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Some philological and methodological thoughts on the problematic place-name Avening, Gloucestershire

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The name of the Gloucestershire parish of Avening is recorded in the Old English form (*to*) *Æfeningum* in a record of an agreement datable to 896 C.E., the surviving copy of which was made in the early eleventh century (Birch 574; Kemble 1073; Sawyer 1441; Grundy 1935–6, 276–8). It has generally been concluded that its original form consisted of the ancestor of a modern river-name Avon + the Old English suffix *-ingas* ‘dwellers associated with [whomever or whatever the preceding element denotes]’ (Baddeley 1913, 13; Ekwall 1928, 22 and 1960, 19; Smith, *EPNE*, I, 284, 302, and *EPNS Gloucestershire*, I, 86; Reaney 1960, 107; Cameron 1996, 67; Gelling 1997, 109; Mills 1998, 19; Watts 2004, 27).¹ This originally ‘ethnonymic’ *-ingas* suffix came, by metonymy,² to be understood as a place-name forming element in names such as Hastings and (with the original *-as* now lost) Reading. Such has also been the consensus regarding Avening, in which, in the copied Anglo-Saxon document, that suffix appears in the dative case

¹ The only partly dissenting view is Baddeley’s belief that the second element is a similar stream-name forming suffix *-ing*, which is real enough (see further below, note 9) but never appears with an original final *-s*. The copy of Sawyer 1441 referred to is British Library, Cotton Tiberius A. XIII, ff. 1–118, ff. 43r–44r. Smith knew only a different, much later, copy, British Library, Cotton Vespasian A. v, ff. 148–94, f. 169r (copied about 1560), which does not differ in the relevant detail.

² Metonymy: a figure of speech in which an entity is referred to using a word associated with that entity, rather than by a word whose primary sense expresses that entity directly. In this example, a place is referred to using the name of a people associated with that place rather than by an expression which was a place-name in its own right.

form *-ingum* required by the preposition *to*.³ The *-ingas* suffix is confirmed in numerous Middle English renderings of the name (as *-inges*) through till 1325, after which the *-s* disappears, though forms without *-s* coexist with these throughout the period (*EPNS Gloucestershire*, I, 86).

However, there are four objections to this reasonable-looking opinion, not all insuperable individually but together amounting to grounds for seriously questioning the common view and for exploring others.

1. The village is not on a river called the Avon, as many of the commentators explicitly note. They conclude either (a) that the stream at Avening was formerly called Avon or was referred to using a word which was the Brittonic ancestor of the Welsh word *afon* ‘river’, the source of the various English Avon names (Ekwall 1928 and 1960; Mills 1998), or (b) that the first inhabitants were called after some river Avon on whose banks they had previously dwelt (*EPNS Gloucestershire*), regarding which see 2. below. Watts (2004) continues to offer both of these options. Neither excuse is susceptible of proof or disproof using the evidence currently available. But it is worth noting that the Brittonic word is only ever borrowed into English as a name, and has never been recorded as a generic word in English for ‘river’, nor as a name for a river in Brittonic. Moreover, the stream at Avening is a headwater of the river Frome, which has a Brittonic name itself,

³ There are two other Avenings in southern Gloucestershire. One is in Thornbury, in the west of the parish (1830; OS 1" map, first edition, a house still there today, though shorn of its woodland; it appears as *Avening Green* on the Thornbury Inclosure map of 1836, Gloucestershire Archives Q/RI/142). The other – also *Avening Green* – is on one of the rivers Avon (the Little Avon), in Tortworth (1697; Gloucestershire Archives D340a/T142 (7)). Neither has been found recorded before the dates mentioned, and any relevance to the present article cannot be demonstrated. It is possible that both contain the rare surname derived from the parish name, exemplified by Thomas *de Avening*, clerk, rector of the church of Beverstone (1283, Gloucestershire Archives D1866/T9; 1294, Patent Rolls, TNA), but only one bearer from post-medieval centuries has been found in the material available to the Family Names of the United Kingdom project, University of the West of England (2010–16): John *Avenig or Avenyng*, 1501 in The National Archives (PROB 11/12/294; from Cirencester). The two place-names may instead be late copies of the parish name, but Smith acknowledges a possibility that the Tortworth name has the same origin as what he proposes for the parish name (*EPNS Gloucestershire*, III, 16, 41).

**frōũ*, ancestral to Welsh *ffraw* ‘brisk, swift, strong’; it seems very unlikely that the English would have used a borrowed generic term, ‘the river’, as a name for a tributary of a river whose authentic local name they already knew, especially when they borrowed that same generic term elsewhere to serve as the name of large and important rivers such as the Stratford, Bristol and Hampshire Avons, as Ekwall already notes (1928, 23). Even the Little



The stream at Avening in autumn, a presently nameless headwater of the Frome (author's photo)

Avon flowing into the Severn through Berkeley Pill is made of sterner and more independent stuff than the stream at Avening. It seems perverse to derive the place-name from a term which appears in the name which attaches to three rivers in the county, but not to the one on which the place actually stands.⁴ Nicolaisen (1961) observed that, in Scotland at least, and probably

⁴ One might also have thought the Britons would have considered the modest Avening stream (see image) to be an example of what the Welsh later called a *ffrwd* or a *nant* rather than an *afon*.

more generally, rivers tended to maintain ancient names lower down their course and to be named in later vernaculars higher up their systems. If this is truly a general principle, that is another reason why the stream at Avening is unlikely to have an Avon name.

2. There are no other examples in Britain of a place-name including *-ingas* derived from a river-name, with two possible, both debatable, exceptions. One of these is Tyn(n)inghame (East Lothian) from the, or a, river Tyne: ‘estate of the Tyne-people’. Nicolaisen (2001: 93–4) justifies his derivation of this name by comparing the name with (only) Avening, so to adduce it in support of a solution for Avening risks a circular justification. However, in the manuscripts including material which constitutes the *Frankish Annals of Lindisfarne* (of which none is later than about 830; Story 2005, 60), we find in annal 756 *Balthere obiit in Tininghami* (Pertz 1866, 505), i.e. with no indication of the genitive case of the *-ingas* element. Later sources mentioning this name (post-1000) show a good Old English *-a-* in the required place, however. The other possible exception is Blything hundred in Suffolk (Ekwall 1960; Briggs and Kilpatrick 2016, 15), ‘dwellers by the Blyth’, used metonymically for an area. Watts (2004), however, offers an alternative origin in a singular *-ing* suffix paralleling other river-names (compare note 9), presumably because there is only one medieval (fourteenth-century) record showing final *-s*. A minor positive is that Tyn(n)inghame at least offers a parallel for a place named after people named after a different river.

3. If Avening is an instance of place-name *-ingas*, it is much further west than the heartland of this suffix as a name-forming element. Most examples are in the eastern counties of England from Essex to the East Riding of Yorkshire and Kent to Dorset, with occasional outliers in the far north-western counties.⁵

Let us first distinguish between *absolute* and *genitival* forms of the suffix. By absolute forms I mean forms in the nominative or dative case which stand alone as place-names. By genitival forms I mean forms in the

⁵ For an authoritative account of the suffix and its distribution, see Gelling (1997, chapter 5).

genitive case which are embedded in more complex place-names, i.e. which are followed by an additional element which is usually topographical in a broad sense. In the south-west and midlands, the westernmost convincing such examples are:

- ♦ Gillingham (Dorset) and Birmingham and Hunningham (Warwickshire), in all of which the suffix appears in its genitive plural form *-inga-* followed by another element (probably *hām* ‘large farm or farming estate’, perhaps *hamm* ‘hemmed-in, topographically enclosed land, land in a river-bend’, etc.);
- ♦ Glastonbury (Somerset), where early spellings convincingly indicate genitival *-inga-* (*Glastingaea*, 704, *Glestingaburg* mid-8th century, *Glæstingabyrig* about 1000, ‘the island (*īeg*)’ and ‘the earthworked place (*burg*, dative *byrig*) of the group called *Glæstingas*’);
- ♦ a small group of names in Gloucestershire, notably Arlingham (with *hamm*), Bagendon (with *denu* ‘valley’), Daglingworth and Charingworth in Ebrington (both with *worð* ‘enclosure, smallholding’).

All of these are genitival forms, i.e. forms which are used in the place-name to denote a group of people and their relationship to a place, not to denote the place itself. There are very few, if any, such genitival examples in Worcestershire, Herefordshire, elsewhere in Somerset, or further south-west. One may be the deanery-name Archenfield (Herefordshire), from Old English *Ircingafeld*, with probable reference to dwellers at the Roman small town Ariconium (Kenchester), but this is more likely to be based on an adaptation of the Welsh name of the area, Ergyng, than an independent Old English *-inga-* formation. Shillingford in Bampton and Shillingford parish (both Devon; *EPNS Devon*, II, 503, 532) deserve consideration, but Watts (2004, 544) offers an alternative solution to this repeated name, and no other name in Devon is beyond reasonable dispute an example of the *-inga-* type.⁶

⁶ Luffincott (*Lughyngecot* in 1242; *EPNS Devon*, I, 152) might appear to be an instance, but it is not on record till the mid-thirteenth century, which in itself raises a large question about its chronology and status. The matter of *-inga(s)* is not even broached in the introduction to the Devon survey.

The type appears therefore to have become obsolete as English settlement proceeded westwards.

On the other hand, the furthest west names ending in absolute *-ingas*, i.e. where the suffix is clearly used as an element to form a free-standing place-name, are probably Filkins (Oxfordshire)⁷ and Cannings (Wiltshire; though Cannings might be suspected of being a plural form, ‘the two estates called *Canning(s)* [i.e. what are now All Cannings and Bishops Cannings]’, with the plural name eventually applied separately to each).⁸ It will be seen that if Avening is an absolute *-ingas* place-name, it stands out geographically, some 25 miles north-west of the Wiltshire places and 20 west of Filkins, and far from the areas where such names are truly frequent, i.e. Sussex, Kent and East Anglia.

Smith offers support from Gloucestershire for his analysis of Avening by treating Twyning as a late Old English name of the same type (*EPNS Gloucestershire*, II, 71). It appears as *Tweoneaum*, *Bituinaeum* ‘between the rivers’ in Anglo-Saxon texts, but as *Tveninge* and the like only after the Conquest; in the latter guise it shows a final *-s* only in a set of related attestations from a single scriptorium, Winchcombe Abbey, and this *-s* cannot therefore be assumed to be an authentic survival from Old English. Authenticated instances of such *-ingas* names are all early Anglo-Saxon, and, as noted above, from further east. Twyning looks like an irregular development of the Old English name resting on the analogy of such local stream-names as Guiting and three other names all containing a quite distinct Old English suffix, singular *-ing*,⁹ two of which are lost (*Theodningc* and *Brihtinc broc*), and the other no longer transparent (Glynch Brook), all of which are, or originate as, stream-names. Smith also treats Hawling as an *-ingas* name (*EPNS Gloucestershire*, II, 17–18). It offers great difficulties of

⁷ Though early spellings with *-s* are rare in the case of Filkins (*EPNS Oxfordshire*, II, 320).

⁸ The relevant data can be found in *EPNS Wiltshire*, 249–50. Smith (*EPNE*, I, 284) suspects the same may have happened occasionally in the documentary record of the two Gloucestershire places called Guiting, Temple Guiting and Guiting Power. But Cannings can also be satisfactorily interpreted as the name of a single estate which was later divided, i.e. as a ‘classical’ *-ingas* name.

⁹ That is, the suffix *-ing*²: *EPNE*, I, 285–90.

interpretation; according to Smith it may mean '(place of) those associated with one or more *h(e)alh* ['nook or corner of land'], or '(place of) those associated with Hallow (Worcestershire)'.¹⁰ However, the universal double <l>-spelling in medieval records suggests that the first element is really Old English *h(e)all* 'hall' or perhaps a male given name of the same form.¹¹ Whichever of these interpretations is correct, Hawling must be the only other reasonable candidate to be an absolute *-ingas* name in Gloucestershire, and the only other one west of Cannings and Filkins. But it should be noted that its only ostensibly pre-Conquest charter attestations show it as a genitive plural form before the topographical words in the dative case *homme* 'hemmed-in land, etc.' and *weallan* 'stream', i.e. it does not appear unambiguously in the guise of an absolute *-ingas* name till after the Conquest.

A very well-known Anglo-Saxon land-grant (with reversions) of 804 C.E. (Birch 313/314, Sawyer 1187), makes reference to *protectionem et defensionem contra Berclinga contentione*, understood to mean 'protection against the claim of the people [i.e. the monks] of Berkeley [i.e. *Berclingas* in the genitive plural]'; in the long version of the charter (Birch 313), *Berclingas* appears in the next sentence where a Latin accusative case is required, and must therefore also be grammatically Old English. No-one seems to have thought it odd that we should have a group-noun appropriately inflected for Old English case and number twice in the middle of a Latin document, but we pass over that here to note that, even if this analysis is correct, the form is not an instance of an absolute *-ingas* place-name that might be used to support the current analysis of Avening. Both mentions are designations of people rather than a metonymic place-name. Avening as a proposed absolute *-ingas* name therefore remains, with the problematic

¹⁰ Smith also accepts Finberg's elucidation (1961, 184–96) of the complex and partly mistaken charter evidence about the relation between Hallow and Hawling.

¹¹ Like Halling (Kent), according to Wallenberg (1934, 118), which, alternatively, contains a male given name of the same form, according to Ekwall (1960), whilst Watts (2004, 247) offers both possibilities. The documentary record of Hallow is split between spellings with <l> and with <ll> (*EPNS Worcestershire*, 129), which seriously complicates the task of interpreting the range of possibilities for the etymology of Hawling.

exception of Hawling, unique in Gloucestershire, some way west of all other absolute *-ingas* names, and quite rare among all *-ingas* names, absolute or genitival, in the west of England.

4. The single Old English record of Avening is (*to*) *Æfeningum*. Acknowledging that reliance on a single form, even in an authentic (in Sawyer's view, though not original) document, is perilous, it is all we have to go on; at least it is consistent with the post-Conquest development of the name (*Aveninges* and the like, in a range of documents). But this single form comes close to wrecking the currently accepted etymology completely, though it may not immediately be clear why. If the name does indeed include the Brittonic river-word **aβon*, it should appear in Old English as **Afon* or, later, **Afen*, and that is the case for well-recorded other rivers with this name (Ekwall 1928, 20–3). It has long been a well-established fact that Brittonic [a] before an original back vowel (e.g. [o]) in the next syllable always appears in Old English as <a>, not <æ> (Jackson 1953, 271–2), and indeed there is only a single instance of the name of any river Avon being spelt with <æ> in an Anglo-Saxon period manuscript. Ekwall (1928, 20–3) knew 53 pre-Conquest mentions, of which 51 have initial <A>. There is just one instance of <Æ>, and a form with <A> appears in the selfsame short text, the bounds mentioned in a grant of land in Wiltshire by king Alfred, purporting to date from 892 C.E. but existing only in a fourteenth-century copy (Birch 567; Sawyer 348).¹² The single Old English spelling of Avening, with <æ>, can therefore only represent **aβon* + *-ingas* with some degree of special pleading.¹³

¹² There is also one aberrant instance spelt with <Ea->, in a (dubious) Mercian royal land-grant of 845 C.E. relating to a monastery at Stratford-on-Avon (Birch 450, Sawyer 198). On this, see further below.

¹³ It might be objected that the spellings of *Glastonbury* cited above undermine the point made here. *Glæstingas*, with <æ>, is the Old English form of the group-name found, or implied, in the place-name, which is adapted from Brittonic **glastan* 'holm-oak(s)' or a form related to Gallo-Latin *glastum* 'woad', both derived from an ancestor of the Welsh colour-term *glas* which covered part of the range of English *blue-green-silver*. However, it is clear that the place-name was understood as though containing Old English *glæs* 'glass', because the name appears in other ancient documents, otherwise incompre-

That special pleading might take one of two forms, neither of them convincing. We could suggest that in the name of Avening [a] became [æ] by the change known as (Mercian) second fronting (Campbell 1959, 62–4; Hogg 1992, 138–42). This change is represented consistently only in a single Old English text (the interlinear glosses on the Vespasian Psalter: British Library Cotton MS. Vespasian A. 1), written in the later eighth century in Canterbury but showing some dialect features classically associated with the West Midlands. However, if second fronting of [a] to [æ] takes place where the following syllable contains a back vowel such as we see in **aβon*, it is subject to the change called back-umlaut and becomes a sound written <ea>. Accordingly, the spelling with <ea> mentioned in footnote 12 might be taken as indirect evidence for the second fronting of original [æ]. But if the Old English spelling of *Avening* itself illustrates second fronting, it presupposes that the [o] in the following syllable had already been reduced to the non-back vowel represented in Old English by the letter <e> by the time of the operation of second fronting, which is generally supposed to have been complete by 700 C.E.; otherwise we would expect to find a spelling *<Eafeningum>, from earlier *<Eafoningum>, with back-umlaut. But the general belief is that such reductions of unstressed syllables are a feature of late Old English (eleventh century). The probability that (to) *Æfeningum* illustrates second fronting is therefore low.

Alternatively, we might suggest that the [i] vowel in the *-ingas* suffix has caused *i*-mutation (in this case fronting to [æ]) of the [a] vowel in the borrowed **aβon*. However, this suggestion would fail for all anglicists on the grounds that, for whatever reason, there is no evidence that this suffix, along with some phonetically similar ones, regularly caused *i*-mutation; or, still more strongly, on the grounds that *i*-mutation was an early change which did not apply in the case of *-ingas* because its operation was complete even

hensibly, as Latin *Urbs Vitrea* ‘glassy town’ and Old Welsh *Ineswitrin* ‘glassy island’; these clearly represent translations of a supposed but unetymological sense of the Old English names *Glæstingabyrig* and *Glastingaea* respectively. The Old English spellings of *Glastonbury* are therefore not evidence that Brittonic [a] could be regularly represented by Old English [æ] in the circumstances indicated, but examples of so-called folk-etymology (phonologically irregular change due to analogy with existing words or names).

before new *-ingas* names began to be coined (as argued by Coates 1984, developing a view held by Karl Luick).¹⁴ Such names are generally reckoned to be among the earliest English place-names, if not, as formerly thought, the very first.

* * *

We are compelled to conclude that the attractive and widely accepted etymology of Avening may very well be wrong, and that what has passed for an etymologically straightforward name is no such thing. We therefore need to take stock. The key point is this: whilst Avening is very far west for a place with an absolute *-ingas* name (i.e. one of a very early type), there is no viable alternative interpretation of the Old English spelling of the suffix; but in that case, the element to which it is attached is most unlikely to be the ancestor of the river-name Avon. What else might it be?

There are three immediately possible lines of attack, none of which is promising, let alone conclusive.

1. We might turn to the male given name *Afa* (Redin 1919, 82), one of the many etymologically unintelligible but well-recorded monothematic (single-element) male names of Anglo-Saxon times. Such names also occur in suffixed forms. A suffix *-in* could cause the required fronting to [æ], but there is no evidence that such a suffix was ever used in given names. Redin (1919, 160–1) dismissed the whole small set of names with a suffix including *-n-* as ‘a few names of doubtful character’, and no-one has returned to them in the century since his monograph was published. A partial parallel for a hypothetical **Æfin*, later **Æfen*, would be the well-attested but late (tenth–eleventh centuries) *Æfic* (Searle 1897, 5), but the odds are stacked against **Æfin*.¹⁵

¹⁴ Exception must be made for certain lexical words formed with an *-ing-* type suffix early in the history of the Germanic languages, even before the emergence of English as a separate strain.

¹⁵ The double consonant in the attested *Æffa* or its female counterpart *Æffe* (Redin 1919, 59, 115) makes them unlikely to be related to the forms under discussion.

2. There is an obscure Welsh male given name *Hefin*, which could descend from an earlier Brittonic **Hafin*, and an early borrowing of this would provide the basis required for an English **Hæfin* with *i*-mutation, later **Hæfen*. There is, however, no such name in the English record, and in any case, the disappearance of Brittonic initial [h] would be irregular in an English borrowing.

3. Formally, the first element might be Old English *ǣfen(n)* ‘evening’, leaving us to play with the idea that the name originates as a group-name meaning ‘people of the West’ (for which compare German *Abendland* literally ‘evening land’ and Latin *occidens* literally ‘(sun) setting’), but even if that were semantically and culturally credible,¹⁶ we would have to note that this form is dialectally West Saxon rather than a Mercian form, which would be *ēfen(n)*.¹⁷ There are, however, a few traces of West Saxon in Gloucestershire (see *EPNS Gloucestershire*, IV, 62–3, where the author does not say explicitly that the instances of vowel shortening he mentions which are spelt with <a> would testify to an etymology in <ǣ> and therefore either to West Saxon, or to a very early, pre-literate, stage of Mercian).

Unless suggestion 3. is accepted, as the best of a bad lot, the only philologically viable solution I can construct is that *Æfen-* must represent a name, but cannot be an ordinary English, Brittonic or British Latin one.¹⁸ Classical Latin had no [v] sound, and its [w] (spelt <v>) never became [v] in Britain as it did on the Continent, to judge by the evidence of Latin borrowings into British Celtic (Jackson 1953, 363–5). But post-Classical Roman names are attested which could credibly be anglicized as *Æfen*, in which the <f> represents [v], as in the modern pronunciation of the place-name, if and only if the <v> between the first two vowels could by this stage represent the proto-Romance pronunciation [v], rather than Classical Latin

¹⁶ The Anglo-Saxons made liberal use of the element *west* in their place-naming, and there is little reason to think they would have used a more abstract term for the simple concept here.

¹⁷ There are medieval spellings of the type *Eveninges*, which might be viewed as being influenced by the everyday word.

¹⁸ And I am not constructing it with a view to presenting a confident proposal, for reasons which will become obvious, if they are not already.

[w]. Formally impeccable as a possible source is an early Romance form of the Roman-period name of Avignon, *Aven(n)io*, -um (the latter latinizing the Greek suffix -on), found in the ablative case as *Auennione* on the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, a thirteenth-century copy of a late Roman map.¹⁹ *Æfeningas* could formally be a word meaning ‘the people of Avignon’, a place known as a centre of sub-Roman Christianity from the third century, in the shape of the abbey later known as Saint-Ruf. It was an episcopal see in the mid-fifth century, became a Merovingian possession in 536, and was still a see in 561 when the Parisian priest Domnolus refused the bishop’s mitre, excusing himself to the Frankish king Chlothar I on the grounds that it would be unsuitable for him to be wearied *inter senatores sophisticos ac iudices philosophicos*.²⁰ That suggests, to spin Domnolus’s plea differently, that the place was still known as a lively intellectual centre in the second half of the sixth century.

A case might be made that this is indeed the origin of Avening. I am content for what follows to be called fantastical (or worse) provided that anyone who calls it that recognizes the philological criteria that any solution of the name has to satisfy, and is aware that this is a philologically satisfactory attempt to fulfil them, whatever the historical and cultural obstacles – unlike those currently on the table.

There are Old English examples, attested in relatively late texts, of -ingas attaching to a place-name to denote that place’s inhabitants, notably for example *Eforwicingas* (from *Eoforwīc*, York, ASC C, annal 918), *Westmoringa* [land] (from Westmorland, ‘[land] of those (from) west of the

¹⁹ Levi and Levi (1967), cited by Rivet and Smith (1979, 149). The base-name cannot be the Roman-period river-name *Aventius* which survives in a suffixed form as the *Ewenni* in Wales, because (despite the appearances arising from the late-suffixed Welsh name) the Romano-British <ɥ> in the sequence <-nt-> would be expected to be preserved in an early English name, as in *Newent* from a British Celtic form something like **Now(j)ant-* (Rivet and Smith 1979, 260–1; *EPNS Gloucestershire*, III, 173), or in *Wintan(ceaster)* ‘Winchester’ for Romano-British *Venta*. Also, Romano-British <v> gives Welsh <w>, not a sound that could be represented by Old English <ƿ>, modern <v>.

²⁰ According to Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum* (book 6, §285). The spirit of the plea, if not its letter, might be expressed as ‘... among hair-splitting political commentators and armchair critics’.

moor or the west moor', *ASC E*, annal 966) and *Eastcentingas* (from East Kent, *ASC E*, annal 1009), (*into*) *Fifburhingum*, (*of*) *Fifburhingan* (from the Five Boroughs, *ASC C* and *E*, annal 1013), *Lindisfarneolondinga* (from Lindisfarne, colophon of the *Lindisfarne Gospels*);²¹ *ealdingc tuninga* (from Ellington, Kent, Birch 784, Sawyer 489, 943 C.E.), *niwan tuninga*, *niwantuninga* (from Newington, Kent, both also Sawyer 489).²² Apart from these, which are from a range of text-types, all the clear examples of the suffix attaching to a foreign place-name relate to biblical places, but the late-tenth-century glossator of the Rushworth Gospel of Matthew had no scruples about using such a method of formation; we find a wealth of examples, including *Samaringa* 'Samaritans (genitive plural), people of Samaria', and *Geransinga* 'Gergenses (genitive plural), people of Gergesa' [slightly garbled], *Sodominga* 'people of Sodom (genitive plural)' and *Sodomingum* 'people of Sodom (dative plural)', *Gomorringa* 'people of Gomorrah (genitive plural)'; note also *Cedaringas* 'people of Cedar [a place-name]', from the *Old English Metrical Psalms*.²³ This shows that, at least in literary Old English, words were being formed that were consistent with those created earlier to form group-names used metonymically as place-names, and some continuity of morphological awareness can be presumed after the late-archaic place-name forming period (? before about 700 C.E., or what Cameron (1996, 70) calls 'the colonizing phase'). It would therefore not be absolutely necessary to ascribe *Avening* to the earliest phase of naming if it was taken to be an early representative of the set of name-containing expressions just mentioned.

²¹ Checked against the image of the MS at <www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_nero_d_iv_f259r>.

²² For discussion of the relation of the spellings to these places in Kent, see Wallenberg 1931, 258–60.

²³ Kluge 1926, 15–16; Munske 1964, 66. There is also *Lidwicingum* (dative plural) for the inhabitants of Brittany (*ASC C*, annal 886, and *D*, annal 885). In this instance, the base element is not a place-name but seems to have been understood as one containing the Old English element *wīc*. It is formed on the Brittonic ancestor of the Welsh adjective *Llydewig* 'Breton'; the actual name of Brittany in Welsh is unsuffixed *Llydaw*. The innovatory form is also found in the Old English poem *Widsith* (line 80).

Could there be any substance in the idea of Avignonnais in early Gloucestershire? We know:

- (1) that Augustine of Canterbury²⁴ was sent to Britain by pope Gregory I, arriving in 597;
- (2) that he had 40 or so companions, but where he acquired them all is unknown, even if some must have started the journey in Rome with him;
- (3) that he journeyed via the Rhône valley;
- (4) that he was in contact with the archbishop of Arles on the way (on (1)–(4) see Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica* book 1, 24);
- (5) that Avignon was a place with strong Christian credentials in the archdiocese of Arles, a mere 21 miles from Arles itself, and we do not know for sure where the archbishop met Augustine within his jurisdiction;
- (6) that Billeswick by Bristol, the location of the present cathedral, is one place which has a defensible claim to being the location of Augustine's celebrated meeting with British bishops in 603 at the place later known as *Augustine's Oak* recounted by Bede (*Historia ecclesiastica* book 2, 2);
- (7) and that Augustine's companion Jordan was later venerated at Bristol; on (6) and (7) see the circumstantial case relating Augustine, Jordan and Bristol made in a series of recent works by David Higgins (2007, 2009, 2012, 2014a, 2014b, 2015).²⁵

In the light of all that, the tentative etymological sketch floated here in the hope of provoking discussion acquires somewhat more credibility than it would otherwise have. It situates the phonologically and morphologically plausible linguistic proposal in a loosely compatible historical context. But it remains true that there are no traditions supporting this etymology at

²⁴ For his biography, see Mayr–Harting 2004.

²⁵ The basis of some of Higgins' speculations about the life and posthumous status of [St] Jordan have been attacked by Hare (2016), but the tradition of the relation between Jordan and Augustine, and the facts of the route and progress of Augustine's mission to England, are solid enough to maintain interest.

Avening itself (24 miles from Bristol as the crow flies), and no record of cathedral or monastic lands or privileges in medieval Avening (judging by the account in *VCH Gloucestershire*, XI, 157–60) to suggest long-established Church interest there, other than the agreement of 896 C.E. (Birch 574, Sawyer 1441) with which we began, recording the resolution of a disagreement about the ownership of mastland and woodland in Avening between Wærferth, bishop of Worcester, and Æthelwald.²⁶ Let the reader beware and wonder, but not dismiss out of hand.

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²⁶ The basis of the bishop of Worcester's claim to this woodland can be seen in an eighth-century document of king Æthelbald of Mercia (Birch 164, Sawyer 103) in which Avening is not actually mentioned by name. In the document of 896, we learn that '... bishop Werferth informed the council that he had been robbed of nearly all the woodland belonging to Woodchester, which king Æthelbald had given to Worcester, [handing it over] to Bishop Wilferth for mastland and woodland, and as a perpetual gift for the good of his own soul. And Werferth said that part of it had been abstracted at Bisley, part at Avening, part at *Scorranstan* [probably Sherston (Wiltshire, just across the Gloucestershire boundary); *EPNS Wiltshire* 109–10] and part at Thornbury, as far as he knew'. On these woodlands, and the possible nature of the bishop's interest in them, see further Cox 1992, 68.

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