

Rhythm and Ritual: New Approaches to Archaeoacoustics

Keywords: Archaeoacoustics, rhythm, ritual, sound, space

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Abstract:

This session explores the intersections between sound, space, and ritual in archaeological interpretation, advancing the field of archaeoacoustics through a new methodological framework. While studies have focused on the physical acoustics of built or natural environments, such as echoes in caves, resonance in megalithic chambers, recent approaches expand this scope to the social, sensory, cognitive, and performative dimensions of sound in the past, including the acoustics of the daily rhythms of the household activities and in the acoustic rhythms of the ritual technologies that formed the soundscape of everyday life.

We are interested to investigate how rhythm, reverberation, and sonic experience shaped ritual practice, community cohesion, and the perception of sacred landscapes. The papers in this session will hopefully highlight how sound functioned as a medium for communication, social bonding, memory, and cosmological order. Topics include the acoustic design of ritual spaces, the role of music and voice in enacting collective identity, and the interplay between environmental soundscapes and human performance. Contributors also address the epistemological challenges of “hearing” the past, questioning how modern technologies and subjective listening practices mediate our reconstructions of ancient sound worlds.

Through case studies spanning prehistory to the modern era, this session seeks to bridge the gap between the measurable and the experiential, combining scientific analysis with phenomenological and interpretive perspectives. Discussions will explore how acoustic properties and cognitive capacities may have structured ritual timing, influenced architectural form, contributed to healing ceremonies, and encoded symbolic meaning, emphasizing the

reciprocal relationship between rhythm and ritual. Ultimately, this session aims to foster a transdisciplinary dialogue among archaeologists, sound artists, musicologists, and heritage scientists. By situating acoustics within broader frameworks of embodiment, performance, and sensory experience, this session repositions sound as a dynamic and integral element of archaeological interpretation, one that resonates across material, temporal, and cultural boundaries.