

Unicode request for annotation to *musical symbol square b*

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We request annotations to the character U+1D1D2 ♮ MUSICAL SYMBOL SQUARE B.

There are two closely-related symbols that are used to mark the two B notes in Gregorian plainchant: B-flat <♭> and B-natural <♮>. As summarized in Hiley (2001), <♭> is called *b rotundum* ‘round b’ or *b molle* ‘soft b’ (whence Italian *bemolle* ‘flat sign’), whereas <♮> is its opposite, *b durum* ‘hard b’ or *b quadratum* ‘square b’ (whence Italian *bequadro* ‘natural sign’). These two symbols were adopted as accidentals to clarify which pitch a B note has within a given passage in a score; in plainchant parlance, they indicate mutation between hexachords, where *b rotundum* is used for the “soft” hexachord that begins on F, and *b quadratum* is used to restore the “hard” hexachord that begins on G, and which is otherwise unmarked. An example of this interplay is shown in Figure 2. Apel (1953: 22) notes that that in some sources *b quadratum* <♮> was written like the natural sign <♮>, which descends from it, but even so it was also used for alterations that the modern natural sign would not be used for, such as changing F to F-sharp (Hiley 2001).

The Unicode name *square b* clearly indicates U+1D1D2 ♮ to be the *b quadratum*—as does Perry Roland’s proposal L2/98-045 that introduced the character (Roland 1998, p. 11)—but it is not used as an accidental in modern plainchant literature as often as its partner *b rotundum* <♭>, and its identity can become obscure. When <♮> is called *b durum*, as is often the case, that leaves open the question of which Unicode character it corresponds to. For example, SMuFL uses the labels ‘soft b’ and ‘hard b’, thus not equating <♮> with the Unicode ‘square b,’ and in addition incorrectly labels both of them ‘flat’ (Figure 1). In addition, like many other sources, the SMuFL glyph for *b rotundum* <♭> (codepoint E9E0 in Figure 1) is rather square and is close enough to the reference glyph for Unicode *square b* <♮> to cause confusion. The SMuFL glyph is representative of the literature; the example in Figure 3 could be multiplied indefinitely. Annotating U+1D1D2 as *b durum* would clarify its identity in such situations.

Annotations

1D1D2 ♮ MUSICAL SYMBOL SQUARE B

- *b quadratum* ‘square b’ = *b durum* ‘hard b’.
- Use 266D ♭ for *b rotundum* ‘round b’ = *b molle* ‘soft b’.
- 266E music natural sign.
- 266F music sharp sign.

Confusables

Depending on the source, both the flat and the natural can look like the square b.

266D music flat sign ↔ 1D1D2 musical symbol square b ↔ 266E music natural sign

References

- Willi Apel (1953) *The Notation of Polyphonic Music 900–1600*. 5th ed. Cambridge: The Mediaeval Academy of America.
- David Hiley (2001) “Accidental.” *Grove Music Online*. Accessed May 19, 2026.
- Perry Roland (1998) *Proposal for Encoding Western Music Symbols in ISO/IEC 10646*. Unicode. UTC Document Registry [L2/98-045](#). Last modified February 19, 1998.
- Sister Marietta, S.N.J.M. (1956) *Singing the Liturgy: A Practical Means of Christian Living*. Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company. media.churchmusicassociation.org/books/singingtheliturgy.pdf.

Figures

Medieval and Renaissance accidentals (U+E9E0–U+E9EF)			
Glyph	Description	Glyph	Description
	U+E9E0 (and U+1D1D2) <i>medRenFlatSoftB</i> Flat, soft b (fa)		U+E9E1 <i>medRenFlatHardB</i> Flat, hard b (mi)

Figure 1. SMuFL [[Medieval and Renaissance accidentals \(U+E9E0–U+E9EF\)](#)]. *B molle* (blue) and *b durum* (red). Both are rather square in appearance. The label ‘flat’ for *b durum* is an error.

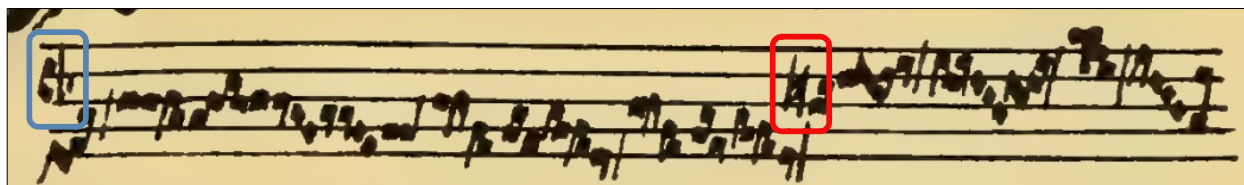


Figure 2. Apel (1953: 257). *B rotundum* (blue) canceled by *b quadratum* (red) in a 13th-century manuscript. appears at the beginning of the passage to mark it as being in B-flat, until that assignment is overridden by to return the passage to B-natural. Despite their age, the glyphs are essentially identical to modern *flat* and *natural*.

The accidental of **B-flat** is allowed in any mode but it appears very commonly in the Gregorian scale of **F** and is often used in the scale of **D**. The sign of the accidental is a rhombus-shaped figure

 which changes the **B** in the melody to **B-flat** (1) until the Latin word which is being sung is completed, (2) until the next bar line on the staff, or (3) until a **natural sign** cancels the flat.

Figure 3. Sister Marietta (1956: 14). Explanation of an unnamed *round b* , with a glyph close to that of SMuFL's in Figure 1 and even described as "rhombus-shaped." Its squarish shape makes it confusable with the Unicode name *square b* assigned to . Marietta says that it is canceled by the "natural sign" rather than *square b*, despite not equating the unnamed with the modern flat sign.