

Recovering Unique Ælfrician Texts Using the Fiber Optic Light Cord:

Pope XVII in London, BL Cotton Vitellius C. v

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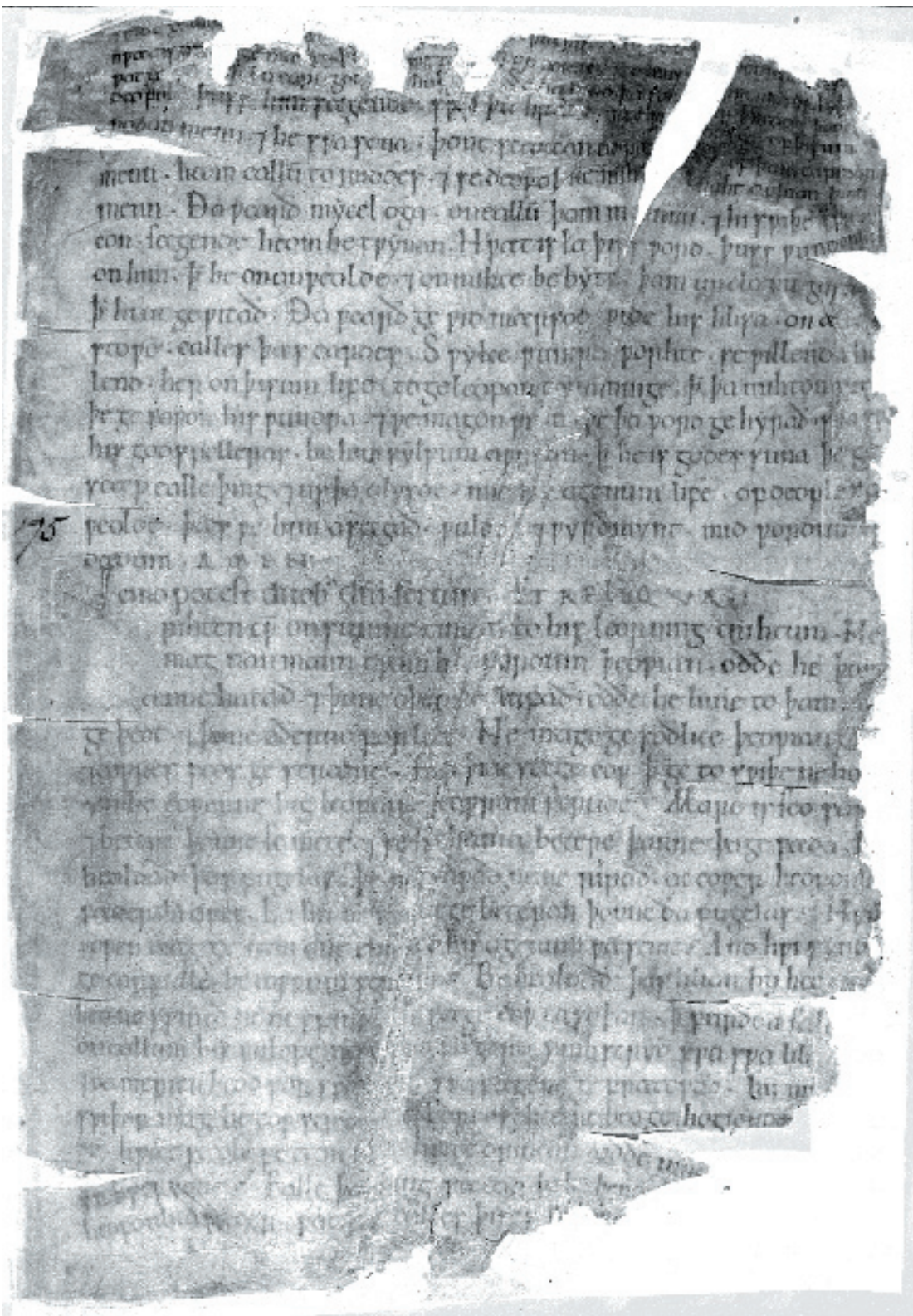
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OF the twenty-eight manuscripts examined by John C. Pope for his 1967-68 edition of Ælfrician Homilies,¹ London, BL MS Cotton Vitellius C. v (Ker 220; cited as H in the standard sigla of Ælfric MSS)² stands out as an excellent witness to Ælfric's later work and mature style. Moreover, of the seven full and clearly genuine homilies for which it supplies readings in Pope's edition (I, IV, XIII-XVII), the first and last are preserved nowhere else, and it also contains three unique passages of sermon XIa: lines 54b-74, 81-85, and 102-27 (Pope I.31-32). Unfortunately, the manuscript was severely damaged in the Cotton fire of 1731, leaving numerous lacunae which make it "not wholly reliable" as a textual authority (Pope II.564). In 1990 and 1991, in the course of translating homilies I-XVII (for the Proper of the Season) from Pope's edition,³ I had the opportunity to examine Cotton Vitellius C. v; comparing my transcriptions to Pope's meticulous edition gradually convinced me that a modern scholar might see somewhat more than Pope had been able to see. This was no doubt partly due to the more limited and focused nature of my project, but also to the availability of modern technology.

The burnt folios of Cotton Vitellius C. v were individually pasted into modern paper frames, probably in 1844 and 1845,⁴ and the tan onionskin pasting paper obscured thousands of words in the manuscript, making them invisible to the naked eye. Pope himself notes, "I made my own examination of the physical characteristics of the manuscripts, size, gatherings, script, &c., mainly in the years 1927-33" (I.13), at a time when the Parker Library at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, for example, had no electric light system.⁵ Therefore Pope, like Ælfric himself, may have often found himself peering at old manuscripts in ill-lighted rooms on short winter days. The Fiber Optic Light Cord (FOLC), a cold pencil-point of light, allows the viewer to see text hidden under the modern paste-downs, making visible letters, pieces of letters, and whole words that Pope could not see.⁶

A conscientious use of FOLC in reading MS Cotton Vitellius C. v confirms the vast majority of Pope's suggestions in whole or in part; Pope's edition demonstrates that careful editing is always on the cutting edge, with or without the latest technology or even the benefit of good lighting. In a few cases, however, evidence gathered with FOLC displaces earlier conjectures. The notes that follow contain a line-by-line analysis of the lacunae found in one homily (XVII) in Pope's collection, one of the Ælfrician texts for which Cotton Vitellius C. v. is the sole or primary witness; it is offered as an addendum to Pope's work, representing the text in its present condition under the best-available conditions of legibility, and as an illustration of the value of FOLC in recovering text from damaged manuscripts.

Homily XVII is a composite homily celebrating four of Christ's miracles; over half of it is devoted to an exposition of the miracle described in the pericope for the day, Mark 7:31-37 (Pope II.563). Pope suggests that homily XVII belongs with homilies XIII-XVI as a part of Ælfric's attempt to complete his series of homilies for the Sundays after Pentecost (Pope II.565). Cotton Vitellius C. v is the only witness for lines 1-202 and 277-314 (Pope II.567); lines 203-76 have been interpolated from *CH* II.xxiii (lines 126-97 in Godden's edition) and are found in



London, BL Cotton Vitellius C. v, fol. 175r
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six other manuscripts.⁷ It is thus an important witness not only for Ælfric's sense of style (by virtue of its mixture of older plain prose material and later rhythmical prose) but also for his compositional technique, the weaving-together of new and old material to create a coherent work.

The collation that follows notes only the lacunae in the text, placing Pope's reading and/or conjecture alongside the author's own best judgment of the visible reading where it differs from Pope; where necessary, more detailed descriptions of the state of the MS are given below each pair of readings. The line numbers are Pope's, and I have followed his complex editorial conventions (described in I.188–90); in this homily, he indicated expanded abbreviations by italics and retained the tironian 7 for OE *and*. Lacunae are indicated by parentheses; letters and words within these parentheses are Pope's conjectures, supplied, as he put it, "from imperfect traces, from the parallel readings of other manuscripts, or from the implications of the context, always with consideration of the space available in the manuscript" (I.189). Conjectures Pope deemed "unduly hazardous" (I.189) were placed in the textual apparatus; here they are listed directly below the reading of Pope's text. In many cases examination of the MS under FOLC reveals more letters than Pope was able to see, or recovers completely letters which were only partly visible to him; these letters are placed outside the parentheses in the right-hand column, indicating that they are no longer conjectural but confirmed. Sometimes Pope has listed a letter or word as visible to the naked eye that is now, in fact, only visible under FOLC, and in a few rare case Pope indicates a lacuna that is in fact visible to the naked eye.

Where Pope was unable or unwilling to offer a conjecture to fill a lacuna, he indicated the approximate number of missing letters by colons (the number is supplied in square brackets after Pope's reading); examination under FOLC often suggests a different number of spaces. While care has been taken in estimating these spaces, the condition of the water- and/or fire-damaged vellum sometimes makes such estimations almost impossible, as Pope himself realized (I.189) and these numbers are at best only approximations. Tears, stitches, worm holes, and other damaged spots are also noted; in these cases, obviously, no technology can recover the lost readings.

HOMILY XVII, DOMINICA XII POST OCTAVAS PENTECOSTEN

(Pope II.563–83; Cotton Vitellius C. v, fols. 172–5)

(fol. 172r)

10 cuma(n).

The right edge of fol. 172r is torn away, and letters are lost at the end of each line through 24.

12 swiþ(e)
 14 (þa)
 15 misli(ce ge)swencte;
 17 (:::~::~) [12 spaces]⁸
 18 þi(ss godspell ge)sette
 20 MARC(VS::~:, se þe) [7 spaces]
 MARC(VS gehaten, se þe)
 21 be(:::~::~) [18]
 be(com to þære Galileiscan)

22	(:.....) [17] (þæs Tyriscan folces	þæ(:.....) [10]
23	:.....) eiscan, [10] (geond þæt Sidon)eiscan,	[end of fol. 172r]

(fol. 172v)

24	o(:.....te)ne tyn (burhsci)ra. [13] o(n bocum synd gehate)ne tyn (burhsci)ra.	on(:.....)tene tyn (:.....)yra. [16]
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Pope calls lines 21-24 “troublesome” (II.580), and in a long note explains the rather complicated reasons for his opinion (II.580–81). He believes part of the problem is that a whole line has been lost. Examination with FOLC confirms that there is enough space for all of the readings suggested in Pope’s note.

28	mid (:.....)um; [17] mid (his halwendum fingr)um;	mid his halgum handum;
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Line 28 is a burnt spot under onionskin paper on the left edge of fol. 172v, above a horizontal split of approximately 1.5 to 2 inches. Pope supplied the conjecture “his halwendum fingrum” here, comparing it with line 121. But under FOLC a different reading is visible, with a different meaning and stronger alliteration.

29	(menu)	menu
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Noted by Pope as “partly visible” (II.568), but fully visible under FOLC.

55	(þæt)	
66	mi(ne)	
68	(yþ)um,	yþum
69	men(nisce)s	
71	(:.....)e [6] (gehwæn)e	(:.....)ne
73	for (þan þe:.....), [10]	for (þan þe:.....) e, [12]

FOLC reveals approximately 19 total spaces (including Pope’s conjectured *þan þe*); a final *e* is visible under FOLC, and before it part of what could be an *m* (though this is not certain). The remaining lacuna leaves enough room for the reading “(þan þe Crist cum)e,” which I propose based on Pope’s suggestion in his note at II:581.

74	Go(des bearn:.....) [7] Go(des bearn on anum)	
76	(:.....), [16]	(:.....), [21]

Pope reports 16 spaces here, but examination with FOLC suggests about 21. Pope offers no suggested reading; various readings such as *7 fram unstæððignesse* “and from unsteadiness” or *and to his gegaderung* “and to his gathering/assembly” would fit the context and the physical space, and create apt alliteration with *staðolfæstnesse* in line 75.

77	þæra (:.....). [10]	þæra (:.....). [15]
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133	sceol(de, ::::) [13]	
	sceol(de, þa God his mod)	
134	me(::::) [18]	me(::::) [21]
	me(nn::::)	

FOLC reveals about 21 spaces available after the *e* in *me(nn)* where Pope records 18. In the textual apparatus Pope notes that “the concluding word may have been an adverb ending in -lice” (II.572). With this in mind, I propose *menn swiðe geornlice* as a possible reading.

(fol. 173v)

135	‘(He be sea)h ... geom(erunge	‘(He be se)ah ... geom(erunge
136	to) ... dum(ba)n ... (an)dyrne word:	to) ... dum(ba)n ... (an)dyrne word:
137	(is) ... (to) ... geopenigenn(e).’	is ... (to) ... geopenigenn(e).’
138	(he)	
139	(::::) [12]	(:)æt fruman
	(us æt fruman)	
141	(::::) [8]	(::::)n
	(feorran)	

Pope notes “(Last letter either *r* or *n*)” (II.572); FOLC confirms *n*.

142	(on)	on
143	(He ge)swutelode	(He g)eswutelode
144	(þære h)eofonlican	(þære)heofonlican
146	(mid)	mid

Only the right side of *m* is visible with FOLC.

147	(m)ot	mot
178	(dæd)um,	dædum,

Pope notes that “the lower half of each letter is visible” (II.574); they are no longer so to the naked eye, but distinct with FOLC.

182	(þ)e	þe
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Only the top half of *þ* is visible with FOLC.

183	(þu)ss	þuss
184	mih(te: [1]) ⁹	mih(::::)
185	h)e	he
186	dum(ban þæt hi)	dum(ban þæt) hi
187	gefrem(man,	
188	mihte)	
189	(::::) [20]	(::::) [22]
	(þæt hi hit nanum ne sædon)	
191	(::::) þe w)e [18]	(::::) þe) we [20]
	(þæt we on þam godum dædum þe w)e	

(fol. 174r)

192	b(u)gon	bu(gon
193) [36]) [30]
194	Se idela gylp (.....) h(....., [8/12] Se idela gylp (huru is an) h(eafodleahter,	
195) sæte, 7 we (eac) [14] Gode swiðe and)sæte,) and)sæte, 7 we eac

Examination with FOLC suggests 9 spaces after *gylp* and 13 after *h* in line 194, ample room for Pope's suggested readings. The words *idela gylp* are partially covered with pasting paper, and only the bottom half of each letter is visible; not even FOLC reveals their top halves. Pope reports that "The *eafo* of *heafod* [is] almost intact though out of position" (II.574), but not even FOLC reveals it now. In 195 FOLC indicates a lacuna of 16 spaces rather than Pope's reported 14, but the vellum here is wrinkled and its original spacing is difficult to determine. After the initial *h* of "h(eafodleahter)" (194) there is a hole some 24 spaces long; the following *and* (195) is visible to the naked eye, but wrenched out of position, partly detached from the main vellum and twisted upwards, with the letters *a-n-d* stacked vertically directly above and to the left of the letters *-sæte*. Other letters are indeed visible to the naked eye here, but they are so out of position that they are impossible to decipher; the manuscript is simply too mangled. Perhaps this is where it landed with a wet thud after being tossed out a window of Ashburnham House in October 1731.

196	ascy(r)ian,	ascyrian
197	(m)ede,	mede
199	(his halgum)	his halgum

Pope indicates in a note that these words are "partially visible" (II.575). As noted above, for lines 203–276 Pope was able to rely on the evidence of six other MSS to supply gaps in the text of Cotton Vitellius C. v; evidence from FOLC helps confirm these readings.

218 g(e)sette

At this point the right side of fol. 174 is cut away; the damage affects lines through 234.

219	oferga(n).	
221	gehat(en)	
223	hi(ne)	
224	fótcopsu(m)	fótcopsum
228	g(e)seah,	geseah,
229	þ(u)	
230	tintr(egie).	
231	A(nd he)	
232	uncl(æna gast)	
233	þ(an þe we	þan (þe we
234	her ma)nega	

(fol. 174v)

235	þ (am earde ne adræfde. Ða stod þær onemm ða dune micel heord	þ (am earde ne adræfde.)Ða s(tod þæ)r (onemm ða dune micel heord
236	swyna,) ... mosto(n into ðam swynum.	swy)na, ... moston in(to ðam swynum.
237	[Ða geðafode se Haelend ðæt ðam deoflum. And hí gewiton of ðam	
238	men into ðam swynum.] Ða swyn ða e)alle	
239	s(æ, sume twa) þusend(:), [1]	sæ, sume twa þusend(:),
240	(deofel)lican scy(f)e.	deofellican scyfe.
241	(be þa)m	be þam
245	Drih(t)en	Drihten
246	Drih(t)en	
247	Dri(h)tenes	Drihtenes
256	adr(æf)de	adræ(f)de

The right margin of fol. 174v is gone.

278 (7)

(Text after line 276 is preserved only in Cotton Vitellius C. v.) The left margin is gone at the bottom of fol. 174v, creating the lacunae through line 287.

279	(Luc)as	
281	(Hæle)nd	(Hæl)end
282	(þær his eð)el	(þær hi)s eðel
284	(:.....: his) [9] (wundredon his)	(:.....:) his

Pope notes that *his* is “partially visible” (II.579), but in fact it is completely so.

285	swiðli(c:.....: [10] swiðli(cere mihte.
286	::: þ)ær [3] And þ)ær

FOLC suggests that only two characters are lost, so the abbreviation 7 would better fit the available space.

287	(:.....: [19] (fulan gaste deoflice)
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(fol. 175r)

289	ge(:.....:) Crist, [23]	geang(sumod:.....:) Crist, [9-14]
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FOLC reveals *-ang* after *ge-*. Only one word in Old English is known to begin with these letters, *geangsumian* “vex, make anxious.” The remaining space is very difficult to judge due to the damaged state of the MS at this point; Pope offers no conjectural reading, nor do I. Immedi-

to increase the legibility of damaged manuscripts, but an intelligent eye remains the best camera, and no amount of digital wizardry can replace the imagination of a diligent editor.

NOTES

- ¹ John C. Pope, ed., *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection. Being Twenty-One Full Homilies of His Middle and Later Career for the Most Part Not Previously Edited* (2 vols.; EETS o.s. 259, 260. London: OUP, 1967, 1968). Cited here as "Pope."
- ² N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: OUP, 1957).
- ³ These eighteen translations are in my dissertation: "Eighteen Sermons by Ælfric: Translations and Commentary," Diss. University of Georgia, 1991 (*DAI* 52A (1991): 2137). Assistance in that work was provided by Professor R. I. Page, then of the Parker Library, the late Professor John Dodgson of University College London, and Dr. Bruce Mitchell of St. Edmund's Hall, Oxford; the research was made possible by a grant from the Fulbright Commission. Revised under the working title *God of Mercy: Ælfric's Sermons and Theology*, it is currently under consideration by a university press.
- ⁴ According to Frederic Madden, "Madden Repairs to Cotton MSS," London, BL Add. 62576, fol. 42.
- ⁵ According to R. I. Page, in a conversation with author 17 February 1990.
- ⁶ This method was also used to recover damaged readings in MS Cotton Vitellius A. xv; see Kevin Kiernan and Andrew Prescott, et al. *Electronic 'Beowulf'* (London: British Library; Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 1999), Kevin S. Kiernan, "Digital Preservation, Restoration, and Dissemination of Medieval Manuscripts" (online at <http://arl.cni.org/symp3/kiernan.html>) and "Digital Image Processing and the Beowulf Manuscript," *Lit. and Ling. Computing* 6 (1991): 20–27. Other new technologies such as the ultra-violet light machine and the binocular microscope give scholars even more ways to decipher damaged manuscripts, but FOLC remains one of the most powerful; in an email to the author, Mr. Laurence Pordes of the British Library's Photo Studio recently remarked that FOLC has not been superseded (9 September 2002).
- ⁷ Cambridge, University Library Gg. 3. 28, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 303, Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 342, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 198, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 162, and Cambridge, University Library Ii. 4. 6. The location of this passage within each MS is given in Malcolm Godden, ed., *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series Text*, EETS s.s. 5 (London, 1979), p. xvi.
- ⁸ Pope suggests *fyligde micel*, citing the translation of the same pericope in Pope XIa.102–27 and LS XVI.134–41 (W. W. Skeat, ed. *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*. 2 vols. EETS o.s. 76, 82 and 94, 114. London, 1881–85 and 1890–1900).
- ⁹ In this rare case Pope's system of notation is ambiguous; his ":" may have been intended to represent a punctuation mark rather than an unfilled lacuna.