

Comments on Capital R Rotunda

L2/06-252

Title	Comments on Capital R Rotunda
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N3027 (L2/06-027) proposes the encoding of the following related letters :

- 1DE3 COMBINING LATIN SMALL LETTER R ROTUNDA
- A75A LATIN CAPITAL LETTER R ROTUNDA
- A75B LATIN SMALL LETTER R ROTUNDA
- A75C LATIN CAPITAL LETTER RUM ROTUNDA
- A75D LATIN SMALL LETTER RUM ROTUNDA

LATIN SMALL LETTER R ROTUNDA is a widely occurring contextual glyph variant of the letter 'r' found in medieval manuscripts and early printed books (almost exclusively in blackletter typefaces), but it is generally considered to be a letterform which, like 'long s' (U+017F), only occurs in lowercase. For example, the Wikipedia article on R Rotunda <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R_rotunda>, which was quite recently edited by the editor of N3027, states that r rotunda is "always lowercase". Extensive research has failed to find any mention of a capital form of r rotunda anywhere, in printed sources or on the internet, other than in the N3027 and the MUFI Character Recommendation <<http://www.mufi.info/specs/>> (lowercase r rotunda has always been in MUFI, but the capital form was only introduced in MUFI version 2.0a with the note "Added for reasons of case pairing").

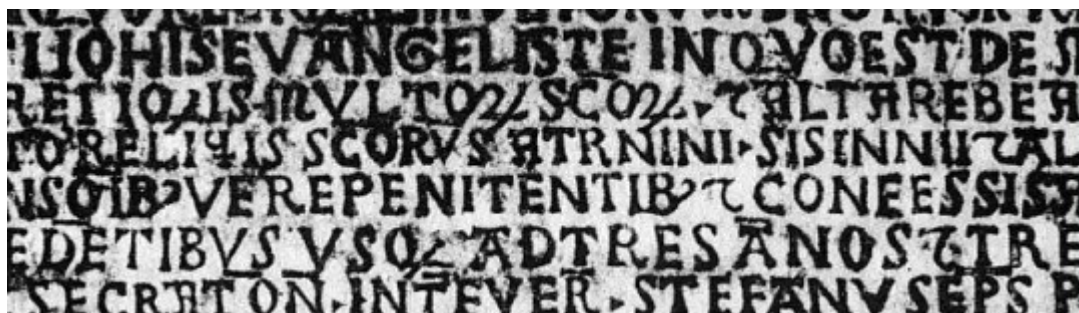
Given that received opinion is that r rotunda only occurs in lowercase form, the proposed encoding of a capital form of this letter should be subject to close scrutiny, and should only be accepted if there is proper evidence for a capital form of R rotunda or a need to encode an artificial capital form. However, N3027 does not provide any examples showing usage of capital R rotunda, but simply states that:

The case-pairing LATIN CAPITAL LETTER R ROTUNDA is attested in texts from the 15th century (Figure 68 shows it in RUM ROTUNDA form, but it does occur on its own).

Whilst this statement may be true, it is not supported by any references, and I have been unable to find a single example of capital R Rotunda in either manuscripts or printed books from any period from the 10th century onwards. I am led to believe that if capital R rotunda does exist it is very rare, and any instances that there may be are probably anomalous. The following are a sample of the sorts of places where lowercase 'r' and 'r rotunda' are differentiated but no corresponding capital R rotunda is found:

- <<http://www.lib.umich.edu/tcp/docs/dox/caxt1.html..caxt6.html>> : sample alphabets from the Caxton's press (15th century)
- <<http://digidol.llgc.org.uk/METS/YLH00001/frames?div=5&mode=reference>> : table of letters used for Welsh (1546)
- <<http://images.library.wisc.edu/HistSciTech/EFacs/Cyclopaedia/Cyclopaedia02/L/00>> Caslon's "Pica Black" sample (1728)

Requests for examples of texts showing capital R Rotunda from the authors of N3027 elicited these two scans in addition to N3027 Fig.68 (1372 Bull of Pope Gregory XI):



From Degering, *Die Schrift* (1929).

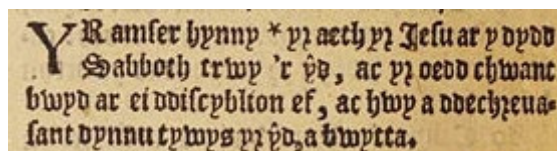


From *Bibliotheca Palatina* (Heidelberg, 1986).

The first example (1256 inscription of Pope Alexander IV) only shows examples of capital Rum rotunda (R rotunda with a stroke, used to represent Latin *-RUM*), and, as with N3027 Fig.68, it does not provide any evidence for the encoding of capital R rotunda.

The second example, which I am told is from the mid 11th century Lorsch Sacramentary, shows what looks like an OR ligature (during the early medieval period r rotunda was not a separate letter, but only occurred ligatured to a preceding letter 'o'). However, from the reading "PER OMNIA SAECULA SAECULORUM" it is evident that it also represents Rum rotunda rather than plain R rotunda.

Thus there is no evidence at present that capital R rotunda has ever been used or that it is required by medievalists or anyone else. It may be appropriate to encode an artificial capital form of r rotunda (as has previously been done with some other historically caseless letters) were it not for the fact that r rotunda already has an established upper case form, namely U+0052 LATIN CAPITAL LETTER R, as can be seen from the example below, where lowercase "yr" is written with r rotunda but capital "YR" is not.



Y Beibl Cyssegr-lan [The Welsh Bible] (Matthew chapter 12). London, 1588.

User expectation is that when a digital text with lowercase r rotunda is uppercased, r rotunda will be converted to 'R'. If LATIN SMALL LETTER R ROTUNDA and LATIN CAPITAL LETTER R ROTUNDA are encoded as a casing pair, then user expectations with respect to casing will not be met. The situation is very similar to that of LATIN SMALL LETTER SHARP S and the rejected LATIN CAPITAL LETTER DOUBLE S (N2888); the only difference being that Capital Sharp S is well attested, and Capital R Rotunda is not.

If, despite the lack of evidence for a capital form of r rotunda, it is considered necessary to encode LATIN CAPITAL LETTER R ROTUNDA, then I would recommend that LATIN SMALL LETTER R ROTUNDA and LATIN CAPITAL LETTER R ROTUNDA are not made a mutually casing pair, but are given the following Unicode properties:

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A75A;LATIN CAPITAL LETTER R ROTUNDA;Lu;0;L;<compat> 0052;;;N;;;A75B;;A75B
A75B;LATIN SMALL LETTER R ROTUNDA;Ll;0;L;<compat> 0072;;;N;;;0052;;0052
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