

THE ENIGMATIC ALFRED JEWEL

A POWERFUL PLAYER IN ALFREDIAN REFORM

IN THE LIVED experience of Alfredian reform, there was no neat division between different kinds of agency. Thing-power and patterns of behaviour frequently intersected and subtly reinforced each other. In this chapter, I collapse the boundary between social practices and assemblages that I have previously maintained. Assemblages and social practices are organic phenomena which develop and decay, emerge and evolve through time. They are essentially contingent and temporal. I argue that the Jewel's agency increased over time, as the social practices in which it was embedded became established and as the assemblage of which it formed part evolved.

In the Prelude, I argued that the Jewel is an *æstel*, referred to in the Prose Preface to the *Pastoral Care*. According to Asser, Alfred was an innovative designer, sufficiently confident to instruct his craftsmen and to commission objects to his own design.¹ Designs such as the candle clock and the horn lantern were novel and carefully reasoned. Significantly, they served a practical purpose; they solved a problem.² In the Alfredian canon, usefulness is a recurring theme, a laudable quality.³ The lexical rarity of the word *æstel* is consistent with novelty, an Alfredian creation.⁴ There is no direct evidence of Alfredian innovation in design or a florescence of creative craftsmanship directly attributable to his patronage. However, there is solid evidence for a corpus of distinctive metalwork datable to his reign.⁵ This provides some support for Asser's comments. While Asser's *Life* was undoubtedly an encomium, his portrayal of Alfred as a designer of novel items for practical use is not part of the standard early medieval characterization of good kings and has no counterpart in the Carolingian literature.

Pratt draws parallels between Alfred's deliberate creation of a coterie of scholarly advisors and his patronage of foreign craftsmen who were encouraged to take up residence at his court. Asser's comments provide the first

1 Asser, chap. 76; Webster, "Art of Alfred," 48.

2 Asser, chap. 104.

3 Faulkner, *Wealth*, 3.

4 Webster, "Aedificia nova," 83.

5 Keynes, "Alfred and the Kingdom," 33.

written evidence for formal West Saxon court patronage of the arts.⁶ Alfredian patronage was carefully thought through: according to Asser, Alfred set aside one-seventh of his annual revenue from taxes and taxes-in-kind to support craftsmen at his court, which was a substantial sum.⁷ Gift-giving as a means of recruiting and retaining a lively court was not new; it is well attested in the Carolingian court, for example.⁸ But in Alfred's case, we see the king implementing a formal scheme, an administrative mechanism, which suggests that to Alfred, ensuring certainty of access to high quality craftsmen was more than an incidental aspect of courtly life.

The deliberate steps which Alfred took to provide for a pool of exceptional talent at his disposal accords with the impression of him as a king who thought about and planned for what he needed to achieve his political goals. There was purpose in his novel arrangement. Alfred's band of scholars helped the king to express his ideological meaning through his translations. Alfred's craftsmen could also help the king to express his ideas in ways that were perhaps complementary and related.⁹

Purposeful creativity underlies the frequent use of the activity of building as a metaphor for acquiring Christian wisdom. This is a recurring metaphor in both the Old and New Testaments (Prov. 9:1; Matt. 7:24–25; 1 Cor. 3:9–23). It was also Solomonic (3 Kings 9:1), a recurring point of reference for "Alfred." The metaphor of building is central to the Preface to the *Soliloquies*, which I have discussed. Asser described the additions to Alfred's *enchriridion* in terms of constructing a building.¹⁰ It is noteworthy that Asser also described Alfred's designs as *aedificia*, a word normally associated with buildings rather than portable objects.¹¹ He may have intended to emphasize that these were not just precious objects, but objects which had been carefully designed to serve "edificatory or instructive" purposes.¹²

Wærferth, in his translation of Gregory's *Dialogues*, translated "aedificatio" not as "getimberness," its most common OE substitute, but as "to ure

6 Pratt, "Persuasion and Invention," 190.

7 Asser, chap. 101.

8 See, for example, Notker, *Deeds of Emperor Charles*, bk. 2, chap. 21, in Noble, *Charlemagne*, 117.

9 Pratt, "Persuasion and Invention," 190.

10 Asser, chap. 88.

11 Asser, chaps. 76, 91, 101. For a discussion of the term *aedificia*, see K & L, 249–50n114; Webster, "*Aedificia nova*," 79–80.

12 Dushman, "Galba Psalter," 132–33; Pratt, "Persuasion and Invention," 199–200.

lare getrymnesse" (strengthening to our learning).¹³ The emphasis on learning and teaching was a major theme in Alfredian ideology. Both Wærferth and Asser may well have been aware of Bede's *Exegetica genuina*, in which he comments on Proverbs 9:1: "Wisdom has built her house." Treschow suggests that Bede's unusual use of the imperfect tense *aedificabit*—"sapientia mulier aedificabit domum suam"—was intended to emphasize that constructing the edifice of wisdom is an ongoing project, an individual responsibility for each Christian.¹⁴

What, then, of the objection that there is only one Jewel? Alfred's Prose Preface makes it clear that he commissioned an *æstel* per manuscript. Hinton argues that the Jewel and the Minster Lovell jewel were created at the same workshop, which suggests that the Minster Lovell jewel is also an *æstel*.¹⁵ The other, perhaps now missing, *æstels* might at some stage have been sold off or reduced to their component parts. There are two principal contexts in which this might be likely. The first is in Æthelred's reign, when the church institutions were obliged to help pay off the Vikings; they sold items adorning the altar as well as other moveable items.¹⁶ The second is centuries later, on the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII.

Alternatively, the Jewel might have been intended to surpass all other *æstels* and was perhaps commissioned with a specific recipient in mind. Alfred names Plegmund, Grimbald, Asser, and John the Old Saxon as providing great assistance with the translation of the *Pastoral Care*. Grimbald, Asser, and John the Old Saxon were not native English speakers. This has implications for their role in translating the text into the vernacular, although they were obviously well-equipped to explain difficult passages in the Latin to Alfred. They also spent long periods of time away from the court.¹⁷ That leaves Plegmund, the Mercian, as the principal assistant to Alfred in the day-to-day task of translation. Plegmund became archbishop of Canterbury roughly contemporaneously with the dissemination of the *Pastoral Care*. Pope Formosus acknowledged Plegmund's importance and zeal.¹⁸ Anlezark suggests that Plegmund may have been the author of the metrical Epilogue to the *Pastoral Care*.¹⁹ He was therefore presumably both

13 Dekker, "King Alfred's Translation," 41.

14 Treschow, "Wisdom's Land," 260.

15 Hinton, *Alfred Jewel*, 32.

16 Hearne, *Hemingi chartularium ecclesiae Wigorniensis*, 1:248–49.

17 Schreiber, "Searoðonca hord," 196.

18 *EHD*, no. 227, 890–92.

19 Anlezark, "Drawing Alfredian Waters," 241.

eminent and likely to have been an assiduous advocate of Alfredian ideology. If the Jewel was intended to surpass all other *æstel*s, then Plegmund would be a logical recipient. This, of course, is speculation—but it is plausible.

I turn now to consider the close connection between an *æstel* and the *Pastoral Care*, which is set out explicitly in the Prose Preface. The following sections focus on reception of the Jewel: who would have handled and seen it, the contexts in which they may have done so, and how the Jewel may have spurred them to act in accordance with their king's wishes. I argue that the agency of the Jewel expanded significantly over time, as Alfredian ideology was disseminated and imbibed, and as Alfred's people began to self-identify as a distinct community, the *Angelcynn*.

The *æstel* and the *Pastoral Care*

"Alfred" notes the expensive gift of an *æstel* in the Prose Preface to the *Pastoral Care*. He ordered that the *æstel* remain with the book:

Ond ic bebiode on Godes naman ðæt nan mon ðone *æstel* from ðære bec ne do, ne ða boc from ðæm mynstre...ic wolde ðætte hie ealneg æt ðære stowe wæren, buton se biscep hie mid him habban wille, oððe hio hwær to læne sie, oððe hwa oðre bi write.

(And I direct in God's name that no one remove the pointer from the book, nor the book from the minster...I desire that they (the book and the *æstel*) always remain in that location, unless the bishop wishes to have it with him, or it is somewhere on loan, or someone is making a copy of it.)²⁰

The book and the *æstel* must stay together whether they are in their usual place or elsewhere. This also suggests that the *æstel* and book are readily separable. The church is intended to be their usual home, but "Alfred" does not stipulate that they must be locked in the church treasury. Indeed, the implication is that book and *æstel* are to be kept readily available for use. They may be used by the bishop outside the church, or loaned to others, or provided for copying by others. This provides some important clues about the contexts in which the book and *æstel* were to circulate in Alfred's extended kingdom.

The Prose Preface makes it clear that the *æstel* was intended to be used with the book. If this direction was obeyed, then whenever the *Pastoral Care* was consulted (and that includes the prefaces), then the Jewel would have been in play. This suggests a context for the Jewel which is very different to its current setting. Context is crucial to understanding how an object does.

²⁰ *Pastoral Care*, 8–10.

The Jewel's agency emerged from its associations with people, ideas, and other things, and its affordances influenced the kind of connections which could be made.

The Affordances of the Jewel

The Jewel's teardrop shape and bevelled sides facilitate a secure grasp on the Jewel even as you move your hand around. If the tube held a pointer, then the Jewel could be used to keep place while reading aloud a text, or it could be pointed at people or other things for emphasis, for dramatic flourish. The flat base of the Jewel allowed the Jewel to be laid flat on an open book if the book was put down temporarily during discussion, or balanced on a knee during a reading. The Jewel's white crystal had connotations of Christ-like purity.²¹ The fretwork was gold, a precious metal frequently used in sacred texts and to adorn passages on church walls. And of course, there was the watching cloisonné figure, with its outsized eyes. As Faulkner puts it: "A thing with eyes is a thing with power: we look at it, and it looks back."²²

Modern scholars argue that the Jewel reified Alfredian ideas with a new visual vocabulary.²³ Pratt and Webster see strong parallels between the Jewel and the Fuller brooch, in the emphasis in both objects on the importance of sight in the quest for wisdom.²⁴ This is not the physical sense of sight, but the mind's eyes. *Modes eagan* was the conduit through which Christian wisdom was accessed and understood. However, at the start of Alfredian reform, as Alfredian ideology began to be articulated and disseminated, it is unlikely that the cloisonné figure was universally interpreted as materializing that ideology.

At the start of Alfredian reform, the number of people who interpreted the cloisonné figure as a personification of Wisdom or a representation of *modes eagan* was probably small. People who had collaborated with the king in the development of his ideas and objectives, or who were aware of those discussions, might well have so interpreted the figure. People who were unfamiliar with Alfredian thinking may have initially interpreted the figure differently. They may have interpreted the figure as Christ the just judge, or as their king, the gift-giver. There was value for Alfred in either interpretation; either interpretation would catch an audience's attention.

²¹ Hinton, *Alfred Jewel*, 22.

²² Faulkner, *Wealth*, 55.

²³ Webster, "Art of Alfred," 56, 81; Karkov, *Art of Anglo-Saxon England*, 214, 216–17.

²⁴ Webster, "Art of Alfred," 65–66; Pratt, "Persuasion and Invention," 214–16.

Alfred was probably sufficiently astute to have intended a deliberate ambiguity, to have allowed for the possibility of multiple, and changing, interpretations. He may have deliberately chosen a design which allowed people to interpret and then reinterpret the figure as they became acquainted with Alfredian ideology.²⁵ For those familiar with that ideology, the Jewel may have reinforced important themes in Alfredian reform from the start. For others, a dawning understanding of Alfredian ideology might well have caused them to look at the Jewel afresh, for the Jewel to prompt them to think of Solomonic wisdom, what it might mean and how to achieve it. Much might depend upon the “expectant eye” of the beholder.²⁶

Those who saw the Jewel being used with the *Pastoral Care* may have included individuals within the orbit of the recipient of the Jewel (lesser clergy, junior royal officials, local administrators, and household members, including fostered youths). Other ealdormen at assemblies and other important meetings, and those to whom the book was lent for study and copying, would also have seen the Jewel being used, as sections of the *Pastoral Care* were consulted and discussed. We should therefore not assume that contemporary interpretation of the figure remained constant, and we should allow for the possibility that as Alfredian ideology was discussed and acted upon, the connection between the Jewel and important tenets of that ideology became stronger and more obvious.

There is a similar process of agency enhancing over time in the Jewel’s speaking object inscription. The inscription on the Jewel tapped into the Anglo-Saxon norm of the speaking object. What the Jewel says, in the first-person voice, connects the artifact with its giver, Alfred. I acknowledge that there were other individuals called Alfred with the wealth to commission this object. For example, there is the ealdorman from Surrey who, with his wife Wærburh, ransomed the Codex Aureus Stockholm from Viking raiders.²⁷

King Alfred used various titles, such as *Westseaxna cyning* (king of the West Saxon), and *Rex Anglorum* (king of the English). Like other Anglo-Saxon kings before him, Alfred generally used the Latin *rex* on his coins, and an expansive title in documents.²⁸ The Jewel’s inscription does carry a signifier of royal status—the cross at the commencement of the inscription. The cross has parallels in contemporary coins and seals.²⁹ Anglo-Saxon coins,

25 Alfred was in the habit of instructing his craftsmen: Asser, chap. 76.

26 Onians, *Art, Culture*, 97–98.

27 Breay and Story, *Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, catalogue item 58.

28 Naismith, *Money and Power*, 80; Keynes, “Alfred and the Mercians.”

29 Hinton, *Alfred Jewel*, 11.

with one very limited exception (the coins of “Sihttric comes”) were only ever issued in the name of the king, and manifested royal control and authority.³⁰ “+Ælfred” expressed the king’s name in a form frequently used in other displays of royal power. It is comparable to the two (roughly) contemporary finger rings with inscriptions interpreted as “King Æthelwulf” and “Queen Æthelswith” respectively, which are said to be royal gifts or symbols of delegated authority.³¹

Given the size of the Jewel, there is very limited space for an inscription; even the small word *rex* could only be used at the expense of another word. It is perfectly possible to suggest a phrase which emphasizes the status of the person who commissioned or gave the Jewel, or which identifies the Jewel as a gift. Due weight should be to the deliberate selection of phrase. There is no reason to assume that Alfred was constrained to use particular words, or that the words were immaterial. It is reasonable to assume that Alfred deliberately chose an expression which highlighted the most important aspects of the Jewel, an expression which would make sense to the recipient of the Jewel and to those who saw it. The phrase chosen resonated with the opening words of the Prose Preface of the *Pastoral Care* and with the talking books of the Alfredian verse prefaces. The cross attached to the name Alfred was a sufficient cue of royal status. After all, the recipient of the Jewel was hardly likely to be confused about the identity of the giver. If the *æstel* and book circulated together, then an audience was also likely to connect the Alfred of the Jewel with the Alfred who speaks in the Prose Preface. The absence of a royal title in the inscription is not a fatal flaw in the identification of King Alfred as the Ælfred inscribed on the Jewel.

The phrase itself, “+Ælfred mec heht gewyrcaþ” (Alfred ordered me to be made) was a direct citation of Alfred’s role in commissioning the *æstel*. The inscription would have layers of meaning to those who were at the forefront of implementing Alfredian reform. To them, the phrase could refer to the novel artifact their king had commissioned and given to them, to the Alfredian texts, and perhaps also to the new community of the *Angelcynn* which Alfred intended to create.³² The inscription on the Jewel was, from its inception, a citation of the broader program of renewal which Alfred was promoting, even though perhaps only a handful of people would have understood the reference in the early days of reform.

30 Williams, “Kingship, Christianity,” 180.

31 Okasha, *Hand-list*, items 70 and 107; Webster, “Age of Alfred,” 268–69.

32 Foot, “Making of *Angelcynn*”; Davis, “National Writing”; Stodnick, “Interests of Compounding.”

When reform was just beginning, when reception of Alfredian ideology was uncertain and success far from assured, the absence of a royal title in the inscription could have helped to spur the recipient of the Jewel to action. The use of the first name emphasized the collegiality Asser attests amongst Alfred's close circle of advisors.³³ It also referenced the shared endeavour, the communal effort, required to bring the project to fruition. The Prose Preface to the *Pastoral Care* makes it quite clear that a communal effort was required. The informality of the inscription provided a levelling effect, consistent with the intimate and ruminatory tone of the Prose Preface.³⁴ At the same time, the inscription acknowledged Alfred's role as the driving force of that program, and therefore underscored his divinely sanctioned responsibility to lead his people. And as the inscription was in the vernacular, it was more easily comprehended by a greater number of people. There is an association between the language of the Jewel's inscription and Alfred's radical use of the vernacular as a language of power.³⁵

Over time, as the *æstel* and book were used together, the inscription's deeper meaning would have become clear to an increasing number and a wider circle of people. The inscription would thus have acted as a reminder, a restatement, of Alfred's role as the instigator of Alfredian ideology and his divinely appointed right to lead. That restatement probably would have coincided with a deeper and wider understanding of the Jewel's iconography. A progressively deeper and more complex understanding of the Jewel fits with Catherine Karkov's concept of envisioning—an interpretation, indeed internalization, of what is presented to sight.³⁶

There is a further crucial association from which the Jewel drew agency. That connection lies in an Anglo-Saxon cultural norm, the social meaning of costly gifts. Royal largesse is a sub-category of the worldly goods which are so robustly defended in the Alfredian translations. What I want to consider here is the cultural framework in which such gifts are given and received.

33 Asser, chap. 77.

34 Alfred employs a similarly intimate style in his *domboc*: Wormald, *Making of English Law*, 416.

35 Richardson, "Making Thanes," 215; Irvine, *Making of Textual Culture*, 405.

36 Karkov, "Sight and Vision," 25–31. Karkov's discussion of envisioning covers objects like the Ruthwell Cross and Byrhtnoth's statues of the female saints of Ely Abbey, as well as manuscript images.

The Social Role of Largesse and the Jewel

The *Pastoral Care* was distributed to every bishopric in Alfred's extended kingdom.³⁷ It is possible that the Jewel was intended to be in a class of its own in terms of its craftsmanship and costliness. However, in the Prose Preface, "Alfred" says that the *æstel* is worth 50 mancuses. This was not simply the bullion value of the *æstel*. Logically, some monetary value must have been ascribed to the other rich components, the cloisonné and the rare rock crystal, and also to the exemplary creative skill which fashioned the object. Some sense of what 50 mancuses was worth can be gained by comparison to contemporary items such as arm-rings, which were high-status fashioned objects. They were frequently the subject of specific bequests which estimated their worth; these range in value from 20 to 120 mancuses.³⁸

Each bishop was thus to receive a costly gift from his king, for his use. These men were members of the aristocracy, and notwithstanding their Christian ideals and values, were likely to respond to valuable objects in the same way as the rest of their class. Asser's description of the gifts showered upon him by Alfred, and Alfred's promise of such gifts (evidently made on the assumption that they would be powerful inducements) is contemporary evidence of the deeply ingrained social role of royal largesse.³⁹ Asser is quick to ascribe his account of the wealth he received from Alfred to a wish to honour the king for his generosity, but his pleasure in recounting the gifts he has received from his king is obvious.⁴⁰

The social role of costly gifts is widely and consistently attested in Old English literature.⁴¹ One of the most notable aspects of the literature is the pleasure evinced in the act of describing treasure, a delight which spans both secular and religious texts.⁴² Such gifts have long been understood to function in early medieval literature as a measure of honour, personal merit, peer esteem, and authority; the economic value of the item was secondary.⁴³

Costly gifts valourized both giver and recipient.⁴⁴ In *Beowulf*, gold is frequently referenced in lordly contexts: the lord who is a "goldgyfa" (line 2652)

37 Sisam, "Publication," 374.

38 Williams, *World Before Domesday*, 114.

39 Asser, chaps. 79, 81.

40 Asser, chap. 81.

41 Bazelmans, *By Weapons Made Worthy*, 149–88.

42 Tyler, *Old English Poetics*, 9.

43 Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, 82.

44 Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*; Godden, "Waerferth and King Alfred," 39–40.

and the hall (Heorot) which is a “goldsele” (lines 1253, 1639). Beowulf’s parting gift of a gold-inlaid sword to the coastguard who courageously challenged him on his arrival made that coastguard more welcome on the mead hall bench, caused his contemporaries to esteem him more highly, because the gift constituted tangible evidence of honour and merit (lines 1900–03). In sharp contrast, Heremod’s hoarding of treasure, his covetousness and his refusal to dispense gifts, was corrosive and socially destructive (lines 1709–57).⁴⁵

Alfred’s own role as a treasurer-giver, and the status it accorded him, is emphasized in the Verse Preface to the Old English Dialogues. This preface, contained in Cotton MS Otho C I, is commonly attributed to Wulfsgige, Bishop of Sherborne. The preface was probably intended to accompany further copies of the translation, made at Wulfsgige’s direction for wider dissemination.⁴⁶

Treasure which is given as a gift is implicated in different social relationships to items which are commissioned or sold.⁴⁷ Medieval gift-giving was often asymmetrical and political in purpose. A king dispensed treasure to inculcate and reward loyalty.⁴⁸ *Maxims I* and *II* make the point clearly. *Maxims I* contains the following (A, lines 71–72):

Gifre biþ se þam golde onfehð, guma þæs on heahsetle geneah.
Lean sceal, gif we leogan nellað, þam þe us þas lisse geteode.

(The one who receives the gold is avid, the man on the high seat has enough of it. If we do not want to speak false, we will have to repay the one who granted us these favours.)

Later in the same poem (B, lines 12b–13a), there is a further reference to the importance of royal gift-giving:

Bu sceolon ærest | geofum god wesan.

(Both [king and queen] must first of all be free with gifts.)

In *Maxims II*, there are two references to royal gift-giving. The first expressly categorizes generosity as an integral part of princely education (lines 14–15):

Geongne æþeling sceolan gode gesiðas
byldan to beaduwe and to beahgife.

⁴⁵ Swanton, *Beowulf*.

⁴⁶ Godden, “Waerferth and King Alfred,” 39–40.

⁴⁷ Nelson, “Introduction,” 5; Davis, *Gift*, 9.

⁴⁸ Wickham, “Conclusion,” 254.

(A young prince ought to be encouraged in war and in generosity by good companions.)

Then in lines 28–29:

Cyning sceal on healle | beagas dælan.

(In the hall a king must share out rings.)⁴⁹

While the political significance of this generosity is largely implicit, *Maxims II* opens with a statement of the king's primary role: "Cyning sceal rice healdan" (A king is to guard his kingdom).⁵⁰

The early medieval sources demonstrate that royal largesse was, in part, about creating a specific idea of the king; gift-giving defined the giver.⁵¹ Bede praised King Oswine of Deira for generosity which proved his "royal dignity" and attracted retainers.⁵² On the other hand, Orderic Vitalis ascribed William Rufus's downfall to immoderate gift-giving which exhausted his treasury and turned him against his aristocracy, and Stephen of Blois was criticized for unwise gift-giving.⁵³ Both Asser and Wulfsgie confirm the importance of treasure-giving to a king.⁵⁴ A good king was bountiful but also measured, even calculating. That is the impression Asser gives of Alfred, meticulously calibrating his largesse to the rank and role of each recipient.⁵⁵ Both prefaces to the *Pastoral Care* link wealth with Christian wisdom. The beautiful Jewel simultaneously demonstrated Alfred's status as a generous king, affirmed the worth of the recipient, and materialized an important aspect of Alfredian ideology—that Christian wisdom is the path to wealth.

The gift of a precious object such as the Jewel in the context of the Prose Preface would have placed an obligation on its recipient to comply with his king's wishes. While the Prose Preface urges the audience to refresh their understanding of Christian wisdom, Alfred needed more from his bishops than a personal commitment to re-engage with familiar sources. He needed them to spread the word, to actively advocate and promote his ideology. A royal gift such as the Jewel would have flattered its recipient by manifest-

49 Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom*, 67–77.

50 Leneghan argues that *Maxims II* is part of an ongoing process of *translatio imperii*: Leneghan, "End of Empire," 412–14.

51 Schwartz, "Social Psychology."

52 *HE*, bk. 3, chap. 14.

53 Chibnall, *Orderic Vitalis*, bk. 10, chaps. 2 and 5, 202–3; *ASC, Peterborough Chronicle*, s.a. 1137.

54 Asser, chap. 76; *Boethius*, 404–07.

55 Asser, chaps. 99–101.

ing his importance to the king. In using the Jewel, the bishop would have flaunted that royal esteem, and affirmed his prestige and authority within his own circle of influence. The direction that the *æstel* and the book be kept together would have encouraged the bishops to use the Jewel whenever they consulted the book. The Jewel may have prompted the bishops to make frequent recourse to the *Pastoral Care*, as it gave them an unimpeachable opportunity to display their importance and closeness to the king.

Alfred's explicit acknowledgement that the book might be in places other than a church, and used in contexts other than private study by the bishop, makes it clear that the Jewel was not an item for display or for choreographed, ritualistic, handling. If texts were used as anchor points for discussions in small gatherings, in textual communities, then the Jewel would have been seen by the people in those groups. They may not have handled it—but they might. At the very least, they would have seen it close up. And those people are likely to have been the adult men of the kingdom, from the highest ealdormen down to the worthies engaged in the running of their local community. The Jewel was thus both reward and incentive. Such wealth was not available to all—yet. Highly desirable and exotic, the Jewel's close connection with the *Pastoral Care* underscored the means by which such wealth might be obtained.

The Lively Hum of Actants in the Assemblage of the Jewel

I have thus far considered the material and the relational aspects of the Jewel separately, for convenience. In the lived experience of the Jewel, all aspects interacted. It is time to explore how that might have played out. The Prose Preface makes it clear that the *æstels* were to be kept with the *Pastoral Care*, that the books were to be consulted in a variety of contexts, and not solely by the bishop. The Jewel may therefore have been frequently used and seen in small settings as well as on formal occasions.

Dorothy Horgan has noted that the punctuation of MS Hatton 20 lends itself to reading aloud, rather than silent eye-reading.⁵⁶ If the Jewel was used as a pointer when Alfredian texts were consulted in group settings, then the phenomenological experience of the Jewel would have been very different to our modern experience of it, remote and static in its glass display case. In use, the Jewel would have had had a liveliness we do not encounter. The Jewel fitted snugly and securely in a moving hand. Its shape facilitated and encouraged movement. Movement increased the impact of certain of its

56 Horgan, "Scribal Contribution," 112.

components: the sparkle of the gold, the luminescence of the rock crystal. The open fretwork design of the inscription permitted the crystal to glow.⁵⁷ In its contemporary context, *in play*, the Jewel was not untouchable, remote, and passive. It was experiential, immediate, and ablaze.

Movement was likely to capture the attention of the audience, to make them think about the Jewel and about Alfredian ideology. If you were reading part of an Alfredian text out loud to others, you could move the Jewel across the page as you read. In doing so, you could feel the Jewel in your fingertips. Your audience could see the Jewel, sparkling in the light. The phenomenological experience of the Jewel would maintain the personal presence of the king, the facilitator of Christian wisdom, the gift-giver, in the act of reading aloud and teaching Christian wisdom.

That sense of the king and the king's presence was amplified by the interaction between the material and relational components of the Jewel. The physical characteristics of the Jewel could act as prompts for particular lines of thought. White crystal and gold had connotations of purity and royalty. The figure and the inscription had layers of meaning, all relevant to Alfredian ideology. At the very start of Alfredian reform, when the Jewel was despatched to its recipient along with his copy of the *Pastoral Care*, the inscription had a levelling effect, bringing the recipient closer to his king at the same time as it reiterated Alfred's role as leader.

Throughout Alfredian reform, the Jewel in its gorgeous materiality tapped into long-standing Anglo-Saxon cultural norms about the role and meaning of treasure, of costly gifts bestowed by a king, acting as both reward for current position and inducement for future behaviour. That enduring relational actant juxtaposed with the capacity of the Jewel to manifest different aspects of Alfredian ideology, for beholders to interpret it afresh as Alfredian reform progressed and knowledge of Alfredian ideology deepened and spread.

The Jewel's persuasive agency may help to account for the surprising number of apparently similar items which have come to light as a result of the Portable Antiquities Scheme. This body of evidence is highly variable in terms of materials, craftsmanship, and location. Materials include lead, copper, silver, and gold—some with glass beads. There are findspots even in the Danelaw (virtually all of the items discussed by Hinton had southern and western findspots). None of these items have inscriptions. This wider corpus of much lesser quality objects broadly similar to the Jewel may suggest a degree of emulation than we cannot discern in the documentary sources.

57 Karkov, *Art of Anglo-Saxon England*, 216.

These objects were deliberately created; they served a purpose. It is possible that individuals lower down the hierarchy had copies made as a marker of identity, a way of showing that they had opted-in to Alfredian reform, or were given them by their lords for the same reason.

Power and Persuasion

The Jewel connected the king to his bishops, leading men of the kingdom, at the start of Alfredian reform. This was when Alfred needed them to act, to spread his ideology. That ideology had a political dimension, in the way it conceived the relationship between king and subject. Alfredian ideology espoused an expanded royal right to lead and a greater obligation to obey than the existing model of Anglo-Saxon kingship. Analyzing the thing-power of the Jewel provides fresh insights into how power was generated in Alfred's kingdom. As a king who lacked strong coercive capacity, how did Alfred ensure that his wishes for reform were met? By persuading others to do as he asked, by increasing their willingness to comply.

By focusing on the reception of the Jewel, on what it was like to use and to see the Jewel, we can identify its active role, its agency. The Jewel was not an exquisite bauble, but a powerful player in Alfredian reform. In focusing on reception and the agency of the Jewel, we also grant Alfred's elites an active role, a choice, in Alfredian reform. The exercise of power is acknowledged to be far more subtle than a top-down model of political power may allow. Asser records grumbling and backsliding, which confirms that there were a variety of responses, degrees of compliance.⁵⁸ We lack the detailed evidence to investigate and calibrate individual responses to Alfredian reform. However, thinking about the "thing-power" of the Jewel enables us to consider some of the ways in which Alfred's elites may have been induced to do more than they could be compelled to do.

Things and practices helped to shape aristocratic response to Alfred's reform program through their persuasive agency. Objects and behaviours open up a fresh perspective—that of the men Alfred relied upon to implement his reforms. Their perspective has tended to slide from view in the traditional scholarship because of difficulties with the documentary evidence.

I said in the Introduction that it is hard to look past the king when considering his reform program. Assessing Alfred himself can be problematic—a consequence of partisan sources and also the exceptional character and qualities of the man. Keynes writes about the tendency to talk about "a

58 Asser, chap. 91.

multiplicity of different Alfreds.”⁵⁹ In much the same way, it is easy to focus sequentially on specific segments of Alfredian reform and discuss them as though they are discrete topics. However, Alfred’s military innovations, his educational program, the *domboc*, the *ASC*, the translations, the championing of the vernacular, and the conceptualization of the *Angelcynn* were a coherent whole. Threaded through them are things and behaviours, designed and used to bring a community into being.

An overall assessment of Alfredian reform is made easier by conceptualizing it as an assemblage in its own right. As always, using the framework of assemblage theory highlights the connections between things, and the dynamic nature of those connections. How to teach others what Alfred had learned? The same way Alfred learned, as an adult, busy with responsibilities of governance. Here is the first connection between actants in the assemblage of Alfredian reform: emulation. What Alfred had learned, others could learn the same way. Not by downing tools and committing themselves to introspective full-time study, but by using texts as anchor points in diverse textual communities, by discussion and debate, at the same time as participating in the management of the kingdom. This was a form of learning on the job, modifying patterns of behaviour and instilling values to reorient the community back to God. Not just claiming the name of Christian but putting into practice a particular version of Christian virtues.

How to encourage such a form of learning without relay teams of dedicated advisors to guide each magnate? By embedding the principles identified as the most important for a well-functioning Christian community into translated texts: invoking the authority of existing works but increasing the reach of those texts through the use of the vernacular. “Alfred” provided the content which the magnates needed to learn and to put into practice in an accessible format. Here is the second set of connections, between what you learn and how you learn it. Alfred co-opted the power of respected texts, the capacity of the monastic scriptoria to produce manuscripts, and the ease of everyday language.

How to ensure that the magnates paid attention and learned? Not by royal decree, but through persuasion. The political landscape is an actant in the assemblage of Alfredian reform. The diffuse distribution of political power in Alfred’s kingdom significantly constrained the king’s options for achieving reforms. The delicate balance of political power necessitated strategies of persuasion, because coercion was not an option. We can identify Alfred’s persuasive strategies. Alfredian text-bodies were plain and there-

59 Keynes, “Power of the Written Word,” 197; see also Keynes, “Tale of Two Kings,” 217.

fore handleable, so that they could be used in a variety of settings and were easy to consult in precisely those contexts of learning on the job. A range of cultural norms were harnessed, to increase the accessibility and the reach of the principles of Christian wisdom embedded in the texts. New and modified social practices were additional actants. The pool of those who would learn was expanded by instituting the practice of lifelong learning. Education and the administration of justice provided fertile ground to disseminate and inculcate Alfredian ideology. There may have been other social practices used in this way, which are now not detectable because of the paucity of the surviving evidence. I discussed fosterage as a possible example of a practice that was ready-to-hand as an instrument in inculcating Alfredian reform.

Alfredian reform did not end with the king's death in 899. I do not have the space in this book to fully explore the trajectory of reform post-Alfred. The next chapter sketches, by way of a coda, how Alfred's heirs continued the reform program and re-shaped Alfredian ideology to their own ends.