

ADULTERY, HOMICIDE, REPENTANCE, PUNISHMENT, AND PENITENCE. EXEGESIS AND TRADITION OF THE STORY OF BATHSHEBA AND DAVID FROM THE CAROLINGIAN RENAISSANCE TO THE TWELFTH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

Bathsheba, wife of the Hittite Uriah, seduced by David, mother of Solomon, king of Israel, is one of the best-known female characters. The following article explores how her story with King David was interpreted in medieval biblical exegesis between the Carolingian period and the twelfth century. Her presence in the biblical text was interpreted in various ways by exegetical authors in a wide range going from her image as prefiguring the Christian Church to being the seductress who led David into sin. Bathsheba is a good example of the variety of interpretations in medieval exegesis, which is sometimes erroneously portrayed as monolithic.

KEYWORDS

Carolingian Period, Ninth Century, Exegesis, Batsheeba, David.

CAPITALIA VERBA

Aetas Carolingorum, Saeculum IX, Exegesis, Betsheba, David.

1. Introduction

The story narrated in *2 Reg (2 Sam)* 11-12 is a famous one. During a spring, King David was on the terrace of his palace when he saw a beautiful woman bathing. He summoned her to his residence to lay with her. Bathsheba –that was her name– was the wife of Uriah, a Hittite warrior who fought in David's armies. She became pregnant, informed David of the news, and the king got rid of her husband and married her. The prophet Nathan would later visit David and point out his sin and the disapproval of the Lord. He would also announce the death of their child despite David's penitence and repentance. However, their union continued, and Bathsheba became the mother of the future King Solomon. The story is well known and has inspired many artists and writers.¹

The early medieval exegesis of this biblical story and the whole matter, with its moralizing and exemplary content, has been scarcely studied in its entirety. It is precisely for this purpose that this paper has been written. It is important to consider that, although David and Bathsheba are the main characters in the story, Uriah and Nathan also play a role in it, and, as we will see, these characters also have a place in the exegetical comments. While the article focuses on the Carolingian exegetical tradition –a recognized framework of academic studies itself– we have decided to extend its scope to the twelfth century in order to present the modifications that the exegesis of this story undergoes beyond the Carolingian period.

The most modern general study on Bathsheba (and the affair with David) is Sara M. Koenig's book, which is a very useful introduction to the subject. However, the author only briefly mentions a few authors for all medieval exegesis –Hiltebert of Tours,² Remigius, and Rabanus Maurus. Koenig's chapter on the tradition of the Bathsheba story in the Middle Ages focuses on iconography, strangely leaving out the biblical commentaries of the time.³ Despite this, Koenig already makes it clear in the introduction to her book that in the Middle Ages, Bathsheba was considered a seductress.⁴ Omitting the study of exegetical texts and the rhetorical use of biblical exegesis in other texts is a major gap in the study of any problem in cultural or intellectual history in the early Middle Ages, since the exegetical texts are central and represent an immense corpus of writings for that period. As we will see in this paper, when studying early medieval texts that deal more or less extensively with the Bathsheba-David affair, the issue becomes a bit more complex than Koenig's assumptions imply.

To study the numerous references to the story of David-Bathsheba in the exegetical and homiletic tradition in the Latin Early Middle Ages, a search has been carried out in digital databases with the aim of selecting the early medieval authors

1. For a general history of the transmission and tradition of the story of David and Bathsheba, see Koenig, Sara M. *Bathsheba Survives*. Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 2018.

2. The text that Koenig cites, only in its English translation, is of dubious attribution, as the author herself explains, cf. Koenig, Sara M. *Bathsheba ...*: 55, n. 8. The doubt in the attribution is raised by von Moos, Peter. *Hiltebert von Lavardin, 1056–1133*. Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1965: 374.

3. Sara M. Koenig. *Bathsheba ...*: 53-78.

4. Sara M. Koenig. *Bathsheba ...*: 5.



who have dealt with the subject. The search has focused on the name Bathsheba in its Latinized forms (*Bethsabe* and *Bersabea*). There are numerous references. Some authors of this period make brief but important mentions, such as Angelomus of Luxeuil († 855), who states that she is the *typum* of the Church of the Gentiles (*gentium*).⁵ Other authors used or further explained and developed the exegesis of this moment in the history of King David or made important innovations in the exegetical tradition of the issue. We will focus mainly on the latter.

2. Rabanus Maurus

Rabanus Maurus (c. 780-856), disciple of Alcuin, biblical exegete, abbot of Fulda (from 822) and close to Louis the Pious,⁶ briefly commented on the Bathsheba-David affair in his *Commentary on Jeremiah*. In this case David is presented as an example of one who –although he has sinned against God– nevertheless repents and does penance.⁷ But his treatment of the matter in his *Commentarium in Libros Regum* is much more important and extensive.⁸ Rabanus dedicated this commentary to Hilduinus, abbot of Saint-Denis, in August 829 with a dedicatory letter that has come down to us.⁹ The commentary was likely the product of his teaching at the monastic school of Fulda and was likely completed in that same year, 829.

In 832 Rabanus took advantage of a visit by Louis the Pious to Fulda to give him a copy of the *Commentarium in Libros Regum*. He considered it an ideal gift for a Christian king, as it would serve as a practical manual to guide the Christian people. The ultimate objective of Rabanus' exegesis, in general, was to complete the

5. Luxovens, Angelomus. "Enarrationes in libros Regum", *Patrologiae. Cursus completus*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris: apud J. P. Migne editorem, 1881: CXV, col. 347C: *Unde et in Paralipomenon libro quatuor fuisse ex Bethsabee uxoris Uriae Hethaei: Samua uidelicet et Sobab, Nathan et Salomon, quae typum gessit Ecclesiae gentium, sicut in sequentibus, Christo duce, latius dicturi sumus.*

6. A general view of Alcuin in Depreux, Philippe; Lebecq, Stéphane; Perrin, Michel J.-L.; Szerwiniack, Olivier, eds. *Raban Maur et son temps*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2010. For his exegetical work, Cantelli-Berarducci, Silvia. *Hrabani Mauri opera exegetica. Repertorium fontium*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2006.

7. Maurus, Rabanus. "Commentaria in Jeremiam", *Patrologiae. Cursus completus*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris: apud J. P. Migne editorem, 1864: CXI, col. 1057B: *Quod sic solvitur: qui habet notitiam Dei, et recedit ab eo, solus peccat in oculis Dei. Qui vero increduli permanserint, quasi illo non vidente et negligente, delinquant. Unde et David vir sanctus, quia corruerat in peccatum uxoris Uriae Bethsabee agens postea poenitentiam loquitur: "Tibi soli peccavi, et malum coram te feci, id est in conspectu tuo (...)." Penance is a central issue during the years of the reign of Luis the Pious when Rabanus writes his work, see de Jong, Mayke. *The Penitential State: Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814–840*. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press, 2009.*

8. The only available edition of the *Commentarium in Libros Regum de Rabano* (Stegmüller 7033-7036) is that of G. Colvenerio printed in Cologne in 1626, which was reproduced by Migne in *Patrologiae. Cursus completus*, ed. Jacques-Paul. Paris: apud J. P. Migne editorem, 1836: CIX, cols. 9-280. The manuscript tradition is extremely broad. Nearly a hundred manuscripts dating from the ninth to the thirteenth century are preserved. For a general introduction to the text, see Chevalier-Royet, Caroline. *Les Livres des Rois dans l'empire carolingien. Exégèse et actualité*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2021: 111-121.

9. Maurus, Rabanus. *Monumenta Germaniae historica. Epistolae. Karolini aevi III*, ed. Ernst Dümmler. Berlin: Weidmann, 1899: 422-424.



works of Bede and Alcuin to have a commentary on the entirety of the biblical texts based on patristic tradition. The *Commentary on Kings* was not only a pedagogical instrument for the brothers of the Fulda Abbey but also a tool for reflection on the government of the world, useful for kings and emperors.¹⁰ Although it is very difficult to establish a direct or even indirect relationship, it must be taken into account that this text was written –and given to the emperor– in the midst of a political crisis, in the stormy years immediately preceding the forced penance and deposition of Louis the Pious in 833 in Soissons.¹¹

Rabanus begins his exegesis of the David/Bathsheba affair citing Isidore of Seville. He notes that the name David means ‘strong handed’ or ‘desirable’. Bathsheba, for its part, means ‘well of satiety’ or ‘seventh well’.¹² But, since in the *Song of Songs* the wife –that is, the Church– is called a ‘well of living water’ (*Song of Songs*, 4, 15), then Bathsheba must be understood as the Church.¹³ In this sense, Uriah’s wife is no longer a woman but she represents the Church and it is the latter who gives meaning to the exegesis. This allegorical interpretation of Bathsheba coincides with that of other Carolingian authors such as the already mentioned Angelomus.

The next question to answer is: who does Uriah represent? According to Rabanus, the Hittite warrior is a figure of the devil.¹⁴ The Carolingian author reaches this conclusion from the supposed meanings of the name Uriah and his Hittite ethnic affiliation (*ethaeus*). Uriah would mean my ‘light is from God’; however, in Hittite it would mean ‘that was separated’. Uriah is the light of God that departed from him, hence Rabanus maintains the allegorical assimilation of Uriah, the Hittite, with the devil. For this reason, the union of Bathsheba and Uriah, whose separation was caused by the action of David, had been a horrible event.¹⁵ Although David indeed sinned, the prophecy should not be lost sight of, since when he had Uriah killed, he was truly signifying the liberation of the Church from the union with the devil. It is necessary to love the David who freed us from the devil.¹⁶ But we must also love

10. Chevalier-Royet, Caroline. *Les livres ...* : 111-121.

11. For Louis the Pious, see the studies collected in Godman, Peter; Collins, Roger, eds. *Charlemagne’s Heir. New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis de Pious*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990. See also the aforementioned book by de Jong in note 7.

12. Maurus, Rabanus. “In libros regum”, *Patrologiae ...*: CIX, col. 98B: (*Ex Isidoro.*) *Nunc et peccatum David, quid in prophetia signaverit, quanta possum brevitate perstringam. Nomina quippe ipsa interpretata, satis ostendunt, quod etiam hoc factum praefiguraverit. David, ut diximus, interpretatur manusfortis sive desiderabilis. Bersabee interpretatur puteus satietatis, sive puteus septimus.*

13. Maurus, Rabanus. “In libros regum”, *Patrologiae ...*: CIX, col. 98B: *Quamlibet autem harum nominis ejus interpretationem in id quod dicere intendimus, assumamus, satis congruit. Nam in Cantico canticorum sponsa, quae illius Ecclesia est, vocatur puteus aquae vivae...*

14. Maurus, Rabanus. “In libros regum”, *Patrologiae ...*: CIX, col. 98C: *Jam vero qui fuerit maritus ejus, quid aliud quam diabolum nominis ejus interpretatio significat?*

15. Maurus, Rabanus. “In libros regum”, *Patrologiae ...*: CIX, cols. 98C-D: *Hujus erant pessimo conjugio deligati omnes, quos gratia Dei liberat, ut Ecclesia “sine macula et ruga” Salvatori primo copuletur. Urias enim interpretatur lux mea Dei; Ethaeus autem abscissus est, sive quia “in veritate non stetit”; sed a luce sua superna, quam de Deo habebat, superbiae merito abscissus est...*

16. Maurus, Rabanus. “In libros regum”, *Patrologiae ...*: CIX, cols. 98D-99A: *Ergo iste quidem David graviter scelerateque peccavit. Quod scelus ejus etiam per prophetam Deus arguit increpando, et ipse abluit poenitendo... postea*



the penitent David, who, in his humility, confessed his sin and healed.¹⁷ Rabanus moves from a literal interpretation to a spiritual one. The meanings of the names Bathsheba and Uriah allow him to spiritually explain David's sin.

Much later in the same commentary, after a long reflection on sin, repentance and redemption with divine intervention, Rabanus returns to the interpretation of the Bathsheba affair,¹⁸ this time from its mystical meaning. Now Bathsheba becomes the Law, the perfect wisdom, united to a material people (*carnali*), i.e. to the Jews. The idea that Bathsheba also meant wisdom is a theme that not only appears in Rabanus Maurus during the ninth century, but was also presented by Florus of Lyon in a letter addressed to the Empress Judith, wife of Louis the Pious (c. 829).¹⁹ This statement emerges from Proverbs 4, 3-6, a text attributed to Solomon in which he states that his mother was the source of his wisdom, being him the wisest of the kings of the Old Testament.²⁰ This is an interesting topic regarding the Christian exegesis of the figure of Bathsheba, since she could have been interpreted as the cause of David's sin, as the temptation placed before his eyes, however this did not happen, since she was not only the king's wife but also mother of Solomon. This double condition made Bathsheba a positive figure in Christian exegesis, at least during the Carolingian period.

Also in this interpretation Uriah would be the Jewish people.²¹ David, who takes Uriah's wife, takes the place of the Redeemer.²² Since Bathsheba means 'the law'

ab eo penitus separatum diabolus occidit, eamque sibi perpetuo connubio copulavit. Oderimus ergo peccatum, sed prophetiam non exstinguamus.

17. Maurus, Rabanus. "In libros regum", *Patrologiae ...*: CIX, col. 99A: *Amemus illum David, quantum amandus est: qui nos a diabolo per misericordiam liberavit. Amemus et poenitentem istum David: qui tam grave in se vulnus iniquitatis ex humilitatis confessione sanavit.*

18. Maurus, Rabanus. "In libros regum", *Patrologiae ...*: CIX, cols. 99A-100B.

19. Judith, the wife of Louis the Pious, is a particularly interesting female character, see Ward, Elisabeth. "The Career of Empress Judith, 819-829", *Charlemagne's Heir. New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious*, Peter Godman, Roger Collins, eds. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990: 205-230.

20. Lexoviensis, Freulfus. "Epistolae variorum inde a morte Caroli Magni usque ad divisionem imperii collectae", *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. V. Epistolae Karolini aevi (III)*, ed. Ernst Dümmler. Berlin: Weidmann, 1899: 319: *Decet enim dominam te venerabilem unicum erudire filium nostrae iocunditatis et novi seculi regem, memor Bersabee, quae Ididam priscorum erudivit sapientissimum seculorum regem, ut idem de se ait: "Nam et ego filius fui patris mei tenellus et unigenitus coram matre mea, et docebat me atque dicebat: Suscipiat verba mea cor tuum, custodi praecepta mea et vives. Posside sapientiam, posside prudentiam, ne obliviscaris neque declines a verbis oris mei, ne dimittas eam et custodiet te, dilige eam et servabit te etc.*

21. Maurus, Rabanus. "In libros regum", *Patrologiae ...*: CIX, cols. 100B-100C: *Potest autem et aliter secundum mysticos sensus haec eadem res accipi, si qua eam puro intellectu rimare voluerit. Cujus autem David in solarium deambulans typum tenet, nisi ejus de quo scriptum est: "In sole posuit tabernaculum suum?" Et quid est Bersabee ad se perducere, nisi legem litterae carnali populo conjunctam spiritali sibi intellectu sociare? Bersabee enim puteus septimus dicitur, quia nimirum per cognitionem legis, infusione spiritalis gratiae, perfecta nobis sapientia ministratur. Quid vero Urias nisi Judaicum populum signat? Cujus nomen interpretatum dicitur lux mei Dei. Judaicus populus quia de accepta legis scientia extollitur, quasi de Dei luce gloriatur.*

22. Maurus, Rabanus. "In libros regum", *Patrologiae ...*: CIX, col. 100C: *Sed huic David uxorem abstulit, sibi que conjungit: quia videlicet manufactis, quod David dicitur, in carne Redemptor apparens...*



and ‘wisdom’, which was in the hands of the Jews, this is why Uriah must die.²³ Rabanus is aware of the paradox to which his exegesis leads: David is a sinner because of what he did with Bathsheba first and with Uriah later, but he becomes more faithful when he receives Nathan’s prophecy. The prophecy transforms the guilt of his actions into innocence.²⁴

3. Paschasius Radbertus

Paschasius Radbertus (c. 792-865), abbot of Corbie between 843 and 851, was a Carolingian author, remembered in the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church as a defender of Eucharistic realism in his controversy against Ratramnus of Corbie,²⁵ but above all he was a great biblical exegete. He commented on the affaire of David and Bathsheba in his *Expositio in Mattheum*, since the name of Bathsheba appears in the genealogy of Jesus Christ, with which this gospel begins. For this author Bathsheba was the Church, coming from the Gentiles (he agrees with Angelomus de Luxeuil), who was cleansed with baptism (*lavacro aquae*) and who aspired to heavenly things, predestined and called to be the beloved wife of Christ in a spiritual marriage.

Uriah represented the demon (*antiqui hostis*), whose force is destroyed through that marriage, which is prefigured in the union between David, *typum redemptoris*, and Bathsheba.²⁶ Uriah, *lux mea Dei*, represents the Jewish people elevated by God. But David took Uriah’s wife and joined herself to her, who represents the perfect wisdom of grace, since Bathsheba is a well of wisdom, but the Jewish

23. Maurus, Rabanus. “In libros regum”, *Patrologiae ...*: CIX, cols. 101A-B: *Unde et Urias ad Joab cum epistolis, ex quibus occidi debeat, mittitur: quia idem ipse Judaicus populus legem portat, qua convincente moriatur, dum enim mandata legis retinens implere nititur, ipse nimirum defert iudicium unde damnatur.*

24. Maurus, Rabanus. “In libros regum”, *Patrologiae ...*: CIX, col. 101B: *Quid ergo per factum istud David scelestius, quid Uria mundius dici potest? Sed rursus per mysterium quid David sacratius? Quid Uria infidelius invenitur, quoniam et ille per vitae culpam prophetiae signat innocentiam, et iste per vitae innocentiam, in prophetia exprimit culpam?*

25. See Otten, Willemien. “Between Augustinian Sign and Carolingian Reality: the Presence of Ambrose and Augustine in the Eucharistic Debate Between Paschasius Radbertus and Ratramnus of Corbie”. *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis / Dutch Review of Church History*, 80/2 (2000): 137-156; Chazelle, Celia. “Exegesis in the Ninth-Century Eucharistic Controversy”, *The Study of the Bible in the Carolingian Era*, Celia Chazelle, Burton van Namme Edwards, eds. Turnhout: Brepols, 2003: 167-187.

26. Radbertus, Paschasius. “Expositio in Matthaem”, *Patrologiae. Cursus completus*. ed. Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris: apud J. P. Migne editorem, 1852: CXX, cols. 66C-D: *Super solarium itaque domus lavante Bersabea, David rex manu fortis petulanti oculo vidit, concupivit et abstulit. Quia videlicet redemptor noster Deus ac Dominus Jesus Christus Ecclesiam, quam ex gentibus acquisivit, lavacro aquae in verbo mundatam, terrena calcantem, coelestibus inhiantem, praedestinatum vidit providus, vocatam dilexit sponsus, ut justificatam sibi conjungeret legitimus spiritali conjugio maritus. Sed ut Bersabeae David conjungatur, Urias vir ejus interficitur; quia ut justorum Ecclesia coelesti sponso adhaereat, antiqui hostis virtus confringitur, contracta pedibus electorum calcanda prosternitur... David itaque in solarium deambulans, typum exprimit Redemptoris.*



people did not recognize the Redeemer, even though in the Law he himself had talked about himself.²⁷

4. Sedulius Scotus

Sedulius Scotus, in his *De rectoribus christianis*, used the example of David's sin and his subsequent repentance and penitence to explain why those in positions of power had to accept being rebuked and corrected by those who were prudent. Sedulius was part of that group of men of letters originally from Ireland, who contributed with their knowledge and their pen to the second Carolingian Renaissance during the ninth century. He was active in the Kingdom of the Franks between 840 and 870, a period in which he wrote not only the cited text but also exegetical works and poetry. He probably wrote the *De rectoribus* in the context of the attempted conquest of Lothair II's kingdom by his uncle, Charles the Bald, and may have dedicated this work to him. The issue is still debated.²⁸

In Sedulius there are no considerations about the different meanings of the case of Bathsheba and David. The King of Israel committed rape and murder. He was rebuked by the prophet Nathan; however, he was not angry with him but accepted his own guilt, repented, wept and did penance.²⁹ Sedulius presents us with the finished form of the image of the penitent David, attentive to Nathan's words. This David responds to Sedulius' idea about the sovereign who is attentive to the opinion and advice of the Church. David is not the only example taken in this sense by Sedulius but in the *De rectoribus* he also mentions Theodosius and Constantine with similar intention. In eschatological terms, the idea, which the author would seek to sustain, focused on the transience of terrestrial glory and

27. Radbertus, Paschasius. "Expositio in Matthaeum", *Patrologiae ...* CXX: cols. 67A-B: *Quid autem est David Bersabee ad se perducere, nisi datorem legis carnali populo legem conjunctam spirituali sibi intellectu sociare? Bersabee autem, ut praefati sumus, puteus septimus dicitur, quia nimirum per cognitionem legis infusionem spiritualis gratiae perfecta nobis sapientia monstratur. Quem vero Urias, nisi Judaicum populum signat, cujus nomen interpretatum diximus, lux mea Dei? Judaicus autem populus quia de accepta legis scientia extollitur, quasi de Dei luce gloriatur. Sed huic Uriae David uxorem abstulit, sibi que sociavit; quia Redemptor in carne apparens de se spiritualiter loqui legem innotuit; ac per hoc, hanc Judaico populo extraneam demonstravit, sibi que conjunxit, quia se per illam praedicari declaravit.*

28. For this issue in particular, but also as a general introduction to Sedulius Scottus, see Pettiau, Hérold. "Quelques réflexions autour du *Liber de rectoribus christianis* de Sedulius Scottus : contexte(s), patron(s), destinataire(s)". *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 96 (2018): 745-769.

29. Scottus, Sedulius. "De rectoribus christianis", *Patrologiae. Cursus completus*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris: apud J. P. Migne editorem, 1844: CCCXI, cols. 311B-C: *Itaque si contigerit ut a prudentibus reprehendatur, se quidem reprehensibilem esse acriter doleat, ac protinus ad poenitentiae medicamenta currere festinet; et qui libenter peccaverat, virgam correctionis libenter atque gratanter accipiat; [...] Quomodo de sancto rege et propheta David legitur, qui cum post stuprum Bersabee et homicidium commissum in Uriam Hethaeum per Nathan reprehenderetur prophetam, non erat reprehensori indignatus, sed sibimet, recognoscens suum peccatum, jam fuerat iratus; et qui post culpam hilarescebat perpetrata, se ipsum per amaram deflevit poenitentiam. Hinc lacrymis veniam promeruit qui coram Domino gravia scelera commisit, et ex fonte lacrymarum venit ad manipulum gaudiorum, sicut ipse alibi dicit: Qui seminant in lacrymis, in exultatione metent, et reliqua.*



the need for self-control of the sovereign based on his task as rector of his people, under ecclesiastical guidance.³⁰ The reference to Theodosius was taken from Ambrose of Milan, who presents the figure of the sovereign, penitent because of the famous Thessaloniki massacre of 390, perpetrated by orders of that Roman emperor.

The theme of the king's penance, which had already appeared in Rabanus, exceeds the question of David's penance as an exegetical theme during the ninth century. Mayke de Jong's studies focused on the two penances of Louis the Pious (822 and 833) with their different causes and results refer to a 'penitential state', in which the expiation of sin has become a policy against the problems that appear on the horizon of Carolingian society.³¹ De Jong points out an element of the penance of 833 –through which the temporary deposition of Louis the Pious is carried out– which is particularly interesting for this work: The biblical quote used is not taken from David's penance but from *Ez* 3:18-19:

When I say to the wicked: "You are going to die", if you do not warn him, if you do not speak to warn the wicked to abandon his bad behaviour, and thus save his life, the wicked will die because of him, but because of you I will ask you for his blood. If you, on the other hand, warn the wicked and he does not convert from his wickedness and his bad conduct, he will die because of him, but you will have saved your life.

The bishops occupy, in effect, the place of the prophet in front of the king, but not that of Nathan in front of David but that of Ezekiel in front of the wicked in general, there the most important issue is the co-responsibility of the prelates in the sovereign's guilt.³² But it is also typical of the great ecclesiastics to correct the action of the kings and for this the bishops of the last years of the reign of Louis the Pious and his successors in the ninth century will develop a vocabulary of the *admonitio* addressed to the kings. In this action, which ultimately has the objective of making sovereigns aware of their sins, repenting and amending them through penance, biblical texts will be central particularly those of the Old Testament.³³

In this sense, it is notable that the penitent David is the reference chosen by Sedulius not because it does not seem relevant to us –since in fact it is– but because it implies an important differentiation with the use of *Ezekiel* 3,18-19 by the bishops in 833. The prelates preferred Ezekiel over Nathan as an Old Testament prophetic figure.

30. Pettiau, Hérold. "Quelques réflexions ...": 747-749.

31. de Jong, Mayke. *The Penitential State* ...: 6-7.

32. de Jong, Mayke. *The Penitential State* ...: 114-115.

33. de Jong, Mayke. *The Penitential State* ...: 118-122.



5. Hincmar of Reims

Hincmar of Rheims (c. 806-882) was one of the most important ecclesiastics and intellectuals of the ninth century and is probably the most studied prelate of the second half of that century.³⁴ In his controversial text *On the Divorce of Lothair and Teutberga* the bishop made a controversial use of the David-Bathsheba affair. In this writing Hincmar stated that not even kings could escape legitimate penance and must act according to the laws of the Church to obtain reconciliation. It was impossible to think about union with a concubine without complying with these laws. It is there that Hincmar introduces his interpretation of the David-Bathsheba affair. The king could not take Bathsheba as his wife until he was purified of his adultery by penance and, having done this, still the son of adultery died. Central to the text is David's penitent condition and the justice of divine judgment.³⁵

Hincmar's *De divortio* was written in the context of the crisis, which took place due to Lothair II's attempt to divorce his legitimate wife, Teutberga, to marry his former lover and mother of his illegitimate children, Waldrada. Hincmar was fiercely opposed to this divorce, since he made a very restrictive reading of the right of husbands to divorce and remarry. The bishop of Reims relied on the patristic tradition –which was not truly clear in this regard –and above all on the *Collectio Dacheriana* and the *pseudo-Isidorian Decretals*.

Hincmar belongs to a generation of Frankish bishops with a great sense of their dignity and importance. The bishops at the end of the reign of Louis the Pious were no longer only instruments of execution of the royal will, as they had largely been in the time of Charlemagne. This transformation of the episcopal function has been widely studied by Steffen Patzold.³⁶ In this general context, but especially in the specific context of the controversy over Lothair II's divorce, Hincmar points out the case of David appropriating Bathsheba, underlining the king's condition as a repentant and penitent sinner. The bishop presents himself as the representative

34. The bibliography on Hincmar of Rheims is immense, for an approach to the character and a fairly updated bibliographic list, see Stone, Rachel; West, Charles, eds. *Hincmar of Rheims. Life and Work*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015.

35. Rhemensis, Hincmarus. "De divortio Lotharii regis et Theutbergae", *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Concilia. IV. Suppl. 1*, ed. Wilfried Hartmann. Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1998: 226, lines 15-25: *Est et illi regi aliud observandum, ne ante legitimam poenitentiam secundum leges ecclesiae susceptam atque peractam et reconciliationem adeptam conjugio, multo minus eidem, de qua agitur, concubine se couplet, quoniam nec David rex sine talis excoctionis poenitentia Bethsabeae, cum qua adulteravit in coniugem habuit, ut et filius, qui ex ipso adulterio natus fuerat, confestim divino iudicio, licet pro eo multum ieiunando et flendo petierit, sit percussus et mortuus; et ipse postea gravissimis tribulationibus ac regni sui amissione per filium suum Absalon ita adflictus est et vexatus ac velut in fornace ignis excoctus atque purgatus, ut vere sola divina clementia evasisse videatur. Et iam ei acerrime contrito corde poenitenti et confitenti misericors dominus peccatum dimiserat, sed quia iustus est et iustitiam diligit, quod rex ab eo ad scelera ulciscenda constitutus egerat scelerate, digne atque iustissime vindicavit.*

36. Patzold, Steffen. *Episcopus: Wissen über Bischöfe im Frankenreich des späten 8. bis frühen 10. Jahrhunderts*. Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2008.



of a Church, which he considers to be his own right to judge and correct the laity, even kings.³⁷

6. Honorius Augustodunensis

Honorius Augustodunensis was one of the great ecclesiastical authors of the early twelfth century. Our biographical data is scarce: perhaps he was an Englishman, moved to Regensburg around 1130 and was in contact with Rupert of Deutz. In any case, the dimensions and influence of his work are remarkable.³⁸

In Honorius' *Expositio in Psalmos*, David is a figure of Christ, Bathsheba is a figure of the Church, and Uriah, again, of the devil. The Church – as an assembly of the faithful (*congregatio fidelium*) – is the wife of Christ just as David was the husband of Bathsheba. The bath of the latter, when David sees it, means baptism, through which the Church is washed from the filth of sin and the devil is annihilated along with his followers.³⁹

According to Honorius, David also means 'desirable', Bathsheba 'well of the testament' and Uriah 'glory of my God'. The author first clarifies the meaning of Uriah, since it is necessary to explain how one goes from being the glory of God to the devil. It is precisely because the devil wanted to usurp that glory when he said of himself that he would be similar to the Almighty (*Is 14, 14*).⁴⁰

The exchange of Uriah for David is explained by Honorius as Bathsheba's inability to tolerate the *concupitum* with her previous husband, which symbolizes the attendance of the Gentile peoples for the arrival of Christ. In Bathsheba both the ancient Law and the expectation of the rest of humanity meet. In the same way that David had Uriah killed, the devil also had to leave the Gentiles.⁴¹ So then, for Honorius the whole affair symbolizes the union between Christ and his Church,

37. See Heidecker, Karl. *The Divorce of Lothar II. Christian Marriage and Political Power in the Carolingian World*. Ithaca-London: Cornell University Press, 2010: 73-99.

38. An introduction to the author is Flint, Valerie I. J. "Honorius Augustodunensis Imago Mundi". *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 49 (1982): 1-153.

39. Augustodunensis, Honorius. "Expositio in Psalmos", *Patrologiae. Cursus completus*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris: apud J. P. Migne editorem, 1844: CCCXXII, cols. 283B-C: *David itaque Christi figuram, Bethsabee Ecclesiae, Urias diaboli imaginem gessit. Et sicut illa, dum in fonte Cedron lavaretur exuta vestibus suis, Davidi placuit, et ad regios meruit venire complexus, maritus quoque ejus principali jussione est trucidatus: ita et Ecclesia, id est congregatio fidelium, per lavationem sacri baptismatis mundata a sordibus peccatorum, Christo Domino noscitur esse sociata, et diabolus apostolis impugnantibus est annihilatus.*

40. Augustodunensis, Honorius. "Expositio in Psalmos", *Patrologiae ...*: CCCXXII, col. 283C: *Hoc et ipsa nomina innuunt. David namque desiderabilis, Bethsabee puteus testamenti, Urias dicitur gloria Dei mei, et designat diabolum, qui sibi gloriam Dei sui usurpavit, dicens: Similis ero Altissimo. Dicitur etiam Lux mea Deus, significans illum qui transfiguratur se in angelum lucis.*

41. Augustodunensis, Honorius. "Expositio in Psalmos", *Patrologiae ...*: CCCXXII, cols. 283C-D: *Sicut Bethsabee non est passa concupitum prioris mariti, postquam copulata est David; ita Ecclesia non est conjuncta diabolo, postquam venit ad Christum desiderabilem, qui fuit exspectatio gentium. Haec puteus testamenti fuit, quia abyssus veteris legis in ea latuit. Urias consilio David occubuit, et diabolus Christi consilio gentilitatem amisit.*



which is also the heir of Old Testament Law, as well as the destruction of paganism and the opening to the conversion of other peoples beyond Israel.

7. Bruno de Segni

Later on, in one of the writings of Bruno de Segni or *Astensis* (†1123) we find the first mention of Bathsheba as a source of temptation for David.⁴² The text in question comes from one of his sentences in his *Sententiarum liber secundus de ornamentis*. Bruno states that David lost his strength (*fortitudinem*), defeated by the voluptuousness of Bathsheba's flesh. From then on, the remaining cardinal virtues also abandoned him.⁴³ David was strong, but as soon as he saw Bathsheba he could not help lust.⁴⁴ The mention is brief but important because it is the first clearly negative view we have in the medieval tradition of David's ill-gotten wife.

8. Godfrey of Admont

Godfrey, abbot of the monastery of Saint Blaise of Admont (in present-day Austria) between 1138 and 1165, is another author about whom we know quite little. In fact, the attribution of the homily, which we will quote below, is not certain; it could have been written by him or by someone close to him, perhaps by his own brother, Irimbert. In principle, although with this reservation, we will retain the attribution of the text to Godfrey.

His exegesis presents elements that had not appeared until now and whose source I have not been able to find, therefore it may represent an innovation of Godfrey (or his monastic environment) in the understanding of the figure of Bathsheba. In this case, she, as David's wife, but above all as Solomon's mother, prefigures the blessed Mother of God –that is, the Virgin Mary.⁴⁵ Godfrey's writing

42. There are not many studies on the work of Bruno de Segni. Grégoire, Réginald. *Bruno de Segni: exégète médiéval et théologien monastique*. Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'alto Medioevo, 1965 remains fundamental. According to I. S. Robinson, Bruno is an example of political use of biblical exegesis although within the early medieval tradition of interpretation based on patristic texts: Robinson, Ian Stuart. "Political Allegory" in the Biblical Exegesis of Bruno of Segni". *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale*, 50 (1983): 69-98.

43. Astensis, Bruno. "Sententiae", *Patrologiae. Cursus completus*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris: apud J. P. Migne editorem, 1854: CLXV, col. 914B: *Perdidit David fortitudinem, quem visa Bersabea carnis voluptas superavit: a quo caeterae virtutes mox territae fugerunt. Quis eum tunc insipientem, injustum, et sine temperantia fuisse dubitat, qui libidine superatus, tam gravia simul peccata commisit?*

44. Astensis, Bruno. "Sententiae", *Patrologiae ...*: CLXV, col. 932B: *Fortis erat David, nihilominus visa Bersabea, luxuria resolutus est.*

45. Admontensis, Godefridus. "Homiliae festuales", *Patrologiae. Cursus completus*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris: apud J. P. Migne editorem, 1836: CLXXIV, cols. 1026D-1027A: *Mulier quarta, Bethsabee videlicet, quam ablatam viro suo David sibi junxit matrimonio, genuitque ex ea regem Salomonem, nihilominus praefiguravit*



represents a major change in the exegesis of Bathsheba, from now on her homily deals with the Virgin and the way in which her person was prefigured in different female characters of the Old Testament.

9. Conclusion

The Bathsheba-David affair has been interpreted and used in various ways in the early medieval exegetical tradition and even until the beginning of the twelfth century. Two main themes stand out: on the one hand, the image of Bathsheba as a prefiguration of the Christian Church (traditionally the Church is a woman and wife) and, by extension, that of David as a *typum* of Jesus Christ; on the other, the figure of David as a penitent. In this second case Nathan becomes important because he in turn prefigures the Church (it is understood that the ministerial Church) which fulfils the function of pointing out the right path (that of repentance and penance) to the powerful of this world.

Bathsheba's guilt exegesis as an instrument of temptation is a late one and, contradictorily, the assimilation of her image as a pre-figuration of the Virgin Mary is also late and somewhat surprising. It is also significant that both Bruno of Segni, who considers Bathsheba to be the cause of David's fall into sin, and Godfrey of Admont, who considers her a prefiguration of the Virgin Mary, are both contemporary authors. In general terms, it can be stated that the negative image of Bathsheba is unusual and a positive image, in which she is the source of Solomon's wisdom, is much more important.

beatam Dei Genitricem, quia et eam, sicut dicere possumus, viro suo, Joseph videlicet, qui eam desponsaverat, Deus Pater quodammodo tulit, quia immaculatam cunservavit. Sic, sic a viro suo sejuncta, omnipotenti Deo conjuncta ex Spiritu sancto concepit, et peperit illum verum Salomonem, verum pacificum Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum, qui per suum sanguinem pacem fecit inter Deum et hominem.

