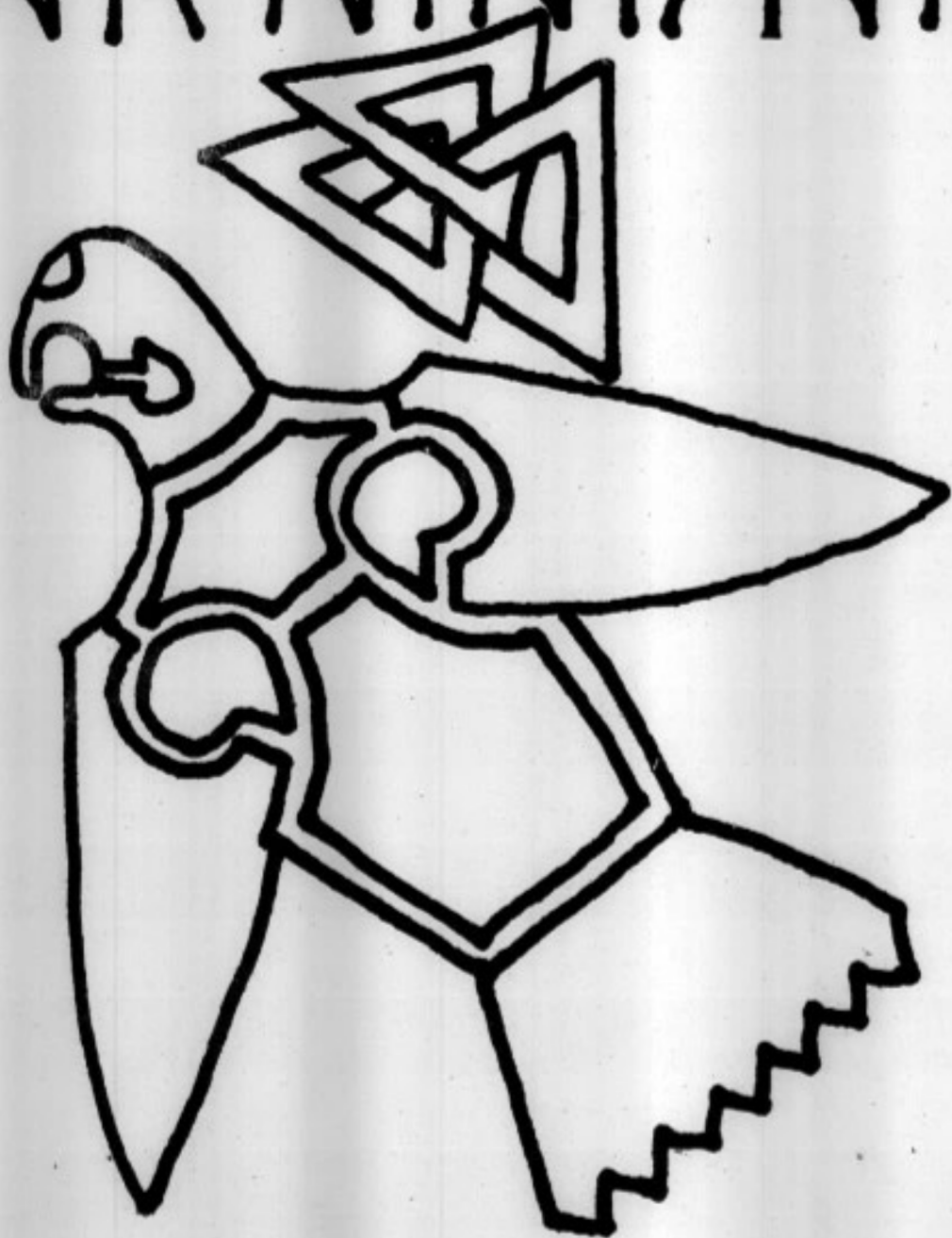


THE RUNESTONE

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WIR RUDENSTI



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. The Runestone is the official publication of the Viking Brotherhood and is published quarterly. Subscriptions are \$3.00 per year. Write The Runestone, "A" Co. 1 Bn. 39th Inf., APO New York 09034

NORSE NOTES

Welcome to yet another issue in our back-on-schedule campaign! We have so many projects going here at The Runestone that it's almost impossible to keep up with them all. First priority is getting on our publishing schedule, which should be accomplished by the next issue. With the pressure off there, we will be able to concentrate on the others.. Organizing skeppslags is our next goal, and by the time you read this we should have some response on this. Planning the groundwork continues for the Thing next summer, when we'll all get together to further our religion. We are considering a pan-pagan project to protest the desecration of our holy place at Gamla Uppsala. A special mailing of complementary copies of The Runestone to selected university professors is in the works. We aren't stagnating!

Your help and support is invited, as always. Let your interested friends know about The Runestone. Practice your religion. If you can send us a contribution to help finance our projects, we'd naturally appreciate it.



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London, E.1.

TELEPHONE: 01-790 8661

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VIKING BURIALS Part 1

Viking burials are a subject of almost universal interest. They crop up in the novel Beau Geste and in the headlines when the body of a rock star is stolen to be given a "Viking burial." No study of the Norse religion is complete without a discussion of the burial customs and beliefs of the Norse peoples.

Heathen burials in the North followed no set rules, but a number of common characteristics can be discerned. The literature on the subject is plentiful and varied to the extent that it is not easy to choose a point from which to begin. Perhaps one factor which will do as well as any other is the connection between the burial and the symbolism of the ship. Rich men and chieftains were customarily buried in actual ships, well-to-do persons were buried in boats, and the poor at least had stones laid around the grave in the elliptical form of a ship. The actual function of the ship, in the great burials of which it was a part, can be viewed from two different aspects. In a burial at Hedeby, the vessel is upright on its keel and has been placed above the burial chamber containing the body. In such a case, the presence of the ship can be interpreted as grave-goods in the same way that the dead man's weapons or other personal belongings might have been. At the Ladby ship burial in Denmark, on the other hand, the body is placed on the ship, which is ready to sail south and to the sun, its anchor ready to be dropped whenever it reaches its destination in the Other World. Here, the ship seems to be a mode of transportation to Valhalla. In another burial - the Oseburg burial in Norway - the ship is moored to a stone. Apparently the soul of the dead man was seen as being capable of initiating the journey himself.

The ship has been a fertility symbol, and hence a symbol of life, at least as far back as ancient Egypt, where it was

associated with the passage of night and day and the resurrection of the sun. This symbolism was kept alive by the cult of Isis, which survived long after the decline of the old Egyptian empire. Ruins of a shrine to Isis have been found at Walcheren on the Dutch coast, dating from about 400 C.E. It is not beyond belief that some elements of Egyptian use of the ship symbol may have been transmitted to our Scandinavian forefathers through contact with the cult of Isis. There are alternate explanations, however, which are independent of cultural transmission from Egypt. The ship has always been an important part of life in the Northlands, as evidenced by very early rock carvings and by the attitude evidenced many centuries later in the attachment of the Viking to his beloved sea-steed. Indeed, the Scandinavian peoples have always reaped a double harvest - one from the land, the other from the sea. It is not surprising that the ship should become a symbol of life and of plenty in an environment where its economic importance was so very great. The ship, it should be added, is a symbol of the Vanir, that family of deities concerned with fertility, life, and plenty. The Vanir (the foremost of which is Frey) are also connected with the grave, in the universal hope of man for a life or a resurrection beyond the grave. Perhaps the ship is related to the grave through its association with the Vanir. Regardless of the theoretical basis, the early Norsemen must have been impressed, for the ship is almost omnipresent in Scandinavian burials.

The connection between the Vanir - especially Frey - and burials extends beyond the ship symbol. Frey's association with such matters is noted in Ynglinga Saga, where his burial in the mound at Gamla Uppsala is mentioned. It seems that the prosperity of the country as a whole was strongly associated with his person, and his death was supposedly kept a secret for three years. Frey's mound is described as having a door in it, as would a living man's dwelling place. Later, as it will be seen, the dead were conceived as living in the mound after death. It has been speculated that perhaps this mention of a door means that the mound possessed a chamber for rites and sacrifices as did the early megalithic tombs in the North. According to Gisla Saga, a priest of Frey in Iceland was buried in his mound, on which no snow or ice ever appeared because Frey "would have no frost between them." Saxo writes of a king Frodi who decreed that every chief who died in battle should be burned in his own ship, and lesser men were to be burned ten to a ship. Frodi as a name is the Danish equivalent of Frey. Thorgrim, a priest of Frey in Iceland, was given a traditional ship burial in a mound. Before the grave was closed, Gisli, the foster brother responsible for his death, cast a huge stone down upon the deck of the ship. When the Oseburg ship was excavated a great stone was found lying on the vessel, calling to mind Thorgrim's funeral in Iceland. From this it has been speculated that the woman buried at Oseburg may have been a priestess of the Vanir,



The Vanir are not the only gods associated with burials, however. The Aesir also figure prominently, Odin's place is a conspicuous one. It is he, the god of the glorious dead, who instituted cremation, which has in fact become known as one characteristic of the cult of Odin. It was the High God who promised that all possessions burned on the funeral pyre, and all treasures hidden in the earth, would accompany the dead to Valhalla. Of the Norse ideas on cremation, a passage from the description of a Rus ship-burial on the Volga River is enlightening. The witness and narrator was an Arab named Ibn Fadlan a secretary to an embassy of the Caliph of Baghdad. "One of the Rus was at my side and I heard him speak to the interpreter, who was present. I asked the interpreter what he said. He answered, 'He said, "You Arabs are fools"' "Why?" I asked him. He said, 'You take the people who are most dear to you and whom you honor most and you put them in the ground where insects and worms devour them. We burn him in a moment, so that he enters Paradise at once.' Then he began to laugh uproariously when I asked him why he laughed, he said 'His lord for love of him, has sent the wind to bring him away in an hour.'"

It is only fitting that Odin, as the god of war and the keeper of Valhalla, should have a place in Norse burial beliefs. Thor also has a place in those beliefs, mainly because of the life-symbolism of his hammer, Mjolnir. The hammer has always been a potent symbol of the life force in Scandinavia, and thus the hammer came to be used in many ceremonial ways - to guard treasure troves, to sanctify brides, and to hallow funerals. Thor blessed the funeral ship of the slain Balder with his famous hammer before it was launched forth from the mourning gods.

NEXT ISSUE: PART II - GRAVE GOODS, CEMETERIES SUTEE AND MORE.

BOOK



REVIEW

The Vikings by Howard La Fay

There are too many books titled The Vikings for the title to be striking or memorable, yet this book manages to be both. As you may remember it was La Fay who wrote that outstanding Viking article in "National Geographic" a few years ago, back in 1970. He has successfully applied his skill again, for The Vikings is a worthy general book on the Norsemen and their activities.

One of La Fay's techniques is to compare present-day life in the Scandinavian countries with what it was during the Viking Age, using both the narrative and Ted Spiegel's perceptive photography to deliver the required impression. Readers of "National Geographic" will recall the excellent photography in the 1970 article mentioned above. Also most praiseworthy is Louis Glanzman's art work, which never fails to be colorful and moving.

It is unfortunate, though, that the author views the age of the Vikings as a closed period in history, which left its mark and then died, never to be revived. Perhaps we can change his mind within the next few years? Nevertheless, La Fay's writing is not unsympathetic and does not appear to be wrapped up in a condemnatory or anti-pagan bag, as sometimes happens when people write about the Vikings.

The volume has been well researched, usually by on-the-scene examination and field work. La Fay's style reads easily and smoothly, without unduly tiring the reader or getting lost in pedantry or technicalities.

The Vikings may be ordered from National Geographic Special Publications, Washington D C., 20036. The cost is \$4.25 plus postage and handling.

"ODIN LIVES!"

NIETZCHE and NORSE PHILOSOPHY

Norse philosophy as we know it today cannot and must not be identified with the teachings of any one individual. To do so would be more than incorrect, it would be dangerous. Yet, there is much to benefit by a study of the various philosophers who have expressed beliefs which impinge upon Norse thought. The philosophy of Frederick Nietzsche is surely one such example.

Nietzsche has been exploited by various political ideologies, especially the fascist. Such exploitation is misleading and should not be taken as valid. The Nazi movement claimed Nietzsche as its own, but made such theft believable only by ignoring salient facts about the pirated philosopher. Hitler's minions carefully ignored the fact that Nietzsche despised Germans and was quick to claim Polish descent for himself. He considered the splintered nationalisms of the Europe of his day to be stupid affairs, and wished to see them replaced by a broad and unifying European culture. Anti-Semitism was evidently not the fetish to him that it was to the Nazis; one reason for his objection to his sister's marriage to Herr Forster was the latter's anti-Semitism. Nietzsche opposed the State rather than glorifying it, referring to it as a "cold monster" and fighting its steadily growing power over the lives of men. All of these characteristics of Nietzsche, the man, are contrary to fascist belief or the beliefs of any collectivist tyrant, yet by careful editing the Nazis were able to use Nietzsche to further their own ignoble ends - just as they were to use the outward trappings of Germanic paganism while denying the essence.

Despite this exploitation, which has brought with it a certain inevitable amount of discrediting of Nietzsche's philosophy, there are many worthwhile ideas which deserve the careful attention of all of us who are interested in an individualist, non-equalitarian, and natural philosophy. In this article we will attempt to examine a few of these ideas and see what relationship they may have to our own Norse beliefs.

One chief characteristic of Nietzschean thought was its stress on what the philosopher called the will-to-live, the affirmation of the life force and vitality and the total rejection of its opposite. He celebrates the Dionysian man, whose dynamic, creative, ecstatic frenzy gives him an overpowering, and overflowing exuberance and a spirit of vitality. The Dionysian man, Nietzsche writes, is "a formula of highest affirmation (emphasis in the original), born of fullness and overfullness, a yea-saying without reserve to suffering's self, to guilt's self, to all that is questionable and strange in existence itself." He speaks of Dionysian pessimism, a tragic, realistic approach to life. The Dionysian hero is so full of confidence and so strong that he welcomes the challenges and the buffetings

of life rather than avoiding them or dreading them as lesser men would do. He is a man who would seek them out, looking for a challenge to his courage and ability, did they not come to him of their own accord in the natural course of life. Nietzsche again and again expounds this idea of a vitality and exuberance which is so strong and so insistent, so very life affirming, that it expresses itself under the most trying and unfavorable circumstances. It forms one of the keystone beliefs in the philosophy of Nietzsche. In fact, the Dionysian man gave Nietzsche an answer to fatalism. Nietzsche taught what he called the Eternal Recurrence, by which he meant that all things occur over and over again, in a vast and unbreakable cycle of repetition. What is happening now has happened before, and will happen many more times. This fatalism, however, does not take into consideration Dionysian man, who by his vitality conquers the circumstances before him, exercising his will. Thus free will is affirmed despite the tendency of the universe to fatalism.

Here we see a parallel to our own Norse beliefs. Our religion is definitely life-affirming; not for us are the meek and the modest in life. We revel in our humanity and in our "naturalness." We believe in indulging all our natural and healthy instincts. Asceticism is foreign to us. Our thirst for life, our energy, our restless desire to experience new things and to accomplish great things takes us out of the morass that is the masses, and has a certain element of the Dionysian to it. The greatest heroes of the Norsemen were definitely Dionysian types such as Nietzsche seems to be referring to in his writings. They were strong, self-confident, self-indulgent, and exercised their will to achieve their desires and to shape their world, in defiance to those who would bow to any inexorable fate.

A second basis of Nietzschean philosophy is the Will to Power. The Will to Power is the basis of Nietzschean morality. Since the "death of God," it is necessary to find a new standard by which to live, a standard founded upon truth. Nietzsche found in Darwin's support he needed for his own concept of Will, since Darwin's theory of evolution saw the struggle to exist, the affirmation of life in its most basic and primeval form, as the process underlying biological evolution. Nietzsche, however, carried Darwin a step further, for he was concerned not merely with the will to exist, but the will to live. Life is vitality, energy, self-assertion - power! The basis of morality, Nietzsche declared, must be this Will to Power. This means, not that "good" may be determined simply by asking what is conducive to the gaining of power, but rather that the man who lives in accordance with the Will to Power, who is strong and self-assertive, will have within him the inherent standards declaring what is noble or what is ignoble.

This morality is a morality of the elite. It is the rare man who can accept these standards or practice them, and such

men elevate themselves above the level of the masses. According to Nietzsche, only the Superman (of whom more later) was truly capable of realizing the Will to Power. However, even the weaklings, the common herd, experienced a need for the satisfaction of the Will to Power, though, because of their very weakness, such satisfaction must be accomplished by indirect means. They are unable to truly affirm life, so they devise a morality which is anti-life, but which still enables them to survive and to gain power. Their morality constructs praise weakness, defeat, humility, and restraint, and preach the "virtues" of pity and an artificial love of everyone, to include one's enemies. These traits are an attempt to evade conflict and to dodge the real issues of life. They proclaim as evil such things as exalt the exceptional man, and set him apart from the rest of humanity - "voluptuousness, power of passion, and selfishness." The followers of these philosophies of weakness are incapable of these things and, because they cannot compete with the strong and vital persons at whose hands they stand to lose, they seek to pull down this non-conforming and life affirming minority. Democracy promotes the belief that all men are equal, and in the process destroys the distinction between the noble and the base. Socialism would abolish those who had proven their superiority by succeeding. Christianity fosters those principles which would fetter the elite, and breeds egalitarianism.

There is little here with which we can argue. Life is based on struggle and only through struggle can man find virtue and the development of noble characteristics - independence, individuality, courage, persistence and strength. There can be no doubt that the philosophies of weakness, such as total democracy, socialism, and Christianity mentioned by Nietzsche, do act as anti-aristocratic and anti-individualist forces designed to emasculate the elite or the nonconformist. Our Norse beliefs require the utmost efforts from us; they demand that we at least attempt to rise above the herd, to make ourselves live in accordance with a heroic creed. Submissiveness, humility and the avoidance of life's conflicts is the antithesis of our way.

Is a true nobility to be found in the Superman, in those who practice the Will to Power? Does the cultivation of this exuberance, this strength and self confidence, invariably impart a knowledge of the distinction between the noble and the base? A skeptic will point to the bullies of the world or to the arrogance of those such as Hitler's SS. Surely these seem to be possessed of the Will to Power, and even more surely are they lacking in even the rudiments of nobility. Is Nietzsche therefore in error? Not necessarily. Far from having the strong, dominant ego of the Superman or the Dionysian, these personalities have pitifully undernourished egos which must be

constantly sustained by excess. They are, in psychological terms, compensating for unhealthy egos. The healthy person, with a truly secure ego, does not need cruelty for he is not constantly trying to reassure himself of anything. The man who exercises his Will to Power, who is truly strong and self-confident, will know the base from the noble.

The Nietzschean ideal as E.L. Allen puts it is "realized in the man who raises himself above his fellows by his powers of body and mind, making no apology for his intrinsic superiority but boldly living it out. He will be hard, pitiless, and stern with himself and with others, since these are the health-giving qualities." The Superman "will be the strong, alert, self-confident but self-disciplined individual, self-creating and lifted high above the nameless multitude." Such a concept is in keeping with the Norse tradition - an elite, an aristocracy, based not on birth, race, or social position but on individual effort and individual attainment. The free individual will make of himself what he can, and no limitations will be placed on those who aspire to succeed or to excel.

Nietzsche's statements on war have earned him great calumny and stand as his most controversial utterances in Thus Spake Zarathustra he wrote:

Ye shall love peace as a means to new wars - and short peace better than long. . . Do ye say that a good cause halloweth even war? I say to you, a good war halloweth any cause. War and courage have done greater things than charity.

Some argue that this was meant in a sheerly metaphorical vein, and that Nietzsche was talking about "warriors of knowledge" rather than literal warfare. Though the Norse philosophy on war is deserving of an article to itself, suffice to say that indeed war and courage have done greater things than charity. As General Patton stated, battle brings out the best in man, such as courage, devotion, and determination and erases the base. Naturally there are exceptions, and much depends upon the cultural conditioning one has received. Still, the Norse religious beliefs on war are a far cry from the Christian and "humanitarian" beliefs on the subject.

Nietzsche will provide valuable food for thought for anyone interested in the Norse religion. He offers an alternative to the Christian philosophy that is based on strength and self-assertion rather than the predigested pulp of the collectivist philosophies. He deserves careful -and discriminating - study.

ECO-CORNER

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

Protecting our environment isn't up to some anonymous government agency, nor up to a lobbying group or some organization. In the final analysis, it is up to what you as an individual responsible for your actions, do. Remember, as a follower of the Norse religion you have a religious and philosophical interest in the environment besides the sheer matter of physical survival. While you are postponing action, the situation worsens: stripmining disturbs 660 acres per day, the air gets dirtier and the mountains of garbage and waste mount.

Here are two things that you can do, beginning right now. Neither require any expense, in fact, both will save you money. What is more, both of them will help you to get in shape, a worthy Viking goal in itself. You have heard both of them before - but this time, do something about them!

* The average citizen in a Western industrial nation will produce 100 pounds of food garbage per year. This is waste on a tragic scale, especially when you consider that most of us eat too much for our own health! If you eat less you will consume less food, of course, but you will also use less packaging, be it paper or plastic. Simply by eating less you will be helping to solve the environmental problem. Use your vegetable garbage (but not your meat garbage) in a compost pile, or throw it into the shrubbery to recycle itself.

* Don't ride everywhere you go. Walk, or ride a bicycle. You'll be healthier for it, you will save money, never have to fumble for change for the parking meter, or search for a parking place. You'll have cleaner air, too.

It's simple. Begin to apply these two steps today, and you will be living your religion in two ways: by protecting nature and by getting your own body back into condition.

Want to do something else for your religion? Stop right now and go through your house, turning out all the lights burning unnecessarily or all the appliances which may be on but which are not being used. Turn off that dripping faucet, too.

 "A pacifist male" is a contradiction in terms. Most self-described "pacifists" are not pacific, they simply assume false colors. When the wind changes, they hoist the Jolly Roger.
 - Robert Heinlein's "Lazarus Long"

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