

A Compendium of Musical Instruments and Instrumental Terminology in the Bible

Yelena Kolyada; translated from Russian by the author with the assistance of David J. Clark. *A Compendium of Musical Instruments and Instrumental Terminology in the Bible*. London: Equinox, 2009. 304 pp. \$140.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9781845534097.

A *Compendium of Musical Instruments and Instrumental Terminology in the Bible* is an English translation and adaptation of a doctoral thesis written in Russian and published in 2003 by Kompozitor in Moscow. The author seeks to answer the question, “What did the instruments that are referred to in the Bible and Tanakh look or sound like?” To answer this question, she draws upon numerous fields of study, such as history, philology, archaeology, and musicology. It is necessary to synthesize from various fields because neither the Tanakh nor the Old Testament defines the instruments—these sacred books simply use the musical terms. In addition, the passage of the centuries has fostered the evolution of the musical terms and definitions. For example, when the Hebrew term “kinnor” is mentioned, one might see it translated as “harp” (KJV) or “lyre” (RSV), and yet a different instrument called “nevel” is also translated as “harp” (RSV) or “lyre” (NIV). Not only are harps and lyres different from each other, present-day harps and lyres also are different from ancient harps and lyres. This book details the differences between a “kinnor” and a “nevel,” thus giving the reader possession of a more accurate assessment of the appearance and sound of these instruments in biblical times.

After providing an overview of references to instrumental music in the Bible in chapter one, the author devotes chapters two through four to the major classes of instruments: plucked strings, winds, and percussion. In each of these chapters, for every individual instrument within each class, the author describes a range of theories, drawn from interdisciplinary sources, on the appearance of the instruments (size, shape, materials of construction, decorative aspects, number of strings, etc.), their country of origin and Jewish modifications, their religious and secular contextual use, their symbolic aspects in various cultures, and the quality of their sound (timbre, range of pitches and volume, etc.). She also details how the instruments were held during performance and how the sound was produced (e.g., plucked with the fingers or a plectrum). She is thorough in presenting these various theories and the plausibility of each. In addition, a plentitude of intricate hand-drawn illustrations replicating archaeological findings held in museums around the world serves to elucidate the text.

In a similar manner to chapters two through four, chapters five through seven cover ambivalent instrumental terms (e.g., mahol could be flute or dance), generic and unclear musical terms (e.g., selah, the ever-popular and mysterious word found predominantly in the Psalter), and biblical musical instruments in post-biblical sources (Talmud and later rabbinic literature, literature of the Church fathers, medieval and Renaissance scholarship). Of particular interest is the coverage of historical and modern translations of the Bible, where the author graciously and succinctly lists and analyzes mistranslations.

The book ends with four helpful appendices. Appendix One provides a list by chapter and verse of all instances in the entire Bible where musical instruments or instrumental ensembles are mentioned. Appendix Two supplies a typological table of the terminology of biblical instruments found in the Tanakh. In a simple and straightforward

fashion, sorted by group or class (e.g., chordophones), it indicates whether the typology (e.g., lyre) of an instrument is exact, probable, or uncertain. Regarding the uncertain types, let the reader be advised to read the scholarship for the various meanings because not all possible meanings are included. Appendix Three lists instrumental ensembles mentioned in the Bible along with chapter and verse citations. While there are no accompanying audio clips, after having read the detailed description of the individual instruments earlier in the book and then viewing this list, I could begin to imagine the sonorous and sometimes serene sounds of the ensembles.

Appendix Four provides a well-organized chart listing all the instruments mentioned in chapters two through six. For each instrument, it lists the Romanized-transliterated Hebrew term, a plethora of versions and translations of the Bible (thirty-six versions in twenty languages), the translated word(s) chosen for each version or translation, and the scriptural chapter and verse citation for each occurrence of the instrumental term. Upon close examination, the reader may note that some translations chose to translate the same Hebrew word in different ways (e.g., NIV: shofar = trumpet [Exodus 19:19, 20:15; Leviticus 25:9 etc.], horn (2 Chronicles 15:14; Hosea 5:8), or ram's horn (1 Chronicles 15:28; Psalms 81:3, 98:6)). A note to English speakers: though the list is comprehensive, several major English translations, such as New American Standard and English Standard Version, are not included.

This book is successful in achieving its purpose for its intended audience. As the author writes in the introduction, the book "is intended for specialists in different spheres of the humanities: musicologists, theologians, historians, philologists, and Bible translators, as well as for all those who would like to have deeper understanding of the Book of Books" (1). After a close examination of the sources used and the erudite explanations in chapters one through seven, I believe each of these groups of people will find something valuable in this book.

An excellent glossary of forty-six biblical and talmudic terms is located at the beginning of the book. While this exists to explain terms used in this book, I also have found it to be a useful quick-reference tool answering basic questions such as, "What is the difference between the Talmud, Gemara, and Mishnah?"

Among this book's valuable aspects, the high point is Appendix Four. While it is valuable as a stand-alone source to compare the original language, translations, and versions, it can be even more so when used in conjunction with the correlating in-depth scholarship located earlier in the book. For example, the aforementioned example of varying NIV translations of "shofar" is explained in chapter seven's coverage of Bible translations, and the actual detailed description with accompanying illustrations of a "shofar" is found in chapter three's coverage on wind instruments. This appendix could be utilized by specialists at any level of research as well as general readers interested in the details of the lexicon.

There are several weaknesses that should be noted. The style of citation is unfamiliar and confusing at first. At the end of the book, there are two sections that serve as bibliographies: "Historical, literary and patristic sources" and "Bibliography." In the text of each chapter, the citations consist of an author's surname in parentheses which refers to an abbreviated bibliography at the end of the chapter (provides author's full surname and abbreviation of forename, year of publication, and name of instrument[s] covered), which refers to the dual bibliographies at the book's end. A few inaccuracies exist in the abbreviated bibliographies. Also, there are some statements where citations would be valuable but are absent.

The index of names of authors is extensive but not exhaustive. The index of instrumental terms is especially helpful in that page numbers in bold font communicate sections with major coverage. Following the appendices are two separate lists of abbreviations of Bible translations referred to throughout the book. While one list also includes

the abbreviations of historical, literary, and patristic sources referred to, the distinction between the two lists is otherwise unclear.

In spite of the weaknesses mentioned, as a former music educator and music librarian and now a theological librarian, I highly recommend this book for purchase for libraries and am very pleased to have it in my personal library. It provides an essential, centralized, and comprehensive source of descriptions of biblical musical instruments and how the Hebrew terms are translated in numerous versions and languages. Indeed, this book will be valuable in supporting a vast spectrum of research interests and levels.

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