St Edward’s Chair in the Queen Mary Psalter

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Introduction

The Queen Mary Psalter (British Library, Royal MS. 2 B. VII) is one of the most important illuminated manuscripts made in fourteenth-century England and ‘among the most extensively illustrated psalters ever produced in western Europe’. Its makers updated and amplified longstanding traditions of psalter layout and decoration to produce an artifact notable for its harmonious design, lavish production and rich presentation of Christian salvation history. This history, told on 319 folios and in over 800 images, begins with an Old Testament preface covering Creation through the story of Solomon depicted in 223 delicately tinted drawings, typically arranged two per page and enclosed in vivid red frames. These pictures are accompanied by captions in Anglo-Norman French as well as lengthy unillustrated Anglo-Norman French summaries of the stories of several biblical protagonists, the latter a feature witnessed in no

other extant psalter prefatory cycle. Written in a mixture of prose and ‘verse in prose format’, the text of the Old Testament preface may have been created expressly for Royal MS. 2 B. VII, as the codicological evidence suggests.2

The account of Christian salvation history told on the pages of the Queen Mary Psalter continues in the four fully painted and gilded full-page miniatures detailing the lineage and kin of Jesus in the male and female lines and the prophetic and apostolic foundations of the faith; the bucolic narratives illustrating the monthly labours and zodiac signs embellishing the Sarum calendar; eighty-seven full- or half-page miniatures displaying New Testament, Christological, Marian, devotional and eschatological themes framing the Latin psalter, canticles and litany; twenty-three historiated initials at the main text divisions; and 464 drawings in the bas-de-page of these Latin texts comprising several thematic series, including bestiary themes, Marian miracles, hagiographical narratives, combatant grotesques and vignettes of courtly and urban entertainment. This last component of its decoration extends the visual programme of the Queen Mary Psalter into the realm of contemporary aristocratic ideals and experience, and doubtless was a source of visual delight.

No less remarkable than these statistics are the conditions of the volume’s facture, because, as is generally agreed, all of the illumination of Royal MS. 2 B. VII was the work of a single artist of long influence and ‘exceptional talent’, the illuminator known as the Queen Mary ‘Master’.3 Of unknown origins and training, the Queen Mary Master is the key member of a group of stylistically related artists – some apparently itinerant, others London-based professionals – who were active in the early fourteenth century illuminating books of diverse genres for a varied clientele that included institutional, monastic, ecclesiastical and lay patrons in Kent, East Anglia, Bangor (Wales), and Paris as well as London and Westminster.4

On account of its lavishness, it has always been assumed that the Queen Mary Psalter was made for a recipient of high rank, probably a member of the English royal circle, with the most frequently suggested candidates being Edward II (r. 1307-27), his queen, Isabella of

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2 Warner, Queen Mary’s Psalter, transcribed and translated the Anglo-Norman French captions but not the unillustrated summaries; Stanton, Queen Mary Psalter, pp. 245-55, transcribed the unillustrated summaries, which encompass all or part of the stories of Joseph (f. 14), Moses (ff. 20v-22), Jael (conflated with Deborah), Sisera and Gideon/Jerobaal (ff. 31v-32v), Gideon/Jerobaal and Abimelech (ff. 35-35v), Jephthah (f. 39v), Samson (ff. 41v-42) and Ruth (f. 46v). For analysis of the Anglo-Norman French preface see Warner, Queen Mary’s Psalter, pp. 8-22; Anne Rudloff Stanton, ‘Notes on the Codicology of the Queen Mary Psalter’, Scriptorium, xlii:2 (1995), pp. 250-62; Ruth J. Dean with Maureen B. M. Boulton, Anglo-Norman Literature: A Guide to Texts and Manuscripts, Anglo-Norman Text Society, Occasional Publications Series, 3 (London, 1999), no. 465, p. 253; Stanton, Queen Mary Psalter, pp. 26-31, here quoting p. 29; and Jackson, in Royal Manuscripts, p. 272.

3 Jackson, in Royal Manuscripts, p. 272.

France (1295-1358), and Edward III (b. 1312; r. 1327-77), hypotheses that are in line with the manuscript’s style-generated dating of c. 1310-20. Yet the identity of the original intended owner(s) and the circumstances of the commission are as enigmatic as the identity of the artist. Named for a much later royal owner, Mary Tudor (r. 1553-58), and apparently owned earlier in the sixteenth century by Henry Manners, Second Earl of Rutland (1526-63), Royal MS. 2 B. VII contains no early fourteenth-century owner or donor portraits, coats of arms, calendar obituaries, or personalizing prayers or inscriptions that might aid in identifying the patron(s) or the original intended recipient(s). Nor is it certain where the Psalter was made, although most scholars consider London or the royal court at Westminster to be the likely locus of its production. In regard to the presumed royal destination of the Psalter, it is worth noting that two other Queen Mary group artists contributed to volumes that may be firmly connected to royal owners. The first of these manuscripts is the Alphonso Psalter (British Library, Add. MS. 24686), begun c. 1284 in connection with the betrothal of the ten-year-old prince Alphonso, older brother of the future Edward II and at the time the heir to the throne. Sometime c. 1302-16 the manuscript was enriched by a Queen Mary artist as part of a campaign of illumination undertaken to adapt the book for Alphonso’s and Edward’s sister Elizabeth. The second manuscript is London, Dr Williams’s Library, MS. Ancient 6, a small psalter illuminated in its entirety c. 1328-40 for Edward III’s queen Philippa of Hainault by the Queen Mary artist whom Lynda Dennison dubbed the ‘Ancient 6 Master’.

The most significant scholarship on the Psalter to date has been concerned chiefly with identifying possible sources for or analogues of the imagery and unusual extra-biblical motifs in its rich visual and textual programme, and on characterizing the broad themes that appear to animate this programme. This essay focuses principally on a single scene on f. 58 in the David cycle in the Old Testament preface depicting the prophet Nathan’s rebuke of David for his sexual relations with Bathsheba, his murder of her husband, the soldier Uriah, and his

5 Warner, Queen Mary’s Psalter, p. 7, suggested that the Psalter was made for either Edward I or Edward II. For a selection of royal candidates and hypotheses as to patronage and ownership, see Stanton, Queen Mary Psalter, pp. 216-44.

6 For the manuscript’s provenance, see Warner, Queen Mary’s Psalter, pp. 1-2.

7 For the localization of the Queen Mary group manuscripts and the Psalter itself, see Sandler, Gothic Manuscripts, vol. i, pp. 30-1, and vol. ii, p. 66; Jackson, in Royal Manuscripts, p. 272; and The British Library’s Digital Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts (as in n. 1), where East Anglia is put forward as another possible place of production.


9 For Philippa’s Psalter, see Sandler, Gothic Manuscripts, vol. ii, no. 74, pp. 81-2; and Dennison, ‘Illuminator of the Queen Mary Psalter Group’.

subsequent marriage of Bathsheba (II Kings 12.1-14) (fig. 1, top). As told in the Vulgate, Nathan begins his censure of David by relating to the king the parable of the poor man whose single ewe lamb was taken from him and slaughtered by a rich man unwilling to deplete his own ample flocks. Outraged at the rich man’s unjust actions and his oppression of the poor man, David is taken aback when Nathan reveals that it is David himself who is the rich man of the parable. ‘And Nathan said to David: Thou art the man. Thus saith the Lord the God of Israel: I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee from the hand of Saul’ (II Kings 12.7). ‘Why therefore hast thou despised the word of the Lord, to do evil in my sight?’ Nathan continues: ‘Thou hast killed Urias the Hethite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon’ (II Kings 12.9). Nathan prophesies the punishment that the Lord will visit on David and his family as a result of David’s sins: ‘Thus saith the Lord: Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thee own house. [...] For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing in the sight of all Israel’ (II Kings 12.11, 12). A repentant David then acknowledged his sin before the Lord, fasted and ‘lay upon the ground’ (II Kings 12.16). A reader-viewer of the Queen Mary Psalter would have seen the Lord’s vengeance unfold in the captioned pictures on ff. 58–60v, where David’s son Amnon rapes his half-sister Tamar, sister of Absalom (fig. 1, bottom), and then a grief-stricken David laments the deaths of both Amnon and Absalom after the former is killed by Absalom’s sons and the latter is slain in the wake of his failed rebellion against his royal father.

The Anglo-Norman French caption for the drawing of Nathan’s censure of David presents a loose summary of the Vulgate narrative: ‘How the prophet Nathan reproved David for the sin that he had committed and promised him that [the Lord] would be avenged. And David descended from his seat and submitted himself on the earth and sincerely repented, and acknowledged his sin in front of all the people, praying for God’s mercy’ (Coment Nathan le prophete reprist David de son pecché q’il avoit fet e li promist vengance. E Davi[d] descendist de soun see e se mist a terre e se repenta grantment e reconust devant tote le peole son pecché en priant Deu mercy) (fig. 1, top).11

The relationship between text and image in the Old Testament preface is a close one, and it is to the caption that one may turn to discern the details of the picture. Dressed in the soft, peaked hat and ample robes that are the conventional garb of prophets in later medieval representation, Nathan stands at the head of a group of men who may represent David’s other councillors. Their presence may also serve to affirm the public nature of David’s censure, which, as the caption states, echoing the Vulgate narrative, takes place before ‘all the people’. The prophet wags a finger in stern rebuke of his repentant royal protégé, who kneels before Nathan, hands joined before him as he ‘pray[s] for God’s mercy’.

The remaining element in the drawing is the large object located immediately behind David at the picture’s left edge. In his analysis of the Old Testament preface in his still valuable partial facsimile of the Psalter, George Warner did not comment on this particular scene; Anne Rudloff Stanton, author of the most recent detailed study of the manuscript, identified this element in the picture as an altar.12 Yet the caption aids in identifying this object: it is the ‘seat’ from which David ‘descended’ at the moment of his repentance.

The monarch’s chair in this drawing is singular in both form and decoration. Nearly all other chairs occupied by biblical rulers and leaders in the Psalter preface conform to two types of seat common in Gothic art: draped or cushioned, backless benches, and low-armed or armless chairs with straight backs and horizontal tops occasionally adorned with small pinacles.13

11 This transcription of the caption prepared by Delbert Russell, Distinguished Professor of French Emeritus, University of Waterloo, in the context of our collaborative work on the Psalter preface; English translation prepared by Russell with contributions by the author. I am extremely grateful to Professor Russell for his generosity and expertise. Missing text is enclosed in square brackets; abbreviations are silently expanded, the acute accent is added to final tonic -e, and initial letters capitalized for ‘David’ and ‘Deu’.

12 See Warner, Queen Mary’s Psalter, pp. 21-2 for the David scenes, and p. 87 for his transcription and translation of the caption. For her analysis, see Stanton, Queen Mary Psalter, p. 179.

13 For examples of the former type of seat, see Royal MS. 2 B. VII, ff 17, 19v (top), 22v (top), 38 (bottom), 38v (bottom), 50v (bottom), 51v (top), 54v (top), 59 (bottom), 63v (bottom), and 64v (top); for the latter, see ff. 23v (top), 24v (top), 50 (top), and 66 (bottom).
Although they may differ in the odd detail, most of these artifacts are fairly uniform, even generic, in appearance, and one assumes that the artist executed them by rote.

Not so the chair in the scene of David’s reproof and repentance, which clearly was drawn with considerable care (figs 1, top and 1 detail). The chair is rendered as if viewed frontally, and the artist applied light brown wash to the area of the seat in order to suggest its recession into depth. A bulb-like finial adorns the apex of the chair’s gabled back, which features posts topped by pinnacles at either side; pinnacles also adorn the posts at the corners of the seat. The interior of the back is decorated with bar tracery that takes the form of a pair of lancets topped by an oculus, enclosed within a larger arch. The head of each lancet contains delicate tracery forming a trefoil, and the oculus encloses a quatrefoil. While the drawing certainly does not match its referent in all of its details, it appears that the Queen Mary Master may have intended to evoke here an artifact of signal importance in the religious and political history of England, and the oldest dated piece of English furniture: St Edward’s Chair.

St Edward’s Chair was commissioned in 1296 by Edward I as a form of ‘trophy case’ to enclose the Stone of Scone, the block of red sandstone used in the coronations of the kings of Scotland that Edward captured during his successful military campaign against the Scots that year (figs 2a and b). As Paul Binski and most recently Warwick Rodwell have outlined, Edward apparently conceived the chair, now commonly known as the Coronation Chair, as a gift to Westminster Abbey. The initial plan was to produce a chair of bronze, and in 1296, Adam, the ‘king’s goldsmith’, made a wooden chair that was intended to serve as a model for the bronze seat. This project was halted in 1297, however, and sometime c. 1298-99, Master Walter of Durham, ‘the king’s painter’, executed the gilded oaken chair that survives today, along with a step or dais and canopy, made in 1300-01; neither of these accoutrements nor the chair’s original base are extant, and their form and design are unknown. Installed by 1307 in St Edward’s Chapel in Westminster Abbey next to the shrine of Edward the Confessor, as is confirmed in an inventory compiled that year, the chair was lavishly ornamented with tooled, gilded decoration, polychromy and enamel inlay, as detailed investigations by Rodwell et al. undertaken in the context of the artifact’s recent restoration have affirmed; the 1307 inventory, which is concerned principally with the Stone of Scone and which mentions the chair, is discussed at greater length below. The gilded interior of the chair’s back showed a seated king, probably Edward the Confessor, holding a sceptre, his feet resting on a recumbent lion. The interiors of the right and left arms featured respectively ‘barbed quatrefoils’ displaying grotesques along with a mounted knight and a green man, and birds of various species perched amid oak leaves. Undulating foliage filled the blind tracery of the exteriors of the arms, and tooled, gilded images of standing kings inhabited the upper register of tracery arches on the back.

To the modern eye, the Queen Mary Master’s drawing may seem only a distant reflection of the chair’s actual appearance. Yet the artist appears to have approached the task of rendering his subject in a manner consonant with medieval notions of copying or ‘portraying’, the goal of which was not to reproduce exactly every feature of the original, but rather to selectively and

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16 Binski, *Westminster Abbey*, p. 138; and see Rodwell, *Coronation Chair*, pp. 2, 18, 19, 63, 64, 72, 106, 121, 124, 240, 245, 247 and 249 for the original base of the chair, and pp. 15, 39, 68, 101, 136, 150, 207, 238 and 261 for the dais and canopy.

17 See Rodwell, *Coronation Chair*, chap. 5, pp. 45-75, for the chair’s design and construction, and the analysis by Marie Louise Sauerberg in chap. 6, pp. 77-104, for its polychromy, gilding and other decoration.
meaningfully ‘transfer’ and reformulate a few of its most important elements.\textsuperscript{18} The tracery on the chair as rendered on the page appears to conflate and condense into a single bay some of the main tracery forms on the various parts of the actual chair, including the open quatrefoils on the bottom grille (which originally contained shields), the blind trefoil arches on the arms and lower back, and the bifora-with-oculus units on the back’s upper register, the enlargement of these forms in the drawing serving to enhance their legibility and ease of recognition (compare fig. 1 detail and figs 2a and b). The Queen Mary Master’s depiction of the chair departs from its ostensible subject in other respects. The artist rendered as round arches the gently pointed lancets on the upper register of the chair’s back. In addition, the illuminator transposed to the interior of the seat back the principal microarchitecture of the chair’s exterior, an artistic choice that evinces the ‘recognition value’ of the tracery within the chair’s overall decorative programme. It is possible that the Queen Mary Master came to his conception of the chair second-hand, as it were, working from verbal instructions. On account of the deliberateness with which the artist appears to have rendered his subject and evoked its main decorative details, however, it seems equally possible that the illuminator actually saw the chair at some point and worked from memory, perhaps with the aid of a sketch.

This apparent evocation of St Edward’s Chair in the Queen Mary Psalter is potentially significant in several respects. It predates by as much as two decades or more the next earliest surviving image that is accepted by most writers as a representation of the chair, found in the miniature of the coronation of an English king in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS. 20, f. 68 (fig. 3).\textsuperscript{19} This richly illuminated composite volume, made in the later 1330s or the 1340s for the Cobham barons of Kent, contains the Latin Apocalypse with a parallel Anglo-Norman French metrical version and prose commentary, the Anglo-Norman French Descent of St Paul into Hell, and the first form of the Fourth Recension of the Coronation Order in Anglo-Norman French, the Latin original having been ‘compiled shortly before its use in the Coronation of Edward II’ in late February 1308: the miniature on f. 68, ‘the most detailed picture of an English Coronation to survive from medieval England’, as Nigel Morgan described it, opens the Coronation Order.\textsuperscript{20} The Cobhams’ interest in including in their book the text of the Coronation Order with its richly painted and gilded illustration likely stemmed from a desire to commemorate a proud aspect of the family’s history: along with the other barons who were Wardens of the Cinque Ports, the Cobham lords participated in the coronation ceremony as canopy-bearers, probably Henry, First Baron Cobham for Edward II and his son John in 1328 for Edward III.\textsuperscript{21} The chair occupied by the monarch in this miniature is a more elaborate piece of furniture than the one in the Queen Mary Master’s picture. Nonetheless, it, too, differs from the actual chair, especially in its base, which includes a ‘blind arcade of trefoil-headed arches’ below the level of the seat not found on the extant chair, an element that may derive from the representation of the throne on Henry III’s great seal of 1259.\textsuperscript{22} The tracery that enriches St Edward’s Chair, and the


\textsuperscript{22} Rodwell, \textit{Coronation Chair}, p. 18; and for Henry III’s great seal, see ibid., p. 20, fig. 26.
bulb-like finial that once crowned its gabled back, are prominent features of the chair as depicted in the Cobhams’ book, as they are in the Queen Mary Master’s drawing.\textsuperscript{23}

While the chair portrayed in Royal MS. 2 B. VII is not an archaeologically faithful record of its subject, it nevertheless may offer evidence concerning some of the now uncertain details of the planned or missing decoration of St Edward’s Chair. It has been hypothesized that the oculus within the gable on the back of the actual chair was once intended to enclose a blind or pierced quatrefoil, or that it once may have contained, or was intended to contain, ‘shaped glass inserts’ set in putty.\textsuperscript{24} Perhaps the quatrefoil within the oculus in the Queen Mary Master’s drawing reflects this aspect of the chair’s decoration, never executed or subsequently lost (fig. 1 detail).

The captioned picture in the Queen Mary Psalter may also contribute to our understanding of the functions of St Edward’s Chair in its early fourteenth-century ritual setting. As James Cameron has recently observed, in the 1307 inventory confirming the chair’s placement in St Edward’s Chapel, this artifact is referred to not as a sedes, the term used in the thirteenth century for royal thrones, or indeed as a thronus, but rather as a cathedra, the word employed to describe the chairs occupied by archbishops and bishops.\textsuperscript{25} This supports the notion that among the chair’s original functions was its use as a seat by celebrant priests officiating at mass in St Edward’s Chapel.\textsuperscript{26}

When St Edward’s Chair acquired the function for which it is now best known, its use as the Coronation Chair, is still a matter of debate. While the chair is first documented as having been used in the English coronation ceremony only in 1399, for the coronation of Henry Bolingbroke as Henry IV, many scholars believe that it may have served as the Coronation Chair as early as 1308, for the crowning of Edward II. The text of the 1307 inventory, which, as noted above, refers to the Stone of Scone, also alludes to the chair’s use in the coronation rite, but the pertinent portion of the text was struck through at an unknown date:

\begin{quote}
It [the Stone] was sent by order of the king to the Abbey of Westminster to be placed there next to the shrine of St Edward, in a certain gilded wooden chair which the King ordered to be made so that the Kings of England and Scotland should sit on it on the day of their own Coronation [words struck through] to the perpetual memory of the matter.
(Mittebatur per preceptum Regis usque Abbatiam de Westmonasterio ad assedendum ibidem juxta feretrum Sancti Edwardi, in qudam cathedra lignea deaurata quam Rex fieri precepit ut Reges Angliae et Scotiae infra sederent ad perpetuam rei memoriam.)\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

Scholars disagree as to the implications of both this text and its emendation. Some writers have adduced the deletion of the relevant portion of the text as refuting the idea of the chair’s early association with the coronation ceremony, while others have maintained that, regardless of its later deletion, the very fact that the text as originally written refers to the coronation,
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confirms ‘the concept of a coronation chair as early as 1307’. The language of the Anglo-Norman French caption for the Queen Mary Master’s drawing appears to support the notion that an association among the chair, the coronation rite and the monarch obtained at the time of the Psalter’s facture, and that these associations were known or made plain to the text Compiler and artist: the caption describes the chair as ‘soun see’, that is, ‘his’ – David’s – ‘seat’ or throne (fig. 1, top).

Widening the focus beyond this drawing may help to elucidate the significance of this image within the Psalter’s larger programme. In fact, St Edward’s Chair is not the only artifact associated with the English coronation ceremony that is evoked in the Old Testament preface of Royal MS 2 B. VII. In a drawing in the Joseph cycle in the bottom register on f. 15v, an episode enriched with apocryphal elements, the Egyptian pharaoh’s richly robed ‘seneschal’, who had purchased Joseph from Joseph’s envious brothers, brings the youth into the royal presence, while a servant, at left, hastens forward with a staff (figs 4 and 4 detail): pharaoh bestows the staff on Joseph a few episodes later, in the top register on f. 17v, when he makes Joseph ‘seneschal of all his land’ (E le Roy li feet seneschal de tute sa tere). The enthroned pharaoh, or ‘king of Egypt’ (Roy de egypte), as he is styled in the Anglo-Norman French caption on f. 15v, is shown holding the dove-topped virga, a key element of the English royal regalia, as he receives Joseph into his service (fig. 4 detail).

In contrast to the sceptre, which was associated with the monarch’s temporal duties and actions, the virga or ‘rod of virtue and equity’ related to the monarch’s ‘personal, moral virtues’ and to the ‘ideal of kingship’. During the coronation rite the archbishop placed the virga in the monarch’s left hand, and as he did so he offered the new king the example of biblical, Davidic kingship to guide his rule. Thus, as it does in the Coronation Order, this singular depiction of the dove-topped virga in the Psalter preface appears to act as a temporal bridge. Held by the ‘king’ of Egypt, the rod seemingly offers pharaoh to the Psalter’s fourteenth-century reader-viewer(s) as an example of sage governance for his appointment of Joseph as his chief steward, and, through Joseph’s wise administration, his handling of the famine that struck Egypt (Gen. 47.13-26). These events are encapsulated in the Psalter preface in the bottom register of f. 17v, where Joseph supervises the filling of the granaries. The comparison between pharaoh and the English king finds a parallel in the account of the agrarian crisis of c. 1315-22 in the London chronicle, the Vita Edwardi Secundi, whose anonymous author, probably a well educated, politically engaged clerk, praised the pharaoh of the Joseph story for his exemption of the priests’ lands from taxation during the Egyptian famine and criticized Edward II for failing to emulate his biblical model.


Anglo-Norman Dictionary, http://www.anglo-norman.net/gate/, s.v. ‘see, sé, sed; sié, sied; sez, siez; scé, cee’.

For Royal MS 2 B. VII, f. 17v (top), see http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IID=53977.

The analysis of the Joseph scenes that follows draws and expands on Smith, ‘History, Typology and Homily’ (as in n. 10).

Smith, ‘History, Typology and Homily’, p. 149.

For Royal MS 2 B. VII, f. 17v (bottom), see http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IID=53978.

of this visual reference to the *virga* was almost certainly purposeful, and would have resonated with representations of this object in other works at or associated with Westminster and London, including the thirteenth-century mural of the coronation of Edward the Confessor at the head of the king’s bed in the Painted Chamber in the Palace of Westminster, illuminated chronicles, royal seals and government documents.\(^{35}\) It is intriguing to note that pharaoh’s throne in the drawing on f. 15v appears to burst into bloom, as if in affirmation of the ruler’s sage kingship, its foliate decoration perhaps meant to evoke in a general way the gilded crocketing that adorns St Edward’s Chair (fig. 4 detail, figs 2a and b). The Joseph story itself had currency in the English royal ambient, and from significantly earlier than the early fourteenth century: in 1238, Henry III ordered that scenes from the Joseph narrative be painted on the wall above and behind the seat of the king (a tergo ultra sedem regis) in the ‘small chapel’, the oratory of St Laurence, by the king’s chamber in the Palace of Westminster; in 1250, Henry had Joseph scenes depicted in his new chapel at Winchester Castle.\(^{36}\)

What specific scenes from the Joseph story were represented in these royal chapels, what aspects of the biblical narrative they may have emphasized, and the nature of their message are unknown. But to return to the picture that is the principal focus of this essay (fig. 1, top), Nathan’s role as David’s adviser and rebuker as portrayed in the Queen Mary Psalter also received topical treatment in an earlier English monument of signal importance: in the paired genealogy of Christ windows originally in the north clerestory of Christ Church Cathedral, Canterbury, it is the prophet and proto-Archbishop of Canterbury Nathan, not his counterpart, King David, who, uniquely among the extant biblical figures in the clerestory’s glazing programme, carries the dove-topped *virga* (figs. 5a and b).\(^{37}\) This pair of lancets thus constitutes a ‘pointed statement of the supremacy of ecclesiastical authority in relation to the monarchy’ that must have resonated strongly with the windows’ monastic viewers – and well beyond the conflict between Thomas à Becket and Henry II.\(^{38}\)

Beyond their mutual inclusion of visual references to artifacts associated with the English coronation rite, what do these two episodes in Royal MS. 2 B. VII – pharaoh receiving the young Joseph from his seneschal and making him his steward, Nathan censuring a repentant David (fig. 4, bottom and fig. 1, top) – have in common? Royal judgement, good and ill, seems to be a key theme of both scenes. In addition, however, both pictures appear to emphasize the role and importance of wise counsel and councillors in relation to royal authority and in ensuring the...

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38 Smith, ‘History, Typology and Homily’, p. 149.
good governance of the realm. The importance of wise counsel and the necessity that monarchs heed it are apparent themes of several scenes in the David sequence, as Stanton observed. The interpretation offered here of these two pictures is supported by their compositional details. Pharaoh’s seneschal, not pharaoh himself, occupies the centre of the Joseph scene, and it is on his seneschal, not Joseph, that the monarch gazes attentively as he takes Joseph by the hand (fig. 4 detail). Similarly, it is Nathan’s gesture of rebuke, isolated against the bare parchment, which occupies the centre of the picture of David’s reproof (fig. 1, top). And while David kneels alone in the left half of the drawing, Nathan stands at the head of a phalanx of men who witness and endorse the prophet’s censure of their errant ruler.

As is well known, in large part in consequence of his tendency to promote and rely on unpopular favourites as well as his poor judgement and perceived abuses, relations between Edward II and his barons and clergy were frequently contentious. This was the case from even before Edward’s coronation, when conflicts erupted between Edward and his magnates over Edward’s promotion of Piers Gaveston, and between Edward and the monks of Westminster over the election of their new abbot, among other issues. The former conflict in particular is held to have motivated the introduction into the Coronation Oath of a new clause in which the king swore ‘to grant and promise to keep and defend the laws and customs that the people of the realm would choose’, and that served to buttress the Declaration of 1308 ‘which validated the reform movement against the king’. A string of political crises early in the reign precipitated the appointment in March 1310 of the Ordainers, those prelates and nobles of the realm who ‘were to have full powers to reform the state both of the kingdom and of the king’s household’. Indeed, as Seymour Phillips notes, citing the account in the Vita Edwardi Secundi, during the roughly three weeks preceding the Ordainers’ appointment, the conflict between Edward and his barons had become so heated that the barons accused the king of ‘breaking his coronation oath and threatened him with deposition’. As the author of the Vita puts it, the barons insisted that ‘unless the king granted their requests they would not have him for king, nor keep the fealty that they had sworn to him, especially since he himself was [not] keeping the oath which he had taken at his coronation, since in law and common sense there is this reservation, that with the breaker of faith faith may be broken.’ The Ordinances, issued in August 1311, forced Edward to implement wide-ranging reforms designed to curb royal power and prerogatives in favour of a baronial council, and were confirmed during subsequent crises in 1316, 1318 and 1321. Moreover, the rise of new royal favourites, the much-hated Despensers, precipitated the composition c. 1319-21 of a treatise on the office of the steward, which stipulated that it was ‘the Steward’s special duty to intervene against the King’s evil counsellors’. In 1321, as the Vita Edwardi Secundi records, his magnates apparently again threatened Edward with deposition; and of course, in January 1327, Edward was deposed and his son was crowned Edward III.

The abbreviated chronology of events presented here for the period c. 1310-22 in particular overlaps the style-generated dating of c. 1310-20 assigned to the Queen Mary

39 Stanton, Queen Mary Psalter, pp. 181, 184, 186.
40 For these events see Seymour Phillips, Edward II (New Haven, CT, and London, 2010), pp. 8-9, 120-4, 125-38.
44 ‘… nisi rex petita concederet, iam non ipsum pro rege habèrent, nec fidelitatem iuratum sibi seruarent maxime cum ipse iusurandum in sua coronacione prestitum (non) seruaret, cum in lege et naturali racione caueatur, quod “frangenti fidem fides frangatur eidem”; Childs (ed. and trans.), Vita Edwardi Secundi, pp. 18-21.
46 Vita Edwardi Secundi, pp. 192-3; Phillips, Edward II, pp. 387, 522.
Psalter. The manuscript might have been produced at any time during this period, or perhaps shortly thereafter: 47 fresh examination of all of the Queen Mary group manuscripts from the codicological, scribal, stylistic and iconographical perspectives might produce new insights into their dating as well as that of Royal MS. 2 B. VII, among other questions. Regardless of the precise date of the Psalter’s making, however, the images in it of an attentive Egyptian monarch, virga in hand, served by a sage seneschal (fig. 4 detail), and a repentant Israelite king ‘descend[ing] from his seat’ and humbly accepting his adviser’s reproof (fig. 1, top), are very much in line with the political concerns that dominated the reign of Edward II, and they were likely produced with these concerns in mind. By virtue of their topical treatment of biblical history, these images in the preface of Royal MS. 2 B. VII would have resonated strongly with the experience of any highly placed member of the English court circle. Nonetheless, it is still congenial to imagine them, and the manuscript as a whole, as intended for the eyes of a royal reader-viewer. The Old Testament preface could have functioned as an exceptionally lavish speculum principis for the young Edward III, as Stanton suggested. 48 Equally, the message of these carefully tailored captioned pictures regarding the nature and limits of royal authority would have been meaningful to Edward II at any point during his tumultuous reign. As pointedly as does the Coronation Order, the image in the Psalter preface of a chastened king vacating ‘his seat’ and prayerfully ‘submit[ting] himself’ to his councillor’s rebuke offered its beholder(s) a model of kingship firmly based, as the Anglo-Norman French version of the Order puts it, on ‘la humblété de David’ – the humility, or meekness, of David. 49

47 Stanton, *Queen Mary Psalter*, p. 240, suggested 1322 as a possible outer date for the production of the Psalter.
Fig. 1. Royal MS. 2 B. VII, f. 58. David ‘descend[s] from his seat’ and is reproved by Nathan (top); Amnon rapes Tamar (bottom).
St Edward’s Chair in the Queen Mary Psalter

Fig. 1, detail. Royal MS. 2 B. VII, f. 58, detail. David’s ‘seat’.
St Edward’s Chair in the Queen Mary Psalter

Figs 2a and b. St Edward’s Chair: three-quarter view; back (after 2013 restoration).
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Fig. 3. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS. 20, f. 68. Coronation of an English king. Reproduced by permission of the Master and Fellows of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.
Fig. 4. Royal MS. 2 B. VII, fol. 15v. Joseph’s brothers present Joseph’s coat to Jacob (top); the seneschal presents Joseph to Pharaoh (bottom).
St Edward’s Chair in the Queen Mary Psalter

Fig. 4, detail. Royal MS. 2 B. VII, fol. 15v (bottom). The seneschal presents Joseph to Pharaoh.
Figs 5a and b. David; Nathan. Christ Church Cathedral, Canterbury, originally north clerestory.
Photos: Robert Harding / Alamy Stock Photo (for David); Nathan Peter Barritt / Alamy Stock Photo (for Nathan).