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## Liquescence

### *Premise*

The Gregorian rhythm revealed to us by the early manuscript sources is the result of a musical declamation of sacred texts. In the expressive phenomenon we call Gregorian Chant there is in fact no reason to refer to either an association or an opposition of “text” and “music”. For if we consider the matter carefully, the very compounding of two distinct elements is the result of a misunderstanding: a misunderstanding founded on the false assumption that we can speak of two proximate, yet distinct and separable, entities. Paradoxically, the famous notion – dear to some recent scholars – that Gregorian chant is a “text-melody symbiosis” has done no more than accentuate that constitutive distance. In fact, if not in intention.

The process (undertaken since 1908) of recovering melodic versions close to the original has been accompanied by a serious and persistent “gap” in the rhythmic aspect – a fact that has surely done little to help achieve the synthesis that we find so forcefully asserted by the first unheighted notations. The study of these notations has usually generated assessments of a specifically musical order, which have sometimes gone some way towards reducing the distance between the reconstituted (though incomplete) melody and its rhythmic framework, but have not (if not partially) succeeded in transferring every new acquisition into the exegetical domain. However, the prodigious progress made by semiology in the second half of the 20th century has contributed, in spite of contradictions and partial visions, towards laying the foundations for a more radical understanding of the early neumatic notations. Rather than a rhythmic code, those signs are an extreme synthesis of all that contributes to *explain* that text. Gregorian chant is not concerned with “reciting” text, but with “creating its exegesis”: hence with the passage from materiality to meaning, from assumptions to objectives, from phonetic conformations to sense.

This is the premise behind my reflections on liquescence, which are therefore concerned not only with the concrete materiality of the text, but also with the rhythm that translates its meaning.

### *What is liquescence?*

The phenomenon of liquescence offers the clearest evidence that Gregorian rhythm is based on syllabic value. The syllable, as is always justly claimed, is

a sort of rhythmic cell. So it is above all by assimilating the syllabic values that we correctly approach the text with regard to its phonetic materiality. In other words, when we analyze the text “with the engine off” (so to speak), we must ensure that we are not drawn into the snares of either mensuralism or isochronism. Instead we must adopt a simple pronunciation that grasps the minimal, yet decisive differences in value between the syllables, without either emphasis or special underlining. These differences are caused not only by the vowel and consonant structures themselves, but also by their constitutive importance within the word (accented, atonic or final syllables, etc.).

This very practical operation, therefore, is what needs to be done first. After that, simple recitation can naturally evolve into a kind of “psalm cantillation”. Nothing more clearly than simple psalmody reveals the elemental need for sung syllabic rhythm to remain as close as possible to correct pronunciation – and to do no more than that. The practice of psalmody, which is so simple in conception yet so complex and demanding in its realization, is indeed the singer’s *forma mentis*. And as such it was exercised by long and patient daily practice. It is therefore something the early scribes would have taken for granted.

If, then, our attention is first addressed to the text as a phonetic phenomenon, it goes without saying that one of the crucial issues concerning rhythm is articulation, i.e. the passage from one syllabic unit to the next (= syllabic articulation) or from one word to the next (= verbal articulation).

Now, liquescence concerns precisely this rhythmic issue, for it appears where the pronunciation of syllables with a particular vowel and consonant conformation is especially complex. The implications of liquescence are wide and they open up areas of research (not covered here) into the different ways of pronouncing texts in different geographic areas in different periods.

In any case, the way the early scribes notated this phenomenon was to make a concrete modification to the final part of the neume. But while we naturally observe that this valuable feature appears in the notational systems of every school, we cannot help also noticing another conspicuous and crucially important fact: that the same instances of a complex syllabic articulation do not automatically correspond to liquescent neumatic forms. For example, the complex syllabic articulations in words like *omnes*, *cordis* and *salvi* are sometimes rendered by liquescent forms, sometimes not. The word is the same, hence the phonetic conformation is unchanged, yet often the liquescence is not written. Evidently, therefore, instead of being an automatic response to a purely phonetic need, liquescence implies another kind of rationale, though the phonetic need is certainly a prerequisite.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Of considerable insight, in this regard, is the study by GODEHARD JOPPICH, “Die rhetorische

*The expressive nature of liquescence*

Once one has grasped the expressive nature of the liquescent graphic forms, the above considerations invite close reflection. Two issues are particularly familiar: the traditional distinction between augmentative and diminutive liquescence; and the ambivalence of identical liquescent forms in the unheighted notations.

The fact that a St Gall cephalicus (as, for that matter, any other form of liquescence in any school of notation) can indicate either just a single sound (virga) or two sounds (clivis) tells us nothing about the expressive nature of the sign (Example 1). Indeed there is a serious risk of misunderstanding, to a great extent caused by the ambiguous terminology, which contradicts the true intention behind the graphic aspect of the liquescence. The ambiguity lies in the assumption that one and the same sign can mean two opposing phenomena: augmentation, if we consider the virga (a single sound); and diminution, if we consider the clivis (two sounds, the second of reduced value).

If the assessment of a liquescent context is merely a question of quantifying the numerical aspect of the sounds, there is obviously no doubt that the same sign is potentially ambivalent. But if instead of a mere note-count, we were to attempt some deeper form of research into quality and structure, using semiological methods, the whole picture changes radically. This is what happens, *mutatis mutandis*, in the neumes with an *initio debilis*, i.e. where the first note of the neume group acts as a sort of “melodic link” and is devoid of structural significance. Consider Example 2. Here on the word “*audivit*”, Laon (Messine notation) puts an intonational torculus, whereas Einsiedeln (St Gall notation) omits the first note and puts a clivis. On “*veni*”, on the other hand, it is Laon that omits the first note of the St Gall pes (plausibly A-C), a note that has also disappeared in the Vatican notation. These are two cases of *initio debilis* neumes. Now, if our comparison of the two unheighted notations were to concern just the number of notes, we would have to admit that there is certainly a difference and a considerable one at that: a clivis versus a torculus (two notes instead of three) and a pes versus an uncinus (two notes instead of one). On the other hand, a rhythmic-structural analysis of the same contexts shows that there is in fact substantial agreement between the two

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Komponente in der Notation des Codex 121 von Einsiedeln”, in *Codex 121 Einsiedeln: Kommentar zum Faksimile*, herausgegeben von Odo Lang, mit Beiträgen von Gunilla Björkwall, Weinheim, VHC, 1991 (see also the Italian translation in *Note gregoriane*, II, 1993, pp. 7-86, ed. by the Cantori Gregoriani). In his article, the author analyzes numerous liquescent contexts and suggests an in-depth rhetorical reading. The result is above all a unified and, at the same time, comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, one that is perfect consistent with the expressive aims of the St Gall liquescences in the various contexts of phrasing.

neume versions, because of the minimal value of the initial note in the context. In short, the *number* of notes has absolutely no influence on the neume's real structure and salient characteristics. Something similar occurs with the liquescent forms, though this time in the final part of the neume.

To return to our cephalicus (used here as an example of every type of liquescence), our concern to establish whether the curling of its final part requires an augmentation of the only note indicated by the virga or the presence of a second, lower, sound of reduced value, should not blind us to what is the only expressive intention behind the decision to resort to liquescence. This is a task for semiology, a method of investigation that can assess the rhythmic implications of differentiated signs.


Here we must pause briefly to consider what the semiological method can actually tell us about the value of the neumatic forms. Above all, we must remember carefully the range and scope of semiology with regard to the rhythmic issue. For the fundamental premise of semiological research is the admission of its limits. And this, as we shall see below, is a point that applies above all to the St Gall notation.

Semiology can say whether a notational form – any notational form – is “simple” or “complex”: or what is normally classified as “cursive” or “non-cursive”. But it can say nothing else, it must be stressed, about the note values. It can merely establish whether a neume – and (within the neume) each single note – is simple or complex. Unfortunately the terminology on the subject is all too variegated. For the simple form we speak of the neume as being cursive, light, fluent or tendentially diminished in value; for the complex form one speaks of it as non cursive, broadened or tendentially augmented in value; and so on. A paradigmatic example is the St Gall single-tone neume (Example 3). Type 1 is the simple form of virga (the same obviously applies to the tractulus); Type 2 is the complex form, achieved by adding an episema. The complex forms of other neumes, as we well know, can also be obtained by modifying their shape (Example 4). The simple form of the pes (round pes, with light values) becomes complex (angular pes, with broadened values) and the same thing happens to the cursive torculus, which becomes a complex torculus when its value is increased.

These are the first basic notions of semiology, and as such are by now universally known and accepted. In particular they indicate a way of thinking about the sign's value that could be summarized as follows: that any modification made to the “simple” form of a neume necessarily makes that form “complex”; or, viewed in terms of values, that every change to a simple form, or to a value that is tendentially “light”, always generates an increase in the value of the resulting complex form. The simple (cursive) form is therefore the first, and most elementary, rhythmic possibility for every neume: the point of departure and the point of constant reference for the construction of the notational system.

But what is liquescence if not an intentional modification of the neume's graphic appearance? We conclude that every liquescent form presents the final articulation of the neume in a "complex" form, hence always with a broadened value. And that must apply well before we make any other kind of assessment concerning the number of sounds implied in the passage to another syllable.

The scribe who chooses to place a liquescence at the end of a neume (after verifying, obviously, the phonetic prerequisites) always opts for a complex form as a means of *adding* weight to the syllabic articulation and never of *reducing* its importance and (consequently) value. Liquescence, therefore, is never a "diminutive" phenomenon, but exclusively and specifically "augmentative".<sup>2</sup>

But let's get back to the graphic form of the St Gall cephalicus (  ). The curling at the top of the virga should be viewed as the transformation of the simple form of single-tone neume into the complex form of its liquescent version. The note indicated by the St Gall virga (whether a single-tone neume or the final element of a compound neume) undergoes broadening, an increase in value and an expressive underlining. In performance this is achieved by the "dilated pronunciation" of a phonetically complex syllabic articulation. Now, this augmentation can either apply just to the note indicated by the virga (the classic case of *augmentative* liquescence) or involve another note (which, in the case of the cephalicus, is melodically lower). This is precisely where the misunderstanding starts: this second note, which is of scant structural importance and of extremely reduced value, cannot and must not suggest a new neume, in this case a clivis, because the rhythmic nature of the clivis and that of the two resulting descending notes are quite different – except, as I have already stressed, merely in the inadequate terms of a numerical count. This is because we cannot, for the reasons just outlined, modify the simple form of the clivis and turn it into the same neume with a shorter final note. The simple form, therefore, cannot in any way recede towards a diminished form, because liquescence is already, in itself, an explicitly augmentative notation.

In short, therefore, the St Gall cephalicus must always be understood as an augmentative liquescence on the note corresponding to the virga. It is an augmentation that can only affect the same note or else conclude with the hint

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<sup>2</sup> If one considers the matter, not only the adjective but also the noun in the term "diminutive liquescence" is debatable, for the phenomenon of liquescence is anything but "liquid". To remain true to the image evoked by the terminology, the text is not "dissolved" as a means of achieving elegant, fluid and soft articulations. On the contrary, it is further charged with the sound (hence with the meaning) that its phonetic conformation permits (though only when necessary).

of a new note, or “added note”,<sup>3</sup> that so to speak completes a situation that is in any case augmentative. The structural weight, therefore, must always be sought in the note indicated by the virga.

The same, obviously, can be said for the other liquescent notations, both single and compound. Here we shall just add a few remarks on the St Gall epiphonus (Example 5), which is an augmentation of a tractulus (—) that may close with a second, higher, sound. Here again (indeed with even greater cause) it is wrong to speak of a two-note neume or “diminished pes”. One of the more solid and enlightening achievements of Gregorian semiology, indeed one of the genuine milestones in the revised conception of Gregorian rhythm, is the verdict on the rhythmic nature of the pes. As demonstrated without fear of contradiction by Rupert Fischer,<sup>4</sup> the tension of this neume manifestly shows the evident *structural distance* between two apparently similar forms (Example 6). The epiphonus is not a “diminished pes”, even when two ascending notes are involved. Its rhythmic nature has nothing to do with the pes. Once again liquescence cannot be the result of recession or shortening.

Instead, an opposite approach to the matter is needed: one that assigns to the liquescent sign an expressive quality that is greater than that of what used to be ambiguously called the “source neume”.<sup>5</sup>

In this regard let us examine the following cases. The epiphonus on “*omnem*” (Example 7) belongs to an extremely clear context of melody-type (Graduals of Mode 2), which, as the example alongside shows, requires a cursive pes at that point. Seen in this light, the epiphonus would seem to be a “reduction” of the pes, which is therefore called the “source neume” because it derives from it.

In actual fact, though the choice of a liquescent form fully respects the formulaic rationale as regards the number of notes, it profoundly affects the

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<sup>3</sup> The term “added sound” is not a new one. It belongs to the semiological tradition, even if it is applied only to liquescent neumes in which the last sound – a reduced value – does not appear in the respective *source neume*. According to this view, the note is extraneous (hence “added”) to the configuration of the neume it derives from. The present article, on the other hand, aims to apply the same terminology to what is traditionally defined as diminutive liquescence. The small note that concludes a *diminutive* neume is in fact already an added sound that completes an augmentative phenomenon. In this case, the *source neume* is not reduced: for while the number of notes remains unaltered, its rhythmic structure is radically changed.

<sup>4</sup> RUPERT FISCHER, “Die rhythmische Natur des Pes”, in *Ut mens concordet voci: Festschrift Eugène Cardine zum 75. Geburtstag*, herausgegeben von Johannes Berchmans Göschl, Sankt Ottilien, EOS Verlag, 1980, pp. 34-136. The most important points of this research are summarized by the same author in ID., “Semiologische Bedeutung und Interpretation des ‘Pes’-Neume”, *Rivista internazionale di musica sacra*, II, 1986, 1, pp. 5-25.

<sup>5</sup> See note 3 above.

structural nature of the sounds themselves. It is worth remembering that it is largely thanks to semiology that it has now been proved that “formula” is not the same thing as “stereotype” and that, in spite of appearances, it is always the requirements of the text that prevail. Such requirements, however, focus on meaning and are not restricted to phonetics, otherwise the syllabic articulation “om-nem” would always correspond to a liquescent notation. And we know that this is not the case (see certain examples in the *Graduale Triplex*, pp. 435,2 or 450,2 and elsewhere).

What happens on “omnem” is not a phonetic “accident” that leaves the compositional framework unchanged and merely sacrifices a part of the second note of the formulaic pes. Instead it is a genuine “agogic-structural mutation” within a formula that nonetheless retains the same number of notes. The cursive pes – a fluid element of lesser structural importance in this context – is replaced by a “new neume” that (in this instance) inverts the rhythmic nature of the “source neume” by attributing structural importance to the first note (through augmentation of its value) and by concluding this augmentation on the following higher note required by the formula. The result is a verbal rhythm that is radically altered to benefit the liquescent syllable, which therefore becomes the real focus and new moment of stress within a formulaic melodic arch that, as a rule, does not call for stress at that point.

Now let us note Example 8. Here at “*benedixit*” the St Gall scribe gives an alternative to the simple “cantillation” embellished by the two cursive pes: on the tonic syllable he replaces the pes with the epiphonus. In this way he gives greater prominence to the whole word (instead of subtracting from it).

### *Liquescence in the Vatican notation*

Unlike many Solesmes editions, which present a certain graphic variety for the square notation, also with regard to liquescence, the Vatican edition is renowned for contemplating only the diminutive liquescence, which is indicated there by reducing the size of the final part of the neume. The forms used are those shown in Example 9.

Unquestionably the square notation can hardly be said to help us to read an augmentative intention into the liquescence: the obvious suggestion is that the “whole” neume is worth more than the “reduced” neume. Let us look at Example 10. Here the tonic syllable “*virgo*” is affected by liquescence (epiphonus) in both the unheighted notations, but not in the Vatican edition, which instead gives a complete pes. The discrepancy is a substantial one, because by foregoing an opportunity to indicate a liquescent context it effectively annuls an important accentual stress. Hence, unlike what one might expect, the absence of (diminutive) liquescence in the Vatican – where instead

it is marked in the unheighted codices – implies a failure to stress the syllabic articulation, hence a loss of expressive density in the text. So the important augmentation conferred by the epiphonus at the word “virgo” (the context is the conclusion of the Time of Advent, during the Communion following the Offertory *Ave Maria* in the same Mass) is diminished and deprived of stress by the complete form of the pes in the square notation.

Now let us consider the following parallel cases (Example 11). The context is formulaic: the first case, from the Introit *Ne timeas Zacharia* for the Vigil of St John the Baptist’s birth clearly alludes to the Communion *Dicite pusillanimes* (example alongside) of the Third Sunday of Advent. The frequent formulaic links between pieces for the Baptist and those for Advent and Christmas are evident and show up the special bond between the Baptist and Christ. What is different, however, is the treatment of the verbal articulation preceding the last word of the formula examined here: the liquescence (i.e. the greatest degree of amplification) is reserved for the Advent piece (“*ecce Deus noster veniet*”). Also worth noting, finally, is a detail that is anything but minor: that here the liquescence does not replace a cursive pes but instead an angular pes, i.e. one in broadened values. Here, therefore, the liquescence can be seen as an augmentation of a formulaic context that is already broadened. Again, the Vatican omits the liquescent notation of the epiphonus on “*noster*”: the “whole” pes fails to do justice to the different treatment of the two contexts.

### *Liquescent notations compared*

Even though recourse to liquescent forms accompanies the long evolution of Gregorian notation, we note that the assumptions and aims behind the choice of this graphic expedient can be different, both among the various neume families and also within them (i.e. among the various manuscript sources that followed one another over the centuries).

This is not the place for a detailed analysis of the evolutionary process of liquescent notations, though such a study – one of extreme complexity and still lacking today – is surely needed.

At a macroscopic level (which necessarily entails a certain superficiality) it is nonetheless possible to draw a significant parallel between the change in interest connected with the passage from adiastematic to staff notation with a progressive change in the rationale behind liquescent notation. The evolution of Gregorian notation over the centuries can be viewed as a gradual passage from a concern with the transmission of meaning to the precise fixing of musical materiality. Certainly, we know very well that the distinction is not at all so clear-cut and that both perspectives coexisted in every age, but the



process is nonetheless evident and its basic co-ordinates are clearly recognizable. All of this is eloquently confirmed by the use of liquescence, which, as I anticipated, is directly concerned with both the materiality of the text and its meaning.

Although the presence of a liquescent neumatic form is always a sign of phonetic complexity in syllabic articulation, its deepest expressive quality is its capacity to sublimate a material necessity by making it an integral and structural part of the phrasing. Now, as we know, phrasing is defined by the moments of tension and distension connected with cursive and non cursive notations. Assuming, therefore, that a liquescent form originates, and should be interpreted, as augmentative (non cursive), its use merely as a response to a simple phonetic need would be tantamount to systematizing, and hence impoverishing, a phenomenon originally of much deeper import. Correct phrasing, i.e. the highest degree of attention to the exegetical dimension of the text, is often achieved by *not* focusing attention on a complexity of pronunciation.

This last statement might seem to verge on the paradoxical, but this is precisely where we find the richness of liquescence and, in general, a key to understanding the exegetical roots of Gregorian chant, as generated with the refinement of rhetorical art.

It also touches on a very concrete subject that happens to concern the performance practice of choral singing in a substantial way. As a rule, singers are expected to “pronounce the text well” in order to make it as intelligible as possible. In the case of Gregorian chant, for which this assumption is equally applicable, awareness in matters of pronunciation must also include the intentionally avoided liquescences. It is precisely these voluntary omissions (i.e. where liquescent notation is not marked, even when the phonetic conditions are suitable) that characterize the use of liquescence and ensure its rhythmic-expressive origins.

Though it is true that liquescence is an enormous resource in the Gregorian repertory, it is also important to stress that the notations that make wide use of it must be considered with great caution. A case in point is the Beneventan school, which palaeographic studies consider to produce superb staffed readings that are among the closest to the melodic version contemplated by the earliest unheighted sources. The notation is renowned not only for being rich in liquescences, but also for showing signs of careful “graduality”.

The Beneventan virga is provided with varying “degrees” of liquescence (Example 12). The added liquescences are progressively substantial, offering a diversification of size that gives a markedly (even if not exclusively) material perspective to the notation of the phenomenon. The different “values” of the liquescence suggest extreme notational refinement: the liquescent system

for every neume is enormously enriched and diversified, almost to the extent of providing a notation within a notation. The writing ranges from a slight hint of liquescence right up to a graphic sign that is very pronounced and conspicuous, indeed almost exaggeratedly so.

It is precisely in this flowering of liquescent forms (and contexts) that we find evidence of a profound change in notational rationale in connection with the finest adiaSTEMATIC notations. In St Gall, as in Laon, the scribe's choice is clear: liquescence is either marked or avoided. It is an unequivocal, intentional and "undifferentiable" sign of textual emphasis – or the lack of it. An unheighted notation has essentially done its job when it uses the liquescent transformation of a neume to indicate a significant moment of focus.

### *St Gall and Laon compared*

The semiological method has specifically focused its research on the two notations transcribed above and below the Vatican staff in the *Graduale Triplex* (1979), one of the method's greatest achievements. The notations are those of St Gall and Metz, the acknowledged symbols of an original, authentic understanding of Gregorian chant. Their extraordinary agreement – unequivocal evidence of a unified repertoire spread over a huge geographic area – is a source of constant amazement. And this substantial concordance of results also applies to the use of liquescence.

Yet while the macroscopic overview is certainly sufficient to show that the two notations have a shared understanding of the phenomenon, closer comparison reveals significant differences.

The temptation to view St Gall and Laon as a single notation is subtle, yet real; and it conceals strong perils in the hermeneutic field. There is no need to question the "end result", since, as I said, a careful semiological examination shows that they generally show a similar exegetical understanding of the sacred texts. And it goes without saying that their agreement is not contradicted by the many rhythmic variants that a comparison of the two notations undoubtedly shows up (even on matters of liquescence). These are simply legitimate differences in expressive nuance and they fail to undermine the solid overall unity of structure. What does need discussing, however, is the notational system used by each of the two schools as a means of arriving at a substantial and profound unity of expressive intents. In short, we should focus not so much on the differences of phrasing (or sense) between the two notations – something which is absolutely normal and, indeed, rich in positive implications – as on a greatly underestimated difference between these two unheighted notations in expressive terms.

To get a better idea of the problem, let us compare the "notational cells"

of St Gall and Metz, i.e. the single-tone neumes (Example 13). In the St Gall notation the virga and tractulus are modified by the addition of the episema (Example 14). But what is the episema if not a precise indication of the importance of that sound? St Gall knows of no other possibility: that sound (or syllable, when we are talking about a single-tone neume) is either marked (with episema) or not marked (without episema). There are no intentionally diversified measurements, graphic sizes or gradations of value. In other words, St Gall radicalizes a piece of rhythmic information by considering it solely in terms of phrasing and therefore uses a kind of yes-no “binary language”. This applies, clearly, both in cases of the added episema and in passages from a cursive to a non cursive line (Example 15).

We can therefore sum up by saying that, according to the St Gall way of thinking, the note values are the practical, free and consciously applied consequence of their determination at a structural level. It is a notation that speaks a clear, precise, essential language consisting of either a “yes” (episema, non cursive form) or a “no” (simple form, lack of episema). We are very far from seeing any presumed indications of performance practice, which were indeed alien to the *forma mentis* of the St Gall scribe.

St Gall, therefore, prefers a “rhythm of direction” to a “rhythm of values”. This can be seen as the response of a notation founded on confidence: confidence that the interpreter was (and should also be today) sufficiently mature to diversify the syllabic values naturally, without expecting from the notation superfluous instructions on what is considered to be a simple precondition.

The relevance and constant novelty of the St Gall notation lies precisely in the immutability of a rhythm of direction (i.e. an exegesis of the text communicated by clear indications of the extension or otherwise of each sound) that needs to be translated into a rhythm of values, each time with novelty, freedom, practical sense and above all fidelity.

With the Messine notation, different considerations apply. As semiological studies have taken pains to assert, the Codex Laon 239 (the most famous source of this eminent school) does not know of the episema. But what is more generally lacking is the underlying reasoning behind this “additional sign”, for here we find a graphic system of another kind.

Again in the case of the Messine notation we shall consider the single-tone neume: the uncinus. What clearly distinguishes it from the corresponding single-tone element of St Gall is its capacity to vary in size. Though one cannot, and must not, classify this graphic variability precisely, its behaviour speaks for itself (Example 16). This example, it must be stressed, shows not so much a rigid system of precise sizes for the uncinus, but rather a graphic tendency; and at the same time it provides a key to understanding the rationale behind the Messine notation. The “concertina-like” representation of the single-tone neume, ranging from the large unc-

inus down to a mere dot (which is properly also an uncinus, though a very small one), avoids the binary (yes-no) rhythmic language of the St Gall notation and instead offers a more direct and concrete graphic translation of the note values. This correspondence is neither measurable nor classifiable and must be interpreted sensitively, yet it is nonetheless real. The entire Messine system is based on a rhythm of values, which, if properly handled, can be translated into a rhythm of direction, in substantial agreement with the St Gall notation.

In any case, the process is the reverse. On the one hand, St. Gall's starting point is a structural consideration drawn with clear contours, rich in assumptions and absolutely devoid of measure. On the other, Laon tends to sketch out the note values, often suggesting slight differences and nuances, and at times arranges the notation in a significant way that even suggests the germs of staff notation. One could say that the two notations achieve the same objectives, but by different routes. One simple example should suffice (Example 17): the familiar case of a proclitic context, a situation frequently encountered in the Gregorian aesthetic. Here both unheighted sources agree entirely about decisively marking the accentual goal of the tonic syllable after the rapid succession of the first two syllables. In Laon the initial fluency, which is indispensable for constructing this proclitic phenomenon, acquires a slight yet significant nuance. On the pre-tonic syllable "man-ducat" it is Laon that reminds us that, even though the context is structurally light (usually notated with two dots, the extreme reduction of the uncinus), the syllable concerned has a complex phonetic structure and consequent articulation. In short, the materiality of the text gives the Messine scribe a reason to linger on the pre-tonic syllable (though without compromising the overall rhythmic structure) and hence to mark a genuine *diversity of value* between the two syllables to be sung.

St Gall disregards the problem because it has absolutely no influence on matters of phrasing: any diversification of the first two syllables would have also involved significant structural variants. St Gall is interested in indicating the proclitic context (a matter of phrasing), whereas Laon translates the same intention into concrete values. To scholars today, who are concerned above all with finding answers to the problem of performance practice, Laon might seem more valuable than St Gall. And indeed the graphic variety in the Messine text and its constant suggestion of the value of the individual compositional elements are qualities that largely endear it to modern musical sensibilities. But in fact this is not the case. Although Laon certainly offers more precise rhythmic information, its risk is that it could reduce the scope for interpretation. Following the Messine notation means respecting a valuable and variegated notation of values; following St Gall, on the other hand, means understanding the phrasing formulated in

binary language and giving it musical shape with the confidence and freedom of one who has already assimilated its assumptions.

Alongside these considerations I would like to make a brief reflection of a methodological order. The *Graduale Triplex* indeed needs to be studied in a “triple” way. The diversity between the two unheighted notations must not be hastily patched up, but should instead be reconciled at the end of a process of interpretation. While the exegetical source of the sacred texts can be said to be identical, the tools used by the two notations are different. A semiological study of the St Gall notation that sets out to search for note values is very vulnerable to misunderstanding. There is a clear divide between hypothesizing the meaning of a neumatic system in terms of values (comprising, therefore, both the melodic and the rhythmic aspects) and one in terms of phrasing. As one out of many possible examples, we could consider the meaning of the added letters, which are abundant in the best St Gall sources and essentially belong to a “notation of phrasing”. If we were to accept a single-minded “musical” reading in terms of the traditional categories of rhythm (*tenete, celeriter*, etc.) and melody (*sursum, iusum, equaliter*, etc.), we would be forced to register an unacceptable notational schizophrenia.

The different ways the two notations treat what is in effect a single exegetical reality (i.e. Gregorian chant), and in particular the way Laon sometimes markedly focuses on the concrete phonetic reality of the text, are features that are most evidently confirmed by the liquescent notation. Consider Example 18. In these two examples the phonetic complexity is ignored by St Gall (for the reasons already mentioned), yet taken on board by the Messine scribe. Compare, for example, the augmentative rounding of the liquescence on the syllables “*iter, faciens*” (1st example) and “*in*” (2nd example). We saw a similar phonetic situation in an earlier example at the syllabic articulation “*man-ducat*” (see above). Indeed, the passage is certainly potentially liquescent, in the sense that it satisfies the phonetic preconditions for the possible use of liquescence.<sup>6</sup> And identical phonetic contexts, duly provided with liquescence, can quite easily be found elsewhere in the *Graduale Triplex* (e.g. p. 278). So why did Laon, after noticing the conditions, not add a liquescence here as well?

Other examples can also be produced. The dragging effect on “*im-perium*” (Example 19), again indicated only by Laon, is perfectly comparable

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<sup>6</sup> Nor must we forget the fact that, in certain cases, liquescence is found in St Gall and not in Laon. Though, to date, there are no significant studies of the matter, the reasons for these differences (the opposite of those illustrated earlier) must not be viewed solely in terms of the Messine rationale.

to the lingering on “*man-duc*at”. But here again we notice that even though the context of articulation is potentially liquescent (compare the same word provided with a St Gall liquescence (!) in the Introit *Ecce advenit, Graduale Triplex*, p. 56), the sign used is again a small uncinus.

The few examples compared here are sufficient to reveal the Messine rationale, which is indeed fully corroborated by more systematic study. It can be summarized as follows: in phonetic contexts of equal complexity (where liquescence often occurs), the liquescence is indicated only when it is preceded by undiminished values. In a diminished context (succession of dots) the rounding of the syllabic articulation is more simply represented by a larger uncinus, without it turning into a liquescent form.

This is what happens even in the next illustration (Example 20). These examples (“*auribus*”, “*eius*”) are potentially liquescent (see the liquescence on “*auribus*” at p. 107 of the *Graduale Triplex*), yet belong to very different rhythmic contexts. The tonic syllable, underlined this time by both unheighted notations (without distinction), is preceded by fluent values in the first case (“*auribus*”) and non-fluent values in the second (“*eius*”).

In the behaviour effectively illustrated by these two cases, the augmentative nature of liquescence is further confirmed. We cannot help noticing that the liquescence underlines a context that is already tendentially broadened. Again we find the Messine notation distinguishing and graduating the values. Liquescence is therefore the greatest augmentation of a value associated with a syllabic articulation and is considered unnecessary when the values are light. In such cases it is sufficient to diversify the syllable by making the uncinus larger.

In the light of the two last examples, which attest an absolutely normal behaviour, we may perhaps conjecture (though with due caution) that St Gall also views the addition of liquescence as an indication of phrasing more significant even than the episema.

A final comment. The discussion here has focused on the nature of liquescence – an expressive feature of decisive importance in the Gregorian edifice – and on the different perspectives connected with the various schools of notation. Not included in the aims of the present study, however, is any research into the reasons for its presence (and also, above all, its absence) in potentially liquescent contexts. Very clearly, this is a field of research of enormous complexity, for it must attempt to explain a phenomenon that is indissolubly bound up with the exegetical dimension of the texts sung. The reasons for a liquescence, or for the lack of a (potential) liquescence, must in any case fall within the bounds of intentionality and not of mere necessity. The scribe’s decision is not a sort of automatic reaction triggered by phonetic contexts or situations of another kind.

Equally, we must reject the explanation that recourse to liquescence (or

otherwise) is a consequence of melodic behaviour.<sup>7</sup> The rationale is the quite the reverse. A melodic context is not so much the “cause” of a neumatic form (liquescent or otherwise) as an “effect” of the understanding of a text and its meaning. Or in other words, since melody is the musical form of that text, it is involved in its meaning. It neither precedes it, nor passively submits to it. Once again, we must overcome the false text-melody dualism raised at the start of this paper. The fact that text and melody constitute a single, indissoluble phenomenon is explicitly confirmed by liquescence.

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<sup>7</sup> The close relationship between melodic situation and choice of liquescence is a constant feature of semiological research. In particular, it finds full application in the studies of J. B. Goschl: JOHANNES BERCHMANS GÖSCHL, “Il fenomeno semiologico ed estetico delle note liquescenti”, in *Il canto gregoriano oggi*, Atti del convegno Internazionale di Canto Gregoriano, Arezzo, 26-27 agosto 1983, a cura di Domenico Cieri, Roma, Pro Musica Studium, 1984, pp. 97-152; ID., “Lo stato attuale della ricerca semiologica”, *Studi gregoriani*, II, 1986, pp. 3-56. When reading the traditional double classification of liquescent notation in a semiological light, Goschl regularly puts the melodic information before the motivations of the choice.