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The Husband's Message

The general situation in the poem is perfectly clear. Two problems are however still the subject of debate. First, does the poem start with Riddle 60, which comes immediately before it in the manuscript? (For Riddle 60 see p. 106.) The answer to this depends largely on whether one considers that the rest is spoken by a human messenger or a personified rune-stave, a device of which the Anglo-Saxons were quite capable (see Metrical Preface to the Pastoral Care, p. 130).

The second problem is what the runes in ll. 50–1 signify. Runes were the letters of an ancient Germanic alphabet, ultimately derived from the Mediterranean alphabets, which was used for carving on wood or stone and which to some extent survived the introduction of writing. Each rune (with minor exceptions) had a name which was a word beginning with the sound it represented, and the runes could therefore be used for punning statements. Thus the poet Cynewulf signed his poems by closing with a passage which contained the names of the runes which spelt his name. In this case there are two attractive solutions offered. These runes stand for Sigel, 'sun', Rad, 'road', Eor, either 'earth' or 'water', Wynn, 'joy', Mann or Dag, 'man' or 'day'. E. A. Kock proposes that the runes represent three objects by which oaths were commonly sworn, the sky (sun-road), the earth (earth-joy), and the swearer himself (man). R. W. V. Elliott suggests that the runes summarise the whole poem, hence either: 'Follow the sun's path across the sea and ours will be joy and the happiness and prosperity of the bright day;' or: 'Follow the sun's path across the sea to find joy with the man who is waiting for you.'
The Husband's Message

Nū ic onsundran pē secgan wille
trēocyn ic tūdre Æwæx;
in mec selda sceal ellor londes
settan sealte strēamas
Ful oft ic on bātes
.... gēohte
pēr mec mondryhten mín......
ofer hēah hafu; eom nū hēr cumen
on cēolpele, and nū cuman sceal
hū pā ymb mōdlufan mínes fēn
on hyge hyge. Ic gehātan dear
pēt pā pēr tirfæste trēowe findest.

Hwaet, pēc ponne biddan hēt se pisne bēam āgrōf
pēt pā sinchroden sylf gemunde
on gewitlocan wordbēotunga
pē gīt on ērdagum oft gesprēcon,
pēnden git mōston on meoduburgum
eard weardigan, ān lond būgan,
frēondsype fremman. Hīne fēhpo ādrāf
of sigeþode. Heht nū sylfa pē
lustum læran, pēt pā lagu drēfe,
sippan pā gehyrde on hilpes ēran
galan gēomorne gēac on bearwe.
Ne lēt pā pēc sippan sipes getwēfan,
lāde gelettan lifgendne monn.

Ongin mere sēcan, mēwes ēpel,
onsite sēnacan, pēt pā sūd ēnonan
ofe merelāde monnan findest,
pēr se pēdēn is pīn on wēnum.
Ne mēg him on worulde willa gelimpan
māra on gemyndum, pēspe hé mē sēgde,

The Husband’s Message

Now will I tell to you who live apart
How I grew up in youth among the trees.
On me must sons of men write messages,
Send me from foreign lands across the waves,
Thus guide their thoughts across the salty streams.
Often by boat have I sought out some land
Where my lord sent me forth to take some message
Over the deep wide sea; now have I come
On shipboard here, and now must I find out
How you feel in your heart about your love
Towards my lord. For I dare promise you
That you will find great loyalty in him.
He bids me tell you, then, who carved this wood,
That you, bejewelled, should yourself recall
In your own secret heart the vows and oaths
That you both made in former times together,
When you might still together live among
The festive cities, both dwell in one land,
And love each other. Feud drove him away
From this great people. Now he orders me
Himself to urge you joyfully to cross
The sea when at the hill-side's edge you hear
The cuckoo singing sad amid the grove.
Do not let any living man deter you
From travelling or stay you from the journey.
Go to the sea, the country of the gull,
And board a ship, that you may southwards thence
Rejoin your man across the water's ways,
There where your lord is waiting for your coming.
For in the world no stronger wish could come
Into his heart, he told me so himself,
THE HUSBAND'S MESSAGE

Than that almighty God should grant you both
That you may distribute together treasures.
And well-made rings to comrades and retainers.
He has in his possession burnished gold
Enough for him to hold a fine estate
Among the foreign people noble land
And loyal warriors, though here my lord
Compelled by need pushed out his boat and left,
And had to cross the rolling waves alone,
Sail on the sea, and, anxious to depart,
Stir up the water ways. Now has this man
Conquered his woes; he lacks not what he wants,
Horses or treasures or the joys of hall,
Or any noble treasure in this world,
O prince’s daughter, if he may have you.
About the former vows between you both,
I understand he coupled in his oath
Heaven and earth, and joined thereto himself
That he would keep, as long as he has life,
Truly with you the bond and pledge of faith
Which you made frequently in former days.

33-41. The MS is again damaged. Some words and letters are here supplied following various editors. For full details see ASFR and Leslie. Much of the translation is guessed at.

41. gelagu, following Leslie, the MS being illegible.