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# Music of the Power and Power of the Music: Towards an Auditory Exploration of Popular Culture in Roman Antiquity

Alexandre Vincent

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# Popular Culture in the Ancient World

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repetition, as Butler has shown.<sup>59</sup> In the case of Pollio, with which I began, his elegance in drawing attention to Octavian's role in the proscriptions protected him from any violent response, and his clever turn may have become widely known. In the case of mass audiences, their numbers and tradition provided similar cover, allowing them to engage in crowd-sourced political discourse on the model of social insects, who exhibit 'swarm intelligence': not mindless group-think but a heightened sense of purpose deriving from group or sub-group identification.<sup>60</sup> That is to say that an individual member of a Roman crowd could do little either to engage the emperor personally or to shape the reaction of the entire crowd, yet as Cicero knew when he sought to judge the political landscape immediately after Caesar's death, crowds conveyed simple, clear and important information expressed through a collective voice. It would be wrong to extend this argument so far as to suggest that this voice of Roman crowds amounted to a form of direct democracy in any strong sense. But we may have gone too far in assuming that popular discourse at massive gatherings had virtually no influence on Roman imperial politics.

<sup>59</sup> Austin 1962; Butler 1997. Morstein-Marx 2013 builds upon his earlier work in interesting ways and suggests that 'plebian "insubordination" did not represent a breakdown in the [republican] system but was integral to the functioning of the system itself' (46).

<sup>60</sup> An approach explored in terms of modern business practices by Miller 2010.

## 7 | The Music of Power and the Power of Music: Studying Popular Auditory Culture in Ancient Rome

ALEXANDRE VINCENT

Music is one of the topics that has been the least explored by historians of ancient Rome. Largely ignored by musicologists (for whom 'ancient music' is pre-Renaissance, but still no earlier than the fourteenth-century invention of *Ars Nova*) and treated as a minor subject by ancient historians, Roman music has only recently started to garner scholarly attention.<sup>1</sup> The lack of ancient sources is of course principally responsible for this indifference: fragmentary survivals of ancient material culture continue to be discovered, but testimonia about musical life in ancient Rome are few and far between. Few ancient instruments have been preserved, and attempts to reconstruct ancient melodies amount to mere guesswork: no Roman score has survived from antiquity. We can, of course, make some broad comparisons with ancient Greek music, which has received greater scholarly attention than its poorer Roman sibling.<sup>2</sup> It is certain, however, that since the publication of Gunther Wille's monumental *Musica Romana* (1967), historians now commonly – and rightly – assert the importance of Roman music as an integral feature of everyday life in the capital and the major Western cities.<sup>3</sup> The abundant literary, epigraphic, iconographic and numismatic evidence gathered by Wille makes this clear, even if the full potential of these sources remains to be exploited. The exact nature of Roman melodies may be unrecoverable, but the concept of 'Roman music' is nevertheless accessible if we forego reconstructing music and focus instead on constructing a musical praxis. A social history of Roman

<sup>1</sup> Dufour and Fauquet 1987 deal with similar themes to those treated here, and are particularly revealing on this chronological partition. The general book on ancient Rome edited by Umberto Eco features a section on music (Eco 2012: 996–1031). Though this section is much more modest than the hundred or so pages devoted to visual arts in the same book, its very presence does signal a notable change, as does the chapter dedicated to music in Rüpke's recent Roman religion textbook (Fless and Moede 2007) and, more recently, the creation of a journal entirely devoted to the subject, *Greek and Roman Musical Studies*.

<sup>2</sup> The most relevant sources are Greek and concern the Orient; see the collection of sources in Pöhlmann and West 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Wille 1967; among the first studies to follow Wille, Baudot 1973 remains one of the few to deal exclusively with Roman musicians.

musical culture must embrace the conclusion that the sound itself matters less than the social identity of those who produced and listened to it, and the context in which it was emitted. Roman music was a means of communication and can be analysed accordingly: it was not a sensory ornament with minimal connection to an extraneous event, but was integral to the social fabric of each and every event. At stake in studying music in such a framework is an understanding of the meaning of an act of communication that connects the source with the target of the sound.

This approach to auditory perception taps into a particularly vibrant field in contemporary historiography: sensory history, or the exploration of the historicity of the senses.<sup>4</sup> Interest in an anthropology of the senses developed in the early 1980s, predominantly in the work of the Canadian scholars David Howes and Constance Classen, and it has since been enthusiastically embraced by the Anglo-American academy. In a nutshell, sensory data are cultural phenomena which are historically and spatially constructed.<sup>5</sup> We do not feel, nor do we hear, in the same manner as a Roman from the first century BCE. The sounds that the Romans heard should not, therefore, be interpreted according to our own sensory and cultural standards, but as far as possible according to theirs. This concept – a cornerstone of the historian's craft – nonetheless needs emphasizing in the preamble to any study on ancient music. An objective of this chapter is to apply this approach to one particular category of sounds, which I call the *music of power*.

In their studies of Roman popular culture, both Nicholas Horsfall and Jerry Toner have signalled the importance of music for the plebeians.<sup>6</sup> However, both have focused on music that was played or sung in moments of leisure (the theatre or popular celebrations like the festival of Anna Perenna) or for the sake of *paideia*. In order to complement these studies, this chapter focuses on 'music employed by the Romans in their public ceremonies', a phrase by Strabo that I employ as a preliminary definition of the music of power.<sup>7</sup> For Strabo, the word *demōsia* ('in public') references the city. But the term should also be understood more concretely as 'played

in public', in front of – at least in theory – an audience of citizens without distinction of rank or class.<sup>8</sup> The double meaning of the term 'public' is significant because it denotes a tension between the collective and the particular; between the city as a whole and the population as an ensemble of singular individuals. The population whose cultural capital this chapter will examine was noticeably affected by the music of power, which they heard repeatedly throughout the course of their lives.<sup>9</sup> We shall explore to what extent the sounds to which the masses were exposed would become a significant part of their culture (taking as a given the proposition that the plebeians *had* a culture). Finally, building on the work of Egyptologist Jan Assmann on rituals, culture and the notion of cultural memory, the role of music in Roman popular culture will be assessed.<sup>10</sup> I use 'Roman' advisedly: while I make occasional forays into other large cities of the Western Empire, this chapter focuses on the inhabitants of the city of Rome, since, for the most part, our historical sources are concentrated on this population.

## Listening to the Music of Power: Soundmakers

A simple method for better understanding the communicative impact of a musical performance is to separate the different agents involved. Concentrating on basic analytical structures enables us to distinguish between those making sounds and those receiving the auditory information. For example, musicians performing in public ceremonies did so for reasons beyond their own personal pleasure; they cannot be considered the target of their own performance, in that they were not performing on their own initiative – rather, they were fulfilling a demand. In the final analysis, then, musicians would be considered rather as 'vectors' of sounds neither aimed at them nor initiated by them. This demonstrates that, in order better to understand the involvement of the different agents present at a

<sup>4</sup> Scholarly production in recent years is huge; for an assessment of Anglo-American historiography and a methodological introduction, see Smith 2007 and Schwartz 2011. Useful recent syntheses, incorporating French research, can be found in Palazzo 2012 and Krampfl and Beck 2013.

<sup>5</sup> See Classen 1993, 1997; Howes 2003, 2005. In France, this approach has been communicated more widely by D. Le Breton. Le Breton 2007 presents a clear overview of his work.

<sup>6</sup> Horsfall 2003: see in particular ch. 1 on songs, and ch. 3, 'Music returns to Rome'.

<sup>7</sup> Strab. *Geog.* 5.2.2: *moustikē, hōsa demōsia chrōntai Rōmaioi*. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations come from the Loeb editions.

<sup>8</sup> On the double meaning of 'public' when associated with religion, see Scheid 2013: 122.

<sup>9</sup> A definition of what constitutes 'the people' is not the main object of this chapter. I will use it here as a synonym for the plebs in its negative definition: that is, the population as a whole to the exclusion of the families of knights and senators. I am aware of the great sociological, financial and cultural diversity that such a loose definition implies. See Courrier in this volume (esp. pp. 107–8). The notion of cultural capital derives of course from the classic work of Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction* (first published in French 1979; Bourdieu 1984). It refers to the amount of cultural resources an individual has at his disposal, whether transmitted by family, school or living in society in general.

<sup>10</sup> Assmann 2010.

musical performance, it is necessary to analyse the specific context of the musical performance with care.

Thanks to the brilliant, muscular soundtracks beloved by directors of epic films, what immediately comes to mind today when thinking about Roman music is the music played during the Roman games.<sup>11</sup> There is some basis for this in our historical narratives: as famously depicted by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, musicians played during the procession bringing the participants of the games to the space where these took place.<sup>12</sup> Ostensibly describing the specific *pompa circensis* of the *ludi votivi* promised by the dictator Aulus Postumius after the battle of Lake Regillus in 499 BCE, Dionysius of Halicarnassus details a typical procession, with elements he had himself witnessed, as well as others borrowed from the annalist Fabius Pictor.<sup>13</sup> *Auloi*, lyre and lute players marched in these processions, a fact confirmed by other narrative and iconographic sources.<sup>14</sup> Yet, starting from the end of the Republic, a third category of instruments, brass instruments, came to be preferred. Juvenal satirizes a games organizer who is surrounded by *cornicines* (musicians playing large bronze instruments turned in on themselves), and these musicians are often featured in Roman relief sculptures along with *tubicines* (musicians playing long, straight bronze instruments).<sup>15</sup> Later, Tertullian mentions the *tibia* and the *tuba* as the two instruments dominating the music of processions for the games.<sup>16</sup>

The organization of games – be they theatrical, musical or gymnastic, circus races or gladiatorial combats – was the prerogative of curule magistrates. More specifically, the aediles were in charge of staging the annual games.<sup>17</sup> Starting with the reign of Augustus, the organization of ritual festivals changed. Even if some republican habits remained unaltered, the emperor progressively gained greater control.<sup>18</sup> No matter who held the

upper hand, organizing the games was an important task for those in charge of the city. As the games were part of the religious rituals of public life, they were the responsibility of those who interceded between the gods and the citizens – that is, priests and politicians, who both hailed from the same social group. These priests and politicians hired the participants of the games: the actors, charioteers and gladiators, and also the musicians who played in the *pompa*. A Roman inscription written in memory of a *cornicen* called Titus Avienus suggests that, by the latest at the end of the first or start of the second century CE, musicians were attached to the imperial *ludus* permanently, or at least for lengthy periods.<sup>19</sup>

The same process of imperial appropriation of ceremonies with a musical component can be seen in the case of the triumph.<sup>20</sup> In both republican and imperial times, the decision to celebrate a victorious general was considered a public matter and thus had to be ratified by a vote in the Senate. The musicians taking part in triumphs – mostly players of large bronze aerophones and *tubicines* – were therefore acting on the order of the public. These musicians were, as described by Plutarch and Appian, at the head of the parade for the triumph of Aemilius Paulus in 167 BCE.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, the frieze of the triumphal relief on the Temple of Apollo Sosianus features a *tubicen* blowing his horn while bearers are about to lift a *ferculum* holding a trophy, which suggests that the scene is at the beginning of the procession.<sup>22</sup> The presence of these musicians became so emblematic of the ceremony as a whole that on the well-known panel of Marcus Aurelius' triumphal arch the emperor has only one *tubicen* by his side, who thus serves metonymically for the entire *pompa*.<sup>23</sup>

Both the games and the triumph were manifestations of Roman public religion. Yet there was another rite, perhaps the most important of all, which necessitated the presence of musicians: the sacrifice. Here, too, the available iconography testifies to the importance of music. Altars from the Augustan period systematically feature a *tubicen* by the side of the

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, the numerous images from films featuring musicians playing bronze instruments reproduced in Martin 2003 and Dumont 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 7.72. <sup>13</sup> Piganiol 1923: 15–32.

<sup>14</sup> On *auloi/tibia*, see notably Cic. *Har.* 11.23 and Ov. *Am.* 3.13.11–12. For a visual representation, see the relief of Castel San Elia, cf. Ronke 1987: figs. 15–19. The *tibia* is pictured with chord instruments on the Pesaro relief (Fless 1995: pl. 10, fig. 1).

<sup>15</sup> Juv. 10.43–6. See the relief from the Stabian Gate necropolis in Pompeii that depicts the procession preceding the games on the first of the three levels of sculpture (Junkelmann 2000: 131, figs. 205 and 209). See also the funeral monument of a *sevir Augustalis* at Amiternum (Ronke 1987: figs. 10–14 and Guidetti 2006).

<sup>16</sup> Tert. *De spect.* 10.2.

<sup>17</sup> Bernstein 1998: 51–78. An exception: the gladiatorial games were theoretically private events, organized for religious ends, until the end of the Republic.

<sup>18</sup> Benoist 1999: 73–82.

<sup>19</sup> *AE* 1988, 23 = *EAOR* 1, pp. 42–3, n. 36, pl. 11, 2 = *EDR* 080574: D(is) [M(anibus)] | T(it) Avien[us] | cornic[inis] | lud[i].

<sup>20</sup> The privatization of the triumph by emperors, starting with Augustus, is a well-known phenomenon: see Bastien 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Plut. *Aem.* 33.1; App. *Pun.* 66.

<sup>22</sup> This relief is currently in the Montemartini Museum (inv. no. MC 2776). *Tubicines* are also found in the same position at the start of a procession on the Medinaceli relief depicting the triumph of Augustus in 29 BCE (after his victory in Actium). This exceptional monument can be seen in full in the catalogue of the 2013–14 Augustus exhibition: La Rocca *et al.* 2013: 321–3.

<sup>23</sup> Currently in the Capitoline Museums, Palazzo dei Conservatori (inv. no. MC 0808). For an analysis of the role of musicians in triumphal processions, see Podini 2004.

sacrificant.<sup>24</sup> Pliny the Elder suggests that the *tibicen* was there because he added to the ritual's completeness. The *tibicen's* role was to insulate, as it were, the sacrificant with a wall of sound, shielding him from any extraneous sounds that might distract him from performing the sacrifice as tradition dictated.<sup>25</sup> The episode known as the 'Tibicines protest' of 311 BCE highlights the fact that the presence of musicians was absolutely necessary in order for sacrifices to be carried out.<sup>26</sup> Because ritual communication with the gods could no longer be properly effected, the musicians' voluntary exile to Tibur endangered the functioning of the city. In order for them to return, magistrates were forced into a course of action that mingled deception with compromise.<sup>27</sup> During sacrifices, therefore, the *tibicines* were directly in the service of the priests and magistrates of the Roman religion. Unsurprisingly, the law regulating the colony of Urso, in Baetica, stipulated that magistrates had one of these musicians at their disposition.<sup>28</sup> Article 62 specifies that the city's *duumviri* and aediles had a right to have on their staff a herald, a *haruspex* and a *tibicen*.<sup>29</sup> The *tibicen*, in sum, allowed magistrates to carry out properly the public religious rites that their office required.

Another example – perhaps less obvious in this context but nonetheless precisely documented – must be added to these instances of the music of power: that of public assemblies of the Roman populace. Dionysius of Halicarnassus describes how, in the early days of Rome, animal horns were used to make the call to assemblies.<sup>30</sup> In later periods, sources stipulate the type of instrument used for the call – making it possible to distinguish between the different types of *comitia*. According to Aulus Gellius, centuriate assemblies were called by a *cornu*, while curiate

assemblies were sounded by the voice of a herald.<sup>31</sup> Such a differentiation is not surprising if one considers the nature of the centuriate assembly, which brought together Roman citizens according to their military rank: the *cornu* was one of the three instruments present in Roman camps, along with the *tuba* and the *bucina*. Calling together citizens with the *cornu* was therefore a way to reassert the military contours of Roman citizenship. Before 218 BCE centuriate assemblies were called in order to vote on laws, to ratify declarations of war and to confirm the capital sentences pronounced by judges in trials *de perduellione*. In his text on the Latin language, Varro illuminates this latter function by pointing to an edict prior to 242 BCE, which details the procedure for the unfolding of centuriate assemblies in high treason trials:

In the same *Commentary on the Indictment*, this is the summing up of the edict written at the end: 'Likewise in what pertains to those who have received from the censors the contract for the trumpeter who gives the summons to the centuriate assembly, they shall see to it that on that day, on which the assembly shall take place, the trumpeter shall sound the trumpet (*classicus canat*) on the Citadel and around the walls, and shall sound it before the house-entrance of this accursed Titus Quintius Trogus, and that he be present in the Campus Martius at daybreak.'<sup>32</sup>

This excerpt from the edict forcefully brings out the construction of the music of power. Musicians who were in charge of bringing together the centuriate assemblies clearly acted on behalf of the civic authorities. They held their mandate thanks to a system of deputization which made them temporarily servants of the city.<sup>33</sup> But the interest of this passage also lies in the fact that it sheds light on the other pole of communication dynamics, that of the receivers of sound.

## Receivers

One of the most constructive ways to explore the audience of the music of power is to retrace, from the perspective of spatial semiotics, the steps of

<sup>24</sup> For illustrations, see Fless 1995 and Ryberg 1955. For a preliminary analysis of the systematization of their representation, see Vincent 2013. For an analysis of the ritual, see Scheid 2005 and Prescendi 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Plin. *HN* 28.3.11.

<sup>26</sup> The story is told by Ov. *Fast* 6. 650–711; Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 55; Liv. 9.30.5; Val. Max. 2.5.4. The same episode is told by Julius Paris, who epitomized the works of Valerius Maximus, and is briefly mentioned by Quint. *Inst.* 5.11.9.

<sup>27</sup> There are many interpretations of the causes of their departure from the city and the circumstances of their return: see Basanoff 1949, Palmer 1965, Dumézil 1973, Girard 1973, Storchi Marino 1979, Massa-Pairault 1985: 92–6, Paillet 2001, Humm 2005: 469–73, Buchet 2010, Vincent 2016. The ancient sources nonetheless agree that the exile was voluntary and the return advantageous to the musicians.

<sup>28</sup> This document was engraved on bronze tablets dating from the Flavian epoch, although the text itself is older, from the pre-Augustan period.

<sup>29</sup> Crawford 1996: 400. In this case, this refers to three types of priests shared by the magistrates.

<sup>30</sup> Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.8.4, see below.

<sup>31</sup> Gell. 15.27.2: 'Eorum autem alia esse "curiata", alia "centuriata"; "curiata" per lictorem curiatum "calari", id est "convocari", "centuriata" per cornicinem.'

<sup>32</sup> Var. *Ling.* 6.92: 'In eodem commentario acquisitionis ad extremum scriptum caput edicti hoc est: "Item quod attingat qui de censoribus redemptum habent, uti curent eo die quo die comitia erunt, in arce classicus canat tum circumque moeros et ante privati huiusce T. Quincti Trogi scelerosi ostium canat et ut in Campo cum primo luci adsiet."

<sup>33</sup> On this juridical condition and the social consequences that it had for the musicians concerned, see Vincent 2016. On adjudications by Roman authorities in general, see Trisciunglio 1998 and Aubert 1994: esp. 112–14 (a legal description of *locatio conductio*).



the musician in charge of calling these public assemblies. The first sound of the horn was blown on the Arx, the oldest citadel of Rome and its most impregnable fortress.<sup>34</sup> During the mid-republican period the Arx was still the military heart of the city.<sup>35</sup> The fact that the *cornicen* was located on the Arx indicated the seriousness of the capital charge, which was carried out by the military authorities in the guise of the praetor, temporarily acting *cum imperio*, who assumed the function of public prosecutor. More practically speaking, the Arx was the highest point in the city, so no other building could block the resonance of the *cornicen*'s sounds. The repeated calls of the *cornicen* along the city walls (*tum circumque moeros canat*, as Varro stressed) designated the target audience, which was the city as a whole. Every citizen, regardless of social class, wealth or reputation, was affected by a capital trial. This encircling of the *Urbs* by the musicians is thus akin to a rite of inclusion, whereby the community of citizens is created acoustically. By contrast, the musician's last call, played at the door of the condemned, worked to differentiate and exclude, by drawing attention to the convict, who stood apart from the rest of the civic population. The sound of the *cornu* resonated within the city walls, breaking the monotony and silence of the Roman night.<sup>36</sup> Absent from Varro's text, the audience is nevertheless omnipresent in the musical journey: an entire citizenry targeted in an acoustic dramatization of justice.

Other scenes related to the carrying out of capital punishment demonstrate how music solemnized such moments for the whole of the civic body – represented, again, as the target audience. Seneca the Elder gives a brief account of the moments preceding an execution in the Forum:

The praetor takes his place on the tribunal, under the gaze of the province. The guilty man's hands are tied behind his back; he stands, facing everyone's intense and reproving stare; the herald asks for silence, the ritual sentence is pronounced, the *classicum* is blown from the other side.<sup>37</sup>

The *classicum* in question was a melody – the only one whose name has been preserved. It was primarily played in a military setting in the case of

<sup>34</sup> On the Capitol as the last refuge for Romans, see the story of the taking of Rome by the Gauls led by Brennus found in, among others, Liv. 5.39–43, 47. On the etymology of Arx, stemming from *arcere* (to push away), see Var. *Ling.* 5.151.

<sup>35</sup> Gianelli 1993.

<sup>36</sup> As the musician had to be at the Campus Martius at the first light of dawn, this implies that he crossed the city at night.

<sup>37</sup> Sen. *Controv.* 9.2.10: 'deinde descripsit, quanto aliter in foro decolletur: ascendit praetor tribunal inspectante provincia. Noxio post terga deligantur manus; stat intento ac tristi omnium vultu. Fit a praecone silentium; adhibentur deinde legitima verba, canitur ex altera parte classicum.'

an emergency (the attack of a camp at night, for example) or to render official honours to magistrates *cum imperio* when they were in the camp. During the Republic, when conscripts manned the army, citizen-soldiers were habituated to the sound of the horn. In the same text, Seneca the Elder contrasts the *classicum* with the *symphonia*, which was generally played in a private setting.<sup>38</sup> While the *symphonia* was totally inappropriate for public ceremonies, the *gravitas* of the *classicum* reinforced the majesty of the Roman people. The *classicum* was thus a familiar tune, at least for the citizen-soldiers, played in order to highlight the dramatic qualities of the event unfolding before the eyes of the Roman population. Capito's words – *omnium vultu*, literally 'in front of the faces of everyone' – emphasize the public space. It was not so much that the entire population of Rome could be found in the Forum – that would be to confuse rhetoric and statistics – but the point is that this ceremony was meant for all citizens, who were all free to come and listen – *in silence* – to the final notes for the condemned man.

## Medium

The responsibility for summoning people's assemblies and dramatizing justice in republican and imperial times fell upon the horns. Present in the processions for games and during triumphs, they were the instruments of choice for the music of power. This can, of course, be explained in practical terms: Julius Pollux, the Greek lexicographer whose *Onomasticon* was composed in the second half of the second century CE, notes that the sound of the *tuba* could be heard at a distance of 50 stades, or about 10 kilometres.<sup>39</sup> The most suitable instruments for communicating to the masses and over a large distance, the *tubae* guaranteed that all citizens heard these soundings of the music of power. It was no longer the case that there were distinct calls according to social rank, as Dionysius of Halicarnassus relates in relation to the regal period: 'whenever the kings thought proper to assemble the patricians, the heralds called them both by their names and by the names of their fathers, whereas public servants

<sup>38</sup> Sen. *Con.* 9.2.14: 'Dic enim mihi, si, cum animadvertere debeat non legitimo cultu ac more solemnium usus, interdum tribunal conscenderit convivali veste, si, cum classicum canere debeat, symphoniam canere iusserit, non laedet maiestatem?'

<sup>39</sup> Poll. *Onom.* 4.88. The Greek term is *salpinx*, which is the equivalent of the Latin *tuba*. On the organologic and acoustic qualities of the *tuba*, see Vendries 2007, the most complete study to date. The size of the inner rim diameter and of the bore of the tuba of Neuvy-en-Sullias seems to confirm Pollux's statement.

summoned the plebeians *en masse* to the assemblies by the sound of the horns'.<sup>40</sup> By contrast, the music of power in later times made no distinction between social classes, with both plebeians and senators hearing the same call.

The acoustic strength of large aerophones partly explains why they were used to transmit information to a very large number of people. This can be deduced from an Augustan document, the epigraphic report of the Secular Games organized in 17 BCE.<sup>41</sup> This long text leads one to believe that more citizens than originally planned participated in the rites of these games, which were designed to inaugurate a new century and a new era for Rome. Initially meant to take place on a single day, the distribution of *suffimenta* (torches, sulphur and asphalt) purifying the participants in the rite was extended to three days.<sup>42</sup> This was done in an edict of the *quindecimviri* dating from 24 May, only four days before the scheduled date.<sup>43</sup> Such overwhelming enthusiasm for a ritual event which one was supposed to attend only once in a lifetime suggests that a very large number of residents of Rome took part, and probably a large number of citizens from outside the capital.<sup>44</sup> The city might then have looked rather like Suetonius' description of the games given by Caesar: taken over by visiting spectators, who took up positions wherever they could during the celebrations.<sup>45</sup> It is this enormous crowd, made up of several hundreds of thousands of individuals, that the trumpet players (*aenatores*) addressed through song on 30 May, calling the citizens to take part in the religious rites (*sacri*) relating to the theatrical games, which were also organized as part of these exceptional celebrations.<sup>46</sup>

A few days later, on 3 June, the mass of citizens again heard these musicians, but this time accompanied by another category of instrumentalists: lyre and *tibia* players. They all accompanied the procession from the Palatine Hill to the Capitol. A narrative of this event is found in the epigraphic account of the Secular Games of Septimius Severus (204 CE).

<sup>40</sup> Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.8.4.

<sup>41</sup> For the edition of this text, see most recently Schnegg-Köhler 2002.

<sup>42</sup> Zos. 2. 5.1; Schnegg-Köhler 2002: 30, l. 48. <sup>43</sup> Schnegg-Köhler 2002: 32, l. 62-7.

<sup>44</sup> This is the meaning of the Roman *saeculum*, cf. Zos. 2.1.1. On the fact that only citizens were authorized to participate in these rituals of the civic religion, see Scheid 2013: 121-43, esp. 130-43, based on Zos. 2.5.1.

<sup>45</sup> Suet. *Jul.* 39.7: 'Such a throng flocked to all these shows from every quarter that many strangers had to lodge in tents in the streets or along the roads and the press was often such that many were crushed to death, including two senators.'

<sup>46</sup> Schnegg-Köhler 2002: 34, l. 86-8 (with commentary, p. 114): 'Item cum ad caerimonias sacro [rum - - -] | certiores esse volumus omnes m[- - -] | aenatores in funere canere [- - - (vacat ?)].'

*Carmen saeculare* was sung, with the musicians accompanying chariots, dancers and even horseback acrobats.<sup>47</sup> On this occasion the musicians paraded on the *sacra via* and crossed the Forum. This is where, according to the inscription, they met the *populus (adstante et intercedente populo)* who had not been able to attend the performance given by twenty seven each of young noble men and women in front of the temples of Apollo Palatinus and Jupiter Capitolinus.

Remarkable for their rich documentary remains, these musical events during the secular games are paradigmatic examples of the music of power. Played by command of the civil authorities, in the name of the entire populace, and on instruments suitable for mass communication, this music was meant to be heard by the entire citizen body of the city, plebeians included. Does this mean that this particular music of power – music that was heard by all – penetrated into popular culture?

## The Music of Power and Popular Culture

Ancient popular culture is difficult to access and assess today because so few truly popular testimonies have reached us. For example, Martial's vituperations regarding his alleged poverty and the hardships of being a *cliens* begging for patronage do not fool anyone: his voice was not a *vox populi*.<sup>48</sup> Epigraphy – which we might consider one of the most useful alternative sources for accessing non-elite history – is of little assistance when it comes to the music of power. Inscriptions supply the names of some musicians, thus allowing us to analyse their social class, but this does not actually enlighten historians as to how musical performances were actually received.<sup>49</sup> The best one can say is that some musicians were indeed in the service of the city and were thus the official emissaries of the music of power.

<sup>47</sup> Pighi 1965: '[ - - - Inde XVviri duxerunt] et tibi[cinum fidicinum cornic]inum aeneatorum et tubicin[u]m translatum, et togarum [- - -] a]sinariorum [- - -]m et tiron[u]mque ludionum quadr[igarum binarum et bi]garum binarum item desultorum cu[rsor]umque factionu[m] singularum pompam] publicis et c[alatoribus ordinantibus, adstante et i]ntercede[n]te populo, per [Via]m Sacram forumque Romanu[m] arcum Seue[ri et Antoni]ni Aug[.g. et Getae Caes.].'

<sup>48</sup> See, for instance, Balland 2010.

<sup>49</sup> For a sociological study of professional musicians, see Vincent 2016. The study of the inscriptions highlights the difference between private musicians and musicians playing for the city, the latter enjoying better conditions, especially post-Augustus.

Other methodological tools are necessary to fill in these gaps. Among them, the concept of 'cultural memory' elaborated by the Egyptologist Jan Assmann proves particularly useful, not least because it was developed by a specialist in ancient history.<sup>50</sup> The concept of cultural memory offers a series of criteria for analysis that are especially adapted to the study of ancient societies. It deals with collective culture, including popular culture, through the prism of a category of events that are among the most richly documented. For Assmann, cultural memory corresponds to a mode of transmission and commemoration of cultural content within a population, regardless of its social components. Cultural memory is at the crossroads of identity, continuity and a certain relationship to the past – all of which make up the very foundations of a community.<sup>51</sup> It is distinguished from 'communicational memory', which corresponds to the memories of a recent past that individuals share with their contemporaries. Cultural memory is developed over a longer period and its content serves as a structural framework for human societies. In order to exist and endure, cultural memory needs to be manifested in concrete moments, such as rituals, defined here as mimetic routines which have acquired meaning beyond their immediate utility.<sup>52</sup> These rituals are repeated in order to anchor memory in a lengthier temporal continuity.<sup>53</sup> Addressed to each and every member of the community, the iteration of these rituals allows for a sharing of cultural givens by the whole community. In this respect festivals and celebrations are of prime importance because they gather together a substantial part of the population, which then collectively integrates or reinvigorates its cultural memory.

The testimonia regarding the music of power that I present here offer elements that would seem to be part of the cultural memory of the inhabitants of Rome. These relate to ritual moments, often of celebration, in collective life. The term 'ritual' should not be understood here in exclusively religious terms, as in the cases discussed above (the triumph, *pompa ludi* and sacrificial rites). Since rituals are defined first and foremost by their normative and repetitive organization, they can be religious or they can relate to an ensemble of purely political actions and traditions.

<sup>50</sup> Assmann 1995 provides a short summary of the idea; the most comprehensive account is Assmann 2010.

<sup>51</sup> The foundation of Assmann's ideas lies in the work of Halbwachs, who developed the notion of 'collective memory', which presupposes that all memory experience becomes lodged in a group and that an individual, by him- or herself, does not have any memory. See the summary in Assmann 2010: 32–43.

<sup>52</sup> Assmann 2010: 19.

<sup>53</sup> Rudhardt 1988: 2–14 on the value of ritual for insertion in an historical chain.

were framed by a raft of traditional, inherited procedures, which is why they are fully congruent with what Christer Bruun has called, with reference to Ostia, 'civic rituals'.<sup>54</sup>

Of all the rituals mentioned in this chapter, the sounds of religious sacrifices were probably the most familiar to the inhabitants of Rome. The rigorous organization of the Roman religious calendar, as evidenced by the records of numerous *fasti* in many cities of the Empire, allowed for sacrificial music to be performed frequently. In addition to fixed, calendrical dates, further sacrifices were added due to events that necessitated communication with the gods (military victories, natural catastrophes, births, weddings, etc.). Sacrificial music was anchored in the city's acoustic culture because these permanent rituals were, by their very nature, repeated regularly through the years. Every iteration was an opportunity to reinvigorate this culture and make it part of the population's collective knowledge. The concrete circumstances of these musical performances also played an important role in the diffusion of such knowledge. According to iconographic and numismatic sources, these rituals took place mostly outdoors, in front of temples.<sup>55</sup> This likely facilitated the dispersion of sound in the city space, so that it could be heard by large numbers of people. Moreover, sacrifices were not held in one single space in the city: the vicinity of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus was used as often as the sanctuaries of the Campus Martius. Thus, throughout the year, the entire urban space would be filled with the sounds of sacrifices, thereby reacquainting the inhabitants' ears with the acoustic culture of ritual.

Processions were clearly one of the preferred modes of diffusion of the music of power. Playing on the order of political authorities, musicians marched through the city streets in order to lead participants to the site of games (usually the temple of the divinity being honoured), to accompany a triumphant general or the participants in a religious ritual, or to inform citizens of an imminent conviction. In so doing, they increased the potential for sound diffusion and enabled their performances to enter the acoustic range of the whole city.

The capillary diffusion of ritual music in urban space and across social classes expanded further during the reign of Augustus when, in 7 BCE, the

<sup>54</sup> Bruun 2009 notes in a similar manner, concerning the inhabitants of the Ostian colony during the imperial period, that the function of these 'civic rituals' was to reinforce the historical and memorial conscience of the community. Bruun does not refer to Assmann's work on cultural memory.

<sup>55</sup> See, on the iconographic representation of musicians, Fless 1995.

city was reorganized into fourteen *regiones* and c. 265 *vici*.<sup>56</sup> This reform of urban planning prompted the first *princeps* to re-establish abandoned neighbourhood cults honouring the gods of crossroads (*Lares compitales*). To these ancient gods, Augustus added the worship of his own genius (*genius Augusti*), which laid the foundations for imperial worship during popular assemblies.<sup>57</sup> The importance of this initiative is well known. In relation to this present study, it embedded the sounds of power even deeper within the fabric of the city. Surviving altar reliefs illustrate the quotidian presence of *tubicines* during sacrifices by neighbourhood officials (*vicomagistri*) in honour of the emperor's genius.<sup>58</sup> Likewise, the large historical relief discovered under the Palazzo della Cancelleria, and today conserved in the Vatican Museums, allows one to associate *tubicines* with *tubicines* in the sacrifices organized during these crossroad rituals. A procession scene shows *vicomagistri* holding statuettes representing the *Lares compitales* and *genius Augusti*, while in the background three *tubicines* blow into their instruments.<sup>59</sup> Each year, then, each urban cell of the *Urbs* – all at the same time – was filled with the sounds of the music of power, imposing upon the citizens of Rome a layer of communal acoustic culture.<sup>60</sup>

The choice of the word 'imposing' to describe this process does not seem excessive given the nature of the instruments concerned. Imagine three *tubae* playing at the same time – three of those instruments that Julius Pollux said could be heard at a distance of 10 kilometres.<sup>61</sup> Could one possibly escape their sounds? The coercive qualities of these sounds, especially those emitted by large aerophones in bronze, should not be underestimated. In his *Apocolocyntosis* Seneca parodies these instruments as being able literally to wake the dead: 'It was certainly a most gorgeous spectacle, got up regardless of expense, clear it was that a god was being borne to the grave: tootling of trumpets, roaring of horns, an immense

brass band of all sorts, such a din that even Claudius could hear it."<sup>62</sup> The sounds emitted by these instruments spread throughout the urban space and into the ears of those who, *volens nolens*, had no other choice but to accept them and to integrate them into a known repertoire. The music of power did not need to be present at the heart of the event since it could be heard far beyond the limits of the visible – a fact that probably did not escape officials seeking to diffuse communications about the political regime. In this respect, one must underline the significant difference between diffusing information visually and aurally. Art historians of ancient Rome rightly attempt to interpret the details of figures featured on coins and on painted or sculpted iconographic programmes, assigning precise meaning to the representation of a god, an animal or a vegetal element.<sup>63</sup> Reflecting upon the power of images, they try to understand whether the iconographical programmes of monuments were seen and understood, and if so by which section(s) of the population.<sup>64</sup> However, the primacy of sight over the other senses in contemporary Western culture is mirrored, we find, in its historiography,<sup>65</sup> and this purely visual approach rarely takes into account the role of music and the sound environment in general. If one accepts, as I have shown here, that there is indeed a soundscape of political power, then one must also take into consideration that these sounds were, by their very nature, an efficient, familiar and indeed effective tool of communication for the Roman population. The music of power spread through the city and touched its audience in a way that figural representations could not.

The means at the disposal of the city for acoustic communication were great, and their efficiency was reinforced by the material contexts of musical performances. However, it is not possible to differentiate between hearers: the city's sounds were imposed without distinction. In this sense,

<sup>56</sup> The figure of 265 *vici* is given by Pliny the Elder (for his time; the figure does not seem unreasonable for a few decades earlier, cf. Lott 2004: 84–98).

<sup>57</sup> There is a vast literature on the Augustan reorganization of the city and on the cult of the crossroads. See, in particular, Fraschetti 1990 and Lott 2004.

<sup>58</sup> See Hano 1986 for the iconography of these altars, as well as Vincent 2013 for a preliminary analysis of this exact point.

<sup>59</sup> For images, see Ryberg 1955: pl. 23; Fless 1995: 51–4, pl. 13, fig. 2 and pl. 17, fig. 1–2.

<sup>60</sup> One can postulate that not all of the *vici* took part in a procession as important as the one represented on the frieze of the Palazzo della Cancelleria, as the city did not have enough *tubicines*. The frieze is more likely a depiction of an ideal *pompa* or one that took place for a particularly important *vicius*.

<sup>61</sup> Wille 1967: 71. This suggests that attending the parade of a *pompa* amounted to exposing oneself to the maximum acoustic volume that one could have in the pre-industrial era.

<sup>62</sup> Sen. *Apocol.* 12: 'Et erat omnium formosissimum et impensa cura, plane ut scires deum efferritubicinum, cornicinum, omnis generis aenatorum tanta turba, tantus concentus, ut etiam Claudius audire posset.'

<sup>63</sup> Here I am thinking specifically of Sauron's interpretations of vegetal friezes decorating the lower level of the Ara Pacis and the diverse reactions that they have elicited (enumerated in Sauron 2000: 50–64).

<sup>64</sup> The very fact that monuments and their ornaments existed is enough to ensure their communicative efficacy, even if no one could comprehend or differentiate the precise details. Cf. Veyne 2002, who takes up the question of the efficacy of Trajan's Column with breathtaking intellectual power.

<sup>65</sup> See Smith 2007 on the hierarchy of the senses and the history of the pre-eminence of vision. For a similar critique, see Howes 2003: xi–xx and Howes 2005. Smith underlines the importance of Foucault's thought for contemporary historiography, and its impact on the dominant position of sight.

the cultural memory of the music of power was universal, and the plebs were part of it but not its sole holder. The mastery of this common acoustic environment defined the contours of what, in discussing contemporary contexts, Barry Truax has called the 'acoustic community'.<sup>66</sup> In our case, we can say that this acoustic community had borders that were geographical (residing in an urban setting where musical performances were held) or political (for instance, knowing the *classicum* by having served in the legions during the period of the Republic), rather than social.

## Conclusions

The results of this study might appear slight, especially for those who, following Jerry Toner, believe that Roman popular culture was more than a few 'half-remembered songs from the theatre'.<sup>67</sup> In fact, in the case of the music of power – defined as music played in public at the behest of political authorities – it is not possible to investigate further into the exact nature of what city-dwellers heard. With the exception of the *classicum*, the historical sources do not allow us to go beyond the study of the specific settings of musical performances. The content of these cultural forms escapes us almost entirely. Furthermore, the music of power was not a form of culture that was exclusively tied to the urban plebeian class. Produced in a public space by mass communication tools – the large bronze instruments such as the *tuba* and *cornu* – these sonorities imposed themselves above and beyond any social divisions. More than a popular culture, properly speaking, these sonorities are closer to constituting a Roman culture – or, indeed, a culture specific to the city of Rome, as the frequency and lavishness of celebrations in the capital exceeded all those of other cities. The music of power might thus be considered a unifying element of urban identity in which the plebeian took part, as did members of other social classes. As an integral part of a number of rites, this music was played frequently in civic space, imprinting itself in the Roman cultural memory as an identity-creating refrain. Such a conclusion, however modest, highlights a rarely studied aspect of our historical sources: even though we cannot access it in full, the soundscape of the past can certainly enlighten us about the culture and organization of ancient cities.

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<sup>66</sup> Truax 1984 58–83, cf. p. 61: 'Sound signals, and the information they convey, bind the community together and contribute to its character.'

<sup>67</sup> Toner 2009: 2.