

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

I "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" seignorial 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 rambler 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 expediat 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 *figus* 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 ramblers, those who did not submit to working with their hands in this reclamation project, were expelled from this garden.

