The Early Medieval Riddle Tradition

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We welcome this opportunity to edit three articles, which—to our minds—perfectly exemplify very different, though mutually complementary, approaches to the early medieval riddle tradition.

Thomas Klein’s “*Pater occultus*: The Latin Bern riddles and their place in early medieval riddling” takes up the task of energizing scholarly interest in the Latin Bern riddles by exploring the collection’s authorial origins and relationship with other late antique and early medieval riddlers. Making a convincing case for the Bern riddles as a Mediterranean contribution, which both drew on the riddles of (the likely North African) Symphosius and influenced (the English) Aldhelm, this article emphasizes the outward-looking and global nature of the bilingual riddle tradition.

From the global context of the riddles, the collection turns to a specific manuscript in Dieter Bitterli’s “The one-liners among the Exeter Book riddles.” This article is also invested in the bilingual tradition, which provides evidence for a discussion of four riddle verses in the Exeter Book as stand-alone texts. Honing in on the intricacies of the manuscript page and arguing that palaeographical analysis points to the Old English riddles in question as one-liners—rather than fragments or errors—Bitterli argues against privileging editorial intervention over manuscript evidence.

Moving from the specific back to the global—this time with a critical agenda that embraces both comparative analysis and the importance of contemporary theory—is Corinne Dale’s “(Re)viewing the warrior woman: Reading the Old English “iceberg” riddle from an ecofeminist perspective.” Dale argues that the icy warrior woman of Exeter Book *Riddle 33*—contextualised in relation to *Beowulf*, the metrical charms and the Icelandic “wave” riddles—represents both an early medieval reflection on the dangers of female power and a new, empowering metaphor for ecofeminists in the modern world.

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Focusing alternately on authorial networks in the early medieval world, the importance of returning to the material text and the capacity of the riddles to engage with theory in a way that looks both forward and back, these articles demonstrate the creative potential of the riddle tradition. With their polyharmony of subjects, voices and languages, the riddles encourage a respect for the diversity of perspectives that lies at the heart of humanities scholarship. We, the editors, are committed to the coexistence of varied methodological approaches that bring the new and the old into conversation with one another, always with an eye toward the bigger picture: the early medieval world was a global one, and the early medieval riddle tradition exemplifies this to its core.