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## ABSTRACT

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The different sub-genres of metal music, which have formed in the last decades, are not only of interest due to their diverse and unique characteristics, but also evidence a variety in metal music whereby its clichéd black and gloomy world gains a bit of color. This multitude of sub-genres will inevitably lead to musicians, fans and even researchers no longer being able to differentiate between the genres. With Viking, pagan, and folk metal, this interesting process of fusion is already taking place, although it is possible to distinguish Viking and pagan at least from folk metal.

Keywords: instrumentation, metal sub-genres, musical analysis, popular music

## INTRODUCTION

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During the last few decades many different metal sub-genres have developed, from the classic, and especially from the extreme, metal genre. Comprising bands such as *Ensiferum*, *Finntroll*, *Korpiklaani* and *Turisas* – surprisingly only Finnish bands – so-called folk metal is one of these sub-genres, which became part of the metal mainstream during the 2000s.<sup>1</sup> For Spracklen the popularity of Finnish folk metal is based on commercialization, while other possible reasons could be the national distinction from Norwegian black and Swedish death metal, or, at least in Finland, a phase of increased inclusion of folk elements in popular music. “The combination of a nationally institutionalized folk tradition and the transnational genre of [...] metal”<sup>2</sup> is also mentioned by Neilson as a reason for the success of Finnish folk metal.

But what exactly is folk metal and how does it differ from other similar, closely linked metal sub-genres such as Viking and pagan metal? It may be true that distinguishing between the three mentioned sub-genres is difficult<sup>3</sup> and that

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1 Spracklen 2015: 360.

2 Neilson 2015: 129.

3 Heinen 2016: 69-70.

“it does not really make sense to differentiate too much.”<sup>4</sup> However, taking into account the historical evolution of metal, the instruments used, analysis of the musical material, and other parameters, folk metal is at least separable from Viking and pagan metal. Kahn-Harris recognized this phenomenon several years ago, stating that people “who are not fans may not see its considerable internal differences.”<sup>5</sup> Because many researchers, journalists, critics and other influencers are not fans of metal music and therefore lack the necessary musical knowledge, they are unable to differentiate between the corresponding genres and therefore merge them unintentionally. As a researcher you do not want to take on a fan’s perspective – at least, if it is not explicitly part of a research project – although the knowledge advantage of fans should not be underestimated.

## THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF VIKING, PAGAN AND FOLK METAL

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When it comes to a new sub-genre it is important to know that it “is not born in an empty space but in a musical system that is already structured.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it should not be surprising that in the beginning a lot of rules and elements are adopted, before a progress of crystallization produces a new sub-genre,<sup>7</sup> or even an independent and separated genre.<sup>8</sup> Whether Byrnside’s process of decaying, which has already been questioned by Elflein,<sup>9</sup> can also apply to metal is questionable, because nearly every metal sub-genre continues to exist after the new one takes root.

For many researchers Viking metal evolved from black metal with the release of *Bathory*’s ‘Blood Fire Death’ album in 1988<sup>10</sup> and the lyrical shift from Satan, devil, and hell to Viking and Scandinavian related topics.<sup>11</sup> Compared to black metal, the lyrics of Viking metal – still dealing with blasphemous issues – “depict Northern landscapes and battles, creating a dark and tense atmosphere [...] [while] the music arrangements became more epic”<sup>12</sup> and the music itself changed “from frenzied cacophony to orchestrated, melodic bombast.”<sup>13</sup> On the other hand,

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4 von Helden 2012: 156.

5 Kahn-Harris 2007: 5.

6 Fabbri 1982: 60.

7 Byrnside 1975: 161.

8 A good example of this phenomenon could be the melodic death metal genre, which originated during the ‘90s in Sweden. As its popularity has increased exponentially during recent years some will argue that it is already a metal sub-genre, although it still has all the characteristics necessary to count as a sub-genre of death metal.

9 Elflein 2010: 35.

10 Bénard 2004: 55; von Helden 2010: 33–34; Piotrowska 2015: 104; Heinen 2016: 68–69.

11 Weinstein is the only one who links the initiation of Viking metal to the release of *Bathory*’s ‘Hammerheart’ – album in 1990 (Weinstein 2013: 60), two years after ‘Blood Fire Death’ was released.

12 von Helden 2010: 34.

13 Moynihan; Söderlind 1998: 22.

Piotrowska describes Viking metal as a new black metal direction, which – in its lyrics – refers to Norse and Viking mythology, while the organization of the musical material is rather chaotic and the boisterous music itself is coupled with “shanty-like melodies”<sup>14</sup> and natural sounds, such as ocean waves. These brief descriptions illustrate that researchers have problems creating a unified definition that includes the musical material, although Viking metal has its roots in black metal and lyrics play an important role in demarcation.

At the same time, pagan metal, which has a wider variety than Viking metal (when it comes to lyrics and music), emerged from black metal through bands like *Primordial* and *Amorphis*.<sup>15</sup> Von Helden states: “Pagan metal mainly deals with Pagan religions and lies in a broader context where not only Old Norse mythology is dealt with, but also Celtic myths and history, fairy tales and other elements of folklore.”<sup>16</sup> This greater diversity and the more general criteria make it difficult to categorize; one could even claim that Viking metal is a specialized type – a sub-genre of pagan metal – but since a parallel development can be observed with respect to the sub-genres, it is difficult to conceive of Viking metal as a further development of pagan metal.

Although the popularity of folk metal is largely influenced by Finnish bands, the sub-genre emerged with *Skyclad*’s debut album ‘The Wayward Sons of Mother Earth’ in Great Britain, in 1991, for the first time. They combine ancient pagan themes and English folk instruments<sup>17</sup> with thrash and classic metal elements. In comparison to black metal, Spracklen argues that folk metal bands have no authentic connection to nationalist patriarchs and therefore construct “fantasies of drinking and fighting.”<sup>18</sup> However, if you look at the Swiss band *Eluveitie* (Spracklen characterizes *Eluveite* also as folk metal), you will notice that within folk metal there are at least some cultural influences shaping the band’s identity. For example, the Helvetii in the case of *Eluveitie*. Also, drinking stories and fantasies are found in other sub-genres, for example with the song ‘Met’ (mead) by the pagan metal band *Equilibrium* (album: ‘Turis Fratyr’).

Confusingly, Weinstein summarizes all three metal sub-genres under one category: Pagan metal.<sup>19</sup> The two brief examples which follow show that Weinstein’s use of the term pagan metal is based on misleading facts, which leads to inaccurate results. The first example occurred in 1994 when the Israeli progressive folk metal band *Orphaned Land*, who are known for founding the folk metal sub-genre oriental metal, released their debut album ‘Sahara’.<sup>20</sup> *Orphaned Land*

14 Piotrowska 2015: 104.

15 Weinstein 2013: 60.

16 von Helden 2012: 156.

17 Spracklen 2015: 365.

18 *Ibid.*: 360.

19 Weinstein 2013: 60-64.

20 Other folk metal sub-genres include medieval metal (mainly in Germany with bands like *In Extremo* and *Subway to Sally*) and Celtic metal.

combines metal with traditional oriental folk elements, while the lyrics deal with the three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Islam, and Christianity). Therefore, it is questionable whether the characterization and classification of a metal band with religious, especially monotheistic influences as ‘pagan’ metal is useful or just wrong.<sup>21</sup> The second example relates to the Swedish metal band *Amon Amarth*. Based on the lyrics referring to Nordic mythology and Viking themes, Weinstein categorizes this music as pagan metal.<sup>22</sup> Unexpectedly, she did not interview the band or pay attention to their declared sub-genre belonging (death metal),<sup>23</sup> as she had previously done with some pagan and folk metal bands. Furthermore, describing and categorizing bands solely with respect to their lyrics and without analyzing the music<sup>24</sup> does not seem legitimate. In addition, Weinstein is fully aware of the fact that *Amon Amarth* developed out of the Swedish death metal scene during the 1990s and counts as one of the founding bands of the melodic death metal genre.<sup>25</sup>

While Viking and pagan metal both have their origins in black metal<sup>26</sup> it is possible to treat the two musical approaches as black metal sub-genres which have become distinctive and independent through the addition of special cultural and musical elements. Folk metal, on the other hand, can be understood as a fusion of several original genres, unlike Viking and pagan metal, which are specializations (Figure 1). A good example of this kind of evolution would be the Finnish folk metal band *Korpiklaani* which started out as the Finnish folk band *Shaman* before they added metal elements to their folk music.<sup>27</sup>

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21 Weinstein is not talking about *Orphaned Land*, but does align pagan metal with non-Christianity.

22 Weinstein 2013: 64.

23 During the last song ‘The Pursuit of Vikings’ of Strasbourg’s concert at “La Laiterie” in 2015, Johann Hegg encouraged the audience to sing the chorus. He said: “And let me tell you something. It doesn’t matter, if you don’t know the lyrics. It’s death metal, no one will know the difference.” The whole concert is available on the ‘Jomsviking’ bonus DVD (included in the Limited Box Edition).

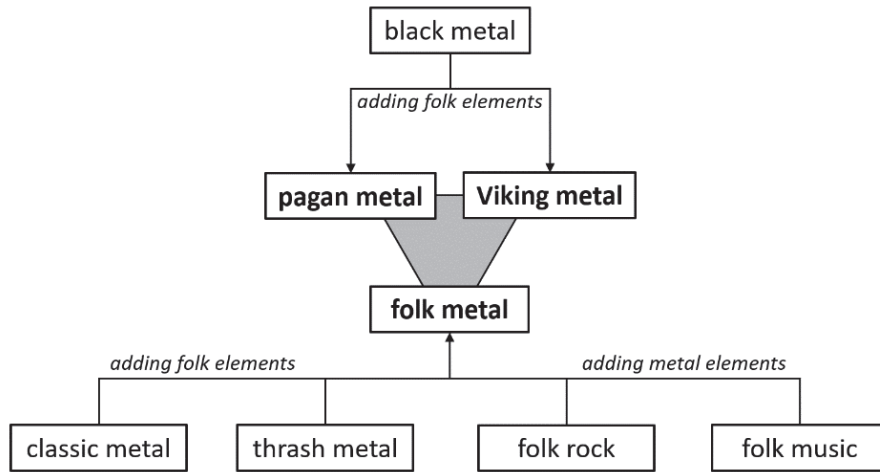
24 This issue was already mentioned by von Helden (von Helden 2010: 34).

25 Weinstein 2013: 61.

26 For Weinstein, these two sub-genres evolved from the whole extreme metal genre and not only from black metal (*ibid.*: 59-60, 74).

27 von Helden 2010: 37.

Figure 1. Historical development of Viking, pagan and folk metal



## INSTRUMENTATION AS A DISTINGUISHING FEATURE OF SUB-GENRES

Whereas Viking and pagan metal bands are already limited in their reach in advance (mainly Nordic mythology and Viking themes), folk metal bands have the possibility of incorporating one specially selected culture and thus integrating the associated instruments into their music.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, in folk metal, the variety of atypical metal instruments should be significantly higher than in other metal sub-genres and could be seen as an indicator. The following table (Figure 2) shows the most prominent Viking, pagan and folk metal bands and the instruments they use in addition to the standard rock and metal line-up (vocals, electric guitar, electric bass, drums). Acoustic guitars and percussion instruments, but also instruments which are never played live on stage, like for example complete string ensembles or brass sections during an introduction, do not appear in this table. The band selection is based on the ten biggest and most important metal festivals in Europe<sup>29</sup> and an analysis of their line-up over several years, while

28 Special attention has to be paid to bands from other sub-genres which also refer to a single culture as their hallmark: The Finnish power metal band *Whispered* for example uses Asian and Japanese themes in trying to establish a samurai metal sub-genre while *Ex Deo*, the side project of the Canadian band *Kataklysm*, plays death metal with lyrics about the Roman and Latin empire.

29 The data was generated using the line-ups of the following metal festivals since their beginnings: *Bloodstock Open Air* (Great Britain), *Copenhell* (Denmark), *Graspop Metal Meeting* (Belgium), *Hellfest Open Air* (France), *Metaldays* (Slovenia), *Rockfest Barcelona* (Spain), *Summerbreeze Open Air* (Germany), *Tuska Open Air Metal Festival* (Finland), *Wacken Open Air* (Germany), *With Full Force* (Germany).

the data for the listed instruments is based on every released song so far.<sup>30</sup> This method, with the limitation of big and famous metal festivals, acts as a filter to sort the sub-genre's important bands from the unimportant ones, because bands which are irrelevant for the sub-genre might perform at smaller festivals, while sub-genre relevant bands consistently perform at bigger metal festivals.

Figure 2. The most prominent Viking, pagan and folk metal bands

band	origin	'folk' instruments	keyboard
<i>Amorphis</i>	Finland	-	yes
<i>Ariana</i>	Russia	bagpipes, balalaika, flute, hurdy gurdy, komuz, mouth harp, recorder, soplika, whistles, yakut, zhaleyka	yes
<i>Die Apokalyptischen Reiter</i>	Germany	-	yes
<i>Einherjer</i>	Norway	-	yes
<i>Eluveite</i>	Switzerland	bagpipes, bass-shalm, bouzouki, cello, Celtic harp, crumhorn, fiddle, flute, gaita, harp, hurdy gurdy, Irish bouzouki, Irish flute, mandola, mandolin, mouth harp, tin whistle, uilleann pipes, violin, whistles, zugerörgel	-
<i>Eiveking</i>	Italy	viola, violin	yes
<i>Ensiferum</i>	Finland	accordion	yes (+ piano and organ)
<i>Enslaved</i>	Norway	mouth harp	yes (+ piano, Hammond organ and mellotron)
<i>Equilibrium</i>	Germany	-	yes
<i>Finntroll</i>	Finland	banjo, mouth harp	yes
<i>Heidevolk</i>	Netherlands	bullhorn, flute, mandolin, midwinter horn, mouth harp, violin	-
<i>In Extremo</i>	Germany	binioiu, cittern, flute, German bagpipes, harmonica, harp, hurdy gurdy, nyckelharpa, piccolo, shawm, timpani, tromba marina, tymbaly, uilleann pipes	-
<i>Kamajar</i>	Norway	-	-
<i>Korpiklaani</i>	Finland	accordion, bagpipes, flute, jouthikko, violin	-
<i>Moonsorrow</i>	Finland	accordion, auto harp, banjo, bouzouki, mandolin, mouth harp, recorder, tin whistle	yes
<i>Orphaned Land</i>	Israel	bouzouki, chumbush, oud, saz, xylophone	yes (+ piano)
<i>Primordial</i>	Ireland	-	-
<i>Skyclad</i>	Great Britain	fiddle, mandolin, violin	yes (+ piano)
<i>Skyforger</i>	Latvia	bagpipes, giga, kokle, mouth harp, pipe, rattle stick, warhorn	-
<i>Subway To Sally</i>	Germany	bagpipe, baroque oboe, German bagpipe, Great Highland bagpipe, geyeleier, hurdy gurdy, mandola, mandolin, renaissance lute, shawm, tin whistle, tromba marina, viola, violin	-
<i>Trollfest</i>	Norway	accordion, banjo, saxophone	synthesizer
<i>Turisas</i>	Finland	accordion, violin	yes
<i>Týr</i>	Faroe Island (Denmark)	-	-

30 The instrument is listed even if it only appears in a single song.

Focusing initially on the origin of the selected bands, it is evident that all bands come from Europe (with two exceptions: *Arkona* and *Orphaned Land*). A restriction to European metal festivals inevitably leads to an increased European band selection, but it is conspicuous that no non-European Viking, pagan or folk metal bands appear in the table, such that they are not well represented in Europe. Possible reasons for the origin and thus for a focus of these three sub-genres on European cultures could be the cultural diversity of Europe, a greater awareness and the stronger presence of their own past, or simply a better and, above all, more long-lived handed down European culture. Also, it is not surprising that genre-founding bands like *Bathory* do not appear in this list, considering that the band no longer exists after the death of Thomas Forsberg, the founder of *Bathory*, in 2004.

When looking at the instruments it is immediately noticeable that there are huge differences in the number of atypical metal instruments. On the one hand there are bands that use little or no 'folk' instruments, but on the other hand there are bands that incorporate a greater number of atypical metal instruments (*Arkona*, *Eluveitie*, *In Extremo*, *Subway To Sally*) in their songs. Instead, many of the bands that, for whatever reason, do not use any or only a few 'folk' instruments in their music, use a keyboard (*Amorphis*, *Die Apokalyptischen Reiter*, *Einherjer*, *Elvenking*, *Ensiferum*, *Enslaved*, *Equilibrium*, *Finntroll*, *Turisas*). Because the keyboard can fulfill two different roles it is treated separately: First, it can be used as a gap filler for a missing and flexible 'folk' instrument,<sup>31</sup> and second, it can also be used to generate atmospheric pad sounds, or to play a melodic line with a synthetic electric sound. Power and symphonic metal bands often tend to use their keyboards for this purpose. There are even three bands that neither use a single 'folk' instrument nor a keyboard: *Kampfara*, *Primordial* and *Týr*.

Considering the instruments alongside the genre affiliation, it turns out that the bands which stand out due to using a significant number of 'folk' instruments are also assigned to the folk metal sub-genre (*Arkona*, *Eluveitie*, *In Extremo*, *Subway To Sally*). In order to perform with the appropriate instruments – at this point, it should be made clear again that not every 'folk' instrument is used in each song – it is not surprising that these bands consist of a larger number of musicians than the other bands,<sup>32</sup> especially looking at *Eluveitie* (9 musicians), *In Extremo* (7 musicians) and *Subway To Sally* (7 musicians). Also, it can be observed that as soon as folk instruments are used (no matter whether a keyboard is used or not), the tendency towards folk metal increases significantly (Figure 3). *Enslaved* and *Moonsorrow* are the two exceptions, whereby *Enslaved* uses a mouth harp only on the second ('Frost' from 1994) of the 14 studio albums released so far while the band *Moonsorrow* uses more atypical metal instruments, but does not use them live on stage and instead uses a recording on a computer.<sup>33</sup>

31 Elovaara 2017: 16.

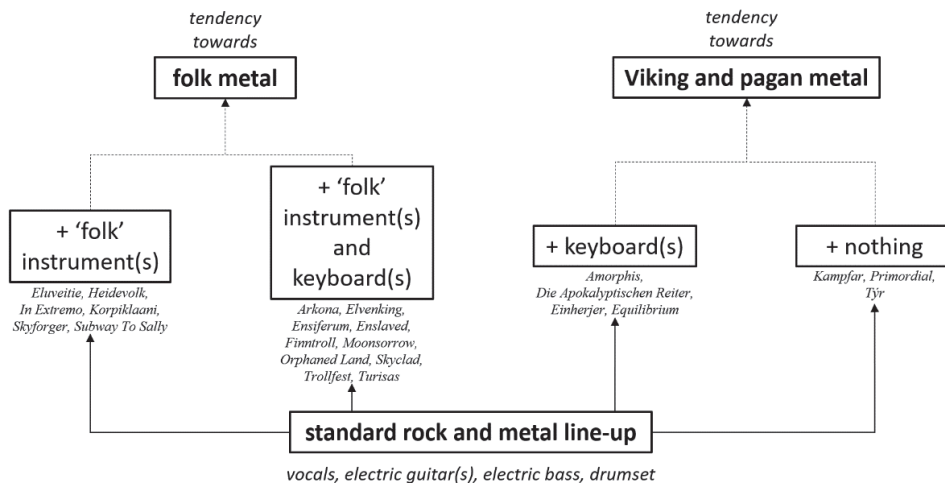
32 *Ibid.*

33 Currently, the band consists of five musicians: lead singer and bass player Ville Sorvali,



In contrast, comparing all the bands listed in the table (Figure 2) that use a keyboard but no ‘folk’ instrument in their songs (*Amorphis*, *Die Apokalyptischen Reiter*, *Einherjer*, *Equilibrium*), you will notice that none of these bands are assigned to folk metal but to Viking and pagan metal instead. No use of a metal atypical instrument would therefore mean that a folk metal sub-genre assignment is excluded. However, this is only true to a limited extent. For example, if you know that the band *Ensiferum* worked together with accordion player *Netta Skog* only on their last album ‘Two Paths’ and only in a few songs, a folk metal classification will be deduced from the band line-up. Otherwise, *Ensiferum* would have to be considered to be a non-folk metal band. A similar phenomenon can be seen in the Faroese band *Týr*, who are assigned to the folk metal sub-genre even without ‘folk’ instruments and keyboards. Piotrowska argues that “a significant part of Týr compositions are based on original Faroese folk tunes [...] [which involve] unusual rhythms, usually in seven-fourths or alternatively twelve-eighths or nine-eighths [...] [and] exploit a minor scale (either in its harmonic or melodic variant) or mixolydian mode.”<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, the fact that the use of a single viola and a keyboard does not necessarily lead to a folk metal categorization is shown through investigation of the early albums (‘Krebskolonie’, ‘Leichenlager’, ‘Farbenfinsternis’ and ‘Wundwasser’) of the German dark metal band *Eisregen*. Up until today, nobody considered classifying *Eisregen* as folk metal.

Figure 3. Tendencies based on the instruments used



guitar player Henri Sorvali, guitar player Mitja Harvilahti, keyboard player Markus Eurén and drummer Marko Tarvonen.

34 Piotrowska 2015: 107.



In addition, the historical development of the three sub-genres can also be derived through consideration of the instruments used: While Viking and pagan metal have a comparable black metal-like line-up, the ‘folk’ instruments from folk rock and folk music have a stronger influence on folk metal. Overall, the line-up and instrumentation are only indications and provide clues as to which sub-genre a particular band belongs to. If you generally deal with the question of which metal sub-genre a band is assigned to, with a choice going beyond Viking, pagan and folk metal, the criteria of instrumentation can only be used to a limited extent, since many metal bands only use the standard metal line-up, or at most add a keyboard.

## MUSICAL ANALYSIS AS A MEANS OF DIFFERENTIATING SUB-GENRES

Unfortunately, when it comes to music and musicological analyses only a few researchers are willing to invest the required amount of work and time involved in transcribing and analyzing songs. Kahn-Harris pointed out that “undoubtedly the most critical weakness in metal studies as it stands [is] the relative paucity of detailed musicological analyses on metal.”<sup>35</sup> The same issue was also mentioned by Brown, who stated that “it remains the case that studies of metal as music are few and far between.”<sup>36</sup> There are some musicological approaches<sup>37</sup>, but the majority of researchers restrict themselves to a brief description of the musical processes without delving too deeply into detailed music-theoretical analysis, as Piotrowska<sup>38</sup> or Spracklen<sup>39</sup> do in the case of folk metal. Since not all songs of the bands listed in the table (Figure 2) can be analyzed, only exemplary songs that are part of the so-called “standard repertoire” are discussed in this chapter. The standard repertoire is a pool of songs that will be played at each of the band’s performances, representing and characterizing the band. This standard repertoire does not exist from the beginning of a band’s career but develops over time through the release of a number of albums. Because bands cannot play all tracks from their albums (entire repertoire) on stage they inevitably have to make this selection at some point (live repertoire). With further albums this live selection is updated again and again, so that after some time the standard repertoire is established. For this reason, it is perfectly feasible to provide a representative song selection of the bands to be investigated.<sup>40</sup>

35 Kahn-Harris 2011: 252.

36 Brown et al. 2016: 11.

37 Chaker et al. 2018; Elflein 2010; Lilja 2009.

38 Piotrowska 2015.

39 Spracklen 2015.

40 In 2014 the thrash metal band *Metallica* even went one step further: For their ‘Metallica by Request’ Tour the fans were allowed to vote on the whole set-list and, unsurprisingly, all the songs of the standard repertoire topped the vote (e.g. ‘Master Of Puppets’, ‘Enter Sandman’, ‘One’, ‘Nothing Else Matters’). The complete data on voting can be checked on the internet (<http://www.metallicabyrequest.com/archive/>, accessed 19 November 2019).

VIKING METAL (E.G. *ENSLAVED*)

Starting with Viking metal and *Enslaved*, which is a good substitute for *Bathory*<sup>41</sup>, the still existing similarities with the black metal genre, especially the second wave, are clearly noticeable.<sup>42</sup> A beautiful example of this is the bridge of the song 'Isa' (album: 'Isa'). First, the change of the time signature<sup>43</sup> is discovered at an untouched tempo (135 bpm). This results in a significant deceleration of the beat – the impression is given that the tempo decreased to 45 bpm, which would be one third of the initial tempo – due to the fact that the new 6/4 rhythm is accentuated on beat one and four. Together with the kick drum, presenting a wall of straight sixteenths, the second electric guitar reinforces the atmospheric, meditative, melodic-less and for black metal characteristic style of music by, at least at first sight, a chaotic sequence of chords (Example 1).

Example 1. Transcription of the song 'Isa' (*Enslaved*), mm. 73-74

A closer look reveals three phenomena that further support the atmospheric character and illustrate that the chord sequence is anything but chaotic: Some of the chords are in open position, some thirds and dissonances can be heard, which lead to interference due to the distortion (adding overtones) of the electric guitar, and additionally a kind of pedal tone sound with the permanent G, which is part of every chord. The reason for these conditions can be found by analyzing the corresponding tablature, as the guitar player simply shifts the chord to another position on the fretboard, leaving the G-string permanently open (Example 2).

41 As a reminder: In comparison to *Enslaved*, another pioneer band of Viking metal, *Bathory* never performed at any major metal festival. Therefore, *Bathory* will not be analyzed in this section.

42 For the characteristics of black metal see e.g. Chaker (Chaker et al. 2018).

43 Actually, the bridge starts four bars earlier, but since in these four bars only the keyboardist plays the deconstructed chord figures, which will be repeated with bar 73, the transcription starts exactly there. However, for the felt deceleration these four bars are very important, because otherwise the change seems sharp and abrupt.

Example 2. Simplified transcription of the second electric guitar of the song 'Isa' (*Enslaved*), mm. 73-76

73

electric guitar 2  
+ tablature

T	13	17	12	8	9	13	8	7
A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
B	10	14	9	5	6	10	5	4

The other instruments (first electric guitar, bass guitar, keyboard), which together embody a unified harmonic structure, amplify the atmospheric and meditative impression with atypical and arpeggiated chords.

However, Viking metal does not only consist of black metal elements. It is also characterized by a combination of clean and unclean vocals, by an anthem- and chorus-like sound, emphasized first and foremost by the keyboard, as well as the connection to Nordic mythology, primarily to Viking culture, which are evident in the lyrics. The song 'The Watcher' by *Enslaved* (album: 'Vertebrae') functions as a prime example of these musical elements. The keyboard, which generates an impressive, choral atmosphere in the background of the tremolo picked electric guitars (Example 3), but also the change from clean, understandable vocals<sup>44</sup> during the chorus to unclean, distorted vocals (growls/screams) during the verse has to be mentioned. While the double kick drumming and the electric guitars create again a meditative state, a small, inconspicuous melody breaks through the carpet of sound and clarifies that Viking metal can also possess some melodic features (Example 3).

Without speaking Scandinavian languages, thematic references to Nordic mythology, ultimately titling the Viking metal genre, can only rely on the song titles, as the lyrics, at least from the first albums of *Enslaved*, are written in Old Norwegian and Nynorsk.<sup>45</sup> With titles such as 'Allföðr Óðinn' ('Allfather Odin'), 'Ethica Odini', 'Fenris', 'Heimdallr', 'Loke', 'Return to Yggdrasil' and 'Wotan', but also with songs like 'Fusion of Sense and Earth', 'Roots of the Mountain', or 'The River's Mouth', the connection to Nordic mythology as well as the affinity to landscapes and nature is clear. Besides this, there are also songs about "the way of living in the Viking Age including fighting, raids and death rituals."<sup>46</sup>

44 von Helden 2010: 34.

45 von Helden-Sarnowski 2017: 25.

46 von Helden 2010: 34.

Example 3. Transcription of the two guitars during the second and third verses of the song ‘The Watcher’ (*Enslaved*)

The image displays four systems of musical notation for two electric guitars. Each system consists of two staves: the top staff is for 'electric guitar 1' and the bottom staff is for 'electric guitar 2'. The music is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The notation shows a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth-note runs, sixteenth-note patterns, and chordal textures. The first system shows a complex interplay of eighth and sixteenth notes. The second system features a steady eighth-note pattern in guitar 1 and a chordal accompaniment in guitar 2. The third system continues with similar rhythmic motifs. The fourth system shows a consistent eighth-note pattern in guitar 1 and a chordal accompaniment in guitar 2.

### PAGAN METAL (E.G. *PRIMORDIAL*, *EQUILIBRIUM*)

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Similar elements can be found through an examination of pagan metal. Thus, when analyzing the bridge of the song ‘Gallows Hymn’ by the band *Primordial*, immediately a comparable rhythm to that used in ‘Isa’ is discovered: The 6/4 beat at 150 bpm with continuously played double kick drum and a focus on count one and four (reinforced by the bass guitar) leads to a deceleration of the felt tempo.<sup>47</sup> Together with the sixteenths of the double kick, the two guitars not only create the typical black metal atmospheric character (Example 4), but also induce a meditative state through the repetitions (e.g. the arpeggio-like, melodic chords of the first guitar).

<sup>47</sup> Admittedly, it has to be said that the whole song, and not just the bridge, is written in 6/4 time.

Example 4. Transcription of the song ‘Gallows Hymn’ (*Primordial*), mm. 43-44

However, it is remarkable that this chord sequence, which is present throughout the whole song, perfectly describes the tonal room by a concluding, classic dominant-tonic (from B7 to Em) connection (Example 5).

Example 5. Simplified reduction of the first guitar of the song ‘Gallows Hymn’ (*Primordial*), mm. 43-60

The fact that pagan metal develops further and distances itself more from black metal than Viking metal does can be discovered by examining the song ‘Blut im Auge’ by the band *Equilibrium*, whose first two albums – ‘Turis Fratr’ and ‘Sagas’ – still show clear pagan metal influences, contrary to today, when they tend to play epic metal.<sup>48</sup> In the second part of the bridge the continuously played double kick and the reduction of the tempo by half by playing the snare drum on count three can be seen as remnants of black metal, but all other components are no longer present. Instead, power chords are supported by strings (keyboard, left hand) and accompany the catchy melody (keyboard right hand), which is even doubled and enhanced by a string sound in the further progression of the bridge. In particular the absence of tremolo-picked electric guitars and the change from riff-based guitar playing to a simple chord structure, which is even more broadly orchestrated by the string sound of the keyboard,<sup>49</sup> give the impression that this music must be ‘epic’<sup>50</sup> and ‘majestic’ (Example 6).

48 Looking at the formation of the band alone, style changes are not surprising, as guitarist René Berthiaume is the only band member who was part of the band during its pagan beginnings.

49 During the bridge this orchestral instrumentation is further supported by a discreet choir.

50 von Helden describes that these epic structures are already visible in Viking metal (“the music arrangements become more epic: the songs were noticeably orchestrated similarly to

Examining the lyrics of pagan metal bands, it turns out that this sub-genre, unlike Viking metal, is not based on one single culture – not naming nation and culture explicitly as further distinguishing criteria. Thus, there is not only a thematic expansion in the lyrics, but also a musical development, which should not be surprising since pagan metal bands use different cultural regions as inspiration, while Viking metal can only rely on one single culture. Heinen, who has also examined the lyrics of pagan metal bands, identified ten similar categories (mythology, historical events, anti-Christian polemics, death, nature, nationalism, rituals, drinking, the search for almighty wisdom, others), which are presented by the bands.<sup>51</sup>

Example 6. Transcription of the song 'Blut im Auge' (*Equilibrium*), mm. 118-125

The musical score for 'Blut im Auge' (Equilibrium) from measures 118 to 125 is presented in a multi-staff format. The instruments included are electric guitar 1, electric guitar 2, keyboard, bass guitar, and drumset. The score is written in a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 4/4 time signature. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings, indicating a complex and rhythmic composition. The keyboard part is particularly intricate, featuring multiple systems of staves and a variety of note values and rests. The bass guitar part provides a steady, driving rhythm, while the drumset part adds to the overall intensity of the piece.

classical music”), but where and how they become exactly visible is not revealed and explained. (von Helden 2010: 34)

51 Heinen 2016: 113-134.

### FOLK METAL (E.G. *ELUVEITIE*, *FINNTROLL*)

Folk metal, on the other hand, is structured in a completely different way, which for example is noticeable when the song ‘Inis Mona’ by the band *Eluveitie* is examined. First, it is discovered that the added folk instruments, in this case violin and hurdy-gurdy, play the melody (Example 7). At this point it has to be said that folk metal music has to have a tonal setting and does not simply consist of riffs that are arranged together, especially when considering that not every ‘folk’ instrument is full chromatic. The rhythm is interesting too: Although it is a common 4/4 beat, due to the bass guitar and the hi-hat it is extremely accentuated as an off-beat (even the electric guitar participates in this rhythm during the last bar of the example). The fact that the tuned down electric guitar (B standard tuning) does not present a continuous wall of distortion leads to a non-black metal classification, and therefore more or less to a non-Viking and non-pagan metal assignment.<sup>52</sup>

Especially when analyzing other folk metal bands, it becomes clear that rhythm plays a major role in differentiating sub-genres. Thus, for example the Finnish folk metal band *Finntroll* often uses a humppa<sup>53</sup> rhythm,<sup>54</sup> which is comparable to a polka-like dance rhythm with a strongly accentuated off-beat, in some of their songs.<sup>55</sup>

A very similar musical structure to that of ‘Inis Mona’ can be discovered by examining the song ‘Trollhammaren’ by the already mentioned band *Finntroll*, even if in this section the characteristic humppa rhythm cannot be found (Example 8). The musical setting (G minor) is already determined by the melody (keyboard) in the first bars: At the beginning of the melody, the fifth frame (G-D) is opened up in a schoolbook manner, before it is extended to an octave frame (G-G) and, in the end, the fundamental tone G is finally established with a characteristic closing figure for melodies (F-A-G). This diatonic tonal source is also presented by the electric guitars, which at this point only play simple power chords, while even the drumset plays an ordinary 4/4 rhythm. Compared to Viking and pagan metal, folk metal attaches less importance to the generation of atmosphere by blast beats, unusual guitar riffs and pad sounds by the keyboard, instead bringing the lyrics and ‘folk’ melody into the center of attention through the use of restrained guitars and drums. The fact that lyrics and melodies play a greater role in folk metal can be recognized not only via the ‘folk’ instruments and the different languages from which folk metal bands can draw but also through the existence of acoustic and unplugged songs, which work without distorted electric guitars and with only a minimal rhythm section.

52 It should be mentioned that tuned down electric guitars and growls are more characteristic of death metal than of black metal.

53 The word humppa is onomatopoeic, which means that the sound of the word is very similar to the actual music – comparable to the word djent for djent metal songs.

54 For example, the song ‘Rivfader’ on the first album ‘Midnattens widunder’ or ‘Skogsdotter’ on ‘Blodsvept’.

55 Neilson 2015: 136.



Example 7. Transcription of the song 'Inis Mona' (*Eluveitie*), mm. 6-10

6

vocals  
 Wel - come to the land of ques - tions, wel - come to the isle of lore, where the veil - ing came crum - bling down.

violin

hurdy-gurdy

electric guitar 1+2

bass guitar

drumset

Example 8. Transcription of the song 'Trollhammaren' (*Finntroll*), mm. 10-13

The musical score for 'Trollhammaren' (measures 10-13) is written in 4/4 time and B-flat major. It consists of four staves: keyboard, electric guitar 1+2, bass guitar, and drumset. The keyboard part features a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes. The electric guitar and bass guitar parts play rhythmic patterns of eighth notes. The drumset part features a consistent pattern of quarter notes and eighth notes.

In summary it is noticeable that folk metal not only makes use of 'folk' instruments but depending on the circumstances also of 'folk' rhythms or 'folk' melodies. However, since you cannot be an expert on every existing culture that inspires folk metal bands, it is sometimes difficult to recognize the corresponding 'folk' signs and thereby to allocate a band to the folk metal genre.

## CONCLUSION

As the foregoing short investigations of musical material have shown, a differentiation between Viking and pagan metal on the one hand and folk metal on the other hand can be achieved. However, it becomes more difficult if Viking and pagan metal have to be distinguished. Whether Viking metal might be a specialization of black metal (meaning that Viking metal becomes a sub-genre of black metal and therefore is called "Viking black metal") while pagan metal rather expands the musical frame remains to be uncovered through future research projects. Furthermore, it has to be mentioned that bands intentionally play with these categorization options and try to create a status of uniqueness in order to market and position themselves more effectively.

Nevertheless, bands that have been part of the metal scene for some time are not as easy to assign to a certain metal sub-genre and must be treated individually. In most cases, the larger the number of songs and albums which have to be analyzed the more complicated the identification of musical similarities will become. Even a change of band members can lead to a different style of music, as new musicians bring new ideas and other influences, while former band members take their own, and perhaps band-defining, way of making music with them. In this case it is important to find a balanced approach, because the bands that have been around for a long time are the ones that have the biggest influence in shaping their respective sub-genres.

In order to ensure a satisfying sub-genre classification, it is unavoidable that not only the socio-cultural environment, the lyrics, or album covers must be examined, but also that these parameters must be considered in the context of the music. Otherwise mistakes, such as the sub-genre categorization of *Amon Amarth* as Viking metal, will happen.

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