† eye, n.2

**Forms:** OE æge, OE ege, IOE ęge (Kentish), IOE–eME eige, eME æye, eME æie, eME eaye, eME eȝe, eME eȝȝe (Ormulum), eME eyie, eME eige, eME eȝie, eME heie, eME heȝye, ME aȝie, ME aȝe, ME ay, ME aye, ME aȝe, ME eȝe, ME ey, ME ey, ME eyhe, ME hey, ME yie (in a late copy); *N.E.D* (1885) also records a form eME æie.

**Origin:** A word inherited from Germanic.

**Etymology:** Cognate with (in different stem classes) Old High German egī (strong feminine) fear, discipline (Middle High German ege), Old Icelandic agi (weak masculine) terror, uproar, discipline (compare *AWE* n.), Gothic agis (strong neuter) fear < an ablaut variant of the Germanic base of Gothic og I fear (see *OWE* n.). Compare *OWE* n. and later *AWE* n.¹

In Old English a strong masculine (*i*-stem) ege. The underlying Germanic base was apparently originally an *s*-stem (reflected in the extended forms discussed at *EYESFUL adj.*), which was probably partly reinterpreted as an *i*-stem (with nominative singular ending *-*s) at an early date, and subsequently passed into other stem classes in the individual languages. Compare ancient Greek ἄχος pain, distress (also an *s*-stem: see *OWE* n.).

**Later development.**

During the Middle English period the sense development of this word ran parallel with the ultimately related *AWE* n.¹ which superseded it by the end of that period. *EYE* n.² and *AWE* n.¹ appear to have sometimes been perceived as regional variants of the same word.

**Obsolete.**

1.

**a. Fear, terror, dread.**

 eOE *Anglo-Saxon Chron.* (Parker) anno 457 Þa Brettas þa..mid micle ege flugon to Lundenbyrg.

 OE *St. Mary of Egypt* (Julius) (2002) 72 Þa waes he ærest swipe afyrht.., ac sona swa þeahhwæÞere mid Cristes rodetacne getrymmede hine and him þone ege fram aewarp.

 c1175 *Ormulum* (Burchfield transcript) l. 19957 Ne birþ uss nohht forr eȝȝe off dæþ Flen godeþ sop to segenn.

 c1330 (?a1300) *Arthour & Merlin* (Auch.) (1973) l. 6419 For sorwe and drede and eȝe Þai flowen euerich his weiȝe.

 c1475 (?1414) *Mum & Sothsegger* (Cambr. Ll.4.14) (1936) ll. 5 Some stode astonyed..For eye of þe eȝe.

 **b. A feeling of profound reverence or respect, mixed with fear or dread, typically as inspired by God or the divine; awe.**


2.

a. Something which inspires fear or awe; an action, event, etc., that is a source of terror, dread, or wonder.

b. Wild or violent anger; rage, madness, fury.

c. The capacity or power to inspire fear or awe. Frequently with reference to God's power.
Apparently arising from a reinterpretation of the Old English objective genitive as a possessive, e.g. in quot. OE the genitive phrase godes ege 'fear of God' came to be reinterpreted as 'God's awesome power'. This reinterpretation had occurred by the second half of the 13th century; slightly earlier examples such as quot. OE 1225 may possibly already have been understood as showing this new sense.

Phrases

to stand eye of and variants: to regard (someone or something) with awe; (in early use) to be fearful or terrified of, to dread. Cf. to stand awe of at awe n. 1 Phrases 1a, to stand in awe of at awe n. 1 Phrases 1b.

a. Originally with eye as the subject of stand, the person affected by fear expressed as the dative object (often placed before the verb), and the cause of the fear frequently specified after of (or less commonly to, from), e.g. Old English him stent ege of ðe 'eye of thee stands (or will stand) to them' (i.e. there is (or will be) fear of you on their part).

OE Old Eng. Hexateuch: Deut. (Claud.) xxviii. 10 Ealle men geseoð ðæt ðu Drihten lufast; him stent ege of ðe [L. timebunt te].

OE Paris Psalter (1932) lxxv. 9 To þam egasan sceal æghwycle habban, þe wera gastum wealdæð and healdeð; eorðcyningecum se ege stancedæð.

a1225 (OE Rule St. Benet (Winteney) (1888) Prol. 5 Cumeð ye, mine biernes, þehyreð me; Godes eie ic eow tece.

a1225 (OE MS Lamb. in R. Morris Old Eng. Homilies (1868) 1st Ser. 21 Muchel is þines eorðlices louerdæs eie, and hunfold mare is cristes eie.]

c1275 (OE Poema Morale (Lamb.) I. 18 in R. Morris Old Eng. Homilies (1868) 1st Ser. 161 Mare eie stondenæð men of monne þanne hom do of criste.

c1275 (OE Poema Morale (Lamb.) I. 5834 Him ne stod æie to naþing [c1300 Otho him ne stod eye of noþing].

c1300 (OE Guy of Warwick (Auch.) I. 7090 Of wer no þurt ous stond no eyæ.

a1450 (OE St. Faith (Bodl.) I. 105 in Archiv f. das Studium der Neueren Sprachen (1889) 82 325 Of þy torment ne stondiþ me non eye.

b. With the dative object reanalysed or recast as subject of stand and eye


OE æLFRIC Rule St. Benet (Winteney) (1888) Prol. 5 Cumeð ye, mine biernes, þehyreð me; Godes eie ic eow tece.

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OE æLFRIC St. Faith (Bodl.) I. 105 in Archiv f. das Studium der Neueren Sprachen (1889) 82 325 Of þy torment ne stondiþ me non eye.
as the object, e.g. ‘We stood no eye of them’.

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\begin{array}{ll}
a 1200 & MS \text{Trin. Cambr. in R. Morris Old Eng. Homilies (1873) 2nd Ser. 39} \quad \text{He þat is recheles and non eige ne stand of louerde.}

c 1330 & \text{Otuel (Auch.) (1882) l. 530} \quad \text{Aþein to bataille þei wente..Neueron of oþer ne stod eie.}

?a 1400 \hspace{1em} (\ast a 1338) & \text{R. MANNYNG Chron. (Petyt) (1996) ll. 150} \quad \text{He stode of him non eye.}

a 1450–1509 \hspace{1em} (\ast ? a 1300) & \text{Richard Coer de Lyon (A-version) (1913) l. 3633} \quad \text{Off hym and hys we stode swilk eye.}
\end{array}
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