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Punctuation Marks in Medieval Chinese Manuscripts[1]

Generally speaking, written Chinese before the 20th century used no punctuation; readers parsed the text based on context, relying on an array of grammatical and modal particles. Another important aid was the often parallel structure of sentences, its organic symmetry and rhythm. Western style punctuation was introduced in 1920 and has been successfully employed ever since.[2] Although for most of its history Chinese writing was fully functional without punctuation, a number of marks had also been used before the modern era. Their presence, however, was sporadic and often limited to educational and commentarial literature.[3]

Naturally, transmitted texts are of little use for the study of punctuation marks in earlier periods because such notation was generally not part of the text proper and, consequently, remained excluded from transmission. Scribal notations were closely tied to manuscript culture and therefore the best method to study them today is to examine the manuscripts, whenever available. In this respect, the Dunhuang manuscripts represent an ideal body of texts for the period of the 5th–10th centuries.[4] They are especially relevant for the early medieval and medieval periods because they comprise, along with material excavated at other sites in Western China (most notably Turfan and Khara-Khoto), the absolute majority of extant manuscripts. Consequently, even though this corpus comes from the

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1 I am grateful to Matthias Richter of the University of Colorado, Boulder for his suggestions and remarks on an earlier draft of this paper.

2 The document titled "Proposal for the promulgation of new-style punctuation marks" was submitted by the eminent Chinese writer Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962), Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885–1967) and several other scholars in November 1919, in response to which in February 1920 the Ministry of Education issued the "Directive on the implementation of new style punctuation marks" (Li Xingjian et al. 2001, 268). Hu Shi's own book *Zhongguo zhexueshi dagang* (1919) was the first book written in vernacular Chinese and published with modern punctuation.

3 For a general treatment of punctuation in Chinese writing in the West, see Harbsmeier (1998), Führer and Behr (2005), and Drège (1991). The first person to discuss punctuation marks in Chinese texts was the Russian missionary-sinologist Nikita Bichurin (1777–1853), more commonly known in the West by his monastic name Father Iakinf (Hyacinth). In his book on Chinese grammar (Bichurin 1838, 20–31), he described the marks used in contemporary printed texts.

4 Based on the colophons of dated texts, it is generally believed that the manuscripts had been written between ca. 400–1000. The overall majority of the texts are handwritten, with a small number of printed ones, and even fewer rubbings from epigraphic material. As a collection, they represent the largest body of Chinese manuscripts ever found, and thus their significance for the study of scribal habits and the history of Chinese writing in general is invaluable.

periphery of the Chinese sphere of influence and at times may exhibit local peculiarities, it is by far the largest and thus provides a representative image of scribal habits.

What we consider punctuation is, of course, a matter of definition. While the etymology of the English word refers to points (Lat. *punctus*) used for dividing text, there are a number of other types of marks (e.g., question and exclamation points, quotation marks, brackets) that are also included in this category. In this paper I am using the term punctuation in a broad sense for all symbols used in manuscripts, other than the text (i.e. characters) itself. To be sure, it would be a difficult task to give an exhaustive count of all such marks, as new manuscript finds often provide evidence of hitherto unknown types.[5] But for the most part newly discovered marks tend to be individual symbols the use of which had been local and exceptional. The tens of thousands of manuscripts from Dunhuang supply enough material to document the major types of marks in common use in medieval times. Although in comparison with modern punctuation they often seem unsystematic, they nevertheless exhibit a surprisingly high degree of consistency in terms of their functionality and appearance over the course of the six centuries represented by the Dunhuang material. This testifies to an unbroken scribal tradition that outlived several dynasties. From the point of view of their functionality, we can group the most common marks into the following categories: 1) correction marks; 2) repetition marks; 3) phonetic marks; 4) abbreviation marks; 5) segmentation marks; 6) reverence marks; and 7) other marks.

1 Correction marks

Although correction and repetition marks (see section 2 below) are not the types that come first to mind when discussing punctuation, they appear at the head of the list here because of their overall prominence in manuscript material. Correction marks are a set of signs used for rectifying mistakes in the manuscripts, by either the writer, or a subsequent editor or proof-reader. Traces of proof-reading

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5 While the original contents of the Dunhuang library cave represent a finite and closed corpus, surprisingly to this day we still do not have a complete list of all manuscripts. Following the dispersion of the collection, many of the items were lost or simply disappeared from the eyes of the world. With the recent boom in Dunhuang studies, new manuscripts are being "rediscovered" each year, and images of these are becoming accessible in digital or printed reproductions. In addition to this, other sites in Western China, most notably Turfan, Khara-Khoto, Loulan and Khotan, are continuously yielding new material. Especially the Turfan area has been rich in manuscript finds and the size of the Turfan corpus is rapidly growing.

abound in the Dunhuang corpus; there are quite a few manuscripts with colophons that record the names and titles of people who checked the completed work for errors. Scrolls of Buddhist scriptures commissioned by the Tang court were executed with skilled and even calligraphy, with at least three persons checking the result.

It is worth noting that mistakes, and their corrections, are very common in extant manuscripts, and virtually no longer scroll is devoid of them. Even court-commissioned *sūtras* include corrections, revealing that such errors, as long as they were corrected, were tolerated in the final product.[6] A Song dynasty account of how corrections were done as part of the proof-reading or editing (*jiaochou* 校 讎) process is described by Chen Kui 陳騤 (1128–1203):

諸字有誤者，以雌黄塗訖，別書。或多字，以雌黄圈之；少者，于字側添入；或字側不容注者，即用朱圈，仍於本行上下空紙上標寫。倒置，於兩字間書乙字。

When errors occur in characters, paint them over with orpiment (*cihuang*) and then write new text atop of that. If there are interpolated characters, mark them with a circle of orpiment; if there are missing ones, insert them by the side of the text. Or if there is not enough space for comments by the side of the text, then use a vermillion circle and write your note on the empty margins at the top or bottom of that line. When two characters are reversed, write the character 乙 between them.[7]

Chen Kui's description is fully compatible with the ways of marking corrections in the Dunhuang manuscripts. One of the most common mistakes was to reverse the sequence of two adjacent characters, which was corrected by placing a small checkmark in the form of ⌟ or ⌞ on the right side of the line between the two characters (figure 1). The second of these is no doubt identical to the character 乙 mentioned by Chen Kui, and also seen in Figure 1/B.

When a character appears in the text by mistake, it is corrected with a deletion mark comprising one or more dots placed by the right side of the character. The most common form had three dots but in some cases there could be one or four dots. For example, in Figure 2/C the character 餘 is marked with four dots, showing that it needs to be eliminated. Figure 2/A shows a case where the copier accidentally repeated two characters but immediately noticed his error and emended it by placing a small dot next to each of the two erroneous characters.

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6 In such high quality elite manuscripts, however, we can observe a tendency to make the corrections as visually inconspicuous as possible, with subtle marks or insertions that would have been virtually unnoticeable to anyone without carefully reading through the entire manuscript.

7 Chen Kui, *Nan Song guan ge lu* 南宋館閣錄 (1998), "Jiaochou shi" 校讎式. For a good review of the editing process and methods in transmitted literature, see Zhang 2001. An alternative translation is also found in Cherniack 1994, 94.

The dots are occasionally written in another colour, as in Figure 2/D which shows that the copier made the mistake of writing the word *pusa* 菩薩 (Bodhisattva) instead of *puti* 菩提 (*bodhi*), and corrected this by marking the character 薩 with a red dot.

A: Or.8210/S.2067   **B:** Or.8210/S.1547   **C:** Or.8210/S.236
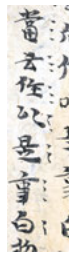

Fig. 1: Examples of notation for reversed characters.[8]

A: Or.8210/ S.321	**B:** Or.8210/ S.797/V	**C:** Or.8210/ S.249(A)R.2	**D:** Or.8210/ S.2067	**E:** Or.8210/ S.1920

Fig. 2: Deletion marks on the right side of mistaken characters. In examples A–D the mark consisting of a different number of dots, whereas in E it is marked with a symbol resembling the character 卜.

Another common deletion mark was a symbol in the shape of the character 卜 placed, just like the dots, on the right side of the redundant character.[9] In the manuscript in Figure 2/E, the copier accidentally used the character 侍 instead of the homophonous 仕, but having caught his mistake, marked the flawed character with the 卜 mark and continued the text with the correct one.

    The custom of using a dot as a deletion mark is also referred to in Guo Pu's 郭璞 (276–324) commentary to the *Erya* 爾雅. The main text says, "'To eliminate'

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8 All manuscript images appearing in this paper come from the Stein collection at the British Library or the Pelliot collection at the Bibliothèque nationale de France. The pressmark for the Stein manuscripts begin with "Or.8210/S.," and for the Pelliot ones with "P." (abbreviated from "Pelliot chinois"). All of these manuscripts are, or shortly will be, accessible online through the website of the International Dunhuang Project (IDP) at <http://idp.bl.uk>.

9 For a study devoted to the 卜 deletion mark, see Zhang Xiaoyan 2003.

means 'to mark with a dot'" 滅謂之點, which is an ambiguous statement explained by the commentator as "to eliminate a character with the brush" 以筆滅字也.[10] We know from a later source[11] that another edition of the text had the character 沾 ("to stain; to soak") in place of 點 ("to mark with a dot"),[12] which seems to be referring to the technique of painting over the wrong character with orpiment.[13] This reading would also be compatible with the original version of the phrase (i.e. using the character 點), although without the alternate version one could certainly take the verb *dian* 點 to refer to the correction marks beside the mistaken character.[14]

2 Repetition marks

Medieval manuscripts habitually employ repetition marks whenever two or more identical characters follow each other. This is an optional notation and in many cases the characters are written out in full.[15] At other times, however, the second instance of the character is omitted and a mark is used in its place. Principally speaking, there are two kinds of repetitions: single-character and multi-character ones. In the first type only one character is repeated, whereas in the latter two or more. While this may seem a trivial distinction, in actual usage the notation for these was somewhat different. The single character repetition was simply marked by a small ﹅ mark put in place of the second character. This mark was sometimes written as ﹅ or ﹅, but the form ﹅ was still by far the most common in Dunhuang. The mark was placed within the main text, in place of the omitted second character occupying, in contrast with most other marks, a full character space.

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10 My translation of the *Erya* definition is, of course, based on Guo Pu's commentary to it, even though originally it very well may have been written with a different context in mind.

11 This later source is the Song commentator Xing Bing 邢昺 (932–1010) who added further annotations to Guo Pu's commentary (see *Erya zhushu* 爾雅注疏).

12 The characters 沾 and 點 are perfectly viable variants, as they not only had similar pronunciation in the time of Guo Pu (as indicated by the shared phonetic component) but also stood for words that were probably cognates.

13 This technique is equivalent to our modern-day method of using "wite-out" or "liquid paper."

14 It is worth noting that in the Dunhuang manuscripts the technique of painting over a character was significantly less common than marking the mistake with small dots on the side. Other methods for deletion were to smudge the error out with ink, to scrape it off the surface of the paper, or to glue a piece of paper over it.

15 In fact, in most cases where repetition occurs, the characters are written out in their full form and the repetition mark is used less commonly.

Figure 3/A shows two instances of single-character repetitions: first the character 薪 and then in the next line the character 滅; in each case the second character is omitted and substituted by a ℣ mark. In multi-character repetition, the repetition mark is placed either underneath the character or at its right bottom corner. An example to the former usage is Figure 3/B where the characters 不可說 ("indescribable; unspeakable") are repeated in the phrase "indescribable and indescribable myriads of sentient beings" 不可說不可說眾生. What makes this case different from the single repetition in Figure 3/A is that the three characters are to be read together and only then repeated as a string. Based on the notation alone, it would theoretically be possible to repeat them one by one as 不不可可說說 but this would obviously produce a meaningless string of characters. The reader must rely on the context for disambiguation. In the case of multi-character repetition, the marks could also be written on the side of the text as a single or double slanted stroke, as in Figure 3/C where the word *niepan* 涅槃 ("Nirvana") is repeated.
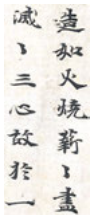
A: Or.8210/S.1547   **B:** Or.8210/S.2067   **C:** Or.8210/S.116

Fig. 3: Examples of single and double-character repetition marks.

3 Phonetic marks

Medieval manuscripts also include a number of phonetic marks with the purpose to clarify the correct pronunciation of a character. In a study on such notation used in Dunhuang manuscripts, Ishizuka Harumichi describes how the marks indicating the four tones of the Chinese language developed from the earlier *poyin* 破音 marks used for distinguishing a character's default and derivative readings.[16] The habit of marking derivative readings by a red dot is already mentioned in Lu Deming's 陸德明 (556–627) celebrated dictionary, the *Jingdian shiwen* 經典釋文:

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[16] Ishizuka 1993, 30–32.

母字與父母字不同。俗本多亂，讀者皆朱點母字，以作無音。非也。

The character 毋 ("not, do not") is different from the character 母 ("mother") used for one's parent. In books circulating among the general population these are often confused and readers always mark the character *mu* 母 with a red dot to show that it should be pronounced as *wu*. This is wrong.[17]

The expression *zhudian* 朱點 ("to mark something with a red dot") appears in the above excerpt as a transitive verb, suggesting that at this time this was a technical term. Lu Deming complains that in manuscripts of inferior quality the characters 毋 and 母 could not be told apart and ordinary readers developed the habit of using a red dot to distinguish between the uses of what they thought to be the same character.[18] Although the above comment was written with the aim of pointing out a misunderstanding, it also provides evidence for existence of the practice of marking a character's pronunciation as a means of distinguishing its original and derivative readings.

Although the *Jingdian shiwen* dates to the late 6th century, concrete examples of such usage appear in the Dunhuang manuscripts only from the mid 7th century. Ishizuka distinguishes several categories of conventions based on the location of the red *poyin* marks with reference to the character itself.[19] The most basic form is when the red dot is placed over the middle of the character, indicating that it is being used in a derivative sense. For example, in manuscript Or.8210/S.2577 the character 樂 appears standing for the words "music" and "pleasure" in two adjacent lines:[20]

是時八萬四千天女，作眾伎樂，而來迎之。其人即著七寶冠，於綵女中，娛樂快樂。

At that time, eighty-four thousand heavenly women shall come and welcome him, performing different kinds of music. He shall instantly don a crown of seven treasures and find amusement and pleasure among the women of the palace.

The first instance of the character, appearing in the word *jiyue* 伎樂 ("music") is unmarked, whereas the other two occurrences in the words *yule* 娛樂 ("amusement") and *kuaile* 快樂 ("pleasure") are marked with a red dot. This shows that

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17 Lu Deming 1985, "Wu bujing" 毋不敬.

18 Needless to say, in this place Lu Deming refers to Sui and Tang manuscripts and is not concerned with the complex relationship between these two characters in the pre-Qin period.

19 Ishizuka 1993, 32–49.

20 This example is also noted in Ishizuka 1993, 41. For a translation of the colophon of this manuscript describing the way of principles of adding punctuation marks, see Section 5.1 below.

the default reading of the character was to stand for the word "music" and that other usage had to be marked in order to distinguish it.

A variation of this technique in Dunhuang manuscripts is when the red mark is applied to the right of the character. In the above two cases it only serves to mark the whole character without specific phonetic information. In contrast with this, the red mark could also appear at one of the four corners of the character, just outside its square boundaries. In such cases not only the presence of the dot was meaningful but also its location, because it was indicative of the tone with which the particular character was supposed to be pronounced, and this in turn also determined the word it meant to represent in that context. Within the Dunhuang material, Ishizuka distinguishes four different systems, depending on in which corner the *ping* 平 ("level") tone, the first of the four, is placed: upper right, lower right, lower left, or upper left. Within each system the tones followed one another in a clockwise direction, that is, if the 1st tone was in the upper right corner, then the 2nd was in the lower right, the 3rd in the lower left, and the 4th in the upper left one.

Ishizuka correctly attributes the development of these marks to advancements in philological studies, as scholars needed to distinguish and mark an increasing amount of linguistic information in texts.[21] However, while the motivation behind the use of the *poyin* system was to study the classics "so as to understand difficult characters and sentences correctly,"[22] one cannot but wonder why some of these elucidations were necessary at all. After all, distinguishing the two pronunciations of the character 惡 (*e* vs. *wu*) in the *Lunyu* 論語 would have been fairly obvious for all literate people, since by the Tang dynasty the text had been used as one of the basic books of elementary education. This suggests that rather than simply facilitating the reading of the texts, such detailed commentarial notation must have functioned as a way of emphasizing and transmitting a certain tradition of interpretation.

4 Abbreviation marks

Abbreviation marks are used for indicating an omitted portion of a word or phrase which is unequivocal in a particular context. They typically occur in non-canonical Buddhist texts, including commentarial literature and the popular genre of so-called "transformation texts" (*bianwen* 變文). There are two types of

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21 See Ishizuka 1981, 107.
22 *Ibid.*

abbreviations: one used for binoms, the other for longer strings ranging from a phrase to complete sentences. The first type is only used for fairly common words where only the first character is written, while the second is replaced by one or two comma-like dots (Figure 4/A, 4/B). Common examples are the words *gongde* "merit" (功德→功、); *rulai* "Tathāgata" (如來→如、); *gongyang* "to make offerings" (供養→供、); *zhongsheng* "sentient beings" (眾生→眾、); *fannao* "affliction" (煩惱→ 煩、); *qingjing* "purity" (清淨→清、), etc.[23] Because the mark placed after the first character at times closely resembles the repetition mark, once again, the context is necessary for a correct reading. There are cases, however, when the mark is simply a downward elongation of the first character (e.g., Figure 4/C).
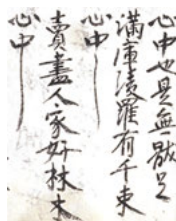
A: P.3808 **B:** P.3808 **C:** P.2133 **D:** P.2305

功德 如來 供養 心中也是無厭足

Fig. 4: Abbreviation marks in manuscripts of popular Buddhist literature.

Beside individual words, abbreviation can also be used for phrases and sentences which are deemed obvious enough so that the reader can decode them based on the context. Generally speaking, these are strings of text that occur repeatedly within the same manuscript. For example, manuscript P.2133 has several such formulaic sentences which are abbreviated after the initial use. Figure 4/D shows the phrase "yet has no contentment in his heart" 心中也是無厭足, appearing three times in the text. The first time it appears in full but after that it is abbreviated by writing the first two characters and then replacing the rest with a long vertical stroke.

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23 Pan Zhonggui 1981, 7–8.

5 Segmentation marks

This is the category of scribal notation which comes closest to our modern notion of punctuation. These marks are used for dividing the text and aiding its understanding, without adding or deleting characters. They are not part of the Chinese script as such but have only been used for learning purposes or parsing difficult or ambivalent texts (e.g., the Classics). Accordingly, these marks appear in manuscripts less frequently than correction and repetition marks, both of which were fairly common, forming an integral part of medieval manuscript culture.

In our modern age we are accustomed to relying on a highly standardised system of punctuation marks and these specify the grammatical relationships within a text with considerable regularity. But consistency in this respect is certainly a modern invention even in Western languages. In contrast with this, medieval Chinese scribes divided the text into smaller segments, indicating groups of characters that belonged together. Nothing in this practice distinguished the end of a sentence in the modern sense of the word; the text seemed to consist of a succession of shorter "chunks," each of which was only a few characters long. Similarly, while the modern understanding of punctuation acknowledges its value for signifying the mood and tone of sentences (e.g., exclamation and question marks), in Chinese manuscripts this was almost never the case, and such nuances were thought to have been sufficiently indicated in the text itself, not the least with a series of modal particles.

When studying the Dunhuang manuscripts, it is probably a good practice not to adhere too closely to our modern notion of punctuation, since the medieval understanding of grammatical constituents and syntactic relations was in many ways different from ours.[24] Instead, it seems more reasonable to begin our investigation with the contemporary functionality of the marks, and only then try to draw parallels with modern usage. Based on their use in context, we can distinguish the following types of marks:

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24 For example, in Li Zhengyu's (1998, 98) classification of punctuation marks in Dunhuang manuscripts the first two categories are the period and the comma. He observes that the period was often written with the same mark as the comma but fails to acknowledge that at the time people might have made no distinction between the two. An improvement in this respect is the work of Guan Xihua (2002) who categorized the marks in the Dunhuang corpus primarily on the basis of their visual appearance and within each category described the function of a particular mark. From the point of view of methodology, the best approach is that of Pan Zhonggui (1981) whose classification is based on the functionality of marks within the manuscripts.

5.1 Separation marks

These are dots in the form of a modern serial comma (.) or a period (。), used for separating smaller bits of texts, which normally do not exceed a few characters. There seems to be no distinction between the two marks, both of them could be used in the same context, and often there were in-between forms. In figure 5/A, for example, red comma-type marks are placed after every few characters, much where we would punctuate the text today with commas and periods. However, the same comma-like symbol is used consistently throughout the manuscript, showing the lack of distinction between a pause and a full stop. Another example in Figure 5/B is a copy of the *Maoshi Zheng jian* 毛詩鄭箋, where the text is divided by the same kind of red dots. Interestingly, the punctuation also extends to the commentaries placed in two-column small script between the main text.[25]

A: P.4010
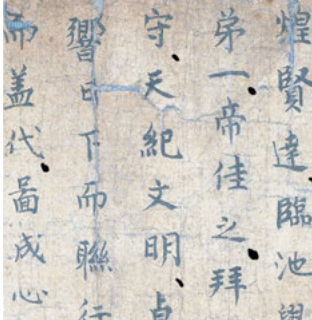
B: Or.8210/S.10

Fig. 5: Separation marks. (The marks on both manuscript images have been retraced in black because the originals red marks are too faint to be easily visible in a black-and-white print.)

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[25] A fascinating aspect of this manuscript is that phonetic readings of selected characters from the main text appear on the verso, exactly where the annotated character is. The user has to hold the paper to the light in order to be able to see the connection between the two sides. See Ishizuka 1970, 5.

Both of the above cases are examples of secondary punctuation when the marks were added not by the copier but someone else who used the text sometime later. We are fortunate to have among the Dunhuang manuscripts a description of the motivation behind such subsequent mark-up. In manuscript Or.8210/S.2577, a 7th-century scroll containing fascicle 8 of the *Lotus sūtra*, the punctuator explains his reasons in the colophon the following way:

> 余為初學讀此經者不識文句，故憑點之。亦不看科段，亦不論起盡，多以四字為句，若有四字外句者，然始點之；但是四字句者，絕不加點。別為作為(帷委反)；別行作行(閑更反)。如此之流，聊復分別。後之見者，勿怪下朱，言錯點也。

> I punctuated this sūtra for beginner students who read it but are unfamiliar with the segmentation of the text. I neither paid attention to larger sections, nor considered their beginning and end. For the most part segments consist of four characters and I started punctuating them when the segments did not comprise four characters. But for four-character segments I added no dots whatsoever. The alternate reading of the character 為 refers to when it is pronounced as 帷委反; the alternate reading of the character 行 refers to when it is pronounced as 閑更反.[26] In this manner, I tentatively distinguished them. Let those who see this later not blame me for using red marks and say that the punctuation is flawed.

The description explains that the punctuator added the marks for the sake of beginners who did not know how to parse the text. But even these novices would have been familiar with the general rule of four-character units in literary Chinese and thus only places where this was not the case had to be marked. Similarly, red *poyin* marks appear in the manuscript only for characters the reading of which in that particular context deviates from their common one. This shows that contrary to our modern custom of punctuating a text thoroughly, in medieval China punctuation was used, if used at all, primarily for solving ambiguities or difficulties. As a result, the system of punctuation we can discern from the Dunhuang manuscripts often appears inconsistent, since a punctuator did not strive for being consistent but concentrated instead on less obvious passages.

5.2 Section marks

These are marks used to denote the beginning of a new section in the text. A section is of course a flexible concept, ranging from a few characters to several lines. In our modern terminology it comes closest to the paragraph. Generally

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26 I am grateful to Prof. William H. Baxter for elucidating the nuances of these *fanqie* pronunciations to me.

speaking, section marks differ from separation marks described above in that the latter are used for indicating syntactic units (i.e. sentences or clauses), whereas the former partition texts into larger, conceptually cohesive segments. With respect to their physical appearance, section marks can have various forms. In Figure 6/A, for example, the section mark is in the shape of red brackets placed at the top right corner of the new section; in the same manuscript, red dots act as separation marks (see 5.1 above) to segment the text into smaller syntactic units.
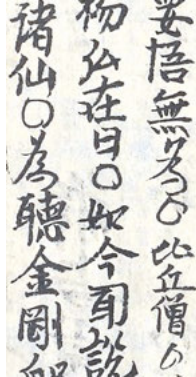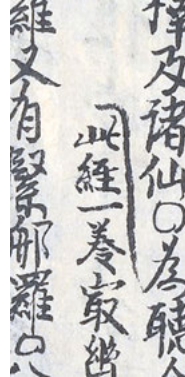
A: P.2418 **B:** P.2133 **C:** P.2133 **D:** Or.8210/S.797

Fig. 6: Section marks in manuscripts.

In Figure 6/B, sections are indicated by large circles (○) placed between characters. Elsewhere in this manuscript, in some cases dots are used instead of circles for the same function. Figure 6/C illustrates how in the same manuscript the large circles are also used to separate the verses of poems, which are only a few characters long and, according to our modern sense of grammar, would often belong to the same sentence. In addition, Figure 6/C also shows the use of brackets as section marks, although with a slightly different functionality. In contrast with the large circles, the brackets mark comments which in our modern practice would probably be consigned to a footnote. In contrast with the short red brackets in Figure 6/A, the brackets in this manuscript are much longer, with their vertical line extending downward along the first few characters of the comment.

The manuscript in Figure 6/D uses hook marks to distinguish the beginning of new sections. Even when the sections begin on a new line, which is usually the

case in this manuscript, the hookmark is placed at the top of the line to emphasize that there is a break between the previous line and this new one. In a few instances, whenever space permits, a new section begins on a half-finished line after the mark[27] – Figure 6/D shows two such sections beginning halfway through the line.

With respect to the identity of the person adding the marks we can be fairly certain that the red marks used in Figure 6/A were added by a later punctuator, i.e. these represent secondary notation. In the other three cases (B, C, and D), however, it was the copier who added the marks while he was copying the manuscript.

Beside the marks described here, the most common way of indicating a new section was by starting a new line, leaving the rest of the previous one empty. In an effort to make the structure of the text visually more apparent, indentation was also commonly used. For example, colophons appended at the end of manuscripts were typically indented and separated from the main text by several lines worth of empty space. Yet another way of controlling the layout was the use of condensed spacing for the characters, most commonly used for stanzas embedded in Buddhist *sūtras*, as well as chapter titles – these served as obvious separators between sections.

6 Reverence mark

This mark is not an actual symbol but an empty space[28] placed before the name or title of a person who is venerated by the community producing the manuscript. Usually the space equals to a single character but occasionally it could be longer. In some cases, not only the names of revered personages were written in this manner but also their attributes. Obviously, the significance of this kind of notation was to draw the reader's attention to the particular spot on the page, to make the name or title stand out from the rest of the text. The traditional Chinese term

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27 This is only true for smaller sections which can fit onto the remaining space of the line. Sections that begin halfway through a line invariably end on that same line. If the new section is longer, it begins on a new line.

28 In taking space as a form of punctuation I am following the modern Western understanding according to which any symbol used to separate or group text can be considered punctuation. See, for example, "Space as a form of punctuation" (Lloyd and Warfel 1957, 368–370).

for this device is *jingkong* 敬空 ("reverence space") and it is usually traced back to a description by Shen Gua 沈括 (1031–1095).[29]

In the manuscript in Figure 7/A, a space is left blank before the word *huangdi* 皇帝 ("emperor"). As an example for the use of a space before a personal name, Figure 7/B shows a segment from the text called "The story of Master Yuan from Mount Lu" 廬山遠公話, where the name of Master Yuan 遠公 is preceded by an empty space.
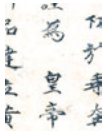
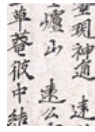**A:** Or.8210/S.3071   **B:** Or.8210/S.2073

Fig. 7: Blank space left before titles and names as a sign of respect.

7 Other marks

The above types of marks represent the most frequently seen ones in the Dunhuang corpus. In categorising the common marks, I intentionally concentrated on manuscripts with running text, that is, texts which consist of longer sequences of sentences. The ones used in this paper were canonical or commentarial works of the main traditions of Chinese religion or philosophy. However, there are also manuscripts, although fewer in number, in which content is stored in a highly structured manner. These are the dictionaries, prescription manuals, bibliographic catalogues, registers, etc. which organize a large number of short records into a database-type format. In order to preserve the transparency of their structure, such manuscripts utilise a fairly consistent system of punctuation and layout, much more so than the ones with a linear flow of text. Therefore, one could collect a much larger repertoire of marks which would not, however, be necessarily representative for the majority of Dunhuang manuscripts.[30]

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29 *Mengxi bitan* 夢溪筆談 2003, 271. Shen Gua, however, describes the term *jingkong* as the space left at the end of official communication submitted to superiors, awaiting their comments and signifying the unreserved acceptance of those. Therefore, although this usage of space is also a sign of respect, it nevertheless serves a different function from the examples here.
30 In fact, in the classifications of Guan Xihua (2002) and Li Zhengyu (1988) the majority of the punctuation marks come from such database-like texts, especially rhyme dictionaries, and in

The systematic use of punctuation in such texts is documented in the *Shitong* 史通 , an 8th century work on historiography by Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661–721):

昔陶隱居《本草》,藥有冷熱味者,朱墨點其名;阮孝緒《七録》,書有文德殿者,丹筆寫其字,由是區分有別,品類可知。

In old times, Tao Yinju [i.e. Tao Hongjing 陶弘景; 456–536] in his *Bencao* (*Materia Medica*) used red and black dots to mark the names of herbs with cold and hot tastes [i.e. effects]. Ruan Xiaoxu (479–536) in his *Qilu* (*The Seven Records Catalogue*) wrote out the titles of books from the Wende Palace collection with a red brush. By this means differences were distinguishable and categories recognizable.[31]

The *Bencao* was essentially an inventory of herbs, and the *Qilu* a catalogue of books, thus both were compilations of a series of individual entries, similar to modern databases. The coherent use of a sophisticated system of color dots was an effective method to signify the hierarchies and relationships in the texts. An interest in the accessibility of records is voiced in the "Foreword" of Lu Deming's 陸德明 (556–627) celebrated dictionary, the *Jingdian shiwen* where he explains that he "wrote the text of the classics in black ink and the annotations to those with red characters, in order to distinguish the two and so that they can be located easily."[32]

8 Summary

The Dunhuang manuscripts demonstrate the existence of a sophisticated and mature system of punctuation in the scribal tradition of early medieval and medieval times. While Chinese writing in general functioned well without punctuation, a series of marks were used by the scribes and readers on a daily basis. Some of the marks (i.e. correction, repetition, abbreviation and reverence marks) were part of the scribal habits, while others (i.e. phonetic and segmentation marks) were primarily used in commentarial and educational contexts. In addition, a more elaborate and fairly consistent notational system was employed in inventory-type texts, such as dictionaries, prescription manuals, catalogues, registers.

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some cases are rather atypical for the entire corpus. One of the marks they documented was, for example, the so-called "substitution mark" occurring only in a limited number of dictionaries as a symbol roughly equivalent to the "tilde" or "swung-dash" used in modern lexicography. In contrast with their approach, the categories and examples recorded by Pan Zhonggui (1981) and Ishizuka (1970, 1981, 1993) are more representative, as they originate from more typical manuscripts with continuous text.

31 Liu Zhiji, *Shitong* 1997, 127.
32 Lu Deming 1985, "Preface" 序録.

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