The King's Speech: Wisdom, Politics, and Textual Culture in Anglo-Saxon England

by

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Abstract

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This dissertation argues that kings were central to the formation of vernacular literary culture in Anglo-Saxon England. Kings typically served in early medieval textual culture as the recipients of clerical instruction, not as authors or educators in their own right. They were enjoined to rule wisely: to listen to advice and issue wise decrees. This limited notion of kingship, however, proved inadequate to the depiction of royal wisdom as it operated in history. In the course of exploring the distant past, when kings had no clerics to advise them, or the ongoing scenario of royal lawmaking, Anglo-Saxon authors constructed royal personae that could reflect wisely on their own actions and offer wisdom to others. These authors adapted instructive genres in textual culture, such as the sermon, the explanatory gloss, and the maxim, into the means of expressing a lay wisdom grounded in experience and reflection rather than formal instruction.

Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* is addressed to a royal reader, Ceolwulf of Northumbria, and kings sit at the heart of its plot as the primary subjects of conversion. Bede treats conversion as a problem of epistemology, rhetoric, and politics as he crafts a language of wise self-reflection for his convert-kings—a rational and lofty style with classical overtones. The unknown poet and scribes of *Beowulf*, meanwhile, staged an even more radical revision of intellectual authority in textual culture: they presented Christian readers with wise pagan characters who reflect at length on some of the central questions of early medieval ethics and theology, including the role of God (or "a god") in altering the balance of earthly power. In the absence of clerical advisors or biblical authority, *Beowulf*'s wise kings judge their own actions by extrapolating from their knowledge of history. With the Old English *Boethius*, a translation of the late-antique *Consolation of Philosophy*, we arrive at a text purportedly authored by an actual king, Alfred of Wessex. The *Boethius* shifts the meaning of political action: rather than a distraction from wisdom, as it is portrayed in the original *Consolation*, it becomes the very means of attaining wisdom. By having the prisoner retain his self-conception as a ruler even after his downfall, the *Boethius* puts kingship at the center of the universal human drive for wisdom. Finally, English kings and their clerical, literate advisors developed the field of written law into an arena for the performance of political wisdom by adapting the essentially ecclesiastical genres

of the diploma (an instrument of pious land donation) and the sermon to the scenario of the king's legal speech. Within the kingdom as an imagined political community, the king was not simply the most powerful individual, but also a public intellectual who had the authority to interpret the state of affairs—a role that was contingent, however, on his success in protecting the nation.

My chapters cumulatively show that kings functioned in early medieval England as figures to think *as* and think *with*. By adapting the genres of textual wisdom to kingly voices and perspectives, Anglo-Saxon authors constructed a vernacular literary sphere with a distinctly political self-conception.

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List of Abbreviations

ACMRS	Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies
ASE	*Anglo-Saxon England*
ASNSL	*Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*
ASPR	Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records
Capit.	Capitularia
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
EETS	Early English Text Society
EHR	*English Historical Review*
EME	*Early Medieval Europe*
Epp.	Epistolae
JCS	*Journal of Celtic Studies*
JEGP	*Journal of English and Germanic Philology*
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
PL	Patrologia Latina
PMLA	*Proceedings of the Modern Language Association*
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
TRHS	*Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*

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Introduction: Political Power and Wise Speech

How, when, and why does a king offer wisdom to others in Anglo-Saxon England? While the wise king is a ubiquitous figure in early medieval moral and political discourse, these questions are not easy to answer. Wise kings *act* wisely, to be sure: they fear the Lord, which is "the beginning of wisdom";[1] they take advice from wise counsellors; they support the Church, protect the widow and the orphan, and ensure that justice is done.[2] Their speech must also embody their wisdom in the judgments it conveys and the action it brings about. But the moral treatises known as *specula principum* or "mirrors for princes," along with the similar discourse that circulated in many genres of medieval writing, almost never stipulate that kings must instruct others, much less persuade others of a course of action or interpret their own decisions.[3] Theoretical accounts of kingship, whether ancient, medieval, or modern, tend to agree that the characteristic speech act of monarchy is the king's command.[4] This command or decree should, of course, be wise: it should be the product of wise deliberation by the king, informed by the advice of wise counsellors, and it should tend toward moral and practical good. The king's wisdom, in this

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[1] Prov. 9:10: "Principium sapientiae timor Domini" ("The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"). All translations of the Vulgate Bible are from Douay Rheims; unless noted otherwise, all non-biblical translations in this dissertation are my own.

[2] See, for example, a letter Alcuin of York wrote to Æthelred, King of Northumbria and other nobles in 793, ed. by Ernst Dümmler in *Epistolae Karolini aeui* Vol. II, MGH Epp. 4 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1895), Ep. 18, p. 51, ll. 19-22: "Regis est omnes iniquitates pietatis suae potentia obprimere; iustum esse in iudiciis, pronum in misericordia—secundum quod ille miseretur subiectis, miserebitur ei Deus—sobrium in moribus, ueridicum in uerbis, largum in donis, prouidum in consiliis; consiliarios habere prudentes, Deum timentes, honestis moribus ornatos" ("The king's duty is to stamp out all iniquities by the power of his piety; to be just in judgments and prompt in mercy—insofar as he is merciful to his subjects, God will be merciful to him—[to be] temperate in his customs, truthful in his words, generous in gifts, shrewd in counsels; to have wise counsellors who fear God and are adorned by good habits"). Alcuin's letter also draws from a Hiberno-Latin treatise called *De duodecim abusiuis saeculi*, which has a chapter on just and unjust kingship and which was present in England in a complete form by the tenth century at the latest: see Mary Clayton, ed., *Two Ælfric Texts: The Twelve Abuses and the Vices and Virtues* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013), 54. For the king's duties towards orphans, widows, and the Church, see Ibid., 128: "[Se cyning] sceal beon bewerigend wydewena and steopbearna…Godes mynstra he sceal mundian æfre" ("The king must be a defender of widows and stepchildren…He must always protect God's churches"). The Latin behind this passage names "aduenis et pupillis et uiduis" ("foreigners and orphans and widows") instead of "widows and children": see *Pseudo-Cyprianus De xii abusiuis saeculi*, ed. by Siegmund Hellmann (Leipzig: Heinrichs, 1909), 54.

[3] While no example of the treatises known as *specula principum* or "mirrors for princes" has been ascribed to Anglo-Saxon England, similar discourse circulated widely in letters of admonition, like that quoted in the previous note, and other clerical genres. Wulfstan of York's *Institutes of Polity* collects, transmits, and expands on material from Continental *specula principum* on the king's duties, including the duties I mention here: see *Die "Institutes of Polity, Civil and Ecclesiastical": Ein Werk Erzbischof Wulfstans von York*, ed. by Karl Jost, Swiss Studies in English 47 (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1959), 40-54. For more general discussions of the discourse of ideal kingship in Anglo-Saxon England and Merovingian and Carolingian Francia, see Eugen Ewig, "Zum Christlichen Königsgedanken im Frühmittelalter," in his *Spätantikes und Fränkisches Gallien: Gesammelte Schriften (1952-1973)*, ed. by Hartmut Atsma, Vol. I (Munich: Artemis, 1976), 3-71; J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 47-97; Hans Hubert Anton, *Fürstenspiegel und Herrscherethos in der Karolingerzeit* (Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid, 1968).

[4] See, e.g., *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, trans. by Sir David Ross (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), III.3, p. 58: "This is plain also from the ancient constitutions, which Homer represented; for the kings announced their choices to the people"; *Die irische Kanonensammlung*, ed. by H. Wasserschleben (Giessen: J. Ricker, 1874), XV.17-18, pp. 96-7, discussed more below on pp. 9-10; Jason Stanley, *How Propaganda Works* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 52: "The nature of public political discourse depends upon the political system. In a monarchy, public political discourse is, for example, pronouncements by a king, queen, or pharaoh."

account, is embodied in action, including speech that is a means to action. The reason for the primacy of decrees in the theory of monarchical speech-acts is not hard to discern: if the king notionally has the final power of decision in all political matters, what does he need to say other than, "Let me hear your thoughts on the matter" and "Here is my decision"?

This dissertation thus explores a category of royal speech that much theory of kingship has no strict need for: speech that offers wisdom to others in the form of counsel, instruction, or interpretation. This kind of royal speech, I argue, is integral to the way that Anglo-Saxon authors, some of them purportedly kings themselves, imagine the public sphere and the readers of their texts. For if early medieval theory frames kingship as a role with a specific and unique function, contemporaneous representations of practice—whether they existed in the imagined distant past or in a record of a recent lawmaking assembly—also depict kings as types of all humans whose words reflect and impart their wisdom to others. By anchoring royal power in universal human virtue, wisdom, and experience, the authors and agents behind these texts figure both kings *and* a wider body of imagined readers as "political animals," to borrow an Aristotelian formulation.[5] Kings sit at the heart of this study for two related reasons. For one thing, they were practically synonymous with government and secular power in Anglo-Saxon England.[6] As I will show, however, they were also understood at times as prototypical social and political actors: not just the recipients of our obedience, but also models of ethical action that readers could, or should, relate to. Queens, on the other hand, were associated more commonly with giving counsel, but that expectation accompanies a general sense that, like the king's counsellors, queens do not rule in their own person, but rather advise.[7]

The representation of kings' wisdom in speech and the staging of that speech in text posed literary and epistemological problems as well as political ones. Anglo-Saxon textual culture was not exactly congenial to the representation of secular political reflection and experience. The world of letters was fundamentally oriented around the Holy Scriptures.[8] A life spent within the Church, as a *uernaculus/uernacula Dei* or "servant of God," entailed at least a

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[5] See *Aristotle's Politics*, trans. by Carnes Lord, 2nd ed. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013), Bk. 1, ch. 2 (1253a2), p. 17: "From these things it is evident, then, that the city belongs among the things that exist by nature, and that man is by nature a political animal." The core of this formulation—"Man is a political animal"—was transmitted in Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, which was known by Byrhtferth of Ramsey, but possibly no other Anglo-Saxon scholar: see pp. 3 and 5-6, below, along with Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 51. Macrobius' translation of *politikon* is *sociale*, which captures only some of the resonance of the original Greek: see R. G. Mulgan, "Aristotle's Doctrine that Man is a Political Animal," *Hermes* 102 (1974): 438-45.

[6] Patrick Wormald, "Kings and Kingship," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, *Vol. I: c. 500 - c. 700*, ed. by Paul Fouracre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 571-604; at 574.

[7] Stacy Klein, *Ruling Women: Queenship and Gender in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), p. 128.

[8] Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana*, written beginning in 396, seminally redefined the classical curriculum and its techniques of reading and interpretation around the Bible. In the British Isles, the seventh and eighth centuries saw the production of many new treatises on reading, writing, and interpreting Latin texts. These so-called "grammatical" treatises treat Scripture and other holy texts, including those by the church fathers, as the ultimate object of their techniques. For example, Bede's *De schematibus et tropis* updates long-standing material on literary figures and tropes with Scriptural examples, while Alcuin's *De grammatica* continues the Augustinian project of defining the liberal arts as aids to biblical interpretation. For these three texts, see, respectively, Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana,* ed. and trans. by R. H. P. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); *Opera didascalia* I, vol. VI of *Bedae opera*, ed. by C. W. Jones, CCSL 123A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1975), pp. 142-71; *Grammatica,* PL 101: 849C–902B. See further Martin C. Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture: "Grammatica" and Literary Theory, 350-1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 178-89, 288-98, and 316-20.

nominal turn away from the things (and wisdom) of this world, including the struggle for earthly power and extended reflection on political ideas.[9] Boniface, Alcuin, and other clerics and scholars used the textual instruments of their spiritual authority to counsel and sometimes harangue powerful people to turn away from sin and rule in a more virtuous manner. Kings and queens, for their part, sent letters to abbots, monks, bishops, and priests, but they did not generally dare to instruct them. Instead, they often asked for their holy intercession or wise counsel.[10] Moreover, Anglo-Saxon kings were often illiterate, and those who could read were still not likely to have been able to compose in Latin, the dominant written language in early medieval western Europe.[11] Representing royal wisdom in text entailed adapting familiar textual forms and discourses to atypical speakers, perspectives, and purposes. Wise royal voices are never created whole cloth out of "popular" or "oral" culture; as I will show, they result from productive encounters between discourses in Anglo-Saxon literary culture.

Despite the absence of a recognized discipline of political science or philosophy in Anglo-Saxon England, the concepts of politics and of the public sphere are of crucial importance to my project and, I argue, to an understanding of early medieval history. "Politics" ultimately derives from the Greek *politikos*, "relating to the state or to public life," by way of the Latin *politicus* and its French derivative, *politique*.[12] Only three texts known to have been read or copied in Anglo-Saxon England use the term in any of its Latin or Greek forms: Augustine's *City of God,* Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, and the eighth-century Corpus Glossary, which nonsensically glosses *politica*, "political," as *demonstratur,* "is shown."[13]

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[9] See 1 Corinthians 3:19: "Sapientia enim huius mundi stultitia est apud Deum" ("The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God").

[10] See, for example, the following examples from the letters of Boniface, Lull, and their associates preserved in the Vienna codex and ed. by Ernst Dümmler in *S. Bonifatii et Lulli epistolae*, in *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini aeui*, Vol. I, MGH Epp. 3 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1892): Ælbwald, King of the East Angles, to Boniface, Ep. 81, pp. 361-2; Æthelberht II, King of Kent, to Boniface, Ep. 105, pp. 391-2; Cynewulf, King of the West Saxons, to Lull, Ep. 139, p. 424.

[11] See V. H. Galbraith, "The Literacy of the Medieval English Kings," Raleigh Lecture on History, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 21 (1937): 201-38; at 205-10. For a nuanced look at lay literacy more broadly, see Susan Kelly, "Anglo-Saxon Lay Society and the Written Word," in *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe,* ed. by Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 36-62. Kelly notes that "references to reading and writing, to the literacy of individuals, to basic education and book-ownership…tend to reinforce the traditional view that literacy was an ecclesiastical preserve," but that an attention to "the ways in which the Anglo-Saxons utilized the written word…seems to show that by the end of the period, if not several centuries before, written documentation had an important place in secular society" (36). Known or purported Anglo-Saxon lay authors include Alfred the Great and Æthelweard, the author of a tenth-century Latin chronicle. See Scott Ashley, "The Lay Intellectual in Anglo-Saxon: Ealdorman Æthelweard and the Politics of History," in *Lay Intellectuals in the Carolingian World*, ed. by Patrick Wormald and Janet L. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 218-45.

[12] On the complex derivation of the English word, see *The Oxford English Dictionary, s.v.* "politic," accessed May 14, 2019, www.oed.com. For more substantive histories of the term and its various cognates, see Volker Sellin, "Politik," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ed. by Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck, vol. 4 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1978), 789-874, esp. 789-802; also, Nicolai Rubinstein, "The History of the Word *Politicus* in Early-Modern Europe," in *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe*, ed. by Anthony Pagden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 41-56; at 42.

[13] Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei Libri I-X*, ed. by Bernhard Dombart and Alphonse Kalb, CCSL 47 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1955), Bk. VII, ch. 23, p. 204; Macrobius, *Commentaire au Songe de Scipion*, *Livre I,* ed. by Mireille Armisen-Marchetti (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2001), Bk. I, ch. viii.6, pp. 51-2; J. H. Hessels, ed., *An Eighth-Century Latin-Anglo-Saxon Glossary Preserved in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge (Ms.*

However, *politicus* was also very rare in classical Latin literature, despite acknowledged contributions to political philosophy by Cicero and others.[14] (The far more common *ciuilis,* the origin of Modern English "civil," was sometimes used in a way similar to *politicus*).[15] While a number of eleventh- and twelfth-century texts contain some form of *politicus,* the term only really took off with the increased circulation of Aristotle's ethical and political treatises in the thirteenth century.[16] If terminology is our sole criterion for the existence of a concept, then any time before the thirteenth century is essentially prehistory for the "political" in the Latin West.

Terminology and concept are hardly identical, however, and an earlier notion that it makes little sense to speak of "political thought" or even "politics" in the early medieval West has shifted, in recent decades, to an interest in distinctive forms of political thought and expression in this period. Susan Reynolds, in particular, has made a strong case that early medieval peoples (*populi, gentes, nationes*) and kingdoms were understood as political entities, all agonized questions about the existence of "nations," "states," or popular representation aside.[17] Other historians of early medieval England and Francia, including Janet Nelson and David Pratt, have found compelling evidence of political thought at the intersection of ideal and practice.[18] "Political power," in the sense I will use it, means public, representative power grounded in law.[19] Even though that power was restricted in Anglo-Saxon England to a small

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No. 144), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1890), p. 96. This claim is based on searches of the following databases of ancient and early medieval texts, all checked against Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), and Helmut Gneuss and Michael Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014): the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*, compiled by Antonette diPaolo Healey with Jon Price Wilkin and Xin Xiang (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2009), https://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doecorpus/index.html, accessed 13 May 2019; the *Library of Latin Texts – Series A (LLT-A)*, Brepols Publishers, http://clt.brepolis.net/llta/pages/QuickSearch.aspx, accessed 13 May 2019; the *Archive of Celtic-Latin Literature (ACLL)*, Brepols Publishers, http://clt.brepolis.net/acll/pages/Search.aspx, accessed 13 May 2019; the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* online (Munich: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek), https://www.dmgh.de/de/fs1/search/static.html, accessed 13 May 2019.

[14] The adjective *politicus, -a, -um* occurs only sixteen times in classical texts found in the *LLT-A*, and ten of these instances occur in the fifth century: http://clt.brepolis.net/llta/pages/QuickSearch.aspx, accessed 14 May 2019.

[15] Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary Founded on Andrews' Edition of Freund's Latin Dictionary*, *s.v.* "cīvīlis," def. I.B (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), online at Perseus Digital Library, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=civilis&la=la#lexicon, accessed 14 May 2019.

[16] The *LLT-A* counts 661 (!) instances of *politicus* from the thirteenth century, over forty times the number counted for all of antiquity (http://clt.brepolis.net/llta/pages/QuickSearch.aspx, accessed 14 May 2019). See also Rubinstein, "The History of the Word *Politicus*," 41-2; on the importance of Aristotle for political philosophy in the late Middle Ages and beyond, as well as the point that there was no single "rediscovery" of Aristotle in this period, see Cary J. Nederman, "Aristotelianism and the Origins of 'Political Science' in the Twelfth Century," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52 (1991): 179-94, repr. in Nederman, *Medieval Aristotelianism and its Limits: Classical Traditions in Moral and Political Philosophy, 12th-15th Centuries* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Variorum, 1997).

[17] See her *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900-1300* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 250-331; also, "The Idea of the Nation as a Political Community," in *Power and the Nation in European History*, ed. by Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 54-66.

[18] See Janet Nelson, "Kingship and Empire in the Carolingian World," in *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation*, ed. by Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 52-87; also, Nelson, "The Political Ideas of Alfred of Wessex," in her *Rulers and Ruling Families Early Medieval Europe: Alfred, Charles the Bald, and Others* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 1999), pp. 125-58; David Pratt, *The Political Thought of Alfred the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[19] The association of political power with law holds true even when, as in early medieval England, there is no written constitution: kings had a monopoly on the issuance of secular law. While "representation" is often defined in

community of lay and ecclesiastical lords, what matters is that it was understood as a "deep, horizontal comradeship" that represented the interests of the kingdom as a whole.[20] This phrase, borrowed from Benedict Anderson's reading of the nation as an imagined community, gets at an aspect of *all* discourse of the political sphere, not just the modern nation-state: while political power may be concentrated in the hands of a monarch or a small élite, the public sphere and the public itself are understood on some level as an undifferentiated body—an ideal community whose decisions are based on transcendent notions like rationality and justice. "Politics" is not simply control or power; it is premised on a sense of the distinct nature of the human being and the exercise of that human nature in deliberation.[21] The king's position in that sphere is not strictly hierarchical; rather, he is both a member of the public and the preeminent representative of that public. It is no accident that the call to recognize the political nature of early medieval kingdoms has been accompanied by an emphasis on the basis of kingly power in the early Middle Ages in consensus and collective decision-making.[22]

A passage from Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, one of the handful of texts with the word *politicus* that an Anglo-Saxon reader could have come across, suggests the crucial ways that political action and virtue overlap with the responsibilities of rule but also extend beyond them. It bears comparison with the duties of the king that I outlined above:

> Sed Plotinus, inter philosophiae professores cum Platone princeps, libro De uirtutibus gradus earum uera et naturali diuisionis ratione compositos per ordinem digerit. Quattuor sunt, inquit, quaternarum genera uirtutum. Ex his primae politicae uocantur, secundae purgatoriae, tertiae animi iam purgati, quartae exemplares. Et sunt politicae hominis, qua sociale animal est. His boni uiri rei publicae consulunt, urbes tuentur; his parentes uenerantur, liberos amant, proximos diligunt; his ciuium salutem gubernant; his socios circumspecta protegunt, iusta liberalitate deuinciunt.[23]

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contemporary political theory with reference to democratic norms only, it is more usefully and accurately understood to result from "an audience's judgment that some individual, rather than some other, stands in for a group in order to perform a specific function" (Andrew Rehfield, "Towards a General Theory of Representation," *Journal of Politics* 68 (2006): 1-21; at 2). See also Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe*, 244-6. Early medieval history falls through the cracks in Jürgen Habermas' account of premodern representation in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. by Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), pp. 6-11. Much of his discussion of the Middle Ages here is based on a feudal stereotype that does not obtain in Anglo-Saxon England.

[20] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 6-7.

[21] This relationship is captured in the Aristotelian line, "Man is a political animal" (see above, p. 2, n. 5), transmitted to Anglo-Saxon England by way of Plotinus and Macrobius (see below on this page). See, further, Leo Strauss, *The City and the Man* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964), 13-21.

[22] See, for example, Susan Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities*, 12-38, 332-9; *Levi Roach, Kingship and Consent in Anglo-Saxon England, 871-978: Assemblies and the State in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 6-14, 104-2.

[23] Macrobius, *Commentaire au Songe de Scipion*, *Livre I*, ed. by Armisen-Marchetti, Bk. 1, 8.5-6: "But Plotinus, prince of philosophers along with Plato, laid out in his book *On the Virtues* the ranks of the virtues ordered by a true and natural principle of classification. He says that there are four types of virtue, each composed of four virtues. The first are called "political," the second "purifying," the third belong to a mind already purified, and the fourth are called "exemplary." The political [virtues] are proper to the human being, insofar as it is a political animal [*sociale animal*]. Using these virtues, good men look out for the best interests of the state, guard cities; with these virtues, they honor their parents, love their children, and love their neighbors; with these, they manage the well-being of the cities; with these, they protect allies with a circumspect prudence and bind them with just liberality."

Guarding cities and making decisions on behalf of the state are typical duties of monarchs; however, "political virtues" also lead to broadly prosocial activities like respecting parents and loving neighbors. More relevantly for early medieval politics, Macrobius' word for "rule" or "govern," *consulere*, includes the idea of "giving counsel": like the wise kings I discuss in this dissertation, his *boni uiri* both make decisions *and* give counsel.[24] His *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* is preserved, at least in part, in five Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, all of them late.

That only one Anglo-Saxon scholar, Byrhtferth of Ramsey, is known to have read the *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* is characteristic of the larger absence of explicit political theory in early medieval England.[25] However, the sprawling and multivalent concept of wisdom furnished the logic for representing political action and reflection in Anglo-Saxon texts; it is to early medieval wisdom, and its relationship to speech and politics, that I now turn.

Making Wisdom Speak

"Wisdom" is a bewilderingly broad and flexible term, one that can appear to mean everything and nothing. This is partly a function of its status as something divine or transcendent—something that defies our understanding. Nonetheless, it is impossible to understand early medieval intellectual culture without both recognizing the various ways that wisdom was conceived and considering how these notions related to practice, especially the production of discourse. I now turn to both of these questions, ultimately considering how early medieval discourse on wisdom created a framework for wise royal speech.

Anglo-Saxon authors had access to an eclectic body of overlapping discourses on wisdom, including biblical material and its offshoots in patristic and homiletic texts; vernacular sayings; and a more intellectually-oriented idea of wisdom that circulated in grammatical texts. For patristic authors and homilists, wisdom was understood as both a moral and a practical good. The Bible offers ample material for this notion in its own set of highly diverse texts. The Book of Proverbs takes wisdom as its primary subject, though the precise meaning of "wisdom" often seems less important than the cultivation of an attitude of piety and attention to divine speech:

> Fili mi, si susceperis sermones meos, et mandata mea absconderis penes te: ut audiat sapientiam auris tua, inclina cor tuum ad cognoscendam prudentiam. Si enim sapientiam invocaveris, et inclinaveris cor tuum prudentiæ; si quæsieris eam quasi pecuniam, et sicut thesauros effoderis illam: tunc intelliges timorem Domini, et scientiam Dei invenies, quia Dominus dat sapientiam, et ex ore ejus prudentia et scientia.[26]

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[24] Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, *s.v.* "consulo," def. I, online at Perseus Digital Library, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0059%3Aentry%3Dconsulo, accessed 18 May 2019.

[25] See Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 51.

[26] Proverbs 2:1-6: "My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and wilt hide my commandments with thee, / That thy ear may hearken to wisdom: Incline thy heart to know prudence: / For if thou shalt call for wisdom, and incline thy heart to prudence: / If thou shalt seek her as money, and shalt dig for her as for a treasure: / Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and shalt find the knowledge of God. / Because the Lord giveth wisdom: and out of his mouth cometh prudence and knowledge."

The repetition of "wisdom" and "prudence," *sapientia* and *prudentia*, seem to structure the passage as much as any communicative content; the logic is ultimately circular, affirming that seeking wisdom will lead one to knowledge of God because God gives wisdom. "The fear of the Lord," as we learn from another proverb, is "the beginning of wisdom": could we, then, paraphrase Proverbs 2:3-5 as, "If you seek wisdom, then you will understand wisdom"?[27] Wisdom is also personified as a female figure in the Book of Proverbs, while early Christians came to identify Christ as the wisdom of God.[28] In addition to being a moral or theological good, nearly identifiable with holiness itself, wisdom, especially in the Old Testament, is also a practical good: wise deeds prosper. This teaching continued to be influential in Anglo-Saxon England—perhaps most famously in the claim, found in King Alfred's preface to the Old English *Pastoral Care*, that English prosperity rose and fell in tandem with English wisdom.[29] The New Testament perpetuates and even strengthens the transcendental nature of wisdom by drawing a sharp contrast between divine wisdom and worldly wisdom. As Paul declares in a typical formulation, "Sapientia enim huius mundi stultitia est apud Deum."[30] The denigration of "the wisdom of this world" encouraged the Scriptural and exegetical framework of Anglo-Saxon intellectual culture more broadly. However, the phrase is also crucially open to interpretation: at times, New Testament authors appear to be condemning a proud disposition toward God and divine mysteries, not the study of a particular domain of knowledge.

While programmatic statements on wisdom in the Bible leave us with a sense of its transcendent goodness but of little else, the example of King Solomon suggests how wisdom could be understood as an enacted quality. Solomon's wisdom is first presented as a matter of his ability to "discern between good and evil" and judge wisely.[31] It is also related to his ability to produce wise speeech, however: to compose sayings and poems; to speak of "trees, from the cedar that is in Libanus, unto the hyssop that cometh out of the wall…and…of beasts, and of fowls, and of creeping things, and of fishes"; and to answer "hard questions," possibly riddles.[32] The most famous example of Solomon's wise judgment is also something like a "hard question": forced to adjudicate the competing claims of two women to be the mother of a single baby boy,

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[27] Proverbs 9:10: "Principium sapientiae timor Domini, et scientia sanctorum prudentia" ("The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is prudence"); Proverbs 2:3-5: "Si enim sapientiam invocaveris, et inclinaveris cor tuum prudentiæ; si quæsieris eam quasi pecuniam, et sicut thesauros effoderis illam: tunc intelliges timorem Domini, et scientiam Dei invenies" ("For if thou shalt call for wisdom, and incline thy heart to prudence: / If thou shalt seek her as money, and shalt dig for her as for a treasure: / Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and shalt find the knowledge of God").
[28] See 1 Corinthians 1:24.
[29] For the text, see Carolin Schreiber, *King Alfred's Old English Translation of Pope Gregory the Great's "Regula pastoralis" and Its Cultural Context: A Study and Partial Edition According to All Surviving Manuscripts Based on Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 12* (Frankfurt am Main and New York: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 190-7. For the association between wealth and wisdom, see T. A. Shippey, "Wealth and Wisdom in King Alfred's Preface to the Old English Pastoral Care," *EHR* 94 (Apr. 1979): 346-55; Nicole Guenther Discenza, "Wealth and Wisdom: Symbolic Capital and the Ruler in the Translational Program of Alfred the Great," *Exemplaria* 13 (2001): 433-67.
[30] 1 Corinthians 3:19: "The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." See also Matthew 11:25, Luke 16:8, Colossians 2:8, and 1 Timothy 6:20-21.
[31] 3 Kings 3:9: "Dabis ergo servo tuo cor docile, ut populum tuum judicare possit, et discernere inter bonum et malum" ("Give therefore to thy servant an understanding heart, to judge thy people, and discern between good and evil").
[32] See 3 Kings 4:32-3 and 10:1-3; qtd. at 4:33—"Et disputavit super lignis a cedro quae est in Libano, usque ad hyssopum quae egreditur de pariete: et disseruit de jumentis, et volucribus, et reptilibus, et piscibus"—and 10:1—"aenigmatibus."

he proposes cutting the baby in half and giving half to each woman, whereupon the true mother speaks up and urges him to give the boy to the other woman instead. Solomon's judgment is not wise because it accords with abstract principles of justice, but because it uncovers a secret truth.

Solomon's riddle-solving, discursive wisdom resembles an early medieval discourse of wisdom that was especially rooted in the products of grammatical culture.[33] These include both texts on reading, interpreting, and composing Latin and the related genre of the "wisdom dialogue," which often features biblical and legendary interlocutors attempting to stump each other with difficult questions. In this milieu, it is hardly surprising that wisdom would be closely associated with the culture of the classroom and its core activities of reading, writing, and answering questions. A number of early grammatical treatises with seemingly insular (perhaps Irish) affiliations thus equate wisdom with literate knowledge: "The foundation of wisdom," they tell us, "is the letter";[34] the five "keys of wisdom" are "continuous reading, retentive memory, zeal in questioning, contempt of riches, and respect for the teacher."[35] *Sapientia* never lost its moral and theological connotations, as suggested by the presence of "contempt of riches," but it also embraced early medieval intellectual culture in its most arcane, erudite reaches. Next to an ideal of *sapientia* grounded in piety and reverence for God existed a notion of the term that was more rooted in intellectual self-identification: scholars were often referred to as *sapientes* or synonymous terms such as *prudentes*, especially in Ireland.[36]

The orientation of early medieval intellectual culture around the Bible, however, meant that wisdom was understood in fundamentally textual terms even in less rarefied circles. One of the most intriguing lay writers of the period, the Carolingian countess Dhuoda, updated the passage from Proverbs 2 that I cited above with a new sense of the need to gain wisdom from reading:

> Tu, si Deum *ex toto* tuo dilexeris *corde*, et uolumina librorum in Ueteris et Noui Testamenti Scripturarum perscrutaberis seriem, et lecta opere compleueris digno, requiescat super te

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[33] The work of Vivien Law, in particular, illuminates the world of early insular grammatical culture. See her *Wisdom, Authority, and Grammar in the Seventh Century: Decoding Virgilius Maro Grammaticus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); *The Insular Latin Grammarians* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1982); "The Study of Grammar in Eighth-Century Southumbria," *ASE* 12 (1983): 43-71.

[34] "Fundamentum sapientiae littera est": from an anonymous grammatical treatise called *Interrogatio de litteris* found in both St. Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, MS 877, p. 67, 15-16, as well as apparently in BN lat. 7501, fol. 2v; ed. in Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture*, p. 461. As Irvine demonstrates, early medieval grammatical texts associate *littera*, the "letter," with writing in particular, even though they also understood *litterae* as elementary units of sound. This is because, as Donatus writes, "The letter is the smallest unit of articulate speech [*uocis articulatae*]," and articulateness is elsewhere defined in grammatical texts as "scriptibility," the quality of being able to be written: see Ibid., 91-104; qtd. at 8.

[35] "Quot sunt claues sapientie? .V. Que? Assiduitas legendi, memoria retinendi, sedulitas interrogandi, contemptus diuiciarum, honor magistri": also from the anonymous *Interrogatio de litteris* as found in St. Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, MS 877, p. 67; ed. once again in Irvine, *Making of Textual Culture*, p. 461. A similar passage is found in the so-called *Collectanea Pseudo-Bedae*, ed. and trans. by Martha Bayless and Michael Lapidge with contributions by Debby Banham et al., Scriptores Latini Hiberniae 14 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1998), p. 124. See, further, Vivian Law, *Wisdom, Authority, and Grammar in the Seventh Century: Decoding Virgilius Maro Grammaticus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 41-6.

[36] See Elva Johnson, *Literacy and Identity in Early Medieval Ireland* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2013), 92-130.

> *spiritus sapientiae*. Nam *omnis sapientia a Domino Deo est*…Quod [i.e. sapientiam] si perquisieris et acceptam tenueris, beatus eris et sapiens poteris esse uocatus.[37]

We could infer a loose, untheorized, and widely-shared notion of wisdom in early medieval intellectual culture that consists of both a deep knowledge of Scriptural history and moral teachings *and* the successful application of that knowledge to moral action in this world. Within the framework of Christian *grammatica*, that knowledge of Scripture could also spill over into the production of wise discourse.

Nothing theoretically prevented this discursive wisdom from being possessed by kings, but it was also not material to early medieval notions of ideal Christian kingship. As I outlined above, the clerical discourse of ideal kingship tended to focus on prudent action. The ideal king embodied wisdom in his conduct: he ruled justly, sought the advice of wise men, and protected the Church and the vulnerable in society.[38] In this milieu, the king's speech could be conceived as an unmediated tool of his power over bodies and resources. *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*, an Irish text from the early eighth century that combines canon law with wisdom and doctrine on a wide variety of topics, describes the *sermo regis*, the "speech of the king," as a form of external action rather than a medium of teaching or reflection:

> Hinc *Hieronimus* dicit: Sermo regis gladius est ad decollandum, funis ad constringendum, trudit in carcerem, in exilium damnat.
> *Agustinus*: Time sermonem regis, punit inimicum, honorat amicum….
> Hinc *Hieronimus*: Sermo regis consolatio infirmorum, desolutio uinctorum, apertio carcerum, remuneratio bonorum. Unde quidam ait: Utinam sermo regis desoluisset me et iuberet liberum esse, ut soluit Ioseph de carcere, et ut Danihelem liberauit de lacu leonum.[39]

The attribution of these statements to Jerome and Augustine of Hippo appears to be fictitious.[40] Stylistically, they share much more in common with the short moral treatise called *De duodecim abusiuis saeculi,* which is also from an Irish context in the late seventh or early eighth century.[41]

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[37] Dhuoda, *Handbook for Her Son: Liber Manualis*, ed. and trans. by Marcelle Thiébaux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), IV.4, p. 136 (emphasis, also in original, denotes citation): "If you love God 'with all your heart,' and examine in sequence the volumes of his Scriptures in the Old and New Testaments, and seriously carry out in your good actions all that you have read, the 'spirit of wisdom' will rest upon you. For 'all wisdom is from the Lord God' … If you seek wisdom earnestly, once you have found her and have held her close, you will be happy and may be called wise."

[38] See n. 2, above; also, the so-called "Second English *Ordo,*" a tenth-century royal coronation oath ed. in Paul L. Ward, "An Early Version of the Anglo-Saxon Coronation Ceremony," *EHR* 57 (1942): 345-61.

[39] *Die irische Kanonensammlung*, ed. by Wasserschleben, XV.17-18, pp. 96-7 (emphasis in original): "On this subject *Jerome* says: "The speech of the king is a sword for decapitating, a rope for binding; it thrusts [one] into prison, and condemns [one] to exile." *Augustine*: "Fear the speech of the king; it punishes the enemy and honors the friend." … *Jerome* on this subject: "The speech of the king [is] the consolation of the infirm, the unbinding of the bound, the opening of prisons, the reward of the good. Whence someone says, 'Would that the king's speech could unbind me and order me to be free, just as it released Joseph from the prison and freed Daniel from the lion's den."

[40] Searches for word combinations from this excerpt in the *LLT- A* (http://clt.brepolis.net/llta/pages/QuickSearch.aspx, accessed 9 Apr. 2019) and *Library of Latin Texts - Series B* (Brepols Publishers, http://clt.brepolis.net/lltb/pages/QuickSearch.aspx, accessed 9 Apr. 2019), databases which contain the works of Jerome and Augustine of Hippo, returned no results.

[41] See Hellmann, ed., *Pseudo-Cyprianus De xii abusiuis saeculi*.

The ninth chapter of the treatise, on "the unjust king," became perhaps the most widely-copied passage on ideal kingship in the early Middle Ages.[42] It equates a long list of noun phrases with *iustitia regis and iniquitas regis,* "the king's justice" and "the king's iniquity." Like the king's speech, the king's iniquity has a direct effect on the natural, physical world: when the king is unjust, "terrarum quoque fructus diminuuntur…tempestates aeris et hiemisperia turbata terrarum fecunditatem et maris ministeria," and so forth.[43] Both the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* and *De duodecim abusiuis saeculi* circulated first in Ireland and on the Continent before apparently travelling to England in the tenth century along with other Continental material.[44]

The *Collectio*'s depiction of the king's speech as a kind of unmediated physical action—a word from the king as a sword beheading you—is simply a more vivid and metaphorical variation of the common view that the basic form of political speech in a monarchy is the king's decree. Royal speech that has a less direct relationship to action but that seeks to affect the hearer's or the reader's mind is not as well represented in work on the politics of early medieval kingship.[45] This kind of speech, I would suggest, is properly rhetorical in a way that the decree is not: it depends on its form and content for its effect, not simply the authority of its speaker.[46] This is why political rhetoric is often associated with speeches of persuasion in spaces of popular or republican deliberation such as the Roman Forum, the Athenian Assembly, or the United States Capitol.[47] There is no evidence for the teaching of political oratory in Anglo-Saxon

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[42] Ibid., 51-3.

[43] Ibid., 52: "the fruits of the earth are diminished…beasts ravage herds of livestock, storms in the air and the churning hemispheres of the heavens prohibit the fecundity of the earth and the bounties of the sea." *Ministeria* appears to mean something like "bounties," but a search of the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, ed. by Richard Ashdowne, David Howlett, and Ronald Latham, (Brepols, 2015) turned up no definitions that would be appropriate here (accessed 10 Apr. 2019; http://www.dmlbs.ox.ac.uk/web/about-us.html;). The *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* adapts this list to ascribe these actions directly to the king's iniquity, making that iniquity the subject of a series of active verbs. *Die irische Kanonensammlung,* ed. by Wasserschleben, XV.3, p. 91: "Iniquitas iniqui regis…tempestates aërias suscitat, terrarum fecunditatem, marisque ministeria prohibet, fulmina succendit, arborum exurit flores, fructus immaturos deiicit" ("The iniquity of the unjust king…stirs up tempests, prohibits the fertility of the earth and the bounties of the sea, creates lightening, burns up the flowers on the trees, casts down fruit that is not yet ripe").

[44] See Shannon Ambrose, "The *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* and the Literature of the Anglo-Saxon Benedictine Reform," *Viator* 36 (2005): 107-18.

[45] There is, however, a good deal of work that establishes that kings used texts for political and ideological ends—that they harnessed ideological resources particular to genres of writing, textual codes, or the written medium itself to shore up their political and economic interests. See, for some recent examples among many, Nicole Guenther Discenza, "Alfred's Verse Preface to the *Pastoral Care* and the Chain of Authority," *Neophilologus* 85 (2001): 625-33; Renée Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia: Historical Representation in Old English Verse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), pp. 175-213; Scott Thompson Smith, *Land and Book: Literature and Land Tenure in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), pp. 22-69 (on tenth-century Anglo-Latin royal diplomas) and pp. 150-89 (on the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*); on manuscripts and manuscript illustrations, see Catherine E. Karkov, *The Ruler Portraits of Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004).

[46] See *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum siue Originum libri XX*, ed. by W. M. Lindsey, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), II.i.1: "Rhetorica est bene dicendi scientia in ciuilibus quaestionibus, [eloquentia copia] ad persuadendum iusta et bona" ("Rhetoric is the science of speaking well regarding civil questions, copious eloquence that serves to persuade toward just and good behavior"); Gabriele Knappe, "Classical Rhetoric in Anglo-Saxon England," *ASE* 27 (1998): 5-29; at 5: "[Rhetoric] was distinguished from the more basic subject of *ars grammatica* in the rhetoric, the 'ars…bene dicendi' (Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* II.xvii.37) aimed at the *good* production of text (for oral delivery) with the aim of persuading the listeners to take or adopt some form of action or belief."

[47] See Adam Potkay, *The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 24-58.

England, persuasive or otherwise. After a thorough survey, Gabriele Knappe concludes that "Anglo-Saxon scholars, with the exception of Alcuin of York, do not seem to have been familiar with the rhetorical tradition of antiquity."[48] Instead, knowledge of rhetorical figures and tropes was transmitted through grammatical treatises, such as Bede's *De schematibus et tropis*.[49] The context of this "grammatical rhetoric," as Knappe dubs it, was not political practice, but the effective reading and interpretation of Christian texts.[50] In the absence of formal (textual) instruction on political and legal rhetoric, speakers would have learned by oral instruction, imitation, and practice. There was, of course, a recognized place in early medieval politics for rhetoric: the king's counsellors were expected to advise and persuade the king.[51] Even here, however, there was little exploration of the political and rhetorical problems of counsel, as there would be centuries later in the work of Albertanus of Brescia and Thomas Elyot.[52] And while counsel is the standard example of deliberative oratory offered by medieval theorists of rhetoric, its theoretical audience of one (the king) means that it has a private rather than a public character.

One early medieval text theorizes kingship as an office that entails a sort of political rhetoric, but crucially stops short of working out the political ramifications of that idea: Alcuin's *Disputatio de rhetorica et de uirtutibus*, a rhetorical treatise composed in ca. 794 and staged as a dialogue between Alcuin *magister* and Charlemagne.[53] Charlemagne begins the dialogue by saying,

> Quia te, uenerande magister Albine, Deus adduxit et reduxit, quaeso ut liceat mihi te de rhetoricae rationis praeceptis parumper interrogare; nam te olim memini dixisse, totam eius artis uim in ciuilibus uersari quaetionibus. Sed ut optime nosti propter occupationes regni et curas palatii in huiuscemodi quaestionibus assidue nos uersari solere, et ridiculum uidetur eius artis nescisse praecepta, cuius cotidie occupatione inuolui necesse est.[54]

Alcuin's treatise represents a considered combination and adaptation of rhetorical texts by Cicero, Julius Victor, Cassiodorus, Fortunatianus, and Marius Victorinus—a host of rhetoricians

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[48] Knappe, "Classical Rhetoric in Anglo-Saxon England," 28.
[49] Bede, *Opera didascalia*, ed. by Jones, 41-72.
[50] Knappe, "Classical Rhetoric," 9.
[51] On counsel as a form of deliberative rhetoric, see Shawn D. Ramsey, "*Consilium:* A System to Address Deliberative Uncertainty in the Rhetoric of the Middle Ages," *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* 15 (2012): 204-21; John R. E. Bliese, "Deliberative Oratory in the Middle Ages: The Missing Millennium in the Study of Public Address," *Southern Communication Journal* 59 (1994): 273-83.
[52] See Albertanus of Brescia*, Liber de doctrina dicendi et tacendi: la parola del cittadino nell'Italia del Duecento*, ed. by Paola Navone (Florence, Italy: SISMEL-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 1998); *Thomas Elyot: Critical Editions of Four Works on Counsel*, ed. by Robert G. Sullivan and Arthur E. Walzer (Leiden: Brill, 2018). For a brief history of the place of consilium, which means both "counsel" and "deliberation," in political and rhetorical thought in the high Middle Ages, see Ramsey, "Consilium: A System to Address Deliberative Uncertainty"; Arthur Walzer, "The Rhetoric of Counsel in Thomas Elyot's Pasquil the Playne," *Rhetorica* 30 (Winter 2012): 1-21.
[53] Wilbur Samuel Howell, ed., *The Rhetoric of Alcuin and Charlemagne* (Princeton: Princeton Unversity Press, 1941). For a consideration of the date of the text, see Ibid., pp. 4-8.
[54] Ibid., p. 67, ll. 10-17: "Because God has led you and brought you back [to Francia], venerable master Alcuin, I beg that I may be allowed to question you a bit about the rules of the art of rhetoric. For I remember you to have said once that all the force of this art was in dealing with civil questions [*ciuilibus quaestionibus*]. As you know very well, we have been accustomed to engage very eagerly in questions of this sort because of the business of the kingdom and the cares of the palace, and it seems ridiculous to be ignorant of the precepts of that art in which we must needs be involved on a daily basis."

steeped in classical ideas about public speech.[55] The notion that rhetoric primarily concerns "civil questions," *ciuilibus quaestionibus*, is borrowed from Cassiodorus. As Matthew Kempshall argues, "civil questions" are not simply political questions for Alcuin: instead, they are those which are "capable of being grasped by everyone through the natural capacity of their minds."[56] The subject matter of civil questions is that which is "right and good" (*de aequo et bono*), a category that includes the political but refers more broadly to the operation of virtue in human society.[57] Alcuin reproduces a Ciceronian narrative of a single wise and eloquent man who raises humanity from a beast-like existence into a civilized state of society, one in which everyone exerts his or her reason.[58] By drawing on a Roman rhetorical tradition, then, Alcuin conceives of wisdom as the source of rational speech and of civilized society: "Ac mihi quidem uidetur, domine mi rex, hoc nec tacita nec inops dicendi sapientia perficere potuisse, ut homines a consuetudine subito conuerteret et ad diuersas rationes uitae traduceret."[59] (Julius Victor's *Ars Rhetorica,* a key source for Alcuin's treatise, even states that "wisdom is the foundation of eloquence": an elusive theorization of a notion that informs much of this dissertation).[60] Drawing people into useful pursuits may have sounded like the work of a king to *magister Albinus* and *Carolus rex*, though Alcuin avoids specificity and simply refers to "magnus…uir et sapiens."[61]

Indeed, the king is an equally elusive figure in the *Disputatio*. After his initial reference to *occupationes regni,* Charlemagne's own kingly experience recedes, and he serves as a convenient springboard for Alcuin's disquisitions.[62] (Ex.: "Charlemagne: 'The order demands that you speak next about the Division.' Alcuin: 'So I shall. The Division is… [15 lines of explanation]').[63] Alcuin's rhetoric is not just an art for kings: because it treats questions that "can be grasped with the natural capacity of the mind," it is proper to all humans insofar as we all reason and argue: "Nam sicut naturale est omnibus se tueri et alium ferire, etiam si armis et exercitatione non didicerint, ita naturale fere est omnibus alios accusare et se ipsos purgare, etiam si exercitatione non didicerint."[64] *Ciuiles quaestiones* and the accompanying art of rhetoric are suitable for all of us: in this redefined quasi-political sphere that encompasses the exercise of

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[55] See Matthew S. Kempshall, "The Virtues of Rhetoric: Alcuin's *Disputatio de rhetorica et de uirtutibus*," *ASE* 37 (2008): 7-30.

[56] Ibid., p. 12. Cf. Howell, ed., *The Rhetoric of Alcuin and Charlemagne*, p. 68, ll. 57-8: "In ciuilibus, id est doctis quaestionibus, quae naturali animi ingenio concipi possunt" ("In civil questions, that is, those 'open to instruction,' which can be grasped by the natural capacity of the mind"). The rendering of *doctis* as "open to instruction" is based on Kempshall, "Virtues of Rhetoric," p. 12.

[57] The phrase is drawn from Cassiodorus' *Institutes*, the source of Alcuin's *ciuilibus quaestionibus*: see Kempshall, "Virtues of Rhetoric," p. 11.

[58] Howell, ed., *The Rhetoric of Alcuin*, p. 68, ll. 33-51.

[59] Ibid., p. 68, ll. 48-51: "It seems to me, my lord king, that a mute wisdom, or one impoverished when it comes to speaking, could not have managed to suddenly turn people from their former custom and draw them to the various arts of life."

[60] Julius Victor, *Ars rhetorica*, ed. by Remo Giomini and Maria S. Celentano (Leipzig: Teubner, 1980), p. 93: "sed est eloquentiae, sicut reliquarum rerum, fundamentum sapientia."

[61] Howell, ed., *The Rhetoric of Alcuin*, p. 68, ll. 39-40: "a great and wise man."

[62] Aside, that is, from a line very like the opening at Ibid., p. 70, ll. 68-70: "KARLUS. … Iam cotidiana occupationum necessitas cogit nos exerceri in illis [i.e. praeceptibus artis rhetoricae]" ("Charlemagne: … 'For the daily necessity of business requires us to engage in them [i.e. the precepts of the art of rhetoric]'").

[63] Ibid., p. 102, ll. 563-81: "KARLUS. Ordo deposcit ut de partitione dicas. ALBINUS. Dicam. Partitio est…" Trans. by Howell.

[64] Ibid., pp. 68, 70: "For just as it is natural to all to defend ourselves and attack others, even if we have not been trained in the use of arms, so it is natural to everyone to accuse others and to clear ourselves, even if we have not been trained in that art." I have inserted a first-person plural ("we") in translation to achieve greater clarity.

justice and virtue, kings appear simply as representative figures because of their necessary participation in problems of governance.

In the *Disputatio*, then, kings attain a *de facto* but untheorized status as paradigmatic actors within a sphere of virtuous public action. *Carolus rex* and *Albinus magister* never claim that the king will need to persuade others—indeed, Alcuin's example of deliberative rhetoric in the *Disputatio* is Achitophel's counsel to Absalom to kill his father, King David, and Chusai's counsel to desist.[65] Alcuin does not seem especially concerned with relating his ancient and ossified rhetorical instruction, ultimately derived from Cicero, to the particulars of Carolingian political culture. Nonetheless, he preserves the idea that the king may need to be conversant with the rules of rhetoric because he lives a public life involved in the discussion of "civil questions." Charlemagne *does* have a theoretical need to discuss, not simply to issue decrees.

Plan of the Dissertation

As I demonstrate in the following four chapters, Alcuin's treatment of ruling as an activity grounded in rhetoric was not as isolated in early medieval literary and political culture as it has often seemed. The texts I discuss in the body of this dissertation all figure wise kingship as something performed in discourse. In this way, they point the way towards a more capacious understanding of political rhetoric, one that better reflects medieval realities. The archetypal image of orators in the Roman Forum or the Athenian Assembly making impassioned speeches of persuasion has little relevance to the theory or practice of kingship in early medieval England. Instead, kings engage in rhetoric when they counsel others, reason through a course of action, or reflect on the conditions, limits, and responsibilities of their office. The staging of their wise speech in text requires the creative adaptation of the forms and modes of wise discourse in Anglo-Saxon textual culture, including sermon, gloss, and maxim.

My first chapter, "Natural Wisdom and Prudent Kingship in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*," argues that Bede figures conversion as the paradigmatic subject of deliberation by wise Anglo-Saxon kings and thus as a fundamentally political act. I read his *Historia ecclesiastica* as a narrative enactment of the theories of natural wisdom, prudence, and moral action that he adumbrates at different moments in his biblical commentaries. Much like his Northumbrian contemporary, the anonymous author of the earliest life of Gregory the Great, Bede believes that pagans can have natural wisdom and other virtues.[66] His convert-kings are not simply awed into conversion by miracles, but have the prudence to recognize the good when they see it, even when it comes in the form of an unfamiliar religion. They reason through their encounter with Christianity in rational, circumspect Latin with Ciceronian overtones. For Bede, natural wisdom thus explains how a pagan can make a true and voluntary conversion to Christianity. It also helps him to align elite Anglo-Saxon social norms with Christian ethics. In this way, a theory of natural prudence encourages Bede to take the culture and beliefs of secular Anglo-Saxons seriously, and justifies reproducing traditional-style narratives in his history of conversion.

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[65] Ibid., p. 70, ll. 93-6.

[66] See *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great: By an Anonymous Monk of Whitby*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968); see, further, Marcia L. Colish, "The Virtuous Pagan: Dante and the Christian Tradition," in *The Unbounded Community: Papers in Christian Ecumenism in Honor of Jaroslav Pelikan*, ed. by William Caferro and Duncan G. Fisher (New York and London: Garland, 1996), pp. 43-92.

The following chapter reads *Beowulf* as an experiment in imagining wise pagan kingship that can reflect on and critique itself in the absence of clerical advisors. The depredations of Grendel and his mother represent a political threat to Hrothgar, one that must be solved by wise deliberation. Beowulf describes his own mission of coming to Denmark as one of offering *ræd*, counsel, to Hrothgar. His adventures are thus not just heroic exploits, but also wise political solutions to the problems posed by the monsters. He and other members of the poem's political class—essentially, the cadre of aristocratic warriors who account for practically all of its characters with speaking roles—ground their own action in an objective understanding of history that they express through improvised sentential discourse. Action and reflection are thus inseparable in the poem's system of historical representation. At the center of the poem, both thematically and spatially, lies Hrothgar's Sermon: a speech of historical reflection and moral exhortation delivered by the aged king Hrothgar to the future king Beowulf. The Sermon, I argue, offers readers of the poem an oral-style simulacrum of textual wisdom. It stages an act of wise self-reflection that can be productively read against an ecclesiastical letter of royal admonition from the 740s and a key moment from the Book of Daniel about historical transitions of power. *Beowulf*, in sum, offers its readers an image of wise political action and actors by emphasizing its characters' capacity for self-reflection and self-evaluation.

In the Old English *Boethius*, a translation of the late-antique *Consolation of Philosophy* supposedly carried out by King Alfred, wise royal speech is not just a problem of historical representation, but also an aspect of the reception of the text itself. The actual identity of the translator, I argue, matters less than the innovative way that the *Boethius* stages political wisdom and royal authorship. The *Boethius* consistently transforms the *Consolation of Philosophy* from a pursuit of apolitical, contemplative happiness into a treatise on the moral exercise of power. Its newly moral framework presents wisdom as something based in conscious choice and effort: we must all *spyrian æfter wisdome*, "pursue wisdom," and use it to carry out our *cræftas*, a word that refers to both virtues and arts or skills. In the most famous passage from the *Boethius*, the translator inserts a speech into the mouth of the dialogue's first-person speaker (often designated in the text as *Mod* or "mind") identifying his own *cræft* as rule. Kingship thus becomes a representative occupation and a means of enacting universal human wisdom. The Old English *Boethius* draws on the tragic story of its hero's imprisonment to construct a canny political wisdom that begins with the explicit recognition of the limits of earthly power. Its moral reinterpretation of the ancient Roman world leads to the surprisingly classical view that political action—identified with rule—can be a means of fulfilling our distinct human capacity for reason.

My final chapter, on the royal speaking voice in English legal texts, turns towards the concrete, "real-world" application of wise royal speech. The unusually rich record of vernacular legal texts in Anglo-Saxon England allows us to witness an encounter between kings and textual culture that unfolded over centuries. Rather than the typical focus on syntactic complexity as an index of date, or the royal first person as an index of kings' personal involvement in lawmaking, I consider how, when, and why kings and their textual agents constructed a royal first-person voice out of the resistant materials of genre and discourse. As the kings of the Cerdicing (West Saxon) dynasty built a continuous tradition of written lawmaking in the tenth century, they increasingly used written law as a tool of policy and public image. For the first time, legal texts frame themselves as responses to specific conditions in the kingdom. Kings are now represented, not just as issuing authorities, but as authorized public interpreters of the state of the kingdom and wise proponents of policy. Because first-person rhetoric is not a traditional feature of vernacular Anglo-Saxon law, kings make use of the genres available to them: the diploma (a

document recording a grant of land or other privileges) and the sermon. Legal texts written in the voices of Æthelstan and Edgar show that Mod's jarring assumption that he can speak wisely about what he knows from experience, namely the *cræft* of kingship, was not isolated to the Old English *Boethius*: it also offered a framework for the public performance of political wisdom by English kings. This wisdom is often called into being by moments of perceived failure and crisis: when the public peace, or *frið*, is under threat, or when the kingdom is besieged by a mysterious plague. It also plays on another limit to the king's power—his dual status as an earthly lord and a vassal of God.

The texts discussed in my four chapters represent kings not just as those who can claim our obedience, but as figures we can think *as* and think *with*. Bede dedicates his *Historia ecclesiastica* to King Ceolwulf and evokes an image of a king eagerly learning about his predecessors, but the wise kings in his narrative model the universal human virtue of prudence for a wider audience. *Beowulf* gives us an inside view of an aristocratic warrior society where all of us could potentially be kings, and the lack of a cadre of specialized moral authorities means that we must interpret and judge our own actions. The Old English *Boethius*, like its Latin source text, portrays a journey to both wisdom and consolation for a once-powerful and now imprisoned man, but it redefines the moral status of that man's former power and holds him up as an example of virtuous practice for all. Finally, English kings in the tenth century draw on an increasingly established and continuous tradition of written law to put forward images of themselves as wise statesmen who could reflect on the origins of national crises and propose effective policy in response. In doing so, they portray themselves as authoritative thinkers and speakers in a combined religious and political sphere instead of simply as figures with the power to issue binding decrees.

Just as they imagine a wide scope for royal speech, the texts I discuss in the following four chapters also imagine kings as an audience for literary discourse. They testify to the central place of kings in the imagined public of England's earliest vernacular literature.

Chapter One: Natural Wisdom and Prudent Kingship in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*

The prominence of kings in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (hereafter *HE* or *Historia ecclesiastica*) is both a fact so common as to not bear repetition, and a question that is still partly unanswered.[1] Bede's representation and ideology of kingship has been discussed by almost too many scholars to number.[2] They agree that kings are central to the text—in large part because the *HE* is a history of conversion and progress in the Christian faith and, as J. M. Wallace-Hadrill put it, "Kings were the focal point of conversion; without them, the propagation of the new faith and the encouragement of its teachers were inconceivable."[3] Kings also form a key part of the audience Bede imagines for the *HE*. He ended up prefacing the work with a letter to King Ceolwulf of Northumbria that claims that the king had already read the *HE* and wished to have it distributed more widely for the edification of his kingdom.[4] In light of the moral theory of learning history that Bede sets out in this preface—essentially, the claim that history offers a gallery of good and bad examples for our imitation or avoidance—the *HE* can be seen in part as a "mirror for princes," indefatigably showing the good or bad consequences that come to kings and their kingdoms from following or abandoning God.[5]

I argue in this chapter that Bede understands conversion as a political act: one that has implications for the well-being of the kingdom and that is a proper subject of deliberation by kings and their counsellors. The decision to convert thus serves the same role in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* as the decision to go to war in Carl Schmitt's theory of the political sphere: it is the quintessential subject of political deliberation, and as such, it constitutes the political sphere.[6] Bede's conversion politics are premised on a theory of natural wisdom: an innate prudence that allows one to perceive what is both moral and useful in the absence of the revealed truth disclosed by Scripture. His wise kings, including Æthelberht of Kent, Edwin of Northumbria, and Oswiu of Northumbria, model prudence in their reflections on conversion. Their prudence is expressed in the language of the Ciceronian orator, the classic union of wisdom and eloquence. The parallel to classical oratory is not incidental: by exercising their natural wisdom in the

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[1] Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

[2] See, notably, J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), ch. 4, pp. 72-97; ibid., "Gregory of Tours and Bede: Their Views on the Personal Qualities of Kings," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 2 (1968): 31-44, repr. in his *Early Medieval History* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1976), pp. 96-114; Judith McClure, "Bede's Old Testament Kings," in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill*, ed. by Patrick Wormald with Donald Bullough and Roger Collins (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), pp. 76-98; Alan Thacker, "Bede's Ideal of Reform," in Ibid., pp. 130-53; at 146-50; Clare Stancliffe, "Oswald, 'Most Holy and Most Victorious King of the Northumbrians,'" in Clare Stancliffe and Eric Cambridge, eds., *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint* (Stamford, Lincolnshire: Paul Watkins, 1995), pp. 33-83; Sarah Foot, "Bede's Kings," in *Writing, Kingship, and Power in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Rory Naismith and David A. Woodman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 25-51.

[3] Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship*, p. 78.

[4] The letter is edited in Colgrave and Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History,* pp. 2, 4, 6. For more discussion of it, see pp. 39-40, below.

[5] On this theory of history, see Calvin B. Kendall, "Imitation and the Venerable Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*," in *Saints, Scholars, and Heroes: Studies in Medieval Culture in Honour of Charles W. Jones*, 2 vols., ed. by Margot H. King and Wesley M. Stevens (Collegeville, MN: n.p., 1979), I: 161-90.

[6] Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. by George Schwab (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1976), pp. 32-7. Schmitt describes war as "the leading presupposition which determines in a characteristic way human action and thinking and thereby creates a specifically political behavior" (34).

decision to convert, Bede's wise kings act as citizens within a heavenly kingdom that distantly echoes the classical *polis*. His *Historia ecclesiastica* thus shows how an Anglo-Saxon monk of the eighth century reimagined classical political theory in light of the revealed truth of Christianity and then chose to embody that theory in narratives that would make his imagined audience—kings—into moral political actors.

I: Natural Wisdom

Natural wisdom is a component of natural theology, which the theologian James Barr defines as follows:

> 'By nature,' that is, just by being human beings, men and women have a certain degree of knowledge of God and awareness of him, or at least a capacity for such an awareness; and this knowledge or awareness exists anterior to the special revelation of God made through Jesus Christ, through the Church, through the Bible.[7]

Bede's interest in natural theology was rooted in his study of the Bible and reflection on Biblical history. For him, as for the Church Fathers, the state of "nature" described the conditions that humans lived under prior to the revelation of God's law on Mount Sinai. This was the period "before the Law," when humans were guided by "natural law" alone. Like other scholars who rely on a theory of natural law or natural theology, Bede emphasizes the order and rationality of God's creation, including the human mind.[8] His commentary on Genesis returns again and again to humans' unique status among God's creatures as rational.[9] Drawing heavily on Augustine and Gregory the Great, Bede associates rationality with both deliberation and the contemplation of divinity. God's declaration, "let us make man," is read as the expression of an inner deliberation—a forethought that fundamentally differs from the illocutionary act depicted by the sentence, "Let man be made, and man was made."[10] God takes counsel or deliberates with

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[7] James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology: The Gifford Lectures for 1991* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 1. While natural theology is an ancient concept, it has experienced a rise in popularity over the last two centuries as scholars have posed the question of science's relation to faith with new urgency. For a wide-ranging introduction to natural theology in both its ancient and contemporary guises, see Russel Re Manning, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Natural Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[8] See Calvin B. Kendall, introduction to Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. by Kendall (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), p. 28: "[Bede's] approach may be termed 'proto-scientific' both in the sense that he took the created world to be rational and ordered and, therefore, capable of being understood, and in the sense that he believed it the duty of the investigator to account for all the data, however messy or apparently contradictory some of them might appear to be."

[9] See, e.g. Bede, *Libri quatuor in principium Genesis usque ad natiuitatem Isaac et eiectionem Ismahelis adnotationum*, ed. by Christopher W. Jones, CCSL 118a (Turnhout: Brepols, 1967), ii.2, p. 34, ll. 1043-9; ii.7, p. 45, ll. 1422-9; ii.9, p. 47, ll. 1485-90; iii.1, p. 60, ll. 1914-7. Bede affirms that women were also created with reason: Ibid., i.27, p. 28, ll. 837-9: "Et femina enim ad imaginem Dei creata est secundum id quod et ipsa habebat mentem rationalem" ("And the woman as well was created in the image of God in that she too had a rational mind").

[10] See Ibid., i.26, pp. 24-5, ll. 730-6 (emphasis original): "Sed priusquam fieret, *Faciamus hominem* dicitur, ut uidelicet quia rationalis creatura condebatur quasi cum consilio facta uideretur. Quasi per studium de terra plasmaretur et inspiratione conditoris in uirtute Spiritus uitalis erigeretur, ut scilicet non per iussionis uocem sed per dignitatem operationis existeret qui ad conditoris imaginem fiebat" ("But before [man] was made, 'Let us make man' was said, namely so that, because a rational creature was being created, it would seem to be made as if with

himself, in other words, before making man, and this act somehow reflects or determines the nature of the human creature: "ut uidelicet quia rationalis creatura condebatur quasi cum consilio facta uideretur."[11] Meanwhile, Bede quotes Augustine (who in turn cites Paul's Letter to the Colossians) in a passage on the link between reason and the divine: "anima rationalis in ea debet erigi, quae in spiritalibus natura maxime excellunt ut quae sursum sunt sapiat non quae super terram."[12] For Bede, reason is precisely what allows man to rule, or "govern," the rest of creation, as stated in Gen. 1:26.[13] God's creation of man has the same structure as a political act because it enacts a practical wisdom that consists in deliberation. For their part, humans can best exercise their own reason by contemplation of divine things, but reason also fits them to rule over others. Reason thus lies at the heart of both Bede's theory of politics and his understanding of humans' relation to God.

Natural law and natural wisdom crucially serve as principles of historical interpretation and moral judgment for Bede in his work as biblical exegete and historian of conversion. They help him explain how Old Testament figures who predated the Law of Moses, such as Adam and Noah, could be understood as virtuous in the absence of revealed truth.[14] And while the Hebrews received the Law with Moses, gentiles had not been so fortunate: in this way, the temporality of "before the Law," "under the Law," and "under grace" was relative, and pagans in Bede's own day who had not learned about the Law and Christ's fulfillment of it were comparable to the Hebrews who lived before Moses.[15] Natural law—the uncodified set of moral principles common to all human societies—and natural wisdom—the capacity to reason morally from what one knows, in accordance with natural law—establish the basis of Judeo-Christian teaching in universal human faculties and cultural norms. The patristic view inherited by Bede of a ladder of perfection rising from "before the Law," to "under the Law," to "under grace" meant that morality for him was not dualistic, but gradual.[16]

Bede's commentary on the story of the centurion, found in Luke 7:1-10 (as well as Matthew 8:5-13), offers a good illustration of his view of natural wisdom as it pertains to the

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deliberation. As if through study [man] was formed from the earth and raised up through the power of the Spirit by the blowing of the Creator's breath, namely so that the one who was being made in the image of the Creator would exist not through the utterance of a command, but through the dignity of a deliberate act").

[11] Ibid.: "so that it would truly seem that [man] was formed as a rational creature, as though made with deliberation."

[12] Ibid., 26. It is worth quoting the larger context: "Congruit ergo et corpus eius animae rationabili, non secundum liniamenta figurasque membrorum, sed potius secundum id quod in caelum erectum est ad intuenda quae in corpore ipsius mundi superna sunt, sicuti anima rationalis in ea debet erigi, quae in spiritalibus natura maxime excellunt ut quae sursum sunt sapiat non quae super terram" ("[Man's] body, therefore, befits a rational mind, not according to the outline and shapes of the members, but rather in that it is raised up towards the heavens and fitted for regarding those things that are lofty on the Earth itself, just as the rational soul ought to be reared up towards those things which most greatly excel by their nature in spiritual qualities so that it may 'mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth'"). The entire passage is drawn from Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram* (CSEL 28.1, p. 187).

[13] See Bede, *Libri quatuor in principium Genesis*, ed. Jones, p. 27, ll. 800-4: "Quia nimirum in hoc maxime factus est homo ad imaginem Dei in quo inrationabilibus antecellit, capax uidelicet rationis conditus, per quam et creata quaeque in mundo recte gubernare, et eius qui cuncta creauit posset agnitione perfrui" ("For indeed, man is most greatly made in the image of God in the way that he excels the irrational animals, namely, that he is created capable of reason, through which he both rightly governs all that was created in the world, and can recognize and enjoy the One who created everything").

[14] See, for example, Bede's explanation of Adam's naming of the rest of animal creation in terms of reason: *In Genesim*, ed. by Jones, I, ii, 19-20, p. 56.

[15] See Peter Darby, *Bede and the End of Time* (Farnhan, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 24-5.

[16] See Kendall, introduction to *On Genesis*, 39-40.

powerful. In this story, a Roman centurion sends a group of Jewish elders to ask Jesus to come heal a sick servant of his. As inducement, the elders mention that the centurion had built a synogogue for them. As Jesus approaches the house, the centurion sends friends to meet Jesus and tell him,

> Domine, noli vexari: non enim sum dignus ut sub tectum meum intres: propter quod et meipsum non sum dignum arbitratus ut venirem ad te: sed dic verbo, et sanabitur puer meus. Nam et ego homo sum sub potestate constitutus, habens sub me milites: et dico huic, Vade, et vadit: et alii, Veni, et venit: et servo meo, Fac hoc, et facit.[17]

Impressed by the man's faith despite his gentile status, Jesus declares, "nec in Israel tantam fidem inueni."[18] (In the version found in Matthew, he states more explicitly that many gentiles will be saved on the day of Judgment, while many Jews will be damned).[19] The centurion thus models faith and piety in the absence of special revelation. His position of authority offers him a basis for both pious action, in his patronage of the Jewish synagogue, and for a pious understanding of, and reverence for, Jesus' own position of authority. Bede interprets Jesus' proximity to the centurion's house, at the moment when he is stopped by the centurion's friends, as signifying that "[ille] qui naturali lege recte utitur quo bona quae nouit operatur eo illi qui uere bonus est appropiat."[20] Furthermore, the centurion's servants can be interpreted allegorically as the "natural virtues, of which many who come to the Lord bring no small portion with them."[21] Bede's awareness of the temporal unfolding of revelation—first the Law of Moses, then the universal grace achieved by Christ's sacrifice—leads him to see human morality in gradual and gradated terms as well.

Bede's commentary on the Acts of the Apostles shows the intertwined roles of rhetoric and natural theology in conversion. As a history of conversion, Acts offers what is probably the closest biblical model for Bede's own *Historia ecclesiastica*. The Book of Acts shows how Jesus' early followers took his message beyond the geographical and cultural borders of Judaism and founded a Church that spread throughout the Greek-speaking Mediterranean world. Bede

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[17] Luke 7:6-8: "Lord, trouble not thyself; for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof. For which cause neither did I think myself worthy to come to thee; but say the word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man subject to authority, having under me soldiers: and I say to one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doth it."

[18] Luke 7:9: "I have not found so great faith, not even in Israel."

[19] See Matt. 8:11-12.

[20] Bede, *In Lucae euangelium expositio*, ed. by D. Hurst, CCSL 120 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1960), II, vii.7, p. 155: "The one who properly follows the natural law, by which he does the good deeds that he knows how to, in that he approaches the one who is truly good." See also his statement on the relationship of the three kinds of divine law in his commentary on the book of James, ed. by D. Hurst, *In Epistolas vii catholicas,* CCSL 121 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1983), II.12, p. 196: "Grauius namque iudicabitur qui legem Moysi quam qui legem naturalem contemnit, grauius item qui agnitam euangelii gratiam quam qui mosaicae legis edicta despicit" ("For anyone who despises the law of Moses will be judged more seriously than someone who despises the natural law; likewise will he be judged more seriously who disregards the recognized grace of the Gospel than he who disregards the commands of the law of Moses"). Trans. by David Hurst, *The Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles of Bede the Venerable* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1985), 26.

[21] Bede, *In Lucae euangelium expositio,* ed. by Hurst, II, vii.8, p. 156: "uirtutes sunt naturales quarum non minimam copiam multi ad dominum uenientes secum deferunt."

happens to have written the earliest surviving prose commentary on the entire book.[22] His decision to do so may have been guided by the fact that none survived from the patristic era,[23] but it also speaks to his interest in conversion and Church history from early in his scholarly career.[24] His commentary on key moments shows his understanding of Christian preaching as rhetoric that must be adapted to the situation of its audience—a rhetorical principle that also guides his own work as a historian. One such moment comes when St. Stephen, known as the "Protomartyr," gives a long resumé of Israelite history to a hostile audience of Pharisees. Stephen names a different burial place for Jacob, however, than is named at Gen. 50:13. Bede explains the discrepancy by claiming that Stephen "followed, not so much the order of historical circumstance, as the issue [*causa*] at stake": that is, his argument that the Pharisees were acting like the backsliders and persecutors of prophets in the Old Testament.[25] As Roger Ray notes, Bede's notion of prizing the *causa* over the *ordo circumstantis historiae* sounds much like Cicero's description of a forensic narrative in his work *On Invention*.[26]

Paul's sermon on the Areopagus in Athens offers an even more explicit and fraught instance of adapting Christian rhetoric to persuade an audience of nonbelievers, this time with an added layer: in addition to addressing a Gentile audience, Paul's sermon touches on the nature of religiosity as such, a piety that transcends confessional labels. In this brief passage, Paul preaches to a philosophical group of Athenians who have erected an altar to an "unknown god."[27] Praising them for their religiosity—though the flattery is lost in the Vulgate's *superstitiosiores,* "very superstitious"—and even citing Stoic poetry approvingly,[28] Paul tells the Athenians that the "unknown God" they are seeking "dwelleth not in temples made by human hands."[29] Bede believes that these pagan yet god-fearing Athenians were better than the Jews who knew God, but rejected Him.[30] They even have "nobility of mind through which they taught by hearing and searching out words," a sort of natural wisdom.[31] Even more strikingly, Bede approves of Paul's citation of a line from a pagan Greek poem along the very same principles that guided his own construction of historical narrative:[32] those of adapting a message to one's audience or, as he figuratively puts it, "dare in tempore cibaria conseruis et audientium

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[22] The commentary is edited as *Expositio actuum apostolorum et retractatio* by M. L. W. Laistner, CCSL 121 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1983).
[23] The lack of earlier commentaries on the Book of Acts may explain why Bede's commentary survives in over eighty-four medieval manuscript copies: see George Hardin Brown, *A Companion to Bede* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 2009), 63-4.
[24] George Hardin Brown estimates the date of the *Expositio*'s composition as sometime between approx. 703 and 709, making it one of the earliest of Bede's works: Ibid., 14.
[25] Laistner, ed., *Expositio actuum apostolorum,* VII.16, p. 33: "non tam ordinem circumstantis historiae quam causam de qua agebatur intendit."
[26] Roger Ray, "The Triumph of Greco-Roman Rhetorical Assumptions in Pre-Carolingian Historiography," in *The Inheritance of Historiography, 350-900*, ed. by Christopher Holdsworth and T. P. Wiseman (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1986), 67-84; at 76.
[27] Acts 17:23: "ignoto Deo."
[28] Acts 17:38: "in ipso enim vivimus et movemur et sumus sicut et quidam vestrum poetarum dixerunt ipsius enim et genus sumus" ("For in him we live, and move, and are; as some also of your own poets said: 'For we are also his offspring'").
[29] Acts 17:22, 17:24: "non in manufactis templis inhabitat."
[30] See Laistner, ed., *Expositio actuum apostolorum*, XVII.23, p. 71.
[31] Ibid., XVII.11, p. 65: "Animae nobilitatem…qua uerba audiendo scrutandoque institerunt."
[32] See p. 22, n. 42, below.

considerare personas."[33] That point could be made on a larger level about both Paul and Bede's recourse to natural theology at opportune moments. For instance, natural law is often thought of as a distinctly Greek and Roman concept instead of a traditionally Hebrew, i.e. Old Testament, one.[34] However, Paul is able to draw here on the Hellenistic context of first-century Judaism and early Christianity to connect with a philosophically-minded Greek audience.

Bede's natural theology and rhetorical principles are thus connected in several ways. Both are premised on the idea that one can, or should, frame truth in a way that connects with one's audience. They also support each other in rhetorical situations associated with conversion or moral instruction. Paul was able to speak to the philosophically-minded Athenians in their own language and isolate aspects of their piety that were compatible with the "true" one oriented toward the Judeo-Christian God. By the same token, perhaps, Bede could isolate the "natural virtues" that his convert-kings "brought with them when they came to the Lord" in the service of instructing his audience (which, as I discuss below, included Ceolfrith, king of Northumbria). While his audience was already Christian, their faith might still need to be set on firmer ground: "conversion" entailed not just an affirmation of the Christian God, but also a turn toward a more spiritual way of life.[35]

II: Staging Prudent Conversion

If Bede's biblical commentaries adumbrate a theory of natural wisdom, especially prudence, his *Historia ecclesiastica* shows how that prudence plays out in the decision to convert to Christianity. His narrative models conversion as a rational process that is carried out through careful teaching and reasoning expressed in rhetoric. In particular, conversion calls for the exercise of prudence or practical wisdom: a primarily Aristotelian virtue transmitted and inflected with Christian meaning by Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine.[36] Bede defines prudence in his treatise on the Temple of Solomon as the virtue "qua discimus quid nos agere, qualiter uiuere deceat" ("by which we learn what we should do and how we should live").[37] The impersonal verb I have translated as "should," Latin *deceat*, does not just refer to moral necessity, but also to advantage or expediency: what is "good for us" in every sense.[38] This fundamentally classical understanding of prudence as an ability to identify both what is

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[33] Laistner, ed., *Expositio actuum apostolorum*, XVII.28, p. 73: "to give food to one's fellow servants at the appropriate time and to consider the nature of one's audience."
[34] For classical ideas of natural law, see Max Salomon Shellens, "Aristotle on Natural Law," *Natural Law Forum* 4.1 (1959): 72-100; Hadley Arkes, "That 'Nature Herself Has Placed in our Ears a Power of Judging': Some Reflections on the 'Naturalism' of Cicero," in *Natural Law Theory: Contemporary Essays*, ed. by Robert P. George (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 245-77; and Ernst Levy, "Natural Law in the Roman Period," *Natural Law Institute Proceedings* 2 (1949): 43-72. For an argument that natural theology is, in fact, rooted in the Old Testament, see Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology*, 102-37.
[35] *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* (*DMLBS*), "conuersio," def. 4a and 5, ed. by Richard Ashdowne, David Howlett, and Ronald Latham, (Brepols, 2015), accessed 7 Apr. 2019, http://clt.brepolis.net.libproxy.berkeley.edu/dmlbs/pages/QuickSearch.aspx,.
[36] See István P. Bejczy, *The Cardinal Virtues in the Middle Ages: A Study in Moral Thought from the Fourth to the Fourteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 11-67.
[37] Bede, *De templo*, ed. by D. Hurst, CCSL 119a (Turnhout: Brepols, 1969), 1, pp. 188-9: "Prudentia namque est, qua discimus quid nos agere, qualiter uiuere deceat."
[38] *DMLBS*, online at http://clt.brepolis.net.libproxy.berkeley.edu/dmlbs/pages/QuickSearch.aspx, "decēre," def. 1: "to befit, be fitting or becoming"; def. 3: "to befit, be right or fitting"; accessed 7 Apr. 2019.

expedient, or useful, *and* what is morally good allows Bede to stage a larger encounter within his *History* between Christian virtues and élite Anglo-Saxon social values. His portrait of Æthelberht of Kent, the first Anglo-Saxon king to convert to Christianity, models the way that a prudent king can recognize and evaluate the moral beliefs of other people. Meanwhile, Bede's more extended and famous treatment of Edwin of Northumbria is structured as a progression towards increasingly more advanced forms of prudent deliberation: from miraculous proof in battle, to the perception of individual self-interest, to comparative reflection on the explanatory power of pagan Anglo-Saxon and Christian cosmologies. Both kings are portrayed in classicizing terms, a means of both emphasizing the grandeur of Anglo-Saxon history and assimilating that past to a classical history still understood as the province of natural wisdom.

Æthelberht of Kent "is the first Anglo-Saxon king to be securely attested by the historical record,"[39] and indeed Bede's knowledge of Æthelberht seems to be heavily dependent on a few surviving documents and dates: unlike in the case of a number of Northumbrian kings, Bede does not appear to have had access to oral traditions or hagiographical material about this early Kentish king. Bede draws on a series of documents connected to the Gregorian mission in Kent, including a letter from Gregory the Great to Æthelberht;[40] he inserts much of his information about the king into the chapter that begins with Æthelberht's death: the date of his death, the length of his reign, the place of Æthelberht in a much-discussed series of *Brytenwaldas* or overkings, his place of burial, his genealogy, and his authorship of a vernacular lawcode that appears to have actually survived to the present.[41] All of this, with the exception perhaps of the lawcode, is the sort of thing that Bede could have gathered from a bare list of dates and a short lineage. The lack of vivid detail surrounding the arrival of the Gregorian missionaries in Canterbury in 596 means that Bede was forced to fill out a bare knowledge of what happened with a sense of what *likely* or *must have* happened, a core technique of rhetorical history-writing as practiced in classical and medieval Europe.[42]

This constraint, however, was also an opportunity for Bede to construct a rational narrative illustrating how a prudent pagan would perceive Christianity on first learning about it. Bede's Æthelberht is a somewhat contradictory figure, and those contradictions testify to the strain between Bede's narrative aims and what he knew to be true of the king. Most obviously, Bede notes that Æthelberht had already received "news of the Christian religion" through his Frankish wife Bertha and her priest Liudhard,[43] but Æthelberht himself describes the preaching of the missionaries as something "new and unknown" to him.[44] On the one hand, Æthelberht has

[39] D. P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings*, rev. ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), 24.
[40] Edited in Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, I.32, pp. 110, 112, and 114.
[41] Ibid., II.5, pp. 148 and 150.
[42] The construction of a plausible narrative out of reconstructed details is famously described in Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On Invention,* I.xxi, ed. and trans. by H. M. Hubbell, Loeb Classical Library 386 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949). On paraphrase as an element of medieval history-writing, see Ruth Morse, *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages: Rhetoric, Representation, and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). For Bede's own awareness and use of the technique, see Roger Ray, "Bede, the Exegete, as Historian," in *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede*, ed. by Gerald Bonner (London: SPCK, 1976), 125-40; at pp. 128-9, and Ray, "Triumph of Greco-Roman Rhetorical Assumptions," in *The Inheritance of Historiography, 350-900*, ed. by Holdsworth and Wiseman, 67-84.
[43] Colgrave and Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, I.25, p. 72: "fama…Christianae religionis."
[44] The gap between Bede's depiction and what might have happened has been further investigated by Ian Wood, who has carefully marshalled contemporary evidence, including Gregory the Great's letters concerning the conversion of the English, to argue that Æthelberht had already reached out to his neighbors, the Franks and

a superstitious fear that the missionaries will try to cast a spell on him; on the other, he understands Christianity enough to grasp that it is a religion of the word, and consequently orders the missionaries to "preach the word of life [*uerbum…uitae*] to him and all of his *gesith*s who were present."[45] Though Bede probably does not mean to suggest that the king himself described the missionary's sermon as "the word of life," his use of indirect discourse makes Æthelberht appear pious even before conversion. By depicting the king as both ignorant of Christian doctrine and eager to hear it expounded, Bede turns Æthelberht into an ideal audience for this *uerbum uitae*.

Bede further uses direct discourse to portray Æthelberht as an example of natural wisdom. His brief response to the missionaries' preaching illustrates the same mixture of cultural strangeness and natural curiosity that informs his actions in the episode as a whole. Speaking as the representative of his people and his culture, Bede's Æthelberht is a living embodiment of natural reason and prudence—a *nobilitas* that is both aristocratic grace and the exercise of a universal human faculty:[46]

> Pulchra sunt quidem uerba et promissa quae adfertis; sed quia noua sunt et incerta, non his possum adsensum tribuere relictis eis, quae tanto tempore cum omni Anglorum gente seruaui. Uerum quia de longe huc peregrini uenistis et, ut ego mihi uideor prospexisse, ea quae uos uera et optima credebatis, nobis quoque communicare desiderastis, nolumus molesti esse uobis; quin potius benigno uos hospitio recipere et, quae uictui sunt uestro necessaria, ministrare curamus, nec prohibemus quin omnes quos potestis fidei uestrae religionis praedicando sociatis.[47]

Æthelberht shows a naturally prudent ability to recognize the inherent beauty (*pulchritudo*) in the words and concepts of this new religion. While Bede does not specify what kind of beauty this is, its application to the "promises" as well as the "words" of the missionaries suggests that it refers to the content of this preaching, rather than (or in addition to) its style. His only reason for not immediately accepting and propagating this message himself also seems eminently reasonable: he cannot overturn centuries of tradition without further consideration. At the same time as Æthelberht carefully articulates his own cultural position, he also recognizes the intentions and beliefs of his visitors when he observes that the Christian message is what *they* "believe to be true and best of all."[48]

Moreover, he frames this observation with a wordy Latin construction that flags both his cautiousness and his ability to reflect wisely within himself: *ut ego mihi uideor prospexisse*, literally, "As I seem to myself to have observed." *Mihi uideor,* or "I seem to myself,"

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possibly the Britons, for missionaries who could help him establish Christian governance in Kent: see his "The Mission of Augustine of Canterbury to the English," *Speculum* 69 (Jan. 1994): 1-17.

[45] Colgrave and Mynors, eds., *Ecclesiastical History*, I.25, p. 74: "uerbum ei uitae una cum omnibus qui aderant eius comitibus praedicarent."

[46] See 17-18, above.

[47] Ibid., 74: "Beautiful, indeed, are the words and promises which you bring; but because they are new and unknown to me, I cannot immediately assent to them and abandon those which I have maintained for so long in common with all the English people. But since you have come here as travelers from far away and, as I have observed, wish to pass along to us things that you believe to be true and best of all, we do not wish to be a nuisance to you. Rather, we will be sure to receive you with gracious hospitality and provide you with whatever food is necessary, and we will not prohibit you from winning over all you can to your religion by preaching."

[48] Ibid.: "quae uos uera et optima credebatis."

encapsulates self-reflection as a process of self-observation. Æthelberht's language here is faintly Ciceronian as well. Apart from the far later Lawrence of Brindisi, Cicero offers by far the greatest number of attestations of the phrase *mihi uideor* in the vast Latin corpus used by Brepols' *Library of Latin Texts, Series A*.[49] *Prospexisse* would also likely have had a classical ring to it: while the overall sample is much smaller, the top three results in the *Library of Latin Texts, Series A* are ancient authors, with Cicero in first place.[50] Bede's own style has been compared to that of Cicero for its balance and refinement.[51] There is currently no evidence that Bede had direct access to Cicero—though, as George Hardin Brown suggests, Bede could have cobbled together a classical-sounding style from his reading of late antique grammarians and rhetorically-educated Church Fathers.[52] Bede's style is arguably all his own, and recent work has demonstrated that he was "sharply aware of stylistic differences" between various genres and literary modes of Latin.[53] In this case, he creates a conspicuously prudent voice for Æthelberht: one with classical overtones and a frequent use of subordinate clauses that express the logical connections between thoughts ("because your words and promises are new and unknown to me…since you have come here as travelers from far away").

The next set of tales in Bede's gallery of wise convert-kings dramatizes the gradual nature of conversion. Edwin of Northumbria looms larger in the *HE* than Æthelberht of Kent, likely reflecting both the state of Bede's information and Bede's own Northumbrian interests.[54] As Colgrave and Mynors note, Bede presents *three* successive "conversion" stories for Edwin, though he also attempts to achieve consistency by making only the last a true conversion story. First, Edwin experiences God's favor in his salvation from a would-be assassin, the safe birth of his daughter, and his victory in battle over a hostile king. Then, in an episode set in Edwin's youth but placed second in the narrative, Edwin is visited by a mysterious figure in the night

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[49] Search for "mihi uideor" performed on *The Library of Latin Texts, Series A,* Brepolis, online at http://clt.brepolis.net/llta/pages/QuickResults.aspx?qry=45de485a-b508-4976-940a-a4fff0779de9, accessed on 4 Apr. 2019. The top three results were as follows: Lawrence of Brindisi (66 attestations), Marcus Tullius Cicero (37 attestations), Augustine of Hippo (12 attestations), and Bernard of Clairvaux (11 attestations).

[50] Search for "prospexisse" performed on *The Library of Latin Texts, Series A*, online at http://clt.brepolis.net/llta/pages/QuickResults.aspx?qry=76e429ef-0d04-4f8b-9cfe-9b0113253f16, accessed on 4 Apr. 2019. The top three results were: Cicero (5 attestations), Ualerius Maximus (2 attestations), and Pliny the Younger (2 attestations). Tertullian, Ambrose, and Bede—the first two known to have been trained in classical rhetoric—tie with Ualerius Maximus and Pliny the Younger.

[51] The humanist and future Pope Pius II, Enea Silvio Piccolomini, described Bede in 1444 as a "cultivator of Tullian eloquence" (*Tullianae cultor eloquentiae*): qtd. in George Hardin Brown, "Ciceronianism in Bede and Alcuin," in *Intertexts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Paul E. Szarmach*, ed. by Virginia Blanton and Helene Scheck (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS in collaboration with Brepols, 2008), 319-30; at p. 319, n. 2. For verdicts on Bede's Latinity from other philologists, see Richard Sharpe, "The Varieties of Bede's Prose," in *Aspects of the Language of Latin Prose,* ed. by Tobias Reinhardt, Michael Lapidge, and J. N. Adams, Proceedings of the British Academy 129 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 339-55; at 341-2. Roger Ray also hints that Bede's style may be influenced by Cicero in his "Bede and Cicero," *ASE* 16 (1987): 1-16; at 16.

[52] Brown, "Ciceronianism in Bede and Alcuin," 323.

[53] Michael Lapidge, "Poeticism in Pre-Conquest Anglo-Latin Prose," in *Aspects of the Language of Latin Prose,* ed. by Reinhardt, Lapidge, and Adams, 319-37; qtd. at p. 329. See also Brown, "Ciceronianism in Bede and Alcuin," 323: "Bede varies his style according to the genre in which he is working (epistolary, historical, encomiastic, homiletic, exegetical)."

[54] On the *HE* as a text within a Northumbrian context, see Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (AD 550-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 235-328.

when he is living as an exile and promised both safety and future power. Finally, Edwin and his nobles hold a council and decide to destroy their pagan idols and convert.

While Colgrave and Mynors suggest that Bede places the council scene last because it "was probably the best known and the most popular,"[55] his arrangement of the three stories also creates a narrative arc with a deliberate gradation of stages. Bede hints at his principles of arrangement at the end of the first story: despite winning a battle after making a wager with God beforehand, Edwin "non statim et inconsulte sacramenta fidei Christianae percipere uoluit."[56] Instead, he takes the intermediate step of giving up pagan worship and beginning to "uerum primo diligentius ex tempore et ab ipso uenerabili uiro Paulino rationem fidei ediscere et cum suis primatibus, quos sapientiores nouerat, curauit conferre."[57] Such a battle-wager conversion may have sufficed for Clovis in Gregory of Tours' *Histories,*[58] but Bede takes pains to portray Edwin's conversion as a gradual process involving status as a catechumenate, a Christian-in-training, before baptism.[59] It is at this point that Bede informs us that Edwin was a *uir natura sagacissimus,* "a man most wise by nature."[60] Bede's hand can also be seen in his placement of the vision scene second in the triad, despite the fact that it occurred first. In Bede's account, by contrast, Paulinus is simply shown Edwin's vision "in the spirit" many years later and uses it to bring the king around to Christianity.[61] The story shows how Paulinus was able to break the *sublimitatem animi regalis*, "the pride of [Edwin's] kingly mind": a difficult stage in Edwin's conversion process that requires a shift in his self-conception.[62] This story of Edwin as a vulnerable young man offered an ideal opportunity for reinterpretation.

The mediation of Edwin's vision by Paulinus thus models Bede's own role as a historian of Anglo-Saxon conversion. The story likely has a background in popular tradition around Edwin,[63] and occurs in the *Life of Gregory the Great* composed by an anonymous monk of Whitby some twenty to thirty years before Bede wrote the *HE*.[64] In both versions of the story, Edwin is a young man living in exile at the court of Rædwald, king of East Anglia. His enemy Æthelfrith, who stems from the other kingdom in Northumbria, Bernicia (Edwin is from the royal family of Deira), attempts to bribe Edwin's current protector Rædwald to kill him. Rædwald finally gives in to greed and plans to kill his charge, and Edwin is informed of this plan by a trusted friend. Refusing to dishonor his host and protector by fleeing, Edwin sits alone outside of his lodging in the middle of the night waiting for death and pondering what to do. It is then that he is visited by a man he has never seen before. The man asks him what he would give

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[55] Ibid., 182 n. 1.
[56] Colgrave and Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, II.9, p. 166: "did not wish to accept the sacraments of the Christian faith immediately and without consideration."
[57] Ibid.: "more diligently learn from the venerable man Paulinus the nature of the faith and to confer with the leading men whom he knew to be most wise."
[58] See Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison, eds., *Gregorii Episcopi Turonensis Libri historiarum X*, MGH SS. rer. Merov. 1,1 (Hanover: Hahn, 1951), II.30, pp. 75-6.
[59] See Milton McC. Gatch, "The Medieval Church: Basic Christian Education from the Decline of Catechesis to the Rise of the Catechisms," in *A Faithful Church: Issues in the History of Catechesis*, ed. by John H. Westerhoff III and O.C. Edwards, Jr. (Wilton, Connecticut: Morehouse-Barlow Co., Inc., 1981), pp. 79-108.
[60] On Bede's representation of Edwin's wisdom, see further pp. 29-31, below.
[61] Colgrave and Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, II.12, p. 176: "in spiritu."
[62] Ibid.
[63] See J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: A Historical Commentary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 70-1.
[64] Bertram Colgrave, ed., *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great, by an Anonymous Monk of Whitby* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), ch. 16, pp. 98, 100.

to the person who could both save his life and grant him a kingdom. After Edwin assures him that he would both reward that man and listen to his counsel, the man gives him a sign—in Bede's rendition, by laying his right hand on Edwin's head—and tells him to remember his promise when he sees that sign again.

While this summary presents the outline of events in the versions of both Bede and the Anonymous of Whitby, the divergences between the two show the extent to which Bede uses literary features of plot, imagery, and suspense to illustrate his understanding of wise, rational conversion. By offering a fuller account that emphasizes the traditional social and political dynamics of the episode—elements often thought of as "Germanic" and secular—Bede suggests a fundamental harmony between traditional English aristocratic values and Christian virtues, between heroic history and providential history. The Whitby version describes Edwin's mysterious visitor in a way that has made commentators see him as identical to Paulinus.[65] He apppears "cum cruce Christi coronatus," leaving no doubt that he is a divine agent.[66] Bede, by contrast, never identifies Edwin's mysterious visitor or describes him in a way that suggests that he is an angel.[67] In addition, Bede adds the classicizing detail that the visitor "repente disparuit, ut intellegeret non hominem esse qui sibi apparuisset sed spiritum."[68] The manner of a spirit or a god's disappearance is a frequent detail in Virgil's *Aeneid*, often serving to emphasize the immaterial or spiritual nature of the visitor or, when there is doubt, to confirm that it cannot be a living mortal.[69] By leaving the identity of Edwin's visitor unclear and drawing on a classical detail, Bede carefully attempts to reproduce the perspective of a pagan Anglo-Saxon and suggests a parallel between pagan Greece and Rome, on the one hand, and pre-Christian England, on the other. While this passage may not contain a true verbal echo of Virgil, its similarity to the portrayal of visions and divine encounters in the *Aeneid* suggests a broader parallel between the two settings of ancient Rome and ancient (i.e. pre-Christian) England.[70] There may even be a broader parallel being drawn between Edwin and Aeneas as figures of exile who wander from place to place. Bede describes the exiled Edwin as a *profugus*, "exile," who

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[65] So say, for instance, Colgrave in his edition of the *Life of Gregory the Great*, 150 n. 67, and Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History: A Historical Commentary*, 71. However, I think it is possible to read the Whitby apparation's mention of "he who will first appear to you in this form and with this sign" ("qui tibi primo cum hac specie et signo apparebit") and subsequent note that it was Paulinus who "first appeared in that form" ("sub hac…specie…primo apparuisse"), to mean, not that the apparation *was* Paulinus, but that an angel took a form similar to that of Paulinus.

[66] Colgrave, ed., *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, ch. 16, p. 100: "crowned with the cross of Christ."

[67] See, by contrast, Dryhthelm's description of his spirit guide: "lucidus…aspectu et clarus erat indumento" ("he was shining in appearance and wearing white clothing") and the corresponding groups of angels and demons who visit the unrepentant thegn in the next chapter: Colgrave and Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, V.12, p. 488 and V.13, pp. 498, 500, 502.

[68] Ibid., p. 180: "suddenly disappeared, so that [Edwin] would understand that it was not a man who appeared to him but a spirit."

[69] See, for instance, Iris' impersonation of a Trojan woman and her sudden disappearance in Book V of the *Aeneid*: Virgil, *Aeneid: Books 1-6,* ed. by H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 63 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), Book V, ll. 657-60, p. 516.

[70] Bede makes at least seven allusions to Virgil in the *HE*, five of them from the *Aeneid*: *HE* I.8, p. 34 (*Eclogues* I.66); *HE* II.12, p. 178 (*Aeneid* IV.2); *HE* II.13, p. 186 (*Aeneid* II.501-2); *HE* III.11, p. 248 (*Aeneid* II.1); *HE* IV.9, p. 362 (*Eclogues* III.102); *HE* IV.26, p. 428 (*Aeneid* II.169); *HE* V.12, p. 490 (*Aeneid* VI.268). While these allusions are scattered throughout the *History*, two occur in close proximity to this passage: one in Edwin's vision, and one in the following chapter. Three of five allusions to the *Aeneid* occur in passages describing visions, suggesting that Bede treats these passages as occasions for heightened literary language.

"wandered secretly through many places and kingdoms for many years" before reaching Rædwald's court.[71] Virgil famously begins the *Aeneid* by describing its titular hero as a *profugus* who was "buffeted about on earth and on the sea by the might of the Gods above."[72] Bede underscores the point with a plaintive line from Edwin as he sits in despair waiting for death; this, surely, with its somewhat *recherché* term *curriculum* for "time," is Bede's version of lofty literary language: "Whither now shall I fly, [I] who have roamed through all the kingdoms of Britain for so many courses of years and seasons avoiding the traps set for me?"[73]

Bede's greater emphasis on the actions of his story's human characters also demonstrates his greater interest in the moral basis of human culture compared to the Anonymous of Whitby. Bede uniquely includes the detail that Edwin is first visited by a "most faithful friend," who informs him of Rædwald's decision to betray him and offers to escort him to safety.[74] Edwin graciously rejects his friend's offer for two reasons: first, he does not want to break the *pactum* he made with the king; and second, he would rather die at the hands of Rædwald than be killed by *ignobilior quisque* ("some less noble person").[75] Bede represents this form of class snobbery among the Anglo-Saxon nobility one other time in the *HE*, when he writes that Sebbi, a king of the East Saxons who had given up his kingdom and taken monastic vows, still retained his aristocratic disposition: "Qui cum, ingrauescente praefata egritudine…timere coepit homo animi regalis, ne ad mortem ueniens tanto adfectus dolore aliquid indignum suae personae uel ore proferret uel aliorum motu gereret membrorum."[76] Only the bishop of London and two servants, Sebbi thought, should bear witness to his loss of bodily control. Edwin's resolute adherence to the pact he has made with his protector Rædwald and his noble delicacy paint him as a true Anglo-Saxon aristocrat. By choosing to represent these details, Bede suggests that the traditional values of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy can be compatible with Christian virtue. Keeping one's oaths is both expedient behavior for a vulnerable young prince and, in this case, conducive to Edwin's ultimate converison.

Bede's focus on the necessity of wisdom and reflection in achieving divine ends leads him to emphasize the role of counsel in his telling of Edwin's vision. In contrast to the account in the anonymous *Life of Gregory the Great,* Bede's version stages a series of human-divine doubles that show how God operates through human prudence. First is the pairing formed by the human visitor and the divine visitor. While Edwin's friend cannot provide satisfactory counsel, the mysterious new visitor can; moreover, his message is also *about* counsel: he asks Edwin what

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[71] Colgrave and Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, II.12, p. 176: "per diuersa occultus loca uel regna multo annorum tempore profugus uagaretur."
[72] Virgil, *Aeneid: Books 1-6*, ed. by Fairclough, Book I, ll. 3-4: "multum ille et terris iactatus et alto / ui superum."
[73] Colgrave and Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, II.12, p. 178: "Quo enim nunc fugiam, qui per omnes Brittaniae prouincias tot annorum temporumque curriculis uagabundus hostium uitabam insidias?" That the line is self-consciously lofty, as I am suggesting, need not mean that it is poetic, though it is notable that Aldhelm provides one of the few early attestations of *curriculum* in the sense of "course of time": see *DMLBS*, "curriculum," def. 3, online, accessed 22 Mar. 2018, http://clt.brepolis.net.libproxy.berkeley.edu/dmlbs/pages/QuickSearch.aspx. On Bede's avoidance of poeticism in prose, see Lapidge, "Poeticism in Pre-Conquest Anglo-Saxon Prose," in *Aspects of the Language of Latin Prose*, ed. by Reinhardt, Lapidge, and Adams, 329-31.
[74] Colgrave and Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, II.12, p. 176: "fidissimus…amicus."
[75] Ibid., p. 176: "compact"; p. 178.
[76] Ibid., IV.11, p. 366: "As his sickness grew worse…the man with a royal spirit began to fear lest, on the point of death and stricken by pain, he might either utter something unworthy of his stature or make some undignified gesture." I have rendered Bede's somewhat intricate Latin rather freely here, translating "indignum" separately for each phrase to which it belongs.

he would give to the person who could persuade Rædwald to let him go in peace.[77] In the anonymous *Life of Gregory*, by contrast, the visitor does not mention Rædwald at all, but simply holds out the prospect of "a happy life and the future rule of his people."[78] Fittingly enough, given the traditional Germanic idea that a wife ought to give counsel to her husband,[79] Bede's version of the tale has the East Anglian queen dissuade her husband from killing Edwin. Her reasoning once again shows how aristocratic values can serve Christian providence: "[admonuit] quia nulla ratione conueniat tanto regi amicum suum optimum in necessitate positum auro uendere, immo *fidem suam, quae omnibus ornamentis pretiosior est*, amore pecuniae perdere."[80] The queen's *fidem*, which I have translated "honor," refers to both Rædwald's inherent trustworthiness, as an inner quality, and his reputation for trustworthiness. Its other, more Christian meaning of "faith" may also be in play, however, especially since the queen's proverb about the value of *fides* closely resembles statements about the worth of wisdom, *sapientia*, in the Book of Proverbs.[81] These rhetorical echoes mirror the queen's role in the story as the human agent of divine providence. The providential sequence of events that save Edwin from his life of wandering and raise him to the throne are thus wrapped in a tissue of purely human, social action. From the outside, they may have appeared simply like the result of aristocratic virtue operating in the proper way: Edwin refusing to renege on his pact with Rædwald and Rædwald's queen recalling him to his sense of honor.

In keeping with this focus on counsel and persuasion, the mysterious visitor in Bede's account also describes Christianity to Edwin in terms of counsel:

> Si autem…is qui tibi tanta taliaque dona ueraciter aduentura praedixerit, etiam consilium tibi tuae salutis ac uitae melius atque utilius quam aliquis de tuis parentibus aut cognatis umquam audiuit, ostendere potuerit, num ei obtemperare et monita eius salutaria suscipere consentis?[82]

The visitor's pairing of *melius* and *utilius,* "better" and "more useful," closely resembles the Ciceronian notion of the proper object of prudent deliberation: that which is both *honestum et utile,* "honorable and expedient."[83] Once more, we can detect a possible double valence in the

[77] Ibid., II.12, p. 178: "siqui sit, qui…Redualdo suadeat ut nec ipse tibi aliquid mali faciat."
[78] Colgrave, ed., *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, ch. 16, p. 100: "felicem uitam regnumque gentis sue futurum."
[79] See Stacy Klein, *Ruling Women: Queenship and Gender in Anglo-Saxon Culture* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2006), 11.
[80] Colgrave and Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, II.12, p. 180 (emphasis added): "She admonished him that it was in no way fitting for such a great king to sell for gold his best friend in his time of need, nor was it fitting for him to lose his honor, more precious than all treasures, for love of money." The original form of *admonuit* is *admonens*, "admonishing."
[81] Cf. Prov. 3:13-15: "Blessed is the man that findeth wisdom and is rich in prudence: The purchasing thereof is better than the merchandise of silver, and her fruit than the chiefest and purest gold: She is more precious than all riches: and all the things that are desired, are not to be compared with her" ("Beatus homo qui invenit sapientiam, et qui affluit prudentia. Melior est acquisitio ejus negotiatione argenti, et auri primi et purissimi fructus ejus. Pretiosior est cunctis opibus, et omnia quae desiderantur huic non ualent comparari").
[82] Colgrave and Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, II.12, p. 178: "If he who truly predicted that such great gifts would come to you could also reveal a better and more useful counsel about your health and life than any that your parents or kinsmen ever heard, would you not obey him and agree to receive his salutary advice?"
[83] See Cicero, *De Officiis*, ed. by Walter Miller, Loeb Classical Library 30 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913), III.4, pp. 282-8. While there is no evidence that Bede had access to this text, he would have

story's key words, this time in the word *salus*, which means at once "health," "safety," and "salvation."[84] As a pagan, Edwin would likely not have a concept of spiritual salvation, but would certainly have one of health or safety. One could thus read the entire episode of Edwin and Rædwald in Bede's account without even knowing that Christianity is involved—and this is precisely Bede's point. The mysterious visitor in the *Life of Gregory the Great*, on the other hand, wears his Christianity on his sleeve, so to speak: besides appearing "crowned with the cross of Christ," he also gives up the game in his prophecy of Edwin's future salvation:

> Qui te uni Deo qui creauit omnia, uiuo et uero docebit obedire, quique Deus daturus est tibi ea que promitto et omnia que tibi agenda sunt per illum demonstrabit.[85]

The Whitby apparation's language is both more explicitly Christian and more coercive than Bede's. Bede's Edwin is far from being "taught to submit" to any man or God, given what Bede refers to as the "loftiness of his kingly spirit."[86] Instead, as a free and wise man, he is able to evaluate the strength of a counsel and decide to accept or reject it.[87] By asking Edwin if he would obey this man and his (unspecified) counsels instead of informing him that he will, the apparation in Bede's version gives Edwin an opportunity to demonstrate his reason and natural wisdom: it would be strange indeed if Edwin refused to follow counsels that he knew were *melius atque utilius*.

One recurring motif in Bede's portrayal of Edwin is his tendency to sit alone and reflect. At the conclusion of the first "conversion" narrative, Bede offers this analysis of Edwin's character:

> Sed et ipse, cum esset uir natura sagacissimus, saepe diu solus residens ore quidem tacito sed in intimis cordis multa secum conloquens, quid sibi esset faciendum, quae religio seruanda, tractabat.[88]

The same image of Edwin sitting alone pondering recurs in Bede's story of Edwin's vision, though not in the Anonymous of Whitby's version of the tale. Indeed, Edwin's pose is mentioned no fewer than five times in the course of the vision chapter: after its first mention in the narrative, the mysterious stranger asks Edwin (in indirect discourse) "why he sat awake alone on

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encountered similar language in Augustine: see Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, ed. by R. H. P. Green (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), IV.142, p. 272. For Bede's citations of *De doctrina Christiana*, including one from Book IV, see Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 199.

[84] See the *DMLBS*, "salus," defs. 1, 2, and 5.

[85] Colgrave, ed. and trans., *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, ch. 16, p. 100: "He [i.e. Paulinus] will teach you to submit to Him the one living and true God who created all things; it is He [i.e. God] who will give you what I promise and will show you through that man all you ought to do." Because the Latin is somewhat garbled here, I follow Colgrave's plausible translation at this point.

[86] Colgrave and Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, II.12, p. 176: "sublimitatem animi regalis."

[87] The idea that virtuous actions can only be done if the agent knows what she is doing and acts voluntarily is Aristotelian: see *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, trans. by Sir David Ross (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), III.1-3, pp. 48-58.

[88] Ibid., II.9, p. 166: "He himself, being a man most wise by nature, would often sit alone for a long time, not speaking aloud but turning over many things in his innermost heart; he pondered what he ought to do and what religion he ought to follow."

a rock at that hour."[89] The stranger describes it once more in his first direct discourse as a *solitaria sessio*.[90] Edwin remains sitting and thinking after the stranger departs, and indeed he continues to do so periodically as king.[91] Most of the physical gestures described in the *HE* are symbolic gestures of piety or submission, as when Aidan "raises his eyes and hands to heaven," or when Sigeberht, King of the East Saxons, alights from his horse and falls before the feet of Bishop Cedd in an act of penance.[92] Sitting alone and sadly pondering is, however, a conventional gesture in Old English poetic narrative.[93] Another detail in this chapter also suggests the influence of vernacular conventions. To evoke Edwin's melancholy state, Bede alludes to the beginning of Book IV of the *Aeneid*, when Dido is developing a love for Aeneas that will soon be fatal:

> At regina graui iamdudum saucia cura
> uulnus alit uenis et *caeco carpitur igni*.[94]

Bede borrows the last three words of this sentence and combines them with another noun phrase: "tacitis mentis angoribus et caeco carperetur igni" ("[Edwin] was seized by silent pains of the mind and a secret fire").[95] Leslie Lockett notes that this is an example of the hydraulic model of the mind, in which "psychological disturbances are associated with dynamic changes of pressure and temperature in the chest cavity."[96] While she focuses on the increasing use of hydraulic language between the *HE* and the Old English translation of the text made in the ninth century,[97] however, Bede's initial "translation" from the *Aeneid* to his own text is equally striking: he has borrowed language used to describe falling in love—burning passion—and applied it to sorrow. His use of the hydraulic model here, possibly unique in his text, works with the traditional image of Edwin sitting alone in contemplation to evoke the scenes and moods of vernacular poetry and, in doing so, to show how a traditional poetic depiction of wisdom can prepare the way for the greater truth of Christian revelation. Far from what Roberta Frank and Patrick Wormald, drawing on Arnaldo Momigliano, have called a "vast zone of silence" between *Beowulf* and the *Historia ecclesiastica*, Bede strategically uses elements of vernacular narrative to demonstrate the universality of Christian wisdom.[98] Edwin—along with, perhaps, Hrothgar and Beowulf—is not

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[89] Ibid., II.12, p. 178: "quare illa hora…solus ipse mestus in lapide peruigil sederet."
[90] Ibid., p. 178, "a solitary act of sitting."
[91] Ibid., p. 180.
[92] Aidan: Colgrave and Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, III.16, p. 262 Sigeberht: III.22, p. 284.
[93] See Hugh Magennis, "*Monig oft gesæt*: Some Images of Sitting in Old English Poetry," *Neophilologus* 70 (1986): 442-52; esp. pp. 451-2, n. 29.
[94] Virgil, *Aeneid*, Vol. 1, ed. by H. R. Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 63 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), Book IV, ll. 1-2, p. 422 (emphasis added): "But the queen, wounded long since by encumbering love, feeds the wound with her veins *and is seized by a secret fire*."
[95] Colgrave and Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, II.12, p. 178.
[96] Leslie Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), p 5. While heat is often associated with anger, both in the early medieval period and now, Lockett notes that "Mental states of hatred, love, *and sadness* can burn and be hot as well" (p. 58; emphasis added).
[97] See Ibid., pp. 102-3.
[98] See Arnaldo Momigliano, "Pagan and Christian Historiography in the Fourth Century A.D.," in his *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), pp. 107-26; Patrick Wormald, "Bede, *Beowulf*, and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy," in his *The Times of Bede: Studies in Early English Christian Society and its Historian*, ed. by Stephen Baxter (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 30-105; at 35; Roberta Frank, "The *Beowulf* Poet's Sense of History," in *The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Early English*

initially wise in a Christian sense, but he is *natura sagacissimus*, and as such, it is only a matter of time before he awakens to the true wisdom of Christianity.

Edwin's conversion finally occurs in the chapter after his vision is recounted, in a famous council scene that explores how natural wisdom can bridge idolatry and Christian revelation. The scene shows, in telescoped fashion, how a group of wise pagans can progress from a purely materialistic view of Christianity's benefits to an appreciation of the religion's epistemological and spiritual superiority. The entire council is represented in only three speeches—two by Coifi, Edwin's chief priest, and one in the middle by an unnamed councillor who offers a pivotal (and now iconic) analogy that compares the flight of a sparrow through an open-ended hall at night to the brief life of humanity on earth. Coifi immediately shows himself sympathetic to Christianity, but his initial reasoning shows, as Charles Plummer once opined, "gross materialism:"[99] he finds paganism lacking because, despite being its figurehead and the most devoted servant of the gods, "there are many men who receive more ample rewards and greater honors from you [i.e. Edwin] than I do and they prosper more greatly in all things which they set out to do or to acquire."[100] Bede goes on to refer to Coifi's speech as *uerba prudentia*, "prudent words," which Plummer finds "disappointing," given Coifi's one-to-one equation between religious worship and earthly status.[101] Julia Barrow suggests that Coifi's words can be seen as prudent "in a worldly way" and notes that Bede is careful to show how Coifi seeks more information after the apparently wiser speech that follows.[102] Indeed, the tripartite ABA structure of the council scene, opened and closed by the chief priest, highlights the stepwise progression of the council as a group of wise pagans towards Christian enlightenment. Rather than Coifi being "chastened by the anonymous nobleman's wise reply,"[103] however, the emphasis is on collective wisdom and logical development—the smooth path that leads from rational materialism to a proper understanding of spiritual goods. Bede actually emphasizes the anonymous councillor's *agreement* with Coifi, not his correction of him.[104] The purity of his motives aside, however, Coifi surely confuses earthly and divine justice when he expects to be rewarded by Edwin for his faith in God; the *HE* itself shows that kings cannot always be trusted to reward Christian bishops faithfully for their service to the kingdom. We cannot understand Bede's reference to Coifi's speech as *uerba prudentia*, I suggest, without recognizing that *prudentia* in its noun form, the virtue of prudence, has a specific meaning for Bede: as he defines the word in his treatise *De templo*, prudence is the faculty "by which we learn what we ought to do and how we ought to live."[105] For early medieval authors like Bede, prudence had to do with discerning what was morally right and then

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Literature in Honor of Morton W. Bloomfield, ed. by Larry D. Benson and Siegfried Wenzel (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1982), pp. 53-65; at 58.

[99] Charles Plummer, ed., *Uenerabilis Baedae Opera Historica*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), vol. II, p. 99.

[100] Colgrave and Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, II.13, p. 182: "multi sunt qui ampliora a te beneficia quam ego et maiores accipiunt dignitates, magisque prosperantur in omnibus, quae agenda uel adquirenda disponunt."

[101] Ibid.; Plummer, ed., *Uenerabilis Baedae Opera Historica*, vol. II, p. 99.

[102] Julia Barrow, "How Coifi Pierced Christ's Side: A Re-Examination of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, II, Chapter 13," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 62 (2011): 693-706; at 699 and 701.

[103] Ibid., 701.

[104] Colgrave and Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, II.13, p. 182: "Cuius suasioni uerbisque prudentibus alius optimatum regis tribuens assensum."

[105] See p. 21, n. 37, above.

doing it.[106] Coifi's words are literally "prudent" because, despite their flawed grasp of doctrine, they tend towards salvation. A few other moments in the chapter suggest that Bede may be implying that Coifi himself shows prudence by dimly perceiving the right course of action, even if he does not know why. After the famous speech that follows, Bede notes that others present at the council also spoke, *diuinitus admoniti*, "advised by God," and Coifi himself later refers to the "wisdom the true God has given me" as the wisdom to perceive the greater truth of Christianity.[107] We can see all members of the council as divinely inspired; within the bounds of that inspiration, however, human agency and wisdom allow Edwin's advisors to formulate the right decision for the right reasons and then allow Edwin, as a wise king, to immediately heed their suggestion.

If Coifi opens the council with a prudent but flawed argument for accepting Christianity, the following speech, which forms the centerpiece of the council scene, is a set piece that aims to show how a wise pagan can formulate a compelling reason to convert to Christianity using his own experience and the symbolic imagery of his own culture. Finding Coifi's words compelling, an unnamed councillor of the king compares "the present life of men on the earth" to the momentary, sudden, and unpredictable flight of a sparrow into a royal hall at night while the king and his men are feasting.[108] The speaker's anonymity, his status as simply *alius optimatum regis*, reminds readers of the *Historia* that such wisdom can come from anyone in the same position.[109] While much discussion of this speech has centered around the source of its imagery,[110] it may be read more profitably in terms of Bede's aim, as a historian, of creating an edifying past for his readers. Whatever its source may be, the narrative crucially asks us to treat the parable as original to this pagan councillor. As such, it shows how a wise pagan can use the raw materials of his own life and culture to reason himself into a truer way of life and system of belief. The effectiveness of this speech as imagery and as rhetoric, I suggest, comes from the complex historical subjectivity it expresses. Placed into the mouth of a pagan from a romanticized past, it uses cultural imagery familiar to the speaker to express an ambivalent view about that culture itself. The wise councillor's reflectivity about his own place in history appears to address present readers of the text as much as, or more than, it addresses the other figures at the council. This kind of self-conscious pastness—the illusion of a past that knows its own pastness and speaks across the historical divide—is also a famous feature of *Beowulf* and other "elegiac" moments in Old English poetry, including *The Wanderer*.[111] Another crucial element of the scene is also

[106] See Bejczy, *The Cardinal Virtues in the Middle Ages:*: Ambrose identifies prudence in "deploring earthly reality and striving for eternal things" (14); for Augustine, prudence "does not merely discern between good and evil, but makes the soul understand that temporal goods are inferior and only external affairs worth pursuing" (23); and for Gregory the Great, "prudence provides knowledge of moral acts" (32).
[107] Colgrave and Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, II.13, p. 184: "sapientiam mihi a Deo uero donatam."
[108] Ibid., II.13, p. 182 and 184; qtd. at 182.
[109] Ibid., p. 182: "another of the king's chief men."
[110] In "The Art of Bede: Edwin's Council," for instance, Donald K. Fry adduces Psalm 83 as a possible source; in *Saints, Scholars, and Heroes,* ed. by King and Stevens, I: 191-207. Danuta Shanzer, meanwhile, adduces a gospel parallel: see her "Bede's style: a neglected historiographical model for the style of the *Historia ecclesiastica*?", in *Source of Wisdom: Old English and Early Medieval Latin Studies in Honour of Thomas D. Hill*, ed. by C. D. Wright, F. D. Biggs and T. N. Hall (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 329-52; at 335.
[111] J. R. R. Tolkien notably read *Beowulf* as inflected by its author's sense of the pastness of its pagan world: see his "*Beowulf:* The Monsters and the Critics," Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Lecture, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 22 (1936): 245-95; repr. in *Beowulf: A Verse Translation,* ed. by Daniel Donoghue, trans. by Seamus Heaney (New York: Norton, 2002), 103-30; at 119. Others have discussed the sparrow simile's associations with poems such as *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* by way of its winter imagery: see, for instance, P. S. Langeslag, *Seasons in the*

reminiscent of *The Wanderer* and its fellow in the Exeter Book, *The Seafarer*: the grim winter setting and "contrast between nature and human society" which, as Hugh Magennis notes, is not a feature of other parts of the *HE*.[112]

Both this speech and the story of Edwin's vision suggest that Bede took a historicist perspective on the conventions that we now associate with Old English poetry. In both cases, he makes use of their literary effects and affects—Edwin's melancholy as he waits to die; the smallness and fragility of human society compared to the natural world—to evoke a past world that must be replaced by a new one, but that also leaves traces worth remembering. Bede does not allow us to simply indulge in the self-conscious beauty of the sparrow simile, however: his wise nobleman offers it up only to advocate for the destruction of the conditions that make it possible, the end of the darkness that makes the interior of the hall such a welcome refuge.[113] The passage thus marks an ambivalence towards the affective potential of pagan literary art. That ambivalence may also be detected, however slightly, in the episode with which the chapter ends: Coifi girds himself as if for war and, riding out to a shrine, "profaned and destroyed the altars which he himself had consecrated."[114] This line echoes a tragic and gory moment from the *Aeneid* when the Greeks burst into the Trojan royal palace and King Priam "[stains] with his blood the [altar] fires he himself had consecrated."[115] Coifi carries out his own desecration *inspirante Deo*, "with God inspiring him," but the Virgilian echo suggests the tragedy latent in the act and, to readers in the know, signals the culturally and morally ambiguous status of the pagan English past by way of its allusion to the pagan Mediterranean.[116]

III: Wise Judgment and Heavenly Citizenship

My discussion of the last scene elapsed without mention of Edwin at all. Indeed, given that this is the only moment in which Bede represents collective deliberation about conversion, it seems crucial that the decision is reached jointly and unanimously. When Coifi reaches a firm conclusion and "suggests" to the king that the Northumbrians destroy their pagan shrines and altars, Bede as narrator comments on the foregone nature of the conclusion with a common Latin rhetorical question: *Quid plura?* "Why need I say more?"[117] The Northumbrian council scene depicts Bede's vision of ideal deliberation in that the councillors are themselves *diuinitus*

Literatures of the Medieval North (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015), 75-6: "Although the scene of indoor comfort has more in common with late-medieval calendar conventions than with what survives of Anglo-Saxon cultural expression, the detail here provided on the natural world is primarily reminiscent of the Old English elegies. Bede's narrative shares the motif of winter storm and winter precipitation with such texts as *The Wife's Lament, The Wanderer,* and *The Seafarer*."

[112] Hugh Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 129.

[113] In this way, as P. S. Langeslag points out, the message of the sparrow simile differs crucially from the message of the "elegiac" poems: "A notable distinction is that the elegiac poems express uncertainty regarding the present life only, whereas Bede's counsellor as yet holds that the present is man's only a priori certainty." See his *Seasons in the Literatures of the Medieval North*, 76.

[114] Colgrave and Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, II.13, p. 186: "polluit ac destruxit eas, quas ipse sacrauerat aras."

[115] *Aeneid: Books 1-6,* ed. by Fairclough, II.501-2: "uidi…Priamumque per aras / sanguine foedantem quos ipse sacrauerat ignis."

[116] Colgrave and Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, II.13, p. 186.

[117] Ibid.

admoniti, "admonished by God," in their arguments. This is persuasion and deliberation, but in a situation where the choice is unequivocal and the deliberative body is unanimous.

The next stage of Bede's depiction of royal wisdom, however, requires the king's active involvement: settling a dispute in his kingdom. This dispute happens to concern one of the more technical issues of Christian liturgy: the method of calculating Easter. The settler of this dispute, King Oswiu of Northumbria, would appear to be well prepared for it by his ecclesiastical education in Ireland.[118] Bede, however, portrays Oswiu as naturally wise, but ignorant of Christian doctrine. Oswiu's prudence is grounded in his political common sense: just as all people in a single kingdom ought to live under a single law, so God's kingdom ought to be unified in its religious observance. The homology between the earthly and heavenly kingdoms is not a trivial one for Bede: politics, the reasoned pursuit of the good life in earthly kingdoms, can (and, if properly conducted, does) lead to God, the ultimate source of good and of "happiness" (*beatitudo*, which can also be translated as "blessedness"). Furthermore, in the move from the earthly to the heavenly kingdom, distinctions are leveled. Kings become mere citizens of the heavenly kingdom.[119] As the paradigmatic users of the practical wisdom (prudence) that leads to happiness in the *HE,* however, kings become not just any heavenly citizens, but paradigmatic ones.

Despite its iconic status in the history of the Anglo-Saxon Church, the so-called "Synod of Whitby" occupies a somewhat unusual place in the history of Anglo-Saxon councils. This is because it embraces aspects of both ecclesiastical and royal councils and depicts a king presiding over a meeting with a primarily ecclesiastical purpose. As Catherine Cubitt argues, Anglo-Saxons made a distinction between *concilia* or "councils," which were a diverse category, and *synodus* or "synods," which "always [bore] a strongly ecclesiastical character."[120] Interestingly, Cubitt's example of such a synod, the "Council" of Whitby, is one that she suggests on the next page ought to be "classed with the *concilia mixta* of the early Middle Ages—a royal council with an important religious dimension."[121] Neither Cubitt nor other scholars who have written on the Council of Whitby seek to explain this curious clash between a prototypically ecclesiastical issue, the method of dating Easter, and the unusually prominent role filled by the Northumbrian king. Our two primary witnesses to the Council are both narrative and literary texts: Stephen of Ripon's *Vita S. Wilfridi* and Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*. However accurate these two texts' depictions may be, they also serve polemical and ideological functions for each author.

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[118] Bede notes that Oswiu was "educated and baptized by the Irish," "a Scottis edoctus ac baptizatus" (Colgrave and Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, III.25, p. 296). I have found no attribution yet for the widespread claim that Oswald and Oswiu were fostered specifically at Iona when they were "in exile among the Irish" (Scotos inter exsolante"), *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, ed. by Alan Orr Anderson and Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), I.1, p. 16.

[119] See Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, I.26, p. 78: "conciues sibi regni caelestis" ("fellow citizens with him of the heavenly kingdom").

[120] Catherine Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils c. 650-c.850* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1985), 5.

[121] Ibid., 6. Cubitt refers to the meeting at Whitby as a "Council" on p. 5 to reflect her sense that it is not a "synod" in the same sense as those meetings "convoked by an archbishop, the legislation of which was binding upon church members without further royal confirmation" (6). Nonetheless, both Bede and Stephen of Ripon refer to it as a *synodus*, suggesting that Anglo-Saxons did not make such a firm distinction between the two terms: see Colgrave and Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, III.25, p. 298: "dispositum est…synodus fieri" ("it was decided to hold a council/synod"), and Bertram Colgrave, ed., *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), ch. 10, p. 22: "omnis synodus" ("the entire synod/council"). I will partake in the caution of contemporary historians, however, by referring to the meeting as the Council of Whitby.

Moreover, the *Vita S. Wilfridi* seems to have served as Bede's primary source for his depiction of the Council, and may have been his only one.[122] Stephen's representation of the Council thus served as a key building block for Bede's: a source that could not be completely rewritten or altered, but that could be expanded or fleshed out to better reveal the issues at stake, the character of the individual participants, or the proper nature of a royal-ecclesiastical council. Walter Goffart treats this scene in the *HE* as a pointed rewriting of the *Vita S. Wilfridi* intended to diminish Wilfrid's prominence. This "undermining of Wilfrid" may only be an epiphenomenon, however, of the most obvious change from the earlier account: Bede greatly expands all aspects of the council scene so as to make it appear like a serious, well-conducted affair instead of a quick and easy victory for Wilfrid.[123] As Goffart himself notes, the Bedan Wilfrid's "remarks are longer than in Stephen's version and do much greater credit to Wilfrid's scholarship."[124] Bede writes with a different sense of narrative order than Stephen of Ripon. For him, history unfolds with a consistent inner logic; processes, not individuals, are his major protagonists. For Stephen of Ripon, by contrast, the world revolves around his hero: if Wilfrid finds success, it is because of his inherent virtue, but if he finds opposition, it must be because of demonic persecution.

Bede's interest in the inner logic of history allows him to make the Council of Whitby scene an illustration of the proper exercise of royal power over the Church, which turns on the ability of a wise king to mediate ecclesiastical affairs despite—or even because of—his ignorance of Christian doctrine. Where neither the narrator nor Oswiu in the *Vita S. Wilfridi* feel the need to justify holding a meeting to decide between conflicting methods of Easter calculation, Bede's Oswiu states a rationale that interprets Church practices by a political logic:

> Primusque rex Osuiu, praemissa praefatione—quod oporteret eos qui uni Deo seruirent unam uiuendi regulam tenere, nec discrepare in celebratione sacramentorum caelestium, qui unum omnes in caelis regnum expectarent; inquirendum potius quae esset uerior traditio, et hanc ab omnibus communiter esse sequendam.[125]

Oswiu's principle of "one heavenly kingdom, one heavenly law" approaches the question of Easter's dating from the perspective of governance; one may imagine him to have made similar statements about the law in his own kingdom. As the judge of "which tradition was the truer," he is thus in the position of legislating religious practice for his entire kingdom, but his point implies an even larger jurisdiction: that over all Christians together, *communiter*. This is not to say, however, that Bede thinks Oswiu should be a universal ruler. Instead, as an earthly king, and thus as someone familiar with the principles of governance, Oswiu has a basic understanding of

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[122] So say Colgrave and Mynors in *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, pp. 306-7, n. 2: "There is no reason to suppose that Bede did more than take Eddius' account and amplify it." See also Walter Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*, pp. 311-3; at 311: "The outline of the Whitby synod remained Stephen's, but profound changes are made by amplification." Cf. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: A Historical Commentary*, p. 126: "I am not convinced that Bede depends for his information on Eddius' Life of Wilfrid: they may have drawn upon a common source."

[123] Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*, 313.

[124] Ibid., 312.

[125] Colgrave and Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, III.25, p. 298: "First, King Oswiu stated, by way of preface, that it was fitting for those who served one God to keep one rule for living, and that it ill befit those who hoped for one kingdom in heaven to differ in their celebration of heavenly rites. Therefore, it ought to be inquired which tradition was the truer, and this should be followed by all together [*communiter*]."

the nature of divine citizenship as well. He will crucially remain silent for the majority of the council, listening to the arguments of the two sides until he determines "which tradition is the truer," the more rooted in Biblical authority.

In his revisions to the account of the *Vita S. Wilfridi*, Bede actually emphasizes Oswiu's *lack* of knowledge of Christian doctrine in order to make the point that the heavenly kingdom works according to the same principles as earthly ones. In the *Vita S. Wilfridi*, Oswiu clinches his judgment with a question to which he already seems to know the answer: "Tunc Oswiu rex, tacente sancto Wilfritho presbitero, subridens interrogauit omnes, dicens: 'Enuntiate mihi, utrum maior est Columcillae an Petrus apostolus in regno coelorum?'"[126] The description of Oswiu as *subridens* ("smiling") suggests faint mockery of the Irish party. It seems to be a feature of council scenes in the *Vita S. Wilfridi*: the only other place where it appears is in the account of Wilfrid's petition before the papal court in 704. Just as in the Council of Whitby scene, the bishops in the court are said to "smile" as they discuss Wilfrid's case.[127] While the bishops' smiles in this case do not seem rooted in contempt or mockery of Wilfrid, they do suggest the mysteriousness of canonical judgment and the power dynamic in the court. Stephen pairs this "smiling" with "speaking Greek among themselves" and "hiding" *something*, it is not specified what, "from us," i.e. from Wilfrid.[128] As in the Council of Whitby scene, the judges' smiles precede a victory for Wilfrid. If this scene at the papal court offers a useful parallel, then, Oswiu's smile at the Council of Whitby is at least tied to a sense of his mysterious knowledge and purposes; its very lack of explanation makes it a sign of the inaccessability of his mind. Paired with his question, it suggests that Oswiu knows that it would be absurd to claim a higher status for Columba than for the Apostle Peter in heaven. Bede, on the other hand, removes any hint of mockery, but in doing so, makes Oswiu seem less knowledgeable about Christianity. In Stephen's account, Oswiu comes to the crucial question involved in the matter without prompting: Wilfrid has not mentioned Peter at all. In response, the "entire synod responds with one voice and one consent" with a biblical citation supporting Peter's preeminence in the Church.[129] Bede, however, has Wilfrid make this point and cite this reference before Oswiu steps in. He accordingly gives Wilfrid a *larger*, not a smaller, role in the outcome of the council. It would be rather surprising if the Irish-educated Oswiu was unaware of Peter's status as the "rock" of the Church and the gatekeeper of heaven. By having him ask Colman if Wilfrid's claim is true, Bede portrays Oswiu as less knowledgeable and less of an independent judge. Perhaps this is a more appropriate role for a king to fill at an ecclesiastical council in Bede's eyes.

Finally, Oswiu's justification of his decision is also retooled to make him seem less authoritative, less kingly, and more like any individual Christian. Stephen of Ripon's Oswiu issues what sounds like a formal pledge:

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[126] Colgrave, ed., *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, ch. 10, p. 22: "After the holy priest Wilfrid fell silent, King Oswiu, smiling, asked them all, 'Please inform me, which one is greater in the heavenly kingdom, Columcille [i.e. Columba] or the Apostle Peter?'"

[127] Ibid., ch. 53, p. 112: "subridentes."

[128] Ibid. The full quote is as follows: "Tunc inter se graecizantes et subridentes, nos autem celantes, multa loqui coeperunt et postremo dicentes accusatoribus" ("Then speaking Greek among themselves and smiling, hiding it, however, from us, they began to speak many things and afterwards they said to the accusers").

[129] Ibid., ch. 10, p. 22: "omnis synodus una voce et consensu respondit." The reference is to Matt. 16:18-19.

> Ille [i.e. Petrus] est hostiarius et clauicularius, contra quem conluctationem controuersiae non facio nec facientibus consentio et iudiciis eius in uita mea in nullo contradicam.[130]

Oswiu thus declares himself a faithful subordinate of Peter who promises not to counter his judgments or to countenance hostility to him among his [i.e. Oswiu's] own people. While Bede's Oswiu is, in true kingly fashion, equally aware of the need to respect heavenly powerbrokers, he reasons in terms of his own salvation:

> Et ego uobis dico, quia hic est hostiarius ille, cui ego contradicere nolo; sed, in quantum noui uel ualeo, huius cupio in omnibus oboedire statutis, ne forte me adueniente ad fores regni caelorum non sit qui reserat, auerso illo qui claues tenere probatur.[131]

This Oswiu does not affirm what he will or will not do (*non facio nec…consentio et…in nullo contradicam*), but rather states what he wishes to do or will try to do (*contradicere nolo…huius cupio in omnibus oboedire*). He also gains a stronger sense of subjectivity, of an independent mental or spiritual life, through his added statement expressing concern for his own entry into heaven. Bede's Oswiu, then, has an especially firm grasp on the principles involved in judging between competing dates of Easter reckoning, but he does so in his capacity as an individual Christian, a citizen of the heavenly kingdom who has an essentially political knowledge of the importance of obeying legitimate authority and its *statutis* ("laws").

Indeed, citizenship is a key concept in the way that Bede links Christian identity to political identity. This linkage goes all the way back to the New Testament itself. It is implicit in Jesus' command, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God, the things that are God's."[132] Jesus' vision of political belonging, however, seems confined to the idea of rendering taxes, paying one's dues. He would, of course, soon die in a manner that pointed to his status as a *non*-citizen. It would be Paul the Apostle—a Roman citizen himself, as the Book of Acts makes clear[133]—who introduced the language of "citizenship" (Greek *politeuma*) of the heavenly kingdom,[134] though the Vulgate renders the word as *conuersatio*, which lacks a specifically political meaning. Outside of the Greek East, the most prominent voices discussing heavenly citizenship are Ambrose and especially Augustine. Both authors draw on the more world-rejecting strains of New-Testament Christianity to emphasize the opposition between the "earthly city" and the "heavenly city." Their use of the term "city" (*ciuitas*) rather than, say,

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[130] Colgrave, ed., *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, ch. 10, p. 22: "He is the doorkeeper and the keeper of the keys, against whom I will not raise a conflict, nor will I consent to those who do so, and I will contradict his judgments in no way in my lifetime."

[131] Colgrave and Mynors, eds, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, III.25, p. 306: "I tell you, then, that he is that doorkeeper whom I will not contradict; rather, I wish to obey his statutes in all things, to the extent that I am able to or know how, lest when I come to the gates of the heavenly kingdom there may be no one to unbolt them for me, since I have shunned him who is proven to hold the keys."

[132] Matthew 22:21: "Reddite ergo quae sunt Cæsaris, Cæsari: et quae sunt Dei, Deo."

[133] Acts 22:22-29.

[134] Found in Philippians 3:20. The Greek term is cited in Claudia Rapp, "City and Citizenship as Christian Concepts of Community in Late Antiquity," in *The City in the Classical and Post-Classical World: Changing Contexts of Power and Identity*, ed. by Claudia Rapp and H. A. Drake (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 153-66; at 156.

"kingdom" (*regnum*) aims squarely at Rome, the earthly city that rules so much of the world.[135] "Earthly" even connotes "satanic" for Ambrose and, by extension, for his student Augustine.[136] Bede's England lacked *ciuitates* in the traditional sense; instead, its "cities" were monastic settlements and episcopal seats.[137] The key territorial units for him were kingdoms, and despite the conventional nature of phrases like "the heavenly kingdom" (*regnum caeleste*), Bede does in fact think of heavenly space in relation to his own reality. His commentary on 2 Peter 1:14 suggests that he shares the traditional Christian sense of opposition between the earthly and heavenly city or kingdom: "For [perfect servants of God] know that their only home, their only city, their only fatherland is in heaven."[138] As we have seen from Bede's discussion of those who live under natural law, however, there exist many degrees for him between "perfect servants of God" and the wicked. The political life on Earth may not be an end in itself, but it is structured in a way that can lead those who participate in deliberation—a tiny group, it turns out—towards a more pious attitude towards the true *patria* of heaven.

In the *HE*, heavenly citizenship often complements earthly citizenship instead of conflicting with it. As the primary subjects of conversion, kings—those one would associate most with earthly kingdoms—in fact become representative citizens of the heavenly kingdom. At the moment that kings convert, they go from being singular members of their own kingdoms to being simply one among many citizens of the heavenly kingdom. After Bede's first convert-king, Æthelberht, becomes a Christian, he "embraced other believers in a stronger love [i.e. than non-believers], since they were his fellow citizens in the kingdom of heaven."[139] The "love" the king feels for his fellow Christians can hardly be imagined to impinge on his kingly duties: Æthelberht does not judge fellow Christians more leniently than pagans, for instance. Æthelberht instead experiences an emotion that is proper to citizenship as such, not to kingship. By becoming a Christian, Æthelberht and other kings acquire a new way of relating to their subjects as fellow citizens. While many commentators on Bede's views of kingship emphasize the distinctness of the office for him—the unique position of kings, interposed between their kingdoms and God[140]—we would do well to remember the sheer number of kings in the *HE* and the frequency with which kings come and go. Bede enumerates a total of *nine* Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in the preface to the *HE*; in his narrative, it is the Church that makes all of these kingdoms into something we might call "England." Kings may never have been "typical" Anglo-

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[135] See Augustine, *City of God: Volume I, Books 1-3*, Loeb Classical Library 411 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), I.praef, p. 12: "Unde etiam de terrena ciuitate, quae cum dominari adpetit, etsi populi seruiant, ipsa ei dominandi libido dominatur, non est praetereundem silentio quidquid dicere suscepti huius operis ratio postulat et facultas datur" ("Whence I cannot pass over in silence, insofar as the plan of this my undertaken work demands it and I am able to, that earthly city, which, when it desires to rule—even when the nations are subject to it—is itself ruled by that desire for rule!").

[136] See Johannes van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon: A Study into Augustine's "City of God" and the Sources of his Doctrine of the Two Cities*, Supplements to Vigilia Christianae 14 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), p. 178.

[137] See John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 246-51, on "symbolic urbanism."

[138] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, trans. by Dom David Hurst, O.S.B. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1985), p. 131.

[139] Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, I.26, p. 78: "credentes artiori dilectione, quasi conciues sibi regni caelestis, amplecteretur."

[140] See, for instance, Foot, "Bede's Kings," at pp. 40-6; Georges Tugène, "Rois moines et rois pasteurs dans *l'Histoire Ecclésiastique* de Bède," *Romanobarbarica* 8 (1984–5): 111–147; Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship*, pp. 72-97; at 73: "Yet neither Isidore nor Augustine affected his idea of earthly rule as it was affected by Gregory the Great's exalted sense of the divine nature of kingship."

Saxons, but in Bede's capacious vision of England as an ethnic and spiritual unit, the kings of these nine kingdoms make up a kind of representative body.

The preface to the *HE,* which takes the form of a letter of submission to Ceolwulf of Northumbria, testifies to another body in which at least one king could be seen as a representative or typical member: the audience of the *HE* itself. In constructing an image of Ceolwulf as an ideal reader or perhaps listener of his text, Bede suggests that the wisdom exercised by his narrative heroes—Oswiu's deft judgment at the Council of Whitby, Æthelberht's willing reception of a new faith, Edwin's long and considered conversion—is the same quality that his readers should use to perceive the moral import of his stories and act on that perception. Bede claims that Ceolwulf had already read the *HE* and now, "because of your concern for the spiritual well-being of all, you wish for [it] to be made more widely known both to you and to those whom the divine authority has placed you over as a ruler."[141] Therefore, Bede now "[sends] it again, for copying and fuller study, as time may permit."[142] This account of Ceowulf's interaction with the text may be partly fictive, and it was traditional to write letters of dedication to kings or other lay patrons who might not be able to read the dedicated work.[143] This is especially likely given that Bede represents Ceolwulf's reception in two quite different ways. After offering this initial image of the king as an authoritative participant in textual culture—someone who could both *legere* and *probare* Bede's work—Bede goes on to praise Ceolwulf for a more basic mode of reception, a desire to learn "the words and deeds of those who came before, and especially of the illustrious men of our own people."[144] Far from correcting Bede's information, language, or interpretation of history, Ceolwulf is now portrayed as an eager student furnishing his mental library with images of great men.

This eagerness is also portrayed in aural terms: Ceolwulf "lends an eager ear to hearing the words of Holy Scripture" in the same way that he evinces the desire to learn about great figures from history.[145] By the same token, the theory of history's moral effects that Bede goes on to relate is also framed in terms of both hearing and reading, with more emphasis on the former:

> Siue enim historia de bonis bona referat, ad imitandum bonum *auditor sollicitus* instigatur; seu mala commemoret de prauis, nihilominus *religiosus ac pius auditor siue lector* deuitando quod noxium est ac peruersum, ipse sollertius ad exsequenda ea quae bona ac Deo digna esse cognouerit, accenditur.[146]

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[141] Colgrave and Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, Preface, p. 2: "historiam memoratam in notitiam tibi simul et eis, quibus te regendis diuina praefecit auctoritas, ob generalis curam salutis latius propalari desideras."
[142] Ibid.: "et nunc ad transcribendum ac plenius ex tempore meditandum retransmitto." Translation is that of Colgrave and Mynors.
[143] See Herbert Grundmann, "Litteratus – Illiteratus," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 40 (1958): 1-6; Ludwig Bäuml, "Varieties and Consequences of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy," *Speculum* 55 (1980): 237-65, at 240, n. 6: "The fact, for instance, that Hrabanus Maurus dedicates his *Commentaria in Cantica* to Louis the German…does not support Thompson's conclusion that he was able to read."
[144] Colgrave and Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, Praef., p. 2: "noscendis priorum gestis siue dictis, et maxime mostrae gentis uirorum inlustrium, curam uigilanter inpendis."
[145] Ibid.: "audiendis scripturae sanctae uerbis aurem sedulus accomodas."
[146] Ibid. (emphasis added): "For if history should relate good things of good people, *the careful listener* is impelled to imitate good; if it commemorates the bad deeds of wicked people, *the pious hearer* or *reader* is no less motivated to to avoid what is harmful and perverse and to imitate all the more eagerly those things that he or she has learned are good and worthy in the sight of God."

While the various desires that Bede attributes to Ceolwulf—desire to learn history, desire to disseminate historical knowledge among his people—may have been subject to the distortions of flattery, the preface represents Ceolwulf's interaction with learned Latin texts in a way that is plausible for early medieval kings. Only a handful of earlier Anglo-Saxon kings could likely have read Latin texts.[147] It is also likely, however, that many kings took an interest in history, both divine and otherwise, since they were themselves key actors in that history. An incident from Carolingian Francia, discussed by Mayke De Jong, casts light on the rich middle ground between fully-literate scholars, on the one hand, and a crude stereotype of illiterate warrior-kings, on the other. In 855, Lothar I, grandson of Charlemagne, wrote to the scholar Hrabanus Maurus and "commissioned a liturgical compendium for use on his travels, containing the readings for mass all year round, each accompanied by its own explanatory homily."[148] Lothar (or his letter-writer) assumes that the work will be read aloud to him at mealtimes,[149] and Hrabanus paints the same picture of imperial reception in his ensuing letter of dedication.[150] While Ceolwulf might not have evinced the same interest in the details of biblical exegesis as Lothar, he could nonetheless be viewed as a "quasi-literate" man with access to readers and a genuine interest in history.

In this way, history serves as an extension of the Bible—of which, Bede notes, Ceolwulf is also an eager student—in that it reveals the moral significance of people and deeds. By demonstrating that God's dispensation persists in recent times and operates on people the reader may be connected to in some way, history serves a valuable role as Biblical supplement. In his praise of Ceolwulf's historical interests, Bede implies that his own work provides these "words and deeds…of the illustrious men of our own people." He is also, of course, aware that he is writing to one such man who either is or could become a *uir illuster*, an illustrious man. His preface thus frames Ceolwulf's role as a wise king from two vantage points. On the one hand, Bede praises Ceolwulf's concern for the "spiritual well-being" or "salvation" of his people, a standard feature of wise Christian kingship in the early Middle Ages. On the other hand, Bede imagines Ceolwulf as an eager student among a company of more venerable figures from English history, an individual and undifferentiated member of an audience—a "literary public," in other words—who can identify with these exemplary figures enough to imitate their deeds.

Given the prevalence of kings throughout the *Historia ecclesiastica* and their role in the text as paradigmatic users of practical wisdom, Bede's gesture to "the illustrious men of our people" seems closely related to his frequent invocation of the *ciues regni caelestis*, "citizens of the heavenly kingdom." While that body is vast and eclectic, embracing all true Christians, kings' active participation in the *regnum terrenum* arguably prepares them for their heavenly citizenship. (Indeed, complementary mentions of the two *regna* appear often in the *History*,

[147] Sigibert of the East Angles and Aldfrith of Northumbria were two likely exceptions: see V. H. Galbraith, "The Literacy of the Medieval English Kings," Raleigh Lecture on History, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 21 (1937): 201-38; at 206-8.
[148] Mayke De Jong, "The Empire as *Ecclesia*: Hrabanus Maurus and Biblical *Historia* for Rulers," in Yitzhak Hen and Matthew Innes, eds., *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 191-226; at 191.
[149] Hrabanus Maurus, *Epistolae*, 49, ed. by Ernst Dümmler, in *Epistolae Karolini aeui III,* MGH Epp. 5 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1899), pp. 503-4; at 503.
[150] Ibid., 50, p. 505; qtd. in De Jong, "Empire as *Ecclesia*," 195.

predominantly when discussing kings).[151] In heaven, all of us will be citizens of equal stature, united in our worship of God. In the meantime, however, Bede builds a virtual *regnum* through the episodes in his *Historia ecclesiastica*: a community of wise kings who are already aware of their inherent equality with other the citizens of the heavenly kingdom, but who are given a unique narrative platform on which to display their prudence, their civic virtue, on Earth.

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[151] See, in Colgrave and Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, II.5, p. 148: "Anno ab incarnatione dominica DCXVI, qui est annus uicesimus primus ex quo Augustinus cum sociis ad praedicandum genti Anglorum missus est, Aedilberct rex Cantuariorum post *regnum temporale*, quod L et sex annis gloriosissime tenuerat, aeterna *caelestis regni* gaudia subiit" ("In the year of our Lord 616, which was the twenty-first year after Augustine was sent with his companions to preach to the English, Æthelberht, king of Kent, after holding his *temporal kingdom* for fifty-six years, ascended to the joys of the *heavenly kingdom*"); III.1, p. 212: "Qui uterque rex, ut *terreni regni* infulas sortitus est, sacramenta *regni caelestis*, quibus initiatus erat, anathematizando prodidit" ("No sooner, however, had both kings obtained the scepters of the earthly kingdom, than they betrayed the sacraments of the heavenly kingdom to which they had been initiated"); III.7, p. 232: "Defuncto autem et rege, successit in regnum filius eius Coinualch, qui et fidem ac sacramenta *regni caelestis* suscipere rennuit, et non multo post etiam *regni terrestris* potentiam perdidit" ("When the king died, his son Cenwealh came to the throne, who refused to accept the faith and the sacraments of the heavenly kingdom; not much later, he also lost power over his earthly kingdom"); III.14, p. 254: "Translato ergo ad *caelestia regna* Osualdo, suscepit *regni terrestris* sedem pro eo frater eius Osuiu, iuuenis XXX circiter annorum" ("After Oswald was brought to the heavenly kingdoms, his brother Oswiu, a young man about thirty years old, accepted the throne of the earthly kingdom in his stead"); even, perhaps, a passage on Gregory the Great in II.1, since it describes exercising the papal office as reigning: "His temporibus, id est anno dominicae incarnationis DCV, beatus papa Gregorius, postquam sedem Romanae et apostolicae ecclesiae XIII annos menses sex et dies decem gloriosissime *rexit*, defunctus est, atque ad aeternam *regni caelestis* sedem translatus" ("At that time, that is, in the year of our Lord 605, the blessed pope Gregory died after having gloriously reigned on the throne of the Roman and apostolic Church for thirteen years, six months, and ten days, and he was brought to the eternal throne of the heavenly kingdom"; p. 122). Emphasis added in each quotation.

Chapter Two: Wisdom and Action in *Beowulf*

If Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* imagines a past that is fairly recent and recoverable, reading and mentally inhabiting the world of the poem *Beowulf* requires a much greater leap into alterity. As has often been pointed out, this would have been true for Anglo-Saxon readers as well as contemporary ones.[1] Roy Liuzza helpfully formulates the historical and cultural "tension" that results from the radical disjunction between the poem's world and that of its Anglo-Saxon readers:

> Every vernacular poem [including *Beowulf*] is an act of imagined solidarity with the very past it supplants and erases by the poem's existence in a textual community. Situated on the border between two worlds, every line of it is fictive, appropriated, and to that extent contested, discourse. The tension between monuments and memory in *Beowulf* arises from the ambivalence of its cultural circumstances: a textual simulacrum of an oral poetics, a history of heroic society in a post-conversion, post-migration world.[2]

This chapter explores an intertwined pair of "contested discourses" in *Beowulf*. One of these, the poem's depiction of wisdom, is, I argue, the key point of contact between its representation of a world and its own status as a participant in Anglo-Saxon literary culture. The other, its representation of kingship, brings both the political status of wisdom and the political implications of reading into focus. *Beowulf* imagines a world in which action and reflection are seamlessly integrated. Kings and aristocratic heroes, the paradigmatic human actors in the poem's view of history, are also tasked with interpreting their own action and moral status. While they could not entirely succeed in that task given that they are "pagans" who "did not know the Lord God," the poem demands that we take their attempts seriously.[3] Beowulf and Hrothgar model a natural wisdom that is both practical (bearing out in prudent action) and contemplative (bearing out in reflection on objects the poem considers unchanging, including human society, God, and the relationship between the two). By presenting its aristocratic characters as types of humanity in a universal sense, *Beowulf* invites the reader to identify with them and to cultivate in him- or herself an aristocratic sense of natural virtue.

I: The Problem of Wisdom in *Beowulf*

In the vast archive of scholarship on *Beowulf* produced in the last 150 years, the pagan-Christian divide has often seemed like the most acute disjunction between the poem's legendary setting and the culture in which it was copied and read in about the year 1000.[4] Without disputing the

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[1] See, for example, Renée Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia: Historical Representation in Old English Verse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 3-4.
[2] Roy Liuzza, "*Beowulf*: Monuments, Memory, History," in *Readings in Medieval Texts: Interpreting Old and Middle English Literature*, ed. by David F. Johnson and Elaine Treharne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 91-108; qtd. at 106.
[3] See p. 43, n. 6, below.
[4] On *Beowulf*'s manuscript, the Nowell Codex, see Max Förster, *Die "Beowulf"-Handscrift* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1919); Kenneth Sisam, "The Beowulf Manuscript" and "The Compilation of the Beowulf Manuscript," in his *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 61-4 and 65-96,

fundamental importance of the religious differences between the poet and his or her characters, however, I argue in this section that the problem of *Beowulf*'s participation in Anglo-Saxon literary culture is more productively framed in terms of wisdom than of faith.

Religion has functioned as one of the main lenses through which scholars have examined *Beowulf*'s relationship to its Anglo-Saxon present and to history.[5] Indeed, the narrator refers to and condemns the paganness of his or her characters in no uncertain terms:

> Swylc wæs þeaw hyra
> hæþenra hyht; helle gemundon
> in modsefan, Metod hie ne cuþon,
> dæda Demend, ne wiston hie Drihten God,
> ne hie huru heofena Helm herian ne cuþon
> wuldres Waldend. Wa bið þæm ðe sceal
> þurh sliðne nið sawle bescufan
> in fyres fæþm, frofre ne wenan,
> wihte gewendan![6]

After telling us so expansively all that the characters do *not* know, however, the narrator oddly seems to let the pagan status of the Danes and Geats fall by the wayside. We see them praying to and praising a God who created the world and bestows all that humans enjoy or suffer on it.[7] One of the most influential answers to this apparent conundrum was posed over thirty years ago by Fred C. Robinson, who argued that the poet deploys religious language in a purposely bivalent way to establish a common ground between his characters' paganness and his readers' Christianity.[8] Effectively, Robinson's point had been preempted several years earlier by A. D. Horton and Marijane Osborn, who both argue that the poet depicts his or her characters as

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respectively; R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 4th ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), xxv-xxxv; Andy Orchard, *A Critical Companion to* Beowulf (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), 12-23. While *Beowulf* survives in only one manuscript, it likely went through at least one stage of transmission before being copied around the year 1000: Michael Lapidge, "The Archetype of *Beowulf,*" *Anglo-Saxon England* 29 (2000): 5-41. Linguistic evidence suggests it may date from as early as ca. 700, though the question of its date of composition has been contentious. For some works that touch on this subject, see Colin Chase, ed., *The Dating of "Beowulf"* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981); Ashley Crandall Amos, *Linguistic Means of Determining the Dates of Old English Literary Texts* (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1980); R. D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992); Leonard Neidorf, ed., *The Dating of "Beowulf": A Reassessment* (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2014).

[5] For a short history and bibliography of the religion question, see Edward B. Irving, "Christian and Pagan Elements," in *A "Beowulf" Handbook*, ed. by Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1997), 175-92.

[6] See Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 4th ed., ll. 175-88, pp. 8-9: "Such was their custom, the hope of the heathens; they had hell in their hearts. They were not acquainted with the Creator, the Judge of Deeds, nor did they know the Lord God, neither could they praise the Guardian of Heaven, the Ruler of Glory. Woe to him who must through dire enmity shove his soul into the embrace of the fire, not expect that any comfort at all would ever come about." See further Fred C. Robinson, *"Beowulf" and the Appositive Style* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1985); Larry D. Benson, "The Pagan Coloring of *Beowulf,*" in *Old English Poetry: Fifteen Essays*, ed. by Robert P. Creed (Providence: Brown University Press, 1967), 193-213.

[7] See Marijane Osborn, "The Great Feud: Scriptural History and Strife in *Beowulf*," *PMLA* 93 (1978): 973-81; at 977-80.

[8] On the potential double meanings of *Beowulf*'s religious vocabulary, see Robinson, *"Beowulf" and the Appositive Style*, 29-59.

naturally wise.[9] (Indeed, Osborn affirms, "There is no Christian-pagan 'problem' in *Beowulf*"—a claim that has not gotten the attention it deserves).[10]

The presence of natural wisdom and the absence of revealed wisdom in *Beowulf* raises questions about the status of the knowledge offered by the poem. *Beowulf* does not shy away from big questions about historical causation and the conditions of good or bad kingship. Beowulf and Hrothgar seek to interpret their own place within larger frameworks of morality and history. Their reflections make up a significant part of the poem. Far from being contained and neutralized by a competing framework of interpretation, Beowulf and Hrothgar's wise pagan perspective is difficult to separate from that of the poem itself. Direct discourse melts imperceptibly back into narration, and the tendency of all characters to utter gnomic, impersonal statements creates the impression that *Beowulf* speaks with a single, wise voice rather than a multiplicity of conflicting voices.[11] The wisdom offered *within* the poem thus tends to merge with the wisdom offered *by* the poem to its Christian readers.

Like nearly every other aspect of the poem, however, the depiction of wisdom in *Beowulf* is "situated on the border between two different worlds," and reading it as an Anglo-Saxon text requires some understanding of the historical gap that the poet was challenged to bridge.[12] The specific context in which the *Beowulf* manuscript, the Nowell Codex, was produced and read will likely never be known.[13] However, the evidence we have of Anglo-Saxon textual culture suggests that manuscript production and writing itself were almost entirely the province of clerics, not laypeople.[14] As Patrick Wormald has argued, *Beowulf* may reflect an eighth-century Anglo-Saxon Church that preserved much of the traditional culture of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy and even functioned as an arm of its economic and political interests.[15] As literate Anglo-Saxons, however, the individuals involved in producing the text(s) of *Beowulf*, whether a hypothetical, lost eighth-century version or the only surviving manuscript copy in the Nowell Codex, were participants in a textual culture that was predominantly oriented around the Bible.[16] The narratives that this culture produced and reproduced, including the books of the Old and New Testaments and saints' lives, presuppose the existence of a class at once religious and

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[9] A. D. Horton, "Religious Attitudes in *Beowulf*," in *Essays and Poems Presented to Lord David Cecil*, ed. by W. W. Robson (London: Constable, 1970), 9-17; Osborn, "The Great Feud."
[10] Osborn, "The Great Feud," 979.
[11] On the lack of clear differentiation between the speaking styles of characters in Old English poetry, see Elise Louviot, *Direct Discourse in "Beowulf" and other Old English Narrative Poems* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2016), esp. 174-222; at 194: "It is important to understand that the various 'voices' contributing to [*Beowulf*]…do not constitute true polyphony, at least not in the usual sense."
[12] Liuzza, "*Beowulf*: Monuments, Memory, History," 106 (see p. 42, above).
[13] In his *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1957), N. R. Ker assigned the Nowell Codex to "s. x/xi," that is, between approximately 975 and 1025 (p. 281). Kevin Kiernan has argued that both the poem and its manuscript date from the reign of Cnut (1017-35), while David Dumville argues for a date between 997 and 1016. See Kiernan, *"Beowulf" and the "Beowulf"-Manuscript*, rev. ed. with foreword by Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 13-63; Dumville, "Beowulf Come Lately: Some Notes on the Paleography of the Nowell Codex," *ASNSL* 225 (1988): 49-63.
[14] See C. P. Wormald, "The Uses of Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 27 (1977): 95-114.
[15] Patrick Wormald, "Bede, *Beowulf*, and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy," ch. 2 of his *The Times of Bede: Studies in Early English Christian Society and its Historian*, ed. by Stephen Baxter (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 30-108.
[16] Thus, the Nowell Codex also includes a versification of the Book of Judith and an Old English *Life of St. Christopher*: see Orchard, *A Critical Companion to "Beowulf,"* 21-2.

intellectual who can interpret God's word for others: priests. For most Old Testament kings, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom":[17] wisdom thus entails, as God tells Solomon, "[doing] all that I have commanded thee, and [keeping] my ordinances and judgments."[18] Solomon is, of course, proverbially wise, and that wisdom is associated with his skill in judgment, his composition of proverbs, his decision to build a temple in Jerusalem, and his skill in answering difficult questions.[19] Indeed, many of the wisdom books of the Old Testament were understood as Solomon's works in the early medieval period.[20] However, Solomon's wisdom is crucially announced and authorized by the narrative voice of Deuteronomistic History, a voice that can state unequivocally that God granted Solomon wisdom.[21] The Deuteronomist also spends a substantial portion of the Solomon-narrative describing the exact layout of the First Temple, and one suspects that the story of Solomon's wisdom in part served to remind later kings of the advantages that come from favoring the priesthood.

Kings in Anglo-Saxon narratives are also not typically responsible for interpreting their own histories and duties, which is largely the prerogative of priests, prophets, and clerics. In the Old English poem *Daniel,* which I discuss more below,[22] the titular Jewish wise man interprets God's will for the Babylonian kings Nebuchadnezzar and Balthasar, and the poem's narrator brings the lessons of covenant history to bear on the biblical narrative.[23] Few other Old English poems actually feature kings as major characters. The two *Solomon and Saturn* poems, analogues of a learned Latin and Old English prose genre, feature the Old Testament king Solomon as a participant in a contest of wits with Saturn, described there as a Chaldean.[24] However, Solomon is less a character in these poems than a mouthpiece of assorted wisdom—his status as a king is seemingly conventional and has little bearing on his representation. Within the Old English poetic tradition, *Beowulf* is alone in foregrounding the reflections of kings unaided, unadvised, and uncontradicted by a figure or a voice of clerical authority.

Beowulf's construction of wise kingly and aristocratic voices within a Christian textual culture is made possible by a tendency, ingrained in the Old English poetic tradition itself, to

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[17] Proverbs 9:10.
[18] 1 Kings 9:4.
[19] Described at 1 Kings 3, 1 Kings 4: 32, 1 Kings 5: 7, and 1 Kings 10: 1-7, respectively.
[20] See, for example, Ælfric's treatise on the Old and New Testament, ed. by S. J. Crawford in *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch, Ælfric's Treatise on the Old and New Testament, and his Preface to Genesis*, EETS o.s. 160 (London: Oxford University Press, 1922), 36: "He [i.e. Solomon] gesette þreo bec þurh his snoternisse. An ys *Parabole*, þæt ys 'bigspellboc,' na swilce ge secgað, ac wisdomes bigspell and warnung wið disig, and hu man selost mæg synna forbugan, and þone weg gefaran þe gewissað to Gode. Oþer ys gecweden *Ecclesiastes*, þæt ys on Englisc 'ealra þeoda ræd' and deaflic to gehirenne on healicum gemote. Seo þridde ys gecweden *Cantica Canticorum*, þæt segð on Englisc 'ealra sanga fyrmest'" ("Solomon composed three books through his wisdom. One is *Parabolae*, that is the Book of Proverbs—not in the sense that you mean when you say the word, but wisdom's example and warning against folly, and how one can best avoid sin, and travel on the path that leads to God. The second book is called *Ecclesiastes*, that is in English 'the counsel for all peoples' and one that is fitting to be heard in solemn assemblies. The third one is called *Cantica Canticorum,* which in English means 'the greatest of all songs'").
[21] See Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, JSOT Supplement 15 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1981).
[22] See pp. 66-8, below.
[23] *Daniel,* ed. by George P. Krapp in *The Junius Manuscript,* ASPR 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), pp. 111-32; at pp. 111-2, ll. 1-51.
[24] *Solomon and Saturn*, ed. by Elliott V. K. Dobbie in *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ASPR 6 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), pp. 31-48. For the prose tradition, see James E. Cross and Thomas D. Hill, eds., *The "Prose Solomon and Saturn" and "Adrian and Ritheus"* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), introduction, pp. 3-18.

represent characters as partaking in a shared consciousness of objective truth.[25] In this system of representation, one's perspective is the product of one's unique position within a shared matrix of experience and history, not of one's unique character or psychological make-up.[26] Beowulf and Hrothgar, in common with every other character in the poem, are able to step outside of themselves and reflect on their position within this matrix. The move from particular to universal, subjective to objective, is achieved through gnomic utterance and a rhetoric that moves back and forth between one's own experience and the experiences of others. Next to the dominant model of moral instruction in Anglo-Saxon textual culture, in which correction comes from moral authorities external to one's own experience, *Beowulf* offers a radically different ethics focused on internal deliberation, self-judgment, and self-correction. *Beowulf*'s depiction of self-reflecting and self-judging subjects effectively collapses the distinction between action and contemplation, such that heroic action (the basic subject-matter of its system of historical representation) is also intellectual work.

II: Gnomic Utterance and Heroic Action

The recourse to universal and objective truth in *Beowulf* is crucially enabled by the poem's use of gnomic utterance, my term for a kind of sententious language that has a fluid rather than a fixed form, a literal frame of reference, and a tendency to "leak" out of universals into particulars. Sententious language in *Beowulf* has often been unhelpfully thought of as proverbial and, by extension, fixed, "popular," and self-evidently traditional. By recognizing its status as a vehicle for improvisation and for expressing the speaker's wisdom in the performance of political action, we can better understand the world depicted in *Beowulf* on its own terms, as well as its resonance in Anglo-Saxon literary culture. Gnomic discourse in *Beowulf* offers principles that explain and motivate action, but its adaptability means that those who utter it are not simply putting principles into practice; they are also formulating those principles in original ways. The generative, improvised nature of *Beowulf*ian maxims is supported by a tendency in the poem to describe heroic action in terms of wisdom and of intellectual labor. Beowulf's heroic exploits in the poem are presented as acts within a political sphere—a space of deliberation—in which gnomic wisdom functions as an authorized language, in Pierre Bourdieu's terms.[27]

Beowulf is rife with sententious language: speech-genres that may be variously and confusingly described as maxims, proverbs, aphorisms, *sententiae*, and gnomes.[28] Each of these terms has a separate history and a distinct pattern of usage. Nonetheless, terms also overlap, such

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[25] See n. 11, above; see also Louviot, *Direct Discourse in "Beowulf,"* 255: "Deprived of a singular, stable voice or point of view, the character seems to have no substance of its own. As suggested by the epithets used to describe them, characters find their identity in their function and in relation to other characters. Their interest lies not in their representation of a credible person, but as vectors of an action and a discourse that goes beyond them, as the embodiment of an archetype that has meaning within a certain ideological framework."

[26] On this feature of Old English poetic psychology, see Britt Mize, *Traditional Subjectivities: The Old English Poetics of Mentality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 16-22.

[27] See Pierre Bourdieu, "Authorized Language," ch. 3 of his *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. by John B. Thompson, trans. by Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 106-16.

[28] An indispensable introduction to sententious discourse in *Beowulf* is Susan E. Deskis, *"Beowulf" and the Medieval Proverb Tradition* (Tempe, AZ: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1996). For the problem of defining various genres of sententious speech, see esp. the introduction, pp. 1-10.

that a single sentence may often be described in more than one way.[29] Each term generally refers to a single sentence, often pithy or punchy, that either makes a general claim or enjoins a certain course of action. (Sententious language can thus have either a propositional or an imperative modality). Sententious language refers to universals, not particulars, and tends to address a commonly-recognized human behavior or an accepted truth. Apart from the aphorism, which is often associated with literary witticism and *belles-lettres*, sententious language generally has a low status in present-day intellectual and literary culture.[30] Common smears include "trite," "commonplace," and "banal."[31]

While *Beowulf*'s sententious language has been the subject of substantial scholarship in recent decades, it remains somewhat misunderstood because of its radical difference from both popular and literary proverb traditions. Gnomic speech in the poem has typically been understood as either a body of self-evident platitudes demonstrating the poem's didactic function or, occasionally and more interestingly, as a canny and coded way of addressing politically sensitive situations.[32] Susan Deskis has written the only monograph dedicated to the subject of *Beowulf*'s sententious language.[33] Her treatment of the material through the prism of the medieval proverb tradition usefully reminds us of the wide currency of the poem's statements about God and human behavior, but it frequently runs up against two problems: first, her examples of *Beowulf*ian "proverbs" or "*sententiae*" often have no close analogues in the medieval texts she cites (apart from other Old English poems); and second, they sometimes fail to meet the strict definition of sententious speech because they refer to particulars, not universals.[34] One larger issue with viewing *Beowulf*'s sententious passages as proverbs is that it creates a false impression of fixity and of folk-wisdom. Ask a present-day person to think of a proverb, and the answer may be something like, "A stitch in time saves nine." Statements like this, also known as "old saws," have a fixed and metaphorical form and mark the speaker as somewhat traditional and possibly elderly. Sophisticated they are not.

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[29] See Paul Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999), 41-60.

[30] See Henry Fairlie, "The Decline of Proverbs," *The Washington Post*, Outlook, 21 Jan. 1979, accessed 6 Apr. 2019, online at https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1979/01/21/the-decline-of-proverbs/401a0131-d289-41b1-9468-2dcce9a771b4/?utm_term=.d4936044b7a3.

[31] See Tom Shippey, "'A Fund of Wise Sayings': Proverbiality in Tolkien," in his *Roots and Branches: Selected Papers on Tolkien*, ed. by Thomas Honegger, Cormarë Series 11, (Zürich: Walking Tree Publishers, 2007), 303-19; at 306: "It is particularly true of good proverbs (and this is what Lord Chesterfield and his fashionable successors have failed to recognise) that they have an absolutely obvious, trite, banal meaning on the surface, but another one, often a harsh or unwelcome one, buried underneath it."

[32] On wisdom's self-evident value as traditional moral instruction, see Kemp Malone, "Words of Wisdom in *Beowulf,*" in *Humaniora: Essays in Literature, Folklore, Bibliography Honoring Archer Taylor on his Seventieth Birthday,* ed. by Wayland D. Hand and Gustave O. Arlt (Locust Valley, NY: J. J. Augustin, 1960), pp. 180-94; at 194: "In introducing words of wisdom into his narrative, moreover, [the *Beowulf* poet] was doing nothing new, and the wisdom itself was not original with him"; on the political value of the indirectness of gnomic speech in *Beowulf*, see T. A. Shippey, "Maxims in Old English Narrative: Literary Art or Traditional Wisdom?" in *Oral Tradition/Literary Tradition: A Symposium,* ed. by Hans Bekker-Nielsen (Odense: Odense University Press, 1977), 28-46.

[33] Deskis, *"Beowulf" and the Medieval Proverb Tradition*.

[34] Deskis herself readily admits when a statement does not meet the strict definition of a proverb or *sententia* but is nonetheless "influenced by proverbial expression in…structural and thematic ways" (Ibid., 65). The frequency with which this happens, however, suggests that comparison to proverbs may not capture the way sententious language works in the poem.

In *Beowulf*, by contrast, sententious speech is often the result of improvisation, both formal and substantive, and it has the status of intellectual discourse. To conveniently designate these characteristics of *Beowulf*'s sententious language, I will refer to this language as "gnomic," borrowing a term that has no necessary reference to circulation in a fixed form.[35] Some of this improvisation arises from the challenges posed by the metrical rules of classical Old English poetry. These unwritten rules, adduced by Eduard Sievers in the late nineteenth century, require alliteration on stressed words in certain positions in each line and allow for only a limited number of patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables.[36] The similarity between sententious material in *Beowulf* and its analogues in other texts is often so tenuous as to make it seem likely that a statement is original to *Beowulf*.

Indeed, fluidity and originality are not accidental qualities of *Beowulf*'s gnomic discourse, but intrinsic aspects of how wise speech operates in the poem. Its maxims often seem like attempts to generalize from a specific example. Indeed, their raw, unfinished quality may even foreground the process of generalization. While Beowulf is recounting his Danish exploits to Hygelac, he mentions Hrothgar's daughter Freawaru, who, he notes, is promised in marriage to Ingeld, the son of a man who had been killed by the Danes in an earlier conflict.[37] Beowulf is skeptical, however, about the power of this alliance to settle the feud between the Danes and Ingeld's people, the Heaðo-Beardan:

> Oft seldan hwær
> æfter leodhryre   lytle hwile
> bongar bugeð,   þeah seo bryd duge.[38]

If pithiness and clarity are what Beowulf is aiming at with this gnomic utterance, he has failed miserably. If his goal, however, is a striking performance of rhetorical prowess, he has arguably succeeded. Two lines feature alliteration beyond what is required by Old English poetic meter, including a cross pattern (l, h, l, h) in line 2030 and double alliteration (b, b, b) in line 2031. The combination of so many qualifying adverbs—"often," "rarely," "anywhere," "a short time"—makes this sentence difficult to construe. Commentators have often thrown up their hands and argued that we must literally take the sentence apart to understand it.[39] Noting the interpretive difficulties posed by the stunning half-line 2029b, which features three successive adverbs and nothing else, including two that contradict each other ("often" and "rarely," *oft seldan*), Susan Deskis suggests that the half-line was added "in order to increase the perceived authority of the statement" because it contains "elements of spatial and temporal generalization," proverbial markers.[40] While Deskis refers to the "authority" of the *poet*, however, Beowulf's maxim is also part of his representation as a character: he offers it to respond implicitly to Hrothgar's *ræd* or

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[35] See Blanche Colton Williams, *Gnomic Poetry in Anglo-Saxon* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1914), 8-9.
[36] For an accessible entry point into Sieversian metrics, see Jun Terasawa, *Old English Metre: An Introduction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).
[37] See Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 4th ed., introduction, lv-lvii.
[38] Ibid., ll. 2029b-31, p. 69: "It rarely happens anywhere that the deadly spear lies still for very long after a national calamity, even if the bride is worthy."
[39] The editors of *Klaeber's "Beowulf"* break it down into two related statements: "(1) 'often (always, as a rule, by litotes) the spear will rest idle only a short time'; (2) 'it seldom happens that the spear rests (for any length of time).'" See p. 230, n. 2029b-31.
[40] Deskis, *"Beowulf" and the Medieval Proverb Tradition*, 134.

"plan" of settling a feud by his daughter's marriage. The maxim's form is shaped by the meter of Old English poetry. In particular, its first half-line, which Deskis notes could be removed without material damage to its meaning, is actually a b-verse. This means that it is required to alliterate with the half-line immediately before it, *sæcca gesette*. Because of the maxim's dependency on the metrical context of line 2029, along with its knotty complexity, it reads like the spontaneous product of Beowulf's ability to generalize from a specific example to a wider knowledge of history.[41]

As commentators on the poem have noted, *Beowulf* tends to wrap its moments of "action"—in particular, Beowulf's combats with Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the dragon—in a thick tissue of interpretation and historical detail.[42] What has not been widely recognized, however, is that this tendency is grounded in the poem's language of heroic action itself. Slaying Grendel is not a "heroic quest," a self-evident goal for the hero: it is framed instead as the result of a wise plan.[43] From the moment that he steps down onto the shore of Denmark, Beowulf portrays his mission as one of offering counsel to Hrothgar. Interrogated by the Danish coastguard, he describes his national and familial identity and then explains his reason for coming to Denmark:

Ic þæs Hroðgar mæg
þurh rumne sefan ræd gelæran
hu he frod ond god feond oferswyðeþ.[44]

Beowulf effectively offers his mental services, his intellectual labor: "I can offer Hrothgar counsel about that with a spacious [i.e. wise] mind." While R. D. Fulk translates the half-line *þurh rumne sefan* as "with candid intentions," the description of a mind or a thought elsewhere in the poetic corpus as *rum* or its synonym *sid*, both literally denoting "wide" or "spacious," denotes wisdom.[45] Beowulf's description of his mission as offering counsel, *ræd gelæran*, is both canny and true to the poem's conception of heroic action. He cannot simply say, "I can defeat the

[41] This is, in fact, the opposite of a rhetorical effect in Old English poetry proposed by T. A. Shippey called "proverbiousness" which mimics proverbiality and accounts for the need to produce traditional-sounding wisdom in a challenging poetic form: proverbious statements, in other words, "sound as if they might be (ought to be, perhaps one day will become) acceptedly proverbial." T. A. Shippey, "*The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* as Wisdom Poetry," in *Companion to Old English Poetry*, ed. Hans Aertsen and Rolf H. Bremmer (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994), 145-58; at 151.

[42] See Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 4th ed., xciii: "At times one suspects that the poet and his audience cared just as much about the social world of *Beowulf*, with its gifts, speeches, protocols, ceremonies, and legendary associations, as about the fights with monsters."

[43] For a classic account of the logic of knightly adventures in medieval romance, see Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), ch. 6, "The Knight Sets Forth," pp. 123-42. Morton Bloomfield offers a compelling and rather Auerbachian reading of *Beowulf* in the context of courtly romance in "Episodic Motivation and Marvels in Epic and Romance," in his *Essays and Explorations: Studies in Ideas, Language, and Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 96-128.

[44] Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 4th ed., ll. 277b-85, p. 12: "I can offer Hrothgar counsel about that with a wise mind, how he, wise and good, can overpower the enemy."

[45] Ibid., l. 1726a, p. 58: "sidne sefan" ("broad mind"); *Elene*, ed. by G. P. Krapp in *The Vercelli Book*, ASPR Vol. II (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), l. 376a, p, 76: "sidne sefan" ("broad mind"); Ibid., l. 1240b, p. 100: "rumran geþeaht" ("a roomier thought").

monster and purge Heorot": as the next several hundred lines show, he must first convince Hrothgar of his suitability for prosecuting the feud with Grendel.[46]

Beowulf's conversation with the coastguard shows that even interactions that might appear routine, official, or administrative—in this case, an interview with the ancient equivalent of a customs officer—can be understood as opportunities for the exchange of wisdom. Gnomic utterance serves as the medium of such an exchange. As he demands to know the identity of these armed strangers, especially the intimidating Beowulf, the coastguard also offers a modified maxim:

> Nu ge feorbuend,
> mereliðende, minne gehyrað
> anfealdne geþoht: ofost is selest
> to gecyðanne hwanan eowre cyme syndon.[47]

The coastguard frames his question, not as a request, but as a proposition: "It is best to reveal where you come from as quickly as possible." The statement does not qualify as gnomic because it refers to the specific context and the addressee ("where *you* come from"), but the phrase *ofost is selest,* taken by itself, does resemble a number of poetic maxims.[48] While this statement may have the sound of a veiled threat, parallels from other Old English poems suggest that Beowulf may have understood it as counsel. The same phrase, *ofost is selest*, occurs in the Old English *Exodus* when Moses is counselling the Israelites to hasten over the dry floor of the Red Sea away from the pursuing Egyptians.[49] It also occurs in the Old English *Andreas*, in a scene reminiscent of the deadly sequel to the episode in Exodus, when the Egyptians are drowned in the returning waters of the Red Sea: the pagan and cannibalistic Mermedonians are being drowned in a flood that miraculously welled from the base of a column at St. Andrew's request, and one of them urges his fellows to release the captive Andrew and pray God for relief.[50] From these other

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[46] See Hrothgar's granting of temporary possession of Heorot to Beowulf, in Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf*,*"* 4th ed., ll. 658-60a, p. 24: "Hafa nu ond geheald husa selest, / gemyne mærþo, mægenellen cyð, / waca wið wraþum!" ("Have now and hold the best of houses, keep fame in mind, make known your valor, stay up in waiting for the hostile one!"). The phrase "hafa nu ond geheald" has an obvious similarity to the marriage vow formula, "to have and to hold," and while it has legal uses in Old English, it also has a wider distribution. See Paul Acker, *Revising Oral Theory: Formulaic Composition in Old English and Old Icelandic Verse* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 6-11.

[47] R. D. Fulk et al., eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 4th ed., ll. 254-7, p. 11: "Now, you foreigners, sea-travellers, hear my honest thought: quickest is best to reveal where you come from."

[48] A number of maxims found in the poems titled *Maxims I* and *Maxims II* by editors take the form, "X *bið* [superlative]," with the closest parallel being found in *Maxims I*, ed. by George P. Krapp and Elliot V. K. Dobbie in *The Exeter Book*, ASPR 3 (Morningside Heights, NY: Columbia University Press, 1936), l. 80b, p, 159: "Dom biþ selast" ("Glory is best"). Old English has two verbs that mean "to be"; the example in *Maxims I*, unlike the coastguard's line, uses the one (*beon*) that has particular reference to unchanging truths (see Marie Nelson, "'Is' and 'Ought' in the Exeter Book Maxims," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 45 (1981): 109-21).

[49] *Exodus*, ed. by George P. Krapp in *The Junius Manuscript*, ll. 293b-6, p. 99: "Ofest is selost / þæt ge of feonda fæðme weorðen, / nu se agend up arærde / reade streamas in randgebeorh" ("It is best that you escape from the enemy's grasp as quickly as possible, now that God has lifted up the red streams as a protecting shield").

[50] *Andreas,* ed. by George P. Krapp in *The Vercelli Book*, ASPR 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), p. 46, ll. 1562b-7a: "Þæt is her swa cuð, / is hit mycle selre, þæs þe ic soð talige, / þæt we hine alysan of leoðbendum, / ealle anmode, (ofost is selost), / ond us þone halgan helpe biddan, / geoce ond frofre" ("It is obvious that it is far better, as I reckon, that we free him from fetters, all of us in accord, (haste is best), and pray to the holy one for help, for succor and relief").

attributions, the phrase *ofost is selest* would not seem to connote a threat: instead, it is usually offered as counsel to members of one's own group, albeit urgent counsel. The Danish coastguard also prefaces his veiled request with an actual request that the Geats "hear my honest thought."[51] That he calls this request a *geþoht*, a "thought," fits with the propositional modality of his actual request. By the same token, Beowulf is not just looking to have his passport stamped and allowed entry into Denmark: after explaining why he and his men have come, he requests of the coastguard, "Wes þu us larena god" ("Be generous to us with your counsels").[52]

As Beowulf undertakes his heroic acts against the Grendelkin, he and other characters continue to characterize his behavior as a wise counsel or plan of action. Hrothgar even uses Beowulf's word *ræd* back at him after Grendel's mother has come to the hall and taken a Danish warrior, Æschere, in exchange for her son's killing by Beowulf. After telling Beowulf the location of the Grendelkin's lair, Hrothgar says, "Nu is se ræd gelang / eft æt þe anum,"[53] which R. D. Fulk translates, "Now the course of action is again dependent on you alone."[54] While "course of action" or a similar phrase is required for smooth translation into modern English, it also lacks something of the mental nature of *ræd*, which can be an inner thought or plan, a proferred thought (i.e., a counsel), or an enacted thought (i.e., a decree, a course of action).[55] Beowulf must determine what to do himself and enact that plan. Hrothgar had already depicted Beowulf's defeat of Grendel as a wise act, a mental accomplishment. On the day after this defeat, the Danes and the Geats compete in athletic games and a *scop* in Hrothgar's court compares Beowulf's *sið*, his victorious exploit, to the hero Sigemund's earlier triumphs. After this period of general festivity, the characters' and the poet's focus turns to pondering the meaning of Beowulf's victory. Many go to look at Grendel's severed arm hanging in Heorot, a *searowundor*, "curious wonder."[56] Hrothgar offers a formal appraisal of Beowulf's deed which, like the conversation between Beowulf and the coastguard, interprets heroic action in terms of wisdom:

> Nu scealc hafað
> þurh Drihtnes miht dæd gefremede
> ðe we ealle ær ne meahton
> snyttrum besyrwan.[57]

While Hrothgar's remark could be read as saying that thinking has failed where acting eventually prevailed, such a negative or minimizing view of *snyttru,* wisdom, would be out of character for the poem. *Snyttru* refers elsewhere in the poem to the mental gifts that God gives to men

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[51] Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* ll. 254b-6a, p. 11: "Nu ge feorbuend, /mereliðende, minne gehyrað / anfealdne geþoht." For *anfeald* as "honest," see *The Dictionary of Old English Online: A to I*, *s.v.* "ān-feald," 4.b., accessed June 8, 2017, http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/.
[52] Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 4th ed., l. 269b, p. 11.
[53] Ibid*.*, ll. 1376-7a, p. 48.
[54] R. D. Fulk, trans., *The "Beowulf" Manuscript: Complete Texts and "The Fight at Finnsburg*," Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 3 (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2010), 177.
[55] Joseph Bosworth et al., "An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online," ed. Thomas Northcote Toller and Others, *rǽd*, Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, 21 Mar. 2010, accessed 6 Jun. 2017, http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/025462.
[56] Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 4th ed., l. 920, p. 33.
[57] Ibid, ll. 939b-42a, p. 33: "Now a man has accomplished, through God's power, a deed that none of us were able to wisely devise before."

(associated here with successful rule), the skill needed to compose a narrative poem, and the mental quality needed to be a successful warrior and eventually ruler. [58] Given its specific connection at two of these other moments with skill in ruling, *snyttru* is unlikely to be a means of denigrating Hrothgar and his counselors' approach to solving the Grendel problem: rather than using too much *snyttru*, they have not used enough, or at least not used it correctly.

The inseparability of heroic action from counsel and wisdom in *Beowulf* suggests that successful heroic action is also prudent action: it results from wise deliberation.[59] Prudence, or practical wisdom, has an intimate connection to political wisdom: in addition to a widespread early medieval tendency, usually untheorized, to identify wise rulers as prudent,[60] Aristotle even affirms that the two kinds of wisdom are "the same state of mind," but differ in that practical wisdom consists in "knowing what is good for oneself," while political wisdom consists in knowing what is good for each individual in the city, i.e. the political community.[61] Discussion of the poem's representation of Migration-Age society, however, tends to proceed along a broadly anthropological track which is not conducive to a political reading. *Beowulf* has often been read against other "archaic" or "early" societies depicted by distant observers, whether that is the Roman Tacitus, writing in the first century CE, or modern anthropologists who have done fieldwork on tribal societies.[62] Such work either assumes or asserts that the poem depicts a prestate society in which human custom and law are understood as inseparable from nature and are equally immune to alteration. In this anthropological framework, law, morality, nature, and religion form a seamless body of custom within archaic societies that makes critique, dissent, and even social division impossible to imagine.[63] The related focus on the "heroic ethos" and "heroic

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[58] Ibid., l. 1726b, p. 58; Ibid., l. 1706a; l. 872b, p. 31.

[59] *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle,* trans. by Sir David Ross (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), VI.7, p. 146: "Practical wisdom on the other hand is concerned with things human and things about which it is possible to deliberate; for we say this is above all the work of the man of practical wisdom, to deliberate well…The man who is without qualification good at deliberating is the man who is capable of aiming with calculation at the best for man of things attainable by action."

[60] See, e.g., Sedulius Scottus, *De rectoribus Christianis,* ed. by R. W. Dyson (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 2010), p. 58 (emphasis added): "Sex autem modis bonus rector sese laudabiliter regit: … quarto cum gloriosorum principum *prudentiam* simul et uerba…sapificet" ("The good ruler rules himself in six praiseworthy ways: … fourth, when he tastes the *prudence* and the words of glorious princes"). For a negative example, see the earliest *Uita S. Dunstani*, ed. and trans. by Michael Winterbottom and Michael Lapidge in *The Early Lives of St. Dunstan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012), 1-110; at 66-7 (emphasis added): "Post hunc surrexit Eaduuig, filius uidelicet Eadmundi regis, aetate quidem iuuenis *paruaque regnandi prudentia* pollens, licet in utraque plebe regum numeros nominaque suppleret electus" ("After Eadred arose Eadwig, King Edmund's son, young in years *and with small wisdom in ruling*, although he had been elected to make up the line of royal names in both peoples").

[61] See *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. by Ross, VI.8, p. 147.

[62] See, e.g., John M. Hill, *The Cultural World of "Beowulf"* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1995); Robert E. Bjork, "Speech as Gift in *Beowulf*," *Speculum* 69 (1994): 993-1022. Anthropological approaches to *Beowulf* can offer much of value. However, one goal of this chapter is to show that *Beowulf* can and should also be read through a historicist lens that keeps Anglo-Saxon textual culture and political thought in mind.

[63] See, for example, René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. by Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 298 (emphasis in original): "'Conservative' is too weak a word to descrive the inflexibility of spirit and fear of change that characterize societies in which the sacred holds sway…There is no question of making a *value judgment* of the existing order, of trying to *decide on, evaluate,* or *manipulate* the 'system' in some way. The primitive mind would regard such endeavors as both impious and insane, guaranteed to provoke the violent retribution of the gods"

society," which has enjoyed wider currency in *Beowulf* studies, also assumes social cohesion and brackets the question of the hero's position in hierarchies of wealth, class, and political power.[64]

However, *Beowulf* cannot be read as anything like an objective description of Migration-Age society: for one thing, it occludes the life-experience of the majority of the Danish and Geats, who were likely peasant farmers.[65] Its total focus on a small, interrelated class of aristocratic warriors means that it can scarcely imagine social difference or conflict; we, as readers, know better. I suggest that Anglo-Saxon readers would have known better, too—that *Beowulf* would have been understood as material for the performance of aristocratic identity. It is also crucial, however, that *Beowulf* depicts the experience of its characters as universal, and therefore representative of all humans as social creatures. These two features of the poem's characters—their actual power to change the course of history by their deliberations, and their assumed universality—make them a true political class. Heroic action is not somehow opposed to prudent action, as much scholarship on *Beowulf* seems to presuppose.[66] Instead, it occurs within a political space—a space of deliberation about how to achieve the common good, whether that means freedom from a monster's ravages or the settlement of a dispute between nations.

III: First- and Third-Person Wisdom and the Moral Framing of Kingship

I now turn to the moment in *Beowulf* that most pushes at the boundary of the moral discourse on kingship that circulated in the early Middle Ages—the centerpiece of the *Beowulf* poet's project of imagining a self-reflecting, self-critiquing royal voice. If the characters' gnomic speech and equation of heroic action with wisdom suggest the possibility for kings and aristocratic warriors to interpret their own action authoritatively, the speech of admonition commonly known as "Hrothgar's Sermon" displays a more audacious willingness to occupy the space of Anglo-Saxon moral discourse on power, tyranny, and sin.[67] Excerpts from contemporary moral instruction offered to kings and an intriguingly similar moment in the Book of Daniel suggest what was innovative about Hrothgar's Sermon within the context of early medieval textual culture: it shows us a king meditating on his own power and its limits. The Sermon's intricate sequence of exempla and historical frames of reference mingle subjective experience with objective distance.

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[64] The concept of the "heroic" appears to have been reified in scholarship with little concern for the problem of inferring categories of Anglo-Saxon social, moral, religious, or political thought. See, e.g., George Clark, "*Beowulf* as a Philosophical Poem," *Florilegium* 25 (2008): 1-27, which assumes the existence of a "heroic faith," "heroic world view," and "heroic age." There is far more evidence for the existence of an informal "chivalric code" in twelfth and thirteenth century texts than there is for a "heroic ethos" in Anglo-Saxon England. See Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 1-18.

[65] The existence of kings, and thus of hierarchy, presupposes the existence of relatively stable landholding and settled agriculture. On the connection between these phenomena, see Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), ch. 6, "Political Breakdown and State-Building in the North," 303-82.

[66] See, for example, John Leyerle, "Beowulf the Hero and the King," *Medium Ævum* 34 (1965): 89-102.

[67] Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 4th ed., ll. 1700-84, pp. 57-60. As the editors of *Klaeber's "Beowulf"* note at p. 213, this title was first applied to the speech by Ludwig Ettmüller in his edition of the poem, *Carmen de Beovulfi Gautarum regis rebus praeclare gestis atque interitu, quale fuerit ante quam in manus interpolatoris, monachi Vestsaxonici, inciderat* (Zürich: Zürcher & Fürrer, 1875); at 136. Because the name is the most convenient one for the speech and in widespread use, I occasionally use it without quotation marks and with the word "Sermon" capitalized to reflect its presence in a proper name.

By combining a universalizing, gnomic framework with material for a specific critique of kingship, *Beowulf* asks its readers to imagine themselves as potential kings while also allowing them to maintain a critical and clerical distance.

After Beowulf has successfully prosecuted the feud with the Grendelkin by killing Grendel's mother, Hrothgar offers a speech that appraises Beowulf's actions and reflects on the limits of his own power. The speech comes roughly halfway through the poem and at a moment of summation and reflection in the plot: at the end of Beowulf's Danish adventure, the first of the poem's two major sections. Like his speech following Beowulf's first victory, Hrothgar utters his "Sermon" immediately after gazing upon a physical remnant of Beowulf's combat, a memento of his victory: the hilt of an ancient sword that Beowulf has just used to kill Grendel's mother. As the ancient property of Grendel's monstrous family, the hilt is a visible token (*tacn,* in the poem) of an epoch-making transition of power, a *translatio imperii.*[68] To drive the point home, the hilt is even a kind of text that discloses "the origin of the ancient strife"—a possible reference to Cain's killing of Abel, understood in the poem as the origin of the monstrous Grendelkin.[69] The narration makes much of the sword-hilt while also leaving its exact character, along with the nature of Hrothgar's understanding of it, ambiguous. It is not clear what exactly its inscription has to say about the "origin of the ancient strife" apart from the (unstated) name of person for whom the sword was made. We also cannot tell whether Hrothgar can read this inscription or understand the precise historical import of the sword-hilt.[70] A tantalizing paratactical construction leaves the impression that Hrothgar may have read the inscription but stops short of saying that he did:

> Hroðgar maðelode; hilt sceawode,
> ealde lafe. On ðæm wæs or writen
> fyrngewinnes.[71]

Hrothgar's near-reading of the inscription is the clearest nod the poem gives to textual interpretation, the dominant paradigm of intellectual engagement for its Anglo-Saxon readers. It is no accident that it musters textual authority at this moment, just before Hrothgar makes a speech that invokes key topics of Anglo-Saxon homiletics and moral instruction. If we interpret the "origin of the ancient strife" as the story of Cain's murder of Abel, the hilt could even stand in for the foundational text of early medieval intellectual culture: the Bible.

Before discussing the way that Hrothgar's Sermon reimagines the situation and application of early medieval discourse on wise kingship, it would be useful to summarize its rather intricate structure. Hrothgar begins by (ap)praising Beowulf as a great man and predicting that he will one day be a source of comfort to his people, presumably as their king. He then moves into a counterexample of failed kingship, his own distant predecessor Heremod. Then, Hrothgar moves out to a general paradigm of how a case like Heremod's can happen: God grants

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[68] See Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 4th ed., l. 1654, p. 56. On *translatio imperii* in a medieval context, see Jacques Le Goff, *La civilisation de l'Occident médieval* (Paris: B. Arthaud, 1964), 353-59.

[69] Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 4th ed., ll. 1688b-89a: "or…fyrngewinnes"; Ruth Mellinkoff, "Cain's Monstrous Progeny in *Beowulf*: Part I, Noachic Tradition," *ASE* 8 (1979): 143-62.

[70] See Seth Lerer, *Literacy and Power in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 158-94; Osborn, "The Great Feud."

[71] Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 4th ed., ll. 1687-9a, p. 57: "Hrothgar spoke; he gazed at the hilt, the ancient artifact. On it was written the origin of the ancient strife."

someone great power and happiness, until he cannot imagine any other way and is assaulted in his mind by pride, described as the devil's arrows. He stops performing his duties as king, and eventually dies, as all men do. This leads into a passage of direct exhortation to Beowulf about the inevitability of death and decline. Hrothgar then brings his narrative back to himself, noting that he had ruled for fifty years and thought "that I had no enemy under heaven's vault"—until "a reversal of that came to me in my homeland, grief after celebration."[72] Finally, he thanks God that his reign has survived Grendel's attacks, and enjoins Beowulf to sit down to a feast.

As a speech addressed to a (future) king on the subject of how to rule wisely, virtuously, and successfully, Hrothgar's Sermon can be classified as a *speculum principum*, a mirror for princes—in this case, a particular prince.[73] Moral instruction aimed at kings or about kingship circulated in a variety of generic forms in the early Middle Ages, including letters,[74] excerptable passages from more general treatises on Christian behavior,[75] and texts that were entirely dedicated to the subject of kingship—*specula principum* proper, which were chiefly a Frankish phenomenon of the ninth century.[76] While these genres have a variety of forms and rhetorical situations, the discourse on ideal kingship found within them tends to focus on a related set of topics. In particular, these texts often cite Biblical exempla of kings who either profited (e.g. David and Solomon)[77] or lost power (e.g. Joash and Solomon's descendents)[78] due to their moral status and their stance towards divine law and religious practice. In doing so, early medieval *specula principum* extend and refine the Old Testament historical argument that rulers who follow God's laws prosper, while wicked rulers—and their subjects—are defeated in battle and afflicted with disease, famine, and other evils.[79]

These texts are fundamentally shaped by their clerical perspective: even when the personal note of exhortation is absent, the author's ability to take a critical stance on kingship is founded on the presumption of his distinctness from that role, his status as an ordained interpreter of God's law. A letter addressed to Æthelbald, king of Mercia in ca. 745-6 by the religious reformer Boniface and his fellow bishops showcases this feature of Latin moral instruction for kings. It opens by noting that the letter-writers have prayed for the king to rule

[72] Ibid., ll. 1769-70a, p. 60: "Swa ic Hring-Dena hund missera / weold under wolcnum"; ll. 1772b-5: "þæt ic me ægnigne / under swegles begong gesacan ne tealde. / Hwæt, me þæs on eþle edwenden cwom, / gyrn æfter gomene."

[73] On the early medieval Latin tradition of *specula principum*, see H. H. Anton, *Fürstenspiegel und Herrscherethos in der Karolingerzeit*, Bonner Historische Forschungen 32 (Bonn, 1968). On the vernacular Irish tradition, which is arguably distinct from the Latin, see Roland Mitchell Smith, "The *Speculum Principum* in Early Irish Literature," *Speculum* 2 (1927): 411-45.

[74] See, for instance, the letter from an unnamed bishop to an unnamed Frankish king in ca. 645, ed. by Wilhelm Gundlach in *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini aevi I*, MGH Epp. 3 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1892), ep. 15, pp. 457-60; the letter of Cathwulf to Charlemagne from 775, ed. by Ernst Dümmler in *Epistolae Karolini aevi II*, MGH Epp. 4 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1895), pp. 501-4; Letter from Boniface, Wera, Burghard, Werberht, Abel, and Wilbald to Æthelbald, ed. by Gundlach in *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini aevi I*, 339-45.

[75] See esp. the ninth section of the treatise *De xii abusiuis saeculi*, ed. by Siegmund Hellmann (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1909), pp. 51-3, on the *rex iniquus* ("unjust king").

[76] The earliest full-length *specula principum* are: *Via regia* by Smaragdus of St. Mihiel (ca. 812-15); *De institutione regia* by Jonas of Orléans (834); *De rectoribus Christianis* by Sedulius Scottus (ca. 859); *De regis persona et regio ministerio* by Hincmar of Reims (ca. 870-77).

[77] See *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini aevi I*, ed. by Gundlach, ep. 15, pp. 457-60.

[78] Solomon's descendents: see Hellmann, ed., *De xii abusiuis*, 53; Joash: see Bertram Colgrave, ed., *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), 40.

[79] This principle is set out clearly in I Kings 9: 3-9. See further Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*.

piously and wisely. They pose as devout, concerned, yet distant religious figures and address the king in somewhat condescending terms:

> Quando autem aliqua dilectione uestrae iniuria de statu regni uestri uel euentu bellorum facta aut, quod maius est, de salute animae periculosum damnum perpetratum per auditum ad nos usque peruenerit, merore [*sic*] et tristitia nos cruciat.[80]

After briefly praising Æthelbald for giving generous alms to the poor in his realm, the bishops get to the point of their letter: they have heard that the king has not married "a lawful wife"; moreover, he has had sexual congress with consecrated nuns and despoiled monasteries of their wealth. Near the end of the letter, the bishops remind Æthelbald of the sin and ensuing punishment of two earlier English kings, including Æthelbald's direct predecessor Ceolred:

> Hi duo reges [i.e. Ceolredi regis Mercionum et Osredi regis Derorum et Berniciorum] haec duo peccata maxima in prouinciis Anglorum diabolico instinctu suis exemplis sceleratis contra praecepta evangelica et apostolica salvatoris nostri publice facienda monstraverunt. Et in istis peccatis commorantes, id est in stupratione et adulterio nonnarum et fractura monasteriorum, iusto iudicio Dei damnati, de culmine regali huius vitae abiecti et inmatura et terribili morte praeventi, a luce perpetua extranei, in profundum inferni et tartarum abyssi demersi sunt. Nam Ceolredum, precessorem venerande celsitudinis tuae...apud comites suos splendide epulantem malignus spiritus, qui eum ad fiduciam dampnandae legis Dei suadendo pellexit, peccantem subito *in insaniam mentis convertit*; ut sine paenitentia et confessione *furibundus et amens* et cum diabolis sermocinans et Dei sacerdotes abhominans de hac luce sine dubio ad tormenta inferni migravit. Osredum quoque spiritus luxoriae fornicantem et per monasteria nonnarum sacratas virgines stuprantem et furentem agitavit; usque quod ipse gloriosum et iuvenilem vitam et ipsam luxoriosam animam contemptibili et despecta morte perdidit.[81]

The bishops assume total control over the moral interpretation of these events: Ceolred and Osred were punished by God for these sins—the same ones being committed now by Æthelred—by being "de culmine regali huius vitae abiecti" and "in profundum inferni et tartarum abyssi demersi."[82] Next, the bishops turn back to their addressee and exhort him passionately:

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[80] Letter from Boniface et al. to Æthelbald, ed. by Gundlach, 340: "Whenever we hear of any misfortune coming to your grace, either in the state of your kingdom or in the outcome of warfare, or, what is even more serious, we hear of some dangerous harm to the salvation of your soul, we are stricken by grief and sadness."

[81] Ibid., 343-4: "These two kings [i.e. Ceolred, king of Mercia, and Osred, king of Deira and Bernicia] publicly demonstrated these two very grave sins in the provinces of the Angles at the devil's instigation, committing crimes against the evangelic and apostolic commands of our Savior. And dwelling in those sins, that is in the rape of, and adultery with, nuns and the breach of monasteries, damned by a just judgment of God, cast down from their position as kings in this life and barred by sudden and terrible deaths, estranged from the eternal light, they were plunged into the depths of hell and the chasm of the abyss. For...an evil spirit lured Ceolred, the predecessor of your venerable highness, as he was feasting splendidly among his nobles, suddenly drove him insane as he was sinning: such that he traveled unconfessed and unrepentent from this life to the torments of hell, without a doubt. Osred, too, a spirit of wickedness seized as he was fornicating and raging through nunneries, raping consecrated virgins; such that he lost his glorious kingdom and his young life and that wicked spirit itself by a contemptible and dishonorable death."

[82] Ibid., 345, "cast down from their position as kings in this life," "plunged into the depths of hell."

> Quapropter, fili carissime, caue tibi foueam, in quam uidisti coram te alios cecidisse. Caue tibi iacula antiqui hostis, per quae propinquos proprios coram te uulneratos cadere uidisti. Adtende tibi a laqueo insidiatoris, in quo notos et conmilitiones tuos uidebas strangulatos et presentem uitam et futuram perdere. Noli talium ad perditionem exempla sequi.[83]

This leads into a brief passage on the transitory nature of human life and earthly goods, supported by well-worn biblical passages from Wisdom 5, Ecclesiastes 18, and James 1.[84] In closing, the bishops refer to Æthelbald once more as "dearest son," and themselves as "your fathers, who busy themselves in addressing your highness because of our love of God."[85] They are both obsequious, in their scrupulous respect for Æthelbald's status as king, and utterly confident that they have the moral and spiritual authority to castigate the king's behavior. They may have been no older than Æthelbald, whose birthdate is unknown but who had been reigning for some thirty years by this point, but they can represent themselves as his "fathers" by virtue of their status in the Church.

Boniface and his fellow bishops' letter to Æthelbald of Mercia doesn't just exemplify the content and situation of the Latin discourse of kingly instruction, however; it also contains striking parallels to the structure and content of Hrothgar's Sermon, helping to clarify the moral stakes of *Beowulf* for its Anglo-Saxon readers. Hrothgar's Sermon centers on a pair of negative exempla not unlike the tales of Ceolred and Osred. First, Hrothgar discusses his own predecessor, Heremod, who was stricken by "a bloodthirsty disposition," *breosthord blodreow*, and ended up killing his own men. This moves into a more general illustration of how a king's mind can be corrupted by the "bitter shaft…of the accursed spirit," a close echo of the bishops' phrase "the darts of the ancient enemy."[86] After describing the nameless king's downfall, Hrothgar turns to direct exhortation in terms reminiscent of the bishops' repeated enjoinders to Æthelbald to "beware": "Guard yourself from that hostility, dear Beowulf, best of men, and choose the better for yourself, eternal counsel; pay no mind to pride, great warrior."[87] After all, life and glory are passing things.[88]

The innovative nature of Hrothgar's Sermon stands out all the more within this shared structure and set of conventional topics. The first crucial point of difference is the speaker's relationship to the addressee. Where Boniface and his fellow missionary bishops address Æthelbald from a great remove—both a physical one, since they write from the Continent, and a moral or experiential one, since they write from the Church—Hrothgar claims the authority to address Beowulf about kingship because of his own experience as a king:

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[83] Ibid., 344: "Beware the pit, dearest son, into which you have seen others fall right in front of you. Beware the darts of the ancient enemy, by which you have seen your own relatives fall wounded right in front of you. Be on your guard against the snares of the deceiver, in which you have seen your own friends and companions strangled and consequently lose both the present life and the one to come. Do not follow the example of these men that leads to perdition."
[84] Ibid., 344.
[85] I quote the entire sentence for context at Ibid., 355: "Quapropter, fili carissime, paternis te et subnixis precibus precamur, ut non despicias consilium patrum tuorum, qui pro Dei amore tuam appellare celsitudinem satagunt" ("Therefore, dearest son, resting on our paternal prayers, we beg you that you not despise the counsel of your fathers, who busy themselves in addressing your highness because of our love of God").
[86] Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 4th ed., ll. 1746-7, p. 59: "biteran stræle…wergan gastes."
[87] Ibid., ll. 1758-60a, p. 59: "Bebeorh þe ðone bealonið, Beowulf leofa, / secg betesta, ond þe þæt selre geceos, / ece rædas; oferhyda ne gym, / mære cempa."
[88] See Ibid., ll. 1761b-8, pp. 59-60.

> Þæt, la mæg secgan se þe soð ond riht
> fremeð on folce, feor eft gemon,
> eald eþelweard, þæt ðes eorl wære
> geboren betera.[89]

The classic Old English poetic technique of variation, whereby an idea is restated in synonymous terms, serves here to ground kingship in its particular behaviors and experiences rather than its outward status: "the one who brings about truth and justice among the people, who remembers everything from a long time back, an old guardian of the homeland." Only the third and last of Hrothgar's allusions to himself, *eald eþelweard,* names him as a king. Hrothgar is entitled to pass judgment on Beowulf because of his shared experience, not because of his distance—and this shared experience allows him to judge Beowulf as *better* than himself. And just as the bishops return to themselves at the end of their letter when they beg Æthelbald to take their preaching as paternal advice, Hrothgar brings his message about the transitory nature of earthly power home to himself. Once again, however, he does so because the lesson is pertinent to himself as well as to Beowulf. Indeed, he offers himself up as a kind of cautionary tale:

> Swa ic Hring-Dena hund missera
> weold under wolcum ond hig wigge beleac
> manigum mægþa geond þysne middangeard,
> æscum ond ecgum, þæt ic me ænigne
> under swegles begong gesacan ne tealde.
> Hwæt, me þæs on eþle edwenden cwom,
> gyrn æfter gomene, seoþðan Grendel wearð,
> ealdgewinna, ingenga min.[90]

But what exactly is Hrothgar a cautionary tale *of*? Asking this question exposes a curious inconsistency in the theme of his discourse. Heremod and the unnamed king both fall victim to the arrows of sin and become positively destructive. Hrothgar, however, only seems to have been guilty of forgetting the transitory nature of earthly life and power and mistakenly assuming that he "didn't have any adversary under the sky's vault."[91] This may be seen as the first stage in the progression towards sin that Hrothgar lays out in his general case. Hrothgar's understanding of what constitutes sinful behavior seems broadly similar to that of Boniface and his fellow bishops; unlike them, however, he frames sinful kingship as the result of kingly power itself. In the bishops' story of Ceolred and Osred, the kings are "suddenly" and inexplicably seized by a kind

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[89] Ibid., ll. 1700-3a, p. 57: "That, indeed, can one say who brings about truth and justice among the people, remembers everything from a long time back, an old guardian of the homeland—that this man was born better."

[90] Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 4th ed., ll. 1769-76, p. 60: "So I ruled the Ring-Danes for fifty years under the heavens and protected them from war with many nations across this earth, from spears and swords, such that I didn't think I had any adversary under the sky's vault. *Hwæt*, a reversal of all that happened to me in the homeland, mourning after rejoicing, after Grendel, the ancient enemy, became my invader." I leave *hwæt* untranslated because it seems untranslatable: however, it can be described as a marker that often signals the beginning of a discourse or a statement that is surprising or otherwise remarkable. Others have used "lo," "listen," or "so," but none of these seems appropriate here.

[91] Ibid., ll. 1772b-3, p. 60: "Ic me ænigne / under swegles begong gesacan ne tealde."

of madness that leads them to commit sin.[92] The devil is responsible, of course, but nothing explains *why* he attacked them, or why he may not also attack Æthelbald. For Hrothgar, by contrast, a sinful disposition begins with extraordinary advantages, such as wealth or power, which lead to a state of hubris, of folly or *unsnyttru*, which can in turn cause a king to let his guard down and become susceptible to the devil's arrows. All of this stems from the mysterious process by which God distributes wealth, power, and virtue to humans:

> Wundor is to secganne
> hu mihtig God manna cynne
> þurh sidne sefan snyttru bryttað,
> eard ond eorlscipe; he ah ealra geweald.
> Hwilum he on lufan læteð hworfan
> monnes modgeþonc mæran cynnes,
> seleð him on eþle eorþan wynne
> to healdenne hleo-burh wera,
> gedeð him swa gewealdene worolde dælas,
> side rice, þæt he his selfa ne mæg
> for his unsnyttrum ende geþencean.[93]

By suggesting that there was a moment before men received power from God and claiming that the reason for those divine gifts is unknowable, Hrothgar makes kingship into a contingent category of the human condition as a whole. Some men, for a reason that we cannot divine, are granted gifts that can lure them into a state of *unsnyttru*, "unwisdom."[94] Kingship is no essential state or even a chosen way of life, but merely one of the outputs of the divine machine that distributes earthly goods. As such, there is no moral position either unique to kings or unavailable to them. Because of their great wealth and power, however, kings are uniquely tempted to sin.

With this evocation of a state prior to or outside of kingship, Hrothgar makes it possible to see Heremod and other failed kings—or *nearly* failed kings, like himself—as human tragedies first and failed or sinful kings second. His description of Heremod's fall from joy and success likewise reads as a personal tragedy rather than merely as an exemplum of evil kingship. This is accomplished formally through two related means: the use of impersonal constructions that take agency away from Heremod himself, and the treatment of Heremod's psychology as the cause of his evil behavior towards other people.

> Ne geweox he him to willan ac to wælfealle
> ond to deaðcwalum Deniga leodum;
> breat bolgenmod beodgeneatas,

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[92] Letter from Boniface et al. to Æthelbald, ed. by Gundlach, 344: "subito."

[93] Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 4th ed., ll. 1724b-34, pp. 58-9: "It is a marvelous thing to say how God grants wisdom, territory, and dominion to mankind through his wise mind; he rules all. Sometimes he lets the mind of a man from a great family run according to its desire, gives him earthly joy in his homeland, [grants] that he may hold the stronghold of men, makes him so powerful over the regions of the world, a wide kingdom, that he himself in his unwisdom cannot imagine an end."

[94] Ibid., l. 1734a, p. 59.

eaxlgesteallan, oþ þæt he ana hwearf,
mære þeoden mondreamum from.[95]

Hrothgar's phrase, "[Heremod] geweox…to wælfealle / ond to deaðcwalum," is difficult to translate precisely because of its ambiguous agency. R. D. Fulk, in a rather faithful rendering for the Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library, offers, "Heremod…did not grow to please them but to the ruin and to the destruction of the Danish people."[96] If we omit the infinitive phrase ("to please them"), however, we arrive at "Heremod…[grew] to the ruin…of the Danish people": this is not exactly idiomatic, and is not paralleled by any of the constructions cited in the *OED*'s entry for the verb "to grow" that are not noted as archaic.[97] This grammatical murkiness creates a murkiness of meaning: Heremod turned into the cause of his people's deaths, but that process does not seem to have been something he could control. Heremod's wrathful and sinful state is depicted as a problem for him, as well as for other people or for God: he is a tragic figure.

IV: Moral Judgment and Poetic Convention

The turn to tragedy—to something properly "poetic" or "literary"—suggests how much our reading of *Beowulf* depends on the field of discourse in which we locate it. In this final section of the chapter, I argue that *Beowulf* stages a confrontation between different fields of discourse and the moral frameworks that they bring with them. This is especially true in both Hrothgar's Sermon and the final section of the poem, which recounts Beowulf's attempt to kill a dragon harrying his kingdom. The poem sets us up to judge Beowulf and Hrothgar as failed kings, but it also demands that we understand them as tragic in a more universally human way. *Beowulf*'s moral ambiguity arises from its combination of distinct frameworks of judgment drawn from multiple fields of early medieval discourse.

My reading of Hrothgar's Sermon pivots around a unique act of textual voicing: material resembling a piece of clerical discourse on wise kingship is put into the voice and perspective of one king speaking to a younger man who will likely be king himself some day. That this situation has never elicited surprise from critics is perhaps because they have taken the poem's air of "traditionality" for granted, along with the lack of clerics in it. Hrothgar's Sermon is far from the most cherished part of *Beowulf*, to judge by critical treatments of it.[98] Scholars have even argued at various times that it represents a later interpolation—an incongruously Christian passage in an otherwise "heroic" poem.[99] Elaine Tuttle Hansen has argued instead that Hrothgar's Sermon fits into a larger tradition of wisdom poetry in Old English, including *The*

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[95] Ibid., ll. 1711-5, p. 58: "He did not grow to please them, but instead he grew into a cause of slaughter and murder for the Danes. Enraged, he cut down his table-companions, his associates, until he turned alone, the great prince, from human joys."
[96] Fulk, ed. and trans., *The Beowulf Manuscript*, 199.
[97] *OED Online*, "grow, v.," Oxford University Press, June 2017, Web, accessed 24 July 2017, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/81904?rskey=60NNxI&result=2&isAdvanced=false.
[98] For a summary of the Sermon's critical history with references, see Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 4th ed., 213-4.
[99] See, for example, John Earle, *The Deeds of Beowulf: An English Epic of the Eighth Century Done into Modern Prose* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), lxxxviii; Michael Lapidge, "The Archetype of *Beowulf*," 36-40. For an argument that marshals linguistic evidence for the early date and thus likely integral status of Hrothgar's "Sermon" as a whole, see Leonard Neidorf, "The Language of Hrothgar's Sermon," *Studia Neophilologica* 91 (2019): 1-10.

Gifts of Men, *The Fortunes of Men*, and *Vainglory*; more specifically, she classifies it, with the poem *Precepts*, as a work of parental instruction.[100] Hansen's analogues are convincing, but they also show how easy it is to forget that Hrothgar's Sermon is specifically about *kingship*.

The move from kingship to a universal human condition also happens within the Sermon itself, through the deployment of a gnomic and universal frame of reference. I have already shown how Hrothgar grounds kingship in the universal condition of receiving goods and virtues from God. He is not exactly an original theorist, however: he speaks in the language of Old English wisdom poetry. Two short poems, entitled *The Gifts of Men* and *The Fortunes of Men* by their modern editors, trace the same arc as Hrothgar does when he imagines a man's rise to wealth and power. They, too, begin with the premise that God gives humans everything they enjoy or endure on the earth. Both emphasize the universality of the process by their catalogue structure, listing various skills, virtues, and fates that humans may be dealt by God.[101] Like Hrothgar, *The Fortunes of Men* opines that only God knows what will happen to any person in the course of his or her life:

God ana wat
hwæt him weaxendum winter bringað![102]

The similarly-titled and -themed poem, *The Gifts of Men*, lacks an equivalent statement about the impossibility of knowing who will receive what gift from God. However, it also omits an explanation of this process, and its form points to the mindboggling diversity of human talents and occupations. The main body of the poem consists of a series of statements, each in the form "Another one is fierce in battle...Another one can wondrously devise the work of any lofty building."[103] The only attempt to theorize this diverse scattering of gifts is the repeated statement, both before and after the main catalogue, that no one is granted too many or too few of these gifts, "lest pride harm him, / or his mind climb up because of that glory."[104] Hrothgar, apparently, doesn't share this poet's sanguine view of human society.

Meanwhile, the crux of Hrothgar's moral admonition to Beowulf—that both his power and his life will pass away—is delivered as a *memento mori* that applies to all people, not just to kings. His rhetoric takes the form of an impassioned list of various causes of death with analogues in other poems that blend "traditional," heroic themes with homiletic material:

Nu is þines mægnes blæd
ane hwile; eft sona bið
þæt þec adl oððe ecg eafoþes getwæfeð,
oððe fyres feng, oððe flodes wylm,
oððe gripe meces, oððe gares fliht,

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[100] For an analysis of the structure of Hrothgar's Sermon, see Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* p. 213; Elaine Tuttle Hansen, "Hrothgar's 'Sermon' in *Beowulf* as Parental Wisdom," *Anglo-Saxon England* 10 (1981): 53-67; at 62.

[101] See Nicholas Howe, *The Old English Catalogue Poems*, Anglistica XXIII (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1985), 104-32.

[102] *The Fortunes of Men,* ed. by Krapp and Dobbie in *The Exeter Book*, p. 155, ll. 8b-9: "God alone knows what the years will bring to him as he grows up!"

[103] Ibid., ll. 39b, 44-5a: "Sum bið wiges heard...Sum mæg wrætlice weorc ahycgan / heahtimbra gehwæs."

[104] Ibid., ll. 100b-1: "þy læs him gilp sceððe, / oþþe fore þære mærþe mod astige."

oððe atol yldo; oððe eagena bearhtm
forsiteð ond forsworceð; semninga bið
þæt ðec, dryhtguma, deað oferswyðeð.[105]

Hrothgar's powerful litany of the specific limits to Beowulf's future power and life—all the ways that he could, and will, decline and die—addresses the universal human who forms the subject of early medieval moral discourse, not just the would-be king. His litany can best be seen as participating in a specifically poetic mode of homiletic discourse. The closest parallel comes from one of the most anthologized poems in Old English, *The Seafarer*, which takes the form of a meditation on the transience of earthly joys by a self-proclaimed exile. In doing so, *The Seafarer* applies more specifically homiletic language to a traditional Old English poetic motif, echoed in works such as *The Wanderer* and *The Wife's Lament*. At the very center of this short poem, the speaker moves from consideration of his particular situation to a meditation on its significance:

Forþon me hatran sind
dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif,
læne on londe. Ic gelyfe no
þæt him eorðwelan ece stondað.
Simle þreora sum þinga gehwylce,
ær his tid aga, to tweon weorþeð;
adl oþþe yldo oþþe ecghete
fægum fromweardum feorh oðþringeð.[106]

Meanwhile, two other pieces from the Exeter Book feature parallels of different sorts: *The Wanderer* offers an impassioned catalogue of things that are *læne,* "transitory," while *The Fortunes of Men* shows that an entire poem could be built out of a catalogue of ways to die. Hrothgar's theological and moral understanding are thus typical of Old English wisdom poetry—what differs is simply his focus on kingship. His "Sermon" also combines the subjectivities of Old English wisdom poetry, where self-reflection is prevalent, and homiletics, where the preacher's moral authority is grounded on his separateness from his audience and on his command of authoritative histories.

Hrothgar's Sermon comes only at the halfway point of the action in *Beowulf*: the second half of the poem focuses on an episode from long afterwards, when Beowulf has been king of the Geats for fifty years. By the end of the poem, he is an aged king like Hrothgar whose kingdom also faces a monstrous threat, this time in the form of a dragon. The plot thus exhibits a striking symmetry. The awkward way that the poem skips over fifty years in a few lines suggests that its structure is conscious, and that we are intended to read the second episode as somehow related to

[105] Fulk et al., eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* ll. 1761b-68, p. 60: "Now the glory of your strength endures for a little while; before too long, however, sickness or the blade will take your life away—or the fire's grasp, or the swelling of the flood, or the grasp of a sword, or the flight of a spear, or cruel old age; else, the brightness of your eyes will fail and darken. In an instant, man, death will seize you."

[106] *The Seafarer*, ed. by Krapp and Dobbie in *The Exeter Book*, pp. 143-7; at 145, ll. 64b-71: "Therefore hotter are the Lord's joys for me than this dead life, passing in the land. I have no faith that earthly wealth will remain forever. Always one of three things brings doubt before one's time has run out: either illness, or old age, or violent hostility forces out the souls of the doomed death-bound ones." All translations from this poem are mine.

the first. But what form does this relation take, and what does that imply about the poem's status as a literary, moral, and didactic work? J. R. R. Tolkien famously read *Beowulf* as "a contrasted description of two moments in a great life, rising and setting; an elaboration of the ancient and intensely moving contrast between youth and age, first achievement and final death."[107] Tolkien thus takes for granted Beowulf's status as both the subject of the poem and a universal type of "man on earth"—at least, of a "great" man.[108] Tolkien reads the poem as "literary" and thus as a work of "imagination" with the "theme" of "defeat inevitable yet acknowledged," of "undefeated will."[109] In doing so, he laid a critical foundation for the poem's newfound popularity in English departments following the second World War.[110] Tolkien's notion of what makes *Beowulf* "literary," however, is arguably a product of his own time as much as of Anglo-Saxon England.[111] While he reads the poem's two episodes as held in tension by the shape of Beowulf's life, we could also read them as a pair of tales about aged kings and about historical transfers of power, *translationes imperii*. The second episode of the poem makes little reference to the first: there is little reminiscence by the aged Beowulf about his youthful exploits in Denmark. Instead, the ending of the poem is preoccupied with Beowulf's legacy as a king.

As I now show, Beowulf's speech of self-appraisal at the end of his life serves to remind us of Hrothgar's Sermon. The structural similarity of these two moments is intended to lead us to judge Beowulf as a king, not just feel for him as a "man on earth" who must face his own mortality. Beowulf has just fought and killed the dragon, but he has received a mortal wound in the process; he thus speaks "over the wound" in the full knowledge that he will soon die.[112] Just as Hrothgar's meditation on the transience of power begins with him looking at the hilt of the ancient sword of the giants, Beowulf's speech comes only after he gazes on an ancient object:

> Ða se æðeling giong,
> þæt he bi wealle wishycgende
> gesæt on sesse; seah on enta geweorc,
> hu ða stanbogan stapulum fæste
> ece eorðreced innan healde.[113]

The hilt of the giants' sword, by the same token, was *enta ærgeweorc*, "the ancient work of the giants."[114] Beowulf's posture of staring at ancient stonework is strikingly reminiscent of a

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[107] J. R. R. Tolkien, "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics," in *Beowulf: A Verse Translation*, ed. by Daniel Donoghue, trans. by Seamus Heaney (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2002), pp. 103-30; at 124-5.
[108] Ibid., 119, 124.
[109] Ibid., 114.
[110] Michael D. C. Drout, introduction to J. R. R. Tolkien, *"Beowulf" and the Critics*, rev. 2nd ed., ed. by Drout (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS, 2011), 1-27.
[111] Tolkien's argument for the poem's status as literature depends on a distinction between history and poetry: where the former has to impart information, the latter exists in the realm of art, of symbolic meaning: narrative is only significant as a source of "theme" and character development. See, for example, his contrast between "historical truth" and "Poesis": Tolkien, "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics," 105.
[112] Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 4th ed., l. 2724b: "ofer benne"; Ibid., ll. 2725b-6: "wisse he gearwe / þæt he dæghwila gedrogen hæfde" ("He readily knew that he had reached [the end of] his days").
[113] Ibid., ll. 2715-9, p. 93: "Then the prince walked until he sat down in a seat along the wall, thinking wisely; he gazed upon the giants' work, how those stone arches firm on their pillars held up the longlasting earth-hall from within."
[114] Ibid., l. 1679a, p. 57.

moment in *The Wanderer*. The sequence of speakers and speeches in the poem is difficult to determine, but this moment announces what will be the last speech:

> Yþde swa þisne eardgeard ælda scyppend
> oþþæt burgwara breahtma lease
> eald enta geweorc idlu stodon.
> Se þonne þisne wealsteal wise geþohte
> ond þis deorce lif deope geondþenceð,
> frod in ferðe, feor oft gemon
> wæl-sleahta worn, ond þas word acwið.[115]

Beowulf's pose thus may have been a conventional one for a wise person about to make a speech in Old English poetry. All of these moments—Hrothgar's Sermon, the Wanderer's last speech, and Beowulf's last speech—feature wise speakers using specific, material fragments of ancient history to reflect on their own place in history and on patterns of repetition or change, such as the recurring acts of *unsnyttru* that Hrothgar traces or the transience of earthly power represented by the ruined wall in *The Wanderer*. The speech that follows this moment in *The Wanderer*, joined so intimately to the act of looking and contemplating, is one of the most famous passages in all of Old English poetry. It is filled with an acute sense of its own lateness, of how much has already happened. This parallel only further supports Tolkien's reading of the ending of *Beowulf* as "elegiac." It also suggests that Beowulf is, in fact, being treated as a type of wise speaker contemplating his own transience. His status as king would thus seem somewhat unimportant at this moment.

However, kingship returns as a salient aspect of Beowulf's situation through the links that tie his speech to Hrothgar's Sermon earlier in the poem. Just like Hrothgar, Beowulf reflects on his reign as a means of instructing a younger man who may one day be king himself. The content of his speech also recalls Hrothgar's Sermon. Beowulf testifies that he "held well what was entrusted to [him], did not seek hidden quarrels, did not swear many oaths falsely."[116] Further, "the Lord of men need not accuse me of the murder of my kinsmen."[117] His language recalls Heremod's crime of killing his own men and the nameless king's neglect of his duties in Hrothgar's Sermon. Beowulf nearly repeats a passage from Hrothgar's narrative of his own folly, however, when he notes that "there was no king of any neighboring peoples who dared to attack me with warriors, profit from terror";[118] Hrothgar had described his own shortsightedness in similar terms: "Thus I ruled the Ring-Danes for fifty years and protected them against war with many nations across this world, with spears and swords, such that I didn't account any man

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[115] *The Wanderer*, ed. by George P. Krapp and Elliott V. K. Dobbie in *The Exeter Book*, ASPR 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), ll. 85-91, p. 136: "Thus the Ruler of Men [i.e. God] destroyed this earthly place until the ancient works of giants stood idle, empty of the noise of inhabitants. He [putatively the "Wanderer" himself] then shall with wise thought ponder this foundation and this dark life, wise in mind, often recalling many slaughters from long ago, and speak these words."
[116] Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 4th ed., ll. 2737b-9a, p. 93: "heold min tela, / ne sohte searoniðas, ne me swor fela / aða on unriht."
[117] Ibid., ll. 2741-2a: "forðam me witan ne ðearf waldend fira/ morðorbealo maga."
[118] Ibid., ll. 2733b-6a: "næs se folccyning, / ymbesittendra ænig ðara þe mec guðwinum gretan dorste, / egesan ðeon."

under the heavens my enemy."[119] As both an assessment of his rule and a performance of his wisdom, Beowulf's final speech hardly impresses. Despite gazing at the ancient *enta geweorc,* a material illustration of the truth that all human power and wealth passes away, Beowulf stresses his power as king and the value of the treasure that he has been able to gain from the dragon's barrow. The full implications of his decision to fight the dragon alone are only spelled out by the messenger who informs the Geats of Beowulf's death and the likelihood of trouble with the Swedes.

When we understand Beowulf's death as a moving illustration of the transience of human affairs, we tend to ignore its particular consequences for his people; when we treat Beowulf as representative of all humanity, or all great men, we bracket his distinct status and duties as a king. To the Geats, he is not simply a beloved friend or leader: he guarantees their continued existence as a people. In this context, his decision to fight the dragon may be seen as foolish, not heroic. (Indeed, the primary difference between his and Hrothgar's handling of their respective monsters is that Beowulf decides to vanquish his monster himself). Gnomic wisdom, crucially, enables Beowulf's catastrophic decision to be categorized as an unavoidable turn of fate. The passage most obviously critical of Beowulf's decision is also uttered by Wiglaf:

> Oft sceall eorl monig anes willan
> wræc adreogan, swa us geworden is.
> Ne meahton we gelæran leofne þeoden,
> rices hyrde ræd ænigne,
> þæt he ne grette goldweard þone,
> lete hyne licgean þær he longe wæs,
> wicum wunian oð woruldende;
> heold on heahgesceap.[120]

The first sentence has a gnomic form, as Susan Deskis shows.[121] The closest analogues she finds in medieval texts, however, exhibit stronger judgment of the king or powerful figure who leads others to ruin. The closest parallel is from the Anglo-Saxon scholar Alcuin's *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, notably in a statement about the power of wisdom:

> Nunc quoque sapientiam praefert fortitudini, et dicit eam plus valere in praeliis quam arma pugnantium; *et crebro evenit, quod per unius insipientiam opes magnae atque divitiae pereunt*.[122]

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[119] Ibid., ll. 1769-73, p. 60: "Swa ic Hring-Dena hund missera / weold under wolcnum ond hig wigge beleac / manigum mægþa geond þysne middangeard, æscum ond ecgum, þæt ic me ænigne / under swegles begong gesacan ne tealde."

[120] R. D. Fulk et al., eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 4th ed., ll. 3077-84a, pp. 104-5: "Often many a man must suffer misery because of the will of a single man, as has happened to us. We could not persuade the dear prince, the guardian of the kingdom, of any counsel that he not encounter the guardian of gold, let him lie where he was for a long time, dwell in his lair until the world's end; [Beowulf] kept to his destiny."

[121] *Deskis, "Beowulf" and the Medieval Proverb Tradition*, 130.

[122] Alcuin, *Commentaria super Ecclesiasten*, *PL* 100.667-722; at 707A; qtd. in Deskis, Beowulf *and the Medieval Proverb Tradition*, 132: "Now he also ranks wisdom ahead of strength, and says that it is more effective in battles than the weapons of the fighters; *and it often happens, that great wealth and riches are lost through one person's lack of wisdom*" (emphasis added). Translation is my own.

The *wræc*, "misery," named by Wiglaf is arguably a compound of the grief that the Geats feel over Beowulf's loss and the national catastrophe that the unnamed messenger predicts will befall them when the Swedes hear of this loss. Alcuin's *insipientia,* "lack of wisdom," is paralleled in Wiglaf's claim that Beowulf would not listen to the counsel of his advisors to leave the dragon well enough alone: the ability to both listen to and act on sage counsel is a key feature of kingly wisdom in early medieval regiminal discourse.[123] Just like Hrothgar's Sermon viewed in the context of Boniface's letter to Æthelbald, statements of gnomic wisdom by both Wiglaf and the poem's narrator thus frame problems specific to kingship in terms of human universals. Where Alcuin's comment cannot be read as anything but criticism of unwise kings or other powerful figures, Wiglaf couches what sounds like criticism of Beowulf in a Stoic-sounding message about the inevitability of suffering at another's hands. The *an*, the individual because of whose desire or will one must suffer, happens to be the king: the one person who theoretically has both the power and the right to carry out his will. Wiglaf thus couches his point about kingship in deceptively universal-sounding language. He also downplays Beowulf's culpability for ignoring his advisors' counsel by explaining, "The fate [*gifeðe*] that drew the king there [towards the dragon's hoard] was too great."[124] Wiglaf's claim that Beowulf was subject to an uncontrollable force makes it possible to interpret Beowulf as tragic instead of as culpable. His explanation of Beowulf's actions thus resembles Hrothgar's claim that great power and wealth can sometimes corrupt a man's mind and even lead him to commit acts of violence. Wiglaf would therefore agree with Alcuin that *insipientia*, folly, can cause misery and destruction. However, unlike Alcuin, Wiglaf understands folly as a state that can be brought on by external forces.

One more *Beowulf*ian intertext shows that the poem's interest in the shape, tension, and resonance of individual human lives (and thus human life writ large) need not preclude us from reading it as an exploration of the more specific problems of kingship and the balance of earthly power. The Old English poem *Daniel* thematizes the problem of kingship in terms similar to those in *Beowulf*, but it differs in its framework of wisdom, of authoritative knowledge. *Daniel* versifies chapters 1-5 of the biblical book of Daniel, which focuses on the exploits of the Jewish wise man of the same name.[125] The versification further develops the main political-theological lesson of the Bible story: that the power of any king or nation depends on adherence to God's law. Accordingly, the poem begins with a fifty-line section that expands Daniel 1:1-2 into an

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[123] See, for example, a letter Alcuin of York wrote to Æthelred, King of Northumbria and other nobles in 793, ed. by Ernst Dümmler in *Epistolae Karolini aeui* Vol. II, MGH Epp. 4 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1895), Ep. 18, p. 51, ll. 19-22: "The king's duty is to stamp out all iniquities by the power of his piety; to be just in judgments and prompt in mercy—insofar as he is merciful to his subjects, God will be merciful to him—[to be] temperate in his customs, truthful in his words, generous in gifts, shrewd in counsels; to have wise counsellors who fear God and are adorned by good habits" ("Regis est omnes iniquitates pietatis suae potentia obprimere; iustum esse in iudiciis, pronum in misericordia—secundum quod ille miseretur subiectis, miserebitur ei Deus—sobrium in moribus, ueridicum in uerbis, largum in donis, prouidum in consiliis; consiliarios habere prudentes, Deum timentes, honestis moribus ornatos").

[124] Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 4th ed., ll. 3085b-6, p. 105: "wæs þæt gifeðe to swið / þe ðone [þeodcyning] þyder ontyhte." The use of *gifeðe* as a noun is unique in Old English: it is usually a past participle that means "given." For that reason, the interpretation of *gifeðe* as "fate" must remain provisional. See the *DOE Online*, *s.v.* "gyfeþe noun, gifeþe," accessed 15 May 2019, https://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/. Whatever its precise meaning, however, the point remains that it is being attributed with the agency to draw Beowulf towards the hoard.

[125] See Paul Remley, *Old English Biblical Verse: Studies in Genesis, Exodus, and Daniel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 288: "Despite its many unique details and special features, the narration of *Daniel* in the main follows the progression of events recounted in Daniel I-V with remarkable fidelity."

exposition on the connection between the Israelites' fortunes and their righteousness.[126] The biblical book opens with Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, capturing Jerusalem and carrying away its king and some of the vessels from the Temple. In a standard formulation for describing defeat in Old Testament historical narrative, the author notes that the Lord "delivered" these things "into his [i.e. Nebuchadnezzar's] hands."[127] The Old English versifier expands this into a much longer narrative of the sins the Israelites had committed that led to the Lord granting victory to their enemies. The main body of the poem, meanwhile, covers Nebuchadnezzar's own sin and punishment, and it concludes with another scene of royal sin, punishment, and power transfer: Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar's heir, provokes the Lord by using the Israelites' holy Temple vessels as drinking goblets at a feast. Just as at the beginning, the poet explains the reason for Babylon's fall more explicitly than the corresponding biblical passage.[128] An angel writes a set of mysterious signs on the wall, which Daniel interprets as a message of Belshazzar's downfall at the hands of the Medes.[129] The circle is complete: the Babylonians were granted dominion for a time, but their crimes have shifted God's favor to a different people, and they can expect to be defeated soon. The anonymous poet has shaped the first five chapters of the book of Daniel into a thematically-unified illustration of the mechanics of God's favor and royal behavior.

The story of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar align in key ways with the events in *Beowulf*. Where Belshazzar sees mysterious writing on the wall announcing his fall from power, Hrothgar's meditation on the transience of power appears to be inspired by a mysterious inscription on the hilt of the giants' ancient sword, which Beowulf brings back with him from the mere.[130] The enigmatic nature of this text is not unlike the *run,* or "mysterious message," written on the wall in *Daniel.*[131] Just as *Daniel* thematizes pride as the cause of kings' and their peoples' downfall, Hrothgar focuses his speech on the dangers of pride. Finally, the story of Nebuchadnezzar's temporary fall from power and period of insanity, when he lived in the wild for seven years as an animal, resembles the cautionary example that Hrothgar offers of his distant predecessor Heremod, as well as Boniface's examples of Ceolred and Osred. Because Nebuchadnezzar recovers from his period of madness and folly and goes on to rule happily, however, his story also bears some resemblance to that of Hrothgar.

However, *Beowulf* and *Daniel* also depict historical interpretation in crucially different ways. Belshazzar cannot interpret the writing on the wall by himself; he needs the services of Daniel, "skilled in the law, God's messenger"—an authorized wise man.[132] Unlike Belshazzar, however, Hrothgar lacks an interpreter, and he proceeds to reflect on the nature of kingship and history in a way that chimes with the moment of historical transition symbolized in the handing over of the sword. Where the writing on the wall transparently signifies (to Daniel, if not to us) the end of Belshazzar's power, and the poem confidently explains this as the consequence of Belshazzar's pride, the connection between the sword inscription and Hrothgar's own example is not entirely clear. Moreover, by juxtaposing examples of failed kings with his own story, Hrothgar's Sermon leaves an impression of failed kingship and ruin that is not completely

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[126] *Daniel*, ed. by Krapp in *The Junius Manuscript*, 111-32; at 111-2, ll. 1-51.
[127] Dan. 1:2.
[128] See Remley, *Old English Biblical Verse*, 284-7.
[129] See Dan. 5:17-31.
[130] See above, p. 54.
[131] Krapp, ed., *Daniel,* in *The Junius Manuscript*, l. 740b, p. 131.
[132] Ibid., ll. 741-2a, p. 132: "æcræftig…godes spelboda."

effaced by the happy conclusion of the Denmark episode. Indeed, the poem at this point has already alluded to the eventual burning of Hrothgar's hall, Heorot, and Beowulf will soon predict the renewal of violence between the Danes and the Heathobards.[133] Given the poem's bipartite and parallel structure, however, Beowulf's own death in combat with the dragon and the spectre of his people's future destruction could also take the place of the catastrophe that was averted long ago with his arrival in Denmark. Now their king is dead, the Geats expect the Swedes to attack them in revenge for an earlier battle that resulted in the death of the Swedish king.[134] Like the Old English *Daniel*, then, *Beowulf* ends in a prophecy of *translatio imperii*: power will shift to a new kingdom. Both the future and the chain of causality, however, are ambiguous in *Beowulf*: instead of a message on the wall, we simply have the Geat messenger's mournful expectation that the Swedes will return.

But the broad parallel between *Beowulf*'s structure and that of Daniel 1-6 offers yet more evidence that the former cannot offer us anything like an uncomplicated literary universality: not all of us have the ability to shift the balance of earthly power with our death. Instead, given that Beowulf's own culpability seems murky, the ending holds out the prospect of another degree of universality: Beowulf's fall and its consequences can be read as an instantiation of the cyclical nature of all earthly power. A manuscript which was produced in Brittany but brought to England in the tenth century contains a passage on the "five times of a kingdom as discussed by the most learned":

> Primum tempus laboris est quando per bella contenditur et per fragores hostium. Tempus secundum quando per incrementa sicut luna crescit usque ad plenitudinem. Tempus tertius plenitudinis est, quando undique ab omnibus non offenditur. Tempus quartum, ut predixi, quando decrescit. Quintum tempus conluctationis et contradictionis. Non potest enim illud ullis prestare beneficia et nullus ad illum quicquid boni facere potest.[135]

The passage is ascribed to the *Proverbia Grecorum*, a collection with early insular connections—perhaps Hiberno-Latin.[136] Indeed, a number of scholars have suggested other parallels between *Beowulf* and early medieval Irish intellectual culture.[137] While this passage cannot definitely be adduced as a source for the poem, its framing of power as a natural process akin to the lunar cycle resonates with the sense of inevitable and tragic loss at the death of King Beowulf. Other proverbs in the *Proverbia Grecorum*, however, take a moral perspective on kingship and earthly

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[133] See Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 4th ed., ll. 81b-5, p. 4, ll. 2024b-69a, pp. 70-1.
[134] Ibid., ll. 2946-3007a, pp. 97-9.
[135] See Dean Simpson, "The *Proverbia Grecorum*," *Traditio* 43 (1987): 1-22; at pp. 15-16: "The first time is one of struggle, when the kingdom is threatened by wars and by the invasions of enemies. The second time is when it grows in stages towards fullness, like a moon. The third is a time of fullness, when it is not threatened on any front. The fourth time, as I said before, is when it wanes. The fifth is a time of conflict and rebellion. Indeed, that time cannot offer any advantages to anyone, and no one can do anything good then." On the history of MS Bodleian Library, Hatton 42, see T. A. M. Bishop, "Notes on Cambridge Manuscripts, Part VI," *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 3 (1959-63): 412-23.
[136] Simpson, "The *Proverbia Grecorum*," 6.
[137] See Charles Donahue, "Grendel and the *Clanna Cain*," *JCS* 1 (1950): 167-75; James Carney, "The Irish Elements in *Beowulf*," in his *Studies in Irish Literature and History* (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1955), 77-128; Charles D. Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 215-72.

power that assumes kings' personal responsibility for their nation's well-being. We may also think of King Beowulf when we read the following:

> Prudens prudentes in consilium uocat et sine eorum consilio nihil facit. Stultus uero in semet ipso cogitat et quod sine consilio aliorum cito uult facit.[138]

The debate over Beowulf's kingly wisdom and virtue at the end of his life is an old one indeed in scholarship on the poem.[139] My aim has not been primarily to solve it, but simply to show that the poem's inscription of Beowulf's death can be read as a resonant and tense union of discourses in Anglo-Saxon and early medieval literary culture—discourses with a centrifugal force pulling us towards either judgment of Beowulf or identification with him.

Beowulf ultimately reminds us that literary convention comes preloaded with ways of seeing and categorizing people, and consequently ways of judging them. This is especially apparent in a moment of gnomic discourse that first announces Beowulf's coming death:

> Ne wæs þæt eðe sið,
> þæt se mæra maga Ecgðeowes
> grundwong þone ofgyfan wolde;
> sceolde [ofer] willan wic eardian
> elles hwergen, swa sceal æghwylc mon
> alætan lændagas.[140]

Not only is Beowulf's death a case of the universal human fact of death, but he is also referred to here as *maga Ecgðeowes,* "the kinsman of Ecgtheow," his father's son, rather than his subjects' king.[141] Old English poetry offers an easy and conventional means of emphasizing different character qualities: variation, which has been defined as "syntactically parallel words or word-groups which share a common referent and which occur within a single clause."[142] While *maga Ecgðeowes* is not technically varying other terms for Beowulf here, it forms a part of a larger formulaic system of epithets that also includes *sunu Ecgðeowes* and *bearn Ecgðeowes*, both of which mean "son of Ecgtheow," and all epithets could be seen as implicitly varying a personal name.[143] Fred C. Robinson has explored the rich semantic potential of poetic variation to bring

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[138] Simpson, "The *Proverbia Grecorum*," 12: "The prudent one calls other prudent people into counsel and does nothing without their counsel. The fool, however, thinks only within himself and immediately does what he wishes, without taking advice from others."

[139] See Leyerle, "Beowulf the Hero and the King"; M. J. Swanton, *Crisis and Development in Germanic Society, 700-800: Beowulf and the Burden of Kingship*, Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik (Lorch: Kümmerle Verlag, 1982), 140-54; John D. Niles, *"Beowulf": The Poem and its Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 235-47; Scott Gwara, *Heroic Identity in the World of "Beowulf"* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 239-310.

[140] Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 4th ed., ll. 2586b-91a, p. 88: "Nor was that an easy journey, that the renowned kinsman of Ecgtheow had to give up the world; he would have to take up residence somewhere else against his desire, just as everyone must leave behind their passing days."

[141] Ibid., l. 2587b.

[142] Fred C. Robinson, "Two Aspects of Variation in Old English Poetry," in *Old English Poetry: Essays on Style*, ed. by Daniel G. Calder (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 125-45; at 129.

[143] *maga Ecgðeowes,* however, is unique to this passage. Instances of *bearn Ecgðeowes* in Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 4th ed., by line and page number: 529b (20), 631b (23), 1383b (48), 1473b (51), 1651b (56), 1817b (61), 2177b (74), 2425b (83); of *sunu Ecgðeowes*:1550b (53), 2368a (81).

out particular qualities of people or things and compress an idea such as, "Because the prince was beloved to us, we begged him not to fight the dragon, but since he was a conscientious guardian of his kingdom, he insisted on doing so," into a form more like, "We could not persuade the dear prince, the guardian of the kingdom, that he should leave the dragon unchallenged."[144] Poetic variation, however, can also be seen as a technique for constructing characters with multi-faceted identities. Beowulf's simultaneous identities as son, nephew, friend, and king seem so obvious as to escape notice, but they would not come into linguistic focus this way in any Anglo-Saxon genre but poetry, whether Old English or Latin. If gnomic statements serve to direct our attention away from Beowulf's potential failings as a king and toward his similarities to us, then poetic variation can have a similar effect by reminding us of Beowulf's membership in multiple communities—a family, a warband, and a nation. However, these very same lines, which Robinson reads in a light very flattering to Beowulf, were also read earlier in this chapter against a more critical line from Alcuin about the consequences of one person's folly.[145] There could hardly be a better illustration of one reason why the poem makes for fascinating and puzzling reading: it and its characters sit triangulated in a literary, cultural, and moral space not quite like any other in early medieval England.

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[144] Robinson, *"Beowulf" and the Appositive Style*, 3-5; at 4. Robinson's example here corresponds to Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 4th ed., ll. 3079-81, qtd. above at p. 65. His own interpretation of it suggests a favorable view of Beowulf's actions. One could, however, understand *rices hyrde*, literally "guardian of the kingdom," not as emphasizing Beowulf's conscientiousness, but rather his duty to protect the Geats by acting cautiously—a duty which he arguably fails to fulfill.
[145] See pp. 65-6, above.

Chapter Three: The Way of Wisdom in the Old English *Boethius*

This chapter argues that the B and C Texts of the Old English *Boethius,* a translation of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* undertaken in the late ninth or early tenth century, reimagine wisdom as a morally virtuous state that consists in the active pursuit of knowledge and the good.[1] In doing so, the Old English *Boethius* also reconceives the relationship between wisdom and the political career of its first-person speaker. I move beyond the difficult and perhaps unresolvable question of whether the *Boethius* was translated by King Alfred the Great to argue that both versions of the text perform Alfredian authorship. Finally, by figuring the historical Boethius's consular role as a combination of ruling and being ruled, the Old English *Boethius* holds out an image of wise kingship that is all the more nuanced and durable for its explicit recognition of the limits of earthly power.

At its heart, the *Consolation of Philosophy* pursues a dialectical method for arriving at truth: one that depends on the reasoned interrogation of currently-held beliefs, typically through conversation.[2] The Old English *Boethius*, however, understands wisdom as knowledge gotten by any means, including authoritative teaching. No longer isolated from everyday social or occupational life, "wisdom" (the Old English word is spelled the same way as the contemporary one) instead supplements and perfects that life. Both Boethius's initial quandary and his subsequent journey to wisdom, I demonstrate, are depicted in the moral terms of sin and will: he begins in a sinful state of despair that is the natural result of his earlier prideful confidence that his prosperity would never end. Both are characteristic sins of the wealthy and powerful. The wisdom he both gains and demonstrates in his dialogue with the personified figure of Wisdom consists in the will to pursue knowledge, to puzzle over wise discourse and listen eagerly: elements of a morally-inflected pedagogy that the text frames as universal Christian wisdom. The famous passage on the tools of governance, I will show, unites Boethius's particular occupation of ruler with the universal scope of wisdom by theorizing the practice of kingship as a means of self-improvement, a *cræft* that uses the same kinds of elements (tools, material, products) as any other. The Old English *Boethius* constructs a unique kind of wise figure in Anglo-Saxon literature: a political professional who is an expert in rule, but is also subordinate to others. Whether or not Alfred the Great is its author, the *Boethius* imagines a new kind of self-reflective active life. By treating rule as a representative *cræft*, a word meaning both "skill" and "virtue," it makes a surprisingly classical argument that a life of political action is a way to human self-fulfillment. Furthermore, it performs Alfredian authorship through its preface and the rhetorical

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[1] For the *Consolation of Philosophy,* see Ludwig Bieler, ed., *Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae Consolatio,* Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 94 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1957). For the Old English translation, see *The Old English* "*Boethius*"*: An Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius's* "*De Consolatione Philosophiae*," ed. by Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine, two vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Godden and Irvine date the Old English *Boethius* to "the period between 890 and 930" (146). The *Boethius* actually survives in two versions: an all-prose version, found in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 180 (2079), ff. 1-94, known as the "B Text," and a prosimetrical version, found in London, British Library, Cotton Otho A.vi, ff. 1-129, known as the "C Text." The verse passages of the C Text largely appear to work from corresponding prose portions of the B Text, and the C Text can accordingly be seen as a later version, though it is unclear how much time elapsed between the two texts. Unless I am discussing verse, I generally cite prose passages from the B Text. On both the manuscripts and the relationships between the two versions, see Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* I: 9-34 and I: 80-105, respectively.

[2] See Seth Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue: Literary Method in "The Consolation of Philosophy"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 94-165.

links that tie that preface to the body of the translation. In doing so, it represents Alfred as a king who has the wisdom to theorize his own power.

I: The Cultural Translation of Knowledge in the Old English *Boethius*

The translator of the Old English *Boethius*, traditionally understood as King Alfred the Great,[3] faced his source text across a wide divide of language, knowledge, and culture. While Boethius was a Christian and had written works of theology,[4] he appears to have viewed the project of writing the *Consolation* as an engagement with the classical philosophical tradition, which emerges as distinct from, but not inconsistent with, the Christian tradition.[5] The translator of the *Boethius*, however, shows little familiarity with the classical philosophical tradition, or at least little desire to show that familiarity. He preserves much of the content of the *Consolation*, but presents it through the lens of a far different understanding of the cultural context of knowledge. As Pierre Hadot has shown, philosophy was understood in the Greco-Roman world as a way of life, a practice that entailed following one of many possible programs of spiritual and mental exercise.[6] Pursuing this way of life, often identified as the *uita contemplatiua*, involved turning away from one's ordinary occupation or social existence, even if only inwardly.[7]

If the *Consolation of Philosophy* aims to develop the soul of the individual over and beyond the world of politics, the Old English *Boethius* has been traditionally understood as a component of King Alfred's program of national education as laid out in his preface to a translation of Gregory the Great's *Regula pastoralis*.[8] While that view has been recently called

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[3] Both the prose preface found in both versions of the Old English *Boethius* and the verse preface, found only in the C Text, claim Alfred as the translator, though the recent editors of the *Boethius* and Nicole Discenza have cast doubt on the authenticity of the prose preface. See Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* I: 141-2 and Nicole Guenther Discenza, "Alfred the Great and the Anonymous Prose Proem to the *Boethius*," *JEGP* 107 (2008): 57-76. The earliest outside claim of Alfredian authorship was made by an Anglo-Saxon nobleman named Æthelweard writing in the late tenth century: see Alistair Campbell, ed., *The Chronicle of Æthelweard* (London: T. Nelson, 1962), 51. Malcolm Godden has challenged Alfredian authorship in a series of recent articles, including "Did King Alfred Write Anything?" *Medium Ævum* 76 (2007): 1-23 and "Alfredian Prose: Myth and Reality," *Filologia Germanica* 5 (2013): 131–58. For a counterargument in defense of Alfredian authorship, see Janet Bately, "Did King Alfred Actually Translate Anything? The Integrity of the Alfredian Canon Revisited" *Medium Ævum* 78 (2009): 189-215. I discuss the question of authorship more below; for now, I will continue to refer to the translator as "the translator," not as Alfred.

[4] These three treatises, called the *opuscula sacra*, are edited by C. Moreschini in *Boethius: De Consolatione Philosophiae, Opuscula Theologica*, 2nd ed. (Munich and Leipzig: Saur, 2005).

[5] The lack of overt Christian reference in the *Consolation* is a widely-discussed problem in the critical literature, summarized by John Marenbon in his *Boethius,* Great Medieval Thinkers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 154-9. My position is essentially that of Pierre Courcelle, expressed in his *La Consolation de Philosophie dans la tradition littéraire* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1967), at 47-64: namely, that Boethius wrote the *Consolation* as a Neoplatonist, but that the truths in the text are also deliberately susceptible of a Christian meaning. Marenbon, on the other hand, argues that Boethius makes the arguments at the end of the *Consolation* incoherent in order to ironically demonstrate the insufficiency of philosophy without Christianity: see Marenbon, *Boethius*, 159-63.

[6] See the essays collected in Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. with an introd. by Arnold I. Davidson, trans. by Michael Chase (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1995).

[7] On the significance of the *uita contemplatiua* in the classical world, see Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 14-17.

[8] For the prose preface to the Old English Pastoral Care, see Carolin Schreiber*, King Alfred's Old English Translation of Pope Gregory the Great's Regula pastoralis and its Cultural Context: A Study and Partial Edition*

into question by Malcolm Godden,[9] it remains an artifact of the *Boethius* itself as a text, since both the B and C versions begin with prefaces attributing the translation to Alfred.[10] Whether or not these prefaces are either correct or original to the moment of translation,[11] they suggest that at least for the early readers of the two surviving manuscript witnesses to the Old English *Boethius*, the text was, indeed, by King Alfred. The prosimetric C Text, which versifies most of the passages in the all-prose B version that correspond to Latin verse, offers a verse preface as well, which refers to itself as a text containing *folccuðne ræd*, "well-known advice," that Alfred translated and versified for *ðiossum leodum*, "these people."[12] The verse preface thus frames the Old English *Boethius* as a text translated by King Alfred to offer useful wisdom to his people.

Scholars who have examined the *Boethius* as the product of an ideological adaptation as well as a linguistic translation have tended to focus on a series of changes made to the relationship between wisdom and earthly goods, especially power.[13] Most obviously, the translation holds out greater hope that wisdom can actually lead to power, and that power, in turn, can be a means of practicing wisdom. At the same time, the translation draws a sharper line between earthly and heavenly rewards and punishments. As Kurt Otten and others have pointed out, these shifts essentially "Christianize" the *Consolation*.[14] While Boethius was himself Christian, and composed several theological treatises, his *Consolation* largely avoids explicit reference to specifically Christian concepts or scriptural history.[15] Boethius seems to have considered Christianity and philosophy compatible yet different things, perhaps distinct modes that are carried out in distinct genres. Alfred's "Christianization" of the *Consolation* thus reflects a different sense of the genre and purpose of the text, a different landscape of textual production, more than a difference of opinion or faith with Boethius. Scholars have suggested that the translation was intended to educate laypeople as part of Alfred's program of education, perhaps in the knowledge they needed to live morally;[16] that it was meant to be "read as a complement to

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According to All Surviving Manuscripts Based on Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 12 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003); at 3-7.

[9] See n. 3, above.

[10] These prose prefaces, as they survive in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 180 (the source of the B Text) and in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 12 (Franciscus Junius' transcription of the same, together with verse sections and prose variants from London, British Library, Cotton Otho A.vi) are essentially identical. See Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* I: 239 and I: 383. For a description of the manuscripts, see Ibid, I: 9-34.

[11] Both the recent editors of the *Boethius* and Nicole Discenza have argued that the prose preface claims Alfredian authorship for the *Boethius* while not representing *itself* as written by Alfred. See Ibid., I: 141-2 and Discenza, "Alfred the Great and the Anonymous Prose Proem to the *Boethius*."

[12] Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* Verse Pref., ll. 9b, 4a, I: 384.

[13] See Kurt Otten, *König Alfreds Boethius* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1964), 21-35; David Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 280-90; Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* I: 64-5; Nicole Guenther Discenza, "The Old English *Boethius*," in *A Companion to Alfred the Great*, ed. by Discenza and Paul E. Szarmach (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 200-26; at 212-7.

[14] See Otten, König Alfreds Boethius; Nicole Guenther Discenza, *The King's English: Strategies of Translation in the Old English "Boethius"* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), 31-56.

[15] See n. 5, above. Many consider there to be only one clear biblical allusion in the text, a reference to Wisdom 8:1 in IIIpr12.22: see Joachim Gruber, *Kommentar zu Boethius, "De Consolatione Philosophiae,"* 2nd ed. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), p. 308 n. 22. However, Joel Relihan includes three other possible allusions. See Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, ed. by Relihan (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2001), 204.

[16] See, e.g., David Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred*, 302-3: "The *Froferboc*'s content strengthens the case for its central role in 're-education'. Dominated by *Wisdom*, the text's significance otherwise proceeds from the centrality of 'liberal arts' in Alfredian instruction...Alfred's intransigent 'judges' could be pictured tardily benefiting from such 'liberal' education."

the Latin text and commentaries";[17] that it was simply an attempt "to rewrite and expand Boethius's text in the light of a contemporary understanding of the issues";[18] or that it was intended to transmit culturally valuable information, including classical mythology and history, to Anglo-Saxon readers—a *translatio studii et imperii*.[19] These are clearly "purposes" of varying kinds, and not all are incompatible with the others. Godden and Irvine's observation that the translation is quite ambitious, that it expands the Latin text freely at a number of points, and that it silently incorporates commentary, all lend weight to their suggestion that it is no mere "crib or guide to the content of the Latin," but rather a rewriting.[20] However, they also downplay the amount of Christianization in the *Boethius,* generally explaining divergence from the *Consolation* in terms of consolidation or explication rather than wholesale alteration. My study of the cultural translation of knowledge in the Old English *Boethius*—the discourses of ignorance, error, wisdom, learning, and instruction in the translated text—supports the idea of a more thorough and systematic Christianization than Godden and Irvine recognize.[21]

Despite its thoroughly Christian moral framework, however, the *Boethius* nonetheless imagines a philosophically-inflected wisdom that makes its practitioners, lay or religious, capable of self-judgment. The personified Wisdom, the counterpart of Philosophia in the original Latin, acts as a guide and a mouthpiece of authoritative knowledge—something that was lacking in *Beowulf*, as I suggested in my last chapter. Mod ("mind"), the figure who represents the historical Boethius, thus doesn't face the same quandary as Hrothgar and Beowulf: he does not need to diagnose or correct himself. However, he resembles Hrothgar in imagining himself, along with other powerful people, as human first and powerful second. While Wisdom spends the greater part of the *Boethius* instructing Mod, the text ultimately hopes to fashion kings or counsellors who can theorize their own political action as wisdom. With its message of self-cultivation, it prepares its readers for a wise and self-reflective active life. In my reading, the Old English *Boethius* is, in fact, a sort of "mirror for princes," as Whitney F. Bolton once claimed in an offhand manner.[22] With its complicated and overlapping set of authors and speaking voices, however, it is anything but a typical member of the genre.

II: Enlightenment and Correction

The Old English *Boethius* reinterprets the journey to wisdom that structures the *Consolation of Philosophy* as a moral process of sin and correction. In doing so, it reads Boethius himself as having made a moral, epistemological, and doctrinal error particular to powerful people: as having pridefully believed that his wealth and power would never end. In this section, I draw on early medieval discourse about pride, despair, and correction to show that the translator

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[17] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* Introduction, I: 71.
[18] Ibid.
[19] See Discenza, *The King's English*, 13-30.
[20] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius*," Introduction, I: 71.
[21] See Ibid., I: 67: "The retention and expansion of most of the allusions to pagan legend…and of the references to classical history, and the absence of any countervailing stories from Christian legend unless we count the Babel story…maintain the sense of a classical ambience to the dialogue."
[22] Whitney Bolton, "How Boethian is Alfred's *Boethius*?" in *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose*, ed. by Paul E. Szarmach (Albany: SUNY Press, 1986), 153-70; at 163.

consistently filters the narrative of the *Consolation* through an Anglo-Saxon moral lens and places the *Boethius* into a field of penitential, homiletic, and even legal writing.

In the original Latin *Consolation of Philosophy*, both the initial quandary of the prisoner and its resolution are problems of knowledge and understanding: his existential and even cosmic despair at being deprived of his wealth, honor, and reputation stems from a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the universe and of the Good. It is possible that his problem is not so much *ignorance* of these things—he has, after all, been a disciple of Philosophia from his youth on—as it is his inability to keep them in mind and apply them to his own situation. By teaching, or reminding, him of them, Philosophia has done her work. Her instruction is ethical, metaphysical, epistemological, and ontological, concerning the nature of the Good, of God, and of God's knowledge and human free will. Direct moral exhortation is fairly rare. The problem, after all, is that the prisoner has become mired in ignorance, not that he transgresses against a moral code. Even though Philosophia scorns ignorant and wicked behavior, she is hardly concerned to correct it— rather, she seeks to correct the ignorance that leads to that behavior. Only at the very end, after a highly abstract discussion of the relationship between providence and fate, God's knowledge and human free will, does Philosophia indulge in direct exhortation to do good for the sake of receiving a good reward from God:

> Aversamini igitur uitia, colite uirtutes, ad rectas spes animum subleuate, humiles preces in excelsa porrite.[23]

This moment of moralizing seems hard-won. It echoes and partly inverts an exhortative moment from the final poem in Book I, in which Philosophia has to help Boethius to clear his mind from the emotions that are clouding it:

> Tu quoque si uis
> Lumine claro
> Cernere verum...
> Gaudia pelle,
> Pelle timorem
> Spemque fugato
> Nec dolor adsit.[24]

Now, instead of telling him to drive hope away, Philosophia urges Boethius to raise his mind to a hope founded on proper understanding of the connection between actions and their consequences. It seems significant that the very final lines of the text are in prose: each previous book had ended in a meter calling on Boethius and his fellow men to act in a certain way in order to continue their progress from ignorance to enlightenment, not simply because it is right. Only

[23] Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio,* Book V, prose 6.47, p. 105: "Turn aside, then, vices, cultivate virtues, raise your mind to correct hopes, offer up humble prayers on high."
[24] Ibid., Book I, meter 7, ll. 20-2, 25-8: "You too, if you wish to perceive the truth with clear vision... cast out joys, cast out fear, drive away hope, lest despair remain."

now that Boethius thoroughly understands why the world goes as it does, and why this is for the best, does Philosophia find it useful to call for moral action.[25]

The Old English *Boethius*, however, presents Mod's initial quandary as a kind of sin and its resolution as a kind of penitence. Kurt Otten noted long ago that Mod suffers from a form of pride: he believes that his long period of prosperity and power will never end. As a consequence, when it does end and he is exiled and imprisoned, he responds with excessive despair, another effect of his pride.[26] The clearest indication of this comes just after Wisdom has taken on the perspective of the worldly felicities or good fortune, *woruldgesælða,* that led Mod into his state of error. These worldly goods, as voiced by Wisdom, accuse Mod of misusing them and then blaming them for the consequences. Their charges are serious: thanks to his "greedy desires," Mod has led God, their creator and bestower, to shun them.[27] Consequently, they cannot "carry out the will of our creator."[28] The worldly felicities thus allege that Mod has interfered with the working of God's power, a startling claim given the orthodox Christian belief in God's omnipotence. The translator's rewriting of this passage, however, gives the claims of the *woruldgesælða* far more weight than Fortune's speech of complaint in the original Latin *Consolation.* Where Philosophia represents Fortune as the giver of worldly goods, Wisdom says that he himself bestows these goods.[29] For an Anglo-Saxon audience, this would be correct: Wisdom, as we will later find out, is God, and God allots earthly goods whenever and to whomever He wishes. This shift in the mechanics of fortune completely changes the moral stakes of the prisoner's error: rather than simply treating Lady Fortune unfairly, he has sinned against God. While Wisdom appropriates much of the speech that Philosophia puts into the voice of Lady Fortune,[30] the *woruldgesælða* themselves get to speak part of the message. Their accusations are couched in the language of serious moral transgression. Mod is *scyldig*, "guilty," because of his *unrihtlustum* and *unrihtgitsunga*, "wrongful desires" and "wrongful greed."[31] *Unriht*, meaning "wrongful" or "unlawful," is a standard first element in Old English compound words denoting sinful qualities or acts.[32] In the *Boethius* itself, it is employed to produce terms meaning "unrighteous," "adultery," and "wrongful hatred."[33] Almost all other occurrences of *unrihtgitsung* in the Old English corpus occur as a standard translation of *avaritia* or "avarice" in lists of the eight capital sins.[34]

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[25] In his *Kommentar zu Boethius*, Joachim Gruber notes the incongruity of the homiletic tone of the ending and, after considering the possibility that the *Consolation* was left unfinished by Boethius and its current ending added by a later editor, suggests that the ending is in fact original (at 403).

[26] Otten, *König Alfreds Boethius*, 45: "Allzu großes Selbstvertrauen war der Ausgangspunkt für die Verzweiflung im Elend" ("Excessive self-confidence was the point of departure for [Mod's] despair").

[27] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* B Text, Chapter 7, l. 137, I: 256: "lustgitsunga."

[28] Ibid., l. 139: "we ne moton for þe fullgan ures scippendes willan."

[29] Ibid., l. 77, I: 254: "þinra gifena þara þe ðe from me comon" ("your gifts which came from me").

[30] On this shift as an intentional act of the translator rather than a mistake, as was once thought, see Ibid., I: 51.

[31] Ibid., B Text, Chapter 7, l. 138 and 142, I: 256.

[32] The following examples are taken from Joseph Bosworth et al., "An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online," ed. by Thomas Northcote Toller and others, Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague: *unriht-dæd*, "evil-doing," http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/033625, accessed 11 Apr. 2019; *unriht-gestreon*, "unrighteous gain," http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/033632, accessed 11 Apr. 2019; *unriht-hæman*, "to cohabit unlawfully, to commit adultery or fornication," http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/033637, accessed 11 Apr. 2019.

[33] These terms are *unrihtwis, unrihthæmed,* and *unrihtfioung*, respectively. See II: 617.

[34] See, e.g., the homily "De sancto Iohanne," found in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 198, ed. by F. Kluge in "Zu altenglischen Dichtungen," *Englische Studien* 8 (1885): 472-9; at 479; Vercelli Homily XIV, ed. by Donald

Mod responds to these charges with contrition, but in a way that only confirms his guilt: "Ic me ongite æghwonan scyldigne, ac ic eom mid þæs laþes sare swa swiðe ofðrycced þæt ic inc geandwyrdan ne mæg."[35] Wisdom's reply is only loosely based on the *Consolation*:

> Þæt is nu git þinre unrihtwisnesse þæt þu eart fullneah forþoht. Ac ic nolde þæt þu þe forþohtest. Ac ic wolde þæt þe sceamode swelces gedwolan, forðam se se ðe hine forþencð se bið ormod, ac se se þe hine sceamað se bið on hreowsunga.[36]

Where Philosophia uses the language of medicine, referring to *Boethius*'s "illness," *morbus*, and his "stubborn pain," *contumacis...doloris*,[37] Wisdom speaks in explicitly moral terms of unrighteousness, error (or even "heresy"), and penitence.[38] Godden and Irvine express some puzzlement over the "somewhat tautological" nature of the line, "Se se ðe hine forþencð se bið ormod" ("For he who despairs is despondent").[39]

However, the apparent tautology vanishes when the moral and penitential connotations of *ormod* are better understood. Wisdom speaks this line with the assumption that Mod knows that being *ormod* is a sin associated with pride, as well as a problem particular to penance. At the end of Book I of the original *Consolation*, Philosophia counsels the prisoner to expel hope, fear, and joy, for these cloud his judgment.[40] In the Old English rendition of this passage, however, Wisdom instead cautions against emotions that are dangerous for the state of the soul:

> Ac gif ðu wilnige on rihtum geleafan þæt soðe leoht oncnawan, afyr fram þe ða yfelan sælþa and þa unnettan, and eac ða unnettan ungesælþa and þone yflan ege þisse worulde; þæt is þæt þu þe ne anhebbe on ofermetto on þinre gesundfulnesse and on ðinre orsorgnesse, ne eft þe ne geortrywe nanes godes on nanre wiðerweardnesse.[41]

Scragg in *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, EETS 300 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 239-46; at p. 246, l. 149. See further *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus,* University of Toronto, http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doecorpus/cgi-bin/oec-idx?index=Fragmentary&type=simple&q1=unrihtg&restrict=Cameron+number&resval=&class=All&size=First+100, accessed Sept. 21, 2017.

[35] Godden and Irvine, eds., *Old English "Boethius,"* B Text, Chapter 8, ll. 1-3, I: 256: "I perceive myself to be guilty in every way, but I am so greatly oppressed by the pain of that offense that I cannot answer you."

[36] Ibid., ll. 3-7: "That is still a part of your unrighteousness, that you are almost entirely in despair. But I don't want you to despair; rather, I want you to be ashamed of such an error. For he who despairs is despondent, but he who feels shame is penitent."

[37] Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio,* Bk. II, prose 3.3, p. 21.

[38] As Godden and Irvine suggest in their note on these lines, the Old English seems to be influenced by a line uttered by Philosophia in Bk. I, prose 2: "Pudore an stupore siluisti? Mallem pudore, sed te, ut video, stupor oppressit" ("Did you fall silent from shame or from stupor? I would prefer shame, but, as I see, stupor weighs you down"). Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* II: 285, n. 8.3-6. The connection between shame and correction is found in a gloss that Godden and Irvine transcribe on the following page. However, the Old English of Chapter 8 of the B-Text and the corresponding Prose 5 of the C-Text is still substantially original.

[39] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* II: 285, n. 8.3-6.

[40] See above, p. 75. For the Stoic context of these lines, see Grüber, *Kommentar*, 166.

[41] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* B Text, Chapter 6, ll. 13-16, I: 251 (emphasis added): "But if you wish to perceive that true light in proper faith, drive from you those evil and useless felicities, and also those useless *un*felicities and the evil fear of this world; that is, you should neither exalt yourself to pride in your prosperity and in your carefree state *or*, on the other hand, should you despair of any good in your state of adversity."

The poetic version of these lines in the C Text adds an extra statement about *ormodnes* and makes more clear that the two states are causally and sequentially linked.

> Ac gif ðu nu wilnast, þæt ðu wel mæge,
> þæt soðe leoht sweotole oncnawan,
> leohtne geleafan, þu forlætan scealt
> idle ofersælða, unnytne gefean.
> Þu scealt eac yfelne ege anforlætan
> woruldearfoða. Ne most ðu wesan for ðæm
> *ealles to ormod,* ne ðu ðe æfre ne læt
> *wlenca gewæcan,* þe læs ðu weorðe for him
> mid ofermettum eft gescended
> and to up ahafen for orsorgum
> woruldgesælðum, ne eft to waclice
> geortreowe æniges godes,
> þonne þe for worulde wiðerweardra mæsð
> þinga þreage and þu ðe selfum
> swiðost onsitte.[42]

Ormod and *orsorh* represent the linked and opposite extremes of a proud and emotionally unbalanced mind: excessive confidence and excessive despair. The connection is signalled by the fact that both extremes are characterized by a form of the word *wac,* “weak,”: after the mind is *gewæcan,* “weakened,” by good fortune,[43] it despairs all too *waclice,* “weakly.”[44] An apparent scribal error in the B Text further suggests how intimately the early readers of the Old English *Boethius* associated excessive despair with excessive confidence. Following the Latin fairly closely, Wisdom says that the worldly felicities “cunningly flatter those minds that they wish to utterly betray in the end, and then, when they least expect it, abandon them in despair to the greatest sorrow.”[45] The B Text, however, erroneously has *ofermodnesse*, “pride,” in place of the *ormodnesse*, “despair,” found in the C Text.[46] While the error can be explained fairly easily by the close similarity in spelling between the two words, the theoretical connection between despair and pride may have also played a role. The same confusion may be at work in Vercelli Homily X.[47]

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[42] Ibid., C Text, Metre 5, ll. 29b-38a, I: 394-5 (emphasis added): “But if you wish to clearly perceive that true light, as you very well can, you must abandon vain and excessive pleasure, useless joy. You must also abandon the evil fear of this world’s difficulties. *Nor should you be too despairing about that, nor should you ever let glories weaken you*, lest you become corrupted once again with pride and too haughty because of your untroubled worldly blessings. Nor should you again despair all too weakly [i.e. greatly] of any good thing when the greatest of worldly adversities oppress you and you fear very greatly for yourself.”

[43] Ibid., l. 36.

[44] Ibid., l. 39.

[45] Ibid., Prose 5, ll. 5-9, I: 395: “mid swiðe monigre swetnesse swiðe lytelice oleccað þæm modum ða hie on last willað swiþust beswican, and þonne æt nihstan, þonne hi læst wenað, hi on ormodnesse forlætað on þæm mæstan sare.”

[46] Ibid., B Text, Chapter 7, l. 8, I: 251.

[47] See Scragg, ed., *The Vercelli Homilies*, Glossary, p. 454, s. v. “ormod.”

Despair does not merely pose a danger for Mod's journey to true knowledge and belief, however: it is also a sin that is sometimes mentioned in penitential contexts much like Wisdom's contrast between *ormodnes* and *hreowsunga*, despair and penance. Anglo-Saxon writers vary between the synonymous terms *ormod* and *orwene*: Ælfric, for instance, seems to prefer *orwene*, while Wulfstan prefers *ormod*.[48] A modern Catholic teaching on despair explains it as a sin because it is willful: "Despair, ethically regarded, is the voluntary and complete abandonment of all hope of saving one's soul and of having the means required for that end."[49] Despair was associated with *tristitia* or "sadness," the word used by John Cassian to translate one of the eight deadly sins from Greek into Latin.[50] Ælfric makes the exact same link in a sermon for Mid-Lent, describing the sin of sadness in terms very similar to the situation of Boethius in the *Consolation*:

> The fifth capital sin is sorrow (*unrotnys*) with this world, that someone becomes unhappy with God because of misfortunes of this present life. Of it springs hostility (*yfelnys*), inconstancy (*wacmodnys*), bitterness of the heart, and despair (*orwennys*) of oneself.[51]

In the Old English *Life of St. Guthlac*, despair (*ormodnys*) is described as an arrow shot by the devil that wounds Guthlac's heart. As a saint, however, unlike Boethius, he manages to stand firm against the temptation to despair.[52] Anglo-Saxon discourse on despair, then, suggests why Wisdom would caution Mod against being *ormod*.

Given that despair is sinful because it means a voluntary renunciation of the effort to save one's soul, it is hardly surprising that it would be specifically commented on in Anglo-Saxon penitential texts. The *Old English Penitential*, for instance, states,

> Manig man wilnað dædbote to underfonne for his sýnnum þonne tweonað him eft for þæra sýnna manigfealdnesse & bið orwene þæt he ne mæge þa bote aberan þe his scrift him tæcð & forlæt hit· þonne bið him seo orwennis to maran sýnne geteald þonne þa sýnna þe he geðohte to andettenne & þæt þa forlet.[53]

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[48] *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*, University of Toronto, searches for "ormod" and "orwen," https://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doecorpus/simple.html, accessed 25 Sept. 2017.

[49] Joseph Delany, "despair," *The Catholic Encyclopedia Online*, Vol. 4 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908), accessed 14 Aug. 2017, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04755a.htm.

[50] See Michael Petschenig, ed., *Iohannis Cassiani: De Institutis Coenobiorum et De Octo Principalium Vitiorum Remediis*, CSEL 17 (Vienna, Prague, and Leipzig: Tempsky, 1888), IX.xii, p. 171.

[51] Ælfric, "Mid-Lent: Secunda sententia," in *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series, Text*, ed. by Malcolm Godden, EETS s.s. 5 (London: EETS, 1979), pp. 121-6; at 124-5 (punctuation modernized): "Se fifta leahtor is unrotnys ðissere worulde, þæt se man geunrotsige ongean god for ungelimpum ðises andweardan lifes. Of ðam bið acenned yfelnys and wacmodnys, heortan biternys, and his sylfes orwennys."

[52] See P. Gonser, ed., *Das angelsächsische Prosa-Leben des heiligen Guthlac*, Anglistische Forschungen 27 (Heidelberg: Carl Wister, 1909), p. 153.

[53] Allen Frantzen, *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials: A Cultural Database*, ed. of *Old English Penitential* based on Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 482, 2a, http://www.anglo-saxon.net/penance/index.php?p=LAUD482_2a, accessed 14 Aug. 2017: "Many a man wishes to undertake repentance for his sins, but then falls into doubt because of the great number of his sins, despairs that he is not able to endure the penance that his confessor prescribes for him, and then abandons it. That despair is then counted as a greater sin than the sins that he originally thought to confess, but abandoned."

These sources, which all survive in higher numbers than does the Old English *Boethius*, suggest why the translator seems to interpret Boethius's original despair as a sin, and why Wisdom is not being tautological when he says, "se se ðe hine forþencþ se bið ormod."[54] Instead, he is saying something akin to, "If you kill someone, then that makes you a murderer": the second term contributes a distinct set of (negative) connotations and reifies action into a morally-charged state. Where the *Consolation* frames the prisoner's mental sickness as merely an obstacle to his happiness and wisdom, the Old English *Boethius* treats it as sinful. The moral danger of negative emotions is reflected in the fact that the Muses, famously referred to as *scenicas meretriculas* ("theatrical whores") and expelled by Philosophia, are turned into *awirgede woruldsorga* ("accursed worldly sorrows") in translation and referred to as *þa mæstan sceaþan* ("the greatest evildoers").[55] Alcuin's *De virtutibus et vitiis*, a moral treatise composed for Count Wido of Brittany ca. 799-800, offers a contrast between "healthful" and "pestilential" sadness that might have informed the Old English *Boethius*:

> Tristitiae duo sunt genera: unum salutiferum, alterum pestiferum. Tristitia salutaris est, quando de peccatis suis animus contristatur peccatoris, et ita contristatur, ut confessionem et poenitentiam agere quaerat, et converti se ad Deum desideret. Alia est tristitia huius saeculi, quae mortem operatur animae, quae nihil in bono opere proficere valet, quae animum perturbat, et saepe in desperationem mittit, ut futurorum spem abstollat bonorum.[56]

Alcuin's *tristitia huius saeculi*, "sadness of this world," closely matches the Old English *woruldsorga*, "worldly sorrows." His contrast between healthy sorrow, which leads to repentance, and pestilential sorrow, which leads to desperation, offers a striking parallel to Wisdom's contrast between *hreowsung* and *ormodnes*.[57] The Anglo-Saxon homilist Ælfric, who draws from the Old English *Boethius* elsewhere,[58] explains the sin of sadness in a way that is even closer to the situation depicted in the *Boethius:* it occurs, he says, when "someone becomes excessively unhappy because of the loss of his goods, which he loved too much, and then complains against God and increases his sins."[59] For the translator of the Old English *Boethius*, Mod's initial state of sadness is not just a symptom of his decline, but a moral problem in itself.

Just as Mod falls into sin, a spiritually "pestilential" emotion, when he becomes desperate, he also falls into heresy, a morally and spiritually transgressive state of false belief. Philosophia tends to define the prisoner's sickness in both somatic and affective terms:

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[54] Godden and Irvine, eds., *Old English "Boethius,"* B Text, Chapter 8, ll. 3-7, I: 256: "he who despairs is despondent."

[55] Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio,* Bk. I, prose 1.8, p. 2; Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* B Text, Chapter 3, l. 7 and 8, I: 245.

[56] Alcuin, *De virtutibus et vitiis*, ch. xxxiii, "De tristitia," PL 101 col. 635: "There are two kinds of sadness: one health-giving, the other pestilential. Health-giving sadness occurs when the mind of a sinner grows sad about its sins and saddens in such a way that it seeks to make confession and penitence, and desires to be turned to God. The other is sadness of this world, which brings about death to the soul, which cannot inspire the soul to good works, which disturbs the mind and often sends it into desperation, so that it takes away all hope of good things to come."

[57] See p. 77 n. 36, above.

[58] See Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* I: 207-9.

[59] Ælfric of Eynsham, *De octo uitiis et de duodecim abusiuis gradus,* ed. by Mary Clayton in *Two Ælfric Texts: The Twelve Abuses and the Vices and Virtues* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2013), 142-77; at 146: "se mann geunrotsað ealles to swiðe for his æhta lyre, þe he lufode to swiðe, and cit þonne wið God and his synna geeacnað."

> Nihil, inquit, pericli est, lethargum patitur, communem illusarum mentium morbum. Sui paulisper oblitus est. Recordabitur facile, si quidem nos ante cognouerit; quod ut possit, paulisper lumina eius mortalium rerum nube caligantia tergamus.[60]

The Old English omits this passage, possibly because the claim that the prisoner was *nihil pericli* ("in no real danger") does not accord with its treatment of Mod's sickness and error. When the prisoner finally tells his entire story of woe, including his banishment from Rome, Philosophia reminds him of his *true* homeland, from which "it was ordained that no one could exile anyone who wished to live there."[61] He has not been exiled, then, but simply wandered or strayed (*aberrasti*).[62] By not wishing to live in his true homeland anymore, he has ceased to deserve to do so.[63] Philosophia, crucially, is allusive and indirect when identifying this homeland. She alludes to God as the "one ruler, one king" of this homeland in a Greek verse taken from Homer's *Iliad*, but never names God directly.[64] Book IV, meter 1 will eventually make clear that this homeland is heaven, where human souls are born and where they eventually return to, according to Platonic doctrine.[65] This heaven is not quite identical to the Christian heaven, however. For one thing, Philosophia suggests that Boethius can visit or even inhabit it during his lifetime. In this sense, the *patria* can also be seen as another version of the *arx philosophiae*, the "citadel of philosophy," a spatial metaphor for the community of philosophers past and present.[66]

The Old English *Boethius* reinterprets philosophical belonging as an adherence to a body of teachings rather than a more abstract membership in the community of philosophers past and present. In doing so, it frames Mod's departure from this teaching as a sinful failure of constancy in belief:

> Sona swa ic þe ærest on þisse unrotnesse geseah þus murcniende ic ongeat þæt þu wære ut adrifen of þines fæder eðele, *þæt is of minum larum*.[67]

The phrase, "þæt is of minum larum," resembles a gloss added to explain what must have seemed like a metaphor to the translator, but which is arguably not one in the original. By identifying Mod's homeland with his own (i.e., Wisdom's) "teachings" or "doctrine," Wisdom

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[60] Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio,* Bk. I, prose 2.5-6, p. 4: "He is in no real danger; he suffers from lethargy, an illness common to all deluded minds. He has forgotten himself for a little while; he will recall easily, since he was indeed able to recognize me before. I will clear the darkening cloud of mortal affairs from his sight for a bit so that he may recall himself."

[61] Ibid., Bk. I, prose 5.5, p. 13: "qua sanctum est ei ius exulare non esse quisquis in ea sedem fundare maluerit."

[62] Ibid., Bk. I, prose 5.3.

[63] Ibid., ll. 6-7: "non quidem pulsus es sed aberrasti"; Ibid., ll. 19-20: "At quisquis eam inhabitare valle desierit, pariter desinit etiam mereri."

[64] Ibid., l. 12, corresponding to *Iliad*, bk. II, l. 204, as cited by Gruber, *Kommentar*, pp. 149-50.

[65] Ibid., IVm1, ll. 1-2: "Sunt enim pennae volucres mihi / Quae celsa conscendant poli" ("For I have feathered wings / Which can climb the heights of heaven"); Ibid., ll. 25-6: "'Haec,' dices, 'memini, patria est mihi, / Hinc ortus, hic sistam gradum'" ("'This,' you'll say, 'is my homeland, as I now recall; / Here I was born, here I will halt my step'").

[66] On this connection, see Gruber, *Kommentar*, p. 151. See Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio*, Bk. I, prose 3.13-14, p. 6—a passage that was omitted in the Old English *Boethius*.

[67] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* B Text, Ch. 5, ll. 4-6, I: 247 (emphasis added): "As soon as I first saw you thus grieving in this sadness, I perceived that you had been driven from your father's homeland, *that is, from my teachings*."

frames the problem as one of mistaken belief or error.[68] Wisdom continues in an explanatory, glossing mode that further paints Mod's error as sin:

> Þær þu him fore of þa ðu þine fæstrædnesse forlete and wendest þæt sio wyrd þas woruld wende heore agenes ðonces buton Godes geþeahte and his geðafunga and monna gewyrhtum.[69]

The two verb clauses in this sentence, separated by *and*, closely resemble separate Latin glosses found in separate manuscripts of the *Consolation* from the tenth and eleventh centuries.[70] One of these, a manuscript from Einsiedeln Abbey in Switzerland from the second half of the tenth century, explains the prisoner's exile in terms of his departure from mental steadfastness or stability: *quod errares a propria mentis stabilitate*.[71] This seems to correspond to *þa ðu þine fæstrædnesse forlete,* but the fit is not quite perfect. The Latin commentary keeps up a running allegorical interpretation of the prisoner's "exile" as a mental exile from a state of wisdom: the verb *errare,* here, makes clear the connection to Philosophia's *aberrasti* just below.[72] The Old English translation, however, has just told us that this "homeland" is actually Wisdom's teachings, not a state of wisdom. Mod's abandonment of his constancy, then, is not the allegorical equivalent to the statement that he left his homeland, but rather a literal explanation for it. The verb *forlete*, "abandoned," also has a stronger sense of volition than *errares*, "wandered," emphasizing that a moral transgression occurred. By joining what appears to have been originally a separate gloss to this one, the clause beginning *wendest þæt sio wyrd*, the Old English *Boethius* further underscores the link between Mod's mental sins and his erroneous belief. In bringing these glosses into its adaptation of the *Consolation*, the *Boethius* moves towards a more nominalized and moralistic vocabulary of mental states. None of the various permutations of *stabilitas* and *constantia* in the *Consolation* have quite the same meaning or application as the terms for "constancy" used in the glosses and translation.[73] *Constantia* is only applied to states of affairs, not states of mind, while *stabilitas* is never used to describe a human

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[68] It is true that Joachim Gruber similarly identifies Boethius's exile in the *Consolation* as both a "fall of the soul" and a "distancing from [Philosophia's] teaching": see Gruber, *Kommentar*, p. 148: "der Fall der Seele," "eine Entfernung von ihrer Lehre." And insofar as Boethius's course of treatment largely consists of rational arguments that lay out discursive truths, his initial state of confusion and forgetting is also bound up in discursive truths. But because the *patria* Philosophia refers to in this chapter is not simply a metaphor, it would also be incorrect, for Boethius, to reduce the prisoner's exile to a mere error in belief.

[69] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* B Text, Ch. 5, ll. 6-9, I: 247: "You travelled away from it when you abandoned your constancy and believed that fate turned the world of its own sake without God's intention and his permission and human merits." As Godden and Irvine note in their commentary on this passage at Ibid., II: 268, it refers back to Mod's claims at B4.16-21 (I: 247), corresponding to CM4.33-52 (I: 390).

[70] See Ibid., II: 268.

[71] Ibid.

[72] See Einsiedeln, Stiftsbibliothek, Codex 179(482), p. 109 – Gregorii epistolae; Boethius, *e-codices: Virtual Manuscript Library of Switzerland,* http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/sbe/0179/109/0/Sequence-985, accessed Aug. 25, 2017.

[73] While it does contain the word *constantia*, "constancy, permanence," this word is only applied to states of affairs, not to human minds or wills. In Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio,* see: Bk. II, prose 1.10, p. 18; Bk. II, prose 2.8, p. 20; Bk. II, prose 3.12, p. 22; Bk. III, prose 11.34, p. 56. The noun *fæstrædnes* has only seven attestations in Old English: three of them are from the *Boethius*, three are from the Old English *Pastoral Care*, and one is from Vercelli Homily iv. See 'fæst-rǣdnes,' *Dictionary of Old English*, University of Toronto, http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/, accessed Aug. 25, 2017.

mind that is unperturbed or steadfast in belief.[74] Just like *ormodnes*, the notion of *fæstrædnes* reifies the prisoner's mental actions into a state with moral significance—in this case a virtue, in that one a vice. By putting these explanatory glosses into the mouth of Wisdom himself, the Old English translator makes Philosophia's diagnosis more explicit and alters the relation between the two dialogue figures. Philosophia's portrayal in the early chapters of the *Consolation* is heavily shaped by the controlling metaphor of mental medicine. She is essentially a doctor who gently reprimands her patient for making a poor choice and getting sick. Wisdom, on the other hand, acts more as a teacher and confessor.

The Old English *Boethius* does not just reflect Anglo-Saxon moral discourse; it also makes use of a widespread vernacular formula with legal and penitential connections. At four separate moments, the translator inserts a qualifying statement beginning *buton*, "except," that specifies a possible act of moral correction or improvement. The use of these tags reinforces the penitential nature of Mod's journey to wisdom and signals the translation's shift into the discourse of homiletic instruction. When the prisoner first sees Philosophia in the *Consolation*, he notices that her dress is torn. She explains that this was done by the philosophical sects, such as the Epicureans and Stoics, who arose in the wake of Plato's death and each claimed to represent all of philosophy.[75] In keeping with his interpretation of philosophical debate in moral terms, the translator of the *Boethius* adds a statement explaining these people's actions as sin and specifying their need for repentance:

> Ac hi gegaderiað monifeald dysig on ðære fortruwunga and on þam gilpe butan heora hwelc eft to hyre bote gecirre.[76]

The phrase "butan heora hwelc eft to hyre bote gecirre" ("unless each of them turns to his improvement") forms part of a widespread formula in legal, homiletic, and penitential texts.[77] The formula occurs with a limited set of locutions: *gebetan* occurs 76 times, *cierran* occurs some

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[74] It is, however, used of God's mind, in a physical metaphor ("stable footing") for a mental state, and to describe the still-human minds of Odysseus' men after they had been physically changed into wild beasts by Circe. In Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio*, see: Bk. I, metre 1, l. 22, p. 1; Bk. IV, metre 3, l. 27, p. 72; Bk. IV, prose 6.14, p. 80.

[75] Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio,* Bk. I, prose 3.7.

[76] Godden and Irvine, eds., *Old English "Boethius,"* B Text, Chapter 3, ll. 18-20, I: 245: "But they gather much folly in that presumption and in that boast unless each of them turns to his improvement."

[77] See, for instance, Ælfric's homily on Passion of the Apostles Peter and Paul, ed. by Peter Clemoes in *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series*, *Text*, EETS s.s. 17 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), Homily XXVI, pp. 388-99; at 399, ll. 88-9 (emphasis added): "Nellað þa apostoli nænne rihtwisne mid heora mansumunge gebindan. ne eac þone manfullan miltsiende unbindan. *buton he mid soþre dædbote gecyrre to lifes wege*" ("The apostles do not want to bind any righteous man with their excommunication, or, on the other hand, any sinful man mercifully unbind, *unless he turns to the way of life with true repentance*"). Similar wording can be found in the Old English translation of the Benedictine Rule, ed. by Arnold Schröer, *Die angelsächsischen Prosabearbeitungen der Benediktinerregel* (Kassel: Wigand, 1885), Ch. V, pp. 20-1 (emphasis added): "Witodlice, þeah hwylc leorninccniht his ealdres gebodu mid weorce gefremme, gif he hit mid muðe beceorað oþþe mid mode besargað, ne bið hit þeah Gode andfenge, þe ælces mannes heortan þurhsyhð, ac for swylcere dæde he nane mede æt Gode ne onfehð, ac gyt ma on ecum wite mid þam murcnerum, þe Gode mishyrdon, bið geset, *butan he mid fulre dædbote his ungeþanc gebete*" ("Indeed, even if every student should carry out his master's commands, it is not acceptable to God if he complains with his mouth or laments it in his mind—God sees through every person's heart. [The student] receives no reward for that from God, but is rather the more set in eternal punishment with the murmurers who disobeyed God, *unless [the student] atones for his ungratefulness with full penitence*").

25 times, and *geswican* occurs some 36 times.[78] Wisdom's claim that these presumptuous philosophers "gather much folly" seems somewhat divorced from the more usual threat of excommunication or damnation. However, as I show in the following paragraph, *dysignes* ("folly") comes to function almost as a byword for sinfulness in the Old English *Boethius*, designating all those who do not follow "divine Wisdom."[79] This legal formula recurs at a point corresponding to the end of the Latin meter about Orpheus and Eurydice, which concludes Book III of the *Consolation*. Boethius allegorically interprets Orpheus as representing any man, like his own stand-in in the *Consolation*, striving to free his mind from its earthly shackles and see by the light of truth, but who turns back and thus loses "whatever excellence he takes with him."[80] The Old English translator borrows this concept, but frames it in terms of the will:

> Forþam swa hwa swa mid fullon willan his mod went to þam yflum þe he ær forlet and hi þonne fullfremeð and [hi] him þonne fullice liciað, and he hi næfre forlætan ne þencð, *þonne forlyst he eall his ærran god buton he hit eft gebete*.[81]

The exact nature of this act of *gebetan*, whether it refers to doing penance or simply attempting to improve, is unclear—just like the threat implied in Wisdom's earlier statement about presumptuous pseudo-philosophers. By using penitential language but removing it from the context of punishment, the Old English *Boethius* emphasizes the moral dynamics of error and correction but also holds out the prospect that moral action is its own reward.

In recasting the prisoner's sickness at the beginning of the *Consolation* as a sinful falling away from divine teachings, the Old English *Boethius* reinterprets his journey to enlightenment as a path to his salvation. His participation in this process of questioning, thinking, and answering thus becomes a morally necessary act of penance and self-reform. This moral interpretation of the prisoner's error and journey to wisdom also affects the way that the pursuit of knowledge itself is discussed. The translator departs from his source text in emphasizing the moral necessity of actively pursuing wisdom, *spyrian æfter wisdome*. From its frequent and unremarkable use in the Old English *Boethius*, it is apparent that the verb *spyrian* has already undergone a metaphorical extension from literal hunting or pursuit—following in someone or something's *spor*, "track"—to investigation.[82] This history, however, means that it also continues to mean "to seek after." The uniting of these two concepts under a single verb means that seeking after wisdom or God, a moral duty for any Christian, is closely related to the idea of *investigating* wisdom or God. In the Old English *Boethius*, seeking after something is fundamentally seeking to *know* it.

The moral necessity of actively seeking after wisdom is especially highlighted in condemnations of those who fail to do so, the foolish or *dysige*. Book IV, Chapter 2 of the *Consolation* lays out the argument that "good people always have power, while wicked men are

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[78] *DOE Web Corpus*, University of Toronto, searches for "butan" and "buton" in proximity to "gebet," "cierr," and "swic," http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doecorpus/, accessed 5 Sept. 2017.

[79] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* B Text, Chapter 3, l. 2, I: 245: "heofencund wisdom."

[80] See Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio*, Bk. III, metre 12, l. 57, p. 64: "quicquid praecipuum trahit."

[81] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* B Text, Chapter 35, ll. 250-4, I: 338 (emphasis added): "Therefore whoever intentionally turns his mind to those evils that he had earlier abandoned and carries them out again and they entirely please him, and he never intends to abandon them, *then he loses all his earlier good unless he once again makes amends*."

[82] See Discenza, *The King's English*, 102, on metaphorical uses of *spyrigan*.

deprived of all of their strength."[83] To make this point, Philosophia reminds Boethius of their earlier conclusion that all humans, good or wicked, seek the highest good—wicked people, however, are blocked from what they seek by their ignorance or their enslavement to emotions and physical sensations. Where Philosophia asks, "But what is *weaker* than the blindness of ignorance?",[84] however, Wisdom asks, "But what is more *wicked* than folly?"[85] To build on and explain this new focus on morality, he then inserts two impassioned questions with no equivalent in the *Consolation*: "Why do they allow themselves to be foolish? Why do they not wish to seek after virtues (*cræftum*) and after wisdom?"[86] Soon afterwards, he also adds the sentence, "We said earlier, however, that nothing was worse than folly."[87] The shift from weakness to wickedness is prepared for by previous moments in the translation. Most importantly, the *Boethius* has already gone far beyond the *Consolation* in establishing wisdom as a virtue. For instance, in material corresponding to Book II, prose 2 of the *Consolation*, the translator has taken a speech of complaint originally put into the voice of Lady Fortune (uttered, however, by Philosophia), and turned it into a speech in the voice of Wisdom him-/herself.[88] In the adapted version of this speech, Wisdom names the virtues as his/her "servants," *þeowas*.[89] Later, in material corresponding to Book III, prose 4,[90] the translator inserts a passage that resembles a gloss, but does not correspond to any known gloss.[91] When reading, "there is some dignity inherent in virtue which immediately transfers to those whom that virtue is joined to,"[92] the translator seems to have been reminded of how he had already described the process of virtue being joined to people: as a gift from Wisdom. He thus adapts this sentence to, "Every virtue has its particular gift [*sundorgife*], and it immediately gives those gifts and that honor to whoever loves it."[93] He then proceeds to enumerate the four cardinal virtues, but with the addition of wisdom at their head:

> Swa swa wisdom is se hehsta cræft and he hæfð on him feower oðre cræftas; þara is an wærscipe, oðer gemetgung, ðridde is ellen, feorðe rihtwisnes. Se wisdom gedeð his

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[83] Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio,* Bk. IV, prose 2.2, p. 66: "bonis semper adesse potentiam, malos cunctis uiribus esse desertos."
[84] Ibid., Bk. IV, prose 2.31, p. 68: "Sed quid eneruatius ignorantiae caecitate?"
[85] Godden and Irvine, eds., *Old English "Boethius,"* B Text, Chapter 36, ll. 154-5, I: 343 (emphasis added): "Ac hwæt sægst ðu þonne þæt sie *forcuðre* þonne sio ungesceadwisnes?"
[86] Ibid., B Text, Chapter 36, ll. 154-6, I: 343: "Hwy geþafiað hi þæt hi bioð dysige? Hwy nyllað hy spyrigan æfter cræftum and æfter wisdome?"
[87] Ibid., ll. 158-9: "Wit cwædon þeah ær þæt nanwuht nære wyrse þonne ungesceadwisnes."
[88] This is a highly-debated moment in the Old English *Boethius*. See Ibid., I: 51-2.
[89] Ibid., B Text, Chapter 7, ll. 77-8, I: 254.
[90] Ibid., B Text, Chapter 27, I: 297-300; Ibid., C Text, Prose 14, II: 444-7.
[91] See Paul Szarmach, "Alfred's *Boethius* and the Four Cardinal Virtues," in *Alfred the Wise: Studies in Honour of Janet Bately on her Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. by Jane Roberts and Janet L. Nelson with Malcolm Godden (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), 223-35.
[92] Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio,* Bk. III, prose 4.18: "Inest enim dignitas propria uirtuti quam protinus in eos quibus fuerit adiuncta transfundit."
[93] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* B Text, Chapter 27, ll. 45-7, I: 298: "Ælc cræft hæfð his sundorgife, and þa gife and þone weorðscipe ðe he hæfð he forgifð swiðe hraðe ælcum þara þe hine lufað."

> lufiendas wise and wære and gemetfæste and geþyldige and rihtwise, and ælces goodes þeawes he gefyllð þone þe hine lufað.[94]

With wisdom understood as *se hehsta cræft* ("the highest virtue"), the *Consolation*'s *ignorantiae caecitate*, "blindness of ignorance," can now be understood as a willful, that is to say, sinful, refusal to pursue knowledge. Where Philosophia and her followers look down from their citadel and laugh at the ignorant mob, Wisdom condemns this mob from the pulpit and holds out hope of converting them.

The *Boethius* mimics the *Consolation* in tracing a trajectory of shifting areas of concern and methods of inquiry.[95] Where the *Consolation* becomes increasingly preoccupied with the question of what methods of reasoning arrive at the highest truth, however, the *Boethius* increasingly focuses on the moral issue of how to practice wisdom. The pursuit of wisdom by listening and asking questions thus comes to constitute the moral person. Book IV, once again, is where both Boethius and his Old English translator wrestle with the question of who can truly understand Philosophia/Wisdom's teachings, which have become increasingly counterintuitive. At one point, for instance, Philosophia makes the point that people are less happy when they are able to carry out their evil desires than when they are prevented from doing so. Boethius agrees that this logically follows from what they have already established, but still finds it hard to concede: how could it be that someone is happier when his or her will is frustrated?

> Tum ego: Mira quidem, inquam, et concessu difficilis inlatio, sed his eam quae prius concessa sunt nimius convenire cognosco. Recte, inquit, aestimas, sed qui conclusioni accedere durum putat, aequum est uel falsum aliquid praecessisse demonstret uel collocationem propositionum non esse efficacem necessariae concusionis ostendat; alioquin concessis praecedentibus nihil prorsus est quod de inlatione causetur.[96]

Boethius's befuddlement at this apparent clash between logical soundness and intuitiveness, Philosophia hints, is inappropriate. Her mini-lecture on logical argumentation suggests that one can only critique such arguments on the basis of their internal structure, not their correspondence to one's general sense of reality. This moment indicates that the two participants in the dialogue have moved to a higher level of argument in their ascent to divine truth, to Boethius's "homeland."

The Old English translator seems to recognize that this is an important moment for reflecting on the method of the dialogue, but adapts it to reflect his own understanding of that

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[94] Ibid., I: 445-6, ll. 46-50: "Indeed, wisdom is the highest virtue and has four other virtues in it: the first is prudence, the second temperance, third fortitude, and fourth righteousness. Wisdom makes those who love it wise and prudent and temperate and patient and righteous, and it fills everyone who loves it with every good custom."

[95] On this process in the *Consolation*, see esp. Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue*, 124-202.

[96] Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio*, Bk. IV, prose 4.11, p. 74: "'A wonderful conclusion,' I then said, 'and one hard to concede: but I acknowledge that it accords very well with what was granted earlier.' 'Your thoughts are right,' she said, 'but it is proper for one who thinks it hard to accede to a conclusion either to demonstrate that something false has been premised or to show that the conjunction of the premises does not give a necessary conclusion.'" Due to the technical nature of Philosophia's point, I follow here the translation of S. J. Tester, *Boethius: The Theological Tractates and the* Consolation of Philosophy, Loeb Classical Library 74 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 341.

method and its moral stakes. He translates the *Consolation*'s dichotomy between what seems intuitive and what logically follows into a dichotomy between easy and difficult subject-matter:

> Ða cwæð ic. Þæt is wundorlic þæt ðu sægst and swiðe earfoðlic dysegum monnum to ongitanne, ac ic ongite þeah þæt hit belimpð genog wel to ðære spræce ðe wit ær ymbe spræcon.[97]

The qualification that Wisdom's point is difficult for "fools" to understand leads Wisdom to reply with a distinction between wise people and fools: wise people are wise because they wish to hear and understand difficult material. Wisdom is indicated by the will, not, we might infer, by the understanding:

> Ða cwæð he. Ic ne sprece nu no to dysegum monnum, ac sprece to ðam þe wel wilniað wisdom ongitan, forðæm þæt bið tacn wisdomes þæt hine mon welnige geheran and ongitan.[98]

Wisdom then paraphrases Philosophia's point that the burden of proof rests on anyone who disagrees with his conclusions, though this hypothetical person is now described as a "fool."[99] Unlike Philosophia, however, Wisdom adds an "or else": if this fool cannot find a logical basis on which to disagree with his conclusions, then the fool must "wend, ongite and gelefe þæt wit on riht spyrigen."[100] In light of the moral distinction drawn between the wise and the foolish, Wisdom seems to be referring to an act of conversion as much as an act of understanding or conceding a point. Indeed, *wendan*, the verb he uses for "to change one's mind," can also mean "to convert."[101] If wishing to hear and understand wisdom is the sign of wisdom, then impatience and a weak will to learn are characteristics of fools. In the *Consolation*, the problem with the perception of the unwise is that they "have regard, not to the order of things, but to their own emotions."[102] In the *Boethius*, it is that they "do not wish to investigate each speech until they correctly understand it, but turn to their vain desires and pursue those."[103] The passage exemplifies the close relationship between action and investigation in the *Boethius*: the same verb phrase, *spyrian æfter*, is used to describe both "pursuing" or "investigating" a discourse with the goal of understanding it, and acting on one's vain desires. In addition, the verb used for "turning" to one's vain desires, *wendað*, is the same verb that has just been used to suggest what

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[97] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* C Text, Prose 27, ll. 33-6, I: 509: "Then I said, 'That is a marvellous thing that you say, and one very difficult for fools to understand; but I understand that it belongs well enough to what we were saying earlier.'"
[98] Ibid., ll. 36-8: "Then he said, 'I am not speaking now to fools, but to those who wish to understand wisdom, for it is a sign of wisdom that one wants to hear and understand it.'"
[99] Ibid., ll. 38-43.
[100] Ibid., l. 42: "turn, understand, and believe that we are following the right direction."
[101] Bosworth, "An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online," *wendan*, def. I.3, Jul. 16, 2010, accessed Aug. 29, 2017, http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/035069.
[102] Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio*, Bk. IV, prose 4.27, p. 75: "dum enim non rerum ordinem sed suos intuentur affectus."
[103] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* B Text, Chapter 38, ll. 182-4, I: 355: "Forþam hi ne lyst spirian æfter ælcere spræce swa lange oð hi þæt ryht witon, ac wendað on hiora unnyttan willan and spyrigað æfter þam."

fools must do to right themselves. The language of pursuing knowledge is impossible to extricate from the language of the will and its moral dynamics of error, sin, and correction.

The translator of the *Boethius* does not just depict the moral status of wisdom differently from Boethius; he also understands knowledge itself in fundamentally different terms. Where the *Consolation* aims to build a tight and rational structure of arguments, each leading logically to the other, the figures in the *Boethius* frame the knowledge they are creating as an eclectic and unstructured mass of individual pieces of wisdom. In the middle of Book III, prose 10, the two dialogue figures establish that God's perfect happiness and his omnipotence are one. At this point, Philosophia compares her own method to a geometrical proof, declaring, "Super haec, inquit, igitur ueluti geometriae solent demonstratis propositis aliquid inferre, quae porismata ipsi uocant, ita ego quoque tibi ueluti corollarium dabo."[104] This "corollary" turns out to be the point that humans who acquire true happiness (*beatitudo*) ultimately participate in divinity: "Omnis igitur beatus deus."[105] The Old English *Boethius* thoroughly reinterprets this passage:

> Ac ic wolde get mid sumre bisne ðe behwerfan utan þæt ðu ne mihtst nænne weg findan ofer, swa swa uðwitena gewuna is, þæt hi willað simle hwætwugu niwes and seldcuþes eowian, þæt hi mægen mid þy aweccan þæt mod þara geherendra.[106]

Philosophia's *corollarium* or "corollary" has become Wisdom's *bisen* or "example," undoing the argumentative structure named in the Latin. Structure is not wholly absent, however; instead, the translator shifts the emphasis from a relation with what has already been established (*demonstratis propositis*) to what is about to come (*hwætwugu niwes and seldcuþes*), adding a pedagogical justification for this new example: "that they might wake the minds of their listeners."[107] The terms established in this passage of metadiscourse—*bisen*, *hwætwugu niwes*—will return several times, most notably at the end of prose 12. They also shape the translator's treatment of the next several lines. While he translates the somewhat shocking claim that every happy person is God, he also adds a specific illustration of the (probably reassuring) stipulation that comes immediately after: that such people are God only by participation, not in nature. God, he says, is:

> se fruma and se staþol eallra [godra and eallra goda, þeah is mænig god] ðe of him cumað, swa swa ealle steorran weorðað onlihte and gebirhte of þære sunnan, sume ðeah beorhtor, sume unbeorhtor. Swa eac se mona, swa miclum he liht swa sio sunne hine gescinð; þonne hio hine ealne geondscinð, þonne bið he eall beorht.[108]

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[104] Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio*, Bk. III, prose 10.22, p. 54: "'Therefore, in addition to these things,' she said, 'just as the geometricians are accustomed to draw something, which they call *porismata*, from the theorems they have proven, so I will give you a sort of corollary."

[105] Ibid.: "Therefore, every happy man is God."

[106] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* I: 321: "But I would like to encompass you with another example that you can't find a way out of, as is the custom of philosophers, that they always wish to show something new and strange, that they might wake the minds of their listeners."

[107] Ibid.

[108] Ibid.: "the origin and the foundation of all good people and all good things, and nonetheless the good that comes from him is manifold, just as all stars are lit and brightened from the sun, some brighter, some less. So also the moon shines as brightly as the sun shines on it; when [the sun] shines all around it, then it becomes entirely bright."

By inserting this analogy, Wisdom has lived up to his promise to offer a *bisen*, and even combined knowledge about the nature of God with astronomy. Later in this chapter, Mod requests that Wisdom tell him *hwætwugu uncuþes*, "something unknown"; at the same point in the Latin, the prisoner calls for *id quod restat*, "that which remains."[109] Where the prisoner imagines the argument of the dialogue as something like a structure missing a brick, Mod merely asks for another brick of knowledge to add to his stack.[110]

The Old English translator's understanding of mental qualities and skills, and of wisdom itself, is more in line with depictions of wisdom in Old English poetry than with Boethius's Platonic framework. Near the end of Book III of the *Consolation*, Philosophia has just brought together many of their previous arguments into the conclusion, "the good is the end of all things."[111] They have arrived at this point through logical deduction, not outside knowledge. While Philosophia utters this conclusion, she notes that Boethius has already come to it: "I am very happy, dear pupil, for you have fixed your mind on the very core of truth. But now that has become clear to you what you said a little earlier you didn't know."[112] This moment appears to prompt her to a poetic reflection on Plato's doctrine of *anamnesis*, the theory that "learning" is actually a process of recollecting truths that the immortal soul knew before its union with the oppressive and transitory body.[113] The key lines on this doctrine describe truth as a seed in the mind that is stirred to life by the winds of *doctrina*, "teaching" or "learning":

> Haeret profecto semen introrsum ueri
> Quod excitatur ventilante doctrina.
> Nam cur rogati sponte recta censetis,
> Ni mersus alto uiueret fomes corde?[114]

The Old English *Boethius* retains this passage, but expands it in a way that reflects both a focus on the moral status of wisdom and a presumption of differences between humans:

> And þeah bið simle corn þære soðfæstnesse [sædes] on þære sawle wunigende, þa hwile þe sio sawl and se lichoma gegaderode bioð. Þæt corn sceal bion aweht mid ascunga and mid lare gif hit growan sceal. Hu mæg þonne ænig man ryhtwislice and gesceadwislice [andwyrdan, þonne men him æniges þinges] acsigen, gif he nan grot rihtwisnesse on him næfð? Nis nan swa swiðe bedæled ryhtwisnesse þæt he nan ryht andwyrde nyte gif mon acsað.[115]

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[109] Ibid., I: 323; Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio*, Bk. III, prose 10, p. 55.
[110] See, also, Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* I: 335: "And nu get ic teohhie þæt ic ðe hwætwegu uncuðes gerecce be þam ilcan Gode" ("And now, I intend to explain something unknown to you about the same God").
[111] Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio,* Bk. III, prose 11.41, p. 59: "oportet rerum omnium finem bonum esse."
[112] Ibid.: "'Nimium,' inquit, 'o alumne laetor, ipsam enim mediae ueritatis notam mente fixisti. Sed in hoc patuit tibi quod ignorare te paulo ante dicebas.'"
[113] See R. E. Allen, "Anamnesis in Plato's *Meno* and *Phaedo*," *Metaphysics* 13 (Sept. 1959): 165-74.
[114] Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio*, Bk. III, metre 11, ll. 11-4, pp. 59-60: "For a seed of truth remains inside which is stirred by the breeze of learning. For why, asked a question, do you correctly answer by yourself, unless a spark lives buried deep in your heart?"
[115] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* B Text, Ch. 35, ll. 16-23, I: 330: "And nonetheless, there is always some grain of the seed of truth dwelling in the soul, as long as the soul and body are united. That grain must be stirred to life by questioning and by teaching, if it is to grow. For how can anyone correctly and rationally

Where Philosophia states matter-of-factly that this seed of truth "is stirred by" teaching, Wisdom states that it "*must* be stirred by asking and by teaching if it is to grow."[116] The notion that everyone could respond to a question correctly, implied by the second-person plural of *censetis*, seems to have struck the Old English translator as in need of comment. After all, humanity is firmly divided in the *Boethius* between the wise and the foolish. Therefore, he adds, "There is no one so deprived of right understanding that he doesn't know the correct answer if asked."[117] In denying the importance of human variation, the translator recognizes this variation. He also implies that *rihtwisnes* is a a gift or a possession, the sort of thing one can be "deprived of" or granted. This finds an analogue in the catalogue poem *The Gifts of Men,* which explores how God has apportioned his gifts to mankind:

> Ne bið ænig þæs earfoðsælig
> mon on moldan, ne þæs medspedig,
> lytelhydig, ne þæs læthydig,
> þæt hine se ar-gifa ealles biscyrge
> modes cræfta oþþe mægendæda,
> wis on gewitte oþþe on word-cwidum,
> þy læs ormod sy ealra þinga,
> þara þe he geworhte in woruld-life,
> geofona gehwylcre.[118]

Like the statement added to the *Boethius,* this passage affirms the ultimate limits to human variation: while everyone enjoys a different gift of wealth, skill, or mental faculty, no one is left completely empty-handed. Were this not the case, we would risk feeling *ormod,* "desperate," just as Mod did at the beginning of the *Boethius.* In this view, both virtues and mental abilities are gifts from God. It is for this reason that the translator pairs *rihtwisnes*, "right understanding," with *gesceadwisnes*, "reason" or "wisdom."[119] It takes knowledge of what is right, as well as reason, to answer wise questions correctly. Translating the "seed of truth" as a "particle of right understanding" also allows the translator to avoid endorsing the doctrine of recollection: it is not the truth itself that lies inside us, but simply the capacity to judge good from evil. In keeping with the doctrine of spiritual gifts espoused in the Old English *Boethius*, answering a question

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answer, when other people ask him something, if he doesn't have a particle of right understanding in him? There is no one so deprived of right understanding that he doesn't know a correct answer if someone asks him." I have followed Godden and Irvine in translating *ryhtwisnes* with "right understanding": the usual meaning, "righteousness," seems out-of-place here: see *The Old English "Boethius,"* II: 61-2 and 402-3. The C Text renders these terms with "rihtwisnesse ne geradscipes" and "geradscipes": Ibid., C Text, Meter 22, ll. 48 and 50, I: 483-4.

[116] Emphasis added: "sceal bion aweht mid ascunga and mid lare gif hit growan sceal."

[117] See n. 115, above.

[118] George Philip Krapp and Elliott van Kirk Dobbie, eds., *The Exeter Book*, ASPR 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), p. 137, ll. 8-16: "There is no one on earth so wretched or so unprosperous, so small-minded or so slow-minded, that the honor-giver should deprive him of all of the mind's skills or of mighty deeds, wisdom in his mind or in speaking, lest he be despairing of all things that he made in this world, of every gift." This translation is adapted from that of Robert Bjork, *Old English Shorter Poems, Vol. II: Wisdom and Lyric*, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvad University Press, 2014), 13.

[119] See n. 115, above.

correctly is a matter of using our mental faculties rather than of recalling something we already knew.[120]

In the heavily adapted and condensed passages corresponding to Book V of the *Consolation,* the translator brings the story of error with which he began to its conclusion in the most urgent kind of wisdom he could offer Mod or his readers: moral instruction on the necessity of trying to understand God in order to merit well of Him. Philosophia declares the existence of human free will immediately in Book V, but does not follow that point to its moralistic conclusion—namely, that we must choose to be good—until the final moments of the final chapter. The intervening chapters are dedicated to difficult arguments about the relationship between God's foreknowledge and necessity. Wisdom and Mod, on the other hand, continually move between questions of causality and questions of moral behavior. Like wisdom and the virtues, the freedom of will that accompanies the faculty of judgment is interpreted in the *Boethius* as a "great gift" from God to humankind.[121] Diverging from the *Consolation*, the *Boethius* immediately associates freedom with the ability to do "good works," which it claims can even put off death.[122] These good works are referred to once more in the following paragraph, which condenses a far longer and more abstract disquisition by Boethius on necessity. He does not yet believe that humans have free will, and consequently fears that "there would be no vices or virtues whatsoever, but merely a mixed and indiscriminate confusion of all merits...there is no reason to hope for anything or pray that it may not come to pass. For what would anyone either hope for or pray to avert, when an inflexible course binds all that can be desired?"[123] But the translator of the *Boethius* conflates the idea of vices and virtues as things with ultimate rewards, on the one hand, and praying, on the other, and substitutes prayer, fasting, and almsgiving:

> Unnytlice we swincað þonne we us gebiddað and þonne we fæstað oððe ælmessan sellað gif we his nabbað þi maran þanc þe ða þe on eallum þingum wadað on hiora agenne willan and æfter hiora lichoman luste irnað.[124]

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[120] The way the translator discusses *rihtwisnes* or *gesceadwisnes* here resembles the way Boethius describes the faculty of judgment in Bk. V, prose 2.4: "Nam quod ratione uti naturaliter potest id habet iudicium quo quidque discernat; per se igitur fugienda optandaue dinoscit" ("For whatever creature can naturally make use of reason has judgment by which it discerns everything; by itself, therefore, it recognizes what must be chosen and what must be avoided"). See Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio*, 90.

[121] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* B Text Chapter 41, ll. 27-8, I: 375: "micle gife freodomes, þæt hi moston don swa god swa yfel swa hi woldon" ("the great gift of freedom, so that they can do whatever good or evil they wish").

[122] Ibid., ll. 32-35: "And men magan begitan þurh þone frydom swa hwæt swa hi willað, buton deað hi ne magon forcirran; æc hi hine magon mid godum weorcum gelettan þæt he þi lator cymð, ge furþum oð oreldo hi hine hwilum lettað" ("And humans can obtain through that freedom whatever they wish, but they cannot turn aside death. However, they can hinder it with good works so that it comes later; they can even put it off until old age").

[123] Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio,* Bk. V, prose 3.32-33, pp. 93-4: "Nec uitia igitur nec uirtutes quicquam fuerint, sed omnium meritorum potius mixta atque indiscreta confusio…Igitur nec sperandi aliquid nec deprecandi ulla ratio est; quid enim uel speret quisque uel etiam deprecetur, quando optanda omnia series indeflexa conectit?"

[124] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* B Text, Chapter 41, ll. 46-9, pp. 375-6: "We labor in vain when we pray and when we fast or give alms if we have no more reward for that than those who act in everything according to their own will and are driven by the desires of their bodies."

Godden and Irvine do not suggest any sources for these lines, but prayer, fasting, and almsgiving form a conventional triad of good works that were especially emphasized in sermons for Lent.[125] Furthermore, humans can make amends through penance, *mid hreowsunga,* when they "sin somewhat in that freedom"; however, "if any of them is so hard-hearted that he would not do penance, then he will have a just punishment."[126] The one-to-one connection between our actions on earth and our rewards in heaven leads Wisdom to ask, "Why, then, would anyone be idle and not work?"[127] Where the journey back to Boethius's homeland in the *Consolation* involves the dialogue figures in more and more abstract and difficult kinds of argument, with a final turn to morality, the same journey in the Old English *Boethius* leads to more and more explicit teaching about the nature of wisdom and folly in Books III and IV, culminating in a sustained lesson on the wisdom of good works in Book V. These diverging paths reflect fundamentally different conceptions of the work as a whole. Philosophia demonstrates to Boethius that the ultimate truth, the highest result attainable by her methods, is also consoling. She has achieved this, in part, by enabling him to imagine the world from God's perspective, and thus escape his own. Wisdom, on the other hand, has given Mod the knowledge it needs to live virtuously and to appreciate Wisdom as a divine gift and use it to attain salvation.

III: *Cræft* and the Application of Wisdom

I now argue that the status of the prisoner-figure in the dialogue—"Boethius" or "Mind"—is altered by a reevaluation of the role of occupation in the Old English *Boethius*. The theory of *cræftas* deployed in the translation—the term means at once "arts," "occupations," and "virtues"—collapses practical and theoretical knowledge and reframes wisdom as a quality that supplements and perfects the successful practice of one's occupation. By framing the practice of kingship as a *cræft*, the *Boethius* enables kings to be understood as type-figures of universal wisdom.

The term *cræft*, the ancestor of the modern English word "craft," is one of the most important conceptual terms in the Old English *Boethius*. The Old English term shares one of its core meanings with its modern cognate—indeed, it commonly serves as a translation of the Latin term *ars*, which primarily denotes a skill, an occupation, or a discipline of study (the source of the phrase "liberal arts").[128] Another meaning of *cræft* is "power."[129] In the Old English *Pastoral Care*, *Boethius*, and *Soliloquies*, however, *cræft* is used in a novel way: it is used at times to translate the Latin word *uirtus*, even in contexts where that word means "virtue" instead of its

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[125] For biblical sources of this triad, see Matthew 6: 1-18 and Tobit 12: 8. Anglo-Saxon sources do not always discuss all three together, but all form conventional subjects of sermons for Lent. See, for example, Ælfric, "Dominica I in Quadragesima," in *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, ed. by Godden, VII, pp. 60-6.
[126] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* B Text, Chapter 41, ll. 72-4, p. 366: "and gif hiora hwilc swa heardheort wære þæt he nane hreowsunge ne dyde þæt he þonne hæfde rihtlic wite."
[127] Ibid., ll. 80-1, p. 377: "Hwi sceal þonne ænig monn bion idel þæt he ne weorce?"
[128] See the *Dictionary of Old English Online*, s.v. "cræft," http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/, accessed Sept. 8, 2017: "The most frequent Latin equivalent of *cræft* is *ars,* yet neither 'craft' nor 'art' adequately conveys the wide range of meanings of *cræft.* 'Skill' may be the single most useful translation for *cræft,* but the senses of the word reach out to 'strength', 'resources', 'virtue' and other meanings in such a way that it is often not possible to assign an occurrence to one sense in ModE without arbitrariness and the attendant loss of semantic richness."
[129] Ibid.

more usual classical meaning of "strength" or "manliness."[130] Peter Clemoes, Susan Hitch, and Nicole Discenza have all written about the implications of uniting physical strength or power, occupation, and virtue in the same word in the Old English *Boethius*.[131] All three see *cræft* as a term that brings together social order, action in this world, and spiritual merit—a bridge, in other words, between moral action and the pursuit of wisdom and other virtues.

The best-known discussion of *cræft* in the Old English *Boethius*, and one of the most famous passages in any Alfredian text, is a speech uttered by Mod about his *cræft* of kingship. The corresponding speech in the *Consolation* is a mere two lines long:

> "Scis," inquam, "ipsa minimum nobus ambitionem mortalium rerum fuisse dominatam. Sed materiam gerendis rebus optavimus quo ne uirtus tacita senesceret."[132]

The translator of the Old English *Boethius* turns this brief dialogue-turn into a disquisition on the nature of kingship as a *cræft*. In doing so, he draws on preexisting semantic connections in Old English, not in Latin. His basis for *cræft* here is *uirtus*, which has related meanings of "strength, power" and "virtue." But the discussion that ensues in the Old English about the *cræft* of kingship clearly treats the term as an equivalent to the Latin *ars*, a skill or discipline guided by rules.[133] Both meanings are operative in the Old English word *cræft*, but they reflect different Latin words and concepts. The translator is thinking in Old English here. By drawing connections between the various meanings of the Old English word *cræft*, he substitutes an entirely different semantic and conceptual system for the one he finds in the Latin text and its early medieval glosses. His interpretation of *cræft* as *ars* leads to a much-anthologized passage setting out the tools needed to practice the art of kingship. Because Mod is suddenly discussing an *ars*, he speaks in the methodical and definitional style we would expect from an early medieval encyclopedia entry on kingship:

> Þæt bið ælces cræftes andweorc þæt mon þone cræft buton wyrcan ne mæg. Þæt bið þonne cyninges andweorc and his tol mid to ricsianne þæt he hæbbe his land fulmannod. He sceal habban gebedmen and fyrdmen and weorcmen. Hwæt þu wast þætte butan þisum tolum nan cyning his cræft ne mæg cyðan. Þæt is eac his andweorc þæt he habban sceal to þam tolum þam þrim geferscipum biwiste. Þæt is þonne heora biwist: land to bugianne and gifta

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[130] On the use of *cræft* to translate *uirtus*, see Nicole Guenther Discenza, "Power, Skill, and Virtue in the Old English *Boethius*," *Anglo-Saxon England* 26 (1997): 90-91. On *ars*, see Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. "uirtūs," http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=virtus&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0059, accessed Sept. 8, 2017.

[131] Clemoes, "King Alfred's Debt to Vernacular Poetry," in *Words, Texts, and Manuscripts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Helmut Gneuss on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. by Michael Korhammer, with the assistance of Karl Reichl and Hans Sauer (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992), 213-38; Hitch, "Alfred's Cræft: Imagery in Alfred's Version of Augustine's *Soliloquies*," *Journal of the Department of English, University of Calcutta* 22 (1986-7): 130-47; Discenza, "Power, Skill, and Virtue."

[132] Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio*, Bk. II, prose 7.1, p. 32: "'You yourself know,' I said, 'that I was hardly at all governed by a desire for mortal things. Rather, I desired the materials for acting so that my power might not wither in silence.'"

[133] See *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, ed. by W. M. Lindsay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), I.2: "Ars uero dicta est, quod artis praeceptis regulisque consistat" ("*Ars*, however, is so-called because it consists of strict [*artis*] precepts and rules").

> and wæpnu and mete and ealo and claþas, and gehwæt þæs ðe þa þre geferscipas behofiað.[134]

The passage resembles others that have been inserted into the Old English *Boethius* in translation and that either reflect marginal glosses or have the general appearance of such glosses. For instance, it begins four sentences with the phrases *þæt is* or *þæt bið*, both of which mean "that is" and which often serve to introduce glosses (typically by the Latin abbreviation *.i.* for *id est*).[135] In addition, the editors of the *Boethius* note that the three terms employed for the human "instruments" of the king's art—*gebedmen*, *fyrdmen*, and *weorcmen*—are all either quite rare or unique in Old English, and look like possible translations of the Latin terms *oratores*, *bellatores*, and *laboratores*.[136]

This shift also alters the dynamic of the discussion between the two dialogue figures in each text. In the *Consolation*, Boethius's brief justification of his intentions leads to a quick rejoinder from Philosophia: "Yet that is the only thing that could attract minds that are naturally outstanding but not yet brought to the finishing touch by the means of the perfection of virtues—the desire, that is, for glory and the reputation of having merited the best things from the state."[137] Wisdom, however, specifies that the only problem is wanting "*false* glory and *unjust* power and *excessive* reputation for good works among all nations."[138] Mod hasn't shown evidence of desiring these things, and Wisdom accordingly puts greater distance between this point and the speech that it responds to. Rather than the linking phrase *atqui hoc unum,* "but that alone," where *hoc* refers back to the desire that the *Consolation*'s Boethius has just expressed, Wisdom merely states, "*one evil* is greatly to be avoided."[139] In addition, the translator accords Mod's speech its own chapter, increasing its sense of authority. An indication of that is made in the language of the text, not simply in the layout of MS Bodley 343.[140] The translator writes the kind of transition from Mod's speech to Wisdom's reply that normally only occurs at the beginning of a new chapter: "When this was said, then that Mind fell silent and Reason began to speak and thus spoke."[141] This transition is very similar to the one that began the chapter immediately preceding, the one with Mod's speech.[142] These changes suggest that Mod's speech

[134] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius*," B Text, Chapter 17, ll. 10-18: "That is the material of each art, without which one cannot carry out that art. That, then, is the king's material and instruments of rule that he have his land fully settled. He must have men who pray, men who fight, and men who work. You know that without these tools, no king can make known his art. That is also his material that he have provisions for those three orders that are his tools. This is their provision: land to settle on and gifts and weapons and food and ale and clothes, and whatever else is proper to the three orders."

[135] See Jacob Hobson, "Translation as Gloss in the Old English *Boethius*," *Medium Ævum* 86 (2017): 207-23; at 213.

[136] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* II: 318.

[137] Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio*, Bk. I, prose 7.2, p. 32: "Atqui hoc unum est quod praestantes quidem natura mentes sed nondum ad extremam manum uirtutum perfectione perductas allicere possit, gloriae scilicet cupido et optimorum in rem publicam fama meritorum."

[138] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* B Text, Chapter 18, ll. 6-7, I: 278 (emphasis added): "wilnung *leases* gilpes and *unryhtes* anwealdes and *ungemetlices* hlisan godra weorca ofer eall folc."

[139] Ibid., ll. 2-3: "[an] yfel is swiðe to anscunienne."

[140] Ibid., I: 277-8. The C Text has the same language at this point, even though it does not begin a new chapter: see I: 422.

[141] Ibid., B Text, Chapter 18, ll. 1-2, I: 278: "Þa þis ða gesprecen was, þa geswigode þæt mod and seo gesceadwisnes ongan sprecan and þus cwæþ."

[142] Ibid., Chapter, 17, ll. 1-2, I: 277: "Þa se wisdom þa þis leoð asungen hæfde, þa geswigode he, and andsworede þæt mod and þus cwæð" ("When Wisdom had sung this song, then he fell silent, and Mind answered and said").

is meant to be understood as true or informative, not merely as a sign of his imperfection. As scholars have noted, however, it is odd for the student figure to suddenly lecture the personification of wisdom itself.[143] But the relationship between humans and their *cræftas*, their "arts" or "occupations," has no equivalent in the *Consolation*. Several chapters earlier, the *Boethius* expands a brief reference in the *Consolation* to "satisfying your needs" with specifics:

> Gif þu þonne þæt gemet habban wille and þa nydþearfe witan wille, þonne is þæt mete and drync and claðas and tol to swelcum cræfte swelce þu cunne þæt þe is gecynde, and þæt þe is riht to habbenne.[144]

The triad of food, drink and clothing is paralleled in a Latin gloss to this passage,[145] but the mention of "tools for whatever craft...is natural to you" has no known source, though its wording is close to Mod's speech on the art of kingship. This *cræft* also appears to be an *ars,* since it requires "tools" and is something one "knows." No art or occupation, however, is "natural" to humanity in the *Consolation*: in our default state, we are simply rational animals with immortal souls who seek the good.[146] The close conjunction of "knowing" a craft and having a craft that is "natural" to you suggests why Mod is able to speak authoritatively on his own craft in Chapter 17: his practice of it is ultimately inseparable from his knowledge of it, and both are natural to him. Mod can speak on his particular craft of kingship, but he can also speak authoritatively about *cræftas* in general, since he knows what he needs to practice his own craft well. The Old English *Boethius* thus collapses the distinction between practical and theoretical knowledge—between knowing-how, denoted by the verb *cunnan*,[147] and knowing-that, denoted by the verb *witan*.[148]

Just as *Beowulf* treats kings and aristocrats as types of humanity as a whole, the passage on the tools of kingship in the Old English *Boethius* frames kings as individuals who differ from other members of society—including potential readers—only in the particular nature of their craft. A king's craft, as Mod defines it, is not carried out for the sake of his subjects, but as an end unto itself. By and large, however, the discourse of ideal kingship in early medieval England, Ireland, and Francia frames kingship in terms of a set of duties towards both God and the king's own people. One of the most influential passages on ideal kingship in this period comes from a seventh- or early eighth-century Irish treatise called *On the Twelve Abuses of the*

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[143] See Godden, "The Player King," 144.

[144] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* B Text, Chapter 14, ll. 23-6, I: 267: "If then, you want to have that amount and know those necessities, then they are food and drink and clothes and tools for whatever craft you know that is natural to you and that it is right for you to have"; cf. Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio*, Bk. II, pr. 5.15, p. 27: "sed si, quod naturae satis est, replere indigentiam uelis" ("But if you want to simply satisfy your needs, which is enough for nature").

[145] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* II: 302.

[146] One of the major problems faced by Boethius is that he must figure out who he is: not simply a *rationale animal atque mortale*, "a rational and mortal animal," but also the possessor of an immortal soul: see Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio*, Bk. I, pr. 6.15, p. 15: "Hocine interrogas, an esse me sciam rationale animal atque mortale?" ("Are you asking whether I know myself to be a rational and mortal animal?").

[147] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* B Text, Chapter 14, l. 25 (emphasis added): "to swelcum cræfte swelce þu *cunne*" ("for whatever craft you *know*"). See *Dictionary of Old English Online*, s. v. "cunnan," def. I, II.A, II.B, http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/, accessed 22 Sept. 2017.

[148] Cit. Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*, s. v. "witan," http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/036091, accessed 22 Sept. 2017.

Age.[149] The ninth section of the treatise details the crimes of the "unjust king" and the corresponding elements of "the king's justice."[150] Each is in the form of a list of verb phrases describing what a king should do, such as *furta cohibere*, "restrain theft."[151] Given that texts theorizing kingship were generally written by clerics, it is hardly surprising that they would usually focus on a king's duties toward different groups in society, to the kingdom as a whole, and to God. The king's subjects appear in *On the Twelve Abuses* and similar texts as the objects of his good works—the widows or orphans, for example, whom he protects.[152] Mod, however, describes the three orders of society as a king's *tools*, not as his beneficiaries or his flock. In doing so, he diverges from the Latin gloss that explains wisdom, *sapientia*, as the material or *materia* needed to rule well[153]—while still emphasizing that one needs wisdom to carry out any craft successfully.[154] This somewhat shocking act of instrumentalizing a king's subjects as his means for practicing his art draws no rebuke from Wisdom. In his own mind, the *Boethius* suggests, a king might think of himself as a private person carrying out a craft—it is just that his people are the tools he needs to carry out that craft successfully. The interior nature of the dialogue is emphasized at this point in particular: the prisoner-figure is consistently referred to as *se mod*, "Mind," and he begins his speech by addressing *gesceadwisnes*, a personified faculty of "Reason."[155] The conception of the king's subjects as his "tools" is thus the natural conclusion of interpreting the prisoner-figure in the dialogue as both Boethius himself, a specific historical personage, and a Mind that can stand in for any human mind.

Whether or not the *Boethius* was translated by King Alfred—and we will likely never know for certain—it stages kingly subjectivity and performs Alfredian authorship. As I will show, the same merging of kingly and universal identity that underpins the speech on the king's tools also underpins the prose preface to the B and C Texts of the *Boethius*. Towards the end of the *Consolation,* Philosophia establishes a principle that will in turn allow her to show that God's foreknowledge is not incompatible with human free will: that is, that "everything is perceived according to the ability of the one perceiving it, not according to its own power."[156] She illustrates this principle by considering how human reason and imagination work on their objects, and later how human perception more generally differs from divine perception. The *Boethius* translates this statement at the appropriate place, but it alters its meaning and deploys it at other moments as well. Where the individual perceiver (*cognoscens*) in the *Consolation* is a

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[149] Siegmund Hellmann, ed., *Pseudo Cyprianus De xii abusiuis saeculi* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1909).
[150] Ibid., 51: "rex iniquus," "iustitia regis."
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid.: "aduenis et pupillis et uiduis defensorem esse" ("to be the defender of foreign visitors, orphans, and widows").
[153] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* II: 317 (emphasis added): "Ad omnes res agendas *materiam* habere debemus id est *sapientiam*, quia sapientia materia est ex qua bene disponuntur gerenda quia tunc bene habet potestatem qui bene sapit regere" ("We should have the *material* for carrying out all things, that is *wisdom*, for wisdom is the material by which things that ought to be done are done well, for that person holds power well when he or she wisely knows how to rule").
[154] Ibid., B Text, Chapter 17, ll. 23-4, I: 277-8: "forþam ne mæg non mon nænne cræft forðbringan buton wisdome" ("for no one can carry out any craft without wisdom").
[155] Ibid., ll. 1-2, I: 277 (emphasis added): "Þa se wisdom þa þis leoð asungen hæfde, þa geswigode he, and andsworede *þæt mod* and þus cwæð. Eala *gesceadwisnes*..." ("When Wisdom had sung this song, then he fell silent, and *Mind* answered and said, 'O *Reason*...'").
[156] Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio*, Bk. V, prose 4.25, pp. 96-7: "omne enim quod cognoscitur non secundum sui uim sed secundum cognoscentium potius comprehenditur facultatem."

universal member of the human species, as distinguished from God, angels, or "lower animals," the individual knower in the *Boethius* is also an individual human considered against other individual humans:

> Hu ne wast þu þæt manig þincg ne bið no ongiten swa swa hit bið ac swa swa þæs andgites mæð bið þe þæræfter spirað? Swilc is se wisdom þæt hine ne mæg nan mon of þisse worulde ongitan swilcne swilce he is, ac ælc winð be his andgites mæðe þæt he hine wolde ongitan gif he mihte.[157]

While it remains true that *no* human "can perceive [wisdom] as it truly is," humankind is also now divided into individuals with different powers of understanding, continuing the trend in the *Boethius* of separating the wise from the foolish.[158] This line is crucially repeated at the end of the prose preface, where it functions as a modesty topos:

> And nu [Ælfred] bit and for Godes naman he halsað ælcne þara þe þas boc rædan lyste þæt he for hine gebidde, and him ne wite gif he hit rihtlicor ongite þonne he mihte, *forþam þe ælc mon sceal be his andgites mæðe and be his æmettan sprecan þæt he sprecð and don þæt þæt he deþ*.[159]

In taking up this crucial phrase from the end of the *Boethius*, the preface and its putative author, Alfred, speak with the voice of the translation. This moment of borrowing indisputably does what some critics have taken the speech on the king's tools to do—efface the distinction between the text and its putative author, Alfred. The preface thus frames Alfred as a type of the seeker of wisdom that the *Boethius* urges us all to be:

> Forþy we sceoldon eallon mægne spirian æfter Gode þæt we wiston hwæt he wære. Þeah hit ure mæð ne sie þæt we witan [hwylc] he sie, we sculon þeah be þæs andgites mæþe þe he us gifð fundigan[.][160]

The actual identity of the translator of the Old English *Boethius* may ultimately matter less than the way that the text performs intellectual authority and vernacular authorship. As I have demonstrated, it connects Alfred's putative voice in the preface to the voice of Wisdom. It also ascribes to "Mind" a view of kingship as a private affair between a king and the art of kingship itself, a pursuit of wisdom through daily practice no different in kind from any other occupation.

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[157] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* B Text, Chapter 41, ll. 106-11: "How do you not know that many things are not perceived in accordance with what they are, but rather in accordance with the power of understanding of the one who seeks to know them? Such is wisdom that no one from this world can perceive it as it truly is, but everyone strives by the power of his own understanding to perceive wisdom if he possibly can."
[158] See pp. 82-4, above; Discenza, *The King's English*, 90-4.
[159] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* B Text, Prose Preface, I: 239 (emphasis added): "And now [Alfred] prays and begs each one who may wish to read this book, in God's name, that he pray for him, and that he not blame him if he [i.e., the reader] perceive it more correctly than he [i.e. Alfred] was able to, *for everyone must speak what he speaks and do what he does according to his leisure and the strength of his understanding*."
[160] Ibid., Chapter 42, ll. 1-3, I: 380: "Therefore we ought to inquire after God with all our might, so that we might know what He is. Even though it may not be in our abilities to know what He is, we should nonetheless endeavor according to the strength of understanding that he gives us."

I will conclude by considering how the representation of kingship as a representative occupation in the *Boethius* might work in concert with the apparent denigration of kingship noted by Malcolm Godden in his arguments against Alfredian authorship.[161] At a number of points, the *Boethius* emphasizes the cruelty of kings such as Nero and Theoderic; confusingly, given the passage on the tools of government in Chapter 17, it also emphasizes at times that Boethius is a counsellor who served under Theoderic.[162] Godden finds it unlikely that a king would translate or promulgate a text that often paints kingship in such negative terms. However, the *Boethius* is focused on the dangers of *bad* kingship, not of kingship as a whole. In fact, its concern with the judgment of wise counsellors may be seen as a means of signalling royal wisdom and virtue: after all, one of the arguments for human free will in the *Boethius* is that God would be a weak king if his subjects were all slaves.[163] The seeming inconsistency between portraying Boethius as a courtier of Theoderic and as a king may reflect a somewhat confused understanding of what a Roman consul, or *heretoga*, was.

In either case, it seems possible that an Anglo-Saxon king, confronting the evidence of bad behavior by emperors such as Theoderic and Nero and aware of the tradition that the earliest consul deposed the last Roman king because of the king's pride,[164] may have wished to see himself in light of the office of consul rather than that of Roman king or emperor. Even though, as Wisdom notes, the earliest consuls seemed even worse to Roman wise men than the kings that they replaced,[165] the *Boethius* offers multiple examples of wise consuls and, in one case, suggests that their wisdom actually brought them power. In the meter where Philosophia reflects on the passing nature of fame, the Old English translator expands a brief reference to Brutus and Cato ("quid Brutus aut rigidus Cato?")[166] as follows:

> Oððe hwær is nu se foremæra and se aræda Romwara heretoga se wæs haten Brutus, oðre naman Cassius? Oððe se wisa and fæstræda Cato, se wæs eac Romana heretoga, se wæs openlice uðwita?[167]

The *Boethius* also offers the example of "the wise Catulus…consul [*heretoga*] in Rome, a very wise man," who spat in the face of the unworthy Nonius when he saw him sitting in a luxurious

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[161] See Malcolm Godden, "The Player King: Identification and Self-Representation in King Alfred's Writings," in *Alfred the Great: Papers from the Eleventh-Centenary Conferences*, ed. by Timothy Reuter (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 137-50. See also Godden, "King and Counselor in the Alfredian *Boethius*," in *Intertexts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Paul E. Szarmach,* ed. by Virginia Blanton and Helene Scheck (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS, 2008), 191-207, esp. 202-7, on the political interests of the Old English *Boethius* in limits on royal power.
[162] Ibid., at 140-5.
[163] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* B Text, Chapter 41, ll. 20-22, I: 375: "Hu wolde [þe] nu [lician] gif hwylc swiðe rice cyning wære and næfde nænne fryne mon on eallon his rice, ac wæron ealle þeowe? Þa cwæð ic. Ne þuhte hit me naught rihtlic ne eac gerisenlic gif him sceoldan þeowe men þenigan" ("'How would it please you if there were such a powerful king and he had no free men in all his kingdom, but all were slaves?' Then I said, 'It wouldn't seem proper or fitting if slaves should serve him'").
[164] Ibid., Chapter 16, ll. 16-19, I: 272.
[165] Ibid., ll. 19-22.
[166] Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio*, Bk. II, metre 7.16, p. 34: "What has come of Brutus or severe Cato?"
[167] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* B Text, Chapter 19, ll. 21-4, p. 283: "Or where is the renowned and resolute Roman consul who was called Brutus, his second name Cassius? Or the wise and prudent Cato, who was also a Roman consul, who was clearly a sage?"

carriage.[168] The *Consolation* actually refers here to the poet Catullus, not a consul Catulus,[169] but the interpretation of the story as being about a wise consul fits the emphasis in the *Boethius* on the importance of wise judgment by political leaders. Finally, the translator expands a passage about the good things Boethius has received from Philosophia to make it clear that the wisdom he received from her actually led to political office:

> Þu me wære ær leof þonne cuð, and ær þon þe þu cuðest minne tyht and mine þeawas; and ic þe geongne gelærde swelce snytro swylce mangeum oðrum ieldran gewittum oftogen is; and ic þe gefyrðrede mid minum larum to þon þæt þe mon to [domere] geceas.[170]

The notion that wisdom can actually bring power is a widely-discussed innovation in the Old English *Boethius* compared to the *Consolation*, and it suggests that all of the knowledge the text contains could ultimately redound to the wisdom of a ruler, even when—or precisely when—it exposes the falseness of power as a good and the fact that many kings have been tyrants. The "Boethius" or "Mind" constructed in the text offers a model of a wise, chastened man who has experienced both power and impotence, who can understand the injustice of wrongful power but also hold out ultimate hope that kings can carry out their *cræft* well and, in so doing, better "practice their wisdom and maintain it."[171] Such a portrait of scrupulous, self-reflective, chastened power is highly useful to a king, and the two manuscript versions of the *Boethius*, with their claims of Alfredian authorship, may be seen as strategic and unparalleled performances of royal subjectivity and royal wisdom.

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[168] Ibid., Chapter 27, ll. 15, 21-2, I: 297-8: "se wisa Catulus...heretoga on Rome, swiðe gesceadwis man."

[169] Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio*, Bk. II, pr. 4.2, p. 42. There were several consuls named "Catulus": see Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* II: 348-9.

[170] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* B Text, Chapter 9, ll. 13-17, I: 257: "You were dear to me before you were even known by me, and before you made known my teaching and my customs; and I taught you wisdom when you were young that has been denied to many older minds; and I advanced you with my teachings until you were chosen as a judge." Cf. Bieler, ed., *Philosophiae Consolatio,* Bk. II, pr. 2.5, 7, pp. 21-2. *Domere* is supplied here from the C Text; the reading in the B Text is *me*, which makes less sense ("I advanced you with my teachings until you were chosen for me"). Godden and Irvine translate *Þu me wære ær leof þonne cuð* as "You were beloved by me before you were well known," finding the notion that "Wisdom cherished Boethius before Boethius was known to him" to be "nonsense" (II: 13, 286). Nonetheless, the syntax of the clause clearly associates both *leof* and *cuð* with *me*, meaning Wisdom, and is closer to the Latin ("prius carus quam proximus esse coepisti," "you began to be dear [i.e. to the Symmachus family, Boethius' in-laws] before you were even related to them [i.e. by marriage]").

[171] Godden and Irvine, eds., *The Old English "Boethius,"* B Text, Chapter 39, l. 23: "heora wisdom fulgan and hine gehealdan." Cf. the more impersonal construction in the *Consolation*: "sic enim clarius testatiusque sapientiae tractatur officium" ("for thus is the office of wisdom carried out more clearly and more evidently").

Chapter Four: The King's Legal Speech

The lay wisdom constructed in the Old English *Boethius* was no mere philosophical exercise: as I show in this chapter, English kings and their textual agents also shaped the field of written law into a site for the rhetorical performance of royal wisdom. They did so by exploring the liminal space between the king's power to command and his responsibility, or practical need, to consult and advise. The rhetorical exploration of the king's power and its limits reached a particular highpoint in the tenth century. Under Edward the Elder, lawcodes begin to be framed as responses to a perception of the current state of the *frið*, or public peace.[1] While the king appears to have maintained control over the interpretation of the *frið*, and it may never have posed a threat to his legitimacy, it served as a theoretical limit on the king's authority to make laws and induced kings to couch legislation in a narrative of analysis and deliberation. The tenth century also saw a heightened interest in the relationship of the earthly kingdom to the kingdom of heaven, especially in the rendering of taxes and tithes. The nature of this relationship—both structural homology and literal interdependence—prompted reflections by Æthelstan and Edgar that explore the limits of monarchical authority. Finally, the renewed threat of Viking raids and invasion beginning in the 990s required a collective response from the English nation: everyone, including the king, had to apply their wisdom to solving this problem.

All of these issues in tenth-century English politics form a context for my reading of the king's legal and political speech in this chapter. My exploration, however, centers around the discursive process of constructing a wise royal voice in lawcodes and other juridically-inflected documents. Staging wise kingly speech required adapting preexisting forms of reflection and instruction in early medieval textual culture to the needs and routines of royal lawmaking—not a simple task, as I explore below. At the same time as royal lawcodes attempted to centralize governmental power under royal administration, they also drew variously on the language of land charters, biblical translation, and homiletics to make kings into wise interpreters of the kingdom and its grounding in principles of human and divine order.[2] Each genre or field of

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[1] On the meaning of *frið,* see "friþ," *The Dictionary of Old English A to I* online, ed. Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey et al. (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2018), https://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/, accessed 8 Aug. 2018. On the prominence of *frið* in late Anglo-Saxon law, see Tom Lambert, *Law and Order in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), ch. 5, "Ideals of Kingship and Order," 202-37. The term's complex and varied usage points to its status as a legal keyword in later Anglo-Saxon England. Much like the subtle blend of procedural and scriptural language in the prologue to Edward's first code, discussed below on pp. 116-7, *frið* combines a theological good (*pax*, the peace that obtains in a Christian society) with pragmatic details of administration. David Pratt captures the narrower sense of the term as "the preservation of order at grassroots level, particularly against threats to livestock and moveable property": see his "Written Law and the Communication of Authority in Tenth-Century England," in *England and the Continent in the Tenth Century: Studies in Honor of Wilhelm Levison (1876-1947),* ed. by David Rollason, Conrad Leyser, and Hannah Williams (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 331-50; at 337. In practice, *frið* could also represent the state of social harmony and divine favor enjoyed by a law-abiding society.

[2] The role played by legislation in the increasing centralization of royal power in the tenth century is a well-trodden issue, and sometimes open question, in scholarship on Anglo-Saxon law. See, among others, Patrick Wormald, "*Lex scripta* and *Verbum Regis*: Legislation and Germanic Kingship from Euric to Cnut," in *Early Medieval Kingship,* ed. by P. H. Sawyer and I. N. Wood (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1977), 105-38; Simon Keynes, "Royal Government and the Written Word in Late Anglo-Saxon England," in Rosamond McKitterick, ed., *The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 226-57; David Pratt, "Written Law and the Communication of Authority," in *England and the Continent in the Tenth Century,* ed. by Rollason, Leyser, and Williams; and Lambert, *Law and Order in Anglo-Saxon England*, 163-201.

discourse offered kings distinct ways of finding a textual voice and of performing their political wisdom: the diploma, a document recording a donation of land, allowed kings to frame lawmaking as a pious and prudent act; biblical translation and commentary allowed one king in particular, Alfred the Great, to pose as a legal scholar as well as a lawmaker; finally, the pastoral language of exhortation and penance figured kings as authoritative interpreters of the realm.

I: Royal Wisdom and Written Law

Secular law poses certain problems for the representation of wisdom in early medieval textual culture. The difficulty lies in the gap between two major sources of influence. On the one hand, there could be no doubt in early medieval Europe that law had deep and holy foundations: much of the Pentateuch was concerned with the laws transmitted from God through Moses, and David and Solomon offered powerful models of wise legal judgment.[3] The utility of such exempla, however, was not entirely clear. Mosaic law claimed to be authoritative, complete unto itself: how could new law fit into the canon? Moreover, legislation in early medieval Europe did not spring *de nouo* out of Biblical ideology; it built on a deep foundation of Roman and Germanic lawmaking. The early Anglo-Saxon laws, in particular, resemble in their overall emphases a number of Latinized and Romanized codes promulgated for and by other Germanic groups in the early medieval West, including the Franks, Alamans, Lombards, and Burgundians.[4] Such laws did not claim to be sacred in any way; they largely sought to mitigate violence and preserve social order, not to lay the foundation for a holy society.[5] One tradition thus offered a strong sense of the moral value of law and the exalted status of lawgivers, but not much in the way of useable textual models; the other offered useable models, but needed to be molded into a suitable textual foundation for a Christian society headed by a wise king. Carolingian Francia followed its own course of inscribing royal law as Christian wisdom, and a number of Charlemagne's legal pronouncements even show the king preaching on Christian doctrine and social duties, as well as questioning his advisors on matters of law and morality.[6] Despite the influence of Carolingian ideology on Anglo-Saxon government and lawmaking, however, English royal legislation would develop its own repertoire of narrative and formal strategies for representing the king's voice, and this chapter will explore how that process unfolded.

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[3] See 1 Kings 3 for Solomon's demand for wisdom and his wise judgment. On the influence of Solomonic wisdom on Alfred the Great's representation in texts, see Janet Nelson, "The Political Ideas of Alfred of Wessex," in *Kings and Kingship in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Anne Duggan, King's College London Medieval Studies 10 (London: n. p., 1993), 125-58; and David Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 151-66.
[4] See Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century, Vol. I: Legislation and its Limits* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 93-101.
[5] See Lambert, *Law and Order in Anglo-Saxon England,* 35-9. For a compelling argument that OE *fæhþ* does not, in fact, mean "feud," as it is often translated, see John D. Niles, "The Myth of the Feud in Anglo-Saxon England," *JEGP* 114 (Apr. 2015): 163-200. Niles nonetheless recognizes the relation between *fæhþ* and social order, however, when he glosses the most common meaning of *fæhþ* as "an act of violence that disturbs social equilibrium and requires a response, if justice is to be asserted" (178).
[6] See Janet Nelson, "The Voice of Charlemagne," in *Belief and Culture in the Middle Ages: Studies Presented to Henry Mayr-Harting*, ed. by Richard Gameson and Henrietta Leyser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 76-88.

Written law, both secular and ecclesiastical, came to Anglo-Saxon England with the Church. It is no coincidence, then, that Æthelberht of Kent, the first Anglo-Saxon king to convert to Christianity, was also the first king to have laws committed to writing, between about 597 and 616.[7] Despite the half-millennium separating the supposed date of the code and the period when the manuscript was produced, the code's language is consistent with an early date.[8] Æthelberht's code consists largely of "injury tariffs": lists of absolute or relative amounts of money that should be used to compensate for various kinds of harm. Similar lists survive in a number of traditional Germanic legal texts, including Burgundian, Frankish, Lombard, Alamannic, and Bavarian lawcodes.[9] The similarity of Æthelberht's tariffs to those found in other codes suggests that his code largely records traditional law (with the possible exception of the first clause, which is on theft of ecclesiastical property).[10] The only indication in the text of Æthelberht's authorship is the rubric, clearly written afterwards, which states, "These are the decrees which King Æthelberht established in the lifetime of Augustine."[11] It seems that the act of writing law represented Æthelberht's main innovation. (He may have also first incorporated the list of penalties against the Church which begins the code and clearly represents an innovation, but this section could also have been added by one of his successors).[12] Æthelberht speaks only implicitly in the code—in the mute witness offered by a physical copy of the code, instead of in the code's language as it survives in its one manuscript copy. The next surviving lawcode, that of Hloþhere and Eadric of Kent (c. 673-86),[13] makes a more integrated mention of the role of the two kings in "add[ing] to the law that their predecessors had made with the following decrees."[14] This one-sentence prologue echoes the prosody of alliterative Old English poetry, which casts the two kings in a heroic light at the same time as it increases the sense of distance between them and the text: they would seem to be the subject of a grand historical narrative instead of the living voice of the text.[15]

[7] See Lisi Oliver, *The Beginnings of English Law* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 8-14, for a discussion of dating.
[8] See Ibid., 25-34, and Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 95.
[9] On these similarities, see generally Lisi Oliver, *The Body Legal in Barbarian Law* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011). Patrick Wormald argues in particular for the influence of a "lost Merovingian king's law" on Æthelberht's code, along with that of the Alamans, Bavarians, Salian Franks, and Lombards: see his *Making of English Law,* 96-101.
[10] See Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 96; Oliver, *Beginnings of English Law*, 45-6.
[11] Felix Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 vols. (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1903-16), vol. I, p. 3: "Þis syndon þa domas, þe Æðelbirht cyning asette on Agustinus dæge." Subsequent references to Liebermann's *Gesetze* are also to volume I, unless specified otherwise.
[12] See Oliver, *Beginnings of English Law*, 47-8.
[13] Hloþhere reigned from 673 to 685, while Eadric reigned from ca. 679 to 686. As Lisi Oliver notes, this lawcode may "actually [represent] a conflation of laws separately issued by the two kings," rather than a genuine product of their co-rule between 679 and 685 (*Beginnings of English Law,* 120).
[14] Liebermann, ed., *Gesetze*, 9: "Hloþhære and Eadric Cantwara cyningas ecton þa æ, þa ðe heora aldoras ær geworhton, ðyssum domum þe hyr efter sægeþ." In this and other citations of Liebermann's edition, I replace the tironian sign with the Old English *and* ("and").
[15] The comparison between Hloþhere and Eadric's preface and Old English poetry was first made by Liebermann in *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1916), vol. III, p. 18. See also Stefan Jurasinski, *The Old English Penitentials and Anglo-Saxon Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 12, nn. 34 and 35.

II: Royal Diploma and Royal Lawcode

The most plentiful kind of written document surviving from Anglo-Saxon England is the diploma: the record of a grant of rights or property, usually land, to another person or an institution.[16] Diplomas were in widespread use in the early Middle Ages throughout the Latin West, though conventions differed by region. Compared to Continental examples, Anglo-Saxon diplomas are distinctly religious in their language and forms of documentary authentication (or lack thereof).[17] The most common variety of Anglo-Saxon diplomas record grants of land by kings to religious institutions. Consequently, they represent one of the most common points of interaction between English kings and textual culture.[18] As I demonstrate in this section, kings drew on the unique resources of the diploma to anchor their lawmaking in a narrative of pious, prudent reflection on the health of both their souls and their kingdoms.

The essential statement of the diploma, "I give *x* to *y*," came to serve as a template for literary performance, political theorizing, and theological contemplation in Anglo-Saxon England, especially during the heyday of rule for Alfred's descendants between about 900 and 1014.[19] On a more basic level, diplomas also offered a conventional means of representing the grantor's voice—in this case, the king's—in writing. Because early Anglo-Saxon law seems to

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[16] Roughly 1,500 diplomas survive that purport to date to the Anglo-Saxon period: see Susan Kelly, "Anglo-Saxon Lay Society and the Written Word," in *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe,* ed. by Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 36-62; at 39. Of these, 294 are found in single sheets dating to the Anglo-Saxon era and thus certainly predate 1066, even if some are early medieval forgeries: see Simon Keynes, "A Classified List of Anglo-Saxon Charters on Single Sheets," https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/1157/703a4e3199f8f13f566b47155cfb2d60f2e2.pdf, accessed 23 Apr. 2019. Many diplomas that survive only in later copies, often in the cartularies created by religious institutions in the later Middle Ages, nonetheless reflect an underlying Anglo-Saxon original. The diploma is the most common type of charter, a category that also includes documents such as "leases, wills, writs, dispute narratives, estate memoranda, and other records" (Scott Thompson Smith, *Land and Book: Literature and Land Tenure in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 7). For general introductions to Anglo-Saxon charters, see F. M. Stenton, *Latin Charters of the Anglo-Saxon Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955) and Patrick Wormald, "Bede and the Conversion of England: The Charter Evidence," Jarrow Lecture, 1984, repr. in Wormald, *The Times of Bede: Studies in Early English Christian Society and its Historian*, ed. by Stephen Baxter (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 135-66; on the royal diploma, see Simon Keynes, *The Diplomas* of *King Æthelred "the Unready" 978-1016: A Study in Their Use as Historical Evidence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 1-39.

[17] See Pierre Chaplais, "The Origin and Authenticity of the Royal Anglo-Saxon Diploma," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 3 (1965): 48-61; Nicholas Brooks, "Anglo-Saxon Charters: The Work of the Last Twenty Years," *ASE* 3 (1974): 211-31.

[18] Kelly, "Anglo-Saxon Lay Society and the Written Word," in *The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe,* ed. by McKitterick: "The primary and most accessible record of the interaction between early Anglo-Saxon society and the written word is the Latin land-charter (technically, diploma) and the associated vernacular documents which deal with land and property…Charters provide the most important illustration of how the secular society of Anglo-Saxon England absorbed the ecclesiastical gift of the written word" (39-40). Kelly's emphasis on the role of Latin *and* vernacular charters as a point of contact between lay society and textual culture is a useful corrective to Martin Irvine's emphasis on vernacularity in *The Making of Textual Culture: 'Grammatica' and Literary Theory 350-1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), esp. ch. 9, "The Implications of Grammatical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England," 405-60.

[19] On the literary, theological, and ideological significance of Anglo-Saxon royal diplomas, see Smith, *Land and Book*; Pauline Stafford, "Political Ideas in Late Tenth-Century England: Charters as Evidence," in Janet Nelson and Pauline Stafford, eds., *Law, Laity, and Solidarities: Essays in Honor of Susan Reynolds* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 68-82; and Jacob E. Hobson, "Behaving Now and Then: Tenurial Exegesis in the Tenth-Century Anglo-Latin Diplomas" (Ph.D. diss., UC Berkeley, 2017), 70-99.

have been largely customary, reflecting generations of communal practice instead of the agendas of individual rulers, the first-person voice of charters offered a crucial resource for kings wishing to narrate their own moral acts of public significance.

As we arrive at the turn of the eighth century, we see a sudden use of Latin documentary formulas and styles in vernacular legislation. These acts of borrowing across the boundaries of language and genre lent vernacular laws "the authority of the official muniment."[20] The new development is particularly visible in the codes of Wihtred of Kent (c. 695) and Ine of Wessex (c. 700). In keeping with the ecclesiastical basis of English documentary culture, both codes show a new interest in the Church and in prescribing Christian morality in English society. Wihtred's code uniquely contains a dating clause based on the indiction, an imperial Roman system that consisted of fifteen-year periods. While indictional dating is not used in any other surviving vernacular lawcode, and is almost nonexistent in Continental charters as well, it is quite common in Latin charters produced in England.[21] This idiosyncracy once again points back to the role of the Church in fostering documentary culture in England: indictional dating is also frequently found in Easter tables.[22] It seems no accident, then, that Wihtred's code largely concerns the Church, or that its preface specifies that it was issued after consultation with the archbishop of Canterbury, the bishop of Rochester, and "each order of the church of that people."[23] Indeed, the code reads as more the product of the king's ecclesiastical advisors than of the king himself. Its formal opening, with the indictional clause of dating, sounds like the product of a royal chancery, and the king is actually named second in the list of those who issued the laws: "Ðær wæs Birhtwald Bretone heahbiscop, and se ærnæmda cyning; eac þan Hrofeceastre bisceop, se ilca Gybmund wæs haten, andward wæs."[24] Documentary conventions such as indictional dating and the naming of issuing authorities thus go hand-in-hand with the code's ecclesiastical focus. However, these conventions also create new possibilities for anchoring royal lawcodes in a place and time and thus conceiving of them as events in an official history.

Ine's code, a close contemporary of Wihtred's, shows how diplomatic formulas could also serve to ascribe royal lawcodes more thoroughly to the king's agency. For the first time in a vernacular code, the king speaks in a first-person voice. That voice is not an unmediated record of the king's thoughts, however: it draws heavily on the conventional form of the royal diploma. Ine's code was originally promulgated sometime between 688 and 726, possibly before 700, and while it only survives in the *Domboc* issued by his descendant and successor Alfred, King of Wessex from 871 to 899, it is generally seen as authentic. It opens with a long, Latinate sentence that, like Wihtred's contemporary Kentish code, attempts to impress by its documentary specificity:

> Ic Ine, mid Godes gife Wesseaxna kyning, mid geðeahte [and] mid lare Cenredes mines fæder [and] Heddes mines biscepes [and] Eorcenwoldes mines biscepes, mid eallum minum ealdormonnum [and] þæm ieldstan witum minre ðeode [and] eac micelre

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[20] Smith, *Land and Book*, 24.

[21] Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis, "Year-Dates in the Early Middle Ages," in Chris Humphrey and W. M. Ormrod, eds., *Time in the Medieval World* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: York Medieval Press, 2001), 5-23; at 11-12.

[22] Susan Kelly, "Anglo-Saxon Lay Society and the Written Word," 42-3.

[23] Oliver, *The Beginnings of English Law*, 152; pref.: "ælc had ciricean ðære mægðe" (translation mine).

[24] Ibid.: "There was Brihtwald, archbishop of Britain, and the aforesaid king; the bishop of Rochester, whose name was Gebmund, was also present."

> gesomnunge Godes ðeowa, wæs smeagende be ðære hælo urra sawla [and] be ðam staþole ures rices, þætte ryht æw [and] ryhte cynedomas ðurh ure folc gefæstnode [and] getrymede wæron, þætte nænig ealdormonna ne us undergeðeodedra æfter þam wære awendende ðas ure domas.[25]

Patrick Wormald notes that "Ine's syntax is so much an 'advance' on that of his counterparts in Kent, as to touch heights of complexity not reached again till c. 930."[26] Wormald does not attempt to explain why Ine's code was so ahead of its time—instead, it seems like a strange disruption of the natural course of development of written law and accompanying notions of law as "at once the vehicle of accepted 'popular' tradition and a tool of aggressive royal policy."[27]

However, this precocity can be explained by the drafter's use of the royal diploma, or charter, as a model for his preface. Nearly every phrase in the opening sentence of Ine's code has parallels in the surviving corpus of Anglo-Saxon charters. One of Ine's own charters, which a number of scholars suggest may have an authentic basis, contains many of the same elements:

> Ego Ini rex Saxonum (cf. *Ic Ine…Wesseaxna kyning*), pro remedio animæ meæ (cf. *be ðære hælo urra sawla*) aliquam partem terræ donans impendo, id est decem cassatos, Hengisli abbati . cum pontificis nostri consilio, consentiente Baldredo (cf. *mid geðeahte [and] mid lare Cenredes mines fæder…*etc.), qui hanc terram donavit ei per petitionem Sergheris: per me donatio hæc imperpetuum sit confirmata ut nullus infringere audeat (cf. *þætte nænig…æfter þam wære awendende ðas ure domas*).[28]

A number of phrases from the prologue to Ine's code, inserted above in parentheses, appear to be direct translations of Latin diplomatic formulas. Furthermore, Ine's concern to prevent anyone's "altering these our decrees" also reads as a conventional feature of charters, which often contain a so-called "anathema clause" threatening a penalty, such as excommunication, on those who would contravene their terms. Individual phrases in the vestigial anathema clause of Ine's prologue are matched in various charters. For instance, S 271 uses a verb (*conuertere*) that may lie behind Ine's *awendan*, "to alter,"[29] while a charter from the time of Offa of Mercia parallels

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[25] Liebermann, ed., *Gesetze*, 88: "I Ine, King of the West Saxons by the grace of God, with the counsel and advice of Cenred my father and Hedde my bishop and Eorcenwold my bishop, with all my nobles and the most venerable wise men of my people and also with a great gathering of God's servants, was pondering the health of our souls and the foundation of our kingdom, so that just law and just royal judgments might be established and supported throughout our people, and so that no nobles or those subject to us afterwards alter these our decrees."

[26] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 104.

[27] Ibid, 106.

[28] S 238, *The Great Cartulary of Glastonbury*, ed. Aelred Watkin, Somerset Record Society (Frome, Somerset: Butler and Tanner, 1952), II: 527: "I, Ine, King of the Saxons, for the health of my soul, do give and grant a certain tract of land, namely ten hides, to Hengisl the abbot, by the advice of our bishop, with Baldred consenting—Baldred, who gave this land to him [i.e. Hengisl?] upon the petition of Sergheris: may this donation be confirmed through me forever so that no one dare to infringe upon it." For verdicts on the charter's authenticity, see *The Early Charters of Wessex*, ed. by H. P. R. Finberg (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1964), no. 364; Wormald, "Bede and the Conversion of the English: The Charter Evidence," in his *The Times of Bede*, ed. by Baxter, 160; Heather M. Edwards, *The Charters of the Early West Saxon Kingdoms*, British Archaeological Reports (Oxford: n.p., 1988), 23-5, 50.

[29] Watkin, ed., *The Great Cartulary of Glastonbury,* II: 527. *Convertere* is described as a Latin equivalent of *samod awendan* in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts in the *Dictionary of Old English* entry for *a-wendan*: see

Ine's "nænig ealdormonna ne us undergeðeodedra" with Latin "seu principum seu quilibet a subiectis" ("whether princes or subjects").[30]

The affinity between documentary formulas and ecclesiastical focus that I noted above in Wihtred's code continues in Ine's code. At its heart, the Anglo-Saxon diploma represents a pious individual act. Its first-person speaker conventionally frames his or her grant of land or privileges to a follower or religious institution as an act motivated by concern for the state of his or her soul.[31] Ine's code continues this tradition, but it combines a concern for the "wellbeing of our souls" with one for "the foundation of our kingdom," suggesting a possible connection between salvation and national welfare.[32] In the first item that follows this authoritative opening, Ine implies that the enforcement of all law is in his domain—even the rules of religious orders:

> Ærest we bebeodað þætte Godes ðeowas hiora ryhtregol on ryht healdan. Æfter þam we bebeodað þætte ealles folces æw [and] domas ðus sien gehealdene.[33]

Ine thus defines his own lawcode as secular, but by framing it in relation to religious "law" (i.e. the rules of monastic orders) and beginning with the former, he claims some authority over law as a whole. Much like the language of his prologue, Ine's command to "God's servants" to observe their own law makes him seem more like a tenth-century English ruler than a seventh-century one—or, perhaps, like a Carolingian *avant la lettre*.[34] The Christian focus of the code's first item continues in the following four provisions, which concern baptism, working on Sunday, the payment of church dues, and sanctuary.[35] However, the great bulk of the code records secular law, much like the codes of Æthelberht and Hloþhere and Eadric. The structure of the code thus reflects the shared but distinct goals of salvation and national welfare found in

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https://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/, III.B., along with reference to specifically legal uses in II.A.1.f.ii and II.A.1.f.iii.

[30] Sawyer 140, A.D. 765 x 792. Offa, king of Mercia, to Æthelnoth, abbot of SS Peter and Paul (St Augustine's, Canterbury); grant of 2 hides (manentes) at Beauxfield, Kent, with grazing rights in the wood called Singledge. Latin with English bounds, held at St. Augustine's, Canterbury. Accessed at http://www.esawyer.org.uk/charter/140.html, 22 Jun. 2018.

[31] While Anglo-Saxon diplomas were also used to record grants of land or privileges to laypeople, they were "introduced in England to record and to protect the privileges and the lands of the church" (Smith, *Land and Book*, 26). Moreover, Anglo-Saxon diplomas were distinguished from continental ones by their more ecclesiastical nature, reflected both in their frequently pious framing and the presence of only religious sanctions in their anathema clauses. Finally, even grants to laypeople were sometimes couched in pious terms. See Chaplais, "The Origin and Authenticity of the Anglo-Saxon Royal Diploma," 51-2.

[32] Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, p. 88, XLIIII: "be ðære hælo urra sawla"; "be ðam staþole ures rices."

[33] Ibid., XLV: "First we command that God's servants correctly keep their rule. After that, we command that the law and judgments of the entire people be kept in the following way."

[34] In his *Capitulare missorum generale* of 802, a programmatic statement on the operation of justice in his realm, Charlemagne decrees that every order of society must live according to *legibus suis*, "their laws," which was more or less equivalent to their *propositum* or *professio*, both terms referring to a "way of life" or "calling" in a specifically religious sense. See *Capitulare missorum generale*, in *Capitularia regum Francorum*, ed. by Alfred Boretius, MGH Capit. 1 (Hanover: Hahn, 1883), no. 33, pp. 91-100; at 92. Charlemagne had famously taken religious canons into his purview as lawmaker in the *Admonitio Generalis* of 789, where he felt the need to defend this action against the suggestion that it might be *presumtiosam*, "presumptuous." See *Admonitio generalis,* in Ibid., no. 22, pp. 52-62; at 53. Ine's code, from the 690s, already assumes that the king is responsible for at least enjoining religious to live by their specific *regulae*, even if it does not envision any means of enforcement.

[35] Liebermann, ed., *Gesetze*, pp. 88, 90.

the prologue. At this early stage in the history of vernacular written legislation, the ecclesiastical and pious associations of the diploma form are still seen as largely separate from the activity of royal lawmaking as such. Wihtred and Ine issue laws in company with ecclesiastical advisors, but there is little evidence that they see their own roles as lawmakers in ecclesiastical terms.

The use of the diploma form to conceive of royal lawmaking as both pious and wise would reach its apex in the reign of Edgar "the Peaceful," who presided over an unprecedented movement of ecclesiastical reform and monastic patronage known as the Benedictine Reform in the 960s and 970s.[36] The Reform was crucially underwritten by the king and queen, who claimed to act as protectors of the male and female religious houses of the kingdom, respectively.[37] Their stated aim was to ensure the kingdom's collective salvation, though their patronage was clearly advantageous for their own interests as well. Some of the highpoints of the Reform included the refoundation of the New Minster as a Benedictine monastery in 963, along with the issuance of a new, stricter monastic customary called the *Regularis Concordia* in 973. At each juncture, Edgar had documents created that portrayed him as a vigilant, wise, and holy reformer king. Both of these documents—the New Minster Charter and the *Regularis Concordia*—blend the characteristic dynamics of the charter proem with a claim for the king's active involvement in safeguarding morality. Edgar is not simply a patron of the Reform, but its author: the agent of its creation. By the same token, the New Minster Refoundation Charter and the *Regularis Concordia* also present Edgar as their author, despite the fact that both were almost certainly written by Æthelwold, Bishop of Winchester.[38]

The New Minster Charter has the basic structure of a diploma, but its application of that structure to a new domain of action has key implications for its depiction of the king's political wisdom. As Simon Keynes notes in a conspectus of all charters from Edgar's reign, the New Minster Charter, "although iconic, is wholly atypical."[39] Rather than the more usual grant of land, the New Minster Charter records a (re)foundation: a "grant of privileges" and, implicitly, an assertion of the king's power over the composition and running of a monastery.[40] In the process, it also issues prescriptions on the behavior of the new Benedictine monks, the king, and laypeople from the surrounding area. Moreover, the pious act around which the Charter centers is the expulsion of the secular clerics who formerly occupied the monastery. Unlike the usual grant of land, this expulsion and the ensuing refoundation of the monastery under the Benedictine Rule

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[36] On Edgar, see the articles collected in Donald Scragg, ed., *Edgar, King of the English 959-975: New Interpretations* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2008). The literature on the English Benedictine Reform is vast, but useful starting-points include Catherine Cubitt, "Review Article: The Tenth-Century Benedictine Reform in England," *EME* 6 (1997): 77-94; Mechthild Gretsch, *The Intellectual Foundations of the English Benedictine Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Robert Deshman, *The Benedictional of Æthelwold*, Studies in Manuscript Illumination 9 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); ibid., "Christus rex et magi reges: Kingship and Christology in Ottonian and Anglo-Saxon Art," *Mittelalterliche Studien* 10 (1976): 367-405.
[37] Thomas Symons, ed., *Regularis Concordia Anglicae Nationis Monachorum Sanctimonialiumque* (Edinburgh and London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1953), 2.
[38] For Æthelwold's authorship of the New Minster Refoundation Charter, see Alexander R. Rumble, *Property and Piety in Early Medieval Winchester: Documents Relating to the Topography of the Anglo-Saxon and Norman City and its Minsters*, Winchester Studies 4.iii (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 65; for his authorship of the Regularis Concordia, see Michael Lapidge, "Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher," in *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. by Barbara Yorke (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1988), 89-117; at 98-100.
[39] Keynes, "A Conspectus of the Charters of King Edgar, 957-75," in *Edgar, King of the English*, ed. by Scragg, 60-82; at 63; Ibid., "Edgar, *rex admirabilis*," in *Edgar, King of the English*, ed. by Scragg, 3-59; at 47.
[40] Keynes, "Edgar, *rex admirabilis*," 3.

are presented as the result of the king's wise deliberation about his own good and the good of the kingdom:

> Quod nullis mihi intercessionibus prodesse poterant, sed potius ut beatus ait Gregorius iusti uindictam iudicis prouocarent qui uariis uitiorum neuis contaminati, non agentes quae Deus iubendo uolebat, omnia quae nolebat rebelles faciebant auidus inquisitor aduertens, gratos Domino monachorum cuneos qui pro nobis incunctanter intercederent, nostri iuris monasteriis deuotus hilariter collocaui.[41]

Edgar's ability to identify what is good for him—what *prodest*, in the original Latin—is fundamentally the same prudence exhibited by Bede's wise convert-kings in Chapter One. His self-interest is, of course, also the interest of his kingdom: with these new "throngs of monks" in place, the "condition of our kingdom [will] thrive" [*nostri regiminis status uigeret*].[42] The New Minster Charter implies that Edgar's pious action and understanding are grounded in his status as one king facing another (i.e., God). The secular canons were "rebelliously" contravening "what God wished in his commandments," and therefore ought to be ejected from their position.[43] In addition to the usual pious concern for his soul's wellbeing, of the sort expressed above by Ine, Edgar reflects on the duties incumbent on him as a king. The Charter emphasizes that reflection at several junctures.[44]

With its combination of sacred narrative, pious testimony, and rules for behavior, the New Minster Charter stands as a masterful performance of King Edgar's wise royal voice. Edgar's first-person voice breaks in precisely where conventional diploma form would lead us to expect: in the dispositive section, immediately following the proem. In common with a number of other tenth-century charters, this proem takes the form of a grand narrative of Creation, the Fall of Man, and humanity's redemption through Christ.[45] After describing how he expelled the secular clerics and installed Benedictine monks in their stead, Edgar issues anathemas to any secular canons who would "plot" (*insidiantur*) against the monks.[46] Curses and blessings transition into rules of conduct for monks, kings and laypeople. While Edgar's first-person voice is restricted to the extended "dispositive" section, he remains the only identifiable speaker in the charter, which characterizes itself in a rubric as a gift from Edgar to Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary.[47] In this, the New Minster Charter resembles the text known as "King Edgar's

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[41] New Minster Refoundation Charter, ed. and trans. by Rumble in his *Property and Piety in Early Medieval Winchester*, Doc. IV, p. 81: "Because they [i.e. the secular clerics] had been of no benefit to me with their intercessory prayers, but rather, as the blessed Gregory said, they had 'provoked the venegeance of the Just Judge,' they who were contaminated with diverse blemishes of vices were not performing the things which God wished in his commandments, and were rebelliously doing all things which God did not wish, I, a keen investigator, turning my attention to these matters, have joyously installed, in the monasteries within our jurisdiction, throngs of monks pleasing to the Lord, who might intercede unhesitatingly for us."
[42] Ibid., 82.
[43] Ibid., 81: "rebelles," "non agentes quae Deus iubendo uolebat."
[44] Ibid, 79-80 (under "De Beniuolo Regis Meditamine," "Concerning the King's Benevolent Design"), p. 81.
[45] Ibid., 74-9 (biblical narrative); 79-83 (expulsion of secular canons). For other examples, see Stafford, "Political Ideas," 70, n. 14.
[46] Rumble, *Property and Piety in Early Winchester*, 83-5.
[47] Ibid., 74: "Eadgar rex hoc priuilegium nouo edidit monasterio ac omnipotenti Domino eiusque genitrici Marie eius laudans magnalia concessit" ("King Edgar promulgated this privilege for the New Minster and granted it to the Almighty Lord and his mother Mary, praising His great works").

Establishment of Monasteries" (hereafter *EEM*), likely written by Æthelwold as a preface to the Old English translation of the *Regular S. Benedicti*. David Pratt has argued that *EEM* represents Edgar's voice in its final section, in a passage formerly thought to be written in the voice of Æthelwold.[48] More work may reveal whether *all* Anglo-Saxon diplomas ought to be understood, on some level, as being voiced by their grantor. At the very least, we may plausibly ascribe the passage on proper conduct by monks, kings, and laypeople to Edgar's voice. The New Minster Charter thus shows how the diploma could serve as a vehicle for political wisdom: one that keeps the kingdom's best interests in mind, deliberates about how best to achieve those interests, and issues rules that do just that.

The *Regularis Concordia*, a monastic customary issued seven years after the New Minster Charter, further shows how the documents of the Benedictine Reform represent that reform as the product of the king's political wisdom. Unlike the earlier document, the *Regularis Concordia* does not feature the king's first-person voice. Nonetheless, it presents itself as a third-person record of the king's thought and speech. Its opening *narratio* centers around the process by which King Edgar came to convene a synod to unify monastic observance in his kingdom. Edgar operates on the same logic as Oswiu in Bede's narrative of the Synod of Whitby: a Christian kingdom ought to follow a single usage in worshipping God.[49] The *Regularis Concordia*, however, puts far more emphasis on the king's initiative in ecclesiastical matters, which it sets in the context of Edgar's lifelong concern with the Church. It explains how Edgar "began to greatly fear, love, and revere God" as a child, thanks to the teaching of "a certain abbot" (likely Æthelwold, the actual author of the *RC,* in a winking self-reference). It then narrates how the king "began to keenly and diligently consider" (*studiose percunctari sollicitus coepit*) what he might do to keep the spark of Christian faith burning brightly.[50] This deep reflection is the impetus for the Reform: first the expulsion of secular clerics and the refoundation of monasteries under Benedictine observance, and now the formulation of more specific rules of monastic practice that supplement the Rule itself. The *Regularis Concordia* thus presents Edgar as the author of the Reform—and, by extension, of the rules of monastic practice that it contains. While Æthelwold and Dunstan, leading reformers in the English Church, likely played the greatest role in actually formulating the customs in the *Regularis Concordia*, Edgar is to be understood in some sense as the true author of the text.[51] This is made clear by the first sentence of the epilogue:

> Praefatus equidem rex, ut huius libelluli Epilogum, uti Prooemium fideli ac rationabili exhortationis monitu coepit, orthodoxe concluderet, prudenti discutiens examine cum magno suae regiae potestatis inperio interdicens magnopere iussit ut nemo abbatum uel abbatissarum sibi locellum ad hoc thesaurizaret terrenum ut solitus census, quem indigenae

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[48] David Pratt, "The Voice of the King in 'King Edgar's Establishment of Monasteries,'" *ASE* 41 (2013): 145-204.

[49] Symons, ed., *Regularis Concordia*, 3: "ne impar ac uarius unius regulae ac unius patriae usus probrose uituperium sanctae conuersationi irrogaret" ("lest a varied and unequal way of observing the customs of one Rule and one country should shamefully bring their holy way of life into disrepute"; on Oswiu and the Council of Whitby, see above, Ch. 1, pp. 33-7.

[50] Symons, ed., *Regularis Concordia*, 1.

[51] The idea of Edgar as "author" is also appropriate in an early medieval context, in which an *auctor* was not simply, or necessarily, a "writer," but also a legitimating "authority." For a brief history of the *auctor* in ancient and early medieval textual culture, see Jan M. Ziolkowski, "Cultures of Authority in the Long Twelfth Century," *JEGP* 108 (2009): 421-48; at 421-35.

> *Heriatua* usualiter uocitant, qui pro huius patriae potentibus post obitum regibus dari solet.[52]

The king is thus represented as having an author's concern for the form and content of the text. It is unclear whether Edgar's "pious and rational advice and exhortation" made it into the text—no passage in the preface is written in the king's voice. The preface does, however, refer at a number of points to Edgar's "wise advice," *sagaci monitu*, to unify monastic observance by the production of the *Regularis Concordia*.[53] The epilogue seems, then, to imagine the king's advice as the unwritten point of origin for the *Regularis Concordia*. It thus envisions a virtual text that begins and ends in the king's wise speech.

Finally, the repeated references in the *Regularis Concordia* to Edgar's "advice" to the leaders of the Reform stand as notable exceptions to the tendency, discussed in the Introduction, to understand kings as the *recipients*, instead of the *purveyors,* of advice. Edgar's role in the Benedictine Reform is both advisory and administrative. He issues commands when he has the authority to do so, and offers advice on matters beyond his strict purview. For instance, he sends letters to ecclesiastical leaders in his kingdom *commanding* them to convene at Winchester, but *advising* them to "be of one mind regarding a unified [monastic] custom."[54] Edgar's involvement in the Reform pushes at the boundaries of royal power. While kings' rights of interference in Church affairs appear to have been a matter of custom as much as explicit regulation, discussions of these rights largely focused on economic and political control. Kings and other laypeople were liable to appropriate property belonging to wealthy religious houses or install their own allies as bishops, abbots, and abbesses.[55] There is less evidence for royal interest in the finer points of liturgy and monastic custom, which would generally have been the concern of powerful figures in the Church.[56] In this realm, Edgar can only claim to exert direct power so far; beyond that, he can offer advice. And yet, as I have argued, the New Minster Charter frames the Reform as a political act because it concerns the wellbeing of the kingdom. As such, Edgar's involvement in the Reform, and thus in ecclesiastical affairs, plays on the limits of his power as king and opens a theoretical space for wise royal counsel. In this liminal space between king and counsellor, Edgar

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[52] Symons, ed., *Regularis Concordia.*, 69: "The aforementioned king, so that he might rightly conclude the epilogue of this little book, just as he began the preface with a pious and rational advice and exhortation, discussing and examining [these matters] prudently, ordered with all the might of his royal power that no abbot or abbess should store up an earthly treasure-chest for themselves so that they might pay the accustomed tax which the natives usually call the *heriot*, which is customarily paid to kings for the powerful of this realm after a death." While I have translated the final clause as literally as possible, Symons offers a rendering that may more closely reflect the intended meaning: "which it is usual to offer to the King *on the death of notable persons of this country*" (emphasis mine). The epilogue's reference to "this little book" echo a reference in the preface to "hoc exiguo…codicello," "this humble little book" (4).
[53] Ibid., 3; see also p. 9, "praedicti regis monitu freti" ("confident in the advice of the aforementioned king").
[54] Ibid., 2-3: "synodale concilium Wintoniae fieri decreuit…cunctosque Christi compunctus gratia monuit ut concordes aequali consuetudinis usu" ("commanded a synodal council to be held at Winchester…and, moved by the grace of Christ, advised all to be of one mind regarding a unified [monastic] custom").
[55] See chapter 11 of the Report from the Legatine Synods held in 787, ed. in Arthur West Haddan and William Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. III (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1871), 453; John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 323-30, 341-67; Catherine Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils c.650-c.850* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1995), 191-234.
[56] On kings' involvement in English councils, see Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils*, 44-59.

is conceived of as a "teacher," *doctor*, who offers wise advice to his leading ecclesiastical subjects.[57]

In section III, below, I will trace the contours of this space of wise royal counsel in vernacular legal texts. Unlike the *Regularis Concordia*, these texts claim to represent the king's speech directly. First, however, I make a slight detour to a voice—Alfred the Great's—that would play a crucial role both in claiming greater authority for the use of the vernacular in legal texts and in exploring the possibilities of the king's first-person voice.

III: Alfred's *Domboc*: The King as Wise Translator

Charters, and the legal texts influenced by the diplomatic tradition, show particular concern for formal measures of authentication. Anglo-Saxon examples may lack the seals that were almost ubiquitous in Frankish charters,[58] but their careful listing of witnesses and the inclusion of an anathema clause for those who would violate them evince a strong belief in the authority of the document *as* document. My next mode of royal speech in a lawcode, that of Alfred the Great in his *Domboc*, would seem to go in the opposite direction from the kinds of rhetorical authority staked out by charters. In keeping with his familiar persona as a translator, Alfred subordinates his own voice to Scripture and adopts an explicitly subjective rhetoric of authentication. These two complementary facets of his textual performance as lawmaker would experience a productive commingling in the legislation of his successors.

Alfred's *Domboc* stands as a totally original kind of document in the history of Anglo-Saxon royal lawmaking: none of Alfred's predecessors had made such an ambitious and strategic use of writing in their roles as legislators; none of his successors would produce anything quite like it, either. It binds a translation and adaptation of Exodus 20-23 to Alfred's own lawcode, followed by a set of laws promulgated by his predecessor Ine. The interstice of the Mosaic law and Alfred's own laws is filled by a short history of sacred law written in the voice of Alfred himself. The *Domboc*'s arrangement, including possibly its 120 chapter rubrics (120 being the years of Moses' life), suggests that Alfred's law is a living descendant of Mosaic law.[59] Its monumentality was recognized by Alfred's successors, who referred to it simply as *seo domboc*, "the Book of Judgments," and who likely played some role in the unusually high number of

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[57] Symons, ed., *Regularis Concordia*, 3 (emphasis added): "Huius praecellentissimi regis sagaci monitu spiritualiter compuncti non tantum episcopi, uerum etiam abbates ac abbatissae, quod talem ac tantum meruerunt habere *doctorem* erectis ad aethera palmis immensas celsithrono grates uoti compotes referre non distulerint" ("Moved in their spirit by the wise advice of this most excellent king, not just bishops, but also abbots and abbesses did not hesitate to willingly raise their hands to the heavens in thanks to the Almighty that they had deserved to have so great a *teacher*"). The portrayal is furthered when Edgar is described as joyously watching his abbots and abbesses strive to live out the precepts of the Benedictine Rule. In Ibid., 2 (emphasis added): "Regulari itaque sancti patris Benedicti norma honestissime suscepta, tam abbates perplurimi quam abbatissae…sanctorum sequi uestigia una fide, non tamen uno consuetudinis uso, certatim cum magna studuerunt hilaritate. *Tali igitur ac tanto studio praefatus rex magnopere delectatus*, arcana quaeque diligenti cura examinans, synodale concilium Wintoniae fieri decreuit" ("Sincerely taking up the Rule of St. Benedict, many abbots and abbesses…joyously vied with each other with one faith—not, however, with the use of one custom—to follow the footsteps of the saints. *Greatly pleased with such and so much effort*, and also examining the matter with deep and diligent care, he decreed that a synodal council be held at Winchester").

[58] Chaplais, "Origin and Authenticity," 52.

[59] See Wormald, "*Lex scripta* and *Verbum Regis*," 132.

extant manuscript copies of it, including six in Old English, which range from the mid-tenth to the twelfth century.[60]

However, the *Domboc* also shows the extent to which Alfred tended to subordinate his own voice and the immediate conditions of writing to the authority of his text. Indeed, the interplay of translated text and original text in the beginning of his *Domboc* is complex enough that scholars have even speculated that the work was meddled with by a later redactor.[61] His lawbook begins somewhat abruptly at Exodus 20:1, the verse that precedes the Ten Commandments:

> Dryhten wæs sprecende ðas word to Moyse [and] þus cwæð: ic eom dryhten ðin God. Ic ðe utgelædde of Egipta londe 7 of hiora ðeowdome.[62]

What follows is a translation of the Ten Commandments and Mosaic law from Exodus 20-23, then a compressed history of the legacy of Mosaic law in the New Testament. Christ came "no ðas bebodu to brecanne ne to forbeodanne, ac mid eallum godum to ecanne."[63] The next key moment for the Mosaic law is the Council of Jerusalem, described in Acts 15. Reflecting its focus on textual authorities, the *Domboc* also translates the apostolic letter issued at the council, whose kernel (the so-called "Apostolic Decree") is that Christians need not observe every commandment of Mosaic law, but that "þæt ge forberen, þæt ge deofolgeld ne weorðien, ne blod ne ðicggen ne asmorod, [and] from diernum geligerum; [and] þæt ge willen, þæt oðre men eow ne don, ne doð ge ðæt oþrum monnum."[64] After this first council of Church history, the prologue summarizes the subsequent history of Christian legislation as it happened following the spread of Christianity itself. The historiographical framework is provided by conversion:

> Siððan ðæt þa gelamp, þæt monega ðeoda Cristes geleafan onfengon, þa wurdon monega seonoðas geond ealne middangeard gegaderode, [and] eac swa geond Angelcyn, siððan hie Cristes geleafan onfengon, halegra biscepa 7 eac oðerra geðungenra witena; hie ða gesetton, for ðære mildheortnesse þe Crist lærde, æt mæstra hwelcre misdæde þætte ða weoruldhlafordas moston mid hiora leafan buton synne æt þam forman gylte þære fiohbote onfon, þe hie ða gesettan; buton æt hlafordsearwe hie nane mildheortnesse ne dorston gecweðan, forþam ðe God ælmihtig þam nane ne gedemde þe hine oferhogdon, ne Crist

[60] See, most recently, Mary P. Richards, "The Laws of Alfred and Ine," in *A Companion to Alfred the Great,* ed. by Nicole G. Discenza and Paul E. Szarmach (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 282-309; also, Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 162-263; Richard J. E. Dammery in "The Law-Code of King Alfred the Great" (Ph.D. dissertation, Trinity College, Cambridge, 1990), vol. I, 112-72.

[61] A possibility raised, for instance, by Dammery in "The Law-Code of King Alfred the Great," vol. I, 175-206, 251-63.

[62] Liebermann, ed., *Gesetze*, 26: "The Lord was speaking these words to Moses and thus spoke: 'I am the Lord your God. I brought you out of the land of Egypt and of its servitude.'" I follow Liebermann's manuscript "E," Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 173.

[63] Ibid., p. 42, *El.* 49: "not to break or abolish those commandments, but to increase them with all good things."

[64] Ibid., p. 44, *El.* 49,5: "that you refrain from worshipping idols, and from eating blood, or what is strangled, and from illicit sexual intercourse, and that you desire, that what other men do not do unto you, so you not do unto them."

> Godes sunu þam nane ne gedemde þe hine to deaðe sealde, 7 he bebead þone hlaford lufian swa hine [selfne].[65]

This passage represents a bold attempt to set traditional Anglo-Saxon law, with its focus on monetary compensation for crimes, in the context of biblical law. In assigning Anglo-Saxon law to "bishops and other renowned counsellors," the text is actually historicizing rather precisely, in a sense: the Anglo-Saxon legal tradition that the *Domboc* builds on had, by Alfred's time, been shaped for centuries by the joint action of religious and secular lawmakers. However, it goes further and claims that these Christian lawmakers actually devised monetary compensation as a means of enacting "the mercy that Christ taught."[66] In reality, the practice of assigning monetary penalties for many crimes appears to have had pre-Christian origins.[67] The text also audaciously interprets the second part of the "Great Commandment" found in Matthew 22:36-40, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," through the prism of lordship: "[Christ] commanded that one should love one's *lord* as oneself."[68] This commanded love, in turn, is the basis for the moral and legal prohibition against *hlafordsearwe*, "betrayal of one's lord." The narrative that begins Alfred's *Domboc* thus sets up Anglo-Saxon lawmaking as the inheritance and culmination of a long history of divine law. While it does this, in part, by adapating Mosaic law to Anglo-Saxon practice,[69] it also makes more fundamental claims for the applicability of biblical law to a distinctly Anglo-Saxon social context.

In keeping with the *Domboc* prologue's focus on preexisting textual authority, the voice of Alfred, its presumed "author"—in the sense of primary textual agent—does not declare itself until after this impressive synthesis of Mosaic, New Testament, and conciliar law. In the earliest extant copy of the *Domboc*, which dates from the 920s or 930s and may have been produced by clerics close to the court of Alfred's son Edward the Elder,[70] the passage containing Alfred's

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[65] Ibid., pp. 44 and 46, *El.* 49, 7: "After many peoples accepted belief in Christ, then many assemblies were convened throughout the world, including those among the English after they accepted belief in Christ [convened by] holy bishops and other notables. In light of the mercy that Christ taught, they established that worldly lords might deign to accept a monetary penalty for many crimes at the first offense; but they did not dare to prescribe mercy for treachery to one's lord, for Almighty God did not grant any [mercy] to those who spurned him, and God's son Christ did not grant any to those who gave him over to die, and he commanded that one should love one's lord as oneself." *Selfne* is supplied from manuscript H, the *Textus Roffensis,* edited by Liebermann alongside E. Its addition here is warranted by the Latin translation of the text found in the *Quadripartitus*, ed. by Liebermann here at p. 47, and by the apparent reference to Matt. 22:39, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."
[66] Ibid.: "ðære mildheortnesse þe Crist lærde."
[67] Early codes issued for Germanic peoples such as the Lombards, Alamans, and Bavarians share the assumption that feud is a common phenomenon and prescribe specific compensations for physical injuries or injuries to honor. See Wormald, "*Lex scripta et uerbum regis*," 8-9: "[We] can never be sure that a provision found in a barbarian legal text is genuinely traditional. Nevertheless, there are indirect indications that much of what we find in Germanic codes does represent the custom of the relevant people as it was conceived at the time…In general, the wergelds and compensations of the Germanic laws are likely to be among the oldest elements among them; indeed, in some cases, they may already have become archaic at the time they were committed to writing." Nonetheless, Wormald also argued for the importance of Frankish written law as an influence and object of emulation among these groups: see his *Making of English Law*, 93-101.
[68] Liebermann, ed., *Gesetze,* 46 (emphasis added): "[and] he bebead *þone hlaford* lufian swa hine [selfne]."
[69] Wormald, *The Making of English Law,* 421; Michael Treschow, "The Prologue to Alfred's Law Code: Instruction in the Spirit of Mercy," *Florilegium* 14 (1994): 79-110.
[70] See Wormald, *The Making of English Law,* 166-7, 171-2.

voice begins on a new line after a small gap.[71] The *Domboc*'s primary editor, Felix Liebermann, also emphasizes its break from the preceding text, and connection to what comes after, by supplying a word to his German translation. I provide both his Old English and his translation:

> Ic ða Ælfred cyning þas togædere gegaderode [and] awritan het, monege þara þe ure foregengan heoldon, ða ðe me licodon.[72]
>
> Ich nun, König Aelfred, sammelte diese [folgenden Gesetze] und hiess [sie] niederschrieben, viele von denen, welche unsere Vorgänger hielten, [nämlich] diejenigen, die mir gefielen.[73]

Liebermann thus specifies that Alfred's *þas* refers to the "following" laws. Indeed, the clause that follows his first comma is appositive to *þas* and suggests that it refers to laws. However, Liebermann's use of brackets to supply implied words also makes apparent the looseness of Alfred's syntax, its tendency to pile appositives next to each other. Given this paratactic quality, one can also read Alfred's first clause as referring to the digest of Mosaic law and summary of legal history that immediately precede it. In this way, it resembles the moment, earlier in the prologue, when the translation of Exodus concludes with the line, "Þis sindan ða domas þe se ælmihtega God self sprecende wæs to Moyse."[74] The *Domboc*'s prologue also has a complicated and overlapping structure that further folds Alfred into its history of sacred law. Its first rubric—and thus in a sense its first law—is a paraphrase of the negative form of the Golden Rule that, in one tradition of the Vulgate Bible, concluded the apostolic letter from the Council of Jerusalem. Like the interpretation of "love thy neighbour as thyself" as a commandment about lordship, this line is also reframed to reflect the audience and purpose of the text: rather than *doing* unto others as you would have them do unto you, it commands the reader to "*sentence* no man to anything that he would not wish himself to be sentenced to."[75] Alfred's entry into the text comes later, and is sandwiched between chapters I and II in the rubrics. While some have been tempted to attribute the rather illogical structure of the prologue and placement of the rubrics to a later redactor, Patrick Wormald suggests that the rubrics may be Alfredian.[76] In addition, the significant number of 120 rubrics in all—corresponding to the years of Moses' lifetime, among other biblical associations[77]—suggests a conscious ideological statement, even if it does not bespeak the most rational form of organization for a lawbook.

The *Domboc* prologue's emphasis on authoritative history, along with its lack of reference to pressing historical conditions in its present and its portrayal of Alfred as a collector and reviser of laws instead of the inventor of new ones, all reflect the larger mode of Alfred's role as an author and textual authority. It begins as a translation with no self-conscious

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[71] Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 173, fol. 39v., viewable online at *The Parker Library on the Web*, Stanford University Libraries, https://parker.stanford.edu/parker/catalog/wp146tq7625, accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

[72] Liebermann, ed., *Gesetze,* p. 46, *El.* 49, 9: "I, then, King Alfred, gathered these together and ordered them to be written down, many of those that our predecessors held, those that I liked."

[73] Ibid., 47 (emphasis added): "I, King Alfred, collected these [*following* laws] and ordered [them] to be copied out, many of those, which our predecessors held, [namely] those that I liked."

[74] Ibid., p. 42, *El.* 49 (emphasis added): "These are the judgments that the Almighty God himself spoke to Moses."

[75] Ibid., p. 44, *El.* 49, 5 (emphasis added): "þæt he nanum men ne *deme* þæt he nolde ðæt he him demde."

[76] Wormald, The Making of English Law, 269.

[77] Ibid., 417.

intervention of its own, and it derives its power as a political statement from the sense of continuity it establishes between its present and the authoritative past it narrates. Its sense of history is sweeping in both directions: looking backwards, Alfred describes himself as the collector of "many of the laws that our predecessors held" and refers back to Ine (r. 688-726), Offa (r. 757-796), and Æthelberht (r. c. 589-616), who, Alfred specifies, "was the first among the English to receive baptism."[78] Looking forwards, Alfred notes that he "did not dare to presume to set too many of my [laws] into writing, since it was unknown to me what would please those who come after us."[79] Unlike Ine, Alfred does not claim to be making legislation that will—or at least should—last for all time. He envisions the same process of selection and abridgement that he made of his own predecessors. In his own case, he claims to have simply selected those laws of his predecessors "which I liked," or "which seemed most correct to me."[80] By juxtaposing his own legislation to Biblical law in the space of a manuscript, he implicitly claims the authority of that Biblical law, but his own voice in the prologue is personal and somewhat understated: he had no need to demonstrate his royal authority explicitly, he could simply expect that his readers would trust in "what seemed most correct to" him.

The disposition of rhetorical authority in the *Domboc* thus resembles that in early medieval textual culture more broadly, the field in which Alfred so famously played the role of translator. His lawbook betrays a clear hierarchy of sources: there is Holy Scripture, which should not be subject to an individual's whim—though, as I showed above, his treatment of biblical material is intriguingly free with the biblical text—and then there are human laws made by him and his predecessors, which are explicitly subject to personal judgment and rewriting. Like his Old English *Boethius*, though to a greater extent, his *Domboc* claims authority through its yoking to an authoritative text, not through a consistent performance of canonicity. Alfred's prologue bears comparison to the prologue of his predecessor Ine's code—the one that Alfred, in fact, chose to set alongside his own. In their prologues, the two kings speak in harmony, not in unison. Alfred wields textual authority as a translator and legal historian. He performs royal wisdom, but in highly subjective terms: we are to trust his judgment when he tells us that he selected and recorded those of his predecessors' laws which he "liked." Ine, by contrast, issued a code that used documentary conventions in order to come across as official and unalterable. Where Alfred merely mentions *minra witena geðeahte*, "the counsel of my advisors," Ine specifies that he took counsel with "all my nobles and the most venerable wise men of my people and also with a great gatherine of God's servants" and names specific counsellors, the most preeminent in the land: his father Cenred, a former king, and two bishops.[81] If Alfred's *Domboc* represents a thoughtful king's confrontation with tradition, Ine's lawcode is stamped by the authoritative moment of its issuance. While Alfred's code may seem like a retreat from the confident "documentarity" of Ine's, it also points the way towards a more substantive engagement between English kings and the theological sources of early medieval notions of law, order, and justice.

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[78] Liebermann, ed., *Gesetze,* 46: "monege þara þe ure foregengan heoldon"; Ibid., "þe ærest fulluhte onfeng on Angelcynne."
[79] Ibid.: "ic ne dorste geðristlæcan þara minra awuht fela on gewrit settan, forðam me wæs uncuð, hwæt þæs þam lician wolde, þe æfter us wæren."
[80] Ibid.: "þara þe me licodon"; "þa ðe me ryhtoste ðuhton."
[81] See n. 25 and n. 28, above.

IV: The Legal Sermon and the King as the Head Minister of State

In Alfred's wake, the increasingly powerful kings of the Cerdicing dynasty also became increasingly adept at using written legislation to project an image of power and wisdom—and to govern. Scholars have written extensively about the apparent uptick in the production of written law and the emergence of a continuous, self-conscious tradition of written law that began with Alfred's *Domboc*.[82] However, we can also witness a new kind of rhetorical performance of lawmaking in the tenth-century vernacular legislation of the Cerdicing kings. Suddenly, beginning with Alfred's son and successor Edward the Elder, we witness the rise of a discourse of *ministerial* kingship, in both senses of the word. That is, kings are now depicted as both leading commentators on affairs of state—a role not previously depicted at all in lawcodes—and as figures who can speak wisely and authoritatively about the kingdom and society, often in terms akin to a sermon.

The prologues of Edward's two lawcodes mark the beginning of a new attempt, by kings and their agents,[83] to explicitly ground legislation both in principles of justice and in analysis of the state of society. The prologue to *I Edward* resembles parts of the prologue to Alfred's *Domboc* by beginning with broader statements of principle. Where Alfred's code in the *Domboc* begins with a broadly moral point aimed at the kingdom as a whole—that everyone should fulfill their oaths—*I Edward* addresses the reeves, the agents of royal justice, with statements that bear on the proper functioning of that justice. These statements combine moral and procedural instructions, framing the king's reeves as both moral and legal agents:

> Eadwerd cyning byt ðam gerefum eallum, ðæt ge deman swa rihte domas swa ge rihtoste cunnon, and hit on ðære dombec stande. Ne wandiað for nanum ðingum folcriht to gereccanne; and ðæt gehwilc spræce habbe andagan, hwænne heo gelæst sy, þæt ge ðonne gereccan.[84]

The legacy of Alfred's legal and literary programs are combined into an ideological package that Alfred himself could not have yet achieved. Edward's commands to his judges to "issue the fairest judgments that you can" and "not be biased by any consideration in interpreting the law" resemble a number of statements of Old Testament law found in Exodus and Deuteronomy, especially Deut. 16:18-19:

> Judices et magistros constitues in omnibus portis tuis, quas Dominus Deus tuus dederit tibi, per singulas tribus tuas: ut judicent populum justo judicio, nec in alteram partem declinent.[85]

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[82] Lambert, *Law and Order in Anglo-Saxon England,* 163-201 and 238-94; Pratt, "Written Law and the Communication of Authority"; Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 286-366; at 286: "In the 135 years after 900 there were only thirteen when kings not known to have issued codes were on the throne."

[83] I use "agents" here, not in the sense of an office, but simply to refer to those involved in making and writing texts in the name of the king.

[84] Liebermann, ed., *Gesetze*, 138, *Prol.*: "King Edward commands all the reeves that you issue the fairest judgments that you can and as accord with the *Domboc*. Do not be biased by any consideration in interpreting the law; and [ensure] that every suit has an appointed day when you can decide it."

[85] Deut. 16:18-19: "Thou shalt appoint judges and magistrates in all thy gates, which the Lord thy God shall give thee, in all thy tribes: that they may judge the people with just judgment, and not go aside to either part." The phrase

The verb *declinent*, "turn aside," was later rendered by the translator of the Old English Hexateuch as *wandian*, the same verb used in the opening of *I Edward*. The provision that these judges are to "judge with a just judgment" (*judicent…justo judicio*) is echoed by a similar *figura etymologica* in the Old English, "deman…rihte domas."[86] Alfred also demonstrated a concern for fair judgments, as famously recorded by his biographer Asser,[87] and though this passage from Deuteronomy is not found in his *Domboc*, a few statements from Exodus on the need for fair judgment are.[88] While Edward's opening statement echoes Old Testament law, it is presented seamlessly as his own speech and integrated with a more procedural statement that every suit should have its day in court.

Like his first code, Edward the Elder's second code opens with a short preface that records his action and speech at a lawmaking session, his performance of a ritual designed to strengthen the kingdom by securing the allegiance of his leading subjects. Where his first code began with an admonition to judge justly, however, this one offers us a new portrayal of both written law and of the king's role as lawmaker in Anglo-Saxon England. For the first time, such law is framed as a response to current conditions in the kingdom: as policy based on an analysis of the current state of affairs. The subject of that analysis is *frið* or public peace—often framed in negative terms as the absence of theft or other crimes.[89] Edward's read on the state of the *frið* seems to be authoritative, though expressed simply in terms of how it seemed to him:

> Eadweard cyning myngode his wytan…þæt hy smeadon ealle, hu heora frið betere beon mæhte, þonne hit ær ðam wæs; forðam him ðuhte, þæt hit mæctor gelæst wære, þonne hit sceolde, þæt he ær beboden hæfde. He agsode hy þa, hwa to ðære bote cyrran wolde [and] on ðære geferræddenne beon ðe he wære, 7 þæt lufian ðæt he lufode, 7 ðæt ascunian ðæt he ascunode, ægðer ge on sæ ge on lande.[90]

The opening of *II Edward* is thus framed as a narrative of the king's speech acts—"King Edward *admonished* his councillors…He *asked* them then…"—and culminates in a passage of indirect speech that reflects an oath of fealty.[91] This narrative casts the king as a new kind of wise figure

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iusto iudicio also occurs in capitularies issued by Charlemagne and Louis the Pious: *Capitularia regum Francorum,* ed. Boretius, MGH Capit. 1, pp. 92, 336.

[86] Liebermann, ed., *Gesetze*, 138 ("issue…fair judgments").

[87] See W. H. Stevenson, ed., *Asser's Life of King Alfred: Together with the Annals of Saint Neots Erroneously Ascribed to Asser* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959) pp. 91-5.

[88] See Liebermann, ed., *Gesetze,* p. 40, *El.* 43: "Dem ðu swiðe emne. Ne dem ðu oðerne dom þam welegan, oðerne ðam earman; ne oðerne þam liofran [and] oðerne þam laðran ne dem ðu" ("Judge very fairly. Do not give one verdict to the rich man, another to the poor man; do not give one verdict to your friend, and another to your enemy").

[89] See above, p. 100, n. 1.

[90] Liebermann, ed., *Gesetze*, 140, 142: "King Edward admonished his councillors…that they all consider how their peace might be kept better than it previously had been; for it seemed to him, that what he had commanded earlier was carried out more poorly than it should be. He asked them then who would turn to the remedy for that and be in the fellowship that he was in, and love what he loved, and hate what he hated, both on sea and on land." Translation is my own, aided by consultation of Liebermann's German translation.

[91] See the oath formula prefaced in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 383 by the phrase, "Ðus man sceal swerigean hyldaðas," "Thus one should swear oaths of fealty," ed. by Liebermann in *Gesetze,* 396: "ic wille beon N hold [and] getrywe [and] eal lufian þæt he lufað [and] eal ascunian þæt he ascunoð, æfter Godes rihte [and] æfter woroldgerysnum" ("I will be loyal and true to *N* and love all that he loves and hate all that he hates, according to the

whose wisdom entails both analyzing the changing state of the kingdom and taking the action necessary to improve it—as a wise expert in public policy who is also a policymaker. The subject of Edward's policy here, *frið*, has spiritual as well as legal connotations: consequently, his policymaking has clerical overtones. The first verb of the entire code, *myngode*, is typically associated with the activity of teachers and preachers. For instance, *ic myngie*, "I admonish," is a common homiletic opener often followed by a moral or behavioral directive.[92] Edward's directive to his councillors that they *smeagan,* "consider" or "ponder," how better to maintain the public peace, also suggests that administration is an intellectual activity.[93] It has even more immediate roots in the literature of spiritual admonition, however. Just as a confessor offers the penitent a specific *bot*, or remedy, for the sins confessed, Edward inveighs his councillors to ponder how the peace might be kept better than it currently is, then offers them a remedy. For their part, his councillors are expected to "turn to the remedy," *to bote cyrran*—a collocation that is used elsewhere only of penance.[94] Instead of fasting or praying in order to rejoin the Christian community, however, Edward's councillors must make an oath of fealty in order to reestablish proper relations to their king. The oath is framed in terms of the bond of association (*geferrǽddenne*) it creates, which is oddly described as the "fellowship that he [i.e. Edward] was in" instead of, say, "a fellowship with him."[95] This ritualized wording makes such a "fellowship"

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law of God and to worldly customs"). On the role of oaths of fealty in tenth-century England more generally, see Lambert, *Law and Order in Anglo-Saxon England,* 210-3, and George Molyneaux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 3-5.

[92] See, for instance, the Old English translation of "Christ's Epistle on the Lord's Day" found in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 140 and edited by R. Priebsch in "The Chief Sources of Some Anglo-Saxon Homilies," from *Otia Merseiana: The Publication of the Arts Faculty of University College Liverpool,* vol. 1 (Hertford, Hertfordshire: Stephen Austin, 1899), 129-48; at 135 (emphasis added): "Ic eow bidde *and mynegie*, abysegiað eow þa hwile ge þæs fyrstes habbon on eowrum gebedum and on fæstenum and on wæccan" ("I bid *and admonish* you, that you busy yourselves, while you still have the opportunity, in your prayers and in fasts and vigils"). See also the first sentence of Blickling Homily 10, an exhortation to repent in anticipation of the end of the world; ed. by Richard Morris in *The Blickling Homilies of the Tenth Century*, EETS 73 (London: N. Trübner, 1880), 107 (emphasis added): "Men ða leofostan, hwæt nu anra manna gehwylcne *ic myngie* & lære…þæt anra gehwylc hine sylfne sceawige & ongite, & swa hwæt swa he on mycelum gyltum…gefremede, þæt he þonne hrædlice gecyrre to þam selran & to þon soþan læcedome" ("Dearest men, I now admonish and teach everyone that he should gaze upon and examine himself, and whatever great sins he has committed, he should quickly turn to the better and to that true medicine"). This example combines admonishment with *gecyrran*, "conversion" (lit. "turning"), the word used for accepting and performing the remedy for one's misbehavior—on which, see below in this paragraph.

[93] For a Carolingian antecedent in one of Charlemagne's capitularies, see Nelson, "The Voice of Charlemagne," 81: "Charlemagne is determined to engage his leading men in collective and individual self-examination, to expose the roots of sin…and eradicate them…The atmosphere Charlemagne wants for this remorseless probing and exposing of individual *conversatio*, that is, motivation and conduct, sounds like a cross between Quaker meeting and quality inspection, with traces of confessional, lawcourt, touch-group, and management training session."

[94] Proximity search of "bot*" and "cyrr*/cirr*" in the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*, compiled by Antonette diPaolo Healey with John Price Wilkin and Xin Xiang (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2009), https://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doecorpus/simple.html, accessed 6 Jul. 2018. *Gecyrran* occurs more commonly than *cyrran*, but the prefix does not change the meaning of the verb, and the forms likely existed in variation with each other. See, e.g., Blickling Homily 8, "Sauwle Þearf," ed. by Morris in *The Blickling Homilies*, 97-105; at 101: "Ne þearf þæs nan mon wenan þæt hine oþer mon mæge from ecum witum alesan, gif he sylf nele his synna to bote gecyrran ær þæm ende his lifes" ("No man can assume that anyone will release him from eternal punishment if he himself is not willing to turn to the remedy for his sins before the end of his life").

[95] Liebermann, ed., *Gesetze,* 142: "on ðære geferrǽddenne beon ðe he wære."

seem like a preexisting entity that Edward happens to be a part of, not an association created at the moment that the *witan* made their oath.[96]

There is no one-to-one correspondence between the roles taken by Edward and his advisors, on the one hand, and the conventional ones of confessor and penitent, on the other. Each figure in this transaction may be understood on two levels, just as *II Edward* envisions two levels of national community. On the level of the assembly, Edward plays the confessor to his advisors' penitents, just as he and they form an intimate *geferrædden* of national political actors. On the level of the kingdom that his laws look towards, however, Edward may be thought of as a bishop whose judgment sets the framework for penance. Meanwhile, his advisors form a corps of priests or confessors who are enjoined to do the mental work of considering the public peace and carrying out wise judgments in their own jurisdictions. While it may be every person's duty to search out their own sins, handbooks for confessors recognize that not everyone is equally willing or able to do this: "Hit gebyrað þæt se sacerd smeage synfulra manna bote be bisceopes dome."[97]

The didactic and clerical valences of Edward's role as king are figured more explicitly in his son Æthelstan's brief ordinance on paying tithes and other dues to the Church (*I Æthelstan,* also known as *Tithing Ordinance*). The text has a complicated history, with surviving Latin and vernacular versions that differ in small but significant respects, and Patrick Wormald raises the possibility that it was added to by Wulfstan.[98] Even if the entire text were a Wulfstanian fabrication, however, it would still offer valuable and unique evidence for the representation of royal wisdom in Anglo-Saxon legal texts.[99] In the tradition of Oswiu at the Synod of Whitby, Hrothgar in his "Sermon," and Mod's more discursive moments in the Old English *Boethius*, Æthelstan takes on the role of a theological authority in his *Tithing Ordinance* but grounds his discourse in his knowledge of his own role as king. After commanding that reeves, bishops, and ealdormen render tithes from the lands they oversee, Æthelstan strikes a distinctly clerical pose and offers three citations from scripture prefaced with the homiletic tags *uton geþencan* ("let us remember") and *us is to ðencanne, hu ondrislic hit on bocum gecweden is* ("we must recall how dreadful it is stated to be in books").[100] The conclusion of the Ordinance, a passage I will refer to as "Æthelstan's Message," grounds the king's spiritual authority in his role as God's representative on earth, a sort of tribute-payer to God. Rather than stating these relations directly, it suggests them through the use of parallel constructions:

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[96] The balance between the text's focus on personal bonds with the king—a fellowship that exists within the larger fellowship of the English kingdom—and its oddly impersonal language suggests the value of a middle path between "maximal" and "minimal" understandings of the English state, as discussed by Levi Roach in his *Kingship and Consent in Anglo-Saxon England, 871-978: Assemblies and the State in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 11-15.

[97] *The Old English Penitential,* ed. by Allen Frantzen on *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials: A Cultural Database* (online), text from Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 482, fol. 1v, http://www.anglo-saxon.net/penance/index.php?p=LAUD482_1b, accessed 6 Jul. 2018: "It is fitting that the priest ponder the penance of sinful people according to the judgment of the bishop."

[98] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 302.

[99] Wulfstan is recognized as the true author of a purported treaty between Edward the Elder and Guthrum, who lived and ruled some fifty years before Wulfstan's birth: see Dorothy Whitelock, "Wulfstan and the So-Called Laws of Edward and Guthrum," *EHR* 66 (Jan. 1941): 1-21.

[100] A search for the phrase *uton/utan geþencan* in the *DOE Web Corpus* returned twelve matches. All but the instance from *Tithing Ordinance* discussed here were from pastoral literature: ten instances were from homilies: HomU 9 (ScraggVerc 4), HomS 38 (ScraggVerc 20), HomS 45 (Tristr 3), HomU 26 (Nap 29), WHom 13, HomS 7, HomS 37, HomM 8; one was from confessional literature: Conf 10.1 (Thorpe). Accessed 13 Apr. 2019.

> Nu ge gehirað, cwæð se cyngc, hwæs ic Gode ann, and hwæt ge gelæstan sculon be mynre oferhyrnesse. [And] gedoð eac, þæt ge me geunnon mines agenes, þe ge me mid rihte gestrinan magon. Nelle ic, þæt ge me mid unrihte ahwar aht gestrynan; ac ic wille eowres geunnan eow rihtlice, on þa gerad þe ge me geunnan mines; and beorgað ægðer ge eow ge þam þe ge mingian sculon wið Godes irre and wið mine oferhirnesse.[101]

This brief passage on political and religious duties clearly has Matthew 22:21 in mind—"Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God, the things that are God's"—though it expands on this verse quite freely. In doing so, Æthelstan's Message enacts a distinctly lay mode of wise rhetoric that is shared by certain passages of the Old English *Boethius* and a passage in the Old English *Dicts of Cato* that is derived from the *Boethius*.[102] This mode is characterized by dense, knotty repetition and a paratactic style that makes meaning implicitly as well as explicitly. The messy sequence of parallel and antithetical pairs that structures the passage turns on both the reciprocal relationship between the king and his people and the analogous relationship between the king and God. Like Hrothgar's Sermon*,* Æthelstan's Message features an envelope pattern, beginning and ending with a dual reference to God and the king (it even repeats the phrase *min(r)e oferhirnesse* verbatim).[103] The analogous nature of the relationship between Æthelstan and his subjects, on the one hand, and God and Æthelstan, on the other, is only implied by the obvious parallelism of "what I grant to God, and what you should carry out on pain of disobedience to me."[104] A key feature of this rhetoric is its overlapping and associative nature—its tendency to spawn more parallel or adversative clauses than is necessary in conveying meaning. In this case, the parallelism of the two *what*-clauses of the first sentence suggested another homology: just as Æthelstan "renders" his subjects' tithes to God, so his subjects must ensure that "you render to me what is mine, whatever you can justly acquire for me."[105] This may refer to taxes and other fines, which were understood as secular analogues to religious tithes. The proviso that his subjects should render what they can "justly acquire" leads into the obvious corollary, "I do not wish you to ever acquire anything for me unjustly," but this is also a set-up to a parallel positive statement with its own internal balance: "instead, I will justly render to you what is yours, on the condition that you render to me what is mine."[106] Æthelstan's Message unfolds progressively and has a clear ending, but it cannot be easily

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[101] Liebermann, ed., *Gesetze, I As.*, p. 148, MS D.: "'Now you have heard,' said the king, 'what I render to God, and what you should carry out on pain of disobedience to me. And be sure to render me what is mine, whatever you may justly acquire for me. I do not wish you to ever acquire anything for me unjustly; instead, I will justly render to you what is yours, provided that you render to me what is mine; and protect both yourselves and those whom you should admonish against God's anger and against disobedience to me.'"

[102] See Nicole Guenther Discenza, *The King's English: Strategies of Translation in the Old English* Boethius (Binghamton, NY: SUNY Press, 2005), 67-9; R. S. Cox, "The Old English Dicts of Cato," *Anglia* 90 (1972): 1-42; at p. 15, nos. 77 and 78.

[103] On envelope patterns in Old English poetry, see Adeline Courtney Bartlett, *Larger Rhetorical Patterns in Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (Morningside Heights, NY: Columbia University Press, 1935), 9-29; on the example in Hrothgar's Sermon, see C. B. Hieatt, "Envelope Patterns and the Structure of *Beowulf*," *English Studies in Canada* 1 (Fall 1975): 249-65; at 254.

[104] Liebermann, ed., *Gesetze, I As.*, p. 148, MS D.: "hwæs ic Gode ann, and hwæt ge gelæstan sculon be mynre oferhyrnesse." I have italicized and underlined certain words to visually represent the parallel structure of Æthelstan's discourse.

[105] Ibid.: "ge me geunnon mines agenes, þe ge me mid rihte gestrinan magon."

[106] Ibid.: "ac ic wille eowres geunnan eow rihtlice, on þa gerad þe ge me geunnan mines."

analyzed or represented with a schematic.[107] Like the view of knowledge offered by Wisdom in the Old English *Boethius*—or, indeed, the passage from the Book of Proverbs I cite in the introduction—rhetorical devices such as verbal repetition and syntactic parallelism do not hold up an elegant or parsimonious conceptual structure in Æthelstan's Message; instead, they ornament the Message's straightforward meaning.[108]

The preface of *IV Edgar*, issued as a response to an unidentified *færcwealme* or epidemic, enacts a situation of wise royal speech with the same grounding in the king's self-knowledge as the passages from *II Edward* and *I Æthelstan*.[109] In fact, *IV Edgar* shares a number of striking similarities to these earlier codes. Like *I Æthelstan,* the solution that it offers to the problem of the epidemic is the rendering of tithes to God. The structural homology between tithes and taxes creates a rhetorical space in which the king is uniquely equipped to speak wisely, since he is understood to be both the representative of his kingdom before God and the highest lord in the land, the greatest recipient of secular dues and privileges. *IV Edgar* begins, not as a lawcode, but as a narrative about the king's contemplation of wise policy:

> Her is geswutelod on þisum gewrite, hu Eadgar cyningc wæs smeagende, hwæt to bote mihte æt ðæm færcwealme, ðe his leodscipe swyðe drehte [and] wanode wide gynd his anweald.[110]

The phrase "Eadgar cyningc wæs smeagende" also instantly calls to mind the opening of Ine's code, "Ic Ine…wæs smeagende," and with it the diplomatic tradition.[111] Unlike the example in Ine's prologue, however, Edgar's pondering is directed towards a specific question: "what solution might be found for the pestilence…?" The answer he poses depends on spiritual authority, a knowledge of sin and its consequences, but it is also framed in terms specific to a layperson:

> [Him] þuhte and his witum, þæt þus gerad ungelimp mid synnum and mid oferhyrnysse Godes beboda geearnod wære, and swyþost mid þam oftige þæs neadgafoles, þe Cristene men Gode gelæstan scoldon on heora teoðingsceattum. He beþohte and asmeade þæt godcunde be woruldgewunan: Gif geneatmanna hwylc forgymeleasað his hlafordes gafol and hit him to ðæm rihtandagan ne gelæst, gif se hlaford mildheort bið, þæt he þa

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[107] See Walter J. Ong's description of oral rhetoric as "additive rather than subordinative," "aggregative rather than analytic," and "redundant or 'copious.'" Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Techologizing of the Word* (London and New York: Routledge, 1982), 36-40; qtd. at 36, 38, 39.
[108] See pp. 6-7, above (citing Prov. 2:1-6).
[109] The date and exact location of *IV Edgar*'s promulgation are unknown, though Patrick Wormald considers it a late code that develops a more personal and rhetorical style: see Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 317-20. It must also be said that *IV Edgar* was promulgated at "Wihtebordesstan," but it is not clear where exactly that is. See Liebermann, ed., *Gesetze*, *IV Eg.* 1, 4, p. 208.
[110] Liebermann, ed., *Gesetze*, *IV Eg. Prol.*, 206: "Here is made known in this writing how King Edgar was pondering [*smeagende*] what solution might be found for the pestilence [*færcwealme,* lit. "sudden killing"] which has afflicted his people so greatly and rampaged widely throughout his kingdom."
[111] See also S1197, a charter from 843x863 in which a nun named Lufu grants an annual render from her estates to the community at Christ Church, ed. Florence E. Harmer, *Select English Historical Documents of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge Unviersity Press, 1914), 7-8; at 7 (emphasis added): "Ic Lufa…*wes soecende [and] smeagende* ymb mine saulðearfe mid Ceolnoðes ærcebiscopes geðeahte 7 ðara hiona et Cristes cirican" ("I, Lufu…was searching and considering about my soul's need with the counsel of Archbishop Ceolnoð and of those at Christ Church").

> gymeleaste to forgyfnysse læte and to his gafole buton witnunge fo; gif he þonne gelomlice þurh his bydelas his gafoles myngað, and he þonne aheardað and hit þencð to ætstrengenne, wen is, þæt þæs hlafordes grama to ðan swiðe weaxe, þæt he him ne unne naðer ne æhta ne lifes: Swa is wen, þæt ure Drihten do þurh þa gedyrstignysse, þe folces men wiðhæfton þære gelomlican myngunge, þe ure lareowas dydon ymbe þæt neadgafol ures Drihtnes: þæt syn ure teoþunga and cyricsceattas.[112]

As a layman, Edgar is uniquely poised to "examine and consider the divine in terms of worldly customs."[113] The statement that he did so was modelled, perhaps, on a conventional statement in Anglo-Latin charters: "one must purchase heavenly goods with earthly things."[114] That statement is also found in the vernacular version of Æthelstan's *Tithing Ordinance*.[115] Both are pieces of royal legislation that pertain to ecclesiastical dues; both draw on a theological commonplace from the diplomatic tradition to represent a king considering how his own power relates to and supports divine power. The innovative translation of this commonplace from goods to customs turns it from a statement about exchange to a structural analogy between the human and divine worlds. This move allows Edgar to speak wisely about "divine customs" because of his intimate experience with earthly ones as a layperson and moreover a lord.

V: Beyond Royal Wisdom: Æthelred II and Cnut

As we move from Edgar's death in 975 to the accession of his son Æthelred II three years later, we move from a king famous for his wisdom to a king whose name would become synonymous with folly: at some point likely after his death, Æthelred acquired the byname *unrǣd*, often

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[112] Liebermann, ed., *Gesetze*, *IV Eg. Prol.* 1, p. 206: "In the first place, it seemed to him and his advisors that this misfortune was earned with sins and with disobedience of God's commands, and most of all with the withholding of the tribute that Christians should render God in their tithes. *He examined and considered the divine in terms of worldly customs*: If a tenant neglects his lord's dues and does not deliver it to him on the appointed day, one can assume that the lord, if he is compassionate, will forgive the negligence and accept his dues without punishment. If he then demands his dues repeatedly through his agents and the tenant hardens and decides to withhold it, one can assume that the lord's anger will grow so great that he will grant the tenant neither life nor possessions. So, then, one can assume that our Lord acts in the same way because of the audacity with which laymen have resisted the repeated admonitions of our teachers about the dues that we must render to our Lord—those are our tithes and church-dues."

[113] Ibid.: "beþohte and asmeade þæt godcunde be woruldgewunan." It is difficult to imagine the king describing his own actions this way, especially since the reasoning that follows makes Edgar appear somewhat naïve, an "outsider" in the realm of the divine who has to reason from what he knows as a temporal lord.

[114] See, e.g., *The Charters of Shaftesbury Abbey,* ed. by Susan E. Kelly, Anglo-Saxon Charters 5 (Oxford: British Academy, 1996), no. 5, p. 13: "iccirco terrenis et caducis eterna et iugiter mansura mercanda sunt" ("Therefore eternal and everlasting things ought to be purchased with earthly and transitory ones"); *Charters of Rochester*, ed. by Alistair Campbell, Anglo-Saxon Charters 1 (London: British Academy, 1973), no. 15, p. 29: "necesse est ut in presenti pietatis insistat operibus, et terrenis rebus atque transitoriis in quantum deo largiente sufficiat sibimet eterna mercatur bona" ("It is necessary that one persist in works of piety in the present, and that eternal goods may be purchased for oneself with earthly and transitory things, however much one can provide with God's generosity").

[115] See section 4.1 from Æthelstan's *Tithing Ordinance*, found only in the Quadripartitus and, in Old English, Lambarde's *Archaionomia* of 1568; ed. in Liebermann, *Gesetze*, 148-9: "Se godcunde lare us gemynaþ, þæt we ða heofonlica ðinga mid ðam eorþlicum and ða ecelic mid ðam hwilwendlicum geearniaþ" ("Holy doctrine reminds us that we earn heavenly things with earthly ones, and eternal things with transitory ones"). Wormald discusses the manuscript situation and observes that the statement is a charter commonplace: see *The Making of English Law*, 302.

rendered "the Unready" but perhaps better translated as "no-counsel" or "ill-advised."[116] Simon Keynes, in particular, has shown that Æthelred's reputation as a failed king is shaped by sources both immediately post-dating the end of his reign, including the annals for 991 to 1016 found in texts C, D, and E of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and by twelfth- and thirteenth-century historians.[117] Æthelred's association with failed counsel also reflects a preoccupation with wise kingship and counsel visible from the period of his reign, however. The decades on either side of the millennium would see an outpouring of discourse about wise and foolish kingship, but they also represent the end of the tradition of self-consciously wise royal lawmaking that I have traced in this chapter. I now turn to the question of how, and why, the discourse of royal wisdom shifted at a moment of great instability for the English kingdom.

The Viking raids that intensified in the 990s prompted a newly heightened sense of the stakes of wisdom in governance: how were Æthelred II and his advisors to face this increasingly existential threat?[118] It is perhaps no coincidence that Æthelred issued a number of charters in the same decade that, for the first time, framed the grants of land they recorded as acts of penance and restitution for earlier spoliations of Church lands, committed during a period of youthful folly and wicked counsel from his advisors.[119] At the same time, Ælfric of Eynsham and Wulfstan of York were emphasizing the importance of good counsel to the nation's well-being. Both accorded counsellors, *witan*, a prominent role in wise governance. In a treatise on the Bible and sacred history addressed to the layman Sigeweard, Ælfric writes that counsellors must examine each order of society—the familiar trio from the Old English *Boethius* of those who fight, those who work, and those who pray—to determine any potential points of moral weakness and correct them for the good of the kingdom.[120] Wulfstan, meanwhile, filled a new role in English political life as a semi-official lawmaker and theorist of both secular and ecclesiastical law and justice. He built on his background as a canon law expert to formulate the moral duties of all orders of society in a time of existential threat from the Viking army. The resulting text, *The Institutes of Polity*, distills centuries of insular and Continental thought about ideal governance into a newly urgent, polemical statement about the collective responsibility of the English to ensure God's continuing favor and stem the tide of national disaster.[121] In keeping with his focus on shared roles and responsibilities, Wulfstan uses the rare word *þeodwitan,* or "national counsellors," to refer to all authority figures, lay and ecclesiastical: "kings and bishops,

[116] Simon Keynes, "The Declining Reputation of King Æthelred the Unready," in *Ethelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference*, ed. by David Hill, British Archaeological Reports 59 (Oxford: n.p., 1978), 227-53; at 240-1.
[117] Ibid. See, further, Pauline A. Stafford, "The Reign of Æthelred II: A Study in the Limitations of Royal Policy and Action," in *Ethelred the Unready,* ed. by Hill, 15-37; Levi Roach, *Æthelred the Unready* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016), 1-19, 312-25.
[118] See Simon Keynes, "The Historical Context of the Battle of Maldon," in *The Battle of Maldon A.D. 991*, ed. by Donald Scragg (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 81-113.
[119] See Levi Roach, "Penitential Discourse in the Diplomas of King Æthelred 'the Unready,'" *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 64 (2013): 258-76; Catherine Cubitt, "The Politics of Remorse: Penance and Royal Piety in the Reign of Æthelred the Unready," *Historical Research* 85 (2012): 179-92; Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred "The Unready,"* 176-86.
[120] Richard Marsden, ed., *The "Old English Heptateuch" and Ælfric's "Libellus de Ueteri Testamento et Nouo," Vol. I: Introduction and Text*, EETS 330 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 201-30; at 228. See, further, Timothy E. Powell, "The 'Three Orders' of Society in Anglo-Saxon England," *ASE* 23 (1994): 103-32; at 114-15.
[121] Karl Jost, ed., *Die "Institutes of Polity, Civil and Ecclesiastical": Ein Werk Erzbischof Wulfstans von York*, Swiss Studies in English 47 (Bern: Francke, 1959).

earls and generals, reeves and judges, teachers and those learned in the law."[122] Kings are at the apex of Wulfstan's ideal Christian society, but they are also part of a larger group of authorities whose duty is to take counsel and guide the people in moral behavior. Furthermore, the *Institutes of Polity* imagines the king as taking counsel *with* his advisors, not simply *from* them.[123]

And yet, despite the new prominence of wise kingship as a topic in Anglo-Saxon texts, Æthelred's reign has not left us written rhetorical performances of the king's wisdom of the sort I identified for Edward the Elder, Æthelstan, and Edgar. The codes issued in Æthelred's name fall into two broad groups: those authored by Wulfstan, and those issued before Wulfstan became the main author of English laws. Already in the earlier codes, we see a subtle shift towards emphasizing the collective enactment of the laws by the king and his advisors: the strong statements of the king's individual agency in Edward, Æthelstan, and Edgar's codes is now absent. Instead of "the king decreed these laws with the advice of his counsellors," Æthelred's codes inform us that "the king *and his counsellors* enacted these laws"—the verb is now plural.[124] This trend largely continues in the codes written by Wulfstan, beginning with *V Æthelred* in 1008. One striking exception is *X Æthelred*, an undated and truncated code that Patrick Wormald sees as a possible discarded draft of another surviving code.[125] *X Æthelred* shares a first-person voice, diplomatic conventions, and pious concerns with a number of texts I discussed in the last chapter, including Ine's code and *IV Edgar*.[126] Much like these two earlier codes, *X Æthelred* presents the king considering what is good for both himself and his people:

> An is ece Godd wealdend and wyrhta ealra gesceafta; and on þæs naman weorðunge ic Æðelred cyning ærest smeade, hu ic Cristendom æfre mihte and rihtne cynedom fyrmest aræran, and hu ic mihte þearflicast me sylfum gerædan for Gode and for worolde, and eallum minum leodscype rihtlicast lagian þa þing to þearfe, þe we scylan healdan.[127]

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[122] Ibid., 62: "Cyningan and bisceopan, eorlan and heretogan, gerefan and deman, larwitan and lahwitan." Only seven texts in the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* include the word *þeodwita* or the variant spelling *ðeodwita*, and four of these texts are certainly or probably by Wulfstan: see Antonette diPaolo Healey, ed., University of Toronto, *DOE Web Corpus*, accessed 1 May 2019, www.doe.utoronto.ca. Two other texts, Byrhtferth of Ramsey's *Enchiridion* and the anonymous translation of the *Liber Scintillorum*, use the term in the sense "learned people, philosophers" (see Bosworth et al., *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,* ed. by Thomas Northcote Toller and others, "þeód-wita," def. II, compiled by Sean Christ and Ondřej Tichý, Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, 21 Mar. 2010, accessed 1 May 2019, http://www.bosworthtoller.com). The closest use of *þeodwita* to Wulfstan's comes from a short history of Christianity and kingship appended by Ælfric to his translation of the Book of Judges. *Þeodwitan* is Ælfric's translation of *senatores* and thus refers to the senators of ancient Rome. See Marsden, ed., *The "Old English Heptateuch" and Ælfric's "Libellus de Ueteri Testamento et Nouo*,*"*, p. 198.

[123] Jost, ed., *Die "Institutes of Polity, Civil and Ecclesiastical,"* p. 48, G1 fol. 70b: "He sceal boclarum hlystan swyþe georne and Godes beboda geornlice healdan and gelome wið witan wisdom smeagan, gyf he Gode wile rihtlice hyran" ("He [i.e. the wise king] must listen to the teachings of books very eagerly and keep God's commandments zealously and often think of wisdom with his counsellors, if he wishes to obey God properly").

[124] In Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen,* vol. I, see: p. 216 (*I Æthelred*); p. 220 (*II Æthelred*); p. 228 (*III Æthelred*).

[125] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 337.

[126] Ibid. Based on the evidence of *Ine*, discussed above at pp. 104-6, I cannot agree with Wormald's claim that the resemblance of *X Æthelred* to the proem of a diploma is "a device unparalleled in pre-conquest lawmaking" (337).

[127] Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, *X Atr. Prol.,* 269: "There is one eternal God, the ruler and the craftsman of all creation; and in a desire to honor His name, I, King Æthelred, first considered how I might raise up Christian practice and lawful sovereignty most firmly, and how I might most usefully provide for myself before God and the world and most rightly ordain those things for my people that we should all hold."

Like Edgar or, indeed, the moral seeker of wisdom in the Old English *Boethius*, Æthelred wishes to "eagerly investigate" [*georne spyrian*] how he might bring about a state of Christian order in his kingdom through law.[128] Moreover, the conjunction of his pious self-interest, his desire to *þearflicast me sylfum gerædan*, "most usefully provide for myself," with his desire to rule his people recalls two other texts that blend diplomatic form and prescription: Ine's code and Edgar's Refoundation Charter for New Minster.[129] The preface of *X Æthelred*, however, is longer than its body, which consists of a few broad affirmations about turning away from sin, honoring God, and promoting justice. These sentences are extremely similar to passages found elsewhere in Wulfstan's *oeuvre*, and Wormald identifies the text as Wulfstan's.[130] While *X Æthelred* stands in a long tradition of religiously-inflected royal lawcodes that foreground the king's wise reflection, it is more transparently the work of someone else, and its narrative accordingly rings especially hollow. It may reflect a failed experiment in genre by Wulfstan: a willingness to try out different frameworks for legal texts that accorded more initiative to the king or, alternatively, to his *witan*.

The abortive performance of royal wisdom in *X Æthelred,* coupled with the role of Wulfstan, suggests one possible reason for both the greater prominence of discourse about kingship and counsel at the turn of the millennium, *and* the lack of texts that stage wise royal speech: the increased size and power of the state in late Anglo-Saxon England, along with the rise of a semi-professional statesman like Wulfstan of York, meant that there was less need for kings like Æthelred, Cnut, and Edward the Elder to reflect publicly on their power or their duties to God and the Church. Those duties had been established by their predecessors, and Wulfstan was more than capable of reflecting on the role of secular law in providential history.[131] Wulfstan continued to draft lawcodes for Cnut into the early 1020s. While those codes witness a return to a greater emphasis on the king's role—the *witan* consult, but only the king technically "decreed" (*gerædde*) the laws—they are essentially pastiches of Wulfstan's earlier codes and texts.[132] In the eleventh century, we seem to be confronting a world where the king's duties are better defined, one where there is no longer a political motivation for staging wise royal speech. Æthelred's youth was, as he would profess multiple times in the penitential charters of the 990s, a period of folly. The focus on royal counsellors in the latter end of his reign also came to take the place of an earlier emphasis on the king's initiative—one mirrored in the expansion of English royal overlordship over much of Britain and the imperial claim, in many charters of especially Æthelstan and Edgar, to be the ruler of the entire island with all of its peoples.[133] Finally,

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[128] Ibid., *X Atr. Prol.,* 2: "Nu wille ic georne æfter þam spyrian, hu we lara and laga betst magan healdan and æghwylce unlaga swyþost aweorpan" ("Now I wish to eagerly investigate how we might best hew to [wise] teachings and laws and thoroughly repudiate all injustices"); for the Old English *Boethius*, see pp. 84-5, above.
[129] See above, pp. 103-8.
[130] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 337; Liebermann, ed., *Gesetze*, 270. For a close parallel to the (truncated?) body of the decree, see *VI Æthelred* 1, described specifically as the "first ordinance of the bishops" (*þæra biscpa frumræd*): Ibid., 246.
[131] See Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, *VIII Atr*. 36-39, pp. 267-8.
[132] The relevant portions of Cnut's codes can be found in Ibid., p. 278 (*I Cn. Prol.*) and p. 308 (*II Cn. Prol.*). See also Patrick Wormald, "Archbishop Wulfstan: Eleventh-Century State-Builder," in *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York: The Proceedings of the Second Alcuin Conference*, ed. by Matthew Townend (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 9-28; at 20: "By my count, 82 of [*I-II Cnut*]'s 305 'clauses'…are from pre-Wulfstan laws, 147 from Wulfstan's earlier codes, and 87 from his other writings."
[133] See Molyneaux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century,* 15-47; ibid., "Why Were Some Tenth-Century English Kings Presented as Rulers of Britain?" *TRHS* 21 (2011): 59-91.

Æthelred's crisis of legitimacy in 1013-4, and the ability of his magnates to set him aside or bring him back, underscored that kings were not inherent, natural leaders so much as flawed holders of an office with certain expectations attached to it.

Conclusion: Teaching *and* Commanding

To a greater extent than the other genres and discourses I've examined in the course of the previous three chapters, interpreting the ideology and force of written law raises the question of how the language of a text corresponds to real-world social and political relations. When the king offers wisdom in the course of issuing legislation or exhorting his people to pay their tithes for the good of the kingdom, we can interpret his posture towards his addressees—his public of lay and ecclesiastical lords, judges, and reeves—in different ways. Is he coming from a position of strength and defining both what is legal *and* what is true, or is he merely the only visible participant in a broader discussion or debate, such that his words have the status of a contested argument? Our general lack of evidence for the reception of royal lawmaking makes the question difficult to answer.

A unique exception to this general absence, however, suggests some of the contours of how the king's legal wisdom could be received. The document known as *VI Æthelstan* records the founding agreement of the London "peace-guild," *friðgyld*, an association of bishops and reeves apparently formed for the purpose of suppressing theft.[134] *VI Æthelstan* forms part of a complicated chain of documents recording the issuance of royal legislation and local responses to that legislation.[135] As such, it reflects Æthelstan's attempts to extend the force of his legislation to specific parts of his kingdom. Near the end of the document, the peace-guild affirms its willingness to hear further instruction from the king—after all, maintaining the peace is a neverending process that requires our constant vigilance:

> [And] ne sy forspecen ne forswigod, gif ure hlaford oððe ure gerefana enig us eacan geþæncean mæge to urum friðgildum, þæt we þarto lustlice fon, swa hit us eallum gerise and us þearflic sy. Ðonne gelyfe we to Gode and to urum cynehlaford, gif we hit eall þus gelæstan willað, þæt ealles folces þing byð þe betere æt þam þyfðum þonne hit ær wære. Gif we þonne aslaciað þæs friðes and þæs weddes, þe we seald habbað and se cyng us beboden habbað, þonne mage we wenan oððe georne witan, þæt þas þeofas willað rixian gyta swyðor, þonne hig ær dydon. Ac uton healdan ure wedd and þæt frið, swa hit urum hlaforde licige; us is micel þearf, þæt we aredian þæt he wile; and gif he us mare hæt and tæcð, we beoð eadmodlice gearawe.[136]

[134] Molyneaux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century*, 105, 109, 113-14.
[135] See Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 291-300.
[136] Liebermann, ed., *Gesetze, VI As.* 8.9, pp. 180-1: "And if our lord or one of our reeves can think of any additions to [the provisions of] our peace-guilds, let it not be ignored or passed over in silence—let us gladly accept it, as it seems appropriate and necessary to all of us. Let us trust, then, in God and our lord king, that if we will carry all these things out, then the people will be less afflicted by thieves than they were earlier. If, however, we fail to uphold the peace and the pledge that we have made and that the king has commanded of us, then we can expect or know for certain that thieves will hold sway even more than they did before. But let us hold our pledge and the peace in the way that it may please our lord—it is crucial that we carry out what he wills; and if he commands and guides us more, we are humbly ready [i.e. to obey and follow]."

Obedience to the king as *hlaford* (“lord”) is difficult to distinguish, in the peace-guild’s language, from respect for the king’s wisdom. On the one hand, the king’s will measures the success with which the peace-guild carries out its duties. The bishops and reeves aim to live up to their pledge “in the way that it may please their lord,” *swa hit urum hlaforde licige*. The overriding impression is of the king’s personal authority, though there is some ambiguity in the peace-guild’s explanation of why it must keep its pledge in the way Æthelstan wishes: “it is crucial that we carry out what he wills,” they say; their expression of necessity, *us is micel þearf*, could either imply a blanket duty to obey the king’s will or reflect a sense that the king’s will is a sure guide to advantage because of his prudence. *Þearf*, after all, covers many kinds of necessity: duty, advantage, and need.[137] Furthermore, the members of the peace-guild affirm the wisdom of the king’s instructions when they declare that keeping their oath will further the public peace, whereas failing to do so will lead to further disorder.

The conflation of obedience to the king *as* king and respect for the king’s wisdom, the quality that makes him worth listening to, is captured especially well in the doublet found in the final line of this passage: “and gif he us mare *hæt and tæcð*, we beoð eadmodlice gearawe.”[138] While the first verb, *hatan*, unequivocally refers to the king’s ability to command, the second one, *tæcan*, suggests that the king can “teach,” “enjoin,” or perhaps even “reveal” more actions that the peace-guild can take in order to suppress theft.[139] They are therefore “humbly ready,” *eadmodlice gearawe*—and here they abruptly stop. The seemingly truncated nature of the clause invites us to infer that they are ready to receive their lord and king’s demands, instructions, or wisdom: all of the edifying, prudent, and authoritative language that he speaks.

[137] Joseph Bosworth, “An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,” *þearf,* accessed 18 Apr. 2019, http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/031562.
[138] Liebermann, ed., *Gesetze, VI As.* 8.9, p. 181 (emphasis added): “and if he *commands and guides* us more, we are humbly ready [i.e. to obey and follow].”
[139] Bosworth, “An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online,” *tæcan*, accessed 18 Apr. 2019, http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/030117.

Epilogue

One recurring motif in my exploration of wise royal speech has been the complex relationship between wisdom, speech, and writing. All the texts discussed in my chapters have featured some mixture of orality and writtenness, often playing the unique benefits of one off those of the other: the seeming spontaneity and naturalness of speech, the weightiness, authority, and even sacrality of the book. Bede presented King Ceolwulf with a textual repository of the wise speech of his predecessors. In doing so, Bede reaffirmed the value of written history as an archive of examples to emulate or avoid, but he also found a way to create the effect of natural, untutored wisdom in Latin prose. The unknown *Beowulf* poet had a similar project, but faced the added challenge of staging wise speech in a world with no exposure to Scripture at all. His or her solution, I argued in chapter two, drew on the self-reflection and self-objectification inherent in gnomic speech. While the place, time, and circumstance of the poem's composition remain mysterious, the perception of Beowulf and Hrothgar as wise by the poem's Anglo-Saxon readers would also have depended, in part, on these readers' ability to recognize contemporary tropes of written Christian discourse about wise kingship in the characters' speeches. The Old English *Boethius,* meanwhile, marries the spoken dialogue represented within the *Consolation of Philosophy* to a distinctly early-medieval sense of the *Consolation*'s authority as an encyclopedia of history, natural philosophy, and moral theology. Its famous passage about the tools of kingship voices the textual discourse of the gloss as a speech uttered by a king—one with lived experience of what he speaks about. My fourth chapter, too, showed how the authors of Anglo-Saxon lawcodes created fictive royal voices out of textual materials. The fiction that the diploma recorded the king's voice, for example, enabled the authors of a number of tenth-century lawcodes to assemble more spontaneous- and original-seeming pieces of written royal speech.

While the preceding four chapters are roughly chronological in order, I have mostly avoided the temptation to turn the history of wise royal speech into a teleology. This was made easier by the fact that the texts I discuss differ more evidently by genre than they do by their instantiation of, say, eighth- or tenth-century literary culture. The Old English *Boethius* and royal pronouncements on the law, discussed in chapters three and four, respectively, bear a more obvious relationship to the moment of their production: the growth of Old English prose plays a central part in what makes them possible, and they testify to increasing resources for representing distinct voices in vernacular text.

It is only fitting, then, that I conclude with a poem that represents both an advanced stage in the textualization of royal wisdom and a relegation of that wisdom to the status of the popular saw. *The Proverbs of Alfred* is a sententious poem composed in early Middle English sometime between c. 1150 and c. 1180.[1] While its material is eclectic and often didactic in the broadest and most popular sense, it begins with a brief frame narrative setting us in the scene of an apparent royal assembly:

> At Seuorde   seten þeines manie.
> Fele biscopes   and fele boc-lerede.
> Erles prude   and cnihtes egleche.

[1] Olaf Arngart, ed., *The Proverbs of Alfred: An Emended Text* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1978). For the date, see Donka Minkova, "The Credibility of Pseudo-Alfred: Prosodic Insights in Post-Conquest Mongrel Meter," *Modern Philology* 94 (May 1997): 427-54.

þer was erl Alfrich of þare laȝe swiðe wis.
And ec Alfred engle herde.
Engle derling on Englelonde he was king.
Hem he gan leren swo ȝe muȝen iheren
hu hi here lif leden scolden…
He was king and clerc wel he luuede Godes werc.
He was war on his word and war on his werke.
He was þe wiseste man þat was on Englelonde an.[2]

The naming of a specific place, likely Seaford in Sussex, and the setting of a royal assembly evoke the conventions of late Anglo-Saxon lawcodes. Stephen M. Yeager identifies particular resonances with Wulfstan's legal writing, especially *I Cnut*.[3] Those parallels come, not from specific laws, but from the social and religious prescriptions that Wulfstan famously includes in his homilies, his lawcodes, and the treatise *The Institutes of Polity*. I am not as confident as Yeager in the influence of *I Cnut* on *The Proverbs of Alfred*: the fact that both texts begin by telling us to love and worship God seems more like a shared feature of basic Christian instruction, and credal openings are found in a variety of didactic texts.[4] Nonetheless, *The Proverbs of Alfred* suggests a popular conception of royal assemblies and their textual memorials, including charters and lawcodes, as places for wise speech. This conception makes more sense in light of Wulfstan's codes, with their concern to both lay down "how [we] should lead [our] lives" and offer more concrete legal penalties and procedures.[5] Wulfstan may have already been straining towards a conception of lawcodes as wisdom texts. Moreover, *The Proverbs of Alfred* goes beyond its early medieval antecedents when it declares that a Christian king must be able to read—not just listen to wisdom from books, as Wulfstan affirms—in order to rule properly.[6]

Like the primary texts I discussed in my first three chapters, however, *The Proverbs of Alfred* sits at a comfortable remove from the world it portrays. Alfred is no longer a present reality, but a mythic figure of royal wisdom, much like Solomon in the Old English dialogues of

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[2] Arngart, ed., *The Proverbs of Alfred*, 8: "At Seaford sat many thegns, plenty of bishops and plenty of book-learned men, proud earls and fearsome knights. There [among them] was Earl Alfrich, who was very wise in the law, and also Alfred, the protector and the darling of the English—he was king in England. He began to teach them, as you will now hear, how they should lead their lives…He was a king and a scholar; well he loved God's work. He was prudent in both word and deed. He was the wisest man then in England." I print both half-lines of each verse, which sometimes alliterate and sometimes rhyme, on a single line to save space and improve legibility.
[3] Stephen M. Yeager, *From Lawmen to Plowmen: Anglo-Saxon Legal Tradition and the School of Langland* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 114-20.
[4] See, e.g., the opening lines of the Old English poem of biblical paraphrase, *Genesis A*, which seem to reflect a common version of the Preface to the Canon of the Mass. A. N. Doane, ed., *Genesis A: A New Edition* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 109, ll. 1-5: "Us is riht micel ðæt we rodera weard, / wereda wuldorcining, wordum herigen, / modum lufien. He is mægna sped, / heafod ealra heahgesceafta, / frea ælmihtig" ("It is most right that we praise in speech the guardian of the heavens, the glory-king of the hosts, love him in our minds. He is the power of powers, the head of all divine beings, the Lord almighty"). For the liturgical parallel, see Ibid., 225-6, n. 1-3a.
[5] See Wormald, "Archbishop Wulfstan."
[6] Arngart, ed., *The Proverbs of Alfred*, 9-10; Wulfstan, *Die "Institutes of Polity, Civil and Ecclesiastical,"* ed. by Karl Jost, Swiss Studies in English 47 (Bern: Francke, 1959), 48.

Solomon and Saturn or the later medieval dialogues of Solomon and Marcolf.[7] Alfred's wisdom is described in an equally distant, mythical fashion: he was simultaneously "king and clerc," as well as "þe wiseste man þat was on Englelonde an."[8] Here, in this vernacular and popular register, "wisdom" is eclectic, universal, and undifferentiated: it is embodied in both word and deed, political action and scholarly contemplation. The neat conjunction of "king and clerc" betrays little anxiety about the role of kings in textual culture—little of the tension I identified in various attempts to voice wise royal speech in Christian historiography, heroic poetry, philosophical translation, and royal law. This ease is only possible because this Alfred has been emptied of most of the markers of kingship. Were it not for a crucial passage near the beginning of the *Proverbs* on the duties of kings and other orders of lay society, he would essentially be a weak narrator-function tying together pieces of eclectic wisdom.[9] The phrase "king and clerc" also, however, reflects Alfred's fame as a translator. In the same vein as the *Proverbs*' lawcode-like opening and its possible Wulfstanian echoes, its portrayal of Alfred's wisdom is less a wholesale invention than a distant echo of history. That wisdom may have lost much of its political and intellectual relevance, but its recurrence in a twelfth-century text shows the lingering need, in the English political imagination, for a king who could lay down wise rules of conduct for himself and for all of his hearers or readers, who are treated as a universal mass of humanity. In a time of rule by distant Anglo-Norman kings, that connection between everyday wisdom or experience and great power may not have been politically inert after all.

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[7] For the prose and verse *Solomon and Saturn* texts see, respectively, James E. Cross and Thomas D. Hill, eds., *The* Prose Solomon and Saturn *and* Adrian and Ritheus (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982) and Daniel Anlezark, ed., *The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009). For the late medieval dialogue between Solomon and Marcolf, see Nancy Mason Bradbury and Scott Bradbury, eds., *The Dialogue of Solomon and Marcolf: A Dual-Language Edition from Latin and Middle English Printed Editions*, TEAMS (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2012).

[8] See also Alcuin's description of Aldfrith, King of Northumbria in his poem *The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*, composed ca. 780-800: "qui sacris fuerat studiis imbutus ab annis / aetatis primae, ualido sermone sophista, / acer et ingenio: idem rex simul atque magister" ("[a man] who was filled with holy learning from his earliest childhood, a scholar and powerful speaker, piercing in his intellect: simultaneously a king and a scholar"). For the Latin, see Alcuin, *The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*, ed. by Peter Godman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), ll. 844-6, p. 70.

[9] See Arngart, ed., *Proverbs of Alfred*, 9-10. As a piece of estates literature that begins at the top and moves down through the orders, this section is not unlike Wulfstan's *Institutes of Polity*: see Jost, ed., 39-131.

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