



WIRRAL ARCHAEOLOGY

ANGLO SAXON RIDDLES

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Anglo Saxon Riddles

Introduction

Anglo Saxons loved riddles. Many have survived in a 10th century book called the Codex Exoniensis (Exeter Book)

Can you guess the right answers?

You can find the answers at the end of the document

Riddle 1

I'm a wonderful thing, a joy to women, useful to neighbours, I injure no one who lives in the village, save only my slayer. I stand up straight in a bed, underneath I am shaggy. Sometimes ventures a young and beautiful churl's daughter, a maid proud in mind, so she grabs hold of me, rubs me to redness and ravishes my head, forces me into fastness. Immediately she feels my meeting, the one who confines me, the curly locked woman. Wet will be that eye.

What am I?

- A. A dog
 - B. An Onion
 - C. A bearskin rug.
-

Riddle 2

A moth ate words, to me that seemed a strange fate.
When I heard about that wonder, that a worm swallowed up a certain man's sayings, a thief in the darkness, his glorious speech, and it's strong foundation, the stealing guest was not a bit wiser for swallowing those words.

What am I?

- A. Time
 - B. A Criminal.
 - C. A bookworm.
-

Riddle 3

Four dilly dandies
Four stick standies
Two crookers
Two lookers
And a wig wag.

What am I?

- A. A plant
- B. A cow
- C. A tree.

Riddle 4

I am a faithful vigilant guardian, always looking after the house,
In the deep night I walk through the unseeing shadows, for I do not lose the sight of my eyes, even in black caverns, against the thieves who ravish the stores of grains, I ambush. I silently set a snare of death.
A roaming huntress, I enter the lair of wild beasts, but I do not wish to chase fleeing herds alongside dogs who bring cruel war against me.

What am I?

- A. A weasel.
 - B. A stoat
 - C. A cat.
-

Riddle 5

I am all on my own, wounded by iron weapons and scarred by swords.
I often see battle.
I am tired of fighting.
I do not expect to be retired from warfare.
Before I am completely done for.
At the wall of the city I am knocked about.
And I am bitten again and again.
Hard edged things made by the blacksmith's hammer attack me.
Each time I wait for something worse.
I cannot find a healer who will make me better.
Or tend me with medicine made from herbs.
Instead the bite of the swords grow larger each day and night.

What am I?

- A. A warrior.
 - B. A chain mail suite
 - C A shield.
-

(Answers at the bottom of the document).

The Nine Herb Charm

The text below is not a riddle, but shows that Anglo Saxon or early Medieval medical care was primitive. prior to the conversion to Christianity, healers used the below named herbs in an attempt to heal wounds or cure sickness.

It was called 'The Nine Herb Charm'.

These are the Nine sacred herbs that the charm speaks of.

Mugwort

Plantain

Watercress

Chamomile

Nettle

Crab apple

Chervil

Fennel

ATTERLOTHE. The unknown and missing herb. Today, it is believed that it was either Viper's bugloss or Wood Betony.

The Nine Herbs Charm was supposed to help the person reciting it to heal a sick person by invoking the god Woden and his skills as a healer.

"Remember, Mugwort, what you made known,
 what you arranged at Regenmeld.
 You were called Una, the oldest of herbs,
 you have power against three and against thirty,
 you have power against poison and against infection,
 you have power against the loathsome foe roving through the land.
 And you, waybread, mother of herbs,
 open from the east, mighty inside.
 Over you chariots creaked, over you queens rode,
 over you brides cried out, over you bulls snorted.
 You withstood all of them, you dashed against them.
 May you likewise withstand poison and infection
 and the loathsome foe roving through the land.
 'Stune' is the name of this herb, it grew on a stone,
 it stands up against poison, it dashes against poison,
 it drives out the hostile one, it casts out poison.
 This is the herb that fought against the snake,
 it has power against poison, it has power against infection,
 it has power against the loathsome foe roving through the land.
 Now, atterlothe, put to flight now, Venom-loather, the greater poisons,
 though you are the lesser,
 you the mightier, conquer the lesser poisons, until he is cured of both.
 Remember, maythe, what you made known,
 what you accomplished at Alorford,
 that never a man should lose his life from infection
 after maythe was prepared for his food.
 This is the herb that is called 'Wergulu'.
 A seal sent it across the sea-right,
 a vexation to poison, a help to others.
 It stands against pain, it dashes against poison,
 it has power against three and against thirty,
 against the hand of a fiend and against mighty devices,
 against the spell of mean creatures.
 There the Apple accomplished it against poison
 that she [the loathsome serpent] would never dwell in the house.
 Chervil and Fennel, two very mighty one.
 They were created by the wise Lord,
 holy in heaven as He hung;

He set and sent them to the seven worlds,
to the wretched and the fortunate, as a help to all.”

This section of the Nine Herbs Charm is sometimes referred to as the ‘Lay of the Nine Twigs of Woden’.

“These nine have power against nine poisons.

A worm came crawling, it killed nothing.

For Woden took nine glory-twigs,
he smote the adder that it flew apart into nine parts.

Now these nine herbs have power against nine evil spirits,
against nine poisons and against nine infections:

Against the red poison, against the foul poison.

against the yellow poison, against the green poison,

against the black poison, against the blue poison,

against the brown poison, against the crimson poison.

Against worm-blister, against water-blister,

against thorn-blister, against thistle-blister,

against ice-blister, against poison-blister.

Against harmfulness of the air, against harmfulness of the ground,

against harmfulness of the sea.

If any poison comes flying from the east,

or any from the north, [or any from the south,]

or any from the west among the people.

Woden stood over diseases of every kind.

I alone know a running stream,

and the nine adders beware of it.

May all the weeds spring up as herbs from their roots,

the seas slip apart, all salt water,

when I blow this poison from you.”

The following section of the Nine Herbs Charm describes how to prepare and use the nine healing herbs while singing, or chanting the charm.

“Mugwort, waybread open from the east, lamb’s cress, atterlothe, maythe, nettle, crab-apple, chervil and fennel, old soap; pound the herbs to a powder, mix them with the soap and the juice of the apple.

Then prepare a paste of water and of ashes, take fennel, boil it with the paste and wash it with a beaten egg when you apply the salve, both before and after.

Sing this charm three times on each of the herbs before you prepare them, and likewise on the apple. And sing the same charm into the mouth of the man and into both his ears, and on the wound, before you apply the salve.”

Riddle Answers.

Onion

Bookworm

A cow.

Cat

Shield.