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VIRGULAE AND DISTINCTIONES: A HISTORY OF WESTERN NOTATIONAL SYSTEMS FROM
GRAMMAR HANDBOOK TO LITURGICAL LEAF

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VIRGULAE AND DISTINCTIONES: A HISTORY OF WESTERN NOTATIONAL SYSTEMS FROM
GRAMMAR HANDBOOK TO LITURGICAL LEAF

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Abstract

I present the history of the virgule or slash (/) as a measure of how students read and interpreted texts first by methods taught in grammar handbooks but then according to scribal-driven innovations to the page. The mark primarily operates in four ways: as an outsider to *distinctiones*, the dominant mode of punctuating from the first century CE to the ninth; as the term *virgula*, a “stem” or “twig” describing the shapes of accents or critical signs in grammatical treatises; as a runover or punctuation mark, both byproducts of Insular innovations in book production during the eighth and ninth centuries; and as an outsider yet again in Carolingian scriptoria, where scribes preferred a modified version of *distinctiones* or a new system of liturgical punctuation called *positurae*. The history of the virgule reveals how the responsibilities once considered as acts of interpretation left to the reader became expectations for the appearance of texts placed upon the scribe.

Introduction

Most, if not all, modern studies of western punctuation rely on M.B. Parkes's (1993) *Pause and Effect*. While many scholars are happily vague on the subject of punctuation, Parkes provides a deep dive into the history of signs from antiquity to the formation of the modern repertory of punctuation symbols. Since the publication of *Pause and Effect*, most books on the subject identify the origins of certain symbols, the repertory of punctuation signs available in a specific time and place, or the application of a punctuation system in a given manuscript. So far as I know, however, no one has written a history of *who* punctuates and why. But, historically, punctuation is a record of interpretation first by readers, then by scribes, and finally by authors and editors. This record is often idiosyncratic, but it is our most valuable measure of how people read and interpreted texts in the early Middle Ages.

It is easy to forget that punctuation is interpretation. In modern editions, words, clauses or phrases, and sentences are all distinct. Paragraph breaks, chapters, a table of contents, running titles, and page numbers are ubiquitous. But readers did not always benefit from such conveniences. Ancient Greek and Latin texts were written in continuous script: rare separation between words and no paragraph breaks. In the fourth century, Augustine recognizes that undistinguished texts pose a danger to orthodoxy, noting the “well-known heretical punctuation” of John 1:1-2: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and there was God” as opposed to “and the Word was God, this was in the beginning with God” (Green 1995, 136).¹

¹ The Latin reads as follows: *Illa haeretica distinctio, in principio erat verbum, et verbum erat apud deum, et deus erat, ut alius sit sensus: verbum hoc erat in principio apud deum, non vult deum verbum confiteri. Sed hoc regula fidei refellendum est qua nobis de trinitatis aequalitate praescribitur, ut dicamus, et deus erat verbum, deinde subiungamus, hoc erat in principio apud*

In this case, the word “punctuation” is misleading because, before the fifth century of the Common Era, most Western texts lacked punctuation entirely. Until the late seventh century, punctuation was sporadic; surviving punctuation marks are the remnants of readers coping with unseparated texts. In the passage above, Augustine warns that readers could incorrectly parse continuous script and unintentionally stray into heresy. He anticipates a time when word spacing is an expectation of finished codices and punctuation guides readers to the orthodox interpretation of scripture.

In the eighth and ninth centuries, manuscripts begin to look much more familiar. Spaces appear between most words, points or commas break sentences into smaller parts, capital letters sometimes distinguish sentences from each other, symbols in the margin differentiate paragraphs, and a unique script indicates new sections of text. Scribes inserted these innovations as they copied manuscripts, parsing the Latin for readers to prevent misunderstanding. But the punctuation they applied was not the author’s; it reflected the individual scribe’s understanding of the text. Authors did not begin to insert punctuation into their texts until the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries. Punctuation was not standardized by this point; authors drew on multiple punctuation systems to create their own personalized repertoires. By the fifteenth century, we can see authors playing with the idea of punctuation as an interpretive tool. They purposely imbedded two separate interpretations in “punctuation poems,” leaving readers to apply punctuation to discern the hidden message of the poem. The following is a late fifteenth-century English punctuation poem with reader-supplied punctuation:

deum (Green 1995, 135). Also see Green (1997, 68-70). R.P.H. Green translates the word *distinctio* as “punctuation.” *Distinctio* could refer to a specific punctuation mark in the three-point system known as *distinctiones*, but it could also simply mean “division, separation,” or “boundary.” See Chapter 1.

In women is rest peas and pacience .
 No season . for soth ought of charite .
 Bothe be nyght & day . theis haue confidence .
 All wey of treasone . owt of blame there be .
 No tyme as men say . mutabilite .
 They haue without nay . but stedfastnes .
 In theym may ye neuer fynde y gesse . Cruelte
 Such condicions they haue more & lesse (Robbins 1939, 206)²

If the lines are read as units of sense, the poem is a celebration of women's attributes. But if the poem is read from caesura to caesura, as is suggested by the placement of points at mid-line, the poem becomes an attack on women. In antiquity, punctuation was a laborious means of separating continuous script, but, by the late Middle Ages, it could be an enjoyable solution to an interpretive riddle. Punctuation poems were popular into the seventeenth century (Robbins 1939, 207). By the nineteenth century, the modern repertoire of punctuation was fully formed.

What Is a Virgule?

The term punctuation applies to marks that resolve semantic or structural ambiguity, but readers inserted other kinds of symbols, such as critical signs, to help them comprehend texts (Parkes 1993, 1). The slash mark (/), now most often seen in alternative designators (e.g., Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms.), in mathematics, and in computer languages, such as HTML5, was once a common punctuation mark in fourteenth-, fifteenth-, and sixteenth-century English poetry and prose.³ The slash has gone by many names, such as oblique or diagonal, but to scholars who study Middle English manuscripts, it is best known as the *virgula* or virgule (Ritter 2002, 146).⁴

² Robbins (1939, 206) finds this poem in Cambridge University Library, MS. Hh. 2. 6, f. 58a. The unitalicized letters reflect abbreviations in the manuscript.

³ An argument could be made that the slash functions exactly like punctuation in computer languages by fulfilling a parenthetical, bracketing, or separating role.

⁴ *The Oxford Guide to Style* (Ritter 2002, 146) says the symbol (/) was also known as the "stroke" and the "shilling mark."

The stroke was placed within or sometimes at the end of written lines; its general function was to mark any pause before the final one (Parkes 1993, 307). The virgule can be found in manuscripts of Geoffrey Chaucer's works; it is especially frequent in three early witnesses of the *Canterbury Tales*.⁵ Its placement has stirred debates on Chaucer's metrics, the oral performance of his works, his French and Italian influences, and the exemplars from which his works were copied.⁶

But little is known about the virgule before the height of its popularity. To my knowledge, the only statements about its origin are unevidenced hypotheses. A.C. Partridge (1964, 185) theorizes that the virgule originates in the *koronis* or *coronis*, a method of paragraphing deployed in Greek papyri.⁷ On the other hand, Ian Robinson (1971) argues that the *virga*, an early form of musical notation, is the more likely origin of the virgule (132).⁸ Neither of these theories are supported by evidence. The virgule was not a punctuation mark in Latin manuscripts until the eighth century. Unlike *distinctiones*, the primary system of punctuation available to readers and scribes in the early Middle Ages, the virgule was never formally recommended by grammar handbooks. Punctuation was one of the responsibilities that Latin

⁵ These are the Hengwrt (Aberystwyth, Nat. Lib. Wales, Peniarth MS 392), Ellesmere (San Marino, Huntington Lib., MS 26 C 9), and Cambridge University Dd.4.24 manuscripts. Using a sample size of sixteen lines, N.F. Blake (2000, 372) determines that the virgule appears in twenty-one of the fifty-four manuscripts of the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*. George Killough (1978) studies specific tendencies, prohibitions, and principles governing the virgule in four of Chaucer's *Canterbury tales* as preserved in the Hengwrt manuscript. In one early manuscript of the *Canterbury Tales*, Killough finds that the virgule obeyed rules which resemble modern usage of the comma, such as separating elements in a series, preceding a coordinating conjunction, or marking clause boundaries with or without subordinating conjunctions or relative pronouns (50, 52, 54, 62).

⁶ For the virgule's role in determining Chaucer's meter, intended presentation, continental sources, and manuscript tradition, see Southworth (1954; 1964), Gaylord (1976), Baum (1961), Robinson (1971), Mustanoja (1979), Killough (1982; 1987), and Burnley (1983).

⁷ See Chapter 1.

⁸ The *virga* is a neum (a character in early musical notation) in Gregorian chant.

grammarians considered as an act of interpretation best left to the reader. But during the seventh and eighth centuries the difficulties posed by Latin to readers whose native tongue was not a Romance language created a need for and an expectation of assistance in the written text. Evidence of this development may be seen in Insular manuscripts (written in Ireland and Britain) and in Carolingian codices (written in the court of Charlemagne, a Frank, whose native language was a dialect of German). The virgule's early applications reveal how readers, scholars, and scribes categorized, simplified, or supplemented notational systems to suit their interpretive needs, providing an entirely different history of interpretation than what we find in the grammars.

Chapter Overviews

The first chapter, “Reading Unseparated Text: *Distinctiones* in First- to Seventh-Century Grammars and Pre-Carolingian Codices,” describes the formatting of early Greek and Latin texts, the processes by which readers interpreted texts, and grammarians’ descriptions of the only formal system of punctuation in the early Middle Ages. *Distinctiones* refers to the three-point notational system first observed in manuscripts around the fifth century but recommended in grammatical treatises as early as the late first century CE. Readers inserted these points into unseparated text, making punctuation a literal measure of the reader’s comprehension. Despite its many recommendations, readers rarely adhered to the system of *distinctiones* at all, often using just two points or none whatsoever. *Distinctiones* remained the only mode of punctuation described in the grammars through the ninth century.

“Ancient Origins of Interpretation: Tracking the Virgule from the Third Century BCE to the Ninth CE” shows how the term *virgula* specialized from its original sense of “twig” to the “stroke” of accents and critical marks over the course of the first century CE to the ninth. In this

chapter, I survey the works of Quintilian, Martianus Capella, Donatus, Diomedes, Isidore of Seville, and Remigius of Auxerre for applications of *virgula*. The term most frequently designates the mark signaling a stressed syllable (acute), a long (*longus*) syllable, or a short (*brevis*) syllable, as well as two critical marks, the obolus and lemniscus. Another mark to which the term *virgula* is applied is the hyphen, the function of which is both performative and syntactical, half accent and half punctuation mark. Readers applied accents, critical signs, and punctuation marks to divide text, indicating that the defining characteristic of punctuation, its relationship to syntax, is a modern development.

“Innovation and Exemplars: The Virgule’s Role in Insular Book Production from the Seventh to Ninth Centuries” proves that the virgule in eighth- and ninth-century Insular manuscripts was not an imitation of Roman exemplars but a result of increased demand for books. The virgule primarily functioned as a run-over mark in manuscripts produced in Northumbrian scriptoria and written in Irish or Anglo-Saxon minuscule (a style of script), but it also appeared as a punctuation mark in manuscripts copied in minuscule near St. Gall. Though some of the most famous products of Wearmouth and Jarrow (a double monastery on the northeast coast of England) were byproducts of the exemplars Benedict Biscop and Ceolfrid brought back from Italy, such as the Codex Amiatinus, an increased demand for copies, especially works by the English scholar Bede, resulted in economical adaptations to script and notation. The application of the virgule appears to coincide with the adoption of Insular minuscule as a more efficient means of copying books. Punctuation trends were impacted by the same forces acting upon scripts, including purpose of use, comprehensibility of writing, treatment of exemplars, and demand for copies.

The last chapter, “*Virgulae, Distinctiones, and Positurae: Notational Competition in Eighth- and Ninth-Century Carolingian Manuscripts*,” demonstrates that early products of Charlemagne’s court scriptorium were heavily influenced by Insular books. Carolingian scribes borrowed the Insular version of *distinctiones* by patterns of points or commas, as well as the virgule for runover marks or punctuation. However, the virgule did not join the general repertory of punctuation during the Carolingian Renaissance. The court scriptorium operated with greater freedom in terms of script style and notational system, a fact which explains why the virgule occurs in manuscripts produced at the end of the eighth century but not the ninth. Moreover, Alcuin of York, an English scholar influential at the center of Charlemagne’s program of educational reform, specifically requested that Carolingian scribes insert a two-fold version of *distinctiones* as they copied liturgical manuscripts. Perhaps as a result, the two-point system or the Insular version of *distinctiones* was the most common form of punctuation through the twelfth century. During the mid-eighth century, a new notational system was invented for liturgical works; *positurae* conveyed more information than *distinctiones*, and the points of *distinctiones* could be easily corrected to *positurae*. Despite the commitment to grammatical education in the Carolingian Renaissance, scribes freely altered the only punctuation system recommended by the grammarians and supplemented it with *positurae* to better meet the needs of readers.

Carolingian methods of punctuation in due course made their way from France to Italy, where they joined the repertory of Beneventan scribes. The virgule was one of four symbols comprising the Beneventan system of punctuation, which was in steady use from the late ninth century to the thirteenth. The mark was recommended by practitioners of the *ars dictaminis*, the letter-writing tradition of the twelfth to fifteenth centuries. Like members of the *ars dictaminis*,

the Italian humanists developed personalized punctuation systems, but the humanists employed more symbols to fulfill precise syntactic functions. Both Petrarch and Giovanni Boccaccio deployed the virgule in their punctuation systems. After becoming a common punctuation mark in fourteenth-, fifteenth-, and sixteenth-century Middle English poetry, the virgule appeared in early printed works until it was effectively replaced by the comma in the mid-sixteenth century. Compared to the point (.), the virgule's lifespan as a punctuation mark was short, lasting only eight centuries. Neither the virgule nor the three-point system remains a part of the repertory of punctuation.

Because punctuation before the age of print is idiosyncratic and difficult to define, it may seem irrelevant to modern textual or literary studies. But the history of notational systems is foundational to the editions we read and the literary debates in which we engage. Before word spacing and formatting became expected features of texts, readers had to rely on their own parsing skills. Scribal-inserted punctuation created the concept of a standard text, enabling the arguments we make about authorial intent today. The complex notational systems with which we convey new editions or literary concepts was made possible by the larger, more precise punctuation systems of the twelfth to fifteenth centuries. Punctuation is not only a record of interpretation; it is the basis of it.

Chapter 1

Reading Unseparated Text: *Distinctiones* in First- to Seventh-Century Grammars and Pre-Carolingian

Codices

Chronological List of Pertinent Grammarians and Works

Authority	Date (CE)	Relevant Works	Relevant Remarks
Quintilian	Late first century	<i>Institutio Oratoria</i> (Russell 2002, 11.3.36)	Warns against faulty punctuation when pleading
Suetonius	Early second century	<i>De Viris Illustribus</i> , “ <i>De Grammaticis</i> ” (Henderson 1997, 416-17)	Reports that for Marcus Valerius Probus emendation, distinction, and annotation were separate processes
Fronto	161	Letter to Volumnius Quadratus (Haines 1919, 309-10)	Promises the works of Cicero <i>emendatos et distinctos</i>
Donatus	354	<i>Ars grammatica</i> , “ <i>De Posituris</i> ” (GL 4, 372) ⁹	Summarizes the <i>distinctio</i> , <i>subdistinctio</i> , and <i>media distinctio</i>
Charisius	362	<i>Ars grammatica</i> , Table of Contents (Irvine 1994, 60-61)	Lists <i>de accentu et posituri</i> , <i>de mora</i> , <i>de distinctione</i> , and <i>de subdistinctione</i> in Book V, large sections of which have been lost
Diomedes	c. 370-80	<i>Ars grammatica</i> , “ <i>De Discretione</i> ” (GL 1, 437-39)	Treats <i>distinctio</i> , <i>subdistinctio</i> and <i>mora</i> as three of the five processes of discretion

⁹ GL abbreviates *Grammatici Latini*, edited by Heinrich Keil in 7 volumes (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1857-80).

Dositheus	Second half of the fourth century	<i>Ars grammatica, “De Distinctione”</i> (GL 7, 380)	Borrows from Charisius and Diomedes to provide Latin and Greek descriptions of punctuation
Servius	Late fourth to early fifth century	<i>Commentarius in Artem Donati, “De Posituris”</i> (GL 4, 427-28)	Largely copies Donatus’s description
Sergius	Early fifth century	<i>In Artem Donati (De Littera, Explanaciones in artem Donati), “De Distinctione”</i> (GL 4, 484-85)	Refers to a manuscript pointed with <i>distinctiones</i> as a <i>codex emendatus</i>
Cledonius	Fifth century	<i>Ars Grammatica, “De Posituris”</i> (GL 5, 34)	Replaces Donatus’s explanation of points with examples in this commentary
Pompeius	Late fifth century	<i>Commentum in artem Donati, “De Posituris”</i> (GL 5, 133-34)	Presents punctuation as instructions for how “a codex is to be marked”
Cassiodorus	Mid-sixth century	<i>Institutiones</i> (Mynors 1937, 1.30.2, 1.15.12)	Applies <i>distinctiones</i> to a Psalter and recommends punctuation for the emendation of Scripture
Isidore of Seville	Early seventh century	<i>Etymologiae sive Origines, “De Posituris”</i> and “ <i>De notis sententiarum</i> ” (Lindsay 1911, 1.20-21)	Claims <i>positura</i> could derive from <i>deponere</i> , to lower the voice, and presents critical signs used for emendation

For much of classical antiquity and the beginning of the early Middle Ages, texts were written continuously without spaces between words or signs of punctuation. Punctuation was inserted by students, teachers, or scholars of grammar as part of the reading process or *lectio*, the elementary first step of interpretation. However, beginning in the first century, punctuation receives special treatment by scholars and grammarians; while some simply treat punctuation as a process independent of reading, others group it with the correction process or *emendatio*, a

later and more difficult stage of interpretation affiliated with critical signs. To understand punctuation's role in the larger interpretive process, we shall examine grammar handbooks extending from the first to seventh centuries. The grammars describe a consistent notational tradition of three points called *distinctiones* or *positurae* used to prepare texts for oral recitation. But appliers of the three-point system hardly adhere to grammatical guidelines in extant manuscripts, that is, if they insert the points at all. Although the grammars taught punctuation as a basic precept of the reading process, only the educated scholars who engaged in the correction process were able to apply *distinctiones*, resulting in the system's limited use until the eighth century.

Continuous Script

Word separation did not become a standard feature of Latin texts written on the continent until the High Middle Ages, though writing centers in the British Isles introduced spacing earlier (Parkes 1997, 99). The earliest Greek and Roman inscriptions separated words with interpuncts (periods at mid-height), but both ancient civilizations abandoned the practice in favor of *scriptio continua* or unseparated text (Saenger 1997, 9-10).¹⁰ Most late Roman and Greek texts appeared without spacing or punctuation. While Greek papyri included organizational aids such as foliation, pagination, and catchwords, these devices were not employed by Romans (12). Thus, the only visual aids provided by Latin scribes included a space at the ends of sentences, an enlarged letter following, or an occasional point (Brown 1993, 81). To make matters more difficult, many ancient texts disregarded conventional word order or even grouping

¹⁰ From the late first century BCE to the early second century CE, words were divided by points or interpuncts in Latin texts (Brown 1993, 80). Saenger (1997, 12) states that Romans ended separation by interpuncts by 165 CE.

grammatically related words (Saenger 1997, 80). Readers had to carefully parse texts to understand them (Parkes 1993, 10). We may not notice it, but modern texts provide us with an enormous amount of help: consistent punctuation, word spacing, conventional word order, paragraphing, headers, and page numbers. Latin readers, on the other hand, were purposefully confronted with pages and pages of unseparated script.

The benefit of *scriptio continua* is a neutral text (Parkes 1993, 10-11). In antiquity, the scribe's role was to reproduce an exemplar, not interpret it (9). In *Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning*, a mid-sixth-century handbook for monastic students, Cassiodorus warns scribes not to edit texts—"to avoid mixing this great good with faulty words by altering letters or in case an uneducated corrector does not know how to correct errors"—and prescribes a lengthy bibliography of readings before scribes undertake any revisions (Irvine 1994, 196; 1.30.2).¹¹ The scribe's role was mechanical, whereas the reader's was interpretive; even punctuation marks were not supplied because punctuating, like separating words, was seen as an interpretive act (Parkes 1993, 10-11). The *scriptio continua* "mindset" is the belief that the burden of comprehension belongs solely to the reader. However, scribes did provide some elementary graphic cues to break up continuous script.

Early Paragraphing

Around the first century BCE, a short dividing stroke was inserted in Greek papyri to mark the end of paragraphs (Thompson 1912, 58).¹² The stroke was a horizontal line called the

¹¹ Translated by Halporn and Vessey (2004, 1.30.2). *Sed ne tanto bono mutatis litteris scriptores verba vitiosa permisceant aut ineruditus emendator nesciat errata corrigere, orthographos antiquos legant ...* (Mynors 1937, 1.30.2).

¹² The mark signaled the end of the previous paragraph, but it appeared at the beginning of the next paragraph.

παράγραφος or *parágraphos*, from *para-*, "beside", and *graphein*, "to write."¹³ It was placed below the beginning of the line in which a new topic was introduced (Brown 1993, 80). The *parágraphos* could take a variety of forms besides the horizontal line, including the wedge (>), the double point (:), and the *κορωνίς* or *coronis* (see Lewis and Short 1969, s.v. *coronis* 1), a mark resembling the number 7. Sometimes called the "scratching stroke," the *parágraphos* could also appear as a vertical line or vertical and horizontal crosslines (Enos 2012, 54). The marks associated with paragraphing make up some of the earliest symbols used in Western composition (49-50).¹⁴

The Greek method of paragraphing was modified in Latin texts. The oldest Latin documents, dating from the late first century BCE to the early second century CE, reveal that the *parágraphos* was eliminated as the first letter of a new topic was projected into the margin (Brown 1993, 80). By the fifth century CE, the *parágraphos* became unnecessary because initials in the margin were enlarged, resembling the modern drop cap; the horizontal stroke could sometimes still be seen above the first letter of different books or sections (Thompson 1912, 59). In addition to formatting changes at the beginnings of paragraphs, series of dots and dashes, such as :, :-, and :. accompanied section breaks (Enos 2012, 55). Paragraphing was the first intervention in continuous script. By breaking large stretches of text into digestible units, scribes reduced some of the preparatory work required of readers. But texts still required a great deal of intellectual labor before they could be read. Grammatical handbooks prescribed a formal method

¹³ Bernard Bischoff (1990, 172) claims a horizontal stroke or right angle signified the division of a text in antiquity, and the right angle (γ) eventually became the modern paraph (¶) and section sign (§).

¹⁴ The double point (:) is the earliest Greek punctuation, originating perhaps as early as the fourth century BCE (Thompson 1912, 59).

of interpretation, in which readers divided and annotated continuous script to make it comprehensible.

Interpretation and Its Parts

Roman grammatical handbooks or *artes grammaticae*, such as Book 1 of Quintilian's *Institutes of Oratory* (c. 95 CE), provided the linguistic skills needed to access the Latin literary canon (Irvine 1994, 56). The divisions and principles of grammar set out in the Roman handbooks were adopted in the early Middle Ages by Christian scholars, such as Cassiodorus, who wrote handbooks of their own as textbooks for beginner and advanced students (55). Grammar was divided in two: the science of interpreting (*scientia interpretandi*) and the rules for speaking and writing Latin correctly (*latinitas*). The science of interpretation consisted of four processes: reading, explanation, correction, and judgement or *lectio*, *enarratio*, *emendatio*, and *iudicium* (fig. 1) (Grotans 2006, 25).

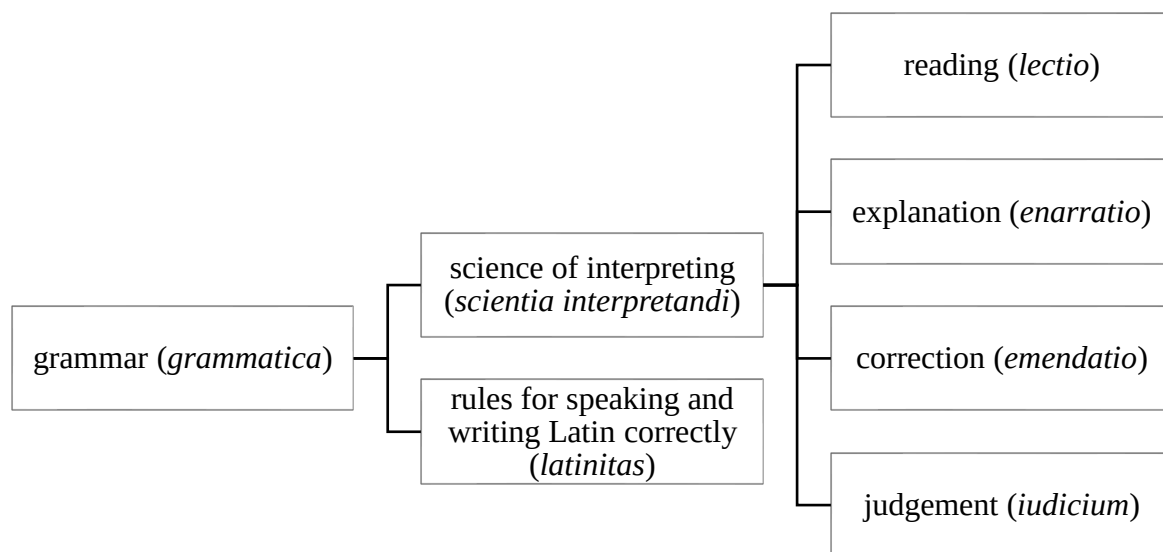


Figure 1

Modern texts come to us clearly articulated; the text as an object of knowledge is relatively stable. On the other hand, the sense and meaning of early Latin texts depended on the individual's interpretive ability; there was no static version of the text prior to being read (Irvine 1994, 68). When a reader first encountered a text in continuous script, he turned to the fundamental first principle of grammatical literacy: the rules for reading or *lectio*.

Reading

Lectio is “the act of reading,” publicly or alone, “instructing,” or “lecturing” (*DMLBS*, s.v. *lectio* 2-4).¹⁵ The reading process was primarily applied to poetry (Irvine 1994, 70). Because it preceded the other processes of interpretation (explanation, correction, and judgement), reading was a prerequisite of meaning (69). The grammar textbooks subdivided reading into accentuation (*accentus*), discretion (*discretio*), pronunciation (*pronuntiatio*), and modulation (*modulatio*) (fig. 2) (Grotans 2006, 26).

¹⁵ *DMLBS* abbreviates *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*. See Ashdowne, Howlett, and Latham (2018).

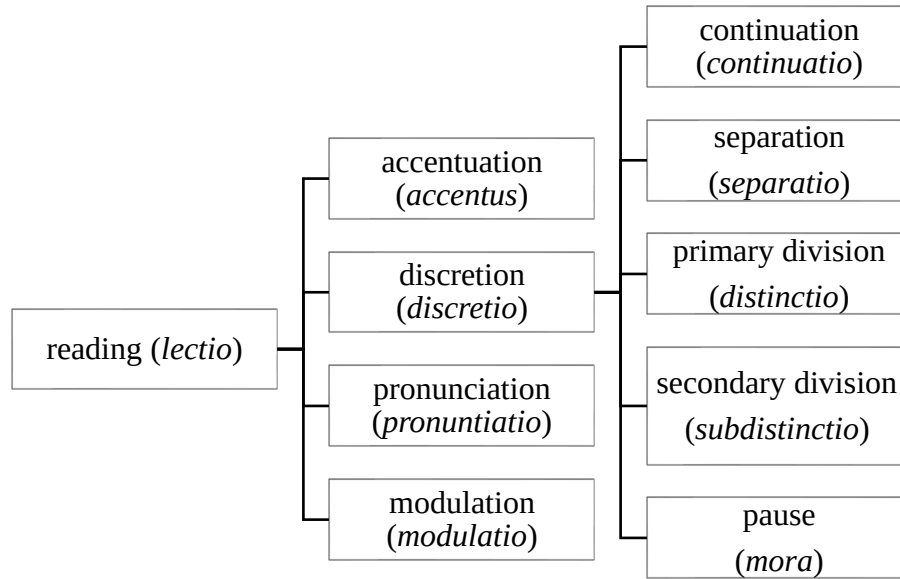


Figure 2

Three of the four divisions concerned oral delivery because the end-goal of reading was vocal performance: accentuation or “accent, stress, and intonation;” pronunciation or “the manner in which a word is uttered,” i.e., speech rate and character imitation; and modulation or the “variation in tone or pitch” (*DMLBS*, s.v. *accentus*, *pronuntiatio* 5, *modulatio* 1). The text was only realized as discourse when spoken aloud, but it required adequate preparation before it could be performed (Grotans 2006, 26-7; Cavallo 1999, 75). The other division of reading is discretion, literally “separation,” “division,” “distinction,” or “differentiation,” which involved the important work of preparing continuous script by dividing up the text, identifying relationships between words, clarifying ambiguous phrasing, and punctuating (*DMLBS*, s.v. *discretio* 1-3a). Unlike today, punctuation was part of the reading—not the writing—process, and it was a crucial precursor to performing a text aloud.

Punctuation before the ninth century largely concerned inflection (Lowe 1914, 231-2). Since antiquity, texts had been primarily read aloud; and, as a result, writing was generally

recognized as a record of spoken language. Attitudes toward the written language began to change in the sixth century when readers started to see writing as capable of conveying information directly to the mind (Parkes 1993, 1). Before the end of the eighth century, there was a dramatic increase in the number of written documents on secular and ecclesiastical matters (Treitler 2003, 369). Writing became a more conspicuous counterpart to oral recitation in administrative, ecclesiastical, and pedagogical circles. By the ninth century, readers understood writing as independent of speech; language could be perceived by ear or eye. Previously, punctuation had conveyed the oral performance of a text by signifying greater or lesser pause values. Its primary purpose was to provide the reader with declamation cues, much like breath marks in a musical score (Ong 1944, 350, 353). Sense was secondary (351).¹⁶ But in the ninth century, punctuation could convey more information about the relationship between parts of a sentence and the status of the sentence as a question or statement (Parkes 1993, 34). Even after attitudes toward writing changed, punctuation continued to fulfill two functions as a component of discretion and the reading process overall: it enabled the proper oral delivery of a text and it divided script, with or without spaces, into comprehensible units.

¹⁶ Walter Ong (1944, 354) writes that grammarians rarely mentioned grammatical units in early descriptions of punctuation. However, since the *distinctio* or high point indicated the ends of sentences, it technically represents a grammatically structured unit. Moreover, beginning with Quintilian, the three points are defined by the *periodus*, *colon*, and *comma*. The *periodus* or period refers to a complete utterance or *sententia* in prose (Parkes 1993, 306). The *colon* (pl. *cola*) is a division of the period in which the sense is complete, but the sentence is not. The *comma* (pl. *commata*) is a division of the *colon* in which the sense is incomplete (302). The relationship of the *periodus*, *colon*, and *comma* to *distinctiones* is outside the purview of this chapter, but grammarians' references to it will be included in footnotes below. Finally, Diomedes explicitly refers to grammatically structured units when describing punctuation; see footnote 40 below. Overall, the grammarians consistently emphasize breath as the determining factor when placing the *distinctio*.

Diomedes's *Art of Grammar* or *Ars grammatica*, produced between c. 370 to 380 CE, is the most extensive extant grammatical treatise of this era (Irvine 1994, 62). In it, discretion is split into five methods: continuation, separation, primary division, secondary division, and pause (GL 1, 436). The first two methods involve sentence structure. *Continuatio*, meaning “continuity,” concerns syntax involving more than just one word (DMLBS, s.v. *continuatio* 1), while separation or *separatio*, meaning “division,” clarifies the syntax of phrases or clauses (DMLBS, s.v. *separatio* 1a). The last three methods refer to punctuation. The terms *distinctio*, *subdistinctio*, and *mora* are the names applied to a variously placed *punctus*, or “small dot,” located at the base, in the middle, or at the top of the line of writing (DMLBS, s.v. *punctum* 1).¹⁷ These points marked syntactical divisions, breathing pauses, and the degree of completeness in an utterance. Primary division or *distinctio* is the name given to the high point; it is the main “division, separation,” or “boundary” between sentences (DMLBS, s.v. *distinctio* 1ab). Secondary division or *subdistinctio* is a “subordinate division, subdivision,” or “part of a part;” it indicates a subdivision of the sentence (DMLBS, s.v. *subdistinctio* 1). Pause or *mora* could signify an “intervening period, lapse of time,” or “pause in speaking,” and it too designates a subdivision of the sentence; later grammarians prefer the terms *submedia* or *media distinctio* for this mark (DMLBS, s.v. 1 *mora* 2).¹⁸ The punctuation symbols themselves were named *distinctio*, *subdistinctio*, and *mora* or *media distinctio*, but the overarching system of punctuation was referred to as *distinctiones* or *positurae*.

¹⁷ The term *punctus* is variable in form, some treating it as a masculine noun (*punctus*) and some as a neuter noun (*punctum*).

¹⁸ Diomedes uses *submedia* and *media distinctio*. Donatus popularizes *media distinctio*, a term borrowed by many commentators on his grammar. See below.

According to Diomedes, primary division, secondary division, and pause are the three components of *positurae* (GL 1, 437). *Positura* means a “sign indicating layout or arrangement,” i.e., “a punctuation mark,” and later the term could signify a “lowering (of the voice)” (DMLBS, s.v. *positura* 1-2).¹⁹ The terminology of punctuation is admittedly confusing, especially for the word *positurae*. In its nominative plural form, *positurae* came to represent a separate system of liturgical punctuation, but in its nominative singular form *positura*, the word came to signify a Latin critical sign (Parkes 1993, 306).²⁰ Before the Carolingian Renaissance, however, *positurae* is a common name for the three-mark system of points or *distinctiones*.²¹ To avoid confusion, *distinctiones* will refer to the three-point system, *positurae* to the liturgical system of punctuation, and *positura* to the Latin critical sign. In review, Diomedes instructed readers to divide continuous script with *distinctiones* during discretion, a method of the reading process. The preparations involved with the reading process (accentuation, discretion, pronunciation, and modulation) were meant to produce a comprehensible text ready for interpretation. Before we can delve into grammarians’ treatment of discretion and punctuation, we must briefly turn to emendation, another stage of the interpretive process associated with a repertory of signs.

¹⁹ Isidore describes how *positura* relates to a lowered voice below.

²⁰ *Positura* is a naturally generic term signifying any placed thing—from *ponere*, “to place, put (in [special] or implied position)” (DMLBS, s.v. *ponere* 1a). See Chapter 4 for *positurae*. See below for *positura*.

²¹ Nomenclature varies in reference. My terminology is borrowed from M.B. Parkes (1993, 302, 306), who uses *distinctiones* exclusively for the three-point system recommended by Donatus, *positurae* for the system of punctuation applied to liturgical manuscripts (i.e., the *punctus flexus*, *punctus elevatus*, *punctus interrogativus*, and *punctus versus*), and *positura* for a critical sign or *nota*. Unlike Parkes, Leo Treitler (2003, 370) refers to the three-point system in “treatises of Roman grammarians” as *positurae*.

Emendation

Of the four interpretive processes, two are connected to a set of symbols: reading, specifically the accentuation and discretion methods, and emendation. While explanation or *enarratio* is a “full description” or “recital” (from *enarrare*, “to describe or relate fully”), judgement or *iudicium* is the “exercising of judgement, deciding of a question,” a “considered opinion,” or an “informed judgement (DMLBS, s.v. *enarratio*, *enarrare* 1a, s.v. *iudicium* 3a, 9). Neither process involves marking the text. Emendation or *emendatio*, on the other hand, generally means “improvement” or “repair,” but in this context the word specifically describes the “correction (of text)” (DMLBS, s.v. *emendatio* 1-3). From the fourth to eighth centuries, grammarians, especially Christian scholars, attempted to establish a standard form of literary Latin (Irvine 1994, 74). Literary models from classical, canonized authors served as the basis for authentic Latin style in grammar handbooks (74-5). Diomedes and other grammarians turned to classical sources, for example, when explaining how to use the hyphen by applying it to a difficult passage from Virgil’s *Aeneid*.²² From the fourth century on, emendation primarily concerned the achievement of an authentic Latin style, including orthography, usage, style, and grammar, according to the principles of the grammar handbooks (75-6). Scholars and well-trained scribes turned to a set of critical signs when emending texts.

²² The example is *ante_tulit gressum* from *Aeneid* 6.677. Donatus and Pompeius use the same passage, both of whom will be discussed below. The grammarians are using the hyphen to ensure *antetulit* is pronounced with a light accent, so that readers of unseparated text do not read *antetulit* and think the *e* in *ante*, which is naturally short, should be lengthened because it is in a closed syllable. Donatus (*GL* 4, 372), Diomedes (*GL* 1, 434-35), Priscian (*GL* 3, 520), Sergius (*GL* 4, 482), and Pompeius (*GL* 5, 132) describe the hyphen as a semicircle at the foot of the line, while Isidore (Lindsay 1911, 1.19.6) reports that it resembles a hook.

Critical Signs

Critical signs were introduced into Greek texts as early as the third century BCE and into Latin poetic works in the second century BCE (Parkes 1993, 12).²³ In Latin, these signs were known collectively as *notae* and individually as *nota*, literally a “mark” but more broadly a “brief comment, critical annotation, or [something similar], relating to a written text” (*DMLBS*, s.v. *nota* 1, 10). Emendation was an advanced stage of the interpretive process; consequently, applicers of *notae* were generally restricted to well-educated scholars.²⁴ In the early second century CE, the historian Suetonius (Henderson 1997, 416-17) describes the Roman grammarian Marcus Valerius Probus of the late first century CE in the act of introducing *notae* to correct error-ridden texts of early writers (*veteres libellos*): “After getting together a large number of copies, he gave his attention to correcting (*emendare*) and punctuating (*distinguere*) them, and furnishing them with critical notes (*annotare curavit*), devoting himself to this branch of grammar to the exclusion of all others” (Zetzel 2018, 312).²⁵ In 161, the prominent orator Marcus Cornelius Fronto agreed to send Volumnius Quadratus copies of Cicero with his own annotations: “You shall have the books of Cicero corrected (*emendatos*) and punctuated (*distinctos*)” (Haines 1919, 308-9). In the sixth century, we saw that Cassiodorus cautioned scribes to correct texts only after an extensive education, part of which would be the study of ancient orthographers. Cassiodorus’s own *Proper Spelling* or *De Orthographia* was composed so

²³ See Zenodotus in Chapter Two.

²⁴ *Emendatio* could precede *enarratio* in the case of liturgical texts, which needed to be corrected before they could be explained (Irvine 1994, 224). Quintilian lists emendation after reading but before explanation and judgement (Russell 2002, 1.4.3). He only considered judgement, not emendation, to be a task of the expert grammarian (Zetzel 2018, 19).

²⁵ *Multaque exemplaria contracta emendare ac distinguere et annotare curavit, soli huic nec ulli praeterea grammatices parti deditus.*

that “doubts can be resolved and the mind is more free to find a way of correcting the text” (Halporn and Vessey 2004, 1.30.2).²⁶ Specific critical signs are described by Quintilian in the first century and elaborated by Isidore of Seville in the seventh.

Quintilian (Russell 2002, 1.4.3) describes just one critical sign: a mark of censorship called the *obelus*. Ancient grammarians used the *obelus*, a horizontal stroke in the left margin, to reject lines or whole books as spurious.²⁷ Six centuries later, Isidore (Barney et al. 2006, 1.21.1-27) provides twenty-seven critical symbols formed by strokes, dots, and even Greek letters in all kinds of combinations. Many of these marks are signs for collation that involve the comparison of two translations or differing copies of a single work: the asterisk denoted omissions, the *lemniscus* represented a paraphrase rather than a word-for-word translation, the *antisimma* indicated that two verses should be transposed, and the *alogus* marked errors (1.21.2, 5, 11, 27). Other signs concerned the structure of the text: the *positura* marked the end of a topic, the *diple* separated citations from the text, the *diple* *ὀβολισμένη* distinguished speeches, and the reversed *diple* pointing right with an *obolus* above conveyed that a similar topic will follow, the *paragraphus* identified the beginning of a new topic, and the *corona* marked the end of a book (Barney, et al. 2006, 1.21.9, 13, 16, 20, 8, 26).²⁸ Some of these signs repurposed the symbols associated with the Greek *parágraphos* to fulfill new roles. The *diple*, placed in the margin to draw attention to citations or otherwise noteworthy sections of text, resembled the wedge (>) form of the *parágraphos* (Parkes 1993, 12, 303). The *simplex ductus* (⁷ or 7) looked like a small

²⁶ ... *et dubietate sublata liberior animus viam emendationis incederet* (Mynors 1937, 1.30.2)

²⁷ The *obelus* is discussed in much more detail in Chapter 2. In *De Grammatica*, Alcuin includes *nota* after *accentus* and *posituras* in a list of the species of *grammatica* (Irvine 1994, 320). See Migne (1844-55, 101.857-8).

²⁸ Isidore calls critical signs *notae sententiarum*.

coronis (7) and separated unrelated words or concepts that had been run together (12, 307).²⁹

Though the Latin *paragraphus* (roughly resembling Γ or ρ) is a transliteration of the Greek *parágraphos*, its shape is unlike any of the *parágraphos* forms, and it marked the beginning of a section, not the end (12, 305).

Notae could fulfill many functions, some of which overlapped with punctuation. Besides pointing out places in the text for special comment, critical signs distinguished major divisions in continuous script and identified units of sense within the sentence (Parkes 1993, 12). Despite the similar functions of punctuation and some critical signs, the grammars categorized symbols according to their role in the interpretive process. Critical signs were placed during the emendation process, whereas punctuation and accents were applied during the reading process. Critical signs enabled scholars to compare documents, identify errors, and achieve the authoritative style of Latin displayed in the grammars, while punctuation and accents helped the reader separate continuous text and prepare it to be read aloud. The reading process was an elementary component of grammatical education; as a result, the grammarians devote lengthy descriptions to it, some of which date to before the first century CE.

Punctuation: *Positurae* or *Distinctiones*

Distinctiones did not originate with Diomedes; his *Art of Grammar* is useful because not only is it an extensive description, but it is also the earliest to survive, and it can provide clues as to how earlier grammarians treated punctuation. Diomedes's rules of *discretio* and Charisius's fourth-century *Art of Grammar*, an encyclopedic compilation of traditional sources for grammar teachers and advanced students, are likely modeled on lost first-century grammars by Marcus

²⁹ For example, place names in a series might be separated from each other using the *simplex ductus* (Parkes 1993, 118-119n54).

Terentius Varro (116-27 BCE) and Remmius Palaemon (fl. 35-70 CE), whose works helped establish the Roman educational program of grammatical studies (Irvine 1994, 57, 52, 56).³⁰ Though large sections of Charisius have been lost, the table of contents suggests that Book V covered accent and punctuation (*de accentu et posituris*), pause (*de mora*), primary division (*de distinctione*), and secondary division (*de subdistinctione*) (61).³¹ The divisions of discretion in Charisius and the description of punctuation in Diomedes are foundational elements of Roman education, perhaps established in first-century grammar textbooks. To understand how the role of punctuation in the reading process changed in the centuries before the Carolingian Renaissance, we shall first look to the ancient origins of *distinctiones* and then examine the grammarians' treatment of the system from the first century CE to the seventh.

Diomedes writes that the markings are called *θέσεις* or *theses* by the Greeks (*GL* I, 437).³² *Thesis* refers to “placing” or “setting down” generally but also to the “lowering, putting down,” or “reduction” of the voice (*DMLBS*, s.v. *thesis* 1-2). It was probably used by Marcus Cornelius Fronto in the second century CE and M. Valerius Probus in the first (Parkes 1993, 13). But none of these authors is the first to use *distinctiones*. Aristophanes of Byzantium, librarian of the Library of Alexandria (c.197 BC), invents *thesis* (*θέσεις*), which employs a high point *στιγμή τελεία* (*stigma teleia*, “perfect dot”), a low point *ὑποστιγμή* (*hypostigma*, “under dot”), and a point at mid-height *στιγμή μέση* (*stigma mese*, “middle dot”) (Thompson 1912, 60). This style of

³⁰ Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* does not cover advanced grammatical studies, including punctuation, but it also played an important role in Roman grammatical education (Irvine 1994, 53). Donatus (discussed below) modeled his *Ars Grammatica* on the works of Varro and Palaemon as well.

³¹ The *Ars Grammatica* of Charisius is in *GL* 1, 1-296.

³² *θέσεις* (*theses* or *theseis*) is the plural form and *θέσις* (*thesis*) is the singular.

pointing marks the formal beginning of a Greek system of punctuation (Brown 1993, 80). When adopted into Latin, *thesis* was renamed *distinctio* (Thompson 1912, 61). In the earliest extant grammars, we shall discover that the main function of the three-fold punctuation system was to give readers ample room for breathing, and that the reading process, though it included discretion, was principally intended for preparing texts to be read aloud.

Distinctiones in the Grammars

Towards the end of the first century, the first book of Quintilian's *Institutes of Oratory* or *Institutio Oratoria* established the grammatical curriculum for citizens of the Roman Empire. Because *Institutes of Oratory* was not intended for advanced students of grammar, Quintilian largely avoided the textual correction and criticism associated with the emendation process (Irvine 1994, 53). But the reading process is well within Quintilian's purview. When describing the four features of good delivery, Quintilian describes punctuation as a counterpart to pronouncing words in full for a lucid delivery. He writes that "speech must be distinct (*oratio distincta*), that is to say the speaker must begin and stop at the right place. We must also note where our speech should be held up and as it were left in the air (the Greeks call this *hypodiastolē* or *hypostigmē*), and where it should be brought to rest" (Russell 2002, 11.3.36). The *hypostigmē* is the Greek name for the low point or *subdistinctio* so there can be no doubt that Quintilian means *distinctiones*. He demonstrates where punctuation is needed in the first lines of *The Aeneid*, though he does not identify which of the three points is to be used, saying "we do at last need punctuation" or "we do not need punctuation here" (11.3.37-8). Quintilian concludes that, "if we regain our breath awkwardly, this produces just as much obscurity as faulty punctuation (*vitiosa distinctio*). Virtue of punctuation is perhaps a small thing; but without it

there can be no other virtue in a pleading” (11.3.39).³³ Punctuation is clearly an essential component of the reading process, and its primary role for Quintilian is to inform the reader where to pause and for how long during oral recitation.

In the mid-fourth century, Donatus recommends Aristophanes’s punctuation system (Brown 1993, 80-81). Like the grammars of Charisius and Diomedes, Donatus’s was modeled on the first-century handbooks of Varro and Palaemon (Irvine 1994, 52). Donatus’s *Ars Maior*, a section within the incredibly successful textbook *Art of Grammar*, acted as the basic grammar schoolbook from the fourth to fifteenth centuries (Irvine 1994, 58). Donatus recommends and helps to popularize the three-fold system of pointing. He defines the three points as follows:

³³ Quintilian uses the terms *cola* and *period* to help determine the length of pause and the proper *distinctio*. Later grammarians will apply the term *commata* similarly. Relevant portions of the Latin passage follow: *Secundum est ut sit oratio distincta, id est, qui dicit et incipiat ubi oportet et desinat. Observandum etiam quo loco sustinendus et quasi suspendendus sermo sit, quod Graeci ὑποδιαστολήν vel ὑποστιγμήν vocant, quo deponendus. Suspenditur ‘arma virumque cano,’ quia illud ‘virum’ ad sequentia pertinet, ut sit ‘virum Troiae qui primus ab oris,’ et hic iterum. Nam etiam si aliud est unde venit quam quo venit, non distinguendum tamen, quia utrumque eodem verbo continetur ‘venit.’ Ob eandemque causam quarto ‘profugus,’ diende ‘Lavinaque venit litora,’ ubi iam erit distinctio, quia inde alius incipit sensus. Et e contrario spiritum interim recipere sine intellectu morae necesse est, quo loco quasi surripiendus est: alioqui si incite recipiatur, non minus adferat obscuritatis quam vitiosa distinctio. Virtus autem distinguendi fortasse sit parva, sine qua tamen esse nulla alia in agendo potest* (Russell 2002, 11.3.36-9). The translation follows: “secondly, speech must be distinct, that is to say the speaker must begin and stop at the right place. We must also note where our speech should be held up and as it were left in the air (the Greeks call this *hypodiasistolē* or *hypostigmē*), and where it should be brought to rest. *Arma virumque cano* (‘Arms and the man I sing’) is left in the air, because *virum* belongs to what follows, giving us *virum Troiae qui primus ab oris* (‘the man who first from the shores of Troy’), after which there is another suspension; for, although where he came from and where he arrived are two different things, yet we do not need punctuation here, because both are covered by the same verb, *venit* (‘came’). For the same reason, there is a fourth pause at *profugus*, after which comes *Lavinaque venit litora* (‘and came to Lavinian shores’), where we do at last need punctuation, because a new sentence begins from this point. Conversely, it is sometimes necessary to recover breath without a perceptible pause, in which case it has to be snatched surreptitiously, because if we regain our breath awkwardly, this produces just as much obscurity as faulty punctuation. Virtue of punctuation is perhaps a small thing; but without it there can be no other virtue in a pleading.”

There are altogether three *positurae* or *distinctiones*, which Greeks call *theses*: *distinctio*, *subdistinctio*, *media distinctio*. There is a *distinctio* in that place where the complete sentence (*sententia*) finishes: we place this point at the top of the line. There is a *subdistinctio* where not much of the sentence remains, which though necessarily a separate element, may presently be introduced; we place this point at the bottom of the line. There is a *media distinctio* where almost as much of the sentence remains as we have already spoken, when, nevertheless, a breath must be taken: we place this point in the middle of the line.³⁴ (GL 4, 372)

Donatus provides names and brief descriptions for the three marks. The high point or *distinctio* represents a final pause after a sentence or complete thought; its modern counterpart is the period (Ong 1944, 351). The difference between the *subdistinctio* and the *media distinctio* is unclear. It seems the *subdistinctio* applies when “not much” (*non multum*) of the sentence remains, whereas the *media distinctio* occurs when “almost as much” remains “as we have already spoken” (*fere tantum...quantum iam diximus*). By contrast, modern punctuation tells us about the relationship between parts of a sentence—a list, for example, follows a colon and a semicolon separates two independent clauses. The purpose of *distinctiones* is to aid oral recitation, which Donatus makes clear when he recommends the *media distinctio* where “a breath must be taken” (GL 4, 372).³⁵ Many subsequent grammarians will borrow from Donatus’s *Art of Grammar* despite its brief description.

Diomedes provides the most descriptive extant summary of the discretion process and an exhaustive explanation of the three points. He defines the marks by their position on the line:

³⁴ *Tres sunt omnino positurae vel distinctiones, quas Graeci θέσεις vocant, distinctio, subdistinctio, media distinctio. distinctio est, ubi finitur plena sententia: huius punctum ad summan litteram ponimus. subdistinctio est, ubi non multum superest de sententia, quod tamen necessario separatim mox inferendum sit: huius punctum ad imam litteram ponimus. media distinctio est, ubi fere tantum de sententia superest, quantum iam diximus, cum tamen respirandum sit: huius punctum ad mediam litteram ponimus* (GL 4, 372).

³⁵ Donatus adds that, “In reading (aloud) the sentence as a whole is called a *periodus* of which the parts are the *cola* and the *commata*.” *In lectione tota sententia periodus dicitur, cuius partes sunt cola et commata [id est membra et caesa]* (GL 4, 372).

[A mark is placed] in a high [position], when it brings the sense to a conclusion, and by us this [mark] is called “final,” by the Greeks *teleia*; in a middle [position] when it gives to the reader a space to breathe, and it is called *media*, in Greek *mese*; in the low [position] when, being inserted, it suspends yet another time the interrupted course of the reading, and it is called by the Greeks *hypostigme*, by us (Latin speakers) *subdistinctio*. (GL 1, 437)³⁶

Initially it seems the distinction between the *media distinctio* (which Diomedes also calls *submedia* or *mora*) and the *subdistinctio* is even less clear than in Donatus’s grammar; the *media distinctio* suits the middle of the sentence, while the *subdistinctio* occurs somewhere between the middle and the end of the sentence. But Diomedes continues: “a *distinctio* is a notation of silence with the sense being brought to closure, where it [silence] is free to pause [*cessare*] at greater length.”³⁷ Of the next mark, he writes that “a *subdistinctio* is a proper note of silence, by which the end point of pronunciation thus is suspended with necessary information remaining [unspoken] so that what remains [to be said] ought to follow immediately” (GL 1, 438).³⁸ Finally, the *media distinctio* “is a slight separation inserted in the continuity of clauses [units of sense]:”

it occupies a middle place between a proper *distinctio* and *subdistinctio* [and it does so] in such a way that it may seem a pause neither altogether complete [*perfecta in totum*] nor omitted but by signal of pausing might intimate desire for the start of another sentence. And this [new] beginning now serves a single purpose for the reader, that he might refresh and nourish the breath with a very short inhalation.³⁹

³⁶ *summo, cum sensum terminat, et vocatur finalis a nobis, a Graecis τελεία; medio, cum respirandi spatium legenti dat, et dicitur media, Graece μέση; imo, cum lectionis interruptum tenorem aliud adhuc inlatura suspendit, et vocatur a Graecis ὑποστιγμή, a nostris subdistinctio* (GL 1, 437).

³⁷ *Distinctio est silentii nota cum sensu terminato, ubi est liberum cessare prolixius* (GL 1, 437).

³⁸ *Subdistinctio est silentii nota legitimi, qua pronuntiationis terminus sensu manente ita suspenditur ut statim id quod sequitur succedere debeat* (GL 1, 438).

³⁹ *Mora est levis in continuatione sensuum interposita discretio legitimae distinctionis subdistinctionisque medium obtinens locum, ita ut nec perfecta in totum nec omissa videatur sed significatione inmorandi alterius desideret principium sensus, et hoc solum modo servat officium ut legenti spiritum brevissima respiratione refoveat et nutriat* (GL 1, 438).

In other words, the *subdistinctio* occurs where a slight pause is necessary just before the end of the sentence; the *media distinctio* is a pause near the middle of the sentence. The three marks are chiefly defined by the length of pause they allow, and the oral component of punctuation is prevalent throughout Diomedes's description. As he writes, *positurae* or *distinctiones* "provide [the reader] opportunity to take a breath, lest by continuation [of reading] the breath should fail" (GL 1, 437).⁴⁰ Diomedes defines punctuation marks according to how much of the sentence remains and where the reader needs to breathe.

In the second half of the fourth century CE, Dositheus borrows from Charisius and Diomedes for his *Art of Grammar*, written in Latin with Greek translations (Zetzel 2018, 297).⁴¹ He explains punctuation in a section entitled *περὶ στιγμῆς* or *peri stigmes*:

A *distinctio* is a notation of silence, which in reading provides [the reader] opportunity [*copiam*] to take a breath, lest by [uninterrupted] continuation [of reading] the breath should fail. These [marks] are three [in number], the difference of these is indicated by three pen marks placed [each] in its distinctive position. When the sense is complete, we place the point towards the letter's head, and it [silence] is free to pause [*cessare*] at greater length. When it is proper to take a breath with the sense not yet complete, we will make a point towards the middle (of the) letter. When we make a pause thus just before the very end of a sentence [that is yet] to be completed, so that immediately we might

⁴⁰ *Lectioni posituras accedere vel distinctiones oportet...quae inter legendum dant copiam spiritus reficiendi, ne continuatione deficiat* (GL 1, 437). Like Donatus, Diomedes concludes with the parts of the period: *in lectione plena sententia periodos dicitur, cuius partes sunt commata et cola* (GL 1, 439). To the best of my knowledge, he is the first grammarian to include examples. In the grammars we've covered so far, punctuation is predominantly for performance, but Diomedes offers what appear to be grammatical guidelines for the *distinctio*'s use: "It is fitting to make a mark of *distinctio* before analogies, which the Greeks call parables, and before applied [*reddita*] similes, and if at any time a transition will have been made from character to character, also before the conjunction *aut*—if indeed it is not placed superabundantly—and before the vocative case, and before *sed* and before *quoniam*, and before *tunc* with pausing rendered [*cessante reddita*], but with marks in front set in higher positions, and after the interrogative" (GL 1, 437). Some of Diomedes' directions resemble rules for the modern comma, especially that a *distinctio* should precede certain conjunctions (*aut*, *sed*, *quoniam*). He is the only grammarian to offer such specific usage rules.

⁴¹ Parkes (1993, 13n65) incorrectly describes Dositheus as a grammarian "of the second century A.D." Vivien Law (2003, 66) dates Dositheus's *Ars grammatica* to the late fourth century.

adduce that which follows, we make notation with a *punctus* at the bottom of the line. (GL 7, 380)⁴²

Dositheus's marks lack names (*subdistinctio*, *mora* or *media distinctio*) and, as in Donatus and Diomedes's grammars, only one conveys grammatical information: the *distinctio* or the period at the top of the line, which designates a final pause. The remaining two points are distinguished by the amount of sense remaining: the *media distinctio* or *mora* appears at mid-line when a pause is needed before the end of the sentence and the *subdistinctio* or the point at the bottom of the line occurs when very little of the sentence remains. Where Donatus chooses between the two points according to the amount of the sentence left to read, Dositheus prioritizes places for the speaker to breathe. Like Diomedes, Dositheus makes clear that the overriding purpose of all three marks is breathing room when he writes that "the *distinctio* is a notation of silence." Here, punctuation is essentially a form of speaking notes that, taken together with accentuation, modulation, and pronunciation, prepare the reader to recite the text.

Donatus's *Ars grammatica* was influential enough to receive commentaries by Servius, Sergius, Cledonius, and Pompeius, just to name a few (Irvine 1994, 58). Later scholars, such as Cassiodorus and Isidore of Seville, received Donatus's *Art of Grammar* through commentaries on it, not the original grammar (59). In the late fourth or early fifth century, Servius, a grammarian who authored treatises on meter and a commentary on Virgil, simply copies the

⁴² *Distinctio est silentii nota, quae in legendo dat copiam spiritus recipiendi, ne continuatione deficiat. hae tres sunt, quarum diversitas tribus punctis diverso loco positus indicatur. ubi plenus est sensus, punctum ad caput litterae ponimus, et est liberum cessare prolixius. ubi sensu nondum pleno respirari oportet, ad mediam litteram dabimus punctum. ubi sub ipsum finem implendi sensus ita suspendimus, ut statim id quod sequitur subicere debeamus, inam litteram puncto notamus (GL 7, 380).*

section on punctuation (*de posituris*) from Donatus's grammar (GL 4, 427-8).⁴³ In the fifth century, Cledonius replaces much of Donatus's description with examples and defines only one mark explicitly: "on account of the expressed thought being long, [the *media distinctio* is needed] so that we may have a space to breathe" (GL 5, 34).⁴⁴ Perhaps Cledonius felt his readers would have a firm enough grasp on the other two marks and that only the *media distinctio* needed further clarification. As in Donatus's grammar and the commentaries of Servius and Cledonius, both sense and breath are the main criteria for punctuation placement.

Pompeius, another commentator on Donatus's grammar, uses similar language in the first half of the fifth century:

He [Donatus] teaches in what manner a codex is to be marked (*distinguaturs codex*). If you wish [on the other hand] to signal that a sense [sentence] is complete, place a *punctus* at the top of the [final] letter. If you wish [to mark] a pause in the middle, place a *punctus* at the middle of [that portion's final] letter. If you wish to show that a bit is left over concerning the sense [sentence], place a *punctus* at the bottom of [its final] letter. Thus you ought to make divisions: when the sense is whole and sound, we place a *punctus* at the top of the [final] letter; when it is medial, suppose that as much as you might have said, so much remains [to be said], we place a *punctus* at the middle of [its final] letter; when a little bit remains and is appended, we place [the *punctus*] at the bottom of the [final] letter.⁴⁵ (GL 5, 133)

⁴³ His only addition is the final sentence: "The *colon* some call a member, the *comma* a pause." (*colon quidam dixerunt membrum, comma caesum*; GL 4, 428). Though Servius expands on the specialized terminology present in Donatus's grammar, he does not explain how the *colon* (plural *cola*) and the *comma* (plural *commata*) relate to punctuation.

⁴⁴ *Media est...propter longum sensum, ut habeamus dilationem respirandi*. Cledonius continues: "The period is the end of the entire sentence; a *comma* is a division that terminates properly with a sense, as 'Caesar frantic for war'; a *colon* is an incomplete division, as 'To Italy driven by fate.'" The examples are from Lucan (*Bellum Civile*, 2.439) and Virgil (*Aeneid* 1.2-3) respectively. *Periodos est conclusio totius sensus; comma est caesura finita cum sensu, ut 'Caesar in arma furens'; colon est caesura curta, ut 'Italiam fato profugus'* (GL 5, 34).

⁴⁵ *De posituris quod tractat, nihil est. docet quem ad modum distinguitur codex. si vis plenum sensum designare, punctum pone ad summam litteram; si vis medium, ad mediam litteram pone punctum; si vis ostendere modicum superesse de sensu, ad imam litteram pone punctum. ita debes discernere: quando plenus est et integer sensus, ad summam litteram ponimus punctum; quando medius est, ut puta quantum dixeris tantum supersit, ad mediam ponimus; quando paululum superest et suspendendum est, ad imam litteram ponimus* (GL 5, 133). Pompeius offers

Pompeius does not mention breathing explicitly, but he does refer to pausing. He emphasizes sense as the main criterion for punctuation placement: the difference between the *media distinctio* and *subdistinctio* is that half and very little of the sentence remains respectively. Overall, Pompeius presents punctuation as instructions for how “a codex is to be marked” (*distinguatur codex*) (GL 5, 133). We have seen similar language referring to distinguished texts in the first and second centuries; Marcus Valerius Probus gave his attention to correcting (*emendare*) and punctuating (*distinguere*) copies of early writers, while Fronto promised “corrected and punctuated,” *emendatos et distinctos*, copies of Cicero. Though we can assume that the three point system still provided performance cues, the absence of breathing and the references to distinguished manuscripts may reveal new expectations for discretion and the reading process generally. Three of the four methods involved in the reading process concerned performance, yet scholars describe manuscripts being marked with *distinctiones*, not signs indicating accentuation, modulation, or pronunciation.⁴⁶ Moreover, multiple scholars refer to

many examples to supplement the following explanation of the period and its parts: “Clearly *cola* and *commata* are not parts of an utterance but parts of a sentence, that is, they are not themselves continuous [do not themselves have continuity], but they are parts of continuous clauses [*membra*]. For example, an utterance, when it is complete, is a period; the parts of the period are *cola* and *commata*.... Wherever the sense is to be suspended thus, so that it neither would seem complete nor lacks anything, it is called a colon. Therefore, a period is a complete utterance, a complete governing idea; and the parts of the governing idea are called *cola* and *commata*. Among orators this [distinction between *cola* and *commata*] is a distinction without a difference. Among poets there is much that stands between *colon* and *comma*,.... Among orators we call these the *incisum* [cut] and the *protentum* [extension]. We [grammarians] call it a *protentum* whenever a syllable remains after two proper [poetic] feet; we call it an *incisum* whenever the sense ends there where the foot ends” (GL 5, 133-4).

⁴⁶ While the grammars do provide accent signs, I have found only a few ambiguous references to distinguishing a manuscript with accent marks. Pompeius writes: *Quod si vis codicem distinguere, ita distingue* (GL 5, 132). This statement precedes the usual section on *posituris*, occurring just before a description of accent marks and accentuation generally. Isidore writes that accent marks “are supplied by grammarians to distinguish words” (*verborum distinctionibus*

corrected and punctuated texts, as if punctuation were an interpretive process like emendation. Marcus Valerius Probus and Fronto describe punctuation and correction as separate processes, but another fifth-century grammarian appears to suggest that punctuation could be a form of correction.

Around the same time (the early fifth century), Sergius slightly expands the descriptions of punctuation in Donatus and Servius:

*A distinctio or positura is [so] called because a positioned mark divides our speech [into coherent sections]; and because distinctio is a species of positura, we accept [use of the term] distinctio, although improperly, in place of [the term] positura itself, that is for the genre itself. For when a book (codex) is corrected (emendatus) by way of a distinctio, a media distinctio, a subdistinctio, nevertheless the book is said to be distinctus [marked with distinctiones]. A distinctio is therefore a mark set at the head of a letter of a full sentence. A subdistinctio is a mark placed at the bottom of a half-complete utterance. A media distinctio is a mark placed in a middle position of a sentence paused for the purpose of taking a breath.*⁴⁷ (GL 4, 484)

Sergius clarifies that *distinctio* is the name of the punctuation mark, but it can also refer to the entire system, which is called *positura*. The difference between the *subdistinctio* and *media*

adopuntur), but this statement does not necessarily refer to a manuscript distinguished by accents (Barney, et al. 2006, 1.19.1). See Chapter 2.

⁴⁷ *Dicta distinctio est vel positura, quod positum punctum distinguit nostram orationem, et cum distinctio species sit positurae, tamen abusive pro ipsa positura, hoc est pro ipso genere, accipimus distinctionem. nam cum sit codex emendatus distinctione, media distinctione, subdistinctione, dicitur tamen codex esse distinctus. est igitur distinctio punctum adpositum ad caput litterae plenae sententiae. subdistinctio est punctum adpositum ad imam partem semiplenae orationis. media distinctio est punctum adpositum mediae sententiae suspensae propter respirationem* (GL 4, 484). Sergius recognizes the need to explain the members of the period, considerably expanding on previous treatises' discussion of these terms. He writes that, "A colon indeed is a part [of a sentence]; a comma is the putative separation [that defines a member of a sentence]. The comma proper is a pause after two and a half metrical feet in the scansion of every verse. A member is what we define [isolate] by way of commas." *colon enim membrum, comma incisum. comma ipsa est pentemimere in scansione totius versus. membrum est quod caedimus per commata* (GL 4, 534). Later, he clarifies that "in prose cola and commata are and signify one thing, in verse truly another and different thing." *verum meminerimus in prosa cola et commata idem esse et unum significare, in versu vero aliud et diversum* (GL 4, 485).

distinctio is simplified so that the *subdistinctio* indicates an incomplete sentence and the *media distinctio* belongs anywhere else necessitating a pause for breath. More importantly, Sergius introduces the language of emendation into a process of reading; when a manuscript has already been pointed with *distinctiones*, it is called *distinctus*. One might assume Sergius refers to a student-prepared text or a reader's individual speaking notes, but he chooses the phrase *codex emendatus*, a manuscript corrected by points. In addition to this cross-contamination of the interpretive processes, Sergius advises readers to place the *media distinctio* for the purpose of breathing, quite clearly associating punctuation with the performative methods of the reading process. Sergius seems to indicate that punctuation could be a form of correction even though its primary purpose was declamation. A century later, the Christian scholar Cassiodorus similarly subsumes punctuation into the emendation process.

In the sixth century, Cassiodorus recommends the three-point system, and he advises scribes to emend with great caution or not to emend at all. He presents these pieces of advice in his *Institutiones divinarum et humanarum litterarum* (*Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning*), a work that is split into sacred and secular readings. The first of the two books covers the processes of reading, explanation, and emendation, outlining rules for the correction, copying, and interpretation of Christian texts in the ideal monastic library. The second book is essentially a compressed grammatical handbook, often copied separately and included in collections of grammars and works on the liberal arts (Irvine 1994, 202-3). In book one, Cassiodorus fervently recommends Donatus's system of punctuation in a section entitled "How Carefully the Text of the Holy Scripture Ought to be Corrected:"

But so that we may add ornament to all this, place in each chapter punctuation marks that the Greeks call *theses*, i.e., small round points...since they make the written text clear and bright when, as is explained below, <like torches> they are fitted in their place and shine forth. How excellent it is to pass unhindered through holy thought and to enter subtly into

the sound nature of its precepts; to set correctly one's own limits for a measured speech and to divide the whole composition in parts in such a way that we can see its beauty and symmetry! For if our body must be known through its limbs, why does it seem right to leave reading confused in its arrangement? These *positurae*, or points, indeed like paths for the mind and lights for the composition, make readers as teachable as if they were instructed by the clearest commentators.⁴⁸ (Halporn and Vessey 2004, 1.15.12)

In contrast to the grammarians we've encountered so far, Cassiodorus is narrowly concerned with pointing religious texts. Punctuation illuminates the text, enabling the reader to comprehend Scripture more quickly without resorting to commentaries for further clarification. It was seen as especially important for ensuring proper reading at the divine service and in the refectory (Lowe 1914, 231-2). Cassiodorus states of *distinctiones* that "these were invented by our ancestors to enable the breath tired out from long speaking to regain its strength in the pauses" (1.15.12).⁴⁹ In a section titled "De Grammatica" in *Institutiones*, he adds that "A punctuation or pause mark is an open [suitable] pause in measured delivery" (Halporn and Vessey 2004, 2.1.2).⁵⁰ The points both elucidate the structure of the composition and function as an individual's breathing marks.

⁴⁸ *Sed ut his omnibus addere videaris ornatum, posituras, quas Graeci thesis vocant, id est puncta brevissima partier et rotunda...singulis quibusque pone capitibus, quoniam illustrem et planissimam faciunt orationem quando, sicut inferius exponitur, suis locis aptata resplendent. quale est enim inoffenso gradu per sensus ire sanctissimos, venasque praeceptorum saluberrimas subtiliter introire; terminus suos modulatae voci competenter affigere, totamque dictionem sic per membra dividere ut suis partibus considerata pulchrescant! nam si corpus nostrum indiget per membra cognosci, cur lectio cum suis partibus videatur confuse derelinqui? istae siquidem positurae seu puncta quasi quaedam viae sunt sensuum et lumina dictionum, quae sic lectores dociles faciunt tamquam si clarissimis expositoribus imbuantur* (Mynors 1937, 1.15.12). Cassiodorus adds that, *quas [distinctiones] si mavis cupidus lector agnoscere, Donatum lege, qui te possit de hac re brevi compendio diligenter instruere*. Halporn and Vessey (2004) translate: "If you, as an eager reader, would like to know them, read Donatus, who can accurately instruct you by his brief summary on this subject." Concerning the three points, Cassiodorus adds that, "The first is the colon, the second, the comma, the third, the period" (Halporn and Vessey 2004, 1.15.12). *Prima est media, secunda subdistinctio, tertia plena* (Mynors 1937, 1.15.12).

⁴⁹ *quas a maioribus nostris ideo constat inventas, ut spiritus longa dictione fatigatus vires suas per spatia discreta resumeret* (Mynors 1937, 1.15.12).

⁵⁰ *positura sive distinctio est moderatae pronuntiationis aperta repausatio* (Mynors 1937, 2.1.2).

Cassiodorus makes clear that the primary purpose of punctuation is still preparation for oral delivery. But Cassiodorus, like Sergius, describes punctuation in a passage about the correction, i.e., emendation, of Scripture; he recommends punctuation be applied during the emendation process because it elucidates the Scriptures as well as a teacher or biblical commentary. Thus, punctuation could be an interpretive process equivalent to emendation in the preparation of texts, or it could be a method included in the emendation process, especially of Christian works.

In the seventh century, Isidore of Seville wrote his *Etymologiae sive origines*, better known as *The Etymologies*. It is an encyclopedia of definitions on an enormous range of topics, including Christian doctrine, grammatical education, and political and cultural history (Irvine 1994, 210). Not only was it a standard text for students during the Carolingian Renaissance, it became “the most widely used grammatical encyclopedia of the Middle Ages” (Irvine 1994, 209). Nearly every library would have had a copy of *The Etymologies* or at least an excerpt of the first section *De grammatica* (210). In it, Isidore advocates for *distinctiones* as “a form for distinguishing meaning,” that when applied properly, will “show the sense of the reading to us” (Barney, et al. 2006, 1.20.1).⁵¹ The name *positura*, he states, is “either because they are marked by points that are set down (*ponere*, ppl. *positus*), or because there the voice is lowered (*deponere*, ppl. *depositus*) to make an interval with a pause.”⁵² Isidore is the first of the grammarians we have surveyed to derive *positura* from *deponere*, “to lower,” specifically “in pitch” (DMLBS, s.v. *deponere* 1a, 1d).⁵³ As much as the ancient system of pointing concerned

⁵¹ *Positura est figura ad distinguendos sensus per cola et commata et periodos, quae dum ordine suo adponitur, sensum nobis lectionis ostendit* (Lindsay 1911, 1.20.1)

⁵² *Dictae autem positurae vel quia punctis positae adnotantur, vel quia ibi vox pro intervallo distinctionis deponitur* (Lindsay 1911, 1.20.1).

⁵³ Cledonius suggests that “*Positurae* get their name from ‘placing’ (*ponendo*), from which they are also called *theses* (GL 5, 34). *Positurae a ponendo dictae. unde et theses dictae*. Sergius

marking logical pauses, it also informed the articulating reader where to raise and lower the voice (Lowe 1914, 231). The relationship of *positurae* to the voice is a reminder that punctuation, like accentuation and the other components of reading, still concerns performance even in seventh century. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (1990, 145) claims that Isidore's description of punctuation betrays "the strong residually oral element in conceptualizing the function and working of written language." However, punctuation signaled performance cues even after it began to convey the relationship between parts of a sentence.

Isidore explains that the rationale for point placement involves both sense and breathing. "For where the speech has begun and the sense is not yet complete, but it is necessary to take a breath," he writes, "a *comma* occurs, that is, a part of the sense, and a point is placed even with the bottom of the letter. This is called the 'subdivision' (*subdistinctio*) because it takes the point below (*subtus*), that is, at the bottom of the line" (Barney, et al. 2006, 1.20.3).⁵⁴ "And where, in the following words, the sentence now makes sense but something still remains for the completion of the sentence," Isidore continues, "and we mark it by a point even with the middle

states that "It is fitting that we call *posituras* what the Greeks call *theses*, which in reading provide [the reader] opportunity to take a breath, lest by [uninterrupted] continuation [of reading] the breath should fail" (GL 4, 533). *Posituras oportet vocemus quas Graeci θέσεις appellant, quae in legendo dant copiam spiritus, ne continuatione deficiat.*

⁵⁴ *Ubi enim initio pronuntiationis necdum plena pars sensui est, et tamen respirare oportet, fit comma, id est particula sensus, punctusque ad imam litteram ponitur; et vocatur subdistinctio, ab eo quod punctum subtus, id est ad imam litteram, accipit* (Lindsay 1911, 1.20.3). Isidore equates the *subdistinctio* with the *comma*, the *media distinctio* with the *colon*, and the *distinctio* with the period in the quotes below. Additionally, he states that "The first punctuated clause is called the subdivision, and it is the same as a *comma*. The middle punctuation follows: it is the *colon*. The final punctuation, which closes the entire sentence, is the period" (Barney, et al. 2006, 1.20.2). Isidore clarifies that his definitions of *comma* and *colon* are specific to prose: "This is the usage among orators. On the other hand, among poets, a *comma* occurs in the verse when, after two feet, there is still a syllable remaining in the word, because a break in the word is made there according to metrical scansion. But when no part of the speech still remains after two feet, it is a *colon*. And the entire verse is a period" (1.20.6).

of the letter. And we call this the ‘middle’ (*medius*) punctuation, because we place the point at the middle of the letter” (1.20.4).⁵⁵ Lastly, “by proceeding through the speech, we make a complete closure of the sentence,” he concludes, “and we place a point even with the top of the letter. This is called a *distinctio*, that is, a disjunction, because it sets apart a whole sentence” (1.20.5).⁵⁶ For the two most difficult *distinctiones*, Isidore offers mnemonics: *subtus* and *medius*. The names *subdistinctio* and *media distinctio* do not refer to the (potentially confusing) hierarchy of clauses and phrases in a sentence but to the relative location of the point on the line. The points are described in terms of the sense remaining, as well as the necessity to pause for air. Isidore’s seventh-century description of punctuation expands and clarifies Donatus’s fourth-century one, but he leaves no clues about the relationship between punctuation and emendation. Rather, he lists accent marks, punctuation marks, and critical signs one after another without telling readers when these signs should be applied during interpretation. Perhaps the conflicting descriptions of punctuation as a method of reading and correction caused confusion, resulting in the infrequent appearance of *distinctiones* in extant manuscripts. More than likely, however, *distinctiones* were either added by inexperienced readers or expert scholars, and, as a result, they do not occur in many formal books.

Distinctiones in the Codices

Thus far, we have tracked the three-point system in the grammars, but, as we shall see, actual usage differed from its written description. Punctuation does not appear in extant papyri or

⁵⁵ *Ubi autem in sequentibus iam sententia sensum praestat, sed adhuc aliquid superest de sententiae plenitudine, fit cola, mediamque litteram puncto notamus; et mediam distinctionem vocamus, quia punctum ad mediam litteram ponimus* (ed. Lindsay 1911, 1.20.4)

⁵⁶ *Ubi vero iam per gradus pronuntiando plenam sententiae clausulam facimus, fit periodus, punctumque ad caput litterae ponimus; et vocatur distinctio, id est disiunctio, quia integram separavit sententiam* (Lindsay 1911, 1.20.5).

early codices (Thompson 1912, 60-1). Beginning in the fifth and sixth centuries we can observe readers using a system of dots placed at low, medial, or high heights in codices to indicate a minor, medial, or final pause respectively (Parkes 1993, 13). We can assume these manuscripts were originally in continuous, unpunctuated script, and the points were added by a second, later hand (Thompson 1912, 61). However, the points are used inconsistently and without attention to the functions laid out in grammar handbooks (Thompson 1912, 60-1). In practice, all three points of the *distinctiones* system are seldom applied (Brown 1993, 80). When *distinctiones* are present, they reflect a highly individualized and in no-way systematic record of interpretation (Parkes 1993, 14). Readers, not scribes, inserted punctuation (and accent marks) until at least the eighth century (Irvine 1994, 72). *Distinctiones* constituted a kind of reader-response punctuation in which the consistency of the program depended entirely on the initiative of the reader and the difficulty of the text.

During basic grammatical instruction, a *grammaticus* or teacher would punctuate an example to teach students to do the same (Irvine 1994, 72). To master a text, inexperienced readers would copy it with punctuation onto wax tablets (Saenger 1997, 72). Yet, the readers inserting *distinctiones* were not always amateurs; members of the social elite, such as professional scholars, grammarians, and students of old Latin texts, also applied the points (Parkes 1993, 11). As we have seen, the grammarian Marcus Valerius Probus punctuated his texts, as did the prominent orator Fronto in the first and second centuries. In the sixth century, the Christian scholar Cassiodorus states, “I recall that I placed these punctuation marks in the archetype of the Psalter, and, in this way, I have, with God’s help, largely clarified its

obscurities” (Halporn and Vessey 2004, 1.15.12).⁵⁷ This select, well-educated group recognized the value of preparing texts for recitation by pointing, even though the reading process was the elementary first step in interpretation, and the grammarians intended punctuation to be inserted by students. Pompeius may have referred to marking codices with *distinctiones*, isolating punctuation for special comment apart from the larger reading process, because notational systems were often inserted by advanced practitioners of grammar. Suetonius (describing the work of Marcus Valerius Probus) refers to texts annotated with punctuation marks and critical signs, perhaps suggesting that the two sets of symbols were seen as equally difficult to apply. Though we cannot be certain, Sergius and Cassiodorus may have subsumed punctuation into emendation because both systems required a great degree of expertise. Despite the relatively basic grammatical instruction required to prepare texts for reading aloud and punctuation guidelines given in grammar handbooks, *distinctiones* were inserted infrequently and inconsistently.

In the eighth and ninth centuries, the three-point system will become an expected feature of texts added by scribes during the production process (Irvine 1994, 72). Until then, educated readers will continue to use *distinctiones* sporadically without attention to the directions provided by grammar handbooks. Rather than add new marks to the general repertory of punctuation, readers will supplement punctuation with the other notational systems available in the grammars. The next chapter reveals how readers understood punctuation in relation to accents and critical marks. We shall track another symbol, the virgule, to discover how grammar handbooks

⁵⁷ *has distinctiones in Psalterio archetypo nos posuisse retinemus, cuius obscuritates talibus remediis ex maxima parte Domino praestante lucidavimus* (Mynors 1937, 1.15.12)

established an organizational tradition in which symbols were categorized as accents, punctuation marks, and critical signs regardless of their individual functions.

Chapter 2

Ancient Origins of Interpretation: Tracking the Virgule from the Third Century BCE to the Ninth CE

Chronological List of Pertinent Grammarians and Works

Authority	Date (CE)	Relevant Works	Relevant Remarks
Quintilian	Late first century	<i>Institutio Oratoria</i> (Russell 2002, 1.4.3)	Uses <i>virgula</i> to mean “mark” when referring to an unnamed symbol that designated certain lines as unnecessary
Donatus	354	<i>Ars grammatica</i> , “ <i>De Tonis</i> ” (GL 4, 372)	Treats <i>virgula</i> as a synonym of <i>nota</i> for two accents, the <i>brevis</i> and the hyphen
Diomedes	c. 370-80	<i>Ars grammatica</i> , “ <i>De Accentibus</i> ” (GL 1, 434-5)	Applies <i>virgula</i> to the <i>brevis</i> and hyphen, the latter of which is also designated as a <i>nota</i>
Sergius	Early fifth century	<i>In Artem Donati (De Littera, Explanationes in artem Donati)</i> , “ <i>De Accentibus</i> ” (GL 4, 532)	Refers to the acute and grave accents by both <i>nota</i> and <i>virgula</i>
Martianus Capella	420	<i>De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii</i> (Willis 1983, 3.273)	Expands <i>virgula</i> ’s range of application from critical marks to the acute and grave accents
Pompeius	Late fifth century	<i>Commentum in artem Donati</i> , “ <i>De Accentibus</i> ” (GL 5, 132)	Uses <i>virgula</i> as a synonym of <i>linea</i> for the hyphen and <i>diastole</i>
Priscian	c. 500	<i>Institutiones Grammaticae</i> (GL 3, 520)	Designates the acute accent, <i>brevis</i> , hyphen, and <i>longus</i> as <i>virgulae</i>
Isidore of Seville	Early seventh century	<i>Etymologiae sive Origines</i> , “ <i>De figuris accentuum</i> ” (Lindsay 1911, 5.27.18, 6.2.21, 7.6.18, 1.19.4, 1.19.6),	Distinguishes between <i>virga</i> “twig” and <i>virgula</i> “stroke” and applies <i>virgula</i> to two critical signs, the <i>obelus</i> and <i>lemniscus</i>

Remigius of Auxerre	Late ninth century	<i>Commentum Einsidlense</i> , “ <i>De Figuris Accentuum</i> ” (GL 8, 229-30)	Uses <i>virgula</i> as a synonym of <i>figura</i> for the <i>brevis</i> and hyphen
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Virgule is a French word designating a “small mark of punctuation,” literally a “little shoot or growth” (Quicherat and Chatelain 1901, s.v. *virgule*; Godefroy, Bonnard, and Salmon 1901, s.v. *virgule*).⁵⁸ The word derives from Latin *virgula* (a diminutive form of *virga*): “a little twig;” by extension “a small rod, a wand,” “a divining rod,” “a stripe on a garment,” or a single “column of smoke” (Lewis and Short 1969, s.v. *virgula*). In this chapter, we shall revisit the most influential grammatical handbooks of the early Middle Ages for evidence of the term *virgula*’s semantic specialization from the original sense “twig” to the extended sense “stroke” for critical signs and accents and eventually to “punctuation mark,” though this definition will not apply until the eighth century. Although critical signs and accent marks are not labeled as punctuation in grammar handbooks, the critical mark, accent, and punctuation categories overlap in function, and all three are involved in parsing and comprehending the text. The origins of the virgule are inextricably tied to how readers defined, and distinguished between, the interpretive marks used to read texts. By understanding why the word *virgula* was restricted in its application from the first to ninth centuries, we can determine how accents, punctuation, and critical marks figured into the interpretive process and how the repetition of categories from each grammatical handbook to the next resulted in a drastically limited repertory of punctuation through the ninth

⁵⁸ In *Dictionnaire français-latin: Du glossaire de Du Cange pour la langue du moyen âge*, the virgule is defined as a *petit signe de ponctuation*. The 1901 edition used here is a revised, updated version. Du Cange’s *Glossarium* of medieval Latin includes in its final volume a short dictionary of medieval French, the source of this definition. *Lexique De L’ancien Français* defines the virgule as a *petite pousse*.

century. As a result, scribes subsequently modified the three-point system found in the grammars and introduced new punctuation marks to describe the relationship between parts of the sentence.

The First Century CE and Earlier

The first instance of *virgula* in its extended sense occurs in Quintilian's *Institutes of Oratory* (Irvine 1994, 53). It reads: *veteres grammatici ... versus ... censoria quadam virgula notare et libros qui falso viderentur inscripti tamquam subditos summovere familia permiserint sibi...* (Butler 1920, 1.4.3). J.S. Watson's (1856) edition translates as follows: "the old grammarians... allowed themselves to distinguish certain verses with a particular mark of censure, and to remove, as spurious, certain books which had been inscribed with false titles, from their sets." The relevant portion here is *versus ... censoria quadam virgula notare*, which H. E. Butler condenses to "obelizing lines." David A. Russell's (2002) translation returns to Watson's more literal rendering: "The old *grammatici* ... allowed themselves to mark lines with a sign of disapproval." A more exact translation of the final phrase might be "a certain censorial mark" (*censoria quadam virgula*). *A Latin Dictionary founded on Andrews' Edition of Freund's Latin Dictionary* includes "a critical mark, as a sign of spuriousness," or a "sign of censure" among *virgula*'s many senses (Lewis and Short 1969, s.v. *virgula*). However, *virgula* simply means "mark," in this context a mark used to designate certain lines as unnecessary. According to Quintilian, the disapproving, censorial, or obelizing mark represents the judgment needed to read and interpret canonized works (Butler 1920, 1.4.3). Quintilian does not offer a physical description or other name that might be attributed to the mark in question, but it appears that the *obelos* is what he had in mind.

The censorial mark belongs to a collection of critical signs deployed in commentaries. Quintilian's mark is the *obelos*: "a horizontal stroke placed in the margin just to the left of a

verse” (Reynolds and Wilson 2013, 11). Zenodotus (*fl.* 280 BCE), one of six of the first librarians at the Museum of Alexandria, used the *obelos* to indicate that a verse is spurious in the third century BCE (8, 11). Aristarchus (*c.* 217-145 BCE), a successor of Zenodotus and student of Aristophanes, developed four more signs: the *diple* (>), which identify noteworthy lines; the dotted *diple* (≧), which marks places in Homeric texts where Aristarchus’s editing differs from that of Zenodotus; the *asteriskos* (*), which signifies an incorrectly repeated verse or, when coupled with the *obelos*, marks verses inserted from another passage; and the *antisigma* (≡), which denotes lines out of order. Several of Aristarchus’s critical signs became Latin *notae*.⁵⁹ Aristarchus devised this notational system to help readers critically assess commentaries on canonized works and compare passages within them. Despite the system’s nuance, just fifteen surviving papyri feature these marks (11). As Quintilian noted, only the old grammarians, a select group of well-educated scholars, had need for critical signs that often directed the reader to consult other texts.

Thus, the *obelos* is not Quintilian’s invention. Rather, Quintilian draws on a system of critical marking already available, but in doing so he contributes to the specialization of the word *virgula* as a “mark” or “sign.” In Quintilian’s application, *virgula* (twig) is closer to the sense “stem,” which maintains both its original sense (stalk) and the extended sense of a long, thin shape or stroke. The term *virgula* may have already implied a horizontal stroke since Quintilian feels no need to describe it further (or his audience of student orators already knew the censorial mark to which he referred). During the next three centuries, the word *virgula* will not just describe signs in the margins; it will apply to diacritics in the text itself.

⁵⁹ See Chapter 1. Two symbols in Aristarchus’s system, the wedge and the horizontal line, were forms of the *parágraphos*.

The Fourth to Sixth Centuries

According to some modern scholarship, the term *virgula* is adopted for the name of the acute accent (´) as early as the fifth century CE in Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* or *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*. Martianus's treatise is not widely used until the ninth century, when it becomes nearly as popular as Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* for teaching grammar (Irvine 1994, 63).⁶⁰ Leo Treitler (2003, 361) writes, "'Virgula' is the name given to the mark of the acute accent by Martianus Capella in the fifth century." And *A Latin Dictionary founded on Andrews' Edition of Freund's Latin Dictionary* appears to agree, listing *virgula* as "an accentual mark" (Lewis and Short 1969, s.v. *virgula*). It would seem Martianus expands the application of *virgula*, from a descriptor meaning "stroke" to the name of a mark within (but still above) the text itself; moreover, *virgula* would then carry phonological information for the reader, which would be a significant change in function from the word's original "stem-like" sense. However, if we compare Martianus on accents to contemporary grammarians' remarks on the same subject, Martianus simply applies the extended sense of *virgula* as a "mark" or "stroke" to the shape of accents. And, more importantly, he is not the first to do so.

Martianus writes: *acutus accentus notatur virgula a sinistra parte in dexteram ascendente, gravis autem a sinistra parte ad dexteram descendens* (Willis 1983, 3.273). Atkinson (2003, 206) translates as follows: "an acute accent is notated as a *virgula* ascending from left to right; a grave [is notated as a *virgula*] descending from left to right." Compare Martianus's phrasing to

⁶⁰ The section on grammar in Martianus's treatise, Donatus's *Ars Grammatica*, and Isidore's *Etymologies* made up the three standardized textbooks of the Carolingian educational program in the late eighth and early ninth centuries (Atkinson 1995, 21).

Donatus's in *Ars Maior*: *Acutus accentus est nota per obliquum ascendens in dexteram partem ´*, *gravis nota a summo in dexteram partem descendens `*, *circumflexus nota de acuto et gravi facta ^* (GL 4, 371). Again, Atkinson (2003, 201) translates: "An acute accent is a *nota* ascending toward the right in oblique motion ´; a grave accent is a *nota* descending toward the right from above `; a circumflex accent is a *nota* made from acute and grave ^." Both authors agree on the shape and name of the *acutus* or acute accent, but where Martianus uses the term *virgula*, Donatus prefers the word *nota*, meaning a "mark, sign, or indication," applicable to such marks as letters, numerals, and diacritical signs (DMLBS, s.v. *nota* 1ab). Moreover, the prepositional phrases accompanying *virgula* and *nota* describe an ascent to the right; assuming that these phrases are not redundant, the shape described by Martianus and Donatus must be a simple mark or stroke. When referring to the *obelus*, Quintilian similarly uses the word *virgula* to mean a stroke. Thus, Martianus does not name the acute accent *virgula* nor does his use of *virgula* suggest that the term signifies an oblique (´) shape. Rather, he expands *virgula*'s range of application from the critical marks of scholars elucidating texts to the acute and grave accents which dictate pronunciation.⁶¹ Martianus's description of accents is written around 420 CE, but *virgula* is applied to accents, just not the acute and grave, nearly a century earlier in Donatus's *Ars grammatica* (Irvine 1994, 63).

While Donatus prefers *nota* for the class of marks to which belong the acute, grave, and circumflex accents, as well as several other accentual marks, he uses *virgula* for the *brevis* or

⁶¹ One unique contribution of Martianus's is the many names he offers for accents: "*fastigia* [gables], because they are placed on top of letters; sometimes *cacumina* [summits], *toni* [tones], or *soni* [sounds]; and the Greeks call them *prosodiae* [itches]" (Stahl, Johnson, and Burge 1971, III.273). Donatus, on the other hand, classifies accents as *de tonis*, saying "Some call tones 'accents,' others 'tenors'" (*Tonos alii accentus, alii tenores nominant*). See Atkinson 2003, 201ff; Atkinson also discusses the relationship of *tones* and *fastigio* to music.

short and the hyphen. He writes that *brevis virgula similiter iacens, sed panda et contractior* √ (“a *brevis* [is] a *virgula* likewise horizontal, but extended [downwards] and more contracted [at the ends], √”). Now known as the breve sign, the *brevis* sits atop a vowel to indicate that it is short. Donatus states that *hyphen virgula subiecta versui: hac nota subter posita duo verba, cum ita res exigit* (“a hyphen [is] a *virgula* placed under the line of writing; [specifically] this mark is placed under two words, when thus the matter [i.e., idea] requires it”). Unlike the modern hyphen, Donatus’s is curved upwards at either end and placed underneath the two words it connects (√). He indirectly characterizes the hyphen by identifying its contrary, the *diastole*, a semicircular mark applied to the bottom of the line (∪) which separates words that have been poorly combined (*GL* 4, 372).⁶² Positively stated, the hyphen links words that should be combined. Donatus designates another horizontal mark, the *longus* or long (—), with *nota*; in contrast to the *brevis*, the *longus* marks long syllables. He also prefers *nota* for the diastole (∪) and *apostrophus* or apostrophe (’) for the mark that signifies omission of a final vowel.⁶³ It seems *nota* and *virgula* are simply synonyms, equally suitable words for describing the features of accent marks. While Donatus’s *Ars grammatica* may be the first surviving handbook to apply *virgula* to accent marks, Martianus is still the first grammarian to use *virgula* for descriptions of the acute and grave accents specifically.

Virgula remains a common designator of accents in grammar books after the time of Donatus. In the second half of the fourth century CE, Diomedes applies *virgula* to the *brevis* and hyphen in his *Ars Grammatica* (Irvine 1994, 62). For marks indicating the acute, grave, and

⁶² Donatus reads: *Huic contraria est diastole, dextera pars [quaedam] circuli ad imam litteram adposita: hac nota male cohaerentia discernuntur.*

⁶³ Donatus reads: *Apostrophos item circuli pars dextera, sed ad summam litteram adposita: hac nota deesse ostendimus parti orationis ultimam vocalem.*

circumflex accents, as well as the hyphen, he uses the generic term *nota* (GL 1, 434-5).⁶⁴ Two subsequent, fifth-century commentaries on Donatus's *Ars grammatica* demonstrate that *virgula* is as common a designator of accent marks as *nota* is (Irvine 1994, 59). Sergius in the early fifth century refers to the acute and grave accents by both *nota* and *virgula* (GL 4, 532); and Pompeius in the late fifth century applies *virgula* to the hyphen and *diastole*, substituting *linea* or "line" in descriptions of the acute, grave, and circumflex accents (GL 5, 132; DMLBS, s.v. *linea* 4).⁶⁵ Of accent marks, Pompeius writes that "if you want to distinguish a codex, so distinguish it" (*si vis codicem distinguere, ita distingue*) (GL 5, 132). *Distinguere* means "to separate," "to punctuate," or, as in this context, "to articulate" fluently with accents (DMLBS, s.v. *distinguere* 1-2). Priscian's grammar *Institutiones grammaticae*, written around 500 CE, explains Latin inflections and syntax using literary passages (Law 2003, 145). It was rediscovered in the Carolingian Renaissance, when works on Latin morphology and syntax were especially popular (Law 2003, 143). The acute accent, *brevis*, hyphen, and *longus* are designated with the term *virgula*; Priscian

⁶⁴ Diomedes reads: *Accentus acuti nota ita / per obliquum ascendens in dexteram partem. gravis nota ita \ a summo in obliquam dexteram partem descendens. circumflexi nota de acuto et gravi figuratur, vel 'c' deorsum spectans ^.* *longus linea a sinistra in dexteram partem aequaliter ducta -.* *brevis virgula similiter iacens, sed panda et contractior, quasi 'c' sursum spectans ∩.* ... *his adiciunt hyphen, cuius forma est virgula sursum sensim curvata subiacens versui et inflexa ad superiorem partem ∪.* *hac nota subter posita utriusque verbi proximas litteras in una pronuntiatione colligimus, ita tamen tum cum ita res exegerit copulam*

⁶⁵ Sergius reads: *Acutae nota est virgula a sinistra parte dextrorsum sublime fastigata; gravis autem notatur simili virgula ab eadem parte depresso fastigio.* In a separate treatise entitled *De littera de syllaba de pedibus de accentibus de distinctione* (GL 4, 4752-485), Sergius describes more accents, including the hyphen and *apostrophus*, but does not describe their shapes. Pompeius reads: *quando vis acutum accentum facere, lineam a sinistra parte in dexteram partem sursum ducito; quando vis gravem, a summa sinistra in dexteram descendito; quotiens vis circumflexum, de gravi et de acuto fac; ... hyphen dicimus, quando duo verba coniungimus, ne erret puer et male pronuntiet.*

applies *nota* to the circumflex accent and the apostrophe (Irvine 1994, 62; *GL* 3, 520).⁶⁶ In the fourth to sixth centuries, *virgula* acts as a synonym for “mark” and “line,” designating a bevy of accent marks, including the *brevis*, hyphen, *longus*, acute, grave, and *diastole*. As frequently as the word *virgula* may appear in sections on accentual figures, it is not the name of any particular accent.

The Seventh Century through the Ninth

In the seventh century, the extended meaning of *virgula* as “stroke” applies to a greater number and variety of marks, while its original sense “twig” is expressed by another word: *virga*. In *The Etymologies*, Isidore distinguishes between the *virgula* we know and the related but distinct *virga*. As mentioned above, *virgula* is a diminutive form of *virga*; the latter term can signify a “shoot, twig, or branch,” “stick,” “rod,” “staff,” “thin cylinder,” “measuring-rod,” or a “vertical stroke” in musical notation (*DMLBS*, s.v. *virga* 1-6, 8). *Virga* and *virgula* overlap, semantically speaking. But in Isidore (Lindsay 1911, 5.27.18, 6.2.21, 7.6.18), *virga* is restricted entirely to its etymological sense: switch, sprout, and twig. *Virgula*, on the other hand, retains its original and extended meanings. In a few cases, *virgula* is a synonym for *virga* (i.e., slender twig at 1.4.17) or an object with the same stick-like shape (drumsticks at 3.21.14). In one instance, *virgula* describes the lower stem of the letter *Y*, evidence which would indicate that, by the seventh century, *virgula*’s specialized meaning had spread beyond its initial uses—the shapes of

⁶⁶ Priscian reads: *accentus acutus virgula est a sinistra parte in dexteram partem ducta sursum: fit namque ita / . gravis a summo in dexteram deprimitur ita \ . circumflexus nota de acuto et gravi facta, scribitur ita ^ . longus est virgula iacens, ita - . brevis virgula est pars circuli iacens inferior, ita ∪ . hyphen, quae coniunctio dicitur, qua tunc utimur, quando duo verba conectimus: est namque subiecta virgula versui circumflexa, ita ~ apostrophos pars item circuli dextera ad summam litteram apposita est, quae fit ita '*

accents and critical marks—to describe letters as well (1.3.7).⁶⁷ In contrast to the grammarians and scholars who precede him, Isidore regularly applies the word *virgula* to critical signs, as well as accent marks.

Among those marks that Isidore categorizes as critical signs, we find the *obolus*—the same mark as Quintilian’s *obelos*. Isidore’s *obolus* is a horizontal line; Isidore identifies it as *virgula iacens* (i.e., lying down or horizontal as opposed to Quintilian’s nondescript “certain censorial mark”), and it signifies unnecessary repetition or falsity “so that, like an arrow, it slays the superfluous and pierces the false” (Barney, et al. 2006, 1.21.3).⁶⁸ Isidore adopts *virgula* for the definition of another sign, the *lemniscus*, which he describes as a *virgula inter geminos punctos iacens*, “a *virgula* lying down between two points” (Lindsay 1911, 1.21.4). This critical mark resembles the division sign (÷) in modern mathematics. According to Isidore (Barney, et al. 2006), it is “put next to those places that translators of Holy Writ have rendered with the same meaning but with different words.” In other words, the *lemniscus* indicated a paraphrase.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Irvine (1994, 215) notes that Isidore’s description of the letter Y is taken from Servius’s commentary on Vergil. Servius also wrote a commentary on Donatus’s *Ars grammatica* but did not use *virgula* to describe the shape of accents.

⁶⁸ The passage in full reads: *Obolus, id est, virgula iacens, adponitur in verbis vel sententiis superflue iteratis, sive in his locis, ubi lectio aliqua falsitate notata est, ut quasi sagitta iugulet supervacua atque falsa confodiat.*

⁶⁹ Stephen Langton (c.1150-1228), in his *Commentary on the book of Chronicles* (Saltman 1978), quotes Isidore on the *astericus* [sic] (Prol. 184), *obelus* (Prol. 191), and the *gniscus* (*lemniscus*) (Prol. 194). Langton indicates that Jerome (c.347 – 420) refers to *astericis* [sic] (Prol. 78) and *virgulis* (Prol. 80) in his first Prologue to *Paralipomenon*. Langton explains that Jerome’s *virgulis* refers to *obelos*, meaning the *obelus*. Jerome writes that Origen placed these marks when mixing the edition of Theodotion into his edition of the Septuagint, using the asterisk to show what was missing and the *obelus* what was superfluous. Here is Langton’s Latin for Prol. 183-95 following the formatting of the 1978 edition: *Ubicumque ergo as[teriscos] id est st[ellas]. Nota quod Ysidorus dicit quod astericus [sic] apponitur in his que omitta sunt, ut illucescant per eum nomina que abesse videntur....Ubi vero obelus etc. Ysidorus dicit quod sagitta Grece obelus. Est ergo obelus virgula iacens ex transverso litere, ut ostendat ibi aliquid*

Isidore gathers these critical signs and twenty-four more from “the ancients” who “placed these in poems and histories to annotate the writing,” specifically “to show a particular judgment about a word or sentences or verses” (Barney, et al. 2006, 1.21.1).⁷⁰ Isidore (1.21.2, 11, 13, 14) draws on the Greek tradition of marking, including Aristarchus’s *asteriskos* (Isidore’s *asteriscus*) and the *antisigma* (Isidore’s *antisimma*), as well as the Latin tradition of *notae*, represented by the *diple* and dotted *diple*.⁷¹ He offers a sign for every possible situation, such as the *chrisimon*, which was “placed according to each person’s individual desire to mark something” (Barney, et al. 2006, 1.21.22). Isidore is the first grammarian we’ve met who uses the term *virgula* for the shapes of critical signs; like many other grammarians, he will apply the word *virgula* to accent marks or *figurae accentuum*.

Isidore lists ten symbols as accent marks, writing that they are “supplied by grammarians to distinguish words” (*a grammaticis pro verborum distinctionibus adponuntur*) (Barney, et al. 2006, 1.19.1; Lindsay 1911). Like Pompeius, Isidore uses *distinctionibus* to mean distinct articulations, not punctuation marks (*DMLBS*, s.v. *distinctio* 1d, 3d). In fact, Isidore draws from some of the grammars we’ve encountered so far, specifically from Pompeius’s commentary on Donatus (Irvine 1994, 212). Isidore prefers *linea* or line when describing the acute and grave accents, borrowing Pompeius’s near exact wording: “a line drawn upwards from the left side to

esse jugulandum. Unde sic dicit Ysidorus.... (The rest is a quotation from the *Etymologies* (1.21.3-5).

⁷⁰ The passage in full reads: *Praeterea quaedam scripturarum notae apud celeberrimos auctores fuerunt, quasque antiqui ad distinctionem scripturarum carminibus et historiis adposuerunt. Nota est figura propria in litterae modum posita, ad demonstrandam unamquamque verbi sententiarumque ac versuum rationem. Notae autem versibus adponuntur numero viginti et sex, quae sunt nominibus infra scriptis.*

⁷¹ Isidore cites Aristarchus by name (1.21.7).

the right” (Lindsay 1911, 1.19.1).⁷² Isidore uses the term *virgula* instead of *linea* for two other accent marks. *Μακρός*, he writes, *id est longa, virgula iacens est ita* (1.19.4). Modern translators (Barney, et al. 2006) understand this accent mark to be a macron, “a long mark...a horizontal stroke,” which came to represent the omission of a nasal consonant (*m* or *n*). It is unclear if Isidore intended the *μακρός* to represent nasal consonants, like the macron, or long syllables, like the *longus*.

Isidore also applies the term *virgula* to the *ύφέν*, better known as the hyphen: *id est coniunctio, quia duo verba conectit, subiecta virgula versui circumflexa* (Lindsay 1911, 1.19.6). Latin *hyphen* derives from Greek *ύφέν* (OED 2020, s.v. hyphen, n.). The mark looks like “a stroke drawn down that curves back at the line” or a hook (,) sitting on the line of writing (Barney et al. 2006). The hyphen has been designated with *virgula* before in the works of Pompeius, Diomedes, and Donatus; but between the fourth and seventh centuries, the mark changes shape from a curved, horizontal stroke below the line (_) to a hook sitting on the line. The function remains the same, though; it “connects two words” (*duo verba conectit*). Isidore’s two uses of *virgula* suggest that the term designates a small pen stroke, irrespective of direction, and synonymous with “line,” though the same may not be true elsewhere in the *Etymologiae*. Isidore largely relegates the etymological senses of *virgula* to the word *virga*, while overall expanding the number of critical signs and accents to which the specialized sense of *virgula* applies.

Two centuries later, *virgula* is still a generic designator of accent marks. In a late-ninth-century commentary on Donatus’s *Ars grammatica*, Remigius of Auxerre selects from a range of

⁷² Compare Isidore’s *linea a sinistra parte in dexteram partem sursum ducta* to Pompeius’s *lineam a sinistra parte in dexteram partem sursum ducito*.

synonyms for “stroke,” using *virgula* to describe the *brevis* and hyphen but “line” for the *longus* and *figura* “figure, form,” or “shape” for the *apostrophus* (GL 8, 229-30; DMLBS, s.v. *figura* 1).⁷³ Remigius follows Donatus in placing the hyphen underneath the line and calls the horizontal line *longus*, not macron. Thus, the extended sense of *virgula*, established by Quintilian in the first century, is synonymous with *nota* (mark), *linea* (line), and *figura* (shape) in grammatical treatises from the fourth to the late ninth centuries. During this time, *virgula* is an accepted descriptor of accent marks, specifically the *brevis*, hyphen, *longus*, acute, and grave. For five hundred years and likely longer, the grammars divide punctuation marks and accents into two distinct categories, but the symbols involved with accentuation have overlapping functions with those concerning discretion.

To explain the hyphen, Donatus, Diomedes, and Pompeius provide the same example from the *Aeneid*: *ante _tulit gressum* (“stepped on before”) (Fairclough 1916, 6.677). Donatus writes that the hyphen is used “when thus the matter [i.e., the idea] requires it” (*cum ita res exigit*). Its function is to “link” (*copulamus*) words (GL 4, 327). Diomedes borrows elements of Donatus’s description, adding that “we combine the closest letters of a word in one pronunciation” (*verbi proximas litteras in una pronuntiatione colligimus*) (GL 1, 435). In his

⁷³ Three grammatical handbooks do not describe accents using *virgula*: the commentaries on Donatus by Servius (GL 4, 426-7) and Cledonius (GL 5, 31-3) and Cassiodorus’s *Institutiones divinarum et humanarum litterarum* (Mynors 1937). The *Institutiones* lacks a section on accents, saying only that “Accent is correct pronunciation according to the rules” (II.2.5), as translated by Halporn and Vessey (2004, 176). The former two grammarians do not describe the shapes of accents but exhaustively explain how to apply them. Remigius reads: *Longa linea, s. accentus est. Aequaliter ducta, ita -, de qua syllabae duo tempora habentes designantur, ut in Pedibus supra dictum est. Brevis uirgula, s. accentus est. ...Ista enim brevis uirgula non ita rotunda est, ut semicirculus, sed uirgula est superius curua, qua brevis syllaba unum tempus habens ostenditur. ... Hyfen uirgula, s. parua. Subiecta, i. supposita submissa. ... Apostrophus item. Congrue dixit ‘item’, quoniam praedicta iteratur figura, sed aliud supra et aliud agit infra.*

commentary, Pompeius states that the hyphen is used “when we combine two words, lest a child err and pronounce it incorrectly” (*quando duo verba coniungimus, ne erret puer et male pronuntiet*) (GL 5, 132).⁷⁴ For inexperienced readers, the hyphen acts as a guide to syllabification in continuous script. Even though the grammarians define the hyphen as connecting two words in pronunciation, the mark actually separates two syllables. In the *Aeneid* example, the grammarians are using the hyphen to ensure the syllables in *antetulit* are pronounced with a light accent. Students might err and think the *e* in *ante*, which is naturally short, should be lengthened because it is in a closed syllable.⁷⁵ Rather, *antetulit* should be syllabified as *an te* not *an tet*. If a reader incorrectly pronounced the *e* in *antetulit* as long, his mistake would confuse listeners and affect the syllabification of the remaining passage. The *diastole* fulfills the opposite function, connecting ambiguous syllables to the appropriate word.⁷⁶ Pompeius provides another example from the *Aeneid*, in which the *diastole* helps young readers correctly say *viridique in litore conspicitur* , *sus* (“on the green bank before their eyes a sow”) instead of *conspicit ursus* (Fairclough 1918, 8.83; GL 5, 132). Both marks convey important information for delivering texts aloud, like the acute or grave accents, but they also divide words in continuous script, like the three-point system of punctuation known as *distinctiones*. *Virgula* will not become a

⁷⁴ Pompeius reads: *ut si dicimus ‘antetulit gressum’, ne dicat ‘ante tulit’. et quo iungitur? syllabam ultimam praecedentis verbi, posterioris sequentem subiecta virgula circumdas, ‘ante tulit gressum’; te tu, ipsas istas subiecta ista virgula circumdas. et dicitur hyphen, quia coniungit sic istas. diastole disiungit. ut si dicas ‘viridique in litore conspicitur* , *sus? ne erret puer et dicat ‘conspicit ursus’, ad istam tur addimus* , *id est circumflexam virgulam, et ita disiungimus.*

⁷⁵ A closed syllable ends in a consonant, while an open syllable ends in a vowel. If a vowel that is normally short appears in a closed syllable, it becomes long.

⁷⁶ Pompeius provides the clearest explanation of both marks.

punctuation mark until the eighth century, but for the first time, the word designates two marks, the hyphen and *diastole*, that operate like punctuation.

Notational System Overlap

M. B. Parkes (1993, 1) states that punctuation's "primary function is to resolve structural uncertainties in a text, and to signal nuances of semantic significance which might otherwise not be conveyed at all, or would at best be much more difficult for a reader to figure out." When texts were frequently read aloud, punctuation allowed the reader to prepare the text by clarifying these structural uncertainties. *Distinctiones* split unseparated text into sentences, clauses, and phrases, thereby preventing the lector from misspeaking during oral performance. The hyphen and *diastole* fill a void left by *distinctiones*. They clarify ambiguous syllable boundaries, offering the reader a way to make finer distinctions within the phrase. These two marks clearly serve a structural purpose, as well as a performative one. The grammarians offer other symbols besides accent marks and *distinctiones* to solve structural ambiguity. Many critical signs or *notae* divide the text into paragraphs or sections: the *paragraphus* identifies the beginning of a new topic, the *positura* indicates the end of one, the reversed *diple* pointing right with an *obolus* above signifies that a similar topic will follow, and the *corona* marks the end of a book (Barney, et al. 2006, 1.21.8, 9, 20, 26). Other critical signs convey structural distinctions of a different kind: the *diple* separates citations from the text, while the *diple ὀβολισμένη* distinguishes speeches (1.21.13, 16). These marks provide structural information above the level of the sentence, yet again meeting a demand for graphic cues left by *distinctiones*. Even though some accents and critical signs could share punctuation's distinguishing function, only *distinctiones* are considered punctuation (*posituris*) in grammars from the fourth to ninth centuries.

The symbols contained in the conceptual categories of accent, punctuation, and critical sign are organized without regard for the symbols' function. As we've seen, grammarians freely expand their descriptions, supplementing synonyms of their own choosing, but because the grammars repeat readily reduced definitions and rules, the symbols they describe never change categories. In Quintilian's first-century grammar, we see *virgula* designate just one critical sign, the *obelus*, but grammarians apply "stem" more broadly in subsequent centuries. Fourth- to sixth-century grammars feature *virgula* in descriptions of accent marks, including the acute, grave, *brevis*, *longus*, hyphen, and *diastole*. By this point, *virgula* is synonymous with "mark, sign," and "line" but retains the etymological sense "twig." In the seventh century, *virgula* describes the aforementioned accents and one more critical sign, the *lemniscus*, while *virgula*'s original sense "twig" is expressed by *virga*. For at least two centuries after, *virgula* remains a descriptor of accents and a synonym for "line" or "shape." But two "accents" designated by *virgula*, the hyphen and diastole, function like punctuation marks. Even though the word *virgula* describes marks with separating functions, the vocabulary within the categories "accent," "punctuation," and "critical sign" are uncritically adopted from grammar to grammar. The repetition of categories in grammatical handbooks results in the restricted application of the word *virgula* as well as a limited repertory of punctuation until the ninth century. The three-point system will only change when scribes begin inserting punctuation during the copying process. In the next chapter, we shall discover that readers in the British Isles, who speak non-Romance languages and learn Latin as a second language, require new graphic cues, such as separation between words, a hierarchy of script styles, and new notational symbols, including the virgule.

Chapter 3

Innovation and Exemplars: The Virgule's Role in Insular Book Production from the Seventh to Ninth Centuries

The virgule is not in any notational system in Latin grammar handbooks through at least the ninth century; rather, the term *virgula* designates a stroke, line, shape, or figure in grammarians' descriptions of accents or critical marks. Yet the oblique line functions as a runover mark or a punctuation sign in manuscripts produced in the British Isles between the seventh and ninth centuries. To the best of my knowledge, no one has established how the virgule was introduced to Irish and Anglo-Saxon manuscripts. We only have unproven guesses at the virgule's origin in Greek paragraphing symbols or early characters in musical notation. Since Insular audiences did not receive the virgule by way of the grammars, the runover or punctuating virgule must have arrived in the British Isles by other means. Some of the most famous products of Northumbrian scriptoria were byproducts of the exemplars brought back from Italy, such as the Codex Amiatinus. We might suppose that the virgule reached the British Isles by way of Roman influence since continental methods of bookmaking so heavily influenced Insular practices; however, none of the extant Roman exemplars feature the virgule. Rather, after the withdrawal of the Roman Empire in 410 CE, the British Isles were allowed a period of isolation that lasted through the sixth century and resulted in innovations in book production and modes of textual marking. An increased demand for copies, especially of Bede's works, forced scribes to develop economical adaptations to script and notation over a relatively short period of time. The runover or punctuating virgule was one of these adaptations.

This study is broken into three parts: continental influence on the British Isles, Irish and Anglo-Saxon developments in book production, and the virgule's arrival in Insular manuscripts. First, we shall identify the byproducts of Roman influence in Northumbria. The founder of the Wearmouth and Jarrow monasteries bequeathed the scribes there with a passionate zeal for Roman Catholic culture, which is evident in the script and formatting of the Ceolfrid Bibles. Next, we shall track Insular adaptations to continental methods of book production. Under pressure for copies of Bede's works, the scribes at Wearmouth and Jarrow replaced Roman-influenced scripts with the more economical Insular minuscule. Additionally, Irish and Anglo-Saxon scribes modified continental notational practices to fit local scripts. Finally, we shall determine whether the virgule in Insular manuscripts results from Roman reverence or Northumbrian innovation. The judgments on what symbols constitute diacritics, what symbols punctuation, in Insular manuscripts derive from the manuscript catalogues of established paleographers. My conclusion, however, that the virgule in seventh- to ninth-century Northumbrian manuscripts was not an imitation of Roman exemplars but a result of increased demand for books, is offered here for the first time.

Continental Influence on Insular Books

Roman Catholic Culture at Wearmouth-Jarrow

We shall start with the establishment of Wearmouth and Jarrow, the two monasteries that housed Roman manuscripts and produced the first Northumbrian imitations of Roman books. In the years leading up to 410, the Roman administration and military withdrew from Britain (Brown 1984, 311). Roman Christianity had already been established in Britain, and the British Church survived the Roman withdrawal and maintained ties to the Irish Church in the fifth and sixth centuries. However, the British Church became isolated from Rome between 454 and 457

(Parkes 1991, 12; Brown 1984, 311). While the British population had accepted Christianity, the Germanic tribes (Angles, Saxons, Jutes) that had settled Britain after the Romans left were still pagan. Gregory the Great's missionary Augustine arrived in Kent in 597 and began to rapidly convert the Germanic tribes to Christianity. The first known visit of Anglo-Saxons to Rome occurred in the mid-seventh century (Ó Carragáin 1994, 2). Benedict Biscop, founder of the Wearmouth and Jarrow monasteries and abbot of St Augustine's Abbey in Canterbury, ventured to Rome five times between 653 and 685, and the fruits of his travel are recorded by Bede in *Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow* (Brown 2003, 57, 60).

Bede writes that Benedict Biscop first went to Rome out of a fervent desire to venerate the tombs of the apostles. Upon his return, "he devoted himself wholeheartedly and unceasingly to making known as widely as possible the forms of church life which he had seen in Rome and had come to love and cherish" (Farmer 1983, 186).⁷⁷ Benedict completed a second trip to Rome around 666, and "this time, just as on his former visit, he took a delight in amassing a good deal of useful knowledge." During this trip, Benedict entered the monastery of Lérins for two years' training in monastic life before taking a third trip to Rome (*loc. cit.*). Upon returning to Kent, Benedict became abbot of the monastery at Canterbury, later called St Augustine's Abbey (Farmer 1983, 188).⁷⁸ Two years later, around 671, Benedict traveled to Rome for the fourth time. Bede notes that "he brought back a large number of books on all branches of sacred knowledge." Benedict's haul included books from Gaul and "holy relics of the blessed apostles and martyrs," brought to the British Isles out of "his ambition to build up monastic life in the

⁷⁷ Where Farmer's (1983) English translation is cited in the text, a footnote provides the corresponding Latin in Plummer (1896), in this case on page 365. The numbers provided for Farmer and Plummer refer to pages not chapters.

⁷⁸ Plummer 1896, 367.

area” (*loc. cit.*). As a result of these trips, Benedict had collected a library of books, including those he gathered from Southern England while serving as abbot of St Augustine’s Abbey (Brown 2003, 60).

King Egfrid of Northumbria ordered Benedict to build a monastery on Egfrid’s own personal property at the mouth of the Wear. Benedict had the monastery built in the Roman style with stone and with glazed windows. He collected “everything necessary for the service of church and altar—sacred vessels and vestments for instance—and saw to it that what could not be obtained at home was shipped over from abroad.” The St Peter monastery, now called Wearmouth, was completed in 674 (Farmer 1983, 189).⁷⁹ In 679, Benedict set out on a fifth trip to Rome, “returning with a greater variety of spiritual treasures than ever before.” Bede writes:

In the first place he returned with a great mass of books of every sort. Secondly, he brought back an abundant supply of relics of the blessed apostles and christian [*sic*] martyrs which were to prove such a boon for many churches in the land. Thirdly, he introduced in his monastery the order of chanting and singing the psalms and conducting liturgy according to the practice in force at Rome.... The fourth benefit Benedict brought back, and one not to be despised, was a letter of privilege from the venerable Pope Agatho, sought with Egfrid’s permission and indeed at his wish and exhortation, guaranteeing the monastery’s complete safety and independence by a grant of perpetual exemption from external interference. Fifthly, he brought back many holy pictures of the saints to adorn the church of St Peter he had built. (Farmer 1983, 190)⁸⁰

Benedict’s efforts to establish a monastery in the image of the Roman Church proved so successful that King Egfrid ordered a new foundation be built at Jarrow a year later (Farmer 1983, 191).⁸¹ The monastery at Jarrow was established in 681 (Brown 2003, 57). The new house was dedicated to the apostle Paul, and Benedict appointed Ceolfrid as abbot (Farmer 1983, 191).

⁷⁹ Plummer 1896, 368.

⁸⁰ Plummer 1896, 369. Bede also recounts this trip in his *Ecclesiastical History of England* iv.xviii.

⁸¹ Plummer 1896, 370.

Benedict also appointed Eosterwine abbot of Wearmouth to allow for his periodic journeys overseas (191-92).

Benedict continued to provide Roman books, relics, chant, and pictures to the twin houses. He took his sixth and final trip to Rome in 685 (Brown 2003, 60). He “returned, as always, with a rich store of countless valuable gifts for his churches: a large supply of sacred books and no less a stock of sacred pictures than on previous journeys” (Farmer 1983, 194).⁸² Over his fifth and sixth trips, Benedict collected illuminated manuscripts, likely produced in Rome, to serve as models for pictures on the walls of the monastery (Hoogland Verkerk 1999, 101).⁸³ On his deathbed in 690, Benedict asked that “the fine and extensive library of books which he had brought back from Rome and which were so necessary for improving the standard of education in this church should be carefully preserved as a single collection and not allowed to decay through neglect or be split up piecemeal” (Farmer 1983, 196).⁸⁴ Bede records Benedict’s final reminders to the brothers, stating that “all I found best in the life of the seventeen monasteries I visited during my long and frequent pilgrimages, I stored up in my mind and have

⁸² Plummer 1896, 373. Bede also describes the fruits of Benedict’s travels in Homily 1.13 on the Gospels: “As often as he crossed the sea, he never returned, as is the custom with some people, empty-handed and without profit, but one time he brought an abundance of holy books, and another time he brought a venerable present of relics of the blessed matyrs of Christ.... Another time he carried back a letter of privilege sent from the lord Pope, by which our freedom from every outside interference was maintained. Another time he transported pictures of the holy histories which were put up, not only for the ornamentation of the church, but also for the instruction of those who looked at them, namely so that those who could not read might learn of the works of our Lord and Savior through gazing on images of these [works]” (Martin and Hurst 2010, 131).

⁸³ The illuminated manuscripts included two illustrated Gospels, one Old Testament, and possibly a Pentateuch (i.e., the first five books of the Old Testament) (Hoogland Verkerk 1999, 101).

⁸⁴ Plummer 1896, 375.

handed on to you, to be steadfastly adhered to, for your own good” (Farmer 1983, 196).⁸⁵ Among the sacred volumes in Benedict’s library were the Roman manuscripts that would serve as exemplars for early Insular books.

Benedict bestowed the monasteries with a lasting zeal for the culture of Roman Christianity, which was transmitted to the monks primarily through the written word (Parkes 1991, 117). He stressed that the brothers follow the Rule and keep the ecclesiastical observances he had seen in his travels, especially at Rome (Ó Carragáin 1994, 4). Bede’s record reveals that the abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow were concerned with preserving monastic practices from the surrounding culture and that books played a central role in maintaining the double-monastery’s Roman traditions (Parkes 1991, 118). Michelle Brown (2003, 53) refers to Wearmouth and Jarrow as “an island of *romanitas* in a Hiberno-Saxon sea.” Generally speaking, the Anglo-Saxons revered Rome because of Gregory the Great’s mission to convert them to orthodox Christianity (Parkes 1991, 12). But the first manuscripts produced at Wearmouth-Jarrow testify to the exceptional veneration of the culture of Roman Christianity there.

Before he died, Benedict appointed Ceolfrid the sole abbot of Wearmouth-Jarrow (Farmer 1983, 200, 198).⁸⁶ Ceolfrid oversaw the double-monastery for twenty-eight years (Farmer 1983, 200).⁸⁷ The monks unanimously elected and confirmed Hwaetberht as the next abbot just before Ceolfrid left for Rome once more; in 716, unfortunately, Ceolfrid died before reaching his destination (Farmer 1983, 204, 206).⁸⁸ Of Ceolfrid’s lasting contribution to Wearmouth-Jarrow, Bede writes:

⁸⁵ Plummer 1896, 374-75.

⁸⁶ Plummer 1896, 376-77, 378.

⁸⁷ Plummer 1896, 379.

⁸⁸ Plummer 1896, 382-83, 385.

He doubled the number of books in the libraries of both monasteries with an ardour equal to that which Benedict had shown in founding them. He added three copies of the new translation of the Bible to the one copy of the old translation which he had brought back from Rome. One of these he took with him as a present when he went back to Rome in his old age, and the other two he bequeathed to his monasteries. (Farmer 1983, 201)⁸⁹

The library at Wearmouth-Jarrow was so well supplied by Benedict and Ceolfrid that there was likely no need for further texts to be copied there until Ceolfrid ordered three copies of Jerome's edition of the Bible, known as the Ceolfrid bibles or pandects (Parkes 1991, 96). Wearmouth-Jarrow scribes strove to imitate the Roman volumes in their library as closely as possible. The Ceolfrid bibles are essentially facsimiles of books copied in Italy a century or more previous (Brown 2003, 63).⁹⁰ Thus, surviving manuscripts imported from Italy, as well as the remaining Ceolfrid bibles, give us a good idea of the Roman exemplars Wearmouth-Jarrow scribes had at their disposal.

Features of Roman Exemplars at Wearmouth-Jarrow

Italian manuscripts imported to the British Isles include a sixth-century Gospels of St Augustine, which may have been brought by the first missionaries to Britain, a fifth-century copy of Jerome on Ecclesiastes, a sixth-century copy of the Book of Maccabees, and the Burckhardt Gospels (Parkes 1991, 12).⁹¹ At least three of these manuscripts served as models in English scriptoria (all but the Gospels of St Augustine). Two were affiliated with Wearmouth-Jarrow: the

⁸⁹ Plummer 1896, 379-80.

⁹⁰ The Codex Grandior or Novem Codices, for example, neither of which are extant (Brown 2003, 63).

⁹¹ In order of appearance: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 286 (*CLA* 126); Würzburg, Universitätsbibl., MS M.P.Th.Q.2 (*CLA* 1430a); Durham, Dean & Chapter Library, MS B.IV.6, fol. 169 (*CLA* 153); and Würzburg, Universitätsbibl., MS M.P.Th.F.68 (*CLA* 1423a). In Gneuss and Lapidge (2014), the manuscripts are numbers 83, 944, 245, and 945. *CLA* refers to Lowe (1934-72). Parenthetical citations of Lowe (1934-72) refer to the manuscript number not the page number.

Book of Maccabees could have served as a model to Wearmouth-Jarrow scribes, and the Burckhardt Gospels were perhaps restored at Wearmouth-Jarrow.⁹² These books would have represented Italian methods of book production, including script, word separation, and column formatting, to Northumbrian scribes. All four are written in uncial, i.e., a majuscule script or a script made up of capital letters (Lowe 1960, 17). None have spaces between words, and all but the copy of Jerome on Ecclesiastes are laid out in two columns *per cola et commata* (i.e. colometrically) so that each phrase, clause, or sentence is on its own line of text (Saenger 1997, 16). *Per cola et commata* separates verses from one another and clarifies pauses within verses (Brown 2003, 186). Two columns were the standard for fifth- and sixth-century Latin books produced on the continent, where one column was considered lower quality (Brown 1984, 325).⁹³ The surviving Ceolfrid bibles copy the features of early Roman manuscripts, such as the sixth-century Gospels of St Augustine, the fifth-century copy of Jerome on Ecclesiastes, the sixth-century copy of the Book of Maccabees, and the Burckhardt Gospels.

The Ceolfrid Bibles

Only one manuscript, the Codex Amiatinus, and one fragment, sometimes called the Ceolfrid Bible, remain of the Ceolfrid Bibles (Brown 2003, 61).⁹⁴ The Codex Amiatinus is so excellent a copy of Roman textual practices that it was considered the work of an Italian scribe

⁹² The Burckhardt Gospels were restored in an uncial of the type written at Wearmouth-Jarrow. See Lowe (1960) plates IIa, I, IIb, and III.

⁹³ Formatting in two columns per page *per cola et commata* is intended to facilitate reading, especially reading aloud (Verey, Brown, and Powell 1980, 17).

⁹⁴ Codex Amiatinus: Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, MS Amiatino 1 (CLA 299). Fragments: British Library, Add. MS 37777 with British Library, Add. MS 45025 (CLA 177) and the Bankes Leaf, Loan 81. In Gneuss and Lapidge (2014), the manuscript is number 825, and the fragments are numbers 293 and 501.3.

as recently as the twentieth century (Lowe 1960, 10-12).⁹⁵ Like the aforementioned Italian manuscripts, the Codex Amiatinus is copied *per cola et commata*. The initial pages of the Codex Amiatinus are formatted in one column, but the majority of the manuscript is formatted in two. One column per page is the standard formatting for Gospels until the ninth century in England and Ireland (Brown 1984, 326). The book is written in formal uncial, rustic capital, and capitular uncial, which will be discussed in detail below (Parkes 1991, 96). The Ceolfrid bible fragment is also copied *per cola et commata* in two columns in a script mimicking Roman uncial (Brown 1991, 57). Besides the use of capitular uncial and the few pages featuring a one-column layout in the Codex Amiatinus, both Ceolfrid bibles reproduce the script and formatting of early Roman Christian texts. Script became an important means by which Wearmouth-Jarrow scribes conveyed the authority of the Roman Church when producing biblical texts.

Uncial, Rustic Capital, Capitular Uncial

Of the scripts we see in the Codex Amiatinus and the Ceolfrid Bible fragment, two (uncial and rustic capital) are either reproductions of Roman exemplars or imitations of continental majuscule. Uncial and rustic capital were the most formal scripts available in Late Antiquity. After entering England through Roman models in the late seventh century, uncial became widespread there by the mid-eighth century (Brown 1984, 314). Both uncial and rustic capital are used for the papal farewell and date formulae in documents from the *registrum* of Gregory the Great, and Wearmouth-Jarrow scribes copied this practice out of reverence for the

⁹⁵ However, the Ceolfrid bibles and other Insular manuscripts differ from imported Roman manuscripts in their sets of abbreviation symbols, stylization of initials, accents over monosyllables, and the spelling of *s* and *ss* (Lowe 1960, 12). Irish scribes applied abbreviations to Latin texts more often than scribes elsewhere in the West (Parkes 1991, 5). The frequency with which Insular scribes abbreviate words may have led to adjusting texts for greater legibility, for example by modifying *distinctiones* for minuscule scripts.

ecclesiastical authority of Rome (Parkes 1991, 112). The same reverence motivated scribes of Wearmouth-Jarrow to meticulously imitate sixth-century Roman uncial, a script they found particularly suitable for bibles. This formal uncial was designed to be a display script in special books; Wearmouth-Jarrow scribes use it for the main text of the Codex Amiatinus (118). Unlike uncial or rustic capital, the third script present in the Ceolfrid Bibles is a Northumbrian invention. Capitular uncial was developed at Wearmouth-Jarrow not as an imitation of Roman script but as a practical book hand. This script is smaller and restricted to lists of capitula or chapters. Capitular uncial dominated in the first half of the eighth century at Wearmouth-Jarrow (97). Insular scribes viewed uncial and rustic capitals as extensions of the Roman Church. Uncial, especially, was perceived as the script appropriate to bibles because of its appearance in the Wearmouth-Jarrow library of Roman Christian texts (Parkes 1991, 96). The scribes of Wearmouth-Jarrow would eventually reject traditional uncial scripts and embrace Insular minuscule as a primary book hand, a singularly important precursor to the virgule's appearance in Northumbrian books.

Insular Adaptations of Continental Methods

Insular Scripts

Like Insular book practices in general, Insular scripts developed in a period of isolation from the continent. When Christian missionaries arrived in Ireland in the fifth century, they brought, in addition to uncial, a workaday script, literary cursive (Bischoff 1990, 83).⁹⁶ From the

⁹⁶ Literary cursive, sometimes called quarter-uncial or cursive half-uncial, would have been used in the more literate parts of the Roman Empire (Brown 1984, 317, 316). It was practiced by professional scholars, learned clerics, and educated laymen, perhaps by such figures as Jerome, Augustine, Boethius, or Cassiodorus. The script would have been used for marginal notes, copying books for personal use, and correspondence (317). For examples of marginal scholia in literary cursive, see the late fourth-century Bembine Terence (Vatican City, Italy, Biblioteca del

period of Roman withdrawal to the mid-fifth century, Insular natives began to develop a system of scripts based on literary cursive. Over the fifth and sixth centuries, correspondence with clergy in Britain allowed this system to spread to both Irish and British Churches. The Insular system did not include rustic capitals, uncials, or formal half-uncials;⁹⁷ instead, it comprised a basic script (*scrittura di base*), a literary cursive, and a documentary cursive.⁹⁸ By the seventh century, the Irish had established a system consisting of two scripts: Insular half-uncial developed from literary cursive, which had alternate forms depending on formality, and Insular minuscule from documentary cursive (Bischoff 1990, 87).⁹⁹ Northern England remained under the influence of

Vaticano Lat. 3226; *CLA* 12) or the late fifth-century Bologna Lactantius (Biblioteca Universitaria 701, fols. 153-189; *CLA* 280); for books copied for personal use in literary cursive, see the sixth-century Josephus in Milan (Biblioteca Ambrosiana Cimelio MS II/1; *CLA* 304); no letters written in literary cursive survive (Brown 1984, 317).

⁹⁷ Insular liturgical and biblical manuscripts, such as gospel books and psalters, were written in a formal half-uncial, sometimes in combination with minuscule (Bischoff 1993, 87-8).

⁹⁸ Insular literary cursive can be seen in the Springmount Bog tablets, and a formalized version of it for liturgical use appears in the Codex Usserianus Primus (Brown 1984, 321): Dublin, Nat. Mus., S.A. 1914.2 (*CLA* 1684) and Dublin, Trinity College Library, 55 (*CLA* 271). These are the oldest Irish manuscripts, dated to the beginning of the seventh century at the latest (Brown 1984, 312). Traces of Insular documentary cursive can be found in a mid-seventh-century fragment of Isidore's *Etymologies* from St. Gall and ten lines of a Gospel in Durham A.II.10 of the same period (Brown 1984, 321, 313; Gneuss and Lapidge 2014, n. 218): St Gall, Stiftsbibl., MS 1399.a.1 (*CLA* 995) and Durham, Cathedral Library, A.II.10, fols. 2-5, 338-9 with Durham, Cathedral Library, C.III.13, fols. 192-5 + C.III.20, fols. 1-2 (*CLA* 147). For Durham A.II.10, also see Gneuss and Lapidge (2014) number 218. Durham A.II.10 was written in Northumbria, but it was copied when Northumbria was largely dependent on Ireland for its writing system. Thus, its text is primarily Insular half-uncial and briefly Insular minuscule (Brown 1984, 313).

⁹⁹ At least three gospel books produced in Northumbria feature the Insular system of scripts. The Book of Lindisfarne (better known as the Lindisfarne Gospels) and Durham A.II.17 (the Durham Gospels), both dated to the late seventh or early eighth centuries, are copied in half-uncial. Book of Lindisfarne: London, British Library, Cotton Nero D.iv (*CLA* 187); see Gneuss and Lapidge (2014) number 343. Durham Gospels: Durham, Cathedral Library, A.II.17, fols. 2-102 with Cambridge, Magdalene College, Pepys 2981 (19) (*CLA* 149); see Gneuss and Lapidge (2014) number 220 and *Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile*, vol. 20. The Codex Epternacensis or the Echternach Gospels, dated to c. 700, is primarily written in a blunt minuscule with colophons in a pointed minuscule. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 9389 (*CLA* 578); see Gneuss and Lapidge (2014) number 893. The Book of Durrow, the first extant gospel book to

the Irish Church until at least 664, during which time the Anglo-Saxons inherited Irish scribal practices, including Insular minuscule and the two forms of half-uncial (Bischoff 1990, 90).¹⁰⁰

While Irish influence was still present in Northumbria and Southwest England, Insular minuscule appeared in early Anglo-Saxon books (Brown 1984, 314).¹⁰¹ Over the course of the eighth century, Anglo-Saxon script spread from the north to the south of England (Bischoff 1990, 91-92).¹⁰²

Ascendence of Insular Minuscule

By the time continental formal scripts, including rustic capitals and uncials, first entered Britain at the end of the seventh century, Insular half-uncial and minuscule were already well-

incorporate carpet and symbol pages, is also copied in half-uncial; scholars who support a Northumbrian origin of this codex date it to c. 680, though others claiming an Irish origin date it slightly earlier (see Alexander 1978, 30). Book of Durrow: Dublin, Trinity College, 57 (CLA 273); see Gneuss and Lapidge (2014) number 213. Thus, three fully developed kinds of script simultaneously existed: half-uncial, blunt minuscule, and pointed to cursive minuscule (Bischoff 1990, 91).

¹⁰⁰ In the first half of the seventh century, the Insular system of scripts also spread with Irish missionaries to the continent, specifically to the monasteries at Luxeuil, Bobbio, and St. Gall (Bischoff 1990, 88).

¹⁰¹ Insular minuscule influenced the oldest extant occurrences of Anglo-Saxon minuscule, as well as the small Irish minuscule found in two grammatical texts copied at Bobbio and early-eighth-century pocket Gospel books, such as the Book of Armagh and the Book of Mulling (Brown 1984, 314). The grammatical texts copied at Bobbio are Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale Lat. 2 (CLA 391) with Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale Lat. 2, fol. 42*-75 (CLA 394) + Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale Lat. 2, fol. 157-158 (CLA 397b) and Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale IV A 8, fol. 1-39 (CLA 400). Dublin, Trinity College Library, 52 (CLA 270) and Dublin, Trinity College Library, 60 (CLA 276) (Brown 1984, 314).

¹⁰² A particularly compressed version of half-uncial was practiced in Britain (Bischoff 1990, 91-92). A Northumbrian variant of minuscule is visible by around the middle of the century in two copies of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*: the Leningrad Bede and the Moore Bede (Bischoff 1990, 91). The half-uncial and minuscule of southern Britain differed stylistically from the north but declined in the course of the eighth century (Bischoff 1990, 92). Leningrad Bede: St. Petersburg, Russian National Library, Q.v.I.18; see Gneuss and Lapidge (2014) number 846, Arngart (1952), and Lowe (1960) plate XXXVIIIa (CLA 1621). Moore Bede: Cambridge, University Library, Kk.5.16; see Gneuss and Lapidge (2014) number 25, Blair and Mynors (1959), and Lowe (1960) plate XXXIXa (CLA 139).

established (Brown 1984, 314-15). It appears that Insular scribes were wary of using non-uncial scripts, specifically Insular minuscule, in books (Parkes 1991, 97). Despite the hesitance to adopt Insular minuscule as a practical book hand, Anglo-Saxon minuscule replaced Roman uncial, which had been especially popular in Northumbria since the formation of the Wearmouth-Jarrow libraries at the end of the seventh century (Bischoff 1990, 91-92). In the first half of the eighth century, capitular uncial had been used for books even in cases where Insular minuscule would be expected (Parkes 1991, 97).¹⁰³ But Anglo-Saxon minuscule replaced capitular uncial as a practical book hand at Wearmouth-Jarrow (Parkes 1991, 111). Capitular uncial remained in use through the tenth century, though it is rarely seen as the principal book hand by the ninth century (Bischoff 1990, 92). Although the scribes at Wearmouth-Jarrow had relied on uncial, rustic capitals, and capitular uncial to replicate Roman books, the eighth century witnessed the retirement of these scripts as primary book hands in favor of the less time-consuming Insular minuscule. Northumbrian scribes consciously adapted the local script to copy books more quickly, foreshadowing the adoption of new notational symbols, including the virgule, to increase efficiency and clarity.

Beginning around 746, the Wearmouth-Jarrow scriptorium, as well as other Northumbrian scriptoria, faced increased demand from the British Isles and the continent for books, especially the works of Bede. At this time, Boniface, the archbishop of Mainz, requested

¹⁰³ It can be seen in the Codex Amiatinus, the Stonyhurst or St Cuthbert Gospel, the Leningrad Bede, and at least two other manuscripts (Lowe 1960, 9). Stonyhurst Gospel: London, British Library, Loan 74 (formerly Stonyhurst College, Lancashire, Society of Jesus); see Gneuss and Lapidge (2014) number 501.2 and Lowe (1960) plate VII (*CLA* 260). The two remaining manuscripts are Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 819 (*CLA* 235) and Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale Lat. 10837. In Gneuss and Lapidge (2014), Bodley 819 is number 604. See Lowe (1960) plate XXXVIIIe. For Paris, Lat. 10837, see Gneuss and Lapidge (2014) number 897 and Lowe (1960) plate XXXVIIIb (*CLA* 606b)

copies of Bede from Egbert, the archbishop of York (Tangl 1916, no.75; Parkes 1991, 109). Soon after, Boniface requested copies of Bede from Hwaetberht, then abbot of Wearmouth-Jarrow (Tangl 1916, no. 76). Approximately twenty to thirty years later, Lul, then archbishop of Mainz wrote to Aethelbert, then archbishop of York, requesting copies of Bede yet again (Tangl 1916, no. 125). Around 764, Hwaetberht's successor Cuthbert wrote to Lul, explaining that the winter had reduced the output of the scribes, as had a labor shortage on the production line (Tangl 1916, no. 116). Since Bede was the house author at Wearmouth-Jarrow, the demand for his works fell directly upon the scriptorium there, producing a crisis by the time of Cuthbert's letter to Lul (Parkes 1991, 111). To quickly produce Bede's works, scribes had to replace uncial or capitular uncial as a primary book hand.

The earliest surviving fragments of Bede are in capitular uncial and date from the second quarter of the eighth century.¹⁰⁴ By the third quarter of the eighth century, however, the works of Bede are produced in Insular minuscule to help meet demand (Gameson 2015, 27). Insular minuscule required less time to write, which was helpful for making multiple copies, whereas uncial scripts, including the popular capitular uncial, took up more parchment and time to produce (Parkes 1991, 112; Gameson 2015, 27). Uncial was used to create a grand, finished look, exemplified by the spacious Codex Amiatinus. Insular minuscule, on the other hand, allowed the content of a text to be prioritized over its finish.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, Insular minuscule could be compressed to use the available space as economically as possible (Parkes 1991, 112).

¹⁰⁴ Bückeburg, Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv, MS Dep. 3 (*CLA* 1233); Darmstadt, Hessische Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek, MS 4262 (Gneuss and Lapidge 2014, no.818; *CLA* 1822).

¹⁰⁵ Since copies of Bede were requested from Anglo-Saxon missionaries in Germany, the scribes of Wearmouth-Jarrow may have thought Insular minuscule more appropriate than the uncial scripts associated with Rome (Parkes 1991, 112).

Capitular uncial and rustic capitals were not completely abandoned; they survive as display scripts in extracts from authorities embedded in the text (i.e., *lemmata*) and papal farewell and date formulae during the second half of the eighth century (Gameson 2015, 27; Parkes 1991, 112). As a result of the crisis in book production at Wearmouth-Jarrow, Northumbrian scribes prioritized more economical, indigenous methods of writing over their reverence for Roman ways (Gameson 2015, 27). Changes to primary book hands were accompanied by modifications to Roman standards in punctuation and word spacing.

Insular Punctuation

Irish and Anglo-Saxon punctuation systems were initially borrowed from continental Latin manuscripts and popular grammar handbooks. Insular scribes encountered the punctus or point and the seven-shaped mark or *positura* in continental manuscripts: (Parkes 1991, 6). Both helped readers to break sentences into their grammatical constituents, and their use was based on Donatus's *Ars grammatica* and Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae sive Origines* (6-7). Donatus describes a three-point system of *distinctiones* for marking the structures of sentences in a text that, though frequently recommended in grammar handbooks and other reference works, was applied inconsistently or not at all in continental manuscripts. The system of *distinctiones* taught in the grammars was intended for majuscule scripts because the *media distinctio* was placed in the middle of the line. In minuscule scripts, however, the *media distinctio* would be difficult to distinguish from the text (Parkes 1993, 32). Irish scribes deliberately adapted this system to make local scripts more easily accessible.

Distinctiones and the *positura*—the seven-shaped mark described by Isidore (*Etym.* 1.21.9) as “a mark opposite to the paragraph,” which “separates ends from beginnings” (Barney et al. 2006)—fused to indicate the length or importance of a pause through a graded system. Irish

scribes placed the seven-shaped mark or punctus on the line of writing to improve legibility in all types of script (Parkes 1991, 6). Rather than a point at the bottom, middle, and top of the line, early-seventh-century manuscripts show that Irish scribes applied the seven-shaped mark once, twice, or three times to designate increasingly important pauses (7-8). In the later seventh or early eighth centuries, the point could occur in the same pattern so that one, two, or three points indicated more significant pauses (Parkes 1993, 32). Some ninth-century Irish and Welsh manuscripts reveal a triple-dot and double-dot system of punctuation in which the three dots mark the ends of sections while two indicate the ends of sentences (Parkes 1993, 32).¹⁰⁶

Anglo-Saxon scribes borrowed many of their paratextual features from the Irish, including the graded system of punctuation in which the number of marks corresponds to the pause's importance (Parkes 1991, 12). Yet some Anglo-Saxon manuscripts contain the single-point punctuation of their Italian exemplars, a byproduct of the reverence Anglo-Saxons had for the Roman textual tradition (16).¹⁰⁷ One manuscript produced at Wearmouth-Jarrow in the early eighth century features the *hedera*, an ancient ivy-leaf symbol used at the ends of sections or chapters in antiquity and repurposed by Anglo-Saxon scribes to separate text from commentary

¹⁰⁶ The arrangement of points and different patterns of points in some Insular manuscripts could be more decorative than functional, resulting in inconsistent patterns of marking (Parkes 1993, 24). The seven-shaped mark could be repeated to fill the remaining space on the line or adorned with colored points (Parkes 1991, 9). Points could be arranged vertically, mimicking a semicolon, or in a triangle, rather than horizontally (Parkes 1993, 304). Points and the seven-shaped mark could occur together, usually as two points followed by a seven-shaped mark (Parkes 1993, 304). In addition, in the ninth century, Irish and Welsh scribes began to insert construe marks: patterns of dots and marks to clarify the grammatical or syntactical relationship of words in a sentence (94).

¹⁰⁷ Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 820h (*CLA* 129). In Gneuss and Lapidge (2014), the manuscript is number 121.

(Parkes 1991, 16-17).¹⁰⁸ This symbol must have been encountered in the Roman books Benedict Biscop and Ceolfrid brought back from Italy and applied to a copy of Bede's *Commentary on Proverbs* (Parkes 1991, 107). Even though Irish scribes freely modified the *distinctiones* system to accommodate minuscule script, the authority of the Roman exemplars at Wearmouth-Jarrow continued to influence the symbols present in eighth-century manuscripts. From the ninth century on, punctuation was inserted to communicate the intention of a text as the scribe understood it (Parkes 1991, 17).¹⁰⁹

The Case of the Virgule

At approximately the same time that Insular minuscule spread throughout Britain, replacing Roman uncial, rustic capitals, and capitular uncial, the virgule begins to show up in books written in Northumbria. The manuscripts in which it appears are not produced in a single scriptorium or limited to a specific text. In the late seventh and eighth centuries, the virgule occurs singly as a runover or overflow mark; when scribes run out of space on the line, they place a slash above or below the line in question and continue. The slash is doubled or tripled and rarely accompanied by other symbols from the seventh to ninth centuries; the double or triple virgule, sometimes preceded by one or two points, indicates runover lines carried to the line above or below. In the eighth and ninth centuries, the virgule punctuates either the main pause or lesser medial pauses. We have seen that Insular punctuation is based on the three-point punctuation system recommended in Latin grammars and modified with the seven-shaped

¹⁰⁸ Bodley 819. Parkes (1991, 106) reassigns the date of this manuscript to the first half of the eighth century.

¹⁰⁹ Punctuation became a central part of what Parkes calls "the grammar of legibility," or the collection of visual devices deployed by scribes to convey the structure of a text; in other words, the grammar of legibility is the set of paratextual conventions that facilitate the reader's access to texts (Parkes 1997, 102).

positura, a critical symbol described by Isidore of Seville. But none of Isidore's critical signs designate runover lines nor do any of the grammars' critical signs or punctuation marks look like the virgule. The symbol that most resembles the slash is the acute accent, but it is difficult to see how Insular scribes could have derived the runover or punctuating virgule from this mark. So what factors encourage the virgule to appear and persist in Insular manuscripts from the seventh to ninth centuries? By assessing the books in which the virgule occurs for similarities in production, including location, script, and the presence of other notational systems, we can hypothesize how the virgule enters Irish and Anglo-Saxon scribes' general repertory of notational symbols and what relationship the mark has, if any, with Roman exemplars in the British Isles. We shall limit our survey of manuscripts to the seven books containing the single runover virgule. Not only does the sample size offer consistency in marking, as opposed to the double or triple virgule, it also includes the earliest dated books in which the virgule appears.

Durham Gospels

In the Durham Gospels and the Stonyhurst or St Cuthbert Gospel, two manuscripts dated to the late seventh and early eighth centuries, the oblique line functions as a runover mark. The Durham Gospels were written in Northumbria, in the Cathedral Chapter at Durham or at Lindisfarne, in the late seventh or early eighth centuries (Gneuss and Lapidge 2014, n. 220; Verey et al. 1980, 19).¹¹⁰ The manuscript containing the Durham Gospels is a composite volume

¹¹⁰ The manuscript is made up of quires of ten leaves with one exceptional quire of eight leaves (Verey, et al. 1980, 16). Insular and continental practices differ in terms of preparing membranes and ruling texts (Bischoff 1990, 87). In fifth- and sixth-century continental books, four sheets were folded to form quires of eight leaves, and the flesh-side of the membrane faced a hair-side (Brown 1984, 321-32). Sheets were pricked in the outer margins and ruled before folding to demarcate lines and columns through the eighth century. In the typical Insular quire of the seventh century, on the other hand, five sheets were folded to make ten leaves, though quires could be irregular, consisting of six, eight, ten, or twelve leaves. Hair-sides were not visually

of two incomplete Latin Gospel books; the first half (fols. 2-102) of the manuscript—what is known as the Durham Gospels—is primarily copied in Insular half-uncial (i.e., capitular uncial) with spaces between most words (Verey et al. 1980, 19, 37).¹¹¹ The Durham Gospels are copied in long lines of one column per page (Verey et al. 1980, 16).¹¹² The main corrector of the Durham Gospels added triangular or vertical groups of points to distinguish shorter divisions of text corresponding to *per cola et commata* formatting (Verey et al. 1980, 17). Minor pauses are marked by one or two points and followed by a small initial (Verey et al. 1980, 17).¹¹³ Though most of the text is in half-uncial, the scribe applies a formal Insular minuscule at the ends of lines, the last lines of pages, and runovers for compression or decoration (Verey et al. 1980, 36). In most cases, runovers are marked with a simple oblique stroke, also known as the apex (f.3v), but they can also be serified so that the two ends of the virgule are angular or emphasized (fols.

distinct from flesh-sides; sheets were pricked in both margins and ruled after folding (Brown 1984, 322). Beginning in the mid-seventh century, there were experiments in continental manuscript preparation on the British Isles, including at Wearmouth-Jarrow. From the eighth century on, Anglo-Saxon quires consisted of eight leaves, following the continental practice (Brown 1984, 323). Generally speaking, the differences between Roman and Insular manuscript preparation were a result of the British Isles' isolation from methods of book production on the continent (Brown 1984, 324).

¹¹¹ See Gneuss and Lapidge (2014) number 221 for the latter half, which Verey et al. (1980, 19) refers to as “The Uncial Leaves.”

¹¹² Its closest relatives are the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Echternach Gospels, though both of these manuscripts are written *per cola et commata* in two columns per page (Verey et al. 1980, 15). The long lines are a feature of the earliest extant Insular Gospel books from the seventh century, such as Usanianus Primus, Durham A.II.10, and the Book of Durrow (Verey et al. 1980, 17).

¹¹³ These points can appear slightly hooked, like the modern comma, and they can occur in a variety of combinations with other symbols to denote quotations or correction marks (*signes de renvoi*) (Verey et al. 1980, 27). The arrangement of two or three points in a triangle at the end of Eusebian sections (i.e., divisions of the Gospels), or in a horizontal line at the end of some lines, is another feature of the earliest Insular Gospel books, including Durham A.II.10 and the Book of Durrow (Verey et al. 1980, 17).

4v, 15r) or dotted with small red points (fols. 38*v, 31v; Verey et al. 1980, 37-8).¹¹⁴ The Durham Gospels and the Stonyhurst Gospels are quite similar in terms of content and script.

Stonyhurst Gospels

The Stonyhurst or St Cuthbert Gospel is the oldest intact European book. It was copied at Wearmouth-Jarrow in the late seventh or early eighth century, probably the early eighth.¹¹⁵ It is primarily written in capitular uncial with liturgical rubrics added, for the most part, in Anglo-Saxon minuscule (Lowe 1960, 18; Gameson 2015, 23).¹¹⁶ The scribe deploys runovers to compress the ends of lines; these mostly occur in the last line of a page. Runovers are written above or below the line but are only sometimes marked by an oblique stroke when they occur above the line (fols. 9v, 22r; Brown 1969, 60). Most words are separated (Brown 1969, 61). Already by the late seventh and early eighth centuries in Ireland, word spacing was becoming an

¹¹⁴ When runovers occur without the virgule, they are often additions by the corrector because the original scribe forgot (Verey et al. 1980, 38).

¹¹⁵ See Breay and Meehan (2015, 3-4) for theories on the manuscript's date. The manuscript is small in size and contains only the Gospel of John (Breay and Meehan 2015, 1).

¹¹⁶ This script associates the manuscript with the Codex Amiatinus (Brown 1969, 6). Like the Codex Amiatinus and Ceolfrid Bible fragment, the Stonyhurst Gospels imitate the sixth-century Italian manuscripts brought to Wearmouth-Jarrow by Benedict Biscop and Ceolfrid (Brown 1969, 6-7). Hair- and flesh-sides are distinguishable from each other, unlike the typical Insular membrane, in which hair- and flesh-sides are indistinguishable (Brown 1969, 58). Quires consist of eight leaves, except for one that has nine leaves (Brown 1969, 56). Besides its continental quiring, the manuscript is produced according to predominately Insular procedures (Gameson 2015, 17). The manuscript was pricked and ruled after folding, a trait of Insular manuscripts, as is the diminution of letters after an initial (Lowe 1960, 18; Brown 1969, 6). On the continent, the initial letter of what we would call a paragraph had been moved to the margin as early as the second century and enlarged by the fifth century (Brown 1993, 80; Thompson 1912, 59). In turn, Irish scribes sometimes enhanced the initial letter with decoration to create a *littera notabilior*. They employed an eye-catching device known as diminution at the beginnings of sections: the letters following a *littera notabilior* gradually decreased in size until they matched the height of the regular text (Parkes 1991, 8).

expected feature of Latin texts (Parkes 1991, 4).¹¹⁷ The text is formatted in single columns *per cola et commata*; otherwise, a mid-line point occurs rarely to reinforce the formatting, and punctuation is largely made up of gaps and enlarged initials (Brown 1969, 61; Gameson 2015, 22). The manuscript's small size, overlong lines, and reduced script suggest that it was designed to be as compact as legibility allowed (Gameson 2015, 23). The Durham and Stonyhurst Gospels are both products of Northumbrian scriptoria. They are predominantly copied in capitular uncial with minuscule included, it seems, as a space-saving device. The *per cola et commata* formatting of the Stonyhurst Gospels is reproduced in the punctuation of the Durham Gospels. Though these two manuscripts both contain biblical works, not all manuscripts containing the runover virgule are liturgical.

Iona Manuscript of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*

The same mark occurs in the early eighth century in the Iona manuscript of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* and in the first or second quarter of the eighth century in a manuscript containing the Gospels. The Iona manuscript of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* or *The Life of Columba*, the saint who founded the monastery at Iona Abby, is the oldest extant version of Columba's biography (Anderson and Anderson 1991, liv). Produced at Iona, the manuscript is copied in an early form of Irish minuscule before 713. It is formatted in two columns of long lines (Lowe

¹¹⁷ The first spaced Latin manuscripts in western Europe were copied in Ireland (Saenger 1997, 83). Insular scribes were one of the first to distinguish words from one another and to aim for consistent word spacing in Latin texts (Bischoff 1990, 173). As evidenced by the Bangor Antiphonary (Milan, Ambrosiana, MS C.5. inf; CLA 311) copied c. 680-691 and the Iona manuscript of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* (Schaffhausen, Stadtbibl. Ms Gen. 1; CLA 998) copied before 713 (Parkes 1991, 4). Shorter words, such as prepositions, were often joined to the following word through the Carolingian period (Bischoff 1990, 173). Scribes in Romance-speaking areas did not begin separating words until the tenth and eleventh centuries (Donoghue 2018, 34-5). By the second half of the tenth century, most Western scribes separated words as they copied (Parkes 1993, 98).

1934-72, 998).¹¹⁸ The Iona manuscript is one of the earliest Insular manuscripts to provide spaces between words. Pauses are signified with a medial point, while ends of chapters are marked with two points or a point and hooked point. One oblique stroke, and very rarely two, indicates runovers, which are carried to the line above (e.g., p.7) (Lowe 1934-72, 998). The Iona manuscript of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* is unlike the Durham or Stonyhurst Gospels in origin, script, and content.

Royal Athelstan Gospels

The Royal Athelstan Gospels was produced in the first or second quarter of the eighth century in Northumbria, perhaps at Lindisfarne (McKendrick, et al. 2011, 97; Brown 2007, plates 34-35).¹¹⁹ The volume was intended for performative reading in churches. Its text is formatted *per cola et commata* in two columns with liturgical rubrics. And the well-worn state of the manuscript suggests it saw daily use (McKendrick, et al. 2011, 97). The script is half-uncial (i.e., capitular uncial) with display capitals modeled after continental exemplars (Kenyon 1900, plate XII; Brown 2003, 48).¹²⁰ A virgule indicates that the blank space at line end has been used to conclude words of the lines below, while a curved mark angled in the opposite direction (\\) finishes letters from the lines above (f. 38) (Kenyon 1900, plate XII). This manuscript is copied in capitular uncial and produced in Northumbria, like the Durham and Stonyhurst Gospels. Its script is also shared with the Iona manuscript of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*, as is the formatting

¹¹⁸ The vellum is prepared according to Irish practice, gathered in quires of twelve, and ruled after folding (Lowe 1934-72, 998).

¹¹⁹ London, British Library, Royal I. B. vii. See Gneuss and Lapidge (2014) number 445 (*CLA* 213). The manuscript is similar in content to the Lindisfarne Gospels but not in style (McKendrick, et al. 2011, 97).

¹²⁰ Initials are moderately decorated in the Anglo-Saxon style (Kenyon 1900, XII).

in two columns. The copy of *Vita Columbae* is not an outlier in terms of origin, however; the runover virgule occurs in another manuscript produced in Ireland.

Multi-Text Isidore Manuscript

In the mid-eighth century, a multi-text Isidore manuscript, the Moore Bede, and the Leningrad Bede feature the slash. Unlike the manuscripts we have discussed so far, which comprise the Gospels or hagiographic material, this multi-text Isidore manuscript from the eighth century contains grammatical material, specifically *De vitiis (linguae)* concerning barbarisms, attributed to Isidorus Iunior (“Basel, Universitätsbibliothek, F III 15d” 2013).¹²¹ The volume was copied in Ireland and belonged to the monastery at Fulda. The text, colophons, and headings are all in an expert, rapid Irish minuscule, and the main text is in long lines of two columns.¹²² The medial point marks both main and lesser pauses, while a virgule indicates that runover lines are carried to the line above (f. 5v or p.12) (Lowe 1934-72, 847). Despite the speed of the script, words are evenly spaced. Besides the Durham Gospels, most manuscripts containing the virgule include sparse or simple punctuation, namely the point. In the Durham and Stonyhurst Gospels, minuscule allowed scribes to conserve space, but this manuscript reveals the local script also saved time. So far in our survey, only books copied in Ireland have used minuscule for the main book hand, but the next codex shows that that minuscule could be used for the main text in Northumbria as well.

¹²¹ Basel, Universitätsbibliothek, F. III. 15d (CLA 847).

¹²² The letters following an initial gradually reduce in size. The quiring is irregular. *Signes de renvoi*, or points and virgules (./) signify omissions.

Moore Bede

A mid-eighth century Northumbrian manuscript contains the oldest extant copy of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Blair and Mynors 1959, 11). Better known as the Moore Bede, this volume was copied between 734 and 737 perhaps at Wearmouth-Jarrow (Blair and Mynors 1959, 25-27, 29). It may have been sent overseas along with other English books and theological works of Bede's in the eighth century (Blair and Mynors 1959, 25). The volume is written in Anglo-Saxon minuscule with an uncial of North English type for headings (Blair and Mynors 1959, 15; Lowe, 1960, 24). Unlike the Insular books above, space is not left between words, probably because of the scribe's desire to conserve space (Blair and Mynors 1959, 18-19). Original punctuation is rare, consisting only of a single point (Blair and Mynors 1959, 23). Runovers are set off by an oblique stroke, sometimes so lightly drawn it is difficult to make out in the facsimile (fols. 3r, 71v, 76v, 124r, 125v, 126r) (Blair and Mynors 1959, 15). Unlike the Iona or Isidore manuscripts, the Moore Bede is copied in Insular minuscule without spaces. In the case of this book, produced during the period of increased demand for Bede in the British Isles, minuscule saved space; perhaps unseparated text saved time (Blair and Mynors 1959, 25). The other three Northumbrian books in our survey are copies of the Gospels in capitular uncial. The minuscule of this Northumbrian manuscript may reflect the non-liturgical content of the book or the tight deadline against which it was produced. Around the same time that the Moore Bede was made, another volume of Bede was copied at Wearmouth-Jarrow in minuscule; this book reveals how the labor crisis at Wearmouth-Jarrow and the increasing popularity of Insular minuscule as a primary book hand contributed to the use of the runover virgule.

Leningrad Bede

The Leningrad Bede was produced in Northumbria at Wearmouth-Jarrow shortly after the Moore Bede (Gneuss and Lapidge 2014, n. 846; Parkes 1991, 98). It contains the second oldest extant version of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (Arngart 1952, 13). The script is Anglo-Saxon minuscule with capitular uncial (Arngart 1952, 18; Lowe 1960, 23).¹²³ Unlike the Moore Bede, this volume separates words and features copious punctuation, including a medial point and smaller points on the line of writing for pauses, commas for various purposes, and an array of symbols in combination for ends of sections (Arngart 1952, 21-22). An oblique stroke, sometimes shaped like a bracket, separates runovers from the text (Arngart 1952, 22). The manuscript was completed in the mid-eighth century in two stages by four scribes (Arngart 1952, 16-18; Parkes 1991, 101, 100). Scribes C and D completed their portions sometime after 731, while Scribes A and B finished in 746, making 746 the date of the final correction of the manuscript (Parkes 1991, 101, 100). The four scribes' handwriting represents different stages in the scriptorium's application of Insular minuscule to books. By determining how frequently each scribe applies runover virgules, we can learn how this marking trend was impacted by the demand for Bede and the replacement of capitular uncial with Insular minuscule as a primary book hand.

¹²³ In the Leningrad Bede, Wearmouth-Jarrow scribes copy the Roman practice of using uncial and rustic capital for the papal farewell and date formulae (Parkes 1991, 14-15). Anglo-Saxon scribes applied the Insular and Roman scripts available to them to distinguish between the commentary on a biblical passage and the passage itself (i.e., a *lemma*) (Parkes 1991, 14). By changing the script according to the content of the text, the Anglo-Saxons developed a hierarchy of scripts in which uncial and rustic capital signaled authoritative extracts, while Insular minuscule signified the regular text. In Bodley 819, for example, *lemmata* are in uncial. London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius A. xiv (CLA 1703) is a copy of the Leningrad Bede, which also uses Roman scripts for the farewell and date formulae of quoted papal documents; see Gneuss and Lapidge (2014) number 367.

Of the four scribes, Scribe D's hand is distinct; it likely resembles the Insular minuscule of the Wearmouth-Jarrow exemplar from which he copied. Scribe D's handwriting reflects an earlier stage of Insular minuscule when the script was beginning to be applied to books and it had not yet conformed to Wearmouth-Jarrow's standards of scribal discipline (Parkes 1991, 104). The other scribes' handwriting is more disciplined in terms of the shapes of letters, matters of layout, and justification of lines, as well as fewer variant letter forms. Their increased precision in forming Insular minuscule resembles the discipline with which Wearmouth-Jarrow scribes copied capitular uncial in the Stonyhurst Gospel (Parkes 1991, 104-106). The same discipline that had been applied to capitular uncial in the late seventh and early eighth centuries was applied to Insular minuscule beginning in the mid-eighth century (Parkes 1991, 104). Scribe C's handwriting is closer to that of Scribe D than that of Scribes A or B; it represents a midpoint in the process of Insular minuscule's evolution. The similarity of Scribe C with D and Scribes A and B with each other suggests that the script's evolution was somewhat rapid, likely hastened by demand for copies of Bede (Parkes 1991, 106). By comparing the number of runover virgules present in the sections copied by Scribes A, B, C, and D, we can assess how this marking trend changes between the early 730s and the late 740s. This comparison will reveal that the swift standardization of Insular minuscule encouraged scribes to make use of the runover virgule as a time- and space-saving measure.

In folios 1 to 32v, Scribe A applies an angular form of the virgule to runover lines at least twice (f. 26b); when the runover occurs on the bottommost line, the word is dropped below and none of the scribes use a virgule. Scribe B marks runovers very frequently in folios 33 to 63v with an angular form of the virgule (fols. 37b, 41a, 42a, 43a, 46a, 50a, 52a, 52b, 53a, 54a, 55a, 60b, 61b, 62a), sometimes with a typical virgule (fols. 48a, 48b, 49a) and, rarely, a reversed

virgule (\) (f. 39a; Parkes 1991, 100).¹²⁴ Scribe C applies a curved, reverse virgule (f. 67a) and a more angular version of the same mark (f. 68a) infrequently, but Scribe C also copies the smallest portion of the manuscript, spanning only folios 64 to 68. Scribe D uses the virgule (f. 158a) and the reverse virgule (f. 158b) quite rarely from folios 68v to 161 (Parkes 1991, 100).¹²⁵

Of the four scribes, Scribe B uses the virgule as a runover mark most frequently. Though Scribes A and D apply the virgule as a runover mark approximately the same amount, Scribe D copies a section roughly three times longer than the portions copied by Scribes A and B. Thus, Scribe D appears to be least familiar with marking runovers. Scribe C's smaller contribution to the manuscript makes it difficult to offer any definitive statements about runover markings. Scribes A and B both use the angular virgule, though Scribe A uses it less frequently and Scribe B infrequently uses the simple oblique stroke or reversed virgule. Scribe C and D, on the other hand, vary the virgule's form: Scribe C marks runovers with the angular, bracketed virgule and a reverse, curved virgule, while Scribe D uses the oblique stroke and the reverse virgule.

Since Scribes A and B represent a later stage in the evolution of Insular minuscule, we might conclude that the virgule's form becomes more consistent, and it occurs more frequently in the 740s. As the scribes at Wearmouth-Jarrow standardize the appearance of Insular minuscule, the angular virgule becomes the customary method of marking runover lines.

Because Scribe D, and, to a lesser extent, Scribe C represent an earlier stage in the evolution of

¹²⁴ Often the virgule is preceded by a point (less often, a comma), which appears to coincide with a pause in the line (fols. 37a, 45a); these are differentiated from a point and smaller virgule (resembling half a percent sign) written slightly above the text to signify transposition (f. 43b) or marginal addition (Arngart 1952, 22).

¹²⁵ Scribe D also uses the transposition sign (f. 136b), which resembles a percentage sign, and the marginal gloss sign (fols. 89a, 90b), which also looks like a percent sign, sometimes with two slash marks.

Insular minuscule, their infrequent use of the runover virgule with multiple, nonstandard forms may indicate a new or informal practice. The runover virgule's presence in the Durham, Stonyhurst and Royal Athelstan Gospels, manuscripts copied in Insular half-uncial (i.e., capitular uncial), reflects the shift in book hands from capitular uncial to Insular minuscule during the eighth century. Though the virgule might have first appeared in books copied in capitular uncial (during the period in which minuscule was not yet appropriate as a book hand), the mark is carried over into Insular minuscule, where it becomes a standard means of marking runovers. Insular minuscule saves space and time, and the runover mark is a space-saving measure, allowing scribes to accommodate more material on each page. This survey of seventh- and eighth-century Insular manuscripts is limited, but it reveals that as Insular minuscule developed into the predominant book hand, the runover virgule became a standard means of saving space to produce codices quickly.

Roman Influence and the Runover Virgule

Moreover, the runover virgule is less likely to appear in manuscripts that prominently feature Roman notation methods. The virgule does not occur in the Codex Amiatinus or the Ceolfrid Bible, two manuscripts deeply influenced by continental books. It does not appear in Bodley 819, a copy of Bede's commentary on Proverbs produced at Wearmouth-Jarrow. The volume is written in Insular minuscule and capitular uncial. The manuscript has been dated to the late eighth or early ninth century, but the early nature of the minuscule would indicate that it should be dated to the first half of the eighth century (Parkes 1991, 106). Although the manuscript is written in minuscule, it appears that the scribes attempted to retain features of their continental exemplars, specifically the ancient *hedera* (Parkes 1991, 106-107). Another copy of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* produced from the Leningrad Bede in the mid-eighth century at

Wearmouth-Jarrow lacks virgules for runovers.¹²⁶ Its careful Anglo-Saxon minuscule belongs to a later stage in the script's evolution, making it a good candidate for the runover virgule, but its punctuation is continental (Lowe 1934-72, 1703). The manuscript is the first extant non-liturgical volume to contain a *punctus versus* written at the time of copying. The *punctus versus* resembles a semicolon (;) or a dot above a seven-shaped comma; it identifies a complete statement and belongs to the liturgical system of punctuation known as *positurae*.¹²⁷ This manuscript may reflect the punctuation of documents from the *registrum* of Gregory the Great or perhaps the practice of John the arch-chanter, whom Benedict Biscop brought from Rome to train the Wearmouth choir on his fifth trip in 679 (Parkes 1991, 109; Farmer 1983, 190). In all of these cases, the commitment to Roman methods of book production may have conflicted with the application of Insular space-saving measures, such as minuscule as a book hand and the virgule as a runover mark. Despite the significant influence Roman exemplars had on early Irish and Anglo-Saxon books, the runover virgule is not associated with continental scripts or notational systems.

Variations of the Virgule

We have focused on the single runover virgule in Irish or Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, but the virgule could be doubled or tripled to signify runovers in Irish books from the seventh to ninth centuries. A mid-seventh-century manuscript copied in Irish cursive minuscule contains Isidore's *Etymologies*; in it, two parallel oblique strokes signify that runovers are carried to the

¹²⁶ This is London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius A. xiv. It uses Roman scripts for the farewell and date formulae of quoted papal documents.

¹²⁷ See Chapter 4.

line above (Parkes 1993, plate 8; Lowe 1934-72, 995).¹²⁸ During the eighth and ninth centuries, three liturgical manuscripts produced in Ireland feature double or triple virgules. One containing the four gospels is copied in Irish majuscule, another term for capitular uncial, and runovers carried to the line above are set off by two or three virgules (Lowe 1934-72, 901).¹²⁹ Another codex of the Gospel of John written in capitular uncial and Irish minuscule uses two oblique strokes to indicate runovers are carried to the line above (Lowe 1934-72, 902).¹³⁰ Finally, runovers carried to the line below are set off by three virgules in a missal fragment copied in capitular uncial and Irish minuscule (Lowe 1934-72, 979).¹³¹ This survey of books is admittedly small, but it suggests that the runover virgule received different treatment in Ireland than in Northumbria. Rather than the single virgule, the double or triple virgule became the preferred notation for runovers in capitular uncial or Irish minuscule.

In the second half of the eighth and the ninth centuries, we find the virgule operating as a punctuation mark on the continent, especially in the area near St. Gall. St. Gall was a continental center of Irish origin and a stopping point for pilgrims on their way to Rome. The library at St. Gall was well supplied with Irish manuscripts of all genres (Bischoff 1994, 13). Scribes in Swiss writing centers may have found the runover virgule in Irish books and repurposed it for punctuation. In the mid-eighth century, a book written in pre-Caroline minuscule at a Swiss writing center, perhaps St. Gall, shows an angular virgule or a semicolon (also known as the

¹²⁸ St. Gall, Stiftsbibl. 1399 a. 1. Lowe states that the manuscript was produced at an Irish center on the continent, perhaps Bobbio, but Parkes (1993, plate 8) agrees with Bischoff (1966, 180, 285), who argues the manuscript was written in Ireland.

¹²⁹ St. Gall, Stiftsbibl. 51.

¹³⁰ St. Gall, Stiftsbibl. 60.

¹³¹ St. Gall, Stiftsbibl. 1394 (Gneuss and Lapidge 2014, 929).

punctus versus) marking the main pause (Lowe 1934-72, 917).¹³² Three codices dating from the second half of the eighth century and copied in pre-Caroline minuscule reveal the virgule signifying main or medial pauses. Two are produced at St. Gall by the scribe Winithar; in the first, the medial point or the virgule marks multiple kinds of pauses, and, in the second, the virgule indicates the main pause (Lowe 1934-72, 903, 952).¹³³ The virgule also represents the main pause in the third manuscript, copied at a Swiss center under Burgundian influence (Lowe 1934-72, 887).¹³⁴ The virgule appears in four more manuscripts copied in minuscule and dated to the eighth or ninth centuries. Two originate in Alemannic writing centers. One features the virgule, the medial point, or the comma as a means of marking various pauses in pre-Caroline minuscule (Lowe 1934-72, 1017);¹³⁵ in the other, copied in Alemannic minuscule, the virgule or the medial point signify minor pauses (Lowe 1934-72, 1022).¹³⁶ During the same period, the virgule or the medial point mark lesser pauses in another codex written in early minuscule and produced in Switzerland or North Italy (Lowe 1934-72, 1003).¹³⁷ This is not an exhaustive list, but it suggests that the virgule is applied idiosyncratically as a punctuation mark in minuscule script. Scribes frequently exchange the virgule for other symbols, and they use it to signify major or minor pauses. Even manuscripts originating in the same scriptorium apply the virgule differently. More research is required to identify the factors encouraging the virgule to become a

¹³² St. Gall, Stiftsbibl. 194.

¹³³ These are St. Gall, Stiftsbibl. 70 (*CLA* 903) and St. Gall, Stiftsbibl. 907 (*CLA* 952) respectively.

¹³⁴ Lucerne, Stiftsarchiv St. Leodegar Schachtel No. 96.

¹³⁵ Zurich, Zentralbibliothek C 65.

¹³⁶ Sarnen, Bibliothek Des Kollegiums S.N.

¹³⁷ Schaffhausen, Stadtbibl. Min. 80 (fly leaves) + Zurich, Staatsarchiv A.G. 19, no. xlii.

punctuation mark; it seems safe to assume, however, that the mark's appearance in books copied in minuscule near St. Gall is a result of Irish influence.

From the seventh to ninth centuries, Insular scribes adopt the virgule as a space-saving tool in local scripts. By doing so, they prioritize economy over the authority of continental exemplars. In the next chapter, we shall learn how Irish and Anglo-Saxon developments in punctuation and script contributed to Carolingian educational reform. Both the virgule and the Insular system of *distinctiones* will take center stage in manuscripts produced at Charlemagne's palace school.

Chapter 4

Virgulae, Distinctiones, and Positurae: Notational Competition in Eighth- and Ninth-Century Carolingian Manuscripts

The Carolingian Renaissance took place over the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries CE with the greatest cultural activity lasting from 751 to 877 (Irvine 1994, 305). By the eighth century, Romance-language speakers and migrants from the British Isles or Western Europe required a common spoken and written standard of Latin for government, church, and education (Treitler 2003, 368).¹³⁸ Carolingian educational mandates created schools in every monastery, and the style of Latin prescribed in grammatical handbooks become the standard for manuscripts produced in the Carolingian empire. Scribes took over the traditional obligations of the reader, pre-interpreting texts by introducing word spacing, distinguishing between sections, and applying punctuation. At Charlemagne's palace school, the court scriptorium eventually located at Aachen, scribes turned to Irish and Anglo-Saxon books for models of manuscript preparation, formatting, decoration, and notation. Many late eighth-century codices produced at court display the Insular modification of *distinctiones* by patterns of points or commas. The virgule can be found in several of these books as a punctuation or runover mark. Despite the heavy reliance on Insular book-making procedures, especially punctuation, at the palace school, the virgule is not adopted in later court manuscripts or books produced in Carolingian scriptoria generally. In other words, the virgule was available to Carolingian scribes, but it did not become part of the general repertory of punctuation.

¹³⁸ During this period, vernacular Latin was changing into its offshoots Italian, French, and Spanish.

Why do court scribes institutionalize the Insular version of *distinctiones* but not the virgule? To answer this question, we shall assess the level of Insular influence felt at the palace school. Insular methods of book production were disseminated first through Irish and Anglo-Saxon monasteries established in Carolingian France, and then by the arrival of Northumbrian manuscripts at the court scriptorium. Next, we shall measure the extent to which Insular notational systems permeated some of the earliest products of the palace school, specifically the Ada, Godescalc, and Arsenal Gospels. Finally, we shall hypothesize why later court scribes elect to use other notational systems besides the virgule. For the first time in the history of Latin books, there are two punctuation systems available from which to choose: *distinctiones* and *positurae*. Carolingian scribes prefer both to the virgule.

Insular Influence in Carolingian France

While the palace school received some Irish and Anglo-Saxon works in the late eighth or early ninth centuries, Insular influence could already be felt in France as early as the sixth century. Luxeuil in France was founded by the Irish Saint Columbanus in the late sixth century.¹³⁹ Though the scriptorium had lost most of its Irish characteristics by 669, its script influenced books produced in France and Italy (Bischoff 1994, 16). Beginning in the mid-eighth century, the authors and works popular in Britain were copied at Corbie. These included works of Latin grammarians and Anglo-Saxons authors, such as Bede and Boniface (17). The influence of Anglo-Saxon scribes spread as monasteries were founded in France, including Echternach and

¹³⁹ The first Irish monastery founded on the continent was Bobbio (in northern Italy) in 613. The monastery's library contained many manuscripts originally made in Ireland (Bischoff 1994, 12, 9). Dogmatic and prescriptive rather than exegetical and interpretive works (e.g. commentaries) predominated. By the beginning of the eighth century, grammatical manuscripts were copied there by Irish and Italian hands (Bischoff 1994, 10).

Chelles. Near Paris and northeast France, scribes imitated British book hands, especially rustic capitals and uncial (18). Many Anglo-Saxon manuscripts reached Charlemagne's court at Aachen in the eighth century, including the Moore Bede (Blair and Mynors 1959, 25).¹⁴⁰

Moore Bede

In the last chapter, we found that the Moore Bede is one of at least seven Insular manuscripts in which the virgule marks runover lines. It was copied in Anglo-Saxon minuscule between 734 and 737 at a Northumbrian scriptorium (Blair and Mynors 1959, 25-27, 29). Words are not separated, and the point alone is used for punctuation (15, 18-19). As its name suggests, the codex holds Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (11). Already within a decade of Bede's death in 735, copies of his works were being sent to the continent (25). The Moore Bede reached the court of Charlemagne around 800 (Bischoff 1994, 67). An intermediate copy of the manuscript was made as an exemplar for the court library, from which a family of texts were produced and disseminated to libraries in West France (68). The Moore Bede cannot have been the only Insular manuscript to reach the continent or find a home at Charlemagne's court because codices produced at the palace school, such as the Ada, Godescalc, and Arsenal Gospels, are heavily influenced by books made in the British Isles.¹⁴¹ These manuscripts were either completed before the Moore Bede arrived at court or they display Insular features that are not found in the Moore Bede, namely the modified system of *distinctiones*.

¹⁴⁰ Cambridge, University Library, Kk.5.16 (CLA 139).

¹⁴¹ Charlemagne ordered his books be sold upon his death, making the holdings of his library difficult to reconstruct (Bischoff 1994, 56). See Bischoff (1994, 56-75).

Ada Gospels

The Ada Gospels were completed in the late eighth or early ninth century for Ada (Charlemagne's supposed sister).¹⁴² The text is primarily copied in Caroline minuscule with headings and running titles in square or rustic capitals (Lowe 1934-72, 1366).¹⁴³ Insular influence is clear in the production and presentation of the manuscript. Word spacing is regular.¹⁴⁴ Prickings or small slits appear in both margins, whereas continental books are usually pricked in just the outer margin (Lowe 1934-72, 1366; Brown 1984, 322). The Ada Gospels are copied in gold. They display full-page miniatures of the evangelists, ornamentation that is likely inspired by Irish carpet pages.¹⁴⁵ The punctuation is decidedly Insular. Multiple symbols signify the main pause: the high point is most frequent, but two points stacked vertically and slanted (:), two points placed horizontally above a comma (·,·), and a point followed by a comma (.,) also appear. Lesser pauses are signified by a point at mid-line or a virgule.¹⁴⁶ Questions are distinguished by the *punctus interrogativus*, an early form of the question mark introduced in the second half of the eighth century (Lowe 1934-72, 1366).¹⁴⁷ I am not suggesting that the scribes

¹⁴² Trier, Stadtbibliothek 22 (CLA 1366).

¹⁴³ A cross and the letter *F* (for *finis*) in red and gold ink mark the beginnings and ends of sections. Gold ink is also used for the headings in square or rustic capitals. The text is set out in double, banded columns (Lowe 1934-72, 1366). Abbreviations are few, a characteristic shared by manuscripts produced in the court scriptorium (Lowe 1934-72, 1366; Bischoff 1994, 83).

¹⁴⁴ Insular manuscripts feature consistent word separation as early as the late seventh century, but the same cannot be said of continental manuscripts until the tenth century (Parkes 1991, 4; Donoghue 2018, 34-5).

¹⁴⁵ Carpet pages exemplify the synthesis of decoration and layout in Irish manuscripts; these full-page illustrations or initials marked the divisions within texts or the beginning of a new text (Parkes 1991, 9).

¹⁴⁶ Final pauses are represented by multiple points or *distinctiones* in tables of *kapitula* as well (Parkes 1993, 33).

¹⁴⁷ The *punctus interrogativus* belongs to a system of punctuation called *positurae*, which was principally applied to liturgical texts (Parkes 1993, 35). See below.

of the Ada Gospels used the Moore Bede (or its intermediary copy) as an exemplar for notational systems; rather, the Ada Gospels display many Insular features that were likely borrowed from Insular books in Charlemagne's library. The runover virgules in manuscripts like the Moore Bede may have inspired scribes at the court scriptorium to apply the virgule as a punctuation mark in the Ada Gospels.

Godescalc Gospels

The Ada Gospels were produced by at least two scribes: folios 17 to 38^v are written in an early stage of Caroline minuscule, while a more advanced script begins with the new quire on folio 39. The first script resembles the hand of Godescalc, the scribe of the Godescalc Gospels, also known as the Godescalc Lectionary (Lowe 1934-72, 1366).¹⁴⁸ The lectionary was written at the order of Charlemagne between 781 and 783 in the palace school, perhaps before it moved to Aachen (Lowe 1934-72, 681).¹⁴⁹ For the most part, the text is in uncial, but Godescalc's dedicatory verses to Charlemagne are in Caroline minuscule (Lowe 1934-72, 681).¹⁵⁰ Like the Ada Gospels, the design and punctuation of the Godescalc Gospels betray Insular influence. The vellum is prepared according to the Insular method, and prickings are in both margins.¹⁵¹ Initials are elaborately decorated, and pages are enclosed with ornate borders (Lowe 1934-72, 681). Words are consistently separated (Steffens 1910, 45). At the end of each *vers*, a metrical structure that does not necessarily fit into a single line of writing, there are two points placed side-by-side (..), one point placed above another and followed by a comma (:.), or a comma set

¹⁴⁸ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Nouvelles acquisitions latins 1203 (CLA 1608).

¹⁴⁹ The scriptorium associated with the palace school was formed when the court was located somewhere between the upper Rhine and the Moselle (Bischoff 1994, 21).

¹⁵⁰ The verses are located at the end of the manuscript (fol. 126^v-127).

¹⁵¹ The hair- and flesh-sides of the vellum are not visually distinct (Brown 1984, 322).

below two side-by-side points (·,·).¹⁵² Ends of poems are marked by three points set out in a triangle with a comma below (Steffens 1910, 45). The medial point can also be found marking various pauses. The *punctus interrogativus* or question mark is also applied to this manuscript, as is the *punctus elevatus*, another symbol from the same system of punctuation as the *punctus interrogativus* (Lowe 1934-72, 681). The question mark and the comma below two points (·,·) also punctuate the Ada Gospels.

Arsenal Gospels

The Ada and Godescalc Gospels are linked to a third manuscript: the Arsenal Gospels.¹⁵³ The Caroline minuscule of the Arsenal Gospels is comparable to the first portion of the Ada Gospels and the dedicatory verses of the Godescalc Gospels (Bischoff 1994, 83; Lowe 1934-72, 681). It was copied at the palace school in the late eighth century. Like the Godescalc Gospels, the Arsenal Gospels were probably produced for royal presentation. The manuscript's preparation is Insular: prickings are in both margins and the sides of the vellum are indistinguishable from each other. Decoration and punctuation are unmistakably reminiscent of Irish and Anglo-Saxon books. Words are consistently separated and written in gold ink. The opening pages are finely decorated in an Insular fashion. A point on the line, a comma, or a point followed by a comma (.,) represent various pauses in the Arsenal Gospels. Groups of points, including the comma below two points (·,·), indicate the main pause, and the question mark denotes questions. Runover lines carried to the line above are signified with an angular bracket,

¹⁵² The same punctuation by multiple points occurs in the dedication verses by Godescalc (Parkes 1993, 33).

¹⁵³ Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 599 (CLA 517).

which resembles a form of the runover virgule in the Leningrad Bede.¹⁵⁴ The Arsenal Gospels share the point followed by a comma (.,) with the Ada Gospels; the comma below two points (:,:) occurs in all three manuscripts.

***Distinctiones* at the Palace School**

Clearly, the Insular methods of manuscript preparation, layout, and decoration influenced works produced by the palace school. The Ada, Godescalc, and Arsenal Gospels reveal that the Insular version of *distinctiones*, specifically by a pattern of multiple points, operated at Charlemagne's court in the eighth century (Lowe 1914, 228n1; Parkes 1993, 32).¹⁵⁵ *Distinctiones* were not commonly used before this period. Despite the consistent description of the three-point system in grammar handbooks from the fifth to seventh centuries, readers applied the points inconsistently. By the late eighth century, *distinctiones* were rarely applied even though the system was endorsed by two of the three most popular grammar handbooks during the Carolingian era—Donatus's *Art of Grammar* and Isidore's *Etymologies*—as well as other commentaries and educational works.¹⁵⁶ But by the ninth century, the majority of manuscripts display a two-fold system of *distinctiones*; the *media distinctio* is omitted and the *subdistinctio* appears either below the *distinctio*'s high point or at the bottom of the line (Parkes 1993, 31).¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ St. Petersburg, Russian National Library, Q.v.I.18 (CLA 1621). Scribes A and B use this angular virgule, for example, at f.26b and 37b.

¹⁵⁵ Punctuation by multiple points and produced by the same scriptorium can be seen in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France MS latins 8850. For manuscripts with multiple points produced at Corbie, see Munich, Clm 14487 (CLA 1301). Carolingian scribes sometimes altered the shape, placement, or number of *distinctiones* (Parkes 1993, 37).

¹⁵⁶ Martianus Capella's treatise does not cover *distinctiones*.

¹⁵⁷ There are several factors which may have contributed to the popularity of a simplified, two-fold system of pointing. It may have resulted from the ambiguous descriptions of punctuation in the grammars. M.B. Parkes (1993, 32) speculates that the order of *distinctio*, *subdistinctio*, and *media distinctio* in Donatus's *Ars Grammatica* "might have been taken to imply that the first two pauses were the most frequently used, or the most important." It may be that Donatus was merely

The two-fold system of *distinctiones* remained the predominant mode of punctuation through the twelfth century (Parkes 1993, 37).¹⁵⁸ The high and mid-line point can be seen in the Ada Gospels, the mid-line point in the Goddescalc Gospels, and the point on the line in the Arsenal Gospels; these simple points are combined with the Insular modification of *distinctiones* by

making inferences about the markings of the Greek grammarians who applied the three-point system as early as the second century BC. Unlike his contemporary Diomedes, Donatus does not offer examples of *distinctiones* at work, perhaps leaving his readers puzzled about how to punctuate within the sentence. The many names of the *media distinctio* may have exacerbated confusion. In Charisius and Diomedes the *media distinctio* is known as the *mora*, and Diomedes states that some call the mark *submedia* (Irvine 1994, 61; *GL* 1, 437). Given the preponderance of names for the mark and its overlapping function with the *subdistinctio* as a medial pause, readers may have preferred to simply ignore the *media distinctio* in favor of a straightforward final and medial pause. But the popularity of Isidore's *Etymologies*, which offers exceptionally clear advice on *distinctiones*, makes it unlikely that the two-point system arose simply out of confusion.

A more likely explanation for the two-point system's popularity on the continent is script. If *distinctiones* were placed according to the grammarians' rules, the *media distinctio* would sit in the middle of the line, where it would be indistinguishable from text written in minuscule script (Parkes 1993, 32; Lowe 1914, 228, n4). Already by the mid-eighth century, the writing centers Luxeuil, Bobbio, Corbie, and Tours (as well as perhaps Lyons and Reims) had developed localized styles of minuscule (Bischoff 1994, 20). Over the course of the mid-eighth and early ninth centuries, scriptoria in northeast France shifted to producing liturgical and non-liturgical Latin manuscripts with minuscule. For example, at Chelles near Paris, this transition process can be observed in the second half of the eighth century (Bischoff 1994, 25). At Corbie, the best-known writing center in France, a similar transition occurred during Charlemagne's reign (768-814) (Bischoff 1994, 26). And at Tours, cursive and half-cursive scripts developed into minuscule over the course of the mid- to late-eighth century; the Caroline minuscule of Tours eventually emerged and did not change throughout the ninth century (Bischoff 1994, 30-31). In all likelihood, the adoption of Caroline minuscule is the dominant reason the *media distinctio* disappeared and a two-point system prevailed (Parkes 1993, 32). That being said, ninth-century manuscripts copied in minuscule sometimes display the mid-line point.

¹⁵⁸ The points of *distinctiones* were written more densely to improve visibility beginning in the ninth century (Parkes 1993, 37).

patterns of points or commas.¹⁵⁹ The virgule also occurs in the Ada and Arsenal Gospels, but it is by no means popular as a punctuation or runover mark in Carolingian books generally.¹⁶⁰

Since Irish and Anglo-Saxon books evidently inspired the design of codices produced by the palace school, why is the virgule (either for runovers or punctuation) not adopted in later works by the court scriptorium? Why do Carolingian scribes prefer the two-point system or the Insular version of *distinctiones* to other Insular marks, such as the virgule? Although there are countless considerations involved with the adoption of symbols in a notational system, three major factors contribute to the virgule's exclusion from the general repertory of punctuation at the palace school and Carolingian scriptoria generally. First, the scribes at the court scriptorium operate with greater freedom than scribes at a monastery; but this fact only explains the rarity of the virgule in court books, not why *distinctiones* predominate in this scriptorium. Second,

¹⁵⁹ Outside the palace school, the two-point system is deployed in a copy of Hilary of Poitiers's *De Trinitate* made in the second half of the ninth century at Rheims by Hrannegil and Iozsmar (Parkes 1993, 249, 32). This manuscript, produced for Archbishop Hincmar to present to his cathedral church, is copied in minuscule with rustic capitals for headings and the first lines of a new section of text (Parkes 1993, 32, 34). The text is formatted in two columns with infrequent word spacing, which may reflect the amount of continuous text the scribe could retain from the exemplar as he made this copy (Parkes 1993, 249). The *distinctio* marks a *sententia* (a grammatical 'sentence' or rhetorical period) and the *subdistinctio* signifies pauses within the sentence (Parkes 1993, 32). Subsequently, the points were converted to *positurae* (249). This manuscript is Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS lat. 12132; fol. 20^v is reproduced in Parkes (1993, plate 50). This copy used a sixth-century manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS lat. 2630; CLA 545a) as an exemplar; fol. 37 is reproduced in Parkes (1993, plate 49). A manuscript of Cicero's *Cato maior de senectute* copied in France during the ninth century shows the scribe applying *distinctiones* and *subdistinctiones*. It is copied in minuscule; new sections are demarcated by the *paragraphus* symbol, the letter K (for *capitulum*), and uncial script for initials and the first line of text. Word spacing is visible but inconsistent and formatting is *per cola et commata*. The scribe has applied the *punctus interrogativus* as well (Parkes 1993, 187). This manuscript is Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS lat. 6332; fol. 81^v is reproduced in Parkes (1993, plate 14).

¹⁶⁰ For example, it is not present in London, Cotton Claudius B.V, f.132v (CLA 1702). The runover virgule is also found in the Dagulf Psalter (see below), another early product of the court scriptorium.

distinctiones are recommended by grammar handbooks and Alcuin of York, the leader of Carolingian educational reform. *De litteris colendis* defines proper Latin usage according to the rules of the grammar handbooks, in which readers found guidelines for *distinctiones*, while Alcuin specifically requests scribes apply the two-fold system of *distinctiones* in liturgical, and perhaps court, documents. Finally, despite the popularity of grammar textbooks, the introduction of new notational symbols by Insular scribes may have triggered a domino effect, encouraging the adoption of a completely new system of punctuation called *positurae*, which fulfilled the punctuating virgule's function and supplemented *distinctiones*.

Uniformity at the Court School

In a monastic scriptorium, the scribes undertook some writing instruction before producing books. This instruction contributed to a uniform style at the scriptorium, which could be developed or adjusted over time (Bischoff 1994, 83). Capitular uncial, for example, originated at Wearmouth-Jarrow and dominated during the first half of the eighth century (Parkes 1991, 97). The four hands of the Leningrad Bede reveal how Insular minuscule evolved at Wearmouth-Jarrow over the course of the eighth century.¹⁶¹ Monastic scriptoria in Carolingian France operated similarly. These schools reformed scripts or adopted new styles, and the evolution of the script was manifested in the products of the scriptoria. It is much more difficult to detect the coherent development of a style at the court school because personnel turnover was high. Some general principles must have been enforced there, including the relatively infrequent use of abbreviations and the choice of uncial or rustic capitals for display scripts. But the expectations for a uniform script were less rigorous (Bischoff 1994, 83). Caroline minuscule varied

¹⁶¹ See Parkes (1991, 93-120).

considerably from the hand of Godescalc to hands in other products of the court school, such as the Aachen, Brescia, and Brussels Gospels (Bischoff 1994, 82).¹⁶² The relaxed standards for script at the court school appear to have applied to notational systems as well, resulting in the inconsistent use of symbols such as the virgule. As we have seen in the Ada, Godescalc, and Arsenal Gospels, notation systems vary widely; all three manuscripts signify pauses with a variety of symbols in combination. Moreover, the virgule is applied differently in two of these manuscripts: as a punctuation mark in the Ada Gospels and an angular runover mark in the Arsenal Gospels. However, all three books incorporate one or two points, which implies that an underlying system of *distinctiones* was probably preferred at Charlemagne's court. There is evidence to suggest the two-point system may have been incorporated into the larger educational reforms of the Carolingian Renaissance: Alcuin, a scholar at York and a seminal figure in Carolingian educational reform, recommends that the scribes at Tours and perhaps Aachen punctuate by the two-point system.

***Distinctiones* and Educational Reform**

Around 782, Charlemagne charged Alcuin with developing a program of reform for the palace school (Treitler 2003, 367). First a student at York, then an advisor to Charlemagne, and finally an abbot at Tours, Alcuin (c. 731-804) was well-educated and a critical figure in instituting Carolingian reform efforts. As Charlemagne's appointed head of the court school, Alcuin brought the acclaimed teaching tradition of York and Northumbria to France (Irvine 1994, 314).¹⁶³ Alcuin exercised enormous influence over grammatical education and Carolingian

¹⁶² Aachen, Domschatzkammer Gospels; Brescia, Biblioteca Civica Queriniana, E.II.9; Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, 18723.

¹⁶³ Since he was born and bred at York, Alcuin would have spoken Old English, a Germanic language, and learned Latin as a second language. In *Versus de patribus, regibus, et sanctis*

textual practices (Irvine 1994, 313); his prestige played an important role in the adoption of two key mandates dictating educational reforms: the *Admonitio Generalis* and *De litteris colendis* (Irvine 1994, 327).

In 789, Charlemagne issued the *Admonitio Generalis*, a mandate establishing reading schools—the curriculum of which included liturgical chant, the reading of the Psalms, the grammars, and the proper copying or emendation of Christian works—and scriptoria in every monastery or cathedral (Irvine 1994, 307). The primary goal of ecclesiastical education was the ability to read and understand the Bible, and the study of liberal arts was intended to fulfill this Christian purpose (Atkinson 2003, 19). *De litteris colendis*, written around 790 and circulated to abbots and bishops, required bishoprics and monasteries to administer an education in literature so that scribes may please God by reading, writing, interpreting, and speaking correctly. Alcuin may have been the court scholar who drafted this mandate (Irvine 1994, 307). Understandable and correct texts were essential to disseminating Charlemagne’s mandates and preserving both secular government and religious power (Grotans 2006, 33). The mandate emphasized that

euboricensis ecclesiae, a praise poem celebrating York, Alcuin outlines the grammatical curriculum by which he learned Latin. After listing “the authoritative writings of Virgil, Statius, and Lucan”—Alcuin delineates “the masters of the grammatical art.” These include “Probus and Focas, Donatus and Priscian, / Servius, Eutyches, Pompeius, and Cominianus” (*quae Maro Virgilius, Statius, Lucanus et auctor; / artis grammaticae vel quid scripsere magistri, / quid Probus atque Focas, Donatus Priscianusve, / Servius, Euticius, Pompeius, Cominianus*) (Godman 1982, lines 1555-57). This list is not comprehensive, but it does tell us the grammars Alcuin would have read as a student at York (Irvine 1994, 327). The template of Alcuin’s *De Grammatica* is based on Donatus’s grammar and filled with material drawn from Priscian, Phocas, Isidore, and Cassiodorus (Irvine 1994, 317-9). Alcuin cites Donatus in his *Ars Grammatica* several times, the first of which is at 855C in *PL* 101, cols. 854-902. Pompeius, too, is quoted in Alcuin’s grammar (Godman, ed. 1982, 127nPompeius). We know that he drew on Priscian’s grammar in *Dialogus Franconis et Saxonis* and *De Orthographia* (Irvine 1994, 327). Though Alcuin cites Servius in his poem on York, he probably means *De Finalibus*, which is about metrical endings, not grammar; Alcuin’s use of Servius is minimal (Godman 1982, 127n1557).

readers must be well-equipped to perform the liturgy with correct pronunciation and address the court in the cultivated language exhibited in grammar handbooks (Grotans 2006, 35; Irvine 1994, 308). Grammars also instructed readers in exegesis, the correct means of interpreting Scripture, an aim of both the *Admonitio Generalis* and *De litteris colendis* (Irvine 1994, 308). The *Admonitio Generalis* and *De litteris colendis* ensured the correct reading and writing of documents for government administration, as well as the proper interpretation and performance of texts in public worship.

The standard, literary form of Latin taught in the grammars became the style of language produced by and expected from Charlemagne's courtiers and bureaucrats, resulting in a uniform model of Latin intended for improved communicability across the empire. *De litteris colendis* established that all writing in Charlemagne's realm reflect the dignity of the king by adhering to the precepts of grammar handbooks (Irvine 1994, 308).¹⁶⁴ The Carolingians sought to encourage the use of grammatically correct Latin, not necessarily to reform or improve the style of Latin being used (McKitterick 1989, 20). In other words, reform efforts were not intended to recreate classical Latin but to improve the communicability of the written language for use in government

¹⁶⁴ Three texts served as a foundation for the Carolingian educational program in the late eighth and early ninth centuries: the section on grammar in Martianus Capella's *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, Donatus's *Art of Grammar*, and Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* (Atkinson 1995, 21). Undoubtedly, the chief authority on grammar was Donatus. Not only does Alcuin's own *Disputatio de vera philosophia*, the preface to Alcuin's *De Grammatica* and his Christian justification of grammatical education, attest to this fact, but so do numerous ninth-century library catalogues, editions, and commentaries (Atkinson 1995, 20). Atkinson (1995) lists the works of Paul the Deacon, Peter of Pisa, Smaragdous (more commonly spelled Smaragdus), Walafrid Strabo, Murethach, Sedulius Scotus, and Remigius of Auxerre. In addition to *De Grammatica*, Alcuin also wrote an alphabetic compilation of words for purposes of spelling and pronunciation entitled *De Orthographia*, as well as *De Rhetorica*, and *De Dialectica*, treatises less popular than Donatus's grammar but espousing the same model of *grammatica*, which would endure until the twelfth century (Irvine 1994, 327, 314).

and church (McKitterick 1991, 133).¹⁶⁵ Punctuation may have been seen as a means of fulfilling the purpose of educational reform by clarifying the structure of Latin. Charlemagne and Alcuin's educational program broadcasted classical Latin texts to reinforce the lessons of the handbooks on grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, and metrics (Treitler 2003, 368-9). The standards of spoken and written Latin were dictated by the grammars in the same way that monasteries obeyed a monastic rule (Irvine 1994, 308). *De litteris colendis* institutionalized the standards for the language of administration and worship. Alcuin's poems and letters indicate that he partly dictated the standards of Latin for producing books at monastic schools, including punctuation.

During the Carolingian Renaissance, it was especially important to correct and clarify liturgical texts (Grotans 2006, 35).¹⁶⁶ In a poem likely written for the scriptorium at Tours, Alcuin advises scribes to pay attention to pointing when preparing these works:

May those who write the words of the holy law
and the sacred sayings of the holy fathers sit here.
Here let them take care not to insert their trifling words,
may their hands not make mistakes through trifles.
Let them zealously aim at corrected books,
may their flying pens go along the correct path.

¹⁶⁵ Grammars restricted to Latin morphology became popular as a result. Priscian's *Institutio de nomine et pronomine et verbo* listed classes of nouns, pronouns, verbs, and participles for non-native speakers of Latin (Law 2003, 143, 145). His *Institutiones grammaticae* received little attention until 800, when it became popular around Tours. Many more copies were made from the ninth to twelfth centuries as scholars annotated and abbreviated *Institutiones grammaticae*. Alcuin borrowed from it in *Dialogus Franconis et Saxonis de octo partibus orationis* and other works (Law 2003, 145). Priscian's popularity was due in part to the need for instruction in Latin as a second language. Parsing grammars, like the anonymous tenth-century *Magnus quae vox*, met the same demand; this type of grammar described a particular noun, verb, pronoun, or particle in each chapter and was first developed in the Carolingian Renaissance by Peter of Pisa, one of the scholars at Charlemagne's court (Law 2003, 148, 140). Grammars that focused on morphology and syntax enabled speakers of vernacular Romance languages to produce correct and elegant Latin, as required by *De litteris colendis*.

¹⁶⁶ As evidenced by the large number of codices for public worship exhibiting early Caroline minuscule (Law 2006, 35).

May they distinguish the proper meaning by *cola* and *commata*,
and put each point in its own place,
so that the lector does not read in error nor suddenly happens
to become silent before the pious brothers in church. (Irvine 1994, 330-1)¹⁶⁷

Alcuin encourages the scribes at Tours to “distinguish (*distinguant*) the proper meaning”—i.e. to interpret the text—“by *cola* and *commata*” in order to “put each point in its own place.” The terms *cola* and *commata* were often used to define the placement of *distinctiones* in the grammars, including in the works of Quintilian, Donatus, Diomedes, Servius, Sergius, Cledonius, Pompeius, Cassiodorus, and Isidore.¹⁶⁸ The *subdistinctio* was placed after a *comma* (plural *commata*), the *media distinctio* followed a *colon* (plural *cola*), and the *distinctio* occurred after a *periodus* or period, an utterance or rhetorical structure which expressed a single idea or where the sentence was complete (Parkes 1993, 13).¹⁶⁹ *Distinctiones* would prevent readers from incorrectly interpreting liturgical works by misunderstanding how parts of the sentence related to

¹⁶⁷ Irvine offers this translation of Alcuin, *Carmina*, 94, 1-10 in ed. E. Duemmler *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (MGH), *Poetae latini aevi carolini: Tomus I* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1884), 320, which reads: *Hic sedeant sacrae scribes famina legis, / Nec non sanctorum dicta sacrata partum; / Hic interserere caveant sua frivola verbis, / Frivola nec propter erret et ipsa manus, / Correctosque sibi quaerant studiose libellos, / Tramite quo recto penna volantibus eat. / Per cola distinguant proprios et commata sensus / Et punctos ponant ordine quosque suo, / Ne vel falsa legat, taceat vel forte repente / Ante pios fratres lector in ecclesia.*

¹⁶⁸ Of the grammars that describe punctuation use from the first to seventh centuries CE, Alcuin was well-acquainted with Donatus’s grammar and Pompeius’s commentary on Donatus, as well as Cassiodorus’s *Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning* and Isidore’s *Etymologies*. Moreover, *De litteris colendis* resulted in greater attention to grammar handbooks for proper Latin usage. According to the grammars, interpreting continuous script was traditionally considered part of the reading—specifically the discretion—process. Yet Alcuin clearly assigns scribes the task of not only dividing unseparated text into syntactically related units but also marking those units with punctuation.

¹⁶⁹ To review from Chapter 1, the *colon* is a member, division, or prosodic component of a period in prose; the *colon* is grammatically complete but logically incomplete. The *comma* is a short subdivision of the *colon* followed by a pause or disruption of the sense (Parkes 1993, 302). Isidore offers the most straightforward explanation of the use of these terms in poetry (*Etym.* 1.20.6).

each other; they would be especially helpful to those reading texts aloud. He directs scribes to point liturgical texts “so that the lector does not read in error nor suddenly happens / to become silent before the pious brothers in church.” *Distinctiones* are presented as speaker’s notes for liturgical documents—a lector’s guide for appropriately-timed pauses in a proper recitation. Alcuin is writing to scribes, such as those at Tours, who “zealously aim at corrected books” that would be distributed to monasteries.¹⁷⁰

In a letter penned to Charlemagne in 799, Alcuin expresses the hope that *distinctiones* can be subsumed under Charlemagne’s revival of learning:

Although major or secondary [division] (*distinctiones vel subdistinctiones*) produces the finest ornament in sentences, their use has nearly been lost because of the ignorance (*rusticitas*) of the copyists. Just as the dignity of scholarship and the equipment of beneficial learning are beginning to be renewed generally by the diligence of your nobility, so too it seems best that the use of these practices be restored in the hands of the copyists. (Irvine 1993, 330)¹⁷¹

Alcuin’s phrase “truly the major or secondary divisions of points” (*punctorum vero distinctiones vel subdistinctiones*) specifically refers to a punctuation system of only two points. The two-

¹⁷⁰ Traditionally, the lector would have been expected to adequately prepare texts for delivery as part of the reading process. Without having previously interpreted the text, the lector would be forced to determine relationships between words and parts of the sentence ad hoc—an undoubtedly difficult task. To prevent any mishap in church, however, Alcuin subsumes the discretion process under emendation; *distinctiones* fulfill two main functions of the reading process—distinguishing or interpreting continuous text and providing performance cues for oral delivery—but to ensure both functions are carried out correctly, Alcuin entrusts *distinctiones* to the scribe. There is some precedent for punctuation as emendation, for example, in Cassiodorus’s *Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning* (Halporn and Vessey 2004, 1.15.12).

¹⁷¹ Irvine translates *distinctiones vel subdistinctiones* as “major or secondary punctuation” as opposed to primary or secondary division. He offers this translation of Alcuin, *Epistolae* 172, 16-20 in ed. E. Duemmler, ed., *MGH, Epistolae Karolini aevi: Tomus II* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1895), 284-5, which reads: *Punctorum vero distinctiones vel subdistinctiones licet ornatum faciant pulcherrimum in sententiis, tamen usus illorum propter rusticitatem pene recessit a scriptoribus. Sed sicut totius sapientiae decus et salutaris eruditionis ornatus per vestrae nobilitatis industriam renovari incipit, ita et horum usus in manibus scribentium redintegrandus esse optime videtur.*

point system was especially popular at Tours throughout the ninth century as a result of Alcuin's poem to the scribes there (Parkes 1993, 32).¹⁷² When he describes *distinctiones* as "the finest ornament," it may seem that punctuation is only decorative or of little importance, but Cassiodorus similarly describes punctuation as "ornament": he writes, "so that we may add ornament to all this, place in each chapter punctuation marks...since they make the written text clear and bright" (Halporn and Vessey 2004, 1.15.12). The word "ornament" may entail the proper use of pauses to make learned, complex, and subordinated speech even more elegant or clear, while visually reinforcing a higher awareness and command of sentence forms, particularly the *comma* (distinguished by the *subdistinctio*) and the rhetorical period (by the *distinctio*).¹⁷³ Alcuin does not just recommend *distinctiones* for liturgical texts copied at the Tours scriptorium; his letter to Charlemagne addresses Carolingian educational reforms generally and practices at the palace school specifically.

Immediately following the passage quoted above, Alcuin identifies the same ignorance present at Tours in the court school:

And so, I am making little progress with the daily battle against ignorance (*rusticitate*) at Tours. But let your authority instruct the boys at court so that they publish most elegantly whatever the most clear eloquence of your thought has composed, so that, circulating

¹⁷² Evident in Rand (1929, vol. 2 plates 34 and 35). Though we cannot say with certainty that Alcuin's poem directly affected scribal punctuation at Tours, his status as head of educational reform would likely have encouraged Carolingian scribes to obey his directions.

¹⁷³ Both Cassiodorus and Alcuin recommend *distinctiones* specifically for religious texts, especially Scripture. In the Carolingian Renaissance the concern that readers may misunderstand the words of the holy fathers—that they may unknowingly adopt and propagate heretical beliefs—became paramount. Alcuin appears to insinuate that punctuation was always a scribal obligation when he states that the use of *distinctiones* "has nearly been lost because of the ignorance of the copyists." Traditionally, the burden of reading texts was placed on readers, but Alcuin was educated in the British Isles, where punctuation was inserted during the copying process. Regardless of whether punctuation was already seen as a scribal obligation or if it was a new expectation placed upon scribes, when Alcuin asks that punctuation be returned to the hands of the copyists, he resituates punctuation as part of the emendation process.

everywhere, the documents (*carta*) in the king's name may display the nobility of kingly wisdom.¹⁷⁴

Above, Alcuin determines the neglect of punctuation is a result of scribes' ignorance (*rusticitatem*); if the ignorance at Tours to which Alcuin refers manifests itself in unpunctuated texts, then Alcuin recommends the scribes at court also insert the two-point system as they copy administrative documents. Already, Charlemagne had issued the mandate *De litteris colendis*, which required documents addressed to the court be written in the correct Latin of grammar handbooks. Alcuin may view *distinctiones* as the most elegant means for visually conveying "the nobility of kingly wisdom" in texts issued from the court. Works emanating from the court established the authoritative language of government documents, providing a model of Latin to abbots, bishops, monasteries, and cathedral schools. Perhaps other scriptoria would follow the model of *distinctiones* in official texts. Moreover, the very purpose of Charlemagne's educational mandates was Christian; Alcuin may have seen court documents as an extension of religious texts, which similarly required *distinctiones* to ensure comprehension.

Before the Carolingian Renaissance, neither punctuation nor diacritical signs were inserted as part of the copying of continental manuscripts; these notational systems were applied by readers (Irvine 1994, 72). But extant manuscripts from this period support the conclusion that scribes obeyed Alcuin's recommendation to point by *distinctiones* and *subdistinctiones*, especially when producing minuscule script. Beginning in the ninth-century, Carolingian scribes added points as they copied religious or secular texts; these points were not found in their

¹⁷⁴ Again, Irvine provides the translation. The Latin reads: *Ego itaque licet parum proficiens cum Turonica cotidie pugno rusticitate. Vestra vero auctoritas palatinos erudiat pueros, ut elegantissime proferant quicquid vestri sensus lucidissima dictaverit eloquentia; ut ubique regalis nominis carta decurrens regalis sapientiae nobilitatem ostendat* (ed. Duemmler 1895, 285, 21-4).

exemplars but were placed according to the initiative of the scribe (Parkes 1993, 32).¹⁷⁵

However, scribes did not limit themselves to the two-point system alone; they incorporated new marks and combined existing ones to create a more nuanced system of punctuation for liturgical texts.

Positurae

Thus far, we have witnessed Carolingian scholars and scribes augmenting the three-point system of punctuation described in grammatical handbooks; scribes applied a simplified two-point system under Alcuin's direction and supplemented the point with other symbols and patterns of multiple points thanks to Insular influence on the continent. But beginning in the second half of the eighth century, an entirely new set of marks called *positurae* began to appear in liturgical texts (Parkes 1993, 35).¹⁷⁶ The system consisted of the *punctus versus*, which resembles a semicolon (;) or a dot above a seven-shaped comma; the *punctus interrogativus* (? or .~ or .^w), which we already saw incorporated into manuscripts produced in Charlemagne's palace school; the *punctus elevatus*, which looks like an exclamation point (.^.) in the Godescalc Gospels or an inverted semicolon (resembling a point below a comma); and the *punctus flexus* (.^u), which was introduced later and only appears in tenth-century manuscripts at the earliest (Parkes 1993, 35-36). The *punctus elevatus* and *punctus flexus* fulfilled the role of the *media distinctio* and the *subdistinctio* respectively, signifying major or minor pauses within the sentence. The *punctus*

¹⁷⁵ For an example of scribal punctuation, see a copy of Pliny's Letters (Florence, Bibl. Medicea-Laurenziana, MS Ashburnham, R.98) copied from a sixth-century fragment.

¹⁷⁶ Although the term *positurae* is essentially a synonym for *distinctiones* in grammar handbooks, it also describes the specifically liturgical system of punctuation that supplemented *distinctiones*. The origin of *positurae* is likely impossible to determine. M.B. Parkes (1993, 36) notes that this system resembles the *distinctio* and *subdistinctio* combined with accents; *positurae* are also similar to ecphonetic signs (related to the application of melodic formulae before pauses during the recitation of a text) in Hebrew and Byzantine manuscripts (304).

versus and *punctus interrogativus*, on the other hand, identified a complete statement and complete question respectively.¹⁷⁷ Unlike *distinctiones*, which only conveyed two pause lengths in practice, *positurae* offered subtler gradations of pauses within the sentence and provided grammatical information about the type of sentence being uttered (Parkes 1993, 40).

Positurae were designed for texts that would be sung in the liturgy or read aloud in the Chapter House or Refectory (Parkes 1993, 37). Since the seventh century, liturgical works generally contained more punctuation than other texts because the clergy required cues to guide the oral delivery of texts (34). At first, *positurae* were restricted to artifacts of monastic culture, but members of monastic communities began to apply these marks to texts that were not normally sung (38).¹⁷⁸ Scribes incorporated *positurae* as they copied, especially the *punctus interrogativus*, the use of which spread from Charlemagne's court in the late eighth century to other continental writing centers (Parkes 1993, 37).¹⁷⁹ But *positurae* were also inserted as corrections into copies of all kinds of texts, even those that would be read silently, to make the punctuation more legible and informative (Parkes 1993, 38). The popularity of *positurae* outside of liturgical works reveals that educated Carolingians sought more precise grammatical

¹⁷⁷ Of the four symbols constituting *positurae*, two became a part of the general repertory of punctuation: the *punctus interrogativus* is the modern question mark and the *punctus elevatus* is the colon (Parkes 1993, 37). After the twelfth century, the function of the *punctus flexus* in monastic texts was unknown (Parkes 1993, 40). The *punctus versus* became redundant because new sentences were consistently indicated with *litterae notabiliores* (Parkes 1993, 39).

¹⁷⁸ London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius A. xiv (CLA 1703), dated to the mid-eighth century, is the first non-liturgical volume to contain a *punctus versus* written at time of copying (Parkes 1991, 109). Parkes (1993, 129n17) speculates that the appearance of *positurae* in books from Wearmouth-Jarrow and the court may indicate that the system was transmitted in liturgical texts made in Rome.

¹⁷⁹ For *positurae* in German manuscripts, see Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 135; fol. 134^v reproduced in Parkes (1993, plate 65). Also see Oxford, Keble College, Millard 41, printed in Parkes (1993, plate 16).

information from punctuation. Scribes had at their disposal a greater number of symbols than ever before; with *positurae* and *distinctiones* in all its forms, scribes could communicate multiple lengths of pauses within the sentence and the status of the sentence as a question or a statement (40). Moreover, these two notational systems complemented each other. Scribes might convert the existing *distinctiones* in a manuscript to *positurae* or add *positurae* where the original scribe had not supplied punctuation (38).¹⁸⁰ Multiple manuscripts produced at the palace school display both sets of symbols.

The Ada, Godescalc, and Arsenal Gospels supplement the Insular version of *distinctiones* with the *punctus interrogativus*; the Godescalc Gospels also insert the *punctus elevatus*. Court manuscripts copied at approximately the same time, such as the Dagulf or Golden Psalter, incorporate more signs of *positurae* (Parkes 1993, 36).¹⁸¹ Like the other manuscripts produced at court, the Dagulf Psalter is heavily influenced by Anglo-Saxon production and decoration methods; its stately Caroline minuscule is copied in gold ink (Lowe 1934-72, 1504).¹⁸² Charlemagne had the manuscript made as a present for Pope Hadrian (Wright and Campbell 1967, 45). Dagulf and another scribe at the court school wrote a portion of the book in the 780s, at which time they use the *media distinctio*, a seven-shaped mark on the line of writing, a *punctus elevatus*, and a *punctus versus* or two points above a comma (·;·).¹⁸³ In the 790s when

¹⁸⁰ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS lat. 13159 (the Saint-Riquier Psalter) (CLA 652) is another manuscript affiliated with the palace school that features *positurae*.

¹⁸¹ Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, MS latin 1861 (CLA 1504).

¹⁸² Ruling occurred after folding, and prickings are in both margins (Lowe 1934-72, 1504).

¹⁸³ Irish scribes fused the *distinctiones* system with the *positura* or seven-shaped mark. Instead of placing points or seven-shaped marks at the top, middle, and bottom of the line, they repeated the mark once, twice, or three times to signify increasingly important pauses. Carolingian scribes adopted both traditions (Parkes 1993, 32). In a copy of the *Rule of St. Benedict* made in the first half of the ninth century at Inde, near the court scriptorium at Aachen, the seven-shaped mark replaces or supplements the point. This is Munich, Clm. 28118. Fol. 7^v is reproduced in Parkes

the codex was being finished, Dagulf adds a stroke above the *media distinctio* and a point below the seven-shaped mark, converting the original punctuation to a *punctus elevatus* and a *punctus versus* respectively (Parkes 1993, 36). Runovers are indicated by a virgule or, like in the Arsenal Gospels, by an angular bracket (Lowe 1934-72, 1504). This manuscript is the first datable example of *positurae* inserted by the original scribe. *Positurae* must have been a new system to court scribes in the 780s, and it must have been popular enough after approximately ten years for Godescalc to correct the previous *distinctiones* to *positurae* (Parkes 1993, 36). *Positurae* continue to appear in books written at court in the early ninth century. The Codex Aureus or the Harley Golden Gospels, copied c. 800. is written in gold uncial and Caroline minuscule.¹⁸⁴ It displays Anglo-Saxon designs in large initials, borders, miniatures of the evangelists, openings of the Gospels, and the title page (Lowe 1934-72, 198; Kenyon 1900, XIII). The scribe punctuates with the *punctus versus*, which can also resemble a reversed comma above a semicolon, the *punctus elevatus* or the mid-line point alone, and the *punctus interrogativus* (Lowe 1934-72, 198). Insular methods of book construction, decoration, and punctuation

(1993, plate 15). The manuscript was produced for the abbot Benedict of Aniane probably for reference rather than for reading in the Chapter House, as evidenced by the lack of *positurae*, the liturgical system of punctuation. The point, placed near the foot of the line, marks the ends of sentences, but in many instances the point has been converted into the seven-shaped mark or the seven-shaped mark has been placed above the point. The seven-shaped marks are supplied by an early corrector or perhaps the original scribe (Parkes 1993, 189). Though the original function of the seven-shaped mark was to indicate the ends of sections, the symbol appears to share the function of the point in some instances and demarcate the ends of sections in others. This copy of the *Rule of St. Benedict* shows Carolingian scribes borrowing Insular punctuation methods, such as the seven-shaped mark, to make *distinctiones* more legible. For other examples of the seven-shaped mark in Carolingian manuscripts, see Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, MS Pluteus LXIII.20.

¹⁸⁴ London, British Library, Harley MS 2788 (CLA 198).

factored heavily into the look of early court manuscripts; however, Insular notation was in competition with the new, liturgical system of punctuation, which offered more nuanced pauses.

Evidence suggests that *positurae* only grew in popularity in Carolingian scriptoria. The Moutier Grandval Bible (British Library, Add. MS 10546) is a mid-ninth-century manuscript copied in Caroline minuscule at Tours. It contains Alcuin's revised version of the Vulgate (McKitterick 1994, 70). Words are spaced consistently, and the decoration is clearly Anglo-Saxon inspired. Since Alcuin advocated for the two-point system at Tours, we would expect to see it in a book produced there shortly after his death; instead, however, we find punctuation by the mid-line point, the *punctus elevatus*, and a triangle of points (Thompson and Warner 1881-81, 3). Between 799, the date of Alcuin's letter to Charlemagne, and the production of this manuscript in the mid-ninth century, *positurae* have spread from the palace school to other Carolingian writing centers, such as Tours. *Distinctiones* are still present: the point at mid-line height occurs in the Ada Gospels, and the triangle of points appears in the Godescalc Gospels. In the Moutier Grandval Bible, these marks are supplemented with *positurae*. Other manuscripts at Tours were either copied with *positurae* or existing *distinctiones* were later modified to become *positurae* (Rand 1929, 1.30).¹⁸⁵ The virgule and *positurae* appear in court books at approximately the same time, and both supplemented either the simplified, two-fold version of *distinctiones* or the Insular variant by patterns of points. Even though Carolingian scribes eagerly adopted Insular notational systems, the virgule did not become a lasting part of their repertory of

¹⁸⁵ Rand (1929) describes an array of strokes and additional dots attached to the *distinctio* and *subdistinctio* in manuscripts produced at Tours, including the addition of a "rising stroke" to the low dot "that indicated, like a neum, the rising of the voice," and a "descending stroke" to the high dot, indicating the opposite (making a *punctus elevatus* and a *punctus versus* respectively). However, he acknowledges the punctuation may be a later addition (1.30).

punctuation marks or diacritical signs. *Positurae* offered a more refined system of pauses that could easily supplement the existing punctuation of a manuscript.

The Carolingian Renaissance revived grammatical education on the continent, spurring scribes of both religious and secular documents to write in the Latin style prescribed by the grammars. Punctuation became an expected feature of proper Latin usage, added during the manuscript copying process. Scribes at Charlemagne's palace school turned to Insular models for their notational systems, modifying or supplementing *distinctiones* with the Insular method of patterns of points or commas. Some of the earliest books produced by the court also borrow the virgule from Insular manuscripts as either a punctuation or runover mark. This marking trend, however, is short-lived. The scribes of the court scriptorium operated with greater freedom in their choice of notational symbols, and the virgule faced too much competition from other notational systems. The head of educational reform, Alcuin of York, insisted that the two-point system be inserted into liturgical works copied at Tours; yet, in the centuries after Alcuin's death, the scribes at Tours supplemented *distinctiones* with the completely new system of *positurae* in the Moutier Grandval Bible, proving that these two systems were easily compatible. Symbols from *positurae*, especially the *punctus interrogativus* and the *punctus elevatus*, supplemented the Insular version of the *distinctiones* system to create a larger, more defined repertory of punctuation. As a result, the virgule does not grace the pages of many manuscripts produced at court or scriptoria in Carolingian France.

Conclusion

Though virgules appear in some early court books, they did not become a popular means of notation during the Carolingian Renaissance. But at the end of the ninth century, Beneventan scribes began to reproduce the marks they found in early court manuscripts, such as the Ada and Goddescalc Gospels.¹⁸⁶ The virgule became interchangeable with the *punctus elevatus* (./) and remained a part of the Beneventan repertory of punctuation until the late thirteenth century (Lowe 1914, 228).¹⁸⁷ In the subsequent centuries, some authors of letter-writing treatises adopted the virgule in their personalized punctuation systems. These practitioners of the *ars dictaminis* were the first authors to insert their own punctuation into texts. Their example was

¹⁸⁶ E. A. Lowe (1914) finds no uniform system of punctuation in Beneventan manuscripts written during the eighth and early ninth centuries. Punctuation in this period comprises of the point (.) or comma (,) for any pause (227). The point and comma (.,), the point above the comma (;), and the angular comma (7) could also signify the main pause (227-28).

¹⁸⁷ Beneventan scribes place these symbols in manuscripts copied in South Italian minuscule. The Beneventan system of punctuation borrows four symbols from Carolingian manuscripts: the interrogation mark, two points surrounding or above a comma (.,. or ;:), the point (.), and the virgule (/) or the inverted semicolon (also known as the *punctus elevatus* ./). Sentences are concluded with the point or two points and comma (.,. or ;:); major mid-sentence pauses are indicated by the point (.) alone; and minor mid-sentence pauses are signified by the virgule or inverted semicolon (./) (Lowe 1914, 228). After the eleventh century, the virgule often occurs alongside the inverted semicolon, and the former signifies an even weaker pause than the latter (234). For example, the virgule indicates slight pauses in at least three liturgical manuscripts produced between the eleventh century and the thirteenth (230). In Vatic. lat. 1202, the virgule indicates a smaller pause than the inverted semicolon; the manuscript containing *Vita S. Benedicti* among other works was produced in Monte Cassino between 1058 and 1087. Vatic. lat. 3973 similarly includes both the virgule and the inverted semicolon; it was produced after 1178 and contains the *Chronicon sive Annales* of Romuald, archbishop of Salerno (Lowe 1914, 230). Cava 24 follows suit; it is dated to 1295 and includes the *Vitae Patrum Cavensium* (231). See plates 70-1, 90, and 99 respectively in Viktor Novak's *Scriptura Beneventana: s osobitim obzirom na tip dalmatinske beneventane: paleografska studija* (Zagreb: Tisak, 1920). From the tenth to the fifteenth centuries, the virgule also acts as an abbreviation sign (Cappelli 1961, xii).

followed by the Italian humanists on the continent, whose notational practices may have inspired Geoffrey Chaucer to punctuate the *Canterbury Tales* with the virgule.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the virgule appeared in Italian treatises on *ars dictaminis*, which treat all forms of Latin composition but primarily the art of letter writing (Denholm-Young 1969, 46). The *ars dictaminis* spread from centers in Italy and France, especially Bologna, Orleans, and Tours, to universities throughout Europe (Pratt 1978, 134; Denholm-Young 1969, 46).¹⁸⁸ Letters were the most common medium for public and private documents. Notaries (those who composed Latin professionally) relied on letter models in prescriptive textbooks, which first appeared at the end of the eleventh century (Pratt 1978, 135; Kristeller 1979, 233).¹⁸⁹ The Italian practitioners of the *ars dictaminis* Guido Faba, Bene of Florence, and Boncompagno were frequently copied in the fourteenth and even the fifteenth centuries (Denholm-Young 1969, 47; Kristeller 1979, 319n26).

Boncompagno's most important work, the *Rhetorica antiqua* or *Boncompagnus*, taught students how to write letters to different audiences, such as the Pope, royalty, the clergy, and noblemen (Paetow 1910, 566).¹⁹⁰ Instead of relying on *distinctiones* or *positurae*, Boncompagno

¹⁸⁸ This branch of rhetoric was first taught in monastic and cathedral schools (Pratt 1978, 134). The *ars dictaminis* gained popularity in the late eleventh century thanks to the growth of government and the resulting demand for trained personnel (Pratt 1978, 146-47). An education in the *ars dictaminis* prepared students for careers in administration, government, and politics but especially papal or imperial chanceries (Pratt 1978, 134; Denholm-Young 1969, 46).

¹⁸⁹ The treatises codified rules that had likely been circulating orally since the end of the tenth century (Pratt 1978, 147). Though they were heavily influenced by Latin grammatical doctrine, especially the works of Donatus and Priscian (or the commentaries on their works), letter-writing textbooks restricted the amount of grammatical and rhetorical material, emphasizing the sections of a letter, correct Latin style, and punctuation (Pratt 1978, 147, 149; Kristeller 1979, 235). By the mid-thirteenth century, Italian treatises predominated because of their simplicity and practicality (Denholm-Young 1969, 55).

¹⁹⁰ Boncompagno authored eleven treatises on letter-writing or document preparation in the early thirteenth century (Paetow 1910, 565; Murphy 1974, 254).

and his peers, including Bene of Florence, Thomas of Capua, and Iacopo Alpoleio da Urbisaglia, offered their own punctuation systems (Parkes 1993, 45).¹⁹¹ In Boncompagno's punctuation system, the oblique slash (/) indicates a medial pause, and the horizontal line (–) marks a final pause. He writes that “a dependent clause is that which is written with a *virgula* that stands upright; whence one denotes the incomplete sense of the expression.” Boncompagno adds that, “the *punctus* marking completion, however, is that which is written with a level *virgula*, on the lap of which the soul of the reader grows quiet” (Hubert 1969-70, xiii.b).¹⁹² Another practitioner of the *ars dictaminis*, Iacopo Alpoleio, applies the *virgula* as a minor medial pause in a system of four marks during the fourteenth century (Parkes 1993, 45). Alpoleio's punctuation system, and larger ones like it, were not applied in books. Boncompagno's simple two-fold system (/ and –), on the other hand, influenced scribes and scholars after the *ars dictaminis* declined (Parkes 1993, 45-6).¹⁹³

The writers of formal letters in Latin are the first authors to punctuate their own writing. Boncompagno, Alpoleio, and other contributors to the *ars dictaminis* tradition may have served as models for humanist writers such as Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. Many humanist scholars wrote formal letters during their careers, and scribes trained in law were familiar with the *ars*

¹⁹¹ Like many practitioners of the *ars dictaminis*, Boncompagno rejected the teachings of ancient rhetoric as impractical (Kristeller 1979, 236).

¹⁹² Hubert (1969-70, xiii.b) relies on Ms. Paris B.N. 8654, f.123 for this excerpt of Boncompagno. The Latin reads: *Suspensius est ille qui uirgula scribitur sursum erecta [sic]; unde sensum locutionis denotat incompletum... Punctus autem planus est ille qui uirgula scribitur plana, in cuius gremio legentis animus quiescit et totus sensus locutionis successiue terminatur.*

¹⁹³ Two points above a comma (;), the final pause in the Roman Church's two-fold system of punctuation adopted by Bene of Florence, also made it into books (Parkes 1993, 45).

dictaminis (Parkes 1993, 46).¹⁹⁴ Accustomed to inserting punctuation into their Latin letters, humanist authors may have been inclined to introduce such marks into their other works. Humanist scholars and scribes employed a greater variety of marks to discriminate between different kinds of pauses within the sentence (Parkes 1993, 84). The virgule became one means of marking medial pauses during the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries. Its incorporation in the punctuation repertoires of the Italian humanists led to the virgule becoming nearly as common as the point (46).¹⁹⁵ Like practitioners of the *ars dictaminis*, humanist scholars developed personalized repertoires of punctuation, which they used to produce copies of texts for themselves or to direct the copying of their own works (Parkes 1993, 48).

Petrarch and Giovanni Boccaccio conflate elements from multiple punctuation systems, using four and five symbols respectively to distinguish between pauses with different functions within the sentence (Parkes 1993, 48). In Petrarch's *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia*, the virgule signifies minor pauses.¹⁹⁶ The pointed virgule, a virgule with a point at the center like the lowercase letter *t*, indicates phrases that are logically required by the rest of the sentence (Parkes

¹⁹⁴ Where the practitioners of the *ars dictaminis* avoided ancient rhetoricians and praised practicality, the humanists imitated Cicero's letters and valued eloquent expression (Parkes 1993, 46-7). Boncompagno claimed to have never read or taught Cicero (Denholm-Young 1969, 236).

¹⁹⁵ In the British Isles and on the continent, the virgule could function as a diastole, separating letters or words too closely placed together. Conrad of Mure, a Swiss master of letter-writing, attributes this function to the virgule in his thirteenth-century *Summa de arte prosandi* (Hubert 1969-70, xiv.b). The virgule was often added to manuscripts originally punctuated by points or *positurae*; see Parkes (1993) plate 54.

¹⁹⁶ The point marks the end of a sentence and a major medial pause. The *punctus elevatus* indicates clauses that are logically and syntactically independent but nevertheless joined to the rest of the sentence, somewhat like the nonrestrictive clause. Petrarch's punctuation principles are evident in the Vatican manuscript of *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia*: Vatican, Bibl. apost., MS Vat. lat. 3359. See Parkes (1993, 82) for an analysis of sentences from fol. 20 and 5^v.

1993, 82).¹⁹⁷ Petrarch's application of punctuation is meticulous; it is designed to facilitate the reader's comprehension by revealing subtle relationships between parts of a sentence (Parkes 1993, 81, 83). Like Petrarch, Boccaccio uses punctuation to communicate how the parts of a sentence relate to each other. In a copy of Aquinas's commentary, which he appends to a Latin translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Boccaccio marks medial pauses of increasing length with the virgule, the pointed virgule, and the *punctus elevatus* (Parkes 1993, 83).¹⁹⁸ He also experiments with paratextual elements in his vernacular works, such as by providing glosses and marginal commentary in his autograph of the *Teseida* (Clarke 2011, 48-9).¹⁹⁹

During the fifteenth century, scribes used punctuation more frequently than ever before (Parkes 1993, 84). The humanists expanded the general repertory of punctuation to include marks such as the parenthesis and the exclamation mark or *punctus admirativus* because they required notation that conveyed the relationship between parts of a sentence (48-9).²⁰⁰ Moreover, authors applied personalized marking systems to their vernacular works. Arguably, the precedent for personalized punctuation systems was set centuries earlier when Jerome applied *per cola et commata* formatting to his Latin translations of Isaiah and Ezekiel. By visually distinguishing

¹⁹⁷ The pointed virgule could also imply greater disjunction between a phrase and the rest of the clause in Petrarch's autograph of *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia*: Berlin, Staatsbibl. d. preuss. Kulturbesitz, MS Hamilton 493. See Parkes (1993) for an analysis of sentences from fol. 9 and 8^v.

¹⁹⁸ The point signifies a final pause (Parkes 1993, 83). Milan, Bibl. Ambrosiana, MS A 204 inf. See Parkes (1993, 83) for an analysis of sentences from fol. 16.

¹⁹⁹ This manuscript is Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Acquisti e Doni 325. See Clarke (2011, 49-51) for Boccaccio's activity as a glossator and commentator.

²⁰⁰ Other marks adopted during this period include the pointed *virgula* and the modern semicolon. Two early forms of the parenthesis were the virgule or the colon (:), which eventually were replaced by the modern form or *virgulae convexae* (Parkes 1993, 48-9). It seems that these two symbols (/ and :) merged to create the semicolon. Both the slash and the colon could convey medial pauses, but the humanists desired a medial pause in between these values (Parkes 1993, 49).

clauses and phrases, Jerome clarified the meaning of these texts and assisted in their oral performance (Brown 1993, 81). Jerome's innovations constitute one of the earliest instances of Latin writers indicating punctuation for their readers (Parkes 1993, 15). Colometric layout was hugely influential in later copies of scripture; Jerome's practice may well have contributed to the punctuation of vernacular, as well as Latin, works produced on the continent and in the British Isles.

Insular scribes were slower to provide copious punctuation for vernacular texts than for Latin ones. Since there appears to be no contemporary description of punctuation conventions in Old English, we must base our assumptions on the surviving manuscripts (O'Brien O'Keeffe 1990, 146). Old English scribes formatted vernacular verse like prose, sometimes indicating the ends of half-lines (Robinson 1971, 135). The earliest manuscripts of Old English verse usually feature the point, but its application is inconsistent, and it sometimes occurs at the ends of verses rather than between half-lines (O'Brien O'Keeffe 1990, 148-94). During the tenth century, Anglo-Saxon verse begins to be punctuated regularly at section divisions and most half-lines (Donoghue 2018, 72).²⁰¹ Punctuation by the point alone is still common in the twelfth century (Donoghue 2018, 56). The rarity of pointing before the eleventh century in Old English texts indicates that readers of the vernacular had little need for punctuation (O'Brien O'Keeffe 1990, 153). Half-line punctuation persists in Middle English verse despite the many differences that developed between Old and Middle English following the Norman Conquest. In fourteenth- and

²⁰¹ The Junius manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 11) is the first in Anglo-Saxon verse to feature predictable punctuation (Donoghue 2018, 72). Latin verse copied in England during the tenth century display the *punctus versus* and the *punctus elevatus*, symbols which do not regularly appear in vernacular manuscripts until later (O'Brien O'Keeffe 1990, 148). *Positurae* are only incorporated in Old English codices in the late tenth or early eleventh centuries (Donoghue 2018, 57-8).

fifteenth-century texts, scribes frequently point the caesura using the virgule. Punctuation is rarer at the ends of lines, where layout and rhyme were clear enough markers of a significant pause (Parkes 1993, 106). When end-line punctuation occurs, scribes usually prefer the *punctus elevatus* or, more rarely, the point (Parkes 1993, 106; Robinson 1971, 135). The punctuation we find in extant manuscripts of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* offers a glimpse into how Middle English scribes expressed rhythmical patterns and slight stresses or pauses using the virgule.

The earliest copies of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* are punctuated with the virgule (Killough 1982, 104, 89).²⁰² These are the Hengwrt (Aberystwyth, Nat. Lib. Wales, Peniarth MS 392), Ellesmere (San Marino, Huntington Lib., MS 26 C 9), and Cambridge University Dd.4.24 manuscripts.²⁰³ In the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts, the punctuation is a hypersensitive complement to sense and meter (Parkes 1993, 107). The virgule frequently appears at midline, generally marking the caesura, though it often occurs more than once per line (Doyle and Parkes 1979, xxxvii).²⁰⁴ In the *General Prologue* of the Hengwrt manuscript, the virgule marks metrical pauses once, twice, or even three times per line (Ransom 1993, 67). The virgule is applied similarly but less frequently in the Ellesmere manuscript's *General Prologue* (69). In Dd.4.24's *General Prologue*, the virgule signifies the *caesura* in nearly every line, and some lines contain

²⁰² In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in England, the virgule was common punctuation in cursive scripts (Parkes 1993, 46). In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the virgule could be employed with the double virgule to indicate medial and final pauses respectively; see Parkes (1993) plate 28.

²⁰³ Hengwrt is dated to the first few years of the fifteenth century, Ellesmere to the first ten years of the fifteenth century, and Dd.4.24 to first twenty years of the fifteenth century (Ransom 1993, 63, 68, 72).

²⁰⁴ It also punctuates another early copy of Chaucer's work: Cambridge, University Library MS Dd.4.24.

more than one virgule (73). However, later manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* show less punctuation.²⁰⁵

The virgule is sporadically inserted in Corpus Christi College 198, dated from the second decade of the fifteenth century (Ransom 1993, 71). Produced between 1420 and 1440, Cambridge University Gg.4.27 features far fewer virgules compared to the earliest copies of the *Canterbury Tales* (74, 77). The disappearance of the virgule and punctuation more generally in later copies of the *Canterbury Tales* likely reflects the attitude that punctuation was not necessary for vernacular texts. This theory is confirmed by the fact that the first edition to copiously punctuate the *General Prologue* was printed in 1526, over a century after Chaucer's death.²⁰⁶ Hundreds of virgules are added to the *General Prologue* presumed to help early modern readers parse Chaucer's archaic Middle English (Ransom 1993, 89). By 1542, the punctuation of the *General Prologue* is modernized with commas (93).²⁰⁷ Virgules do not appear in printed editions of the *Canterbury Tales* after this point. By 1602, punctuation is placed at the ends of most lines, not just the middle; this edition of Chaucer's work is the first to include a glossary, proving that contemporary readers were struggling to understand an earlier stage of the English language (Ransom 1993, 101; Pearsall 1984, 81).²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ For example, British Library Additional 35286 (Ad³) shows irregular points and no virgules; the manuscript is dated between 1430 and 1450 (Ransom 1993, 69-70). British Library, Egerton 2726 (En¹) features sparse virgules and points; it was produced during the same period as Ad³ (74).

²⁰⁶ This is Richard Pynson's second edition, *Here begynneth the boke of Caunterbury tales / dilygently and truely corrected / and newly printed* (STC 5086).

²⁰⁷ This is William Thynne's second edition, *The workes of Geffray Chaucer newlye printed, wyth dyuers workes whych were neuer in print before* (STC 5069).

²⁰⁸ This is Thomas Speght's second edition, *The Workes of Ovr Ancient and learned English Poet, Geffrey Chavcer, newly Printed* (STC 5080).

But if punctuation disappears from later copies of the *Canterbury Tales*, why is the virgule so common in Hengwrt, Ellesmere, and Dd.4.24? Could the punctuation in these early manuscripts reflect Chaucer's original punctuation? We know that John Gower supervised the production of copies of the *Confessio Amantis* and provided readers with an elaborate marginal apparatus (Clarke 2011, 5). Is it not possible that Chaucer could have been attentive to the pointing of early copies of his tales? He expected accuracy from his scribe, as is clear in his note to his scribe "Adam Scriveyn:"

Adam scriveyn, if ever it thee bifalle
Boece or Troylus for to wryten newe,
Under thy long lokkes thou most have the scalle,
But after my makynge thou wryte more trewe;
So ofte adaye I mot thy werk renewe,
It to correcte and eke to rubbe and scrape,
And al is thorough thy negligence and rape. (Benson 1987, 1-7)

Might Chaucer have considered punctuation when correcting errors in copies of his work? We could compare the punctuation in manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* to determine if commonalities in virgule placement reflect the punctuation of Chaucer's autograph.²⁰⁹ To start such a study, we might limit our analysis to the *Pardoner's Tale* and focus particularly on Hengwrt, Ellesmere, and Dd.4.24. We might also assess whether Boccaccio's use of the virgule spurred Chaucer to apply it in his own writing. Boccaccio's *Teseida* was one of Chaucer's sources for the *Canterbury Tales*, specifically the *Knight's Tale*. Chaucer acquired a copy of it on one of his two trips to Italy, the first from 1372 to 1373 and the second in 1378 (Pearsall 1992, 102, 106). W. E. Coleman (2005, 117) has established Venice, Bibl. Marciana, MS Marc. It. IX, 61 as the closest approximation of the copy of *Il Teseida* that Chaucer worked from when

²⁰⁹ Such a comparison would need to consider the possibility that punctuation could reveal genetic relationship among manuscripts.

writing the *Knight's Tale*. If the virgule appears in Chaucer's copy of *Il Teseida*, we may have reason to believe that Chaucer's source material affected the transmission of his work.

Boccaccio's experimental attitude toward the presentation of his works may have encouraged Chaucer to provide his readers with more visual cues. The close study of the virgule may reveal first, how authors intervened in the punctuation of their texts, and second, how sources supplied paratextual influence, not just themes, plot, or characters.

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