

NEW VOICES IN CLASSICAL RECEPTION STUDIES

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Horus and Zeus Are Playing Tonight – Classical Reception in Heavy Metal Band Names

© Martin Lindner and Robert Wieland (Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Germany)

ABSTRACT

Lair of the Minotaur and *Stench of Styx*, *Tragedy of Caesar* and *Rise of Caligula* – artists in the heavy metal music genre are apparently very fond of classical references when it comes to naming their bands. The sheer number of almost 2,000 examples (based on data from the online resource *Encyclopaedia Metallum* and various band websites) can only be handled by a comparative onomastic approach.

Our study looks at band names as an indicator for different modes of classical reception. A quantitative analysis provides us with an overview of the distribution between e.g. Egyptian, Greek or Roman references. Furthermore, it allows us to group our findings into subcategories such as the deities of a specific pantheon – but also to look at other statistical aspects like the geographical dispersion of name choices. A qualitative crosscheck helps us to verify and interpret the results in their particular context. While some bands merely use a classical “label”, many take inspiration from antiquity for their lyrics, their visual presentation, and other parts of their work and creative output.

On the one hand, some main tendencies confirm findings from other studies of popular classical reception. The bias towards Greek mythological and Roman historical contexts, for example, is very similar to the familiar distribution in classical epic films and TV series. On the other hand, the qualitative crosscheck reveals the limits of a comparative onomastic analysis. The “rules” of the heavy metal music genre exert a strong influence on this specific and rather homogenous form of classical reception. Our study outlines major aspects and provides framework results, stable more or less on an international scale, which will have to be tested by the growing number of case studies in this field of research.