

A WATERCOLOR RECREATION OF THE LUDWIG PSALTER, FOLIO 3R

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Artist's Note

This is a watercolor recreation of fol. 3r of the Ludwig Psalter, a psalter made between 825 and 850 at the Abbey of Saint Bertin for King Louis II, grandson of Charlemagne and the first ruler of East Francia. I chose to recreate a leaf of this manuscript to explore and commemorate two major points: the interconnectedness of different countries and the flow of ideas and artistic styles during the Early Middle Ages, and the central role of the psalter in the medieval court.

Looking at this full-page illumination of the first words of the Psalms, one may be struck by the distinctly Insular design of the page with its complex interlacing patterns and characteristic birds' and dragons' heads in the corners. These foreign designs continue throughout the whole manuscript alongside the distinctly Frankish element of the Carolingian minuscule. This synthesis of the Insular and Frankish artistic traditions is the direct result of the process begun by Louis' grandfather Charlemagne, known as the Carolingian Renaissance, which aimed to revive education and high Christian morals amongst the people. Great thinkers, clergymen, and artists were drawn from afar to Charlemagne's court, including the Irish monks who had until then been the main preservers of Latin and spreaders of Christianity.

During the Early Middle Ages kings would often look towards their Old Testament counterparts as exemplars, and regularly reading commentaries on these Biblical stories became popular amongst Charlemagne's descendants. While the Books of Hours dominated the High Middle Ages, the Early period was a "psalmodic culture," with everyone, from the clergy to the laity, being encouraged to use the Psalter as the basis of their personal prayer. The text of the psalms was often used to teach students to read, with "psalteratus" being the term to denote someone who was literate. The words of King David served as the model for kings to achieve and enact piety. It is hence no wonder that such lavish decorations were bestowed on the Psalters. Consequently, these rich manuscripts

became a form of diplomatic gift to ecclesiastical institutions that solidified the monarch's ties to God and the Church while also showcasing his wealth (Adamska 2013).¹ It also played into the Carolingian ideal of standardizing the liturgy and correcting the corrupted Latin by spreading new manuscripts with corrected spellings and a clear, legible text written in the specially-developed Carolingian miniscule.

The Psalter, therefore, can be seen as a symbol for King Louis' rule. Even though he had been termed "the German" since the eighteenth century, he himself did not perceive himself as being anything but a ruler of Eastern Francia, an heir to Charlemagne. He ruled not over Germans, but over a loose collection of various peoples, including the never-before united Franks and Slavs. The synthesis of different artistic styles in the Ludvig Psalter stands as an emblem for this diversity. The care with which it was made shows him as an heir not only to Charlemagne's lands, but also to his ideals. And the vibrant miniatures found on each page would have served as a contemporary sign of his power as the Psalter would be read aloud to him in the presence of his court.

Since my goal with this project was to explore how the visual arts fit into and inform their historical and cultural context, I made the choice to use modern materials rather than historically-accurate dyes and inks in order to concentrate on the design rather than the production techniques.

¹ Anna Adamska, "A Book in All Royal Hands: How Medieval Rulers Read the Psalter," *Polish Libraries* 1 (2013): 186–209.



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