

The Sexual Riddle Type in Aldhelm's *Enigmata*, the Exeter Book, and Early Medieval Latin

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IN THE EXETER BOOK we find the so-called sexual riddles,¹ whose classification as such has traditionally relied on the presence of two essential components: sexual imagery and double entendre. On this basis, at least fourteen pieces have generally been labeled as “sexual” or “double entendre” in editions and anthologies: Riddles 12 (ox and hide),² 20 (sword), 25 (onion), 37 (bellows), 42 (rooster and hen), 44 (key and lock), 45 (dough), 46 (Lot and his offspring), 54 (churn and butter), 61 (shirt or helmet), 62 (poker), 63 (glass beaker), 65 (onion), and 91 (key).³ Two series with erotic components are therefore featured (nos. 42–46 and 61–63) making the sexual element even more prominent. In addition to this, Riddle 75–76,⁴ with a scatological solution (urine), is a further piece that should be taken into account. This significant presence of erotic and bawdy material therefore suggests that this riddle subgenre⁵ was well known in the second half of the tenth century when the Exeter Book was compiled.⁶

This wide representation of sexual riddles in the vernacular notwithstanding, no precise correspondence to the erotic riddle category has been detected in Anglo-Latin *enigmata*,⁷ collections mostly composed by eminent clerics, as is the case of Aldhelm (Bishop of Sherborne), Tatwine (Archbishop of Canterbury), Boniface (Archbishop of Mainz-Würzburg), and most probably the author known as Eusebius.⁸ From this viewpoint, it is quite reasonable that from the whole set of rhetorical, stylistic and thematic aspects shared by the two riddling traditions, only sexual components should be missing in Anglo-Latin *enigmata*.⁹ All this has led critics to consider that the Exeter sexual riddles might illustrate the felicitous ways in which the vernacular context occasionally favored the transition of a literary subgenre from the popular/oral dimension to the learned/written milieu of monastic culture.¹⁰ Also, given the usual qualms of Anglo-Saxon writers in their handling of erotic topics,¹¹ the Exeter sexual riddles have therefore been regarded as an isolated case of bawdy literature that surprisingly managed to survive in a codex with an overtly religious thrust.¹²

Despite this general scholarly view, it is hard to believe that Aldhelm, the pioneer of riddling in Anglo-Saxon England, had no acquaintance with this well-known riddle form. Indeed, Aldhelm's collection presents several riddles that seem to have sexual overtones. For example, in Aldhelm's Enigma 70 double entendre may be at hand in describing the loaf of bread as something "growing hard" in the oven, an image that recalls Exeter Riddle 45, where the dough in the oven is said to be "growing in a corner."¹³ Similarly, the wine cask in Aldhelm's Riddle 78 is personified as a woman "making many men drunk," eventually pregnant with alcohol ("my inwards swell to the full with must")—a clue that brings to mind the allusion to the hen's resulting pregnancy after the sexual encounter with the rooster as found in Exeter Riddle 42. Further in Aldhelm's collection, Enigma 80 offers a sexually loaded description of a goblet as a promiscuous woman: "many people wish to grasp my neck with their right hands and to seize my delightfully smooth body with their fingers." These double entendre clues find a notable parallel in Exeter Riddle 63, which handles the personification of the glass beaker in a similar way.

Even if these cases are clearly not as explicit and as crude as the examples found in the Exeter counterparts, the presence of sexual imagery and innuendo is worth examining in Aldhelm's *Enigmata*. On this basis, and given that it has only recently been accepted that Old English and Anglo-Latin riddling are basically two sides of the same coin,¹⁴ I will try to show that the sexual riddle category existed as such in Aldhelm's seminal *Enigmata* and was probably directly transmitted from there into other Anglo-Latin collections including that of Tatwine. If my arguments are accepted, it is easy to envisage a leap of the Latin sexual riddle form into the vernacular. The evidence of the erotic riddle subgenre in Aldhelm's collection can therefore shed light on the way Anglo-Latin and Anglo-Saxon literary modes flowed in a harmonious continuum.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE SEXUAL RIDDLE SUBGENRE

The relationship between the Exeter sexual riddles and popular/oral tradition has been recently expounded by Patrick J. Murphy, who has showed, contra Craig Williamson's stance, the folk roots of most of these pieces.¹⁵ But the connection between the literary riddle and erotic/bawdy imagery is actually as old as riddling itself. An outlining of the evolution of the sexual riddle subgenre from antiquity to the late medieval period may thus help us understand that this riddle category, as we find it in the Exeter collection and Aldhelm's *Enigmata*, was not created by solely turning to oral/popular

culture at a given moment, since it was antedated by a well-established tradition.

To start with, in the Talmud (Midrash Mishle), which has preserved the riddle exchange that was held between the Queen of Sheba and Solomon,¹⁶ appears the famous “incest” piece of Lot, which has traditionally been included in the sexual riddle category and has a well-known medieval reflection in Exeter Riddle 46: “Then she [Sheba] questioned him [Solomon] further: ‘A woman said to her son, thy father is my father, and thy grandfather my husband; thou art my son, and I am thy sister.’ ‘Assuredly,’ said he, ‘it was the daughter of Lot who spake thus to her son.’”¹⁷ In Greek literature, book 10 of the *Deipnosophistae* (“Sophists at Dinner,” ca. 228 CE) by Athenaeus also exemplifies the presence of erotic pieces, which are clearly rooted in popular tradition, in collections of literary riddles. Set in the form of a dialogue between several guests invited to a banquet, this work offers all kinds of sophisticated topics, among others a discussion on wines, music, law, and various literary themes. At some point in the course of the conversation, the guests start to focus on riddles. Among logogriphs and other learned pieces, a bawdy riddle by Eubulus, a Greek author from the fourth century BCE, is cited: “It has no tongue, yet it talks, its name is the same for male or female, steward of its own winds, hairy, or sometimes hairless; saying things unintelligible to them that understand, drawing out one melody after another; one thing it is, yet many, and if one wound it, it is unwounded.”¹⁸ The riddle is solved as “the rump.” In the same collection, this riddle is followed by another piece by Eubulus, which illustrates typical sexual double entendre: “There is an image which stands on top, its lower parts gaping, bored sharply clear through from head to foot; it gives birth to men at the tail, each one in his turn, and some of them obtain the right to live, while others must wander forth, each bearing his own fate in his own person, but calling out ‘Beware!’” The answer that is provided implicitly alerts readers to the potential sexual solution “penis”: “You can decide for yourselves that this signifies the allotment-urn, for I don’t want to cite all that Eubulus says.”

The riddle of Lot and Eubulus’s pieces may suffice to show how the sexual riddle form, which largely derives from folk culture, has usually made its way through literary riddling from antiquity. Also importantly, these pieces illustrate three basic subtypes of sexual riddle. The first subtype implies the use of double entendre and normally conveys a veiled allusion to a sexual object of some kind, as in Eubulus’s allotment-urn riddle. Subtype 2 normally offers a direct or indirect reference to sex as in the case of the Hebrew query of Lot, which betrays a concern with a particular sexual practice (incest). The third subtype involves a bawdy allusion of some kind,

which may sometimes be accompanied by the description of a physiological activity and the reference to an obscene word. Eubulus's rump riddle is therefore a good example of this, even if its last clue ("if one wound it, it is unwounded") reveals a partial use of double-entendre technique as in subtype 1. Further in this essay, I will explore in detail the presence of these three subtypes in the Exeter Riddles and Latin medieval *enigmata*.

With the emergence of Christianity and the gradual establishment of the Church in Western Europe, the presence of sexually explicit material in literary works dramatically dwindled. The constraints exerted by the Church, which gave rise to new attitudes to sexual matters, may have had a strong impact in the development of the sexual riddle subgenre. Given this new cultural environment, it seems reasonable that almost no trace of erotic or bawdy riddling has been recorded by scholarship in the early medieval period. In Pseudo-Bede's *Joco-Seria* 10¹⁹ a grammatical puzzle takes a scatological turn (translation by Andy Orchard): "Littera queque culum facit ut uideat uelut oc[u]lus? / (Gloss.) Etque culus—ani dorsi que minime uidet, antepone o littera et uidebit ut oc[u]lus utpote quia erit oculus" [How do you make an ass-hole see? (answer: add the letter "o," to transform *culus* (ass-hole) into *oculus* (eye)].²⁰ With its overt use of obscene vocabulary (note the emphatic reference to *culus* and *anus*), the query clearly fits in the third riddle subtype. In addition to this, other critics previously made brief reference to the possible sexual double entendre of some of Alcuin's riddles included in his *Carmina*. For example, Fritz Loewenthal compared the sexual innuendo found in Alcuin's two versions of the riddle on the oven (nos. 64.1–2) with Exeter Riddle 62 (poker).²¹ But Alcuin's most outstanding illustration of double entendre is no doubt piece 92.1 from the *Carmina* in which a bath-house is described (my translation): "Nudus eat hospes, placeat cui ludere mecum / Atque fovere meo corpora fonte sua" (1–2) [Naked, the guest gets in, who enjoys playing with me and warms his body up in my water].²² Here, the sexual reading of the clues is undeniable. Nevertheless, as far as I know, these pieces are the sole illustration of bawdy riddling in Anglo-Saxon England noted by scholars. No further reference to sexual double entendre in early medieval riddle tradition has been made so far.²³

By contrast, in the later Middle Ages a renewed interest in the sexual riddle subgenre can be detected. The fourteenth-century collection composed by the Bohemian Benedictine monk known as Claret or Claretus de Solencia is an example of how the literary riddle merges with the popular, paving the way for the erotic subgenre. The extensive treatment of double entendre in Claret's collection (ca. 1365) has generally been acknowledged by scholarship, thus demonstrating that we should expect erotic riddling

not only from out of the cloister.²⁴ Claret's Enigma 44 may serve to illustrate the use of erotic innuendo in this collection (Peachy's translation): "Cum simplo trudo, duplum sibi pendet in ano. Pungit acu sola, pendent fini duo fila" [With one I penetrate, and two hang down behind. A needle has a single point, and two threads hang from the end].²⁵ With its sexually loaded clues, the riddle clearly conforms to the first subtype although the use of the word *anus*, euphemistically translated by Peachy, also places this piece in the orbit of subtype 3.

In late medieval England, the presence of sexual riddles has also been attested to by scholars. For example, a mid-fifteenth-century collection of Latin Riddles, edited and discussed by Andrew Galloway, similarly shows a remarkable conflation of the learned and the erotic, as observed in the following logogriph (my translation): "Dimidium lune paradisi porcio quarta, / Et primum nardi faciunt loculos vacuari"²⁶ [Half of the moon (i.e., *lu*, the first syllable of *lune*) and the fourth portion of Paradise (i.e., *pa*), the first (part) of *nardi* (nards, i.e., *nar*), making the (other) compartments empty (i.e., discarding the remaining two letters of the word)]. As Galloway explains, the riddle spells out the word *lupanar* (brothel). Giving an insight into the world of prostitution through its answer, this logogriph falls into subtype 3.

Our knowledge of the erotic riddle subgenre in the later Middle Ages also seems to have been significantly undermined by scholarly prejudices. Louise O. Vasvári, for example, stated that the well-known Middle English lyric "I have a gentil cok" is actually a "bawdy literary riddle with deep roots in popular riddling tradition."²⁷ If this hypothesis is right, this could testify to the presence of the sexual riddle type in the context of vernacular literary riddling in this period. As she offered her arguments, Vasvári appropriately summarized the ways in which the study of the sexual riddle subgenre has been biased by academic qualms: "[double-entendre] riddles have often remained unrecognized by naive editors or they have been bowdlerized in a variety of ways, ranging from editorial silence or expurgation to an unacknowledged pruning of collections."²⁸ In my view, this precise scholarly attitude has prevented any serious effort to detect the presence of sexual components in the case of early medieval riddling.

Although these examples bear witness to the presence of sexual riddling in the late Middle Ages, scholars have recorded no equivalent phenomenon in the early medieval period. The apparent absence of sexual or risqué ingredients in early Latin *enigmata* certainly seems remarkable if we take into account that double entendre is practically inherent to the playful nature of riddling.²⁹ In this sense, it has generally been assumed that, given their

more sophisticated and learned scope, Latin riddles probably remained unaffected by the folk substratum that, by contrast, nurtured their vernacular counterparts. The supposed absence of sexual riddling in the early medieval period seems to me further illustration of a scholarly bias which calls to mind the recent discovery of sexual components in other medieval literary genres whose religious essence deterred traditional criticism from openly discussing them.³⁰

As Danuta Shanzer has demonstrated, literary obscenity survived well beyond the classical period and was transformed into new modes of expression that found their way through unexpected channels such as Old Testament exegesis, translations of the Bible, and hagiographies, among other literary genres. She has similarly pointed out how scholarly oversimplification in this field has often seriously affected our perception of the continued use of the obscene element in the literature dating from the second to the sixth century.³¹ If Shanzer's arguments in favor of the survival of obscenity in late antiquity are correct (and I think they are), we should similarly expect some representation in riddling, where metaphors, double entendre, wordplay, and other typical devices of this genre that naturally function as effective camouflage of sexual material could well have facilitated its continuity after the classical period. In this train of thought, it may be inferred that Symphosius, a late Roman author who wrote a collection of one hundred riddles, may have at least been acquainted with the presence of sexual components in the literature of the post-classical period.³² It is worth noting that Michael Lapidge and James L. Rosier pointed out parallel phrasing in this author's metrical preface to the Riddles and an anonymous erotic poem from the so-called "African Anthology," also containing his *Enigmata*.³³ This piece of evidence is however much too slender to assume a connection between erotic poetry and riddling in Symphosius's time. Yet, a close reading of some of Symphosius's riddles may yield more encouraging results and may also justify the suspicious warning contained in the last line of Symphosius's preface: "Da ueniam, lector, quod non sapit ebria Musa" [Pardon, reader, the indiscretions of a tipsy Muse] (15).

Symphosius's Riddle 43 (*cucurbita*, gourd), which is worth quoting in full, can serve as a paradigm of this author's use of double-entendre technique: "Pendeo, dum nascor; rursus dum pendeo, tunc cresco, / Pendens cum moueor uentis et nutrior undis. / Pendula si non sim, non sum iam iamque futura" [Hanging I am born; yet again, suspended I grow, hanging when I am swayed by the breezes and nourished with moisture. Hanging if I remain not, soon shall I be not at all]. Here, the description of the gourd dwells on the idea of dangling, with the repetition of the verb *pendeo*, which

typically features as a characteristic of sexual riddles whose veiled solution is penis.³⁴ Also interestingly, the choice of “pendula” (hanging), an adjective fitting the feminine term *cucurbita*, conjures up Latin *mentula*, penis.

Symphosius’s Riddle 3 (*anulus cum gemma*, ring with gem) similarly offers some clues that seem to involve sexual innuendo: “Corporis extremo non magnum pondus inhaesi: / Ingenitum dicas, grauatum pondere tali” [At the body’s end a no great weight I clung: you would say grown there, burdened by such a weight] (1–2). Note the insistence on the concept of weight, as observed in “pondus,” “grauatum,” and “pondere.”³⁵ A further interesting case is offered by Riddle 89 (*strigilis aenea*), which describes a bronze strigil used for removing dirt and sweat from the skin in a bathhouse: “Robida, curua, capax, alienis humida guttis . . .” [Ruddy, curved, capacious, bedewed with strange drops (i.e., somebody else’s drops of sweat)] (1). In this sense, both vagina and semen seem to be readily suggested. All these cases lead us to the assumption that Symphosius was well acquainted with the use of sexual double entendre.

In Symphosius’s Riddle 32 (*taurus*), the description of the bull offers an introductory line that is worth analyzing: “Moechus eram regis, sed lignea membra sequebar” [An adulterer of royalty was I, but wooden members I pursued] (1). The term *moechus*, meaning “fornicator, adulterer” alludes to the story of Pasiphaë, the wife of King Minos of Crete.³⁶ The curse of Poseidon made her fall in love with a white bull. Daedalus then made a wooden cow with an open part at the rear, which was covered by a cowhide, so that Pasiphaë could hide inside and satisfy her unnatural sexual desire. The reference to this ingenious device is presented in the phrase “sed lignea membra sequebar.” The punning term *membra* could thus be read, on the one hand, as referring to the royal members (i.e., Pasiphaë) chased by the animal and, on the other, to the bull’s seeking either the wooden cow’s legs or genitalia.³⁷ The riddle seems representative of subtype 2, since the clues allude to adultery, fornication (note the explicitness of the term *moechus*) and, like the riddle of Lot, to an anomalous sexual practice, zoophilia. In addition to this, it may illustrate subtype 3 because of the use, albeit veiled, of Latin *membrum*. Enigma 32 therefore reveals a deliberate blending of two classical subtypes of sexual riddle at work, suggesting Symphosius’s knowledge of this riddle subgenre.

The subsequent medieval Anglo-Latin collections can also provide evidence of the interest that their authors had in the erotic riddle. Indeed, some of Tatwine’s riddles denote a good knowledge of double-entendre technique and a skillful handling of sexual imagery. A notable illustration of this is Enigma 13 (*acus pictili*, embroidery needle), which offers a much more elaborate and sophisticated version of Claret’s needle counterpart:

Reginae cupiunt animis me cernere, nec non
 Reges mulcet adesse mei quoque corporis usus;
 Nam multos uario possum captare decore.
 Quippe meam gracilis faciem iugulauerat hospes,
 Nobilior tamen ad crescit decor inde genarum.

[Queens, it is known, greatly desire me, and kings enjoy seeing my body used; for my varied grace charms many. Let my face be pierced by a slender guest, and the beauty of my cheeks will even be nobler.]³⁸

The double entendre is easily perceived from line 1 with the use of the verb *cupio*, which, as Lewis and Short's *Latin Dictionary* points out, denotes "a natural, involuntary inclination, or an unbridled or passionate desire." The poet stresses the idea of queens' eagerly coveting the object by using the pleonasm "animis" (in their hearts). The double entendre continues with the reference to kings' enjoying "corporis usus," a clue that probably alludes to their satisfaction with the product of needlework—i.e., lavishly embroidered clothes appropriate to their rank. But the syntactic construction clearly allows the sexual reading: kings enjoy (to see) the use of the needle/penis. In this context, the sexual innuendo is intensified with the use of the verb *captare* (to captivate, to entice), which also suggests the action of grasping the object. At this point of the enigma, line 3 generalizes the statement expressed in the previous two lines: many people—"multos," including queens and kings and, implicitly, women and men alike—are irresistibly attracted by the uses of the needle/penis. In line 4, the riddle offers a metaphorical twist in the double entendre, making the needle assume a female role when pierced by a slim stranger or guest (the thread), which in turn becomes the penis-like object. The feminine characterization of the needle seems confirmed by the allusion to the cheeks' increasing their beauty—a possible nuanced reference to the blushing produced during sexual intercourse. Tatwine's Enigma 13 can therefore be classified as subtype 1 with its double solution needle/penis and the typical gender distinction that is characteristic of double-entendre pieces by opposing first queens to kings and later the needle to the thread.

In Tatwine's collection, there are further cases of sexual innuendo. For example, in Enigma 29 (*mensa*), a domestic activity such as removing the tablecloth is figuratively compared to the raping of a woman: "Certatim me predones spoliare solescunt, / Raptis nudata exuuiis mox membra relinquunt" [Often I (the table) am eagerly plundered by robbers, who, after tearing off my dress (i.e., the tablecloth), leave behind my naked body] (4–5). As in Symphosius's Enigma 32 (bull) above, note the use of the punning term "membra," which simultaneously alludes to the table's legs and the metaphorical human limbs or genitals. By the same token, the flying

arrow in the battlefield in *Enigma* 32 (*sagitta*) is said to “flit hither and thither among gay youths”—“iuuenum letos inter discurrere cetus” (4)—as if suggesting the promiscuous behavior of a prostitute. Apart from designating a crowd or band, the punning term “cetus” or “coetus” (a variant reading of Latin *coitus*) also provides the meaning “sexual encounter,” thus clearly betraying the erotic reading suggested by this enigma.³⁹ In Riddle 28 (*incus*), Tatwine’s description of the anvil seems to conjure up the image of an erect penis: “Grande caput collo consertum sumere cernor, / Cui penitus nulli constant in uertice crines. / Heu! fato miser, immobili qui sto pede fixus . . .” [On my neck I have a clumsy head, a head on whose top grows no hair at all. Piteous is my lot: I am fixed by an immovable foot] (1–3). In the case of the whetstone riddle (no. 39, *coticulus*), the clues clearly make use of double entendre: “Ridet acumine qui rodens me lingit habunde” [bright and sharp he becomes who licks and nibbles me all over] (4). The clue no doubt brings up resonances of the well-known erotic image of the sword/phallus as the product of the smith’s skillful work with the whetstone.

A further author to take into account is Eusebius, whose *Enigmata* apparently do not provide as clear cases of sexual double entendre as his predecessor Tatwine. However, Eusebius’s *Enigma* 46 (*leopardus*), where the leopard is described as a result of the “promiscuous” union of a lioness and a pard, reveals a clear erotic slant.⁴⁰ The first line of the riddle offers “Seua mihi genitrix atroxque est lena decreta . . .” [Fate gave me as mother a fierce and awful bawd]. As Williams explains, “lena” is a playful misspelling of Latin *leaena* (lioness), thus deliberately alluding to *lena*, meaning “a bawd, a procuress.”⁴¹ By means of wordplay, Eusebius was connecting the description of a hybrid type of animal to the “degenerate” offspring deriving from prostitution. In this sense, Eusebius’s inclusion of the term “lena” therefore recalls subtype 3 as exemplified by the *lupanar* logogriph above.

This overview of the sexual riddle subgenre has been intended to offer evidence of the continuity of this riddle category from antiquity to the later Middle Ages. In turn, the analysis of a selected group of riddles by Symphosius, Tatwine, and Eusebius has, I hope, contributed to providing the missing piece in the puzzle of the history of medieval sexual riddling.⁴² Accordingly, the upcoming analysis of the Exeter Riddles and Aldhelm’s *Enigmata* may be enlightened by our newly achieved perception that sexual riddling was a widespread cultural phenomenon that also manifested in the early medieval period.

THE SEXUAL RIDDLES OF THE EXETER BOOK

In this section, I will start by examining how the two main subtypes of sexual riddle, exemplified in the preceding section by Eubulus's allotment-urn riddle and Lot's query, function in the Exeter Book collection.⁴³ A good illustration of the first subtype is Exeter Riddle 37 (bellows), which may help us understand the mechanics of sexual imagery and double entendre in the vernacular context:

Ic þa wihte geseah;	womb wæs on hindan
þriþum aprunten.	þegn folgade,
mægenrofa man,	ond micel hæfde
gefered þæt hit felde,	fleah þurh his eage.
Ne swylteð he symle,	þonne syllan sceal
innad þam oþrum,	ac him eft cymeð
bot in bosme,	blæd biþ aræred;
he sunu wyrceð,	bið him sylfa fæder.

[I saw the creature. Behind it was its belly, hugely distended. It was served by an attendant, a man of great strength, who had accomplished much when what filled it flew out through its eye. It never dies when it must give what is inside it to the other, but this is restored again in its bosom, its breath is revived. It creates a son and is its own father.]

The riddle opens with a typical anatomical reference to the creature's belly—"womb" (1) and "bosme" (7), two terms that frequently occur in a sexual context.⁴⁴ A further clue is provided by the term "eage" (4), here suggestive of male anatomy. Also interestingly, throughout the poem the bellows is characterized as a passive creature whereas the "magenrofa man" (3) takes an active role as he skillfully handles the object. The description of the action clearly involves double entendre, evoking sexual intercourse, and offers a characteristically gender-marked distinction with the allusion to the man as of "great strength." Also, the text reveals an interest in providing class differentiation, as the bellows is operated by a servant ("þegn folgade," 2).⁴⁵ At the end of the riddle, the allusion to offspring (i.e., the wind coming out of the bellows) as a result of the man's mechanical action is also a well-known commonplace in erotic compositions. Furthermore, as usual with subtype 1, the riddle offers a sexual solution (penis) and a nonsexual one (bellows).

Another example of the first subtype is Exeter Riddle 45 (dough), in which sexual innuendo is pervasive:

Ic on wincle gefrægn	weaxan nathwæt,
þindan ond þunian,	þecene hebban;
on þæt banlease	bryd grapode,
hygewlonc hondum,	hrægle þeahte
þrindende þing	þeodnes dohtor.

[I have heard of something growing in a corner, swelling and standing up, raising its covering. At that boneless thing a proud-hearted bride grasped with her hands; a prince's daughter covered that swelling thing with her robe.]

In this text the double-entendre technique functions in a similar way to that observed in the bellows riddle. The dough is thus described with typical ambivalent expressions such as “banlease” (3) and “þrindende” (5), which can equivocally refer to both the dough and the penis. The latter term—cf. “aprunten” (2) for the swelling of the bellows in Riddle 37—therefore is used to describe the rising of the dough in the oven, an image that evokes the penis and the vagina. Also, as with the preceding composition, there is a concern with terms related to gender and social class.⁴⁶ The woman manipulating the dough is thus alluded to as “bryd” (3) and “þeodnes dohtor” (4).

The majority of the Exeter erotic riddles belong to this first subtype. As observed in Eubulus's allotment-urn piece—as well as in the other riddles of Symphosius and Tatwine discussed above—all of these texts from the Exeter collection present a similar deployment of sexual imagery in which the description of the object in question implicitly calls to mind human anatomy. In turn, the handling of the object usually involves an action of some kind that is described in such a manner as to invite comparison with sexual activity. Besides, as in Tatwine's needle enigma described above, most of these texts offer the gender distinction observed in Exeter Riddles 37 and 45, and all of them at some point incite readers to provide a sexual solution. Other examples of this first subtype are Riddle 4 (bell), Riddle 12 (ox and hide), Riddle 21 (plow), the two onion riddles (nos. 25 and 65), the key riddles (nos. 44 and 91), 54 (churn), 61 (shirt or helmet), 62 (poker), 63 (glass beaker), and 87 (bellows).

There are several riddles in the Exeter collection in which double entendre is absent but the occurrence of an implicit or explicit reference to sex has earned them the label “erotic,” and can therefore be classified as subtype 2. The most famous example is Exeter Riddle 46 (Lot and his daughters), the counterpart of the archetypical Talmud query that was discussed in the preceding section:

Wer sæt æt wine	mid his wifum twam
ond his twegen suno	ond his twa dohtor,
swase gesweostor,	ond hyra suno twegen,
freolico frumbearn;	fæder wæs þær inne
þara æpelinga	æghwæðres mid,
eam ond nefa.	Ealra wæron fife
eorla ond idesa	insittendra.

[A man sat at wine with his two wives, and his two sons and his two daughters, as also sisters and their two sons, noble first-born children. The father of each of these princes was there with them, and an uncle and a nephew. In all there were five men and women sitting within.]

The riddle presents the outcome of Lot's incestuous relationship with his daughters, which ends up in a confusing family structure of five members. Lot is thus said to have two wives—i.e., a blunt allusion to bigamy, which adds to incest as a reprobate conduct and confirms the riddle's ascription to subtype 2. He is then said to have two sons from his two daughters; the daughters are therefore sisters to their own sons, while the two boys are uncle and nephew to each other at the same time.

Riddle 42 (rooster and hen), whose beginning indulges in sexual imagery, is a further representative of subtype 2 in the Exeter collection:

Ic seah wyhte	wrætlice twa
undearnunga	ute plegan
hæmedlaces;	hwitloc anfeng
wlanc under wædum,	gif þæs weorces speow,
fæmne fyllo.	

(1-5a)

[I saw two strange creatures openly enjoy sexual intercourse outside; if the deed was successful the proud fair-haired woman gained fullness under her clothes.]

This riddle thus starts with the description of the two creatures coupling outdoors and the typical reference to resulting pregnancy. Apart from the explicitness of the opening image, critics have pointed out the presence of words possibly part of the colloquial register—notably, “plegan” (2) and “hæmedlaces” (3).⁴⁷ With its direct allusion to sex, Riddle 42 is therefore an illustration of subtype 2. Unlike the preceding bellows riddle, in this text the female role gains prominence with the hen's characterization as “hwitloc” (3)—a typical class marker that contrasts, for example, the dark-haired slave (“wonfeax wale,” 8) of Riddle 12. With its basic meaning “proud,” “wlanc” (4) in turn personifies the bird as a lustful woman in this sexual context.

A further example of subtype 2 is Riddle 20 (sword) which, like the preceding composition, is not completely devoted to sexual imagery but has equally been considered to rank alongside the other erotic pieces of the collection.

ne weorþeð sio mægburg	gemicledu
eaforan minum	þe ic æfter woc
.....
minum þeodne on þonc,	swa ic gien dyde
bearngestreona.	þæt ic þolian sceal
hæmed habban,	Ic wiþ bryde ne mot
geno wyrneð,	ac me þæs hyhtplegan
bende legde.	se mec geara on

(20-21; 25b-30a)

[The family from which I was born will not be increased by children of mine . . . as I still have done at the pleasure of my prince, that I must do without the begetting of children. I cannot have intercourse with a bride, but that joyous play is ever denied me by him who of old laid bonds upon me.]⁴⁸

This passage, with the description of the sword as a creature that is not capable of having sex with a woman, is mainly responsible for the inclusion of Riddle 20 in the erotic category. The clues dwell on the paradox that the sword, an epitome of virile power and a well-known phallic symbol, is however a “celibate fighter,” as Williamson puts it.⁴⁹ As observed in this passage, instead of double entendre there is simply a literal reference to sex—notably, with expressions such as “hæmed” and “hyhtplegan” (28), which we can compare with “plegan” and “hæmedlaces” in Riddle 42 above—catalogued by critics as typical of the erotic category. Also importantly, the allusion to offspring as a logical consequence of sex is a further erotic element occurring in this passage. Note, for example, the emphatic reference to children in “eaforan” (21) and “bearngestreona” (27).

The third subtype of sexual riddle also features in the Exeter collection. Riddle 75–76, convincingly solved by Williamson as urine, is, however, the only representative of this subtype that has been detected. Williamson proposed to read the runic passage, which I here reproduce as HNLD, standing for Old English *hland* or *hlond*, which is found in glossaries as equivalent to Latin *lotium*.⁵⁰ The clues thus playfully allude to the idea that men and women urinate in a different way: “Ic swiftne geseah on swaþe feran / DNLH / Ic ane geseah idese sittan” [I saw, swift on the track, DNLH travelling along. I saw a woman sit alone]. Both the solution and the clues therefore imply not only the use of a salacious word (*hland*) but also the reference to a physiological act. Accordingly, as with Eubulus’s rump piece, Riddle 75–76 conforms to the typical requirements of riddles pertaining to subtype 3. Besides, the Exeter urine logograph, like the Greek rump riddle or the fifteenth-century *lupanar* piece, exemplifies once more the blending of the learned and the scatological in literary riddles.

ALDHELM’S SEXUAL RIDDLES

Now that we have explored these three basic subtypes in both medieval Latin and vernacular tradition, this essay will focus on Aldhelm’s *Enigmata* in order to discover the possible occurrence of features that pertain to the sexual riddle category. In Aldhelm’s collection, there are some riddles worth checking against the main two subtypes. Subtype 1 may thus be illustrated by Enigma 70 (*tortella*, loaf of bread):

De terris orior candenti corpore pelta
 Et niue fecunda, Vulcani torre rigescens,
 Carior et multo quam cetera scuta duelli;
 Nec tamen in medio clipei stat ferreus umbo.
 Me sine quid prodest dirorum parma virorum?
 Vix artus animaeque carerent tramite mortis,
 Ni forsans ualidis refrager uiribus Orco.

[I arise from the earth, shield-shaped with a gleaming body of rich snow, growing hard in the heat of Vulcan (i.e., the oven)—and yet more valuable by far than other shields of battle; nor is there any iron boss in the middle of my shield-shape. Without me, what use is a shield (in the hands) of grim warriors? Limbs and vital spirits would scarcely be freed from the pathway of death if I did not oppose Hades with powerful determination.]

In a way that distantly recalls Exeter Riddle 45 (dough), Aldhelm's enigma possibly makes use of double entendre, as the clues describe the dough (i.e., the figurative penis) rising ("orior," 1) and growing hard ("rigescens," 2) in the oven, which is in turn the metaphorical vagina ("Vulcani torre," 2). As with the Exeter counterpart, the reference to bread making thus invites comparison with lovemaking. In Aldhelm's enigma this is suggested by means of the allusion to flour as "life-giving or fertile snow" ("niue fecunda," 2). But Aldhelm goes beyond the description found in the Exeter counterpart, as he provides a more sophisticated type of double entendre. Interestingly, he likens the shape of the dough to a particular type of shield, a *pelta*, a crescent-shaped shield, which thus becomes a suitable comparison for the loaf-of-bread subject and, we may conjecture, susceptible to a sexual reading. Aldhelm playfully alludes to other types of shield—*scutum* (3), *clipeus* (4), and *parma* (5)—as inferior or less worthy if compared to the initial *pelta*. The Latin riddle then ends with the logical conclusion that the *pelta*—i.e., the final product (the loaf of bread)—is more valuable than anything, a notion that recalls the reference to butter (the metaphorical child of the double entendre) being the precious outcome of churning in Exeter Riddle 54.

Another riddle from Aldhelm's collection that seems consonant with the first subtype is Enigma number 80 (*calix vitreus*, glass goblet):

De rimis lapidum profluxi flumine lento,
 Dum frangant flammae saxorum uiscera dura
 Et ardor fornacis regnat habenis;
 Nunc mihi forma capax glacieque simillima lucet.
 Nempe uolunt plures collum constringere dextra
 Et pulchre digitis lubricum comprehendere corpus;
 Sed mentes muto, dum labris oscula trado
 Dulcia compressis impendens basia buccis,
 Atque pedum gressus titubantes sterno ruina.

[From fissures in rocks I flowed forth in a slow stream while flames cracked open the hard inwards of stone and the heat of the furnace held sway, once the reins had been released. Now my receptive shape gleams forth, very similar to ice. To be sure, many people wish to grasp my neck with their right hands and to seize my delightfully smooth body with their fingers. But I change their minds as I give kisses to their lips, applying these sweet kisses to their tightly pressed mouths: and (thus) I strike down the tottering advances of their feet with disaster.]

The first three lines of the riddle allude to the manufacturing of glass and might be prone to a sexual reading, especially with the reference to the cracks in the rocks (“rimis lapidum,” 1) through which the stream flows, the inwards (“uiscera,” 2) of stones, and the heat of the furnace (“ardor fornacis,” 3). The adverb “nunc” in line 4 marks the beginning of the description of the final product, the glass goblet. Thus, the object is physically characterized as a woman, since the clues playfully refer to the goblet’s receptive form (“forma capax,” 4)—compare this with Symphosius’s use of *capax* in Enigma 89 (bronze strigil) above—and its supple body (“lubricum corpus,” 6). The poem dwells on the goblet’s female characterization describing it as a beautiful woman who is desired by many men (“plures,” 5). The verbs “constringere” (to grasp, 5) and “comprendere” (to seize, 6) clearly allude to physical contact, suggesting embracing and lovemaking with the allusion to the right hand (“dextra,” 5) and fingers (“digitis,” 6). Also, note the presence of alliteration putting the emphasis on both the action of embracing and the anatomical parts that are embraced: “collum constringere” (5) and “comprendere corpus” (6).⁵¹

The double entendre becomes even more explicit with the elaborate reference to lips and kissing: “labris oscula” (7)—with a possible pun on *labrum*, also meaning “a vat for treading out grapes”—and “Dulcia compressis basia buccis” (8). As expressed at the end of the riddle, the human characterization of the glass goblet also implicitly evokes a prostitute bringing about men’s downfall by means of her enticing charms and wine. This could be the sexual solution suggested by the clues. The image similarly conjures up the Whore of Babylon, which in Magennis’s words “becomes a powerful image for the lethal seductions of the world.”⁵² The conspicuous sexual overtones of the goblet enigma might therefore be justified by the instructional possibilities offered by the Whore-of-Babylon motif.

Exeter Riddle number 63 (glass beaker) offers an interesting parallel to Aldhelm’s goblet enigma, as other scholars have pointed out:⁵³

Oft ic secga	seledreame sceal
fægre onþeon,	þonne ic eom forð boren
glæd mid golde,	þær guman drincað.
Hwilum mec on cofan	cysseð muþe

tillic esne, þær wit tu beoþ,
 fæðme on folm[. . . .]grum þyð,
 wyrceð his willa[. . .]ð l[.]
 (1-7)

[I have often to be of good service to men's joy in the hall, when, bright with gold, I am carried forth where men drink. Sometimes in a chamber, where we are together, a good man kisses me with his mouth, presses me with his fingers in his hand's embrace, carries out his desire . . .]

Here, the beaker is characterized as a woman and, as the double entendre develops, the comparison of drinking with lovemaking offers a striking parallel to Aldhelm's enigma with the allusion to embracing, kissing, and the typical anatomical references to the mouth, fingers, and hands involved in the action. Though extremely fragmentary, the subsequent clues possibly allude to the vessel's transparency, a notion that is suggestively equated to pregnancy, as the beaker/woman cannot conceal ("mipan," 10) being full ("fulre," 8). The phrase "mid golde" (3) could then fit the description of a glass beaker with metalwork ornamentation.⁵⁴ The notable resemblance therefore seems to suggest that the Exeter riddle was based on Aldhelm's goblet enigma or a similar version of it.

Aldhelm's Enigma 78 (*cupa uinaria*, wine cask) provides a further interesting case of double entendre which parallels some of the characteristics observed in the goblet enigma and Exeter Riddle 63:

En, plures debrians impendo pocula Bacchi,
 Vinitor expressit quae flauescens uuis
 Pampinus et uiridi genuit de palmite botris,
 Nectare cauponis complens ex uite tabernam.
 Sic mea turgescunt ad plenum uiscera musto,
 Et tamen inflatum non uexat crapula corpus,
 Quamuis hoc nectar centenis hauserit urnis.
 (1-7)

[Look, I dole out cups of wine, making many men drunk—(cups of wine) which the vintner pressed from golden-yellow grapes and the vine produced from the green sprout of the grape, filling the wine-merchant's stall with nectar from the vine. Thus my inwards swell to the full with must, yet inebriation does not trouble my swollen body, even though someone might draw off this nectar in a hundred jars.]

As with the preceding goblet motif, this enigma personifies the wine cask as a temptress leading many men ("plures," 1) astray by means of wine ("pocula Bacchi," 1). Besides, the personification of the object also playfully acknowledges the polysemic character of the term *copa* (or *cupa*) since, apart from its primary meaning "cask," it could designate "a female tavern-keeper and castanet-dancer, who exhibited her arts in her ale-house."⁵⁵ A further element supporting the double-entendre reading is the use of verbs

that typically occur in an erotic context. Note, for example, the allusion to actions such as pressing (“expressit,” 2)⁵⁶ and filling (“complens,” 4).⁵⁷ The text also plays on the idea of pregnancy with the allusion to wine being begotten (“genuit,” 3) by the green branches of the vine (“uiridi . . . de palmite botris,” 3) and by the vintner’s pressing the grapes. This reference to wine production thus dovetails with the subsequent description of the cask’s swollen body (“mea turgescunt ad plenum viscera,” 5, and “inflatum . . . corpus,” 6) as suggestive of pregnancy.

So far we have seen some examples of the first subtype of sexual riddle but Aldhelm’s *Enigmata* may also illustrate subtype 2. In his collection we do not find such explicit references to sex nor colloquial expressions of the kind observed in Exeter Book Riddles 20 (sword), 42 (rooster and hen), and 46 (Lot and his daughters)—the prototypes of the second category discussed above. However, Aldhelm’s Enigma 82 (*mustela*, weasel) offers an interesting counterpart to Exeter Riddle 20, since the first offers some clues that we can compare to the Anglo-Saxon text:

Non ego dilecta turgesco prole mariti,
Nec fecunda uiro sobolem sic edidit aluus,
Residuae matres ut sumunt semina partus;
Quin magis ex aure praegnantur uiscera fetu.
(3–6)

[I do not become pregnant with beloved children, nor does my womb, made fertile by a male, produce offspring in the way other mothers receive the sperm of the embryo. Instead, my inwards become pregnant with child from my ear].

Like Exeter Riddle 20, these lines similarly exhibit an overt allusion to sex and they center on the weasel’s anomalous process of impregnation. The explicitness of the references to insemination (“fecunda uiro,” 4 and “semina,” 5) and subsequent pregnancy (“praegnantur,” 6) would thus be equivalent in Exeter Riddle 20 to the description of the sword’s inability to have sex and beget children. In turn, the insistence on offspring (“prole,” 3; “sobolem,” 4; “fetu,” 6) in the Latin riddle finds an echo in the emphatic reference to children in Exeter Riddle 20: “eaforan minum” (21) and “bearngestreona” (27). On the other hand, the expression “turgesco” (1)—cf. “turgescunt” in the wine cask enigma (no. 78)—literally alludes to the weasel’s physical swelling, an expression that would also correspond to the description of the hen’s pregnancy—“fyllo” (5)—in Exeter Riddle 42. Also significantly, *turgesco* figuratively means “to swell with passion,” thus increasing the sexual resonances of the text.⁵⁸ Finally, the riddle also makes use of terms such as “aluus” (womb, 4) and “uiscera” (6) that frequently occur in the erotic context.⁵⁹

Aldhelm's Riddle 60 (*monocerus*, unicorn) might be worth taking into account as a further illustration of the second subtype:

Collibus in celsis saeui discrimina Martis,
 Quamuis uenator frustra latrante moloso
 Garriat arcister contorquens spicula ferri,
 Nil uereor, magnis sed fretus uiribus altos
 Belliger impugnans elefantēs uulnere sterno.
 Heu! fortuna ferox, quae me sic arte fefellit,
 Dum trucido grandes et uirgine uincor inermi!
 Nam gremium pandens mox pulchra puerpera prendit
 Et uoti compos celsam deducit ad urbem.
 Indidit ex cornu nomen mihi lingua pelasga;
 Sic itidem propria dixerunt uoce Latini.

[In no way do I fear the attacks of cruel Mars, even though the hunter with his vainly baying hound should be babbling, a bowman shooting iron-tipped arrows; rather, sustained by my immense strength, I behave as an aggressive warrior (and) bring down mighty elephants. Alas, cruel fortune, which thus tricked me by craft, since I slaughter mighty beasts but am overcome by a harmless virgin! For, laying bare her breast, the beautiful young woman straightway captures me and, having thus fulfilled her wish, she leads me back to a lofty city. The Greek language gave me my name because of my horn; the Latins call me likewise in their language (i.e., *monocerus*).]

This enigma opens with the description of this animal as an incredibly strong creature, which is not afraid of hunters and is capable of attacking mighty elephants. The clues clearly offer a male-oriented characterization of the animal, presenting it as warlike or aggressive (“belliger,” 5) and endowed with great strength (“magnis . . . uiribus,” 4). From line 6 onwards the riddle focuses on the paradoxical weakness of the unicorn—a creature that is defeated by a young maiden, however. The masculine role of the unicorn has thus its counterpart in the girl, who is portrayed as young (“virgine,” 7), harmless (“inermi,” 7), and beautiful (“pulchra,” 8).

The strongly marked sex roles of both the unicorn and the girl seem a deliberate choice on the part of Aldhelm, since this has no parallel in the corresponding passage from the *Physiologus*, one of the possible sources of this enigma: “Non potest ei uenator appropriare, propter quod ualde fortissimum est. Quomodo ergo eum uenantur? uirginem castam proiciunt ante eum; exilit in sinum uirginis, et illa calefacit eum, et nutrit illud animal; et tollit in palatium regum” [The hunter cannot approach him (the unicorn) because he is extremely strong. How then do they hunt the beast? Hunters place a chaste virgin before him. He bounds forth into her lap and she warms and nourishes the animal and takes him into the palace of kings.]⁶⁰ This passage therefore makes the virgin's seduction part of the hunters' stratagem to trap the unicorn. By contrast, Aldhelm's riddle mentions the hunter's incapacity to capture the animal but he interestingly dissociates

this fact from the seduction scene, a decision that clearly puts the emphasis on the sexual potential of the story. In the *Physiologus* passage, the account of the seduction of the unicorn is also significantly different from that offered by Aldhelm's riddle, since the girl's behavior (though not fully devoid of sexual interpretation) centers on her maternal care of the animal and her leading him to the mysterious "palatium regum."

In Aldhelm's riddle, despite the use of the term "puerpera" (8, "a woman in labor or in childbed, a lying-in woman"), the sexual connotations are clearly enhanced by the choice of expressions such as "gremium pandens" (8), alluding to the girl's deliberate visual display of her physical charms. The term "gremium" equates the typical occurrence of words like "womb" as observed in Exeter Riddle 37 (bellows) and other sexual riddles of the collection. Besides, the verb *prendo*, which clearly fits the semantic field of hunting, might be sexually loaded on account of the unicorn's horn alluded to in line 10. The phrase "puerpera prendit" parallels expressions such as "bryd grapode" (3) alluding to the girl grasping the dough with her hands in Exeter Riddle 45 or "heo on mec gripeð" (7), referring to the woman seizing the onion in Riddle 25. The sexual connotations of "prendit" are similarly highlighted by its linkage through alliteration with "pandens" and "pulchra puerpera." This may in turn have prompted Aldhelm's choice of *puerpera* to describe the young girl. The phrase "uoti compos" (9) is also suggestive of sex in this context, as it resembles expressions such as "worhte his willan" (6) in Exeter Riddle 54 (churn) or "wyrceð his willan" (7) in Riddle 63 (glass beaker).

On the basis of this analysis, Aldhelm's Riddle 60 seems to fit well in the second sexual subtype with the deliberate choice of sexually loaded vocabulary and the gender-marked roles of the unicorn and the virgin. Also importantly, Exeter Riddle 42 alludes to animal sex but Aldhelm's Riddle 60 takes this a step further, since it suggests sex between a human and an animal, a sexual tendency strongly abhorred by the Church. Aldhelm's Enigma 60 thus resembles Symphosius's number 32, which similarly evokes zoophilia with the story of the bull and Pasiphaë. The presence of the seduction passage in the Aldhelmian piece would, however, be justified by its potential didactic use: no matter how strong a man is, the snares of female beauty can easily defeat him.

The study of the erotic category in Aldhelm's *Enigmata* in light of the Old English counterparts and a selected group of early Latin medieval riddles has provided some interesting results. First of all, it has showed that some of the pieces of Aldhelm's collection are illustrative of the main two subtypes of sexual riddle discussed in sections 1 and 2 of this essay. The comparative

analysis of the Old English prototypes and a number of Aldhelm's riddles has thus proved that they all have in common some features that are characteristic of the erotic category such as sexual imagery, the occurrence of distinctive gender roles and the employment of a particular vocabulary that is susceptible to a sexual reading. Aldhelm's Riddles 70 (loaf of bread), 78 (wine cask), and 80 (glass goblet) therefore conform to subtype 1, in which double entendre functions as a basic component. Also, these three riddles each suggest a sexual solution ("penis" in number 70 and "prostitute" in numbers 78 and 80). In turn, Riddles 60 (unicorn) and 82 (weasel) seem to fit well in the second subtype, as suggested by the presence of sexual imagery without the mediation of double entendre and the typical emphasis on gender differentiation. Still, the intensity of the double-entendre technique employed by Aldhelm is significantly lower, as is true of the riddles of Symphosius and Tatwine discussed above, and results in a much more diluted set of clues than the cruder sexual innuendo found in the Exeter counterparts. In Aldhelm's *Enigmata*, a further significant aspect is the lack of representation of subtype 3, which is also absent in the other Latin collections with the sole exception of Eusebius's Riddle 46 (leopard) that may pertain to this category. Usually entailing much coarseness, the third subtype may not have attracted these authors.

The analysis provided in this essay points to the conclusion that Aldhelm, like his predecessor Symphosius, was in good command of the erotic riddle category. In light of the discussion of sexual riddles from Symphosius in section 2 of this essay, this hypothesis gains ground, as it is well known that Aldhelm was acquainted with the *Enigmata* of his predecessor.⁶¹ It is also generally assumed that Aldhelm's collection became one of his most popular works and a literary model for subsequent writers. Additional sexual pieces have been found in the collections of Aldhelm's successors, especially in Tatwine's *Enigmata*. Significantly, none of the sexually loaded texts seems to have undergone censorship in any of the manuscripts in which they are extant. We may assume that this owed to the low degree of obscenity found in their double entendres and the riddle format proper, which effectively managed to disguise the erotic elements. But since this is also true of their Exeter coarser counterparts, we may speculate that the Latin sexual riddles won acceptance as a subgenre of riddling.

The reasons leading Aldhelm to include a representation of erotic riddles in his collection may relate to how the *Enigmata* initially belonged to the *Epistola ad Acircium*. The dedicatee of this letter, and therefore of the *Enigmata* proper, was a certain Acircius, who has been convincingly identified with King Aldfrith of Northumbria (686–705), a learned man and a per-

sonal acquaintance of Aldhelm's.⁶² The collection of riddles addressed this monarch and, presumably, targeted his court as well. In this light, it is understandable that Aldhelm would have wished to offer some sexual riddles in an attempt to please and entertain the newly installed king and a courtly audience. Aldhelm's own background as a man descending from nobility might have made him well aware of the literary tastes of the aristocracy.⁶³ The glass goblet, the unicorn, and the wine cask riddles—entailing all three the metaphorical description of a temptress in a sensual, sophisticated mood—could have been welcomed by an upper-class audience. Similarly, the allusion to hunting in the unicorn Enigma and the description of the different types of shields in the loaf-of-bread riddle, would similarly be appreciated in an aristocratic milieu. As a whole, apart from their clear didactic purpose as illustrative texts of metrical theory, Aldhelm's *Enigmata* possibly targeted an audience of noblemen and ecclesiastics at court.

Finally, the study of the erotic category not only sheds light on the possible original readership of Aldhelm's *Enigmata* but can also help elucidate the role of the Exeter sexual riddles in the context of the Benedictine reform. The fact that a canonical author like Aldhelm, much valued in the Benedictine circles,⁶⁴ fostered this subgenre is a solid argument to support the idea that this riddle category had a literary status of its own in the second half of the tenth century, when the Exeter Book was compiled. Accordingly, the presence of some vernacular specimens of the erotic subgenre in the Exeter collection would not seem as disturbing for contemporary readers as it so far has been assumed. Furthermore, the occurrence of two erotic riddle sequences (nos. 42–46 and 61–63) plus the total absence of traces of censorship in the manuscript seem to indicate not only that ecclesiastical authorities in the late tenth century tolerated this riddle type but also that they continued to do so well beyond the eleventh century when Bishop Leofric donated the Exeter Book to the Cathedral Library. If my arguments are accepted, then we should no more regard the Exeter Riddles as an exceptional shelter of erotic literature, since these vernacular texts are the rightful heirs of a long-standing tradition initiated in England by Aldhelm.

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NOTES

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- 1 These pieces were formerly known as “obscene riddles,” a nomenclature that has been usually replaced by “sexual” in the past decades because of the first’s strongly negative connotations. I here follow Tanke’s and Heyworth’s preference for the adjective “sexual” instead of “obscene.” See John W. Tanke, “*Wonfeax wale*: Ideology and Figuration in the Sexual Riddles of the Exeter Book,” *Class and Gender in Early English Literature: Intersections*, ed. Britton J. Harwood and Gillian R. Overing (Indiana U. Press, 1994), 22, and Melanie Heyworth, “Perceptions of Marriage in Exeter Book Riddles 20 and 61,” *Studia Neophilologica* 79 (2007): 171. See also Glenn Davis, “The Exeter Book Riddles and the Place of Sexual Idiom in Old English Literature,” *Medieval Obscenities*, ed. Nicola McDonald (York: York Medieval Press, 2006), esp. 39–43.
- 2 Some of these solutions are based on John D. Niles’s interpretation of the corresponding riddles in his *Old English Enigmatic Poems and the Play of the Texts* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006). As for the numbering and edition of the Exeter Riddles in this essay, I use George Philip Krapp and Elliott van Kirk Dobbie, eds., *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: The Exeter Book*, vol. 3 (Columbia U. Press, 1936).
- 3 There are other riddles that do not form part of the canonical list (if there is any) but could likewise be regarded as belonging to the sexual type, since they comply with some of the features that have been discussed. In *Die “zweideutigen” altenglischen Rätsel des “Exeter Book” in ihrem zeitgenössischen Kontext* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1984), Reinhard Gleissner offers an analysis of nos. 25, 42, and 46, but has also included in this category other riddles which are wholly or partially based on sexual double entendre: nos. 11, 12, 20, 30a, 37, 44, 45, 54, 61, 62, 63, 75–76, 91, and 95. Gregory Jember, “An Interpretative Translation of the Exeter Book Riddles” (PhD diss., University of Denver, 1975), includes nos. 4, 11, 17, 18, 21, 23, 30, 80, and 87 in this category. On the basis of the suggestiveness of some of their clues, Riddles 4 and 21 have recently been regarded by Patrick J. Murphy as belonging to the sexual riddle category. See his *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2011), esp. 74–75 and 175–76. For further information on the Exeter sexual riddles, see Edith Whitehurst Williams’s “What’s So New about the Sexual Revolution? Some Comments on Anglo-Saxon Attitudes toward Sexuality in Women Based on Four Exeter Book Riddles,” *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, ed. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (Indiana U. Press, 1990), 137–45; D. K. Smith’s “Humor in Hiding: Laughter Between the Sheets in the Exeter Book Riddles,” *Humour in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. Jonathan Wilcox (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), 79–98; and my “The Key to the Body: Unlocking Riddles 42–46,” *Naked Before God: Uncovering the Body in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Benjamin C. Withers and Jonathan Wilcox (Morgantown: West Virginia U. Press, 2003), 60–96.

- 4 For the sake of consistency, the two lines and the runic passage formerly comprising Riddles 75 and 76 in Krapp and Dobbie's edition, which Williamson has proved integral to a single text, are here referred to as Riddle 75–76. See Craig Williamson, *The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book* (U. of North Carolina Press, 1977), 352–57.
- 5 Here I subscribe Murphy's recent allusion to a "sex riddle subgenre" (*Unriddling the Exeter Riddles*, 182).
- 6 Exeter, Cathedral Library, MS. 3501—usually referred to as the Exeter Book—contains the only medieval collection of Old English riddles that has survived to our days. There is no scholarly consensus as to the exact decade of the second half of the tenth century when this manuscript was produced. On the basis of the resemblance to the script found in London, Lambeth Palace, MS.149, Flower affirmed that the Exeter Book was written "early in the period 970 and 990"; R. W. Chambers, ed., *The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry* (London: Lund & Humphries, 1933), 90. Conner claimed that the script suggests a date between 950 and 970; Patrick W. Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter: A Tenth-Century Cultural History* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1993), 76. Bernard J. Muir, ed., *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: An Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501*, 2 vols. (Exeter: U. of Exeter Press, 1994), 1:1, proposes a time span between 965–75.
- 7 As I will comment later in this essay, a scatological riddle from early medieval tradition has been reported, and cursory reference to some of Alcuin's riddles has been made.
- 8 Eusebius has traditionally been identified with Hwætberht, the Abbot of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow and a colleague of Bede. However this identification is far from settled. For this, see Michael Lapidge, "The Present State of Anglo-Latin Studies," *Insular Latin Studies*, ed. Michael Herren (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980), 52.
- 9 Andy Orchard has showed that most of the formal and stylistic features of the Exeter Book Riddles find an echo in Anglo-Latin *enigmata*. See his "Enigma Variations: The Anglo-Saxon Riddle-Tradition," *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe and Andy Orchard, 2 vols. (U. of Toronto Press, 2005), 1:372–75.
- 10 This traditional view is represented, for instance, by Frederick Tupper who regarded these riddles as "evidently popular products" in his *The Riddles of the Exeter Book* (Boston: Ginn, 1910), li.
- 11 For an illustration of the ways Anglo-Saxon authors have made efforts to accommodate sexual matters to contemporary propriety, see Hugh Magennis, "No Sex Please, We're Anglo-Saxons? Attitudes to Sexuality in Old English Prose and Poetry," *Leeds Studies in English* 26 (1995): 1–27; Morton Donner, "Prudery in Old English Fiction," *Comitatus* 3 (1973): 91–96; and Anita R. Riedinger, "The Englishing of Arcestrate: Woman in *Apolonius of Tyre*," in *New Readings on Women*, 292–306.
- 12 The religious character of the opening works of the Exeter Book is evident, as stated by Muir: "the first eight poems were placed together because they are related thematically in their concern with different models for Christian living," *Exeter Anthology*, 1:25.
- 13 The translation in this essay of all quotations from the Exeter Book Riddles is by W. S. Mackie, *The Exeter Book, Part II* (London: EETS, 1934). The translation of Aldhelm's *Enigmata* is from Michael Lapidge and James L. Rosier, eds., *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works* (Cambridge U. Press, 1985).

- 14 I have elsewhere tried to demonstrate that the Exeter Riddles were at least partially compiled according to the organizing principles observed in Latin collections. See my “Latin Riddles (enigmata),” and “Exeter Book Riddles” in *The Literary Encyclopedia*, ed. Robert Clark et al. (London: Literary Dictionary Company, 2005 and 2006); “Patterns of Compilation in Anglo-Latin *Enigmata* and the Evidence of a Source-Collection in the *Exeter Book Riddles* (nos. 1–40),” *Viator* 43 (2012): 339–74; and *Isidorean Perceptions of Order: The Compilation of The Exeter Book Riddles and Medieval Latin Enigmata* (West Virginia U. Press, forthcoming). See also Orchard’s “Enigma Variations” and Dieter Bitterli, *Say What I Am Called: The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book and the Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition* (U. of Toronto Press, 2009).
- 15 See *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles*, esp. 175–214, correcting the view of Williamson (*Old English Riddles*, 11): “There is no reason to ascribe the so-called obscene riddles to a folk tradition any more than the ‘straight’ riddles. The double entendre riddles are carefully crafted; indeed they must be so to carry out the disguise.” Even if scholarship has tended to regard the Exeter sexual riddles as of a quality inferior to their “straight” counterparts, Murphy has emphasized the learned craftsmanship of these pieces, helping to discard the traditional view of these riddles as marginal literature.
- 16 For these riddles, see J. B. Friedreich, *Geshichte des Räthsels* (Dresden, 1860), 98–103. Also included in the Second Targum (or *Targum Shen*, an Aramaic version of the Book of Esther), these queries are not in the Bible, which gives only a terse reference to this contest (1 Kings 10:1). For a general overview of the riddling genre in antiquity, see Archer Taylor, *The Literary Riddle before 1600* (U. of California Press, 1948) and Mary Jane McDonald Williams, “The Riddles of Tatwine and Eusebius” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1974), 1–9.
- 17 Cited from Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1909; rpr. 2003), 2:xxvi, 960.
- 18 Cited from Charles Burton Gulick, ed. and trans., *Athenaeus: The Deipnosophists*, 7 vols. (Harvard U. Press, 1927–61), vol. 4. Subsequent references to the riddles from book 10 of *The Deipnosophists* are from this edition; for further examples of erotic riddles in this work, see 540–41 and 544–45. Book 14 of the Greek Anthology also contains sexual riddles: see W. R. Paton, *The Greek Anthology*, 5 vols. (Harvard U. Press, 1979), 5:26–107 (e.g., nos. 29, 43, 55, 58, 62). For information on Greek riddling tradition, see Konrad Ohlert, *Rätsel und Rätselspiele der alten Griechen* (Berlin, 1886; rev. ed., Berlin: Mayer and Müller, 1912).
- 19 The *Joco-Seria* is an assemblage of nineteen queries, spuriously attributed to Bede, which appears in Cambridge, University Library Gg.v.35 from the mid-eleventh century. See Frederick Tupper Jr., “Riddles of the Bede Tradition. The ‘Flores’ of Pseudo-Bede,” *MP* 2 (1904): 561–72. Interestingly, the manuscript containing the *Joco-Seria* also presents, among others, the riddle collections of Symphosius, Aldhelm, Tatwine, and Eusebius. For further information on this codex, see A. G. Rigg and G. Wieland, “A Canterbury Classbook of the Mid-Eleventh Century (the ‘Cambridge Songs’ Manuscript),” *Anglo-Saxon England* 4 (1975): 113–30, and Jan M. Ziolkowski, ed. and trans., *The Cambridge Songs (Carmina Cantabrigensia)* (New York: Garland, 1994), esp. xvii–xxxix.
- 20 Quoted from Tupper, “Riddles of the Bede Tradition,” 569. I am here offering Orchard’s paraphrasing of this query, which is erroneously referred to as Pseudo-Bede’s *Flores* 10 in his “Enigma Variations,” 287. *Flores*, also known as *Collectanea pseudo-Bedae*, is actually a different collection that has come down to us as part of an edition of Bede’s complete works by Johann Herwagen (Basel, 1563). See Martha Bayless and Michael Lapidge, eds., *Collectanea pseudo-Bedae* (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1998).

- 21 Fritz Loewenthal, *Studien zum germanischen Rätsel* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1914), 142. For further comments on the parallelisms shared by these riddles, see Gleissner, *Die "zweideutigen" altenglischen Rätsel*, 380–81. For Alcuin's oven riddles, see Ernst Dümmler, *Monumenta Germaniae historica, Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini*, 4 vols. (Berlin: 1881), 1:282–83 (nos. 64.1–2); a third version of the oven riddle is found in 1:328 (no. 100.3).
- 22 Dümmler, *Poetae*, 1:318; my translation. For a recent commentary on this piece and Alcuin's oven riddles, see Dieter Bitterli, "Alkuin von York und die angelsächsische Rätseldichtung," *Anglia* 128 (2010): 4–20. The author, however, makes only superficial reference to the double entendre of the bathhouse riddle (9).
- 23 To my knowledge, there are only two other articles in which double entendre has been discussed in the context of medieval Latin riddling. See David W. Porter's "Æthelwold's Bowl and the Chronicle of Abingdon," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 97 (1996): 163–67, and "A Double Solution to the Latin Riddle in MS. Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus Museum M16.2," *ANQ* 9 (1996): 3–9. In these two articles, Porter discusses a Latin riddle found in Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus Museum M 16.2 (eleventh century), but the double entendres employed in this piece are not sexual.
- 24 Frederic Peachy, ed. and trans., *Clareti Enigmata: The Latin Riddles of Claret* (U. of California Press, 1957), 22, observes: "A cursory check reveals at least thirty-nine [riddles], and possibly fifty-seven, out of one hundred thirty-six to contain or suggest some obscenity . . . nor are all solutions exempt from vulgarity either." For the combination of learned and folk components found in Claret's collection, see 2–3.
- 25 Edition and translation from Peachy, *Clareti Enigmata*.
- 26 Cited from Andrew Galloway, "The Rhetoric of Riddling in Late-Medieval England: The 'Oxford' Riddles, the *Secretum philosophorum*, and the Riddles in *Piers Plowman*," *Speculum* 70 (1995): 99 (no. 12). The riddle is found in London, British Library, Harley 3362. For further cases of erotic/bawdy pieces from the late medieval period, see 101, no. 26, from the Harley manuscript, and no. 3 from London, British Library, Sloane 513.
- 27 Louise O. Vasvári, "Fowl Play in my Lady's Chamber: Textual Harassment of a Middle English Pornithological Riddle and Visual Pun," *Obscenity: Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages*, ed. Jan M. Ziolkowski (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 108. "I have a gentil cok" is found in London, British Library, Sloane 2593 (fifteenth century).
- 28 Vasvári, "Fowl Play," 115. Also see n15 on the same page.
- 29 As pointed out by Murphy, *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles*, 176: "In a genre so rich with metaphor, innuendo is always on the verge of budding up, if it is not always in full bloom." This is also quite obvious in the case of post-medieval collections like *The Demaundes Joyous*, printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1511, ed. John Wardroper (London: Gordon Fraser, 1971), which exploit bawdy and scatological material to the hilt.
- 30 In the past few decades some scholars—most recently, Peter Dendle—have studied the notable presence of sexual imagery in hagiographic works such as *Juliana* in the Exeter Book. An illustration of the use of double entendre with sexual connotations is, e.g., detected in lines 401–5 of this poem. For this, see Peter Dendle, "How Naked is Juliana?, *PQ* 83 (2004): 355–70, esp. 356; Marie Nelson, *Judith, Juliana, and Elene: Three Fighting Saints* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 109; and Shari Horner, "Spiritual Truth and Sexual Violence: The Old English *Juliana*, Anglo-Saxon Nuns, and the Discourse of Female

- Monastic Enclosure," *Signs* 19 (1994): 669. On the other hand, Carole Braun Pasternack has proved that several passages from Aldhelm's prose *De virginitate* are heavily instilled with sexually loaded diction. See her "The Sexual Practices of Virginitate and Chastity in Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*," *Sex and Sexuality in Anglo-Saxon England Essays in Memory of Daniel Gilmore Calder*, ed. Carol Braun Pasternack and Lisa M. C. Weston (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS, 2004), 93–120.
- 31 Danuta Shanzer, "Latin Literature, Christianity and Obscenity in the Later Roman West," *Medieval Obscenities*, ed. Nicola McDonald (York: York Medieval Press, 2006), 180: "Modern scholars . . . themselves often legatees of Paul and Augustine, see the classical world as one that tolerated both the sexual and the obscene and Christians as those who restricted, censored and controlled sexuality and obscenity."
- 32 Symphosius is an unknown author who was probably active some time before the sixth century. See Raymond Ohl, *The Enigmas of Symphosius* (Philadelphia, 1928), esp. 13–15. Symphosius's collection became a model of riddling composition for subsequent generations of enigmatists. His influence is not only perceived in Aldhelm's *Enigmata* but also in the collections of Tatwine and Eusebius.
- 33 Cf. "post epulas laetas, post dulcía pocula mensae . . ." (3) from Symphosius's preface and "Post mille amplexus, post dulcía savía penem / confiniis laterum detortum suscipe, posco . . ." (1) from poem 377 of the "African Anthology." See Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: Poetic Works*, 244n16. The citation from Symphosius's preface is from F. Glorie, ed., *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, Collectiones Aenigmatum Merovingicae Aetatis*, vol. 133A (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1968). The translations of Symphosius's riddles offered in this article are by Raymond Theodore Ohl and are found in this edition. For poem 377, see D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Anthologia Latina I: Carmina in codicibus scripta I, Libri Salmasiani aliorumque carmina* (Stuttgart: K. G. Saur, 1982), 292–93.
- 34 For the traditional double-entendre description of the penis as a hanging object, see Murphy, *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles*, 176 and 179–80. Also, note a similar use of *pendeo* in Claret's Enigma 44 (needle) cited above.
- 35 Heaviness is a feature that is typically associated to sexual vocabulary designating the penis and the testicles. See J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (London: Duckworth, 1982), 51, 71.
- 36 All definitions of Latin terms in this essay are from Charlton Thomas Lewis, *A Latin Dictionary* (1879; rpr. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).
- 37 The polysemic term *membrum* can refer to either "a limb, member of the body" or the male sexual organ. Even if Latin *membrum* usually denotes the penis, in the context of this riddle the author may have chosen the word to allude to genitalia in general. Note, e.g., the use of the plural *membra* in the latter sense in the following excerpt from Arnobius's *Adversus Nationes* 3.10: "Habent ergo dii sexus et genitalium membrorum circumferunt foeditates, quas ex oribus verecundis infame est suis appellationibus promere?" Cited from Shanzer, "Latin Literature," 200n137. Also compare "membra" (line 8) in Alcuin's Riddle 92.1 (cited above) as the guest's washing his limbs in the bathhouse.
- 38 The edition and translation of the Latin riddles by Tatwine and Eusebius is by Erika von Erhardt-Siebolt and appears in F. Glorie, ed., *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*, vol. 133.

- 39 As noted by Adams, *Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, 179, “the form *coetus* is occasionally at-tested with the same sense [i.e., *coitus*], usually in poetry, where it is metrically convenient (*coetus* was disyllabic . . . whereas *coitus* was trisyllabic).”
- 40 Eusebius followed traditional natural lore which considered the leopard as a degenerate animal, deriving from the union of two different kinds of felines. Isidore, e.g., alluded to the leopard as springing “ex adulterio leaenae et pardi” (i.e., from the adulterous relationship of a lioness and a pard). *Etymologiae* 12.2.10–11, cited from W. M. Lindsay, *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911).
- 41 Williams, *The Riddles of Tatwine and Eusebius*, 225.
- 42 Apart from the examples that have just been discussed, I have also detected other cases of sexual double entendre in both Symphosius’s collection and Tatwine’s *Enigmata*. In addition to this, further possible sexual innuendo might be found in the other Latin collections that are extant from the early Middle Ages as, for instance, the so-called Bern Riddles. Besides, in Boniface’s *Enigmata* I have observed some vague sexual resonances in line with Aldhelm’s Riddle 78 (wine cask) and Riddle 80 (glass goblet). Further discussion on these supplementary cases would however take this essay far beyond its reasonable length limits.
- 43 In the case of the Exeter Riddles, the distinction of the two main subtypes of sexual composition has already been made by Tanke, “*Wonfeax wale*,” 30–31.
- 44 According to Lindheim, the term *womb* may also be endowed with colloquial character in the Exeter Book sexual riddles. See Bogislav V. Lindheim, “Traces of Colloquial Speech in Old English,” *Anglia* 70 (1951): 22–42, esp. 29–31.
- 45 For variant readings of some of the sexual clues found in Riddle 37, see Riddle 87 (bel-lows) in the Exeter collection.
- 46 See Jonathan Wilcox’s comments on the marked sexual roles and the emphatic reference to social status in Riddle 45 (dough) in “‘Tell me what I am’: the Old English Riddles,” *Readings in Medieval Texts: Interpreting Old and Middle English Literature*, ed. David F. Johnson and Elaine M. Treharne (Oxford U. Press, 2005), 52–53.
- 47 Julie Coleman has listed both *plegan* and *hæmed* among other Old English terms allud-ing to sex which have been traditionally affected by editorial euphemism in dictionaries: “Sexual Euphemism in Old English,” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 93 (1992): 93–94. Also compare the use of *plegan* in Exeter Riddle 42 with *ludere* in Alcuin’s Riddle 92.1 (discussed above). For an assessment of the advances of the *Dictionary of Old English* in the semantic field of sex, see Roberta Frank, “Sex in the Dictionary of Old English,” *Unlocking the Wordhord: Anglo-Saxon Studies in Memory of Edward B. Irving, Jr.*, ed. Mark C. Amodio and Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe (U. of Toronto Press, 2003), 302–12.
- 48 For a thorough analysis of these ambiguous lines, see Hayworth, “Perceptions of Mar-riage,” 174–75.
- 49 Williamson, *Old English Riddles*, 194.
- 50 For this, see Williamson, *Old English Riddles*, 354.

- 51 As Adams, *Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, 181, points out, “An obvious concomitant of intercourse is holding or embracing, and verbs from these semantic fields are often used euphemistically.”
- 52 Hugh Magennis, “The Cup as Symbol and Metaphor in Old English Literature,” *Speculum* 60 (1985): 517–36, at 519.
- 53 On the basis of its resemblance to Aldhelm’s Enigma 80, F. Dietrich, “Die Räthsel des Exeterbuchs: Würdigung, Lösung und Herstellung,” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 11 (1859): 478, proposed “beaker” as the solution of Riddle 63. Subsequent critics have accepted this proposal, although there is no consensus as to the degree of influence from the Aldhelmian model.
- 54 However, as Carol Neuman de Vegvar pointed out to me, there are no archeological traces of this kind of ornamented glass from the period of the Exeter Book, which suggests that the techniques to attach gold to glass had not yet evolved by this time. This would point to an imported glass beaker on account of Frankish glass industry, which was more developed than Anglo-Saxon by then. Another possibility is that the riddle’s vessel might be a drinking horn with golden fittings, which usually appear at the mouth and at the pointed end. The liquid inside the horn could similarly be viewed from outside and there is archeological evidence from the second half of the tenth century which may allow us to assume the validity of this solution. Still, the parallelisms with the Aldhelmian model are so remarkable that I would rather be inclined to think of an imported type of glass goblet with golden ornamentation, as Niles has also deduced with his proposal *glæs-fæt* or “glass beaker” for this riddle in *Old English Enigmatic Poems*, 143. I must thank Carol Neuman de Vegvar for the generous feedback that I received from her on this subject.
- 55 In this sense, the punning device recalls the effect pursued by Eusebius with the term “lena” in Enigma 46 discussed above.
- 56 As Adams, *Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, 182, states, “verbs of pressing and the like are often used of the male role.”
- 57 The use of these verbs can compare with the frequent occurrence of verbs related to the idea of pressing and filling in the sexual context of some of the Exeter Riddles. Cf. the presence of *þywan* (to press) in Riddles 12, 21, and 62 and (*ge*)*fyllan* (to fill) in Riddles 37, 44, and 61.
- 58 Cf. the presence of verbs alluding to swelling in the Exeter collection as with *þindan* (Riddle 45) and *þrintan* (Riddles 37 and 45).
- 59 Cf. the use of terms alluding to the womb or the entrails in some of the Exeter Riddles: *bosm* (Riddles 12 and 37) and *womb* (Riddles 37 and 62). Also note use of the term *venter* (womb) in two of Alcuin’s oven riddles (*Carmina*, nos. 64.1–2).
- 60 Chap. 35 (*De monoceraton*), cited from Francis J. Carmody, ed., “Physiologus Latinus Versio Y,” *University of California Publications in Classical Philology* 12 (1941): 95–134; Michael J. Curley, trans., *Physiologus* (Austin: U. of Texas Press, 1979).
- 61 In the *Epistola ad Acircium* Aldhelm explicitly acknowledges his debt to Symposius. See Rudolf Ewald, ed., *Aldhelmi Opera in Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi*, vol. 15 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1919), 75.

- 62 For the name Acircius as from “*a+circio* (*Circius* = the northwest wind, hence ‘someone from the region of the northwest’),” see Michael Lapidge, “The Career of Aldhelm,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2007): 24. For the passage in the *Epistola* in which Aldhelm mentions King Aldfrith, see Barbara Yorke, “Aldhelm’s Irish and British Connections,” *Aldhelm and Sherborne: Essays to Celebrate the Founding of the Bishopric*, ed. Katherine Barker and Nicholas Brooks (Oxford: Oxbow, 2010), 170–71. In this passage, Aldhelm reminds Aldfrith of a ceremony in which the first acted as the latter’s godfather. This fact has served to infer the approximate date of composition of the *Epistola* and, therefore, of the *Enigmata* as well, since the letter was probably sent by Aldhelm soon after Aldfrith acceded to the throne in 686.
- 63 It has been traditionally assumed that Aldhelm was himself of royal blood although the identity of his father is still doubtful. According to William of Malmesbury, Aldhelm’s father was Kenten, which Lapidge, “Career of Aldhelm,” 17, recognizes as “a corrupt spelling of the OE name *Centwine*,” and therefore as a possible reference to King Centwine of Wessex (676–85). The passage in question is from William of Malmesbury’s *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* (5.188). For an edition of this text, see Michael Winterbottom, ed. and trans., *William of Malmesbury: Gesta Pontificum Anglorum, the History of the English Bishops*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 2007), vol. 1.
- 64 Note, e.g., that Mechthild Gretsch, *The Intellectual Foundations of the English Benedictine Reform* (Cambridge U. Press, 1999), 4–5, has convincingly claimed that Bishop Æthelwold and his circle were responsible for the glosses found in Aldhelm’s prose *De Virginitate* from Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, 1650.