

BENSON AND HEDGING MY BETS

Rob Briggs

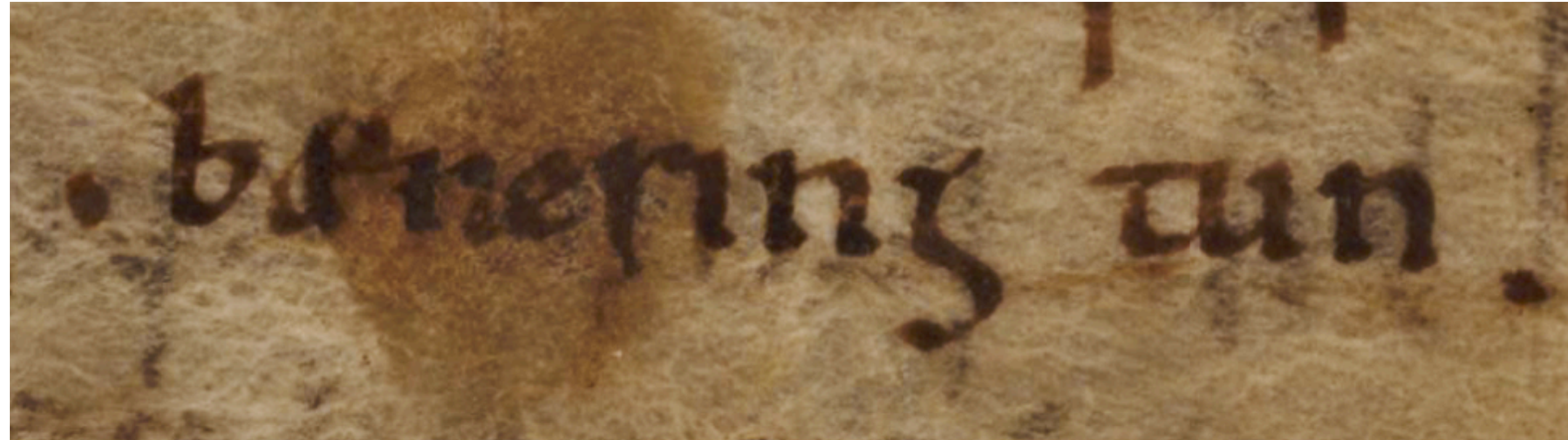
@2for1_pizzas

Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland

Spring Conference (online)

11th April 2021

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS A, late 9th century



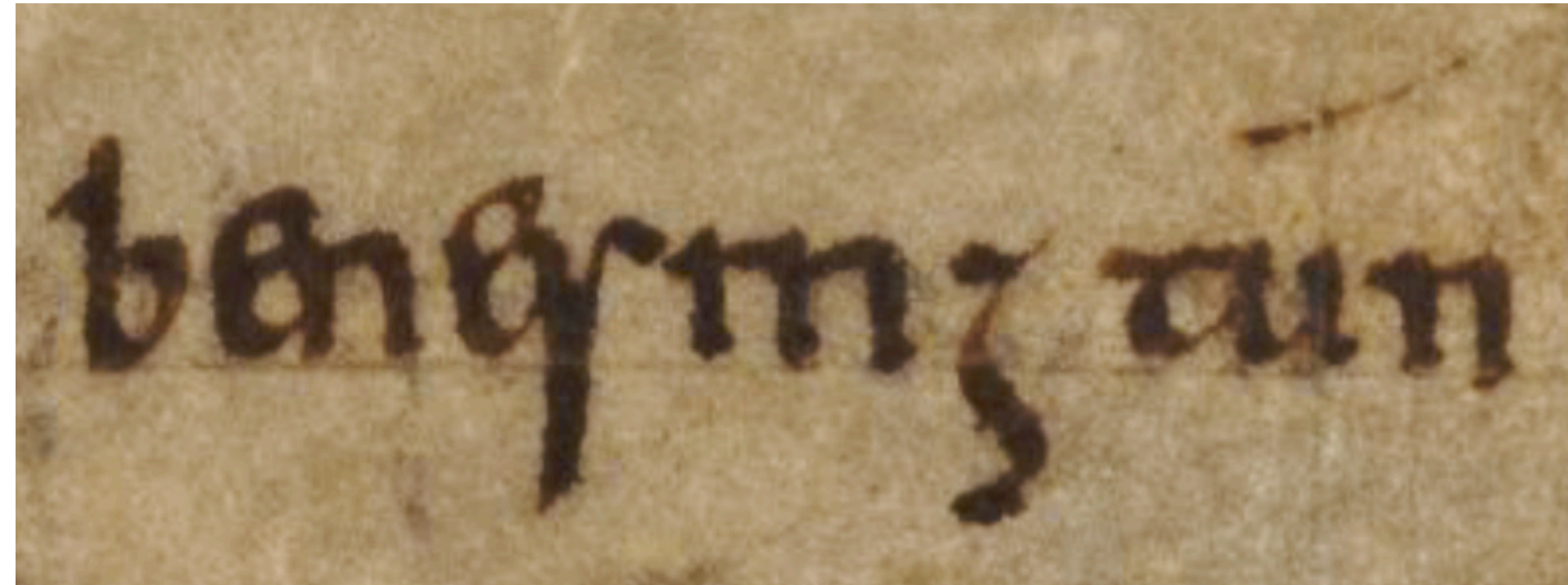
<https://parker.stanford.edu/parker/catalog/wp146tq7625>

Michael Swanton, trans. and ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* (2000)

‘571. Here Cuthwulf fought against the Britons at *Bedcanford* and took four settlements: Limbury and Aylesbury, **Benson** and Eynsham’ (page 18)

BUT... suggested to be partial erasure of original *Benning tun* as per MS G (or A2), early 11th century

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS A, *circa* 892

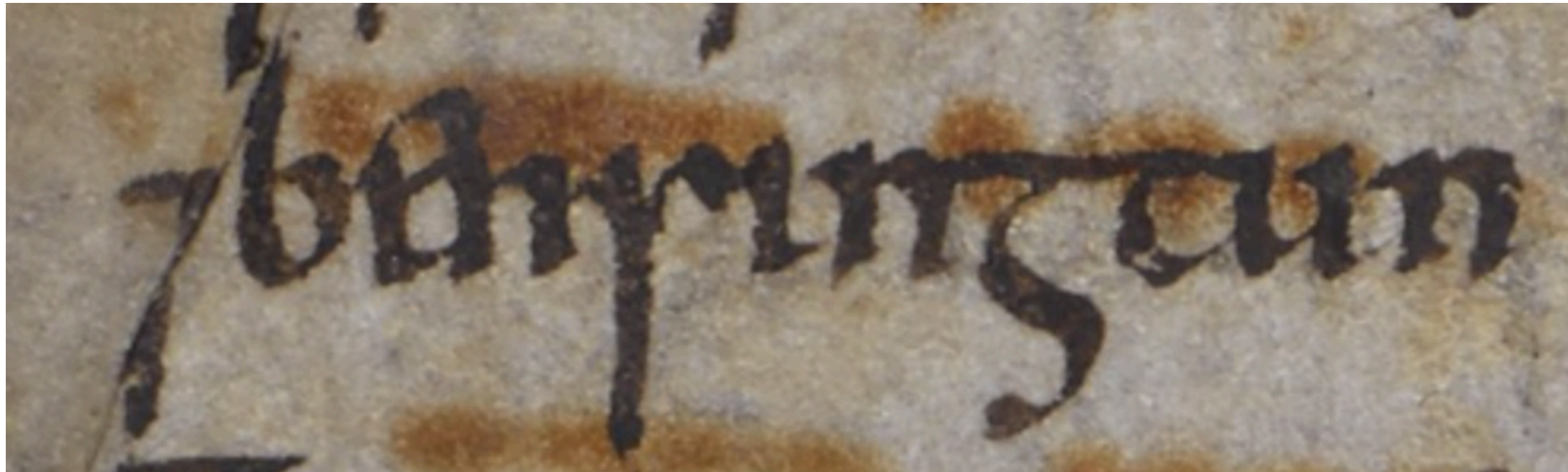


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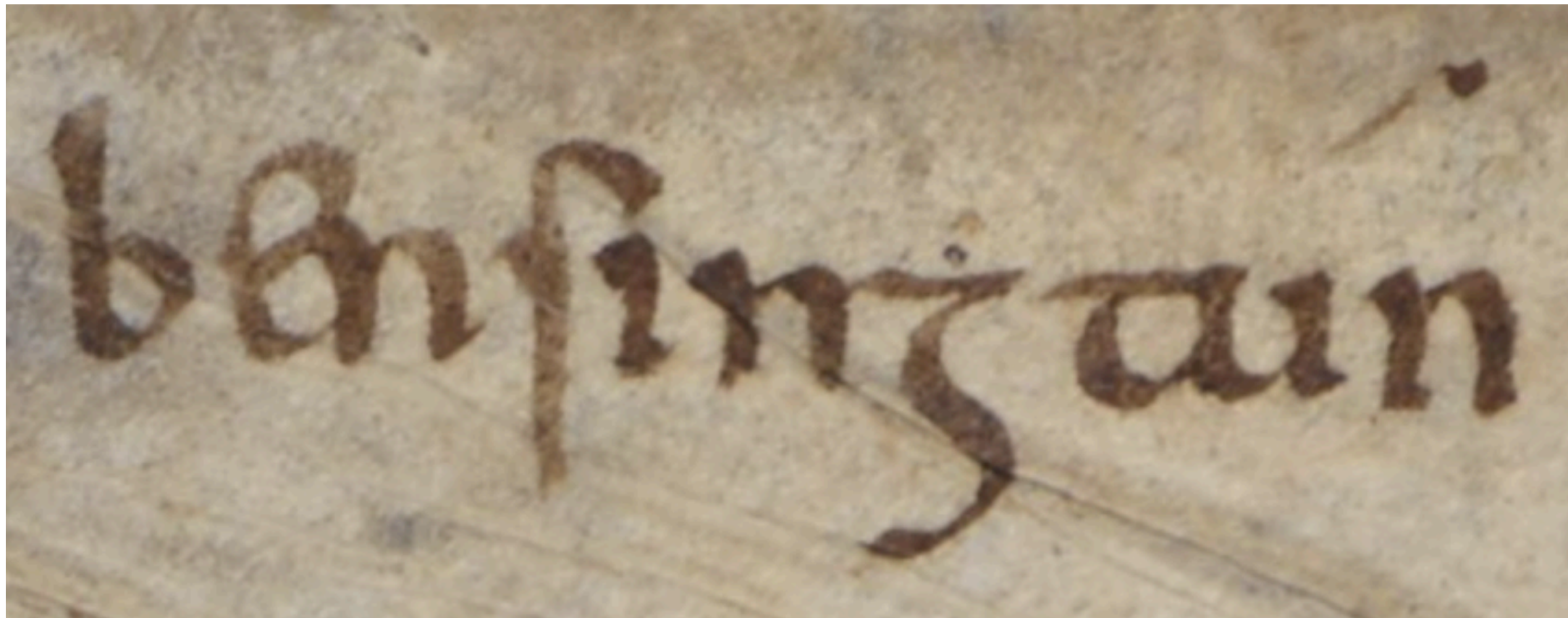
Michael Swanton, trans. and ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* (2000)

‘777 [for 779]. Here Cynewulf and Offa fought around **Benson**, and Offa took the settlement.’ (page 50)

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS B, late 10th century



571 annal

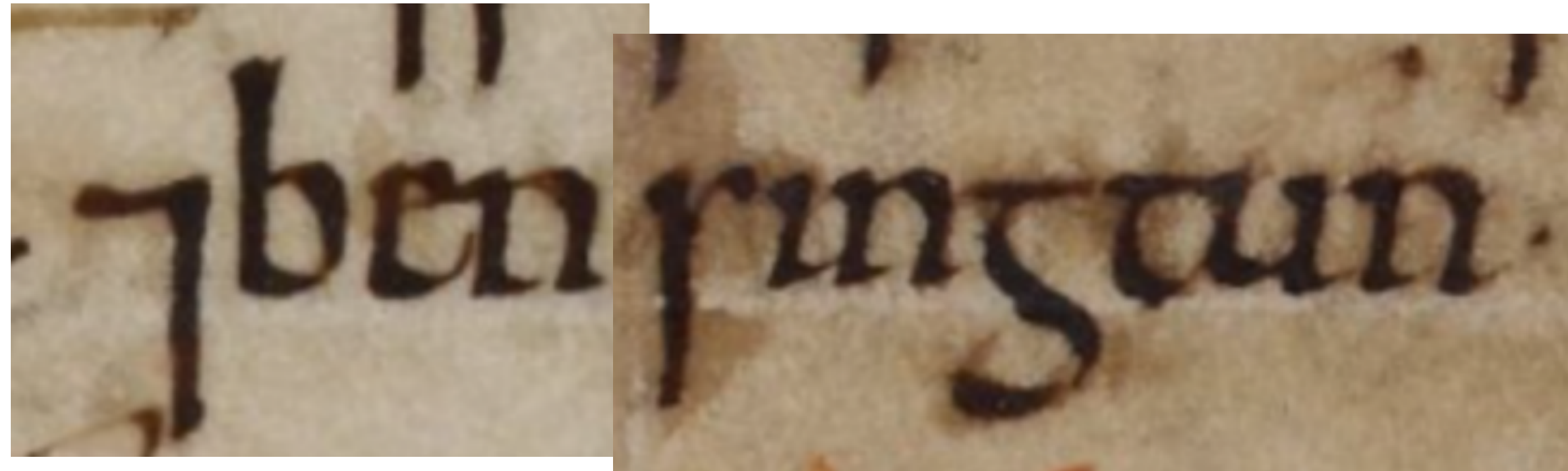


777 annal (for 779)

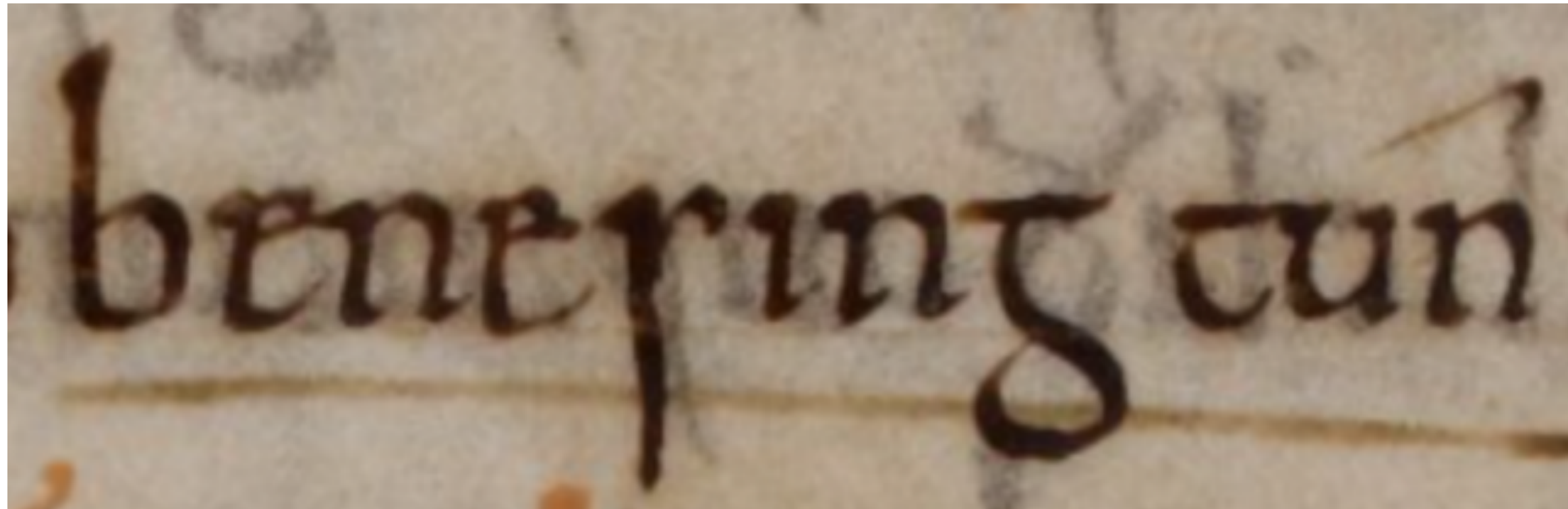
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Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS C, early 11th century



571 annal

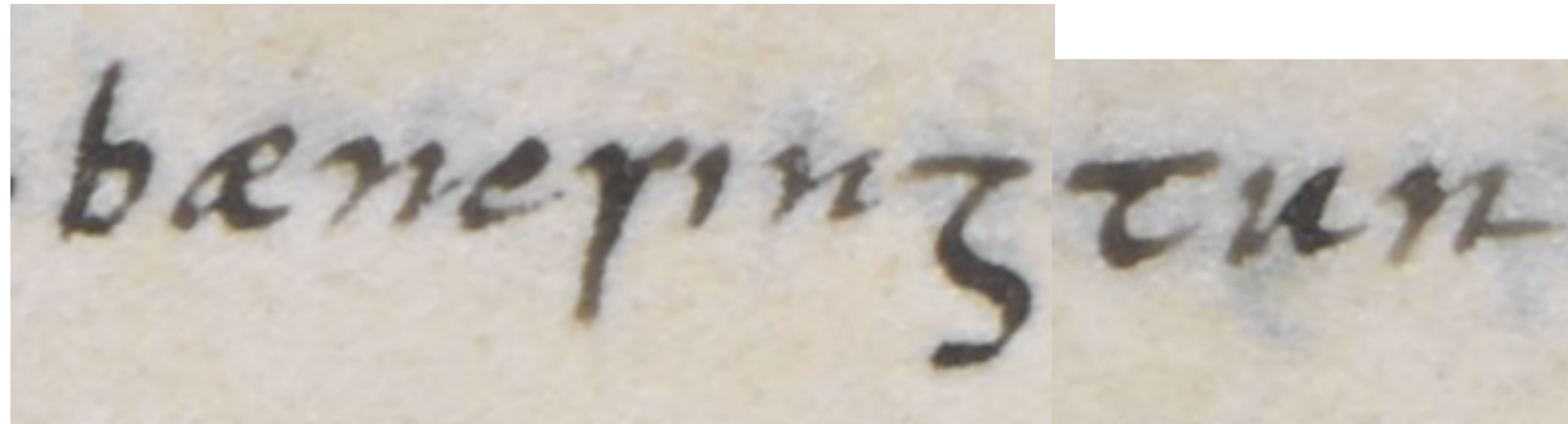


777 annal (for 779)

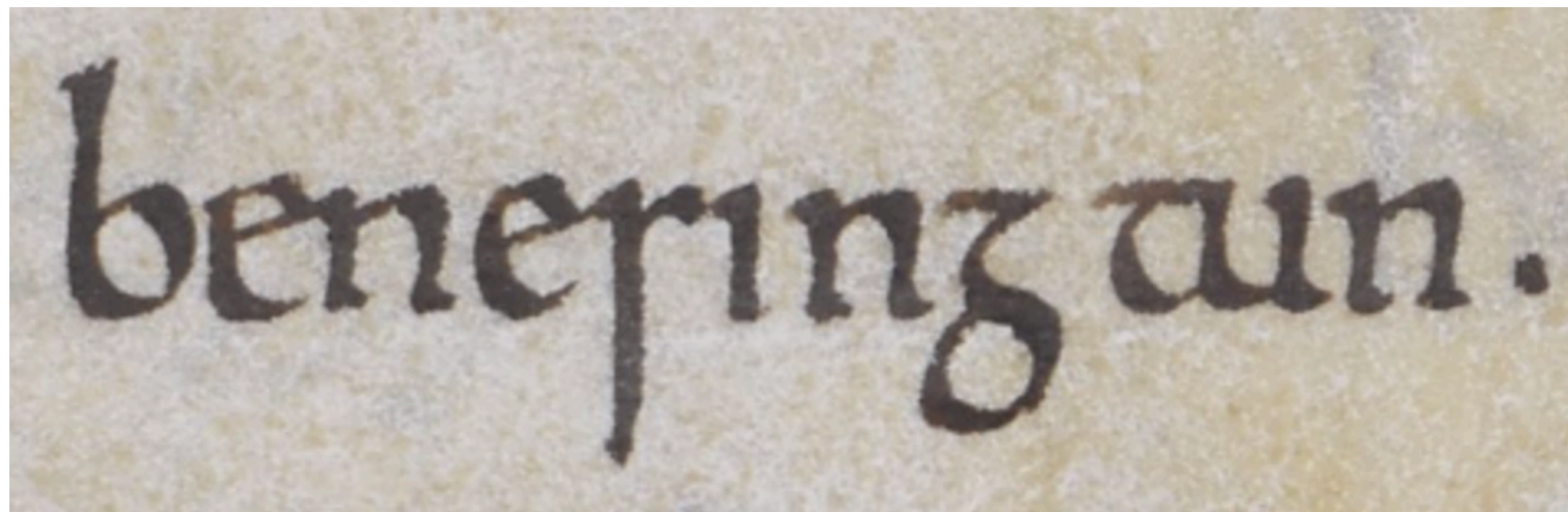
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http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_tiberius_b_i_f126v

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS D, mid-11th century



571 annal
[16th century supply leaf,
probably replicating MS A]

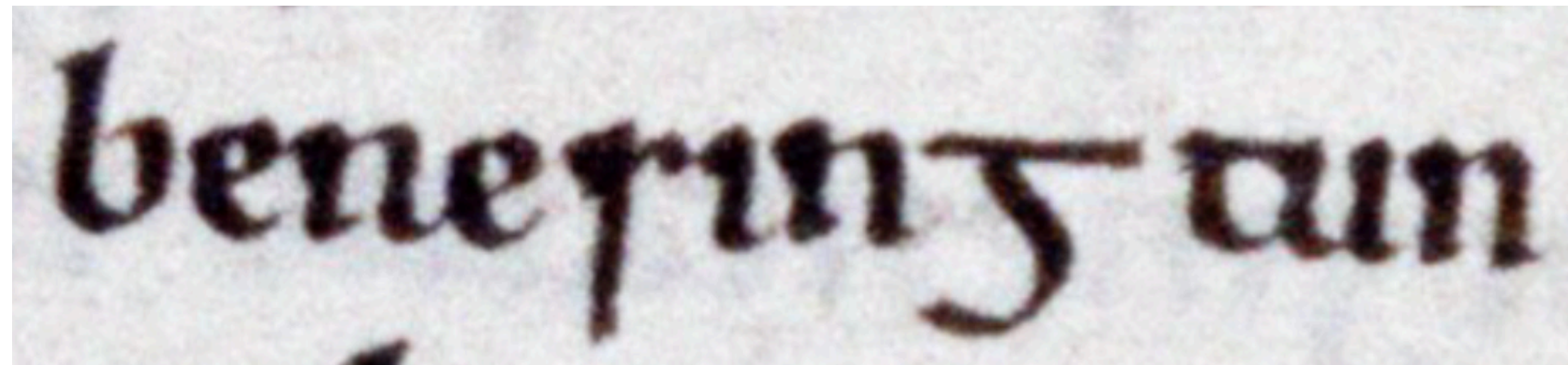


777 annal (for 779)

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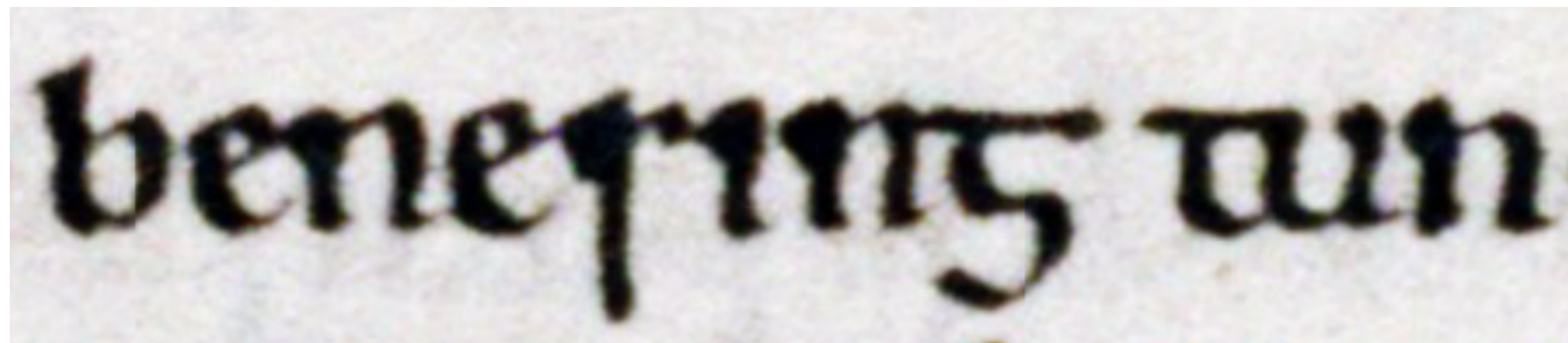
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Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS E, early 12th century



beneþing tan

571 annal



beneþing tan

777 annal (for 779)

[https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/inquire/Discover/Search/#!/?
p=c+0,t+,rsrs+0,rsps+10,fa+,so+ox%3A%5Easc,scids+,pid+6272311c-058d-417a-8e21-0
5e463b4f1f9,vi+ec9ae7f7-302c-46a6-ae10-9c18d42428a0](https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/inquire/Discover/Search/#!/?p=c+0,t+,rsrs+0,rsps+10,fa+,so+ox%3A%5Easc,scids+,pid+6272311c-058d-417a-8e21-05e463b4f1f9,vi+ec9ae7f7-302c-46a6-ae10-9c18d42428a0)

Sawyer 887, 998 [early 13th century]

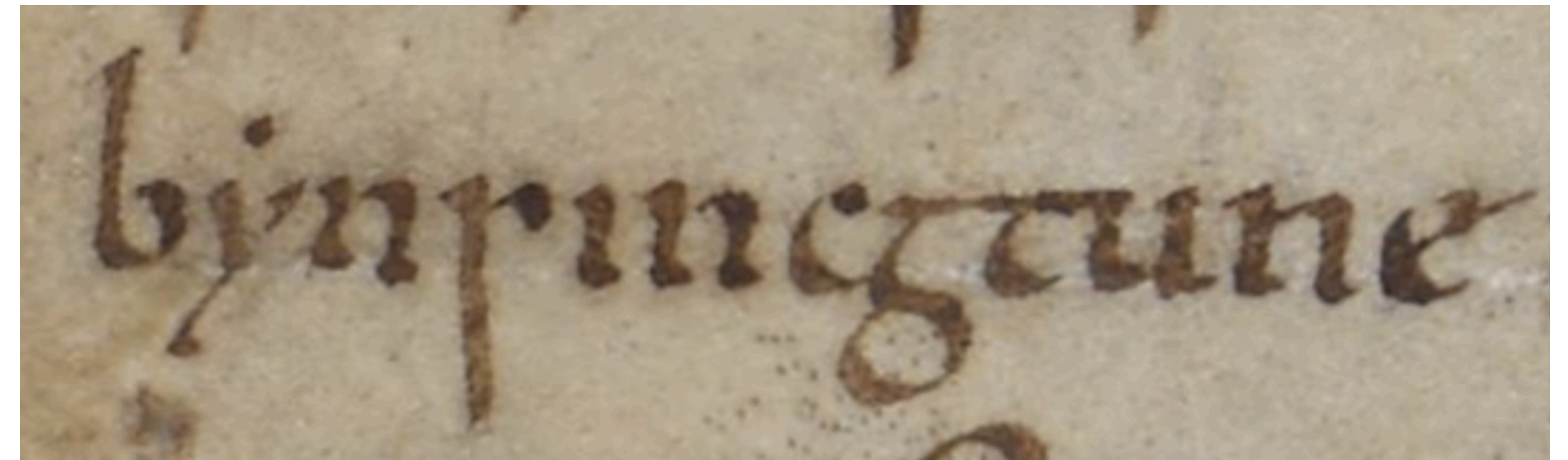
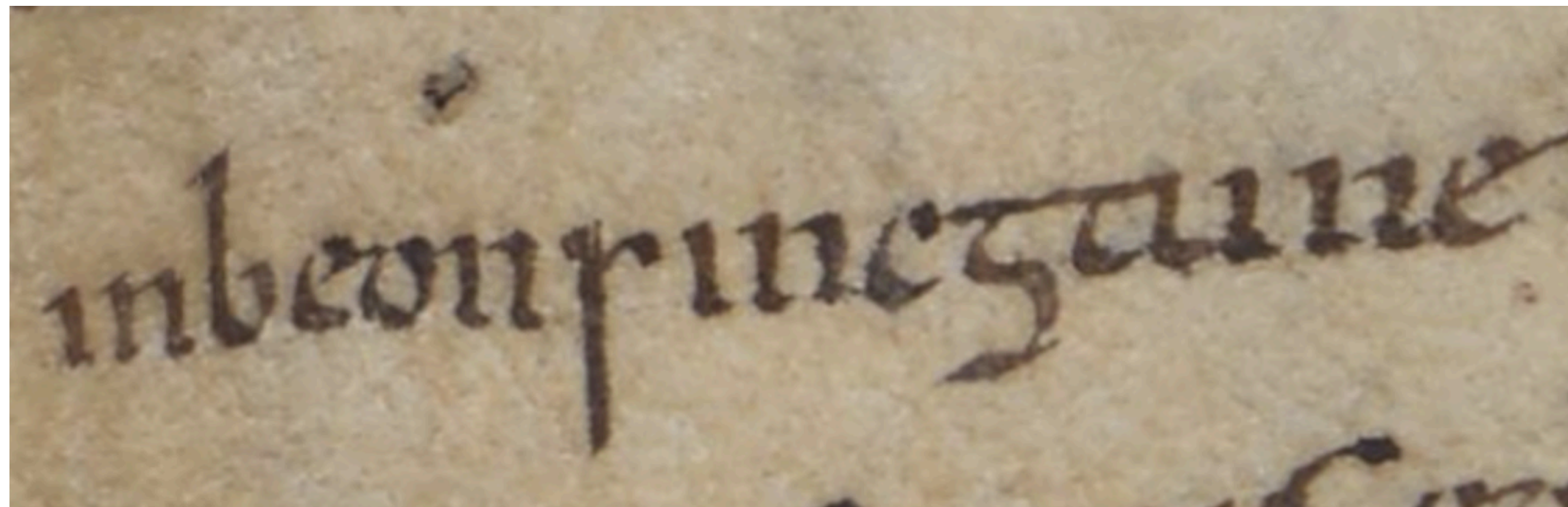
*binas uidelicet mansas in loco qui ab accolis **Bynsingtun land** nominatur*

London, British Library, Cotton Claudius B. VI, ff. 98v-99v

Susan Kelly, *Charters of Abingdon Abbey, Part 2* (2001)

‘The two hides [...] need not have been located within the present parish of Benson, but could have been carved from any property, close or distant, formerly dependent on the royal vill.’ (page 496)

Sawyer 217, 880 for 887 [early 11th century]



*sex homines qui prius pertinebant ad **villam regiam in Beonsincgtune***

“...six men who previously belonged to the royal vill at Benson”

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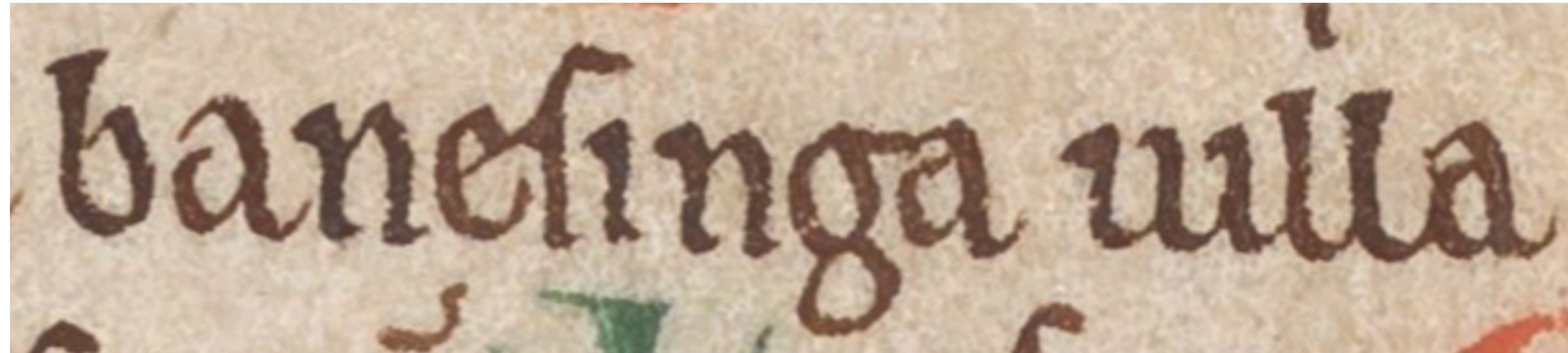
Benson as an *-ingtūn* name: etymologies

“Benesa’s farm” — Margaret Gelling, *The Place-Names of Oxfordshire* (1953), page 116

“The estate called after Benesa” — Victor Watts, *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names* (2004), page 50

“The estate associated with a man called *Benesa” — A. D. Mills, *A Dictionary of British Place-Names* (2011), page 53

Sawyer 93, '739' [earlier 12th century]

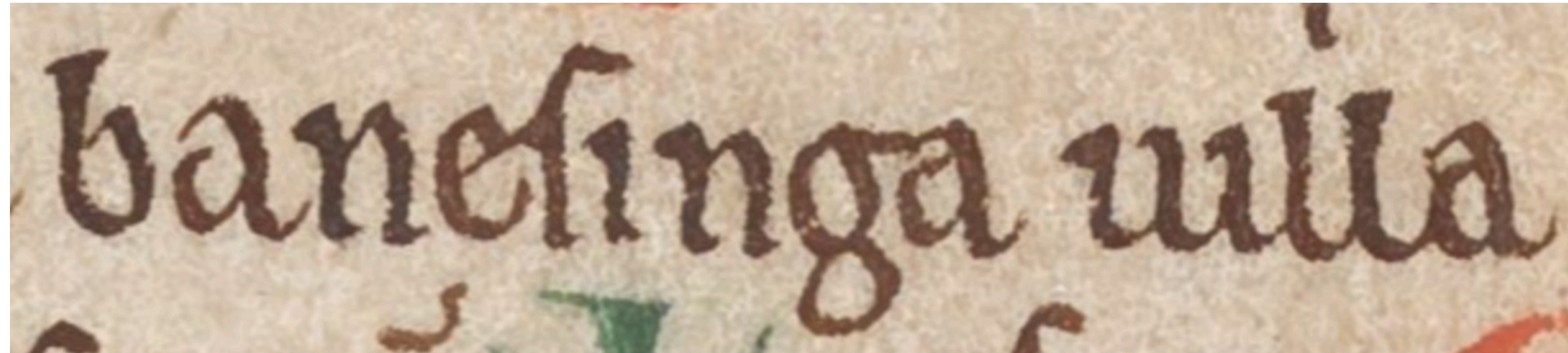


*Ego Forthere episcopus in **Banesinga uilla** iubente rege
crucis signum + infixi.*

'The *tūn* of the *Benesingas*' — Eilert Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 4th edition (1960), page 37

http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_claudius_c_ix_f106r

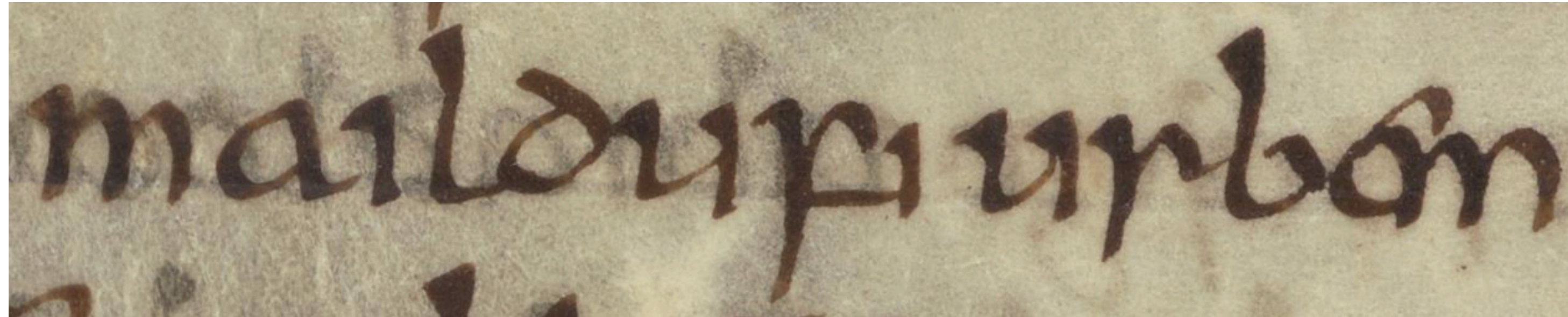
Sawyer 93, '739' [earlier 12th century]



Susan Kelly, *Charters of Abingdon Abbey, Part 1* (2000)

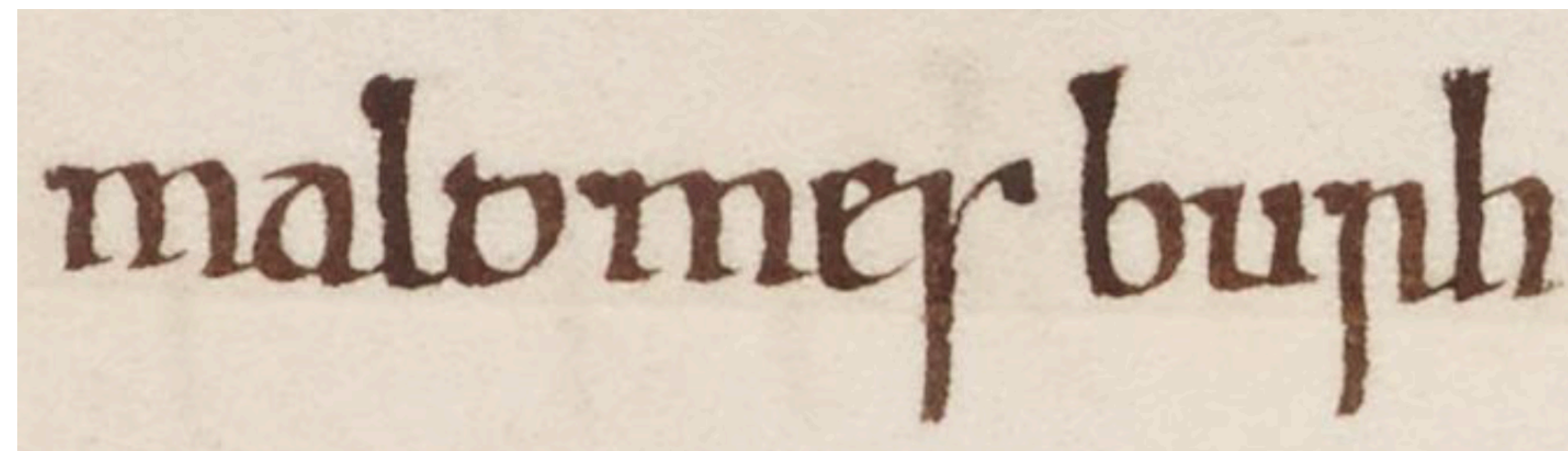
‘Forthere’s subscription [...] includes the interesting locative detail *in Banesinga uilla*, probably a reference to Benson [...] Detail of this kind seems inappropriate within an individual subscription, but probably derives from the same early source as the names of the bishops.’ (page 25)

An example of an 8th-century bilingual name-form



‘Moore Bede’ mid-8th century (737?), f. 114v

<https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-KK-00005-00016/235>



‘Old English Bede’ (Cambridge, University Library MS Kk.3.18) later 11th century, f. 92r

<https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-KK-00003-00018/187>

Etymological analyses of Benson

Which attestations were used and which were not

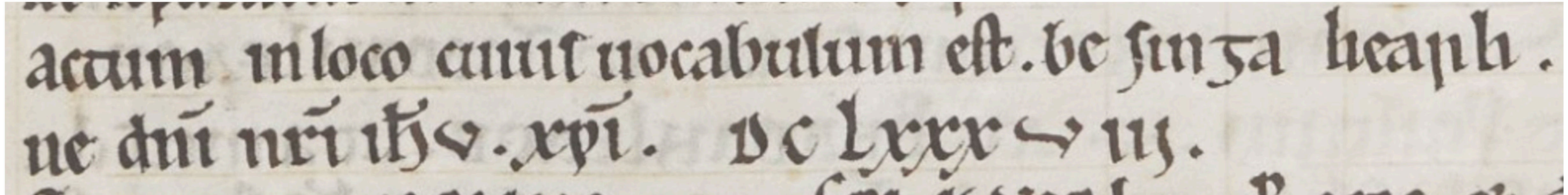
	Ekwall	Gelling	Watts
ASC MS A	✓	✓	✓
ASC other MS		✓	✓
S 93	✓		
S 217	✓	✓	✓
S 887			

What was Benson in this period?

- A regionally-important royal centre
- Somewhere worth fighting over and controlling
- A place of elite assembly

*For possible archaeological evidence of a great hall site at Benson, see Adam McBride, 'An Early Anglo-Saxon Great Hall at Benson? An Alternative Interpretation of the Excavated Evidence', Oxoniensia, **81** (2016), 19–26*

Sawyer 235, 688 [mid-12th century copy]



Actum in loco cuius uocabulum est . be singa hearh .

“Done in the place whose name is *Be singa hearh*”

http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_15350_f057v

***'Besingahearh'* and Basing/Basingstoke**

Eilert Ekwall, 'Variation and Change in English Place-Names' (1962)

'I have suggested that the place [Basingstoke] is referred to as *Besingahearh* in 688'

'An etymological connection with Basing and Basingstoke is probable. Supposing *Besinga-* to be a scribal error for or a legitimate phonetic variant of *Basinga-*, the name would mean "the heathen temple (OE *hearg*) of the people of Basing".'

'Basingstoke has as a second component OE *stoc* "place", probably also more pregnantly "monastery" and "meeting-place".' (page 13)

***'Besingahearh'* and Basing/Cowdery's Down**

John Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England* (2018)

‘The plausible identification of the Cowdery’s Down hall complex with the cult site of *Besingahearh*, where Caedwalla of the Gewisse held an assembly in 688, raises the startling possibility of overlap between pagan and Christian ritual.’ (page 136)

‘The spelling Basing- rather than Basing- introduces a potential difficulty, but not a serious one given that this text survives only in a late transcript.’ (page 126 footnote 97)

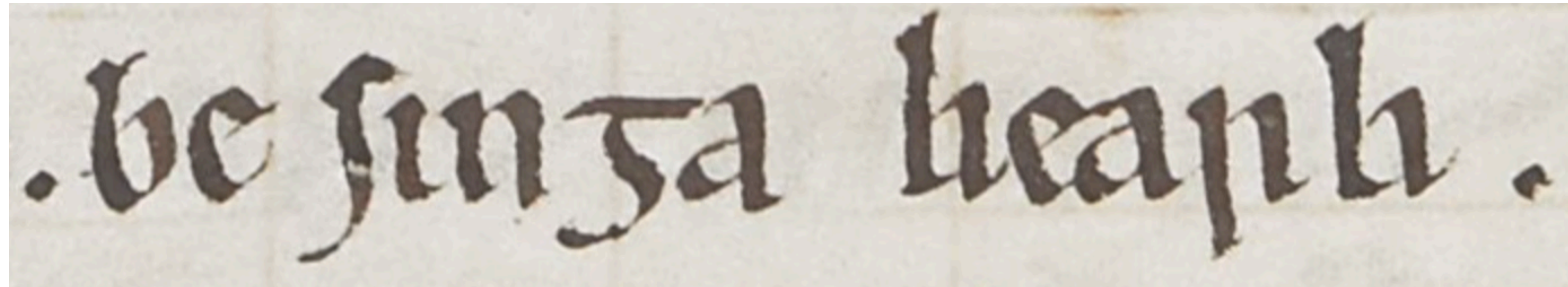
***'Besingahearh'* and Basing/Cowdery's Down**

Richard Sharpe, 'King Ceadwalla and Bishop Wilfrid' (2021)

'The charter is dated to the first indiction, with the year of the incarnation also stated, 688, and the place at which the giving was done is named *Besingahearh* 'the sanctuary of the Besingas', a group whose name is preserved in the north-east Hampshire places of Old Basing and Basingstoke.' (page 16)

<https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/files/cdpeoplsharpeceadwilfsharepdf>

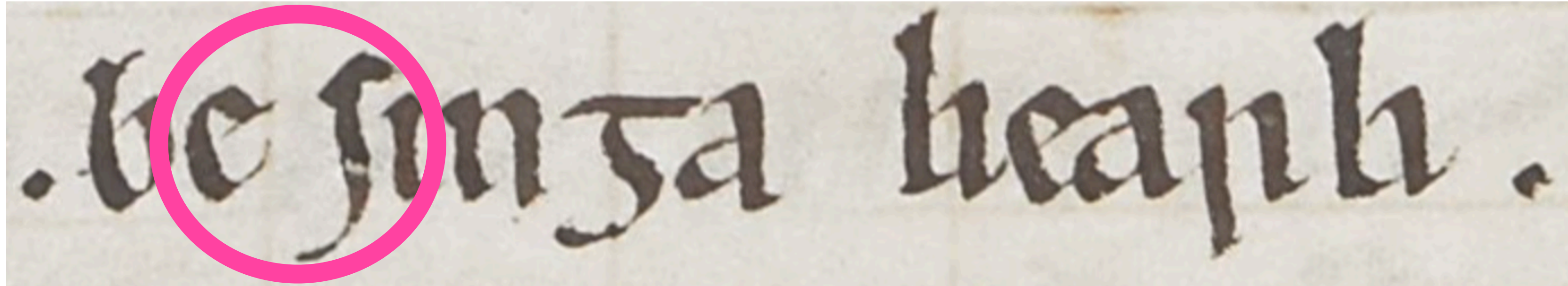
Not *Besinga hearh* (or *Bes inga hearh*)



.be sin ʒa heaph.

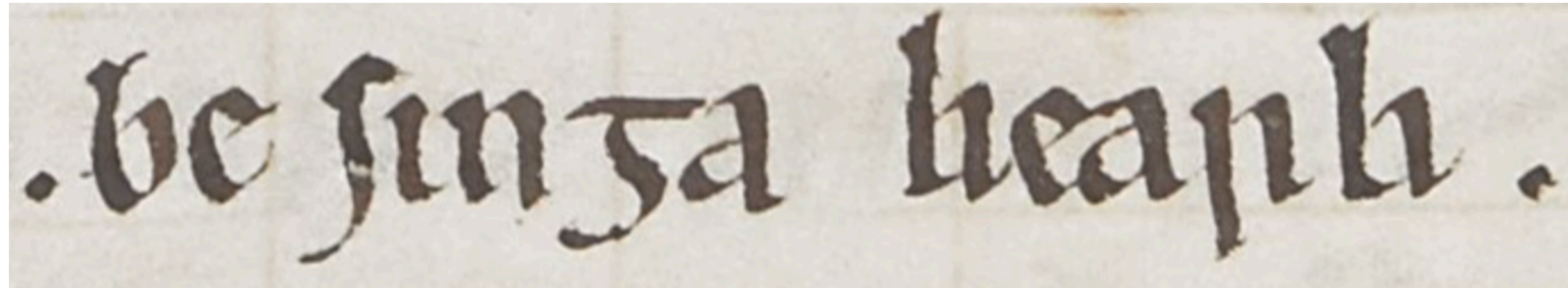
http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_15350_f057v

Not *Besinga hearh* (or *Bes inga hearh*)



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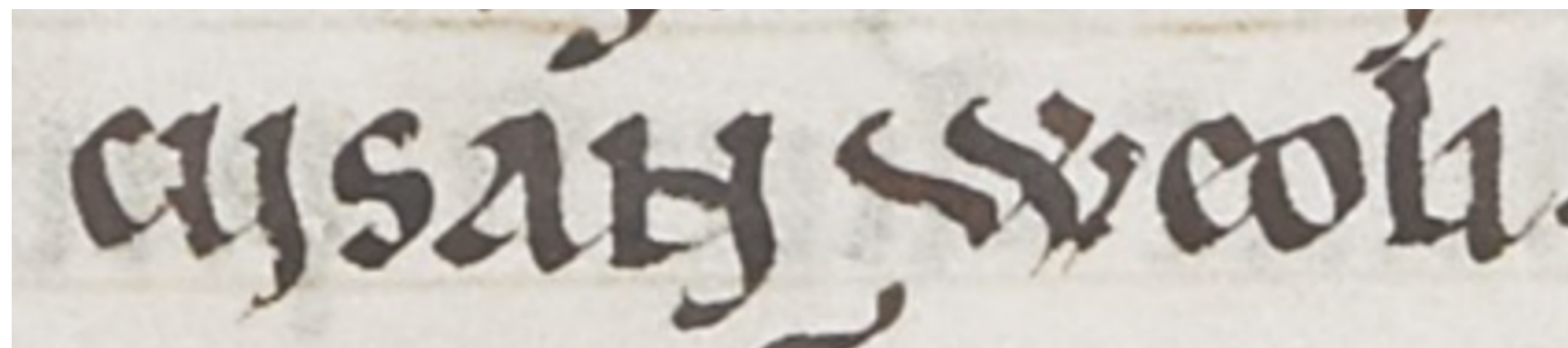
Not *Besinga hearh* (or *Bes inga hearh*)



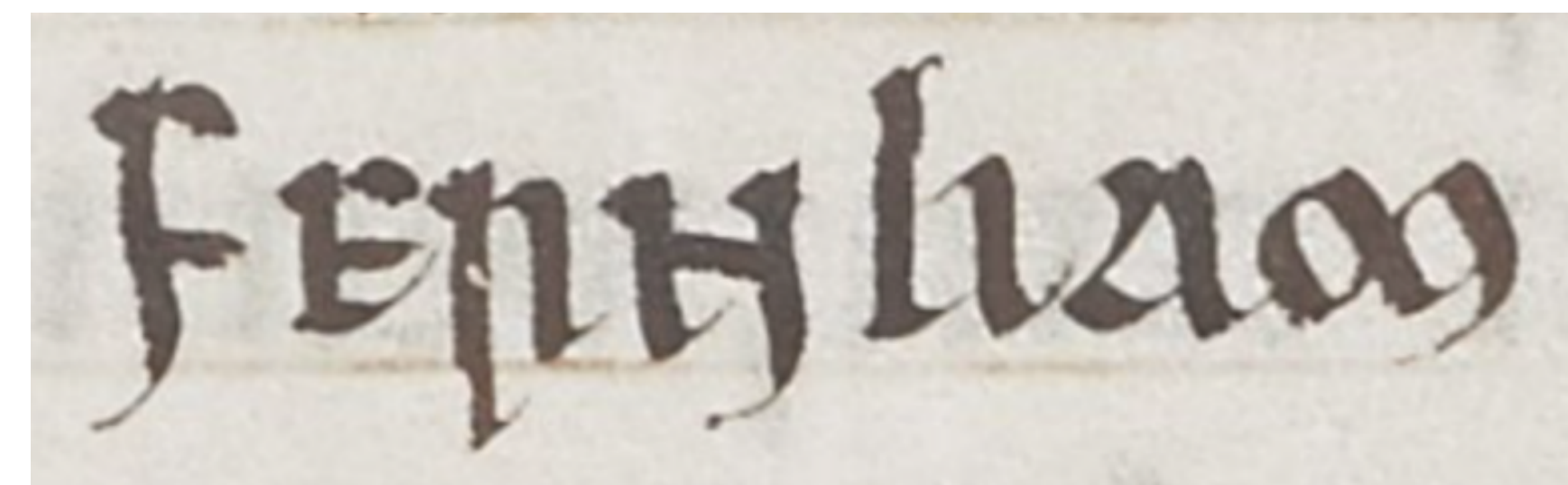
.be sunsa hearh.



unbintan gom



cysaht swcolh.



ferthlaas

So...

**Should *be singa hearh* be
interpreted as *Be[...]singa hearh*?**

So...

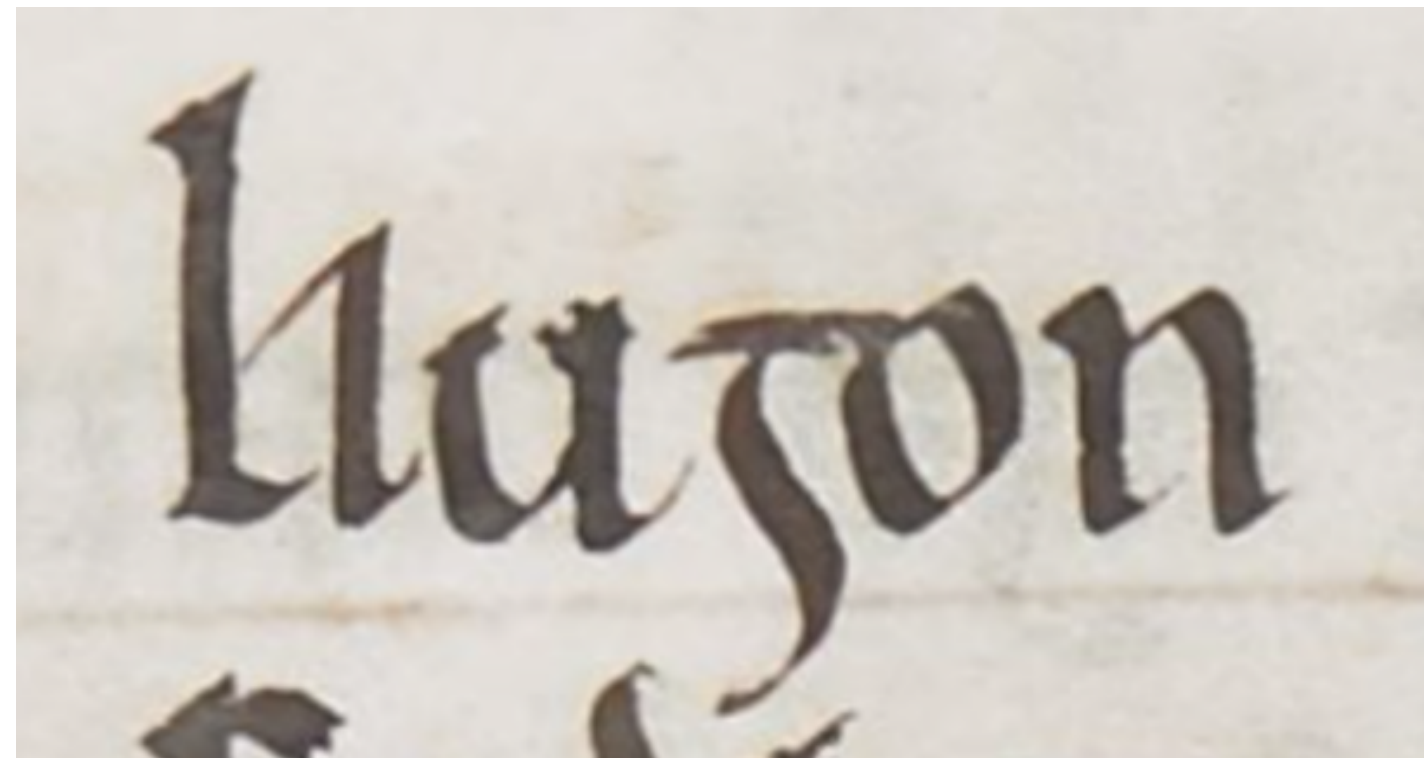
Should *be singa hearh* be interpreted as *Be[...]singa hearh*?

**Could it stand for an original
Benesinga hearh*?

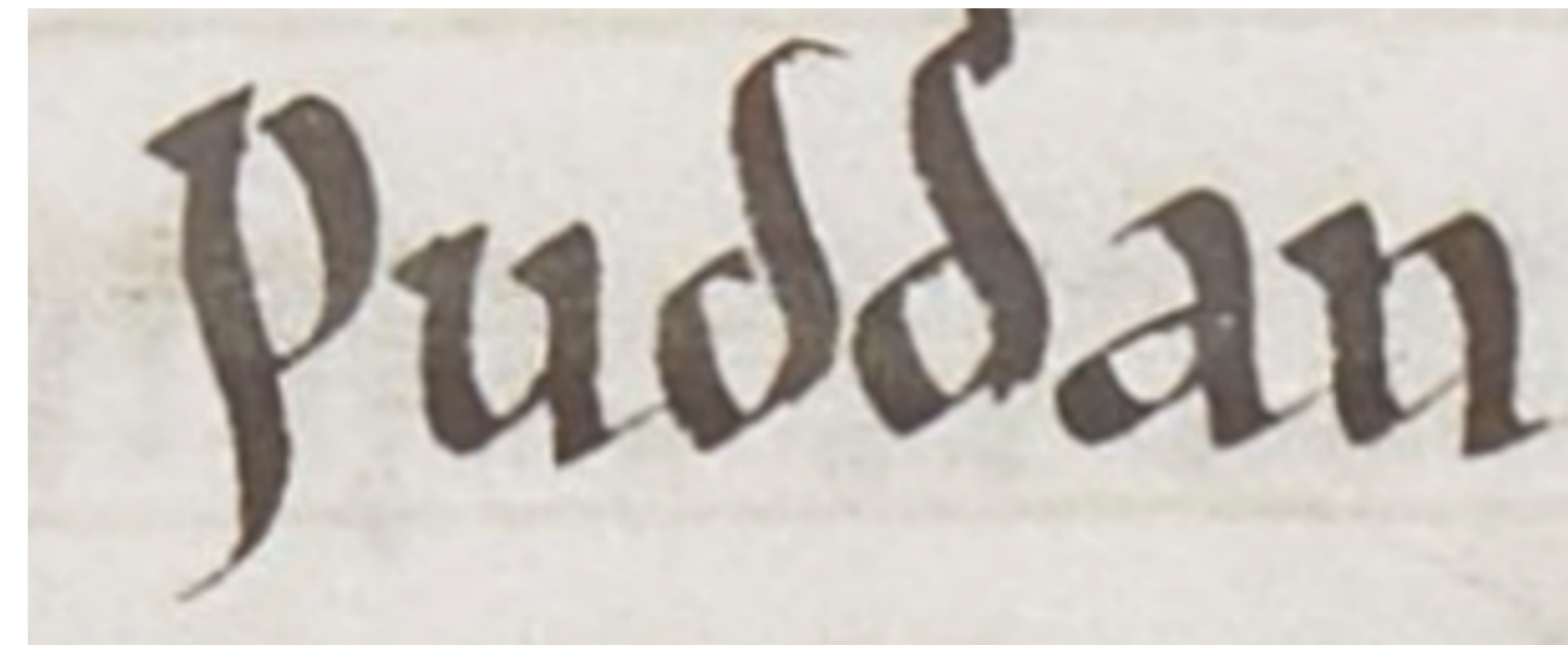
Textual history of Sawyer 235

Dorothy Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, Volume 1 (1955)

‘The scribe, who misread a miniscule open *a* as *u*, must have had an eighth- or early-ninth-century exemplar before him’ (page 484)



= Hagona

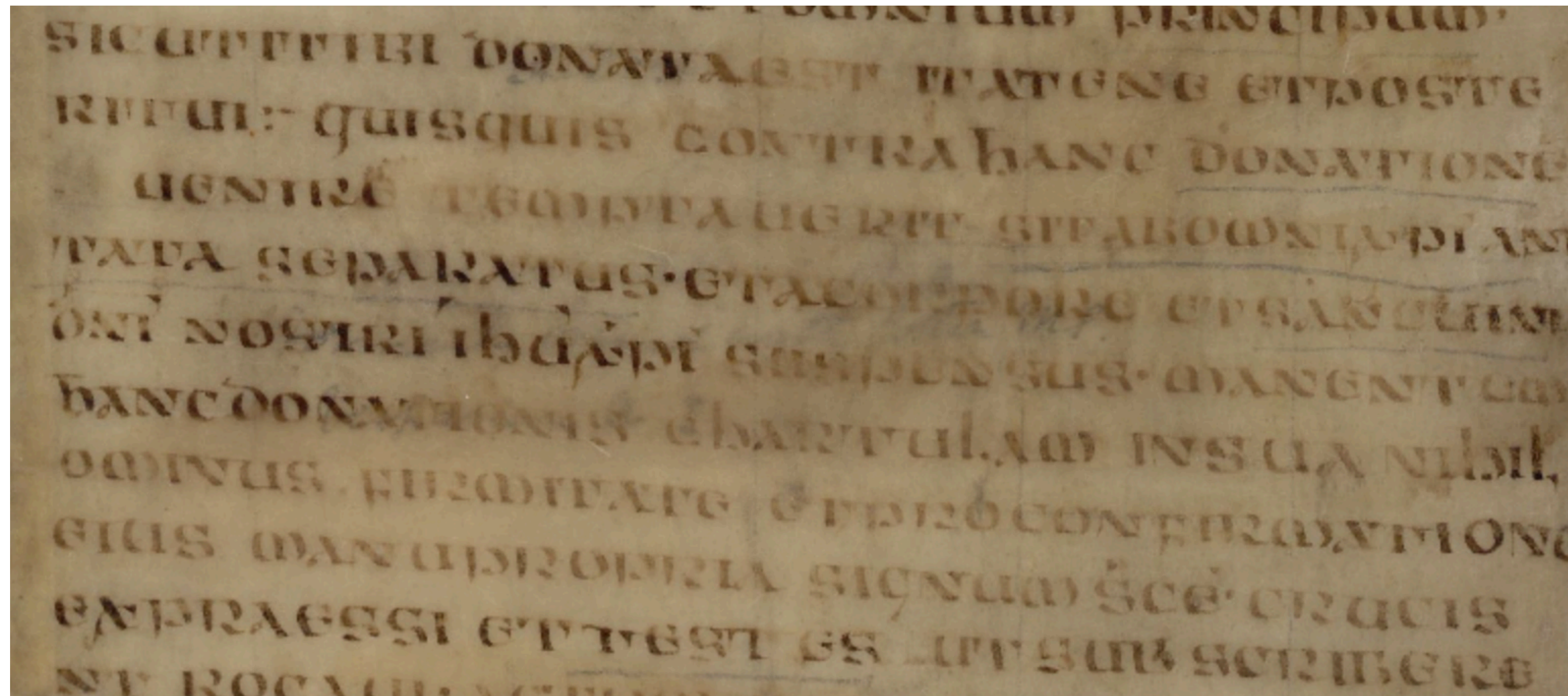


= Wadda?

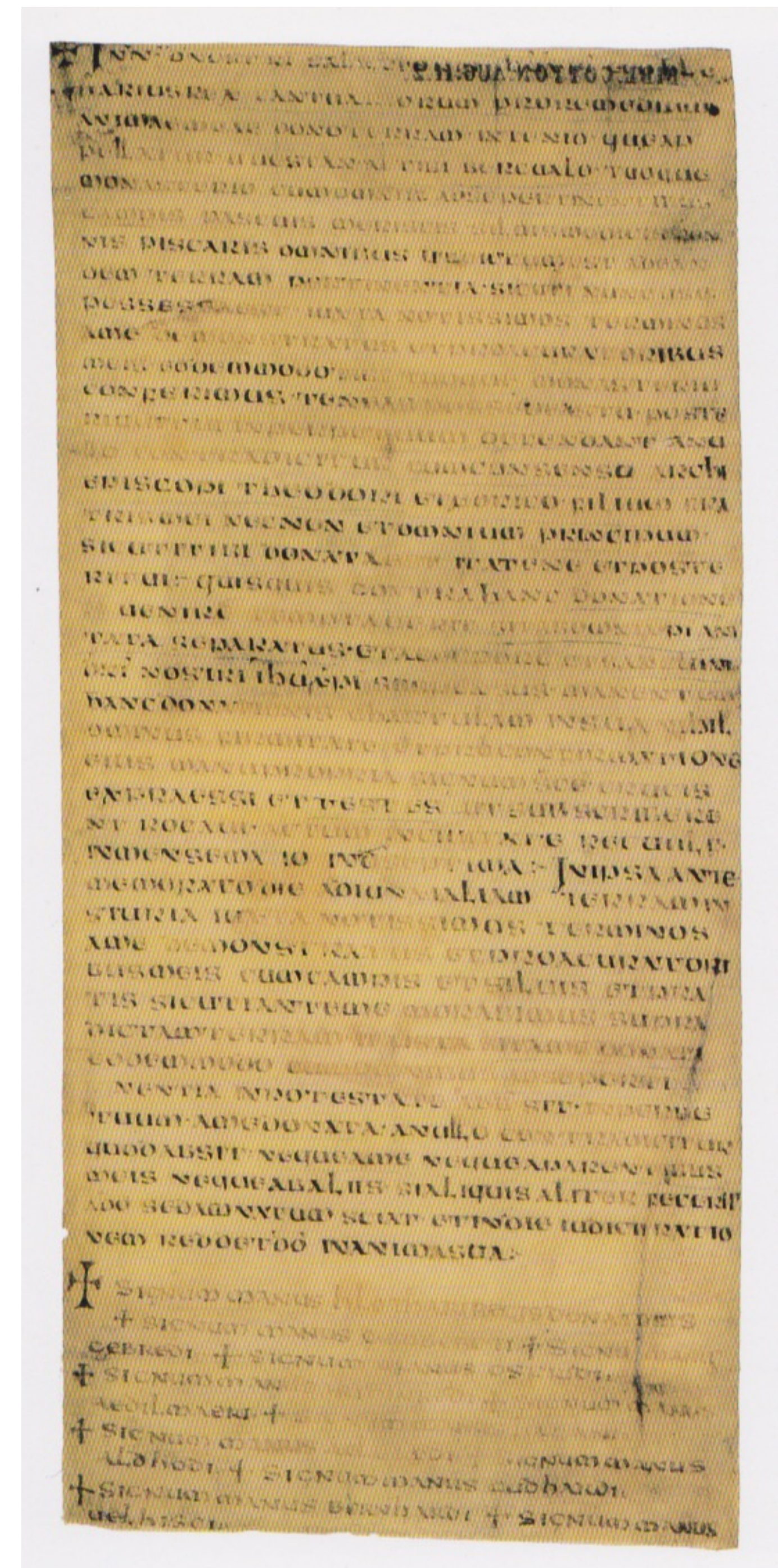
http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_15350_f058r

A decent diploma

Sawyer 8, 679



http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_augustus_ii_2_f001r



A damaged diploma

Sawyer 1171, 686 × 688 [later 8th-century copy]



http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_augustus_ii_29_f001r

A disappeared diploma!

Sawyer 1246, 686 × 688 [16th-century transcription]

*Septima supra uicum . Lundoniae . data a
Quoenguyda uxore . [...]aldi . x . manentium .*

‘Seventh, ten hides above Lundenwic given by
Cwengyth wife of [...]ald’

Issue 1: from *hearg* to *tūn* (via Latin *villa*)

OE *hearg*: Keith Briggs, ‘Harrow’ (2010)

hearg found as gloss for Latin *Lupercal*, *sacellum*, *simulacrum*, *lucus*, *fanum*, *Capitolium* — but not *villa* (pages 51–52)

‘*Gumeningahergae* [Harrow on the Hill] and *Besinga hearh* would make good sense as the capitol, headquarters or citadel of the respective tribes’ (page 53)

Issue 1: from *hearg* to *tūn* (via Latin *villa*)

OE *tūn*: James Campbell, ‘Bede’s Words for Places’ (1979)

‘The OE translation of Bede rightly draws no distinction between his *villa* and *vicus*; both are usually translated *tun*’ (page 48)

‘Bensington was a place which later had four and a half hundreds associated with it’

‘It is [...] likely that, from an early date, one of the meanings of *tun* was “royal vill” [...] Such an early meaning for *tun* would help explain the much later translation of *tun* by *pagus*, if the term were extended from a royal vill to the area dependent on it’ (page 50)

Issue 2: from *-inga* to *-ing*

Margaret Gelling, 'Review of Walter Piroth, *Ortsnamenstudien zur angelsächsischen Wanderung*' (1980)

'Dr Piroth follows Ekwall in citing as the earliest spelling *Banesinga villa* c. 730; but this is from a forged charter [...] and it is doubtful whether it has any validity.

'Probably the post-Conquest forger added *-a* in *Banesinga* because he felt this made an elegant Latinisation.

'Other spellings [...] demonstrate that the name is an *-ingtūn* formation.' (page 84)

Issue 2: from *-inga* to *-ing*

- An enduring centre of power would have a more widely-understood “history” than places of lesser status
- **Benesingas* ceased to be a group in direct control of the *hearg* — or even in existence by late 8th century? (*Kultverband?*)
- **Benesa* may have been a personage with a direct, still-meaningful and thus enduring link to Benson
- ?Mercian renaming as *Benesingtun*, if not ‘*tūn* called after **Benesa*’ then perhaps “*tūn* at the place (traditionally) associated with **Benesa*”?

Concluding thoughts

- Benson was a major centre of strategic and political importance possibly as early as the late 6th century
- *Benesingtūn* as a name very probably did not arrive until much later (mid—late 8th century? Is annal for 779 of potential relevance?)
- *Banesinga villa* not as dubious as it seemed to Gelling (who did not dispute it was related to Benson)
- A royal centre and meeting-place at which prominent people gathered

Concluding thoughts

- *Be singa hearh* is not the expected way for an OE compound place-name to be written in either the late 7th or mid-12th centuries
- Received manuscript version of S 235 text exhibits evidence for an intermediate copy, so scope exists for damage to have occurred and letters to have been lost or become illegible
- Benson = **Benesingahearh* would fit with what is understood about political context of 688 at least as well as Basing/Cowdery's Down
- **Shows paying very close attention to the way in which early name attestations are written can inspire new lines of thinking**