



Dissonant Testimony: The Transformation of Music in the Greek Versions of Daniel 3¹

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INTRODUCTION

The Greek versions of Daniel 3 (Old Greek [OG] and Theodotion [TH]) contain additional poetic and narrative material. The most well-known of these are the Prayer of Azariah (vv. 26–45) and the Song of the Three Youths (vv. 52–90).²

¹ I am deeply honored to dedicate this article to my colleague, mentor, and friend, Dr. Mark Throntveit. In the summer of 2016, Mark and I met together weekly to study and review the Greek materials related to Daniel 3. Our study of this fascinating material remains the basis for my ongoing interest in the text.

² There is widespread agreement that these represent secondary insertions into an originally shorter story. The question of whether the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Youths were originally composed in a Semitic language or in Greek has not been fully resolved. While most scholars assume a Semitic original, Jan Joosten has recently and convincingly called into question this loose consensus, proposing instead that the prayer may have been composed in Greek and that the redactor “may have conceived the passage from the start as a supplement to the story of the three men in the fiery furnace.” Jan Joosten, “The Prayer of Azariah (DanLXX 3),” in *Septuagint and Reception: Essays Prepared for the Association for the Study of the Septuagint in South Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 16.

When thinking about biblical texts, the literary and artistic motifs are often key to understanding them. These additions to the book of Daniel contain an important clue to their purpose, through the references to music and song, which are juxtaposed with the music in the court of King Nebuchadnezzar.

Scholars have long recognized that the inclusion of this material had a profound impact on the narrative in Daniel 3. For example, attention is often paid to the confessional nature of the Prayer of Azariah (see especially vv. 28–33, 37), and how it shifts the narrative’s emphasis away from the faithfulness of the three youths and toward national sin and judgment.³ The prayer transforms the moral fabric of the story, turning the king’s capricious and even comedic expressions of anger into intentional acts of divine judgment.⁴ The language of sacrifice is also notable. In the absence of a temple cult, the supplicant offers up “a broken life” and “a humbled spirit” and requests that they be accepted “as though it were with whole burnt offering of rams and bulls and with tens of thousands of fat lambs” (OG vv. 38–40).⁵

T. J. Meadowcroft’s work on the Aramaic and Greek texts of Daniel draws additional attention to literary and theological features that are impacted by the additions, including narrative flow, consistency, setting, the portrayal of time, perspective, etc.⁶ Meadowcroft’s work helpfully demonstrates that the Greek additions to Daniel 3 are not simply composition-historical puzzles to be solved. Rather, the expansive editorial activity in the Greek texts resulted in the creation of unique literary compositions, whose distinct artistic and theological elements are worthy of study.

The additional poetic and narrative material, however, dramatically increases the significance and role of music, adding layers of literary complexity and profoundly reshaping the story.

³ Authors often draw attention to the incongruity between the penitential tone of the Prayer of Azariah and the larger narrative in Daniel 3. See, e.g., Klaus Koch, *Deuterokanonische Zusätze zum Danielbuch: Entstehung und Textgeschichte*, 2 vols (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1987), 2:35; Carey Moore, *Daniel, Esther, Jeremiah: The Additions* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1977), 40–41; T. J. Meadowcroft, *Aramaic Daniel and Greek Daniel: A Literary Comparison*, JSOT 198 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 129; John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 198; John J. Collins, ed. Henrietta L. Wiley and Christian Eberhart, *Resources for Biblical Study* (Atlanta: SBL, 2017), 233–64. Unless otherwise noted, all Greek translation are from the New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS).

⁴ For a discussion of the comedic elements in Daniel 3, see Michael J. Chan, “*Ira Regis*: Comedic Inflections of Royal Rage in Jewish Court Tales,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 130:1 (2013): 1–25.

⁵ For the argument that the three Torah-observant Jewish youths function as cultic substitutions, see Jarvis J. Williams, “Cultic Action and Cultic Function in Second Temple Jewish Martyrologies: The Jewish Martyrs as Israel’s Yom Kippur,” in *Sacrifice, Cult, and Atonement in Early Judaism and Christianity: Constituents and Critique*, ed. Henrietta L. Wiley and Christian Eberhart, Resources for Biblical Study (Atlanta: SBL, 2017), 233–64. Unless otherwise noted, all Greek translation are from the New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS).

⁶ In his concluding comments, Meadowcroft notes: “The major difference between the two accounts of ch. 3 lies in the insertion of additional material between vv. 23 and 24. In narrative terms it shifts the centre of the story away from the moment of defiance described in vv. 16–18 MT and on to the contents of the Prayer of Azariah and Song of the Three.” Meadowcroft, *Aramaic Daniel and Greek Daniel*, 159.

The present article advances the important work of Meadowcroft and others by studying how the literary motif of music was developed and expanded in the Greek versions of Daniel 3. Even if one excludes the Greek additions, music plays a significant role in the narrative, primarily as the audible cue to fall before the golden image and do obeisance (see, e.g., Dan 3:4–5, 7, 10–11, 15). The additional poetic and narrative material, however, dramatically increases the significance and role of music, adding layers of literary complexity and profoundly reshaping the story.

MUSIC IN THE VERSES COMMON TO MT, OG, AND TH

Music plays a significant role in the Masoretic Text. After the relevant parties are assembled before the statue on the plain of Dura, a herald proclaims the following:

בעדנא די תשמעון קל קרנא משרוקיחא קיתרוס סבכא פסנחרין סומפניה וכל זני
זמרא חפלוך וחסגרון לצלם דהבא די הקים נבוכדנצר מלכא (Dan 3:5).

When you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, tambour, and the entire musical ensemble, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar erected.

The command is reiterated⁷ with variations in verses 10 and 15.⁸ The point is to depict a “command and obedience”⁹ structure, with the sound of music being the liturgical cue for Nebuchadnezzar’s subjects to demonstrate their unwavering obedience to him. Not surprisingly, the story’s primary conflict materializes around the breaking of this structure, when the three youths refuse to serve Nebuchadnezzar’s god or worship the golden statue (vv. 8–18).

The Greek versions of these verses largely accord with the MT:

ὄταν ἀκούσητε τῆς φωνῆς τῆς σάλπιγγος, σύριγγος, καὶ κιθάρας, σαμβύκης καὶ ψαλτηρίου, συμφωνίας¹⁰ καὶ παντὸς γένους μουσικῶν, πεσόντες προσκυνήσατε τῇ εἰκόνι τῆ ἡ χρυσοῦ ἣν ἔστησε Ναβουχοδονοσορ βασιλεύς.

⁷ Hector Avalos draws attention to the comedic function of the repetition, noting that the reiteration of the decree exposes “the mechanistic and thoughtless behavior of the pagan worshippers, of the pagan government bureaucracy in particular.” See Hector Avalos, “The Comedic Function of the Enumerations of Officials and Instruments in Daniel 3,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 53 (1991): 52. See also Chan, “*Ira Regis*,” 14–25; David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 175.

⁸ Rather than providing a lengthy instrument list as one finds in MT and TH, OG summarizes the lists of instruments in vv. 10 and 15, referring only to τῆς σάλπιγγος καὶ παντὸς ἡχου μουσικῶν (“the horn and all the sounds of musical instruments,” NETS).

⁹ Carol A. Newsom with Brennan W. Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 106.

¹⁰ TH lacks συμφωνίας.

Whenever you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, and a symphony of all kinds of musical instruments, you should fall down and do obeisance to the gold image, which King Nabouchodonosor has set up. (OG Dan 3:5)

While subtle differences occur across the MT, OG, and TH versions of these verses, all of them represent music in the same manner—as a cue to the king’s subjects that they should genuflect and worship the golden image. Instrumental music serves liturgy of domination, which the king’s subjects must heed if they are to survive.

MUSICAL REFERENCES IN THE OG AND TH ADDITIONS

The additional material found in the Greek versions of Daniel 3 significantly expands the role of music, in both the poetic and the prosaic plusses. The first instance is in verse 24. OG reads:

Οὕτως οὖν προσηύξατο Ανανίας καὶ Αζαρίας καὶ Μισαήλ,¹¹ καὶ ὕμνησαν τῷ κυρίῳ, ὅτε αὐτοὺς ὁ βασιλεὺς προσέταξεν ἐμβληθῆναι εἰς τὴν κάμινον.

So, therefore, Hananias and Azarias and Misael prayed and *sang hymns* to the Lord (ὕμνησαν τῷ κυρίῳ), when the king ordered them to be thrown into the furnace (emphasis mine).

While maintaining its emphasis on the singing of the three youths, TH differs significantly from OG:

καὶ περιεπάτουν ἐν μέσῳ τῆς φλογὸς ὑμνοῦντες τὸν θεὸν καὶ εὐλογοῦντες τὸν κύριον.

And they were walking around in the middle of the flames, *singing hymns* (ὕμνοῦντες) to God and blessing the Lord (emphasis mine).

TH’s use of the additional term εὐλογοῦντες alongside ὑμνοῦντες is significant. On the one hand, using this term creates a stronger link to the Prayer of Azariah, which uses εὐλογητὸς only two verses later in verse 26. But a more likely explanation is that TH’s use of both εὐλογοῦντες and ὑμνοῦντες in combination brings verse 24 into stronger conformity with the Song of the Three Youths, which uses the twin terms, εὐλογεῖτε and ὑμνεῖτε (“Bless . . . sing hymns) as a refrain found in every verse from verse 51 through verse 88.¹²

¹¹ OG uses the Hebrew names of the youths, whereas MT refers to them by their Babylonian names, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

¹² The strong connections between v. 24 and the Song of the Three Youths give credence to Collins’s claim that “v. 24 would seem to introduce the Song of the Three Young Men, rather than just the Prayer of

After the Prayer of Azariah, there is an additional narrative insertion (vv. 46–51), which describes the excessive heat of the furnace, the death of the attendant Chaldeans, and the actions of the “angel of the Lord” to protect the three youth. That insertion introduces the lengthy Song of the Three Youths (vv. 52–90), specifically making reference to their musical activities:

Ἀναλαμβάνοντες δὲ οἱ τρεῖς ὡς ἐξ ἑνὸς στόματος ὕμνον καὶ ἐδόξαζον καὶ εὐλόγουν καὶ ἐξύψουν τὸν θεὸν ἐν τῇ καμίνῳ λέγοντες.¹³

Now the three resuming, as though from one mouth, were singing hymns and glorifying and blessing and exalting God in the furnace, saying . . . (OG Dan 3:51)

Verse 51 expands the vocabulary used to describe the musical activity of the three youths by adding ἐδόξαζον (“glorifying”)¹⁴ and ἐξύψουν (“exalting”). Immediately following verse 51 is the lengthy and highly repetitive Song of the Three Youths (vv. 52–90). The song is structured as follows:

- I. God is blessed, praised, and exalted (vv. 52–56)
- II. Various aspects of creation are called upon to bless the Lord (vv. 57–88a)
- III. Reasons for blessing and acknowledging the Lord (v. 88b–90)

Verses 57–88a follow a fixed blessing formula, structured around two phrases: “Bless the Lord [εὐλογεῖτε . . . τὸν κύριον.]” and “Sing hymns, and highly exalt him forever [ὑμνεῖτε καὶ ὑπερυψοῦτε αὐτὸν εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας].” The one being called upon to “bless the Lord” is placed between εὐλογεῖτε and τὸν κύριον, as in verse 59:

εὐλογεῖτε, οὐρανοί, τὸν κύριον·
ὑμνεῖτε καὶ ὑπερυψοῦτε αὐτὸν εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας.

Bless the Lord, you heavens;
Sing hymns, and highly exalt him forever. (OG Dan 3:59)

*Like cosmic conductors, the youths summon angels,
elements, celestial entities, creatures, and human beings
alike to bless the Lord and sing hymns.*

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Azariah. It is likely that the additions were made in two stages, first the prose passage and the Song, then the Prayer.” Collins, *Daniel*, 198.

¹³ TH is largely identical to OG, except for replacing Ἀναλαμβάνοντες δὲ with τότε, and for lacking καὶ ἐξύψουν (“exalting”).

¹⁴ δεδοξασμένον is also used in the Prayer of Azariah, v. 26 “glorified is your name your name forever!” (NETS).

the Prayer of Azariah, the Song of the Three Youths is completely devoid of references to sin, judgment, or misfortune. In fact, the only hint of suffering is found at the end of the song, where the reasons for praising God are given:

ὅτι ἐξείλατο ἡμᾶς ἐξ ᾄδου, καὶ ἔσωσεν ἡμᾶς ἐκ χειρὸς θανάτου,
καὶ ἐρρύσατο ἡμᾶς ἐκ μέσου καιομένης φλογός,
καὶ ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς ἐλυτρώσατο¹⁵ ἡμᾶς.

For he has rescued us from Hades
and saved us from the hand of death
and delivered us from the midst of the burning flame
and released us from the fire. (OG Dan 3:88)

The song concludes with a summons to worship God:

ἐυλογεῖτε, πάντες οἱ σεβόμενοι τὸν κύριον τὸν θεὸν τῶν θεῶν·
ὕμνεῖτε καὶ ἐξομολογεῖσθε, ὅτι εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα
τὸ ἔλεος αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τῶν αἰώνων¹⁶

All who worship the Lord, bless the God of gods
sing hymns, and acknowledge him,
for his mercy is forever and ever and ever. (OG Dan 3:90 NETS)

The final reference to music is in verse 91. This verse contains Nebuchadnezzar's reaction to the three youths.

Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ ἀκοῦσαι τὸν βασιλέα ὑμνούντων αὐτῶν καὶ ἐστῶς
ἐθεώρει αὐτοὺς ζῶντας, τότε Ναβουχοδοноσορ ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐθαύμασε.

And it happened that when the king heard them singing hymns and when he stood, he saw them alive. Then Nabouchodonosor the king was astonished. (OG Dan 3:91)

TH is similar:

Καὶ Ναβουχοδοноσορ ἤκουσεν ὑμνούντων αὐτῶν καὶ ἐθαύμασε.

And Nabouchodonosor heard them singing hymns and was astonished.
(TH Dan 3:91)

For the Greek versions, Nebuchadnezzar's astonishment is a result both of what he sees and of what he hears. This fact stands in stark contrast to the MT, which describes Nebuchadnezzar's reaction as a response only to what he sees:

אֲדִין נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר מַלְכָּא חוּהּ וְקָם בְּהַתְּבַהֲלָה עֵנָה וְאָמַר הֲזֵה בְּרוּהִי הֲלֹא גַבְרִין תְּלַחֵא
רְמִינָא לְגוּאֵי נֹרָא מִכְּפַחֵין עֵנִין וְאָמַרִין לְמַלְכָּא יִצְיָבָא מַלְכָּא

¹⁵ TH repeats ἐρρύσατο ("delivered") here.

¹⁶ TH is identical, except it lacks the last six words in the OG: καὶ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τῶν αἰώνων

ענה ואמר הא אנה חזה גברין ארבעה שרין מהלכין בגוא נודא וחבל לא איהן
בהון ורוה די רביעיא דמה לבר אלהין

Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished. Rising up quickly, he said to his advisors: “Were there not three men that we cast bound into the flame?” They answered the king, “True, O King.” He responded: “But I see four unbound men, walking in the middle of the fire, and they are unharmed. And the fourth has the look of a god.” (MT Dan 3:24–25)

The miracle prompting Nebuchadnezzar’s response was in their dramatic rescue from the flames. Nebuchadnezzar’s response is followed by a blessing of his own, found in all three versions (MT v. 28, OG and TH v. 95). The OG version reads as follows:

ὕπολαβὼν δὲ Ναβουχοδονοσορ ὁ βασιλεὺς εἶπεν Εὐλογητὸς κύριος ὁ θεὸς τοῦ Σεδράχ, Μισάχ, Ἀβδεναγῶ, ὃς ἀπέστειλε τὸν ἄγγελον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔσωσε τοὺς παῖδας αὐτοῦ τοὺς ἐλπίσαντας ἐπ’ αὐτόν· τὴν γὰρ προσταγὴν τοῦ βασιλέως ἠθέτησαν καὶ παρέδωκαν τὰ σώματα αὐτῶν εἰς ἔμπυρισμόν, ἵνα μὴ λατρεύσωσι μηδὲ προσκυνήσωσι θεῶ ἑτέρῳ ἀλλ’ ἢ τῷ θεῷ αὐτῶν.

Then in response Nabouchodonosor the king said, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Sedrach, Misach, Abdenago, who has sent his angel and saved his servants who hope in him; for they disregarded the king’s order and yielded up their body for burning in order that they might not serve or do obeisance to another god except their God.” (OG Dan 3:95)¹⁷

When Nebuchadnezzar responds to their song with a blessing of his own, the hierarchical power arrangements between king and subjects are dramatically overturned: the one who commanded others to bow in response to his imperial anthem now obeys the youths by joining their blessed chorus.

The terminology of blessing is particularly noteworthy in the Greek versions. As noted above, the Song of the Three Youths repetitiously calls upon creation to

¹⁷ TH, similarly, reads: καὶ ἀπεκρίθη Ναβουχοδονοσορ καὶ εἶπεν Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς τοῦ Σεδράχ, Μισαχ, Ἀβδεναγῶ, ὃς ἀπέστειλε τὸν ἄγγελον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐξείλατο τοὺς παῖδας αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ἐπεποιθίσαν ἐπ’ αὐτῶ καὶ τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦ βασιλέως ἠλλοίωσαν καὶ παρέδωκαν τὰ σώματα αὐτῶν εἰς πῦρ, ὅπως μὴ λατρεύσωσι μηδὲ προσκυνήσωσι παντὶ θεῷ ἀλλ’ ἢ τῷ θεῷ αὐτῶν. “And Nabouchodonosor answered and said, ‘Blessed be the God of Sedrach, Misach, Abdenago, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, because they trusted in him. And they altered the king’s word and yielded up their bodies to the fire so that they might not serve or do obeisance to any god except their God’ (TH Dan 3:95, NETS).

“bless the Lord” (εὐλογεῖτε . . . τὸν κύριον, vv. 54–88). When Nebuchadnezzar responds to their song with a blessing of his own, the hierarchical power arrangements between king and subjects are dramatically overturned: the one who commanded others to bow in response to his imperial anthem now obeys the youths by joining their blessed chorus. Their music, not his, would ultimately win the day.

CONCLUSIONS

The motif of music undergoes a remarkable transformation in the Greek additions of Daniel 3. In the MT, music plays a significant but one-dimensional role: whenever Nebuchadnezzar’s subjects hear the music, they are supposed to genuflect and worship the statue of gold (see MT Dan 3:4–7, 10–11, 15). But layers of literary complexity are seen in the Greek editions of the narrative. Two key insights emerge.

First, by framing the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Youths explicitly as *songs* (see OG/TH Dan 3:24, 51), the editors invite a contrast to the king’s own music, which was intended to prompt obedient responses and scripted adulation. The additional prayers are also an act of obedience, but to YHWH the true king, who alone is “the Lord and glorious over the whole earth” (OG v. 45). Interpreted in this way, the songs are both defiance and obedience.

Second, the Greek versions develop the ironic and parodic elements of the narrative. As noted above, the music of the three youths (like the music of Nebuchadnezzar) calls forth obedience and worship—not to a golden statue, but to the God of all creation. Nebuchadnezzar shows himself to be the paragon of obedience and submission: with energy and passion he leaps from his chair, blesses the Lord, declares the supremacy of the Hebrew God, and praises the *disobedience* of the three youths (see OG and TH vv. 91–96). Without doubt, this is an absurd image of the great Babylonian king. But the image of a malleable—even if absurd—king fits well into the larger constellation of Nebuchadnezzar stories in Daniel 2–4, which depict the king as capriciously tyrannical and occasionally teachable. ⊕

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