Every Inch a King

Comparative Studies on Kings and Kingship in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds

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BRILL

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BREAKING AND MAKING TRADITION:
ÆTHELSTAN, 'ABD AL-RAHMAN III AND THEIR PANEGYRISTS*

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Shakespeare called flattery "the monarch's plague".[1] The main symptom of this royal ailment is panegyric. Historians have tended to agree with the poet about its pestilential nature. Panegyrics are hyperbolic and derivative by design, qualities not immediately attractive in an historical source.[2] But written sources of all sorts borrow and bend; panegyric is merely obvious about its biases. Moreover, a crooked source is sometimes a good source. While enquiries about institutions and material culture are best answered with less subjective evidence, enquiries about perceptions and ideology profit from the reliably unreliable.[3] Since praise of rulers is ubiquitous across cultures, panegyric is fertile ground for the comparative study of royal ideologies.

How people praise those whose patronage they seek reveals what they think about power and what they think power wants to hear. How praise-givers write their own interests into flattery reveals something else: how individuals try to shape the ideas that govern the practice of power.[4] These processes are clearest in times of ideological change. Political action is shaped by what can be legitimised, so when rulers act in ways that defy standards, legitimisers like praise poets gain importance.[5]

This paper uses panegyric to compare two innovating royal ideologies of the tenth century. Æthelstan of Anglo-Saxon England (r. 924–39) and

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  [1] Sonnet 114, line 2.
  [2] As was pointed out by the seventh-century writer Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, 140: "A panegyric is an extravagant and immoderate form of discourse in praise of kings; in its composition people fawn on them with many lies. This wickedness had its origin among the Greeks, whose practised glibness in speaking has with its ease and incredible fluency stirred up many clouds of lies" (*Etymologiae*, vol. I, VI, viii, 7).
  [3] *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors*, 34.
  [4] Bobrycki, "*Nigellus, Ausulus*", 173.
  [5] Cf. Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism*, 105.

ʿAbd al-Rahman III of Umayyad al-Andalus (r. 912–61/300–350 AH) made novel claims about their status and authority in roughly the same generation. I examine how two of their panegyrists assisted in the legitimation of these claims. Despite cultural, religious, and political differences, the way panegyrists legitimised royal pretensions in Christian England and Muslim Spain was strikingly similar. Both poems I examine linked their subjects' ideological claims to deeper cultural contexts: Carolingian literature for Æthelstan and ʿAbbasid *adab* for ʿAbd al-Rahman III. And in their legitimating flattery, we can sometimes see how these poets guided innovating ideologies to their own interests.

Æthelstan and the Carta Dirige Gressus

The scribes who drafted Æthelstan's charters called him "king of the English, raised by the right hand of the omnipotent to the throne of the whole kingdom of Britain".[6] His moneyers called him REX TOTIUS BRITANNIAE, "king of all Britain", or depicted him for the first time on English coins wearing a crown whose Carolingian appearance proclaimed his hegemonic ambitions just as surely.[7] Why did Æthelstan, whose dynasty had controlled only a portion of what is now southern England a generation before, think that he was not just the king of the English but also the emperor of all Britain?

Æthelstan was from a family of kings who slowly extended their power in the island of Britain from their base in Wessex.[8] Under Alfred (r. 871–99), this dynasty fostered a political ideology that stressed the unity of the English-speaking peoples over a local West-Saxon identity.[9] The idea of a single English people had a long ecclesiastical history, but only between Viking and West Saxon aggrandisement did it become politically feasible. Court sources call Alfred *rex Angulsaxonum*, "king of the Anglo-Saxons", a neologism that makes sense of his broad dominion.[10] His son Edward the

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[6] Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters* [hereafter S], no. 416 (12 November 930): *Æðelstanus rex Anglorum, per omnipatrantis dexteram totius Bryttaniæ regni solio sublimatus*.

[7] Blunt, "Coinage of Athelstan, 924–939". For crown symbolism see Kirschner, *Die Bezeichnungen für Kranz und Krone im Altenglischen*.

[8] Keynes, "Control of Kent". For a brief survey of Æthelstan's reign, see Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 339–57. For fuller treatment see Foot, *Æthelstan*.

[9] Wormald, "Bede, the Bretwaldas"; Foot, "Making of Angelcynn"; Foot, "Remembering, Forgetting, and Inventing".

[10] Asser, *Alfred the Great*, 227–28; Keynes, "King Alfred and the Mercians". For Alfred's royal ideology see Pratt, *Political Thought of King Alfred*.

Elder (r. 899–924) made this title real by seizing Mercia in 918 and conquering East Anglia from the Danes.[11] Edward paved the way for his eldest son, Æthelstan, who was made king in Mercia upon his father's death in 924. Upon the premature death of Æthelstan's half-brother Ælfweard, king in Wessex, Æthelstan took over all his father's kingdom.[12]

After a conservative period of using his forbears' titles in charters and coins, Æthelstan expanded the scope of his claims to power.[13] He may have been the first Anglo-Saxon king to have been consecrated with a crown, a quintessentially imperial emblem, at Kingston on 4 September 925.[14] He followed his consecration with a flurry of diplomatic alliances. He never wed or had children, but he married his sisters to powerful rulers: the Norse king of York Sictric, the west Frankish politico Hugh of Neustria, the future emperor Otto I, and King Conrad of Burgundy.[15] When Sictric died in 927, Æthelstan marched on York, ousted Sictric's would-be heir, and, in the wake of his victory, demanded and received submission from the remaining kings in Scotland, Strathclyde, and Wales.[16]

After these triumphs Æthelstan adopted his two titles: king of the English and king of all Britain. Although Anglo-Saxon kings had vaunted claims about English unity and insular hegemony before, none had done so with such material success.[17] Æthelstan's coins from Northumbria survive in impressive numbers. He lavished gifts on the two great powers of the Anglo-Saxon north, the archbishop of York and the community of St Cuthbert at Chester-le-Street.[18] His charters, famous for their grandiloquent "hermeneutic" Latin, were donor-drafted and formulaic, unlike the variable, beneficiary-drafted documents of earlier Anglo-Saxon kings.[19] These diplomas reveal that *rex Anglorum* and *rex totius Britanniae* (or a

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[11] For Edward see the essays in Higham and Hill, eds. *Edward the Elder*.

[12] Dumville, "West Saxon Genealogical Regnal List", 29; Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*, 65, 70.

[13] Charters: S 396, S 397, and S 1417; coins: Blunt, "Coinage of Athelstan", 47.

[14] Nelson, "First Use".

[15] MacLean, "Making a Difference"; Sharp, "Tradition of Dynastic Marriage".

[16] Foot, "Where English Becomes British", 132. For the predecessors to this submission, see Davidson, "(Non)Submission of the Northern Kings". For the great assemblies at which subkings professed their obedience, see Maddicott, *Origins of the English Parliament*, 1–56.

[17] Foot, "Where English Becomes British", 139–40; Foot, *Æthelstan*, 212–26; for earlier concepts of British hegemony among kings on the island see John, *Orbis Britanniae*.

[18] For York see S 407 and Le Patourel, "Amounderness"; for Chester-le-Street see Rollason, "St Cuthbert and Wessex".

[19] For this style, see Lapidge, "The Hermeneutic Style".

variant like *basileus totius Albionis*) were more than passing enthusiasms.[20] These formulas were continuously used from around 927 until Æthelstan's death, outliving chancery personnel.[21]

Sarah Foot and Michael Wood have rightly stressed the "British", imperial aspect of Æthelstan's self-image.[22] *Rex totius Britanniae*, not *rex Anglorum*, appeared on coins. Æthelstan's commitment to crown iconography reflected his appropriation of Carolingian imperial ideology.[23] Celtic kings attested Æthelstan's charters as *subreguli* (subkings) and spent major holidays under the ritual shadow of their overlord.[24] A famously hostile tenth-century Welsh poem pours bile upon the tribute exactions of a Saxon *mechteyrn*, "overlord", almost certainly Æthelstan.[25] "So much, in the hearts of the Welsh, for Æthelstan's 'kingdom of Britain'", writes Simon Keynes.[26] But if this poem, *Armes Prydein Vawr* ("Great Prophecy of Britain"), is evidence that the Welsh held Æthelstan's overlordship in contempt, it is also evidence that they felt its impact. When Constantine II of the Scots rebelled in 934, Æthelstan's ships sailed to the northernmost reaches of Britain. The king of the Scots was dragged to the south, as two charters witnessed by "Constantine subking" attest.[27] When Constantine rebelled again in 937, this time allied with Owain of Strathclyde and Olaf, the Norse claimant to York, Æthelstan defeated his enemies in a great battle at Brunanburh. His victory was celebrated by an Old English poem,

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[20] Keynes, *Diplomas of King Æthelred*, 43–62.

[21] Debate about the nature of Æthelstan's "chancery" is part of a vexed dispute over the existence of an Anglo-Saxon royal writing office. See *The Charters of Abingdon Abbey*, lxxiii–lxxxiv and Insley, "Where Did All the Charters Go?" for summaries of key issues and positions. Drögereit, "Gab es eine angelsächsische Königskanzlei?"; Chaplais, "The Anglo-Saxon Chancery"; Keynes, *Diplomas of King Æthelred*; Chaplais, "The Royal Anglo-Saxon 'Chancery'"; Keynes, "Regenbald the Chancellor (*sic*)"; Keynes, "West Saxon Charters"; Insley, "Charters and Episcopal Scriptoria".

[22] Foot, "Where English Becomes British", who builds upon Walker, "A Context for Brunanburh?"; Foot, *Æthelstan*, 212–26; Wood, " 'Stand Strong Against the Monsters' " and "Making of King Aethelstan's Empire"; compare to Keynes, "England, c. 900–1016", 469.

[23] Wood, "Making of Aethelstan's Empire", 267; see too Nelson, "Earliest Surviving Royal *Ordo*", 356–58 and Maddicott, *Origins of the English Parliament*, 19–21.

[24] For the most famous of these kings, see Kirby, "Hywel Dda".

[25] *Armes Prydein*, lines 18 and 100, and see p. 26 for the meaning of the word.

[26] Keynes, "England, c. 900–1016", 469.

[27] S 426 and S 1792 (printed in *Charters of St. Paul's*, no. 11, p. 158).

inserted into the vernacular *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.[28] Æthelstan fought for his kingdom of Britain.[29]

Carta dirige gressus ("Letter, direct your steps"), a short Latin verse epistle written to praise Æthelstan, offers insight into how he first justified this kingdom to his subjects.[30] This poem is based on one written for Charlemagne by *Hibernicus exul* ("the Irish exile") around the year 800. In a typical conceit, the poet instructs his letter to transverse the kingdom, spreading the king's deeds and praises. W.H. Stevenson thought the poem was composed "in Frankland" in the context of Æthelstan's marriage alliance to Otto.[31] Michael Lapidge argues more convincingly that it was fashioned in England, around 927, after the capture of York and the submission of the northern kings, but before Æthelstan's chancery and moneyers had taken up the themes of his new status in their respective media. For Lapidge, *Carta dirige gressus* is a missing link between the deeds of 927 and Æthelstan's mature ideology.[32]

We lack a complete copy of this poem, and both manuscript versions, British Library, Cotton Nero A. ii (hereafter C) and Durham A. II. 17, pt 1 (hereafter D), are corrupt.[33] Telling phrases include "through all Britain" (*per totum Britanium* C), "Saxon army" (*Saxonum exercitum* C, *Sex annum esserssitum* D), "this completed Saxonland" (*ista perfecta Saxonia* C), some reference to submission (*fideles servitia* C), and the names "Æthelstan", "Sictric", and "Constantine" in one form or another. *Ista perfecta Saxonia* has been seen as a sort of Neanderthal between "kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons" and "kingdom of the English". Lapidge translates it, "this England now made whole".[34] "This Saxonland" (Foot: "Saxon realm") is more literal, and it is important to remember that "Saxon" long remained a generic name for Anglo-Saxons, and it was not set in stone in the tenth century that *Angli*, "Angles", "English", would prevail.[35] The sense of completion in

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[28] *Battle of Brunanburh*. For its dating, see Foot, "Where English Becomes British", 143–44.

[29] Foot, "Where English Becomes British", 144; Wood, "'Stand Strong Against the Monsters'", 200–3.

[30] Stevenson, "A Latin Poem"; Lapidge, "Some Poems", 71–81, with text and translation at 83–84. Foot, *Æthelstan*, 112.

[31] Stevenson, "A Latin Poem", 486–87.

[32] Lapidge, "Some Poems", 81.

[33] For transcriptions from both manuscripts and the *Hibernicus exul* poem, see Stevenson, "A Latin Poem", 482–83.

[34] Lapidge, "Some Poems", 86.

[35] Foot, "Where English Becomes British", 133 n. 23; cf. Keynes, "England, c. 900–1016", 469.

perfecta, in any case, drives home the main point: unity. Meanwhile, *Rex totius Britanniae* appears in embryo in the references to Britain and perhaps in the reference to (Constantine's?) *servitia*.[36] Lapidge has gone further and reconstructed a putative version of the text before the copyists mangled it, but for now we shall focus less on the text than on the context.[37]

It is well known that Æthelstan used gift books to strengthen connections with important communities and to disseminate ideological claims among them.[38] Holy books bestowed particular authority on what was copied into them. Manumissions, land grants, and notices of all sorts consequently survive in their margins. Poetry was also recorded on the pages of bibles and liturgical books. Another panegyric to Æthelstan, *Rex pius Æthelstan*, was inserted into a luxurious Frankish gospel book (Cotton Tiberius A. ii) that he gave to Christ Church, Canterbury, apparently copied out by the grateful recipients.[39] The D copy of *Carta dirige gressus* survives in a similar context, an early eighth-century gospel book written at Lindisfarne. *Carta dirige gressus* was copied into D in what Lapidge describes as "a hand of the late tenth (or possibly early eleventh) century".[40] Since this poem was not added in Æthelstan's day, it must have been copied from an inscription in another book, or from an oral reading (see below). We know that Æthelstan sent several gift books to the community of St Cuthbert, which had moved from Lindisfarne to Chester-le-Street, and would eventually move to Durham. He hoped to win over the saint, arguably the most important political figure in the Anglo-Saxon north, his death in 687 notwithstanding. Corpus Christi College Cambridge 183 is the classic example of this courtship: a lavish book of hagiographical and liturgical material for St Cuthbert, supplemented by lists of bishops and kings from southern England. The frontispiece is a crowned image of Æthelstan offering the book to Cuthbert.[41]

We know from Durham historiography that Æthelstan's gifts had impact. Not only did house histories like the tenth- or eleventh-century *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto* and the *Libellus de Exordio* of Symeon of

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[36] Foot, "Where English Becomes British", 140–41.
[37] Lapidge, "Some Poems", 75.
[38] Keynes, "King Athelstan's Books"; Lapidge, "Some Poems", 72–74.
[39] Lapidge, "Some Poems", 81–85.
[40] Ibid., 72.
[41] Keynes, "King Athelstan's Books", 182–85; Rollason, "St Cuthbert and Wessex", argues that CCCC 183 was meant for a West Saxon audience. Either way, Æthelstan used gift-books and liturgy to link Anglo-Saxons north and south of the Humber. For the practical importance of liturgy in early medieval politics, see McCormick, "Liturgy of War".

Durham record Æthelstan's munificence, they internalised his ideology. The *Historia* has an episode in which St Cuthbert tells King Alfred that

> God has delivered your enemies into your hands, and likewise all this land, and established hereditary rule for you and your sons and the sons of your sons. Be faithful to me and to my people, for all Albion (*tota Albion*) has been given to you and your sons. Be just, for you are chosen king of all Britain (*rex totius Brittanniae*).[42]

The *Historia* presents these titles, found in contemporary diplomatic but first used by Æthelstan, as the prophetic promise of Cuthbert to Æthelstan's grandfather.

The C version's significance is harder to interpret.[43] The first quire of the manuscript (fols. 3–12) appears to be a contemporary unit: a calendar of saints, notes on the *computus, Carta dirige gressus*, and a prayer.[44] Based on the saints in the calendar, Lapidge argues that the quire-unit belonged to a southwestern community like Sherborne, Exeter, or St Germans in Cornwall.[45] This implies that the poem was heard in two communities traditionally outside of West-Saxon influence (Northumbria and Cornwall).

Heard perhaps literally. Corruptions suggest that the prototypes for C and D, or the texts themselves, were copied by ear. Mistakes like *quarta* for *carta* (D) or *sex annum* for *Saxonum* (D) are hard to explain otherwise. Mistakes like *armieros* for *armigeros* (C) or *dirie* for *dirige* (D), as Lapidge points out, follow the Old English pronunciation of intervocalic *g*.[46] We do not know when or in what context the poem might have been recited and copied, or how many times it was read or recopied before making its way into our manuscripts. The fact that *Carta dirige gressus* was read aloud at all suggests that poems written in holy books could have reached wider audiences than those who had a chance to look into the books directly, even if the mangled state of the text mitigates against comprehension.[47]

The poem's Carolingian prototype is another source of information about its possible aims and audience. As Stevenson first pointed out,

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[42] *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*, c. 16. Cf. Symeon of Durham, *Libellus de Exordio*, ii.17, where Cuthbert makes the same promise to Edward the Elder: *Totius . . . Brittannie regnum filiis tuis me impetrante concedetur disponendum* ("by my intercession the kingdom of all Britain will be conceded to your sons and placed at their disposal").

[43] Lapidge, "Some Poems", 72.

[44] Ibid., 72–74.

[45] Ibid., 73–74.

[46] Ibid., 76 n. 130.

[47] Cf. Garrison, "The Emergence of Carolingian Latin Literature", 127–28 on transmission.

Carta dirige gressus is based on *Hibernicus exul*'s poem for Charlemagne, *Carta, Christo comite* ("Letter, with Christ guiding [you]").[48] The poem postdates Charlemagne's imperial consecration, and the author of *Carta dirige gressus* may have chosen it as a model for its imperial imagery. As with its descendent, *Carta, Christo comite* directs a letter to the palace, where it is to pray for the emperor, his family, and his people. It concludes with self-mocking importunement: *Post haec, carta, Caesarem rogatu continuo / de me Christi servulo sit memor exiguo* ("After, letter, may this be, by constantly importuning Caesar, a reminder of me, a little servant of Christ"). The poem's twelve strophes are divided into two double verses apiece, usually but not always rhyming, generally with fourteen syllables and proparoxytone stresses (7 + 7pp. in Norberg's notation).[49] One gets a better idea of the flavour by singing the poem with "Pop Goes the Weasel" as a (very) rough guide to the rhythm: *Cárta, Chrísto cómite / pér tellúris spàtium / ád Caesáris spléndidum / núnc pergé palàtium* ("Letter, with Christ's guidance, now proceed, across an expanse of lands, to the splendid palace of Caesar"). This metre is more playful than alternatives like dactylic hexameter and elegiac couplets. This panegyric was probably sung aloud, and one suspects the Anglo-Saxon re-make aimed at a similar light touch. That separates *Carta dirige gressus* from the high style of Æthelstan's charters or of the poem *Rex pius Æthelstan*, but does not diminish its Carolingian pretensions.

By refashioning this poem in the light of current events, its author presented Æthelstan as an "English Charlemagne". The refashioner was familiar with events and facts important to Æthelstan's later ideology: York taken, Saxonland completed, the Scots subservient, Saxon power throughout "all Britain". He adapted the original poem to accommodate these aspects of Æthelstan's kingship. The resulting work was circulated in religious books on either end of England. It was read, maybe sung, aloud. Its audience was ecclesiastical. Its register was easy, but this did not stop scribes from mangling it. Latin poetry, inscribed into deluxe books, was a medium by which Æthelstan successfully shared his ideological message with important audiences. We might conclude that it was in this medium, and to this audience, that he first gave ideological explanation to his 927 victories.[50]

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[48] *Poetae Latini Carolini*, I, 399–400. Stevenson, "A Latin Poem", 484–85.

[49] Norberg, *Introduction à l'étude de la versification latine médiévale*, 111; Lapidge, "Some Poems", 75–76.

[50] For further discussion of the poem see Foot, *Æthelstan*, 19–20, 112.

I am not sure we can speak more confidently than this. Lapidge tentatively identified the author of *Carta dirige gressus* as a certain Peter, scribe of Winchester and allegedly a member of Æthelstan's writing office.[51] This would link the poem to Æthelstan's charters, revealing an interesting connection between poetry and diplomatic. This interpretation is attractive, but it cannot stand without reservations. The line *per Petri preconia* from which Lapidge makes this argument seems to have been part of the original Carolingian poem, where it referred to St Peter or to the Pope.[52] It is possible that an author named Peter, like the scribe of Winchester, might have kept "Peter" as a self-reference, but there were other Peters in Æthelstan's England. The first would be Æthelstan himself, whose name means "noble rock" in Old English, as his poets knew. A Latin poem about Æthelstan, a dense acrostic written perhaps during Æthelstan's childhood, makes several petrine puns.[53] The poet, one *Iohannes* (whom Lapidge identifies as John the Old Saxon), calls Æthelstan *archale saxum*, "ruling rock", and *augusta rupis*, "imperial stone", and describes his army as a *petrinum agmen*, "stony legion". Perhaps *Carta dirige gressus* purports to be, or is, a refashioning of *Hibernicus exul*'s work by the king himself. This would not be unusual, given King Alfred's well-known involvement in contemporary literature. It would work as a pleonasm in the context of Lapidge's reading of the relevant lines: *Dixit rex Athelstanus / per Petri preconia* ("King Æthelstan said, by 'Peter's' announcements"). But *dixit* ("he said") is not the only possible reading. The original *Hibernicus exul* poem probably read *dic ut* ("say that"), not *dixit* ("he said"), an imperative directed at the letter.[54] *Petrus* could also be St Peter, here in his role as patron of the church of York. This makes sense in the context of Æthelstan's conquest of York after Sictric's death, given his land grants to the archbishop of York (directed to St Peter).[55] Ultimately, then, the authorship of *Carta dirige gressus* remains a mystery.

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[51] Lapidge, "Some Poems", 80. This attribution is followed by Foot, *Æthelstan*, 19–20.

[52] *Poetae Latini Carolini*, I, 400 (line 7) reads *perpeti praeconio*, favouring Mai's reading over Martène's (*per Petri praeconia*). The original manuscript read "per petri preconie". Stevenson, "A Latin Poem", 485 n. 17 argues convincingly for Martène's reading.

[53] Lapidge, "Some Poems", 60–71 discusses this poem. See also Wood, " 'Stand Strong Against the Monsters' ", 193–95.

[54] *Poetae Latini Carolini*, I, 400 (line 7). The manuscript reads "dixit," which Martène emended to "dic ut" on the basis of other imperatives in the poem (lines 11, 13, 21).

[55] Le Patourel, "Amounderness".

'Abd al-Rahman III al-Nasir and the Historical urjuza *of Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi*

'Abd al-Rahman III's assumption of caliphal status is better documented and studied than Æthelstan's claims to "British" hegemony.[56] When 'Abd al-Rahman III came to power in 912 (300 AH), the title he inherited from his predecessors was not *khalifa*, "caliph", "successor [to Muhammad]", but *amir*, "commander", "general".[57] The Andalusi ruler's appropriation of caliphal status in 929 (316 AH) was an extraordinary assertion about the nature and extent of his authority. 'Abd al-Rahman III's family, the Umayyad dynasty, had once ruled as caliphs (661–750/41–132 AH), but their regime had been overthrown in the 'Abbasid revolution of the mid-eighth century.[58] One of the few Umayyads to escape death in that revolution had been 'Abd al-Rahman I, 'Abd al-Rahman III's direct ancestor.[59] 'Abd al-Rahman I had arrived in al-Andalus (i.e. the Iberian Peninsula) in 755. He was proclaimed *amir* at Córdoba a year later. Thereafter the Andalusi Umayyads ruled independently of the new 'Abbasid caliphate. They cultivated their caliphal roots by calling themselves *Banu al-Khala'if*, "sons of caliphs", but limited their titles to *amir* or *malik* ("king").[60] Andalusi history from the mid-eighth century to the beginning of the tenth was a struggle for mastery between the *amirs* based in Córdoba and Muslim or Christian local rulers ("rebels" or "infidels" in later Umayyad historiography).[61] The "rebels" were winning when 'Abd al-Rahman III came to power.[62] His predecessor 'Abd Allah (888–912) had lost control even of the Córdoban hinterland. His worst enemies, the Hafsunids based at Bobastro, openly

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[56] Fierro, *'Abd al-Rahman III* is a good introduction. The classic survey of the period remains Lévi-Provençal, *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane*. See also Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*; Wasserstein, *Caliphate in the West*; Vallvé, *Califato de Córdoba*, esp. 131–200; and the richly illustrated essays in Cabrera, ed., *Abdarrahman III*.

[57] For the nature of Umayyad caliphal ideology, see Fierro, "La política religiosa"; Fierro, "Violencia, política y religion"; Safran, *Second Umayyad Caliphate*; Safran, "Command of the Faithful in al-Andalus"; Barceló, "El califa patente"; Cruz Hernández, *Islam de Al-Andalus*, 109–36. Martínez-Gros, *L'idéologie omeyyade* is less reliable.

[58] For the nature of the eastern Umayyad ideology, see Gabrieli, "Consideraciones sobre el califato omeya". For the destruction of the Umayyad house, see Moscati, "Le massacre des Umayyades".

[59] Chalmeta, "Nacimiento del stado neo-omeya andalusi"; for the Umayyads' perceptions of their own past, see Safran, *Second Umayyad Caliphate*, 160–63.

[60] Lévi-Provençal, *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane*, I, 113–14.

[61] For overviews, see Lévi-Provençal, *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane*, I, 91–396; Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 30–81.

[62] Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 33.

opposed him.[63] Nevertheless, local leaders continued to recognise amiral authority even as they usurped its resources.[64] This nominal authority sustained the new *amir*'s vigorous reconsolidation of Umayyad power.

During the first sixteen years of his amirate, 'Abd al-Rahman III led armies against his enemies. He attacked the rebels' bases one by one until he held sway over much of the peninsula.[65] With the death of the Haf-sunid chief 'Umar ibn Hafsun in 917 and the capture of Bobastro itself in 928, 'Abd al-Rahman III had extended his dynasty's power in Iberia to its greatest extent ever. Like Æthelstan, he saw his military successes as a stepping-stone to loftier things. In 929 (316 AH) he formally adopted the title of caliph, using the traditional title "Commander of the Faith-ful" (*amir al-mu'minin*), and taking the regnal name (*laqab*) al-Nasir li-Din Allah, "Victorious in the Religion of God".[66] This was a rather more significant step than the one taken by Æthelstan in the same decade. Æthelstan's *rex totius Britanniae* was a *bricolage* of Anglo-Saxon, Caroling-ian, and Roman notions of rulership. The caliphal title by contrast was instantly recognisable throughout the Muslim world, for it designated the legitimate ruler of the house of Islam. 'Abd al-Rahman III's new title was a claim to universal legitimacy.

Yet 'Abd al-Rahman III was not the only caliph in 929, and far from the master of all Islam. Aside from the 'Abbasids in Baghdad, the Shi'i Fatim-ids of North Africa had claimed to rule as caliph-imams since 909.[67] The peculiarities of Fatimid political theology aside, the essential claim of all three rulers—universal legitimacy—as well as their fundamental signs of authority—*khutba* (the reading of the ruler's *laqab* at Friday sermon), *sikka* (the minting of gold coins)—were the same.[68] 'Abd al-Rahman III defended his own claim to the caliphate through sermons, histories, building projects,

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[63] Collins, *Early Medieval Spain*, 220–21.

[64] Ibrahim ibn al-Hajjaj, *malik* of Seville, was one of the most prominent. See Lévi-Provençal, *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane*, I, 366; Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 76; and Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome*, 343.

[65] Manzano Moreno, *La Frontera de al-Andalus*, 346–70.

[66] Fierro, "Sobre la adopción del título califal". For the *laqab*'s significance, see Safran, "Command of the Faithful in al-Andalus", 185.

[67] On Fatimid political theology, see Bierman, *Writing Signs*; Canard, "Le cérémonial fatimite"; Canard, "L'impérialisme des Fatimites"; and Halm, *The Empire of the Mahdi*.

[68] Ibn Hayyan, *Al-Muqtabis V*, 159–60, trans. 184–85; discussion in Lévi-Provençal, *His-toire de l'Espagne musulmane*, I, 110–17; Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 90–91; Safran, *Second Umayyad Caliphate*, 19–21.

notably the great capital Madinat al-Zahra', and, of course, the patronage of poetry.[69]

It is difficult to overstate the importance of poetry in the first several centuries of Islamic politics.[70] Poetry and rulership were intricately connected in the Arabic tradition. The *qasida*, quintessential Arabic praise poem, predated Islam itself.[71] Being a connoisseur (and subject) of good poetry and being conversant in the vast corpus of Arabic literature were essential signs of elite standing. As Stetkevych has demonstrated, the recitation of panegyric poetry played a major role in court ceremonial, making poetry a part of the ritual "mythopoesis of the Arabo-Islamic court", as she terms the process of ideology formation.[72] Poets had more clout in the house of Islam than in Latin Christendom, drawing stipends from rulers and enjoying wide fame for their success. *Qasa'id* and poems in other metres exist for caliphs of all stripes (many tried their own hand at versification). It stands to reason that 'Abd al-Rahman III and his successors would also solicit poetry in their bid for caliphal status.[73]

Aside from the *qasida*, another form for Arabic panegyrics was the *urjuza*, a poem in *rajaz* metre. *Rajaz* was a popular metre for historical poems, lower-brow than *qasida*, but appropriate for long narratives—light and easy to memorise.[74] It might be compared to the rhythmic metre in which *Carta dirige gressus* was written.[75] But in the Muslim world, poems were recited in an Arabic closer to the vernacular (albeit in a far higher register) than learned Latin was to contemporary Romance, and certainly to Germanic vernaculars like Old English, so they reached a wider audience.[76] Arabic court poetry was popular and effective propaganda. Paul Alvar in the ninth century claimed that young Christians preferred Arabic to Latin, and poetry to the gospels.[77] In a realm that was far from

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[69] See the essays in Cabrera, ed., *Abdarrahman III* for overviews and illustrations.

[70] On the interaction of poetry and Islamic ideology: Stetkevych, *Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*.

[71] The literature on *qasida* is enormous. A good place to start is with the essays in Sperl and Shackle, eds. *Qasida Poetry*.

[72] Stetkevych, *Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*, ix.

[73] García Gómez, "La poésie politique"; Stetkevych, "Poetics of Ceremony".

[74] Vernet, *Cultura*, 276; Frolov, "Place of Rajaz".

[75] Vernet, *Cultura*, 301 n. 30 gives a concise technical description and likens it to leonine hexameter, a medieval Latin hexameter that flourished in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

[76] On the lay audience for Latin poetry in early medieval Europe, see McKitterick, *Carolingians and the Written Word*, 227–32. For the difference between the spoken Arabic of Al-Andalus and the Arabic of high poetry, see Collins, *Early Medieval Spain*, 210–11.

[77] Paul Alvar, *Indiculus Luminosus*, c. 35, ed. Gil, 313–15. On Christianity under the Umayyad regime, see Collins, *Early Medieval Spain*, 203–19.

fully Muslim, poetry played a major role in disseminating the ruler's claim to authority.

One major *urjuza* survives describing 'Abd al-Rahman III's first twenty-odd years of rule.[78] It is the work of a famous author, Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi (860–939/246–328 AH). This Andalusi litterateur (*adib*) was born in Córdoba and served as a court poet to Umayyad *amirs* as well as to other Andalusi strongmen.[79] His *urjuza* recounts 'Abd al-Rahman III's military successes year by year from AH 301 to 322 (912–33), in language borrowed partially from the poetry of the 'Abbasid poet-caliph Ibn al-Mu'tazz (d. 908).[80] It is a small part of Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi's massive *Kitab al-'Iqd* ("Book of the Necklace").

The *'Iqd* is a huge encyclopaedia of *adab*, divided into twenty-four topical books, each named for a jewel in the "necklace".[81] *Adab* encapsulates the knowledge and culture that a well-bred individual ought to know, like the *artes liberales* of the contemporary Christian West.[82] It covers the arts of rulership, war, diplomacy, court etiquette, eloquence, literature and poetry, history, music, the natural sciences, courtship and love, food, drink, and banter. *Adab* inspired a literature of urbane collections, like the *'Uyun al-Akhbar* of Ibn Qutaiba (d. 889/276 AH) which influenced Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi and served as one of his main sources for the *'Iqd*.[83] Such books were compiled rather than composed. As Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi himself explained,

> my merit . . . is only that of compiling the reports, exercising good choice, summarising well, and writing an introduction at the beginning of the book. Everything else has been taken from the mouths of the learned and traditionally received from the wise and the literati.[84]

Yet Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi underplayed the extent of his authorship. As Walter Werkmeister has shown, Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi's borrowings from earlier

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[78] Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi, *al-'Iqd al-Farid*, IV, 501–27. I use Monroe's translation in "Historical *arjuza*", 80–95.

[79] Arié, "Un lettré hispano-musulman"; Werkmeister, *Quellenuntersuchungen*, 16–43.

[80] Monroe, "Historical *arjuza*", 70.

[81] Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi, *al-'Iqd al-Farid*, ed. Amin et al. Issa J. Boullata is working on a full English translation, currently with two volumes: *Unique Necklace*. For the structure and the contents of the *'Iqd*, see Werkmeister, *Quellenuntersuchungen*, 27–32 and *Unique Necklace*, I, xx–xxi. See also Rubiera Mata, *Literatura Hispanoárabe*, 177–80. Later the *'Iqd* won the epithet *al-farid* ("unique"). For its place in the *adab* tradition see Bray, " 'Abbasid Myth".

[82] Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi, *Unique Necklace*, I, xiii; Rubiera Mata, *Literatura Hispanoárabe*, 171–73.

[83] Werkmeister, *Quellenuntersuchungen* treats the sources and parallels of the *'Iqd*.

[84] Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi, *Unique Necklace*, I, 2.

collections vary significantly from those texts as they come down to us.[85] This may reflect the oral transmission of Arabic poetry in the middle ages, or the variegation of manuscript traditions, but it also reflects editorial decisions made by the compiler.[86] Furthermore, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi also included significant contributions of his own: "I added...some fine poems of mine so that the reader of this our book may know that our Western land, despite its remoteness...has a good share of verse and prose".[87] Our *urjuza* is one of these poems. Although it has been examined with respect to Umayyad ideology before, it has not been studied with the ideological significance of the *ʿIqd* in mind.[88] Yet like *Carta dirige gressus*, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi's *urjuza* is as important for its context as for its text.

The *urjuza* is longer and less fragmentary than *Carta dirige gressus*. The poem is the triumphant account of how a caliph restored order to an Islamic world plagued by *fitna*, "strife", and *shirk*, "polytheism" by systematically defeating rebels and infidels. This picture of ʿAbd al-Rahman III's reign justifies the Umayyad ruler's wars against other Iberian potentates. For from the ʿAbbasid or Fatimid point of view, ʿAbd al-Rahman III's conquests were themselves part of *fitna* and *shirk*.[89] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi's poem forestalls this interpretation. J.T. Monroe has treated the literary techniques and suggestive organisation by which Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi brings his subject to caliphal heights.[90] For example, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi emphasised the timeless legitimacy of ʿAbd al-Rahman III's caliphal status rather than dwelling on his assumption of the caliphate in 929. The poem therefore calls ʿAbd al-Rahman III *caliph* from the outset, even though his reign begins in AH 301 (912).[91] By opening his *urjuza* with a description of the whole world in turmoil, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi transforms internecine war in a far western province into the chaos of universal apostasy and rebellion. He heightens the drama by describing how violence broke out even at the time of the great festivals that bring all Muslims together:

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[85] Werkmeister, *Quellenuntersuchungen*, 57–61, 186–88, 463–69. See also Werkmeister, "Parallelstellen-Verzeichnis".

[86] Schoeler, *Oral and the Written*, 29.

[87] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *Unique Necklace*, I, 3. See Veglison Elías de Molins, "Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi" for Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi's "Andalusi literary nationalism".

[88] Monroe, "Historical *arjuza*".

[89] See Halm, "Refutation d'une note diplomatique" and Yalaoui, "Controverse".

[90] Monroe, "Historical *arjuza*", 72–80.

[91] Ibid., 74.

> Thus during *'Id* we have even had to pray under the protection of guards out
> of fear for an enemy intent upon revenge,
> Until we were given in rescue, like a light putting heaven and earth next to
> each other,
> The Caliph of God, whom He elected and chose over all creation,
> From the source of the Revelation, the above of divine wisdom, and the best
> descendants of the Imams.[92]

This recasts 'Abd al-Rahman III's hard battles with other Iberian rulers
as a narrative of pious unification. As Monroe writes, "the poet imposed
a unified vision of transcendent meaning on the strictly chronological
sequence of events".[93]

But the *adib* had other tools to legitimise 'Abd al-Rahman III's universal-
ist pretensions. Since the *'Iqd* as a whole proposes to encapsulate all *adab*,
Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi's historical *urjuza* defends 'Abd al-Rahman III's caliphal
legitimacy simply by its place within a jewel of this universal encyclo-
paedia. The historical *urjuza* falls at the end of the fifteenth book of the
'Iqd, the "Book of the second adorable jewel: on caliphs, their histories,
and battles".[94] This book collects historical anecdotes and arranges them
into a chronological narrative. This begins with the deeds of the prophet
and the rightly guided caliphs. It continues with the Umayyad caliphs. It
describes the *fitna* in which the 'Abbasids overthrew and massacred the
Umayyads, and their *dawla* ("state"), which Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi does not
honour with the name of a caliphate. It concludes with a section on the
"caliphs" in al-Andalus, which begins with 'Abd al-Rahman I, who never
claimed caliphal status in his lifetime, and ends with Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi's
own *urjuza* on the military exploits (*ghazawat*) of 'Abd al-Rahman III. Ibn
'Abd Rabbihi's *urjuza* thus falls at the end of a book that gives a complete
account of all caliphs since the prophet, which relegates the 'Abbasids to
mere usurpers and overlooks the Fatimids entirely. It presents the *amirate*
of 'Abd al-Rahman I and his sons as the continuation of the Umayyad
caliphate in al-Andalus.

The concluding *urjuza* therefore casts a triumphant light on the histori-
cal anecdotes that precede it. These anecdotes are for the most part bor-
rowed straight from other authors like the ninth-century historian Khalifa

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92 Ibid., 81, lines 24–27.
93 Ibid., 74.
94 Boullata's translation: Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi, *Unique Necklace*, 4 (*Kitab al-'asjada al-thani-
yya fi al-khulafa' wa tawarikhihim wa ayyamihi*). The word *al-'asjada* also means "gold", a
matter of significance given the exclusive caliphal right to mint gold coins (*sikka*).

ibn Khayyat.[95] But simply by its placement in this book, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi's poem refashions them in the image of ʿAbd al-Rahman III's caliphal ideology. At the same time, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi's panegyric gains significance as the final justification for this ideological vision of the past, the final, triumphant word in the book on caliphs:

> Finally the *imam* turned back, having eased the pain from his sorrows,
> Having freed the wilds from their defilements, and having cleansed the
> towns of their impurities.[96]

By placing this panegyric where he does, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi makes ʿAbd al-Rahman III's reign the triumphant resumption of legitimate caliphal rule at the end of a period of irreligious strife (the *fitna*). The work of legitimation is done not so much by the tricks of Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi's poetry, but by the accumulated prestige of the literature which forms the rest of the book. In this great encyclopaedia that purports to be a guide to all matters, from a self-proclaimed arbiter of *adab*, the force of the panegyric is not so much in its verses but in its surroundings. The *ʿIqd* moves the whole Islamic world to al-Andalus, places ʿAbd al-Rahman III at its head, and maintains the compiler, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, as the link between them. Given the prestige and wide dissemination of *adab* and *rajaz* poetry, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi has potentially done the new caliph a great service. What did he expect by way of remuneration?

In *Carta dirige gressus*, the identity, let alone the ulterior motives, of Æthelstan's panegyrist was dim. *Carta dirige gressus* served as a mnemonic of obligation in gift-books: it tells us about Æthelstan's use of poetry in relation to the recipients of his munificence, but we remain uncertain as to its author's hopes of recompense.[97] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi's expectations are clearer. "The south winds are only remotely related to his beneficence", he cooed of his patron's liberality, "while the clouds are shamed by his generosity" (28). This *adib* was going to be paid for his services. For the *ʿIqd*, in its survey of all things worth knowing, did not fail to explain how caliphs show generosity, an old theme of *adab*. In fact, the whole third book of the *ʿIqd*, the Book of the Chrysolite, is about "generous men and liberal givers".[98] Anecdote after anecdote describes poets praising kings, viziers,

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[95] Werkmeister, *Quellenuntersuchungen*, 134–35, 494–97.
[96] Monroe, "Historical *arjuza*", 94, lines 444–45.
[97] For the remuneration of poets in a Carolingian setting, see Garrison, "Emergence of Carolingian Latin Literature", 128–29.
[98] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *Unique Necklace*, I, 151–225.

and caliphs, and asking for monetary rewards. The forwardness of these money-grubbing pleas is part of their fun and a platform for ingenuity. One poet wins several thousand dirhams from the ʿAbbasid *wazir* Yahya ibn Khalid ibn Barmak using the following charming verses:

> I asked Generosity, "Are you a free man?" He said, "No.
> I am a slave of Yahya ibn Khalid".
> I asked, "By being purchased?" He said, "Rather by inheritance:
> He inherited me from one forefather after another".[99]

Rewarding poets is the path to great rulership: a pointed message to a young court faced with a literary culture based on Baghdadi characters like Ibn Barmak. When Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi lists the three main virtues of ʿAbd al-Rahman III in the preface to his *urjuza*, he includes generosity along with the caliph's buildings and his status. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi has a poem for the ungenerous too, in the first book of the *ʿIqd*, on rulership (*sultan*):

> On this subject I said:
> "If you come to a person in order to honour him
> And he ignores your act, then it is better to abandon him.
> Seeking alternate people and turning your back brings comfort.
> Other people will give you sufficiency, if one is unsuited.
> A man who accepts humiliation for himself
> Deserves to have his lofty nose cut off".[100]

From the author of a collection of *adab* that legitimises ʿAbd al-Rahman III's universalist claims by placing him at the centre of a cultured universe, in an Islamic world with three competing caliphs and one shared literary culture, this is no idle threat. By the start of the tenth century, *adab* had become an essential accoutrement of caliphal courts. But the caliphs who patronised Ibn Qutaiba, al-Jahiz, al-Mubarrad, and the other literary figures from whom Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi drew were all ʿAbbasid. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi was a Córdoban author who could appropriate this culture for al-Andalus. If the prospect of Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi's "turning his back" was a threat (at least in theory), his ability to put Baghdadi culture to work for the Umayyads was worth rewarding. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi achieved wealth and status as a court poet under the Andalusi rulers.[101] Poetry and literature would long play a role in the prestige that justified Umayyad caliphal

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[99] Ibid., I, 183.
[100] Ibid., I, 56.
[101] Lévi-Provençal, *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane*, III, 492–93.

claims and kept them alive into the eleventh century. The art of clever compilation, "my merit" as Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi puts it in the *ʿIqd*'s introduction, was as much a part of this justification, and reason to patronise an author, as the art of composing metre itself.

Conclusion

In recent years, scholars like Wolfram Drews and Jenny Oesterle have stressed the potential of comparative studies for the study of premodern kings.[102] The ʿAbbasids and the Carolingians usurped official power almost at the same moment and legitimated their coups by similar methods.[103] The Ottonians and Salians defended their imperial status at the same time as the Fatimids defended their caliphal authority.[104] In this study, I have tried to show how the sons of Alfred and the sons of ʿAbd al-Rahman I justified their ideological innovations with similar means in the early decades of the tenth century.

Æthelstan cobbled a hegemonic ideology from Carolingian precedents and Anglo-Saxon realities. His panegyrist consequently refashioned a Carolingian poem to fit an Anglo-Saxon setting. ʿAbd al-Rahman III transported a universal caliphate to the west to make sense of his own Iberian hegemony. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi gave him the literary tools with which to justify this audacious claim. In both cases, the poem's context promoted its subject's and in the case of the *ʿIqd* its author's interests as much as the text. Both poets turned to external contexts (the Carolingian Empire, ʿAbbasid court culture) to explain or justify the novel ideologies of their patrons. They refashioned materials from these contexts and wove them into their own cultural matrix—recitation, gift books, *adab*. Undergirding these processes were two cultures of the book. The legitimising power of the written word stood upon the literary accomplishments of the Carolingian and Alfredian Renaissances for Anglo-Saxon England and the ʿAbbasid *adab* tradition for the Andalusi Umayyads. These older traditions themselves depended upon the authority of the Bible and the Qurʾan, which confirmed the power of the word.

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[102] Drews, "Transkulturelle Perspektive"; Oesterle, *Kalifat und Königtum*, 22–31.

[103] Drews, *Die Karolinger und die Abbasiden von Bagdad*, with a comparative discussion of historiography and panegyric at 154–67.

[104] Oesterle, *Kalifat und Königtum*.

Yet powerful differences remain. Despite Æthelstan's considerable successes, he never possessed the wealth or sway of his contemporary ʿAbd al-Rahman III. We know much more about Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi than about Æthelstan's anonymous panegyrist, and the *adib*'s poem was surely more successful. Latin was at a remove from the Old English vernacular, and it is clear from the transmission of *Carta dirige gressus* that its copiers did not fully understand the poem. A closer comparison might be between the Old English poem on the battle of Brunanburh inserted into the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and our panegyric in the *ʿIqd*. Nevertheless, comparison between *Carta dirige gressus* and Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi's *urjuza* brings out a similarity I have tried to stress: the ambiguous relationship between an innovating royal culture and its external inspirations in the early years of ideological innovation. Innovating kings turned to foreign or historical sources for legitimation. When they broke tradition by their actions and titles, with only the past to go on, panegyrists were there to turn innovation into new tradition.

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