

An Overview of the Ancient Germanic "Religion"

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There is a proliferation of interest in Germanic Heathenism that has manifested itself in our popular culture. We can observe this phenomenon in the recent release of video games like "God of War Ragnarok," the surging popularity of TV series such as "Vikings," and Marvel movies featuring Thor. The culture and mythology of pre-Christian Scandinavia have once again captured the attention of many. This renewed interest is entirely understandable, given that this realm is exceptionally captivating, teeming with a diverse pantheon of Gods, mythical creatures, valiant heroes, and compelling narratives that have permeated contemporary popular culture in recent years. However, it prompts us to inquire: What do we truly comprehend about the religions of the ancient Germanic peoples, as deciphered through archaeological evidence and scholarly research? And how do these influences shape the contemporary resurgence of Germanic Heathenism?

When I mention Germanic religion, I am, of course, referring to something rather specific. Present-day religion in Scandinavia encompasses a wide range of beliefs. In addition to traditional Protestant Christianity, non-Western religious belief systems such as Islam, Hinduism, and various others are on the rise in Scandinavia due to mass immigration from Third World countries. When I discuss Germanic religions in this context, I am primarily addressing the religious practices that prevailed in this region before the ascendancy of Christianity. This includes venerable deities such as Odin, Thor, Frigga, Freyja, and Frey, to name just a few.

It's essential to acknowledge that when addressing an entire religious tradition, or perhaps multiple traditions, spanning many centuries and evolving across various regions, it is impossible to present a comprehensive narrative in a single discussion. Germanic Heathenism did not have a singular theology. Therefore, in this essay, I will concentrate on specific aspects. My goal is to provide a general overview of Heathen-Germanic religious and cultural traditions that should be kept in mind by modern Germanic Heathens.

The Germanic people held a belief in numerous Gods and various supernatural beings, which is commonly known as polytheism. These Gods, along with their families, were frequently depicted in ways that closely resembled humans, complete with distinct personalities. They displayed a diverse array of behaviors, including engaging in conflicts, experiencing love, forming sexual relationships, and encountering deception. Essentially, their concept of deities shares similarities with the belief systems of other ancient polytheistic cultures, such as the ancient Greeks, Celts, and other Indo-European societies, as well as with the Egyptians and many Semitic peoples.

Certainly, many of the religious cults and myths in the Germanic countries are intertwined with a broader Indo-European heritage. Direct connections can be identified between the myths and deities across various Germanic regions, Italy, Greece, Gaul, Persia, and even India. An illustration of this phenomenon is evident in the names of the Gods. For instance, the Greek term for God or deity, "theos," has a direct correlation with the name of the supreme God in their pantheon, Zeus (or Jupiter in Roman religion). This word evolves into "dios" in Latin and is associated with the Sanskrit term for Gods, "Devas," among other linguistic parallels. Intriguingly, the Norse God Tyr also etymologically originates from this term, sharing its linguistic roots with Zeus, despite the distinct roles they play in their respective pantheons.

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In any case, the Gods held a central place in the daily lives and societal structure of the ancient Germanic people, as well as all heathen folks. Their world was inhabited not only by Gods but also by Giants, elves, and other supernatural beings, each with their specific place in the cosmology. It was crucial to maintain the proper order of this cosmos, and the Gods, particularly those from the Aesir lineage (including Odin, Thor, and Balder), resided in Asgard. To ensure order and protection, humans in Midgard had to appeal to the Gods through various rites, offerings, sacrifices, and other religious practices as a form of worship and exchange. In return, the Gods provided protection, often defending humans against the inhabitants of Utgard or Jotunheim, including the arch-enemies of the Gods known as the Jotnar or Giants. More importantly, they gave us the means to protect ourselves through the use of runes, galdr, and seidr magic.

I will only briefly touch upon the intricate details of this cosmology and mythology in this essay. I will endeavor to outline the general framework of the heathen spiritual customs, which share similarities with other polytheistic religions from various parts of the world. When discussing Germanic Heathen spirituality, it is essential to clarify that we are referring to a distinct set of beliefs that endured for thousands of years across a vast expanse of territories separated by mountains, rivers, seas, and even oceans. Communication was virtually nonexistent, and most people had no idea about the beliefs and practices of other tribes, villages, or communities. Since there were no written records, the stories, customs, and practices gradually evolved from one generation to the next.

It is crucial to recognize that when dealing with an entire religious tradition or multiple traditions that spanned centuries and evolved across different regions, providing a comprehensive narrative in a single discussion is impossible. Therefore, we need to focus on specific aspects. Thus, I will try and provide a general overview of this religious and cultural tradition.

The Germanic people believed in numerous Gods and superhuman beings, a belief system commonly referred to as polytheism. These Gods and their families were often depicted in very human-like ways, with distinct personalities. They exhibited a wide range of behaviors, including conflicts, love, sexual relationships, and deceit. In essence, their concept of Gods shares similarities with other ancient polytheistic religions, such as those in ancient Greece or Egypt.

We have access to several primary sources for our research, with a diverse range of perspectives. First among these is the work of Snorri Sturluson, an Icelandic poet, historian, and politician who also embraced Christianity. His "Prose Edda" and "Heimskringla" provide valuable insights into our subject matter.

Another significant source is Saxo Grammaticus' "History of the Danes," specifically books one through nine, which hold relevance to the Heathenry we are exploring. It's worth noting that Saxo was a devoted Christian who strongly opposed Heathenism, actively working to eradicate it from Christian domains.

Last but certainly not least is the renowned "Poetic Edda," also known as the Codex Regius. Tradition attributes its recording to Sæmundr the Learned, sometimes referred to as the Saemundr Edda. Although rediscovered in the 17th century, it is believed to have been transcribed in the 13th century, potentially influenced by Christian perspectives.

Beyond these core texts, we have a wealth of sagas and scaldic poems, some attributed to known authors and others not. Many of these were likely authored by Christian monks who

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recorded the available tales, often infusing their own viewpoints, and safeguarded them within monastic collections.

Although the majority of historical sources originate from Christian authors, there is a notable departure from this Christian-centric perspective in the work of the Roman historian Tacitus. Tacitus's writings shed light on the Germanic tribes and offer valuable insights into the religious practices of the second century. Consequently, as we delve into these historical accounts, it becomes imperative to carefully assess their reliability, potential biases, and to maintain a vigilant approach when interpreting them.

Let's begin with the Prose Edda by Snorri Sturluson.

Iceland's early settlement in the late 9th century by the Norse marked the beginning of a significant historical transition towards Christianity, which culminated around the year 1000. This shift from heathenry was rather sudden, as for nearly three centuries, heathen practices were tolerated to some extent. However, as time passed, the Kings of Norway took a harsh stance against heathenism and eventually banned it.

Before these events transpired, Icelanders established an educational institution in the region of Oddi, situated in the southwest part of the island. It was here that Saemund the Younger, a descendant of the learned Saemundr, taught subjects such as myths, Germanic religious practices, and Germanic magic. During his adolescence, Snorri, a prominent figure in Icelandic literature, resided in Oddi and attended the Oddi School set up by Saemundr the Wise around 1100 C.E. Oddi School.

Interestingly, this school would later gain a somewhat ominous reputation. The Christian Church, in an effort to distance itself from the school's heathen teachings, referred to it as the "Black School" and falsely claimed it was associated with devil worship and "Black Magic."

These documents appear to have been meticulously crafted as a handbook for comprehending Norse myths, many of which have unfortunately been lost to the sands of time. Within their pages lie concise summaries and explanations of these myths, along with profound insights into the workings of certain elements of Norse poetry, such as "kennings." Kennings, in essence, are poetic expressions or metaphors that skillfully describe people and objects through allegory.

However, there is an intriguing aspect to Snorri's work. Some contend that Christian teachings may have influenced him, and while this may hold some truth, it is more probable that he integrated a code pertaining to Germanic initiation rituals and the utilization of both galdr and seidr magic. An illustrative instance of this can be found in his depiction of the Yggdrasil tree, which diverges from the description in the Poetic Edda. Snorri opted for 9 worlds, whereas the Poetic Edda enumerates at least 12 worlds, perhaps even more. The 9 worlds, it turns out, are actually psycho-spiritual constructs representing facets of the human soul and consciousness. The journey between these worlds, which follows a well-defined structure, serves as an initiatory process that the magician undertakes.

Snorri included a prologue in the first section of the four books of the Prose Edda. This prologue consists of a euhemerized Christian account of the origins of Norse mythology. In this narrative, the Nordic Gods are portrayed as human Trojan warriors who departed from Troy following the city's fall, a narrative parallel to Virgil's Aeneid.

Certainly, Snorri incorporated this prologue as a strategic move to enable himself to subsequently explore the subject of the Germanic Gods and their religious beliefs and practices without facing the risk of condemnation by the Church for witchcraft, potentially leading to his execution by burning.

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Despite Snorri's attempt to disguise his love for heathenry through the use of euphemism, the Prose Edda remains a valuable resource. It contains references to myths that are otherwise missing and provides insights into the myths we do possess. Additionally, it occasionally elaborates on existing information, even if it contradicts other sources, primarily the Poetic Edda. Such contradictions are not problematic; instead, they offer multiple perspectives on the past. It's important to remember that when reading the Prose Edda, you are essentially examining a commentary and summary of myths from a ritualistic standpoint, with the aim of preserving knowledge for those who wish to learn about Germanic Magic and keep it alive within a society dominated by a foreign cult.

Next, let's delve into the works of Saxo Grammaticus, the author of "The History of the Danes." Saxo, a Danish bishop, historian, and devoted Christian, penned his work during the transitional period between the 12th and 13th centuries. He chronicled a version of the traditional history of Danish culture, spanning across 16 volumes. However, the ones pertinent to heathenry are books one through nine.

In contrast to Snorri's use of euphemism, which aimed to pacify the Church and was confined to the introductions of the Prose Edda and the Heimskringla, Saxo consistently employed euphemism when referring to specific deities. According to Saxo, every being discussed in mythology was a part of the physical world, actively engaging with Danish history. Saxo's unique Christian perspective on euphemism was employed to discredit the heathen Gods as much as possible. Given the central role of the Gods in Germanic culture, he couldn't simply dismiss them. Instead, he portrayed Odin as an elderly wizard residing somewhere in Scandinavia and even ridiculed the Norse for believing he was a God. He went as far as asserting that Odin utilized "Black Magic" to extend his life through the centuries. Saxo justified his narration of legends by describing the seemingly absurd beliefs of the Norse and their veneration of these various wizardly beings.

In Chapter 20 of Book One, he wrote that during that era, there were three diabolical species of wizards, each practicing their own miraculous illusions. Saxo proceeded to detail Giants of immense stature, the practitioners of magical arts who engaged in battles with them, and the offspring born from these unions, who cunningly deceived the barbarians into believing they were Gods. He even claimed that Odin forbade the practice of *saidr* Magic.

He further expounded on this by stating that it was not surprising that barbarians succumbed to their peculiar enchantments and were drawn into the rituals of a debased religion, as even the intelligent Romans had been enticed into venerating similar mortals with divine honors. I mention these matters so that when I expound upon omens and wonders at length, the skeptical reader may not dispute them. After this diversion, I shall resume my narrative.

Saxo Grammaticus can be a source that we should study but we must look at everything he wrote, not with a grain of salt, but with a ton of salt.

When delving into the realm of ancient Germanic Heathenism, it is imperative to understand the sources from which scholars derive their knowledge. This is not a straightforward matter but one of paramount importance. Several key sources exist to which scholars turn in order to unravel the mysteries of this ancient belief system.

First and foremost, archaeological findings play a pivotal role. These findings encompass preserved places or objects from the era in question. Examples include gravesites, statues, and cultic artifacts that offer valuable clues regarding the practices of these religions during that time.

Another essential source is runestones or runic inscriptions. Take, for instance, the Jadesberg Stone located in Western Sweden, dating back to the 6th century. It stands as one of

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the earliest surviving runestones in Sweden, marked by its use of the Elder Futhark script. Though its message is relatively straightforward – essentially identifying the author and an Erulian – scholars continue to debate some finer details and implications. The individual behind the inscription might have possessed expertise in runes or rituals, but uncertainty lingers.

Despite their brevity, runes often showcase aesthetic beauty and contain vital information. They occasionally offer insights into Gods, myths, historical events, and even incorporate visual elements. Many allude to place names that hold significant importance in deciphering ancient Germanic religion. Numerous locations throughout Scandinavia bear names linked to Gods.

Furthermore, literary sources enrich our understanding. Poems, tales, and sagas, initially recited during special occasions in ancient and medieval times, eventually transitioned into written form, primarily during the Middle Ages. The most celebrated among these sources are the Eddas.

There are two Eddas that constitute the primary sources of material about the Gods. Firstly, the Prose Edda, also known as the Elder Edda, comprises a collection of poems from various times and places. Despite uncertainties about their dating (some potentially influenced by Christian theology), their compilation into a single work offers a plethora of narratives about heroes, Gods, and pivotal events such as Ragnarok and the creation of the world.

The second type is the Prose Edda, often attributed to the 13th-century Icelandic Christian monk Snorri Sturluson. Originally intended as an instructional guide for composing scaldic poetry, it inadvertently evolved into a treasure trove of Norse myths and stories.

Aside from these primary sources, external accounts from Roman writers and Christian missionaries offer additional perspectives on the culture and religion of the Germanic peoples, shedding light on the intricate tapestry of ancient Germanic beliefs. There are also accounts of the famous Arab traveler, Ibn Fadlan, who came into contact with Norsemen in the heart of Russia.

Now, these sources, of course, need to be viewed critically to some extent and approached carefully because they likely contain inherent bias. They are typically authored by outsiders, often with a critical perspective towards this religion or culture. Unfortunately, reconstructionists often fail to consider this when delving deep into the "historical records." They display excessive enthusiasm in their translations and uncritical acceptance of the source material, believing that everything should be taken as "historical fact." I've observed that many reconstructionists tend to be members of reenactment associations, dressing up in Civil War uniforms and participating in battle reenactments, or they create a virtual U.S.S. Starship Enterprise from Star Trek and become part of the crew. They seem to desire the creation of a fantasy world in which they can immerse themselves. However, historical sources can still be consulted as long as we approach them with scientific rigor and a critical, historical mindset.

These are also significant sources. Almost all of these sources, except for a few runic inscriptions, date from the period following a substantial cultural and linguistic shift that occurred around the 6th century. During this time, the language of Scandinavia underwent significant changes, and the religious practices appeared to be increasingly influenced by their Germanic neighbors to the south.

Consequently, gathering information about the religious tradition before the 6th century becomes even more challenging, except for a few well-informed conjectures. Therefore, in this episode, our primary focus will be on the practice of religion during what is known as the Viking Age. This era extends from the 8th century to roughly the 11th-12th century.

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What do we truly understand about religion in ancient Scandinavia based on the sources I've mentioned? These sources provide insight into their religious traditions, which were polytheistic in nature, encompassing numerous Gods, deities, and other supernatural beings. The mythology of this religion is rich with captivating tales involving colossal monsters, Giants, apocalyptic scenarios, festive gatherings, and much more. It is evident that the ancient Germanic populace led lives profoundly intertwined with this religious tradition. The deities held substantial influence in people's lives, regardless of how they may have interpreted them. Furthermore, there existed a structured order of existence in which both Gods and humans played significant roles, necessitating the preservation of this balance through ritual practices.

As we discussed in previous episodes, it is essential to approach myths and mythology with the appropriate perspective. In our current culture, heavily influenced by Abrahamic religions, we are accustomed to the idea of a single, definitive account of events concerning the origin of the world or various sacred myths. However, this is not the norm for most ancient mythologies. Myths are narratives that are continually evolving and adapting based on their context. They can be likened to living organisms, constantly changing and developing. Numerous variations of a story exist, all of which convey the same fundamental truth or message.

When examining our sources on Germanic mythology, we encounter a striking diversity. To some extent, it's challenging to categorize ancient Germanic belief systems as a singular "religion" in the conventional sense, akin to the Abrahamic frameworks, defined by specific characteristics. Instead, it resembles an intricate tapestry of interconnected religious phenomena, exhibiting significant variations based on location, community, and era. Individuals conceived and enacted their religious convictions and rituals in a multitude of distinctive and diverse ways. For instance, mythology has numerous versions and conflicting narratives, rendering it difficult to construct a comprehensive or systematic portrayal.

We can examine the primary sources available to us, such as the Poetic Edda, to form the basis of our overarching discussion. However, we must remain cognizant of the fact that this presents an incomplete picture, and there exist numerous variations on any given subject. We must presume that much of the lore and myths have been lost to history, never having been recorded.

The ancient Germanic people perceived their existence as encompassing distinct realms or abodes. At the very heart of their cosmology lies Asgard, the dwelling place of the Gods, specifically the Aesir deities. Positioned at the absolute center of Asgard, and consequently at the utmost core of the cosmos, stands the colossal tree known as Yggdrasil. This tree arguably serves as the most ubiquitous symbol within Germanic religion as a whole. Yggdrasil symbolizes the tree of life, functioning as an axis around which the world revolves and from which all events transpire. Given that it is the Gods in Asgard who, in a sense, shape the world, tree symbolism prevails in religions worldwide. It embodies the axis mundi or the central point of the world, signifying life itself.

Germanic mythology is distinctive in several aspects, with Yggdrasil standing as a prime illustration. This immense tree draws sustenance from a well at its roots, where we encounter mythical entities known as the Norns. Among these Norns, three bear names: Urdr, Verdandi, and Skuld. They play a pivotal role in ensuring the tree's nourishment and are responsible for weaving the threads of Fate, symbolizing the life threads and destinies of both humans and the world. Yggdrasil then disperses this nourishment extensively through its sprawling branches, creating a profound image that transcends the realm of Asgard.

Beyond Asgard, which serves as the central realm of the Gods, exists the world where humans reside, known as Midgard. As the name implies, this world lies between Asgard and the outer realms. You can visualize this cosmic arrangement as concentric circles, with Asgard at its core. Beyond Asgard lies Midgard, inhabited by humans, and further outward are regions with more enigmatic appellations. One such place is Utgard, which essentially translates to "the outside world" or "outer place." It is where various other forces and beings dwell, often in opposition to the Gods of Asgard, particularly their archenemies, the Jotnar or Giants. Utgard is sometimes used interchangeably with Jotunheim, which is the Giants' home. However, at times, Jotunheim appears to be just one facet of the broader category of Utgard.

In this cosmic perspective, Midgard, our world, serves as a crucial intermediary between the Gods in Asgard and their adversaries on the opposing side. We, as humans, exist between the realms or forces of order (the Gods) and chaos (the Jotnar). This positioning is significant for understanding our role within the cosmos, albeit it is a simplified overview.

Norse mythology also frequently mentions the concept of nine worlds, with Asgard and Midgard being just two of them. In the "Voluspa," the first poem in the Poetic Edda, which is one of the most renowned texts in Norse mythology, the Volva or Seer describes these worlds as follows: "I remember the Giants born so long ago in those ancient days. They raised me. I remember nine worlds, nine giantesses, and the seed from which Yggdrasil sprang." Unfortunately, the specifics of these worlds are somewhat obscure, but some scholars have made educated guesses based on references in other sources. In fact, we must ask - are there really only nine worlds? The ancient Germanic people used several sacred numbers to describe multitudes. Three of these were 1, 3, and 9. One was used when there was a single person or thing. If there were a few, such as two, three, or four, they might use the number three. But if there were many more, they would use nine. It didn't matter to them if the numbers they used were exact; it was more about understanding whether there were 1, a few, or a large multitude.

When it comes to the nine worlds, we hear familiar names such as Asgard, Midgard, Vanaheim, Hel, Helheim, Niflhel, Ljossalheim (home of the Light Elves), Alfheim (home of the Elves), Jotunheim (home of the Giants), Muspelheim (a realm of fire), Svartalheim (home of the dark elves), Niflheim (a cold and dark place, sometimes linked to the realm of the dead), and Nidavellir (the home of the dwarves). Additionally, Andlagr (the second heaven) and Vidblainn (the third heaven where Gimli is located) are mentioned. The relationships between these worlds remain uncertain, but their names provide clues about the beings that inhabit Germanic mythology, which extends beyond humans and Gods to include elves, Giants, dwarves, and more.

In this intricate cosmology, Yggdrasil and Asgard occupy central positions, radiating into various worlds. At the very edge of the world, in the far reaches of Utgard, lies a colossal serpent known as the Midgard Serpent. This serpent, born of Loki and Angrboda, encircles the entire world and holds it together. If this serpent were to perish or be disturbed, the entire world would crumble. Its depiction as an ouroboros, biting its own tail, symbolizes concepts like eternity. This serpent plays a pivotal role in Germanic cosmology and will have a significant part in the events of Ragnarok.

One captivating aspect of Germanic mythology is that it charts the complete history of the world, from its inception to its ultimate demise. This cosmic narrative unfolds like an inevitable cycle, detailed in the sources, encompassing the birth of the universe, the emergence of the Gods, and ultimately, the cataclysmic end known as Ragnarok.

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Ragnarok is on the horizon, and the Gods must make preparations. However, let's step back a bit and examine where this all begins. At the dawn of existence, before the world, Gods, or anything else, there was a primordial void or chaotic state. From this void emerged two beings: a colossal, primeval giant named Ymir and the primeval cow, Audumbla.

Several significant events follow. From Ymir's body, other beings are born, specifically the first Giants. Ymir serves as the ancestor of all Giants. From Ymir, several races of Giants are born: the Jotnar, who can be either enemies or friends of the Gods, sometimes marrying into the Aesir and Vanir. Another race of Giants is born from Ymir, known as the Thurses. This second race of Giants is described as heinous, gigantic beings, known as Thurses or Trolls.

Meanwhile, Audumbla starts licking salt from rocks, leading to the appearance of a man's head, Buri. This event marks the beginning of another line of beings, with Buri being the first God. From Buri, a son called Bor is born, and eventually, Bor marries one of Ymir's offspring, Bestla. They have three sons named Odin, Vili, and Ve. These three children are the first Gods, and Viktor Rydberg speculates that they are the progenitors of the three divine races: the Aesir, the Vanir, and the Light Elves. Odin, Vili, and Ve are also known by other names: Odin, Lodurr, and Hoenir. Rydberg hypothesizes that from Odin, the race of Aesir was born; from Vili/Lodurr, the race known as the Vanir emerged, and from Ve/Hoenir, the race of Light Elves came into being.

Rydberg ponders the origins of the Vanir and Light Elves. While we can ascertain that Odin is the All-Father of the Aesir, there is no indication regarding the beginnings of the Vanir and Light Elves. Rydberg believes that the Vanir are the offspring of Ve, and the Light Elves originated from Vili. He mentions that aside from their involvement in the creation of life, particularly the human species, they have no significant role in the creation of the cosmos. It is questions like these that we, as modern-day heathens, must pose and not shy away from simply because historical records do not mention them.

So, from its inception, two distinct lines of beings emerge: the Giants and the Gods. The Giants are the offspring of Ymir, but simultaneously, the Gods themselves are offspring, stemming from both Ymir and Audumbla. This duality can be somewhat confusing, but these two lines of beings have existed since the beginning and have been engaged in constant conflict.

The narrative takes an intriguing turn when the three God brothers decide to rebel and kill Ymir. From Ymir's body, they craft the universe or multiverse. His legs become mountains, his blood transforms into the waters, and his flesh shapes the Earth. This not only explains the cosmic origin of the profound conflict between the Gods and the Giants but also connects with similar creation myths found in various cultures worldwide, such as Tiamat in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt's cosmology. At the same time, as I already mentioned, from Odin, Vili, and Ve spring three divine races: Aesir, Vanir, and the Light Elves.

Now, with the world formed and the Gods firmly established, they yearn for a peaceful existence in Asgard. Regrettably, their plans are disrupted when three female Giants suddenly materialize. This account, discovered in the *Voluspa*, remains enigmatic and arduous to decipher. One interpretation posits that they are, in fact, a singular Giantess who meets her demise thrice, only to be reborn each time. However, one aspect remains unmistakable: the arrival of these giantesses ignites a conflict between the two divine races—the Aesir and Vanir—bringing an end to the Golden Age in Asgard and Midgard. Peace is ultimately restored, as both divine races come to the realization that the Giants were the root cause of the war.

As a consequence of this turmoil, the Gods feel compelled to fashion new beings to help them avert the recurrence of such a devastating war. They begin by magically fashioning the race

of Dwarves from the maggots found in Ymir's flesh, who prove to be adept weapon-crafters for the Gods. Moreover, during this period, the Gods also bring forth humans, initially intended as aides. The creation story of humans varies among sources, presenting two distinct narratives. In the *Voluspa*, it implies that the Gods breathe life into two logs in Midgard, endowing them with dual sexes—male and female. The Gods then bestowed form upon this new life, breathed life into them, and granted self-awareness. It remains ambiguous whether they created all life forms in Midgard or solely humans. However, an alternative tale in Snorri's *Prose Edda* specifically describes the creation of man and woman. In this narrative, Odin and his two brothers, Lodurr and Hoenir, are responsible for shaping humanity from two tree trunks. Is this a separate creation, specifically giving rise to the first human man and woman from the Ash and Elm trees?

Irrespective of the version, Odin consistently plays a pivotal role in the creation of humanity. In both accounts, the initial human beings, Ask and Embla, bear names etymologically linked to trees, potentially hinting at a symbolic connection between humans and trees. This connection's significance is underscored by the central role of Yggdrasil, the colossal tree at the heart of Asgard, which upholds the entire cosmos.

In the "*Voluspa*," the creation of humans is described as follows: "Three powerful and passionate Gods departed from Asgard to Midgard. There, they discovered Ask and Embla, feeble and devoid of fate, lacking breath, souls, hair, or voice. They appeared inhuman. Odin bestowed upon them breath, Honir granted them souls, and Lodurr endowed them with hair and human countenances." This suggests that although they were alive, they were not yet truly human. In the first creation tale, the three Gods created life, including trees, and in the second creation story, they took two trees and fashioned the first human man and woman.

Finally, it is essential to note that Germanic mythology also encompasses a vision of an inevitable future: Ragnarok. This catastrophic event will be triggered by the demise of Balder, Odin's beloved son, at the hands of Loki, Odin's adopted brother. This occurrence sets into motion a series of events culminating in Ragnarok, where the Giants, led by Loki and accompanied by the Midgard Serpent and Fenrir, an enormous wolf-like creature, engage in a cataclysmic war against the Gods.

During Ragnarok, all will engage in combat. Fenrir will devour Odin, but Thor, his son, will avenge him by battling the Midgard Serpent, resulting in their mutual destruction. This catastrophic event leads to the complete devastation of the world. However, amid the chaos, a glimmer of hope emerges. The *Voluspa* hints that after Ragnarok, a form of renewal will occur. A new world will rise from the ashes of the old one. The *Voluspa* states, "I see the Earth rise a second time from out of the sea green. Once more, waterfalls flow, and eagles fly overhead, hunting for fish among the mountain peaks. The Aesir meet on Idavollr and reflect on the bones of the Midgard Serpent. There, they recall the great events of Ragnarok and Odin's ancient wisdom."

The poem encompasses a narrative that spans from the creation of the Gods in the universe to its eventual demise and rebirth. From the depths of a new ocean will rise a New Earth. Within it, a hall more magnificent than sunlight, thatched with gold, is known as Gimli. A new race of courageous individuals will dwell there, experiencing joy throughout their lives.

Regarding religion, the Germanic heathens, like other heathens worldwide, did not have a formal religion. This offers a broad overview of some of the most popular and frequently recounted aspects of Norse mythological accounts, which were considered a way of life rather than a structured religious system. In this worldview, numerous Gods were revered by humans through various practices. People saw themselves inhabiting a world teeming with Gods, Giants,

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monsters, dwarves, elves, and various other creatures that held significant meaning for them. These entities profoundly shaped their lives, with myths, stories, and characters serving as integral aspects of life in the Germanic regions during that era. Daily existence was characterized by constant interactions with these deities and other cosmic forces.

In contrast to the Abrahamic religions, Germanic religious mythology did not prioritize beliefs; instead, it primarily upheld an orthopraxic faith, placing a greater emphasis on actions rather than doctrines. Belief in myths, stories, and Gods was just one facet of this faith. At its core, Germanic worship revolved around individuals' interactions with the Gods, the offerings they presented, and the rituals they conducted.

It's essential to note that the ancient Scandinavian languages lacked an equivalent term for "religion." The closest term, "sidr," conveyed the notion of custom or tradition, reflecting the pragmatic nature of Germanic religion, which centered on customs and practices rather than rigid beliefs. There was no singular church or theology, concepts that were foreign to the ancient heathen peoples of northern Europe. These ideas only gained traction in Europe with the advent of Semitic monotheistic religions from the Middle East. For ancient heathen Europeans, religious beliefs were simply part of their way of life, which varied and evolved over time.

When dealing with spiritual matters related to death, private cults, and making offerings to the Gods in Germanic society, people conducted these activities both publicly and privately. Family life was central, with homesteads serving as the focal point. Within families, various religious rituals and customs were observed, sometimes on a daily basis.

Significant life events, such as births, weddings, and deaths, were accompanied by rituals invoking higher powers, like Freyja, who was associated with fertility. When someone passed away, they were often buried near the homestead with important belongings, ensuring that the deceased still played a role in the family's life. Ancestor worship was prevalent, with families offering food or beverages at the gravesites of their forebears.

The concept of the afterlife in Norse religion was diverse. Some adherents believed in various realms such as Hel, the glittering Fields, and Valhalla, while others held different perspectives. These alternative views included an afterlife governed by Freyja, a beautiful mountain known as Helgafjell, or the realm of the chosen, Odainsaker. This rich diversity serves as a testament to the fluid and intricate nature of Germanic religious beliefs. In addition to these spiritual aspects, the practice of magic and protective spells played a significant role, particularly in the context of childbirth. Ritual experts often called upon protective deities and engaged in magical rituals to ensure the safety of women during labor, with runes frequently featuring prominently in these ceremonies. These practices were deeply ingrained in the customs of Germanic religion.

Various forms of divination were prevalent in ancient cultures. In some instances, sacred sticks inscribed with Runes, a unique form of writing specific to the respective culture, were cast into the air, and the manner in which they landed held profound significance, providing insights into future events and more. This practice, although distinct in its cultural context, was not exclusive to Norse beliefs and could be found in many other societies.

Protective amulets were commonly embraced by ordinary people in Germanic culture. These amulets frequently incorporated Runes, as these characters were believed to possess specific magical powers. Another prevalent form of amulet involved wearing a miniature representation of Thor's hammer, Mjollnir, around one's neck, with the belief that doing so would invoke the protective influence of the God Thor.

Different Gods were associated with various aspects of life and called upon for different purposes. Odin, one of the central deities, was often regarded as the most powerful and a leader among the Gods. In the creation account, he is considered one of the original ancestors of all the Gods and holds a prominent position in mythology. Odin is a versatile God associated with diverse domains, often assuming different disguises. He frequently interacts with humans incognito, using various names, which can be perplexing for those unfamiliar with the mythology. In his most authentic form, Odin is typically depicted with a single eye, accompanied by his two ravens, Hugin and Munin, and his famous eight-legged horse, Sleipnir.

Odin serves as the God of warfare, and offerings were made to him before battles. However, he also encompasses other roles, such as being the God of poetry, shamanic practices, and wisdom, particularly mystical wisdom linked to death and Runes. An intriguing tale in the Poetic Edda recounts Odin hanging himself in the World Tree, Yggdrasil, to gain mystical knowledge about death and the secrets of the runes.

While Odin is undeniably significant, many scholars suggest that he may not have been as widely worshipped as one might assume. Among the elite and specific groups like warriors or poets, Odin was revered. However, for the majority of ordinary people, other Gods were more popular, including Thor, Freyr, and Freyja.

Thor, Odin's son, is a God renowned for his immense strength and his association with thunder. His divine role revolves around the maintenance of order in the world, frequently wielding his iconic hammer, Mjollnir, to engage in battle against Giants and other adversaries who pose a threat to this delicate equilibrium. Thor was celebrated as the honest God, an entity who unflinchingly honored his promises and harbored a special affection for the common people. He would leap into his chariot, which was drawn by two colossal goats, embarking on journeys to confront impending conflicts.

When the sound of rolling thunder resonated through the heavens, it signified that Thor was on the move, riding forth to confront destructive Giants, all in defense of both Asgard and Midgard. In times of need, people invoked his name, beseeching him to bestow the earth with life-nurturing rain, for he was indeed a God of storms.

Thor enjoyed widespread popularity among the pantheon of Gods, with numerous figurines and various references to him scattered throughout Scandinavia. As evident, it was a common practice for individuals to wear miniature replicas of his hammer as amulets around their necks. Additionally, in the divine realm, there exist the deities Freyr and Freyja, who are siblings and belong to a distinct group of Gods known as the Vanir. Freyr, a God of harvest, agriculture, and fertility, is frequently invoked in contexts where these themes hold significance, particularly during the spring season. His connection to fertility is unmistakable in his depictions, often featuring an erect phallus as a symbol of his divine influence.

Freyja is undeniably one of the most intriguing deities among the Norse pantheon. Her origins may trace back to the ancient religious traditions of Scandinavia, possibly predating even the other Indo-European Gods. Much like her brother, she embodies aspects of fertility, sexuality, love, and eroticism, yet her domain extends far beyond these realms. In a manner akin to Odin, she holds dominion over seidr, a mystical practice traditionally associated with women. Additionally, she presides over matters of death and governs a specific realm of the afterlife previously mentioned. Freyja frequently takes center stage in renowned mythological narratives, making her arguably the most pivotal and beloved Goddess in Norse mythology.

While the Gods were evidently of great significance and played a substantial role in the private domain, there were other cosmic forces that also exerted a significant influence on the

lives of the Germanic heathens. Within the confines of their homesteads, rituals involving various collective entities such as elves, disar, norms, and home wrights held a much more prominent position than those involving the actual deities. The latter primarily featured in the public cult, which we will explore shortly.

Among these beings, there existed a collective category known as the "vætter," which comprised supernatural spirits or creatures responsible for inhabiting and safeguarding the land. Specifically, those referred to as "landvætter" were believed to serve as guardian entities for specific locations. Each place was thought to have several vætter looking after it, with their abodes in waters, creeks, rocks, or caves. It was the duty of people to maintain the vætter's contentment, foster good relations with them, and show them respect. Consequently, numerous sources recount how female family members would offer food and beverages to the vætter—a practice that appeared to persist long after the Christianization of the region. Ensuring the vætter's happiness in a particular location could bring various benefits, such as increased crop yields. Conversely, falling out of favor with the vætter might result in less favorable agricultural outcomes.

The private sphere was filled with religious rituals, but what about the public? How did society come together to maintain its relationship with the Gods?

Public cults held great significance in ancient Germanic society. One of its central and vital rituals was the "blot." This ceremony involved a ritual sacrifice where the community gathered at specific times during the year to make offerings to the Gods. There were four major blot festivals annually. The first occurred in spring, celebrating the transition from winter to summer and honoring one of several fertility Goddesses, such as Ostare or Idunn. The second took place on Midsummer, commemorating the death of Balder. In the fall, people expressed gratitude for the summer harvests and prepared for the darker winter months. This blot was associated with the God Freyr, who governed harvest and fertility. Lastly, there was the midwinter blot, likely linked to the solstice, also known as Yule. Interestingly, some aspects of this tradition may have influenced modern Nordic Christmas celebrations. Thor was celebrated by the burning of a straw goat. People would place their requests for the New Year into the straw goat before it was burned. It should be remembered that Odin was always honored during these blots because he was, after all, the All-father. The last day of April and the first day of May were celebrated as a time when one asked for protection against evil forces. It was called by Christians Walpurgisnacht, where people asked the saints to protect them from the evil spells of witches.

Before the Christianization and the introduction of the Julian calendar, the Germanic peoples relied on a Lunisolar calendar to coordinate their heathen seasonal festivals and sacred periods. These festivities included Álfablót, Dísaþlót, Veturnáttablót, and Blötmónað at the onset of winter, Yule and Mōdraniht during the heart of winter, and Hrēþmónað and Sigrlót in the summer half of the year. It's important to note that not all of these holidays were observed universally across heathen Germanic communities. The customs also varied among heathens in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, the British Isles, and Germany (including the Lowlands). Furthermore, customs evolved over the centuries. This is why establishing a unified heathen theology based on reconstructionism is currently deemed unfeasible. It would be akin to Dr. Frankenstein assembling disparate parts from deceased bodies and sewing them together. His efforts merely resulted in creating a monster, which, as history shows, did not end well for the good doctor.

Here are some standard heathen holidays, although they differ from place to place:

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Late December (winter solstice) - Julblot or Yule blót

February - Disablot (Dísablót)

Spring equinox - Vårblot (Spring blót)

Late April to early May - Majblot (May blót)

Summer solstice (Midsummer) - Midsommarblot

Early August - Sensommarblot (Late-Summer blót)

Autumn equinox - Höstblot (Autumn blót)

October to November - Alvablot (Álfablót)

In addition to these, Adam of Bremen records a description of a grand festival held at the Temple at Uppsala every nine years.

The term "blot" had a dual significance, signifying both sacrifice and fortification. This ritual's primary objective was to present offerings to the Gods to reinforce the connection between the divine and the human. Various methods were employed, including offering food and beverages. However, more commonly, it involved the sacrifice of animals. In contrast to modern neo-pagan movements, which emphasize offerings of food and drink, ancient Germanic rituals often featured the sacrifice of animals such as horses, sheep, and goats. Their blood was carefully collected and used for anointing the images or statues of the Gods. The meat from these sacrificed animals was never wasted; instead, it was cooked and shared during a communal feast, thereby strengthening both community bonds and the relationship between the community and the Gods.

The primary mode of religious practice among ancient Germanic people revolved around offerings and sacrifices. Public cult practices primarily centered on animal sacrifice, whereas in private households, offerings typically consisted of food and beverages. Privately sacrificing animals would have been costly. Some scholars have suggested that human sacrifice may have occurred in ancient Scandinavia, especially in earlier periods, but it was likely rare during the Viking Age. These claims should be approached cautiously, as most available sources were written by later Christians who often portrayed pagan practices in a negative light.

These offerings and sacrifices formed the cornerstone of the ancient Germanic religious experience, much like in many other polytheistic traditions. By presenting offerings and fortifying the Gods, while also maintaining positive relations within the community, the Germanic people aimed to establish a state of harmony, both in a literal sense and in terms of social and cosmic order. This objective parallels concepts found in other traditions, such as Dharma in Vedic traditions or Asha in Zoroastrianism.

The question of where these rituals took place is crucial. While a blot could theoretically be conducted anywhere, it was often performed in sacred places or locations associated with the Gods. These sites were sometimes called "horgar," although the exact meaning is uncertain, possibly suggesting an altar or a pile of stones where rituals took place. Some scholars argue that dedicated buildings, similar to temples, known as "hof," may have existed for such cults. However, there is an ongoing debate about the nature and role of these "hof" structures. They could have functioned as equivalents to Christian churches or may have been used for rituals.

Ritual specialists played pivotal roles in leading public cultic ceremonies. These specialists included the "Thulr," an orator and knowledgeable sage well-versed in all aspects of the cult and mythology. There were also men and woman known as "Godi" or "Gydia." They represented the male and female forms of the same title, respectively. These individuals served

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as the counterparts of priests in ancient Norse religion. This was especially true in Iceland. They presided over public rituals such as major blóts. It's worth noting that these individuals weren't exclusively devoted to religious duties; they often held political roles as well, reflecting the strong connection between religion and political power. Ultimately, the king typically held ultimate authority over the cult and ensured the proper performance of rituals.

I've briefly discussed the practice known as Seidr, which is believed to be a form of Germanic Shamanism. This is a fascinating phenomenon that often defies clear explanation. Seidr existed somewhat on the margins of society and was primarily associated with a group of female practitioners known as "volvas." They would perform the Seidr ritual, inducing altered states of consciousness in various ways to gain insight into hidden aspects of reality. Often, they could traverse different realms or dimensions in the form of an animal, while their human body remained in place. Some might even consider this a mystical experience, where volvas gained insight into past and future events, seeing or experiencing things beyond regular human senses. In this tradition, volvas were almost prophetic figures, and it was a volva who narrated the entire story of creation through to Ragnarok in the Voluspá, which literally means something like "the prophecy of the volva."

Men also practiced Seidr, but usually in conjunction with Rune magic.

This practice of Seidr is primarily associated with figures like Odin and Freya, who are thought to be its originators. There are tales that suggest other Gods also practiced Seidr. One of these is the tale where Thor loses his hammer, which was stolen by a Giant. Thor's hammer, Mjollnir, is clearly a male phallic symbol, representing Thor's manhood. Heimdall suggests that Thor dresses as Freyja to trick the Giant into returning his hammer. Thor dressing as Freyja has marvelous symbolism. Unlike Christian references that label men who practiced Seidr or "ergi" as homosexuals, here you have Thor, probably the most masculine God, using Seidr to restore his manhood—his hammer. The act of dressing like Freyja is symbolic of Thor learning Seidr and using it. And yes, he is able to retrieve his hammer.

The Christian Church condemned Seidr as witchcraft and spread the propaganda that men who practiced it were homosexuals. This was very effective in a world now dominated by a patriarchal religion. The three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) share a common ancestry in the Middle East. Women were considered as less than human and mere property. The Church feared the empowerment of women and thus condemned Seidr. Saxo Grammaticus even claims that Odin forbade the use of it.

The Church did not fear the use of Rune magic because to master Rune magic, one needs to first master Seidr. This is why Odin asked Freyja to teach him Seidr. Although it played a relatively marginal role in pre-Christian religion in ancient Scandinavia, it was undeniably significant.

As is evident from ancient Scandinavia and the broader Germanic Europe, religion exhibited remarkable diversity and was deeply embedded in every facet of society. It encompassed a broad spectrum, ranging from private rituals conducted by families within their homesteads for rites of passage and offerings to Gods and other supernatural entities, to public ceremonies involving sacrifices and feasts. It even extended its influence over the political structure and the authority of the king, shaping people's perceptions of themselves, their place in the world, and the cosmos. This belief system existed in the space between Asgard, the realm of the Gods, and the otherworld in Germanic Mythology, the domain of various other forces, and it lacked a rigid theology. The world surrounding them teemed with these forces, profoundly influencing their lives.

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The tales of Gods and heroes, as found in sources like the Eddas, are exceptionally captivating and entertaining. To the people of pre-Christian Scandinavia, these stories held immense importance and significance, regardless of their interpretations. Despite the eventual dominance of Christianity as the official religion in this region in the first few centuries after the turn of the first millennium, many remnants of the old customs persisted. Some were assimilated by the church, imbued with new Christian symbolism, while others endured on the fringes.

In recent times, there has been a resurgence of interest in and practice of the ancient Norse religion, known by various names such as Ásatrú or Norse/Germanic paganism. This revival is part of the neo-pagan movement, where people rediscover these ancient belief systems as alternatives to established religious institutions like Christianity. Deities like Odin, Thor, and Freyja have once again become significant spiritual figures and symbols for many people, not just in Scandinavia but around the world.

Contemporary practitioners now gather to perform rituals, with animal sacrifice being generally excluded and replaced by offerings such as food and drink. Most who practice Germanic Heathenism tend to be individualistic and innovative as they adapt the old religion to the 21st century. Practitioners of Ásatrú can be divided into three primary groups: Universalists, Folkish, and Esoteric National Socialists. The Universalists are also divided into those who are not political but are willing to blend Germanic traditions with other traditions, both Indo-European and non-Indo-European. They tend to consider themselves a part of the "New Age" movement. However, some Universalists use various forms of heathenism or neo-paganism as a cover for their obvious Marxist or woke agenda. On the other extreme, the Esoteric National Socialists are very much like these Universalists, using heathenism as a cover for their political agenda. The Esoteric NS are neo-Nazis who also use heathenism as a cover for their political agenda. The third group is the Folkish Heathens. While Universalists tend to lump the Folkish with the Esoteric NS, the Folkish Heathens defend themselves, emphasizing that they are not racialists (people who hate everyone who does not belong to their group). They recognize the existence of race and ethnicity as having a spirit-genetic basis in reality, and they prefer not to mix various traditions. However, they welcome all ethnic groups and races to practice their unique form of heathenism.

The Folk Faith of Balder Rising boasts an extensive initiative known as The Yggdrasil Training Program. This program is meticulously crafted to impart knowledge about Germanic Magic, Mythology, and Heathen Philosophy. We have welcomed students from diverse backgrounds, including South America, Africa, the Middle East, and notably, India. All individuals, regardless of their ethnic or racial heritage, are warmly encouraged to participate.

It is heartening for us to observe that nearly all participants without European or Indo-European ancestry have reported a profound desire to explore their unique Heathen heritage after completing the program. As practitioners of magic, it brings us immense satisfaction to facilitate the discovery of one's true ancestral roots for everyone. For more information about the Yggdrasil Training Program go to www.Vrilology.com or www.Vrilology.org.

Direct Link to the Nine Books of the Yggdrasil Training Program:

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