

Two historical riddles of the Old English

Exeter Book

by

John Donald Hosler

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John Donald Hosler

has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Committee Member

Committee Member

Committee Member

Major Professor

For the Major Program

For the Graduate College

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Importance of the Exeter Book

Exeter Cathedral Library MS. 3501, known as Codex Exoniensis or, more commonly, the Exeter Book, is perhaps the most important surviving literary manuscript from the Anglo-Saxon period of roughly 600-1066 AD. It completes the bulk of surviving Old English poetry along with three other Old English codices: Beowulf and Judith (British Library, Cotton Vitellius A. xv), Junius (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 11) and the Vercelli Book (Vercelli, Cathedral Library, MS CXVII) (Lloyd 4). The Exeter Book contains approximately one-sixth of the surviving corpus of Old English verse (Gameson 135). The composition and history of the Exeter Book have been areas of considerable scholarly activity.

The Exeter Book's history can be definitively traced back to 1050, when Bishop Leofric moved the episcopal see that oversaw Devon and Cornwall from Crediton to Exeter, taking charge of the lands and books already present there. The bishop inherited a region filled with strife and

uncertainty. In 1003, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle notes, "Here Exeter was broken down through the French Churl Hugh whom the lady had set as her reeve; and the raiding-party completely did for the town and took great war-booty there" (Swanton 135). The Danes sacked and looted the town shortly thereafter, the monasteries of Exeter were destroyed, and the town was burned (Gameson 139).

Yet under Leofric Exeter flourished, and one improvement came in the form of a new library with a burgeoning book collection. We can trace to Exeter the provenance of 67 cathedral manuscripts from before the twelfth century; Leofric donated 32 of these. The library was then the largest collection at the time of any old foundation cathedral; these, unlike other cathedrals, were administered by secular canons instead of monks (Conner 2, 11). By the eleventh century only Canterbury, Salisbury, and Worcester possessed more volumes (Conner 2).¹ In 1072, the Exeter Book became one of Leofric's donations. A scriptorium was created in Exeter as well, but librarians at the Exeter Cathedral Library hypothesize that Exeter Cathedral MS. 3501 was written at a different scriptorium in Glastonbury over a hundred years earlier (Lloyd 3).²

In comparison to the three other remaining Old English codices, the Exeter Book encompasses the widest variety of verse. Within are such heroic narratives as "Guthlac" and the regretful elegies of "The Wife's Lament" and "The Wanderer." Alongside these poems are the enigmatic riddles that are unique to the Exeter manuscript (Lloyd 4).

In contrast to the fire-ravaged leaves of Beowulf and Judith, the Exeter Book is almost entirely preserved. The original has suffered only minor damage, including a loss of leaves, knife cuts, holes from burning brands or possible dampness, and stains from what may have been a spilt mug of ale (Pope 26). These problems do not affect the majority of the texts within. A transcription was made in 1832, and in 1933 a facsimile was created to ensure the survival of the complete text (Conner 253). Today, unless one needs to examine the first folio of "Christ" or the burnt section of the riddles, the manuscript is relatively unnecessary as a primary research tool (Conner 254). The Exeter Book now sits in the Exeter Cathedral Library, enshrined in a protective casing next to the Exon Domesday, the second outstanding medieval manuscript in residence at Exeter Cathedral.

Currently, the Exeter Book is composed of 123 folios that are estimated to total about 77 percent of the original copy (Conner 109-10). There are no illuminations or illustrations in the manuscript, excepting incised figures in six folios that were drawn without the use of color (Krapp xiv). The leaves are arranged in the remains of seventeen quires. The book itself, for a volume written in the vernacular, is quite large: 320 x 220mm, with a written area of 240 x 160mm (Gameson 135).

The Exeter Book proper is arranged in three booklets. Booklet I includes the three "Christ" poems and the two "Guthlac" poems. Booklet II, probably the oldest collection, includes poems from "Azarias" to the first eight lines of "The Partridge." Notable works in this booklet are "The Wanderer," "The Seafarer," and "Widsith." Booklet III, by far the largest of the three, comprises the rest of the book. It runs from the remaining lines of "The Partridge" to Riddle 95 at the manuscript's end. Some of the more famous verses in Booklet III include "The Wife's Lament," "Wulf and Eadwacer," "Deor," and the nearly one hundred riddles.

In summary, the Exeter Book is a large and varied source of Old English poetry, one of four major vernacular

collections known to us currently. It is difficult to date its creation exactly, but sometime in the mid to late-tenth century seems appropriate. It was probably written somewhere in southwestern Britain, perhaps in Glastonbury if not at Exeter itself. From remaining inscriptions in other Exeter Library holdings, we know that Bishop Leofric donated the book c. 1072. Though damaged and scarred by numerous incidents, the manuscript has been copied and printed into several modern editions.³ As we will see, the existence of the Exeter Book greatly aids our modern understanding of the literary culture of pre-Conquest Britain.

The Exeter Book Riddles

Of the four surviving Old English poetic codices, only the Exeter Book contains Anglo-Saxon riddles, 95 in all. The lack of riddles in the Beowulf, Junius, or Vercelli manuscripts makes the interpretation of the riddles in Codex Exoniensis a unique challenge. The Exeter riddles have been translated and published more than any other Old English text and therefore invite extended study (Muir 576).⁴

The riddles are arranged in three distinct sections in Booklet III. The first 59 follow "Wulf and Eadwacer," which in the early twentieth century was thought to be the first riddle. Thereafter follows "The Wife's Lament" and other poems, concluding with "Homiletic Fragment II." Riddles 30b (different from the first riddle 30, known as 30a) and 60 come next, followed by "The Husband's Message" and "The Ruin." Concluding the manuscript are riddles 61-95. There is no scribal note to indicate the completion of the text but only the last lines of Riddle 95.⁵ Paull Baum postulates that the Exeter Book scribe wrote down the first 59 riddles but acquired additional materials at a later date. In other words, the riddles may be in some sort of chronological arrangement, based on the available working materials of the scribe (27).⁶

Little agreement has been reached about the authorship of the riddles or even the Exeter Book at large. It was once thought that Cynewulf was the primary author of the Exeter Book poems, but scholars today tend to assume there were several. Compelling evidence is found in the arrangement of the riddles, scattered as it is, which suggests a variety of sources given to the scribe at different times. Scribal conventions, however, are similar

throughout the manuscript, and the riddles employ the same capitalization and punctuation devices as the shorter poems in the manuscript. The language of the riddles is also consistent with the rest of the Exeter Book in terms of dialect and form (Williamson 9). There are, however, no scribal spaces between the riddles in the folios, though there are gaps between other poems in the volume (Krapp xvi).

In addition, many of the riddles can be traced back to Latin, Celtic, or Germanic riddles similar in language or theme. In particular, dependence upon the Latin riddles of Aldhelm, bishop of Sherbourne (c.640-709), Tatwine, archbishop of Canterbury (d.734) and Eusebius, a possible friend of the abbot of Wearmouth (c.680-747) can be found in riddles 16, 35, 40, 47, 60, 65 and 85 (Krapp lxvi-ii).⁷ Therefore, the riddles may stem from a riddling tradition in the first half of the eighth century.

Organization and Goals of this Study

Michael Alexander notes, "the riddles have been a rather neglected department of Old English poetry, though scholars regularly turn them over" (84), but several

critical theories have been applied to riddle interpretation nonetheless. These include New Criticism, which explores the lyrical quality of the riddles; theories of paronomasia and wordplay; strict linguistic approaches; and exegetical interpretations. In the continuing search for good solutions, however, I feel that a different methodology is necessary. Agop Hacikyan writes, "Besides their literary qualities, many of these riddles reflect Old English society in all its aspects and portray the daily life and customs of early Englishmen" (38). Accordingly, my purpose in this study is to argue for a historical approach to the study of poetic riddles, specifically those found in the Exeter Book.

My model for interpretation is Robert Hume's methodology of Archaeo-Historicism (1999), through which I will examine pertinent historical contexts surrounding the Exeter riddles. Hume explains the method as an attempt "to reconstruct specific contexts that permit the present-day interpreter to make sense of the cultural artifacts of the past and the conditions in which they were produced" (8). The method rests on the idea that historical knowledge is possible and can be reconstructed through primary materials. Reading in the light of the uncovered

historical context, we can change our understanding of a text; the process is an inseparable part of close reading (Hume 36). Hume envisions the methodology as a synthesis: Archaeo-Historicism involves both the reconstruction of context and the interpretation of texts within that context (26).

The study of the Exeter Book riddles, I believe, requires such an investigation. Through close study of two riddles, 17 and 74, I will show how such a historical inquiry reveals a new solution for each. My findings will then be used in conjunction with close study of each riddle's poetic imagery and linguistic features. At the completion of this thesis, I will suggest that solutions to the Exeter riddles should not be offered until the available historical contexts of both poem and solution have been reasonably and thoroughly interrogated.

CHAPTER 2: EXETER RIDDLE 17

Explication and Past Solutions

Riddles ask for solutions to certain questions, demanding a reader response. We can analyze and enjoy the Exeter riddles for their poetic qualities or the historical insight they offer, but inevitably, we must offer a solution to the conundrum. Riddle solving is a highly deductive process, and sometimes the connections between clues and solutions are hard to identify. Once we propose a solution to a riddle, we must then demonstrate that the answer fits the given clues. The Exeter Book riddles are often obscure, their clues mired in the complexities of a historical context as well as in the conventions of Old English.

Williamson argues that the solution to the first riddle in this study, Exeter Riddle 17, is uncertain (179). Every proposer of a solution has agreed, however, that the riddle asks for the identity of a certain physical object and not a moral or spiritual concept.⁸ Many other Exeter riddles do the same, and answers proposed for different

riddles range from "oxen" to "one-eyed seller of garlic." The objects were probably common sights to everyday Anglo-Saxons, thus reflecting bits and pieces of early medieval Britain:

The Old English riddles compose a series of thumbnail sketches of the daily realisms of Old English life. They are in a certain sense a listing of the things with which man's life was woven: the birds and animals of country life, man's food and drink, the tools with which he worked, the armor and weapons with which he fought, his instruments of music. By their range and detailed vividness the Riddles supplement the pictures of Old English culture derived from the narrative poems (Kennedy 39).

Hume's historical method is directly applicable, as objects that were unknown to Anglo-Saxons are unlikely to be valid solutions.

Exeter Riddle 17 is relatively short at eleven lines and reads as follows:⁹

Ic eom mundbora	minre heorde,
eodorwirim fæst,	innan gefyllled
dryhtgestreona.	Dægtidum oft
spæte sperebrogan;	sped bip þy mare
fylle minre.	Frea þæt bihealdeð,

hu me of hrife fleogað	hyldepilas.
Hwylum ic sweartum	swelgan onginne
brunum beadowæpnum,	bitrum ordum,
eglum attorsperum.	Is min innað til,
wombhord wlitig,	wloncum deore;
men gemunan	þæt me þurh muþ fareð

(Krapp 189).

I am the protector / of my flock,
 an enclosure with wires firm, / fill'd within
 with people's treasures. / In day-time oft
 I spit dread of spears; / my speed is the greater
 from my fullness. / My master beholds
 how from my belly fly / the shafts of battle.
 Sometimes I with swart / begin to swell,
 with brown, war-weapons, / with bitter points
 dire venom'd spears. / My inside is good,
 my intestines comely, / to the proud dear:
 men remember / what through my mouth passes

(B. Thorpe 398).¹⁰

Previously suggested solutions have all been objects:

ballista (a military siege engine), fortress or town, oven,
 forge, beehive, phallus, ink well, and quiver (Williamson
 179-81).¹¹ The solution remains elusive, however, because
 all of these answers fail two tests. First, they typically
 do not meet certain historical burdens. Second, the
 solutions do not meet each and every clue that the riddle
 provides. These twin problems will each be discussed in
 turn.

In English scholarship, Riddle 17 has received scant attention in the last twenty years. Newer solutions have fared poorly because of the reasonableness of Franz Dietrich's original answer of "ballista" (1859), so far the most convincing solution to the riddle. But in contrast to some Exeter solutions that are universally accepted, not everyone has agreed with Dietrich.¹² The major problem with "ballista" lies in early medieval history; as we will see, it is unlikely that such military devices existed in Anglo-Saxon England.

I solve Riddle 17 as a different object of war, a ninth or tenth-century "Viking Longship." The solution of "ship" has been proposed as a solution for Exeter Riddles 19, 32, 36, and 64, and appears to be a relatively common theme. I will support my solution to Riddle 17 by first explaining its historical context; thereafter, I will demonstrate how a Viking longship meets the textual demands of the riddle.

Vikings and Their Ships

Viking ships were a common sight before, during, and after the tenth century. The ship was probably the most

important aspect of Scandinavian life; Vikings relied on ships for raiding, from early forays on Frankish territory and Scottish monasteries up until later raids on the greater British Isles. The ship was the Vikings' solitary tool of expansion for nearly three centuries.¹³ Basil Greenhill provides a short synopsis of the Vikings' outward growth:

In the late AD 700s Europe was entering the 250 years of Scandinavian expansion, the years of the Vikings. This was the period when kings and earls, local chieftains and merchants and bands of villagers from what are now Denmark, Norway and Sweden, using the clinker-built boats as the chief tool and agent of their expansion, colonized, traded and raided from southern Russia to North America. They settled in Iceland, Greenland, northern France, Britain and Ireland, and worked their great open boats into the Mediterranean and much smaller boats down the great rivers into the Black Sea (194).

The early history of Norway in particular is wrapped more in naval warfare than in politics or diplomacy (Brøgger 185). The ships were the triumphs of Viking civilization:

The ships of the Vikings were the supreme achievement of their technical skill, the pinnacle of their material culture; they were the foundation of their power, their delight, and their most treasured possession. What the temple was to the Greeks, the ship was to the Vikings; the complete and harmonious expression of a rare ability (Greenhill 195).

The threat of unexpected Scandinavian attacks and large-scale Danish invasions was constant throughout the late Anglo-Saxon period. Vikings attacked not only Britain's eastern shore but also points all around the Isles, including the coasts of Scotland and Ireland. When Vikings raided, a native leader was generally faced with two accepted tactics: engage in combat or pay a tribute of *danegeld*.¹⁴

Viking activity in the period that surrounded the creation of the Exeter Book was considerable. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle places their first landing in England in 789, noting, "there came for the first time 3 ships of Northmen from Hordaland: these were the first ships of the Danish men which sought out the land of the English race" (Swanton 54). In 866 the Vikings captured York, and a

Northumbrian attempt to retake the city in the following year met with disaster. The Vikings subsequently held the city for the next decade (Campbell 166). Olaf Guthfrithson, the Viking King of Dublin, invaded Mercia and East Anglia in 940 with great success. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle notes, "The Mercians refused hard hand-play to none of the heroes who with Olaf, over the mingling of waves, doomed in flight, sought out land in the bosom of a ship" (Swanton 108). Olaf's forces were driven out after his death in 942, but Eric the Bloodaxe, a former Norse king, then seized control of Northumbria and it was held until 954 (Campbell 168).

Relative peace came under the strong reign of King Edgar (959-75) but after his death, the heir Edward the Martyr was murdered in 978. The event ushered in Edward's half-brother Ethelred the Unready as king, and along with him came a period of uncertainty. Viking raiding then renewed in 980, with brutal attacks across Britain, and interestingly, in the southwest region close to Exeter (Loyn 65). The Battle of Maldon followed in 991, and for the rest of the tenth century Viking raids were continually successful against what Henry Loyn calls "English forces [that] were constantly wrong-footed" (65). While no major

Scandinavian settlements existed in the southwest, raiding there continued; this is perhaps due to the high degree of monastic activity in the region.

Archaeologists have dated several Viking ships to the period of 850-1000. The discoveries include the Oseberg ship, the Gokstad ship, the Ladby ship, the Skuldelev find, and the Graverney boat. All longships, they are more narrow and faster than the larger battleships (which were designed for ocean travel) that Hastein and Ironside employed in the Mediterranean raids of 861.

The Oseberg ship, dated c. 820, was intended for service in sheltered waters, rivers, and inlets. The Gokstad ship, though much larger than the Oseberg and dating from some 75 years later, was a vessel of similar utility (Greenhill 196-7). Both of these boats are larger than the standard, slimmed-down, Viking coastal boat.

The Ladby ship and other finds are more representative. According to Greenhill, "She [Ladby] is long and narrow, 67 ½ ft (20.6m) long and only 9 ½ ft (2.9m) broad. Smaller than the bigger longships she probably represents the smaller type of vessel in which the Danish Vikings raids on eastern Britain were carried out" (199). The Skuldelev find, an unearthed tomb of several

vessels, consists of the portions of five ships: a fishing or ferryboat, two longships, and two cargo ships, all dated c.1000. The longships are of the smaller raiding type, with 20 to 26 oars apiece (Greenhill 200-1). Finally, the Graveney boat, dating from the early tenth century, is a fine example of a common Viking longboat. Greenhill writes, "She is probably a boat which had an everyday job to do. A coaster, perhaps operating between creeks and rivers of southeastern England, occasionally across to the Low Countries" (203).

Ships were not the exclusive property of Scandinavians, however. Alfred the Great, king of Wessex, used ships as early as 875, as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle notes: "King Alfred went out to sea with a raiding ship-army, and fought against 7 ship loads, and captured one of them and put the others to flight" (Swanton 75). In addition, King Edgar, maintained his own fleet and regularly circumnavigated Britain himself. James Campbell views Edgar's naval capabilities as a large contribution to the relative peace during his reign (172-3). Therefore, some Anglo-Saxon knowledge of the structure and capabilities of tenth-century ship designs existed, likely influenced by Viking styles.

Linguistic Analysis

Now armed with some understanding of the significance and uses of Viking ships, we should ask whether a Viking ship satisfies the conditions of Riddle 17. As in most Exeter riddles, several textual demands must be satisfied before a solution will make sense. There are four main conditions within Riddle 17. First, the subject is a protector and an enclosure with wires, filled with treasures. Second, in the daytime it is fast and spits spears or "spear-terrors" (Abbott 11).¹⁵ Third, at times it begins to swell with brown war-weapons with bitter points, and its inside is good. Fourth, men remember what passes through its mouth. Some past solutions such as "oven" and "forge" do not, as Jonathan Wilcox notes, account for the wire enclosure or the spitting of spears, and are thus unlikely solutions (396). I will discuss each of these conditions separately in order to argue for the solution of "Viking Longship."

*I am the protector...an enclosure with wires firm, fill'd
within with people's treasures*

Typically, a Viking raid incorporated a surprise strike against a village or monastery and a quick seizure of valuables and food. The soldiers then returned to their boats and departed. Paddy Griffith notes, "They followed their noses, in effect, from one place to the next, stopping where they discovered weak defenses or attractive winter quarters, and moving on where the resistance was found to be strong" (88-9). The boats carried cargo of all sorts in their hulls and were thus *innan gefylled* with treasures. As Williamson notes, Dietrich's solution of "ballista" would not have been filled with these treasures or *dryhtgestreona* (180).

Connections have often been drawn between Viking longships and the boats depicted in The Bayeux Tapestry. The Norman ships are virtually identical with Scandinavian types, and although the tapestry is of a later date than the Exeter Book, the distance is less than a hundred years (Sawyer 200). The importance of this similarity is found in the panels of the tapestry's fabric. In panel 44 the ships are loaded with either horses or shields, demonstrating that much cargo could be carried in a

longship (Stenton 136). In panels six and seven the Anglo-Saxon ships look very similar to their Norman counterparts (Stenton 108-9). The boats had raised decks at each end, facilitating a lower middle that could be filled with warriors or cargo (Gardiner 19). Greenhill notes that the Graverney boat was intended to be "a moderately fast carrier of heavy concentrated cargoes, such as stone or salt. She is seaworthy, reasonably fast and capable of making seagoing voyages under sail carrying six or seven tons of cargo" (204). Several sorts of cargo were hauled within the hulls of the boats, and in Viking ships seized treasure often comprised a part of that load.

The Old English *eodor wirum fæst* is interesting in its own right. Versions of the root *wir* are found elsewhere in the Exeter Book:

Riddle 14, line 3: *wirbogum*
 Riddle 20, line 4: *wir*; line 32: *wirum*
 Riddle 26, line 14: *wire*
 Riddle 40, line 47: *wirum*
 Riddle 71, line 5: *wire*
 "The Ruin," line 19: *wir* (Bessinger 1438).

It is difficult to grasp the exact notion of Anglo-Saxon wire. It could be in the form of a metal framework or perhaps metal thread used in ornamental work (Bosworth 252, 1237).

The most specific clue lies in Beowulf, where wires adorn a helmet given to Beowulf in Heorot (1031a). *Wirum bewunden*, the wires' purpose was to keep "firm head-guard, / so that file-sharp swords, / battle-hardened, / might not harm him" (Chickering 109). This helmet was likely a bronze or iron cap-shaped frame, worked very thin, that was fixed over a cap of leather (Hewitt 69). An example was found near Cheltenham in 1844: the metal cap is adorned with a ring, and it has a chain that appears to have been fastened under the warrior's chin (Hewitt 70). This early medieval example of wire, then, is actually a set of flat bronze or iron bands. Panel twenty-one of The Bayeux Tapestry offers more evidence. In Duke William's siege of Brittany, the rebel Conan flees the castle of Dol on horseback, wearing a helmet banded with strips of a contrasting color (L. Thorpe 76). It is framed into a sort of cap, a possible descendent of the version mentioned in Beowulf.

The syntax is also of some assistance, as Thorpe translates line 3a as "an enclosure with wires firm." The overriding image is thus of a structure that helps to guard against danger, and not of wire shaped for ornamental purposes. Though the meaning of *wirum* is hard to grasp,

its connections with personal protection and warfare are good indications that the riddle's solution is militaristic in nature.

In addition, Viking ships were indeed the protectors of their owners. Viking military strategy centered on the use of boats, and their outward expansion, made possible through the use of ships, was necessary for survival. Julian Richards describes the reasons behind the Viking expansion, found in the traditions of land allocation back in Scandinavia:

With estates being passed to eldest sons and distributed by rulers to their followers, there would be increasingly less land to go round in Scandinavia. To maintain the system expansion was essential, and the easiest way to expand was overseas, where land, wealth and prestige could all be sought. No doubt the lure of undefended treasure in the churches and monasteries was an incentive, and Vikings may have switched between trading, raiding and settling in much the same fashion as Elizabethan privateers in the Caribbean, according to which was the most advantageous strategy (14).

Certainly, Vikings could not have expanded so far without their boats, especially when warfare was involved. The Viking boats possessed tremendous tactical advantages; without the quick-strike capability they offered, Vikings were relegated to the strictures of land combat, where they and their foes were more evenly matched. Most of the Vikings' major operations were in coastal or inshore areas (Griffith 88). The boats excavated from the late Anglo-Saxon period are mainly longships that were designed for coastal and river expeditions. In a sense, then, longships protected their owners in combat and in the fight for survival. Therefore, a Viking ship meets the burdens of "protector" and "fill'd with treasures." "An enclosure with wire" can also be linked to a protective device, though the connection is hard to identify precisely.

I spit dread of spears; my speed is the greater

Two of the most widely accepted solutions to Riddle 17, "ballista" and "fortress," attempt to account for the "spit spears" as the ejection of projectiles and the sally of armed troops. Both solutions, however, raise some historical questions. Williamson argues:

The Anglo-Saxons neither built nor occupied Roman-style forts...The linguistic evidence indicates some doubt as to the nature of the Latin ballista. The evidence suggests that neither military commanders nor poets knew much about the fancy catapults of the Romans. The riddler could conceivably have constructed a "ballista" riddle from Latin sources (Vitruvius, *De Architectura* x.i.3; Caesar, *De Bello Civili* vii.25; and Isidore, *Etym.* xviii.x.1-2 all mention Roman catapults of various kinds), but in a riddle collection where most of the subjects would have been recognized by the ordinary Anglo-Saxon, this seems unlikely (180).

Though the term *ballista* existed, pictorial representations of neither crossbows nor larger ballistae survive from the time before 1200. In 1139, Pope Innocent II had even declared that such devices were unfit for Christian warfare (Hewitt 158).¹⁶ The closest appearance of ballista was at the Siege of Paris in 885, where a Danish army commanded by Siegfried employed either crossbows or ballista-type siege engines against Count Odo. The Norman historians Guillaume le Breton and Guiart, however, both place the weapon's

first British adoption in the reign of Richard I (1189-99), far later than the period surrounding the Exeter Book (Hewitt 158-9). It is unlikely that Vikings employed such measures in Britain. A good example is the siege of Chester in 918, where Vikings mined the walls of the fort but did not use ballistae (Bradbury 41-44).

A Viking ship meets the clues of both speed and spit-spears. The speed of longships is well known; even the Graverney boat, a carrier of heavy cargo, was probably quite fast. Moreover, battles were usually conducted in the daytime, so a small Viking raiding party meets the *dægtidum oft* hint as well. In addition, a Viking ship may spit spears in two ways. First, warriors charged out of their boats into battle, armed with spears held aloft or thrown. Griffith notes, "It was apparently traditional to start a battle by throwing a spear right over the enemy army, to claim it for Odin. After that there might be a 'spear song' of thrown javelins" (164). The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle mentions tipped weapons in one particular defeat of King Olaf in 937:

...on the battle field, in the conflict of standards, the meeting of spears, the mixing of weapons, the encounter of men, when they played

against Edward's sons on the field of slaughter.
 Then the Northmen, bloody survivors of darts,
 disgraced in spirit, departed on Ding's Mere, in
 nailed boats over deep water, to seek out Dublin
 and their own land again (Swanton 109).

Further, missile weapons were an integral part of Viking combat. They used both short and long bows, and Viking quivers carried up to 40 arrows (Griffith 162-3).¹⁷ A poetic personification of the longship would enable it to "spit dread of spears" through either device: the charge of spear-armed troops out of the hull, or a volley of missiles from offshore. In lines three through five, the phrase "my master beholds how from my belly fly the shafts of battle" certainly indicates tipped weapons of some sort, and they could feasibly fly from the "belly" of a ship when shot from a bow.

*I with swart begin to swell...with bitter points...my inside is
 good*

The swelling of the insides of the subject (*swelgan onginne*), called a womb by H.H. Abbott, is syntactically linked to the bitter points (*bitrum ordum*) as the insides

swell with these points (11). This might signal the reentry of Viking warriors into the ship after a campaign, carrying weapons and plundered loot with them. It could also signify the stocking of a ship with arms; warriors loaded their arrows, spears, and swords onboard before casting off. The riddle also mentions *beadowæpnum* or “war-weapons,” another connection to these arms.

The description of a “good inside” (*Is min innað til*) is curious and more difficult to interpret. Past solutions have made the assumption that whatever is inside of the object is good: troops within a fortress, stones or arrows in a ballista, arrows in a quiver, metal in a forge, or ink in an inkwell. Accepting this precedent, the cargo of a longship would surely be considered good, especially if the boat was carrying provisions or captured treasure. The notion of “good” might also refer to the utility of an object, as the ships were useful or good in many ways to their owners. In sum, the cargo of either men or material goods would be seen as valuable; filled with supplies, weapons, and soldiers, a Viking ship meets the aforementioned clues of the riddle.

Men remember what through my mouth passes

I understand these last two half-lines of the riddle as referring to legends or accounts of war. The idea of remembrance appears to invoke directly a sort of oral tradition. At the very least, it indicates that the actions of the riddle's object are memorable in some way. Viking raids were long remembered, probably for the suffering and death of the occasion, and especially by family members who lost kin in combat. The surviving poems "The Battle of Maldon" and "The Battle of Brunanburh" demonstrate a clear written remembrance of the Vikings.

In a larger scope, the actions of Vikings often directly influenced regions of Britain, and a great deal of raiding surrounded the period of the Exeter Book's creation. Vikings conquered several towns in the Isles in the tenth century. In 918 the Viking Ragnall captured Tynemouth, and a year later he took York. The famous Amlaib was defeated at the Battle of Brunanburh in 937. The Viking Magnus raided Penmon in Wales in 971, and his brother Godfried took Anglesey and Lleyrn in 980 (Sawyer 98-100). Further, at various points in time Danish men such as Eric Bloodaxe (d.952) became kings of Britain. The Danes sacked Exeter itself in 1003, and the invading King Sweyn

filled his ships with the spoils of the town (Hoveden 84). These major events affected the landscape of Anglo-Saxon England, and Riddle 17 may refer to these past military and political events remembered by the populace.

The final clue to Riddle 17 is the image of a mouth. The mouth may be a figurehead at the prow of a Viking ship, carved into a likeness of a person or a serpent/dragon. There are figureheads pictured in The Bayeux Tapestry, and Williamson notes that Scandinavian ships are known to have carried them since the Migration period (350). Griffith explains, "If they [boats] carried forbidding dragon-prows or hex-inducing magical paintwork, then those were status-enhancing features for the owner, to be envied and admired" (80). The value of these sculptures increased their popularity, and figureheads were commonly found on Viking ships.

These figureheads seemingly transformed Viking ships into living creatures. A.W. Brøgger notes, "Our sagas for more than four hundred years... are one long story of ships and boats, of building and adornment, of the delight of skalds and storytellers in ships that plough the waves, rejoicing like living creatures in the sea which foams

round their bow" (183). A full personification of a ship would include a mouth at the ship's bow.

Exeter Riddle 32, solved by "ship," provides a clearer explanation of the mouth image, however, as that riddle is itself a personification of a ship. Line 8b-9a, "*Hæfde fela ribba; / muð wæs on middan*," has been interpreted as the hatchway of a ship (Krapp 197,339). Kevin Crossley-Holland translates the lines, "It has many ribs, and a mouth in its middle" (53). Williamson comments that boats with great, high holds, and hatchway doors are found in the Junius manuscript (236). Independent of a figurehead, then, is another way to picture a ship's mouth. Further, the idea of "what through my mouth passes" (*me þurh muþ fareð*) is easier to envision if the mouth is a hatchway. The entrance into the ship's middle facilitates the transport of "peoples' treasures" (*dryhtgestreona*) and "war-weapons" (*beadowæpnum*) to and from the hold. Viking warriors, emerging from the hatchways of ships equipped with figureheads, were remembered by Anglo-Saxons, and the clues of the riddle have thus been met.

Justification of Solution

It is apparent that Viking longships were abundant in Anglo-Saxon England. It is clear that people in tenth-century Britain knew about Viking raids or perhaps experienced them personally. The Vikings' boats were of crucial importance to their owners, and their use on the coastlines and rivers of Britain resulted in many battles, political changes, and frequent accounts of suffering.

I argue that one of these infamous ships is the solution to Exeter Book Riddle 17. A longship meets all the textual burdens of the riddle. Through the advantage they offered in combat, and for their usefulness to an expansionary people, longships were the primary protectors of their owners. The longships could haul tons of provisions or looted treasure, and many warriors, armed with spears and bows, could sally forth from the ship's hull to attack various inland targets. The exploits of these Viking warriors were recorded in heroic Old English poems, and the actions of these Scandinavians changed lives and livelihoods throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. Therefore, through the evidentiary method of Archaeo-

Historicism, a Viking ship meets the textual conditions of
Riddle 17 and is historically viable.

CHAPTER 3: EXETER RIDDLE 74

Explication and Past Solutions

Exeter Riddle 74 is another poem with an uncertain solution, although the text has sparked a number of ideas. Called an “editor’s delight” by Williamson, the poem has been carefully debated in recent years (349). Short in length, the riddle is a fast read but a difficult conundrum to solve:

Ic wæs fæmne geong,	feaxhar cwene,
ond ænlic rinc	on ane tid;
fleah mid fuglum	ond on flode swom,
deaf under ype	dead mid fiscum,
ond on foldan stop	hæfde ferþ cwicu

(Krapp 234).

I was once a young woman,
 a glorious warrior, / a grey-haired queen
 I soared with birds, / stepped on the earth,
 swam in the sea / dived under waves,
 dead amongst fishes. / I had a living spirit.

(Crossley-Holland 91).

This short and complex enigma places many demands on its readers, most notably the oppositional features of man/woman (*fæmne*, *rinc*), fly/swim (*fleah*, *swom*), and dead/alive (*dead*, *cwicu*). Few solutions are able to

satisfy all these paradoxes, though many have been suggested. Scholars have offered, debated, and reinforced solutions for Riddle 74 frequently in the past thirty years. Usually, the solutions are commended by others for their imaginative qualities but are deemed incomplete soon after. In addition, some commentary has been offered as to how we should read this riddle. Interpretations can be based on its figurative language, its fanciful images, or through a critical examination of its terms.

A more concrete solution, I think, can be found by using Hume's model of historical analysis. Again, examining evidence from tenth-century Britain in combination with textual elements will yield clear results. A continuing search for the historical context of the Exeter Book will be instructive in Riddle 74, as mythological and archaeological evidence will help to suggest a different solution.

The textual analysis of Riddle 74, however, will differ from that of Riddle 17, as will our use of the Archaeo-Historicist approach. Whereas Thorpe's translation effectively illustrated the poem's clues in Riddle 17, the actual meanings of the individual Old English words in Riddle 74 need to be reconsidered because new clues are to

be found in the individual words. The riddle is very short yet full of evidence; each separate word is a clue, as is each half-line syntactically. While the syntax has traditionally been the focus of analysis, a closer inspection of each lexical item changes the meaning of the clues entirely. This sort of reexamination of meanings should be careful and reasonable throughout, for as John Niles writes, "No word or phrase is forced to mean anything other than what it can reasonably be expected to mean, given the linguistic conventions of the era" (184). Our historical evidence will then provide a cultural backdrop against which to consider these textual clues.

Bruce Mitchell argues that no previous solution meets all of Riddle 74's demands (240). Past suggestions are usually in the realm of object solutions: water, cuttlefish, sun, siren, barnacle goose, swan, oak-boat, and ship's figurehead. The one solution that is not a physical object is Erika von Erhardt-Siebold's "soul." These solutions are based on somewhat limited definitions of the Old English words in the riddle; consequently, few are able to meet the riddle's many clues. As we will see, the solutions have other historical and textual problems as well.

I solve Riddle 74 with another physical object, "moon." Shining bright in the sky, the moon is a common sight to all peoples, yet an untouchable object that has taken on various mystical associations through time. This solution is a variation on Marcella McCarthy's solution of "sun" (1993), but one that I believe satisfies the clues of Riddle 74 more completely. I will first argue for the moon's historical significance in the life of Anglo-Saxons, and then I will reevaluate the Old English in the poem. Finally, I will explain how the moon is a comprehensive solution to Riddle 74.

The Moon in Myth, History, and Archaeology

Myths and legends surrounding the moon abound in ancient history, but medieval perceptions in Britain are harder to trace. It is difficult to argue that Anglo-Saxons were aware of the various stories found in classical literature. While monks and clergy certainly had access to books, the average person was rarely educated and not able to read Latin texts. We are unsure, for example, if the Roman goddess Diana, symbolized by the moon, was a known

figure to Anglo-Saxons. Instead, the majority of legends were likely passed through a localized oral tradition.

Even so, some shards of moon worship in medieval Britain have survived. One Germanic myth associates the moon with a female spirit called Nanna, and there are other ancient tales of moon-maids (Mackenzie xxxvii). The original St. Paul's may have been built atop a moon shrine, and other Anglo-Saxon churches were probably built on pagan sacred groves (Elliott 55). The moon was venerated openly in Britain until Wulfstan, Archbishop of York, forbade this worship c.1000. Accordingly, sanctuaries for pagan gods like the moon existed across the island (Hutton 298). An association between the moon and the Virgin Mary is found in Revelation 12:1, but it is not certain that Anglo-Saxons were reading the Book of Revelation in the tenth century (Ferguson 45).¹⁸

In addition, runic evidence is of some assistance when we are searching for cultural clues. Though in relative disuse in the tenth century, runes were common sights in Britain nonetheless. Ralph Elliot notes, "coins with runic legends were struck in the seventh and eighth century, a clear indication that the conversion to Christianity did not impede the continuing use of the [*futhorc*, the runic

alphabet] among the Anglo-Saxons" (52). Traces of runic lore, and allusions to that lore, are found in Old English charms and in Cynewulf's works, and runes may have influenced some of the riddles in the Exeter Book (Elliot 55-57). C.J. Arnold writes, "the feeling of secrecy and exclusivity that is conveyed by runic letters and inscriptions is also to be found in the early Anglo-Saxon interest in riddles" (153). As we will see from the presence of runic moon associations, runes could have influenced authors and audiences alike in pre-conquest Britain.

The Germanic rune Tir or Tiw, named for the runic letter T (symbolized by ↑) is believed to have symbolized "the man in the moon." It also indicated courage and glory (Linsell 92). This rune appears in both the Germanic and Anglo-Saxon futharks as rune number 17; R.I. Page therefore argues for a migratory tradition of runic symbolism from Germany to Britain (8). This T-rune is also evidence of possible Anglo-Saxon attitudes towards the moon. The British association of the moon as a warrior will become instrumental to the solution to Riddle 74.

Linguistic Analysis

Turning now to the textual clues of Riddle 74, we must seek the moon's presence in the Old English words and phrases. The riddle asks for a solution that is, like Riddle 17, the subject of the poem. Niles describes the specific details of this subject:

It was female but also male; it was a young
maiden but also a mature woman; it moved about
not just in one medium but on land, in and on the
sea, and in the air; and at one time or another
it was both quick and dead (172).

Scholars have accepted similar lists of these paradoxes for many years. Some key individual words in the first two lines should be revisited, however, because they offer clues that will change Niles' paradoxes. The words *fæmne*, *feaxhar*, and *rinc* are elemental clues describing the subject of the poem. Once these three words have been considered, they can be examined within the poem's syntax more completely. Next, the remaining three lines of the riddle will be examined, which will point to "moon" as a credible answer to the clues provided. Throughout, the historical context of each clue will be addressed.

*Ic wæs fæmne geong, / feaxhar cwene, / ond ænlic rinc / on
ane tid*

Fæmne is usually defined as "woman," and the poem tells us that this woman is also young (*geong*). Other Old English derivations of the root word seem to indicate not a woman generally but a virgin: "virgin-like" (*fæmnenlic*), "virginity" (*fæmn-had*), and *fæmnan*, "of a virgin" (Bosworth 265). Lexically, we could then regard the poem's word *fæmne* as "virgin"; it is philologically reasonable because of the many related applications of its root. In addition, this definition is stronger lexically than the standard translation of "woman," and it allows some poetic flexibility when making a comparison between this image and the image of a man (*rinc*). Another common definition of *fæmne* is "maiden," a clear synonym of "virgin." In the end, this reading asks a different question: what could be a young and virginal object?

The moon could be an answer to this question. We already know that the moon was sometimes associated with moon-maids. The moon is young or "new" during a certain stage in its cycle; Anglo-Saxons would surely have noticed

its different stages, colors, and shapes. In addition, Geoffrey of Monmouth (c.1136) tells a story about the Trojans' ancient journey to Britain that mentions the virginal goddess Diana. While Geoffrey's accounts are at times fanciful, the legend is interesting:

They came to a deserted city and there they found a temple of Diana [...] Brutus stood before the altar of the goddess [...] "O powerful goddess, terror of the forest glades, yet hope of the wild woodlands, you who have the power to go in orbit through the airy heavens and the halls of hell" (46).

Though Geoffrey's account is of questionable authority, the passage does indicate some remembrance of the ancient Diana.

Replacing "woman" with "virgin" then affects the paradox between *rinc* and woman. *Rinc* can be defined as a man or a warrior, but nearly every translation has identified this part of the paradox as "man": Crossley-Holland's translation at the beginning of this chapter is the exception rather than the rule. The denotation of the two words is similar because we know that during this period warriors were almost always men. The Old English

lexicon contains other similar examples: "brave man, hero" (*hæle*), "warrior, hero" (*hæleþ*), and *secg*, "man, sword" (Bosworth 500, 855). Also, *scealc* is a "man, soldier" (Bosworth 822), and in line 939 of Beowulf Howell Chickering translates this term as "retainer" (103). Similarly, *rinc* can be taken either way, but in a historical reading I would prefer to define the term as "warrior." The most compelling evidence lies in the Old English *magu-rinc*, a compound of *mago* and *rinc* that is defined as "young man, man, warrior" (Bosworth 666). Clearly, it is no stretch to translate *rinc* as warrior in Exeter Riddle 74.

However, defined as "warrior," *rinc* actually has a curious association with the moon. Tony Linsell links the tradition of the T-rune with a warrior, male in nature and "unflinching in battle and in all that he does. Warriors and travelers look to his brightly burning light" (92). Elliott notes that Tiw was often invoked as an aid to victory in battle (71, 88). Arnold offers more evidence for this warrior-moon: "There are examples of the T-rune on weaponry, for instance, a sword pommel from Gilton and a spear-blade from Holborough (Kent) which may refer to Tiw as a war god" (151). The archaeological evidence strongly

indicates a relationship between the T-rune and heroic attributes of the moon. The warrior image is linked to the T-rune and the T-rune often symbolized the moon; therefore, the moon could be described as a warrior.

Moreover, Williamson solves Exeter Riddle 29 with "sun and moon." He interprets the poem partially as a tale of the moon's activities and designs by noting, "the treatment in the riddle seems more heroic than Christian. The moon is a plundering warrior and not a Satanic prince" (228). In the scope of Anglo-Saxon mythology, archaeology, and modern scholarship, then, it is not unreasonable to view the moon as a warrior.

Daniel Donoghue asks, if one Anglo-Saxon riddle demands a certain solution, is it impossible that another may as well (47)? As we have already seen, "ship" has been offered for four Exeter riddles, and other riddles have been solved by various forms of "ox," "horn," and "onion." It is possible that "moon" is a common answer to different riddles as well.

Frederick Tupper notes that the subject of the riddle is "both young and old," but other clues in line one twist this paradox around (Williamson 104). In line one, the alliteration connects the syntactic unit of *fæmne geong*

with *feaxhar cwene*. The definitions of *feaxhar* (gray-haired, hoary, and old) all convey a sense of advanced age and also the colors gray or white.¹⁹ Contrasted with the virginity in *fæmne*, *feaxhar* suggests an image of old age. Thus, if we read *fæmne* as "virgin" instead of "woman," the paradox changes to something a bit different from "young and old." Rather, we are faced with something else: what is an elder or ancient virgin?

How does the moon meet this new criterion? The moon, as we know, is new every month, changing in shape and color constantly. To an Anglo-Saxon or any other person, the moon is eternal; it has always filled the night sky, never failing to wax and wane. Its luminescence is pale white and gray, and this nature seems to fit both the meaning and spirit of the word *feaxhar*. In effect, the moon could be an ancient virgin, meeting both criteria through its eternal transformation. It is also a warrior, contrasted in the riddle with the image of an ancient virgin.

*fleah mid fuglum / ond on flode swom, / deaf under ype /
dead mid fiscum*

To this point, I've interpreted the moon as a warrior who is young and ancient, virginal and white, and all at

the same time. The initial paradoxes of riddle 74 have thus been met through reasonable historical clues. The next clues of Riddle 74 are as follows: the object must fly with the birds (*fleah mid fuglum*), swim on or in the water (*flode swom*), and dive under the waves, dead with fish (*deaf under ype / dead mid fiscum*).

The moon meets many of these requirements. It moves through the sky or "flies," and its bright moonshine easily lights the surface of a lake, river, marsh, or ocean. "Dead with fish" is a more curious idea, but one that also allows the solution of moon. Many fish swim near the water's surface while they are alive. When they die, the fish float on the surface of the water and drift towards the shoreline. The moon's light on the water's surface reaches on top and under the surface where those fish lie suspended in death.

The moon could also dive under the waves in another way. In her solution of "sun," McCarthy suggests that in an imaginative sense the sun could be seen as diving and dying as it rises and sets each day (209). As long as sunlight covers the Earth the sun is alive, but when it dives below the horizon it disappears, almost as if it were dead. I disagree with "sun" as a solution because it does

not reflect the gray or white nature of *feaxhar*, but I think the concept works well with the moon. The moon also moves across the horizon each day, diving down as dawn approaches. So the moon could dive in two ways: its light penetrates water, and the satellite itself dives through the sky.

ond on foldan stop / hæfde ferþ cwicu

The moon thus meets the primary conditions and paradoxes of riddle 74. At the poem's end, the word *foldan* in line 5a indicates the location of the object and perhaps a final clue. *Foldan stop* denotes some movement or marching upon the Earth, but it is unclear whether the word refers to the entire world or only a particular patch of land. Certainly, the moon fits the former idea better - the moon definitely marches across the entire Earth. Anglo-Saxons held different perceptions of the scope of their world, however, and it is difficult to make a clear historical statement about those observations. The moon meets the criterion in either case: its light canvasses the whole of the earth and/or an individual plot of land. Indeed, its light would eventually trek across everyone's

field, forest, or village in a regular fashion. In particular, moonlight slips easily across the surface of a river or lake, thereby "swimming on the waves" (*on flode swom*). The living spirit (*ferþ cwicu*) in line 5b could then represent both the physical presence of the moon and its luminescence.

Justification of Solution

Previous solutions to Riddle 74 have some trouble meeting the paradoxes and clues of the poem. Moritz Trautmann's "water," Erhardt-Siebold's "soul," McCarthy's "sun," and Frank Whitman's "writing" do not address the notion of virginity, the figure of a warrior, or a hoary-headed object. Other solutions such as Ferdinand Holthausen's "swan," Donoghue's "barnacle goose," and Dietrich's "cuttle-fish" are based primarily on the clues of flying, swimming, and diving, but they do not address the paradox between virginity and old age. Williamson's "ship's figurehead" could be an ancient object swimming on the waves and flying through the crest. The author suggests that it would also march on the earth when detached from the ship's prow, but the Old English *stop*

("march, advance") does not seem to apply to an object that is carried by someone else, in this case, a sailor or soldier (351).

Two of the more interesting solutions are Niles' "oak-boat" and Tupper's "siren." Niles suggests that an old tree covered in lichen could be a *feaxhar cwene*, but it is hard to imagine an Anglo-Saxon audience, people likely to be living simple lives of daily labor, recognizing this sort of elusive reference to a tree. Further, an old tree would not, because of its age, be a *fæmne geong*. The siren has been suggested because of its dual nature: the creature has a body of a woman but the face of a man (Abbott 41). Williamson notes, however, that sirens do not appear elsewhere in Old English poetry (349). In addition, Riddle 74 clearly calls for a singular object with the word *Ic* in 1a, and sirens are always found in groups. Jenny March notes, "In Homer there are two of them, but most later writers speak of three, sometimes four. Apollodorus says that one of them sang, while the other two accompanied the singer on lyre and pipes" (358). In The Republic Plato mentions eight sirens in a group singing together (617b). So "siren," like many of these older solutions, has some trouble meeting the nuances of the riddle's clues.

The moon, however, meets the conditions of Riddle 74 completely. It could be considered a warrior, virginal yet very old, white or gray. The moon flies with the birds, its light swims on or underneath the waves where dead fish are floating, and it also dives under the horizon as the dawn approaches. Its light would glow and seem alive while it traveled all over Britain. In accord with Hume's historical method, we see that references to the moon appear in runic symbolism and Anglo-Saxon mythology. The moon was, of course, a common sight in the sky, and it has been part of a suggested solution to another Exeter riddle. The evidence strongly suggests that the solution of moon meets the clues of the riddle, is historically reasonable, and is lexically plausible.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Findings

While Hume's Archaeo-Historicism is certainly not the only way to examine the riddles of the Exeter Book, it is clear that the method yields tangible results. Analyses of historical contexts offer increased comprehension and in the process, the riddles become more interesting and/or entertaining. As we have seen, Exeter Riddles 17 and 74 are good examples of historical poems in Old English literature.

Riddle 17 asks for an object that protects its owner, spits spears, moves quickly, is filled with treasures, and is often remembered by men. As I have shown, a Viking longship satisfies the clues of the riddle, but only when the history of both the period and the ships themselves have been investigated. Purely literary solutions have merit, but as we have seen with "ballista," sometimes the most imaginative ideas do not mesh with the realities of Anglo-Saxon England. If an Anglo-Saxon was unlikely to either experience or appreciate the object, the chances that the object is the correct solution are minimal.

Similarly, Riddle 74 alerts the reader to a series of deceptive clues that require some thought and investigation. Quick translations reveal little about the connotations of each word; rather, standard meanings only serve to limit the range of solutions available. An inquiry into both the lexicon and the words' derived meanings, however, allows us to explain more fully each paradox and clue of the riddle. For a century *fæmne* has been translated as "woman," but as we have seen, other denotations existed. There may be no absolute meaning to the word, but the alternatives must be tested, especially if the riddle's solution is uncertain. When the lexical clues are bolstered by additional historical evidence, the solution becomes much stronger.

Through this method, I have determined the solutions to Exeter Riddles 17 and 74 to be "Viking longship" and "moon," respectively. Both solutions withstand historical and linguistic tests, and both answers fit the spirit of the riddle's clues. While dozens of other solutions have been offered to the same conundrums, many of them have failed to satisfy the clues and paradoxes provided. It is also difficult to position some of these solutions in the context of Anglo-Saxon England. After an Archaeo-

historicist inquiry, I believe that the historical contexts surrounding these two riddles yield enough evidence to support my solutions, answers that meet the literary clues from which they originated.

Implications of this Study

In addition to Riddles 17 and 74, Williamson labels Exeter Book Riddles 4, 49, and 85 as “uncertain,” and several other riddles and their corresponding solutions are still under debate. Only a few solutions, such as “sun” for Riddle 6, have been accepted by all editors (148). While most solutions may never be universally agreed upon, there is clearly room to reexamine each of these riddles through their historical contexts.

In the past, scholars have typically mentioned each solution’s historical context briefly, but usually more research must be performed. It is not enough to say that Viking ships existed in the period; we must explain what they looked like and who saw them, describe their activities, and explore the scope of their impact. Of course the moon was in the Anglo-Saxon sky, but what did Anglo-Saxons think of it? How did the moon influence their

culture, and most importantly, why might someone write a poem about it?

Our clues, however, must always find purchase in the poems themselves. The reader examines the riddle's clues first, proposes a solution second, and finally returns to the clues in order to justify the proposed answer. Riddle 74, for example, defines the object as a *feaxhar cwene*: what does the author mean by that? A competent close reading of the poem demands an examination of the terms' meanings and connotations. Thus, our answers must always originate from the literary clues, and it then takes our imaginations to conceive the connections between the clues and the solutions. Armed with knowledge of the poems' language, conventions, and historical contexts, we are less likely to offer unrealistic or unsupported solutions to the riddles. The Archaeo-Historicist approach thus offers the reader a more complete procedure for the interpretation of Old English riddles, poems that have now puzzled humans for over a millennium.

NOTES

¹ As Connor notes, with Worcester and Salisbury possessing 71 and 81 books respectively, Exeter's library was very close in size to these other sees'. Canterbury was far and away the largest with 221 volumes.

² For alternate theories see Conner 48-94 and Gameson 166. Conner suggests that the Exeter Book could have been written in Exeter after 968 by a group of monks sent from Glastonbury by St. Dunstan. Gameson's comparison between Exeter MS. 3501 and contemporary tenth-century charters place the manuscript's creation between 960 and 993.

³ In Old English, see Krapp and Dobbie or Bernard J. Muir, The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry (Exeter: U of Exeter Press, 1994). Muir has recently released the second edition of his text in electronic format; see The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: Electronic Edition, CD-ROM (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000). For Modern English translations see Benjamin Thorpe, Codex Exoniensis: A Collection of Anglo-Saxon Poetry (London, 1842. New York: AMS Press, 1975) or W.S. Mackie, The Exeter Book, Part II: Poems IX-XXII (London: The Early English Text Society, 1958). Mackie's text is a continuation of Israel Gollancz's incomplete work The Exeter Book: An Anthology of Anglo-Saxon Poetry, Part I (London: The Early English Text Society, 1895).

⁴ In German, see Franz Dietrich (1859) or Moritz Trautmann, Die altenglische Rätsel. (Die Rätsel des Exeterbuchs.) Alt - und mittelenglische Texte 8 (Heidelberg, New York: Stechert, 1915). In Old English, see Craig Williamson, Riddles or Louis J. Rodrigues, Anglo-Saxon Riddles (Lampeter: Llanerch Enterprises, 1990). In Modern English, see Frederick Tupper, The Riddles of the Exeter Book (Boston: Ginn, 1910); Alfred John Wyatt, Old English Riddles (Boston: Heath, 1912); Paull F. Baum, Anglo-Saxon Riddles of the Exeter Book (Durham: Duke University Press, 1963); H.H. Abbott, trans., The Riddles of the Exeter Book (Cambridge: The Golden Head Press, 1968); Kevin Crossley-Holland, The Exeter Riddle Book (London: The Folio Society, 1978); and Craig Williamson, A Feast of Creatures: Anglo-Saxon Riddle-Songs Translated with Introduction, Notes and Commentary (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).

⁵ Several different methods of numbering the riddles exist. The standard is Krapp and Dobbie's system from the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records; the most recent alternate system is Williamson's Riddles. In general, Williamson's numbering scheme subtracts two digits from each riddle number; Williamson combines some of the fragmentary riddles, thus reducing the total number of riddles from 95 to 91. The accepted numbering scheme, however, remains that of the ASPR. Because the system encourages less debate and is widely accepted, ASPR numbering will be used throughout this study.

⁶ Despite the question, today every Exeter Book scholar agrees that the manuscript is copied entirely in a single hand (Muir 27). For an extended discussion, see Conner 19.

⁷ This Eusebius should not be confused with the Christian historian Eusebius Pamphili of Caesarea (c.378).

⁸ Some riddles, such as Exeter 40 and 66 (both solved by "creation"), have conceptual solutions.

⁹ There are two runes, *l* (*lagu*) and *B* (*beorc*), inscribed in the margin between Riddles 16 and 17. There is some debate over the meaning of the runes and their relation to either riddle. The runes may have been added at a later date or by a different scribe. For an extended discussion, see Williamson, Riddles 181-2.

¹⁰ This chapter will use Benjamin Thorpe's translations (1842) throughout. Though the translation is very old, I feel it captures the spirit of the Old English language well. Moreover, study of Riddle 17 depends not so much on the translation of individual words but on the poem's syntax, and Thorpe's text is sufficient for this purpose.

¹¹ Williamson notes: "Dietrich first solved the riddle as 'ballista,' but later offered the solution, 'fortress,' after a suggestion by Lange. Trautmann solved the riddle as 'oven,' but in his edition admitted the dual possibility - 'Wurfmenge (??) Backofen (?)'. Wyatt accepts 'fortress'; Tupper, Mackie, and Krapp and Dobbie accept 'ballista', Pinsker argues for the solution, 'forge', Shook argues rather ingeniously for the solution, 'ink-well.'" Peter Bierbaumer and Elke Wannagat suggest "beehive," as does Gregory K. Jember. Jonathon Wilcox suggests "Quiver."

¹² As an example, the solutions to Riddles 46 and 47, "Lot and his family" and "Bookworm," respectively, are virtually universally accepted.

¹³ The term "Viking" can refer to several different Scandinavian peoples.

¹⁴ The most famous Anglo-Saxon example of such is "The Battle of Maldon," in which the aldorman Byrhtnoth refuses to pay tribute to a large Viking army, choosing instead to defend his homeland with arms.

¹⁵ This kenning is of Abbott's own devising.

¹⁶ The papal decree reads: "Artem illam mortiferam et Deo odibilem balistariorum et sagittariorum adversus Christianos et Catholicos exerceri de cetero sub anathemate prohibemus" (The use of that death-bringing art of crossbows and arrow-heads, hated by God when used against Christians and Catholics, is prohibited under anathema in military service).

¹⁷ Griffith notes: "When we think of Viking weaponry we tend to think mainly of close-quarter battleaxes and swords, but in reality most Vikings would doubtless have seen missile arms as equally important...Especially when troops were protected from their enemies by strong fortress walls or ships' bulwarks, an exchange of missiles might

often have been the only mutually convenient way to express hostility...Archery was inseparable from Viking combat..."

¹⁸ The New American Bible (South Bend: Greenlawn Press, 1991). "A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars." The Book of Revelation had not been translated into Old English by the tenth century.

²⁰ For a related study on the uses of white and gray, see C.P. Biggam, Grey in Old English: An Interdisciplinary Semantic Study (London: Runetree Press, 1998). Riddle 74's *feaxhar*, however, is not included in Biggam's text.

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