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RETROSPECTIVE THESES AND DISSERTATIONS

Two historical riddles of the Old English Exeter Book

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John Donald Hosler. *Iowa State University*

Degree Type

Thesis

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2001

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Abstract

Contained within the Old English manuscript Exeter Cathedral Library MS. 3501, otherwise known as the Exeter Book, are 95 poetic riddles. These riddles have invited substantial study over the last 150 years, yet solutions to many of the riddles are still uncertain. This thesis examines two of these contested puzzles, Exeter Riddles 17 and 74. In his study, the author examines these two riddles through the method of Archaeo-Historicism. Such a method allows the investigation of the historical contexts surrounding each riddle, one that seeks clues outside of the verse. Once compiled, the historical evidence is used in conjunction with the clues offered in the riddles' texts themselves. Through this method, Chapter Two of the thesis solves Exeter Riddle 17 with the answer of "Viking Longship," and Chapter Three solves Exeter Riddle 74 with the answer of "Moon." Since the Exeter Book was likely created in the ninth or tenth centuries in England, it is likely that the volume's riddles reflect elements of life in the Anglo-Saxon world. Previous solutions to Riddles 17 and 74 however, have often failed historical tests of validity. The model of Archaeo-Historicism is thus useful in the search for evidentiary clues both inside and outside of the riddles' texts. In the concluding chapter, therefore, the author argues not only for the validity of his solutions, but also for the premise that solutions constructed from both literary and historical evidence are more viable than purely imaginative solutions.

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Exeter Book, the largest extant collection of Old English poetry. Copied c. 975, the manuscript was given to Exeter Cathedral by Bishop Leofric (died 1072). It begins with some long religious poems: the Christ, in three parts; two poems on St. Guthlac; the fragmentary "Azarius"; and the allegorical. In addition, the Exeter Book preserves 95 riddles, a genre that would otherwise have been represented by a solitary example. Britannica Quiz. The ABCs of Poetry: Fact or Fiction? The arrangement of the poems appears to be haphazard, and the book is believed to be copied from an earlier collection. This article was most recently revised and updated by J.E. Luebering, Executive Editorial Director. Learn More in these related Britannica articles © 1963, Duke University Press. Library of Congress Catalogue Card number 63-21168. Cambridge University Press, London, N. W. 1, England. Printed in the United States of America. by the Seeman Printery, Inc., Durham, N. C. PREFACE. THE ninety-odd riddles in Anglo-Saxon which have come down to us in a single manuscript are naturally a miscellaneous collection of varying merit. A few of them are poetical in the best sense of Anglo-Saxon poetic style, as good as anything outside the heroic style of the The Exeter Book is generally acknowledged to be one of the great works of the English Benedictine revival of the tenth century; the precise dates that it was written and compiled are unknown, although proposed dates range from 960 to 990. This period saw a rise in monastic activity and productivity under the renewed influence of Benedictine principles and standards. At the opening of the period, Dunstan's importance to the Church and to the English kingdom was established, culminating in his appointment to the Archbishopric at Canterbury under Edgar and leading to the monastic reformation... Here are two of these Anglo-Saxon riddles, both in Old English and translated into modern English. The answers to the riddles are included below the text.