

Reading Neumes

It is not possible to offer in these webpages a general introduction to reading neumes that improves upon published studies. What is offered instead are offer case studies that explain the reconstruction process for selected examples - these may be found [here](#). For those wishing to learn more about the working of neumatic notation in order to attempt their own reconstructions, the following graded and annotated bibliography is provided.

1. Mary Berry, *Plainchant for Everyone* (RSCM, 1979); expanded and updated by John Rowlands-Pritchard (ed.), *The RSCM Guide to Plainchant: An Introduction to Plainsong* (RSCM, 2015)

This short guidebook provides a practical introduction to square notation designed for singers. It assumes no previous knowledge in taking the reader from first principles through to reading complex chants.

2. [David Hiley, *Gregorian Chant, Cambridge Introductions to Music* \(Cambridge: CUP\), 2009, ch 4. \('Thinking about Gregorian chant in the Middle Ages, and notating it'\)](#)

This chapter provides a clear and approachable introduction to the earliest notations for Gregorian chant. It guides the reader through the basics of the modal system as inherited from Greek theory and elaborated in the early Middle Ages, before passing to a brief overview of the earliest neume scripts. The table provided on p. 182 (Table 4.2 Eight medieval types of signs for notating chant) offers a particularly useful initial orientation, charting equivalences between neumatic notations, square notation and modern notation. An explanation of signs that indicate further qualifying details follows immediately afterwards, illustrating the range of information that can be recovered from early neumatic scripts.

3. David Hiley, *Western Plainchant* (Oxford: OUP), 1993, 340-60

This more detailed study summarizes previous research on neumatic notation and offers a detailed introduction to the historical problem of interpreting neumatic scripts alongside tables of neume scripts divided by region.

4. Robert M. Fowels (trans.), *Introduction to Gregorian Semiology* (Solesmes), 1982

This handbook is a translation of Cardine's highly influential work on rhythmic interpretation of early neume scripts, first published as Eugène Cardine, *Semiologia gregoriana* (Rome), 1968. It is recommended for those seeking to refine their knowledge of the interpretation of neumatic notation.

5. Sam Barrett, *The Melodic Tradition of Boethius' "De Consolatione Philosophiae" in the Middle Ages*, Monumenta Monodica Medii Aevi,

Subsidia 7 (Kassel etc.: Bärenreiter), 2013, vol. I, ch. 3 'Notators and Notation'

This chapter provides a detailed palaeographic introduction to the notations added to Boethian *metra*. The comments on individual notations in vol. II should be of use to those seeking to create their own reconstructions.

Practical sources

***Graduale Triplex* (Solesmes: Abbaye Saint-Pierre de Solesmes), 1979**

This version of the Gradual contains neumes added to the 1974 edition of the *Graduale Romanum* by Marie-Claire Billecocq and Rupert Fischer from Laon 239 and manuscripts of the St Gall family. It is recommended as a practical first port of call for those wishing to increase their fluency in reading early neumatic scripts.

***Graduale Novum I De dominicis et festis* (Regensburg: ConBrio Verlagsgesellschaft), 2011**

This more recent publication provides newly reconstructed melodies for the Gradual that follow closely the implications of the earliest neumatic notations with neumes added from Laon 239 and the St Gall family

Online resources

Richard Crocker, 'A Gregorian Archive',
<http://www.richardcrocker.com/chants/>

This resource collects together performances of the Propers of the Mass from the *Graduale Triplex* as informed by the neumatic notations. It is recommended to those wishing to compare their readings of neumatic notations with those of a recognised scholar.