



## **From Ink to Sound: Decoding Musical Manuscripts**

### Video Transcript

#### **Writing music: from sound to ink**

[Matteo Nanni] Welcome to the second week. Imagine, that for a long time, music was transmitted just orally. The musicians had to memorise a huge repertoire of liturgical chant. During the ninth century, medieval singers began to mark their song texts with little lines and dots in order to depict the melodies and in order to recall them to memory. I will introduce you now to an important shift, the very beginning of notation in medieval music history.

The background of this evolution is an extensive ecclesiastical and political reform issued during the eighth century by Charlemagne. During the Carolingian period, the so-called Gregorian chant originated as a reworking of Roman ecclesiastical song by Frankish cantors. The newly generated and widespread repertoire was then written down, starting from the second half of the ninth century in Carolingian monastery scriptoria, a room where manuscripts were copied.

The members of the chant community felt the necessity for writing down the melodies with a system of signs that is called neumatic notation. The neumes depict the melodic line, although without giving exact notes or rhythms to be sung. Neumes did not replace the practice of singing by heart. They just helped the singer to verify if they were singing correctly.

We can finally deduce that the urgency to visualise music was initially based on the idea of notation as a control system.