In die Skriflig / In Luce Verbi
ISSN: (Online) 2305-0853, (Print) 1018-6441

Charlemagne as David revisited

Author:
Lynton A. Boshoff[1]

Affiliation:
[1]School of Ancient Languages and Text Studies, Faculty of Theology, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

Corresponding author:
Lynton Boshoff,
lynton.boshoff@nwu.ac.za

Dates:
Received: 01 Mar. 2023
Accepted: 23 May 2023
Published: 30 Aug. 2023

How to cite this article:
Boshoff, L.A., 2023, 'Charlemagne as David revisited', *In die Skriflig* 57(1), a2951. https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v57i1.2951

Copyright:
© 2023. The Author. Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Read online:

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

It was common practice in literate and learned circles at the late 8th-century Carolingian court to give one another personal nicknames. Although this would suggest a world of intimacy and private confidences, these nicknames are also used in the literary and artistic productions of the time. Most notably, Charlemagne himself is called 'David', in remembrance of the Old Testament king. While this phenomenon is treated in broad terms in most studies on Carolingian history and culture, as an expression of idealised kingship, the nature of its application and significance in individual instances in literature addressed to Charlemagne has been less well defined. In this article, therefore, I revisit and nuance the *idée reçue* of Charlemagne as David, the ideal, divinely chosen ruler, the epitome of scholarly learning and wisdom – in short, the image of the king which was actively promoted on the political stage. I consider, as case studies, uses of the David name in the Latin poetry of Alcuin, Angilbert, Modoin, and Theodulf of Orléans. Through close reading of these texts and consideration of the rhetorical strategies of the poet, performance context and audience, as well as the intellectual milieu of the Carolingian court, it is shown that the selected authors make use of David in a consistent and recurrent pattern, which reflects a vision of the king that is unified and unique to the context of a court circle of poets and their literary pursuits.

Contribution: This article aimed to contribute to the field of Latin literary studies through analysis of how the name David, when used for Charlemagne, is treated in poems written at and for the court. This image of the king, which is used in a closed context of the poets in question and their audience, has further implications for the status and goals of the poets at court, as well as the influence which Charlemagne had over the literary revival of the period.

Keywords: Charlemagne; David; Carolingian poetry; Medieval Latin poetry; nicknames in poetry.

Introduction

It is a well-documented feature of Carolingian intellectual culture that members of the court, especially those with literary pretensions, made use of nicknames to refer to each other. Most of these were creations of the Northumbrian monk Alcuin, who stated in a letter that he chose to give people bynames as a means of fostering a sense of familiarity between author and addressee, and because it was something practised in biblical times.[1] These names took inspiration from a number of sources: classical literature, personal or physical qualities, linguistic adaptations in Latin of Anglo-Saxon or Frankish originals, and biblical sources, to name but a few.[2] To this latter category belongs an allusive nickname which is used for Charlemagne himself, that of David, slayer of Goliath, king of the Israelites, originator of the Temple, and composer of psalms.

Most modern works on the Carolingians make a blanket reference to this phenomenon and all provide much the same explanation for the choice of the name David, namely that the speakers seek to evoke an idealised ruler, or idealised kingdom, by its use. On a grand scale this is a plausible conclusion, for David, in particular, and biblical kingship more generally, form a significant part of the public image of both an anointed king and a chosen people, which the Carolingian royals sought to project.[3] However consistent such explanations may be with the

1. *MGH Ep.*4.241.23–26: '*Saepe familiaritas nominis immutationem solet facere; sicut ipse Dominus Simonem mutavit in Petrum, et filios Zebedei filios nominavit tonitrui*.' (Often it is familiarity which is accustomed bringing about a change of name; like the Lord himself changed Simon into Peter and called the sons of Zebedee, the sons of thunder). All references to Carolingian letters follow Dümmler's (1895) edition in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistulae* IV (= *Epistulae Aevi Karolini, Tomus II*), and are referred to by their number in that volume. Likewise, all Carolingian poetry referenced in this article is taken from Dümmler's (1883) edition in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Poetae Latini aevi Carolini* I, unless otherwise specifically indicated.

2. Cf. the instructive table categorising nicknames in Alcuin, according to their inspiration in Garrison (1998:61).

3. On usage of such among the Carolingians beyond mentions in passing, Garrison (1995:220–229) is the most extensive with reference to the literary record. In this regard, see also Lehmann (1959:157–158), Von den Steinen (1965:76–77), Silagi (1981:790–791), and Garrison (2000:153). Fichtenau (1951:25–34) discusses at length its use, alongside that of the emperor Constantine in Byzantium and how the Carolingians, in addition to taking inspiration from the architectural symbolism of the Eastern Empire, modelled their ideology of kingship on Byzantine practice. See also Zahnd (2008) on Byzantine usage.

centralised ideal of kingship, these do not take into account the variety of instances in which the David name is used, nor indeed any literary conceit in which the author chooses to make use of it. In this article therefore, I aim to nuance this view of the David nickname. I am in the first instance interested in determining what constitutes 'David' as a character in these poems, and how he fits into those poems' milieu. From this, I consider to what extent the use of the David name corresponds corresponds to the stated contemporary reason for applying nicknames, as well as to what extent the David name in the poetry corresponds to the imagery of David used in an 'official' capacity, that is, on the level of the king's public image. As Silagi (1981:790) notes, the name David, used to refer to Charlemagne, is not common in contemporary poetry. Of those poets who were active at court in some way during Charlemagne's lifetime, only Alcuin of York, Angilbert of St-Riquier, Theodulf of Orléans, and Modoin of Autun make use of it, in addition to some instances in the anonymous epic *Karolus magnus et Leo papa*.[4] In letters it appears somewhat more often, but again this use is limited to Alcuin. Consequently, my focus is on these authors.

David in royal iconography up to the Carolingians

Before looking at specific instances of the David name in poetry, it would be useful to summarise the *status quo* of the 'iconographic' use of David and biblical kings and kingship prevalent in late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages.[5] Although this practice was enthusiastically adopted, the use of David as a shorthand for the reigning king was not created by the Carolingians themselves. Several precedents exist for its use, both close to home and further afield. The Carolingian house traced its origins to the time of the Merovingian Franks. Under these kings, Charlemagne's ancestors were 'mayors of the palace', a title indicative of their role in running the royal household, as well as of their considerable power at court. At that time the trope was already present, even if only in incipient form.[6] For example, Charibert I (r. 561–567) is hailed in the poetry of Venantius Fortunatus as displaying characteristics of David and Solomon.[7] Elsewhere in the literary record, however, elements of David's story are mainly added for dramatic effect or rhetorical colour, as in the case of Gregory of Tours' portrait of Chlothar (r. 558–561) and his son Chram, who are given the analogues David and Absalom. A similar treatment is to be found in Isidore of Seville's descriptions of the Visigothic kings. In the East, Byzantine court tradition crystallised the comparison to the Old Testament king in its liturgy, as is recorded in the *De ceremoniis* [On ceremonies] of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus. Here, one of the titles of the emperor is 'new David', alongside 'new Constantine'.[8] Fichtenau (1954) argues that along with many architectural elements used in the palace of Aachen, the Carolingians also adopted this courtly ritual as a means of legitimising the Frankish Empire as a continuator of Late Roman traditions.[9]

The first Carolingian king to be called David in an official capacity was Pippin the Short (r. 751–768), whom the Pope hailed in his letters as a new David. By extension, the Franks and Francia were the chosen people and a new Israel.[10] Although the Carolingians wished to be seen as the heirs of Rome in the West – to the point that Aachen is seen as a New Rome – the adoption of aspects of Old Testament kingship signifies a break from the traditions of the Roman empire.[11] Unlike the emperors of old, David and Solomon were anointed kings, a ritual which made sacred what is essentially a secular office, becoming at once king and priest.[12] The metaphorical use of David is thus evidently part of a centralised ideological programme (Ullman 1969:32–33).

Whether this centralised approach was current among, or at the very least motivated, writers in less official contexts, is less clear. The trope was used early in Charlemagne's reign by such writers as a certain Cathwulf, who leaves no further trace in the literary record. In a letter written around 775 sending his good wishes to the king, he draws parallels – among other biblical stories – between the king and David's righteous defeat of his enemies, coupled with firm faith in the protection of God[13] and his wisdom.[14] In the *Libri Carolini,* written around 790 in response to the questions of iconoclasm, discussed at the Second Council of Nicaea, David and Solomon are again used in the abstract and for rhetorical colour, mostly as a means of introducing quotations from the Bible in support of the Carolingians' ideological position.[15] Importantly, these are non-specific, in the sense that they form but part of a litany of biblical parallels, and refer to the most general qualities that typify a good king (cf. Wallace-Hadrill 1981:300–307; Cairns 1989:19–21).

4.Poems in which David is used for Charlemagne to a significant degree are the following: Alcuin, *carmm.* 6, 13, 26, 27, 37, 38, 40, 42, 45, 74, 75 and 83; Angilbert, *carm.* 2; Theodulf, *carm.* 27; Modoin, *ecloga*.

5.What follows is greatly informed by Kantorowicz (1946:56–59), Fichtenau (1954) and Garipzanov (2004).

6.See Reydellet (1981:297–440) for an analysis of its use among the Merovingian writers, especially Venantius Fortunatus and Gregory of Tours. Much of what follows is greatly indebted to the work of this scholar.

7.Ven. Fort. *carm.* 6.2.78,80: *Est tibi Daviticae mansuetudo vitae* [Yours is the clemency of David's life], *Iudicium sapiens de Salomone trahis* [You take your wise judgement from Solomon].

8.Constantinus VII Porphyrogenitus, *De cerem.* 2.82. See also its use in court liturgies under Charlemagne's successor, Louis the Pious.

9.Other measures to show continuity with the Late Roman Empire are identified by Brown (1994:28–29), particularly the interest in producing a literate and learned intellectual culture after the conquest of the Lombard kingdom.

10.See on this topic, Garrison (2000).

11.See also Garipzanov (2008:261–305) on how the choice of iconographic inspiration shifts throughout Charlemagne's reign, from biblical to Late Roman examples.

12.Thus Kantorowicz (1946:57), but also see Fichtenau's (1978 [1957]:57) objection to this observation, namely that the only priest-king in the Old Testament is Melchisedech.

13.MGH *Ep*. 4.503.33–41.

14.MGH *Ep*. 4.503.12–15.

15.One example of this scheme will suffice as an illustration here: '*Quae|dum ita se habeant, magne praesumptionis est | Deum sibi quempiam dicere "conregnare", cum | hoc nec David dicere ausus est, de quo Dominus | dixit*: Inveni virum secundum cor meum, *et il-| lud:* Inveni David servum meum, oleo sancto meo | linivi eum; *nec Salomon, cui a Domino dictum | est*: Sapientia et scientia data sunt tibi …' (*MGH Conc*. 2. *Suppl*. 1. 14–20).

It is only in the mid-790s, beginning with Alcuin, that the David name is used openly with specific reference to Charlemagne, although it has been suggested by Dümmler (1892:399) that an early instance of its use in Charlemagne's time can be detected in the poetry of Paul the Deacon, albeit veiled through the use of a numerical allusion.[16] Significantly, it is with Alcuin that the use of the David name shifts from being simply a rhetorical ornament, to a nickname for the king himself. As noted above, the occurrence of the name in poetry is limited, and thus where it does occur, its employment must be both premeditated and have specific significance.

David in contemporary poetry

The poets under discussion here were selective as to which elements of the biblical David's career they employ.[17] Despite Charlemagne's extensive military campaigns, David's episodes with Goliath and his exploits against other tribes, are never mentioned. Any sort of martial reference is generic in the extreme, usually distilled to Charlemagne in the guise of David being a *defensor* [defender], and then only in the realm of the abstract. With the exception of Alcuin's *carm.* 45, Charlemagne-David thus takes on a very passive role in these poems: he is always either the object and recipient of praise and adoration, or a figure overseeing the goings-on at court at a remove.[18] Qualities such as his wisdom, love for learning, piety, and connection to God, are highlighted instead. So too are David's infidelities or other weaknesses passed over, as one would expect given the rules of panegyric.[19] An overview of the poems under consideration shows that the instances where David is invoked, fall generally into one of two broad categories: David in relation to the welfare of the kingdom and Church, and David in relation to the welfare of the world of letters and learning. The use of the name in the former context is in the standard panegyrical mould, hailing the king as an ornament and defender of the Church, thus fulfilling the role in poetry of the *rex et sacerdos* figure which he embodied after the synod of Frankfurt (see Bullough 1973:165). David's traditional attribute as a scholar king shows more variety in its employment, and a greater divergence from the 'official' position, so I will focus more on this aspect within the scope of this article.

My starting point here is Angilbert's *carm.* 2 [*Surge, meo domno dulces fac, fistula, versus*].[20] This poem, addressed to a personified shepherd's pipe, is an example of Schaller's (1971) category *Zirkulardichtung* (poetry with an epistolary flavour, meant to be circulated among friends and rivals). Schaller (1971) proposes a date of either 794 or 795, when Angilbert was absent from court.[21] Charlemagne-David is the focus of the first third of the poem, and is given the following three-line description:

> *David amat veterum sacratos noscere sensus,*
>
> *Divitiasque senum gnaro percurrere corde,*
>
> *Scrutarique sacrae gestit secreta sophiae.*
>
> Angilbert, *carm.* 2.15–17
>
> [David loves to come to know the hallowed significance of the ancients, examines completely the riches of the old men with knowing heart, and sees to it that he thoroughly investigates the secrets of sacred wisdom.]

The image is the purest expression of David as a wise and learned king among the poems considered here. He is both a continual learner [*noscere*] and has perhaps natural aptitude for it [*gnaro … corde*]. In line with the descriptions in Einhard and the general information given to us in official edicts and circular letters issued by the king, especially *De litteris colendis* [On the cultivation of literature], the focus of this learning is the realm of the sacred.[22] Though this David bears elements of the *rex et propheta*, the *sacrae … secreta sophiae* (17) does not seem to include things which have yet to pass, particularly as the main verb here is *scrutari*, 'to investigate thoroughly'. Instead, this would seem to indicate more a sense of the mystical, in the sense of things which are not revealed, as made clear in *De litteris colendis*. The tenor of this description also seems to be one which shows Charlemagne-David's knowledge to be acquired, and is subject to external input, as he surrounds himself with other scholars to create the atmosphere of a scholar-king's court:

> *David habere cupit sapientes mente magistros,*
>
> *Ad decus, ad laudem cuiuscumque artis in aula,*
>
> *Ut veterum renovet studiosa mente sophiam.*
>
> Angilbert, *carm.* 2.19–21
>
> [David is desirous of having teachers, wise in mind, for the dignity and praise of whatever art in his hall, so that he might renew the wisdom of those who have come before, by their studious mind.]

As in these lines, however much David may have been known to the Carolingians as a writer of psalms, in none of the instances where Charlemagne is invoked as David in the guise of scholar and poet, does he actively participate in

16. Paulus Diaconus *carm.* 14.53–54: *Quingentos centum postremi quinque sequantur, | deliciae populi, summus et orbis amor* [Let the five hundred and five hundred of the end follow, beloved of the people, and highest love of the world]. Dümmler (1892:399) takes the number *quingenti* (and thus also *centum … quinque*), when written as a numeral (D), to be a Tironian abbreviation of the name David (DD). Fichtenau (1954:31) suggests that the veiled allusion is necessary due to fragile relations with the Eastern Empire in the aftermath of the Second Council of Nicaea in 787.

17. For a general outline of David's qualities, see Daniélou (1957:594–595). Knowledge of the story among the Carolingian writers is displayed in several places in both prose and poetry, such as a letter of Alcuin to Charlemagne of around 795 (*MGH Ep.*4.41.14–19), and Alcuin, *carm.* 9 and 69.

18. In the interests of clarity, and despite the risk of unwieldiness, I will use 'Charlemagne-David' when referring to David, used of Charlemagne in poetry, and 'David', when referring to the biblical David.

19. See for example Menander Rhetor (370.30–371.3).

20. Though *carm.* 2 is one of the earlier poems included here, it should not be taken that this poem is the archetype for all that follow. This is largely due to the uncertain dating of the majority of Carolingian poetry (see for example Garrison 1994:132).

21. For some interpretations of the poem as a whole, the reader is directed to Schaller (1971), Green (1980), Godman (1985), Knight (2012), and Schmalholz (2022).

22. Einhard (*Vita Karoli Magni* 24) relates that Charlemgagne was fond of having Augustine's *De civitate Dei* read aloud to him at mealtimes; the spirit of *De litteris colendis* is summed up in the following injunction: *Quamobrem hortamur vos litterarum studia non solum non negligere*, *verum etiam* humillima et Deo placita intentione *ad hoc certatim discere*, *ut facilius et rectius divinarum scripturarum mysteria valeatis penetrare* [Therefore we encourage you not only, not to neglect the study of literature, but also to learn eagerly for this purpose, with a very humble intention which is pleasing to God, so that you can more easily and more correctly penetrate the mysteries of divine scripture] (MGH *Capitularia* I, 29.30–33).

literary production.[23] This is instead the province of the poets themselves, or of female members of Charlemagne's family. Theodulf gives a clear example of this, stating:

David in arce manet paucis cum forte puellis,

Pieria sufflat carmina quaeque tuba.

In primis rutilat Flaccinas Delia Musas,

Post aliae pariter organa sacra boant.

Delia Threiciam iam pangit pollice chordam,

Floribus atque ornat tempora sacra novis.

Theodulf, *carm.* 27.27–30

[David remains in his citadel, as it happens, with a few girls, and each blows tunes of the Muses on a trumpet. Delia[24] shines in the foremost ranks with the Muses of Flaccus, and afterwards the others blare on their sacred instruments. Now Delia strikes the lyre with her thumb and adorns her sacred temples with new flowers.][25]

The ancillary aspect of the king to poetic composition, is further nuanced in Alcuin, *carm.* 37 (*Dulcis Homere vale, valeat tua vita per aevum*), which has an extended passage of praise for Charlemagne, though it is addressed in the first instance to Homer – Alcuin's nickname for Angilbert.[26] Here he expresses his wish for the king's long life, specifically so that he, Alcuin, may continue to engage in his intellectual activity.[27] Key to this description is the emphasis on a joint effort between Alcuin and Charlemagne, here signalled twice with *tecum* (*Pierio ut tecum liceat mihi ludere versu,* [So that it might be permitted for me to play in verse with you], *carm.* 37.11, and *Quae via me tecum perveat astra super,* [Which road might carry me with you beyond the stars], *carm.* 37.16). Linked to this is the idea of permission which the king grants with the subjunctive *liceat*. This may be directly by his approbation, or indirectly by virtue of his being alive, but the result is still that it is only he who can provide the correct setting in which Alcuin may follow his scholarly pursuits.

Angilbert likewise expresses this symbiotic relationship in *carm.* 2. The poem is noteworthy for its multiple refrains which take inspiration from ancient works, and potentially also contemporary poetry.[28] In one such refrain, *David amat vates, vatorum est gloria David,* 'David loves the poets, the poets' ornament is David', the functions of each party are made clear: Charlemagne-David provides support to the poets by his love (in reality rather his favour, approbation and protection), and they in turn glorify him and his court with poetry.

Rather than composing, Charlemagne-David is most consistently in a position of judgement. Typically, this is expressed using the verbs *probare* [to approve] and *cernere* [to discern]. We can see an example of this in Alcuin, *carm.* 42 (*Splendida dum rutilat*), one of the most developed instances of this treatment. Alcuin describes an old man (himself), who at dawn composes poetry (*rectiloquos ludos pangeret,* 6) for the boys of the palace school. The king, here given the epithet of *clarissime consul* [most famous leader], must in turn approve (*probaret,* 8) these poems. At the same time, Charlemagne-David must act as a protector of the poet's activity and defend him against unscrupulous poets. Alcuin further emphasises this role, by underlining the trifling nature of the poetry he produces, here recalling the dichotomy of the poet's *rusticitas* [unrefined style], compared to the king's *sapientia* [wisdom] in the letters: the poems are mere games, *munera parva* (12), and *paucula dicta* (18).[29] Trifles they may appear to be, but they are clearly important enough to require the royal stamp of approval. Moreover, the emphasis Alcuin places on both the correctness of the poems (*rectiloquos ludos*) and also, via *probaret*, the inherent goodness and truth of these utterances, underlines the loftier aspirations of Charlemagne's programme, and that something serious underpins them.[30]

This idea is also very prevalent in an acrostic poem on the subject of the cross (*carm.* 6).[31] Here, Alcuin writes:

Te, mea vita, salus, tibi tantum cantica condet
Et generosa canet vox semper carmina, aperto
Si liceat plectro, quia clarus carmine David
Insistendo probat pretioso sancta coturno.

carm. 6.20–23

[My songs memorialise you, my life, my salvation, for you alone and my voice will always sing generous songs, if my lyre should openly be allowed to, because David, renowned in his precious majesty, approves of holy things, and because the song must be contemplated.]

Again Charlemagne-David sits in judgement [*probat*], and again is *clarus*, but notable here is the reason given for his

23. An odd description in contrast to reality – cf. Blakeman (1991:213 n. 27). Another conceit is the poems written in the *persona* of Charlemagne, but these are clearly the product of men more learned than the king. (as Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni* 25, relates). For an evaluation of Charlemagne's literacy, see Dutton (2002:69–92); Godman (1985:5) refers to him as a 'semi-literate', while Garrison (1994:124) is equally damning in her assessment.

24. A nickname for one of Charlemagne's daughters, probably Berta, according to Garrison (1998) and Blakeman (1991:213 n. 29), who also suggests Gisela. The name could equally point to Rotrude, given descriptions of her composing poetry in Angilbert, *carm.* 2.43–47.

25. Flowers and the picking of flowers are recurring metaphors for literature and literary composition in Carolingian poetry – see also Green (1980:57 n. 43 ff). Though it would appear that Theodulf describes literal music-making, the boundary between musical composition and poetic composition is blurred in Carolingian poetry, as we see in the numerous references to personified pipes and flutes (on which see also Knight 2012).

26. The reader is directed to Viarre (1989:230, 233) for a broader interpretation of this poem.

27. Alcuin, *carm.* 37.9–12: *O mihi dulcis amor David, per saecla valeto, | Quam te praesentem semper habere velim, | Pierio ut tecum liceat mihi ludere versu, | Scandere vel summi sidera celsa poli.* ('O my sweet love David, be well forever, how I would like to have you present always, so that I might be allowed to play in verse with you, and to ascend the lofty stars of highest heaven'.)

28. Specifically, Virgil, *ecl.* 8, Psalm 108 (*Paratum cor meum, Deus)* and Peter of Pisa, *carm.* 35. The latter's is closer to Angilbert's refrain, but as Green (1980:52) acknowledges, the nature of their relationship is uncertain. Alcuin's *carm.* 45 also has a similar refrain but given its late date in comparison to Angilbert's poem, would seem rather to take inspiration from that.

29. On modesty tropes in general, see Curtius (2013 [1953]:83–85). See also Banniard (1985:580–583), who analyses Alcuin's style for traits of an actual lower register and 'Romance' speech.

30. Cf. TLL (10.1461) *s.v. probo.*

31. As Garrison (1995:105) notes, the chronology of Alcuin's poetry is a vexed question, but *carm.* 6 should at least be seen as part of Alcuin's time on the Continent (thus either in his first period from 782 to 790, or from 793 until his death). Schmalholz (2022:133–136) in the summary of the work done on the *carmina figurata,* indicates it as an early work belonging to the 780s.

doing so. Taking *carmine … insistendo* as an ablative absolute with causal flavour, it is the content of the poem which demands to be heard and to be judged, even more so given that it is associated with the realm of the sacred. Likewise, it is David's position as ruler, which compels him to take on this role.

Theodulf, who seemingly had professional disagreements with Alcuin, picks up on this role too, mocking Alcuin and his students in *carm.* 27.41–42:[32] *Has paucas cernit David psalmista camoenas, | regales inter iam resonans epulas.*[33]

Taking all these variants together, it would seem that one of the uses of referring to Charlemagne as David is not merely to flatter him as a scholar king (although it may come across as that, too), but rather to reference literary production more broadly. The contexts in which the name is found, emphasise the favourable milieu for such literary activity which David provides by being promotor, protector, and judge. This is so even where the content is not in the poem itself, but implied by virtue of what the poem is appended to, as is the case for Alcuin's *carm.* 75 (*Floreat aeternis tecum sapientia donis*), of which part is attached to a letter written to Charlemagne, concerning grammatical matters, and another part to a letter in which both Charlemagne's learning and Alcuin's compositional abilities are praised.

This is distinctly different to instances where the king's real name is employed instead – Charlemagne in this guise, is much more rooted in the physical world. Alcuin's poetry is (by virtue of there being more numerous examples), again most representative of this. For example, *carmm.* 102 and 107 both refer to the king as a donor for the decoration of monastery architecture. *Carm.* 80, which forms the preface to Alcuin's treatise *De rhetorica*, is the only such poem in which Charlemagne's role as judge is echoed without the David name.[34] As much as rhetoric is closely linked to composition, its purview is the real world, and it is well known that Alcuin's work aspires more to a manual of idealised rulership, than to being a *vademecum* for budding orators (see e.g., Bullough 1973:165).

At this point, it is useful to briefly consider the performance context and audience of these poems – in short, those to whom the trope of David would have been understood as a meaningful code. Poems such as Angilbert's *carm.* 2, are presumed to have literally been circulated among those who are mentioned in it, before being recited in a plenary situation (so Schaller 1971; Green 1982). Other poems, such as Alcuin *carm.* 42, do not offer an obvious performance situation, though the motif of bucolic competition suggests a public forum (as discussed in Knight 2012:15–1). Still others, such as the *carmina figurata*, require visual engagement with their audience. This would seem to suggest that the readership or listenership belong to the same intellectual sphere and can appreciate the poet's art for what it is. A natural conclusion would be to resurrect the idea of a 'coterie' that wrote primarily of and to its own members. The employment of the name David, as indicating a certain set of conditions and thus an intellectual milieu, could thus be seen as an expression of unity among this set of poets, setting the tone for the spirit of the age. This would also explain why several poets do not use the name and could account for the uniformity of style between the poets under discussion here.

The end of Davidic kingship?

A variation on the use of David as a name for Charlemagne, can be seen in the work of Modoin of Autun, most often identified by his byname, Naso. Attributed to him are a two-part eclogue and one other minor poem, and it is in the former that the David name is found.[35] The eclogue follows the broad lines of ancient models such as Virgil and Calpurnius Siculus, in using two interlocutors, here simply named *Puer* [Boy] and *Senex* [Old Man] in the first book, and Nectylus and Micon in the second. As in the poems discussed above, old(er) men typically take on the role of teacher and poet-speaker in Carolingian court poetry, while the term *pueri* is reserved for their pupils, and specifically those pupils who perform poetry before the king and act as *de facto* emissaries of the poet.[36] In Modoin's poem, the boy complains about the difficulties he has being recognised for his poetry, and laments that the old man knows nothing about the struggles of the present time, having made his name, and found his fortune long ago in better times. The poem is generally thought to be written much later than the others under discussion here, in the first decade of the 9th century.[37] Like other poems reliably dated to this period, such as *Karolus magnus et Leo papa*, we see David's name being used alongside more firmly Roman imagery, specifically that derived from Virgil.

Modoin's eclogue uses multiple names for Charlemagne in the same poem: *Carolus* in the prologue, the first book and once in the second book; *David* twice in the first book, and once again in the *envoi* of the second book; and as *Palaemon* in the first book. Again Charlemagne-David takes on what is by now the familiar role as judge of poetry, a role closely associated with the genre of ancient eclogue. This has double significance for Modoin, given that both the prologue and *envoi* mirror the situation presented in the eclogue, whereby the poet seeks the king's approval for his poetry. A unique detail in the poems under discussion, is that the poet has the Boy talk about his desire not only for Charlemagne-David to

32.Cf. Blakeman's comments to these lines, as well as the broader discussion of his relationship with Alcuin (Blakeman 1991:45–47, 215).

33.'David the psalmist passes judgement on these small poems, resounding amidst the royal feast'.

34.Alcuin, *carm.* 80.2.3–6: *Scripserat haec inter curas rex Karulus aulae | Albinusque simul: hic dedit, ille probat. | Unum opus amborum, dispar sed causa duorum; | Ille pater mundi, hic habitator inops*. [King Charles had written these things among his other cares and Albinus at the same time: the latter presented it, the former approved it. Though the work be only one of both hands, so the cause of both is different; The former is the father of the world; the latter its poor inhabitant.]

35.For general interpretations of this poem, see Green (1980) and Schwitter (2009).

36.Green (1980), following Schaller (1971), takes this as literal. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Knight (2012) argues for everything relating to public performance modalities to be fictional and rooted in literary convention.

37.Godman (1985:190 n. 24); see also a summary of more recent thoughts, arguing for a date prior to 804 in Whitta (2002:704 n. 6) and Schwitter (2009:47 n. 4). As the latter notes, the poem cannot date from earlier than 800, given the content.

hear his poems, but simply for the Boy to be in David's presence:

Magnus amor fesso fuerat contingere sedes

Davidicas, insigne caput nam cernere mundi.

Improba mens hominum! Infelix ego saepe putavi,

Hoc satis esse, semel si David forte vidissem.

Modoin, *ecl.* 1.14–17

[It had been a great love for one so tired to reach David's seat, for it is to look upon the famous head of the world. How wicked is the mind of men! I have often unhappily thought that this would be enough if I had seen David but once.]

Fesso (*l.* 14) can be read as referring to the old man who is wearied from his warlike past, or to the boy himself, whose description of the perilous sea journey is a metaphor for his poetic activity (Godman 1985). Likewise, the boy believes that merely the sight of Charlemagne-David in passing (*forte*) will be sufficient to relieve his suffering. Modoin thus presents Charlemagne-David's kingdom as a safe haven, if not something of a promised land.[38] However, much of the boy's first entry regarding Charlemagne-David is tinged with regret and lament for missed opportunities and a time that is no longer recoverable. Thus, we not only have the *irrealis* in *si David forte vidissem* (17), but also the adverb *quondam* (21) and the parenthetical expression *ut memini* (22). The latter seemingly refers to things which used to happen, but which no longer do. The end of the boy's first entry signals a turn to the present, and a shift in focus to a more straightforwardly panegyrical mode: Charlemagne, now referred to as Palaemon, the judge of Virgil's second *Eclogue*, presides over many kingdoms, in what has turned into the iconic second Rome.

This is not an isolated instance. Returning to Alcuin, *carm.* 45, we find the descriptions of Charlemagne-David as a Christ-like figure, culminating in the following injunction, adapted lightly from the sixth book of Virgil's *Aeneid*: *Erige subiectos et iam depone superbos,| Ut pax et pietas regnet ubique sacra*, *carm.* 45.67–68.[39] The reminiscence of Virgil's hero, Aeneas, while uncommon in the shorter poems, is exploited especially in the anonymous epic *Karolus magnus et Leo papa*, which also deals with the events around 800.[40] Here Charlemagne is compared directly to Aeneas, by means of significant and copious intertextual borrowings; David is used alongside the king's real name.[41] It is significant that these poems, written around the same time, should combine the Davidic elements which characterise much of the poetry with Virgilian overtones, to the point of the latter supplanting the former. If we allow ourselves to consider at least a very loose chronology (inasmuch as the evidence permits), with early poems such as the acrostic and Angilbert's *carm.* 2 at the one end of the spectrum, and these late poems at the other, one can discern a shift in ideology, given the rapprochement of Francia with the Pope and the adoption of the trappings of empire more generally. Such a diachronic development mirrors that which Garipzanov (2008) describes with reference to iconographic practices.

Together with the understanding of a Davidic kingdom as shown above, we could take this to imply a gradual loss of the convivial, fertile literary atmosphere at court, before Charlemagne's coronation as *imperator* [emperor]. After all, as Godman (1985:6–8) reminds us, the 'Carolingian Renaissance', as exemplified by the poets under discussion here, refers to a very short period of time and an even shorter period when all poets mentioned were at court together. A yearning for such a 'golden age' by a more junior colleague, is thus a fitting caption to this period.

38.Cf. the Boy's description of 'Rome' (a place of the mind that can be wherever the head of the world is), as such at *ecl.* 1.41 (*hic requies fessis demum venientibus extat*).

39.'Uplift the downtrodden and now put down the proud, so that sacred peace and piety may reign everywhere'. The Virgilian original is *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos,* 'to spare the downtrodden and vanquish the proud' (*Aen.* 6.853).

40.See especially Zwierlein (1973:45–46, 48–49). Angilbert, Modoin, and even Einhard have been suggested as potential authors of the epic, but there is no consensus.

41.*Karolus magnus et Leo papa* 13–14, 393, 416. Piety is once again the general identifying characteristic. Where the poet expands on the name (13–14), light is the predominant image: Charlemagne is described as the *Europae … pharus*, followed by the equating of David to the Sun, in order to illuminate the land by the light of his piety (*magno pietatis lumine*). Such association with light is normally reserved for Charlemagne's real name. See also Silagi (1981) on the wordplay inherent in this habit. An extensive *Similienapparat* showing the degree to which the poem is reliant on Virgil for expression, is given in Schwind (1999).

Conclusion

Alcuin justified his use of nicknames as a means of fostering familiarity between speaker and recipient. However, the David name does not readily fall within this category, especially as it is not a name of Alcuin's creation, and the contexts of its use suggest a more public space. Elements of its use in poetry reflect some of the high-level connotations of Davidic kingship – a wise king, a defender of the faith – but not others, such as anointed kingship and military exploits. Some of these elements also reflect what might be understood as 'policy positions' of Charlemagne's rule, such as the promotion of literature for better understanding of Scripture. As Garrison (1995:223) states, it is impossible to determine the amount of influence which Charlemagne had in enforcing the Davidic ideal at court, or whether it carried any official status. These poems nevertheless display a marked consistency of use and an almost unified picture of the David name, which is somewhat different from modern historians' understanding of David as an ideal of mediaeval rulers. Instead, its presence reflects the poets' understanding of this model of biblical kingship as it applies to the world of their poetry, and in signalling this understanding to other poets, readers, and listeners, unites those who recognise its significance into a closed group of shared ideals and aspirations.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Miranda Williams and Tycho Maas for providing articles from overseas' libraries, and to the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

Competing interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Author's contributions

L.A.B is the sole author of this article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research, without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

References

Banniard, M., 1985, 'Théorie et pratique de la langue et du style chez Alcuin, rusticité feinte et rusticité masquée [Theory and praxis of language and style in Alcuin, Rustic style feigned and rustic style hidden]', *Francia* 13, 579–601.

Blakeman, C.J., 1991, 'A commentary, with introduction, text and translation, on selected poems of Theodulf of Orleans (Sirmond III.1–6)', PhD thesis, University of St Andrews.

Boret, A. (ed.), 1883, *Capitularia regum francorum, Tomus Primus*, Bibliopolius Hahnianus, Hannoverae.

Brown, G., 1994, 'Introduction: The Carolingian renaissance', in R. McKitterick (ed.), *Carolingian culture: Emulation and innovation*, pp. 1–51, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Bullough, D., 1973, *The age of Charlemagne*, 2nd edn., Paul Elck, London.

Cairns, F., 1989, *Virgil'sAugustan epic*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Curtius, E.R., 2013 [1953], *European literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, transl. W.R. Trask, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Daniélou, J., 1957, 'David', in T. Klauser (ed.), *Reallexikon für Antike- und Christentum*, Band 3, pp. 594–603, Anton Hiersemann, Stuttgart.

Dümmler, E. (ed.), 1883, *Poetae Latini aevi Carolini, Tomus I (= Monumenta Germaniae Historica Antiquitates Tomus I)*, Apud Weidmannos, Berolini.

Dümmler, E. (ed.), 1895, *Epistolae Karolini aevi, Tomus II (= Monumenta Germaniae Historica Epistolae Tomus IV)*, Apud Weidmannos, Berolini.

Freeman, A. (ed.), 1998, *Opus Caroli regis contra synodum (Libri Carolini) (= Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Concilia Tomus II, Supplementum I*), Hahnsche Buchhandlung, Hannover.

Dümmler, E., 1892, 'Zu den Gedichten des Paulus Diaconus [On the poems of Paul the Deacon]', *Neues Archiv* 18, 397–401.

Fichtenau, H., 1951, 'Byzanz und die Pfalz zu Aachen [Byzantium and the Palace at Aachen]', *Mitteilungen des Instituts fur Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 59, 1–54.

Fichtenau, H., 1978 [1957], *The Carolingian empire*, transl. P. Munz, University of Toronto Press, Toronto.

Garipzanov, I.H., 2004, '*David, imperator augustus, gratia dei rex*: Communication and propaganda in Carolingian royal iconography', in A. Al-Azmeh & J.M. Bak (eds.), *Monotheistic Kingship*, pp. 89–117, Central European University Press, Budapest.

Garipzanov, I.H., 2008, *Symbolic language of authority in the Carolingian world (c. 751–877)*, Brill, Leiden.

Garrison, M.D., 1994, 'Carolingian Latin poetry', in R. McKitterick (ed.), *Carolingian culture,* pp. 111–140, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Garrison, M.D., 1995, 'Alcuin's world through his letters and verse', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, U.K.

Garrison, M.D., 1998, 'The social world of Alcuin: Nicknames at York and at the Carolingian Court', in L.A.J.R. Houwen & A.A. McDonald (eds.), *Alcuin of York, scholar of the Carolingian Court. Proceedings of the Third Germania Latina Conference held at the University of Groningen, May 1995*, pp. 59–79, Egbert Forsten, Groningen.

Garrison, M.D., 2000, 'The Franks as the New Israel? Education for an identity from Pippin to Charlemagne', in Y. Hen & M. Innes (eds.), *The uses of the past in the early Middle Ages*, pp. 114–161, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Godman, P., 1985, *Poetry of the Carolingian renaissance*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, OK.

Green, R.P.H. (ed.), 1980. *Seven versions of Carolingian pastoral*, Department of Classics, University of Reading, Reading.

Kantorowicz, E., 1946, *Laudes regiae: A study in liturgical acclamations and medieval ruler worship*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.

Knight, G.R., 2012, 'Talking letter, singing pipe: Modalities of performance at the Carolingian court', *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Âge* 79, 7–47.

Lehmann, P., 1959 [1941], *Erforschung des Mittelalters: Ausgewählte Abhandlungen und Aufsätze 1*, Hiersemann, Stuttgart.

Reydellet, M., 1981, *La Royauté dans la littérature latine de Sidoine Apollinaire à Isidore de Séville*, Ecole Française de Rome, Rome.

Schaller, D., 1971, 'Vortrags- und Zirkulardichtung am Hof Karls des Großen [Performance and circular poetry at the court of Charlemagne]', *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch* 6, 14–36.

Schmalholz, R., 2022, *Verdichtete Botschaften: Wie Gelehrte um Karl den Großen in Gedichten kommunizierten*, Bohlau Verlag, Wien.

Schwind, J., 1999, 'Similienapparat zum Text von 'De Karolo rege et Leone papa' [A list of similar passages to the text of 'De Karolo rege and Leone papa']', in W. Hentze (ed.), *De Karolo Rege et Leone Papa: der Bericht über die Zusammenkuft Karls des Großen mit Papst Leo III. in Paderborn in einem Epos für Karl den Kaiser*, pp. 143–156, Bonifatius, Paderborn.

Schwitter, R., 2009, 'Unvergängliche Hirtenlieder für den Kaiser: Modoins Eklogen und die Neubelebung panegyrische Bukolik am Hof Karls des Grossen [Eternal pastoral poems for the Emperor: Modoin's eclogues and the revival of panegyrical bucolic at the court of Charlemagne]', *Jahrbuch für internationale Germanistik* 41(2), 41–68. https://doi.org/10.3726/82034_47

Silagi, G., 1981, 'Karolus – Cara lux', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 37(2), 785–791.

Ullman, W., 2010 [1969], *The Carolingian Renaissance and the Idea of kingship, The Birbeck Lectures 1968–1969*, Routledge, Abingdon.

Viarre, S., 1989, 'Les Carmina d'Alcuin et la réception de la tradition chrétienne dans les formes antiques', in A. Lehner & W. Berschin (eds.), *Lateinische Kultur im VIII. Jahrhundert : Traube-Gedenkschrift*, pp. 217–242, EOS Verlag, St. Ottilien.

Von den Steinen, W., 1965, 'Karl und die Dichter [Charles and the Poets]', in W. Braunfels (ed.), *Karl der Grosse: Lebenswerk und Nachleben*, vol. 2, pp. 63–94, Schwann, Düsseldorf.

Wallace-Hadrill, A., 1981, 'The emperor and his virtues', *Historia* 30(3), 298–323.

Whitta, J., 2002, '*Ille ego Naso,* Modoin of Autun's Eclogues and the *Renouatio* of Ovid', *Latomus* 61(3), 703–731.

Zahnd, U., 2008, 'Novus David — Νεος Δαυιδ', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 42, 71–87. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110196764.71

Zwierlein, O., 1973, 'Karolus Magnus – Alter Aeneas', in A. Önnerfors, J. Rathofer & F. Wagner (eds.), *Literatur und Sprache im europäischen Mittelalter, Festschrift Karl Langosch zum 70. Geburtstag*, pp. 44–52, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt.