

Chapter 1

Neums and Latin Pronunciations

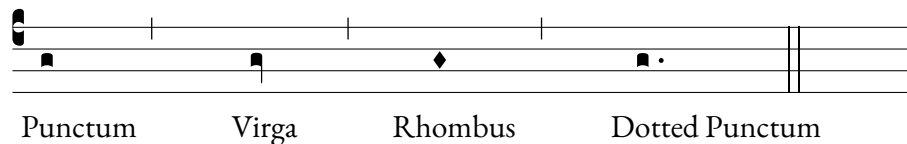
A congregation that is devoutly present at the sacrifice, in which our Savior together with His children redeemed with His sacred blood sings the nuptial hymn of His immense love, cannot keep silent, for “song befits the lover” (Saint Augustine, *Serm.* 336, n. 1.) and, as the ancient saying has it, “he who sings well prays twice.”

—Pope Pius XII, *Mediator Dei* ¶193, 20 November 1947

1.1 Neums

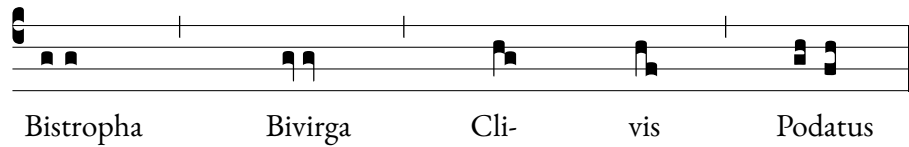
At first glance these square notes may appear as esoteric as Egyptian hieroglyphs, but once broken down it really is a very simple musical notation. The following is adapted from [A Plain and Easy Introduction to Gregorian Chant](#) by Dr. Susan Treacy.

1.1.1 One-note Neums



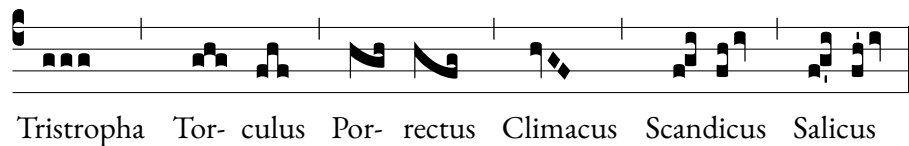
- ***Punctum*** is the simplest neum and is **held for one count**
- ***Virga*** is a *punctum* with stem
- ***Rhombus*** means “diamond” and is a *punctum* on its side
- **Dotted *Punctum*** is **held for two counts**, getting quieter on the second half

1.1.2 Two-note Neums



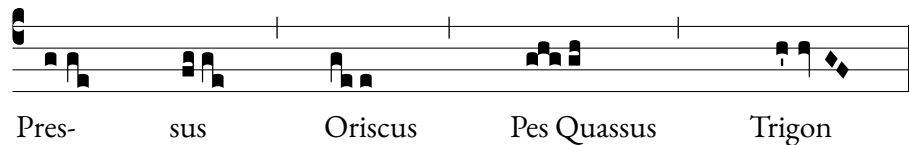
- *Bistropa* or *Distropa* is made of two *punctums* and is **held for two counts**, getting louder on the second half
- *Bivirga* is made of two *virgas* and is **held for two counts**, getting louder on the second half
- *Clivis* comes from the Latin for “inclined” and is composed of a *virga* and a *punctum*; it is sung **high–low**
- *Podatus* comes from the Latin for “foot” and is composed of a *punctum* and a *virga*; it is sung **low–high**

1.1.3 Three-note Neums



- *Tristropa* is made of three *punctums* and is **held for three counts**, getting louder on the second half
- *Torculus* comes from the Latin for “to twist” and is sung **low–high–low**
- *Porrectus* comes from the Latin for “to stretch” and is sung **high–low–high**
- *Climacus* comes from the Latin for “ladder” and is sung **high–lower–lowest**
- *Scandicus* comes from the Latin for “to ascend” and is sung **low–higher–highest**
- *Salicus* is a *scandicus* with an vertical *episema* (discussed shortly below) on the middle note which calls for an expressive lengthening of that note (most especially when the vertical *episema* is above the note); it is sung **low–higher (with slight hold)–highest**

1.1.4 Compound Neums



- **Pressus** comes from the Latin for “to press” and is composed of either a *punctum* or a *podatus* with a *clivis*
- **Oriscus** comes from the Greek for “horizon” and is composed of a *clivis* with a *punctum*
- **Pes Quassus** comes from the Latin for “foot shake” and is composed of a *torculus* with a *podatus*
- **Trigon** comes from the Latin for “triangle” and is composed of a *punctum* with a *climacus*
- In all of the above cases, when two *punctums* appear next to each other the note is **held for two counts** (like a *bistrophæ*)

1.1.5 Special Notations



- **Ictus** is the first note of a binary or ternary grouping of notes and is notated with the **Vertical Episema**
- **Horizontal Episema** is a horizontal line over a note and signifies an expressive lengthening; when it is across multiple notes, the first notes get lengthened more than the latter
- **Quilisma** comes from the Greek for “rolling” and is the squiggle in the middle of a three-note ascending neum; it is a note in of itself, and the note preceding it gets an expressive lengthening; it is sung **low (with slight hold)–higher–highest**
- **Liquescent** is a small teardrop note that signifies a certain part of a word to be articulated; it is used to separate:
 - the vowels of a diphthong (*Al-le-lu-ia*, *Lau-da-mus*)
 - consonants (*San-ctus*, *tol-lis*, *Ho-san-na*, *et lux*)

1.2 Latin Pronunciations

Like the placard nailed to the top of the Cross, the Mass communicates in several languages: Hebrew (*Amen, Alleluia, Sabaoth*), Greek (*Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison*) and, of course, Latin. Ecclesiastical Latin is quite distinct from other forms and has a host of special rules governing proper pronunciation. The following is adapted from the *Liber Usualis* (N^o 801 in Latin-English, 1961), pages xxxvj–xxxix.

1.2.1 Vowels

Each vowel has one sound; a mixture or sequence of sounds would be fatal to good Latin pronunciation; this is far more important than their exact length.

- **A** as in *father*, never as in *can* (e.g. *Pater*)
- **E** as in *red, men, met*, never as “ay” in *ray* (e.g. *Jesus*)
- **I** as “ee” in *feet*, never as in *milk* or *tin* (e.g. *Filio*)
- **O** as in *for*, never as in *go* (e.g. *fortis*)
- **U** as “oo” in *moon*, never as in *custom* (e.g. *Spiritu*)
- **Y** is treated as the Latin **I** (e.g. *martyr*)

1.2.2 Diphthongs

As a general rule when two vowels come together each keeps its own sound and constitutes a separate syllable (e.g. *Dei, diei, filii, eorum, prout, ait*). However, there are the following exceptions:

- **AE** and **OE** are treated as the Latin **E** (e.g. *saecula saeculorum, caeli* or *coeli*); this applies also if it appears as **Æ** and **Œ**
- In **AU**, **EU** and **AY** the two vowels form one syllable but both vowels must be distinctly heard (e.g. *Lauda, eumdem* and *Raymundus*)
- **Q** or **NG** followed by **U** and a vowel keeps its normal sound and is uttered as one syllable with the vowel which follows (e.g. *qui, quae, quod, quam, sanguis, sanguine*)
- **Cui** is pronounced with two syllables, but in certain hymns it may be treated as one on account of the metre


1.2.3 Consonants

The consonants must be articulated with a certain crispness; otherwise the reading becomes unintelligible, weak and nerveless.

- **C** before **E, AE, OE, I** or **Y** is pronounced like “ch” in *church* (e.g. *caelum, Cecilia*)
- **CC** before the same vowels is pronounced like “T-ch” (e.g. *ecce*)
- **SC** before the same vowels is pronounced like “sh” in *shed* (e.g. *ascendit, descendit*)
- Except for the above cases **C** is always pronounced like the English *K* (e.g. *caritas, corpus, esca, saecula saeculorum*)
- **CH** is always like *K* (e.g. *Christi, chorus, Cherubim, brachium*)
- **G** before **E, AE, OE, I** or **Y** is soft as in *generous* (e.g. *Regina, magi, genitum, agimus*)
- **G** in all other cases is hard as in *government* (e.g. *ego, vigor, Gloria, gaudia*)
- **GN** has a softened sound like “ny” in *canyon* (e.g. *Dignum, Agnus, Regnum, Magnificat*)
- **H** in *mibi* and *nihil* is pronounced like the English *K*
- **H** in all other cases it is silent (e.g. *homo, bodie*)
- **J** sometimes appears as **I** and is pronounced like the English *Y* (e.g. *Jesu, jam, Alleluia, major*)
- **PH** is always like the English *F* (e.g. *Propheta*)
- **R** before another consonant should be slightly rolled like in *three* (e.g. *carnis*); do not bring the **R** sound into a preceding syllable (e.g., *Kyrie, Sapere, Diligere, Maria*)
- **S** is hard like in *sea* (e.g. *Sanctus*), but if it is between two vowels it is slightly softened like in *misery* (e.g., *misericordia, Hosanna*)
- **TI** after any letter (except **S, T** or **X**) and before a vowel is pronounced “tsee” (e.g. *patientia, gratia, constitutio, laetitia, laudatio*)
- Otherwise **T** is always like the English *T* (e.g. *termino*)
- **TH** is always like *T* (e.g. *Thomas, catholicam*)
- **X** is pronounced “ks”, slightly softened when coming between two vowels (e.g. *exercitus*)
- **XC** before **E, AE, OE, I** or **Y** is pronounced “ksh” (e.g. *excelsis*)
- **XC** before other vowels is pronounced “ksc” (e.g. *excussorum*)
- **Z** is pronounced “dz” as in the end of *stands*, but not as “z” in *zebra* (e.g. *azymus, zizania*)
- All the rest of the consonants **B, D, F, K, L, M, N, P, Q** and **V** are pronounced as in English
- Double consonants must be clearly sounded (e.g. *bello, Abbas, Joannem, Innocens, piissime, terra*)

1.3 Bringing it All Together

Without being too concerned about “reading” the music, let’s try our hand at chanting a well-known prayer following the neums along with the words and keeping our pronunciation in check.

6. 
G ló-ri- a * Patri, et Fí-li- o, et Spi-rí-tu- i Sancto. Si-cut e-rat in princí-pi- o, et nunc,
et semper, et in sǎcu-la sǎcu-ló-rum. Amen.

1.4 Homework

Practice slowly pronouncing the words of Psalm 116 in Latin. This will be very relevant in a future lesson. It is always a good practice to have the translation of a Latin piece handy so that you know exactly what you’re praying.

1. Laudáte Dóminum, omnes Gentes: *
laudáte eum, omnes pópuli :
2. Quóniam confirmáta est super nos miser-
icórdia ejus: * et véritas Dómini manet in ætér-
num.

1. O praise the Lord, all ye nations: praise
him, all ye people.
2. For his mercy is confirmed upon us: and
the truth of the Lord remaineth for ever.

Also, if you’re one to recite your *Pater*’s and *Ave*’s in Latin, check to see that your pronunciations are up to par.