Report on the November 11-13 EMAP Conference

Jeremy Sexton

On November 11-13, 2015, several members of the HBS attended a conference of the Ancient Brass Project, a branch of the European Music Archaeology Project (EMAP). The conference was held at the Università degli Studi della Tuscia in Viterbo, Italy. This historic event represented the culmination of years of research done by ancient brass scholars, who assembled to discuss work on a wide range of instruments, including the Celtic *carnyx*, the Greek *salpinx*, the Roman and Etruscan *lituus*, *cornu*, and *tuba*, the Scandinavian *lur*, a pair of Irish hunting horns, the Loughnashade trumpet (also from Ireland), and Celtiberian clay trumpets. The event was the first collaboration between EMAP and the HBS, whose members were warmly received by the university and by conference manager Stefano De Angeli.

In the first session on the morning of November 11, Cristophe Maniquet, Joël Gilbert, Jean Boisserie, and Paolo Piccardo presented their work on a set of seven *carnyces* found at Tintignac in France. The presentation included discussions of acoustical measurements done on these instruments and of the reproduction of one of them by Boisserie. Craftsman John Creed explained the methods he used to create a reproduction of the Loughnashade trumpet, a large and impressive instrument that can be played in two possible configurations: with the bell facing behind the player in a horn-like curve, or with the bell facing away from the player to form a S-shape. (A small debate followed this presentation concerning the “correct” configuration for the instrument, or whether both might have been used in different contexts.)

Peter Holmes kicked off the second day of the conference with a presentation on the reproductions of Greek, Etruscan, and Roman instruments that had been brought to the conference and outlined some of the decisions that had been made in the reconstruction process. For example, the lengths of some of the tubes had been modified so that the instruments could be played in tune together (by our modern standards of intonation). Murray Campbell discussed implications of the acoustic properties of ancient Roman and Etruscan instruments for these instruments’ capacity to play in tune. In particular, he focused on the *lituus*, which has a mostly cylindrical bore, and the *cornu*, which has a conical bore, concluding that it should be possible for these instruments to play in tune together provided that the lowest partials are not used. In the following session, Marina Micozzi and Chiara Bernardini explored the appearance of brass instruments in both Roman and Etruscan iconography, hypothesizing the use of these instruments as a symbol of political authority and of power in general. Giovanna Bagnasco Gianni supported this conclusion through her discussion of a *lituus* found at the Etruscan settlement of Tarquinia. The discovery of this ritually bent *lituus* in a sacred space supports the notion of this instrument as a symbol of both religious and institutional power. The next paper session presented the work of Claudia Pelosi and Giorgia Agresti, who had performed an analysis of several *litui* and *cornua*, using x-ray fluorescence techniques to determine the composition of the instruments’ metal at several points along their length. There followed a roundtable discussion about the Ancient Brass Project, the reconstructions of instruments, and the caution required when working on a topic for which the evidence is so scarce. That evening, there was an experimental playing session in which a number of performers tested out several of the reproductions. The performers demonstrated instruments that conference attendees had expressed an interest in hearing, and the performances were used to spark debate and discussion among the attendees. Particularly engaging was the discussion of the manner of playing the *carnyx*: was it held vertically as depicted on the Gundestrup cauldron, or was it typically played in a position more comfortable and less potentially damaging to the player’s lips? It was suggested that the instrument may have been played different ways in different contexts. It was also suggested that other *types* of *carnyces*, unknown to us because they have not survived, existed for different contexts and (probably) different playing techniques.

The role of the Historic Brass Society session on the last day of the conference was to explore links between the study of the ancient European brass instruments covered by EMAP and the study of more modern instruments. The HBS session began with the presentation of the Monk Award to trombonist Wim Becu for his outstanding work as a performer on historic instruments and in historic styles. Keith Polk delivered a presentation on the representation (and misrepresentation) of ancient European brass in Renaissance art. Annemies Tamboer presented on the medieval ban-horn, an instrument often mistaken for a Roman *lituus* (as a simple Google Image search for “*lituus*”will reveal). Jeremy Montagu discussed (and played) the shofar, an instrument still used in Jewish synagogues today, making it the oldest type of “brass” instrument still in use. Montagu also discussed his recently-published book on this instrument. Trumpeter Gabriele Cassone demonstrated many of the reproductions of ancient instruments. Acoustical measurements were taken as he played each instrument as loudly as possible, as softly as possible, and over as many partials as possible.

The day after the conference officially ended, a concert featuring many of the instruments discussed and played at the conference was held in the auditorium of the Università degli Studi della Tuscia. The first selection on the program was especially memorable. The lights dimmed and performers entered from the rear of the room and circled the audience, breathing and clicking through conch-shell trumpets before playing in the conventional manner. Towards the end of this selection, one performer cued a recording of waves at the seashore, and the resemblance between this sound and the sound of the eight or so performers breathing into their instruments was striking. Other especially memorable components of the performance were John Kenny’s playing of the reproductions of the Loughnashade trumpet and the Tintignac *carnyx*. Kenny employed such techniques as clicking, singing and shouting into the instruments to produce a wide variety of strange and interesting timbres. The use of such techniques in this performance probably stems from the considerations discussed during the conference: that because we know very little about the music and performance practices associated with these ancient instruments, the performer’s goal should be to explore a variety of different sounds and procedures. This principle is essentially modern, reflecting the tendency of contemporary composers to seek new sounds and new means of sound-making. To my fascination, the concert that resulted was strikingly modern in sound and in “feel,” despite the antiquity of the instruments used.

This conference and concert were truly a monumental event, a major step forward in our understanding of ancient music and ancient instruments. Let us hope that this event sparks the continuation and growth of the international effort to learn about and reproduce these ancient brass instruments.