Comment on L2/20-270 regarding two puncti

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I'm writing this document primarily to make the argument that I think the two puncti in L2/20-270 should not be encoded but should remain unified with Question Mark and Exclamation Mark, as has been the case for quite a while, and if desired to differentiate the two, users should use other fonts, or an OpenType feature like hist—Historical Forms.

Primarily, I question the degree to which medievalists actually view these as separate characters. It seems clear to me that both characters have nearly identical function to the modern characters, and in many cases, very similar form, to the degree that they are glyph variants and not separate characters.

0.1 The names of the puncti are just Latin translations of the English names of the modern characters

I found a few sources which use the names punctus exclamativus and exclamation mark interchangably:


“Cut out all these exclamation points. An exclamation point is like laughing at your own joke.”

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, quoted in Sheilah Graham and Gerald Frank, *Beloved Infidel*.

Of all the graphic devices used to maim, corral, and jerry-rig Old English poetry, the exclamation point is the loudest and the most dangerous. It may also be the youngest. This outspoken symbol began its career in late fourteenth-century Italy, a contrivance of the humanist cognoscenti. Called the punctus admirativus or the punctus exclamativus, the mark heralded the rise to power of a Renaissance oratorial literary aesthetic. In concert with the punctus (period) and punctus interrogativus (question mark), the punctus admirativus was meant to indicate the tonal inflection of clauses. From the start, its use was erratic, dependent on the vague category of “exclamatory clauses” that the humanists perceived in the classical orators. Once its name in England was reduced from the haughty Latin binomial to “exclamation point,” “point of exclamation,” and “point of


3. Parkes, *Pause and Effect*, p. 49: “[T]he punctus admirativus or exclamation mark. . . reflects more obviously the oratorical ideal revived by the dictaminists and the humanists.”

4. Iacopo Alpoleio da Urbisaglia, who claims to have invented the mark, explains its purpose as follows, as reproduced in Parkes, *Pause and Effect*, p. 49: “Ego vero, videns quod exclamativa vel admirativa clausula aliter solet quam continuus vel interrogativus sermo enunciari, consuevi tales clausulas in fine notare per punctum planum et comam eodem puncto lateraliter superpositum” (So when I saw that the exclamatory or admirable clause tended to be enunciated in a different fashion from the continuous or the interrogative clause, I began noting the ends of such clauses with a plain punctus: and a comma placed lengthwise above it).
And likewise the *punctus interrogativus*:


Punctuating the English translation of the homilies poses a challenge to the translator. The Latin punctuation system is rather simple. The *punctus* is used throughout the Riesen Kodex to indicate four forms of modern punctuation: full stop, comma, semicolon, and colon. Occasionally, the *punctus interrogativus* indicates sentences that contain a question. No punctuation signals the introduction of direct speech, and Scripture flows together with commentary. It was necessary to add punctuation consistently in the Latin edition in order to aid the reader. How does one employ contemporary punctuation to separate the various voices in the scriptural text (the narrator, the author, or Jesus himself recounting a parable, the characters within historical narratives and parables) from the voice of Hildegard, who speaks not only


spoken or emotio[nal tones.

? Systematic use of the *question-mark* (or *punctus interrogativus*) began at the court of Charlemagne, in the late eighth century. That use is, of course, to ‘mark questions’ and ? signals their characteristic spoken inflection—but any word can take a *question-mark* (‘Tapirs?’), and Latin has four primary verbs of enquiry (*quaero*, *interrogare*, *sciscitor*, and *percontor*) as well as presumptive forms (famously, that ‘*Num d...*’ expects the answer ‘no’). ‘Interrogations’ (demanding ‘yes’ or ‘no’) certainly take a *punctus interrogativus*, but whether ‘queries’ (lookings, searches), ‘sciscitations’ (repeated enquiries), or ‘percontations’ (soundings, as of water with a pole) should do so is unclear. English has only two of these verbs (*question/query and interrogate*) but adds Germanic ‘ask’ (callings for or upon) while fudging all their distinctions—as the very loose term ‘rhetorical questions’ shows: are they unanswerable? unanswerable in time? or just unanswered (in time)? In drama (as in court) the distinction might be life or death, but no conventional means of marking it is available. *Question*-marks may, however, be doubled or tripled, to indicate bewilderment or surprise. The lower point usually has the value of a full-stop, but need not, and the *question-mark* can be used medially (see *Paradise Lost* I.X.546, N437). In 1754 the Real Academia Española began the practice of inverting *question*-marks at the beginning (¿What did you say?): as European integration proceeds initial inversion may spread, and has uses in TESL.

**Text (3.2): Oxford, Bodleian Library, Eng. poet. MS A.1 (‘Vernon’), folio 385v, column 2**

*M ony cunye fondynges. is l. bis feоде Bok. Moni diuere sumne. & moni maner saluen. Vr lord 3iue ou grace*

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‘Witnesses Preordained by God’

[folio 386r, column 1]

\[bat heo ow moten helpen. Of alle þe ōpuru þenne, is schrift þe beste. Of hir schal ben þe ōporfe Bok. as ich bi heet þerweeppe. And nyeþ 3eme how vch a Bok. falleþ into ōpur; as ich er seide. Her beginneþ þe ōporfe Book.\]

\[Wo þinges nyeþ þeme. of schrift. Iþe biginynge. þe þürste; of whuch miht hit beo. þat ōpur; whuch hit schule ben. þe þeos beþ. as two limen. And eþer is to delet þe þürste. on sixe. þat ōpur; on sixene parties þou is þis; of þe þurste. S ch rift hþe mony mihtes. Ac lnhle of alle; sigge bote sixe. þe þreo a þeyn þe deuel; and þreo on vs seluen. ch rift schent þe deuel. hákkeþ of his heued. And al to drcueþ his strengþe. Schrift wasscheþ us; of alle vr fulþen. Þe þeldeþ us. alle ur leoren. þe Makeþ vs. Goddes children. Eþer haueþ his þreo. Preoue we nou alle. þat þe þürste þreo; beþ alle l.schewed. in luthid deeden. luthid; þþ is schrift. as was þare iseid. sinue Olfrone. þat is þe feond of helle. Torn þer vpþ þer we spaken of fouleþ kuynde. þat beþ l.liknet to Ancre. He hakked of his hed. And seþeþ com & schewed hit. to þe Borwh prestes. þe þenne is þe feond l.schent; whon me scheweþ in schrift. al his quedschupus.\]
Perhaps even more noticeably to the eye, however, the Vernon text is supplied with much more thoroughgoing punctuation than the early texts of Ancrere Rule are. The pilcrow or paraph-mark, ¶, is used frequently throughout, varying with punctus, punctus elevatus and punctus interrogativus. The punctus and punctus elevatus are generally used to indicate comma and cola respectively, while the paraph-mark, often accompanied by a capital letter, is regularly deployed to signal the completion of a periodus. The punctus interrogativus, or question-mark, is occasionally deployed with rhetorical questions, e.g. *He stood a zeyp bind.* Capital letters are much more commonly found in Vernon than in Nero, and the beginning of the fifth book is marked by an inset title, not marked in Nero. As Roger Dahood pointed out in a pioneering article on the developing layouts of the Ancrere Rule tradition, the Vernon scribe ‘seems to have been especially concerned to make Part Five accessible for reference’ (Dahood 1988: 96). The comprehensive scheme of punctuation provided by the Vernon scribe, much more extensive and substantial than in Nero, is clearly designed to help readers make sense of the text more easily.

As can be seen, Smith (2020) uses a modern ? for the punctus interrogativus, see red circled ?.

Other sources cited in L2/20-270 similarly tend to use glyph variants in paleography, e.g. figure 7 from Parkes (1993). But before coming across L2/20-270 I viewed such paleographic transcriptions as having been done primarily so readers would be aware that the mark is not quite the modern mark, and that not all of the rules of intonation apply. I certainly never viewed it as its own character.

Indeed, despite showing several glyph variants, Parkes is clear that the exclamativus is the equivalent of the modern mark:


\[ \text{punctus exclamativus} \] (also known as punctus admirativus). The equivalent of the modern exclamation mark; it first appeared in the second half of the fourteenth century: see plates 30–39.

If even medievalists use words like “equivalent” and use the terms interchangably, it’s hard in my mind to justify the puncti as anything but glyph variants.