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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', EAr, either 'earth' or 'water', Wynn, 'joy', Mann or Dæg, '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

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The Husband's Message

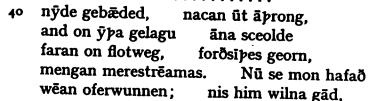
Nū ic onsundran pë secgan wille trēocvn ic tūdre āwēox: in mec ælda sceal ellor londes settan sealte strēamas Ful oft ic on bates gesöhte pær mec mondryhten min ofer heah hafu: eom nû hêr cumen on ceolpele. and nū cunnan sceal > hū þū ymb mödlufan mines frēan on hyge hycge. Ic gehätan dear Pæt þu þær tirfæste treowe findest. Hwæt, pec ponne biddan het se pisne bēam āgrōf pæt pü sinchroden sylf gemunde on gewitlocan wordbeotunga pe git on ærdagum oft gespræcon, penden git möston on meoduburgum eard weardigan. an lond bügan, freondscype fremman. Hine fæhpo ädraf of sigepeode. Heht nû sylfa þē lustum læran. pæt pu lagu drēfde. sippan pü gehvrde on hlipes oran galan geomorne geac on bearwe. Ne læt þu þec siþþan sībes getwæian. läde gelettan lifgendne monn. Ongin mere sēcan. mæwes ēpel, onsite sænacan. pæt þū sūð heonan ofer mereläde monnan findest. pær se peoden is pin on wenum. Ne mæg him on worulde willa gelimpan māra on gemyndum, pæspe he me sægde.

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

ponne inc geunne alwaldend God
pæt git ætsomne sippan mötan
secgum and gesipum sinc brytnian,
35 næglede bēagas; hē genöh hafað
fædan goldes
pæt he mid elpēode ēpel healde,
fægre foldan
holdra hælepa, pēah pe hēr min wine



ne mēara ne māōma ne meododrēama ēmges ofer eorpan eorlgestrēona, pēodnes dohtor, gif hē pīn beneah.

Ofer eald gebēot incer twēga, gehÿre ic ætsomne .S.R. geador

50 .EA.W. and .M. āpe benemnan,
pæt hē pā wære and pā winetrēowe
be him lifgendum læstan wolde
pe git on ærdagum oft gespræconn.

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

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

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.