

## **‘Sing the dark song of Érenn to me’ Irish Saga and Metal Music**

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Although first written in the Middle Ages, these sagas purport to offer a glimpse of the mythic, pre-Christian past, populated with a larger-than-life cast of heroic warriors, sinister druids, and pagan gods. While they have not enjoyed the same degree of influence as their Old Norse counterparts, the Irish sagas have been a source of inspiration for metal bands, especially folk metal bands, in Ireland and abroad.

This paper will begin with an overview of the bands which draw upon early Irish literature in their songs, as well as the stories which are frequently referenced or retold in their lyrics. This is followed by a discussion of the various scholarly and popular intermediaries through which artists may have encountered these medieval texts. There will also be a brief discussion of the use of medieval and modern Irish by these bands although, as will be noted, the use of Celtic languages tends to be fairly superficial.

The majority of the paper will be dedicated to an analysis of the ways in which bands make use of early Irish narrative. For some bands, the main attraction of Irish saga is those elements which suggest an affinity with fantasy literature. For other bands, the use of saga narrative is part of a strategy of invoking an archaic national past: “primordial nationalisms”, to borrow Simon Trafford’s term. Unsurprisingly, many of these bands are from Ireland, and their use of Irish saga forms part of a general preoccupation with Ireland’s past and future. For bands from outside of Ireland, this invocation of an Irish and Celtic past can be seen as a form of nationalism which is distinctly international in character, defined by a sense of a shared Celtic identity and an opposition to modernity.