Leeds Studies in English

YET ANOTHER NOTE ON ALFRED'S *ÆSTEL*

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The meaning of King Alfred's word *æstel* has puzzled and extended the minds of many scholars wiser and more erudite than I. The literature on the subject is rich. Much of it is summed up in the late Rowland L. Collins's detailed and ingenious article in the festschrift for J.E. Cross.[1] It is unlikely that I shall achieve a convincing solution to the problem where so many have failed, and all that I can do is point to some curiosities in the gloss evidence for the word so as to clear up some misunderstandings and to minimise fallacious argument.

It is common knowledge that *æstel* occurs only four times in Old English texts, with essentially two independent references. The word occurs twice in the continuous prose of Alfred's preface to the translation of Gregory's *Cura Pastoralis*, two texts of which were glossed in the thirteenth century in the "tremulous Worcester hand".[2] It also occurs in Ælfric's *Grammar* and in his *Glossary*.

On the two glossed manuscripts of *Cura Pastoralis* there are important comments made:
(1) Collins notes that in the Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, 12 text the word *æstel* is glossed *festuca* whose recorded uses

> do not offer any interpretation which immediately clarifies the meaning of *æstel*. Perhaps of greater significance is the choice of *æstel* for a thirteenth-century glossator's attention when not many words are marked. It already seems to have needed explanation.[3]

(2) D.R. Howlett draws conclusions from the glossing of Bodleian MS, Hatton 20:

> Since the Worcester Glossator wrote in both MSS Hatton 20 and CCCC 12, but glossed the word *æstel* only in the latter, one might infer that he knew from Wærferth's manuscript [Hatton 20] what the object was and that survival of the *æstel* in that copy rendered a gloss unnecessary. Even if the object were not in the manu-script, he might have known from the tradition of the house what it was.[4]

Both these arguments are specious, and they make clear the need for a more detailed description of the gloss evidence for OE *æstel*.

(1) *That in CCCC 12, a tenth-century manuscript of the* Cura
Pastoralis, *apparently attributed to Worcester only because of its
glosses in the tremulous hand.*[5]
The first occurrence of *æstel* is on line 25 of fo.3a (a page
equivalent to *rædan - nan mon* in Sweet (1871-2): 6, 1.13 - 8, 1.1),
and the second on line 1 of fo.3b. The text of fo.3a amounts, in
Sweet's printed version, to about 150 words. It has some 31 inter-
linear glosses counting those in the top margin as interlinear, and
12 glosses in the inner, outer and lower margins, all in the
tremulous Worcester hand, though not all written, as will be seen,
at the same time. This does not count the long translation,
"pleimund*us* archiepiscop*us*/arserus (sic) episcop*us*/grimbaldus
sacerdos./johannes presbiter" opposite the list of Alfred's collab-
orators. Counting in this crude way there is a gloss for every
four words or so of the original. This is quite a high rate of
glossing and certainly refutes Collins's comment that "not many
words are marked". Moreover, the glosses are not noticeably
attached to difficult words only as the following list shows (line
references to Sweet are given in brackets).

Interlinear
(6.13) lære: doceat.   siðða̅n: post, wrongly over the first
syllable of *furður*.   furður: ulterri*us*.   (14) geðiode: lingu*a*,
the exact grammatical form unclear.   furður: diuci*us*.   hierran:
alciori.   (15) læden geðiodes: latine lingue.   ær ðyssum: ante
hoc.   oðfeallen: usque *modo*, wrongly, over the first element.
(16) monege: multi.   (17) missenlicum: diuersis.   monig
fealdum: multiplicis, wrongly over the second part of *missenlicum*.
bisgum: occupat*ion*ibus.   ðisses: huius.   (18) cynerices:
regni.   ða: illu*m*.   (19) hwilum: aliquando.   word: verbo.
be worde: ad uerbum.   hwilum: aliquando.   ondgiet: intellectum
(20) of ondgiete: ex i*n*tellectu.   hie: illu*m*.   (23) andgiet/
fullicost: intellexi, wrongly, over the first half.   (24)
areccan: i*n*terpretare.   hie: ea*m*.   (25) wille: uolo.   ane:
una*m*.   onsendan: misi, wrongly.   (8.1) fiftigum: .l.   be/beode:
precipio, twice, once over the verbal prefix, once in the lower
margin below the stem.
' On fo.3b: (2) æstel: festuca*m* in the top border.

Inner margin
(6.15) oðfeallen: vsque *nunc*, wrongly.   (22) siðða̅n: postqua*m*.

Outer margin
(6.15) ġemunde: memini.   lar læden geðiodes: doctrina lingua
latine.   (19) hierdebóc: hiredeboc, ?wrongly.   (23) andgiet/
fullicost: intelligibilius.   (24) areccan: i*n*terpretare.
biscep/stóle: episcopatui.   (25) onsendan: mittere.   æstel:
æstel . festuca/∴. indicatorium.   (8.1) moncessa: maunseis, or
perhaps maunscis.

     It is interesting, though it may not be conclusive, to speculate
on the purposes of these glosses. They represent several different
types. Some, I suppose, are grammatical: as ða: *illum* which shows
that ða is the pronoun not the conjunction or adverb, and *hie:
illum/eam* which indicate that *hie* is accusative not nominative.

Perhaps *wille: uolo* makes it clear that *wille* is a verbal not a
nominal form, while *hierran: alciori* shows that *hierran* is a com-
parative adjective not a noun. Some seem to distinguish between
different meanings a word can have: as *furður: ulterrius* opposed to
furður: diucius (if that is a genuine distinction in Old English).
Some are simple cribs, though they may also serve to demonstrate
the grammatical form of the lemma: as *lære: doceat, missenlicum:
diuersis, cynerices: regni* and *areccan: interpretare*. It is at
any rate simplistic to assert that the only reason for a word's
being glossed was that it "seems to have needed explanation".
Examples like *ær ðyssum: ante hoc, siððan: postquam, fiftigum: .1.*
make that quite clear.

There is another distinction to be made, for it is unlikely
that all the glosses by the Worcester scribe on this page were made
on a single occasion. Ker has warned us that a "variation in the
degree of shakiness is to be found throughout the work of the
'tremulous' scribe", and this certainly applies to the glosses of
CCCC 12, fo.3a.[6] There are two groups of glosses to be roughly
distinguished, one, called here for convenience Worcester A, where
the hand is comparatively firm and small, the other, Worcester B,
where it is spindly and very shaky. Ker calls the "tremulous
Worcester hand" an "old man's hand", and it would be reasonable to
assume that the shakier efforts are those of older age.[7] All the
marginal glosses of fo.3a save that which lists Alfred's collab-
orators are of the Worcester B sort. The interlinear glosses are
sometimes A, sometimes B. To confirm the hypothesis that B is later
than A, there are several cases on fo.3a where B corrects A. For
instance, where A, faced with the divided word *andgiet/fullicost*,
took the first part as the past tense singular of a verb *an(d)-/
ongietan* and translated it *intellexi*, B noted the complete word and
rendered it, not strictly correctly but at least nearer the mark,
intelligibilius. Where A took *onsendan* as a past finite verb, B
recognised it as an infinitive, and added *mittere* alongside *misi*.
Perhaps in adding *precipio* under the second (stem) part of the
divided word *be/beode* B indicated that the word's significance lay
in its stem rather than in its prefix, as A implied in putting
precipio over *be/*. Occasionally B added a gloss to a word that A
had left unglossed, as *memini* for *gemunde* (though A has this earlier
in the manuscript), *interpretare* for *areccan* (as B also on a pre-
ceding page), and *episcopatui* for *biscepstóle*. Of course, the
explication of the glosses in the "tremulous Worcester hand" given
here is quite inadequate. There are many pages of such glosses in
CCCC 12, and many more Anglo-Saxon manuscripts with glosses in this
hand. Yet, as far as it goes, this study suggests that B had a
rather clearer and deeper understanding of Anglo-Saxon prose than A.
Or in other words, the Worcester scribe learned more Old English as
he got older. Even then he was not perfect. The word *oðfeallen*
still baffled him, and the best he could do was change *usque modo* to
vsque nunc, still apparently believing that the verbal prefix was the
preposition *oð*, "until, up to".

How does this affect the glossing of *æstel*? On the top line of
fo.3b there is the simple gloss *festucam* written over the second

occurrence of *æstel* by Worcester B. The occurrence on fo.3a
presents a more complex situation. The gloss is marginal, and the
arrangement of the material suggests that B first wrote "æstel" and
then added (the ink is slightly darker) ".festuca". After that,
over the top of "æstel" and sloping to avoid that word, he wrote
"indicatorium", keying this to the lemma in the text by the sign ∴.
Thus, B's first choice for glossing *æstel* was *festuca*, and
indicatorium was a further, possibly more precise but possibly more
desperate, attempt at the word.[8]

Whether it is possible to be more discriminating than this I
am not sure. Yet it seems at least possible to distinguish, on the
lower half of fo.3a, two periods of glossing for Worcester B. The
earlier (i.e. the less shaky) consists only of the marginal
quotation of three technical words: *hiredeboc*, *æstel* and *maunseis*.
The later (i.e. the more shaky) wrote all the other marginal
glosses, including the pair *festuca* and *indicatorium*, as well as
festucam over *æstel* on fo.3b. If this distinction is valid, it
seems that the Worcester scribe drew *æstel* out into the margin at
first only as a word that caught his attention. Only later did he
find a suitable gloss for it.

(2) *That in Hatton 20, a late ninth-century manuscript identified
as that sent by Alfred to Bishop Wærferth of Worcester.*
The equivalent passage to that of CCCC 12, fo.3a, occupies in this
manuscript fo.2a, line 13 – fo.2b, line 5.[9] John Joscelyn, Parker's
secretary, glossed these lines, taking his material from CCCC 12.
Otherwise all the glosses to this passage are in the tremulous hand,
a Worcester B type. All are interlinear save the list of Alfred's
helpers which is in the outer margin: "plegmund/arsere (sic)/
grimbolde/johanne". The tremulous hand's interlinear glossing is
sparse, barely a quarter of that of CCC 12:

(6.14) læden: latina.   hieran: alciori.   (15) ða (ic): tunc.
ða (gemunde): ea.   (15) geðiodes: linguæ.   (18) ða: illum.
(20) hie: illum.   (23) andgit fullicost: intelligibilius.
(24) areccean: retulere.   (8.1) fiftegum: .1.

Here too the glossator expressed a grammatical preoccupation,
distinguishing the different functions of *ða* and the case of *hie*.
The other words he translated in this passage are also closely
parallel to those he glossed in CCCC 12. They do not, however,
include the "hard words" *hierde bôc*, *æstel* and *mancessan*. Indeed,
it is difficult to explain why he chose to gloss such words as he
did, and certainly Howlett's argument that, in failing to include
æstel among them, he revealed his common understanding of the word
is far-fetched. The whole passage is thinly glossed; it requires
no special reason to explain the absence of an equivalent for any
one word.

Though nothing of value can be deduced from the lack of a gloss
on *æstel* in Hatton 20, the material in CCCC 12 may yet yield some-
thing. None of the three "hard words" drawn out into the margin of
fo.3a has a contemporary Latin translation. *Æstel*, as we have seen,
later received two Latin equivalents. I am not sure of the status
of the other two words, *hiredeboc* and *maunseis/maunscis*. Above I

marked *hiredeboc* as "?wrongly", since I wondered if the Worcester glossator had confused the first element with ME *hired(e)*, "household, court, crowd". I suspect, however, that this is unlikely, though Middle English writers apparently did not distinguish clearly between *hired(e)* and *herd(e)*, "herd, flock", *herd(e)*, "herdsman".[10] But the Worcester glossator had, in Alfred's original, the word *pastoralis* to guide him, and so is unlikely to have been in error. Hence I think that, in writing *hiredeboc* in the margin, Worcester B was simply drawing out a form of *hierdebóc* as he did with *æstel* some lines later. I do not understand the form *maunseis/ maunscis*. At any rate, I have not found a comparable spelling in any dictionary. Grammatically it looks to be a Latin dative/ ablative plural (which should mean that it derives from a reading such as Hatton 20 *mancessan* (for *-um*) rather than the genitive plural *moncessa* of CCCC 12).

The Worcester scribe's practice elsewhere in CCCC 12 may throw light, or perhaps darkness, on these three marginal annotations. Not infrequently he wrote Old English words in the margins of this manuscript without translating them, and it is worth looking at what sort of words they were. In the first thirty folios of CCCC 12 there are the following examples:

(1b) onstal. (5a) licettað, olecunge. (12a) sæs, siðemeste. (14a) loðan. (15b) þearle. (16a) arodnesse. (23b) hreon. (25a) iþwænen. (26a) teter. (27b) [a]smorad.

These are all in Worcester B. Some of them represent fairly rare Old English words, as *onstal*, *arodnesse*; but not all, as *sæs*, *þearle*, *hreon* show. There may be non-semantic reasons for some of the marginalia. In cases like *olecunge*, *siðemeste*, *loðan*, for instance, the annotation may be intended to clarify the misleading or confused word division of the manuscript (*olec/cunga*, *siðe mestadóm*, *lo/ðan*). The absence of a translation may in some cases indicate that Worcester B was unsure of the meaning, but not in all, for scribe A had already supplied some interlinear glosses:

licettað: blandiuntur. oleccunga: diss[i]mu/lat*ione*. sæs: maris. siðemesta: extrema, but over the preceding article. loðan: tunice. ðearlan: district*us*. arodnesse: autoritat*em*. hreon: turbato. geðwænan: irrigare. teter: impetigin*em*. bið asmorad: suffocat*ur*.

There are also in these folios several other cases where Worcester B drew out words into the margin, and later, in darker ink, added equivalents:

(12a) eosul.i. asina. onwon: torto. (18a) anette: solitudin*em*.

We cannot conclude from these that the Worcester B scribe only learned the meanings of the Old English words some time later, since in each of these cases the text has an earlier, interlinear, Worcester A gloss: eosul: asinaria. onwon: prauitat*em*. anette: ? suli.

From this brief look at the tremulous hand's glossing – and I stress it is only a preliminary survey and fairly crude in the

detail it goes into - we can sum up a few things that can *not* be
deduced from the evidence. From Hatton 20 we cannot conclude that
Worcester B knew what an *æstel* was simply because he did not choose
to gloss it. From CCCC 12 we cannot assume that (i) *æstel* was a
hard or unusual word simply because it is drawn out into the margin,
or (ii) Worcester B did not at first know the meaning of the word
simply because he did not give it a Latin equivalent, or (iii)
Worcester B learnt the meaning of *æstel* later because he added
Latin equivalents. Indeed, looking at the general practice of the
glossing of these manuscripts, it seems that nothing can be safely
deduced. There remain only the Latin equivalents to give a clue as
to the word's meaning.

Indicatorium can be left till later since it is clear where
Worcester B got it from; he copied Ælfric's *Glossary* which pairs it
with *æstel*. But what was Worcester B's authority for *æstel*:
festuca? I know of no source, and can judge the validity of the
equation only by examining the scribe's general competence in trans-
lating Old English. In CCCC 12 this must be tested from Alfred's
Preface and the Metrical Prologue and Epilogue to the *Cura
Pastoralis* since for the text proper he had a Latin crib which he
certainly used.[11] The Preface is, as I have shown, quite highly
glossed, and on the whole the glossing is competent. Most semantic
glosses are accurate, and this includes translations of relatively
rare words like *swæð* (uestigium, A), *reccelease* (neggligentes, A),
wealhstodas (mediatores A, interpretes B). Yet other rarish words
are left unglossed, as *onstal*, *ánlepne* (but this is glossed "solum"
in Hatton 20), *crecas*, *niedbeðyrfesta*. There are also occasional
mistakes. *Sido*, "morals" (Sweet (1871-2): 2, 1.6) is twice glossed
"collaterales" by B, presumably in the belief that the word is the
plural of OE *side*, "side". A glossed *witena* (4, 1.19) "sapienciam".
Over the group *hu sio æ* he put "quondam", presumably identifying the
article with OE *(g)io* (4, 1.25). And of course there is the
Worcester glossator's continual trouble with the verbal prefix *oð-*.
The Metrical Epilogue has only two glosses, both correct, but it is
in the Prologue that the glossator makes his real howlers. Though
several of his glosses are quite right, he clearly had trouble in
understanding verse, where inevitably the language and syntax are
harder than in prose. So, the sequence "cempa romepapa" (8, 1.9)
is glossed "miles romanorum" with B presumably misreading the last
word as *romewara* which indeed it somewhat resembles. The genitive
"sefan" (8, 1.10) he took as a numeral and glossed "vii". Worcester
B repeats only the first of these errors (siodo: collaterales) in
Hatton 20.

The misinterpretations are of different qualities. Taking
sibbe in the sense "kinship, friendship", *collaterales* (= having a
common ancestry) makes some sort of sense in the context: "and at
home they kept their sense of kinship, common ancestry and their
power". Or again, more marginally: "when I recalled all this, I
wondered very much about the great wisdom (*sapienciam*) there once
was among the English". Or certainly: "then I recalled how once
upon a time (*quondam*) law was first known in the Hebrew tongue".
In these cases Worcester B could extract some sort of meaning despite

his clear weakness in grammar. In contrast, the errors in the Metrical Preface show that Worcester B made little sense of that text.

From this examination of the Worcestor glossator's competence it seems there is a fair chance - but no more than that - of the gloss *festuca* being accurate and meaningful. The whole range of meanings that earlier scholars have found for the Latin word - stick, twig, stalk, straw, rod of office, wand - can come into play, but not with our complete confidence.

To turn now to *indicatorium*, otherwise only known from the Ælfric *Glossary* pair. I begin by disposing of an apparently promising line of attack. The tremulous Worcester scribe's own copy of Ælfric's *Grammar* and *Glossary* survives in part as Worcester Cathedral MS F 174.[12] In this work the Worcester man brings many of Ælfric's word forms up-to-date, and we might hope for a clue to the meaning of *æstel* from this. Does the Worcester form coincide with ME *astel(le)* which MED quotes only from fifteenth-century texts in the senses "billet, shingle, firewood, splint", deriving the word from OF *astele*, ML *(h)astella*? Alas, this is a vain hope. The passage under scrutiny occurs on fo.61b, a leaf which has the outer edge cut away, with the loss of some ten to a dozen letters a line. The reading of 11.28-9 is:

>]l.sera.hespe.chorus.chor.Gradus.stæpe.Indicatorium.
>]a.sticke.Regula.Regolsticke.lampas. ⁊ .lucerna. ⁊ .later.

The gloss for *indicatorium* is cut away, as is most of the lemma *legula* for *sticke*. Presumably there has been careless copying anyway, for a whole line (*scabellum* scamul.*thus* stor.*odor* bræd. *thuribulum* storcylle)[13] is omitted between *æstel* and *legula*.

There remains only the possibility of deducing the meaning of *indicatorium: æstel* from their position in the Ælfric *Glossary* list. It is not easy to discern a clear pattern behind the lists of lemmata in this work, and in any case that would go beyond the intents of this paper. Collins defines that in which *indicatorium* occurs as one of "church buildings, books, church furniture, and ecclesiastical equipment", which is a fair enough summary.[14] Opening with the neutral *domus*, it goes on to the major words *terplum*, *ecclesia*: then diverts to *angulus*, *altare*: then follows a group of book-words, perhaps because books were used at the altar, *liber*, *codex*, *uolumen*, *littera*, *folium*, *pagina*: then *arca*, a word that may though need not have specific ecclesiastical signification (? reliquary), with the similar *loculus*: then a group of objects that could be found on or near an altar, *calix*, *patena*, *crux*, *staurus*, *candelabrum*: then the bishop's throne, *cathedra*. The list returns to words defining more fundamental aspects of church structure: *fundamentum*, *pauimentum*, *solum*, *paries*, *tectum*, *fenestra*, *hostium*. This last word leads the compiler astray, and he inserts *hostiarius* before going back to his basic words *ianua*, *ualua*, *arcus*, *fornix*, *columna*. Then he returns to the "door" theme with *ianuarius*, *clausura*, *clauis*, *clauus*, *sera*. Then back to more important features, *chorus*, *gradus*, and it is then that *indicatorium* comes, followed by

scabellum. Thereafter is a group of incense-words, *thus, odor, thuribulum*: than a pair of words baffling at this point of the list, *legula* (with the very general gloss *sticca*) and *regula*. Then follow words for lights and candles, bells, vestments and clothing, and so to items of the dormitory.

The list seems to me a confused one. It is as though its compiler started off intending to define the main features of a church building, but from time to time got led astray by associations. Three conclusions seem appropriate: (i) though, I understand, *indicatorium* occurs only here, yet it must have been a common enough word in the English church for Ælfric to bother including it, (ii) *indicatorium* is surprisingly distant from other book-words in the list, so it is unlikely that an *æstel* is an essential part of the structure of a book, as a book-cover, for instance, (iii) *indicatorium* is associated with the chancel (*chorus*: *chor*) of a church.

This is as far as I go. From here the conditions that Collins lists in his article take over, and it is now up to the etymologists, the liturgiologists and the ecclesiologists, working in collaboration, to tell us what an *indicatorium*: *æstel* is.

[1]   R.L. Collins, "King Alfred's *Æstel* Reconsidered", *Leeds Studies in English*
        n.s. 16 (1985) pp.37-58.

[2]   References to this text in the present article are to *King Alfred's West-
        Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, Part 1, ed. H. Sweet, EETS OS 45
        (Oxford, 1871-2) by page and line.

[3]   Collins, "Alfred's *Æstel* Reconsidered", p.41.

[4]   D.R. Howlett, "Alfred's *Æstel*", *English Philological Studies* 14 (1975) p.72.
        Cf. also B. Harbert, "King Alfred's *Æstel*", *Anglo-Saxon England* 3 (1974)
        p.106: "he [the Worcester glossator] knew and glossed Hatton 20 and may
        actually have seen the *æstel*".

[5]   There were ".ii. pastorales englisce" at Worcester in the eleventh century:
        M. Lapidge, "Surviving Booklists from Anglo-Saxon England", in *Learning and
        Literature in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. M. Lapidge and H. Gneuss (Cambridge,
        1985) p.63. One of these must have been Hatton 20, so the other was pre-
        sumably CCCC 12.

[6]   N.R. Ker, "The Date of the 'Tremulous' Worcester Hand", *Leeds Studies in
        English* 6 (1937) p.28.

[7]   There is some difficulty in establishing the unity of these hands. J. Bazire
        and J.E. Cross note in Bodleian MS Hatton 116 glosses in "a hand similar to
        that of the 'tremulous,' but it is firmer and neater": *Eleven Old English
        Rogationtide Homilies* (Toronto, 1982) p.41. Miss Christine Franzen of
        Somerville College, Oxford, who has worked extensively on the subject, is of
        the opinion that here too we have the "tremulous" hand. She agrees with me
        that Worcester A in CCCC 12 is the "tremulous" hand: it resembles that which
        wrote "dedicatio" in Hatton 114, fo.10a, which Ker defines as "more firmly
        written than the glosses, . . . in the same type of script and certainly by
        the same hand": "Date of the 'Tremulous' Hand", p.28. Miss Franzen also
        informs me that medical evidence suggests that the shakiness of this hand
        is due to a congenital tremor that would probably get worse with time. I
        am most grateful to her for her advice on this subject.

[8]   Theoretically, I suppose, the glosses could have been written in the
        opposite order, *indicatorium* first and then *festuca* fitted in below it, but
        from the lineation of the pair that seems much less likely.

[9]   I take my readings of this manuscript from the facsimile, *The Pastoral Care.
        King Alfred's Translation of St. Gregory's Regula Pastoralis*, ed. N.R. Ker,
        Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile 6 (Copenhagen, 1956), not being able
        to afford the fees that the Curators of the Bodleian Library demand from
        members of the whole republic of learning who do not have Oxford affili-
        ations.

[10]   MED under *hērd(e* n.(1).

[11]   For this scribe's use of an original Latin text as a crib to the Old English
        translation see *Medium Ævum* 51 (1982) pp.117-18.

[12]   N.R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1957)
        no.398. I am grateful to Dr B.S. Benedikz, Sub-Librarian, Special
        Collections, of Birmingham University Library for access to a microfilm of

this manuscript.

13   *Ælfrics Grammatik und Glossar*, ed. J. Zupitza, Sammlung englischer
     Denkmäler 1 (Berlin, 1880) p.314.

14   "Alfred's *Æstel* Reconsidered", p.41.