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La poesia religiosa inglese antica
Old English Religious Poetry

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Veronka Szőke

WEEPING EYES AND THE OLD ENGLISH PHRASE
WOPES HRING

The aim of the present article is to reconsider the Old English poetic formula *wopes hring*, which is used in four poems, where the contexts indicate that the phrase refers to shedding of tears. However, the meaning of *hring* (?'sound' or ?'circle') and the origin of the formula, long subject to scholarly debate, have not been conclusively clarified. The prevailing view was advanced by Kenneth Brooks, who claims that *hring*, meaning 'circle, ring', refers to the eye and the formula indicates eyes wet with tears. He supports his thesis by pointing to the use of the compound *ēaghring* (lit. 'eye-ring'). In this essay, further lexical evidence is provided to uphold the connection between *hring* and the eye in *wopes hring*, which appears to be a learned coinage referring to the shedding of tears in contexts where crying plays an important role in the spiritual progress of the weeping characters.

Parean l'occhiaie anella sanza gemme
(The sockets of their eyes resembled rings without their gems)

Dante, *La divina commedia. Purgatorio*, xxiii, 31[1]

1. *Introduction*

The Old English formulaic phrase *wopes hring* is one of several poetic expressions that has received much scholarly attention because of the difficulty in fully determining its meaning and the imagery that lies at its core: the four contexts in which it occurs – *Elene* (1131b), *Christ B* (537b), *Guthlac B* (1339b), and *Andreas* (1278b) – all unequivocally refer to a shedding of tears

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[1] The image occurs in the description of the gluttons and effectively hints at the utmost emaciation that characterises those who loved food during their earthly life and have now been punished with starvation. The text is quoted from Natalino Sapegno's edition; Dante Alighieri. *La divina commedia. Purgatorio*, Scandicci (Firenze) 1993; the quotation is at 256. Its English transl. is taken from *The Princeton Dante Project 2.0* (Princeton University) <http://etcweb. Princeton.edu/dante/index.html> (20/10/2017).

and, when considered separately, the two words that form the phrase are not ambiguous. However, it is their combination – *wopes hring* – which entails several conundrums.

The purpose of the present article is to reconsider the much-investigated issues related to this phrase and to provide further lexical evidence that may contribute to clarifying its interpretation. To this end, it might be first useful to make a preliminary survey of the occurrences of each word in verse and their interactions with nouns related to weeping (*tēar*[2] 'tear' and *dropa* 'drop'). Whenever deemed necessary, references will also be made to their use in prose and glosses. Attention will then be focused on the main scholarly views regarding the meaning of *hring* in *wopes hring*, and, in particular, on the in-depth study by Brooks, who translates the phrase as 'circle of weeping' and paraphrases it as "outpouring of tears".[3] In his opinion, the expression was partly inspired by the round shape of the eyes from where tears originate, and he supports this interpretation by means of the compound *ēaghring* (lit. 'eye-ring'). In the *Dictionary of Old English*, this is translated as the 'region about the eyes, the eye', 'socket of the eye', and 'pupil',[4] and it occurs in prose and in glossaries as an equivalent of the lemmata *pupilla*, *orbis* and *rota*. According to Brooks, the unusual formula *wopes hring* describes the eyes "when wet with tears", and the construct must be interpreted in the light of the conceptual pattern concerning emotions and their manifestations in Antiquity and the Middle Ages. His view will be endorsed by pointing out further lexical evidences that signal to a tendency to refer to the eyes (or their parts, such as irises, the sockets of the eyes or, more generically, the region around them) by making use of nouns meaning a 'circle', a 'ring'. Glossaries are the main, though not the only, sources of such evidence.

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[2] The vowel length is always indicated except in the case of the excerpts quoted from the editions of the poems and their analysis.

[3] Kenneth R. Brooks, "Old English *wopes hring*", *English and Germanic Studies* 2 (1948-49), pp. 68-74, at 73-74.

[4] Angus Cameron *et al*., *Dictionary of Old English: A to I online*, Toronto 2018 (henceforth *DOE*). Other dictionaries used in the article are: Joseph Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, ed. enl. by T.N. Toller, Oxford 1898 (henceforth *BT*); T.N. Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* [...]. *Supplement*, with rev. and enl. addenda by Alistair Campbell, London 1973 (henceforth *BTS*).

2. Wōp *and* hring *in verse: lexical and semantic considerations*

In the *Thesaurus of Old English*,[5] the word *wōp* is listed under the heading "complaint, lamentation", alongside the other members of the word-family WOP[6] and nouns denoting 'weeping, lamentation', that is *hēaf* and *wānung*, with which *wōp* sometimes forms doublets or binomials. *Wōp* also occurs under the specific heading "shedding of tears",[7] together with the nouns *dropa* and *tēar* (both as simplices and compounds) and the verbs *(ge)tēarian* 'to shed tears', *tȳran* 'to run with tears', *(ge)wēpan* 'to weep, lament' and the verb phrase *āgēotan tēaras* 'to shed tears'.[8] *BT* records the sense 'a whoop, cry' for *wōp*, noting that its most common denotation is 'a cry of grief; wailing, weeping', and pointing out that it is also used to refer to the shedding of tears (*s.v. wōp* II a).

As for the distribution of the word-family WOP in Old English poetry,[9] the noun forms *wōp* and *wōpig* 'mournful, doleful'[10] occur 39x, and the verb *(ge)wēpan* 'to weep, wail, lament' is attested 21x.[11] *Wōp* is usually deployed to ex-

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[5] Jane Roberts *et al*., *A Thesaurus of Old English*, 2 vols., London 1995, I, p. 444 (08.01.03.04.01) (henceforth *TOE*).

[6] Capital letters are used to refer to a whole word-family which includes noun and verb forms.

[7] *TOE*, I, p. 444 (08.01.03.04.02).

[8] *TOE*, I, p. 445.

[9] The lexical data have been gathered with the aid of Antonette diPaolo Healey *et al*., *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*, 2009: <http://www.doe.utoronto.ca/index.html> (29/10/2017); henceforth *DOEC*. All citations from OE poetry are taken from George Ph. Krapp / Elliott V.K. Dobbie, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, 6 vols., New York / London 1931-53, if not otherwise indicated. The translation of the poetic excerpts are from the publications of the Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library series, unless otherwise indicated: Robert D. Fulk, *The* Beowulf *Manuscript*, Cambridge, MA / London 2010; Daniel Anlezark, *Old Testament Narratives*, Cambridge, MA / London 2011; Christopher A. Jones, *Old English Shorter Poems*, I. *Religious and Didactic*, Cambridge, MA / London 2012; Robert E. Bjork, *The Old English Poems of Cynewulf*, Cambridge, MA / London 2013; Mary Clayton, *The Old English Poems of Christ and His Saints*, Cambridge, MA / London 2013. The transl. of the *Metres* used in the article is by Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine (*The Old English Boethius. An Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius's De Consolatione Philosophiae*, 2 vols., Oxford / New York 2009). The editorial titles of the Old English poems quoted in the article are indicated in abbreviated forms, according the conventions followed by the *DOEC*.

[10] In verse, -*wōp*- occurs twice in compounds (once as a base, *herewōp* 'the shout raised by an army', and once as a modifier, *wōpdropa* 'a tear').

[11] In prose, *wōp* and the other noun forms (*wōpig* 'mournful, doleful', *wōplic* 'mournful, doleful', *wōplice* 'mournfully, with lamentations', and *bewōpen* 'tearful') are attested ca.

press a condition of physical, mental or spiritual suffering and distress, and its meaning is 'wailing' or 'weeping' in generic terms (17x),[12] whereas in some contexts, crying aloud is stressed (10x).[13] In the remaining instances (11x), *wōp* is associated with tears; the noun – also used once in the plural (*heaf and wopas*, *JDayII* 90b) – is varied by nouns clearly denoting the physical results of weeping, that is, *tēar*[14] or *dropa*.[15] *Tēar* and *dropa* are often used with specific verbs that convey the denotation 'to shed tears', such as *gēotan*[16] 'to emit from the body, pour out, shed' (which could refer to "tears, one's own blood and other bodily fluids", *DOE*) and *mǣnan*[17] 'to mourn, complain'.[18]

This concise survey points to the peculiarity of the association of *wōp* with *hring*. The latter noun usually denotes a 'ring of metal or some other hard material' (*DOE*, s.v. *hring* 1) or 'something ring-shaped', i.e. "an object

210x. The occurrences in glosses (ca. 100) include *wōp*, *wōplic*, *bewōpen*, and the compound *wōpleoþ* 'a mournful lay, a tragedy'.

[12] The occurrences will not be listed since they are not relevant to the purpose of the article.

[13] *Wōp* is associated, for instance, with the past participle *gehȳred*/*gehēred* 'heard' (*Sat* 332; *And* 1554-1555a; *Beo* 783b-786) or with the verb (*up*) *ahebban* 'to lift, raise into the air' (*Ex* 200-201a; *And* 1155a, 1156a; *GuthB* 905-906; *Beo* 128b-129a). Further emphasis on the sound produced by weeping is also conveyed by the adjective *hlūd* 'loud' (*ChristC* 997-999a; see also *And* 1155a, 1156a).

[14] In verse, *tēar* 'tear' or 'shedding of tears' occurs as a simplex 22x and 3x as a compound (*brynetēar* 'burning tear', *wollentēar* 'having hot tears', and *tēarighlēor* 'having the cheeks wet with tears').

[15] 6 simplices and 5 compounds are attested in the poetic corpus. In verse, *dropa* only refers to 'drop(s)' of tears when it forms a compound with *wōp* (*MSol II* 284a) or when it varies *tēar/tēagor* 'the water from the eyes, tears' and *wōp* (*JDay II* 34-36; *GuthB* 1055b-1057a and 1340b-1341a). DROPA has ca. 59 occurrences in prose.

[16] See also *ofergēotan* 'to cover by pouring' and *(teāras) āgēotan* 'to shed tears' (*DOE*, s.v. *ofergēotan* 1.a.iii).

[17] *Jul* 711b-712a; *GuthB* 1339b-1340a (see *infra*).

[18] The compound *tēarighlēor* 'having the cheeks wet with tears', which is a hapax in Old English, is attested once in the eddic *Guðrúnarhvöt* (st. 9.6), where the adjective *táruchlýra* is used in relationship with Guðrún mourning over the corpse of her husband Sigurðr. A similar compound, *úrughlýra* 'wet-cheeked', also occurs in *Guðrúnarkviða önnor* (st. 5.3), and its referent is again Guðrún. For a contextual and lexical analysis of the motif of weeping, see Teresa Pàroli's study: "The tears of the heroes in Germanic epic poetry", in Hermann Reichert / Günter Zimmermann (eds.), *Helden und Heldensage. Otto Gschwantler zum 60. Geburtstag*, Wien 1990, pp. 233-266; for the eddic corpus, see pp. 234-242. I thank Lorenzo Lozzi Gallo for drawing my attention to an association which is not attested in Old English, and is instead common in Old Norse poetry, that between tears and gold: several kennings for gold are built on references to the tears that Freyja shed for her husband Óðr when away from home.

whose circularity is natural and/or incidental" (*DOE*, *s.v. hring* 2).[19] The word goes back to Gmc **hrengaz* and to PIE **(s)ker-* 'to turn, bend'.[20] It is attested as *hring* in Old High German, Old Saxon and Old Frisian, as *hringr* in Old Norse. Latin *circus* 'a circle, ring'[21] and the Greek κρίκος (Homeric form of κίρκος) 'a ring, circle' are cognates.[22] The idea of circularity that character- ises *hring* is also applied to a 'group of persons (standing in a circle)' (*DOE*, *s.v. hring* 3) and 'a course or space' (*DOE*, *s.v. hring* 4). Old English *hring*, on which the survey will focus, is attested 66x in poetry.[23]

Neither *wōp* nor *hring* is specific of poetic diction. However, their combi- nation brings about a poetic formula that always occurs in the same metrical position (line b)[24] and is used in two poems signed by Cynewulf, *Elene* and *Christ B*, and in two works which are considered to be closely associated with the poet, that is *Guthlac B* and *Andreas*. As influential studies claim, *GuthB* is not just a poem with a strong Cynewulfian veneer, but probably the fifth work by Cynewulf that has been handed down to us.[25] The attribution of *And* to Cynewulf, mostly on the basis of the 150 parallels between the former and the poems signed in runic letters by Cynewulf,[26] is no longer tenable, but the

[19] On the use of *hring* in the Exeter *Riddles* 48 and 59, see Elisabeth Okasha, "Old English *hring* in Riddles 48 and 59", *Medium Aevum* 62 (1993), pp. 61-69, at 64.

[20] See Julius Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2 vols., Bern / München 1959-69, *s.v. *(s)krengh-*, I, p. 936.

[21] See Alfred Ernout / Alfred Meilett, *Dictionnaire étimologique de la langue latine. His- toire des mots*, Paris 2001, *s.v. circus*, p. 122: "sens premier 'cercle', mais a été remplacé dans cette acception par le diminutif *circulus* et a tendu à ne plus désigner que le 'cirque'. [...] A *circus* se rattachent [...] *circulus (circlus)*: cercle et objet en forme de cercle (gâteau, plat); orbe d'un astre; réunion, assemblée". See *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Oxford 1968 (henceforth *OLD*), I, *s.v. circulus* 'a circular figure or form, circle' and "a more or less circular structure [...]"; 'a belt, necklet, armlet, ring, or other circular ornament'; the senses 'an imaginary circle in the sky', 'a recurring sequence or cycle of activity' and 'a group of people assembled for conver- sation, as an audience, etc.' are also listed.

[22] Henry George Liddell / Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford 1968, *s.v.* κίρκος 'circle, mostly in the form κρίκος [...] hence, ring'.

[23] Alongside the noun *hring* (38x), the word-family HRING also includes the adjective *hringed* 'made of rings' (2x). There is an even distribution of noun forms in prose and glosses (ca. 80x).

[24] In these lines, *wop* is involved in triple alliteration.

[25] See Andy Orchard, "Both style and substance: The case for Cynewulf", in Catherine E. Karkov / George H. Brown (eds). *Anglo-Saxon Styles*, Albany, NY 2003, pp. 271-305, at 294-296, 304.

[26] See Alison M. Powell, "Verbal parallels in *Andreas* and its relationship with *Beowulf* and Cynewulf", unpubl. PhD diss., University of Cambridge 2002, pp. 283-299.

parallels are a sure sign of the intense borrowing from Cynewulfian verse by the *Andreas*-poet.[27]

3. *The meaning of* hring *in the phrase* wopes hring

The interpretation of *hring* in *wopes hring* is open to question. There is a major divide between those who translate the word as 'sound' (hence 'sound of weeping/lamentation', i.e. "loud weeping/lamentation") and those who prefer its most common and widespread meaning of 'ring, circle'. If the latter translation is chosen, the resulting kenning-like locution 'circle of weeping' or 'ring of weeping' remains opaque.

The translation of *hring* as *sonus*, first advanced by Grein,[28] enjoyed widespread consensus,[29] and was also supported by Holthausen in his *Altenglisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*.[30] However, such interpretation is inherently weak[31] since the meaning 'sound' is only attested in two glosses of Latin *signum*, that is *bellhring* 'bell-ringing' (as a summons to prayer, 3x) and *nōnhring* (bell-ringing to announce the hour for the service of nones, 1x),[32]

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[27] See the studies by George Ph. Krapp (ed.), *Andreas and The Fates of the Apostles. Two Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poems*, Boston / New York / Chicago / London 1906, pp. xxxiii-xxxvi, and Orchard, "Both style and substance", pp. 287-291 and 293.

[28] C.W.M. Grein, *Sprachschatz der angelsächsischen Dichter*, rev. by J.J. Köhler with Ferdinand Holthausen, Heidelberg 1912-14, p. 360 (*s.v. hring* 'sonus').

[29] C.W.M. Grein (ed. / transl.), *Dichtungen der Angelsachsen stabreimend übersetzt*, 2 vols., Cassel / Göttingen 1863, I, p. 163 (*Wehlaute* [*ertönten*], *ChristB*); II, p. 35 (*des Wehklagens Laute*, *And*); II, p. 103 (*Wehklage*, *GuthB*). In *El*, Grein translates the half-line in which the phrase occurs as "Weinen erhub sich da"; II, p. 134. See also Julius Zupitza (ed.), *Cynewulfs Elene*, Berlin 1883, p. 63 (*getön, schall, laut*); Ferdinand Holthausen (ed.), *Cynewulfs Elene mit Einleitung, Glossar, Anmerkungen und der lateinische Quelle*, Heidelberg / New York 1905, p. 67 (*Getön, Schall, Laut*); Krapp (ed.), *Andreas*, pp. 142-143 ('a ringing cry'); Krapp / Dobbie (eds.), *The Exeter Book*, New York 1936, p. 251 (*ChristB*); Charles W. Kennedy (transl.), *Early English Christian Poetry*, London 1952, p. 101 ('sound of weeping', *ChristB*), p. 155 ('sound of sobbing', *And*); p. 209 ('sound of weeping', *El*); W.F. Bolton (transl.), *An Old English Anthology*, London 1963, p. 111 (*ChristB*); R.K. Gordon (transl.), *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, London / New York 1970, p. 202 ('sound of weeping', *And*) and p. 231 (*El*).

[30] Ferdinand Holthausen, *Altenglisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 3. Aufl., Heidelberg 1974, p. 174 (*s.v. hring* 2., *Ton, Laut, Klang*). See also Hertha Marquardt, *Die altenglischen Kenningar. Ein Beitrag zur Stilkunde altgermanischer Dichtung*, Halle a.S. 1938, p. 197.

[31] Brooks, "Old English *wopes hring*", pp. 70-71.

[32] *BTS*, p. 654.

thus connecting *hring*, specifically, with the sound produced by a bell.[33] Notwithstanding the fact that the few extant occurrences refer to sound produced by metallic objects, the translation of *hring* as 'sound' is still adopted in several recent editions and translations of the four poems in which *wopes hring* is used.[34]

The other major interpretation, that of *hring* as 'circle', stands on firmer lexical grounds, and underlies both the ample paraphrase of *wopes hring* given by Grimm as *fletus intensissimus quasi circulatim erumpens*[35] and the more recent, plainer, renderings such as 'circle of weeping' or 'ring of weeping'.[36] In his edition of *Christ*, Cook discusses the phrase in detail and concludes that it denotes tears envisioned as "pearls upon a string, or as beads in a necklace or rosary". In Cook's view, a plausible rendering of the phrase is "circling fountain of tears".[37] A similar solution was advanced by Kock, according to whom the phrase describes tears as "the globe[s] of weeping".[38]

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[33] The weak verb *hringan* denotes the production of metallic sounds, such as the clinging of armour (*Beo* 2x, and *MSol II* 1x), and the resounding of bells, and non-human sounds (*DOE*, *s.v. hringan* 'to cling, ring', 1. and 2.a and b). (*H)ringan* is more frequent in prose and in glosses (26x), where it usually means 'to ring, make sound (a bell)', 'to sound canonical hours' (*DOE*, *s.v. hringan* 2.a) or 'to announce (certain times/events) by ringing a bell' (*DOE*, *s.v. hringan* 2.b). The denotation 'to ring round, surround' is conveyed by verbs such as *ymbhring(e)an* 'to ring round, surround' (ca. 16x) and *behringan* 'to surround, encircle' (4x), which, however, are only attested in prose. See Karl Brunner, *Altenglische Grammatik*, nach der angelsächsischen Grammatik von Eduard Sievers, Tübingen 1965, § 405.2, p. 314.

[34] See Bjork (ed. / transl.), *The Old English Poems*, p. 9 ('sound of lamentation', *ChristB*); p. 71 ('sound of lamentation', *GuthB*), p. 221 ('sound of lamentation', *El*). Consider also single editions, such as Richard North and Michael D.J. Bintley, *Andreas*, Liverpool 2016, pp. 281-282. 'Sound of weeping' is S.A.J. Bradley's choice (*Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, London / Vermont 2003).

[35] Jacob Grimm (ed.), *Andreas* und *Elene*, Cassel 1840, p. 130. See *BT*, *s.v. hring*, p. 561: "The meaning given by Grein, *sonus* [...], does not seem to suit the context very well, which [...] points to shedding tears as the idea to be conveyed".

[36] See *infra*.

[37] Albert S. Cook (ed.), *The Christ of Cynewulf. A Poem in Three Parts, The Advent, The Ascension, and The Last Judgment*, Boston / New York / Chicago / London 1900, p. 127. See Brooks, in his review of the edition (Kenneth R. Brooks, *The Modern Language Review*, 61 [1966], p. 100).

[38] Ernst A. Kock, "Interpretations and emendations of early English Texts - VI", *Anglia* 44 (1920), pp. 97-114. Richard North's interpretation of the phrase differs substantially from those considered so far. The scholar claims that "in all four instances of 'wopes hring', the image appears to be a ring, used as a metaphor for compunction", and explains it in the light of the myth of Baldr's death, the events related to it, and, in particular, the ring Draupnir

Apart from such remarks, few of the studies dealing with the formula have gone further than simply translating it until Brooks addressed the issue at length. After summarising and commenting on the interpretations of the phrase, and specifically of *hring*,[39] the scholar briefly analyses *wopes hring* in context, which leads him to the conclusion that "the idea to be conveyed by *wopes hring* is not that of a cry, but of the shedding of tears".[40]

4. Wopes hring *in context*

To gain a better insight into the meaning of *wopes hring* it is necessary to consider its use in the poems *Elene* 1131b; *Christ B* 537b; *Guthlac B* 1339b; *Andreas* 1278b and to analyse the Latin sources of the passages in which the phrase occurs. While in *Guthlac B*, *Christ B* and *Andreas*, *wopes hring* is connected with suffering, distress and physical pain, in *Elene*, it conveys joy and gratitude. In all instances, the description of emotions and their physiological manifestations accord with the pattern of the "hydraulic model";[41] rational thoughts, human will and emotions are not localised in the head, but in the heart or, more generically, in the chest cavity, which is also the repository of words and speech. Thus, the latter is, as Jager notes, "the spiritual, intellectual and verbal 'centre of action' in humans".[42] Intense mental and emotional activity triggers inner change that may have external outcomes, such as tears. As Lockett puts it, "psychological disturbances are associated

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that Óðinn laid on his son's pyre; see *id*., "Old English 'wopes hring' and the Norse Myth of Baldr", in Andrew Reynolds / Leslie Webster (eds.), *Early Medieval Art and Archaeology in the Northern World. Studies in Honour of James Graham-Campbell*, Leiden / Boston 2013, pp. 893-909, at 901.

[39] Brooks, "Old English *wopes hring*", pp. 69-72.

[40] *Ibid*., p. 71. This view is resumed in his edition of *Andreas* (Brooks [ed.], *Andreas and The Fates of the Apostles*, Oxford 1961, p. 109), and it is also supported by Jane Roberts (*Guthlac Poems*, Oxford 1979, p. 180), Earl R. Anderson ("Liturgical influence in *The Dream of the Rood*", *Neophilologus* 73 [1989], pp. 293-304, at 297, and *Cynewulf. Structure, Style, and Theme in His Poetry*, Rutherford, NJ / London 1983, pp. 168-169) and Dennis Cronan ("Poetic meanings in the Old English poetic vocabulary", *English Studies* 84 [2010], pp. 397-425, at 407).

[41] For a thorough analysis of the "hydraulic model" in the Old English literary tradition, see Leslie Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions*, Toronto / Buffalo / London 2011, *passim*.

[42] Eric Jager, "Speech and the chest in Old English poetry: Orality or pectorality?", *Speculum* 65 (1990), pp. 845-859, at 848.

with dynamic changes of pressure and temperature in the chest cavity. These physical changes resemble the behaviour of a fluid in a closed container, which expands and presses outward against the walls of the container when heated [...]".[43] Thus, grief, pain, distress, but also joy, bring about heat in the breast and could also lead to seething, swelling and boiling (both of the container and its contents). This process is usually referred to through the verbs *sēoðan* 'to seethe, boil, cook in a liquid' and *weallan* 'to well, bubble forth, spring out, flow' and the noun *wilm* 'that which wells (a fount, stream, water that surges or boils)'.[44] The increase in temperature, hence pressure, generates constriction and makes it difficult to exercise control over water and also over the physiological products of emotional turmoil, which consequently "boil over" or "burst" the container.

Brooks's view on *wopes hring* is that "*wopes hring* 'the circle of weeping' [...] would thus express a comparison between hot tears flowing out over the eye-lids (the natural result of emotions welling up within) and boiling liquid overflowing the circular rim of a cauldron". Considering the opaqueness of the phrase and the impossibility of rendering its full meaning in idiomatic Modern English, Brooks paraphrases wopes *hring* as "outpouring of tears",[45] which I shall also use in my translation of the lines in which the formula occurs.

In *GuthB*, the poet dwells on the feelings of Guthlac's servant and on the tears he sheds after his master's death, when he is about to go to Guthlac's sister, Pega, to let her know about the event,

> Gnornsorge[46] wæg
> hate æt heortan,   hyge geomurne,
> meðne modsefan,   se þe his mondryhten,
> life bilidenne,   last weardian
> wiste, wine leofne. Him þæs wopes hring
> torne gemonade.   Teagor yðum weol,
> hate hleordropan,   ond on hreþre wæg
> micle modceare. (*GuthB* 1335b-1342a)

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[43] Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, p. 5.
[44] *Ibid.*, pp. 54-64, 73-81, and 131-141.
[45] Brooks, "Old English *wopes hring*", p. 74.
[46] See *gnornsorg* 'grief and lamentation' in *El* 655b and 976b.

(He felt great grief, hot in his heart, a sad mind, a weary disposition. He knew that his lord, his beloved friend, had remained behind, deprived of life. The outpouring of tears bitterly reminded him of this: the tears, hot drops on his cheeks, welled in waves, and he felt great sorrow in his chest.)[47]

The hapax *teagor* 'tears' collocates with the adverb *torne*[48] and is varied with the compound *hleordropan* (pl.) 'tears' (i.e. cheek-drops), qualified as *hate* 'hot'. Both *teagor* and *hleordropan* are governed by the verb *weallan*; the seat of emotions (*hreþer* 'chest') is oppressed by *micle modceare* 'great sorrow'. This section of lines has no correspondence in *The Life of Saint Guthlac* by Felix, where, in the parallel passage, the focus is on the miracles that follow Guthlac's death and on the servant's fear at witnessing them.[49] This elaboration upon the man's feelings of grief and his crying is a variation of a previous section of lines in which the poet lingers on the servant's emotions as he watches over his dying master,

> fore his mondryhtne   modsorge wæg,
> hefige æt heortan.   Hreþer innan swearc,
> hyge hreowcearig   [...]
>   [...]   He þæs onbæru
> habban ne meahte,   ac he hate let
> torn þoliende   tearas geotan,
> weallan wægdropan. (*GuthB* 1051-1057a)

(he felt distress, was heavy in heart, for his master; his breast grew dark, his mind troubled [...] He could not keep his composure over it, but suffering grief, he let the burning tears pour out, the drops of water surge.)

This description develops from the Latin remark "His auditis, praedictus frater flens et gemens crebris lacrimarum rivulis maestas genas rigavit",[50] in which the focus is on the tears shed by the man. In the Old English poetic rewriting of the episode, the outpouring of tears (*let* [...] *tearas geotan*, which is varied with *weallan wægdropan*), is preceded by a description of

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   [47] My translation.

   [48] The collocation also returns in *El* (*torne* + *tearas* 1133); see also *ChristA* (*tornworda* + *tearas* 172); see *infra*.

   [49] Bertram Colgrave (ed.), *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, Cambridge 1985, pp. 158-159.

   [50] *Ibid*., pp. 154-155.

the distress that cannot but "boil over" and result in tears of sorrow. As Pàroli notes, "[...] there are few points at which the Latin text and the two Anglo-Saxon poems [Guthlac A and Guthlac B] correspond. In dealing with this subject, the English authors seem to hew to the native poetic tradition [...]".[51]

In the two passages from *GuthB*, there are close verbal parallels in the rendering of the man's frame of mind (*Gnornsorge wæg / hate æt heortan*, 1335b-1336a, and *modsorge wæg, / hefige æt heortan*, 1051b-1052a), and also in the description of the shedding of tears, in both of which we find the collocation *tēar/teagor* + TORN. These lines are a good example of what Izdebska pointed out in her analysis of the TORN word-family: "the emotion or internal state denoted by *TORN* is accompanied by physical manifestations, such as hotness, tears or weeping, and is of high intensity".[52]

The topic of loss is also developed in *ChristB*, in the sections of lines that deal with the apostles' sorrow and their weeping at the Ascension of the Lord. This motif is neither attested in the New Testament[53] nor in Gregory's *Homilia in Evangelia XXIX*, the final part of which is the poem's source. The men's grief cannot be related to Christ rebuking them for having been so slow in believing (Mc. 16:14) since Cynewulf makes no mention of it. After an allusion to the apostles' sadness (*Him wæs geomor sefa, / hat æt heortan, hyge murnende* 'Their spirit was sad, / hot around their heart, their mind mourning', 499b-500),[54] their distress is elaborated upon, first by pointing to their weeping and then by lingering on the internal process that led to the tears (inner heat → seething and burning of the feelings' container → tears). The apostles' dejection because of the departure of the Lord is expressed "[...] in the traditional language of mourning so common in Old English heroic and elegiac poetry",[55]

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[51] Pàroli, "The tears of the heroes", p. 252.

[52] Daria Izdebska, "The curious case of *TORN*: The importance of lexical-semantic approaches to the study of emotions in Old English", in Alice Jorgensen *et al.* (eds.), *Anglo-Saxon Emotions. Reading the Heart in Old English Language, Literature and Culture*, Farnham, Surrey / Burlington, VT 2015, pp. 53-74, at 67.

[53] Mc. 16:19-20; Lc. 24:51-53; Acts 1:9-11; 2:33.

[54] The similarity of these lines with those referring to Guthlac's death in *GuthB* was first highlighted by Earl R. Anderson (*Cynewulf*, p. 59).

[55] Shannon Godlove, "The elevation of the Apostles in Cynewulf's *Christ II*: *Ascension*", *Philological Quarterly* 91 (2012), pp. 513-535, at 516.

> Þær wæs wopes hring,
> torne bitolden;   wæs seo treowlufu[56]
> hat æt heortan,   hreðer innan weoll,
> beorn breostsefa. (*ChristB* 537b-540a)

(There was an outpouring of tears overwhelmed with grief; enduring love was hot in their heart, their chest welled within, their heart burned.)[57]

In this context, *wopes hring* is not varied by nouns, and the verb associated with it is *beteldan* 'to cover over, surround', which only occurs in poetry (7x) and with a high density in the *Phoen* (4x). One occurrence in the latter poem is of interest in the light of the passage in *ChristB*. The description of the birds that surrounded (*hringe beteldað*, 339b) the flying phoenix, which are referred to by means of the *comitatus* imagery, recalls Christ and his followers, in accordance with the allegory developed in the poem,

> fenix biþ on middum,
> þreatum biþrungen.   Þeoda wlitað,
> wundrum wafiað   hu seo wilgedryht
> wildne weorþiað,   worn æfter oþrum,
> cræftum cyþað   ond for cyning mærað
> leofne leodfruman. (*Phoen* 340b-345a)

(in the midst is the phoenix, encompassed by those troops. The nations look on, marvel with amazement at how the happy retinue, one flock after another, pays homage to the untamed creature, how they skilfully proclaim and glorify as king the beloved leader of their tribe.)

The circular assembly of birds surrounding the phoenix may be juxtaposed to some extent with the apostles surrounding Christ at the Ascension. As Clemoes first pointed out, Christ's ascension into heaven (*wolcnum bifongen* 'enveloped in clouds', 527b) is viewed from the perspective of the "terrestrial observer", as is also indicated by the phrase *ofer hrofas upp* 'above the roofs' (528b). The scholar claims that "the picture that Cynewulf had in mind of

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[56] A combination of the adverb *torne* with the hapax *treow(lufu)*, which is only attested in the poem, is probably moulded on the set of TORN + TEAR collocation; see *supra*.

[57] My translation.

the Ascension taking place above the earthly city has [...] these elements: the apostles standing in the round church of the Ascension [...], looking upwards; other buildings in the background; above, [...] Christ ascending in an area of clouds [...]".[58] This set of associations was further developed by Anderson, according to whom "the 'ring of weeping' [...] suggests, through the figure of a circle with the ascending Christ at its center, the unity of the apostles, Christ's comitatus, in *compunctio amoris*".[59]

Another episode that has a certain thematic and iconographic similarity with the Ascension portrayed in *ChristB* is Beowulf's funeral, in which the King is ritually mourned by his retinue. In the first phase of the ceremony, a pyre was prepared on which Beowulf's body was then placed by the men attending the ceremony. The fire, which was *wope bewunden* 'interwoven with weeping' (3146a), with the thanes' lament, burned until [...] *ða banhus gebrocen hæfde / hat on hreðre* ([...] it had broken down the bone-house hot in its very heart, 3147-3148a); then *heofon rece swealg* (the heaven swallowed the smoke, 3155b). The combination of fire and weeping within a phrase well conveys the sorrow that takes hold of the men because of their lord's death and parallels the grief felt by the apostles at the place of the Ascension.

The third use of *wopes hring*, which is found in *And*, occurs in the highly dramatic context of the second day's flogging of the Apostle in the hands of the pagan Mermedonians. In the vivid rendering of his trial, a parallel is developed between the blood flowing from the apostle's wounds and the tears streaming from his eyes,

> Swat yðum weoll
> þurh bancofan, blodlifrum swealg,
> hatan heolfre. Hra weorces ne sann,
> wundum werig. Þa cwom wopes hring
> þurh þæs beornes breost, blat ut faran,
> weoll waðuman stream. (*And* 1275b-1280a)

(Blood welled in waves over his body and it ravaged in streams, the hot gore. His body did not care for pain, exhausted by its wounds. Then came an out-

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[58] Peter Clemoes, "Cynewulf's image of the Ascension", in Robert E. Bjork (ed.), *Cynewulf. Basic Readings*, New York / London 1996, pp. 109-132, at 114 and 116.

[59] Anderson, *Cynewulf*, pp. 168-169.

pouring of tears,[60] pale over the man's breast, and the stream welled up in floods.)[61]

This passage is part of a larger section in the poem that expands upon the Apostle's sufferings and where incremental repetition is at work. This becomes even more evident if one considers the descriptions alongside the corresponding passages in the Greek and Latin versions of the Saint's life. The poet also underlines the blood shed by Andreas in the description of the torture he underwent on the first day of his imprisonment,

> Wæs þæs halgan lic
> sarbennum soden,   swate bestemed,
> banhus abrocen.   Blod yðum weoll,
> hatan heolfre. (*And* 1238b-1241a)

(The saint's body was subjected to painful wounds, wet with blood, his bone house broken apart; blood flowed in hot, gory waves.)

In the corresponding section of *Praxeis*, the author refers to this aspect by means of a concise simile: "[...] his blood was a stream just as water is upon the earth",[62] which is resumed in very similar terms some lines later: "[...] his flesh was mingled with the earth and his blood was a stream",[63] and then a third time when weeping is also cursorily mentioned: "[...] again his flesh was mingled with the earth, and his blood flowed just as water upon the earth. And while he was dragged, the blessed one wept [...]".[64] In the *recensio Casanatensis*, the representation of the physical punishments meted out by the Mermidonians and their consequences for Andreas are far more concisely dealt with than in the Greek version: "[...] throwing cords about his neck, drawing him through all the streets and lanes of the city [...] they splattered his flesh and blood and hairs through the streets and weakened him to the

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[60] In her recent ed. and transl. of the poem, Mary Clayton adopts this rendering (*Old English Poems*, p. 269).

[61] My translation.

[62] Robert Boeing (transl.), *The Acts of Andrew in the Country of the Cannibals*, New York / London 1991, p. 17.

[63] *Ibid.*

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

point of death".[65] Hence, *Praxeis* and *Casanatensis* do not contain any reference to tears in the sections that closely correspond to the Old English lines, and the brief mention of weeping in contiguous passages is not characterised by any image that could have inspired the use of *wopes hring*.

In *And*, *wopes hring* is defined as *blat* 'pale, livid, ghastly',[66] an adjective that also qualifies the bizarre personification of hunger in the poem: *blat(es) beodgast(es)* 'livid ghost at the table' (1088a).[67] By means of the compound *beodgast*, which most probably entails a word-play on *gyst* 'visitor, stranger' and *gast* 'spirit, soul, demon',[68] hunger is represented as a "foreigner who shares food with the Mermedonians and who is thus integrated into the community in the course of a meal, [which, however] is devoid of any substance [...] since the livid ghost at the table betokens famine and starvation to death".[69] The adjective *blat*, suitable for qualifying both hunger and tears, also indicates the physical results of starvation and weeping, hence an absence of colour and the emaciation and weakness resulting from an event or from a condition that consumes the sap of physical or emotional life. Thus, in the case of *wopes hring*, *blat* is both a qualification of the tears and of the apostles' dismay that generates them.[70]

The use of *wopes hring* in *El* is quite original, since joy causes the queen's weeping when she contemplates the holy nails that Judas-Cyriacus hands over to her,

> Hæfde Ciriacus
> eall gefylled,   swa him seo æðele bebead,
> wifes willan.   Þa wæs wopes hring,
> hat heafodwylm   ofer hleor goten,
> (nalles for torne   tearas feollon
> ofer wira gespon),   wuldres gefylled

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[65]   *Ibid.*, p. 49.

[66]   The adjective is only attested in poetry (*And* 2x and *ChristB* 1x).

[67]   In *TOE*, the adjective is listed under the heading "pallor, absence of colour", p. 144 (03.01.14.02).

[68]   *DOE*, s.v. *bēodgast*, *bēodgyst*.

[69]   Fabienne L. Michelet, "Eating bodies in Old English *Andreas*", in Nicole Nyffenegger / Katrin Rupp (eds.), *Fleshly Things and Spiritual Matters. Studies on the Medieval Body in Honour of Margaret Bridges*, Newcastle upon Tyne 2011, pp. 165-192, at 167.

[70]   In *ChristB*, the adjective shows the same kind of use by qualifying the wounds caused by the devils' darts, which are defined as *blatast benna* 'the most livid of lesions' (771a), and hints at both the physical and spiritual effects of evil.

cwene willa.   Heo on cneow sette
leohte geleafan,   lac weorðode. (*El* 1129b-1136)

(Cyriacus had fulfilled the woman's every desire as the noble one had asked
him. Then there was an outpouring of tears, hot head-flood streamed down
her cheeks. The tears, however, did not fall for grief over the joining of wires:
the queen's purpose was fulfilled with glory. She knelt down with pure faith
and worshipped the gift.)[71]

The passage mirrors the queen's intense emotions at contemplating the
much longed-for relics; her feelings are conveyed in greater detail than in
the factual report provided by the Latin *Inventio*: "Quos eiciens cum magno
timore, obtulit uenerabili Helenae, quae figens genua et caput inclinans,
adorauit eos".[72] In this section of lines, the array and artistry of verbal echoes
and word-play grow dense; the poet twice makes use of the past participle
gefylled (*eall gefylled*, 1130a; *wuldres gefylled*, 1134b) and puts *cwen* 'queen'–
which elsewhere collocates with *cneowmæg* 'kinsman' and (*ge/on*)*cnawan*
'to recognise'[73] – together with *cneow* 'knee', thus creating the anagrammatic
pair *cwen – cneow* (*cwene willa. Heo on cneow sette*, 1135). The use of this
collocation serves to introduce the new, final, phase of Elene's progress, now
portrayed simply as a woman venerating the nails with pure faith and devo-
tion, as the combination of this set of words with *leoht* and *geleafa* (*leohte
geleafan,* 1136a) signals.[74]

The physiological counterpart of Elene's intense feelings is her outpouring
of tears, which is referred to by means of the compound (*hat*) *heafodwylm*
'(hot) head-flood' (i.e. 'stream of tears', *DOE, s.v. heafodwylm* 2.),[75] and by
wopes hring. The verb *geotan*, one of the most frequent verbs used to denote a
shedding of tears, governs both nouns in this context. The woman's emotional

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[71] My translation.

[72] Stephan Borgehammar, *How the Holy Cross Was Found. From Event to Medieval Leg-
end*, with an Appendix of Texts, Stockholm 1991, p. 270.

[73] See also *El* 586b-587.

[74] The collocation centred on the root *l+v.+f*, that is *lof* 'praise', (*ge*)*lēafa* 'faith', *lēof*
'dear', and *lofian* 'to praise', to which *lēoht* 'light' (n.) and 'clear' (adj.) may be added, is one
of Cynewulf's favourite ones. It was first detected and studied by Eugene R. Kintgen, "*Lif*, *lof*,
leof, *lufu*, and *geleafa* in Old English poetry", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 78 (1977), pp.
309-316. See also Zacher, "Cynewulf at the interface", pp. 363-365.

[75] The compound is used in Bald's *Leechbook* where it denotes 'burning in/inflammation
of the head' (*DOE, s.v. heafodwylm* 1.).

involvement is also pinpointed by the collocation consisting of the nominative plural *tearas* (1133b) and the indirect object *torne* (1133a).[76] Once more, the motif of tears is a Cynewulfian innovation, as is shown by the comparison with the succinct account provided by the *Acta Cyriaci*.[77]

In the light of this contextual analysis, it is not far-fetched to claim that Klaeber's assumption according to which "in none of the four places in which *wopes hring* occurs, is it necessarily *synonymous* with 'tears'"[78] is no longer tenable. The analysis also shows that weeping is a subject of importance in the Old English poems considered above: the description of the shedding of tears is either an innovation or an amplification compared with their Latin sources.

5. *Clues to the genesis of the formula*

5.1. Ēaghring *'eye-ring' and its use in Ælfric*

As already pointed out, Brooks relates *hring* 'circle, ring' to the shape of the eyes or their sockets. Thus, he paraphrases the locution as "a flood of tears circling round within the (socket of the) eye". The scholar supports his interpretation of *hring* – the connection *hring*-eye – with the evidence provided by the noun *ēaghring* 'eye-ring', which indicates the 'eye', the 'region about the eyes' (according to the definition of the *DOE*),[79] or, more specifically, the 'iris' and the 'socket of the eye' (4x).

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[76] Cynewulf coins a compound, centred on the base word -*hring*, to indicate the holy nails placed in the bit of Constantine's horse (*bridelshring*, 1193a).

[77] See *supra*. The binomial consisting of tears and devotion is well attested in the Old English tradition. Its root goes back to the bitter tears of repentance shed by Peter after betraying Christ, and to the patristic literature that frequently elaborated on the subject of tears of contrition, originating from the awareness of one's sins; see Jean-Charles Payen, *Le motif du repentir dans la littérature française médiévale (des origines à 1230)*, Genève 1968. In later theological reflections, tears came to be qualified as sweet since they were considered as gateway to grace; Hannah Hunt, *Joy-bearing Grief. Tears of Contrition in the Writings of the Early Syrian and Byzantine Fathers*, Leiden / Boston 2004, and Piroska Nagy, *Le don des larmes au Moyen Age. Un instrument spirituel en quete d'institution*, Paris 2000.

[78] Frederick Klaeber, "*The Christ of Cynewulf. A Poem in three Parts*, ed. by Albert S. Cook", *The Journal of Germanic Philology* 4 (1902), pp. 101-112, at 109.

[79] *DOE*, *s.v. ēaghring* 1.a: "glossing *rota*, usually 'wheel', here perhaps 'eye' or 'region about the eyes'".

This compound occurs in prose works by Ælfric (4x) and in glosses and glossaries (9x), where it translates the lemmata *pupilla* 'pupil' (1x), *orbis* 'orbit' (4x), and *rota* 'iris; socket of the eye' (4x).[80] The use of the compound in the Ælfrician texts is quite remarkable since their sources do not contain clues that may have prompted the use of *eaghring*. In Ælfric's *Life of Agnes*, the virgin rejects her pagan suitor choosing Christ as her divine bridegroom;[81] her spiritual commitment is conveyed through a speech bearing ecstatic and sensual overtones,

> Of his muðe ic underfeng meoluc and hunig
> nu iu ic eom beclypt mid his clænum earmum
> his fægera lichama is minum geferlæht
> and his blod geglende mine eahhringas. (*Natale Sancti Agnetis* lines 45-48)

> (I received milk and honey from his mouth; and now I am embraced with His pure arms; His fair body is united to mine, and His blood has adorned my eye-rings.)[82]

In the final part of the corresponding Latin text, the author associates the blood of Christ to the cheeks of Agnes by writing *et sanguis eius ornavit genas*.[83] In this light, Ælfric's choice to associate blood with *eahhringas* 'eye-rings; the 'sockets of the eyes', is noteworthy,[84] and its result is a poetic image that Bethurum tellingly defines as "a somewhat more bizarre one in the tradition of the Cynewulfian *wopes hring*".[85] The common meaning of *gena* is

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[80] Brooks, "Old English *wopes hring*", p. 72; *BT* records the plural form *ēaghringas* 'the eyebrows, eyelids' (p. 226). In *BTS*, Toller introduces a correction and lists the singular form *ēaghring* 'the socket of the eye; also the pupil'; *s.v. ēaghring*, p. 165.

[81] *Natale Sancti Agnetis virginis*; Walter W. Skeat (ed. / transl.), *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, 2 vols., London / New York / Toronto 1966, I, line 30, pp. 172-173.

[82] *Ibid*.

[83] "Iam mel et lac ex eius ore suscepi. Iam amplexibus eius castis astricta sum. Iam corpus eius corpori meo sociatum est, et sanguis eius ornavit genas meas"; Christine Phillips, "Materials for the study of the cult of Saint Agnes of Rome in Anglo-Saxon England. Texts and interpretations", unpubl. PhD diss., Center for Medieval Studies, York 2008, pp. 217-218. Phillips points out that "it is noticeable that Ælfric changed very little when he translated Agnes' first and last speeches": *ibid*., p. 124.

[84] *OLD*, I, *s.v. gena*.

[85] Dorothy Bethurum, "The form of Ælfric's 'Lives of Saints'", *Studies in Philology* 29 (1932), pp. 515-533; the quotation is from p. 526.

'a cheek', alongside which two further senses are recorded: the singular also means 'an eyelid' (*OLD*, *s.v. gena* 3) and the plural *genae* 'the region about the eyes, the eyes' (*OLD*, *s.v. gena* 2).[86]

In the *Life of St. Swithun*, *eaghring* occurs in a description characterised by an almost surgical precision, in which a man accused of theft is punished by having his eyes pulled out and his ears cut off. Thanks to Swithun's intercession, he recovered his sight notwithstanding that his eyes "wæron ut adyde of þam eahhringum, and se oðer æppel was geemtigod and se oðer hangode gehal æt his hleore" (had before been thrust out of the eye-rings [sockets] and one apple [ball] was removed, and the other hung down whole, at his cheek", lines 279-281).[87]

Ælfric's sources were Lantfred's *Translatio et miracula S. Swithuni* and an epitomised version of this text (the so-called *Epitome*) prepared by the abbot himself.[88] In Lantfred's work, the injury inflicted on the young man is described in the following terms: *Unus autem oculus omnino erat obrutus, verum alter pendebat super eius faciem*,[89] whilst in the corresponding passage of the *Epitome* (ch. 13), the rendering is less detailed: *Et oculi eius, qui erant ferro extincti et omnino euulsi, inluminati sunt*.[90] Thus, in Old English the anatomic words used to describe the punishment inflicted on the man and its consequences are *eahhring* to indicate the sockets of the eyes, from which one of the eyeballs (*æppel*)[91] is removed, while the other hangs on his cheek (*hleor*). Instead, the Latin source only uses the common nouns *oculus* and *facies*.

In the two remaining examples, the evangelical episode of the healing of the blind at Syloe is evoked (Io. 9:1-41); in the homily *Passio sancti Bartholomei apostoli*, Christ explains to the blind man that his impairment was not caused by his parents' sins, but it is a means that allows God's miracles to manifest themselves,

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[86] These senses, however, are not recorded in the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* (*DMLBS*), which gives for *gena* 'cheek; cheek-bone'; see R.K. Ashdowne *et al.*, *DMLBS*, 3 vols., Oxford / New York 2018, I. *s.v. gena*. In the glosses, the Old English *hlēor* or *hagospind* corresponds to *gena*.

[87] Skeat (ed. / transl.), *Ælfric's Lives*, I, lines 279-281, pp. 458-459.

[88] Michael Lapidge, *The Cult of St Swithun*, Oxford 2003, p. 68.

[89] *Ibid.*, pp. 312-313.

[90] *Ibid.*, pp. 570-571.

[91] *DOE*, *s.v. æppel* 3.b 'the pupil (conceived of as ball-shaped), or eyeball'.

he þærrihte mildheortlice hine gehælde. & geswutelode þæt he is soð scyp-
pend þe ða ungesceapenan eaghringas mid his halwendum spatle geopenode.
(*Passio sancti Bartholomei apostoli* lines 293-295)

(and he forthwith mercifully healed him, and manifested that he is the true
Creator, who opened the unshapen eye-rings with his salutary spittle.)[92]

The homily *Healing of the Blind Man* resumes the same episode, and it
is a version of Ælfric's homily;[93] the generic word *oculos* used in John's ac-
count ("lutum posuit mihi super oculos et lavi et video", Io. 9:15) becomes
eahringæs in the homily, "mid lame he me smirode ofer mine eahringæs, and
ic weosc me and iseah" (He anointed me with clay on [the region around my
eyes] my eyes, I washed myself and I saw').

5.2. Ēaghring *'eye-ring' in glosses and glossaries*

Apart from the use of *eaghring* by Ælfric, the compound has further attesta-
tions as interlineary glosses pertaining to Aldhelm's prose *De virginitate* (5x)
preserved in Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale 1650. According to Gretsch, many
of these glosses were provided by Æthelwold.[94] It renders *pupilla* 'pupil' (1x)[95]
– which elsewhere is usually glossed as *sēo(n)* (35x) – and *orbis*, in the con-
text of the phrases *orbes oculorum* 'orbits of the eyes' (2x);[96] the remaining

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[92] Peter Clemoes (ed.), *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies. The First Series. Text*, Oxford / New
York / Toronto 1997, lines 293-295, p. 449; transl. by Benjamin Thorpe, *The Homilies of the
Anglo-Saxon Church*, I. *The Sermones Catholici or Homilies of Ælfric*, 2 vols., London 1844,
I, p. 475.

[93] Susan Irvine (ed.), *Old English Homilies from Ms Bodley 343*, I, Oxford / New York /
Toronto 1993, lines 41-42, p. 62.

[94] Mechthild Gretsch, *The Intellectual Foundations of the English Benedictine Reform*,
Cambridge 1999, pp. 132-133, 332-335 and *passim*.

[95] Louis Goossens (ed.), *The Old English Glosses of MS. Brussels, Royal Library, 1650*
(*Aldhelm's* De Laudibus Virginitatis), Brussel 1974, p. 253, no. 88: "pupillaru*m*: *ehringa*".
See Rudolf Ehwald, (ed.), *Aldhelmi opera,* Berolini 1919, lines 11-12, p. 230: "[...] non ut
passivos oculorum obtutus libere per aethera relaxet, sed ut certos pupillarum conspectus
demonstret [...]".

[96] Goossens (ed.), *The Old English Glosses*, p. 442, no. 4567: "oculo*rum* orbib*us*: CD
eahringū": Ehwald (ed.), *Aldhelmi opera*: prose *De virgine*, L, lines 6-7, p. 306.8: "Etenim
tam furva frontis effigies sibi soli patentibus oculorum orbibus delitescit [...]". See also Arthur
S. Napier (ed.), *Old English Glosses Chiefly Unpublished*, Oxford 1900, p. 121, 1, no. 4686.

occurrences (2x) refer to 'heavenly orbs' *orbes c(a)elorum*.[97] Latin *orbis* has a semantic range centred on the idea of something circular ("an object having the form of a circular plate, a disc"), and it could also be used "of the 'ball or round of the eye' and 'an eye'".[98]

The remaining four occurrences of *eaghring* are glosses of *rota*, which usually denotes a variety of wheels – "the wheel of a vehicle", and "a wheel as used for various mechanical purposes" – and "an imaginary circle in the heavens conceived of as revolving", and it is usually glossed as *hwēol*.[99] *Eaghring* glossing *rota* and probably meaning 'socket of the eye' is conveyed twice in a class glossary on parts of the human body that is handed down in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 730.[100] The remaining occurrences (2x) are interlinear glosses to one of the major examples of Hiberno-Latin poems, the *Lorica* 'Breastplate',[101] which belongs to the genre of prayers consisting of enumerations of parts of the human body for which protection from physical and spiritual evils is recommended.[102]

Alongside the use and the senses listed above and in the light of our analysis, it is of interest a peculiar use of *rota* meaning 'iris' in insular Latin,[103] in the *De excidio Britanniae* by Gildas,[104] where *rota* occurs in the account

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[97] Goossens (ed.), *The Old English Glosses*, p. 382, no. 3580: "orbi*bus* : C ocul*is*; ł celor*um* agminib*us* : CD *ehringū*. See Ehwald (ed.), *Aldhelmi opera*: prose *De virginitate*, ch. XXX-VII, p. 286.16 ("[...] caelestis militiae manipulo astriferis inferri caelorum orbibus conspexit"). See also Napier (ed.), *Old English Glosses*, p. 98, 1, no. 3690.

[98] *OLD*, *s.v. orbis*, I.

[99] *OLD*, *s.v. rota*, Oxford 1976, II, fasc. 5.

[100] Waltraud Ziegler, "Die unveröffentlichten Glossare der Hs. Oxford, Bodley 730", *AAA: Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 6 (1981), pp. 127-154, at 131, 143, 149 (f. 146r, nos. 253 and 278: *rota* 'eahringas'). Ziegler translates *eahringas* as 'Augenhöhlen'.

[101] See the so-called "Cambridge *Lorica*", *rotis* = '*eghringum*' (A.B. Kuypers [ed.], *The Prayer Book of Aedeluald the Bishop, Commonly Called The Book of Cerne*, Cambridge 1902, p. 86) and "Harley *Lorica*", *rotis* '*eahringum*' = 'irides' (J.H.G. Grattan / Charles Singer [eds.], *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine. Illustrated Specially from the Semi-Pagan Text 'Lacnunga'*, London / New York / Toronto 1952, pp. 138-139).

[102] Long considered a work by Gildas, it was then attributed to Laidcenn Mac Baith Bannaig, a monk at Clúain-ferta-Molua (Clonfert-Mulloe), and dated to 659; see Michael Herren, "The authorship, date of composition and provenance of the so-called *Lorica Gildae*", *Ériu* 24 (1973), pp. 35-51, at 31-38 and 49-51.

[103] *DMLBS*, III, *s.v. rota* 6.a 'iris (of eye)'.

[104] According to Herren, the connection *rota* = iris arose from glosses to the *De excidio*; Michael W. Herren (ed. / transl.), *The Hisperica Famina*, II. *Related Poems*, Toronto 1987, p. 126.

of the arrival of the Roman troops in Britannia. The fifth-century historian develops a vivid simile according to which the Romans were, "[...] si monta-nus torrens crebis tempestatum rivulis auctus sonoroque meatu alveos exun-dans ac sulcato dorso fronteque acra, erectis, ut aiunt, ad nebulas undis."[105] And the powerful impression is strengthened by describing the effect that the huge waves had on the beholder's eyes: "[...] luminum quibus pupilli, persaepe licet palpebrarum convolatibus innovati, adiunctis rimarum rotarum lineis fuscantur [...]".[106] The translation and interpretation of the final part of the sen-tence – (*adiunctis*) *rimarum rotarum lineis* – entail several difficulties, since the usual meanings of *rima* and *rota* ('a narrow cleft, crack, fissure'[107] and a 'wheel', respectively)[108] do not fit into the context, in which the plural *lineis* (*linea* 'line') is also controversial.[109] Grosjean convincingly argues that *rimae* refers to the fissures created by lowering the eyelids; through these narrow fissures, the *rotae*, that is, the irises of the eyes are perceivable.[110] In one of the recensions of the *De excidio,* the word *tautonibus* (meaning *pili palpebrarum* 'eyelashes')[111] occurs instead of *lineis*; this gives rise to *adiunctis rimarum rotarum tautonibus*, which Grosjean translates as "[...] en rapprochant les cils des fentes formées devant l'iris [...]".[112] Thus, the reading brings together *rota* and the insular noun *tauto* that, according to the *DMLBS*, means 'eyelid, eye-lash, or eyebrows'.[113]

   Gildas was a source text for Hisperic Latin, and this statement is well exemplified by the case of *rota* (= iris),[114] and *tauto* (= eyelid/eyelash) that occur together in the *Lorica* (*pupillis rotis palpebris tautonibus* "pupils,

[105]   Theodor Mommsen (ed.), *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae*, in *Chronica minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII,* III, Berolini 1898, 17, p. 34.

[106]   *Ibid*.

[107]   *OLD*, II, fasc. 5., *s.v. rima*.

[108]   See *supra*.

[109]   Winterbottom adopts an intrusive approach and replaces *rotarum* with *rotantium*, which leads him to translate *adiunctis rimarum rotantium lineis* as "when they encounter the lines of the whirling clefts"; see *id.* (transl.), *Gildas. The Ruin of Britain and other works*, London / Chichester 1978, p. 22.

[110]   Paul Grosjean, "Remarques sur le *De excidio* attribué à Gildas", *Archivium Latinitatis Medii Aevi* 25 (1955), pp. 155-187, at 181.

[111]   Mommsen (ed.), *De excidio*, p. 34.

[112]   Grosjean, "Remarques", pp. 181-182.

[113]   *DMLBS*, III, *s.v. tauto* "[τὸ αὐτό], the same, the like, (by misplacement of a gloss understood as) eyelid, eyelash, or eyebrow".

[114]   Jane Stevenson, "Bangor and the *Hisperica Famina*", *Peritia* 6-7 (1987-88), pp. 202-216.

irises, eyelids [and] the like").[115] In the *Lorica*, "[...] most of the names [parts of the body] [...] are Latin words attested elsewhere, and of these the vast majority are drawn from *Etym.* II.I".[116] However, there is also a limited group of words that is not conveyed by the *Etymologiae*, and *tautonibus* (abl. pl. of *tauto*)[117] belongs to it. In this context, *tautonibus* appears to be a synonym for *palpebris* 'eyelids', and this semantic relationship (*palpebrae* = *tautones*) is confirmed by "combined glossarial evidence".[118] Herren explains that "*tauton* = *palpebra* has no obvious etymology and one can hazard that it is in fact a 'ghost word' deriving from the Greek ταὐτόν [...] 'the same thing', and misunderstood as a Greek word meaning *palpebra*. We might imagine a Latin-Greek glossary arranged as follows: *palpebrum. blefara*/*palpebra. tauton*".[119]

The equation of *tautones* with *palpebrae* is also attested in another Hiberno-Latin work, dated to the seventh century by Herren, namely the alphabetic poem *Rubisca* 'Redbreast', which focuses on the physical features of a robin redbreast, its behaviour and habits, which are described with satirical overtones. The poet reuses a considerable part of the anatomical vocabulary of the *Lorica*;[120] *tautones* occurs in one of the two stanzas that focus on the bird's eyes, where the eyelids and eyebrows are seen as ornaments encircling the eyes; these ornaments may be lacking, but not the pupils,

> Licet ambitu:[121] absque tautonum
> super et cili-: -orum decorum

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[115] "Cambridge *Lorica*", *rotis* 'eghringum' = 'irides', *palpebris* 'brawan' = 'eyelids', *tautonibus* 'oferbruum' = 'eyebrows' (Kuypers [ed.], *The Prayer Book*, p. 86); "Harley *Lorica*", *rotis* 'eahringum' = 'irides', *palpebris* 'bræwum' = 'eyelids', *tautonibus* 'bruum' = 'eyelashes' (Grattan / Singer [eds.], *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, pp. 138-139).

[116] Herren, "The authorship", p. 47.

[117] Herren (ed. / transl.), *The Hisperica Famina*, pp. 82-83. Along with others, this line is dependent on an invocation to God so that He may *meo ergo* [...] / *galea salutis esto* (be [for me] a helmet of safety [...], lines 39-40); *ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

[118] *Ibid.*, p. 126. On the glosses of *tauto*, see also Grosjean, "Remarques", p. 182.

[119] Herren (ed. / transl.), *The Hisperica Famina*, p. 126.

[120] Michael Herren, "Some conjectures on the origins and tradition of the Hisperic poem *Rubisca*", *Ériu* 25 (1974), pp. 70-87, at 76-77. See also David Howlett, "*Rubisca*: An edition, translation, and commentary", *Peritia* 10 (1996), pp. 71-90, at 85.

[121] The supine *ambitu* is glossed *circuitu*; Herren (ed. / transl.), *The Hisperica Famina*, p. 98.

ullum glebenis:[122] ferant obtalmum
 non sine tamen: ferunt auium. (*Rubisca* 45-49)

(Though the philosophers say there may be birds' eyes without the surround-
ing ornaments of eyelids and eyebrow, yet they do not say there can be any
without pupils!)[123]

5.3. *The Greek* κύκλος *'wheel; eye, eye-ball'*

The Greek noun κύκλος features the same extension of the semantic field of
rota (to encompass the iris) of the Insular literature,[124] and probably has a met-
aphorical origin. Alongside the meanings of 'a ring, circle' and 'any circular
body', κύκλος is attested, in plural, with the sense of 'eye-balls, eyes'.[125] This
use occurs in some of Sophocles' tragedies,[126] generally as a plural form and
once as a singular, with regard to Zeus's vigilant eye.[127] Another example of
such meaning is provided by the novel *Leucippe and Clytophon* by Achilles
Tatius (II century AD), in which the earliest most detailed literary descrip-
tion of weeping and of the effect that tears have on the eyes is conveyed:
if the latter are fair, tears increase their beauty, and if they are ugly, their
ugliness is amplified. After this aesthetic equation, the novelist's attention
shifts to the attractive eye: the author compares the black pupil *crowned*[128]
(στεφανούμενος) by the white part of the eye with the generous breasts of
a fountain, from which water springs. And then he adds that 'when the salt

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[122] *Glebenis* could be a corrupted form of the Greek *glenis* 'pupils of the eye' or a form
in which the meaningless syllable -*be*- was introduced for metrical reasons (Herren [ed. /
transl.], *The Hisperica Famina*, p. 156).

[123] *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

[124] This goes back to the reduplicative PIE root *kʷekʷlo-, and it is attested in several
languages. See OE *hwēol* and ON *hvél* 'wheel'; Julius Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymolo-
gisches Wörterbuch*, *s.v. kʷel-, kʷelə*-, I, pp. 639-640.

[125] Henry G. Liddell / Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, *s.v.* κύκλος I and II (II.8:
"in pl. eye-balls, eyes [...] rarely, in sg. eye"). See also Pierre Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymo-
logique de la langue grecque. Histoire des mots*, 4 vols. in 5, Paris 1968-80, II, p. 597, *s.v.*
κύκλος: "'cercle, roue', etc. [...], tout ce qui est de forme ronde, dit de remparts, d'une assem-
blée, des yeux, des joues, d'une orbite, etc".

[126] Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* line 1270, *The Antigone* line 974, and *Philoctetes* line
1354.

[127] Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus* line 704.

[128] My emphasis.

water of tears floods around the eye', referred to as κύκλον (acc. sg.), its white part shines, whilst the black inside turns to purple.[129] This portrayal of the eyes wet with tears is close to what the Old English poet probably had in mind when he coined the phrase *wopes hring*. The metaphor of the weeping eyes as a fountain is also found in texts that are much closer in time and space to the Old English poems and prose works taken into examination in our analysis of *wopes hring*, such as the verse *De virginitate* by Aldhelm,[130] and the *Carmen de abbatibus*, which was composed by the monk Æthelwulf at the beginning of the ninth century.[131]

5.4. Sēohringc *'pupil-ring' and* wuldorbēah *'glory-crown'*

As pointed out above, the *Lorica*'s vocabulary is clearly reliant either on Isidore's *Etymologiae* or on glossaries drawn from this work,[132] and many "Hisperic words acquire their senses from Isidorian etymologies".[133] One such case is *rota*, which must be considered in the light of the iris's description provided by Isidore, in Book XI of the *Etymologiae*.[134] After having dwelt on the *pupilla* and its features, Isidore proceeds by conveying the following reference to the mid-section of the eye "circulus vero, quo a pupilla albae partes oculi separantur discreta nigredine, corona dicitur, quod rotunditate sui ornet ambitum pupillae".[135]

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[129] Book VI.vii.1-2; for the Greek text and its transl., see Helen Morales, *Vision and Narrative in Achilles Tatius'* Leucippe and Clitophon, Cambridge 2004, p. 136.

[130] *Carmen de virginitate*, lines 964-966: "et reus in tantum lacrimarum flumina fudit / irrigat et salsis oculorum fontibus ora, / donec ocellorum caruissent luce pupillae"; Ehwald (ed.), *Aldhelmi opera*, p. 394.

[131] In the description of Abbot Sigbald's entrance into the church to celebrate his first mass, the poet focuses on the man's emotions: "fontibus e calidis salse daecurrere gutte / incipiunt, Christi magnus quas excitat ardor / pectore de puro, trepidant nec guttura cantum"; Alistair Campbell (ed.), *Aethelwulf. De abbatibus*, Oxford 1967, lines 457-459, p. 37.

[132] Herren, "The authorship", p. 49. See also § 5.2.

[133] Herren, "Some conjectures", p. 75.

[134] Herren (ed. / transl.), *The Hisperica Famina*, p. 126. Isidore was also one of the most influential intellectual authorities in Anglo-Saxon England. His works were available in several monastic libraries (Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, Oxford 2008, pp. 127, 309-313 and David W. Porter, "Isidore's Etymologiae at the School of Canterbury", *Anglo-Saxon England* 43 [2014], pp. 7-44).

[135] W.M. Lindsay (ed.), *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, 2 vols., Oxford 1911 (XI.i.38).

For the sake of our analysis, the two nouns that refer to the iris – *circulus* and *corona* – and the way the iris is defined in the *Etymologiae* (the ring that surrounds the pupil is a *corona* since its roundness adorns the edge of the pupil) are very significant. Like *rota* (= *ēaghring* 'socket of the eye', 'iris'), *circulus* – of which *hring* is a cognate – denotes the 'iris' only in an insular context (*DMLBS*),[136] and it is once glossed in Old English as (*þæs*) *sēohringc* (lit. 'pupil-ring'). The compound *sēohringc* consists of *sēo-*, the most widespread Old English word for 'pupil', and of *-hring*, and it refers to the iris as a circle, a ring, that encompasses the pupil.[137] *Circulus* (glossed as [*þæs*] *seohringc*) is attested in the Latin-Old English class glossary copied on the margins of the manuscript fragment London, British Library, Add. 32246 and in the Antwerp glossaries[138] within a sequence of lemmata on the parts of the body. The source of most lemmata is the *Etymologiae*. The section of the glossary in which *circulus* appears is organized according to a loose top to bottom order that starts from the forehead (*frons*) and proceeds with the eyes (*oculi*), eyebrows (*supercilia*), brows/eyebrows (*cilia*), eyelids (*palpebre*) to the *circulus* and pupil (*pupilla*, vel *pupula*). *Circulus* is resumed a few entries after its first occurrence as a synonym of *corona*,[139] which is glossed as *wuldorbeah* denoting 'iris'.[140] This meaning is only attested here since *wuldorbeah*, that consists of the nouns 'splendor, glory' and 'ring, crown',[141] is a compound that belongs to the so-called Winchester vocabulary, and is used to gloss Latin *corona* when it denotes a metaphorical crown

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[136] *DMLBS*, I, *s.v. circulus* 'iris (of eye)' 3.d.

[137] This kind of image also surfaces in Early Middle English; see *Middle English Dictionary*, *s.v. eie* 'eye', where *cercle of the eie* denotes 'the iris', <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED13116&egs=all&egdisplay=open> (11/09/2017). The phrase *cercles of eyen* ('irises') is used in the description of Lycurgus, King of Thrace, in the *Canterbury Tales*: "The cercles of his eyen in his heed, / They gloweden bitwixen yelow and reed" ("The Knight's Tale", lines 2131-2132).

[138] David W. Porter (ed.), *The Antwerp-London Glossaries. The Latin and Latin-Old English Vocabularies from Antwerp, Museum Plantin-Moretus 16.2 – London, British Library Add. 32246*, I. *Texts and Indexes*, Toronto 2011, p. 96, no. 1773: "Circulus . þæs seo hringc".

[139] *Ibid*., p. 96, no. 1779 "Corona . ł Circulus . wulderbeah".

[140] The Isidorian *corona* is once glossed as *beag* in Cleopatra III; see John J. Quinn (ed.), "The minor Latin-Old English glossaries in MS. Cotton Cleopatra A III", unpubl. PhD diss., Stanford University 1956, p. 25. See also *DOE*, *s.v. bēag* 'iris of the eye', 1.d.iii.

[141] *Bēag* usually denotes a 'circular ornament usually made of metal' (arm-band; necklace, collar; crown […]; ring; etc., *DOE*).

as the 'crown of eternal life' worn by martyrs (the material crown being rendered as *helm* or *cynehelm*).[142]

In examining the use of *rota* in the *De excidio* and in the *Lorica*, its co-occurrence with *tauto* has already been pointed out. Similarly, in Add. 32246 the entry *corona vel circulus* is followed by *tauto*, glossed *hringban ðæs eagan*[143] (lit. 'circular bone of the eye'), in reference to either the 'eyebrow' or the 'socket of the eye'.[144] Thus, in the same context, *circulus* and *tauto* are used to refer, respectively, to the iris and the ?eyebrow / ?socket of the eye, and -*hring*- occurs twice (*seohringc* and *hringban* [*ðæs eagan*]) in the related glosses.

6. *Conclusion*

The analysis of the contexts in which *wopes hring* is used suggests that the motif of weeping represents an innovation with respect to plausible or ascertained Latin sources, or an expansion of scanty references to weeping. This is the general context which probably accounts for the unusual combination of two common nouns – *wōp* and *hring* – to indicate an outpouring of tears (*wopes hring*). In order to gain a better understanding of the origin of the phrase, attention has been focused on the use of *hring* in the poetic and prose corpus, and specifically on the compound *eaghring* 'eye-ring', which is used by Ælfric (to indicate the 'eye' and the 'socket of the eye') and in glosses (where it renders *pupilla* 'pupil' [1x], *orbis* [in the expressions *orbes oculorum* 'orbits of the eyes', 2x and *orbes c[a]elorum* 'heavenly orbs', 2x, and *rota* 'iris' and 'socket of the eye', 4x]).

My research has pointed out the insular use of *rota* (in the meaning 'iris'), which is first attested in Gildas's *De excidio Britanniae*, from where it probably spread to the *Lorica*; *rota* is glossed *eaghring* 'iris' (2x) in the "Cambridge and Harley *Lorica*". *Rota* is rendered by *eaghring* 'socket of the eye' also twice in a class glossary whose source is the *Etymologiae*, where the description of the iris was not devoid of a certain poetic flavour.[145] Another glossarial evidence concerning the use of *hring* in relationship with the 'iris'

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[142] Gretsch, *The Intellectual Foundations*, pp. 98-104. See also the verb *gewuldorbēagian* 'to crown' (*BT*).

[143] Porter (ed.), *The Antwerp-London Glossaries*, p. 96, no. 1780: "Tauto . hringban þæs eagan".

[144] *DOE*, *s.v. hringbān* 'circular bone, socket'.

[145] See § 5.2.

is also connected with Isidore: in the class glossary of Add. 32246, *seohringc* (whose structure is comparable to that of *eaghring*) glosses *circulus*, in the meaning 'iris'.

The evidence of glosses suggests that *hring* in *wopes hring* indicates (by way of metonymy) the eye(s) from which tears flow and not the sound of weeping. If this line of reasoning is correct, it might also be worth noting the recurrent connection between *wōp* and *ēage*, the common noun for 'eye', attested in prose. In portrayals of the horrors of hell that the unrepentant will experience, Christ's cautionary words with regard to hell – *ibi erit fletus et stridor dentium* (Mt. 8:12; 13:42,50) – are often quoted. This passage of the Gospel is mostly (21x) rendered literally in Old English prose and interlinear glosses, and translated as *wop and toða(ne) gristbitung*[146] 'weeping and gnashing of teeth'.[147] There are, however, six homilies in which the doublet undergoes an amplification as if the mention of *wōp* would have evoked a reference to the eye(s): hence the phrases *eagena wop* (*and toþa gristbitung*) 'weeping of the eyes (and gnashing of teeth)' (6x),[148] once attested as *eagena wop* (*and toða geheaw*).[149] The two words are also found, albeit in a different morpho-syntactic relationship, in the Ælfrician *Life of Saint Cecilia*, in which the executioner Maximus recounts with *weopendum eagum* 'weeping eyes' a vision following the beheading of some Christians, whose souls were received in heaven by God's angels.[150]

However, the phrases *eagena wop* 'weeping of the eyes' and *weopendum eagum* 'with weeping eyes' do not correspond syntactically to *wopes hring*

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[146] A variant version of *wop and toða(ne) gristbitung* (*wop and toða gebitt* 'weeping and gnashing of teeth') is also used by Ælfric (7x).

[147] See *heaf and gristbitung* 'lamentation and gnashing of teeth' (1x) and *wop and toða grystlung* 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' (1x).

[148] The doublet *eagena wop and toða gristbitung* occurs in: D.G. Scragg (ed.), *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, Oxford 1992, *Homily VIII*, l. 82, p. 147; Alan O. Belfour (ed.), *Twelfth-Century Homilies in MS. Bodley 343*, I. *Text and Translation*, London / New York / Toronto 1998, *Homily VI* (*The Second Sunday in Lent*), l. 28, p. 52; Max Förster, "Der Vercelli-Codex CXVII nebst Abdruck einiger altenglischer Homilien der Handschrift", in Ferdinand Holthausen / Heinrich Spies (eds.), *Festschrift für Lorenz Morsbach*, Halle 1913, pp. 20-179, at line 21, p. 135; Joyce Bazire / James E. Cross (eds.), *Eleven Old English Rogationtide Homilies*, London 1989, *Homily 3* (*In Letania Maiore*) l. 120, p. 52; Rudolph Willard (ed.), *Two Apocrypha in Old English Homilies*, Leipzig 1935, p. 44.

[149] Bruno Assmann (ed.), *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben*, Kassel 1889, *XIV. Ueber das jüngste Gericht*, l. 128, p. 168.

[150] *Passio sanctae Cecilie virginis*; Skeat (ed. / transl.), *Ælfric's Lives*, II, line 275, pp. 372-373.

'circle/ring of weeping', in which the relationship between weeping and the eyes is reversed: 'circle (= eye) of weeping'. That said, attention must go back to the specific contexts where *wopes hring* is used, and which are characterised by a fair degree of homogeneity: two of the poems are signed by Cynewulf and the remaining two are associated to his style.[151] The peculiar coinage must have been created by the Mercian poet (or another poet of his kind) as an expression aimed to evoke "eyes wet with tears" and also to pinpoint a number of cases in which shedding of tears is much more than a plain expression of grief and distress: in the four poetic passages, tears result from grief originating from the loss of one's master (*Guthlac B*) and of Christ (*Christ B*) or from the punishments inflicted on the apostle Andreas by the pagan Mermidonians. In one case (*Elene*), tears are originated by the joy caused by the recovery of much-desired objects. In all the poems, the outpouring of tears marks an important phase in the spiritual progress of the weeping characters.

A superb example of how the impossibility of weeping is instead synonymous with both emotional punishment and with the denial of spiritual improvement and redemption is provided by an image conveyed in Dante's *Inferno*. Ptolomea, the ninth circle of hell, is the dwelling place of those sinners who during their lifetime had betrayed friends and guests. Those sinners lie trapped in an icy lake whence only their upturned faces poke out. Repentance is no longer viable, and their suffering cannot be eased, not even by the shedding of tears since *e 'l duol che truova in su li occhi rintoppo* (for the grief that meets a barrier at the eyelids, xxxiii, 95).[152] Frost freezes the first drops and creates a crystal-like barrier which hinders the outpouring of any further tears that flow back filling *sotto 'l ciglio tutto il coppo* (the cups beneath the eyebrows, xxxiii, 99), thus enhancing their anguish and grief.[153]

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[151] See § 2.

[152] Natalino Sapegno (ed.), Dante Alighieri. *La divina commedia. Inferno*, p. 372, xxxiii, 94-99.

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