14th Symposium of the International Study Group on Music Archaeology

(ISGMA 2027)

Impact and Interaction: Musical Means in Context

27 September–1 October 2027, Heidelberg, Germany

Organising committee:	Dahlia Shehata, Raquel Jiménez, Wang Xidan
Venue:	University of Heidelberg, Department of Assyriology
Dates:	27 September–1 October 2027
Formats:	in person (online presentations may be accommodated upon request)
Language:	English

Reflecting the thematic breadth of music archaeology and committed to transferring its fundamental research into wider academic, cultural, and public debate, the 14th conference of the International Study Group on Music Archaeology centres on the interaction of musical means in social, political, and religious contexts and explores the impact of musical sounds, and of their use and application, on specific events and performances. Moving beyond an isolated evaluation of sounds and their expression, the symposium invites reflections on the complex interactions between people, musical sounds and instruments, materials, spaces, and environments, and on the multiple meanings and experiences emerging from these relationships.

Musical instruments, the human voice, and their combinations, together with distinctive rhythms and melodies, offer rich possibilities for expressing emotions, values, and cultural identities across societies, forming an essential part of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Musical soundscapes range from the powerful sounds of percussion, signalling instruments, and vocal exclamations in public processions to unison melodies accompanying quiet prayer and meditation. Yet such broad categories can reinforce cultural biases and obscure the diversity of musical elements, their interactions, meanings, and effects, calling for closer examination and critical evaluation.

The symposium welcomes contributions that examine music and sound as situated, embodied, and relational practices, while reflecting on the possibilities and challenges of reconstructing, interpreting, and communicating the musical past:

1. How did musical means shape collective experience, identity, and belonging, and how did they mark inclusion, exclusion, or social difference?

2. How can musical instruments, both ancient and reconstructed, be understood not merely as inert objects, but as active agents within networks of social and sonic interaction?

3. Which emotional, bodily, spatial, and communicative effects of sound can be reconstructed from archaeological, iconographic, textual, and acoustic evidence, and to what extent do modern, often Eurocentric categories of perception distort them?

4. How can interdisciplinary and digital approaches, from archaeoacoustics, sonic and experimental reconstruction to sensory studies, make the sounding past accessible to research and strengthen connections between heritage institutions and the public?

5. What new research perspectives and opportunities for collaboration can emerge from dialogue between music archaeology and related yet distinct fields, such as ethnomusicology, the new organology, musicology, heritage studies, and artistic practice?

Connecting Past and Present

Situating music archaeology within current debates in the humanities, social sciences, and heritage sciences, the conference aims at placing particular emphasis on long durée perspectives. How are musical practices passed on, interrupted, or revived over extended periods of time? How do their

functions change when they are re-embedded in different religious, political or social contexts? These questions explore the impact of music within its historical context as well as subsequent reinterpretations of its meanings and functions by later generations. It further includes the recreation and revival of ancient and music and sounds through public presentations, exhibitions, and modern performances, as well as reception and contemporary composition. These themes will be addressed in a dedicated panel discussion.

Special ICTMD Music Archaeology Study Group Session

ISGMA 2027 will also host a special session of the ICTMD Study Group on Music Archaeology, to which ICTMD members are invited.

Submission Guidelines

In view of the conference's objectives, we encourage contributions that engage with the following topics:

- Sensory archaeology, embodied experience, and perception

- Identity, diversity, and social cohesion

- Human–environment relations, soundscapes, materials, and craft knowledge

- Mobility, migration, and cultural transfer

- Transmission, discontinuity, and change of meanings and practices

- Knowledge transfer and heritage education

Contributions from all periods and regions, from prehistory to the early modern era, on topics relating to any aspect of music archaeology, music history, ethnoarchaeology, and ethnomusicology, as well as neighbouring disciplines such as acoustics, history of religion, and cultural anthropology, are equally welcome.

We warmly invite scholars and students to submit a title and an abstract of no more than 200 words in English, together with their name, affiliation, and email address, no later than 20 December 2026 via the conference website: https://eventos.uva.es/go/isgma2027

Please also indicate in the abstract document whether your presentation requires any additional materials or equipment, and whether you are a member of the ICTMD and wish to participate in the ICTMD session.

We welcome proposals for the following formats:

- Papers: 20 minutes plus 10 minutes of discussion
- Posters: A0 (printable at Heidelberg University)
- Workshops on experimental craft and performance: 90 to 120 minutes
- Participants' concert: demonstrations and performances of reconstructed instruments and their contexts

Submissions: https://eventos.uva.es/go/isgma2027

For further information, please contact: ISGMA@ori.uni-heidelberg.de