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How Many Romans Could Admire Cicero? Acoustics, Facial Expressions, Hand Gestures, and Public Speaking in Rome



Our presentation investigates the audibility of speech across various speaking platforms in ancient Rome during the late Republican and Early Imperial period, specifically focusing on the rostra vetera, rostra aedis Castoris, rostra Augusti, rostra aedis divi Iulii, the Capitoline Temple, and the Temple of Bellona. Employing a rigorous approach, we use acoustic simulations based on virtual reconstructions of these historical venues, considering not only the geometry of the space but also the acoustic properties of the construction materials.

Our investigation incorporates two distinct levels of background noise (49, and 55 dBA) to mirror the diverse auditory environments of ancient Rome. Additionally, crowd size estimation relies on insights gained from contemporary crowd studies in analogous scenarios. By combining these elements, we aim to answer a fundamental question: which rostra, during a specific historical period, maximized the intelligibility of the speaker's message to the largest audience?