

RUNG 'ARISE' IN ANCRENE WISSE

OED cites the verb *rung* twice from *Ancrene Wisse*; it is otherwise unknown. On their devotions the author instructs his charges, 'for the *Gloria patri* always stand up (*rungen up*) and bow'.¹ The Corpus text has *rungen*, but Nero substitutes *arisen*. The author later urges defiance of the hound of hell: 'stand up (*rung up*), bestir yourself; lift your eyes and hands to heaven', where *rung* figures in both Corpus and Nero.² Glossaries describe *rung*'s etymology as obscure.³ Yet the meaning 'stand up' is clear, and remains accepted.⁴

If *rung* is not from English, French, or Norse, might it be from Welsh? If so, it would be from *rhyngu* 'to reach, attain, get'. This survives now only in the phrase *rhyngu bodd* 'to please' (literally 'reach satisfaction'). But its original sense 'to reach, attain, get' occurs in archaic texts and is confirmed by its Old Irish cognate *ro-icc* 'reaches, arrives, attains'. An Old Welsh text of the ninth century gives the phrase *ni rincir i les* 'its benefit is not reached' (= it is necessary). The twelfth-century bard Gwalchmai declares the man is blessed who may attain (*yd ragwy*) a maiden's favour. In the same century the proud poet Cynddelw asks Christ that benefit reach (*ranghwy*) him.⁵

There seems no phonological objection to derivation of *rung* from Middle Welsh *rhyngu* (imperative singular *rhyng*), while a development from 'reach, attain, get' to 'arise, stand up' is quickly grasped. The borrowing probably reflects orders to Welsh servants. They would often have had to stand up and

¹ *The Ancrene Riwe*, tr. Mary Salu (London, 1955), 9.

² Salu, 129.

³ *Early Middle English Texts*, ed. Bruce Dickins and R. M. Wilson (Cambridge, 1951), 302; *Early Middle English Verse and Prose*, ed. J. A. W. Bennett and G. V. Smithers, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1968), 555.

⁴ "Temptations" from 'Ancrene Wisse', ed. Yoko Wada (Osaka, 1994), 124, 125.

⁵ *Gatriadur Prifysgol Cymru* (Caerdydd, 1950-2002), 3139.

get things. A peremptory tone may even be discerned in the author's commands, whether to stand up and say the *Gloria*, or fight the Devil. He was most familiar with this verb in its imperative mood, like the Anglo-Indians of E. M. Forster, who knew the imperatives of Hindi verbs, but stumbled over politer forms. *Rung* would, then, reflect the servant-world of the Marches, like the AB language's *baban* 'baby' and *cader* 'cradle' (where Welsh nurses of English babies have also left their mark).⁶

Andrew Breeze

University of Navarre, Pamplona

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⁶ A. C. Breeze, 'Welsh *Baban* "Baby" and *Ancrene Wisse*', *NQ*, ccxxxviii (1993), 12-13; Richard Dance, 'The AB Language' in *A Companion to 'Ancrene Wisse*', ed. Yoko Wada (Cambridge, 2003), 57-82, at 75 n. 51.