

17th Annual MOISA meeting

Monday June 22nd 2026 – Wednesday June 24th 2026

Venues: Villa Kérylos, Beaulieu/Mer and University of Nice (place to be defined)

Ancient Greek and Roman Music in its Environment: Public, Domestic, Natural and Cyber-spaces

The development of new disciplinary fields in recent decades – music archaeology, soundscapes studies, archaeoacoustics, as well as archaeology of performance –, have led to considering from new perspectives the spaces in which ancient people used to produce and listen to musical performances. The *Spatial turn* initiated in the social sciences in the 1980's has also made it possible to rethink some aspects such as the relationship between cities and the countryside, the venues of science and of performance, the circulation of technical skills and of experts of knowledge. It encouraged to address the question of music and musicians on different scales, from the very local level to the regional and even Panhellenic level. Much more, the agency approach, developed in the social sciences during the 2010's, proposed to rediscover the plurality of territorial forms in the ancient world, up to their concrete materialization in the landscape. While the main criticism applied to historiography of Antiquity was a certain determinism of the natural environment, the analysis based on actors attempts to understand territories without geographical preconceptions, by reintroducing the active role of individuals and socio-political communities.

One of the main approaches is the articulation between artistic acts and public spaces, which can be understood through a synchronic point of view (comparing the same type of public space in different cities of a same culture) or a diachronic one (for example, the evolution of the soundscape from the Greek agora to the Roman forum). Public spaces, whether indoors or outdoors, are thus considered as sites designed for the creation and the hearing of sound, in the sense that the arts constituting performance interact with architecture and urban planning, both as physical spaces for the dissemination of sound and as symbolic spaces for the expression of power. Here comes the distinction between profane space and sacred space, where the symbolic division of the territory (*temenos* / *templum*) creates a boundary that careful archaeological excavations now allow us to better understand: for instance, the recent excavations of the sanctuary of Artemis at Amarynthos (Euboea) allow us to reconsider the inscription related to the *Artemisa* indicating that the musical procession to the altar must take place in the courtyard whose topographical organization is now known.

The question of domestic spaces, on the other hand, has been rather neglected by research, undoubtedly due to a lack of sources as substantial as those for cities or sanctuaries. Nevertheless, many texts of various kinds (history, novels, epigrams, etc.) evoke interior scenes, as does iconography (vases, frescoes, mosaics), allowing us to closely examine the role that music played within the confines of houses. It would certainly be worthwhile today to reassess these questions in light of archaeological discoveries of private spaces, whether in Greek cities (Olynthus, excavations of the Thessaloniki metro) or Roman cities (Vesuvian cities); another interesting issue could be the study on the places of performance described in the papyri from Greco-Roman Egypt.

Research on the soundscape highlights the different status of spaces depending on whether they are urbanized or rural, or even left in their natural state. Some specific natural features were used to create musical performances, which may have been very remote places (caves, mountains, deserts); natural or even supernatural sounds were interpreted in terms of comparisons trying to bring the unknown back to the known: the accounts of travellers or the texts of naturalists thus offer sonic experiences that awaken curiosity. This complex relation to natural environment invites us also to consider the way ancient people dealt with natural resources to produce the instruments: What do we learn about importation and exportation of materials? was it forbidden to use some materials? Were there any strategies of recycling materials or of repairing instruments rather than replacing them?

A case like that of Delos, where one can study the spatial relationship between spaces of production and spaces of performance, or Pompeii, where people attempted to take advantage of natural conditions, seems emblematic: these two cities have yielded both in situ instrument remains and a rich iconography of the musical practices that took place there, allowing us to question the sonic identity of certain neighbourhoods. It thus seems perfectly appropriate to organize this meeting at the [Villa Kérylos](#), which Théodore Reinach had built in Beaulieu-sur-Mer in the style of a Hellenistic Delian house, entrusting this project to the architect Emmanuel Pontremoli between 1902 and 1908. The house still holds the piano on which Théodore Reinach undoubtedly played ancient music.

The Villa Kérylos must have been a place for musical performances inspired by antiquity, as was the decoration of its rooms. There may well have been concerts of ancient music, but the archives of the Reinach family were largely dispersed during the Second World War. Nevertheless, this provides an opportunity to consider the status of these modern spaces occupied by the music of antiquity, which was initially intended for a very specific location, most often as a single, unrepeated performance. What status should be accorded to this music, removed from its original context? Even more significantly, the development of recordings, first analogic and then digital, lends ancient music a new materiality (33 rpm records to CD and others), even a certain immateriality, which allows it to leave physical spaces for cyberspace. Whether through the recording conditions, which transform a digital act into a purely digital space, or through dissemination, the ontological status of the musical work is altered. Ancient music has in fact joined the world of contemporary creation, with its new means of computer-assisted composition and its legal and social issues (for example the question of intermediality or intellectual property).

A variety of questions arise, in particular:

- what role does the place of performance play in the composition of a musical piece?
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- is there any sonic identity of urban or rural spaces?
- how do approaches in spatial agency change our perception of ancient musical performances?
- is there any evolution in the use of domestic spaces to perform music from pre-classical to Roman times? What does the archaeology of construction and urbanism bring to the topic?
- how do cyberspaces change the ontology of ancient musical pieces?

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 March 1st, 2026, and will be evaluated by the Scientific Committee by March 15th, 2026. Applicants whose abstracts are accepted will be notified immediately afterwards by email and asked to confirm their participation by April 1st, 2026.

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

Scientific committee

Laurent Capron (National Centre for Scientific Research - France)

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