

Creating the Sacred at Court.
Sensorial Practices and Experiences in Europe (1300–1800)

Abstracts

International Conference, Bratislava, Slovak University of Technology,
September 21–23, 2026

Organisation: COST Action 24164: *Sensing Europe's Court Spaces at the Crossroads of Past, Present and Future* (SENSES) and Slovak University of Technology

Session 1

Émilie Corswarem (Université de Liège), *Performing the Sacred in Rome's National Churches*

Acting as focal points for the foreign communities present in Rome, the national churches functioned both as charitable institutions for their respective communities and as representatives of their crowns, providing assistance and hospitality to the *connazionali*. Some also ranked among Rome's principal musical centres. They hosted ceremonies that, in the seventeenth century, were particularly sumptuous. Paradigmatic examples of multimedia celebrations, they lend themselves particularly well to an approach focused on deciphering action and effect.

These ceremonies often benefited from the presence and support of key members of the national faction in Rome, foremost among them the cardinal protector of the crown. The cardinal's court, itself a satellite of the papal court, was in turn structured around a constellation of affiliated spheres of patronage – including those of family members, national agents, and other associated actors. Considering these various settings offers a way of exploring the circulation of sensory experiences and cultural practices across interconnected courtly spaces. Beyond these interconnected courtly settings, the celebration itself extended into the urban sphere. Through the propagation of sounds, firecrackers, musical instruments, and fireworks, the temporal and spatial boundaries initially assigned to the celebration were effectively expanded.

Focusing on the dispositifs that structured the multisensory experience and on the agency of sound and music makes it possible to shift attention away from symbolic meaning alone toward the very ways in which the Baroque festival operated. This perspective requires close attention to the objects involved – their material qualities, cost, and circulation between palace, church, and the various spaces occupied by the celebration – as well as to a cross-analysis of complementary types of sources. Together, these elements provide valuable evidence for reconstructing festive practices, such as the approaches developed within the PerformArt ERC project (dir. A.-M. Goulet). The modes of action of sound and music within the Baroque festive dispositif thus bring us closer to what constituted one of its principal, if not primary, aims: effect.

Ilaria Grippaudo (Università di Palermo), *Staging Death: Music, Ritual, and Inter-Sensorial Experience in Viceregal Palermo*

This paper explores the role of music in the construction of inter-sensorial experiences within the sacred court spaces during a specific historical phase of Viceregal Palermo (late seventeenth to early eighteenth century). Focusing on funeral ceremonies for members of the Spanish royal family and inquisitorial *autodafés*, the essay investigates how sound contributed to shaping emotionally intense ritual environments and structures of power, particularly in relation to the Royal Chapel of Palermo, commonly known as the Palatina Chapel. Drawing on festival books, chronicles, and ceremonial reports, the study aims to reconstruct the interaction between music, sacred space, and ephemeral decorations in terms of symbolic redefinition.

In these occasions, the Royal Chapel functioned not merely as an institution, but also as a symbolic space from which devotional and political authority radiated into the urban context. Polychoral performances, the ringing of bells, candles, incense, and 'moving' sounds within processions generated immersive experiences designed to affect both the senses and emotions of participants. Particular attention is also devoted to the strategic placement of musicians within restricted spaces, platforms, and ceremonial 'theatres', whose spatial organization amplified the interaction between sound, vision, and ritual structure.

This conception of ritualized events turned sacred spaces into environments of embodied and sensory perception, in which sonic and sensory strategies transformed death into a collective ceremonial experience, as well as a spectacle of dynastic authority. The repetition of specific sounds, musical alternation, and the accumulation of sensory stimuli contributed to forms of emotional intensification and temporal suspension characteristic of Baroque ritual culture. By combining musicological inquiry with approaches drawn from sensory history and the study of court spaces, this paper also reflects on the methodological challenges involved in reconstructing past sensory perception through textual descriptions that focus on sound, space, and ceremonial practice in Baroque Sicily.

F. Serra İnan, *Sacralizing the Sovereign Body: Thrones and Sensory Authority in Early Modern Court Residences*

In *Archaeology and the Senses* (2013), Yannis Hamilakis challenges the classical hierarchy of the five senses and proposes instead the commingling and versatility of sensorial experience. Within this framework, material objects are understood as "extensions of the human body," functioning as sensorial prostheses that shape perception and embodied experience. Building on this approach, this paper examines the throne as both an extension of the sovereign's 'body politic' and a sensorial device instrumental in the sacralization of authority at court.

Across numerous mythological and religious traditions – from Greco-Roman antiquity to the Abrahamic religions – the throne appears as a celestial seat associated with transcendent authority. As a result, the terrestrial ruler's throne acquired associations with divine rulership. The throne functioned not merely as furniture or insignia, but as a ceremonial apparatus structuring visibility, elevation, hierarchy, and bodily orientation within courtly space.

Despite the throne's linguistic dominance and iconographic centrality, however, the actual presence of the object within early modern European court residences appears surprisingly limited. Unlike the Ottoman, Safavid, Mughal, or Ming and Qing courts, where thrones occupied a central ceremonial and architectural role, in European courts thrones were often confined to church ceremonies, only selectively entering the ceremonial contexts of court residences.

Departing from the Habsburg court and ceremonies, such as *Erbhuldigung*, in which thrones formed an integral part of ritual practice, this paper presents initial observations on the spatial and sensorial role of the throne across seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European courts. Aiming to trace the gradual process through which the throne was integrated into the architecture of court residences, it proposes to understand the throne as a performative and material extension of sovereign presence through which the sacredness of authority was temporarily staged and experienced.

Session 2

Marta Battisti (UC Louvain), *Staging the Brightness of the Roman Church: Sensorial Practices at Santo Stefano Rotondo under Gregory XIII*

This paper explores the sensorial practices through which the sacred was staged by the Jesuit German-Hungarian College at the church of Santo Stefano Rotondo in early modern Rome. A circular building described as a “theatre,” Santo Stefano Rotondo was renovated between 1580 and 1582 thanks to important donations from Gregory XIII (in office 1572–1585) to the German-Hungarian College. Intended as a crucial site for displaying the aims of the reformed Roman Catholic Church, it hosted several liturgical celebrations attended by the papal court: Gregory XIII notably visited the church for the Station Day in 1583, while several cardinals and their entourages are reported to have attended other festivities there.

The relationship between the papal court, the College, and Santo Stefano Rotondo is examined through the figure of its first rector, Michele Lauretano (in office 1578–1587). Archival sources portray Lauretano as a central actor in the creation of the sacred, which in his view corresponded to a series of specific actions all revolving around the notion of brightness. At Santo Stefano Rotondo, these included cleaning the pavement, dusting the images, and decorating altars with liturgical objects, candles, textiles, and flowers. Such practices were intended both to arouse devotion and to instruct students in the proper creation of a sacred atmosphere, preparing them for missionary activity in Reformed territories. Lauretano’s conception of the sacred culminated in celebrations involving processions and polyphonic music, during which the church space was carefully organized to accommodate different audiences.

Situated at the intersection of art history, musicology, and the history of the senses and emotions, this case study argues for a more integrated approach to sacred spaces in light of the practices that animated them. The paper also reflects on how embodied approaches may deepen our understanding of sacred environments, presenting the results of an on-site performance of a motet and a litany composed by Annibale Stabile (in office 1578–1590).

Anne-Françoise Morel (KU Leuven), *Deprivation in the Wilderness, Delight in Paradise: the Multiple Facets of Sensory Experience in Spiritual Detachment at the Carmelite Desert in Marlagne (1619)*

In 1619 the Discalced Carmelite Desert of Marlagne (Namur, Belgium) was founded at the instigation and under the patronage of the Archduke Albert of Habsburg and the Infanta Isabella, regents of the Low Countries, who inaugurated the Desert after its completion. According to the rules established by Thomas de Jesus in 1594 and 1604, the Desert was instrumental in re-establishing the Order's eremitical tradition through the mortification of the senses. Carmelite Deserts were reputed for the rare beauty of the site, which emerged from the perfect symbioses of natural and "man-made" elements and resulted in the creation of a sacred landscape.

The volume *La Sainte Solitude ou le bonheur de la vie solitaire, avec une Description poétique du Saint-Désert de Marlagne...*, by friar Albert de Saint Jacques (1644) describes the Desert contrasting the torment of the wilderness with a pastoral ideal and sometimes almost heavenly description of the site. While such description through opposition is characteristic of the epoch's spiritual literature, the detailed descriptions of the visual, auditory, and other sensory elements are striking. They remain however understudied so far.

Combining GIS, the theory of Affordances (Gibson's Ecological Approach to Visual Perception, 1979), and research by walking this contribution seeks to understand how the multisensory experience of the desert was part and parcel of the Discalced Carmelites' spiritual endeavour. As such, we gain new insights into the *raison d'être* and the natural and man-made characteristics of the desert typology in the order's spirituality, adding to and critically assessing the allegorical interpretations traditionally attributed to it in scholarly literature.

This presentation is part of a collaborative research project including architects, architectural historians, art historians, literature historians from UC Louvain (GEMCA-L.A.A.) and KU Leuven (PADP).

Nuno Senos (Universidade Nova de Lisboa), *A Courtly Chapel Revealed*

In the second half of the 15th century, the Duke and Duchess of Beja promoted the construction of a series of buildings in their hometown including a palace and an attached convent whose church functioned as palatine chapel as well as burial space for both. An 18th century campaign covered the entire inner space of the church in gilded woodcarving, forever hiding whatever original features may have survived underneath.

Recently the wood paneling in the main chapel had to be removed for conservation works thus revealing not only a very well preserved fresco program that had been painted at the time of the original construction of the church (simulating rich damask covering walls and vault, as well as false stereotomy on parts of the walls) but also the full decoration of the rib vault mostly done in gold leaf, and generous parts of the Duke's tomb, richly carved and also still holding its original polychromy.

Systematic conservation campaigns that took place across Portugal in the 19th and earlier 20th centuries made it that most polychromy in religious spaces is now lost. The decorative features now revealed in Beja show that the original courtly chapel looked nothing like the immaculate stone surfaces that have become the hallmark of gothic chapels. On the contrary, the original program evoked a series of sensorial responses, the most obvious of which triggered by the abundant use of forms and colors but that further extends to the evocation of (false, depicted) carved stone and the tactile feeling of (also false) textiles.

These still undergoing conservation works have brought to light a whole new sensorial world, made of unsuspected shapes, colors and textures, unique in Portugal, and that will force today's scholars to rethink their (our) perceptions of the world of gothic courtly spaces. A digital reconstruction of the original chapel, also under construction, will also be discussed.

Joanna Ciemińska (Museum of Art, Łódź), *Practices of Private Devotion and Oratories as Spaces of Consumption: a Sensory Reading of Women's Inventories from 16th–17th century Spain*

This paper examines how the practices of private devotion of aristocratic and princely women in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Spain were shaped by forms of collecting and consumption embedded within the sensorium. In doing so, this paper applies a sensory approach to the study of inventories of goods while also interrogating about the strengths and limitations of such sources for this type of analysis. In spatial terms, this paper focuses on the oratory as a place in which devotion, privacy, consumption and the sensorial entwined.

Oratories, i.e., rooms in private residences destined for prayer and in which the mass could be celebrated, were also often spaces of lavish consumption and collecting, concerned with the representation of status and serving as sites of embodied pleasure. These devotional and worldly functions were informed by the olfactory atmospheres, tactile experiences, and visual effects produced by the objects displayed and used there. Sensory experiences could be provoked by the presence of, among other things, incense, scented objects, candles, aromatics-filled jewellery and trinkets, relics, textiles, portative altars, rosaries, reliquaries and visually striking precious materials such as gold and crystal. The main question of this analysis, therefore, is how sensory experience participated in the creation of the sacred within the context of privacy at court. The focus will be placed on the court of Joanna of Austria (1535–73), Princess of Portugal, in Las Descalzas Reales in Madrid and on the residences of Ana de Mendoza y Enríquez de Cabrera (1554–1633), 6th Duchess of the Infantado; sources related to other persons will be utilized for further contextualisation.

Giulia Giovani (Università di Siena), *Aristocratic visits, music, and visual culture in the Convent of Santa Maria degli Angeli in 17th Century Siena*

In 1656, Berenice Della Ciaia—sister-in-law of Pope Alexander VII Chigi—visited the cloistered convent of Santa Maria degli Angeli (*Il Santuccio*) in Siena, accompanied by women from some of the city's most prominent aristocratic families, including the Chigi Piccolomini, Elci Bulgarini, and Bulgarini Saracini. The institution was closely connected to Siena's noble elite, as many of its Augustinian nuns originated from the same patrician networks that, under Medici rule, continued to shape the political, social, and cultural identity of the former Republic. Indeed, although incorporated into the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, the Florentine-based ducal administration enabled local Siennese elites to maintain their influence through patronage, religious institutions, and forms of courtly representation.

Within this context, official visits by noblewomen to the *Santuccio* reinforced the convent's prestige within the competitive landscape of Siennese female monasteries, while simultaneously transforming the cloister into an environment in which ritual and sensory experience converged through food, music, and the visual arts.

Music played a central role in this process. Performed during feast days and ceremonial visits, it articulated both spiritual devotion and noble identity. The convent's visual culture likewise emphasized musical performance: in 1612, Ventura Salimbeni painted a *Concert of Angels* beside the altar, representing with remarkable precision instruments such as the organ, archlute, violin, cornett, and lira. Around the same period, a musical-themed painting by Rutilio Manetti was installed near the choir, while an organ equipped with a double keyboard could be played both from the church and from within the *clausura*. Later, another musical subject was painted by Antonio Buonfigli on the organ shutters.

Drawing on scholarship in musicology and art history, this paper investigates how hearing and sight jointly shaped the convent experience. Unlike other early modern female convents studied primarily through their musical activities, the *Santuccio* stands out for the exceptional integration of musical and visual culture within the construction of devotional identity.

Session 3

Mathis Vauxion (Université de Nantes), Élouarn Le Chenadec (École Centrale de Nantes),
Creating the Sacred through Decor: Chapels, Oratories and AI-Based Simulation in Late Medieval Loire Court Spaces

This paper proposes to examine the creation of sacred space at court through the material, visual and sensorial arrangement of chapels and oratories in the Loire region during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Rather than considering sacredness as an inherent quality of a place, it approaches it as the result of staged interactions between architecture, images, objects, light, sound, smell, textiles and embodied devotional practices. The case study derives from two ongoing doctoral projects, one devoted to the representation and materialisation of the decoration of chapels and oratories in late medieval Loire courtly contexts, the other to heritage digital twins and generative AI. Particular attention will be paid to the degree of personalisation introduced by patrons through heraldry, donor imagery, funerary devices, liturgical furnishings, textiles and visual references to dynastic or princely models. The aim is to understand how these elements shaped both private devotion and public representation within courtly sacred environments.

The paper will also present a proof-of-concept developed through this interdisciplinary collaboration. Taking as a point of departure the announced development of *By God Alone* for *Crusader Kings III*, and more broadly the logic of historical simulation and game modding, the prototype allows a medieval lord to arrange a devotional space by selecting architectural, decorative and sensory components. Each generated environment is not presented as a definitive reconstruction, but as a historically constrained hypothesis, associated with degrees of probability depending on the nature of the sources used: surviving remains, textual descriptions, inventories, iconography or analogical comparison.

By combining art-historical analysis, AI-assisted generation and critical modelling, this contribution asks how digital methods can help us think through the seriality of sacred decor, the uncertainty of lost interiors, and the performative production of holiness in courtly spaces. It therefore treats simulation not as an illustrative tool, but as an epistemological device for questioning how the sacred was materially and sensorially created at court.

Olivia B. Weber (University of Texas at Austin), *From Champmol to Germolles: The Formation of Ducal Identity across Sacred Courtly Spaces in Late Medieval Burgundy*

This paper examines how the image of the Duke and Duchess of Burgundy—their authority, status, and roles as rulers—was visually and spatially constructed and reinforced across sacred courtly spaces in late medieval Burgundy during the reign of Philip the Bold (r. 1363–1404) and Margaret of Flanders. Focusing on the relationship between the ducal Carthusian monastery of the Chartreuse de Champmol and the ducal residence of the Château de Germolles, it argues that ducal identity was formed through the coordinated use of sacred and residential spaces.

Sculptural programs associated with Champmol and shaped within a liturgical context were recontextualized at Germolles, where their meaning shifted in a courtly residential setting.

These transformations must be understood primarily in relation to the spatial environments in which they were encountered. At Champmol, the sculptural programs of the church—most notably the kneeling figures of the duke and duchess at the church portal—articulated a mode of rulership grounded in dynastic memory and devotional practice. These works were encountered within a monumental and liturgical setting that structured perception through scale and passage across the church threshold. By contrast, related sculptural forms and iconographic strategies, when deployed at Germolles, presented the duke and duchess as active rulers within that setting. Here, ducal identity was seen and experienced through the movement across interior and exterior spaces, including the recontextualization of portraiture—likely originating in sculptural programs associated with Champmol—within a pastoral register.

By tracing the movement and transformation of sculptural programs across these sites, this paper demonstrates how shifts in spatial and sensory conditions reshaped ducal representation. Ultimately, it shows that the Burgundian ducal image was continually remade and reinterpreted through its placement and encounter within sacred spaces.

Vincent Vanhamme (KU Leuven), Yannick Sluyts (independent researcher), Monika Rychtariková (KU Leuven), Krista De Jonge (KU Leuven), *Sacred Echoes: Reconstructing the Lost Sacred Spaces and their Soundscape of the 14th-century Royal Residences in Valois France*

This paper examines the sensorial experience of sound in the sacred space of the late fourteenth-century Valois royal residences in France. The reconstruction of a soundscape of lost spaces entails a twofold methodology. This is demonstrated through the case study of the royal lodgings in the north wing of the Louvre in Paris, built by Raymond du Temple for King Charles V and his wife, Queen Jeanne of Bourbon, between 1364 and 1380.

First, a spatial reconstruction of the apartments is made, using not only the historical records such as accounts and descriptions, already known to leading scholars such as Mary Whiteley and Alain Salamagne, but also the hitherto unused archaeological surveys realised during the construction of the present-day Grand Louvre museum, thus achieving a more reliable model in three dimensions. Special attention is given to the use of BIM (Building Information Modelling).

Secondly, the paper focuses on the experiences developed on reconstructing the sacred soundscape(s) of the royal apartment as part of the VALSOUNDS-project. Central to this is the use of room acoustics software, such as Odeon® and Treble®. Drawing on reconstructed evidence for the Louvre's chapel and oratory, mirroring a similar configuration realised from 1367 onwards, by the same masters, the hunting lodge at Vincennes, to the east of the city, provides comparative archaeological data to calibrate the acoustic models more accurately.

The paper addresses both successes and methodological limitations and pitfalls inherent in the chosen approach, along with the problems encountered during the reconstruction of the spatial and acoustic components. The auralisations provide new insights into research on the music of the era and, conversely, enrich the understanding of late mediaeval courtly space.

VALSOUNDS (valsounds.eu) is an ERC proof-of-concept project directed by Karl Kügle, Krista De Jonge, and Monika Rychtariková at KU Leuven in 2023-2024.

David Jun (Brno University of Technology), *Challenges in Recording Anechoic Sound for Archaeo-Acoustic Research Related to Court Residences as a Multisensory Environment*

Archaeo-acoustic research often requires two complementary types of sonic material: first, an accurate representation of a historical space's acoustics through room impulse responses, and second, recordings of voices or musical instruments free from any reverberation. The latter allows researchers to recreate performances within virtual reconstructions of historical environments.

Producing such "anechoic" recordings, however, presents both technical and performative challenges. From a technical perspective, limitations arise from the nature of each musical instrument, microphone selection, and the reconstruction process itself. Equally important, however, are questions of performance validity. Musicians typically rely on the acoustics of a space and on the physical presence of other performers to shape timing, balance, and musical expression. Yet anechoic recording need to be (a) well separated by individual instruments and (b) recorded in an acoustically "dead" space.

This contribution discusses practical solutions used to address these issues. Appropriate microphone selection and positioning can reduce acoustic spill while preserving recording quality. At the same time, real-time binaural presentation of real or simulated room acoustics through open headphones can provide performers with a convincing sense of space during recording. Together, these approaches aim to balance technical precision with musically credible performance in archaeo-acoustic research.

Session 4

Krista De Jonge (KU Leuven), Camilla Cavicchi (Centre d'Études supérieures de la Renaissance, Tours), Philippe Vendrix (CNRS France), Monika Rychtariková (KU Leuven), *Sacred Soundings at Mary of Hungary's Court. Exploring the Binche Palace (1547- 1549) Soundscape with Digital Tools*

This paper first explores the sacred space of the Renaissance Palace built by Jacques Du Broeucq for Mary of Hungary, regent of the Low Countries, from 1547 to 1549, at Binche, and second, proposes a multi-disciplinary methodology for re-creating its soundscape, associating court studies, architectural history, musicology and acoustics. Building upon the multi-sensorial experiments developed for the MARY4ALL project (www.mary4all.eu) and its related series of public exhibitions, this proof of concept uses only existing digital tools in order to achieve a creative way of presenting new research perspectives to a variety of audiences.

The main research problems we shall address are, first, from the perspective of the court historian: how did the relatively narrow and tall chapel of the Binche palace and its flanking great halls function as "sacred space"? Where can we locate the different protagonists – the main patron, guests of note, high-ranking courtiers, and the lower orders – in this complex conjunction of space? From the perspective of the historian of music, considering the different listening positions, what can be inferred regarding the experience of music? What about the repertoire and its performance practice? From the perspective of the acoustician, considering that the Binche Palace has been lost (excepting for archaeological remnants), what can be done about a proper calibration of the acoustic model?

The paper will also propose a comparative approach, to be developed in the future, which involves analysing still existing similar spatial configurations, materials testing (in which the highly detailed accounts for Binche play a crucial role), and multiplying the sound samples (with varying performance factors) for the auralisations.

Milton Pedro Dias Pacheco, *Sacred Senses in Courtly Spaces: The Ceremonial of the Portuguese Royal Chapel through the Manuscript of D. Maria of Portugal in the Ducal Court of Parma*

D. Maria of Portugal, daughter of the Infante D. Duarte, sixth son of King D. Manuel I and fourth Duke of Guimarães, was raised within a refined and devout courtly environment shaped by humanist principles, ceremonial practices, and the religious doctrines of sixteenth-century Portugal. Following negotiations led by Felipe II of Spain, D. Maria married Alessandro Farnese in Brussels, heir to the Duchy of Parma and Piacenza. Her departure from Portugal constituted a significant moment of cultural and ritual transfer, as she carried with her a Portuguese household, together with ceremonial and culinary manuscripts, personal objects, and the devotional traditions of her native court.

Raised within the highly ritualized environment of the Portuguese royal court and the ducal household of Guimarães, D. Maria internalized a sophisticated ceremonial culture, as evidenced by the Ceremonial of the Royal Chapel, a detailed manual of liturgical practices and royal duties that accompanied her as part of her entourage. This ceremonial reveals how courtly experience extended beyond strictly sacred spaces, articulating itself with other environments, such as

banqueting halls, within a continuous performative framework. Structured according to the liturgical calendar, it regulated religious ceremonies, festive services, and spatial arrangements, thereby creating an integrated sensory system. Sound (chant and liturgical recitation), sight (chromatic vestments and visual hierarchies), smell (incense and candles), touch (textiles and liturgical and tableware objects), and taste (banqueting practices and regulated consumption) interacted to produce complex sensorial atmospheres across courtly spaces.

By focusing on the interaction between ritual norms and material culture, this paper argues that the ceremonial should not be understood merely as a liturgical manual, but as a key instrument in the sensory construction and transfer of courtly experiences across different contexts. Analysing such sources allows us to reconstruct the multisensory fabric of Early Modern court life and to better understand how sacred and princely experience was produced, regulated, and embodied in a transnational framework through the case study of D. Maria of Portugal.

Benjamin Dörr (FH Berlin, Potsdam), *The Eucharist and the Dynasty: The High Altar Area of El Escorial as an Operative Spatial Order*

This paper examines the church of El Escorial, as a spatial organization of perception and participation. Sacred spaces are often described through style, iconography, or symbolism, while historical perception and spatial impact remain insufficiently addressed. The paper therefore proposes a method of spatial analysis that understands architecture not as a static carrier of meaning, but as an active medium of institutional and religious order. This work is part of the research project *Auramaschinen*, which examines the spatial strategies through which perception and participation are organized, attention is captured, and meaning condensed.

The Church of El Escorial is examined through its high altar area, which serves as the focal point of spatial condensation. The sacred space thus appears not merely as a site of liturgical practice, but as a complex spatial system. The high altar, tabernacle, Royal Oratory, and Pantheon are linked into a shared perceptual context through visual axes, lighting, and spatial gradation. In this way, the Christian Eucharist, royal sovereignty, and dynastic memory are bound together into a shared spatial-symbolic order. The paper analyses the spatial strategies through which this order is brought about. It examines spatial sequences, thresholds, visual axes, and lighting design. Particular attention is paid to the hidden light behind the tabernacle, which illuminates the monstrance and stages sacred presence. The position of the king is also analysed, whose hidden oratory creates both proximity to and distance from the liturgical centre.

Using the Church as an example, the study demonstrates how sacred architecture focuses attention, creates a sense of presence, and makes religious and political order spatially tangible. Architecture thus appears as an “aura-machine”: a spatial system that organizes institutional order through perception, attention, and presence.

Eelco Nagelsmit (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Bibliotheca Hertziana Rome), *Demonstrating the Temple of Solomon at the Prussian Court in 1720*

In the early eighteenth century, the German school teacher Christoph Semler (1669-1740) created a detailed wooden scale model of the Biblical Temple of Solomon. Based on descriptions and measurements from the Bible, it was designed to offer its viewers a three-dimensional treasure-trove of exegetical opportunities. During live demonstrations, they were invited to explore the links between biblical events and histories through visualization of their spatial and temporal relations. These links included references to Levitical ritual and music, e.g. the Psalms.

The Pietist leader, minister, and advisor to the Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm I, August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) presented models by Semler to the king's children: in 1720 Princess Wilhelmine received a small copy of the Temple-model, and later that year, Crown Prince Friedrich one of the city of Jerusalem. Detailed written reports on the presentation of these gifts at the Berlin court shows that these were closely orchestrated events, part of a larger strategy to help forge (a model of) the ideal Christian ruler. My research suggests that Francke's elaborate gifts may not just have aimed to influence the royal children but their parents as well.

Although the original models are lost, we created a virtual reconstruction in Augmented Reality based on textual and visual sources in the accompanying manual (Halle, 1718). In my proposed contribution to the workshop, I will present this interactive AR-model on tablets and ask what such a reconstruction of a reconstruction might tell us about eighteenth-century epistemological procedures, and more specifically about the princely education. And how the digital AR-technology can potentially engage a twenty-first century audience with historical objects and religious ideas through spatial, architectural, and multi-medial means?

Session 5

Hee-Sook Lee-Niniioja (independent researcher), *The Daily Choreography of Power: Ritual Time and Movement in the Doge's Palace of Venice as Hybrid Sacred Spaces*

This paper reinterprets the Doge's Palace as an architectural system designed to create political power through spatial arrangement, movement management, and the application of sensory effects. Instead of arguing for the palace as a static Gothic Renaissance landmark, it is viewed as a ritual machine for hybrid sacred spaces: it is a physical environment whose architectural logic choreographed bodies, set the rhythms of time, and changed the sensory conditions of governance in the Venetian Republic.

The methodology combines architectural analysis with studies of rituals, sensory history, and political anthropology. Spatial analysis shows how the palace's plan, with its nested thresholds, hierarchical antechambers, monumental halls, and limited private suites, controlled access and encoded the political hierarchy. Ritual studies reveal how ceremonial practices activated these areas as performance venues. Sensory history reconstructs the auditory, visual, and atmospheric features of spaces: how their surfaces, size, and light affected political perception. Political anthropology helps us understand architectural form and how embodied behaviour generated the republic's mode of authority.

Some architectural areas of the palace's ritual logic work are examined. The Scala dei Giganti was a ceremonial ascent framing the Doge's inauguration with its height and grandeur. The Anticollegio and Sala del Collegio demonstrate the organization of diplomatic meetings through spatial compression, controlled waiting, and choreographic movements. The Sala del Maggior Consiglio builds a shared political identity through scale, sound, and visual saturation. The Doge's apartments show how small sizes, traffic jams, and sensory constraints express a republican ideal of regulated closeness instead of a royal display.

The Doge's Palace was a backdrop for governance and an active instrument to assert architecture's role in shaping political behaviour. Its spatiality, materiality, and sensory design created unique Venetian spaces of ritual and architecture—demonstrating how built environments could structure political culture as effectively as laws or institutions.

Pedro Manuel Luengo Gutiérrez (Universidad de Sevilla), *Exposure Duration. Time and Duration of Early Modern Rituals in Palaces*

The timing and duration of Early Modern palace rituals are important aspects that are often overlooked. Although historical information about this feature is often limited, it significantly influences contemporary interpretations. The duration of an event affects how much time is available to focus on details and the ability to concentrate. It also adjusts to changes in sunlight, allowing the eyes to adapt to new lighting conditions or reduce glare, and it even enhances the perception of scents. Without this information, the current explanations of several palace rooms—where tourists today often spend more time than any historical visitor—may be misleading.

This presentation aims to demonstrate that early modern courts considered both the duration of the courtesan's visit and the time of day to be important. To accomplish this, archival sources on Spanish cases will be compared with those from other European countries in an effort to provide a preliminary explanation. The next step is to analyse historical sacred compositions and liturgical celebrations to estimate the duration of certain events, which can help clarify other, less well-known cases. Finally, the implications for sensory artistic perception will be explored using digital simulations. To achieve this, digital reconstructions of spaces will be created, with simulations conducted at various times and on different days.

Gaëtan Naulleau (Centre d'Études supérieures de la Renaissance, Tours), *Quantifying Polyphonic Singing at the Sainte-Chapelle du Palais around 1700: Towards an Understanding of the Interactions between the Musical and Visual Ornamentation of the Liturgy*

In princely sanctuaries, the prestigious embellishment of the liturgy was distinguished not only by the quality, opulence, or singularity of its musical ornaments, but also by their quantity. At the Sainte-Chapelle du Palais, this aspect can be assessed with great precision by analysing complementary normative texts drafted at the end of the seventeenth century. Their regulations provide an exact measure of the musical elements deployed at Matins, Mass, Vespers, and so forth: everything performed in improvised polyphony or composed polyphony is recorded there, along with even the slightest interventions of the organ.

One of the most significant—and most specific—pieces of information concerns the celebration of Mass at the Sainte-Chapelle du Palais: every single day without exception, the Ordinary was sung in *musique figurée* (composed polyphony), and the Proper in *chant sur le livre* (improvised polyphony).

This uncommon practice raises several questions. When was it instituted? Does the daily use of music at Mass reflect a policy specific to the Sainte-Chapelle du Palais, or does it point to a more general prestigious practice imposed in places associated with the French court, in the fourteenth century as well as in the eighteenth? Finally, what influence did this usage exert on the other Sainte-Chapelles and on other princely courts—particularly that of the dukes of Lorraine?

Quantifying the use of polyphonic singing at the Sainte-Chapelle du Palais is essential in order to assess the interaction between the visual and the sonic dimensions of the ceremonial experience. Far from being a mere “spice” used only on exceptional occasions, polyphonic singing contributed its diffuse resonance, its rhythm, and, in a sense, its modernity—the perpetual renewal inherent in this performative art allowed for constant and invisible stylistic transformations, unlike the more intermittent and less frequent renewal of altarpieces, goldsmiths’ work, sculptures, and, a fortiori, architectural elements.

Bartomeu Martínez Oliver (Universitat de les Illes Balears), *Staging Sacred Authority: Ritual, Sensory Experience, and Sovereignty in the Acclamation of Rafael Cotoner (Malta, 1660)*

How was sacred authority made perceptible within early modern courtly space? In an early modern courtly setting, this essay explores the ceremonial acclamation of Grand Master Rafael Cotoner in Malta in 1660 as a performative and sensory construction of sacred authority. The study examines the ceremony as a meticulously planned ritual that sacralised the sovereignty of the Grand Master of the Order of St. John, rather than just as a political declaration, based on an unpublished narrative source kept in the Arxiu Històric de la Universitat de les Illes Balears.

The Hospitaller Order held a unique position at the nexus of military might, religious mission, and princely authority in the early modern Mediterranean. Therefore, a Grand Master's acclamation served as a symbolic turning point where political legitimacy was expressed through ritualized forms of sacred representation. The ceremony turned Valletta's urban fabric into a theatrical, multisensory setting where the new ruler's authority was staged through architecture, transient decoration, movement, sound, and group participation.

Using a sensory and spatial approach, this paper investigates how ritual practices mobilized ceremonial processions, visual spectacle, and the symbolic language of sacred kingship to create an experiential framework that allowed for the public affirmation of sovereignty. By doing this, the study highlights the peculiarities of a military-religious order whose political authority was inextricably linked to its spiritual identity while placing the Maltese acclamation within larger early modern traditions of court ceremonial.

The paper adds to the current discussions on the construction of sacred environments within courtly settings by concentrating on the relationship between ritual performance, urban space, and sensory experience. It contends that Rafael Cotoner's acclaim is a powerful illustration of how early modern political power could be staged and viewed as a type of sacred authority.

Alysée Le Druillenec (Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, UC Louvain), Nils Renard (Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne), *Humbling the King before the Lord, Sensing the Sacred of the Coronation: A Liturgical Perspective on the Vow of Louis XIII and its Reenactment under Louis XIV*

This paper examines the Vow of Louis XIII and its reenactment under Louis XIV as a liturgical and sensorial production of the sacred at the French court. The kneeling king, facing the Pietà, structures a field of perception: posture, gaze, proximity to the dead Christ, and Marian presence organize how the sacred is seen and experienced. The body of the king is central to this configuration.

The Vow articulates an act of dispossession. Crown, sceptre, and kingdom are placed under the authority of the Virgin and of Christ. This gesture engages a set of sensory forms: the visibility of kneeling, the affective charge of the Pietà, the liturgical memory carried by the image, and the

courtly setting in which it is received. The scene produces humility as something visible, embodied, and shared to all beholders during Mass.

In 1712, Louis XIV has himself represented as his father's pendant. He adopts the same posture and faces the same figure of the dead Christ. The repetition takes place after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes and renewed tensions with Rome. The king's body carries these conflicts. His kneeling aligns him with both his father and the Virgin, and places royal authority within a regime of submission that must be seen and felt.

Read alongside the reformulation of the coronation liturgy after Henri IV, the Vow participates in the construction of the Rex Christianissimus. Anointing, gesture, posture, and image produce a sacred kingship that depends on its perceptibility. The sacred at court emerges through these coordinated forms, at the intersection of liturgy, image, and embodied experience. Amidst the debates on the evolution of coronation rituals, from the 17th to the 18th century onwards, this image offers a vivid reenactment of the fundamental element of the coronation ceremony in the medieval ordo especially : the symbolic union between Church and State. The humbling of the King that opens the ceremony, barefoot and dressed with a simple white shirt, is usually reversed when the archbishop who led the ceremony is the first, as subject of the King and loyal feudal lord, to offer his homage to the newly enthroned King. The reversion of the relation of power and submission during the ceremony is central to the nature of the ritual and the complex web of relations between the king and the sacred. The humbling of the King of France, at a time of good personal relations with Rome, is here coalescent to the strong authority that Louis XIV has just demonstrated by destroying Port-Royal des Champs, deemed to be unloyal subjects. In between this dual relation, the Gallican component of the coronation is given a strong, though ambivalent, demonstration of power.

This co-authored paper offers an in-depth analysis of this artwork, combining the perspectives of a historian of sacred art and theologian with those of an early modern political historian and anthropologist of religion.