HUMOUR, HISTORY AND POLITICS IN LATE ANTIQUITY AND THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

EDITED BY

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Alcuin's Disputatio Pippini *and the early medieval riddle tradition*

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The early medieval period saw a flowering of riddles and riddle collections, both religious and secular, both earnest and light-hearted. To date the greater part of scholarly attention has been focussed on the Old English riddles of the *Exeter Book*, on the grounds both of literary merit and of mystery – the text does not include the answers, an omission that has provided happy occupation for decades of scholars. These two features – literary merit and mystery – also appear in what is perhaps a yet more remarkable riddle collection, the *Disputatio regalis et nobilissimi iuvenis Pippini cum Albino scholastico* of Alcuin.[1] The *Disputatio* is unusual in that it intermingles prose riddles with wisdom literature; that, unlike all other examples of the form, it puts the dialogue in the mouths of contemporary interlocutors (one Alcuin, the other Pippin, the son of Charlemagne), and represents itself as conversation between them; and that, to a degree rarely seen in dialogues, it is playful, teasing and genuinely witty. For the most part, however, scholarship has ignored the *Disputatio*, and the text has yet to claim its rightful place as a remarkable reflection of the strength a dialogue could obtain in the hands of a master craftsman such as Alcuin.

The early medieval tradition of literary riddling was inspired by Symphosius (or Symposius), a Late Latin poet whose exact identity is uncertain.[2] Symphosius' hundred riddles, each consisting of three verse lines, circulated widely in the medieval period; later riddle collections frequently rephrased those of Symphosius or simply borrowed riddles from him wholesale. The earliest surviving medieval collection is the *Bern Riddles*, apparently written in the seventh century by one Tullius,

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[1] The *Disputatio* is edited by W. Suchier in L. W. Daly and W. Suchier, *Altercatio Hadriani Augusti et Epicteti Philosophi* (Illinois Studies in Language & Literature 24) (Urbana, IL, 1939), pp. 137–43. It is reprinted below. For bibliography on the text see M.-H. Jullien and F. Perelman, *Clavis des auteurs latins du Moyen Age: territoire français 735–987*, vol. II, *Alcuin* (Turnhout, 1999), pp. 164–5.

[2] For Symphosius' riddles, see *Variae Collectiones Aenigmatum Merovingicae Aetatis*, CCSL 133A, ed. F. Glorie (Turnhout, 1968), pp. 611–721.

whose origins and provenance are not yet fully understood.[3] Tullius, like Symphosius, wrote in verse; each riddle is six lines long. This period also saw a proliferation of riddle collections by Anglo-Latin writers. Latin riddle sequences were composed by the Anglo-Saxons Aldhelm (d. 709 or 710), Boniface (c.675–754), Tatwine (d.734) and Eusebius. Aldhelm's collection consisted of 100 verse riddles, varying in length, with an underlying theme of the wonders of creation, and culminating in an eighty-three-line riddle on 'Creation' itself.[4] Boniface, missionary to Germany and author of a number of works, was the author of a strictly edificatory set of twenty riddles, ten on virtues and ten on vices.[5] Tatwine, archbishop of Canterbury and the author of a Latin grammar, composed forty verse riddles, more didactic than descriptive, treating not only concrete objects but also abstractions such as 'the four senses of Scripture'.[6] These were rounded out to 100 by one Eusebius, perhaps to be identified with Hwætberht, abbot of Wearmouth-Jarrow in the early eighth century.[7] Eusebius' sixty verse riddles are a hotchpotch of lofty topics ('heaven'), opposites ('land and sea') and marvellous creatures ('ship-retaining fish').

These riddles all appeared as a part of formal collections, but there is also evidence that Latin riddles circulated independently and without the imprimatur of a named author. A number of riddles occur, *inter alia*, in the pseudo-Bede *Collectanea*, a compilation of materials assembled on the continent by an eighth-century cleric who had access to both Irish and English material.[8] The assemblage includes five riddles of Symphosius and five of Aldhelm, as well as eleven anonymous prose riddles. Of the prose riddles, only two seem to have no extant analogues: the others are

3 *MGH PLAC* 4.2, ed. K. Strecker (Berlin, 1923), pp. 737–59, and *Variae Collectiones Aenigmatum, CCSL* 133A, ed. Glorie, pp. 541–610. On the collection and the varying contents of the manuscripts, see C. E. Finch, 'The Bern Riddles in Codex Vat. Reg. Lat. 1553', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 92 (1961), pp. 145–55.

4 Aldhelm's *enigmata* are edited by R. Ehwald, *Aldhelmi Opera, MGH Auctores Antiquissimi* 15 (Berlin, 1919), and reprinted in *Variae,* ed. Glorie, pp. 359–540. They are also reprinted and translated by J. Hall Pitman, *The Riddles of Aldhelm* (New Haven and London, 1925). On the riddles see M. Lapidge, 'Introduction to the *Enigmata*', in *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works,* ed. M. Lapidge and J. L. Rosier (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 61–9.

5 *MGH PLAC* 1, ed. E. Dümmler (Berlin, 1881), pp. 3–15, and *Variae,* ed. Glorie, pp. 273–343.

6 Tatwine's riddles may be found in *Variae,* ed. Glorie, pp. 165–208. See also F. H. Whitman, 'Aenigmata Tatwini', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 88 (1987), pp. 8–17.

7 *Variae,* ed. Glorie, pp. 209–71.

8 *Collectanea Pseudo-Bedae* (Scriptores Latini Hiberniae 14), ed. M. Bayless and M. Lapidge (Dublin, 1998). On the riddles specifically, see the chapter by Bayless, 'The *Collectanea* and medieval dialogues and riddles', pp. 13–24.

paralleled in Aldhelm, Eusebius and riddle collections of later centuries
(the Lorsch collection, St-Gall, Stiftsbibliothek 196 and the *Exeter Book*).
This may serve as a useful reminder that, despite the seeming monu-
mentality of riddle collections, riddles at heart were a more informal
genre, and must have circulated singly, orally and in prose, as much
as in verse and in manuscript. No prose riddle collections are found
in manuscript, however, until the late eighth century, with the appear-
ance of two contemporary assemblages: the pseudo-Bede *Collectanea* and
Alcuin's *Disputatio Pippini.*

Later centuries reflect a greater variety of registers and forms. The
twelve riddles in the ninth- or tenth-century Lorsch collection appear in
verse, but are only supplied with answers by the modern editor.[9] Both
formal and informal groups appear in the 'Cambridge Songs' manu-
script, Cambridge, UL Gg.5.35, an eleventh-century classbook from
Canterbury containing copies of the riddle collections of Symphosius,
Aldhelm, Boniface, Tatwine and Eusebius. The manuscript also includes
two other collections: a group of verse riddles on school subjects and nine-
teen prose Latin logogriphic riddles, riddles that encode the name of the
object in the body of the riddle.[10] The scribe who first wrote or copied
out the logogriphic riddles provided no solutions, but a second hand of
the same period both supplied and explained the answers. As the riddles'
modern editor remarks, 'his solutions, unlike so many of those fastened
by modern scholarship upon early riddles, have the not small merit of
really solving the problems to which they are attached'.[11]

Prose Latin riddles have also survived in other manuscripts of the
period, such as St-Gall, Stiftsbibliothek 196, a manuscript of the tenth
century that appends three prose riddles to those of Symphosius and a
biblical curiosity dialogue.[12] Verse riddles also occur singly, such as the
Leiden riddle[13] and the Latin verse riddle on 'Æthelwold's bowl' found

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9 *MGH PLAC* 1, ed. Dümmler, pp. 20–3, and *Variae*, ed. Glorie, pp. 345–58.
10 On the Cambridge Songs manuscript, see A. G. Rigg and G. R. Wieland, 'A Canterbury classbook
of the mid-eleventh century (the "Cambridge Songs" manuscript)', *Anglo-Saxon England* 4 (1975),
pp. 113–30 (esp. pp. 120–30). For the verse riddles, see *Anecdota Bedae, Lanfranci et Aliorum*, ed.
J. A. Giles (London, 1851, repr. New York, 1967), pp. 50–3; for the logogriphic riddles, see
F. Tupper, Jr, 'Riddles of the Bede tradition', *Modern Philology* 2 (1904–5), pp. 1–12 (at pp. 8–11).
11 Tupper, 'Riddles', p. 7.
12 The three riddles are printed in Daly and Suchier, *Altercatio Hadriani* p. 144, n. 91.
13 For the Leiden riddle, see *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems* (Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records 6), ed.
E. v. K. Dobbie (New York, 1942), p. 109. It and the *Exeter Book* version are translations of
Aldhelm's 'Lorica' riddle; all three are printed by C. Williamson, *The Old English Riddles of the
Exeter Book* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1977), pp. 88–9 and 243–4.

in an eleventh-century manuscript.[14] Finally, the vernacular tradition of riddles surfaces in the ninety-one or so Old English verse riddles of the *Exeter Book*, copied around the year 1000.[15]

Alcuin's dialogue thus forms a very early example of a more informal and conversational framework for riddles, although it is one that reflects their origins – as questions and answers, a guessing game between two people – more clearly than the monumental and often unguessable riddles of the verse collections. Uniquely among riddle collections, however, Alcuin's *Disputatio* also partakes of a second tradition, that of wisdom and curiosity dialogues.

Wisdom dialogues were question-and-answer texts that defined common objects or concepts in terms of metaphors.[16] Typical examples included, for instance, '*Quid est epistola? Tacitus nuntius*' and '*Quid est somnus? Imago mortis*': 'What is a letter? A silent messenger' and 'What is sleep? The image of death.' In a sense, these were embryonic riddles, the building blocks of poetry. Curiosity dialogues, by contrast, were catechisms of biblical riddles, chiefly concerned with paradox: 'Who died and was never born? Adam', and so forth.[17] Curiosity dialogues often incorporated items from wisdom dialogues, and paradox riddles were sometimes intermingled.[18] These three forms – riddle collections, wisdom dialogues and curiosity dialogues – served similar functions: to evoke wonder at the glory of God and the everyday marvels of his world, which included his ability to unite opposites in paradox, and to provide pleasure while doing so.

Alcuin's *Disputatio* is confected from these three components: wisdom dialogues, curiosity dialogues and riddle collections. The framework of

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[14] See D. W. Porter, 'A double solution to the Latin riddle in MS Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus Museum M16.2', *ANQ (American Notes & Queries)* 9 (1996), pp. 3–9, and 'Æthelwold's bowl and *The Chronicle of Abingdon*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 97 (1996), pp. 163–7. On other early medieval riddles, see G. Polara, 'Aenigmata', in *Lo spazio letterario del medioevo*, series 1: *Il medioevo latino*, vol. 1, *La produzione del testo*, ed. G. Cavallo et al. (2 vols., Rome, 1993), vol. 11, pp. 197–216.

[15] *The Exeter Book* (Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records 3), ed. G. P. Krapp and E. v. K. Dobbie (New York, 1936), pp. 180–210, 224–5 and 229–43; Williamson, *Old English Riddles*.

[16] For the history of wisdom dialogues and many examples of the form, see Daly & Suchier, *Altercatio Hadriani*. Other wisdom questions are found in the dialogues printed by W. Suchier, *Das mittellateinische Gespräch Adrian und Epictitus nebst verwandten Texten (Joca Monachorum)* (Tübingen, 1955).

[17] The *locus classicus* for items of this type is the set of dialogues known as the *Ioca monachorum*, although they also appear in dialogues such as *Adrianus et Epictitus*. Both types are printed in Suchier, *Gespräch*. In other studies I have also referred to curiosity dialogues as trivia dialogues; they are the same form. See also Shanzer, above, pp. 26–7.

[18] These are of the briefest type, not the more complex paradoxes favoured by Alcuin and other named authors. For instance, *Adrianus et Epictitus* version *AE₂* asks '*Quid tangitur et non videtur? – Anima. Quid videtur et non tangitur? – Celum*' (Suchier, *Gespräch*, p. 33, nos. 49–50).

the text is adopted from a version of a widely circulating wisdom dialogue, the *Altercatio Hadriani Augusti et Epicteti philosophi.*[19] Where the *Altercatio Hadriani* remains sober and straightforward, however, Alcuin's dialogue goes wildly astray: the questioner and the respondent exchange roles, sombre metaphors are abandoned for spirited riddles, and the clarity of answers is cast aside for teasing, hinting and impish evasiveness.

Both the milieu – the high-spirited erudition of Charlemagne's court – and Alcuin's own character set the stage for the playfulness of the *Disputatio.* As master of Charlemagne's court school, Alcuin seems to have had a flair for imaginative and playful teaching. He is credited with introducing into circulation important texts that had been abandoned for centuries, among them Priscian's grammatical work the *Institutiones grammaticae,* and the treatise on logic *De decem categoriis.* Where texts did not exist, or where the available authorities were too dry or unsuitable, Alcuin composed his own texts.

Typical of these is the *Dialogus Franconis et Saxonis de octo partibus orationis,* a grammar in the form of a dialogue between a Frankish pupil and his Saxon comrade, with interventions from Alcuin himself.[20] The dialogue recasts the information in Priscian's *Institutiones grammaticae* into more easily digestible form, and occasionally comments on the differences in the taxonomies set forth by Priscian and those of the other great grammatical authority, Donatus, in the way that such queries might be raised in lessons. The details of the students' ages suggest that the boys were actual pupils at the court school, and that the text served as a way of enlivening otherwise dull grammatical instruction, as well as giving the boys a vehicle for rehearsing the material among themselves. *De rhetorica et virtutibus* was another teaching dialogue, this one framed as a conversation between Alcuin and Charlemagne.[21] Alcuin is also the likely author of a collection of story problems, the *Propositiones ad acuendos*

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[19] The *Altercatio* is edited by Daly and Suchier, *Altercatio Hadriani,* pp. 104–7, along with a number of related texts. Alcuin's *Disputatio* borrows a number of elements from a lost recension of the text printed as the *Altercatio,* but other parts of Alcuin's text are more closely related to other wisdom dialogues, notably the *Vita Secundi* (ed. Daly and Suchier, pp. 152–9, esp. pp. 158–9) and an addition to *Adrianus et Epictitus* found in manuscript C (ed. Suchier, *Gespräch,* p. 37). It is also worth noting that some of these versions are retailed under the title *Disputatio,* so that Alcuin's title sets the text in the tradition of wisdom dialogues.

[20] The text is may be found in *PL* 101, cols. 854–902.

[21] For the *De rhetorica,* see *PL* 101, cols. 919–46 and *Rhetores Latini minores,* ed. C. Halm (Leipzig, 1863), pp. 523–50. Halm's edition is reprinted with a few changes, and a translation, by W. S. Howell, *The Rhetoric of Alcuin and Charlemagne* (Princeton, 1941). On Alcuin's dialogues, see also E. Ann Matter, 'Alcuin's question-and-answer texts', *Rivista di storia della filosofia* 4 (1990), pp. 645–56.

iuuenes.[22] Many of these are number problems, but among them is the famous 'About the wolf and the goat and the bundle of cabbages', in which a man has to take a goat, a wolf and a bundle of cabbages across a river in a boat too small to carry more than one item at once.[23] All of these teaching texts share Alcuin's stamp: a concern with engaging his pupils, with personalising his materials, and with expressing human warmth as he did so.

Alcuin's imaginative teaching style seems to have been part and parcel of Carolingian court life, which valued wit and play as well as learning.[24] A poem by Theodulf, a member of the royal entourage, depicts the lively tenor of the court:

> Ludicris haec mixta iocis per ludicra currat,
>   Saepeque tangatur qualibet illa manu.
> Laude iocoque simul hunc illita carta revisat,
>   Quem tribuente celer ipse videbo deo.[25]

> Let this poem romp amidst the mirth and amusements,
> And may it often be held by every hand.
> And, covered with praise and delight, may it return to him
> Whom, God granting, I will see soon.

The poem portrays the court on an ideal day, with all its members present in their accustomed roles. Alcuin is depicted in what is presumably his typical occupation: in the midst of the court, setting problems on a variety of subjects for others to work out. As the poem is in praise of Charlemagne, Theodulf expresses his wishes that Charlemagne will be the one to solve the conundrums Alcuin sets:

> Sit praesto et Flaccus, nostrorum gloria vatum ...
> Quique sophista potens est, quique poeta melodus,
>   Quique potens sensu, quique potens opere est.

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[22] The text is edited by M. Folkerts and H. Gericke, *Die Alkuin zugeschriebenen Propositiones ad acuendos iuvenes* (Aufgaben zur Schärfung des Geistes der Jugend)', in *Science in Western and Eastern Civilization in Carolingian Times*, ed. P. L. Butzer and D. Lohrmann (Basel, 1993), pp. 283–362. On the text and transmission, see also M. Folkerts, 'Die Alkuin zugeschriebenen "Propositiones ad acuendos iuvenes"', in *Science in Western and Eastern Civilization*, ed. Butzer and Lohrmann, pp. 273–81.

[23] Folkerts and Gericke, *Propositiones*, pp. 316–17 (no. 18).

[24] For further discussion of Carolingian courts and humour, see Innes, above, pp. 142–56.

[25] *MGH PLAC* I, ed. Dümmler, p. 483, no. 25, lines 9–12; also repr. and trans. P. Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance* (Norman, OK, 1985), no. 15, pp. 150–63; this passage is at pp. 150–1. The translations above are my own.

Et pia de sanctis scripturis dogmata promat,
  Et solvat numeri vincla favente ioco.
Et modo sit facilis, modo scrupea quaestio Flacci,
  Nunc mundanam artem, nunc redibens superam:
Solvere de multis rex ipse volentibus unus
  Sit bene qui possit solvere Flaccidica.[26]

Let Flaccus [i.e. Alcuin] be present as well, the glory of our poets . . .
He is a powerful scholar and a melodious poet,
Great in perception and great in his works.
May he propound the pious teachings of holy Scripture,
And loosen the chains of numbers with an encouraging jest.
Though sometimes Flaccus' questions may be easy, sometimes difficult,
Now on a worldly topic, now on higher things,
Among the many who want to solve the Flaccidities,
May the king himself be the one who can solve them well.

There is plentiful evidence of Alcuin's love of such puzzles and games. In addition to the *Disputatio*, he wrote at least seven surviving verse riddles, all of them apparently original: one on a comb, one on a furnace, and five logogriphic enigmata.[27] He was so fond of the comb riddle that it appears again, paraphrased, in a letter.[28] In addition to these examples of literary play, Alcuin composed acrostic verses and, indeed, appears to have introduced the form to the Carolingian court, starting a trend which resulted in the presentation of a set of such verses to Charlemagne.[29] His letters also testify to the extent to which encoding was, for Alcuin, a sign of affection or familiarity.[30] Even his habit of bestowing by-names on the members of the court is an expression of his delight in encoding and transforming things by the use of language.[31]

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[26] *MGH PLAC* 1, ed. Dümmler, p. 486, lines 131 and 133–40; repr. and trans. Godman, *Poetry*, pp. 156–7.

[27] For these riddles, see *MGH PLAC* 1, ed. Dümmler, pp. 223 (no. 5, the comb riddle) and 281–3.

[28] *MGH Epistolae* 4, ed. E. Dümmler (Berlin, 1895) no. 26, p. 67. The riddle is discussed by P. Sorrell, 'Alcuin's "comb" riddle', *Neophilologus* 80 (1996), pp. 311–18.

[29] See M. Garrison, 'The emergence of Carolingian Latin literature and the court of Charlemagne (780–814)', in *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation*, ed. R. McKitterick (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 111–40, at pp. 121–2.

[30] See, for example, *MGH Epistolae* 4, ed. Dümmler, no. 176, p. 291, and the commentary by M. Garrison, 'The social world of Alcuin: nicknames at York and at the Carolingian court', in *Alcuin of York: Scholar at the Carolingian Court* (Germania Latina 3), ed. L. A. J. R. Houwen and A. A. MacDonald (Groningen, 1998), pp. 59–79, at pp. 74–5, n. 54. This encoding of words was not unique to Alcuin: another example from the Carolingian court is discussed by Keith Sidwell, 'Theodulf of Orléans, Cadac-Andreas and Old Irish phonology: a conundrum', *Journal of Medieval Latin* 2 (1992), pp. 55–62.

[31] On this see Garrison, 'Social world of Alcuin'.

The court welcomed such diversions and entertainments, and riddling in particular became almost an heroic pastime among contending poets. Between 782 and 786 Charlemagne, Peter of Pisa and Paul the Deacon exchanged a series of riddle poems and challenges. One poem depicts Charlemagne challenging Paul the Deacon to solve a riddle overnight, and Paul trying to distract Charlemagne from the challenge by sending him a competing set of riddles.[32]

The *Disputatio*, then, is only one text in a lively tradition that combined learning and wit, that supplied new and engaging texts to pupils, and that trained those pupils to take their place in a milieu that valued learned amusement. As a man practised in both affection toward, and flattery of, royal personages, it was percipient of Alcuin to choose Pippin, the son of Charlemagne, as his dialogue partner.

To say that he chose Pippin, however, is to be less precise that one might think: in fact, Charlemagne's court was oversupplied with sons of Charlemagne named Pippin, there being two. The first was Pippin the Hunchback, Charlemagne's eldest son, born around 769 from a connection with a Frankish noblewoman, Himiltrude (it is unclear whether marriage was involved). In 777 Charlemagne's new wife, Hildegard, bore a son named Karlmann, who was destined early for great things. The boy was designated king of Italy at four, the same age in which he was baptised by the pope; at his baptism his name was changed to Pippin, for reasons that are not clear. It is almost certainly this younger Pippin who figures in the *Disputatio*.

To arrive at this conclusion requires some analysis of the likely date of the *Disputatio* and the circumstances of its composition. In so doing, it is necessary to pose a number of questions. First, does the *Disputatio* reflect a genuine conversation between Alcuin and Pippin? The answer here is certainly no: although the text is unique among literary dialogues for its moments of seemingly genuine and spontaneous exchange, as a whole it is much cleverer and more contrived – more literary – than real conversation. Secondly, was the dialogue intended to be presented to Pippin, or does it merely feature him as a character? It is unlikely that the text was intended exclusively for Pippin, as it is clearly a literary production; even

[32] The poems are edited by Karl Neff, *Die Gedichte des Paulus Diaconus* (Munich, 1908), nos. 16–22, pp. 82–105. See also Garrison, 'Emergence of Carolingian Latin literature', pp. 121–2. A library catalogue also gives evidence of riddles, now lost, composed by Joseph Scottus, a student of Alcuin from York also at the Carolingian court; see M. Garrison, 'The English and the Irish at the court of Charlemagne', in *Karl der Grosse und sein Nachwirken: Charlemagne and his Heritage*, ed. P. L. Butzer, M. Kerner and W. Oberschelp (Turnhout, 1997), pp. 97–123, at p. 105.

Alcuin's letters, like the letters of many other medieval authors, although ostensibly addressed to a sole recipient, were accomplished showpieces of literary endeavour, which were certainly meant to circulate among a wider audience, as indeed they did. In similar fashion, it is likely that Pippin was addressed in the first instance, but that Alcuin also envisioned a secondary audience of schoolboys. Indeed, schoolboys are mentioned twice in the dialogue, once in reference to a number riddle, hereafter simply cited as the number in parentheses (*'Pueri in scola sciunt'*, 'The boys in the school know that one' (100)), and again when the two interlocutors conspire to keep the answers a secret from them: ('. . . *sed pone digitum super os, ne pueri audiant quid sit'*, 'but put your finger on your lips, so the boys don't hear the answer' (95)). In this latter case, the solution is never revealed overtly, so the schoolboys do indeed never 'hear' the answer. The dialogue implies that the conversation is taking place between Alcuin and Pippin in the foreground, with the schoolboys in the background listening, but this apparent spatial distinction may in fact be a temporal one: Pippin is the privileged first reader of the dialogue, but it will be passed on to the schoolboys in turn.

As head of the school, Alcuin would have been in charge of Pippin's education, and so it is a very reasonable assumption that he did indeed address the *Disputatio* directly to Pippin. This would be not merely a pedagogical move but also a flattering one, since Alcuin's model text, as Pippin must have known, was a version of the *Altercatio Hadriani Augusti et Epicteti philosophi*. The strategy of casting Pippin in the role of Hadrian and himself in the role of Epictetus is of a piece with Alcuin's hallmark practice of assigning elevated classical identities to himself and the members of the court.

The question then remains: how old was Pippin when the dialogue was addressed to him? Certainly he is distinguished from the *pueri*, the boys in the schoolroom, not only by rank but also by age. Although the enjoyment of such dialogues was not confined to youngsters, dialogues and riddles have strong ties to early medieval school curricula, and the *Disputatio* in particular seems designed to appeal to youthful tastes.

Alcuin did not arrive to take charge of the court school until 781 or 782; he stayed at court continuously until 796 except for two sojourns in England, once in 786 and again from 790 to 793. Thus, when he arrived at court the elder Pippin, Pippin the Hunchback, would have been twelve or thirteen; at Alcuin's first return to England, seventeen; and at Alcuin's second journey, twenty-one to twenty-three. The younger

Pippin would have been around four when Alcuin arrived, nine at his first journey, between thirteen and sixteen at his second, and nineteen when Alcuin left the court in 796 to become abbot of Tours. The most important question remaining, then, is whether the *Disputatio* was written while Alcuin was in residence at the court or while he was abroad. There are a number of reasons to believe that the latter is the case, and that the text actually formed a letter sent to Pippin by Alcuin. As I shall show, the theme at the close of the dialogue is *epistola*, and Alcuin depicts the text itself as a letter Pippin is holding in his hand. At another point Pippin is depicted as saying '*Si scirem quid esset navis, prepararem tibi, ut venires ad me*' – 'If I knew what a boat was, I would make one ready for you, so you could come to me' (76). (This does not imply that Pippin was too young to be familiar with boats, but that he had not yet learnt the conventional wisdom-dialogue metaphor for boats, which Alcuin promptly supplies.) This suggests that Alcuin was overseas when he composed the text for Pippin, and thus the date can mostly likely be assigned to the period 790 to 793, when Alcuin's stay abroad was long enough to allow him the leisure to write. If one accepts the supposition that the dialogue is most likely to have been aimed at youthful tastes, then this would suggest the younger Pippin, who would be between thirteen and sixteen during these years, as its recipient.[33] This would be in keeping with Alcuin's attentiveness to the nuances of winning royal benefaction: although details of Pippin the Hunchback's early career are obscure, he seems to have been out of favour at court, and indeed was banished from the court to the monastery of Prüm in 792, on the grounds of conspiracy. To cast him as an analogue of the emperor Hadrian, when he was not destined for rulership of any sort, would have been a gaffe of the first order.

It seems likely, then, that the text addresses the younger Pippin, who was probably between thirteen and sixteen at the time, and that Alcuin sent the text from abroad. Pippin had presumably been his student for some years, as Alcuin had arrived at court when Pippin was four, and so there was already a bond of affection between them, as well as a grounding in basic texts and the dialogue form, so that Pippin would have been alive to the changes rung by the *Disputatio* on the conventions of the genre.

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[33] There were also periods in which Alcuin remained at court and the younger Pippin was away – in 787, when he was ten, for example, Pippin was involved in leading troops from Italy into battle – but the reference to Alcuin coming to Pippin via boat suggests that this is not the separation referred to in the text.

The *Disputatio* begins in the form of a wisdom dialogue. Dialogues of this type go back to the late classical period, and a wilderness of related texts proliferated in the early medieval period. Unusually, Alcuin puts his *Disputatio* in the mouths of real interlocutors, but otherwise this section of the dialogue follows standard practice, with material borrowed, as usual, from the common store of proverbs and metaphors. The text consists of short and often poetic definitions of common concepts: Pippin asks, '*Quid est homo*?', 'What is man?' and Alcuin answers, '*Mancipium mortis, transiens viator, loci hospes*', 'The slave of death, a traveller passing by, the guest of a place' (8). '*Quomodo positus est homo*?', 'How is he situated?' '*Ut lucerna in vento*', 'Like a lantern in the wind' (10). '*Quid est terra*?', 'What is earth?'; '*Mater crescentium, nutrix viventium, cellarium vitae, devoratrix omnium*', 'The mother of growing things, the nurse of the living, the storehouse of life, the devourer of everything' (56). Not all the questions have this sombre tone: the text also asks '*Quid est venter? Custos fragilium*': 'What is the belly? The guardian of crumbs' (40); '*Quid sunt pedes? Mobile fundamentum*': 'What are the feet? Moveable pedestals' (44). The subjects of enquiry are cosmic as well as pedestrian: '*Quid est annus? Quadriga mundi. Quis ducit eam? Nox et dies, frigus et calor. Quid est aurgia eius? Sol et luna*': 'What is a year? A four-horse chariot of the world. Who pulls it? Night and day, heat and cold.' 'Who is its charioteer? The sun and the moon' (68–70). These are finely balanced between riddles and poetry, but their quality cannot be ascribed to Alcuin: the vast majority of the items he uses are paralleled in other wisdom dialogues.

Even at the beginning of the text, however, Alcuin displays a sharpness unusual to such dialogues. Other examples of the form shuffle the questions so that they appear in random order, but Alcuin begins with the building blocks of the enterprise. Pippin enquires, '*Quid est littera*?', 'What is a letter [of the alphabet]?' Alcuin replies, '*Custos historiae*', 'The guardian of history' (1). Pippin then expands his enquiry from the letter to the word: '*Quid est verbum? Proditor animi*', 'What is a word? The betrayer of the soul' (2). The dialogue then moves into conventional formulae, but the theme returns in the final subject of enquiry, a letter (*epistola*) – what has finally been built up when the letters and words with which the dialogue began have been assembled.

After this beginning, the text continues in conventional form to the tune of seventy-three questions. Uniquely among wisdom dialogues, however, this rather poetic and hence contrived interchange is transformed into something like real conversation. Pippin has been enquiring about the heavens, but at a certain point, he balks: '*Magister, timeo altum ire*',

'Master, I'm afraid to go up high.' Alcuin replies, '*Si times, descendamus; sequar quocumque ieris*', 'If you're afraid, let's go down; I'll follow wherever you go' (74–5). This diversion into subjective commentary is unprecedented in the genre. This is not merely personal commentary, but an exploration of the possibilities of words. When Pippin protests that he is afraid to go 'high', he opens the door to multiple meanings. The Latin word *altum* refers both to heights and to depths, so Pippin has also been expressing his fear of going out upon the deep. In saying 'let's go down', Alcuin is alluding back to the last topic of enquiry, the heavens, but Pippin now turns the double meaning upon its hinges and begins to talk about the depths of the ocean. Afraid to venture out to the depths, Pippin says, '*Si scirem quid esset navis, prepararem tibi, ut venires ad me,*' 'If I knew what a boat was, I would make one ready for you, so you could come to me' (76). This interchange involves an extraordinary convergence of images: the heights in the previous passages are transformed into the depths, and Pippin is afraid to set out upon these depths. The line also invokes the topos of beginning a literary enterprise as setting out across the sea, an image common to the period, employed both by Alcuin elsewhere and in a poem about Charlemagne ascribed to Einhard.[34] As I have suggested above, the passage also alludes to the fact that Alcuin genuinely was residing across the sea from Pippin. The sea voyage Pippin wishes Alcuin would make for him, then, may not be merely a literary expedition but also a literal one, back to court to answer Pippin's questions.

Once Pippin, in the text, has mentioned a boat, Alcuin, back safely in the conventions of the wisdom dialogue, responds with a conventional string of metaphors for boat: '*Navis est domus erratica, ubilibet hospitium, viator sine vestigiis, vicinus harenae,*' 'A boat is a wandering home, a shelter anywhere, a traveller without footprints, a neighbour of beaches' (76). Pippin makes a few more typical enquiries along these lines, on hope, friendship, faith and suchlike, when suddenly the dialogue again takes a turn away from formulaic phrases to original and self-reflexive answers. '*Quid est mirum?*', 'What is a wonder?' asks Pippin (86). Alcuin responds not with a formulaic definition but with an example. More than that, his unconventional response, absolutely unparalleled in other dialogue

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[34] Alcuin's example is in the 'Versus de sanctis Euboricensis ecclesiae': *MGH PLAC* i, ed. Dümmler, p. 198, lines 1321–3; the image also opens the poem from Einhard (ibid., p. 366; repr. and trans. Godman, *Poetry*, no. 25, p. 196). On the topos of beginning a literary work as equivalent to setting out to sea, see E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. W. Trask (London, 1953), pp. 128–30.

literature, is a wonder itself; it constitutes its own definition. The exchange reads:

P. Quid est mirum? – A. Nuper vidi hominem stantem, molientem, ambulantem, qui numquam fuit. (86)

P. What is a wonder? – A. Recently I *saw* a person standing, moving, walking, who never was.

So Alcuin responds to the question 'What is a wonder?' with something that does not define a wonder but that embodies it. A further source of dislocation is the fact that, at the word 'wonder', the tables have been turned: now Pippin is answering rather than asking, an about-turn also unknown in the dialogue tradition. Alcuin proposes that he ask Pippin '*alia mira*' – 'other wonders' – and Pippin agrees.

At this point the text has let loose of its moorings in the wisdom tradition. A cascade of riddles follows. These riddles, moreover, are not just *enigmata*, but are genuinely enigmatic: in all but the first few, the answer is never supplied. Pippin appears to guess every one correctly, but he only supplies veiled hints to the reader: it is as if Alcuin is teasing Pippin, and then Pippin is teasing us. Riddle 92 may serve as an example. The riddle performs the typical riddle trick of characterising an inanimate object as 'dead', and then constructing a paradox between 'dead' things and 'live' ones. In this case the objects in question are bells, although the text never reveals the solution. The riddle reads: '*Audivi mortuos multa loquentes. – P. Numquam bene, nisi suspendantur in aëre*', 'I heard the dead speaking copiously. – P. Not very well, unless they're hanging in the air' – a response which at once hints at the answer and magnifies the complexity of the original riddle.

Through the course of this riddle dialogue, Pippin's understanding increases: where initially he needs to be told the answer, he is soon alluding to – but not revealing – the answer himself. In this first instance, where Alcuin provides a 'wonder' – 'Recently I saw a person standing, moving, walking, who never was' – Pippin has to ask for the solution, and Alcuin reveals it: the person standing, moving and walking who never was is '*imago . . . in aqua*', 'a reflection in water'. Pippin laments, '*Cur hoc non intellexi per me, dum toties vidi hunc ipsum hominem?*', 'Why didn't I know that, when I've seen that person every day?' (88). This is typical of the conversational and self-mocking tone of this section of the dialogue, quite at odds with the formulaic interchange of earlier sections. In another example, Alcuin propounds a riddle about a pot boiling over:

'*Vidi mortuum sedentem super vivum, et in risu mortui moritur vivus*', 'I saw a dead one sitting on a live one, and in the laughter of the dead one the live one dies' (94). The dead one is a pot of water, the live one the fire on which it sits, and when the dead one laughs – boils over – the fire dies. None of this is explained, however. Pippin merely hints at the answer, '*Hoc coqui nostri norunt*', 'Our cooks know that one', and Alcuin increases the sense of collusion: '*Norunt, sed pone digitum super os, ne pueri audiant quid sit*', 'They do know it, but put your finger on your lips, so the boys don't hear what it is' (94–5).

The rapport between the two even gets to the point where Pippin dares to tease Alcuin. Alcuin asks a chick-in-egg riddle: '*Vidi quendam natum, antequam esset conceptus*', 'I saw someone born before he was formed.' '*Vidisti et forte manducasti*', 'You saw him', says Pippin, 'and perhaps you ate him' (96). '*Manducavi*' – 'That I did' – says Alcuin (97). Here the conventions of the riddle form, propounded in the first person with the formulaic 'I saw' introduction, are transmuted into the concrete world of the personal: 'You saw and perhaps you ate', 'So I did.' Typically when the riddle is elevated into literature, it is cast in verse and made elegant. Alcuin's interest is not stylistic display but communication in the service of affection.

The *Disputatio* contains seventeen riddles in all: four of these have close parallels in Symphosius, from whom they were probably borrowed, and seven have analogues in other early medieval riddle collections: Aldhelm, the *Ioca monachorum*, St-Gall 196, pseudo-Symphosius, and the pseudo-Bede *Collectanea*.[35] This leaves six that have no surviving analogues, but as the other questions in the *Disputatio* are derivative, it is probable that these riddles were part of the common stock of the time.

One surviving parallel provides an interesting contrast to the combination of succinctness, clarity and evasiveness that is the hallmark of this collection, as well as supplying an answer that has vexed a number of scholars. Alcuin's no. 101 is an animated paradox riddle: '*Quid est cui si caput abstuleris, et resurgit altior?*', 'What is it that when you take away the head, it springs back higher?' As with the other riddles, Pippin only hints at the answer: '*Vade ad lectulum et ibi invenies*', 'Go to your bed and you'll find it there' (101). The answer, as is clear from an analogue in Aldhelm, is a pillow: the trick of the riddle lies in the fact that it is the sleeper's head, rather than that of the object, that is taken away – an elegant example

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35 On these parallels, see 'Commentary', below.

of the misdirection common to medieval riddles.[36] In contrast to this simple formulation, Aldhelm's version is mired in the complexities of the rhetorical exercise:

Pulvillus
Nolo fidem frangas, licet irrita dicta putentur,
Credula sed nostris pande praecordia verbis!
Celsior ad superas possum turgescere nubes,
Si caput aufertur mihi toto corpore dempto;
At vero capitis si pressus mole gravabor,
Ima petens iugiter minorari parte videbor.[37]

Pillow
I do not want to strain belief, although these things may seem preposterous,
But open a trusting heart to my words!
I am able to swell toward the loftiest clouds on high
If the head is taken from me as the whole body is removed;
But if I am pressed down, burdened by the weight of a head,
Seeking the depths, straight away I will seem smaller in part.

Although Aldhelm's animated subject speaks in the first person, the poem itself is studiously impersonal; by contrast, Alcuin invites the listener not merely to guess from his own experience, but to bring his own world into the guessing-game of the riddle.

This use of familiar surroundings and practices is exemplified by one of the most problematic of the riddles, an example that has preserved its abstruseness to the present day. The riddle reads: '*Vidi hominem octo in manu tenentem, et de octonis subito rapuit septem, et remanserunt sex*', 'I saw a man holding eight in his hand, and from the eight he suddenly took away seven, and six remained.' Pippin replies, '*Pueri in scola sciunt*', 'The boys in the school know that one' (100). In fact the riddle is apparently a paraphrase of a verse riddle of pseudo-Symphosius:

De VIII tollas VII et remanet VI.
Nunc mihi iam credas, fieri quod posse negatur.

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[36] The riddle has remained obscure in recent times, and modern scholars have tried to understand it as a logogriphic riddle. Friedrich Schwarz suggested that the answer might be 'castrum – astrum', in line with the two logogriphic riddles of Symphosius ('Das dritte der reichenauer *Aenigmata Risibilia*', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 63 (Neue Folge 51) (1926), pp. 268–69, at p. 269, n. 1). Bengt Löfstedt has also suggested 'pediculus – ediculus' as the solution ('Zu den sog. *loca Monachorum*', *Eranos* 94 (1996), pp. 34–6, at p. 35).

[37] Aldhelm no. 41: *MGH Auctores Antiquissimi* 15, ed. Ehwald, p. 115; *Variae*, ed. Glorie, p. 425. The poem is also reprinted and translated by Hall Pitman, *Riddles of Aldhelm*; the pillow riddle is on pp. 22–3. The translation above is my own.

Octo tenes manibus, sed me monstrante magistro
Sublatis septem reliqui tibi sex remanebunt.[38]

From 8 you take away 7, and 6 remain.
Now you should believe me, it is possible to do what you might discount.
You hold eight in your hands, but, as the schoolmaster showed me,
Lift seven away, and six will remain.

The pseudo-Symphosius is not supplied with an answer either, but the references to school in both versions confirm Karl Menninger's suggestion that the riddle refers to finger-counting.[39] The system of representing the numbers by the position of the hands and fingers goes back to the classical period, and descriptions of the technique occur in more than fifty manuscripts of the early Middle Ages, as well as in those of Bede's *De temporum ratione*, of which a treatise on finger-counting forms the preface.[40] Bede's version 2 is typical:

Cum ergo dicis unum, minimum in laeua digitum inflectens, in medium palmae artum infiges. Cum dicis duo, secundum a minimo flexum, ibidem impones. Cum dicis tria, tertium similiter adflectes. Cum dicis quattuor, itidem minimum leuabis. Cum dicis quinque, secundum a minimo similiter eriges. Cum dicis sex, tertium nihilominus eleuabis, medio dumtaxat solo, qui medicus appellatur, in medium palmae fixo. Cum dicis septem, minimum solum, caeteris interim leuatis, super palmae radicem pones. Iuxta quem cum dicis octo, medicum.[41]

When, therefore, you say 'one', bend the little finger of your left hand and put the tip in the middle of your palm. When you say 'two', bend the second finger, next to the little one, and put it there likewise. When you say 'three', bend the third finger likewise. When you say 'four', raise the little finger again. When you say 'five', raise the second finger, next to the little finger, in the same way. When you say 'six', you should lift the third finger, with the middle one [between the third finger and the little finger – i.e. the ring finger], which is called the *medicus*, alone placed in the middle of the palm. When you say 'seven', put the little finger alone on the bottom of the palm, raising the rest. When you say 'eight', lay the ring finger next to it.

[38] *Variae*, ed. Glorie, p. 723, no. 4.

[39] K. Menninger, *Number Words and Number Symbols: A Cultural History of Numbers*, trans. P. Broneer (Cambridge, MA and London, 1969), pp. 201–4. (The German original was *Zahlwort und Ziffer*, rev. edn 1958.) Menninger cites the pseudo-Symphosius version of the riddle, but was apparently unaware of Alcuin's version.

[40] See C. Cordoliani, 'A propos du chapitre premier du *De temporum ratione*, de Bède', *Le Moyen Âge* 54 (1948), pp. 209–23; *Bedae Opera de Temporibus*, ed. Charles W. Jones (Cambridge, MA, 1943), pp. 329–30; *Bedae Venerabilis Opera, pars VI: Opera Didascalica* 2, *CCSL* 123B ('Turnhout, 1977); and, for a wider survey of finger-counting, A. Riecke, 'Computatio Romana: Fingerzählen auf provinzialrömischen Reliefs', *Bonner Jährbücher* 186 (1986), pp. 165–92.

[41] *Bedae Venerabilis Opera*, ed. Jones, p. 269.

The sign for eight, then, is to bend the little finger and the ring finger down; the sign for seven is to hold only the little finger down; and the sign for six is to hold only the ring finger down. Thus to make the sign for eight – or, as Alcuin says, 'hold eight in your hand' – and then suddenly to take away the sign for seven does indeed produce the sign for six.

There is also an identifiable source for the end of the *Disputatio*, and an examination of that source may reveal the skill with which Alcuin transformed standard texts into his own material. In a letter written sometime between 793 and 796, Alcuin quotes the wisdom dialogue that formed the inspiration for the *Disputatio*, the *Altercatio Hadriani*. Alcuin says:

De epistola interrogasti, quid esset? Nam 'epi' super, 'stola' habitus Grece dicitur. Unde Hadrianus imperator Epitetum philosophum inter alias inquisitiones interrogavit, quid esset cinctum? At ille videns eum epistolam manu tenentem respondit: 'Quod manu tenes.' Volens intellegere, quasi supercinctorium esset epistolae sigillum, quo a foris vestiatur cartula.[42]

You asked, what is a letter [*epistola*]? *Epi* means 'upon' in Greek, and *stola* means 'garb'. For this reason the emperor Hadrian asked Epitetus the philosopher, among other things, what is 'bound'? And he [Epitetus], seeing him holding a letter in his hand, answered, 'What you hold in your hand.' By this he meant that the seal of the letter was bound up, by which the document was garbed against the outside.

Alcuin was very fond of this image, of a letter being bound, and in a short poem he combines it with the image of opening, or solving; the image turns on the verb *solvere*, which has what in English is a double meaning, to open or solve, so that one opens or solves a letter as one might open or solve a riddle. His poem, enclosed with a letter, reads:

Nulla manus cartam discingat, ni tua, praesul;
Solve, pater sancte, et lege tu feliciter illam.
Succinctum solvat, cupiat qui abscondita scire ... [43]

Let no hand unbind the letter, praesul, but yours;
Open [solve] it, holy father, and read it happily.
Let him solve [untie] the bound thing, who wishes to know hidden things ...

Alcuin was so fond of the image of unbinding a missive that he used it in a different verse accompanying another letter.[44] In all these instances, a letter carries with it, in the name *epistola*, its own definition ('bound up')

[42] *MGH Epistolae* 4, ed. Dümmler, no. 88, pp. 132–3.
[43] *MGH PLAC* I, ed. E. Dümmler, no. 29.2, p. 248.   [44] Ibid., no. 56.1, p. 268.

in riddle form, so that every letter is an invitation to unbinding on several levels.

In the *Altercatio Hadriani*, Alcuin's model text, this initial riddle about a letter serves as a preface to the conventional metaphor for letter: *'Quid est epistola? Tacitus nuncius'*, 'What is a letter? A silent messenger.'[45] In Alcuin's version all these elements are transformed:

A. Quid est tacitus nuntius? – P. Quem manu teneo.
A. Quid tenes manu? – P. Epistulam tuam, magister.
A. Lege feliciter, fili! (108–10)

A. What is a silent messenger? – P. What I hold in my hand.
A. What do you hold in your hand? – P. Your letter, master.
A. Read happily, my son!

The *Disputatio* is framed as a dialogue, but of course it is not a conversation; it is a text. One can imagine Pippin reading this text as Alcuin sent it to him, as part of a letter. From the text, Alcuin asks, 'What do you hold in your hand?' and the real Pippin can answer, 'Your letter, master.' The *Disputatio*, a letter, an *epistola*, is, as its name suggests, something that has to be unbound, a document of 'hidden things', and this particular document above all is created to embody its name, a closed thing, full of hidden things to be opened and solved.[46]

THE RIDDLES OF THE *DISPUTATIO*: TEXT, TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

Text

The text is reprinted from L. W. Daly and W. Suchier, *Altercatio Hadriani*; the punctuation of no. 88 has been altered.

86. P. Quid est mirum? – A. Nuper vidi hominem stantem, molientem, ambulantem, qui numquam fuit.
87. P. Quomodo potest esse? pande mihi. – A. Imago est in aqua.
88. P. Cur hoc non intellexi per me, dum toties vidi hunc ipsum hominem? – A. Quia bone indolis es iuvenis et naturalis ingenii, proponam tibi quaedam alia mira; tempta si per te ipsum possis conicere illa.

89. P. Faciemus ita tamen, ut si secus quam est dicam, corriges me. –
A. Faciam ut vis.
90. A. Quidam ignotus mecum sine lingua et voce locutus est, qui
numquam ante fuit nec postea erit, et quem non audiebam nec
novi. – P. Somnium te forte fatigavit, magister.
91. A. Etiam, fili; audi et aliud: Vidi mortuos generare vivum, et in ira
vivi consumpti sunt mortui. – P. De fricatione arborum ignis natus
est consumens arbores.
92. A. Verum est. Audivi mortuos multa loquentes. – P. Numquam
bene, nisi suspendantur in aëre.
93. A. Vere. Vidi ignem inextinctum pausare in aqua. – P. Silicem in
aqua significare vis reor.
94. A. Vidi mortuum sedentem super vivum, et in risu mortui moritur
vivus. – P. Hoc coqui nostri norunt.
95. A. Norunt, sed pone digitum super os, ne pueri audiant quid sit.
Fui in venatione cum aliis, in qua si quid cepimus, nihil nobiscum
portavimus, et quod capere non potuimus, domum portavimus no-
biscum. – P. Rusticorum est hec venatio.
96. A. Est. Vidi quendam natum, antequam esset conceptus. – P. Vidisti
et forte manducasti.
97. A. Manducavi. Quis est qui non est et nomen habet et responsum
dat sonanti? – P. Biblos in silvis interroga.
98. A. Vidi hospitem currentem cum domu sua, et ille tacebat et domus
sonabat. – P. Para mihi rete, et pandam tibi.
99. A. Quis est qui videre non potest nisi clausis oculis? – P. Qui stertit
tibi ostendit illum.
100. A. Vidi hominem octo in manu tenentem, et de octonis subito rapuit
septem, et remanserunt sex. – P. Pueri in scola sciunt.
101. A. Quid est cui si caput abstuleris, et resurgit altior? – P. Vade ad
lectulum et ibi invenies.
102. A. Tres fuere: unus numquam natus et semel mortuus, alter semel
natus et numquam mortuus, tertius semel natus et bis mortuus. –
P. Primus equivocus terre, secundus Domino meo, tertius homini
pauperi.
103. A. Dic tamen primas litteras nominum. – P. .i., .v., .xxx.
104. A. Vidi feminam volantem, rostrum habentum ferreum et corpus
ligneum et caudam pennatam, mortem portantem. – P. Socia est
militum.

Translation

86. P. What is a wonder? – A. Recently I saw a person standing, moving, walking, who never was.
87. P. How can that be? Tell me. – A. It's a reflection in water.
88. P. Why didn't I know that, when I've seen that man every day? – A. Because you are a boy of good character and natural understanding, I will ask you some other wonders. Try and see if you can guess them yourself.
89. P. Let's do it so that if I guess wrong, you correct me. – A. I'll do as you wish.
90. A. A person I didn't know spoke to me without tongue or voice, who never was before nor ever will be, and whom I didn't hear or know. – P. Perhaps sleep had tired you out, master.
91. A. That's it, my son. And I heard another one: I saw the dead give rise to the living, and in the wrath of the living the dead were consumed. – P. From rubbing wood together fire is born as it consumes the wood.
92. A. It's true. I heard the dead speaking copiously. – P. Not very well, unless they're hanging in the air.
93. A. True. I saw fire unextinguished in the water. – P. You mean flint in water, I'm thinking.
94. A. I saw a dead one sitting on a live one, and in the laughter of the dead one the live one dies. – P. Our cooks know that one.
95. A. They do know it, but put your finger on your lips, so the boys don't hear what it is. I was on a hunt with some other people in which if we caught something, we took nothing back with us, and what we could not catch, that we carried home with us. – P. That's a hunt familiar to countryfolk.
96. A. It is. I saw someone born before he was formed. – P. You saw him and perhaps you ate him.
97. A. That I did. Who is it that is not, and has a name, and gives an answer to a sound? – P. Ask the rushes in the woods.
98. A. I saw a guest running along with his home, and he was silent and the home made noise. – P. Get me a net ready, and I'll show him to you.
99. A. Who is it that can only see with his eyes closed? – P. He who snores shows him to you.
100. A. I saw a man holding eight in his hand, and from the eight he suddenly took away seven, and six remained. – P. The boys in the school know that one.

101. A. What is it that when you take away the head, it springs back higher? – P. Go to your bed and you'll find it there.
102. A. There were three: one never born and died once, the second born once and never died, the third born once and died twice. – P. The first is equivalent to the earth, the second to my Lord, the third to a poor man.
103. A. Tell me the first letters of their names. – P. 1, 5, 30.
104. A. I saw a woman flying, with an iron beak and a wooden body and a feathered tail, carrying death. – P. That's a woman beloved of the soldiers.

Commentary

I have not cited riddles on the same subject with no discernible relation to the phrasing or content of those found in the *Disputatio*. These are my own notes and do not draw on the work by Daly and Suchier except where noted.

86–7. A reflection in water. No known early medieval parallels extant.
   90. A man in a dream. No known early medieval parallels extant.
   91. Fire kindled from sticks. No known early medieval parallels extant.
   92. Bells. No known early medieval parallels extant.
   93. Flint. No known early medieval parallels are extant, although the final line of Symphosius no. 76 [47] is possibly related in sense: '*Nec lignis ut uiuat eget, nec ut occidat undis.*'
   94. A pot on the fire. There are parallels in St-Gall, Stiftsbibliothek 196,[48] pseudo-Bede *Collectanea* 197, and two late medieval German-language collections.[49]
   95. Lice or fleas. Paralleled by Symphosius no. 30.[50]
   96. Chick in egg. Paralleled by Symphosius no. 14.[51] Tullius no. 8.[52]
   97. Echo. No known early medieval parallels extant.
   98. Fish in river. This is derived from Symphosius no. 12.[53]
   99. A dreamer. This may be related to Symphosius no. 99, on sleep, of which the last line is '*Sed me nemo uidet, nisi qui sua lumina claudet*'.[54]
  100. Scholastic finger-counting. This is paralleled by pseudo-Symphosius no. 4.[55] On the solution, see explanation above.

[47] *Variae*, ed. Glorie, p. 697.   [48] Printed by Daly and Suchier, *Altercatio Hadriani*, p. 144, n. 91.
[49] See Bayless and Lapidge, *Collectanea*, pp. 144 and 245.
[50] *Variae*, ed. Glorie, p. 651.   [51] *Variae*, ed. Glorie, p. 635.   [52] Ibid., p. 554.
[53] *Variae*, ed. Glorie, p. 633.   [54] *Variae*, ed. Glorie, p. 720.   [55] *Variae*, ed. Glorie, p. 723.

101. Pillow. There is a distant parallel in Aldhelm no. 41.[56]

102–3. Adam; Enoch or Elijah; Lazarus. The first two are paralleled in numerous versions of the *Ioca monachorum* and *Adrianus et Epictetus*.[57] Early medieval dialogues containing versions of all three riddles (none with the answers encoded) include the B-version of the *Ioca monachorum*, contained in the Bobbio Missal[58] and the pseudo-Bede *Collectanea*.[59] The numerals '.i.' and '.v.' beginning the answers clearly refer to the place of the letter in the alphabet: 'i' is the A of Adam and 'v' the E of Enoch and Elijah. As Daly suggests,[60] the number 'xxx' was represented by the Greek lambda in certain medieval documents, and the lambda then represents the L of Lazarus. Adam, being made from the earth, is equivalent to it; Enoch and Elijah serve as antetypes of Christ; and Lazarus was a poor man.[61]

104. Arrow. No known early medieval parallels extant.

[56] *MGH Auctores Antiquissimi* 15, ed. Ehwald, p. 115, and *Variae*, ed. Gloric, p. 425.

[57] *Gespräch*, ed. Suchier.

[58] *The Bobbio Missal: A Gallican Mass-Book (MS Paris Lat. 13246)*, ed. E. A. Lowe (3 vols., London, 1917–24), vol. II, p. 6.

[59] Ed. Bayless and Lapidge, nos. 5 (p. 122) and 123–4 (p. 136), with commentary on pp. 202 and 228.

[60] Daly and Suchier, *Altercatio Hadriani*, p. 145, no. 103.

[61] On these clues see further Daly and Suchier, *Altercatio Hadriani*, p. 145.