



From Ink to Sound: Decoding Musical Manuscripts

Video Transcript

How does a medieval voice sound?

[Matteo Nanni] We have just heard and seen the video recording of Dominique Vellard and his ensemble singing the Introitus *Sacerdotes tui, Domine*. Maybe you could hear that they did not sing just the pitches of the melody, but that this recording takes into consideration how the medieval voice was articulated. The reason of this subtle shading of the melody is that the Vellard ensemble was singing after having memorised the chant and then reading from the neumes.

Even if neumatic notation cannot visualise the pitches and the rhythmic relations, it is, however, capable to display the voice articulations in a very detailed manner. I want to show you some examples. You see here a version of *Sacerdotes tui* from a manuscript written around 960 in the monastery of Einsiedeln, Switzerland. It is notated with so-called German neumes. On the left side, you can see the beautifully illuminated initial over the song text, here in tan colour, it is easy to recognise the single neumes written with darker ink.

[MONASTIC CHANTING]

In this segment, you can see many different neumes: a *pes quadratus*, a *porrectus*, a *climacus*, a *clivis*. We also see here two times the significative letter E for *equaliter*, same pitch, and other neumes I shall talk about shortly. The different shapes of the neumes and the additional signs had an influence on the performance. I will show you which effect they have on the declamation. Let's verify it as we read and listen. First, I want to talk about the *litterae significativae*, letters which were meant to clarify the meaning of the neumes affecting the rhythm, the pitch, or the manner of execution. For example, L stands for *levare*, a rise in the pitch. And C for *celeriter*, faster.

[MONASTIC CHANTING]

The *episema* is a small stroke that is here added to the *clivis*. It probably indicates a lengthening of the notes to which it applies. In this example, you can hear it before and after a *quilisma*, which gives another emphasis to the notes. In medieval sources, it is described as a trembling and rising sound.

[MONASTIC CHANTING]

Here, you can see the same melodic feature, two times a downwards interval, the first time in the normal shape of a *clivis*, the second time with a different articulation of it. It is a *cephalicus*, a so-called *liquescent* neume, which indicates article or vocal treatments for these notes. *Liquescence* is a feature of neumatic notation which arises in singing certain consonants to provide a semi-vocalisation of that consonant as a passing note to the next pitch. Here, it occurs on the consonant N of the word *duant*. There is also an addition of a letter I for *inferius*, that is, lower.

[MONASTIC CHANTING]

Finally, I want to show you a more complex combination of neumatic signs. On the words *David servuum*, you can see here on the syllable *ser*, a *torculus* with several articulation signs. Two letters are added, L for *levare*, raise, and P for *pressionem*, driving forward, becoming faster. The shape of the *torculus* here is different from the one you became acquainted with in the past steps. The longer and bent line here indicates a special voice effect on the word *servuum*. It is a *liquescent* neume that emphasises the consonantal sound R.

[MONASTIC CHANTING]