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Illusions of Grandeur: The Instruments of Daniel 3 Reconsidered¹

This essay began simply as an attempt to identify the enigmatic instruments in Nebuchadnezzar's orchestra. Along the way it became apparent that the study of these instruments was firmly attached to certain entrenched assumptions of biblical interpretation. While these assumptions await future investigation, my hope here is primarily to help the reader hear Nebuchadnezzar's orchestra as its first audience did.

I

Chapter 3 of the book of Daniel revolves around a strange religious ceremony that involved no priests, prayers or sacrifices:

You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble, you are to fall down and worship the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. (Dan 3:4b–5 NRSV)²

The only liturgy is the sound of the great orchestra, a signal to the whole empire to bow and venerate a gargantuan golden statue. This musical ensemble has always intrigued interpreters, not only because of its uniqueness in the biblical canon, but because the instruments are as enigmatic as they are unique.

The names of the instruments — *qarna*, *mashroqita*, *qatros*, *sabbecha*, *psanterin* and *sumponia* (קרנא, מִשְׁרוֹקִיתָא, קִיתְרוֹס (K) קִיתְרוֹס (Q), סַבְכָא, פְּסַנְתְּרִין, וְלִשְׁבָּעָא: בְּעֵדְנָא דִּי תִשְׁמַעְוּן קֹל קַרְנָא מִשְׁרוֹקִיתָא קִיתְרוֹס סַבְכָא פְּסַנְתְּרִין סוּמְפּוֹנִיָּה וְכָל זַנִּי זְמִרָא תְּפִלוּן וְתִסְגִּידוּן לְצִלְמֵי דְהַבָּא דִּי הַקִּים נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר מִלְּבָא: — are mostly Aramaicized versions of Greek instrument names. Although an ample corpus of Greek music literature survives, these instruments still remain a great puzzle; indeed, it is only because of the *wealth* of information about them that the depth of the problem becomes clear.³

1 The idea for this paper originated in a class at the Catholic University of America with Professor Douglas Gropp, whom I would like to thank for his kind help and encouragement. I would also like to thank my professors at the University of Maryland, particularly Dr. Adele Berlin, for their unfailing support and guidance.

2 לְכוּן אֲמַרְיוֹן עֵמְמָא אֲמַיָּא וְלִשְׁבָּעָא: בְּעֵדְנָא דִּי תִשְׁמַעְוּן קֹל קַרְנָא מִשְׁרוֹקִיתָא קִיתְרוֹס סַבְכָא פְּסַנְתְּרִין סוּמְפּוֹנִיָּה וְכָל זַנִּי זְמִרָא תְּפִלוּן וְתִסְגִּידוּן לְצִלְמֵי דְהַבָּא דִּי הַקִּים נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר מִלְּבָא: —

3 Since it is impossible to give a thorough history of the interpretation of these instruments in a paper of this scope, these summaries will be restricted for the most part to the difficulties in

The first instrument, the *qarna*,⁴ is the only one attested in other Semitic texts. Translating the name is simple enough, since the English word, “horn,” is etymologically connected to the Aramaic *qarna* (from Hebrew *qeren*) via Latin *cornu* (Montagu 2002: 97). The difficulty lies in identifying the instrument more precisely: What type of horn was it? Was the author imagining a curved horn or a trumpet? Was it made of wood, or bronze, or brass? These questions are archeological rather than etymological and lead to a central difficulty in the study of Dan 3: determining the date of composition of the text. Though the story is set in the court of Nebuchadnezzar II, scholars have convincingly argued that the text was composed in the Hellenistic period, five hundred years after Nebuchadnezzar’s reign. If so, should we search in the Neo-Babylonian assemblage of musical instruments or among Hellenistic instruments? The correct horn for this ensemble is presumably the one that would have been used in cultic worship and played alongside the other instruments in one of these periods.

The name of the second instrument, *mashroqita*, is found nowhere else, so its identity can only be speculated.⁵ It is most likely derived from the onomatopoeic root *s-r-q*, meaning “hiss” or “whistle.” The Septuagint translates it into *syrinx*, also from an onomatopoeic word, *syrigmos*, which also means “hiss” or “whistle.” Even if the words are analogous, it does not necessarily follow that the instruments are, too. According to Pierre Grelot, if the *mashroqita* is the same instrument as the *syrinx*, the instrument in the ceremony in Dan 3 would have been a pan pipe, a shepherd’s instrument, which is entirely unattested in ancient Near Eastern cultic practice (see Grelot 1979: 27).

The *qatros* appears to be the Greeks’ *kithara*. As we will see, in transliteration the Greek *symphonia* retained the vocalization and became the Aramaic *symponia*, and the *sambyka* became the *sabbecha*; why then did the *kithara* become the *qatros*?⁶ Most scholars presume that *qatros* derives from the word “*kitharis*,” a name used by Homer for the same instrument, which was later replaced by the word “*kithara*” (Maas 2010). It is odd that this antiquated name should be used for such a common instrument, since many of the Greek instruments on the list

identifying them without considering the legions of solutions that have been proposed, none of which, I believe, have adequately dealt with the problems considered below. The most recent summary of research on these words can be found in Koch 2005 and Braun 2002. The most thorough and oft-cited study to date remains Pierre Grelot’s 1979 article “L’orchestre de Daniel III 5, 7, 10, 15.” See esp. Montagu 2002 on the problem of identifying the instruments.

⁴ קַרְנָא; OG, θ’: Σάλπιγγος.

⁵ מַשְׂרוֹקִיתָא vv 5, 7, 15 מַשְׂרוֹקִיתָא v 10; OG, θ’: σύριγγος.

⁶ קִיתְרוֹס (K) קִתְרוֹס (Q) 1x; קִיתְרִים (K) קִתְרוֹס (Q) 3x; OG, θ’: κιθαρα(ς). In the former examples the Greek “M” assimilates into the following consonant; Koch (248) also notes that it is curious that the name is “not...the Attic *kithara* commonly used in the Hellenistic period” (all translations mine).

(most notably the *psanterin* and the *symponia*) are attested, at the earliest, five centuries after Homer, by which time *kitharis* had long been replaced by *kithara*.

The *sabbecha* appears to be the *sambyka*, an instrument which the Greeks ascribed to barbaric origin. Scholars of ancient Greek music have concluded that the *sambyka* is similar to a curved harp still found in Ethiopia and Uganda.⁷ Because there is no evidence for such an instrument in Babylonia in either of these periods, most biblical scholars equate the *sabbecha* with an instrument that is found in these times and at those places — a small, triangular harp. This identification is entirely speculative, though, and is, in my opinion, implausible. Regardless of what it looked like, Greek texts portray the *sambyka* as an instrument of adulterers and prostitutes, which makes it seem an inappropriate instrument for a solemn religious ceremony.⁸

The *psanterin* is assumed to correspond to the Greek *psalterion*.⁹ In Greek texts, the only evidence for the instrument outside Dan 3, *psalterion* does not designate a specific instrument, but refers to the class of plucked chordophones (stringed instruments), of which, at the time, there was an enormous variety. It should also be noted that the word *psalterion* is only found from the fourth century BCE, arguably a *terminus post quem* for the passage in Daniel (West 1992: 74).

The *sumponia* has proved by far the most difficult to identify, and it has not even been established conclusively that it is an instrument at all. In Greek texts again the only external evidence to the term *sumponia* seems to refer to a harmony or unison of sounds.¹⁰ Its first occurrence that could arguably be interpreted as referring to an instrument is in the second century BCE, and even then it might still be interpreted as music, harmony or even a group of musicians.

All of the instruments, then, seem to defy identification to a greater or lesser extent: the *qarna* could be any number of horns; the *mashroqita* is entirely unknown, although, if it is the same instrument as the one in the Septuagint, it would seem an odd choice for such a ceremony. As for the names with Greek origins: The *qatros* is an anachronistic term for a most common Greek instrument; the *sabbecha* is difficult to identify, and perhaps also inappropriate for a cultic event; the *psanterin* is not any particular instrument while the *sumponia* may not be an instrument at all. The most recent archeological and textual evi-

7 חֲבִיבָה v 5 אֲשֶׁר v 7, 10, 15; OG, θ': σαμβύκης. Montagu 2002: 98–99.

8 E.g., Eupolis, frag. 148.4 in Maas and Snyder 1989: 150. While it might be argued that the barbaric origin of the instrument presumes a different cultural context, its position in the middle of a list of comparatively late Greek instruments, like the *psalterion* and *symponia*, points to a thoroughly Greek musical culture. See also West 1992: 76–77.

9 פְּסַלְתֵּרִיִן v 5, 10, 15; פְּסַלְתֵּרִיִן: v 7; OG, θ': ψαλτηριον.

10 חֲבִיבָה: v 5, 15; v 7 omits; חֲבִיבָה (K) חֲבִיבָה (Q) v 10; OG, θ': Συμפוניה. Polybius, *Histories* XXVI 1a.

dence makes the orchestra appear more puzzling than ever, as neither the dates and the uses nor the social settings of these instruments seem to correspond with one another, or with the purported dates of corporation of the text.

These instruments do share two things, however: First, despite an abundance of evidence, they are extremely difficult to identify with any precision, and second, put together as an ensemble they are anachronistic in relation to one another and do not belong to one historical era. This conclusion is not helpful from a historical perspective, but it serves as one possible basis for considering these terms as a unified group.

On its own, “Nebuchadnezzar’s orchestra” is a group of five or six curious instruments; in the context of the whole chapter, the ensemble is one of a number of groups of mostly foreign terms that include also a list of bureaucratic titles (vv 2–3), the names of the young men in the story and a list of the garments they wore (v 21). These lists are a fundamental, if not *the* fundamental structural feature in vv 1–15, the first half of the chapter. I have included this well-known section to allow the reader to consider these lists as they are used in the story:

King Nebuchadnezzar made a golden statue whose height was sixty cubits and whose width was six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. ² Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent for the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces, ¹¹ to assemble and come to the dedication of the statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ³ So the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces, assembled for the dedication of the statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

When they were standing before the statue that Nebuchadnezzar had set up, ⁴ the herald proclaimed aloud, “You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, ⁵ that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble, you are to fall down and worship the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶ Whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire.” ⁷ Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ⁸

Accordingly, at this time certain Chaldeans came forward and denounced the Jews. ⁹ They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever! ¹⁰ You, O king, have made a decree, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble, shall fall down and worship the golden statue, ¹¹ and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire. ¹² There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach,

11 אֲדָרְגָזוֹרְיָא וְפַחְוֹתָא אֲדָרְגָזוֹרְיָא גְדַבְרָא דְתַבְרִיא תַפְתִּיא וְכָל שְׁלֹטְנֵי מְדִינָתָא

and Abednego. These pay no heed to you, O king. They do not serve your gods and they do not worship the golden statue that you have set up.”¹³

Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought in; so they brought those men before the king.¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods and you do not worship the golden statue that I have set up?¹⁵ Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble to fall down and worship the statue that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire, and who is the god that will deliver you out of my hands?” (Dan 3:1–15 NRSV).

While the lists in Dan 3 are similar to lists commonly employed in ancient Near Eastern literature, here they are used in a noticeably different way (see especially Coxon 1986). In his book on ancient Jewish court legends, for instance, Wills notes that while in long stories repetitions are needed to remind the audience of the plot, in Dan 3 — a story of a mere thirty verses — the constant repetition of lists makes no sense (Wills 1990). For example, the repetition in v 3 of the impossibly long list of officials appearing in v 2 — the two lists separated only by the word וְכָל־הַכְּהֹנֵי־הַמֶּלֶךְ ‘so’ — is clearly not necessary to remind us of the officials, and must instead have another purpose. As Avalos puts it: “the immediate and mechanical reproduction of the enumeration of v 2 in v 3 is an effective reflection of the immediate and mechanistic acceptance of the king’s request by the entire pagan bureaucracy” (Avalos 1991: 585). In v 5 “the peoples of all nations and languages” are told that when they “hear the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble,” they are to “fall down and worship the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up...at the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.”¹² When the officials accuse Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego of disobeying this command, they do so by repeating the royal decree verbatim. Even more tellingly, the king — the author of the law — also appears to be compelled by it: when he turns to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego he, too, recites it almost verbatim, barely changing “Nebuchadnezzar” to “I.”¹³ Verbatim repetition is so central to vv 1–15 that more than three quarters of the verses consist entirely of it, an active illustration of the blind and thoughtless submission of everyone in the kingdom,

¹² Coxon has pointed out that the phrase “that Nebuchadnezzar the king set up” is found seven times (with slight variations), while the phrase “burning fiery furnace” is repeated eight times, reinforcing the threat that appears so powerful, though the flames prove harmless against the divine protection of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, (Coxon 1986: 109).

¹³ See Dan 6:14–15, where the king admits to being under the force of his own law.

including the king himself, to the power of the great king.¹⁴ The power is entirely of human construction: one human rules over other humans, all of who thoughtlessly obey orders of human creation and repeat laws of human invention, as if these somehow had power in and of themselves. But this power — and the submission to it expressed in the repetitions — could only exist as long as everyone believed they really were powerful; but as we know, of course, not everyone did.

Exactly halfway through the story, things take an abrupt turn: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refuse to bow, an act that reveals the king's power to be an illusion, only real insofar as people are willing to act upon it. The king's power is shaken, and from this point until the end of the story there are no more repetitions.¹⁵ The king, shocked with the challenge to his power “was so filled with rage against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face was distorted. He ordered the furnace heated up seven times more than was customary and ordered some of the strongest guards in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to throw them into the furnace of blazing fire” (Dan 3:19).

In his madness Nebuchadnezzar orders the fire heated so high it incinerates the guards as they cast Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the furnace. Enraged, the king jumps up from his throne to watch the three burn, only to find four men — the fourth man having “the appearance of a god” — walking in the midst of the fire unbound and unharmed.

After Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego emerge from the fire, a group of officials *gathers* (מִתְכַּנְּשִׁין), as in v 3, but now at their own initiative, without the king's command. The list of officials who gather is much shorter than that found in v 3, and noticeably lacks the concluding phrase *all the officials of the provinces* (מְדִינָתָא כּל שְׁלֹטְנֵי) found in vv 2–3. The officials look at Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and discover that the *fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men* (לֹא שְׁלַט גּוֹרָא בְּגִשְׁמָהוֹן). That even the fire does not have power over them (לֹא שְׁלַט) is the clearest sign that the king, and, by extension, the officials, the so-called מְדִינָתָא שְׁלֹטְנֵי, have no real power either. Their power is only as real as the artificially ordained “province” they rule. The wordplay in these penultimate

14 The numbers in normal sized type show the verses and those in parentheses represent the verses that repeat them. Thus numbers in superscript represent verses not constructed of previously found: ¹, 2 (= 3); ⁴; 5 (= 7, 10, 15); 6 (= 11); ⁸; ⁹; 12 (= 14); ¹³.

15 With the notable exception of the foreign names of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, which are repeated nine more times (for a total of 18 times over 13 verses), while their Hebrew names, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, are never mentioned. On this, see also Montgomery 1927: 201; Collins 1993: 184; Coxon 1986: 104 n. 31. The list of officials is referred to again (v 27), but only in a short form. The same occurs with the list of clothing (ibid.) of which only the first word, סְרָבְלֵיהוֹן, ‘their belts’, is given. The list of clothing, which occurs in the second half, can be read as part of their assimilation in the empire, wearing the empire's formal (?) garments.

verses of mockingly mirrors, and dispels the pompous artifice of the first half of the story.

The king acts quickly to avert political catastrophe: knowing he has no power over Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, he makes a regal display of magnanimity, blessing their god, outlawing blasphemy against this god and giving them the right to worship their god (vv 28–29). In a deft, rhetorical riposte he differentiates between the power of gods (as in v 29, *there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way*) and the power of men, promoting Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Letting their god into the pantheon, but not accepting him as his own, Nebuchadnezzar officially concedes only the smallest amount of power, presumably to avoid a similar threat in the future, while ostensibly retaining control. The audience, meanwhile, knows that despite the appearance of human rule, God is the real power behind any throne. The story is an expression for a new generation of the view that God uses foreign powers as his actors in the world, while still being retaining the power himself.

II

The story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in Dan 3 is strikingly similar to Dan 6, the story of Daniel in the lions' den: in both stories, officials of Judean descent (מִמְּבֵנֵי יְהוּדָה; Dan 1:6) in a foreign court are denounced for disobeying a royal decree demanding idolatrous worship — an offense punishable by death. The officials remain faithful to their God, and are consequently sent to die: Daniel in the lions' den and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in a furnace. With divine help they survive, precipitating the king to outlaw blasphemy against their God.

The two stories are essentially similar, but they are told in fundamentally different ways. The story of Daniel in the lions' den is a court intrigue with very plausibly human characters and human actions, while the story of three young men in the fire is a magical tale told in a broad, caricatured style.¹⁶ The exaggeration in Dan 3 magnifies the foreign power and contrasts it with God to show that while the empire appears omnipotent, the real power belongs to God. More importantly, Dan 3 contrasts human actions and attitudes: the Babylonians' thoughtless servitude to the visually astonishing statue — an image of purely human power — against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's decisive faith in the invisible, yet real (and really omnipotent) God. Dan 3 tries to teach the listener to differentiate between the *material* and the *real*, and its lessons are found not only in the

¹⁶ Collins (1993: 181) calls it “hyperbolic style.”

dénouement, but throughout the narrative. Every image of the empire's power is nothing but an illusion waiting to be dispelled.

The first illusion appears in the first verse of the chapter, in the form of Nebuchadnezzar's colossal gold statue.¹⁷ The deception is in the details: according to Koch, the proportions of the statue are “surprising...unheard of elsewhere in the art of the ancient world” (Koch 2005: 274). At 60 cubits by 6 cubits (about 100 feet tall and 10 feet wide, or 30 meters by 3 meters), it is less a colossus than an impossibly enormous gold totem pole (Koch 2005: 274).¹⁸ So although the first impression is of an incredibly grand statue, closer consideration reveals its proportions to be entirely preposterous (see, e.g., Collins 1993: 183). The apparent symbol of power represents instead the instability and the vanity of the empire that would build it.

Like the golden statue, the lists of foreign bureaucrats, instruments and apparel are also powerful illusions, symbols of the empire's place as the political and cultural center of the world. All three lists are very similar in content and construction, and this similarity provides the key to understanding them, and dispelling them.

The two Aramaic names that begin the list of instruments would have been clearly identifiable as instruments by an Aramaic-speaking audience, even if they could not be distinctly imagined. These two are followed by four foreign names that could have been more difficult to identify. The list ends with the phrase *וְכָל זֵנוּי זְמָרָא* ‘and all kinds of instruments’. The list of officials (vv 2–3) similarly opens with three common titles (see Collins 1993: 182–183), followed by three much more obscure, anachronistic ones, and closes with a similar phrase: *וְכָל שְׁלֹטְנֵי מְדִינָתָא* ‘and all the officials of the provinces’.¹⁹ The list of the garments worn by Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego follows the same pattern, though more briefly, beginning with one plausibly familiar term followed by two unknown ones, and ending with the word *וְיִלְבְּשֵׁיהוֹן* ‘and [the rest of] their clothing’ (see Koch 2005: 253). These final phrases appear to serve two functions: to explain in simple terms the nature of the foreign items on the lists (“and all the [other]

¹⁷ It is not without some irony that it begins with this description: in Dan 2 Nebuchadnezzar dreams of a gold-headed statue that is destroyed, which Daniel ominously interprets for the king, saying: “you are the head of gold.” Cf. v 1, *צֶלֶם דְּיִיְדִיבָה*, ‘a golden image’; with v 19, *צֶלֶם אֲנַפְוּהִי*, Nebuchadnezzar's face, which is filled with rage when Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refuse to bow to the statue; see Coxon 1986: 112.

¹⁸ Montgomery (1927: 196) denotes the proportions of the statue “grotesque.” These proportions would make it almost the same height as the Colossus of Rhodes (perhaps not coincidentally) and near that of the Statue of Liberty, both of which were very wide at the base.

¹⁹ “Largely incomprehensible titles...” three of which are *hapax legomena*, (Koch 2005: 245); “Anachronistic...Persian titles” (Collins 1993: 183).

instruments/officials/clothing”), and to magnify the already extensive enumeration into even grander terms. The lists also share a rhetorical purpose: the foreign content gives the immediate impression of a powerful, universal empire, while the concluding phrase trails off into vague, immeasurable greatness. As the already-numerous officials become innumerable, an enormous orchestra plays in a ceremony, attended by the whole known world to which men are wearing what appears to be rather complicated and formal clothing.

Montgomery (1927: 201) famously denoted Nebuchadnezzar’s orchestra “very cosmopolitan,” a statement Collins (1993: 184) repeated approvingly; Coxon writes (1986: 104) wrote that “the precise cataloguing which characterizes the formal lists...leave[s] us in no doubt of the writer’s antiquarian interest and inclination to provide an authentic setting to stories set in the Babylonian exile.” The exoticism of these lists is perhaps too easily accepted as confirmation of the historical authenticity of these terms, or at least the author’s attempt to recreate it. Why should these instruments be regarded as a unique bubble of historical fact in a sea of hyperbole?

Most scholars agree that Dan 3 is not an objective historical account: The plain of Dura is apparently not a real place (Collins 1993: 182); no colossal gold statue of such absurd proportions has ever been found, or is ever mentioned in any other ancient Near Eastern text — a corpus not known for understatement. There is no evidence for a Babylonian edict requiring a religious ceremony that requires the presence of all the empire’s officials and subjects in one place and at one time (e.g., Collins 1993: 184). Neither is there evidence for Babylonian use of incineration in a furnace as a means of capital punishment (Koch 2005: 269). Given all of this, it would seem natural to subject the instruments to an equal level of scrutiny and suspicion, but, surprisingly, no one has done so.

III

At a recent conference about music in the ancient Mediterranean, Professor Joachim Braun argued passionately and convincingly that a new historiography of biblical music is needed. While scholars have long since cast doubt on the historicity of large swaths of biblical “history,” no similar skepticism has been aimed at other aspects of the Bible, particularly music and musical instruments appearing in it. One of the reasons that the historicity of biblical music has remained unchallenged, Braun argued, is that scholars find comfort in believing that some things in the Bible *are* true, must be true — that some things can be dug up and held (and held up as evidence for this truth), and heard, presumably as they once sounded.

While this is difficult to confirm, it is true that no commentary I have come across has done more than try to identify these instruments. None has ever suggested that the historicity of these instruments, like that of other objects in the story, might be questioned or questionable, and perhaps entirely beside the point.

It is entirely appropriate to try to identify the instruments mentioned in Dan 3, but, when attempts fail or require so many convolutions as to become unproductive, it is necessary to take a new approach. In this case, a hyperbolic story full of incredible details and in which the only similarities among the instruments (and among the other lists, too) is apparently irreconcilable inconsistency, it is worth asking if they were ever intended to represent a real orchestra. The names of the instruments, like those of the officials and their apparel, appear to have eluded identification for so long because, I suggest, they were intended to be imaginary — part of a carefully crafted illusion. Nebuchadnezzar's orchestra undoubtedly appears “cosmopolitan,” as it was supposed to. Closer inspection, however, shows that it was only a mock regal orchestra, just as the empire was only a charade of power.

Perhaps in the future the terms *psanterin* or *symponia* will be accurately, historically identified. For now, though, it appears that Dan 3 asked — and asks — that the audience recognizes the difference between illusion and reality, just as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did. For those Jews living under foreign rule who listened carefully to the story of the three faithful young men, the *qarna*, *marshoqita*, *qatros*, *sabbecha*, *psanterin* and *symphonia*, and all the other instruments made no sound at all.

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Cypro-Archaic I period, 750–600 BCE.

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