# 'Hold the Heathen Hammer High’: Representation, Re-enactment and the Construction of ‘Pagan’ Heritage

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Abstract

Viking Metal, Pagan Metal and their relatives represent sub-genres of Black and Folk Metal characterized by their historical and mythological references, their incorporation of folk melodies alongside traditional music and instruments, and the use of contemporary material culture and dress. Like earlier folk-rock traditions, these sub-genres have often steered an interesting course between the hedonistic tendencies which can accompany rock music (the ‘rock ’n’ roll lifestyle’) and an educational role: Metal as heritage and specifically as heritage interpretation. In this paper the authors explore these various connections through conversations with members of two prominent bands (Týr and Heidevolk) who gave research seminars at the University of York in 2012 and 2013. The connections between music-making, landscape, performativity and narration are prominent in both cases, and form the basis of this study.

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# Introduction

We come from the land of the ice and snow,

From the midnight sun where the hot springs flow.

The hammer of the gods will drive our ships to new lands,

To fight the horde, singing and crying: Valhalla, I am coming.

Led Zeppelin, *The Immigrant Song* (1970)

The status of sound and music as components of cultural heritage has grown in recent years. More traditionally, studies have tended to incorporate the acoustic properties of ancient sites and landscape (eg Boivin et al. 2007; Hultman 2013) and the sounds of ancient instruments (eg. Hepp et al. 2014). More recently interest has extended, often within archaeological agenda, to include an emphasis on music making (Graves-Brown 2014), performance spaces (Schofield 2000) and the lifestyles of musicians (Graves-Brown and Schofield 2011). Within the context of an ever-expanding and increasingly unauthorised heritage discourse, notable places associated with music making and performance and landmarks associated with musicians are being documented and in some cases protected. In London for example, an official blue plaque identifies a flat occupied by Jimi Hendrix, a bench in Soho Square supports a plaque remembering singer songwriter Kirsty MacColl, and the Abbey Road studios have statutory protection. In Liverpool, the childhood homes of two of the Beatles are in the ownership of the National Trust (Graves-Brown 2012; Darvill 2014). Museums exist to Abba (Stockholm) and the Ramones (Berlin). Books are written about places associated with a particular musician or band: Morrissey’s Manchester is an obvious example, as is Coventry’s associations with 1970s Ska band The Specials - *Ghost Town* was written specifically about Coventry in the late 1970s. The connections that exist between musicians and the places where they live and work have been investigated within the context of landscape characterisation (Lashua et al. 2009; Schofield 2014a). The heritage of metal music has been previously discussed by Spracklen et al. (2014), with particular reference to the north of England, while a museum display marked the association of heavy metal bands (including Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin) with the Black Country in England’s West Midlands, bands incidentally who have interesting and (in Led Zeppelin’s case) significant folk pedigree. In his overview of English folk music and its various manifestations, Young (2011, 407) describes Led Zeppelin’s rock standards *The Battle of Evermore* and *Stairway to Heaven* as, ‘of a piece with the sylvan acoustic shimmer of Forest, the Incredible String Band and the nixie-land stomp of the new British country music’. As we will see later, lyrics of historic and mythical content can amount to a slightly confused hybrid, in the case of *The Battle of Evermore* between, ‘folk memory of medieval border skirmishes between English armies and raggle-taggle Celtic or Pictish villagers … jumbled up with scenes from the climactic battle royal at Pelennor Fields in Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*’ (and interesting if not significant that he too, like Led Zeppelin’s songwriters, lived in and was influenced by his childhood in the West Midlands). But this is what has always happened - ‘traditional’ music is recast and reinterpreted for new audiences, just as old buildings are recast to suit modern needs.

Much has therefore been said about music and cultural heritage. But despite this (and see Roberts and Cohen 2014 and Darvill 2014 for overviews), and with notable exceptions such as Young (2011), little has been said about the most obvious of connections, where musicians make specific and articulate references to the past, where they specifically encapsulate and confront it in their music and the way they perform and present themselves as musicians, narrators and re-enactors.

Pagan Metal falls within the context of a genre commonly referred to as Folk Metal, something of a catch-all term for a range of approaches to heavy metal that are influenced musically, lyrically, or aesthetically by folk tradition. Those influences may be in the form of folk music itself, or in rather more abstract cultural phenomena such as heritage, narrative, folklore, or costume. Since its first appearance in the 1980s and 1990s (but with earlier origins, see Young 2011), this seemingly unlikely hybrid has more recently blossomed into a movement of significant scale and momentum, giving rise to a number of festivals and tours, and building a sizeable global fanbase with a strong presence on the web and in social media.

Arguably the best known sub-genre of Folk Metal (and also often placed under the heading Black Metal) is so-called 'Viking Metal', the public image of which has been impacted by perceived and unfortunate connections with nationalism and other elements of right-wing politics. Widely publicised episodes of civil disobedience and violent or destructive subversive behaviour, such as the burning and desecration of churches (Williams 2012), have created negative connotations. Varg Vikernes, a musician in Norway’s Black Metal scene of the early 1990s, for example, was accused of arson of the wooden church of Fantoft, Norway (Williams 2012, 60-61).

However, while clearly countercultural, and apparently host to a number of anti-religious themes, it seems such vandalism is far from the movement’s overarching agenda (if it can be labelled a movement, given its diversity). An alternative view can be seen at any gig featuring Folk Metal bands, or at any of the many festivals that follow this theme: bands and fans in various levels of medieval costume, aware (to varying degrees) of the authenticity of what they wear and the objects they carry, listening to and engaging with compositions that have their roots in traditional music, and in Nordic myths and Sagas. The accompanying imagery encapsulates the places, events and material culture of an early-medieval, Celtic (late prehistoric), or Germanic past. As such, it might be argued that this particular genre is better viewed within the context of other forms of folk-rock crossover, such as *Morris On* (whereby rock music adapted traditional ‘Morris’ tunes), Fairport Convention and other bands from the late 1960s and 1970s, and even the likes of Bellowhead as a more recent example, rather than alongside the extremes of Black Metal.

The question of authenticity (within which we also include ‘accuracy’) has received significant attention in recent heritage discourse (eg. Jones 2009; 2010), and while not central to our argument, it is a word that frequently recurs in the discussions that follow. Its use in this paper refers both to the material objects associated with the various musical genres described (artefacts and dress for example), the narratives, mythologies and folkloric traditions retold in songs and sleeve-notes, and in the music itself. Jones (2009, 134) defines authenticity as being ‘authentic, truthful or genuine’ and associated within heritage conservation with notions of the ‘original’ and the ‘genuine’. Like Jones, we recognise how authenticity is not in fact inherent in objects, places and – more relevant here – cultural practices. Rather it is the ‘networks of relationships between objects, people and places that appear to be central, no the things in and of themselves (Jones 2009, 136-7). Furthermore, and citing Jones (ibid.), ‘[W]hen people experience a sense of the genuineness, truthfulness, or authenticity of objects it is something akin to aura, or voicefulness, that they articulate. It is the unique experience of an object, and crucially … the web of relationships that it invokes with past and present people and places, that is important.’

With that in mind, comparisons can helpfully be drawn between traditions of reinvention and reinvigoration within music and approaches to more traditional forms of heritage (buildings and landscape, ‘the historic environment’). Purists often reject change, or consider the status quo a default position. On the other hand change, some argue, is essential for a sustainable future. By this later view heritage becomes an opportunity, not a constraint. As Palmer (2008, 8) puts it,

Heritage is not simply about the past; it is vitally about the present and future. A heritage that is disjoined from ongoing life has limited value. Heritage involves continual creation and transformation. We can make heritage by adding new ideas to old ideas. Heritage is never merely something to be conserved or protected, but rather to be modified and enhanced.

It is the same with music. Constraint ensures traditional forms of music remain merely within their tightly defined genres, ‘authentically’ repeated to audiences wanting to hear the music as originally conceived. Some folk clubs of the 1960s only allowed performers to sing songs originating in their own country, to ensure the sound was authentically reproduced and not distorted by the ‘wrong’ dialect (Young 2011, 144-6). Yet change provides the opportunity for cross pollination, development and progress, and exposure to new audiences. An example is the classic *Liege and Lief* album, produced by Fairport Convention in 1969. As Young explains (2011, 263), it received both praise and condemnation on its release, purists objecting to the band’s ‘cavalier mismatching of tunes and texts, and a certain slapdash approach.’ An earlier track, *A Sailor’s Life* (from the 1969 album *Unhalfbricking*), is the first example of a traditional English folk song played with a rock drum kit and sticks. Fairport Convention may well have distorted and altered traditional lyrics and melodies, but more significant may be the fact their ‘electrifying act preserved and restored the guts and spontaneous vigour to the folk continuum’ (ibid.).

But it is not only about the sound. There is also the engagement, or the relationship between performer and audience that matters and whose ‘authenticity’ has relevance here. This was why Bob Dylan was branded a ‘Judas’ for his electric performance at Manchester Free Trade Hall in 1966, not for ‘going electric’, but for demoting listeners to passive spectators (MacDonald 2003). We will return to this point.

In this study we combine a number of themes prevalent within contemporary heritage discourse, namely: heritage and representation; intangible cultural heritage (music, art and performance, accepting that the very term is itself problematic, given that all heritage is intangible, after Smith 2006); and material culture studies. We consider the question of change and authenticity, and the relationships of material culture to the genre. We consider the status of Pagan Metal (the music and attendant cultures, including material culture) as a distinctive and meaningful form of heritage, and we promote an argument for the emergence of a new strand of cultural heritage around which a specific and distinctive ‘heritage community’ (after Council of Europe 2005, Article 2) has converged. It is also the case that members of this ‘heritage community’ would not likely consider themselves as such, or indeed recognise the material culture and ‘construct’ as heritage, but rather as some form of ‘tradition’, ’ownership’ or ‘belonging’. In similar vein, the places they sing about are also more likely to be described as ‘homeland’ or ‘place’, than as their heritage.

For this paper we bring together studies of two comparable bands from different cultural backgrounds, in order to examine the breadth of their influences and intentions. This was preferred to taking the more obvious route and focusing entirely on Scandinavian bands devoted to the performance of music informed by stories relating to a particular, tightly defined chronological context. Those bands are Týr and Heidevolk (Figs 1 and 2). These, like most bands, baulk at being labelled, but we believe the term ‘Pagan Metal’ unites them better than any alternative. ‘Folk Metal’ is too broad a category, while the need for a sharp, catchy label rules out ‘music inspired by stories and histories of ancient, antique and early-medieval northern Europe’. The label most commonly cited, however, and most influential in shaping and giving clear identity to the genre, is Viking Metal, and this therefore is worth some closer examination.

[Figs 1 and 2]

Scandinavia and the ‘Viking Metal’ Landscape

The term ‘Viking Metal’ is one of many that falls within a complex web of genres and subgenres, the precise form of which is constantly shifting, as trends and fads emerge and fade. The geography is also shifting, although a clear focus remains in the ‘nordic’ Scandinavian countries where there is also a long tradition of extreme metal. Norway in particular is known for its Black Metal, which has proven highly influential in the genre, and has conferred upon the region a central position in the global ‘metal geography’. Viking Metal seems to have emerged here, as a variant that simply drew upon (inter alia) Scandinavian folk traditions and music. While Black Metal is traditionally Satanic or anti-Christian in nature, the corresponding sentiment in Viking Metal would be better described as simply pagan, or ‘heathen’. More important than any particular religious (or anti-religious) message is the genre’s concern with ancestry, sense of place, and ‘heritage’. From these origins, Viking Metal has diversified (at least in aural terms), and now covers a range of styles that run the gamut between Black Metal and what one might justifiably term classic rock. The use of traditional instruments is not as common in Viking as in Folk Metal, although bands such as Týr do recall (and incorporate) traditional folk tunes in their music. This may be due to the lack of archaeological evidence for Viking instruments (though see, for example [Kyriaco](http://www.google.co.uk/search?tbo=p&tbm=bks&q=inauthor:%22Christine+Kyriacou%22)u *et al.* 2004: 90-91; MacGregor 1985: 144-8; Müller 1988) combined in some cases with a desire for authenticity.

There is little need to cover here the most frequently exploited musical underpinnings of Viking Metal. As Mulvany (2000) has pointed out, those elements that digress from what one may think of as the fundamentals of metal music generally owe little to any authentic ‘Viking’ past. Musically the reference is more frequently to a sense of the maritime in general terms, and in many cases this is manifested in the use of melodies and rhythms that owe much to traditional sea shanties. Presumably this conflation of maritime contexts is a knowing one, but one nonetheless felt to be somehow evocative. It is not our purpose to critique this particular musical contrivance, but rather to focus on approaches that are, in the opinions of the authors, rather more imaginative, and arguably more authentic.

For some commentators, the music, lyrics, performance, art, iconography, media and merchandising of bands involved in this movement communicate messages that can be dark, sinister, malevolent; even violent (see, for instance, Trafford and Pluskowski 2007). Though undoubtedly true in some cases, and the reliance upon images of weaponry and warfare is undeniable, in many cases this is clearly little more than stylistic grandstanding, a sort of lyrical trope, while in others it is obviously being drawn upon with tongue firmly in cheek, or invoked with a particular purpose in mind, and one that need not be discussed in pejorative terms.

Early experiments in what one might now refer to as Viking Metal were undertaken by Swedish band, Bathory. Their success with work such as *Twilight of the Gods* (1991) was quickly followed by bands such as Norway’s Enslaved (*Fires of Midgard)*, not to mention Varg Vikernes’s far-right Burzum project, which certainly represents the most extreme manifestation of the movement’s general anti-religious sentiment. More recently, the scene has seen considerable growth, with the success of bands such as Sweden’s Amon Amarth (whose videos feature images of Viking longships and warriors, while their album *Twilight of the Thunder God* was paired with a short, Norse-myth themed graphic novel), and Finnish bands such as Ensiferum, Turisas, and Korpiklaani, who are particularly notable for their distinctive focus on Saami tradition and shamanism, calling into question again the validity and usefulness of the ‘Viking Metal’ label.

Nonetheless, the flowering of what is often referred to as Viking Metal in Sweden and Finland is particularly notable, not least given that the heartland of Black Metal itself lies, as we have seen, in western Scandinavia. However, the popularity of this approach to music extends further, such that while many of the points of reference for Viking and Folk Metal lie in northern Europe, and most particularly in what we might term ‘Germanic’ or (to a lesser degree) ‘Celtic’ culture, the genre is now a truly global phenomenon, with successful bands working in contexts as diverse as Russia, southern Europe, and the USA. That said, in Viking Metal in particular, there is a tendency for artists to speak of their Nordic ancestry, while bands such as Heidevolk(Netherlands) and Dalriada (Hungary) relate alternative elements of early European heritage, real or imagined.

Therefore here, and largely for the reasons of definition indicated above, we adopt the term Pagan Metal to collectively describe and characterise those bands whose influences are grounded firmly in the pre- or counter-Christian (but not anti-Christian) past, and based on versions of historic events as described amongst historic, archaeological or folkloric sources. We will now make some general comments about this genre, prior to presenting some outcomes arising from conversations and meetings with members of the two bands, Týr and Heidevolk in 2012 and 2013.

Pagan Metal

Across the spectrum of musical influences, backgrounds, and agendas, one may identify within Pagan Metal some uniformity in the ways people engage with heritage. Concerts, for example, are characterised by audience participation: from fist-pumping and rhythmic chanting through to drinking competitions (and one recalls here the way Bob Dylan was seen to show disrespect for folk tradition in his Manchester gig in 1966, by relegating the audience to mere spectators), and the routine use of Viking and pagan imagery (such as drinking horns) amongst band members and audiences alike. Similarly, the shirtless and long-haired look common to much of rock music is given an added dimension by the baring of tattoos inspired by Nordic art or mythology, in both men and women (Fig 3) (Davis 2007), and the stereotypical image of the ‘Viking warrior’ as a hirsute symbol of masculinity (the long-haired appearance of early-medieval peoples has been much overstated, but the perceptual connection between hairiness and barbarism is a powerful and long-lived one; see Ashby 2014)*.* Costumes and props play an important role, as some bands (such as Turisas) perform in costume and facepaint, evoking a time and space only imagined, while others take a more ‘re-enactor-like’ approach to authenticity of experience, wearing mail and plate armour and Nordic-inspired jewellery (Fig 4), while wielding swords, shields, and axes. Such imagery is front and centre in much album artwork and promotional material, while band websites often feature a sort of imagined ‘medievalese’ language, as well as items for sale, in the form of pendants for example (Fig 5), and other jewellery additional to the ubiquitous t-shirts.

[Figs 3-5 hereabouts]

These are not all heartfelt attempts to engage authentically with the past, and for many bands, this is simply not the point; their music is not heritage or re-enactment, but rather (merely) entertainment. For the unthinking, this might be cast as a sort of ‘tabloid history’ (Walsh 1992: 1), while for others, anachronisms may be deliberately presented for effect, whether out of pure artistic performance, or out of a sort of intentional negotiation of authenticity. In all cases, however, performance and image are important, and for some, this may be seen as an offshoot of re-enactment, if not a manifestation in and of itself (the incorporation, albeit informally, of Viking Metal nights into York’s annual Viking Festival stands as testament to this). It is notable that in many aspects of heritage (in the traditional sense, incorporating for example museums; sites and monuments; scholarly discourse) performance and the body are conspicuously absent (less so in anthropology and cultural geography, eg. Crouch 2010). In re-enactment, by contrast, they are played up. This is precisely what is happening here, and for bands with a more explicitly heritage-led agenda, their experience consists in a coming together of teaching, engagement through action, and linguistic, musical, and iconographic game-playing.

In what follows, we explore the work of two such bands in more detail. These bands’ engagement with the genre is rather different in both context and in motivation, but common ground exists. Both bands were selected for study for their participation in the renowned annual York Viking Festival. This is a week-long festival of Viking culture and traditions which, over the past few years, has culminated in a ‘Viking Metal’ gig on the final Saturday night. In 2012 and 2013 the authors invited band members to also give a research seminar within the Department of Archaeology, in an ongoing series of events referred to as ‘Metal Friday’. In 2012 Metal Friday comprised Heri Jonsson (lead singer) and Kári Streymoy (then drummer) of Týr, a leading band from the Faroe Islands, concerned with Nordic and Faroese heritage and whose 7th studio album, *Valkyrja* was released in 2013. ‘Metal Friday’ in 2013 featured Joost Westdijk (drummer) and Kevin Vruchtbaert (guitar) from Dutch band Heidevolk, whose preoccupation with the history and development of Gelderland reflects their own particular and personal history. Their 5th studio album, *Batavi*, was released in 2012.

By studying the various ways in which these two bands engage with their traditions, their sense of place and history, we report the examination of the image, output, experiences, context (musical and intellectual), and intentions of each. This is partly undertaken through the analysis of lyrics, music, artwork and performance, and partly through the discussion of these issues with band members at the Metal Friday events. We begin with the band we invited in 2012, Týr (Fig 1).

Týr

Týr, from the Faroe Islands, play metal that is lyrically informed by Norse mythology and literary tradition, as well as a raft of other folk influences, while musically it is strongly redolent of traditional Faroese folk music. Though their very name, Týr, refers to a Norse god (the figure associated in most traditions with law), and their lyrics and artwork recall stories and icons of Nordic heroic tradition, they actively reject the label ‘Viking Metal’, and prefer not to see themselves as part of any particular musical subgenre. While happy with the broad label of ‘heavy metal’, vocalist Heri Joensen asks: 'This Pagan/ Viking/ Folk/ Death/ Doom: who cares really?'

While this may seem a little disingenuous given their reliance on Norse imagery, the idea is supported by the research of Mulvany (2000, 45-6), who points out that Folk and Death Metal has been carved up into numerous sub-genres, often largely on the basis of lyrical content, rather than the music itself. In this respect, Týr stand a little apart from the mainstream, in employing a distinctive fusion of musical styles: not by drawing upon ‘Viking’ music per se (whatever that might sound like), but rather by closely connecting themselves with Faroese folk tradition. Accordingly, they do not wear ‘Viking’ costumes on stage, and were it not for the content of their music and lyrics, one might be hard pressed to distinguish them from any other metal band.

But these traditional references are key to what Týr produces. For example, they make use of Faroese chain dances (rhythmic tales originally thought to be medieval ring dances) and lullabies, informing both vocal melodies and guitar lines. It is notable that a significant number of their songs are sung in their native Faroese (all titles on their 2008 *Land* album are in this language). For the band, these traditional references are particularly powerful, as they depend on personal engagement and awareness: the chain dance is about participation, rather than spectating. An example, and a favourite amongst Týr fans, is the track *Sinklars V*i*sa* (from *Land*), an interpretation of a traditional Faroese song of the same name, in turn drawn from an old Norwegian tale that relates the story of the Battle of Kringen, in which Scottish mercenaries were ambushed by local Norwegian peasants en route to joining Swedish forces mustering against them in the Kalmar War (1611-13). Like many of their songs, this draws upon ideas of independence, land, Nordic nationhood and identity, and the enthusiasm with which Týr’s fans participate in its performance is striking. In fact, and interestingly, the effect of the traditional Faroese melody, and the use of the Faroese language are sufficient to evoke an air of the ‘Viking’ notwithstanding the post-medieval context of the narrative. Nonetheless, it seems that for the band themselves, there is a significance in Faroese traditional music and folk tales, and this is quite independent of their interest in old Norse mythology.

The origins of this influence are apparently straightforward. According to Joensen, folklore is everywhere in Faroese culture. 'It’s just something that’s there for anyone who’s interested….Many of the songs we’ve done are simply taken from memory, because I’ve heard them so many times'. Nonetheless, he is under no illusion that what they do is a continuation of Faroese tradition: 'We’re not a traditional band; we’re just a band influenced by traditional music.'

For Joensen any such ambition would not be feasible, as the medium in which they work does not allow for the kind of extended storytelling that characterises Faroese folk music. Rather, some members of the band clearly see what they do as a sort of anthropology or intangible heritage, and Joensen’s interest in these traditions is clearly manifest beyond his musical and lyrical output; he has recently enrolled on a degree course in Faroese language and literature at the University of the Faroe Islands.

Notwithstanding this interest in folk music, the more typical Norse mythological influences are nonetheless clear. In listening to Týr ’s music and lyrics, or inspecting their artwork, their engagement with this heritage is readily apparent. Much is communicated through album titles such as *Erik the Red*, and lyrics that refer to many of the archetypes of the Viking period (swords; Ragnarok; the ‘heathen hammer’). However, in listening to the music, and particularly in interviewing the band, this interest is not as straightforward as one might at first suspect. Joensen explained that such Old Norse imagery is not obviously present in modern or traditional Faroese society, and his interest in and knowledge of this material dates back to school history lessons. His intent is not to present any realistic or historically accurate representation of the Viking Age, but rather to use mythological imagery as a mirror to turn on contemporary society. Thus, *Ragnarok*, their most explicitly mythologically focused album (and something of a concept album) narrates the story of the destruction and rebirth of the world, taking the Eddic tale of Ragnarokto inform its central themes, but then filling this template with references to contemporary society. In Joensen’s own words: ‘The only real application for myths today is to use them as metaphors'.

This dynamic admixture of traditional folk music and Old Norse imagery and narrative is distinctive, even within the Pagan Metal genre. The band’s approach to heritage engagement, as well as to music and lyrics more generally, does seem to have developed over the 16 years of their existence, and most particularly over the last decade, during which their popularity has grown considerably. Thus, more recent albums have featured fewer lyrics written entirely in Faroese, but that is not to say that this engagement is any weaker, only that it is differently articulated. As a case in point, their most recent album, *Valkyrja* is described by Týr as a 'concept album with a storyline based on an anonymous Viking age warrior'. In order to secure his place in Valhalla, this individual has to leave his female partner, and win over the Valkyrie. The story is thus something of a traditional love story wrapped up in trappings of Norse mythology, and does seem to represent something of a departure for Týr. It nonetheless relates the familiar themes of honour in battle, paganism, and, perhaps most importantly, the idea of home. Indeed, a recent reviewer described the album as being ‘as authentic as anything the Faroe Islanders have ever delivered’ (Aykroyd 2013).

Inevitably, not all members of the band are equally engaged in this aspect of the music, and Joensen freely admits that while some members of the band take an active role in songwriting, they have little interest in the heritage element of the work. Moreover, the longevity of the band is such that personnel changes have occurred (in 2013 they lost drummer Kári Streymoy), which must itself have implications for consistency of purpose or direction. Nonetheless, the band’s music is characterised by at least two ubiquitous elements: Joensen’s engagement with his Faroese heritage on the one hand, and his interest in the power of Nordic myth and legend to provide analogy on the other. These characteristics set the band somewhat apart from both the mainstream of metal music, and from many of Týr’s Viking and Pagan Metal counterparts.

Heidevolk

In contrast to Týr, Heidevolk’s (Fig 2) music could be classified as fairly traditional ‘metal’ music, making use of double bass, drums, modal guitar solos and harmonised doubling. The most distinctive element is the fact that singer Mark ‘Splintervuyscht’ Bockting’s vocals are sung in Dutch in what borders on a folk styling, while songs such as *Saksenland*, the opener on album *Walhalla Wacht* (trans.: Valhalla Awaits, 2008) feature introductions and outros that employ traditional instruments: the ‘midwinterhoorn’, and bullhorn, supplemented by the violin and tin whistle. The music is also notably in a major key; it is not downbeat but rather optimistic, even heroic. Like Týr, Heidevolk also include a number of acoustic, shanty-like drinking songs.

The booklet accompanying the *Walhalla Wacht* CD/album features images of band members equipped with re-enactor weaponry. Some of their videos also feature re-enactment groups, and the narrative presented is of men preparing for war, and the women wishing them well for their journey. The artwork accompanying *De Strijdlust is Geboren* (trans.: The Lust for Combat is Born, 2005) is of landscape, open fields and woodland, reflecting the album’s predominant ‘homeland’ theme. The *Batavi* (2012) artwork comprises images of band members in ‘grunge-like’ poses, not obviously in costume but with beakers, swords and shields illustrated on a separate page. The cover image is of a Roman cavalry helmet, excavated near Nijmegen, and now displayed in the local Museum.

Heidevolk are unusual within the music industry (and within Pagan Metal specifically) in being a not-for-profit organisation whose aim is to promote awareness in Germanic history, mythology and folklore (Joost ‘den Vallenknotscher’ Westdijk pers comm). As their website states, the album *Batavi,* ‘catapults the listener directly onto the northwestern European battlefields of the Roman Empire’ ([www.heidevolk.com/home/band](http://www.heidevolk.com/home/band) - accessed 27 April 2014). Their music has a specific role in educating younger audiences (to ‘open their eyes’) to the region’s landscape and history. Their guitar player (Reamon ‘Bomenbreker’ Bloem) is a history teacher, and Bockting a ‘walking Encyclopedia’. Their lyrics are carefully and thoroughly researched. The motivation to promote or narrate (hi)stories was recognised with Týr, and as a motivation it is not perhaps so unusual within the genre. Winterfylleth (from northern England) have an interest in teaching listeners something about English history (Spracklen et al. 2014, 56), for example. For Heidevolk’s concept album *Batavi*, which presents a history of the Germanic tribe of the Batavi between the first centuries BC and AD, the entire story was written before composing the music. Additional to their own lyrical content, old poems and anthems are used, while they also recognise the significance of landscape in shaping history. Much has been said about the emphasis on nationalism, and certainly that is writ large in some of Heidevolk’s and Týr’s lyrics. But it as arguably as much about place and landscape in the sense of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ as it is about politics and national or regional identity. In their ‘Metal Friday’ presentation, for example, Heidevolk related something of an origin myth, in which local tribespeople waved and cheered as the Roman army built a settlement near Arnhem on the Rhine delta during summer months, knowing full well the seasonal floods would wash it away (this story may originate with Tacitus’ *Historiae*, Book V, 19). However, the band also described their own connection to landscape, and the significance of place to local communities. The album cover and associated artwork for *De Strijdlust is Geboren* shows a sword in the ground against a backdrop of semi-wooded, undulating and misty landscape. Westdijk described how band members often made walks to explore their connection with landscape, and it was on one of these walks that the image was made. This is no small point; the album is essentially a biography of the landscape that forms the ‘homeland’, the stage-set upon which the stories are enscripted. For example, in *Het Gelders Volklied* (trans: The Geldern Anthem),

The droveways of Gelder are the most beautiful in our dear Netherlands

Rich clay and moorlands

Streams, woods and hillsides

Yonder the Waal, there the Ijsesel

Then the Maas and the Rhine as well …

(This and all subsequent Heidevolk lyrics by Rowan Middelwijk, Reamon Bloem, Joost Westdijk, Joris van Brandenburg, Mark Bockting, copyright Edition Iron Avantgarde Publishing)

While in *En Wij Stappen Stevig Voort* (trans: And We Firmly March Forward),

When heathlands dress in purple

And the birch forest extends her peaceful coolness to us,

We walk through the Gelders forests, enjoying her infinite beauty.

It is within these depictions of landscape that Heidevolk present their historical narrative. In the sleevenotes for the ‘concept’ album Batavi for example, the band,

[H]ereby present you with nine songs based on the early history of the Batavian tribe. The Batavians were a Germanic tribe that came to the present-day Netherlands in the first century BCE. Here they encountered the mighty Roman Empire, with which they allied … The songs on this album cover the time span from the origination of the Batavian tribe until its eventual revolt against the Romans was crushed, in 70 BCE.

*De Toekomst Lonkt* (trans: The Future Beckons) describes the search for a new homeland:

Far from our fatherland

Determined, our people follow their desire for freedom

Led along the banks of the Rhine

To a better existence.

According to the sleevenotes, *Een Nieuw Begin* (trans: A New Beginning) ‘tells the story of how the Batavian tribe came into being. … According to the Roman historian Tacitus they were originally a part of the Chatti tribe, located in present-day Hessen, Germany.’

There where the sun sinks, there where the Rhine disappears

Beyond the horizon lies the land where our fate leads us

Drive from our land in blood and striving

For downstream we travel, there await a new beginning

Thus Hiedevolk present their interpretation of an historic period and of events that shaped a region through lyrical content, and packaging rich in visual images. There are questions here, as elsewhere across the genre, about authenticity and artistic licence. Are the artefacts displayed and the histories presented ‘correct’? Are the songs relaying an accurate account of often well documented historic events? Or is this just about entertainment and the pursuit of the hard-rock agenda?

In the closing section we draw together the results of our conversations with Týr and Heidevolk in addressing these questions, and assessing the relevance and validity of what we might refer to as ‘metal heritage’.

#

# Discussion: A Metal Education?

This and previous studies (eg. von Helden 2010) of these complex subgenres of metal music illustrate and represent an interesting trend within cultural heritage towards not only a wider acceptance as heritage of the ordinary and the everyday alongside the nationally significant and the iconic, but a willingness and impetus to explore heritage’s outer reaches, the marginal areas in which definitions of cultural heritage and heritage communities start to fragment and become increasingly contested. Shown here, in the deliberate attempts by two bands to embed history, tradition and place within their music, heritage appears clearly to form part of the equation, even though the word ‘heritage’ itself is rarely used. Mainstream pop heritage (and one thinks immediately of the Beatles and Liverpool, eg. Leonard 2013) has now become mainstream, even ‘authorised’ (after Smith 2006; eg. Roberts and Cohen 2014), accepted as such for at least a decade, evident (for example) in official recognition (through listing or nominations) for recording studios at Abbey Road (London) and Chess Studios (Chicago) in the United States (Samuelson and Peters 1995), and the National Trust owning houses formerly occupied by members of The Beatles, for example. Metal however exists on the margins of popular music, being recognised as amongst the loudest and the most extreme of its sub genres. It also exists on the geographical margins of an increasingly globalised music industry. Its treatment as heritage seems equally extreme; black and white so to speak: as we have seen, early in their career, the Norwegian band Enslaved were part of a Black Metal scene commonly associated with church burnings and violence, but by 2007 the New York Times (<http://www.ballade.no/mic.nsf/doc/art2007111313095614612954> - accessed 10 October 2013) and Norwegian Media Channel NRK (<http://www.nrk.no/kultur/norske-satanrockere-topper-ny-times-1.3985829> - accessed 10 October 2013) label the members ‘keepers of the cultural heritage’. Yet, as conversations with Týr and Heidevolk have shown, this should come as no surprise. The connections between musicians and the places they come from or encounter and adopt as ‘home’, are strong and hugely influential. Von Helden’s research (2010) includes the statement that Scandinavian people have a 'strong attachment to nature', citing Johnny Hedlund (singer with Unleashed) who noted how:

the influences that I have are actually from my ancestors and from sitting in the countryside and feeling the power of nature - just by sitting there knowing that my grandfather’s father’s father was standing here with his sword … by knowing that you are influenced by it (Moynihan and Soderlind 2003, 203).

And as von Helden (ibid., 263) explains, this supports the evidence of artwork and imagery, prevalent within the subgenre, on albums, t-shirts and so on, of direct connections to place and to history. She gives the example of Enslaved’s cover artwork for *Blodhemn* (1998), which shows:

the band members standing on the shore, surrounded by rocks, dressed in Viking clothing and armed with swords. The background is made up of the sea and a drifting Viking longship underneath the outlines of a gigantic human skull that appears to be hovering in a darkening sky.

The music thus becomes a medium through which the message, the story, is conveyed. One might reasonably question the accuracy of ‘the story’ - the facts of the matter. But who decides what is accurate? What kinds of accuracy are acceptable? And should accuracy even be a key concern for those delivering a particular heritage ‘product’? Perhaps creating a spark of interest, or instilling a sense of belonging, especially amongst non-traditional heritage audiences, is more important? And if so, the message and the means by which that message is conveyed (the melody, for example) becomes central, a point which takes on increased relevance where the melody itself has authenticity (as with Týr’s *Sinklars Visa*), or where the music transports aspects of landscape character to the listener. Thus musicians become both keepers *and* facilitators, creating new media through which local renditions of a greater past can be conveyed to an increasingly globalised audience. In a world in which heritage ‘experts’ will engage more in facilitation than enforcement (Schofield 2014b), and in which ‘understanding’ and ‘enjoyment’ drive the virtuous circle, bands like Týr and Heidevolk can thus have a prominent role in creating new renditions of old heritage to new and often non-traditional audiences. This affords comparison with folk-rock heavyweights like Fairport Convention, Steeleye Span and the Incredible String Band, for example, where entertainment and an embedding within the folk landscape was one motivation, alongside more overtly promotional motives that mirrored Cecil Sharp’s (1907) endeavours to record English folk song in the early twentieth century. This is not so much about education, in the traditional sense of the word, but rather creating sparks of inspiration from which understanding and familiarity can develop.

Various studies indicate a lack of cultural engagement amongst younger people and non-traditional audiences, recognising also that these audiences have often felt excluded because they take a different (non-conventional, marginal) view of what ‘their’ heritage actually is, as well as how to articulate and engage with it (eg. Lashua et al 2012). This presents challenges for a heritage sector anxious to engage marginalised and minority groups, as well as those others traditionally considered hard to reach. The majority of traditional heritage attractions and activities appeal to conventional middle-class and predominantly middle-aged and older audiences. Other attractions and activities are specifically focused on younger age groups, and especially children. Re-enactment is an example of this. But what of young adults, the main group traditionally considered ‘consumers’ and ‘makers’ of popular music and those most active in this branch of creative industry? What heritage activities and places exist to represent their interests? As we have seen, some key ‘landmark’ places are now badged as heritage sites, but for a scene that often challenges convention and authority, this barely seems sufficient. One clear answer to this shortfall is the visual media and the music itself, both of which are routine for the majority of young adults.

This returns us to the question of authenticity. Folk music and historically-themed film and television may not present entirely accurate historical accounts, but can nonetheless inspire, providing signposts and markers to an historical past. The majority of media use history as the source of good stories, as drama. But with Týr and Heidevolk we have a slightly different situation, one in which history and tradition are used specifically to promote cultural identity. By following Týr and Heidevolk, young people can enjoy the music, the live shows and the festivals, but they also learn. For the bands, the recorded music, and the live shows, become opportunities to inform, and to promote. Sitting down with a CD or mp3, listening to the lyrics, glancing at the artwork, one hears the stories; by attending the live show one is immersed, as we have seen, in a hectic environment in which band and some audience members wear clothes bearing various degrees of authenticity, and with appearances that bear resemblance to people some 2000 years ago. One should perhaps not take this too seriously. This, after all, is entertainment, and many participants will see it only in these terms. But what is also happening here has happened over millennia. Old stories are being told and retold, invented, reshaped and recreated. As Sindbeak (2011) has said, the ‘Viking ideal’ is one perhaps everyone can engage in if re-identified as being about maritime history and development, and which, paradoxically provides a sort of unity of European spirit.

The majority of bands and musicians write songs and compose music as a commentary on the contemporary world. In the examples presented here those stories are deeply rooted in the past and in the landscape, and specialists seeking to find and explain relevance of the past in the present could usefully recognise the possibility of Týr, Heidevolk and other bands of these related genres (what we term ‘Pagan Metal’) may have an important part to play. It also seems a distance away from studies that present metal music (including the subgenres outlined here) as merely the cause of teenage depression and, *in extremis*, suicide (eg. Shafron and Karno 2013). Here we align this music more with cultural engagement and cultural participation, noting the synergies that existed between folk rock bands in the 1960s and ‘70s and the English folk tradition. This returns us to the Faro Convention (Council of Europe 2005) and Palmer’s (2008, 8, op. cit.) reference to ‘making heritage, by adding new ideas to old ideas’, and the opportunity (after Young 2011, 263, op. cit.) to add ‘vigour to the folk continuum’.

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CAPTIONS

Fig. 1: Týr on stage in Hamburg, 2006. This image, the property of Arne List, is available through Wikimedia Commons. Permission is granted to copy, distribute and/or modify this document under the terms of the GNU Free Documentation License.

Fig. 2: Heidevolk on stage in Alibi, Wrocław (Poland) on their ‘Low Lands & High Seas Tour’, 2009. This image, the property of Buka Nadchodzi, is available through Wikimedia Commons. This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

Fig 3: An example of a Viking-inspired tattoo, on the arms of a female re-enactor, artisan, and Viking metal enthusiast. The design is informed by Viking sculpture and metalwork, and incorporates a representation of 'valkyrie' mount recently found in Norfolk. Photo S. Ashby, Model: E. Boast.

Fig 4: A selection of Thor's hammer ('Mjolnir') pendants produced for sale to the re-enactor and Viking metal markets. Many such items can be found for sale at events such as York's annual Viking Festival. Image: Cat Glazzard, (c) Asgard Crafts.

Fig 5: 'Tyr' pendants produced by a company specialising in reproduction early-medieval metalwork for the re-enactor, media, and museum markets. The pendants feature the word 'Tyr' spelled out in Norse runes, and were given away with copies of Tyr's (2013) *Valkyrja* album. Image: Cat Glazzard, (c) Asgard Crafts.