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Royal Piety and Davidic Imitation: Cultivating Political Capital in the Alfredian Psalms

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Abstract This article examines the first fifty Old English prose psalms in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds lat. 8824 (ff. 1–63). Composed in an early West Saxon dialect, they are located amongst the uniquely early West Saxon works of the Alfredian canon. Within this Alfredian literary milieu (c. 871–899), the political model of Alfredian kingship appears informed by a consistent imitation of Davidic topoi and royal piety, generating political capital through appropriating the historical and religious authority of Davidic kingship. As the pre-eminent Davidic work, the Psalms represent the greatest potential for Alfredian kingship to posture itself as a new dispensation of Davidic rule. Translating the Psalms provided an ideal opportunity for "royal posturing," which was "exploited with particular immediacy" (Pratt in Problems of authorship and audience in the writings of King Alfred the Great, p. 179, 2007). The Davidic posturing in the Alfredian Psalms functioned within a broader political agenda, encouraging national unity. Through identifying Alfredian kingship with David and disseminating a vernacular reconstruction of a Hebraic text, the Anglo-Saxons were postured as the new Israel: a divinely chosen and blessed nation with a mandate to uphold Judeo-Christian law and morality. In this translation, we see Alfred's *angelcynn* presented as participating in the providential trajectory of biblical history, unifying the separate Anglo-Saxon principalities in the collective progression and expansion of Christendom.

Keywords Old English · Alfred · David · Psalms · Anglo-Saxon · Charlemagne

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I

Within the framework of Alfredian kingship the ideals of extreme royal piety and Davidic imitation function as methods of cultivating political capital: Alfredian kingship consolidates its legitimacy and authority through adapting Davidic standards and tropes. As a work largely attributed to King David the Psalter provides a unique opportunity for Alfredian kingship to confirm its Davidic qualities and directly harness the authority of Scripture: the translation of the Psalms facilitates a potent fusion of biblical narrative and late-ninth-century West Saxon political circumstance. In this context we see political capital cultivated as "*credit* founded on *credence* or belief or *recognition*" (Lecours 2005, p. 39); it functions as a "reputational capital linked to notoriety … [and] to the manner of being perceived" (Bang 2003, p. 148). In the Alfredian Psalms this intangible wealth of perception is generated through the construction of a kingly image,[1] which is defined by its exploitation of Davidic values. The vernacular reconstruction of the *Romanum* Psalter becomes a type of Davidic performance.[2]

Before examining the conventional and contextual matrix of the Psalm's exploitative performance of Davidic kingship and its cultivation of political capital, it is important to locate the text within the field of current scholarly discourse and establish the Psalms' relationship—if any—with King Alfred. The authorial status of the Psalms has recently been reviewed in accord with changing critical attitudes regarding the viability of royal authorship in the Alfredian canon as a whole.[3] Malcolm Godden has spearheaded a critical movement to liberate these texts from their authorial dependence on Alfred, ultimately contending that: "Alfred did not 'write' anything" (Godden 2007, p. 18). While he qualifies this by stating that such an extreme position on the authorship of Alfredian texts is not yet entirely provable, he notes: "We should at least stop assuming that the king wrote them all, or even authorized them" (ibid.). In contrast, through examining the lexical features in the Old English *Pastoral Care*, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, the *Soliloquies* and the Alfredian Psalms, Janet Bately concludes that Alfred authored them all, perhaps with assistance, stating: "There was one mind at work … that mind was king Alfred's" (Bately 1982, pp. 94–95). Sympathising with Bately, David Pratt emphasises the self-authenticating nature of the texts bearing Alfred's name,[4]

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[1] The referents 'Alfredian Psalms' and 'Ps(p.)' indicate the first fifty Old English prose psalms of the Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds lat. 8824, ff. 1–63, which is the sole extant copy of Ps(p.). London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius E. xviii, a *Gallicanum* Psalter with interlinear Old English glosses, contains fragments of the introductions to Ps(p.). All references to Ps(p.) are from: P. P. O'Neill (2001); all translations are original. See also, Toswell (1996).

[2] O'Neill observes: "The main source of the Paris Psalter's paraphrase was the *Romanum* Psalter, an Old Latin version of the psalms probably introduced by Augustine of Canterbury to England in the late sixth century" (O'Neill 2001, p. 31).

[3] While the reader will appreciate that literary canons are subjective, malleable things, the Alfredian corpus can be considered to roughly include translations of Gregory the Great's *Cura pastoralis*, Boethius' *De consolatione Philosophiae*, Augustine's *Soliloquiae*, Ps(p.) in addition to the introduction of Alfred's *domboc* (law-book). See Godden (2007, p. 1); Pratt (2007b, p. 167); Bately (1982, p. 94); Waite (2000).

[4] Sweet (1871, p. 1, l. 1); Godden and Irvine (2009); Liebermann (1903–1916, pp. 46, 49:10).

observing the importance of the relationship between the author and the audience and contending that the texts necessitate authorial identification (Pratt 2007b, p. 191).

However, as Godden observes, citing Carolingian and West Saxon precedent, a text declaiming royal authorship does not necessarily equate to genuine royal authorship: "We have a range of texts in the voice and name of Charlemagne, including poems, prefaces, circular letters and treatise on doctrine, but no modern scholar thinks that any of them were actually composed by the king" Godden (2007, p. 5).[5] The Psalms, as we have them, offer no prefatory material relating the text to Alfred and, in light of Godden's arguments, even if they had at some point in their textual history been accompanied with such information, which has been surmised, it would not serve as definitive evidence of royal authorship.[6] William of Malmesbury's oft-cited twelfth-century claim for Alfredian authorship of the first section of the Psalter appears drawn from the same limited pool of evidence available to contemporary scholars (Stubbs 1887–1889, 1:132), namely the internal claims of the texts and the later writings of Ælfric and Æthelweard.[7] There are also significant issues with William's definition of the Alfredian canon, as it includes texts which are no longer considered 'Alfredian,' notably the Old English translation of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, which was dissociated from Alfred on account of its Mercian dialect (Rowley 2011, pp. 37–48).

In contrast, a linguistic analysis by Bately and O'Neill indicates the dominant dialect of the Psalms to be early West Saxon, allowing the text to be potentially composed within Alfred's rule (c. 871–899), placing it amongst the uniquely early West Saxon texts of the Alfredian canon (Bately 1982).[8] Bately's study suggests that these texts are unified and royally authored through consistent lexical, syntactical and stylistic choices (Bately 1982, pp. 94–105). While such a study does reveal a unifying pattern of lexical and stylistic similarities between the Psalms and the Alfredian corpus, extending the presence of these similarities to determine the common involvement of a single author is an irrational gesture. Stylistic similitude among texts is expected when they are of the same language and time and from the same cultural and literary milieu.[9]

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[5] In reference to insular examples of authorial duplicity Godden observes the accepted assumption that Bishop Wulfstan composed the law-codes for Æthelred under the king's name (Godden 2007, p. 5).

[6] There is good reason to speculate that Ps(p.) may have contained some kind of introductory authorial reference; the first folio of Ps(p.) is missing, which could have contained an authorial note. There is evidence suggesting a tradition of removing the Alfredian prefaces from later copies; for example, Cambridge, Trinity College R. 5.22 (717) contains a copy of the Alfredian *Pastoral Care* dated to the end of the tenth or early eleventh century without an expository preface. See Horgan (1973, pp. 162–164); Schreiber (2003, pp. 57–65).

[7] Godden (2007, pp. 4–5); Ælfric (1997, p. 174); Æthelweard (1962, p. 50).

[8] While exhibiting both early and late forms of West Saxon, O'Neill concludes that the inflectional system used in the text is predominately early West Saxon: "Overall the conflicting linguistic evidence is best reconciled by regarding the surviving text of Ps(p.) as a late West Saxon recasting of and Early West Saxon text" (O'Neill 2001, p. 63). The standardisation of spelling which accompanied the insular Benedictine reform provides the clearest guide for the dating of dialects, with early West Saxon being used until ca. 930.

[9] Godden warns it would be: "unwise to the think that the linguistic and stylistic evidence *demonstrates* that the works are all by the same author" (Godden 2007, p. 10).

It is equally possible, but perhaps more likely, that the distinctive features identified by Bately may be representative of a collaborative "court-style" produced or influenced by the scholarly collective Alfred assembled at his court and are credited in the Prose Preface to the *Pastoral Care* (Pratt 2007b, p. 169),[10] though this too remains speculative. Despite the absence of a precise source the Psalms appear to be the product of an Alfredian milieu, however, the extent to which Alfred was personally involved in the production of the Psalms—or any text—appears currently irrecoverable, the evidence supporting his direct authorship is circumstantial at best. While resisting an absolute assertion of authorship the Psalms preserve and propagate fundamental ideas of West Saxon kingship and political strategy, which resonate with the larger Alfredian corpus. Thus, the thesis of this article does not depend on an absolute resolution of the authorship debate. However, it does assume, in accord with the evidence, that the Alfredian canon is the product of a shared literary movement and appears thematically unified by the political concerns of the Alfredian court.

II

The cumulative image of Alfredian kingship and political praxis drawn from the corpus as a whole appears consistently informed by Davidic ideals and motifs, revealing a unifying impulse to cultivate political capital through Davidic imitation. Thus, the Psalms occupy a pre-eminent place within the Alfredian corpus, allowing a thorough and potent appropriation of Davidic authority and its biblical *gravitas*. However, in order to fully understand the political significance of the Alfredian Psalms and their relationship to the wider corpus, the conventions of Davidic kingship and royal piety must be examined, and the context of their Alfredian adaptation.

The Alfredian exploitation of royal piety and Davidic imitation mobilised political trends and models long exemplified within the Carolingian world, which had been energised by the ecclesiastical reforms of the eighth and ninth century. The reforms sought to harmonise political and ecclesiastical structures, resulting in the legislation of rigorous spiritual devotion and moral discipline, extending from the church to include the laity. In Charlemagne's *Admonitio* he states: "[The people] must be admonished, exhorted and if necessary compelled" in the observance of "canonical prohibitions" "[and] the ancient institutes of universal councils" (King 1987, p. 209).[11] These policies were a product of extreme royal piety influenced by the impulse toward the imitation of David. Charlemagne notes in the preface to the *Admonitio* that his primary responsibility as leader was the salvation of his people—

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[10] "Plegmunde minum ærcebiscepe … Assere minum biscepe … Grimbolde minum mæssepreoste … Iohanne minum mæssepreoste" [Plegmund my archbishop … Asser my bishop … Grimbald my mass-priest … John my mass-priest] (Sweet 1871, p. 6, ll. 21–22). On 'court style' see Pratt 2007a, p. 65, 183–85.

[11] Boretius and Krause (1883–1897, 1:53–54). According to McKitterick Charlemagne's *Admonitio* "contains the most complete statement of all the proposals for the reform of the church and its ministers and for the education of the people" (McKitterick 1977, p. 4).

an inherently Davidic concern.[12] The figure of David united within the individual of the king the two conventionally separate offices of ecclesiastical and secular power, rendering him a priest-king. Alcuin observed that Charlemagne, like David, incorporated the offices of royal leadership and priestly instruction (*praedicatio*) to lead the nation, a people of faith, toward salvation.[13] Through the mediatory role of priesthood Davidic kingship assumes spiritual responsibility for the nation, a pastoral quality foreshadowed in David's youthful occupation as shepherd.[14]

An important tangential aspect of this pastoral and priestly image is the implied interiority of Davidic kingship. David is chosen, not for his appearance, but for the condition of his heart and is described as "a man after God's own heart" (1 Sam 13:14; 16:7), suggesting an internal attitude reflective of the divine, which locates the king as an exemplary model to his people for pious conduct. This kingly image, made available under the auspices of reform, encouraged a new style of political self-representation. Louis the Pious and subsequent Carolingian rulers consolidated their authority through defining their position as a *ministerium*, a divinely appointed ministry or office.[15] The status of the *ministerium* qualified their kingship as divinely sanctioned and established the ruler as a moral exemplar to the people, which allowed individuals to claim moral superiority in support of their authority. However, it also rendered them vulnerable to accusations of improper conduct. Consequently, public admissions and repentance of sins, genuine or fabricated, by ministerial rulers regularly served as a means to neutralise this political threat and demonstrate exemplary humility and piety. This was the motivation behind Louis the Pious' voluntary confession and penance in 822. Here we see an unusual economy of piety where royal sin permits the performance of royal devotion, which in turn operates as a means to cultivate political capital and consolidate authority; the presence of royal sin becomes a positive political tool.

The idea of political advantage through conventional weakness or failure is reflected in the image of the suffering king. Ninth-century scholar Sedulius Scottus considered Job-like suffering and testing as a locus for strength and resolve (Scottus 1906, pp. 72–75), an idea explicitly echoed in Gregorian thought: "Ille igitur, ille modis omnibus debet ad exemplum uiuendi pertrahi, qui cunctis carnis passionibus moriens iam spiritaliter uiuit" [Therefore, the manner of every (man) must be made into a living example, who, in dying to all passions of the flesh, still lives spiritually] (Gregory 1992, I.10). In the dedicatory verses prefacing the second of the king's two bibles it is clear that Charles the Bald was actively promoted as a suffering king: "Ergo nec hunc David nec Iob magis esse probatos/Apparet plane, pro te nec plura tulisse,/Quanta tuus Karolus mitis, pius atque benignus" [Therefore it is clear that neither David nor Job was tested more, nor bore greater things for you, as much as your Charles, mild, pious and benign] (Traube 1896, p. 257). The manifestation of

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[12] King (1987, p. 209); Boretius and Krause (1883–1897, 1:53–54).

[13] Burns notes: "The Carolingian image of kingship was shaped by the Old Testament models of holy kingship such as David … who was both a king and priest" (Burns 1991, p. 167).

[14] 1 Sam 16:19, 17:15; Ps. 78:70–71.

[15] Godman and Collins (1990, pp. 455–486); Story (2005, p. 72).

royal sin or illness is inflected to stress the extreme piety and humility of royal leadership, thereby validating kingly authority.

The penitential image of David in the Psalter served as the dominant model for royal piety, confession and humble repentance; the scene of David's confession to Nathan is recorded in ivory on the cover of Charles the Bald's personal Psalter (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 1152). The dedicatory illustration of Charles the Bald's first bible shows him receiving the bible (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 1, f. 423ʳ), while the accompanying verses address Charles as King David: "O decus O veneranda salvs O splendide David" [O glory, O worshipful greetings, O splendid David] (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat.1 f. 422ᵛ). The image itself references the illustration prefacing the Psalms in the same manuscript (ibid. f. 215ᵛ): the face, crown and guard of Charles are a purposeful replication of those seen in the earlier image of David. As Dutton and Kessler observe, we are to conclude from the final verses and imagery that: "Charles the Bald was now none other than David himself" (Dutton and Kessler 1997, p. 96). Davidic piety also extended from domestic political discourse into military conduct; Heiric of Auxerre described Charles' bloodless victory in 858 as exhibiting Davidic humility and mercy in the proprieties of war.[16] The royal imitation of Davidic values and tropes, however, extends back not just to Charlemagne but also to Pippin III and the Merovingian kingdom,[17] providing a precedent of cross-kingdom movement: Davidic posturing migrates from the Merovingians to the Carolingians and then to the West Saxon courts.

The Carolingian imitation of Davidic kingship and piety represents the clearest precedent for the Alfredian appropriation of Davidic authority and devotion. In his *Life of Alfred* Asser presents an image of Alfred inherently informed by the traditions of Davidic imitation, constructing his narrative in order to portray Alfred as a new David. In similar fashion to Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne*, a model on which Asser drew, Alfred's biography was not a work of objective historicity. Rather, it is an encomium celebrating Alfred's greatness and propagating the distinctive image of Alfredian kingship, which was shaped by the received biblical model of David. For example, just as David fled into the wilderness from his enemies, we see Alfred withdraw into the marshlands of Somerset before emerging triumphantly (Asser 1959, p. 55). Perhaps most notably, Asser recasts Alfred's childhood encounter with Pope Leo IV in a Davidic light, indicating that Alfred was adopted as a spiritual son and anointed as king (ibid. p. 8). While there is documentary evidence confirming Alfred's warm papal reception, it is a potential forgery and does not mention Leo IV anointing him.[18] It is highly unlikely that Leo IV would have performed such a rite as Alfred had four older brothers who were all in line to the throne before him.[19]

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[16] "Mansuetissimus rex Carolus, belli pacisque artibus Davidicae semper modestiae comparandus" [The most gentle king Charles, of Davidic mildness, prepared always in the skills of war and peace] (Heiric of Auxerre 1850–1863, II.100–102).

[17] See Wallace-Hadrill (1965, p. 26).

[18] Hunt (1912, p. 278); Keynes and Lapidge (1983, p. 232).

[19] Twelfth century writer Aelred of Rievaulx suggests that Leo IV, of a prophetic disposition, foresaw Alfred's future greatness and royal status, though this seems unlikely (Pollard 2006, p. 63).

Asser adapts the familiar topos of Samuel's anointing of David, with the prophet passing over the older, superficially suitable, brothers in favour of David, anointing him while Saul still sat on the throne (1 Sam 16). The appropriation of this trope locates Alfredian kingship within a narrative that not only represents royal authority as divinely ordained, but also implies Alfred to be the harbinger of a new era of divine favour, locating him within the movement of providential history. Just as David was to supersede Saul, who had been rejected by God, Alfred's kingship is suggested to remedy the insufficiencies of past leadership, which tolerated sin.[20] The issue of whether or not those kings before Alfred really were inferior is not important. Rather, what we see is a method of cultivating political capital; Asser is suggesting that Alfred, in his Davidic anointing, is the fulfilment of divine purpose and the apogee of earthly kingship.

Asser casts Alfred's morality in a distinctively Davidic light. As David refused to murder Saul and seize the throne that God had promised him (1 Sam 24), Asser tells us that Alfred could have taken leadership from his last surviving brother, but instead he waited for God's permission before assuming his divinely appointed position (Asser 1959, p. 42). Alfred's peaceful resolve to the siege of Athelney echoes the bloodless victory of Charles the Bald, exhibiting Davidic mercy and grace (ibid. pp. 55–56), clemency that resulted in the conversion of the pagan king Guthrum, with Guthrum's baptism being arranged and directed by Alfred himself. In accordance with David's status as priest-king we see Asser combine both ecclesiastical and martial offices in constructing the image of Alfredian kingship. The image of Alfred as a priest-king is further developed through the royal performance of extreme piety and humility.

Asser represents Alfred's devotional regime as so intense that he would often secretly attend nightly sessions of prayer, perhaps echoing Samuel's youthful nocturnal divine encounters, so as to appropriate the semblance of Samuel's prophetic authority.[21] Alfred is also described as constantly in possession of his personal *Enchiridion*. While not extant, it is indicated by Asser that the text contained a selection of prayers, psalms and liturgy for the service of the hours and performance of the daily Office (Asser 1959, pp. 88–89). The observance of the daily Office was conventionally reserved for ecclesiastics, involving the ritual recitation of all 150 psalms in a weekly cycle. For Asser the figure of Alfred embodied a Davidic union of ecclesiastical and secular power, with the king's piety confirming his divinely ordained status. The extreme nature of Alfred's devotion appears closely associated with his reported illnesses, suggesting an adaptation of Carolingian strategies: the image of a suffering king equates to a favourable royal persona and manufactures political capital.

Both Gregory and Asser perceived bodily illness as a divinely licensed means of restraining desire, retaining royal humility and preventing the contemplation of future sin.[22] Asser shows us a youthful Alfred requesting, and receiving, from God a physical affliction in order to assist in resisting carnal desires and temptations, emphasising his humility and dependence on the Lord for strength. Alfred is struck

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[20] Similarly, Samuel replaced Eli because of his spiritual delinquency, see 1 Sam 12:12–36, 6, 15.

[21] 1 Sam 3.

[22] Gregory (1992, II.12); Asser (1959, pp. 59, 74).

ill again at his wedding, leading Pratt to assume Alfred's condition: "[is] necessitated by his uncontrollable state of *carnale desiderium*" (Pratt 2001, p. 83). Alfred's illness allows his royal image to be framed by significant gestures of piety and humility, functioning as part of Asser's Davidic posturing, while also associating the body of the king with the kingdom.

The king takes on the sins of the people in a physical sense, reflecting both the intercessory faculty of the Davidic priest-king and of Christ, physically bearing the sins of humanity.[23] This somatic association between king and kingdom is suggested through Asser's repeated correlation of Alfred's physical tribulation and the difficulties he faced in attending his other kingly concerns: the external affliction of pagan invasion and the resistance of his own people to his orders, particularly regarding the construction of new fortifications.[24] Asser describes Alfred as "cotidiana et nocturna anxius tristitia" [harassed daily and nightly by afflictions] resulting from a personal lack of divine wisdom and knowledge of the liberal arts (Asser 1959, p. 76). It is Alfred's pious imitation of Solomonic values and the assembly of an international scholarly collective in his court, which cures these afflictions. Alfred places the pursuit of divine wisdom at the fore of his royal concerns—just as Solomon did—and his physical condition is remedied (Asser 1959, p. 76). Alfred's personal circumstance—the afflictions caused by an absence of divine wisdom—becomes a metonym for national issues. In the Prose Preface to the *Pastoral Care* the Danish attacks are considered divine punishment for a national failure to pursue wisdom.[25] Davidic priesthood becomes literally encoded into the king's body, as Alfred somatically registers the transgressions of his people.

The Old English *Pastoral Care* also appears concerned with promoting the Davidic image of Alfredian kingship. The Preface depicts Alfred inheriting his kingdom in a state of sapiential decline,[26] and while the factual value of this statement is hard to measure, it remains consistent with the Alfredian assimilation of Davidic topoi. David's kingship interrupts a period of moral degeneracy and godlessness, necessitating a new and corrective form of kingship.[27] The Preface

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[23] Asser presents Alfred's sacrifice as distinctly Christ-like (Asser 1959, p. 89).

[24] Asser asks rhetorically, "quid loquar de [Alfred]?" [what might I say concerning Alfred]?: "Qui maxima, excepto illo dolore, perturbatione et controversia suorum, qui nullum aut parvum voluntarie pro communi regni necessitate vellent subire laborem" [Who received sorrow, great disturbance and debate from his own people, whom would voluntarily undertake little or no work for the common needs of the kingdom] (Asser 1959, p. 92). In addition to paralleling the health of the royal body and the kingdom, here Asser contrasts the minimal effort of Alfred's nobles with Alfred's own efforts to negotiate the practicalities of ruling while in a state of extreme suffering, indirectly encouraging the fulfilment of royal obligations.

[25] "Geðenc hwelc witu us þa becomon for ðisse worulde, þa þa we hit nohwæðer ne selfe ne lufedon ne eac oðrum monnum ne lifdon" [Remember what punishments befell us in this world when we ourselves did not love (wisdom) nor transmitted it to other men either] (Sweet 1871, p. 5, ll. 5–6). On the 'health of the nation' see Leneghan (2010).

[26] Sweet (1871, p. 2, ll. 2–16).

[27] "In those days there was no king in Israel: *every* man did that which was right in his *own* eyes" (Judges 21:25), leading Israel to demand a king (1 Sam. 8:20). God responded, "I gave thee a king in Mine anger, and took him away in My wrath" (Hosea 13:11). However, David's predecessor, Saul, was also an apostate, consulting a witch (1 Sam 28), before eventually committing suicide on the battlefield (1 Sam 31).

suggests that Alfred, like David, is introducing a new dispensation of divinely sanctioned leadership necessitated by the spiritual insufficiencies of his predecessors. The corrective that Alfredian kingship seeks to implement is largely one of education, translating works into the vernacular with the specific mandate of clarity and simplicity (Sweet 1871, p. 7, ll. 19–20), disseminating a usable literature for the purpose of spiritual and governmental edification. This educative drive, as we have seen, has its precedent in the Davidic image of Carolingian kingship: Alfredian kingship assumes pastoral responsibility for the spiritual and devotional health of the nation. In this the way we might consider the production of the *Pastoral Care*, the *Consolation*, the *Soliloquies* and the Psalms as a direct consequence of Alfredian kingship replicating the Davidic union of ecclesiastical and secular offices, attempting to instruct the nation and lead it towards the fulfilment of its divinely ordained martial and soteriological destiny.

III

In the Alfredian Psalms the authorship and performance of each psalm is individually credited to David through the extra-biblical introductions prefacing each passage[28]; David is postured as the inescapable cynosure of the text, rendering the psalms hyper-Davidic. In stressing the status and presence of David the paraphrast expands the significance, political authority and spiritual jurisdiction of Davidic kingship,[29] thus, increasing the political capital that Alfredian kingship may potentially accrue through its association with the figure of David. Additionally, an emphasis on David serves to centralise the presence of Alfredian kingship within the psalms, as the image of Alfredian kingship is—as we have seen—defined by those qualities associated with David.

The energy of each psalm's introduction focuses on the figure of David. The introductions are structured around an *argumentum*, providing a précis of the psalm's content and theme and a set of interpretations which function as an exegetical guide to the psalm. The introductions follow a unique fourfold interpretative schema, which differs significantly from Augustine's conventional four-point biblical exegesis. The scheme contains: an anagogical interpretation; a historical interpretation; an allegorical interpretation, concerning Christ or the Church; and a moral interpretation, applying the passage practically to the Christian reader.[30] While the introductions maintain a patristic influence, offering three of the four Augustinian interpretations—historical, allegorical, and moral—they do not provide an anagogical interpretation. Instead the principal interpretation of the introductions is historic and explicitly Davidic: the Alfredian interpretative schema firstly locates the psalm in a Davidic context, relating the performance and

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[28] See especially: Ps(p.), Ps. 4, intro. Additionally, Ps. 1 has no introduction as the folio preceding it is missing (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 8824).

[29] The paraphrast of the Psalms is commonly accepted as the same author of the introductions (O'Neill 2001, p. 27).

[30] de Lubac (2001); Caplan (1929).

composition to a historical point in David's life,[31] often drawn from 1 and 2 Samuel.[32] For example, we see the introduction to Psalm 14 provide: a historic-Davidic interpretation; a second historic interpretation, relating the psalm to an Old Testament event; a moral reading; and an allegorical interpretation, in this case Christological:

> Dauid sang þysne feowerteoðan sealm, þa he adrifen wæs of his earde— wiscte þæt he moste eft to cuman;

> And swa dyde Israela folc þa hie on hæftnyde gelædde wæron of Hierusalem to Babilonia;

> And swa deð ælc rihtwis man þonne he þysne sealm singð—wilnað him sumere rothwile on þissere worulde and ec[re] reste æfter þisum;

> And swa dyde Crist þa he hine sang—seofode his earfoðu to Drihtne.

> [David sang this fourteenth psalm, when he was driven from his native country—he wished he were allowed to return to it; and so did the Israelites, when they were lead in captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon; and so does each righteous man when he sings this psalm—he desires some time of peace in this world and eternal rest after this world; and so did Christ when he sang this psalm—lamented his suffering to the Lord] (Ps[p.], Ps. 14, intro).

However, the fourfold interpretative system is not consistently applied; fifteen introductions have a threefold system and four introductions have only one interpretation. Nevertheless, it is significant that the Davidic interpretation remains consistently employed in all introductions and is always given priority at the beginning of the introduction. The consistent emphasis on the Davidic interpretation demonstrates a clear prioritisation of this mode of exegesis, a hermeneutic strategy further revealed in the selective use of source material.

The main source for the content of the introductions appears to come from the *argumenta* in the pseudo-Bede *In Psalmorum Libris Exegesis*.[33] Each introductory *argumentum* contain three elements:

i)   A historical framework, concerning Davidic or a post-Davidic event from the Old Testament.
ii) A mystical interpretation, occasionally containing a liturgical component.
iii) A moral or second mystical interpretation.

As the Davidic readings are inconsistently provided the composition of the introductions reveals a purposeful emphasis on the Davidic clause. Thus, when *Arg.* i) lacked a Davidic reading, one was invented. *Arg.* i) for the introduction to Psalm 14 (above) contains no Davidic interpretation, citing a post-Davidic event: "Uerba

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[31] Ps(p.), Pss. 4, intro, 5, intro.

[32] Ps(p.), Ps. 38, intro; cf. 1 Sam 21–31.

[33] *In Psalmorum Libris Exegesis* was a composite work containing an *Argumentum, Explanatio* and *Commentatio* for each psalm. The *Commentationes* provide a line-by-line commentary, while the *Explanationes* provide an orthodox commentary on the Psalm's biblical *titulus,* its contents and division, which is derived mainly from Cassiodorus (O'Neill 2001, p. 35; Cassiodorus 1958).

populi in captiuitate Babylonia optantis reditum ad patriam enumerantisque quibus meritis quis ad hanc peruenire queat" [The words of the people in Babylonian captivity wish for a return to the homeland and to count up the due rewards with those who might arrive there] (Pseudo-Bede 1862a, b, p. 14). However, the composer projects the *argumentum* onto David, rendering him the figure lamenting exile and indicating an intentional Davidic emphasis.[34] The figure of David is given further prominence through "Dauid sang" and "he cwæð" framing both ends of an introduction,[35] ensuring the psalm will be read as coming from the mouth of David and facilitating the immediacy of direct speech.

This immediacy is part of a broader attempt to contemporise the Psalms, collapsing the historical past into the present: Alfredian kingship postures itself as the new dispensation of Davidic kingship, equating the Anglo-Saxons to the new Israel.[36] In the introduction to Ps. 4 David is described as singing the psalm amongst his *werod* (fighting band), a Davidic image that is distinctly different from the conventional courtly presentation of David surrounded by musicians and courtiers.[37] For the ninth century Anglo-Saxon audience *werod* intimated the image of a troop of warriors attending a noble or war-leader. In creating a framework of relevant imagery the paraphrast implicitly merges an identifiable image of Anglo-Saxon governance with Davidic kingship. Thus, the royal image of Alfredian kingship appears to draw on the authority of both David and the traditional—perhaps romanticised—idea of Anglo-Saxon leadership. Recasting the Psalms as relevant and applicable to a ninth century Anglo-Saxon readership also recalls the educational imperative of Alfredian kingship, as it assumes the responsibilities of a priest-king.

The educational role of the Psalms is evident in the paraphrast's penchant for clarity and utility, an idea paralleled in the fluid Alfredian attitude to translation outlined in the Prose Preface: "hwilum word be worde, hwilum andgit of andgi[e]te" [Sometimes word for word, sometimes sense for sense] (Sweet 1871 p. 7, ll. 19–20). In comparison with Ælfric's Preface to Genesis, which demanded a strict accuracy in translation,[38] the paraphrase of the Psalms presents a unique approach to Scripture. While the introductions signal an explicit instructional agenda, providing methods of exegesis to enhance understanding of the psalm, the

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[34] See above for Ps(p.), Ps. 14, intro.

[35] See Ps(p.), Pss. 8; 18; 28; 44; 50, intros.

[36] In an equivalent tactic to the Psalms' exploitation of Davidic authority, the preface to Alfred's *domboc* associates the contemporary dispensation of Alfredian law with the divine consignment of Mosaic Law in a paraphrase of Exodus 20–23. Furthermore, following the paraphrase of Exodus are paraphrases of Mathew 5:17 and Acts 15, which define the parameters of Mosaic Law as it related to Alfred's constituency, attended by an exposition of early religious law-making at synods. In this way, we see a potent synthesis of Anglo-Saxon law and all Judeo-Christian law from the time of Moses, which are united through the figure of Alfred: "Ic ða ælfred cyning þas togædere gegaderode [and] awritan het" [Then I king Alfred gathered this together and commanded it to be written] (Liebermann 1916, p. 46, 49:9).

[37] London, British Library, Cotton Vespasian A.i, f. 30ᵛ; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France lat. 1, f. 423ʳ.

[38] "We ne durron na mare awritan on Englisc þonne ðæt Leden hæfð" [We dare write no more in English than the Latin has] (Crawford 1969, p. 80).

paraphrast consistently seeks to clarify and alter the Latin source. The introduction to Ps. 2 indicates the desire to clarify the Latin in the vernacular: "'psalmus Dauid,' þæt ys on Englisc, "Dauides sealm" ['The psalms of David,' which is in English, David's psalm] (Ps[p.], Ps. 2, intro.).[39] In Ps. 16 the paraphrast explains why the consumption of swine is framed in pejorative terms, clarifying Judaic law: "þæt Iudeum unalyfedlic ys to etanne" [for the Jews are not allowed to eat that] (Ps[p.], Ps. 16:14).[40] There is a repeated move to include additional information to passages that might be considered difficult or required an ecclesiastical background to understand. In Ps. 44 the paraphrast provides a Christological interpretation of the psalm through adding exegetical material after each relevant passage.[41] Additionally, in order to unpack the metaphor of God's word destroying the mighty cedar trees of Ps. 28 the paraphrast adds the explanatory "þa treowa tacniað ofermodra manna anweald" [the trees signify the strength of proud men] (Ps[p.], Ps. 28:5). This is followed by an alteration to the Hebraic metaphor, "et comminuet Dominus tamquam vitulum Libani" [and the Lord will shatter them to pieces as the calf of Libanus] (Weber 1953, Ps. 28:5), where *tamquam vitulum Libani* becomes "emne swa þa lytlan onwæstmas" [just like the little branches] (Ps[p.], Ps. 28:5). The alteration emphasises the might of God through imagery consistent with the initial arboreal metaphor and in terms understandable to a wide Anglo-Saxon audience.

The utility of the text is part of its educational function, with the formulaic structure of the introductions serving to enhance its intended usability. The constant repetition of "and" at the start of each new interpretation (see Ps. 14 above) and the recycling of a small pool of nouns and verbs, which indicate the context of the psalm,[42] reveals the intentional simplicity and clarity with which the introductions were composed. While the introductions allowed for ease of reading, the psalms are also often injected with poetic expression and dramatic imagery. The rhythmic repetition and alliteration in Ps. 9 represents a conscious poetic expansion of the source, ending in a pair of assonant synonyms: "*Hwylc* broc and *hwylc* sar we *þoliað* and *þrowiað*" (emphasis added) [Which affliction and which pain we suffer and endure] (Ps[p.], Ps. 9:34).[43] In Ps. 17 the paraphrast expands on the source stressing the drama of the speakers plight: "Me ymbhringdon sar and sorga and granung fulneah oð deað" [Sorrow and pain surrounded me and groaning almost to death] (Ps[p.], Ps. 17:4). The speaker is not just surrounded by *gemitus mortis* [the groaning of death] as in the original,[44] but also the alliterative *sar and sorga*. In the vernacular the *gemitus mortis* is intensified and dramatised, becoming groaning *fulneah oð deað*, emphasising the extent and desperation of the speaker's peril. The image of Alfredian kingship advances its Davidic status, not just through pastoral posturing and as a priest-king, but also through literary and artistic merit: just as

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[39] Additionally, in Ps(p.) Ps. 13:3 the Latin "aspis" is clarified for the reader.

[40] See also Ps(p.), Pss. 7:13, 9:34, 10:5, 17:7, 21:13, 15; 22:5, 23:4, 24:6 etc.

[41] Ps(p.), Pss. 44:1–2, 4, 7, 11–13, 15.

[42] Nouns: sealm, earfoð, wærc; verbs: singan, gebiddan, geswencan, seofian.

[43] Cf. "Laborem et dolorem" [labour and pain] (Webber 1953, Ps. 9:35).

[44] "Circumdederunt me gemitus mortis" [The groaning of death surrounded me] (Webber 1953, Ps. 17:5).

David is described as a talented musician,[45] the Alfredian Psalms reflect the efforts of a competent artist. The image of Alfredian kingship appropriates the Davidic role of educator, pastor and psalmist in its reproduction of the Psalms.

The Psalms also provide a unique space to propagate the Alfredian image of royal piety, generating political capital through strategies comparable with Asser's manipulation of Alfred's illnesses. The physical state of the king is again associated with the stability and health of the kingdom, resulting in demonstrations of royal piety and humility. The introduction to Ps. 27 illustrates this process as David petitions the Lord to ease his sufferings: "Ægðer ge modes ge lichaman, and wið ealle his fynd gescylde, ge wið gesewene ge wið ungesewene" [Both of the mind and of the body, to protect him against all his enemies, both the visible and invisible] (Ps[p.], Ps. 27, intro.). Here the physical and mental suffering of the king parallels the simultaneous assault of enemies, both literal and conceptual. While it is possible that *gesewene* [visible] and *ungesewene* [invisible] enemies refer to martial and spiritual warfare, it more likely indicates martial and somatic afflictions as the next interpretation concerns physical illness. Ezechias appeals to God to deliver him from: "Ægðer ge æt his mettrumnesse ge æt his feondum" [Both from his illness and from his enemies] (Ps[p.], Ps. 27, intro.).

In the introductions of Ps. 10 and 12 an identical dyad emerges, illustrating the correlation of martial tribulation and royal illness, which facilitates a display of royal piety and humility in the form of a psalm confessing sin, asserting righteousness and petitioning the Lord to move. This relationship between royal piety and hostile enemies appears to exploit the contemporaneous Viking invasions. The paraphrast indicates that the pious ruler will resist foreign incursion through divine support[46]: Alfredian kingship exhibits exemplary piety and therefore has divine advocacy in protecting the security of the nation. Such textual posturing legitimises and consolidates the authority and royal status of Alfredian kingship, while also establishing a divinely licenced kingly image. This dynamic is echoed in the paraphrast's treatment of royal sin.

In Ps. 18 the paraphrast associates the morally *unwemme* [spotless] and *geclænsod* [cleansed] royal figure with the providential absence of conflict (Ps[p.], Ps. 18:13). The equation is simple: royal adherence to God's law ensures governmental stability. However, the paraphrast expands this with an addition to the source, observing the reason for this to be that conflict distracts from the introspective consideration and eventual confession of sin: "Þonne ne mæg ic smeagan mine unscylda" [Then I am not able to meditate on my grievous faults] (Ps[p.], Ps. 18:13). Therefore, the acknowledgement and implied presence of royal sin is vital for the display of humility and piety, which secures divine favour and ultimately governmental harmony. This is an intrinsically Gregorian concept reflected in the Alfredian *Pastoral Care*: "Forðæm oft ælmieghtiga God fo[r]let ðæt mod his gecorenra gesyngian on sum lytlum ðingum … ðæt hi him ondræden, [and] murkien for hira unfullfremednesse" [Therefore the almighty God often lets the minds of his chosen ones sin in some small things … that they may fear him, and

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[45] 2 Sam 23:1; 1 Chr 16:7.

[46] Ps(p.), Pss. 24:21, 28, 43:14.

grieve for their imperfection] (Sweet 1871, p. 467, ll. 10–13). Sin becomes an important regulatory mechanism, ensuring royal humility and necessitating pious behaviour. Through Davidic imitation—in the form of psalmody—the image of Alfredian kingship appropriates the piety and humility of David's penitential response to sin.[47] In this way political capital is generated through an attractive kingly image, which is unequivocally qualified by humility and assured of divine support.

IV

In conclusion, the image of Alfredian kingship appears clearly informed by a consistent imitation of Davidic topoi and royal piety, generating political capital through appropriating the historic and religious authority of Davidic kingship. David provided a potent exemplar for Christian kingship, embodying and prefiguring the humility and priesthood of Christ while also functioning as a martially successful warrior-king. As the pre-eminent work of David, the Psalms represent the greatest potential for Alfredian kingship to identify itself as a new dispensation of Davidic rule. Pratt notes that translating the Psalms provided an ideal opportunity for "royal posturing," which was "exploited with particular immediacy" (Pratt 2007b, p. 179). The imitation of Davidic kingship and piety in the Alfredian Psalms also functioned within a broader political agenda that sought to secure national unity. Through identifying Alfredian kingship with David, and disseminating—or at least producing—a vernacular reconstruction of an ultimately Hebraic text, the Anglo-Saxons were postured as the new Israel: a divinely chosen and blessed nation with a mandate to uphold Judeo-Christian law and morality.[48] *Angelcynn* [the English nation] participates in the providential trajectory of biblical history, unifying the separate Anglo-Saxon principalities in the collective progression and expansion of Christendom.[49]

The vernacular reconfiguration of the Psalms affords the image of Alfredian kingship a compelling medium through which to fully appropriate the values and piety associated with the figure of David. The Psalms appear recast within a contemporary framework relevant to a ninth-century readership, offering us a privileged glimpse into West Saxon ideas of kingship: a kingly model that seeks to imitate the Davidic union of ecclesiastical and secular offices, while also exploiting the presence of royal sin and illness—genuine or fabricated—in order to substantiate divine support and legitimacy. Within the Psalms these topoi and penitential standards are mobilised to perpetuate the Davidic capacity of Alfredian kingship, propagating a divinely endorsed and martially potent royal image through the persuasive agency and authority of Scripture.

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[47] Pss. 32, 51; Frantzen (1983).

[48] Butler (2010, pp. 10–17).

[49] Sweet (1871, p. 2, l. 12; p. 3, l. 13). This unifying term is introduced in the Prose Preface to the *Pastoral Care* indicating the patriotic agenda of Alfredian kingship. On this see Foot (1996); Frantzen and Niles (1997); Wormald (1994).

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