

ALDHELM'S *AENIGMATA* AND THE TEACHING OF LATIN PROSODY

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IT IS A curious fact that so much of the earliest Anglo-Latin poetry should have been riddles. Some 270 verse riddles were composed, mostly during the late seventh or eighth centuries, and their authors were some of the most learned and esteemed men of the age, including Aldhelm, Bishop of Sherborne (ca. 705–710/11), the Venerable Bede (ca. 672–735), Tatwine, Archbishop of Canterbury (ca. 731–34), Boniface, Archbishop of Mainz (ca. 745–54), and Alcuin of York (ca. 735–804).¹ The immediate and immense popularity of the riddle as a poetic genre in England arose out of the first Anglo-Latin collection: Aldhelm's *Aenigmata*, which was probably also the first major metrical work by someone who learned Latin as a distinctly foreign language.² Aldhelm sent his *Aenigmata*, together with his own metrical treatises, to Aldfrith, King of Northumbria (r. 685–705).³ His purpose was apparently to help others understand Latin metre by exemplifying the rules of versification expounded by the metrical tracts in a series of short, memorable poems in the form of riddles.

The traditional chronology of Aldhelm's works does not seem to support the idea that he intended his *Aenigmata* to be teaching texts. Aldhelm probably composed his riddles long before either metrical treatise, even circulating a version of them before their publication alongside these didactic works.⁴ This early version has in fact survived in a few continental manu-

1 For all these Latin riddles, see Orchard, *The Old English and Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition*, 1:1–291, 2:1–313.

2 For Aldhelm's *Aenigmata*, see *Aldhelmi Opera*, 97–149. On Aldhelm's place in the literary tradition, see Bolton, *A History of Anglo-Latin Literature*, 597–1066, 1:68–100; Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, 19–24; Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, 1–8.

3 For this composite work, see *Aldhelmi Opera*, 33–204; Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, 12–13, 31–47; Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, 61–94, 183–221.

4 See Lapidge and Rosier, *The Poetic Works*, 61; Orchard, *The Old English and Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition*, 2:2.

scripts, and it is virtually the same as the final version that appears alongside the metrical treatises.⁵ It is not clear therefore that Aldhelm initially composed his riddles to serve what turned out to be their ultimate pedagogical function. Nor does Aldhelm's *Aenigmata* form an obvious didactic program to learn the scansion or composition of metrical verse. On its surface, Aldhelm's *Aenigmata* is simply a collection of learned, literary riddles composed in dactylic hexameters.

In what follows, I should like to examine the evidence for a metrical program in the text of Aldhelm's *Aenigmata* itself. Several riddles do in fact refer to some aspect of Latin metre or versification, most obviously in Riddle 84 *Scrofa pregnans* (Pregnant Sow). In others, metrical allusions are hidden in the solutions to the riddles themselves, as in Riddle 10 *Molossus* (Mastiff) and Riddle 75 *Crabro* (Hornet). These isolated allusions attest to Aldhelm's didactic interest in metre, but they hardly form a coherent pedagogical program to teach it to others. The best evidence for this is to be found rather in the metres that Aldhelm used in his *Aenigmata* and can only be revealed by scanning the verses themselves. In this way, I shall show that the collection progresses from metrical diversity to metrical uniformity. This progression coincides with the gradual increase in the length of the riddles throughout the collection, so that Aldhelm's *Aenigmata* begins with short, metrically diverse riddles and ends with longer, more uniform ones. I contend that this hidden design forms a kind of poetic program that demonstrates first the construction of the hexameter by giving an example of every possible combination of metrical feet and caesurae, and then displays Aldhelm's regular poetic style in action. Seen in this light, Aldhelm's *Aenigmata* also dramatizes the growing prowess of its author as a poet, starting with the composition of individual verses and progressing to larger units of versification.

More importantly, this design anticipates Aldhelm's approach to versification in his two metrical works. In the first of these works, *De metris*, Aldhelm showed the various ways a hexameter might be constructed and gave examples of every possible combination.⁶ Aldhelm's other treatise, *De pedum regulis*, consists of lists of words arranged by their metrical quantities, so that the vocabulary may be easily incorporated into the various verse patterns described in the first treatise.⁷ As we shall see, this concern for poetic vocabulary corresponds to the later part of Aldhelm's *Aenigmata*,

⁵ See Lapidge, "Aldhelmus Malmesberiensis Abb. et Scireburnensis Ep.," 19–26.

⁶ For Aldhelm's *De metris*, see *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. Ehwald, 77.19–96.24 (cited by page and line number); and see Neil Wright's translation in Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, 191–211, 265–65.

⁷ For Aldhelm's *De pedum regulis*, see *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. Ehwald, 150.1–201.20;

where the riddles are metrically more uniform but rich in poetic diction. Scanning Aldhelm's *Aenigmata* thus reveals a hidden design within the collection, which prefigures the author's approach to teaching metre in his later metrical tracts. This might have been a product of Aldhelm's experimental use of a new medium rather than an intentional didactic plan, but it nonetheless reveals how his *Aenigmata* was composed to express the author's own techniques for metrical versification.

Aldhelm and Latin

Latin metrical poetry was especially difficult for non-native speakers of Latin such as Aldhelm. This was due to the strangeness of Latin prosody and the lack of suitable guides for those who learned Latin as a second language. Metrical poetry works differently from the vernacular poetry that Aldhelm and other Anglo-Latin authors would have been familiar with.⁸ Whereas Old English verses are composed according to rhythmical patterns of stressed syllables, Latin metrical verses are arranged by the length or quantity of syllables; that is, how long it takes to pronounce them. Syllables can be either long (—) or short (˘), where two short syllables are equal in length to one long.⁹ The various combinations of long and short syllables are called metrical feet, the two most important types of which in dactylic hexameter are the dactyl (D), which consists of one long and two short syllables (—˘˘), and the spondee (S), which consists of two long syllables (— —). Since two short syllables have the same quantity as one long, these two types of feet occupy the same amount of space in the verse. As its name suggests, a hexameter contains six feet, and most of these are either dactyls or spondees, although the final foot may in fact be either a trochee (—˘) or a spondee (— —). This system of arranging verses by vowel quantity was utterly foreign to Aldhelm and the other early Anglo-Latin poets, who would have been familiar with the accentual rhythm of their native Old English poetry.

Nor were there suitable guides at the time to explain the rules of Latin metre.¹⁰ Although metrical treatises did exist then, they had been written by

and see Wright's partial translation in Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, 212–19, 265.

8 For a comparison of Aldhelm's Latin verse and Old English poetry, see Lapidge, "Aldhelm's Latin Poetry," 247–69; Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, 119–25.

9 On medieval Latin metrical poetry, see Rigg, "Metrics," 106–10; Norberg, *An Introduction to the Study of Medieval Latin Versification*, 58–80; and Ruff, "The Place of Metrics," 149–53.

10 See Law, *Grammar and Grammarians*, 92–101; Ruff, "The Place of Metrics,"

and for those who already knew how to pronounce Latin words correctly; they did not provide a systematic guide to the scansion of Latin vocabulary. Aspiring poets had to read vast quantities of Latin verse by reliable authors, such as Virgil and Sedulius, and to study each word in context to determine its metrical value.¹¹ Moreover, the available metrical tracts did not explain the essential rules of composition, such as elision, which had been obvious to native speakers of Latin. These difficulties meant that ostensibly no non-native speaker of Latin in north-western Europe successfully composed a major metrical work before Aldhelm.¹²

Aldhelm's knowledge of Latin metre was made possible by the arrival in England of two Mediterranean masters: Theodore of Tarsus and Abbot Hadrian.¹³ Writing a few decades later, Bede described both men as fluent speakers of Latin and Greek and mentioned prosody explicitly in his account of the curriculum at Canterbury during this time.¹⁴ We know that Aldhelm studied at Canterbury, and it is likely that he learned Latin metre there from Hadrian himself.¹⁵ His first metrical work was probably his riddles, because he described their composition as preliminary exercises to hone his new metrical craft:

Nostrae exercitationis sollicitudo ... centenas enigmatum propositiones componere nitebatur et velut in quodam gymnasio prima ingenioli rudimenta exercitari cupiens, ut venire possit deinceps ad praestantiores operis materiam.¹⁶

(The purpose of my study was to try to compose a hundred riddles, and I wanted to exercise the first rudiments of my talent as if at school, so that it might later be turned to work of more substantial matter.)¹⁷

149–53; Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet*, 40–46.

11 On the Latin verse curriculum, see Green, *Latin Epics of the New Testament*, 353–63; Steen, *Verses and Virtuosity*, 16–19; Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet*, 46–50; McBrine, *Biblical Epics in Late Antiquity*, 210–30.

12 For the oldest Anglo-Latin metrical verse, see Lapidge, “The Earliest Anglo-Latin Poet.”

13 For Theodore of Tarsus, see Bolton, *A History of Anglo-Latin Literature*, 1:58–62; and Lapidge, “The Career of Archbishop Theodore,” 93–121. For Abbot Hadrian, see Bischoff and Lapidge, *Biblical Commentaries*, 82–132.

14 Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, IV.2.

15 On Aldhelm's education at Canterbury, see Lapidge, “The Career of Aldhelm,” 31–34; and my “The Poetic Tradition of Anglo-Saxon Riddles,” 42–59. For Hadrian's role in Aldhelm's metrical training, see Law, “The Study of Latin Grammar,” 50–52; and Lapidge and Rosier, *The Poetic Works*, 189.

16 Aldhelm, *Epistola ad Acircium*, 76.5–7. See also Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, 61; Orchard, *The Old English and Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition*, 2:2.

17 All translations mine.

This comment suggests that Aldhelm's first foray into metrical composition was his *Aenigmata*, presumably the early version known as the First Recension.¹⁸ Then at some time before the end of the reign of King Aldfrith (r. 685–705), Aldhelm corrected certain metrical errors in his riddles (creating the so-called Second Recension), wrote the two metrical treatises, and sent them all together to Aldfrith.¹⁹ Aldhelm thus associated his own riddles with metrical education, including them to exemplify the rules of versification expounded by the two treatises. It is likely, however, that he composed these riddles long before the other works, so it is unclear whether he initially intended them to serve this pedagogical purpose.

Aldhelm's two metrical works nonetheless reveal his approach towards metrical versification.²⁰ Taken together, the *De metris* and *De pedum regulis* form a pedagogical program that begins with the various ways a hexameter might be constructed and ends with vocabulary that might be fitted into these different patterns. Aldhelm's main concern in his *De metris* was the relationship between the number of syllables in a verse and its metrical feet, a problem immediately faced by any non-native speaker of Latin. The treatise therefore begins with an explanation of elision; the rule that describes when two syllables are elided or pronounced as one in a verse and so do not count separately.²¹ This is followed by a description of the hexameter and then a section in which Aldhelm gives an example of every possible combination of metrical feet that can form a hexameter, all arranged according to the number of syllables in the verse.²² Aldhelm made most of these verses

18 On Aldhelm's First Recension, see Ehwald, *Aldhelmi Opera*, 43–44; Lapidge, "Aldhelmus Malmesberiensis," 19–26; Laird, "The Poetic Tradition of Anglo-Saxon Riddles," 123–42; but compare O'Brien O'Keeffe and Journet, who could not confirm the existence of two distinct recensions, in "Numerical Taxonomy," and Stork, *Through a Glass Darkly*, 10–11.

19 See Lapidge, "Aldhelmus Malmesberiensis," 19–26; Laird, "The Poetic Tradition of Anglo-Saxon Riddles," 123–42.

20 See Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, 183–90. See also Law, *Grammar and Grammarians*, 93–101; Ruff, "The Place of Metrics," 149–53; Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet*, 40–46.

21 See Aldhelm, *De metris*, ed. Ehwald, 78.10–81.8; and Wright's translation in Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, 191–94. For Aldhelm's use of elision in his verse, see Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, 184–85; Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, 79–83; Lapidge, "Aldhelm's Latin Poetry," 249–55.

22 For Aldhelm's description of the hexameter, see Aldhelm, *De metris*, ed. Ehwald, 81.9–84.8; and Wright's translation in Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, 194–97. For the sample hexameters, see Aldhelm, *De metris*, ed. Ehwald, 84.5–92.23; and translation in Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, 197–207.

repeat the same basic sense, that “Christ saved the world,” thereby showing his command over a group of interchangeable, synonymic words to fit any metrical space required by a verse.²³ This was a formulaic technique that Aldhelm used throughout his poetry.²⁴ Turning again to the relationship between words and feet in a verse, Aldhelm concluded his *De metris* with a section on caesurae; the natural pauses in a verse that coincide with word-breaks.²⁵ Aldhelm’s *De metris* therefore concerns all the possible ways that a hexameter might be composed, both with a varying number of syllables, and with different relationships between the wordbreaks and the metrical feet; that is, with different types of caesurae.

Aldhelm’s other metrical work, *De pedum regulis*, complements the previous work by including lists of words arranged by their metrical quantity, so that the vocabulary can be readily incorporated into the patterns described in the first treatise. To arrange this vocabulary, Aldhelm used the twenty-eight types of metrical feet in poetry and gave a list of words fitting each type. But because only three of these types occur in dactylic hexameter, this arrangement is distracting and reveals Aldhelm’s tendency towards theoretical completeness at the expense of practical advice.²⁶ Yet Aldhelm’s *De pedum regulis* nonetheless filled a need in metrical education by providing a large amount of vocabulary, ready to fit into various metrical situations, a kind of practical, metrical handbook.²⁷ If Aldhelm’s *De metris* considered how syllables and words fit variously into verses, then his *De pedum regulis* took the opposite approach, starting at the level of individual words and showing how the metrical feet mapped onto them. Aldhelm arranged these lists according to their metrical shapes, without any regard for the mean-

23 See, for example, Aldhelm, *De metris*, ed. Ehwald, 84.27: “in cruce confixus mundum Christus salvavit” (nailed on the cross, Christ saved the world); and Aldhelm, *De metris*, ed. Ehwald, 84.29: “Christus filius aeterni salvavit mundum” (Christ, son of the Eternal One, saved the world).

24 On Aldhelm’s formulaic style of versification, see Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, 19–24; Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, 84–125; Lapidge, “Aldhelm’s Latin Poetry,” 247–56, esp. 250–51; McBrine, *Biblical Epics in Late Antiquity*, 231–44.

25 Aldhelm, *De metris*, ed. Ehwald, 92.24–96.24; and Wright’s translation in Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, 207–11.

26 See Ruff, “The Place of Metrics,” 155–64; Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet*, 42–45. The three types are the dactyl, spondee, and trochee.

27 See Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, 188–89; Laird, “The Poetic Tradition of Anglo-Saxon Riddles,” 145–47, 184–85.

ing of the words.²⁸ But their metrical shape was precisely what a non-native speaker of Latin needed to know.

Aldhelm's two metrical tracts reveal his approach to versification: he imagined the hexameter as a grid to be filled with varying combinations of syllables.²⁹ Aldhelm's *De metris* confronted directly the relationship between the number of syllables in a verse and its metrical feet, including how elision works and where caesurae should appear. His *De pedum regulis* provided a large amount of vocabulary, arranged by its metrical value, so that it might be easily fitted into the various verse patterns described in *De metris*. Aldhelm's two treatises were thus pioneering attempts to explain Latin metre from the perspective of a non-native speaker of the language and filled several gaps in metrical education.

Aldhelm composed his *Aenigmata* when the study of Latin metre was newly available in England. In it, he overcame the serious challenge posed by an utterly foreign poetic system, and he wrote his own metrical treatises to help teach it to others. Although the practical value of such tracts has sometimes been doubted, they actually do form a coherent pedagogical program, which presents both the various metrical patterns that must be filled and a large amount of poetic diction ready to be incorporated into them.³⁰

Metrical Lessons in Aldhelm's *Aenigmata*

Despite having apparently been composed before the metrical treatises, Aldhelm's *Aenigmata* contains a few references to metre and metrical versification. The only explicit reference appears in Riddle 84 *Scrofa pregnans* (Pregnant Sow), where Aldhelm mentioned how many types of *syzygies* (a type of metrical unit) exist in Latin prose. Other references do appear, hidden in the solutions to the riddles, for Aldhelm evidently chose certain solutions to demonstrate some rule or technique pertaining to metrical poetry in the text of the riddle itself. This is the case in Riddle 10 *Molossus* (Mastiff), the solution to which refers to a type of metrical foot, and Riddle 75 *Crabro* (Hornet), which alludes to a form of metrical license. Both riddles provide examples of the thing alluded to in their respective solutions, which sug-

28 See Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet*, 44.

29 See Ruff, "The Place of Metrics," 169; Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet*, 44.

30 On the usefulness of Aldhelm's treatises for learning to compose metrical poetry, see Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, 187–89; Ruff, "The Place of Metrics," 153–65, 170; Lapidge, "Aldhelm's Latin Poetry," 251; Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet*, 42–45.

gests that Aldhelm composed at least some of his riddles either as teaching texts or as exercises in some metrical technique.

The clearest example of a metrical lesson occurs in Aldhelm's Riddle 84, *Scrofa pregnans* (Pregnant Sow), which states explicitly that there is a total of ninety-six different types of syzygies (a metrical unit similar to the foot but consisting of five or more syllables).³¹ Aldhelm embedded this piece of information in the text of the riddle itself, which was otherwise drawn from folk tradition. The text of Riddle 84 is as follows:

Nunc mihi sunt oculi bis seni in corpore solo,
bis ternumque caput, sed cetera membra gubernant.
Nam gradior pedibus suffultus bis duodenis,
sed decies novem sunt et sex corporis ungues,
5 sinzigias numero pariter similabo pedestres.
Populus et taxus, viridi quoque fronde salicta
sunt invisā mihi, sed fagos glandibus uncas,
fructiferas itidem florenti vertice quercus
diligō; sic nemorosa simul non spernitur ilex.³²

Now in my body alone are twice six eyes, and twice three heads, but other limbs control me. For I walk supported by twice two and ten feet, but there are ten times nine and six nails to my body; altogether I am equal in number to the types of metrical syzygies. The poplar, yew, and willow with its green foliage are hateful to me, but I love the beech, bending with nuts, and similarly the fruit-bearing oak with its blossoming canopy; likewise, the shady holm oak is not despised.

This riddle falls neatly into two halves, with the first ending after line five. In the opening verses, the speaker says how many eyes, fingers, and other body-parts that it has. In the final four verses, the speaker mentions several types of trees, some of which bear nuts. The first part describes a pregnant sow and requires one to determine how many piglets it will bear, and was clearly drawn from folk tradition, for the pregnant sow is an ancient and widespread riddle topic, with examples in ancient Greek, Old Norse, and other languages.³³ But although the traditional version of the riddle always described the litter as containing nine piglets, Aldhelm increased the size of the litter to eleven piglets. The reason for this change becomes clear by line five, which says that the resulting ninety-six fingers and toes equals the

31 On the ninety-six types of metrical syzygies, see Isidore, *Etymologiae*, I.xvii.1.

32 Aldhelm, *Aenigmata*, 136.

33 See Heusler, "Die altnordische Rätsel," 141–42; Tupper, *The Riddles of the Exeter Book*, 155; Ohlert, *Rätsel und Rätselspiele*, 29–30; Taylor, *English Riddles from Oral Tradition*, 28–31, 696 (no. 56); Tolkien, *The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise*, 90.

number of types of metrical *syzygies* (*sinzigias...pedestres*).³⁴ This is something that Aldhelm discussed in his *De pedum regulis*, where he said that there were ninety-six types of metres in prose (or *syzygies*) in addition to the twenty-eight types of metrical feet in verse.³⁵ Riddle 84 thus includes an obvious piece of metrical information, which might prompt a teacher to explain the various types of metrical feet and *syzygies* or simply what these two things were. But the practical value of this information to an aspiring Anglo-Latin poet might be doubted, especially since the *syzygy* pertains to prose composition and not to verse. Riddle 84 nonetheless attests to Aldhelm's interest in conveying—or at least alluding to—metrical knowledge in his *Aenigmata*.

Another two riddles include poetic or metrical lessons hidden in their solutions. The solution to Riddle 10, for instance, is the species of hunting dog called *molossus* (mastiff), a word that also refers to one of the twenty-eight types of metrical feet in poetry. But this connection is not mentioned directly in the text of the riddle, which rather describes only the behaviour of the dog:

Sic me iamdudum rerum veneranda potestas
fecerat, ut domini truculentos persequar hostes;
rictibus arma gerens bellorum praelia patro,
et tamen infantum fugiens mox verbera vito.³⁶

Long ago, the awesome power of things had made me such that I pursue my lord's hostile enemies; bearing weapons in my jaws, I fight the battles of his war, and yet I avoid the beatings of children by fleeing immediately.

Here Aldhelm described the mastiff as a loyal servant that goes bravely into battle alongside his master but flees from little children. The subject is thus portrayed as a suffering servant, a motif found in many Anglo-Latin and Old English riddles.³⁷ The riddle revolves around the antithesis of the subject's power and weakness, for it is both brave and cowardly. But why did Aldhelm choose the solution *molossus* (mastiff) in particular? To be sure, Aldhelm would have been familiar with Molossian dogs from Virgil's *Georgics*, where

34 Note that pigs have four digits on each foot (my thanks to Leslie Lockett for pointing out this zoological fact to me).

35 See Aldhelm, *De pedum regulis*, ed. Ehwald, 150.10–14; and Wright's translation in Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, 212.

36 Aldhelm, *Aenigmata*, 102.

37 On the suffering-servant motif see Orchard, *The Old English and Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition*, 2:144, note to TAT 5.

they are singled out as fierce protectors of the flock.³⁸ But there is no reference in Aldhelm's riddle to guarding sheep or other livestock. Moreover, Aldhelm was very particular about the solutions to his riddles, and he even considered their etymologies (or what he understood to be their etymologies).³⁹ There is no allusion here, however, to the derivation of *molossus* (mastiff) from Molossia in Greece.⁴⁰ Nor is there any other reason why this riddle might not be solved by some other breed of dog or simply by the word *canis* (dog) in general.

However, as Aldhelm explained in his *De pedum regulis*, the word *molossus* is also the name for a metrical foot consisting of three long syllables (---).⁴¹ Although dactylic hexameters do not admit such feet, Riddle 10 nonetheless contains several words that scan as Molossian (---) either by nature or by their position in the verse: *iāmdūdūm*, *bēllōrūm*, and *īnfāntūm*.⁴² These words may be compared with several other trisyllabic words in Riddle 10 that are not Molossian, so that the text of the riddle makes a convenient teaching text; one can imagine a classroom exercise to correctly identify all the Molossian words. Riddle 10 thus describes a generic guard dog, but Aldhelm chose the solution *molossus* in particular because it was also the name for one of the types of metrical feet.⁴³ Aldhelm then ensured that several examples of this metrical foot were included in the text of the riddle itself, which thereby becomes a kind of teaching text on the subject.

Another lesson may be hiding in Aldhelm's *Aenigma* 75, Crabro (Hornet). This is one of the longer riddles, coming towards the end of the collection and describing the war-like behaviour of the titular insect at length:

Aera per sudum nunc binis remigo pennis,
horridus et grossae depromo murmura vocis,
inque cavo densis conversor stipite turmis
dulcia conficiens propriis alimenta catervis,
5 et tamen humanis horrent haec pabula buccis.
Sed quicumque cupit disrumpens foedera pacis
dirus commaculare domum sub culmine querno,

³⁸ See Virgil, *Georgics*, III.404–408.

³⁹ See Howe, "Aldhelm's *Enigmata* and Isidorian Etymology."

⁴⁰ For the etymology of *molossus*, see Isidore, *Etymologiae*, I.xvii.6; Lewis and Short, s.v. *molossus*1.

⁴¹ Aldhelm, *De pedum regulis*, ed. Ehwald, 162.18–163.5.

⁴² See Orchard, *The Old English and Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition*, 2:22, note to ALD 10.

⁴³ But compare Erhardt-Siebold, *Die lateinischen Rätsel der Angelsachsen*, 173–74.

extemplo socias in bellum clamo cohortes,
 dumque catervatim stridunt et spicula trudunt,
 10 agmina defugiunt iaculis exterrita diris.
 Insontes hosti sic torquent tela nocenti
 plurima, quae constant tetrīs infecta venenis.⁴⁴

I row through the clear air with double wings, bristling I emit the humming of a coarse voice, and in a hollow trunk I gather in dense throngs, preparing sweet nourishment for our band, and yet this food repulses human mouths. But whosoever cruelly desires to defile our home under its oaken roof, breaking the bonds of peace, I immediately call our allied forces to battle, and when they resound in their companies and thrust their sharp points, the terrified column flees from our cruel javelins. So the guiltless throw at guilty strangers many spears, which were infected with foul venom.

Here Aldhelm disguised the hornet in martial imagery, as though its hive were a fortification and its sting a spear. Aldhelm's main source for this sort of topic was Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*, which does not describe the hornet but rather the bee in this way: "apes...innumera prole castra replent, exercitum et reges habent, proelia movent, fumum fugiunt, tumultu exasperantur" (bees fill their fortresses with innumerable offspring, they have an army and kings, fight battles, flee smoke, and are provoked by commotion).⁴⁵ Isidore's description of *crabro*, however, does not mention the hornet behaving in this manner,⁴⁶ and Pliny the Elder—Aldhelm's other major source of encyclopaedic information—said that hornets do not form swarms at all.⁴⁷ Why then did Aldhelm choose the solution *crabro* (hornet) for Riddle 75 rather than *apis* (bee)? One reason, of course, was that he had already used the solution *apis* for Riddle 20. But he also likely had in mind the metrical license known as *sphecodis* (hornet-like), a Greek-derived word that Aldhelm used in his *De metris*.⁴⁸ As Vivien Law noted, Aldhelm probably learned this word from Hadrian himself, and it properly pertains to Greek

⁴⁴ Aldhelm, *Aenigmata*, 131–32.

⁴⁵ See Isidore, *Etymologiae*, XII.viii.1; Erhardt-Siebold, *Die lateinischen Rätsel der Angelsachsen*, 208–10.

⁴⁶ Isidore, *Etymologiae*, XII.viii.2.

⁴⁷ Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis historia*, XI.xxiv.73: "nec crabronum autem nec vesparum generi reges aut examina, sed subinde renovatur multitudo subole" (neither hornets nor wasps have kings or swarms, but rather their multitude is continually renewed by offspring); but compare Lapidge and Rosier, who suggested that Aldhelm's "comment on the taste of the hornet's 'sweet food' may derive from personal experience," in *The Poetic Works*, 253n68.

⁴⁸ See Aldhelm, *De metris*, ed. Ehwald, 94.15, 95.6–7.

poetry not Latin verse.⁴⁹ But Aldhelm nonetheless attempted to apply it to Latin, defining it thus in his *De metris*:

D: Quid adstruis esse spicodin?

M: Spix dicitur graece crabro, unde derivatur spicodis, et tamen miurus vel spicodis ad unam significationis regulam pertinere noscuntur, quia utraque animalia tenui et gracili membrorum extremitate terminantur: ita et versus, qui pirrichio clauditur, terminatur.⁵⁰

Student: What do you think *spicodis* to be?

Teacher: In Greek *spix* means “hornet,” from which *spicodis* is derived, and so both *miuros* (mouse-like) and *spicodis* (hornet-like) are understood to have the same meaning, since the limbs of both animals end in a thin and slender tail; so too ends the verse, which concludes with a pyrrhic foot.

Here Aldhelm explained how the final foot of a hexameter could be shorter than the other feet, insofar as a trochee (~ ~) is permitted there, whereas the other feet must be either dactyls (~ ~ ~) or spondees (~ ~), both longer than a trochee. Although Aldhelm was mistaken to claim that a pyrrhic foot (~ ~) could constitute this final foot in Latin hexameters, he nevertheless correctly included a few examples of these short “hornet-like” verses in Riddle 75, each concluding with a trochaic word: *vōcīs*, *pācīs*, and *quērnō*. Calling attention to these words, no fewer than eight verses in Riddle 75 terminate with a word ending in *-is*, just like the genitive *vōcīs* and *pācīs*. The other words, however, are all dative or ablative plural, so that they form spondees in the final feet. Aldhelm therefore likely chose to compose a riddle about *crabro* (hornet) with a lengthy, descriptive text, because it provided him the chance to show this metrical license in action. It is thus possible that Riddle 75 served as a prompt for a teacher to expound this poetic license, hidden in its solution.

As we have seen, then, Aldhelm’s *Aenigmata* includes several teaching opportunities that might have prompted a teacher to expound an aspect of metrical prosody. One such lesson was embedded in the text of Riddle 84 *Scrofa pregnans* (Pregnant Sow), but several others were concealed in the solutions to the riddles, as in Riddle 10 *Molossus* (Mastiff) and Riddle 75 *Crabro* (Hornet). Aldhelm thus provided his readers not only with a collection of short, memorable poems on diverse topics, but also with the occasional piece of metrical information. It is possible that Aldhelm meant this information to provide pedagogical opportunities for a teacher to expound

⁴⁹ Law, “The Study of Latin Grammar,” 50–52.

⁵⁰ Aldhelm, *De metris*, ed. Ehwald, 95.5–9.

on the relevant topic. But the seemingly random assortment of facts about metrical prosody in the *Aenigmata* do not form a coherent program, even though they show a poet eager to share what he knows about a new and mysterious artform. To get a fuller understanding of the role that Aldhelm's *Aenigmata* played in his program for teaching Latin prosody we must scan the verses themselves.

Metrical Diversity in Aldhelm's *Aenigmata*

Aldhelm's *Aenigmata* is metrically unlike his other works, insofar as it is much less monotonous in its use of metrical patterns. As Andy Orchard has shown, Aldhelm's regular poetic style was very uniform in its use of the same few metrical patterns; that is, the patterns of dactyls and spondees in a verse.⁵¹ But Orchard also noticed that Aldhelm's *Aenigmata* was less uniform in this respect than his other poetic works.⁵² As I shall show, this greater metrical diversity is not evenly distributed across the *Aenigmata*, but rather predominates at the beginning, where most of the shorter riddles occur. At the end of the collection, the riddles become both longer and more metrically monotonous. The collection therefore begins with short, metrically diverse poems, which show the various ways that a hexameter might be constructed, and it ends with longer, more uniform poems in the author's mature poetic style. Aldhelm's *Aenigmata* thus concentrates first on the construction of individual hexameters and then progresses to larger units of versification. This design, I contend, is a kind of pedagogical program that dramatizes the growing prowess of its author as a poet.

That Aldhelm's poetry is metrically uniform is easy to show. As we have said, each hexameter contains six feet, but only the first four of these feet were variable in medieval Latin, because the fifth foot was regularly a dactyl (D) and the sixth either a spondee (S) or a trochee.⁵³ This means that there are sixteen different combinations of dactyls and spondees available to a poet in the first four feet of every verse. Aldhelm, however, largely relied on the same few metrical patterns, as Orchard's statistics, summarized in Table 4.1, show.⁵⁴ It can be seen there that Aldhelm's four favourite metrical patterns together account for nearly three quarters (74.39%) of his entire

⁵¹ Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, 84–91.

⁵² Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, 88.

⁵³ See Aldhelm's own comments in Aldhelm, *De metris*, ed. Ehwald, 83.6–12; and Wright's translation in Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, 196.

⁵⁴ See Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, 85 (Table 4).

metrical output: DSSS (29.54%), DDSS (19.02%), SDSS (13.12%), and SSSS (12.71%). I therefore refer to these four types as Aldhelm's common metrical patterns, because they occur so much more frequently than do the next most popular combinations: DSDS (5.83%), DDDS (3.45%), DSSD (3.29%), SDDS (2.66%), and SSDS (2.49%). As a group, these five uncommon patterns only account for 17.72% of Aldhelm's total metrical corpus, in contrast to the 74.39% of his four common patterns. The remaining 7.9% of Aldhelm's verses use one of the remaining seven metrical patterns, which Aldhelm only used very rarely: DDSD (1.80%), SDSD (1.63%), SSSD (1.34%), DSDD (1.18%), DDDD (1.01%), SSDD (0.48%), and SDDD (0.46%). Given the scarcity of these patterns in Aldhelm's poetry, they are called rare in Table 4.1. Orchard compared these statistics with that of other Latin poets and found that Aldhelm stood out as one of the most metrically uniform poets, re-using the same few patterns to compose most of his poetry.

Aldhelm's *Aenigmata* is, however, much more metrically diverse than his other poems. This is immediately obvious from a comparison of the frequencies of Aldhelm's common, uncommon, and rare metrical patterns to his general practice described above. From left to right in Table 4.1, Orchard's statistics for the frequency of metrical patterns can be compared to Aldhelm's average usage in his *Aenigmata* alone. The four common metrical patterns, which represent about three quarters (74.39%) of his total poetry, only account for 61.89% of the *Aenigmata*. In their place occur a higher ratio of uncommon (24.90%) and rare (13.21%) metrical patterns. It is thus clear that Aldhelm's riddles are more metrically diverse than his other quantitative poems.

The distribution of this diversity reveals a hidden design within Aldhelm's *Aenigmata*. The collection is more metrically diverse at the beginning and gradually becomes more monotonous towards its end. This change corresponds to the collection's progression from short to long poems, since Aldhelm arranged his collection to progress roughly from the shortest to the longest riddles. To illustrate this progression, it is helpful to divide Aldhelm's *Aenigmata* into groups to compare the metrical diversity within the various parts of the collection. The precise placement of these divisions is arbitrary, but they nonetheless show that there is an incremental progression in metrical diversity within the *Aenigmata*. In Table 4.2, the riddles are divided into five groups, each containing roughly the same number of verses (but without dividing a riddle between two groups). Group 1 includes the verse preface and Riddles 1–26, which have an average length of 4.4 verses; group 2 comprises Riddles 27–50, which have an average length of 6.5 verses; group 3 is Riddles 51–70, with an average length of 7.9 verses; group 4 is Riddles 71–91, with an average length of 7.9 verses; and group 5 is Riddles 92–100,

Table 4.1. The Metrical Diversity of Aldhelm's *Aenigmata*.

Metrical Pattern		Average Frequency in Aldhelm's Poetry ⁵⁵		Occurrences in Aldhelm's <i>Aenigmata</i>	Average Frequency in Aldhelm's <i>Aenigmata</i>	
COMMON	DSSS	29.54%	74.39%	217	27.02%	61.89%
	DDSS	19.02%		130	16.19%	
	SDSS	13.12%		82 ⁵⁶	10.21%	
	SSSS	12.71%		68	8.47%	
UNCOMMON	DSDS	5.83%	17.72%	58	7.22%	24.90%
	DDDS	3.45%		44	5.48%	
	DSSD	3.29%		45	5.60%	
	SDDS	2.66%		28	3.49%	
	SSDS	2.49%		25	3.11%	
RARE	DDSD	1.80%	7.90%	25	3.11%	13.21%
	SDSD	1.63%		15	1.87%	
	SSSD	1.34%		15	1.87%	
	DSDD	1.18%		21	2.62%	
	DDDD	1.01%		21	2.62%	
	SSDD	0.48%		6	0.75%	
	SDDD	0.46%		3	0.37%	

with an average length of 19.1 verses. There is, then, a persistent increase in the average length of the riddles across these five groups.

This increase in length corresponds with a gradual decrease in metrical diversity towards the end of the collection. In group 1, the four common patterns only account for 49.01% of the verses, which is significantly lower than the average across the *Aenigmata* as a whole (61.89%), not to mention Aldhelm's entire corpus (74.39%). This is due to the scarcity of two common patterns, in particular DSSS and SSSS, which occur only as 13.25% and 2.65% of feet in group 1, but as 27.02% and 8.47% of feet in the *Aenigmata* as a whole. Group 1 also contains a higher proportion of uncommon (32.45%) and rare patterns (18.54%) than the other four groups within the *Aenigmata*.

In the subsequent groups, the proportion of common metrical patterns gradually grows larger, while that of the uncommon and rare patterns

55 For the figures in this column, see Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, 85 Table 4.

56 This total includes the two acrostic and telistic verses embedded in the preface.

Table 4.2. The Distribution of Metrical Diversity in Aldhelm’s *Aenigmata*.

Metrical Pattern		Group 1 (Pref., Riddles 1–26)		Group 2 (Riddles 27–50)	
COMMON	DSSS	13.25%	49.01%	20.51%	56.41%
	DDSS	19.21%		19.23%	
	SDSS	13.91%		10.90%	
	SSSS	2.65%		5.77%	
UNCOMMON	DSDS	9.93%	32.45%	7.05%	30.13%
	DDDS	7.95%		10.90%	
	DSSD	1.99%		8.33%	
	SDDS	8.61%		3.21%	
	SSDS	3.97%		0.64%	
RARE	DDSD	1.99%	18.54%	4.49%	13.46%
	SDSD	3.97%		0.64%	
	SSSD	3.31%		1.28%	
	DSDD	3.31%		2.56%	
	DDDD	5.30%		3.21%	
	SSDD	0.67%		1.28%	
	SDDD	—		—	

shrinks. As we have seen, Aldhelm’s common patterns only occur at a rate of 49.01% in group 1, but they compose 56.41% of his verses in group 2. This ratio continues to rise in the subsequent groups, where we find common patterns accounting for 61.39% of group 3, 68.68% of group 4, and 72.09% of group 5. Aldhelm’s uncommon and rare patterns, in contrast, occur at lower and lower rates in each successive group of riddles. Uncommon patterns fall from 32.45% in group 1 to 30.13% in group 2, 24.68% in group 3, 19.28% in group 4, and 19.19% in group 5. Similarly, Aldhelm’s rarely used patterns become gradually more infrequent towards the end of the collection. Whereas group 1 includes rare patterns at a rate of 18.54%, group 2 uses them at a rate of 13.46%, group 3 at 13.92%, group 4 at 12.05%, and group 5 at 8.72%. In fact, the ratios of common, uncommon, and rare patterns in group 5 are virtually the same as Aldhelm’s regular practice, making this section of the *Aenigmata* as uniform as his other metrical works.

Aldhelm’s *Aenigmata* are thus more metrically diverse than his other poems, but this diversity is not evenly distributed across the collection. Aldhelm composed his shorter riddles such that they contain a much higher frequency of rare and uncommon metrical patterns. But as he began to compose the longer riddles, he relied more and more on his mature, metrically

Group 3 (Riddles 51–70)		Group 4 (Riddles 71–91)		Group 5 (Riddles 92–100)	
29.75%	61.39%	28.92%	68.68%	40.70%	72.09%
15.19%		12.65%		15.12%	
8.86%		10.84%		6.98%	
7.59%		16.27%		9.30%	
5.70%	24.68%	7.23%	19.28%	6.40%	19.19%
3.17%		2.41%		3.49%	
10.13%		3.62%		4.07%	
0.63%		2.41%		2.91%	
5.06%		3.62%		2.33%	
4.43%	13.92%	1.21%	12.05%	3.49%	8.72%
2.53%		1.21%		1.16%	
1.90%		1.81%		1.16%	
2.53%		3.62%		1.16%	
0.63%		3.01%		1.16%	
0.63%		0.60%		0.58%	
1.27%		0.60%		—	

monotonous poetic style. This design suggests that Aldhelm was primarily concerned with the construction of individual hexameters in his shorter riddles, carefully including an example of every possible type in the first half of his collection. Group 1 alone contains examples of fifteen of the sixteen possible combinations, leaving only one very rare pattern unattested there (SDDD).

Aldhelm may also have been interested in another aspect of metrical verse; the placement of caesurae (that is, the pauses that naturally occur at the wordbreaks in each hexameter). His regular use of caesurae was repetitive. Orchard's analysis of caesura patterning throughout all of his poetry reveals that Aldhelm was primarily concerned with the so-called B caesura, which occurs in the third foot, effectively dividing the line into two halves.⁵⁷ If the wordbreak falls after the first long syllable of the third foot (˘ || ˘ or ˘ || ˘), then the caesura is classified as B1 or masculine. If the division occurs between the two short syllables of a dactyl (˘˘ || ˘), it is called B2 or feminine. As Orchard showed, Aldhelm's favourite caesura was B1, with

⁵⁷ Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, 92–97.

roughly 97.5% of his B-caesura verses constructed this way.⁵⁸ Conversely, only about 2.5% of his B-caesura verses have a feminine B2 caesura, a disparity arising from the general scarcity of dactyls in Aldhelm's verse. Indeed, none of Aldhelm's four common metrical patterns (DSSS, DDSS, SDSS, SSSS) has a dactyl in the third foot, thereby precluding the possibility of a B2 caesura.⁵⁹ As with his metrical patterns, then, Aldhelm's caesurae reveal him to be a very monotonous poet (Table 4.2).

Unlike his other poetry, Aldhelm's *Aenigmata* has a relatively high proportion of verses with a B2 caesura. This is due to the general prevalence of dactyls in the *Aenigmata*, where certain uncommon, dactyl-heavy patterns, such as DSDS, DDDS, and SDDS, occur at relatively high rates. As Table 4.2 illustrates, these three patterns account for 9.93%, 7.95%, and 8.61% of the verses in group 1; more than double their average usage by Aldhelm (5.83%, 3.45%, and 2.66% in Table 4.1). It is not surprising, then, that Aldhelm's *Aenigmata* contains a much higher rate of B2 caesurae than his other works. Of the 148 verses in group 1 with a B caesura, fourteen include the B2 variety (9.3%), which is significantly higher than what Orchard reported was Aldhelm's average usage (2.5%). In Riddle 4 *Natura* (Nature), Aldhelm clustered these unusual caesura patterns into one short, metrically diverse poem:

Crēdē mī hī, rēs nūllā mǎn ēt sīnē mē mōdē rānte	DSDD
ēt frōn tēm fācī ēmquē mē ām lūx nūllā vī dēbit.	SDDS
Quīd nēscī āt dīcī ōnē mē ā cōn vēxā rō tāri	DDDS
āltā pō lī sō līsquē iū bār lū nāequē mē ātus?	SDDS ⁶⁰

Believe me, nothing exists outside of my control, and yet no light will see my face and form. Who does not know that upon my order rotate the lofty dome of the heavens, the splendour of the sun, and the motions of the moon?

Every verse in this riddle is a different metrical pattern, none of which Aldhelm regularly used. All four lines include a B2 caesura, which is marked above with a double vertical line, splitting the verse into two halves at the third foot. Riddle 4 therefore demonstrates this type of caesura concisely, making it a helpful teaching text to the student of Latin prosody. Even if this were an accident of Aldhelm's deliberate use of so many metrical combinations in the early part of his *Aenigmata*, it nonetheless shows how his short riddles concentrate on the construction of individual hexameters, including elements such as caesurae.

⁵⁸ Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, 92.

⁵⁹ See Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, 94.

⁶⁰ Aldhelm, *Aenigmata*, 100.

Aldhelm's *Aenigmata* is more metrically diverse than his other poems, but this diversity only characterizes the beginning of the collection. There Aldhelm was primarily concerned with the composition of individual hexameters, making sure to include an example of every possible type. He also experimented with different kinds of caesurae, again revealing his interest in composition at the level of individual verses. These short poems therefore provide fitting teaching texts to be read alongside the metrical tracts, even if they are the product of the author's own experimentation in a newly learned medium.

Metrical Uniformity in Aldhelm's *Aenigmata*

At the end of the collection, the metrical diversity that characterized the beginning of Aldhelm's *Aenigmata* gives way to the author's regular poetic style. This corresponds to the gradual increase in the length of the riddles, so that the longer riddles at the end of the collection are also more metrically uniform. Why did Aldhelm do this? Using his favourite metrical patterns, Aldhelm was able to versify at length in his longer riddles at the end of his collection. The extra verses of these riddles rarely contribute to their enigmatic quality; in fact, they include verbose passages that provide more details than necessary to solve the riddle. Such passages tend to be on a particular poetic theme or *topos*, such as the martial imagery in Riddle 75 *Crabro* (Hornet), where the subject is portrayed as a warrior guarding a fortress. In such passages, Aldhelm included as many different words that fit the theme as possible, each made to fit into Aldhelm's grid-like pattern of the hexameter.⁶¹ With so many thematically related words, these riddles serve as a kind of prosodic dictionary or versified *gradus*, which might be scanned and studied by an aspiring poet who wished to compose verses on the same theme. If the metrically diverse riddles at the beginning of Aldhelm's *Aenigmata* concentrate on the construction of individual hexameters, the more uniform ones at the end are concerned with poetic images, themes, and topoi.

The convergence of Aldhelm's uniform metre and verbose diction can be seen best in Riddle 92 *Farus editissima* (Very Tall Lighthouse). Here Aldhelm described the lighthouse (*pharos*) in a long, narrative passage about sea-travel, a common subject in poetry.⁶² To illustrate the relative uniformity

⁶¹ For the idea that Aldhelm imagined the hexameter as a grid, see Ruff, "The Place of Metrics," 169; Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet*, 44.

⁶² For the sea and sea-travel in poetry, see, for example, Ashley, "Poetic Imagery in

of this text, the caesurae and cadences are marked with vertical lines, all finite verbs are underlined, and the metrical patterns are noted on the right:

	Rupibus in celsis, qua <u>tundunt</u> caerula cautes,	DSSS
	Et salis undantes <u>turgescunt</u> aequore fluctus,	DSSS
	Machina me summis <u>construxit</u> molibus amplam,	DSSS
	Navigeros calles ut <u>pandam</u> classibus index.	DSSS
5	Non maris aequoreos <u>lustrabam</u> remige campos	DDSS
	Nec ratibus pontum <u>sulcabam</u> tramite flexo,	DSSS
	Et tamen immensis errantes fluctibus actos	DSSS
	Arcibus ex celsis signans ad litora <u>duco</u> ,	DSSS
	Flammiger imponens torres in turribus altis,	DSSS
10	Igneae brumales dum <u>condunt</u> sidera nimbi.	DSSS ⁶³

On high cliffs where blue water beats the rock and a waving flow swells the salty sea, ingenuity built me large with tall masses, so that as a guide I can show boat-bearing paths to fleets. I never traversed the marine expanses of the sea by oar, nor did I plough the ocean by boat on a winding course, and yet those who wander, driven by immense waves, I lead to shore, directing from my lofty stronghold, as a flame-bearer setting up torches on high towers, when wintry clouds conceal the fiery stars.

This riddle describes the location and operation of a lighthouse in detail. Nine of the ten verses follow the same metrical pattern (DSSS), which is the one that Aldhelm used most often. This uniformity extends to the caesura patterning in Riddle 92, where every verse admits a B1 caesura (||) before the final cadence (|) of the last two feet. And it persists in the placement of finite verbs (underlined above), which Aldhelm regularly placed in the middle of the verse. When medial verbs separate adjectives from the nouns they modify, the verses resemble the golden-line construction.⁶⁴ This was Aldhelm's favourite way to construct a hexameter, as seen in the many narrative passages of his *Carmen de virginitate*.⁶⁵

Into this grid-like pattern, Aldhelm versified at length about the lighthouse, providing more details than were necessary. He could have ended the riddle after the fourth verse if its enigmatic quality were his main concern. Instead, he repeatedly described the maritime setting of the lighthouse,

Homer and Virgil," 26–27; Rahner, "Antenna Crucis II: Das Meer der Welt"; Holton, "Old English Sea Imagery."

⁶³ Aldhelm, *Aenigmata*, 140.

⁶⁴ On the golden-line construction, see S. E. Winbolt, *Latin Hexameter Verse*, 219–24; Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, 15, 96–97; Steen, *Verses and Virtuosity*, 26.

⁶⁵ See Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, 12–16, 84–125.

using many different words for the sea: *caerulum* (dark blue, sea), *aequor* (level surface, sea), *fluctus* (wave), *mare* (sea), *campus* (plane surface, sea) and *pontum* (sea).⁶⁶ Aldhelm also included several words related to ships—*classis* (fleet), *remex* (oarsman, oar), and *ratis* (raft)—as well as several verbs relevant to sea-travel: *tundo* (beat); *undo* (rise in waves); *tugesco* (begin to swell); *lustrō* (traverse); *sulco* (plough); and *erro* (wander). To these may be added several special poetic words, namely the following adjectives: *aequoreus* (marine); *brumalis* (wintry); *flammiger* (flame-bearing); *igneus* (fiery); and *naviger* (ship-bearing), most of which also pertain to the maritime theme.⁶⁷ Riddle 92 is thus a versified *gradus* of vocabulary related to the sea and sea-travel, all contained in an extremely monotonous metre. Whatever lessons are here, they pertain to poetic imagery and diction, not to the various ways a verse might be constructed.

This study of the patterns of metrical diversity in Aldhelm's *Aenigmata* reveals that it was designed both to display the growing prowess of its author as a poet and to illustrate the principles of Latin prosody. The collection progresses from short, metrically experimental poems to longer, more descriptive ones. This design may be symptomatic of a novice poet, eager to exercise his skill in a new medium, rather than the product of a genuine didactic plan to teach metrical poetry. But the distribution of metrical patterns in the collection shows rather how Aldhelm was thinking self-consciously about metre when he composed his riddles. It is no accident that the early riddles use so many different metrical patterns nor that the later riddles use so few. Those at the beginning seem to be the product of Aldhelm's experimentation with different ways of constructing hexameters, whereas the longer riddles at the end provide the reader with a rich source of poetic words, arranged by the various topics and themes of the riddles themselves. Understood in this way, the *Aenigmata* combined with the *De metris* and the *De pedum regulis* constitute a fairly complete program for the teaching of Latin prosody. The *De metris* contributes the structural principles of Latin metre, the *De pedum regulis* scans the Latin vocabulary for its metrical values, and the *Aenigmata* illustrates the application of both in a series of poetic riddles.

Although Aldhelm probably composed the riddles before the metrical tracts, he was nonetheless interested there in conveying metrical information. As we have seen, several of Aldhelm's riddles refer to metre, either

⁶⁶ See Orchard, *The Old English and Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition*, 2:96–97.

⁶⁷ For Aldhelm's use of these compound adjectives, see Lapidge, "Old English Poetic Compounds," at 25–26; Orchard, *The Old English and Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition*, 2:5–6; Laird, "The Poetic Tradition of Anglo-Saxon Riddles," 162–91.

directly or indirectly, such as Riddle 84 *Scrofa pregnans* (Pregnant Sow), Riddle 10 *Molossus* (Mastiff), and Riddle 75 *Crabro* (Hornet). Although these scattered allusions to metre hardly amount to a coherent pedagogical program, they nevertheless attest to Aldhelm's concern for conveying metrical knowledge through his riddles. The best evidence of his metrical interests, however, can be seen only by scanning the verses of the *Aenigmata* themselves. This reveals a hidden design within the *Aenigmata*, with the first half concentrating on the construction of individual hexameters and the second half progressing to larger units of versification. The collection as a whole therefore displays the growing prowess of its author as a poet, and forms a kind of pedagogical program for aspiring poets to follow.

Aldhelm was fully aware of his pioneering place in the Anglo-Latin literary tradition. In the letter to King Aldfrith that accompanied the *Aenigmata*, Aldhelm characterised himself as the first of the Germanic peoples to master Latin poetry and compared himself to Virgil, who was the first Latin author to compose agricultural poetry.⁶⁸ Aldhelm thus imagined his own literary legacy as the forefather of the Anglo-Latin poetic tradition. His *Aenigmata* was ostensibly the first major metrical work by someone who learned Latin as a distinctly foreign language. It not only inspired the composition of more riddles in Latin verse, but also the Anglo-Latin metrical tradition as a whole. In the generation following Aldhelm, many Anglo-Latin authors could now follow his precepts and examples and compose their own metrical verses. Since many of them first learned prosody from Aldhelm's metrical treatises as illustrated by his *Aenigmata*, it is not surprising that they should adopt for their own exercises the form of the master and exercise their newly-learned craft by composing their own riddles in Latin verse. This, I think, accounts for the popularity of the genre in the generations after Aldhelm.

68 Aldhelm, *Epistola ad Acircium*, 202.4–17; and translation in Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, 45–46.

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