

Comment on L2/20-270 regarding two *puncti*

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$$\left(\begin{array}{c} !? \\ \text{Psi}^{\text{hedel}}\text{isto} \\ \text{copypaste} @ \text{kittens}.ph \end{array} \right)$$

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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* interchangeably:

Weiskott, Eric. *Making Beowulf Scream: Exclamation and the Punctuation of Old English Poetry* *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 111, No. 1 (January 2012), pp. 25-41

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

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, quoted in Sheilah Graham and Gerold Frank, *Beloved Infidel*¹

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*.² Called the *punctus admirativus* or the *punctus exclamativus*, the mark heralded the rise to power of a Renaissance oratorical literary aesthetic.³ 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.⁴ Once its name in England was reduced from the haughty Latin binomial to “exclamation point,” “point of exclamation,” and “point of

1. Sheilah Graham and Gerold Frank, *Beloved Infidel* (self-published, 1958), p. 198. I am happy to acknowledge my gratitude to Roberta Frank for her comments on this paper. Any errors in the present text remain my own.

2. M. B. Parkes, *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1992), pp. 49 and 213, developed from M. B. Parkes, “Punctuation, or Pause and Effect,” in *Medieval Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Medieval Rhetoric*, ed. J. J. Murphy (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1978), pp. 127–42.

3. Parkes, *Pause and Effect*, p. 49: “[T]he *punctus admirativus* or *exclamativus* (the 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 soleat quam continuus vel interrogativus sermo enunciari, consuevi tales clausulas in fine notare per punctum planum et coma eidem puncto lateraliter superpositum” (So when I saw that the exclamatory or admirative 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).

Fidel Sebastián Mediavilla. *La puntuación del Quijote (1605 y 1615)*. (2008). Academia del Hispanismo. p. 34

²⁷ «Another symbol, the *punctus admirativus* or *exclamativus* (the exclamation mark), reflects more obviously the oratorical ideal revived by the dictaminists and the humanists. Iacopo Alpoleio da Urbisaglia claims to have invented the *punctus admirativus* ! (...) The use of the *exclamativus* was revived by Coluccio

And likewise the *punctus interrogativus*:

Kienzle, Beverley Mayne. *Translation of Homilies on the Gospels by Hildegard of Bingen*. (2011) p. 28

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 Riesenkode 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.⁸⁸ 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

Lennard, John. *The Poetry Handbook*. (2006) p. 120
spoken or emotional 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*, *inter/rogare*, *sciscitor*, and *percontor*) as well as presumptive forms (famously, that 'Num . . .' 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* ix.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.

Smith, Jeremy J. *Transforming Early English: The Reinvention of Early English and Older Scots*. (2020) pp. 85–88.

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

Mony cunne fondynges. is I. þis feorþe Bok. Moni diuerse
sumus. & moni maner saluen. Vr lord ȝiue ou grace

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[folio 386r, column 1]

þat heo ow moten helpen. Of alle þe oþure þenne is schrift þe
beste. Of hire schal ben þe fyfþe Bok. as ich bi heet þer vpe.
And nymeþ ȝeme how vch a Bok. falleþ into oþur as ich er seide.
Her beginneþ þe fyfþe Book.

T Wo þinges nymeþ ȝeme. of schrift. I. þe biginnyng.
þe ffurste of whuch miht hit beo. ¶ þat oþur
whuch hit schule ben. ¶ þeos beoþ. as two limen.
And eiþer is to delet ¶ þe ffurste. on sixe. ¶ þat
oþur on sixtene parties ¶ Nou is þis of þe furste.

Schrift haþ mony mihtes. Ac I. nulle of alle sigge bote
sixe. ¶ þreo a ȝeyn þe deuel and þreo on vs seluen.
chrift schent þe deuel. hakkeþ of his heued. And al to
dreueþ his strengþe. ¶ Schrift wasscheþ us of alle vr fulþen.
¶ Ȝeldeþ us. alle ur leoren. ¶ Makeþ vs. Goddes children.
Eiþer haueþ his þreo. Preoue we nou alle. ¶ þe ffurste
þreo beoþ alle I. schewede. in Iudith deeden. ¶ Iudith þ^t
is schrift. as was ȝare iseid. slouȝ Oloferne. þat is þe fend
of helle. Torn þer vpe þer we speken of foulene kuynde.
þat beoþ I. liknet to Ancre. He hakked of his hed. And seþþ^e
com & schewede hit. to þe Borwh preostes. ¶ þenne is þe feond
I. 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 *Ancrene Riwe* 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 commata 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. *Ho stod a zeyn him?* 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 *Ancrene Riwe* 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.⁴

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:

Parkes, M. B. *Pause and Effect*. (1993) p. 306

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 interchangeably, it’s hard in my mind to justify the *puncti* as anything but glyph variants.