

# Conference Report

## Sounds of Power: Sonic Court Rituals In- and Outside Europe in the 15<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> Centuries

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“Does power have its own specific sound? Or: How do sounds in combination with other media function specifically in courtly rituals of the premodern era? And: What reactions and associations did they trigger in the ritual community?”<sup>2</sup> On 17–19 June 2021, the international conference “Sounds of Power: Sonic Court Rituals In- and Outside Europe in the 15<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> Centuries” was held at the University of Bern focusing on these questions and bringing together researchers from different disciplines. Due to the ongoing pandemic conditions, the conference took place in a hybrid format organized by Cristina Urchueguía, Margret Scharrer and Tül Demirbaş, as part of the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) Project “The Sound of Power: Sound as an Intermedial Category of Courtly Festive Rituals in an Intercultural Perspective in the 15<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> Centuries”.<sup>3</sup>

The conference brought together speakers from Germany, Turkey, Portugal, USA, France, Israel, United Kingdom and Switzerland, with 17 individual presentations and two roundtable sessions under the leadership of five different moderators. Following the preparatory workshops in Istanbul (4–5 September 2020) and Bern (5 February 2021) organized by the same team and focusing mainly on the Ottoman and European court cultures and dynastic celebrations, this conference expanded the scope of interest to different cultural contexts, such as the Safavid Empire, the Joseon Dynasty, and colonial Mexico. Furthermore, the concept of sound was discussed in a broader sense by researchers from musicology, ethnomusicology, linguistics, history, art history, and sinology. This diversity of disciplines represented by the conference researchers was crucial to exploring the interdisciplinary nature of the theme at issue, in particular the usage of music and sound as an expression of power within court rituals, celebrations, and festivities, as well as the cultural interaction between sonic activities and media. The conference thus provided a platform for researchers with different perspectives on court celebrations and rituals to exchange ideas within a scientific framework, as well as enabling discussions around fundamental theoretical-methodological questions and archival sources.

Serving as an introductory session under the moderation of Cristina Urchueguía and Judith I. Haug (Istanbul), the first day of the conference included presentations by Katherine Butler Schofield (London), Harriet Rudolph (Regensburg), Tobias C. Weissmann (Mainz) and Evelyn Korsch (Erfurt), in which fundamental theoretical and methodological aspects of political power, sound, ritual, and ceremony were

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2 Quoted from the introduction text written by organizers in the conference booklet. To access the conference booklet: [https://www.musik.unibe.ch/unibe/portal/fak\\_historisch/dkk/musik/content/e39911/e155112/e178366/e1092581/e1082191/e1085024/Conferencebooklet\\_digital\\_ger.pdf](https://www.musik.unibe.ch/unibe/portal/fak_historisch/dkk/musik/content/e39911/e155112/e178366/e1092581/e1082191/e1085024/Conferencebooklet_digital_ger.pdf) [15.06.2022].

3 The project is based at the Institute of Musicology of the University of Bern under the supervision of director Cristina Urchueguía. This three-day conference was funded by the University of Bern, Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), Schweizerische Musikforschende Gesellschaft (SMG), Burggemeinde Bern, Fondation Johanna Dürmüller-Boll, Schweizerische Akademie der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften (SAGW), Institut für Musikwissenschaft, Walter Benjamin Kolleg / Interdisziplinäres Forschungs- und Nachwuchsnetzwerk / Graduate School of the Humanities and Kommission für Forschungs- und Nachwuchsförderung / Philosophisch-historische Fakultät der Universität Bern.

addressed. Katherine Butler Schofield focused in her keynote speech on the Hindustani music at the Mughal court in India between 1593 and 1707, while Harriet Rudolph explored the soundscapes of the early modern princely courts. Tobias C. Weissmann's presentation examined communication strategies and the role of sound in papal rituals in early modern Rome. The first day concluded with a paper by Evelyn Korsch about sounds and power in *Rappresentationi* in sixteenth-century Venice.

The second conference day was subsumed under the title "Ottoman and Habsburg-Burgundian Court Cultures". The first session moderated by Margret Scharrer included papers by Baptiste Rameau (Dijon), on musical ensembles of Burgundian Dukes and the relationship of the ducal power; Helen Coffey (London), on the court of Maximilian I, his wedding with Bianca Maria Sforza and the role of dance in courtly ceremonial; and Daniel Tiemeyer (Heidelberg), on the political power of Margret of Austria through Marian songs at the court of Maximilian I. The second session moderated by A. Tül Demirbaş shifted the focus to the Ottoman court. Songül Karahasanoğlu and Süleyman Cabir Çıplak (Istanbul) spoke about Ottoman music theory and its development in connection with Western ideas; Ido Ben-Ami (Tel Aviv) presented the important role of awe in Ottoman festivals, by examining emotions and the use of animal sounds at the 1582 and 1720 festivals; Gamze İlaslan (Regensburg) discussed the soundscape of diplomacy with examples from the Ottoman and Habsburg courts. The second conference day closed with Markus Koller (Bochum), Cristina Urchueguía (Bern) and Karolina Zgraja (Zürich) comparing different media strategies of the Burgundian-Habsburg and Ottoman courts.

The third and the last day of the conference was dedicated to "Other Cultures and Transfers". Ana Cláudia Silveira (Lisbon) focused on the port city of Setúbal, Portugal, festivals and processions as tools of political power, and their connection to the House of Aveiro. Christof Paulus (Munich) examined the soundscape of the Landshut wedding in 1475 and discussed the reflections and reactions of communities to noisy soundscapes. Thilo Hirsch (Bern) and Marina Haiduk (Bern) presented the only organological paper of the conference dedicated to the *rebecchino* from the collection of old musical instruments of the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, discussing its use in the context of musical performances and its meaning, especially as a symbolic element. Zeynep Çavuşoğlu (Istanbul) turned the focus of the conference from Europe back to the Middle East. She examined the sound diversity of the city of Isfahan during the Safavid Empire in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Jieun Kim (Heidelberg) focused on the music of the Joseon Dynasty, in particular during the King Sejong era, and showed the portrayal of *Ye-Ak* (order and harmony) idealized by the Joseon Dynasty in various historical events. Grayson Wagsstaff (Washington, D.C.) examined the influence of the sound of Habsburg power in colonial Mexico, showing how Emperor Charles V was symbolized in rituals by the music of Cristobal de Morales. Joseph S. C. Lam (Ann Arbor, Michigan) traced the visual presentation of musicians, musical instruments and their performances in traditional Chinese music with historical roots from Ming China focusing on wind and percussion instruments and the sound of military power. The last session of this three-day conference was a concluding roundtable with François Picard (Paris), Wolfgang Behr (Zürich), and Britta Sweers (Bern). Under the title of "Sound of Power, Sound of Cultures", methodological problems were discussed from literary, ethnomusicological, and anthropological perspectives, emphasizing how sound sources can be analyzed and interpreted, especially underlining the diversity of music, cultures, and historical variability.

The restrictions and difficulties caused by the global pandemic were obvious in many areas. Despite this, it was encouraging to see that communication channels for sharing and transferring scientific knowledge have been found throughout this process. Organized in hybrid format, this conference was able to reach a very wide audience from different parts of the world.

Importantly, this was not only the case for the conference speakers but also for its audience. This interdisciplinary meeting thus enabled young researchers from humanities and social sciences to

connect with the international scene and especially engage with young and competent researchers working in the same fields. Together with outputs from two previous workshops, the outcomes of this conference were announced to be published in open access format.

