

Organology and Iconography of Ancient Egypt and the Renaissance

HENRY G. FISCHER

Wallace Research Curator in Egyptology, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

HAVING COME UNDER well-merited criticism, some years ago, for subjecting readers of the *Journal* to the “introductory trumpet blasts” of my incessant Egyptological contributions, I feel some misgivings in embarking on a subject that is not only Egyptological but literally concerns trumpets. But since it also makes a comparison with Renaissance iconography, I hope that it may nonetheless serve as an appropriate tribute to Helmut Nickel, whose range of knowledge is probably more diverse than that of any curator in the history of our institution. My trumpet blast will be brief—despite its lengthy title—but it is a heartfelt salute.

Although I have written elsewhere about the Egyptian trumpet,¹ it did not occur to me, at that time, how very faithfully its form is displayed in the two-dimensional representations that constitute the bulk of our evidence. Nor did I fully perceive the inferences that might be drawn from that fidelity. The earlier examples, dating from the reign of Queen Hatshepsut down to the Amarna Period, show a funnel-shaped bell. This is most clearly pictured in the tombs of Tjanuny² and Nebamun, both dating to the reign of Tuthmosis IV (Figures 1, 2). A relief depicting dancing girls from the Amarna Period shows that the same type of instrument was still in use at that time (Figure 3).³

A funnel-shaped bell is also exemplified by the bronze trumpet of Tutankhamun (Figure 4)—one of the only two instruments of its kind that have survived from pharaonic Egypt. In contrast to this, the other trumpet, which is made of silver, has a bell that is slightly but unmistakably flared (Figure 5). To show the contrast more clearly, I have made a pair of

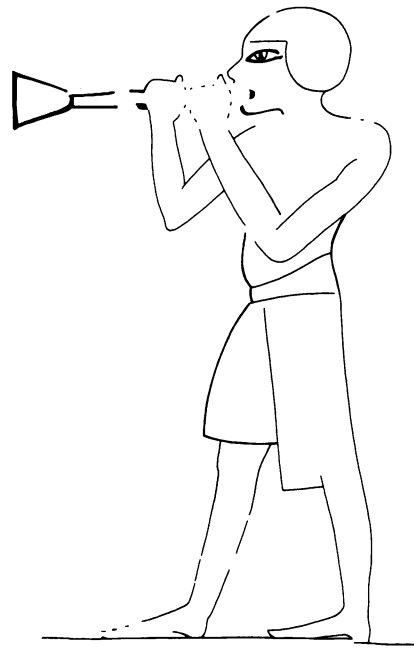
drawings that straighten the shanks, both of which were bent to some extent by the warping of the wooden cores placed within them (Figure 6).⁴

The dating of these trumpets deserves closer attention. The one made of silver is redecorated with a scene showing Tutankhamun in the presence of the principal gods; but it already bore his name as part of the original decoration, and may therefore be attributed with certainty to his brief reign. The bronze trumpet bears a similar scene, which, although more carefully executed, was undoubtedly added at the same time as its counterpart, in preparation for the burial. This bronze trumpet had not been inscribed previously, however, and its date of manufacture is therefore less secure. The difference in form between the two instruments strongly suggests that the bronze trumpet is of somewhat greater antiquity, dating to the reign of Akhenaten, while the silver trumpet embodies a new design. But, like the bronze one, the silver trumpet has a bell made separately from the tube; it is perhaps to be regarded, therefore, as transitional.

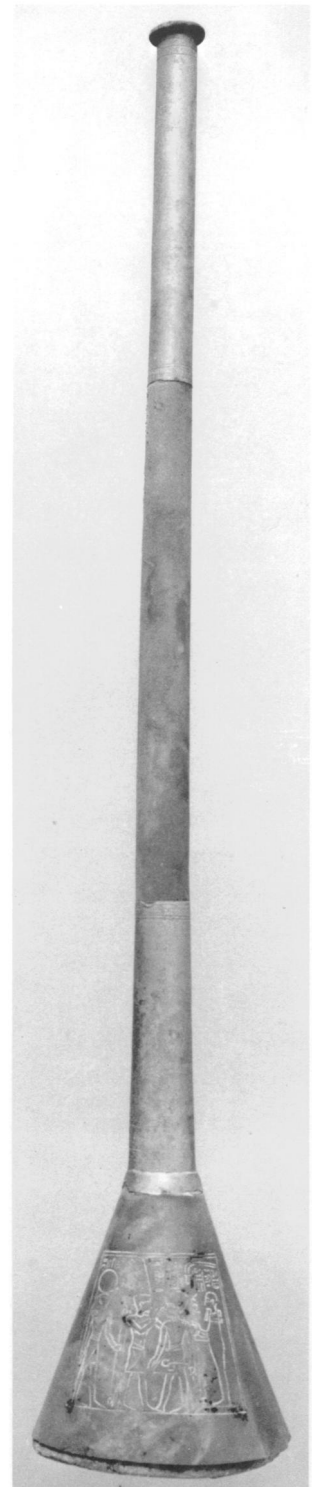
From the time of Tutankhamun onward trumpets were consistently represented with this new form of bell, gradually flared, and there is no further evidence of a separation between bell and shaft.⁵ A particular nicety of observation appears in those cases where the trumpeter is shown blowing his instrument while holding, beneath one arm, the wooden core that was slipped inside it for reinforcement when the trumpet was not in use (Figure 7); it may be noted that the core is slightly smaller than the trumpet itself. Thus, while one must always make due allowance for the conventions and limitations of

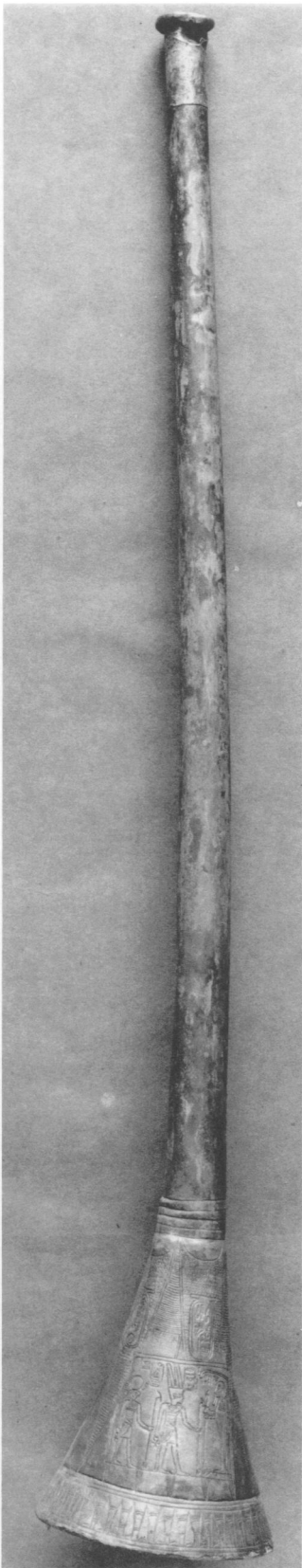


1. Trumpeters, painting from the tomb of Tjanuny, time of Tuthmosis IV, Theban Tomb 74 (photo by Egyptian Expedition, The Metropolitan Museum of Art)
3. Dancers and Musician, relief from Hermopolis, Amarna period. Limestone. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Norbert Schimmel, 1985, 1985.328.11

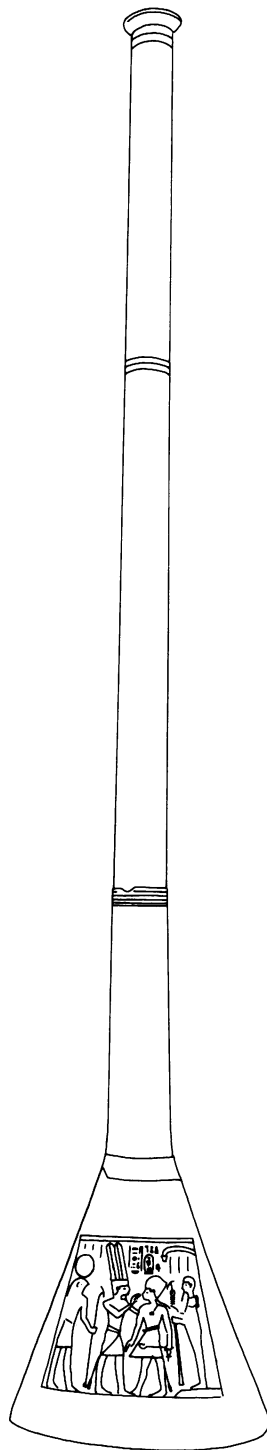


2. Trumpeter, after painting from the tomb of Nebamun, time of Tuthmosis IV–Amenophis III, Theban Tomb 90 (redrawn from Norman Davies, *The Tombs of Two Officials of Tuthmosis the Fourth* [London, 1923] pl. 27)
4. Bronze trumpet from the tomb of Tutankhamun. Cairo Museum (photo: Harry Burton)

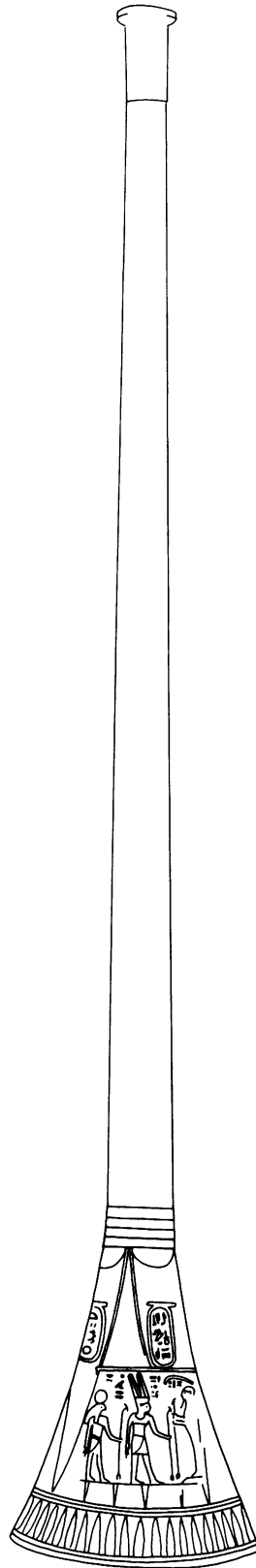




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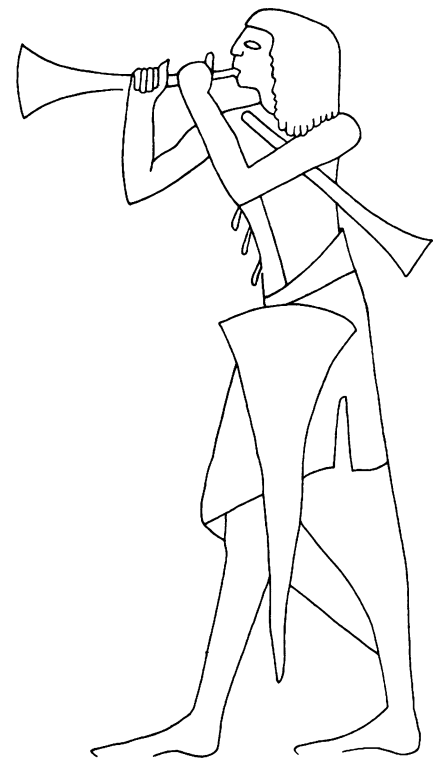


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5. Silver trumpet from the tomb of Tutankhamun. Cairo Museum (photo: Harry Burton)
6. Schematic drawings of Figures 4 and 5, with shaft straightened
7. Trumpeter, after a relief in the temple of Abu Simbel, reign of Rameses II (redrawn from C. Desroches-Noblecourt et al., *Le grand temple d'Abou Simbel: La Bataille de Qadesh* [Cairo, 1971] pl. 4)



8. Heinrich Aldegrever (1502–ca.1558), *Music for a Wedding Dance. The Great Dance*, 1538 (from Tom L. Naylor, *The Trumpet and Trombone in Graphic Arts 1500–1800* [Nashville, 1979] p. 22)

two-dimensional Egyptian art, the iconography of that culture is, where trumpets are concerned, surprisingly reliable and accurate.

The same cannot be said, however, for the iconographic evidence concerning brass instruments of the European Renaissance. From one and the same period—early in the sixteenth century—we have quite different representations of trombones. Some, as for instance the well-known engraving by Heinrich Aldegrever dated 1538 (Figure 8), show a very narrow, conical bell. Others, notably the woodcut by Hans Burgkmair entitled *The Triumph of Maximilian I*, show a bell that is wider at the end and much more flared (Figure 9). A glance at the adjacent krummhorns, which display even more improbably flared bells, is sufficient to confirm the suspicion that this feature is a stylistic embellishment—one in keeping with the ornate convolutions that permeate the entire scene.⁶ The artist has also strayed from reality by



9. Hans Burgkmair (1473–1531), *The Triumph of Maximilian I*. Woodcut. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1932, 32.37 (1–20)





10. *Angel with Trombone*, decorated panel on organ balcony, 1508. St.-Pierre de Gonesse (photo: Michel Foussard)

making the slide of the trombone much too short. An improbably wide and everted bell likewise appears on the trombone in a panel decoration on the organ at Gonesse, dated 1508 (Figure 10); adjacent panels show the same peculiarity in the representation of both the krummhorn and the trumpet.⁷ The recurrence of an exaggeratedly flaring bell in depictions of all these instruments suggests, once again, that it is a purely stylistic feature.

For one seeking knowledge about the history of the instrument, such stylistic liberties are unfortunate. The oldest trombones that have been preserved belong to the second half of the century, about a hundred years after the instrument had come into use.⁸ The two earliest examples—both fragmentary⁹—have straighter, more conical bells than their successors, confirming our reservations about Burgkmair's accuracy. One of these, dated 1557, was in fact made by Jörg Neuschel of Nuremberg, the adoptive son of the trombonist portrayed by Burgkmair. I therefore feel compelled to conclude that iconography cannot, except in the most general way, provide us with a picture of Renaissance trombones of earlier date than the surviving examples. Nor can we even be quite sure that the Aldegrevier

11. Jost Amman (1539–91), *Musicians*, late 16th century. Engraving. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, The Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1949, 49.95.138



engraving (Figure 8) proves that trombones were reversed in order to be played left-handed, although that seems likely enough in view of the fact that Renaissance woodwinds made provision for both right- and left-handed players.¹⁰ But what is one to make of a later sixteenth-century engraving by Jost Amman (Figure 11), which shows the trombone similarly reversed with the bell section over the right shoulder, yet played by a man who is clearly right-handed? This impossibility conjures up visions of Laocoön attempting to play the serpent. It is a hopeless struggle.

Despite its sophisticated standards, Renaissance draftsmanship entails a measure of artistic license and stylistic individuality, qualities of which the an-

cient Egyptians were relatively innocent. Their keenness of observation, combined with an adherence to tradition, did not admit to such vagaries, although it must be conceded that the adherence to tradition often prevented their art from keeping abreast of current reality. In the representation of trumpets this did not occur, apparently because a change in the instrument's design coincided with a point of time—the Amarna Period—in which artistic tradition was sufficiently interrupted as to permit the delineation of new forms. Thanks to this circumstance we can follow a transformation in the shape of trumpet bells that is paralleled, to a lesser extent, in the bells of brass instruments of the Renaissance from about 1560 to 1580.

NOTES

1. "The Trumpet in Ancient Egypt," in *Pyramid Studies and Other Essays Presented to I. E. S. Edwards*, John Baines et al., eds. (Oxford, 1988) pp. 103–109.

2. Cf. Annelies and Artur Brack, *Das Grab des Tjanuni* (Mainz, 1977) pl. 9.

3. In the aforementioned article I suggested that this relief may display a touch of humor, since at that time the trumpet was used for military signals and would not have been used to accompany a group of female dancers.

4. Cf. Lise Manniche, *Musical Instruments from the Tomb of Tut'ankhamun* (Oxford, 1976), who advances this idea more tentatively. The correctness of the theory is proved by the fact that, in the bronze trumpet, the incised bands that circle the shank at its base where it joins the bell are compressed on one side.

5. A regression to the earlier form is to be found on a panel from a coffin of the Roman period in the Berlin Museum: see Hermann Ranke, *The Art of Ancient Egypt* (Vienna, 1936) pl. 277.

6. There is a single piece of evidence for a krummhorn with an everted bell, a surviving example in the Kunsthistorisches Museum at Vienna, dating to the 16th century; but the end curves sharply upward and this part is a separate addition to the body of the instrument. As Barra R. Boydell says, it thus "differs radically from all other types" (*The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments* [London, 1984] I, p. 520).

7. See Daniel Bontemps, *L'Église Saint-Pierre Saint-Paul de Gonesse (Val d'Oise)* (Gonesse, 1981), remarks by Michel Foussard, p. 39. The slide trumpets of Memling's panel of angels at Antwerp show an even more everted bell, as Robert Barclay has

reminded me; Mr. Barclay also points out that, in the case of the trumpeter with the slide exposed, the tubing is hopelessly out of alignment on either side of the extended hand. Following a telephone conversation on this subject, he has written: "I find it unlikely that the bell flare would *devolve* from a sharp flare in the previous century to the funnel-like bells of Neuschel, Steiger, etc., and then evolve again to a sharper flare." He accordingly concludes that Memling too took stylistic liberties despite the apparently meticulous detail of his rendering of the instrument.

8. For this estimate, see Anthony Baines, *Brass Instruments: Their History and Development* (London, 1976) pp. 107–108.

9. These are: the Erasmus Schnitzer tenor dated 1551, which has a trumpet bell, with the other elements subsequently added (Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg MI 170); and a tenor made by Jörg Neuschel and dated 1557, a cut-down bass of which only the end of the bell can be regarded with certainty as original (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna). Both will be discussed in the forthcoming revision of my booklet *The Renaissance Sackbut and Its Use Today*.

10. The bottom hole was reduplicated side by side, the unused one to be sealed with wax. On instruments where the bottom hole was closed by means of a key, the key had a double prong, extending both rightward and leftward. This arrangement may not have been expressly intended for left-handed players, however, since Tinctoris says the double hole was meant to accommodate two styles of playing, some players preferring to place the right hand above the left: see Anthony Baines's translation in the *Galpin Society Journal* 3 (1950) p. 20.