

The Gregorian Octoechos

Before beginning a systematic study of the eight Gregorian modes, it is prudent to recognize that the word *Octoechos*, applied to Gregorian chant, is not without some ambiguity.

In a very general sense, it designates the system of eight modes into which the medieval manuscripts classify all of the Gregorian pieces. It is a data base that appears in the oldest musical witness of the Gregorian repertoire (the tonary of St-Riquier,¹ copied a little after the year 800 in the north of France), and that is maintained thereafter.

However, things quickly reveal themselves to be more complex than the impression given by our general definition. Indeed, certain sources, those influenced by the theoreticians, consider the eight modes as a fundamental structure of composition. Others, those who represent more the world of singers, see in the Octoechos a simple rule of agreement between the antiphon and its psalm tone.

Nevertheless, everyone ultimately agrees to fit each Gregorian piece into one of the eight official modes. These modes are designated by a number (1 to 8) or by a term of Greek origin. The classification is based on two criteria: the final of the piece and its psalmodic tenor (or its “dominant,” if it is sung without the psalm).

Protus authentic	1 st mode	final <i>d</i>	tenor <i>a</i>
Protus plagal	2 nd mode	final <i>d</i>	tenor <i>f</i>
Deuterus authentic	3 rd mode	final <i>e</i>	tenor <i>b</i>
Deuterus plagal	4 th mode	final <i>e</i>	tenor <i>a</i>
Tritus authentic	5 th mode	final <i>f</i>	tenor <i>c</i>
Tritus plagal	6 th mode	final <i>f</i>	tenor <i>a</i>
Tetrardus authentic	7 th mode	final <i>g</i>	tenor <i>d</i>
Tetrardus plagal	8 th mode	final <i>g</i>	tenor <i>c</i>

¹ Cf. *supra*, pp. 24-26.

The words *protus*, *deuterus*, *tritus* and *tetrardus* are Latinized imitations of Greek words. They mean 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th. The word *authentic* means principal, and the word *plagal* means derived or relative. This terminology seems to establish a relationship with Greek music, but which and from what epoch?

In fact, the origin of this system is far from being clearly elucidated today. Assiduous study of the Gregorian repertoire shows that numerous pieces do not fit into this simplified framework. In fact, this table bears no relation to the rules of composition for the melodies. It is the medieval musicologists who insisted on fitting the repertoire into these eight categories.

In our exploration of the Gregorian modes, we will certainly refer to this framework – which is today traditional, but without letting ourselves be hampered by the theorizing that it represents. We will simply expose the musical facts, that is, study each of the eight modal categories with reference to its repertoire and its characteristics.

For each mode, we will begin with a concrete musical analysis of an example.

We will then present the scale of the mode, with its principal notes and the role of each of the degrees, all of which we will summarize – as well as possible – in a summary table. We will also present some elements, that is, characteristic formulas, of the modal vocabulary. The number of these characteristic formulas will necessarily be very limited: The reader will pursue a personal study, while systematically reviewing the pieces of the repertoire given for each mode.

To assure the connection with the first part of this work, we will try to rediscover the different archaic and bipolar modes that might be at the origin of each mode of the Octoechos – even if we know that the ornate pieces of the Mass are not directly born of such modal evolution.

We will conclude the exposé of each mode with a reflection on the ethos of that mode, a reflection that grows out of the study of the repertoire of the mode. In each case, this very personal meditation was done in the course of the 1980's by Canon Jean Jeanneteau. Not at all definitive, these reflections or meditations invite further research.

from *The Gregorian Modes*
Daniel Saulnier, OSB
trans. *Edward Schaefer*
(Solesmes, 2001)

Mode I
Degrees Summary Table

Degree	Recitation	Cadence	Ornament	Modal Relationship
<i>d</i>	secondary		of <i>c</i>	5 th
<i>c</i>			of <i>a</i>	
<i>b</i>			of <i>a</i> (if <i>c</i> influences)	
<i>b-flat</i>			of <i>a</i>	
<i>a</i>			principal psalmodic tenor	intermediate
<i>g</i>	important	intermediate	of <i>a</i>	
<i>f</i>	strong degree	intermediate		2 nd
<i>e</i>	rare	final	of <i>d-f</i>	4 th (rare)
<i>d</i>			2 nd	
<i>c</i>			suspensive	strong of <i>d</i>
<i>a</i>			intermediate	ornament
			(very rare)	(rare)

The principal notes of composition in Mode I are high *a* and *g*, and low *d*. The pieces also have frequent developments on *f*. More rarely, we encounter recitations on high *c*.

Mode II Degrees Summary Table

Degree	Recitation	Cadence	Ornament	Modal Relationship
<i>b-flat</i>	important principal psalmodic tenor strong degree		of <i>g</i> or <i>a</i>	1 st ? 5 th and 8 th
<i>a</i>			of <i>g</i>	
<i>g</i>			of <i>f</i>	
<i>f</i>			of <i>g</i>	
<i>e</i>	principal	intermediate (if <i>d</i> is important)	of <i>d</i> and <i>f</i>	1 st
<i>d</i>		final		
<i>c</i>		intermediate	of <i>d</i>	
<i>b</i>			of <i>c</i> or <i>a</i>	
<i>b-flat</i>			of <i>g</i>	
<i>a</i>		intermediate	of <i>c</i> or <i>d</i>	
<i>g</i>		intermediate	of <i>a</i>	

Mode II has three principal notes of composition: *d*, final; *f*, official dominant and psalmodic tenor; and also *g*.

Mode III

Principle Notes

The authentic upper note of recitation is *b*, very often concealed in abundant ornamentation by *c*. There do exist, however, pieces in which high *c* is the veritable note of recitation: Offertory *Filiae regum*.

The primitive psalmodic tenor is *b*, but in numerous medieval manuscripts from northern Europe and in the modern editions, this tenor is raised to *c*.

The final cadence rests on *e*.

Mode IV
Degrees Summary Table

Degree	Recitation	Cadence	Ornament	Modal Relationship
<i>c</i>			of <i>a</i>	8 th
<i>b</i>	exceptional		of <i>a</i>	3 rd
<i>b-flat</i>			tied to <i>g</i>	
<i>a</i>	principal psalmodic tenor	intermediate	of <i>g</i>	1 st ?
<i>g</i>	important deuterus-tritus	intermediate	of <i>a</i>	
<i>f</i>	pseudo-tenor strong degree	intermediate inverted	of <i>e</i>	
<i>e</i>		final		3 rd
<i>d</i>	important	intermediate	of <i>e</i>	1 st
<i>c</i>		intermediate	tied to <i>e</i>	
<i>b</i>			very rare	
<i>b-flat</i>			very rare	

Mode IV is structured on three notes: *e*, *g* and *a*.

Depending on the piece, any of these three degrees can be utilized as a note of recitation. The first two are the notes of composition of the verses of the Responsories. *A* is the psalmodic tenor. *E* is the final.

While not properly a note of composition, *f* has a strong importance.

Mode V
Degrees Summary Table

Degree	Recitation	Cadence	Ornament	Modal Relationship
<i>g</i>	principal psalmodic tenor	intermediate	of <i>f</i> and <i>d</i>	8 th 2 nd
<i>f</i>			of <i>e</i>	
<i>e</i>			of <i>c</i> and <i>d</i>	
<i>d</i>			of <i>c</i>	
<i>c</i>				
<i>b</i>	rare	very rare	of <i>c</i> and <i>a</i>	(7 th)
<i>b-flat</i>			from below	
<i>a</i>		intermediate	of <i>c</i>	
<i>g</i>		intermediate	of <i>f</i>	
<i>f</i>		sometimes	final	
<i>e</i>			of <i>d</i> and <i>f</i>	
<i>d</i>		intermediate	of <i>f</i>	
<i>c</i>		intermediate	of <i>f</i> and <i>d</i>	

C, official dominant of the mode, is the psalmodic tenor and principal note of composition.

F is the final of the mode.

The two principal degrees of the mode, then, are also the strong degrees of the scale. The hierarchy of the degrees and the structure of the scale are in full resonance here.

Mode VI
Degrees Summary Table

Degree	Recitation	Cadence	Ornament	Modal Relationship
<i>c</i>	auxiliary psalmodic tenor		of <i>a</i>	5 th
<i>b</i>			of <i>a</i> and <i>c</i> (if <i>c</i> influences)	
<i>b-flat</i>			of <i>f</i> , <i>g</i> and <i>a</i>	
<i>a</i>			of <i>g</i>	
<i>g</i>			intermediate	
<i>f</i>	strong degree	final		5 th
<i>e</i>		rare		
<i>d</i>		intermediate		
<i>c</i>		intermediate		

Mode VI possesses only one note of composition: *f*, the final of the pieces. For the psalmody, it resorts to *a*, even if it has been infrequently heard in the piece.

Mode VII
Degrees Summary Table

Degree	Recitation	Cadence	Ornament	Modal Relationship			
<i>b</i>	principal psalmodic tenor		exceptional				
<i>a</i>			rare				
<i>g</i>			important				
<i>f</i>			of <i>d</i> , strong				
<i>e</i>			of <i>d</i>				
<i>d</i>							
<i>c</i>			auxiliary strong degree		intermediate	of <i>b</i>	8 th
<i>b</i>			auxiliary		intermediate	of <i>c</i>	
<i>a</i>					intermediate		
<i>g</i>			rare		final		8 th
<i>f</i>		intermediate	of <i>g</i>				
<i>e</i>			very rare				
<i>d</i>		intermediate					

The principal notes of Mode VII are *d* for the high cantillations and the psalmodic tone, and *g* for the final.

The auxiliary notes *c* and *b* can take on notable importance.

**Mode VIII
Degrees Summary Table**

Degree	Recitation	Cadence	Ornament	Modal Relationship
<i>e</i>			rare	
<i>d</i>	episodic		of <i>c</i>	7 th
<i>c</i>	principal psalmodic tenor		(of <i>b</i>)	5 th 2 nd
<i>b</i>	auxiliary		(of <i>c</i>)	3 rd
<i>b-flat</i>			rare	
<i>a</i>		intermediate	of <i>g</i>	
<i>g</i>	rare	final		
<i>f</i>	important	intermediate	strong	
<i>e</i>			of <i>g</i>	
<i>d</i>		intermediate	important	
<i>c</i>		intermediate	of <i>d</i>	

Mode VIII has two upper notes of recitation: *c* (psalmodic tenor) and *b*.

The lower note of recitation, *g*, is also the final of the pieces.

B and *g* are the notes of recitation for the verses of the Responsories.