

ARTICLES

The Solesmes Chant Tradition: The Original Neumatic Signs and Practical Performance Today

By Charles Cole

EARLY SOLESMES

The real starting point for any study of the Gregorian Chant of Solesmes is the refoundation of Solesmes itself. Originally founded in 1010 by the Benedictine Abbey at Le Mans, the community was dissolved during the French Revolution. It was a local priest, Dom Prosper Guéranger, who instigated the return of monks to the site and became the new Abbot of Solesmes. He was responsible for the refounding of the French Benedictine tradition which had all but disappeared. He sought an ideal, an almost romanticized version of Benedictine monasticism, and he knew the importance of the restoration of the chant and its pride of place at the heart of the liturgy. Right from the start in 1833 his intentions were very clear and he instilled in the founding precepts of Solesmes an absolute respect for the primacy of the chants. In 1856 he engaged a number of monks in the study of manuscripts and the work of Solesmes began, leading to the main Solesmes Editions, as shown in Table 1.

1883	<i>Graduale</i>
1889	<i>Paleographie Musicale</i> (1st Volume)
1891	<i>Antiphonale</i>
1908	<i>Graduale</i> (Vatican Edition)
1912	<i>Antiphonale Romanum</i>
1934	<i>Antiphonale Monasticum</i>
1974	<i>Graduale Romanum</i> (The Vatican Edition rearranged according to the Vatican II Calendar)
1979	<i>Graduale Triplex</i> (Graduale Romanum with neumatic signs added)
1983	<i>Liber Hymnarius</i>
2005–2007	<i>Antiphonale Monasticum</i>
2009	<i>Antiphonale Romanum</i>

Table 1: Important Publications from Solesmes, 1883–2009

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These Solesmes editions have become primary sources, and among them are performing editions with which we are very familiar, but it is all too easy for us to take them for granted. It is almost unthinkable to imagine trying to create editions of Gregorian chant without any reference to the Solesmes editions. Yet this was the task which faced the monks, and it is therefore very important for us to try and put the Solesmes editions in the context of their time.

We should bear in mind that when the monks were embarking on this task, chant was at a very low ebb and the fragile aural tradition had been compromised by the nineteenth-century revival of Medicean Chant at Ratisbon. This so-called “debased” chant had all melismas removed and textual and musical accents forced into alignment. Solesmes had to use very early diastematic manuscripts in conjunction with the neumatic sources (diastematic meaning notation written on the lines). Although thirteenth-century books enshrined to a certain extent elements of semiology in the diastematic notation, the notation during the medieval period became ever more simple and ever less sophisticated. This is an example of very basic notation from the early fifteenth-century:



Figure 1: “William Cole” *Antiphoner*, Spain c. 1400–1450

Dom Pierre Combe’s book *The Restoration of Gregorian Chant*¹ gives us a great insight into the tortuous struggle which went on in the early days of Solesmes. The painstaking research and letters exchanged by the monks and their visits to see manuscripts which they then copied out by hand, in an age when travel was not easy, show us what a time-consuming process this was. This we should not forget, because it gives us an idea of the sheer determination of those monks to bring about a chant renaissance and their belief in the undoubted value of their project.

¹Dom Pierre Comb, O.S.B, *Histoire de la restauration du chant grégorien d’après des documents inédites: Solesmes et l’Edition Vatican* (Solesmes: Abbaye Saint-Pierre de Solesmes, 1969); translated as *The Restoration of Gregorian Chant*, tr. Theodore N. Marier and William Skinner (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2003; paperback reprint, 2008).

The aim of the monks of Solesmes was to produce a performing edition based on the neumatic signs. They had, in effect, to create an urtext edition (composer's original version), using primary sources, where none had existed before. This practical edition was intended to enable the chants of the church to be properly performed again in their liturgical context. The notation used in the Solesmes editions was not a return to early medieval notation but was their own adaptation, a refinement and development of quadratic notation to try and incorporate details of the original neumatic signs.

OLD SOLESMES

Dom André Mocquereau (1849–1930) was a distinguished cellist who studied at the prestigious Paris Conservatoire before entering the community at Solesmes. Early rhythmic interpretation, as exemplified by Dom Mocquereau, became accepted as standard, and was based on the analytical construct of *arsis* and *thesis* which originated in Ancient Greek poetry. This style, generally known to us as “Old Solesmes,” is defined by the so-called “rhythmic” signs such as the dot (*mora*), the vertical *episema* which marks the ictus, and the horizontal *episema*. It is well documented in a number of places such as in the introduction to the *Liber Usualis*, and was an attempt to provide a readily understandable means of singing the chant. As a classical musician, Dom Mocquereau would no doubt have been very sensitive to the potential vulnerability of Gregorian chant, lacking any obvious rhythmic structure in its melodies. We are generally familiar with chant, but it is easy to forget that it was not always thus.



Figure 2: Dom André Mocquereau (1849–1930)

These rhythmic signs therefore arose out of Mocquereau's concerns to ensure that a chant tradition would take hold and endure at a parish level. The use of the ictus, marked by the vertical *episema*, was intended to make sense of the rhythm of the music once it had been transcribed onto four line quadratic notation. There is in fact no basis in medieval musical analysis for the ictus; it does not exist in the semiology but was rather adapted from the theory of classical poetry. It was part of Solesmes' own form of analysis, in other words a nineteenth-century adaptation. The ictus, from the Latin word meaning to strike or smite, was intended purely as an internal rhythm, however over time it became misinterpreted as an accentuation. Solesmes no longer uses these rhythmic interpretations, and Saulnier's discussion of the 2005 *Antiphonale Monasticum* calls instead for a revival of the primacy of the text:

Rhythmic theory, to the extent that it inflicts a rhythmic distortion on the words and phrases that are chanted, appears in contradiction to the elementary

principles of liturgical music composition, which must be set fundamentally at the service of the sacred text.²

The singing at Solesmes may have moved on from the early style, but “Old Solesmes” has undoubted artistic value as a performance style, and is still used in a number of places. However, the label “Old Solesmes” is unhelpful in giving the impression of something that is somehow separate, or distinct, from everything else. Even the word “old” suggests something that has been superseded by a new or improved version, a curious irony being the fact that the expression “Old Solesmes” is generally used by its most loyal advocates. Such an expression almost invites us to take sides. “Original Solesmes,” as I would prefer to think of it, is a style with which I am very familiar, as it formed the basis, with some modifications, of the way I was brought up to sing chant as a chorister at Westminster Cathedral during the 1980s. It is probably fair to say that for many of us, this style is our “default” setting, the one which we most naturally revert to. And it is partly for that reason that the older style is so practical especially when large groups of people are singing chant together. The older style has an innate beauty of its own, however its formulaic structure means that it can be resistant to nuance.

However, Solesmes is a living tradition of chant, represented by two aspects: one aspect is given to us by example in the form of the daily singing of the Mass and offices in its abbey church dedicated to St. Peter. The other aspect is the long line of scholarly work by monks such as Joseph Pothier (1835–1923) and Mocquereau in the beginning, right through Gajard and Cardine and up to more recent work by Dom Jean Claire (1920–2006) who carried out such important study of the modes. This work, the study of the neumatic signs, or semiology, is a continuous and ongoing process. The quadratic notation itself cannot be developed, as it is a transcription, a secondary construct, so semiologists are obliged to look at the original neumatic signs, otherwise they will be one step removed from the primary source.

THE SEMIOLOGICAL SOURCES

Semiology is the term which Dom Eugène Cardine (1905–1988), monk of Solesmes, eventually settled on as being the best description for his life’s work, the study of the original neumatic signs. These signs are, for want of a better word, the “hieroglyphics” which we are most likely to encounter in the *Graduale Triplex*. The more usual and classic Gregorian chant notation is generally referred to as “quadratic notation,” or more colloquially as “square notes.” The quadratic notation is what Solesmes propagated through its published material



Figure 3: Dom Eugène Cardine (1905–1988)

²“A Translation of Saulnier’s Introduction to the New Antiphonale Monasticum,” posted on the Chant Café by Nick Gale <<http://www.chantcafe.com/2010/07/translation-of-saulniers-introduction.html>> or search: “Saulnier’s Introduction” at the Chant Café <<http://www.chantcafe.com/>>.

and is found in all the major chant books which we use today, such as the *Graduale Romanum* and the *Gregorian Missal*.

One of the older monks of Solesmes told me that Dom Cardine was “chaleureux,” a warm-hearted man who was obsessed with chant almost to the exclusion of everything else. He permanently had his head in a book and would be busy puzzling over the neumes and making annotations. A good insight into this can be found in his *Graduel Neumé* which is a copy of the 1908 gradual with neumatic signs added along with his copious notes and cross-referencing of chant formulas.³

An interesting parallel can be found in Dom Mocquereau’s personal copy of the *Liber Gradualis* which is now kept in the *Atelier de Paléographie Musicale* at Solesmes.⁴ This earlier volume, rarely seen, also contains

In Nativitate Domini. 33

AD TERTIAM MISSAM.

In Die Nativitatis Domini.

Introitus 7. *7. 11. 11. 11. 11. 11. 11.*



Figure 4: Dom Eugène Cardine, *Graduel Neumé*, p. 33

Figure 5: Photo of Dom Mocquereau’s copy of the 1883 *Liber Gradualis* (photos by author)

³Eugène Cardine, *Graduel neumé*, Paléographie musicale, 2nd series, vol. 4 (Solesmes: Abbaye Saint-Pierre de Solesmes, 1966).

⁴*Liber Gradualis* (Tournai: Desclée, 1883).

Figure 6: Photo of Dom Mocquereau's copy of the 1883 *Liber Gradualis* (photos by author)

the neumatic signs, written in Dom Mocquereau's own hand.

Dom Cardine's *Graduel Neumé* was later superseded by the *Graduale Triplex*, so called because it is a copy of the 1974 *Graduale Romanum* with the neumatic signs added from two different traditions, Laon and Saint-Gall, so that the chants appear in parallel triplicate.

The Laon notation appears above the staves in black and the Saint-Gall notation appears below, in red. The notation from Laon derives from a ninth century manuscript known as Laon 239 which is a gradual written by an unknown author near the French City of Laon. The Saint-Gall notation derives from a number of manuscripts which exist at the Swiss Abbey of Saint-Gall. Amongst the most important of these are the *Cantatorium of Saint-Gall* (Saint-Gall 359) which is the oldest Saint-Gall source dating from the tenth century, and Einsiedeln 121, an eleventh-century gradual. The *Cantatorium* contains graduals, alleluias, and tracts,



Feria V post dom. Ss.mæ Trinitatis
SS.MI CORPORIS ET SANGUINIS CHRISTI

RBCKS Antiphona ad introitum II

Ps. 80, 17 et 2. 3, 11

L126
E257

C IBA-VIT e- os ex á-di- pe fru-
mén- ti, alle- lú- iá : èt de
pe- tra, mel-le sa- tu- rá- vit e- os, alle- lú- iá,
e- al- le- lú- iá, e- al- le- lú- iá. Ps. Exsul- tá- te
De- o adiu- tó- ri nostro : iu- bi- lá- te De- o Ia- cob. Ant.
Súmi- te psalmum, et da- te týmpanum : psal- té- ri- um iucún-
dum cum cítha- ra. Ant.
Ego e- nim sum Dóminus De- us tu- us, qui edú- xi te

Figure 7: Introit for Corporis et Sanguinis Christi, *Graduale Triplex*, p. 377

while Einsiedeln 121 contains, in addition, the introits, offertories, and communions. Hartker's *Antiphoner* (Saint-Gall 390/1) is the best source of office chants.

Partly because there is much more material available, most performing musicians in my experience tend to focus on the Saint-Gall notation, only really looking at Laon for a secondary opinion. By and large, Laon tends to back up Saint-Gall, however it is of more value in the study of rhythm.

Dom Cardine's book *Gregorian Semiology* is in effect the semiologist's bible. He provides a table of the neumatic signs from Saint-Gall and from Laon.⁵

TABLE OF NEUMATIC SIGNS FROM ST. GALL

	Names of Symbols	Simple Symbols	Symbols differentiated by				Symbols indicating a special meaning		
			the addition		the modification		melodic	phonetic	
			of letters	of episemas	of the mark	of the grouping (neumatic break)		Liquescence	
								augment.	diminut.
symbols indicating melodic movement	1 virga	/	b	c	d	e	f	g	h
	2 tractulus	-						v	
	3 punctum	.						[v] (v)	
	4 gravis	\							
	5 clivis	/			[Λ]	[Λ]	/	ρ β	ρ
	6 pes	✓			✓ [✓]	✓	/	ρ ρ ρ	ρ
	7 porrectus	~			~		~	~	~
	8 torculus	∩			∩		∩	∩	∩
	9 climacus	∧			∧		∧	∧	∧
	10 scandicus	∨			∨		∨	∨	∨
	11 porrectus flexus	~			~		~	~	~
	12 pes subbipunctis	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓
	13 scandicus flexus	∨			∨		∨	∨	∨
	14 torculus resupinus	∩			∩		∩	∩	∩
symbols including a unison	15 apostropha	[∩]	[∩]	[∩]	[∩]			[∩]	
	16 distropha	[∩∩]	[∩∩]	[∩∩]				[∩∩]	
	17 tristropha	[∩∩∩]	[∩∩∩]	[∩∩∩]				[∩∩∩]	
	18 trigon	[∩∩∩]	[∩∩∩]	[∩∩∩]				[∩∩∩]	
	19 bivirga & trivirga	[∩∩]	[∩∩]	[∩∩]				[∩∩]	
symbols carrying a qualifying sign	20 pressus	[∩]	[∩]	[∩]				[∩]	
	21 virga strata	[∩]	[∩]	[∩]				[∩]	
	22 oriscus	[∩]	[∩]	[∩]				[∩]	
	23 salicus	[∩]	[∩]	[∩]				[∩]	
	24 pes quassus	[∩]	[∩]	[∩]				[∩]	
25 quillisma	[∩]	[∩]	[∩]				[∩]		
26 pes stratus	[∩]	[∩]	[∩]				[∩]		

Brackets enclose neumatic forms used only in combination.

Figure 8: Table from Cardine's *Gregorian Semiology*, pp. 12–13

⁵Dom Eugène Cardine, "Semiologie Grégorienne," *Études Grégoriennes*, 11 (1970), 1–158; translated as *Gregorian Semiology*, tr. Robert M. Fowells (Solesmes: Abbaye Saint-Pierre de Solesmes, 1982).

A table such as this might make the subject of semiology seem deceptively simple, rather like code-breaking using a substitution cipher where you simply look up each sign to see what it means. Unfortunately the reality is much more complicated than that and in the pages which follow this table, Cardine illustrates the fact that many of these signs have different meanings in different contexts. The more one reads of Dom Cardine's book, the more daunted one can become as the sheer size of the subject becomes apparent. It was translated into English by Robert M. Fowells, whose own book, *Chant Made Simple*, is an excellent introduction to the Saint-Gall notation for anyone who is interested in venturing into semiology.⁶ I will look at a few areas of semiology which are often encountered in the arena of practical liturgical performance.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Horizontal Episema over the Clivis

The *clivis* is a neume group of two notes, the second lower than the first. The *episema*, or horizontal line, which generally appears over the first note, is usually interpreted as a lengthening. However, Dom Joseph Gajard (1885–1972) tells us:

These signs are not, strictly speaking, signs of length but signs of expression, although, of course, they should be translated by a slight lengthening and softening of the note over which they are placed. They remain, nevertheless, above all, expression marks.⁷

His emphasis here on the fact that these are expression marks is significant, as is his realistic concession that this will sound as a lengthening. He is specifically singling out the first note of the *clivis*, not both. He emphasizes this further a few pages later when he says, “theoretically speaking, the *episema* affects only the first note of the *clivis*.” However he then goes on: “but the second note also comes under its influence.”

This slightly cryptic remark doesn't entirely clarify his position, although it seems very clear that his interpretation is that the first note should be lengthened, and not the second. However, Dom Cardine's interpretation is different: “The lengthening indicated by the *episema* affects both notes. It does not affect the first note exclusively despite the fact that the *episema* is printed on this note alone in the rhythmic editions.”⁸

Cardine's opinion is very clear, and he goes on to demonstrate that the Laon neumes show this to be the case. He also talks about this in his book *Direction of Gregorian Chant*, which is a useful and concise guide for any chant practitioner.⁹ In it he warns of the unnatural effect of what he calls “ternary” rhythms which arise when only the first note of the *clivis* is lengthened,

⁶Robert M. Fowells, *Chant Made Simple* (Brewster, Mass: Paraclete Press, 2000/2007).

⁷Dom Joseph Gajard, *The Solesmes Method: Its Fundamental Principles and Practical Rules of Interpretation*, tr. R. Cecile Gabain (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1960), p. 69.

⁸Cardine, *Gregorian Semiology*, 33.

⁹Dom Eugène Cardine, *Direction of Gregorian Chant*, tr. Leonard Maluf and Alexander Schweitzer (Solesmes: Abbaye Saint-Pierre de Solesmes, 2003).

particularly in a series of consecutive episematic *clivises*, such as in the communion *Tollite hostias* (shown in Figure 9) which could end up sounding more akin to a Viennese Waltz at the words “adore Dominum.”

IV
T Olli-te hó- sti- as, * et intro- í- te in á-
 tri- a e- jus: a-do-rá- te Dó-mi-num in au- la
 sancta e- jus.

Figure 9: Communion antiphon *Tollite hostias*, Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

So here we have two different monks of Solesmes giving their different interpretations. In my general experience in England, Cardine’s interpretation is the one which is heard most widely, and is now part of the house-style at both Westminster Cathedral and the London Oratory. As I was sitting around a table discussing this particular passage with some monks at Solesmes, the most elderly monk present wordlessly leaned over and drew a long line over all the notes. His understanding seemed pretty clear. A greater range of lengthening, and therefore variety of expression, is possible when both notes come under the episematic influence.

The Vertical Episema

I have already mentioned the vertical *episema* which was used to mark the ictus. The same sign, a short vertical stroke, has been used to mark the *oriscus* in the *salicus*, which has caused some confusion. Here is an example in the Requiem introit on the first syllable of “aeternam.”

The *oriscus* is now thought to mean that one should give the note which follows, in other words the third note of the *salicus*, some form of emphasis or sense of arrival. However the *episema* means that it is often the *oriscus* itself which takes precedence, as the sign came to be understood as meaning that the second note should be lengthened. The adherence to this understanding was

I
 VI
R E-qui- em * ae- tēr- nam do- na e- is
 Dómi- ne: et lux perpé- tu- a lú- ce- at
 e- is. Ps. Te de- cet hymnus, De- us, in Si- on; et ti-bi
 reddé-tur vo-tum in Ie-rú-sa-lem. Ant. Réquiem.

Figure 10: Introit *Requiem aeternam*, Graduale

perpetuated because the editions continued with the notational design that Solesmes devised with the publishers Desclée.

A major update to the notational design came in the *Liber Hymnarius* which contains a table of explanation in the introduction, shown in Figure 11.¹⁰

NEUMÆ AUT NEUMARUM ELEMENTA	EXEMPLA FIGURARUM		
	FIGURÆ RECTÆ	FIGURÆ LIQUESCENTES	
		AUCTÆ	DEMINUTÆ
1. PUNCTUM	• •	• • •	•
2. VIRGA	┆		
3. APOSTROPHA	◊	◊	
4. ORISCUS	•		
5. CLIVIS	┆	┆	┆
6. PODATUS	┆	┆	┆
7. PES QUASSUS	┆	┆	
8. QUILISMA-PES	┆	┆	
9. PODATUS INITIO DEBILIS	┆	┆	
10. TORCULUS	┆	┆	┆
11. TORCULUS INITIO DEBILIS	┆	┆	┆
12. PORRECTUS	┆	┆	┆
13. CLIMACUS	┆	┆	┆
14. SCANDICUS	┆	┆	┆
15. SALICUS	┆	┆	
16. TRIGONUS	┆		

Figure 11: Introduction to the *Liber Hymnarius* (1983), p.

Among the many changes is the fact that the *oriscus* is no longer marked by the vertical *episema*, instead being denoted by what I call a “flag” note. Another important development is the improved delineation between the *punctum*, *virga*, and *apostropha*. This reflects the move

¹⁰*Liber Hymnarius* (Solesmes: Abbaye Saint-Pierre de Solesmes, 1983).

towards active repercussions and away from the early style which advocated tied notes. Here the updated notation is put to good use in the responsory for Christmas.

R.V.

H Odi e * no· bis cæ· ló·rum Rex de Vir·

gi·ne na· sci di· gná·tus est, ut hó·minem pér·di·

tum ad re· gna cæ· lésti· a re· vo· cá·

ret:

Figure 12: Excerpt from *Responsory Hodie nobis caelorum*, *Liber Hymnarius*, p. 489

Practically speaking, these newer notational designs are probably much less familiar to most of us as they are currently only used in the office repertoire, rather than in the Propers of the Mass.

Quarter Bars and Half Bars

The barlines which appear in the Solesmes editions were added by the monks and do not appear in the original neumes. Along with the markings of quarter bars and half bars, they provide a very welcome overview of the grammar of the phrase. The quarter bar, in particular, is useful to show the period of the phrase. Although these quarter bars were not necessarily intended by Solesmes to show a breath, to breathe or not is often best decided by context, not by formulaic observance. However if a quarter bar coincides with a comma in the text, then one might feel much more inclined to breathe there.

The practice at Solesmes aims at a continuous line, and individual singers take breaths where they need them by simply omitting a note. It is really a matter of interpretation for a conductor whether or not quarter bars are acknowledged by a breath in performance. If the quarter bars are to be observed with a breath, the overall sense of flow should of course be compromised as little as possible. Sometimes it can be expedient to use quarter bars as “rally points,” especially when a large group of singers is involved, or if the chant is being sung in procession. It is, however, more usual to breathe at half bars. There could be other interpretations of where the half and quarter bars come, but the full bars are pretty definitive. An example of an alternative placement of a quarter bar occurs in the gradual *Dispersit*, where there is a case

for bringing forward the final quarter bar of the first section by three notes. (In the *Graduale Triplex*, Solesmes marks this with a slur suggesting that the quarter bar is better removed altogether.)

Grad.
2.
D
Ispérsit, * de- dit paupé- ri- bus :
justí- ti- a e- ius ma- net in saé-
cu- lum saé- cu- li.

The image shows a musical score for a Gradual. It consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a large initial 'D' and the text 'Ispérsit, * de- dit paupé- ri- bus :'. The second staff continues with 'justí- ti- a e- ius ma- net in saé-'. The third staff continues with 'cu- lum saé- cu- li.'. The fourth staff shows a continuation of the melody. A slur is placed over the final quarter bar of the first section, as described in the caption.

Figure 13: Gradual *Dispersit*, *Graduale Romanum* (1974), p. 520; Slur of *Graduale Triplex* shown in parentheses

Hidden Liquescents

Solesmes generally includes *liquescents* in the quadratic notation when there are either diphthongs (two adjacent vowels which are both sounded), or vocalized consonants such as “n,” “m” or “l.” These *liquescents* almost always occur on the second note of a neume. Here in the familiar opening of Sanctus XI we see both a rising and descending *liquescent*.

II
S
Anctus, * San-ctus,

The image shows a musical score for the Sanctus. It consists of two staves of music. The first staff begins with a large initial 'S' and the text 'Anctus, * San-ctus,'. The second staff continues the melody. A liquescent is shown on the second note of a neume, as described in the caption.

Figure 14: Sanctus from *Mass XI (Orbis Factor)*

In the opening of the introit for the Third Sunday of Advent, the diphthong on the opening syllable is given a *liquescent*, as shown in Figure 15.

I
G
Au-dé- te *

The image shows a musical score for the Introit. It consists of two staves of music. The first staff begins with a large initial 'G' and the text 'Au-dé- te *'. The second staff continues the melody. A liquescent is shown on the opening syllable, as described in the caption.

Figure 15: Introit from Third Sunday of Advent, *Gaudete*

However, one will frequently find “hidden” *liquescents*, as they are sometimes called, which exist in the semiology but have not been transferred into the quadratic notation. Very often these are single-note *liquescents* rather than the more familiar two-note ones. The Office repertoire in particular contains many examples such as this one:

Figure 16: Antiphon to Third Psalm of Vespers on the First Sunday of Advent; Quadratic Notation from *Liber Usualis* (1953), Neumatic Signs from Saint-Gall, Stiftsbibliothek 390 (*Hartker's Antiphoner*)

This Antiphon comes from a project which is being undertaken at the London Oratory where we are in the process of adding the Saint-Gall notation to the antiphons to facilitate more informed performances. This particular example contains three single-note *liquescents*. The Saint-Gall sign for a *liquescent* looks rather like a “P” and the first one you will see is in the second phrase over “omnes.” Its purpose here is simply to draw attention to the “M” of “omnes” to ensure that it is properly enunciated. The other two draw attention to the double “L” in the same way, in the words “illa” and “alleluia.”

These “hidden” *liquescents* are simply a call for the really clear formulation of the text. They are cautionary in nature, as reminders towards performance, but they show the musical considerations of the monks. They also give significant insight into the interpretation of the two-note *liquescent*, suggesting that one should leave room for the vowel in the second note rather than closing up fully onto the consonant as is practiced in some places.

Variations of pitch

In the course of looking at semiology, it is impossible to avoid instances of discrepancies between the pitches given in the quadratic notation and those suggested by the Saint-Gall manuscripts. There is a very good example of this in the Introit for the Epiphany, shown in Figure 17.

Cf. Mal. 3, 1; 1 Chron. 29, 12; Ps. 71, 1. 10. 11

E 50

C-CE * advé- nit domi- ná- tor Dó-
mi- nus : et regnum in ma-
nu e- ius, et pot- éstas, et impê- ri- um.

Figure 17: Introit *Ecce advenit*, *Graduale Triplex*, p. 56

At “Dominator” there is a rising fourth as given by Solesmes. However in the semiology it says “e” meaning *equaliter*, same note, in other words the same note with which “advenit” ended. The same thing happens at “et regnum.” This means that the whole piece becomes an essay on the rising third which makes a great deal of sense. The “r” or *rursum* meaning elevate at “et potestas” affirms this. So why did Solesmes write these as rising fourths? It might be that this comes from the aural tradition or from diastematic material. If this is the case, then this represents an example of a tension between the aural tradition and the semiological source material.

These differing pitches have not subsequently been reset, perhaps partly as a matter of practicality for Solesmes, but should we change these notes? Some would argue that Dom Cardine is encouraging us to do so, but many of us feel rather uneasy about deviating from the Vatican approved text. It seems permissible to change the odd quarter bar or lengthening, but when it comes to altering pitches, perhaps that is a bridge too far. In the case of this introit, we are dealing with a choral piece, not a congregational piece, so to make a change would not be interfering with the body of music which is familiar to the average worshipper. To change notes in a congregational chant such as part of the ordinary would be another matter entirely. This would be a major interference with the “folk” memory of the faithful, whose familiarity with these melodies should not be compromised. William Mahrt’s book, *The Musical Shape of the Liturgy*, essential reading for any Catholic musician, states: “Chant is plainsong; its pitches are fixed, but its rhythm is subject to interpretation. Even in the context of a striking variety of rhythmic interpretations, the melodies remain the same melodies.”¹¹ A little later on in the same passage he says: “What differences of pitch as do exist in the Gregorian tradition are relatively minor variants . . . but not constituting different, much less “invented” pieces.”¹²

¹¹William Mahrt, *The Musical Shape of the Liturgy* (Richmond, Va.: Church Music Association of America, 2012), p. 180.

¹²Ibid., 180–1.

Tensions arose between Solesmes and the Vatican during the early twentieth century when concerns over the changing of musical texts reached a critical point. The Vatican had given primacy to the Frankish tradition as the typical edition, using the Saint-Gall, Einsiedeln, and Laon sources rather than other such as English (Sarum), Hungarian, or Mozarabic. The Solesmes chant tradition was thus being enshrined and given an iconic status. The flip side to this was the fact that the Vatican did not want any changes to these early editions. This resistance to change caused Solesmes enormous problems because one cannot simply stop the process of ongoing scholarship.

By the 1960s, however, there had been a change of heart and the Second Vatican Council called for critical editions. This means that the *Graduale Triplex* has a value enshrined by the Second Vatican Council, in other words, it's approved. However, the quadratic notation remains the same, so are we allowed to employ the neumes, or should they remain, quite literally, academic? Returning to the Epiphany introit, the *Graduale Novum*,¹³ which is a Regensburg rather than Solesmes edition, makes the neumatic changes to the musical text, and a number of others besides.

Intr. II

E c-CE advé- nit domi- ná-tor Dó- mi- nus: et
 regnum in ma- nu e- jus, et po- téstas, et im-
 pé- ri- um. Ps. De- us, ju- díci- um tu- um Re- gi da: * et
 justí- ti- am tu- am Fí- li- o Re- gis.

Figure 18: Introit from Epiphany, Ecce advenit, from *Graduale Novum*

¹⁴*Graduale Novum* (Regensburg: ConBrio, 2011).

The *Graduale Novum* is another critical edition, an alternative transcription, and should be judged as such. Whether or not it is acceptable to use it in the context of the liturgy is another matter. When one looks at the semiology, a whole number of other possibilities begin to present themselves, and we have to find a way to deal with that.

CONCLUSION

It is quite possible in the midst of all this to lose sight of the wood for the trees. It is therefore perhaps worth reminding ourselves what our primary aim should be. Above all, Gregorian chant is the prayer of the church. For a long time, there has existed at Solesmes an enduring practice of this prayer which is worthy of our utmost respect. Over the years the practice has changed, for sure, but the chant at Solesmes is, and will always remain, a prayer, even if musicologists differ over the meaning of the semiology.

Monsignor Andrew Wadsworth drew attention the primacy of the text when he addressed the Conference of Catholic Directors of Music at Westminster:

In our Catholic tradition, liturgical chant is first and foremost cantillation, a song which arises from the text, a song which is essentially a heightened proclamation of a verbal message and which takes its emphases from the natural accentuation of the text and finds its melodic rhythm from the cadence which is already within the words.¹⁴

Most of what the semiology says seems to be towards an opening up of the text, in other words a description and explanation of the text through music. Semiology has to be seen as an aid, not an end in itself. If it becomes an end in itself, problems can arise. If you try and sing everything marked in the semiology you will end up tying yourself in knots and the result will probably be stiff rather than flowing. The singer must never feel a victim of a system and the chant must seem natural. Saulnier's discussion of the *Antiphonale Monasticum* also warns of the dangers of trying to get too involved with the semiology:

The(se) neumes are not intended for all singers, since many in the monasteries sing by memory and imitation. On the other hand, they will be useful for choir directors and for informed amateurs in providing objective indications on which to base their interpretation.¹⁵

The Choirmaster at Solesmes, Dom Bruno Lutz, told me that neither he nor any of the Schola sing from the *Graduale Triplex* which he described as a "*livre d'étude*," a study book which should be used for reference. It is his opinion that to sing from the *Triplex* is to risk getting too attached to single details rather than seeing the whole musical picture. Whilst seeing his point, I am inclined to think that singing from the *Triplex* is not a problem as long as you are aware of the pitfalls, and I am aware of many scholas which use it successfully.

¹⁴Andrew R. Wadsworth, "Towards a New Culture in Liturgical Music," *Sacred Music*, this issue, p. 63 below.

¹⁵"A Translation of Saulnier's Introduction," cf. note 5, above



Figure 19: The Monk's Choir at Solesmes

There are other factors which have a bearing on how much semiological nuance is achievable. At the modestly proportioned abbey church of Solesmes, the monks of the schola do not sing a projected sound but almost sing to themselves, allowing the reverberation to add a luminous quality. Professional singers, who generally work in larger buildings, tend to produce a projected sound which can make nuance quite difficult, as do the practicalities of rehearsal time. In general, professional choirs rehearse less, and in the limited time available there is usually also polyphony to be prepared. Perhaps the most important advice for us all as singers and conductors can be found in the introduction to the *Liber Hymnarius*:

The principles set out here stem from the perfect matching of the sacred text with the Gregorian melody. This is why those who in singing strive to respect Latin diction, possess by this very fact most of what is required to execute Gregorian chant well.¹⁶ ❧

¹⁶[Dom Jean Claire], "Prænotanda," *Liber Hymnarius* (Sablé-sur-Sarthe: Abbaye Saint-Pierre de Solesmes, 1983), p. xvi.