

Punctuation in the postclassical antiquity and the Middle Ages as attested by Greek and Latin papyri and other writing materials

Linguistic evolution is a never-ending process, in which changes over the centuries in all the different textual types (both documentary and literary) and on all kinds of writing supports have progressively led to the formation of a writing system governed by conventions of text layout and stylization. Among the most significant conventional approaches is the system of punctuation, which was born prior to and evolved during post-classical antiquity (Turner & Parsons 1987, 8). The examination of punctuation as an ancient phenomenon is a challenge for modern research (Wingo 1972, 14), and, as a result, a definition that can be consistent and valid in every historical context, seems problematic.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the earliest forms of punctuation in post-classical antiquity and their evolution throughout the Middle Ages, as attested by Greek and Latin papyri and other writing materials. The theoretical basis of the presentation will focus on the following topics: the problems that modern researchers face in defining punctuation, especially with regard to the ancient evidence; the ancient systems of punctuation and definitions of their symbols as described in the treatises of grammarians between the 2nd century BC and the 7th century AD written in Greek and Latin; the form and the use of the first graphemes defined as punctuation symbols and their relationship with another category of symbols, the lectional signs; and how the distinction of textual and paratextual elements can affect the definition of punctuation. My final conclusions will be drawn from a corpus of 45 manuscript sources and will focus on: the extent to which the symbols of the treatises are confirmed in the papyri, the linguistic contexts of their occurrence; the frequency and level of consistency of their use, and how those change throughout

post-classical antiquity and the early Middle Ages; and the role of the various types of handwriting in the process, such as the transition from majuscule to minuscule letter forms.

References

Wingo, E. O. (1972). *Latin Punctuation in the Classical Age*. The Hague: Mouton.

Turner, E.G., Parsons, P.J. (1987). *Greek Manuscripts of the Ancient World*. London: Institute of Classical Studies.