

**Abstract:** The word *barbitos* has always remained quite marginal in Latin literature, in comparison with others indicating stringed instruments. After its occurrences in Horace, Ovid and Statius, it was taken back with a certain success by some important authors of late antiquity, whose style was highly elaborated and full of conceits, probably for its rarity and refinement. However, all authors make use of it with full awareness of the original features of the instrument and with a pregnant meaning, inside a metaliterary discourse, both as a motto and a mark of poetic inspiration and style. Yet the stylistic level authors allude to by mentioning the *barbitos* is twofold and diverging: low in Claudianus and Sidonius, high in Martianus, Alcimus Avitus and Venantius Fortunatus. This ambiguity can be formely found in Horace, but it generally concerns the lyrical genre in itself.

**Keywords:** *Barbitos*, Late Latin literature, Motto, Stylistic level, Lyrical genre.