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Premodern Ecosystems:
Climate, Environment, People

CAROLINGIAN ECOLOGICAL SOVEREIGNTY

THEOLOGY, EMPIRE, AND NATURE

by
NOAH BLAN

ARC HUMANITIES PRESS



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AND NATURE**

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PREFACE

IN THE DECADE-PLUS research and writing of this monograph I thought a lot about trees, woodlands, forests, orchards, roots dug deep and intertwined, branches and ramifications, and the flowering fruits of long-suffering labour. As the forester and writer Peter Wohlleben has argued (see subsequent citations), a forest functions less like a collection of separate organisms and more like a single interconnected system, held together by ongoing exchanges of nutrients, signals, and long-term mutual support. What appears above ground as a set of discrete organisms is sustained by networks that bind the whole together. The work that follows has likewise depended on forms of intellectual and personal support that are often less visible than the finished product, but no less essential to it.

I am profoundly grateful to my editor Anna Henderson, who saw the potential in this manuscript and patiently guided me in its iterations; to production manager Tania Colwell for expert support and guidance; to Danna Messer for such meticulous copyediting; and to everyone else at Arc Humanities Press who has made the process a genuine pleasure from start to finish. To Emily Morgan Harless, who undertook the index with care and enthusiasm, I offer my sincere thanks. I thank also the reviewers whose constructive feedback shaped this book at multiple stages of its development. Any faults are of course my own.

Deepest thanks also go to Paolo Squatriti and Ray Van Dam, two scholars, mentors, and friends whose insights, encouragement, and enthusiasm helped me see that it is not just the humans of the past we should be searching for but life wherever it leaves its mark, in soils, systems, and the more-than-human worlds people inhabited. Equal in learning and in friendship, Valerie L. Garver first introduced me to the Carolingians and, in doing so, set me on the path that made this book possible.

There are many others whose support has sustained me along the way. At the University of Michigan, special thanks goes to Diane Owen Hughes, Peggy McCracken, Valerie Kivelson, Christian de Pee, the faculty, staff, and graduate students of the Medieval and Early Modern Studies program, Hussein Fancy, Kit French, Deborah Dash Moore, Ian Moyer, Betsy Sears, and Department of History staff members (past and present) Lorna Altstetter,

Sheila Coley, Diana Denney, Sue Douglas, Terre Fisher, Kathleen King, and Greg Parker. At Lake Forest College, I am deeply grateful to the colleagues who teach me, every day, how to teach and think historically more effectively—especially Rudi Batzell, Tina Groeger, Anna Trumbore Jones (who generously and most helpfully read this entire manuscript), Courtney Joseph, Dan LeMahieu, and Ben Zeller. For their mentoring and friendship, I thank Mary Ellen Carroll and Fran Pease.

Many scholars, colleagues, and friends have read portions of the manuscript or contributed to its progress in other ways. Foremost among these are Jacqueline Antonovich and Paula R. Curtis whose balanced attention and expertise helped shape the work throughout. I would be remiss not to call special attention to Lynda Coon for her encouragement and criticism; to Paul Dutton for writing about “Charlemagne, King of Beasts,” which helped shape the questions that animate this book; and to Tom Noble, who introduced me to Alcuin’s Genesis captions. I also thank Ellen Arnold, Courtney Booker, Scott Bruce, Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis, Abigail Firey, Robin Fleming, Matthew Bryan Gillis, Eric Goldberg, Thomas Greene, Joachim Henning, Richard Hoffmann, Rutger Kramer, Tim Newfield, Owen Phelan, Martha Rampton, Andrew Romig, Barbara Rosenwein, and John Terry, for their generosity and expertise.

This book is based on my doctoral work, and special thanks goes to Andrew Rabin and the Wallace Johnson First Book Program, which helped me move beyond the dissertation and rethink the project as a monograph. Close collaboration with Michael E. Moore and the other fellows in the program helped me refine the project and sharpen its central arguments. My original research was made possible by funding from the University of Michigan’s Department of History, Eisenberg Institute for Historical Studies, and Rackham Graduate School, as well as a postdoctoral fellowship at the university’s Institute for the Humanities and a finishing fellowship from the Doris G. Quinn Foundation. At Lake Forest College, Krebs Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Tara Natarajan generously provided a subvention that made the reproduction of colour images in this book possible.

Finally, this book would not have been completed without the support of my partner, Rachel Schwimmer, and the boundless curiosity of my daughter Matilda, whose inspiration has stayed with me throughout. I dedicate the book to Matilda.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AG</i>	<i>Admonitio generalis</i>
<i>BnF</i>	Bibliothèque nationale de France
<i>Carm.</i>	<i>Carmina</i>
<i>DGAL</i>	<i>De Genesi ad litteram</i>
<i>EDLC</i>	<i>Epistola de litteris colendis</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistola</i>
<i>Ep. var.</i>	<i>Epistolae variorum Carolo Magno regnante scriptae</i>
<i>Epp.</i>	<i>Epistolae Karolini aevi</i>
<i>ESD</i>	<i>Explanatio sex dierum</i>
<i>KMLP</i>	<i>Karolus Magnus et Leo Papa</i>
<i>VK</i>	<i>Vita Karoli Magni</i>

INTRODUCTION

AT ITS GREATEST territorial extent, the Carolingian Empire stretched from the Mediterranean to the North Sea, and from the Atlantic Ocean to the Elbe River, and its rulers attempted to impose imperial hegemony onto politically autonomous and locally powerful regions. What I refer to in this book as Carolingian “ecological sovereignty,” the way in which these rulers and their elite contemporaries imagined the natural world as part of the Frankish imperial order, emerged from a theological understanding of empire and self-conscious sense of place in both historical and salvific time. This mode of governance grew from the Carolingian theological vision of a Christian empire situated within the sweep of salvation history. The alignment of church and court was expressed through *correctio*, an unevenly shared commitment to reform and regulation. That same logic informed how Carolingians conceived of their surroundings: nature, bodies, and spaces alike were subject to correction so that they might participate in redemption. For Charlemagne, the first Carolingian emperor, and his successors, a world thus “redeemed” became both a reservoir of power and a mirror of their divine authority.

Of course we should pause over the very vocabulary of *correctio*, for as Carine van Rhijn and others have shown, the categories of “reform,” “renaissance,” and even *correctio* itself are far less stable in the Carolingian sources than modern scholarship often assumes. The dominant image of a court-driven, top-down movement centred on kings, capitularies, and a narrow intellectual elite rests on traditionalist assumptions that continue to structure modern analysis. Manuscript study reveals a much broader field of participation, including the “mostly anonymous inhabitants of the Carolingian world [who] were no mere passive recipients of royal prescriptions or admonishments. They were active agents who shaped and reshaped the ideas and ideals of their world.”¹ At the heart of Carolingian cultural activity was not improvement for its own sake but *for salvation*. Van Rhijn identifies “the single most important idea that inspired the flourishing of Carolingian culture from the later eighth century onwards”: that “God’s own people, no

¹ van Rhijn, “Introduction,” 2–3.

matter their position or place in the world, should strive to lead Christian lives and shine with virtue in the eyes of their stern God in order to reach the Kingdom of Heaven.”² Improvement was therefore teleological; education, knowledge, and moral discipline were meaningful because they served that salvific horizon. *Correctio* then more often referred to individual moral amendment rather than structural transformation. Such a culture of shared responsibility extended well beyond a royal court which mattered enormously but did not operate in imperious isolation.

As members of this imagined community, Carolingian elite cast themselves as labouring lords in a fallen world, preparing both empire and environment for Christ’s return. They believed renewal would not simply restore creation but transform it into something greater, and so their projects of reform, whether in worship, doctrine, or land use were part of the same redemptive work. The tasks of cultivating fields and reaping souls were both economic necessities and spiritual obligations, a way of pruning corruption and progressing toward but never achieving perfection. In this vision, Charlemagne became a new Adam,³ charged with stewardship of an earthly paradise yet ultimately only a forerunner to the final restoration that Christ alone could bring.

This model fits within what can in modern terms be labelled an “inclusive exclusion” because nature was simultaneously marked as something to be disciplined and set apart.⁴ Agamben’s concept of inclusive exclusion helps explain for us how Carolingian understandings of nature, labour, and sovereignty adorned *their* sense of eschatological time. For Agamben, inclusive exclusion describes how certain forms of life are brought into the domain of power only by being set outside its protections, as with the *homo sacer*, the sacred man, who in ancient Roman law was included in the political order only by his exclusion; a figure who may be killed but not sacrificed. Agamben uses this figure to lay out the foundational paradox of sovereignty. In other words, the man’s life was politically significant precisely through his exclusion from rights.⁵ In the context of Carolingian renewal, nature itself is subjected to a similar logic: it is not abandoned or destroyed but subordinated and sanctified through its exclusion from perfection.

2 van Rhijn, “Introduction,” 3.

3 For Paul Dutton’s groundbreaking labelling of Charlemagne as the “New Adam,” see *Charlemagne’s Mustache*, 57, 63.

4 This is a term coined by Agamben, *Homo sacer*, trans. Heller-Roazen, 8.

5 Agamben, *Homo sacer*, trans. Heller-Roazen, 11–13, 22–23.

The natural world, marred by sin and marked as fallen, is drawn into the orbit of Carolingian ecological sovereignty not as a pure object of salvation but as a site of provisional labour, always tending toward but never achieving Edenic restoration, for only Christ could perfect this. Carolingian efforts to prune, cultivate, and “improve” the land are premised on nature’s imperfection, which must be corrected but can never be fully redeemed without Christ’s return. In this way, nature is included in the sacred project of salvation precisely as what must be excluded from perfection until the eschaton. It is a theological ecology shaped by inclusive exclusion. Charlemagne’s role as a quasi-Adamic king reveals how this logic extends to human sovereignty itself: he embodies and directs the labour of redemption, but his very imperfection points beyond itself, anticipating the true and final redeemer.

These themes clearly resonate in one of the most striking poetic evocations of the Frankish ruler at the zenith of his power working to order the human and nonhuman elements of creation into paradisaical order beginning at the still under-construction imperial capital at Aachen. Although only a fragment of this work, *Karolus Magnus et Leo Papa* (Charlemagne and Pope Leo) survives, we glimpse in its lines the newly crowned Roman emperor heralded in maximum hyperbolic, imperial magnificence.⁶ The poem’s audience was meant to envision Charlemagne as both a new

6 The debate over the dating and authorship of the poem has a long and vital history nicely delineated by Stella, “Autore e attribuzioni del ‘Karolus Magnus et Leo Papa,’” 19–22. Two dominant theories of authorship are most frequently cited. The first, put forth by Dieter Schaller, relies on a structural and thematic reading of the poem’s Virgilian nature, and suggests that Einhard wrote the poem sometime in the first years of the ninth century. Schaller, *Studien zur lateinischen Dichtung des Frühmittelalters*, 158–63. Christine Ratkowitsch instead explores the stylistic links between the eclogues of Moduin (ca. 770–840) and *Karolus Magnus*. Ratkowitsch, *Karolus Magnus—alter Aeneas, alter Martinus, alter Iustinus*, 60–76. Francesco Stella demonstrates that the case for Moduin’s authorship is more plausible: see above, and also Stella, “Autor und Zuschreibungen des sog. ‘Karolus Magnus et Leo papa,’” 155–75. Helene Scheck has argued persuasively that *Karolus Magnus* was written by a woman—most likely Charlemagne’s cousin Gundrada—who studied with the great poets of Charlemagne’s era at the royal court. That Gundrada wrote it rather than her sisters Rodtrud or Theodrada, or even Charlemagne’s sister Gisla, is suggested by the fact that *Karolus Magnus* omits any mention of Louis the Pious, even when he was involved in historical events the poem described. Scheck thinks this striking omission related to Louis’ “purging” of the court of Charlemagne’s daughters after their father’s death. In any case—Einhard, Moduin, or Gundrada—authoring post-dates the events of 799, and the events described were both recalled from memory and modelled on Latin poetic styles and structures. The author was connected intimately to Charlemagne’s court and poets. Scheck, “Nuns on Parade,” 24–32.

Aeneas⁷ (the mythical founder of ancient Rome who had escaped from conquered Troy), and a new King David, a “beacon of Europe” whose “name is broadcast to the stars,” and comparable to (even surpassing!) the brightness of the sun itself, whose “great love” “illuminates the earth.”⁸ From the palace’s high place overseeing and directing the construction of various works, Charlemagne commanded the hewing of stones and extracting the labour of men for the construction of the walls of a “Rome to come”:

From afar the pious Charles stands upon the citadel,
Marking out each site and laying the lofty walls of the Rome to come.
He commands that there be a sacred forum and, by right, a senate—
A place where the people may take up justice, law, and holy decrees.
A busy cohort is set to work: one part shapes stones fit for rigid columns,
Another raises the citadel high into the air;
Still others strive to roll boulders with their hands,
They dig out harbours and lay the deep foundations of a theater,
Enclosing halls with lofty domes.
Meanwhile others labour to uncover the warm springs of baths,
Opening great bathhouses that boil of their own accord,
And they set splendid seats with marble steps.⁹

The labourers bearing stones and fitting marble slabs together were surrounded by the noise of the city that hammered the air—wagons and an industrious legion of people working, while others forged iron for cutting more marble and rocks—while, busy as bees (evoking the labourers in Dido’s Carthage from the *Aeneid*), the Franks worked to construct Charlemagne’s city:

7 On the new Aeneas, see: Stella, “Autore e attribuzioni del ‘Karolus Magnus et Leo Papa,’” 23.

8 “Europae quo celsa pharus cum luce coruscat. / Spargit ad astra suum Karolus rex nomen opimum; / Sol nitet ecce suis radiis: sic denique David / Inlustrat magno pietatis lumine terras!” *Karolus Magnus et Leo Papa*, ed. Beumann et al., p. 60, lines 12–15 (hereafter, *KMLP*). Translation from Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, 199.

9 “Roma secunda...Stat pius arce procul Karolus loca singula signans / Altaque disponens venturae moenia Romae. / His iubet esse forum sanctum quoque iure senatum, / Ius populi et leges ubi sacraque iussa capessant. / Insistitque operosa cohors; pars apta columnis / Saxa secat rigidis, ercem molitur in altum; / Ast alii rupes manibus subvolvere certant, / Effodiunt portus, statuuntque profunda theatri / Fundamenta, tholis includunt atria celsis. / His alii thermas calidas reperire laborant, / Balnea sponte sua ferventia mole recludunt, / Marmoreis gradibus speciosa sedilia pangunt.” *KMLP*, ed. Beumann et al., p. 66, lines 94. 97–108. All translations mine unless otherwise noted.

The wagons give off their noise; a mighty crash strikes the sky,
 A clamor rises, a great din swells in the city.
 The busy cohort comes and goes, spread throughout the city,
 Eagerly gathering the materials for lofty Rome.
 Meanwhile, others prepare useful sharpened iron—
 By which marble may be sculpted and stone may be cut.
 The work boils with energy; just as in summer
 Bees, mindful of the winter to come,
 Gather fine provisions with their mouths, plucking little blossoms—
 Through clear streams and thyme they fly with buzzing wings,
 Some alight on flowers, and strive to return
 With their plunder in tow, revisiting their fragrant camp.
 Some strive to raise up their growing brood,
 Others arrange their nectar-filled cells in order,
 Packing dewy honey in their bended thighs.
 Just so do the Franks roam through the broad city.¹⁰

No other text from Charlemagne's era came close to describing the building work of a city in such vivid detail, adding to the "epic" character of the poem's subject and the imperial city as a "second Rome."¹¹

The poetry of Charlemagne's courtiers after the imperial coronation in 800 evinced a new self-awareness of their geopolitical significance, spiritual responsibilities, and about the "political character and cultural purpose of their own writing." Seen in this light, the construction of Aachen became a "symbol for the *imperium* established by a second but mightier Aeneas."¹² The poet's tableau of industry and manufacture in the building and daily hubbub of Aachen illustrates the exploitative relationship between the Franks and the natural world, characterized by the harvesting of raw materials from the earth and their employment in the fabrication of an un-natural space

10 "Plaustraque dant sonitum; vastus fragor aethera pulsat, / Fit strepitus, magna consurgit stridor in urbe, / Itque reditque operosa cohors, diffusa per urbem, / Materiam Romae certatim congregat altae. / His alii parant acuentes utile ferrum, Marmora quo possunt sculpi et quo saxa secari. / Fervet opus; velutique solent aestate futurae / Pulchra hiemis non inmemores alimenta ciborum / Cum facere, ore legunt carpentes floscula apesque / Per latices, per thima volant stridentibus alis, / Floribus insidunt aliae praedaeque redire / Accepta studeant, redolentia castra revisant / Aut foetus aliae certant educere adultos / Aut cum nectareas componunt ordine cellas / Roscida stipantes sinuoso poplite mella; Haud aliter lata Franci spatiantur in urbe." *KMLP*, ed. Beumann et al., p. 68, lines 121–36.

11 Schaller, *Studien zur lateinischen Dichtung des Frühmittelalters*, 169–70.

12 Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, 24.

that paradoxically symbolized a “natural” Frankish hegemony and Aachen’s place as a new imperial capital.

Yet in the poet’s descriptions the nonhuman environment structured their capital as much as did the din of human activity. We learn that:

Not far away, there is a grove on high ground and pleasant green thickets—
A verdant wood near the city, and fresh meadows with running streams
Lie at its centre, enclosed all around by many walls.¹³

In this enclosure adjacent to the city:

Here, every kind of bird flutters about the stream...
And near these grassy banks, a herd of stags grazes...
The glade, uncovered by foliage, lies open; and throughout these woods,
Every kind of wild beast lies hidden.¹⁴

Here these creatures were provided with a sheltered place for roaming and eating, encouraged to live and dwell. And here Charlemagne hunted them.¹⁵ The enclosure was a game park, well-watered and surrounded by walls meant to keep creatures within as much as to keep anyone without entering.¹⁶ Very likely the game park lay within the Ardennes Forest that in Charlemagne’s era extended up to Aachen itself. The palace therefore occupied a “liminal position...between settled, cultivated lands to the north and east, and the relatively raised and wilder land to the south,” a position that allowed its ruler to straddle worlds both urban and rural.¹⁷ As with the city’s labourers, the enclosure made legible the hierarchies delineating the Frankish ruler from those beings whose life and actions made the capital and the game park at Aachen; nonetheless, Charlemagne’s role was not one of simple domination. Both scenes highlighted town and forest as built environments that symbolically and materially supported Charlemagne’s capital,

13 “Non procul excelsa nemus est et amoena virecta / Lucus ab urbe virens et prata recentia rivis / Obtinet in medio, multis circumscita muris.” *KMLP*, ed. Beumann et al., p. 68, lines 137–39. Translation from Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, 205.

14 “Hic amnem circumvolitat genus omne volucrum...Hosque toros iuxta cervorum pascitur agmen...Fronde resecta vacat; passim genus omne ferarum / His latet in silvis.” *KMLP*, ed. Beumann et al., p. 68, line 140; p. 70, lines 144, 147–48.

15 “Hic pater adsidue Karolus, venerabilis heros, / Exercere solet gratos per gramina ludos.” *KMLP*, ed. Beumann et al., p. 70, lines 149–50.

16 Schaller, *Studien zur lateinischen Dichtung des Frühmittelalters*, 171–73.

17 Rollason, “Forests, Parks, Palaces, and the Power of Place in Early Medieval Kingship,” 431–32.

and whose management demonstrated sovereignty. The poet's Charlemagne was both part of this imagined ecosystem and above it, participating in the enactment of life and supervising its operation.

Aachen, whose construction this poem and its author, the Paderborn Poet, so vividly evoked, was a reimagined earthly paradise, and as such, stands as a microcosm for the Frankish realm, the quintessence of Charlemagne's empire as a "good garden of Carolingian civilization": an imperial capital where its ruler demonstrated sovereignty by the management and domination of worlds both built and natural.¹⁸ The word "paradise" descends etymologically from the game parks that the Achaemenid Persian emperors had maintained. Accreting meaning for the Franks via Greek and Roman interlocutors, the keeping of such reserves, their management of animals and of all hunting within, defined imperial authority in both the ancient Mediterranean and in early medieval Europe.¹⁹

Charters and capitularies from the time reflect Charlemagne's vision of his royal role as both sustainer and taker of life through control over wilderness resources. By claiming ownership of wild animals and restricting hunting rights to designated areas, Charlemagne not only preserved game for royal use but also redefined the forest as a space of sovereign privilege, where the king alone regulated access to life-giving sustenance and the right to kill. Eric Goldberg draws our attention to a dramatic surge in the creation of charters on this topic issued as a departure from Merovingian norms that underscored Charlemagne's authority to categorize and command the natural world. He urges us to examine such encounters among human and non-human actors as containing "encoded messages about sovereignty, political authority, and power."²⁰

Karolus Magnus reveals the interplay between obligations to keep alive and license to kill the creatures inside this "paradise" through its depiction of the royal hunt. Charlemagne, along with an entourage that included his wife, sons, and daughters, arrived at a forest adjacent to the city, pursuing trackers as their hounds chased a particularly elusive and ferocious brown boar.²¹ The scene is worth examining in close detail, for it reveals how Charlemagne's authority was based in part on both the preservation and the

18 Paul Edward Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache*, 57, 63.

19 Allsen, *The Royal Hunt in Eurasian History*, 35–37.

20 Goldberg, *In the Manner of the Franks*, 72–78, 11.

21 *KMLP*, ed. Beumann et al., p. 78, lines 267–79.

taking of life in this game park. On the heels of the hounds, the party chased the boar, which hid in shadowy thickets and dense shrubbery:

Here one wanders, deceived by the scent, through the shadowy thickets;
 Another wheels about from this glade to that.
 One has seen the prey, the other scents its fleeting trace.
 A clamour arises, a great din issues from the depths of the woods,
 And the trumpet fires the brave Molossian hounds to fierce battle.
 The savage boar charges forward with menacing tusk,
 And shaken, the leaves fall from the tall trees all around.
 Through the vast wilderness he flees, carving his path
 With swift, relentless flight through trackless places,
 Gnashing as he cuts through the mountain heights.
 Spent by the chase, panting, he halts with weary feet.
 Now he readies weapons of death against the dogs and the pursuing crowd;
 And tosses the raging Molossians with his dreadful snout.²²

When chance, wile, and sheer ferocity seemed to allow the beast to take flight, the opportunity for Charlemagne to perform his role as nature's sovereign had arrived:

Presently father Charles himself charges into their midst.
 Faster than a flying bird he pierces with his sword the beast's
 Breast and drives cold iron through its heart.
 The boar crashes down, vomiting out its lifeblood
 And rolls over in yellow sand as it dies.²³

Any one of the hunters could have slaughtered the boar, but the carefully choreographed scene demanded that Charlemagne do it. In this moment, he stood above the party as both the preserver of the game park and the culler of its inhabitants. In this violent enactment of power, Charlemagne's

22 "Errat hic umbrosis delusus odore frutectis, / Alter in alterius hinc saltibus inde rotatur; / Ille vidit, hic praedam sentit odore fugacem. / Fit strepitus, silvis consurgit stridor in imis, / Et tuba magnanimos incendit ad acra molosos / Proelia. Dirus aper quo se fert dente minaci, / Arboribusque excussa cadunt folia undique ab altis: / Per loca vasta fugit rapidoque per invia cursu / Tendit iter, frendens teret alta cacumina montis; / Cursibus exhaustus lasso pede constat anhelus. / Iam parat arma necis canibus turbamque sequacem / Sternit et horrendo rabidos rotat ore molosos." *KMLP*, ed. Beumann et al., p. 78, lines 282–26, 80, lines 287–91.

23 "Mox Karolus pater ipse volat ense ferinum / Pectus et intinguens gelidum in praecordia ferrum. / Corruit ille, vomens vitam cum sanguine mixto, / In flava moriens seseque volutat harena." *KMLP*, ed. Beumann et al., p. 80, lines 294–98. Translation from Goldberg, "Louis the Pious and the Hunt," 621.

sovereignty became clear to all the living human and nonhuman entities in his presence.

The chase was not between boar and Charlemagne alone, but rather involved all the Franks who accompanied him, their hunting dogs, the trees whose presence and silence obstructed and guided both hunter and prey, and even the rough terrain—the desolate place through which it fled and the impassable trail that slowed the boar’s escape.²⁴ The pursuit and slaying of the boar was an example of what I call Carolingian ecological sovereignty, an inclusive exclusion that reverberated from their theological understandings of a Christian empire and a sense of their location (and role) in historical and salvific time. The entangling of Frankish church and Carolingian state reflected the amalgamation of Carolingian theology and politics according to shared (although not uniform) goals of *correctio*, the pursuit of “correct” religious doctrines and practices—and therefore in the salvation and proper management of bodies and spaces. For Charlemagne and his successors, a “redeemed” nature was both a source of power and a reflection of their divine authority.

This is a story of the Carolingian elite living in anticipation of Christ’s return and working to prepare the earth for that event. Carolingian theologians read in both Old and New Testaments not that creation would be restored to its former state at the Second Coming, but that through Christ all things would be made new. It was a renewal—a regeneration, more perfect even than the first iteration. Carolingian efforts to “improve” their environment and their worship were part of the same reclamation project—a slow pruning to shape the empire into a more (but never quite) perfect garden. It rested on a sense of a “fallen” corrupted world that had to be redeemed by working to better it through proper Christian teachings and practice led by God’s agent of power on Earth: the Frankish king, supported by his bishops and magnates, and allied with Rome.

This distinction may be a fine one, but it is the difference between their envisioning nature as a *tabula rasa*²⁵ ready for development and seeing instead an environment manifesting the ecological consequences of sin, which needed to be ameliorated for both economic and spiritual reasons.

24 “Per loca vasta fugit...per invia cursu.” *KMLP*, ed. Beumann et al., p. 80, line 289.

25 Lynn White argued that medieval Christianity, culture, and technology reshaped nature into a blank slate stripped of intrinsic value, turning it into raw material for human use and thereby laying the foundation for the modern ecological crisis. This view is surprisingly still prevalent among environmental histories. White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” 1203–6.

That improvement could take concrete form in the hard labour needed to work in the vineyards, fields, meadows, and pastures was appropriate, given the sin to be overcome. But for the Carolingians, only Christ himself could truly wipe clean the ledger of sins, restoring nature to a perfect condition—thus, the mission of taming the wild mapped onto salvific time as well. Although they could not return nature to its perfect state, humankind—and particularly the Christian king—had the duty to try. Charlemagne thus took up the mantle and tasks of Adam, Paradise’s fallen custodian, and of righteous Old Testament monarchs. He was, nevertheless, still an imperfect figure, whose role as a “new” Adam was meant to anticipate that of the final Adam, Christ himself.

We see one version of this process at work in the boar’s hunt and its treatment after the fact as the king distributed the animal’s flesh and trophies, offering them as booty to cheer his men and bind them to his cause, enacting symbolically what Timothy Reuter called “plundering-expeditions” that accompanied Frankish conquest and imperialism.²⁶ Then Charlemagne spoke to his companions with friendly words meant to solidify their bonds of shared combat:

Fortune has granted that we draw out this joyful day,
She nods favourably to the omens and blesses our endeavours.
Therefore, all of you, as we carry out this task—
Bring kindly care to the pursuit of the hunt!²⁷

The Paderborn poet wrote quite plainly that this “work”—the hunting—was what they should devote themselves to most zealously. Yet given that the hunt was at this point concluded, how should we understand Charlemagne’s words? What did the poet mean by exhorting the Franks to devote themselves to the “art of the hunt”? Was this merely the extolling of an aristocratic pastime, or a call to something more portentous?

The poet anticipates our questions, zooming out from the local scene to parallel the events of the hunt just outside Aachen to the larger Frankish realm. Hammering the point home for the reader with little subtlety, the poet connected the chase to Carolingian hegemony in wider Europe via the pursuit of not a wild animal but a “savage” people:

26 “Mox aliam Karolus praedam iubet inde movere.” *KMLP*, ed. Beumann et al., p. 80, line 300. Reuter, “Plunder and Tribute in the Carolingian Empire,” 76–78, 80.

27 “Hanc fortuna diem nobis deducere laetam / Annuit auguriis et nostra incepta secundat; / Ergo favete omnes istum exercendo laborem, / Venandi studio curamque adhibete benignam!” *KMLP*, ed. Beumann et al., p. 80, lines 302–5.

The hero himself returns to Saxony with many thousands;
 Hosts gather from the diverse quarters of the world,
 And kindred forces hasten over the steep banks of the Rhine
 To subdue the rebellious Saxon people
 And to rend the savage people with cold iron.²⁸

It was a deliberate choice to commemorate Charlemagne's imperial coronation, which was after all the main focus of the poem's composition, with a parallelism that yokes the Franks and "the art of the hunt" to the pursuit and slaughter of the unruly Saxons. Like the wild boar, this "savage people" were supposed to live or die according to Charlemagne's wishes within the larger imperial realm. It signified that this was a paradise to be managed and redeemed on a grander scale. As we shall see, Carolingian ecological sovereignty ensnared not only those animals designated as "game" for the king, but, as it was imagined and articulated by Charlemagne's courtiers and theologians, it implicated all the living human and nonhuman inhabitants of the Frankish realm in hierarchies of obedience and domination under Charlemagne's rule.

It is my argument in this book that Carolingian rulers demonstrated authority and potency through the exercise of sovereignty over "natural" spaces and animals. I broaden this scope beyond the hunting of animals to argue that Carolingian thinkers and writers—especially those courtier-theologians who surrounded Charlemagne during the latter quarter of the eighth century—imagined the empire itself as a kind of reserve or garden, one whose living inhabitants their rulers sought to control and cull, according to their belief in a divine mandate to redeem and tame the natural world. It is this tension between Charlemagne as a sovereign who both preserved life and took lives that the *Karolus Magnus* poem highlighted so clearly, and that informs my arguments in what follows.

But Carolingian control over the human and nonhuman inhabitants of the empire supported Carolingian claims of sovereignty just as effectively as violence did. This ecological sovereignty helps explain how the exercise of power over the people, animals, and plants of Francia legitimated Carolingian claims of imperial hegemony over bodies and spaces in Europe. The *Karolus* poet illustrates how the Franks claimed sovereignty over the living and non-living members of local, regional, and imperial spaces at a

28 "ipse / Saxoniam repetit cum multis milibus heros. / Agmina conveniunt diversis partibus orbis, / Cognataeque acies properant super ardua Rheni / Litora, Saxonum populum domitare rebellem / Et saevum gelido gentem rescindre ferro." *KMLP*, ed. Beumann et al., p. 82, lines 336–41.

time when these took on a distinctly Carolingian flavour. Michel Foucault once argued that in modern times political sovereignty was no longer defined by the power to kill alone, but it was located in “taking charge of life,” because “more than the threat of death...[that] gave power its access even to the body.”²⁹ The artifacts of Charlemagne’s empire (and medieval records generally) reveal premodern and modern articulations of political sovereignty—between the state as taker of life and manager of living beings—were not so disparate as Foucault’s formulation suggested.³⁰ That is not to say that the threat and exercise of violence were not constituent to early medieval European politics. They were. But like many premodern rulers in Eurasia, Charlemagne demonstrated sovereignty in the control *and* supervision of subservient human and nonhuman living beings as much as he did in other ways.³¹

This book examines how Carolingian thinkers and writers near Charlemagne around the turn of the ninth century imagined themselves both within nature and as masters of its human and nonhuman populations. A tension between real and ideal characterized the Carolingians’ conception of and engagement with the natural world and their perceived relationship between the people and the land. Answers to these larger questions become apparent through careful analysis of late eighth- and early ninth-century Carolingian theological and clerical texts by courtier-theologians Wigbod (ca. 780s) and Alcuin of York (ca. 781–804), as well as through study of Carolingian ideological documents that circulated widely among Carolingian *literati*.

As we shall see, Wigbod’s and Alcuin’s roles set them apart as a new kind of courtier-theologian: figures legitimated by their biblical knowledge and spiritual authority, which lent them real political import in Charlemagne’s inner circle. In Carolingian political culture the court advisor was an agent of admonition, a trusted insider who could use proximity to the ruler to offer moral correction and counsel. Along with bishops and other clerics, they were expected to warn against injustice, correct misconduct, and report abuses to the king, who was in turn expected to heed such correction. While some, like Alcuin, felt at times secure enough to directly critique Charlemagne’s actions, more often the courtier-theologian’s advisory culture operated through carefully coded forms of criticism, indirect

29 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 141–43.

30 McCracken, *In the Skin of a Beast*, 29–30.

31 Allsen, *The Royal Hunt in Eurasian History*, 147.

counsel grounded in spiritual or moral precedents.³² In these Carolingian texts, outward- and inward-looking statements of collective aspirations for “correct” religious beliefs and practices shine through. Indeed, there and elsewhere Carolingian texts explicitly link good fortune, the chance for bountiful agricultural yields and hopes for tranquil weather, with good rule and obedience to the sovereign, who ruled over all with the advice of his bishops. Then (as now) the ecological was political—but this only becomes apprehensible through peeling back the layers of Carolingian theological discourses of power and nature to find their intersections with politics, law, and everyday life.

In the remainder of this introduction, I address four interrelated lines of inquiry. First, I situate Carolingian ecological sovereignty as a dimension of Carolingian kingship, in which authority over the natural world was inseparable from authority over human communities. Second, I locate Carolingian and early medieval environmental history within the broader field of environmental history, a field in which this period has often been marginalized or unevenly treated. Third, I consider the methodological problem posed by the sources themselves: the overwhelmingly formulaic, normative, and prescriptive character of the surviving evidence, which requires careful reflection on how historians can employ such materials to reconstruct Carolingian conceptions of and interactions with the environment. Fourth, I circle back to Carolingian thinkers and how they reimagined Adam as a model for Charlemagne’s role in ordering both society and the natural world. Rather than Paul Dutton’s “new Adam,” Charlemagne functioned more as a “penultimate Adam,” one who could not restore creation to perfection but who could reshape it through *correctio* in anticipation of Christ. Finally, I conclude with an outline for the book.

Kingship, Empire, and Carolingian Ecological Sovereignty

It was the Carolingian conquests in the later eighth century and ruling elites’ attempts to react to crises and events that began to bring about what historians have labelled the “Carolingian Empire.” But I contend that after 789 (following the issuance of the *Admonitio generalis*—the “constitution” of the Carolingian reform program) glimpses of the ideologies of Charlemagne’s empire began to emerge, and these were deeply involved in what becomes Carolingian ecological sovereignty, well underway by the

32 van Renswoude, *The Rhetoric of Free Speech*, 180–81, 190–91, 184–86.

later eighth century. These visions of authority justified and made legible in the landscape Carolingian claims of authority and exercises of power, all rooted in *correctio*. Carolingian ecological sovereignty was meant to hold together a polity that does not always look like what we think an empire should be, in which the emperor could only rule by securing the buy-in of regional and local elites. Under Merovingian rule local aristocracies and the Frankish royal courts coexisted only in a loose association. Carolingian rulers, however, employed political ritual and the rhetoric of spiritual correction to bind local aristocrats to the court and the idea of Carolingian kingship.³³ Consequently, Carolingian sources on “natural” things and on humans’ relationship with ecologies express diverse perspectives while all work to aggrandize the ruler and portray Charlemagne as the lord and tamer of nature.

Expanding historical understanding of how imperial power works, I argue that Frankish sovereignty over vast territories depended on Carolingian environmental imaginings even as it was enforced by Carolingian armies. The later ninth-century Carolingian *renovatio*—the “revival” of Roman imperial ideologies—was rooted in a quest for correct, biblical authority and knowledge, and the redemption and domination of the natural world. For example, when Charlemagne brought “Roman” plants and symbols to Francia it was in service to those ideals.³⁴ Of course the sources used to study Carolingian reform reveal a tension between confidence and uncertainty. Reform texts present themselves as efforts to improve existing structures, yet they also expose deep anxiety about whether those efforts would succeed. Religious ideas and political action were closely intertwined in the Carolingian world, but belief was also personal and shaped by doubt as well as conviction. Public statements of religiosity were therefore not simply political performances. The legislative programs and narratives produced at court should instead be understood as appeals directed at individuals, encouraging them to reflect on their responsibilities within the Christian order rather than merely obey commands for institutional change.³⁵ Focusing on the key courtier-theologians surrounding Charlemagne at the turn of the ninth century opens one significant window onto how such individuals shaped and were shaped by these appeals.

33 Innes, “Charlemagne’s Government,” 86.

34 Blan, “Charlemagne’s Peaches,” 521–45.

35 Kramer, “The Problem(s) with the Carolingian Reform(s),” 26.

Because Carolingian politics and religion were inseparable, a Carolingian environmental history should be ecocritical and material in analysis, but ultimately theological. A “Carolingian” environmental history has to consider how Carolingian thinkers and writers reflected and considered themselves both within nature and as masters of its inhabitants, under God’s authority. Carolingian writers were closer to “nature” than the modern scholars studying them because their world was structured by different and very real constraints of geography, agriculture, and demography. At the same time, Carolingian writers’ worldview was hyper-anthropocentric, and they envisioned their kingdom and actions at the centre of a historical drama that began in the deep past of the Bible and would culminate in an apocalyptic near future.³⁶

This book focuses on the formative years of Carolingian imperialism at the end of the eighth and the beginning of the ninth century. Jennifer Davis refers to this early phase of the Carolingian Empire as “Charlemagne’s,” partially repurposing Heinrich Fichtenau’s statement that the ruler was the “centre (*Mittelpunkt*) of the whole kingdom.”³⁷ By this phrase Fichtenau implied that Charlemagne was something like “the decider” (to evoke a modern political phrase), who was flattered and cajoled by advisors playing on the king’s own sense of self-importance to achieve their ends. My arguments draw on many of the same sources that Fichtenau used, but I see a more active agency on Charlemagne’s part in the shaping of the Frankish realm, and I follow Davis in recognizing the Frankish ruler’s centrality to Carolingian power—he was the great distributor of land, wealth, plunder, and titles for whose attention other Frankish magnates vied.³⁸ Charlemagne and other Carolingian elites governed an empire *in fact* and learned on-the-fly how to articulate or justify it in their symbols and ideology. I add to this claim that Charlemagne and his advisors articulated their nascent imperial sovereign claims over vast territories by incorporating control and redemption of the natural world into their *ministerium*.

Charlemagne sought to arrange life on earth like that of the heavenly kingdom, according to an Augustinian notion of *ordo*, and sought to impose

36 As Paolo Delogu argues, the Carolingian conception of “nature” was the environment in which humans lived. Delogu, “L’ambiente altomedievale come tema storiografico,” 99.

37 Fichtenau, *The Carolingian Empire*, trans. Munz, 29–30; Fichtenau, *Das karolingische Imperium*, 38.

38 Davis, *Charlemagne’s Practice of Empire*, 19.

that arrangement on many Carolingian subjects.³⁹ For Augustine, *ordo* (Latin for “order”) was the idea that everything in creation has its proper place within God’s design. The universe, human society, and even a person’s inner life were meant to reflect a divinely established hierarchy and harmony. When things are in the right order, when love, desire, and action are directed first toward God and then toward other things in their appropriate measure, then life and community flourish. But when this order is disrupted, when people love lesser things more than higher ones (for example, wealth or power more than God), the result is disorder, sin, and conflict.⁴⁰

Mayke de Jong’s work has highlighted the Carolingian discourse of *ministerium*, a spiritual mandate that drew ecclesiastics and lay aristocrats together with this view of *ordo*. This shift in political theology is a drastic change from the previous Merovingian Frankish regime whose records “mention this connection only occasionally,” whereas Charlemagne’s rule increasingly invoked the responsibilities of *ministerium* in preventing realm-wide disorder and injustice. *Ministerium* entailed the overlapping bonds of shared responsibility theoretically linking ruler, episcopate, aristocrats, and all inhabitants of the Carolingian Empire in a process of ongoing spiritual and temporal salvation.⁴¹ The degree to which the Carolingians were able to achieve these goals is debatable, and it may be that the enactors of Charlemagne’s expansive vision of sovereignty could not scratch much below the surface of real dirt and living bodies. Nevertheless, recovering the discourse of Carolingian ecological sovereignty and tracing attempts to justify its claims reveal key practices behind the articulation of royal authority and the exercise of power in the Carolingian polity.

In this framework, the Frankish king received God’s power and authority first, and then transmitted it to the bishops, clergy, and other elites. Carolingian writers preferred a “Christian empire” that, as de Jong puts it, “did not so much represent a return to an ‘original’ Roman (imperial) universality, politically or ecclesiastically...as a micro-Christendom gotten out of hand by its very territorial extension.”⁴² Going further, de Jong adds that the very

39 Fried, *Karl der Grosse*, 70–71. On *ordo*, see de Jong, *The Penitential State*, 37, 121; de Jong, “Charlemagne’s Church,” 110–11. De Jong’s articulation of this notion envisions the Carolingian ruler possessing a divinely-ordained *ministerium* and responsibility for the spiritual wellbeing of a church and kingdom jointly conceived as an *ecclesia*, “united by a correct worship of God.”

40 Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, trans. Walsh and Honan, 217–20.

41 de Jong, *The Penitential State*, 121.

42 de Jong, “*Ecclesia* and the Early Medieval Polity,” 119.

“notion of *ecclesia* [church], including all its connotations of the eventual salvation of God’s people, was harnessed to the identity of the Carolingian polity, with the ruler’s responsibility for the salvation of its people as its defining factor. Thus, the Carolingian polity became a *corpus Christi* [body of Christ].”⁴³ In other words, the idea of the universal church became entangled with conceptions of the state, and the body of Christ with the Frankish body politic, at whose head was Charlemagne. The Carolingian renewal centred on *correctio*, the goal of recovering and producing correct scriptural texts and authority and the implementation of biblical knowledge from the ruler down to aristocrats—lay and religious—and the priests who would instruct parishioners. This notion was what gave force and motion to Carolingian reform and political culture, to such a degree that failure to carry out one’s responsibilities under *ministerium* demanded spiritual correction, leading to the implementation of educational reforms aimed at promoting Christian morality.⁴⁴

Ideally, this process functioned on a continuum, with the ruler and the episcopate balancing each other on the scales of “mutual *admonitio* and acknowledgement of sin or error,” but because of the overlapping and interdependent natures of Carolingian *ministeria*, agents of offices required correction when they sinned, and public correction for a public sin.⁴⁵ At the same time, secular magnates expressed anxiety over the toll that the duties of their temporal office exacted upon their immortal souls, seeking reassurance and pastoral guidance from spiritual authorities.⁴⁶ It was in his role as head of such a polity that Charlemagne and subsequent Carolingian rulers, in language of pastoral care, attempted to exercise sovereignty over many parts of that political body, as seen in foundational documents like the *Admonitio generalis*.⁴⁷

But still one may ask: was it an empire in fact? Assessing an empire should never be as simple as whether or not it was a large geographical polity containing a core metropolis that dominated (through violence or

43 de Jong, “*Ecclesia* and the Early Medieval Polity,” 119.

44 Booker, *Past Convictions*, 165, 227; de Jong, *The Penitential State*, 4.

45 de Jong, *The Penitential State*, 135, 152.

46 Smith, “Einhard,” 64; Noble, “Secular Sanctity,” 16; Riché, *Daily Life in the World of Charlemagne*, trans. McNamara, 81–83.

47 On medieval rulers and “the capacity to make live,” see McCracken, *In the Skin of a Beast*, 12–13, 29–30; Booker, *Past Convictions*, 144.

economics) colonies or some other kind of periphery settlements.⁴⁸ The Carolingian court, with its itinerant ruler and tenuous grip on local and regional power, dependent on other magnates, does not share many characteristics with the competent, centralized bureaucracies of more modern empires. Martin Gravel has demonstrated how such relatively “weak” emperors exerted real political control over distant localities through the mobility of the court (even the rumour of an imperial visit could suffice); the omnipresence of the sovereign in coins, sealed documents, and mandatory common prayers; and appointed officials—both lay and ecclesiastic—who owed their position and allegiance to the ruler.⁴⁹ Richard Sullivan anticipated this way of re-imagining the Carolingian polity, arguing that instead of a strong “empire” (as traditionally defined), the “Carolingian concept and practice of empire meant strikingly different things to different people...there was not one unifying and universally shared view of what the Carolingian Empire was and how it should be managed, but many conflicting divisive views.”⁵⁰ In such a polyphonic empire, the meaning of rule itself was a matter of contention, as voices across the Carolingian world sought to shape nature, ritual, and sovereignty in divergent ways.

A Carolingian Environmental History

Recovering Carolingian ecological sovereignty reveals how crucial the eighth and ninth centuries were to the longer environmental history of medieval Europe. It amends medieval environmental histories that celebrate the ecological impacts of the ancient Romans, and then leap from them to the twelfth century. David Herlihy, for example, argued influentially that four distinctive attitudes shaped medieval environmental history. These attitudes corresponded more or less to four separate (but overlapping) periods of medieval history that “progress” as humans’ relationship to their environment became more complex over the course of the Middle Ages.⁵¹ This ana-

48 Reynolds, “Empires,” 158.

49 Gravel, *Distances, rencontres, communications*.

50 Sullivan, “The Carolingian Age,” 288–89.

51 Herlihy, “Attitudes,” 100–101, 112 launched the Middle Ages with an “eschatological” phase (third to fifth centuries) when Christian intellectuals focused on the fallen state of the world and its imminent destruction and re-creation. Next came the “dark age” of dense, misty forests and ravenous wolves, the kind of nature portrayed in *Beowulf*, one inherently hostile to human beings that lasted up to the year 1000 and generated an “adversarial” phase. A new, better “collaborative” period arrived

lytic structure forces sources into a rigid framework of analysis and favours the later medieval periods at the creative expense of the earlier, imposing an artificial barrier of thought between the demarked eras. To his credit, Herlihy pointed this problem out, admitting that the four attitudes “did not supplant one another in sequence,” and no one completely overrode the other.⁵² Nevertheless, the scheme nearly totally ignores the rich Carolingian sources of the eighth and ninth centuries.

Herlihy’s interpretive scheme drew inspiration from the famous arguments of Lynn White, who highlighted the ecological advances of the High Middle Ages. White’s argument pushes the idea that medieval people saw the environment as a blank slate by showing how new technology, cultural imagery, and Christian theology combined to strip nature of intrinsic value or spirit. What remained was raw material—soil to be overturned, forests to be cut, animals to be dominated—available for human exploitation without moral or spiritual restraint. This shift, he postulated, set the foundation for the modern ecological crisis. He notes that medieval calendars visually reinforced this shift. Earlier pagan calendars personified the seasons passively, but new Frankish calendars from around 830 depicted people coercing nature—ploughing, harvesting, chopping trees, butchering animals. These images symbolized a cultural imagination in which humans dominated and remade the environment, or in White’s words, “Man and nature are two things, and man is master.”⁵³ In my reading, White is partially correct here, not to the extent that classical and early post-classical agrarians did not think about exploiting nature; they did. Nor do I deny that Frankish landlords and farmers tried to tame their environment; they did this also. But in the frame of Carolingian ecological sovereignty, it was in support of a theological and political project in which the ordering of fields, forests, and waters was less about blank-slate exploitation and more about manifesting the ruler’s divinely sanctioned role as Adamic gardener, transforming the landscape into a legible, moralized environment that reflected imperial authority and eschatological purpose.

when humans realized and wrote about the ways they could actually shape their own environment, perhaps even collaborating with the divine unfolding of history to usher in Christ’s return by stewarding the natural world to this end. In the wake of the demographic catastrophe of the fourteenth century, the “recreational” stage saw people turn in their sorrow and confusion to the natural world as a place of refuge and renewal.

52 Herlihy, “Attitudes,” 101.

53 White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” 1204.

More recent environmental histories have continued to focus on the second half of the medieval millennium, though methodological innovations have complicated the “progressive” view of ecological change in the European Middle Ages. John Aberth takes the novel approach of analyzing “parts” of nature separately, e.g. the “elements,” the forest, etc., rather than adhering strictly to the four phases. However, in the end he largely agrees with Herlihy’s premises and ignores much of the early Middle Ages, although when he does discuss the ninth-century *Vita Sturmi* (Life of St. Sturm) in some detail, it is noteworthy for the present study that his analysis pertains to the setting up of a “paradise” amidst the frightening wilderness.⁵⁴ We find nothing of the Carolingian period in Steven A. Epstein’s *The Medieval Discovery of Nature*, in which he explores the shifting role of experimentation in medieval people’s thinking and writing about the natural world; this neglect despite the fact that Carolingian writers thought a great deal about their environment *and* their place within it.⁵⁵ These omissions probably derive from a perception of early medieval writers not as authors but repeaters “almost word for word” of earlier texts.⁵⁶ As we shall see, Carolingian writers and exegetes were compellingly original in their recycling and reworking of ancient sources.

Source Questions

Richard Hoffmann’s survey of medieval environmental history argues that the eighth- and ninth-century explosion of Carolingian texts “suddenly open[s] a window” for environmental historians to understand how people began to think about organizing and using land in the post-Roman West.⁵⁷ Tim Newfield has answered this call to use Carolingian texts to understand the Frankish impact on the environment by collating mentions of natural disaster in the early Middle Ages, demonstrating how the hazards of pestilence, climate change, and famine shaped the demographics and economies of early medieval Europe, and that (at some level) contemporary authors were aware of their ecological precariousness.⁵⁸ Indeed, Newfield’s impressive cataloging of natural disasters in early medieval Europe puts forward

54 Aberth, *An Environmental History of the Middle Ages*, 90–91.

55 Epstein, *The Medieval Discovery of Nature* does not once mention a Carolingian author or text.

56 Aberth, *An Environmental History*, 18.

57 Hoffmann, *An Environmental History of Medieval Europe*, 79–81.

58 Newfield, “The Contours of Disease and Hunger.”

a model for how to organize and process seemingly formulaic mentions of incidents across disparate texts.

There is more opportunity for contextualizing the sources within early medieval cultures, as Newfield himself recognizes, to identify “motifs” and “borrowed phrases and terms” from elsewhere that were recycled to describe things like food shortages or other environmental hazards.⁵⁹ Doing so shows how early medieval people deployed familiar language and themes to describe ecological events in ways that made sense to them, as Paolo Squatriti has shown for the floods of 589 in Italy.⁶⁰ Michael McCormick, Paul Dutton, and Paul Mayewski have come the closest to this kind of interwoven analysis for northern Francia, deploying a wider array of sources and materials to understand both environmental history and how Carolingian writers understood ecological change in their own times. In studying paleoclimatic “anomalies” found in proxy records like ice cores, tree rings, and speleothem oxygen isotopes across the Northern Hemisphere, they looked to Frankish annals that documented unusually harsh winters, and found a high degree of overlap between the datasets.⁶¹ The principal hazard in such an analysis is that one set of evidence may overshadow the other, depending on the questions modern historians pose, and it becomes tempting to see climate as *the* main driver for political and social change at the expense of human agency or cultural contingency.

To do a “Carolingian” environmental history we must read eighth- and ninth-century texts about nature in light of Carolingian culture and society. Three recent books have cleared additional paths for this approach. Jean-Pierre Devroey’s magisterial monograph on empire and the environment during Charlemagne’s reign cautions against increasingly prevalent climate-determinist stories. It is not that climate shocks do not occur or are without significance in their own right, but famine becomes ascertainable as history when markets, institutions, and rulers convert these phenomena into hunger. He treats Francia as an assemblage of environments, with humans acting inside various microclimates, and focuses on the years 740–820, a window that aligns meteorological thirty-year baselines with Charlemagne’s lifetime. Here readers discover how the Carolingian state governed scarcity, with the “pastor-king” Charlemagne obliged to feed, regulate, and discipline

59 Newfield, “The Contours of Disease and Hunger,” 228.

60 Squatriti, “The Floods of 589,” 819–20.

61 McCormick, Dutton, and Mayewski, “Volcanoes and the Climate Forcing of Carolingian Europe.”

his flock. In practice, this means not writing peasants as silent victims of a hostile nature, but centring (as does chapter two of the present study) peasant agency, solidarities, and adaptation. Devroey's evidence includes tree rings, sediments, and volcanic eruptions, but his explanations are found in institutions, law, and decisions for provisioning the empire. The recurring stress points he tracks in the late-eighth and early-ninth centuries anchor that argument. Read this way, Devroey's painstaking analysis undergirds my claims about Carolingian ecological sovereignty: court theology and legislation were meant to work together to order bodies, markets, and landscapes as part of royal *ministerium*.⁶²

Maintaining our attention on the intersection of nature and Carolingian governance, Paolo Squatriti's *Weeds and the Carolingians* shifts the focus to how "wild" plants were mobilized as tools of governance, moral reform, and imperial ideology for the Carolingians. Weeds in the early Middle Ages were understood as deeply temporal phenomena, whose emergence, significance, and management were shaped by seasonal rhythms, agricultural calendars, and theological narratives. Squatriti explores how Augustine, adapting both classical and Christian exegetical traditions, shifted from viewing weeds as postlapsarian punishments to interpreting them as part of God's original and good creation—only perceived as "bad" due to human sin and agricultural needs. Carolingian thinkers inherited and adapted these debates, negotiating different interpretations of Genesis while also incorporating weeds into broader imperial projects of calendrical reform, cosmology, and agricultural ordering. Ultimately, Squatriti shows how weeds were not merely plants out of place, but indicators of sacred and agricultural time, central to how early medieval Christians made sense of creation, sin, and their own labour. Carolingian authors linked the removal of weeds to the purification of communities, both ecclesiastical and secular. Weeding thus became a framework for thinking about *correctio*, in which the emperor was cast as a "weeder-king" tasked with disciplining unruly elements in the body politic. Squatriti concludes that weeding was not merely an agricultural concern but a symbolic and practical tool of governance and religious reform, grounding this in material evidence as much as in texts, so that the weeds of the exegetes are never far from the weeds in the fields.⁶³

⁶² Devroey, *La nature et le roi*, Introduction, esp. 9–16 and 21–27; on the case sequence (763–64, 779, 792–94, 802–13); 132–42 on provisioning measures (tithes, stocks, weights/measures, price rules, anti-hoarding, export bans).

⁶³ Squatriti, *Weeds and the Carolingians*, 4–13, 88–100, 109–21, 180 for the phrase "weeder-king."

The third work turns from land and plants to the texts through which nature was known. Anna Dorofeeva's *Reading Nature in the Early Middle Ages* takes the Latin *Physiologus*, a collection of descriptions of animals, plants, and stones, and follows its manuscript tradition from about 700 to 1000. Dorofeeva's argument rehabilitates early medieval writers who have been dismissed as mere compilers of inherited material, and she shows that compilation was itself creative intellectual work, whether within a single text or in the assembling of a composite codex. For my purposes, the ninth-century portion of that story matters most: the compilers whose glosses, glossaries, and copies Dorofeeva reconstructs were working in the same scriptoria that involved the correction of biblical texts during the Carolingian era, and their texts were not passive repositories of tradition but instruments for reshaping how the natural world was understood. Thus, the Carolingians used reading and commentary not only to inherit but to modify late antique knowledge systems for new moral and political ends. Central to this was collecting, excerpting, and organizing knowledge of the natural world into morally and theologically resonant forms. Through this lens, development of "natural" knowledge was part of a broader Carolingian commitment to renewal and reform.⁶⁴ Though part of a larger story and longer chronology, Dorofeeva's insights on the early ninth century reveals a moment when collecting natural knowledge—glosses, glossaries, calendars, bestiaries—was intimately tied to the work of empire. In Dorofeeva's reading, their texts were not passive repositories of tradition but active instruments for reshaping reality.

Situated alongside these works, *Carolingian Ecological Sovereignty* encounters Wigbod, Alcuin, and others as developers and transmitters of the notion that working within and dominating nature helped to redeem both a corrupted environment and the "Christian people." This "mission" was essential to the ruling family's aims to establish a "Christian empire" across Europe, and Carolingian *correctio* began with a mission to cultivate and promote "correct" Christian beliefs and practice. This book is arranged to show the development of Carolingian ecological sovereignty as it was shaped by exegesis on the biblical book of Genesis, disseminated by key courtiers and advisors to Charlemagne, and finally utilized by Carolingian rulers, who were themselves subject to its strictures. Documents associated with the Carolingian royal court show how the pursuit of "better" biblical

64 Dorofeeva, *Reading Nature in the Early Middle Ages*, 13–15, 29–33, 74–78.

exegesis was a political undertaking meant to bolster Charlemagne's role as the "new Adam," who would master nature.

Carolingian rulers produced hundreds of legislative documents, known as capitularies, and presided over assemblies and synods in which the bodies of animals, but also plants and people, were not merely regulated but managed in ways that were meant to sustain Carolingian structures of power and reflect their notions of authority. The scope of these texts was "vitally concerned about the general population of the empire...touching all people and concerning numerous areas of life."⁶⁵ We see clearly aspects of Carolingian ecological sovereignty in legislation concerning royal estates. Paul Dutton, for example, has argued that "Control and not conquest of the natural world" was the Carolingian goal, and he traces the outlines of these aspirations in the capitulary *De villis*, which instructed Charlemagne's agents in the management of royal estates. Its stocking of flora and fauna on those properties created a fantastical menagerie of peaches and peacocks, among other unusual plants and animals; the created beings in royal gardens were a tangible re-creation of paradisiacal order on earth.⁶⁶ Similarly, one may read the "Aachen" capitulary (ca. 801–813) as echoing *De villis*'s active management of nature, in its authorization to clear valuable woodland if it meant increased viticultural and pomicultural production: "let them plant vineyards and make orchards, and wherever useful men are found, let a forest be given to them for clearing, so that our service may be improved."⁶⁷ Like *De villis* this command directed *iudices* to protect woodlands and forests.⁶⁸ Such land clearance would have increased the empire's agricultural capacity and availability of produce in the short term, but its authorization depended entirely on the direct benefits to the sovereign, Charlemagne. In this case the regulation of trees served as a measure of Carolingian sovereignty. Yet as we shall see in the case of Wigbod's commentary on Genesis, these modes

65 Davis, *Charlemagne's Practice of Empire*, 38.

66 For peacocks and exotic fauna, see Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache*, 54; on pomiculture and the capitulary, see Blan, "Charlemagne's Peaches," 544–45.

67 "Et plantent vineas, faciant pomaria, et ubicumque inveniunt utiles homines, detur illis silva ad stirpandum, ut nostrum servitium in melioretur." *Capitulare Aquisgranense*, ed. Boretius, p. 172, lines 22–24.

68 "Ut silve vel forestes nostre bene sint custodite; et ubi locus fuerit ad stirpandum, stirpare faciant." *Capitulare de villis vel curtis imperialibus*, ed. Brühl, chap. 59, lines 15–17; Grainge, "Assarting and the Dynamics of Rhineland Economies." See also Sonnlechner, "The Establishment of New Units of Production in Carolingian Times," 40.

could be inverted, and trees could teach the apprentice imperialists how to exercise sovereignty.

More recent historians have rightly criticized earlier twentieth-century interpretations that contrasted the documentary practices of the Carolingian polity with more modern empires, and that imagined in Carolingian documents an entrenched professional bureaucracy where there was none or saw a “failed state” in the political fragmentation of the later ninth century.⁶⁹ Yet even within this fragmented empire, documentary practices did not collapse; rather, they circulated and adapted, travelling across regions and sustaining connections that outlived political unity. Prosopography demonstrates the existence of interconnected networks of kinship and patrimony linking the aristocracy and the episcopate to the monarchy through political ritual that emphasized moral authority and a sort of “early medieval consensus politics.”⁷⁰ This mutual co-dependence—embedded in shared religious culture—entangled elites with competing interests into cooperation. And it is thus easier to imagine that erudite texts produced and consumed at court penetrated lay and clerical elite cultures whose members eagerly competed for royal favour and patronage.

Because the early Carolingians came to conceive of their polity as both *ecclesia* and a renewed, Christian empire, their political experiment was rooted ultimately in the most fundamental textual source: the Bible. Theirs was not the last community to employ the scriptures as a sort of constitutional document, but Carolingian thinkers took more seriously than most the commands in Genesis to master and safeguard God’s creation.⁷¹ This included every being living within the empire and the “stuff” of the earth, such as rocks, waterways, and winds. Carolingian exegetes found in Genesis

69 Even the most ardent imaginer of a vigorous Carolingian machine of state, François-Louis Ganshof, admitted that in practice the Frankish monarchy lacked the organizational resources to enforce royal legislation at every level throughout the empire, relying instead upon the administrative talents of episcopal and lay authorities as well as royally appointed officials. Ganshof, *The Carolingians and the Frankish Monarchy*, 87–90, 145.

70 Matthew Innes acknowledges that Carolingian rulers likely desired the power that Ganshof described, but Innes diverts attention away from institutions in favour of social actors. Innes, *State and Society in the Early Middle Ages*, 5–11; Innes, “Charlemagne’s Government,” 72–73.

71 Genesis 1:28 reads, “And God blessed them, saying: Increase and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and rule over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and all living creatures that move upon the earth.” Douay-Rheims translation of the Latin Vulgate.

a model of and justification for the exercise of authority over other creatures and thus for politics. Of course, they did not always agree on exactly how to apply this knowledge, imagining and recycling different ways that humans and nonhuman creatures could relate with and among each other. Medieval humans defined themselves and their sense of self through the violent domination of animals,⁷² and Carolingian hunting was a perfect example of this process. But as we shall see, biblical commentaries, like Wigbod's on Genesis, offered alternative views to this dynamic: authority need not always mean forceful domination.

Charlemagne and Adam

Whether violent or not, for Carolingian notions of sovereignty, it was crucial to liken Charlemagne to the biblical Adam. This permitted Carolingian writers to perceive the new empire as a game park, the management of which instructed rulers in the exercise of sovereignty even while it propelled Frankish conquests.⁷³ Paul Dutton demonstrates how idealized gardens in two *Fons vitae* (fountain of life) manuscript illuminations painted for Charlemagne (the Godescalc Evangelistary ca. 781–783 and the Gospels of Saint-Médard of Soissons ca. early ninth century) reflected what was then known about *the* garden of Eden. Enclosed by a wall and surrounded by the four rivers of paradise (symbolizing the four gospels), the fountain in the centre was supported by four pairs of columns.⁷⁴ In the enclosure depicted in the Godescalc Evangelistary (Figure 1), the fourteen birds of paradise of the first painting enact their own hierarchical relationships while a stag at the bottom approaches the fountain of life. In the Saint-Médard gospel (Figure 2) twenty-one birds accompany four deer. Like the *Karolus* poet's imagined Aachen, these images overlay built and natural environment, as the human-made stone structures and the animals give shape to the enclosure, while the fountain of life—adorned by the cross itself, the figurative tree of life—anchors the composition. These painted enclosures were microcosmic reenactments of a properly ordered nature. The hierarchies of authority in the garden were the realm of the “first” Adam that rested on the

⁷² Steel, *How to Make a Human*, 24.

⁷³ On Adam and sovereignty over creatures as a model for rulers, see Piron, “Ève au fuseau, Adam jardinier.” On “paradise” gardens as manifestations of sovereignty and microcosms of an ordered world, see: Allsen, *The Royal Hunt in Eurasian History*, 46–49.

⁷⁴ Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache*, 54–55; Psalms 41:2.



Figure 1. Depiction of an idealized garden in the Godescalc Evangelistary, ca. 781–783. Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), MS n.a.l. 1203, fol. 3v. Courtesy of the BnF. Public Domain.



Figure 2. Depiction of an idealized garden in the Gospels of Saint-Médard of Soissons, early ninth century. BnF, MS latin 8850, fol. 6v.
Courtesy of the BnF. Public Domain.

“correct” governance of creatures and environments. The cross of Christ, the “last” Adam, lay at its heart.⁷⁵

These visual representations were not mere artistic endeavours but ideological expressions reinforcing Charlemagne’s role as caretaker of creation. They visually demonstrated how Charlemagne’s rule, informed by *correctio*, could transform chaotic wilderness into structured gardens, echoing Adam’s original command to name and manage creation. They are not only sumptuous works of Carolingian manuscript art but also microcosmic representations of the empire as a cultivated garden. Each image renders the fountain of life, as the centrepiece of a paradisiacal enclosure. This fountain, adorned with a cross—the new Tree of Life—anchors the scene, while the supporting colonnades, four in number, recall both architectural grandeur and theological order: they mirror the four rivers of Eden, the four gospels, and the fourfold structure of creation under divine law.⁷⁶

In the Godescalc Evangelistary, the structure shelters the fountain at the core of a lush garden populated by birds and a single stag. The fourteen birds do not flit randomly but enact a careful choreography of hierarchy—some perched above, others below—mirroring the ordering of creation and, by extension, of society within Charlemagne’s empire. At the fountain’s base, the stag bends toward the water, recalling Psalms 41:2, “As the hart panteth after the fountains of water; so my soul panteth after thee, O God.”⁷⁷ Here, desire for the divine is linked with obedience to order, just as the Carolingian subject’s fidelity to ruler and empire was bound up with salvation. The Saint-Médard Gospels elaborate this vision with still greater abundance. Here the enclosure teems with twenty-one birds and four deer, multiplying the signs of life and prosperity. The animals, wild but tamed, coexist within the human-built structure. The balance between stone architecture and the living creatures demonstrates how culture and nature interpenetrate when rightly ordered. The fountain remains at the centre, crowned by the cross of Christ, the “last Adam,” but the scene is unmistakably imperial: a vision of paradise domesticated, contained, and managed, just as the empire itself was to be structured and cultivated under Charlemagne’s governance.

Together, the two images function as visual sermons on sovereignty. They reimagine Eden not as a lost paradise but as a present possibility, an

75 The idea of the first and last Adam comes from 1 Corinthians 15:45: “The first man Adam was made into a living soul; the last Adam into a quickening spirit.” Douay-Rheims translation of the Latin Vulgate.

76 Coon, *Dark Age Bodies*, 21–22.

77 Douay-Rheims translation of the Latin Vulgate.

enclosure that can be recreated in manuscript, palace, and empire alike. Just as Adam was charged to name and govern the creatures of the first garden, Charlemagne was to order creation anew through *correctio*, ensuring that beasts, birds, and even human subjects dwelt harmoniously within the imperial game park. These illuminations thus show the Carolingian Empire as a garden in which natural abundance is enclosed by architecture, hierarchies are visibly displayed, and the fountain of life flows under the sign of the cross.

Paul Dutton reads these two images alongside the gathering of exotic animals and plants in Charlemagne's royal gardens that the capitulary *De villis* called for, noting that Charlemagne was "cast as a new Adam returning his estates to that prelapsarian state of perfection in which God had begun it."⁷⁸ Thus, the Frankish ruler's wishes to re-name plants, animals, the winds, and even the months of the year echoed God's instructions to the first man in the first garden. Although Carolingian writers associated Charlemagne with several biblical figures, most obviously Josiah, the ancient king of Judah who restored God's temple and the ancient Hebrew laws given by Moses. There is no extant evidence explicitly naming the Frankish ruler as Adam, though, as we shall see, Alcuin came closest to doing so. Nevertheless, Carolingian readers would have remembered the New Testament verses that tied the ends of Christian teleology from beginning to end through the bodies of two humans: Adam and Christ. By means of the "first man Adam" (*primus homo Adam*) sin and death entered the world, and through the actions of the "last Adam" (*novissimus Adam*) forgiveness and resurrection became possible.⁷⁹

For the Carolingians this was not an idle distinction, as the legislative and theological documents of the era evoked a millenarian sense that the latter days were much closer than the first ones,⁸⁰ and that it was "Charlemagne's solemn responsibility not simply to root out sin but also to ready the world for the end of days."⁸¹ Indeed, as Matthew Bryan Gillis puts it: "Carolingian theology was imperial politics on a cosmic scale, as rulers and intellectuals sought to make sure their realm maintained divine favor."⁸² Although the Carolingians may not have known their exact location in eschatological time, both Charlemagne's rhetorical and real efforts to order and re-order

⁷⁸ Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache*, 55–56.

⁷⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 45.

⁸⁰ Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages*, 160.

⁸¹ Romig, *Be a Perfect Man*, 36.

⁸² Gillis, *Heresy and Dissent in the Carolingian Empire*, 2–3.

society and its natural context were rooted in the establishment of a Christian empire and the ushering in of the end of days.

Rather than Dutton's "new Adam" who would return creation to its prelapsarian state, I argue that "the penultimate Adam" was the kind of Adam Charlemagne aspired to be, for this Adam could aid the Carolingian reshaping of the environment while also conforming to their sense of eschatological time. For Carolingian thinkers, in the long history of salvation there could be many Adams on the way to the final iteration, but Charlemagne was the most recent and, more importantly, the ruler, and the one best positioned to root out sins and their "natural" consequences: the thorns, thistles, wild animals, and unruly humans that descended from the first Adam's missteps. Through the implementation of *correctio* and the enlargement of Frankish hegemony a Carolingian ruler could redeem the land and re-order it into a "garden" or a game park. Its occupants would dwell under the divinely designated authority of the latest Adam, Charlemagne, and their obedience would help usher in the final Adam's return.⁸³ Human morality tied into both personal salvation and the wellbeing of the entire realm, which would face either tranquil seasons and fecund agriculture or natural disasters and dearth of resources, depending on the successful implementation of *correctio*. In the pages to come, my recalibration of Adam considering these views confirms Dutton's allusory insight on Charlemagne as an Adamic figure.

Outline

Chapter one examines the writings of Alcuin of York, like Wigbod a close advisor of Charlemagne in the last quarter of the eighth century, alongside contemporary Carolingian writings and reveals that perceptions of Carolingian kingship were tied to ecological phenomena. It begins with an anecdote from the mid-ninth-century chronicle Nithard's *Histories*, which explained how the Carolingian civil war, fought among Charlemagne's grandchildren for control of a fractured empire during the early 840s, perverted the tranquil and fecund environment established by "good" rule. This idea evolved from ancient Roman, Christian, and early medieval Insular origins and accreted new meaning in the Carolingian context, becoming the key principle undergirding Carolingian ecological sovereignty. Alcuin was the main transmitter to the imperial court of the royal-disaster paradigm established in chapter

83 On the fallen condition of early medieval nature and its violent deterioration up to the Apocalypse if left un-redeemed, see Dendle, "Plants in the Early Medieval Cosmos," 47–50.

nine of the famous pseudo-Cyprianic text *On the Twelve Abuses of the World*. The Northumbrian cleric's blending of these ideas with ancient Roman and early Christian notions of disaster changed over time in response to natural disasters and perceived calamities like the Vikings' sack of the monastery at Lindisfarne in 793. Examples of "bad" kings from Alcuin's native Britain shaped the cleric's notion that Charlemagne could not only be a great ruler but was perhaps the only king capable of inaugurating a paradise on earth.

Chapter two unearths the biblical roots of Carolingian politics, authority, and theories of sovereignty under Charlemagne by reconstructing the ideological underpinnings of the Carolingian political project, which was aimed at building a Christian empire through the correction of Christian beliefs and practices (*correctio*) and the renewal of Roman culture (*renovatio*). The combination of these two ideals is what gave Carolingian imperialism its flavour. One of the first directives that Charlemagne issued when he became ruler was the command to correct and disseminate biblical texts, and to learn from older commentaries and produce new ones. I connect *correctio* to exegesis because Carolingian ecological sovereignty derived from a specific understanding of theology that fuelled their mission to build a Christian empire. Carolingian understandings of nature in this context matter for understanding Charlemagne's symbolic role as a new Adamic figure in the governance of his empire. Texts such as the Capitulary of Herstal (779), the *Epistola de litteris colendis* (On the Cultivation of Letters, late 780s), the Synod of Frankfurt (794), and particularly the *Admonitio generalis* (789) represent foundational documents for these efforts, explicitly connecting the proper understanding and stewardship of nature to theological and political correctness.⁸⁴ The Carolingians did this in the spirit of *correctio*, but it turned out that spending so many hours pondering late antique commentaries on Genesis shaped the ecological thinking of Charlemagne's courtiers. This chapter discusses these larger changes, and introduces Wigbod, a pivotal courtier-theologian at the royal Frankish court during the 780s.

Surprisingly little modern scholarship has focused on this important figure. Wigbod was long marginalized or ignored by most scholars of early medieval Europe because apparently little to no evidence supporting his actions or influence survived outside his biblical exegesis.⁸⁵ This chapter takes the fact of the extant commentaries as a strength, arguing that Charlemagne's

84 Dorofeeva, *Reading Nature in the Early Middle Ages*, 13–14.

85 Michael M. Gorman is the exception to this generalization, see various citations below.

commissioning of Wigbod to produce the first “official” biblical commentary of his reign proves the author’s influence as a courtier. Wigbod’s theological exegesis was both a metaphor and medium for discussions of and experimentations with power, authority, and sovereignty. Wigbod’s interpretation of the creation story was politicized. He thought Genesis granted humans a particular role in nature, one that licensed Carolingian redemption and redress of the ills of the postlapsarian environment. Because the first humans’ sin had twisted the hierarchies of nature established in the first garden under the first Adam, in the Carolingian garden Charlemagne, the latest Adam, had to work to reestablish order among the unruly creatures. Human-animal relations structured by human sin and mortality required the subjugation and management of animals by well-informed people. The Carolingian projects of empire and *correctio* were means to that end.

Chapter three outlines a Carolingian moral ecology of individual, collective, and environmental salvation based on “redemptive” agricultural labour that was the key to membership within the empire. Taking Wigbod’s observations about what the Old Testament book of Genesis revealed to Carolingian elites about humans and trees the chapter historicizes them within Carolingian socio-political transformations of the era. Wigbod’s commentaries were theological texts that operated as historical, social, and political commentaries. In them, Wigbod metaphorized humans, trees, authority, and obedience to teach Carolingian elites how to dominate and supervise both the environment and those who laboured within it, namely the many peasant farmers who cultivated and worked the land. Contextualizing Wigbod’s commentary within a web of Carolingian sources shows how Carolingian elites began to valorize agricultural labour and labourers rather than denigrate them (as was previously commonplace) as the deserved consequences of Adam’s curse to toil the land. To the Carolingian elites, this new “moral ecology” presented an opportunity for peasants to participate (via their obedience and labour) in the Carolingian imperial project: the pan-European subjugation and “salvation” of peoples, animals, plants, and environments.

Alcuin established and popularized the vocabulary and rubric for assessing the signs of “good” kingship that would later be deployed against the Carolingian emperor Louis the Pious by his critics in the 820s and 830s. Chapter four thus exposes how, from the later eighth century, when the Frankish king’s doings became linked with the ecology of the realm, the formula was contested, reshaped, affirmed, and transformed over the course of the early ninth century by clerics and royal advisors. Extant expressions of the prescription for a prosperous realm from important luminaries of the era like Alcuin and Theodulf of Orléans (among others) underscored

the conjunction of felicity and good rule that shaped Carolingian imperialism. Theodulf emerges as a hefty counterweight to Alcuin's optimism: his poetry revealing a sense of environment that darkly mirrored earlier buoyant praise of Charlemagne. Theodulf's is a gloomy vision of a barren and disordered natural world manifested in the disruption of its seasonal cycles, its infecundity, and changing climate. Theodulf feared that these changes signalled that the end of all things was perhaps on the horizon. Carolingian ecological sovereignty dictated that just as disobedience led to the original Adam's expulsion from Eden, so it would (and did) result in the Frankish king's downfall and the deleterious effects on nature of a bad king.

The linkage between Adam and Charlemagne skilfully inserted the Carolingians into theological time and salvific history (as well as into existing early medieval discourses about bad kingship). Long before the *clades* (disasters) that haunted Charlemagne's son and successor as emperor Louis the Pious,⁸⁶ critics' voices warned against sin, death, and the abnegation of sovereignty through misdeeds, all themes bound up in the nature-disaster discourse and language of felicity and Carolingian ecological sovereignty. This chapter concludes by showing how Alcuin's Genesis *tituli*—short captions meant to accompany images of Creation—placed Charlemagne directly into the biblical drama of Adam's sovereignty, obedience, and fall. Alcuin's verses crystallized a Carolingian theology of ecological sovereignty, linking biblical stewardship with Frankish kingship. I also argue that the *tituli* bound Charlemagne's rule to eschatological time, presenting him as an Adamic figure whose success or failure in cultivating order—like Adam's—would determine the fate of his dominion. In doing so, I position the *tituli* as both theological commentary and political instruction, encapsulating the Carolingian paradigm of empire as a garden to be curated, guarded, and potentially lost.

Finally, in its conclusion this book traces the trajectory of these formulae after Charlemagne's reign by considering the monk Wetti's deathbed vision of Charlemagne (824). Captured in a poem, *Wetti's Vision*, written by Heito (his abbot at Reichenau) and later reworked and amended by Walafrid Strabo in 827, Wetti described encountering a place of purgatory, where he saw the previous ruler Charlemagne being slowly devoured by one of the beasts over which he should have held mastery. It was further proof that the imperial game park's warden had lost his mandate through his own sinful desires and actions; a mandate that Louis the Pious was meant to restore.

86 de Jong, *The Penitential State*, 151.

Even after Charlemagne's death, control and subjugation of nature continued to justify and support Carolingian claims to sovereignty, and the failure to do so proved to contemporary observers the catastrophe of bad rule. Carolingian ecological sovereignty continued to structure Carolingian politics even as Louis' political actions and motivations differed from Charlemagne's, and his advisors and fellow aristocrats became even more dedicated to the idea of a Christian empire. This book recovers the first crucial period of the Carolingian era, Charlemagne's reign, as critical for understanding the transformation of European ecologies and environmental cosmologies and asserts the importance of the early Middle Ages for understanding medieval environmental history.

ROYAL DISASTER

THIS CHAPTER EXAMINES the eighth-century congruence between rulers' moral standing and environmental conditions. The Insular association of bad kingship with politico-ecological disaster intermingled with the writings of Charlemagne's courtier-theologians, who infused these ideas with Roman and Christian traditions. At the centre of this process was Alcuin of York, whose letters and poetry show how ecological well-being and political order became mutually reinforcing signs of just rule. His writings, alongside those of his contemporaries, articulated a framework in which environmental stability was both the evidence of and the reward for moral kingship. In so doing, this chapter demonstrates how Carolingian thinkers established the "grammar" of imperial sovereignty: a rulebook for effective kingship in the garden of empire, where the health of fields, forests, and waters mirrored and legitimated the justice of the ruler. If courtier-theologians like Alcuin and Wigbod pondered the responsibilities of labourers to preserve and redeem the environment, what guidelines were there for the rulers of the Carolingian paradise? This was one of the most important questions that occupied the minds of Carolingian elites throughout the eighth and ninth centuries.

Writing in the middle of the ninth century, the lay chronicler and grandson of Charlemagne, Nithard (ca. 795–844), offered some of the most detailed accounts of the Carolingian civil war. It was fought among the surviving heirs of Charlemagne's son and sole surviving legitimate male heir, Louis the Pious (778–840), over what had become regional blocs of a formerly unified empire. For the tumultuous years 830–843, Nithard's *Histories* became an incisive, often bitter meditation on the political failures that led to civil war and the division of the empire. The following words, including the final quotation from Wisdom 5:21, conclude his work:

Here, then, let each one consider what madness it is to neglect the common good and rage after private and personal desires—since by doing both, one so greatly offends the Creator that he makes all the elements turn against such madness. And I will readily prove this with examples still well known to almost everyone. For in the time of Charles the Great, of good memory, who died now nearly thirty years ago, because the people then walked one

and the same straight path, and thereby the public way of the Lord, there was peace and harmony everywhere. But now, on the contrary, because each person follows whatever path he pleases, dissensions and quarrels are everywhere evident. Then there was abundance and joy everywhere; now there is scarcity and sorrow everywhere. The very elements, then aligned with each thing, are now opposed to all things everywhere, as the Scripture given by divine gift bears witness: *And the whole world shall fight against the senseless.*¹

Nithard juxtaposed these “natural” consequences of internecine conflict, betrayal, and the forsaking of the good of the realm to the pacific reign of Louis’s father, Charlemagne, beginning the work by recalling “Emperor Charles of good memory, rightfully called the Great by all peoples,” who left behind a Europe “full of every goodness.”² Nithard’s Charlemagne was

A man, indeed, surpassing the human race of his time in all wisdom and all excellence, such that to all the inhabitants of the world he appeared both fearsome, lovable, and equally admirable—and through this, he made the entire empire shine forth manifestly in every way, rendering it honourable and beneficial to all.³

It was, in fact, this very combination of kingly virtues that Nithard found most remarkable in Charlemagne, who conquered the “fierce and iron hearts of Franks and other barbarians, which not even Roman power” was able

1 “Hic quique colligat, qua dementia utilitatem publicam neglegat, privatis ac propriis voluntatibus insaniat, dum ex utrisque creatorem adeo offendat, ut etiam omnia elementa eius vesaniae contraria reddat. Quodque huiusmodi exemplis pene adhuc omnibus notis praefacile probaturus accedam. Nam temporibus bone recordationis Magni Karoli, qui evoluti iam pene anno XXX. decessit, quoniam hic populus unam eandemque rectam ac per hoc viam Domini publicam incedebat, pax illis atque concordia ubique erat, at nunc econtra, quoniam quique semitam quam cupit incedit, ubique dissensiones et rixae sunt manifestae. Tunc ubique habundantia atque leticia, nunc ubique poenuria atque mesticia. Ipsa elementa tunc cuique rei congrua, nunc autem omnibus ubique contraria, uti scriptura divino munere prolata testatur: *Et pugnabit orbis terrarum contra insensatos.*” Nithard, *Historiarum libri IIII*, ed. Müller, 49–50. Italics in the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* edition.

2 “Karolus bone memoriae et merito Magnus imperator ab universis nationibus vocatus, hora videlicet plus minus diei tertia, in senectute bona decedens omnem Europem omni bonitate repletam reliqui.” Nithard, *Historiarum libri IIII*, ed. Müller, 1.

3 “vir quippe omni sapientia et omni virtute humanum genus suo in tempore adeo praecellens, ut omnibus orbem inhabitantibus terribilis, amabilis pariterque et admirabilis videretur, ac per hoc omne imperium omnibus modis, et cunctis manifeste claruit, honestum et utile effecit.” Nithard, *Historiarum libri IIII*, ed. Müller, 1.

to do.⁴ Charles “alone” accomplished this through “measured dread” so that “dared to undertake nothing except what was in keeping with the public good.”⁵

This portrait of Charlemagne has complex historical and theological underpinnings. Nithard punctuated his entire chronicle with natural disasters, portents that foreshadow and herald the bad decisions of the powerful combatants in the succession struggles of Louis’s sons, reflecting well-known tropes from the Latin historical genre.⁶ There is more to Nithard’s statements, however, than literary devices that serve as omens to future calamity; the *Historiae* clearly link the behaviour of the natural world with the conduct of its sovereign, and thus show how Charlemagne’s rulership was seen to uphold the ecological sovereignty of the Carolingian dynasty over the environment and its inhabitants. Nithard and other Carolingian writers believed that a good king who worked for the benefit of society would ensure agricultural productivity and climatic tranquillity, while a bad king who behaved unjustly would court famine and disaster. Thus, the upstanding Carolingian ruler created a “good” environment, whose existence proved the sovereign’s good behaviour; likewise, the immoral ruler spawned poor environmental conditions that certified his poor behaviour.

The links between rulership and nature were not only evident to Nithard from personal observation but were also rooted in the same garden-game park framing of empire and society that Carolingian exegetes had found in their study of Genesis. Nithard’s musing on the rebelliousness of creation betrays an implicit assumption that the elements were not in rebellion under earlier rule, meaning that, in his view, within his empire Charlemagne had begun to tame the environment and all its creatures. Charlemagne had successfully carved out a paradise on earth and enjoyed the bounties of its harvest. In the mid-ninth century Nithard and his contemporaries perceived that the Carolingian garden no longer followed the order established by its Adam—Charlemagne. Instead, his grandchildren sowed the seeds of discord and reaped its fruit: the thorns and thistles that have been, since Genesis, the reward of rebellion.⁷

4 “Nam super omne, quod ammirabile fateor fore, Francorum barbarorumque ferocia ac ferrea corda, quae nec Romana potentia domare valuit.” Nithard, *Historiarum libri III*, ed. Müller, 1–2.

5 “hic solus moderato terrore ita repressit, ut nihil in imperio moliri, praeter quod publicae utilitati congruebat, manifeste auderent.” Nithard, *Historiarum libri III*, ed. Müller, 2.

6 Polanichka and Cilley, “The Very Personal History of Nithard,” 196–97.

7 Genesis 3:18.

However, Nithard's ideas and the ninth-century discourse of Carolingian kingship and disaster did not emerge *ex nihilo*. Rather, in his juxtaposition of bad and good rule, Nithard neatly fit his narrative into a grammar of Carolingian kingship that had first taken shape in the later eighth century, one which blended biblical, Roman, and Insular ideas about royal behaviour and responsibilities with the consequences of negligent, bad, and irrational rule. In this paradigm, good kings and prudent rule brought harmony and goodness to the realm while bad kings and reckless, self-serving rule courted divine displeasure and even the rebellion of the natural world itself.

As the framework of Carolingian kingship began to coalesce in the final decades of the eighth century, thirty years after the Austrasian dynasty rose to power, its strongest control mechanisms were *correctio*—the idea that the Carolingian king could and ought to promote one correct version of Christian worship—and the sacralization of the king himself, buttressed by scriptural examples and salvific historical narratives. The Carolingian ruler, both because of the contingent circumstances of the dynasty's political ascent (usurping the Merovingian throne and allying so closely to the papacy in the 750s) and because of contemporary religious beliefs and praxis, embodied and conformed to certain notions of good kingship. Almost all such notions had two roots: biblical example and the practical exercise of power. The contrast between the good rulership and politico-ecological disaster produced by bad rule is key to understanding both Carolingian kingship and ecological sovereignty.

Of course, the idea of disaster as divine punishment for misdeeds or sin has a long history in premodern Europe. In the *Georgics*, the Augustan-era Roman poet Virgil imagines a cosmos rearranging itself around its future god, the seasons and nature itself yielding to the flourishing peace and prosperity of the ruler who was “the giver of increase and lord of the seasons.”⁸ This associated the Roman emperor with a role in and responsibility for environmental conditions. Even the eastern Roman emperor Justinian's novel legislation from the sixth century warned that the offence of blasphemy led to the occurrence of famines, earthquakes, and plagues—dangers that could be prevented by avoiding sin, but which would intensify if the sinful behaviour was not corrected.⁹ In Merovingian Francia, Gregory of Tours used disasters

⁸ Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I–V*, trans. Fairclough, 80–116, at 83.

⁹ “Propter talia enim delicta et fames et terrae motus et pestilentiae fiunt, et propterea admonemus abstinere ab huiusmodi praedictis illicitis, ut non suas perdant animas. Sin autem et post huiusmodi nostram admonitionem inveniantur aliqui in talibus permanentes delictis, primum quidem indignos semetipsos faciunt dei

to reject pagan historical narratives in favour of his own Christian version of history.¹⁰ And fundamental to all such considerations was the medieval belief in the Genesis deluge.

Nor was Genesis the only relevant portion of the Bible for thinkers inclined to correlate God's retribution and natural disasters. Immoral Old Testament kings provoked the most violent disasters in the Scriptures.¹¹ Mayke de Jong shows how the idea of *clades* as "some kind of catastrophe caused by the collective sins of the people, and, in particular, its rulers," characterized later ninth-century Carolingian politics, so readers equated disasters and punishments for kings and emperors having offended God.¹² These endemic beliefs broke through at particular moments during the reign of Louis the Pious when he was vulnerable, but de Jong also alludes to their earlier relevance in actions of "collective atonement" such as fasting, almsgiving, and litanies.¹³ De Jong acknowledges Alcuin's early role in articulating these ideas, but her main focus is the council of Paris in 829 and the age of Louis the Pious in general.¹⁴ This chapter reveals a much earlier dissemination of this royal-disaster paradigm in Carolingian texts, most importantly in Alcuin's writings—especially his letters. In the development of Carolingian kingship theory this late eighth-century phase is an essential "missing link" in the elaboration of Carolingian ecological sovereignty.

***De duodecim abusivis saeculi* (On the Twelve Abuses of the World) and Cathwulf's Letter to Charlemagne**

If a strong Frankish kingship was a practical reality by the opening years of Charlemagne's rule, it took the bishops and clergy a little longer to furnish "the technical equipment in the shape of verbal expressions, allegories, nomenclatures, which enveloped the bare official bones with doctrinal and

misericordia, post haec autem et legibus constitutis subiciuntur tormentis." *Novellae*, ed. Schoell, novel 77, chap. 1, sect. 1, p. 382.

10 Arnold, "Rivers of Risk and Redemption in Gregory of Tours' Writings."

11 Blattmann, "'Ein Unglück für sein Volk,'" 89.

12 de Jong, *The Penitential State*, 151.

13 de Jong, *The Penitential State*, 154. See also, the above cited McCormick, "The Liturgy of War."

14 de Jong, *The Penitential State*, 174. De Jong cites Blattmann (n11 above) and Meens, both of whom discuss some of Alcuin's letters, but not systematically. Meens, "Politics, Mirrors of Princes and the Bible."

ideological flesh.”¹⁵ In the last decades of the eighth century non-Frankish political philosophies first entered the “mainstream of western political thought” in Francia via Iberia (mostly through commentaries of Isidore of Seville and those who recycled his writings) and Ireland/Britain.¹⁶ In the mid- to later eighth century, one of these strands of political thought found in the mirror-for-princes genre appeared on the Continent from Ireland, mediated by the so-called *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* (On the Twelve Abuses of the World). Early medieval clergy sometimes cited it as a work of St. Patrick, but usually as the product of Cyprian, the third-century bishop of Carthage, neither of which was probably true, which is why the text’s author is known today as pseudo-Cyprian, and why the text is included in a work known as *Collectio Hibernensis*.¹⁷ In the early Middle Ages *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* was seen as an “Irish” text, and it was the vehicle by which a correlation between kingship and nature first appeared in northern Francia.¹⁸

The text of *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* takes its inspiration and structure from the seventh chapter of the Benedictine *Rule*, which presents twelve steps for achieving humility. However, pseudo-Cyprian’s steps adopt the form of “negative” behaviours: instead of presenting what makes for just rule, *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* focuses on the consequences of an unjust king.¹⁹ It is in its ninth chapter that notions of kingly conduct tied to natural phenomena first emerge. To begin, the chapter lays out the unique position of a king, who must rule himself and his people through correct behaviour and justice. Justice requires that he not use his authority to oppress people,

15 Ullmann, *The Carolingian Renaissance and the Idea of Kingship*, 49.

16 Nelson, “Kingship and Empire,” 52; Hans Hubert Anton offers a broad overview of philosophies and their origin/transmission to western Europe in the seventh and eighth centuries in Anton, *Fürstenspiegel und Herrscherethos in der Karolingerzeit*.

17 Anton, “Pseudo-Cyprian,” 2:569–74.

18 Meens, “Politics, Mirrors of Princes and the Bible,” 351–52, notes that, although there are some commonalities between the conduct of a king and the state of the realm in classical and “Germanic” ideals of kingship, this text should be read “in an Irish context.” Aitchison, “Kingship, Society and Sacrality,” 63, argues that an Irish scholar produced the text on the Continent. Thus this particular correlation between kingship and nature developed in Insular thought for the first time in the early Middle Ages.

19 Meens, “Politics, Mirrors of Princes and the Bible,” 351–52; Pseudo-Cyprian, *De XII abusivis saeculi*, ed. Hellmann. The ninth abuse is on pp. 51–53. The twelve abuses include: a wise man without works, an old man without religion, a young man without obedience, a rich man without charity, a woman without modesty, a nobleman without virtue, an argumentative Christian, a proud pauper, an unjust king, a neglectful bishop, a populace without discipline, a people without law.

that he protect the vulnerable, that he rid the realm of criminals and evildoers, that he take good counsellors, and that he ignore the “superstitions of magicians, soothsayers, and sorceresses”—noteworthy here because of the close connections between a “bad” biblical royal figure like Saul and sorcery.²⁰

All that is fairly commonplace in handbooks for early medieval rulers, which enjoin the king to do and not do things according to Christian ideals. What comes next, however, is more original, for it tethers the king’s conduct to the behaviour of the natural world, since the ruler who fails to follow these precepts will face challenges to his authority in the form of natural disasters:

The peace of the people is broken, and offenses even arise from within the kingdom. The fruits of the earth are diminished, and the services of the people are hindered. Many and various sorrows stain the prosperity of the realm: the deaths of loved ones and children bring grief; enemy invasions devastate the provinces on all sides; wild beasts tear apart herds of cattle and flocks of livestock; storms of the air and disordered seasons obstruct the fertility of the land and the services of the sea. At times, lightning strikes burn up crops, blossoms of trees, and vine shoots.²¹

In this passage, not only is the king’s conduct linked with disaster, but broken peace and hostile incursions work in concert with the forces of nature to generate an environment of waste and want that disrupts the kingdom at every social and economic level. The king in this scenario would be unable to lead effectively or benefit from the labour and service of his dependents because they in turn cannot sustain themselves amid the deaths in their families and the destruction of their fields. Even the sea itself would defy those who plied their trades upon its waves.

The violation of normal kingship breaches a cosmological balance, which is why its consequences extend beyond the sovereign to the realm and

20 Pseudo-Cyprian, *De XII abusivis saeculi*, ed. Hellmann, 51–52. Quotation from p. 51, lines 17–18. “magorum et hariolorum et pythonissarum superstitionibus non indendere.” 1 Samuel 28:3–25.

21 “pax populorum rumpitur et offendicula etiam de regno suscitantur, terrarum quoque fructus diminuuntur et servitia populorum praepediuntur, multi et varii dolores prosperitatem regni inficiunt, carorum et liberorum mortes tristitiam conferunt, hostium incursus provincias undique vastant, bestiae armentorum et pecorum greges dilacerant, tempestates aeris et hiemispermia turbata terrarum fecunditatem et maris ministeria prohibent et aliquando fulminum ictus segetes et arborum flores et pampinos exerunt.” Pseudo-Cyprian, *De XII abusivis saeculi*, ed. Hellmann, p. 52, lines 11–19.

even *through* time, wreaking havoc in its wake on the king's descendants.²² Indeed, the author of *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* concludes this section by warning that "Above all, however, a king's injustice not only darkens the face of the present empire, but also casts a shadow over his sons and grandsons, preventing them from holding the inheritance of the kingdom after him."²³ There is biblical precedent for this claim, noted in the ninth abuse, where the author reminds readers that because Solomon sinned against God, "the Lord scattered the kingdom of the house of Israel from the hands of his sons; yet because of the righteousness of King David, He always left a lamp from his offspring in Jerusalem."²⁴ This is a reference to the division of the kingdom of Israel after Solomon's death, because he had begun worshipping pagan gods and abandoned the example of his father, David, for whose sake he permitted Solomon's heir to retain the city of Jerusalem and its immediate environs.²⁵

The Irish text's account of the abuse of the unjust king addresses the ruler in an abstract way, and although it may have had its origins in the circulation of similar ideas in seventh- and eighth-century Ireland, it does not seem to be connected to any one monarch.²⁶ *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* establishes an architecture for considering the king and his cosmological role mediating divine assent with natural concord, in order to establish and safeguard the peace and productivity of the kingdom. Mayke de Jong highlights the relevance of *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* in her discussion of later ninth-century critics of Louis the Pious and his son Lothar, noting its direct citation in the Paris council of 829 and surrounding texts in the culture of *admonitio* that developed around the emperor.²⁷ However, these ideas and methods of royal criticism were not an innovation of the middle third of the ninth century, but had instead been fully operational during the later eighth century. The first iteration on the Continent of the pseudo-Cyprianic linkage

22 Meens, "Politics, Mirrors of Princes and the Bible," 351.

23 "Super omnia vero regis iniustitia non solum praesentis imperii faciem fuscatur, sed etiam filios suos et nepotes, ne post se regni hereditatem teneant, obscuratur." Pseudo-Cyprian, *De XII abusivis saeculi*, ed. Hellmann, pp. 52–53, lines 19, 1–2.

24 "Propter pisculum enim Salomonis regnum domus Israel Dominus de manibus filiorum eius dispersit, et propter iustitiam David regis lucernam de semine eius semper in Hierusalem reliquit." Pseudo-Cyprian, *De XII abusivis saeculi*, ed. Hellmann, p. 53, lines 2–5.

25 1 Kings 11:1–43.

26 Meens, "Politics, Mirrors of Princes and the Bible," 351–52.

27 de Jong, *The Penitential State*, 174–76.

between ecological phenomena and the conduct of the king in his present and the future took place at Charlemagne's court in the 770s and 780s.

We can see evidence of the linkage in a 775 letter addressed to Charlemagne from Cathwulf, an Insular scholar working at the Carolingian court.²⁸ Preserved in the personal collection of correspondence belonging to the abbots of Saint-Denis, a monastery closely allied with the Carolingian family, Cathwulf's letter may have been written for the February 775 dedication of the abbey's new church. Its themes of kingship and proper moral behaviour were meant to instruct Charlemagne in his role as royal patron to the abbey and ruler of the Frankish people. Cathwulf's letter was also a recognition of Charlemagne's success following his conquest of Lombard Italy and may have been an attempt to guide him at a moment when the king looked to strengthen and solidify his rule under nascent and still materializing urges to reform the Frankish church and governance of the realm.²⁹

Cathwulf's letter lays out the case for Charlemagne's greatness and exhorts him to rule justly over Franks and other peoples, praising the king for his many accomplishments as head of the "kingdom of Europe," and stating clearly that the king should be ascendant over all, followed by (of course) the bishop.³⁰ Cathwulf's acclamation of Charlemagne takes the form of a series of eight "proofs" that Charlemagne had surpassed his peers and his ancestors with the "crown of glory," based on the more or less biographical facts of his ascent to power and crushing or marginalizing of his competitors, followed by eight habits of good kings, presumably as behaviours for which Charlemagne ought to strive: truth, patience, largesse, persuadability, correction of evils, elevation of goodness, modest taxes, fairness of judgment

28 Meens, "Politics, Mirrors of Princes and the Bible," 354. Joanna Story notes that his name seems to be Anglo-Saxon, but his use of Irish materials may complicate that assertion. Similarly, he has been referred to by modern scholars as a monk, a priest, a churchman, and a courtier—all of which may be accurate or none of them. Story, "Cathwulf, Kingship, and the Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis," 8n32. "Domine mi rex." Cathwulf, letter to Charlemagne, *Epistolae variorum Carolo Magno regnante scriptae* 7, in *Epistolae Karolini aevi* 2, ed. Dümmler, 501–4, at 502, line 4. Mary Garrison is more confident that Cathwulf was most definitely an Anglo-Saxon living on the Continent. Garrison, "The English and the Irish at the Court of Charlemagne," 101–2.

29 Story, "Cathwulf, Kingship, and the Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis," 11, 20–21.

30 "quod ipse te exaltavit in honorem glorie regni Europe...Memor est ergo semper, rex mi, Dei regis tui cum timore et amore, quod tu es in vice illius super omnia membra eius custodire et regere, et rationem reddere in die iudicii, etiam per te. Et episcopus est in secundo loco, in vice Christi tantum est." Cathwulf, *Ep. var.* 7, ed. Dümmler, p. 503, line 1, 3–6.

among the rich and poor.³¹ As Joanna Story notes, these eight proofs and habits correlated to the eight columns of the newly dedicated church at Saint-Denis that Charlemagne would have seen at the February event.³² What came next, however, laid out benefits of good monarchical behaviour in explicit terms, echoing many of the words from pseudo-Cyprian:

And then there shall be calm in the air and weather, fruitfulness of earth and sea with all that grows in them, and you shall rule many nations happily (*feliciter*), and your enemies shall fall before your face, and so on. But on the contrary, as St. Patrick said: "Because of a king's injustice, there shall be unhappiness (*infelicitas*) for himself, strife with his wife and sons, famine among the people, pestilence, infertility of the land, and the fruits of the earth shall be struck by various storms of the sea, and he shall be overcome by his enemies and driven out of his kingdom."³³

Cathwulf's portrayal of the environmental consequences of kingly conduct shares many similarities with, and obviously draws from, the pseudo-Cyprian text.³⁴ The felicitous emotives at work here will be discussed below in chapter four of this book, but for now it is worth observing how Cathwulf echoes the placidity and agricultural fecundity of good rule along with the calamities that follow bad rule: family conflict, natural disasters, food shortages and hunger, and even foreign conquest.

To hammer the point home, Cathwulf concluded by directing Charlemagne's attention to the cases of Waiofar, an Aquitanian aristocrat whom Charlemagne's father Pepin crushed after he had broken oaths of fidelity to the Frankish king, and Desiderius, the Lombard king whom Charlemagne's forces defeated after a long siege at Pavia in 774.³⁵ This campaign was

31 Story, "Cathwulf," 3–4, 10; Cathwulf, *Ep. var.* 7, ed. Dümmler, p. 502, lines 14–41 and p. 503, lines 31–38.

32 Story, "Cathwulf, Kingship, and the Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis," 20–21.

33 "Et tunc erit aeris et tempestatum tranquillitas, terre maris cum omnibus in eis nascentibus fecunditas, et dominaberis etiam multis feliciter gentibus et inimici tui ante faciem tuam cadunt et reliqua. E contra, sicut dixit sanctus Patricius: 'Pro regis iniustitia sui ipsius infelicitas erit, uxoris filiorum quoque dissensio, populorum fames, pestilentia, infecunditas terre, maris quoque tempestatibus fructus terrarum diversis percussis, et ab inimicis suis superatus et expulsus de regno.'" Cathwulf, *Ep. var.* 7, ed. Dümmler, p. 503, lines 38–44.

34 There are hints of Isidore of Seville as well. According to Anton, Cathwulf's letter first integrated Isidore of Seville's portrayal of a stern king dedicated to his people's welfare with the idea of good and evil consequences of rule, according to Irish and Anglo-Saxon ideas of kingship. Anton, *Fürstenspiegel und Herrscherethos*, 76–77.

35 Bachrach, *Early Carolingian Warfare*, 222–23; Bachrach, *Charlemagne's Early*

launched in part as a consequence of Charlemagne's repudiation of marriage to a daughter of the Lombard king. This resulted in Desiderius pushing Pope Hadrian to recognize the legitimacy of his grandchildren, who were sons of Carloman, Charlemagne's deceased brother and former rival. This move was perceived as a threat to Charlemagne's sole claim to rule the Franks.³⁶ These direct appeals from very recent memory to the consequences of aristocratic betrayal and a "bad" ruler's perfidy may have signalled awareness on the part of Cathwulf of "what he thought Charlemagne might like to hear," to borrow Rosamond McKitterick's phrase, but it also shows that he sought to link the present to biblical examples of kings who lost their kingdoms through bad conduct: "Rehoboam, Ahaz, Ahab, and the other kings of the Jews, who did evil in the sight of the Lord and did not walk in the commandments of God."³⁷

This insertion of more current events into Cathwulf's warnings characterizes the ways in which Insular notions of kingship interacted with other ideas at Charlemagne's court. For example, like *De duodecim abusivis saeculi*, Cathwulf's letter bid Charlemagne to stamp out practitioners of magic, although the letter included a new addition not mentioned by the pseudo-Cyprian author—storm-makers (*tempestarios*), the first reference to this particular kind of magic user in Frankish texts.³⁸ This term took hold among Charlemagne's inner circle, as it was added to the magic or divination practices mentioned in the Bible and banned in the 789 *Admonitio generalis*: that there may be no "numerologists, enchanterers, storm-makers,

Campaigns, 310–426.

36 Noble, *The Republic of St. Peter*, 131; Bachrach, *Charlemagne's Early Campaigns*, 263–64. For more on the marriage agreement and Charlemagne's repudiation of Gerperga, see Janet Nelson's discussion in "Making a Difference in Eighth-Century Politics."

37 McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 81. "Et sicut habes exempla sufficienter in his diebus et patrum tuorum, sicut de Waepere et de Desiderio filioque eius regnisque illorum et rel.; sicut Roboam, Achaz, Achab et reliqui reges Iudeorum, qui fecerunt malum in conspectu Domini et non ambulaverunt in mandatis Dei." Cathwulf, *Ep. var.* 7, ed. Dümmler, pp. 503–4, lines 44–45, 1–2.

38 "sin aliter puniantur per legem. Maleficos, [vene]ficos, tempestarios, strigas, phitonissas." Cathwulf, *Ep. var.* 7, ed. Dümmler, p. 504, lines 11–12. The *Indiculus superstitionum et paganarium*, an eighth-century list of pagan beliefs and practices includes a reference to a superstition "of storms" (*De tempestatibus*), but does not mark out a specific conjurer of storms. *Indiculus superstitionum et paganarium*, ed. Boretius, p. 223, line 12.

or spellbinders.”³⁹ The injunction appears in an 802 capitulary for the *missi* (royal agents) and among the capitularies collected by Ansegis in the later ninth century, as well as in the Council of Paris of 829, which also alluded to *De duodecim abusivis saeculi*, condemning storm-makers: “For they claim by their sorceries to be able to disturb the air and send hailstorms, to predict the future, to steal crops and milk and give them to others.”⁴⁰

Concern about weather magic and manipulation in Francia has a long history. In *Glory of the Confessors*, Gregory of Tours related a story in which a tree that had been felled by a strong wind moved Martin of Tours to make the sign of the cross over it before then restoring the tree to its rootedness. Gregory reported that the tree still stood in his day, although it was dead because of the many people who had stripped its bark for mixing into a healing medicine.⁴¹ Despite the Merovingians’ relatively syncretic approach to the regulation of meteorological phenomena, the Carolingians seem to have viewed such activities much more suspiciously. Paul Dutton points out that Cathwulf’s initial warnings to Charlemagne on storm-makers was tied to the king’s two responsibilities, that is to say more generally “his good standing with God and his duty to protect Christians from pagan and diabolical beliefs” and his very kingship itself, in which “his religious and royal natures were fused.”⁴²

This mattered to Charlemagne because storm-making and other pagan practices flew in the face of his responsibilities to safeguard the realm and the church. But I argue that weather conjuring also usurped the king’s role as the only person whose conduct legitimately shaped the Frankish natural world. By allowing storm-makers to persist in his kingdom, Charlemagne would have abdicated his unique charge to make it rain, or not, and become unworthy to rule his people.

We can sense echoes of this call during the reign of Charlemagne’s son, Louis the Pious. In 815, Agobard the bishop of Lyons related his encounter of a village whose inhabitants were about to execute three men and one

39 “ut cauculatores nec incantores nec tempestarii vel obligatores non fiant.” Charlemagne, *Admonitio generalis*, ed. Boretius, p. 59, line 2 (hereafter, *AG*).

40 *Capitulare missorum item speciale*, ed. Boretius, 104, line 6; *Ansegisi abbatis capitularium collectio*, ed. Boretius, p. 402, lines 79–80. For the Council of Paris of 829: “Ferunt enim suis maleficiis aera posse conturbare et grandines immittere, futura praedicere, fructus et lac auferre aliisque dare.” *Concilium Parisiense* (829), ed. Werminghoff, p. 669, lines 35–36. Translation from Dutton, *Charlemagne’s Mustache*, 173.

41 Gregory of Tours, *Glory of the Confessors*, trans. Van Dam, 8.

42 Dutton, *Charlemagne’s Mustache*, 173.

woman, referred to as “cloud-sailors,” who were accused of riding in cloud ships from a land of Magic (*Magonia*) to collect crops felled by hailstorms sent by the storm-makers (*tempestarii*) to damage the fields. Agobard ultimately disbelieves the claim of the rural accusers as “stupidity,” and laments its persistence among rural folk as offensive, because these people would render offerings in kind to forestall weather damage when they forgot to pay their tithes to the church and the needy.⁴³ The king was the one who ordained and set rents and tithes; he was the one who demanded and exacted tribute and channelled weather modification, for good or ill. If Agobard had not confronted them he would have allowed the storm-makers (even if only in the popular imagination) to continue to appropriate the ruler’s *ministerium*—his duties and responsibilities as a Christian king—and thus conjure up the very negative consequences associated with bad rule.

To eliminate any ambiguity about Charlemagne’s responsibilities and obligations, Cathwulf explicitly admonished him to remember that in the blending of roles as one who corrects and condemns according to the law, “you serve as God’s official in all these matters and as His avenger.”⁴⁴ Cathwulf’s letter thus demonstrates awareness of the pseudo-Cyprianic notions of good and bad kingship and nature among courtiers of the Frankish king, but it also connects those abstract formulations to real political and religious concerns of eighth-century Francia. It further offers a snapshot of the idea of the kingdom as a paradise, governed and ordered by a divinely appointed steward, which was coalescing during this early phase of Charlemagne’s rule.

The letter’s focus on placid nature reflects those prelapsarian conditions of Eden where creation existed to support and nourish the humans to whom its governance had been entrusted. In case the point was missed, Cathwulf informed Charlemagne in no uncertain terms: “But with those setting things in order rightly—that is, together with trustworthy bishops and counts, and so forth—so that you may root out from your kingdom the thorns, thistles, and stumbling blocks of vice, and piously govern the army of Christians, the members of Christ.”⁴⁵ This statement explicitly connects the end goal of all

43 Agobard of Lyons, *De grandine et tonitruis*, ed. Van Acker. There is a translation of excerpts from this text in Dutton, *Carolingian Civilization*, 189–91.

44 “Haec et his similia corrigere vel damnare pro vindictae legis...recte iudicare, quod minister Dei es in his omnibus et vindex, et reliqua.” Cathwulf, *Ep. var.* 7, ed. Dümmler, p. 504, lines 17–19. Translation from Dutton, *Charlemagne’s Mustache*, 173.

45 “sed recta disponentibus, [id e]st cum episcopis et comitibus probatis et rel.; ut spinas et tribulas et scandala vitiorum possis [e regn]o tuo extirpare et exercitum

those things advised by Cathwulf—to eliminate the consequences of bad rule (“thorns and thistles”), i.e., those things that occur when God’s laws and commands are not followed—with the penalties suffered by Adam and Eve and their descendants after the Fall: expulsion from the garden of Paradise and the curse of the land, which they would sow only to bring forth thorns and thistles.⁴⁶

The letter reflects the commingling of these ideas, but it is difficult to know to what degree an outsider, of whom we have only this mention, influenced policy in Charlemagne’s court. It is likely that Cathwulf’s missive was read at court, because Alcuin revealed in a letter (793) to the Northumbrian king Æthelred that he had read about the “conduct of the king” related to “prosperity of the whole people.”⁴⁷ It is, however, difficult to imagine that Cathwulf’s letter was the main driver of Charlemagne’s policies or construction of kingship twenty years after its writing. It is somewhat easier to imagine that the letter reflected ideas and discussions which had been occurring at the Carolingian court, blending Insular with biblical and Roman ideas of royal authority.

Pertinent here is some knowledge gleaned from a much later text. In his text *On the Organization of the Palace* (882), Hincmar of Rheims wrote that he knew and copied a version of the text from Adalhard of Corbie, who had been a chief counsellor of Charlemagne. Hincmar/Adalhard cites directly *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* as a source of authority for the late-ninth century palace instructions.⁴⁸ Rosamond McKitterick notes that trying to use this text to reconstruct knowledge about Charlemagne’s court is fraught with uncertainties, although “there are a sufficient number of stylistic reminiscences of Adalhard’s phrasing in the Corbie statutes recurring in the *De ordine palatii* to encourage confidence in Hincmar’s claim that the text by Adalhard had indeed once existed.”⁴⁹ Thus, some portion of *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* may have been known at Charlemagne’s court beyond what Cathwulf or Alcuin hinted.

christianorum, membra Christi, pie regere.” Cathwulf, *Ep. var. 7*, ed. Dümmler, p. 504, lines 7–9. Genesis 3 and virtually all other Carolingian writers use *tribulos*.

46 Genesis 3:18.

47 “Legimus quoque, quod regis bonitas totius est gentis prosperitas.” Alcuin, *Epistola 18*, ed. Dümmler, p. 51, line 29 (hereafter, *Ep.*). Meens, “Politics, Mirrors of Princes and the Bible,” 354.

48 Hincmar of Rheims, *De ordine palatii*, ed. Gross and Schieffer, 50, 52, 54. See translation in Dutton, *Carolingian Civilization*, 489–90.

49 McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 144–45.

There is no smoking gun that connects *De duodecim abusivi saeculi* and Carolingian policy. But the same themes enumerated in Cathwulf's letter arise in Alcuin's writings—particularly in his correspondence and his poem to the religious community at York, and they evolved in concert with political events in Britain and on the Continent. Reading Alcuin's exhortations and admonishments of kings both past and present shows him to have been one of the chief architects of Charlemagne's political, religious, and cultural reform program and a transmitter of pseudo-Cyprianic-like concepts of kingship and nature.

Alcuin's York Poem and Early Views on Kingship

In May of 799, Alcuin wrote to Charlemagne on the plight of the whole of Christendom, under attack by "evildoers" from Constantinople to Rome and Francia. By this time the Yorkish cleric had been in the king's service as a counsellor, theologian, and principal educator for at least thirteen years (perhaps as many as eighteen), and had been on the Continent for all but three of them.⁵⁰ Yet in 799 Alcuin wrote from Tours, where he had been serving as abbot for three years, removed from the presence (and possibly the favour) of his king.⁵¹ This perhaps explains why Alcuin begged Charlemagne to consider the letter in a merciful light, prompted as he was to write by his "love of devotion."⁵² In this letter, Alcuin raised the question of leadership and the inability of the pope and the Byzantine emperor to control the situation, hampered as they were by political misfortune—the 799 physical assault and maiming by rebellious aristocrats of Pope Leo III in the streets of Rome and the 797 deposition and blinding (a mutilation that caused his death) of Byzantine emperor Constantine VI on the orders of his own mother.⁵³

50 Bullough argued forcefully that the evidence for Alcuin's arrival at Charlemagne's court in 781 (based on his journey to Rome on behalf of Eanbald and a charter that shows Charlemagne's presence at Parma—where he met Alcuin at some point—in the same year) is entirely circumstantial and outweighed by the preponderance of other evidence pointing to his arrival in 786. Bullough, *Alcuin*, 331–46. In his excellent and economical biographical sketch of Alcuin, Peter Godman follows the conventional view that Alcuin met Charlemagne at Parma on March 15, 781, when he was invited to the Frankish Court, to which he arrived either in 781 or early 782. Alcuin, *The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*, ed. and trans. Godman, xxxvi–xxxvii.

51 Bullough, *Alcuin*, 436.

52 "Haec, precor, aspiciat clementi lumine nostras / Litterulas, scripsit quas pietatis amor." Alcuin, *Ep.* 174, ed. Dümmler, p. 288, lines 23–24.

53 "DOMINO PACIFICO DAVID REGI FLACCUS ALBINUS SALUTEM...Nam tres

Both rulers were attacked by those who should have been under their authority, signalling a weakness of rule on their part under the framework of the pseudo-Cyprian model of rulership: bad rule courted rebellion and the loss of one's dominion. The pope was not a king, and his position was soon restored with Charlemagne's aid, but Alcuin's framing of the three figures is not without purpose. The third figure in the discussion was, of course, a ruler like Charlemagne:

The third is the royal dignity, in which you, our lords, have been appointed by the dispensation of our Lord Jesus Christ as rulers of the Christian people—a dignity more powerful than the others mentioned, more radiant in wisdom, and more exalted in the honour of kingship. Behold, upon you alone the entire well-being of the churches of Christ leans and rests.⁵⁴

Echoing Cathwulf's earlier statement, Alcuin then reminded the Frankish king that, because of these responsibilities, "You are the avenger of wrongdoings, the guide of those who go astray, the comforter of the sorrowful, the exalter of the good."⁵⁵ The letter concludes with a poem to Charlemagne, "now aged," exhorting the environment to wish its lord good health:

Let the holy stars of heaven, and the green grasses of the earth,
All cry out together: "Fare well, David, everywhere."
Let earth, sky, sea, humankind, birds, and beasts
With one united voice proclaim: "Fare well, our father."⁵⁶

personae in mundo altissime hucusque fuerant: id est apostolica sublimitas, quae beati Petri principis apostolorum sedem vicario munere regere solet; quid vero in eo actum sit, qui rector praefate sedis fuerat, mihi veneranda bonitas vestra innotescere curavit. Alia est imperialis dignitas et secundae Romae saecularis potentia: quam impie gubernator imperii illius depositus sit, non ab alienis, sed a propriis et concubibus, unique fama narrante crebrescit." Alcuin, *Ep.* 174, ed. Dümmler, p. 288, lines 17–22. Succinct descriptions of the incident in: Goodson, *The Rome of Pope Paschal I*, 18; Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, 244.

54 "Tertia est regalis dignitas, in qua vos domini nostri Iesu Christi dispensatio rectorum populi christiani disposuit, ceteris praefatis dignitatibus potentia excellentiorem, sapientia clariorem, regni dignitate sublimiorem. Ecce in te solo tota salus ecclesiarum Christi incinata recumbit." Alcuin, *Ep.* 174, ed. Dümmler, p. 288, lines 22–26. Translation from Allott, *Alcuin of York*, 111.

55 "Tu vindex scelerum, tu rector errantium, tu consolator maerentium, tu exaltatio bonorum." Alcuin, *Ep.* 174, ed. Dümmler, p. 288, lines 26–27. Translation mine.

56 "Optime quod regem suscipit ipsa senem...Sidera sancta poli, viridis et gramina terrae, / Omnia conclament: 'David ubique vale.' / Terra, polus, pelagus, homines, volucresque, feraeque / Concordi clament voce: 'Valeto pater.'" Alcuin, *Ep.* 174, ed. Dümmler, pp. 288, 289, lines 22, 25–28.



Figure 3. Pen drawing accompanying Psalm 8 in the Utrecht Psalter, ca. 830. Utrecht, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS 32, fol. 4v. Public Domain.

This version of Charlemagne celebrates the years of successful rule that Alcuin had witnessed as a member of the king's inner circle, a time in which the king has governed so well (at least as Alcuin desired to frame it) that creation itself—described in the very language of Genesis—had been tamed to his rule and sings his praise.⁵⁷

Indeed, the poem alludes to one of the most famous psalms of David, who beheld the “heavens, the works of [God’s] fingers: the moon and the stars which [He] had founded,” and marvelled that the deity bothered to think of humans or that he cared for the “son of man,” whom God made: “a little less than the angels,” crowned by glory and honour and established over the created order.⁵⁸ David’s vision of this ecological dominion was due to God, who “subjected all things under [man’s] feet, all sheep and oxen, even the livestock of the field, the winged creatures of the sky, and the fish of the sea who move about the paths of the sea.”⁵⁹ David’s psalm ends with a cry, “Lord, our Lord, how admirable is your name in the whole world!”⁶⁰ The psalm imagines environmental hierarchy from the point of view of a man humbled at the overwhelming awesomeness of God’s majesty and wondering at the responsibilities of the human tasked with the stewardship of creation.

We perhaps find this Psalm’s interpretation represented visually in the famous Utrecht Psalter’s striking illustration of it (Figure 3). The Utrecht

57 Genesis 1:21–22.

58 “Quoniam videbo caelos tuos, opera digitorum tuorum, lunam et stellas quae tu fundasti. Quid est homo, quod memor es ejus? aut filius hominis, quoniam visitas eum? Minuisti eum paulo minus ab angelis; gloria et honore coronasti eum; Et constituisti eum super opera manuum tuarum.” Psalms 8:4–7.

59 “Omnia subiecisti sub pedibus ejus, oves et boves universas, insuper et pecora campi, volucres caeli, et pisces maris qui perambulant semitas maris.” Psalms 8:8–9.

60 “Domine, Dominus noster, quam admirabile est nomen tuum in universa terra!” Psalms 8:10.

Psalter was almost certainly produced at Reims in the early ninth century, executed in the distinctive sketchy style of the Reims school by multiple creators. The manuscript itself provides no dedicatory verses or colophons, so its authorship, patronage, and dating remain disputed. On stylistic grounds it has long been linked to Archbishop Ebo's first tenure at Reims (816–835) and compared to the Ebo Gospels, though Dominique Alibert has argued for a narrower dating around 823, connecting its imagery with Ebo's role in the Viking embassy at Soissons and with Louis the Pious's penance at Attigny in 822.⁶¹ By contrast, Celia Chazelle has proposed a later date in the mid-ninth century, around 845–855, under Hincmar, reading the illustration of the Athanasian Creed as reflecting concerns particular to his early tenure as archbishop.⁶² Despite these competing hypotheses, scholars generally agree that the Psalter originated in Reims and that its iconography presents a visual mirror for princes, contrasting David's exemplary kingship with the folly and tyranny of Saul and others.⁶³

In the Utrecht Psalter's depiction of this biblical scene, a crowned figure emerging from a half-glimpsed palace occupies the middle left third of the page, teaching children, standing with the beasts of the earth underfoot, while the birds and fish move swiftly through air and water under the stars, which proclaim Creation's majesty.⁶⁴ To the right, the heavens arch over the scene with a thin crescent moon flanked by stars glowing in the night sky. Like the animals of the Ark in obedient twos the cattle, sheep, and goats ruminate while the figure—gazing directly at Christ enthroned above—holds court below. Birds descend in graceful arcs, their movement ominous, as they veer not toward tranquil waters but toward the gaping, beast-like mouth of hell, where the damned are hurled at spearpoint by an angel. Fishes caught in violent perturbations swim either toward or away from the pit watched by waterfowl who cautiously rim the pond's edge. The composition stages a cosmic drama of praise and punishment, where creation's wonder is shadowed by its fall, waiting on the word of this didactic figure and the receptiveness of his children's audience.

Alcuin's poem shifts this perspective to his marvel at a different "son of man," i.e., his David, Charlemagne, repurposing the imagery of the psalm to elevate the Frankish king to whom all creation offers praise as nature's

61 Jaski, "The Ruler with the Sword in the Utrecht Psalter," 73–75.

62 Chazelle, "Archbishops Ebo and Hincmar of Reims and the Utrecht Psalter."

63 Jaski, "The Ruler with the Sword in the Utrecht Psalter," 72–76.

64 Dodwell, "The Final Copy of the Utrecht Psalter," 44.

sovereign. There was, however, nothing inevitable about this view, and it reflects Alcuin's own life experiences with (and disappointments in) other kings.

If the above letter demonstrates Alcuin's tribute to Charlemagne as the one ruler in the world capable of fulfilling the duties of a just king, then a close reading of his correspondence and the York poem shows how that view took shape in the last two decades of the eighth and the early years of the ninth century. By contrasting his early views on kingship with his response to disaster and his later portrayals of Charlemagne, the trajectory of Alcuin's thinking and his contribution to the pseudo-Cyprianic discourse at Charlemagne's court becomes clear. This analysis is informed and shaped by Alcuin's poetry—particularly the lengthy poem dedicated to his home community in York—where appropriate, as it elucidates or reinforces a sentiment expressed in prose. In the York poem we see how Alcuin first began to associate just kingship with a good environment, and how bad kings wrought havoc and brought disasters on their own lands.

Alcuin's earliest extant views on kingship become evident in his *Versus de patribus regibus et sanctis Euboricensis ecclesiae* (Poem on the Bishops, Kings, and Saints of the Church of York), a lengthy composition dating from 780 or 781, and so of special relevance to the period of his life before arriving at Charlemagne's court. The poem comprises 1658 hexameters largely drawn from preexisting historical and poetic works by Bede (ca. 673–735), followed by original material from Alcuin's era, which served to celebrate his vision of the achievements of both the Northumbrian kingdom and the cathedral school at York, where he was raised.⁶⁵ The poem's modern translator, Peter Godman, suggests it is entirely possible that the poem was substantially revised in the 790s because of Alcuin's disgust with the "nadir of Northumbrian kingship" a sentiment that also emerges in his correspondence of the same period.⁶⁶ Either way, the poem offers a parallel formulation of kingship to that found in Alcuin's other writings.

The first king mentioned in the York poem is Edwin, who ruled over Deira and Bernicia (earlier kingdoms in the Northumbrian region) from 616–633, and embodies many of the kingly virtues praised by Alcuin. A recent convert to Christianity, Edwin gently looked after the welfare of his people even while he waged victorious war against his enemies, and he conquered all the other peoples of Britain, bringing them "in total submission...

⁶⁵ Alcuin, *The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*, ed. and trans. Godman, xxxix–xl.

⁶⁶ Alcuin, *The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*, ed. and trans. Godman, xlvii.

under his kingly yoke.”⁶⁷ Edwin was a king who had established a peaceful realm through violence, but who “ruled as a judge, with war at a lull, holding his peoples in check with firm reins of justice.”⁶⁸ Edwin’s was not, however, an obedience won out of love, since violence among the people was curtailed through fear, “since everyone feared the axe of vengeance on his own head if he failed wholeheartedly to observe the wise decrees which the leader had determined his subjects should uphold.”⁶⁹ Edwin’s reign was shortened by bloody assassination and sedition, and it took the king’s nephew Oswald, who had been living as an exile in Scotland, to gather an army and crush the regicidal conspirators who had usurped the throne.⁷⁰ Having stamped out that threat to his rule, Oswald reigned for almost ten years until his death in 642, and Alcuin’s poem praises the king for his character: “generous to the poor, self-denying, but unstinting to all, true in his judgments, kindly and pious of spirit, of signal distinction but humbly tempered, terrible to his enemies but genial to each of his friends, as invincible in war as he was scrupulous to maintain peace treaties.”⁷¹

The other kings whom the York poem portrayed favourably follow a similar pattern: violent conquest to overcome disorder followed by peaceful, pious rule until chaos again breaks the narrative. There are exceptions to this formula. Ecgrith (r. 670–685), for example, receives particular scorn because he sent a military expedition to Ireland “to slaughter and ravage the innocent,” which (in the coalescing Insular version of ideal kingship) invited

67 “Qui mox accipiens sceptri regalis honorem / quaesivit propriae genti bona, largus in omnes, / nec per sceptrum ferox, sed de pietate benignus, / factus amor populi, patriae pater, et decus aulae, / assiduus superans hostilia castra triumphis, / imperioque suo gentes superaddidit omnes, / finibus atque plagis qua tenditur insula longa. / Iamque iugum regis prona cervice subibant / Saxonum populus, Pictus Scotusque, Brittanus.” Alcuin, *The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*, ed. and trans. Godman, 14–15.

68 “Interea placida regni dum pace tribunal / rexerat armipotens, sopitis undique bellis, / iustitiae validis populos frenebat habenis.” Alcuin, *The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*, ed. and trans. Godman, 14–15.

69 “Nec rapit arma furor, legum sub pondere pressus / ultrices timuit capiti quia quisque secures, / provida ni tot servaret pectore scita, / quae posuit populis rector servanda subaxtis.” Alcuin, *The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*, ed. and trans. Godman, 14–15.

70 Alcuin, *The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*, ed. and trans. Godman, 22–25.

71 “pauperis largus, parvus sibi, dives in omnes, / iudiciis verax, animi pietate benignus, / excelsus mertitis, summissus mente sed ipsa, / hostibus horribilis, cunctis iocundus amicis: / ut bello indomitus, sic pacta in pace fidelis.” Alcuin, *The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*, ed. and trans. Godman, 26–27.

retribution in the form of his downfall at the hands of the Picts, who defeated Ecgfrith and left Northumbria in the hands of his more peaceful brother Aldfrith, a “king and a teacher.”⁷² As a model from his own era, Alcuin turned to the figure of Eadberht who ruled Northumbria from 737–758 alongside his brother Egbert the archbishop of York. This alliance, however, marked the zenith of Northumbrian kingship, as Eadberht’s son Oswulf, who ascended to the throne after his father retired to the monastery at York in 758, was assassinated by his own household in the same year, inaugurating a period of internecine conflict and the end of Alcuin’s mentions of Northumbrian kings in the York poem.⁷³

We can glean some generalities about Alcuin’s early predilections for kingly conduct from these poetic images. Past kings Edwin, Oswald, and Oswiu were to be seen as exemplars who would address the needs of the present turbulent politics of late eighth-century Northumbria. Moreover, given the contemporary failures of Northumbrian kings in Alcuin’s era, it was even more imperative that the church have a large role in guiding the king.⁷⁴ To illustrate in brief the tumult of Northumbrian royal succession, when Alcuin departed England for the Continent in the early 780s, Ælfwald I was reigning, who had taken the throne of Northumbria from Æthelred I, the son of Æthelwald “Moll,” who had usurped the throne following Oswulf’s death. Ælfwald himself would be succeeded by Osred II (Oswulf’s son), who was in turn forced out of office and succeeded by a restored Æthelred I, who reigned until his death in 796, when he was succeeded by Osbald, who was expelled in the same year, and then Eardwulf, who managed to hang on until 806, when he also was ousted.⁷⁵ This series of failed or weakened kings, set against the more worthy examples of remoter past Northumbria, informed and shaped Alcuin’s discussion of kingship in his letters.⁷⁶ As Bullough notes, in this context the poem also becomes “an early statement of the link

72 “Ecgfrith.../ *agminibus missis animo trans aequora saevo, / praecipiens gentes Scotorum caede cruenta / vastare innocuas.../ mox adversus eum Pictis bellantibus ipse / occubit victus misera cum clade suorum / imperii linquens Aldfrido regmina fratri.../ ...idem rex simul atque magister.”* Alcuin, *The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*, ed. and trans. Godman, 68–71.

73 Bullough, *Alcuin*, 238. For a solid summary of the tumultuous 770s–790s in Northumbrian politics, see Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings*, 127–33.

74 Alcuin, *The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*, ed. and trans. Godman, li, lix–lx

75 Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings*, 131.

76 Alcuin, *The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*, ed. and trans. Godman, xlv.

between Divine authority and that exercised in the world by King Charles,” key themes in the development of Alcuin’s ideas on the conduct of a king.⁷⁷

Violence and Natural Disaster in Alcuin’s Lindisfarne Letters

The York poem offers one version of Alcuin’s notions of kingship and the pitfalls of bad rule, but it is overshadowed by the volume of his surviving letters. Relying on Alcuin’s correspondence to narrate history presents challenges because while the standard collection—either that edited by Dümmler in the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* or Jaffé’s *Monumenta Alcuiniana*—contains just over 310 letters, only 281 of them were composed by him. This number excludes prefaces to his longer works, letters written on behalf of Charlemagne, and those written to Alcuin but preserved in the collection. Alcuin lived from ca. 735–804, yet none of his letters from before the 780s survive, and only fifteen come from before the end of 793. Most of the extant letters, in fact, cluster around the years 798–801.⁷⁸ My reading of Alcuin’s letters in this section focuses on those letters addressed to kings or those in which he specifically mentions either the conduct of a king or events that echo the warnings of pseudo-Cyprian’s unjust king to trace the shifts in Alcuin’s thinking during his association with the Frankish court.

In 790, fresh from a period of at least four years at Charlemagne’s itinerant court participating in some of the Frankish king’s most important and lasting reform initiatives, Alcuin wrote to Adalhard—Charlemagne’s cousin and the abbot of Corbie, who was himself also accustomed to the company of and access to kings and centres of power—a letter that (in part) criticized the incumbent Northumbrian king, the restored Æthelred I.⁷⁹ Astonishingly,

⁷⁷ Bullough, *Alcuin*, 410.

⁷⁸ The letters are found in these edited collections: *Epistolae Karolini aevi*, ed. Dümmler, pp. 18–493; *Monumenta Alcuiniana*, ed. Jaffé, 132–897. The foremost modern Alcuin expert, Donald Bullough, made a vigorous defence of what he called “the biographical approach” in relying on Alcuin’s correspondence to assemble the most complete version of Alcuin’s life and accomplishments to date. Even Bullough, however, criticized those who would take “a few short phrases, not infrequently employing quite commonplace language and occurring incidentally in letters concerned predominantly with other topics, and [proceed] to induce from them theories of polity and authority and the capacity to influence events in ways that literally changed nations.” Bullough, *Alcuin*, 35, 38, 118. This critique pointedly highlights the danger of overanalyzing language that could have been rhetorical exercise, and the fallacy of taking a phrase out of its context to stretch a broader argument.

⁷⁹ Adalhard was Charlemagne’s cousin, and served as abbot of Corbie and also as a

Alcuin penned this critique during his three-year sojourn in England from within the borders of Æthelred's own kingdom:

Moreover, know this, like-minded brother: I found affairs somewhat troubled in my homeland, and I did not find the disposition of the new king to be what I either hoped for or wished. Nevertheless, we offered him and others some words of admonition. And today we are labouring against injustice, as much as we are able, along with certain magnates.⁸⁰

The disturbances which troubled Alcuin doubtless referred to the deposition and forced tonsuring of Osred II in 790, followed by Æthelred, who later during his restored reign had Osred executed after a failed coup d'état in 792 (Æthelred himself was murdered in 796 in part as retribution for these events).⁸¹ Worthy of note, too, is Alcuin's connection of the king's conduct with broader events, as well as his role as an admonisher and fighter of injustice—all pseudo-Cyprianic themes. In contrast to Alcuin's pointed criticism, a letter that may have originated in the same period (pre-792) to Angilbert (Nithard's father who was described in contemporary sources as "Charlemagne's most beloved abbot"), the chancellor of the Frankish king's son, Pepin, reveals some of the benefits of good kingship.⁸² Alcuin notes generally that "the reward of kings for aiding the wretched...is known to be great in the sight of divine mercy."⁸³

Alcuin's surviving letters do not revisit these themes until after his return to the Continent in 793—the same year that Vikings sacked the monastery at Lindisfarne, a small tidal island about 1 km off the northeast coast of Britain. The monastery itself was crucial in the history of Christianity and

special advisor to the emperor's son, Pepin, in his role as king of Italy. Costambeys et al., *The Carolingian World*, 193; McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 88.

80 "Caeterum cognoscas, unanimis frater, turbatas ex parte res me offendisse in patria nec talem invenisse animum novi regis qualem vel speravi vel volui. Tamen aliquid fecimus ammonitionis illi et aliis. Et hodie laboramus contra iniustitiam prout possumus, cum quibusdam potentibus." Alcuin, *Ep.* 9, ed. Dümmler, p. 35, lines 7–10.

81 Rollason, *Northumbria, 500–1100*, 194.

82 Dümmler noted the date as possibly originating from before 792, (possibly as early as 783/5) a position with which Bullough initially agreed, although he subsequently post-dated the letter to the late 790s. Alcuin, *Ep.* 11, ed. Dümmler, 37; Bullough, "'Baiuli' in the Carolingian 'regnum Langobardorum,'" 635n6; Bullough, *Alcuin*, 38n83. For Angilbert's connections and importance to Charlemagne, see Freeman and Meyvaert, "*Opus Caroli regis contra synodum*," in Freeman, *Theodulf of Orléans*, 1:4–14.

83 "Regum vero merces in miserorum iuvamine...magna apud divinam constat esse clementiam." Alcuin, *Ep.* 11, ed. Dümmler, p. 37, lines 10–12.

conversion in Britain. Founded in the mid-seventh century by Aidan, Lindisfarne was the home base for the conversion of northern England and Scotland, and the bishopric of the famous St. Cuthbert. The island mirrored the extreme conditions of the renowned and remote monastery at Iona off the western coast of Scotland. Ironically, it was this very proximity to the shore which left the monks vulnerable to attack by sea.⁸⁴ The *Northumbrian Annals* from 793 recalled the portents that purportedly foreshadowed the Vikings' attack of the monastery at Lindisfarne:

The fourth year of King Æthelred, dire portents terrified the wretched nation of the English, inasmuch that horrible lightning and dragons were often visible in the heavens, and flashes of fire were seen darting and dancing to and fro; and such signs signified a great famine, with the fearful and indescribable slaughter of many men which ensued.⁸⁵

These omens fit neatly into the grammar of the calamitous consequences invited by a bad king, including natural, supernatural, and military disasters.

The raid occurred on June 7 or 8, though Alcuin almost certainly could not have learned of it and had time to compose the seven lengthy letters he wrote to the survivors of the attack until much later.⁸⁶ Other than the terse mentions of famine and slaughter from chronicles like the above, Alcuin's letters offer the only other substantial source for this event, which greatly disturbed him even if contemporary sources from the Continent ignored the attack.⁸⁷ Alcuin's response to the Viking sack of Lindisfarne pertains to these notions of kingship and his transformation of their violent incursion into a natural disaster.

Alcuin's first response takes the form of a letter to the Northumbrian king Æthelred I in which he reminds the king that there is in fact a connection between the decline of royal conduct and authority following the murder of Ælfwald, the king who had usurped Æthelred in 778. The king following him was deposed and exiled, until Æthelred was himself restored in 790. In the eighth-century Northumbrian culture of political violence, sometimes

84 Higham, *The Kingdom of Northumbria*, 133–34, 174.

85 “Anno dcc.xc.iii. qui est anno Ethelredi quartus, dira prodiga miseram Anglorum terruere gentem. Siquidem fulmina abominanda, et dracones per aera, igneique ictus saepe vibrare et volitare videbantur; quae scilicet signa famem magnam, et multorum hominum strategem pessimam atque inedibilem, quae subsectuta est, demonstravere.” Text and translation from *Byrhtferth's Northumbrian Chronicle*, ed. and trans. Hart, 130–31.

86 Alcuin, *Ep.* 16–22, ed. Dümmler, p. 4, 42–60.

87 Bullough, *Alcuin*, 411.

a claimant seized the throne and yet died, a trend that Alcuin viewed as divine retribution. “Consider carefully, brothers,” Alcuin writes, “and examine most diligently, lest perhaps this unusual and unheard-of evil was earned by some unheard-of evil custom,”⁸⁸ before launching a tirade against sexual depravity, greed, and violence, which he claimed had increased everywhere during that time.⁸⁹ Then, Alcuin’s letter echoes those warnings from *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* that examples from both the Bible and history should demonstrate to any thinking person that “because of such sins, kings have lost their kingdoms and peoples their homeland. And while the powerful unjustly seized what belonged to others, they justly lost what was their own.”⁹⁰ Alcuin then presses the portents that came before the calamity. He asks what it signified that blood fell during Lent at York, from the north and in clear air—“we saw it,” he writes—if not that a bloody punishment was to come from the north “upon the people.”⁹¹

There is a proffered remedy for both king and magnates in Alcuin’s admonishment, when, invoking the biblical example of the king Hezekiah and the power of prayer, he told Æthelred to:

Defend the homeland with constant prayers to God, and with works of justice and mercy toward others. Nothing defends the homeland better than the fairness and piety of its rulers, and the intercessions of God’s servants. Be leaders of the people, not plunderers; shepherds, not predators. You received honours (*honores*) through the gift of God: heed the keeping of His commandments, that you may have as your protector the One whom you

88 “Attentius considerate, fratres, et diligentissime perspicite, ne forte hoc inconsuetum et inauditum malum aliqua inauditi mali consuetudine promeretur.” Alcuin, *Ep. 16*, ed. Dümmler, p. 43, lines 6–7.

89 “Non dico, quod fornicationis peccata prius non essent in populo. Sed a diebus Ælfwaldi regis fornicationes adulteria et incestus inundaverunt super terram, ita ut absque omni verecundia etiam et in ancillis Deo dicatis hec peccata perpetrabantur. Quid dicam de avaritia rapinis et violentis iudiciis? dum luce clarius constat, quantum ubique hec crimina succreverunt et populus testatur spoliatus.” Alcuin, *Ep. 16*, ed. Dümmler, p. 43, lines 7–12.

90 “Qui sanctas legit scripturas et veteres revolvit historias et seculi considerat eventum, inveniet pro huiusmodi peccatis reges regna et populos patriam perdidisse. Et dum aliena potentes iniuste rapuerunt, propria iuste perdidierunt.” Alcuin, *Ep. 16*, ed. Dümmler, p. 43, lines 12–15.

91 “Signa enim huius miserie precesserunt...Quid significat pluvia sanguinis, qui quadragesimali tempore Euboraca civitate...vidimus de borealibus domus sereno aere...Nonne potest putari a borealibus poenas sanguinis venire super populum?” Alcuin, *Ep. 16*, ed. Dümmler, p. 43, lines 16–21. For Alcuin’s possible location, see Bullough, *Alcuin*, 410.

had as your benefactor. Obey the priests of God. For they must give account to God of how they admonish you, and you, of how you obey them.⁹²

This statement offered the beleaguered king a lifeline; by asking for divine help and acting justly and mercifully, he could restore his own conduct and the welfare of his realm. By juxtaposing leadership with thievery and shepherding with predation, Alcuin strikingly shows the consequences of bad kingship: the thief makes off with property and predators with lives. The *honores*—land, rank, title, influence, power, etc.—of a king were seen as loaned only by the grace of God, and to reclaim or maintain that authority the king would have to listen to critics like Alcuin. In this view, the stakes were both eternal and temporal, and—like those of pseudo-Cyprian and Cathwulf—their outcome shaped the state of the environment and kingdom.

This is not the final word in Alcuin's correspondence on Lindisfarne and the failings and potential of Æthelred: he spares no detail of the bishop and monks affected by the Viking attack, and among these letters the Yorkish cleric describes their armed violence as a scourge and a pestilence, subsuming two of the consequences predicted by the pseudo-Cyprian author into natural disasters. In the same cycle of letters responding to the attack on Lindisfarne, Alcuin wrote Æthelhard, the archbishop of Canterbury, whose election had been secured in 792 by the Mercian king Offa due to his influence as "over-king" of Kent, meaning that Alcuin's letter may have been a circumspect attempt at reaching another king's ears as a call to action.⁹³ In it, Alcuin reminds Æthelhard (and perhaps Offa by proxy) that their predecessors in Britain were pagans who conquered the island through violence, even though they possessed it and prospered under Christian rule. Alcuin protests, "How great a disgrace it is, then, that we Christians should lose what those pagans acquired. I say this in reference to the scourge that recently befell parts of our island, which has been inhabited by our forefathers for nearly 350 years."⁹⁴

92 "Defendite patriam precibus assiduis ad Deum, iustitiae et misericordiae operibus ad homines...Nichil melius patriam defendit quam principum equitas et pietas et servorum Dei intercessiones...Estote rectores populi, non raptore; pastores, non predatores. Deo dante honores accepistis: attendite observationem mandatorum eius, ut eum habeatis servatorem, quem habuistis largitorem. Oboedite sacerdotibus Dei. Illi enim habent rationem reddere Deo, quomodo vos ammoneant; et vos, quomodo oboediatis illis." And "Mementote, quod Ezechias rex iustus et pius une prece impetravit a Deo." Alcuin, *Ep. 16*, ed. Dümmler, p. 44, lines 13–24.

93 Bullough, *Alcuin*, 401.

94 "Patres itaque nostri, Deo dispensante, licet pagani, hanc patriam bellica virtute

The language of the scourge calls to mind the punishment of the whip, but it is not the lash of the New Testament endured unjustly by Christ as part of his salvific actions.⁹⁵ Rather, Alcuin's word choice echoes the warnings of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, who foretold God's punishment of the rebellious Israelites at the hands of the pagan Assyrians as a scourge, just as the Israelites had been the previous beneficiaries of a divinely orchestrated massacre of their enemies.⁹⁶ Simon Coupland shows how Carolingian theologians in the ninth century came to see the Vikings as the "rod" and the "people of God's wrath," who were sent by God to punish the Franks for their sin, and the Frankish people themselves as those who were called to repent and defend the church at all costs—both spiritually and physically. This point of view helps explain why, later, the Vikings would be accepted as "Normans" in the Frankish realm because they had been adopted into the church by those soldiers of Christ who prayed and worked as missionaries among them.⁹⁷ Later the Isaiah text portrays the king in Jerusalem, confident that his wickedness and pact with hell would protect him from the forthcoming punishment—a notion that the prophet disabuses, stating "when the overflowing scourge crashes over, you will be crushed by it."⁹⁸

Alcuin's imagery of the scourge as a flood wave that overcomes the king in his city reimagines a military conquest as a natural disaster. It is not without purpose that Alcuin never referred to the Viking invaders as north-men or Norse (*Nortmanni*), despite the captions in the modern edition. Alcuin consistently referred to these raiders as *pagani*, a rhetorical device that highlights their instrumentality as agents of divine punishment, precisely as the Old Testament usage of *flagellum* did.⁹⁹ In a similar letter to the monks at Wearmouth and Jarrow, the monastery which produced Alcuin's spiritual

primum pagani possederunt." And "Quam grande igitur obprobrium est, ut nos christiani perdamus, quod illi pagani adquisierunt. Hoc dico propter flagellum, quod nuper accidit partibus insulae nostrae, quae prope tricentis quinquaginta annis a parentibus inhabitata est nostris." Alcuin, *Ep. 17*, ed. Dümmler, p. 47, lines 12–16.

95 Matthew 27:26; Mark 14:65; John 19:1.

96 "Et suscitabit super eum Dominus exercituum flagellum, juxta plagam Madian in petra Oreb." Isaiah 10:26.

97 Coupland, "The Rod of God's Wrath," 536, 538, 553–54.

98 Isaiah 28:15, 18. "flagellum inundans cum transierit, eritis ei in conculcationem."

99 Bullough, *Alcuin*, 414. Coupland also notes that the Vikings are "often" described in other Carolingian texts as *pagani*, while the Franks are *christiani*, and destruction occurred "divino iudicio" and victories achieved "adiuvante Domino." Coupland, "The Rod of God's Wrath," 535.

forbear Bede, located just over 100 km south along the Northumbrian coast, Alcuin even further naturalized the Viking incursion. “You dwell by the sea, from whence the pestilence first fell upon us,” wrote Alcuin likening the assault on Lindisfarne to a disease.¹⁰⁰ He then alluded to the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah: “From the north evils will blaze forth, and from the Lord will come a dreadful notice.”¹⁰¹ In this vocabulary of fire, a natural disaster, Alcuin repurposed the prophetic warnings from Jeremiah, which were originally intended to provoke the king in Judah and his subjects to repent and turn back from their sins or face the punishment: invasion and destruction at the hands of the Chaldeans.¹⁰²

Equipped with that knowledge, we can see the same device at work in the other letters of Alcuin’s Lindisfarne cycle. When Alcuin wrote Æthelred in 793, he admonished the Northumbrian court to “Fear the scourge that has come upon the Church of St. Cuthbert...now miserably laid waste by the pagans. Whoever does not fear this, does not amend himself, and does not weep to God for the prosperity of his homeland, has not a heart of flesh, but of stone.”¹⁰³ In a letter to Higbald, the bishop of Lindisfarne, Alcuin again links the Vikings and the calamity¹⁰⁴ that they wrought to pagan invaders of the past, sent by God to destroy places that he had marked for punishment:

Jerusalem, the city beloved by God, perished with the temple of God in the Chaldean flames. Rome, encircled by the crown of the holy apostles and countless martyrs, was torn apart by the devastation of the pagans...Nearly all of Europe was emptied by the swords and flames of the Goths and Huns.¹⁰⁵

100 “Vos maritima habitatis, unde pestis primo ingruit.” Alcuin, *Ep. 19*, ed. Dümmler, p. 55, line 7.

101 “In nobis impletum est, quod olim per prophetam praedictum est: ‘Ab aquilone inardescunt mala et a Domino formidolosa laudatio veniet.’” Alcuin, *Ep. 19*, ed. Dümmler, p. 55, lines 7–9. Coupland notes this allusion to Jeremiah as well, although only as a prelude to the discourse that arises in the ninth century. Coupland, “The Rod of God’s Wrath,” 538.

102 Jeremiah 1:14–16.

103 “Timete flagellum, quod venit super ecclesiam sancti Cudberhti...nunc vero miserabiliter a paganis devastatum. Qui hoc non timet et se ipsum non corrigit et pro suae patriae prosperitate non plangit ad Deum, carneum non habet cor, sed lapideum.” Alcuin, *Ep. 18*, ed. Dümmler, p. 52, lines 26–29.

104 “Sed versa vice vestrae tribulationis calamitas licet absentem multum me cotidie contristat.” Alcuin, *Ep. 21*, ed. Dümmler, p. 57, lines 5–6.

105 “Hierusalem, civitas Deo dilecta, cum templo Dei Chaldea flamma periit. Roma, sanctorum apostolorum et innumerabilium matrum corona circumdata, paganorum vastatione disrupta est...Tota pene Europa Gothorum vel Hunorum gladiis evacuata

This is grim stuff indeed, but the comforting point here, it seems, is the discernment that, however piously Higbald and his brethren had lived, certainly, if Jerusalem and Rome had endured these disasters and rebounded, then Lindisfarne would, too. In a lengthy poem on the destruction of Lindisfarne, Alcuin repeats these same historical reminders, adding to them the Christians of the Iberian peninsula, whose churches and fine things had been seized by Muslims over the course of the previous decades.¹⁰⁶ To the Yorkish cleric, the attack on Lindisfarne is just the most recent in a long history of good places ruined because of the sins and bad behaviour, not of the locals, but of others—namely kings.

Developing the nature-disaster theme in his Lindisfarne letters, Alcuin also refers to the Viking onslaught as *castigatio*, translated typically as a punishment or a correction. This certainly fits with the surrounding rhetoric of his Lindisfarne letter cycle, but the word also echoes language from Pliny's *Natural Histories*, a text that Alcuin likely knew at least in part from the Aachen court library.¹⁰⁷ On the pruning of trees, Pliny wrote

Some trees are improved by severe treatment or stimulated by a pungent application...Ashes also have the effect of salt, but it acts more gently; consequently they are sprinkled on figs and on rue, to prevent their getting maggoty or rotting at the roots. It is also advised to pour salt water on the roots of vines if they are too full of moisture, but if their fruit falls off, to sprinkle ashes with vinegar and smear them on the vines themselves, or ashes with sandarac if the grapes rot; but if the vines do not bear, to sprinkle and smear them with ashes mixed with strong vinegar; and if they do not ripen their fruit but let it dry up first, the vines should be lopped down to the roots and the wound and fibers of the wood drenched with strong vinegar and stale urine and covered up with the mud so produced, and repeatedly dug round. If olives give too little promise of fruit, growers bare their roots and expose them to the winter cold, and the trees profit by this drastic treatment (*castigatione*).¹⁰⁸

et flammis." Alcuin, *Ep. 21*, ed. Dümmler, p. 57, lines 29–33. Bullough thought that this letter could be from 799, although that does not alter its contribution to the discussion of Lindisfarne and royal disaster. Bullough, *Alcuin*, 433n3.

106 Alcuin, "The Destruction of Lindisfarne," in Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, 126–37.

107 Bullough, *Alcuin*, 285–86; Bischoff, *Manuscripts and Libraries in the Age of Charlemagne*, trans. Gorman, 29, 57.

108 "Quaedam poena emendantur aut morsu excitantur...salsis enim aquis aluntur. salis vim et cineres sed leniorem habent, ideo ficis adsparguntur rutaeque, ne fiant verminosae neve radices putrescant. quin et vitium radicibus aquam salsam iubent adfundi si sint lacrimosae, si vero fructus earum decidunt, cinerem aceto conspergi

Alcuin wrote no gardening manual for the monks of Lindisfarne, yet his sentiment in the letters to them that the attack was a divine punishment for laxity and impious behaviour resonates metaphorically with the notion that some trees must be pruned, have ash or salt poured over them, along with bitter vinegar, and cruel exposure to the harsh air of northern winter in order to thrive and develop new growth. Even the positive consequences of the pruning, which was for Pliny that the trees would profit (*proficunt*) from this harsh treatment, have an eerie similarity, as Alcuin argued that Lindisfarne's *castigatio* was appropriate, because it would profit (*proficiat*)—the same root verb—their eternal salvation.¹⁰⁹ Here we find clear parallels to the idea of a kingdom as a garden that must be tended and improved: England needed the kind of *correctio* that Alcuin had seen in Francia, and the rule of a gardener-king like Charlemagne who could transform it into a paradise of strongly rooted and obedient trees.

The sack of Lindisfarne seems to have marked a caesura in Alcuin's consideration of the prosperity and fortunes of his native country, and it sparked a shift in his hopes for kings and how a good sovereign can shape the environment. For, as Bullough wrote, "[n]o later event, not even [Charlemagne's] Imperial coronation of 800 which has so often been claimed as the centre of Alcuin's thinking in the late 790s, provoked or inspired in him a comparable literary outpouring."¹¹⁰ Because of this, it is worth considering some of Alcuin's remaining thoughts on kingship in his letters from the later eighth and early ninth century. Regarding kings in Britain, Alcuin viewed, for a time, the stable rule of Offa the king of Mercia similarly to Charlemagne. Alcuin's few letters addressed to Offa and his son, written during his travels in England and in his capacity as Charlemagne's representative, highlight their just and good qualities.¹¹¹

ipsasque inlini, aut sandaraca si putrescat uva, si vero fertiles non sint, aceto acri subacto cinere rigari atque oblini; quod si fructum non maturent prius inarescentem, praecisarum ad radices plagam fibrasque aceto acri et urina vetusta madefacere atque eo luto obruere, saepe fodere. olearum, si parum promiseret fructus, nudatas radices hiberno frigori opponunt eaque castigatione proficiunt." Text and translation from Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, trans. Rackham, 5:180–81, bks. 17–19.

109 "Castigatio vero, quae facta est in monasterio vestro, dignum est, ut vobis proficiat ad salutem sempiternam." Alcuin, *Ep. 21*, ed. Dümmler, pp. 57, 59, lines 6–7.

110 Bullough, *Alcuin*, 418.

111 For a copiously detailed synopsis of this period in Frankish-Mercian relations and travels between England and the Continent, see Story, *Carolingian Connections*.

In the late 780s or early 790s, Alcuin wrote Offa's son Ecgrith a letter reminding him that he did not "lack anything in the way of necessary instruction from your most wise and excellent parents, whose examples of virtue are themselves proclamations of salvation for the people," echoing the moral health and wealth pseudo-Cyprianic message.¹¹² Similarly, Alcuin also praised Offa as the "glory of Britain, the trumpet of preaching, the sword against enemies, the shield against foes," presenting the Mercian ruler as a just king who fulfilled his royal obligations.¹¹³ After the assassination of Æthelred in Northumbria, Alcuin complained to Offa, noting that the diplomatic gifts intended for the northern court sent by Charlemagne were withdrawn due to the Frankish king's ire at the treachery of the aristocrats who were "worse than pagans"—which was saying a lot considering the blame placed previously on non-Christians.¹¹⁴

Alcuin sets the Northumbrian desolation before Offa's eyes: "Behold the most holy places laid waste by pagans, the altars defiled with broken oaths, the monasteries violated by adultery, the land stained with the blood of lords and princes."¹¹⁵ Alcuin's point in this appeal was to convince Offa to "diligently correct your people from their corrupt ways and instruct them in the commandments of God, lest the homeland given to us by God be destroyed because of the people's sins," lest the same fate befall Mercia.¹¹⁶

Sadly, for Alcuin, Offa's achievements unravelled beginning with his decision to execute the king of the East Angles in 794, which led to armed occupation of the south under the overlordship of Mercia. After Offa died on July 26 or 29, 796, his son and successor, Ecgrith, reigned for only 141 days, then died suddenly. In retrospect, Alcuin interpreted this dynastic misfortune (as one might expect) as God's punishment for Offa's brutal policies of murdering rivals and kin to ensure that his son would reign alone and

112 "Non quod tibi aliquid desit a sapientissimis et optimis parentibus ammonitionis necessariae, quorum honestatis exempla populo praedicamenta sunt salutis." Alcuin, *Ep.* 61, ed. Dümmler, pp. 104–5, lines 32–33 and 1.

113 "Vos estis decus Britanniae, tuba praedicationis, gladius contra hostes, scutum contra inimicos." Alcuin, *Ep.* 64, ed. Dümmler, p. 107, lines 13–14.

114 "peiores eam pagani estimans." Alcuin, *Ep.* 101, ed. Dümmler, p. 147, lines 10–16.

115 "Ecce loca sanctissima a paganis vastata, altaria periuriis foedata, monasteria adulteriis violata, terra sanguine dominorum et principum infecta." Alcuin, *Ep.* 101, ed. Dümmler, p. 147, lines 20–21.

116 "Tu vero, sapientissime populi Dei gubernator, diligentissime a perversis moribus corrippe gentem tuam et in praeceptis Dei erudi illam, ne propter peccata populi destruat patriam nobis a Deo data." Alcuin, *Ep.* 101, ed. Dümmler, p. 147, lines 28–30.

uncontested. Instead, his vast kingdom was taken up by a magnate, Coenwulf, who claimed (perhaps falsely) distant relation to the dead king.¹¹⁷ The change in regime may have threatened Alcuin's standing at the Mercian court, and he saw within his lifetime an end to any hopes for the kind of just kingship in England that he found and wrote about in Francia.¹¹⁸ Coenwulf's reign outlasted Alcuin (d. 804), and so we do not know if the Mercian king lived up to the Yorkish cleric's hopes. By the last years of the century Alcuin's eyes had turned back toward the Continent.

The Sights and Smells of Disastrous Rule

Carolingian writers measured the success of kingship not only in laws or victories but in the sights, smells, and conditions of the spaces that made up the Christian empire. Just as illuminated gardens and flowing fountains could serve as rhetorical images of right rule, so too could their opposites—dilapidated, defiled, and foul-smelling holy places—function as warnings of disastrous governance. Here we encounter Alcuin's imagery of filth and disrepair, reading it within the same grammar of kingship that produced heavenly images like those *fons vitae* images discussed above: both paradise and ruin, blossom and stench, belonged to the same symbolic language of ecological sovereignty.

Alcuin saw in Charlemagne the closest approximation of the just king whom nature affirmed and obeyed. Although the eighth- and ninth-century associations between the Frankish ruler and Old Testament figures like Moses, David, and Solomon are many, even Charlemagne did not escape all of Alcuin's warnings. In a missive to the Frankish king in 798 (the well-known "two swords" letter), Alcuin praised the king:

Most beloved and honourable defender and ruler of the churches of Christ, let the venerable zeal of your most holy wisdom encourage some by admonition, correct others by rebuke, and instruct still others in the disciplines of life—so that, becoming all things to all people, you may deserve to gain from all an everlasting reward, and may appear glorious in the sight of the Lord your God, accompanied by a great and praiseworthy multitude of people.¹¹⁹

117 Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings*, 147–48.

118 Bullough, *Alcuin*, 442.

119 "Nec enim hoc solis sacerdotibus vel clericis audiendum ibi arbitreris, sed etiam bonis laicis, et bene in opere Dei laborantibus dicendum esse credas; et maxime his, qui in sublimioribus positi sunt saeculi dignitatibus, quorum conversatio bona et vitae sanctitas et ammonitoria aeternae salutis verba suis subiectis praedicatio

And yet, in the same letter, Alcuin notes caustically that in Francia “We have also seen, in some places, the altars of God negligently left without a roof, befouled with bird droppings or the urine of dogs.”¹²⁰ Mary Albieri sees in this contradictory conclusion to an otherwise straightforward letter a concrete example of Alcuin’s wishes that Charlemagne listen to his bishops on how the church should be administered.¹²¹ In fact, Alcuin’s charge (*vidimus* – we have seen) reads less as a case for episcopal autonomy than as a report that the clergy were neglecting their sovereign’s commands. For by this time, Charlemagne had demonstrated a particular concern with the roofing of churches and their general upkeep under royal purview in his own kingdom and abroad, having promised to Pope Hadrian materials to replace the roof of St. Peter’s in Rome in the 780s.¹²²

As part of the Frankish reaction to Byzantine Iconoclasm in the early 790s, Theodulf of Orléans prepared for Charlemagne’s court a response to the Second Council of Nicaea (787) known as the *Opus Caroli regis contra synodum* (The work of King Charles against the Synod). Several times in this lengthy theological treatise Theodulf criticizes the Byzantines for having allowed their shrines and holy places, and especially their roofs, to fall into disrepair.¹²³ Michael McCormick notes the sarcasm in Theodulf’s response that Charlemagne “did not need lessons about honouring churches from an empire in which many shrines lacked not only lighting and incense but even roofs.”¹²⁴ At the Council of Frankfurt in 794 (the previously discussed large assembly that met to discuss the Byzantine controversy, among other topics), Charlemagne looked to the churches of his own realm, commanding:

poterit esse...Quapropter, dilectissime et honorande ecclesiarum Christi defensor et rector, tuae sanctissimae sapientiae venerabile studium alios ammonendo exhortetur, alios castigando corrigit, alios vitae disciplinis erudiat; ut, omnibus omnia factus, ex omnibus mercedem habere merearis perpetuam; ut cum magna et laudabili populorum multitudine gloriosus in conspectu domini Dei tui appareas.” Alcuin, *Ep. 136*, ed. Dümmler, p. 209, lines 1–5, 7–12. For a close reading of this letter, see Albieri, “The Sword Which You Hold in Your Hand,” 117–32.

120 “Vidimus quoque aliquibus in locis neglegenter altaria Dei absque tecto, avium stercoribus vel canum mictu fedata.” Alcuin, *Ep. 136*, ed. Dümmler, p. 210, lines 14–15. Translation from Allott, *Alcuin of York*, 82.

121 Albieri, “The Sword Which You Hold in Your Hand,” 130–31.

122 McCormick, *Charlemagne’s Survey of the Holy Land: Wealth*, 148.

123 Theodulf, *Opus Caroli regis contra synodum*, ed. Freeman, p. 494, lines 33–37 and p. 495, lines 1–6.

124 McCormick, *Charlemagne’s Survey of the Holy Land*, 147–48.

Let the buildings of churches and their roofs be repaired or restored by those who hold benefits from them. And wherever it is found by trustworthy men that timber, stones, or tiles that belonged to church buildings are now in someone's private home, all such materials are to be returned and restored to the church from which they were taken.¹²⁵

Later in an 807 capitulary, Charlemagne ordered his *missi* to reexamine this question, focusing in particular on churches and their roofs, cataloguing the information in an inventory and swearing to the accuracy of their assessment.¹²⁶ McCormick detects in this command the king's voice as an "experienced administrator" because in practical terms a roof must be tended to before anything else in a dilapidated building.¹²⁷

Yet the capitulary is also evidence of a trope in texts produced for and in the vicinity of Charlemagne that saw in solid roofs a sign of right repair and functioning of a church or holy site. And if, as de Jong argues, Charlemagne's empire was imagined as *ecclesia* (a large church), the status of its roofs and coverings very much mattered as a manifestation of the realm's wellbeing.¹²⁸ Therefore, on the surface Alcuin's observation, bizarrely placed in a reply for a technical question on exegesis, reveals perhaps the potential for untidy habits to take hold and eat away at Charlemagne's authority and the prosperity of his kingdom.

Alcuin's chosen language is uncannily evocative of his earlier communication to Offa, in which he lamented the Northumbrian "holiest places" that had been defiled (*foedata*) by perjury and stained with blood, while the Frankish altars had been befouled (*fedata*), by bird excrement and dog

125 "Ut domus ecclesiarum et tegumenta ab eis fiant emendata vel restaurata, qui beneficia exinde habent. Et ubi repertum fuerit per veraces homines, quod lignamen et petras sive tegulas, qui in domus ecclesiarum fuerint et modo in domo sua habeat, omnia in ecclesia fiant restaurata, unde abstracte fuerunt." *Capitulare Francofurtense*, in *Concilia aevi Karolini*, ed. Werminghoff, p. 169, lines 4–7.

126 "Volumus itaque atque praecipimus, ut missi nostri per singulos pagos praevidere studeant omnia beneficia quae nostri et aliorum homines habere videntur, quomodo restaurata sint post annunciationem nostram sive destructa. Primum de ecclesiis, quomodo structae aut destructae sint in tectis, in maceriis sive parietibus sive in pavimentis necnon in pictura etiam et in luminariis sive officiis... Qualiter autem sit, hoc unusquisque vicarius singulis comitatibus in suo ministerio simul cum nostris missis praevideat, et sicut ipse hoc coniurare valeat, totum sicut invenerit in brevem mittat, et ipsos breves nobis deferant." *Capitula de causis diversis*, in *Capitularia regum Francorum*, ed. Boretius, 1:136, lines 9–13, at 16–19.

127 McCormick, *Charlemagne's Survey of the Holy Land*, 147.

128 de Jong, "Charlemagne's Church," 106.

urine.¹²⁹ Perhaps Alcuin buried in such feculent imagery his dire fears about the same fate looming over the Frankish kingdom. If the clergy who oversaw these holy sites neglected their roofs, and if the *missi* who were to report on their statuses to the king faltered in their duties, their failure reflected on Charlemagne and represented a breakdown in his authority. Such oblique criticism may have been safer than openly accusing Charlemagne of the same negligence that led to devastation in Britain.

In this case defiled and dirty churches both revealed a lack of Charlemagne's oversight as the ruler of the Christian empire and presented an opportunity (e.g., the restoring of roofs) to exercise sovereignty via supervision of environments. Alcuin's mention of unroofed holy sites and urinating dogs and defecating birds was more than a curious one-off remark. The inability of the Frankish king to maintain his churches and control these animals (and their inappropriate excretions) disrupted the harmony of Charlemagne's ordered garden-empire. Dilapidated churches and incontinent beasts were an early warning sign that things were not as they should be, that Charlemagne was not behaving rightly—i.e., listening to and (when appropriate) correcting his clergy.

If the lush, ordered gardens of the *fons vitae* manuscripts (see above, Figures 1 and 2) discussed in the Introduction offered an ekphrasis of just rule—an image where obedient animals, verdant growth, clear waters, and sweet fragrance displayed the righteous harmony of the Carolingian paradise—then Alcuin's descriptions of bird-droppings and dog urine upon neglected altars provided their rhetorical counterpart, an anti-ekphrasis of disastrous rule. The same grammar applied, but with reversed signs: where blossoms once proclaimed divine favour, foul smells marked divine displeasure; where sturdy roofs had symbolized protection and stability, leaking timbers signalled neglect and disorder.

In this inversion, Alcuin demonstrated that the Carolingian garden was never a neutral backdrop but a stage on which sovereignty was constantly judged by its material and sensory conditions. The rhetoric of filth thus belonged to the same "rulebook" of kingship as the rhetoric of paradise, showing that in the Carolingian grammar of rule a flourishing garden was proof of sovereignty, while a stinking ruin was proof of its failure.

129 Alcuin's letter to Offa above. This is a variant spelling of the same word.

Conclusion

Alcuin's letter reiterates that Carolingian ecological sovereignty rested on both natural and built environments; as with hunting game parks, the intersection of these areas revealed the ruler's precarious sovereignty most clearly. Alcuin's conviction that Charlemagne could succeed if he acted accordingly is patently clear in his letters and other writings. It is in these other works that Alcuin's notions of good kingship most clearly merge with the ideal of just rule in the person of Charlemagne himself. But how could a king inculcate these sentiments in himself and into the kingdom at large? It turns out that this very question shaped the development of some of the most foundational "reform" documents of the Carolingian Empire and led to a renewed focus on Genesis commentaries.

GENESIS AND CAROLINGIAN ECOLOGICAL SOVEREIGNTY

THIS CHAPTER TRACES how three foundational texts of Charlemagne's reforms—the *Admonitio generalis* (789), the *Epistola de litteris colendis* (Letter on the Cultivation of Learning), and the Synod of Frankfurt (794)—set the stage for a new wave of biblical commentary at court, especially on Genesis, and how these efforts were bound up with the articulation of Carolingian ecological sovereignty. I begin by examining how *correctio*, framed as an aspirational totalizing mandate of reform, linked royal legislation, biblical exegesis, and the production of “corrected” texts in opposition to heterodox rivals. I then situate Alcuin's influence and the intellectual strategies of the royal court within these documents, before turning to Wigbod's Genesis commentaries as the first official exegetical projects commissioned by Charlemagne. By following the interplay of legislation, commentary, and court culture, I argue that Genesis offered Carolingian thinkers models of rulership and dominion over creation that were central to Charlemagne's claims of sovereignty over both land and people, and that this biblical re-ordering of knowledge was essential to their vision of empire.

In March 789 Charlemagne's court issued a capitulary known to posterity as the *Admonitio generalis*, a wide-ranging document that established many different goals related to Carolingian reforms. It portrayed Charlemagne as a new King Josiah, bringing his wayward people, religious and lay alike, back to the right biblical teachings.¹ Capitularies were a kind of legislation that gave concrete form to royal pronouncements.² The Frankish ruler issued capitularies, and although they were linked by medium and custom to laws, their imbued power derived not from legal convention per se but rather from the authority of the king's words they embodied.³ In this case, the *Admonitio generalis* called for sweeping reforms across the Frankish kingdom “to correct what is erroneous, to cut away what is unwarranted, to strengthen what is right.”⁴ Charlemagne sought to transform the daily

1 Contreni, “The Carolingian Renaissance,” 710.

2 Maclean, *Kingship and Politics in the Late Ninth Century*, 20.

3 Wormald, “*Lex scripta* and *Verbum regis*,” 123.

4 Bullough, *Carolingian Renewal*, 141; Contreni, “The Pursuit of Knowledge in

lives of his subjects through the institution of corrected methods of teaching, reading, writing, and preaching.⁵ The idea of “correction” (i.e., *correctio*) was “omnipresent in Carolingian capitularies and applied to all categories of society: the sovereign, the bishops, the abbots, the counts, the whole Christian people.”⁶ *Correctio* put both the biblical text and commentaries on it at the centre of political action in the Frankish kingdom, and shaped the development of Carolingian ecological sovereignty. Early Carolingian exegetes looked to the Bible for examples of good rulership, because doing so both satisfied the needs of *correctio* and offered powerful (and acceptable) models for Charlemagne’s emulation.

Doubtless some part of the notion that the Franks had wandered from correct teachings stemmed from the Carolingians’ deliberate rejection of alleged failures on the part of the previous Merovingian rulers. But the sources also offer specific examples of these deficiencies. Among them lay the charge against the clergy that prayers and other essential spiritual services, the obligations of the religious, were missing their mark: that is to say, the blessing of both their patrons and the realm itself. This failure was an abrogation of the basic compact between ecclesiastical and lay partners, that the former would ensure the spiritual safety of the latter in exchange for security and sustenance. In this political-theological context, Charlemagne was seen as ruler of the Christian empire, inspired by the Old Testament examples of David and Josiah, bridging the legacies of Rome, the Frankish kingdom, and expanded territories in Saxony, northeastern Iberia, and northern Italy. This worldview not only privileged the role and works of Carolingian exegetes, but connected many of them to powerful patrons who, in some cases, commissioned the works themselves.

The dearth of acceptable biblical commentaries was a real concern to Charlemagne and his advisors. They alleged that the lack of good Bibles and commentaries led to bad prayer and teaching. According to the *Admonitio generalis*, the surest method of combatting this ignorance was rigorous training in correct biblical teachings. The court’s reforming energies were harnessed and transmitted through subsequent actions documented in the Council of Frankfurt in 794 and in Charlemagne’s famous letter to Baugulf, the abbot of Fulda, the *Epistola de litteris colendis*. These texts further tied

Carolingian Europe,” 107. “errata corrigere, superflua abscidere, recta coartare.” Charlemagne, *AG*, ed. Boretius, 52–62.

5 Meens, “Religious Instruction in the Frankish Kingdoms,” 55.

6 Depreux, “Ambitions et limites des réformes culturelles à l’époque carolingienne,” 732–33.

spiritual efficacies to the study and production of correct biblical texts, best achieved through repeated reading of patristic sources *and* classical, pagan literature and grammar. Reconnecting with the Church Fathers was no small task, because in Francia most of their works were circulated abridged or in collections of *florilegia*. For example, when the first new biblical commentaries began to be compiled at Charlemagne's court, scholars often knew of a source such as Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram* (On the Literal Meaning of Genesis) only through an intermediary such as Bede. The centuries following the patristic era (ca. 500–750) saw the creation of thirty-five new biblical commentaries, of which Bede bore responsibility for no fewer than fourteen, although he was joined in this effort by Gregory the Great and Isidore of Seville. In their contrast to the voluminous and enduring legacy of the Church Fathers, Carolingian writers lamented a dearth of novel exegetical materials compounded by decades of scribal errors and textual inconsistencies in the Bible itself that hampered systematic study of the scriptures.⁷

This chapter reads closely the “constitutional” documents of the Carolingian reforms, the *Admonitio generalis* and the *Epistola de litteris colendis*—duly noting Alcuin's role in their production and influence—along with the Synod of Frankfurt (794) and shows how they lay behind the outpouring of new biblical exegesis at Charlemagne's court. Further, I argue that these developments propelled political culture and helped define Carolingian ecological sovereignty.

In fact, the first “official” Carolingian commentary focused on Genesis and emphasized the adventures of the first man and the supervision of the land and creatures of Eden. That Adam should have been a model for Charlemagne's sovereignty is not at all obvious, since only tenuous references—namely, as we shall see, in Alcuin's Genesis “captions”—link the Frankish ruler with Adam by name. Nevertheless, Adam's successes and failures in the supervision of the first garden taught Charlemagne another articulation of authority and new understandings of sovereignty for his nascent empire. Alcuin recognized Charlemagne as a kind of Adam, and this identification was meant not only to legitimate the ruler's claims of sovereignty over natural spaces but also to situate him in Christian history. As a type of Adam who was supposed to dominate, supervise, and redeem the land and its inhabitants, Charlemagne would both achieve salvation for his people

7 Contreni, “Carolingian Biblical Culture,” 3; Fox, “Alcuin the Exegete.” Gregory the Great and Isidore of Seville were prolific authors of the sixth and seventh centuries, but produced comparably fewer exegetical commentaries on books of the Bible than Bede.

and accelerate Christ's (the last Adam's) return. This helps explain the late eighth-century Frankish royal court's focus on the reform of scripture and biblical exegesis of Genesis: the recovery of both furthered the aims of *correctio* and legitimated Charlemagne's imperial aspirations.

The *Admonitio generalis*

Alcuin's influence on the legislation of Charlemagne's early efforts to reform Carolingian religion, education, and practices stands out through the style, tone, and content of this text. The *Admonitio generalis* is a hyper-analyzed text which "suffers from over-familiarity," so much so that modern readers take for granted "Charles's view of his princely functions" as fact and miss the document's novelty.⁸ The *Admonitio generalis* is not the fullest expression of the Carolingian reform program, but rather heralds its enthusiastic launch.⁹ Often treated as the beginning of Carolingian reform, its language stresses guidance and admonition rather than coercion. The text repeatedly frames its program as instruction meant to educate and guide church leaders so that they can improve the condition of the church.¹⁰ In fact, the emergence of cultural, intellectual, and spiritual *renovatio* (renewal), built on complementary concepts of *emendatio* (improvement), *admonitio* (admonition), and *correctio* (correction), sprang from roots anchored to both late Roman imperial practice and the (either fruitless or undocumented) efforts of their Merovingian predecessors.

It was, however, in the *Admonitio generalis* that the "synthesis of ideology and administrative action" was first accomplished by the Carolingian ruler, who prioritized this project and had better luck than those who had come before him.¹¹ In particular, the aim and scope of the final twenty-three sections following the fifty-nine canons borrowed from the *Dionysio-Hadriana*, the collection of canon law sent to the Franks from Rome at Charlemagne's request, reveal Alcuin's hand in shaping policy.¹² More broadly, the document reveals a court still determining how its authority should operate. It acknowledges problems, asks bishops and abbots to assume

8 Bullough, *Carolingian Renewal*, 141–42.

9 McKitterick, *The Frankish Church and the Carolingian Reforms*, 1.

10 Kramer, "The Problem(s) with the Carolingian Reform(s)," 27.

11 Bullough, *Carolingian Renewal*, 141; Brown, "The Carolingian Renaissance," 6.

12 Contreni, "The Pursuit of Knowledge in Carolingian Europe," 107; Bullough, *Carolingian Renewal*, 142.

responsibility for teaching and correction, and portrays the royal court as assisting these efforts. In this sense the text emphasizes vigilance and moral responsibility rather than the imposition of fixed solutions.¹³ The *Admonitio generalis* was a bold document, importing a swath of Roman ecclesiastical practices and adapting them to Frankish requirements. The preface merits special attention for its general mandate, applicable to all who dwelt in the Frankish kingdom, and for its totalizing scope, binding ruler, clergy, and lay people together in what Bullough refers to as the “synthesis of ideology and administrative action.”¹⁴ As McKitterick observes, the *Admonitio* stemmed from a long coevolution of Christianity alongside the “institutional and political framework of the Frankish realm,” in which prior Carolingian “mayors and kings” had organized lay-ecclesiastical assemblies for policymaking and enactment.¹⁵ However, the legislative muscle flexed in the *Admonitio* seems to have been a novel method both for confronting heterodox strands in and launching the wholesale transformation of Frankish society.

In the first half of the eighth century, before the issuance of the *Admonitio*, Archbishop Boniface of Mainz’s accusations of heresy against a bishop named Adalbert demonstrate earlier practices quite unlike the *Admonitio*’s model. Adalbert had allegedly deceived the everyday folk that he encountered with cheap tricks based on suspect relics that an angel from the other end of the world had supposedly given to him.¹⁶ Boniface and the Frankish episcopate interpreted these bizarre acts and the popular enthusiasm for them as a threat against established churches and the well-being of the Frankish people. Resorting in the end to an ecclesiastical synod involving the pope, Boniface and other bishops stripped Adalbert of all authority and condemned him to monastic penance for the rest of his life. Before the *Admonitio generalis* this was how the Frankish church combatted heresy, though the anxieties stoked by Adalbert would resurface in the 780s.¹⁷

More than the spectre of false teachings, by 789 the Carolingian reformers confronted what they claimed was a dearth of patristic knowledge and a corrupted biblical text. In the new vision addressing the court’s concern to “all the orders of ecclesiastical piety and authorities of secular power,” the *Admonitio generalis* placed both groups under the authority of Charlemagne,

13 Kramer, “The Problem(s) with the Carolingian Reform(s),” 30.

14 Bullough, *Carolingian Renewal*, 141.

15 McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 240.

16 Innes, “Immune from Heresy,” 111.

17 Firey, *A Contrite Heart*, 111–14.

the “king *and* leader (*rector*) of the kingdom of the Franks...devout defender and humble helper of the holy church.”¹⁸ This depiction of Charlemagne relied on a “correct” understanding of Isidore of Seville’s definition of *rex* as one who rules rightly (*recte*), and thus corrects rightly: Charlemagne intended to “order” his kingdom.¹⁹ The recipients of this care, most especially the “shepherds of Christ’s churches and leaders of his flock,” were to:

strive to lead the people of God to the pastures of eternal life, and make every effort to carry back the wandering sheep on the shoulders of good example and exhortation within the walls of ecclesiastical stability, lest the lurking wolf find anyone who transgresses canonical sanctions or exceeds the traditions of the fathers and the universal councils (which God forbid) should devour them.²⁰

The stakes were high. In the eyes of Charlemagne and his close advisors, the price of bad teaching and misunderstanding of patristic authorities could not be clearer.

The prescribed solution to these problems was correction, which called for teachers to “keep themselves within the bounds of the (church) fathers’ decrees,” and “the examples of the saints are always to be followed.”²¹ Charlemagne provided for these exhortations to be enacted by his representatives and clerics working together: “We have sent our envoys to you, who—by the authority of our name—might, together with you, correct those things that need to be corrected.”²² The most obvious solutions for “faulty” doctrines were the correction of the Vulgate, the recovery and transmission of authoritative biblical commentaries, and the production of new ones.

18 “Ego Karolus...rex et rector regni Francorum et devotus sanctae aeclesiae defensor humilisque adiutor, omnibus ecclesiasticae pietatis ordinibus sue saucularis potentiae dignitatibus.” Charlemagne, *AG*, ed. Boretius, 53. Emphasis mine.

19 Depreux, “Ambitions et limites des réformes culturelles à l’époque carolingienne,” 733–34, 737.

20 “o pastores ecclesiarum Christi et ductores gregis eius...populum Dei ad pascua vitae aeternae ducere studeatis, et errantes oves bonorum exemplorum seu adhortationum humeris intra ecclesiasticae firmitatis muros reportare satagimini, ne lupus insidians aliquem canonicas sanctiones transredientem vel paternas traditiones universalium conciliorum excedentem, quod absit, inveniens devoret.” Charlemagne, *AG*, ed. Boretius, 53.

21 “intra paternas sanctiones se contineant.” And also “sanctorum semper exempla sequenda.” Charlemagne, *AG*, ed. Boretius, 53–54.

22 “nostros ad vos direximus missos, qui ex nostri nominis auctoritate una vobiscum corrigerent quae corrigenda essent.” Charlemagne, *AG*, ed. Boretius, 53.

Alcuin would be involved on these fronts, producing for Charlemagne a corrected version of the Vulgate in 801, after many years of labour.²³

Among the twenty-three sections added to the Roman canons in the *Admonitio generalis* were three pertaining to correct knowledge and understanding of both the Bible and the Church Fathers. Each of these new sections assumed the primacy of the Bible not as a theological text alone, but as an authoritative document for the actual mapping out of Frankish political and religious society and the structuring of intellectual life.²⁴ Section seventy-two of the document addressed clergy:

And let schools be established for boys learning to read. Correct well the Psalms, the notes, the chants, the *computus*, and the grammar throughout the several monasteries and bishoprics, and the Catholic books too—because often, while some desire to pray to God properly, they pray poorly due to uncorrected books.²⁵

This statement linked people's ability to communicate with God to the accuracy of available scriptural texts: their prayers might not work if they did not know how to pray, on account of their faulty Bibles. Furthermore, this section warned clergy to "not let your boys corrupt them, whether in reading or copying; and if it is necessary to copy the Gospel, the Psalter, or the Missal, let men of mature age do the writing."²⁶ These were not tasks that could be undertaken lightly or without adequate preparation.

23 Efforts to correct Jerome's Vulgate underwent several phases during Charlemagne's lifetime. The Frankish king encouraged Maudramne the abbot of Corbie from 772–781, as well as Theodulf of Orléans. But it was Alcuin, while he was abbot at Saint-Martin of Tours, who undertook the wholesale revision of the Bible. Labouring diligently with the support of those around him at Tours from 797 to 801, Alcuin worked to complete this request of his king. On Christmas Day 801, Alcuin presented to Charlemagne the completed version for the anniversary of his imperial coronation. Over the course of the ninth century this "Alcuinian" version would supplant older versions. Riché, "Instruments de travail et méthodes de l'exégète à l'époque carolingienne," 151.

24 Contreni, "Carolingian Biblical Culture," 3.

25 "Et ut scolae legentium puerorum fiant. Psalmos, notas, cantus, computum, grammaticam per singula monasteria vel episcopia et libros catholicos bene emendate; quia saepe, dum bene aliqui Deum rogare cupiunt, sed per inemendatos libros male rogant." Charlemagne, *AG*, ed. Boretius, 60.

26 "Et pueros vestros non sinite eos vel legendo vel scribendo corrumpere; et si opus est euangelium, psalterium et missale scribere, perfectae aetatis homines scribant." Charlemagne, *AG*, ed. Boretius, 60.

The *Admonitio generalis* took great pains not only to promote the correction and production of authorized biblical texts and commentaries, but also to condemn heterodox writings. Section seventy-eight of the document spelled out clearly this expectation, singling out “*pseudografia* and dubious stories, or those that are entirely contrary to the catholic faith,” as its prime target.²⁷ Here the *Admonitio* hearkened back to the earlier struggle against Adalbert, who purportedly erected and burned little crosses, and also offered his own nail trimmings and hair clippings to followers at mass gatherings, claiming their association with the relics of St. Peter.²⁸ Adalbert also allegedly received penitents seeking confession and absolution with the rather Christ-like claim that his gaze had already laid bare their hidden secrets; they had no need to confess because he already interceded on their behalf before God.²⁹ This decades-old episode seemingly continued to resonate among the people and unnerved the Frankish ecclesiastical establishment:

...and the most wicked and utterly false letter, which in the year past some (erring themselves and driving others into error) were saying had fallen from heaven: let these neither be believed nor read, but rather be burned, lest the people be led into error by such writings.³⁰

Here James Palmer detects “the shadow” of Adalbert, suggesting that Frankish popular religion was “inherently apocalyptic.” If that were the case, the legislation of Carolingian *correctio* confronted “incorrect” apocalypticism, redirecting these energies through approved media “to lend urgency to its fight.”³¹ Carolingian ecological sovereignty would stretch this further still, channelling such apocalyptic fervour into the persona of Charlemagne as the “penultimate Adam.”

The only antidote to wrong texts was right texts: “only the canonical books, Catholic treatises, and the sayings of the holy authors are to be read

27 “Item et pseudografia et dubiae narrationes, vel quae omnino contra fidem catholicam sunt.” Charlemagne, *AG*, ed. Boretius, 60.

28 Firey, *A Contrite Heart*, 111–14.

29 Innes, “Immune from Heresy,” 112.

30 “et epistola pessima et falsissima, quam transacto anno dicebant aliqui errantes et in errorem alios mittentes quod de cel cecidisset, nec credantur nec legantur sed conburentur, ne in errorem per talia scripta populus mittatur.” Charlemagne, *AG*, ed. Boretius, 60.

31 Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages*, 149–50.

and taught.”³² This prescription was buttressed in a subsequent section by an injunction against those who “invent and preach to the people new or non-canonical ideas based on their own opinion and not according to the Holy Scriptures.”³³ Rather than making use of divergent viewpoints for political ends, the *Admonitio* clearly marked these aberrant texts and testimonies as harmful and destructive, in very real and tangible ways, to Frankish spiritual wellbeing. And as the Council of Frankfurt in 794 demonstrated, the best way to test doctrine and text was to examine them in light of the Church Fathers. Thus, the greatest threat came not from external opponents but from those within the group who introduced new modes of interpretation. Such figures were dangerous precisely because, as Irene Van Renswoude puts it, they “employ the exact same language and retain the same values as the other members of the community,” yet also “challenge the shared interpretation of the community and introduce difference into what is so far an unquestioned, undifferentiated practice of determining truth.”³⁴ These conflicts did not revolve around new knowledge but new interpretations of a shared body of foundational texts. In response, early medieval communities developed mechanisms not simply to refute error but to manage it socially. The anxiety provoked by such debates was epistemological and social at once: how to preserve unity of interpretation without fragmenting the community. Frankish clerics and their king deployed communal mechanisms for distinguishing truth from falsehood and for managing internal divergence.³⁵

The Synod of Frankfurt of 794

In 794 Charlemagne and his spiritual advisers were busy confronting the Adoptionism controversy at home and the distant spectre of what they perceived to be Byzantine iconoclasm abroad. In that year Charlemagne summoned bishops and magnates from every corner of the realm to an assembly and synod, intended as a “universal” church council, the “largest and most auspicious” such gathering of the Frankish king’s reign to that point.³⁶

32 “Sed soli canonici libri et catholici tractatus et sanctorum auctorum dicta legantur et tradantur.” Charlemagne, *AG*, ed. Boretius, 61.

33 “et non sinatis nova vel non canonica aliquos ex suo senso et non secundum scripturas sacras fingere et praedicare populo.” Charlemagne, *AG*, ed. Boretius, 61.

34 van Renswoude, “Error Assessment,” 179.

35 van Renswoude, “Error Assessment,” 205.

36 Ganz, “Theology and the Organisation of Thought,” 763; Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, 160.

The principal focus and eventual outcome of the synod, as the *Annales regni francorum* (Royal Frankish Annals) related, was the condemnation of Adoptionism, with Alcuin himself likely having penned one of the letters from Charlemagne to the Spanish bishops.³⁷

Adherents of Adoptionist teachings believed Christ emptied himself of divinity in order to take in all aspects of humanity except for sin. Once filled with human nature, God adopted Christ back into the Trinity. Carolingian theologians generally held the opposite view, which maintained that Christ assumed a human nature through sinless union with humanity; God did not lower himself, but rather lifted humanity up out of sin.³⁸ What might seem like an arcane dispute over fine points of theology was a major political-theological crisis. Even more than most other controversies Adoptionism heightened ecclesiastical anxiety. It had popular appeal, stoked fears about the long-dormant heresies of Arianism and Nestorianism and threatened the authority of Frankish bishops to pronounce doctrine and instruct their king.³⁹

Alcuin's presence and influence in this gathering stand out clearly in the last chapter of the capitulary. It published the results of the synod, which saw fit "to receive Alcuin into its fellowship and its prayers, on the grounds that he was a man learned in ecclesiastical teachings."⁴⁰ Courtier-theologian Alcuin's presence and status as a holy man of exceptional erudition lent credence and import to the theological and political proceedings of the synod. Alcuin had been educated in English cathedral and monastic schools before having been "transplanted" to the Frankish kingdom where he applied that acquired knowledge and experience to the considerable goals of Carolingian social and cultural reform.⁴¹ This transaction could not have been one-way; but even as Charlemagne doubtless sought to impose his will, his relationship to Alcuin and other influential spiritual advisors surely stirred his thinking.

Regarding the promotion of good biblical writing and commentaries to combat bad understandings, rooted in the traditions of patristic authorities,

37 *Annales regni Francorum*, ed. Kurze, 96. For the Alcuin connection: Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, 177.

38 Chazelle, *The Crucified God in the Carolingian Era*, 53–55.

39 Chandler, "Heresy and Empire," 508.

40 "Aliquinum ipsa sancta synodus in suo consortio sive in orationibus recipere dignaretur, eo quod esset vir in ecclesiasticis doctrinis eruditus." *Synodus Franconfurtensis*, ed. Boretius, 78.

41 Contreni, "The Pursuit of Knowledge in Carolingian Europe," 106.

the synod had a great deal to say. It is worth considering these words in their full context:

Understand, brothers, what you read, and do not invent new and unknown names, but hold fast to those found in Holy Scripture. For the names found there concerning Christ God have honourable meanings, fitting for our salvation. Do not be tossed about by human inventions but fortify (*roborate*) yourselves in the solidity of the Holy Scriptures. Read them, teach them—for in them is eternal life. You have pressed the point again and again, and repeated over and over, that the testimonies you assert agree with the holy Fathers. But, as we have demonstrated, you understand their words far otherwise than how they themselves understood them, those who inserted these very testimonies into their books. And we have found, as we said before, that you have most certainly infected their most holy writings with the poison of heretical depravity and inserted words which we read nowhere in their books—unless perhaps your teachers held such a view, whose names, we suppose, would have remained unknown to the holy and universal Church of God until now, had this schism of error not been made known to the world through you.⁴²

There are several overlapping and contingent obligations threading through this canon. First, Frankish clergy were enjoined to read, but at the same time warned against looking for or making up answers that have not been found either in the Bible or tested by established authorities, namely the Church Fathers.

The imagery evoked by the word choice (*roborate*) of the scribe calls to mind the firm, steadfast rootedness of the oak (*robor*), planted in the sure and nurturing soil of holy scripture, standing strong against the shifting waves of uncertainty. The stakes could not have been higher, for in the refuge of that deeply rooted tree, into which the Church Fathers had grafted

42 “Intelligite, fratres, quae legitis et nolite nova et incognita nomina fingere, sed quae in sancta scriptura inveniuntur tenete. Illa enim, quae ibi inveniuntur de Christo Deo, honestas habent significationes et nostrae saluti convenientes. Et nolite per humanas inventiones fluctuare, sed in soliditate sanctorum scripturarum vosmetipsos roborate. Illas legite, illas docete, quia in illis est vita aeterna. Inculcastis iterum iterumque replicastis vos consona sanctis patribus ponere testimonia. Sed, ut probavimus, longe aliter vos illorum intellegitis dicta, quam illi ipsi intellexerunt, qui haec ipsa testimonia libris inserebant; et invenimus, sicut et ante praefati sumus, certissime vos illorum sanctissima scribta hereticae pravitatis veneno infecisse et interservisse verba, quae nusquam in illorum legimus libris, nisi forte vestri magistri ita sensissent, quorum nomina sanctae et universali Dei ecclesiae ignota putamus hucusque remansisse, si huius erroris scisma per vos mundo ea non innotuisset.” *Concilium Francofurtense*, ed. Werminghoff, MHG Conc.2.1156, lines 8–19.

sensible truths, could be found eternal life. The exhortation to read and teach, driving the point home repeatedly, was the only sure way to apprehend the meaning of what the Fathers said when they joined their wisdom, via commentaries, into the trunk of biblical knowledge. Like pure water, their words could act as a solvent to dilute the poison of false teachings. Therefore, the only surefire way to make certain that one's theological understanding and instruction was "correct" was to test it against those words and doctrines that planted the Frankish church in the orchard of its new mission. However, the desire for good knowledge was not in itself enough to qualify a reader to fully comprehend the complex layers of literal, metaphorical, and allegorical instruction in either patristic writings or the Bible itself.

***Epistola de litteris colendis*—Letter on the Cultivation of Learning**

The *Admonitio generalis* set the dynamo of Carolingian reform into motion, a process observable in the canons of the Synod of Frankfurt in 794. I examine here the *Epistola de litteris colendis* as it laid out more of the rationale and thinking undergirding these efforts and should be read considering the former documents. *De litteris colendis* urged religious leaders

not only not to neglect the study of letters, but indeed to pursue it eagerly with a most humble intention pleasing to God, so that you may more easily and more rightly penetrate the mysteries of the divine Scriptures.⁴³

These texts are often linked in discussions of the renewal of Latin literature and the prioritization of biblical knowledge, and they share an author, of influence if not of the words themselves, in Alcuin.⁴⁴ When read alongside the earlier documents, the letter reveals the central role of biblical exegesis

43 "Quamobrem hortamur vos litterarum studia non solum non neglegere, verum etiam humillima et Deo placita intentione ad hoc certatim discere, ut facilius et rectius divinarum scripturarum mysteria valeatis penetrare." *Karoli Epistola de litteris colendis*, ed. Boretius, 78–79 (hereafter, *EDLC*).

44 Riché, "Instruments de travail," 148–50. Luitpold Wallach detected the authentic voice of Alcuin by comparing the phrasing and word selection to the more than 250 letters of his correspondence that survive. Furthermore, in addition to these characteristically Alcuinian words and turns of phrases, the letter "contains elements of Alcuin's style, and educational ideas which, like those of Alcuin, belong to the tradition of Anglo-Saxon humanism," further cementing Alcuin's influence in generating the letter. Wallach himself admitted, however, that the version of the letter sent out from the court would have necessarily been penned by the hand of a scribe of the royal *capella*, which was responsible for producing authentic documents of the king. Wallach, "Charlemagne's *De litteris colendis* and Alcuin," 292–94.

in Carolingian *renovatio*. *De litteris colendis* not only further elucidated the nascent Carolingian educational policies, but it demonstrates Alcuin's ongoing influence in these matters. Charlemagne ostensibly sent this letter to Baugulf, abbot of Fulda from 779–802, out of frustration with the bad Latin in letters received from clerics across the realm.⁴⁵ Many scholars have accepted the letter as a normative text, presenting a general mandate addressed to all the religious houses of the Frankish kingdom to improve their Latinity, literacy, and education, in order to be better able to understand and teach others the lessons of the Fathers and the Bible.⁴⁶

These themes are all present in the text, and the letter clarifies and enhances several sentiments of the *Admonitio generalis* pertaining to the improvement of scriptural knowledge and general education. Relating *De litteris colendis* to the *Admonitio* rests on diplomatic analysis of the letter as a mandate.⁴⁷ Using the legal formulaic structure of the language and argument, put together in the style of the king's royal voice, and the relationship established previously between Charlemagne and Fulda in an immunity charter of 774, the letter seems authoritative. Although it did not possess the same legal heft as a capitulary, Luitpold Wallach believed it was "an expression of the king's will concerning educational matters which cannot be enforced by law."⁴⁸ However, the purpose and context of this document are not entirely clear, as a more recent detailed study of the text by Thomas Martin has shown. By setting the internal contents of the letter against what is known regarding other common types of texts used in the Carolingian world, Martin argues against the *De litteris colendis* as mandate, legislation, or circular letter. Martin sees the *De litteris colendis* as a truly personal letter from the king to Baugulf but admits that the instructions to pass on copies to his other supporters and bishops suggest that Charlemagne was thinking

45 Contreni, "Learning for God," 101.

46 See, e.g.: Diem, "The Emergence of Monastic Schools, 34–37; McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 240; Contreni, "The Pursuit of Knowledge," 107; Contreni, "Learning for God," 101.

47 Wallach stated: "It is quite clear that Charlemagne's letter cannot be simultaneously a *circular letter* addressed to schools, a *double circular letter* addressed to archbishops and bishops, a *triple circular letter* sent to monasteries, a *personal letter* addressed to Baugulf subsequently used as a circular letter, and a *capitulary* sent to abbots." Luitpold Wallach, "Charlemagne's *De litteris colendis*," 288. Emphasis in the original.

48 Wallach, "Charlemagne's *De litteris colendis*, 288–89, 294.

about the further spread of the document.⁴⁹ Even the dating of the *De litteris colendis* is not without controversy, something relevant for thinking about the document's relationship to the other pillars of Carolingian *renovatio* discussed above, the *Admonitio generalis*, and the Council of Frankfurt.⁵⁰ Thomas Martin dates the letter as having been produced between March of 789 and summer of 790, which interestingly puts it between the *Admonitio* and the Council of Frankfurt.⁵¹ This earlier dating is noteworthy for thinking about the call for scriptural knowledge and commentaries, more fulsomely articulated later in the Council of Frankfurt, hinted at in the earlier *Admonitio*, and made a bit clearer here.

In my view, early medieval letters were by nature of their composition and their reception more or less "public" documents, and I suspect it highly improbable for the court to issue a document in the king's name as "the bishoprics and monasteries have been entrusted to us for governance, with Christ's favor" and including its not-so-subtle warning to Baugulf to forward the letter if he wished to stay in the royal good graces, without Charlemagne having had the larger context of the kingdom in his mind.⁵² That said, it is possible to read *De litteris colendis* as a personal articulation of Charlemagne's desire to promote learning and biblical literacy that later became formulaic or generalized in the *Admonitio generalis*. Such a reading does not diminish the vital significance of recovering and producing better and more

49 Martin suggests that content alone does not justify assigning the letter legal authority, and as a capitulary it lacked any enforcement or obligation on the part of the recipient. Martin, "Bemerkungen zur 'Epistola de litteris colendis,'" 31:244–46, 254.

50 Relying on internal markers, Luitpold Wallach argued that Charlemagne sent the letter to Abbot Baugulf of Fulda between the years of 794–796, although some have suggested a date as early as 784, which would significantly prefigure the dissemination of the *Admonitio generalis*. Wallach, "Charlemagne's *De litteris colendis*," 292–94; on the earlier dating see: McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 240n114; also Fleckenstein, *Die Bildungsreform Karls des Großen als Verwirklichung der "norma rectitudinis"*. The early date seems less credible, given the fuller fleshing out of ideas only generally suggested in these earlier texts. Diem, "The Emergence of Monastic Schools," 34.

51 Martin also relies on internal markers, such as the fact that from 786–790 Angilram was the bishop of Metz, and received the letter; or Charlemagne's imperial coronation (the text refers only to *rex* and not *imperator*, and the post-800 documents usually named Charlemagne with both titles). Martin, "Bemerkungen zur 'Epistola de litteris colendis,'" 31:259–60, 266–70.

52 "ut episcopia et monasteria nobis Christo propitio ad gubernandum commissa." *EDLC*, ed. Boretius, 79.

accurate commentaries on the books of the Bible in the spirit of *correctio*, and a close reading of the text of *De litteris colendis* further reveals its ideals to match those of the other sources.

After establishing his authority, duty, and royal rights, Charlemagne's letter explained that, with the counsel of his advisors (presumably including Alcuin here), he finds that those religious under his rule should:

In the study of letters they ought to expend the effort of teaching upon those who, by the Lord's gift, are able to learn, according to each one's capacity—so that, just as the standard of the Rule orders moral conduct, so also persistence in teaching and learning may order and adorn the sequence of words.⁵³

This command prioritized Latin study, because it would make clerics and monks better writers, a prerequisite for producing the kinds of texts that the court desired. The opposite was proven in the letters that the court had received from monks, who were supposed to be praying for the salvation of king and realm, but whose writings showed their uncouthness. If that accusation was not bad enough, next came the most dire warning: "We began to fear that perhaps, just as there was less skill in writing, so too there might be much less wisdom in understanding the Holy Scriptures than there ought to have been."⁵⁴ As with the anxieties expressed in the Council of Frankfurt, the authors of this letter were gripped by fear of the consequences of the situation. For what could be more perilous: "although errors of words are dangerous, errors of sense are much more dangerous."⁵⁵

De litteris colendis goes a bit further in its recommended reading. Here, it is not the Fathers alone but also those acceptable pagan classical authors who could teach these monks how to think and write so that they could perform their tasks correctly.⁵⁶ What one reads, sees, and hears shapes the way that the mind perceives and processes information that has been encoded into a specific format, in this case Jerome's Vulgate, which bore the imprint of classical Latinity:

53 "in litterarum meditationibus eis qui donante Domino discere possunt secundum uniuscuiusque capacitatem docendi studium debeant impendere, qualiter sicut regularis norma honestatem morum, ita quoque docendi et discendi instantia ordinet et ornet seriem verborum." *EDLC*, ed. Boretius, p. 79, 11–14.

54 "timere inciperemus, ne forte, sicut minor erat in scribendo prudentia, ita quoque et multo minor esset quam recte esse debuisset in sanctorum scripturarum ad intelligendum sapientia." *EDLC*, ed. Boretius, p. 79, lines 26–29.

55 "quamvis periculosi sint errores verborum, multo periculosiores sunt errores sensuum." *EDLC*, ed. Boretius, p. 79, line 30.

56 Contreni, "The Pursuit of Knowledge in Carolingian Europe," 110.

Now since in the sacred writings there are figures of speech, tropes, and other such devices inserted, there is no doubt that each person understands them spiritually all the more quickly, the more fully he has first been instructed in the discipline of letters.⁵⁷

The message of *De litteris colendis* was unambiguous. Those who were under the obligation or who desired to instruct others in spiritual things had to master Latin literature, an expectation setting this document alongside the *Admonitio* and the Council of Frankfurt in jumpstarting the Carolingian *renovatio* according to the demands of *correctio*.

That is the context within which Charlemagne confronted the dearth of commentaries from the years 500–750.⁵⁸ Commenting on the bible was political, because the exercise of exegesis allowed Carolingian clerics and theologians to interpret political facts and events “in light of the History of Salvation,” and even to use biblical examples to criticize their rulers.⁵⁹ Indeed, as Caroline Chevalier-Royet notes, “Carolingian scholars did not conceive of temporal rupture” regarding the biblical past, meaning that for them contemporary history was the working out of a divine plan initiated at creation, and proper studying was meant to help work toward that end.⁶⁰ As the eighth century waned, and the ninth century dawned, there was an explosion of interest in and composition of biblical commentaries, stimulated by the Carolingian reforms and heralded by the *Admonitio generalis*, the Council of Frankfurt of 794, and the *De litteris colendis*. Crucially, this scriptural exegesis—as both didactic example and practical lessons—helped shape Carolingian “public discourse” on questions like spiritual renewal, divine providence, and political purpose as much as did liturgy, morally instructive advice manuals, and the more programmatical texts mentioned here.⁶¹

57 “Cum autem in sacris paginis schemata, tropi et caetera his similia inserta inveniuntur, nulli dubium est, quod ea unusquisque legens tanto citius spiritualiter intelligit, quanto prius in litterarum magisterio plenius instructus fuerit.” *EDLC*, ed. Boretius, p. 79, lines 33–35.

58 Contreni, “Carolingian Biblical Culture,” 3.

59 Depreux, “Ambitions et limites des réformes culturelles à l’époque carolingienne,” 742.

60 Chevalier-Royet, “Saül et David, premiers rois oints,” 63–64.

61 Evans, *God and History in the Early Medieval*, 23–37.

Wigbod and Genesis at Charlemagne's Court

At the beginning of this wave, Charlemagne commissioned the first biblical commentary of his court, on Genesis by the courtier-theologian Wigbod.⁶² Genesis offered the Frankish ruler and other Carolingian elites models of authority and thought experiments in sovereignty that sought to relate people to plants, animals, and wider ecosystems. It also came first in the Bible. Yet if Genesis provided models of dominion, it also furnished the idiom that made such dominion intelligible, for Carolingian exegetes read in the creation narrative the promise of *renovatio* and the restoration of the divine image in man.

Carolingian authors understood becoming Christian not as a single moment but as an ongoing process of interior transformation; their exegesis presupposed the same structure: an initial conversion and an enduring work of reform directed toward spiritual perfection. The sacrificial act of Christ restores corrupted creation, yet at the same time inaugurates a new act of creation. Thus, *renovatio* does not return humanity to a primordial state; it moves humanity forward toward a better, eschatological condition.⁶³ As Kristina Mitalaitė demonstrates, Carolingian commentators reinforced this eschatological orientation. They framed *reformatio* as daily renewal, situating moral transformation within a trajectory toward resurrection. In this vision, everyday reform participates in a divine plan whose fulfilment lies outside time and beyond history. Carolingian reflection on Genesis and Pauline renewal did not primarily concern administrative reform. It articulated a framework in which the restoration of the divine image structured human nature, temporality, and destiny. Reform was first interior, then eschatological, but it prompted institutional goals like better and more accurate biblical texts and commentaries on them.⁶⁴ When Carolingian thinkers and writers like Wigbod then deliberately engaged with inherited classical and patristic traditions, they reinterpreted them through the prism of Christian theology.⁶⁵ This intellectual approach allowed Charlemagne's advisors and scholars to frame his ecological governance as fulfilling ancient Christian promises to restore harmony and order to nature. In other words,

⁶² Fox, "Alcuin the Exegete," 39–40.

⁶³ Mitalaitė, "Reformatio and correctio in Carolingian Theology and Orthodoxy," 208–12.

⁶⁴ Mitalaitė, "Reformatio and correctio in Carolingian Theology and Orthodoxy," 213.

⁶⁵ Dorofeeva, *Reading Nature in the Early Middle Ages*, 14–15.

the cultural choices made by Carolingian thinkers regarding which texts to preserve and how to present them directly influenced their conceptions of political and ecological sovereignty.

Real deficiencies in knowledge fettered the first Carolingian biblical scholars, who were “unprepared to confront the patristic direction directly,” and instead knew mostly excerpts or abridged snippets from Augustine and Jerome.⁶⁶ While Carolingian scholars indeed turned to Church Fathers like Augustine as foundational authorities, they rarely encountered such writings directly, instead accessing them through excerpts, sermons, and often through intermediaries like Caesarius of Arles, Gregory the Great, or Bede. This indirect reception meant that Augustine’s presence was frequently symbolic, representing broader orthodoxy and consensus among patristic authors rather than sustained engagement with his complete texts. Consequently, Augustine served as both an authoritative resource and a rhetorical tool, invoked by Carolingian intellectuals not just to recover lost knowledge, but to promote social and ecclesiastical unity in alignment with Charlemagne’s broader goals of *renovatio* and *correctio*.⁶⁷

So when Charlemagne called for his spiritual advisors to prepare new commentaries, their first task was to connect the brain trust of his court to the body of texts from the patristic era. They were aided in this recovery by the Hiberno-Latin exegetical boom of the eighth century, whose example was carried across the English Channel by Alcuin, a Northumbrian trained in the study of Bedan works by Archbishop Egbert of York, who in 734 had corresponded with Bede himself.⁶⁸ Although Alcuin was summoned to the Frankish court by Charlemagne, he was in effect an intellectual insurgent, “transplanted to the kingdoms of the Franks,” where he applied the considerable training in reading, teaching, and administration that he had acquired at York to the reforms initiated by the Frankish king. One consequence of “harness[ing] the quiet pursuit of religious life and wisdom to broad social reform” was that it “forced Carolingian leaders to think about schooling and how it might be used to achieve their goals.”⁶⁹ This development would eventually lead to deploying prominent court intellectuals to monasteries,⁷⁰ effectively exporting the religious and administrative goals of the rulers

66 Contreni, “The Patristic Legacy to c. 1000,” 87, 88–89.

67 Timmermann, “An Authority among Authorities,” 534–36, 540–46.

68 Higham, *(Re-)Reading Bede*, 21–22.

69 Contreni, “The Pursuit of Knowledge in Carolingian Europe,” 106.

70 Diem, “The Emergence of Monastic Schools,” 30.

to monastic schools, which would (at Luxeuil and Auxerre) produce some of the most innovative Carolingian commentaries on Genesis. Monasteries became centres of book production and training, linked to the “cause of Carolingian *renovatio* and *correctio*.”⁷¹ But like the Bible itself these efforts had their own genesis.

In the last quarter of the eighth century Charlemagne commissioned the first official biblical commentary of his reign, *Quaestiones in Octateuchum*, an encyclopedic work that gathered in one text the most important and authoritative words of the Church Fathers on the first eight books of the Old Testament. The request was no small task, for as noted above much exegetical knowledge and scholarship had been lost or forgotten in the decades between the death of Isidore of Seville in 636 and the ascent to power of the Carolingians in the mid-eighth century. Early medieval biblical commentaries circulated primarily in epitomes, *florilegia*, and handbooks.⁷² This fact was not lost on Charlemagne, who placed the production of new commentaries and recovery of ancient learning among the highest priorities of his court. It is fitting that, when seeking to recover Christian textual knowledge, the theologians and scholars closest to the king looked first to the beginning.

How God ordained the creation of the universe and set Adam, before the Fall, to govern its inhabitants, edified a Frankish king engaged in an effort to centralize power and legitimate an expansive authority. Carolingian exegesis grappled with subjects of consequence to the Frankish ruler’s authority: salvation and renewal.⁷³ The new perspective on Genesis was characterized by a firm reliance on the authority of patristic authors, with little (if any) alteration to their words, so that the information necessary to instruct a reader in the correct ways to read the biblical text could be gathered in one place. To complete this task, Charlemagne appointed the courtier-theologian, Wigbod (fl. 780–800), about whom little is known compared to contemporaries such as Alcuin or Theodulf of Orléans (ca. 750/760–821), but whose influence reverberates throughout Carolingian exegesis.⁷⁴ Wigbod assembled his

⁷¹ de Jong, “From Scholastici to Scioli,” 46.

⁷² Gorman, “The Encyclopedic Commentary on Genesis Prepared for Charlemagne by Wigbod,” 8.

⁷³ Evans, *God and History in the Early Medieval West*, 36–37.

⁷⁴ Leonardi refers to Wigbod’s “new method,” which involved comprehensive commentary on each and every verse of a book, using direct quotations from Church Fathers. Alcuin, Claudius of Turin, and Hrabanus Maurus followed this model in their commentaries. Leonardi, “Aspects of Old Testament Interpretation in the Church,” 189.

massive commentary on the first eight books of the Bible, of which *Quaestiones in Genesim* forms a part, from the works of several Church Fathers, primarily mediated through Augustinian and Isidorean texts.⁷⁵

Scholars have rightly focused on Wigbod's *Quaestiones* as an important milestone in Carolingian exegesis, but I argue that we should also be considering another of Wigbod's works known as *Explanatio sex dierum* (Commentary on the Six Days [of Creation]) in a similar light.⁷⁶ For if *Quaestiones in Octateuch* represents the "official" exegetical view of Charlemagne's court, how that commentary developed is worth knowing. Some have characterized the early Carolingian exegetes like Wigbod as mere compilers of patristic writings, and Bullough famously castigated Wigbod's *Quaestiones in Octateuch* as a "substantial piece of 'scissors-and-paste' exegesis," suggesting that there was little value in studying an assemblage of undigested texts and quotations.⁷⁷ But reading *Explanatio sex dierum* allows us to reconstruct how Wigbod compiled the Genesis portion of his massive commentary—it was a sort of "rough draft" of the longer work. And since nowadays medieval compiling and editing are often seen as original reconsiderations of their sources Wigbod's "derivative" texts merit careful analysis. Indeed, a close reading of Wigbod's *Explanatio sex dierum* opens a window onto his understanding of the issues in the Genesis text that will illuminate his purpose in assembling *Quaestiones in Octateuch* and its role in Charlemagne's court.

Michael Gorman calls *Explanatio sex dierum* a "commentary on" Augustine's literal commentary on Genesis.⁷⁸ Hence a close reading of *Explanatio sex dierum* can show the development of Wigbod's thinking regarding the selection and arrangement of Augustine's sources and materials. Unlike in *Quaestiones in Octateuch*, which is truly a catena of assembled sources

75 Gorman, "The Encyclopedic Commentary on Genesis Prepared for Charlemagne by Wigbod," 178–80.

76 *Explanatio sex dierum* appears in the *Patrologia Latina* (PL 93:207–34) attributed to Pseudo-Bede under the title of *De sex dierum creatione*, but is now identified with Wigbod's authorship, ca. 780–800. Henceforth I refer to this text as Wigbod, *Explanatio sex dierum*, ed. Migne (hereafter, *ESD*). See: Gorman, "The Epitome of Wigbod's Commentaries on Genesis and the Gospels," 7; Gorman, "The Encyclopedic Commentary on Genesis Prepared for Charlemagne by Wigbod," 178.

77 Bullough, *Carolingian Renewal*, 14.

78 Gorman, "The Epitome of Wigbod's Commentaries on Genesis and the Gospels," 8. A note on terminology: although this word originally derives from two Greek words (*hexa* and *hemer*, to make *hexaemeron*—meaning the six days), most of the early medieval Latin commentators seem to have used the latinized form *hexameron* unless referring to a specific title of a work. I follow their convention in this chapter.

listed by name and quoted verbatim, in the *Explanatio sex dierum* Wigbod attempted to synthesize disparate patristic ideas into a coherent argument. It proved plausible enough that certain phrases from this text appear verbatim in subsequent Carolingian commentaries, attesting to this text's circulation and influence.⁷⁹ Most of Wigbod's knowledge of Augustine's literal commentary comes from *florilegia* and a seventh-century Irish epitome called *Exhymeron*, which is no longer extant, so it is impossible to know exactly which parts of Augustine's work Wigbod had actually read.⁸⁰ This knowledge must be inferred from context, usage, and, occasionally, omission. In his *Explanatio*, Wigbod offered a sense of the nature of authority and sovereignty that is drawn from the Genesis narrative and the distinctions between pre- and postlapsarian bodies.

Wigbod's reframing of the creation narrative did not occur in a vacuum. Like other courtier-theologians associated with Charlemagne, Wigbod had to fit into the setting of the Frankish royal court. He was successful enough to emerge as a key figure in Charlemagne's exegetical program during the last twenty years of the eighth century. Though less well known than Alcuin and Theodulf of Orléans (both of whose literary output also happens to have survived better), for Wigbod to have been commissioned with the task of producing Charlemagne's first official biblical commentary means he stood out among the other influential intellectuals at the court.⁸¹ In sum, the court circles are a key context for understanding Wigbod's biblical commentaries.

Scholars have grappled with Wigbod's curriculum, and he has been confused with at least two other men of similar name. For example, in 1967 C. W. Jones opined that "Of Wigbod nothing is known."⁸² Ernst Dümmler, an editor of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, cast Wigbod as an old, fat warrior at

79 Many passages were lifted verbatim by both Claudius of Turin (fl. 810–827) and Hrabanus Maurus (ca. 780–856) in their Genesis commentaries. This is interesting, because Gorman argues that Claudius was the first Carolingian exegete to attempt a combination of the literal and the allegorical interpretations of Genesis, writing, "The aim of Claudius was original: to produce a complete commentary on the entire book of Genesis, discussing in turn nearly every statement and element in the narrative." Gorman, "The Commentary on Genesis of Claudius of Turin and Biblical Studies under Louis the Pious," 317. However, as we see in *Explanatio sex dierum*, Wigbod was already thinking along these lines.

80 Gorman, "The Encyclopedic Commentary on Genesis Prepared for Charlemagne by Wigbod," 178–80.

81 Munzi, "Compilazione e riuso in età carolingia," 202.

82 Bede, *Libri quatuor in Principium Genesis*, ed. Jones, iii.

Charlemagne's court whose glory days lay behind him—famously the butt of one of Theodulf's jokes—the same Widbod whom the Astronomer's *vita* of Louis the Pious records as having been appointed *comes* of Périgueux, in Aquitaine, by the king.⁸³ Wigbod was likely neither of these individuals. In his preface to the works of Avitus of Vienne, Rudolf Peiper, another *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* editor, suggested that Wigbod might have been the same person as Rigbod, the abbot of Lorsch from 784–804 and the archbishop of Trier from 791–804, a tantalizing possibility given the connections of the manuscripts of Wigbod's commentary on Genesis to the Lorsch library and the church at Trier.⁸⁴ Unfortunately, linguistic analysis of the two names seems to dispel this possibility.⁸⁵

Wigbod was nevertheless connected to both locations. At least two versions of Wigbod's enormous commentary were held at Lorsch, as were copies of every work that he used in the text. With the exception of Charlemagne's presentation copy that remained at St. Maximin in Trier, all other extant versions of the commentary came from Lorsch.⁸⁶ Among diplomatic records, there is strong circumstantial evidence that Wigbod (alongside Alcuin) was the *abbas presbyter* whom Charlemagne sent in 786 to

83 Gorman, "Wigbod and Biblical Studies under Charlemagne," 51. For Theodulf's poem, see: Theodulf, *Carmina*, ed. Dümmler, p. 488, line 205n7 (hereafter, *Carm.*). For the joke, see: Kershaw, "Laughter after Babel's Fall," 201. The reference in the Astronomer's *vita* is: *Vita Hludowici imperatoris*, ed. Tremp, 292.

84 *Prooemium*, ed. Peiper, lviii.

85 Gorman cites two separate letters on the subject that he received from Donald Bullough and Bernhard Bischoff. As stated by Gorman, Bullough concluded that "Wigbod and Ricbod cannot be alternative forms of the same name and thus the two men cannot be the same person." Bullough wrote that "The first elements [of the name: Ric(h) vs. Uuig] are quite distinct in etymology and in significance, but also in pronunciation! The initial sounds represented by *R* and by *Uu* being in the eighth/ninth centuries totally different. [Old High German] *R* is really a guttural, hence the spellings in *HR* (Hrabanus, Hruadgoz, etc.). *Uu* is a spirant or labial : and when, in Romance regions, it phonetically 'moves back', it becomes of course a palatal –*Uuido* > Guido or Gui, *Wilhelm* > Guillaume. There is therefore no realistic possibility of confusion between the two names. Indeed, as I read the Lorsch catalogue, the compiler/scribe knew perfectly well that the commentator was not the same person as his former abbot." Donald Bullough to Michael Gorman, March 25, 1994, as cited in Gorman, "Wigbod and Biblical Studies under Charlemagne," 61n65. On the same question Bischoff wrote, "I write—Wigbod, because I cannot believe that an attempt at identification with Ricbod is methodologically sound." Gorman, "Wigbod and Biblical Studies under Charlemagne," 61n66.

86 Gorman, "Wigbod and Biblical Studies under Charlemagne," 61–62.

accompany papal delegations to English synods in Mercia and Northumbria.⁸⁷ J. M. Wallace-Hadrill noted Charlemagne's confidence in Wigbod's diplomatic capabilities, describing him as the king's "official observer" representing "a kind of Frankish supervisory interest" at the courts of Offa and Ælfwald in the two early English kingdoms.⁸⁸ Moreover, Gorman speculates that Wigbod may have gained considerable influence with Charlemagne, and used his commentaries "to curry royal favour" at the Frankish court.⁸⁹ In the 780s therefore Wigbod was Alcuin's equal among Charlemagne's most important courtiers and advisors.

Wigbod came to the attention of his most vociferous modern champion, Michael Gorman, through the discovery of a lost colophon, which had been attached to one version of Wigbod's commentary but not the full edition.⁹⁰ In 1719 Edmund Martène transcribed what may have been the actual presentation copy of Wigbod's commentary, but any attribution to Wigbod was lost.⁹¹ Gorman takes to task several of the modern historians whose brief studies of Wigbod failed to wonder "how many Wigbods or Wibods (or Widbods) were active in Charlemagne's service."⁹² Gorman's response to this question satisfactorily proposes two figures: Wigbod the diplomat and theologian, and the layperson Wibod the unlucky target of Theodulf's scorn who eventually became the *comes* in Périgueux.⁹³ Although circumstantial evidence points toward this conclusion, it remains somewhat tentative.

More certain is the former Wigbod's importance to Charlemagne's court in the late eighth century, as is his authorship of six works of biblical exegesis, including *Explanatio sex dierum*.⁹⁴ The structure, content, and arguments

87 Gorman, "Wigbod and Biblical Studies under Charlemagne," 52.

88 Wallace-Hadrill, "Charlemagne and England," 158.

89 Gorman, "The Epitome of Wigbod's Commentaries on Genesis and the Gospels," 6.

90 The eighteenth-century scholar Edmund Martène knew of the official commentary and its dedication to Charlemagne, but the manuscript he transcribed contained only Wigbod's commentary on the first three chapters of Genesis. This is the version that Migne attributed to Wigbod and included in volume 96 of the *PL*. The full, exhaustive commentary on the Octateuch appears in volume 93 of the *PL*, wrongly attributed to Pseudo-Bede. See: Gorman, "The Encyclopedic Commentary on Genesis Prepared for Charlemagne by Wigbod," 175.

91 Gorman, "Wigbod and Biblical Studies under Charlemagne," 62.

92 Gorman, "Wigbod and Biblical Studies under Charlemagne," 51–59.

93 Gorman, "Wigbod and Biblical Studies under Charlemagne," 60.

94 Gorman, "The Epitome of Wigbod's Commentaries on Genesis and the Gospels," 8–9. These are: The *Recapitulatio de paradiso*, an early effort treating Genesis;

of this relatively unknown text must be laid out clearly before applying its teachings to Carolingian political culture. The structure of *Explanatio sex dierum* largely follows the narrative of the first three chapters of Genesis, and is organized by “day” of creation, followed by lengthy sections on the episodes leading up to and following the Fall. Thus, the text really covered everything from the moments before creation to the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise. It follows, then, that the list of days included the seventh, as the biblical narrative also did, despite the six-day premise of the text given at the outset. Each “day” begins with an excerpt from the Genesis text, followed by a historical interpretation of how the given verse reflects or was fulfilled in a different biblical passage; thus, for example, Genesis 1:1 prefigured John 1:1, and so forth.⁹⁵ These scriptural resonances usually echo the Psalms, Proverbs, the Gospels, or a Pauline text, and serve to illustrate the point that the creation narrative is the origin of a story in which Christ’s incarnation is the climax, with everything having come before and after inflected by that event. Then comes a literal explanation or clarification (sometimes as a *quaestiones et responsiones* dialogue) or investigation into the mechanics of the operation discussed, usually within the discussion of the “day,” and at other instances in separate subsections such as “*De creatione lucis*” or “*De creatione hominum*.” Last appear multiple smaller bunches of text grouped under headings as recapitulations, which reiterate or further explicate the points given above.

As one might expect from a commentary on Augustine’s literal commentary, the focus of Wigbod’s attention is the literal and historical, but unlike Augustine he does deploy allegorical and anagogical interpretations to nuance or show relevance in the historical meaning of a given passage. The anagogical sense in patristic exegesis refers to the eschatological interpretation of Scripture that anticipates the final consummation of all things in Christ’s return. Henri de Lubac distinguishes between two types of anagogical senses: one objective and doctrinal, focused on the end times, and the other subjective and mystical, concerned with individual contemplation. Ultimately, the anagogical sense unites doctrinal and mystical insights, completing the spiritual interpretation of Scripture alongside the allegorical

a compilation on Genesis, which is a series of excerpts from other works; the *Explanatio sex dierum* (the subject of this chapter); the official court commentary on the Octateuch; a commentary on the Gospels; and an epitome of his commentaries on Genesis and the Gospels.

95 For my reading of historical exegesis, see: Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:41–82.

and tropological senses.⁹⁶ In Wigbod's text these instances are usually sign-posted quite clearly with phrases like "*in allegoria*" or "*haec secundum anagogen*," showing a deliberate attempt at lacing these three exegetical approaches into one framework. These interpretive choices shape the selection, arrangement, and even the length of a given passage.

The first "day," stretched across four columns of Migne's edition, received a long treatment because it offered the ideal venue for connecting the creation of the universe to the incarnation of Christ. The second, third, and fourth "days," which deal with separating the earth from the waters, the gathering of waters, and the division of the heavens into light and dark, respectively, received comparatively shorter shrift, about a column each of Migne's text. This is also true for the seventh, the day of rest. The fifth "day" merited two columns of text, primarily because here Wigbod began to weave literal and historical explanations with scientific theories about natural phenomena. So, for example, he expounded on the qualities of water, which produced watery creatures, and in the next breath speculated that demonic or emotional disturbances correlate with inclement weather. The sixth "day," which saw the creation of the man, received two and a half columns of text, which are predominantly taken up by a lengthy discussion of this work. Following the seventh "day" there occurs a three and a half-column recap of the six days, highlighting a theological history of humans and morality vis-à-vis their relationships with different kinds of animals. Adhering to the Genesis narrative, Wigbod then spent the remaining twelve columns on subsections: the ascent of the waters and the irrigation of the earth, the planting of Paradise, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the division of the river of Paradise, the warning of the tree, the creation of the woman, the cunning of the serpent, the snake's suggestions to the woman, the agreement of the woman and of the man, the voice of reproach and calling, the man's excuse, the curses of the serpent, the woman, and the man, the mortal raiment, and the expulsion from Paradise. All told, the story of the Fall takes up the entire last third of the text.⁹⁷

96 Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac*, 44.

97 A note on terminology: I refer to "the man" and "the woman" where the primary sources use *homo* and *mulier*, and reserve Adam or Eve for when the text explicitly names them. For the bulk of both the Genesis narrative and commentaries on it, these individuals are identified by their sex and not by name. Naming is an act of sovereignty, and it is important to discussions of authority and expectations. Additionally, I render *homo* as "the man," but when it occurs in the plural or with a descriptor (e.g. *hominum* or *humanum genus*) I render it as humankind when the context clearly applies it to all people.

If *Explanatio sex dierum* was a commentary on Augustine, it must be read alongside Augustine's works on Genesis. Although it is not entirely clear which sources Wigbod knew, as Gorman shows, the material contained within the encyclopedic commentary proved Wigbod was aware of several Augustinian (or misattributed) Genesis commentaries, and we know from Einhard that Charlemagne preferred the works of Augustine, especially *De civitate Dei* (The City of God), to other books.⁹⁸ There is also the fact that Wigbod had connections with the abbey of Lorsch, whose library contained many works by Augustine.⁹⁹ These two factors make quite likely Wigbod's access to the most substantial reserves of patristic sources in Frankish lands at that time. It also follows that if a rephrasing or reworking of Augustine's text reflects a clear choice by Wigbod, an omission merits similar attention. This is not an argument from silence, because there are clear instances where he seems to have had access to a particular passage yet chooses to emphasize some ideas at the expense of others. Furthermore, Wigbod drew on much more than Augustine's commentary alone, and explaining what and how he used these other sources illuminates the text's purpose, and the role of commentaries in shaping Carolingian ecological sovereignty.

Conclusion

The contribution of Carolingian exegetes like Wigbod to early medieval environmental thought derived from their reading of past authorities. Yet the texts deliberately selected and deployed patristic voices to new effect, thus reconstituting and making them different. The commenters compiled exegesis precisely because the Church Fathers' work was authoritative and recovery of correct texts was at the heart of the Carolingian cultural program.

98 These are: *De civitate Dei contra Paganos*, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber*, and *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*. The misattributed texts included the *Exhymeron*, which was a seventh-century Irish epitome and *Dialogus quaestionum LXV*, a florilegium of *quaestiones*, both of which stemmed from Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram*, and were thought by Wigbod to have been authored by Augustine himself. Gorman, "The Encyclopedic Commentary on Genesis Prepared for Charlemagne by Wigbod," 178; Bischoff, *Manuscripts and Libraries in the Age of Charlemagne*, trans. Gorman, 56–57.

99 See my above discussion of the connections linking Wigbod and Lorsch. Michael Fox goes so far as to assert that Wigbod compiled his encyclopedic commentary at Lorsch, though he does not provide any specific evidence beyond speculation. Fox, "Alcuin the Exegete," 39. For the library catalogue of Lorsch, see: Häse, *Mittelalterliche Bücherverzeichnisse aus Kloster Lorsch*, 136–67. For Augustine's works at Lorsch, see: Verbraken, *Études critiques sur les sermons authentiques de Saint Augustin*.

Writing on the creation story was a venerable tradition and practice of Christian intellectuals stretching backward to the beginnings of Christianity, and Carolingian exegetes' efforts put their texts in this line as much as their deference to the Carolingian *renovatio* put them in another one.

Commenters like Wigbod did not recycle patristic thought just because Augustine or Isidore of Seville proposed something. Though trees, animals, and humans would be central to any writing on the Hebrew creation narrative, I suggest that those components of God's universe had special resonance for both authors and readers in late 700s Francia. In the case of Wigbod, who lived and worked in the lower Rhineland and travelled extensively in the early English kingdoms of Mercia and Northumbria, a tree meant something profoundly different from what it might mean to a writer in the Mediterranean littoral, the home environment of both Augustine and Isidore. At the court of Charlemagne, men like Wigbod assembled commentaries that made sense to north Europeans and that served the purposes of a polity engaged in constructing a new Christian empire.

Carolingian exegetes were embedded in the ethos and rhetoric of *correctio* inaugurated by the *Admonitio generalis* and *De litteris colendi*. They reveal that the Carolingians' considerations of the natural world and their articulation of authority and exercise of sovereignty were based on their understandings of Genesis. Indeed, the Carolingians' legislation program was steeped in "eschatological finality," and was inseparable from their aims of imposing universal Christian empire on early medieval European peoples and environments as they prepared for the end.¹⁰⁰ Recovering from Wigbod's Genesis commentary his notions of Carolingian ecological sovereignty based on the control and supervision of nature is the subject of the next chapter.

100 Depreux, "Ambitions et limites des réformes culturelles à l'époque carolingienne," 732–33.

THINKING TREES

THIS CHAPTER RETURNS to Charlemagne's Adamic sovereignty in the imperial garden via a deeper exploration of how Wigbod used arboreal metaphors to frame a moral ecology for the empire. Beginning with Charlemagne's 806 capitulary at Nijmegen, which bound economic relief to theological expectations of labour, the chapter situates Wigbod's *Explanatio sex dierum* at the heart of a new discourse that recast agricultural toil not as a curse but as redemptive participation in creation. Wigbod's "treeish" metaphors positioned peasants as rooted bodies, obedient and nourished under seigneurial care, much like Eden's trees tended by Adam. By tracing these exegetical connections through Augustine, Isidore, and Carolingian commentary, the chapter shows how ecological sovereignty depended on the transformation of work into a salvific act—one that legitimated domination, exclusion, and the moral economy of labour. In Carolingian thought, trees were not only natural resources but also mirrors for human obedience, fertility, and stability, and thus became models for how subjects might be cultivated, pruned, and made to flourish within Charlemagne's garden-paradise.

In March of 806, during a period of widespread famine across the Frankish realm, Charlemagne issued a capitulary directed at ameliorating the food crisis from his palace stronghold at Nijmegen on the river Waal. The decree commanded landowners to provide sustenance for the needy and set price controls on the sale of grain designed to restrain unscrupulous landlords from price gouging on whatever spare food might be sold on the open market. Curiously embedded within the same capitulary was a seemingly contradictory statute concerning "beggars who wander throughout the lands." The decree commanded:

Concerning beggars who wander through the lands, it is our will that each of our faithful feed his own poor person, whether from his benefice or from their own household, and not allow him to go begging elsewhere. And wherever such beggars are found, unless they work with their hands, let no one presume to give them anything.¹

¹ "De mendicis qui per patrias discurrunt volumus, ut unusquisque fidelium nostrorum suum pauperem de beneficio aut de propria familia nutriat, et non

At first glance the directive opposes the capitulary's general sentiment, which was to encourage Frankish aristocrats (the likely audience for such a decree) to conform to the Carolingians' version of Christian *oikonomia*, a worldview in which the *paterfamilias* (whether God, king, or abbot) was to act in ways that protected both the weak and the powerful members of their "household."

Prioritizing treatment and care for the poor and indigent made "good" economic sense, because such motivations were embedded in early medieval social and cultural norms of reciprocity and redistribution. These were themselves calibrated to certain late antique Western Christian ideals: the rejection of anomie and legislating a common good—even while profit remained a strong motivation in economic transactions.² Moreover, above all, Carolingian economics, like Carolingian politics, were constrained, stretched, and impelled by religious and cultural discourses shared among Carolingian elites, who shaped and were reshaped by these interpretive frameworks over the course of the eighth and ninth century. The discourses took their structure from the Carolingians' ultimate goal of *correctio*: the empire-wide imposition of "correct" Christian beliefs and practices that were to culminate in (and make manifest) individual and collective safety and abundance, and the ultimate spiritual salvation of all. It was the ruler's primary responsibility to ensure those ends. When realities of food and other crises disrupted the norms that good kingship was meant to establish, Carolingian responses adopted seemingly "irrational," religious remedies,

permittat aliubi ire mendicando; et ubi tales inventi fuerint, nisi manibus laborent, nullus eis quicquam tribuere praesumat." *Capitulare missorum Niumagae datum c. 10*, in *Capitularia regnum Francorum*, ed. Boretius, p. 132, lines 3–6. All translations mine unless otherwise noted. Jean-Pierre Devroey discusses the entire capitulary and its role in the discourse of Carolingian moral economy. See: Devroey, "La politique annonaire des Carolingiens," 343–45. For an analysis of the famine of 806 and the other Carolingian food shortages, see Newfield, "The Contours of Disease and Hunger," 292–346; Devroey, *Le nature et le roi*.

2 Devroey, *Puissants et misérables*, 606–7. On the social embeddedness of economic systems, see Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 55. See also Richard Hodges's discussion of these ideas pertaining to the Carolingian economy. Hodges, *Dark Age Economics*, 3–9, 20. Matthew Innes provides a useful elaboration of the same in "Framing the Carolingian Economy." Adriaan Verhulst suggests that taxation might have been just as likely a motivator as social status, downplaying the relative importance of social embeddedness in light of clear profit-seeking motivations. Verhulst, *The Carolingian Economy*, 130–31. Marcelo Cândido da Silva highlights the ultimate spiritual "tribulations" that Carolingian texts suggested lay at the root of economic decisions, even while they considered social bonds and obligations. Cândido da Silva, "L'économie morale' carolingienne," 67.

because these thinkers imagined their world in highly spiritual and eschatological terms: their economic choices were “rational” in that context.³

Charlemagne excepted beggars who refused manual labour from the capitulary’s protections not because of some cold, economic rationale about productivity versus complacency, but because Carolingian theology, and thus Carolingian cultural norms structured according to *correctio*, required the active participation of every member in their community. Following the logic of Carolingian ecological sovereignty, Charlemagne and his ecclesiastical advisors not only connected these obligations to his position as mediator between heavenly and earthly authorities, but cast his role as the “new Adam,” tasked with cultivating and guarding the Franks’ budding “paradise.” As the chief gardener and warden of the empire-as-paradise, Charlemagne had to enlist the aid of ecclesiastics, lay aristocrats, and even peasants of many statuses to do the work of taming the wild and cultivating a new Eden. The Franks’ new paradise was not only a spiritual aspiration, but took physical form in cleared lands, managed woodlands, modified waterways, reclaimed wastelands, and the built environments in which they lived and worked every day.

Carolingian supervision and management of the environment were manifestations of order, right conduct, and salvation, which were themselves hallmarks of belonging in Carolingian society. Excluding those rambles from the capitulary’s benefits put them in a legal category beyond the threshold for inclusion within Charlemagne’s garden: their membership in Frankish paradise, like that of Adam and Eve, depended on active participation in the garden’s cultivation and stewardship. Like those original humans, failure to do so resulted in their expulsion from the community, and from political life—by which I mean Carolingian moral economy and a share in the social and spiritual salvation as outlined above.⁴ Paradise was not meant to have two-way access. Such exclusion, narrowed to Charlemagne himself, was *the* principle undergirding Carolingian ecological sovereignty and legitimating his rule of the Christian empire. Its early formulations emerged in

3 Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* presents a framework for assessing rational “irrational” economic decisions that were rooted in religious, social, and cultural priorities. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 80–95.

4 As Patrick Wormald has clarified, Frankish capitularies did not bear the same sense of “legality” as Roman and other law codes, but were more akin to an expression of the king’s will, which, in practice, carried the weight of law. Wormald, “*Lex scripta and Verbum regis*,” 123. My reading of expulsion from the garden and exclusion from political life is informed by Giorgio Agamben’s ideas in *Homo sacer*, trans. Heller-Roazen, 20–29, 87–90.

Wigbod's commentary on Genesis. In his exegesis Wigbod continues what Rutger Kramer calls a "debate about the burdens of authority" that undergirded seemingly "programmatically" that had occurred in texts like the abovementioned *Admonitio generalis* which attempted to guide individual spiritual action if not forecast the future success of the realm.⁵

This chapter outlines a theology of moral ecology, one closely related to the moral economy described above, that developed at Charlemagne's court in the latter eighth century, as expressed in the biblical commentary of his first court exegete, Wigbod, whose logic shaped Carolingian ecological sovereignty. In chapter two, I showed how and why biblical exegesis became central to the Carolingians' mission of *correctio* and both spiritual and temporal renewal. Here, Wigbod's theories based on degrees of sentience among creatures and gendered hierarchies of authority between the first humans gives purpose to that effort. I connect his commentary on Genesis to the emerging discourse of Carolingian ecological sovereignty as it pertained to the work and produce of agricultural labourers, the root source of Frankish prosperity and power. For Wigbod's exegesis recast their toil, long seen as inherited punishment for the sins of humanity's most ancient forebears, as redemption, participation in the regeneration of a corrupted nature. Wigbod's interpretations of Adam's punishment no longer resounded with distant echoes of humanity's condemnation to toiling in an earth cursed to sprout thorns and thistles. Instead, it whispers with faint murmurings praising agricultural workers' acquiescence to "righteous" seigniorial domination.

The transformation from punitive to "redemptive" labour was the heart of Wigbod's moral ecology: the notion that "improving" the environment led to a kind of revalorization of agricultural labour, which transmuted such work from Adam's curse to Charlemagne's blessing. That peasants' participation was structured by varying degrees of unfree statuses and asymmetries of power made sense according to Carolingian logic, because Charlemagne's (and by proxy his designates') ability to coerce dependents directly reflected his perceived effectiveness as a king. Cold comfort though this must have been for peasants who became ensnared in the lordly intensifications of eighth- and ninth-century Francia. Nevertheless, from an elite Carolingian perspective, such domination was the instrument with which God demonstrated the righteousness (or not) of the entire realm. Indeed, Carolingian social domination and coercive labour was inseparable from Carolingian redemption and renewal.

5 Kramer, *Rethinking Authority in the Carolingian Empire*, 23–24.

Written in the 780s, around the same time as his more well-known commentary on the first eight books of the Bible, Wigbod's *Explanatio sex dierum* reveals the sources and inventiveness of a courtier at the height of his power, influence, and access to the king. Wigbod's importance to the development of Carolingian ecological sovereignty adds to our understanding of how theology shaped discourses of power and social domination. Wigbod's *Explanatio* used arboreal metaphor for teaching Carolingian elites how obedient agricultural labourers should live: like trees, planted and tended by an arborist, their lord, much as the original creatures of Eden were supervised by Adam before the Fall. Wigbod's "treeish" humans sustained broader Carolingian discourses of morality.

This chapter will show how Wigbod's notions about "treeness" as a metaphor for political life asked what it meant to be a tree in the Carolingian empire-paradise. To unravel this question, we must read both Augustine's and Wigbod's interpretations of the tree of life and how they thought the first humans' obedient cultivation of their garden modelled ideal patterns of rulership and subservience to a sovereign—God and then Adam. Wigbod's interpretations of the original humans' disobedience in Paradise and their consumption of the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil makes this clear. Wigbod's theory that obedient labour in a "fallen" world could both work toward individual and collective salvation and the renewal of nature formed the core of his moral ecology. Crucially, the first humans' deceptive use of fig leaves to conceal their nudity, which had become shameful to them following their disobedience, makes it possible for Wigbod to imagine the people living in the Carolingian Empire as "thinking trees."

Their metaphorically "treeish" bodies rooted within the soil of the imperial paradise, Frankish peasants participated in transforming and redeeming the environment. From the perspective of elites like Wigbod, the obedient agricultural labour of peasants working for their *familia*,⁶ under the supervision of its lord, was what drew these peasants across the threshold of Carolingian political life. A threshold defined by the ongoing struggle for individual and collective salvation and propelled by the imposition of Frankish hegemony across Europe. Those who did not work with their hands, the rambler, were excluded from such "salvific" labour and therefore from Carolingian political life.

⁶ Carolingian seigneurial domination was expressed by the term *familia*, which referred to the social relations between the dominant and the dominated. Devroey, *Puissants et misérables*, 443–44.

Trees, Bodies, and *viriditas*

Wood, according to Michel Pastoureau

lives and it dies, it has sicknesses and flaws, it is greatly individualized: one can see its knots and its peculiarities of growth, its cracks and its notches. Like a human being, it can suffer, rot or be injured; like [a human] it can be infested by a worm.⁷

We can extend Pastoureau's insight into the medieval European context of trees, the source of wood, and other plants. Plants and people live in a certain environment, influenced by their surroundings and in balance with the rhythms of time and the movement of fluids. In the Middle Ages, humans were thought to possess a balance of fluids that, like sap ascending through a tree, flowed through the veins and animated motion and sensation.

Such ruminations on tree bodies help root Wigbod's arboreal metaphors in both practical and symbolic aspects of Carolingian culture, for his commentary describes the living force of trees and the temporal and sensorial experiences of "treeish" existence in similar language:

[trees] are not moved from their proper places by their own bonds. Although trees live, they live not by means of a soul, but through greenness (*viriditatem*), because that sap is poured into the root, then is made into the substance of the tree, then the pouring forth of the branches, and thereafter into the greenness (*viriditate*) of the leaves.⁸

These sensations seem unique to trees, fixed and rooted, nourished by mysterious aqueous forces that produce their living essence: *viriditas*—the greenness of their foliage. Yet there are metaphorical linkages to human sensation and (im)motility. A tree's rootedness, for example, from its point of view, was not a disadvantage but an asset. Oliver Rackham explains the functions of a tree's roots as threefold: "to hold the tree up; to supply it with water; and to supply it with minerals."⁹ Wigbod was obviously not aware of the third, modern concept, but the first two, structural support and

⁷ Pastoureau, "Introduction à la symbolique médiévale du bois," 26.

⁸ "Quid est enim, quod ista omnia in unum dicit imperavit fieri, et terram germinare, et aquas congregare, nisi quod ista omnia in terra radice figuntur? Ideo ad eamdem diem pertinere dicuntur quia quamvis longe lateque per incrementa sua diffunduntur, tamen de locis propriis nexibus suis non moventur. Quia arbores vivunt, vivunt tamen non per animam, sed per viriditatem, quia ille succus infunditur in radice, deinde in qualitatem arboris efficitur, et postea in effusione ramorum, et exinde in viriditate foliorum." Wigbod, *ESD*, ed. Migne, 212A–212B.

⁹ Rackham, *Woodlands*, 34.

hydration, were certainly relevant to the thinking of the eighth-century theologian. And for Wigbod (as for Rackham) the “holding-up function is the critical one.”¹⁰

This interpretation of a root’s meaning likely drew on Isidore of Seville, whose take was fixed in the pages of the foremost repository of encyclopedic knowledge in the early Middle Ages, his *Etymologiae*. Isidore wrote that “a root is so called because fixed in the ground in the manner of wheel spokes, as it were, it goes down deep, for natural philosophers say that [the depth of the roots] is equal to the height of the trees.”¹¹ We know now that trees possess a remarkable ability to remain upright despite natural decay or external forces like wind, lightning, or erosion. A freestanding tree does not suffer from “root competition” from other trees, and can develop larger, though not necessarily deeper, root systems, which retain “a greater weight of soil to counterbalance” those of trees in more restrictive root systems. While trees like beeches cooperate subterraneously and nourish their neighbours’ roots, in woodlands natural processes uproot trees, and in plantations do so often.¹² And like the peasants who were rewarded for staying put and labouring for the good, Wigbod’s rootedness connected staying put to nourishment, strength, and security. Wigbod thought about roots in terms less scientific, but he acknowledged the stupendous achievement of God’s creative act when trees sprang forth from the ground already rooted in it. The simultaneous germination from the land of every kind of tree where they were supposed to be was further sign of God’s omnipotence. That trees were anchored in the right place, and did not move, confirmed the excellence of Creation.

About the motion of trees, Wigbod offered surprisingly little compared to Augustine, which may reflect the texts he had available more than his preference, or perhaps because it was their stationary nature that best fit the Carolingian ideal for peasants. The bishop of Hippo acknowledged the movement of growth, but little else. In his discussion of the differences between the celestial and the earthly realms, Augustine reckoned it obvious that the physical world would be “filled throughout its whole expanse with parts that move from place to place with motions appropriate to their

10 Rackham, *Woodlands*, 34.

11 “Radix appellatur quod quasi radiis quibusdam fixa terris in profunda dimergitur. Nam physici dicunt parem esse altitudinem radicum et arborum.” Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum sive Originum*, ed. Lindsay, 18.6.14.

12 Rackham, *Woodlands*, 34. On cooperation, see: Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees*, 15–16.

natures.”¹³ Nevertheless, plants and trees were not counted among these “parts” because “by roots they are fastened in the earth; and, although they have movement of their own growth, they are not moved from their steadfast positions by their own effort; but where they are fixed, there they are nourished and grow.”¹⁴

In contemporary parlance, plants have proprioception, or know where they are, and they move according to two basic properties. The root tip and the stem of a plant contain statoliths, cells which sense gravity and tell the plant when to root into the soil and when to stretch upward into the air. Meanwhile, the circling or swaying of plants and their limbs, known to modern botanists as circumnutation, occurs due to a complex interaction of endogenous cellular and hormonal factors.¹⁵ Augustine, unaware of these mechanics, nevertheless understood how motility could distinguish plants and trees from humans and animals. Humans, like Eden’s lord Adam, possess something called “spontaneous motion,” which gives them “animated and living flesh.”¹⁶ Trees, by contrast, are moved only by either external stimulus (wind, e.g.) or “through an internal motion by which internally something happens that pertains to the growth and appearance of a tree, by which moisture is drawn into the root and is transformed into that which composes the nature of a plant or tree.”¹⁷

Augustine’s passage on plant movements contains the argument that Wigbod paraphrased. If some humans could be metaphorically “treeish” the spontaneous motion that Augustine discussed perhaps inspired Wigbod to

13 “impleretur partibus intra universum, quae de loco in locum congruis motibus agerentur?” Augustine of Hippo, *De Genesi ad litteram*, ed. Zycha, 53 (hereafter, *DGAL*). Translation from Taylor, *St. Augustine*, 1:65.

14 “cujus generis herbae atque arbores non sunt. radicibus quippe ista fixa sunt terrae: et quamvis habeant motus incrementorum suorum, de locis tamen propriis non moventur nisibus suis; sed ubi fixa sunt, ibi aluntur et crescunt.” Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 53.

15 The word “statolith” descends from Greek for “stationary stone,” which, if he could have known it, would doubtless have pleased Wigbod in his allegorical reading of trees. For a basic explanation of plant proprioception and circumnutation and the historical discovery of these processes, see: Chamovitz, *What a Plant Knows*.

16 “motuque...spontaneo.” And “animatae viventisque carnis.” Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 213–14.

17 “nam moventur et arbusta, non tantum vi extrinsecus impellente, ueluti cum uentis agitantur, sed illo motu quo intrinsecus agitur quidquid ad incrementum speciemque arboris pertinet, quo ducitur succus in radicem, uertiturque in ea quibus constat herbae natura uel ligni.” Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 214.

assert that trees live despite their lack of a soul. The living movement by the transfer of moisture from the earth to the tree is a subtly different mechanism and complicates Augustine's sharp divide between humans and plants. For Wigbod it was not the independent movement that characterizes a tree, but rather its greenness (*viriditatem*). Instead of being drawn in, the moisture is poured into the root, where it is made into the substance of trees. Then, the livingness manifests in the fullness of branches and the greenness of its leaves (*viriditate foliorum*).¹⁸ Where Wigbod rephrased some of Augustine's account regarding the transfer of moisture from the earth through a tree to its foliage, he omitted the Church Father's distinction between the kind of "internal motion" a tree experiences and the "spontaneous" motion "real" living creatures like humans experience, "which is connected with sensation for the management of the body, as is the case in every kind of animal, which Scripture calls a living being."¹⁹ In fact, for Augustine, that was what separates plant life from animal and human life. Without those initial stirrings, the first man would not have been able to "feel in body," and animals and humans would be incapable of producing nails or hairs, the kind of manifestation that exemplifies living growth.

This seems on its face to be a contradiction, because there is a kind of parallel to be drawn between a tree's growth and shedding of leaves; but God breathed into the first man the breath of life, a vital difference which sparked his initial sensory experience. Touch, sight, hearing, smell, and taste come from the brain and the face, according to Augustine, while only tactile sensation pertains to the rest of the body. In this view, all sensation originates in the front part of the brain, because that is the part of the organ closest to the face, recalling the first man's onto which God breathed the breath of life. Motion results from sensation, which occurs in the back of the brain.²⁰ Augustine understood that trees have none of these abilities, so their motion, which at times mimics that of other bodies, nevertheless represented a different phenomenon. Indeed, Augustine emphatically stated that if the first man had contained internal motion without "sensation or spontaneous motion," he would not have been called a living being. Wigbod understood this process in the context of marvelling at the first man, who had been moulded from the

18 See above reference to Wigbod, *ESD*, ed. Migne, cols. 212A–212B.

19 "nihil enim horum sine interno motu. sed iste motus non est spontaneus, qualis ille qui sensui copulatur ad corporis administrationem, sicut in omnium animalium genere, quam uocat scriptura animam uiuam." Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 214.

20 Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 215.

slime of the earth and yet received the breath of life and thus the spark of motion and sensation, which he possessed but animals did not.²¹ Given his fluency with Augustine's ideas on the subject, it seems unlikely that Wigbod's choice to focus on the differences (rather than any similarities) between the first man and animals was a thoughtless decision.

For Wigbod, the living tree was bound up with the abovementioned concept of *viriditas*, or greenness, the liquid which becomes verdant life. In Latin the word *viridis*, from which *viriditas* descends, connects to a "large family of words that evoke vigor, growth, and life."²² Wigbod's familiarity with ancient Roman authors informed his use of the word and any understanding of the virtues of green. Pliny's *Natural History*, a copy of which could be found in Charlemagne's court library, was a likely source of inspiration for Wigbod's appreciation for greenness and vitality or beauty. No other colour was better than green, according to Pliny, and so the human gaze gravitates toward the colour of verdant things: green objects, stones, and plants. Looking on green objects such as marble or emeralds was efficacious for healing injured eyes or restoring their vitality after the onset of eyestrain, although Pliny also included instructions for an eye potion made from a mashed-up green lizard mixed with other ingredients. It was green itself, however, and not the green objects or animals, that possessed the power to restore fatigued vision. Thus, if one could turn to the most accessible source of green—plant life—all the better; however, an emerald had the power to concentrate all the green of nature into one handheld transmitter.²³

In his analysis of these Latin texts, Jean Trinquier suggests that the common ecological experience of the long, dry summers of life on the shores of the Mediterranean filtered such beliefs through a complex of cultural assumptions that valued rest and restoration in the rural countryside of shade, running water, and verdure.²⁴ In this context, Pastoureau suggests

21 "spontaneo motu, id est, de anteriore parte, per sensus intelligitur omnis, quia homo habet sensum, quem animalia non habent." Wigbod, *ESD*, ed. Migne, col. 224B. For Wigbod's entire discussion of motion and the soul see: cols. 223C–225D.

22 Pastoureau, *Green*, trans. Gladding, 20. This word family includes: *virere* (to be green, to be vigorous), *vis* (strength), *vir* (man, masculine singular), *ver* (spring), *virga* (stem, rod), and (Pastoureau speculates) perhaps *virtus* (courage, virtue).

23 Trinquier, "*Confusis oculis prosunt uirentia*," 97–98. The twelfth-century theologian Hugh of St. Victor would later write that the emerald "in its nature is of such greenness, that it surpasses all the plants, and all the leaves of the trees, and all the gems by its verdancy." Hugh of St. Victor, *De bestiis et aliis rebus*, ed. Migne, col. 116C.

24 Trinquier, "*Confusis oculis prosunt uirentia*," 112–14.

that the early medieval blending of Germanic and Roman cultures produced new, green clothing through the combination of Roman forms and dyes available only in Northern Europe.²⁵ It is difficult to know if this is true, given the lack of material, visual, or textual examples describing the clothing of the Carolingian elite. The most famous literary description occurs in Einhard's *Vita Karoli Magni*, but he mentioned nothing about the colour of Charlemagne's clothing. Einhard instead celebrated the Frankishness of Charlemagne through his choice of dress, promoting the king's social status and internal virtue. The Frankish "costume" called for simple linen underclothes, swathed in flax-cloth leg wrappings under a tunic, and then covered during the winter with pelts of otter-skin or ermine.²⁶

If green clothing was more popular among Frankish elites, it is conspicuously absent in the manuscript illuminations of Charlemagne's heirs from the ninth century, which were intended to portray the figures in their capacity as the rulers of the Christian empire. For example, Hrabanus Maurus famously depicted Louis the Pious as a *miles Christi*, clothed as a soldier clutching a shield and a cross, wearing a blue tunic.²⁷ The Gospels of Lothar, which were produced at Tours ca. 850 in honour of the emperor Lothar I, clothe him "in a dark blue tunic and wrapped in the natural folds of a toga-like garment of purple and gold."²⁸ The Vivian Bible, produced at Tours and dedicated to Charles the Bald in 845 or 846, presents the western Carolingian ruler as draped in a purple tunic under a yellow robe trimmed with gold, while the sacramentary of Metz has the king wearing a "court costume" that is dominated by gold and yellow, although he is standing on a green landscape.²⁹ The coronation page of the *Codex Aureus*, what Schutz calls "the most sumptuous propagandistic claim and portrayal of the legitimacy of Carolingian royalty within the context of the Christian empire," depicts Charles the Bald in a purple toga, while the surrounding figures of the court wear dark blue tunics trimmed with gold.³⁰ These vividly painted images do

25 Pastoureau, *Green*, 45.

26 Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, ed. Pertz and Waite, pp. 25, 27–28, lines 22–25 and 1–2 (hereafter, *VK*). "Vestitu patrio, id est Francico utebar. Ad corpus camisam lineam, et feminalibus lineis induebatur, deinde tunicam, quae limbo serico ambiebatur, et tibialia; tum fasciis crura et pedes calciamentis constringebat et ex pellibus lutrinis vel murinis."

27 Schutz, *The Carolingians in Central Europe*, 249.

28 Schutz, *The Carolingians in Central Europe*, 251–52.

29 Schutz, *The Carolingians in Central Europe*, 249–50, 255.

30 Schutz, *The Carolingians in Central Europe*, 258. In the case of religious figures,

not reveal the dominance or even presence of green colour used in the clothing of members of royal or imperial courts.

The Bible itself, and patristic commentary on it, was the other major medium through which Wigbod's green knowledge filtered. For green colour-words this is not so helpful as classical Latin, as Pastoureau notes that the Bible often lacks colour descriptors, paying more attention to "the nature and quality of materials" rather than chromatic value. François Jacquesson undertook a quantitative analysis of colour-words in the Bible, finding that white, red, and black dominate, followed by purple and brown; yellow and green (sometimes considered separately, sometimes together) come in last place. When green does appear in the scriptures it usually describes plant life instead of objects, with the sole exception of two mentions of emeralds.³¹ In a study sponsored by the Centre national de la recherche scientifique in France, Jacquesson put the same question to the Church Fathers, finding that in patristic commentaries on the Bible scattered through the first 120 volumes of the *Patrologia Latina* white, red, and black make up the majority

green would eventually become the most common colour of liturgical garments in the later Middle Ages, following the reforms of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. Twenty years before that council, Lothar of Segni (the future Pope Innocent III) wrote that red should be adopted for the feast days of apostles and martyrs and for certain other high liturgical days, marking green as appropriate for "ordinary time." Miller, *Clothing the Clergy*, 40–41, 110, suggests that the *Egino Codex*, a collection of homilies produced in Verona near the end of the eighth century (ca. 796–799), possibly shows early signs of the emergence of green in liturgical dress through its depictions of Leo the Great, Gregory the Great, and Ambrose of Milan, whose chasubles contain the colours ochre, red, and green. The *Egino Codex* was produced at Verona for Egino the bishop at the end of the eighth or beginning of the ninth century. It is held at Berlin Staatsbibliothek, MS Phillipps 1676.

31 Pastoureau, *Green*, 38. Christel Meier and Rudolf Suntrup have catalogued all the colours of the Latin Vulgate, and it is especially telling in this regard as they show: "In the Vulgate occur the green-colour words *virens* (twenty times), *vireo/viresco* (three times), *viridis* (fourteen times) and *viriditas* (once). In twenty-three cases, these colour words are the carriers of meaning...There are also about 115 other scriptures that provide for [g]reen interpreted as the foundation [of the eschatological city of Jerusalem], where it is not mentioned as signifying a green colour word, but a green colour idea is implicit. This is mainly the whole range of nature with its plants, for example, tree and wood (olive, palm, willow, cypress), bush and grass, grass and hay, wine and vines, flowers (lily, rose, violet), byssus (linen) and reed, ivy, laurel, myrrh and hyssop; with its plant parts: root, seed, juice, stalks and stock, leaves and branches, fruit and thorns; with its landscape elements: field, field and seed, garden, meadow and pasture, soil and shore or in general the green (*virectum*, *viride*) in nature." Meier and Suntrup, *Lexikon der Farbenbedeutungen im Mittelalter*, 806–7.

of colour-words, although gold and yellow increase their share significantly, followed by green and (scarcely) blue.³² Pastoureau suggests that commentators did not feel comfortable theorizing the meaning of the colour green because it was not linked with any virtues or vices,³³ although it may be that lack of discussion by Church Fathers perhaps reflected green's rarer occurrence in the Bible.

Despite these limitations, green played a key role in the real and virtual visual culture of early medieval Western Europe. In the eyes of some early medieval theologians, green was the colour of the land after it had been adorned by God with plant life during the earth's creation, and it remained a symbol of paradisiacal hopes. Thus, in a letter by Paulinus of Nola (d. 431) the metaphorical pathway to heaven was reached through the orchard or garden of his basilica, and Ambrosius Autpertus (d. 784) later wrote that the green mineral stone jasper signified the green pastures of Paradise.³⁴ Using the evidence of both visual depictions and writings like these, Gottfried Haupt argued that the inhabitants of Northern Europe pined for verdant nature after the long, dark winter.³⁵ The early growth of spring was like an explosion of youth and power, symbolized in the colour green. The green of nature, captured in gems or stones, marked the liminal boundaries between the blossoming yet fleeting matter of this world compared to the durable life of Paradise. For Northern Europeans green marked the arrival of spring, and yet also stood for the anticipation of resurrected life in eternity.³⁶

Meier and Suntrup identify a key concept of the human being as a "microcosm of nature and historical process."³⁷ Since medieval Christians saw themselves as straddling that line between natural and supernatural worlds this explains the many analogies in these texts between "the

32 Green-words make up 5.4% of the total number of patristic colour-words. They are: *vitreum* (3.6%), *viridem* (1.6%), and *prasinum* (0.2%). Jacquesson, "La chasse aux couleurs à travers la Patrologie latine."

33 Pastoureau, *Green*, 39.

34 Paulinus of Nola, *Epistolae*, ed. Migne, cols. 336C–337A; Alcuin (misattributed), *Commentariorum in Apocalypsin libri quinque*, ed. Migne, col. 1116C.

35 Haupt, *Die Farbensymbolik in der sakralen Kunst des abendländischen Mittelalters*, 110.

36 Later writers Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173) and Bruno of Segni (d. 1123), drawing on this tradition, explicitly connected the evergreen lives of the saints following the resurrection of the body and the beauty of eternal verdancy. Haupt, *Die Farbensymbolik in der sakralen Kunst des abendländischen Mittelalters*, 110.

37 Meier and Suntrup, *Lexikon der Farbenbedeutungen im Mittelalter*, 809.

vegetative life of nature and the creaturely existence of humans.”³⁸ Furthermore, Christ himself symbolized green wood (*lignum viride*), the living cross, un-withered, through which he overcame death and brought new life.³⁹ Perhaps demonstrating this notion, a psalter produced for Louis the German between 825–850 portrays the Eastern Frankish king clothed in red or purple, lying prostrate and clutching a green cross that towers over him (Figure 4).⁴⁰ The unusual green cross may symbolize the life and viridity of Christ as the new Tree of Life.

Wigbod’s understanding of green was rooted in an arboreal discourse that linked patristic authors to Carolingian exegetes. In the leaves of the tree Wigbod witnessed the generative creation of that third day, repeated every spring when life stirred again after the long stillness of winter, and saw in their verdancy the promise of eternity. Green had signified steadfast faith for Bede (d. 735), and also would for the later Carolingian exegetes Hrabanus Maurus (d. 856), who found in jasper “greenness of faith,”⁴¹ and Haimo of Auxerre (d. ca. 878), for whom the jasper stone signified the elect, whose faith never wilts, but “stands firm in the greenness (*viriditate*) of their working.”⁴² This was the green virtue of unshakable faith which imbued the onlooker with the hope of eternal life.⁴³ The twelfth-century theologian Hugh of St. Victor would later write that:

Jasper is placed first in the foundation of the house of the Lord, and it has such a nature: it is of green (*virentis*) colour. Whoever wears it fears no phantoms, and it signifies those who hold to the faith of God and never dry up from it, but are always green in it.⁴⁴

38 Meier and Suntrup, *Lexikon der Farbenbedeutungen im Mittelalter*, 809.

39 Meier and Suntrup, *Lexikon der Farbenbedeutungen im Mittelalter*, 809, 815.

40 Schutz, *The Carolingians in Central Europe*, 260.

41 Bede wrote in his commentary on Apocalypse, “in jasper, therefore, the greenness (*viriditas*) of faith.” Bede, *Explanatio Apocalypsis*, ed. Migne, col. 202C; Hrabanus Maurus in *De universo*, “in jasper the greenness (*viriditas*) of faith.” Hrabanus Maurus, *De universo libri viginti duo*, ed. Migne, col. 470C.

42 “Sive etiam per lapidem jaspidem, electi exprimuntur, quorum fides nunquam marcescit, sed in viriditate operationis constat.” Haimo of Auxerre, *Expositionis in Apocalypsin*, ed. Migne, col. 1204B.

43 Haupt, *Die Farbensymbolik in der sakralen Kunst des abendländischen Mittelalters*, 111–12.

44 “Jaspis primus ponitur in fundamento domus Domini, qui talem habet naturam, virentis coloris est. Qui super se eum habuerit, nulla phantasmata timet, significatque eos qui fidem Dei tenent, et nunquam arescunt ab ea sed semper virent in ea.” Hugh of St. Victor, *De bestiis et aliis rebus*, ed. Migne, cols. 115D–116A.



Figure 4. Crucifixion scene in Louis the German Psalter, first third of the ninth century. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin—Preußischer Kulturbesitz, MS Theol. Lat., fol. 58 (Rose 250). Public Domain.

Wigbod's exegesis tapped into a green discourse spanning from antiquity to the later Middle Ages and beyond, in which virtue, healing, and redemption could be discerned in the very fabric of Creation.

Trees were connected to the other creatures of Genesis by their generation from the earth, but trees sensed, felt, and moved quite differently. Green vegetation was worth considering as a mirror for human interaction in and with the natural environment. Wigbod also understood trees and their produce metaphorically, seeing in their verdure and bounty the fruits of obedient "treeish" living. Some of these themes he pursued in discussing the two most famous trees of paradise, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Through them Wigbod articulated the sovereignty of the first humans, whose task it was first to work and maintain the garden of Paradise in obedience to God.

Planted in Paradise: Obedience, Labour, and Dominion

Wigbod's commentary suggested that "treeish" humans achieve their best lives through obedient agricultural labour. Wigbod's God was a gardener, constantly watering, planting, pruning, and arranging the life contained within His good garden. This God traced the furrow in which His best creature followed, toiling in the creation to make it better. The image of God as gardener and the related one of the earth as a garden made sense to Wigbod because they answered a pressing contemporary question: how might one manage Charlemagne's nascent imperial garden. In theological terms, scriptural trees transmitted truths about authority among humans, animals, and plants. This is why Wigbod drew on Augustine's and Isidore's commentaries on Genesis to explain the purpose of the first man, namely, to understand and obey God, in whose image he had been made.⁴⁵

It was from the idea of awareness, rooted in obedience to God's commands, that the man derived his authority over the created beings of the earth, including all the animals and the woman, who was subordinate to him.⁴⁶ The man was to tame his sinful nature as well "that they may rule, by the understanding of reason, over all fleshly disturbances, as if these were

45 "Deus hominem ad imaginem suam, perfectum scilicet virum, qui non quemlibet sanctorum virorum imitando, sed ipsam veritatem contemplabiliter intuendo operatur iustitiam, ut ipsam intelligat et sequatur, ad cuius imaginem factus est veritatis." Wigbod, *ESD*, ed. Migne, col. 219A.

46 Wigbod, *ESD*, ed. Migne, col. 219B.

insensate living things.”⁴⁷ Possibly Wigbod meant trees and animals with the last phrase, since earlier in the text he wrote “Animals live and feel; trees, however, as we have said, live and do not feel. Man, indeed, lives, and feels, and understands, because he has the discernment between good and evil.”⁴⁸ Wigbod then reiterated the waywardness of humans and the world’s need for order and governance by returning to plant metaphor. Wigbod’s interpretations reveal his understanding of how God works in the world and how humans model God’s behaviour through working the land:

As the Lord said: “*My Father is working still, and I am working.*” For although He created all things at once, yet He governs daily—in watering, planting, building, and in other matters. For just as a person who works a field, if he abandons it, it remains uncultivated, so too the world created by God cannot exist without God’s governance. As the Apostle Paul says: “*Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but God who gives the growth.*”⁴⁹

Although Wigbod echoed the familiar argument that God remains actively at work in the world He created, in line with Augustine’s ideas about time and primordial causes, the exegete’s use of this theme to explain humanity’s first relationship with other creatures was a distinctive and original move. Effectively the first Carolingian commenter on Genesis proposed work within their vegetable environment as humans’ best way toward fulfilment of their purpose: bettering Creation through working with their hands within its vegetation.

We encounter the seeds of this logic germinating in Augustine’s writings as Michael Marder connects the bishop’s urge to “denatu[re]” plant and animal life to his rejection of Manicheism: “by detaching life...from its botanical and biological underpinnings,” Augustine argued that nonhuman life existed to serve the needs of people. Not only humans’ power of life and death over nonhumans then, but also the “signature activities and ‘movements’

47 “ut dominantur rationis intellectu omnium carnalium perturbationum, quasi insensibilium animantium.” Wigbod, *ESD*, ed. Migne, col. 219B.

48 “animalia vivunt et sentiunt; arbores autem, sicut diximus, vivunt, et non sentiunt. Homo vero vivit, et sentit, et intelligit, quia habet discernendi discretionem inter bonum et malum.” Wigbod, *ESD*, ed. Migne, col. 216A.

49 “quomodo dixit Dominus: *Pater meus usque modo operatus est, et ego operor.* Quia quamvis tunc omnia creasset simul, quotidie tamen gubernat, in rigando, in plantando, in aedificando, vel in caeteris rebus. Nam sicut homo qui agrum exercet, si illum dimittit, incultus remanet, ita et mundus creatus a Deo sine Dei gubernatione esse non potest, secundum apostolum Paulum: *Neque qui plantat, neque qui rigat, est aliquid, sed qui incrementum dat Deus.*” Wigbod, *ESD*, ed. Migne, col. 221B. The first biblical reference is to John 5:17, and the second is to 1 Corinthians 3:7.

of the Aristotelian vegetal soul” separated creatures.⁵⁰ Wigbod’s modifications of Augustine’s text do the opposite: a premodern variant of Agamben’s “anthropological machine,” they humanize the nonhuman—trees in this case—animating tree bodies and connecting their movement to sentience and verdant life. By illustrating obedient trees as verdant, motile, and semi-sentient beings, Wigbod’s commentary included them within the political life of the first garden, thus using disobedient trees—arboreal bodies that lacked (or tried to mask) such sensorial experiences and qualities—to mark what was less human.⁵¹

Collaboration between cultivator and cultivated most clearly demonstrated Wigbod’s ideas about the relationships among the man in Paradise and the plants therein. Wigbod weighed these issues in his discussion of the infamous tree of the knowledge of good and evil. About this tree, Wigbod seems to have found the primary rationale for this tree’s name and purposes in Augustine’s words, for his explanation derives mostly (although not entirely) from the literal commentary. Beginning with the seemingly simple question, “*The tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. Why has it received this name?” Wigbod frames his discussion of the tree around the theological complications of a being whose fruit led to the first evils, that was created “good” by a perfect and benevolent deity.⁵² He doubtless adopted this tack from Augustine, who began, perhaps not unexpectedly by asserting that the tree was “certainly visible and corporeal, as the other trees,” and that obvious fact aside, the reason “why it took this name, must be sought.”⁵³ It is revealing of Augustine’s intellectual honesty that he wrestled with this problem—confessing his uncertainty on the question—and relying on those sentiments that pleased him: “that tree could not have been harmful in its produce.”⁵⁴ This feeling was rooted in the firm logic that if God had made everything “very good” he could not have planted anything evil in Paradise;

50 Marder, *The Philosopher’s Plant*, 70–71.

51 Agamben, *The Open*, 37–38.

52 “*Lignum scientiae boni et mali*. Quare istud nomen accepit?” Wigbod, *ESD*, ed. Migne, col. 226A.

53 “prorsus et hoc lignum erat uisibile ac corporale, sicut arbores caeterae. quod ergo lignum esset, non est dubitandum; sed cur hoc nomen acceperit, requirendum.” Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 239.

54 “Mihi autem etiam atque etiam consideranti dici non potest quantum placeat illa sententia, non fuisse illam arborem cibo noxiam.” Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 239.

the evil was rather in the violation of God's command.⁵⁵ This is the very logic that Wigbod drew on with great economy in the simple reply to his question about the name, because "God created all things exceedingly good."⁵⁶

For Wigbod the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was therefore both a real tree and a symbol of testing. The tree existed physically within Paradise. Indeed, Augustine had stated again that scripture "described a real tree," and it could have been an apple, peach, or pear, but unlike the tree of life it was not defined by its actual fruit. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil, then, was not named after its fruit, whatever form that took, but because it contained within it "the future transgression of the command in which the man would learn through the experience of punishment, the difference that lay between the good of obedience and the evil of disobedience."⁵⁷ Wigbod, however, flipped the perspective, imagining the transformation of the tree from the point of view of the man:

By that knowing of good and evil, he would recognize how great a difference there is between the obedience of good and the disobedience of evil. For if he had thereupon transgressed, it would be evil for him; but if he had not transgressed, it would have been good for him, since he would not have learned the experience of punishment.⁵⁸

Wigbod's reworking of Augustine's explanation privileged the place of the man and his ability to name the tree through his own potential actions. Even in the man's inevitable downfall it reflected the hierarchies of Paradise. Wigbod challenged Augustine's clear assertion that the tree got its name specifically so that the first man would know to observe the prohibition and not touch it.⁵⁹ In fact, from this perspective, it may not have mattered if they

55 "neque enim qui fecerat omnia bona ualde, in paradiso instituerat aliquid mali: sed malum fuisse homini transgressionem praecepti." Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 239.

56 "Deus omnia valde bona creavit." Wigbod, *ESD*, ed. Migne, col. 226A.

57 "in illa erat praecepti futura transgressio, in qua homo per experimentum poenae disceret, quid interesset inter oboedientiae bonum, et inoebedientiae malum." Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 240.

58 "Id agnoscendo boni et mali, quantum fuisset inter obedientiam boni, et inobedientiam mali, quia si exinde transgressus fuisset, malum illi esset; si bonum illi fuisset, quia si transgressus non fuisset, experimentum pene non didicisset." Wigbod, *ESD*, ed. Migne, cols. 226A–226B.

59 "Lignum enim tale nomen accepit, ut eo secundum prohibitionem non tacto caueretur, quod eo contra prohibitionem tacto sentiretur." Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 254.

had chosen to obey the command or not, because the tree's name reflected its potential for bestowing the discernment of good and evil through the violation of the prohibition.⁶⁰

Wigbod's sense of this tree did not depart completely from Augustinian notions of human dependence and obedience. "The evil for the man was his transgression of the command [of God]," wrote Augustine, for whom the tree was where human and divine will intersected over the issue of obedience.⁶¹ This conclusion was satisfying to Augustine because it recognized God's perfect benevolence while acknowledging that his true purposes could not have been fulfilled without establishing first a test for the humans to overcome. "It was proper," following this logic, "that the man, placed under the Lord God, should have been prohibited somehow, so that for him to be deserving of his Lord obedience itself would be the virtue."⁶²

Wigbod rendered these words nearly identically, reemphasizing that God knew what harm would happen if the transgression were to occur, but also that the man needed the trial:

Why did the Lord forbid him to eat from that very tree? Because He knew that He would condemn him if he transgressed. Indeed, it was necessary that man, placed under the Lord God, be forbidden something, so that by earning it through obedience itself he might have Him as his Lord.⁶³

Indeed, Wigbod speculated that "if he had kept the commandments of his Creator, virtue would have been his, obedience itself, which he lost after his transgression."⁶⁴ Augustine, too, supposed that the man's obedience would have been meaningless without restrictions on his actions, because in obedience the man would find his true, best purpose: service under God's dominion, outside of which disaster awaited. Indeed, Augustine explicitly made the point:

60 Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 254.

61 "sed malum fuisse homini transgressionem praecepti." Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 239.

62 "oportebat autem ut homo sub domino deo positus alicunde prohiberetur, ut ei promerendi dominum suum uirtus esset ipsa oboedientia." Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 239. Translation adapted from Taylor, *St. Augustine*, 2:42.

63 Quare ei Dominus prohibuit ut non comedisset de ipso ligno? Quia sciebat damnaturum, si transgressus fuisset. Oportebat enim ut homo sub Domino Deo positus aliunde prohiberetur, ut ei promerendo Dominum suum virtus esset ipsa obedientia." Wigbod, *ESD*, ed. Migne, col. 227A.

64 "si vero servasset praecepta Creatoris sui, virtus ei fuisset, et ipsa obedientia, quam post transgressionem perdidit." Wigbod, *ESD*, ed. Migne, col. 227A.

I am able to say most accurately that [obedience] is the only virtue of all creatures acting rationally under the authority of God, and that the first and greatest vice swelling one's own ruin is to want to be one's own master, which vice is called disobedience.⁶⁵

Obedience is explicitly linked to the ability of a creature to think and feel, for if the practice of domination occurs among all creatures, it is only through conscious understanding that one can perceive and accept the idea of sovereignty. Quite plainly, then, "there would not be any way for a man to realize and feel that he was subject to the Lord unless he was given some command."⁶⁶

Wigbod understood this argument, echoing its logic in the assertion (noted here again) that "Animals live and feel; trees, however, as we have said, live and do not feel. Man, indeed, lives, and feels, and understands, because he has the discernment between good and evil."⁶⁷ That distinction could not have been achieved without first submitting to the dominion of God, and yet the act of disobedience was imminent. This is the Augustinian logic wherein the man (and by extension all humans), like a tree, would have lacked the capacity for thinking and sensation without the prohibition: the choice to obey or not was what made the man who he was. If the reader had any doubts about this argument, Wigbod turned to Isidore's allegorical explanation, writing that "The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is properly the free choice of the will, which is placed in the midst of us, for the recognizing of good or evil."⁶⁸ The tree, for Wigbod, was planted in both the man and the garden in order to orient him. It gave him his bearings within the framework of the hierarchies of creation and Paradise.

For Wigbod the twin notions of sovereignty and domination were dependence and obedience. Not coincidentally, I think, these were also the

65 "possum uerissime dicere solam esse uirtutem omni creaturae rationali agenti sub Dei potestate. primumque esse et maximum uitium tumoris ad ruinam sua potestate uelle uti, cuius uitii nomen est inoboedientia." Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 239–40.

66 "non esset ergo unde se homo dominum habere cogitaret atque sentiret, nisi aliquid ei iuberetur." Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 240. Translation from Taylor, *St. Augustine*, 2:42.

67 "animalia vivunt et sentiunt; arbores autem, sicut diximus, vivunt, et non sentiunt. Homo uero uivit, et sentit, et intelligit, quia habet discernendi discretionem inter bonum et malum." Wigbod, *ESD*, ed. Migne, col. 216A.

68 "lignum scientiae boni et mali proprium est voluntatis arbitrium, quod in medio nostri est positum, ad agnoscendum bonum vel malum." Wigbod, *ESD*, ed. Migne, col. 226C. The words come from: Isidore of Seville, *In Genesis*, ed. Migne, col. 216C.

hallmarks of seigneurial social domination under Carolingian rule. Like Wigbod's obedient trees, peasants' figurative relationship to the planter and their imagined location in the garden oriented them to their role within the imperial paradise. Wigbod's arboreal metaphor was not, however, without complication, for he fretted about how things worked out for Adam in Eden. In discussing the first humans' disobedience vis-a-vis the tree of the knowledge of good and evil Wigbod performed some of the most intricate syntheses of the literal and the allegorical. His exegesis mixed Augustine and Isidore to forge a new argument for understanding how the planting of the tree and the command to work and guard Paradise modelled "correct" political life.

Domination: To Protect and Cultivate

The forms that Carolingian elites expected peasants' participation in political life to adopt drew directly from thinkers like Wigbod, and his ruminations on Genesis. In the formative years of Charlemagne's imperial project, Augustine's literal commentary, and Wigbod's interpretations of it, formed an ideological core of this enterprise. Mathieu Arnoux has argued that Augustine's literal commentary highlighted Eden and the dynamic between Adam and Eve as an ideal medieval model of social relations, wherein "subjections are dictated only by mutual love, and where there is *neither servitude nor domination*."⁶⁹ Yet, hierarchies of domination between the man and the woman, and between the humans and the other creatures of Paradise, were, in fact, present at the garden's inception. Nevertheless, Arnoux's suspicions about the deployment of Augustine's commentary, and its valorization of agricultural labour as a way of securing peasants' buy-in to their own domination, merits further exploration. Arnoux folded the insight into his framework for articulating widespread acceptance of the "fight-pray-work" tripartite division of later medieval society,⁷⁰ but Carolingian texts like the 806 capitulary and Wigbod's commentary suggest earlier attempts to convince elites (if not peasants themselves) that seigneurial domination was both morally right and central to Carolingian *correctio*. Carolingian moral ecology was justification for Carolingian ecological sovereignty.

In fact, about working the land in Paradise, Augustine had much to say that tethered productive labour to "righteous" domination. To begin, agriculture itself was an inherently good activity, because it reflected natural

⁶⁹ Arnoux, *Le temps des laboureurs*, 149–50. Emphasis added.

⁷⁰ Arnoux, *Le temps des laboureurs*, 145–50.

hierarchies: “fields are cultivated, societies are governed, the arts are practised, and other activities go on both in the heavenly society and in this mortal society on earth.”⁷¹ These relationships could not work without clear hierarchies, as Augustine shows “in a tree, husbandry tends it on the outside so that...its interior might grow.”⁷² Similarly, in Augustine’s mind, Paradise could not have thrived without the tending of the man, who was placed there by God in order to work and guard it.

Augustine lamented the ambiguities of these terms, imposed by the interpretation of the Greek and Latin scriptures to which he had access, because “to work” (*ut operaretur*) does not take an obvious object.⁷³ Augustine speculated that one potential interpretation of the phrase, could be that “what [the man] cultivated in the land through agriculture he preserved in himself through discipline.”⁷⁴ This statement implies a position which the modern scholar Richard White has famously argued: the best way to understand nature is to work within it, and that work itself is a means of knowing nature.⁷⁵ In this way, Augustine wondered, if the man had learned from the way that the dirt of Paradise yielded fruits to him, could he have seen in this example the obedience of good fruits—achieved through careful tending—and the thorns of disobedience, the result of lack of care and attention.⁷⁶ Of course, this was not what happened to the first man, who indeed grew rebellious and thus incurred fruitless labour: thorns and thistles became his lot.⁷⁷ An alternative theory more amenable to Augustine was that it was God Himself who:

cultivated and guarded the man. Just as the man works the earth, not to make earth, but to render it cultivated and fruitful, so God Himself more thoroughly cultivates the man, whom He created to be the man, so that man might be justified if this man were not to depart from Him through pride.⁷⁸

71 “agros coli, societates administrari, artes exerceri et quaeque alia siue in superna societate aguntur siue in hac terrena atque mortali.” Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 244. Translation from Taylor, *St. Augustine*, 2:46.

72 “Sicut autem in arbore id agit agricultura forinsecus, ut illud proficiat, quod geritur intrinsecus.” Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 244.

73 Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 245.

74 “an ut quod operaretur in terra per agriculturam, in se ipso custodiret per disciplinam.” Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 246.

75 White, “Are you an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?”

76 Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 246–47.

77 Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 246–47. Reference to Genesis 3:18.

78 “Est alius in his uerbis sensus, quem puto non immerito praeponendum, ut

In this view, God planted the man in Paradise as a tree to be tended and nurtured, and this treeness—those qualities that made him like a tree—was part of his ideal nature, articulated by Augustine in the assertion that “the same God who creates the man, so that he is the man, cultivates and guards the man that he also might be good and blessed.”⁷⁹

Wigbod seemed unaware of Augustine’s musing on tree husbandry and the dual meaning of “treeish” bodies. In fact, the word *agricultura* does not occur even once in Wigbod’s text, despite appearing twelve times in Augustine’s commentary.⁸⁰ Maybe Wigbod turned to a more readily available commentary (Isidore’s), which focused much more on the symbolism of the tree and the work it did inside of the first man, because Augustine’s full commentary was unknown in his circles. Nevertheless, after a brief departure Wigbod picks up Augustine’s text again, very near to the earlier passages, where the latter reexamines the Genesis verse placing the man in Paradise to work and guard it. Wigbod’s deployment of the text is inexact; it is rather difficult to figure out where some of his words originate.

Augustine noted how the Genesis author here used “Lord God” (*dominus deus*) where before only “God” (*deus*) appeared.⁸¹ For Augustine, this change signified theological transformation: for if the scripture was written for humans it was important for them to recognize the need “to have the Lord God, that is, to live obediently under his domination, rather than to misuse one’s own power lawlessly.”⁸² This phrase, “sub ejus dominatione obedienter vivere, quam licentiose abuti propria potestate,” contrasts the state of living under God’s sovereignty with foolish attempts to strike out on one’s own, which led (through the loss of Paradise) to mortality and strife. In Augustine’s text, this argument culminates in the assertion that “For He has no need of our servitude, but we have need of His dominion, so that He

ipsum hominem operaretur deus et custodiret. sicut enim operatur homo terram, non ut eam faciat esse terram, sed ut cultam atque fructuosam, sic deus hominem multo magis, quem ipse creavit ut homo sit, eum ipse operatur ut iustus sit, si homo ab illo per superbiam non abscedat.” Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 247.

79 “deus idem qui creat hominem, ut homo sit, ipse operatur hominem atque custodit, ut etiam bonus beatusque sit.” Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 247.

80 This is including all variations in declension following the root word *agricultura*-.

81 Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 248.

82 “sed propter hominem scribebatur, ad eum admonendum quantum ei expediat habere dominum deum, hoc est, sub ejus dominatione obedienter uiuere, quam licentiose abuti propria potestate.” Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 248.

may work in us and guard us.”⁸³ The point here is a theological one: humans needed to serve God, because that relationship sustained and nurtured their wellbeing.

Returning to Charlemagne’s Nijmegen capitulary of 806 helps peel back these layers of metaphorical labour and domination. The capitulary (and other similar Carolingian documents) reveals the role of lay aristocrats and ecclesiastics as mediators in economic transactions and social organization, and in the sharing of the king’s responsibilities for both the social and spiritual good.⁸⁴ This is why Marcelo Cândido da Silva cautions against dividing the decree’s claims of authority between “economic” and “religious” spheres, linking its judgment against the ramblers with Adam’s curse to cultivate the earth by toil.⁸⁵ But, as Wigbod’s commentary illustrates, it also connected the labour of those who *did* work with their hands as cultivators with positive attributes.

The *Rule* of St. Benedict—one of the most important early authorities for later Carolingian monastic reforms and organization—also reflected the “revalorization” of agricultural workers and labour after long association with Adam’s curse.⁸⁶ For though the *Rule*’s forty-eighth chapter on the “daily work of hands” cautions primarily against the perils of idleness, prescribing manual labour balanced with devout reading, it drew monks into the world of farmers through manual labour. Yet the exhortation contained a privileged caveat, encouraging monks not to be too upset if poverty or the needs of their house require them to work with their hands in the field harvesting crops, because then they would be “truly monks if they live by the work of their hands.”⁸⁷ It is telling that Hildemar’s influential later ninth-century Carolingian commentary on the *Rule* clarified this point by reassuring the brethren that the urgent necessity of grain really did legitimate the labour of monks who had to work

83 “ille quippe nostra seruitute non indiget, nos uero dominatione illius indigemus, ut operetur et custodiat nos.” Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 248.

84 Devroey reads the 806 capitulary alongside the Synod of Frankfurt of 794, the *Admonitio generalis* of 789, and other capitularies connected to various food shortages. Devroey, “La politique annonaire des Carolingiens,” 336.

85 Cândido da Silva, “L’‘économie morale’ carolingienne,” 172–73, 177.

86 Devroey, “La politique annonaire des Carolingiens,” 343–34.

87 “Otiositas inimica est animae et ideo certis temporibus occupari debent fratres in labore manuum, certis iterum horis in lectione divina...Si autem necessitas loci aut paupertas exegerit ut ad fruges recollendas per se occupentur, non contristentur, quia tunc vere monachi sunt si laborem manuum suarum vibunt.” Venard, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, 160–61. Translation mine.

with their hands, neglecting spiritual studies. The necessity for persuading monks on this point perhaps reveals where these religious would most rather spend their time and energy: it was not in the field.⁸⁸ As in the Nijmegen capitulary, it was during periods of ecological stresses that anxieties about provisioning etched Carolingian social categories in the starkest relief.

Augustine's pivotal role in shaping medieval attitudes toward labour is demonstrated in the bishop of Hippo's shift from allegorical explanations of work in his earliest Genesis commentary toward a literal understanding of Adam's role in the garden. God's wishes for Adam "to work" (*operaretur*) collapsed into his command that the first man be custodian (from *custodire*) of paradise, acting as warden of a garden not really requiring protection, in a world not yet marred by sin. The conflation of the two terms became an injunction that "made Adam to act in order to preserve the state in which he was placed."⁸⁹ In other words, Adam's sovereignty was based on God's force to "make" him live, and his ability to command the life under his authority in Paradise. Moreover, Adam's authority as Eden's sovereign depended entirely on his ability to preserve Paradise, through obedience to God's commands. The first man's was a paradoxical sovereignty in which his restriction from full cognizance (in the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) put him closer to "treeish" life (and thus nearer to Wigbod's ideal workers) than that of Paradise's planter. In a sense, Adam could never know the fullness of his responsibilities without being excluded from them—as he would be, along with Eve—following their sin and expulsion from Paradise. This, according to Sylvain Piron, is what Augustine meant in the verb *custodire*: "Adam had to act in order to preserve the garden and not be expelled."⁹⁰

It was through agricultural labour that Adam, and his descendants, would begin to redeem and renew the earth, bringing forth fruit in place of thorns and thistles. Yet their agricultural work within the garden began before their expulsion. Their obedient cultivating labour was what defined social life together, under God's supervision, before the fall—and after. Therefore, the agricultural toil itself was not a curse, but was, in fact, the key to recovering right social relations and the stable, bountiful nature lost in the first humans' missteps. Augustine's interpretation naturalized the arrangement in the garden as a form of human political life from the species'

88 See Hildemar of Civite, *Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict*, chapter 48. Hildemar of Civite, *Expositio regulae ab Hildemaro tradita et nunc primum typis mandata*, ed. Mittermüller, 476–89.

89 Piron, "L'amélioration du monde," 225, 226, 230–31.

90 Piron, "Ève au fuseau, Adam jardinier," 313–14.

very beginnings. Obedient agricultural labour, and the social domination that went with it, was what bridged the threshold from life outside the garden into a new paradise. It is easy to see how this notion supported the Carolingian vision of ecological sovereignty, for as Piron writes of the humans in the garden: “by practising on plants and animals, the practical wisdom of human action can move from the wild to the domestic state of ‘governable thing.’”⁹¹ By “practising” on the creatures of Eden, Adam discovered and first exercised sovereignty.

Wigbod adopted Augustine’s framework of working and guarding the garden but deployed it with subtle differences that provoke drastically different results, spinning his insight with fibres of Carolingian moral ecology. In Wigbod’s hands, the Genesis text names both God and Lord to show how much it profits him to have the Lord God as his own—that is “to live obediently under his lordship *so that he might work*” (*sub ejus dominatione obedienter vivere ut operaretur*).⁹² Hence where Augustine’s version links obedient living with the promise of spiritual and relational fulfilment vis-à-vis God—an opportunity the humans of Paradise lost after their sin—Wigbod’s version tethered the purpose of life itself to obedient labour under the Lord’s domination. As he proceeded in this narrative, Wigbod used words which do not derive from Augustine’s commentary: “He ought to have worked not with servile toil, but with the will of an honourable soul, and to have guarded it—that is, that he should commit nothing for which he would deserve to be expelled from there.”⁹³ The statement echoed Augustine’s general ideas about the positive effects of obedient service, but explicitly connected that labour to the threat of banishment—an idea that did not originate in the Genesis text.

Wigbod then alluded to the theological explanations, drawing on Augustine’s ideas about the divine origin of good works in the man, who could do nothing good without God’s aid.⁹⁴ Wigbod’s next comment also matches up with nothing obvious in Augustine’s text:

91 Piron, “L’amélioration du monde,” 231.

92 “utrumque nominat, et Deum et Dominum, ut ostenderit quantum ei expedit habere Dominum Deum suum, id est, sub ejus dominatione obedienter vivere ut operaretur.” Wigbod, *ESD*, ed. Migne, col. 226C. Emphasis added.

93 “debut operari non labore servili, sed honestae animae voluntate, et custodiret illum, id ne aliquid committeret quare inde mereretur expellere.” Wigbod, *ESD*, ed. Migne, col. 226C. These words may be Wigbod’s own, or derive from a lost source.

94 “Ecce dedi vobis omnem herbam, et reliqua, sed ut Dominus operatus fuisset in eis justitiam, pietatem, et caetera bona; quod Deus homini tribuet, quia nihil potest

And he was to work it so that he might be just, and guard it so that he might be safe—for if God should abandon him and withdraw His support, he would remain empty, since God has no need of any good from him. *But we all stand in need of His lordship.*⁹⁵

In these words, Wigbod adhered to the theological sense of Genesis and Augustine's commentary, but the explicit mentions of obedience, security, and the threat of the removal of comfort—his life *within* Paradise—alongside his labour linked obedient servitude with protection and lordship in a new way, just as had Wigbod's discussion of labour in the garden. The culmination of Wigbod's moral ecology connected obedient labour to safety, security, and (ultimately) salvation within the political order established in the beginning, and modelled by God's designates—the original Adam, and Wigbod's Adam, Charlemagne. It was key to unlocking the king's role in Carolingian ecological sovereignty: as we shall see, the "new Adam" was likewise simultaneously vulnerable to expulsion from the paradise while also the guarantor of their precepts.

There are other signs of praise—leavened with gestures of domination—for agricultural work among Carolingian texts. Shifts in elite attitudes toward valuing manual labour resulted in Carolingian decrees mandating observation of Sunday rest, and the lifting of such restrictions only in times of great need, as well as in the increasing prevalence of land-tenure-for-labour arrangements between lords and dependents. So much so, Jacques Le Goff argued, that in the Carolingian era "*labor* takes on a meaning that makes it more or less synonymous with *melioramentum*,"⁹⁶ that is to say, it came to mean improvement of the land at the hands of agricultural workers. The rhetoric of the ninth-century abbot Adalhard of Corbie went even further in weighing not only the value of produce but his moral responsibilities toward workers who were obliged to transport the grain tithe to his abbey from distant locales:

homo facere sine adiutorio Dei." Wigbod, *ESD*, ed. Migne, col. 226D. This resonates with Book 8, Chapter 12 of Augustine's commentary, which clearly defines the working of God through humans by grace, through which all good human activity originates.

95 "Et operaretur illum ut justus esset, et custodiret, ut tutus esset, quia si illum Deus dereliquerit, et solatium ejus abstraxerit, ille inanis remaneret, quia Deus nihil bonum ei necesse sit. Sed nos omnes indigemus dominatione ejus." Wigbod, *ESD*, ed. Migne, col. 226D. Emphasis added.

96 Le Goff, "Le travail dans les systèmes de valeur de l'Occident médiévale," 15–16. Italics in the original.

Then, if perhaps because of the longer journey there is no possibility of bringing in the *familia*, a good counsel remains, at the Lord's prompting, so that on this account, neither is the tithe left unpaid nor any sin incurred with regard to the poor. That is, all that quantity or quality of labour which has accrued in more distant places, and which on this account, although it can be rendered in spelt, is nevertheless impossible as sheaves or hay—a wholesome counsel still remains, God inspiring it, from another quarter, so that neither is the *familia* worn down nor the tithe withheld.⁹⁷

Adalhard's provisions strike at the tension between acknowledging peasants' "proper" role as labourers and haulers of food needed to sustain the abbey while recognizing their suffering, revealing how Carolingian domination of both humans and their environment propped up the discourse of moral ecology as "rational and just." In fact, as Michel Lauwers notes, the relief of such affliction reinforced peasants' exploitation and re-inscribed their social identities, for in his mercy the abbot "manifests his power to regulate relations of dominations."⁹⁸

Adalhard's statute also exposes how Carolingian moral ecology impacted people and environments via the "spatialization" of domination, which was always structured along social relations in a "web of dependency" at the centre of which was the seigneurial lord. Movement of labour, produce, and service toward the lord signified subjugated spaces and a "relation between the dominant and the dominated."⁹⁹ Carolingian sources refer to this relationship as *servitium*, and it was never a demand for goods or services themselves but an imposition demanding such from peasants, who, from the perspective of Carolingian elites, possessed no social identity beyond their seigneurial dependence. The domination given form by peasants' *servitium* did not distinguish labour from product: *servitium* made both the thing (grain, transportation, etc.) and the peasants themselves.¹⁰⁰

In other words, returning to Wigbod's arboreal metaphor, like trees in a garden they could be planted in paradise under the supervision and

97 "Deinde si forte propter longiorem uiam possibilitas adducendi familiae non fuerit, bonum exinde restat domino insinuante consilium, ut propter hoc nec decima remaneat nec ullum in pauperibus generetur peccatum : id est ut omnis illa quantitas uel qualitas laborationis quae in longioribus locis adcreuerit et ob hoc, quamuis in spelta fieri possit, in garbas tamen et feno impossibile fuerit, restat tamen deo inspirante ex alia parte salubrae consilium, ut nec familia conteratur nec decima retrahatur." "Statute seu Brevia Adalhardi abbatis Corbeiensis," ed. Semmler, 390.

98 Lauwers, "Le 'travail' sans la domination?," 313–14, 317.

99 Devroey, *Puissants et misérables*, 446–47.

100 Demade, "Les 'corvées' en Haute-Allemagne," 340–41.

cultivation of their minder. And if sources silence the voices of the peasants whose work within nature supported the Carolingian moral ecology, we perhaps glimpse such *servitium* in the tasks assigned to Charlemagne's royal estate managers, to whom the capitulary *De villis* gave firm instructions:

So that our woods and forests may be well guarded (*custoditē*); and where there is a place for clearing, let them have it cleared, and let them not allow fields to encroach upon the woodland. And where woods ought to remain, let them not permit excessive felling and damage; and let them guard (*custodiant*) our game well within the forests...[let them also make our meadows ready in due season]. That they guard (*concustodiant*) our fields and cultivated lands well together...That the buildings within our estates, and the hedges around them be well [guarded] (*custoditē*).¹⁰¹

In the "custodial" language of Eden, Charlemagne's instructions for the maintenance of his estates signified microcosmic landscapes and enclosures that mirrored the discourse of moral ecology that came to define belonging in the imperial paradisiacal order.

Just as with the workers whose labour granted them access to the mercy of elites, Charlemagne's managers earned their keep and station through their *servitium*, which was *itself* their economic and social identity. Lauwers suggests that it was not labour and production themselves that led to farmers' salvation, but rather their obedience and "the circulation of the fruits of their labours."¹⁰² This partly correlates to Wigbod's exegetical insights. Yet in the Carolingian moral ecology *servitium* had a dual role, signifying not only movement toward the landlord but toward Wigbod's "Lord God" and the redemptive work of improving the land through its cultivation and renewal of a cursed creation. The farmers' salvation, like that of the original cultivators in Eden, rested on their redemptive and obedient labour. Planted in paradise and supporting the work of their "new Adam," as both metaphorical trees and real subjects, peasants through their oppression under Carolingian moral ecology, in Wigbod's words, all stood in need of domination.

101 "Ut silvę (ve)l forestes n(ost)rę bene sint custoditę; et ubi locus fuerit ad stirpandu(m), stirpare faciant, et campos de silva increscere n(on) p(er)mittant. Et ubi silve debent esse, non eas p(er)mittant nimis capulare atq(ue) damnare; et feramina n(ost)ra intra forestes bene custodiant...[ponant et prata n(ost)ra ad tempus.] Ut campos et culturas n(ost)ras bene concustodiant...Ut aedificia intra curtes n(ost)ras (ve)l sępes in circuitu bene la (ve)l [sint custoditę]." *Capitulare de villis vel curtis imperialibus*, ed. Brühl, chaps. 36, 37, 41.

102 Lauwers, "Le 'travail' sans la domination?," 331–32.



Figure 5. Pen drawing accompanying Psalm 127 in the Utrecht Psalter, ca. 830. Utrecht, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS 32, fol. 73v. Public domain.

Thinking Trees

Like Augustine, for Wigbod, the trees of Paradise were both real (physical) and symbolic (spiritual or allegorical), and trees were central to the theological and political vocabulary of Charlemagne's court. From their matter Wigbod, the king's exegete, erected structures of sovereignty. We find echoes of Wigbod's hybrid human-trees in subsequent Carolingian exegesis and visual depictions of scripture.

In a depiction of Psalm 127 (Figure 5) from the Utrecht Psalter, the Frankish illustrator (as they almost always did) depicted these verses occurring in a Frankish environment. In the upper right quadrant of this scene stands a round table laden with bread and wine—real sustenance, but of course also through transubstantiation spiritual nourishment. The table is surrounded by vines and royal figures and attendant children, who sit to enjoy their repast while the psalmist himself looks on from a hillock on the right. And then the verses themselves:

Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in His ways.
 You shall eat the fruit of the labour of your hands;
 you are blessed, and it shall go well with you.
 Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine on the sides of your house;
 your children like olive shoots around your table.¹⁰³

103 Psalms 127:1–3. "Beati omnes qui timent Dominum, qui ambulant in viis ejus. Labores manuum tuarum quia manducabis, beatus es, et bene tibi erit. Uxor tua sicut vitis abundans, in lateribus domus tuae; filii tui sicut novellae olivarum in circuitu mensae tuae."

Having transposed the Franks as God's "chosen" people, Carolingian exegetes applied what wisdom they found contained in scriptural verses to themselves, with enormous consequences to conceptions of kingship and ecological sovereignty, as we will soon see.

But for now, focus on the image of the king's spouse as a vine and his children as "treeish" olive saplings planted around the table. For here we see an elite formulation of Wigbod's hybrid human-trees—with the children mirroring the real olive trees looming behind their table. The queen and the children are not agricultural labourers, yet in their presence the king grasps with hands the bread and the wine—the real and symbolic fruits of hard work that the Psalm commends. They experience and participate in the domination of their lord, planted around his table and representative of obedient submission in an elite formulation of hierarchical authority. Here the metaphorical trees gave structure to the royal *domus* just as elsewhere less exalted trees did to the paradisiacal garden itself.

The gulf between opposing ends on the spectrum of Carolingian social domination is revealed in the contrast to what is not mentioned but *is* portrayed: the labourers actually doing the work to supply that sumptuous table, rooted within the domination of the demesne space. The juxtaposition sharpens the ideological work of the miniature: behind the wall, vines coil into ornate patterns and the royal household enjoys a Eucharistic banquet of abundance, while outside the wall, bent figures harvest grapes and haul baskets to the winepress. The same vegetal forms that ennoble the royal family in metaphor become, in the lower register, the framework of unremitting toil. Authority is thus naturalized in arboreal imagery across the scene, but the social distance between elite consumption and peasant labour is inscribed just as vividly in the composition of the page as it was in the lived landscape of a Carolingian estate.

These themes are encapsulated in Wigbod's discussion of the first humans' expulsion from Paradise for their sin of having eaten the forbidden fruit, turning to how they covered their naked bodies in fig leaves. This first act of sartorial independence resulted from their new awareness of their own nudity. Wigbod explained this episode allegorically, drawing on Isidore's commentary:

And when they perceived themselves to be naked, they sewed together fig leaves. With the fig leaves they cover themselves, who embrace the rough world, who burn with the itch of carnal pleasure; and those who, deceived by heretical depravity and stripped of God's grace, gather the coverings

of lies like fig leaves, fashioning for themselves girdles of depravity when they speak falsely of the Lord or of the Church.¹⁰⁴

This comment explained the event in purely symbolic terms, connecting Adam and Eve's fallen condition, earned by their own choice and actions, to those who allow themselves to be led astray by false teachings. On the surface this seems to be a simple repetition, but that obscures Wigbod's creativity. By examining Isidore's understanding of some of the key terms and concepts deployed in this passage and then reading it alongside Wigbod's words on mortal clothing, and his previous arguments for tree sensation and rootedness, what Wigbod really meant becomes clearer.

The fig-leaf episode offered Wigbod the chance to revisit the themes developed in his commentary about trees and "treeish" obedience. It brought to the fore those qualities that make a tree a tree—the elements that give it life, water and rootedness in earth, which combine in some unobservable way within the tree's body to produce its essence: *viriditas* and the greenness of its leaves. In his *Etymologiae*, Isidore explained that "the fig tree is called *ficus* in Latin from *fecunditas* (fruitfulness), for it is more fertile than other trees. In fact, it bears fruit three or even four times a year, and as one crop ripens, another begins to emerge."¹⁰⁵ Despite slight variations in spelling and case number between the versions of Wigbod and Isidore, nothing drastically shifts the meaning.¹⁰⁶ Isidore thus associated the tree with fruit-

104 "*Cumque cognovissent se esse nudos, consuerunt folia fici. Folio fici se contegunt, qui saeculum asperum amplectuntur, qui prurigne voluptatis carnalis uruntur; quique et decepti haeretica pravitate, et gratia Dei nudati, tegumenta mendaciorum tanquam folia fici colligunt, facientes sibi succinctoria pravitatis, cum de Domino vel Ecclesia mentiuntur.*" Wigbod, *ESD*, ed. Migne, col. 231D. The scriptural reference is from Genesis 3:7.

105 "*Ficus Latine a fecunditate vocatur. Feracior enim est arboribus caeteris. Nam ter quaterque per singulos annos generat fructum, atque altero maturescente, alter oboritur.*" Isidore of Seville, *In Genesin*, ed. Migne, cols. 612A–612B.

106 I use coverings here, even though many renderings of the Vulgate use "loincloth" or some similar word. Isidore defines *succinctorium* as an apron that hangs under the arms and tied around the side, so it seems closer to a whole body covering than an undergarment. See Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum sive Originum*, ed. Lindsay, bk. 19, chap. 23. Isidore's version of the fig leaf passage reads: "And when they knew that they were naked, they sewed fig leaves together. They clothe themselves with fig leaves—those who embrace the harshness of the world, who are plowed by the itch of carnal pleasure, who, deceived by heretical depravity and stripped of God's grace, gather the coverings of falsehood like fig leaves, fashioning for themselves girdles of perversity when they lie about the Lord or the Church." "*Cumque cognovissent se esse nudos, consuerunt folia ficus. Foliis fici se contegunt, qui saeculum asperum*

fulness, but in his allegorical commentary—redeployed by Wigbod—this reproductive activity took on the taint of earthly desire: Isidore connected the fig’s leaves with those “who burn with the itch of carnal pleasure,” and for Wigbod, too, the leaves ignited lustful itches.¹⁰⁷ The fig’s fertility also foreshadowed the woman’s curse, an idea that Wigbod borrows from Isidore, who had God predict that the woman’s sorrows would increase, especially in childbirth, and she will produce many children, unless she replaces lust with another bad habit.¹⁰⁸ In this reading, the fig leaves were a false foliage that sprang forth not from the wondrous internal transformation of water into viridity, but from murky lies and carnal activity, the stain and curse of sin. Wigbod went on to reproduce Isidore’s gloss that this curse resulted in the woman’s subordination to the man (“he will have dominion over you”—*ipse dominabitur tui*¹⁰⁹): “lest she fall...she serves willingly, as if to a husband who commands,” establishing the framework of postlapsarian (corrupted) human hierarchies of gender.¹¹⁰

This interpretation reads strangely alongside Augustine’s version of the fig tree, because the bishop of Hippo claimed quite clearly that there was nothing special about their choice of foliage, writing “nor do I think that they imagined anything in these leaves of such a kind, that might come together to now conceal sexual members.”¹¹¹ On the contrary, it was despite their lack of knowledge that they grabbed fig leaves, but that the choice subsequently teaches the reader about their sin and the cause underlying it.¹¹² Augustine prefaced these comments with an extended rumination on pre- and postlapsarian bodies, concluding that after their sin the humans’ bodies became mortal and diseased like the “flesh of cattle” (*pecorum carni*), and thus taints

amplectuntur, qui prurigine voluptatis carnalis arantur, quique decepti haeretica pravitate, et gratia Dei nudati, tegumenta mendaciorum, tanquam ficus folia, colligunt, facientes sibi succinctoria pravitatis, cum de Domino vel Ecclesia mentiuntur.” Isidore of Seville, *In Genesin*, ed. Migne, col. 220B.

107 See above.

108 “*In dolore paries filios, nisi quia voluptas carnalis cum aliqua mala consuetudine vult vincere?*” Wigbod, *ESD*, ed. Migne, col. 233B.

109 Genesis 3:16.

110 “ne corruiat...libenter servit quasi viro jubenti.” Wigbod, *ESD*, ed. Migne, col. 233B. The words come from Isidore of Seville, *In Genesin*, ed. Migne, cols. 221C–222A.

111 “nec arbitror eos cogitasse aliquid in illis foliis, quod talibus congrueret contegi iam membra prurientia.” Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 366.

112 Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 366.

them with the same appetite for sexual activity that drives all animals to procreate.¹¹³

The association of sensual depravity with the fig leaves that occurred in all three texts does not prove that Wigbod knew about Augustine's passage—in fact, if he disagreed with Augustine's position that there was nothing inherently wrong with fig leaves, he may well have omitted it by choice. Nevertheless, Wigbod's discussion of mortal, animal bodies shows that these themes were on his mind. Wigbod closed his commentary with a brief passage "On mortal clothing," that takes its inspiration (and some words) from Isidore and Augustine, but which seems (in the absence of other evidence) a unique creation. In Wigbod's version, Adam suddenly understood the difference between the good of obedience and the evil of disobedience, knowing that he had neither achieved what he desired (to be his own master) nor saved the good life that would be lost outside Paradise:

Just as we know what difference there is between the good of obedience and the evil of disobedience, so now Adam understands—for not only had he not been made such as he wished to become, but neither did he preserve what he had been made.¹¹⁴

Using Wigbod's logic, I conclude by suggesting that, for him, the stitching together of the fig leaves and the attempted concealment of their bodies was a misguided (disobedient) attempt by the humans to reclaim a sense of treeness.

If God planted the man in Paradise as a kind of tree, to be nurtured and tended by him, then putting on the fig leaves camouflaged the humans' deathly animal flesh with the green leaves of verdant life. Their sin was in knowing too much, and—as Wigbod wrote quite clearly—trees live but do not feel or think; therefore, the man and the woman tried to become vegetal, senseless, as they had been before their missteps. Adam, according to Wigbod:

He also received a garment of skin by divine judgment, by which designation the mortality of the body is signified....and that he might one day stretch forth his hand to the tree of life, and live forever. Now the stretching forth

113 "hoc ergo amisso statu, corpus eorum duxit morbidam et mortiferam qualitatem, quae inest etiam pecorum carni, ac per hoc etiam eundem motum, quo fit in pecoribus concumbendi appetitus, ut succedant nascentia morientibus." Augustine of Hippo, *DGAL*, ed. Zycha, 366.

114 "Sicut nos scimus inter bonum obedientiae, et malum inobedientiae, ita nunc Adam intelligit, quia ille non solum non fuerat factus qualis fieri voluit, sed nec illud quod factus fuerat conservavit." Wigbod, *ESD*, ed. Migne, col. 234A.

of the hand fittingly signifies the cross or the crucifying pain of penitence, through which eternal life is regained.¹¹⁵

This reading unambiguously shows the transformation of his body into something new, the animal-human, for whom the tree of life was lost, but his outstretched hand reaching for it symbolizes another tree to come, the cross and salvation. An image very like this can be found in Hrabanus Maurus's *In honorem sanctae crucis*, which Celia Chazelle points to as the figural display of Christ's body and his revelation of kingship, writing that "this is the eternal lord and 'holy creator' come into the world to seize the prize from the deep, the God placed on the cross who bestowed the supernal crown."¹¹⁶ In the Carolingian formulation, Christ himself thus became "treeish," standing as a hybrid man-cross, arms outstretched like branches reaching toward the sunlight.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how Carolingian ecological sovereignty took shape through arboreal metaphors that reimagined agricultural toil as a redemptive act rather than Adam's curse. Beginning with Charlemagne's 806 capitulary at Nijmegen, which tied food relief and exclusion of idle beggars to a moral economy of labour, I traced how Wigbod's *Explanatio sex dierum* recast peasants as "thinking trees," rooted bodies whose obedience under seigneurial care mirrored Eden's cultivated trees. Drawing on Augustine, Isidore, and patristic traditions of *viriditas*, Wigbod developed a theology of "moral ecology" in which the greenness of trees symbolized vitality, faith, and the promise of renewal, and in which obedience to lords mirrored obedience to God. His exegesis of the trees of life and knowledge reinforced that salvation required cultivation, discipline, and subordination, hierarchies that mapped neatly onto Carolingian social and political structures seen in contemporary texts and images juxtaposing lords and peasants. In this way, Wigbod's metaphors made peasants' coerced labour not only necessary for survival but also integral to the empire's spiritual and ecological order. By casting domination as care, and toil as salvation, Carolingian thinkers

115 "Accepit etiam tunicam pelliceam divino iudicio, quo nomine corporis mortalitas significatur...possitque aliquando manum porrigere ad arborem vitae, et vivere in aeternum. Manus autem porrectio bene significat crucem vel cruciatum poenitentiae, per quam vita aeterna recuperatur." Wigbod, *ESD*, ed. Migne, col. 234A.

116 Chazelle, *The Crucified God in the Carolingian Era*, 81, 101, 115. A high-quality digital image of this image can be seen at https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Reg.lat.124.

naturalized a system in which ruling and cultivating were inseparable, and in which the empire itself became a garden whose flourishing justified both power and exclusion. This logic, rooted in the metaphor of “thinking trees,” laid the groundwork for subsequent Carolingian efforts to frame all of creation—land, animals, and people alike—as resources to be ordered, disciplined, and redeemed under ecological sovereignty.

Wigbod’s commentary shows how one Carolingian exegete saw in trees the ideal metaphor for explaining obedience both to God and to one’s earthly lord: to be planted and nurtured in a well-tended garden was to live the life of the exemplary Carolingian subject. As evidenced in the Nijmegen capitulary and theorized in Wigbod’s exegesis, obedient labour under “righteous” seigneurial domination granted access to Carolingian renewal and the redemption of nature, and thereby fuller participation in their imperial project: the pan-European subjugation and “salvation” of peoples, animals, plants, and environments. The rambler, those who did not submit to working with their hands in this reclamation project, were expelled from this garden.

JOCUND RULE, FECUND NATURE

THIS CHAPTER TURNS to the ways Carolingian authors framed Adamic kingship not only as a matter of correct conduct or theological rectitude, but as a visible and experiential condition, legible in the prosperity of the land and the joy of its people. Through prayers, poems, and letters, advisers like Alcuin and Theodulf articulated a vision of rule in which the flourishing of creation—fertile fields, balanced seasons, and well-ordered churches—served as signs of divine favour, while famine, decay, or neglect betrayed royal failure. The chapter traces the consolidation of this discourse around the language of *felicitas*, or happiness, which provided the Carolingians with a flexible vocabulary to link emotion, environment, and authority. Courtier-theologians like Alcuin, Theodulf, and others were stakeholders in the “Carolingian division of responsibilities,” encouraged to give and solicit advice in “an almost continuous debate...between the court and the ruler, and between centre and periphery.” The ways such thinkers consciously fit themselves into the “matrix formed by the intersecting concepts of... Church and empire” shaped their debates on how to better the lives of all the realm’s inhabitants, including their sovereign’s.¹ By following Alcuin and his contemporaries, we see how the “happy kingdoms” of the Carolingian imagination were constructed as both promise and warning: a grammar of kingship that defined the sovereign’s role as steward of an imperial garden whose health reflected his justice and whose ruin exposed his sins.

When Carolingian kings attained their office, clergy conducted an accession liturgy in their honour, seeking the blessing of God on the new ruler and the whole realm. The early ninth-century Sacramentaries of Angoulême and of Tours both include a specific prayer invoked as a blessing formula to accompany the anointing of the king, a practice which began with Charlemagne’s father Pepin and recalled the Old Testament example of Samuel anointing the king David.² The prayer takes its name from the first word in the text, *Prospice* (Look down):

1 Kramer, *Rethinking Authority in the Carolingian Empire*, 43–44, 216.

2 Bouman, *Sacring and Crowning*, 91; Nelson, “Kingship and Empire in the Carolingian World,” 54–55.

Look down, Omnipotent God, with serene eyes on this most glorious king. As Thou didst bless Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so deign to irrigate and bathe him by Thy potency with abundant blessings of spiritual grace with all its fullness. Grant him from the dew of heaven and the fatness of earth abundance of corn, wine and oil and a wealth of all fruits from the generous store of divine gifts, through long years; so that, while he is reigning, there may be healthiness of bodies in the fatherland, and peace may be unbroken in the realm, and the glorious dignity of the royal palace may shine before the eyes of all with the greatest splendour of royal power and be seen to be glittering and bright as if filled with the utmost splendour by the greatest light. Grant him Omnipotent God, to be a most mighty protector of the fatherland, and a comforter of churches and holy monasteries with the greatest piety of royal munificence, and to be the mightiest of kings, triumphing over his enemies so as to crush rebels and heal nations; and may he be very terrible to his enemies with the utmost strength of royal potency. Also may he be generous and loveable and pious to the magnates and the outstanding leaders and the faithful men of his realm, that he may be feared and loved by all. Also may kings come forth from his loins through successions of future times to rule this whole realm. And after glorious and happy times (*tempora...felicia*) in this present life, may he be worthy to have eternal joys in perpetual blessedness.³

Prospice charged the king to actively practise good rule and, in many ways, articulates an inversion of pseudo-Cyprian's *rex iniquus*. That text had warned the king against bad conduct because of the consequences: discord, disruptions in familial succession, illness and famine among the

3 "Prospice omnipotens Deus serenis obtutibus hunc gloriosum regem illum, sicut benedixisti Abraham Isaac et Iacob; quibus illum largis benedictionibus spiritualis gratiae cum omni plenitudine tua potentia inrigare atque perfundere digneris. Ut tribuas ei de rore caeli et de pinguedine terrae habundantiam frumenti vini et olei et omnium frugum opulentiam ex largitate divini muneris longa per tempora. Ut illo regnante sit sanitas corporum in patria et pax inviolata in regno. Et dignitas gloriosa regalis palatii maximo splendore regiae potestatis oculis omnium luce clarissima coruscare atque splendore quasi splendidissima fulgora maximo perfusa lumina videantur. Tribue ei, omnipotens Deus, ut sit fortissimus protector patriae et consolatur ecclesiarum atque cenobiorum sanctorum maxima cum peitate regalis munificentiae. Atque ut sit fortissimus regum, triumphator hostium ad opprimendos rebelles et paganas nationes. Sitque suis inimicis satis terribilis proxima fortitudine regalis potentiae; obtinatis quoque atque procelsis proceribusque ac fidelibus sui regni sit munificus et amabilis et pius, ut ab omnibus timeatur atque diligatur. Reges quoque de lumbis eius per successiones temporum futurorum egrediantur regnum regere Francorum. Et post gloriosa tempora atque felicia praesentis vitae gaudia sempiterna in perpetua beatitudine habere mereatur. Quod." *Prospice*, Sacramentary of Angoulême, fol. 130, published in Bouman, *Sacring and Crowning*, 91. Translation by Nelson, "Kingship and Empire in the Carolingian World," 58.

people, unproductive land and inclement weather, in addition to sorrows and unhappiness. *Prospice* offered positive encouragement and tangible environmental benefits: a list of dos instead of don'ts.

It is significant that the exhortation concludes by forecasting “happy times” for the king who follows these guidelines, for, by the time the sacramentaries were assembled, the notion of happy rule or happy kingdoms (*felicia regna*) had become constituent in the construction of Carolingian kingship, and therefore stood as a pillar of Carolingian ecological sovereignty. The conjunction of *felicitas* and good rule, however, first coalesced in the later eighth century when the Frankish king's doings became linked with the ecology of the realm. This chapter again follows Alcuin—a principal transmitter of these ideas—as the eighth century became the ninth. But other voices also enter the discussion and are, as we will see, crucial for unravelling the meaning of *felicia regna* and to uncovering some of the ways in which Carolingian kings were instructed in its merits.

Happy Kingdoms

The idea of using Alcuin's letters to trace a phrase or single idea as representative of broader discourses of Charlemagne's era is traditional. Already in the 1950s Luitpold Wallach, the historian and diplomaticist, identified the concept of *stabilitas regni*, which he defined as the “realization of the ruler's moral responsibility toward his subjects, regardless of origin or nationality,” in Alcuin's letters to both English and Frankish kings. Wallach located this phrase among the royal summons issued by Charlemagne, but cautioned against a conflation of the idea between media: a political meaning of “stability of the kingdom” versus a religious idea of *stabilitas* as the “enduring solidity of faith” practised by those who took vows in religious orders.⁴ Nowadays, we recognize that there was no clear dividing line between secular and sacred in Carolingian politics, though there were thorny questions of jurisdiction, and underlying all a shared sense of responsibility for the spiritual safety of the realm. Nevertheless, we should retain the premise undergirding Wallach's basic point that paying attention to the ways that language structures discourse yields an understanding of how the king and those at the royal court imagined the ruler's responsibilities.

Alcuin's letters offer a striking vision of Carolingian rulership as a sacred political order that collapses the boundary between earthly empire

4 Wallach, *Alcuin and Charlemagne*, 62–64.

and divine providence. Sophia Moesch notes that by casting Charlemagne as “new” versions of biblical rulers, Alcuin constructs a typological genealogy that roots his authority in salvation history. He draws heavily on Augustinian language, particularly the concepts of peace and justice but reworks them to suggest that these ideals are not deferred to the eschaton but realized, however imperfectly, in the present Carolingian order. Charlemagne’s reign becomes a city of perpetual peace whose walls are built of virtue and justice, where the *populus Christianus* finds safety under the shadow of divine favour. For Alcuin, the Carolingian state is not merely legitimate but is blessed, chosen, even exceptional.⁵ His letters make clear that the empire’s authority depends not just on martial success or dynastic continuity but on fidelity to Catholic orthodoxy, which alone ensures that its ruler governs as *rector* (leader) and *vindex* (avenger) in accordance with God’s will.

Many historians consider events from the year 799 as a prelude to Charlemagne’s imperial coronation in 800. That event, which Einhard presented as an unanticipated shock, has more recently been reevaluated, and it is suggested that the Frankish king had been “thinking imperially” in the 790s.⁶ The campaign season of 799 saw the complete conquest of Brittany, and in September an exultant Charlemagne hosted Pope Leo III, who had fled Rome after having been attacked and maimed at the instigation of Roman aristocrats, at Paderborn in Saxony. Holding the audience at this locale was a “dramatic symbol” of Frankish power in a region Charlemagne had been trying to subdue his whole life.⁷ As de Jong notes, the Frankish king’s rescue of the pope stabilized that base of religious legitimacy on which a good portion of the Carolingian dynastic claim rested—the assent of the papacy.⁸ And yet the pope’s escape northward, described by Alcuin as the flight of an “eagle” who, lately deserting the heights of the Roman citadel,” came “to drink the springs of the Saxon countryside and to see the lion, dominating over all living things and beasts.”⁹ Alcuin’s vivid description more than hints that Charlemagne (or at least those in his entourage) saw this event as a reorientation of their relationship: from this time onward he, not the pontiff (who was

5 Moesch, *Augustine and the Art of Ruling in the Carolingian Imperial Period*, 86–92.

6 Collins, “Charlemagne’s Imperial Coronation,” 66–68; Davis, *Charlemagne’s Practice of Empire*, 25, 39, 345.

7 Collins, “Charlemagne’s Imperial Coronation,” 64–65; McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 51.

8 de Jong, “Charlemagne’s Church,” 117.

9 “Cui crederem, si quid dixisset de aquila? qui, nuper Romanae arcis deserens cacumina, ut biberet Saxonici ruris fontes et videret leonem, cunctis dominantem animantibus et feris.” Alcuin, *Ep. 181*, ed. Dümmler, p. 299, lines 7–9.

actually named Leo, Latin for “lion”), was the metaphorical apex predator and principal partner in their political relationship.

In the later 790s, at the same time as Charlemagne widened his imperial ambitions, Alcuin’s correspondence began to incorporate more consistently the Frankish sovereign into his vision of happy rule. After March 799, Alcuin wrote to Charlemagne in response to philosophical and natural questions, likening Aachen to a “new Athens” which “may perhaps be created in Francia, indeed, a far finer one” than its ancient namesake.¹⁰ This reference to the seat of ancient knowledge and wisdom may reflect, as Bullough has suggested, his dissatisfaction with the direction that court scholarship had taken during his absence from it (beginning in 796) while abbot at Tours. In any case, it is clear that in the last years of the eighth century, Alcuin had resumed his duties as author of much of Charlemagne’s diplomatic correspondence, responsible also for instructing the king himself.¹¹ In that same letter, Alcuin heralded the arrival of “joyful times (*felicia...tempora*) for the Christian people in the exaltation of [Charlemagne’s] happiness (*felicitatis*).”¹² In this statement, Alcuin does not warn or exhort, he acclaims Charlemagne as the embodiment of the *rex aequus* (just king), whose actions have produced happiness and therefore prosperity, presumably including the environmental benefits the Yorkish cleric had written about previously.

Recall here the late eighth-century transmission of these ideas to the Continent. Insular scholar Cathwulf had warned Charlemagne about the benefits of good and the consequences of bad rule:

And then there shall be calm in the air and weather, fruitfulness of earth and sea with all that grows in them, and you shall rule many nations happily (*feliciter*), and your enemies shall fall before your face, and so on. But on the contrary, as St. Patrick said: “Because of a king’s injustice, there shall be unhappiness (*infelicitas*) for himself, strife with his wife and sons, famine among the people, pestilence, infertility of the land, and the fruits of the earth shall be struck by various storms of the sea, and he shall be overcome by his enemies and driven out of his kingdom.”¹³

¹⁰ “forsan Athenae nova perficeretur in Francia, immo multo excellentior.” Alcuin, *Ep. 181*, ed. Dümmler, p. 279, line 22. Text and translation from Godman, *Poets and Emperors*, 39.

¹¹ Bullough, *Alcuin*, 436.

¹² “felicia christiano populo tempora in vestrae felicitatis exaltatione.” Alcuin, *Ep. 170*, ed. Dümmler, p. 279, lines 7–8.

¹³ “Et tunc erit aeris et tempestatum tranquillitas, terre maris cum omnibus in eis nascentibus fecunditas, et dominaberis etiam multis feliciter gentibus et inimici tui ante faciem tuam cadunt et reliqua. E contra, sicut dixit sanctus Patricius: ‘Pro regis

Other than the misattribution of pseudo-Cyprian's text to St. Patrick, only the sequence and level of detail changes between Cathwulf and pseudo-Cyprian, with one notable exception. The original ninth abuse does not mention either the unhappiness of the bad king or the good king's happy domination of peoples and enemies. *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* does mention the "joy of humans" (*gaudium hominum*) who live under good rule, but there is no obvious connection to *felicitas/infelicitas*, which Cathwulf's screed so clearly articulates. Moreover, pseudo-Cyprian's warning impugned the inheritance and authority of the bad king's descendants, drawing on the biblical examples of David and Solomon, whereas Cathwulf introduced a new element, levelling that threat to the sitting king: he will suffer both defeat and banishment from his kingdom, but the fate of his progeny is not specified. Rather, Cathwulf levelled his condemnation at Charlemagne's defeated enemies.

Alcuin, too, had previously used this framework, writing about the brothers King Eadberht and Archbishop Egbert who ruled Northumbria from 737–758, presiding over "happy times" (*tempora...felicia*).¹⁴ As king and bishop together they ruled the Northumbrian people: "the one ruling the church's law, the other the business of the realm."¹⁵ This framework—king and bishop working together—stands out as the most excellent arrangement in Alcuin's poem, prefiguring his later formulation of Carolingian happy kingdoms (*felicia regna*), as the brothers helped each other achieve their goals of enlarging and securing temporal rule and expanding the reach and influence of the church.

Closing a letter to King Æthelred I and his court, Alcuin prayed that "God make you happy (*felices*) even in this earthly kingdom."¹⁶ This sentence marks Alcuin's earliest extant association in prose of the good king, the idyllic environment, and the language of felicity. In another letter to Æthelred I from 793, Alcuin makes these connotations even more explicit. Alcuin argues:

iniustitia sui ipsius infelicitas erit, uxoris filiorum quoque dissensio, populorum fames, pestilentia, infecunditas terre, maris quoque tempestatibus fructus terrarum diversis percussis, et ab inimicis suis superatus et expulsus de regno." Cathwulf, *Ep. var.* 7, ed. Dümmler, p. 503, lines 38–44.

14 "Tempora tunc huius fuerant felicia gentis, / quam rex et praesul concordii iure regebant." Alcuin, *The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*, 100. Translation mine.

15 "hic iura ecclesiae, rex ille negotia regni." Alcuin, *The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*, ed. and trans. Godman, 100–101. Translation mine.

16 "Deus vos et in hoc terreno regno felices efficiat." Alcuin, *Ep.* 16, ed. Dümmler, p. 44, line 35.

We also read that the goodness of a king is the prosperity of the whole people: the victory of the army, the mildness of the air, the abundance of the earth, the blessing of children, the health of the people...And he who governs well the people subject to him has a good reward from God—namely, the heavenly kingdom. Very happily (*feliciter*) does he reign on earth who from an earthly kingdom will earn a heavenly one.¹⁷

This statement is an even more direct evocation of *De duodecim abusivis saeculi*, including the environmental and agricultural benefits of good rule, along with the promise of successful heirs. The most significant addition is hinted at in Alcuin's previous letter—happy rule on earth. In Cathwulf's letter, the king could rule happily, and he would invite unhappiness onto himself through un-kingly conduct, but Alcuin's is the first connection among Charlemagne's courtier-theologians of happy kingship to a happy people.

Another letter to Æthelred, likely from 793, warns the king that it is unfitting for one seated on the throne of a kingdom to live with such bad manners, and sets out alternatives as paired opposites: reason rather than anger, mercy rather than cruelty, truth rather than falsehood, chastity, continence, and sobriety rather than their contraries. He then closes with a prohibition that Alcuin did not invent: "Do not, do not seize what belongs to others, lest you lose your own." What Cathwulf had quoted as St. Patrick's account of kings who unjustly seized what was not theirs and justly lost what was, Alcuin presses on Æthelred as an imperative, the repeated "do not, do not" (*noli, noli*) emphasizing the weight he wanted it to carry. The letter ends by entreating that "Almighty God make you bloom with the happiness (*felicitate*) of the kingdom, the dignity of good character, and long-lasting prosperity."¹⁸ For Alcuin, it seems, Charlemagne had achieved the

17 "Legimus quoque, quod regis bonitas totius est gentis prosperitas, victoria exercitus, aeris temperies, terrae habundantia, filiorum benedictio, sanitas plebis... et qui bene regit subiectum sibi populum, bonam habet a Deo retributionem: regnum scilicet caeleste. Valde feliciter regnat in terra, qui de terreno regno merebitur caeleste." Alcuin, *Ep. 18*, ed. Dümmler, p. 51, lines 29–33. Emphasis added.

18 "Non decet te in solio sedentem regni rusticis vivere moribus. Ira tibi non dominetur, sed ratio. Misericordia te amabilem faciat, non crudelitas odibilem. Veritas audiatur ex ore tuo, non falsitas. Castitatis tibi conscius esto, non libidinis; continentiae, non luxoriae; sobrietatis, non ebrietatis. Noli notabilis esse in aliquo peccato, sed laudabilis in omni opere bono. Largus est in dando, non avarus in rapiendo. Iustitia omnes tuos exornet actus. Esto forma honestatis omnibus te videntibus. Noli, noli rapere aliena, ne et propria perdas." And also: "Deus omnipotens regni felicitate, morum dignitate, longaeva prosperitate te florere faciat." Alcuin, *Ep. 30*, ed. Dümmler, pp. 71–72, lines 25–30 and 1–9. For the date see Bullough, *Alcuin*, 90–91n222.

former and driven out fear of the latter's effects, his reign marked not by warnings of disorder but by the visible signs of *felicitas*—peace in the skies, abundance in the fields, harmony in the household, and the submission of enemies—so that the king himself could be praised as the guarantor of both cosmic balance and earthly prosperity.

In another letter, dated by Dümmler to after March 799, Alcuin praised Charlemagne for surpassing his peers not only in political and military prowess, but even more in his pursuit of wisdom and enthusiasm for religious devotion:

And as much as you have been set above others in the power of your rule, so much do you excel all in the beauty of wisdom and the ardour of holy religion. Happy the people (*Felix populus*) who rejoice in such a prince, on whose prosperity the welfare of all depends, and in whose good cheer (*hilaritate*) the hearts of all will rejoice.¹⁹

Note the move from passive to active: *praelatus* (have been set above) in the power of his rule, *praececellis* (you excel) in wisdom and holy religion. Alcuin makes clear that what Charlemagne held by conferral was one thing, and what he attained through his rule was another. For Alcuin, these outcomes were predictable, for he knew not only of the logic of pseudo-Cyprian, but also that of the Bible, when he followed with a quotation: "As it is said: 'In the cheerfulness (*hilaritate*) of the king is life'; whose throne scatters iniquity, and reverence for whose countenance preserves them even unto equity."²⁰ In 797, Alcuin wrote to Coenwulf (r. 796–821), the new king of Mercia, urging him in very pseudo-Cyprianic language that the English *gens* had been

wearied by many tribulations on account of its sins. It must be raised to the height of its ancient honour by the goodness of kings, the preaching of Christ's priests, and the piety of the people, so that the blessed offspring of our fathers may merit to possess everlasting happiness (*felicitatem*), and the stability of the present kingdom, and strength against its enemies.²¹

19 "Et quantum regni potentia praelatus, tantum sapientiae decore et sanctae reigionis fervore omnibus praececellis. Felix populus, qui tali principe gaudet, in cuius prosperitate salus cunctorum consistit, in cuius hilaritate omnium animus gaudebit." Alcuin, *Ep. 171*, ed. Dümmler, p. 281, lines 26–28.

20 "ut dictum est: 'In hilaritate regis, vita'; cuius solium dissipat iniquitatem, cuius vultus reverentia conservat usque ad aequitatem." Alcuin, *Ep. 171*, ed. Dümmler, p. 281, lines 28–30.

21 "Gens enim Anglorum multis propter peccata fatigatur tribulationibus. Quae regum bonitate et sacerdotum Christi praedicatione et populi religione erigenda est ad antiqui culmen honoris; quatenus benedicta patrum nostrorum progenies

The statement blends the ideas of the warnings against an unjust king with the addition of happy rule, seeking both the everlasting happiness of the world to come alongside happiness in this present earthly kingdom. Like Adam's (until the Fall), a just king's obedience to God's command went together with a happy existence, and his disobedience or negligence invited disaster and even exile.

These quotes hint that Alcuin is doing more in these letters than simply noting a correlation between the good king and tranquil environments. The good Frankish king follows the example of good Old Testament kings and is therefore also *happy*, and a prosperous people shares in that emotion. Alcuin's letter, in fact, suggests that the king performed royal happiness with a purpose. The first quote on the cheerfulness of kings derives from Proverbs 16:15: "In the cheerfulness of the king's countenance [is] life: and his clemency [is] like the latter rain."²² The simile of mercy like rain resonates well with Alcuin's view of the king whose just actions dissolve injustice. But it is the Proverbs verse before this one that gives the sentence its full context: "The wrath of a king [is like] the messengers of death, and the wise man will placate it."²³

In this contrast, the happiness of the king is juxtaposed with his anger, an emotion that Gerd Althoff has shown early medieval kings deployed as part of a "rulership practice" in which the expected angry reaction of a king governed the actions and uncertainties of those under his authority.²⁴ There was, Althoff argues, a shift during the Carolingian era away from the constantly angry king, who invited the wrath of his magnates and soldiers, into a royal figure who deployed anger modified by "accompanying emotions" like clemency and mercy, mildness and piety, which gave the ruler the best of both worlds: the ability to coerce and project expectations for aristocratic behaviour but also retain the advantage of "sacral legitimacy."²⁵ Of course, this development meant that the king would also have to display more Christian behaviour than that of the Merovingians, but this was in

perpetuum mereatur possidere felicitatem, et praesentis regni stabilitatem et contra inimicos fortitudinem." Alcuin, *Ep. 123*, ed. Dümmler, p. 181, lines 13–17.

22 "In hilaritate vultus regis vita, et clementia ejus quasi imber serotinus." Proverbs 16:15.

23 "Indignatio regis nuntii mortis, et vir sapiens placabit eam." Proverbs 16:14.

24 Gerd Althoff, "*Ira Regis*," 59–61.

25 Althoff, "*Ira Regis*," 62–65.

keeping with the new partnership with Rome, the overarching premise that upheld the Carolingian usurpers' claim to the Frankish throne.²⁶

Alcuin extolled Charlemagne in terms that fit neatly alongside those already familiar in Carolingian political discourse. For example, in a letter from August 799, Alcuin closed with a standard entreaty to Christ that he safeguard and bless Charlemagne, but in so doing he tapped into this novel language of happy rule:

May Christ grant you happy times (*Tempora...felicia*)
of this kingdom and the eternal, beloved David."²⁷

In these and earlier statements Alcuin laid out an emotional standard for the Frankish king: the just king, who followed the prescriptions of biblical examples and of *Prospice*, and who heeded the warnings of pseudo-Cyprian, demonstrated his goodness not only through right action but through his manifest happiness: that, for Alcuin, was a sure sign that all was right in the realm.

The cues to happiness in Alcuin's lauds and exhortations might be characterized as what William Reddy labels "emotives": words and gestures that reflect not the internal sentiment of the one doing the talking or gesturing but, rather like a performance, they signal and "translate into words" desired outcomes and behaviours.²⁸ In this way, Charlemagne was a positive mirror image of Althoff's wrathful (Merovingian) king, who did not so much feel angry, but who performed anger to discipline and correct wayward aristocrats and to uphold the norms of the court. There may also have been an element of physiognomics—the ancient practice of studying a person's outward appearance, especially their face, to discern their inner characteristics and personality—which had regained popularity among authors in late antique and early medieval Italy.²⁹ Perhaps Alcuin's (and other Carolingian

26 Althoff, "Ira Regis," 65.

27 "Tempora concedat Christus felicia regni / Huius et aeterni, David amate, tibi." Alcuin, *Ep. 178*, ed. Dümmler, p. 296, lines 11–12.

28 Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*, 105.

29 Physiognomy was known and practised in Late Antiquity, but was less discussed as a technical science in early medieval Europe, perhaps because so many of the treatises that discussed it were available only in the less-known Greek language. Despite the apparent lack of early medieval physiognomic treatises, Paolo Squatriti has shown that physiognomic elements—in particular authors' descriptions of smiling faces—shaped the writers' and revisers' portrayals of prelates in the *Liber pontificalis*—a late antique biography of the popes of Rome—and physical descriptions in other early medieval texts. Squatriti, "Personal Appearance and Physiognomics in Early Medieval Italy," 193–97.

authors') calls for Charlemagne to put on a "happy face" and rule cheerfully show that such physiognomic notions had spread to Francia by the end of the eighth century. Alcuin's pleadings for and reminders of the king's cheerfulness, so intimately connected to the happiness of the realm, translated all the diffuse warnings and recommendations surveyed up to this point for the king and those at court.

Felicia regna elegantly clarified that concept into a simple formula: happy king, happy people, happy kingdoms. The king's conduct *and* emotional performance were inseparable from this framework. Barbara Rosenwein's concept of "emotional communities" is useful here, as a description of "groups in which people adhere to the same norms of emotional expression," and as "a group in which people have a common stake, interests, values, and goals."³⁰ If the irate king inspired obedience and the dolorous king moved people to mercy, then the happy king ensured *and proved* the prosperity of his people and realm. An emotional community and its shared vocabulary function to control and discipline behaviour and cultivate "internalized norms" that structure the very ways in which its members "think and act." Even the emotives that signal expectations shape the community "by their very existence."³¹ When members of the court encountered the happy king they would then, if they were discerning enough, know to expect the concomitant manifestations of their happy kingdoms, and how to comport themselves as members of the happy people.

As shown above Insular, biblical, and Roman sources blended to create this concept of realm-wide bliss and so it was accessible to other Continental eighth-century writers. That *felicia regna* could have occurred both earlier and contemporaneously (and meant something else) should not be too surprising, as Rosenwein shows, "More than one emotional community may exist—indeed normally does exist—contemporaneously, and these communities may change over time."³² Certainly one of Alcuin's letters from 801, addressed to Charlemagne in his role as *magister philosophiae*, encourages this interpretation: "Happy the people (*Felix populus*) which is governed by a wise and pious prince, as one reads in that Platonic proverb, which says that kingdoms would be happy (*felicia...regna*) if philosophers, that is, lovers of wisdom, were to reign, or if kings were to devote themselves to the study of philosophy."³³

30 Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, 2, 24.

31 Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, 25.

32 Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, 2.

33 "Felix populus, qui sapiente et pio regitur principe; sicut in illo Platonico legitur

Alcuin's mention of Platonic verses seemingly refers to the famous "philosopher king" of the *Republic*, but it is in fact a recycled quotation from Boethius's *De consolazione philosophiae*: "It was you [Philosophy] who established through the words of Plato the principle that those states would be happy where philosophers were kings or their governors were philosophers."³⁴ Alcuin, however, turns that famous dictum into one which works for the emotional community signalled by *felicia regna* in Carolingian circumstances: loving philosophy helps make the good king, but he is the one whose performed cheerfulness shapes and proves the happy people and realm. Boethius's work influenced the early medieval political language of *felicitas* through its reminder that "What does the clamor of tragedies lament, if not fortune overturning happy kingdoms with an indiscriminate blow"³⁵ Carolingian happy kingdoms, of course, depended not on the whims of *fortuna* but, rather, on the conduct and attitude of their sovereign.

Happy kingdoms also called to mind Augustine of Hippo's warnings from *The City of God* that men are not "happy who live always amid the disasters of war."³⁶ On the contrary, the blissful society imagined by Augustine was one that had surpassed need for warfare, whether internal civil war or against external enemies. Eschewing even such divisive language as peoples, kingdoms, or provinces, Augustine invited the reader to instead contemplate these polities as if they were individuals.³⁷ When reduced to that more manageable perspective, Augustine argues, the greedy man and the modest

proverbio dicente felicia esse regna, si philosophi, id est amatores sapientiae, regnarent, vel reges philosophiae studerent." Alcuin, *Ep.* 229, ed. Dümmler, p. 373, lines 2–4.

34 "Atqui tu hanc sententiam Platonis ore sanxisti: beatas fore res publicas, si eas vel studiosi sapientiae regerent vel earum rectores studere sapientiae contigisset." Text and translation from Boethius, *Theological Tractates*, trans. Stewart, Rand, and Tester, 146–47.

35 "Quid tragoediarum clamor aliud deflet nisi indiscreto ictu fortunam felicia regna vertentem?" Boethius, *Theological Tractates*, trans. Stewart, Rand, and Tester, 182–83.

36 "cum hominum felicitatem non possis ostendere, semper in bellicis cladibus." Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 4.3. Text and translation from Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, trans. Green, 2:12–13.

37 "Hoc ut facilius diiudicetur, non vanescamus inani ventositate iactati atque obtundamus intentionis aciem altisonis vocabulis rerum, cum audimus populos regna provincias; sed duos constituamus homines (nam singulus quisque homo, ut in sermone una littera, ita quasi elementum est civitatis et regni, quantalibet terrarum occupatione latissimi)." Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 4.3. Text and translation from Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, trans. Green, 2:12–13.

man distinguish themselves by their behaviour: restlessly seeking new additions to his estate on the one hand versus self-sufficient coexistence with his family and friends in a spirit of kind piety on the other.³⁸ For the bishop of Hippo, the choice was obvious: we should prefer to dwell where there is “happiness” (*felicitas*).³⁹

Sophia Moesch dissects Augustine’s carefully modulated usage of *felix/felicitas* and *beatus/beatitudo* to delineate the boundaries between worldly and eternal forms of happiness. While the term *felicitas* appears in Augustine’s *City of God*, Moesch shows that Augustine restricts its application to temporal or civic well-being, even when applied to so-called “Christian emperors.” By contrast, *beatitudo* is reserved for the eternal joy of the heavenly city, often qualified with terms like *aeterna*, *vera*, or *in regno caelorum*. Moesch argues that Augustine’s refusal to equate political success with divine favour, his refusing to conflate the “*felix imperator*” with eternal blessings functions as a theological critique of imperial triumphalism. This interpretive precision underscores a broader dispensational framework in which worldly order unfolds as part of an eschatological process yet remains distinct from the ultimate fulfilment of beatitude in Christ.⁴⁰

It is therefore especially noteworthy when Alcuin makes such an interpretive leap *beyond* Augustine. In a realm characterized by such qualities of “religion and good conduct,” these would be sufficient to “ensure true happiness, whereby this life may be well spent, and eternal life attained hereafter.”⁴¹ The language of *felicitas* therefore also rooted nascent Carolingian ecological sovereignty in one of the most influential texts of early medieval Western Christianity.

Augustine’s vision became a model for Charlemagne and the theologians and aristocrats at the royal court. Augustinian thought permeated Frankish capitularies and other texts of Charlemagne’s era. It instructed a Carolingian audience in the logic that correct religion and good conduct

38 Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 4.3. Text and translation from Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, trans. Green, 2:12–15.

39 “qua vigilanter adhibita si nostra intentio corrigatur, facillime videbimus ubi habitet vanitas et ubi felicitas.” Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 4.3. Text and translation from Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, trans. Green, 2:14–15.

40 Moesch, *Augustine and the Art of Ruling*, 53–54.

41 “Nam quantum ad ipsos pertinet, pietas et probitas eorum, quae magna Dei dona sunt, sufficit eis ad veram felicitatem, qua et ista vita bene agatur et postea percipiatur aeterna.” Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 4.3. Text and translation from Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, trans. Green, 2:14–15.

would inaugurate Christian rule on earth.⁴² At the same time, Charlemagne's performed happiness instructed the mistrustful and perhaps even angry courtiers who were competing for his favour and *honores* by his cheerful example. If Charlemagne were to reject Augustine's advice, he could expect his own soul to be destroyed along with his people and realm.⁴³ This distinction is the only thing that separates emperors from brigands, as Augustine famously asked:

if justice is left out, what are kingdoms except great robber bands? For what are robber bands except little kingdoms...this plague grows to a point where it holds territory and establishes a fixed seat, seizes cities and subdues peoples, then it more conspicuously assumes the name of kingdom, and this name is now openly granted to it.⁴⁴

The irony here is that Charlemagne's "happy kingdoms" were forged by conquest and secured through the elimination—by happenstance or purposefully—of his familial political rivals.

Felicitous Rivals

It may be that the non-Franks in Charlemagne's entourage like Peter of Pisa and Paul the Deacon, along with those who, like Alcuin or Theodulf of Orléans, had departed their homelands to join the Carolingian court, especially wished the king to achieve this state. They employed the language of *felicitas* to both constrain and persuade Charlemagne to become a *rex felix*. Even some manuscripts of the *Divisio regnorum* of 806, Charlemagne's attempt to settle the inheritance of his children and the rule of the Franks after his death, reflected this image of the ruler and signalled the *felicitas* code, heralding him as "Emperor Caesar Charles, most unconquered King of the Franks and governor of the Roman Empire, pious, happy (*felix*), victor, and triumphant, ever august."⁴⁵

⁴² Fried, *Karl der Grosse*, 70–71.

⁴³ Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 4.3. Translation Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, trans. Green, 2:14–15.

⁴⁴ "Remota itaque iustitia quid sunt regna nisi magna latrocinia? Quia et latrocinia quid sunt nisi parva regna?...Hoc malum si in tantum perditorum hominum accessibus crescit ut et loca teneat, sedes constituat, civitates occupet, populos subiuguet, evidentius regni nomen adsumit, quod ei iam in manifesto confert." Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 4.3. Translation from Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, trans. Green, 2:16–17.

⁴⁵ "Imperator Caesar Karolus rex Francorum invictissimus et Romani rector imperii

There is evidence that the language of *felicia regna* was current among Alcuin's contemporaries, demonstrating that these norms had gained traction at the court. Angilram of Metz was closely associated with Charlemagne, who appointed the bishop his royal arch-chaplain following the death of Fulrad of Saint-Denis in 784.⁴⁶ The former episcopal see had become especially important to Carolingian legitimacy in the later eighth century. Around that time, Angilram asked Paul the Deacon (ca. 720–799), the Friulian author of the famous *History of the Lombards*, to write a history of his bishopric, which became the so-called *Gesta episcoporum Mettensium* (Deeds of the Bishops of Metz). This association between city and court went even further; not only did the *Gesta* add justification to the Carolingians' dynastic claim via their descent from Arnulf the early founder of Metz, but it also worked to bring Metz into warmer relations with the Carolingians.⁴⁷ It is noteworthy, then, that Angilram's own *Versus de episcopis Mettensis civitatis* (Poem on the Bishops of the City of Metz, ca. 774) deploys the *felicitas* motif as a reflection of *episcopal* authority. Angilram wrote about Felix II (r. 715–716), the bishop who served more than fifty years earlier, that "Felix (whose name literally means 'Happy') showed the people happy kingdoms (*felicia regna*)."⁴⁸ Angilram's poem then highlights the contributions of the next bishops (Sigibald and Chrodegang) before bringing the narrative up to the period of his own governance, concluding the poem with an exhortation to the Frankish king in the language of *felicitas*:

King Charles, graced in understanding, in form, and in spirit,
received the sceptre of Italy by Christ's gift.
Whom together, at blessed Stephen's asking,
may the right hand of him on high protect and rule,
happy (*felices*) through the age.⁴⁹

pius felix victor ac triumphator semper augustus." *Divisio regnorum*, ed. Boretius, pp. 126ff. Walter Schlesinger argues that this title derived from the "Donation of Constantine," the famous eighth-century forgery that granted the papacy lands in Italy supposedly on the authority of Constantine the Great. Schlesinger, "Kaisertum und Reichsteilung," 125–27. Johannes Fried suggests that it is equally likely that Charlemagne's *Divisio* shaped the language of the forgery rather than vice versa. Fried, "Donation of Constantine" and "Constitutum Constantini," 54–55. Either way, the image of a ruler as *felix victor* emerged during Charlemagne's reign.

46 Goffart, "Paul the Deacon's 'Gesta episcoporum Mettensium,'" 63.

47 Paul the Deacon, *Liber de episcopis Mettensibus*, ed. and trans. Kempf, 11.

48 "Ostendit Felix populis felicia regna." *Versus de episcopis Mettensis civitatis sibi ex ordine successerunt*, ed. Dümmler, p. 61, line 53.

49 "Rex Carolus sensu, formaque, animoque decorus / Italiae accepit Christi de

This view of Charlemagne as the one ordained by God to take up the rule of Italy accords with Paul the Deacon's prose *Gesta*. Although he did not explicitly draw on the language of *felicitas*, Paul wove into the historical narrative of the bishopric the tale of Charlemagne's Lombard conquest, ending with a statement "all Italy was no less placed under a gentle lordship."⁵⁰

There were two roughly contemporary sources that both stitched Charlemagne's conquest of the Lombard kingdom into the history of the bishops of Metz. The editor of the *Gesta*'s modern critical edition points out that not only was the work intended to bolster Charlemagne's dynastic claim via descent from Arnulf (an earlier bishop of Metz whom the Carolingians claimed linked them to the Merovingians by blood), but it also laboured to bring Metz into warmer relations with the Carolingians.⁵¹ This means that the *Gesta* should be read as a commentary on Carolingian rule and episcopal authority, and (as the one who commissioned it) perhaps also on Angilram's own verse on the subject. It was, after all, Angilram who asked Paul to write the *Gesta*.

Another Italian, Peter of Pisa—Charlemagne's grammar instructor before Alcuin and another contemporary of Paul the Deacon and Angilram—also deployed the language of *felicitas*. Peter's biography is murky, but in his *vita* of Charlemagne Einhard called him an "old deacon" by the time he instructed the Frankish king alongside Alcuin in the latter part of the eighth century, and his tenure was thus coterminous with the others discussed here.⁵² Indeed, Alcuin himself noted that when he was a "young man" in the 760s he came across Peter in Pavia, so the two tutors of Charlemagne had known each other for some time.⁵³ Peter was an original member of Charlemagne's team of "old hands" in the 780s, who saw a newly arrived courtier-theologian like Paul the Deacon as a "trespasser on their territory"

munere sceptrum. / Quos simul excelsi, Stephano poscente beato, / Protegat atque regat felices dextra per aevum." *Versus de episcopis Mettensis civitatis sibi ex ordine successerunt*, ed. Dümmler, p. 61, lines 59–62.

50 "cunctaque nihilominus Italia dominatione miti positus est." Paul the Deacon, *Liber de episcopis Mettensibus*, ed. and trans. Kempf, 76–77.

51 Paul the Deacon, *Liber de episcopis Mettensibus*, ed. and trans. Kempf, 11.

52 "In discenda grammatica Petrum Pisarum diaconem senem audiuit." Einhard, *VK*, ed. Pertz and Waite, p. 30, lines 8–12. Gorman, "Peter of Pisa and the *Quaestiunculae* Copied for Charlemagne in Brussels II 2572," 238–39.

53 "Dum ego adolescens Romam perrexi et aliquantos dies in Papia regali civitate demorarer, quidam Iudaeus, Iulius nomine, cum Petro magistro habuit disputationem." Alcuin, *Ep.* 172, ed. Dümmler, p. 285, lines 3–7.

at court.⁵⁴ Peter authored numerous poems directed against Paul the Deacon in a sort of poet's battle of wits—often in the voice of the king—meaning that Peter “simultaneously flatters Charlemagne and seems to enlist his support for the poem sent in his intimidating name to the uncertain débutant at court.”⁵⁵ Peter Godman documents some of these interchanges, including a well-known poem commenting on Paul the Deacon's arrival at Charlemagne's court.⁵⁶ In a different poem from Peter addressed to Paul the Deacon, the Pisan poet playfully and vividly constructs a natural landscape illumined by sunlight, hidden by shadows, and populated by prey and hunters, before moving on to a description of figures at the royal court, which seems to have been the intended topic and audience of the verse.⁵⁷ In this poem Peter concludes by beseeching God's favour for the king in cosmic, ecological, and felicitous terms:

Almighty God, [preserve] Charles, who wields happy sceptres (*felicia sceptrā*),
He who created the starry heaven, the earth and the sea,
Who bounds the foaming shores of the deep with its waves.⁵⁸

These lines place Charlemagne and his demarcated authority inside the created order, under God, alongside other divinely ordained boundaries within terms strikingly like the happy kingdoms of Alcuin and Angilram discussed above.

That Peter of Pisa deployed this language in one extant example is worthy of notice in itself, but the fact that it was Alcuin who supplanted Peter as Charlemagne's primary tutor and “director of education” at the court, and also Alcuin who most clearly deployed the framework of *felicitas* in other venues, hints that the Yorkish cleric attuned himself to an emotional community that was already forming around Charlemagne, the happy king.⁵⁹

54 Godman, *Poets and Emperors*, 51.

55 Godman, *Poets and Emperors*, 52.

56 Godman, *Poets and Emperors*, 51–54.

57 Peter of Pisa, “Pauli et Petri Diaconorum carmina,” ed. Dümmler, 52–54.

58 “Omnipotens Karolum felicia sceptrā regentem, / Qui caelum astriferum terram pontumque creavit, / Litora spumifera pelagi qui terminat undis...conservet.” Peter of Pisa, “Pauli et Petri Diaconorum carmina,” ed. Dümmler, 53–54, 38–40, 44. Full passage lines 38–45.

59 On Alcuin's supplanting of Peter of Pisa and others, see Godman, *Poets and Emperors*, 56.

Prodigies and Unfortunate Sons

More proof of *felicia regna's* valence in the latter eighth century derives from Alcuin's chief courtly rival, Bishop Theodulf of Orléans, whom Thomas Noble labels with good reason "the finest poet of the Carolingian age."⁶⁰ Theodulf had arrived in Septimania (southern Francia) in the late 770s or early 780s as a refugee fleeing a violent crackdown by the ruler in Cordoba after a Saragossan uprising in the Iberian Ebro basin. Ann Freeman suggested that it was Theodulf's education in this area, rooted as it was in the classical traditions of Late Antiquity, that drew the admiration and jealousy of his peers.⁶¹ Theodulf's erudition and wit may help explain how, as Noble put it, he "appeared out of nowhere and immediately assumed a leading role at the Carolingian court," a factor that (as the arrival of Paul the Deacon had similarly made Peter of Pisa feel threatened) may have contributed to animus between him and Alcuin, who had finally been accepted as an equal at court.⁶²

In 796 while he was absent from the court, Theodulf wrote a "verse-epistle" which was addressed to Charlemagne's entourage. Peter Godman argues that Theodulf's poetic description of the court "transposes the narrower setting of his rivals onto a universal stage where the majesty of the triumphant war-lord, at a banquet to celebrate his victory over the Avars, outshines his court like the sun in zenith."⁶³ Alcuin, Theodulf's rival, appears as one of the chief objects of his scorn, depicted as having a "porridge-like"⁶⁴ mind and as a drunkard who "may order glasses of wine or of beer to be fetched, or chance to want both of them, to make his teaching all the better."⁶⁵ Godman argues that Theodulf's "malicious imitation" of Alcuin's work was meant to embarrass his foe as a reminder "that he had his superior in the

60 Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, 163.

61 Freeman, "Theodulf of Orléans," 186, 188.

62 Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, 163. This animosity would only increase over time. For a detailed and fascinating study of a conflict that drew Charlemagne into a dispute over Alcuin's authority as the abbot of Tours and Theodulf's as bishop of Orléans, see Meens, "Sanctuary, Penance, and Dispute Settlement under Charlemagne.

63 Godman, *Poets and Emperors*, 68.

64 Godman, *Poets and Emperors*, 68.

65 "Aut si, Bacche, tui, aut Cerealis pocla liquoris / Porgere praecipiat, fors et utrumque volet, / Quo melius doceat." Theodulf, *Carm.*, ed. Dümmler, p. 488, lines 193–35. Translation from Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, 161.

intellectual as well as the political spheres.”⁶⁶ It is, therefore, all the more striking that in this poetic reimagining of Charlemagne’s court, cast in universal terms—“The entire world resounds in your praise, my king,” writes Theodulf, imagining the majesty of the king as measurable only insofar as the great rivers of the realm themselves could be bounded—he, too, invoked the language of felicity.⁶⁷

After several lines lauding Charlemagne for his piety and successful conquest of the Avars, a Eurasian group who had harried and plundered central Europe for decades, Theodulf heralded the arrival of the Frankish king’s hard-won peace and its corollary environmental effects:

Behold, the new spring comes, with it all happiness (felicia),
And they draw near to you and yours, O king, by God’s gift.
See, the year is renewed, rejoicing in eternal laws,
And now the earth, its mother, brings forth her shoots.
The woods grow green with leaf, the fields are decked with flowers,
And lo, the elements keep their several courses.⁶⁸

The positive environmental effects, like verdant and flowering vegetation and seasons turning as they should, respond to the virtuous king who has lived piously and conquered the enemies of kingdom and faith, reflecting those same norms that arose in pseudo-Cyprian, Cathwulf, Alcuin, and the rest.

Those same “natural” manifestations, even down to the *elementa* themselves, later occurred in Nithard’s accounting of Charlemagne, and show how the conduct of the Carolingian king correlated to the environment and the ways in which *felicitas* communicated these ideas to the sovereign and court. These similarities over time hint at the resilience of this model of kingship, first articulated in Charlemagne’s circle in the last decades of the eighth century, as it was contested, shaped, and reframed via the historical

66 Godman, *Poets and Emperors*, 69.

67 “Te totus laudesque tuas, rex, personat orbis, / Multaque cum dicat, dicere cuncta nequit. / Si Mosa, Rhenus, Arar, Rodanus, Tiberisque, Padusque / Metiri possunt, laus quoque mensa tua est.” Theodulf, *Carm.*, ed. Dümmler, p. 483, lines 1–4. Translation from Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, 151.

68 “Ver venit ecce novum, cum quo felicia cuncta / Teque, tuosque adeant, rex, tribuente deo. / En renovatur ovans aeternis legibus annus, / Et sua nunc mater germina promit humus. / Silvae fronde virent, ornantur floribus arva, Sique vices servant, en elementa suas.” Theodulf, *Carm.*, ed. Dümmler, p. 483, lines 51–56. Translation from Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, 153.

memory of the Frankish king during the later reigns of Louis the Pious and his descendants amid the political turmoil of the ninth century.

Despite the confident assertions of writers in the late eighth century, disasters shaped Charlemagne's final years. The sureness of the Frankish ruler and his courtiers in the standard of *felicitas* must have been shaken by the death of Charlemagne's son and heir, Charles the Younger, in 811. Unlike his siblings who, like Pepin in Italy and Louis in Aquitaine, had been assigned kingdoms of their own to govern, Charles the Younger remained at his father's side throughout his life. Charles was the only child of Charlemagne to have been anointed king by Pope Leo at Rome following the imperial coronation in 800, and the *Divisio regnorum* of 806 had assigned him the Frankish heartland to rule. Every indication hints that Charlemagne favoured Charles as his primary "heir" with a "positive future."⁶⁹ The previous year Charlemagne's son Pepin, the king of Italy, had also died.⁷⁰ Einhard, the emperor's most successful biographer, reported that the deaths of his children "deeply disturbed" Charlemagne, and "his affection [toward his children], which was just as strong [a part of his character], drove him to tears."⁷¹ The loss of his children doubtless grieved the emperor as a father, but, according to pseudo-Cyprian's logic, it also signalled that all was not well in the realm.

Similarly, in 805/6 a drastic food shortage and subsequent famine held Charlemagne's empire in its grip, another warning sign from pseudo-Cyprian's list. In response, Charlemagne tried to ameliorate the disaster through "economic" tools like price fixing, but he also ordered the entire realm to fast and pray for three days to appeal to divine mercy.⁷² An earlier capitulary from Thionville ordered that "if from this there should come famine, disaster, pestilence, unseasonable weather, or any other kind of tribulation whatsoever, our edict is not to be awaited, but God's mercy is to be implored at once."⁷³ There is an ominous and pessimistic air to these documents from Charlemagne's final years and a "sense of time running out," to borrow de

⁶⁹ McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 51–53.

⁷⁰ Costambeys et al., *The Carolingian World*, 195–96.

⁷¹ "Mortes filiorum ac filiae pro magnanimitate, qua excellabat, minus patienter tulit, pietate videlicet, qua non minus insignis erat, compulsus ad lacrimas." Einhard, *VK*, ed. Pertz and Waite, 24. Translation from Dutton, *Charlemagne's Courtier*, 29.

⁷² Verhulst, *The Carolingian Economy*, 25–26, 128–29; de Jong, "Charlemagne's Church," 128.

⁷³ "De hoc evenerit fames, clades, pestilentia, inaequalitas aeris vel alia qualiscumque tribulatio, ut non expectetur edictum nostrum, sed statim depraecetur

Jong's phrase— a feeling that the empire had not achieved the lofty goals enumerated in the *Admonitio generalis* of 789.⁷⁴

Disasters shaped the historical memory of Charlemagne from almost its very inception. Writing in the 820s after Charlemagne's death in 814, Einhard noted that "there were so many signs of his approaching death, that not only other people, but even he himself knew the end was near."⁷⁵ Einhard cited three straight years of lunar and solar eclipses, buildings that collapsed, a bridge that burned, and meteors plummeting from the night sky. Even the king's own horse threw down its mighty rider, the impact snapping off his sword and belt—the symbols of his secular power and authority as well as adult masculinity—and the earth shook the foundations of the imperial capital at Aachen, while the golden apple that adorned the palace chapel's roof was struck by lightning, falling onto the roof of the bishop's nearby house.⁷⁶

For Einhard and subsequent chroniclers, as the house of Charlemagne's spirit crumbled, his surrounding environment—all of creation itself—tied as it was to the king's health, happiness, and conduct, shuddered and

Dei misericordia." *Capitulare missorum in Theodonis Villa datum secundum, Generale*, ed. Boretius, 122–23.

74 de Jong, "Charlemagne's Church," 129.

75 "Adpropinquantis finis conplura fuere prodigia, ut non solum alii, sed etiam ipse hoc minitari sentiret." Einhard, *VK*, ed. Pertz and Waite, 25. Translation from Dutton, *Charlemagne's Courtier*, 25:36.

76 "Per tres continuos vitaeque termino proximos annos et solis et lunae creberrima defectio et in sole macula quaedam atri coloris septem dierum spatio visa. Porticus, quam inter basilicam et regiam operosa mole construxerat, die ascensionis Domini subita ruina usque ad fundamenta conlapsa. Item pons Rheni apud Mogontiacum, quem ipse per decem annos ingenti labore et opere mirabili de ligno ita construxit, ut perenniter durare posse videretur, ita tribus horis fortuita incendio conflagravit, ut, praeter quod aqua tegebatur, ne una quidem astula ex eo remaneret. Ipse quoque, cum ultimam in Saxoniam expeditionem contra Godofridum regem Danorum ageret, quadam die, cum ante exortum solis castris egressus iter agere coepisset, vidit repente delapsam caelitus cum ingenti lumine facem a dextra in sinistram per serenum aera transcurrere. Cunctisque hoc signum, quid portenderet, ammirantibus, subito equus, quem sedebat, capite deorsum merso decidit eumque tam graviter ad terram elisit, ut, fibula sagi rupta balteoque gladii dissipato, a festinantibus qui aderant ministris exarmatus et sine amiculo levaretur...Accessit ad hoc Aquensis palatii tremor et in domibus, ubi conversabatur, assiduus laqueariorum crepitus. Tacta etiam de caelo, in qua postea sepultus est, basilica, malumque aureum, quo tecti culmen erat ornatum, ictu fulminis dissipatum et supra domum pontificis, quae basilicae contigua erat, proiectum est." Einhard, *VK*, ed. Pertz and Waite, 36–37. See the translation of this entire passage in Dutton, *Charlemagne's Courtier*, 25:36–37.

convulsed in mutual commiseration, exactly as Alcuin and his contemporaries had feared it would. Probably during the same era, Theodulf wrote a poem that darkly mirrored his earlier buoyant praise of the exalted emperor who, while he was alive, had been gloried by a verdant, fruitful, and harmonious nature.⁷⁷ After Charlemagne's death, Theodulf's gloomy vision of a barren and disordered natural world proved through the disruption of its seasonal cycles, its infecundity, and changing climate that the end of all things was perhaps near:

One may see how the world moves on and marks its ruin,
and with voices silent sings the failing of itself...
That temper of winter no longer stands as once it was,
which might nourish the grasses, the woods, the crops.
The sun's abundance is lacking for summer's scorching labour,
nor are the spring seasons now glad in their proper office.
Autumns no longer overflow with sweet new wine,
nor do they flourish, laden with tree-fruit.
Now the earth bears nothing good as once it bore,
and teaches that it is itself exhausted and barren.⁷⁸

The environment in Theodulf's poem was a perverse mirror image of Paradise described in the Genesis story, which had been a model for Charlemagne's empire as garden. If the Carolingians saw the return of Christ and the end of the world as the ultimate positive outcome of *correctio* and

77 The dating is debatable. Dümmler thought that the poem came from Theodulf's early career. Alexandrenko, *The Poetry of Theodulf of Orleans*, 95–96n1. Heinrich Fichtenau thought that this poem was from the later years of Charlemagne's reign and was perhaps even read to the emperor himself. Fichtenau, *The Carolingian Empire*, trans. Munz, 183–84. Nineteenth-century scholars Louis Baunard and Charles Cuissard both assigned this poem to the years ca. 817–820 when Theodulf had been exiled from Orléans and imperial favour. Baunard, *Théodulfe, évêque d'Orléans et abbé de Fleury-sur-Loire*, 316–17 and Cuissard, *Théodulfe évêque d'Orléans*, 98–99. Dieter Schaller likewise dated the poem to Theodulf's period of exile, arguing that the pessimism of the poem thus reflects the bishop's own personal troubles alongside those of the world at large. "The poem's contrast with the earlier courtly praise verse fits with this interpretation. Schaller, "Philologische Untersuchungen zu den Gedichten Theodulfs von Orléans," 22–23.

78 "Cernere inest, ut eat mundus signetque ruinam, / Defectumque sui voce tacente canat...Non ea temperies hiemis prius ut fuit exstat, / Quae nutrire queat gramina, lingua, sata. / Copia deest solis torrendo aestate labori, / Verna nec officio sunt modo laeta suo. / Dulcibus haud adeo mustis autumnus redundant, / Foetibus arboreis non onerata vigent. / Nil modo terra boni sic fert velut ante ferebat, / Effaetam et sterilem semet inesse docet." Theodulf, *Carm.*, ed. Dümmler, pp. 468–69, lines 1–12.

renewal, these could only be achieved through the proper leadership of the ruler and the salvation of both the people and the land. Knowing as he did the discourse of *felicitas*, when Theodulf described the world ending in such biological and climatic entropy, his poem signalled a failure in Carolingian kingship even as it demonstrated the import of Carolingian ecological sovereignty as a measuring stick for rulers.

Inscribing Ecological Sovereignty

In this section, I turn to Alcuin's Genesis *tituli*, seemingly modest "captions" for church walls and altarpieces, that in fact crystallized an entire theological ecology of rule, nature, and disaster—the *felicitas* code itself. The imperatives embedded in the verses—Adam naming creatures and then being driven out—are not just narrative devices but warnings, mapping the role of gardener-king onto Charlemagne. He could heed God's warnings and remain paradise's steward, or neglect them and be expelled, like Adam.

Read through the coded language of *felicitas* and implicit responsibilities of *ministerium*, the *tituli* draw the Carolingians into sacred time, making their authority contingent on obedience to God's order. In this way, Alcuin's inscriptions served as concise reminders that ecological sovereignty, like Eden itself, could be lost through negligence or sin. Before doing so, it is important to pause and observe that this language of ecological sovereignty was not merely symbolic. It bore real stakes for Alcuin and the other courtier-theologians who plied their sovereign with its appeals to cheerfulness. The cluster of later eighth-century sources deploying the language of felicity and ecological disaster demonstrates its usefulness and prevalence among several courtiers and advisors to Charlemagne on this topic. Its appearance in both praises and admonitions suggests that the Frankish king himself understood its meaning as an emotive, in Reddy's sense.

To this point, I have referred to happy kingdoms/*felicia regna* mainly through its instrumentality as a means for the king's attainment or loss of ecological and political success, and its meaning has been hinted at obliquely by reference to surrounding contexts, or as an emotive signal for courtiers and subjects. It has meant the political realm, a bishop's authority, and even (thinking back to Alcuin's York poem) a description of heaven on earth. But its clearest sense connects "happy kingdoms" to the original idyllic Paradise of the Garden of Eden, a usage which maps onto the trajectory of Alcuin's thinking as it changed over time, thus offering a useful framework for considering this whole chapter. Indeed, as seen above it took shape in Alcuin's mind as far back as ca. 780, before he had even arrived at Charlemagne's

court, and it continued to exert influence in areas outside the royal context, almost as if spilling over from one reservoir to the next.

A careful reading of Alcuin's poetic lament for Lindisfarne shows this quite clearly. The poem has been described by Mary Garrison, and understood more widely, as "comfort literature, but reaching toward theodicy,"—i.e., the struggle to explain God and goodness in the face of evil and suffering. Yet, I think there is more at work in this text, and it points toward the crystallization of Alcuin's conclusions on rulership in a Christian empire, if one could make such a paradise on earth. Alcuin's poem draws on the imagery of Edenic Paradise lost and happiness subverted to make this point.⁷⁹ The first lines begin:

After the first man had left the gardens of Paradise
And entered the lands of misery, needy and banished,
in burdensome exile he and his children began to pay the penalty
for the wicked act of treacherous theft he had committed.
Human life passes rapidly through many sorts of disasters
and every man has had different kinds of days.
In the course of fate sadness will be mixed with joy;
no one has firm control over delight.
No one has had success every day,
no one always enjoys predictable happiness (*felices*).
Nothing remains eternal under the tall dome of the sky,
all things change at different times.
One day smiles, the next laments a catastrophe,
no stability is granted by a token of luck.⁸⁰

This is the image of the earth after the first humans' missteps—a model of Paradise corrupted by bad rule, for Adam's first task was to be a proper caretaker of the resources that had been assigned to him: lordship over his companion, the animals, and vegetation of his realm.

79 Garrison, "Alcuin, *Carmen IX* and Hrabanus, *Ad bonosum*," 72.

80 "Postquam primus homo paradisi liquerat hortos / Et miseras terras exul adibat inops, / Exilioque gravi poenas cum prole luebat, / Perfidiae quoniam furta maligna gerit, / Per varios casus mortalis vita cucurrit, / Diversosque dies omnis habebat homo. / Fatali cursu miscentur tristia laetis, / Nulli firma fuit regula laetitiae. / Nemo dies cunctos felices semper habebat, / Nemo sibi semper gaudia certa tenet. / Nil manet aeternum celso sub cardine caeli, / Omnia vertuntur temporibus variis. / Una dies ridet, casus cras altera planget, / Nil fixum faciet tessera laeta tibi." Alcuin, *Carm.* 8, ed. Dümmler, p. 229, lines 1–14 (hereafter, *Carm.*). Translation from Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, 127.

Alcuin drew on this biblical example to help explain the sorrow and loss of the attack at Lindisfarne, which, as I argued before, resulted in his mind from the actions of (in great part) bad kings. The lesson here, for Alcuin, was clear, and this episode demonstrates the truest meaning of *felicia regna*, which was the right stewardship of the *ministerium* that God had entrusted to a ruler: life, land, church, and people, coexisting happily under the watchful gaze of the cheerful king. For Alcuin, Charlemagne had achieved this status to a greater extent than any of his royal contemporaries, and yet, as the episode with the abovementioned Frankish altars that had been neglected and left spattered by animal excrement shows, there was some measure of concern that the Frankish king would not live up to these paradisiacal expectations.

Alcuin, along with his contemporaries who deployed the same framework, seems to have admonished the king repeatedly in letters and poetry, but the Yorkish cleric also offered something else that may have confronted Charlemagne when he was especially susceptible to correction. As discussed earlier, one of the top priorities of the Carolingian reform program was the improvement of biblical texts and production of exegetical commentaries on the Bible, and Alcuin authored at least one commentary on the Genesis text, showing some measure of interest in the subject. Alcuin, in fact, wrote a letter to a former pupil at York named Sigulf, explaining the purpose of his Genesis commentary, which was to collect his explanations on the text so that he could recall to memory what had been lost from their earlier conversations on the subject. This was a special concern for those “who are distracted by the occupations of the world and wearied by the various burdens of travel,” someone (one may speculate) like a diligent Carolingian king.⁸¹

We can see glimmers of the Yorkish cleric’s interest in these themes in the so-called Alcuin Bible, which may have been started under the courtier-theologian’s direction at Tours’ monastic scriptorium and presented to Charlemagne after the cleric’s death in 804. It articulated cosmic hierarchies in its depiction of Adam’s naming of the creatures of Paradise (Figure 6). In the upper right corner of the Alcuin Bible, this scene included the serpent, the animal that tempted Eve into sin (in the Carolingians’ view causing Adam’s sin, too, and that of all subsequent humans), along with other beasts named by Adam in Paradise. As Jill Bradley argues, the snake’s presence here (it was not depicted similarly in the other extant

81 “maxime nobis, qui saeculi occupationibus distrahimur et diversis itinerum molestiis fatigamur.” Alcuin, *Ep. 80*, ed. Dümmler, p. 122, lines 23–24. Translation from Allott, *Alcuin of York*, 138.



Figure 6. Genesis page from the Alcuin Bible, ca. 834–843. Staatsbibliothek Bamberg, Msc. Bibl. 1, fol. 7v. Courtesy of the Münchener DigitalisierungsZentrum Digitale Bibliothek. Public Domain.

illuminated Carolingian Genesis scenes) was meant to demonstrate the reptile's subordination to Adam, and that the "man should be able to command and control it."⁸² Indeed, the Alcuin Bible's depiction of the events of Genesis—the creation, instruction, and fall of the first humans, and their exile from Paradise—was meant to be read eschatologically as a "cycle of creation, sin, punishment and the possibility of redemption," meaning that Adam's story and the perils and promises of fulfilling God's commands to both care for the garden and to cultivate the earth were crucial models for Carolingian sovereignty. They were meant to instruct Charlemagne in the management of his garden, the entire realm.⁸³

The Bamberg Genesis *tituli* act not as simple labels but as interpretive cues, condensing extended scriptural passages into concise rubrics that control the viewer's reading of the cycle. Their "caption" verbs (*formavit*, *adduxit*, *increpavit*, *compellit*—He formed, He brought, He rebuked, He compels) make God the grammatical subject at each stage, though the shift from perfect to present at the last leaves the curse of labour still operative for the viewer. The captions thus bind the visual sequence to a theological trajectory: from God's creative sovereignty, through the rupture of human disobedience, to the punitive imposition of physical labour. The sequence unfolds as a tightly ordered descent. At the top, the caption announces the formation of Adam from earth and his commission to name the animals, a double sign of human dominion rooted in divine handiwork. The second line shifts abruptly to Eve's derivation from Adam's rib and the serpent's intervention, juxtaposing creation and corruption in a single register. The third and fourth captions bring divine judgment into focus: God's rebuke and the immediate expulsion from Paradise. The fifth and sixth emphasize exile and consequence, presenting Adam and Eve together in their banishment before isolating Adam in the toil of tilling the soil. The captions compress narrative into theological frames, transforming the images into a moralized sequence in which sovereignty yields to sin, and sin to subjection. The viewer is not simply shown Genesis in pictures but taught to read it as a paradigm of lost dominion and the burdens of postlapsarian existence.

Alcuin composed more Genesis *tituli*, perhaps meant to elucidate images like frescos that would decorate the walls of churches as well as altarpieces and other rooms. A reconsideration of these *tituli* in their likely intended context takes this analysis further. Alcuin wrote for Charlemagne

⁸² Bradley, "You Shall Surely not Die," 64, 67.

⁸³ Bradley, "You Shall Surely not Die," 75.

a series of labels explicating creation images from Genesis, and it is not known which buildings (if any) presented Alcuin's *tituli*, nor precisely which paintings they were meant to illuminate. But there is evidence for such biblical cycles adorning the walls of complexes like the palace chapel at Ingelheim, and similar Carolingian frescos are partially extant at an Alpine monastery in Münstair (Switzerland).⁸⁴ Alcuin's *tituli* derive from the lost *Codex Bertinianus*, which is the source for a number of Alcuin's other texts, including a poem on divine majesty, one depicting the crucifixion, and a sixteen-line poem (each line a caption to accompany an image) on the Genesis story of the Creation and Fall of the first humans.⁸⁵

For my purposes here, the Genesis ekphrasis is especially of interest. Alcuin imagines Paradise and human sovereignty over nature. Since they predate by several decades the earliest known Genesis cycles of Carolingian art, including the Alcuin Bible discussed above, Alcuin's *tituli* come at the beginning of a Carolingian tradition of biblical interpretation.⁸⁶ Alcuin's Genesis *tituli* begin with the creation of Adam out of dust, and his third caption enjoins the first man's sovereignty over the nonhuman: "Father Adam, give names to all living things."⁸⁷ This statement neatly encapsulates a concept that Alcuin and other Carolingian exegetes spent hundreds of lines of text articulating: the first man obeyed God by exercising sovereignty over the animals and creatures of Paradise.

Alcuin's captions adopted a narrative subject-verb structure, with two lines standing out because of their use of the imperative mood. In addition to the line that calls for "Father Adam" to name the creatures, this line deploys the imperative verb construction: "Go out, Adam, and leave behind

84 Ermold mentions in his panegyric for Louis the Pious the painted walls of the palace at Ingelheim, which were adorned with biblical episodes, including a lengthy description of the paradise image. Ermoldus Nigellus, *Carmina in honorem Hludowici Caesaris*, ed. Dümmler, pp. 63–64, lines 181–99. There is a translation of this passage in Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 174. For Münstair, see Wyss, Rutishauer, and Nay, eds., *Die mittelalterlichen Wandmalereien im Kloster Münstair, Grundlagen zu Konservierung und Pflege*, 63–76.

85 Alcuin, *Carm.* 115, ed. Dümmler, 346.

86 Arnulf, *Versus ad picturas*, 149–51. This Bible is also called the Bamberg Bible, and its text may have originated shortly after Alcuin's death (804) at Tours, although it is possible that it was produced under Alcuin's supervision for presentation to Charlemagne. Bradley, "You Shall Surely not Die," 64–65.

87 "Nomina pone pater cunctis animantibus Adam." Alcuin, *Carm.* 115, ed. Dümmler, p. 346, line 3.

the happy kingdoms (*felicia regna*)."⁸⁸ It is a clever play on words that at once echoes Adam's charge to dominate all the creatures of Paradise and captures the essence of the happy king and blessed environment paradigm.⁸⁹ This double meaning connects the order and good productivity of the earth in Paradise with that established under Charlemagne's rule (as the pseudo-Cyprianic discourse predicted).

Alcuin's verse implies that just as disobedience led to Adam's expulsion from the garden, so it would result in the Frankish king's downfall and the deleterious effects on nature of a bad king. The linkage of Adam/Charlemagne in this *titulus* also skilfully inserted the Carolingians into theological time and salvific history, according with a view of the Franks and their ruling family as the new *populus Dei*. Alcuin's sharp and concise imperative (in God's voice) warned against sin, death, and the abnegation of sovereignty through misdeeds, all themes bound up in the nature-disaster discourse and language of *felicitas* established in *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* and the other eighth-century texts surveyed above.

Alcuin's Genesis *tituli* unambiguously and efficiently expressed those warnings that, through the coded language of *felicitas*, infuse so many of his other writings on kingship and rule: the governor of the happily ruled, appointed by God, defends the rules and customs of Paradise or he will lose both realm and power. If the Carolingians did not uphold these duties, they—like Adam—would lose their dominions, which is precisely how Nithard explained the chaos and strife of the civil war fought among Charlemagne's grandchildren: once wholesome nature in open rebellion against its caretakers. It was the same warning issued by pseudo-Cyprian, vividly depicted through Cathwulf's thorns and thistles, and articulated by Alcuin and his contemporaries, the heeding of which sustained for a time Charlemagne's empire of happy kingdoms.

Alcuin's verse *tituli* likely worked in a similar way, impressing the point for any readers of the verses and on anyone contemplating the images they might have accompanied. The line explaining Adam's naming of the animals stands apart from most of the poem, which reports in the third-person: God created Adam, the angel guarded the gate of Paradise, Noah built an ark, etc. "Father Adam" adopts the imperative, marking this line of the text out as a command. Alcuin and others frequently deployed biblical epithets for

⁸⁸ "Perge foras Adam et felicia regna relinque." Alcuin, *Carm.* 115, ed. Dümmler, p. 346, line 7.

⁸⁹ See "Introduction," 20n51.

the recipients of their writings. Alcuin and his contemporaries regularly addressed the recipients of their writings through biblical epithets, and a reader accustomed to that habit might well have heard the imperative as reaching past Adam to the ruler who was to exercise the same dominion. Perhaps “Father Adam” was meant for Charlemagne, for elsewhere Alcuin portrayed all of creation as crying out to him, “Fare well, father.”⁹⁰

The terminology used by Alcuin to refer to “all living things” (*cunctis animantibus*) reflects the language of the Genesis text and Alcuin’s own commentary on it, but it also recalls Alcuin’s letter in which he depicted Pope Leo’s flight northward—the very event that the *Karolus Magnus* poet, examined in this book’s Introduction, also described, and that precipitated Charlemagne’s imperial coronation. As we saw earlier, in this letter Alcuin likens Leo’s escape to that of the flight of an “eagle” who fled to Saxony to see Charlemagne, “the lion, dominating over all living things and beasts” (*leonem, cunctis dominantem animantibus et feris*), further equating the Frankish king to the Edenic steward and subverting Leo’s own name in the process. But here Alcuin’s vivid depiction of Charlemagne as the “king of beasts” included the *feri* whose wildness resulted from the Fall and the corruption of creation and signalled a reorientation of the Franco-Papal political dynamic: from this time onward Charlemagne (the *leonem*), not the pontiff Leo, took charge.⁹¹

Carolingian reform efforts linked *correctio*, and thus exegesis, to a desire to transform the environment from a wilderness into a garden or game park of curated plants, animals, and people.⁹² The idea of tidying up nature took shape at Charlemagne’s court and spread throughout the Carolingian Empire during the next century. Charlemagne was the latest and best-positioned Adam, equipped and sanctioned to re-arrange and redeem the natural world, bringing it under Frankish dominion. Charlemagne’s ecological governance was simultaneously a political act, a theological imperative, and an eschatological necessity. Through councils, capitularies, letters, and exegesis, Alcuin and others taught the Carolingians to reimagine origin myths in

90 “Optime quod regem suscipit ipsa senem...Sidera sancta poli, viridis et gramina terrae, / Omnia conclament: ‘David ubique vale.’ / Terra, polus, pelagus, homines, volucresque, ferraque / Concordi clament voce: ‘Valeto pater.” Alcuin, *Ep.* 174, ed. Dümmler, p. 289, lines 22, 25–28.

91 “Cui crederem, si quid dixisset de aquila? qui, nuper Romanae arcis deserens cacumina, ut biberet Saxonici ruris fontes et videret leonem, cunctis dominantem animantibus et feris.” Alcuin, *Ep.* 181, ed. Dümmler, p. 299, lines 7–9. For “king of beasts,” see Dutton, *Charlemagne’s Mustache*, 43–68.

92 Dutton, *Charlemagne’s Mustache*, 67.

the pages of the Genesis text, and their expansive vision of ecological sovereignty took as its model the first three chapters of that work.⁹³

Conclusion

Alcuin's warnings connected the rhetoric of happy kingdoms with the discourse of ecological sovereignty that Wigbod had found in Genesis and deployed to bolster Charlemagne's mission of *correctio*. Wigbod's commentary offered metaphorical instructions for achieving these goals, and Alcuin's (and other Carolingian authors') writings established an early warning system for detecting success or failure on the ruler's part in terms of happy kingdoms and disastrous environments. A ruler who governed rightly, according to both the demands of *correctio* and the standards of a just, happy king, was supposed to supervise and improve not only the living creatures of his good garden but also shape the land itself. For doing so legitimated and supported the goals of *correctio* according to the logic of Carolingian ecological sovereignty.

This chapter has shown how the Carolingian discourse of *felicitas* became a flexible yet powerful framework for measuring the responsibilities and failures of kingship. From Alcuin's prayers, letters, and poetic admonitions to the competing voices of rivals like Theodulf, we have seen how happiness, prosperity, and ecological well-being were cast not as incidental blessings but as the very proof of just rule. To be a Carolingian king was to embody a visible harmony between ruler, people, and environment—an emotional and material performance in which blooming fields, ordered churches, and smiling faces attested to sovereign virtue, while filth, famine, and disorder warned of collapse.

By weaving together biblical exempla, classical echoes, and the lived experience of the court, Carolingian authors forged a rulebook in which joy and justice, felicity and fertility, became inseparable measures of sovereignty, facts that could and should be observed in the transformation of the environment around them. It is no accident, then, that Charlemagne's grandson Nithard could summarize his grandsire's reign by declaring that he "ruled happily (*feliciter*) for thirty-two years, and no less held the helm of empire with all felicity (*felicitate*) for fourteen years."⁹⁴

⁹³ Leonardi, "Aspects of Old Testament Interpretation in the Church," 189.

⁹⁴ "Regnavit feliciter per annos duos et XXX imperiiq[ue] gubernacula nihilominus cum omni felicitate per annos quattuordecim possedit." Nithard, *Historiarum libri IIII*, ed. Müller, 2.

CONCLUSION

I HAVE SHOWN that making better Christians (*correctio*) grew to include supervision of the environment and its inhabitants in Carolingian ideology. In the late eighth century both ideas came to define the exercise of Carolingian sovereignty over bodies and spaces in Europe. Supervision and domination of the environment became an end and constituent to the Carolingians' mission to Christianize and "redeem" lands and peoples: that is what Carolingian ecological sovereignty meant. The *Admonitio generalis*, the Council of Frankfurt in 794, and the *De litteris colendis* demonstrated that the pursuit of "better" biblical exegesis was not merely an intellectual exercise: Genesis became a model for Carolingian sovereignty because Charlemagne, the "new Adam," would master nature. Courtier-theologian Wigbod showed that trees were the ideal metaphor for obedience both to God and to Carolingian lords. Insular, Roman, and Frankish notions associating good rule with a prosperous environment and bad rule with a deleterious environment combined to forge a new idea of kingship at Charlemagne's court. The vocabulary of "happy kingdoms" meant the kind of empire as garden-paradise discussed in Wigbod's exegesis, Alcuin's letters, and Theodulf's poetry, became a measuring stick for Charlemagne's success or failure.

At the end of January in 814, Charlemagne died. He had spent the final part of the hunting season in the vicinity of Aachen but did not travel far because of his age and infirmity. In his biography of the emperor, Einhard reported that Charlemagne died of a fever and a "pain in his side, which the Greeks call pleurisy."¹ Fasting from food, Charlemagne thought to master his ailments as he had subdued illnesses in the past through moderation and bed rest. Yet on the morning of January 28, at the age of seventy-two,

I "Cumque ibi hiemaret, mense Ianuario febre valida correptus decubuit. Qui statim, ut in febribus solebat, cibi sibi abstinentiam indixit, arbitratus hac continentia morbum posse depelli vel certe mitigari. Sed accedente ad febrem lateris dolore, quem Greci pleuresin dicunt, illoque adhuc inediam retinente neque corpus aliter quam rarissimo potu sustentante, septimo postquam decubuit, die, sacra communione percepta, decessit, anno aetatis suae septuagesimo secundo et ex quo regnare coeperat quadragesimo septimo, V. Kal. Februarii, hora diei tertia." Einhard, *VK*, ed. Pertz and Waite, p. 35, lines 3–13.

Charlemagne succumbed to his illness. In Einhard's biography the event was heralded by many prodigies and omens that proved the dis-ordering of the Frankish realm and the degeneration of the Carolingian emperor's body. Such a disintegration of the polity's theological-political underpinnings threatened the Carolingian good garden described above.

Through historical happenstance Louis the Pious was the sole inheritor to the imperial title and rule of the Franks because both his brother Charles (the heir apparent) and his exiled brother Pepin had died in 811. It seems as if Louis had never been intended to rule as sole emperor, having spent nearly all his adult life in the south in Aquitaine, away from the Carolingian heartlands that Charles the Younger was meant to rule. In the poem *Karolus Magnus*, Louis was omitted from the courtly procession to mirror his place in the real-life entourage of Charlemagne. Moreover, one of Charlemagne's daughters may be responsible for having the emperor buried at Aachen instead of at Saint-Denis, the traditional burial site for kings of the Franks.² Historians have recently read into this innovation a sign that the succession was contested, despite Charlemagne's and Louis's co-rule as emperors after 813. Louis was a "southern" outsider, and powerful aristocrats—Charlemagne's daughters, but also Wala, the first magnate named in the ruler's will—did not know or trust him.³ Shortly after Louis arrived at Aachen to take up his father's rule, he expelled his sisters, Wala, and other powerful aristocrats whose allegiance might be questionable, and condemned the palace "as a den of sexual permissiveness and corruption and presented himself as a righteous and pious reformer, riding into town to cleanse the court and the empire of impurity."⁴ These actions were practical responses to political threats, but they were long taken as evidence of Louis as a "pious" reformer more interested in legislating morality than in governing an empire.⁵ Yet Louis's actions in 814 (and throughout his reign) were those of the ultimate *insider*. He understood Carolingian theological-political culture and believed that his father had lost his way and had been in the end cast out from the happy kingdoms.

After Charlemagne the tenor of Carolingian ecological sovereignty shifted but not the tune itself. Louis's biographers portrayed the emperor

2 On the women at Aachen, see Nelson, "Women at the Court of Charlemagne," 223–42.

3 Costambeys et al., *The Carolingian World*, 196–97.

4 Costambeys et al., *The Carolingian World*, 199.

5 Ferdinand Werner, "*Hludovicus Augustus*," 1–4.

as the abbot of a monastery that spanned the length and breadth of the empire.⁶ Yet we have seen that the monastic garden was both constitutive of and constituent to the Paradise-game park imagined by Carolingian theologians and clerics, and that ordering the lives within its walls contributed to the mission of supervising, controlling, and redeeming nature. Louis the Pious collaborated with his chief monastic reformer, Benedict of Aniane to fashion a monastic style of rulership in the Carolingian Empire that contributed to an ethos of “lay sanctity” in ninth-century Francia and informed later medieval concepts of knighthood.⁷ Louis the Pious’ deposition in 833—at the hands of bishops and his son, Lothar—and forced public penance was also for a long time taken as a sign of weak rule by historians, yet it too was a performance of authoritative piety, and it made perfect sense according to the logic of Carolingian religious and political culture.⁸

In the Carolingian imagination, the royal disaster-happy kingdoms paradigm and the image of the empire as a garden together formed a grammar of ecological sovereignty, in which the ruler’s virtue was legible in the flourishing or decay of creation itself. This notion continued to shape Carolingian politics and imperialism in the ninth century. In fact, Louis’s self-abasement reflected the values of Carolingian ecological sovereignty reconstructed in this book. So too did the aims of the bishops who pressured their emperor to step down and undergo penance: in their *Relatio* (the record of the event’s proceedings) they accused Louis of negligence in his governance of the empire, which directly impacted the “scandal of the church,” the “ruin of the people,” and the “destruction of the kingdom.”⁹ These accusations stemmed from Louis’ decision to include his youngest son (from a different mother) Charles the Bald in the succession and division of the realm, at the expense of territories belonging to Charles’s older brothers.¹⁰ The *Relatio* then compared Louis with his father, Charlemagne, who had enlarged the kingdom

6 Noble, “Thegan, Introduction,” in *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 187–88.

7 McKitterick, *The Frankish Church*, 14; Diem, “The Carolingians and the *Regula Benedicti*”; Noble, “Secular Sanctity,” 8–16; Airlie, “The Anxiety of Sanctity,” 373; Leyser, “Early Medieval Canon Law and the Beginning of Knighthood,” 51–56.

8 de Jong, “Power and Humility in Carolingian Society,” 44–46.

9 *Episcoporum de poenitentia, quam Hludowicus imperator professus est, relatio Compendiensis*. “sunt multa, quae per negligentiam in hoc imperio contigerunt, quae ad scandalum ecclesiae et ruinam populi vel regni interitum manifestis indiciis pertinebant.” In Booker, “The Public Penance of Louis the Pious,” 13. Translation adapted from Booker, *Past Convictions*, 259.

10 de Jong, *The Penitential State*, 25–36, 32–33.

and brought peace, a tranquillity that Louis's indecisiveness and impulsiveness wrecked. One can see in the above charges the seeds of the dissension surrounding the succession crises and civil conflicts of the mid-ninth century, though the bishops framed their narrative within the context of spiritual correction. The emperor and the bishops of the Carolingian Empire shared the theological-political discourse of ecological sovereignty, finding divine retribution in *clades*—ecological and other catastrophes that resulted from the ruler's misdeeds.

There is perhaps no more striking proof that norms of ecological sovereignty from Charlemagne's reign persisted—even as his moral reputation suffered in the aftermath of his rule—than the dream recorded in the *Visio Wettini*. In November of 824, Wetti, a monk of Reichenau, experienced a dream-vision that took him (among other places) to a place of purgatory, where he saw Charlemagne:

Wetti said that he had seen standing there a certain prince, who had once ruled Italy and the Roman people, and his genitals were being mangled by the teeth of a beast, although the rest of his body remained free from injury. Wetti was struck with violent bewilderment, wondering how so great a man, who had appeared almost alone among others in this modern age in defense of Catholic faith and direction of the holy church, could have been inflicted with such a hideous punishment. His angelic guide quickly answered that although he had done many wonderful and praiseworthy things accepted by God, for which he would not be deprived of his reward, nevertheless, alongside these other goods offered to God, he had given himself up to the delight of debauchery and had chosen to end his long life in this state.¹¹

In Wetti's vision, Charlemagne was being slowly devoured by one of the beasts over which (as nature's sovereign) he should have held mastery, betrayed by his own sinful desires. It was further proof that the imperial game park's warden had lost his mandate, one that Louis the Pious had to restore.¹²

11 "Illic etiam quendam principem, qui Italiae et populi Romani sceptrum quondam rexerat, vidisse se stantem dixerat, et verenda eius cuiusdam animalis morsu laniari, reliquo corpore immuni ab hac lesione manente. Stupore igitur vehementi attonitus, ammirans quomodo tantus vir, qui in defensione catholicae fidei et regimine sanctae ecclesiae moderno seculo pene inter ceteros singularis apparuit, inuri tanta deformitate poenae potuisset. Cui ab angelo ductore suo protinus responsum est, quod, quamvis multa miranda et laudabilia et deo accepta fecisset, quorum mercede privandus non est, tamen stupri inlecebris resolutus, cum ceteris bonis deo oblatis longevitatem vitae suae in hoc terminare voluisset." *Heitonis Visio Wettini*, ed. Dümmler, 271. Translation from Dutton, *The Politics of Dreaming*, 63–64.

12 For "king of beasts," see Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache*, 43–68.

Walafrid Strabo's later verse reworking of Wetti's vision struck even more clearly the chords of Carolingian ecological sovereignty:

He [Wetti] gazes also upon him [Charlemagne], scanned across the fields,
Who once held the kingdoms of Ausonia and the lofty Roman race,
Now standing still with fixed step,
And the beast before him tearing at the genitals of the man who stands.¹³

Charlemagne (whom we can identify by the acrostic beginnings of each verse line that spell out "CAROLUS IMPERATOR"¹⁴), in other words, was rooted, standing still (*fixo consistere gressu*) not unlike a tree—but like Wigbod's Adam and Eve, a *thinking* tree, condemned to live, feel, and ponder his transgressions—while the animal emasculated him. It was a complete inversion of the gendered hierarchies of Paradise and the biblical authority that had legitimated Charlemagne's claims of sovereignty over bodies and spaces in the Christian empire.

Despite these shifts in tenor, Louis the Pious's "practice" of empire shared "fundamental continuities" with that of his father.¹⁵ Both their political agendas were rooted in the commitment to correct biblical teachings. The scope and ambitions had changed: Charlemagne had ruled a Frankish heartland that was surrounded by kingdoms made up of different *gentes*, each possessing varying degrees of political and religious autonomy, and which were absorbed, annexed, and drawn into political relationships with Franks over the course of the long eighth century. Louis the Pious, himself a product of one of the peripheral kingdoms (Aquitaine), ruled an empire that became more polyethnic and universal in the descriptions of its chroniclers, who described him not as ruler "of the Franks," but rather as the "Christian emperor of the *populus christianus*."¹⁶ Between 816 and 829, Louis and the ecclesiastics who advised him put into place a program developed at assemblies and promulgated via synods and capitularies with "empire-wide force."¹⁷

13 "Contemplatur item quantam lustrata per arva, / Ausoniae quondam qui regna tenebat et altae / Romanae gentis, fixo consistere gressu, / Oppositumque animal lacerare virilia stantis." *Visio Wettini Walahfridi*, ed. Dümmler, p. 318, lines 446–49. Translation from Pollard, "Charlemagne's Posthumous Reputation and the *Visio Wettini*."

14 Dutton, *The Politics of Dreaming*, 66.

15 Costambeys et al., *The Carolingian World*, 198.

16 Noble, "Louis the Pious and the Frontiers of the Frankish Realm," 340–42.

17 Noble, "Louis the Pious and the Frontiers of the Frankish Realm," 345.

Carolingian exegetes in the 810s and 820s reflected this newfound confidence in their imperial success, as commentators like Claudius of Turin worked to produce wholly new texts on Genesis that derived from earlier texts like Wigbod's but that asked new questions.¹⁸ These developments foreshadowed the education and confidence of mid-ninth century writers like Angelomus of Luxeuil, described by Michael Gorman as a "self-conscious creator, not a mere excerptor of previous opinions," and John Scotus Eriugena, who blended biblical and ancient Greco-Roman philosophical notions to create complex and controversial arguments about the properties of God and the universe itself.¹⁹

By the time Louis the Pious died, and his sons warred among themselves for control of a fractured empire in the 840s, in John Contreni's words, the "fissures in the landscape of biblical culture, evident in its most sophisticated work, suggest that the seed sown by Charlemagne and tended by generations of kings, bishops and masters sank deep roots in Carolingian literate society, but that its harvest was somewhat unexpected and troubling."²⁰ Further investigation into the diverse interpretations of Genesis commentaries (and their political patrons) might shed light onto continuities or ruptures in ideas of ecological sovereignty in the later ninth century and beyond. But it is certain that the application of Genesis to the contemporary context of Carolingian politics (whether under Charlemagne or his successors) was an important legacy of Wigbod and Alcuin, among others.

Even Louis the Pious, despite his initial "clearing of the decks" policy regarding Charlemagne's habits and personal associations, returned to the forms established by his father. Louis is known to have gone hunting twenty-seven times as ruler, performing both his own fitness to rule and the success of the empire.²¹ In panegyric verse describing a hunt in which the king of the Danes joined the Frankish royal entourage, Ermold told how "happy caesar bagged many beasts" while "the boy Charles" (the Bald) was presented with a captive deer to slay himself:

[h]e picked up weapons suited to his tender years and struck the animal's quivering hide. It was a boyish achievement this time, but more would fol-

18 Gorman, "The Commentary on Genesis of Claudius of Turin," 317.

19 Moran, "The Secret Folds of Nature," 109–10.

20 Contreni, "The Patristic Legacy to c. 1000," 529–35.

21 Goldberg, "Louis the Pious and the Hunt," 614.

low, and he would go forth marked by his father's strength and adorned with his grandfather's name.²²

Such Carolingian performance of fitness to rule extended beyond the hunt to the control and reclamation of real landscapes. Louis the Pious helped establish the monastery at Conques, in southern France, a place that "used to be fit only for wild beasts and songbirds and was unknown to men on account of its wilderness."²³ Louis endowed the church and the monastery, and "gave it a path cut through the rocks with heavy, sweaty labor, which made the place accessible," and he protected the place when it was under attack by the "Moors," so that "where recently a great troop of beasts lay down to sleep, now cornfields give thanks to God."²⁴ Within the game park and without, control and subjugation of natural bodies continued to justify and support Carolingian claims to sovereignty.

At the end of the eighth century, several strands of theological and political authority came together at Charlemagne's court to coalesce into Carolingian ecological sovereignty. They facilitated the development of new notions of imperial authority and power rooted in the control of the natural world. The courtier-theologians who advised Charlemagne drew on biblical notions of authority and Roman models of sovereignty, fusing them with Frankish customs and other ideas from Britain, Visigothic Iberia, and Italy, to bolster Charlemagne's claims to rule over vast spaces in Europe and its human and nonhuman inhabitants. The ambitious concept of ecological sovereignty first developed and shaped at Charlemagne's court informed the lofty aims set forth in "constitutional" documents like the *Admonitio generalis*. Ultimately, Charlemagne's exercise of imperial rule was rooted in Carolingian ecclesiastics' vision of him as a kind of

22 "Caesar laetus enim dat corpora multa ferarum...Carolus cum quibus ipse puer... Arma aevo tenero tunc convenientia sumit, / Perculit atque ferae terga tremenda puer. / Hunc puerile decus hinc inde frequentat et ambit, / Unc patris virtus, nomen et ornat avi." Ermoldus Nigellus, *Carmina in honorem Hludowici Caesaris*, ed. Weidmann, p. 72, lines 507, 516, p. 73, lines 529–32. Translation from Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 181.

23 "Olim namque feris avibusque canoribus aptus, / Ignotusque homini pro feritate fuit." Ermoldus Nigellus, *Carmina in honorem Hludowici Caesaris*, 11, lines 197–98. Translation from Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 133.

24 "Rupibus excisis valido sudante labore, / Quo pateat locus hic, semita regi datur... Nuper quo valido recubabant agmine beluae, / Redditur inde deo nunc quoque grata seges." Ermoldus Nigellus, *Carmina in honorem Hludowici Caesaris*, ed. Weidmann, p. 11, lines 205–6 and p. 13, lines 265–66. Translation from Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 133–34.

Adam, the steward of a garden who subjugated all creatures in his domain to Frankish sovereignty. A nostalgia for conditions in *the* beginning underlays the Carolingians' self-appointed mission to subdue and redeem the world before its end.

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