From Aachen to Al-Andalus: the journey of Deacon Bodo (823–76)

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Sometime in the first six months of 838, Bodo, a palace deacon at the court of Louis the Pious, converted to Judaism, changed his name to Eleazar and removed himself to Muslim Spain. The incident is well attested in various sources although the reasons for his abandonment of Christianity are not clearly given. In 840, a year after arriving in Spain, Bodo, now Eleazar, engaged in a debate with Álvaro of Córdoba, a Christian writer and scholar living in Muslim territory who claimed to be of Jewish ancestry. Their correspondence provides illuminating insights into the framework of cultural and religious experience of this period. Bodo’s self-imposed exile from Christian society is also an important rejection of the Carolingian cultural programme, a voice of protest that was probably more widespread than Carolingian society would have us believe. What follows is partly an analysis of the main textual sources that brings into relief personal, social and political themes seen to lie behind the theological debates of the period. There is also an attempt to uncover aspects of Bodo’s earlier life before his conversion.

Bodo at the court of New Israel (838–9)

Bodo’s passage from Christianity to Judaism has been described as a shocking event, variously attributed to the influence of the Jewish party at court, the role of Jewish merchants and commercial interests, even contact with the Jewish empire of the Khazars. The story of Bodo also brings out the traditional fears of Jewish proselytism coupled with the powerful attraction that Judaism exerted on parts of the population and on some Carolingian theologians.¹ But it is also the case that this dissent

and rejection of Christianity may have had more to do with the role of Old Testament exegesis at the court of Louis the Pious, where a biblically centred political culture underpinned the self-presentation of Carolingian kingship. Here, at court, a veritable David ruled over New Israel: scholars such as Claudius of Turin and Hrabanus Maurus gave lectures on the Pentateuch. The theme of Frankish kingship viewed as an embodiment of New Israel and the role of Old Testament commentary has been much studied and noted, but the importance of Old Testament texts validating kingship and sovereignty has not been taken up in connection with Bodo. It may be more illuminating to set aside the reported scandal of the event and return to a fresh examination of the sources that mention Bodo. This perspective casts new light on aspects of Bodo’s personal and intellectual formation prior to his rejection of Christianity in 838 and on the nature of his subsequent writings.

The apostasy of Deacon Bodo is recorded after troubled times at the court of Louis the Pious. Following the revolts of the 830s, the aged king conferred on his youngest son Charles a part of the kingdom. Nithard, the illegitimate son of one of Charlemagne’s daughters, and a historian who has left an important first-hand account of these years, tells us that in August 838 Louis vested Charles with the sword and the crown, the culmination of the father’s restored authority over his other

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sons. This had been preceded at Aachen in 837 by a ceremony where Abbot Hilduin of St-Denis and Count Gerald of Paris took an oath of allegiance to the young Charles.1 We also know from sources written many years later that Bodo may have been at St-Denis as a young cleric in 823 or at least served under Hilduin before being attached to the palace; but what had been his allegiances and the shape of his career in those intervening years? Later we shall see that Bodo had some comments to make on the subject of morals and religious belief at the court, and that he also may have had close ties to the Alemannic circle around Empress Judith that grew up after her marriage to Louis in 819. Bodo was certainly acquainted with the influential Walahfrid Strabo who had arrived in Aachen in 829 from Fulda to be tutor to the young Charles. Did the connection go back earlier? And how closely was he also linked to the young Charles?

What, then, are the sources that mention Bodo and his apostasy? These remain the accounts by Prudentius in The Annals of St. Bertin (hereafter AB) for 839 and for 847; an exchange of letters between Bodo and Álvaro of Córdoba written in 840; a poem addressed to Bodo by Strabo, of uncertain date; a letter by Lupus of Ferrières of 838; a passage written in 846 by Amolo, archbishop of Lyons, featured in his polemic against the Jews; and finally, a most important letter probably written in 876 by Hincmar, archbishop of Rheims to Charles the Bald. The principal record of the apostasy is the AB 839 entry given below:

Meanwhile something very distressing happened, something to be bewailed by all the children of the Catholic Church. Rumour spread the news and the Emperor found out that the deacon Bodo, an Alemann by birth and deeply imbued from his earliest childhood in the Christian religion with the scholarship of the court clergy with sacred and secular learning, a man who only the previous year had requested permission from the Emperor and Empress to go on pilgrimage to Rome and had been granted this permission and been loaded with gifts: this man seduced by the enemy of the human race had abandoned Christianity and converted to Judaism . . . Thus he was circumcised,

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1 Nithard, Histoire des fils de Louis de Pieux, ed. and tr. Ph. Lauer (Paris, 1964), I, 6, p. 26. Events covered in J.L. Nelson, Charles the Bald (London, 1992), pp. 91–7. At the time of Charles’s majority he was old enough to have had a chapel of his own, and ‘his mother’s friends became his’ (p. 93). The palace ‘chaplains’ comprised an array of duties: clerks, administrators, secretaries, and chaplains. ‘Capella’ covered all of these, and this fluidity frequently shocked reform-minded observers. See P. Depreux, Prosopographie de l’entourage de Louis Le Pieux (781–840) (Sigmaringen, 1997), p. 19: ‘La Chapelle était donc un ensemble aux contours mal définis: il faut nous accommoder de ce flou.’ What space did Bodo occupy? Was he part of Charles’s ‘chapel’ just before he left the court?
let his hair and beard grow and adopted – or rather usurped – the name of Eleazar . . .

Giving the fullest record, if not necessarily the first, this part of the 839 annal, close in time to the event, provides the only description of the man, and the supposed importance of what took place. The simple enumeration of detail suggests that this AB source can be better understood as a moral tale belonging, perhaps, to a wider literary background of Biblical references. The year’s entry in the annal can be read as a series of literary conventions rather than a historical narrative, and this approach furnishes a truer understanding of the first Bodo source.

The entry for 839 as a whole is relatively long, the main subject the instability caused by continuing discord between Louis and his sons. Around this central topic, a number of subsidiary events are positioned: the appearance of pirates and rebels at the limits of the empire, the flooding off the coast of Frisia and the conversion of a court chaplain to Judaism. Ambassadors arrive from another land, shooting stars appear in the night sky, and a report is given of a dream by an Anglo-Saxon priest. The cycle of the year is taken from winter to winter: the entry begins at Christmas 838 and ends just before the next one.

The record of this year is an extensive journey, the movement of a wandering medieval court throughout the empire. The narrative tracks over the territory of the kingdom, pausing at frontiers to defend them, mentioning foreign envoys that wish to cross these, and requesting safe passage. The year’s entry also gives a detailed survey of territories for a proposed division between the sons. More importantly, between Christmas 838 and Easter 839, the annalist inserts news of two incidents: Bodo’s apostasy and the flood in Frisia. Two events are presented as components that communicate a wider moral lesson to support the main story: discord between a father and his sons and ensuing disorder and disunity in the kingdom. The entire Bodo story and the flood in Frisia are exempla to develop a longer argument.

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5 Grat, pp. 27–8: ‘Preacterea die septimo kalendas ianuarii, die videlicet passionis beati Stephani protomarystis, tanta inundatio contra morem maritimorum aestuum per totam paene Frisiam occupavit . . .’
Bodo’s famous first appearance, then, is a small supporting example in a larger picture: Old Testament allusions abound in the first section of this AB entry to make this case. The flood covered the land, the Father is displeased with his sons who seek his blessing. In the priest’s dream, there is a reference to the dream that Joseph explained to the Pharaoh: the years of plenty followed by the years of famine in Genesis XL1.29–30, succeeded by the fog as one of the plagues in Exodus IX–X. There is also a reference to the bold letters in the Anglo-Saxon priest’s dream that need to be read and understood, as in Daniel V where Daniel reads the writing on the wall at the Babylonian court. The narrator’s ‘we weep to say it’ when introducing and recounting the Bodo episode is linked to the line in the priest’s dream about ‘souls of the saints [who] cry out to God with incessant weeping’. In effect, the dream described is an extreme form of the ordering of detail to conform with a moral argument. The tone of the AB 839 passage thus reflects a developed world of Biblical interpretation and reference recycled back onto contemporary history.

We may speculate that the source for the details about Bodo was news passed by word of mouth, that may have been embellished as it spread: ‘rumour spread the news’, the text tells us. What can these ancient details tell us today? That the man was educated both in sacred and secular learning, an Aleman by birth. It is curious that education should be stressed, but it is most likely that Prudentius suggests as extraordinary that this learned man renounced the Christian faith despite his intellectual formation. However, the opposite could also be suggested: that he converted precisely because he had engaged with Biblical texts so intensively, and participated in the teaching given by Hrabanus Maurus and others. As the source tells us that he has been studying since childhood, Bodo was very probably educated in an atmosphere of textual debate and investigation into Old Testament books.

A topic of principal interest to Carolingian scholars, steeped as they were in the Commentaries of Jerome, was the Hebraica Veritas, the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, considered to be the most important source for establishing the text of the Latin version. The interest in this ‘original’ text leads to another related topic, namely the question of Jewish Biblical exegesis, which was considered important for an understanding of the ‘historical’ sense of the Old Testament. Such was

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6 The description of Bodo: ‘quod lacrimabiliter dicimus – Christi fide, sese Iudaeum professus est’. The dream is: ‘et nisi iste animae sanctorum tam incessanter cum fletu ad Deum clamarent, iam aliquatenus finis tantorum malorum in christiano populo esset’ (Grat, pp. 28–9).

the intellectual atmosphere at the court of Louis, where the king ruled over New Israel and Hrabanus Maurus was known to lecture to a sophisticated audience, able to understand the restricted code of allegory and figurative exegesis, assisted by lectores. It is probable that, as a gifted child, Bodo was put into preparation for holy orders at an early age, perhaps as an oblate at one of the monastic centres of the Alamannian region such as Reichenau, or possibly Fulda on the Saxon frontier, and that he absorbed this exegetical culture. In the heated atmosphere of court politics Prudentius, the court annalist, selects telling details: the man is educated, perhaps privileged, and an Alamman. The precise manner of his conversion cannot be known: some have proposed that he might have been a secret Jew before he left the court, others that he converted at a time and place on his journey south. Did he go to Rome as he told the emperor and empress, or did he head straight for the Spanish March? All this remains pure conjecture, although some have tried to suggest a passage through Ausona (Vic) in the March.

Two annal sources give a date for the event, and one Reichenau annal actually pinpoints a day, month, and precise time when he is supposed to have lapsed. The source does not make clear, however, if this refers to a ceremony that took place, or the moment in which Bodo decided to become a Jew. Why should such an exact time be noted? It suggests that someone attached to Reichenau, or connected with the monastery, was in Bodo’s confidence. It is also noteworthy that this entry for 838 should have Bodo and Strabo crossing textually, for the annal also records Strabo’s appointment as abbot of Reichenau. It may be that someone from Reichenau brought the news of Bodo’s apostasy to the imperial court at Bodman in Swabia on Lake Constance (near Reichenau) in Lent 839. The AB 839 text pinpoints the arrival of the news in April of that year. The AB 839 source also makes it clear that Bodo set out for Rome sometime in 838 and reached Zaragoza in mid-August. The months leading up to August 838 were the period when Charles attained his majority and was formally invested with the crown at Quierzy and Strabo officially ceased to be his tutor, leaving to become abbot of Reichenau. As these events would have been prepared for, it suggests two things: first, that this was the end of an era for both Strabo and Bodo and may have been an additional factor in Bodo’s decision; second, it is possible that Strabo knew of the decision when...

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7 These lectures are treated in Gorman, ‘Claudius of Turin’ and De Jong, ‘The Empire as ecclesia’, pp. 195–207, where such biblical commentaries can sometimes be viewed as statements of political positions. The question of Hebraica Veritas is discussed in B.S. Albert, ‘Adversus Iudaeos in the Carolingian Empire’, in G. Stroumsa and J.C.B. Mohr (eds), Contra Iudaeos. Ancient and Medieval Polemics between Christian and Jews (Tübingen, 1996), pp. 119–42.
he went to Reichenau in 838, and reporting this, was able to give such
precise information with the date. The connection between the two
men survives in the crossing of their comings and goings in the 838
entry of the Continuation. It may be therefore that the first news of
Bodo’s apostasy came out of Alemannia and not Spain.\(^8\) Bodo asked
both the emperor and empress for permission to go on the pilgrimage
to Rome. Later, when the news of his flight is known, Prudentius says
this was a ‘distressing episode for [both] the Emperor and Empress’. This
suggests a close connection with the royal couple; and possibly, in
the case of the empress, because Bodo was an Aleman.

More unusual and probably embroidered from this oral account
cited earlier, is the celebrated description of Bodo’s change of appearance
that captures his passage from one religion to another. In this transition,
the body becomes a metaphor for the dismemberment of one identity
and the reconstitution of another. Using a metonymic device, different parts of the body of a Christian – hair, beard, clothes, circumcision – are transformed to represent the whole collective body of Judaism. The episode is described in terms of organic change (hair and beard growing), cultural transformation (clothes), and bodily reshaping (circumcision). Prudentius seeks by this memorable process to make Bodo unknown even to himself and the rest of the world that he previously inhabited: Bodo has become, as it were, another species. His anatomical shape is taken to pieces and then reassembled as the representative of another collectivity: the Jewish people.

Before going further with the description of Bodo, it is possible at
this point to infer from the AB text that Bodo’s abandonment of Christi-
anity is yet another example of the sinful state of the empire and of Louis’s vain efforts to hold the body politic together. The moral lesson
preached by Prudentius in this text as a whole is that the body politic has fallen apart. This is represented by Bodo’s body, dismembered into
fragments and reassembled as an another body alien to the well-being
of the empire. The following personal and political themes in this
passage are organized around the image of the body; an image which,

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\(^8\) B. Blumenkranz, *Juifs et Chrétiens dans le Monde Occidental 430–1096* (Paris, 1960), p. 166, suggests that he might have converted some time before; A. Cabaniss, ‘Bodo-Eleazar: A Famous Jewish Convert’, *Jewish Quarterly Review* 42 (1952), pp. 313–28, at p. 322, has two phases; A.J. Zuckerman, *A Jewish Principedom in Feudal France* (New York, 1972), p. 275, routes Bodo through Ausona (Vic) in northern Spain, a town with an important Jewish population at this period. For Ausona see Bachrach, *Early Medieval Jewish Policy*, pp. 69–70. The Reichenau annals *Annales Augiensiae* (*MGH SS* I, p. 68, record Bodo’s apostasy and Strabo’s appointment as abbot in the same entry for 838. The Continuation also has an entry for 838 (*MGH SS* I, p. 49), giving the exact time of the apostasy, between eight and nine o’clock in the morning before the vigil of Ascension day, i.e. 22 May 838. The news is recorded as arriving in April 839 as Löwe, ‘Die Apostasie’, p. 158 indicates. For background to these events see Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, pp. 91–7.
through analogy, becomes the connecting device between public and private:

a. The body of the kingdom that is being broken up by civil war.
b. The body of the king that is breaking up because of the family quarrel.
c. The extremities of the body politic that are attacked by enemies.
d. The English priest who leaves his body to see the sinfulness of the world.
e. The body of Bodo that is broken up and reassembled as a Jew.

Finally, it might be suggested that the king has lost any connection with the body of God. He is suffering, he is abused, perhaps he has had his blessing from God removed. This has been repeatedly illustrated by the contrast in the language between the person of the father confronting his sons, and the formal person of the emperor carrying out his divinely ordained ministerium. The language of Prudentius’s text describing Louis, father and emperor, sets out the human failings of the man that have weakened the office of the ruler, so that the person of the king and the role of kingship are set against each other, leading to a removal of authority from the office of emperor. This suggests a portrayal of the king’s two bodies, human by nature and divine by grace. One is mortal and corruptible; the other is beyond the person and endures unchanged. What matters for an understanding of this section of the AB text are the interconnected frames of reference set out above. Thus, the idea of the king’s two bodies is parodied by the two bodies of Bodo and Eleazar; Louis’s abandonment of Christianity constitutes a violation of the proper use of the body that stems from Louis’s failures in the rule of the empire; Louis’s failures have weakened the connection between the king’s two bodies – the one natural, the other divine.

The manner in which Bodo is redesignated as Eleazar is a casting out, a ritual that is performed following his self-imposed exile. Only at this one moment in the entire AB 839 is there a direct intervention of the narrator: ‘we weep to say it’, the only personal reference in the text. The most unusual aspect of Bodo’s description is that it is given at all, for on the whole, Old Testament techniques and the normal style

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9 Louis’s penance at Attigny in 822, and the deposition by his sons in 833, despite restoration at Compiègne in 834, was seen by some to have removed his divine authority. See M. De Jong, ‘Power and Humility in Carolingian Society: The Public Penance of Louis the Pious’, EME 1 (1992), pp. 29–52. For a discussion of the king’s two bodies see E. Kantorowicz, The King’s Two Bodies (Princeton, 1957), p. 81. Here, an acclamation of Amalar of Metz’s compares Louis the individual and the eternal kingly figure of the biblical David: ‘Divo Hludovico vita! Novo David perennitas!’
of the AB text eschew detailed physical description.\textsuperscript{10} In contrast, the passage here that recounts Bodo’s personal appearance stresses the revulsion caused by his apostasy: the Frankish man made to become a stereotype of a foreign person, the ‘other’. Each detail can be said to be the opposite of what he was: short-haired, clean-shaven, unmarried, uncircumcised, a man of peace. Now reversed, he is an aggressive proselytizer, circumcised, long-haired, who marries, and even forces his nephew to convert to Judaism. The significant word in the text is ‘usurped’, for Bodo has usurped the name of Eleazar, and metonymically through the name, a complete identity that is not rightfully his. From now on he is another: to Christians, according to this source, he is a man who has been rubbed out (Bodo) and replaced by a man he has no right to become (Eleazar). The problem of depicting a Jew is apparent: if a prophet or a patriarch were conventionally described in a pre-Christian context, this would be done in a positive manner to prefigure Christianity. In this case, Prudentius has sought to shape a negative anti-Jewish argument by dwelling on the physical details. In fact, the ‘warrior’s gear’ alluded to in the text has been identified as the dress of a non-Muslim in Arab territories. It has provoked some debate. In Prudentius’s account it would only serve to heighten Eleazar’s ‘otherness’.\textsuperscript{11}

Finally, this other person crosses a frontier that is corporeal, indicated by his changed physical appearance, and one that is also religious, implicit in his assumption of a new faith. Eleazar (the new person), located in the Spanish March just over the border in Zaragoza, has also crossed a geographical and political frontier. But this frontier, described by Prudentius, is more imaginative than geographical. It becomes a recreated world, rather than an actual territory or place, set between Christendom and Islam. On the other side of that boundary was to be found heresy, paganism, idolatry or Judaism. This is the imagined place where Bodo has gone, a move to a different reading of the same Old Testament texts. In a sense, then, Bodo has moved from one body of texts to another; he has crossed a textual frontier.

Immediately a process of writing Bodo out began. That same year, 838, in a letter written by Lupus – soon to become abbot of Ferrières


\textsuperscript{11} B. Blumenkranz, ‘De nouveau sur Bodo-Eleazar?’, \textit{Revue des Études Juives} 113 (1953), pp. 36–41, at p. 39; Zuckerman, \textit{A Jewish Princedom}, pp. 275–7; it is unlikely that Bodo wore military dress as Cabaniss, ‘Bodo-Eleazar’, p. 322, suggests. Bodo changes clothes to become a Jew, putting on a different belt. This parodies Louis’s deposition and reinstatement, where he first removed and then replaced, his imperial vestments and \textit{cingulum}. © Blackwell Publishing Ltd 2005 Early Medieval Europe 2005 13 (2)
Lupus excuses himself to an unidentified source for not having sent a letter of consolation. He says it was left with Bodo who never delivered the message ‘either through treachery or neglect’. As Bodo has gone, written out of the Frankish world, he has become a convenient person to blame.  

The subject of personal ‘frontiers’ appears again in 840, when Eleazar disputes with Álvaro the claim to an authentic identity. In 847 he will again appear in the \textit{AB}, this time portrayed threatening the political frontier between Christendom and Islam. But for now, this new figure of Eleazar in another geographical space, lies outside the political and religious control of the Christian sovereign. Bodo has left behind, as it were, the court of New Israel, and is now captured in other sources.

\textbf{Eleazar in the land of the Visigoths (840)}

The exchange of letters between Álvaro of Córdoba, a Christian in Al-Andalus, and Eleazar is preserved in one manuscript copied in the tenth century in Visigothic minuscule. The manuscript, in the archive of the Cathedral of Córdoba, is the work of two different hands and contains other work of Álvaro’s. The letters are numbers XIV–XX of his collected correspondence, one of which is dated 840 (XVI, 6). It is not

\begin{itemize}
\item L. Levillain, \textit{Loup de Ferrières. Correspondance}, 2 vols (Paris, 1927), I, 82–4, Letter 11. Lupus was another Alemain close to Bodo. To leave a letter, through an intermediary (Marcward, abbot of Prüm), for Bodo to deliver, would indicate this. This letter was written in September 838 as Levillain’s note suggests. We have here an earlier reference to Bodo’s apostasy, that precedes \textit{AB} 839. Perhaps the Reichenau annal is also earlier: both these references then may come before Prudentius. Löwe, ‘Die Apostasie’, p. 160, n. 16, refers to some doubt that this is Bodo, but the phrase ‘quibus aut fraud aut negligentia detraxit effectum’ is employed. Lupus had visited the court at Frankfurt in 836, and in 837 he was invited to appear a second time. Lupus was eagerly using Alemannic links to gain advancement through Judith, and would have been close to the other Alemians, Bodo and Strabo. This is also suggested by E. Ward, ‘The Career of the Empress Judith 819–843’, Ph.D. thesis (London, 2003), pp. 230–3. Ward also emphasizes the importance of these young Alemans connected to Judith. In this same Letter 11 Lupus hopes for some preferment from Judith. It is not surprising that he is quick to distance himself from Bodo.
\end{itemize}
open to doubt that these letters were written to Eleazar. Whilst the letters address their recipient as ‘Transgressor’, the salutations of the first three mention Eleazar by name. Later in the correspondence, Álvaro refers to Eleazar’s presence at the Frankish court (XVIII, 14), and to his marriage (XVIII, 16). There are also statements by Álvaro that refer to Eleazar’s activities and opinions of the court, which will be addressed later. Since the letters can be dated to 840, this ties in with the arrival of Eleazar in Arab territory. There is also another reference to him as a man of Gaul (XVI, 1).

The entire correspondence consists of seven letters: four by Álvaro and three by Eleazar. Unfortunately those by Eleazar are incomplete, only some sixty lines or so survive, as someone appears to have removed folios and erased lines in the manuscript in order to destroy his comments. His arguments therefore have to be reconstructed from Álvaro’s responses that refer to statements made by Eleazar. Of course, there is no way of knowing if, in his replies, Álvaro ignored some of the better arguments that he could not deal with. Once again, as in the Frankish world, Eleazar has been ‘rubbed out’ – just as Prudentius and Lupus each attempted to do in their own way.  

The contents of the letters have been studied, and it has been noted that the main topics fit into the conventional themes of Jewish–Christian polemics. The three main issues are: the question of the Messiah; a discussion about the True Israel (Verus Israel); and whether Christianity is a fulfilment of the Old Testament. All these matters involve the two antagonists in the standard use of biblical exegesis common to these debates, through the repeated use of figurative and allegorical examples.

81–218 and PL 121, pp. 475–514. All references to the letters above give both a letter number and a section number. When the text is quoted, the reference also includes a page number. The name ‘Eleazar’ is used in view of his changed identity, but reverts to ‘Bodo’ when discussing him in relation to Frankish sources.

14 B. Blumenkranz, ‘De nouveau sur Bodo-Eleazar?’, pp. 35–6 suggests that new techniques of digitization could be used to reveal some of the missing text. Blumenkranz also has reconstructed a summary of Eleazar’s supposed statements in ‘Un pamphlet juif médiéval latin de polémique antichrétienne’, Revue d’Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuse 24 (1954), pp. 401–13.

15 The most comprehensive study of the letters is Blumenkranz, Juifs et Chrétiens; also important is Zuckerman, A Jewish Kingdom, pp. 274–84. J.C. Lara Olmo, ‘La Polémica de Álvaro de Córdoba con Bodón-Eleazar’, in C. Del Valle Rodríguez (ed.), La controversia Judeo-Cristiana en España (Desde los orígenes hasta el siglo XIII) (Madrid, 1998), pp. 331–59 gives a full analysis. I have to thank Sr. Lara Olmo for making available to me a Spanish translation of the letters. For the Jewish–Christian debates as a genre see also: H. Maccoby, Judaism on Trial. Jewish–Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages (London, 1982); R. Chazan, Barcelona and Beyond. The Disputation of 1263 and its Aftermath (California, 1992); J. Cohen, Living Letters of the Law. Ideas of the Jews in Medieval Christianity (Berkeley, 1999); A.S. Abulafia, Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance (London, 1995). Cohen provides an excellent recent survey. Also valuable for the Carolingian period is B.S. Albert, Adversus Judaeos (see n. 7 above).
The letters are the only known source where Eleazar is recorded in his own words: but even these fuller statements are still dominated by silences, so his voice has to be reconstructed. Once again, the existence of this figure is filtered through a hostile Christian source, yet the picture that emerges here is more complete because there is a form, albeit limited, of dialogue. But this text is important for another reason: Eleazar is depicted by a non-Frankish source. The discourse in these letters covers issues that are outside Frankish control.

The opening debate regarding the Messiah centres around a frequently cited passage of Genesis XLIX.10 that is presented by Álvaro in the opening letter (XIV, 4): ‘The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, / Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, / Until Shiloh come; / And unto him shall the gathering of the people be.’ This is the conventional Christian argument that the absence of political sovereignty of the Jews is proof that the Messiah has come, and the prophecy of this verse has been fulfilled. Álvaro lists the kings of Judah since the book of Daniel to demonstrate that the Jews had sovereigns up to the coming of Jesus, just as the Genesis passage foretold (XIV, 4,5). This debating point was traditional, but it can be inferred from Álvaro’s reply to Eleazar that the former palace deacon, well trained in Biblical studies and Jewish commentary, introduces a non-Christian argument. He proposes that the verse in Genesis refers not to the Jews’ political sovereignty (shebet meaning ‘sceptre’) but in fact to the tribe of Judah (shebet meaning ‘tribe’). Eleazar therefore argues that the Genesis verse refers to the survival of the tribe of Judah and not the sovereignty of the Jewish people. Other references in this verse link Eleazar and Strabo in an interesting way. The Jewish reading of this verse, responding to the survival of the royal line, whereas Eleazar refers to the survival of a people. Other references in this verse link Eleazar and Strabo in an interesting way. 

The use of Genesis XLIX.10 to prefigure Christ is a topic repeated by all Church Fathers and many Carolingian commentators. For a recent survey of Genesis commentary at this time see M. Fox, ‘Alcuin the Exegete: The Evidence of Quaestiones in Genesim’, in Chazelle and Edwards, The Study of the Bible, pp. 39–60. A variation on this tradition is found in Strabo’s De imagine Tetrici, where Scintilla ends her speech by prophesying the unending fecundity of the royal line: ‘The kingdom of these fathers will never lack for seed/until the King comes flashing in a cloud of fire’ (De imagine, 87–8). This links this topic with ‘the divinely sanctioned authority of the Carolingian Kings and the regeneration of their seed until Judgement day’ (P. Godman, Poets and Emperors. Frankish Politics and Carolingian Poetry (Oxford, 1987), pp. 141–2). Translation of Strabo: M.W. Herren, ‘The De Imagine Tetrici of Walahfrid Strabo: Edition and Translation’, The Journal of Medieval Latin 1 (1991), pp. 118–39. Herren questions Godman’s reading in ‘Walahfrid Strabo’s De imagine Tetrici: An Interpretation’, in R. North and T. Hofstra (eds), Latin Culture and Medieval Germanic Europe (Groningen, 1992), p. 29. Following Godman, we infer that Strabo is addressing Louis’s fecundity in producing an heir at the time of the disputes about inheritance of the empire, and of course praising Judith and Charles. This is a telling use by Strabo of the same biblical verse to mention the survival of a royal line, whereas Eleazar refers to the survival of a people. The debate about a Jewish king and the Christian denial of the survival of a Jewish sovereign state into the ninth century is taken by some to refer to the Khazar empire. Álvaro says the Jews are accustomed to look for a king overseas: ‘Soliti enim erant ultra mare inquirere . . . regem
usual Christian position, may also have come from Eleazar’s new-found Jewish colleagues in Córdoba. The argument appears to rattle Álvaro who is sarcastic about Eleazar’s rapid progress in Hebrew (XVI, 1).

The opening argument of the debate draws attention to another aspect of this text that has hitherto gone unremarked: the relative status of each disputant, Christian and Jew, in the Arab territory of Al-Andalus. The question of the legal status of Jews and Christians in Spain is important for two reasons. First, Jews and other non-Muslims living under Islamic rule (while enjoying some internal autonomy in religious and most civil matters) were subject to the jurisdiction of Islamic law. Second, the status of Jews was the same as that of the Christians, both subjects of the Islamic state, albeit second-class ones. Members of the two religions were subsumed under a broader category of infidel: the *dhimmis*, who were ‘people of the Book’, non-Muslims recognized by the prophet Muhammad as recipients of divinely revealed scripture. The background to the letters underlines the fact that the dispute takes place in a Muslim state, outside the sovereign domain of Christendom; so Christian arguments are robbed of any supporting political authority to actually prove the case. From this perspective, the interpretation of the text changes: both disputants are disempowered and cut off from an imagined or previous secular state that could validate their faith. In terms of the position advanced by Álvaro, this is a governing irony that makes the sovereignty debate and the citation of Genesis XLIX.10 unusual. As a result, the arguments and topics – Messiah, king, church, and state – take on a different aspect.

Eleazar is then led to prophesy, based on calculations in Daniel, that the date for the coming of the Messiah is known: he will arrive within twenty-seven years, some 800 years after the destruction of the Temple i.e. AD 867–8 (XVI, 7). Álvaro responds that he is happy to take up the wager that whosoever is proved wrong will pass to the other religion (XVI, 7). Conventional arguments about prophecies and historical changes, centred around Old Testament texts that can be seen to mask social and political tensions for both antagonists, are also carried on through references to arguments about the body. Not many years later, Álvaro, in another work, was to make a similar prophecy using the same text from Daniel. This time the prophecy would announce the end of Islamic power over the Christian community. The novelty of this thesis was to link biblical exegesis with Islamic history and doctrine, and

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equate Muhammad with a form of precursor of Antichrist by citing Daniel VII.23–5, where the fourth beast is equated to the fourth kingdom, implying that Muslim domination would end in AD 870.17 The date of this later text of Álvaro’s (854) and the date of the Eleazar letters (840) offer a valuable clue to survival of elements of Visigothic cultural identity after the Arab conquest.

The letters between Eleazar and Álvaro bridge the time of the Adoptionist dispute (785–805) and the decade of the Martyrs of Córdoba (850–9). These texts capture an important moment in a process of cultural exchange that was going on between Goths, Franks and Arabs, set in motion by the twin rise of Arab and Carolingian power. They also show the fluid nature of ethnic and religious identities under pressure from political changes caused by military conquest. Eleazar’s presence in Spain as a Frank who had converted to Judaism was part of this wider phenomenon of adjustment and exchange. The tone of the letters sometimes hints at antagonism between the Frank from Aachen and the Goth in Córdoba, rather than between a Jew and a Christian. Behind the arguments can be detected a recent past of resentful Franks and the diminished political status of Goths, which had contributed to the Adoptionist dispute when Charlemagne had intervened in the affairs of the Toledan church. Caught between the Caliphate and the Carolingians, Visigoths had been obliged to take on new roles in territories they had previously governed. This had created a Mozarab identity and culture in Arab-ruled areas, a world between Islam and Christianity. The ‘Martyrs of Córdoba’ would in effect contest that identity and insist on challenging the Muslim authorities. A fuller treatment of this matter is beyond the scope of this article, but Álvaro’s reaction to Eleazar and his arguments reflects this ambiguous cultural context, where Álvaro is both proud of his Christian beliefs and fearful of losing his religion and culture to increasing Arabism.18


The letters therefore hint at the construction of a religious and cultural identity that goes beyond the ideological certainties of a polemic. If identity is often created through confrontation with another, this interaction is at the heart of the letters that pass between Eleazar and Álvaro. There are two passages that address the issue. One contrasts the two men as representatives of a cultural group and a religion, and makes an important point about the ‘True Israel’:

Which of us better deserves the name of Israelite? You who, as you say, have been converted from idolatry to the worship of the Supreme God, and are a Jew not by race but by faith, or I who am a Hebrew both by faith and race? But I am not called a Jew because a new name has been given to me which the mouth of the Lord has named. Abraham is my father, for my forbears descended from that stem: for looking for the Messiah who was to come, and receiving him when he came, they are more truly Israel than those who were expecting him but rejected him at his coming, and have not ceased to hope for him, for you are still awaiting one whom you have already rejected. The Gentiles who daily are being converted to the faith of Israel take their place in the people of God, while you have adhered to the error of the Jews. (XVIII, 5)

The meaning of these lines has aroused some discussion. Álvaro appears to assert that although Eleazar is now a Jew, he, Álvaro, is the real Israelite, son of the ‘True Israel’ because he has embraced Christ. He also implies that whilst a Christian by faith, the ethnic origins of his line were Jewish. In Visigothic Spain, the conversion of a family to Christianity during the previous 150 years or so would not have been surprising. This condition puts Álvaro at a double advantage over Eleazar who is neither a Jew by ethnic origin nor a member of the ‘True Israel’ by faith. In fact, the opposition to Eleazar may be most marked because he is a Frank. This comes out in the second reference to Álvaro’s lineage in the final lines of the last letter, when he has been goaded...
into a fury by the irony and intellectual sense of superiority shown by Eleazar the Frank. In the penultimate letter, XIX, Eleazar calls him a ‘mad dog . . . a compiler, like those from whom you extracted all these things’ (XX). Eleazar questions not only Álvaro’s ability, but also the entire basis of early medieval disputation: the constant citation of the church Fathers and other commentators of biblical texts. Perhaps this is Eleazar’s final riposte to the exegetical world of Claudius of Turin, Hrabanus Maurus and others that he has challenged by his apostasy, as well as an insult to the luckless Álvaro, whose erudition is all the poorer because he has become distanced from Christian and Latin culture. Eleazar, the highly educated Frank from the court of Louis the Pious, pours scorn on the mediocre compiler in Islamic Córdoba who lacks originality and sophistication. The ‘compiler’ jibe would have touched at the heart of his insecurity, and provokes an angry reply from Álvaro who constructs a direct line for himself back to the original Goths, as celebrated by earlier Visigothic historians. Here, Álvaro champions not only the Christian Visigothic past: he eagerly assumes it with the passion of a convert. It is the war cry of a member of a disappearing Latin culture being assimilated by Islam, a man who has lost out to Franks as well as Arabs. The timeline of references back in history remembers a Visigothic empire that conquered Rome, challenged the Greeks, and now might survive the Islamic empire. The manifest destiny of the Visigoths here expressed is a preparation for the later writings and the zealotry of the Cordovan Martyrs:

The Getes [Goths] despise death while praising the wound, also this: The Getan – he says – he goes with his horse . . . I am the one . . . the one who Alexander said had to be avoided, who Pyrrhus feared, and for whom Caesar trembled. Of us, Jerome said: He has a horn in his head, flee far away. And so do not talk of mad dogs and recognise yourself as a snarling fox . . . and do not say that I am compiler of ancients which is appropriate for people of great power.  

Both Umayyads and Carolingians had eclipsed the line of the Visigothic kings and especially the authority of the Visigothic church. In this final ill-tempered letter, Álvaro attempts to reconstruct the past and resurrect a lineage that can empower the present Christians in Córdoba, who are allowed to worship but have no sovereignty. The references to Goths may be more cultural than ethnic: it is impossible to know if Álvaro was a Hispano-Roman, a Goth, or a Jew by ancestry. Visigothic
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culture and society were held to be the product of the first two. The importance of the term ‘Goth’ is the same as ‘Israel’: an appropriation of an imagined nation or kingdom that Álvaro waves as a banner at Eleazar. In the end, both Eleazar and Álvaro are inside one political domain that governs them, and the frontier between their two faiths, the ancient divide between Goth and Frank, is overwhelmed by this reality.

Before leaving these letters, we need to look at a further set of devices in the exchange that makes use of the body image to communicate important social and historical arguments. Throughout, the polemic remains rooted in differing interpretations of the Old Testament, and in an image of Judaism that only exists up to the coming of Christ. For Álvaro, the centrality of the Old Testament is made necessary for the Christian argument, so that former Jewish texts can prefigure the coming of Christianity: post-biblical Judaism ceased when the Old Testament gave way to the New Testament. Judaism is an inheritance that is closed, as was understood in the earlier description of Bodo by Prudentius, where Bodo is exiled into the unfulfilled Judaic past.

The foul language used by Álvaro in Letter XVII is a response to Eleazar’s view of the bodies of Jesus and Mary, since Eleazar questions the virgin birth (XVIII, 11). This provokes an extended rhetorical exercise from Álvaro, citing examples of miracles from the Old Testament that prove a virgin birth possible. Álvaro’s traditional argument around Old Testament citations takes place on two levels. First, the Jew is incapable of seeing the virgin birth, because he has rejected the Messiah: he is unable to understand the higher spiritual dimension of any argument. Second, he is trapped in a lower plane of physical existence. This position culminates in the association of purely physical and bodily functions to the Jewish view of reality.

Some of the most important details on this matter concern manners and morals at the Frankish court. This arises when Eleazar sets out the main reasons for his conversion to Judaism (XVII), although as there is a large extract that has been cut out by a later hand, it can only be

24 A.S. Abulafia, ‘Bodies in the Jewish–Christian Debate’, in S. Kay and M. Rubin (eds), Framing Medieval Bodies (Manchester, 1994), pp. 123–137, addresses the use of body imagery in the polemic, and in Abulafia, Christians and Jews, develops this argument in relation to the ‘Christianisation of thought’ in the twelfth century. These arguments in the Eleazar–Álvaro letters are an early example in the tradition of the polemic. For the development of the Jewish–Christian debate in Spain see Y. Baer, Historia de los Judíos en la España Cristiana, tr. J.L. Lacave (Barcelona, 1981).
reconstructed from Álvaro’s reply in the next letter (XVIII). The principal reason for converting is given: a rigorous and exhaustive study of the Old Testament that has led him to criticize and reject his previous faith (XVIII, 2, 16). Then Eleazar insults the figure of Christ and the virgin birth (XVIII, 11–15), and also attacks the moral and religious laxity of the Frankish court (XVI, 2; XVIII, 14). Álvaro refuses to countenance Eleazar’s court descriptions. In fact, he uses these to undermine Eleazar’s assertions about Jesus, and parade *ad hominem* attacks that attribute the conversion to reasons of the flesh. He ends by suggesting that Eleazar should become a Muslim, as then he could taste as many women as he wished (XVIII, 16). Álvaro cannot accept that a Jew could look at his own actions and objectively view them as wrong or immoral: a Jew is incapable of reasoning about his behaviour.

One of the other observations made by Eleazar, as reported by Álvaro, is that he has seen fourteen people at the court hold different religious views (XVIII, 14). This is an important remark. It might refer to theological debate at the Carolingian court or even be a criticism of the moral laxity of the clergy. Some of these issues will be addressed later when looking at Hincmar’s letter to Charles the Bald. Eleazar’s remarks are important because they place him amidst a chorus of voices that criticize religious and moral behaviour at court, particularly that of the clergy in the 820s and 830s.²⁵

The long letter XVIII ends with an extended peroration reminiscent of the vision of an Old Testament prophet, who curses Eleazar and all Jews for their blindness: they shall remain dispersed and damned for unnumbered years (XVIII, 23). The final argument is that Judaism cannot see beyond the material existence of Christ’s body: Eleazar is a

²⁵ Such troubled feelings give rise to texts like Prudentius’s dream in *AB* 839 and Strabo’s *Visio Wettini* where ’Many of the abuses which *Visio Wettini* denounces – from its attack on the corruption of the counts (v.482 ff) to its censure of monastic avarice, gluttony and sodomy (v.699–784) – link this text with the reforming party led by Benedict of Aniane’ (Godman, *Poets and Emperors*, pp. 131–2). For this visionary poem see D. Traill, *Walahfrid Strabo’s Visio Wettini: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Frankfurt, 1974). These themes are carried over in a more subtle and oblique fashion in Strabo’s *De imagine Tetrici* (see n. 16) that reflects rising tensions between parties at court. Note the description given by Álvaro of Bodo’s own promiscuous activities with young ladies at the court (XVI, 2): ’ita ut passim per diversarum feminarum concubitos in templo nostro te glorios dulces tibi abuere complexos’ (Gil, p. 235). This suggests that Bodo, whilst critical of these practices, would have been an unwilling (?) participant or witness. Agobard’s criticisms of religious disunity echo Bodo’s fourteen faiths, when he states that five people sitting down together would have no law in common: *Liber adversus legem Gundobardi*, PL 104, p. 116. His *Libri Apologetici* contains criticisms of Judith and the ‘games’ that were carried out with young priests (ludat pueriliter) whilst other priests (ordine sacerdotali) looked on or joined in (colludentibus), PL 104, p. 314. For this background to Judith see E. Ward, *Agobard and Paschasius Radbertus as Critics of the Empress Judith*, *Studies in Church History* 27 (1990), pp. 15–25, and *idem*, ‘The Career of the Empress Judith’, *PPG* 178–9. Eleazar’s account can be added to this chorus of voices.
sexual animal who can only read the Law literally and not interpret it figuratively in a Christian sense:

For if you wish to understand the Law as carnal, not only do you attribute limbs to God, but you affirm that He is similar to you, and whilst you refuse to say that Christ is God, you make all men eternally equal to God.26 (XVIII, 2)

The letters therefore show an exchange of views about Frankish and Visigothic culture where both sides appeal to the reconstituted past of the 'True Israel'. Eleazar, a Frank, maintains the concern of the Frankish court with a model of Israel, but he has removed it from the political power of the Carolingians to claim it back for the Jews, with an expectation of sovereignty in some future. He even offers a precise date: AD 867–8. In the same way, Álvaro claims that he has access to Israel, which he associates with the line of the lost Visigothic kingdom, that will return in the future, in AD 870. In each case, two disempowered figures, removed from their original cultures (the Frankish empire and the Visigothic kingdom) seek to reclaim a discontinued lineage through an argument that tries to prove who has the better claim to an idealized vision of Israel. In this way arguments about personal belief, political instability and cultural loss, are all brought together. And such arguments are embodied in biblical commentary and exegesis that also appeals to corporeal images to make some of the points.

It is worth pointing out that this was the argument, in reverse, that Deacon Bodo was actually making from a Jewish standpoint against Christian society when he decided to reject the Christian faith. Eleazar had also suggested in his description of the Frankish court that Christians lacked sexual control. The conclusion is that whilst this argument can be 'christianized', and an abandonment of social forms and religious practices by the Carolingian king or his people can be proclaimed, this can only be put forward by a Christian like Prudentius in his moral discourse in AB 839. In this way, the figure of Bodo is born out of the Christian moral critique of Christian society made by Prudentius. But, equally, the figure of Eleazar is born out of this same critique of Christian society made by a Jew.

Again, in AB 839, descriptions of the body, associated with integration and disintegration, control and lack of control, and purity and impurity, organize many of the social and political issues, as in the

26 Gil, p. 246: ‘Nam si legem carnalem intelligere uolueris, non solum Deo membra adscribis, uerum etiam similem tibi eum firmautis, et dum refugis Deum dicere Xpm, omnem prorsus hominem Deo probabis equum.’
letters examined. But a disproportionate emphasis on Old Testament examples suggests that recurring images of a strong king, imperial authority and social cohesion, predominate over individual salvation and a developed Christology of Jesus as contained in the New Testament. The political imagery associated with the *AB* 839 annal, and the arguments in the letters, to some extent convey a Christianity of the Father rather than of the Son.\(^7\)

Similar arguments critical of Judaism and the influence of the Jewish religion upon Christianity, are repeated in the polemical work of Agobard and Amolo, both Spaniards (like Prudentius), who considered that the two religions were too close for comfort.\(^8\) Amolo’s *Liber Contra Judaeos*, an anti-Jewish tract, also contains a reference to Bodo that makes use of most of the descriptive features of the earlier Prudentius source, and provides a picture of Bodo seen again from a Frankish viewpoint.

**Bodo at the border (846–7)**

The Amolo text, whilst repeating the original Prudentius details of 839, also strikes a note of political confrontation between Frankish and Islamic empires. This ideological divide reflects a changed foreign policy situation at the time. The description of Bodo’s activities, as captured in Prudentius’s *AB* entry for 847, has a similar political tone to Amolo’s text.\(^9\) The annal for this year appears to link three issues:

\(^7\) M. De Jong, ‘Rethinking Early Medieval Christianity: A View from the Netherlands’, *EME* 7 (1998), pp. 261–75, at p. 271, suggests the concentration on the Old Testament by authors of the period indicates that they saw this as the ‘authoritative text’, whereas later medieval writers turned more to the Gospels and a more developed view of Christ’s Passion. Kantrowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, p. 77, proposes this with regard to throne images, but more recently, C. Chazelle, *The Crucified God in the Carolingian Era* (Cambridge, 2001), advocates a more complete view based on an analysis of art and texts.

\(^8\) For Agobard see J. Cohen, *Living Letters*, pp. 123–45. Cohen places Agobard in the *Adversus Iudaeos* tradition, but helpfully clarifies the connection of Agobard’s religious and political writings. He shows how all the tracts form one vision that attacks public policy concerning (a) Jewish economic privileges, (b) the distribution of ecclesiastical properties to the magnates, and (c) the King’s actions towards his sons with regard to the succession. Cohen stresses Agobard’s understanding of contemporary Jewish customs and beliefs: his knowledge of post-biblical Judaism was noteworthy. This is also picked up by Albert, *Adversus Iudeos*, pp. 138–42 who says that concern with day-to-day coexistence with Judaism, and a detailed legislative agenda, has its origin in knowledge of Visigothic laws on how to restrict Jews. See also A.J. Zuckerman, ‘The Political Uses of Theology: The Conflict of Bishop Agobard and the Jews of Lyon’, in J.R. Sommerfeldt (ed.), *Studies in Medieval Culture 5* (1970), pp. 33–51.

\(^9\) Amolo’s *Liber contra Iudaeos* can be dated six years after the letters. As some of the material from the Eleazar letters is similar it has been proposed that Amolo had sight of a copy, and this is underlined by the fact that Bodo reappears in this text. See Zuckerman, *A Jewish Princedom*, p. 303. Löwe, ‘Die Apostasie’, p. 158, n. 5 proposes that Deacon Florus actually wrote this text. As Florus was the Bishop’s secretary and co-authored several letters with Agobard it is possible, but we have left Amolo as the author. Chapter 42 from Amolo’s tract...
(i) The visit of an Arab delegation from Córdoba sent by Abd al-Rahman II to negotiate a treaty with Charles the Bald.

(ii) The story of Bodo’s efforts to urge Christians in Spain under Islam to convert to either Islam or Judaism or be killed.

(iii) A reference to a petition sent by Christians in Spain to Charles to intervene on their behalf to stop such a choice between conversion or death.

There was continuing unrest on the border during these years, which led to the negotiation of the peace treaty here mentioned. Musa Ibn Musa, head of the Banu Qasi clan, was in perpetual revolt against the Caliphate, and the West Frankish king Charles the Bald took advantage by intervening in the politics of the region and seeking to ally himself with Musa. Equally, the authorities in Córdoba supported a rebellion in the Frankish border region in 847 that included the count of Gascony and Charles’s nephew Pippin. In addition, the Cordovan Martyrs became prominent with the first execution in April 850, and religious tension may have been building earlier, affecting exchanges between Franks and Arabs. This is probably responsible for the reference to Bodo urging Christians to convert or die. Despite the textual linking of these three issues, there is no evidence to suggest any actual connection between them. The \( AB 847 \) source has usually been cited to suggest that Bodo ‘attempted to persuade the amir Abd al-Rahman II to force his Christian subjects to abjure their faith, expecting that they would thereby be driven into the folds of Islam or Judaism’.\(^\text{30}\) This \( AB \) source does not actually state that Bodo had any dealings with the authorities, or that any proclamation was made or pamphlets written. There is no surviving document that confirms a petition by Spanish Christians to the king. On the other hand, there is no reason to doubt that Eleazar may have continued some form of proselytizing activity. Another aspect of the Martyrs’ viewpoint was a conflict between radical Christians such as Álvaro, and Christian bishops who wanted to coexist with the Arab state. It is also possible that the \( AB 847 \) source reflects...
such rising tensions between moderate and radical Christians within Muslim territory. This entire subject has become part of a wider debate among some historians who see the Cordovan Martyrs as a movement that was part of an anti-Muslim rebellion supported by outside Christian powers: i.e. the West Frankish king. The full implications of this debate lie beyond the scope of this work. The most important points to be made here are two: first, that the 840 letters already foreshadow a number of these matters, and second, that the description of Bodo’s activities are fragmentary and confused. They do not give any indication of any proclamation, or contact with Muslim authorities.

**Bodo remembered (876)**

The story of Bodo usually ends here. But a letter written many years later lends a final retrospective view of Bodo’s career. Hincmar’s text, like the last line of a sonnet, provides the unexpected insight that weaves back through earlier verses, altering the meaning and the relationships that were read at the beginning of the poem. Again, as in a sonnet, there is ambiguity at the end of the journey of Deacon Bodo.

In a letter to Charles the Bald in the 870s, Hincmar introduces Anastasius’s translation of the life of Dionysius the Areopagite. The text of this letter covers several other matters in an implicit fashion. The document provides a miniature recapitulation of Hincmar’s early career and its waning influence; Hincmar’s role in the promotion of the cult of St Denis; and a comment and critique on the sources of royal power with special reference to the abbey of St-Denis. Woven into this picture is a little-noted set of references to Bodo’s early career. All these events had taken place long before the letter’s composition. This letter has been commented on by others with regard to the origin and development of the cult of St Denis. Although this subject is not our main concern, it is necessary to examine briefly certain of its aspects in attempting to explain the references to Bodo.

In the letter Hincmar is anxious to prove that this new translation of the life of the Areopagite was preceded by the one he worked on with Hilduin around 827. To achieve this, he fashions a chain of events and recollections that begin over half a century earlier. This story is told to confirm Hincmar’s role and authority in the first discovery and

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31 Nelson, ‘The Franks’, p. 73, says that there may have been outside support; Wolf, *Christian Martyrs*, pp. 36–47, shows that the historiographical treatment of the Cordovan Martyrs has variously presented this episode as (a) a precursor to modern Spanish identity and nationhood, (b) a rebellion against the Muslim State, (c) a religious cult that formed the prelude to a Messianic era. Bachrach, *Early Medieval Jewish Policy*, pp. 114–16, examines the Jewish role in the border region at this time.
dissemination of the cult of the most important saint associated with the royal Frankish line and the abbey of St-Denis. The abbey was favoured by Charles, who took over the position of lay abbot in 867. Hincmar seeks also to remind Charles that he was centrally involved in the future king’s success during the critical period of the 820s and early 830s, a time when Charles was born and his father Louis was under constant threat from his other sons. The close association between Charles, the abbey, and the cult of the saint is an important part of his royal authority: Hincmar tells Charles that he was instrumental in giving him that authority, and also criticizes Charles for its abuse. This is a late statement by Hincmar of one of the central beliefs of his career: that royal power comes from the support of the church and prelates like himself. The subtext of this letter is therefore a strong but veiled attack on Charles, and it enlists the memory of Bodo to achieve this.

The story told constructs a connection to the past by introducing another document within the letter concerning the life of St Sanctinus, whom tradition holds to have been the second bishop of Meaux after St Denis. It is likely that Hincmar is citing this tradition to reinforce the Dionysian theme of his account. This source not only illuminates long forgotten details of Bodo’s early career, it also illustrates how the past is recreated and recollected to suit the aims of the letter’s author.


33 For the Hincmar text see PL 126, pp. 153–4. J. Devisse, Hincmar, Archevêque de Reims, 3 vols (Geneva, 1976) II, 801, 1007; and Löwe, ‘Die Apostasie’, p. 159 give background. I wish to thank Janet Nelson for clarifying difficulties with regard to the translation of the Hincmar letter, and also for making useful suggestions generally. I must also thank Matthew Innes for his insightful comments and observations. The editors of EME made most helpful editorial contributions.

34 Hincmar is relying on the Vita Faronis, MGH SSRM V, pp. 171–203, by Hildegard of Meaux written around 865. This Life contains several points with regard to Hincmar’s letter. First, the Vita alleges that St Denis was the first bishop of Meaux and Sanctinus his successor. Therefore the booklet about St Sanctinus mentioned in the letter reinforces the Dionysian credibility of Hincmar’s story and ‘trumps’ Anastasius’s translation, as Hincmar has saved a very old document (Vita, Ch. 67, p. 182). Second, Hincmar refers in the letter to the Viking sack of Meaux and that sadly the original little book did not survive. This is a scarcely veiled criticism of Charles, as it was held that he had collaborated with the Northmen to allow the sack of Meaux, for which Hildegard attacks Charles (Vita, Chs 123–6, pp. 200–1). This criticism is perhaps carried on with a reference to the capture of Abbot Louis of St-Denis by pirates (Vita, Ch. 124, p. 200). For background to this see N. Wylie, ‘The Vita Faronis, Bishop Hildegard of Meaux, and West Frankish Politics 855–862’, BA dissertation, King’s College London (1989). I thank Neville Wylie for making this available to me. For traditions of Meaux see L. Duchesne, L’Ancienne Gaule, 2 vols (Paris, 1916), II, 476–7.
Such has also been the case with the other sources that have been looked at. But in this example, Bodo’s memory is appropriated by Hincmar for an entirely different purpose. In 839 Prudentius textually dismembered Bodo and sent him into exile; Lupus used him as a scapegoat for the loss of a letter. Now Hincmar links him with the story of a book associated with a critique of royal power. Bodo is mentioned for reasons other than apostasy and exile. Bodo’s apparent influence and proximity to royal circles is probably used to criticize the prestige and authority of Charles’s mother and even refer to Charles’s own childhood, in the light of Bodo’s later espousal of Judaism.

Hincmar takes care in this letter to Charles to set out a sequence of events leading to the survival of the Sanctinus book: a text within a text. He begins the story with Charles’s birth in Frankfurt in 823, the year in which Hucbert is made bishop of Meaux. The next sentence tells us that Bodo, a friend of Hucbert, helped to place Wandelmar, a relative of his, in Meaux to teach chant (‘quemdam clericum ipsum Bodonis propinquum nomine Wandelmarum’). According to the letter, Wandelmar had been trained by Teutgar at St-Denis. We are also told that Bodo served under Abbot Hilduin, also lord and patron of Hincmar. Hucbert had been director of the palace choir and was then charged with the reform of the choir and liturgy at Meaux. It is noteworthy that Bodo is a link in a chain of people, recognized for their standing and knowledge of music and liturgy. There is more than a suggestion that attitudes to chant were indicative of wider issues and political positions. At St-Denis two camps created uncertainty at the abbey from 817 onwards, to which was added the short exile of Hilduin in 830. Hilduin’s association after 830 with the cult of St Denis and the translation of the Dionysian texts, was part of this political struggle. The references to all these figures tied to Bodo suggest that he may have been caught up in these debates and conflicts, which survive in the 840 exchange of letters with Álvaro.35

These connections are important, for they also clarify Bodo’s Alemannic lineage as he is related to Wandelmar. But the text does not make clear that Wandelmar’s move

35 On music and chant: S. Rankin, ‘Carolingian Music’, in McKitterick (ed.), Carolingian Culture, pp. 274–316. For Hilduin’s career see P. Depreux, La prosopographie, pp. 250–6. For background see Brown, Politics and Patronage, pp. 207–239. Wandelmar trained at St-Denis under magister Teutgarius. For St-Denis background A.W. Robertson, The Service Books of the Royal Abbey of St. Denis (Oxford, 1991), pp. 34–43, and pp. 327–38 is important. This affair echoes the chorus of voices about the morals of clergy who are of no clear status and the ‘fluidity’ of the court chapel (see above nn. 1 and 25). In this struggle at St-Denis, Robertson suggests that the abbey ‘entrusted their internal Government to members of the royal house in the mid-ninth century’, p. 43. This picks up Hincmar’s criticism of royal power made in the letter. I must thank Susan Rankin for leading me to the wider background to this question on music.
to Meaux took place in 823, nor that Bodo's presence in the abbey can be fixed in that year. A later date for Wandelmar's move makes more sense, because Hucbert only found upon his arrival in Meaux 'that certain issues with regard to science and religion had been unattended', and this would have been the reason for Wandelmar's subsequent posting.

Nevertheless, Hincmar's letter seems artfully to tie all these happenings to Charles's birth, even though some events happened later. Because Bodo is close to Strabo, who arrived at the court in 829 to be royal tutor to the prince, it is likely that Bodo's influence may date from this period. Bodo's role in Wandelmar’s appointment could have happened in the 830s. Whatever the exact date, Hincmar describes Bodo as a person with important family connections and influence. There is also no verifiable evidence of Bodo’s birth date for an accurate chronology. The only indirect reference is Strabo’s poem addressed to Bodo, written probably after 829. In this poem Bodo is described as a young boy, or younger than Strabo, who was born in 809. Recalling events for a purpose so many years later in the 870s, Hincmar has probably conflated the birth of Charles the Bald in 823 with some later acts of Bodo such as his role in Wandelmar’s appointment to Meaux. A closer analysis of Strabo’s poem suggests a relationship that dates from earlier times and may also link both Bodo and Strabo’s companion, Gottschalk.

The fact that three sources (Prudentius, Amolo, Hincmar) stress either noble birth or Aleman background, would suggest Bodo was well placed in the Alemannic kinship system with powerful patrons. Given

36 See MGH Poet Lat II, 386. Bodo is described as ‘Pusio candidule, candide pusiole’, certainly a young boy or younger than Strabo who was born in 809. Cabaniss, ‘Bodo-Eleazar’, p. 316, says ‘Assuming a difference of no more than five years, we may suppose that Bodo was born about the time of Charlemagne’s death and the accession of Louis the Pious (814)’, but this would make him nine years old in 823. A closer reading of Strabo’s poem indicates that it may also have been referring to events well before 829, the date of Strabo’s arrival at court to become Charles’s tutor. Bodo is referred to in the title as ‘Yppodiaconum’, a sub-deacon, so is he more junior? The phraseology gives the sense of three parts to the poem: that Strabo was a mentor or tutor to Bodo; that they parted when the young Bodo left to go elsewhere; that he has gone to serve a higher patron whom he must strive to please as he is destined for high office. Could this be the emperor or Hilduin at St-Denis? It is also likely that this poem was written after 825, even if it might refer to an earlier time. This is because this is the date of Gottschalk’s much more important poem ‘Ut quid iubes, pusiole’, which is possibly set at Reichenau and features a language referring to exile. The same note of exile and departure, on a lesser scale, permeates Strabo’s poem, together with the unusual word ‘pusiole’, as mentioned by Cabaniss in ‘Bodo-Eleazar’, p. 318. The word was probably first used by Gottschalk and imitated by Strabo. When these two were together at Reichenau and Fulda they would have shared poems, ideas, and even special terms of endearment. For a discussion of this poem see P. Godman, Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance (Duckworth, 1985), pp. 40–3. Given Strabo’s later well-known interest in plants and herbs, the tree or plant mentioned in line 3 might not only be a metaphor for the growth of friendship or cultivation and education of Bodo, but an actual one they planted together at an earlier time in the gardens at Reichenau. I am grateful to David Traill for this suggestion and to David Ganz for comments on the poem.
that Empress Judith was also of the same background, it is not impossible that Bodo’s career and advancement were associated with her. This would explain Bodo’s association with circles at the court to which Judith has been linked, and which Bodo mentions some years later in the 840 letters. It would also account for some of the scandal and distress described by Prudentius: through close association or kinship and his proximity to Strabo, Bodo was probably at the centre of Judith’s party. The Prudentius text also mentions that Bodo enjoyed the empress’s favour, and how distressed she was at his conversion. All this would have made the issue of Bodo’s apostasy even more sensitive, as it would have been seen to reflect badly on Judith’s position and her alleged activities. Hincmar’s veiled reminder to the king of these background details may not be coincidental. Bodo’s career may even have been down to Judith. The letter from Hincmar, one of the most important figures of this period, ties the memory of Bodo to her son, perhaps given Bodo’s later apostasy as a criticism of Charles. It stresses Bodo’s friendship with the empress and the young prince, when Charles was tutored by Bodo’s friend, Strabo, from 829 to 838.

The story of Bodo is dominated by a note of dissent that became so extreme it led to exile. Exile (actual or internal) links two Alemann figures – Bodo and Strabo – and also a Saxon, Gottschalk. In Strabo’s case his major poems contain an ambiguous condemnation of the morals of the court and the clergy. It is open to question how far Bodo may have been influenced by Strabo, a strong critic, but too much of a courtier to express himself openly. The years 838–9 see all three exiled or seeking exile. Strabo was removed from the abbacy of Reichenau on Louis’s death, although he later regained the post. Bodo chose apostasy to manifest his dissent from the religion and morals of the court. Gottschalk rebelled against the discipline of orthodox monasticism and fled to preach a controversial doctrine. Shortly after Bodo had carried out the same deception, Gottschalk too pretended to go on a pilgrimage to Rome in order to escape.

Bodo’s scant texts and Strabo’s poems, contain prophecies and visions that communicate unease and criticism of society. In the case of the two Alemans, their dissent seems to lead back to Reichenau and Fulda, the academies that shaped Gottschalk and Strabo, and possibly

also Bodo. It is likely that Bodo passed through one of these centres. Other texts written at Reichenau seem to carry on this note of opposition: it is perhaps the case that monastic centres were far from unquestioning in their support of the ‘royal cultural programme’. How much opposition existed, and what form did it take? Bodo’s career reveals what one study has called ‘a deep seated urge in Carolingian society to seek dimensions of religious experience beyond the acceptance of a few basic credal formulations and the observance of prescribed cult practices’. It also suggests that there may have been a more widespread incidence of Jewish proselytism. Given the extreme political conflicts of the period and the unease and chorus of criticism, it is not to be wondered that the Carolingian spin doctors sometimes failed to keep everyone ‘on message’. In looking closely at Bodo’s story we find more questions arise to be answered: it seems that the journey of Deacon Bodo is far from over.

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38 R.E. Sullivan, ‘The Context of Cultural Authority in the Carolingian Age’, in R.E. Sullivan (ed.), The Gentle Voices of Teachers. Aspects of Learning in the Carolingian Age (Columbus, OH, 1995), pp. 51–105, at pp. 71–5; P. Dutton, The Politics of Dreaming, p. 75, examines what Sullivan calls those ‘deep-seated urges’ through the dream genre. Dutton looks at Strabo’s Visio Wettini and other dream texts produced at Reichenau and sees ‘a monastic laboratory’ of dreams. On Gottschalk, D. Gant, ‘The Debate on Predestination’, in M. Gibson and J.L. Nelson (eds), Charles the Bald: Court and Kingdom (Aldershot, 1990), pp. 283–302; D.E. Nineham, ‘Gottschalk of Orbais: Reactionary or Precursor of the Reformation?’, Journal of Ecclesiastical History 40 (1989), pp. 1–18. On Jewish proselytism, there is a neglected story about the conversion of Christians to Judaism from the ninth century on. Other prominent figures are mentioned, such as the cleric Weclin, Obadiah, and Andreas bishop of Bari. All these had to flee into exile like Bodo. An examination of genizah documents found in Cairo, and other records, suggests that there could have been as many as 15,000 such converts from Christendom arriving in Jewish communities over the following two centuries. See N. Golb, Jewish Proselytism: A Phenomenon in the Religious History of Early Medieval Europe (Cincinnati, OH, 1987), p. 36. Bodo’s journey from Alemannia to Babylon (if true) is also an important addition to the many examples of long-distance travel and communication in the ninth century, as featured by McCormick, The Origins, pp. 123–280. McCormick also refers to Gottschalk in the chapter entitled ‘Traders, Slaves and Exiles’, on pp. 260–1.