

13th Annual MOISA meeting

CNRS & The University of Strasbourg

Maison Interuniversitaire des Sciences de l'Homme – Alsace (MISHA)

Strasbourg, Monday June 27th, 2022 – Wednesday July 29th, 2022

Venue: MISHA (5, allée du Général Rouvillois, Strasbourg), Salle de conférences

The Sounds of the Beyond: The Mysteries of Ancient Greek and Roman Music

Les sons de l'au-delà: les mystères de la musique grecque et romaine

Although the etymology of *mysterion* is not entirely clear, scholars have traditionally thought it to be derived from the Greek μύω, meaning “to close” or “to shut.” The word may thus refer to shutting not only the eyes (during the initiation ritual), but also the mouth, since initiates were not allowed to reveal what happened in the ritual. Nevertheless, the mysteries were probably not as esoteric as scholars have thought (see R. Turcan and W. Burkert).

While scholars have, in the past, treated a variety of cults as mysteries, nowadays they operate with a stricter definition of the term. “Mysteries” designate, first, ancient Greek mysteries (the Eleusinian, the Dionysian and the Orphic-Bacchic Mysteries) and, secondly, new mystery cults worshipping divinities that Greeks and Romans adopted gradually from other cultures (Cybele, Isis and Mithra). Mysteries supplemented civil religion rather than competed with it: they had the same goal of creating an individual relationship to deities through votive offerings. Any individual could easily observe the rites of the state religion, be an initiate in one or more mysteries (whatever her/his status might be), and at the same time adhere to a certain philosophical school.

A variety of inscriptions, inscribed instruments, ritual objects, iconographic representations, and texts all attest to the importance of music and sound in mysteries. For instance, the rattling noises in the cults of Dionysos and Cybele were imbued with magical and protective qualities. The archaeological remains of a *mithraeum* in Strasbourg (Koenigshoffen) give an opportunity to reflect more precisely on the sounds heard in Mithraic mysteries (see the current exhibition “Le mystère Mithra. Plongée au cœur d'un culte romain” in the Musée royal de Mariemont, Belgium), in which initiates imitated the cries of ravens and the roaring of lions. The representation of a sistrum on a mosaic in the *mithraeum* in Ostia suggests that there were sonic connections between the mysteries of Isis and Mithra.

The recent discoveries of golden tablets related to the Orphic mysteries shed new light on those rituals and their conception of the afterlife. The connection of the tablets with Pythagoreanism should be explored, since both try to understand the secrets of the universe. The theory of the harmony of the spheres is a way to decipher the sounds of the beyond, the inaudible music that rules the *kosmos*. Gaudentius made this clear at the very beginning of his *Introduction to Harmonics* by quoting a famous Orphic statement: “I sing for the intelligent; uninitiated, close the door!”

Since there has never been any full enquiry into the soundscape of mysteries, there is need for close examination of this rich material. A variety of questions arise, in particular:

- what role did music and sound play in the ritual for a new initiate?
- what role did initiates attribute to music and sound in the afterlife?
- how do we access a sound that was supposed to remain secret to all but the initiates?
- what does the corpus of Orphic Hymns contribute to our understanding of the soundscape of the mysteries?
- how does music theory try to explain the secrets of the universe?
- how has the music of mysteries been re-imagined by modern composers (e.g. Mozart's *Magic Flute* (1792), G. S. Mayr's *I misteri eleusini* (1802) and Y. Markopoulos' *Liturgy of Orpheus* (1994))?

As always, a session will be devoted to new finds or new studies of ancient finds.

Proposals of less than 300 words for 20-minute papers are invited.

Conference language: English

Proposals should be sent to sylvain.perrot@unistra.fr by January 31st, 2022, and will be evaluated by the Scientific Committee by March 1st, 2022. Applicants whose abstracts are accepted will be notified immediately afterwards by email and asked to confirm their participation by April 1st, 2022.

Only MOISA members are eligible to present a paper. It is possible to join the Society at <http://www.moisasociety.org>.

Scientific committee

Daniela Castaldo (Università del Salento - Italy)

Alexandra Goulaki-Voutyra (Aristotle University Thessaloniki - Greece)

Stefan Hagel (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften - Austria)

Athena Katsanevaki (Aristotle University Thessaloniki - Greece)

Angelo Meriani (Università di Salerno - Italy)

Timothy Moore (Washington University in Saint Louis – USA)

Sylvain Perrot (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique - France)

Donatella Restani (Università di Bologna 'Alma Mater' - Italy)

Antonia Roumpi (Aristotle University Thessaloniki – Greece)

Fabio Vergara Cerqueira (Universidade Federal de Pelotas - Brasil)

To get to Strasbourg and the MISHA

1/ By plane: there is a small airport in Strasbourg-Entzheim. From the airport to the main train station, please take a train TER (or a bus if you arrive late). The journey is ca. 15 minute. The fare is 2,80 € if you go only to the train station, 4,50 € if you want a connection with tram. More information here: <https://www.strasbourg.aeroport.fr/EN/Passengers/Access/Shuttle-train.html>

There is also a direct TGV connection between Roissy CDG and Strasbourg Gare Centrale (XER). If you travel with Lufthansa to Francfort, you can book the journey up to Strasbourg (XER), since there is a Lufthansa bus connection between the airport of Francfort and Strasbourg (ca. 3 hrs). The bus stops close to the train station.

2/ By train: the main train station (Gare centrale) is located close to the city centre. From the station go straight on, cross the bridge to reach the Langstross/Grand'rue, one of the main streets of the city centre (ca. 5-10 minutes). Always straight on to reach the cathedral (ca. 15-20 minutes). Three tramlines call at the train station: A/D (downstairs) and C (ground level, outdoors, on the square). Tramlines A (to Illkirch) and D (to Kehl) call at several stations in the city centre; tram C (to Neudorf) goes around the city centre to the West. You can buy tickets at the machines located in the external hall of the train station or at any tram station.

3/ By bus (Flixbus/Isilines/Eurolines/Megabus): the station is located Place de l'Étoile, close to the Conservatory of Music and Dance. There is a tram station nearby, tram lines A/D. To go to the city centre, take A to Parc des Sports or D to Poteries.

Here is a map of Strasbourg: <https://www.plandutouriste.eu/map/naviguer-dans-le-plan.php>

The MISHA is one of the buildings of the University campus, in the quarter called Esplanade. It is ca. 15 minutes from the city centre by feet. The closest tram station is Observatoire (lines C/E/F). More information here: <https://www.misha.fr/en/misha/useful-information>