

1ST ROUNDTABLE

From *Powerslave* to *Senjutsu* Heavy Metal & Orientalism

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Amongst the Catacombs of Nephren-Ka: Reimagining Monumental Architectures of Ancient Egypt in Heavy Metal's Visual Culture

Egypt is arguably one of the most evocative cultures of the ancient world, having served as inspiration to artists over centuries. Egyptian built spaces, in particular, have been used as a backdrop to express ideas of grandeur and opulence that highlight the perceived exoticism of Egypt. Monumental architecture is thus widely seen to encapsulate the essence of Egyptian civilisation.

As a result, Egypt has been characterised in the popular imagination as a culture of monumentality, and heavy metal capitalises on that idea. Pyramids, temples, and burial chambers feature in the visual vocabulary of metal bands, recreating and perpetuating a depiction of Egypt that fits with the audience's expectations of this ancient civilisation. For example, the well-known cover of Iron Maiden's 1984 album *Powerslave* presents a mega-pyramid fronted by colossal statuary that serves in equal parts as stage and main theme of a reimagined ancient Egypt. An emphasis on certain types of built spaces, however, fosters a conception of Egypt as a static culture where things—including architecture—never change.

In this presentation I explore to what an extent this obsession with monumentality is deployed in metal culture. I focus mainly on the visual representations of architecture in music videos, artwork, promotional material, and stage props, but consideration will be given to descriptions of architectural spaces in lyrics as well. I argue that heavy metal's representations of Egyptian architecture perpetuate Orientalist tropes that portray Egypt as a mystical and exoticised 'Other'. Rather than dismiss these depictions on account of their fancifulness and lack of historical accuracy, I propose to use Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity to interpret these reimagined architectures as third spaces that act as in-between places where new meanings of ancient Egypt are created and negotiated.

Iron Maiden and the Samurai Culture From *Maiden Japan* to *Senjutsu*

For centuries, until the end of the Edo period (1603-1868), Japan remained an obsolete society, ruled by the feudal system and largely isolated from the Western world. This contributed to an imagined, and sometimes distorted perception of this country and its people. According to Curtis Andressen, author of *A short history of Japan: from Samurai to Sony* (2002), it is hard to define whether the Japanese are “isolationist or expansionist, considerate of other cultures or arrogantly dismissive, willing members of the international community or shy and fearful of engaging with others, wildly successful or perched on the edge of economic ruin”. From the Meiji period (1868-1912) onwards, the country opened its doors to Western technologies and to capitalism, leading it to modernization. However, with the defeat in WWII, Japan to struggle hard to recover from disaster and to regain their self-confidence. This was achieved through a balance of political, economic and even religious principles, allied to massive investment in education. The fierce internal competition forced the Japanese to develop a strong sense of duty and an acute strategic vision, which in the long run led them to conquer the foreign market. Today, brands such as Yamaha, Sony, Toshiba, Mistubishi, Honda, Nissan and Toyota, to name but a few, are omnipresent in the Western world, as are their *cuisine* and popular culture. Conversely, Japan became more receptive to foreign cultures, in particular to popular music: the Beatles’ 1965 concert at the Tokyo Budokan, as well as tours by Deep Purple, KISS and Queen in the 1970s are a testimony to this. Iron Maiden followed suit, presenting their *Killer World Tour* to Japanese audiences in May of 1981, which resulted in their first official live record, the EP *Maiden Japan*. In this paper, I will use works by Wilson (2013) and López-Vera (2020), among others, to analyse how the *samurai* culture was absorbed and recreated by Iron Maiden throughout their career, focusing on three moments: the aforementioned EP; the song “Sun and Steel” (1983), about legendary samurai Miyamoto Musashi; and their long awaited album *Senjutsu* (2021).