

Significant Romanian Letters

In many Manuscripts of Saint-Gall origin, the neums are surrounded by letters, as can be seen in the photographic reproductions of the *Paléographie Musicale*. (See t. IV, Manuscript 121 of Einsiedeln).

Origin. — A chronicler of Saint-Gall, Ekkehart IV, the young (c. 1036), attributes to Romanus, the singer sent from Rome to Saint-Gall about the year 790, the use of the Letters. Thus the name Romanian Letters. Let us keep this name, although the origin is disputed.

Significance: The thing which is not disputable is their existence and meaning. A letter from Notker, a monk of

Saint-Gall (c. 912), gives a very authentic explanation of them. It has been preserved for us in the Manuscript 381 of Saint-Gall, and in the Manuscript lit. 5. of Bamberg (p. 28) Reichenau origin. A short version of this letter is found also in the Codex 371 of Leipzig. We make use of it here.

Reason for these Romanian Letters: The raison d'être of these letters is to clarify the Neumatic Notation, which does not make certain either the intonation or the Rhythm. Thus we have two series of Letters, whose function is to correct these faults.

First Series — Melodic Letters. Seven Letters.

These attempt to fix the intervals, but they give only vague indication. We enumerate them here :

Elevation : *a* — Ut *Altius* elevetur admonet.
 l — *Levare* neumam.
 f — *Sursum* scandere.
 g — Ut in gutture garruletur *gradatim*.

Descending : *a* — Ut *deprimatur*.

Unison : *l* — *Iusum* vel *inferius* insinuat.
 e — Ut *equaliter* sonetur.

Second Series — Letters relative to the rhythm. Seven Letters.

These letters are divided in three classes :

Retard : *τ* — *Trahere* vel *tenere*.
 κ — *Expectare*.
 m — *Mediocriter* moderari melodiam.

Acceleration : *c* — Ut cito vel *celeriter* dicatur.
 ϑ *Statim* — Suivez. Do not pause.

Intensity : *ῑ* — *Pressionem* vel *perfectionem* significat.
 ϕ — Ut cum *fragore* feriat.
 k — *Clange* significat.

Rallentando : The (*τ*) indicates a “tenue” of the voice, as in modern music. It is often used as the Episema : *τ* for *π*

There are often nuances in this lengthening, where the (*τ*) can double a note.

The (✂) is usually placed between two groups, two incises, two members of a literary or musical phrase to indicate a *mora vocis*, translated in the Solesmes Rhythmic Editions by a (.) which doubles the value of the note.

The (m) after or near a note designates a moderated movement; joined to another letter, it undergoes a modification of meaning. (See third Series).

Accelerando: The (c) expresses in general, lightness, *piu mosso*, animation. It is necessary an attentive study of this letter to understand its different functions. There are two kinds of meanings attached to it: One *positive*, the other *negative*.

a) *Positive meaning*: The (c) expresses an accelerated movement, momentarily, from the normal movement of the work executed, as the *piu mosso*, *animato*, *accelerando*, or *stretto* of our modern music. In the Gregorian Art, as in modern music these modifications never change the value of the notes, but only give to the phrase more interest and life.

b) *Negative meaning*: Often the (c) is employed in opposition to the *Episema* and the *tenete*. It precedes or follows these signs of length. These two significations have this in common, that the (c) never changes the value of the note, while the (ʞ) and the *Episema* can double the note they modify.

Intensity: (f) — Every note marked with this letter is strong. It is fairly rare in the Saint-Gall Manuscripts. However a manuscript of Reichenau (Bamberg, lit. 6) employs it a little more frequently.

(k) A strong note. Used very rarely.

(p̄) can signify also a strong note, but this letter has other meanings, also, (*perfecte*, *parum*).

Although the invention of Romanus was ingenious, it did not entirely clarify the faulty notation. To show more definitely the intonation and the nuances of rhythm, the master added other letters to the first, to augment or diminish their value. These follow:

Third Series: Modifications of the preceding letters. Three Letters.

(ʞ) — Ut *bene* extollatur vel gravetur, vel teneatur.

(v) — *Valde*.

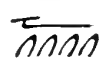
(m) — *Mediocriter*.

(**ℒ**) — Sense of this letter is very clear : (**ℒ**) — bene levare; (**ℒ**) — bene teneatur, *etc.*

(**ℓ**) Rarer. A synonym of (**ℒ**) : valde. (**ℓ**) — iusum, inferius valde.

The letter (**ℓ**) given in the Second Series, is often united to different letters : (**ℓ**) altius mediocriter; (**ℓ**) celeriter mediocriter; (**ℓ**) inferius mediocriter; (**ℓ**) tenete mediocriter.

IMPORTANT REMARK : Generally these significant letters affect only a single note of the neumatic group to which they are joined. The position of the “ letter ” denotes the note affected : clivis and podatus with first note lengthened :  In the following podatus, it is the second note which is affected : 

There are exceptions to this rule, however : when the (**ℓ**) or the (**ℒ**) is prolonged over a series of groups, the accelerando or the retard affects all the groups :  

Another example :   = equaliter, a melodic letter; the five punctums are to be sung at the unison.

The signs and the rhythmic letters are often employed in the same group :

Clivis —  , 1st note light, 2nd note supported or lengthened by the Episema.

Climacus —  , 1st note light (celeriter), 2nd ordinary, 3rd, lengthened or supported by Episema.

All the notes of a group may be modified in their movement, by the Romanian Letters :

The *Torculus*  long. All the notes are retarded.

The *Scandicus*  . The four *Punctums planums* marked with the Episema are to be retarded and marked strongly.

The *Climacus*  is to be treated with a progressive Ritar-dando, on the four last notes.

Saint-Gall signs : The Saint-Gall Manuscripts contain other signs and abbreviations which are not mentioned by Notker :

- c̃ = conjungatur — to join, to blend. Legato.
 Lēn = leniter — sweetly, dolce.
 Moll = Molliter — with delicacy, softly. pp.
 fid = fideliter — faithfully, with exactitude.
 fidenter = with assurance (?).
 siml = simul — ensemble, together, tutti.
 similiter — in like manner, the same.
 perf = perfecte — with perfection.
 f = statim — without pause, suivez, continue immediately.
 sometimes equivalent to (c) celeriter.

Rhythmic signs of Metz. (Messin) As Saint-Gall these are divided into two different kinds :

- a) Rhythmic signs, properly called.
- b) Significant Letters. (Messins).

The Notation of Metz, to explain the rhythm, used only the signs modifying the ordinary neums. The “additions” of Saint-Gall were unknown.

The Episema was represented by some sort of a modification of the contour of the neum, or by a Letter, with the same meaning.

As at Saint-Gall, there are ordinary neums, and long neums :

<i>Ordinary Neums</i>		<i>Long Neums</i>
Punctum	.	~
Clivis	7	~ ~ or ~ ~
Podatus	┘	~ ~
Torculus	∩	~ ~ or ~ ~
Climacus	⋮ or ⋮	~ ~

The value of the long neums is revealed to us by the comparison with the Saint-Gall manuscripts. In fact the ordinary Messinian signs correspond exactly with the ordinary Sanguinian signs. There are thousands of examples of this concor-

dance between the two schools. See above, *Punctum planum*, in the Saint-Gall list. The long neums of Metz have no more rhythmic value than the *punctum planum* of Saint-Gall.

The *Messinian Letters* : We do not have a letter from a Notker at Metz to give us the key to the Significant Letters of the Manuscripts of Metz. Nevertheless, most of them can be interpreted in the light of the Saint-Gall Manuscripts. As at Saint-Gall, we distinguish two series : the *melodic letters* ; and the *rhythmic letters*.

Melodic Letters :

We enumerate them :

Elevation : or (*f*) as at Saint-Gall = Sursum.

Descending : (*h*) humiliter (iusum) Saint-Gall.

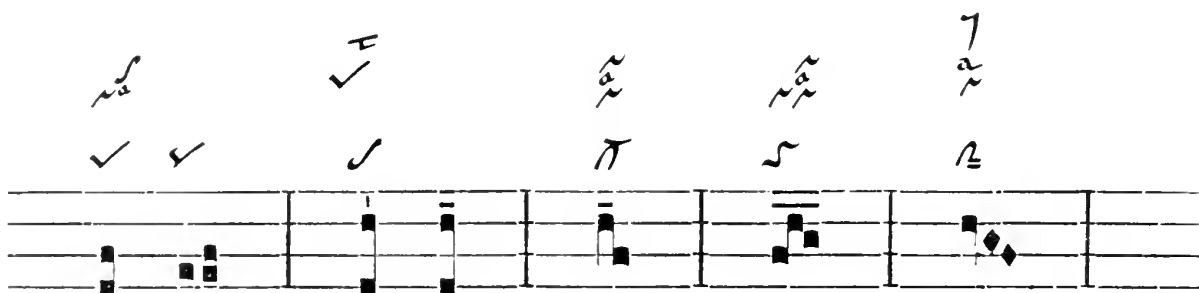
Unison : (*eg*) = equaliter.

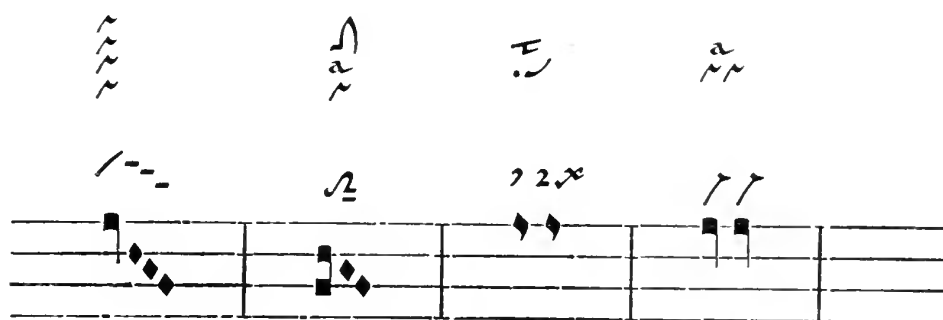
Other letters of less importance were also in use at Metz.

Messinian Rhythmic Letters.

Retard	(<i>τ</i>) = tenete.
Lengthening, amplification	(<i>a</i>) = auge, augete, ample.
	(<i>c</i>) = cito, celerius, celeriter.
	(<i>n</i>)
Acceleration	(<i>τn</i>)
	(<i>nL</i>) naturaliter.
	(<i>nLτ</i>)

The (*τ*) as at Saint-Gall, marks a "tenuto" of the voice. It has often for an equivalent, (*a*) — augete, ample, etc. These two letters are nearly always found on the neumes, which in the Saint-Gall manuscripts, are indicated *long*.





Celeriter, Naturaliter. — The Notkerian letter (*c*), *celeriter*, is found in the manuscripts 239 of Laon, but it very often agrees with (*n*), *naturaliter*. These two letters correspond always with the notes or groups, either ordinary, or marked with the (*c*), in Saint-Gall.

There is some mystery surrounding the letter (*n*). In the Laudunensis 239, this letter appears either alone, or followed by (*l*), or (*τ*). In the Codex 91 of Angers, the (*n*) is never alone, but always accompanied by (*l*), — (*nl*), and once we find (*nlτ*). The expression which seems to respond better to this combination, is *naturaliter*, in opposition to (*a*), *amplitude*, length, which changes the ordinary value of the notes.

The reciprocal substitution of (*c*) and (*n*), in the Manuscript 239 of Laon, reduces the signification of (*c*) to its just value. The school of Metz confirms this interpretation.

There is however an exception to understand in the notation of Laon: it is when the neumatic sign chosen by the copyist surpasses a little the real value that he wishes to attribute to it; then this (*c*) placed over the excessive sign restores it to its desired duration, and, here, the meaning of *celeriter* must be taken to the letter; in this case the (*n*) never replaces the (*c*).

The Manuscripts of Metz employ the same sign for the *Pressus* as for the *Salicus*. The *Pressus* is a long, doubled note, while the central note of the *Salicus* is a supported and lengthened note, but seldom doubled. There is a similarity between these two signs, therefore the same neum in the Messinian manuscripts, and especially in the Laon 239. But in order to reduce the *Salicus* to its just value, the copyist adds the (*c*) *celeriter* to the middle note. The (*n*) is never used in this case, as it would give just the opposite meaning.

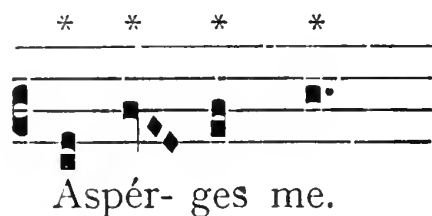
CHAPTER II. *

RHYTHM AND EXECUTION OF MELODIC GROUPS IN THE PHRASE.

It is the function of these *rhythmic groups* and *time groups* to form the phrase members, as we have explained before. Some groups are joined together to form closely-knit musical sentences, while others are as it were detached, according to the musical sense.

A general sign of the "junction" of groups, is the graphic union of several notes in a single group, and the placing of these groups close together. On the other hand, graphic spacing between notes and groups usually means disjunction. But the notators were not always careful to indicate these "junctures" and "disjunctures", so that today one of the most difficult problems of Gregorian Rhythm is to determine these two different types of groups, especially among the melismatic chants. It was only after a long laborious comparison of manuscripts that Dom Mocquereau and his workers were able to come to a few definite conclusions. We have already explained the term juxtaposition, in the Chapter on Rhythm, but a few more words will not prove detrimental :

When *time-groups*, the last note of which are without *mora vocis*, are united to a following note or group; Ictus falls on first note of each group. Examples :



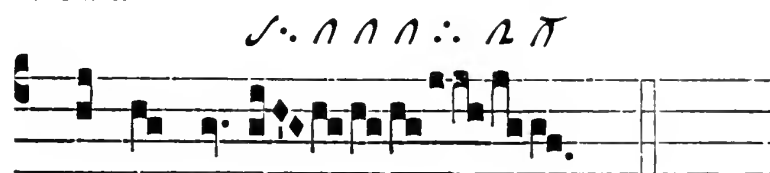
How the manuscripts indicate this juxtaposition of groups.

a) The procedure of the documents without rhythmic signs, is to place the groups very close together.

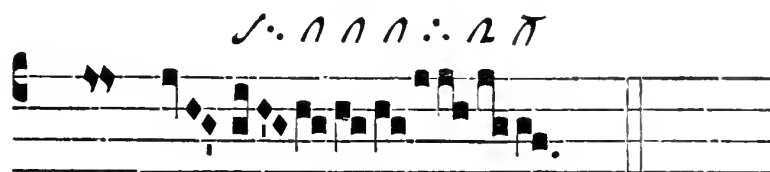
b) The Rhythmic manuscripts are more precise. The absence of any letter of length, whatsoever, is an infallible sign of juxtaposition.

* See Vol I, Part II, Chapter VII "*Le Nombre Musical*".

Mss. St. Gall.



Dómi- ne



inténde

The Saint-Gall neumes above the staff plainly tell us that there is to be no retard, but that all the groups are to be sung in one phrase.

The same phrase is found in other manuscripts with the added Significant Letters, both Romanian and Messinian. (See explanation in Chapter).

Laon 239

A

S. Gall 376

B

Several Mss. S. Gall

C

Tract. *Qui regis*

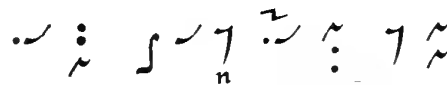
The (c) — celeriter, lines B and C, is continuous over the three *clivis*, thus indicating a close liaison.

The (simul) over the (c), on line B, emphasises the celeriter. It is a redundant sign, and used in only one manuscript.

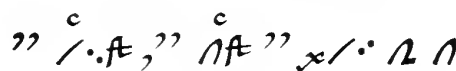
As for the Codex of Laon 239, the graphic union of the three *Clivis* in a single group is significant. The (n), naturaliter, at the base of the two groups prevents a pause of any kind, either after the *pes snbbipunctus*, or the *clivis*. The effect wanted by the composer is no doubt a slow trill of four beats, which is to accelerate up to the *trigon*, or *pressus* of the square notation.

The use of the sign $\text{f} = \text{statim}$.

Laon 239



S. Gall



R. br. *Timebunt*



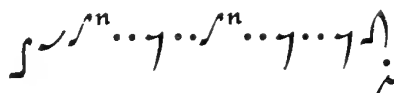
et vi-débi- tur

There is to be no *mora vocis* after the *climacus-do-la-sol*, or the *clivis-do-la*. Why? The punctums are brief, and this group is surmounted by a (c), which seems to affect the entire neum. Then the addition of the $\text{f} = \text{statim}$, which immediately follows says to continue without retard. The same remarks apply to the next *clivis-do-la*.

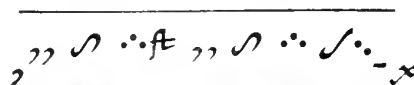
The manuscript of Laon furnishes the same indications for the Climacus. The long punctum $\sim$ at the base this neum, is *only long when* accompanied by r or some other indication of retard. As for the clivis, the (n) naturaliter which follows it is equivalent to $\text{f} = \text{statim}$ in the Saint-Gall manuscripts.

Another example of $\text{f} = \text{statim}$.

Laon 239



Mss. S. Gall



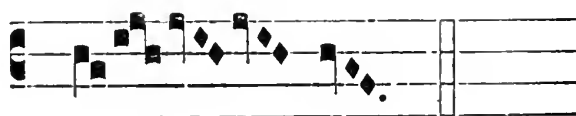
Tract. *Commovisti*



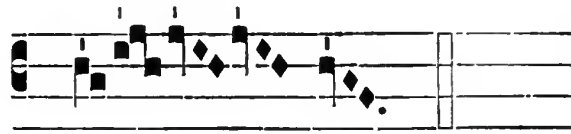
Sa-
fúgi- ant na

This sign interdicts a retard after the *trigon-pressus do-sol*, where the white space might suggest a *mora vocis*.

A lesson in Gregorian Rhythm: How would the average musician rhythm the following phrase member?

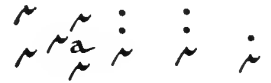


The average modern musician would no doubt place the ictus on the first note of every group, thus :

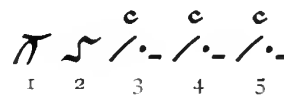


To the ear accustomed to figured music, this rhythm would sound very well. But to the gregorianist? Even he might be a little confused, but he would try and find out the intention of the unknown composer. How? Only one answer : search the manuscripts. We find the following equivalence between the Saint-Gall and the Messin neumatic versions :

Mss. Messins



Mss. Sangalliens



Ry. G. V Mode



All the groups are rhythmized, except the first. The (•) celeriter warns the reader or singer not to stop, or “punch” the top notes, but on the contrary to glide lightly over these culminating notes. Everywhere in the gregorian repertoire we find such subtle phrases. All choir directors do not have recourse to the manuscripts, but a careful study of the Solesmes style will bring light into their twilight, for the thorough scholarly approach of the great men of this school has settled many questions for us, the lesser specialists.

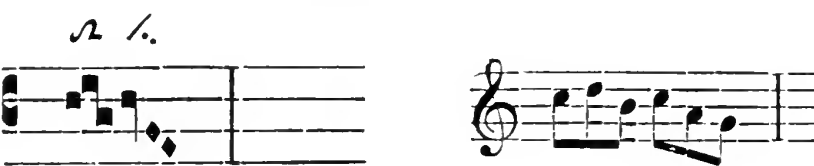
Let us continue with the analysis of this excerpt : The Punctum planum on the last note of the Climacus (3, 4, 5), indicates a light support and lengthening, which naturally attracts the rhythmic ictus. We have spoken of the function of the (•) celeriter, here.

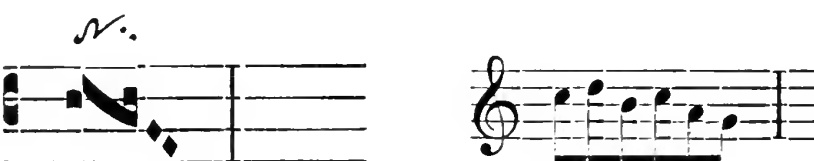
The Torculus ♪ is entirely enlarged, with a rhythmic ictus on the first and third notes. This last ictus prepares the “légèreté” of the Climacus which follows. Finally the long Clivis ⌣ with its first note well supported and allongated, is the *only time group* of the melisma. So much for the Saint-Gall document.

The Messinian manuscript (above) conforms exactly with the Saint-Gall indications: We have the long Clivis, the long Torculus with the sign (α) augete (largo), corresponding to the lengthened Torculus of the Saint-Gall version. The three Climacus are composed of two light punctums each, ending with the long punctum, which indicates a support and corresponds with the *punctum planum* of Saint-Gall.

Such is the rhythmic interpretation of this passage, according to the manuscripts. There are many explanations of this sort in "*Le Nombre Musical Grégorien*" of Dom Mocquereau, and in the "*Monographies Grégoriennes*", by Dom Mocquereau, Dom Gajard, and other authorities. It will pay the student of Plainchant to make detailed studies of these volumes.

The rhythmic signs are not the only proof of the necessity of joining the groups. In the manuscripts we find the same passages written, sometimes in a single neumatic group, sometimes in two groups, sometimes three. The following passage from the Offertory "*Reges Tharsis*" from the Codices:

a) in two groups 

b) in one group 

The musician who would like to rhythm the first example (a), by simple juxtaposition (rhythmic ictus on the first note of each group), needs only to study the second example (b), to understand that his idea has no value. However, in this second example, the musician is free in principle to place the ictus on either the third or fourth note. But, which subdivision will better preserve the true Gregorian tradition? This question must always be asked by the modern musician, who is accustomed to classical and modern rhythms. The average musician would make the following mistake, and place the ictus on the first notes of the groups.



The gregorianist would decide that the separate groups mean nothing, but would study the situation in the light of the documents before proceeding with his divisions. The following would be his conclusion, as he would decide to place the rhythmic ictus on the (*si*), thus joining the groups according to the spirit and habits of the neumatic notation. See the following :



The descending melodic design demands a rhythmic support on the *notes do-si-sol*. Also the rhythmic manuscripts place a Romanian episema on the last note of the Torculus. (a)

Another example of the same Melisma, with one note more. Offertory "*Inveni*". Three different notations :

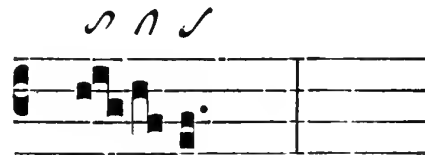
- a) in a single group;
the Virga final is
Resupina. Mss. St. Gall.



- b) in two groups :
mss. S. G. 375,
and S. G. 340.



- c) in three groups :
mss. Monza,
mss., Novalése.



These three notations are equally good, if in singing, the joining of the groups is well observed. Because of its graphic unity, type (a) might be considered the best. Here the melodic and rhythmic unity is well defined. (b) In the second example the (c) celeriter forbids a support on the first note of the Clivis; this indication preserves the unity of the group. (c) To attain the same result in this example we place the rhythmic ictus on the last note of each group, thus blending the notes of the incise.

There are thousands of examples showing the same melodic formula written in several graphic styles. For this reason,

it is important to use éditions of the chant which the rhythmic and dynamic signs. However, it is difficult to indicate the delicate nuances of interpretation found in the manuscripts; for this reason every serious student of Plainchant should study these intricacies with a real authority on these matters — and there are very few — who understand the theory, and also the true meaning of the melopée.

How would you divide the rhythm in the following group?

Mss. Messins



Mss. Sangalliens



Ry. G. Mode II

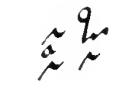


We are sure that the first note of the Pressus demands an ictus: also the first of the two Virgas. But what of the first group? We have five notes. — We make a time group of the *pes subbipunctis*, and divide it into two binary composite beats, placing the ictus on the first and third (*la*) notes; then because of the *Pressus*, the (*la*) of the following *podatus* must go back to the binary group thus forming a composite ternary rhythm. The central ictus might fall on the (*sol*), but the (*la*) seems to invite a support, being a modal note in this, the fifth mode. The complete phrase of this chant follows :

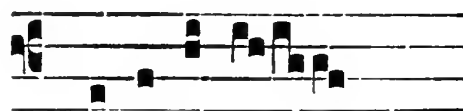


Another example of agglutination, after time groups :

Mss. Messins



Mss. S. Gall



Alle-lú-ia.

The first *Clivis sol-fa*, and the first note of the second Clivis, form a composite ternary rhythm, thus closely connecting

the groups. After you are certain of the notes and the interpretation of these excerpts, sing each one in one breath, making the usual crescendo upward, but without "punching" the top notes. Of course the Pressus in the first example demands a "pressing" support, so to speak. But in the second example, the (-c) celeriter above the second Clivis warns to sing lightly.

The disjunction of groups. — The disjunction of groups in the course of a musical phrase is made by retarding the voice (mora vocis) on the last note of the group. In the rhythmic éditions of Solesmes, the dot (•) or the horizontal episema (-) indicate this separation.

The value of the (mora vocis) is variable : It usually doubles the value (•) of the note at the end of an incise or phrase member. At the end of a long phrase, or at the end of a piece, it may triple the normal value of the preceding note. In the case of the (mora vocis) expressed by the horizontal episema (-), a very slight nuance of retard only may be meant. This retard depends on the phrase, the taste of the musician, and forms rather a link between the groups than a separation. A great deal of study and practice is necessary for the artistic treatment of the horizontal episema (-).

How the manuscripts indicate the distinction of groups in the melismas.

In the manuscripts it is not always easy to find the positive signs which indicate a mora vocis. These signs are of various sorts : white spaces, rhythmic signs and letters; these indications happily aid each other to give us the desired information.

We must search the answers in the neumatic notation, as the Guidonian notation has preserved little or nothing of the rhythmic indications in the ancient manuscripts. While the notation on lines has preserved the melodic tradition, it has at the same time destroyed the rhythmic tradition.

The *white spaces* between the groups are the most uncertain indications of the distinction of groups.

The rhythmic signs of Saint-Gall and Metz are a great help in distinguishing the groups and small divisions. However, the episema or ictic note at the end of a group, even the punctum planum, do not suffice to determine a mora vocis; often the episema is the sign of a simple support. But, in the manuscripts, if a very clear white space follows this "support" we are almost

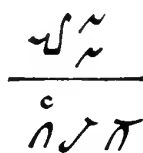
certain that a *mora vocis* is meant. The following melisma will illustrate :



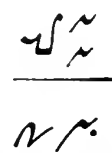
* *mora vocis*

Two versions of the same chant : The Codices of Saint-Gall write in two different ways the following.

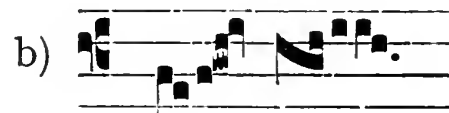
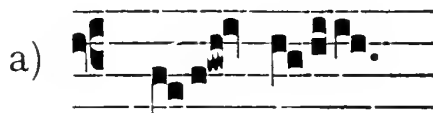
Laon 239



Mss. Sangalliens



Mode II. Tract.



The two notations are equivalent, but the first must be interpreted by connection of groups, between the *Clivis* and *Podatus*, making a ternary rhythm before the *Pressus* which follows. In the second example the *Porrectus* takes care of the ternary rhythm as a time group. The real effect of such phrases is :



A few examples of the fusion of groups in the Pressus :

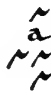
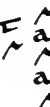
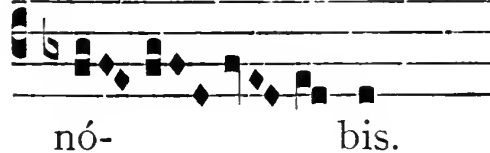


The last note of the first group always draws the rhythmic ictus, with the result that the first note of the second group loses its rhythmic ictus and its individual ictus by virtue of its fusion with the preceding note.

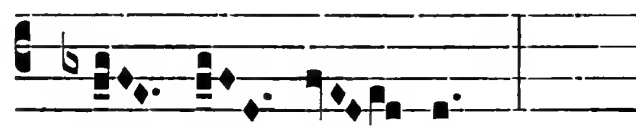


Here the episema on the last note of groups A and B, plus the white spaces following, certify *mora vocis*. In the Manuscript of Laon, a (⏏) tenete is found on the last note of group B.

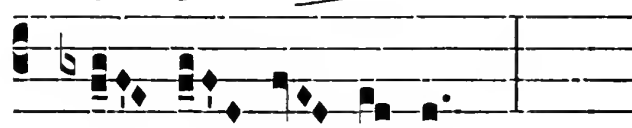
Sometimes several different interpretations may be drawn from the rhythmic signs, as in the following. In like cases we often find aid in other documents and even fragments.

	A	B	C
Laon 239			
S. Gall Mss.			
Ry. G. <i>Convertere.</i>			
	nó-		bis.

There are two possibilities here: disjunction after groups A and B.

A	B	C
		
3-	2	3- 2 2
nó-		bis.

or by joining all the groups.

Largement		
		
2-2	2-2	3- 2- 2

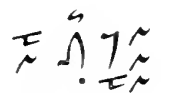
For many reasons, some of them more or less complicated, Solesmes has chosen the first interpretation.

Sometimes the rhythmic letters can settle these difficulties for us; but they are not always clear. Each case must be studied separately; we cannot make too many generalizations. It is necessary to know well the different shades of meaning between the different letters and combinations of letters. Also

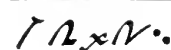
the relationship of the letter with the rhythmic sign in each special case, as well as a careful comparison of their meaning in the various schools of manuscripts. No conclusions may be made without considering all these facts and many others.

The rhythmic letters of disjunction are the (τ) = tenete, common to both the manuscripts of Saint-Gall and Metz; the (α) = *augete*, in the Messian documents, when they are attached to the last note of a group, favor usually disjunction. However it is the letter ($\propto$) = *expecta* which gives us the most certain information in regard to the mora vocis and the separation of groups. This letter, wherever found, either in connexion with text or melody, indicates an incise, the end of a phrase member, *etc.* It is the sign par excellence of disjunction or mora vocis, in distinct opposition to the sign (f) = *statim*, which is the infallible sign of juncture. Often the ($\propto$) serves to explain more fully the signs (τ) and (α). Observe the following:

Laon 239



St. Gall 376 and Ein. 121



Intr. *Aqua sapientiae*

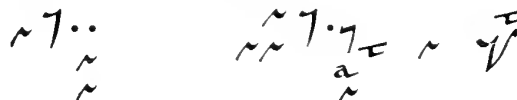


The ($\propto$) after the Torculus (*la-re-do*) is found in two manuscripts of Saint-Gall. It settles the value of the episema on the last note of the Torculus.

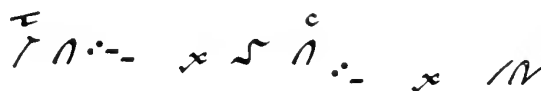
The (τ) in the Laon version, prescribes at the same place, a disjunction by means of a mora vocis. In Laon, this (τ) is not always a doubled note, but when it corresponds to an ($\propto$) of Saint-Gall, we can definitely give it this value.

Another example — Gradual “*Ex Sion*”.

Laon 239



Mss. Sangalliens



Grad. *Ex Sion*



ordinavé- runt

