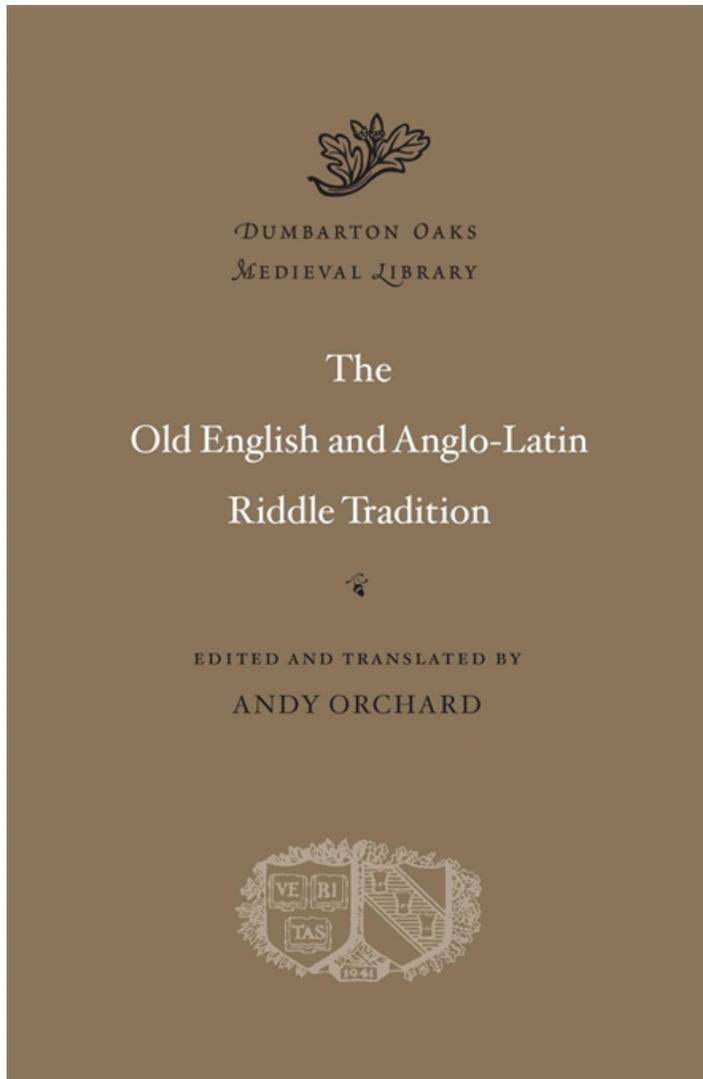


The Old English and Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY ANDY ORCHARD



What offers over seven hundred witty enigmas in several languages? Answer: *The Old English and Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition*. Riddles, wordplay, and inscrutable utterances have been at the heart of Western literature for many centuries. Often brief and always delightful, medieval riddles provide insights into the extraordinary and the everyday, connecting the learned and the ribald, the lay and the devout, and the familiar and the imported. Many solutions involve domestic life, including “butter churn” and “chickens.” Others like “the harrowing of hell” or “the Pleiades” appeal to an educated elite. Still others, like “the one-eyed seller of garlic,” are too absurd to solve: that is part of the game. Riddles are not simply lighthearted amusement. They invite philosophical questions about language and knowledge.

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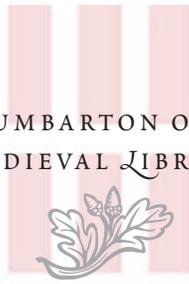
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Riddle Tradition

Edited and Translated by

ANDY ORCHARD

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Contents

Introduction vii

THE ANGLO-LATIN TRADITION

ALDHELM 2

BEDE 94

TATWINE 110

HWÆTBERHT, *THE RIDDLES OF EUSEBIUS* 140

BONIFACE 182

ALCUIN 222

THE LORSCH RIDDLES 266

THE ABINGDON RIDDLE 278

THE HIGH-MINDED LIBRARY 280

THE OLD ENGLISH TRADITION

THE FRANKS CASKET RIDDLE 294

THE LEIDEN RIDDLE 296

THE EXETER BOOK RIDDLES 298

CONTENTS

THE OLD ENGLISH RUNE POEM 420
THE RIDDLES OF SOLOMON AND SATURN II 436
THE OLD ENGLISH PROSE RIDDLE 440

SOURCES AND ANALOGUES OF
THE TRADITION

SYMPHOSIUS 444
THE BERN RIDDLES 500
THE VERSES OF A CERTAIN IRISHMAN
ON THE ALPHABET 548
THE OLD ICELANDIC RUNE POEM 562
THE RIDDLES OF GESTUMBLINDI 570
VARIOUS RIDDLES 594

Abbreviations 605
Note on the Texts 609
Notes to the Texts 619
Notes to the Translations 639
Bibliography 871
Index of Solutions 877

THE ANGLO-LATIN
TRADITION

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Aldhelm

ALD PR

Arbiter, aethereo iugiter qui regmine sceptra
Lucifluumque simul caeli regale tribuna
*Disponis moderans aeternis legibus illu**D—*
*Horrida nam multans torsisti membra Vehemot**H,*
5 *Ex alta quondam rueret dum luridus arc**E—*
Limpida dictanti metrorum carmina praesu
*Munera nunc largire, rudis quo pandere reru**M*
*Versibus enigmata queam clandestina fat**V:*
*Sic, Deus, indignis tua gratis dona rependi**S.*
10 *Castalidas nimphas non clamo cantibus istu**C,*
*Examen neque spargebat mihi nectar in or**E;*
*Cynthi sic numquam perlustro cacumina, sed ne**C*
*In Parnasso procubui nec somnia vid**I.*
*Nam mihi versificum poterit Deus addere carme**N*
15 *Inspirans stolidae pia gratis munera ment**I;*
*Tangit si mentem, mox laudem corda rependun**T.*

Aldhelm

ALD PR

You, judge, who always govern with heavenly rule
both the scepters and the starry royal judgment-seat of the
sky,
controlling it all with eternal laws —
for in punishment you tortured the grim limbs of
Behemoth,
when that dread one once fell headlong from the lofty
citadel— 5
now, protector, lavish clear gifts on the one composing
poems in meter so that, even unskilled,
I may through speech be able to reveal in verse the masked
mysteries of things:
in this way, God, do you freely give your gifts to the
unworthy.
I do not summon here with songs the Castalian nymphs, 10
nor did any swarm trickle nectar into my mouth;
so, I never wander over the peaks of Cynthus,
nor yet did I ever fall asleep upon Parnassus, nor see
dreams.
For God can bestow on me verse-inducing song,
freely breathing pious gifts into a dull mind; 15
if he touches a mind, soon do hearts reverberate in praise.

Metrica nam Moysen declarant carmina vateM
 Iamdudum cecinisse prisci vexilla tropeI,
 Late per populos illustria, qua nitidus SoL
 20 Lustrat ab oceani iam tollens gurgite cephaL;
 Et psalmista canens metrorum cantica vocE,
 Natum divino promit generamine numeN
 In caelis prius exortum, quam Lucifer orbI
 Splendida formatis fudisset lumina saecliS.
 25 Verum si fuerint bene haec enigmata versV,
 Explosis penitus naevis et rusticitatE,
 Ritu dactilico recte decursa nec erroR
 Seduxit vana specie molimina mentiS,
 Incipiam potiora, sui Deus arida servI,
 30 Belligero quondam qui vires tradidit IoB,
 Viscera perpetui si roris repleat haustV.
 Siccis nam laticum duxisti cautibus amneS
 Olim, cum cuneus transgresso marmore rubrO
 Desertum penetrat, cecinit quod carmine DaviD.
 35 Arce poli, genitor, servas qui saecula cunctA,
 Solvere iam scelerum noxas dignare nefandaS.

ALD I

Altrix cunctorum, quos mundus gestat, in orbe
 nuncupor (et merito, quia numquam pignora tantum

For metrical songs declare that the prophet Moses
 once, long ago, sang of the trophies of an ancient victory,
 widely famous throughout the nations, wherever the
 brilliant sun,
 lifting its head from the depths of the sea, shines; 20
 likewise the Psalmist, singing metrical songs out loud,
 proclaims a godhead born through divine generation,
 brought forth in the heavens when the universe was
 created,
 before the morning star had shed its shining light upon the
 world.
 But if these mysteries in verse have been well traversed, 25
 with flaws and roughness utterly expunged,
 in correct dactylic style, and error has not corrupted
 the efforts of the mind with its empty appearance,
 I shall begin something better, if God,
 who once gave strength to battling Job, were to fill up 30
 the dry innards of his servant with a draft of eternal dew.
 For you drew streams of water from dry rocks
 once, when the host, having crossed the Red Sea,
 entered the desert, as David sang in song.
 You, father in the citadel of heaven, who guard the whole 35
 universe,
 deign now to disperse the wicked blight of sins.

ALD I

I am called she who nourishes everything on the globe
 that the world produces (and deservedly so, since wicked
 offspring

improba sic lacerant maternas dente papillas).
Prole virens aestate; tabescens tempore brumae.

ALD 2

Cernere me nulli possunt nec prendere palmis;
argutum vocis crepitum cito pando per orbem.
Viribus horronis valeo confringere quercus;
nam superos ego pulso polos et rura peragro.

ALD 3

Versicolor fugiens caelum terramque relinquo;
non tellure locus mihi, non in parte polorum est.
Exilium nullus modo tam crudele veretur;
sed madidis mundum faciam frondescere guttis.

ALD 4

Crede mihi, res nulla manet sine me moderante,
et frontem faciemque meam lux nulla videbit.
Quis nesciat ditione mea convexa rotari
alta poli solisque iubar lunaeque meatus?

never gnaw with their teeth mother's nipples as much as
this).
In summer I am burgeoning with progeny; languishing in
wintertime.

ALD 2

No one can see me or hold me in their hands;
I swiftly spread the piercing sound of my voice throughout
the world.
I can smash oak trees, with my grim-sounding strength;
for I strike the high skies and pass through the fields.

ALD 3

Fleeing in many colors, I leave heaven and earth behind;
there is no place for me on the ground, nor in the sphere of
the sky.
No one else so dreads such a fearful exile;
but with moist drops I shall make the world grow green.

ALD 4

Believe me, there is nothing beyond my control,
and no eye sees my face and form.
Who does not know that at my command the high vaults of
heaven,
and the sunbeams, and the motions of the moon, all spin?

ALD 5

Taumantis proles priscorum fame fingor,
 ast ego prima mei generis rudimenta retexam:
 sole ruber genitus sum partu nubis aquosae;
 lustrum polos passim, solos non scando per austos.

ALD 6

Nunc ego cum pelagi fatibus communibus insto,
 tempora reciprocis convolvens menstrua cyclis:
 ut mihi lucifluae decrescit gloria formae,
 sic augmenta latex cumulat gurgite perdit.

ALD 7

Facundum constat quondam cecinisse poetam:
 "Quo Deus et quo dura vocat Fortuna; sequamur!"
 Me veteres falso dominam vocitare solebant,
 sceptrum regens mundi dum Christi gratia regnet.

ALD 5

I am alleged to be the child of Thaumantas, according to the
 ancients,
 but I shall reveal the first beginnings of my birth myself:
 I was born red from the sun through a watery cloud;
 I brighten the sky by my wanderings, and only in the wind
 do I not rise up.

ALD 6

Now I am involved in the shared fate of the sea,
 rolling out monthly patterns in alternating cycles:
 for just as the brightness of my light-shining form grows
 less,
 so too does the water, piled up, lose the increase of its swell.

ALD 7

It is said that once a skillful poet sang:
 "Where God and harsh Fortune summon us, let us go!"
 Falsely our ancestors used to call me mistress,
 when in fact Christ's grace should govern, ruling the
 thrones of the world.

ALD 8

Nos Athlante satas stolidi dixere priores;
 nam septena cohors est, sed vix cernitur una.
 Arce poli gradimur necnon sub Tartara terrae;
 furvis conspicimur tenebris et luce latemus,
 5 nomina de verno ducentes tempore prisca.

ALD 9

En ego non vereor rigidi discrimina ferri,
 flammarum neu torre cremor; sed sanguine capri
 virtus indomiti mollescit dura rigoris:
 sic cruor exsuperat, quem ferrea massa pavescit.

ALD 10

Sic me iamdudum rerum veneranda potestas
 fecerat, ut domini truculentos persequar hostes;
 rictibus arma gerens bellorum praelia patro,
 et tamen infantum fugiens mox verbera vito.

ALD 8

Plodding predecessors have said that we were the children
 of Atlas;
 we are indeed seven, though one is hard to see.
 We walk in the summit of the sky, as well as in the depths of
 the earth;
 we can be seen in the deepest darkness, but disappear in
 light,
 taking our ancient names from the time of spring.

ALD 9

Look: I do not fear the dangers of hard iron,
 nor do I burn in a furnace of fire; but in goat's blood
 the hard force of my unconquerable strength is made soft:
 so gore defeats what a mass of iron trembles to take on.

ALD 10

In this way did the fearsome force of things make me long
 ago
 to chase after my master's enemies when they attack;
 wearing weapons in my jaws I engage in the conflicts of war,
 though by fleeing I am quick to avoid the blows of children.

A Commentary on “The Old English and Anglo- Latin Riddle Tradition”

ANDY ORCHARD

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