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'Exeter Riddle 4' and Two Other Bell Riddles

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ABSTRACT

In early medieval England, the ringing of bells served a wide range of functions. This article argues that a detailed understanding of bells and their everyday use can help to explain the intricate narratives and elaborate language of three Latin and Old English riddles. The first, the late antique 'Riddle 80' by Symphosius, describes a dinner bell and the idle chatter of a drunken party. The second, Tatwine of Canterbury's 'Riddle 7', presents a funeral bell hanging in a tower as a deposed emperor who is hung and beaten. The third, the well-known 'Exeter Riddle 4', presents an everyday monastic bell as if it were an obedient monk, and it casts their relationship as interdependent and symbiotic. The bell solution has been heavily disputed. However, when the riddle is read alongside the rich context of monastic culture, and with careful attention to linguistic detail, this solution is confirmed.

The bells of early medieval England came in all shapes and sizes, and they were rung for a myriad of purposes, both religious and secular. Bells ranged in size from small, clinking *tintinnabula* and wooden *tabulae* to large, clanging circle bells. They announced all kinds of events, both prosaic and extraordinary, from mealtimes or religious ceremonies to the death of an abbess or abbot, and the sighting of an invading force. We should not think of the quintessential early medieval bell as an enormous circle bell ringing out sonorously from large belfries and cathedral towers. In their study of medieval church bells, John Arnold and Caroline Goodson write that:

> The origins and development of bells in the church took diverse and circuitous routes […]. At worst, the bell-tower lurches precariously back in time, and all its associated uses and meanings impose themselves upon every past mention of bells (or of what are assumed to be bells).[1]

As one would expect given their profound cultural importance, there are many references to bells in late antique and early medieval literature. Riddles were one of the most important and prestigious literary genres of early medieval England, and so it should be no surprise that bells featured in several riddles too. The trend begins with Symphosius' 'Riddle 80', one of the 100 Latin riddles of this anonymous late antique author. His collection, probably written in North Africa

[1] J. H. Arnold and C. Goodson, 'Resounding Community: the History and Meaning of Medieval Church Bells', *Viator* 43 (2012), 99–130, at 100–1.

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at some point between the third and sixth century, was extremely influential on the early medieval riddle tradition.[2] The eighth-century riddle collection composed by Tatwine, archbishop of Canterbury, also includes a rather idiosyncratic bell riddle, 'Riddle 7', in his collection of forty Latin riddles.[3] In both cases, as we will see, an understanding of the differing functions of the bells described in these riddles can provide us with us a deep and nuanced understanding of the artistry of these riddles. Many scholars would also include a third bell riddle, 'Exeter Riddle 4', which is one of approximately ninety-five Old English riddles in the late tenth-century Exeter Book.[4] However, these riddles do not include answers. As a consequence, the solution to this complex riddle has been highly contested ever since Franz Dietrich suggested a bell in 1859, along with the alternative solution of millstone.[5] Since then, many solutions have been suggested, including lock,[6]

[2] *Symphosius, the Aenigmata: an Introduction, Text and Commentary*, ed. and trans. T. J. Leary (London, 2014), p. 41. All references to Symphosius' riddles in this article are from Leary's edition and translation [hereafter referenced as *The Aenigmata*]. For recent scholarship on the dating and authorship of the riddles, see *Enigmata Symposii. La fondazione dell'enigmistica come genere poetico,* ed. M. Bergamin (Florence, 2005), pp. xi–xvi; E Sebo, 'Was Symphosius an African? a Contextualizing Note on Two Textual Clues in the Aenigmata Symphosii', *N&Q* 56 (2009), 324–326; C. Castelletti and P. Siegenthaler, 'Virgilian Echoes in the Aenigmata Symposii: Two Unnoticed Technopaignia', *Philologus* 160 (2016), 133–150, at 144–6; Leary, *Symphosius: the Aenigmata*, pp. 1–6. For their influence on the Riddles of Aldhelm, see T. Klein, 'Pater Occultus: the Latin Bern Riddles and their Place in Early Medieval Riddling', *Neophilologus* 103 (2019), 399–417, at 409–11, for their influence on the Bern Riddles, see Klein, 'Pater Occultus', pp. 404–8, and for their influence on the Exeter Book Riddles, see D. Bitterli, *Say What I Am Called* (Toronto, 2009), pp. 18–20. For their medieval popularity more generally, see M. Salvador-Bello, *Isidorean Perceptions of Order: the Exeter Book Riddles and Medieval Latin Enigmata* (Morgantown, WV, 2015), pp. 133–41. The widespread popularity of Symphosius is attested by the number of his riddles that circulated, in full or in part, and verbatim or in paraphrase, in other early medieval texts. These include the Latin *Historia Apollonii regis Tyri* and its Old English translation, Alcuin's *Disputatio Pippini* (see M. Bayless, 'Alcuin's Disputatio Pippini and the Early Medieval Riddle Tradition', *Humour, History and Politics in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. G. Halsall (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 157–78, at 170, 177), the *Collectanea Pseudo-Bedae* (see M. Bayless, 'The Collectanea and Medieval Dialogues and Riddles', *Collectanea Pseudo-Bedae*, ed. M. Bayless and M. Lapidge (Dublin, 1998), pp. 13–24, at 22) and *De divisionibus temporum*, a popular Carolingian revision of an earlier Irish computus manual (see N. Mogford, 'The Moon and Stars in the Bern and Eusebius Riddles', *Riddles at Work in the Early Medieval Tradition: Words, Ideas, Interactions*, ed. M. Cavell and J. Neville (Manchester, 2020), pp. 230–46, at 230).

[3] All references to Tatwine's riddles in this article are to 'Aenigmata Tatvini' in *Variae collectiones aenigmatum Merovingicae aetatis*, *pars altera*, ed. M. De Marco, CCSL 133 (Turnhout, 1963), 166–208.

[4] All references to the Exeter Book Riddles in this article are to *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Record*, ed. G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie, 6 vols. (New York, 1931–42), specifically vol. 3 [hereafter *ASPR* 3].

[5] F. Dietrich, 'Die Rätsel des Exeterbuchs', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Alterthum* (1859), 448–490, at 461.

[6] F. Holthausen, 'Zu den altenglischen Denkmälern, eine zweite Abwehr und Richtigstellung', *Englische Studien* 51 (1917), 180–8, at 185.

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handmill,[7] pen,[8] bucket,[9] dog,[10] the Devil,[11] plough-team,[12] sword,[13] and the sun.[14] Craig Williamson, writing in 1977, considered the riddle to be unsolved.[15] More recently, Patrick Murphy has robustly defended the bell solution, as a 'symmetrical metaphor of a bell as a creature roused in the same way that a reluctant riser responds to the ringing of a bell'.[16] His reading reminds us that riddles of this kind do not merely describe objects, but the social relationships that underpin them too. Despite Murphy's work, the bell solution is not yet secure enough to be considered definitive. This article intends to redraw the lines of scholarly opinion firmly on the side of the bell. To do so, we must appreciate how closely aligned the riddle's complex and enigmatic language is with the rich literary and social context of bells and bell-ringing.

DINNER BELLS AND SYMPHOSIUS' 'RIDDLE 80'

Most bells in Ancient Rome were small bells or gatherings of bells, which were known in Latin as *tintinnabula*. References to these bells are common in classical Latin literature, and they attest to a wide variety of functions and associations. They were used as protective pendants,[17] phallic windchimes,[18] ceremonial bells,[19] doorbells,[20]

[7] F. Holthausen, 'Zu altenglischen Dichtungen', *Anglia* 44 (1920), 346–56, at 346.

[8] L. K. Shook, 'Riddles Relating to the Anglo-Saxon Scriptorium', *Essays in Honour of Anton Charles Pegis*, ed. J. R. O'Donnell (Toronto, 1974), pp. 215–36, at 226–7.

[9] A. N. Doane, 'Three Old English Implement Riddles: Reconsiderations of Numbers 4, 49, and 73', *MP* 84 (1987), 243–57, at 247–9.

[10] W. Tigges, 'Signs and Solutions: a Semiotic Approach to the Exeter Book Riddles', *This Noble Craft: Proceedings of the Xth Research Symposium of the Dutch and Belgian University Teachers of Old and Middle English and Historical Linguistics, Utrecht, 19–20 January 1989*, ed. E. Kooper (Amsterdam, 1991), pp. 59–82, at 77-8.

[11] M. Heyworth, 'The Devil's in the Detail: a New Solution to Exeter Book Riddle 4', *Neophilologus* 91 (2007), 175–96.

[12] S. F. Cochran, 'The Plough's the Thing: a New Solution to Old English Riddle 4 of the Exeter Book', *JEGP* 108 (2009), 301–9.

[13] C. Dale, 'A New Solution to Exeter Book Riddle 4', *N&Q* 64 (2017), 1–3.

[14] J. Neville, 'Sorting out the Rings in "Þragbysig" (R.4)', *Riddles at Work in the Early Medieval Tradition*, ed. Cavell and Neville, pp. 21–39.

[15] C. Williamson, *The Old English Riddles of The Exeter Book* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1977), pp. 141–3.

[16] P. J. Murphy, *Unriddling the Exeter Book* (University Park, PA, 2011), p. 74.

[17] A. S. Pease, 'Notes on Some Uses of Bells among the Greeks and Romans', *Harvard Stud. in Classical Philol.* 15 (1904), 29–59, at 423.

[18] Varro, cited in Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, VI: *Books 20–23*, trans. W. H. S. Jones, Loeb Classical Library 392 (Cambridge, MA, 1951), 72.

[19] Plautus, 'Pseudolus', *The Little Carthaginian. Pseudolus. The Rope*, ed. and trans. W. de Melo, Loeb Classical Library 260 (Cambridge, MA, 2012), 278.

[20] Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, II: *Claudius. Nero. Galba, Otho, and Vitellius. Vespasian. Titus, Domitian. Lives of Illustrious Men: Grammarians and Rhetoricians. Poets (Terence. Virgil. Horace. Tibullus. Persius. Lucan). Lives of Pliny the Elder and Passienus Crispus*, ed. and trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 38 (Cambridge, MA, 1914), 282. See also Pease, 'Notes on Some Uses of Bells', pp. 32–4.

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and livestock-bells,[21] amongst other things.[22] Bells may also have been used as alarms or for announcing the watches, although these functions were normally reserved for trumpets.[23] Many bells had a connection with time: announcing bathing times in public baths,[24] the time for household slaves and employees to get out of bed,[25] funerals,[26] the opening and closing of markets,[27] and the change of courses at banquets.[28] It is probably the last of these functions that Symphosius has in mind in his 'Riddle 80', which is solved as *tintinnabulum* ('small bell').

> Aere rigens curvo patulum componor in orbem.
> Mobilis est intus linguae crepitantis imago.
> Non resono positus, motus quam saepe resulto.[29]

As Leary notes, the context of this riddle immediately before those on food and drink, along with the riddles' symposium context, suggest the bell for the changing of courses at dinner.[30] The first line explains the shape and material of the bell. According to Leary, the association of bronze with stiffness and hardness juxtaposes with the image of the bell's curvature,[31] which creates a minor opening paradox. But the reference to *aes* is as much an etymological as a physical clue since instruments of all kinds, including bells, were often referred to metonymically and in the plural using this word. Writers would often refer to bells or cymbals by pairing *aes* with the word *tinnitus* ('jangling'). For example, both Donatus and Augustine use the phrase 'tinnitus aeris' to describe onomatopoeia.[32] The stock phrases 'tinnitus aeris', 'tinnitus aere' and 'tinnitus aeni' can also be found in the

21 Numerous examples in classical literature, too many to list here, can be found of bells for oxen, mules, asses, pigs, and elephants.
22 Pease gives numerous other uses in the Greco-Roman world, such as the celebration of Dionysius, testing the courage of horses, and herding bees (Pease, 'Notes on Some Uses of Bells', pp. 29–59).
23 Pease, 'Notes on Some Uses of Bells', p. 43.
24 Martial, 'Epigram Liber XIV', *Epigrammaton libri*, ed. W. Heraeus (Leipzig, 1925), p. 337.
25 Lucian, 'De mercede conductis', *The Works of Lucian*, ed. & trans. A.M. Harmon, Loeb Classical Library 130 (Cambridge, MA, 1960), 452–3.
26 See Pease, 'Notes on Some Uses of Bells', p. 35.
27 Sextus Empiricus, *Against Logicians*, ed. and trans. R. G. Bury, Loeb Classical Library 291 (Cambridge, MA, 1935), 338–9.
28 Pease, 'Notes on Some Uses of Bells', p. 34.
29 '[I am] rigid, with curved bronze, fashioned in a ring. The moving image of a chattering tongue is inside. Put down, I make no sound; when I am moved, I resound'.
30 Leary, *Symphosius*, p. 206
31 Leary, *Symphosius*, p. 206.
32 'Nomen de sono factum, ut tinnitus aeris, clangor tubarum' ('a word made from a sound, as in the jangling of bells and the blast of a trumpet'), Donatus, 'Ars grammatica', *Grammatici Latini*, ed. H. Keil, 8 vols. (Leipzig, 1857–1870), IV, 367–402, at 400; Augustine, *De Dialectica*, ed. J Pinborg, trans. B. D. Jackson (Dordrecht, 1975), p. 94.

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work of Seneca,[33] Ovid,[34] Catullus,[35] and Ausonius,[36] among others. It seems likely that the first word of the riddle is designed to evoke both the jangling sound of the bell and the first two syllables of the solution. The first and second lines describe the bell's rim as if it were a wide-open mouth *in orbem*, and the clapper as a talkative tongue. These clues are not merely visual, but associative too. The propensity of small bells to jingle constantly, rather than ring out deeply, led to their association in classical literature with sciolistic and empty chatter. As Leary explains, 'while able to "talk", bells could not speak rationally and misogynistic comparisons were therefore made between female garrulity and the sound of bells'.[37] For example, when describing gossiping women, Juvenal's 'Satura 6' tells us: 'verborum tanta cadit vis | tot pariter pelves, tot tintinnabula dicas | pulsari'.[38] A related proverb, originating with Plautus, has it that 'numquam [...] temere tinniit tintinnabulum; nisi quis illud tractat aut movet, mutum est, tacet',[39] with the meaning that a gossip needs an audience.[40] The idea of a chattering bell also fits well with the performative context of Symphosius' riddles – the party atmosphere of the classical symposium. Not only does the jangle of the bell announce the different courses, but it also mimics the drunken chatter of the guests. We are reminded of Symphosius' remarks on drunken blabbermouths in the prologue to his riddles, when he describes those guests who tell riddles as 'verbosa cohors studio sermonis inepti'.[41] A similar idea is expressed in the first two lines of Symphosius' 'Riddle 70', which describes how a water clock regulates speech and silence.

[33] 'Quid miser expavescis ad clamorem servi, ad tinnitum aeris aut ianuae impulsum?' Seneca, 'De ira', *Moral Essays*, I: *De Providentia. De Constantia. De Ira. De Clementia*, trans. J. W. Basore, Loeb Classical Library 254 (Cambridge, MA, 1928), 338.

[34] 'Aeraque tinnitus aere repulsa dabunt' ('bells clashing against bells will jangle'), Ovid, *Works in Six Volumes*, V: *Fasti*, ed. and trans. J. G. Frazer, rev. ed. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library 253 (Cambridge, MA, 1931), 202.

[35] 'Aut tereti tenues tinnitus aere ciebant' ('or they shook a fine jangle with polished bells'), Catullus, *Gai Valeri Catulli liber* in *Catullus. Tibullus. Pervigilium Veneris,* ed. and trans. F. W. Cornish, J. P. Postgate and J. W. Mackail, rev. ed. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library 6 (Cambridge, MA, 1913), 64.262, at 114.

[36] 'Nec Dodonaei cessat tinnitus aeni' ('Nor does Dodona's brazen tinkling cease'), Ausonius, *Ausonius*, II: *Books 18–20. Paulinus Pellaeus: Eucharisticus*, trans. H. G. Evelyn-White, Loeb Classical Library 115 (Cambridge, MA, 1921), 29.23, at 114.

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] 'Such a great deluge of words fall, you would think that kettles or bells were being struck', Juvenal, 'Satire 6', *Juvenal and Persius*, ed. and trans. S. M. Braund, Loeb Classical Library 91 (Cambridge, MA, 2014), 276.

[39] 'A bell never rings by chance. Unless someone pushes or pulls it, it is mute, it is silent'. Plautus, 'Trinummus', *Stichus. Three-Dollar Day. Truculentus. The Tale of a Traveling-Bag. Fragments*, ed. and trans. W. de Melo, Loeb Classical Library 328 (Cambridge, MA, 2013), 224.

[40] See T. E. Jenkins, 'At Play with Writing: Letters and Readers in Plautus', *Trans. of the Amer. Philol. Assoc.* 135 (2005), 359–392, at 378–9.

[41] 'A loquacious band in learned pursuit of foolish speech'.

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Lex bona dicendi, lex sum quoque dura tacendi,
Ius avidae linguae, finis sine fine loquendi.[42]

Although this riddle is about how a clock regulates the time granted for an orator to speak in a legal or administrative setting,[43] it also alludes to the idea that Saturnalia is a festival on which the courts are 'silent' and only idle chatter is permitted.[44] In a similar way, the chattering bell regulates the time that is allocated to human chattering at the symposium, reminding us such time to tell riddles is limited. This may explain the acrostic *AMMON(E)O* ('I remind or warn') that is formed by the first and last word of each line, albeit requiring the addition of one letter. In such roundabout ways, the riddle reveals an unexpected connection between the chattering bell and the chattering riddle-teller.

TOWER BELLS AND TATWINE'S 'RIDDLE 7'

Many of the functions of classical bells continued well into the medieval period. For example, the Old English law code known as the 'Hundredgemot' mentions three forms of sound that can be admitted as legal testimony: 'hryðeres belle, hundes hoppe, blæshorn'.[45] The implication is that oxen and guard-dogs in tenth-century England often wore bells, just as their classical Mediterranean forebears did. Likewise, the Roman use of bells at funerals continued into the Middle Ages in the ringing of the bell at impending death (i.e. the passing bell), at the news of the death of a holy person (i.e. the death knell),[46] and the ringing of various kinds of

[42] 'The good law of speaking, I am also the hard law of being silent; a rule of an eager tongue and an end of speaking without end'.

[43] *The Aenigmata*, pp. 189–90.

[44] It is likely that Symphosius is thinking of the pseudo-etymology of *dies nefasti* ('public holiday') from *fatus* ('spoken'), as mentioned by Macrobius: *Saturnalia*, I: *Books 1–2,* ed. & trans. R A. Kaster, Loeb Classical Library 510 (Cambridge, MA, 2011), 192.

[45] 'The ox's bell, the dog's bell, and the horn'. 'Hundredgemot', *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, ed. F. Liebermann, 3 vols. (Halle, 1903), I, 192–5, at 194.

[46] For a seventh-century example, see 'audivit subito in aere notum campanae sonum, quo ad orationes excitari vel convocari solebant, cum quis eorum de saeculo fuisset evocatus' ('she suddenly heard the distinct sound of a bell, which would wake and gather them to prayers, whenever any of them had been called from this world'), Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, in *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), xxiii, p. 412 [hereafter *HE*]. For a tenth-century example, see 'Quod si ex alio monasterio noto ac familiari frater quis nuntiatus fuerit defunctus, conveniant pulsata tabula undique fratres et, motis uti praediximus omnis signis …' ('When news arrives from another well-known and confraternal monastery that a brother has died, once the *tabula* has been sounded, let the brothers gather from all around, and, as all the bells are rung in the aforementioned manner …'), *Regularis Concordia Anglicae Nationis Monachorum Sanctimonialiumque: the Monastic Agreement of the Monks and Nuns of the English Nation*, ed. and trans. D. T. Symons (London, 1953) [Hereafter *RC*], p. 67.

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bells at funerals (i.e. the lych bell).[47] Just like their classical ancestors, most bells of the period 'would presumably have clanged or tinkled, rather than tolled sonorously across a distance'.[48] Although larger, mounted bells and more sophisticated casting techniques became increasingly widespread in the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries, the large church bell hung in a belfry was a comparative rarity in England until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[49] This is not to say that belfries did not exist, but only that the bells were not typically of the scale found from the end of the eleventh century onwards. However, various church buildings, known as tower naves, were built in pre-Conquest England, many of which would have housed small and medium-sized hanging bells. Built in imitation of imperial architecture on the continent, tower naves were typically high-status chapels, often with a mortuary function, which required a bell.[50] The earliest-known examples date from the eighth and early ninth century.[51] The first example was constructed by Wilfrid at Hexham shortly after regaining his Northumbrian see in 706. As one would expect from Wilfrid, he consciously adopted a Roman style of architecture, in direct contrast to Irish-influenced Lindisfarne; the building likely functioned as a high-status mortuary chapel.[52] The two other bell towers known to have been built in the eighth century – at York and Winchester – were also used for funerary purposes.[53] Tower-building reached its pre-Conquest apotheosis during the tenth-century Benedictine Reform, when it became the mark of a prosperous monastery, such as Glastonbury, Abingdon, Thorney, Sherborne, Worcester or Winchester.[54] The *Colloquies of Ælfric Bata*, written at the end of the tenth century, lists a *cloccarium* or *bellhus* among those things that a good monastic church should have.[55] Many of these Reform-era buildings were also closely associated with royal authority. For example, Byrhtferth of Ramsey describes King Edgar as standing high up in the tower at Winchester Old Minster

[47] For example, 'Inde defertur in ecclesiam, psallentibus cunctis motisque omnibus signis' ('and then it [i.e. the body] shall be carried into the church whilst all the psalms are chanted and all the bells are rung'), *RC*, p. 65. Funerary handbells appear in the scene of the death of Edward the Confessor in the Bayeux Tapestry (*c.* 1070, Musée de la Tapisserie de Bayeux).

[48] Arnold and Goodson, 'Resounding Community', p. 103.

[49] *Ibid.* pp. 104, 110–11.

[50] M. Shapland, *Anglo-Saxon Towers of Lordship* (Oxford, 2019), pp. 118–131.

[51] *Ibid.* pp. 8–16.

[52] *Ibid.* pp. 8–11.

[53] *Ibid.* pp. 11–15.

[54] *Ibid*, pp. 16–27.

[55] Ælfric Bata, *Anglo-Saxon Conversations: the Colloquies of Ælfric Bata*, ed. S. Gawa, trans. D. W. Porter (Woodbridge, 1997), p. 162. Ælfric's translation of *bellhus* as *cloccarium* ('bell tower') suggests this was its usual tenth-century meaning (see Shapland, *Anglo-Saxon Towers of Lordship*, pp. 146–7).

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as the sacristan rings the bell for Vespers, in his *Vita Oswaldi*.[56] A related type of bell tower developed at the end of the tenth century, when it became fashionable for lords to construct non-monastic tower naves, often situated independently from ecclesiastical buildings. For example, Wulfstan of York's 'Geþyncðo' mentions a *bellhus* among the property requirements of a thegn.[57] Such edifices were typically intended as extensions to high-status residences, and their design borrowed heavily from the iconographical language of imperial prestige and ecclesiastical authority.[58]

Tatwine's 'Riddle 7', written in the early eighth century, describes a hanging bell, possibly an early tower bell of some kind.[59] Tatwine clearly does not have the small, jangly bell of Symphosius in mind, and he gives his riddle the unusual title, *De tintinno*, perhaps in the mistaken belief that *tintinnabulum* is the diminutive form of a noun, *tintinnus*.[60] Tatwine would likely have been aware of the early Northumbrian bell towers; he would certainly have seen continental examples in his visit to Rome to receive the pallium.[61] Intriguingly, his riddle appears to refer to a tower bell's mortuary function as well as its association with imperial power. Sandwiched between riddles on the essential materials of the scriptorium (letters, pen, parchment) and the church (altar, cross, lectern), it describes its subject using a narrative about an emperor's misfortune.

> Olim dictabar proprio sub nomine caesar,
> Optabantque meum proceres iam cernere vultum.
> Nunc aliter versor superis suspensus in auris,
> Et caesus cogor late persolvere planctum
> Cursibus haut tardis cum ad luctum turba recurrit.
> Mordeo mordentem labris mox dentibus absque.[62]

The riddle relies upon two parallel narratives. In one, an emperor is deposed and tortured, before taking his revenge. In the other, each time the bell rings, it is as if it is being beaten and its cries are from the pain. The bell is described in the opening

[56] Byrhtferth of Ramsey, 'The Life of Oswald', *The Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgwine*, ed. and trans. M. Lapidge (Oxford, 2000), p. 46.

[57] Wulfstan of York, 'Geþyncðo', *Gesetze* I, 456–9 (456).

[58] Shapland, *Anglo-Saxon Towers of Lordship*, pp. 34–105.

[59] As recognised by E. von Erhardt-Siebold, *Die Lateinischen Rätsel der Angelsachsen* (Heidelberg, 1925), pp. 139–40 and M. J. McDonald Williams, 'The Riddles of Tatwine and Eusebiu' (unpubl. PhD dissertation, Univ. of Michigan, 1974), p. 113.

[60] *Ibid.* However, McDonald Williams is wrong in thinking that Tatwine coins the term *tintinnus* himself (see the examples from sixth-century Gaul in J. N. Adams, *The Regional Diversification of Latin, 200 BC–AD 600* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 321).

[61] See 'Continuatio Bedae' in *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 572–7, at 572).

[62] 'Once I was known as 'Caesar' and princes wished to see my face. Now instead I dwell above, hanging in the air. And, once struck, I am forced to send out lamentations far and wide, when the crowd returns to the wailing ever so quickly. Instead, I bite the biter with my toothless lips'.

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line as an emperor. The suggestion by Franz Buecheler that this is a reference to the melting down of bronze statues or coins of pagan emperors to be recast as bells is somewhat plausible.[63] However, Tatwine's primary inspiration is most likely a pseudo-etymological pun between the verb *caedere* ('to strike') and the familia *Caesar*,[64] a name that was once glorious and renowned by *proceres*. The metaphor also alludes to the high status of the hanging bell, and perhaps to its associations with Rome and imperial power. The emperor is then overthrown, hanged and tortured, which leads to the pun's return in line four, when the *caesar* (the 'striker') is himself *caesus* ('struck'). Likewise, the bell is raised and hung up and then struck.

Depicting a hanging object as if it is being tortured or executed is not unique to Tatwine's riddles. For example, the oil lamp of 'Lorsch Riddle 10' denies that it is a criminal, before admitting that 'in laqueo reus ut fur pendeo longo'.[65] Alcuin uses a similar idea in the *Disputatio Pippini*, when Pippin announces cryptically, 'Nunquam bene, nisi suspendantur in aere', and Alcuin answers him with the equally enigmatic 'Audivi mortuos multa loquentes'.[66] The remark is designed to mislead the reader that the dead hanging on the gallows can somehow talk, but the real meaning is the funeral bell that 'speaks' for the dead. However, Tatwine's tortured bell remains alive, which allows for another piece of wordplay, this time on the dual sense of *planctum* as lamentation (a meaning derived from the idea of beating the breast) and the simple noise of striking. The emperor cries out in his pain and the bell rings out as if it wails. The bell's *luctus* attracts the masses very quickly (*cursibus haut tardis*). In the literal narrative, these crowds appear to be gathering happily to witness the torture of a pagan emperor;[67] in the metaphorical narrative, they are thronging to the sounds of a funeral, with the implication that the bell is a lych bell. The final line borrows heavily from Symphosius' 'Riddle 44' on the onion, which proclaims 'mordeo mordentem […] dentesque non habeo ullos'.[68] Just like his predecessor, Tatwine is imagining the bell as a mouth, and it is very likely that he had Symphosius' tongue-like clapper in mind. The biting refers to

[63] F. Buecheler, 'Coniectanea', *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 36 (1881), 329–342, at 342. The idea is endorsed by von Erhardt-Siebold, *Die Lateinischen Rätsel*, p. 144.

[64] See Isidore, *Etymologarium sive origunum Librei XX*, ed. W. M. Lindsay, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1912), II, IX.ii.3.

[65] 'I hang on a long noose like a guilty thief', *Aenigmata Laureshamensia*, CCSL 133, 345–358, at 356.

[66] 'I heard the dead speaking a great deal'; 'Not truly unless they are hung in the air', Bayless, 'Alcuin's Disputatio Pippini', p. 175.

[67] A. Orchard, *A Commentary on the Old English and Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition* (Cambridge, MA, 2021), p. 146.

[68] 'I bite the biter […] and I have no teeth'. The phrase proved popular for subsequent riddle authors, and it crops up in Bern Riddles 37 and 41, as well as in Aldhelm's 'Riddle 46' and 'Exeter Riddle 65' in modified form. See A. Orchard, 'Enigma Variations: the Anglo-Saxon Riddle-Tradition', *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, ed. K. O'Brien O'Keeffe and A. Orchard (Toronto, 2005), pp. 284–304, at 295–7.

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how the clapper and the lip of the bell's rim strike – or 'bite' – each other. At the same time, he implies that the deposed emperor has had his teeth bashed in, yet he is somehow taking his toothless revenge on those who earlier harmed him.

MONASTIC BELLS DURING THE BENEDICTINE REFORM

Although early medieval bells played an important role in announcing deaths, the two most prominent uses of bells were to mark the canonical hours and to call a congregation to church. The origins of the bell as a marker of prayer has traditionally been ascribed to Paulinus, the fourth-century Bishop of Nola, on the basis of the late Latin word *nola* ('mass bell').[69] A separate tradition ascribes this to Pope Sabinian at the turn of the seventh century.[70] But, given the various ways in which bells were already used for announcing time in the pre-Christian world, it seems likely that bells were used to mark Christian prayer and ceremony much earlier than these legends would have it. The bell was particularly important to monastics, who aimed to live a life of constant devotion, in which every act, however mundane, was an act of prayer. Thus, bells were increasingly used to mark out not only the canonical hours, but also each moment of the heavily regulated monastic day – thus a bell would ring whenever monks were expected to begin a new task.

The increasingly complex lives of the monasteries and churches of tenth and eleventh England required a considerable number of different bells, often in double figures. In the early eleventh century, the minster at Sherburn-in-Elmet, a moderately-sized but wealthy institution, owned '.iiii. handbellan, ond .vi. hangende bellan'.[71] Similarly, the Exeter inventory drawn up by Leofric in the years after the Conquest records that 'ond þær næron ær buton .vii. uphangene bella, ond nu þær sind .xvi. uphangene ond .xii. handbella'.[72] The mid-tenth-century monastic rule, the *Regularis concordia*, is a testament to the variety of roles that bells performed, mentioning three different types of monastic bell. The first is the *tabula*, a wooden panel that was probably adopted from the practice of Roman basilicae.[73] According to the *Regularis concordia*, the *tabula* is to be struck whenever

[69] The connection of *nola* to the town of Nola is mentioned as early as the ninth century, in Walafrid Strabo, *Libellus de exordiis et incrementis quarundam in observationibus ecclesiasticis rerum: a Translation and Liturgical Commentary*, ed. and trans. A. L. Harting-Correa (Leiden, 1996), p. 62.

[70] See Polydore Virgil, *De rerum inventoribus*, ed. and trans. J. [sic. T.] Langley (New York, NY, 1868), p. 190.

[71] 'Four handbells and six hanging bells': 'Inventory of Church Goods at Sherburn-in-Elmet', *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, ed. and trans. A. J. Robertson, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1956) [hereafter *ASChart*], p. 248.

[72] 'Before [Leofric's restoration of Exeter] there were only 7 hanging bells, but now there are 15 hanging bells and 12 handbells': 'The Gifts of Bishop Leofric to Exeter', *ASChart,* p. 228.

[73] Amalar of Metz mentions having encountered the practice in Rome, where the *tabula* is used 'non propter aeris penuriam, sed propter vestutatem': Amalar of Metz, 'De Ecclesiasticis Officis Libri IV', *Theodulfi opera omnia*, ed. J. P. Migne, PL 105 (Paris, 1864), 985a–1243c (1201b–c).

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there is manual labour to be carried out during the day,[74] for Saturday maundy,[75] and when death seems imminent.[76] The second kind of bell, the *tintinnabulum*, was a small hand-bell that was usually rung for some time.[77] It is often associated with night-time prayer in the *Regularis concordia*, marking out periods of transition such as the ordered procession to church, and so the tinkling of *tintinnabula* must have been a common one in the early hours of the evening and morning.[78] But the most frequent bell referred to in the *Regularis concordia* is the ambiguous *signum*, which was rung for daytime church gatherings,[79] prayer,[80] confession,[81] mealtimes and other events in the monastic day, as well as for seasonal customs, such as the ringing of all the bells at Nocturns during the Christmas period.[82] The *signum* was typically rung by the sacristan or their secular equivalent, the ostiary, whose identities were strongly bound up with such timekeeping. For example, in the *Monasteriales indicia*, a handbook of monastic sign-language, the symbol for the *cyricweard* (i.e. the sacristan or ostiary) is a hand-movement 'swylce he wille ane hangigende bellan teon'.[83] Their role included timing the bell correctly, as other insular and continental monastic texts attest. For example, the ninth-century *Institutio Canonicorum Concilii Aquisgranensis* includes a chapter on why and how canons should observe the hours most diligently, explaining that 'custodes praeterea ecclesiae harum horarum distinctiones bene norant, ut scilicet signa certis temporibus pulsent . . .'.[84] Similarly, in his pastoral directions to the clerics of Sherborne minster, Ælfric requires that the ostiary 'sceal mid bellan bicnigan þa tida'.[85]

74 *RC*, pp. 20, 22, 30.

75 *Ibid.* p. 22. The maundy, a monastic practice of daily and weekly foot-washing of the poor (from which the title of Maundy Thursday is derived) is the subject of two chapters in *RC* (pp. 61–3). See also Benedict of Nursia, *Regula Benedicti*, ed. R. Hanslik, CSEL 75 (Vienna, 1960), 46.

76 *RC*, pp. 64–5.

77 The difference between the jangling *tintinnabulum* and a regular bell is also alluded to a short epigram by Alcuin (Alcuin of York, 'Carmina CVIII', *Alcuini Opera Omnia*, ed. J. P. Migne, PL 101 (Paris, 1851), 754c.

78 *RC,* pp. 13, 15, 33.

79 *Ibid.* p. 49.

80 *Ibid.* p. 20.

81 *Ibid.* p. 38.

82 *Ibid.* pp. 29–30.

83 'As if one were ringing a hanging bell': *Monasteriales Indicia: the Anglo-Saxon Monastic Sign Language,* ed. D. Banham (Pinner, 1991), p. 22.

84 'The church-wardens should be well aware of the hours, so that they ring the bell at the right times': 'Institutio Canonicorum Concilii Aquisgranensis', *The Chrodegang Rules*, ed. J. Bertram (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 96–131, at 118.

85 'Must mark out the hours with the bells': Ælfric of Eynsham, 'Pastoral Letter for Wulfsige', *Councils & Synods with other Documents Relating to the English Church*, I: *AD 871–1204*, ed. D. Whitelock, M. Brett and C. N. L. Brooke, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1981), I, 191–226 (no. 202).

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Since the bell marked out the rhythms of the monastic day, it also became a symbol of monastic obedience and submission. Just as a monk was bound to follow rule and custom unquestioningly, so they were bound to obey the bell unquestioningly too. For example, in a discussion on the weekly maundy each Saturday, the *Regularis concordia* stresses that 'nullus quippiam quamuis parum sua ac quasi propria adinventione afere presumat […] sed ab universis […] tempore opportuno consuete peragatur'.[86] Obedience did not simply require that one should drop everything at the sound of the bell, but also that one should not anticipate it. For example, the *Regularis concordia* describes the period of study or prayer between Prime and Terce thus:

> Tunc facto signo eant et se diurnalibus induant calceamentis; nullus enim hoc debet praesumere antequam illud audiatur signum, exceptis ministris neque tunc ab aliquo intermittatur sine licentia ne praesumptione temeraria oboedientiae meritum lugubriter obnubilet.[87]

Although the monastic schedule did grant some space for individual expressions of piety, these were also ultimately regulated by the bell. Thus, although the *Regularis concordia* allocates time for personal prayer after the first call to bed, the final call is to be obeyed without exception.

> Si quis vero post haec, devotionis suae forte fervore, his diutius incumbere volverit, agat quidem haec; sed audito signo aeditui quo resides ad egrediendum vocat nil moretur.'[88]

In such a way, the bell calls out to the ordinary monk and the exceptionally devoted alike. Its ringing was the bottom line, and its power to stir monks to action was legendary in the traditions of monastic literature. For example, in Bede's *Vita Cuthberti*, a paralysed monk is sent to Lindesfarne, where he is laid out with relics next to his feet. He lies there all night, until 'at ubi consuetum in monasterio nocturnae orationis signum insonuit, excitatus sonitu resedit ipse'.[89] The bell calls him to rise from bodily paralysis, just as it calls his brothers to rise from sleep. At the same time, monks were not expected to be passive automatons, but rather to

[86] 'No one should presume to do anything at all, however small, on his own inspiration […] but let everything be done at the correct time and according to custom', *RC*, p. 63.

[87] 'Once the bell has been rung, let them go and put their day-shoes on. None should do this before the bell is heard except the priests, nor should they fail to do this without permission, lest the service of obedience be clouded over by reckless presumption', *ibid.* pp. 14–16.

[88] 'If someone, in the fervour of devotion, wishes to pray any longer, let him do so. But, having heard the bell of the sacristan call back those who remain, let him not delay', *ibid.* p. 24.

[89] 'When the customary signal of Nocturns sounded out in the monastery, he woke and sat up with that very sound', Bede, 'Vita Cuthberti', *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: a Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life*, ed. and trans. B. Cosgrave (Cambridge, 1940), p. 300.

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obey wilfully the signal on each occasion.[90] Another recurrent literary motif was the idea that the bell rouses the righteous from sleep just as Christ's teaching rouses them from eternal death. For example, an anonymous Old English homily, 'Assmann XIV'[91] warns its audience that 'deofol us læreð slæpnesse and sent us on slæwðe, þæt we ne magon þone beorhtan beacn þære bellan gehyran'.[92] The homilist then tells them that God 'us læreð wæccan and sent us on leohte heortan, þæt he wolde, þæt we oft cyrican sohtan'.[93] In this way, each ring was a call to rise from the dangerous inertia that imperilled the soul – the spiritual consequences of disobeying the bell were very serious indeed.

'EXETER RIDDLE 4'

Only twelve lines long, 'Exeter Riddle 4' uses a compelling variety of enigmatic words and phrases to disguise its subject in a way that is at once harmonious and baffling.

Ic sceal þragbysig þegne minum,
hringum hæfted, hyran georne,
min bed brecan, breahtme cyþan
þæt me halswriþan hlaford sealde.
Oft mec slæpwerigne secg oðþe meowle
gretan eode; ic him gromheortum
winterceald oncweþe. Wearm lim
gebundenne bæg hwilum bersteð;
se þeah biþ on þonce þegne minum,
medwisum men, me þæt sylfe,
þær wiht wite, ond wordum min
on sped mæge spel gesecgan.[94]

[90] For the passive and active aspects of monastic obedience in the Reform period, see K. O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Stealing Obedience: Narratives of Agency and Identity in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto, 2012), pp. 3–26, 46–54, 55–93.

[91] Most of the homily is derived from other sources, but this passage is not. See D. G. Scragg, 'The Corpus of Vernacular Homilies and Prose Saints' Lives before Ælfric', *ASE* 8 (1979), 223–77, at 245–7.

[92] 'The devil preaches sleep and exiles us into sloth, so that we cannot hear the bright signal of the bell', 'Homily XI', *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben*, ed. B. Assmann (Kassel, 1889), p. 168.

[93] 'God enjoins us to wake and sends us with pure heart, because he wants us to attend church very often,' *ibid.*

[94] 'When hard at work, held together with rings, I must be most obedient to my servant, I must break my bed and announce with a crash that a lord gave me a neck-ring. Often a man or woman touches sleep-weary me. Winter-cold, I reply to those grim-hearted ones. At times a warm limb bursts the bound ring. Although that very thing will be agreeable to my servant, an unwise man, and to me, if I could understand anything and tell my story successfully'. Note the correction of MS 'hringan' in line 2 of the edition in *ASPR* 3.

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The first and probably the most difficult clue is found in the opening half-line – the compound adjective *þragbysig*, which is not found anywhere else in Old English corpus. Its apparent novelty and its unusual position in respect of the governing pronoun would both seem to indicate especial significance as a clue. Any reading of the riddle must therefore begin by asking what *þragbysig* means, as well as explaining its unusual syntax. This is no easy task. The meaning of the *þragbysig* is not immediately clear, not merely because it is a hapax legomenon, but also because of the difficulty of interpreting the *þrag-* element. Unfortunately, Bosworth & Toller's dictionary definition of *þrag* as 'a time, season' has misled several scholars.[95] It is clearly referring to the phrase *ða þrage and ða tide* in 'Blickling Homily 11',[96] which is *tempora vel momenta* in the Vulgate and *the times or the seasons* in the King James Bible.[97] But none of the sixty-six instances (fifty-one in poetry and thirteen in prose) of *þrag* refer explicitly to the seasons.[98] Although this would not refute seasonal solutions such as Shannon Ferri Cochran's plough-team or Ann Harleman's bucket of water, it would certainly weaken them significantly, since both scholars lean on this meaning considerably.[99] Importantly, *þrag* always designates a time-period (either as a noun or adverbially), rather than a particular time or season, or the idea of abstract time.[100] Although its near synonym, *tid*, can refer either to dates and events in time (a feast day, a canonical hour, a mark on a sundial) or to periods of time (e.g. for a time, sometimes, from time to time), *þrag* only ever refers to the latter. It is frequently used as a dative of time (*þrage* or *þragum*).[101] The dative singular has the sense of 'for a time.' Often this is a relatively long period of time,[102] but such a meaning is relative, and so the ninth-century

[95] *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary based on the Manuscript Collections of the late Joseph Bosworth*, ed. T. N. Toller (Oxford, 1898), *s.v. þrag.*

[96] 'Homily XI: On þa halgan þunres Dei', *The Blickling Homilies of the Tenth Century*, ed. R. Morris, EETS 73 (London, 1880), 114–31, at 117.

[97] Acts 1:7.

[98] *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* (2016), University of Toronto, ed. A. Cameron, A. C. Amos, A. D. Healey *et al.* [hereafter *DOE*].

[99] Cochran writes: 'this calendar [of crop rotation] befits two separate but related meanings of OE *þrag*, both "time" or "routine" and "season"', 'The Plough's the Thing', pp. 305–6. Likewise, Harleman writes, 'since the noun *þrag* has the meanings "time" and "season"; we can translate *þragbysig* as "busy with the season" or "afflicted by the season", reflecting the fact that the ice which forms in winter is an affliction or "busyness" imposed by the time of year and the weather', A. H. Stewart, 'The Solution to Old English Riddle 4', *SP* 78 (1981), 52–61, at 58).

[100] For example, 'Hu seo þrag gewat, | genap under nihthelm, swa heo no wære' (*The Wanderer*, lines 95b–96, *ASPR* III), is unambiguously 'how that time has gone, darkened under the shadow of night, as if it never were,' and not 'how that moment has passed …' or 'how time has passed …'.

[101] On several occasions when verbs can be both transitive and intransitive, it is unclear whether *þrage* is an adverbial or the object of the verb.

[102] For example, the length from Creation to the present day in the *Old English Boethius* (*The Old English Boethius with Verse Prologues and Epilogues Associated with King Alfred*, ed. and trans. S. Irvine

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Corpus Glossary simply glosses it with the Latin word *interim* ('for a while').[103] The plural adverbial form *þragum* is less common, occurring nine times in the corpus, always in poetry. On each occasion, it expresses repeated periods of duration, with the sense of 'for several periods of time.'[104] When used nominally, *þrag* means 'for a while', and never 'at some particular time.' For example, in 'Guthlac B' it refers not to the moment of the loss of a lord, but to the aftermath, since one grieves in the wake of death, rather than only at the moment of death.

> Ellen biþ selast þam þe oftost sceal
> dreogan dryhtenbealu, deope behycgan
> þroht þeodengedal, þonne seo þrag cymeð,
> wefen wyrdstafum.[105]

Old English poets often describe periods of hardship, and this might mislead us into thinking that *þrag* has intrinsically negative connotations. In Juliana, it refers twice to the period of the Devil's punishment,[106] in the *Old English Boethius* to the period of Boethius' imprisonment,[107] and in *Beowulf* the compound *earfoðþrag* ('a period of hardship')[108] refers to the twelve years of Heorot's oppression. However, *þrag* can also refer to benign or positive times, such as the period during which a patient must inhale vapour from a kettle[109] and the length of Christ's time on earth.[110] Thus, if we accept Melanie Heyworth's contention that *þragbysig* 'introduces a sense of the potential for negativity in this riddle'[111] then we must also accept that the converse is also true.

and M. Godden (Cambridge, MA, 2012), M20, line 134), the lifetime of Methuselah in 'Genesis A' (*ASPR* 1, 1217) or the period during which a corpse must spend in the earth before its resurrection at the Last Judgement in 'Guthlac A', line 1178, *ASPR* III.

103 *Anglo-Saxon and Old English Vocabularies*, ed. T. Wright (London, 1884), p. 26.

104 For example, 'þunar byð þragum hludast' ('Maxims II', line 4a, *ASPR* III) means something like 'sometimes thunder is loudest'. Likewise, I would argue that '… ðonne hy of waþum werge cwoman | restan ryneþragum owe gefegon' ('Guthlac A', lines 212–3) is best understood as 'then they, weary of wandering, briefly rested several times'.

105 'Courage is best for him who most often must endure lord-death, deeply ruminate on the oppression of separation from a master, when the time has come, woven by the words of fate', 'Guthlac B', 1348–51a, *ASPR* III.

106 'Juliana', lines 446 and 464, *ASPR* III.

107 *OE Boethius*, M1, line 77a.

108 *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg,* ed. F. Klaeber, R. D. Fulk, R. E. Bjork, and J. D. Niles, 4th ed. (Toronto, 2008) [hereafter *Beowulf*], line 283b.

109 'Læce Boc II', *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England*, ed. and trans. T. O. Cockayne, 3 vols. (London, 1864–1866), II, 158–299, at 338.

110 'Homily XII: In die Pentecoste', *The Blickling Homilies*, pp. 131–7, at 131.

111 Heyworth, 'The Devil's in the Detail', p. 177.

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The -*bysig* element of *þragbysig* is much easier to understand. The adjective *bysig*, the noun *bisigu* and the verb *bisgian* all refer to the process of occupying oneself mentally, whether positively in productive work or negatively in cares and anxieties.[112] We should not discount the importance of the -*bysig* element, with its sense of mental intentionality. When considered alongside the evidence above, this tells us that the compound *þragbysig* is unlikely to mean 'seasonally busy', 'busy with ('abstract') time', or 'busy at a difficult time'. It also seems incorrect to read *þragbysig* simply as a synonym for the ubiquitous and more metrically flexible *hwilum* ('at times', 'sometimes', 'frequently'). Since the noun is headed to an adjective, the meaning of *þragbysig* is unlikely to be a copulative ('at a time *and* busy') or appositional ('at a busy time-period') compound. If it is endocentric, it means 'busy at a time', 'busy for some time', or perhaps even 'busy all the time'. Alternatively, if it is exocentric, then it represents something more than the sum of these two words, for example 'preoccupied', 'hard at work', or 'obedient'.

The unusual position of *þragbysig* after noun and verb raises another important question about its meaning: is the object always *þragbysig*, or only when it *sceal*… *hyran*…*brecan*…*cyþan*? The linguistic evidence would point to the latter. The use of postnominal adjectives (i.e. adjectives that follow their noun) to qualify a pronoun is occasionally found in OE verse.[113] Although postnominals with *ic* are a comparative rarity, the form does occur several times in the *Exeter Riddles*, perhaps under the influence of similar, appositive constructions in Latin riddles. Thus, we find the following:

1. Þonne ic astige *strong*[114]
2. Þonne ic *winnende* | holmmægne biþeaht, hrusan styrge[115]
3. Þe ic *lifgende* lond reafige | ond æfter deaþe dryhtum þeowige[116]
4. Nelle ic *unbunden* ænigum hyran | nymþe searosæled[117]
5. Þonne ic hnitan sceal *hringum gyrded* …[118]
6. [Ic reorde] hwilum mæwes song | þær ic *glado* sitte[119]

The exact sense of the adjective or participle is ambiguous in several of the above examples, and I do not wish to touch on the debate as to whether these

112 See 'bysig' and related entries in *DOE*.

113 For example, 'Hu he frod ond god feond oferswyðeþ' ('how he, wise and good, overcomes the enemy'), *Beowulf*, line 279.

114 'Whenever I rise, strong', 'Exeter Riddle 1', line 3a.

115 'Whenever I, fighting, cover up the mighty ocean and stir up the earth', 'Exeter Riddle 2', lines 8b–9.

116 'I who, living, ravage the land, and, after death, serve men', 'Exeter Riddle 12', lines 14–15.

117 'Unbound, I obey no one unless properly tied', 'Exeter Riddle 23', lines 15–16a.

118 'When I, girded with rings, must hit …', 'Exeter Riddle 91', line 3.

119 'Sometimes I sing the gull's song, when I sit, cheerful', 'Exeter Riddle 24', lines 6b–7a.

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postnominals are attributive (e.g. 'I, strong, rise'), predicative (e.g. 'strong, I rise'), or appositional (e.g. 'I rise, strong').[120] But I would note that in every instance here, the adjective or participle describes the governing pronoun as it was at the time of the main verb. Thus, the wind is strong *when* it rises and it fights *when* it covers up the ocean, the ox ravages the land *when* living, the bow is disobedient *when* it is unbound, the key is bound by rings *when* in use and the jay sits cheerfully *when* singing. On this evidence, it seems likely that the subject of 'Exeter Riddle 4' is only *þragbysig* when it *sceal*… *hyran*…*brecan*…*cyþan*. When we recognise that this is only the case when it 'obeys its servant', 'breaks the bed' and 'announces loudly', then certain aspects of the riddle's prosopopoeia come into focus. A bell is busy and hard at work when it is rung; at other times, it sits idle. This makes an interesting contrast with the monk, who is always expected to be busy and obedient, but especially so when the bell is rung.

Servitude and obedience are constant themes throughout the riddle, but particularly in the first four lines. In lines 1b and 2b, the riddle plays with the ostensibly paradoxical idea that a master might be obedient to their servant (*þegne minum*…*hyran georne*). Scholars have explained this in various ways. For example, Donne, Cochran and Stewart all suggest that the riddle creature is an object used by a person who is themselves a servant,[121] and Steward and Heyworth interpret the word *þegn* ambiguously as both 'servant' and 'lord'.[122] But the 'obedient to my servant' paradox is most easily reconciled when we understand it in terms of the symbiotic relationship between bell and monk – each is obedient to the other. The monk is servant to the bell, to whose sound he must *hyran georne* without question; the bell is a servant of the sacristan or ostiary who rings it. Furthermore, as Murphy points out, the dual meaning of *hyran* as 'to hear' and 'to obey' is particularly suitable for the bell solution.[123] The apparent paradox also chimes with other expressions of monastic obedience in texts of this period. As Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe has shown, these frequently went beyond simple gestures of behavioural compliance to create a complex 'drama of freedom and obedience' that complicated the relationship between superior and subject.[124] Given this literary context, it is entirely fitting that 'Riddle 4' should also blur the distinction between 'servant' and 'lord'.

[120] See M. Callaway, 'The Appositive Participle in Anglo-Saxon', *PMLA* 16 (1901), 141–360, at 153; B. Mitchell, *Old English Syntax*, 2 vols. (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1985), I, 160, at 75; D. Haumann, 'Adnominal Adjectives in Old English', *Eng. Lang. & Ling.* 14 (2010), 53–81.

[121] Donne, 'Three Old English Implement Riddles', p. 246; Stewart, 'The Solution to Old English Riddle 4', p. 57; Cochran, 'The Plough's the Thing', p. 305.

[122] Stewart, 'The Solution to Old English Riddle 4', p. 57; Heyworth, 'The Devil's in the Detail', pp. 179–80.

[123] Murphy, *Unriddling*, p. 73.

[124] O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Stealing Obedience*, p. 248.

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The theme of servitude is continued in line 2a, *hringum hæfted,* which is the first of three punning references to rings. The word *hæftan* is extremely suggestive of servitude. It can mean 'to bind' but also 'to capture or enslave', from which the word *hæft* ('prisoner', 'slave') is derived. This may allude to an aspect of the bell's binding or mounting: the loophole (*hring*) of a hanging bell is fastened (*hæfted*) to its mounting, and the loophole of a hand bell is tied to a leather strap. But, as Murphy notes, the phrase need not refer only to the bell's fastening, but also its ringing.[125] Certainly, this sense of *hring* is attested by the existence of compounds such as *belhring* and *nonhring* with a similar meaning in the *OE Longer Rule of Chrodegang.*[126] We could say that a bell's entire life is bound with ringing – it has no other existence. Similarly, the monk, in their commitment to total obedience, is bound tightly to the ringing of the bell. Line 3a explains that the bell must *min bed brecan*, which Murphy links to the early morning ringing that woke monks from their beds before Nocturns and Matins.[127] This phrase also seems to express a subtle monastic irony. The bell spends most of its time unused and 'in its bed'. When it is roused from its sleep and rung by its master, monks are also roused from the dangerous sleep of lethargy. Another important clue is found in in line 3a – the bell must *cyþan breahtme. Cyþan* typically refers to a verbal act, and so the idea is that the bell is, in a sense, speaking. Yet it does so *breahtme*, a word that can refer to a loud noise, but which can also mean 'a glimmer', and thus 'in a flash', as attested by its glossing of *atomus* in the 'Cleopatra Glossaries'.[128] Both senses are appropriate to the loud, abrupt clanging of a bell. It announces 'that', or quite possibly 'because' (*þæt*), its monastic master has given it a *halswriþa.*[129] Tupper thought that this word suggested a leather bell-harness,[130] but it more likely refers to the large ring (the loophole or 'crown') at the top of a handbell or hanging bell. If one imagines that the bell is a person, then we see the sloping upper edges as the shoulders and the portion above this as the neck – we still refer to these features as the shoulders and neck today – and so the crown is literally the 'neck-ring'. The social and religious connotations of *halswriþa* also fit well with the passage's theme of servitude and obedience. It could suggest a benevolent lord bestowing a 'necklace' on a favoured retainer, or equally it might imply a punishment collar, a symbol of slavery inherited from Rome.[131] Finally, it also plays upon the bell's similitude to the

125 *Ibid.* p. 72.

126 *The Old English Version of the Enlarged Rule of Chrodegang together with the Latin Original,* ed. A. Napier (London, 1916), pp. 21–2, 32, 77.

127 Murphy, *Unriddling*, p. 73.

128 'In atomo, in breahtme', in the *First* and *Third Cleopatra Glossaries* (*Anglo-Saxon and Old English Vocabularies*, ed. T. Wright (London, 1884), pp. 424, 495).

129 Note that the term could be understood in the plural too.

130 Tupper, *Riddles*, p. 79.

131 See Heyworth, 'The Devil's in the Detail', p. 182.

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monk, who rises 'in a flash' to proclaim his servitude to God, which is signified physically through another kind of ring that sits above the neck – the monastic tonsure. All these connotations of *halswriþa* are therefore consistent with the bell interpretation.

From line four, the theme of obedience dissipates for a time and other aspects of monastic bellringing come into focus. The bell is described as *slæpwerige*, which continues to play upon the dual idea of the bell awoken from its 'rest' and the monk awoken from lethargy. The person who *oft*…*greteþ* the bell on each occasion is the sacristan or ostiary. This might be *secg oðþe meowle*, depending on whether the monastery houses monks or nuns. The idea of 'touching' a sleepy bell suggests the common monastic practice of rousing *slæpwerige* monastics quietly by touching them if they oversleep.[132] *Gretan* has a secondary meaning of 'to play an instrument',[133] and it is possible that the riddle plays upon this sense of the word too. The idea of an early morning wake-up call is continued with the phrase *wintercealdˌ* Not only does this describe the cold-to-the-touch iron of the bell, but also the monk whom it wakes. The bell then *oncweþe*, repeating the conceit that the bell speaks. It does so to the weary sleepers, who might, in their unwillingness to rise, easily be described as *gromheorte*,[134] particularly if we see riddle as a kind of self-deprecating, monastic inside joke. More humour can be found in the idea of a *wearm lim* that *gebundenne b[æ]g hwilum bersteð*, which several scholars have understood as a not-so-subtle innuendo.[135] Tupper and Murphy both interpret the *wearm lim* to be either the ringer's arm or the clapper.[136] Tupper also explains the *gebundenne b[æ]g* as the band that secures the clapper, although the bell's circular rim seems more likely. The success of this reading depends on how we understand the verb *berstan.* It is always used intransitively or with a dative indirect object in Old English except on this occasion,[137] but a transitive sense of *bersten* and *to burst* is common in Middle and Modern English. It usually denotes breakage or rupturing, but it seems reasonable under the circumstances to understand it as denoting a falling, crashing, or smashing, with a meaning of 'at times, the clapper crashes against the bell's rim'. Such a reading seems appropriate when considered alongside examples of *berstan* elsewhere in Old English verse to denote loud, violent

[132] It is first mentioned in the early sixth century *Regula Magistri*: *La Règle du maître,* ed. A. de Vogüé, 2 vols. Sources Chrétiennes 105–106 (Paris, 1964), II, 166.

[133] See the examples of *gretan* to describe harp-playing in 'The Gifts of Men' (line 49), 'Maxims 1' (line 169), *Beowulf* (lines 1063 & 2107), and the *OE Pastoral Care* (*King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, ed. H. Sweet, EETS 45 (London, 1871), 175).

[134] See Murphy, *Unriddling*, p. 74.

[135] For example, Heyworth, 'The Devil's in the Detail', pp. 188–9; Murphy, *Unriddling*, p. 75; Dale, 'A New Solution', p. 3.

[136] Tupper, *Riddles*, p. 79; Murphy, *Unriddling*, p. 74.

[137] *DOE s.v. berstan.*

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events such as crashing thunderclouds[138] and breaking waves.[139] The riddle uses *berstan* to express the violent suddenness of the bell's ringing – a literal and allegorical wake-up call to the weary monastic.

The final four lines shift the riddle's focus back to the opening lines' themes of interdependence and symbiosis, inviting us to contemplate how the monk and the bell are dependent on each other. Again, this is described as a relationship between the speaker and their servant (*þegn*). Both are depicted as equally unwise and ignorant. The monk is the bell's servant because he is bound in obedience to its call, and he is *medwisum* because he requires a bell to wake him from their literal and figurative slumber. At the same time, the bell that the monk obeys can neither *wiht wite* nor *wordum min* | *on sped…spel gesecgan* because it can neither ring without its servant ringing it nor speak intelligibly. Not only does this play with the idea that the monk serves a master who is entirely ignorant and unthinking, but it also recalls the classical trope, as found in Symphosius' 'Riddle 80', that a bell's ringing is merely empty chatter. Despite this, the message of the bell is agreeable (*on þonc*) to the monk, who is thankful for its sound – however *gromheort* he might be – because it calls him from the dangerous spiritual inertia that threatens the soul.

CONCLUSION

'Exeter Riddle 4' is one of a small group of socially aware riddles that play upon the relationship between human and bell. All three riddles use prosopopoeia to imagine the bells as creatures with mouths that speak in curious ways, although they are otherwise quite dissimilar in both the language that they use and the kinds of bells that they describe. The tradition begins with Symphosius' urbane and highly self-aware 'Riddle 80', which uses its subject to satirise the verbose symposium environment of the classical riddle, gently mocking the very riddle form itself by comparing it to the dinner-bell's empty patter, as well as reminding us that the time for such games is limited. The complexity of religious life in early medieval England required various types of bells with various functions, and so it should not be a surprise that this complexity is reflected in the riddles that came after Symphosius. Tatwine's 'Riddle 7' personifies a mortuary bell as a deposed emperor, a choice that reflects the high status of such devices as well as the apparent connection between the words *caedere* and *Caesar*. Although the riddle reflects the social use of such bells to announce deaths and funerals, the relationship between human and bell is largely etymological, rather than being based on any deeper level of similitude. 'Exeter Riddle 4', on the other hand, is saturated in the discourse and ideology of everyday monastic bellringing. It dramatizes the symbiotic relationship between bell and monk, which is presented in terms of the

[138] 'Biersteð hlude | heah hloðgecrod' ('the cloud crashes loudly'), 'Exeter Riddle 3', lines 62b–63a.
[139] 'Brim berstende' ('the breaking sea'), 'Exodus', *ASPR* 1, line 478a.

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master-servant relationship that is so common to the riddling tradition. By focusing on the obedience of both the bell who is rung and of the monk who must respond to the ringing, it reminds the reader that the bell's call was not to be answered blindly or unwillingly, but rather consciously, wilfully, and dutifully. In such a way, 'Exeter Riddle 4' is as much about the experience of living by the bell as it is about the bell itself. It is perhaps the most thoughtful consideration of the relationship between bell and monk that survives from early medieval England.

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