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Asser's Bible and the Prologue to the Laws of Alfred

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Recommended Citation

Carella, K. (2012). Asser's Bible and the Prologue to the Laws of Alfred. *Anglia: Journal of English Philology* 130(2): 195-206.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/ang-2012-0041>

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ASSER'S BIBLE AND THE PROLOGUE TO THE LAWS OF ALFRED

Abstract: In this article, I compare the Biblical citations in the Prologue to Laws of King Alfred with those in Asser's *De rebus gestis Ælfredi* to see if the author(s) of these documents quoted from a similar text of the Scriptures, and what this data might reveal about the authorship of the aforementioned Prologue. My analysis shows that the author of both documents knew and relied on an Insular Celtic version of the New Testament. While acknowledging that the data available for analysis is too scant to draw firm conclusions, I suggest that my evidence supports the possibility that Asser played a formative role in drafting the Prologue to Alfred's law code and speaks against the active participation of Alfred's Continental guests.

1. INTRODUCTION

For roughly the past two decades, the relatively small corpus of writings attributed to the West-Saxon King Alfred (r. 871–899) has drawn increasing scrutiny. Scholarship employing a wide variety of methods has raised serious questions – and doubts – about matters such as the parameters of the canon, the authenticity of individual texts, their authorship, and their relationship to one another.¹ While new facts have emerged, no interpreta-

¹ These questions have a long history in scholarship and have attracted particular interest recently. See especially: Kenneth Sisam, "The Authorship of the Verse Translation of Boethius' *Metra*", in Kenneth Sisam, ed., *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1953) 293–297; Dorothy Whitelock, "The Prose of Alfred's Reign", in Eric Gerald Stanley, ed., *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature* (London: Nelson, 1966) 67–103; R. W. Clement, "The Production of the *Pastoral Care*: King Alfred and his Helpers", in Paul Szarmach, ed., *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose* (Albany, NY: State U of NY P, 1986) 129–152; Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999; repr. 2001) 272–277; Janet Bately, "The Old English Orosius: The Question of Dictation", *Anglia* 84 (1966): 255–304; Janet Bately, "King Alfred and the Old English Translation of Orosius", *Anglia* 88 (1970): 289–322; Janet Bately, "Compilation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 60 BC to AD 890: Vocabulary as Evidence", *Proceedings of the British Academy* 64 (1978): 93–127; Janet Bately, ed., *The Old English Orosius*, EETS, s.s. 6 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980) lxxiii–lxxv; Janet Bately, "Lexical Evidence for the Authorship of the Prose Psalms in the Paris Psalter", *Anglo-Saxon England* 10 (1981): 69–95; Janet Bately, "The Literary Prose of King Alfred's

tion of the ever-growing quantity of evidence has attained general acceptance. At the very least, the dated view that held Alfred as the “Father of Old English Prose” has been shaken, and the generations-old image of the King as primary author and translator (relying to a greater or lesser extent on the help of his advisors), though by no means abandoned, has been left teetering precariously and will certainly meet with considerable challenges in the future. Indeed, many now seriously ask whether Alfred wrote (or translated) anything at all.²

To be sure, I shall not settle this debate here. In the present article, I shall add my voice to the wider conversation only by addressing a narrowly focused question for which this ongoing controversy necessarily provides a backdrop. Although my conclusions may bear on questions relevant to the Alfredian canon as a whole, it is my purpose here only to examine the relationship between one work attributed to the King, namely the Prologue to his law code, and the principal work attributed to his chief advisor, Asser’s *De rebus gestis Ælfredi*. In particular, I shall compare the non-standard Biblical citations in these documents to see what, if anything, this data might reveal about a possible connection between them. So far, this question has escaped consideration, I suspect because of the paucity of Scriptural citations available for analysis in Asser’s *De rebus gestis Ælfredi* and because none of these citations overlaps with those cited in the Prologue to Alfred’s law code. At the outset, then, the prospects for unearthing any significant evidence would appear bleak. That said, I

Reign, Translation or Transformation?”, Paul Szarmach, ed., *Old English Newsletter Subsidia* 10 (London: King’s College, U of London, 1980; repr. Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Modern Studies, 1984); Janet Bately, “Old English Prose Before and During the Reign of King Alfred”, *Anglo-Saxon England* 17 (1988): 93–138; Janet Bately, “The Alfredian Canon Revisited: One Hundred Years On”, in Timothy Reuter, ed., *Alfred the Great: Papers from the Eleventh-Centenary Conferences* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003) 109–120; Simon Keynes & Michael Lapidge, *Alfred the Great. Asser’s Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983) 28–36; Malcolm Godden, “Wærferth and King Alfred: the Fate of the Old English *Dialogues*”, in Jane Roberts & Janet L. Nelson with Malcolm Godden, eds., *Alfred the Wise. Studies in Honour of Janet Bately on the Occasion of Her Sixty-fifth Birthday* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1997) 35–51; Patrick O’Neill, *King Alfred’s Old English Prose Translation of the First Fifty Psalms* (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 2001) 44; Paramjit S. Gill, Tim B. Swartz & Michael Treschow, “A Stylometric Analysis of King Alfred’s Literary Works”, *Journal of Applied Statistics* 34 (2007): 1251–1258; Paramjit S. Gill, Tim B. Swartz & Michael Treschow, “King Alfred’s Scholarly Writings and the Authorship of the First Fifty Prose Psalms”, *The Heroic Age* 12 (2009) [online journal]; Malcolm M.R. Godden, “The Old English *Orosius* and Its Sources”, *Anglia* 129 (2011): 297–320.

² Malcolm Godden, “Did King Alfred Write Anything?”, *Medium Ævum* 76 (2007): 1–23; Janet Bately, “Did King Alfred Actually Translate Anything? The Integrity of the Alfredian Canon Revisited”, *Medium Ævum* 78 (2009): 189–215.

would argue that circumstances render the matter worthy of examination, despite its apparent lack of promise.

Foremost among these circumstances is the Insular character of the aforementioned Prologue. As I have argued in two recent articles,³ the Prologue to Alfred's law code was not only based on a Hiberno-Latin source, the so-called *Liber ex lege Moysi*,⁴ but it also relied on legal and theological ideology typical of the contemporary Irish milieu out of which its source emerged. For several reasons, not all immediately obvious, this might lead one to suspect Asser's involvement in the composition of the Prologue. Although the Irish origin of the source would not have attracted the Welsh-born Asser in and of itself, the ideas contained within it would likely have seemed more familiar and hence more appealing to someone with an Insular education and sensibilities. Moreover, since the text appears likely to have been transmitted to Alfred's Wessex not from Ireland directly but rather via Brittany,⁵ Asser would have encountered it (first-hand or at some unknown number of removes) from churchmen with whom he shared a language differentiated only by minor dialectal variance, and with whom he shared a closely related historical and theological background. I do not mean to suggest that Asser would have been motivated by sentimentality for his Celtic compatriots, but only that the ideological underpinnings of the text would have seemed familiar and hence compelling to him given his cultural and educational background.

While the data I present below falls well short of proving Asser's involvement in the composition of the Prologue to Alfred's law code, it does suggest that, like Asser when composing *De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, the author of the Prologue to the Laws of Alfred relied on an Insular version of the gospels closely related to the Irish Book of Armagh. I shall discuss the significance and limitations of these findings in my conclusion. My primary aim, therefore, is to examine the Scriptural evidence that points to a connection between these two documents, and then – having established that case to the best degree possible – to consider its potential implications. I hope my conclusions will provide a piece of a larger puzzle, proving useful to others addressing broader questions concerning the Alfredian canon.

³ Bryan Carella, "The Source for the Prologue to the Laws of Alfred", *Peritia* 19 (2005): 91–118, and Bryan Carella, "Evidence for Hiberno-Latin Thought in the Prologue to the Laws of Alfred", *Studies in Philology* 108 (2011): 1–26.

⁴ The text has been edited recently by Sven Meeder, "The *Liber ex lege Moysi*: Notes and Text", *Journal of Medieval Latin* 19 (2009): 173–218.

⁵ For a summary of the evidence supporting a Breton provenance for the *Liber ex lege Moysi* and related texts, see Carella 2011, 17–18.

2. BIBLICAL CITATIONS IN ASSER'S *DE REBUS GESTIS ÆLFREDI*

As William Henry Stevenson noted in the introduction to his edition of Asser's *De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, there are seven unambiguous Biblical quotations included in the text marked with formal wording indicating them as such. These include: § 76.49 Matt. 6:33; § 76.58 Ps. 85:9; § 89.9 Luc 23:42; § 96.20 Matt. 27:64; § 99.18 Gen. 4:7; § 99.21 Prov. 21:1; § 101.12 2 Cor. 9:7.⁶ To this list, Michael Lapidge added nine more instances where Asser appears to refer to the Bible by loosely echoing its wording.⁷ Among these clearly marked quotations, Stevenson identified two as *Vetus Latina* readings.⁸ Furthermore, Richard Marsden has pointed out that, of the five remaining direct citations of the Bible, "... all are from passages which are similar in their Vulgate and Old Latin versions".⁹ Those that Lapidge discovered cannot be classified either way, since – as he noted – they consist of very short, fragmentary allusions to the Scriptures that only dimly reflect the original.

Asser's reliance on a mixed Old Latin version of the Scriptures is noteworthy, the significance of which has been summarized by Michael Lapidge and Simon Keynes:

The version of the Bible cited by Asser was, on at least two occasions, the 'Old Latin' (*Vetus Latina*) translation, as opposed to Jerome's 'Vulgate' translation. The 'Old Latin' Bible enjoyed some currency in late antiquity (it is cited by St. Patrick and Gildas, both of whom were educated in Roman Britain), but during the early Middle Ages it was gradually replaced by the Vulgate. The process of replacement, in England and on the Continent, was complete by the eighth century. Asser's knowledge of the 'Old Latin' Bible is most likely to derive from his early training at St. David's, and that he should still be quoting from it toward the end of the ninth century suggests that St. David's was, in this respect at least, a cultural backwater.¹⁰ Furthermore, since the use of this outmoded version of the Bible would fit with someone of Asser's pedigree, Stevenson took the occurrence of Old Latin readings to be evidence of the text's authenticity.¹¹

In general, Insular Celtic versions of the gospels tended to retain a relatively large proportion of Old Latin readings (as much as forty percent, by one count¹²), intermixed with an overall Vulgate text. It is not surpris-

⁶ William Henry Stevenson, ed., *Asser's Life of King Alfred* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1904; repr. 1998) xciv.

⁷ Michael Lapidge, "Asser's Reading", in Timothy Reuter, ed., *Alfred the Great: Papers from the Eleventh-Centenary Conferences* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003) 27–47, at 31.

⁸ Matt. 6:33 (§ 76.49) and Gen. 4:9 (§ 99.18). See below.

⁹ Richard Marsden, *The Text of the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) 50, n. 253.

¹⁰ Keynes & Lapidge 1983, 53.

¹¹ Stevenson 1904, xcv.

¹² See, for example, Lemuel Hopkins-James, *The Celtic Gospels, Their Story and Their Text* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1934; repr. 2001) xxxiv.

ing, therefore, that Asser's citations from the Bible would show features of both versions.¹³

3. TEXTUAL EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS¹⁴

Close analysis of Biblical quotations listed by Stevenson reveals that four of the seven contain possible non-Vulgate readings. I shall discuss each of these in order of increasing significance.

§101.12: 2 Cor. 9:7

Asser: Hilarem datorem diligit Deus

Vulgate: [unusquisque prout destinavit corde suo non ex tristitia aut ex necessitate] hilarem enim datorem diligit Deus¹⁵

Comments: Here, Asser omits the connective *enim*. It is possible that the omission results from a stylistic choice on Asser's part, and is therefore of no particular significance. Readings without *enim*, in any case, are frequent in Augustine's writings and among early Insular authors before and after Asser, including Alcuin, Anselm of Canterbury, and Ailred of Rievaulx.

¹³ See Marsden 1995, 49–54 and Hopkins-James 1934, xxxiii–xxxvi. For a thorough survey of research on the topic, see Martin McNamara, “The Text of the Latin Bible in the Early Irish Church. Some Data and Desiderata”, in Próinséas Ní Chatháin & Michael Richter, eds., *Irland und die Christenheit: Bibelstudien und Mission/Ireland and Christendom: The Bible and the Missions* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987) 7–55.

¹⁴ My analyses are based, as appropriate, on the following reference works: *Vetus Latina*: Bonifatius Fischer *et al.*, eds., *Vetus Latina: Die Reste der altlateinischen Bibel* (Freiberg: Herder, 1949–); Adolf Jülicher, ed., *Itala: Das Neue Testament in altlateinischer Überlieferung* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1938–63); Petrus Sabatier, ed., *Bibliorum Sacrorum Latinæ versiones antiquæ, seu Vetus Italica ...* (Rheims: Apud Reginaldum Florentain, 1743–1751). Vulgate: Francis Aidan Gasquet *et al.*, eds., *Biblia Sacra iuxta Latinam Vulgatam Versionem* (Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1926–); John Wordsworth, Henry White & Hedley Fredrick Davis Sparks *et al.*, eds., *Nouum Testamentum Domini Nostri Iesu Christi Latine*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1889–1954). Additionally, I searched for parallels to non-standard readings in the following electronic resources: *Patrologia Latina Database* (Alexandria, VA: Chadwick-Healey, 1995–); *Acta Sanctorum Database* (Cambridge: Chadwick-Healey, 1999–); *Vetus Latina Database: Bible Versions of the Latin Fathers* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002–); and the *Cross Database Searchtool of the Cetedoc Library of Christian Latin Texts* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005–), allowing searches of the *Cetedoc Library of Christian Latin Texts* (*Libraries A and B*), the *Archive of Celtic Latin Literature*, the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, and the *Aristoteles Latinus Database*. My results are based on significant data gathered from these resources.

¹⁵ All Vulgate readings from the New Testament, unless otherwise noted, are from Wordsworth, White & Sparks 1889–1954.

§89.9: Luc 23:42

Asser: Memento mei cum veneris in regnum tuum **Christe**

Vulgate: [et dicebat ad iesum] **domine** memento mei cum ueneris in regnum tuum

Comments: Although the particular wording in *Asser*'s reading is not attested as an Old Latin or Vulgate variant, versions of this passage with vocative *Christe* occur as a non-standard reading¹⁶ in two minor Old Latin witnesses. These include:

Antiphonale Mozarabicum (Ms. Leon, Catedr. 8):¹⁷ Memor esto nostri **Christe** in regno tuo, et dignos fac nos de resurrectione tua

and a closely related reading:

Sacramentarium Mozarabicum:¹⁸ Memor esto nostri, **Christe**, in regno tuo et dignos fac nos de resurrectione tua

Since both readings with *Christe* instead of Vulgate *Domine* occur in Mozarabic (Visigothic) liturgical witnesses, it is tempting to attribute *Asser*'s reading to influence from the Mozarabic rite on the early Insular Celtic liturgy, an influence which has been discussed for over a century.¹⁹ The paucity of evidence in this instance, however, makes any such claim highly speculative. Thus, while it is possible that *Asser* knew this reading from an Insular liturgical source influenced by the Mozarabic rite, it is just as

¹⁶ By “non-standard” reading, I intend to signify a citation of the Scriptures not attested in any of those witnesses (either of the *Vetus Latina* or the *Vulgate*) determined by modern scholars to be sufficiently authoritative for use in reconstructing the Biblical text. Alternative readings found in these witnesses are included in the apparatuses of the standard editions and are referred to as “variants”. Strictly speaking, I am using both terms (i.e., “non standard” and “variant”) anachronistically, since there was no standard version of the Scriptures in the ninth-century. Here, I use these terms to describe readings markedly divergent from the Biblical text generally current in the ninth century.

¹⁷ *Vetus Latina: Vetus Latina Database* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002–).

¹⁸ D. Marius Férotin, ed., *Le Liber Mozarabicus sacramentorum et les Manuscrits Mozarabes*, Monumenta Ecclesiae Liturgica, vol. 6 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1912; repr. Roma: CLV Ed. Liturgiche, 1995) col. 244, ll. 2–3.

¹⁹ There has been a significant amount of discussion concerning Mozarabic influence on the early Insular Celtic liturgy. This issue, however, must be understood within the broader context of the development of and mutual influences between the various liturgies of the early medieval West. For recent discussion and bibliography, see especially: Peter Jeffery, “Eastern and Western Influences in the Irish Monastic Prayer of the Hours”, in Margot E. Fassler & Rebecca A. Baltzer, eds., *The Divine Office in the Latin Middle Ages: Methodology and Source Studies, Regional Developments, Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) 99–143, at 127, and Yitzhak Hen, “The Nature and Character of the Early Irish Liturgy”, *L'Irlanda e gli irlandesi nell'alto medioevo* (Spoleto, 16–21 aprile 2009), *Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi Sull'Alto Medioevo* 57 (2010): 353–377, at 363–365.

likely that he made this minor alteration of his own volition for the sake of clarity, fearing perhaps that, out of context, *Domine* might be ambiguous, referring to either God the father or Christ his son.

§99.18: Gen. 4:7

Asser: Si recte offeras recte autem non dividas peccas

Vulgate: nonne si bene egeris recipies sin autem male statim in foribus peccatum aderit sed sub te erit appetitus eius et tu dominaberis illius²⁰

Vetus Latina: Nonne si recte offeras recte autem non dividas peccasti²¹

Comments: This is a well-attested Old Latin reading. *Asser*'s non-standard use of *peccas* (in the present tense), as opposed to *peccasti* (in the perfect), however, is apparently unique.

§76.49: Matt. 6:33

Asser: Quaerite ergo primum regnum Dei et iustitiam eius et haec omnia praestabuntur vobis

Vulgate: quaerite autem primum regnum dei et iustitiam eius et haec omnia adicientur uobis

Comments: Of the four non-standard Biblical quotations in *Asser*'s *De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, this one is by far the most interesting. Here, the reading *ergo* in place of *Vulgate autem* – though admittedly a minor connective word, potentially altered as a matter of stylistic choice – is an attested Old Latin variant represented among the main *Vulgate* witnesses only in the Insular group DEQR.²² Supporting the possibility that this reading is a legitimate variant (and therefore probably not a spontaneous alteration for stylistic purposes) is the reading *praestabuntur* for *Vulgate adicientur*. *Asser*'s use of *praestabuntur* – a common Old Latin variant – is preserved among the main *Vulgate* witnesses only in D. On this point, Stevenson noted that this variant "... occurs only in the eighth or ninth-century Book of Armagh [i.e., D] and in the ninth-century St. Germain's MS., which in the Gospels shows Irish influence".²³ Elsewhere, I have identified this reading once each in the writings of Chromatius of Aquileia (*Tractatus in Mathaeum*) and Caesarius of Arles (*Sermo* 146) and nowhere else. Considering all the evidence, it is reasonable to conclude that – at least in this instance – *Asser* relied on an Insular version of the Scriptures related to D when composing *De rebus gestis Ælfredi*.

²⁰ All citations from the *Vulgate* Old Testament, unless otherwise noted, are from Gasquet *et al.* 1926–.

²¹ Fischer *et al.* 1949.

²² These sigla refer to the following manuscript witnesses:

D Dublin, Trinity College, 52 ("The Book of Armagh"), *saec.* ix¹ (270);

E London, British Library, Egerton 609, *saec.* ix;

Q Dublin, Trinity College, 58 (A.I.6), ("The Book of Kells"), *saec.* viii–ix (275);

R Oxford, Bodleian Library, Auct. D.II.19 ("The Gospels of Mac Regol" = "The Rushworth Gospels"), *saec.* viii–ix (231).

²³ Stevenson 1904, xciv.

4. DISCUSSION

Asser's reliance on an Insular version of the Scriptures, while interesting, is hardly surprising. Of potentially greater significance is what his use of this version might suggest about his possible involvement (or the involvement of those close to him) in drafting other documents in the Alfredian canon. On this account, the lengthy translation into Old English of segments of the Old and New Testaments that constitute the bulk of the Prologue to Alfred's law code are of particular interest, not the least of which because it has been argued that this text derives from a Hiberno-Latin source.²⁴ Close analysis of the non-standard readings in the extended translation of Exodus 20:1 through 23:13, with which the Prologue to Alfred's law code begins, however, yielded inconclusive results. Since the author translated these verses into Old English, my ability to make detailed comparisons between them and the Latin Scriptural witnesses is severely limited; and – as a result – I can claim little else with confidence about this portion of the text than that the version of Exodus underlying it was apparently a mixed, though mostly Vulgate, original.

Among the brief translations from the New Testament that follow, however, the citation of Acts 15:29 is particularly worthy of note for the present argument. The Old English translation of this verse in the Prologue to the Laws of Alfred includes the following phrase added to the end of the verse:

... 7 þæt ge willen, þæt oðre men eow ne don, ne doð ge ðæt oþrum monnum²⁵
 [... and that which you would wish that other men do not do to you, do not do that to other men]²⁶

Like the citations from Exodus, the fact that this verse was translated into Old English renders detailed comparison with the Latin Scriptural witnesses difficult if not impossible, since one cannot reconstruct the details of the Latin exemplar from which Alfred was working. In this case, however, the entire phrase cited above is a Scriptural variant omitted completely in almost all Vulgate witnesses; and so – in this particular instance – precise reconstruction is not necessary. Ultimately, this reading would appear to derive from an Old Latin variant preserved in certain texts of the Vulgate, slightly different versions of which are found in two main Vul-

²⁴ See Carella 2005, 91–118 and Carella 2011, 1–26.

²⁵ All references to and citations from the Prologue to the Laws of Alfred are from Felix Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, Bd. 1 (Halle a.S.: Niemeyer, 1903–16; repr. Aalen: Scientia, 1960; repr. Clark, NJ: The Lawbook Exchange, 2007) 26–46. I have used the E-text (i.e., Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 173 – the so-called “Parker Chronicle and Laws”). This citation: *El.* 49,5, p. 44.

²⁶ All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

gate witnesses: **D**^M, i.e., the Book of Armagh,²⁷ belonging to the Insular family of gospel texts, and the Codex Theodulfianus,²⁸ belonging to the Spanish family.

It is important to acknowledge that the idea expressed in this variant of Acts 15:29 – a version of the so-called “Golden Rule” (whether expressed in positive terms “do unto your neighbor as you would have him do unto you” or negative terms “do not do unto your neighbor as you would not have him do unto you”) – is a widely attested proverb, with reflexes not only in the Christian West,²⁹ but in many cultures around the globe.³⁰ It is not impossible, therefore, that the author of the Prologue to Alfred’s law code encountered this idea in another, non-biblical source. In the Bible itself, there are two other expressions of this concept: Christ’s well-known statement in Matthew 7:12, and a lesser-known, negatively-cast version (similar to the variant reading of Acts 15:29 cited in the Prologue to Alfred’s law code) in Tobit 4:16:³¹

Tob. 4:16

quod ab alio odis fieri tibi vide ne alteri tu aliquando facias

[See that you never do to another what you would hate to have done to you by another]³²

This verse from Tobit is explicitly linked to Matt. 7:12 in Gregory the Great’s *Moralia in Iob* in two separate *loci*:

²⁷ **D** (see above, n. 22).

²⁸ **e**^M Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, lat. 9380, *saec.* viii–ix (576), “The Mesmes Bible”.

²⁹ Liebermann (1903–16) points out that a similar proverb is attributed to the Roman Emperor Alexander Severus (r. 222–235 AD): *Quod tibi fieri non vis, alteri ne feceris*, II, 587 (s.v. “Moral” 4), and III, 48.

³⁰ On the currency of this proverbial expression see especially François Glorie, “Sources de s. Jérôme et de s. Augustin: I. Une Source Païenne de Saint Augustin?”, *Sacris Erudiri* 18 (1967/68): 451–77; Antoon Bastiaensen, “Le ‘Praeceptum Aureum’ dans la Tradition Épigraphique et Littéraire”, *Revue Bénédictine* 98 (1988): 251–257; Christian Hostettler, Samuel Singer & Werner Ziltener, eds., *Thesaurus Proverbiorum Medii Aevi = Lexikon der Sprichwörter des Romanisch-Germanischen Mittelalters*, 13 vols. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995) XII, 45–48 (§ 5.4–5.6). I am grateful to Charles D. Wright for drawing my attention to these articles.

³¹ Albert Stanburrough Cook, *Biblical Quotations in Old English Prose Writers* (London: MacMillan & Co. 1898) 67. See also Liebermann 1903–16, II, 448 (s.v. “Gerechtigkeit” 3), 587 (s.v. “Moral” 4) and III, 48 (*Af El.* 49,5,4).

³² All translations of Scripture are based on the Douay-Rheims version, though I have modernized obvious archaisms and altered the translation to reflect non-standard readings.

(1) Hinc quidam sapiens dicit: *Quod tibi non uis fieri, alio ne feceris*. Hinc in euangelio Dominus dicit: *Quae uultis ut faciant uobis homines, et uos eadem facite illis*.³³

[Hence the wise man says, “What you do not wish to be done to you, do not do to another person” (cf. Tob. 4:16). Hence in the gospels the Lord says: “What you wish that men do to you, do also the same thing to them” (cf. Matt. 7:12)].

(2) Proximi autem dilectio ad duo praecepta deriuatur, cum et per quemdam iustum dicitur: *Quod ab alio tibi odis fieri, uide ne tu alteri facias*. Et per semetipsam Veritas dicit: *Quae uultis ut faciant uobis homines, et vos facite illis*.³⁴

[Love of one’s neighbor, however, is drawn from two precepts, since it said both by a certain righteous man: “See that you do not do to another what you would hate to be done to you by another (cf. Tob. 4:16), and by Truth itself [i.e. Christ]: “What you wish that men should do to you, do also to them” (cf. Matt. 7:12)].

In the context of the Prologue to Alfred’s law code, however, this statement is unambiguously presented as part of Acts chapter 15, not as a separate citation from Tobit directly, or indirectly via Gregory’s *Moralia*. While it is not impossible that the text’s author was secondarily influenced by other sources (proverbial, Biblical, patristic, or otherwise), it is most reasonable to infer that the immediate, primary source for this passage in the Prologue to Alfred’s law code was the aforementioned variant reading of Acts 15:29.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Close Scriptural analysis of the kind I have applied here is reliable only when there is a sizable quantity of data to examine. In this case, the data set is clearly too small to draw ironclad conclusions. All that is possible is to posit a tentative appraisal, amply surrounded by a flurry of admonitory statements advising due caution about conclusions based on it.

With these words of warning, I offer the following cautious assessment: Given the time and place in which the Prologue to Alfred’s law code was composed, it seems most likely that the variant reading of Acts 15:29 contained within it derived, directly or indirectly, from the author’s use of an Insular version of the Scriptures related to The Book of Armagh (D). Since there is some indication that Asser knew this version (i.e., his use of a variant quotation of Matt. 6:33 in his *De rebus gestis Ælfredi* also likely from an Insular text of the gospels, discussed above), it is possible that he had some involvement, firsthand or at some remove, in the composition

³³ Marcus Adriaen, ed., *S. Gregorii Magni Moralia in Job: Libri I–X*, CCSL 143 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979) 323, VI.xxxv.16–19.

³⁴ Adriaen 1979, 539, X.vi.61–65.

of the Prologue to Alfred's law code. Of course, it would be irresponsible to suggest that he was the author based on this evidence alone. More safely, one might posit that Asser (or someone with a similar education) brought an Insular text of the Bible with him to Alfred's court upon which the author of this Prologue relied, or that the author (one or more) was associated with a party of intellectuals within Alfred's royal circle more closely connected with either Asser or other Insular scholars (or both) than with Alfred's Continental guests.

On the other hand, this evidence speaks against the commonly held thesis that the citation of Acts 15:29 in the Prologue to Alfred's law code derives immediately from a letter sent to Alfred by archbishop Fulk of Rheims, wherein he cites this verse as evidence in a larger argument chastising the English for improper legal practices.³⁵ Moreover, it seems unlikely that a Continental scholar like Grimbald³⁶ – dispatched to England by archbishop Fulk, and often seen as a conduit of Fulk's and (ultimately) archbishop Hincmar's influence – would draw upon an Old Latin text of the Bible without correcting his citations to bring them in line with the Vulgate (as Hincmar usually did³⁷). I have argued against the position that Grimbald is the author of the Prologue on other grounds elsewhere.³⁸ Further evidence for this point is provided by David Pratt's observation that the version of Acts 15:29 cited by Hincmar and Fulk does not include the Old Latin variant addition found in Alfred's prologue.³⁹ Considering Hincmar's well-known preference for Vulgate readings, this fact lends further credence to the theory that this variant reading was not imported from the Continent.

Of course, there are other ways to interpret this evidence. That said – and acknowledging that the data available for analysis is too scant to yield conclusive results – the available facts support the thesis that the

³⁵ Fulk's letter is edited in Dorothy Whitelock *et al.*, *Councils and Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church*, vol. 1, A.D. 871–1204, pt. 1, 871–1066 (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1981) 8–9.

³⁶ There were numerous Continental scholars at Alfred's Court. I mention Grimbald in this context specifically, however, because those scholars who believe Alfred relied heavily on Hincmarian ideas for the Prologue to his law code have speculated that Grimbald might have carried these ideas with him, since he was sent by Hincmar's successor Fulk. See especially Michael Treschow, "The Prologue to Alfred's Law Code: Instruction in the Spirit of Mercy", *Florilegium* 13 (1994): 79–110, at 102–107, and Wormald 2001, 419–427.

³⁷ Moses Hyamson, *Mosaicarum et Romanarum Legum Collatio* (London: Oxford UP, 1913) xxxiii–xxxiv.

³⁸ Carella 2005, 91–118, at 93–108, and Carella 2011, 10–17.

³⁹ David Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 229.

Prologue to Alfred's law code was not produced by a scholar (or scholars) with a more mainstream Continental education (or subject to such an individual's influence or revision), but rather by a scholar (one or more) with Insular, specifically Celtic, education and sensibilities. Of the known candidates, Asser is the most likely to fill this role, though a good bit more evidence would be necessary to secure this conclusion.⁴⁰

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⁴⁰ This article was written thanks to a generous grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded by the Medieval Institute at the University of Notre Dame. I offer my deepest thanks to both. I am particularly grateful to Thomas N. Hall, Patrick P. O'Neill, and Charles D. Wright for their guidance and helpful comments.