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“The Emir of the Catholics”

Alfonso VIII of Castile’s Golden Morabetinos. Cultural Appropriation, Imitation, or Translation of Islamic Coinage?

1. Preliminary Considerations on ‘Cultural Appropriation’, p.358. – 2. A Numismatic Takeover: Alfonso VIII’s Golden Morabetinos and their Islamic Model, p. 361. – 3. Comparative Cases: Further Christian Imitations of Islamic Coinage, p. 368. – 4. The ‘Maravedís Alfonsinos’ against the Horizon of Christian Imitative Coinage, p. 375. – 5. Concluding Remarks, p. 382.

ABSTRACT: Focusing on numismatic material from the medieval Iberian Peninsula, this essay explores the hermeneutic potential of the concept of ‘cultural appropriation’ for the study of pre-modern processes of cultural exchange. In a first section, the text discusses current notions of ‘cultural appropriation’, many of which refer specifically to modern or contemporary societies. Abandoning epoch-specific premises, the essay proposes a more general semiotic reading of ‘culturally appropriated’ objects as ‘transcultural signifiers’ that interrelate the parties involved in cultural exchange and create entanglements of cultural orders and systems of meaning. The second section tests this specific understanding of ‘cultural appropriation’ on a series of numismatic takeovers from medieval Spain: in 1172, King Alfonso VIII of Castile began issuing gold coins in imitation of the established Almoravid dinar. While maintaining the outward appearance of the Muslim model, Alfonso changed the Arabic inscriptions on the coins to proclaim the superiority of Christian faith and rule. Comparison with other examples of imitative Muslim coinage issued by Christian rulers from the eighth to the twelfth centuries helps to assess this particular case of ‘cultural appropriation’, which in several respects defies current understandings of the concept.

For several years now, the catch phrase ‘cultural appropriation’ has fuelled societal debates, usually generating a high degree of public interest. It may seem tempting to make use of this colourful term to draw attention also to medieval history and its objects of research¹. As a key word in current socio-political controversies, however, ‘cultural appropriation’ almost inevitably evokes specific notions, expectations, and moral judgements that must burden the concept as an analytical instrument. At this moment, it is yet unclear whether the concept in its most recent concretions can be meaningfully applied to pre-modern phenomena and whether it can offer any additional analytical value for their study. In the following, I will present some methodo-

¹ This article is based on a paper held at the conference ‘Premodern Forms of Cultural Appropriation?’, organised by the Cluster of Excellence ‘Religion and Politics’ at the University of Münster, in September 2023.

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logical considerations on ‘cultural appropriation’, and then evaluate them against selected numismatic material from the medieval Iberian Peninsula, which exemplifies various scenarios of cultural interaction and apparently challenges certain underlying assumptions of current notions of ‘cultural appropriation’. My aim is to examine whether the concept of ‘cultural appropriation’ can adequately capture the variety of different constellations and strategies in pre-modern cultural takeovers, or whether it misses specific scenarios that are better described as, e.g. ‘imitation’ or ‘translation’.

1. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS ON ‘CULTURAL APPROPRIATION’

The concept of ‘cultural appropriation’ originated in critical ‘Cultural Studies’ in the 1970s, where it served to analyse power imbalances and to uncover mechanisms of domination and oppression inherent in many processes of cultural exchange. About three decades later, the concept found its way also into pre-modern studies². Here it was welcomed for its specific hermeneutical potentials: to a greater extent than other concepts, ‘cultural appropriation’ allowed to focus on the agency of the adopting side in cultural transfers and to highlight the creative performance in the act of ‘making one’s own’ a foreign cultural artefact³. Furthermore, more clearly than other approaches, the concept directed the view to power relations and inequalities between the parties involved as a relevant factor in the study of cultural exchange.

Since then, however, the concept has evolved and undergone a specific sharpening of meaning and perspectives. For one thing, ‘cultural appropriation’ has become a key term in societal controversies. The term has gained popularity as a veritable activist ‘shibboleth’, used to denounce acts of (racist) discrimination and alleged ‘alienation’ of cultural property originally created and owned by marginalised communities⁴. But in academic discourse too, the concept of ‘cultural appropriation’ has experienced a constriction of focus and – in parts – an ideological charging⁵. Although contributions to the further development of the concept have come from a variety of scientific disciplines, most research on ‘cultural appropriation’ has so far centred on modern and postmodern scenarios. More specifically, the concept has been used predominantly to address the lasting effects of colonialism in contemporary socie-

² See, e.g. KATHLEEN ASHLEY – VÉRONIQUE PLESCH, The Cultural Processes of ‘Appropriation’, in: *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, 2002, pp. 1–15; CLAIRE SPONSER, In Transit. Theorizing Cultural Appropriation in Medieval Europe, in: *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32, 2002, pp. 17–39; RICHARD A. ROGERS, From Cultural Exchange to Transculturation. A Review and Reconceptualization of Cultural Appropriation, in: *Communication Theory* 16, 2006, pp. 474–503.

³ ASHLEY – PLESCH, Processes (as note 2), p. 3; ROGERS, Exchange (as note 2), pp. 475–476.

⁴ LARS DISTELHORST, *Kulturelle Aneignung* (Nautilus Flugschrift), Hamburg 2021, esp. pp. 41–51, 127–133.

⁵ MARKUS TAUSCHEK, Gegen die Essenzialisierung. Kulturelle Aneignung als Problem, in: *Zeitschrift für empirische Kulturwissenschaften* 120, 2024, pp. 90–107, here pp. 92–93.

ties. This focus entails specific perspectives and presuppositions. Several epoch-related features complicate the application of the concept in its currently predominant post-colonial understanding to other historical periods and must be overcome if ‘cultural appropriation’ is to be meaningfully used for the study of pre-modern phenomena. The following issues are of particular relevance in this respect:

Firstly, current concretions of the concept regularly work with categories, such as ‘race’, ‘ethnicity’, or ‘indigeneity’, that do not capture adequately the constellations of cultural encounters in pre-modern periods, where group boundaries were rather marked by, e.g. creed, lineage, legal status, or language. Abandoning the time-related (post-)colonial categories, however, means to lose also the supposedly unambiguous patterns of power imbalances associated with them. While in contemporary ‘Western’ contexts, labelling as ‘Black’ or ‘Native’ commonly connotes a marginalised status, relations of dominance and subordination between medieval cultural entities were by no means as clearly defined by default and must therefore be examined without bias in each individual case.

Secondly, in current discourse, ‘cultural appropriation’ is often conceptualised in terms and modes that are characteristic of modern capitalist consumer societies and representative political systems, respectively. The rights of disposal over cultural goods, for example, are conceived in categories of property law and copyrights⁶, while the modes of illegitimate ‘misuse’ of foreign cultural artefacts are thought of in economic terms as ‘commodification’⁷, ‘consumption’⁸, or ‘exploitation’⁹ of foreign resources without permission or appropriate (monetary) compensation. Correspondingly, ‘silencing’ in public discourse and denial of cultural self-representation¹⁰, as well as ‘non-recognition’ as full-fledged participants in, and equal contributors to societal and cultural processes, are considered the most serious harms suffered by ‘victims’ of ‘cultural appropriation’¹¹. Regarding medieval contexts, by contrast, it seems more proper to shift the focus from legal ‘ownership’, political ‘representation’, and

⁶ See the influential approach suggested by SUSAN SCAFIDI, *Who Owns Culture? Appropriation and Authenticity in American Law* (Rutgers Series on the Public Life of Arts), New Brunswick 2005.

⁷ RINA ARYA, *Cultural Appropriation. What It Is and Why It Matters?*, in: *Sociology Compass* 15, 2021, pp. 1–11, here pp. 1, 4–6, <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12923>, last accessed: 23/01/2025; DISTELHORST, *Kulturelle Aneignung* (as note 4), pp. 134–139.

⁸ ANGELA GRACIA B. CRUZ et al., *Between Cultural Appreciation and Cultural Appropriation. Self-Authorizing the Consumption of Cultural Difference*, in: *Journal of Consumer Research* 50, 2024, pp. 962–984; DISTELHORST, *Kulturelle Aneignung* (as note 4), pp. 94–105.

⁹ ROGERS, *Exchange* (as note 2), pp. 477–478, 486; ERICH HATALA MATTHES, *Cultural Appropriation and Oppression*, in: *Philosophical Studies* 176, 2019, pp. 1000–1013, here pp. 1005–1006; DIANNE LALONDE, *Does Cultural Appropriation Cause Harm?*, in: *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 9, 2021, pp. 329–346, here pp. 337–340.

¹⁰ ERICH HATALA MATTHES, *Cultural Appropriation Without Cultural Essentialism?*, in: *Social Theory and Practice* 42, 2016, pp. 343–366, here esp. pp. 350–351; Id., *Oppression* (as note 9), pp. 1006–1007.

¹¹ HOCHAN KIM, *Cultural Appropriation and Social Recognition*, in: *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 52, 2024, pp. 254–288, esp. pp. 267–269; LALONDE, *Harm* (as note 9), pp. 334–337.

economic ‘utilisation’ to a more semiotically informed perspective on ‘meaning’ and ‘interpretive authority’. Understood in this sense, ‘cultural appropriation’ may translate more generally to (arbitrarily) re-assigning significance to a cultural artefact taken from another community to make it serve the adopting party’s aims and interests.

Thirdly, ‘cultural appropriation’ has undergone an increase of moral charge, not only in recent activist usage but also in substantial parts of the academic discourse¹². Rooted in postcolonial theory, the concept aims to expose structures of discrimination and injustice resulting from power imbalances that underlie many scenarios of cultural exchange¹³. ‘Cultural appropriation’ is thus commonly defined one-sidedly as an act of domination (or oppression¹⁴) perpetrated by a dominant majority against a subordinate minority¹⁵. In this sense, the inequality of power relations¹⁶ and the implicit violence inherent in the unauthorised taking of a foreign cultural good make ‘cultural appropriation’ in itself appear a morally reprehensible offence. Consequently, there is a consensus in much of the recent academic literature that ‘cultural appropriation’ is potentially or even in principle harmful and thus objectionable¹⁷. This moral bias, however, compromises the neutrality of the concept as an analytical tool, not least because the constellations of pre-modern cultural encounters often do not allow for a simple identification of ‘victims’ and ‘perpetrators’. Consequently, it seems reasonable not to restrict ‘cultural appropriation’ *a priori* solely to the supposedly dominant party, but to equally address adoptions of foreign cultural items by both sides involved. This does not suggest ignoring power inequalities in cultural takeovers, but to regard them as a formative, rather than essentially defining factor of ‘cultural appropriation’.

Fourthly, for reasons partly related to the concept’s popularity in recent controversies on identity politics¹⁸, many current understandings of ‘cultural appropriation’ are based on essentialist models of a strict separation between the cultural communities involved in the respective transfers of artefacts¹⁹. This applies not only to the

¹² TAUSCHEK, *Essenzialisierung* (as note 5), pp. 92–93.

¹³ DISTELHORST, *Kulturelle Aneignung* (as note 4), pp. 41–72. Distelhorst highlights the “emancipatory intention” (p. 53) of the concept as an instrument for “anti-racist criticism” (p. 51).

¹⁴ MATTHES, *Oppression* (as note 9), esp. pp. 1004–1007.

¹⁵ Conversely, adoptions from the majority’s cultural repertoire by a minority are, by definition, not considered ‘cultural appropriation’, see, e.g. ARYA, *Cultural Appropriation* (as note 7), p. 3; MATTHES, *Oppression* (as note 9), p. 1005; ID., *Essentialism* (as note 10), pp. 347–348; MARIN BREDIN, *Cultural Appropriation*, in: WOLFGANG DONSBACH (ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*, 12 vols., Oxford – Malden (MA) 2008, accessed online: <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405186407.wbiecc165>, last accessed: 07/11/2024.

¹⁶ ARYA, *Cultural Appropriation* (as note 7), p. 3; BREDIN, *Cultural Appropriation* (as note 15).

¹⁷ See, e.g. LALONDE, *Harm* (as note 9); MATTHES, *Essentialism* (as note 10), pp. 346–354.

¹⁸ DISTELHORST, *Kulturelle Aneignung* (as note 4), pp. 106–118.

¹⁹ Discussed as a methodological problem by TAUSCHEK, *Essenzialisierung* (as note 5), and MATTHES, *Essentialism* (as note 10), esp. pp. 354–366; ID., *Oppression* (as note 9), pp. 1006–1010. Less critical: DISTELHORST, *Kulturelle Aneignung* (as note 4), pp. 51–61.

distinction between an originally ‘owning’ and an ‘appropriating’ culture, but also to various notions of what makes the usage of an adopted item allegedly ‘inappropriate’. Many recent approaches conceive of ‘cultural appropriation’ as an act of ‘alienation’ and define as illegitimate any use of adopted goods that either is unaware of or deliberately disregards their original meanings and significance²⁰. Apart from sweepingly discrediting all creative reinterpretations and remodelling of adopted objects by the receiving community²¹, this understanding implies a fundamental detachment of ‘appropriated’ items from their respective cultures of origin. On closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that ‘cultural appropriation’ does not usually erase all the original meanings and connotations of an adopted artefact. Rather, in most cases, the persisting knowledge about the item’s emergence from an alien culture forms a vital part of its re-assigned significance in the adopting community. ‘Appropriated’ cultural objects thus often function as transcultural signifiers that relate to the adopting community’s ideas about the Others and its relation to them. Instead of a supposed separation and detachment, ‘cultural appropriation’ rather seems to create specific entanglements of cultural orders and sign systems.

In the following, I will evaluate the proposed semiotically informed reading of ‘culturally appropriated’ artefacts as ‘transcultural signifiers’ in pre-modern settings of cultural entanglements on a specific source material: coinage. In addition to their monetary function as a means of payment, coins in pre-modern societies served as a medium of political mass communication and the representation of power²². The material tokens always referred symbolically to an immaterial dimension of meaning; thus, they were ‘signifiers’ par excellence. Of particular interest with respect to transcultural relations now are cases where historical emitters adopted models and symbolic codes of foreign coinage for their own issues and thus played on different readings of cultural signs. As a contact zone between Christian and Muslim societies, the medieval Iberian Peninsula offers some interesting examples.

2. A NUMISMATIC TAKEOVER: ALFONSO VIII’S GOLDEN MORABETINOS AND THEIR ISLAMIC MODEL

Over the twelfth century, gold currency had become essential for Castilian trade and commerce. Remarkably though, Castile did not mint the necessary species itself but relied on foreign coins that had been flowing in in great quantities from Muslim-ruled

²⁰ See, e.g. EMILY KENDALL, Cultural Appropriation, in: Encyclopedia Britannica, 30 Oct. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/cultural-appropriation>, last accessed: 07/11/2024; BREDIN, Cultural Appropriation (as note 15).

²¹ SPONSLER, In Transit (as note 2), pp. 17–20, 35–36.

²² JOSÉ MARÍA de FRANCISCO OLMOS, La escritura en la moneda. Un reflejo del poder político y religioso en el occidente medieval, in: *De Medio Aevo* 10, 2021, pp. 31–66.

al-Andalus since the second half of the eleventh century²³. Initially, after the collapse of the Caliphate of Cordoba in 1031 CE, the weak Muslim petty kingdoms, known as Taifas, had filled the coffers of the Christian realms with their payments of protection money (*parias*)²⁴. After the Almoravids had reunited al-Andalus in 1091 CE, these payments had stopped, but now trade and booty pumped enormous amounts of money from South to North. During this phase, the Almoravid dinar became the predominant gold currency all over the Western Mediterranean. Christian sources refer to these coins as ‘morabetinos’ or ‘maravedís’, both Romance derivations of the Almoravids’ self-denomination in Arabic, i. e. al-Murābiṭūn. While Almoravid rule declined in mid-twelfth century, the importance of the ‘morabetino’ survived.

The breakdown of Almoravid power in al-Andalus after 1143 CE led to a second era of petty kingdoms. Among the most prominent figures of this time was Ibn Mardaniš²⁵, or ‘Rey Lobo’ (the ‘Wolf King’) as he was called in Christian sources. In 1146–1147 CE he seized power in Valencia and Murcia and quickly expanded his realm all over the Eastern part of al-Andalus (*Šarq al-Andalus*). Ibn Mardaniš’s rule was virtually built upon gold. Enormous payments, particularly to the kings of Castile and the counts of Barcelona, secured his emirate against the threat of Christian ‘reconquest’. At the same time, Ibn Mardaniš hired large Christian mercenary armies²⁶ to fight his Muslim rivals, the expanding Almohads. This double strategy was costly and caused a permanent need for money. Under Ibn Mardaniš, the mints in Valencia and Murcia constantly emitted enormous amounts of gold coins²⁷. This coinage was exported on a large scale to the Christian realms in the Iberian North as well as beyond the Pyrenees to France and Italy²⁸. Due to their high quality and almost ubiquitous availability, the ‘maravedís lopinos’, as they were named after Ibn Mardaniš’s vernacular sobriquet ‘Rey Lobo’, set the standard in the Christian territories, and became the currency of record for most financial transactions. There is rich documentation from Castile, Aragón²⁹,

²³ ID., El nacimiento de la moneda en Castilla. De la moneda prestada a la moneda propia, in: ÁNGEL RIESCO TERRERO – JAVIER de SANTIAGO FERNÁNDEZ (eds.), I Jornadas científicas sobre documentación jurídico-administrativa, económico-financiera y judicial del reino castellano-leonés (siglos X–XIII), Madrid 2002, pp. 303–346, here pp. 333–334.

²⁴ ADRIÁN ELÍAS NEGRO CORTÉS, Las parias. Una introducción general, in: FLOCEL SABATÉ I CURULL – JESÚS BRUFAL SUCARRAT (eds.), Investigar l’Edat Mitjana, Lleida 2018, pp. 43–54.

²⁵ ABIGAIL KRASNER-BALBALE, The Wolf King. Ibn Mardaniš and the Construction of Power in al-Andalus (Medieval Societies, Religions, and Cultures), Ithaca – London 2023.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 69–85.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 211–213; CAROLINA DOMÉNECH-BELDA, Moneda y poder en tiempos de Ibn Mardaniš, in: JORGE ALEJANDRO EIROA RODRÍGUEZ – MARÍA ÁNGELES GÓMEZ RÓDENAS (eds.), Rey Lobo. El legado de Ibn Mardaniš, 1147–1172. Exposición Museo Arqueológico de Murcia, junio–diciembre 2019, Murcia 2019, pp. 114–131.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 129–131.

²⁹ MARÍA ISABEL UBIETO ARTUR, Los morabedís ayadinos, circulación y cambio en el Reino de Aragón según la documentación coetánea, in: Numisma. Revista de Estudios Numismáticos 186–191, 1984, pp. 209–225.

Navarre, or Barcelona³⁰, e.g. of property deals or grants of pensions, which were defined and transacted in this specific sort of coins³¹. However, when Ibn Mardaniš was defeated by an Almohad army in 1171 CE and died shortly thereafter, the steady supply of gold coins from Murcia to its northern neighbours dried up abruptly. It was probably not purely accidental that this sudden cessation of coin imports from Ibn Mardaniš’s emirate coincided with a breaking innovation in Castilian monetary history: in 1172 CE³², after centuries of exclusive circulation of Andalusí dinars, Alfonso VIII began to issue gold coins in his own name.

It is commonly assumed that the new Castilian gold coinage was primarily introduced as a substitute for the now lacking dinars from Murcia³³. Indeed, Alfonso obviously kept the appearance of these Islamic coins, just as they had been minted under Ibn Mardaniš. He kept not only the standard weight and alloy of the Murcian dinar³⁴ but stuck to the model also with respect to the type. His first *morabetini* preserved a typically Islamic, non-iconic design, consisting almost exclusively of epigraphic legends in Kufic Arabic script. At first glance, Alfonso’s earliest gold coins would hardly be distinguishable from the Islamic ‘maravedís lopinos’, were it not for a star and a cross

³⁰ FELIPE MATEU Y LLOPIS, *Morabetinos lupinos y alfonsinos desde Ramón Berenguer IV de Barcelona a Jaime I de Aragón (1131–1276)*. Datos documentales sobre su curso en Navarra, Aragón, Barcelona, Lérida y Valencia con referencias a otras especies monetarias de igual valor, in: II *Jarique de Numismática hispano-árabe* (Quaderns de l’Institut d’Estudis Ilerdencs 3), Lleida 1990, pp. 93–116.

³¹ Arnald Puy suggests that accounting in gold coinage was a practice limited to a rather small elite circle, cf. ARNALD PUY, *Tracking down the Glitter of Gold in the Diplomatari de Santes Creus*, in: *Imago Temporis. Medium Aevum* 7, 2013, pp. 176–224.

³² The first surviving specimen dates to 1173 CE. However, written records document monetary transactions in the new “oro alfonsí” as early as February 1173 CE. This suggests a first emission of the coins in 1172 CE, see MANUEL MOZO MONROY, *Estudio y catalogación de los morabetinos arábigos monolingües y bilingües labrados en Castilla durante los reinados de Alfonso VIII, Enrique I y Fernando III*, in: *OMNI Extra* 1, 2014, pp. 165–186, here p. 167; JOSÉ MARÍA DE FRANCISCO OLMOS, *El maravedí de oro de Alfonso VIII. Un mensaje cristiano escrito en árabe*, in: *Revista general de información y documentación* 8, 1998, pp. 283–301, here p. 294; ID., *Nacimiento* (as note 23), p. 334. By contrast, MIQUEL CRUSAFONT – ANNA M. BALAGUER, *Medieval European Coinage*, vol. 6: *The Iberian Peninsula*, Cambridge 2013, pp. 285–286, date the first emission of the Alfonsine gold coin to 1173 CE.

³³ GONZALO OLIVA MANSO, *Cien años de moneda en Castilla (1172–1268)*. El siglo del maravedí de oro, in: *Espacio, tiempo y forma. Serie III: Historia medieval* 31, 2018, pp. 483–519, here pp. 485–486, 512; JAMES J. TODESCA, *Selling Castile. Coinage, Propaganda, and Mediterranean Trade in the Age of Alfonso VIII*, in: MIGUEL GÓMEZ et al. (eds.), *King Alfonso VIII of Castile. Government, Family, and War* (Fordham Series in Medieval Studies), New York 2019, pp. 30–58, here p. 43; CRUSAFONT – BALAGUER, *Coinage* (as note 32), pp. 286–287; HANNA E. KASSIS, *The Coinage of Muḥammad Ibn Sa’d (Ibn Mardaniš) of Mursiya. An Attempt at Iberian Islamic Autonomy*, in: MÁRIO GOMES MARQUES – DAVID MICHAEL METCALF (eds.), *Problems of Medieval Coinage in the Iberian Area III. A Symposium held by the Sociedade Numismática Scalabitana and the Instituto de Sintra on 4–8 October 1988*, Santarém 1988, pp. 209–229, here p. 219.

³⁴ FRANCISCO OLMOS, *Nacimiento* (as note 23), pp. 334–335. For the changes in weight and value of the maravedí alfonsí after its first emission, see OLIVA MANSO, *Cien años* (as note 33), esp. pp. 486–492; ID., *Enigmas monetarios en el derecho local. Los mencales y maravedís en los fueros castellanos*, in: *Revista general de información y documentación* 26, 2016, pp. 313–340, here pp. 326–327.

on the obverse that marked his coins as Christian³⁵. In a second phase from 1184 CE, the Latin letters ALF would appear as a further distinctive feature³⁶ (figures 1 and 2).

However, as soon as one starts reading the Arabic legends, it becomes clear how deeply Alfonso changed the Islamic model in a particularly Christian way³⁷. The inscriptions on Ibn Mardaniš's gold coins changed several times during his rule³⁸. None of the surviving exemplars can be shown to have served as the exact model for Alfonso's imitations. Nevertheless, several striking parallels clearly link the Castilian morabetinos to the Murcian dinars (figure 3). On the obverse, the 'maravedís lopinos' show a five- or six-line inscription respectively, starting with the Islamic *šahādah* ("There is no god, but Allāh / Muḥammad is the messenger of Allāh"). On some early coins this confessional formula is followed by a eulogy on the prophet ("May God bless him and grant him peace")³⁹, which is omitted on later coins to provide space for further lines of text. The second part of the obverse's legend names Ibn Mardaniš as the ruler (*amīr*) who emitted the coins. Here, variations appear with respect to the form of the personal name as well as accompanying religious formulas: on early coins, Ibn Mardaniš appears only with his *ism* and *nasab* as Muḥammad b. Sa'd⁴⁰, later inscriptions add his *kunya* Abū 'Abd Allāh⁴¹. In 547 H / 1152–1153 CE, at a height of his ideological confrontation with the Almohads, Ibn Mardaniš introduced a reference to Sura

³⁵ MOZO MONROY, Estudio (as note 32), type no. A8:1; MANUEL MOZO MONROY – MORTEN SØVSØ, Discovery of a Unique Golden Arabic Morabetin from the Year 1218 of the Safar Era in Gørding (Ribe-Denmark) in: Revista Numismática OMNI 13, 2019, pp. 324–339, here esp. pp. 328–332; ANTONIO VIVES Y ESCUDERO, Monedas de las dinastías arábigo-españolas, Madrid 1893, nos. 2019–2021 (high-resolution sample picture of Vives no. 2019 and Mozo no. A8:1.3: <https://tonegawa.eea.csic.es/T-def/almoravids/c69.jpg>, last accessed: 15/11/2024).

³⁶ MOZO MONROY, Estudio (as note 32), type no. A8:2; VIVES Y ESCUDERO, Monedas (as note 35), nos. 2022–2041 (high-resolution sample picture of Vives no. 2022 and Mozo no. A8:2.2: <https://en.numista.com/catalogue/pieces122691.html>, last accessed: 15/11/2024). MANUEL MOZO MONROY – ANA SERRANO, Los morabetinos arábigos bilingües de Alfonso VIII, entre lo mozárabe y lo mudéjar 2021, online: <https://wearenumismatics.com/los-morabetinos-arabigos-bilingues-de-alfonso-viii-entre-lo-mozarabe-y-lo-mudejar/>, last accessed: 15/11/2024.

³⁷ For a detailed study see FRANCISCO OLMOS, Maravedí (as note 32).

³⁸ For distinct phases in Ibn Mardaniš's minting, see KASSIS, Coinage (as note 33); DOMÉNECH-BELDA, Moneda (as note 27), pp. 123–126. The titles and religious formulas used at different stages were not simply conventional but expressed a specific developing concept of political legitimacy based on tradition and opposed to the messianic ideology of the Almohads, see KRASNER-BALBALE, Wolf King (as note 25), pp. 109–130; EAD., Political and Religious Authority in the Coinage of Ibn Mardaniš, in: SERGIO CARRO MARTÍN et al. (eds.), Mediterráneos. An Interdisciplinary Approach to the Cultures of the Mediterranean Sea, Newcastle upon Tyne 2013, pp. 303–318.

³⁹ VIVES Y ESCUDERO, Monedas (as note 35), nos. 1931–1932 (542–543 H / 1148–1150 CE), no. 1940 (547 H / 1152–1153 CE). The eulogy is absent from coins struck in 543–546 H / 1150–1152 CE, where the *šahādah* is arranged in a three-line scheme starting with *Allāh*, cf. Vives nos. 1933–1939 (sample picture of Vives no. 1934: https://tonegawa.eea.csic.es/T-def/almoravids/IMG_7623.JPG, last accessed: 15/11/2024).

⁴⁰ Ibid., nos. 1931–1939.

⁴¹ Ibid., nos. 1940–1963.



Figure 1: Alfonso VIII of Castile, Maravedí Alfonsí, Toledo 1174
(Images courtesy of Coins of al-Andalus, Tonegawa Collection:
<https://tonegawa.cca.csic.es/T-def/almoravids/c69.jpg>).



Figure 2: Alfonso VIII of Castile, Morabetino, ALF-type, Toledo 1192
(Images courtesy of https://de.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Maravedí_Alfonso_VIII_Toledo.jpg).

3:103 in order to propagate his righteousness and his caliph-like quality as upholder of the Islamic Ummah’s religious unity⁴²; furthermore, he appended a pious plea for God’s support (“May God strengthen him”) to his name⁴³. Finally, from 564 H / 1168–69 CE Ibn Mardaniš’s dinars also mention his eldest son Hilāl as his designated successor⁴⁴. In contrast to the multiple reformulations of the central legend, the inscription along the margin of the coins’ obverse remained unchanged over the

⁴² Ibid., nos. 1941–1963: *yā taṣimū bi-ḥabl Allāh* (“He holds fast to the rope of God”). On the interpretation of this Qur’anic reference, see KRASNER-BALBALE, Wolf King (as note 25), pp. 120–122.

⁴³ *Ayyada-bi Allāh* (“May God strengthen him”).

⁴⁴ VIVES Y ESCUDERO, Monedas (as note 35), nos. 1964–1965: *wālī ‘abdi-bi Hilāl*. See KRASNER-BALBALE, Wolf King (as note 25), pp. 126–127.



Figure 3: Ibn Mardaniš, Dinar, Murcia 544 H / 1149–1150 CE
(Images courtesy of Coins of al-Andalus, Tonegawa Collection:
https://tonegawa.cca.csic.es/T-def/almoravids/IMG_7623.JPG).

years. It invariably gives a Quranic quotation from Sura 3:85, which had already been common on Almoravid dinars: “Whoever seeks a way other than Islam, it will never be accepted from them, and in the Hereafter they will be among the losers.”

While the obverse names Ibn Mardaniš as the factual emitter of the respective coin, the central legend on the reverse legitimises his local rulership by embedding it into the overarching order of the pan-Islamic caliphate. By demonstratively pledging allegiance to the Sunni caliphate of the Abbasids, Ibn Mardaniš opposed both the Almohad ideology⁴⁵ of the theocratic rule of a chosen Mahdī and his dynastic successors, as well as the rivalling messianic concept of the Fatimid imamate. However, in the first years of his minting⁴⁶, the coins issued by Ibn Mardaniš only bore a generic reference to an unspecified *al-imām ‘Abd Allāh amīr al-mu’minīn* (“Imam ‘Abd Allāh, Commander of the Faithful”), which here is to be understood not as a personal name but literally as a ‘servant of God’⁴⁷. A major change in this respect came about in 547 H / 1152 CE, when Ibn Mardaniš replaced the reference to the generic *‘Abd Allāh* by the mention of a specific Abbasid caliph, Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 22–50.

⁴⁶ VIVES Y ESCUDERO, Monedas (as note 35), nos. 1931–1939 (542–546 H / 1148–1152 CE).

⁴⁷ The mention of a certain *al-imām ‘Abd Allāh* as placeholder for the absent caliph had already become common on the coinage of several Andalusī Taifa kingdoms after the fall of Umayyad rule in 1031 CE, see ALEJANDRO PELÁEZ MARTÍN, *El califa ausente. Cuestiones de autoridad en al-Andalus durante el siglo XI* (Monografías del Máster Universitario en Estudios Medievales Hispánicos 15), Madrid 2018, pp. 79–98. The Almoravids initially adopted this unspecific reference to *al-imām ‘Abd Allāh* for their gold dinars, even though they too had demonstratively affiliated with the Abbasid caliphate to legitimise their rule. Only from 1138–1139 CE, in reaction to the caliphal claims of the Almohads, they explicitly specified the caliphate they recognised as legitimate by adding the dynastic *nisba al-‘abbāsī* to the generic ruler’s title, cf. ALMUDENA ARIZA ARMADA, *The Coinage of al-Andalus*, in: *Shedet* 4, 2017, pp. 68–90, here pp. 80–81; FRANCISCO OLMOS, *Maravedí* (as note 32), p. 287.

Muqtafi⁴⁸ (r. 1136–1160 CE), whose rule is explicitly marked as ‘divinely ordained’ (*li-amr Allāh*)⁴⁹. In 557 H / 1162 CE, almost two years after al-Muqtafi had died in Baghdad, Ibn Mardaniš returned to naming the generic ‘*Abd Allāh*’ on his coins, but he now specified him expressly by the adjective (or dynastic *nisba*) *al-‘abbāsī*⁵⁰. The circular inscription along the margin, in turn, starts with the typical Bismillah (“In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful”), and continues with technical information on where and when the respective coin had been minted (e. g. “This dinar was struck in Murcia [Valencia] in the year [...]”).

This was the model. What did Alfonso VIII make of it⁵¹? In the field of the obverse, Alfonso took Ibn Mardaniš’s place as the legal emitter of the coinage: he too is named in the typical Arabic form by *ism* and *kunya* as *Alfunṣ b. Saṅḡub* (“Alfonso, son of Sancho”). Remarkable is his ruling title, “Commander of the Catholics” (*amīr al-qaṭuliqīn*), that alludes to the pan-Islamic caliphal authority rather than to the merely regional emirate that Ibn Mardaniš had claimed in his coins. The inscription on the obverse concludes with a two-line blessing formula for the ruler: “May God strengthen him and grant him victory” (*ayyada-hu ‘llāh wa-naṣṣara-hu*). While Ibn Mardaniš’s maravedís had underscored their Islamic character by presenting the *ṣabāḍab* formula, confessing the oneness of God and the prophethood of Muḥammad, Alfonso’s coins, in turn, invoke the Triune God of Christian orthodoxy. They do so, however, in an alternate position. It is in the margin of the reverse that one reads: “In the name of God and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the one God”, followed by a verse from the Gospel replacing the original’s Quranic quotation. Where the Islamic coins had announced that any other religion than Islam would lead to damnation (Sura 3:85), the Christian maravedís now state “whoever believes and receives baptism shall be relieved” (Mark 16:16). In the field of the reverse, Ibn Mardaniš’s original allegiance to the pan-Islamic authority of the Abbasid caliphs was replaced by a reference to its analogous Christian counterpart, i. e. the Roman papacy as ‘leader’ (*imām*) of the Christian church. Finally, the inscription on the margin of the obverse specifies the mint where the coins were struck as well as the year according to the Spanish Era. All surviving specimens of the Alfonsine maravedís were struck in Toledo. The city was the only one in the Castilian realm that held all the necessary resources to produce Islamic-style coins: on the one hand, an established mint, but above all a reservoir of experts from among the so-called ‘Mozarabic’ population who could read, write, and engrave Arabic script⁵².

⁴⁸ Misspelled as *al-Muktafi* on the first issues: VIVES Y ESCUDERO, *Monedas* (as note 35), no. 1940.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, nos. 1940–1955. See also KRASNER-BALBALE, *Wolf King* (as note 25), pp. 118–120.

⁵⁰ VIVES Y ESCUDERO, *Monedas* (as note 35), nos. 1956–1968.

⁵¹ JAIME PÉREZ SÁNCHEZ, *Morabetinos Alfonsinos*, in: *Manquso* 9, 2018, pp. 55–85; FRANCISCO OLMOS, *Maravedí* (as note 32), esp. pp. 293–300; *Id.*, *Nacimiento* (as note 23), pp. 337–338; MOZO MONROY – SØVSØ, *Discovery* (as note 35), pp. 331–332; KRASNER-BALBALE, *Wolf King* (as note 25), pp. 216–221.

⁵² FRANCISCO OLMOS, *Nacimiento* (as note 23), p. 336; *Id.*, *Maravedí* (as note 32), p. 297; CRUSAFONT – BALAGUER, *Coinage* (as note 32), pp. 287–288; MARÍA JOSÉ MARTÍN-PEÑATO LÁZARO, *La moneda hispano-árabe en Toledo*, in: *Tulaytula. Revista de la Asociación de Amigos del Toledo Islámico* 3,

Alfonso's choice of an explicitly 'Islamicate' design for his morabetinos was clearly a deliberate takeover of foreign cultural codes and symbols, which would lend prestige to his own coinage. However, he undertook a profound reformulation of the original Islamic coins' message, meaning, and significance by 'translating' them culturally, politically, and religiously into Christian ones. Before discussing this 'cultural translation'⁵³ further, it seems useful to look at some other examples of imitative Islamic coinage issued by Christian rulers, which will serve as comparative material.

3. COMPARATIVE CASES: FURTHER CHRISTIAN IMITATIONS OF ISLAMIC COINAGE

Alfonso VIII was not the first to imitate foreign gold coins; he was not even the first Castilian ruler to issue Islamic-style dinars. From 1147 to 1156 CE, his grandfather Alfonso VII had temporarily ruled over the Muslim town of Baeza. During this decade, a mint located in the conquered city produced gold coins largely identical to the Almoravid dinar⁵⁴. In most cases, one can deduce only from the date given on the consistently Islamic coins that they were struck under Christian rule. It is not clear whether Alfonso took over a functioning mint in the conquered city or rather built a new mint himself, for which he would in any case have had to rely on local Andalusí minters. Most likely, therefore, the moneyers working in Baeza under Christian rule simply continued to produce the very same sort of Islamic coins they had already been striking in Almoravid or Taifa mints before having been hired by the Castilians. At least in some coins, however, the Christian interlude has left explicit traces. A small number of dinars from this period bear the inscription "struck in Baeza according to the weight standard [or fineness] of Castile" (*ḍariba haḍ[ā] al-dīnār bi-Bayasab bi-ʿīyār Qaṣṭīlyah*)⁵⁵ (figure 4). The meaning of this phrase is not entirely clear, as there was not yet a defined Castilian standard for gold currency. Roma Valdés suggested that it might have referred to a slight adjustment of the coins' weight in order to simplify their exchange ratio to the circulating Castilian silver currency⁵⁶. The peculiar inscription appears only in coins issued during the first years of the Castilian overlordship;

1998, pp. 37–49, here pp. 46–49; JOSÉ ANTONIO DÁVILA GARCÍA-MIRANDA, Los morabetinos toledanos, ¿mudéjares o mozárabes?, in: Crónica mozárabe. Boletín informativo de la Ilustre Comunidad Mozárabe de Toledo 42, 1996, pp. 9–10. García-Bellido drew attention to three peculiar stone moulds for the casting (!) of Alfonsine maravedís of the ALF-type, which were found near Salamanca; the moulds, although apparently never used, were probably intended to produce forgeries, cf. MARÍA PAZ GARCÍA-BELLIDO GARCÍA DE DIEGO, Moldes procedentes de Salamanca para fundir maravedís de Alfonso VIII, in: OMNI Extra 180, 1983, pp. 227–240.

⁵³ KRASNER-BALBALE, Wolf King (as note 25), p. 220.

⁵⁴ DAVID FRANCÈS VAÑÓ, La moneda anónima de Baeza, in: Manquso 9, 2018, pp. 43–53; RODRÍGUEZ – RÓDENAS (eds.), Rey Lobo (as note 27), pp. 152–153, nos. 14–15.

⁵⁵ VIVES Y ESCUDERO, Monedas (as note 35), no. 1995 (high-resolution picture: <https://tonegawa.eea.csic.es/T-def/almoravids/c68.jpg>, last accessed: 15/11/2024).

⁵⁶ ANTONIO ROMA VALDÉS, Emisiones monetarias leonesas y castellanas de la Edad Media. Organización, economía, tipos y fuentes (Textos de numismática 2), Madrid 2010, pp. 121–122.



Figure 4: Alfonso VII of Castile, Dinar, Baeza 545 H / 1150–1151 CE
(Images courtesy of Coins of al-Andalus, Tonegawa Collection:
<https://tonegawa.cca.csic.es/T-def/almoravids/c68.jpg>).

its sudden disappearance may have resulted from a political change: the Castilians probably withdrew from the city in 1149 CE and entrusted the government of Baeza to a Muslim vassal, Abū Marwān⁵⁷. This, however, would even strengthen the impression that the Baeza maravedís struck under Alfonso VII were in fact genuine Islamic coins.

A second example are the so-called ‘mancusos’⁵⁸, which the counts of Barcelona issued for several decades throughout the eleventh century⁵⁹ until these coins were in their turn supplanted by the Almoravid dinars. The first known exemplar of this coinage dates to 1018 CE or shortly after⁶⁰. It resembles a gold dinar struck in 407

⁵⁷ FRANCÈS VAÑÓ, *Moneda* (as note 54), p. 47.

⁵⁸ The term ‘mancus’ is usually explained as a derivation from Arabic *manqūṣ* (‘engraved’), thus supposedly pointing to an Arabic/Islamic origin of this sort of coins. As early as 1954, however, Philipp Grierson proposed eighth-century coinage from Byzantine Italy as the eponymous model for the ‘mancus’ (PHILIPP GRIERSON, *Carolingian Europe and the Arabs. The Myth of the Mancus*, in: *Revue Belge de philologie et d’histoire* 32, 1954, pp. 1059–1074). His view did not gain acceptance at the time but has recently been reaffirmed by VIVIEN PRIGENT, *Le mythe du mancus et les origines de l’économie européenne*, in: *Revue Numismatique* 6, 2014, pp. 701–728. For a more sceptical perspective, see RICHARD RAYMOND RING, *The Missing Mancus and the Early Medieval Economy*, in: MICHAEL FRASSETTO – MATTHEW GABRIELE et al. (eds.), *Where Heaven and Earth Meet. Essays on Medieval Europe in Honor of Daniel F. Callahan* (Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 174), Boston 2014, pp. 33–41, here pp. 39–41.

⁵⁹ ALMUDENA ARIZA ARMADA, *The Mancuses issued in the Name of the Ḥammūdīd Caliphs. A Cordoba-Barcelona-Kyiv Connection. New Perspectives*, in: *The Ukrainian Numismatic Annual* 6, 2022, pp. 148–168; ANNA M. BALAGUER, *Història de la moneda dels comtats catalans*, Barcelona 1999, pp. 367–370 (tipus 18–22) and pp. 396–403 (tipus 26–28).

⁶⁰ HENRI LAVOIX, *Catalogue des monnaies musulmanes de la Bibliothèque nationale*, vol. 2: *Espagne et Afrique*, Paris 1891, p. 516, no. 1114. For a photographic reproduction see ARIZA ARMADA, *Mancuses* (as note 59), pp. 155–156; BALAGUER, *Història* (as note 59), pp. 70–72.



Figure 5: Gold Mancuso of Bonnom (Berenguer Ramón I), Barcelona 1023–1024 CE (= ANS 1944.100.1.) (Images courtesy of the American Numismatic Society: <http://numismatics.org/collection/1959.86.1>).

or 408 H / 1016–1018 CE by the North-African mint of Ceuta (*Madīna Sabta*) in the name of the Berber ruler ‘Alī b. Ḥammūd⁶¹. In the turmoil that ultimately led to the collapse of Umayyad rule in al-Andalus, ‘Alī b. Ḥammūd seized control of Córdoba in 1016 CE and usurped the title of caliph, only to be killed shortly afterwards in 1018 CE⁶². The gold coin in question has his name with the full caliphal title on the reverse, in the field of the obverse appears the Islamic confession of the one God (“There is no God but Allāh alone, he has no partner”). The poor epigraphic quality of the Arabic inscriptions, however, shows the coin to be a non-Muslim imitation. After his death, ‘Alī b. Ḥammūd was succeeded by two further members of his family, al-Qāṣim and Yaḥyā al-Mu‘talī, whose names and caliphal titles also appear on Barcelonese mancuses struck until 1035 CE. However, these latter coins are no longer replicas of the Ḥammūdīd originals but are clearly distinguished by a bilingual legend giving the name of the (Jewish) moneyer ‘Bon(n)om’ in Latin script. Furthermore, at least one series from 414 H / 1023–1024 CE expressly mentions Barcelona as the place of minting, thus making explicit that the coins were struck in a city under Christian rule⁶³ (figure 5).

It is disputed whether the coins bearing Bon(n)om’s name were official issues of the reigning counts or whether they were of a private nature. If the emission of the

⁶¹ MARÍA DOLORES ROSADO LLAMAS, Las acuñaciones de ‘Alī b. Ḥammūd, in: Mainake 31, 2009, pp. 395–410, here pp. 401–409, probably no. 17 (= VIVES Y ESCUDERO, Monedas [as note 35], no. 732); the dating on the imitative coin is illegible.

⁶² On ‘Alī and the Ḥammūdīd dynasty, see PETER C. SCALES, The Fall of the Caliphate of Córdoba. Berbers and Andalus in conflict (Medieval Iberian Peninsula 9), Leiden 1994, pp. 90–104, 176–180.

⁶³ BALAGUER, Història (as note 59), pp. 367–368, tipus 18–19 (high-resolution sample picture of tipus 19: <http://numismatics.org/collection/1959.86.1>, last accessed: 23/01/2025); ARIZA ARMADA, Mancuses (as note 59), pp. 156–157.

mancusos was the private endeavour of specialised artisans⁶⁴, it probably lacked any political dimension. In fact, previous research has generally explained the Catalan reproduction of Islamic gold dinars in terms of purely economic needs. It was generally assumed that the upheavals in al-Andalus from 1009 CE had interrupted the influx of gold coins on which the Christian kingdoms of the Iberian north had become dependent. The new Barcelonese mancusos were therefore generally seen as a substitute for the supposedly dwindling supply of Andalusí coins⁶⁵. However, this idea has been questioned with good reasons. Contrary to prior assumptions, the quantities of Islamic gold coins that flew into the domestic economies of the Christian realms during the final crisis of the Umayyad caliphate did not decline but rather even increased⁶⁶. The striving factions in the Andalusí civil war heavily drew on Christian military support to fight their respective rivals and paid for this with copious amounts of coined money. To all appearances, therefore, there was no shortage of gold coins in Barcelona around 1018 CE. Moreover, if the new Barcelonese mancusos would have been merely a substitute to the established Umayyad dinars, why then would they imitate the coinage of a rival caliphal dynasty that had seized power only recently and – more importantly – against which Count Ramón Borell had still been fighting fiercely in 1016 CE?

In view of such inconsistencies, Almudena Ariza Armada has most recently argued in favour of the official character of the Barcelona mancusos, linking their emergence to the political rather than the monetary realities of the time⁶⁷. Since the middle of the tenth century, the counts of Barcelona – like other Catalan rulers – had sought an alliance with the caliphate of Córdoba; *de facto*, the Catalan counts had thus become ‘vassals’ of the Umayyads. This strategic orientation towards the south had played a decisive role in Catalonia’s emancipation from Gallo-Frankish domination in the 980s CE; it had outlasted the period of ‘Āmirid attacks, and finally embroiled the Catalan counts in the factional struggles for the caliphate: from 1010 CE, count Ramón Borrell (r. 992–1017 CE) had been fighting on the side of an Umayyad legitimist party⁶⁸. In 1016 CE, however, the Berber Ḥammūdids seized power in Córdoba. The counts of Barcelona had to adjust to these changed political conditions, especially since Ramón

⁶⁴ On Bonhom see GEORGE CARPENTER MILES, *Bonhom de Barcelone*, in: *Études d’orientalisme dédiées à la mémoire de Lévi-Provençal*, 2 vols., Paris 1962, pp. 683–693. After Bonhom, a moneyer named Enea appears in the records.

⁶⁵ BALAGUER, *Història* (as note 59), p. 70.

⁶⁶ PIERRE BONNASSIE, *La Catalogne du milieu du X^e à la fin du XI^e siècle. Croissance et mutations d’une société* (Publications de l’université de Toulouse-Mirail. Sér. A 23+29), 2 vols., Toulouse 1975/1976, here vol. 1, pp. 372–379.

⁶⁷ ARIZA ARMADA, *Mancuses* (as note 59), pp. 158–159.

⁶⁸ On the relations of the Catalan counts with Córdoba, see BONNASSIE, *Catalogne* (as note 66), vol. 1, pp. 340–361; and more particular: JOSEP SUÑÉ ARCE, *El origen de toda la enfermedad. Los condes Ramón Borrell de Barcelona y Ermengol I de Urgell frente a los Amiríes*, in: MARTÍN ALVIRA CABRER – MIGUEL GOMES MARTINS (eds.), *Fechos de armas. 15 hitos bélicos del Medievo ibérico (siglos XI–XVI)* (Guerra medieval ibérica 2), Madrid 2021, pp. 13–23; SCALES, *Caliphate* (as note 62), pp. 97–100, 200–204.

Borell's death in early 1017 CE left the county with an under-aged successor: until 1023 CE, Ermesinda reigned for her minor son Berenguer Ramón I (r. 1017–1035 CE). As Ariza Armada intriguingly suggests, minting in the name of the now ruling Ḥammūdīd caliphs may thus have not been an act of Catalan self-empowerment vis-à-vis a slowly fading Islamic dominance, but rather a demonstrative recognition of the Ḥammūdīd claim to power. In fact, Andalusī rulers of that period not only granted their clients and vassals the right to mint coinage in the name of their caliphate but rather demanded them to do so as a visible sign of allegiance⁶⁹. This interpretation suggests that the Islamic-style mancuses of Barcelona were not an example of appropriation, with Christian actors arbitrarily exploiting Islamic numismatic models to serve their own (monetary) needs and interests. Rather, Counts Ramón Borell⁷⁰ and Berenguer Ramón may have issued these gold coins in the name and at the behest of their new Ḥammūdīd overlords⁷¹. Only a generation later – long after the fall of the caliphate and the end of Ḥammūdīd rule in al-Andalus – first mancuses were struck in Barcelona that bore the name and title of the ruling Christian count Ramón Berenguer (r. 1035–1076 CE) in Latin script (RAIMVNDVS COMES). Though still roughly imitating a dinar struck in the name of the third Ḥammūdīd caliph, Yaḥyā al-Muʿtalī, the dies now were cut by engravers apparently unfamiliar with the Arabic script; moreover, the coins are heavily debased to only half of the original's weight⁷².

The bilingual legends link the later Barcelonese gold coins to a third example: the unique 'mancusus' of King Offa of Mercia, minted in or shortly after 786 CE⁷³

⁶⁹ ARIZA ARMADA, Mancuses (as note 59), p. 154.

⁷⁰ As Ariza Armada suggests, the imitation of the coin featuring ʿAlī b. Ḥammūd's name probably dates from the reign of Ramón Borell. However, there is only a narrow time span that would allow for this attribution: ʿAlī b. Ḥammūd proclaimed himself caliph on 3rd of July 1016 CE (SCALES, Caliphate [as note 62], p. 93), while Ramón Borell died on 27th of February 1017 CE (RAMON ORDEIG I MATA, *El dia de la mort del comte Ramon Borrell. 27 de febrer de 1017*, in: *Annals de l'Institut d'Estudis Gironins* 55, 2014, pp. 65–82).

⁷¹ ARIZA ARMADA, Mancuses (as note 59), pp. 153–156.

⁷² CARMÉ MONTALBÁN MARTÍNEZ, *Un mancús (II) de Ramon Berenguer I*, in: *Annals de l'Institut d'Estudis Gironins* 35, 1995, pp. 47–54; BALAGUER, *Història* (as note 59), pp. 71–72, 396–401, tipus 26–28.

⁷³ British Museum, object no. 1913,1213.1 (high-resolution picture online at https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_1913-1213-1, last accessed: 23/01/2025). DEREK CHICK, *The Coinage of Offa and his Contemporaries*, ed. MARK BLACKBURN – RORY NAISMITH (The British Numismatic Society. Special Publications 6), London 2010, p. 55, type 1a; SHERIF ANWAR – JERE L. BACHARACH, *The Prestige of Muslim Coins. An Eighth-Century English Imitation of a Muslim Dinar*, in: *al-Abhath* 58/59, 2010/2011, pp. 13–20; HENRI MARCEL LEON, *An Anglo-Saxon King Proclaims The Unity of Allah and that Muhammad is His Prophet*, in: *Islamic Review and Muslim India* 4, 1916, pp. 80–90; JOHN ALLAN, *Offa's Imitation of an Arab Dinar*, in: *The Numismatic Chronicle and Journal of the Royal Numismatic Society. Fourth Series* 14, 1914, pp. 77–89; PHILIP WILLIAM POOLE CARLYON-BRITTON, *The Gold Mancus of Offa, King of Mercia*, in: *British Numismatic Journal* 5, 1908, pp. 55–72; ADRIEN DE LONGPERIER, *Remarkable Gold Coin of Offa*, in: *The Numismatic Chronicle* 4, 1841, pp. 232–234.



Figure 6: Offa of Mercia, Mancus (Dinar), 8th century, British Museum object no. 1913,1213.1.

(Images courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum [licence CC BY-NC-SA 4.0]:

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_1913-1213-1).

(figure 6). The coin, of which only one specimen is known, imitates an Abbasid dinar, struck in 157 H / 773–774 CE under the rule of caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 754–775 CE). Offa commissioned a die cutter (who obviously was not familiar with Arabic script) to fully reproduce the Islamic coin’s type, including the proclamation of Muḥammad’s prophethood, and then to insert his own name and royal title in Latin script in the field of the reverse. Notably, Offa did not have extant Islamic dinars countermarked⁷⁴ but had struck new ones with a bilingual legend, thus demonstratively making the coinage his own. Two features of Offa’s dinar require explanation: first, why did Offa have a gold coin minted, while trade and commerce in his own realm as well as in neighbouring areas were almost exclusively based on silver currency⁷⁵? Second, why did he choose an Islamic coin to imitate? The only surviving exemplar of this peculiar coinage is commonly thought to have been originally found in Rome⁷⁶. This fact possibly links the coin to a pious donation made by Offa to the papacy in 786 CE⁷⁷. Papal

⁷⁴ Wolfgang Hahn drew attention to a countermarked Abbasid gold coin that apparently imitates Offa’s bilingual dinar, see WOLFGANG R.O. HAHN, A Mancus Apparently Marked on Behalf of King Offa. Genuine or Fake?, in: NICHOLAS HOLMES (ed.), *Proceedings of the XIVth International Numismatic Congress, Glasgow 2009*, 2 vols., Glasgow 2011, pp.1464–1469. Hahn argues in favour of the coin’s authenticity.

⁷⁵ In fact, from the eighth century onwards Anglo-Saxon kings rarely issued gold coins alongside the dominant silver coinage: CHICK, *Coinage* (as note 73), pp.55–56, types 1a–3a; GARETH WILLIAMS – MICHAEL COWELL, *Analysis of a Gold Mancus of Coenwulf of Mercia and other Comparable Coins*, in: *British Museum Technical Research Bulletin* 3, 2009, pp. 31–36; CHRISTOPHER EVELYN BLUNT – REGINALD HUGH MICHAEL DOLLEY, *A Gold Coin of the Time of Offa*, in: *The Numismatic Chronicle* 8, 1968, pp.151–160, here pp.156–157.

⁷⁶ LONGPERIER, *Gold Coin* (as note 73), p. 232; ANWAR – BACHARACH, *Prestige* (as note 73), p.13; CHICK, *Coinage* (as note 73), p.55.

⁷⁷ The first to put forward this hypothesis was LONGPERIER, *Gold Coin* (as note 73). It found acceptance, among others, by CARLYON-BRITTON, *Mancus* (as note 73), pp.63–68; LEON, *King* (as note 73),

letters of that period suggest that the king had vowed to send 365 *mancusi* to Rome every year to feed the poor and light the churches in the Eternal City⁷⁸. The term ‘mancusus’, used in this context, did not necessarily refer to a specific sort of coins but more probably indicated a certain value or metal weight⁷⁹. Nonetheless, Offa apparently had a special sort of hybrid coins struck to fulfil his obligation. The fact that he chose to copy an Islamic gold dinar was certainly due to the high esteem that this sort of currency enjoyed throughout the Mediterranean at that time. However, he did not simply reproduce this model but deliberately changed its appearance by inscribing his own name and title on it. He thus exploited the high prestige of the Islamic coin to enhance his own symbolic capital as a powerful and prosperous ruler⁸⁰.

Given the presumed historical context of the only surviving specimen, Offa’s dinar has often been referred to as a “ceremonial coin”⁸¹, i.e. a coin minted not for circulation as regular currency but to present a diplomatic gift in a particularly prestigious form. In 2004, however, Lutz Ilisch showed that at the same time royal mints in the Eastern part of the Carolingian Empire produced copious amounts of imitative Islamic dinars that were obviously meant to circulate⁸². Around twenty-five such imitations have been identified so far; judging from the variety of dies, though, Ilisch assumes mintage numbers of several hundreds of thousands of pieces⁸³. Remarkably, most of these Carolingian imitations reproduce the same Abbasid dinar of 157 H, after which also Offa had his golden mancusus modelled. However, there are two crucial differences between Offa’s coin and the Carolingian ones: firstly, Offa marked his mancusus as his own issue by visibly modifying the original type. His gold coin did not pretend to be an original Islamic dinar⁸⁴. This is different with the Carolingian coins: they lack any deliberate marking of their imitative character and were obviously intended to pass unnoticed as genuine Islamic coins. The second difference is in the

pp. 81–82, 89–90; ANWAR – BACHARACH, *Prestige* (as note 73), pp. 15–16. Other authors are more reluctant in accepting this connection, e.g. RORY NAISMITH, *Islamic Coins from Early Medieval England*, in: *The Numismatic Chronicle* 165, 2005, pp. 193–222, here pp. 196–197; RING, *Missing Mancus* (as note 58), pp. 38–39.

⁷⁸ Pope Leo III to King Coenwulf of Mercia in 798 CE: *Epistolae Karolini Aevi*, vol. 2, ed. ERNST DÜMMER (MGH Epp. 4), Berlin 1895, no. 127, pp. 187–189: [...] *ut per unumquemque annum, scilicet quantos dies annus habuerit, tantos mancusos eidem Dei apostolo aeclesiae, nimirum trecentos sexaginta quinque, pro alimoniis pauperum et luminariorum concinnationes emittere. Quod et fecit* [...].

⁷⁹ RING, *Missing Mancus* (as note 58), for Anglo-Saxon ‘mancusi’ see esp. pp. 37–39; NAISMITH, *Coins* (as note 77), p. 196.

⁸⁰ ANWAR – BACHARACH, *Prestige* (as note 73), p. 14.

⁸¹ BLUNT – DOLLEY, *Gold Coin* (as note 75), pp. 157–158.

⁸² LUTZ ILISCH, *Die imitativen solidi mancusi. ‘Arabische’ Goldmünzen der Karolingerzeit*, in: REINER CUNZ et al. (eds.), *Fundamenta Historiae. Geschichte im Spiegel der Numismatik und ihrer Nachbarwissenschaften. Festschrift für Niklot Klüßendorf zum 60. Geburtstag am 10. Februar 2004* (Veröffentlichungen der urgeschichtlichen Sammlungen des Landesmuseums zu Hannover 51), Hannover 2004, pp. 91–106.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁸⁴ ANWAR – BACHARACH, *Prestige* (as note 73), pp. 14–15.

weight and fineness of the two coinages: while the mancusus of Offa has nearly the weight and alloy of the Islamic original⁸⁵, the Carolingian coins are all significantly underweight and have a much lower fineness, effectively containing about twenty percent less fine gold than the standard dinars. Some imitations turn out to be gilded silver or even copper⁸⁶. This points to different aims of the two coinages: Offa obviously wanted to demonstrate that he was able to issue gold coins that were as good as the renowned Islamic dinars; his *manкуси* were thus intended to enhance his reputation as a ruler and as a true son of Saint Peter. The Carolingian gold coins, by contrast, must be considered forgeries, pretending a value they did not have.

4. THE ‘MARAVEDÍS ALFONSINOS’ AGAINST THE HORIZON OF CHRISTIAN IMITATIVE COINAGE

The foregoing examples stand for a variety of rather different scenarios, constellations, and motifs underlying potential monetary ‘appropriations’. In all the cases discussed, Christian rulers issued Islamic-style coins in order to ‘exploit’ the symbolism of prestigious Muslim coinage for their own purposes. The visual ‘Islamicness’ of their issues either guaranteed the acceptance of the coins, attributed to the reputation of their emitters, or conveyed the intended message of affiliation and loyalty. In no case, however, did the utilisation of Islamic numismatic patterns happen ‘unaware or in disregard’ of their respective original contexts and meanings. Right the contrary was true: all imitative coins intentionally played on the positive associations linked to the trusted and highly esteemed Muslim gold currencies.

To what extent did the imitators deliberately assign new significance to the appropriated coins? In the case of the Carolingian counterfeit money, any visible alteration of the Islamic coins’ outer appearance would have been downright counterproductive; the fake dinars were probably meant to pass unrecognised as originals. With Alfonso VII’s Baeza dinars, too, a shift in meaning is hardly recognisable: Alfonso kept the Almoravid coins’ appearance largely unchanged, neither did he translate them into new contexts of usage. One could even speculate that the indication of a diverging coin weight in the inscription was not ordered by Alfonso, but rather goes back to the Arab moneyers, who marked the coins as inferior for those who could read Arabic. Count Berenguer Ramón of Barcelona, in turn, seems to have played basically according to Cordoban rules when he first issued mancuses; his emission of imitative dinars did not detach the coins from the political sign system of the caliphate. Such a decontextualisation took place only a generation later in the bilingual mancuses issued after 1035 CE. With these coins, however, Count Ramón Berenguer actually continued his father’s minting rather than appropriating anew foreign Islamic coinage. It was only

⁸⁵ See the data provided by WILLIAMS – COWELL, *Analysis* (as note 75), p. 32.

⁸⁶ ILISCH, *Solidi manкуси* (as note 82), pp. 100–101; RORY NAISMITH, *Six English Finds of Carolingian-Era Gold Coins*, in: *The Numismatic Chronicle* 170, 2010, pp. 215–225, here pp. 223–225.

King Offa who clearly re-defined the meaning of his imitated *mancusus*. Although basically keeping the Islamic model, Offa marked the coin as his own issue and thus made it propagate his royal reputation. Apparently, this message was directed not only to his subjects in Anglo-Saxon Mercia but also to addressees abroad such as the Roman papacy. Of all the cases considered, therefore, Offa's use of Islamic numismatic forms and codes seems to come closest to 'appropriation'.

The examples discussed, however, do not correspond to the standardised patterns of power relations presupposed by current understandings of 'cultural appropriation': none of the presented emitters of imitative Islamic coins was in a dominant position vis-à-vis the Muslim societies, from which they adopted the numismatic forms and standards for their respective issues; neither, however, can they be regarded as 'dominated' or 'oppressed' by the Muslim side. The parties involved in the cases examined here did not encounter each other within the same polity but interacted as sovereign powers across external borders. Subordination and superiority therefore did not manifest themselves in forms of 'discrimination' or 'marginalisation' within societies, but in political, economic, and military power relations between realms and empires. Nevertheless, these power relations are important for the assessment of the scenarios analysed. Of all coin emitters, certainly Alfonso VII of Castile was in the most powerful position vis-à-vis his Muslim opposites, at least temporarily, having gained control of the Baeza mint between 1147–1156 CE by forceful conquest. However, Alfonso simply continued to have struck essentially Almoravid coins, which hardly show any traces of active Christian interference. The issuing of his 'morabetinos' therefore hardly constituted a deliberate gesture of Christian dominance. The Catalan counts of Barcelona, by contrast, were in a rather weak position when they first started issuing Islamic-style coins around 1018 CE. In the throes of a domestic succession crisis, they had just lost their long-standing Umayyad allies and now had to come to terms with a new caliphal dynasty in Córdoba, which they had still been fighting against only shortly before. Re-orientating their allegiance and minting Ḥammūdīd dinars as a sign of subordination may have been a way to cope with the radically changed political circumstances. However, the counts kept issuing their Islamic-style coins long after the power of the Caliphate of al-Andalus had faded; apparently, they felt no need to discard the coins as a supposed sign of political inferiority at the first opportunity. Finally, Offa of Mercia as well as the eighth-century Carolingian minters had no regular contact whatsoever with the Abbasid Empire whose coins they were copying. Their imitative coinage was therefore not related directly to the political or military balance of power between Christianity and Islam at the time; nevertheless, issuing (or forging) Islamic-style coins was in itself a tacit recognition of the unrivalled prestige and undisputed economic dominance of the Abbasid dinar.

None of the scenarios discussed exactly resembles the case of Alfonso VIII's 'Islamicate' dinars with their deliberately Christianised message. However, they direct the view to various questions that also need to be addressed with respect to the 'maravedis alfonsinos'. Why did Alfonso VIII start to issue his own gold coinage at all? It is

commonly assumed that the Castilian king introduced his morabetinos to compensate for a supposedly growing shortage of Islamic dinars⁸⁷. This interpretation, however, disregards the origin of the raw material necessary for the minting: where did the gold for the ‘maravedís alfonsinos’ come from? Castile had no relevant gold mining itself⁸⁸. The gold that reached the Iberian Peninsula during the high Middle Ages was almost exclusively of Sub-Saharan origin and was traded along routes controlled by the North-African Berber empires of the Almoravids and Almohads, respectively⁸⁹. In the Christian realms of the Iberian North, this gold would usually arrive in the form of coined money. With high probability, Alfonso obtained a substantial part of the raw material for his morabetinos by melting down Islamic coins⁹⁰. At first glance, therefore, the emission of the Alfonsine maravedís would result in a zero-sum-game without increasing the volume of gold currency in circulation. Moreover, the Mardanišī dinars from Murcia had been the standard gold currency in Castile for decades. Why should Alfonso have suddenly decided to replace the well-established Islamic coins with new ones? In fact, the gold currency circulating on the Iberian Peninsula underwent a radical change at the very moment when Alfonso started minting his morabetinos. Ibn Mardaniš had been the last Muslim ruler of al-Andalus to issue coins according to the traditional Almoravid model. The Almohads, who firmly established their rule over all of al-Andalus in 1171 CE, introduced a new form of dinars that starkly differed from their rivals’ coinage in both type and weight⁹¹. Even users unable to read the Arabic legends would recognise the difference at once. Probably, so, Alfonso started to issue morabetinos himself not for a general shortage of gold coins, but to keep the trusted (Almoravid) dinar as the monetary standard in his realm.

⁸⁷ See the references in footnote 33.

⁸⁸ In Roman times, there had been considerable gold mining in the North-East of the Iberian Peninsula, which seems to have continued at a very reduced degree also in the Visigothic period, see LINDA R. GOSNER, *Mining for Gold in Visigothic Iberia. Archaeological Perspectives on Economy, Landscape, and Labour*, in: *Al-Masāq* 35, 2023, pp. 271–290, esp. pp. 279–284. There is no information on local gold production in the Christian territories after 711 CE until the later Middle Ages.

⁸⁹ JOSÉ LUIS de VILLAR IGLESIAS, *Al Ándalus y las Fuentes de Oro*, Córdoba 2017, pp. 233–234. In Umayyad al-Andalus, minor gold mines operated around Murcia and Granada at least until the end of the caliphal period, cf. MICHAEL MORONY, *The Early Islamic Mining Boom*, in: *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 62, 2019, pp. 166–221, here p. 184. However, when ‘Abd ar-Rahmān III began to exercise the caliphal right of coinage in 929 CE and issued gold dinars on a large scale, he resorted to imported gold from sub-Saharan Africa, see VILLAR IGLESIAS, *Fuentes* (this note above), pp. 196–197, 210–217.

⁹⁰ By contrast, CRUSAFONT – BALAGUER, *Coinage* (as note 32), p. 287, assume that Alfonso “converted into coin jewellery and gold objects”.

⁹¹ The striking feature of the type is a square that frames the field on both sides of the coin. At an average of 2.27 grams, the Almohad dinars were significantly lighter than the Almoravid ones. It was not until 1185 CE that Caliph Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb introduced a ‘double’ dinar weighing 4.55 grams, which became known in Christian lands as the *dobla*, see ARIZA ARMADA, *Coinage* (as note 47), pp. 81–83; VILLAR IGLESIAS, *Fuentes* (as note 89), pp. 270–280.

This might explain why Alfonso preserved the weight and fineness of the Murcian dinars in his own gold coins, but it does not account for their peculiar type. Alfonso could have well given his morabetinos a distinctly Latin-Christian appearance, as the kings of León and Portugal would do only a few years later. They too began to issue morabetinos according to the Almoravid standard. Their coins, however, bear monolingual inscriptions in Latin and show pictorial representations of the ruler, heraldic lions, buildings, coats of arms, or crosses, as was common on the silver coinage of the respective Christian realms⁹² (figures 7 and 8). Alfonso of Castile, instead, chose a design close to the Islamic original. He certainly did so to ensure the acceptance of his coins. For this purpose, however, he could have simply issued the well-known Mardanišī coins himself (in immobilised form), similar to what his grandfather Alfonso VII had done two decades earlier at the Baeza mint. For his Castilian subjects and their Latin-Christian trading partners, the visual 'Islamicness' of the coins would have been sufficient to evoke the intended impression of high quality and trustworthiness. Nevertheless, Alfonso decided to change the political and religious message conveyed by the coins' legends. Apparently, it was the symbolic power of the coinage rather than its pragmatic function as currency that motivated this intervention.

Alfonso too exploited the high esteem of established Islamic coinage to enhance his own royal prestige. Like King Offa of Mercia, Alfonso marked his maravedís as his own issues by inscribing his name and title. However, while Offa targeted Latin-reading addressees, Alfonso chose the Arabic script and language to propagate his political as well as religious programme. Who could have been the intended audience of this propagandistic communication? Only very few of Alfonso's own subjects would have been able to understand the Arabic legends. Most of them probably lived in or around Toledo – the centre of Castilian Mozarabism – where Alfonso's morabetinos were minted. Like all other inhabitants of Castile, however, the Mozarabic community was accustomed to Islamic gold coins and would hardly have demanded the Christianisation of their Arabic inscriptions. Was it the Arabic-speaking population of al-Andalus that Alfonso had in mind when he translated the original Islamic message of the maravedí coins into a Christian one⁹³? Indeed, beside domestic circulation, the gold coins were vital for Castile's trade with al-Andalus. Alfonso could thus reasonably expect his dinars to also reach the Muslim-ruled south of the Iberian Peninsula. At first glance,

⁹² MANUEL MOZO MONROY – MANUEL RETUERCE VELASCO, Nueva hipótesis sobre los maravedís leoneses de los "Rex Legionensis" Fernando II y Alfonso IX, in: *Gaceta numismática* 176, 2010, pp. 17–29; CARMEN ALFARO ASINS, Un *maravedí* de Fernando II de León. Nueva adquisición del Museo Arqueológico Nacional, in: *Boletín del Museo Arqueológico Nacional* 13, 1995, pp. 71–73 (for a high-resolution image, search for object nr. 1994/104/1 at <https://ceres.mcu.es>, last accessed: 23/11/2024). The Portuguese emission of gold coins probably began early in Sancho I's reign (r. 1185–1211 CE); for a high-resolution image of one of his early 'marabotinos', see <https://ikmk.smb.museum/object?id=18205684>, last accessed: 23/01/2025.

⁹³ As suggested by FRANCISCO OLMOS, *Nacimiento* (as note 23), pp. 338–340; ID., *Maravedí* (as note 32), pp. 284, 300.



Figure 7: Fernando II of León, Maravedí, León 1157–1188, Museo Arqueológico Nacional de España, Madrid. Inv. 1994/104/1. Foto: Gemma Obén Tolosa.



Figure 8: Sancho I of Portugal, Morabitino, 1185–1211, Berlin, Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen, object no. 18205684 (Images courtesy of Münzkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz [license CC BY-SA 4.0]: <https://ikmk.smb.museum/object?id=18205684>).

the use of coinage to propagate a religious-political message in a foreign language could be reminiscent of another supposed parallel case in Iberian coinage history: when the Muslims conquered the peninsula in 711 CE, they briefly issued a golden *solidus*, based on Byzantine models, on which the abbreviated Islamic *šahādah* appeared in Latin letters: *INN(omine) D(omi)NI NO(n) D(eu)S N(i)S(i) D(eu)S S(o)L(u)S N(o) N S(ocius)*⁹⁴ (figure 9). However, the differences are obvious: in 711 CE, addressing the Latin-Christian population of al-Andalus in their own language was a first step to set up Muslim rule over the recently conquered territory. Alfonso, by contrast, would

⁹⁴ VIVES Y ESCUDERO, Monedas (as note 35), nos. 1–8, 12 (high-resolution picture of Vives no. 2: <https://en.numista.com/catalogue/pieces74325.html>, last accessed: 23/01/2025). On the so-called ‘transitional coins’ see most recently: SÉBASTIEN GASC, Numismatic Data about the Islamic Conquest of the Iberian Peninsula, in: *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 11, 2019, pp. 342–358, here pp. 343–345; ALMUDENA ARIZA ARMADA, Los dinares bilingües de al-Andalus y el Magreb, in: *Revista Numismática Hécate* 3, 2016, pp. 137–158, here esp. pp. 143–146.



Figure 9: Transitional Dinar, al-Andalus, 93 H / 712–713 CE
(Images courtesy of Coins of al-Andalus, Tonegawa Collection:
https://tonegawa.eea.csic.es/T-def/coins/IMG_9100.JPG).

have addressed a cultural and religious community living beyond the reach of his factual rule. Why should he have done so?

It is difficult to imagine that he designed his coins as an instrument for a religious missionary campaign among the Muslim inhabitants of the neighbouring realm⁹⁵. Nevertheless, issuing coins that demonstratively proclaimed the superiority of the Christian faith and Castilian rule in Arabic was a strong political statement and a claim to the imperial-like quality of his kingship. Such hegemonic aspirations found their expression also in titles like *rex Hispanie* or *rex Hispaniorum*, which Alfonso used in his charters particularly during the early 1170s, i. e. precisely at the time when he adopted the ‘imperial’ gesture of minting gold coins⁹⁶. Following the tradition of Alfonso VII, such titles laid claim to authority over the entire Peninsula and all its inhabitants⁹⁷. In the early 1170s, this message may have been primarily directed against Alfonso’s main Christian rival, Fernando II of León, but it was also perceived on the Muslim side: in his ‘Complete History’, the thirteenth-century chronicler Ibn al-Aṭīr inserted a letter, certainly made-up, from Alfonso to the Almohad caliph Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr that depicts

⁹⁵ TOM NICKSON, ‘Sovereignty belongs to God’. Text, Ornament and Magic in Islamic and Christian Seville, in: *Art History* 38, 2015, pp. 838–861, here pp. 838–840.

⁹⁶ Three hundred and thirty documents in total survive from the first two decades of Alfonso’s reign (1159–1179 CE). Fifty-six of these charters feature pan-Hispanic titles, fifty of which date between November 1170 to May 1174 CE, cf. JULIO GONZÁLEZ, *El reino de Castilla en la época de Alfonso VIII*, 3 vols. (CSIC. Escuela de Estudios medievales. Textos 26), Madrid 1960, vol. 2: *Documentos* (1145–1190), nos. 149–151, 153–154, 156–167, 170–175, 177–182, 184–186, 188–206. Only eight charters from this period show other intitulations. Before and after this period, allusions to a pan-Hispanic dimension of Alfonso’s rule are sporadic (*ibid.*, nos. 54–55, 81, 97, 223, 275).

⁹⁷ JOSEPH O’CALLAGHAN, *Ideas of Kingship in the Preambles of Alfonso VIII’s Charters* in: GÓMEZ et al. (eds.), *King Alfonso VIII of Castile* (as note 33), pp. 11–29, here p. 14.

Alfonso on the eve of the battle of Alarcos in 1195 CE boasting about his expectation to extend his rule over the “two religions” and the “two peoples” of Hispania ⁹⁸.

Did Alfonso’s adoption of Islamic coinage constitute a gesture of dominance? If so, towards whom? As Abigail Krasner-Balbale has pointed out, by imitating the dinars of Ibn Mardaniš, Alfonso was not arbitrarily usurping the emblems of a foreign enemy or marginalised minority but continuing the minting of a loyal vassal with whom the Castilian kings had maintained friendly relations until his death in 1172 CE ⁹⁹. Striking the ‘maravedís alfonsinos’ after the Murcian model can therefore hardly be seen as a confrontational gesture towards the original ‘owners’ of this currency, but rather as an expression of appreciation – not necessarily of the former ally’s person but of the reputation and reliability of his coinage, which had been normal currency in Castile for decades. Nevertheless, Alfonso began issuing his maravedís at a time when the power balances on the Iberian Peninsula were just about to change. The death of Ibn Mardaniš in 1172 CE and the collapse of his emirate swept away the bulwark that had hitherto shielded Castile from Almohad aggression. Alfonso’s realm was now directly exposed to Muslim attacks, as he would painfully learn already in the summer of 1172 CE when the Almohads launched their first campaign against a Christian territory and besieged the Castilian frontier town of Huete ¹⁰⁰. For the next forty years to come, the Almohads would pose a permanent threat to Alfonso and his kingdom. By modelling the inscriptions on his gold coins after the ‘maravedís lopinos’, Alfonso incidentally adopted a propagandistic programme that directly opposed the Almohad claim to power and countered Almohad ‘Mahdism’ with the Sunni concept of the caliphal ‘Imamate’. It is questionable, however, whether Alfonso was cognizant of the specific meaning of the individual terms and formulas within the internal Islamic discourse on political theology, when he transformed them into the Christian message on his coins. Rather, he probably adopted them unknowingly, without referring specifically to the Almohad doctrine. His maravedís proclaimed the primacy of Christianity and Christian rule over Islam in general. Nevertheless, in 1172 CE this propagandistic message was not yet an expression of the programmatic crusading ideology that was to become the veritable ‘leitmotif’ of Alfonso’s royal self-representation from the 1180s. During the first half of the 1170s, Alfonso’s main concern was still to secure his kingdom against neighbouring Christian rivals ¹⁰¹. It was not until 1177 CE that he began to

⁹⁸ French translation: Ibn El-Athir, *Annales du Maghreb et de l’Espagne*, ed. and transl. EDMONT FAGNAN, Algier 1898, pp. 610–612, here p. 611: “[...] si je reste vainqueur, [...] c’est mon autorité qui s’étendra sur les deux religions, c’est ma prééminence qui s’imposera aux deux peuples.”

⁹⁹ KRASNER-BALBALE, *Wolf King* (as note 25), pp. 14, 214–221.

¹⁰⁰ CARLOS DE AYALA MARTÍNEZ, *Holy War and Crusade during the Reign of Alfonso VIII*, in: GÓMEZ et al. (eds.), *King Alfonso VIII of Castile* (as note 33), pp. 118–142, here pp. 120–121; KRASNER-BALBALE, *Wolf King* (as note 25), pp. 55–60; GONZÁLEZ, *Reino* (as note 96), vol. 1, pp. 910–924.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 797–803; GONZÁLO MARTÍNEZ DÍEZ, *Reyes de Castilla. Alfonso VIII (1158–1214)* (Corona de España 21), Burgos 1995, pp. 84–86.

mobilise systematically Castilian forces against the Muslim south “in the defence of Christendom”¹⁰².

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Alfonso imitated Islamic numismatic models for his own gold coinage. On the one hand, he did this for pragmatic reasons, to ensure that his morabetinos would be accepted as a full substitute for the Murcian dinars, which had served as the normal currency in Castile for decades. However, Alfonso did not stop at simply replicating the established Islamic coins; he expressly made the dinars ‘his own’ by inscribing his name and title on them. Although this is clearly a case of an ‘unauthorised’ cultural takeover, it is, however, difficult to capture this example in the standardised models of ‘cultural appropriation’ in their currently prevailing postcolonial understanding. The constellation of parties involved was much more complex than the insinuated dichotomy between a ‘usurper’ and an ‘expropriated’ side. Alfonso borrowed the basic forms of his coinage from his late ally Ibn Mardaniš, used the coins to assert an imperial quality to his rule over Christian rivals, and propagated the hegemony of the Christian faith over the expanding Almohads. None of these constellations was characterised by clear dominance over a minoritised or marginalised counterpart. Although Alfonso made his coins convey a new political and religious message, different from the Islamic dinars, he did not detach his morabetinos from their original symbolic code system. On the contrary, he deliberately used the prestigious patterns of Islamic coinage to lend weight to his own political and religious message, which he wanted to be understood by both Christians and Muslims. At the same time, however, Alfonso’s coins testify to a creative reassignment of meaning and significance. Alfonso not only ‘appropriated’ the cultural signs of the other side, but profoundly transformed them through ‘cultural translation’, making them part of his own, Christian symbolic repertoire.

¹⁰² DE AYALA MARTÍNEZ, *Holy War* (as note 100), pp. 121–127; MARTÍNEZ DÍEZ, *Alfonso* (as note 101), pp. 123–140; GONZÁLEZ, *Reino* (as note 96), vol. 1, pp. 924–931.