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Title:

To be or not be (a Goth): Gothic origins and the construction of identity of Iberian kingdoms (10th-12th centuries)

Abstract:

The genealogical connection of medieval kings of Spain to a specific people – the Visigoths – became among of the most important tools of legitimation used in the historiography written in the North-western Iberian Christian kingdoms. Chronicles and documents written under the direct command of king Alfonso III of Asturias affirmed the Gothic origins of the Asturian dynasty, an ideological current known as Neogothicism. In the same manner, and throughout the 11th-12th centuries, chronicles and documents issued by kings of León, successors of the Asturian kings, also used continuity with the Gothic past to consolidate the power of that dynasty. However, texts coming from other geographies, namely the territories of the recently formed kingdom of Portugal, opted for an alternative view of the past and of the origins of the realm, establishing other kinds of connections to validate the emergence of this new political entity. The aim of this paper is to show how continuity and discontinuity were used as an identity mark and a legitimation strategy in a set of texts written between the 10th and 12th centuries in Asturias, León and Portugal.

Resumo:

As relações genealógicas dos reis ibéricos com os visigóticos foi uma das ferramentas de legitimação usada pelos historiógrafos dos reinos cristãos do noroeste da Península Ibérica. As crónicas escritas na corte de Afonso III das Astúrias afirmaram a origem gótica da dinastia régias asturiana, uma corrente ideológica que se tornou conhecida como Neogoticismo. Do mesmo modo, nos séculos XI e XII, a documentação emitida pelos reis de Leão e as crónicas redigidas nesse espaço geográfico nesse mesmo período também reclamaram essa ligação com o passado gótico como estratégia de legitimação da dinastia reinante. Contudo, textos redigidos neste período mais tardio e provenientes de outras geografias, nomeadamente do recém-nascido reino de Portugal, foram imbuídos de uma visão alternativa do passado e das origens dos seus governantes, criando no seu discurso outro tipo de estratégias de forma a validar a emergência desta nova entidade política. O propósito deste artigo é mostrar como a continuidade e a descontinuidade funcionam como marcas identitárias e se tornaram em estratégias de legitimação em vários textos historiográficos produzidos entre o século IX e o século XII nas Astúrias, Leão e Portugal.

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TO BE OR NOT BE (A GOTH): GOTHIC ORIGINS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY OF IBERIAN KINGDOMS (10TH-12TH CENTURIES)[1]

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Introduction: continuity and discontinuity as political strategies of legitimation

The search for origins is connected to one of the most basic philosophical questions formulated by mankind: «where do we come from, where do we go». Many answers have been proposed in different times and across scientific fields such as astronomy and physics (controversy surrounding the evolution of the universe), biology and genetics (DNA tests), history (genealogical trees). The Arts too proposed their own response to the question of origins. Works like Paul Gaugins' oil painting intitled «*D'où venons-nous? Que sommes-nous? Où allons-nous?*», or Gustave Coubert's «L'origine du monde» constitute two famous examples.

In the European Middle Ages, origins played an important role in the political discourse, partly because of the importance assumed by 'the past' in society and culture. Tales surrounding collective origins of a group of people or of an individual were often used as a tool to explain and justify rivalries, regional differences, power struggles as well as the emergence of new political entities. In the specific case of ruling dynasties, biological connections to a famous legendary individual of the past or to an ethnic group was a way of bestowing prestige and legitimacy to the ones claiming to be their descendants[2]. In light of the biblical typological thought that shaped medieval written culture[3], these figures were not to be seen uniquely as prestigious ancestors. The deeds,

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[2] Redondo (1988, p. 16). The connection to a mythical past is widely used in other medieval chronicles. In the *Gesta Francorum*, a genealogical relationship between the Frankish kings and the Trojans is created through Atenor, a kinsman of king Priamus. A chronicle written in Great Britain in the 9th century established a similar connection between the kings of England and Troy. This connection was later to be specified in the person of Brutus by the author of the *Historia Anglorum*.

[3] Auerbach (1952), Spiegel (1997).

character and behaviour of a founding father (less often a founding mother) were understood to be a prefiguration of the ethical standards of their descendants. It is no wonder then that invoking continuity between past and present was a very common strategy employed by historians in order to legitimize claims to rulership or the presence of social or ethnic groups in any given territory or institution.

By that token, discontinuity, which, in some cases, materializes in narratives of expulsion of a people from a territory or in a genealogical cut, should not be used by authors of medieval texts as a discursive strategy to justify the political authority of a dynasty, of a group or of an individual. But was this truly so? Can we affirm that the use of discontinuity as a legitimizing weapon is absent from medieval texts? This article will tackle this question and try to explore how continuity and discontinuity were used in medieval Iberian historiography of the 9th-12th centuries as a means of political legitimation. The connection to the Visigoth kings who ruled the Peninsula before the conquest of this land by the Arab-Berber armies in 711 will be at the center of this study.

The Visigoths

Information about the Visigoth past were accessible to medieval writers through the works of several historians. Some were Ibero-Romans and witnessed the arrival of the Visigoths to the Iberian Peninsula, like bishop Hidatius. Others were themselves members of the *gens gothorum*, like John of Biclarus and Isidore of Seville. Although they had visible differences in their appreciation of the Visigothic kings and rulership, all these historians seem to have agreed on some key-points: Visigoths established themselves in the Iberian Peninsula in the mid of the 5th century. They came to dominate most of it around 585, the year in which Leovigild conquered the Suevi kingdom. Another important occurrence emphasized by some of these historians was the political-religious conflict that erupted between Leovigild (Arian) and his eldest son, Hermenegild (Catholic). The 3rd *concilium* of Toledo of 569, in which the conversion of Leovigild' son, Reccared, to Catholicism took place is yet another accentuated event[4].

The Arabo-Berber conquest of the Iberian Peninsula did put an end to the Visigothic rulership of this territory. Causes and details of how that came to be were extensively covered by both Arabic and Latin historiography, and the «loss of Spain» became a recurrent theme in both medieval and contemporary historiography[5]. The debate about this matter was inaugurated by the Arabic tradition, which attributed the defeat of king Rodrigo in the battle of Guadalete to faults of his own. In some texts, Rodrigo is portrayed as a tyrant who usurped the throne from the minor sons of king

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[4] As Teillet (1984, pp. 446-447) has shown, the Chronicle of John of Biclarus concedes an enormous importance to this *concilium* and to the conversion of Reccared as a sign of the spiritual unity of the Iberian Peninsula. Isidore of Seville will make of Reccared one of the ideal monarchs of the Visigothic monarchy.

[5] See the current debate between historians such as García Sanjuan and Emílio González Ferrín.

Witiza. Other chronicles portray him as a rapist, who violated the daughter of Count Ilham of Ceuta, the keeper of the 'gates' of the Iberian Peninsula[6].

The oldest Latin testimonies offered an alternative story. *Chronica Mozabica of 754* blamed the outcome on the treason committed by a faction of the Gothic army, who switched sides during the battle[7]. What matters here is that the loss of power by the Visigoths was caused by treason or to the faulty behaviour of some prominent figures of the Visigothic elite. The «loss of Spain» became a failure of its rulers more than a merit of its conquerors.

First historiographical texts produced in Asturias by the end of the 8th century retrieved the topic of the Arab-Berber conquest followed along the same lines. Strongly affected by the previous historiographical tradition of placing the guilt of defeat with the Visigoths, and under the cultural influence of the Carolingians[8], these texts hold a vision of the gothic era characterized by the negation of a continuity between the Gothic times and the Asturian kingdom[9]. An annalistic text I will name *List of Kings of 812* was written in the court of Alfonso II and constitutes an example of this view:

> In era CCCa XLa VIIIIa egressi sunt Goti de terra sua.
> Era CCCa LXa Via ingressi sunt Ispaniam. Dominati sunt Ispaniam gens Gotorum
> annis CCC LXXX III et de terra sua peruenerunt in Ispaniam per annos XVII.
> Era DCC XL VIIII expulsi sunt de regno suo.
> Era DCCa La Sarraceni Ispaniam obtinent. Antequam Domnus Pelagius regnaret
> Sarraceni regnauerunt in Ispaniam annis Ve.

The end of the political domain of the Goths in the aftermath of the Arab-Berber conquest of Iberia is explicitly mentioned through the expression «*expulsi de regno*

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[6] Other historical factors that accounted for the fall of the Visigothic kings: multiple revolts led by different factions that ended up in dethronements (since Wamba (672) till 711 there were five great sublevations), which led to the association to the throne of the son of the king to maintain power, repression of aristocracy, persecution of minorities and runaway slaves.

[7] Mommsen (ed., 1894, *Chronica Mozarabica, 754*, p. 352). Martin (1997, pp. 13-17) sees in this text a connection between the loss of Spain by the Visigoths and the political instability caused by different kings (Egica, Witiza, Rodericus).

[8] Caroligian and pro-Carolingian texts also refer the end of the Gothic rulership of Iberian Peninsula. Texts such as *Chronologia regum gothorum*: Roderic reigned for 3 years. In this time, in the aera 752 [AD 714] the Sarracens were summoned because of the country's troubles, and they occupied the Spains, and seized the kingdom of the Goths, which hitherto they stubbornly possess in part. And they struggle with the Christians night and day, and the daily fight until God's predestination orders that they be cruelly expelled. The kings of the Goths perished. In total they add up to 304 years (...) In the aera (x) reigned Charles, king of the Franks and patricius of Rome. For the interpretation of this text see Martin (1997, pp. 17-19).

[9] Escalona (2003, pp. 226-232). Other authors who treated this question hold a different view: Martin (1997, pp. 25-27) believes that the testament of Alfonso II already contains some proto-neogothic elements.

suo»[10]. The Asturian kingdom was thus portrayed as a completely new political reality. Its rulers were not bound to repeat their military or character failures.

However, roughly by the end of the 9th century, a new trend is set in motion in the court of Alfonso III, the Great. This ideological shift seems to have been linked to a waning of the Carolingian influence in the northwest of Spain, as well as to the migration to this region of groups of Mozarabic Christians, who until that time lived under the authority of the Caliph of Cordova. Some members of this minority were persecuted by the local authorities (Martyrs of Cordova) due to an increase in apocalyptic beliefs that contemplated the imminent coming of a new Messiah who would put an end to the Muslim rulership. During this conflictive period, Mozarabic communities began to revive the memory of a Gothic past[11]. It is in this context of persecution and migration of Mozarabs to the Christian kingdoms of the north that three Asturian chronicles – *Chronica of Alfonso III* (two versions, *Rotensis* and *ad Sebastianum)*, and *Chronica Albeldensia* – are written under the authority of Alfonso III. There, a biological and political continuity between the Visigoths and the Asturian kings is introduced for the first time.

The process of co-opting the Visigothic past begins with the «gothification» the founder of the kingdom of Asturias, known as Pelayo. Depending on the text, he is considered to be the son of a Gothic nobleman of royal birth persecuted by Witiza (some versions of *Albeldensia*[12] and *ad Sebastianum*[13]), the son of Veremundus, a nephew of King Rodrigo (other versions of *Albeldensia*)[14], or a *Spatarius* of both Rodrigo and Witiza (*Rotensis*)[15]. Thus, and in spite of some small but visible differences, all three chronicles written during the reign of Alfonso III's reign converge in presenting Pelayo as a member of the Gothic elite[16]. Consequently, his presence in the Asturian territory and his elevation to kingship transform Asturias in the political continuation of the Gothic kingdom. At the same time, and through genealogical relationships, Pelayo was made a Goth, and so was Alfonso III, who due to the intricate system of transmission of power

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[10] As Bautista (2009, p. 129) has pointed out, the same text explains that the Visigoths are not originally from the Iberian Peninsula. In that sense they are not seen differently than other more recent conquerors.

[11] Escalona (2003, pp. 234-239).

[12] Gil Fernández (ed., 1985a, 33) «Ibique Fafilanem ducem Pelagii patrem, quem Egica rex illuc direxerat, quadam occasione uxoris fuste incapite percussit, unde post ad mortem peruenit. Et dum idem Uittizza regnum patris accepit, Pelagium filium Fafilanis, qui postea Sarracenis cum Astures reuellauit, ob causam patris quam prediximus, ab hurbe regia expulit» (Gotfried manuscript).

[13] Gil Fernández (ed., 1985c, 8): «Pelagium filium quondam Faffilani ducis ex semine regio principem elegerunt».

[14] Gil Fernández (ed., 1985a, XVa-1): «Pelagius filius Ueremudi nepus Ruderici regis Tutelani accepit regnum era DCCLVI» (only in ms. *R*).

[15] Gil Fernández (ed., 1985b, 8): «Ipso quoque prefecturam agente, Pelagius quidam, spatarius Uitizani et Ruderici regum...».

[16] According to Du Cange's dictionary, *spatharius* has the same meaning as *armiger*.

in the Asturian kingdom[17] was not his direct descendent. However, he was being cognatically linked to Pelayo's daughter's husband, Alfonso I, who seems not to have been an Asturian by birth.

The aforementioned Asturian chronicles conceded a lot of attention to Alfonso I, the son-in-law of Pelayo and the brother of Fruela, a direct paternal ancestor of Alfonso III. All three chronicles praise the joint military prowess of the two siblings, and enumerate the lands and cities that they conquered. Simultaneously, they disclose their origins by making them the sons of a certain Peter. As Julio Escalona states,

> Duke Peter was the missing indispensable link for making Alfonso III's dynasty the direct descendents of Kings Leovigild and Reccared, the most glorious references in their cherished Visigothic past. Therefore, concentrating the crucial eighth-century developments on Alfonso I can be seen as the central piece in a wider scheme aiming to devise a glorious past for Alfonso III, and legitimate his policies[18].

So, according to *Albeldensia,* Peter is duke of Cantabria[19], an aristocrat from another northern region. *Rotensis* transforms Peter of Cantabria into a duke with royal blood[20]. And *ad Sebastianum* adds the cherry on top of the cake: Pedro of Cantabria's royal blood came from Visigothic kings[21]. His ancestors are named in this text: Leovigild and his son, Reccared and, therefore, Pedro is not directly linked to Witiza or Rodrigo, who had negative written traditions associated to them. Alfonso I (and, through his brother Fruela, also his great-great-great nephew, Alfonso III) becomes a descendant of the Gothic kings of old; and Asturias, from Pelayo on, is portrayed as the political uninterrupted continuation of the Visigothic kingdom. Neogothicism as a political ideology was officially born[22].

Neogothicism: Specificities of an ideology

In the following centuries, Neogothicism went on being used by medieval Iberian historians as one of the preferred strategies for political legitimation of the ruling Leonese dynasty. In the late 11th century, political and military circumstances, such as

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[17] See Ferreira (2011, §44-49).

[18] Escalona (2003, p. 255).

[19] Gil Fernández (ed., 1985a, XV-3): «Iste [Alfonso I] Petri Cantabrie ducis filius fuit».

[20] Gil Fernández (ed., 1985b, 11): «Adefonsus filius Petri Cantabrorum ducis ex regni prosapiem Asturias aduenit».

[21] Gil Fernández (ed., 1985c, 13): «Post Faffilani interitum Adefonsus successit in regnum, uir magne uirtutis filius Petri ducis, ex semine Leuuegildi et Reccaredi regum progenitus».

[22] On the topic of Neogothicism see, among others, the works of Martin (1997), Ladero Quesada (1993), Maravall (1997, pp. 299-326) Deswarte (2003); Bautista (2009), Le Morvan (2012; 2013).

the conquest of Toledo by Alfonso VI in 1085, allowed for a closer connection with the Visigothic past, a connection that transcended chronicles and can be seen in charters. In the *narratio* of a charter aiming at restoring the dioceses of Toledo issued in the following year, Alfonso VI mentions the conquest of the city while remembering his ancestors who once ruled it: «sicque inspirante Dei gratia exercitum contra istam urbem mobi, in qua olim progenitores mei regnaberunt potentissimi atque opulentissimi...»[23].

Although the charter does not explicitly mention the Goths, this reference to Alfonso VI ancestry can only point at them, given that the city was under Muslim control since the fall of Rodrigo until Alfonso conquered it back.

Chronicles written to praise Alfonso VI were also keen to establish more detailed genealogies. In the *Historia Legionensis* (*HL*), written between 1120-1150 by a monk of San Pelayo's monastery located in the city of León, Alfonso VI, «ex illustri gotorum prosapia»[24], is the central axis of the narrative. The text begins by narrating the perils and obstacles faced by Alfonso until he united León, Castile and Galicia under his authority. At this point, the narrator decides to interrupt the events concerning Alfonso's biography and begins to detail both his paternal and maternal lineages.

The maternal side does not seem to be very problematic here. Using Asturian chronicles as sources, the writer of *Historia Legionensis* makes of Alfonso's mother Sancha, a descendant of Peter of Cantabria and Alfonso I, and through them, of Reccared[25]. But how about Alfonso's father, Fernando? Fernando was not an Asturian by birth. He was actually the son of the king of Navarre, Sancho III the Great, and of the countess of Castile, Munia. Being a second son, he inherited his mother's property[26], becoming Count of Castile. His access to the throne of León is only made possible through his marriage to Sancha, the daughter of Alfonso V of León. Fernando's profile is very similar to Alfonso I's, who married the daughter of Pelayo, the first king of Asturias. Like Fernando´s, his origins were not in Asturias and thus fell short of legitimacy to become a king.

To grant Fernando I the authority he lacked, a Gothic link is once again forged. The *Historia Legionensis* transforms Peter of Cantabria into an ancestor of the kings of Navarra[27]. Thus, Alfonso VI inherits the royal catholic Gothic blood from both his maternal and paternal side. The biological connection between Alfonso and Reccared becomes visible through actions: by means of his personal conversion, Reccared placed

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[23] Gambra (1998, vol. II, doc. 86, p. 277).

[24] Pérez de Urbel (1952, ed., p. 119).

[25] For the genealogy of the kings of Léon in this text see Pérez de Urbel (1952, ed., pp. 136-177).

[26] See Ferreira (2014: §24).

[27] Pérez de Urbel (1952, ed., p. 178). For a detailed analysis of the implications of this connection see also Gomes (2017, pp. 259-261).

the Visigothic kingdom under Roman Catholicism[28]. Six centuries later, Alfonso VI ordered the abolition of the Iberian liturgical rite in favour of the Roman, which made him the Reccared of the 12th century.

Discontinuity reloaded: a Portuguese strategy of legitimation

Chronicles written in late 11th and 12th centuries considered that the Asturian-Leonese kings were descendants of a particular branch of Visigothic kingship. Neogothicism as an ideological discourse had achieved its goal.

Roughly at the same time, a new political power situated northwest in the Iberian Peninsula emerged that wanted nothing to do with Neogothic legitimacy. The «*Territorium Portucalensis*», a land roughly comprised between the rivers Minho and Mondego, was given to Teresa and her husband, count Henry of Burgundy, in the last years of the 11th century by her father, that was none other than Alfonso VI[29]. In the first years of their rule, Henry and Teresa tried to expand the borders of the *territorium*, taking advantage of the political and military unrest that followed the death of Alfonso VI in 1109 and the rising to the throne of his daughter Urraca while at the same time holding the southern border. Count Henry died in 1112 in Astorga (today a province of León that was under his power). After Henry's death, Teresa continued to fight for the consolidation of her power over the territory, but by following a more diplomatic approach: for instance, she started to use the title of queen in her charters from 1117 onwards. Afonso Henriques, their son, pursued the path of autonomy, adopting the title of king and achieving important military victories against the Moorish Taifa Kingdoms of the South, and against the Leonese kings, Alfonso VII and Fernando II, until he was defeated by the latter in Badajoz (c. 1169).

The first Portuguese texts addressing the foundation of the new kingdom are a set of annals, whose complex textual tradition is not yet fully clear despite the efforts of the, scholars that have been drawn to their study[30]. What seems to be evident enough is that by the end of the 12th century, this annalistic material had developed into a chronicle, known today as *Chronicon Lusitanum* (*CL*), at the monastery of Santa Cruz of Coimbra. Adopting a genealogical/dynastic structure and combining previous annalistic material with longer narrative segments, the text began with the Goths and ended with the narration of the siege of Santarem by the Almoravids in 1184.

Chronicon Lusitanum's vision of the Gothic past is antagonistic to the one affirmed by the Asturian texts of Alfonso III´s court and by the Leonese chronicles dating from the 12th century. It clearly advocates a rupture between the Visigothic rulership of Iberian

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[28] See Thieulin-Pardo's (2012) essay on the functionality of ethical models and anti-models in the *Historia Legionensis*.

[29] For the biography of Teresa (and her husband) see Amaral/Barroca (2012).

[30] Among these are David (1947), Bautista (2009).

Peninsula and the Asturian kingdom founded by Pelayo: «Antequam dominus Pelagius regnaret Sarracenis regnauerunt in Hispania annis V»[31].

This passage comes from a text that had been rejected by the historiographic tradition founded in Asturias during the reign of Alfonso III, i.e., the *List of Asturian Kings of 812,* written in the court of Alfonso II, which denied the existence of a continuity between the Goth kings and the Asturian rulers. In line with that text, the *Chronicon Lusitanum* presents the Asturian monarchy as a new political entity with no link to a Gothic past, nor to the authority or legitimation bestowed by it. However, what could be the meaning and function of adopting an antigothicist discourse in the newly founded kingdom of Portugal? For one, I do not think that the integration of elements from the *List of Alfonso II* in the *Chronicon Lusitanum* meant that those who were composing it lacked access to texts offering an alternative or even contrasting view of this matter. In fact, they knew and used other historical narratives written in Asturias, such as *Chronica Albeldensia*. As I have previously mentioned, this chronicle stipulates a continuity between the Visigothic and Asturian kingdoms. Accepting the cut between these two political entities proposed by the *List of Asturian Kings of 812* can thus be understood as a deliberate choice made by the authors of *Chronicon Lusitanum*.

This hypothesis becomes stronger if one takes into account the use of discontinuity in other segments of *Chronicon Lusitanum*. In fact, the severed connection between Asturians and Visigoths is just one of many cuts with the past featured in this text. This corroborates the idea that breaking the link with the Visigoths in this Portuguese text does not come merely from copying a source that contained that information. It rather constitutes a well-designed strategy aimed at fatally wounding the political legitimation of the Leonese dynasty as Asturian-Leonese historiographers had conceived it in previous centuries. The following example is remarkably illustrative of the purpose through which *Chronicon Lusitanum* brings in discontinuity as a legitimation strategy.

After referring the death of Alfonso VI, the text introduces information about the conquest of Sintra by Henry of Burgundy: «Era 1147 tertio cal iullii obiit rex d adefonsus regis ferndinandi filius. Era 1147 mense iulio capta fuit sintra a comite d. henrico, genero alfonsi regis marito filiae suae regina dona tarasie»[32].

This is an interesting segment because of what it reveals and what it hides. The text clearly implies that despite the death of Alfonso VI, the war effort against the Muslims was still going on, and was effectively lead by Henry. At the same time, the text does not make any reference to the succession of Alfonso VI by his daughter Urraca, a kind of information expected in a text with a dynastic/genealogical structure. As a result of this omission, and while evoking the death of Alfonso VI without mentioning his successor in León, the text casts Henry as the sole authority and military leader in the

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[31] Brandão (1632, f. 271v).

[32] Brandão (1632, f. 272v).

western part of the Iberian Peninsula. In this case, it is Henry's military prowess that enables him to hold the land without having to place it under the authority of the kings of León.

Hence, *Chronicon Lusitanum* uses discontinuity to bestow political authority over the territory of Portugal upon the new dynasty. The underlying ethical lesson is that the land belongs to those able to conquer and protect it. In the past, the guardians might have been the Visigoths or the Kings of Léon, but the access to political sovereignty was not dependent (or at least not entirely) on a biological legacy. By discarding Pelayo's Visigothic ancestry, the *Chronicon Lusitanum* moves him closer to Henry of Burgundy, who in turn becomes the last link in a chain of successful military leaders that rule by their own virtue and not by having a remarkable origin.

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