

## On Luke xv. 25, *συμφωνία*: Bagpipe.

PHILLIPS BARRY, A.M.

33 BALL STREET, BOSTON, MASS.

**I**N the following pages, I propose to show, that, of the successive English translations of the New Testament, one only, that of Wyclif in the fourteenth century, has given an exact translation of the word *συμφωνία*, in this passage of the third Gospel. My evidence will be partly historical, partly philological.

Let us first place, side by side, the various renderings as they stand :

1) Wyclif, <sup>1</sup>	a symphony and a croude.
2) Tyndale,	minstrelsy and dancing.
3) AV. and RV.,	music and dancing.

According to the Standard Dictionary, and other authorities, "symphonie" is the archaic English word for some musical instrument, either dulcimer or bagpipe. And this word has a most extraordinary history. Originally Greek, it has, by successive borrowings from the parent language, appeared in Aramaic, Syriac, Latin, all of the Romance languages, Hungarian, and English. Finally, by its appearance in modern Greek as a loan-word from the Italian, it presents an instance of word-migration almost unparalleled in the whole field of philology. The following table will illustrate the course of its wanderings :

Greek, <i>συμφωνία</i> .	
1) Aramaic,	šūmpōnyāh.
2) Syriac,	šephūnyō.
3) Latin,	symphonia.
a) Provençal,	sinphonia.
b) Italian,	sampogna.
x) Modern Greek,	σαμπούνα. τσμπούρα. τσάμπνια.
c) Spanish,	zampoña.
d) Portuguese,	sanfona.
e) Old English,	symphonye.
f) Old French,	chiffonie.
4) Hungarian,	csimpolya.
a) Roumanian,	cimpōae.

<sup>1</sup> Wyclif translated from the Vulgate.

And the semasiology of the word offers features hardly less startling, if less unusual. Thus, it had, as its formation shows :

1) Original abstract sense, — denoting combination of the idea expressed by the word *φωνή* in its widest significance.

I. *Technical*, as well defined by Porphyrius, p. 265 : “Symphonia is a term used to express the fusion and blending into one sound, of two sounds differing in pitch. A necessary condition of it is, that the two sounds shall together form a sound different in quality from either of the two sounds which by their fusion create ‘symphonia.’”

In this sense it is used by all of the ancient writers on music and harmony, a sense corresponding to the modern idea of consonance.

II. *Metaphorical*, as often by Plato, in his philosophical disputations. It may be remarked, in passing, that no examples of its use prior to the time of Plato are found.

2) Derived concrete sense, — denoting some object, whose individuality is determined by the presence of a feature expressing the abstract idea — a musical instrument. And it is so used for no less than three such instruments, each representing a specific type, *e.g.* :

#### I. BAGPIPE, A WIND INSTRUMENT.

Greek, four times.	Romance Languages.
Aramaic, once.	Hungarian.
Syriac, once.	English, archaic.
Latin, many times.	Modern Greek.

#### II. HARP, A STRINGED INSTRUMENT.

Ruodlieb, 30.	O. H. G. gloss to Daniel 3 <sup>6</sup> .
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#### III. DRUM, AN INSTRUMENT OF PERCUSSION.

Isidorus, *Orig.* 22.

I shall now show that the use of *symphonia* as the name of a musical instrument was very widespread, if late, and from various sources adduce proofs to show that it is to be identified with our bagpipe. In this process, I shall proceed from the known to the unknown. The Romance and Hungarian words are all names of various forms of drone pipes, in use at the present day among the peasants over a large part of Europe. In its simplest form it is a pipe fastened to a bag of goatskin, having no drone, and often called in Italy by the name *cornamusa*. The French form, having a chanter and three drones, is also called *musette*, a name given it by the would-be bucolic squires and dames of the court of Louis XIV.

As may be seen by comparing the table given on page 180, all these words go back, through the Latin *symphonia*, to a Greek word *συμφωνία*, which occurs in four places :

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|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1) Polybius, xxvi. 10. | 3) LXX, Dan. 3 <sup>5</sup> . |
| 2) Polybius, xxxi. 4.  | 4) Luke 15 <sup>28</sup> .    |

Leaving the fourth instance for the moment out of account, it will be seen that the remaining three have to do with an incident in the life of the notorious Antiochus IV., surnamed Epiphanes, the prototype of Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel. The LXX uses *συμφωνία* as a translation of the Aramaic loan-word *šūmpōnyāh*, the origin of which is now agreed to be Greek, with the acceptance of the late date of the book of Daniel. The Latin Vulgate renders it also by *symphonia*, and in connection with this, it will be interesting to cite the following note of Forcellini :

*symphonia*, . . . apud Vulg., interpr. Dan. 3<sup>5</sup>.<sup>15</sup> (col. Lc. 15<sup>28</sup>) . . . coniunctim cum sambuca memoratur, videturque intelligi *tibia utricularis*, Italice *cornamusa*, in usu apud Asiaticos populos.

Hebrew tradition has always held to the interpretation of *šūmpōnyāh* in Dan. 3<sup>5</sup>, as a bagpipe, and this interpretation is now accepted by the editors of the Revised Version in so far as to be given a place in the margin of the text, recommended as a substitute for the obvious mistranslation of the A.V., *i.e.* "dulcimer."

The picture of the Apocalypticist being admitted to be drawn from the scenes at the court of the hated Antiochus, prefigured by Nebuchadnezzar, as the ideal Jew of the writer's own day is prefigured by Daniel, it follows that in the two passages of Polybius, the word *συμφωνία* must have the same significance as in the LXX, and *šūmpōnyāh* in the Aramaic, — that is, the name of a musical instrument, the bagpipe. It has, however, been suggested that it might mean either "a chorus of singers," or "a band," in the modern sense. But it is easy to show that neither of these interpretations can be the correct one. For our knowledge of what music at the court of Antiochus was, we must depend on what we know of Greek music in general, for, with all his faults, the tyrant was at least intensely Greek.

Now, in their choruses, the Greeks had only one of the various forms of part-song, the antiphony, in which the voices are separated by the interval of an octave ; to part-song in the modern sense, they never came nearer than the horrors of consecutive fourths and fifths,

an experiment given up at once, to be made not again for nigh a thousand years. It is true that in the time of St. Jerome (420 A.D.) the word *symphonia* is used by the Latin writers for the antiphony, a sense that perhaps may be traced back to 350 A.D., but we should remember that Polybius wrote five centuries earlier, at a time when there is no proof that the word was used in this sense.

As for the suggestion that some form of instrumental polyphony is meant, little may be said here in reply. We have no evidence that the Greeks ever had anything like the modern band, and if the writer had had anything of the sort in mind, he would not have used *συμφωνία* and *κερατίου* together, as he does in the first passage. So that as far as Polybius and the LXX are concerned, we may say that *συμφωνία* is the name of a musical instrument, and further, that *συμφωνία* must have had this sense in Greek for some time, as it appears already in 165 B.C. as an Aramaic loan-word.

The text of the three passages is as follows :

1) Dan. 3<sup>d</sup> :

*ὅταν ἀκούσῃτε τῆς φωνῆς τῆς σάλπιγγος, σύριγγος, καὶ κιθάρας, σαμβύκης καὶ ψαλτηρίου, συμφωνίας, καὶ παντὸς γένους μουσικῶν, πεσόντες προσκυνήσατε τῆι εἰκόνι τῆι χρυσεῖ . . .*

2) Polybius, xxvi. 10 :

*ὅτε δὲ τῶν νεωτέρων ἀσθειὸν τινὰς συνευχουμένους, οὐδεμίαν ἔμφασιν ποιήσας, παρῆν ἐπικωμῶζων μετὰ κερατίου καὶ συμφωνίας.*

3) Polybius, xxxi. 4 :

*καὶ τῆς συμφωνίας προκαλουμένης, ὁ βασιλεὺς ἀναπηδήσας ὤρχεϊτο καὶ προσέπαιζε τοῖς μέμοις.<sup>2</sup>*

So much for the LXX and Polybius. I now come to the fourth passage in which *συμφωνία* is used in Greek, as I shall show, in the sense of a bagpipe. It is the well-known passage of the third Gospel, in the parable of the Prodigal Son :

<sup>2</sup> These three passages may be thus translated :

Dan. 3<sup>d</sup> : "That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, bagpipe, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image."

Polybius, xxvi. 10 : "When Antiochus was aware that some of the young men were having a good time, he used to come on a sudden, with music of horn and bagpipe, to join in the revels."

Polybius, xxxi. 4 : "And when the bagpipe began to play, the king sprang to his feet and danced, making sport with the buffoons."

Luke 15<sup>23</sup>:

ἦν δὲ ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ ὁ πρεσβύτερος ἐν ἀγρῶι, καὶ ὡς ἐρχόμενος ἤγγισε τῆι οἰκίαι, ἤκουσε συμφωνίας καὶ χορῶν, κ.τ.λ.

The Latin Vulgate has the following rendering :

Erat autem filius eius senior in agro, et cum veniret et appropinquaret domui, audivit symphoniam et chorum.<sup>3</sup>

Important in connection with this passage is the comment of St. Jerome, showing that its interpretation was already in his time a subject for difference of opinion :

St. Jerome, *Ep.* xxi. 29 :

Male quidem de Latinis symphoniam putant esse genus organi, cum concōrs in Dei laudibus concentus hoc vocabulo significetur.

"Some of the Latin commentators have the opinion, a wrong one, that symphonia is the name of a musical instrument, in spite of the fact that the harmonies of divine worship are called by this name."

That is, in spite of a prevailing belief to the contrary, even among the Latin commentators, St. Jerome prefers to take *symphonia* as applied to the antiphony. And he is cited as authority for this interpretation at the present day, when one ought to consider the fact, that whatever his authority be on matters theological, his opinion on matters musical and archaeological is an opinion and no more.

An examination of the two translations of the Gospel made before 400 A.D. brings out the fact that the dispute is older than St. Jerome. Thus, in the Gothic version of Ulfilas, the phrase "saggwins jah laikins," that is, "singing and dancing," is found as the rendering of *συμφωνίας καὶ χορῶν*, showing that he understood *συμφωνία* in the same sense as St. Jerome. On the other hand, the early Syriac versions, of which the oldest, the Sinaitic palimpsest, may be the oldest of all existing translations of the Gospel, offer evidence that may be used in support of my interpretation, namely, that *συμφωνία* is the name of an instrument.

Sinaitic : "He heard the sound of singing and *sephānyō*."

Peshitto : "He heard the sound of the singing of many."

Philoxenian : "He heard the concord of sound of singing and dancing."

<sup>3</sup> Literally rendered by Wyclif :

"He heard a symphony and a croude,"

carrying on the tradition, as I shall endeavor to show.

Observe, that in the Sinaitic, unaffected by the modernizing conjectures of the later versions, the word συμφωνία is rendered by a loan-word, showing that it must have been regarded as the name of an instrument.

The question now resolves itself into the following: Given two interpretations, both of them defended by early commentators, how is it to be determined which is right? I think the decision must be left to contemporary evidence, if such be attainable. And this is found in plenty in the works of the Latin writers, some of them living in the time of the author of the third Gospel. Such evidence consists of a large number of instances in which *symphonia*, as a loan-word from the Greek, is used in a connection such that intelligible translation is impossible, unless it is supposed to be the name of a musical instrument.

These instances may be divided into three classes:

- 1) Two instruments are contrasted, the *symphonia* and one already well known.
- 2) Where from the context it may be seen that some sort of musical instrument is meant.
- 3) Passages not referable to either of these classes, including one supported by extraneous testimony.

#### CLASS I.

- 1) Seneca, *Ep.* li. 12:

Quidni malit quisquis vir est, somnum suum classico quam symphonia rumpi?

"Why does not a man prefer that his sleep should be broken by the sound of the war trumpet than that of the bagpipe?"

- 2) Celsus, *De Med.* iii. 10:

Discutiendae tristes cogitationes, ad quod symphoniae et cymbala strepitusque proficiunt.

"Melancholy thoughts must be dispelled, for which purpose bagpipes, cymbals, and noise are excellent."

- 3) Pliny, *N. H.* ix. 8:

Delphinum non homini tantum amicum animal, verum et musicae arte mulcetur, symphoniae cantu et praecipue hydraulici sono.

"Not only is the dolphin an animal disposed to be friendly to man, but it may be tamed by practice of music, especially by the chanting of the bagpipe and the sound of the water-organ."

4) Prudentius, *Symm.* ii. 527 :

Signum symphonia belli  
Aegyptis dederat, clangebat buccina contra.

"To the Egyptians, the bagpipe gave the signal, while on the enemy's side rang forth the note of the curved horn."

## CLASS II.

1) Cicero, *Cael.* 35.

Accusatores quidem, — comissiones, cantus, symphonias iactant.

"The plaintiffs charge 'Revellings, songs, bagpipes.'"

2) Cicero, *Pro Gellio*, fragm. ix. Baiter :

Fit clamor, fit convitium mulierum, fit symphoniae cantus.

"Anon is heard the shouts of men, the screams of women, the chanting of the bagpipe."

3) Cicero, *Verr.* iii. 105.

Cum in conviviis eius symphonia caneret, maximisque poculis ministraretur.

"When at his revels the bagpipe chanted, and the biggest cups were passed round."

4) Cicero, *Verr.* v. 31 :

Non offendebantur homines, locum illum litoris percrepare totum muliebribus vocibus, cantuque symphoniae.

"People took no offence, though the whole place along the shore was echoing with the cries of women and the chant of the bagpipe."

5) Cicero, *Verr.* v. 92 :

Curritur ad praetorium, quo istum ex illo praeclaro convivio reduxerant paulo ante mulieres, cum cantu atque symphonia.

"The crowd makes for headquarters, whither the prisoner had been escorted a short time before from that splendid banquet of his, by a crowd of women, with song and bagpipe."

6) Petronius, *Cena. Trim.* 34 :

Cum subito signum symphonia datur, et gustatoria pariter a choro cantante rapitur.

"When suddenly the signal was given on the bagpipe, the singing chorus likewise made a rush for the dainties."

7) Seneca, *Dial.* iii. 9 :

Feliciorem ergo tu Maecenatem putas, cui amoribus anxio, et morosae uxoris cotidiana repudia deflenti somnus per symphoniarum cantum ex longinquo lene resonantem quaeritur?

"I suppose you think Mæcenas was a happier man, because, while worrying over his intrigues, and lamenting the daily spurnings of a surly wife, he had to seek rest while listening to the chant of bagpipes, sounding gently from far away."

8) Seneca, *Ep.* xii. 8 :

Pacuvius, qui Syriam usu suam fecit, sic in cubiculum ferebatur a cena, ut inter plausus exoletorum ad symphoniam caneret *Βεβλωτα. Βεβλωτα.*

"Pacuvius, who adopted the Syrian habits, used to have himself carried from the revel to his bedroom, that he might sing, amid the applause of debauchees,

'His life is nearly done,'

to the tune of a bagpipe."

9) Seneca, *Ep.* li. 4 :

Videre ebrios per litora errantes et comissiones navigantium et symphoniarum cantibus strepentes lacus et alia quae velut soluta legibus luxuria non tantum peccat, sed publicat quid necesse est.

"Behold drunkards wandering along the shores, revels of sailors, lakes echoing to the chant of bagpipes, and other enormities, not only perpetrated, but even proclaimed as necessary by that loose living which imagines itself without the law."

10) Seneca, *Ep.* cxxiii. 8 :

Quem ad modum qui audierunt symphoniam ferunt secum in auribus modulationem illum ac dulcedinem cantuum, quae cogitationes impedit, nec ad seria patitur intendi, — sic adulatorum et prava laudantium sermo diutius haeret quam auditur.

"Just as those who listen to the bagpipe carry away with them in their ears that melody and sweet chanting, which impedes mental action, and will not admit serious thoughts, so the talk of flatterers and evil counsellors remains with one longer than the moment of hearing."

11) Fortunatus, *Vita Mart.* iv. 48 :

Donec plena suo cecinit symphonia flatu.

"Until the bagpipe in full blast has chanted,"

12) Suetonius, *Caligula* :

.. discumbens de die inter choros ac symphonias litora Campaniae peragret.

"Sprawling on his litter, in broad daylight, he used to travel over the shores of Campania, amid dancers and bagpipes."

## CLASS III.

1) Horace, *A. P.* 374 :

Ut gratas inter mensas symphonia discors,  
et crassum unguentum et Sardo cum melle papaver  
offendunt, poterat ducl quia cena sine istis.



"Just as at a delightful banquet we are offended by the discordant bagpipe, coarse perfume, and opium mixed with Sardinian honey, for the reason that a banquet may be enjoyed without them."

2) Pliny, *N. H.* viii. 64 :

Docilitas tanta est, ut universus Sybaritani exercitus equitatus ad symphoniae cantum saltatione quadam moveri solitus inveniatur.

"So great is their docility, that we find that it was a custom for the entire cavalry division of the Sybarite army to move to a kind of dance accompanied by the chanting of the bagpipe."

Athenaeus, the learned antiquarian of the second century A.D., tells the same story on the authority of Aristotle :

Ath. *Deipn.* p. 439 :

εἰς τηλικούτον δ' ἦσαν τρυφῆς ἑλληκότες ὡς καὶ πρὸς τὰς εὐωχίας τοὺς ἵππους ἐθίσαι πρὸς αὐτὸν ὠρχεῖσθαι, τὸτ' οὖν εἰδότες οἱ Κροτωνιάται θεε αὐτοῖς ἐπολέμουν, ὡς καὶ Ἀριστοτέλης Ἱστορεῖ διὰ τῆς πολιτείας αὐτῶν, ἐρέδοσαν τοῖς ἵπποις τὸ ὀρχηστικὸν μέλος. συμπάρησαν γὰρ αὐτοῖς καὶ αὐληταὶ ἐν στρατιωτικῇ σκευῇ, καὶ ἅμα ἀλούντων ἀκούοντες οἱ ἵπποι, οὐ μόνον ἐξωρχήσαντο, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἀναβάτας ἔχοντες ἤτομόλησαν πρὸς τοὺς Κροτωνιάτας.

"To so great a degree of luxury had they come, that for their amusement horses were trained to dance to the flute (bagpipe). Knowing this, the Crotonians, when they were at war with the Sybarites, as Aristotle tells in the *History of the Sybarite State*, struck up a dance tune for the horses, for they had pipes in soldiers' uniform with them. And the instant the horses heard the sound of the pipers, they not only danced, but with the riders on their backs were stampeded, and ran off to the Crotonian side."

Since both accounts evidently come from a common source, and since Pliny has *symphonia*, while Athenaeus has αὐλός, it is probable that the original passage in Aristotle had *συμφωνία*, for Aristotle was himself a musician as well as an antiquarian.

So much for the Latin writers, the testimony of whom is all to show that in the first century A.D. a musical instrument was well known by the name *symphonia*. And this instrument can be no other than the bagpipe, still called by the same name in all of the Romance languages derived from the Latin. An exact statement of the manner in which it is played upon is also preserved for us by a contemporary of Pliny :

Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 71, p. 381 :

φασὶ δὲ καὶ γράφειν καὶ πλάττειν ἱκανὸν εἶναι, καὶ αὐλεῖν τῷ τε στόματι καὶ ταῖς μασχαλαῖς ἕσπον ὑποβάλλοντα.

"They say that he was a clever painter and sculptor, and knew how to play on the flute with his lips and the bag under his arms."

Lastly, I venture to present a few bits of evidence, confirming the testimony of the Latin authors, gathered from the writings of the commentators and glossaries, as follows :

1) Scholia Bern. to Vergil, *Georg.* ii. 193 :

Apud Tuscos a Tyrrheno symphoniae et tibiae usus inventus est, et sacris primum additus est.

"Among the Etruscans the use of the bagpipe and flute was the invention of Tyrrhenus, and by him first adopted in religious ceremonies."

2) Serv. on Vergil, *Aen.* i. 67 :

Tyrrhenus et Lydus . . . excogitaverunt tibiae modulationem et concentum symphoniae tubarumque.

"Tyrrhenus and Lydus composed melodies for the flute and duets for bagpipe and trumpet."

3) Glosses :

*C. G. L.* iv. 184. 19, 292. 3, 574. 25 :

tibia : symphonia;

*C. G. L.* :

symphonicus : ἀδλητή.

In summing up my results, the evidence in favor of the two interpretations of Lk. 15<sup>25</sup> is found to be the following :

1) *Συμφωνία* : *bagpipe*.

I. *συμφωνία*, in Greek, perhaps as early as the time of Aristotle, comes to be the name of a musical instrument. In 164 B.C. it appears in the Aramaic of Dan. 3<sup>5</sup> as a loan-word, interpreted "bagpipe" by Hebrew tradition and by most biblical commentators of the present day. In Greek it is found three times, one of the instances being in the LXX of Dan. 3<sup>5</sup>, and in the other two it is used in such a connection that it must be the name of an instrument.

II. *Symphonia*, as a Latin loan-word from the Greek, is found in many passages in the works of writers of the first century B.C. and A.D. It is also used to render *συμφωνία* in the Vulgate of Dan. 3<sup>5</sup> and Lk. 15<sup>25</sup>. That the bagpipe is the instrument referred to follows from the fact that *symphonia*, as the name of the bagpipe, has passed into all of the Romance languages.

III. In the second century A.D. this interpretation must have prevailed in the Eastern churches, as it appears in the Syriac of the Sinaitic palimpsest, which has the Syriac loan-word *ḥephānyō* as a rendering for the Greek *συμφωνία*.

IV. As late as the fifth century, it prevailed largely in the Latin church, and was rejected only on the influence of St. Jerome.

2) Συμφωνία : *music, i.e. singing.*

I. St. Jerome, in the epistle cited above, declares for this interpretation. But because *symphonia* was used by the Latin writers of his time for vocal music, it does not follow that it was so used in the time of the author of the third Gospel.

II. This interpretation cannot be traced back farther than the time of Ulfilas (d. 381) who holds to it in his Gothic translation of the Scriptures. Though Ulfilas made his translation mostly from the Greek, it cannot be shown that *συμφωνία* ever had this sense in Greek, and this may well be one of the places in which he did not understand the Greek and had recourse to the Latin interpreters.

On the basis of the foregoing evidence, I think we have sufficient ground for restoring the rendering of Wyclif, made from the Vulgate, in accordance with a tradition that the word *συμφωνία* is the name of a musical instrument, replacing, however, the archaic *symphony* by the modern word *bagpipe*, and read :

“Now his elder son was in the field, and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard bagpipe and dancing.”