Response to the proposal to add the Tironinan letters

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Introduction. This is a response to Michael Everson and Andrew West's proposal (L2/19-172), to support the casign pair of Tironian letters, used by medieval ortographies. In that document, they discuss three possible models for implementing medieval orthographies that include casing pairs of letters et.

- **Model 1:** Change properties of the TIRONIAN SIGN ET and add the uppercase version mapping to the existing character.

- **Model 2:** Leave the current character as it is, and add both letters seperately.

- **Model 3:** Add the capital version of the tironian letter without any case relation being added.

Model 1 is prefered by the authors while I prefer Model 2; since we both now agree that model 3 is undesirable, we can ignore it for the rest of the document. This document argues in favor of model 2 and against model 1.

Supposed precedent for the property switch. Everson and West begin by claiming there is precedent for changin character's general category from that of a punctuation mark, to that of a letter. However Everson and West do not provide the rationales behind those changes (neither can I find them myself). This is important, since it does not count as precedent, if the switch was not done for the same reason as Everson and West; that reason being the support of some non-contemporary ortography.

Perhaps the switches are better explained for fixing some undesariable word and linebreak results, or a clerical error from the original proposal (now lost), that gave those characters a mistaken identity. This is the same reason the Suzhou numerals are wrongly called Hangzhou numerals.

Actual disunification precedent. I would not oppose model 1, if the character in question was only attested in old documents (that would truly imply mistaken identity), however it is clear that the modern use of the character dropped the case relation and only uses the character to indicate conjuction (i.e. punctuation), rather than to write new words. This means that users not familiar with medieval paleography/epigraphy, will be exposed to a glyph very different from what they expect, in important contexts such as signage. They will also be exposed to undesirable glyph changes upon an uppercase operation, applied to a range of text.

Perhaps non-medieval savy, contemporary users, is what the ad hoc meant by "modern users". The sign was encoded for their needs and not that of medievalists. Modern users expect a sign that has the same function of an ampersand, but has a different apperance. This is abudantly clear on the contemporary photos Everson and West provide.

In this sense, the argument for disunifying the sign and the letters, is identical to the one used for the glottal stop casing pair (an argument Everson and West include in their proposal): They both serve different communities with incompatible needs.

Word breaking. Furthermore, Everson and West have not discused the implications this has for word breaking. Typically, punctuation signs (including the ampersand) do not form part of words. So if an Irish user were to type: "bread ⁊ wine", that user would expect for that to count as two words; but under Model 1, that could be perceived as 3, since the *et* would be perceived as a single letter word (similar to what happens for the english article "a"). Such a user would have no mechanism to avoid such a problem.

The problem may also manifest itself for medieval transcriptions, where the software would wrongly claim that a single word with an et letter in the middle, is in fact two words, despite the absence of spaces.

Conclusion. With this in mind, I highly recommend the UTC to encode the two tironian letters as a casing pair, rather than assign case to the sign et and reclassify it as a letter.

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