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# The Unexpected Song: An Early Italian Vernacular Poem, a Neumatic Notation, and How to Detect Their Interrelationships in the Ravenna Charter

**Abstract:** In 1999, Alfredo Stussi discovered in Ravenna a love poem written on the back of a charter, now considered the oldest poem in an Italian vernacular. The charter containing it preserves also a series of signs written in adiastematic neumatic notation. The presence of fragmentary musical annotations raises the questions of whether the poetic text may have been set to music and, in such case, in what way. The essay examines how the arrangement of the neumes on the charter's verso follows the formal structure of the song and proposes a possible reconstruction of the original melody.

## 1 Music written for a text?

Twenty years after the publication of an authoritative study by Alfredo Stussi – which definitively brought to the surface an underground tradition of studies dating to Giovanni Muzzioli's work in the late 1930s – the importance for the history of Italian literature of charter 15518ter of the Archivio Storico Arcivescovile in Ravenna can no longer be doubted.<sup>1</sup> This also became clear from the various studies and critical analyses concerning it that have since appeared.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stussi 1999b.

<sup>2</sup> For the review of previous scholarship see Stussi 1999b, 1–2 and the respective footnotes. See also, Alfredo Stussi 1999a; Stussi 1998; Asperti/Passalacqua 2000; Castellani 2000, I, 524–536; Breschi 2004; Giunta 2006; Tomasoni 2005; Lannutti 2005.

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**Note:** The present text is an updated revision of a contribution to the interdisciplinary seminar *Tracce di una tradizione sommersa. I primi testi lirici italiani tra poesia e musica* held in Cremona on 19–20 February 2004. The Italian version was published in Lannutti/Locanto 2005.

On the back of charter 15518ter, a notarial document concerning a nunnery, slightly distanced from the conclusion of the *canzone in lingua di sì*, *Quando eu stava* and, as far as the lower trimming allows us to gather, above the first verse of *Fra tuti quî ke fece lu Creature*, a scribe wrote down and later erased a series of musical signs, today almost illegible under natural light.<sup>3</sup> Taken as a whole, the signs seem to indicate a complete composition, subdivided into sub-sections and marked by recurring patterns and melodic fragments.<sup>4</sup>

The coexistence of a literary and a musical text within the same document immediately raises a number of questions. The first and most obvious concerns the nature of the possible relation between verses and neumes: is the proximity of the two texts only factual, resulting purely from chance? Or does it amount to an integrated system of words and music, whose rationale, which cannot be recognised at first, could instead be decoded through adequate research? Surely, the latter is the most elementary question that must precede any serious analysis of the Ravenna charter. From the outset, Stussi himself was aware of the inescapability of this problem, and did not hesitate to commission from Claudio Gallico a *Musicological note* on the matter, in order to ensure that his enquiry was open to the entire range of problems raised by the charter.<sup>5</sup> Gallico's verdict was a negative one: he believed that the 'musical fragment [...] does not seem to be related to the poetic text situated above it'.<sup>6</sup> Gallico's opinion was in line with the idea of a complete 'divorce' between lyrical poetry and music in twelfth-century Italy, as posited some decades ago by De Bartholomeis, Contini and Roncaglia. Such conception had the obvious effect of decreasing greatly the musicological significance of the charter, which eventually lost any trace of singularity,

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3 Note that the writing on the verso, the side concerned in our discussion, is inverted with respect to the *pagina vendicionis* transmitted on the recto.

4 Some musical signs that can be distinguished above literary text B – at least judging by what remains of them, after the damage inflicted by men and time to the lower edge of the charter – seem also to be found in the second-last neumatic line of the 'complete' composition notated at the centre of the document: this fact (if it is not due to mere coincidences between simple cadential gestures) could lead one to postulate an operation in which elements were copied from one part to another of the same document – something meaningful for the interpretation of *all* of the texts found on the charter, as we shall see in the following discussion.

5 This was published as an appendix to Stussi 1999b, 50–51. See, in the same appendix, the *Nota paleografica* by Antonio Ciaralli and Armando Petrucci (Stussi 1999b, 43–49).

6 Gallico in Stussi 1999b, 51. This conclusion – all too readily accepted – was responsible for the complete oblivion which came over not only the problematic aspects, but also the very existence of the musical signs in parchment 15518ter within academic literature following Stussi 1999b, as well as in educational materials derived from such publication.

becoming simply one of the many medieval documents emerging on an almost-daily basis from ecclesiastical and civic archives.

Nevertheless, at a closer look, such an emphatically negative response to the question about a possible relation between the poetic and musical text, not only transferred the onus of its examination to the separate domains of Italian philology and medieval musicology, but it also remained far from solving the many problems raised by the source. In fact, if the literary and the musical systems of the charter were entirely separate and self-sufficient, it would be all the more arduous to discuss the nature, genre, form and function of the musical annotation. It would also be rather challenging to account for the graphic elements and the orderly way in which the neumes are set out on the parchment. Furthermore, on the literary side, it would be hard to establish anything whatsoever about the possible relations (complementarity? integration?) that might exist between the texts referred to by Stussi as 'A' and 'B', that is, the *canzone* proper and the five verses *Fra tuti quî ke fece lu Creature*.

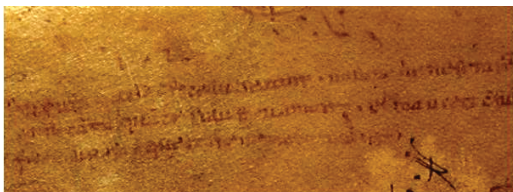
The complexity of the matter, and the conclusions that might be drawn, deserve therefore at least a second hearing; all the more so given that various elements are, in my opinion, anything but incompatible with the hypothesis of an actual connection between *these* texts and *this* music. These elements are:

1. from a general point of view, as mentioned above, the notational signs first handwritten and later erased above text B (Fig. 1) show features resembling part of the second-last line of neumes.<sup>7</sup> If the trimming eliminated a considerable portion of the parchment as maintained by Stussi, based on what can be deduced from the recto (in particular the almost complete elimination of the *noticia testium*), it is reasonable to believe that the relationship between the erased neumes and the 'B' verses was originally closer and more direct than it currently is (with the literary texts A and B now appearing to be completely detached from the musical text as a whole);<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See above, note 5. The parchment's trimming, I stress, allows us to grasp the similarities between some of the neumatic profiles, but does not permits us to definitively affirm or deny more extended or widespread correspondences. Nonetheless, for the reasoning we are currently putting forward it is sufficient to note the simple fact that text B too was associated – since the outset – with a musical notation.

<sup>8</sup> Stussi 1999b, 4.



**Fig. 1:** The notational signs first handwritten and later erased above text B; © Ravenna, Archivio Storico Arcivescovile.

2. from a musical point of view, the clear analogies in the melodic profile of the two neumatic sections placed one above the other in the second-last line of the musical annotation (Fig. 2) suggest that, instead of a transitory polyphonic bifurcation as Gallico postulated (which, as such, would not match any known written musical form), these are possibly two distinct endings of a repeated section of music.<sup>9</sup> That is, the two segments imply a first suspended conclusion, after which the same musical material is repeated from the beginning, finally reaching its ending – generally by way of slight melodic variations – in a more definitive and affirmative way. In other words, this feature would be an occurrence of what current semiographic conventions refer to as ‘prima’ and ‘seconda volta’ and that medieval musicology, adopting the terms used in contemporaneous treatises, usually defines as *ouvert* and *clos* (*aperto* and *chiuso* in medieval Italian, *apertum* and *clausum* in Latin).<sup>10</sup> Indeed, such melodic profiles are not only typical, but also constitutive of the (later) *formes fixes*;



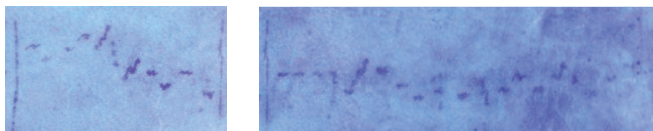
**Fig. 2:** Two neumatic sections placed one above the other; © Ravenna, Archivio Storico Arcivescovile.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Al termine della seconda e della terza linea è evidente la divisione del disegno in due semi-chori, i quali procedono simultaneamente’ [‘At the end of the second and the third lines, there is a clear division of the melodic profile into two semi-choirs, which proceed simultaneously’], in Stussi 1999b, 51.

<sup>10</sup> See Rohloff 1943, 53. See the entry ‘sub voce’ in *The New Grove* (Sadie 2001, vol. 18, 818–819). Hereunder, we will largely use the French terminology.



3. lastly, again from a musical point of view, the vertical strokes seen in the first and third lines seem to designate well-defined musical sections (Fig. 3). As we will see, not only would such structural sense not be contradicted by a correlation between music and poetry, but it would be made on the contrary all the more significant.<sup>11</sup>



**Fig. 3:** Vertical strokes as possible marks of defined musical sections; © Ravenna, Archivio Storico Arcivescovile.

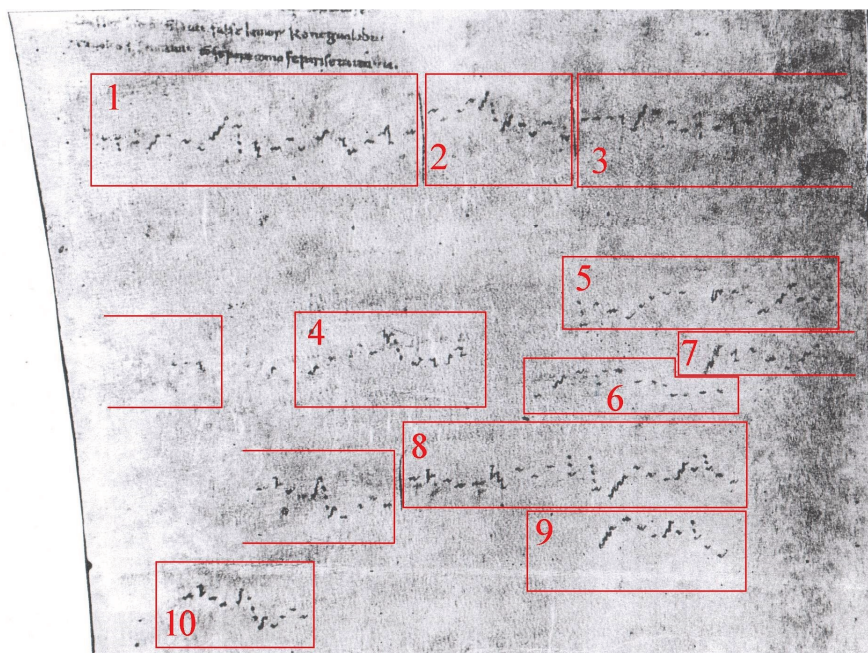
While these are indeed enticing observations, it might be possible to object that they are still overly ‘instinctive’ to be somehow suitable for resolving the issue. Thus, in order to give a solid and positive consistency to the impression they elicit, we would require at least one clear and unequivocal piece of evidence, ascertaining once and for all that a certainly autonomous section of music contains a number of neumes *compatible* with an equally autonomous section of the poetic text. Given the conventions of troubadour and *trouvère* songs, such a section should be at least one verse. As the verses of the *canzone* are decasyllables, we may assume that, as mentioned above, a number of neumes *compatible* with a section of the poetic text would mean, at least, ten neumatic signs. Fewer signs would prevent the revelation of any correlation between music and poetry, unless one allows for a single multisonic neumatic sign to be subdivided over more than one syllable, while a higher number can simply imply the presence of one or more melismas.<sup>12</sup> Naturally, the *conditio sine qua non* for this type of

<sup>11</sup> Gallico, instead, believes that the strokes fall into the domain of practice rather than structure, and could mark either ‘due interpunzioni al canto [two cases of articulation within the song] (*suspiria, pausationes, respirationes*)’, or the boundaries of an ‘intervento responsoriale [a responsorial passage]’, the latter meaning an alternation between solo and choral passages, as would certainly be habitual in religious and ceremonial music, to which Gallico ascribes – even if only ‘genericamente [generically]’ – the morphology and function of the musical figures on the charter. See Stussi 1999b, 51.

<sup>12</sup> A general consensus on this matter has been reached in musicology. The only discordant opinion – formulated *pro domo sua*, since it represents the necessary precondition for his highly singular rhythmic interpretation of Limousin and Compostela polyphony – is Karp 1992. Karp maintained that it is possible in general (and systematically in the repertory he examined) that

verification would be the segmentation of the notational *continuum* into discrete, meaningful, ‘certainly *autonomous*’ sections.

A brief glance at the neumes notated in the central area of the parchment (Fig. 4) allows us to readily recognise ten segments of varying length and layout:<sup>13</sup>



**Fig. 4:** Sectional grouping of the neumatic notation.

Nevertheless, neither the simple *a capo*, nor the physical distance between the segments can be positively considered *a priori* as definite indications of boundaries between sections. For now, it would be thus preferable to limit ourselves to considering only those parts of the text that the scribe explicitly isolated from

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the appearance of a new syllable coincides not with the *first* but the *last* sound of each neumatic group.

<sup>13</sup> The image is a digital enhancement by the author of this chapter and Massimiliano Locanto of Plate 5 published in Stussi 1999b, 56. Note the equivalence of the number of notational segments and with that of the verses in each stanza of *Quando eu stava*. The pertinence of this fact to the line of research we are presently pursuing is however simply ‘evocative’, thus it should not be taken into consideration for now.

what preceded and/or followed by using the aforementioned vertical strokes, the only graphic elements in the charter that unquestionably indicate a deliberate and intentional separation. Among the ten units identified, the only one that fully meets this requirement is the second, isolated by a vertical line both to the right and to the left:

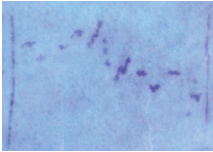


Fig. 5: Neumatic section 2, enlarged; © Ravenna, Archivio Storico Arcivescovile.

This section, as can be seen in Fig. 5, consists of precisely ten neumatic groups, some representing a single sound, some more than one. As this number fulfils the preliminary requirement to be met before continuing our enquiry, let us now suppose at least as a working hypothesis that the text(s) and the music of the Ravenna charter *are* actually linked to one another. This will allow us to direct the inquiry towards two complementary but distinct objectives: on the one hand, to undertake a reconstruction of the melodic profile and on the other, to ascertain if and how this melodic profile can accommodate – and re-express, with its own structures – the poetic structure of the *canzone*. The deciphering and interpreting of the notational signs necessarily acts as the first phase of research and as a preparation for the second phase of connecting the various melodic sections to the subdivisions and verses of the poetry. I will now present the two phases in order, starting by the charter's semiography and its neumatic code.

## 2 A hypothesis for a melodic reconstruction

### 2.1 Type of notation

Before proceeding with a detailed melodic interpretation of the signs on the Ravenna charter, a few moments should be devoted to examining the type of notation on the charter.<sup>14</sup> This will allow us to expose once and for all the nature

<sup>14</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the matter see Locanto 2005 and Rosa Barezzani 2005.

of the issues at stake, and the kind of problems facing us both immediately and further on in the analysis.

The main features of the notation are:

1. a general *in campo aperto* layout, but with a clear diastematic intention;
2. a rather freely-traced *ductus*;
3. basic morphological features resembling, but not identical to a graphic *koinè* derived from the Messine (Lotharingian) tradition, mixed at times with more decidedly Italian notational traits.

The first of these three features combines the absence of any material line whether traced in dry-point or ink, around which to organise the notation of the melodic pitches, with a patently scalar layout of the signs, both adjacently and above all over longer distances. This approach differs from that of most notations *in campo aperto*, especially earlier ones, that approach the spatial organisation of the signs by placing the beginning of each neumatic element at the same distance from a reference line, whether real – generally consisting in the straight line provided by the ruling of the literary text – or virtual.

The second feature is evident almost at first sight, given that the *notator* – a scribe who certainly had some experience in the writing of music, even though his degree of professional knowledge in the field cannot be established – did not reserve any calligraphic attention for the overall layout of the neumes. At a slightly closer look, moreover, one may detect many signs of haste, e.g. functionally identical neumes – for the most part resembling the Lotharingian *uncini* – may appear in different sizes (Fig. 6), or of inconsistency, e.g. when the same neumatic sign seems to take on a variety of graphic forms with no apparent difference in meaning, as for the three *clives* in Fig. 7.

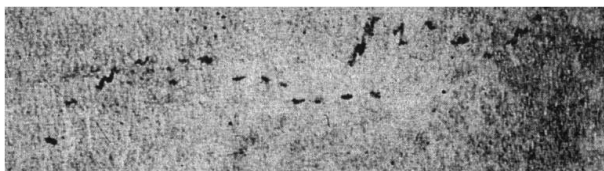











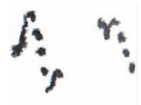
Fig. 6: Different size of the same neumatic form; © Ravenna, Archivio Storico Arcivescovile.



**Fig. 7:** Different shape of the same neumatic form; © Ravenna, Archivio Storico Arcivescovile.

The third feature is the coexistence in the charter's notation of a style of music writing similar to the one originated in the Lorraine region in the shape of the monosonic *uncini*, alongside graphic conventions frequently found over wide areas of Italy, such as the groups of ascending notes whose elements are graphically joint – generally called *gradata* in Beneventan musical palaeography (Table 1).<sup>15</sup> Since a detailed study would be too articulated to be presented as part of this paper, I will limit myself to noting it as an undisputed fact, referring to the other essays that have appeared on the topic for an in-depth examination.<sup>16</sup>

**Table 1:** The notation of the Ravenna Charter.

<i>tractulus</i> ( <i>uncinus</i> )		<i>climacus</i>	
<i>punctum</i>		<i>porrectus</i>	
<i>clivis</i> (left) and double <i>clivis</i> (right)		<i>torculus</i>	
<i>pes</i>		<i>strophici</i>	
<i>scandicus</i> (left) and four-note <i>scandicus</i> (right)		composite forms	

<sup>15</sup> On the *gradata*, see *PM* XV, 132, 158.

<sup>16</sup> See Locanto 2005, 138–146 and Rosa Barezzani 2005, 205–212.

## 2.2 Diastematic conjectures

One cautionary note is necessary here before moving on to possible melodic interpretation of the neumes. A notation *in campo aperto*, even when the neumes are carefully placed diastematically, remains a notation that does not allow us to formulate definitive judgements on every detail of the melodic profile it expresses. The interpretation proposed here, even though pondered at length and supported, in my opinion, by a high degree of reliability, remains a hypothesis, and as such susceptible of being refined and perfected, above all in the reading of single neumes.<sup>17</sup> This is due to one reason that I will mention shortly, as well as to the concrete difficulties that affect the reading of some parts of the musical text. For example, in the right margin of the first line and the zone immediately beside it, the almost complete transparency of the ink and the impurities of the hair side of the parchment make the single signs very hard to decipher.

With all of the caution required by the nature of the object, we shall thus attempt a melodic reading of the neumatic signs. I shall begin with the following considerations:

1. the notator, as mentioned above, did not trace a line around which to set out the neumes; the very concept of ‘diastematic intentionality’, which I have already referred to, however, implies that the signs are organised around a line that is, at least, virtual;
2. through the direct observation of the charter it was possible to infer that, in order to picture such a virtual line, the scribe took advantage of the lines of texts showing through from the *pagina venditionis* that appears on the recto: the text thus becomes a sort of ‘virtual dry-point line’, perfectly suited to provide a reference for the writing of the melody;
3. once it has been established that the notation is spatially organised around a precise reference point, it becomes possible to gauge the degree of regularity with which the *notator* proportionally set out the various signs while representing the scalar movement of the melody. This regularity proves to be surprisingly consistent over larger distances within the single lines – as could be verified both *de visu*, and by digital enhancement of the charter – and only slightly more ambiguous on the level of successive stepwise movements, especially when they occur within a single neumatic sign. (This

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<sup>17</sup> See below, § 2.4.

is neither surprising nor anomalous, considering the requirement for tying together the various strokes that constitute a sign).

On the basis of these premises and of the following equivalences between sign and sound, listed according to the table of neumes explained above, it is possible to obtain the following diplomatic transcription of the melodic line (see Ex. 1 below).<sup>18</sup>

In order to complete the reconstruction, all that is left is to establish the pitch of the reference line – the ‘virtual dry-point line’ – which will allow for a diastematic reading of the single neumes. This pitch, I maintain, can only correspond to the note *F* – in the medieval sense of the term – for at least two converging reasons<sup>19</sup>:

1. the presence, in the notation, of signs placed at the same height as the reference line, which seem to be melodically similar to the *distropha* and/or the *bivirga* of the St Gall tradition which, as is well known, is placed only on the degrees above the semitone, and whose position normally corresponds to the reference line<sup>20</sup>;
2. melodic and modal incongruities which would arise in case of other pitch attributions, e.g. if the melody were to be graphically centred around the pitches *G* or *A* it would produce frequent tritonal circuits (which could be corrected *per be molle*; a note that would, anyway, alternate with the *be durum* in an absolutely irrational way); or, if graphically centred around *E* or *be durum*, would contradict the previous observation.

We can thus disambiguate the previous transcription by adding a clef that defines pitches and introduces definite intervallic relations (see Ex. 2 below).

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<sup>18</sup> Locanto 2005, 134. In the transcription, the slurs above the notes indicate the single neumatic elements on the charter.

<sup>19</sup> That is, designating an interval within a hexachordal reference system and not referring to an absolute pitch.

<sup>20</sup> See Rampi/Lattanzi 1991, 463.

The image displays a musical score for a single melodic line, transcribed diplomatically. The notation is presented on a single staff, using a series of dots to represent pitch and curved lines to indicate intervals. The score is divided into ten measures, each labeled with a measure number in a box. The notation is as follows:

- Measure 1:** Starts with a single dot, followed by a series of dots connected by curved lines, indicating a melodic line.
- Measure 2:** Continues the melodic line from Measure 1.
- Measure 3:** Continues the melodic line from Measure 2.
- Measure 4:** Continues the melodic line from Measure 3.
- Measure 5:** Continues the melodic line from Measure 4.
- Measure 6:** Continues the melodic line from Measure 5.
- Measure 7:** Labeled "7 (continua)". Continues the melodic line from Measure 6.
- Measure 8:** Continues the melodic line from Measure 7.
- Measure 9:** Continues the melodic line from Measure 8.
- Measure 10:** Continues the melodic line from Measure 9.

**Example 1:** Diplomatic transcription of the melodic line.





## 2.3 Subdivision into sections

The layout of the music in the previous example intentionally reproduces – in line with the motivations put forward in § 1 – the distribution of the music as it appears on the charter. To refer the melody to the literary text, nevertheless, it is indispensable to define as precisely as possible the limits of each section, in order to obtain homogeneous units for the comparison between the musical and poetical contexts. After an attentive recording and examining of all the manuscript's details that may be relevant to our aim (e.g. vertical strokes, *a capo*, intra-neumatic spaces), it seems possible to state that:

- *sections 1* and *2* do not raise any particular problem, since the vertical strokes in the first line are more than sufficient to mark their respective conclusions;
- *section 3* begins in the first line of music and ends with the neume seen at the start of the following line; that this is the case can be deduced from:
  - a. the presence, at the end of the line, of the sign known as a *custos*, which ordinarily anticipates the first pitch of the next line, and that in the Ravenna charter seems to be used only when a section does not come to a close within the end of the line but continues in the line below without interruption;
  - b. the considerable gap left (intentionally<sup>21</sup>) by the *notator* between the first neume of the second line and the neumatic groups that follow;
- *section 4* is detached in the same way from what follows by a considerable blank space;
- *section 5* is made up of, and comes to an end with, the set of neumes in the upper part of the second half of the line, and the fact that this line's limit cannot be breached is proved by the absence of a *custos*<sup>22</sup>;
- *section 6* is also notated halfway through the second line; it is a natural continuation of section 5, owing to the melodic rhyme given by the four repeated notes, and necessarily precedes section 7, because the charter's notational layout does not contain neumes to be sung in a direct melodic sequence that are placed closely one above the other;<sup>23</sup>

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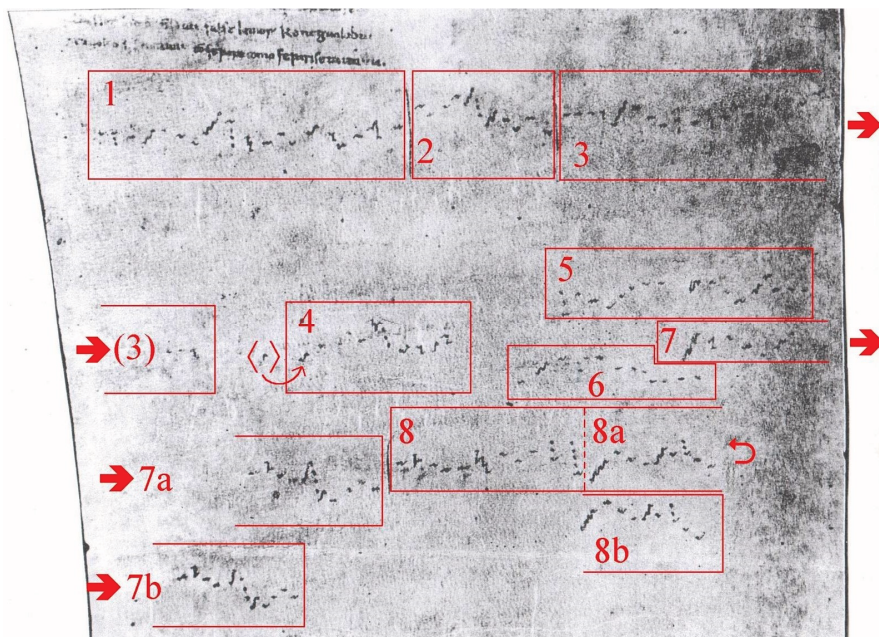
**21** A morphologically identical neume, placed at the same height as the neume that opens the fourth section, can in fact be seen just to the left of the 'true' beginning of the section: this fact, in my opinion, not only does not invalidate the meaning of the non-notated space as a separation, but validates it. The scribe, even while having already notated the *pes* that begins the fourth unit, eventually felt it was the case to interpose even more 'empty space' between the sections (later forgetting to erase the neume that was no longer required).

**22** Verified both directly on the parchment and through enlargements of digital reproductions.

**23** The beginning of section 7 lies, in fact, slightly to the left of the last note of section 6.

- sections 7 and 8, lastly, are much more articulated and complex than could possibly appear at first. *Section 7* begins with the middle group of the aggregation of neumes on the second line (with its beginning placed slightly above the end of section 6); the *custos* therefore informs that it continues on the third line, and the vertical stroke (just as was the case in sections 1 and 2) marks its endpoint. *Section 8* begins after the stroke and is clearly binary, having a twofold conclusion, one *ouvert* and one *clos*, notated with extreme care one above the other, as mentioned in § 1. It is evident, however, that the short group of notes contained in the fourth and last line of music consists of the same number of notes and the same neumatic progression as the segment which, in the third line, precedes the dividing line. This disposition, in my opinion, represents the scribe's intention to notate, in an abbreviated form, another *ouvert/clos* repetition: a repetition that during performance naturally recommences from the beginning of the section and proceeds, at the appropriate moment, to the *seconda volta*. The fact that this *seconda volta* is not notated vertically (as in section 8), but placed at the end of the piece can only imply a performance indication, i.e. that the sections are to be sung in the following order:
  - a. firstly, the melody of section 7 with its open cadence (*prima volta*: 7a);
  - b. then section 8, to be sung twice, consecutively: the first time with its *ouvert* ending (8a) and the second with the *clos* (8b);
  - c. finally, the repetition of section 7, sealed by its final *clos* (7b).

A well-defined musical structure thus emerges, to which we will return when discussing its correspondences with the poetic structure of the *canzone*. For now, let us limit ourselves to visually summarising its constituent elements in Fig. 8.



**Fig. 8:** Continuity and discontinuity of musical sections between lines; © Ravenna, Archivio Storico Arcivescovile.

## 2.4 Melodic-structural transcription and relative observations

Based on our previous observations, we can further refine the melodic transcription given in § 2.2 by subdividing the notational *continuum* in such a way as to highlight textual repetitions and recurrences. Formally significant, these instances are also noteworthy since they mark the composition's structural cadences and define, along with the vocal *ambitus* and the recurrent pitches, the modal region to which the melody is to be ascribed and checked against (Ex. 3).

1

2

3

4

5

6

7a (*ouvert*)

8a 8b

*ouvert*

*clos*

7b (*clos*)

The musical score is written on ten staves in treble clef. The first six staves are numbered 1 through 6. Staff 7 is labeled 7a (*ouvert*). Staff 8 is labeled 8a and 8b. Staff 9 is labeled *ouvert*. Staff 10 is labeled *clos*. Staff 11 is labeled 7b (*clos*). The music consists of various melodic lines with notes, rests, and slurs. The notation includes a repeat sign on staff 8 and a double bar line at the end of staff 11.

**Example 3:** Melodic-structural transcription.

Regardless of any comparison with the features of liturgical, especially trope melodies, and with the particular constructive and formal aspects of the secular repertory,<sup>24</sup> the conjectural reconstruction of the Ravenna monody shows a remarkably coherent melodic profile in itself, as well as compared to the parameters of melodic conduct of the time. It is noteworthy in the following respects:

1. the precision with which the mode is calibrated, corresponding to a predominantly authentic *protus* and with an appropriate initial emphasis on the *repercussio*;
2. the well-considered alternation in the melody's driving movements, which highlights, in a balanced manner, at times the upper and at times the lower area of the modal gamut;
3. the conclusive cadence on the modal final, regularly constructed with an adequate and contrasting use of the *subfinalis*;
4. the ending of the *ouvert* degree above the final, as is frequent in the intonation of poetic texts (Ex. 4).

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<sup>24</sup> For which I refer again to Locanto 2005, 152–156.

1

2

3

4

5

6

7a (*ouvert*)

8a 8b

*ouvert*

*clos*

7b (*clos*)

*clausola 'litugica'*

*clausola 'litugica'*

rima melodica (A)

rima melodica (A)

rima melodica (B)

rima melodica (C)

rima melodica (C)

rima melodica (C)

rima melodica (B)

Detailed description: The image displays a musical score for 'The Unexpected Song' across ten staves. Each staff begins with a measure number in a box: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7a, 8a/8b, an unlabeled staff, and 7b. The notation is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat. The music consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together, with various slurs and ties. Annotations include 'clausola 'litugica'' with dashed brackets above staves 3 and 4, and 'rima melodica (A)', '(B)', and '(C)' with solid brackets above staves 5, 6, 7a, 8a/8b, the unlabeled staff, and 7b. Performance directions in italics include '*ouvert*' above staves 7a and the unlabeled staff, and '*clos*' above staves 8a/8b and 7b.

**Example 4:** Refined melodic-structural transcription.

The agreement seen between elements situated on different musical and conceptual levels cannot be a mere coincidence, nor can the composition's internal coherence be thought to derive in any way from a fortuitous, albeit fortunate, excess of editorial serendipity. Maintaining that the critical reconstruction developed hereto is fundamentally reliable, it is not tantamount to declaring that some aspects of our reconstructed reading cannot be improved. For example, it is not in the least possible to rule out a different interpretation of some of the neumes, something which on the contrary, in more than one case, is related to the technological progress made in conserving and restoring antique documents.<sup>25</sup> Nor can it be excluded that a few singles notes might be more precisely diastematically defined (the *G* that in the first section follows the *tristropa*, for example, might well be read as another *F*).<sup>26</sup> That which cannot be invalidated by any possible improvement – and I believe I can state this without contradicting the premises accepted as of the outset – concerns instead the piece's overall outline in the form and the layout we have presented in the last few paragraphs.<sup>27</sup>

That being said, we are ready to proceed from the melodic reading of the neumatic signs to the fundamental task at hand: providing indications as to the relation between musical structure and poetic structure.

### 3 Musical structure and poetic structure

#### 3.1 The correlation between neumes and syllables

Before attempting to superimpose poetry and music verse by verse and section by section, however, we must reflect for a moment on the rationale that governs

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<sup>25</sup> In section 2, for example, the third-last group could correspond to a simple *uncinus* D, rather than to a *porrectus* D-C-D; and it is perfectly possible that a more advanced digital enhancement than the one presently available will reveal that a few signs interpreted by our transcription as *distrophae* are actually to be read as more modest monosonic *uncini*.

<sup>26</sup> A different problem is how to consider many of the *Bs* in the melody, i.e. whether they are to be sung as *be durum* or *be mollis*. In the final draft of the transcription, the *loci* where, in my opinion, it makes sense to raise the question are marked by a flat sign in parentheses above the staff, as is customary in modern editions of early music. Each of them, however, serves more to signal the problem than to introduce a necessary call for a single solution which, in any case, would not truly belong to the realm of textual reconstruction, since neither of the two inflections puts into question the correctness of reading the pitch *B*.

<sup>27</sup> For an extensive list of instances where the reading is questionable and/or particularly problematic, see the critical commentary which follows the edited musical text.



the correspondence between syllables and sounds within each identified melodic unit. In the majority of these, in fact, the number of neumatic elements exceeds, by a little or by far, the quantity of syllables available: therefore, the possible placement of melismas, covering from two to  $n$  neumatic elements has to be postulated.<sup>28</sup> What principles, then, can regulate the subdivision of the syllables of a verse among the single neumatic elements? Given the chronological period in which the piece was notated (or composed), and considering the melodic movements that distinguish it, I believe that such principles can be deduced from two semiographic phenomena, well known from the musicological literature on Gregorian chant: 1) the so-called *coupure neumatique* ('neumatic articulation'), and 2) the progressive disuse – and, from a certain moment on, the definitive *graphic* disappearance – of special neumes characteristic of the oldest notations (appended *strophae*, *oriscus*, *trigon*, etc.)<sup>29</sup>

The latter, as is well known, are peculiar signs with which numerous adiasemantic notations represent on parchment certain elements of performance practice, or suggest – even within the system's lack of diastematic indications – obligatory melodic conducts, or recurrent intervallic movements. Musical palaeography has long observed that the evolution of diastematic notation, as well as other musical factors, led to the gradual disappearance of these mnemonic-interpretative signs. Clearly, such evolution did not mean that the sounds represented by those signs fell away, but were progressively transformed into more 'ordinary' musical graphemes. It is therefore possible that isolated notes within a melisma, or at the end of a neumatic group, do not amount to entirely autonomous neumes, but simply represent the 'full' rendering of signs that would once have been notated in those 'special' graphic forms. Therefore, these signs may not necessarily – often cannot – have a syllabic value, and must be read as continuations of the preceding group(s).

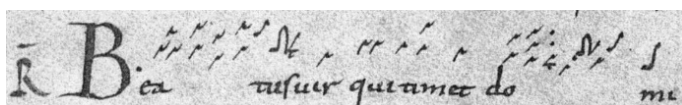
All the more important, and with a much wider application in the present context, is the earlier phenomenon, present in those notational families that gave the highest degree of attention to all dimensions of the performance of liturgical monody, known as 'neumatic articulation', the graphic representation of the gesture carried out by scribes who 'raised their pen' *after* a rhythmically and/or

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<sup>28</sup> I use the expression 'neumatic element', rather than simply 'neume', because the latter term refers habitually to the entire set of sounds sung to one syllable, which can be graphically subdivided into lesser units.

<sup>29</sup> For an overall illustration of these, see Rampi/Lattanzi, 353–408, 474–488.

structurally conspicuous sound.<sup>30</sup> Arguably, this particular musical nuance could not be better highlighted graphically than through emulating – ‘putting into ink’ – the chironomic gesture of conductors, who would stop their hand to make the singers hold a note, before setting into motion once again the rhythm and flow of the melody.<sup>31</sup> This sort of neumatic ‘cut’ does not normally allow for any syllabic articulation, and, once again, indicates a prolongation of the syllable sung *before* it. The principle of neumatic articulation can also be applied to more than one consecutive sound, at times breaking down the entire neume, as can be seen in the second syllable of the following example in which there is an equal number of neumatic elements and sounds:<sup>32</sup>



**Fig. 9:** ‘Beatus’ taken from f. 29 of the *antiphonale missarum*, Laon, Bibliothèque municipale, MS. 239 (facsimile edition: *PM X*).

In much the same way, it is relevant to our study when the notation introduces a graphic separation imposed by the support or the writing tool, even though it had no significance for the rhythmic interpretation of the melody.<sup>33</sup>

By gathering all these possible instances into a single system, it is possible to establish, for example, that section 3 as well consists of ten neumes, in that the first twelve notes are grouped together within a single neume, sung on a single syllable. This is due to the fact that:

- a. the first three monosonic notes can be considered a *trivirga*;<sup>34</sup>
- b. the two following groups imply an articulation of the low pitches, rhythmically neutral;

<sup>30</sup> In later notations, the articulation can also be a secondary consequence of the lesser usage or disappearance of the special neumes mentioned above.

<sup>31</sup> On the chironomic appearance of the oldest notations, in the St Gall tradition in particular, see the classic text by Cardine 1968, 4–5.

<sup>32</sup> Between the ninth and the tenth sound in the melisma corresponding to ‘domi[um]’, on the same line, one can instead observe an articulation followed by a neumatic group whose elements are joined together.

<sup>33</sup> For a typology of both categories, see Rampi/Lattanzi 1991, 338–346.

<sup>34</sup> See Rampi/Lattanzi 1991, 496–500.

- c. the last three sounds – two monosonic ones followed by a downward inflection – can be considered to be the equivalent of the directional melodic movement notated as a *trigon* (or *pressus maior*) in St Gall manuscripts, here written out in full:<sup>35</sup>




**Example 5:** Possible correspondence between neumes and syllables in section 3.

Therefore, the correspondence between neumes and syllables in sections 1-7 takes on the configuration shown in Example 6 (detailed motivations are provided in the critical commentary below):<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> In the example I have purposefully placed the first verse under the notes, since the structural symmetry between verses and sections has not yet been verified.


<sup>36</sup> I have not taken into consideration section 8 here, so as not to introduce propositions pertaining to the next paragraph ahead of time.

1




1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2




1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3




1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4




1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5




1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7a (ouvert)



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**Example 6:** Correspondence between neumes and syllables in section 1-7.

### 3.2 The coordination between music and poetry

From the notational dynamics we discussed so far, it has become clear how a text can plausibly be combined with a melody when this features a higher number of sounds than syllables. With the long-standing assumption that each section of music provides the intonation for no more and no less than one verse, we can finally begin to deal with the overall correspondence between poetic structure

and musical structure, investigating how the verses of the *canzone* are distributed with respect to the subdivisions of the music. An initial hypothesis for this relation ensues almost directly from an observation that the number of verses in text A matches the overall number of musical sections. The two could therefore be paired according to the following sequence:

**Table 2:** Text and music coordination – hypothesis 1.

verses (text A)	rhymes of the literary text	sections of the musical text
1	a	1
2	b	2
3	a	3
4	b	4
5	a	5
6	b	6
7	c	7a
8	c	8a
9	c	8b
10	d	7b

However, this hypothesis in my opinion gives rise to at least four contradictions:

1. it forces us to underlay the text of sections 8a and 8b breaking all the previous observations regarding special neumes and neumatic articulations;<sup>37</sup>
2. it does not account for the distribution of the vertical strokes used as divisions, since it is hard to conceive why they were used so sporadically and without any logic if their only purpose is to indicate the conclusion of one verse-unit;
3. it matches textual with musical repetitions in a completely disarticulated way, in that, no textual repetition is matched by a musical repetition and vice versa;

<sup>37</sup> Even a cursory glance at these sections reveals, indeed, a higher number of neumatic elements than could possibly correspond to ten syllables per section.

4. it totally disregards the fact that, in the overall layout of the charter, text B too seems to have been set to music since the outset (in a way, moreover, neumatically similar to some portions of the current section 8)<sup>38</sup>.

Each objection, if considered on its own, is most likely not sufficient to invalidate the hypothesis under examination. Taken as a whole, however, the difficulties these points raise would seem to indicate that a relation between text and music, involving a simple continuous progression, might not be feasible. Yet, such a relation is not the only one that can be postulated on the basis of available data. There is, in fact, at least one other possible connection that would not lead to the problems mentioned above, i.e. that the music covers not only the stanzas of text A, but also the five verses of text B, which could be linked to the former according to the following broad outline:

**Table 3:** Text and music coordination – hypothesis 2.

text A	verses	rhymes in the literary text	sections of the musical text
	text B		
1		a	1
2		b	2
3		a	1
4		b	2
5		a	1
6		b	3
7		c	4
8		c	5
9		c	6
10		d	7a
	1	E	8a
	2	E	
	3	E	
	4	E	8b
	5	F	7b

<sup>38</sup> Cf. n. 6 above.

There are many advantages to this kind of arrangement:

1. in the first place, text B is now also paired with a passage of music that was connected to it since the first conception of the charter's musical layout;
2. musical sections 8a and 8b now cover two verses each, thus removing the obstacles found in the first table of correspondences;
3. the *piedi* of the *canzone*'s stanzas are now matched by a repeated passage of music, according to the compositional conventions of the time;
4. the vertical strokes finally make full sense, since they separate those sections – and only those sections – that are to be repeated: the first two strokes isolate, to the right and to the left, the musical material which is to be omitted in the passage from the *ouvert* of the first two *piedi* to the *clos* of the third, while the stroke on the third line marks the point from which to repeat after returning back to the start of the section, as implied by the *ouvert*, moving then towards the *clos*.

In truth, this series of correspondences still contains a few stumbling blocks. These, however, turn out to be much more easily overcome than the problems that afflicted the first hypothesis. The most challenging of these obstacles concerns sections 8a and 8b, where, at first sight, there does not seem to be sufficient space to accommodate (twice) two hendecasyllables, the metre of the text B. Nonetheless, at a closer look it is possible to note that:

- a. the melodic rhyme between the first and second member of the section clearly informs of the end of the first verse of the pair to be sung, each time, to the same music; any possible problem in the compatibility between text and music thus exclusively concerns the second verse;
- b. for this too, moreover, the problems may be only superficial: it cannot be entirely ruled out that, when dealing with the textual sequence '*nesune ne nesarà senza tenure*'<sup>39</sup> which already contains one too many *ne* syllables, the *notator* recalling the fragment from memory fell into one of the most typical haplographies while copying and retained in his mind something similar to '*nesun-ne serà...*', failing to notate the correct quantity of *uncini*;<sup>40</sup>
- c. this error had consequences in the section's repetition, whose *clos*, following the model of the *ouvert*, ended up reproducing its faults.

Thus, from the sum of (a), (b) and (c), it becomes possible also for the second part of the section (8b) to support the corresponding hendecasyllable at the minimal

<sup>39</sup> Text B, verse 1b, diplomatic transcription: Stussi 1999b, 36.

<sup>40</sup> Stussi 1999b, 37.

cost of introducing one or two repeated notes. This integration is certainly neither overly weighty nor unheard of, and is in any case much less substantial than the interventions required and made by Stussi for a correct rendering of both texts A and B.

The musical form now taking shape may thus be legitimately considered a *chanson à refrain*: a form that perfectly corresponds to that of the literary text as edited by Maria Sofia Lannutti who, unlike Stussi, maintains that text B is not independent from text A, but is actually its *refrain*. The final mutual correspondence of text and music can be summarised as follows:

**Table 4:** Text and music coordination – final hypothesis.

verses	rhymes in the literary text	sections of the musical text
1	A	1
2	B	2
3	A	1
4	B	2
5	A	1
6	B	3
7	C	4
8	C	5
9	C	6
10	X <sup>41</sup>	7a
1R	Y	8a
2R	Y	
3R	Y	
4R	Y	8b
5R	X <sup>41</sup>	7b

<sup>41</sup> The pair of verses 10-5R, which in Stussi's edition appears as x<sub>10</sub>/X with the rhyme 'plasea' [= 1A] : 'die', can according to Lannutti become regular (X/X) by simply reintegrating at the beginning of line 10 the reading 'a cui' of the manuscript, and amending the conclusion of 5R to become 'dia': see Lannutti 2005, 174.



If this hypothesis is correct, a few elements immediately come to light that are worthwhile emphasising:

1. the musical form is unitary, that is, a performance of the stanza cannot take place separately from one of the *refrain* – this is proved by the conclusion of unit 7a, which is a modally suspended *ouvert* that finds its logical musical conclusion only in the *clos* of unit 7b;
2. the melody of the stanza must therefore have been composed at roughly the same time as, or in any case not after the melody of the *refrain*;
3. the neumes can only have been written on the parchment after both text A and text B;
4. this neumatic writing, lastly, seems to me to have been set down – unlike what Stussi has demonstrated for the literary text<sup>42</sup> – by memory, and not copied from an exemplar as the layout of the musical signs does not seem to have been planned, neither in itself nor in relation to the text to be sung – see the *a capo* consisting of a single neume in section 3; the vertical strokes themselves, furthermore, seem to have been added at the very least when the musical writing had already been completed, almost as if to clarify the macro-formal structures that the *notator* – or, later on, someone in his place – may have felt to be not completely unequivocal.

Whatever may be the case regarding this last issue, having reached this point in the enquiry, we may maintain with almost no critical qualms that the thesis we set out to ascertain concerning a union between music and poetry has been confirmed. The Ravenna charter 15518ter thus transmits both the oldest poetic and musical text in the *lingua di sì*, which can be eventually transcribed as follows, in compliance with its musical structure:<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Stussi 1999b, 24.

<sup>43</sup> The text included is the first stanza of the *canzone* and the *refrain*, following Stussi 1999b 26 for text A (amended at line 10, as explained in note 46), and Lannutti 2005, 154, for text B.

**1**

1. Quan - do eu sta - va in le tu' ca - the - ne,  
 3. s'eu vo - - - - les - se su - fi - rir le pe - ne  
 5. k'en no gran - d'e de spe - ran - ça ple - ne,

---

**2**

*prima e seconda volta*

2. oi A - morg, me fi - - - sti de - man - da - re  
 4. ou le tu' re - chi - - - çe.a ban - du - na - re,

---

**3**

*terza volta*

6. cun ver di - re, sem - pre voln' an - da - re.

---

**4**

7. Non re - spu - s'a vui di - - - ri - ta - men - te

---

**5**

8. k'eu fi - than - ça non a - vea ni - en - te

---

**6**

9. de vi - ni - re, ad u - nu cun la çen - te

---

**7a**

10. a cui far fi - sti - nan - ça non pla - se - a.

**Example 7:** Final melodic and poetic reconstruction of *Quando eu stava* (part 1).

8a 8b

1R. Fra tu - ti qui che fe - - - ce lu Crea - tu - re  
3R. c'a - me tan - tu quan - t'e' sulu fa - cu - mu - re.

*prima volta*

2R. nu - - - su - ne ne se - rà, sen - - - ça te - - - nu - re,

*seconda volta*

4R. El m'au - ci - t'e con - fun - de\_a tu - te l'u - re,

7b

5R. ce mai po - so\_a - quet - taru no - - - te né di - a.

**Example 7:** Final melodic and poetic reconstruction of *Quando eu stava* (part 2).

## 4 Critical commentary

The numbers in the column to the left indicate, respectively and referring to the transcription (Ex. 7), *section*, *syllable* and where necessary or pertinent *note/notes*. Moreover:

- the expression ‘neumatic articulation’ refers to what follows the indicated note;
- the interpretation of the rhythmic meaning of neumatic articulations, and the reference made to a ‘full’ writing of special neumes, both refer to St Gall notation; this does not imply that the charter’s musical writing emulates all of the properties and the graphical-semiological functioning of that notation, but only aims to bring out a few semiographic phenomena that are implied in my view by the graphic-notational system of the Ravenna charter.

- 1,2,4            neumatic articulation halfway up (with regard to the previous note: or lower articulation with regards to the following note)
- 1,2,8-10        neumatic articulation (rhythmically significant)
- 1,2,10          uncertain diastematic interpretation: the most probable reading is the one given in the text, but it is not impossible that the note should be read as E (possibly in a liquescent form)
- 1,2,14          disjoint form at the top of the line (rhythmically significant)
- 1,2,18          neumatic articulation at the bottom of the line (rhythmically neutral)
- 1,2,22          neumatic articulation at the bottom of the line (rhythmically neutral)
- 1,3             uncertain diastematic interpretation: the most probable reading is the one given in the text, but it is not impossible that the note should be read as F
- 2,7             uncertain diastematic interpretation: unison repercussion or single-pitch neume F
- 2,8             uncertain diastematic interpretation: *torculus*, as in the text, or single-pitch neume D
- 2,9             uncertain reading: unison repercussion or single-pitch neume F
- 2,10            uncertain reading: single-pitch neume C, or unison repercussion as in the text, or unison repercussion C
- 3,1,5            neumatic articulation at the bottom of the line (rhythmically neutral)
- 3,1,9            neumatic articulation at the top of the line (rhythmically significant)
- 3,1,10-12        writing 'in full' of a special neume such as the *trigon*
- 3,10            it is unclear whether the sign before the *clivis* is a stain or a micro-*uncinus*: the first seems more probable; otherwise the most probable melodic reading is G-G-F (writing 'in full' of a *trigon* or a *pressus maior*)
- 5,3             uncertain diastematic interpretation
- 5,4,1-3          the neumatic group F-G-A seems to be notated jointly; however, the connecting lines are so thin that a disjoint writing (resulting in an increase of the rhythmic weight of each sound) cannot be excluded
- 5,4,4-5          unison repercussion as in the *bivirga*
- 5,4,4-8          uncertain diastematic interpretation: the pitches may be also A, A, G-A, A
- 5,4,8            writing 'in full' of a *strophe*
- 5,6,1            neumatic articulation halfway up (rhythmically significant); uncertain diastematic interpretation: the note could be read also as E
- 5,7             uncertain diastematic interpretation, especially of the second sound (which could be another C)
- 6                it is unclear if at the end of the section there are three or four sounds in unison (the second sign being *probably*, but not *unquestionably*, a stain)
- 6,3-10          another possible diastematic interpretation that takes into account the previous remark as well: G, E, E, D, C, C, C, C
- 7a,1,4          neumatic articulation at the top of the line (rhythmically significant)

7a,4,1	neumatic articulation halfway up (rhythmically significant)
7a,5,1	neumatic articulation at the beginning of the line
7a,7,1	neumatic articulation at the beginning of the line
8,6,1-6	the reading of the neume is highly uncertain: it could be, with almost equal probability, both a triple and a double <i>clivis</i> ; its melodic interpretation can be the one given in the text or (more simply) A-G-G-F
8a/b,3-4	conjectural reading (discussed in § 3.2)
7b,1-4	repetition of section 7a not written out in full in the ms (see § 2.3)
7b,5,1	neumatic articulation at the beginning of the line: see 7a,5,1
7b,7,1	neumatic articulation at the beginning of the line: see 7a,7,1

## 5 Concluding observations

The conclusions reached after the attempts at textual reconstruction and interpretation made can only be presented as a non-definitive summary. I will therefore conclude simply by recalling two salient points that represent the outcome of my study, along with a note that is, instead, of a more general nature.

(1) I began the analysis of the Ravenna charter prefiguring a hypothesis to verify the possible relations between the literary text and the musical text. While I cannot profess, at the end of the path, to have transformed this hypothesis into a certainty, it seems to me, nonetheless, that the evidence and reasoning I have presented allow us to strongly corroborate this hypothesis; drawing on seventeenth-century theological terminology, these conclusions allow us to give our hypothesis the status of an *opinio probabilior*: an *opinio* that, while destined to remain such, and with no pretensions of becoming *certa et indubitata*, is nevertheless more than an *opinio probabilis*, and infinitely more than a mere *opinatio*; it is a supposition sustained by a highly remarkable convergence of diversified evidence. For this reason, now the burden of proofing passes to those who believe that the notational signs on the charter do not refer to the texts that this same charter transmitted.

(2) All of the above, is necessarily independent from any possible improvements in single melodic readings that may result from examining enhanced photographic or digital reproductions of the parchment.

(3) More importantly, if referring the music of the text in charter 15518ter is indeed, as I believe, a well-founded statement, what would seem to emerge (and what musicology and the history of literature will have to increasingly consider) is that twelfth-century Italy was a milieu in which an everyday familiarity between music and lyric poetry was still perfectly natural and far from any

‘divorce’.<sup>44</sup> Along the lines of this metaphor, we do not know whether, and to what extent this relationship was a ‘happy’ one, nor which of the two arts was the first to be ‘unfaithful’. Neither do we know – and perhaps never will – whether this was a long-lasting marriage, nor whether the divorce came about quickly and consensually, or led accusations to be brought against one or the other.

Finally, what seems to be suggested by the document we have examined is that the bond between music and poetry, at the dawn of literature in the *lingua di sì*, may well not have been as the following centuries have shown a lifelong union, yet neither was it a *liaison dangereuse*, nor – all the less – a secret relationship.

## Abbreviations

PM X	<i>Antiphonale missarum Sancti Gregorii, IX<sup>e</sup>–X<sup>e</sup> siècle, Codex 239 de la Bibliothèque de Laon</i> (Paléographie musicale 10), Solesmes: Abbaye Saint-Pierre, 1909 [Reprint Bern: Lang, 1974].
PM XV	<i>Le Codex VI.34 de la Bibliothèque Capulaire de Bénévent</i> (Paléographie musicale 15), Solesmes: Abbaye Saint-Pierre, 1937 [Reprint Bern: Lang, 1971].

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<sup>44</sup> This idea had its inception in the first Italian edition of this text, examining the far less problematic ‘Piacenza fragment’ as well, a poem provided with notation (also of the Metz-Lotharingian type) only for its refrain, and mutilated on its right side: ‘O bella bella bella madona p[’].’

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