Introduction to Alcuin of York’s *De Ratione Animae*

Alcuin of York revitalized learning in Charlemagne’s court. He stands as one of the greatest minds of the early Middle Ages who helped spearhead the Carolingian Renaissance. Alcuin was such a prolific writer, that another digital humanities project studying the evolution of Latin compared him with Cicero, Pliny, and Augustine. [[1]](#footnote-0) It comes as no surprise then that Aelfric’s manuscript would contain the writings of his fellow Englishman.

One of Alcuin’s works in Aelfric’s collection is his moral treatise, *De Ratione Animae*, and is a current TASP digitalization project. Alcuin’s theology in this work is rooted in St. Augustine’s theology, which carries influence from Neo-Platonism (a philosophical school founded by Plotinus.) For instance, Alcuin finds a tripartite division of the soul with a concupiscence, a rationality, and an irascibility.[[2]](#footnote-1) This resembles the tripartite division of the soul in Plato’s Republic. Alcuin’s treatise demonstrates a mastery of logic. For example, he writes that if every man loves the good, and God is the *summum bonum*, then it is natural that men should love God.[[3]](#footnote-2) A mastery of logic is to be expected from a man who revived the trivium (grammar, logic, and rhetoric). Alcuin was also a poet who wrote several sequences, one of which can be found in his *De Ratione Animae*.[[4]](#footnote-3)

The digital humanities today are carrying on Alcuin’s mission of transmitting knowledge down through the ages. The Carolingian Renaissance saw the development of Carolingian minuscule to make reading easier. Projects in the digital humanities (such as this one) are using XML to make the reading of manuscripts to modern eyes equally accessible.

1. Freni, Giulia. “The First Steps of Digital Humanities: A Review of Tara L. Andrews and Caroline Macé’s Analysis of Ancient and Medieval Texts and Manuscripts: Digital Approaches.” *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (2021). <https://doi.org/http://digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/15/3/000546/000546.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Alcuin, De Ratione Animae, line 27 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Ibid., 11-12 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Ibid., lines 285-328 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)