Universal Multiple-Octet Coded Character Set
International Organization for Standardization
Organisation Internationale de Normalisation
Международная организация по стандартизации

Doc Type: **Working Group Document**
Title: **On the glyph of** LATIN LETTER CLOSED INSULAR G
Source: **Michael Everson and Andrew West**
Status: **Individual Contribution**
Date: **2022-01-09**

1. INSULAR G, CLOSED INSULAR G, and CAROLINGIAN G. The orthography of the Early Middle English *Ormulum* is remarkable in that it indicates three different reflexes of original /g/. Its author, Orm, uses Carolingian G for /dʒ/, as in *seggen* (Old English *secgen*) 'to say' [ˈsɛdʒən]; INSULAR G (ꟿ) for /j/ (this is the ancestor of yogh ȝ), as in *ꟿiff* 'if' [jɪf]; and a unique CLOSED INSULAR G of his own invention for /g/, as in ᵹ*oddspell* 'gospel' [ˈgɔdspɛl].

G g Ᵹ ꟿ Ᵹ ᵹ

Peter Baker suggests (see Figure 9) that the analysis of these letters should lead to an interpretation of "closed Insular g" as what we will call "Carolingian g with headbar". We do not believe the evidence is sufficient to make this determination. Orm uses Carolingian Gg in Middle English for /dʒ/ and in Latin (where he does not use Insular Ᵹꟿ). Unfortunately none of Orm's Latin text has any instances of initial capital G, but we can look at some contemporary texts to show that capital Carolingian had a distinctive C-like shape (Figures 1–3) and even a square one (shown in type in Figure 4). In fact some English texts use a C-like shape for the capital of lowercase ꟿ. But Orm does not. His uppercase and lowercase Insular Ᵹꟿ and his uppercase and lowercase Insular closed Ᵹᵹ share the same shape (see Figures 5 and 6). We do not know what his capital Carolingian G would have had, but it is doubtless C-like, and his lowercase Carolingian g is unremarkable—so standard Gg glyphs are most probable.

Baker's suggestion that Orm just put a crossbar atop a Carolingian g is a possible analysis, but putting a crossbar atop a capital G would make it look very much like an Insular Ꞇ, particularly in manuscript, and Orm is not likely to have done that. Orm's understanding of letters seems to be quite advanced, and he would not likely want to do something so ambiguous. In any case we believe that the evidence best suggests that Orm used Gg for /dʒ/ in English (perhaps this phoneme was used in the Latin he used), Ᵹꟿ for /j/, and that he modified the Insular letter, not the Carolingian one, by borrowing the downstroke of the top part of the g.

Shown on the left here are the Baskerville glyphs used in Evertype publications. Shown on the right are the glyphs in version 1.002 of Junicode (this version of the font does not have LATIN CAPITAL LETTER SCRIPT G). In red are glyphs which have been made out of glyphs found in that version, for reference as we discuss the shapes. (They were made quickly and without the care Baker puts into his font.)

G g Ᵹ g Ᵹ ꟿ Ᵹ ᵹ   G g ‿ g Ᵹ ꟿ Ᵹ ᵹ

Baker suggests (Figure 9) a glyph ᵹ which looks like LATIN LETTER SCRIPT G with a crossbar, but Orm's Carolingian g doesn't really look like ɡ—it looks more like g. In fact, all three of Orm's g's share the S-shape which is most original to the insular letterform:

$$\text{ᵹ ꞩ ᵹ}$$

Because Orm does not use a shape like ɡ we don't believe there is a reason to prefer a ɡ-shape to a g-shape for the Carolingian letter, and, because (unlike the usual Gg pairing) uppercase and lowercase ꞩꞩ and ᵹᵹ have the same shape in Orm's hand, we stand by our analysis and the glyphs which have been ballotted and encoded. The letter is really LATIN CLOSED INSULAR G, and it is not *LATIN G WITH HEADSTROKE.

Now the glyphs used for INSULAR G ᵹᵹ in Junius seem to be in the tradition of Edmund Fry's typography, and that shape doesn't "close" very easily. Orm's insular g is decidedly S-like. Perhaps some alterations to Junius' INSULAR G would be of benefit for CLOSED INSULAR G. See Figure 4.

In any case we do not believe that a g/ᵹ/ŋ distinction is what we have in the *Ormulum* (or g/ᵹ/ɡ either), and we maintain that g/ꞩ/ᵹ are the right glyphs to use.

There are similarities in the ductus of all three letters in Orm's hand. See Figures 7 and 8.

2. Glyph improvement. The reference glyph could benefit from a thicker closing loop taken from the g.

$$\text{ᵹᵹ} \rightarrow \text{ᵹᵹ g}$$
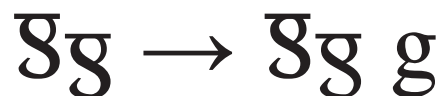
3. Bibliography

Fry, Edmund. 1799. *Pantographia: containing accurate copies of all the known alphabets in the world; together with an English explanation of the peculiar force or power of each letter; to which are added, specimens of all well-authenticated oral languages; forming a comprehensive digest of phonology*. London: Printed by Cooper and Wilson, for John and Arthur Arch, Gracechurch-Street; John White, Fleet-Street; John Edwards, Pall-Mall; and John Debrett, Piccadilly.

Wright, C. E. 1960. *English vernacular hands from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries*. (Oxford Palaeographical Handbooks.) Oxford: Clarendon Press.

4. Figures.

Figure 1. Example from Wright 1960 (Plate 1, from the Peterborough version (1121–1155) of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle) showing G and g circled in red and blue respectively. This scribe does not use the insular letterforms ᵹ and ᵹ.

Figure 2. Example from Wright 1960 (Plate 3, from Vices and Virtues (c. 1200)) showing G and g circled in red and blue respectively, alongside the insular letterform ꟻ used here for ȝ, circled in orange.
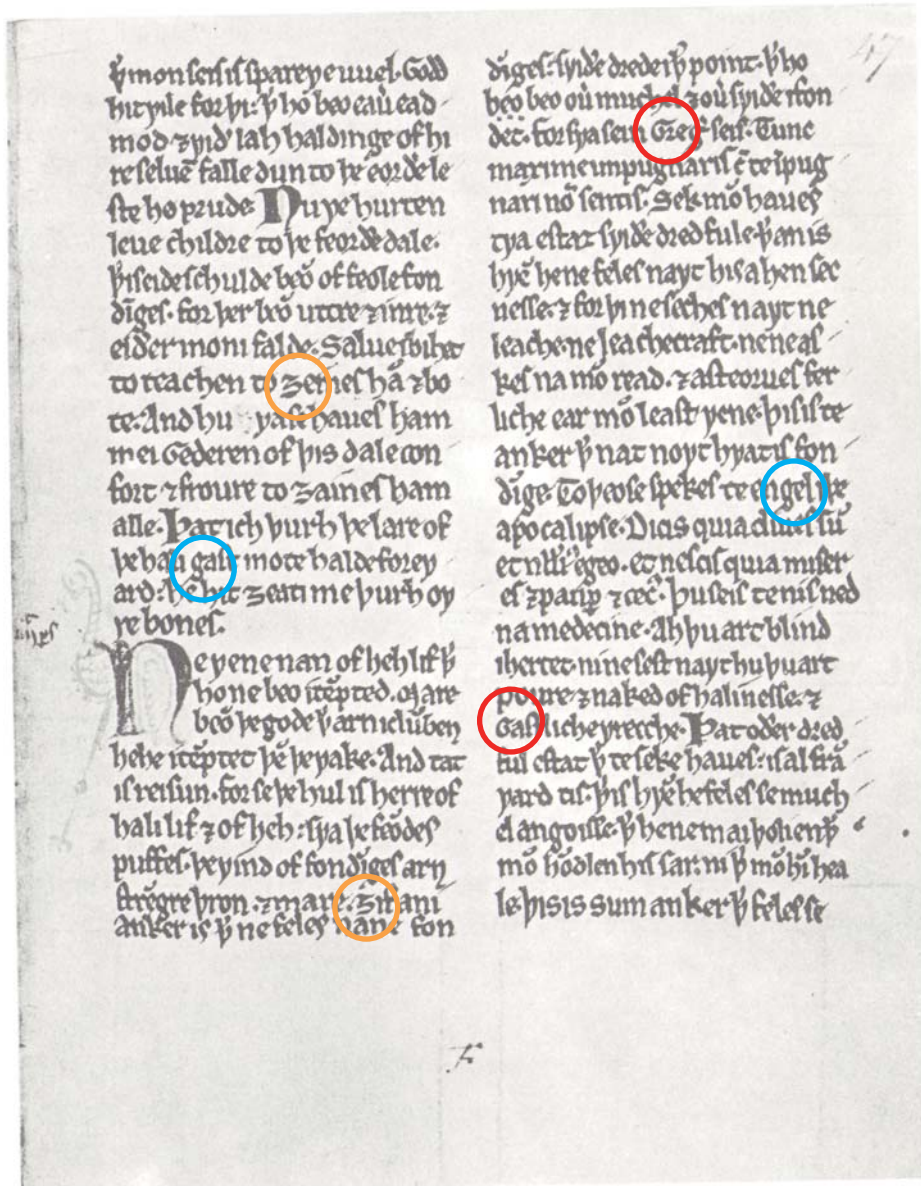
Figure 3. Example from Wright 1960 (Plate 5, from Ancrene Wisse (c. 1225)) showing G and g circled in red and blue respectively, alongside the reflex of an insular letterform of ᵹ used now as ȝ, circled in orange.

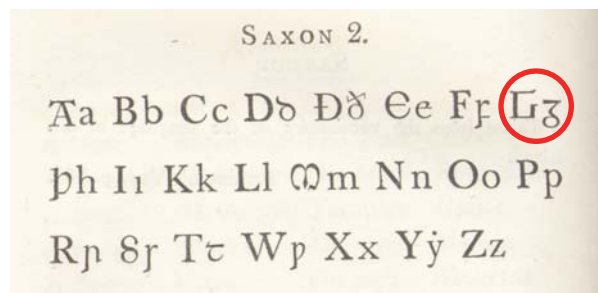**Figure 4.** Example from Fry 1799:260 showing "Saxon" insular letterforms. This may inform the glyph shape of INSULAR G ᵹᵹ in Peter Baker's Junicode font. Perhaps if that shape were revisited in Junicode with regard to the ᵹᵹ shape it might make design of ȝȝ easier.
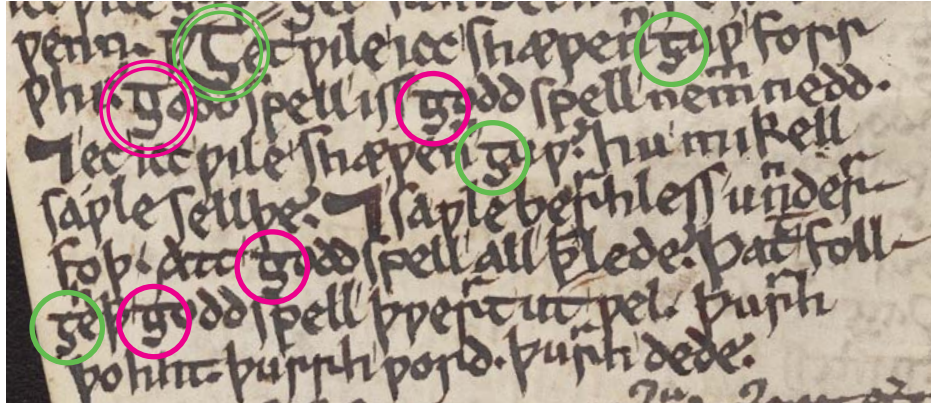
Figure 5. Text from the *Ormulum*, f. 9v, lines 99–106, showing uppercase and lowercase INSULAR G (circled in green) alongside uppercase and lowercase CLOSED INSULAR G (circled in red); the capitals are double-circled. Transcription of the text:

Ᵹ Séꞇ pile icc fhæpeň ᵹup foɲɲphi⸴

Ᵹoddſpell iff ᵹoddſpell neꝯnedd.   100

� ec icc pile fhæpeň ᵹup⸴

Hu mikell fáple fellþe⸴

Ꝼ faple beꞃhleff uňdeꞃfoþ.

Aꞇꞇ ᵹoddſpell all þ lede⸴

Þaꞇ follᵹeþ ᵹoddſpell þþeꞃꞇ úꞇ pel.   105

Þuꞃh þohhꞇ. þuɲɲh poɲd. þuꞃh dede⸴
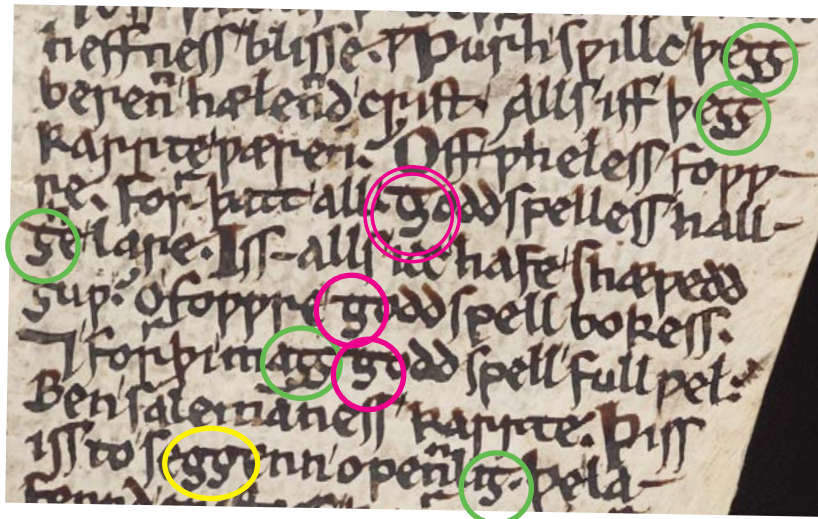
Figure 6. Example from the *Ormulum* f. 9r, lines 47–56 showing lowercase INSULAR G (circled in green) alongside uppercase and lowercase CLOSED INSULAR G (circled in red); the capital is double-circled. Circled in yellow is Carolingian g. Transcription of the text:

Ꝼ Þuꞃh ſpillc þeᵹᵹ beɲeň hæleňd cɲiſꞇ.

Allf iff þeᵹᵹ kaɲɲꞇe pæɲeň.

Off pheleff foɲɲɲe. Foꞃ þaꞇꞇ all

Ᵹoddſpelleff hallᵹe laɲe.   50

Iff — allf icc hafe fhæpedd ᵹup⸴

O foɲɲɲe ᵹoddſpellbokeff.

Ꭾ foꞃþi maᵹᵹ ᵹoddſpell full pel⸴

Ben fálemāneff kaɲɲꞇe⸴

Þiff iff ꞇo feggenn opeňliᵹ   55

Þe lafeɲɲd cɲiſꞇeff kaꞃꞇe.

Figure 7. Text taken from Figure 6 above (lines 52, 50, and 55 repectively) showing what appears to be the ductus of the letters lowercase ᵹ, uppercase Ᵹ, and two lowercase g's. There is nothing compelling here to suggest that CLOSED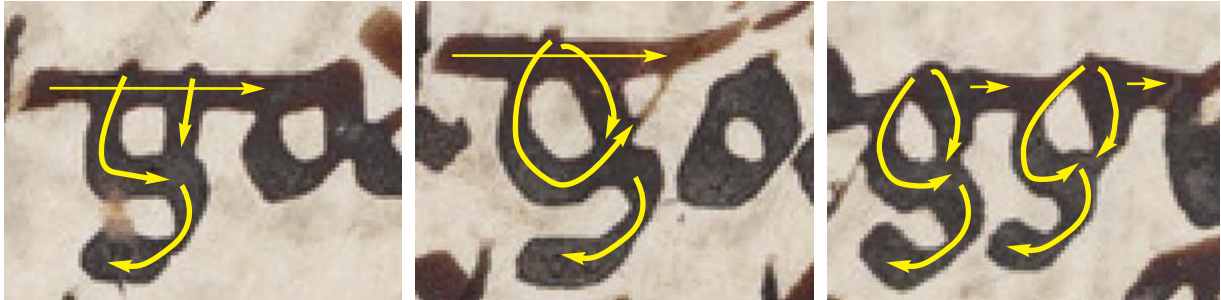 INSULAR G is necessarily based on a Carolingian original; the two downstrokes on the lowercase ᵹ are nicely parallel—just as a "closing stroke" on the insular ᵹ would be! And again, the uppercase pair Ᵹ/Ᵹ have the same basic structure, and the latter does not look like a Carolingian G. Moreover, since Orm's g does not look like script g, basing the glyph for ᵹ on that, as Baker suggests (see Figure 9) would be a mistake.
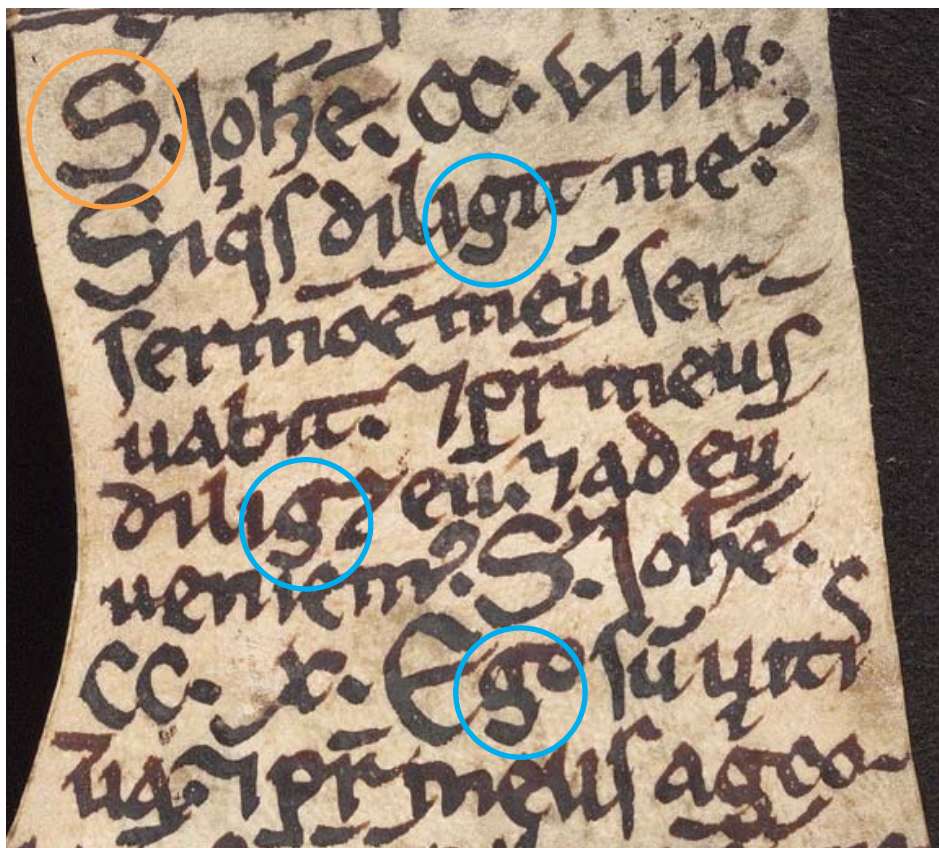

Figure 8. Text in Latin from the *Ormulum* f. 8r showing lowercase Carolingian g with an S-shape alongside uppercase S which has the same shape.

I was very pleased to see the additions for Orm and his 12th-c. Ormulum in 14.0—the text is horrible poetry but a great linguistic resource, and Orm's peculiar characters are needed to do it justice. As you might expect, I've been busy adding these characters to Junicode.

The interpretation of U+A7D0 and 1 ("closed insular g") in Latin Extended D struck me as odd. Arthur Napier (History of the Holy Rood Tree, 1894, pp. 71-2, here: https://www.google.com/books/edition/History_of_the_Holy_Rood_tree/WRpEA AAAYAAJ?hl=en) described Orm's peculiar g, used for plosive /g/, as "a kind of compromise" between the insular g (U+1D79) used in Old English texts and the Carolingian g (like either the two-loop g or U+0261) used in writing Latin from about the mid-10th c. onwards. As to structure, you can see in the attached (taken from the same page of the online facsimile as in the Everson/West proposal for these characters) that Orm's U+A7D1 (number 3 in the image) is nothing more than the Carolingian g of number 1 (perhaps with the horizontal stroke at upper right drawn a little higher) with an additional horizontal stroke added at upper left. (The two strokes are not continuous, though they appear intended to be understood as a single top stroke.) The top of the Carolingian loop is usually plainly visible, rising slightly above this two-part horizontal stroke. The insular g (number 2), by contrast, has a single horizontal stroke at the top and an s-like shape descending from it. This lower shape is structurally quite different from the bottoms of numbers 1 and 3, which are the same. (I'll spare you the details.)

In short, I wouldn't call number 3 a "closed insular g" at all, but rather "g with top horizontal bar" or the like.

The result of this misinterpretation of the MS letter is that the Unicode reference character is slightly absurd:

The Junicode interpretation is (far from pretty, but), I would say, more true to the MS letter-shape:

The Unicode reference character is important, I think, since most font makers seem to copy these exotic characters from the code charts without ever consulting the MSS they're based on.

I'm not sure this matter is worth such a long exposition as this (sorry!), but I thought I'd mention it anyway. Font makers are soon going to start putting U+A7D0 and U+A7D1 in their fonts, and the results are going to be unfortunate.

Best,
Peter

Department of English
University of Virginia
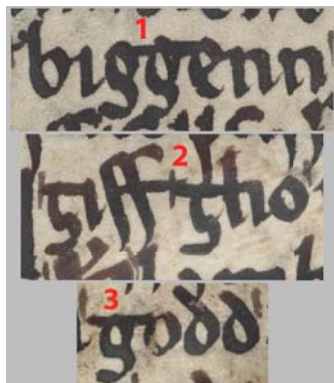P.O. Box 400121
Charlottesville, Virginia 22904-4121

Figure 9. Text of the e-mail on this topic sent by Peter Baker to Deborah Anderson, 2021-09-21.