

# MEDIEVALISM AND METAL MUSIC STUDIES

Throwing Down the Gauntlet

Edited by

Ruth Barratt-Peacock

Ross Hagen



**Emerald Studies in  
Metal Music & Culture**

# **MEDIEVALISM AND METAL MUSIC STUDIES**

# EMERALD STUDIES IN METAL MUSIC AND CULTURE

**Series Editors:** Rosemary Lucy Hill and Keith Kahn-Harris

**International Editorial Advisory Board:** Andy R. Brown, Bath Spa University, UK; Amber Clifford-Napleone, University of Central Missouri, USA; Kevin Fellezs, Columbia University, USA; Cynthia Grund, University of Southern Denmark; G r me Guibert, Universit  Sorbonne Nouvelle, France; Catherine Hoad, Macquarie University, Australia; Rosemary Overell, Otago University, NZ; Niall Scott, University of Central Lancashire, UK; Karl Spracklen, Leeds Beckett University, UK; Heather Savigny, De Montford University, UK; Nelson Varas-Diaz, Florida International University, USA; Deena Weinstein, DePaul University, USA

Metal Music Studies has grown enormously over the last eight years from a handful of scholars within Sociology and Popular Music Studies to hundreds of active scholars working across a diverse range of disciplines. The rise of interest in heavy metal academically reflects the growth of the genre as a normal or contested part of everyday lives around the globe. The aim of this series is to provide a home and focus for the growing number of monographs and edited collections that analyse heavy metal and other heavy music; to publish work that fits within the emergent subject field of metal music studies; that is, work that is critical and inter-disciplinary across the social sciences and humanities; to publish work that is of interest to and enhances wider disciplines and subject fields across social sciences and the humanities; and to support the development of Early Career Researchers through providing opportunities to convert their doctoral theses into research monographs.

## Published Titles

**Pauwke Berkers and Julian Schaap**, *Gender Inequality in Metal Music Production*

**Paula Rowe**, *Heavy Metal Youth Identities: Researching the Musical Empowerment of Youth Transitions and Psychosocial Wellbeing*

## Forthcoming Publications

**Catherine Hoad (ed)** *Australian Metal Music: Identities, Scenes and Cultures*

**Peter Pichler**, *Metal Music and Sonic Knowledge in Europe: A Cultural History*

**Karl Spracklen**, *Metal Music and the Re-imagining of Masculinity, Place, Race and Nation*

**Jasmine Shadrack**, *Black Metal, Sexuality, Subjectivity and Sound*

Interested in publishing in this series? Please contact Rosemary Hill  
R.L.Hill@leeds.ac.uk and Keith Kahn-Harris keith@kahn-harris.org

# **MEDIEVALISM AND METAL MUSIC STUDIES: THROWING DOWN THE GAUNTLET**

**EDITED BY**

**RUTH BARRATT-PEACOCK**

*The Friedrich Schiller University of Jena, Germany*

**ROSS HAGEN**

*Utah Valley University, USA*



United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited  
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2019

Introduction, editorial matter and selection © Ruth Barratt-Peacock and Ross Hagen, 2019; individual chapters © their respective authors, 2019.

**Reprints and permissions service**

Contact: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. Any opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the authors. Whilst Emerald makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of its content, Emerald makes no representation implied or otherwise, as to the chapters' suitability and application and disclaims any warranties, express or implied, to their use.

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-78756-396-4 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-78756-395-7 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-78756-397-1 (Epub)

Introduction, editorial matter and selection © Ruth Barratt-Peacock and Ross Hagen, 2019; individual chapters © their respective authors, 2019



ISOQAR certified  
Management System,  
awarded to Emerald  
for adherence to  
Environmental  
standard  
ISO 14001:2004.

Certificate Number 1985  
ISO 14001



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*For Sophie, Nora, and Graham*

*This page intentionally left blank*

# Contents

List of Figures	<i>ix</i>
List of Tables	<i>xi</i>
List of Musical Examples	<i>xiii</i>
List of Contributors	<i>xv</i>
Foreword: Good Music    Bad History <i>Scott G. Bruce</i>	<i>xvii</i>
Acknowledgements	<i>xxi</i>
<b>Introduction</b> <i>Ruth Barratt-Peacock and Ross Hagen</i>	<i>1</i>
<b>Part I: Metal's Medieval Frames</b>	
<b>Chapter 1 The Trans-medial Fight for Glory</b> <i>Johannes Hellrich, Christoph Rzymiski, and Vitus Vestergaard</i>	<i>13</i>
<b>Chapter 2 Medieval Media Transformations and Metal Album Covers</b> <i>Vitus Vestergaard</i>	<i>21</i>
<b>Chapter 3 Getting Medieval: Signifiers of the Middle-Ages in Black Metal Aesthetics</b> <i>Eric Smialek</i>	<i>35</i>
<b>Chapter 4 Computational Detection of Medieval References in Metal</b> <i>Johannes Hellrich and Christoph Rzymiski</i>	<i>57</i>



**Part II: Nationalism and Identity in Metal Medievalism**

**Chapter 5 The Politics and Poetics of Metal's Medieval Pasts**

*Shamma Boyarin, Annika Christensen, Amaranta Saguar García, and Dean Swinford* 71

**Chapter 6 The New Metal Medievalism: Alexander the Great, Islamic Historiography and Nile's 'Iskander Dhul Kharnon'**

*Shamma Boyarin* 81

**Chapter 7 The Return of El Cid: The Topicality of Rodrigo Díaz in Spanish Heavy Metal**

*Amaranta Saguar García* 93

**Chapter 8 Making Heritage Metal: Faroese *Kvæði* and Viking Metal**

*Annika Christensen* 107

**Chapter 9 Black Metal's Medieval King: The Apotheosis of Euronymous Through Album Dedications**

*Dean Swinford* 121

**Part III: Historical Source Materials in Metal Musics**

**Chapter 10 Finding the Past in the Present and the Present in the Past**

*Ruth Barratt-Peacock, Ross Hagen, and Brenda S. Gardenour Walter* 137

**Chapter 11 Obsequiae: Reconciling 'Authentic' Medieval Musical Styles with Metal**

*Ross Hagen* 145

**Chapter 12 The Villon that Never Was**

*Ruth Barratt-Peacock* 157

**Chapter 13 Satanic Bowels: Medieval Inversion and the Black Metal Grotesque**

*Brenda S. Gardenour Walter* 171

Index 181

# List of Figures

## Chapter 1

Fig 1.	Stylometric Analysis of Ancient Rites' Albums (Character 4-Grams).	17
--------	---	----

## Chapter 3

Fig 1.	Appearances of the Word 'Medieval' in <i>Encyclopaedia Metallum</i> .	37
Fig 2.	Three Woodcut Engravings Frequently Used as Black Metal Album Art. Michael Furter, Demon Carrying Off a Child Promised to the Devil (1493), Unknown, Vlad Tepes Old Newspaper Cutting (1499), and Francesco Maria Guazzo, Witch Giving the Ritual Kiss to Satan (1626).	38
Fig 3.	Frequency of Lyrical Themes Used in the Albums in Table 1.	42
Fig 4.	Common Descriptors in Online Fan Reviews of Black Metal with Medieval Imagery, Grouped into Themes.	43

## Chapter 4

Fig 1.	Dendrogram Describing the Similarity of Twelve In Flames Albums with Each Other.	64
Fig 2.	Dendrogram Describing the Similarity of Albums by In Flames and Schandmaul.	65
Fig 3.	Dendrogram Describing the Similarity of Albums by Several German Bands With and Without Medieval References.	66
Fig 4.	Three-dimensional Visualisation of German Bands.	66

## Chapter 11

Fig 1.	Opening of 'Altars of Moss.'	154
--------	------------------------------	-----

*This page intentionally left blank*

# List of Tables

## Chapter 3

Table 1.	Woodcut Artwork Used for Album Covers.	40
Table 2.	Number of Bands that Appear in an <i>Encyclopaedia Metallum</i> Advanced Search by Genre and Lyrical Themes.	42

## Chapter 4

Table 1.	Topics Discovered by Our Automatic Approach and Words They Contain.	60
Table 2.	Topics Discovered by Our Automatic Approach and Most Specific Bands.	62
Table 3.	Medieval Influenced Bands and Their Top Topic(s) in Order of Importance.	63

*This page intentionally left blank*

# List of Musical Examples

## Chapter 3

Example 1.	Haggard’s ‘Chapter II: The Origin of a Crystal Soul’, First Verse Excerpt (0:53).	46
Example 2.	Haggard’s ‘Chapter II: The Origin of a Crystal Soul’, Instrumental Interlude Excerpt (2:26).	46
Example 3.	Satyricon’s ‘Dark Medieval Times’, Flute Outro Excerpt (7:17).	46

*This page intentionally left blank*

# List of Contributors

**Ruth Barratt-Peacock:** Literature and Musicology, Friedrich Schiller University Jena, Germany. Ruth has written on German medieval re-enactment and metal music. Her current research is on early Romanticism, the application of model theory to postcolonial literatures, contemporary Australian poetry, and Anthropocene literature. She is associated with the research-group Modell Romantik: Variation Reichweiter Aktualität.

**Shamma Boyarin:** English, University of Victoria, Canada. Shamma's research explores the relationship between Hebrew and Arabic in the Middle Ages and the interplay between 'religious' and 'secular' discourses. His work is influenced by scholarly approaches that interrogate what seem like binary oppositions and hard drawn boundaries between categories.

**Scott G. Bruce:** History, Fordham University, USA. Scott is an historian of religion and culture in the early and central Middle Ages. His research interests include monasticism, hagiography and the medieval reception of the classical tradition. He is a specialist on the history of the abbey of Cluny.

**Annika Christensen:** Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies, University of Leeds, UK. Annika's interest lies in Faroese ballads and their role in contemporary Faroese culture, from sculptures to heavy metal music. Other research interests include language, music, and heritage in contemporary formations of national identities.

**Brenda S. Gardenour Walter:** Medieval History, Boston University, USA. Brenda's research examines the role of Aristotelian discourse, medicine and scholastic theology in the construction of alterity and the influence of medieval otherness on dark culture. Her work examines the multivalent relationships between cultural constructions of the body, architectural theory, and the natural world.

**Ross Hagen:** Utah Valley University Orem, USA. Ross's research interests include music and nostalgia, music fan cultures, black metal, and avant-garde music. His writings have appeared in the books like *Metal Rules the Globe*, *Hardcore Punk and Other Junk* and *The Ashgate Research Companion to Fan Cultures*. He is also a performer and composer.



**Johannes Hellrich:** Digital Humanities, Friedrich Schiller University Jena, Germany. Johannes' work focusses on the automated capture of word meanings and methodological issues affecting diachronic research in the humanities. He has also worked on problems affecting multilingual lexical resources as a member of the MANTRA EU project.

**Christoph Rzymiski:** Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History, Germany. Christoph is a Scientific Programmer. His background is in linguistics research with a focus on statistical and corpus-based language analyses. He enjoys working with heterogeneous data sets, finding the common denominator of data points using modern machine learning techniques and statistical methods.

**Amaranta Sagar García:** Amaranta specialises in Hispanic Medieval and Early Modern Literature. Her main field of research is the late-medieval Spanish masterpiece *Celestina*. She has published several papers and a monograph on this topic, and is the driving force behind the bibliographical database *Bibliografía Celestinesca*.

**Eric Smialek:** Music, McGill University, Canada. Eric's research uses a mixture of methodologies from music, linguistics, sociology, and philosophy. He developed methods of music analysis for extreme metal screams by analysing vowel formants using spectrographic techniques. He draws on interdisciplinary genre theory to critique taxonomies of genre and develop semiotic approaches to musical form.

**Dean Swinford:** English, Fayetteville State University, USA. Dean has published recent work in *Studies in Medievalism*, *Classical Traditions in Science Fiction*, *Modern Philology*, *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures*, *Medieval Perspectives* and *The Mediaeval Journal*. He is also the author of the *Death Metal Epic* series of novels.

**Vitus Vestergaard:** Media Studies, University of Southern Denmark, Denmark. Vitus' research focus is on metal studies. He is also interested in exhibition medium and media innovations in cultural institutions, for example *Marks of Metal* (2015, exhibition) or *Extreme Music: Hearing and Nothingness* (2016, conference co-organiser and speaker).

# Foreword: Good Music | Bad History

*Scott G. Bruce*

The period of western European history known as the Middle Ages (c. 400–1400 CE) has exerted a formative influence on the imagery of heavy metal lyrics and the tone of heavy metal music since the genre began in the late 1960s (Cope, 2010). Pounding drum beats, thundering bass-lines and crushing guitar chords demand subject matter that evokes power and darkness. Popular notions of medieval Europe oblige. Whether drawing influence from the mysteries of a pre-Christian world of Nordic paganism, the triumphant exploits of Christian warriors in an age of embattled faith, or simply the grim and unsparing realities of human life in a society before the advent of advanced medicine and modern technologies, modern metal bands turn again and again to the European Middle Ages as a reservoir for the words and images that give life to their music.

The discovery and reuse of the premodern European past in metal music is not a straightforward process, however. As many of the chapters in this volume make clear, metal musicians evoke the medieval period primarily as an ahistorical aesthetic and only rarely as an historical point of reference. With few exceptions (see the chapters by Amaranta Saguar García and Shamma Boyarin, in this volume), metal lyricists find inspiration not directly from medieval texts, but rather from a host of intermediary media produced between the eighteenth century and the present, like popular works of history, fantasy literature with historical inflections, and more recently, entertainment media like movies and video games. While these kinds of works are important because they attract the attention of the public to the distant past, they do not purport to be accurate works of history. As a result, the European Middle Ages that inspires the metal community typically has less to do with the premodern past, as historians understand it, than with a fount of images and ideas – some plausibly medieval, some completely ahistorical – from which metal musicians draw inspiration with little concern that these materials have been unmoored from the historical contexts that do so much to inform their meaning. But even in ahistorical usage, these materials can be instrumentalised into micropolitical and cultural reactions to the forces of modernity, capitalism, and Christianity within the discourses of metal scenes.

---

**Medievalism and Metal Music Studies: Throwing Down the Gauntlet**

**Emerald Studies in Metal Music and Culture, xvii–xx**

**Copyright © Scott G. Bruce**

**All rights of reproduction in any form reserved**

**doi:10.1108/978-1-78756-395-720191002**

Media transferences from medieval sources to metal song lyrics can follow any number of meandering channels, but they are almost never direct, the reason being that metal artists lack the proficiency in Latin and other languages necessary to access premodern documents firsthand. Instead, these artists draw inspiration for their songs from images and impressions of the Middle Ages mediated most often through modern history books and fictional stories set in medieval societies. For example, ‘Into the Crypts of Rays’, the opening song on Celtic Frost’s debut album *Morbid Tales* (1984), tells the story of Gilles de Rais, a self-confessed murderer of children who fought alongside the saintly Joan of Arc during the Hundred Years’ War (1337–1453 CE). Gruesome and ironic, the tale of Gilles was ideal material for a heavy metal song, but Celtic Frost lyricist Tom Warrior recently recalled the challenge of researching premodern historical figures in the 1980s before the advent of the internet: ‘[Y]ou had to raid libraries and go to secondhand bookstores’ (Mudrian, 2009, p. 39). Popular historical studies, like Frances Winwar’s *The Saint and the Devil, Joan of Arc and Gilles de Rais: A Biographical Study in Good and Evil* (1948), would have been instrumental in mediating information about famous premodern individuals like Gilles de Rais to metal songsmiths like Tom Warrior.

In recent years, fantasy films set in mythical premodern locales have played an important role as well. ‘To Cross the Bridge’, a track on High on Fire’s *Blessed Black Wings* (2005), narrates the woes of a ‘wandering warrior’, who shared ‘tales of horror’ about his harsh captivity, the burdens of which granted him tremendous strength. Lyricist Matt Pike’s indirect inspiration for this story was not a medieval tale, but a series of modern short stories by Robert E. Howard (1906–1936) about his fictional character Conan, a barbarian adventurer whose exploits appeared in the early 1930s in the pages of the monthly pulp magazine *Weird Tales* and were later popularised through adaptations in paperback novels, comic books and films. Motifs from the work of Howard and other *Weird Tales* contributors like H. P. Lovecraft and Robert Bloch appear frequently on High on Fire albums, especially *De Vermis Mysteriis* (2012). While Conan is without doubt the ‘wandering warrior’ of ‘To Cross the Bridge’, Pike gives away the source for the song with the lines about a fallen victim who gains strength through a ‘wheel of pain’. The torment of the warrior on a ‘wheel of pain’ finds no precedent in Howard’s original Conan stories. Instead, it was a conceit of the 1982 film *Conan the Barbarian* starring Arnold Schwarzenegger to explain the hero’s unrivalled physical strength. Thus, in this case, a metal artist drew on a modern film adaptation of early twentieth-century short stories about a fictional medieval warrior to frame his song. The role of the historical Middle Ages in this process of transference is distant at best.

The inspiration of medieval Europe for metal song-writers shows no sign of waning, for two clear reasons. First, popular conceptions of the prevailing mood of the Middle Ages – dark, gloomy, superstitious and fraught with fear – fit the tenor of metal songs, irrespective of the fact that medieval historians long ago dismissed the notion of the Dark Ages in European history (Wood, 2018). Second, medieval Europe was the historical setting of the triumph of Christianity over ancient paganism and its repeated conflicts with non-Christians, like Muslims and

Jews, especially in the context of the crusades (1095–1291 CE). Metal artists with ideological agendas, whether the restoration of pagan religious experience from the pre-Christian past or the valourisation of Christian warriors in their battle against infidels, continue to find fertile ground in medieval Europe for their anthems to lost homelands and white supremacist values. Irrespective of their specific agendas, these artists cultivate their authority with a mirage of a Middle Ages shaped by their nostalgia and their bigotry. Like modern politicians who evoke the return of the Dark Ages in their speeches to suggest that Islamist militants and other so-called ‘enemies of western civilisation’ are themselves uncivilised and thus do not merit the treatment accorded to members of modern nation states, metal song-writers who portray the European past as a safe haven from their religious or racist ideologies are practicing bad history (Wollenberg, 2018). In a similar but opposing vein, leftist neopagan and Viking groups instrumentalise the same nostalgia into a critique of capitalism instead of focussing on racial and ethnic identities.

The reality of medieval Europe, as it turns out, is much more complicated than metal song-writers often portray it. Historical research reinforces the fact that western Europe was not a beleaguered society of homogenous, white, Christian, hetero-normative people, but rather a rich and diverse collection of communities entangled in commerce, engaged in conversation and living in messy co-existence with their many non-Christian residents and neighbours (Heng, 2018; *The Medieval Globe*, 2014–present). Moreover, it is important to stress that the modern redeployment of medieval imagery for the purpose of identity formation through music and other media almost always overlooks the fact that medieval people, from the waning days of the Roman Empire to the eve of the Protestant Reformation, were themselves involved in the ongoing negotiation of their collective identity vis-à-vis their inherited past. In the same way that modern people look back to distant ages for ideas and images to inform their sense of who they are, European Christians of the Middle Ages were not exclusively ‘presentist’ in the act of identity formation. Unlike modern western cultures, medieval traditions valued authority derived from antiquity and treated novelty with suspicion. As a result, we find premodern Christian authors borrowing the political, religious and cultural raiment of even older cultures, most notably the Trojans, the Israelites and the Romans, to weave their own identities (as shown in Brenda Walter’s chapter). The distant past lent legitimacy to the living present of medieval experience for over a millennium, authenticating the founding legends explaining the origins of peoples and countries, providing the rituals of anointing that sanctified kings and preserving the Latin language and literature esteemed by Christian monks despite its pagan content. Like the modern era, the Middle Ages was not a period characterised by a homogenised western culture, but rather a bricolage of old and new images and ideas, as medieval Christians wrought their own sense of themselves from the borrowed and reused remains of even older civilisations.

The Middle Ages of most metal music is not founded in any historical reality; it is impressionistic and mythical. The overwhelming majority of metal song-writers make no claims about the accuracy of their depiction of the medieval past. Nor should they. As modern artists, they are free to redeploy any words or images

suggestive of premodern Europe in their songs, even if they are anachronistic or inaccurate, because historical accuracy is not their goal. Metal musicians are story-tellers, whose songs echo with the resonances of ancient stories, as in Celtic Frost's 1985 song 'Circle of Tyrants', which makes reference to ballads of battle and mysterious tales. Like medieval story-tellers, the value of the stories woven by metal artists is their evocative and emotional power; the enduring joy of their listeners is the most important measure of their success. It is only when these artists misrepresent historical knowledge about the Middle Ages to serve their modern ideological agendas that critics can (and should) level the charge that they are misusing the past to serve the present. Bad history does not make for good music.

## References

- Cope, A. L. (2010). *Black Sabbath and the rise of heavy metal music*. Burlington, VA: Routledge.
- Heng, G. (2018). *The invention of race in the European Middle Ages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- The Medieval Globe*. (2014–present). Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/tmg/>
- Mudrian, A. (2009). *Precious metal: Decibel presents the stories behind 25 extreme metal masterpieces*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.
- Winwar, F. (1948). *The saint and the devil: Joan of Arc and Gilles de Rais: A biographical study in good and evil*. New York, NY: Harper and Brothers.
- Wollenberg, D. (2018). *Medieval imagery in today's politics*. Leeds: Arc Humanities Press.
- Wood, I. (2018). *The transformation of the Roman west*. Leeds: Arc Humanities Press.

## Acknowledgements

This book is part of the series *Metal Music and Culture* and would not have been possible without the work of series editors Rosemary Hill and Keith Kahn-Harris, as well as the support of the International Society of Metal Music Studies. There has always been such a strong presence of medievalism and neomedievalism from the very beginnings of metal and rock that a book on the connection between metal music and medievalism is long overdue. In working on this project however, there was also a sense of déjà-vu. Metal music studies is a young area of study which is inherently multi-disciplinary, and vitally connected to the here and now. Over the course of this project, we have found there to be much common ground with medievalism as a discipline. In this book, we have brought together scholars from metal studies and medievalism, but also other disciplines such as history, musicology, media studies, computer linguistics, literary studies, and Jewish and Arab studies. We would like to thank all these scholars, not just for their individual insights, but for the conversations and discussions we able to have in working together on what is an incredibly knotty, but also fascinating topic: metal music and the medieval.