point was he ever supposed to be their master. We are therefore examining relations between powers that were understood to be external to each other.[53] In this context, the word "diplomacy" is less misleading and indeed actively useful as a specific subset of political communication. For the purposes of this book, Nicolson's definition of diplomacy will be adapted to the management of relations between external autonomous powers by the process of negotiation.

Diplomacy is often misleadingly perceived as the opposite of military conflict.[54] In practice, in the relations discussed in this book, diplomacy was an adjunct to war and the most intense bouts of envoy sending tended to coincide with bursts of fighting.[55] As Clausewitz observed, the ambassador and the army were both tools to be employed by the ruler, frequently deployed in conjunction, and in order to explain the use of one, the reasons for not using the other need to be borne in mind.

Political Context

The relations discussed in this book took place in a political context that was the result of a number of processes that began in the middle of the eighth century. The first was the ending of the political unity of the Islamic world.[56] The Umayyad caliphs had commanded an empire that

52. Ibid., 6.

53. Walker, *Inside/Outside*.

54. Berridge, *Diplomacy*, 1.

55. Barnwell, "War and Peace," 129; Padoa-Schioppa, "Profili del diritto internazionale," 34.

56. Nef and Tillier, "Les voies de l'innovation."

stretched from al-Andalus in the west to the Indus in the east and could plausibly claim to rule the entire Muslim community.[57] That political consensus was often questioned, with the Battle of Karbalāʾ in 680 being the climax of only the most famous challenge to their authority, but it was not until the mid-eighth century that the authority of Damascus started to permanently break down. In the west this began with the Great Berber Revolt of 739/740, which saw Berber soldiers in North Africa rebel against the caliph.[58] Although Ifrīqiya proper (modern Tunisia, eastern Algeria, and western coastal Libya) remained in Umayyad control after a series of battles in 742, the lands to the west stayed effectively independent from the reach of the caliph from then on. The turmoil in North Africa spread to al-Andalus, where news of the trouble prompted a coup overthrowing the governor in 741. This did not prevent Berbers in the peninsula from rebelling and raising armies. The ensuing civil war involved multiple factions, including a sizeable army of Syrians who arrived in al-Andalus fleeing defeat at the hands of the Berbers of North Africa. Although the details of this conflict are beyond the scope of this discussion, the result was an al-Andalus that was in practice beyond the rule of the caliphs from this point.

The lack of an effective response from Damascus to this crisis in the west can partly be explained by the political instability that began with the death of Caliph Hishām in 743. In 750 the Umayyads were overthrown by the ʿAbbāsids, who claimed to be the rightful leaders of the caliphate as the heirs of ʿAlī.[59] This claim was backed by an army built around the descendants of Arabs settled in Khurasan in the east.[60] Amongst the handful of Umayyad survivors was Hishām's grandson, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Muʿāwiya, who fled to North Africa. After failing to gather support there, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān arrived in al-Andalus in 756, where he took advantage of the political chaos to proclaim himself emir of Córdoba. This was the beginning of a long and bloody process in which ʿAbd al-Raḥmān slowly took control of al-Andalus.[61] Unifying Muslim Spain around Córdoba was a difficult task, and large chunks of al-Andalus were willing and able to

57. Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, 82–122.

58. Manzano Moreno, "The Iberian Peninsula and North Africa," 590–593.

59. The literature on the ʿAbbāsid Revolution is enormous. For historiography, see Humphreys, *Islamic History*, 104–127; Shaban, *The ʿAbbāsid Revolution*; Lassner, *The Shaping of ʿAbbāsid Rule*; Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate*; Sharon, *Black Banners*; Marín-Guzmán, *Popular Dimensions*.

60. Daniel, *The Political and Social History of Khurasan*.

61. Collins, *The Arab Conquest of Spain*, 174.

defy Umayyad power for long periods of time across the eighth and ninth centuries. Particularly relevant for our discussion is the extended Ebro river valley region in the northeast of the peninsula, which was dominated by Roman cities such as Zaragoza. The Muslim lords of these cities were frequently independent minded and capable of doing business with different Christian powers to the north of them.

The dramatic political events discussed above shaped Carolingian interaction with the Islamic world in a number of ways. First, the new ruling dynasty of the caliphate were the ʿAbbāsids, whose power base was Iraq rather than Syria.[62] This shifting of political weight meant that affairs in the Western Mediterranean received less attention than previously from the caliphs. In consequence, when ambassadors from the Franks first began arriving, they did so at a long remove from core ʿAbbāsid military or political concerns. Second, the division of the Islamic world prompted the development of new polities in North Africa. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān was not the only political fugitive to seek sanctuary amongst the Berbers of North Africa. More successful than the Umayyad was Idrīs b. ʿAbd Allāh, who fled the defeat of an ʿAlid revolt in 786. Settling in Volubilis in 788, he conquered most of what is now Morocco, founding a Shi'ite dynasty that would dominate the region throughout the ninth century.[63] Further east, from 800 the Aghlabid dynasty ruled Ifrīqiya.[64] In 827 they also began a protracted conquest of Sicily.[65] Muslim adventurers established short-lived emirates on mainland Italy at Taranto and Bari in the 840s.[66]

The Carolingians thus encountered a multipolar Islamic world. The immediate consequence of this was a shift in the balance of power between the Franks and al-Andalus. The invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in 711 had inaugurated a period where Muslim armies had been on the offensive in Francia, launching raids across the Pyrenees. Despite Charles Martel's famous victory at Tours in 732, two years later the governor of al-Andalus received the submission of Avignon and Arles.[67] The splintering that followed the Berber revolt ended any question of further Muslim expansion.[68] Isolated from support from the rest of the Islamic world and fighting for its political survival in al-Andalus, the new Umayyad Emirate faced the

62. Elad, "Aspects of the Transition."
63. Manzano Moreno, "The Iberian Peninsula and North Africa," 598–599.
64. Anderson, Fenwick, and Rosser-Owen, *The Aghlabids and Their Neighbors*.
65. Nef, "Reinterpreting the Aghlabids' Sicilian Policy."
66. Musca, *L'emirato di Bari*; Bondioli, "Islamic Bari."
67. *Chronicle of Moissac*, a.734 115.
68. Sénac and Ibrahim, *Los precintos de la conquista*.

Franks from a position of weakness that was to shape its interaction with the Carolingians for some time to come.[69]

The second political development of the eighth century of relevance to this discussion is the rise of the Carolingians to power in the Frankish world.[70] At their height the Merovingians, the previous dynasty to rule the Franks, had controlled an empire that stretched from the Pyrenees to across the Rhine.[71] By the early eighth century their influence was in serious decline. Peripheral regions such as Aquitaine and Bavaria were effectively independent under hereditary dukes.[72] Within the Frankish heartlands, the Merovingian kings were increasingly under the control of their Mayors of the Palace. Following a series of civil wars, this office was occupied by Charles Martel and his descendants, known to modern scholarship as the Carolingians.[73] The end of the Merovingian monarchy came in 751, when Martel's son, Pippin III, deposed Childeric III and had himself crowned king of the Franks.

The Carolingians were an expansionist power. Especially important for this book are the conquests of Septimania and Aquitaine, completed by Pippin and his son Charlemagne in 759 and 769 respectively, which took the Franks up to the border with al-Andalus.[74] The conquest of the kingdom of the Lombards in 774 brought the Carolingians permanently into Italy.[75] The defeat of the Lombard kings in northern Italy prompted the development of autonomous polities in the south of the peninsula, most notably the Principality of Benevento.[76] The Carolingians had a close relationship with the popes, offering them political and military backing in exchange for spiritual aid and legitimacy.[77] This bond was strengthened when Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne emperor on Christmas Day in the year 800.

Frankish relations with the Islamic world were the result of these mid-eighth-century changes. An expanding Carolingian empire came into

69. Manzano Moreno, "The Settlement and Organisation," 95–104.

70. Costambeys, Innes, and MacLean, *The Carolingian World*.

71. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*.

72. Lewis, "The Dukes in the *Regnum Francorum*," 400–406; Rouche, *L'Aquitaine*, although see Bayard, "De la *Regio* au *Regnum*" and Bellarbre, "La 'nation' Aquitaine"; Jahn, *Ducatus Baiuvariorum*.

73. McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms*, 16–40; Fouracre, "Frankish Gaul to 814," 85–90.

74. Bachrach, "Military Organisation"; Fournier, "Les campagnes de Pépin le Bref"; Kramer, "Franks, Romans, and Countrymen."

75. Costambeys, *Power and Patronage*, 273–352.

76. West, "Charlemagne's Involvement in Central and Southern Italy."

77. Noble, *The Republic of St. Peter*, 256–276.

contact with multiple polities ruled by Muslims in the Western Mediterranean. These encounters took place on the edges of Carolingian power in the Iberian Peninsula and southern Italy but also across the Mediterranean, as discussion of Charlemagne's interest in the Idrīsids and Ifrīqiya will show. While the caliphate retained an interest in the Western Mediterranean, the eastward shift in its centre of gravity ensured that affairs in Iraq and Iran held a much higher priority than al-Andalus, Africa, or even Egypt and Syria.

The importance of this geopolitical configuration is demonstrated by the way Carolingian relations with the Islamic world withered when it vanished. The late ninth century saw all the major powers involved hit by political crisis.[78] In the years between 861 and 870 four successive ʿAbbāsid caliphs were held prisoner by their own Turkish slave soldiers in a period known as the Anarchy at Samarra.[79] Although the ʿAbbāsids succeeded in restoring their control over Iraq after 870, the rest of the caliphate had been divided between a number of independent dynasties, including the Ṣaffārids in eastern Iran and the Ṭūlūnids in Egypt and Syria, removing any lingering interest the caliphs may have had in Carolingian affairs.[80] In al-Andalus, a breakdown in political order in the last years of Emir Muḥammad I worsened during the reign of ʿAbd Allāh (r. 888–912), whose power was frequently confined to the Guadalquivir valley, ensuring that he had little or no time for Frankish dealings.[81]

The overthrow of Emperor Charles the Fat in 887 by his illegitimate nephew Arnulf marked the end of the Carolingian monopoly on royal status in the Frankish world.[82] In the West Frankish kingdom it brought the non-Carolingian Odo (r. 888–898) to the throne.[83] The reign of his successor, the Carolingian Charles the Simple (r. 898–922), was characterised by struggle against overmighty subjects, as well as by the acquisition of Lotharingia.[84] Later Carolingians were also concerned with restoring their power within the West Frankish kingdom. In particular, Aquitaine and Septimania were generally beyond the rule of the Carolingians in

78. Pohl, "The Emergence of New Polities," 44.

79. Kennedy, "The Decline and Fall"; Gordon, *The Breaking of a Thousand Swords*, 90–104.

80. Bonner, "The Waning of Empire"; Brett, "Egypt"; Bosworth, *The History of the Saffarids*, 9–16.

81. Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*, 45–47.

82. Keller, "Zum Sturz Karls III"; MacLean, *Kingship and Politics*, 191–198.

83. Nelson, "The Frankish Kingdoms," 138–141.

84. McNair, "After Soissons"; Lößlein, *Royal Power*.

this period.[85] The shrinking size of the territory over which the Carolingians and ʿAbbāsids effectively controlled also shrank the distance of their diplomatic ambitions. As a consequence, the revived Umayyad state in al-Andalus under ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III (r. 912–961) found itself with very little need to engage with the politically distant Carolingians.

Sources

The early medieval world often seems curiously devoid of diplomacy. Earlier historians, noting a gap in references to envoys in the historical narratives following the sixth century, have perceived a hiatus in diplomacy in Western Europe.[86] An important insight into this problem was provided by Paul Barnwell, who argued that diplomatic relations in the period were only recorded when they had specific relevance to the interests of particular chroniclers.[87] This was further demonstrated by Gillett with reference to Late Antiquity.[88] This observation has multiple implications. Not only does this suggest that the silence of contemporary political narratives does not necessarily prove the absence of diplomacy; it also implies the value of looking at texts which were not written with the purpose of talking about the subject but which contain hints hiding between the lines. Another important consideration in dealing with these sources is that most of them were composed by people with a closer connection to one party involved in the diplomacy than the other, which raises possible issues both of perspective and of bias.[89] As a consequence, understanding the nature of the sources being employed, the purpose for which they were compiled, and the context in which this took place is crucial to reconstructing early medieval diplomacy.

By the standards of the early medieval world, the Carolingians are represented by an unusually rich source base. Their worlds can be approached through a large corpus of royal biographies, charters, poems, and formularies.[90] The narrative spine for an examination of the politics

85. McNair, "Political Culture," 2–5.

86. Ewig, *Die Merowinger*, 40–47.

87. Barnwell, "War and Peace," 132.

88. Gillett, *Envoys and Political Communication*, 10.

89. Drocourt, "Christian-Muslim Diplomatic Relations," 54.

90. On relevant royal biographies, see Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*; see Innes and McKitterick, "The Writing of History," 204–208 and McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 18–22; Löwe, "Die Entstehungszeit"; Tischler, *Einharts "Vita Karoli"*; Patzold, "Einhards erste Leser"; Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici imperatoris* and Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*; on charters, Foot, "Reading Anglo-Saxon Charters," 41; McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 188–204; Koziol,

of the dynasty is provided by the annals compiled in the period.[91] These annals are histories with information organized by year in ostensibly neutral, often terse, apparently disjointed sentences, providing a surface impression of objectivity which hides their true complexity as carefully constructed political texts.[92] Entries in the annals are normally short and frequently appear unconnected to each other. Some of the annals were updated year by year, with material being composed shortly after the events they describe. Others were clearly written in more extended chunks, or edited with the benefit of hindsight, a prime example being the *Annales regni Francorum* (ARF), which in turn has a later Revised variant which covers material until 812.[93]

Many of the annals can be tightly connected to the Carolingian dynasty. The *Continuations* to the *Chronicle of Fredegar*, which are very important for Frankish history in the eighth century, appear to have been overseen by Charles Martel's brother and nephew.[94] Unsurprisingly, they are strongly pro-Carolingian, presenting the dynasty's rise to power in a positive light. Likewise, the *Annales regni Francorum* contain a sophisticated justification for Carolingian rule and seem to have been kept and maintained at court.[95] Other annals were more distant. The West Frankish *Annals of St-Bertin* were produced from about 830 until 861 by Bishop Prudentius of Troyes away from the court.[96] Prudentius was of Iberian origin, which may explain the interest in Spanish affairs exhibited in the text.[97] The *Annals of Moissac* and *Aniane* represent a valuable southern history-writing tradition. Deriving from a now lost common source, they were redacted in c. 818 and c. 840, respectively.[98] Composed in Septimania, they frequently provide a closer perspective on events in the

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The Politics of Memory; Chandler, *Carolingian Catalonia*, 18; on poems, Godman, "Louis 'the Pious' and His Poets" and *Poets and Emperors*; Depreux, "Poètes et historiens"; on formularies, Rio, *Legal Practice*, 81–100.

91. McKitterick, *Perceptions of the Past*, 66.

92. Innes and McKitterick, "The Writing of History," 211–213; Nelson, "History-writing," 438; McKitterick, *History and Memory*, 131; Foot, "Finding the Meaning of Form."

93. On the Reviser, see Collins, "The 'Reviser' Revisited" and McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 27–31.

94. Collins, "Deception and Misrepresentation" and *Die Fredegar-Chroniken*, 89–96; "The Continuations of the Chronicle of Fredegar," 300; but see the doubts of McKitterick, "Political Ideology," 166, "Die Anfänge des karolingischen Königtums," 155–156, and *History and Memory*, 138.

95. McKitterick, "Constructing the Past," 115.

96. Nelson, "The "Annals of St. Bertin,'" 34–35.

97. AB 7.

98. D'Abadal i de Vinyals, "El Paso de Septimania," 17n9; Bisson, "Unheroed Pasts," 283–284; Buc, "Ritual and Interpretation," 201–207; Kramer, "A Crowning Achievement."

Spanish March than elsewhere, displaying detailed knowledge of Andalusian affairs.[99]

This Frankish material is immensely useful and is frequently the only contemporary source to directly refer to relations between the Carolingians and the Islamic world. It is nonetheless partial, being normally written by people who were generally sympathetic to the Carolingians and with only the broadest understanding of the politics on the Muslim side of the border. In order to counterbalance these defects, we must consider sources from the Islamic world. However, these are if anything more challenging than the Frankish evidence. As in the case of Carolingian history writing, much of the source base was composed close to and in support of dynastic rulers. They suffer the additional disadvantage of not being strictly contemporary.

The sources for the history of the early ʿAbbāsid Caliphate were compiled considerably later than the period with which they are concerned. By far and away the most important narrative account of the early ʿAbbāsid caliphs is that provided in the universal *History of the Prophets and Kings* of Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (839–923), which has been the linchpin of all subsequent scholarship. This work was completed in 915, almost a century after the last contact between a caliph and a Carolingian, but al-Ṭabarī was the heir to a considerably older historical tradition. A case in point is one of al-Ṭabarī's chief sources, the writer Ibn Isḥāq (d. 767), who was commissioned by al-Manṣūr (r. 754–775) to compose a universal history for the education of the caliph's son, the future al-Mahdī (r. 775–785).[100] Ibn Isḥāq complied but his history now only survives in fragments. That Ibn Isḥāq's knowledge was transmitted was due to the work of his students. As Gregor Schoeler observed, the most prestigious mechanism for learning in the period was listening to the lectures of teachers.[101] Teachers kept notes as mnemonic aids, while students took notes of lessons, both of which could circulate and be copied by others.[102] Similar mechanisms made the work of other key figures available to al-Ṭabarī, including al-Wāqidī (d. 822), al-Haytham b. ʿAdī (d. c. 822), and al-Madāʾinī (752–843), who were all patronised by the ʿAbbāsid regime.[103]

99. Buc, "Ritual and Interpretation," 189–191 and "Political Rituals," 197–198.

100. Schoeler, "The Transmission of the Sciences," 34, orig. published as "Die Frage der schriftlichen."

101. Schoeler, *The Genesis of Literature*, 24; Cook, "The Opponents of the Writing of Tradition."

102. Schoeler, "The Transmission of the Sciences," 34.

103. Schoeler, *The Genesis of Literature*, 7; Lindstedt, "The Role of al-Madāʾinī's Students," 295–340. For a list of al-Ṭabarī's teachers, see Gilliot, "La formation intellectuelle."

It is important to note that al-Ṭabarī assembled a large body of material that was previously circulating without a definite fixed shape transmitted by teachers or notes.[104] The scholars of the early ʿAbbāsid period had long careers in which they updated their notes and changed their lectures.[105] Different students took different records, and the chain of transmission across the ninth century offered opportunities for misunderstanding or distortion. Nonetheless, there is good reason to believe that the basic narrative of his material genuinely derives from the work of historians who were active in the time of the early ʿAbbāsids.

Writing history in the early ʿAbbāsid Caliphate could be a controversial business. The ʿAbbāsids were not the only possible dynasty that could have replaced the Umayyads as caliphs. Many would have preferred one of the descendants of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (r. 656–661), the fourth caliph and the Prophet's son-in-law, amongst them the historian al-Yaʿqūbī (d. 897).[106] Key events such as the civil war between Hārūn al-Rashīd's sons, Muḥammad al-Amīn (r. 809–813) and ʿAbd Allāh al-Maʿmūn (r. 813–833), proved to be extremely divisive.[107] Much of the surviving historical material served to legitimise the victors in these struggles.[108]

That said, the same narrative emerges in sources composed by historians with very different views. The account of the pro-ʿAlid al-Yaʿqūbī is essentially that of al-Ṭabarī, generally sympathetic to the ʿAbbāsids, "with added curses."[109] Further, the patchwork compiled nature of the text militates against too streamlined a narrative, with al-Ṭabarī frequently including contradictory material and leaving it to the reader to decide between them.[110] In the event that his history should offend or seem implausible, al-Ṭabarī defended himself by saying it is "the fault of someone who transmitted it to us. We have merely repeated it as it was repeated to us."[111] This is not to say that al-Ṭabarī had no agenda but that it is possible to observe discordant voices. Even al-Ṭabarī's contemporaries had difficulty divining his beliefs, with him being falsely accused of ʿAlid sympathies by his enemies.[112]

104. Schoeler, *The Genesis of Literature*, 75, 112.

105. Schoeler, "The Transmission of the Sciences," 33.

106. Millward, "Al-Yaʿqūbī's Sources." On the ʿAlids, see Bernheimer, *The ʿAlids*.

107. Yücesoy, *Messianic Beliefs*.

108. El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography*, 11–13.

109. Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 11. See the reservations of Daniel, "Al-Yaʿqūbī and Shi'ism Reconsidered."

110. Robinson, "Islamic Historical Writing," 246.

111. Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Vol. 1*, 170.

112. Mårtensson, "Discourse and Historical Analysis," 303.

Al-Ṭabarī's complete history comes to around 7,800 manuscript pages, stretching from Adam to his own time.[113] The sections that deal with the caliphate are structured both by year and reign, with the annalistic pattern breaking on the death of each caliph to allow al-Ṭabarī to include anecdotes and statements about the ruler's character that he found hard to place chronologically. References to a chain of authorities for a piece of information become fewer in number in al-Ṭabarī's history after 815, with none after 884. This may suggest that al-Ṭabarī was increasingly composing from his own knowledge rather than compiling earlier material as the history got closer to his lifetime.[114] The history bears witness to its creator's interests, with approximately a third of the material devoted to the time of Muḥammad and the Rāshidūn Caliphate, and much attention paid to Iran and the central caliphate. The treatment of regions such as Egypt and Ifrīqiya is much more cursory.[115] Al-Andalus is the subject of a handful of notices.[116] Given this, that al-Ṭabarī did not mention the Franks is to be expected. Nonetheless, by illustrating the other concerns and priorities of the ʿAbbāsid caliphs, he provides an essential guide to the changing circumstances that motivated and shaped their contact with the Carolingians.

The source base for al-Andalus in the eighth and ninth centuries resembles those for the caliphate in style and genre, being written by people who followed Eastern fashions in the writing of history.[117] It is therefore unsurprising that similar problems arise in handling it. The earliest surviving works concerning the history of al-Andalus are not only late, they are dependent on Egyptian material, suggesting a lack of a native tradition.[118] The tenth century saw a major increase in historical writing connected to the Umayyad court. These histories were intended to legitimise the rulers of Córdoba and, in particular, to support the adoption of the title of caliph by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III in 929 in the face of competition

113. Leder, "The Literary Use of the *Khabar*," 277.

114. Shoshan, *Poetics of Islamic Historiography*, xxxii–xxxiii.

115. Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate*, 216; Fenwick, *Early Islamic North Africa*, 7–8.

116. Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Vol. 23*, 164, 182, 201, 215, 219; Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Vol. 29*, 247–248; Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Vol. 32*, 164–165; König, *Arabic-Islamic Views of the Latin West*, 78.

117. Manzano Moreno, "Oriental "Topoi.'"

118. Makkī, "Egypt and the Origin of Arabic Spanish Historiography." On the transmission of early material, see Marín, "La transmisión del saber"; Fierro, "The Introduction of Ḥadīth," 75.

from the ʿAbbāsids and Fāṭimids.[119] Their narratives celebrate the Umayyad dynasty, portraying ʿAbd al-Raḥmān as the worthy inheritor and saviour of a prestigious and divinely blessed line.[120] They concentrate on affairs in Córdoba and the court apparatus.[121] Of particular interest to them was the initial conquest period in the early eighth century, which provided opportunities to compare the caliph to his famous namesake and the founder of the emirate.[122]

Two of the most important accounts survive in a single late fourteenth-early fifteenth-century manuscript, Paris BNF Arabe MS 1867.[123] This manuscript contains the vivid if anecdotal history of Ibn al-Qūṭīya, who, as his name suggests, was a tenth-century Muslim of Gothic ancestry, and the more mysterious anonymous *Akhbār Majmūʿa* (Collected Accounts).[124] The latter has prompted historiographical debate that is fierce even by the heated standards of Iberian scholarship but is probably a tenth-century compilation assembled as part of efforts to legitimise the new Umayyad Caliphate.[125]

The core of most subsequent Andalusi history writing was the annals compiled by the al-Rāzī family, court historians to ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III and al-Ḥakam II (r. 961–976).[126] Their work was well-regarded enough by later medieval historians writing in Arabic to form the basis of their accounts. The coherence and level of agreement between the later sources are due to their shared dependence on the al-Rāzīs. It is no longer extant in full, only surviving abbreviated in an early fourteenth-century

119. Manzano Moreno, "El medio cordobés"; Safran, *The Second Umayyad Caliphate*, 111–116.

120. On the legitimisation efforts of the Umayyad Caliphate, see Safran, "Ceremony and Submission."

121. Manzano Moreno, *La Frontera de al-Andalus*, 14.

122. Martinez-Gros, *L'idéologie omeyyade*, 81–105; Manzano Moreno, "Las fuentes árabes," 431.

123. Fierro, "La Obra Histórica."

124. Christys, *Christians in al-Andalus*, 175–183; Clarke, *The Muslim Conquest of Iberia*, 67.

125. Arguing for a late composition: Chalmeta, "Una historia discontinua"; Molina, "Los Ajbār Maŷmūʿa" and "Un relato de la conquista"; for an eighth-century origin, Ribera, *Historia de la conquista*, xii–xix; Sánchez-Albornoz, *El "Ajbār maŷmūʿa"*; Oliver, "Los autores del *Ajbār Maŷmūʿa*" and "El *Ajbār Maŷmūʿa*"; for a tenth-century date, Martinez-Gros, *L'idéologie omeyyade*, 52; Chalmeta, *Invasión e Islamización*, 50; Safran, *The Second Umayyad Caliphate*, 120–134.

126. Manzano Moreno, *La organización fronteriza*, 101; Lévi-Provençal, "Sur l'installation des Rāzī en Espagne," 230; Pellat, "The Origin and Development," 119. On the Umayyad Secretariat, see Soravia, "Entre bureaucratie et *littérature*."

Portuguese version, which in turn is only preserved in a garbled fifteenth-century Spanish translation.[127]

The final end of the Umayyad Caliphate in 1031 loomed over all subsequent writers, turning their narratives into tragedies and encouraging the mourning of lost glories, often exaggerated.[128] The bedrock of modern histories of Umayyad Spain is the narrative of Abū Marwān b. Khalaf b. Ḥayyān (987–1075), the *Muqtabas*. Ibn Ḥayyān began his career as an official in the last days of the caliphate and deplored its fall.[129] His history is generally considered to be the most reliable of the surviving corpus, being almost entirely based on the al-Rāzī chronicle. María Luisa Ávila convincingly argued that the *Muqtabas* were composed after 1069.[130] Unfortunately it survives in fragmentary form in a handful of damaged manuscripts, with only the material for 796–880 (almost illegible from 847), 912–942, and 971–975 remaining. His history was used by most subsequent writers.[131] Amongst the writers who preserve material from Ibn Ḥayyān, the most important are ʿAlī b. al-Athīr (d. 1233), who wrote in Mosul and used it for his universal history, and Ibn ʿIdhārī, who included it as part of his history of the wider Maghrib, writing in c. 1312.[132]

Standing a little outside this tradition is the *muwallad* historian and geographer al-ʿUdhrī (d. 1085). Unlike most of the other historians discussed here, he was not based in southern Spain but spent much of his career at the *ṭāʿifa* kingdom of Zaragoza, which was one of the polities that emerged from the collapse of the caliphate of Córdoba.[133] Accordingly his *Tarṣī al-akhbār* is concerned with the history of Zaragoza and the Upper March and contains different perspectives on the exercise of Umayyad authority from Córdoba. As well as drawing upon the Córdoban al-Rāzī material, al-ʿUdhrī includes information that appears to be from sources local to the Upper March. His work is a geography, structured around accounts of the histories of different towns in the Upper March, of which only about a tenth survives.[134]

127. Collins, *Caliphs and Kings*, 19.

128. García Gómez, "Algunas precisions."

129. Chalmeta, "Historiografía," 379.

130. On the debate over the dating, see Chalmeta, "Historiografía," 390; Molina, "Sobre la Historia de al-Rāzī," 441; Ávila, "La fecha de redacción del *Muqtabis*."

131. Molina, "Técnicas de *amplificatio*."

132. Clarke, *The Muslim Conquest of Iberia*, 122; Molina, "Sobre la Historia de al-Rāzī," 435; Martos Quesada, "La labor historiográfica"; Sánchez-Albornoz, "Some Remarks on *Fatḥ al-Andalus*," 158.

133. Al-ʿUdhrī, "La Marca Superior."

134. Lorenzo Jiménez, *La dawla de los Banū Qasī*, 47.

It is with these slim traces that the history of the Islamic world's dealings with the Carolingians will be written. Doing so requires both close reading and wide comparison, bound together by inference. Just as a diplomat must try to draw an accurate picture of those they do business with and their motivations based on limited information, so too must the early medieval historian. Nonetheless, with regards to the subject at hand, we have material from all of the major powers involved, all of which can be connected, albeit often at second- or third-hand, to the period in question, and to the political actors involved, which provides an essential advantage in pursuing this question.

This book seeks to advance scholarly understanding of Carolingian diplomacy with the Islamic world by placing the activity within its wider political context. As discussed above, the extant Arabic sources can be used to build up a sophisticated picture of the Muslim polities with which the Carolingians interacted and the changing pressures and circumstances their rulers found themselves in. It was these factors that shaped their engagement with the Franks and without which their relationships cannot be fully understood. This diplomatic activity also needs to be placed within the context of Frankish politics, with similar attention being paid to the dangers and incentives faced by the Carolingians. This approach allows the field to move away from straightforward models of a grand alliance system and instead examine the way specific conditions defined different diplomatic moments. This brings the differences between Carolingian diplomacy with the ʿAbbāsids, here characterised as "prestige-based," and relations with the Umayyads, referred to as "frontier diplomacy," to the forefront. It also widens the scope of investigation by drawing Muslim states in North Africa and Italy into focus, and reopening questions about why the Carolingians engaged in diplomacy in some times and places, and not in others.

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