



THE

RUNSTONE



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THE RUNESTONE is a journal of the ancient, yet ever new, religion known as Asatru. It is dedicated to that religion and to the values of courage, freedom, and individuality which are associated with it.

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GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSIONS:

The AFA welcomes contributions from our readers. Material submitted will be considered for publication but returned only if requested and accompanied by sufficient postage to cover costs. For a copy of complete guidelines for submissions, please send a S.A.S.E. to the AFA at the above address.

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CALENDAR

May 9 - DAY OF REMEMBRANCE FOR GUTHROTH. One of the Uppland minor kings, Guthroth had the audacity to make a speech opposing the policies of Olaf Tryggvason, who was at that time busily killing people who didn't want to be Christians. For exercising his Teutonic rights, Guthroth was captured and his tongue was cut out. Use your tongue for the Gods today! Sing their praises, recite heroic poetry, tell someone of their glory, call an AFAer to keep in touch.

June 8 - LINDISFARNE DAY. On this date in the year 793, three Viking ships raided the isle of Lindisfarne and sacked the monastery there, officially opening the Viking Age. Toast the memory of these warriors with strong mead or other suitable beverage.

June 21 - MIDSUMMER. This is the longest day (and shortest night) of the year. Now the Sun begins its long decline, sliding into the darkness which will culminate six months from now at Yule. Identifying the Sun with the brightness of Balder, we celebrate in honor of both. Perform the Greeting to Sol early in the morning, and bask in her rays later in the day if you can. Do something fun today! Maybe a picnic, or at least lunch in the park rather than in the company cafeteria, is in order?



Sick of the nonsense you see on TV? Want to do something about it? Here are the addresses of the major networks. Let them know what you think - you don't have to quietly submit. Maybe you could copy this information and keep it in a handy place (On your TV? Your refrigerator?).

ABC - 1330 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10019 (212-887-7777)
CBS - 51 W. 52 St., New York, NY 10019 (212-975-4321)
NBC - 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, NY 10020 (212-664-4444)
PBS - 475 L'Enfant Plaza, S.W. Washington, D.C. 20024 (202-488-5000)
HBO - 114 Ave. of Americas, New York, NY 10036 (212-512-1000)
FBC - Fox Broadcasting Co., 1020 W. Pico Blvd. Los Angeles, CA 90035
SHOWTIME Movie Channel - 1633 Broadway, New York, NY 10019 (212-708-1600)
DISNEY Channel - 4111 Alameda Ave. Burbank, CA 91505 (818-846-6661)
HTN - 41 Harbor Plaza, Stamford, Conn. 06904 (203-965-6072)
WTBS, CNN - 1050 Techwood NW., Atlanta, GA 30318 (404-827-1717)
WGN - 2501 Bradley Place, Chicago, Ill. 60618 (312-528-2311)
ESPN - 355 Lexington Ave. New York, NY 10017 (212-661-6040)
USA NETWORK - 1230 Ave. of the Americas, New York, NY 10020 (212-408-9100)



An Odinist Confession

I first prayed to Odin some twenty years ago, in October of 1966. At least that was my first serious attempt to invoke that triune God who is called Har, Jafnar, and Thridi. I have remained an Odinist since that day, and have besought the aid of Odin, and His blessing, at every important passage of my adult life. To me, Odin is no mere fragment of our collective unconscious, no malevolent wind blowing through our Northern soul: Odin lives and loves as surely as do I. I am certain of very few things in this life, but I am absolutely certain on two counts: that of my own existence, and the existence of Odin.

As a child, living on the edge of a great forest, I had long felt the existence of a benevolent and freedom-loving God. This being rejoiced in wildness, in untrammelled freedoms, in a spirit of adventure, and most of all in His great woodlands. He was a God of heroism, of mankind's stretching itself to ever new and further reaches of the cosmos. He was a God of the wild places of the earth, a God of wisdom and learning, a huntsman. I called Him many things in those early years, and did not learn His name until that October day, so long ago, when I first called out to Him: Odin!

Most of us search long to learn the name of our God. I had heard or read the name Odin often enough as a child, but it meant little even to a precocious child such as I. Only when I came to read Peter Andreas Munch's Norse Mythology did I hear and understand. It came like a thunderbolt: Of course! I realized, here at last is the God of my people, the God of the Northlands.

Unlike the Gods of old, Odin is a spirit within me as much as a being without. He is the font of all creation, and I had sprung from Him: little wonder that He coursed through me, He courses through all things. He imparts to us His warrior spirit; His love of wild, free things: His thirst for knowledge and wisdom. Realizing this was perhaps the most important discovery of my life. Odin, heilige Gott, nur ich durch du!

All of creation is Odin's sacred place, and we live accordingly: in the sacred manner handed down to us by our ancestors. As an Odinist, certain places are more special to me than other places, and I'm sure that Odin has His favorite spots as well. I have yet to find, however, an Odinist version of Rome, Jerusalem, or Mecca. I'm sure that Odin has a temple somewhere, but I've never seen it, unless it be the earth and sky combined.

Odin walks the earth, and hence is called Wanderer. Similarly, we Asafolk have traversed the entire globe, carrying our nation, and our sacred places, within us. Our mead halls are sacred, of course, but only because we consecrate them so. When we bid Odin walk in our midst at Althing, or partake of our libations and Blots, the very earth changes with His presence.

The Neo-Platonic philosopher Plotinus knew somewhat of Odin, and it is possible to understand something of Odin's consecrating presence through using Neo-Platonic terms. As He consecrates our gathering with His presence, we partake

somewhat of Valhalla and Asaheim. The visible characteristics of the mead hall or Blot (the "accidents" of Neo-Platonic thought) remain the same, but the metaphysical core of these things (the Neo-Platonic "substance") is changed. Simply put, the substance of Midgard becomes the substance of Asaheim due to the consecrating presence of Odin. Not only does Odin walk amongst us, but we also walk with the Gods. Where then is Asaheim? It is us, or it is nowhere. Odin changes all things with His consecrating power.

The Eddas teach that the material world is the handiwork of Odin. They teach us that creation is good, not a corruption of some far-off metaphysical idea. Our faith teaches us that we are created beings, that we are naturally good, that creation itself is good, and that we should manifest our existence through good works. We do this not only for the right to enter Valhalla, but because we see it as right, and just, and good. Odinists are optimistic mystics.

When I speak of entering Valhalla, I speak of the eternal existence of man's spirit in the company of whatever cosmic forces he aligns himself with. I believe that it is necessary, however, for man to align himself with the cosmic good, as ever defined by our people, in order to have any true immortality.

Our folk has always stressed that this world is a created world and that we are created beings. We are taught this for good reason: the old creation stories tell us as a people that nothing exists for us unless it is made by us.. Our faith tells us that this world is ours, that our culture was built by the strivings and aspirations of our people. We celebrate our culture as the most vital and creative cultural force on earth. WE are the legacy of that creation: Odin's Folk.

I realize that our culture is endangered today, as it has never been. We are slowly being out-bred and out-voted. Our Northern culture is being assailed religiously, politically, racially, and culturally. This is nothing new for us, and the struggle is not tiresome. We are the Volsungs born anew, determined this time not to be exterminated by the forces of nihilism. Having learnt some hard lessons in the past, most Asafolk realize that we must carry on our struggle through the affirmation of our folk. There is a tendency when one's culture is besieged to lash out at other cultures, particularly those perceived as being enemy cultures. This is a mistake. Not only has this tactic never worked throughout all of history, but it has always dissipated the energies of the folk, usually just at the times we could least afford it.

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Herby Felgate
Richard Paratore
Edric Hannsson
Hardy Felgate

Ralph Ruark
Karen and Bob Taylor
Larry Staton
Dan West

Mark Thatcher
Norman Anspach

We are grateful also to all those who donated to the fund but who wished to remain anonymous.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

A NEW BOOK ON RUNES is Runes and Magic: Magical Formulaic Elements in the Older Runic Tradition by Stephen E. Flowers.

From the beginnings of the scientific study of runes, questions concerning their magical nature have been raised. In this book Stephen Flowers puts this question in the context of current theories of magic for the first time. He approaches the problem of runes and the connection to magical thinking from a structural standpoint based on linguistic models of communication. Certain formulas are isolated and analyzed as to the possible ways in which they could be considered "magical" within the context of general conceptions of magic in archaic Germanic culture.

Flower's analysis of the runic evidence from the perspective of current theories of magic and the history of writing systems brings us a good measure closer to a comprehensive answer to the riddle of the runes.

This work runs 457 pages in a 6"x 8 3/4" hardbound volume, and is available for \$57.00 from Peter Lang Publishing, Inc. 62 West 45th Street, New York, NY 10036-4202

A "WODEN" BELT BUCKLE AND A BOAR PENDANT are two items recently received from Das Edelweiss (P.O.Box 179, Lakeside, CA 92040). Both are done in what I presume to be brass - I'm not much of a metallurgist! - and the workmanship makes them look very attractive. The buckle is 3" long, modelled on an old Anglo-Saxon find showing Woden with a spear in each hand; it's \$21 plus \$2 for postage and handling. The boar is about an inch long, but done in three dimensions, and costs \$3.65 without a hanging ring and \$4.10 with. Send a SASE for more information on their products.



MORE ON PRAYER IN SCHOOLS!

A couple of issues back we described our battle to get prayer stopped in our local school, and voiced our opinion that such goings-on - although strictly illegal - are more common than most of us think. A news segment on national TV a few weeks ago confirmed this hunch. According to a poll, daily prayer and Bible reading continue in a significant percentage of the elementary and secondary schools across the nation. It was clear from interviews that this is possible only because there is no complaint from parents or other concerned citizens. If the Christians meet with resistance on the issue, they can't win, simply because they are clearly violating the law. The lesson for us? Protest! They're tremendously vulnerable. Any one of us can quickly and effectively halt this unfair practice, if we detect it in our community. So stay alert - and fight back!

Ways We Worship

"Worship? Don't talk to me about worship. We Asafolk value our freedom too much to ever bend our knees to our Gods like the Christians do to theirs! Why, the great Ragnar would never have. . ."

Okay, okay, - we don't relate to Odin or Freya or any of the others the way Christians do to Jesus or Jews to Yahweh. Subservience isn't our style. But we do communicate with them, often in a more or less ritualized or formalized way, and for the purposes of this article that's what we mean by "worship".

So what are some ways we can honor and communicate with our Gods and Goddesses? Well, there are full-fledged blots (rhymes with "boats") of the sort in our Rituals of Asatru, volume one, and there are seasonal rites and other ceremonies marking life's turning points in volumes two and three respectively. These are fine for many purposes, but for other occasions some people find them too long or too structured. In the rest of this little essay, let's examine some alternatives, some ways that you can use to improve your contact with the holy Powers.

Do you have a family altar or shrine? If not, you can set one up (in some private part of the house if you're the only follower of the Aesir and Vanir in the household, or perhaps even in the front room if this is a whole family affair). It needn't be fancy - even a simple arrangement can be a focus for deliberate communication with the Gods and Goddesses. A daily or weekly time set aside for a short invocation or for meditation will add power to your spiritual life. Use your imagination to provide the words you need, supplemented, if you like, by verses from the Edda or by a poem that says what you feel.

If you honor the Gods in the company of family or friends, you can seat yourselves around a table and pass a horn or cup of mead or other suitable beverage in a formal sumbel.* Or you can be less structured about it and simply pass the horn, toasting the deities and our heroes, while enjoying the comradeship (Yes, I know that sounds like a definition of a sumbel, but the latter does have more to it than that if it's to be done correctly).



But perhaps you're a solitary Asaman or Asawoman. You don't have anyone you can pass a horn to, and you don't like drinking alone. So - drink with our Gods and Goddesses, instead! The libation poured upon the ground is one of the oldest and most universal religious rites, and you don't need other people around to do it. Go out in your back yard or in some other outdoor place where you have privacy. Raise your horn filled with an appropriate form of alcohol. Speak a few heart-felt sentences praising the deity or hero in question. Take a drink, yourself, to establish a link, then pour the rest upon the ground as an offering to the other party present.

GUILDS

THE CONTINUING CLAN, (our parent and child guild), c/o Cheryl Follette, P.O.Box 1182, New Haven, CT 06505. The latest issue of Bifrost is all about ships - from mythological lore to Viking-oriented puzzles and poems dealing with Nordic sea vessels. There's the first of four articles on knots; after the last one, a badge will be offered. A sunwheel design contest has also kept things rolling, so to speak. **WANTED:** your child's artwork, poems, jokes, riddles and stories!

THE WARRIOR GUILD, Wolf Publications, P.O.Box 1768, Lynn, MA 01903. Wolf-Age publisher Frank Ciampa has moved, and the resulting dislocation has forced him to drop an issue, but we're assured that things will soon be back on course. The last issue included a review of Newark's The Celtic Warrior by Frank and a nice piece on Viking swords by Gunnora.

THE BACK TO BASICS GUILD, P.O.Box 961, Payson, AZ 85547. Guild leader Mike Murray has been preoccupied with Folkmoot preparations, but the guild is alive and well, and more issues of Nerthus will be forthcoming. This is a sort of mini Mother Earth News for Asafolk; drop Mike a line if you're interested.

A COOKING GUILD? Is there enough interest out there to form a guild that would deal with food and food preparation as practiced in our traditional culture? For information, send a SASE to Kelly Lazette, 2256 Mayham Rd. Carrollton, OH 44615. She has a super black bread recipe, too!

THE BREWING GUILD, c/o Jace Crouch, 7860 W. Jefferson Rd., Elwell, MI 48832. They'll hold a mead contest at Folkmoot, and renowned brewer Mike Murray will offer a seminar on mead-making techniques. Current guild projects include brewing for young folk, a comparison of "natural" versus "chemical" recipes, and side-by-side yeast comparisons. Furthermore, the Mead Making Handbook is completed, and is available to interested AFAers at a buck a shot. Brewer's Guild T-shirts are available for \$8.50, postpaid. For information, contact Jace Crouch, Guildmaster.

THE SHAMAN/COMPUTER GUILD, 884 South Lewis Street, Lakewood, CO 80226. If you want to learn about Teutonic shamanism or Asatru-related uses of computers - or if you have something to say on these topics! - these are the folks you want to talk to.

THE NORSE CULTURE AND SAGA GUILD, 2922 S. Marvin Avenue, Tucson, AZ 85730. Norraena, the newsletter of this guild is currently published as an integral part of the magazine Vor Tru. The most recent one contains an article on historical links between the English and Norwegian languages and comments on everything from drinking to the sagas.





Greater than goodness,
Of beauty beyond
So shall I speak of
As pale as the ash,
Goldgiver is she,
The Lady of Cats,
The poppy is placed,
But bested by far
On fist the falcon,
Ice by a diamond,
Hers is the hawk's flight,
Her jewels do shine
Magic her harpstrings,
Fair are all these,

those granted glory
mere fairness of form,
she, like the sunlight:
as pale as the moon.
the amber her tears:
her hair gold as corn.
by her feet flowers,
its beauty by hers.
fair as the frost is:
its beauty is dimmed.
holds her hands healing.
as bright as the moon.
spells in her singing.
still she is more fair.

This verse is after the form of typical Scandinavian poetry, in particular a love poem composed by Egil Skallagrimson. Like the courtly, lyric poetry of more Southerly lands, Egil never names the subject of his poem, but it is clear from the text who Egil's subject must be: his brother's widow, Asgerd. Egilssaga was probably written down in 1230, and though anonymous, there is good reason to believe that it was composed by Snorri Sturleson (1179-1241). Egil himself lived from about 910-990.

Egilssaga. trans. H. Palsson & P. Edwards. Penguin Books, New York. 1980.

Our Soil, Our Soul

From earliest times, our farming ancestors recognized that they dealt with mysteries. A man might plough his land, sow his seed and keep it free from weeds, but in so doing, he knew he contributed only half the ingredients for a successful harvest. The other half - the soil-pulverizing frosts, the rain, the sunshine, the quickening of life in the seed - were all matters over which he had little control. The cycle is awe-inspiring, and, to our ancestors, needful of assistance from various Gods and Goddesses. How could spring come at all unless a sacrifice was made, and what better offering than the life of a king or prince? For the sake of a bountiful harvest for their people, kings once went willingly to their deaths, and their sacrificial blood was spread on the winter fields. As recently as a hundred years ago, a farmer could still be advised to kill his best calf to save his herd from disease.

Since it is tied to the recurring cycle of the seasons, farm lore contains many relics of ancient beliefs. Much hard-won wisdom, gathered over the centuries, was passed from generation to generation in easily remembered rhymes and proverbs, many of which are believed in still. Between farmers and their land, there is often a bond which is enshrined in the proverb: "A farmer should live as though he were going to die tomorrow, but farm as though he were going to live forever." To our ancestors, the soil was something to nurse and venerate for it was the mother of all things and the home of the Goddess of fertility. Even today, we speak of "Mother Nature" and "Mother Earth".

When drink is taken into the fields, especially at harvest time, it is still the custom to pour a little on the ground for luck. The origins of this ritual extend far back, into pre-history. In Wales, a drink will sometimes be poured onto the earth as a compliment to the "Good People" or the fairies.

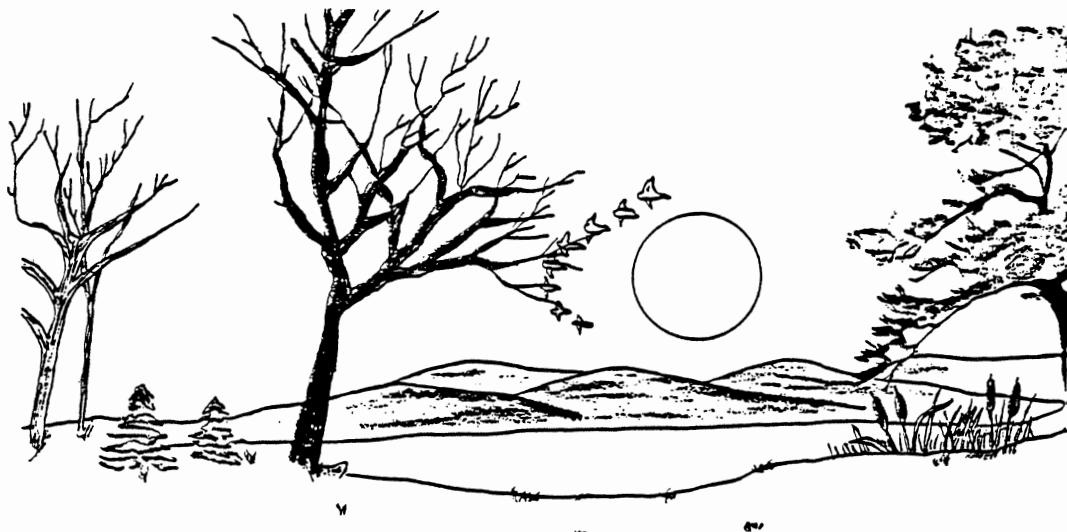
An old farming rhyme is: "One year's seeding, seven years' weeding", for seeds allowed to lay dormant in a field that had been neglected for a year can produce weeds up to seven years later. Nowadays, farmers purchase extra winter feed for their livestock to supplement their own produce. Very few of our ancestors could afford such a luxury; to feed their livestock, farmers were entirely dependent on what they themselves had grown during the previous summer. A common-sense proverb was: "On a farm on Candlemas Day (February 2nd), Need be half the straw and two-thirds the hay." It would be a poor farmer today, who allowed pests and fungus disease to rob him of three-quarters of the seed he sowed. Yet the handicaps our ancestors suffered were described in this bleak rhyme: "Sow four grains in a row; One for the pigeons, one for the crow; One to rot, and one for to grow."

For many centuries, sheep were far more important than cattle to the British economy, and much rural lore revolves around them. Some of this lore may date from pre-history, for many of the forty-plus surviving breeds of British sheep are of very ancient stock. For example, Soay sheep from the Outer Hebrides, are almost identical with a type that grazed on the Wiltshire Downs 3,000 years ago.

Most of the lore concerns the shepherd's calendar. Many sheep begin lambing early in February, and the shepherd then drove them to sheltered lambing pens. Hill sheep, which are hardier, lamb a little later, in the open. Both types were washed about three weeks before shearing, to clean their fleeces. Shearing took place then, as it does today, in June or July. This explains the proverb: "Shear sheep in May, you'll shear them all away", for May is too early for shearing. The saying "shear your sheep when Elder blossoms peep" is sound advice indeed, for Elder flowers do not appear until the warmer weeks of June.

Each district had its own words for counting sheep; most were probably derived from ancient Celtic. Shepherds still used these words until about forty years ago. The words were chanted in groups of five, with the fifth word strongly stressed. On reaching twenty, the shepherd raised a finger and began again, from one. The counting continued until all ten fingers were raised making a total of 200 sheep, and a tally mark was made on a piece of wood. In most areas, the count proceeded in single units: yan, tan, tethera, methera, pimp, sethera, lethera, hothera, dothera, dick (one through ten). In Sussex though, the sheep were counted in pairs and only ten words were ever used: wuntherum, twotherum, cockerum, cutherum, shetherum, shatherum, wineberry, wig-tail, tarry-diddle, den.

© Linda Dice



The Masks of Odin

The Masks of Odin (Wisdom of the Ancient Norse)
by Elsa-Brita Titchenell
Theosophical University Press
(Post Office Bin C
Pasadena, CA 91109)

I must begin by stating that I am mildly prejudiced against Theosophical philosophy. I feel it mixes science and religion until what is left is neither fish nor fowl. The resulting science is shaky and myth loses its poetry and mystery. That said, I can continue.

In Masks of Odin, Ms. Titchenell interprets the Eddas from a Theosophical point of view. The giants are matter (and our baser nature); the Gods are spirit (and our higher nature). These beings have their homes and express the vibration of certain planets. Freya is Venus and Brisengamen is spiritual intelligence, Her gift to us.

I have no argument with this type of thinking used symbolically (as an astrologer I use these symbols every day). My problem with this is when it is viewed as physical fact.

The second problem I have with the book is the author's style. It is convoluted, pretentious, and I found it absolutely maddening.

"Slain" by the gods, Ymer becomes Orgalmer (primal loud noise), the keynote whose overtones vibrate throughout the sleeping shelves of space. Like the Tibetan Fohal which sets the atoms spinning, this graphically describes a first vibration organizing motion in inert protosubstance, creating vortices whose amplitudes and velocities determine the wavelengths and frequencies that make the various ranges of matter. (p.46)

The book does have some saving grace, however. Taken on a symbolic level, many of Ms. Titchenell's ideas are enlightening. Her images of the World Tree and of the Norns were inspiring to me. She is meticulous in studying the shades of meaning in her translations, though someone with a knowledge of old Icelandic would gain most from these discussions.

Perhaps most enjoyable are Ms. Titchenell's translations of the Eddas. (Selected lays are translated from a Swedish text.) These are very lively and readable. My own favorite is Havamal, which reminds me of the Tao Te Ching in both style and content. She seems in her element here, all pretention and stiffness are gone. She is alive.

You might want to check to see if your library has this book before you spend your hard-earned money on it, or you could put it on your Yule list.

Masks of Odin is rather like walking down a gravel path and finding

Reading Masks of Odin is rather like walking down a gravel path and finding a golden nugget here and there beneath your feet -- but you have to be looking.

Showing Asatru



When we think of ways that we can publicize our Gods, the things that come to mind are usually the obvious, high-profile ideas - putting up flyers, handing out AFA business cards, or writing letters to newspapers. There's a lot to be said for all these methods, and we shouldn't neglect them, but let's not forget what is perhaps the most basic and lasting way of making a favorable impression on others: living what we speak and speaking what we live!

If we are really living Asatru we will be industrious, self-reliant, and capable people who don't whine and who treat others honorably. We'll be doing our very best to pay our way and educate our kids. Our homes and our persons will be clean and presentable. Asatru sets high personal standards and we should continually strive to live up to its expectations - honestly, without deceiving ourselves. By doing this we become the sort of people that others respect, admire, and like to associate with. No one - even if they strongly disagree with Asatru - can effectively find fault with us if we live our lives in a worthy way.

Having lived up to what we preach, we then need to own up to the source of our inspiration. We have to let people know, in the most graceful way possible, why we have our lives in order. We do this, not by being pushy and tactless, but by simply not hiding our Gods when asked about them, or when the subject of religion comes up.

Easy? Of course not. It's hard enough to live a life of the sort that reflects well on Asatru; the very fact that we hold unconventional beliefs tends to make it harder for many of us to "play the game" and be the sort of solid citizen that people respect and look up to. Once that's done we've still only accomplished half the job, because it takes courage to confess a belief in the Gods. It's easier to mutter something incomprehensible when someone asks us about our Thor's Hammer, or to laugh it off with a light remark - but when we do so, we're selling our Gods and ourselves short and denying someone the chance to at least learn something about his or her heritage. Be proud of yourself! Be proud of the Gods!

By simply going about life - with kids in school, with the family involved in normal events like youth sports or civic activities - we quickly show people that we're not monsters or freaks. They'll see that, except for our unusual beliefs and some rather high standards in certain areas, we're not so different from them. It's hard to hate the person you rub shoulders with every day, and hard to believe that their religion does them any harm. You'll be legitimizing yourself and the Gods just by making your daily life a fine example.

It's a simple two step process: live what you speak by meeting Asatru's demanding standards, then speak what you live by letting others know, when the subject of religion comes up. Don't hide Asatru - show it proudly to others in the way you live. You are the best advertisement for our values, our beliefs, and our way of life!



THE
INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS
FOR
MIEVIAL STUDIES
1988



The following article was really a letter written to your editor. Rather than merely running it in Moot Point we thought we'd give it high profile. We offer it to you, our readers, as a proposal for action but also as an example of the kind of ideas Asafolk can come up with. Read on!

The recent Runestone article, "Support Your Local Germanic Studies" prompts me to write of what is certainly an opportunity for lovers of medieval Germanic lore and possibly an opportunity for Asatruar in particular. This is the annual International Congress on Medieval Studies, held at Western Michigan State University in Kalamazoo each May. (This year, May 7-10.)

This is a scholarly conference lasting four days, with well over a thousand papers given during that time. To my knowledge, it is unique in offering so much diversity to people of so many different interests for such a reasonable price!

There is no membership requirement--teachers, PhD's are in attendance, but so are many who are not professionally related to the middle ages. It is not a religious conference in the sense that members are expected to be members of some organization, church or the other--though there will be 44 regional, national and international societies--some religious--holding meetings during the conference. Interest in scholarship in the middle ages unites all who attend. There seems to be room there for papers on topics as diverse as Old Icelandic Language and Literature and Monastic Education in Carolingian Society.

I have attended for three years now, and have found it a great deal of fun --though it would be even better if more people interested in Old Norse, Vikings and medieval Scandinavia in general were in evidence. It is not the place to recruit members for a religion, but it is certainly an excellent place to contact people with interests in Teutonic paganism, to share ideas, to plan together and encourage one another in endeavors of research, scholarship, publishing and the like. I would think that such are part (not all) of the goals of Asatru and The Runestone.

Specifically, I would suggest the following:

- Consider attending the forthcoming conference yourself and encourage others with a scholarly bent to do the same. It would be quite easy to post a notice on the bulletin boards and get people interested in Norse culture together. (Whether they would be interested in all of the aims of Asatru --who knows? That they would be interested in many of them seems likely to me.)
- Consider officially sponsoring a session on Old Norse Religion at the 1988 conference. Proposals for sessions next year are due May 15 of this year. I would be willing to work up a paper on something under that rubric and with just two more so willing, the AFA could sponsor such a session.

In short, this conference could be for AFA what it is for many other medieval-oriented organizations in America--an opportunity for scholarly exchange among members and with others having related interests. It might be a useful supplement to the Althing and guild meetings.

If any of this sounds interesting at all, I suggest you write or call the Institute directly for a free program booklet and registration form. This will give you a bird's eye view of the conference and its activities. Their address:

Professor Otto Grundler, Director
The Medieval Institute
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, MI 49008
Phone: (616) 383-4980

* * * * *

So, there you have it! I know of at least two other AFA members who attend this conference. We have a fair sprinkling of academic sorts on our mailing list - might there not be some potential for action here? If you're a scholar or if you're just interested in attending, write and we'll try to put you in touch. Here is another chance to promote our worldview.



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BEOWULF



"Beowulf" is the longest and perhaps greatest of the poems that have come down to us in Old English. It is a hero's story made into a poem, so that all the pleasures of poetry are added to the stirring events of the hero's life. Beowulf had to be exciting and easy to understand, because when it was composed, literature was not read quietly out of books but was recited after feasts, in the halls of kings and nobles. The scop or gleeman spoke Beowulf and other poems aloud, probably striking a small harp to mark the rhythm. Such poems often inspired warriors before battle, or celebrated a victory.

Though Beowulf was composed by a scop who called England his native land, the scene of the story is not England. Beowulf was a Geat, which means that he came from southern Sweden. Hrothgar, the king he came to help, was a Dane, and most of the story takes place in Denmark. Though the poem could not have been written down before A.D. 700, the events in it probably happened in the 6th century. The only copy of Beowulf that we have was written about A.D. 1000, in the West Saxon dialect. (What we now term "dialect" is the ghost of very localized languages, dependent upon the land itself for many of its nouns.) Though most of the manuscript might seem to be written in a "foreign" language from our modern standpoint, some of the words in Beowulf still exist in our current English.

Many things about the poem must have stirred the listening warriors. Old English is very powerful, with harsh consonant sounds like K, D, G, KH, and GH. The Old English scops used alliteration, the repetition of one consonant sound, instead of rhyme . . .

"Great was the grief of the gold-friend of Scyldings"

shows how the scop tied his line together with the sound of G. The rhythm is as strong as the beat of marching feet. Each line has two parts and is divided by a pause. Each of the two parts has two strong beats. So there are four strong beats in each line, two on one side of the pause and two on the other:

"Great was the grief//of the gold-friend of Scyldings. . .

If the line is said aloud, accenting the words in bold print and pausing at the double line, you will feel the rhythm that could make warriors wish to grasp their spears and march.

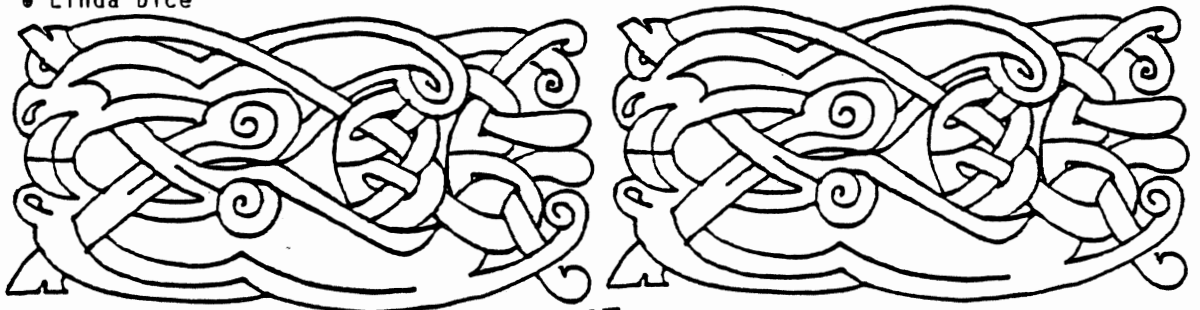
Old English poems are rich in images, because the scop used kennings. The scop who composed Beowulf calls the sea a "whale-path"; a traveler is an "earth-stepper"; a battle, a "spear-play". Since his England was misty, craggy and gloomy, with many empty wildernesses, his images are often mysterious and frightening.

The main story of Beowulf runs as follows: Hrothgar, King of the Danes, built a great house called Heorot. Here his warriors gathered to drink mead and listen to the scop sing his songs. Their revelry enraged an evil monster named Grendel, who lived in the marshes. He began attacking the mead-hall at night, killing the men while they were sleeping. Finally, Hrothgar was forced to abandon Heorot.

Beowulf, a young hero, hearing in Geatland of Hrothgar's grief and determined to assist, crossed the icy sea with fourteen companions-at-arms. He told Hrothgar his good intentions, and obtained permission to try his might. After the Danes had feasted the visiting Geats in Heorot, Hrothgar and his warriors went elsewhere while Beowulf and his companions remained behind in the hall. Grendel came, and opening the iron-bolted door at a touch, fell upon one of Beowulf's sleeping friends, killing him. However, before Grendel could carry off the body to the marsh, Beowulf caught the beast's hairy arm and dragged on it until he wrenched it out of its shoulder socket. Grendel fled, leaving his arm and a trail of blood behind. The next morning, Geats and Danes followed the trail to a pool that was boiling with the blood of the dead monster. That night the Geats lodged elsewhere, and the Danes went back to sleep - safely, they thought - in Heorot. But Grendel's mother, a monster hag, came to the hall seeking vengeance, and killed a Danish warrior. Again, Beowulf took Hrothgar's troubles upon himself. He followed the trail of Grendel's blood to the pool in the wasteland and leaped in. Under the water, in a vaulted room, he found and killed the hag. He also found the dead body of Grendel and cut off the head, carrying it back to the king.

The poem "Beowulf" is a strange mixture, since it refers to both pagan rites and Christian beliefs. It tells, on the one hand, about real things, such as lordly feasts and sea journeys, and about mythological and legendary things such as dragons, on the other. It contains at least one event that we know happened in history, besides many events that could occur only in myth. Beowulf is both noble and exciting, and shows us much about the earliest heroes - their courage, generosity and faithfulness, as well as their love of glory and danger. Like a rich bracelet found by excavators, no one knows who made it or exactly how it was made. It is rough and dark, but strongly beautiful. It speaks to us of old times, old customs and men and women who would be quite forgotten, if the scop had not told of them in the king's hall.

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MOOT POINT



"Moot Point" is our letters column. We reserve the right to edit submissions. Please address your letters specifically to "Moot Point", and sign your name or initials just as you want them to appear in print. Let us hear from you!

Dear Maddy,

I wrote a book, Viking Voyages to the Western Seas, a few years ago and have had no luck getting it published. It seems that the major publishers all feel that there is just not enough sales potential or interest in Vikings, no matter how well it was researched or written.

I was impressed with your book list and the books I have sent for, things that are almost impossible to get anywhere else. I tried to phone you as I was wondering if you do any publishing yourselves or know of anyone else who would be interested in my project. I believe it to be an important work that a lot of people would be interested in.

Sincerely,

Richard P. Toth

We're not set up to do that sort of thing ourselves, nor do we know anyone who can, but perhaps some of you out there can offer ideas or assistance?

Dear Steve:

In the midst of your obviously demanding restructuring of AFA and all the other depressing news of the time, I just had to pass on to you a pleasant little story (absolutely true) to celebrate Summer Finding. Perhaps it will encourage and give a smile to others.

A few weeks ago I was struggling through a frustrating negotiation on a manuscript with a foot-dragging publisher. One evening it occurred to me that I had a friend to call on in creative matters: Freya. I took down the agate Brisngamen which I had hanging in her honor in a quiet corner of my bedroom (beside my Thor's Hammer which I had carved in his honor several years ago) and put it around my neck, promising to wear it night and day if she would step in and resolve this negotiation. About a week later the strand of thread which held the necklace together broke. I struggled all that morning trying to repair it but no matter what I did, it broke again.

That afternoon my agent called and said the negotiations had been completed a few days earlier and she was forwarding the contract for the book for my signature. When I got all the documents with their dates, I realized that the publisher had, in fact, made up his mind on the day I had called on Freya for help and the date of the contract which he had prepared coincided exactly with my promise to Freya. As soon as the contract was safely in the hands of my agent, Freya had completed her task and made it plain what she wanted in return: a new Brisngamen to recognize her efforts. No wonder I couldn't repair the old one. As the greatest lady of the Vanir is most certainly entitled to be, she is a lady of great pride and perhaps a little vanity. Clearly, I was not going to be

allowed to take her for granted. A new Brisingamen she wanted and she most certainly will have!

Regards

Ed Neville

The Goddesses and Gods are still active in the world, as Asafolk from all over can testify. We who honor them should remember that they are much more than "just symbols". We've got friends out there (In there?Up there?)in Asaheim!

Dear Stephen/Steve,

I hope we can be on first name basis, since I noted in the newspaper articles you sent me that we are approximately the same age--I'm 35. Thanks for the article and letter.

First, I must tell you how relieved you've made me. My reading of The Runestone, your letters and now the articles have convinced me that Asatru is not some whacky cult. When I first wrote, I expected the worst. During my years in newspapers I've met up with my share of loonies--mostly Christian groups, I must admit.

Therefore, while fascinated to learn about Odinists here in America in the 20th Century, I was a bit circumspect. My most pleasurable surprise has been the discovery that Asatru has basically the same mind-set as I have.

My own introduction to the pre-Christian richness of Germany was in 6th grade. I attended a Catholic school and we had a typically pre-Vatican II biased world-history text. The section on Germany had a graphic showing Boniface felling an oak tree in a sacred grove. As you might imagine, the explanation was erroneous--something to the effect that the Germans "worshipped" the trees and were converted to Christianity when the "saint" was not struck dead by a lightning bolt as expected. Nothing, of course, about Charlemagne and his massacres.

Something did not ring true about the account. In addition, my love of trees made me question such a wanton destruction of an ancient oak. I went to the library and furthered my research and met all the German Gods and Goddesses. I was saddened to learn how my ancestors had been acculturized and had been taught to accept that a middle-Eastern tribe was the "chosen people". I have also been dismayed that Germans so slavishly copied the decorative arts of the Romans whose civilization I greatly admired. I feel the Germans should have developed something architecturally distinct. The Scandinavians did a little better job, but even they were swayed by classical civilization. Why, for instance, do so many frescoes portray Greco-Roman deities instead of the indigenous Germanic ones?

Anyway, during the 1970s, I toyed with a revival of the old religion. I was interested by the part in the material you sent that said a number of people across the country also had the same idea at about the same time. That makes me give more serious consideration to a phenomenon I've read about recently--I've forgotten the buzzword--that has put forward the notion that discoveries seem to occur simultaneously. They've done experiments with Macaque monkeys that seem to advance the theory.

It all strikes me--and certainly some family and friends--as rather unusual and amusing that I would be championing a religion after all my years as an outspoken atheist. Reaction to my 6th grade history text, perhaps? I suppose, intellectually, I would still have to classify myself as an atheist--or non-theist-- as Mrs Murray-O'Hair likes to soften the pejoratively viewed word.

However, In Asatru I can foresee a sort of emotional belief, something similar to how many Jews accept their religion--for the cultural and psychological bond it can provide.

Therefore: Hail Odin!

Cordially,

Mike May

The paths by which we come back to our native religion are many and varied, and yours is one more story to illustrate that process. So often it seems to revolve around some event in childhood - a tale heard, a book remembered. All the more reason for us, today, to proliferate such tales and books! I think you'll find your journey (like that of all of us) is only beginning - - .

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am researching an interesting subject in Household Customs and the Folklore of Domestic Architecture, with a view to publication in the future.

This study, which is well established, concentrates on the folklore that surrounds the structural elements of domestic architecture and the domestic customs, activities and superstitions connected with the house, both internal and external. The four broad areas encompassed are:

Building, Builders Rites, and Construction Customs
The New House
The Established House
Feasts and Festivals

My research is confined to the culture of Northern Europe and includes the countries of Iceland, Scandinavia (including western Finland), United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany (and territories before 1945), Netherlands, northern Belgium, Luxembourg, Lichtenstein, Austria, Switzerland, France (Brittany), and the Prussians in Lithuania and Latvia. Also included are those countries largely influenced by these cultures such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States of America.

I would appreciate if you would broadcast my interest through your organization or publication so that I may contact, speak or correspond with people who remember, know of, or still practice, household customs and superstitions originating in Northern Europe.

Yours Sincerely,

Michael Murphy
P.O.Box 313
Chatswood, N.S.W.
Australia, 2067

Sounds like a worthwhile project to us! Perhaps our readers can assist in this useful cultural endeavor?



ASATRU - AN OVERVIEW

Are you new to Asatru, or is this your first copy of The Runestone? If so, you might like a little background on whāt this is all about, so you can better understand the contents of our magazine.

Asatru is the original, pre-Christian religion of the peoples of northwestern Europe. It was followed by the various tribes that became today's Englishmen, Germans, Scandinavians, Dutch, and related groups. A similar religion and way of life was practiced by the Irish, Scottish, and Welsh. Because of this overlap and the movement of peoples in ancient and modern times, it's fair to make a general statement that Asatru is a religion that expresses the heritage of people of Northern European descent as a whole. In short, this is the faith of your ancestors! Because it's our native belief, we feel it best expresses our way of looking at the world.

Our forebears believed in a number of Gods and Goddesses. Some of us think of them as real in the most literal sense, and others of us view them as symbols that help us understand the divine aspects of the universe. However you consider them, it is useful to know the names and functions of some of the main ones.

ODIN - father of the Gods, associated with wisdom, magic, ecstasy
THOR - a God of strength and might, defender of the Gods and men
FRIGGA - mother of the Gods, wise, involved with family, children
TYR - one-handed God renowned for scarifice, valor, and war prowess
BALDER - most beautiful of the Gods, softspoken, bold and good
SKADI - mountain-dwelling Goddess who hunts on skis
HEIMDAL - watchman who guards the Rainbow Bridge leading to the realm of the Gods
IDUN - Goddess who keeps the magic apples that renew the Gods' youth
LOKI - mischievous trickster of the Gods who often works against their aims
FREYA - Goddess of love, associated with fertility and procreation, but with a warrior aspect also
FREY - a virile fertility God whose domain includes love, joy, and prosperity
NJORD - God connected with the sea as a source of food and of prosperity through trade

Most of these Gods and Goddesses belong to the family or tribe we call the Aesir, but the last three are of another line, the Vanir.

From time to time you will see words in Old Norse used in our pages. This was the language of the Vikings, to whom we owe much of what we know about Asatru. You'll find frequent references to the Old Viking or Nordic culture and history, too.

What does our religion value? We preach and practice courage, honor, the importance of family and ancestral bonds, strength, freedom, the preservation of our kind, and joyful, vigorous life.