

THE RUNESTONE

WIKI RUNESTON

Stephen McNallen
6587 Baumholder
Postfach 114
West German



"Sebbe Als", warship replica built in 1968.
(Courtesy Viking Ship Museum, Roskilde, Denmark)

The Runestone is a journal of the old Norse religion and is dedicated to the revival of that religion as epitomized during the Viking Age, and to the revival of the values of courage, freedom, and personal independence which are associated with it.

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NORSE NOTES

It is with a great deal of pleasure that I must relate to all our readers a recent event of great importance for our movement. Last November I traveled to London with my fiancée and met with John Yeowell of the Odinist Committee there. For any of you who are not familiar with the Committee and their excellent publication Raven Banner, I refer you to their address elsewhere in this issue. We conferred at some length over some fine beer in a pub, and exchanged tokens of friendship and future correspondence. In June, John will be flying to join me in Germany where another event - of very great personal import as well as of religious significance - will be taking place. A full, and joyous, report will follow in the next issue of The Runestone.

Other events under way here include mailings to all past subscribers and to present subscribers urging more efforts to expand readership of The Runestone.

A reminder - copies of our rituals booklet are available at \$1.50 each and "ODIN LIVES" bumper stickers can be purchased at 50¢ each. For anyone out there who needs to make a tax-exempt contribution, we qualify according to the Internal Revenue Service and we could most surely put any contributions to good use.

VIKING BURIALS - PART II

In the last issue we examined the relationship of the ship, the Vanir, and the Aesir to Norse burial beliefs. Now we will study other features, such as the dragon motif and certain specific burials.

Dragons are often identified with the dead man, watching over his treasure in the grave. Exactly why this came to be is uncertain. It could be that the concept of all-devouring death, stalking every man like a dragon, entered into it, or perhaps the flickering flames of the funeral fire seemed to resemble some live monster. At any rate the association seems to be an ancient one; tree coffins found at the Alammanic cemetery at Oberflacht had serpents or dragons carved on the lids, perhaps to guard the slumber of the dead ones contained therein.

The practice of putting a favorite wife or slave to death to accompany the dead person to the afterlife was a common one. The person so selected could be killed prior to the lighting of the pyre, or they could be closed up in the mound and allowed to suffocate. In the story of Sigurd the Voisung, we are told that Brynhild immolated herself on his funeral pyre to be with the slain hero. The Swedish king Sigurd had the body of a dead princess placed on his funeral ship before it was launched. Sigrd the Proud, a queen of Sweden, left her royal husband Eric because he was aging and she had no desire to be burned at his funeral. Archaeological evidence of another person accompanying a master or husband into the Other World was found at Oseburg in Norway, Birka and Valsgrde in Sweden, Balladoole on the Isle of Man, and somewhat less certainly in other places. The Icelandic settler, Asmund Atlason, was buried in a boat accompanied by a slave who killed himself after his master's death. The custom is described by Ibn Rustah as it was apparently practised by the Norsemen in Russia, after 922 C.E., as follows: "When a leading man among them dies, they dig a grave like a big house and put him inside it. With him they put his clothes and the gold bracelets he wore and also much food and drinking vessels and coins. They also put his favourite wife in the grave with him, while she is still living. And so the entrance to the grave is stopped up, and she dies there."

Ibn Fadlan, in his famous narrative of a Rus ship burial on the Volga, describes how a slave girl voluntarily met death at her master's funeral so as to be with him in the future life.

Viking grave goods tell us a great deal about Norse culture as a whole, and have become a favourite tool of the archaeologist. Grave goods commonly included such items as weapons, tools, clothing, food, jewelry, and even horses, other animals, carts, sleds, and of course ships. The nature and quantity of these goods varied from place to place and time to time. More horses are found in Icelandic graves than elsewhere. At Oseburg thirteen horses and an ox were unearthed. Poultry seems not to have been commonly included among the possessions buried with the dead, but the evidence is not conclusive because the remains of poultry would not likely have been preserved as well as other organic materials. In pre-Viking Denmark only symbolic offerings and grave goods were evidently used. Fragments of objects rather than the entire object were often included in the grave, or symbolic miniatures were employed to replace and represent the original. It was otherwise in Norway and Sweden, where complete grave goods were used and, incidentally, where most of the boat burials are found.

Frequently, grave goods were smashed, bent, broken or burned before being buried with the deceased. The idea seems to have been to

make the object "different" from similar, whole ones in the same way that the corpse was "different" from a living man. Another possibility which has been suggested is that the "soul" of the object could only be released and allowed to accompany the dead man if this was done - if it was, in effect, ritually killed. This destruction of grave goods may be related to the mass destruction of booty on a huge pyre after a battle, as reported of the Germanic tribes by Tacitus. On the other hand, this latter ritual may be more in the way of an offering to the war god rather than to enable the "spirit" of the object to accompany a slain warrior. Could it be that the operative principle is the same in both instances, in that the release of the soul of the material item is necessary whether the object is a grave good or an offering to the war god?

The variety of Viking burials is considerable. Bodies were inhumed in chambers, cremated with ships, cremated and placed on whole ships as at Tune, or animals may have been cremated to accompany an inhumating burial as at Balladoole. Graves were typically capped by mounds, but flat graves are not infrequent. The classic Hollywood style Viking funeral was not a frequent occurrence, and may be limited to the myths. The body of the god Balder was placed on his ship Kringhorni and pushed out to sea in this tradition. All the gods were present when the giantess pushed the ship off from shore, bearing with it the corpse of Balder's grief-stricken widow, Nanna, and his horse. According to *Beowulf*, the body of the first Danish king, Scyld, was laid in his ship and set asea. King Haki of Norway and Sigurd, King of Sweden, were said in some accounts to have been set out to sea when they were dead or dying of wounds received in battle.

A great deal of Norse lore surrounds the burial mound itself. The idea was solidly fixed in the pagan beliefs that the dead man continued to live, in spectral form, in the mound or in a holy mountain or hill near the ancestral farm. The family carefully maintained the mound and took care not to antagonise the dead ancestor, who might then cause trouble by "walking". Fear of ghosts or of undead corpses was a prominent feature in Norse beliefs on the supernatural, and may have inspired mound-entering to still the specter. The Oseburg mound had been entered and an attempt had apparently been made to steal the queen's bones. Her bed had been hacked to bits. Such break-ins were not for purpose of pillage, and in any case could not have been easily accomplished without the knowledge of the community. They may indeed have been attempts to "kill" the corpse a second time to prevent its walking. A second possible reason which has been put forth for these rather mysterious mound-breakings - which include such famous graves as the Oseburg and Gokstad graves - is that the relatives of the deceased were attempting to recover some item of magical significance to aid the family in a time of severe crisis.

The role of the mound in the community deserves notice. When the Norse peoples developed the state to the extent that kings were called into existence, their accession took place on the ancestral mound. Some mounds appear to have been built with flat tops, as though for the performance of ceremonies. At the holy site of Uppsala, the Thing-place was on the mounds. On the Isle of Man, the Tingwall mound is built over an ancient cemetery. Such a development is natural, considering the belief that by sitting on a mound one could gain inspiration, obtain guidance from the dead, or even lay claim to the title of the deceased king!

Above all, the mound must be remembered in the context of the Norse clan - which included not only the presently living members of the family but also the ancestors long dead but nevertheless real and intimately a part of the family life in its broader sense.

In some cemeteries, such as the one at Ingleby in Derbyshire, the mounds are only two or three metres in diameter. Others are relatively vast. The largest, in fact, is the pre-Viking Raknehauq, which measures 19 metres high and 95 metres in diameter. Interestingly enough, it is empty of a corpse, as are some other mounds in Scandinavia, notably the larger Jelling mound. One authority suggests that these artifacts were capped by mortuary houses; others maintain that they were merely empty cenotaphs never meant to contain a body.

NEXT ISSUE - VIKING BURIALS, PART III

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The next article is reproduced with the permission of *Infantry*, a US Army publication. It is extremely relevant to the warrior mystique which is at the heart of the cult of Odin as it was known to our Viking ancestors. I, for one, am in great agreement with its author.

Even in time of "peace" the safety and survival of the nation are really a function of the effectiveness of its armed forces. The first and most basic measure of this effectiveness is the degree to which the Infantry of the general line can be persuaded to get up out of their holes and charge into hostile fire. That this is a hazardous business needs no demonstration: the Infantry take 80 percent of the casualties in any war. It is therefore something of a mystery to the schools of psychologists who have studied people only in "peacetime" civilian environments and have never dealt with soldiers or studied military history.

Certainly there is not enough money anywhere to pay people to do what the Infantry soldier is asked to do in combat. Interestingly, this last is extensively illustrated by the exploits of the Gurkhas in British and Indian service, and the French Foreign Legion, both mercenary corps with no "innate" loyalty to the flags for which they are asked to die. They are, of course, the extreme case, but a study of the workings of this paradox, I submit, can bring one very close

about the glories of dying for France in the sands of the desert or the jungles of Southeast Asia.

For as far back as there had been a specifically German national consciousness, France—the France of Louis XIV and Napoleon—was the traditional, hereditary national enemy. The current rapprochement between France and Germany is a very recent thing, and strictly a response to the power and aggressive intentions of the Soviet Union.

TRIBAL ANIMAL

Except where specifically trained otherwise, the male of the species is still in a great many ways a tribal animal. From the very earliest times, the men and warriors of the tribe have gone out as a group to hunt and to defend the tribe and its territory against other tribes and the larger predators. Very early, the tribes that were not effective fighters and hunters were squeezed out and absorbed or destroyed by those that were. In this process, what I shall call the "tribal ethic" got pretty well ingrained into the spirit of the

MAJOR ALEXANDER M.S. McCOLL

Of Tribes and Regiments

to enlightenment in matters of the leadership and motivation of Infantry and other combat soldiers.

Of course, it is easy to shrug and dismiss the Gurkhas as medieval-minded, inscrutable Asiatic primitives. Or, on the erroneous notion that the Legion has always been predominantly German, it is as easy to make equally racist assumptions about some mysteriously "innate" characteristic of pure-bred Aryan Germans that makes them want to be good soldiers. But there is some truth in those propositions.

Certainly, from what one reads—chiefly John Masters' "Bugles and a Tiger", which, with Patton's "War As I Knew It", should be required reading for all combat arms officers and noncommissioned officers—much of what went on among the Gurkhas is more easily grasped intuitively than verbally analyzed.

And there were, and are, a lot of Germans in the Legion, especially among the NCOs, and there is little doubt that the whole thrust of the German—or, more properly speaking, Prussian—state and educational system for at least half a century before Hitler had been chiefly designed to inculcate the soldierly virtues: discipline, loyalty, respect for authority, exaltation of the Army and the officer corps, and all the rest. But surely that system said nothing much

male half of the species. And I see no inherent reason to deny that mental as well as physical traits can, in a general sense, become innate as a result of several hundred generations of the inter-tribal struggle for survival and dominance.

What features of the "tribal ethic" apply to the leading of soldiers, mercenary or otherwise? There are as many features as there are similarities of the spirit between a tribal war party going out to raid another tribe or slay a mastodon and a rifle platoon going out on a combat patrol, including such things as leadership by example; total personal loyalty between members of the group; not admitting to fear, fatigue or a disinclination to stand up and charge one more time; prestige and admiration for superior courage and prowess in the face of the human or animal enemy.

There was also the rule that a young man of the tribe, before he was admitted to sit with the warriors and elders in the council house of the tribe, or to have access to the girls, had to prove his manly prowess by slaying a lion in single combat, or whatever the tribally-approved sublimation of this might be. Genetically, this insured that weaklings did not breed.

Today, young men play football, do dangerous things on motorcycles, and jump out of perfectly good airplanes. The specific sublimations are different, but the underlying

spirit was immemorially ancient when the stone battle-axe was the latest thing in military technology. Fortunately, modern theories of guilt-seeking, "Peace in our Time", and general self-castration have not entirely destroyed this spirit.

SUPERNATURAL

Also, very early, man became aware of the supernatural. Courage, steadfastness in adversity, and the hope of victory were nourished by ritual evocation of the gods of war and the hunt, and of the spirits of mighty men—leaders of the tribe in the hunt and in battle—who had gone before. The tribe was taken to include not only its presently living members but also the glorious dead, so that treachery or cowardice were not only a betrayal of the living but an unforgivable offense against the tribal gods and ancestral spirits.

This, also, is not far below the surface in these later days. Since the end of the Thirty Years War (1648), and except in Japan, the Middle East (both sides), Spain and Ireland, the more formal sort of religion has generally stayed out of the business of war-making, but the Infantry still sings the Ballad of Roger Young. Can one say that the customary early-morning run of the airborne unit complete with the traditional animal noises, is, in addition to good exercise, at least subconsciously something of a war-dance invoking the spirits of and claiming unity with the brave men of the various airborne organizations who have gone before? And why not? (Of pagan doings in the Marine Corps we shall not speak; there are at least a few sacred mysteries which it is unseemly for the uninitiated to disclose.)

All of which leads up to the proposition that, psychologically, the regiment can and should be the equivalent of the tribe to its members. From what one reads, at least since World War II, this was how the Foreign Legion operated, albeit more or less subconsciously. To the de-tribalized young men emerging from the ruins of a shattered Europe, the Legion offered structure embellished with pomp and ceremony, admission after due and painful initiation (their recruit training was very tough) to membership in an elite group, including symbolic communion with the sacred dead of the tribe, and all the rest.

Of course the discipline was tough, the training thorough and the leaders at the unit level competent and dedicated. But I submit, these were merely the means whereby the underlying pseudo-tribal identification (*Legio Patria Nostra*) was directed and applied to the task at hand. It is impossible to imagine the Legion without its awareness of its own history, its traditions and holy relics (the artificial hand of Captain Danjou, for instance), and its very thorough indoctrination of each recruit in these things and the notion that, in effect, the ghosts of the legionnaires who have gone before are a judging audience for everything he does. This is indeed strong and strange medicine, but probably very effective.

This is not the place to get into the causes of the non-success of the French efforts in Indochina and Algeria; whatever else, they were in no sense the result of any failure of courage, prowess, or discipline in the Legion. The legionnaire is also permitted to look down on the rest of

the French Army, possibly excepting the paratroopers of the *Armée Coloniale*, as untrained, undisciplined rabble and scum. This can be overdone, of course. Geoffrey Bocca once observed that while it is normal and desirable for any good unit to try to make members of other units feel that they smell bad, it is disastrous when the attempt is a success.

VOLUNTEER ARMY

How does all this apply to the "All Volunteer Army" (why not call it, or at least work toward trying to be an "All Professional Army"?) between now and the next war?

- The recruiting pitch, at least for the combat arms, should be based even more openly on an appeal to the spirit of adventure and the urge to prove one's manly prowess, e.g., by standing in the door of an airplane.

- This could be profitably carried over into basic combat training, if it were conducted preferably on a regimental basis and bore down heavily on the history and traditions of the Army and the regiment, ceremonial observation of glorious anniversaries to include explanations of what and why, and so on.

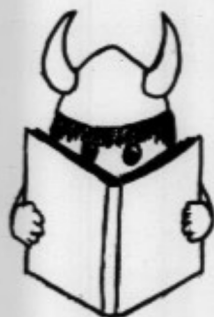
- There should be something of a regimental system in the British manner, where the individual soldier, NCO, or officer (even officers are human and have a capacity for having morale) is permanently identified with a specific regimental entity, and where units are renumbered and re-flagged every three years. One reason for the exceptional esprit and effectiveness of the Special Forces is that, almost alone among entities in the Army, they have been able to maintain some degree of this sort of long-term individual identification.

- At all levels there should be a more articulate awareness of these ancient truths. Their use and application have been an intuitive reflex by effective combat leaders since the beginning. They are not to be taught in some sit-down class on "Leadership, Personal Motivation and the Psychology of the Soldier"; a better subject for the class would be "History and Traditions of the Regiment". But these must also show themselves in action and in spirit in all the ways that things are done within a unit, from the colonel to the least child of the last soldier. For a regiment, like a tribe, includes not only the men and warriors, but also the women-folk and children.

Finally, let us not forget the spirit of adventure, the urge to prove one's masculine prowess, and the need for tribal identification are powerful and potentially dangerous forces. If they do not find a home in the armed forces working for the benefit of the nation, they will surely find other and much less beneficial outlets (some time, take a look at the Che Guevara mystique). Therefore, let us consciously put these forces to work for the defense of our country and the security of the Free World.

An OCS graduate of the Field Artillery School, MAJOR ALEXANDER M.S. McCOLL is now a USAR Mobilization Designee at the JFK Center for Military Assistance, Fort Bragg. He received both his A.B. and his J.D. with honors from Harvard. McColl commanded a tank company at Fort Hood and was a senior advisor for part of his 30 months in Vietnam.

BOOK



REVIEW

RUNES by R W V Elliott

Practically all of the books that we have reviewed in the past couple of years have been books which deal generally with the Norse gods or with Viking culture. Runes is an exception. It is oriented toward those who have a special interest in the runic writing of our ancestors. From it, one should easily be able to translate runic inscriptions.

Elliott deals with the origin of runic writing, and then devotes space to runes in Scandinavia and in England. The futhark, or runic alphabet, is examined at some length. Besides covering merely the linguistic and literary uses of runes, the author relates a good deal of fascinating information concerning the magical use of runes in casting spells and in divination. Finally, he proceeds to examine in detail a number of runic inscriptions found in England.

Many readers may be surprised at the many magical and religious implications of the runic symbols. Odin sacrificed himself on the World-Tree to obtain the knowledge of the runes, and the connotation is affirmed by Elliott: "The word 'rune' itself places the futhark at the very heart of Germanic religious cult; to this day the German raunen connotes 'whisper' and 'secret' and 'mystery', associations coeval with the powerful magic of runic lore". We can see from this that Elliott's book is no mere text on the old Germanic alphabet.

This is the only book of its kind of which I know in the English language. Previously, unless one spoke one of the Scandinavian tongues or German, the vast store of runic lore was inaccessible. Runes changes the situation drastically. Better yet, it is a book consciously designed for the novice, for the person with little or no prior knowledge of runes.

Runes is available from Manchester University Press, 316-324 Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9NR, England.

Viking's Choice

There are skalds who try to tell us

That Odin lives on wine,

But wine is the stuff of Hellas

From the purple-clustered vine.

It's sunny fragrance is dear to those

Who love the shepherd's need--

But the lord of Scandinavian snows

Must have the Viking's mead!

Wine and its dainty pleasure

May sult the pampered mouth

Of a man whose indolent leisure

Is lulled by the lazy South;

But Odin's promise, duly sworn

By his magic golden ring,

Says that so long as the runes adorn

The fabric wrought by the spinning Norn,

The honeyed mead must fill the horn

Which the blue-eyed Valkyries bring!

- Courtesy of a reader

ECO CORNER

NER

This section of The Runestone is set aside for the subject of individual action to support our ecology, for two reasons. First, our religion is a religion of nature, of the free and the wild places on the Earth. Secondly, the worsening ecological crisis will result in more regulation and less freedom, unless we solve it ourselves.

Cut down on waste! To quote Environmental Action, Inc., "The average American throws away 5.3 pounds of garbage per day. It costs \$4½ billion a year to collect and dispose of this solid waste. This includes 30 million tons of paper, 4 million tons of plastics, 30 billion bottles and 60 billion cans."

Here are some practical hints, from the same people:

- * Use as few paper bags as possible. Take a cloth bag to the market to do your shopping. Put all your purchases in one large bag at a department store. Carry a lunch box to work or school rather than a sack.
- * Buy loose fruit and vegetables. You save money and waste less, and you can see what you're buying. If your market is one of those that packages all of its produce in plastic wrap, protest - then look for another market.
- * Avoid buying goods packaged in polyvinyl chloride containers, because when incinerated they give off poisonous fumes. Polyvinyl chloride is the clear, glass-like material used for shampoo and hair tonic containers, and the like.
- * Avoid pre-packaged and pre-cooked foods. They waste more in packaging, and you have to pay for the packaging, too.
- * Buy concentrated fruit juices and drinks, rather than innumerable cans and bottles.

One thing the literature clearly shows - ecology makes good sense. By following the above measures, you avoid paying for useless packaging. Often you get other benefits like being able to see what you're buying, or having more nutritious food.

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 19120

A new publication of the occult is The New Broom from Dallas. Write:

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 Box 1646
 Dallas, Texas 75221

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