

Laon Level 1 Group 5-1

Four- and Five-note Neums – Explanation

Transcript

Once we pass the level of three-note neums, all of the larger neums are simply compounds of two or more smaller neums.

In this unit, I will give you just a few of the more common of the many possible combinations.

Remember, we define a neum as a group of notes that sets a single syllable of text.

For example, we have already seen the three-note scandicus. Well, the scandicus can actually have any number of notes, as long as there are at least three.

QUIZ 1

Here, for example, is a four-note scandicus. No matter how many notes a neum has, if it is a group of at least three ascending notes, it is a scandicus.

Here are some examples of this longer scandicus in modern notation. Remember, the interval between any two of the notes can vary. So, the actual number of possibilities is extensive.

Conversely, the climacus can actually have any number of notes, as long as there are at least three.

QUIZ 2

For example, here is a four-note climacus. Now, take note. In Laon, remember that the three-note climacus looks like this. While it might seem logical to assume that the four-note climacus would simply add another punctum, like this.

However, as an isolated neum, this figure is virtually non-existent. What is typical is to see a clivis extended by two, or perhaps more, puncti.

No matter how many notes a neum has, if it is a group of at least three notes in descending order, it is a climacus.

Here are some examples of this longer climacus in modern notation.

Now remember, the interval between any two of the notes can vary, so the actual number of possibilities is extensive.

What if we were to take a scandicus, that is, a series of ascending notes, and combine it with a podatus, two descending notes? It would look like this.

If the scandicus reverses direction and descends for only one note, it is called a scandicus flexus. In Latin, the word, *flexus* is literally “a turning point,” with an implied meaning that the turning is downward. For example, a *genu flexum* is a knee that is bend (implicitly to the ground). We can see that the scandicus rises, and, then at the top, it turns downward for one note. Notice that the first note of the podatus replaces the last note of the scandicus.

The modern equivalent could look like this, or this, or this, or any of a number of variations on this pattern of at least three rising notes that are followed by a single lower note.

If we were to combine a scandicus with a climacus, we would get this, a scandicus subbipunctis, literally, a “scandicus with two puncti underneath.”

Actually, it might look this, too. Notice, again, how the top note of the climacus replaces the last note of the scandicus. This eliminates the lengthening effect of the virga in the neum.

Of course, the scandicus subbipunctis could have more than three ascending notes and then descend for two notes, like this.

Its modern equivalent could look like this, or this, or any of a number of variations on this pattern of at least three rising notes in ascending order that are followed by two lower notes in descending order.

Notice how in Laon the rising notes tend to move from lower left to upper right in about a 45-degree angle, and how the descending notes tend to move in straight line down.

Now that you see how this works, if we were to combine a pes with a climacus, what do you think it would be called?

QUIZ 3

A pes combined with a climacus would be called a pes subbipunctis, literally, a “pes – lower note, higher note, with two puncti underneath.” It might also look a little more like this.

You may be thinking that this really looks like a torculus with a punctum underneath. And in the way that it is written in Laon, that is exactly what it is. So the same neum could also be called a torculus subpunctis, literally, “a torculus with a punctum underneath.”

The modern equivalent could look like this, or this, or this, or this, or any of a number of variations on this pattern of a lower note, followed by a higher note, followed by two lower notes.

Suppose we took a torculus and combined it with a single higher note, like this.

This we call a torculus resupinus. The Latin term *resupinus* means “lying on one’s back.” Think of the cognate “supine.” I am not sure whether this term is applied here because this combination of notes is structurally the same this way, or reversed, that is, flipped on its back, or simply because the last note flips up in the opposite direction.

In any case, just as the term *flexus* is applied to a neum in which the last note turns down, so, too, the term *resupinus* is applied to a neum in which the last note turns up, and here are a few examples of how the torculus resupinus can be notated with modern neums.

One last comment before we leave this neum. In the exercises you will also see this form of the torculus resupinus. As I mentioned before this is actually an altered form of the neum. It is a torculus resupinus with an *inítkio débilitis*, or “weak first note.” Properly, it’s modern equivalent would look like this. However, for the purposes of the exercises, this neum is treated as a normal torculus resupinus. We’ll correct that error in a later version of the program.

Take a look at the neum on the screen. Then take the quiz.

QUIZ 4

It is a porrectus flexus. Here is the high-note, low-note, high-note pattern of the porrectus, and then it turns down, or flexes, for another note.

You might also see it this way.

Here are just a couple of examples of the many ways the porrectus flexus can be notated with modern neums.

In Laon, there are a few combinations of neums that don't have specific names.

For example, here is a neum that combines a clivis with a podatus. We actually saw this in the video of musical examples of three-note neums. Its modern equivalents might look like this.

Here is another example. This neum combines a clivis with a torculus. Its modern equivalents might look like this.

SUMMARY