

# *XMM-Newton* observations of the massive colliding wind binary and non-thermal radio emitter Cyg OB2 #8A (O6If + O5.5III(f))\*

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## ABSTRACT

We report on the results of four *XMM-Newton* observations separated by about ten days from each other of Cyg OB2 #8A (O6If + O5.5III(f)). This massive colliding wind binary is a very bright X-ray emitter – one of the first X-ray emitting O-stars discovered by the *Einstein* satellite – as well as a confirmed non-thermal radio emitter whose binarity was discovered quite recently. The X-ray spectrum between 0.5 and 10.0 keV is essentially thermal, and is best fitted with a three-component model with temperatures of about 3, 9 and 20 MK. The X-ray luminosity corrected for the interstellar absorption is rather large, i.e. about  $10^{34}$  erg s<sup>-1</sup>. Compared to the ‘canonical’  $L_X/L_{bol}$  ratio of O-type stars, Cyg OB2 #8A was a factor 13–19 overluminous in X-rays during our observations. The EPIC spectra did not reveal any evidence for the presence of a non-thermal contribution in X-rays. This is not unexpected considering that the simultaneous detections of non-thermal radiation in the radio and soft X-ray (below 10.0 keV) domains is unlikely (De Becker et al. 2005b). Our data reveal a significant decrease in the X-ray flux from apastron to periastron with an amplitude of about 20%. Combining our *XMM-Newton* results with those from previous *ROSAT*-PSPC and *ASCA*-SIS observations, we obtain a light curve suggesting a phase-locked X-ray variability. The maximum emission level occurs around phase 0.75, and the minimum is probably seen shortly after the periastron passage. Using hydrodynamic simulations, we find a maximum of the X-ray emission close to phase 0.75 as well, but the computed X-ray luminosity is in excess by about a factor 6 to 8. We propose that at least part of this discrepancy may be explained by overestimated mass loss rates, and partly by the fact that higher order effects, such as radiative inhibition, were not taken into account in our simulations. The high X-ray luminosity, the strong phase-locked variability and the spectral shape of the X-ray emission of Cyg OB2 #8A revealed by our investigation point undoubtedly to X-ray emission dominated by colliding winds.

**Key words:** stars: early-type – stars: winds, outflows – stars: individual: Cyg OB2 #8A – X-rays: stars – stars: binaries: general

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Cyg OB2 (VI Cygni) association has several particularities that stimulated the interest of astronomers. It has a diameter of about 2°, corresponding to about 60 pc at a distance of 1.7 kpc (Knödseder

2000). It harbours a huge number of early-type stars: about 100 O-type and probably more than 2000 B-type stars (Knödseder 2000; Comerón et al. 2002). Considering its mass, density and size, Knödseder (2000) proposed it may be the first object in the Galaxy to be re-classified as a young globular cluster. However, a complete census of the massive star content of Cyg OB2 is not easy to achieve because of the heavy extinction in this direction (Comerón et al. 2002). So far, a spectral classification has only been proposed for its brightest and bluest members (Massey & Thompson 1991).

Another particularity of Cyg OB2 is that it contains some of the brightest OB stars of our Galaxy (see e.g. Herrero et al. 2002),

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among which we find some of the brightest X-ray emitting early-type stars. Historically, the *Einstein* X-ray observatory discovered the first X-ray sources whose optical counterparts were known to be massive stars in Cyg OB2, i.e. Cyg OB2 #5, #8A, #9, and #12 (Harnden et al. 1979). The same field was further investigated with various X-ray observatories: *ROSAT* (Waldron et al. 1998), *ASCA* (Kitamoto & Mukai 1996; De Becker 2001) and more recently *Chandra* (Waldron et al. 2004). This paper is the first of a series presenting the *XMM-Newton* view of Cyg OB2. It will focus on its brightest X-ray emitter, i.e. Cyg OB2 #8A (BD +40° 4227).

Cyg OB2 #8A was recently discovered to be a binary system consisting of an O6I(f) primary and an O5.5III(f) secondary (De Becker et al. 2004c; De Becker & Rauw 2006). The system is eccentric ( $e = 0.24 \pm 0.04$ ) with a period of  $21.908 \pm 0.040$  d. The fact that Cyg OB2 #8A is a binary system could reconcile the high bolometric luminosity reported by Herrero et al. (2002) with its spectral classification, believed so far to be a single O5.5I(f) star. The analysis of a time series of the He II  $\lambda$  4686 line revealed a phase-locked profile variability likely attributed to a wind-wind interaction (De Becker & Rauw 2006).

In the framework of the campaign devoted to the multiwavelength study of non-thermal radio emitters (see De Becker 2005), Cyg OB2 #8A is a particularly interesting target. The non-thermal radio emission, supposed to be synchrotron radiation (White 1985), requires (i) the presence of a magnetic field and (ii) the existence of a population of relativistic electrons. However, although in the past few years the first direct measurements of surface magnetic fields have been performed for a few early-type stars, e.g.  $\beta$  Cep (Donati et al. 2001),  $\theta^1$  Ori C (Donati et al. 2002) and  $\zeta$  Cas (Neiner et al. 2003), the estimation of the strength of the magnetic field of massive stars remains a difficult task. Therefore our knowledge of magnetic fields in early-type stars is at most fragmentary. The relativistic electrons are supposed to be accelerated through the first order Fermi mechanism described for instance by Bell (1978), and applied to the case of massive stars by Pollock (1987), Eichler & Usov (1993) and Chen & White (1994). This process requires the presence of hydrodynamic shocks. We mention that an alternative scenario was proposed by Jardine et al. (1996), but we will assume here that the first order Fermi mechanism in the presence of hydrodynamic shocks (the so-called Diffusive Shock Acceleration - DSA - mechanism) is the dominant process. For a discussion of the physical processes involved in the general scenario of the non-thermal emission from massive stars, we refer e.g. to De Becker et al. (2005a) and references therein. The issue to be addressed here is that of the nature of these shocks: are they intrinsic to the stellar winds (see e.g. Feldmeier et al. 1997), or are they due to the wind-wind collision in a binary system (see e.g. Stevens et al. 1992).

In the case of Wolf-Rayet (WR) stars, the non-thermal radio emitters are mostly binary systems (see Dougherty & Williams 2000 and Rauw 2004 for reviews). But for O-stars, the situation is less clear even though the fraction of binaries (confirmed or suspected) among non-thermal radio emitters has recently evolved to a value closer to that of WR stars (see De Becker 2005). The recent discovery of the binarity of Cyg OB2 #8A lends further support to the second scenario where the population of relativistic electrons, and consequently the non-thermal radio emission, is produced in the interaction zone between the winds of two stars (in this binary system).

In addition, one can wonder whether non-thermal radiation can be produced in the high-energy domain as a counterpart of this non-thermal emission in the radio waveband. Indeed, as rel-

ativistic electrons are present close to a source of UV photons, i.e. the photosphere of the star(s), other mechanisms such as inverse Compton (IC) scattering are expected to play a significant role in their cooling. As a result, these stars could be non-thermal emitters both in the X-ray and soft  $\gamma$ -ray domains as well. In this context, several targets have been investigated in the X-ray domain with *XMM-Newton*: 9 Sgr (Rauw et al. 2002), HD 168112 (De Becker et al. 2004b) and HD 167971 (De Becker et al. 2005b). Up to now, no unambiguous detection of non-thermal X-ray emission has been revealed by the X-ray observations of non-thermal radio emitters.

Beside the putative non-thermal emission, the X-ray spectrum of massive binaries like Cyg OB2 #8A is expected to be dominated by thermal emission produced by the plasma heated by hydrodynamic shocks due to intrinsic instabilities or to the wind-wind collision. As a colliding wind binary, Cyg OB2 #8A might be compared to other massive binaries where the colliding winds contribute significantly to the thermal X-ray emission (see for instance WR 140, Pollock et al. 2005; and WR 25, Pollock & Corcoran 2005). In this context, the possibility to detect a non-thermal emission component as discussed above will depend strongly on the properties of the thermal emission contributions. De Becker et al. (2005b) discussed the unlikelihood of the simultaneous detection of non-thermal radio and soft X-ray emission and proposed that short period binaries (a few days) were more likely to present a non-thermal X-ray emission below 10.0 keV than wide binaries. To investigate the X-ray emission of the massive members of Cyg OB2, we obtained four pointings with the *XMM-Newton* X-ray observatory. This paper is devoted to the massive binary Cyg OB2 #8A. The study of the other bright X-ray emitting massive stars, along with that of other fainter sources of the field, is postponed to a forthcoming paper.

The present paper is organized as follows. Section 2 describes the observations and the data reduction procedure. The spectral analysis of EPIC and RGS data of Cyg OB2 #8A is discussed in Sect. 3, whilst Sect. 4 is devoted to a discussion of the X-ray luminosity and to its variability. The discussion of archive X-ray data is provided in Sect. 5. Section 6 is devoted to a general discussion. Finally, Sect. 7 summarizes the main results of this analysis and presents the conclusions.

## 2 OBSERVATIONS

We have obtained 4 observations of Cyg OB2 with the *XMM-Newton* satellite, with a separation of about ten days between each pointing (see Table 1). The aim-point was set to the position of Cyg OB2 #8A in order to obtain high resolution RGS spectra of this system. Because of the brightness of the massive stars located in the field of view we used the EPIC medium filter to reject optical light.

### 2.1 EPIC data

#### 2.1.1 Data reduction

All three EPIC instruments were operated in the full frame mode (Turner et al. 2001, Strüder et al. 2001). We used the version 6.0.0 of the *XMM* Science Analysis System (SAS) for the data reduction. The raw EPIC data of the four pointings were processed through the `emproc` and `epproc` tasks. The event lists were screened in the standard way: we considered only events with pattern 0–12 and pattern 0–4 respectively for EPIC-MOS and EPIC-pn.

**Table 1.** Observations of Cyg OB2 performed in 2004 with *XMM-Newton*. The columns yield respectively the (1) revolution number, (2) the observation ID, (3) the observation date, (4) the beginning and ending times expressed in Julian days, (5) the orbital phase at mid-exposure according to the ephemeris determined by De Becker et al. (2004c), and finally (6) the performed exposure time expressed in ks.

Rev.	Obs. ID	Date	JD −2 453 300	$\phi$	Exp. (ks)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
896	0200450201	10/29-30	8.458 – 8.701	0.534	21
901	0200450301	11/08-09	18.425 – 18.691	0.989	23
906	0200450401	11/18-19	28.399 – 28.688	0.445	25
911	0200450501	11/28-29	38.372 – 38.639	0.900	23

**Table 2.** Effective exposure time of the Cyg OB2 observations after rejection of the flare contaminated time intervals.

	Obs. 1	Obs. 2	Obs. 3	Obs. 4
EPIC-MOS1	18.6 ks	20.9 ks	22.9 ks	12.6 ks
EPIC-MOS2	18.2 ks	20.3 ks	22.6 ks	12.9 ks
EPIC-pn	14.9 ks	15.2 ks	19.0 ks	9.0 ks
RGS1	18.0 ks	19.7 ks	20.1 ks	12.2 ks
RGS2	17.9 ks	19.1 ks	19.8 ks	12.2 ks

We selected the source X-ray events from inside a 60 arcsec radius circular region centered on Cyg OB2 #8A, excluding its intersection with a circular 15 arcsec radius region centered on Cyg OB2 #8C (RA = 20:33:17.9 and DEC = +41:18:29.5, Equinox 2000.0). The background region was defined as an annulus centered on the source and covering the same area as the circular source region, excluding its intersection with a 15 arcsec circular region centered on a point source (RA = 20:33:13.9 and DEC = +41:20:21.4, Equinox 2000.0). For EPIC-MOS2 data, we excluded the intersection of these two regions (source and background) with a rectangular box to reject a bad column that crosses the central CCD, at slightly more than 30 arcsec away from the center of the source region. We did the same in the case of EPIC-pn data to avoid a CCD gap located at about 40 arcsec from Cyg OB2 #8A. In each case, the boxes were adjusted after a careful inspection of the relevant exposure maps. Fig. 1 shows the source and background regions used for the three EPIC instruments in the case of Observation 1. The regions for the other observations differ only by the rotation angle. We generated the response matrix file (RMF) with the `rmfgen` task for EPIC-MOS data. For EPIC-pn data, because of a problem with `rmfgen`<sup>1</sup>, we used the canned response matrix for on-axis sources provided by the SOC. The ancillary response files (ARF) were generated with the `arfgen` task. We finally rebinned our spectra to get at least 9 and 16 counts per energy bin respectively for EPIC-MOS and EPIC-pn. All our spectra were then analysed using the `XSPEC` software (see Sect. 3.1).

<sup>1</sup> The `rmfgen` task may not work properly when confronted to somewhat complicated source regions made of circles and boxes such as shown in Fig. 1. See the XMM helpdesk message ID SASv6.0/16904 at <http://xmm.vilspa.esa.es/xmmhelp> for details.

### 2.1.2 High level background episodes

We extracted a high-energy light curve (Pulse Invariant – *PI* – channel numbers > 10 000, i.e. photon energies above  $\sim 10$  keV) from the complete event lists to investigate the behaviour of the background level during the four pointings. High background time intervals are known to occur because of solar soft proton flares (Lumb 2002). We detected high background level episodes mostly in the fourth pointing. Even though such a high background level is not expected to affect significantly the spectral analysis of sources as bright as Cyg OB2 #8A (see e.g. De Becker et al. 2004a; 2004b), we decided to filter our data sets to reject the most affected time intervals. After inspection of the light curves from the four data sets, we selected the time intervals below a threshold of  $20 \text{ cts s}^{-1}$  for EPIC-MOS and  $75 \text{ cts s}^{-1}$  for EPIC-pn. As a consequence, the effective exposure times are reduced (see Table 2) compared to the values provided in Table 1. However, this allows us to obtain the cleanest possible spectra thereby increasing the reliability of our analysis. As can be seen from the spectra shown for instance by De Becker et al. (2004b), the background correction produces spectra with large error bars on the normalized flux for spectral bins strongly affected by a high background level. In the case of bright sources like Cyg OB2 #8A, the data analysis does not suffer critically from the rejection of a fraction of the exposure time.

### 2.1.3 Pile-up?

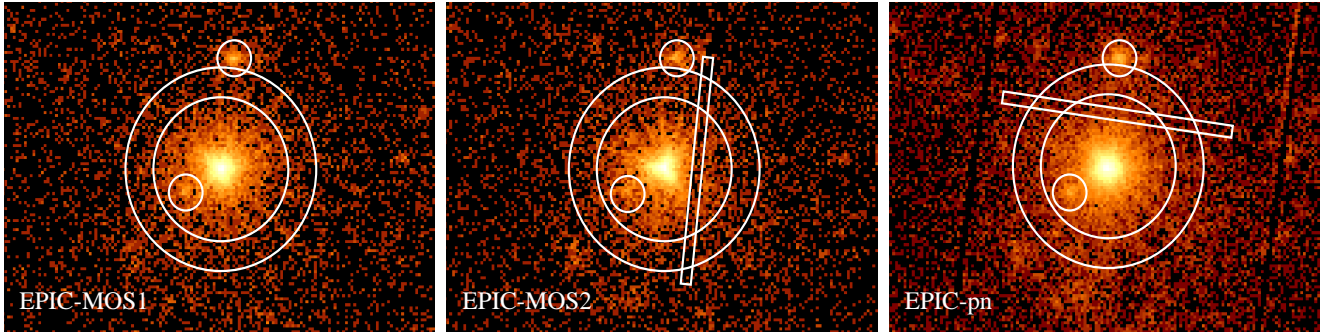
Considering the X-ray brightness of Cyg OB2 #8A, one can wonder whether the EPIC data are affected by pile-up. According to the *XMM-Newton* User’s Handbook, the count rate threshold above which pile-up may occur for point sources in full frame mode are about 0.7 and 8.0  $\text{cts s}^{-1}$  respectively for EPIC-MOS and EPIC-pn in full frame mode. As will be shown later (see Table 7), the critical value is reached for some EPIC-MOS data sets, and we have to check whether our data are affected.

First, we generated pattern histograms and searched for the presence of patterns 26-29 events expected to be due to pile-up. We did not find such patterns for any of our data sets. Next, we used the `epatplot` task to draw curves of the singlet and doublet events as a function of *PI*. We obtained a first series of curves on the basis of event lists filtered using the standard screening criteria and the spatial filter described hereabove for the source region. A second series of curves was then built on the basis of event lists obtained with a slightly modified spatial filter, where the core of the point spread function (PSF) was excluded. Since pile-up is expected to occur mainly in the core of the PSF, these latter event lists should essentially be unaffected. As the curves built using `epatplot` are supposed to be pile-up sensitive, we may expect some differences between the two sets of curves if our data are indeed affected. However, no significant differences were found. Consequently, we consider that our data are unaffected by pile-up.

## 2.2 RGS data

### 2.2.1 Data reduction

The two RGS instruments were operated in Spectroscopy mode during the four observations (den Herder et al. 2001). The raw data were processed with the SAS version 6.0.0 through the `rgsproc` task. The first and second order spectra of the source were extracted using the `rgsspectrum` task. We selected the background events from a region spatially offset from the source region. The response



**Figure 1.** Source (circle) and background (annulus) regions selected for the spectrum extraction of Cyg OB2 #8A for the first *XMM-Newton* observation. Boxes were used to exclude the CCD gap for EPIC-pn and the bad column for EPIC-MOS2. Small circular regions were used to exclude faint point sources close to Cyg OB2 #8A. The EPIC-pn image was corrected for Out Of Time (OOT) events. The inner circle has a radius of 60 arcsec. North is up and East is to the left.

matrices were constructed through the `rgsrmfgen` task for RGS1 and RGS2 data of the four pointings.

### 2.2.2 High background level episodes

We followed the same procedure as described in Sect. 2.1.2 to select good time intervals (GTIs) unaffected by soft proton flares. However, as the mean level of the light curves was different according to the data set and also to the instrument, we refrained from adopting the same count rate threshold for all the data. After rejection of the time intervals contaminated by the high background, we obtained the effective exposure times quoted in Table 2. As for the EPIC data, the pointing whose exposure time is the most severely reduced is the fourth one.

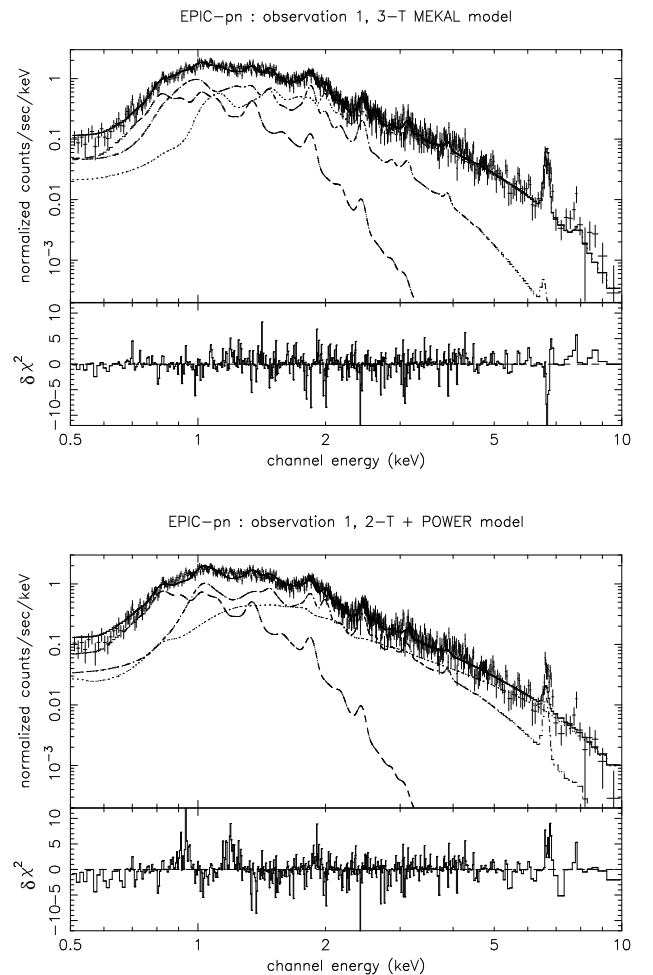
## 3 ANALYSIS OF CYG OB2 #8A DATA

### 3.1 Spectral analysis

As briefly discussed in Sect. 1, several physical mechanisms are expected to be responsible for the X-ray emission of massive stars. On the one hand, the heating of the plasma of the stellar winds by hydrodynamic shocks is responsible for a thermal emission. These shocks may occur in stellar winds of individual stars (see e.g. Feldmeier et al. 1997) or in the wind-wind collision zone of binary systems (see e.g. Stevens et al. 1992). These two types of hydrodynamic shocks are able to produce plasma with characteristic temperatures of the order of a few  $10^6$  K and of a few  $10^7$  K respectively. To first approximation, such a thermal emission can be modelled by optically thin thermal plasma models (`mekal` model: Mewe et al. 1985; Kaastra 1992). On the other hand, non-thermal emission processes like IC scattering are expected to produce a power law component in the X-ray spectrum. In this section, we will use composite models made of `mekal` and power law models. We note that solar abundances (Anders & Grevesse 1989) are assumed for the plasma throughout this paper.

### 3.2 ISM and wind absorption

Absorption models are required to account for the fact that both local circumstellar (wind) and interstellar (ISM) material are likely to absorb a significant fraction of the X-rays. The ISM absorption column was fixed to a value of  $N_{\text{H}} = 0.94 \times 10^{22} \text{ cm}^{-2}$  obtained from the dust-to-gas ratio given by Bohlin et al. (1978), using the



**Figure 2.** EPIC-pn spectrum of Cyg OB2 #8A of Observation 1, fitted with a `wabsISM*wind*(mekal1+mekal2+mekal3)` (upper panel) and a `wabsISM*wind*(mekal1+mekal2+power)` (bottom panel) model between 0.5 and 10.0 keV. The three components are individually displayed in both cases. The Fe K blend at about 6.7 keV is the most obvious feature in the spectrum. The bottom window of each panel shows the contributions of individual bins to the  $\chi^2$  of the fit. The contributions are carried over with the sign of the deviation (in the sense data minus model).

**Table 3.** Parameters of the two components of Cyg OB2 #8A mainly estimated on the basis of a comparison with typical values provided by Howarth & Prinja (1989).

	Primary	Secondary
Sp. Type	O6If	O5.5III(f)
$T_{\text{eff}}$ (K)	39 000	42 000
$R_{\star}$ ( $R_{\odot}$ )	23	14
$M_{\star}$ ( $M_{\odot}$ )	73	59
$L_{\text{bol}}$ ( $\text{erg s}^{-1}$ )	$4.2 \times 10^{39}$	$2.1 \times 10^{39}$
$\log g$	3.58	3.85
$\dot{M}$ ( $M_{\odot} \text{ yr}^{-1}$ )	$8.5 \times 10^{-6}$	$2.6 \times 10^{-6}$
$V_{\infty}$ ( $\text{km s}^{-1}$ )*	2267	2891

\* The terminal velocities of both stars were estimated to be 2.6 times the escape velocities of the stars (Vink et al. 2000, 2001), calculated on the basis of the typical stellar values given by Howarth & Prinja (1989).

colour excess ( $E(B - V) = 1.6$ ) provided by Torres-Dodgen et al. (1991).

To account for the fact that the wind material is ionized, an ionized wind absorption model was used for the local absorption component. We adopted the same opacity table as in the case of the multiple system HD 167971 (De Becker et al. 2005b), obtained with the wind absorption model described by Nazé et al. (2004). In De Becker et al. (2005b), we showed that there were no significant differences between opacities derived from various sets of parameters covering at least spectral types from O5 to O8. From the optical data already presented in De Becker et al. (2004c), we can estimate some crucial stellar and wind parameters of the stars in Cyg OB2 #8A. Following the spectral types of the two components, i.e. O6If and O5.5III(f), we adopted typical stellar radii and effective temperatures from Howarth & Prinja (1989), allowing us to estimate the bolometric luminosity of the two stars. The mass loss rates and terminal wind velocities were then obtained from the mass loss recipes of Vink et al. (2000, 2001). These parameters are quoted in Table 3. Provided that the stellar parameters of Cyg OB2 #8A lie within the parameter space discussed by De Becker et al. (2005b), we estimate that the wind absorption model that we used for HD 167971 suits the local absorption of Cyg OB2 #8A as well.

### 3.3 EPIC spectra

In order to fit the EPIC spectra, we tried different models including `mekal` and power law components. The quality of the fits was estimated using the  $\chi^2$  minimization technique and the best-fit parameter values are quoted in Table 4. We checked the consistency of our results with both the Cash statistic (Cash 1979) and the  $\chi^2$  statistic using a Churazov weighting (Churazov et al. 1996). We did not find any significant differences in the results obtained with the three methods. This was not unexpected as we are dealing with good quality spectra containing rather large numbers of counts per energy bin.

The best fits between 0.5 and 10.0 keV were obtained using a three-temperature thermal model. In the case of EPIC-MOS2, our fits pointed to normalization parameter values that deviated significantly from those of EPIC-MOS1 and EPIC-pn. This might be due to the bad column crossing the source region in the case

EPIC-MOS2 (see Fig. 1), resulting in serious problems in obtaining a valuable ARF. For this reason, we discarded the EPIC-MOS2 data from our discussion and we will concentrate on EPIC-MOS1 and EPIC-pn data. As quoted in Table 4, the reduced  $\chi^2$  lies between 1.01 and 1.56 according to the instrument and to the data set. The characteristic temperature of the three thermal emission components are respectively about  $3 \times 10^6$ ,  $9 \times 10^6$  and  $20 \times 10^6$  K. We note the good agreement achieved for the four observations, with a slightly lower temperature for the hard component of the second observation. The upper panel of Fig. 2 shows the EPIC-pn spectrum of Cyg OB2 #8A between 0.5 and 10.0 keV fitted by the three-temperature thermal model. Clearly, the most spectacular feature of this spectrum is the Fe K blend at about 6.7 keV. This spectral feature is observed for all instruments and in all data sets. As discussed by De Becker et al. (2004b), a large amount of relativistic electrons would be needed to produce such a line in a non-thermal plasma, and we therefore estimate that it might be considered as a signature of the thermal nature of the hard X-ray emission component observed in our EPIC spectra.

The results obtained with models including a power law were rather poor. Even though in some cases the replacement of the hardest thermal component discussed previously by a power law led to a slightly improved reduced  $\chi^2$ , these models were rejected because they failed to fit the iron line at about 6.7 keV. The bottom panel of Fig. 2 shows the result of the fit of the EPIC-pn spectrum of Observation 1 with such a model. We see that the iron blend is poorly fitted, and that the fit of the softer part of the spectrum is less satisfactory than in the case of the upper panel of the same figure. In this case, the two thermal components yield  $kT$  of about 0.26 and 1.20 keV, whilst the power law has a photon index of about 3. We note also that we tried to use more sophisticated models with wind absorption columns affected to each emission component. However, this did not improve the quality of the fits and in most cases we obtained similar values (within the  $1-\sigma$  error bars) for every local absorption component. For these reasons, we used only one local absorption column as described in Table 4.

Finally, in order to model our X-ray spectra of Cyg OB2 #8A, we adopted an alternative approach relying on a different physical interpretation of the thermal X-ray emission from shocked plasma. As discussed by Pollock et al. (2005), it is likely that the shocked plasma is not in equilibrium. We therefore tried to fit the EPIC spectra with the non-equilibrium ionization (NEI) plasma model (`vp-shock` model available in `XSPEC`) initially developed for supernova remnants (see Borkowski et al. 2001), even though this model was not calculated for colliding wind binary conditions. We obtained reasonable fits of the spectra with statistic values as good or better than those reported in Table 4, although this model failed to fit the soft part of the EPIC spectrum. However, the physical interpretation of these fits is not straightforward considering the parameters of the model, i.e. the chemical abundances and the ionization age of the plasma.

### 3.4 RGS spectra

As a first step, we combined the first and second order spectra in order to inspect the main spectral features and to identify the spectral lines. Above about  $17 \text{ \AA}$ , the spectrum is very absorbed and we concentrated our analysis on the spectral domain below this wavelength. We identified the prominent lines through a comparison with the `aped` (Smith & Brickhouse 2000) and `spex` (Kaastra et al. 2004) line lists (see Table 5). In order to perform a more de-

**Table 4.** Parameters for EPIC spectra of Cyg OB2 #8A in the case of a  $wabs_{\text{ISM}} * wind * (mekal_1 + mekal_2 + mekal_3)$  model. Results are given for MOS1, pn, and combined MOS1+pn ('EPIC') in the case of the four observations. The first absorption component ( $wabs_{\text{ISM}}$ ) is frozen at the ISM value:  $0.94 \times 10^{22} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ . The second absorption column, quoted as  $N_w$  (in  $\text{cm}^{-2}$ ), stands for the absorption by the ionized wind material. The normalization parameter (Norm) of the  $mekal$  components is defined as  $(10^{-14} / (4\pi D^2)) \int n_e n_H dV$ , where  $D$ ,  $n_e$  and  $n_H$  are respectively the distance to the source (in cm), and the electron and hydrogen number densities (in  $\text{cm}^{-3}$ ). The indicated range in the parameter values represents the 90% confidence interval. The last two columns give respectively the observed flux and the flux corrected for the ISM absorption between 0.5 and 10.0 keV.

	$\text{Log } N_w$	$kT_1$ (keV)	$\text{Norm}_1$ ( $10^{-2}$ )	$kT_2$ (keV)	$\text{Norm}_2$ ( $10^{-3}$ )	$kT_3$ (keV)	$\text{Norm}_3$ ( $10^{-3}$ )	$\chi^2_{\nu}$ (d.o.f.)	Obs.Flux ( $\text{erg cm}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$ )	Corr.Flux ( $\text{erg cm}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$ )
<i>Observation 1</i>										
MOS1	21.74 <sup>21.82</sup> <sub>21.67</sub>	0.23 <sup>0.27</sup> <sub>0.20</sub>	4.94 <sup>10.35</sup> <sub>2.57</sub>	1.03 <sup>1.10</sup> <sub>0.87</sub>	9.67 <sup>12.21</sup> <sub>5.95</sub>	1.98 <sup>2.60</sup> <sub>1.66</sub>	4.93 <sup>8.26</sup> <sub>2.72</sub>	1.26 (281)	$6.23 \times 10^{-12}$	$3.36 \times 10^{-11}$
pn	21.68 <sup>21.73</sup> <sub>21.62</sub>	0.26 <sup>0.29</sup> <sub>0.23</sub>	2.66 <sup>4.10</sup> <sub>1.68</sub>	0.79 <sup>0.83</sup> <sub>0.76</sub>	9.87 <sup>10.83</sup> <sub>8.97</sub>	1.84 <sup>1.91</sup> <sub>1.77</sub>	7.59 <sup>8.16</sup> <sub>7.06</sub>	1.24 (636)	$6.85 \times 10^{-12}$	$3.07 \times 10^{-11}$
EPIC	21.70 <sup>21.74</sup> <sub>21.66</sub>	0.25 <sup>0.28</sup> <sub>0.23</sub>	3.23 <sup>4.40</sup> <sub>2.24</sub>	0.83 <sup>0.87</sup> <sub>0.79</sub>	8.81 <sup>9.58</sup> <sub>8.06</sub>	1.81 <sup>1.87</sup> <sub>1.75</sub>	7.51 <sup>8.05</sup> <sub>7.04</sub>	1.39 (924)	$6.61 \times 10^{-12}$	$3.09 \times 10^{-11}$
<i>Observation 2</i>										
MOS1	21.96 <sup>22.01</sup> <sub>21.90</sub>	0.23 <sup>0.27</sup> <sub>0.20</sub>	9.00 <sup>17.88</sup> <sub>4.05</sub>	0.83 <sup>0.97</sup> <sub>0.75</sub>	10.11 <sup>12.00</sup> <sub>8.37</sub>	1.67 <sup>1.90</sup> <sub>1.53</sub>	5.44 <sup>6.76</sup> <sub>4.07</sub>	1.01 (265)	$4.87 \times 10^{-12}$	$2.71 \times 10^{-11}$
pn	21.90 <sup>21.93</sup> <sub>21.86</sub>	0.24 <sup>0.28</sup> <sub>0.23</sub>	6.16 <sup>8.90</sup> <sub>3.67</sub>	0.79 <sup>0.85</sup> <sub>0.74</sub>	9.74 <sup>10.92</sup> <sub>8.56</sub>	1.57 <sup>1.66</sup> <sub>1.50</sub>	6.60 <sup>7.46</sup> <sub>5.70</sub>	1.05 (580)	$5.22 \times 10^{-12}$	$2.64 \times 10^{-11}$
EPIC	21.91 <sup>21.95</sup> <sub>21.89</sub>	0.24 <sup>0.26</sup> <sub>0.22</sub>	6.55 <sup>9.66</sup> <sub>4.53</sub>	0.80 <sup>0.85</sup> <sub>0.75</sub>	9.76 <sup>10.77</sup> <sub>8.77</sub>	1.60 <sup>1.68</sup> <sub>1.53</sub>	6.24 <sup>6.96</sup> <sub>5.49</sub>	1.12 (852)	$5.15 \times 10^{-12}$	$2.64 \times 10^{-11}$
<i>Observation 3</i>										
MOS1	21.80 <sup>21.85</sup> <sub>21.72</sub>	0.27 <sup>0.29</sup> <sub>0.23</sub>	3.67 <sup>6.08</sup> <sub>2.20</sub>	0.89 <sup>0.98</sup> <sub>0.82</sub>	7.71 <sup>8.86</sup> <sub>6.60</sub>	1.92 <sup>2.20</sup> <sub>1.80</sub>	6.20 <sup>6.90</sup> <sub>4.44</sub>	1.37 (296)	$5.85 \times 10^{-12}$	$2.53 \times 10^{-11}$
pn	21.70 <sup>21.75</sup> <sub>21.66</sub>	0.28 <sup>0.30</sup> <sub>0.26</sub>	2.55 <sup>3.43</sup> <sub>1.94</sub>	0.81 <sup>0.85</sup> <sub>0.78</sub>	9.34 <sup>10.14</sup> <sub>8.60</sub>	1.91 <sup>1.98</sup> <sub>1.85</sub>	7.18 <sup>7.59</sup> <sub>6.74</sub>	1.21 (686)	$6.75 \times 10^{-12}$	$2.88 \times 10^{-11}$
EPIC	21.72 <sup>21.79</sup> <sub>21.69</sub>	0.28 <sup>0.30</sup> <sub>0.26</sub>	2.71 <sup>4.41</sup> <sub>2.10</sub>	0.83 <sup>0.87</sup> <sub>0.79</sub>	8.75 <sup>9.48</sup> <sub>8.01</sub>	1.92 <sup>1.98</sup> <sub>1.86</sub>	6.84 <sup>7.22</sup> <sub>6.41</sub>	1.49 (989)	$6.47 \times 10^{-12}$	$2.76 \times 10^{-11}$
<i>Observation 4</i>										
MOS1	21.96 <sup>22.01</sup> <sub>21.89</sub>	0.22 <sup>0.24</sup> <sub>0.19</sub>	14.94 <sup>27.73</sup> <sub>8.27</sub>	0.88 <sup>1.00</sup> <sub>0.78</sub>	10.36 <sup>12.31</sup> <sub>8.04</sub>	1.72 <sup>2.16</sup> <sub>1.53</sub>	5.32 <sup>7.16</sup> <sub>4.77</sub>	1.17 (225)	$5.38 \times 10^{-12}$	$3.89 \times 10^{-11}$
pn	21.86 <sup>21.89</sup> <sub>21.80</sub>	0.24 <sup>0.28</sup> <sub>0.23</sub>	8.38 <sup>10.89</sup> <sub>4.31</sub>	0.87 <sup>0.92</sup> <sub>0.81</sub>	11.78 <sup>13.00</sup> <sub>10.21</sub>	1.82 <sup>1.92</sup> <sub>1.69</sub>	5.44 <sup>6.52</sup> <sub>4.84</sub>	1.33 (506)	$6.31 \times 10^{-12}$	$3.74 \times 10^{-11}$
EPIC	21.89 <sup>21.92</sup> <sub>21.85</sub>	0.23 <sup>0.25</sup> <sub>0.22</sub>	9.93 <sup>13.28</sup> <sub>6.97</sub>	0.87 <sup>0.92</sup> <sub>0.82</sub>	11.38 <sup>12.38</sup> <sub>10.10</sub>	1.82 <sup>1.90</sup> <sub>1.69</sub>	5.21 <sup>6.16</sup> <sub>4.68</sub>	1.56 (738)	$5.91 \times 10^{-12}$	$3.73 \times 10^{-11}$

**Table 5.** Identification of the prominent lines in the RGS spectrum of Cyg OB2 #8A between 6 and 17 Å.

Ion	Wavelength (Å)
Si XIV (Ly $\alpha$ )	6.180
Si XIII (He-like)	6.648
Mg XII	7.106
Mg XII (Ly $\alpha$ )	8.419
Mg XI (He-like)	9.169
Fe XVII	10.000
Ne X (Ly $\alpha$ )	12.132
Ne IX (He-like)	13.447
Fe XVII	15.014

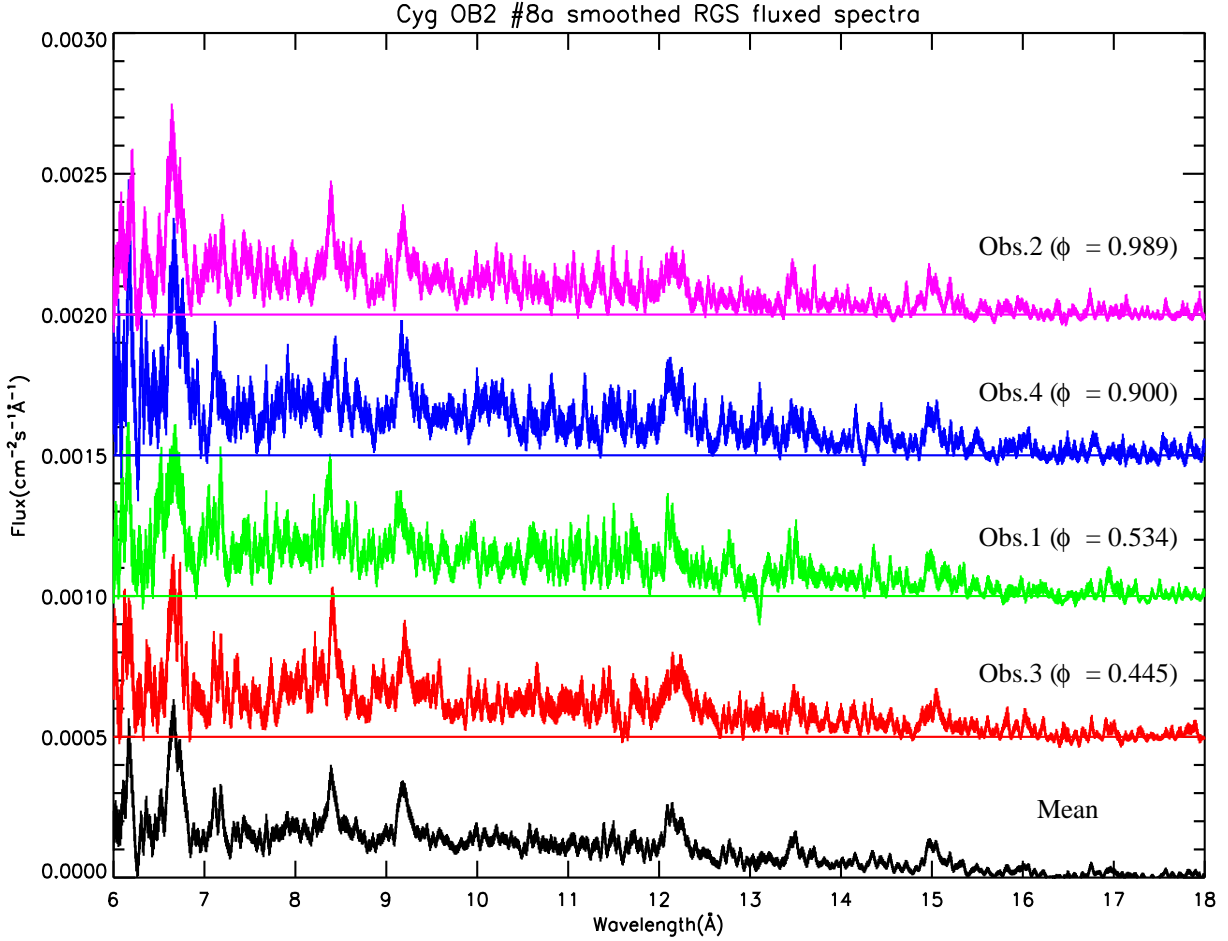
tailed analysis of the RGS data, we obtained fluxed (RGS1 + RGS2) spectra for our four observations (see Fig. 3). Individual lines show intensity variations from spectrum to spectrum of a few times 10% and apparent velocity variations of a few hundred  $\text{km s}^{-1}$ , both of which are at the limit of detectability with the data available, whose exposures were typically only 20 ks. The reality of such apparent orbit-related changes could be assessed with longer exposures of 60 to 80 ks.

The 4 RGS spectra were similar in form with no obvious changes in the long-wavelength absorption cut-off near 17 Å. Models with only interstellar absorption at the expected value of  $0.94 \times 10^{22} \text{ cm}^{-2}$  are able to account for the cut-off, although we are not able to exclude a further circumstellar component for some plasma emission models. EPIC and RGS yield an effective

combination with the RGS resolving lines down to Fe XVII (15.015 Å) and EPIC up to Fe XXV (18.500 Å), emphasizing the broad range of ionization conditions that exist in the X-ray emitting plasma of Cyg OB2 #8A. A similar situation was found in the X-ray spectrum of the colliding-wind system WR140 (Pollock et al. 2005). We have constructed general models involving a bremsstrahlung continuum absorbed by the expected fixed amount of interstellar material underlying line emission unconstrained by any physical plasma models from H-like and He-like ions of Ne, Mg, Si, S, Ar and Ca as well as ions of Fe from Fe XVII to Fe XXV. The best-fit continuum temperature was  $1.9 \pm 0.1 \text{ keV}^2$ . In the absence of high-resolution data of good statistical weight, the same line velocity profile was used for all the lines, allowing them all to be red or blue shifted from the laboratory wavelength by the same velocity and broadened by the same velocity width. Such models are able to provide a good fit simultaneously to EPIC-MOS and RGS data (we did not consider EPIC-pn data here because of the slightly poorer spectral resolution of this latter instrument).

In addition, we used the same kind of composite models as used in Sect. 3.3. We subtracted the background of individual spectra and then applied the response matrix for a global fitting between 5 and 35 Å. We note that the difference in the RGS1 and RGS2 count rates reported in Table 7 stems for the dead CCD of RGS1 that falls in the 10 – 14 Å wavelength domain. We obtained the best-fit with a two-component  $mekal$  model. The  $\chi^2$  are slightly

<sup>2</sup> For a pre-shock velocity of the order of  $1800 \text{ km s}^{-1}$  (see Table 11) and solar abundances, one could expect the post-shock temperature to be of the order of 3.8 keV, but the lower value derived from the fit may be due to the off-axis obliquity.



**Figure 3.** Smoothed RGS fluxed spectra of Cyg OB2 #8A obtained for our four observations between 6 and 18 Å. The orbital phase is specified in each case. The lower panel represents the mean RGS spectrum. The five spectra are respectively vertically shifted by 0.0005 in flux units. The prominent lines observed in the spectra are listed in Table 5.

better if we use three thermal emission components but the error bars on the resulting fit parameters increase substantially. As we are dealing here with spectra containing sometimes small numbers of counts per energy bin, we used the Cash statistic (Cash 1979) to compare the results obtained with the  $\chi^2$  statistic. We did not find any significant differences between the results obtained with the two approaches. We obtained typical temperatures of about  $2 \times 10^6$  and  $8\text{--}12 \times 10^6$  K. These temperatures are close to the values obtained for the two softer thermal components of the 3-T model fitted to the EPIC data (see Sect. 3.3). The fact that a third emission component is not needed for data from the RGS instruments is explained by their different bandpass, i.e.  $0.4 < E < 2.5$  keV, whilst the  $\sim 20 \times 10^6$  K thermal component is mostly required for higher energies. We checked the consistency of the results obtained between EPIC and RGS data through a simultaneous fit of the spectra from the four instruments, i.e. EPIC-MOS1, EPIC-pn, RGS1 and RGS2. We used the same three-temperature model as in Sect. 3.3 and we obtained parameter values (see Table 6) very close to those presented in Table 4 for the simultaneous fit of EPIC-MOS1 and EPIC-pn spectra, with similar or slightly larger reduced  $\chi^2$ .

## 4 X-RAY LUMINOSITY OF CYG OB2 #8A

### 4.1 Variability analysis from XMM-Newton data

The count rates obtained with the five instruments on board *XMM-Newton* for the four observations are quoted in Table 7. We observe significant variability of Cyg OB2 #8A on a time-scale of about ten days, i.e. the typical separation between two pointings in our series. The largest variation is found between Observations 1 and 2, with an amplitude of about 20%. We emphasize that the variations we observe for all instruments are correlated. To illustrate the variability observed between the different observations (see Fig. 4), we compared the count rates obtained in several energy bands in Observation 1 with those obtained in Observation 2 (*left panels*), Observation 3 (*middle panels*), and Observation 4 (*right panels*), respectively for EPIC-MOS1 (*upper part*) and EPIC-pn (*lower part*). In each of these plots labelled (a) to (f), the upper section displays the count rates and the lower section shows the relative variability of the observed count rate. Although it is not shown here, we note that the same comparison was performed for the X-ray fluxes, estimated on the basis of the 3-T model with parameters given in Table 4. A plot of the relative variability of the observed X-ray flux of Cyg OB2 #8A for EPIC-pn has been presented by De Becker & Rauw (2005). We clearly see that there is a decrease in the X-ray

**Table 6.** Same as Table 4 but for RGS data fitted by a  $wabs_{\text{ISM}} * wind * (mekal + mekal)$  model between 5 and 35 Å. For each observation, the results are provided for the simultaneous fit (RGS1 + RGS2) of first order, second order, and first + second order spectra. The last line for each observation gives the parameters obtained for the simultaneous fit of combined RGS (2 instruments, 2 orders) and EPIC (MOS1 and pn) data with a  $wabs_{\text{ISM}} * wind * (mekal + mekal + mekal)$  model between 0.5 and 10.0 keV.

	Log $N_w$	$kT_1$ (keV)	Norm <sub>1</sub> ( $10^{-2}$ )	$kT_2$ (keV)	Norm <sub>2</sub> ( $10^{-2}$ )	$kT_3$ (keV)	Norm <sub>3</sub> ( $10^{-3}$ )	$\chi^2_\nu$ (d.o.f.)
<i>Observation 1</i>								
RGS: Order 1	21.88 <sup>21.95</sup> <sub>21.81</sub>	0.19 <sup>0.22</sup> <sub>0.18</sub>	13.77 <sup>24.14</sup> <sub>6.12</sub>	1.00 <sup>1.06</sup> <sub>0.94</sub>	1.52 <sup>1.70</sup> <sub>1.35</sub>	–	–	1.17 (229)
RGS: Order 2	21.76 <sup>21.41</sup> <sub>21.96</sub>	0.20 <sup>0.27</sup> <sub>0.17</sub>	8.64 <sup>27.02</sup> <sub>1.20</sub>	1.38 <sup>1.64</sup> <sub>1.25</sub>	1.18 <sup>1.41</sup> <sub>0.96</sub>	–	–	0.93 (109)
RGS: Ord. 1 & 2	21.87 <sup>21.94</sup> <sub>21.78</sub>	0.19 <sup>0.20</sup> <sub>0.18</sub>	16.28 <sup>25.83</sup> <sub>8.71</sub>	1.26 <sup>1.33</sup> <sub>1.18</sub>	1.37 <sup>1.49</sup> <sub>1.23</sub>	–	–	1.15 (343)
EPIC + RGS	21.65 <sup>21.70</sup> <sub>21.60</sub>	0.24 <sup>0.26</sup> <sub>0.22</sub>	2.71 <sup>3.82</sup> <sub>1.89</sub>	0.78 <sup>0.82</sup> <sub>0.76</sub>	0.85 <sup>0.93</sup> <sub>0.78</sub>	1.76 <sup>1.81</sup> <sub>1.71</sub>	8.13 <sup>8.59</sup> <sub>7.63</sub>	1.39 (1243)
<i>Observation 2</i>								
RGS: Order 1	22.03 <sup>22.09</sup> <sub>21.99</sub>	0.23 <sup>0.32</sup> <sub>0.19</sub>	9.44 <sup>21.63</sup> <sub>3.00</sub>	1.19 <sup>1.14</sup> <sub>0.98</sub>	1.69 <sup>2.05</sup> <sub>1.56</sub>	–	–	1.59 (217)
RGS: Order 2	21.99 <sup>22.08</sup> <sub>21.90</sub>	0.22 <sup>0.28</sup> <sub>0.18</sub>	10.41 <sup>22.73</sup> <sub>3.28</sub>	1.01 <sup>1.40</sup> <sub>0.69</sub>	1.23 <sup>1.56</sup> <sub>0.93</sub>	–	–	0.89 (110)
RGS: Ord. 1 & 2	22.03 <sup>22.08</sup> <sub>21.98</sub>	0.23 <sup>0.27</sup> <sub>0.20</sub>	10.12 <sup>18.95</sup> <sub>5.18</sub>	1.04 <sup>1.10</sup> <sub>0.98</sub>	1.64 <sup>1.83</sup> <sub>1.46</sub>	–	–	1.37 (332)
EPIC + RGS	21.90 <sup>21.92</sup> <sub>21.87</sub>	0.24 <sup>0.25</sup> <sub>0.22</sub>	5.70 <sup>7.46</sup> <sub>4.10</sub>	0.78 <sup>0.81</sup> <sub>0.74</sub>	1.00 <sup>1.08</sup> <sub>0.91</sub>	1.57 <sup>1.64</sup> <sub>1.52</sub>	6.49 <sup>7.11</sup> <sub>5.84</sub>	1.17 (1151)
<i>Observation 3</i>								
RGS: Order 1	21.84 <sup>21.92</sup> <sub>21.96</sub>	0.22 <sup>0.30</sup> <sub>0.18</sub>	4.05 <sup>11.09</sup> <sub>1.29</sub>	1.05 <sup>1.11</sup> <sub>1.00</sub>	1.35 <sup>1.53</sup> <sub>1.18</sub>	–	–	1.13 (240)
RGS: Order 2	21.84 <sup>21.91</sup> <sub>21.71</sub>	0.24 <sup>0.31</sup> <sub>0.19</sub>	3.17 <sup>10.83</sup> <sub>1.17</sub>	1.01 <sup>1.07</sup> <sub>0.96</sub>	1.25 <sup>1.46</sup> <sub>1.15</sub>	–	–	1.03 (121)
RGS: Ord. 1 & 2	21.84 <sup>21.91</sup> <sub>21.77</sub>	0.22 <sup>0.30</sup> <sub>0.18</sub>	3.85 <sup>11.71</sup> <sub>1.37</sub>	1.04 <sup>1.08</sup> <sub>0.99</sub>	1.32 <sup>1.47</sup> <sub>1.18</sub>	–	–	1.09 (366)
EPIC + RGS	21.62 <sup>21.66</sup> <sub>21.57</sub>	0.27 <sup>0.33</sup> <sub>0.25</sub>	15.05 <sup>20.56</sup> <sub>8.89</sub>	0.80 <sup>0.82</sup> <sub>0.77</sub>	0.85 <sup>0.90</sup> <sub>0.78</sub>	1.88 <sup>1.94</sup> <sub>1.84</sub>	7.13 <sup>7.46</sup> <sub>6.81</sub>	1.54 (1324)
<i>Observation 4</i>								
RGS: Order 1	22.00 <sup>21.08</sup> <sub>21.93</sub>	0.23 <sup>0.34</sup> <sub>0.19</sub>	10.30 <sup>26.41</sup> <sub>2.59</sub>	0.92 <sup>1.00</sup> <sub>0.78</sub>	1.62 <sup>2.16</sup> <sub>1.39</sub>	–	–	1.17 (153)
RGS: Order 2	21.78 <sup>21.92</sup> <sub>21.60</sub>	0.33 <sup>0.41</sup> <sub>0.24</sub>	0.73 <sup>17.15</sup> <sub>0.34</sub>	0.77 <sup>0.87</sup> <sub>0.69</sub>	1.58 <sup>1.97</sup> <sub>1.36</sub>	–	–	0.91 (76)
RGS: Ord. 1 & 2	21.94 <sup>22.02</sup> <sub>21.87</sub>	0.29 <sup>0.41</sup> <sub>0.19</sub>	3.18 <sup>16.13</sup> <sub>1.31</sub>	0.83 <sup>0.91</sup> <sub>0.77</sub>	1.65 <sup>2.01</sup> <sub>1.45</sub>	–	–	1.09 (234)
EPIC + RGS	21.87 <sup>21.90</sup> <sub>21.83</sub>	0.23 <sup>0.25</sup> <sub>0.22</sub>	7.81 <sup>10.54</sup> <sub>5.56</sub>	0.86 <sup>0.88</sup> <sub>0.81</sub>	1.21 <sup>1.30</sup> <sub>1.10</sub>	1.83 <sup>1.91</sup> <sub>1.72</sub>	5.18 <sup>5.94</sup> <sub>4.73</sub>	1.54 (954)

**Table 7.** Observed count rates of Cyg OB2 #8A for the five *XMM-Newton* instruments, expressed in  $\text{cts s}^{-1}$ .

	EPIC-MOS1	EPIC-MOS2	EPIC-pn	RGS1	RGS2
Observation 1	0.741 ± 0.007	0.737 ± 0.007	2.141 ± 0.013	0.034 ± 0.002	0.056 ± 0.002
Observation 2	0.592 ± 0.006	0.598 ± 0.006	1.697 ± 0.012	0.027 ± 0.002	0.040 ± 0.002
Observation 3	0.699 ± 0.006	0.692 ± 0.006	2.038 ± 0.011	0.032 ± 0.002	0.048 ± 0.002
Observation 4	0.688 ± 0.008	0.667 ± 0.008	2.009 ± 0.015	0.035 ± 0.002	0.049 ± 0.002

count rate (flux) between the first and the second observation in the whole EPIC bandpass. The first and third observations appear to be very similar. In the case of the fourth observation, we see that the count rate decreases only in the hard energy band (above about 2.0 keV). We note that all the variability trends discussed here are consistent in both EPIC-MOS1 and EPIC-pn data, either if we consider count rates or observed fluxes, .

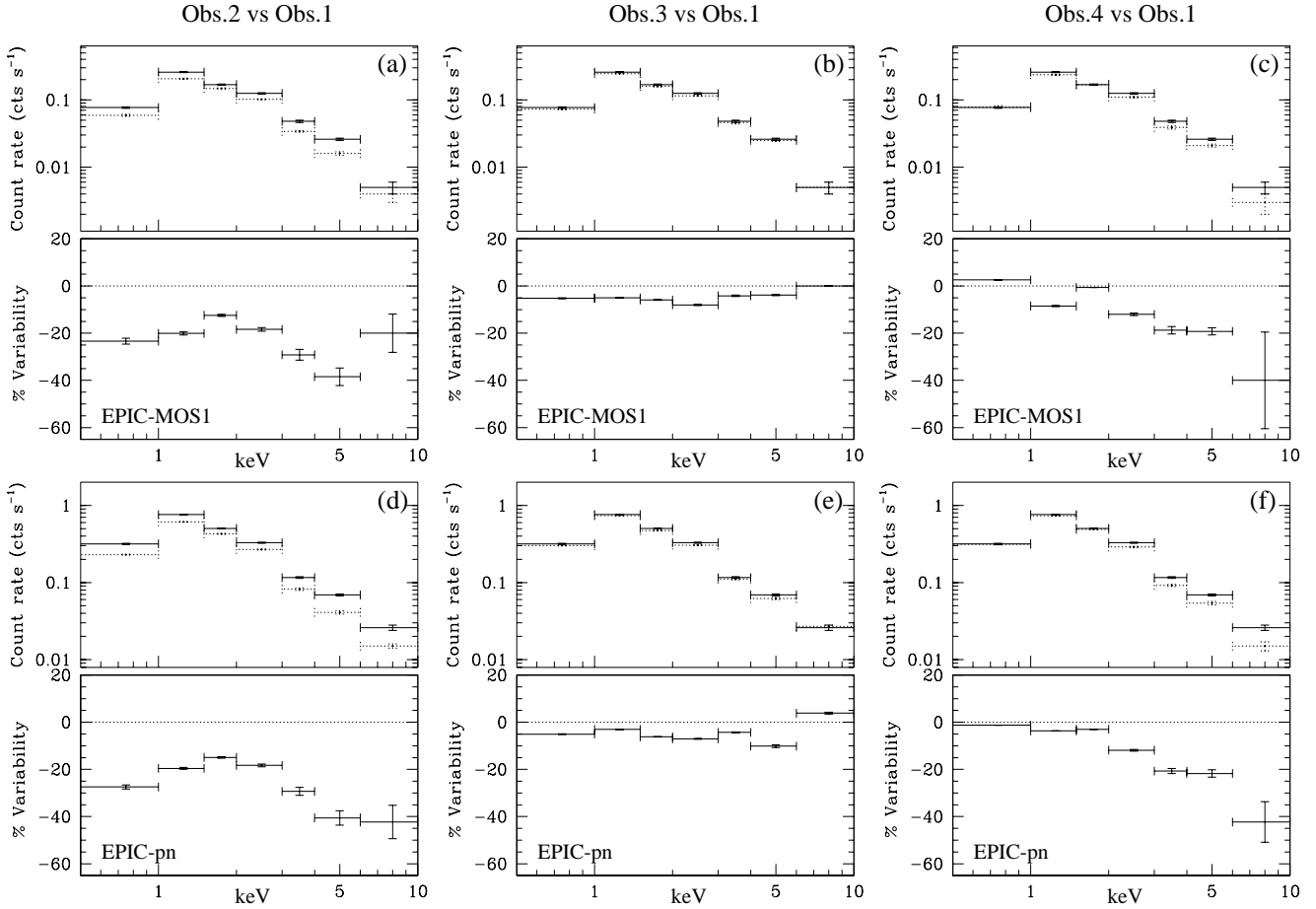
We finally searched for short term variability, i.e. within a single exposure. We have binned the event lists into 100 s, 200 s, 500 s and 1000 s time intervals in four energy bands, respectively 0.5–10.0 keV, 0.5–1.0 keV, 1.0–2.5 keV and 2.5–10.0 keV. We calculated the count rates in each time bin, along with their standard deviation, after subtraction of a background scaled according to the respective surface areas of the source and background regions (the same as used for the spectra extraction, see Sect. 2.1.1). Good Time Intervals (GTIs) were considered to compute the count rates using effective time bin lengths. A first inspection of the light curves does not reveal any significant variability correlated between the EPIC

instruments on time-scales shorter than single exposures. This lack of significant variation is confirmed by variability tests applied to every light curve ( $\chi^2$  and pov-test as described by Sana et al. 2004).

## 4.2 Overall luminosity

On the basis of the best-fit parameters presented in Table 4 for the three-temperature model, we have evaluated the fluxes between 0.5 and 10.0 keV for the four exposures. The observed, i.e. absorbed, fluxes are provided in the last but one column of Table 4. Considering a distance to Cyg OB2 #8A of 1.8 kpc (Biegging et al. 1989), we computed its unabsorbed X-ray luminosity, i.e. corrected for the ISM absorption, in the case of the simultaneous fit of EPIC-MOS1 and EPIC-pn data. The results are collected in Table 8. In this table, we also provide the  $L_X/L_{\text{bol}}$  ratio. On the basis of the bolometric luminosities given in Table 3, we also computed the expected intrinsic X-ray luminosity using the empirical relation proposed by Sana et al. (2006). Although this latter relation relies on a





**Figure 4.** Relative variability of Cyg OB2 #8A for EPIC-MOS1 and EPIC-pn between 0.5 and 10.0 keV. For each part of the figure labelled a, b, c, d, e or f, we have represented: (i) *Upper panels*: Observed count rate of the first observation (solid symbols) as compared to the  $n$ th observation (dotted symbols) with  $n$  being the number of the observation, i.e. 2, 3 or 4. (ii) *Lower panels*: Relative variability of the observed count rate. A negative value stands for a decrease in the X-ray flux as compared to Obs. 1. The vertical error bars on the count rates stand for the  $1\text{-}\sigma$  confidence interval, while the horizontal bars give the energy interval considered.

rather small sample of O-type stars compared to that of Berghöfer et al. (1997), we preferred to use this one because it was established in the same energy domain as for the present analysis, i.e. between 0.5 and 10.0 keV. We therefore obtain X-ray luminosities of  $5.17 \times 10^{32}$  and  $2.58 \times 10^{32}$  erg s $^{-1}$  respectively for the primary and the secondary. The sum of these two quantities, i.e.  $L_X$  of  $7.75 \times 10^{32}$  erg s $^{-1}$ , allowed us to calculate X-ray luminosity excesses ranging between about 13 and 19 (see column (4) of Table 8).

## 5 ARCHIVE X-RAY DATA

### 5.1 ROSAT-PSPC data

Cyg OB2 has been observed twice with the ROSAT-PSPC instrument. A first observation was performed on 1991 April 21 (sequence number rp200109n00,  $\sim 3.5$  ks), and the second one between 1993 April 29 and 1993 May 5 (sequence number rp900314n00,  $\sim 19$  ks). The latter consisted mainly of four exposures spread over about five days. The analysis of Waldron et al. (1998) revealed a significant variation of the soft X-ray flux (below 2 keV) between the 1991 and the 1993 observations, with the highest emission level observed in 1993. We retrieved the screened data

**Table 8.** X-ray luminosity of Cyg OB2 #8A. The columns (1) and (2) yield respectively the flux and the luminosity between 0.5 and 10.0 keV, corrected for the ISM absorption, and derived from the simultaneous fit of EPIC-MOS1 and EPIC-pn instruments with the 3-T model. The luminosities are computed considering a distance of 1.8 kpc (Biegging et al. 1989). Column (3) gives the  $L_X/L_{bol}$  ratio, and finally the X-ray luminosity excess is provided in column (4).

	Corr. flux (erg cm $^{-2}$ s $^{-1}$ ) (1)	Corr. $L_X$ (erg s $^{-1}$ ) (2)	$L_X/L_{bol}$ (3)	excess (4)
Obs. 1	$3.09 \times 10^{-11}$	$1.20 \times 10^{34}$	$1.9 \times 10^{-6}$	15.5
Obs. 2	$2.64 \times 10^{-11}$	$1.02 \times 10^{34}$	$1.6 \times 10^{-6}$	13.2
Obs. 3	$2.76 \times 10^{-11}$	$1.07 \times 10^{34}$	$1.7 \times 10^{-6}$	13.8
Obs. 4	$3.73 \times 10^{-11}$	$1.45 \times 10^{34}$	$2.3 \times 10^{-6}$	18.7

from the archive and we used the `xselect` software to analyze the data of Cyg OB2 #8A. We extracted a light curve of this observation and we split it by applying time filters to obtain four separated data sets with effective exposure times of about 3–4 ks. We selected the source events within a 1 arcmin circular region. The background was selected in an annular region around the source region of the

**Table 9.** Observed count rates (CR) of Cyg OB2 #8A for the *ROSAT*-PSPC observations expressed in  $\text{cts s}^{-1}$ . The orbital phase is computed at mid-exposure according to the ephemeris of De Becker et al. (2004c).

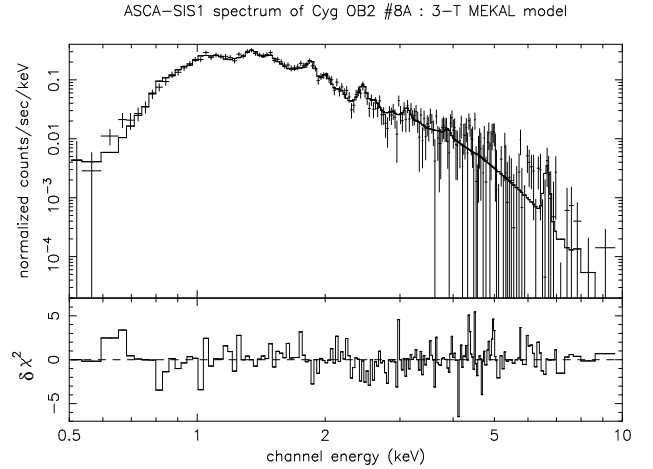
Observation	JD (−2 400 000)	$\phi$	CR ( $\text{cts s}^{-1}$ )
rp200109n00	48 368.074	0.022	$0.187 \pm 0.008$
rp900314n00 #1	49 107.104	0.756	$0.306 \pm 0.014$
rp900314n00 #2	49 109.310	0.856	$0.282 \pm 0.010$
rp900314n00 #3	49 110.218	0.898	$0.295 \pm 0.007$
rp900314n00 #4	49 110.972	0.932	$0.245 \pm 0.008$

same area, excluding its intersection with a 30 arcsec circular region centered on a point source located to the North relative to Cyg OB2 #8A (RA = 20:33:13.9 and DEC = +41:20:21.4, Equinox 2000.0). We used the *xspec* software to analyse the spectra and we obtained reasonable fits with a single temperature mekal model, with a *kT* of about 0.5–0.7 keV. We determined the count rates for each subexposure in the 0.4–2.5 keV energy band and we collected them in Table 9, along with the time of each exposure.

## 5.2 ASCA-SIS data

The Cyg OB2 association was observed with *ASCA* (Tanaka et al. 1994) during the performance verification phase on 1993 April 29 (sequence number 20003000,  $\sim 30$  ks). A first analysis of these data was reported by Kitamoto & Mukai (1996). These authors already pointed out the need to use two thermal emission components, with characteristic temperatures of the order of 0.6 and 1.5 keV respectively, in order to model reasonably the data of Cyg OB2 #8A. We retrieved the raw data and processed them using the *xselect* software. Even though both gas-imaging spectrometers (GIS) and solid-state imaging spectrometers (SIS) were operated during the observation, we only used SIS data because of their better spatial resolution. We extracted the source events within a 2.21 and 2.95 arcmin radius circular region respectively for SIS0 and SIS1. In both cases, we selected the background events from a rectangular box located a few arcmin to the East of Cyg OB2 #8A. As the source region crosses over two CCDs, we constructed two response matrix files (RMF), i.e. one for each CCD, and we obtained the effective RMF through a weighted sum of the two individual response matrices.

The spectral analysis was performed with the *xspec* software, and the best-fit results were obtained with the three-temperature thermal model described in Sect. 3.3. We note that we obtained a lower value of the reduced  $\chi^2$  by replacing the third thermal component by a power law, but we estimate that this apparently better result is only due to the rather poor quality of the data in the hard part of the spectrum, unlikely to reveal the Fe K line clearly present in our *XMM-Newton* EPIC spectra. As the quality of the SIS0 data appeared to be significantly poorer than that of SIS1, we considered only the latter in our spectral analysis. The best-fit parameters obtained with the 3-T thermal model between 0.5 and 10.0 keV are given in Table 10. The SIS1 spectrum and the corresponding model are presented in Fig. 5. From this model, we obtained an absorption corrected  $L_X$  of  $1.86 \times 10^{34}$  erg  $\text{s}^{-1}$  between 0.5 and 10.0 keV, leading to an X-ray luminosity excess of about 24. We finally note that the observed count rate in the same energy band is  $0.331 \pm 0.004$   $\text{cts s}^{-1}$  for SIS1.



**Figure 5.** ASCA-SIS1 spectrum of Cyg OB2 #8A fitted with a  $\text{wabs}_{\text{ISM}} * \text{wind} * (\text{mekal}_1 + \text{mekal}_2 + \text{mekal}_3)$  model between 0.5 and 10.0 keV. The lower part of the figure has the same meaning as for Fig. 2.

**Table 10.** Parameters for the ASCA-SIS1 spectrum of Cyg OB2 #8A fitted with a  $\text{wabs}_{\text{ISM}} * \text{wind} * (\text{mekal}_1 + \text{mekal}_2 + \text{mekal}_3)$  model between 0.5 and 10.0 keV. The parameters have the same meaning as in Table 4.

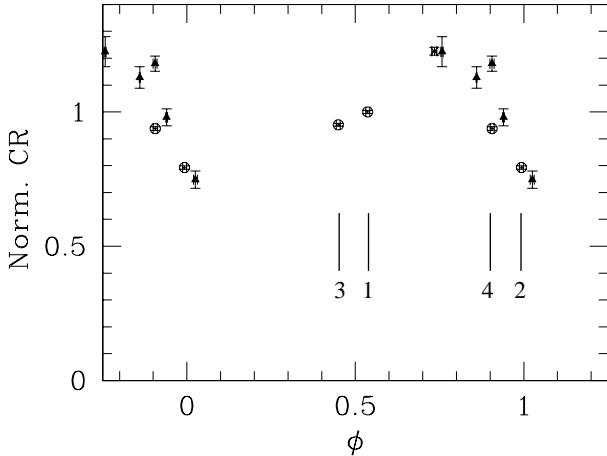
Log $N_w$	$21.82^{21.92}_{21.73}$
$kT_1$ (keV)	$0.23^{0.29}_{0.19}$
Norm <sub>1</sub>	$9.91^{30.18}_{3.98} \times 10^{-2}$
$kT_2$ (keV)	$0.83^{1.04}_{0.73}$
Norm <sub>2</sub>	$1.30^{1.64}_{1.00} \times 10^{-2}$
$kT_3$ (keV)	$1.66^{2.06}_{1.46}$
Norm <sub>3</sub>	$7.61^{9.83}_{1.47} \times 10^{-3}$
$\chi^2_{\nu}$ (d.o.f.)	1.05 (180)
Obs. Flux (erg $\text{cm}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$ )	$7.42 \times 10^{-12}$
Corr. Flux (erg $\text{cm}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$ )	$4.88 \times 10^{-11}$
Corr. $L_X$ (erg $\text{s}^{-1}$ )	$1.86 \times 10^{34}$
$L_X/L_{\text{bol}}$	$2.94 \times 10^{-6}$
$L_X$ excess	$\sim 24$

## 6 DISCUSSION

### 6.1 Orbital modulation of the X-ray flux

#### 6.1.1 Observational material

As Cyg OB2 #8A is a binary system, one could wonder whether the existing X-ray observations reveal a modulation of the X-ray flux. This issue was first addressed by De Becker et al. (2005a) where the results from several X-ray observations (*ROSAT* and *ASCA*) were combined to obtain a phase-folded light curve, on the basis of the ephemeris published by De Becker et al. (2004c). The light curve suggested a phase-locked modulation of the X-ray flux, probably due to the combined effect of the variation of the absorption along the line of sight and of the X-ray emission itself as a function of orbital phase. Because of inconsistencies between *ROSAT*-HRI and -PSPC count rates and because of a poor sampling of the orbital cycle, this preliminary light curve did

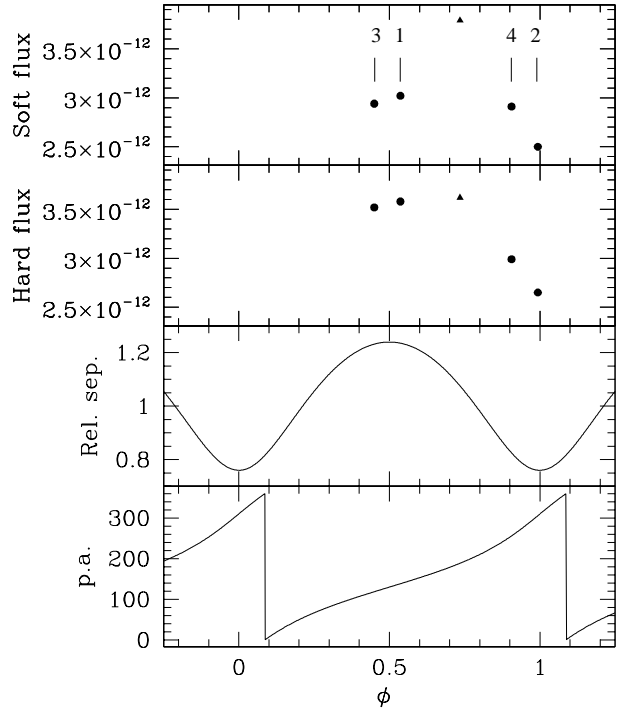


**Figure 6.** Normalized (see text) equivalent X-ray count rate of Cyg OB2 #8A from different observations as a function of the orbital phase following the ephemeris of De Becker et al. (2004c). *ROSAT*-PSPC: filled triangles. *ASCA*-SIS1: cross. *XMM-Newton*-EPIC: open circles. The vertical lines point to the four *XMM-Newton* observations labelled by their number.

not allow us to draw a firm conclusion. However, the light curve presented by De Becker et al. (2005a) suggests clearly that the *ROSAT*-HRI count rates show a phase modulation similar to that of the PSPC data.

Using our four *XMM-Newton* observations, along with the results from archive *ROSAT*-PSPC and *ASCA*-SIS1 data<sup>3</sup>, we constructed a new light curve. To compare the count rates from the different instruments in a consistent way, we used the 3-T model with the parameters obtained for the simultaneous fit of EPIC-MOS1 and EPIC-pn data for Observation 1, and we convolved it with the respective response matrices of *ROSAT*-PSPC and *ASCA*-SIS1 to obtain faked spectra. We obtained count rates of  $0.250 \pm 0.004$  and  $0.270 \pm 0.001$  cts s<sup>-1</sup> respectively for both instruments. On the basis of these values, and of the count rates obtained in Sect. 5, we compared the X-ray emission level from all observations after normalization with respect to the *XMM-Newton* Observation 1. The normalized X-ray count rates obtained this way are plotted as a function of the orbital phase in Fig. 6. We note that this light curve does not suggest any large error on the orbital parameters derived by De Becker et al. (2004c), considering the short period and the large time interval separating some of the observations discussed here. Over the time range between 1991 and 2004, an error of 0.040 d on the period would indeed lead to an error on the orbital phase of the order of 0.4. This suggests that the error of 0.040 d given for the 21.908 d period might be a somewhat conservative value, reinforcing our confidence in the orbital parameters proposed by De Becker et al. (2004c).

This curve presents a maximum at an orbital phase close to 0.75. We note the relative consistency of the various observations that contribute to the rather steep decrease in the X-ray emission between phases 0.75 and 1.0. We note however a discrepancy between the EPIC and PSPC points close to phase 0.9. Unfortunately, the



**Figure 7.** Variability of the X-ray flux of Cyg OB2 #8A as a function of the orbital phase observed with *XMM-Newton* (filled circles) and *ASCA* (filled triangle). The four *XMM-Newton* observations are individually labelled by their number. The four panels provide respectively (from top to bottom), the flux between 0.5 and 2.0 keV in  $\text{erg cm}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$ , the flux between 2.0 and 10.0 keV in  $\text{erg cm}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$ , the relative separation between the primary and the secondary, and the position angle of the system in degrees.

lack of observations between phases 0.0 and 0.4 prevents us from constraining the position of the minimum, likely located shortly after phase zero. A somewhat more detailed view of the variability of the observed X-ray flux can be obtained on the basis of Fig. 7. The X-ray fluxes in the soft (0.5 – 2.0 keV) and hard (2.0 – 10.0 keV) bands are individually plotted as a function of the orbital phase in the two upper panels. In order to investigate the variability in the hard part of the X-ray spectrum, we used only *XMM-Newton* and *ASCA* data. The separation between the two stars in Cyg OB2 #8A and the position angle (p.a.)<sup>4</sup> are also provided. The decrease of the X-ray flux between apastron and periastron is particularly obvious in the hard energy band. The maximum close to phase 0.75 suggested by Fig. 6 comes mainly from the soft band, as shown by the upper panel of Fig. 7.

In addition to the decrease in the X-ray flux, the comparison between the *XMM-Newton* Observations 1 and 2 reveals a significant decrease in the characteristic plasma temperature of the hottest thermal component (see Table 4). As these two observations are respectively close to phases 0.5 (largest separation) and 0.0 (smallest separation), the decrease in the post-shock plasma temperature could be related to the decrease in the pre-shock velocity at the position of the collision zone. For this rather close binary

<sup>3</sup> As we suspect some problems in the calibrations of the HRI instruments relative to the PSPC, we do not consider *ROSAT*-HRI count rates in our discussion.

<sup>4</sup> This position angle is 0° when the primary is in front of the secondary, and is 180° in the reverse situation. The longitude of the periastron ( $\omega$ ), that is required to compute the position angle, is equal to  $220^\circ \pm 12^\circ$ . This result was not mentioned in De Becker et al. (2004c).

system, the winds will indeed not yet have reached their terminal velocity before they collide. Using our estimate of the orbital (De Becker et al. 2004c) and wind (Table 3) parameters and adopting a  $\beta = 1$  wind velocity law, we calculate the distance between the stagnation point (i.e. the location of the wind-wind interaction on the binary axis) and the centre of each star. Following an estimate of the inclination angle of the system<sup>5</sup>, i.e. about  $26 \pm 5$  degrees, we infer absolute distances of about 131 and 81  $R_{\odot}$  respectively for the primary and the secondary at apastron (resp. 80 and 50  $R_{\odot}$  at periastron). Using the corresponding pre-shock velocities, we expect the post-shock temperature to vary (on axis) between about  $65 \times 10^6$  K and  $49 \times 10^6$  K from phases 0.5 to 0.0<sup>6</sup>. According to the values quoted in Table 4, the observed temperature for the hottest thermal component is about  $21 \times 10^6$  and  $18 \times 10^6$  K respectively for Observations 1 and 2. The fact that the predicted and observed temperatures are so different (about a factor 3) may suggest that the effective pre-shock velocity is lower than predicted by about a factor 1.7. However, as the EPIC bandpass does not extend further than 10 keV, we should bear in mind that our spectral fits may underestimate the characteristic temperature of the post-shock plasma. Moreover, some fraction of the emission is expected to come from off-axis where the shocks are oblique, leading the averaged observed emission to have a lower characteristic temperature than anticipated at the stagnation point. Finally, some radiative inhibition (Stevens & Pollock 1994) may be at work close to the line of centres of the binary system, therefore reducing the speed of the wind flows before they collide.

Some explanation for the variability described in Sect. 4.1 (see Fig. 4) and in Fig. 6 and 7 can be given on the basis of the different orbital phases of our *XMM-Newton* observations. In the case of a binary system like Cyg OB2 #8A, we can expect some variability in the X-ray domain mainly for two reasons<sup>7</sup>:

- the variation of the line of sight absorption along the orbital cycle, likely to affect mostly the softer part of the spectrum (i.e. below about 2.0 keV).
- the variation of the separation between the two stars, as the orbit is eccentric, likely to affect the physical conditions in the colliding wind zone. If some variability is observed in the harder part of the spectrum, it should most probably come from this process.

Considering the strong differences between Observations 1 and 2 in the whole EPIC bandpass (parts (a) and (d) of Fig. 4), both factors might play a significant role. Considering only *XMM-Newton* results, this decrease is more spectacular in the hard part of the spectrum (Fig. 4 and Fig. 7). This should be due to the variation of the separation between the two stars. The fact that Observation 2 occurs when the primary is ‘in front’ of the secondary (position

<sup>5</sup> We estimated the inclination angle by comparing the minimum masses given by De Becker et al. (2004c) and the typical masses given by Howarth & Prinja (1989) for stars of the spectral type and luminosity classes of the components of Cyg OB2 #8A.

<sup>6</sup> These temperatures correspond to the mean of the post-shock temperatures obtained respectively for the primary and the secondary. These temperatures are maximum values as they are estimated along the line of centres.

<sup>7</sup> We also mention that some variability may be expected if the wind collision crashes onto the surface of the secondary (see e.g. Pittard 1998 and Sana et al. 2005), but we do not expect this scenario to occur in the case of Cyg OB2 #8A as the wind collision zone is not located close enough to the surface of the secondary.

angle close to 0 degrees), i.e. at an orbital phase where the absorption should be larger, may explain the decrease in the soft part of the spectrum. The parameters quoted in Table 4 point indeed at a higher local absorption column in the case of Observation 2 as compared to the first one. The same trend is also suggested by the fits of RGS spectra (see Table 6). The lack of significant variability between Observations 1 and 3 (parts (b) and (e) of Fig. 4) is compatible with the fact that they fall nearly at the same phase close to apastron. Finally, the decrease in the X-ray emission observed above 2.0 keV in Observation 4 (parts (c) and (f) of Fig. 4, and Fig 7) might be explained by the decrease in the separation, lowering the X-ray emission from the collision zone. The somewhat higher local absorption in the case of Observation 4 suggested by the wind absorption parameter given in Table 4 may be an artifact of the fit, where the apparent higher absorption is compensated for by the larger normalization parameter of the same observation.

### 6.1.2 Hydrodynamic simulations

Considering the light curves presented above (see Fig. 6 and Fig. 7), it is obvious that the X-ray emission from Cyg OB2 #8A presents orbital modulations which are worth to be further investigated. For a better understanding of the physical processes responsible for this orbital modulation, we compared our *XMM-Newton* observations with the predictions of detailed hydrodynamic simulations using the same approach as Sana et al. (2004). In this method, the VH-1 numerical code based on the Piece-wise Parabolic Method (Colella & Woodward 1984), is used to solve the partial differential equations of hydrodynamics followed by a remap onto a fixed grid after each time step. A radiative energy loss term is included in the hydrodynamic equations in order to treat the cooling self-consistently. For details see Stevens et al. (1992), Pittard & Stevens (1997) and Sana et al. (2004).

Briefly, two spherically symmetric ionized winds of constant velocity are assumed, resulting in an axisymmetric geometry around the lines of centres where the hydrodynamic problem is reduced to a two-dimensional flow. The orbital motion is neglected. As the acceleration of the wind is not taken into account, the pre-shock velocity is estimated on the basis of a classical velocity law ( $\beta = 1.0$ ), for a terminal velocity estimated to be 2.6 times the escape velocity (Vink et al. 2000). We adopted a square grid size of  $300 \times 300$  cells, corresponding to physical distances of  $1.5 \times 1.5 10^{13}$  cm and we let the flow evolve a time long enough so that the system relaxes from the initial conditions. At each step, grids of density, pressure, radial and axial velocities are obtained, and therefore grids of temperature can be calculated. The X-ray emission from the system is evaluated by summing up the emissivity of each cell of the grid at each time step. The column of absorbing material was computed following a three-dimensional geometry taking into account the inclination of the system and the orientation of the line of sight with respect to the system (see Sana et al. 2004 for details).

We chose three different system configurations to evaluate the evolution of the X-ray flux between 0.5 and 10.0 keV along the orbital cycle: (i) apastron ( $\phi = 0.5$ ), (ii) intermediate ( $\phi = 0.75$ ), and (iii) periastron ( $\phi = 0.0$ ). The pre-shock velocities estimated in each case are given in Table 11 for both stars of the system. In the three cases, the collision zone relaxes from initial conditions after about 2500 steps, i.e. about  $3 \times 10^5$  s, and turns out to be highly unstable. This instability is however not expected to come from the cooling as the shocks in Cyg OB2 #8A are rather adiabatic, excepted perhaps to some extent in the case of the shocked primary

**Table 11.** Pre-shock velocities calculated at the three orbital phases selected for the hydrodynamic simulations respectively for the primary and the secondary of the system. The velocities were calculated on the basis of the terminal velocities and radii provided in Table 3, using a  $\beta = 1.0$  velocity law. We note that, as the estimate of the pre-shock velocities depends on the radius of the stars, the uncertainty on this latter quantity might be responsible for uncertainties on the calculated pre-shock velocities, and therefore on the post-shock temperatures as well.

Phase ( $\phi$ )	$V_{pre-shock,1}$ ( $\text{km s}^{-1}$ )	$V_{pre-shock,2}$ ( $\text{km s}^{-1}$ )
0.5	1870	2400
0.75	1800	2310
0.0	1620	2080

wind at periastron (the cooling parameter ( $\chi$ ) for the shocked primary and secondary winds are respectively of the order of 0.5-1.3 and 2.5-7.3, the lowest value corresponding to periastron and the highest one to apastron). It could instead result from shear instabilities as the winds in Cyg OB2 #8A have different velocities. However, at this stage we cannot exclude a numerical origin for these instabilities.

The mean and standard deviation of the X-ray luminosity are computed over a large number ( $\sim 5500$ ) of time steps after relaxation from the initial conditions. The averaged predicted X-ray luminosities, absorbed by both the wind and the interstellar material (using  $N_{\text{H}} = 0.94 \times 10^{22} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ , see Sect. 3.2), are given in the second column of Table 12. The comparison of the predicted and observed X-ray luminosities reveals that the theoretical modelling overestimates the X-ray luminosity by about a factor 6 to 8. Possibly, the neglect of some physical processes such as radiative inhibition (Stevens & Pollock 1994) likely to occur in the case of Cyg OB2 #8A, may be partly responsible for this discrepancy. As the winds do not have very different wind momentum rates, we do not expect sudden radiative breaking (Gayley et al. 1997) to be at work. However, we note that the X-ray luminosity is proportional to  $\dot{M}^2$  for adiabatic systems. A small error on the mass loss rate will therefore have a strong impact on the predicted X-ray luminosities. The high predicted luminosities may thus point to an overestimate of the mass loss rates used in the simulations. Moreover, a fraction of the kinetic energy of the shocks may be involved in the acceleration of particles (electrons and protons), but at this stage models likely to provide an estimate of this energy fraction are still lacking. However, the simulations predict indeed a minimum of the X-ray luminosity at periastron that is consistent with what we observe (see Fig. 6). The rather high emission level observed close to phase 0.75 is also predicted. We mention that the amplitude of the variation between phases 0.75 and 0.0 is very similar for observed and predicted luminosities. The X-ray luminosity at apastron appears however significantly lower than at phase 0.75, whilst the simulations lead to similar values at both phases. We note that the standard deviation on the predicted X-ray luminosity is the largest at apastron, suggesting that the X-ray emission could be more variable at this orbital phase. However, this could result from the remapping of our 2D hydrodynamic simulation on a 3D emission grid, which can lead to amplified variations. In addition, the relative emission levels obtained at the three orbital phases selected for our simulations

**Table 12.** Predicted absorbed fluxes of Cyg OB2 #8A at three characteristic phases of the orbital cycle. The observed X-ray fluxes obtained close to the three phases are also quoted for comparison. For this latter quantity, the satellite is specified in each case. The observed fluxes are taken from Tables 4 and 10.

Phase ( $\phi$ )	$f_{X,\text{sim}}$ ( $\text{erg cm}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$ )	$f_{X,\text{obs}}$ ( $\text{erg cm}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$ )
0.5	$(5.46 \pm 1.49) \times 10^{-11}$	$0.66 \times 10^{-11}$ (XMM #1)
0.75	$(4.81 \pm 1.06) \times 10^{-11}$	$0.74 \times 10^{-11}$ (ASCA)
0.0	$(2.95 \pm 0.43) \times 10^{-11}$	$0.52 \times 10^{-11}$ (XMM #2)

are in agreement with the fluxes plotted in Fig. 7 in the hard energy band, i.e. the spectral domain where the colliding winds are mainly expected to produce X-rays. Although this should be considered as first order results as we performed the simulations at only three orbital phases, the rather good agreement of the general behaviour between the predicted and observed variabilities confirms that the observed orbital modulations of the X-ray flux are produced by the line of sight absorption and by the variation of the separation between the two stars, as these two effects are dominant in our simulations. This results provides strong support to the scenario where the modulations of the X-ray flux come from the colliding winds.

## 6.2 Non-thermal emission

Cyg OB2 #8A is known as a bright non-thermal radio emitter (Bieging et al. 1989). The fact that it is a confirmed binary system suggests that the non-thermal emission is produced in the wind interaction zone. This has recently been confirmed by Blomme (2005) who presented a phase-folded radio light curve built on the basis of new data showing a strong phase-locked variability of the radio flux density. This is in agreement with the results of the study of Van Loo (2006) who showed that the production of the observed non-thermal emission from isolated stars is unlikely. In this scenario, electrons are accelerated through the first order Fermi mechanism up to relativistic velocities (Eichler & Usov 1993). This population of relativistic electrons is expected to interact with the local magnetic field, likely originating from the two stars, to produce synchrotron radiation in the radio domain (see e.g. Dougherty et al. 2003). New developments in the modelling of non-thermal radio emission from massive binaries are described by Pittard et al. (2006). These recent models take into account several physical effects like free-free absorption, the Razin effect and IC cooling.

The latter process is particularly interesting in the sense that the cooling of relativistic electrons by UV photospheric photons through IC scattering is likely to produce a non-thermal high-energy emission component. However, we did not find any evidence for a power law emission component attributable to a non-thermal emission in our XMM-Newton-EPIC spectra of Cyg OB2 #8A. This was not unexpected as any putative non-thermal emission component would probably be overwhelmed by the strong thermal emission arising from the wind-wind interaction zone. The unlikelihood of the detection of a power law emission below 10.0 keV in the case of non-thermal radio emitting massive binaries was indeed pointed out by De Becker et al. (2005b). However, such a non-thermal emission could possibly be detected in very hard X-rays and soft  $\gamma$ -rays, where the spectra are not expected to be contaminated by thermal emission. For instance, De Becker et al. (2005a) estimated that the possible contribution

of Cyg OB2 #8A to the  $\gamma$ -ray emission from the yet unidentified EGRET source 3EG J2033+4118 could amount up to about 10%. However, these estimations need to be refined using more sophisticated models (see e.g. Pittard & Dougherty 2006). In addition, the observation of the Cyg OB2 region with the IBIS(ISGRI) imager onboard the *INTEGRAL* observatory did not allow to detect any high-energy emission putatively associated to the massive stars in Cyg OB2 (De Becker 2005).

## 7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we presented the results of four *XMM-Newton* observations of the massive binary Cyg OB2 #8A separated by about ten days from each other. The best fits of the X-ray spectra were obtained using a three-temperature thermal model, with characteristic plasma temperatures for the three components of about  $3 \times 10^6$ ,  $9 \times 10^6$  and  $20 \times 10^6$  K. The hottest component is most probably attributed to the thermal X-ray emission from the collision zone between the winds of the two stars. The nature of the X-ray emission appears to be purely thermal, and we failed to fit power law models to the hard part of the spectrum. This is in agreement with the idea proposed by De Becker et al. (2005b) that non-thermal radio emitters are not likely to display a non-thermal emission component in their X-ray spectrum below 10.0 keV. We note also that the EPIC spectrum of Cyg OB2 #8A is reasonably fitted by non-equilibrium ionization models such as used by Pollock et al. (2005) in the case of WR 140. The X-ray luminosity is very high (about  $10^{34}$  erg s<sup>-1</sup>, leading to an X-ray luminosity excess of 13–19 during our observations). This rather high X-ray emission level is in disagreement with the statement by Waldron et al. (2004) that the X-ray emission in Cyg OB2 #8A is probably not different from that expected from isolated O-stars.

The analysis of high spectral resolution RGS data reveals an absorbed spectrum with prominent lines mainly from Si XIV, Si XIII, Mg XII, Mg XI, Ne X, Ne IX and Fe XVII. The comparison of the spectra obtained at different orbital phases suggests a possible variability of some line profiles. Provided the variations of these lines are phase-locked, it may suggest that the plasma heated by the colliding winds contributes significantly to their production, but a better phase coverage of the orbital cycle is needed to investigate this behaviour in detail.

We folded the count rates from our *XMM-Newton* observations, along with those from archive *ROSAT*-PSPC and *ASCA*-PSPC observations, with the ephemeris given by De Becker et al. (2004c). We observe a variability of the count rate and of the X-ray flux of about 20% between apastron and periastron. The light curve as a function of the orbital phase points to a maximum at about phase 0.75, and suggests a minimum shortly after the periastron passage. The shape of the light curve might be explained by the combined effect of absorption and varying separation along the orbital cycle, this latter factor being responsible for the lower pre-shock velocity reached by the winds at periastron with respect to apastron. Using hydrodynamic simulations, we also find a lower emission level close to phase 0.0, but the predicted X-ray luminosities are overestimated by more than a factor 5. Such a discrepancy may be explained partly by somewhat excessive mass loss rates, and also by the fact that we did not take radiative inhibition effects into account in our simulations. The amplitude of the observed variation is less than predicted. This contrast may be reduced by including shock modification (Pittard & Dougherty 2006), by reducing the value of  $\beta$  for the wind velocity law, or even by slightly

changing the inclination angle. As a main conclusion, we state that the strong phase-locked variability – along with the spectral shape – of the X-ray emission of Cyg OB2 #8A revealed by our investigation points undoubtedly to X-ray emission dominated by colliding winds.

The investigation of the high-energy emission from Cyg OB2 #8A is likely to provide a wealth of information on the physics of interacting stellar winds. With a period of only about 22 days and such a large X-ray brightness, Cyg OB2 #8A offers the unique opportunity to monitor easily and intensively its X-ray emission during a complete orbit, and therefore to perform a detailed study of the interaction between stellar winds in massive binaries. In the future, Cyg OB2 #8A appears to be an ideal target for the Wide band X-ray Imager (WXI) and the Soft Gamma-ray Detector (SGD) onboard the Next generation X-ray Telescope satellite *NeXT* (Takahashi et al. 2004), whose sensitivity is expected to be significantly better than that of *INTEGRAL*. On the other hand, the results from the radio monitoring of Cyg OB2 #8A (Blomme 2005) might be used in parallel with state-of-the-art models to evaluate the non-thermal emission level in the high-energy domain. Moreover, provided that the relativistic electrons are accelerated in the collision zone of massive binaries, the simultaneous determination of the non-thermal luminosity both in the radio and high-energy domains is expected to provide an independent approach to estimate the local magnetic field in the interaction zone of the colliding winds.

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