

Recommendation against encoding ornamental punctuation marks for Siddham

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Anshuman Pandey's proposal to encode the Siddham script L2/12-234 includes in its proposed character repertoire fourteen floral/artistic punctuation characters by the name of SIDDHAM SECTION MARKS.

Anshuman's preliminary proposal for Siddham L2/12-011 had nine of these characters under the name SIDDHAM TERMINAL MARK. That document had also noted (in §5.6 on p 10) that several such "ornaments" are found in Siddham script texts and wondered whether or not these should all be encoded separately. Apparently a liberal approach has later on been chosen in the matter of encoding these ornaments whence the number has increased from nine to fourteen in the final proposal.

I feel that such ornaments should not be over-liberally encoded.

If a script consistently employs particular marks as punctuation (such as the DEVANAGARI PUSHPIKA encoded at A8F8) those are clearly candidates for encoding (if such written forms are not already encoded). Normally consistency itself will limit the number of such marks.

In the present case, the sheer variety and number of these marks points to the manuscript authors exercising their imagination. When nine in the preliminary proposal has grown to fourteen in the final one, presumably there will be even twenty to thirty distinct forms found in the manuscripts so far not examined. There is neither meaning nor point in encoding all such decorative marks as they, due to their very inconsistency, do not acquire any more character status than cliparts.

One should remember that calligraphy and artistic strokes are a defining characteristic of Siddham writings, and ornamental marks would naturally flourish in such a writing environment. This does not mean that they all acquire plain-text character status to be encoded.

Even for Sharada, Anshuman had sent me a document with attestations for miscellaneous ornamental marks asking for feedback. Native Kashmiri scholars of Sharada whom I consulted regarding this said that these marks have no special significance and are purely decorative. As such, one would be hard put to justify a plain-text character status for such marks in Sharada. The same applies to the related script Siddham also.

Therefore, unless there is special significance (such as, one is used at the end of a chapter, another at the end of a sub-chapter and so on) to any of these punctuation marks in Siddham, it is better to not encode them. If at all any of these marks are found to be used consistently, they may be encoded.

As such, I would recommend that the ornamental punctuation marks be removed from the present Siddham proposal. They may be proposed later on with further evidence of significance or consistent use.