A Dutch Translation of 15 Old English Riddles

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Prof. Dr. A. Van Herreweghe
Ic eom wunderlicu wiht

15 Old English Riddles of the Exeter Manuscript translated into Dutch

Acknowledgements

In the process of writing this thesis, I have made extensive use of the comments and introduction of Craig Williamson in his “The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book” as well as Crossley-Holland’s “The Exeter Book Riddles”, Charles W. Kennedy’s “The earliest English Poetry” and G.A. Lester’s “The Anglo-Saxons, How they lived and worked”. Concerning the source of the riddles I have followed Tine Defour’s and Crossley-Holland’s lead and I have taken them from “The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records III: The Exeter Book”, edited by George Philip Krapp and Elliot van Kirk Dobbie, based on the facsimile of the original manuscript, unless stated otherwise. For the translation of Old Enlish words, I have used the on-line version of the Bosworth and Toller Dictionary. It is mentioned in my bibliography, but I have not added a note every time I mention them in the text.

JStor has also been a great source of information with a lot of articles concerning the Riddles that I would otherwise not have found. As for the lay-out and the general basis, Tine Defour’s thesis has been an inspiration that cannot be estimated high enough.

The picture on the cover is of a brooch found in Pitney, Somerset, England, and is taken from D.M. Wilsons “Anglo-Saxon art”.

I want to thank Professor Van Herreweghe, first of all for inspiring me with the premise of the thesis and helping me find this interesting subject, but also for the corrections she made in my translations and her help therein.

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Introduction

The first thing that comes to mind when hearing the word riddle might be a question insoluble, something forever covered up, shrouded in mystery. The latter is what the Anglo-Saxon poet(s) who wrote the riddles of the Exeter Manuscript had in mind, but (t)he(y) did not want to cover up the solutions forever. Through an ingenious interweaving of clues and deceit he urged his Anglo-Saxon audience in the mead-hall to search for the solution that maybe did not speak for itself, but was neither insoluble.

The riddling game is of course not limited to the Anglo-Saxon world; it is a very universal and human tradition of which many examples can be found in different layers of society, different literary traditions, different ages and continents. As Crossley-Holland states it so beautifully: “It is reasonable to suppose that as soon as men had wits they delighted in riddling. And they have delighted in it ever since …”.  

The English word “riddle” derives from Old English rædan, for which Bosworth and Toller suggest the following possibilities of translation: to counsel, give advice; to consult, deliberate, take counsel upon a matter; to resolve after deliberation, to determine, decide; to rule, govern, direct; to have the disposal of, have possession of; to read (a) as in to read a riddle, to explain; to prepare. Crossley-Holland explains how “in a wide sense, a riddle does teach: it presents the old in a new way.”

Famous Riddles

In mythological tales there are many examples of how wisdom and lore might make the difference between life and death. In the third poem of the poetic Edda Vafþrúðnmál, the Æsir Odin defeats the Giant Vafþrúðnmál through a game of riddling. He asked him what Odin had whispered in Baldr’s ear before Baldr’s body was placed on the funeral ship and only Odin would have known the answer to that question. Later this form of “riddle” was adopted by Bilbo Baggins in J.R.R. Tolkien’s “The Hobbit”, after a nerve-wracking game of

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4 ibid.
5 Unknown, *Poetic Edda* (from *Codex Regius ms.*)
riddling, among which such beauties as “Voiceless it cries / Wingless flutters / Toothless bites / Mouthless mutters”, Bilbo eventually asks what he has in his pocket and as with Odin, he would be the only one to solve this correctly. Odin’s riddling skill is also mentioned in the third part (Siegfried) of Wagner’s opera Der Ring des Nibelungen, where he (in the German opera, he is mentioned by his German name Wodan) engages in a riddling game with Mime and wins it by asking her the name of the person who can make the blade that can destroy Fafner, a dwarf gifted with a powerful arm and fearless soul.⁷

On another continent, far more to the south, the Sphinx asked Œdipus in Sophocles’ Oedipus Tyrannus “what had one voice and goes on four legs in the morning, two legs in the afternoon and three legs in the evening”.⁸

But also religious writings are known to make extensive use of riddles, examples are found in the Koran and the Riga Veda. The Bible contains the famous and almost impossible to solve riddle that Samson asked the Philistines at his wedding to a Philistine girl.⁹ The riddle goes as follows: “Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness”. The Philistines, angry, pushed his newlywed wife to ask Samson for the solution and pass it on to them.

A last example of a famous riddle is the question Rumpelstiltskin asks the queen in the German fairy tale with the same name, namely to guess his name in three days time.

**The Old English Riddles**

The Old English Riddles are “poems which are examples of poetic composition in highly conventionalised and widely prevalent genres”¹⁰. They are preserved in the Exeter Manuscript in three groups. Riddles 1-60 on folios 101a-115a; Riddle 60 and a second version of riddle 30 on folios 122b-123a; Riddles 61-95 on folios 124b-130b. The third book has unfortunately been badly damaged by fire, knife strokes and the spillage of liquid from a cup or mug, the result being that 19 have their text impaired and 2 (20 and 40) are incomplete, probably as a result of missing folios.¹¹ Originally, the manuscript probably contained 100 riddles. This assumption is based on earlier collections in Latin that had this same amount of Riddles, e.g. Aldhelm’s Ænigmata, Symphosius and Tatwine and Eusebius’ collection.

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⁷ Wagner, R., Siegfried (from Der Ring des Nibelungen), 1876
⁸ Sophocles, Oedipus Tyrannus, ca. 429 BC
⁹ The King James’ Bible, Old Testament, Book of Judges, 14:14
¹⁰ Kennedy, C. W., The Earliest English Poetry – A critical survey of the poetry written before the Norman Conquest with illustrative translations, Oxford University Press, 1943, p. 131
¹¹ ibid.
The riddles are further called “a mosaic of the actualities of daily experience” by Charles Kennedy. He suggests with it, that the Riddles give a glimpse of the daily life of Anglo-Saxon society, but these riddles are not a means of normal, daily description. They deceive the reader, they provide a glance at a daily object or anything else they describe. The reality is sometimes far to seek through the continuous ambiguity of the enigmatic definitions that they are.

Subjects

The subjects of the riddles vary greatly. More than a dozen are concerned with traditional Germanic heroic elements such as battle, weapons and armour. Examples of this in my translations are the “sword”, “shield”, “bow”, “helmet” and the “horn”, if it is considered a battle horn, are. Despite the strong presence of war-related themes the presence of Christianity in the Anglo-Saxon society is also well reflected; examples in my translations are the “sun”, the “cross” and the “Bible”. There are many riddles to which the answer is an animal, real or not, I do not have an example of imaginative creatures amongst my translations, but a famous one is the phoenix, when it comes to existing animals the “song-thrush” comes to mind. In the field of the homely life of society some utensils or household objects are mentioned, of which I translated the riddles concerning the subjects of the “horn” in form of a drinking cup, the “rake”, the “key” and the “mill with sluice”. Crossley-Holland points out that “more than any other literature that survives from the period, this riddle collection is the song of the unsung labourer.”

That leaves us with the answers to Riddles 50 and 54: “fire” and the “churning of butter”. I would classify them both as tools or aids in the home life of the Anglo-Saxon. Other subjects that I have not encountered in my translation are musical instruments (except if the horn is considered as a musical instrument), but some examples are Riddle 31, “bagpipe” and Riddle 70, “shepherd’s pipe” or “harp”. For the omnipresence of the sea and sea-journeys that inhabitants of an island experience, the “anchor” is a representative.

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13 Kennedy, C. W., The Earliest English Poetry – A critical survey of the poetry written before the Norman Conquest with illustrative translations, Oxford University Press, 1943, p. 134
The question of Authorship

About poetry that is dated such a long time ago, often there is no knowledge about authorship, and the Riddles are no exception. Although their variety of theme and diversity in quality and form suggest that they are a collection rather than the product of a single pen. Of the great editors of the Riddles, Tupper looks upon them, “with the exception of Riddles 40 and 66, as the work of one single poet of the early eighth century”. 16

In 1857 Leo accredited the riddles to Cynewulf 17. He saw the supposed author’s name in the text of Wulf and Eadwacer, in a charade-like manner of runic names. This text stands just before the storm-riddles and is rather short and obscure, so Leo took it to be a riddle as well. When Dietrich solved the last riddle as “wandering singer” he believed it to be a sign that Cynewulf left his signature in the first and last riddle. Also the word lupus in the 90th Riddle convinced him of this. He did not stand alone in his belief. Many of the scholars of Anglo-Saxon Literature at the time believed his explanation to be true, but after Trautmann had published a destructive criticism in 1883 some of them (Holthausen and Ramhorst) started to doubt the far-fetched claims of Leo. 18

In 1888 Henry Bradley suggested that Wulf and Eadwacer was no riddle at all and in 1891 Leo’s theories were brought down completely when Sievers, upon a close examination of the language, decided that it was impossible to see the poem as a charade on the name Cynewulf. 19

The question of Date

When Christianity came to Anglo-Saxon England it did not only bring faith but also a Latin literary tradition that became widely followed throughout the country. Symphosius, Aldhelm, Tatwine and Eusebius were all composers of Latin riddles which must have circulated quite well among scholars and to whom in some degree the Old English riddles seem to be indebted. 20 There is a reasonable certainty that the poet(s) knew the conventions and techniques of the classical rhetoric. 21

19 ibid.
20 Kennedy, C. W., The Earliest English Poetry – A critical survey of the poetry written before the Norman Conquest with illustrative translations, Oxford University Press, 1943, p. 133
Here and there, throughout the series, an influence of the work of Syphosius and Aldhelm is discernible, although Wyatt regards it as improbable that either Tatwine or Eusebius have exercised an influence on the writers of the riddles. Tupper thinks 12 riddles have employed “motive of Symphosius and Aldhelm in such fashion as to suggest direct borrowing from the Latin enigmas”. But Williamson finds that the influence of Latin Riddles on the Old English ones has been overstated in the past and claims it is dangerous to generalise since “(1) Latin and Old English riddle-writers may have used the same general sources […] ; (2) the riddle-writers may have had independent but similar human perceptions about certain riddle-creatures; and (3) it is impossible to tell if the motifs in the Old English riddle came from the Latin or vice versa.”

Williamson points to the “lack of any documented tradition of social riddling in early England”, contrary to the very present Latin one. From there he concludes, with Ker, that the Old English Riddles have been derived from a literary tradition, but that they assumed distinct Old English qualities, namely “imaginative portrayal and projection and the power of a dramatic, literary game”. About the dating of the poems, Krapp and Dobbie write:

“It is of course very likely that a large number of the riddles date from the early eighth century, when Englishmen were most active in the composition of Latin riddles, but a more definite statement than this is hardly possible in the light of our present knowledge.”

This early eighth century is traditionally called the “golden age of Old English poetry”, but there were differences between kingdoms and periods, and since there is no certitude about where the Exeter Riddles came from, it is hard to say with conviction that they are a product of this “golden age”.

The numerous metrical and linguistic criterions that have been used to decide on an approximate date are in Sisam’s words, nothing better than guess-work hampered by statistics. They do not take into account various elements of the riddles, such as difference

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of authorship, textual tradition and the brevity of the poems. So Tupper claims it is useless trying to date the riddles as a whole.  

**Form**

The length of the Riddles varies from one line to over a hundred. They are constructed in the Anglo-Saxon poetic pattern, a metrical system that combines lines consisting of four stressed syllables with alliteration. Similar metrical systems are found in Old Icelandic, Old Saxon and Old High German, but a typical Old English poetical line exists of two half-lines with two stressed syllables each, divided by a caesura. This system has been thoroughly studied by Siever and he has noticed five different rhythmic patterns and designated them with the letters A, B, C, D and E. Tine Defour has discussed this clearly enough in her work so I do not think repetition is necessary here.

The alliteration of the stressed syllables makes the schedule complete. In each line of a text the first element of the second half-line must alliterate with the first and/or second stressed syllable of the first half-line.

As a blend of Christian elements, Germanic heroism and classical tradition the riddles make extensive use of similes, kennings, metaphors, irony, wit, humour, personification and even lewd suggestiveness descending into indecent *double entendre*. A difference from Latin is that they make no use of any acrostics.

Most of the riddles are anthropomorphic, which means they describe something not human in a human disguise. It is part of the rhetoric devise, metaphors. These are constantly used in Old English Literature, and the most famous example of this is the kenning, which is a little riddle on its own. A kenning is a metaphoric description of a noun, a famous example is “the whalepath” when talking about the sea. It is a typical Germanic rhetorical device, whereas prosopopoeia, where the subject pretends to speak as someone else, is a classical device.  

27 Williamson, C. (ed.), *The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book*, University of North p. 9  
As stated before, there was awareness of the Latin tradition brought to the island when Christianity came, and the poet, “living in a time of the fusion of two cultures, could choose what [he] wished to use of two literary traditions.” Whatever they chose, the effect is that even today the Riddles are still appreciated for their lively poetic value.

The Exeter Book

The original manuscript of the Riddles was the Exeter Book or the Codus Exoniensis. It has been demised to the Exeter Cathedral by Leofric, the first bishop of Exeter, after his death in 1072. In the list of his donations to the cathedral there is a manuscript described as .i. mycel Englisc boc be gehwilcum þingum on leodwisan geworht. Most scholars assume this is the Exeter Manuscript. Ker claims that “the hand is the same throughout” and so it is probable that only one scribe was involved in the copying. Williamson and Sisam agree with this. About the dating of the manuscript, it is presumed to be copied during the last quarter of the tenth century.


Anglo-Saxon society

For this chapter I have made a summary of the chapter “How they organised their society” on p. 66 of G.A. Lester’s “How they lived and worked” together with some other material, always quoted below, I find it conveys a brief introduction to the Anglo-Saxon society. I think this is an important chapter because of the influence of this society on the riddles.

The Anglo-Saxons originated from Germanic tribes on the continent. They came to Britain after the Romans had withdrawn to deal with problems in the Roman Empire. The Britons were abandoned to deal with constant attacks of the Picts and the Scots, they invited the Saxons to help them. This information has come down to us through a Welsh monk,

32 ibid.
Gildas, who wrote “Overthrow and Conquest of the Britons”.  Their name had no relevance to any specific tribal group on the mainland of Europe, it was probably used to distinguish the Old Saxons on the continent from the English Saxons.

Their values changed very little despite migration from the European Continent, the advent of Christianity and the passage of time. They were constantly “caught up in endless turmoil – against the Romano-British, against each other, against the Vikings and finally against the Normans”.  

Tacitus wrote in his “Germania” “On the field of battle it is a disgrace for the chief to be surpassed in bravery by his retainers, and for the retainers not to equal the bravery of their chief. To have left the battle alive after your chief has fallen, that means lifelong infamy and shame. To defend and protect him, to put down one’s own acts of heroism to his credit – that is what the really mean by allegiance. The chiefs fight for victory, the companions for their chief.” And “A man is bound to take up the feuds as well as the friendships of father or kinsman.”

The Anglo-Saxon society knew the class system found on the continent as well The most commonly distinguished classes are king, nobleman (thane, ealdorman or gesith), free peasant (churl) and slave. Where a man belonged in the system was based upon “birth, wealth, rights, duties and occupation”. The king was the most powerful man within his kingdom according to Anglo-Saxon law, but there was constant struggle and as a result of that countries could become vazals of the king who had defeated them in war. In that case the king became the subject of a “greater” king and often had to pay a tribute.

A nobleman and a peasant freeman were not at the same level, but were distinguished “firstly by the property he owned, and secondly by birth”. The lowest rank was the slave, he had no wergild (the persons monetary value) and could be “bought, sold and bequeathed”. A man could be a slave through birth or become one through war or criminal offences.

At the time the Riddles were written down, the Anglo-Saxon world had probably been Christianised for the largest part and if not Christianity was certainly steadily growing as the new belief, but since no clear date is established for the creation of the riddles, it is possible

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40 ibid.
that an earlier belief was adhered, notwithstanding the obvious Christian references who could have also been constructed by the monk copying them.

Evidence of ancestral fertility rites has been found in the regions the Anglo-Saxons were thought to originate from. Of a pagan mythology that is often linked with early England little evidence has survived. Some of the old gods’ names are known through the days of the week and certain place names and they are related to the Scandinavian mythology recorded in the Eddas and Icelandic sagas, but that does not necessary mean that the beliefs of the pre-Christian inhabitants of the British Isles were the same as those of later Scandinavian people.43

The role of the scope or minstrel in the primitive Germanic world is formulated in the poem Widsið. It recounts the adventures of a travelling minstrel and it appears that he had a prominent place in Anglo-Saxon society. “Even the Christian monks from the eighth century enjoyed the recitations of their ‘heathen’ tales of old.”44 But Alcuin’s reproach: “Quid enim Hiinieldis cum Christo”45, shows that not all the clerics were happy to see that; Hinieldis or Ingeld was a legendary hero mentioned in Beowulf. Alcuin did not want the monks to interfere with the “heathen” tales but Bede and Aldhelm were convinced that the style of the secular songs would be a good instrument for conveying the Christian ideology to people.46

Three of the most important ideals are fame, loyalty and fate. The suggestion is present, even in works which are strongly Christian in parts, that, as life after death is uncertain, the most a man can do is to take care that his good reputation will survive him, but in the first half of the seventh century the Christian fate began to spread and the Germanic ideals were combined with Christian ones47; a blend which is very obvious in the Exeter Book Riddles.

**My Translations**

I selected the riddles that I wanted to translate bases on two criteria. First and foremost, 26 of them had already been extensively translated and commented upon by Tine Defour48. As for the others, there were not al that many left which had no damage, so I have worked with as many of them as possible. For the numbering of the Riddles I have used

45 Oft-cited letter from Alcuin to Higbald of Lindisfarne in 797.
Krapp and Dobbie’s order\textsuperscript{49}, also followed by Crossley-Holland in his “The Exeter Book Riddles”\textsuperscript{50}, and I have placed them in a numerical ordering, because this seemed to be the most logic approach.

My translation was influenced by the Latin lessons in secondary school and how we were taught to translate those literary renderings of history. Expanding on that experience I wrote the riddles down, studied word per word the grammatical features and possible translations and afterwards tried to mould them into meaningful sentences. Of course dealing with poetry this does not suffice and keeping the Old English tradition of alliteration in mind I tried to implement as many as possible. When a meaning could not be conveyed without loss of alliteration I did chose to keep the meaning and lose the alliteration pattern. There are indications that in Anglo-Saxon poetry, the poet did not always stick to the pattern, so I think no harm is done when a Dutch translation, from time to time, deviates from this pattern. Our language has no such tradition and it is only for stylistic beauty that I have tried to make use of it.

For a good translation it is of the utmost importance to know what the solution to the Riddle is, and if that solution is uncertain, to at least know how it has been reflected on by other scholars. Therefore I added a subtitle “solution” to every riddle. In my translation I have also included notes that I think are important for a contemporary reader, who is not familiar with the ways and culture of the Anglo-Saxons.

A last paragraph I dedicate to the solution of the Riddles. Unlike the Latin Riddles, the solution of the enigma was not mentioned in the title, so instead of a game of intelligent description, it was truly a game of solving a puzzle. Whether or not the solutions were easily found at the time the riddles were composed, is to some extent unknown, but in the present day they have made grown men and scholars quarrel like children. An example is given in the article “Solutions of the Exeter Book” by Frederick Tupper Jr. where the author attacks Professor Moritz Trautmann’s solutions and the professor himself in a rather harsh way\textsuperscript{51}. In it he “insists upon the importance of what he calls ‘the historical method of riddle study’ which can give the investigator a ‘riddle-sense’”\textsuperscript{52}.

Cut-and-dried answers will probably never turn up, but as long as all the elements in the text are accounted for and the solution responds to some reality known to have been within the


grasp of an Anglo-Saxon riddler, it may be believed to be correct. That is the meaning of the words at the beginning of this introduction, “everything indicated about this thing is true”, hence, every statement in a riddle is a clue about the answer, even if covered up. 53

RIDDLES
## Solutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Riddle number</th>
<th>Solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>shield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>song-thrush</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>horn</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>anchor</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>sword</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>bow</td>
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<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>wood and cross</td>
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<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>rake</td>
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<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>key</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>mill (and sluice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>churn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>helmet and shirt (of mail)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Riddle Nr. 5

Ic eom anhaga iserne wund,
bille gebennad, beadoweorca sæd,
ecgum werg. Oft ic wig seo,
frecne feohtan. Frofre ne wene,
þæt me geoc cyme guðgewinnes,
ær ic mid ældum eal forwurðe,
ac mec hnossiað homera lafe,
heardesc heoroscearp, hondweorc smiþa,
bitað in burgum; ic abidan sceal
laþran gemote. Næfre læcexynn
on folcstede findan meahte,
þara þe mid wyrtum wunde gehælde,
ac me eçga dolg eacen weorðað
þurh deaðslege dagum ond nihtum.

Ik ben alleen, aangevallen door ijzer,
Verminkt door bijlen, verzadigd van strijd,
Moe van messteken. Menigmaal zie ik oorlog
En tergende tegenstand. Troost verwacht ik niet,
Noch dat ik steun in de strijd zal vinden
Voor ik tussen de krijgers helemaal zal verdwijnen
En de herinneringen van hamers slaan mij,
Het scherpe, harde handwerk van de smid,
Overwint mij in elke stad. Ik kan enkel wachten op
Het laatste treffen. Nooit heb ik
in een hofstede een heler gevonden
die met kruiden mijn kwetsuren kon helen,
Maar mijn scherpe verwondingen vergroten
Door doodslag, dag en nacht.
Solution

L.C. Müller was the first one to propose the solution “shield” and everybody has genuinely accepted it. Resemblances between this riddle and Aldhelms “clipeus” riddle are there, but are hardly noticeable. While the Old English shield describes itself as a warrior, worn by constant battle and tired of strife, and not even having a healer’s medicin to help him, the Latin shield is of superhuman nature receiving blow after blow to protect its bearer and is described as being made of wood and oxhide.  

There is no description of any ornaments on the shield, like there are on the shield found at the Sutton Hoo site. This shield survived only in metal scrapings and the central boss (this is where one holds the shield), but the scrapings were gilded emblems, including a predatory bird and a dragon. The circular wooden orb of probably about 90 cm diameter had decayed.  

Nothing is said about the shape of the shield in this riddle, so there is some uncertainty on that matter. By the end of the period other forms had been developed, in the Bayeux tapestry the most common one is a kite-shaped shield.

Translation

Instead of gewond I have chosen to use the word aangevallen (1) because I think it suits the metaphor of a shield being crushed by a sword or dagger made of iron. Being actually a participle of a verb, it is a more active word, than forenamed adjective. The picture that comes to mind here is of a warrior in battle instead of a warrior after the battle, and since the shield is depicted as a fierce warrior I find it important to depict it in the arena. In the first two lines I did not only use alliteration but also assonance in the words ‘ijzer’, ‘bijlen’ and ‘strijd’.

The ‘bijlen’ (2) are known to have been used as weapons in Anglo-Saxon society but also as tools and this double meaning serves this riddle well. The orb, often being made of wood and covered with a hide, was shaped through the cutting of wood with an axe, in which case it was wounded by an axe the first time. The second time the axe was a waraxe, mostly with an iron head. Two different types of waraxes are distinguished, a throwing axe and an axe which had the length of an iron shaft.

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55 ibid.
56 British museum, on line version, accessed 22/7/2008
<http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/pe_mla/s/shield_from_the_ship-burial_at.aspx>
I have translated *ecgum* (3) very freely for two reasons. Firstly the alliterative pattern, which I thought could be preserved here without loss of meaning, and secondly the ‘ijzer’ in the first line can be interpreted as swords or sword edges. In this way the shield is attacked by three different weapons which are enough to depict the ‘tergende tegenstand’. With these alliterating words I tried to convey the image of repeated and annoying struggle. *Frecne feohtan* (4) is a repetition of the dangerous fighting already mentioned in the lines above, so I decided to focus more on the weariness of this warrior. ‘Tergend’ (4) implies repetition and agony and when he encounters battle time and time again, this is how he must feel, no ‘troost’ (4), no ‘steun’ (5) in the endless battles.

When translating *eal* (6) I have opted for ‘helemaal’ to convey the meaning that the shield had already been so heavily wounded by the weapons described in the first three lines that it will perish completely into battle, if it does not get the support, ‘steun’ (5), he needs. Williamson points out that *mid ældum* (6) has two possible translations. I have used the most commonly accepted “among men”, but “by means of flames” would also be a suitable translation. All editors have chosen to maintain “among men” though, so I have followed them.58 In the same line he draws attention to the word *forwurðe*. Krapp and Dobbie as well as Holthausen accept this alteration in the Exeter manuscript, which read *forwurde*, but all other editors kept the original word. Mitchell shows that the word “*ær* as a conjunction introducing a clause of time normally prefers a subjective; the preterite subjunctive usually refers to the past or to the future-in-the-past, neither of which is the case here.”59 Williamson accepts the emendation *forwurðe* as the present subjunctive form because one would expect that with a present tense verb used in the main clause and a subjunctive referring to time future.60

*Homera lafe* in line 7 is a kenning for swords, they are called “memory of hamers” since they were created in the smithy. In line 8 and 9 I have tried to add a double meaning, the poetic subject is still talking about the sword that strikes him when he describes *hearecg heoroscearp / hondweorc smiþa* (8), but I have translated it in such a way that it could also mean that the shield also has a battle to fight in the cities’ smithy, when the smith beats dents out of the shield, and again it is striken and defeated. That is why I did not translate *bitað* as ‘bijn’(9).

In line 9 I tried to convey the meaning of dying in a sense that simultaneously denotes hope, and despair. The shield is hoping for a final encounter, which can mean two things: that its fighting days will be over or that the repetitive blows have finally slain it. But unlike a real warrior a shield is made of wood and is not easily “killed”, although no ‘heler’ (11) can heal its ‘kwetsuren’ (12). Its battle days are not over yet, even if it is so weary. In that respect, the last two lines might not be as negative as they seem, because the general tone of the poem is one of wanting to die.

To translate læcecỵn (10) literally would only confuse the contemporary reader of these riddles. The Bosworth and Toller Dictionary provides the translation of “the race of physicians”, which does not mean enough in Dutch to translate literally. By using ‘heler’ (11) instead I have also wanted to make a reference to the wyrtum (12), because that is what somebody who heals with herbs is called today. The herbs are important here to stress the difference between the shield and the warrior who is the vehicle of the metaphor here. A shield can be “healed” with plaster, like the Sutton Hoo shield was.61 Herbs do not heal shields though, only men.

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Riddle Nr. 6

Mec gesette soð  sigora waldend
Crist to compe.  Oft ic cwice bérne,
unrimu cyn  eorþan getenge,
næte mid niþe,  swa ic him no hrine,
þonne mec min frea  feohtan hateþ.  5
Hwilum ic monigra  mod arete,
hwilum ic frefre  þa ic ær winne on
feorran swiþe;  hi þæs felað þeah,
swylce þæs ofres,  þonne ic eft hyra
ofær deop gedreag  drohtað bete.  10

De Heer Christus zeker van de overwinningen heeft mij
In de strijd geplaatst. Wanneer mijn heer mij beveelt te
Vechten verzeng ik vaak de ontelbaar veel levende
Geslachten die de aarde bevolken, ik kwel

5  Hen met rampspoed, hoewel ik hen niet aanraak,
Soms verlicht ik vanop afstand van velen de geest,
Soms troost ik hen die ik vroeger
Hevig bevocht; niettemin voelen zij ook
Dat conflict , wanneer ik na hun hevige lijden

10  Opnieuw hun leven verbeter.
Solution

Every editor has accepted the solution of the “sun”. Williamson notes that “the sun is mentioned frequently in Old English poetry, but rarely with reference to its dual nature as both a benefactor and a scourge of mankind.”

It is mentioned in Isidore’s *De Natura Rerum* though that the sun is essentially fire and that its heat is tempered by water vapour.

Nos autem credimus eum sicut habere virtutem illuminandi, ita etiam vaporandi. Igneus est enim sol; ignis autem et illuminat, et exurit. Quidam autem dicunt solis ignem aqua nutriri, et ex contrario elemento virtutem luminis, et vaporis accipere; unde frequenter solem videamus madidum, atque rorantem; in quo evidens dat indicium, quod elementum aquarum ad temperiem sui sumpserit.

In the next passage, Isidore compares the role of the sun as a benefactor and a scourge to that of Christ.

Hoc quantum ad naturam ejus pertinet. At vero juxta spiritualem intelligentiam, sol Christus est, sicut in Malachia scriptum est: *Vobis autem credentibus justitiae sol orietur, et sanitas in pinnis ejus*. Merito autem Christus sol intelligitur dictus, quia ortus occidit secundum carnem, et secundum spiritum de occasu rursus exortus. Item sol illuminat, et exurit, et opaco tempore confovet sanos, febricitantes vero flagrantia geminati caloris incendit; ita et Christus credentes fidei spiritu vegetante illuminat, negantes se aeterni ignis ardore torrebit.

This passage is taken over by Aelfric in his *De Temporibus Anni* and by the Old English poet of *Christ III*, where it is said that Christ rose up like the morning sun on Doomsday.

þonne semninga on Syne beorg

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63 ibid.
suþaneastan sunnan leoma
cymeð of scyppende scyppende leohor
þonne hit men mægen modum ahycgan,
beorhte blican, þonne bearn godes
þurh heofona gehleodu hider oðyweð.
Cymeð wundorlic Cristes onsyn,
æþelcyninges wlite, eastan fram roderum,
on sefan swete sinum folce,
biter bealofullum, gebleod wundrum,
eadgum ond earmum ungelice.

In Gregory’s *Moralia in Job*, XXXII, vii, the author explains that although the Lord is unchanging, he may appear calm and righteous to the righteous and wrathful to the unrighteous. Williamson finds that the Old English riddler clearly “draws here upon the tradition of the Christ-like sun, but with a new twist: in the riddle the sun is a personified creature in its own right, a minion warrior of the lord Christ”\(^{68}\). He presents the sun as “inanimate and human, and even superhuman, depending on his audience’s Christian frame of reference for their recognition of the divine sun in the riddle”\(^{69}\).

The scourching of the sun seems extravagant outside a Christian frame, because in contrast to the heat of the sun in the riddle, Anglo-Saxon summers were not tropical, but very much as they are today.\(^{70}\)

**Translation**

For this translation I am heavily indebted to Crossley-Holland.\(^{71}\) In the first line the word *soð* can refer to the veritude of Christ or to his confidence in the result of a battle. The sun claims here to be a warrior of Christ, and thus doing his bidings when he scourches the ‘ontelbaar veel levende geslachten die de aarde bevolken’ (3-4). The word ‘bevolken’ (4) is a free translation of “resting on” or “pressing on”, which are translations of *getenge* (3). This conveys a sense of weight of these people on the earth, as they walk, stand, rest and live.

Trying to convey the sun as a warrior of Christ, I have used ‘rampspoed’ (5) to indicate the early Christian feeling that bad things happened because God wanted them to happen. He instigated disasters to punish, ‘kwel’ (4), those living on earth. But this malignant feature of the sun of Christ is only one side of his character, the other side is covered in lines 6 and 7, and states his comforting side. On *mod aretan* (6) I found a translation (‘verlichte

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geesten’) that covers two aspects of the sun, and thus has a double meaning. On the one hand
the sun can make a person happier and enlighten a cloudy mood. On the other hand she is
literally shining light upon this earth. The former is rementioned in line 7, when the sun
‘troost’ through her light, even though she has fought those she comforts before (8).

In Old English the word aer (7) is a sign of the pluperfect72, and is thus used with a
preterite. In Dutch there is no such tense to express this meaning, so another solution had to
be thought of. Therefore I have used the word ‘ook’ (8). It is not found in the original text but
is used to convey a sense of continuity of the sun’s scorching up to this present day.

The last line of this poem has incited some incertainty about how to translate it. I have
followed Williamson’s suggestion to translate ofer deop gedreag (10) as “after severe
suffering”. He finds that “a number of citations of gedreag come from contexts that clearly
imply suffering”, and so it is possible that some of them are related to the verb dreogan,
which has a meaning of “to suffer”. He also sees deop (10) in a metaphorical sense and ofer
(10) with the accusative as “after”. It had been glossed by Grein as “maris”, since deop often
refers to the sea, and the Bosworth and Toller Dictionary translates the phrase as “over the
deep tumult of waves”.73

The constant shifting between good and evil is yet another example of the two images
of Christ as sol justitiae, and the “passage through suffering, necessary to reach a state of
comfort, may be significant in this medieval tradition”.74

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74 ibid.
Riddle Nr. 8

Ic þurh muþ sprece mongum reordum,
  wrencum singe, wrixle geneahhe
  heafodwoþe, hlude cirme,
healde mine wisan, hleopre ne miþe,
eald æfensceop, eorlum bringe 5
blisse in burgum, þonne ic bugendre
  stefne styrme: stille on wicum
sittað nigende. Saga hwæt ic hadde,
þe swa scirene sceawendwisan
hlude onhyrge, hæleþum bodige 10
  wilcumena fela woþe minre.

Met mijn mond maak ik vele tonen,
Ik zing met gemoduleerde stem, ik zing helder
Ik verander vaak van hoofdmelodie,
Maar ik behoud mijn refrein, verberg mijn lied niet

5 Wanneer ik, oude avondbard, roep met
Buigende stem breng ik blijdschap
Aan mensen in steden; zij zitten stil in
  Hun huizen gebogen. Zeg hoe ik heet,
  Die luid zoals de mimespeler het lied

10 Van de nar imiteert, met mijn stem kondig ik
Veel welkome dingen aan de mensen aan.
**Solution**

“Many guesses have been made at the subject of the Old English poem known as Riddle 8 of the *Exeter Book*. ‘Pipe’ (the musical instrument), ‘bell’, ‘nightingale’, ‘wood-pigeon’, ‘chough’, ‘jackdaw’ and ‘jay’ have all, at one time or another, had their supporters, but the present day opinion is overwhelmingly in favour of a song-bird (the poem actually comes second in a group of four on birds), and the favourite is a ‘jay’.75 This can be explained by the mimicking powers attributed to the subject of this riddle. The ‘nightingale’ has also had many followers, since as it names implies he is an *afensceop* and Aldhelm’s Latin enigma on the nightingale, *De Luscinia*, have been indicators that this proposition might be the “right” one, but as for Aldhelm’s riddle, only the first two lines resemble the Old English one, the rest of the poem is completely different. Young suggests a whole different solution which I have followed because of her clear explanation of which I will give a summary here.76

The bird that is looked for has powers of mimicry and his gift of song. According to Young this leaves the jay out, for there is not much pleasure in hearing “a jay scream”, and in England it is “notoriously shy”. The nightingale on the other hand does not possess enough mimic powers to please Young. On behalf of the song-thrush she indicates that the bird is known to be an effective mimic of even the nightingale. Furthermore it has a chief melody which often varies and he is one of the last birds to sing in the evening.77

Under this riddle stands an odd-looking symbol. Different people have had different opinions on whether this symbol is the title rune (C-rune) for Riddle 8 or whether it belongs to the previous Swan-riddle. The latter is what Krapp and Dobbie state and many have agreed with them. Jean I. Young points out in her article that “it is written very faint and thin and that Thorpe p.390 took for an S-rune what is really a modern imitation of the old n in *ne beom* (Riddle 7).”78 Therefore any solution resting wholly or chiefly on the evidence of this first S- and now C-rune becomes suspect. This applies to Dietrich’s “wood-pigeon” (O.E. “cuscote”),

76 ibid.
78 Citation of the introduction in the facsimile edition of the Exeter Manuscript that relates to runes, p.64. Cited by Young, J. I. in Riddle 8 of the Exeter Book, *The Review of English Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 71 (Jul., 1942), pp. 308-312
Mackie’s “chough” (O.E. “ccō”), Trautmann’s “bell” (O.E. “clugge”) and Dietrich’s alternative solution “pipe” (Lat. “camena”).

**Translation**

The “song-thrush” is presented in this Riddle as a bard or scop. This makes for a very rich image of the real scop, pretending to be a song-thrush, pretending to be a scop. Trying to make it not too easy on the reader, I have used ‘mond’ to translate *muh* (1), instead of the more obvious ‘snavel’.

There are several instances in Anglo-Saxon poetry where the modulation of voice, mentioned in line 2, is mentioned. Examples of them are found in the Bosworth and Toller Dictionary, p. 1274 under heading II. In Latin it is mentioned by Aldhelm in his enigma on the nightingale, *De Luscinia*: “Vox mea diversis variatur pulchra figures”.

Scholars have not yet achieved an unanimous decision on the meaning of the *heofodwoþe* (3). It is glossed by some as “voice”, by others as “headvoice”, “the vocal tones of the head register” or “one of the higher registers of the voice in singing or speaking, applied to the second register (that immediately above *chest-voice*), and to the third register or falsetto”.” But there is no clarity on this matter, so I have translated it as fitting as I could with ‘hoofdmelodie’ (3). I have used this word to make a contrast with the refrain that is always the same. About the song of the song-thrush, Peterson says it is “luid en muzikaal, wilder dan van merel, waarbij de korte, gevarieerde frasen enkele keren worden herhaald.”

This is both in correlation with the melody, that changes sometimes, but is repeated so that the refrain stays the same, and the loud and clear calling mentioned in lines 3 and 9. I have translated *hlude crime* (3) freely as ‘ik zing helder’ (2) to indicate more clearly the beauty of the thrush’s song instead of the literal but less appealing ‘ik schreeuwluid’.

Line 4b already suggests that the bird is often near people’s homes, because he does not conceal his song. Another reading would be that he sings very loudly. Both aspects are covered elsewhere in the text as well.

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The sentence in the Krapp and Dobbie manuscript went on for 8 lines, and is not easily rendered in Dutch without a full stop, so I have used another punctuation at the end of line 4 to make it easier on contemporary readers. For the same reasons I have also adapted the sequence of the lines to render an easier reading.

Williamson correctly remarks the strangeness of calling a bird *eald* (5) and suggests it means “[b]elonging to former times or an earlier period as well as to the present; long established”, instead of “old in years”. Either way the song-thrush is a bird that has an average life expectancy of fifteen years and eleven months\(^{84}\), and an interesting point here is that Chaucer also writes of the bird as “the throstel olde”\(^{85}\).

As for the ‘mensen in steden’ (7) who are ‘stil in hun huizen gebogen’ (8), they convey an image of winter when people are warming up themselves by making themselves small. The song-thrush sweeps this image away with his song, because he is a migratory bird\(^{86}\), which indicates that he comes back in spring, and thus if the ‘mensen in steden’ hear his voice that means the winter has ended; in that respect he brings joy to those bowed in their homes. The word *sittað* (8) is a change in the manuscript to fit the understood subject “they”. Since “it is not clear how a song-thrush should sit silently”, the subject is probably *eormanlum* from line 5\(^{87}\).

The ninth line of this poem is one that is much discussed. Cosijn took *scirenige* (9) as a form of *sericige* and *sceawendwise* (9), meaning “showing songs” and emended it to *sciernicge*, “actress, female jester”\(^{88}\). I have used this reading, but like Williamson, Krapp and Dobbie, Tupper and Mackie, I retain the original manuscript’s spelling. The word *sceawendwisan* is probably related to *sceawendspæc*, which means “jesting song” or “song(s) of jesters”.\(^{89}\) Hence the translation ‘die luid zoals de mimespeler het lied van de nar imiteert’ (9-10). ‘Mimespeler’ is the masculine variant of *sciernicge*, but I think using the female word here would give it more importance than it deserves and thus risks to confuse readers.

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\(^{89}\) Tupper, The Riddles of the Exeter Book, p. 86, cited in Young
The last lines I have already referred to when commenting on the *eorlum stille on wicum sittað nigende* (7-8). The most probable explanation is that the happy message the bird brings, is the coming of spring.
Riddle Nr. 14

Ic wæs wæpenwiga. Nu mec wlonc þeceað
geong hagostealdmon golde ond sylfore,
woun wirbogum. Hwilum was cyssað,
hwilum ic to hilde hleoþre bonne
wilgehleþan, hwilum wycg byreþ 5
mec ofer mearce, hwilum merehengest
fereð ofer flodas frætwum beorhtne,
hwilum mægða sum minne gefylleð
bosm beaghroden; hwilum ic bordum sceal,
heard, heafodleas, behlyþed licgan, 10
hwilum hongige hystum frætweed,
wlitig on wage, þær was drincað,
freolic fyrdscœorp. Hwilum folcwigan
on wiege wegað, þonne ic winde sceal
sincfag swelgan of sumes bosme; 15
hwilum ic gereordum rincas laðige
wlonce to wine; hwilum wraþum sceal
stefne minre forstolen hreddan,
flyman feondscealþan. Frige hwæt ic hatte.
Ik was een krijgers wapen. Nu bedekt een
Jonge vrijgezel mij trots met goud
En zilveren krullen. Soms word ik door mannen gekust
Soms roep ik met luide stem trouwe kameraden op
Om oorlog te voeren. Soms dragen paarden
Mij over grenzen. Soms reist de zee-hengst met mij
Over de golven, schatten van glinstering,
Soms vullen meisjes, versierd met ringen
Mijn boezem. Soms moet ik, hard en hoofdloos,
Op een tafel liggen, van alle schoonheid beroofd.
Soms hang ik met pracht en praal aan de muur,
Een oorlogstuig, behangen met sieraden,
Daar waar mannen drinken. Soms word ik
Door volksstrijders te paard gedragen, als ik rijkbehangen
De adem van andere boezems moet slikken.
Soms nodig ik, hoogmoedig zingend,
De krijgers uit tot de wijn; soms moet ik
Met vertoornde stem gestolen goederen teruggenemen,
En dieven weggagen. Vraag hoe ik heet.
Solution

Dietrich’s (ZfdA. Xi, 464) solution “horn” is accepted by all editors. There is another riddle in the Exeter Book which solution is probably “horn”.

“Because of its origin and its wide variety of uses to which the horn was put, the subject provided the shaper of the riddle with an abundance of significant details which he has used to great advantage. The poetic whole suggests a sophisticated skill in image-making.”

The uses entail the weapon of the aurochs (line 1), a treasure (line 2 and 3a, 11), a drinking cup (line 3b, 8), an instrument to assemble people (4 and 5a, 12-15). Some of these drinking horns were found at the site of Sutton Hoo. And Caesar mentions in De Bello Gallico: “Haec studiose conquisita ab labris argento circumcludunt atque in amplissimis epulis pro poculis utuntur.”

The second half of the third line also lifts a piece of veil: The sense of “the kissing of the cup” often recurs. “Creatures traditionally kissed in riddles are drinking cups (cfr the “beaker” in Riddle 63). And the theme also appears in Aldhelm’s Riddle 80, “Calyx Vitreus”, (which has had a clear influence on the Riddle 61), in Bern Riddle 6, “De Calice” (CCL. Cxxxii A, p. 552), and in Lorsch Riddle 5, “De Cupa Vinaria” (CCL. Cxxiii, p. 351).”

Translation

Already in the first line the translator is confronted with a problem some editors have had to deal with, viz. waepenwiga (1). All the editors read this as a compound meaning “armed warrior”. But Trautmann and Swaen rightly point out that the creature can be a weapon on the head of the beast of whom it was taken, or that it can metaphorically be a wiga as it goes to battle, but it cannot be an armed warrior, since it carries no weapon but is the weapon itself. Therefore they have translated the first half-line like I did “I was the weapon of a warrior”. In

91 Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, 6, 28
that way the contrast between *Ic wæs* and *nu mec* is clearer. The horn changed from a weapon into a treasure.\(^93\)

I have translated *hagostealdmon* (2) according to Bosworth and Toller as a bachelor, or someone enjoying celibacy, although other editors, translate the word with terms that bear other meanings, such as “hero” or “retainer”. I tried to give an image of the adornments on horns like the ones found at Sutton Hoo and Taplow barrow. They are gilt, but the patterns and curves are made of silver treads, thus I did not translate literally (‘goud en zilver, gebogen metalen draden’), since the metal was obviously silver, and it did not need repetition.\(^94\)

![Image of silver mount from drinking horn]

**FIGURE 1. SILVER MOUNT FROM DRINKING HORN**

When making the second half-line of the third line passive, I had in mind the passive attitude of the horn in this riddle. All this time he never has any saying in what is happening to him. This is made clear when he talks about the fact that he must (*sceal* (9) has a heavy connotation of “have to” in Old English), lie on a board. The adjectives used to describe that experience give a negative connotation to the image. So in a sense the horn is complaining, because if he could choose so, he would not be there. In this half-line, as in the riddle, ‘Ik’ is the subject, but is not an agent.

In line four I have taken the risk of another very free translation, to make the reading and understanding of this riddle easier for the Dutch reader. Bosworth and Toller give a

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variety of possible translations for the word hleódor (hearing, what is heard, sound, noise, voice, speech, song), and from them becomes clear what is meant, it would not reflect the stylistic beauty of the Anglo-Saxon riddles though, if I were to translate the fourth line as ‘Met geluid roep ik soms trouwe kameraden op …’. Something had to be added, whether it would be the possessive pronoun ‘mijn’, or an adjective. I added the latter because it is an expression often heard, and certainly associated with a horn of war. The ‘trouwe kameraden’ (4) in this line are not the allies of the horn, but of its master. Since a horn can shift masters easily in battle, his master is the one who conquers him; Those friends should thus be seen as a more general term; a troop of warriors that rallied to go into battle.

The word mearce (6) has been translated as simply “earth”95, “land” or “marshes”96, but I found ‘grenzen’ (6) more suited because it shows that the horn is masterless. It is a treasure, so the person who conquers it can keep it, and in an area were many battles were fought, a treasure could often switch between masters. It is unlike a loyal subject, who can remain faithful to his preferred lord, even when only in his thoughts; this object has no will of its own.

The next lines conveys again the meaning of travelling that I have just explained here, but more is to be mentioned about the phrase fretwum beorhtne (7). No translation that I have read has translated this in a correct way, and indeed it seems difficult to fit in the sentence without it losing meaning. The word fretwe is a feminine noun, dative plural, beorht is a masculine adjective requiring a dative, inflected as a genitive plural. The literal translating is in this case: “treasures of bright”, which is not a correct English phrase, but seems poetically acceptable. In Dutch this is not acceptable though, so I have translated the adjective as a noun. Some other translations in English I have read97, changed the noun into an adjective, but this is just as good.

When making notes about his translation on this riddle Williamson argued that heafodleas (10) could mean more than just “separated from the bull’s head”, the element heafod might refer to the creature’s own head, in which case it refers to the open end of the horn, through which the mead is drunk. In this respect I opted to translate bordum (9) as “table” (it could also mean a “plank” or “board”), to make another reference to the drinking and dining, thus taking into consideration Williamson’s note.

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97 Crossley-Holland: “gleaming”, Kennedy: “brightly adorned”.

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I have translated the word *behlyþed* (10) following Wyatt and Swaen⁹⁸ as being deprived of its beauty. Williamson rightly states that a horn has two treasures - its silver and its mead.⁹⁹ The expression ‘met pracht en praal’ (11) conveys very well the two semi-synonyms *frætwed* (11) and *wlitig* (12) while avoiding unnecessary repetition.

In line 15 ‘de adem van andere boezems’ implies the breath coming from lungs other than the horn’s. The bosom has been mentioned before, but it is not his now. I found that translation more suggestive of the blowing of the horn, than the literal but less poetic ‘de adem vanuit boezems’. The mentioning of *basm* in line 9 seems no coincidence since the meaning of the two lines is basically the same, namely the filling of the horn. In one case with air, as a battle horn, in the other, the horn is filled with mead, as a drinking cup.

Concerning the free translation of the word *gereordum* (16), I would like to make the same remark as I did with *hleóðor* (line 4). I find that ‘hoogmoedig zingend’ (16) better conveys the image of the horn than the more strangely put ‘hoogmoedig, met stemmen’.

Using the word ‘vertoornd’ (18) the horn is again personifying itself with its master, as it has done before (line 4), when it is blown by a person that is ‘vertoornd’. The horn itself will not have this quality; it always sounds the same. But when it sounds, a notification is given. Enemies may flee upon hearing it, as do thieves (19), and allies’ hearts are relieved.

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Vaak moet ik worstelen met water en wind
Zij vechten samen tegen mij, wanneer ik de aarde, bedekt
Door de golven, probeer te bereiken; het vaderland is mij vreemd.
Ik ben sterk in de strijd als ik standvastig ben;
Als dat mij niet lukt, zijn zij sterker dan mij,
En gooien mij, versplinterd, in het strijdperk.
Zij willen wegslepen wat ik moet beschermen.
Ik zal hen dat beletten als mijn staart het houdt
En de stenen kunnen mijn kracht weerstaan,
En mij stevig vasthouden. Vraag hoe ik heet.
Solution

Again Dietrich was the first to give the solution. He thought “anchor” was the appropriate solution, and everybody else agreed. The source for this riddle is the “Ancora” riddle, or riddle 61 by Symphosius:

“Mucro mihi geminus ferro coniungitur uno;
cum vento luctor, cum gurgite pugno profundo;
scrutor aquas medias, ipsas quoque mordeo terras.”

The second line is analogous to lines 1 and 2a of the Old English riddle, and line 3 of the Latin text may find parallels in lines 2a-3 of the Old English although our anchor never “bites the land” as does the Latin (mordeo terras). The first line is however very different in describing its subject. While the Old English anchor has a tail (steort), the Latin one has twin points (Mucro geminis) and is described as distinctly made out of iron, the one that I have translated is not.

“In this riddle the subtlety of an otherwise simple description lies in the witty and at first glance paradoxical truth that the power of the anchor is linked with stillness and its weakness with movement.”

The tenor, an anchor, is disguised as a warrior. Because the vehicle is a warrior fighting fiercely against forces of nature that are much stronger than he is, the anchor’s struggle is very heroic. “Likewise, the concept of battle and struggle is enhanced, as in this case it does not only pertain to physical combat but also to the struggle against nature.”

Translation

In the first line I have combined winnan and feohtan to ‘worstelen’, because I find it denotes the struggle of the anchor to reach the bottom of the ocean, through the waves. It gives a sense of fighting close to each other, constantly surrounding and grabbing each other, as do the waves and the anchor. This verb also renders the idea of motion and movement better than e.g. ‘vechten’ or ‘strijden’, and, as mentioned in the solution, movement is the

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102 Kennedy, C. W., The Earliest English Poetry – A critical survey of the poetry written before the Norman Conquest with illustrative translations, Oxford University Press, 1943, p. 135
103 Culver Jennifer, Bridging the gap: Finding a Valkyre in a riddle, university of North-Texas, may 2007
prime weakness of the anchor. Only when the sea is still, will the anchor be able to sink in the ocean and keep his position under the rocks.

Together the wind and the water produce the waves and the current of the sea; this is what is keeping the anchor from reaching the bottom of the ocean. By translating secan (2) as ‘proberen bereiken’ (3) I wanted to stress the struggle again. Bosworth and Toller state that the translation possibilities are “to try to find, to look for, make search for”. I have combined these elements in my translation. ‘De aarde bedekt door de golven’ (2-3) is of course the bottom of the ocean.

The anchor has no land to call its own, and it is never on shore, only at sea, therefore it has no motherland. It does not even know what it means to be loyal to a land; it is only loyal to its ship, that which it ‘moet beschermen’ (7).

The anchor is strongest when it is fixed to the bottom; the word ‘standvastig’ (4) expresses this well. It also tricks the reader to believe that this object is standing, so the image of the warrior reoccurs. When it fails to reach the bottom of the ocean, it is because of the current of the water, so the combined element of water and wind. They are ‘zij’ mentioned in line 5.

Line 6 is a free translation of the original. Of the waves is often said that they throw things upon the shore, therefore I have used the word ‘gooien’ (6), and the ‘strijdperk’ (6) is of course a double reference to the realm of the waves, which is an arena for the anchor, and the literal battleground a warrior enters when he fights. Through the pounding of the anchor’s enemies he eventually becomes wounded and ‘versplinterd’ (6). Through this word I wanted to lift the veil over the true solution a little more, since a warrior is not likely to become ‘versplinters’, but an anchor is.

I have translated oðfeorrian (7) according to Bosworth and Toller’s indication of “to remove to a distance, take away”, but I have added the notion of ‘slepen’ (7) to indicate that the current carries the ship away against its will. But the anchor will prevent it from doing so, if its ‘staart het houdt’ (8). The ‘staart’ referred to here is the fluke of the anchor, which is called a tail because it is at the underside of the anchor and sticks out of its body, as does an animal’s tail. Again this is a deceiving device and the reader is led to believe that the solution he is looking for is an animate one, for a tail is not normally linked with an instrument made by the hands of man.

The palm or fluke of the anchor is hooked underneath the stones of line 9, which are then hoped to resist the power of the anchor. This line is translated freely since the sequence of the words in Old English made a precise rendering into Dutch rather impossible. Line 9 and
10a are both part of the conditional clause begun at line 8b (‘als …’). I roughly have based my translation on Mackie’s, who writes as follows: “if my tail endures, / and if the rocks may hold fast / against my strength”. Of course stið (9) is not a noun but an adjective belonging with mec (9). That does not fit the Dutch (or English for that matter) translation, so I have followed the other editors, such as Mackie, who translated it in this way.
Riddle Nr. 20

Ic eom wunderlicu wiht, on gewin sceapen,
frean minum leof, fægre gegyrwed.
Byrne is min bleofag, swylce beorht seomað
wir ymb þone wælgim þe me waldend geaf,
se me widgalum wisað hwilum
sylfum to sace. þonne ic sinc wege
þurh hlutterne dæg, hondweorc smiða,
gold ofer geardas. Oft ic gæstberend
cwelle compwærnum. Cyning mec gyrweð
since ond seolfre ond mec on sele weorðað;
ne wyrned wordlofes, wisan mæned
mine for mengo, þær hy meodu drincað,
healdeð mec on heaføre, hwilum leteð eft
radwerigne on gerum sceacan,
orlegfromne. Oft ic oþrum scod
frecne æt his freonde; fah eom ic wide,
wæpnum awyrged. Ic me wenan ne þearf
þæt me bearn wræce on bonan feore,
gif me gromra hwylc guþe genægeð;
ne weorðed sio mægburg gemicledu
eaforan minum þe ic æfter woc,
nymþe ic hlafordleas hweorfan mote
from þam healdende þe me hringas geaf.
Me bið forð witod, gif ic frean hyre,
guþe fremme, swa ic gien dyde
minum þeodne on þonc, þæt ic þolian sceal
bearngestreona. Ic wiþ bryde ne mot
hæmed habban, ac me þæs hyhtplegan
geno wyrneð, se mec gaira on
bende legde; forþon ic brucan sceal
on hagostealde hæleþa gestreona.
Oft ic wirum dol wife abelge,
wonie hyre willan; heo me wom spreceð,
floceð hyre folmum, firenaþ mec wordum,
ingod gæleð. Ic ne gyme þæs compes

Ik ben een wonderbaarlijk wezen, voor wapengeschil gemaakt
Geliefd door mijn heer, elegant versierd.
Mijn harnas is bontgekleurd, net zoals de heldere
Metalen versiering, die rond het doodbrengende juweel kronkelt,
Dat mijn heer mij gaf, de dwalende die mij soms zelf
De weg toont naar de strijd. Dan draag ik een schat door
De heldere dag naar het hof, het handwerk van smeden
Of goud. Geregeld vermoord ik hen die een ziel meedragen
Door strijdwapens. De koning versiert mij

Met schatten en met zilver en hij prijst mij in de zaal
Daar waar zij mede drinken, hij onthoudt mij geen woord
Van lof, onthult mijn kwaliteiten aan de menigte.
Hij legt mij beperkingen op, maar soms laat hij mij
Moe van de reis, maar moedig in de strijd, opnieuw

In vrijheid zoeven. Vaak verwondde ik één ernstig
Door de hand van zijn vriend; ik ben wijd beschreven
De vervloekte onder wapens. Ik mag niet verwachten dat
Een zoon mij wrekt met het leven van de moordenaar,
Als iets kwaads mij aanvalt in de strijd;

Mijn geslacht wordt niet uitgebreid met
Zonen die ik later verwek, tenzij ik mij heerloos
Moet afwenden van de voogd die mij ringen gaf.
Mij is verder bevolen dat, als ik mijn vorst gehoorzaam
En in de strijd succesvol ben, zoals ik steeds heb gedaan

Mijn heer indachtig, ik moet afzien van
Het voortbrengen van een zoon. Ik mag geen gemeenschap hebben
Met de bruid, maar het vrolijke spel wordt mij steeds
geweigerd door hem die mij al zo lang aan banden legde;
daarom moet ik van het celibaat van rijke mannen genieten.

30 Vaak maak ik, versierd door draden een dame kwaad
Ik beperk haar wil, zij spreekt kwaad over mij,
Zij vecht met haar handen, zij beschimpt mij met woorden
En roept kwaadaardig. Maar ik geef niet om die strijd.
Solution

This riddle is one that still bears some uncertainty. Dietrich solved it as “sword” and all the major editors have accepted this, with the exception of Trautmann, of whom it is known that he is not afraid to propose ideas that seem awfully far-fetched. His suggestions “hawk” or “falcon” seem unconvincing for anyone but himself. Williamson finds that double entendre “sword” and “phallus” with an emphasis upon the latter is “another unlikely solution. Certainly there is some sexual joke at the end of the riddle, as most editors have realized, but Kay goes too far when he tries to reinterpret the whole of the riddle in terms of the concluding joke.” 104

The double entendre is certainly no common one, as used in Riddle 44, where a constant tension is maintained between the key-solution and penis-solution. This riddle seems to have two apparently unrelated parts, which Shook already noticed 105. In the first part (1-17a), a weapon, probably a sword, reveals itself as a warrior, but in the second part this warrior suddenly stops mentioning warfare and talks about celibacy. There is a possibility that these two seemingly unconnected aspects of the creature may be combined, but I do not think a double entendre is what was intended here.

Williamson argues that the second half of the poem alludes to the phallus, but only as a means to disguise the speakers non-sexual and non-human identity:

“The sword is a celibate fighter; it enters the fray without hope of progeny. It brings real death to men [...] Women do not love that weapon but revile it. The point here is not [...] that the sword is actually a phallus; the point is that the sword is a real and not a metaphorical weapon, that it brings a real and not a metaphorical death. There are certainly two weapons in the last part of the poem, and the hidden ‘weapon’ by implication -- the ‘weapon’ that may ‘battle’ and beget children, the ‘weapon’ that the wife loves -- is a phallus [...] The end of the riddle begins to make sense only when we realize that the sword describes itself as unlike that other ‘weapon’.” 106

When the poetic subject states that for him it is forbidden to marry, procreate and make love, the underlying implication seems to be that he does hope to do so anyway, but for that he needs to escape his enslaver. That possibility seems to be there though: *nympe ic hlafordleas / hweorfan mote / from þam healdende*,\(^\text{107}\) so I cannot agree with Williamson nor other editors.

Their answers seem to confuse more than that they resolve something, so I propose another reading here, one that gives some certainty to the answer “sword” and leaves the “phallus” out of the picture. I am inclined to see lines 17b-30a as a description of the dying scene of a chief on a battlefield. The warrior, with whom the sword is paralleled, knows he will die, because to outlive the chief in battle was considered a dishonour\(^\text{108}\), so the warrior would become ‘heerloos’, but he would like to have a son to have his death avenged. In the poem “The Battle of Maldon” the heroic stand of Byrhtnoth and the men of Essex is described. After the lord, Byrhtnoth, dies his “loyal retainers wish only to lose their lives alongside him ...”\(^\text{109}\). In this story Godric flees the battle after Byrhtnoths death and there is mention that “it was not right”. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles record the story of Cynewulfs retainers “who fought to the death to avenge their dead lord.”\(^\text{110}\)

It is not a far-fetched theory then that the warrior must stand by his dead chief, but it is also not far-fetched that he regrets not to be able to start a family, in that respect he is ‘de vervloekte onder wapens’. I think it is clear that the warrior/sword will not leave his lord and thus he will be ‘succesvol in de strijd’; this does not necessarily mean that he will win the battle, but it could refer to the inner struggle he wins when the warrior continues his fight. Line 30b to 35 again describe the sword as it is: a battleweapon, which urges the lord to fight, and it that way angers women, because it causes her husband to be away from home. A housewife had no weapons, so her battle is one of words and hand to hand fighting, but the sword is above that, because it is much stronger, thus it ‘geeft niet om die strijd’.

\(^\text{107}\) ibid.
Translation

The first line is almost identical to as the second line of the bow-riddle (no. 23), which is an implication that the subject is again a weapon. In that respect I have translated in exactly the same way, although the words in the original manuscript are not completely similar.

There are many examples of swords that are ‘elegant versierd’; one of them is the silver sword hilt from Fetter Lane presented underneath. It is partially reconstructed.

In line 3 I have used ‘harnas’ to represent the scabbard for which it probably is a metaphor. It denotes the protection of the warrior who is depicting the sword. Williamson says “they were often made of wood and simply covered with leather or cloth, but sometimes they were adorned with jewels”, and citing Bruce Mitford: The Sutton-Hoo sword, for example, had scabbars-bosses “with a cross in the centre of a unique petal-like design, set up in wedge-shaped covered cells between them”. G.A. Lester talks of them as being “sometimes decorated, for example with appliqué panels, and reinforced at the mouth with a metal band and at the tip with a metal ‘chape’”.

The first word of the fourth line wir seems strange here, but the Bosworth and Toller Dictionary state that this word is “often used apparently in ornamental work”. Williamson

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takes the *wælgim* (4) to probably be “a scabbard jewel associated with the death-dealing destruction of the sword”\(^{114}\), but I see it as being the scabbard itself. As I have said, it was sometimes adorned, and certainly in this poem, so that it is a juwel or a treasure itself. But when this treasure is perceived, death can come swiftly, since the sword is probably not far away. Combining those elements, I have given a more vivid description of the ornaments on the scabbard than translating verbatim would have done. In this case it also makes more sense that ‘*mijn heer mij [dat] gaf*’ (5); giving a juwel to a sword has no meaning for it, but to give it both protection and shelter might be more practical. That the scabbard is a jewel reminds us again of the well known tradition of giving treasures and rings in Anglo-Saxon society.

The *waldend* (4) here can refer to both the sword’s ‘heer’ and the metaphorical warrior’s ‘heer’, although they are not the same person. The sword fights for the thane and the warrior fights for his chief. The first lord, the thane, can give the scabbard to the sword, but the chief is the ring-giver, he gives ‘*het doodbrengende juweel*’ (4), which is at the same time the armour of the warrior and the scabbard of the sword.

In line 7, *handweorc smiþa* is traditionally glossed as swords, but since in this case the carrier is the “sword”, I would prefer the rendering to be “treasures”. A smith can also be a bronze smith, making juwels and other artefacts, and the rest of the sentence states something similar, nota bene that gold and a treasure are being carried to the court.

I have chosen to dissolve the kenning *gæstberend* (8) in ‘*hen die een ziel meedragen*’ (8). The Dutch language makes no great use of kennings, and for that reason I have given a description of the kenning, which is more legible for a contemporary Dutch reader, and in the mean time avoids the loss of poetic value.

Line 9 to 12 describe the praising of a warrior by his chief, as well as the praising of a sword by its master. Both are done in the ‘*zaal, waar zij mede drinken*’ (10-11). I have shifted line 12b to fit next to 10b, because I believe that *paer hy meodu drincað* (12) is an appositive to *sele* in line 10. Further I wish to note that *since ond seolfre* (10) are datives, but I believe the meaning that the poet tries to render is the one I have used translating the words as ‘*met schatten en met zilver*’ (10), even though this is no correct use of a dative. Crossley-Holland has translated in the same way: “A king enriches me with silver and precious swords”.\(^{115}\) This is not the first reference to the decoration of swords, so I think my translation here needs no further explanation.


When I translated *scacen* (15) as ‘zoeven’ (15), I bore in mind the noise a sword would make, when it is pulled out of its scabbard, and into battle. In Dutch the expression of ‘een zwaard zoeft door de lucht’ is well-known and it is a good metaphor for the sword that deals blows.

I saw no use in following Williamson in changing the manuscript to a full stop to make its twopart structure more evident\(^{116}\), because I don’t think this phrase will be easily misunderstood. The sentence is clear, and so I have kept the semicolon of the original manuscript.

Williamson points out the importance of the sequence leading up to the reference of ‘vaak verwondde ik één ernstig door de hand van zijn vriend’ (15-16). “The sword’s actions have been described in the hall *for mengo þær hy meodu drincað* (line 12) where it is appropriately sheathed (*healdeð mec on heaþore*, line 13a). Inappropriately, by implication, it is drawn and used against friends – and the earlier reference to mead drinking is hardly happenstance. Too much drinking often leads to a table catastrophe […] And many of the Anglo-Saxon *Laws* warn against the drawing of swords at table.”\(^{117}\)

The word *fah* in line 16 has two possible meanings in my opinion. Firstly, the metaphorical one of being ‘beschreven’ (16) in battle, meaning that it has been notched by other weapons or shields when it gave or received strokes. The second, literal meaning is based upon the decoration of swords, by carving figures or even words in them, “like the sword found at Lincoln bearing the mysterious music ANTANANANTANANTAN.”\(^{118}\)

For the translation of line 17a I am indebted to Crossley-Holland’s rendering: “the most accursed of weapons”.\(^{119}\) I have used this translation because I find this indicates what is about to come when the poetic subject relates upon his bachelor existence, something he does not seem to enjoy.

I have translated *dyde* (25) with a perfectum ‘heb gedaan’ (25), to indicate that the poetic subject has always before been successful, and still is; he will not leave his lord.

Line 23, *þe me hringas geaf*, may seem harder to understand in respect to the solution of the sword, but as Williamson, citing Davidson, points out:


“A number of Anglo-Saxon swords unearthed by the archaeologists have had rings of one sort or another attached to the hilt. Some, mainly those found in Kentish cemeteries, have a fixed ring attached to the pommel and a loose rind linked to this. Others have not rings, but a metal fittings shaped to represent one ring held inside another. The significance of the ring or the ring-knob (as the metal fittings in the shape of rings are now called) in each case has been the subject of some debate. […] At first it was thought that the rings might have been used for the attachment of an amulet, but most of these theories now seem doubtful. The ring-knobs of course would not be useful for attaching anything. It is now thought that the rings may have been used in all cases as a symbol of a liege-lord relationship, to a warrior entering his service was considered to form a bond of mutual obligation and loyalty between them”120.

I have added a personal pronoun which was needed to render the text in Dutch in lines 29b-30, thus combining it with line 28b-29a: ‘maar het vrolijke spel wordt mij steeds geweigerd door hem die mij al zo lang aan banden legde’.

The difficulty in solving and thus translating this riddle lies in the absence of an ending. All editors, except for Wyatt and Mackie, agree that there is a folio or maybe more that is missing. Although the next riddle starts properly on the next page, no full stop indicates the ending of the poem after compes (35).121

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Riddle Nr. 23

Agof is min noma eft onhwyrđed;
ic eom wætlic wiht on gewin sceapen.
þonne ic onbuge, ond me of bosme fareð
ætren onga, ic beom eallgearo
þæt ic me þæt feorhbealo feor aswape. 5
Siþþan me se waldend, se me þæt wite gescop,
leoþo forlætæð, ic beo længre þonne ær,
ophæt ic spæte, spilde geblonden,
ealfelo attor þæt ic ær geap.
Ne togongeð þæs gumena hwylcum, 10
ænigum eþe þæt ic þær ymb sprice,
gif hine hrineð þæt me of hripe fleogeð,
þæt þone mandrinc mægne geceapaþ,
fullwered fæste feore sine.
Nelle ic unbunden ænigum hyran 15
nymþe searosæled. Saga hwæt ic hatte.
Goob is mijn naam andersom;
Ik ben een wonderbaarlijk wezen, voor wapengeschil gemaakt.
Wanneer ik buig en vanuit mijn boezem een
Vergiftigde angel vertrekt, ben ik helemaal klaar
5 Om dat dodelijke venijn ver van mijzelf weg te drijven.
Wanneer mijn heer, die mij martelt,
Mijn leden loslaat, ben ik langer dan voorheen,
Totdat ik, vol van vernietiging, het noodlottig vergif,
Dat ik daarvoor innam, weer uitspuw.
10 Het is niet gemakkelijk voor mannen om weg te
Vluchten van hetgeen waarover ik vertel,
Als wat uit mijn buik vliegt, hem beroert,
Dan betaalt hij voor mijn vergif met zijn kracht,
en voor een gevulde beker daarvan zeker met zijn leven.
15 Ik gehoorzaam niet, tenzij bekwaam gebonden
Ik wil niet ongebonden zijn. Zeg wat mijn naam is.
Solution

The solution of this riddle is one of the most generally accepted ones. Dietrich was the first editor to solve the riddle as “bow” and Trautmann suggests the bow is a crossbow\textsuperscript{122}, but crossbows were unknown in England until they were brought over by the French in the eleventh century\textsuperscript{123}.

There is uncertainty about the bow possibly being a longbow. Bradbury thinks the English people were not familiar with this instrument before the 13\textsuperscript{th} century\textsuperscript{124}, but the well preserved remains of a broken Neolithic long-bow of yew was found

“on the 1\textsuperscript{st} of June 1961 by Mr M. Spencer, 8 ft deep in peat diggings, about 360 yards NW of the old Eclipse Peat Works. Examination and reconstruction showed that it had an original length of 6 ft 3 ins, had been bound with thread at the extremities, presumably of animal gut, and was bound with approximately 16 leather bands and oblique thongs. The techniques of peat stratigraphy, pollen analysis and radio carbon test all confirmed a Neolithic date ca. 2690+120 BC.”\textsuperscript{125}

There are references to archery in the works of Aldhelm. In the letter to Heahfrith Aldhelm uses an archery simile: “just as the warlike bowman in the midst of battle is hemmed in by a dense formation of enemy legions, …”\textsuperscript{126}, but Jim Bradbury thinks “it is probably derived from classical sources rather than contemporary experience”. Aldhelm also uses the bow as an example in his \textit{Tract on Virginity}. The sources may be classical but Aldhelm seems to anticipate that his contemporaries will recognise the archery terms and it certainly suggests that the Anglo-Saxons were familiar with the bow.\textsuperscript{127} There is also evidence of the existence of bows in e.g. Beowulf:

\begin{verbatim}
weaxan wonna leg  wigena strengel,
þone ðe oft gebad  isernscure,
þonne stræla storm  strengum gebæded
scoc ofer scildweall,  sceft nytte heold,
feðergearwum fus  flane fulleode.\textsuperscript{128}
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{124} Bradbury, J., \textit{The Medieval Archer}, Boydell Press, 1998
\textsuperscript{125} Detailed records - Ordnance Survey Archaeology Division 1966 ST44SW5 (SCC Planning Department)
\textsuperscript{128} Beowulf, \textit{Beowulfmanuscript}
And last but not least I must make mention of the tapestry of Bayeux which shows the English and Norman soldiers both using bows:

![Tapestry of Bayeux](image)

**Translation**

Sievers saw in *agof* (1), instead of *agob*, an error of the scribe caused by the orthography of his time. Wyatt thought that already at the time of the composition of the poem *b* and *f* were used interchangeably so that by writing *agof* the poet intended to introduce a learned problem into an otherwise pointless riddle.\(^{129}\) Williamson on the other hand thinks this to be unlikely.\(^{130}\)

The problem is of course here whether to translate *agof* as ‘goob’, the inverse of ‘boog’, like Mackie does it in English. Erika von Erhardt-Siebold thinks it should not be done while *agof* is in the original Old English text. Some would in this case alter the word to *agob*, but she does not agree with them either and I clearly see her point there. More inconsistencies have been found in the riddles, but I suggest adding a note to point these out instead of changing the original text. The same applies here, but the question remains what to do with the translation of the word. To use ‘goof’ instead of ‘goob’ would be ridiculous, because there is no interchangeability of *f* and *b* in the Dutch language. Therefore I have decided to translate


the word as ‘goob’ (1) all the same, for the purpose of clarity towards the reader. The subject of deception comes up here and one might wonder whether I am not making things to easy for the contemporary reader, since the riddles were clearly cut out to deceive next to their informing qualities. It is my opinion though that the amount of cunningness has not really diminished, the hearers of the riddle probably knew that $f$ and $b$ were interchangeable.

Although the word sceapen (2) is stricto sensu an infinitive it should be considered as a perfect participle (gesceapen) and is thus translated as ‘gemaakt’ (2). The three w’s in the second line make a nice alliteration. ‘Wapengeschił’ (3) makes clear that a weapon is the subject of this poem, which ‘striijd’ also would have suggested, but not as literally as ‘wapengeschił’, so I have chosen the latter.

I found the word ‘buig’ (3) to fit very well with the curve of the bow as it bends to ready itself to release its arrow at full speed. The word ‘boezem’ (3) is a straightforward translation of the Old English bosme (3), but I think it covers the metaphor well. The arrow is shot from the bow like air is pressed out of a bosom or lungs. The word atren onga (4) is an example of a kenning for arrow. The circumlocution depicts the arrow as poisonous sting of an animal. Of course it is not sure whether this is only a figure of speech, used many times before, or if the fact that this arrow is poisoned actually has a special meaning in the poem. I think, with von Erhardt-Siebold that this phrase is only a repetition of a formula that has existed for a long time, some sort of fixed expression, simply meaning “a deadly arrow”. More of it is mentioned further in the riddle, ‘dodelijk venijn’ (5), ‘noodlottig vergif’ (8), but every time the arrow in itself is mentioned, not per se a poisoned one.

I have translated the half line se me þæt wite ge scop in line 6 very freely (‘die mij martelt’ (6)), because I did not think a literal translation would convey the meaning of the master bending the bow’s limbs by pulling the string, and thus hurting the bow, torturing it. When these limbs are then released (‘loslaat’ (7)), the bow becomes longer again, in height that is, until it is ready to shoot again.

The lines oppæt ic spete, spilde geblonden, ealfelo attor þæt ic ær geap (8-9), don’t really have anything to do with the poison of the poisonous arrow mentioned before, I think, it is rather a description of the arrow being placed on the bow (‘innam’ (9)) and afterwards

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132 In Statius’ work, the Achilleid, Achilles is killed by a poisoned arrow and shoots his friend Chiron with one; Hercules kills Nessos, the centaur who later was responsible for his death, with an arrow poisonous with hydralblood; and Loki makes a poisoned arrow of mistletoe to kill Baldr.

being fired (‘uitspuw’ (9)). ‘Vol van vernietiging’ (8) also is a free translation which I have chosen for two reasons: the alliteration it provides and as a reference to the space between the limbs and the string being fraught or swollen with destruction. I have based my translation on Mackies, who uses ‘fraught with destruction’.

The last half line (9b) has some metrical problems, so Sievers, Tupper, Mackie and Williamson propose reading aer or aer. Trautmann suggests to emend geap to geseap, or gepeah; Holthausen would emend to gegrap. But the form geap from Old English geopan, “to take to oneself, to receive” is probably legitimate.

About line 11, von Erhardt-Siebold points out something curious. I have not followed her explanation, but I find it interesting enough to mention. She claims that the word spree should be replaced by spirce or spyrce from spycan, spiercan to Old English spearca, spark. Spircan, to sparkle, and spircing, sprinkling, are recorded. Spirce thus may mean: I emit sparks, sparkle, sprinkle, spirt. She thus translates the eleventh line as ‘what I spirt about’. The reason I have not used this in my translation is that Williamson points out that to spirce, “to sparkle” is only used with reference to fire or to objects that are on fire.

The word ‘buik’ (12) is the same metaphor as ‘boezem’ (3), viz. for the string of the bow or the place between the string and the wood. What I think is hinted at here is childbirth: like a child comes out of the womb, the arrow comes out of the bows lap. I have used the word ‘buik’ though, because ‘baarmoeder’ would not suit the meter nor the general atmosphere of this poem. That word is too feminine for a weapon, in a clearly masculine atmosphere. Metaphors such as bosm (3) or hrif (12) were usually loosely used so that it doesn’t need to allude to anything in particular.

The word mandrinc in line 13 has a literal translation of “mean drink”, or “poison”. Again this is a reference to the arrow and not to the poison on the arrow mentioned in line 4. But the figure of speech is “poculum mortis”, the cup of death. Carleton Brown traced this in early medieval Latin hymns, in Old English and in Old High German poetry. In line 13 there is talk of a poison drink, but in line 14 mention is made that one will surely die if he drinks a full cup of this. This is how Erika von Erhardt-Siebold sees this line, as an apposition

136 Ibid.
to mandrinc (13)\textsuperscript{138}, and I have followed that translation. About this part many remarks have been made. The original manuscript says \textit{wer fæste}. The early editors (Grein, Wyatt, Assmann) keep this reading, but it has been emended by many. Holthausen uses \textit{fullwered fæste} (14), the words I have chosen to follow, as have Krapp and Dobbie, but Williamson chose to use \textit{full ferfæste}.

When translating \textit{fæste} (14), I rather freely have used ‘zeker’ (14), because “firmly”, the translation Bosworth and Toller give, did not fit the context. And being an adverb, I think ‘zeker’ is certainly acceptable here.

In contrast to the proposed solution to riddle 5, the shield, the bow seems to enjoy warfare, because he ‘wil niet ongebonden zijn’ (16), meaning that he does not want to be laid aside, he wants to be used.

The word ‘ongebonden’ (16) has of course a double meaning. On the one hand, in the case of a bow, if he is unbound, it means he is not ready for use. The string of the bow was untied, i.e. with one end of the cord disconnected, so that it would not lose its resiliency when it was not being used\textsuperscript{139}. On the other hand, being unbound means not to have a master whom to give account to. In Anglo-Saxon society two of the cardinal principles were the bonds of loyalty between a man and his lord and between a man and his family. However loyalty to the lord came first.\textsuperscript{140} The poetic \textit{Maxims} tell us: “Wretched is he who must live alone, to him fate has commanded that he dwell friendless.”\textsuperscript{141}


\textsuperscript{141} \textit{Exeter Book}, Wisdom Poems, Maxim I
Riddle Nr. 26

Mec feonda sum feore besnypede,
woruldstrenga binom, wætte síþan,
dyfde on wætre, dyde eft þonan,
sette on sunnan, þær ic swiþe beleas
herum þam þe ic hæfde. Heard mec síþan 5
snað seaxes ecg, sindrum begrunden;
fingeras feoldan, ond mec fugles wyn
géond speddropum spyrede geneahhe,
ofer brunne brerd, beamtelge swealg,
streames dæle, stop eft on mec, 10
sipade sweartlast. Mec síþan wræh
hæleð hleobordum, hyde beþenede,
gierede mec mid golde; forþon me gliwedon
wættlic weorc smiþa, wire bifongen.
Nu þa gereno ond se reada telg 15
ond þa wuldorgesteald wide mære
dryhtfolca helm, nales dol wite.
Gif min bearn wera brucan willað,
hy beoð þy gesundran ond þy sigefæstran,
heortum þy hwætran ond þy hygeblÝran, 20
ferþe þy frodran, habbaþ freonda þy ma,
swæsra ond gesibbra, sopra ond godra,
tíla ond getreowra, þa hyra tyr ond ead
estum ycað ond hy arstafum
lissum bileycað ond hi lufan fæþmum 25
fæste clyppað. Frige hwæt ic hatte,
nifum to nytte. Nama min is mære,
hæleþum gifre ond halig sylf.
Een van mijn vijanden beroofde mij van leven,
Nam mijn levenskrachten af, maakte mij nat,
Dompelde mij onder in het water, deed het daarna opnieuw,
Zette mij in de zon, waar ik erg veel van de

Haren die ik had, verloor. Daarna sneed het lemmet
Van het mes mij hard, en ontdeed mij van alle onzuiverheid;
Vingers pakten mij in en de verenpracht van de vogel
Besprenkelde mij met betekenisvolle druppels, die vaak
Over de bruine rand rezen, slikte opnieuw inkt in,

Slechts een deel van de stroom en stapte weer op mij,
Zwarte sporen achterlatend. Daarna kleedde
De mens mij met een kaft, met huid bedekte hij mij,
Met goud versierde hij me; en zo verfraaien de wonderlijke
Werken van de smid mij, met zilverdraad omhuld.

Nu maken die sieraden en de rode inkt
En de prachtige schatten de Verlosser van naties
Overal beroemd, en niet de pijnen van de hel.
Als de kinderen van mannen gebruik willen maken van mij,
zie zijn zij veel welvarender en zo zegevieren zij meer,

Dapperder van hart, blijer van gemoed,
En wijzer van geest zijn zij, en zij hebben meer vrienden,
Gelierder en hechter, echter en beter,
Nuttiger en trouwer, die de glorie en voorspoed van hen
Laten groeien door goede wil en die hen omringen met

Hulpvaardigheid en vriendelijkheid en hen van liefde
Innig in hun armen sluiten. Zeg hoe ik heet,
Die de mensen dient. Mijn naam is beroemd,
Nuttig voor de mensen en heilig zelfs.
Solution

Crossley-Holland thinks this riddle “occupies an extraordinary place in our literature. It was composed to be recited, and yet it celebrates something that is read. It stands at the crossroads or the oral and the written traditions.” He takes the subject of the riddle to be a religious book. This was suggested first by Dietrich (ZfdA. xi, 467) who elaborated on the solution of “book” proposed by L.D. Müller (Collectanea Anglo-Saxonica, p. 63, 1835). Further more Tupper states that the book doesn’t need to be a Bible, but Williamson thinks that the last line and a half are a clue saying that this is exactly what is meant.

The first 6 lines describe the process of the making of parchment from animal skin. About this process Williamson explains that it “may be traced back to Eumenes, king of Pergamum in the second century B.C., whose supply of papyrus from Egypt was withheld because of a feud.”; his information is based on Pliny’s “Naturalis Historia”. The consequence of the process is well shown in the riddle. An animal is killed, its skin washed to remove blood and dung, usually the liquid in which it was soaked contained a potion made of plants, lime or urine to facilitate the dehairing. After one more bath the skin was dried and then scraped clean with knives to remove the last hairs. The other tools to construct a text are also described. A quill, made from the (preferably long) feather of a bird and dye, processed from wood.

I do agree strongly with the Bible solution, because of the remarks Williamson makes, but also line 16 (maere dryhtfolca helm) convinces me. Of the word helm the Bosworth and Toller Dictionary states under category IV: “in poetry the word is applied to persons, thus God and Christ are spoken of as æþelinga, hæleþa, háligra, duguþa, dryhtfolca, engla, grásta, heofona, heofonrícés, wuldres helm and helm wera, ælwihta.”

Translation

The well known Dutch expression ‘van het leven beroven’ in line 1 and the translation of line 2 ‘nam mijn levenskrachten af’ both depict the death of the animal whose skin will be used to make the parchment.

Williamson notes about line 3b that don is to be interpreted as “to put, bring, take”, as is indicated in the Bosworth and Toller Dictionary, category IV. I have not followed his interpretation because I find it rather far-fetched. Reed describes the process and notes that

more than one bath is necessary\textsuperscript{144}, therefore I have translated \textit{dyde} as ‘deed’ and \textit{ponan} as ‘daarna’, a word linked with “thereupon”, the translation found in the Old English Dictionary.

In lines 5b and 6 there is some uncertainty about the meaning of the word \textit{sindrum}. Although Holthausen (\textit{AEW}, p. 294) defines it as cinder or dross, Bosworth and Toller gloss line 6 as “cleaned from impurities”\textsuperscript{145}. Since the latter I think is a better source, I have adopted their suggestion in my translation, adapting the sentence to fit better in Dutch.

Upon translating \textit{fugles wyn} (7), I wanted to keep the audience guessing, but a literal translation seems too confusing for a present-day audience. Maybe “the joy of the bird” was once a common kenning for quill, but it certainly is not anymore. I did not want to lose the element of description though, so I have used ‘verenpracht’, to state more obviously what is meant, but also to keep an element of joy or proudness in the feathers which is represented in \textit{fugles wyn}.

The first word of line 8, \textit{geondsprengde}, is adapted according to the note Williamson has made. He based his emendation on Grein’s which he finds “improves the sense because it separates the action of the quill in sprinkling the parchment with ink-letters from its returning to the inkwell for more ink”.\textsuperscript{146} I have translated the second word, \textit{speddropum}, rather freely as ‘betekenisvolle druppels’ because I find it indicates the solution of the riddle. It gives a glance of what is happening; these are not just average drops of ink, they are meaningful, hence they are words. The metaphor of this sentence which extends over 6 lines in Krapp and Dobbie’s version of the original manuscript continues when in line 8b and 9a there is mentioning of the quill travelling over ‘de bruine rand’. By this the poet describes the movement of the hand guiding the quill in the inkwell, dipping it in the brown ink (\textit{beamtelge swealg}) and returning to the pages to write more (\textit{stop eft on mec}). When I wrote ‘slechts een deel van de stroom’ (10), I wanted to convey the image of a full inkwell. Every time the quill “swallows” the ink (9) only a little bit of the liquid is used; the larger part is still in the inkwell so there is a lot to come. This might indicate the thickness of the tome.

The human characteristics which are so typical for the anthropomorphic riddles are well distinct when translating \textit{wrah} as ‘kleedde’ (11). The vehicle of the metaphor here is a victim of some strange assaults, described in the first line, this man is then dressed, which extends the metaphor and conveys the meaning of a book cover to the readers. The ‘huid’ or

\textsuperscript{144} ibid.  
hyde in line 12 is not the same as the skin of which the parchment of the book is made, it refers to the binding and is a repetition of the previous word, hleobordum. Williamson quotes Madan on this matter who explains that most of the bindings in the Middle Ages were leather “fastened over solid wooden boards”. Further on he describes the ornaments of which this poem speaks in lines 13-17: “the finest books received an ivory, silver, or even gold binding, and the sides were carved or worked into embossed figures and set with jewels.”

I have translated the word wire in the context of the smith’s work to mean zilverdraden’ (14). The Anglo-Saxon art shows a very curly style which the word ‘omhuld’ implies well. The words ‘ornamenten’ and ‘prachtige schatten’ denote the work of the smith, the silver wires and the above described ivory, silver or even gold on the bindings are obviously valuables.

In the next lines I have wished to give the book, which is already very clearly depicted, a more biblical character. The Bosworth and Toller Dictionary talks of a “protector of nations” when translating dryhtfolca helm, but also mentions that helm is a name that is given to Christ or God. I have followed that path and made the “protector” a ‘Verlosser’, a translation which also conveys that meanins but also has a clear Christian element. Christian faith is meant to be spread, according to the Bible, and the poem clearly states that this book will make Christ more known throughout the country with the phrase wide mærăn.

Regarding the reading of dolwite (17), I have followed the emendation of Grein, who read dolwite as one word and was copied by several other editors, who then translated it in several ways as “the pain of the wound” (Bosworth and Toller) or “the pains of hell” (Tupper and Crossley-Holland). Keeping the Bible in mind, this last translation makes more sense then Mackie’s “Let not the foolish man impute blame”.

Riddle 26 then continues with a description of how the children of man will benefit from the use of the Bible, in other words, how it will change their life for the better if they have faith in the Lord. It ends with saying the object is famous, holy and of use to mankind. A Bible meets these three descriptions; its use is that of a guideline in life.

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148 Ibid.
**Riddle Nr. 30**

Ic eom legbysig, lase mid winde,
bewunden mid wulde, wedre gesomnad,
fus forðweges, fyre gebysgad,
bearu blowende, byrnende gled.
Ful oft mec gesiðas sendað æfter hondum, 5
þæt mec weras ond wif wlonce cyssað.
þonne ic mec onhæbbe, ond hi onhnigæ to me
monige mid miltse, þær ic monnum sceal
ycan upcyme eadignesse.

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Ik word verteed door vuur, bevecht de wind,
Omwonden met schoonheid, heb ik stormen verzameld,
Ik ben klaar om, door vuur gekweld, op een lange reis te vertrekken,
Een bloeiende boomgaard, een gloeiende sintel.

5 Vaak geven volgelingen mij met de hand door,
En kussen voorname heren en dames mij.
Wanneer ik opgericht word, en menigen voor mij buigen
Met nederigheid, dan zal ik voor mensen de
grondslag van hun geluk laten toenemen
**Solution**

This is the only riddle in the *Exeter Book* for which there are two texts. I have used (a) to translate from, but I include the (b) version here for reference. The two versions are essentially the same though (b) is defective at lines 2 and 4 because of the manuscript burn.

(b)

Ic eom ligbsig,  
lace mid winde,  
w… …dre gesomnad,  
fus forðweges,  
fyre gemylted,  
bear… blowende,  
byrnende gled.

Ful oft mec gesiþas  
sendað æfter hondum,  
þæt mec weras ond wif  
wlonce gecyssað.

þonne ic mec onhæbbe,  
ond hi onhnigað to me,  
modge miltsum,  
swa ic mongum sceal  
ycan upcyme  
eadignesse.

Several solutions have been proposed for this riddle, but not one is accepted by all as a suitable answer. First Dietrich (ZfdA. Xi, 469) solved the riddle as “rainwater” but he could not explain lines 4-9 adequately, Pinsker (*Anglia* xci, 15ff) opted for “snowflake”, but most editors accept the solution put forward by Blackburn (*JEGP* iii, 4ff.) who solves the riddle as “an beam in the various senses that the word carries out in Old English, tree, log, ship, and cross (probably also harp and bowl).”

Tupper, Mackie and Krapp and Dobbie accept Blackburn’s solution. Wyatt lists the riddle as unsolved. Trautmann, who earlier had proposed the solution, “Ährenfeld” (*Anglia Beibl.* V, 49), accepts Blackburn’s beam with certain reservations. He “rightly notes that beam may mean “tree”, “log” or “cross” but not “ship”, “harp” or “cup”.” Therefore he supposes that line 1-4 are specifically about trees and 5-9 about the cross. I have followed his solution, for I find it better than Williamson who makes another distinction in the last section. He thinks lines 5 and 6 are about a cup and 7 to 9 about the cross. I can understand why he prefers that solution, but I think a cross is just as well applicable to lines 5 and 6 as is a cup, and Ockam’s razor states that the simplest solution often is the best, so in this case I followed

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151 ibid.
I would like to narrow down the concept of cross to the Christian cross. Since all the references made are those concerning the Christian tradition.

**Translation**

The first half-line of this riddle, *Ic eom legbysig*, I have translated very freely, but I do think it fits the solution perfectly. The original text states that the poetic is troubled by the fire, in Dutch the translation would be ‘bezig zijn met’. The two expressions are also very closely related, but I did not think that rendered the troublesome relationship wood has with fire. By using 'verteerd' (1) I hinted on two things. First the figurative meaning: to be mentally consumed by something, like the riddle says, but on the other hand, and I find this provides some sense to the poem: wood is of course consumed by fire when it is lit. With the second half-line this extends an alliterative line.

I have added the words ‘heb ik’ in the second line. *Gesomnad* (2) is a past participle, but the auxiliary is omitted; in Dutch, the text would not be as easy to read without it. About the third line Williamson says that “O.E. *fus* often means ‘ready to depart after death’ (see BTS., p. 275, category III) and *forðweg* also sometimes means ‘the way forth from life’”. I have translated *forðweg* (3) in that respect as a long journey, a metaphor often used to convey the meaning of death. Combined with ‘ik ben klaar’ (3) the meaning of the two words is very well preserved I think. To make it more obvious for the reader that the long journey mentioned is death, I made ‘door vuur gekweld’ (3) apposition to ‘ik’ (1), because as everybody knows wood “dies” through flames.

In the next line two opposite aspects of wood are being addressed. In ‘Een bloeiende boomgaard’ (4) the image is that of the wood in its strongest, most lively aspect, but ‘een gloeiende sintel’ (4) is all that remains after it has dealt with fire. From line 5 on I suspect the basic meaning of *beam*, “wood”, is altered to the second meaning: “cross”. With ‘volgelingen’ (5) I have already made a hint at the Christian tradition for which the cross is a symbol. The word ‘gezelschappen’ would be just as suitable a translation, but has the disadvantage of being applicable to any sort of crowd. A follower, as the word itself claims, follows certain instated traditions and laws, or dogma’s, such as Christianity imposes. Today the cross is still passed in a company and kissed by the believers.

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The word *wlanc* (6) has many translations, all of which denote a sense of richness or arrogance. The word I have chose to use is ‘voornaam’ (6), because it better suits the Christian moral the people around the cross were supposed to have.

While in the first four lines the wood was very active, the cross is more of a passive object. It is being kissed, being passed on and being bowed to. In that respect I have translated *onhebe* (7) as ‘opgericht word’ (8), and not as ‘mij opricht’ what the original text would suggest. The image that comes to mind is a cross in the hand of a priest or monk held towards a crowd of people who humbly bow before it in a church. On Anglo-Saxon churches Lester says: “An early reconstructed church in Escomb has a tall, narrow nave (14 m long), lighted by five small, splayed windows set high in the walls. The overall impression is one of simple austerity. This was probably a field church, but the main centres of Christianity were the monastries, whose main churches (minsters) were grander buildings.”

Whereas to the word *mils* (8) Bosworth and Toller suggest a few translations (“joy”, “mercy”, “mildness”, “favour”, “humility” a.o.) of which I found ‘nederigheid’ (8) the best suitting translation in the context of people bowing to a cross. I think the last line and the half line before that (*þær ic monnum sceal | ycan upcyme | eadigesse*.), 8b and 9, have a double meaning. The crucifix might be a metaphor for the Christian god to whom is prayed through means of the crosss, who will answer the people’s prayers and thus make them happier. Another reading implicates that the prayer in itself or religion itself will make their lives better.

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Riddle Nr. 34

Ic wiht geseah in wera burgum,
seo þæt feoh fedeð. Hafað fela toþa;
nebb biþ hyre æt nytte, niþerweard gongeð,
hiþeð holdlice ond to ham tyhð,
wæþeð geond weallas, wyrte seceð; 5
aa heo þa findeð, þa þe fæst ne biþ;
læteð hio þa wlitigan, wyratum fæste,
stille stondan on stapolwonge,
beorhte bican, blowan ond growan.

Ik heb haar gezien in de steden van mensen;
Zij die het vee voedert. Zij heeft veel tanden;
Haar neus is haar ten nutte, naar beneden gebogen,
Ze plundert toegewijd en gaat terug naar huis,
5 Wandelt langs muren, zaden zoekend;
Altijd vindt zij hen, die niet vastzitten;
Zij laat die schone, stevige kruiden, gerust staan
Op de plaats waar ze kunnen groeien.
Prachtig schitteren, bloeien en groeien.
**Solution**

Another one of Dietrich’s solutions that later editors followed was the “rake”.

Trautmann had solved the riddle before, proposing “bee” or “saw”, but was convinced by Dietrich’s “rake”, since his Saw solution was based on a resemblance with Riddle 60 of Symphosius, but it turns out that the riddles subjects only shared teeth.\(^{155}\)

There can be no doubt that the rake was a commonly used tool in Anglo-Saxon England, it is mentioned in *Be gesceadwisan gerefan*, a late tenth or early eleventh century document.\(^{156}\)

Most of the riddles are anthropomorphic; their subject describes itself or is described in human terms. In Riddle 5 for example, the shield “verwacht […] troost”, it expects something, which is typically a human feeling. This riddle causes confusion by using a domestic animal as a vehicle for the “rake”. Crossley-Holland says of it that “[t]he object described is mundane but the treatment is sensitive and the ending atmospheric”.\(^{157}\) I have tried to keep this description in mind translating in such a way as not to lose this poetic value.

**Translation**

A *wiht* (1) is a typical female noun meaning “object, being”, but by translating this as a pronoun, a closer relation between the seer and the esteemed subject of the poem is established. It is also a means to create an ambiguous feeling about the subject of the poem. The rake is disguised as a domestic animal in this riddle, and ‘haar’ suits both the animal and the rake, translating the word as ‘object’ would deny the animal a straight entrance in the riddle, since it is a too clear indication to a tool. The word *wiht* is often found in the Exeter Riddle collection, examples in my translations are the sword (Riddle 20) and the bow (Riddle 23).\(^{158}\)

Line 2a allows another reading of this riddle, since a domestic animal is not likely to feed cattle, in this respect I would like to quote Marie Nelson who suggests a Christian level in this poem, especially in reference to line 6 and 7: the ones “die niet vast zitten” (6) “are the sinners doomed to destruction, and the ‘schone stevige kruiden’ (7) are the good Christians

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\(^{158}\) Other riddles the word *wiht* occurs in are: 18, 20, 24, 25, 29, 34, 37, 38, 39, 42, 51, 56, 57, 58, 68, 85 and maybe more.
allowed to remain on the flourishing plain”. This female Christ figure also feeds the cattle, which is on this level the people living on earth, and she nourishes them metaphorically with faith and joy.

Line 2b on the other hand returns to the animal status of the rake and here the ground of the metaphor is teeth. The tines of the rake are described as the teeth of a beast. For the translation of *gonged* (3), I wanted to render the image of an animal sniffing at the ground, like a dog. I thought ‘gebogen’ would suit this and it connects the two half lines through the sniffing in the second half-line and the useful nose in the first one.

That the animal described here is a domestic one is shown in line 4b where the beast ‘gaat terug naar huis’. I have deliberately used ‘terug’ in this context so as to suggest that the animal takes this stroll frequently, this regularity might have a master at the bottom of it. In line 4a on the other hand, I shift again to the Christian influence, because the shifting between the sinners and the good Christians begins with the plundering of the earth. The implication is that the female Christ figure takes those wrongdoers and convicts them to death, just as in line 6. With this explanation in mind, I have translated *holdlice* as ‘toegewijd’, because it implies both that the job is a serious business and the religious aspect of faith. Marie Nelsons describes it as follows: “An audience familiar with the multiple meanings of religious poetry might well see more in this poem than the description of a common implement of cultivation”.

I consider *stabilwonge* as a kenning, denoting the place where one blooms. In this case it is meant metaphorically (where people develop themselves, viz. a home) and literally (where flowers bloom). I have dissolved the kenning to fit a Dutch reading public to ‘de plaats waar ze kunnen groeien’, because I think it serves both meanings.

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**Riddle Nr. 44**

Wrætic hongað  bi weres þeo,
frean under sceate.  Foran is þyrel.
Bið stiþ ond heard,  stede hafað godne;
þonne se esne  his agen hrægl
ofre cneo hefeð,  wile þæt cuþe hol 5
mid his hangellan  heafde gretan
þæt he efenlang ær  oft gefylde.

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**Translation**

Iets wonderliks hangt aan de lies van de heer,
Onder zijn kleed. Vooraan is er een opening,
Het is stijf en hard, het heeft een veilige plaats.
Wanneer de jongeling zijn eigen kleed
5 Over de knie heft, wil datgene met zijn
Hangend hoofd gekende holtes groeten
Die even lang zijn en die hij vroeger vaak vulde.
Solution

The solution to this riddle is twofolded in that way that two possible answers have been suggested by Dietrich, “key” and “dagger-sheath”, and that they both reach all the presupposed elements. I with Tupper prefer the “key” solution and have focussed on this primarily. He notes that “it is unwise to dogmatize over the answers to Anglo-Saxon riddles of this class [for] it is probable that the collector himself knew and cared little about the original solutions, since any decorous reply would adorn his unseemly tale” 161

This riddle is obviously one of the obscene class, since the solution that would easily come to mind is the male genitals. The double entendre is skilfully constructed so as to suit every indicated assumption of the poem. In that respect “penis” would also be a fitting solution, but the other riddles show that the “obscene solutions” are mostly just a deviation to trick our minds.

Translation

In the first line I have used the word ‘wonderlijk’ to give a description of what riddles are actually about. They take a normal, common thing or object, and describe it in such a way that it becomes uncommon and mysterious.

I had some difficulties translating the word ðeōh (1). The Bosworth-Toller dictionary translates it as hip or thigh, but I would like to comment that the double entendre is not very well rendered in that case. A penis does not hang from a man’s hip or thigh. I have used the word ‘lies’ (1) because it seems more suited, although the English equivalent ‘groin’ is too much a euphemism for genitals, and can therefore not be used. It would make the double entendre too explicit. A key though can hang in that area, just as well as it can hang from a hip. Another solution would be the modification of the preposition be (1) to ‘bij’, but I find it a less attractive sentence in Dutch and in an anatomic context the hip or thigh is still far from the penis.

For the word sceat (2), the Bosworth-Toller dictionary provides a load of possibilities, many having to do with corners and angles, but the translation ‘kleed’ (2) seems to be the only correct one here. It has the meaning of a piece of cloth to cover something up, but also of a garment worn by men in that age. Of the dress of the pre-Christians can not be said much more than that the commonest materials were wool and linen. Some original patterns have been recovered from the faint impression of the weave upon the gold. From later Anglo-

Saxon times more evidence is found in e.g. manuscripts, the Bayeux Tapestry, the will of Wynflæd (in it, the lady mentions gowns of linen and one of “double badger-skin”) and some carvings. The richer man might wear a knee-length tunic with tight, puckered sleeves and a short cloak. The garments of an older man would be more enveloping and flowing.\textsuperscript{162} The possibility of a ‘kleed’ is thus very reasonable.

About the opening Williamson says that “some Anglo-Saxon keys have been discovered with holes in the flat part of their tongues (see Wilson, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Ornamental Metalwork 700-1100 in the British Museum}, items 40 and 140 and plates). The holes were presumably functional in certain kinds of locks.”\textsuperscript{163}

For the present-day reader this might not mean very much and this word can make him entertain doubts about the “key” as the solution, so a note to this word is necessary. Crossley-Holland has translated it literally: ‘It has a hole (3) in its head’\textsuperscript{164}, David Cristal says ‘In front is a hole.’\textsuperscript{165} Every translation I have come across has left it in their translation, so I do so too, but with the comment that a note must be present for the contemporary reader.

When referring to a key the phrase \textit{stede hafað godne} (3) seems not to do anything for the solution. Literally, it has a good place. I think what is meant here is that it is safe under the garments of the young man, nobody can steal the key, and the nudity of the bearer is covered, as it should. This especially works fine, because of the contradiction in the following lines, when the subject of our riddle is no longer under the protection of its garment. Instead of the semicolon used in the original text, I chose to use a full stop to have a better indication of the division between line 3 and 4.

I have used the word ‘kleed’ (4) for the more obvious \textit{hrægl} (4) as well to make clear a point that this is the same veil that covered the object that is now being lifted not only to show the object, but also to put it to work when the cover is lifted up. The word ‘(ver)heffen’ (5) explains better what is meant than the “hitch” used by Crossley-Holland\textsuperscript{166}, because when a man lifts up his dress he shows a clear sign of sexual desire. When he just moves it, no such innuendo is made.

In translating \textit{his} (6) I have tried to take into account some modern syntax, so as not to confuse the object and the young man, both addressed be “he”, of course the young man is not


the one with a hanging head, so I used ‘datgene’ (5) to clarify that I am talking about the subject of the riddle, namely the key.

Upon translating *hangellan heafde* (6) to ‘hangend hoofd’ (6) I have taken two things into account. Both words are neuter dative singular, so it is obvious that they belong together, but it seems a strange combination. In my opinion two solutions seem possible to solve this enigma. Crossley-Holland has used the words “head of that hanging thing”\(^\text{167}\), and that is one of the possibilities which I propose: the head is part of the key and the key hangs, thus the head hangs too. The other one is that head has hanging parts about it, that are used to open a lock, the blade of the key as it is called.

I have translated *efenlang* (7) according to the notes of Trautmann mentioned in Williamson’s book, after the analogy with *efeneald* and *efenswið*, the word modifies the neuter *hol* in accusative in line 5 and the relative *þæt* in line 7, so the key is said to want to fill the hole that is equally long and that it has often filled before. The other possibility is to translate *efenlang ær* as “just as long as before”, making it a time phrase modifying *he*, instead of an adjective with *hol*. Tupper insists on translating this as “just as long as he was once before” alluding to the double entendre in the riddle, as the penis is not always long enough to “fill” the hole.\(^\text{168}\)

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**Riddle Nr. 49**

**Ic** wat eardfæstne  
**anne standan,**  
deafne, dumban,  
se oft dæges swilgeð  
þurh gopes hond  
gifrum lacum.  

Hwilm on þam wicum  
se wonna þegn,  
swearat ond saloneb,  
sendeð oþre  
under goman him  
golde dyrran,  
þa æþelingas  
oft wilniað,  
cyningas ond cwene.  
**Ic þæt cyn nu gen**  
nemnæn ne wille,  
þe him to nytte swa  
ond to dugþum dop  
**þæt se dumba her,**  
eorp unwita,  
ær forswilgeð.

---

**Ik weet er één staan, gefixeerd, stom**  
En doof, die overdag vaak nuttige  
Stromen slikt door de hand van de slaaf  
Soms in de huizen zendt de donkere dienaar,  

5 **Zwart en donker van gezicht, anderen**  
Onder zijn kaken, dierbaarder dan goud,  
Dat wat vorsten vaak verlangen, en  
Koningen en koninginnen. Ik wil dat ding  
Nu geen naam geven, dat eerst door de stomme,  

10 **De domme donkere, is verzwolgen**  
En het zo tot iets nuttigs en voordeligs maakt voor hen.
Solution

For this implement riddle many solutions have been proposed. The most generally accepted one is Trautmann’s “oven”\(^{169}\), Dietrich’s bookcase\(^{170}\) has been preferred by some, L.K. Shook\(^{171}\) has proposed “pen and ink” and Williamson favours “book”\(^{172}\), modifying Shook’s solution.

But as A.N. Doane says: “most of the solutions proposed are faulty because they do not deal with all the elements of the text. This is an especially difficult piece because it yields easily to several soft solutions, none of which is really convincing upon examination.”\(^{173}\) He has tried to find another more suitable solution and came up with “millpond and its sluice”. I have followed his guidelines since they were quite convincing.

Mr. Doane also points out the special structure of this riddle, viz. a riddle within a riddle. Without knowing what the answer to the subriddle is (what is swallowed, the thing which the riddler will not name) or who the servant(s) are, the reader cannot get to the solution of this enigma.

First of all it is not exactly clear what the word *gop* (line 3a) means but C.W.M. Grein\(^{174}\) suggested a connection with Old Norse *hergopa*, “a female warcaptive” or slave. As lower-class servants are often mentioned in the Exeter Book riddles this seems a good solution.\(^{175}\) The second mention of a servant is *þegn* (line 4b), but I do not think it is the same servant as the *gop*. The *gop* in this case is the human servant sending “others into the mouth” of the black inanimate servant, the *þegn*, who “cannot speak but is all mouth.”\(^{176}\)

The subriddle then is “what is dearer than gold and is desired by noblemen, princes, kings and queens”. Doane concludes that this object must be water because

> ‘the thing dearer than gold is desired by “noble” persons, princes, kinds, and queens. Since gold is the thing conventionally desired and possessed by such


\(^{176}\) Ibid.
persons, and, moreover, since it is desired by princely people of all conditions, old and young, male and female, it must be something not normally associated with “noble” or “heroic” covetousness on the one hand or with scholarly achievement on the other. It must be something necessary or desirable for all people - something common.  

Translation

I favour the solution of the millpond and its sluice, (hence the words ‘stromen’ (3) and ‘verzwolgen’ (10) who clearly hint to water and rivers), but I have also tried to stick closely to the original text since there is still no certainty about any “correct” answers. The word eardfæstne (1) means here fixed in the earth or the ground. A mill obviously does that, all the other solutions don’t, except maybe for the clay oven. So because of this importance to the solution, I did not just translate this word as ‘gefixeerd’ or ‘vast’, but literally “in the earth”.

About the word anne (1) Rissanen notes that it is the only Old English case of an occurring after an adjective and suspects it is used as a noun178. I have followed this explanation, as has Mackie, in using ‘ik weet er één staan, gefixeerd …’ (1) Williamson construed the weak adjective dumban (2) as a noun and translated “I know of a certain dumb thing that is fixed to the ground and deaf”. I did not use his translation, because I find deafen (2) and dumban (2) to be part of one entity. I am not sure about their meaning though. They seem to matter but every inanimate object that does not make sounds has these qualities, so I consider them to be an echo of an expression heard often before. The ‘nuttige stromen’ (2-3) on the other hand are a clear indication of the water passing through the mill. Lacum (3) was glossed by most editors as coming from lāc or “gift”, until Shook suggested it come from lacu, “pool, stream”. Either reading is possible, but with respect to the solution of mill and sluice, that I favour, I have chosen the latter one.

The word gop (3) is glossed by Bosworth and Toller as a “captive” or a “slave”, but the question mark indicates the uncertainty that the word brings with it; in Williamson’s words, it continues to elude the scholars179. Grein defines the word as either “servus”, with reference to the Old Norse hergopa (a female slave captured in war) or gēopan (to take with

violence, often denoting that captives are being taken) or as “listig”. But other scholars dispute both explanations with respect to the length of the vowel or phonetical association.

*On þam wicum* (4) would literally mean “in that place”, but the modern reader will of course just as well understand the adverb of place ‘daar’, which fits the metre better. I have also changed its place to make it easier to read.

‘Dienaar’ (4) and ‘slaaf’ (3) are not the same word in this text, because I also am of the opinion that they are not the same person. The ‘donkere dienaar’ (4) is the same person of whom the poet has spoken in the first line, the one who is ‘stom en doof’ (1-2), or the answer to this riddle, the mill with its sluice. ‘He cannot speak but is all mouth’ De *gop* (3) on the other hand is probably a human character, the mill-owner, who operates the sluice and the inanimate, dark servant the sluice itself, made of oak wood which turns very dark when wet from the rivers that pass under its jaws. The ‘kaken’ (6) are of course the gates of the sluice, and if this is interpreted as a mouth a face can be constructed and it is a ‘zwart en donker’ (5) one.

The last line ‘door de stomme, de domme donkere’ (9-10), is a repetition of the first, and also a confirmation that the one being ‘stom en doof’ (1-2) is the same one as ‘die donkere dienaar’ (4), from the beginning of the poem.

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Riddle Nr. 50

Wiga is on eorþan  wundrum acenned
dryhtum to nytte,  of dumbum twam
torht atyhted,  þone on teon wigeð
feond his feonde.  Forstrangne oft
wif hine wrið;  he him wel hereð,
þeowaþ him geþwære,  gif him þegniað
mægeð ond mæcgas  mid gemete ryhte,
feduð hine fægre;  he him fremum stepeð
life on lissum.  Leanað grimme
þam þe hine wloncne  weorþan læteð.

Een stralende strijder is op deze wereld geschapen door een wonder,
Te gebruiken door mensen, uit twee stomme dingen
Voortgekomen, de ene vijand gebruikt het tegen de
Andere om hem te verwonden. Hij, de sterke, wordt vaak
5 Door een vrouw bedekt; als mannen en vrouwen
Hem op de juiste manier verzorgen, hem
Voorzichtig voeden, gehoorzaamt hij hen goed
En dient hen gewillig; hij verrijkt hen met vreude en voordelen
In het leven. Maar als men hem arrogant laat worden,
10 Vergoedt hij hen dat wreedaardig.
Solution

When Dietrich solved the riddle as “dog”, not everybody agreed with him, and it was rightfully pointed out that a dog is not *torht* (line 3), ‘stralend’, nor is it *wundrum acenned* (line 1), ‘vervaardigd door een wonder’, at least no more so than any living creature. Herzfeld and Trautmann finally solved the riddle as “fire” and this solution was accepted by all.\(^{183}\)

The similarity with Aldhelm’s riddle 44 “ignis”, the fire, which is also constructed out of two things: *Me pater et mater gelido genuere rigore*, as with the Bern Riddle 23, “De Ignis Scintilla”, point to similar subjects:

Durus mihi pater, dura me generat mater,
Verbere nam multo huius de viscere fundor.

Translation

With the word ‘krijger’ (1) this riddle abruptly starts with deceit towards its readers, but to compensate for that brusque beginning I have translated *torht* (3) as stralend. Bosworth and Toller give a number of possible translations (*beautiful, glorious, noble, bright, clear etc.*), but I have chosen to use ‘stralend’ to put an emphasis on the light and warmth the fire gives, like the sun.

The two unrealistic solutions suggested here are “flint” and “steel”, or two flints, or even possibly two pieces of wood. Tupper notes the glosses *ferrum* and *silex* to *pater* and *mater* respectively in the Royal MS. 12, C. XXIII manuscript of the Aldhelm riddle.\(^{184}\) I find it important to make a distinction between *acenned* (1) and *atyhted* (3). The first meaning that it is created by something or someone, the second that it has sprung out of two things. These two verbs create a paradox (the object is in the same time made and born) from which the riddle can benefit, deceiving its readers. The next sentence, *ponge on teon wiged feond his feonde* (3-4) tries to give away as little as possible about the subject, since the answer to this subriddle is that many things can be used by one enemy to hurt another one.

In line 4 I have created another paradox by putting *forstrangne* and *hine* next to each other as a contrast with *wif* (5); strong though this warrior is, he is easily beaten by a woman. When passivating this sentence I bore in mind that the fire is completely at the hands of the

woman, it has no doing of its own when she covers him up. Krapp and Dobbie note that this is apparently a reference to the covering of the fire with ashes (p. 348).

The word *geþwære* (6) is a form of *geþweþe* and I concordantly have translated it as ‘gewillig’ (8). With gehoorzaam (5) these are the two references to the fire’s friendship to man, but one has to be cautious and there are conditions, described by ‘de juiste manier’ (6) and ‘voorzichtig’ (7). ‘Voorzichtig’ is not the exact translation of the word *fægre* (8), but it is the one I have used to describe how a fire should be tended. As with *mid gemete ryhte* (7), it is a preview of what is to come in line 9b and 10. If the fire is not nourished with enough care it will be too great to keep under control. On the other hand, if wood is added too sparsely, the fire will extinguish.
Riddle Nr. 54

Hyse cwom gangan, þær he hie wisse
stondan in wincle, stop feorran to,
hror hægestealdmon, hof his agen
hrægl hondum up, hrand under gyrdels
hyre stondendre stiþes nathwæt, 5
worhte his willan; wagedan buta.
þegn onnette, wæs þragum nyt
tillic esne, teorode hwæþre
æt stunda gehwam strong ær þon hio,
werig þæs weorces. Hyre weaxan ongon 10
under gyrdelse þæt oft gode men
ferðum freogað ond mid feo bicgað.

De jongeman kwam waar hij haar wist
Staan in een hoek, hij bewoog
En stapte op haar toe, hief zijn eigen kleren
Met zijn handen op, stootte iets stijfs
5 Onder de gordel van haar die daar stond,
Deed zijn wil en liet hen allebei schokken.
De jongeman was snel, maar zijn dienaar was
Capabel voor haar en soms nuttig, maar van hen twee
Werd op elk moment zijn kracht eerder moe,
10 Van dat werk, dan de hare. Onder haar gordel begint
Te groeien, datgene waarvan vaak goede mannen
Zielsveel houden, en met geld bemachtigen.
Solution

Dietrich solved this riddle first as “baker’s boy and oven” but was later, like all the other editors, convinced by Trautmann’s “churn”, since, as Wyatt points out, “one is more apt to become tired of churning than of baking” and wagedan buta is more applicable on churning, as Tupper suggests.¹⁸⁵

This double entendre riddle is different from the others, because the balance that is usually presented between the two possible solutions has obviously tipped to one side. The repetition of the female pronouns and the verbs, which all point to sexual activity, turn the fleshly solution into the one centered, instead of the “shadow” solution.¹⁸⁶ Some of the verbs even hardly apply to the “decent” solution, there is for example no need to lift one’s clothes while churning the butter and to *ferðʒum freogad* the “child of the churn” is only reserved for a few strong admirers of dairy products.¹⁸⁷ I wonder if the right solution has been found here. Of course I do not support a dogmatic reading and solving of riddles, but to solve a riddle all the aspects it carries must be applicable to the solution, and it seems this is not the case here. I have tried to incorporate the churn-solution, but focused on the sexual allusions, since they seem the most striking.

Translation

The many female pronouns which make it easier to perceive the object as a woman than as a churn, begin in line one with *hie*. The following occurrences are *hyre* (5), *hio* (9) and again *hyre* (10); to add meaning to these and highlight their importance I have added some that were necessary for a correct Dutch rendering: ‘haar’ in line 2 and ‘voor haar’ in line 8. The last insertion was made to emphasise the lovegame as a useful work for procreation, viz. making a girl pregnant is one is capable.¹⁸⁸

The manuscript is emended because of a note in Williamson that the original text, *Inwinc sele* makes no sense, and there is no absurdity in a churn standing in a corner. Further in the second line I have changed the order of the b-line with 3a for an easier reading. That is also the reason why I have omitted *haegstealdmon* (3), because in my opinion, it seems like an unnecessary repetition.

¹⁸⁷ ibid.
¹⁸⁸ ibid.
Crossley-Holland translates *his* in line 3 as her, denoting that the man lifts up her dress for the sexual intercourse. Although the pronoun is without a doubt masculine, the author gives the possibility of the “churn” another chance to avoid being pushed into the background. The churn (which is implied by “her”) has a lid which needs to be opened in order to put the milk inside; in that respect it is not a bad metaphor. With a reading using *his* as a masculine pronoun though, I can only suggest the rolling up of sleeves in order to begin the work. That still does not explain why ‘iets stijfs’ (4) is being inserted ‘onder de gordel’ (5). A churn usually has a hole in the top where the plunger is put through.

Williamson points out the obscenity of the word *nathwaet* “in order to facilitate the double entendre”. It is used in other obscene riddles, such as Riddles 25 (onion), 45 (dough), 61 (helmet) and 62 (borer).\(^\text{189}\) In Riddle 61, which I have translated, it is used in the exact same way: ‘iets harigs’ to imply a penis. I have changed the intepunction of this sentence somewhat by adding ‘en’ and omitting the semicolons to make it a continuous whole.

Line 6b has been changed to stress the submissive position of the woman or churn; the *hægstealdmon* does all the work, as does the plunger. This is also exemplified in lines 8b-10a, describing the fact that he seems to grow tired quicker than the woman/churn; she is but the receiver. This line 6b is the least veiled of this poem and therefore I have used a word to translate *wagedan* that leaves not much to the imagination, ‘schokken’. This verb clearly paints the picture of sexual intercourse: the movement of going up and down, or back and forth. With some imagination and good will these movements also suit the churning of the butter, although it is probably not the first thing that comes to mind. Williamson thinks that “the original game consisted of inducing the riddle-solver to guess the ‘wrong’ solution, that is the anatomical one, in order to offer him the ‘plain’ solution and proof of his salacious imagination.”\(^\text{190}\)

Focussing on the sexual allusions of this riddle, I have altered the meaning of lines 7 and 8a to make a pun on the fact that a lack of quality in the act does not necessarily imply a lack of result, if the instrument is ‘capabel en […] nuttig’ (8). For that reason I have added ‘maar’ to line 7, creating a contradiction which was not originally there. The cream is stirred rapidly but needs a capable plunger to get the result: butter. The other more fleshly result is of course pregnancy. But a child is not usually something bought with money, especially not in the case where one has conceived it, and butter is not usually something that is dearly loved. It


is what is stated in the riddle though and by lack of a better solution I leave the meaning of these last lines aside, as others have seemingly done as well.
Riddle Nr. 61

Oft nec fæste bileac freolicu meowle,
ides on earce, hwilum up ateah
folmum sinum ond frean sealde,
holdum þeodne, swa hio haten wæs.
Siðþan me on hreþre heafod sticade,
5 nioþan upweardne, on nearo fegde.
Gif þæs ondfengan ellen dohte,
mec frætwedne fyllan sceolde
ruwes nathwæt. Ræd hwæt ic mæne.

Vaak heeft een voornamme vrouw mij opgesloten
In een doos, soms haalt de Dame mij eruit
Met haar handen en geeft ze me aan de heer,
De bevallige prins, zoals haar bevolen was.
5 Dan steekt hij zijn hoofd in mijn schoot
Van beneden naar boven zich insluitend in het nauw.
Als de kracht van de krijger iets waard was,
Is wat mij, versierd, moet vullen, iets harigs.
Raad hoe ik heet.
Solution

This riddle has two suggested solutions that fit all the postulated criteria: it must fit in a box, be in some contact with women but mainly be a male attribute and something must be able to go through it and fill it. The objects that meet the above-mentioned criteria are a shirt (or a shirt of mail), first proposed by Dietrich, and a helmet, which Wyatt believes to be the solution. Some editors prefer one or the other but I agree with Williamson that, since they both fit the poem, they should both be listed “as equally possible”.  

Tupper was the first to note the sexual allusions and found it debased the poem; “he was derisive of its alleged ‘dirt’ and dismisses Trautmann’s impulse to take it more seriously”. The poem is not a whole double entendre though, it begins only in line 5, but it goes on the rest of the riddle, until it ends with Ræd hwæt ic mæne. According to Crossley-Holland this deviation from the standard Frige hwæt ic hatte or Saga hwæt ic hatte indicates “the poet’s intention to be ambiguous”.

Translation

As can be seen in the first lines the double entendre solution “vagina” is not really suiting here. It can not be locked up in a box, nor taken out of it by hand and given to someone, the description is of a purely sartorial nature. Because of that I have not tried to convey any more sexual tension than is displayed in the original text.

I am aware of Whitehurst Williams’ opinion, who thinks that the earce is “a metaphoric statement for the Lady’s great modesty which is set aside only in the proper circumstance – when her lord commands”, but Bolding points out that there is no certitude about her being right, since there is no mentioning of modesty elsewhere. I think her explanation is too far-fetched and based on seeing things that are not really there.

The two parts of the poem are well separated by a full stop. Still the beginning of the second part comes quite unexpected in an otherwise simple text. From line 5 onwards the reader’s thoughts are distracted by the underlying brewing of a double entendre.

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Instead of translating the word *hreðer* (5) as bosom, I have chosen the somewhat more charged ‘schoot’. There is no direct sexual tension, but the reader will probably raise an eyebrow at this word. The word is not always a reference to the female genitals, but can also simply refer to the area, as in the phrase “to sit in someone’s lap”, combined with the verb ‘steken [...] in’ (5) though it stirs up the tension.

If line 5 is a hint at sexuality, line six is a slap in the face, there is no more hidden or subconscious layer here. The movement the ‘heer’ (3) makes is not coincidentally the one made when penetrating a vagina: ‘van beneden naar boven zich insluitend in het nauw’. The next half-line is freely translated to give a double meaning in the sexual content. What fills the vagina is of course a penis, but in the vulgar tongue, ‘vullen’ implies that the man has an orgasm in the woman, thus filling her with sperm, and ‘als de kracht van de krijger iets waard was’, making her pregnant.

After having put the reader on the wrong track for some time, a hint is given at the “chaste” solution of the poem, by the word *frætwedne* (8). This word is a past participle of the verb “to ornate”, and is inflected as an accusative belongs with *mec* (8). It is thus a description of the subject of the poem, not of what fills it. There are a good many examples of decorated helmets and shirts of mail, but the female genitals can hardly be called ‘versierd’ (8).
**Conclusion**

A translation of texts that are over a thousand years old and originating from a culture that is very different from the one we experience today, is different from a translating a contemporary text, but the same aspects must always be observed. The message of the original text must be conveyed to the present-day audience without losing its meaning, but with the addition of new elements to convey that meaning.

Since readers of the Riddles are well aware of the distance in time and culture I have permitted myself to keep close to the original text. With some changes in syntax and a few words that possess approximately the same double meaning or a new one I find that the texts are not all that difficult to render. Of course differences in culture must be kept in mind and even more important, the special structure of the Riddle which tries to inform and deceive at the same time. Marie Nelson mentions translations of the Exeter Book Riddles in an essay, and says about them that the “dangers are obvious when would-be riddle solvers must use texts that are not merely purposefully ambiguous, but often accidentally made more difficult to read through translation issues.”

I think there will be no argument on that matter, and with that in mind I tried to make the texts as clear as possible for contemporary Dutch readers. This often implied changing the syntax, using prepositions that are not fit to describe a dative is one of the most common changes. But sometimes an image could not be conveyed without a note to the reader. This happened one time in Riddle 44, where there is no satisfying image for the opening in the head of an Anglo-Saxon key, because nowadays keys work on another principle.

I have experienced the most difficulty in trying to keep the alliterative scheme, but as the reader will have noticed, it is often there. Sometimes more devices were possible to embellish a riddle, and I have made use of e.g. assonance. I must admit that I have focused primarily on content though, and not as much on the form of the riddle. In some of them I have been able to keep the metre, but I have not hesitated to change it if it meant that a better word could be used to convey the content.

Further on I have tried to come up with a modified solution of Riddle 20, the sword, and Riddle 30, the beam-riddle and take those into account when translating.

All in all the “game of riddle-solving” has been a very pleasant and gratifying experience and I am happy to contribute my mite in informing a contemporary society about the earliest Anglo-Saxon poetry.

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