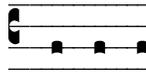


Melodic Embellishments

in
Gregorian Chant
(their modern equivalents)

“The first step in any serious study of the chant consists of distinguishing the important structural notes from the secondary ones. Only then can one respect their hierarchy or order of importance (Dom Eugène Cardine, *An Overview of Gregorian Chant*, p.45).”

Three examples of ornamenting the same word:



The structure pitches: í- te- rum (spoken as: **i-** te- rum)

Example 1:

er : í- te-rum GT 21/2
232/4

Example 2:

í- te-rum GT 234/1

Example 3:

í- te-rum, e' GT

Example 1: The tonic accent of the word (í-) should receive ample sound according to the Virga with an episema in the St. Gall notation. Both Laon 239 and the St. Gall notation indicate that the intermediate syllable (-te-) should be sung lightly and quickly. Laon 239 uses the small dot to show this. The St. Gall notation adds a *c* (celeriter = quickly) to the Tractulus. The final syllable (-rum) must now dissipate all the energy that still remains from the tonic accent. The Bivirga in St. Gall has added episemas and the two notes in Laon 239 have an “*a*” (= augete, enlarge) between them. These two notes must be prolonged enough to absorb all the remaining energy that was generated by the strong tonic accent on the first syllable of the word. The repetition of the last pitch functions like a short version of a *tremolo* (not to be confused with a *vibrato*!), or those repeated notes in a Baroque concerto. The effect is that of repeating the last syllable of

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the word, like a fading echo. The rhythmic motion is toward the final note over the last syllable of the word.

Example 2: Here the tonic accent has three notes. The first note in the St. Gall notation is a Virga with an episema that indicates it should be sung with more than normal energy. The *e* that follows it indicates that the flowing form of the Pes that follows it will begin on the same pitch. The first note of the Pes should be sung very lightly and quickly, while the second note regains full syllabic value as the last note over that syllable. The effect is like that of an athlete straining forward and gaining momentum before quickly throwing the javelin to the target. In this case, that target will be the last syllable of the word. One can get a feel of this by energetically drawing that first St. Gall Virga and then quickly drawing the beginning of the Pes shape and releasing that energy as you lift the pen. Try directing yourself with those motions as you sing the word.

Example 3: In this example, the first two notes are sung lightly and quickly. The second note acts as an upper embroidery of the main reciting pitch, while the first note functions as a light *portamento* into that second note. The two notes function as ornaments leading to the third note. Since this last note is the final note before the change of syllable, it regains full syllabic value and becomes the goal of the melodic motion. The second syllable (-ter-) now has two notes instead of just a single note as in the two previous examples. However, they are notated by the flowing form of the Pes in both Laon 239 and in the St. Gall notation. The first note will be sung very lightly and quickly, while the second note will regain full syllabic value as the last note before the change of syllable. The effect will be that of a *portamento* style of singing, the first note being a light glide into the second note as the really important note. Once again, the final note of the final syllable will absorb all the remaining energy that was developed on the first syllable that functioned as the tonic accent.

According to Guido of Arezzo two repercussed notes that are above a whole step in the Gregorian correspond to three notes in the Roman, in which the second is an upper embroidery of the other two notes: AA (Gregorian), AB^bA (Roman). Example 3 from the

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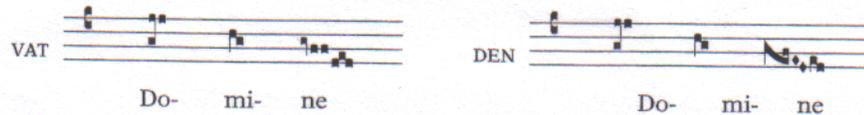
Graduale Triplex, page 232, line 4 is an illustration of this. Guido says: "... we frequently produce these [intermediate] notes with a less strong impulsion, to such an extent that it [the pitch] seems rise or fall when in fact it is the same note that is repercussed." (cf. Micrologus, ch. XV) On the other hand, when two repercussed notes are above a semitone in the Gregorian they correspond in the Roman to three notes in which the second is a lower embroidery of the other two notes: FF (Gregorian), FEF (Roman).



Gregorian: Ex-sul- tá- vit (GT 28/8) Roman: Ex-sul- tá- vit

It seems that the Gallican cantors failed to hear those light, intermediate notes and reduced these ornaments to a Bivirga as seen in the first example above (GT 28/8). John the Deacon tells us that the Frankish cantors sang like "... bellowing bulls that had the voices of drunkards who were incapable of the sweet modulation required by the inflections of the chant." On the other hand, Notker of St. Gall insisted that the Roman cantors were constantly changing the melodies of the chants! Most likely, the Roman cantors improvised these as embellishments that could be added or not, as the occasion suggested. Among these embellishments were the frequent oscillation around the subsemitonal degree, as seen in the following examples:

4. In. *Sacerdotes tui* GT 485.1

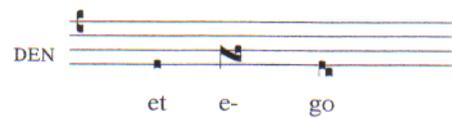
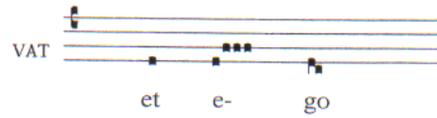


7. In. *Omnis terra* GT 260.5

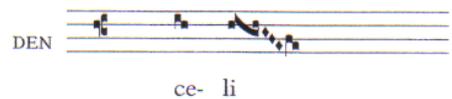
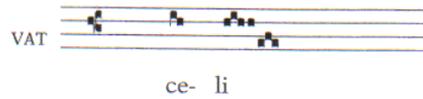


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13. Co. *Qui manducat* GT 383.4



14. In. *Terribilis est* GT 397.2



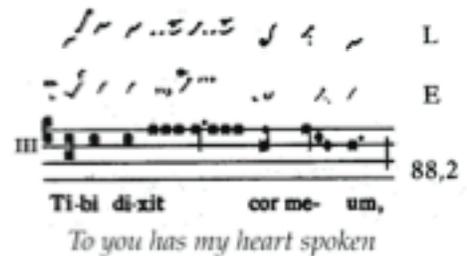
The Saint Denis (Old Roman) tradition oscillates around the subsemitonal degree, while the Germanic tradition clearly uses the graphic designs that are characteristic of a unison melody. Notice how the descent from the structure pitch A to the Final D in both *Sacerdotes tui* GT 485.1 and in *Omnis terra* GT 260.5 is filled in with the subsemitonal degree E around the structure pitch F in the Saint Denis tradition, while the VAT uses repeated notes.

Besides the ornamental amplification of lengthened notes, the Roman tradition also presents the habit of filling in disjoint intervals, especially descending ones, of gliding a lengthened note downwards, often to the interval of a fourth. The last example (*Terribilis est*, GT 397.2) shows this tendency to “fill in” from the F to the C over the final syllable of the word *celi*. It also shows that the third note is so lightly sung that it could be heard as either an F (in the VAT) or an E (in the DEN manuscript of the Roman version).

This ornamental amplification also concerns lengthened notes. Indeed the medieval authors spoke of the fact that a lengthened note often becomes the place of a vibration or even of a repercussion.



Example A:



Example B:

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The repetition of the first four notes over the word *Tharsis* (Thár-si-i-i--s; í--i-i-i--s) will sound as if it creates an echo from a distant land. This would produce a kind of “word painting” of the great distance between Bethlehem and the land of Tharsis (at the western end of the Mediterranean sea). The repetition of the first four notes over the word *dixit* in the second example will sound like the regular rhythmic pulsing of a human heart: **dí**--xi-i-i--; **í**--i-i--it. Laon 239 indicates the lengthening of the fourth and the final note by the addition of a *t* (tenere = hold) to those notes. The St. Gall notation adds an episema to those notes for the same purpose.

Gregorian chant makes use of a number techniques for embellishing a chant that grow out of the types of inflections used in good public speaking. Among these are the following:



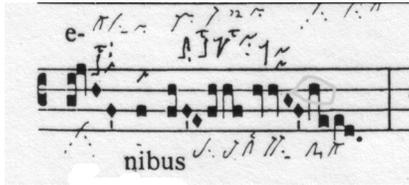
Portamento: GT 30.5. The first note over the accented syllable (*sum-*) of the word *summo* is missing in both the Vatican square notation and in the St. Gall notation (*Cantatorium*, page 30). It is present as the first note of the quickly flowing Pes given in the Laon 239 (p. 45) notation. The note was sung so lightly and quickly that some cantors and notators did not think they heard a note at that point in the melody. Today, it is a standard, respected technique of good *bel canto* singing and of expressive violin playing (cf. Joshua Bell!).



Escape Tone: GT 37.1. In the square note notation, the second note over the syllable *li* functions as an escape tone. The Laon 239 notator gives only a two-note, quickly flowing Clivis for that syllable. Thus the first note will be sung very lightly and quickly, a fore runner of the modern escape tone. The final

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note will regain full syllabic value and be the goal of the melodic motion. In the St. Gall notation it is prepared by a *portamento* that produces a three-note neume, the Torculus.

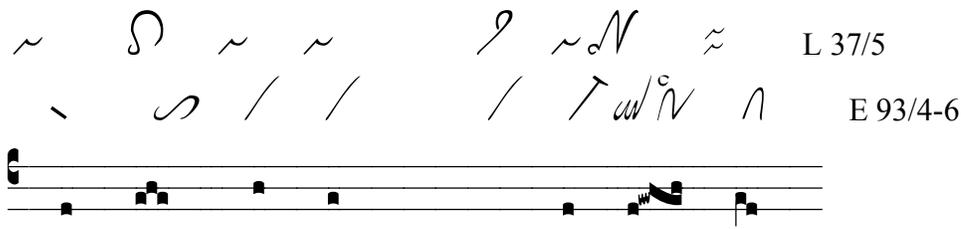


GT 25.8. Here the escape tone is found near the end of a punctuating melisma as the final C before the descent to the doubled G. It functions as a delay in the melodic descent from A to G in the melodic line by a quick return to the previous structure pitch, the note C.



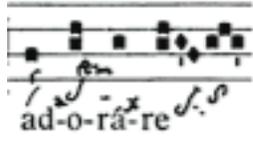
Passing tone: GT 47.6. The second note of the Clivis over the syllable *li* of the word *filius* functions as a passing tone that creates a smoothly descending melodic line from the Torculus (an ornament of the structure pitch D) over the first syllable of the word to the note A of the final syllable.

The following example shows the use of an ascending passing tone as the first note of the Torculus over the second syllable of the word *Misereris*. When the formula is elided, the passing tone becomes the weak Quilisma note on the first syllable of the word *nihil* in the same piece:



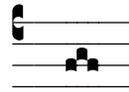
Mi- se- ré- ris [.] et ni- hil (GT 62.1)

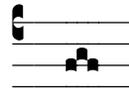
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Trill: GT 59.2 CO. *Vidimus stellam*. The notes over the final syllable of the word *adorare* produce a kind of trill, or turn, that creates a rhetorical delay for the passage to the word *Dóminus* (adore – the Lord!). It is given an even added emphasis by the delay on the accented syllable, indicated by the *x* (= expectare, wait!) between the accented syllable and the final syllable.

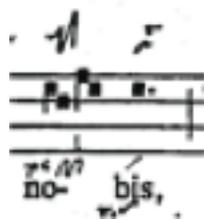
Tremolo: Cf. GT 58.5. *Reges Tharsis* in Example B as given above. The repetitions over the word *Tharsis* produce a pulsing sound that resembles the sound produced by the tremolo stop on a pipe organ. It adds vibrancy to a sustained pitch. The repetition of the pattern in this example produces an echo effect, a kind of “word painting.”



Upper Neighbor: The Torculus neume  is often used to produce an upper neighbor melodic embellishment.



Lower Neighbor: The Porrectus neume  often functions as a lower neighbor melodic embellishment.



Double Neighbor: GT 47.6 *Puer natus est*. Here it is used to highlight an important word accent.

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Appoggiatura:

GT 88.1 CO. *Domine, Deus meus.*

The two-note Clivis over the word *me* functions as an appoggiatura. In both notations the final two notes are lengthened for the final cadence. Laon 239 shows the first note as having greater volume/intensity than the final note, since in the context of the cadence, the smaller size of the final Uncinus would not indicate shorter length but less volume.

The Introit *Puer natus est nobis* (GT 47-48) provides some examples of embellishing a basic structure pitch, the Dominant and reciting tone of the 7th mode.



(Pu-er na- tus est) no- bis

no- bis

no- bis

no- bis

The accented syllable of the word *nobis* has the structure pitch E. To this is added a melodic anticipation (the Clivis), a portamento (the Torculus) and finally the double neighbor ornament (the two Clivis neumes).

The accented syllable of the word *eius* has the structure pitch C. The phrase (nómen) *éius* uses a double neighbor turn as a “wind-up” to the accent and adds two notes to fill in to the final syllable, which now is given an appoggiatura embellishment. The phrase (húmerum) *éius* uses a lengthened Clivis to add power and a second Clivis to add speed to the accent. It finishes with the same embellishments as the previous example. The added ornamentation is appropriate for the phrase: “... whose rule [imperium] is on **his** (little) shoulders!”



é- ius



(nómen) é- ius



(húmerum) é- ius