

# Three Paschal Antiphons

Joseph Pothier, "Trois Antiennes pascales", *Revue du Chant Grégorien*, year 8 no. 8 (March 1900): 122-126.<sup>1</sup>



**A** LLE-LU-IA, La-pis revolútus est, al-lelú-ia, ab ós-ti-o  
monumén-ti, alle-lú-ia, alle-lú-ia. Allelú-ia, quem quæris múli-er ?  
allelú-ia : vivéntem cum mórtu-is, allelú-ia, alle-lú-ia. Allelú-ia,  
noli fle-re, Marí-a, allelú-ia : resurréxit DÓ-minus, allelú-ia,  
alle-lú-ia.

In its antiphons and responsories, as well as, at times, its simple recitatives, the liturgy offers us all forms of style, but preferably lyric and even dramatic form.

We were recently giving an example of dramatic style, drawn from the proper office of St. Scholastica. Retelling in its way the touching dialogue between brother and sister and then the vision of the brother who, three days later, sees the soul of his sister climb to Heaven under the form of a white dove: it is to sing precisely as the Church invites us in her office of Virgins: *Ante torum hujus virginis frequentate nobis dulcia cantica dramatis* (second antiphon of the first nocturne).

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The three antiphons notated above, which are sung at Matins of the Sundays after Easter, furnish us also with a *canticum dramatis*: a whole scene in three brush-strokes: “Alleluia, the tombstone has been rolled out onto the ground, alleluia; the entrance is open, alleluia, alleluia. – Alleluia, O Woman, why do you seek the living One among the dead? alleluia, alleluia. – Alleluia, cease your tears, alleluia, the Lord is risen, alleluia, alleluia.” These repeated Alleluias that burst in accents of triumph at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of each phrase, respond perfectly to the lyric enthusiasm that the proclaimed news excites, and to the dramatic effect of the interpellation addressed to Mary Magdalene. The surges of the melody also come, for their part, to brilliantly complete the thoughts and the sentiments which the words themselves already express so powerfully.

Without having to play in liturgical chants the pre-eminent role we see for it in our three antiphons, the *Alleluia* nonetheless is called at every instant to bring its joyful note. We are particularly aware that in Paschaltide there is no antiphon, no responsory, nor even a simple versicle that can end without its sweet melody resounding on the ear like a last echo leaving, as a last impression on the soul, that of the joys of the resurrection.

Often as well in this same season and at solemn feasts, the *alleluia* not only ends the antiphon but is intercalated into it, being repeated either at every phrase, or at times even after a simple incise, as in the antiphon *Notum fecit Dominus, alleluia, salutare suum, alleluia*, and other similar antiphons of the sixth mode, found either at the *Benedictus* or the *Magnificat* in Paschaltide, or at the third nocturne of major feasts: Christmas, Epiphany, Ascension, and this with a psalm tone, formerly special and more solemn, that recalls the versicle of the brief responsory in Paschaltide, as the antiphon itself recalls the body of the responsory. (See Gerbert, *Scriptores de musica*, vol. I, 217.)

It is rarer to see a piece begin, as in our three antiphons, *ex abrupto*, with *Alleluia*. This was found formerly at Easter, for the Invitatory antiphon, and has been preserved at the Ascension and Pentecost as well for the psalm *Venite*. (See *Revue*, year 6 no. 9, 141-142.) One responsory still remains in the monastic office in the same conditions: the responsory *Alleluia, Audivimus eum in Ephrata*, etc. at the third nocturne of the fourth and fifth Sundays after Easter.

As for occasions when the antiphon is composed entirely of *alleluia*, this is, as a rule, in the Roman breviary, all year apart from the season after Septuagesima, for Lauds and the little hours of Sunday, and as well in Paschaltide for Sunday and ferial Vespers. The same applies to the monastic breviary, but adding, as St. Benedict prescribes in the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of his rule, the third nocturne of Sunday and the six last psalms of ferial Matins.

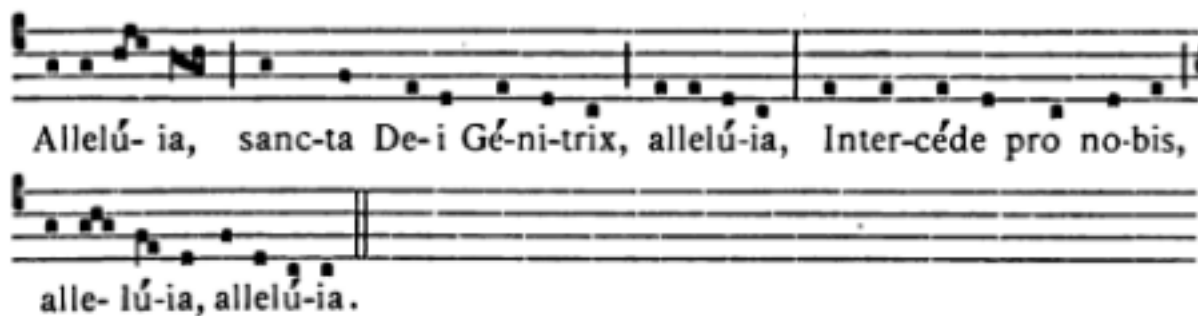
It is also medieval practice, in Paschaltide, even on the feasts of saints, to replace each of the antiphons from the rest of the year with a series of alleluias, sung on the melody of the ordinary antiphon, and consequently fewer or more depending on the extent of the melody, as in the nine alleluias of the first antiphon of Lauds in Paschaltide, modulated on the Easter antiphon *Angelus autem Domini*.

Let us come back to our three antiphons: *Alleluia, Lapis revolutus est*, etc. They are currently found to be the only ones of this form and with this melody in the Roman usage; but in the ancient antiphonaries, others are found in imitation of them.


Thus in the Sunday office, at Compline, the antiphon of the *Nunc dimittis* is, in Paschaltide: *Alleluia, Resurrexit Dominus, alleluia, sicut dixit vobis, alleluia, alleluia*; in Ascensiontide: *Alleluia, Ascendens Christus in altum, alleluia, captivam duxit captivitatem, alleluia, alleluia*; in Pentecost season: *Alleluia, Spiritus Paraclitus, alleluia, docebit vos omnia, alleluia, alleluia*. Likewise at Christmas, the canticle antiphon at Compline is: *Alleluia, Verbum caro factum est, alleluia; et habitavit in nobis, alleluia, alleluia*. At Epiphany: *Alleluia, Omnes de Saba venient, alleluia, aurum et thus deferentes, alleluia, alleluia*. Other Roman-French breviaries contain almost all the same antiphons.


Their melody is the same throughout, with only some unimportant variations that are easy to explain.

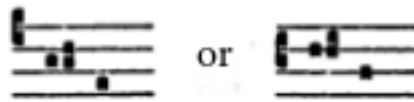
Nonetheless, as with other chants that have a catchy and easily popular melody, it can happen that, while repeating it from memory without having retained it well, one may be satisfied with an approximation, and one ends up introducing noticeable alterations that even deform its character in part. For example, here is one of the alterations derived in a Processional from Saint-Martin d'Autun, from the XIII century. (*Bibliothèque du Grand Séminaire.*)




The transposition of the piece from the *fa* scale to the *do* scale is not much to take into consideration here: it is only a variant of the notation, and as such accidental.

What is more serious is at the beginning, for the second note of the *torculus* on the syllable *lu*, being raised by a minor third in place of a major second, which certainly is the primitive reading; and then having raised the third note of the same *torculus* similarly; which gave *la, do, ti* instead of *la, ti, la*. As a consequence of this first deviation, the *podatus* that originally applied to the following syllable *ia* is transformed into a *porrectus*. 


With the *podatus*, which, placed as it is, is practically equivalent to a *pes quassus*  (in fact it is substituted for the *podatus* in certain antiphonaries), the voice ought to come to rest on the *sol* (*do* in the transposed chant), considering that *la* (*re* in the transposition), acting to break the cadence but not forming a cadence or a note of rest itself, becomes a simple passing note or pausing note. The movement of the melody leaves from the note *sol* (or *do*) and comes to fall naturally and agreeably on *mi* (or *la* in the *fa* scale), according to the reading followed above for our paschal antiphons. The cadence is therefore this one:



But with the *porrectus* , the modal role of the notes has changed: it is *la* (or *re*) that becomes an important note; *sol* (or *do*) loses its value and is no longer what one calls the real note for the harmony. The singer finds himself, as it were, easily led to descend from *la* to *mi* by conjoint steps, according to the faulty reading of the Autun manuscript.

As a result of this last melodic alteration, the *alleluia*, which ends this first part of the antiphon, is itself altered. In effect, given that, in the true reading, the notes of the word *alleluia* repeat the preceding notes graciously and form their echo, sadly in the altered reading, which no doubt came after an intermediate and less faulty reading, the effect of repercussion or echo is destroyed and replaced by something dry and forced. For the sake of comparison:



The second reading would be, for the ear, equivalent to the first, if the *clivis* of the former were replaced by a *cephalicus* : and it is probably this substitution which took place first; and, as the *cephalicus* is most often represented by a simple note with two tails, it was enough to omit the two tails, or even only one of the two, to arrive at the second reading, and from that second to the third.

We do not have documents at hand that would confirm our conjectures; but they are sufficiently based on the same variants or alterations easy to confirm in many analogous places.

One of the most frequent variants is the one we just were indicating in the first place; that is, the substitution of the minor third for the major second: *la, do* for *la, ti*; or *re, fa* for *re, mi*; or again *sol, te* for *sol, la*. Usually this difference, which is very frequent, does not change the character of the melody at all. If in the cited example, the effect of the *do* substituted for the *ti* is more noticeable, it is due to the following note, equally raised by a degree. *La, do, la* would be equivalent to *la, ti, la*; but *la, do, ti* detours the ear further and constitutes a truly serious alteration, both for itself and for the consequences to which it leads for the rest of the phrase, multiple consequences whose nature and various stages we have indicated.

No doubt there would also be interest in examining the variations of the second part of the antiphon likewise, inasmuch as they become more and more considerable; since once derailed the melody does not find its path again, but ends by losing it completely at the double alleluia.

Lest we lose ourselves in the details, let us only say on the subject of this second part, that the beginning of the phrase rested on good track despite everything. As for the notes of *pro nobis*, that is, *do, re, mi* which replace *do, mi, sol*, that is a variant of secondary importance having a certain number of manuscripts in its favor. Critical study, the science of discernment, is necessary for finding one's way amid the variants that

one can find in documents of diverse origin and more or less ancient date that have transmitted the liturgical melodies to us in writing. It presupposes knowledge, and practical knowledge of the liturgy. Everything, and the chant does not escape from this law, must be judged in its own milieu. It is not by remaining seated at one's work desk without ever haunting a choir that one can learn to discern the diverse forms that a chant can take, and the variations of execution to which it is susceptible. One must study the manuscripts, but to put them to good use, to understand the particularities of notation that they can offer, one must see the causes that brought them forth and the conditions in which they were produced. One needs to know that these documents and the way they were notated represent what was practiced before they were written, in each of the churches to which they belong.

Here it is not like the transmission of a text by copies made successively, the more recent from the more ancient. No, because it is obvious, from the very nature of the variants, that the chant was, first of all, perpetuated simply by use: *usus* is the word given to the first genre of notation, to neumatic notation without lines. In that state of things, melodic or rhythmic divergences, more or less numerous but usually leaving the substance of the chant intact, were necessarily introduced under the influence of singing habits and also the pronunciation proper to each country and each era. These divergences, which thus characterise the times and places, are highlighted by the manner of notation particular to each class of manuscripts, and even in part to each manuscript. One can encounter copyists' errors or caprices of calligraphers; but it is not in these errors or imaginings that one is to seek the most ordinary cause of chant variants in the ancient manuscripts. The explanations given above, on the subject of a particular melody, can serve to make it understood and put us on guard against absolute systems and preconceived systems, however ingeniously assembled they may be.

Dom Joseph POTHIER.