

An Enduring Enigma: Shedding Light on the Text of the Leiden Riddle, 1845–2025

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What riddle can be solved, but cannot be read? The Leiden Riddle, which survives on the last folio of Leiden, Leiden University Libraries, VLQ 106, stands out among the Old English riddles for having virtually no discussion about its solution. Instead, it is the Leiden Riddle's exact reading that has continued to puzzle philologists for the past 180 years, owing to the damaged state of the manuscript. Following a brief introduction to the Leiden Riddle, this article traces the editorial history of the text, showing how the application of novel techniques over the years has gradually shed more light on the Leiden Riddle, while never quite stifling continued speculation on parts of the text. Appendices to this article provide an overview of suggested readings for the Old English text and a comprehensive bibliography of publications on the Leiden Riddle.

Keywords: Leiden Riddle; editorial history; Old English; philology; manuscript study

1. The Leiden Riddle: A brief introduction

Leiden University Libraries, VLQ 106 was written in Fleury Abbey in the ninth century and contains Latin riddles by Symphosius and Aldhelm.¹ On the last folio of the manuscript, a Fleury scribe copied an Old English text from an exemplar in an unfamiliar, insular script (see Figure 1).² A line-by-line translation of this text, known as the Leiden Riddle, is provided below:

The wet ground, wondrously chilly,
first gave me birth from its innards.
I know that I was not produced from woolly fleeces,
or hairs, through lofty skill in thoughts.
There are no twisted wefts for me, nor do I have warps,
nor through a threat of violence does a thread resound in me,
nor do humming shuttles shiver in me,

¹ For a full description of the manuscript and its provenance, see Bremmer and Dekker (2006).

² While most scholars assume that the copying of the Leiden Riddle was contemporary with the rest of the manuscript, potentially by the second scribe of the main Latin text (see Gerritsen 1969), Parkes (1972) maintains that it was copied later, in the tenth century. On the unfamiliarity of the Fleury scribe with the insular exemplar he was copying, see Donoghue (2018, 63–69).

nor does a slay beat me about;
 nor did worms weave me with the skills of fate,
 those who craftily decorate fine yellow cloth.
 Nonetheless, I will be called a desirable garment
 widely over the earth among heroes;
 nor do I fear the flight of arrows with the terror of awe,
 even though it be drawn purposefully from quivers. (trans. Orchard 2021a, 297)

The riddle, giving a unique insight into textile production (see Cavell 2016, 54–67), describes a coat of mail—a defensive garment not made with the techniques usually applied to wool, cotton or silk.

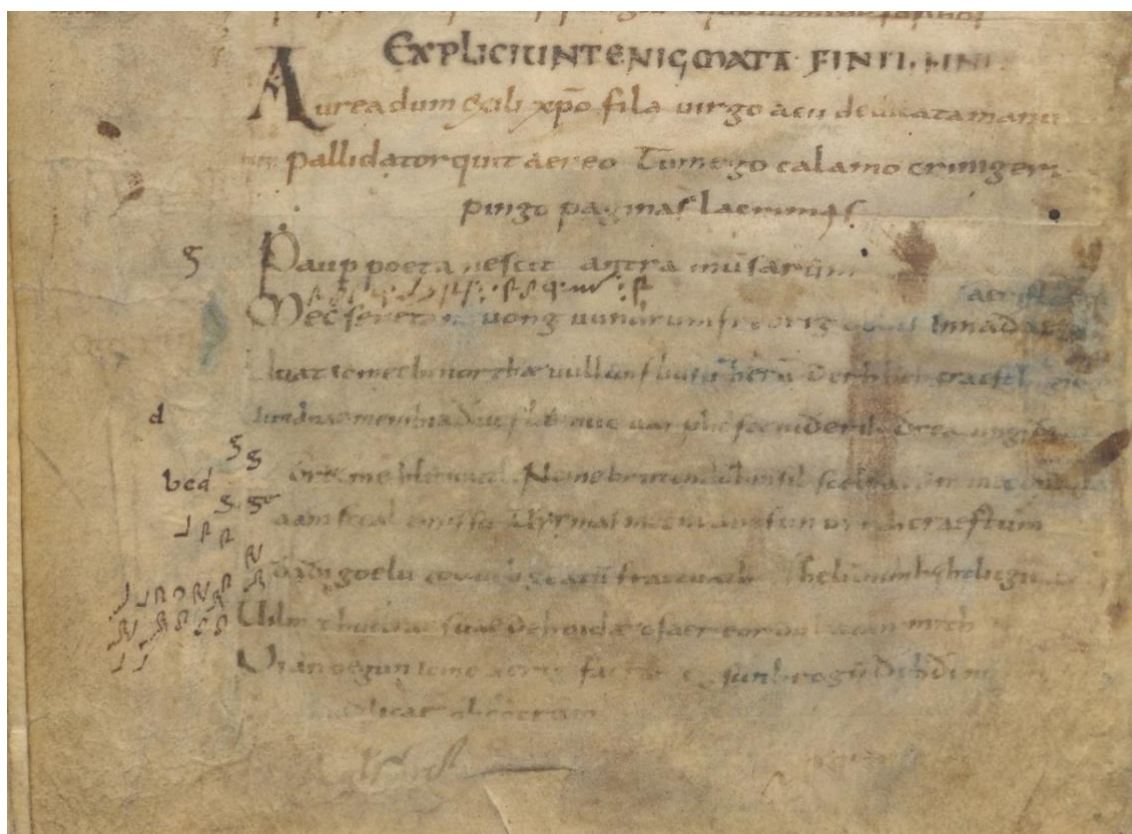


Figure 1. Digital scan of the Leiden Riddle, made in 2015. Leiden, Leiden University Libraries, VLQ 106, fol. 25v. Reproduced by permission.

The Leiden Riddle is an expanded Old English adaptation of a Latin riddle by Aldhelm, the title of which (*De lorica* “on the mail-coat”) confirms the unanimously accepted solution. Aldhelm’s original Latin reads as follows:

Roscida me genuit gelido de viscere tellus;
 non sum setigero lanarum uellere facta;
 licia nulla trahunt nec garrula fila resultant;

nec crocea Seres taxunt lanugine vermes;
 nec radiis carpor duro nec pectine pulsor;
 et tamen en vestis vulgi sermone vocabor:
 spicula non vereor longis exempta faretris.

The dewy ground gave me birth from chilly innards; I was not produced from a shaggy fleece of wool; no yarn draws me, nor sounding threads leap about; nor do Chinese worms weave me from their saffron floss; nor am I drawn from wheels, nor beaten with the harsh comb; yet still will I be called “clothing” in common speech: I fear no darts drawn forth from lengthy quivers. (ed. and trans. Orchard 2021a, 26–27)

The Leiden Riddle’s Old English rendering of this Latin text has drawn scholarly attention for its systematic expansion of each Latin verse into two Old English poetic lines (see, e.g., Klein 1997; Orchard 2010, 66–72). In terms of the manuscript layout, it is notable that the scribe “apparently tried to squeeze a pair of Old English lines into each of the seven remaining lines ruled at the bottom of folio 25v” (Donoghue 2018, 65). This method of verse lineation, likely present in the exemplar and not entirely successfully executed in VLQ 106 (since the spillover of some lines had to be completed with superscript text and compressed letter forms), represents “an anomaly in the writing of Old English verse” (69).³

The Leiden Riddle further stands out from the majority of Old English poetry in that it survives in multiple manuscripts. Another version of the riddle appears in the Exeter Book as *Riddle 35* (or *33*), recently renamed to *Hopeful Garment* (Neville 2024). While the two versions largely correspond in sense, one major difference concerns the last two lines. Here, the Exeter Book version departs from the Latin original and replaces the reference to not fearing arrows with a formulaic ending inviting the reader to provide the answer: “Saga soð-cwidum, searo-þoncum gleaw, / wordum wis-fæst, hwæt þis gewæde sy” (You who are clever in cunning thoughts, securely skilled in words, say in truthful utterance what this garment might be; ed. and trans. Orchard 2021a, 346–47). This alteration, effectively removing one of the clues of the riddle, has the effect of making the Exeter Book version slightly more ambiguous.⁴ A linguistic difference between the two versions concerns their dialect: the Leiden Riddle shows Old Northumbrian forms, while the Exeter Book version has features typical of Late West Saxon, including Leiden’s *ueta* (wet; l. 1) and *herum* (hairs; l. 4) for Exeter’s *wæta* and *hærum* (see Dance 2010, 40–41). Since the Leiden Riddle is

³ Traditionally, Old English verse is assumed to have been laid out as prose; for a fundamental reexamination of how Old English poetry appears in manuscripts, see Burns (2024).

⁴ On ambiguity in the Exeter Book riddles, see Neville (2024). For a detailed comparison between the Exeter Book and Leiden versions, see O’Donnell (1996, 259–69).

significantly older than the Exeter Book version (the date of composition is usually set to the eighth century on account of its archaic language)⁵ and given the overall similarities between the two versions, it is generally assumed that the Exeter Book version represents an updated rendering of the exemplar of the Leiden Riddle, rather than an independent translation of the Latin original.

To recapitulate, the Leiden Riddle is a valuable cultural witness to techniques of textile production; an intriguing example of how Latin and Old English poetic traditions intersect; one of the earliest manuscript versions of an Old English poem, showcasing an unusual attempt at verse lineation; the only Old English verse riddle to appear outside the Exeter Book; and an important witness to Early Old Northumbrian, an under-represented dialect of Old English. Yet, for all its cultural, literary and linguistic qualities, the bulk of publications on the Leiden Riddle deal with the philological and paleographical attempts to secure an exact reading of the manuscript text, obfuscated by damage to the last folio through rubbing and the nineteenth-century application of a chemical reagent. The remainder of this article reconstructs the editorial history of the Leiden Riddle, drawing on published scholarship as well as unpublished archival material in order to reconstruct how scholars over the last 180 years have tried novel techniques to get a better reading of this enigmatic text.

2. First edition and lithograph facsimile

In 1845, the German scholar Ludwig Conrad Bethmann (1812–67) published the first edition of the Leiden Riddle, as part of his article “Alte Glossen” in the *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum*. This article was a byproduct of Bethmann’s travels to various libraries and archives in France, Germany and the Low Countries, where he studied manuscripts in order to edit texts for the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*. His visit to Leiden in 1839 was recorded by the Leiden librarian Jacob Geel (1789–1862), who wrote the following in his “notes on strangers visiting the library”:

Dr Bethmann uit Hanover, die de Bibliotheken rondreist voor de Monumenta Germaniae van Pertz. Hij heeft zich hier eenige weken opgehouden en gewerkt. Een knap en hupsch jong mensch.⁶

⁵ For an overview of suggested dates of composition, see Gleissner (1988, 99n3).

⁶ Leiden University Library, BA1 N 2. In the neat copy of the “notes on strangers” in BA 1 N 3, Geel’s remark about Bethmann’s being a “knap en hupsch jong mensch” is omitted. The date of Bethmann’s visit according to the Leiden records is June 1839, but this does not correspond to the dates provided in Bethmann’s own travelogue.

Bethmann visited Leiden in two stints (14 August–18 September, 4–27 November 1839), as becomes clear from Bethmann’s published travelogue in which he fondly remembers “die reiche Ausbeute aus den Schätzen der Universität und . . . die Freundschaft des gelehrten und geistreichen Bibliothekars, herrn Prof. Geel” (the rich harvest from the treasures of the university and . . . the friendship of the learned and witty librarian, Professor Geel; Bethmann 1843, 29). The first items in Bethmann’s 1845 article come from three Leiden manuscripts: the Old English and Old High German glosses in the “Leiden Glossary” (VLQ 69); the Old High German glosses added to a manuscript of Lucan’s *De bello civili* (VLQ 51); and the glossary of Old English elf names and the Leiden Riddle from VLO 106.

Mec sevetam uong undrum freorig.
obl . . s innada . . aer Uuat ic mecbiuorthae uil-
lansliusū herū derbbehcraest l
Uundnae membra d'ue flae mic uar phefæ uiderih đrea ungiđi
đret me bliminid Neine hrutendu hrisel scel . . ad . mimec
bu . . .
aam sceal enyssa Vyrmas mecui auesun uyrđicraestum
đaðn goelu tođ aeb geatū fraetuath. l' hēliđum hēhtlicgna . .
Uilm thudrae suae đe huidae osaer eorđu hatan mith
Viandegun icme acrig facrae egsunbrogū đehđim
. . . . adlicae obcocrum. . . . (Bethmann 1845, 199)

It was Dietrich himself who would publish the first critical edition of the Leiden Riddle in 1859. Rather than travelling to Leiden, Dietrich was sent the manuscript

by the Leiden librarian Willem George Pluygers (1812–80). On 24 February 1859, Dietrich had requested the manuscript to be sent to Marburg:

Hochzuverehrender Herr Oberbibliothekar! . . . Eine im vorigen Jahre angefangne wissenschaftliche Untersuchung über die angelsächsische Räthseloesie macht es mir nur sehr wünschenswerth, und um zu einem gewissen Abschluss zu kommen, nothwendig, einen Leidener Codex zu vergleichen, dessen Einsicht durch eine Reise dorthin zu erreichen, mir unmöglich ist. . . . Ich erlaube mir nun die gehorsamste Bitte an Ew. Hochwelgeboren, mir, wenn es thunlich ist, den bezeichneten Codex zu einem kurzen Gebrauch von etwa 14 Tagen oder 3 Wochen, gefälligst zu gehen lassen zu wollen.⁷

Most esteemed sir chief librarian! . . . A scholarly investigation into Anglo-Saxon riddle poetry, begun last year, makes it highly desirable for me, and indeed necessary in order to reach a certain conclusion, to compare it with a Leiden codex, the examination of which by traveling there is impossible for me. . . . I therefore take the liberty of the most humble request that Your High Well-born, if possible, kindly lend me the aforementioned codex for a short period of use of approximately 14 days or 3 weeks.

Dietrich's most humble request proved effective. According to the loan registers of the Leiden University Libraries, VLQ 106 was sent to Marburg on 5 March 1859 and it was received back in Leiden on 13 April of the same year.⁸

Dietrich made the most of his month with the Leiden Riddle and produced a transcription and edition of the text, along with a painstaking analysis of its paleographic and linguistic features. His work was published as part of the *Schulprogrammschrift* for the University of Marburg's academic year 1859–60, but also circulated as a stand-alone publication.⁹ Dietrich's main purpose appears to have been to identify Cynewulf as the author of the Old English riddles (a notion no longer supported); he was also the first to identify the Leiden Riddle's connections to Aldhelm's original Latin version and its analogue in the Exeter Book. His normalized edition in fourteen poetic lines, with editorial emendations between square brackets, is provided in full below:

⁷ Dietrich to Pluygers (24 February 1859). Leiden University Libraries, BPL 2432.

⁸ The loan to Dietrich is recorded as no. 43 in the loan register for 1859. Leiden University Libraries, BA2 S372.1. In a letter dated 8 March 1859, Franz Dietrich confirms the receipt of the manuscript in Marburg; Dietrich to Pluygers (8 March 1859). Leiden University Libraries, BA1 M 104. The author would like to thank Lisa Lenderink (Leiden University) for sharing her expertise on the loan registers of Leiden University Libraries.

⁹ The independently circulated publication, entitled *Kynewulfi poetae aetas: aenigmatum fragmento e codice lugdunensi edito*, is dated to 1860 on the title page, but the *Schulprogrammschrift* was most likely published at the beginning of the academic year, in 1859.

Mec se uêta uong uundrum freórig
 ob h[is] innaðae aer[est] c[ende].
 [Ne] uuât ic mec biuorthae uullan fliusum
 hêrum ðerh hêhcraeft b[i] h
 Uundnae me ni biað ueflæ, ni ic uarp hefæ,
 ni ðerih ðreá[t]an giðr[âcu] ðrêt me hlímmid
 Ne me hrûtendi hrisil scel[f]aeð,
 ni mec ô[huanan] aam sceal cnyssa;
 Uyrmas mec ni âuêfun vyrði craeftum,
 ða ði goelu godueb geatum fraetuath:
 Uil mec hu[e]drae suae ðêh uîdæ ofaer eorðu
 hatan mith heliðum hihtlic giuae[ði].
 Ni anoegun ic me aerigfaerae egsan brôgum,
 ðêh ði . . . adlice ob cocrum (Dietrich 1859, 21)

This edition clearly demonstrates a great improvement on Bethmann's version and many of Dietrich's readings and emendations still stand undisputed (see Appendix 1).

Dietrich also printed a lithograph facsimile of the Leiden Riddle (Figure 2). This lithograph is of particular interest, since it represents the state of the manuscript folio before the application of a chemical reagent in 1864 (discussed in the next section). Owing to their manner of production (a manuscript page is redrawn onto a plate or stone), lithographs such as these cannot be entirely trusted, since they do not always accurately reproduce letter forms.¹⁰ This issue is clear from the Latin text immediately above the riddle, largely unaffected by the reagent, which shows slight differences between the manuscript (Figure 1) and the lithograph (Figure 2) in, for instance, the capitals <T> and <P> in *Tum* and *Paup(er)* and the <x>s in the line beginning with *Aurea*. One curious item in the lithograph of the Old English text is its depiction of the initial negation *Ne/Ni* (l. 3) at the end of the first manuscript line of the Old English text.¹¹ According to Dietrich, the scribe had initially omitted the negation; upon rereading the text, the scribe had squeezed in the negative particle in the right-hand margin, after *innaðae* (l. 2), in a reddish yellow ink. The letter <N> and a curved minim (part of either an <e> or <i>) are clearly visible in the lithograph, but these have not been seen since by scholars investigating the manuscript. It is possible that Dietrich's interpretation of the text, including his comparison with

¹⁰ On the use of lithography and other methods of creating facsimiles of medieval manuscripts, see Echard (2025).

¹¹ Throughout this article, proposed readings and emendations of Old English words are printed in italics and will have bracketed references to the fourteen poetic line numbers; whenever it is necessary to refer to the lines in the manuscript, these will be referred to as "manuscript lines." Individual letters or letter groups are placed between angled brackets.

the Exeter Book version (which does have the negation), may have influenced the production of the lithograph. Conversely, the reddish-yellow ink may have originally been there but has fallen victim to a chemical reagent that was applied five years after Dietrich looked at the manuscript.

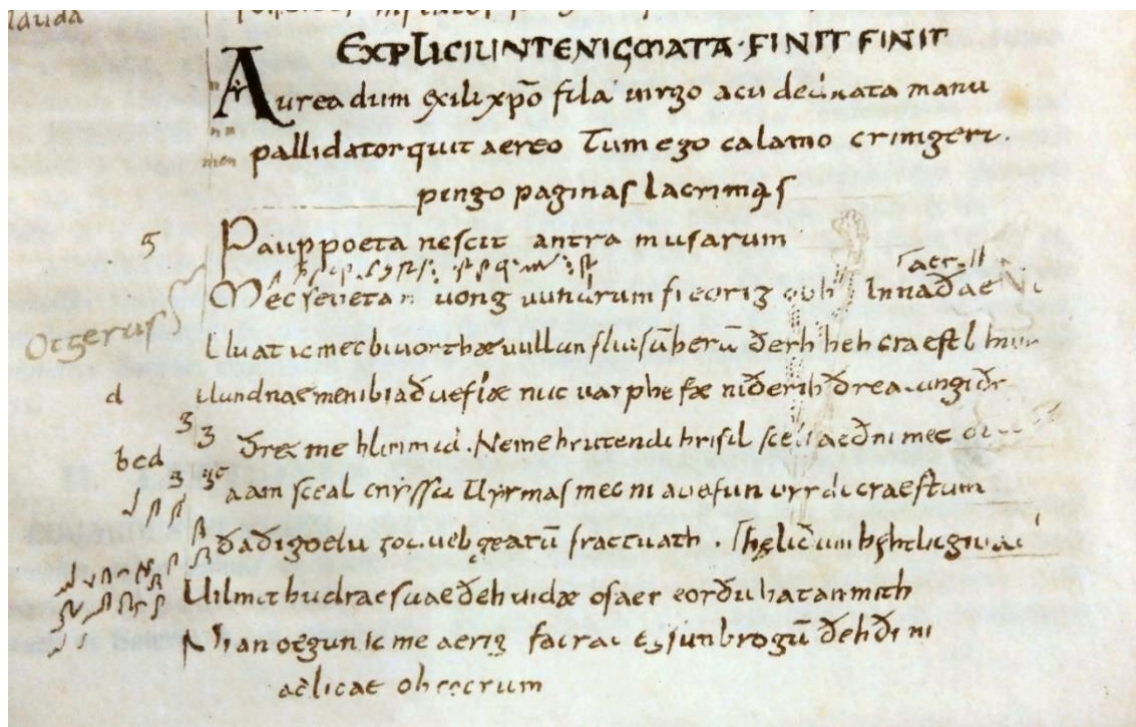


Figure 2. Lithograph of the Leiden Riddle, published by Dietrich (1859).

In 1861, basing himself on Dietrich's facsimile rather than looking at the manuscript itself, another German philologist, Max Rieger (1828–1909), produced a new edition of the Leiden Riddle for his *Alt- und angelsächsisches Lesebuch* (1861). Rieger's corrections include changing Dietrich's [frac]adlicae (l. 14) into [frac]aðlicae, noting that the form of the letter before <licae> is shaped like an <ð> without the cross stroke and that this change does not alter the meaning of the word. He also disputes Dietrich's claim that two words are missing after *ob cocrum* (l. 14) at the end of the poem, since the sense of the corresponding Latin line in Aldhelm's original ("spicula non vereor longis exempta pharetris") is sufficiently covered and there are no traces of any words after *ob cocrum*.

Dietrich and Rieger's editions were superseded by that of the English philologist Henry Sweet (1845–1912), published in his *Oldest English Texts* (1885). Sweet's edition had the advantage of being based not only on his own direct inspection of the manuscript (which was loaned to him for nearly half a

year), but also on a transcription made in 1864 after a chemical reagent had been applied, as the next section explores.

3. The application of a chemical reagent and a new edition by Henry Sweet

The loan registers of Leiden University Libraries for 1864 reveal that the manuscript of the Leiden Riddle was borrowed by no fewer than three individuals, all residents of Leiden, over the course of one month. First, German classicist Lucian Müller (1836–98) was sent the book on 1 November 1864; he returned it four days later, when it was immediately lent to the Leiden librarian Pluygers; upon its subsequent return on 8 November, it was sent to the Dutch linguist and lexicographer Matthias de Vries (1820–92), who returned the manuscript at the end of the month.¹² Sometime during that month, likely between 5 and 8 November, Pluygers had applied a chemical reagent (ammonium sulfide) to the Leiden Riddle that temporarily made the letters more legible, a common practice at the time.¹³ His transcript, marked with his initials and the note “Descripsi in . Novembr . 1864. Medicinam adhibui: Sulphuret. ammonii” (I transcribed this in November 1864. The medicine I have applied: ammonium sulfide), shows Pluygers’ attempts at deciphering the letters; judging by the number of question marks and bracketed alternatives, some words still remained hard to read (see Figure 3).

On the whole, Pluygers’ transcript does not appear to have been influenced by the editions of Dietrich or Rieger and mainly reproduces graphic forms, resulting in such readings as *iundnae* (l. 5) for Dietrich’s *Uundnae*, *enyssa* (l. 8) for *cnyssa* and *avesun* (l. 9) for *avefun*. While some of Pluygers’ readings may betray his unfamiliarity with the script and language, Pluygers did confirm Dietrich’s emendation *h[is]* (l. 2) and was the first to provide some letters for the right-hand margin. His transcription was used and praised by many later editors of the Leiden Riddle.

On the basis of the loan register, it may be assumed that it was Müller who advised Pluygers to apply the reagent. Müller was a frequent borrower of Latin manuscripts from the Leiden collection while he worked on his *Geschichte der klassischen Philologie in den Niederlanden* (1869). Unfortunately, nothing concerning VLQ 106 is mentioned in the extant correspondence between Müller and Pluygers.¹⁴ Similarly, de Vries is not known to have referenced or worked on

¹² The loans are recorded under nos. 369–71 in Leiden University Libraries, BA2 S372.1.

¹³ On the use of reagents on medieval manuscripts in the nineteenth century, see Bock (2015, 254–81).

¹⁴ Thirteen letters from Müller to Pluygers, covering the years 1862–66, are archived under Leiden University Libraries, BPL 2432.

the Leiden Riddle. In other words, the roles of both Müller and de Vries in the editorial history of the Leiden Riddle remain shrouded in mystery.

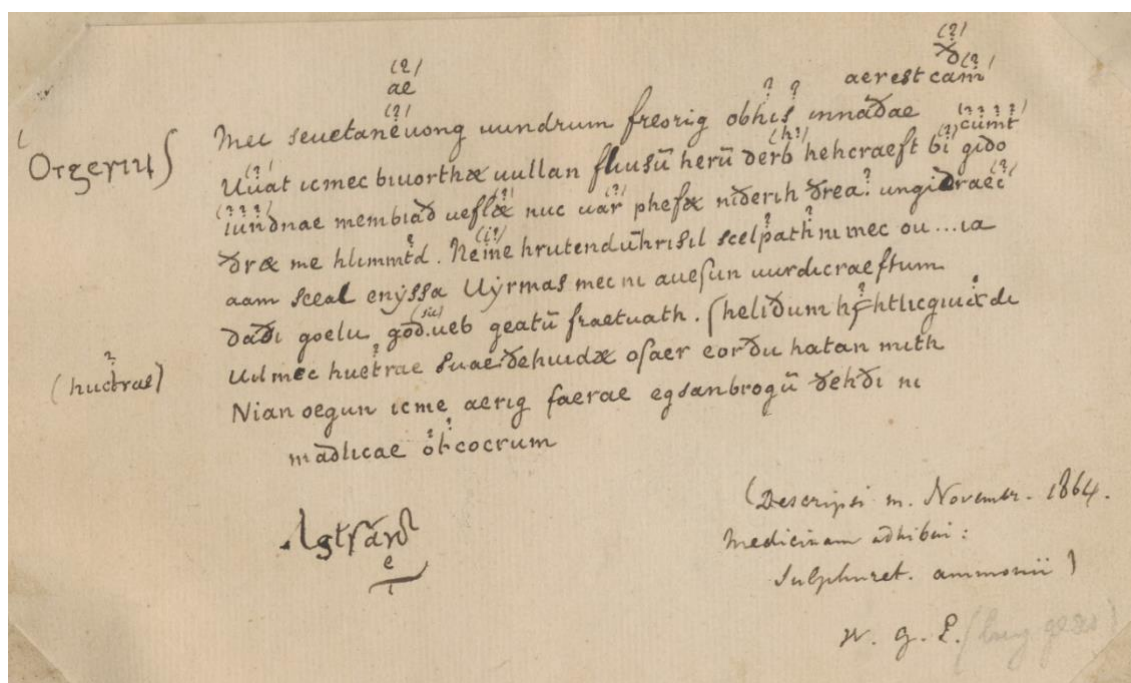


Figure 3. Transcription by W. G. Pluygers after application of reagent in November 1864. Leiden, Leiden University Libraries, VLQ 106, fol. 27r. Reproduced by permission.

The first editor of the Leiden Riddle to profit from Pluygers' transcript was the English scholar Henry Sweet (1845–1912). Sweet was sent the manuscript, along with Pluygers' transcript, on 20 May 1879; originally the loan was meant to end on 20 August, but the manuscript would eventually return to Leiden as late as 12 November.¹⁵ Sweet managed to procure the loan through the intervention of P. J. Cosijn (1840–99), Leiden's first professor of Old Germanic and Anglo-Saxon, whom Sweet had asked for assistance in getting access to two Leiden manuscripts, VLQ 106 and VLQ 69 (the "Leiden Glossary").¹⁶ In a letter to Pluygers, dated 16 May 1879, Sweet wrote that Cosijn had informed him that Leiden University's Board of Governors was willing to loan both manuscripts; Sweet further mentions that the loan could be facilitated by the India Office Library in London.¹⁷ The overseas loan was agreed to, "contrary to custom," with

¹⁵ This loan is recorded under no. 1188 in Leiden University Libraries, BA2 S372.1.

¹⁶ Sweet to Cosijn (19 March 1879). Leiden University Libraries, LTK 1762 G: Sweet 1.

¹⁷ Sweet to Pluygers (16 May 1879). Leiden University Libraries, BPL 2432. Sweet's borrowing of the Leiden Riddle manuscript has left a large paper trail, involving various letters sent by the India Office Library, Leiden University Library, Leiden University's Board of Governors, as well as the Dutch Ministries of Internal and Foreign Affairs, who were all involved in the facilitation and

the explicit instructions not to apply any chemical reagent to the Leiden Riddle.¹⁸ Upon receipt of the manuscript, Sweet thanked Pluygers and informed him of the quality of the accompanying transcript (apparently not realizing it had been made by Pluygers himself):¹⁹

I received a note last week from Dr. Rost, the librarian at the India Office, telling me that the MSS. from Leiden had just arrived. I saw them on Saturday. The careful reading of the Riddle made by your librarian is very valuable, and I do not think I shall be able to improve on it except by conjectural emendation. I will attend to all your directions: I never use chemical reagents.²⁰

Sweet (1885) would repeat his praise for the transcript in the introduction to his own edition of the Leiden Riddle in his *Oldest English Texts*: “[t]his reading is of the highest value, giving many letters which in Dietrich’s text are inserted only conjecturally—sometimes incorrectly. It is evidently purely objective, giving nothing but the purely graphic evidence” (150). On the basis of the transcript and his own inspection of the manuscript, Sweet introduced more than ten corrections to the Dietrich-Rieger edition (see Appendix 1), of which he singles out two: *hygidoncum [minum]* (l. 4; matching the Exeter Book’s *hygeþoncum min*) for *bi [hige / hiortan minum]* and *hrutendu(m)* (l. 7) for *hrutendi*. Sweet’s 1885 edition was reprinted in various anthologies of Old English (e.g., Kluge 1888; Wülcker 1897), including his own *Second Anglo-Saxon Reader: Archaic and Dialectal* (1887) and the 7th edition of his *Anglo-Saxon Reader in Prose and Verse* (1894), thus ensuring that the Leiden Riddle, as a prime example of the Old Northumbrian dialect, was read by generations of scholars studying Old English.

shipping of the loaned manuscript. Copies and references to these letters may be found in the archives of the Leiden University Libraries and the Board of Governors of Leiden University. Leiden University Libraries, BA1 M 27 (no. 354); BA1 M 30 (nos. 154, 211, 354, 378, 573); BA1 M 36 (nos. 67, 74, 129); AC3 10 (no. 247); AC3 11 (no. 381); AC3 12 (nos. 566, 573); AC3 164 (nos. 381, 566); AC3 1520 (163, no. 22; 226, no. 2; 320–21, no. 10).

¹⁸ The summary of this letter to Sweet was recorded in a copybook: “Bericht, dat aan t verzoek wordt voldaan door tegen gewoonte de cod. naar London te zenden: doch bepaald dat geen chemisch middel op f. 25vo van N 106 mag toegepast worden: toen t laatstelijk hier is gedaan, werd alles wat leesbaar werd, gecopieerd” (notice that the request is being fulfilled by sending the codices to London, contrary to custom, but stipulating that no chemical reagent may be applied to folio 25v of no. 106: when it was last done here, everything that was legible was copied). Leiden University Libraries, BA1 M 36, no. 74.

¹⁹ From the introduction to his edition of the Leiden Riddle, it becomes clear that Sweet had actually misread Pluyger’s initials as “W. G. L.” (Sweet 1885, 150). In the Leiden University Libraries copy of *The Oldest English Texts* (401 C 20), the initials have been corrected with pencil to “W. G. P.” This may be the copy donated to the library by Sweet himself, attested by a postcard to Pluygers’ successor Willem Nicolaas Du Rieu (1829–1896) that reads “I send you herewith my last copy of Oldest English Texts, which I hope will arrive safely.” Sweet to Du Rieu (30 May 1890). Leiden University Libraries, BA1 M 56, no. 369.

²⁰ Sweet to Pluygers (14 July 1879). Leiden University Libraries, BPL 2432.

4. Revolutionary readings by Otto B. Schlutter

In 1909, Otto B. Schlutter (1858–1934), a German scholar affiliated with Hartford Public High School, Connecticut, offered a radical new reading of the Leiden Riddle, with almost twenty corrections to Sweet’s text (see Appendix 1). Schlutter had spent several months in Leiden, consulting the manuscript.²¹ By his own testimony, his method was meticulous:

Verfasser hat den handschriftlichen tatbestand unter den verschiedensten lichtverhältnissen geprüft, und um einer beeinflussung durch vorgefasste ideen möglichst vorzubeugen, zwischen jeder erneuten prüfung einen gewissen zeitraum verstreichen lassen. Die ergebnisse einer jeden prüfung sind wieder und wieder geprüft worden. Der gebotene text hat daher anspruch darauf, als genau zu gelten, so genau wenigstens, als sorgfältige prüfung einen text machen kann. (Schlutter 1909a, 385)

The author examined the handwritten document under the widest variety of lighting conditions and, to best prevent the influence of preconceived notions, allowed a certain period of time to elapse between each repeated examination. The results of each examination were reviewed again and again. The text presented here can therefore be considered accurate, at least as accurate as careful examination can make a text.

Schlutter’s readings were extraordinary. A few examples may suffice: whereas Sweet had noted that two letters had been erased between *ueta* and *wong* in the first line of the poem, Schlutter claimed that no erasure had taken place, but that the second word should be read as *erðwong* (“earth-womb”); Schlutter had also seen traces of *Ni* (l. 3) in the left-hand margin of the second manuscript line, before *Uuat* (l. 3), while Dietrich had seen them in the right-hand margin of the first manuscript line after *innaðae* (l. 2); where Dietrich and Sweet had read *hlimmid* and *hlimmith* (l. 6), respectively, Schlutter had seen *hlæmmede*; and, more dramatically still, Schlutter claimed that *cocrum* (l. 14) was followed by

²¹ Schlutter was evidently travelling through Europe to consult manuscripts containing Old English. In a letter to the Leiden librarian Scato Gocko de Vries (1861–1937) dated 6 March 1909, Schlutter announces his intention to travel to Leiden from Brussels and asks the librarian to arrange the borrowing of two manuscripts with Old English glosses from the Royal Library in Brussels (MSS 8558-63 and 1828-30) so that he might compare them with a Leiden manuscript (probably referring to the “Leiden Glossary” in VLQ 69). In another letter, dated five days later, Schlutter reports his arrival in Leiden and intentions of visiting the library. On 31 December 1909, Schlutter writes his third and last letter to the Leiden librarian, thanking him for “[t]he liberal use you allow the investigator to make of your treasures.” The letters by Schlutter to de Vries are found in Leiden University Libraries, BA 1 M 86, 1909, nos. 455, 510; 1910, no. 1 bis. Based on the colophon of Schlutter (1910), he next travelled to Freiburg.

traces of <lon>, which he emended to *lon[gum]*—a perfect match to Aldhelm’s Latin phrase “longis . . . faretris” (long quivers; l. 7). To support his readings, Schlutter published a transcription that mimicked the layout and script of the manuscript (see Figure 4).

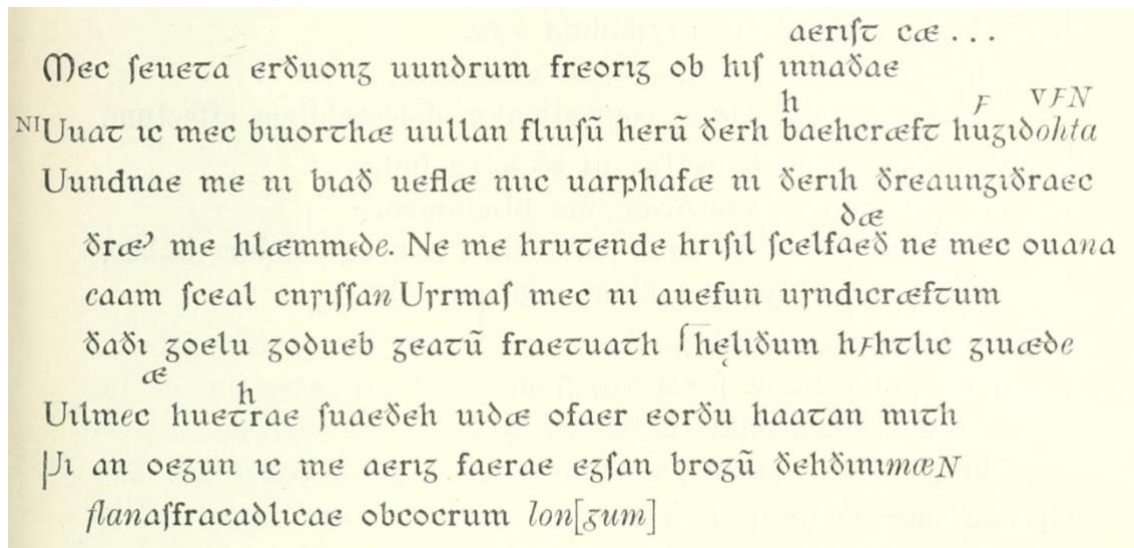


Figure 4. Type-facsimile of the Leiden Riddle, mimicking manuscript layout, published by Schlutter (1909a).

In a “Nachtrag” to his publication, Schlutter thanked the printers of *Anglia* for their effort in reproducing the letters, noting:

Zum schlusse kann ich nicht umhin, der druckerei meinen dank und anerkennung auszusprechen für die wirksame verwendung der ae. lettern zur darstellung des rätsels. Der leser gewinnt dadurch ein wenigstens annähernd getreues bild der hs.-lichen überlieferung, und das ist, dünkt mich, wenn irgend etwas, eine demonstratio ad oculos, dass die Karras’schen ae. typen nicht sowohl einer ‘wissenschaftlichen spielerei’, als vielmehr höchst ernsten, praktischen zwecken dienen. (Schlutter 1909b, 516)

In conclusion, I cannot help but express my thanks and appreciation to the printing house for the effective use of Old English type to depict the riddle. The reader thereby gains at least an approximately faithful image of the manuscript transmission, and this, it seems to me, is something of a demonstration to the eyes that (Ehrhardt) Karras’ Old English types serve not so much as a “scientific gimmick” as highly serious, practical purposes.

Despite Schlutter’s imagined practical purposes, the typeface does not really match that of the script used in the manuscript (cf. Figure 1). More

problematically, scholars have generally pointed out that Schlutter's novel readings also do not appear to match the manuscript version of the Leiden Riddle.

The most vocal criticism to Schlutter's edition in this regard came from Dutch scholar Johan Hendrik Kern (1867–1933), who condemned Schlutter's readings as “grammatisch oder metrisch so unglaublich . . . ganz unmöglich oder unwahrscheinlich” (grammatically or metrically so unbelievable . . . completely impossible or improbable; Kern 1910, 452). Following his own reexamination of the manuscript in Leiden, Kern was only willing to accept two of Schlutter's novel readings: *hafæ* (l. 5) and *hrutende* (l. 7) for *hefæ* and *hrutendu(m) / hrutendi*. Schlutter (1910) published a response to Kern's criticism, claiming that the latter had not consulted the manuscript as thoroughly and in as objective a manner as he had and, moreover, had been influenced by the Exeter Book version of the riddle. As for the metrical problems that Kern had pointed out, Schlutter hit back: “Woher weiss Kern, dass der Schreiber der Leidener hs. eine metrisch einwandfreie fassung des rätsels entweder hat schreiben wollen oder der sachlage nach hat können?” (how does Kern know that the scribe of the Leiden manuscript either intended to write a metrically flawless version of the riddle or, given the circumstances, was able to do so?; 1910, 459). Schlutter next addressed most of the readings on which he and Kern disagreed and, in the greater majority of cases, defended his own. Interestingly, he often did so by referencing two photographs of the manuscript; these are referred to more than twenty times across ten pages but are not reproduced in the article. While defending many of his novel readings in opposition to Kern, Schlutter also introduced a number of corrections to his earlier edition, including *eorðwong* (l. 1) where he had earlier read *erðwong*; *ahuana* (l. 8) for earlier *oua[n]a*; and he no longer claimed to have seen any letters after *cocrum* (l. 14), where he had earlier seen <lon> (corrected to <lab> in Schlutter 1909b). These and other differences between Schlutter's first and second editions are a cautionary reminder that philological readings of damaged manuscripts can be highly subjective and may even change over time. Four years later, Kern (1914) published a reply to Schlutter's new readings, once again rejecting them and adding that his own reexamination of the manuscript had not resulted in changes to his readings published in 1910.²²

Kern's swift exorcism of Schlutter's revolutionary readings could not prevent them from having an impact on the editorial history of the Leiden Riddle. Prior to his publication in 1909, Schlutter had sent his transcription to the American literary scholar Frederick Tupper (1851–1950), who reprinted it wholesale in his notes to his edition of the *Riddles of the Exeter Book* (1910). Tupper accompanied

²² Ferdinand Holthausen (1860–1956) travelled to Leiden in the autumn of 1920 to consult the Leiden Riddle “mit Hilfe einer Lupe” (with the aid of a magnifying glass) and explicitly confirmed Kern's criticism of Schlutter's work (Holthausen 1921, 312).

Schlutter's text with the following prefatory note: "His detailed discussion of every debatable point in the text deserves larger treatment than my present space affords, but I am fortunate in being able to print his version of the problem and his Latin translation—however different his interpretation may be from my own" (153). Another editor of the Exeter Book Riddles, Alfred J. Wyatt, simply reprinted Schlutter's edition in his *Old English Riddles* (1912, 92). In addition, C. T. Onions' revisions of Sweet's *Anglo-Saxon Reader* showed the influence of Schlutter's text until the 9th edition of 1928.²³

Schlutter also appears to have prompted Moritz Trautmann (1842–1920) to reexamine the Leiden Riddle. On 2 January 1910, Trautmann contacted the Leiden librarian de Vries, prefacing his request for a photograph of the Leiden Riddle with: "Wie ich von Prof. Schlutter höre hat Ihre Bibliothek ein fotogr. Faksimile des „Leidener Rätsels“. Da ich gegenwärtig wieder einmal an den ae. Rätseln bin, so wäre mir die Überlassung der Photographie auf einige Tage höchst erwünscht" (as I understand from Professor Schlutter, your library has a photographic facsimile of the "Leiden Riddle." Since I am currently working on the Old English riddles again, I would be most grateful if you could lend me the photograph for a few days).²⁴ On the basis of this photograph, Trautmann made a new edition of the text for his *Die altenglischen Rätsel (die Rätsel des Exeterbuchs)* (1915). Even though he called Schlutter's study "[e]in sehr sorgfältiges Studium des überlieferten Textes" (a very careful study of the transmitted text; 1915, 96) and provided the variants of Schlutter's edition in his critical apparatus, Trautmann ultimately rejected most of Schlutter's revolutionary readings, though Schlutter's influence may be seen in Trautmann's *hl[æ]mmeð* (l. 6) for earlier *hlimmith* / *hlimmid*.²⁵

In all, despite Schlutter's meticulous methodology and energetic defense of his readings, most of his corrections to Sweet's edition found no resonance in the long run. One later critic's words, referring specifically to another striking feature of Schlutter's 1909 edition—his translation of the Leiden Riddle into Latin verse—may be applied more broadly to Schlutter's work on the riddle as a whole: "never

²³ From the 10th edition on, the text is based on Smith (1933); see Zandvoort (1954, 13).

²⁴ Trautmann to de Vries (2 January 1910). Leiden University Libraries, BA1 M86, 1910, no. 6. A summary of the librarian's reply survives in a copy book in Leiden University Libraries, BA1 M 94, 1910, no. 9: Trautmann was allowed to borrow the photograph for a number of weeks and was even offered the loan of the entire manuscript if he could get his own librarian to arrange it. The manuscript was never loaned to Trautmann, who thanked the Leiden librarian for the photograph in a letter dated 8 January 1910. Leiden University Libraries, BA1 M 86, 1910, no. 18.

²⁵ Trautmann (1915) further introduced two emendations that have not been adopted by any other scholar of the poem: he emended the last words of line 4 to *hygepon[ca mægn]* "the strength of thoughts" rather than anything resembling the Exeter Book reading *hygeponcum min*; for the last line, seeing no traces of earlier emendations [*flanas*] or [*flanae*] and only reading <dlīcae>, Trautmann suggests emending to [*daropas dihtae*] or [*daropas diptae*], "prepared darts" or "poisoned darts."

intended as a joke, though it was certainly a tour de force . . . a curious episode in the history of Old English scholarship” (Anderson 1967, 171). Be that as it may, Schlutter’s references to different lighting conditions in his first article and to photography in his rejoinder to Kern anticipate the next step in the editorial history of the Leiden Riddle, which was achieved through the use of ultraviolet fluorescence photography.

5. Photographical reproductions and continued paleographical polemics

A crucial advance in reading the Leiden Riddle was made by the British scholar Albert Hugh Smith (1903–67), who published the current standard edition of the Leiden Riddle as part of his *Three Old Northumbrian Poems* (1933). Smith first contacted Leiden librarian Henri Peter Blok (1894–1968) on 3 May 1932, asking for photographs of the riddle as well as Pluygers’ transcript, noting “though I do not expect that we shall be able to see anything like as much as they did in 1864.”²⁶ Following this request for photographs, John Wilks (1889–1968), the librarian of University College London, contacted Leiden to arrange a loan of the manuscript for Smith’s perusal.²⁷ According to the loan registers of Leiden University Libraries, Smith was sent the manuscript on 6 June 1932.²⁸ On 5 July, Smith reported back to Blok about his efforts thus far and his plans for further inspection of the manuscript:

I have made a careful study of the last folio. As the MS stands I do not think any improvements can be made on Kern’s readings. But I have consulted Dr. Robin Flower, Deputy Keeper of the Manuscripts at the British Museum and he suggests that if viewed under ultra-violet rays more might be seen. And I wonder whether you would give me permission to take the MS to the British Museum [1 kilometer from here] where they have developed this method of examining Manuscripts to a high degree so that Dr Flower could apply the rays.²⁹

Wilks repeated this request when he sent VLQ 106 back to Leiden on 15 July 1932. No doubt reassured by Smith’s and Wilks’ repeated guarantees that the manuscript would not be damaged by the ultraviolet rays, the manuscript was

²⁶ Smith to Blok (3 May 1932). Smith wrote again on 27 May 1932, thanking Blok for a copy of Pluygers’ transcript and a “photostat” of the Leiden Riddle, asking for “an ordinary photograph . . . as I think it would be a safer medium to work with.” All letters involving the loan by Smith are archived under “University College London” in Leiden University Library, BA2 A28.3.

²⁷ Wilks to Blok (30 May 1932).

²⁸ This loan is recorded under no. 6121 in Leiden University Libraries, BA2 S372.3.

²⁹ Smith to Blok (5 July 1932).

once again sent to London in September 1932, whence it returned to Leiden in March 1933.³⁰

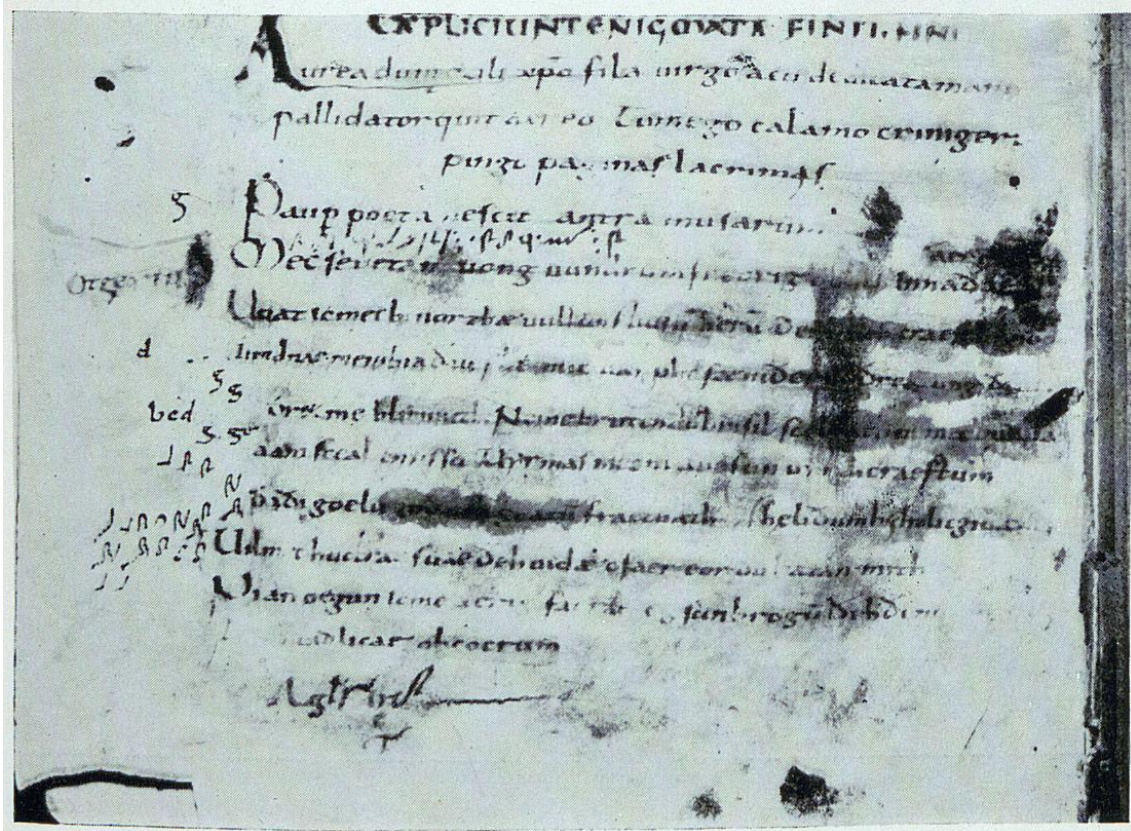


Figure 5. Ultraviolet fluorescent photograph facsimile of the Leiden Riddle, published in Smith (1938).

Using ultraviolet fluorescent photography to improve the legibility of medieval manuscripts was new in the 1930s and the Leiden Riddle was one of the first Old English manuscripts to be examined in this way.³¹ Smith, collaborating with the British physicist Edward Neville da Costa Andrade (1887–1971), examined a number of medieval manuscripts under ultraviolet light in the early 1930s, using various filters and techniques he later described in his article “The Photography of Manuscripts” (Smith 1938). That article featured two photograph facsimiles of the Leiden Riddle, one taken under normal light and the second taken under

³⁰ Wilks confirms the receipt of the manuscript in a letter dated 30 September 1932. In a letter dated 13 March 1933, Wilks writes that he sent VLQ 106 back to Leiden, “insured for £12,” along with “two photographs taken by Dr. Smith under the ultra violet rays.” This second loan is recorded under no. 6135 in Leiden University Libraries, BA2 S372.3.

³¹ For a technical description of how ultraviolet fluorescence can be used to increase the visual contrast between parchment and iron-based inks, see Kiernan (1994, 40–42) and the references provided there.

ultraviolet light (Figure 5). Smith's ultraviolet photograph shows one of the downsides of ultraviolet fluorescent photography, as described by Kevin Kiernan (1994, 43): "the areas treated by the reagent are covered by an opaque film that shows up in the black and white photograph as dark stains eclipsing any vestiges of letters beneath them." According to Smith (1938), these stains are due to the fact that "the fluorescence of parchment is considerably reduced if the parchment has been treated with certain chemicals, in particular by ammonium sulphide" (18), as had happened to the Leiden Riddle.³²

In his own edition of the Leiden Riddle, Smith (1933) modestly declares that "it is now extremely doubtful whether further research on the manuscript will produce a more reliable text than Sweet's or Kern's, but by ultra-violet light it has been possible to confirm previous readings and to place beyond doubt other readings which are uncertain without such help" (8). Indeed, in his edition, provided below with his editorial emendations between square brackets, Smith mostly agrees with Sweet, often confirming the latter's emendations of letters only partially visible to the naked eye and rejecting almost all of the innovations introduced by Schlutter (see Appendix 1):

Mec se ueta uong uundrum freorig
 ob his innaðae aerest cæn[d]æ.
 [Ni] uaat ic mec biuorhtæ uullan fliusum,
 herum ðerh hehcraeft hygiðonc[um min].
 Uundnae me ni biað ueflæ, ni ic uarp hafæ,
 ni ðerih ðreatun giðraec ðret me hlimmith,
 Ne me hrutendu hrisil scelfath,
 ni mec ouana aam sceal cnyssa.
 Uyrmas mec ni auefun uyrði craeftum,
 ða ði geolu godueb geatum fraetuath.
 Uil mec hu[e]thrae suaedeh uidæ ofaer eorðu
 hatan mith hēliðum hyhtlic giuæd[e];
 Ni anogun ic me aerigfaerae egsan brogum
 ðeh ði n[umen] siæ niudlicae ob cocrum.

In all, Smith introduced only two readings that had not been offered by editors before: *Uaat* (l. 3) for earlier *Uuat* and *hrutendo* (l. 7) for earlier *hrutendi*

³² Smith (1938, 19) describes the photographs taken of the Leiden Riddle as follows: "Professor Andrade . . . (with Mr. L. Walden) took several photographs by fluorescent ultraviolet light and made some dozen prints of varying density, one or another of which brought up different parts of the manuscript and enabled us to arrive at a more reliable text. One of these fluorescent ultraviolet photographs is reproduced as Plate IIB [Figure 5 in this article] and comparison with Plate IIA [not in this article, but cf. Figure 1] will show how this method has increased the contrast of the writing and how at the same time the stains due to chemical or water have in places prevented active fluorescence of the parchment."

(Dietrich 1859) / *hrutendu(m)* (Sweet 1885) / *hrutende* (Schlutter 1909a). Indeed, Smith's contribution to the editorial history of the Leiden Riddle lies not so much in proposing new readings, but in confirming earlier disputed readings and emendations with the authority of ultraviolet fluorescent photography.

Smith's edition has been widely accepted as authoritative.³³ For instance, one of the editors of the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, Elliot van Kirk Dobbie (1907–70), decided not to reinspect the manuscript for his edition of the Leiden Riddle, acknowledging that “Smith's readings, obtained under ultraviolet light, are as good as we are ever likely to get, considering the state of the text” (Dobbie 1942, cx). Similarly, the Groningen professor Reinard Zandvoort (1894–1990) praised Smith's edition as “as near perfection as any such work is ever likely to be” (1954, 13), although his own examination of the manuscript and its ultraviolet fluorescent photographs could not confirm Smith's readings of the final <æ> in *cæn[d]æ* (l. 2) and the faint traces of *siæ* (l. 14) that, according to Smith, were “clear by u.v. light” (Zandvoort 1954, 15–16). Zandvoort's critical reexamination of the Leiden Riddle was a prelude to the next step in the editorial history of the Leiden Riddle, which featured two of the greatest paleographers of the twentieth century: Johan Gerritsen (1920–2013), a student of Zandvoort, and Malcolm Parkes (1930–2013).

Writing in 1969, Gerritsen argued that, in spite of previous efforts, a number of readings of the Leiden Riddle remained uncertain:

A certain amount of doubtful help was at one time obtained from a reagent; other help, also doubtful, has been obtained from ultraviolet photography. Ammonium sulphide can temporarily freshen up old writing, but leaves a stain which reduces contrast; ultraviolet photography can show things that the naked eye cannot see, but it cannot tell whether the marks it shows are ink, or are original. It is still up to an editor to use his judgment, and, before he does so, to collect the maximum number of facts on which to base it. (Gerritsen 1969, 534)

Working on the assumption that the Old English text was copied from an insular exemplar by the same scribe who penned the second half of the Latin texts in VLQ 106, Gerritsen intended to use insights gained from the scribe's usual Caroline letter-forms and the fact that the scribe may have been “a mechanical copyist—a copyist struggling indeed with an unknown language and an imperfectly familiar hand . . . , but an ordinary copyist, making ordinary mistakes in what is essentially a faithful, not a sophisticated copy” (539–40). Gerritsen demonstrated his new approach through the reexamination of the first word of the second manuscript

³³ The reviews of Smith's *Three Old Northumbrian Poems* are listed under Greenfield and Robinson (1980), no. 3240; see also the discussion of these reviews in Zandvoort (1954, 13–16).

line, which Smith had read as *Uaat* (l. 3) in opposition to earlier *Uuat*. Gerritsen notes that the second character of this word “looks like a *u* with a horizontal stroke connecting the tops of the two minims” (540) and this could only be interpreted as an <a> if the scribe had used a square-headed <a>, a character never used in the Latin text of the manuscript and which would only appear in the tenth century. As for the <U>, here Gerritsen maintained that the scribe had made a mistake, misinterpreting an insular capital <N>, “resembling a rather wide, round-bottomed capital U” (537), for a <U>, writing *Uuat* (l. 3). Since the initial <U> is redundant—in nineteen other cases, the Leiden Riddle represents an initial /w/ with a single graph <u>—Gerritsen assumed that this must represent the scribe’s mechanical copying of *Ni uat*. Thus, where Dietrich and Schlutter had claimed to have seen the word *Ni* in either the right-hand or left-hand margin of the manuscript, Gerritsen hypothesized that the negative particle had been represented by the capital <U> the whole time.³⁴ Gerritsen next provides a full reexamination of the entire riddle, aided by a hand reader in the Leiden reading room that allowed for switching between ultraviolet and white light, as well as newly made ultraviolet and infrared photographs made by the Forensic Laboratory in The Hague. Gerritsen’s investigation yielded more corrections to Smith’s edition, including *ærist* (l. 2) for Smith’s *ærest* and *nuidlicae* (l. 14) for Smith’s *niudlicae* (see also Appendix 1).

Parkes was next to weigh in on the issue and prefaced his article on the Leiden Riddle with the anecdote that he had examined the manuscript “under extremely strong early morning sunlight” (1972, 207). The sunlight had allowed Parkes to distinguish more clearly between the traces of the ink and the parts of the parchment affected by Pluygers’ reagent. Parkes’ subsequent examination of the manuscript under ultraviolet light and the application of various photographic techniques to enhance old photographs,³⁵ allowed him to make a new diplomatic transcription of the Leiden Riddle (for a slightly modified reproduction, see Figure 6).³⁶

³⁴ Gleissner (1988) offered yet another explanation: accepting the second graph as an <a> and following Gerritsen’s (1969) hypothesis of a misinterpreted capital <N>, he reconstructs *[N]aat*, a contraction of *ni uaat*, with double <a> to mark the length of the vowel.

³⁵ The procedure used by Parkes (1972) is described by Kiernan (1994, 43–44) on the basis of private correspondence between Parkes and Kiernan.

³⁶ In Figure 6, Parkes’ superscript numbers in round brackets that refer to notes have been removed and italics on the last letter of *brogum* have been added. Parkes explains his transcription rules as follows: “expanded abbreviations are indicated by means of italics. Square brackets [] enclose letters which have been deleted by the scribe, and angle brackets < > enclose letters which have been damaged: where traces of ink are still visible and the traces are sufficient to identify the letters beyond question the letters have been printed in roman type; where the identification is based upon reconstruction the letters have been printed in italic; where it is not possible to determine the nature of missing letters from traces on the page I have supplied dots

Mec seueta[. .] uong uundrumfreorig o<bhis> innaðae ʀ ǵaer<e>st <ceñd. .>¹
 Uaat icmecbiuorthae uullanfliusum herum. ðerhheh craeft <hy>gið<on> ʀ<c.m>¹
 Uundnae. menibiað. ueflae niic uar ph<a>fae niðerih ðrea<.>ungi ð<rae.>
 ðr&. me hlimmit<h>. Neme hrutendohrisil scel<f>a<th>n<e>mec ou<an>a
 aam sceal cnyssa Uyrmas mecni au<e>fun uy<rd>icraeftum
 ðaði goelu <g>o<d>.u<e>bgeatum fraetuath. ʀ hēliðum hyhtlicgiuae< . .>
 Uilm<e>c hucʀ<h>¹trae suaēðehuidæ ofaer eorðu <h>atan / mith
 Nianoegun icme aeri<g> faera<e> egsanbrogum ð<e>hði ni< . . .>
 <ni>dlicae obcocrum

Figure 6. Diplomatic transcription of the Leiden Riddle, based on Parkes (1972).

Parkes' transcription differs from Gerritsen's in a number of details (see below). A major difference between their appraisals of the text of the Leiden Riddle was that Parkes claimed that the Old English text was only added in the tenth century by a third scribe (who had to write around the pen trials of neums in the left-hand margin), rather than subscribing to Gerritsen's theory that it was the work of the ninth-century scribe responsible for the second part of the Latin text of the manuscript. Since a tenth-century scribe made the use of a square-headed <a> possible, Parkes reinstated Smith's reading of *Uaat* in opposition to Gerritsen's *Uuat* (for [Ni] uat).

In 1984, Gerritsen wrote a response to Parkes, defending his identification of a ninth-century scribe for the Old English text and, therefore, his reading of *Uuat* (l. 3). He also lists nine other places where Parkes and he had disagreed, without making any concessions to Parkes (see Table 1):³⁷

Table 1. Differences between Parkes (1972) and Gerritsen (1984).

Leiden Riddle	Parkes (1972)	Gerritsen (1984)
line 1	ueta [th erased] uong	ueta [uo erased] uong
line 2	ær<e>st	æríst

to indicate the number of letters which would fit into the space available. Insertions above the line are enclosed within half-square brackets" (207–8).

³⁷ For the use of different bracket types, italics and dots in the citations from Parkes (1972), see footnote 36.

line 2	<ced.>	cand[æ]
line 3	Uaat	Uuat
line 4	<hy>gið<onc.m>	hygiðoncu[m on]
line 5	h<a>fæ	hefæ
line 6	gið<ræ.>	giðrae.
line 7	hrutendo	hrutende
line 14	ni<. . .>	nu[men] siæ
line 14	<niu>dlicae	nuidlicae

These unresolved paleographical polemics between Parkes and Gerritsen, as well as their disagreements with Smith, show that the application of ultraviolet fluorescent photography to the Leiden Riddle did not succeed in producing a unanimously accepted reading of the text. Indeed, just like their predecessors from the long nineteenth century, Smith, Parkes and Gerritsen made the most of the advanced technology available to them but effectively still produced personal readings of the text. Gerritsen (1969) had anticipated this criticism when he wrote: “It goes without saying that this is a personal record, but to qualify every ‘certain’ or ‘unmistakable’ by the adverb ‘subjectively’ would be tedious. Nevertheless the reader will do well so to qualify them mentally” (542).

6. Conclusion: A new millennium, new hope for the Leiden Riddle?

At the onset of the new millennium, Leiden University’s English Department celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. To commemorate this event, a fund drive was organized among its alumni and 4000 guilders were donated to replace the faltering nineteenth-century binding of Leiden University Libraries, VLQ 106.³⁸ The manuscript, dubbed the “Leiden Riddle Manuscript,” was extensively restored, recollated and rebound, ensuring future use by new generations of scholars.³⁹

While the Leiden Riddle has enjoyed continued scholarly interest over the past 25 years (see Appendix 2), no new readings have been suggested for the text through the application of novel technologies. This is not for lack of trying. In the

³⁸ Until 1886, the manuscript had been wrapped in a parchment wrapper from ninth-century Fleury (now Leiden University Libraries, VLF 122). The rebinding is reported in Leiden University Libraries, BA2 S370.1, under 9–15 August 1886.

³⁹ The restoration report “Conservating the Leiden Riddle Manuscript” by restauratieatelier Meridiaan, Amsterdam (14/09/2000) is available via https://web.archive.org/web/20041117130408/http://ub.leidenuniv.nl/bc/whs/nieuws/riddle_manuscript/object1.html (last accessed 6 January 2026). The restoration process is also described in Bremmer and Dekker (2006, 108–9).

first half of the 2020s, the Leiden Riddle was subjected to various techniques that serve to increase the legibility of obscured texts.⁴⁰ These techniques included combinations of Reflectance Imaging Spectroscopy (RIS) with Independent Component Analysis (ICA), Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and Non-Negative Matrix Factorization (NMF), as well as Macro X-Ray Fluorescence (XRF) scanning. While these methods have proven successful in other cases,⁴¹ the results of each of these initial efforts on the Leiden Riddle remain inconclusive or are still pending. The future will tell whether enough ink remains on the manuscript page in order to gain new insights into the text. Aside from potentially resolving disputed readings, new analyses of the ink may also confirm Gerritsen's suspicion that the second scribe of the Latin text was also responsible for the Old English text. Regardless, if the editorial history of the Leiden Riddle teaches us anything, it is that new techniques will always lead to new philological questions and form fresh ground for paleographical debates. In that regard, a definitive edition of the Leiden Riddle may never materialize and it is likely that the real enigma of the Leiden Riddle will endure for some time to come.

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⁴⁰ These efforts, initiated by the author of this article in collaboration with Marcelle Cole (Utrecht University), were conducted by researchers from Delft University of Technology, the Lazarus Project (University of Rochester) and the University of Hamburg, with the support of Leiden University Libraries staff, especially André Bouwman and Karin Scheper. The author would like to thank all involved for their time and expertise.

⁴¹ See Stam et al. (2025) and Di Benedetto et al. (2025).

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⁴² Bruno Assmann is sometimes given as the editor of this volume, (e.g., by Smith [1933, 49]), but Assmann was the editor of the third volume of the *Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa*.

Appendix 1. Dietrich's 1859 edition of the Leiden Riddle with alternative readings

The base text of the following edition is that published by Dietrich in 1859, with minor interventions: his diacritics have been removed; caesuras have been added to mark half lines; Dietrich's silent emendations of abbreviations for nasals and ampersands have been marked with round brackets; and his editorial interventions are placed between square brackets. Words for which new readings or conjectural emendations have been proposed in publications after that of Dietrich are marked in italics, in the edition as well as the apparatus. The critical apparatus in the footnotes lists these new readings (with emendations for lost or incomplete letters between square brackets), referencing only the first published edition to introduce these changes. All departures from Dietrich by Smith (1933), Gerritsen (1969) and Parkes (1972) have been included.⁴³ In other words, owing to reasons of practicality and space, the apparatus is not a complete overview of the twenty odd editions (and their revised editions) of the Leiden Riddle. The overview will be of value for future researchers mainly as an overview of potential readings of the text. In addition, the overview may be used to reconstruct the genealogy of any individual edition, which, more often than not, will have been based on an amalgamation of various earlier editions rather than on inspection of the manuscript itself.

⁴³ In terms of bracketing and use of italics, quotations from editions have been adapted for consistency across this article.

Mec se *ueta*⁴⁴ *uon*⁴⁵ uundrum freorig
 ob *h[is]*⁴⁶ *innaðae* *aer[est]*⁴⁷ *c[ende]*⁴⁸.
*[Ne]*⁴⁹ *uuat*⁵⁰ ic mec biuorthæ uullan fliusu(m)
 heru(m) ðerh *hehcraeft*⁵¹ *b[i] h*⁵²
 Uundnae me ni biað ueflæ, ni ic uarp *hefæ*⁵³,

⁴⁴ All editors except Schlutter (see next footnote) identify an erasure of two letters following *ueta*. The erased letters may be <ne> / <nae> (Sweet 1885) || <ue> / <uo> (Kern 1910) || <u.> (Holthausen 1921) || <na> (Smith 1933) || <uo> (Gerritsen 1969) || <..> (Parkes 1972: “Prolonged scrutiny under strong sunlight suggested that the erased letters were possibly <th>, but nothing is visible under ultra-violet light”).

⁴⁵ *erðwong* (Schlutter 1909a) || *eorðwong* (Schlutter 1910).

⁴⁶ *his* (Sweet 1885; Smith 1933; Gerritsen 1969) || *[his]* (Parkes 1972).

⁴⁷ *aer[ist]* (Rieger 1861) || *aerest* (Sweet 1885; Smith 1933: “clear with ultraviolet light”) || *aerist* (Gerritsen 1969) || *aer[e]st* (Parkes 1972: “the second <e> seems certain”).

⁴⁸ *caend[æ]* (Sweet 1885) || *cæ[nda]* (Schlutter 1909a) || *cæ[nde]* (Schlutter 1910) || *cæn[d]æ* (Smith 1933) || *c[a]nd[æ]* (Gerritsen 1969: “<c> and <n> are unmistakable, of <d> little remains, and the final <æ> is not there at all. The second letter is very doubtful; I cannot persuade myself that I see the <æ> [...] and even <a> seems not so clear as to rule out <e>. [...] Clearly <a> in the infra-red photographs”) || *[cend.]* (Parkes 1972; his explanation extends over pp. 208–10 and includes a sketch of the traces he had seen) || *c[e]nd[æ]* (Smith and Foy 2019–).

⁴⁹ *[Ni]* (Rieger 1861; basing himself on Dietrich’s facsimile, which shows an <N> followed by a curved stroke (part of either an <e> or <i>) following *innaðae* in the previous line; Schlutter 1909a claims he saw traces of this in the left-hand margin before *Uuat*; Smith (1933) emends without having seen any traces of *[Ni]*) || *N[i]* (Gerritsen 1969; see discussion above—Trautmann [1915, 96] had offered the same explanation).

⁵⁰ *Uaat* (Smith 1933: “clear with u.v. but by ordinary vision it appears as *Uuat*”; Parkes 1972) || *N[i] uat* (Gerritsen 1969; see discussion above) || *[N]aat* (Gleissner 1988; see footnote 34 above).

⁵¹ *haehcraeft* (Schlutter 1909a).

⁵² *b[i] hi[ge minum] / b[i] hi[ortan minre]* (Rieger 1861; also suggested by Dietrich in his commentary) || *hygidoncum [minum] / bigido[n]cum [minum]* (Sweet 1885: noting that Pluygers’ transcript read *b(i) gido(cumt)* and “I read very doubtfully <..gi[d.can.]>”) || *higido[n]cum [min]* (Kluge 1888) || *hygido[hta vyn]* (Schlutter 1909a) || *h[y]gido[ncum min]* (Kern 1910) || *hygido[nca mægn]* (Trautmann 1915) || *hygido[n]cum [in]* (Sedgefield 1922) || *hygidon[cum min]* (Smith 1933: “*hygidonc* is now visible by u.v., the <h> being altered from , and <c> over the line”) || *hygidoncu[m on]* (Gerritsen 1969: “<h> seems clear, <y> proved by its dot, enough of <g> to identify, <iðo> clear, bases of two serifless minims pretty certainly <n>, <c> (above <g>) probable, <u> probable, nothing else. *[min]* pure hypothesis; what evidence there seems to be points to *on*. If an <m> followed the preceding <cu> it will have belonged to it, as there is no trace of a superscript over the <u>. Unless the scribe misjudged the space needed there is then room for two more letters, and of the first of these some traces remain that could be <t>, <r> or conceivably <o>”) || *[hy]gid[onc.m]* (Parkes 1972) || *hygidon[cum min]* (Smith and Foy 2019–).

⁵³ *hafæ* (Schlutter 1909a; Smith 1933: “clear by u.v.”; Parkes 1972) || *hefæ* (Gerritsen 1969: “<e> doubtful but much easier than <a>”) || *h[a]fæ* (Parkes 1972: “<a> is certain under ultra-violet light”).

ni ðerih *ðrea[t]an*⁵⁴ *giðr[aece]*⁵⁵ *ðr(et)*⁵⁶ me *hlímmid*⁵⁷
 Ne me *hrutendi*⁵⁸ hrisil *scel[ff]æð*⁵⁹,
*ni*⁶⁰ mec *o[huanan]*⁶¹ *aam*⁶² sceal *cnyssa*⁶³;
 Uyrmas mec ni auēfun *uyrdi*⁶⁴ craeftum,
 ða ði *goelu*⁶⁵ godueb geatu(m) fraetuath:
*Uil*⁶⁶ mec *hu[e]drae*⁶⁷ suae ðeh uidæ ofaer⁶⁸ eorðu

⁵⁴ *ðrea[t] an* (Rieger 1861; treating it as two separate words) || *ðrea[t]un* (Sweet 1885) || *ðreaun* (Schlutter 1909a; forming the word *ðreaungiðraec*) || *ðreavun* (Schlutter 1909b) || *ðreatun* (Smith 1933: “the greater part of <t> has been rubbed away, but if the MS is observed from the side the mark of <t> is still clear (visually and by u.v.)”; Gerritsen 1969: “clear except for <t>, of which only the bottom hook is visible; given its position only <t> would fill the space”) || *ðrea[.]un* (Parkes 1972).

⁵⁵ *giðraec* (Sweet 1885; Smith 1933; Gerritsen 1969: “<raec> possible, bus as easily <racu> or just <rac>”) || *gið[ræ.]* (Parkes 1972: “<æ> is certain”).

⁵⁶ *ðræ'* (Schlutter 1909a) || *ðræt* (Schlutter 1910) || *ðr[æt]* (Trautmann 1915) || *[præd]* (Smith 1933, emended from MS *ðr(et)*).

⁵⁷ *hlímmith* (Sweet 1885; Smith 1933; Gerritsen 1969: “initial <h> easily (or in fact?) , <lim> clear, <mi> four disjunct minims, <t> clear, its top linked to the preceding minim, final <h> clear”) || *hlæmmed[e]* (Schlutter 1909a, transcript) || *hlæmmeð* (Schlutter 1909a, edition) || *hl[æ]mmeð* (Trautmann 1915) || *hlímmi[h]* (Parkes 1972).

⁵⁸ *hrutendu(m)* (Sweet 1885) || *hrutende* (Schlutter 1909a) || *hrutendu* (Smith 1933; Gerritsen 1969: “clear”) || *hrutendo* (Parkes 1972).

⁵⁹ *scelfæð* (Sweet 1885) || *scelfath* (Smith 1933: “by ordinary vision the ending may equally well be <-æð> or <-ath>, but by u.v. the latter is certain”; Gerritsen 1969: “all but <f> and <th> easily read; <th> seems certain, but not <f>. What looks like <f> in daylight seems part of the old overlying stain under u.v., and there also seems rather too much space for <f>”) || *scel[ff]a[th]* (Parkes 1972: “crossbar of <f> is visible by ultra-violet light”).

⁶⁰ *ne* (Schlutter 1909a; Gerritsen 1969: “clear”) || *n[e]* (Parkes 1972).

⁶¹ *o[huanan]* (Rieger 1861) || *ou[ua]n[a]* (Sweet 1885) || *oua[n]a* (Schlutter 1909a) || *oua[n]an* (Schlutter in Tupper 1910) || *ahuana* (Schlutter 1910) || *ouana* (Smith 1933: “clear by u.v. though doubtful by ordinary vision”; Gerritsen 1969: “tops of first <a> and of first minim of <n> missing, but could be nothing else”) || *ou[an]a* (Parkes 1972: “Two traces, one recognizable as the bottom of the lobe of the letter <a> and the other as the second minim of <n>, are clear when magnified under ultra-violet light”).

⁶² *caam* (Schlutter 1909a) || *cam a* (Schlutter 1910).

⁶³ *cnyissan* (Schlutter 1909a).

⁶⁴ *uyndi* (Schlutter 1909a forming the word *uyndicraeftum*; Sweet 1894 suggested *u[yn]dicraeftum* as an emendation for the manuscript reading *uyrdi craeftum*).

⁶⁵ Clear as *goelu* in the manuscript but silently emended to *geolu* in some editions (e.g., Smith [1933]).

⁶⁶ *Uil [m]* (Schlutter 1909a) || *Uil mon* (Schlutter 1910) || *Uil[u]* (Trautmann 1915) || *Uil mec [mon]* (Holthausen 1919).

⁶⁷ *hudrae* (Rieger 1861) || *huethrae* (Schlutter 1909a) || *hu[e]thrae* (Smith 1933: “<h> being added above <t>, as is clear by u.v. . . .; MS <c> may be a faded <e>, and this <c> (or <e>) with <t> and the long downstroke of <h> has been misread as <d>”) || *huctrae* (Gerritsen 1969: “clear; of the supposed <h> over the <t> only the stem is clearly there”) || *huc[h]trae* (Parkes 1972).

⁶⁸ *ofer* (Rieger 1861).

*hatan*⁶⁹ mith *heliðum*⁷⁰ *hihtlic*⁷¹ *giuae*[*di*]⁷².
 Ni *anoegun*⁷³ ic me aerigfaerae
 eg-san brogu(m), ðeh ði *adlice*⁷⁴ *ob cocrum*⁷⁵

⁶⁹ *haatan* (Schlutter 1909a) || *batan* (Gerritsen 1969: “*hatan* | <h> could be , <t> imperfect but certain”).

⁷⁰ *hæliðum* (Rieger 1861) || *heliðum* (Sweet 1885; Smith 1933; Gerritsen 1969: “clear”; Parkes 1972).

⁷¹ *hyhtlic* (Sweet 1885; Smith 1933; Gerritsen 1969: “first (not second) <h> could be ”; Parkes 1972).

⁷² *giuaede* (Sweet 1885) || *giuaed*[*i*] (Kern 1910) || *giuaed*[*e*] (Smith 1933: “the last letter is not now visible”) || *giuæd*[*e*] (Gerritsen 1969: “<gi> clear, <u> tolerably certain, <a> with additional marking top right probably <æ>, <d> clear, apparently followed by a downstroke that is too straight to be part of <e> as normally written and too far from a (perhaps adventitious) downstroke farther in the line to make <u> acceptable”); *giuae*[*..*] (Parkes 1972).

⁷³ *anoegnu* (Schlutter 1910) || *anoegu n*[*a*] (Sedgefield 1922).

⁷⁴ *ni*[*man* *flanas* *frac*] *adlice* (Rieger 1861) || *ni*[*man* *flanas* *frac*] *adlice* (Sweet 1885) || *ni*[*mæn* *flanas* *frac*] *adlice* (Sweet 1887) || *ni*[*maen* *flan*] *as* [*frac*] *adlice* (Schlutter 1909a) || *ni*[*mæn* *flanæ* *frac*] *adlice* (Kern 1910) || *ni*[*mæn* *darto*] *bas* [*d*] *ih*] *ae* / [*d*] *ypt*] *ae* (Trautmann 1915) || *n*[*ume*] *n* *siæ* *niudlice* (Smith 1933: “this line is defective, but examination by ultra-violet light and u.v. photography reveals that the letter after the first *n* began with a minim . . . and that the word ends in *n*; *siæ* is faint but clear by this light. The first word on the last line is *niudlice*”) || *ðeh ði nu*[*men*] *siæ* *nuidlice* (Gerritsen 1969: “*numen* | <n> is clear, <u> seems clear in oblique light, unidentifiable traces following it could have belonged to <m>, <e> is not there at all, two final minims can be seen, but hardly identified as <n>; the word would fit the available space and the remaining traces of writing. - *siæ* | faint, but remarkably clear under u.v. [...] - *nuidlice* | clear under u.v.; the three minims following the <n> are evidently intended for <ui> . . . round insular <d>”) || *ni*[*..* .] [*niu*] *adlice* (Parkes 1972: “<n> is followed by a minim stroke, here recorded as <i> for typographical convenience . . . There is no trace of the *siæ* which Smith claims to have read. [For <niu>:] There are five traces, the first three of which are recognizable as minim strokes. In a very hard print based on a photograph taken in ordinary light the last two traces are joined together at the bottom. There also appears to be a mark joining the top of these two traces (which suggests that they should be interpreted as the letter <a> and would give the reading *niadlice*), but I am unable to determine whether this mark is a trace on the surface or a mark in it. Moreover, the direction of the first trace differs from that of <a>. I have therefore transcribed as <u>.”) || *ni* [*sia*] [*ni*] *udlice* (Smith and Foys 2019–).

⁷⁵ No words are missing after *cocrum* (Rieger 1861; Smith 1933; Gerritsen 1969; Parkes 1972) || *cocrum lon*[*gum*] (Schlutter 1909a; corrects to *cocrum lab* in Schlutter 1909b; Schlutter no longer lists anything following *cocrum* in Schlutter 1910).

Appendix 2. A comprehensive bibliography of publications on the Leiden Riddle arranged chronologically

Selection of editions

1. Bethmann 1845 [edition on p. 199].
2. Dietrich 1859 [edition on p. 26 and lithograph facsimile after p. 26].
3. Rieger 1861 [edition on pp. xxii–xiii; reprints Dietrich (1860) with corrections].
4. Sweet 1885 [edition on pp. 149–51, with variants from Dietrich (1859), Rieger (1861) and Pluygers' transcript (referenced as "L.")].
5. Sweet 1887 [edition on p. 90, based on Sweet (1885); 2nd edition by T. F. Hoad (1978) features a new edition on p. 107, based on "facsimiles available" (vi)].
6. Kluge 1888 [edition on p. 140, based on Sweet (1885) with Sieversian metrical types—the Leiden Riddle is retained, though without the Sieversian metrical notation, in the 2nd and 3rd edition (1897, 1902) but omitted from the 4th edition (1915)].
7. Sweet 1894 [edition on p. 176; the text is retained in all subsequent versions of Sweet's *Reader*, with occasional updates by C. T. Onions and Dorothy Whitelock].
8. Wülker 1897 [edition on pp. 205–6, based on Sweet (1885) with variants from Dietrich (1859) and Rieger (1861)].
9. Schlutter 1909a; corrigenda in Schlutter 1909b.
10. Kern 1910 [edition with response to Schlutter 1909a].
11. Schlutter 1910 [edition with response to Kern 1910].
12. Tupper Jr, 1910 [edition on p. 27, based on Sweet (1885) with variants from Dietrich (1859) and Rieger (1861); on p. 153, he reprints the edition sent to him by Schlutter, prior to the publication of Schlutter (1909a)].
13. Wyatt 1912 [edition on p. 92, based on Schlutter (1909a)].
14. Trautmann 1915 [edition on pp. 20–21, with variants from Dietrich (1859), Rieger (1861), Sweet (1885) and Schlutter (1909a)].
15. Sedgfield 1922 [edition on p. 118, based on Tupper (1910)].
16. Smith 1933 [edition on pp. 44–47; no changes are made to the edition of the Leiden Riddle in the reprint of 1968 or the revised edition of 1978].
17. Dobbie 1942 [edition on p. 109; notes and variants from other editions on pp. 199–201].
18. Cavell 2015b [edition based on Dobbie (1942) and Smith (1933)].
19. Smith and Foys 2019– [edition based on Dobbie (1942), Gerritsen (1969) and Parkes (1972), with facsimile and translation].
20. Orchard 2021 [edition based on Smith (1933) with translation on pp. 296–97; notes on pp. 613, 741–42].

Studies on the text of the Leiden Riddle and facsimiles

21. Kern 1914 [response to Schlutter 1910].
22. Smith 1938 [photographic facsimiles under normal light (plate IIa) and under UV light (plate IIb)].
23. Zandvoort 1954 [photographic facsimiles of Leiden Riddle under UV light (plate II) and under normal light (plate III) and facsimile of Pluygers' transcript (plate IV)].
24. Gerritsen 1969.
25. Parkes 1972 [with facsimile].
26. Gerritsen 1984 [with colour facsimile].
27. Gleissner 1988.
28. Robinson and Stanley 1991 [item no. 4; facsimile on p. 22].
29. Bremmer and Dekker 2006 [item no. 158, manuscript description on pp. 107–112; with microfiche facsimile].
30. Porck 2025 [with colour facsimiles of Leiden Riddle and Pluygers' transcript].

Other studies and notes

31. Holthausen 1919 [p. 52].
32. Trautmann 1919 [p. 248].
33. Holthausen 1921.
34. Gerritsen 1954.
35. Huppe 1959 [pp. 74–77].
36. Anderson 1967.
37. Williamson 1977 [pp. 243–45].
38. Fulk 1992 [pp. 404–5].
39. Kiernan 1994 [pp. 42–45].
40. O'Donnell 1996 [pp. 259–69].
41. Klein 1997.
42. Steen 2008 [pp. 91–98].
43. Dance 2010 [pp. 40–42].
44. Orchard 2010 [pp. 66–72].
45. Weber 2012.
46. Salvador-Bello 2015 [pp. 14–15, 42].
47. Cavell 2015a.
48. Cavell 2016 [pp. 54–67].
49. Neidorf 2017 [pp. 112–14].
50. Donoghue 2018 [pp. 63–69].
51. Orchard 2021 [pp. 317–320].
52. Burns 2024 [pp. 80–81].