

o sont la morte che porto corona g onte signora de ognia persona e t cossi son hera forte a dura che trapasso le porte a vitra le mura O utro lanho col mio strate Sapienta beleza forteza mente vale Non e signor madona ne vassallo B isogna che lor entri in questo ballo

Quotations of the Middle Ages in the music of the 'Gothic' movement. An analytical survey

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Abstract

The article deals with bands making the "Ethereal" type of music and their use of quotations of the Middle Ages. The first example is the track *Il bagatto* (2000) by Ataraxia. The primary source for Ataraxia's music is a French dance published in 1530 which, in turn, reveals harmonic connections with an Italian one published in 1578. The two ancient dances, French and Italian, seem to have been conceived as separate developments from a common archaic tune. The Italian one was used in the Seventies by Angelo Branduardi, who added a text taken from the famous fresco of Pinzolo portraying the "danse macabre" (1539). Considering that the lyrics of Ataraxia's *Il bagatto* show strong connections with Branduardi's ones, we could say that the general network of ancient-modern references reveals its intriguing circular shape.

The second example is the Troubadour song *Reis glorios* (12th century), put into music by Ordo Equitum Solis (1992) and Estampie (2000). Ordo Equitum Solis' version shows characteristics that are typical of the philological ensembles: among the others, the efforts to follow the inner rhythm of the words and the renounce to any chordal support. Estampie's version, on the contrary, aims to change the ancient tune into a sort of "pop song", in the attempt to trap the text into a constant rhythm and to put it into a precise harmonic structure.

To end, the common background of these bands shows how this kind of quotations can be traced back to the period following the production of Dead Can Dance in the years 1987-1990.

◆ Danse Macabre Church of San Vigilio in Pinzolo Florence



Rosa Crux Picture by Andreia Moutinho (2011)

Within the music of the so-called 'Gothic' movement they do exist many various tendencies. For example there is a clear, huge difference between the 'Post punk' and the 'Ethereal' front.

While the Post punk, deriving directly from Punk music, deals with a classic Rock set (bass, guitar, drums and voice, sometimes with keyboards), the Ethereal current is not so easily classifiable.

When describing the Ethereal musical set, it is easier to list what is missing rather than what is part of it: it lacks the electric guitar, for example. In its place we often find an acoustic twelve string guitar. Keyboards are important. There are no drums, however various types of percussion find their place. Very often there is no bass guitar. In few words, the Ethereal approach has no, or at least not much, 'Rock' attitude.

Furthermore, it is to be said that the label 'Ethereal' is not such a good one and it is going to be used within this context only because at present we are lacking a better description. We could also talk about 'Neoclassical' bands for example, or 'Neo-Medieval', or 'Neo-Folk' as well but also 'Dark Wave' and so on, picking one of the many conventional labels that journalists have used in the past in the attempt to create a



Corvus Corax Promotional picture

classification. In any case it is undeniable that those bands of the 'Gothic' movement that have the Middle Ages among their main references are usually clustered under the label 'Ethereal'.

From a strict musical perspective, sometimes these bands use clear quotations from ancient tunes. More frequently they employ sonorities that recall ancient music like the Gregorian chants, the Troubadors music, The Arsnova dances and the Polyphonic music in general.

This analysis aims to deal with the accurate quotations of Medieval music; therefore it will not consider the rich world of allusions and unspecified references, nor it will deal with those relations whose matrix is not strictly the 'Gothic' movement, as for example the 'Metal' one.

Furthermore, within this analysis, you will not find mention of bands such as the French Rosa Crux, who too have the Middle Ages at the

^{1.} See Vicente Domínguez Manzano, *La esencia clásica en la música gótica actual*, «Hereija y Belleza» 1, pp. 227-239, and Pedro Ortega Ventureira, *La mujer y lo sagrado. Visiones del Neo-Simbolismo en la cultura visual gótica*, «Hereija y Belleza» 1, pp. 121-137.



Francesca Nicoli Picture by Livio Bedeschi from Saphir sessions

heart of their astonishing cultural, aesthetical and conceptual proposal. However here we are dealing with a paradox: the music of Rosa Crux is in fact much more projected towards the contemporary music, in respect to their artistic project, than towards an arcane past. For this reason they escape our classification. And if, on one side, their singing is in Latin, their lyrics are taken from sacred and/or esoteric texts and their use of choirs is peculiar, on the other side the musical structure of their tracks is very Gothic/Post Punk oriented, totally far from the Ethereal style that we are striving to analyse here.

At this point, it is understandable why other bands like Corvus Corax, In Extremo or Tanzwut, cannot have a place in the present discussion either: they share a neo-medievalism based on a common 'Metal' music matrix, recognizable for example within their attitude of stressing the parameter of rhythm. This matrix provokes, from a cultural point of view, an overall interpretation of the Middle Ages that is particularly far from the musical world that we are presenting today.

Among the so-called 'Ethereal' bands that we are considering here, the reference to the Middle Ages is not exclusive. In their careers these bands show a particular interest for the past in general, for myth and for the unusual and often also for the ethnic exploration.

As we can read in Ataraxia's words below, lead singer Francesca Nicoli often says things like these:

We are interested in history in its whole entirety; we travel across the ages to propose again, in current times, the spirit of Time, seeping through our sensitivity. We have embraced several historical periods, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Classic Greece, the Baroque era and the Nineteenth Century; soon we will go back as far as 10.000 years from now to achieve Atlantis.²

It is correct and, for many years of their long career, reviewers have recognized many references to the Middle Ages in Ataraxia's works. For Ataraxia, this has been the key of their musical evolution throughout the Nineties, at least until the beginning of the second millennium. Let's analyze some old reviews of their CDs. With reference to the first album, *Simphonia Sine Nomine* (1994):

ATARAXIA's interesting combination of Classical, Medieval, Choral & mood music has appealed to me from the moment I first heard it. [English review]³

"Elevazione" (Elevation). Medieval lullaby of beaming purity, we are on our knees ... our hearts rejoice. [French review]⁴

With reference to the second album, Ad Perpetuam Rei Memoriam (1994):

After Ordo Equitum Solis or Black Rose, Italy presents us ATA-RAXIA, another band that walks into medieval reigns. The trio has been founded in 1985 and, after three self-produced audiotapes, publish its first CD. To the listener a mix of "traditional"

^{2. «}A noi la storia interessa per intero, viaggiamo nel tempo per riproporre ai giorni nostri, filtrato dalla nostra sensibilità, lo spirito del Tempo. Abbiamo abbracciato vari periodi storici, il Medioevo ed il Rinascimento, la Grecia Classica, l'epoca del Barocco e l'Ottocento, prossimamente ci allontaneremo 10.000 anni dai giorni nostri per approdare ad Atlantide», interview by Nikita, «Rosa selvaggia» n° 13, January-February1999, http://nicolar.free.fr/xinterv7.htm (accessed May 15, 2013).

^{3.} Review by Antony Burnham, «Metamorphic Journeyman», http://nicolar.free.fr/xcdrev13.htm (accessed May 15, 2013).

^{4. «}Elevazione. Berceuse medievale d'une purete radieuse, nous sommes a genoux... le coeur en joie», Avis by Ataraxian, «Par S», 22/12/2004, http://nicolar.free.fr/xcdre194.htm (accessed May 15, 2013).

gothic, medieval and renaissance music is offered. [German review]⁵

The apex of Medieval references in the Ataraxia's production was reached with *Historiae* (1988) and *Sueños* (2000). The following sentence, from the Italian fanzine «Ascension magazine» in reference to *Sueños*, is a good synthesis of the common perception of both fans and critics, when facing their work:

The CD, almost as if it was a time-machine, carries us onto a theatre of ancient sounds and emotions, typical of the Media Aetas,⁶

where «Media Aetas» literally means «Middle Ages». Ataraxia have reported many quotations of medieval music in their career. Here we have chosen *Il bagatto* (one of the figures of the Tarots: the magician, the juggler), a track from the CD *Sueños*, to better illustrate our analysis. The music of this song is a «remake» of a «traditional French Renaissance ballad which ended up being interpreted and spontaneously spread across the Italy of the Communes during the Humanism»,⁷ while the lyrics have been written by Vittorio Vandelli, the guitarist of the band.

The source of this track by Ataraxia is a *Tourdion* (also "Tordion"), a dance song in triple meter, similar to the *Galliard* but faster in time, which became popular thanks to Pierre Attaignant's version published in 1530.8 Probably the melody dates back from the high or late Middle Ages. Provided with a text, during the Renaissance period it became a famous wine song, *Quand je bois du vin clairet*.

«Ascension magazine» n° 6, February 2001, p. 56.



Branduardi Picture by Francesco Trucchia

Remakes of this song are common nowadays, and for example Corvus Corax, a band quoted above, did a popular version of it in *Ante Casu Peccati*. The music is built on a ground bass that is common in many ancient dances. The guitar arrangement is Vandelli's creation.

The allusion to Italy quoted above should remind the reader of a traditional dance from Friuli (a region of Northern Italy), a *ballo* named *Schiarazula Marazula*. In the Seventies this song was made popular by Angelo Branduardi, a famous Italian singer-songwriter who is skilled in using Medieval tunes for mainstream audiences. The title of Branduardi's song is *Ballo in fa# minore*. 10

^{5. «}Nach Ordo Equitum Solis oder Black Rose beschert uns Italien mit ATARAXIA eine weitere Band, die sich in mittelalterlichen Gefilden bewegt. Das Trio besteht seit 1985 und legt nach 3 selbstproduzierten Tapes seine erste CD vor. Für wird dem Hörer eine Mischung aus "herkömmlichen" Gothic, Mittelalter und Renaissancemusik geboten», review by Holger Meyer, «Magazin für Dark Music, Kult(ur) und Avantgarde» (date unknown), http://nicolar.free.fr/xcdrev40.htm (accessed May 15, 2013).
6. «L'album, quasi fosse una macchina del tempo, ci trasporta sul teatro di suoni ed emozioni antiche, tipiche dell'età di mezzo», review by Flavio Furlan & Claude,

^{7.} Ataraxia, Sueños, CD, reissue by Infinite Fog Production (Russia), 2012: booklet, pp. 2 and 8.

^{8.} Tourdion, n° [7] in Neuf basses dances, deux branles, vingt et cinq Pavennes avec quinze Gaillardes en musique a quatre parties, Paris, Pierre Attaignant, 1530. The author of the track is unknown: it is possible that Attaignant was only the publisher, or at most the adapter. This dance is related to the previous n° 6, the "Basse-dance" entitled "La Magdalena". The Tourdion was first discussed in Thoinot Arbeau [Jehan Tabourot], Orchésographie, Jehan des Preyz, Langres 1588 (modern edition: Orchesography, translated by Mary Stewart Evans, Dover, New York 1967). For a commentary see E. Phillips Barker, Master Thoinot's Fancy, «Music & Letters», vol. 11, n° 4, 1930, pp. 383-393.

^{9.} Corvus Corax, *Tourdion, in Ante Casu Peccati,* CD, John Silver Production, 1989. 10. Angelo Branduardi, La Pulce D'Acqua, LP, Polydor (Italy), 1977. A different version, directly based on Mainerio's ballo, with the original title Schiarazula marazula, has been published by Branduardi in the CD Futuro antico II. Sulle orme dei patriarchi, EMI (Italy), 1999. We must stress that in his career Branduardi has recorded at least two different versions of Attaignant's Tourdion: one in 1979, with new lyrics in the Italian language where the title is Donna ti voglio cantare (in Cogli La Prima Mela, LP, Polydor); another one in 1998, with the traditional text (Quand je bois du vin clairet) and the original title Tourdion (in Futuro Antico II).

The big diffence with Ataraxia's version is the rhythm (in Ataraxia's we have six/eight, in Branduardi's we have two/four); also the melodic patterns diverge a lot. However the ground bass is the same and the lyrics have a very similar mood as well as heavy correspondences.

Branduardi	Ataraxia
Sono io la morte e porto corona E son di tutti voi signora e padrona E davanti alla mia falce il capo tu dovrai chinare E dell'oscura morte al passo andare Sei l'ospite d'onore del ballo che per te suoniamo Posa la falce e danza tondo a tondo Il giro di una danza e poi un altro ancora E tu del tempo non sei più signora.	Benvenuta sia la morte, benvenuto sia il suo ballo Che cosi è l'umana sorte che mi prende senza fallo Benvenuta sia la morte, mia compagna e consigliera Che cosi è l'umana sorte non ne posso far preghiera Benvenuto sia il suo ballo, che mi prende senza fallo E il silenzio suo soave mi fa il partir men grave.
Death I am, and I wear a crown And I am, of you all, mistress and owner And when faced with my sickle your head will have to bow And you will follow the pace of the obs- cure Death You (Death) are the guest of honour of the ballet that for you we are playing Put down your sickle and start a round- dance First round-dance and then another one And you will no longer be the Mistress of Time.	Be welcome Death, be welcome its dance That human fate is this, that captures me without failure Be welcome Death, my companion and counselor That human fate is this, I really cannot pray for it Be welcome its dance, that captures me without failure And its sweet silence makes my departure less arduous.

Branduardi's lyrics are clearly inspired by the words written in the famous fresco of Pinzolo (near Trento, Italy), which represents the "danse macabre", depicted by Simone Baschenis in 1539.¹¹

The music of *Schiarazula Marazula* became famous thanks to Giorgio Mainerio, a Renaissance Italian composer, who published a four-part instrumental score of this *ballo* in 1578. As for *Quand je bois du vin clairet*, many (philological or free) versions of his song can be found on YouTube.

Schiarazula Marazula is also famous because it was tied with witchcraft. In the Seventeenth century it used to be sung and danced in a little town of Friuli, Palazzolo, by women and men to evoke the rain: this fact was the cause of a denunciation to the Inquisition. This piece of history has been studied by Carlo Ginzburg in his famous book *I benandanti*, about pre-Christian rituals still persisting in Northern Italy during the Renaissance period.¹²

Who was Giorgio Mainerio? He was born in Parma, Italy, around 1535, probably from a Scottish father (he signs «Mayner» and «De Maynerijs» too). He became a priest and in 1560 he was in charge of the church of S. Orsola at the Dome in Udine, Italy. Here he became skilled in music, initially as choir singer and then as choir master. He was interested in natural magic and he was in fact accused of sorcery and occultism in 1563. The acts of the trial talk about «hopprobriosa et nefanda crimina contra honorem dei omnipotentis». Mainerio ended up being absolved at the trial since no concrete proofs were found against him, even though many forbidden books were discovered in his house. Anyway, he decided to leave and in 1578 he moved to the Cathedral of Aguileia. In the same year, in Venice, his book Primo Libro de' balli accomodati per cantar et sonar d'ogni sorte de istromenti - where we can find todesche, saltarelli, English and French ballets, dances with women names (La billiarda, La saporita padovana, La lavandara), two famous passemezzi (Pass'e mezzo antico and Pass'e *mezzo moderno*) and, above all, *Schiarazula Marazula* - was published.

Mainerio died in 1582: he was less than fifty years old.¹³

The second example of this survey concerns the band Ordo Equitum Solis. It is well known that their image and their aesthetics in the past have been directly connected with the Middle Ages. You can appreciate the culmination of these elements on the front cover of their second CD/LP *Animi Aegritudo* (1992). ¹⁴ In this context the presence of a certain irony is obvious, however, to tell the truth, the audience did not catch it at all.

^{11.} About the dance macabre of Pinzolo, see Arturo Miglio, *Le danze macabre di Simone Baschenis*, in «Fatebenefratelli: Rivista mensile dei Padri fatebenefratelli della Provincia lombardo veneta», 1957, pp. 116-118, and Silvia Vernaccini, *Baschenis de Averaria: pittori itineranti nel Trentino*, Temi, Trento 1989; see also Giuseppe Ciaghi, *Nell'antica chiesa di San Vigilio a Pinzolo*, UNiservice, 2006. For the complete text of the Baschenis' fresco: http://www.medioevo.org/artemedievale/Pages/TrentinoAltoAdige/Pinzolo.html (accessed July 1, 2013).

^{12.} Carlo Ginzburg, I benandanti. Stregoneria e culti agrari tra Cinquecento e Seicento, Enaudi, Torino 1977. Ginzburg's book is still studied at Italian Universities nowadays. 13. See Marco Maria Tosolini, Giorgio Mainerio, musico, abate, negromante: una storia friulana del sedicesimo secolo, Il campo, Udine 1986; Giuseppe Vale, La cappella musicale del Duomo di Udine dal sec. XIII al sec. XIX, NA VII (1930), pp. 87-201: 111-113; and Manfred Schuler, Mainerio, Giorgio, Grove Music On Line, Oxford University Press, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article_citations/grove/music/17481 (accessed August 6, 2013).

^{14.} Ordo Equitum Solis, Animi Aaegritudo, CD/LP, Musica Maxima Magnetica (Italy), 1991.

Musically, as for Ataraxia and prior to them, Ordo Equitum Solis found in the Medieval tunes a reliable source of inspiration. And, besides many tracks that remind of archaic sonorities without being truly quotations of ancient music; besides their recurring singing in Latin (for example, think of *Angoris Nox*, their debut song); besides the many references to Paganism and ancestral rituals (*Message to Pan, Canto alla Vita*, etc.), we can also find some explicit quotations of Medieval music. Among them, surely *Reis glorios*, the famous song of the trobadour Guiraut de Bornheil (XII century), stands out for its specificity; it became a celebrated song and also a model for others bands of the Gothic movement, for example - we will see - Estampie.

We can say that Ordo Equitum Solis' version of *Reis glorios* agrees in principle with a current production of this song made by the philological ensembles of Medieval music. The song is introduced, as it is common in Medieval music, by a free instrumental preambolum, realized with an essential guitar that resembles a lute, by cymbals (little chimes) and by a keyboard sound that resembles a reed instrument like a bassoon or a shawm, all typical musical instruments employed in ancient music: in fact Reis glorios is an alba (a 'dawn' song), whose preambolum, with its open-endedness, introduces the mood that follows later in the song. The original score of Reis glorios has survived with the melodic line alone. It lacks rhythm and harmonic accompaniment completely, same as for all the other Troubadors' surviving music. For this reason, the professional ensembles of Medieval music today do perform this kind of tunes without any real harmonic support: nothing else than a drone is required underneath the voice; and, as far as the rhythm goes, this rests on the accent marks of the words. 15

In the Ordo Equitum Solis' version-these characteristics are also respected. Following the instrumental preambolum, we find just a drone, which is a fixed, static bass note that sustains the melody; above it, the music of the melody sung by Leithana flows freely, floating on the pure inner rhythm of the words rather than on a overwritten, imposed rhythm.

The German band Estampie, another ensemble who deals with the Ethereal context of the Gothic movement, does exactly the opposite, as we will see shortly.

Reis glorios appears in Estampie's CD *Ondas* in 2000,¹⁶ so time wise their version comes after the one of Ordo Equitum Solis, which we believe they were probably aware of (Ordo Equitum Solis' track circulated widely with-



Ordo Equitum Solis AnimiÆgritudo cover

in the Gothic movement during the Nineties). Firstly, one could consider that Estampie's song does not start with an instrumental preambolum: in fact it starts *in medias res*. However the main feature that should be noticed by the listener is the treatment of the rhythm: the track starts with a light however relentless rhythmic sequence that underlines the melody and steadily goes on for all the duration of the track. This rhythm frames the whole song, even though it forces the melodic line to be altered at some stages: it is a real effort because the melody was not born to be a rhythmic one in the way modern music is. Another relevant feature that distances the Estampie's version from the one of Ordo Equitum Solis is in the harmony: the keyboards fill up the track with a style that is clearly harmonic. This is not too invasive, however the harmony reduces a lot of the 'ancient' dimension of the listening at once. In fact it directly brings us back from the Middle Ages to an elegant and pleasant easy-listening Pop-Wave.

At first impression, Estampie deals with Medieval Music much more than what Ordo Equitum Solis does: let's think of their first CD, *A Chantar*, 1990,¹⁷ made up by songs of female Troubadours for exam-

^{15.} See for example Simone Sorini's (member of the renowned ensemble Micrologus) live version on Youtube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1so3p84RLE (accessed May 24, 2013).

^{16.} Estampie, Ondas, CD, Red Moon (Germany), 2000.

^{17.} Estampie, A Chantar. Lieder Der Frauen-Minne, CD, Christophorus (Germany), 1990.

ple, or let's think of the following one, *Fin Amor*, 2002,¹⁸ defined by themselves «Medieval music of the 21st century».¹⁹ Notwithstanding this, their version of *Reis glorios* is really far from its matrix and, if we did not know it in advance, we would struggle to recognize its origin.

What kind of path have all these bands followed recently?

They are all still active today. However today their references to the Middle Ages are much less pronounced. This is a fact:

- in the new Ordo Equitum Solis' CD, *Killing Time Killing Love*, published recently after a gap of many years;²⁰
- in the twelfth Estampie's CD, Secrets Of The North,²¹ that they themselves point out to be «a journey into a fascinating, boreal world of sound»: in fact, as the title suggests, their work refers to folk sounds, traditional and popular ballads of the North, and not at all to specific Medieval music;
- in the last Ataraxia's CD, *Llyr* (2011),²² which is conceived with reminiscences to archaic (and not defined) sonorities, to the folk, epic and explicit quotation of «Celtic and Eastern traditions».

Is it possible to find a common denominator, the motion or the principle that provoked the ending, or at least a strong decrease, of this flowering? It seemed to be particularly tied to the Nineties. Did a common origin exist at the time, or was it just a common feeling that became active in many different emanations?

We must stress that human creativity is free and it comes from personal, deep and intimate experiences. Notwithstanding this, it is possible to find a common factor of inspiration and this can surely be traced back to the production of Dead Can Dance in the years 1987-1990, meaning among *Within The Realm Of A Dying Sun, The Serpent's Egg* and *Aion*, respectively their third, fourth and fifth LPs.²³

These records cover the 'Medieval period' of the Australian band that, at the time, really did a pioneering work into the rediscovering process,



Dead Can Dance Promotional photo (1986)

which was above all the new creative usage of those sonorities, perfectly adequate to the late XX century music.

Many of their songs remind of Medieval music without being truly it. For example the track *The host of Seraphim,* from *The Serpent's Egg,* opens with a 'Gregorian' double drone. Again the second song from the same record, *Orbis de ignis,* deals, with its structural counterpoint, only with voices and an ancestral bell. At the time they were published, these songs were perceived by the Gothic audience, made up also by young Ataraxia, Ordo Equitum Solis and so on, as truly revolutionary.

The confirmation of Dead Can Dance's 'New Medievalism' arrived in 1990 with a track that quickly became famous in all the Gothic clubs. It was in fact a real quotation of Medieval music: *Saltarello*.²⁴

The Saltarello is in fact a very ancient Italian ballo, a dance particularly famous in the history of music because it represents one of the very few

^{18.} Estampie, Fin Amor. Musik zwischen Liebe, Sehnsucht, Leidenschaft Und Dem Rauen Nordwind, CD, Warner Strategic Marketing (Germany), 1992.

^{19.} In Estampie's official website, http://www.estampie.de/album.php?id=6 (accessed May 24, 2013).

^{20.} Cynfeirdd (France), 2013.

^{21.} Banshee Records (Germany), 2013.

^{22.} Prikosnovénie (France), 2010.

^{23.} Dead Can Dance, Within The Realm Of A Dying Sun, LP/CD, 4AD (England), 1987; The Serpent's Egg, LP/CD, 4AD (England), 1988; Aion, LP/CD, 4AD (England), 1990.

^{24.} Aion, track 2.

surviving written tracks of instrumental music coming directly from the Middle Ages.²⁵

In any case the whole of the *Aion* LP has its roots into the Middle Ages, even though it must be underlined that Dead Can Dance's vision is not and does not aim to be philological, but it is a truly 'Ninenties' vision. After this record, Dead Can Dance abandoned the Medieval suggestions and went on to explore other ethnic fields, changing a lot of their musical-artistic research. They left this territory to their many followers and imitators. However we have chosen here not to quote examples of Dead Can Dance's imitators: we preferred to describe, moving from the examination of the compositional techniques, some of the achievements of talented bands who oriented their creativity towards this type of sonorities for a meaningful period in their careers, clearly displaying an autonomous style.

(English translation by Alex Curci)



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H. M. S

^{25.} The earliest extant surviving reference (XIV century) of the *Saltarello* is the well-known manuscript London, British Museum, Additional 29987 (Lo). Here four different versions of this dance appear at page 62r-63v. The one chosen by Dead Can Dance is nowadays the most popular.