Religious Practices of the Pre-Christian and Viking Age North

by Alfta Reginleif

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Table of Contents

Cover
Digital Dwarf Adv.
Title Page

Introduction
Sacred Enclosures
The Hof
Stave Churches
The Hörg
Sacred Groves
Sacred Trees
Sacred Stones
Holy Mountains and Hills
Sacred Rivers, Lakes, Bogs, Springs, etc.
Descriptions of Sacred Places
Pillars, Posts and the Irminsul
Sacred Ground
Images of the Gods
The Blót-feast
Blót Feast Descriptions
The Procession
The Full
The Solemn Oath
Hallowing
Facing North
Offerings
Prayer
Animal Sacrifices
Sacred Fire and Holy Water
Salt Springs
Sacred Fire
The Landvættir
The Annual Feasts
The Harvest Feast
The Álfablót
Winter Nights
Dísarblót
Jól
The Wild Hunt
The Oath Boar
Thorrablót
Class, Location and the Tides
The Spring Rites
Sigrblót/Summer Finding
Ostara (Eastre/Easter)/Walpurgis Day/May Day
Rites of Spring Summary
Sun's Wending (Midsummer)
Feasts Held Regularly At Longer Intervals
Time-Keeping
The Two Great Seasons
The Turning of the Moon
Nights Before Day
Day Names
Month Names
Modern Practice
Introduction
The Sacred Enclosure
Rules for Sacred Ground
Images of the Gods and Goddesses
The Wild-fire
The Blót-feast and the Full
The Solemn Oath
Offerings
Hallowing
When To Blót
Blót Activities
Conclusion
Footnotes (page 1)
Page 2
Page 3
Page 4
Page 5

The Religious Practices of the Pre-Christian and Viking Age North

Introduction

The undertaking of this article is one that I have felt was needed for some time. Since The Northern Way is a reconstructionist tradition I wanted to shed a little light on the actual practices of our Northern European fore-fathers. The common opinion is that there is little in way of information about the Religious Practices of the Pre-Christian and Viking Age North. I therefore expected to find maybe 20 or 30 pages worth of notes and, from that, be able to offer some very rough outlines. It was not long before I realized that there was more information out there than I had thought. What I found is that there was information to be found. It was like someone had made a puzzle that was the Religious Practices of the Northern Europeans and then taken those puzzle pieces and spread them to the wind. Every book I read or every saga I looked through, would yield more pieces to that puzzle. I am confident that, had I had time and had been able to study more sources, I would have found more pieces to that puzzle. Unfortunately I had a deadline and I had to stop somewhere and start working on writing this article. So I took the puzzle pieces I had gathered and began to organize them. With each puzzle piece I began to see an overall picture of the Religious Practices of the Pre-Christian and Viking Age North. I did not find all the puzzle pieces and I most likely never will, but I believe that I now have enough to be able to get a fairly decent picture of those religious practices.
It is certain that scholars have made many studies of the religious practices of pre-Christian Northern Europeans. I don't consider myself a scholar by any means, although I hope that my studies will one day earn me that title. I think that, as excellent as the work done by scholars on this subject is, it still lacks a view point which would, in my opinion, shed much light on the subject. That point of view is one from the believer, that is, the point of view from one who sees the Regin as reality instead of some attempt of "primitive" man to describe the forces of nature or any of the other various theories that come from the religion called Science. I hope to be able to offer that view (i.e. of a believer) and that those reading this article will find that view of use.
My goals with this article are to first present the actual practices that we have evidence of from the lore and from established and quality scholarship. I hope to present it in an organized manner by grouping it into logical groups. Then I would like to offer my thoughts on how we, as modern followers of the Northern Way, can take those practices and incorporate them into our modern practice as we honor the Regin and strengthen the ties that have with them. I will leave it to the reader to judge as to whether or not I have been successful in this.

Sacred Enclosures

The types of places considered sacred are surprisingly varied. A sacred area might be in a grove of trees or a particular tree. A large standing stone or a spring might be considered sacred or a hill or a lake. Any striking landmark might be considered sacred. From the evidence we have, it seems that these types of sacred sites were the norm until the Viking Age (roughly from 700 C. E. until about 1100 C. E.) at which time build structures became more prominent. Despite this, natural landmarks as sacred ground continued well until the Christian conversion.

The Hof

Sacred groves and various other sacred sites of that sort continued but as the Viking Age neared its end the hof became more common. Zoëga gives the definition for the word "hof" as "Heathen temple." (1) These Heathen temples were also called goðahús (House of the Gods) or blóthús (House of Sacrifice). (2) Although the word hof is generally taken to indicate a temple of some sort there is some debate as to whether or not this is true as there have been no actual Heathen temples to survive into modern times. Archeology has yielded no sure answer to this question either. Because the word 'hof' occurs in many place names it was once thought that this indicated the existence of many temples but later scholarship has shown this to be nothing more than the assumptions of "later antiquarians." (3) If hof does refer to a temple proper then judging from the place names there would have been quite a few temples. The word hof may have referred to farm buildings. Hof could have referred to a large communal hall where large gatherings for the feasts that were held on Holy Nights. (4) It would have been used after the blót or sacrifice. If this were the case the animal which was sacrificed was killed at the holy site and prepared for cooking in the hof, while the parts that were dedicated to the gods were left hanging on a sacred tree or on poles. An example of this type of hof was excavated in an area in north-eastern Iceland called Hofstaðir. When it

was first excavated it was thought, from the ground plan, to be a large temple. Later scholarship thinks it more probably that this was a great hall for a farmhouse and that it was used by the leading gothi of the area to hold feasts during the major Holy Days. It would not have been built for purely religious purposes and could have been used for other purposes. (5) Possible proof of this in the lore comes from the story of how the Christian skald Sigvatr Þorðarson (c.1020) was sent by the Christian king of Norway to arrange a marriage between the king of Norway and the daughter of the king of Sweden. At this time Norway was Christian but the people of Sweden still clung to the ways of Hethenism. When Sigvatr came to a farm that was called "hof" seeking shelter and was turned away. The farm wife there explained that they were in the midst of the álfablót (Feast of the Alfs/Elves) and that she feared the anger of Othinn if the skald were allowed in. He experienced this at several farms. As noted one of the farms he visited was called hof. This could have been referring to the hall which he was barred from entering. (6) Further proof of this might be found in the word Dísasal (7) which is the name given to a place of worship for the goddesses or dísir in many sources. The Old Norse word salr means room or hall and the words salskynní and saldrótt mean homestead and household folk respectively. (8) Although we cannot be sure that there were temples built that were solely for the religious purposes early on, they most certainly developed some time during the Viking Age and perhaps earlier. While natural features in the land were regarded as sacred sites, there developed a need for an enclosed or fenced off area as the word vé (9) (sacred enclosure) indicates. From the evidence we have the use of idols to represent the Regin was a late development. We know that the Germans in the 1st centuries did not represent their gods and goddesses with images. (10) It is possible that the need for an enclosure developed as a response to the development of depicting the gods and goddesses in human form. These idols would have needed a place to set them apart and or house them.

The enclosure may have developed from something as simple as a raised earthwork or an ditch that was made to surround (enclose) the sacred area. The area enclosed could be circular, square or rectangular and include other sacred features such as posts/pillars, springs ect. (11) There are various examples of this type of enclosure from archaeological finds. One called the Goloring which is near Coblenz is circular in shape and has a diameter of about 190 metres. The dating of this site is thought to be around the sixth century B.C.E. This site contained a large posthole in the center. Could this have been for an Irminsul (see "Pillars and Posts")? Another example is in Czechoslovakia and was rectangular in shape (80 meters by 20 meters) which was surrounded by a ditch. In it were bones of children and animals. This site is thought to have had an artificial platform and pits holding bones and pottery fragments. There was a stone in the shape of a rough pyramid about 200 cm. high which stood in the place where the offerings were made. The center of this enclosure was taken up by the grave of what is thought to be the grave of a priestess. It dates back to the third century B. C. E. (12)

The best evidence for a pre-Viking Age temple is found at Tronheim Fjord. As was common practice with the Christians, a church was built on the spot but there were signs of an earlier building that dated back to 500 C. E. which contained numerous post holes. There was signs of burning, as if the previous building there had been burned down by Christians in order to make way for their church to replace the older Heathen temple. Also found were tiny pieces of gold foil which were commonly used on figures known as goldgubber in Denmark. (13) There have been attempts to rebuild temples such as the reconstruction of the temple at Uppsala but that reconstruction is based on the ground plan of a Wendish temple at Arcona which was destroyed by the Danes in the twelfth century. (14)

Whether the word 'hof' originally designated a large meeting hall where the community would gather for the sacrificial feast after the blót, which was held at a separate site, or if it designated a temple proper or, as Rudolf Simek suggests, that temples were simply roofed versions of hörgrs (see 'The Hörgr'), (13) it is clear that by the end of the Viking Age it had come to designate a temple which was solely dedicated to religious functions. (14)

Descriptions of hofs do survive in the sagas and in various other sources from the middle ages. One common feature is that they seem to all have been constructed of wood. One possible example was excavated in Northumberland and is considered to be from the seventh century which places it in the Anglo-Saxon pre-Christian period. It measured 11 x 5.5 m. and had inner walls. The doors were in the center of the longer walls and there was a second building which scholars belief may have served as the kitchen, as many animal bones were found there. The skulls of these animals were not found there but in the main building in a pit. The

main building had three post holes as well. (15) The temple at Mære as well as the temple at Uppsala were also described as being made of wood and post holes were found at those sites as well. (16) Although there is little doubt that there were smaller hofs constructed archaeologists have been unable to uncover any evidence or any large buildings or the outlines of such under churches. The elaborate descriptions we find in the sagas and buy such accounts as come to us from Adam of Bremen may be influenced by accounts of temples in Christian literature or from the large medieval churches built of stone. (17)

Thórólf Mostrar-skegg's ("Moster-beard") hof is described in Eyrbyggja Saga, in chapter 4:

"There he let build a temple, and a mighty house it was. There was a door in the side-wall and nearer to one end thereof. Within the door stood the pillars of the high-seat, and nails were therein; they were called the Gods' nails. There within was there a great frith-place. But off the inmost house was there another house, of that fashion whereof now is the choir of a church, and there stood a stall in the midst of the floor in the fashion of an altar, and thereon lay a ring without a join that weighed twenty ounces, and on that must men swear all oaths; and that ring must the chief have on his arm at all man-motes (Things).

On the stall should also stand the blood-bowl, and therein the blood-rod was, like unto a sprinkler, and therewith should be sprinkled from the bowl that blood which is called "Hlaut", which was that kind of blood which flowed when those beasts were smitten who were sacrificed to the Gods. But round about the stall were the Gods arrayed in the Holy Place.

To that temple must all men pay toll, and be bound to follow the temple-priest in all farings even as now are the thingmen of chiefs. But the chief must uphold the temple at his own charges, so that it should not go to waste, and hold therein feasts of sacrifice."

Hofs were often constructed either close by or made to include natural sacred landmarks. These could be sacred groves and/or sacred trees or springs or standing stones to name a few. (18) In Hörd's Saga Thorstein Gullnapr has a "sacrificing house" in which is a stone which he venerates. In the Saga Thorstein sings this song to the stone:

> Thou hast hither Before the sun shines,
> For the last time The hard Indridj
> With death-fated feet Will justly reward
> theeTrodden the ground; For thy evil
> doings.
>
> Hörd's Saga chapter 37

It was also common for smaller individual shrines or personal hofs to be built. The Old Norse word for this was stalli or stallr, meaning altar or support for an idol. (19) One example of one is the "temple" that Thorolf of Helgafell built next to the holy mountain. In this hof or stalli was kept the sacred ring of the god and the hlautr bowl used to catch the sacrificial blood. (20) The stalli was considered as distinct from the hörg. (21) It is also possible that the larger hofs were specifically for larger gatherings, such as a district who, when they came together would have need of a larger hall and that the smaller hofs were personal hofs or no more than a covering for personal stalli. (22) The hofs were built in such a way that they could be disassembled and moved if need be. There are examples of this in the lore such as Landmánabók and Eyrbyggja Saga. In Landnámabók Thorhad who was an old hofgothi (temple priest) in Thrandheim in Mœri, decided to move to Iceland. He carried with him the temple mould (dirt) and the altars and settled in a place called Stödvarfjord. He rebuilt his temple there and the whole fjord was considered holy from that time on. (23) The bringing of dirt from the foundation of the temple to the new location seems to have been a common practice as we find it done in what is probably the most well known example of a temple being moved, in Eyrbyggja Saga. Here Thórólf Mostrarskegg ("Moster-beard") sets out for Iceland after disassembling and bringing most of the his temple with him, including the two high seat posts. (24) The mould brought was said to be specifically from under where Thorr had sat. (25) When Thórólfr neared Iceland he took the two high seat posts, one of which had the likeness of Thorr carved on it, and threw them overboard. He said that he would land and make that place his home where the pillars came to land. It was said that the pillars immediately began to drift toward a ness much faster than most thought was normal and it was at that ness that Thórólf landed and named Thorsness. (26)

The post holes mentioned so often most likely have a more practical purpose. This practical purpose could have very well been put to ritual and/or sacred use as well, as in the case of Thórólf who carved the likeness of Thorr into one of his high seat pillars. To understand the practical use of the posts in hofs you must know a little about how hofs and Stave Churches were built. Although there is no proof that hofs were built in the same fashion as Stave Churches, I would postulate that to be the case. H. R. Ellis Davidson discusses this method of building in her excellent book "Myths and

Symbols In Pagan Europe." Instead of the walls and pillars being set in the ground and surrounded with stone, which, according to Davidson does not last very long, the Stave Churches were built on what are called 'groundsills'. These were four massive lengths of timber laid down in the form of a square. From this a series of masts or pillars rose, which supported the walls and roof of the structure, rounded at the foot like the masts of a ship. The post holes found in so many sites by archaeologists were possibly there in order to 'anchor' this groundsill. (27)

Stave Churches

Before moving on I should take a few lines to describe the Stave Churches. Anyone who has seen a picture of these beautiful churches is well aware of their uniqueness. There is much debate as to whether or not these represent true Heathen temples that were later used by the Christians or if they are basically Christian in origin. There are about 31 of these churches that have survived from a period between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries in Norway. There is nothing like them anywhere and are no where close to the heavy stone and brick constructions found in England and Germany. As mentioned above these Stave Churches were built in a way that allows them to last a very long time. The masts or pillars that anchors them to the ground is also the way in which they are described, i.e, a one-mast church for those with one central pillar rising from the center of the groundsill, or many-masted church for those like the one in Borgund where "the sleepers forming the sill are arranged to form a square inside a rectangle, and the masts are set round the square. At Borgund there are as many as six different levels from the ground to the central tower, and a series of roofs of different heights are grouped around the central sanctuary." (28) The strongest argument for the theory that these churches are examples of Heathen hofs comes from the fact that they had been brought to a "standard of perfection" as early as the 11th century. The development of such a beautiful and intricate style that has never been duplicated elsewhere could not have happened in so short a time if they were Christian inventions and must have come from a long tradition native to Norway. (29)
The earliest Stave Churches have many elaborate carvings on their walls and pillars that are obviously from Norse lore, which shows the likely possibility that these churches were converted Heathen hofs. Dragons protrude from the gables in the same way they would have from the prows of the Viking longships. According to Davidson, who quotes Lorenz Dietrichson, there is an obvious link between the building techniques of the Stave Churches and ship-building. He points out that, "'A row of arches, upside down, is placed between different rafters, just as it was between the ribs of a Viking ship. In the ship these ribs were not attached to the keel, and similarly the rafter arches and the beams are separate from the ridge beams of the church…. The entire church is strengthened throughout by elbow joints and brackets, just as the Viking ships are.' Inside the churches it is dark and mysterious, and the fact that the roof rises in the center gives an impression of narrowness and height, drawing the gaze upwards. A building of this kind would emphasize the centrality of the sacred place, while the series of different levels would be in accordance with the picture of the world of the gods and men and supernatural beings grouped vertically and horizontally around the World Tree." (30)
It is my opinion that the Stave Churches were, as Christianity has done with so many other aspects of our tradition, appropriated and that they are genuine examples of what pre-Christian hofs would have looked like in Norway. It is my hope that one day I will be able to visit those churches personally one day. It is also my hope that one day we will see one constructed, with the same techniques, here in America.

The Hörg

Another type of sacred site was known as the Hörg which is defined as "a heathen place of worship, cairn or altar of stone." (31) This could have also included the many stone circles that can be found all over Northern Europe. The hörg was considered as distinct from the stalli. (32) Although the stalli was an altar and might be made of stone it was distinguished from the hörg because the hörg was under the open sky and surrounded by an enclosure of stones. (33) In modern Norwegian and Icelandic the word hörg is used for "mountain top." When hörgs were destroyed they were described as being "broken" instead of burned as is used when describing the destruction of hofs. (34) They were often dedicated to particular deities as we see was the case of Ottar's hörg described in the lay from the Poetic Edda called Hyndluljoth. (35) There it is said of Ottar by Freyja that:
10. "For me a shrine of stones he made,-
And now to glass the rock has grown;-
Oft with the blood of beasts was it red;

In the goddesses ever did Ottar trust. (36)
The Old Norse word used here and translated as "shrine of stones" was hörg. Various sagas in the Fornaldr Sögur and others support the view that the hörg was in the open air. (37) There were other terms for open air sacred sites (some of which we will examine below) such as 'lundr' meaning 'grove' or 'field' which is similar to the word vé which means 'temple or sanctuary' (38) and is generally taken to refer to groves and similar sacred areas. (39)
The altar of the hörg was one that was sacrificial in nature. As is seen in the strophe from Hyndluljoth, the hörg was reddened with the blood of sacrifice so much that is was as shiney as glass from fires. That they were often dedicated to particular gods or goddesses is seen from the descriptions in the lore and by place names, such as Þörshörgr and Oðinshögr. (40) Sacrifices to the Dísir are mentioned as being given on hörgrs such as the one in Hervarar Saga. In that saga, the princess Alfhild is acting as gythja and conducting the sacrifice to the dísir by reddening the hörg at night when Starkard kidnaps her.
So from the evidence we have it is clear that the hörg could be considered any open air altar that is made of stone and/or stone circles that enclose a sacred area.

Sacred Groves

The oldest form of sacred space we have record of is the sacred grove. The various terms for sacred enclosures of natural origin, such as groves was "lundr" meaning 'grove' (41) and vé meaning 'sacred field or sacrificial site'. (42) One of the earliest, if not the earliest, mentions of a sacred grove comes from Tacitus' Germania. Here he tells us of the practice of the Germans in their worship. They have no images of the gods and goddesses and indeed judged it unsuitable to have them. Their places of worship were whole woods and groves and they called them by the names of their gods. (43) Tacitus also tells us of a pair of gods who are brothers called "Alcis" who are worshiped in a sacred grove. Their priests were said to dress as women. Again here he tells us that there were no images present in their worship of these two brother gods. (44) The gods were considered to dwell in these groves among the boughs of the trees. (45)
Even though hofs would become more prevalent as the Viking Age came to an end the vé (pronounced like vay rhyming with hay) was still a place of worship well into the Viking Age and even afterwards. The Christians made it a special point to either build churches in them or cut them down. A song in the Königinhof mentioned a grove from which the Christians scared away the sacred sparrow which dwelled there and the bishop, Unwan of Bremen made it his special task to have sacred groves cut down. (46)
One tradition connected with sacred groves, which I'll examine in more detail later was the hanging of the heads and/or skins/carcasses of animals in the branches of a sacred tree or the trees of a sacred grove. This practice is attested to having been done at the great temple at Uppsala which had an adjoining sacred grove. In this sacred grove where hung the bodies and animals and men which had been sacrificed. It is most likely that the animal carcasses were actually the heads and skins of the animals. Perhaps a fine destinction but I'll discuss why that might be so later on when I examine this practice in more detail. (47)
Like hofs, sacred groves were some times adjacent to other sacred land marks. There is an account of a rivulet in Livonia which originated in a sacred grove and which supplied a sacred fountain. No one was allowed to cut any of the trees in this grove and if someone even broke a twig there they were said to be sure to die that year. The fountain was kept clean and if anything was thrown in the fountain storms would result. (48) In Hervarar Saga Hlöðr Heiðreksson was said to have been born in a holy wood with weapons and horse. (49) In the Prose Edda Snorri tells us of he sacred grove called Glasir:
"Why is gold called the Needles, or leaves, of Glasir? In Ásgard, befor the doors of Valholl, there stands a grove which is called Glasir, and its leafage is all red gold, even as is sung here:
Glasir stands With golden leafage
Before the High God's halls.
Far and wide, this tree is the fairest known among gods and men. (50)
The Old Norse used here is lundr, which as we showed previously refers to a sacred grove or field. The point to be made from this is that pre-Christian and Viking Age Heathens had a great veneration of groves as places holy to the gods. No tree within a sacred grove was to be harmed in any way and the gods and goddesses themselves were some times thought to dwell there. Mention of sacred groves could be found throughout Scandinavia. In Romove, Prussia there stood a holy grove in which was a holy oak which was hung with clothing. This grove was considered the most sacred spot in the land and to be the seat of the gods. No unconsecrated person could enter nor

any beast slain there. There were said to be many groves like this throughout Prussia and Lithuania (51) Another reference comes from an account of a battle between the Franks and the Saxons at Notteln in the year 779. A wounded Saxon had himself conveyed into a holy wood where a deity was thought to dwell. Grimm believes that the word given for this deity was purposely chosen to avoid naming a "well-known Heathen god." It is not clear whether the Saxon wished to die there or if he felt he could be healed there. In either case it is easy to see the veneration that sacred groves were held in. (52)

There is some reason to believe that sacred groves were, more often than not dedicated to the Vanir or one among their ranks. The sacred grove in Uppsala would have most likely been dedicated to Freyr as he was worshipped above all by the Swedes at that time and his grave mound was said to be among the howes of that hof. Tacitus tells us of a sacred grove dedicated to the earth mother Nerthus who is thought to possibly be the consort of Njörthr. (53) Elves were also thought to be caretakers of trees and of groves. These groves sometimes found enclosed by silken thread were called elfträd-gårdar by the Swedes. (54) We know from the Prose Edda that Freyr is considered the ruler of the alfs (elves) and that he was given Alfheimr (elf-home) as a tooth fee (footnote):

5. Ydalir call they the place where Ull
A hall for himself hath set;
And Alfheim the gods to Freyr once gave
As a tooth-gift in ancient times. (*)
- Grimnismol, Strophe 5 (55)

Sacred Trees

Sacred groves were not the only natural landscape feature that might be considered as sacred. Individual trees, either in groves or elsewhere many times were considered holy. There are numerous mentions of sacred trees in the lore, especially oaks and the rowan which were considered sacred to Thorr. Although oaks were mentioned quite often and considered the most holy according to Grimm, as in the case in Romove mentioned already, there were other trees that were held to be sacred as well. The Beech tree and the Ash were considered sacred and to this day it is considered dangerous to break the bough of an Ash. (56) The world tree Yggdrasill is said to be an Ash, and it is under this tree that the Regin hold the Thing. (57) In Tacitus' Germania is a description of the method used for consulting the gods and it has been conjectured that this description is of the runes being used. Although it is by no means certain if the description is of the runes it certainly is not beyond the realm of possibility. In the description wood from a certain type of tree is said to be used for the divination. That wood is any wood from a fruit bearing tree. (58) Deitmar describes a grove of Beech wood trees on an island which were venerated as sacred. (59) The Vita S. Germani Autisiodorensis written by Constantius (circa 5th century) tells of a pear tree which stood in the middle of Auxerre and was honored by the Heathens. (60) This would lend further support to Tacitus' statements concerning the special nature of fruit bearing trees. Hazels were in olden days used to hedge in a law court and the elder also was held in veneration. (61)

It was not an uncommon practice to leave offerings at the foot of a sacred tree or for wreaths to be hung on them. This practice continued after the Christian conversion. (62) A tenth century Greek account tells of a practice of the Rus who were traders on the Dnieper who brought cocks with them for the purpose of sacrificing as a thank-offering. They laid their sacrifices at the foot of an enormous oak on an island now called St. Gregory's Island. This oak survived into the nineteenth century. It is thought the Rus were sacrificing to Thorr who was often called upon to assist travelers and with whom the oak was associated. (63) The Langobards also left offerings at trees as is evidenced from their "blood-tree" or "holy tree." (64) There is evidence of this with other cultures such as the Lettons who believed their god Pushkait lived under the elder tree. They would leave bread and beer for him beside the tree and would not burn elder wood for fear of bad luck. (65) And of course there is the practice of hanging animal heads and carcasses/skins in the limbs of the tree which we'll examine more closely later in the article.

As would be expected certain trees were immune from cutting. Oaks and hazels were not to be cut. In order to cut wood from the elder tree, a prayer was required sometimes on bent knee and bare head in later times. This is most likely a survival of a Heathen tradition. Tales exist of men beginning to cut down certain trees only to hear a voice commanding them not to cut down the tree. (66) Many times individual trees were given names, specifically names of goddesses (67) or were addressed with female titles. The later traditions of beautiful maidens sitting inside the hollows of trees and even later Christian traditions of the 'Madonna in the Wood,' were possibly derived from this tradition. Tree's might be called by the names of Hlin, Gna or be address as frau or dame, Old

Norse words for woman or lady. (68)
The Veneration of sacred trees was something that continued into the Chrsistian conversion. In Minden on Easter Sunday the young people of both sexes used to dance, with load cries of joy, in a circle around an old oak. (69) Despite this survival of Heathen custom, the Christians went out of their way to cut down sacred trees. There are cases, however, where the Heathens stood up and would not allow the Christians to desecrate their holy sites according to Grimm. Despite those instances of resistance Christians were always ready to cut down sacred trees and groves wherever they found them and replaced them with Christian churches. When ever they did not chop down the trees the sites they were on were converted to Christian churches. The church at Fritzlar was actually said to have been built out of the wood from the sacred oak that had stood there. (70)
Like sacred groves there is evidence that may point to sacred trees being connected with the alfs. Some pine trees were thought to have what was called a 'hafs-fru' (sea-maiden?) dwelling under them. It was said one could sometimes see snow-white cattle being driven up from the lake and through meadows to them and no one dared to touch the bows of the tree. Trees of this sort were thought to be sacred to individual alfs. (71)
There are also descriptions of processions being made to a holy oak near Wormeln, Paderborn once every year. Most all the evidence we have for processions are connected with Vanir gods and goddesses. (72) As we have seen, the alfs and Vanir seem to be intimately connected. In the Eddas one would expect that when the tribe of the Aesir and Vanir to be with when talking of the gods. It is interesting to note that instead it is Aesir and Alfs many times.
It is then possible to say that the vé (sacred grove or field) was a particular feature of Vanir worship? In Viga-Glúms Saga we here of a field that was devoted to Freyr. Glúm killed someone in that field and thereby incurred the wrath of the Vanir god. (73) While we could not say for sure that sacred groves and trees are a feature of Vanir worship we could say that there is a strong possibility of such, as most all the references we have of the veneration of trees and groves are connected either with Vanir deities or with the alfar.

Sacred Stones

Another sacred space used by Northern European Heathens was the sacred stone. These were many times massive and/or strangely shaped stones. (74) In Landnámabók we find Eyvind the son of Lodin who is said to have settled in a valley and on the edge of whose land was the Gunnsteinnar (Gunn-rocks) which he worshipped. (75) Heathens were adept at arranging great masses of stone and many times used them in grave-mounds as well. (76) Oaths were sworn on holy stones at Things and stones were used in sacrifices as well. (77)
There are also examples of folk traditions surviving that most likely have Heathen origins such as the Hollow Stone near Hesse. On Easter Monday the youths and maidens of the villages nearby carry nosegays and draw some water and will not venture down from the area of the stone unless they have flowers with them. (78)

Holy Mountains and Hills

There were quite a few examples of whole mountains or hills being considered sacred. Some of these are shown in place names such as Wodan's Hill or Thunar's Hill. (79) Thórólf Mostrar-skegg ("Moster-beard"), when he moved to Iceland found a large outcropping of rocks which he named Helgafell and considered most holy. He believed that he would fare there to live with his ancestors upon his death and no one was allowed to look on it (pray to it) without having washed. Nor, as is common with sacred space, were the animals living there allowed to be killed. He also built a hof nearby. (80)
According to Grimm the so-called 'witch's mountains' of later Christian times were originally places sacred to Heathens and used for sacrifices. The Christians, of course, turned them into places where 'devil worship' occurred by witches. Elves also took up residence in hills quit often and these alfs were often given offerings. (81)

Sacred Rivers, Lakes, Bogs, Springs ect.

There are many examples of sacred bodies of water in the lore. There have been many archaeological finds indicated offerings from bogs and in lakes. River bends that formed an ea (aue) were thought to specially sacred to the gods. (82) There were many instances of a sacred spring or well located beside hofs or sacred groves. There are still folk customs that have their followers making offerings to these wells and springs. (83) Offerings were thrown in lakes and there was an example of man who threw offerings of food into a waterfall in Iceland. (84) In Skedemosse on the island of Öland a large number of objects have been recovered from a dried up lake bed. These objects are thought to have been offerings. (85)

Descriptions of Sacred Places

There are more than a few descriptions of hofs and sacred spaces that have survived in various literature. Some may have been influenced by the author's knowledge of Christian churches in England or on Mainland Europe. One of these descriptions about which there is much debate among scholars as to whether it is an authentic description of a Heathen hof is Adam of Bremen's description of the hof at Uppsala. It is described as being made completely of gold and to house the statues of three gods. Thor was said to occupy the middle seat and to the left and right were the statues of Wodan (Othinn) and Fricco (Freyr). The temple was encircled by a golden chain which hung from the gable of the house, the reflection of which was able to be seen very far off by those approaching the hof. (86) It is doubtful that the whole hof was constructed out of gold, although this could have been wood which was coated with gold foil.
The hof of Thórólf Mostrar-skeggr is described in Eyrbyggja Saga. It was made of wood and possibly sat on a groundsill as it is mentioned that he took earth from beneath the 'platform' when he took the temple down to transport it to Iceland. There were two pillars on either side of the high seat on which Thorr's statue would have been placed and one of the pillars had the likeness of Thorr carved into it. The door to the temple was in the side-wall near one end and just within this were two more pillars, the 'sacred columns' on which were the reginnaglar (god- nails.) These columns as I have postulated before could have been primarily used to anchor the groundsill. This of course does not bar them from having sacred significance as well. Within this hof there was another, like the choir in Christian churches, and in the middle of the floor stood a platform or stalli (an altar) which lay a ring that was un-joined and the hlautr-bolli, (sacrificial blood bowl) (87) which was used to catch the blood from the sacrifices. This ring was the oath-ring which was worn on the arm of the gothi or chief at the Things and which weighed 2 ounces (20 ounces in other accounts). On it were sworn holy oaths. Also on the stalli was the hlaut-teinn (sacrificial blood twig) (88) which was used to sprinkle the sacrificial blood on the walls, altar and those present at the blót. Around the platform stood the statues of the gods. 'Near at hand' was the dómhríngr (Doom Ring) within which stood Thorr's Stone over which the back was broken of those to be sacrificed. (89)
Thorgrim Helgisson was said to be a great performer of sacrifices. On his farm land at Kjalarnes he had a hof which is described as being one hundred feet long by sixty feet wide. Thorr received the highest honors there and it had a round vaulted roof. Thorr's statue was the central statue with the statues of the other gods grouped around his. Before Thorr's statue was a stalli. This stalli was covered on top with iron and there was a fire which burned on it that was never allowed to go out and which was called the sacred fire. Also on the stalli laid a large silver ring which like the one in Thórólf Mostrar-skeggr's hof was worn by the hofgothi during meetings such as at Things and which all oaths were sworn on. There was also a hlaut-bolli here as well which was made of copper. The animals sacrificed were served at the feast and the humans who were sacrificed were thrown in a bog nearby which was called the blót-kéllda (sacrificial pool/bog). (90) (91)
There seems to have been, as can be seen in previous sections, an inner room or area where the statues of the gods and the stalli were located. This part of the hof would have been smaller than the main part of the building in which the feasts were held assuming they were not held in a separate hall. The feast hall had fire pits down the middle over which cauldrons of meat were cooked for the blót feast. On each side of the fire pits would have been tables and benches on which the participants in the feast sat and ate. (92) This is also supported possibly, in Fridthjof's saga where we find the kings and their wives sitting in a room were fires burned on the floors and their wives sat anointing the gods. There was drinking going on in another room. (93)
Depending on the resources of the person who owned and/or maintained the hof they could be very beautifully decorated. But even the smaller hofs could have been carved with beautiful carvings in wood and hung with elaborate tapestries. The hof dedicated to Thorgerd Hörgabrúd, who was possibly the family dís of Hákon Jarl, is described as adorned with inlaying of gold and silver on the inside and to have had so many windows that there was not a shadow in the whole place. (94)
When Charlemagne destroyed the Irminsul (8th century) he is said to have removed great treasures of gold and silver from there. Gold vessels, beautiful broaches, one of which was in the shape of an eagle, and a great jeweled collar were among the treasures removed from a site at Petrossa, Romania in 1837. The well known Gundestrup Cauldron may have been dismantled and removed to deposit in the bog it was found in and is thought by scholars to have been from a hof. (95)
There are many places in the sagas where the

hofs, especially the smaller ones, are said to be tented and hung with tapestries. It was common for Norse chieftains to hang their halls with beautifully made tapestries so we can trust that this was a genuine practice for Heathens in decorating their hofs. (96) In the late Kjalnesinga Saga there is a description of a hof that is much similar to the one built buy Thorgrim Helgisson. It was one hundred and twenty feet long by sixty feet wide. At the inner end was a 'circular annex' shaped like a cap or hood. Tapestries hung within. Like Thorgrim's temple the chief god was Thorr whose statue stood in the middle with the statues of the other gods surrounding him. There was also a stalli topped with an iron plate on which was a fire kept constantly burning and silver oath ring and a hlautbolli. (97)

Another feature we find common in descriptions of hofs is that most have a gold ring which is hung on the door. There was one said to have been ordered by Earl Hakon for the hof at Throndheim. (98) Another is described as coming from the door of a temple at Hlader which Olaf had taken in Olaf Tryggvasson's Saga.

The dísarsalr (hofs dedicated to the dísir) are described in the lore as well. In Fridthjof's Saga it is described as the highest among buildings in the Baldr's Grove. It had fires along the floor and seats on either side. (99) The hall was thatched with bleached linen which was probably connected with the goddesses who are weavers and spinners. (100) The Dísar hall described in Ynglinga Saga was big enough for King Adils to ride around with his horse. There may be some indication here that the kings actions were somehow disrespectful and where the cause of his horse stumbling which caused his death. (101) (102)

Unlike the temples of the Greeks and Romans, Heathen hofs do not seem to have been very much mention of going to them for purposes of healing. (103) This seemed to be the domain of grave mounds and other open air sites. (104)

Most hofs seem to have been dedicated primarily to one god or goddess although more than one were worshipped in the same hof. As can be seen above there was usually one god who was placed in the center and was considered the deity for whom the hof was primarily dedicated to. This spot seems to have been normally taken by Thorr. (105) Freyr seems to have occupied this position as well in many temples. (106) In Hrafnkel's Saga, the saga's namesake built a hof that was sacred to Freyr and he was called 'freysgothi.' (107)

With the larger temples it was common to have a "temple tax" to assist in the upkeep of the hof. In one instance the hofgythja (gothi or gythja responsible for collecting the tax and up-keeping the temple) Steinvör had a problem getting a certain Thorleif to pay his temple tax as the other men in the district did (108) In Ynglinga Saga we are told by Snorri that Othinn imposed a scat or tax on each person which was used to maintain readiness to defend the country and to pay for the sacrifice feasts. (109) When Freyr took over there were said to be several districts called Uppsala-Aud (Uppsala wealth) that were set apart to help pay for the maintaining of the hof and to help pay for the great sacrificial feasts. As may have been the case in most instances such as this, some of the land was considered the personal property of the hofghothi. (110) The temple near Helgafell that was built by Thórólf Mostrar-skeggr also had a temple tax of which everyone in the district was expected to pay. (111)

Pillars, Posts and the Irminsul

From the archaeological evidence post holes and therefore posts or pillars existed in Heathen hofs. The descriptions in the sagas we have back this up as well. From the descriptions of the groundsill which Stave Churches are built on we can see that there is a good possibility that most of these pillars were practical in nature though that does not rule out their ritual significance. Many times what started out for practical reasons in time becomes sacred. The central support pillar in these hofs may have been an example of this duel purpose, both practical and sacred. Besides offering support and stability to the central part of the hof this central pillar could have represented the world tree, the center of the nine worlds.

That these pillars were considered sacred is easily seen in the sagas. The high seat pillars were considered sacred to Thorr. (112) We have more than one example of pillars being thrown overboard into the water and in order to see where they would make landfall. The pillars were thought to have been guided by Thorr. Ingólf and Hjörleif together, Lodmund the old and Thórólf Mostrar-skeggr all three used this method when sailing for Iceland. These stories are told in Landnámabók and in Eyrbyggja Saga. (113)

An archaeological find in 1926 found post holes underneath the church at Gamla Uppsala. They were arranged in such a way that if connected would have formed concentric rectangles. (114) This shows an arrangement that seems to be present in most hofs, that is, the stalli and statues being in the center of the hof, much like the world

tree and Mithgarthr is the center of the nine worlds. This very possibly shows an intentional design that was set up to mirror the cosmological beliefs of Heathenism. As I hope to show later when talking about Sacred Ground, the hofs and other sacred sites were set up so that the most sacred part of the temple was in the center and the central support pillar which was some times called the Irminsul would have represented the World Tree, Yggdrasill. Davidson lends support to this theory (as does Grimm [115]) when she says, Among Scandinavians of the Viking Age a tree appears to be the main symbol of the central pivot of the universe, but the so-called 'high-seat pillars' of wood which formed the main support in the center of halls and sanctuaries might be viewed as a northern version of the Germanic pillars raised in holy places." (116)

The pillar was a very significant feature in sacred sites for the Germanic peoples. At Eresburg, the Anglo-Saxons had a high wooden pillar that they called Irminsul. (117) It thought that this pillar was connected with a god named Irmin which some believe is connected to Tiwaz (Tyr). (118) Rudolf of Fulda describes the Irminsul as a universal pillar supporting the whole, which would serve to connect it to the World Tree. (119) Irminsul is also spelled as Hirminsul in the Chron. Moissiac. The Franks in the 8th through 13th centuries connected the word Irminsul with pillars with a Heathen image carved on them. Grimm speculates that the Thorr's pillars, the Anglo-Saxon Æthelstân-pillars and the later Roland-pillars are connected with the Irminsul. (120)

Again the Christians made use of this when they could, but more often they made a show of chopping down these pillars as they did with sacred trees and groves. The great pillars of the Christian temple of the Grail are described in the Hanover MS as irmensûl. (121) In the Frankish annals Charles the Great destroyed a chief seat of 'Heathen superstition' that was called Irminsûl. (122)

Sacred Ground

The idea of sacred ground is one that is common to most religions and Heathenry was no different. There were certain rules that must be followed when one treaded on sacred ground.

One prohibition that seems to have been almost universal is that no violence was to be done on sacred ground for any reason, excepting sacrifices of course, which were not considered in the same category. To commit violence on sacred ground was considered an outlaw offence, which for Heathens was almost a death sentence. An outlaw had no rights and could be killed on sight without penalty. So it is easy to see how serious an offense Heathens considered the committing of violence on sacred ground. We have more than a few examples of this in the literature. At the afore mentioned Sacred Oak at Romove no tree could be cut down nor was any beast allowed to be slain there. (123) At Helgafell no man or beast was allowed to be injured in any way and no violence could be committed there. (124) In Eybyggja Saga we are told that the hof area was considered so holy that men should not defile the field with blood-shedding no where they allowed to relieve themselves there. "..to that end was appointed a skerry called Dirtskerry." (125) In Landnámabók Thorhad considered the fjord where he landed in Iceland as so holy that nothing was to be slain there except homestead cattle. (126)

Another closely related prohibition was against the carrying of weapons on sacred ground. Like the prohibition against violence on sacred ground, the prohibition against the carrying of weapons on sacred ground seems to have been almost universal. In the Saga of Olaf Tryggvasson it is said when the king went into the temple at Mæri that none of his men had weapons and he had only a gold-mounted staff. (127) This same law was in effect for the Althing as well. Everything concerned with the law was under the rule of the gods and this, therefore, made the Althing a holy assembly. Sacrificial feasts were held at the Thing and there was a ban on carrying of weapons though it is said that it was not always enforced. (128) Another incident in which Olaf Tryggvason entered into a Heathen temple shows the same thing happening at the temple in Thrandheim as happened in Mæri. (129) That weapons were not allowed in sacred areas is also shown in the method in which some Christians chose to defile Heathen hofs. In Bede's story of the conversion of Northumbria (History II, 13), there is a story of a High Priest who rides to the temple and throws a spear into it. Obviously he knew the laws against the carrying of weapons in sacred sites and hofs and his intention was clearly to defile the temple and show his disrespect for the Heathen gods. (130)

The penalties for those who violated these bans could be quite severe. As mentioned before the penalty for killing someone on sacred ground was outlawry which for the Heathen was nearly a death sentence. The term for this offense was 'Varg í véum" which meant 'wolf in the enclosure'. This law applied to the hof as well as the fields that

surrounded it. It also applied to the Thing-place which was regarded as sacred while the Thing was being held. (131) The penalty for bringing weapons onto sacred ground was some times not as drastic as outlawry. In Vatnsdale Saga Hrafn and Ingimund are walking while involved in a very engrossing conversation. Not thinking, Hrafn inadvertently walks into a hof with his weapon. His penalty for this was that he had to give up his valued sword whose name was Aettartangi (132) Another example of outlawry from violence done on sacred ground is in Kjalnesinga Saga. A certain Búi entered a hof to find Thorstein laying on his face in front of the statue of Thorr. Búi crept up to Thorstein silently and before Thorstein could react he picked Thorstein's head up and smashed it against a rock, killing him. Búi then carried his body out and threw it near the fence of the enclosure. He then set the hof on fire and locked the doors. Búi was later outlawed for this act. (133) In Fridthjof's Saga, Fridthjof is outlawed after he entered the Dísir hof and struck King Helgi; an act that caused the hof to catch fire and thereby he proved that his name was one well deserved, as his name Fridthjof means "peace-thief." (134) The gods themselves were thought to avenge these desecrations as is evidenced in Fridthjof's Saga, when Fridthjof's men beg him to make amends to King Helge and pray that Baldr would take his wrath for Fridthjof's violating the hofs in Baldrshaeg. (135) In Njal's Saga the man responsible for the burning of a hof is said to expect the revenge of the gods . The earl says of the gods, that they do not avenge everything on the spot and that the person responsible would be barred from Valhalla and never be able to enter. (136) Tacitus tells us also that those who had quit their shields during battle were not allowed to join in the blót-feasts. In fact Tacitus tells us that many who escaped battle unscathed (a defeat presumably) were said to have committed suicide by hanging themselves. (137) Another example occurs in Viga-Glúms Saga (Slaying Glúms Saga or if we were to say it in a modern way, Killer Glúm's Saga.) Glúm kills a troublesome neighbor in a field that is sacred to Freyr and incurs the gods wrath. He eventually had to forfeit his lands as a result of this act. (138) In one instance the deed of burning down of a temple was said by Hákon Jarl to result in Hrapp (the perpetrator) being shut out of Valhalla. Another incident of violence on sacred ground occurs at Helgafell. Here Thórólf had established a Heraðs-Þing (district thing). (139) It was located on the extremity of the promontory of rocks that made up Helgafell. After his death some of those who attended a Thing held there relieved themselves on the sacred grounds and a battle arose as a result and blood was shed. Because of this the Þingvöllr (thing field or place where the thing is held) had to be moved. The ground there was no longer considered sacred because of the blood that was shed there. (140)

It was also customary to conduct some kind of purification on ones self before treading on sacred ground. At Thorsness no one was allowed to look on Helgafell without being washed. According to MacCulloch the verb used here, líta, should probably be interpreted as 'turn toward in prayer' as it was hardly possible to be outside at Thorsness and not see Helgafell which could be seen from just about anywhere in the area. (141) In Romove, no 'unconsecrated person' was allowed to set foot in the forest where the sacred oak stood. (142) There is also cause to believe that special clothing or at least ones best was worn to the blót feasts. An indication of this would come from the Icelandic word, blótklæði which means 'garments worn at sacrifices.' (143)

As mentioned before answering the call of nature on sacred ground was considered an act of desecration. It resulted in bloodshed on Helgafell. It was normal for an area to be provided for relieving oneself just off of Sacred Ground as was the case in Erybyggja Saga. (144) In fact, the desecrating of another persons sacred ground was used as a means of insult by some. (145)

Another interesting custom is mentioned by Grimm. "Whoever is engaged in a holy office, and stands in the presence and precincts of the god, must not stumble, and if he falls to the ground, he forfeits his privilege. So he who in holy combat sinks to the earth, may not set himself on his legs, but must finish the fight on his knees, Danske viser 1, 115;" (146) It is interesting to note that it was considered a bad omen if one's horse stumbled. Erik the Red's horse stumbled when he was riding down to the ship of his son, Leif Eriksson who was about to set sail on a trip in which he would discover America almost 500 years before Christopher Columbus set sail. Because his horse stumbled Erik considered a bad omen for the trip and did not go. Was the stumbling of a gothi or gythja considered a bad omen or the a sign that the gothi did not have the approval of the gods? There were methods of marking off sacred space. These methods created the 'sacred enclosure,' such as the stone circles of the hörg. One method that was commonly used was board fences. (147) In Fridthjof's Saga Baldershage, in which was the hall of the Dísir, was enclosed with "high wooden

pales." (148) In Kjalnesinga Saga the hof is described as having an enclosure which consisted of a fence. (149)
When reading various web sites that are concerned with Heathenism or books of the same, a statement that one might come across would be something similar to, "We do not bow before out gods like sheep but stand before them with honor." While I think this statement indicates a general concept of what the gods and goddesses are to most Heathens, that is, honored kin and not unknowable beings to be cowered before, it is never the less not very accurate. In the afore mentioned Kjalnesinga Saga, it is Thorstein's laying face down in front of the statue of Thorr that allows Búi to sneak up on him and smash his head against a rock. (150) Likewise, in Færeyinga Saga, we find Jarl Hákon throwing himself down and laying before the statue of Thorgerd Hördabrud, when asking for her help. (151) Grimm tells us that men bowed before the statue of Thorr as well. (152) So while the statement that we do not bow before our gods like sheep is true in the spirit of the word, it is not true in the letter of the word.
According to Grimm another tradition of respect shown while on sacred ground was the uncovering of one's head. This is a well known custom in Christian churches and it would appear from Heathen harvest customs that Grimm quotes, we have, once again, a strongly possibility of another Heathen custom appropriated by the Christians. (153)

Images of the Gods

That there were images of the gods and goddesses is without doubt. Whether or not this was a late development is a matter of some debate. The earliest sources we have describe the practices of the Germans in Tacitus' Germania. Here more than once Tacitus describes the views the Germans had on depicting the gods and goddesses. He tells us that they did not have any statues for the Alcis. (154) He goes further and says that not only did the Germans not depict their gods in statues they considered it unsuitable to show them in any human likeness. (155) They saw their gods as living in the grove itself, in the boughs of the trees. (156)
Toward the Viking Age this practice changes and the depicting of the gods in human form becomes more prevalent at the Viking Age comes to a close. The practice of the gods and goddesses being depicted in statues may have had an intermediate phase of a sort. Thórólf Mostrar-skeggr's hof may have been an example of this. Of his temple it is said that one of his high seat pillars had the likeness of Thorr carved on it. This carving of the likeness of Thorr on pillars may have developed into the practice of having carved statues. (157)
Whether or not statues of the gods and goddesses was an early practice, it certainly was a late practice in the Viking Age. These images were called líkneski ('likeness') and skurð-goð ('carved gods' which may have been a title bestowed by Christians.) (158) It is likely they were mostly carved out of wood. In the saga of Olaf Tryggvasson two wooden men, which are thought to be statues of gods, are taken form the mound of Freyr. One was kept in Sweden while the other was transferred to Trondheim in Norway. (159) They would have been painted and possibly overlaid with gold and silver and even clothed. Because they were made of wood and also given the Christians' zeal for destroying 'idols' we have very few examples of these that have survived. The few that have survived have been smaller versions that were carved in ivory or copper. (160)
In the lore there are quite a few examples of statues being mentioned. The image of Thorgerd Hördabrud which Jarl Hákon worshipped in a hof was in the image of a splendidly dressed woman who was ornamented with gold and silver as well as fine clothing. The image was said to have been as tall as a full-grown man and to have had a large gold ring on her arm and a hood for her head. The image was looted and destroyed by Olaf Tryggvasson. (161)
Adam of Bremen, in his description of the hof at Uppsala gives a description of the statues there which may or may not be legitimate. He describes three statues all made 'totally out of gold.' The three gods depicted are Thor and how has the middle and most esteemed position, and to the left and right of him are Wodan (Othinn) and Fricco (Freyr.) (162)
A practice mentioned the lore which there is very little explanation for was the anointing of the statues. Grimm theorizes that the dipping of images in a stream may have been part of some Heathen rite and it is possible that this was somehow connected with the anointing of statues. (163) In Fridthjof's Saga the wives of the kings are said to be sitting near the fire and warming them while anointing them and wiping them with napkins. (164) What this anointing was for is unsure. It is noted though that this anointing or smearing with fat and then baking in the fire of the statues is always performed by women. (165) In the account from Fridthjof's Saga, there are multiple images of

gods and goddesses that are being 'anointed' by the wives of the kings there and one that is specifically mentioned is an image of Baldr which falls into the fire on account of Fridthjof's outlaw actions.
More than any other god, an image of Thorr is most often mentioned. In Thrandheim there was said to be an image of Thorr in a wagon which could be pulled along. (Flateyjarbók I, 268:320) And in Thorr's temple in Sweden there were said to be hammers which were used to imitate the sound of thunder. Magnus of Denmark removed these hammers in 1125. (166)
There usually was more than one statue in a hof, and many times specifically three are mentioned. (167) One of the statues usually occupied the central and most honored position and that position was almost always occupied by Thorr. Even in Sweden at the temple at Uppsala where Freyr was so venerated, it was Thorr that occupied the central position in the hof there, according to Adam of Bremen. Olaf Tryggvasson is said to have attacked and desecrated a temple in Rogaland that has Thorr as the central image as well. (168) It is interesting note that in Adam of Bremen's description we find Othinn listed among the statues at Uppsala, (169) because this is the only reliable source of literature in which a statue of Othinn is mentioned. There was an image of Freyr at Thrandheim but there is some debate about the description from Droplaugarsona Saga that places Freyr and Thorr on a lower bench in the hof and Frigg and Freyja occupying the higher bench. (170)
Thor's statue is mentioned more than any other by far. Adam of Bremen also relates an instance in Sweden in 1030 when an English missionary found a statue of Thorr standing at the assembly place (Thing.) He smashed it up with an axe and was at once put to death for it. The hof at Mærin in Thrandheim was said to have an image of Thorr that was adorned with gold and silver and that it was honored above all the other gods. The image was seated in a splendid chariot to which was harnessed to goats that were beautifully carved in wood. Both the cart (wagon) and the goats were on wheels and the cords attached to the goat's horns were of silver. The statue of Thorr in the temple belonging to Jarl Hákon also was placed in a wagon which is described in Njál's Saga. The image of Thorr in the Dales which was visited by King Olaf in 1021 was not in a wagon but had a hammer which was held by the statue. This statue was carried out during gatherings and had a special platform which it stood on during these gatherings and the statue was said to have no lack of gold and silver. (171)
There was also what are called the 'goldgubber images.' These tiny gold images depict two figures together, one male and one female which face each other, sometimes embracing or holding a leafy branch between them. They are usually found in sets and in house-sites, instead of graves or hofs. There is a lot of speculation as to what they represent. Some believe they depict Freyr and Gerthr and that they might be used for fertility and/or to bless marriages, perhaps the Vanir version of the laying of Thorr's hammer on the brides lap to bless the marriage. They are also thought to have been used to bless a new home as well and in one instance at least, were found in the remains of a hof.

The Blót-Feast

The basic religious observance of pre-Christian and Viking Age Heathens was the blót-feast. The word blót is a noun and a verb (blóta - to sacrifice). As a noun it is translated as 'sacrificial feast.' (172) It was universally used to describe the method of worship used in Heathenry. (173) Simek says that the word originally meant 'strengthen' (the god) [his parenthesis.] (174) At the risk of contradicting a well known scholar, I would say that 'strengthen,' instead, referred to strengthening the ties between the Regin and mankind, in other words strengthening the ties of kinship that exist between the Regin and those who honor them. Davidson agrees with this when she says, "They met to renew their contract with the supernatural world, and to ensure good luck for the coming season, and this was something for the whole community to share in and not for selected guests." (175) Not only where these feasts a way of strengthening the bonds between man and gods but they were also a way of keeping the bonds of community and family strong. (176) This idea of the blót being a means of keeping the ties between family and between gods and man strong can be seen in the sayings of the High One.
"44 With presents friends should please each other, With a shield or a costly coat: Mutual giving makes for friendship So long as life goes well.
46 A man should be loyal through life to friends, And return gift for gift, Laugh when they laugh, but with lies repay A false foe who lies.
47 If you find a friend you fully trust And wish for his good will, Exchange thoughts, exchange gifts, Go often to his house.
113 If you know a friend you can fully trust, Go often to his house: Grass and brambles grow quickly

Upon the untrodden track. (177)
The blót could easily be seen as a way of "going often to the house of the gods," and as way of exchanging gifts with a friend whose good will you wish.
The blótar were a means of insuring the health and growth of the community. Davidson says, "In spite of occasional encircling walls, it is essential to see the sacred place as something not set apart from the ordinary secular world, but rather as providing a vital center for the needs of the community and for maintenance of a kingdom. It offered a means of communication with the Other World, and was regarded as a source of power, inspiration, healing and hidden knowledge. One or more deities might be revered in the shrine or cult place, and through them men might get in touch with the underworld or with the world of the sky. Law and order essential for the established community was centered in the holy place, and sanctuaries like Tara, Uppsala and Thingvellir might service as microcosm and map of the entire kingdom." (178)
The main element was the sacrificial feast. The blót was held at which time the animal would be sacrificed. (179) It should be noted that the character of these animal sacrifices were very much different than other practices such as those done by middle eastern religions. The animal was eaten by those present at the blót feast, except for those parts dedicated to the gods which, from the lore, was most likely the head and skin and possibly certain organs. Also of great importance was the drinking of mead or ale. Food and ale/mead were hallowed to the gods and therefore in partaking in them each person was considered as sharing in the othr of the gods and goddesses. (180) These blót feasts were distinguished from normal banquets by the fact that the participants ate hallowed meat from the sacrificed animal and drank mead or ale in the honor of the gods and of ancestors. (181)
The evidence for these feasts are quite numerous. In the mid tenth century a Spanish Jew from Cordova describes the customs of the market town of Hedeby in Denmark. He relates that to the people there sacrificing and feasting went together 'They hold a feast where all meet to honor their god and to eat and drink. Each man who slaughters an animal for sacrifice - ox, ram, goat or pig - fastens it to a pole outside the door of his house, to show that he had made his sacrifice in honor of the god.' (182)
It is interesting that in most references to the great feasts there is nothing saying that the sacrifices were made to any particular god or goddess. Instead it is normally offered for peace, fertility, victory, the gods in general or for other similar reasons. At other times certain deities might be sacrificed to depending on the boon desired. Thorr was often sacrificed to for safe travel as well as in times of pestilence or famine. Othinn was sacrificed too in times of war. One example of this is in Fornmanna Sögur when a sacrifice is made to Othinn and two ravens croaked loudly after the sacrifice and this was seen as a good omen that Othinn had accepted the sacrifice. After this the Jarl burnt his ships, confident that his enterprise would be successful. (183) Freyr might be sacrificed to, for a wedding in order to bless it. Special occasions like the weddings, births, coronations and funerals, i.e all the major life tides, were also causes for the blót feast. (184) The Swedes sacrificed to Freyr for peace and plenty. The account of the Rus sacrifice on the island of St. Gregory was said to be for success in trading and although the sacrifice was left at the foot of an oak tree, we cannot say for sure which god or goddess it would have been intended for, although Thorr and Freyr would be possibilities. (185) In Hallfredar Saga there is an instance where the crew of a ship make a vow to sacrifice to Freyr if they got a fair wind to Sweden or to Thor and Othinn if they got a good wind to Iceland. (186) As we will see later when examining the feasts for particular Holy Nights, the major Holy Nights had definite purposes. (187) Besides the regular blót feasts which were held at set times each year, times of famine, failure in crops, pestilence or similar events would necessitate the need of a sacrifice. (188) Blóts were also held to gain success in trade and battle. Ibn Fadlin gives an excellent account of a blót conducted by the Rus to insure success in trade.
'When the ships come to this mooring place, everybody goes ashore with bread, meat, onions, milk and intoxicating drink and betakes himself to a long upright piece of wood that has a face like a man's and is surrounded by little figures, behind which are long stakes in the ground. The Rus prostrates himself before the big carving and says, "O my Lord, I have come from a far land and have with me such and such a number of girls and such and such a number of sables", and he proceeds to enumerate all his other wares. Then he says, "I have brought you these gifts," and lays down what he has brought with him, and continues, "I wish that you would send me a merchant with many dinars and dirhems, who will buy from me whatever I wish and will not dispute anything I say." Then he goes away.
If he has difficulty selling his wares and his stay is

prolonged, he will return with a gift a second or third time. If he has still further difficulty, he will bring a gift to all the little idols and ask their intercession, saying, "These are the wives of our Lord and his daughters and sons." And he addresses each idol in turn, asking intercession and praying humbly. Often the selling goes more easily and after selling out he says, "My Lord has satisfied my desires; I must repay him," and he takes a certain number of sheep or cattle and slaughters them, gives part of the meat as alms, brings the rest and deposits it before the great idol and the little idols around it, and suspends the heads of the cattle or sheep on the stakes. In the night, dogs come and eat all, but the one who has made the offering says, "Truly, my Lord is content with me and has consumed the present I brought him."' (189)

Ibn Fadlan's accounts can be considered accurate for the most part because he was a man who was very interested in the customs of foreign people. (190) It was also common to hold sacrificial blóts in thanks of victory already obtained. Tacitus tells us of such an account in his Annals. After the defeat of Varus and three Roman legions, the leaders of the Romans were all sacrificed in thanks for victory. (191) We also have an account of a blót held every Oct. 1st by the Saxons which was celebrated to commemorate the victory of the Thuringians in 534 C. E. (192) Even though any of these reasons might be part of the purpose for the feast the main reason was always the strengthening of bonds between the Regin and man. (193)

The great blót feasts were also an occasion for consulting about the future. Divination was often performed at these feasts as was also the custom to be done at the inauguration of a king. The Scandinavian boar sacrifice mentioned in Ynglinga Saga was said to be associated with enquiring into the future. (194)

The methods used are described in some cases though not fully. Some methods were a chip or chips called the blótspan (sacrifice chip) or by lots. The blótspan was dipped in the sacrifricial blood. These both were cast and read by the person doing the divination. There was also a method in which scales were involved. If the favorable scale went higher then it was considered a good omen. (195) Normally this divination was about things that would be of interest to the whole community such as how crops would do in the coming year and the health of the people of the community as a whole.

Blót Feast Descriptions

Some rather good descriptions of what the blót feast would have been like have survived in the literature. One description is in the Saga of Hakon the Good.

"It was an old custom, that when there was to be sacrifice all the bondes should come to the spot where the temple stood and bring with them all that they required while the festival of the sacrifice lasted. To this festival all the men brought ale with them; and all kinds of cattle, as well as horses, were slaughtered, and all the blood that came from them was called "hlaut", and the vessels in which it was collected were called hlaut-vessels. Hlaut-staves were made, like sprinkling brushes, with which the whole of the altars and the temple walls, both outside and inside, were sprinkled over, and also the people were sprinkled with the blood; but the flesh was boiled into savory meat for those present. The fire was in the middle of the floor of the temple, and over it hung the kettles, and the full goblets were handed across the fire; and he who made the feast, and was a chief, blessed the full goblets, and all the meat of the sacrifice. And first Odin's goblet was emptied for victory and power to his king; thereafter, Niord's and Freyja's goblets for peace and a good season. Then it was the custom of many to empty the brage-goblet ; and then the guests emptied a goblet to the memory of departed friends, called the remembrance goblet. Sigurd the earl was an open-handed man, who did what was very much celebrated; namely, he made a great sacrifice festival at Hlader of which he paid all the expenses." (196)

As we can see here it was customary for those participating in the feast to help defray the cost by contributing to the things needed for the feast. In this case the generosity of the Jarl Sigurd is shown when he paid all the expenses. This description gives us a fairly good description of what went on that these feasts.

The feast, as would be logical, always followed the sacrificing of the animal. It is likely that this part of the blót feast was performed at some sacred site and that after the animal was sacrificed, those participating in the blót feast would retire to a hall or outdoor area specifically prepared for the feast. The meat was cooked in cauldrons which were placed on fire pits that ran down the center of the hall. On either side of the fire pits were tables and benches for the community to eat their meals on. At some point the person responsible for overseeing the feast, usually the Jarl or Chief, would hallow the mead or ale and it would passed out for the full (toast). These were horns were some times hallowed by handing them across the fire. There were initial toasts that were started off with normally but the toasting could go on indefinitely. The

first was called Othinn's Full (Othinn's Toast) and was drank in his honor. It is also said that this first toast was Thorr's Full for those who trusted in their own strength. The second toast was Njörth's Full and Freyr's Full. These two fulls were for prosperous seasons and peace. Next came the Braggi Full. These fulls were used to make oaths and boast of oaths completed. Then finally there was the Minni Full which was a full in honor of ancestors or friends who had passed to the other worlds. It was the person giving the feast, that is, the Jarl or Chief who called out the beginning of each of these fulls after which each person in the hall followed suit before the Jarl began the next full. (197) The description of this feast seems to mirror one held in the halls of Aegir, the Sea-Giant, in which the Regin were in attendance.

Of old the gods made feast together
And drink they sought ere sated they were;
Twigs they shook, and blood they tried:
Rich fare in Ægir's hall they found. (198)

The third line of this strophe seems to be referring to the hlautbolli and the hlautteinn used in collecting and sprinkling the sacrificial blood. So as mentioned the animal sacrifice of Heathens, unlike the sacrifices of other cultures, was in the form of a sacred feast. Except for certain parts, the animals was eaten by those assembled for the feast. (199) This feast was considered to be shared with the gods and goddesses. Especially the sacrificial blood (hlaut) was considered as belonging to the gods and it was used to hallow all those present. (200) That the people actually ate the meat, as opposed to it being burned up is born out in many sources. (201)

This meat was normally cooked in a cauldron, most likely in the fire pits that ran most of the length of the hall and on either side of which were those feasting. That the meat was boiled and not roasted seems to be the case. In every example I could find it is stated specifically that it was boiled in cauldrons as opposed to being roasted on a spit. Grimm correctly believed that this tradition with the cauldron could very well be where the stereotype of the witch with the boiling cauldron originated from. (202) This is not hard to see given the Christian penchant for depicting all Heathen practices as 'devil worship.' The cauldron shows up in other sources as well. In a Norwegian Saga the Trolds have a copper kettle and Christians believed in a large cauldron in Hell. (203) We also find in the poem from the Poetic Edda, Hymskvitha that the meat of bulls was boiled in a cauldron. (204) Davidson also confirms the use of cauldrons in boiling meat as well. (205)

Cauldrons were also used to make the mead and hold the mead at the feasts. The Eddic poem Hymskvitha tells of Thorr's journey to obtain the great cauldron of Hymir in which ale was brewed. (206) At the feasts there was a second cauldron in addition to the ones that the meat was boiled in. This second cauldron was for the ale or mead of the feast. (207) We see ale being brewed in a great cauldron in Hymskvitha as well. (208)

There is also evidence that cauldrons were consecrated to the gods from Old Norse proper names such as Asketill and Thorketill (abbrev. Thorkel) and the Anglo-Saxon Oscytel. (209) Cauldrons were also found in graves along with more fragile ones that hold ale. One found at Sutton Hoo was big enough to hold a sheep. (210)

Although the feasts were sacred in nature, it was no somber-faced affair as you would see in Churches on Sunday morning. It is logical to assume that the blót before the feast, where the animal was sacrificed was a very somber affair. If, as is my speculation, that this blót was performed at a sacred site different from the hof (hall) where the feast was held, we could very easily see this part of the Blót-Feast as being a very respectful affair. In any case though, by the time the feast began it was a time of joy and celebration. Just as the ties between and god and man were being strengthened and celebrated so where the ties between family and community. The feasts connected with the worship of Nerthus which is described by Tacitus show us a community celebrating with great joy. (211) Davidson agrees with this view as well when she says, "In the regular feasts in honor of the gods the atmosphere was apparently one of hospitality and enjoyment; everything that can be discovered about the celebrations at Skedemosse in the period before the Viking Age, for instance, suggests that a good time was had by all, and that the torch-lit feasting and throwing of offerings into the water must have been a memorable experience." - (212)

There were special activities during blót-feasts. From Gregory's dialogues and from the account of Adam of Bremen there was playing and singing. (213) In Fornmanna Sögur (VI, 99) Harld Hardradi of Norway arranged for the telling of a saga that would last for the entire Yule feast. This tradition lasted into Christian time and was appropriated by the Christians for their festivals. (214) There might also be games and contests (215) such as sports contests, racing, and wrestling to name only a few. (216) So it is easy to see that the great feasts were times of celebration and fellowship between the family and community.

Some scholars believe that once a feast had started strangers were barred from participating. (217) As the Norse were renowned for their hospitality this is something that is hard to accept. One example used to put forth this idea is that of Sigvat, the Christian skald. On a mission for the Christian king of Norway, he was traveling through Sweden. In late autumn he was turned away from more than one farm (hof) because they were holding the Álfablót. This was, however, more likely to been because Sigvat was a Christian than to have been because he was a stranger coming late. He was turned away 'as if he were a wolf.' One of the hofkonar (farm-wives) was said to have said that she feared the anger of Othinn should she let him in. (218) From this evidence it seems more likely that it was the Christian that was not welcome as opposed to the late-coming stranger. Earlier in the Viking Age before Christianity had been able to get a foothold Christians were expected to attend the blót-feasts whether or not they wanted to or not as was the case with the Langobards. (219) Others instead allowed the Christians to pay a fine if they did not attend.

The Procession

The procession is an event that takes place before the blót-feast and may be a custom specifically connected with Vanir worship. We have more than few descriptions of these processions and in nearly every case it is a Vanir god or goddess that is being honored. The oldest account we have is from Tacitus which scholars believe to be describing a procession that is in honor of Nerthus (Herthum), the Earth Mother. A wagon drawn by two oxen made its way throughout the land and wherever it came it was welcomed with great delight and celebration. Weapons were put aside and the people feasted for days. (220) The wagon was so integral to the processions of the Vanir that they are some times called Wanes which is the Anglo-Saxon word meaning "wagon."

Two delicately made wagons were found in a peat bog that are dated to about the same time as Tacitus was writing his descriptions in Germania. They were found dismantled in a peat bog in Dejbjorg Denmark. They were made of wood and decorated with sheet bronze. Another decorated wagon was found in the Oseberg ship find which was buried in the late ninth century. It was carved with elaborately carved scenes with human and animal figures and because of the style is thought to be a copy of a much earlier version. (221) The ship burial at Oseberg is thought to possibly have been the burial of a Vanir gythja (priestess). The reason for this is because of the beautifully decorated wagon and the corn, apples and nuts that were found in the ship. Davidson says that the ship was admirably suited to take a priestess up and down the coast from one settlement to the other on a course of visits like those made by Nerthus in Denmark. (222)

There was also a procession much like the one described of Nerthus that was in honor of Freyr. In the Flateyjarbók there is a tale that is attached to the Saga of Olaf Tryggvasson in which Gunnar poses as the god Freyr and dupes the trusting Swedes bilking them of many gifts and their gythja who was called the wife of Freyr, until Olaf finally calls him back to Norway. It is obvious from the account that the writer intended to show the folly of Heathen worship. Despite this, it is probable that the tradition of the statue of Freyr being carried in a wagon which made processions is one that is based on actual practices in Sweden as it was the whole basis of the jest. (223) In this account the people flocked to the wagon and brought their offerings and celebrated with feasts in the same manner as is described for Nerthus by Tacitus. (224)

Other processions may have been common with other deities and with sacred objects. Grimm states that the carrying out of divine images was an essential feature of Heathen cults in general. Grimm mentions an account of an unknown Gothic god that rode in a wagon. In folklore Dame Holda and Berhta make processions in wagons during midwinter. And there is Deitrich which Grimm theorizes is based on an earlier legend concerning Freyr who rides a golden boar in a procession and there is the heroes banquet in which the boar is led around the benches in a procession, albeit a short one. (225)

Grimm also theorizes that the practice of carrying images of the Madonna and images of the saints in processions during times of drought, bad crops, pestilence or war was most likely a borrowing of Heathen practices. These processions were thought to bring back rain, the fertility of the soil, etc., and Grimm says that they were even carried to help put out fires. (226)

Grimm states that incense-offerings were not used by Heathens and is a Christian addition. (227) But then he goes on to say, in descriptions of Midsummer traditions that Heathens were said to throw all manners of herbs into the fires. I would submit that since more than few herbs are used as incense and that this practice points to the distinct possibility that incense were in fact used by Heathens.

As we shall see when I deal with the types of offerings that were made, there were quite a few possibilities for offerings and many times it depended on the means each person, as to what they offered. Incense may have been one of these offerings.

The Full

I would like to hear examine the Full with a little more detail. In Old Norse the word 'full' means 'a toast' (228), usually in honor of the gods and goddesses or ancestors. The full was a symbol of that of that agreement that ended the war between the Aesir and Vanir which has never been broken. Each time we raise the horn to honor both Aesir and Vanir we honor that agreement. (229)
As we saw in the descriptions of the blót feast the rounds of full had a set pattern. The first full going to either Othinn or Thorr, the next going to Njorthr and Freyr, next was the Braggi-Full which oaths and boasts were made and finally the Minni-Full (memory toast) for ancestors and friends who have passed over. Specifically it was said that these were drank to 'kinsmen who lay in barrows (graves)." (230) This same formula is virtually repeated in Kákonar Saga goða when Jarl Sigurd drinks to Othinn for power and victory, Njörth and freyr for peace and good seasons and to the dead ancestors. (231) These fullar were always drank with hallowed mead or ale. The full was drank in honor of other gods and goddesses than those already mentioned. Freya is mentioned as having a full drank in honor of her and this practice was one that was continued by the Christians when they drank the full in honor of Christ, Mary and St. Michael as was done by Olaf in Fornm. sögur. In the same saga it is demanded of Olaf later on that he drink the full in honor of Thorr, Othinn and the other ases (gods). (232)
A major part of the full was the Braggi-full. During this full one would either make an oath to accomplish some dead or relate how they had completed an oath that had been sworn at a pervious blót-feast. In Hervarar Saga such an oath is made (233) and there was also a Braggi-full oath involved in the coronation of a new king. In Ynglinga Saga we have one such oath described. It is said there that it was the custom of the one who was heir to the throne to throw an heir-ship feast. At this feast he would sit on a footstool in front of the high-seat until the full bowl (cauldron?) was brought in and was then to take the Braggi-horn and make solemn vows that he would fulfill. After that he would ascend to the high seat and officially take the kingship. It is related that King Ingjald stood up and grasped a large bull's horn and made a vow to expand his kingdom in all four directions. He then took the horn and pointed it to the four quarters. (234)
As is possibly indicated from chapter 40 of Ynglinga saga it seems that the ale or mead that was drank came from a hallowed cauldron. The Suevic cupa which was filled with beer was a hallowed sacrificial cauldron as was the one which the Cimbri sent to emperor Augustus. (235) Large cauldrons have been found in Germanic graves. (236)
That the cauldron was a genuine tradition can be shown in what I call "Christian Propaganda." These are tales told that illustrate the power of Christian priests and clerics over Heathen gods. One such example is in the Life of St. Columabanus, which is a Latin work written in the seventh century. In this tale the saint comes to the Alamanni in Switzerland. there he sees a group of men clustered around a huge vessel they called cupa, which was surely a cauldron. It held about 20 measures of beer. When the saint asked the men what they were doing, they replied that they were offering the beer to Wodan. The saint was said to approach the cauldron and blew on it which caused it to shatter and all the beer was lost. Another similar story is found in a tale of St. Verdrastus. He accompanied the Frankish king, Chlothar to a blót feast. This was in the early days of the Christian conversion so Heathen rites were still very much practiced. At this feast allowances were made for Christians. There were two cauldrons set up, one for Christians and one for Heathens that had been prepared according to their customs. Seeing this Vedrastus made the sigh of the cross over the Heathen cauldron and it burst and many were said to be converted by his show of power. (237) Now it is obvious that these stories are nothing more than Christian propaganda but they do show that the practice of ale, beer or mead in a sacred cauldron at blót feasts was a genuine Heathen practice. Otherwise the Christians would not have singled out this practice for their propaganda.

Davidson says that Celts and Germanics alike had tales that emphasize the importance of the great cauldron for holding mead or ale in the other world. (238) We see this in the Eddic poems Lokasenna and in Hymskvitha.

> 3. "The word-wielder toil for the giant worked,
> And so revenge on the gods he sought;
> He bade Sif's mate the kettle bring:

"Therein for ye all much ale shall I
brew." (239)

5. "There dwells to the east of Elivagar
Hymir the wise at the end of heaven;
A kettle my father fierce doth own,
A mighty vessel a mile in depth." (240)

This lay is the story of how Thorr brings back the massive cauldron of Hymir. It was only this cauldron that was large enough for Aegir to brew enough mead for the feasting gods and goddesses.
The importance of hallowing the ale or mead for the full is shown in many places in the lore. One way this was done was by passing the horn of mead over or around a fire. The hallowing of the mead with fire seems to have been an essential part of the full. (241) Other sources show that the drink was hallowed by the Jarl of the feast before the drinks were passed out. (242) It is also possible that the drink was hallowed by virtue of being in a hallowed cauldron. (243) What ever the method of hallowing the mead was, we do know for sure that it was considered important to hallow the mead or ale before drinking.
The custom of using a bulls horn to drink the full with is one that is undoubtedly an ancient one. One of the first mentions of it comes from Caesar in his Gallic Wars. He says that the Germans put great value on the horns of the auroch. He describes them with rims of silver and always used at their great feasts. (244) These horns were still used at the end of the Viking Age. These were used in Norwegian courts until the eleventh century when Olaf the Quiet replaced them with 'cups which could be filled at table.' A beautiful pair of gold drinking horns of Germanic workmanship was discovered near Gallehus in North Schleswig in the eighteenth century. These horns date from the fifth century and one of them was inscribed with runes. They were used in the kings court until they were stolen by a thief who melted them down before he was caught. There was a series of rings that decorated these horns and these rings were decorated with scenes of dancing and sporting events. There were also men with animal heads, a three headed giant and horses and there is a woman shown carrying a horn. Scholars theorize that these horns were meant to be used at seasonal rites. (245) Another pair of horns dated from the seventh century were found at the ship grave in Sutton Hoo and these were finely decorated with silver-gilted rims and tips. (246)
There were also legendary horns. There was one called Grim the Good that had a man's head on the tip and was said to speak and be able to foretell the future. (247) The giving of the name Grim to horns would connect them to Othinn of whom the brewing of ale and mead was associated with. (248)
There are many depictions of a female figure carrying a horn and this could be an indication that the bearing of the horn of mead might have been traditionally done by a woman and this position might have been one of honor. This is possibly a mirroring of Othinn's Valkyries who carry the horns of mead to the einherjar in Vallhöll. This image is seen on a number of stones from the Viking Age that were set up as memorials. There were amulets of these mead horn carrying women as well. One example was on an amulet found in Sweden in the cemetery in Birka. The same woman appears on carved stones from tenth century England. And as we noted above the fifth century Gallehus horn has an image of this woman as well. (249)
As they did with so many other aspects of the Heathen faith the Christians took the full and adapted it for their own use. In early Christian Norway, there was a law that encouraged the brewing of ale for certain festivals such as All Hallowmas and Christmas. The ale at these feasts was to be consecrated to Christ and Mary for peace and plenty, in the same way it had been dedicated to Njörthr and Freyr for the same reasons previously. To fail to do so meant the person committing the infraction had to pay a fine to the bishop. Instead of drinking the full to the Heathen gods and goddesses and departed ancestors they instead drank to Christ, Mary, St. Martin, St. Olaf and other saints as well as the Holy Ghost. The substituting of Christ, Mary and the saints for the Heathen gods and goddesses and departed ancestors for the full was suggested to Olaf Tryggvasson in dream by St. Martin. This practice was observed as late as the seventeenth century at wedding feasts in Iceland. (250) There was also a Christian custom called St. John's mine which was a toast in memory of St. John. (251) As the full was such a strong part of Heathen tradition it is not hard to see that these later Christian customs have their roots in the Heathen practice.
The minni-full (memory toast) is a practice that has continued to this day and the modern custom of the toast has it roots in this Heathen custom. Grimm says that, "At Othergen a village of Hildesheim, on Dec. 27 every year a chalice of wine is hallowed by the priest, and handed to the congregation in the church to drink as Johannis segen (blessing); it is not done in any of the neighboring

places. In Sweden and Norway we find at Candlemas a dricka eldborgs skål, drinking a toast." (252) It is also obvious that the practice of drinking to the saints at medieval guild-feasts in Scandinavia had their roots in the full as well. (253) The Gothland Karin's Guild drank to Christ, St. Catharine and Our Lady, while the Swedish Eric's Guild to St. Eric, Our Saviour and Our Lady. At the funeral of Harald of Denmark who had been converted to Christianity, the full was drank in honor of Christ, St. Michael and to the memory of the dead king. (254)

The Solemn Oath

Since we know that drinking of the full many times included the taking of an oath, I think it would be good to, here, take a look at the oath. The oath was normally sworn on an object. Many times this object was the oath ring and this oath ring was a sacred item in the hof. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle gives an example of the oath ring being used by the Danes (255) in 876 and there is an account of a ring called Thor's ring on which oaths were sworn. Thor presided over the Assembly, which opened on Thursday (Thor's Day) in Iceland. (256) In Eyrbyggja Saga the oath ring was described as being 20 ounces of silver. When not in use it lay on the stalli and during feasts the gothi wore it on his arm. (257) In the description of Thórólf's hof in Iceland, the ring is described as being 2 ounces and was worn on the finger of the gothi during all assemblies. Like the description in Eyrbyggja Saga, this ring laid on the stalli of the hof when not in use. (258)

In Landnámabók we have a very good description of the oath ring and its use. It was to be at least two ounces or more and when not in use it would lay on the stalli. As in the previous examples it was to be worn by the hof-gothi at all assemblies and here we find out that it was to be reddened by blood from the sacrificial animal before hand. Here also we find the basis for the modern practice of taking an oath on the Christian Bible in courts of law for every man who had a case in the Thing (law assembly) was required to swear an oath on this ring and name two witnesses. The oath was worded thusly: "I name [the two witnesses] witnesses herein, that I take an oath on the ring, a lawful oath, ---so help me Frey and Njörd and the Almighty Ás (Othinn), as I shall pursue (or defend) this suit, or bear witness, or give verdict or judgment, according to what I know to be most right and true and in accordance with the law." The example we have in Víga-Glúms Saga agrees very closely with this account. The man taking the oath was to take it on a silver ring not less than three ounces that had been dipped in the blood of a sacrificed ox. Glúm used the following words to swear his oath: "I take a temple-oath on the ring, and I say to the god,' etc. " Freyr and Njörth are not used in this oath, instead only 'the god' is mentioned. (259) The above examples that list the ring as being 2 ounces may be a mistranslation. For examples the description given in Eyrbyggja Saga listed above gives the ring as being 2 ounces. The actual text for this is 20 eyrar which Davidson says is about 550 grams or roughly 17.5 ounces. This would be a more logical weight for a ring that was worn on the arm. (260)

While rings were mentioned many times as the object on which oaths were sworn, there were others. According to Grimm oaths were sworn by the river Leiptr. (261) As we saw in the section dealing with the full, oaths were sworn over the horn of mead and there are also examples of oaths being sworn on a boar during Yule and on sacred stones.

Hallowing

We know without doubt that Thorr's hammer was used in hallowing. As it can be shown that the Christian practice of the sign of the cross did not come into being until they began to make in roads into Northern Europe and therefore was most likely yet another Christian adaptation of a Heathen custom, and coupled with other literary evidence, we have good cause to believe that the sign of the hammer was a genuine Heathen practice used for hallowing. Grimm supports this when he says, "As the North made the sign of Thor's hammer, christians used the cross for the blessing (segnung) of the cup; conf. poculum signare, Walthar. 225, precisely the Norse signa full. (262) Davidson likewise agrees when she says, "The popularity of the hammer sign and the uses it was put to in the Viking Age indicate the strength of the cult of Thor in Norway and Iceland <<(Fig. 28)>>. It was used to mark boundary-stones, was raised over a newborn child as a mark of its acceptance in the community, and according to the poem Thrymskviða was brought in at weddings to hallow the bride, and laid on her lap. It was also depicted on memorial stones for the dead, to whom Thor's protection extended, while the conception of the hammer restoring the dead to life is found in the myth of Thor raising his goats to life after they had been killed and eaten." (263) This is described in Gylfaginning 44. After having eaten his goats, he takes the skins of the goats and lays the bones on them and, with his hammer, hallows them and brings

them back to life. (264) The sign of the hammer was also used at burials to hallow the dead and the burial ground. (265) In the Prose Edda, Gylfaginning 49, Thor hallows the funeral pyre of his Brother Baldr with his hammer. (266) In the saga of Hakon the Good we have what could be the description of the sign of the hammer being made over mead. Here, Jarl Sigurd is hosting a feast in which the Christianized King Hakon attends. Sigurd spoke some words over a horn of mead and blessed it in Othinn's name and then passed it to Hakon. Hakon took the mead and made the sign of the cross over it. When asked what the king had done, Sigurd explains it as the king making the sign of the hammer over it as all do who trust in their own power and strength. (267) There is a lot of debate about whether or not this is an example of a genuine Heathen practice being depicted but I think that, at the very least, we must admit that it is a strong possibility. What we can say without doubt is that Thorr's hammer was used for hallowing and the making of a sign to represent it in the absence of having a hammer is not only likely, but completely within reason.

The concept of divine implements is one that was a strong tradition in Scandinavian lore. (268) The mirroring of the practices of the gods was a practice that can be seen in many areas. The law assembly of the Thing was itself modeled after the council of the gods. (269) So we can see, from the examples of Thorr's use of Mjollnir in hallowing how this would have become a tradition among Heathens.

Thorr himself was called upon to hallow as well. The inscription on the Danish Glavenstrup Stone which was carved circa 900-925 C. E. calls on Thorr to hallow the runes. (270) Thorr's hammer was also often depicted on stones and was used as an amulet. In Landnámabók Einarr Thorgerisson, an Orkney migrant, marked his new territory with an ax, which symbolized Thorr, an eagle symbolizing Othinn and a cross. (271)

Just as the cross was and is considered the symbol of Christianity so was Thorr's Hammer considered a symbol of Heathenism. (272) The hammer has been found in many late pagan amulets and inscriptions point to its use as the Heathen answer to the cross. A tenth century die shows that a metal smith was ready to cast either crosses or hammers depending on the buyers religion. (273) The hammer is found represented on many stones as well. These depictions on stones were found especially in Sweden. (274)

Hallowing was also done with fire. When talking of the full we found that the full horns were some times hallowed by handing them across or around fires before the full was drank. (275) Fire was also used to mark boundaries and Davidson believes this rite was connected with Thorr who guarded boundaries and because of lightning's ability to start fires. Thórólf Mostar-skeggr marked the boundaries of his land by walking around them with a torch in hand when arriving in Iceland. (276) It is interesting to note that the Old Norse word for fire is eldr and the word for lightning is elding. (277)

Facing North

When engaged in sacred activities there was one direction that Heathens faced and that was North. They looked Northward when praying, and sacrificing. (278) Instead of taking this practice and converting it for their own use, like they did for so many other things, the Christians looked upon the North quarter as the 'unblessed quarter.' It was also unlucky to make a throw in the northern direction. (279) We know also that most Heathen graves were oriented in a northern direction and that Christian graves were oriented in an Eastern direction. At the abrenuntiatio, which many Heathens were forced to take in order to renounce their Heathen beliefs they were instructed to face west when renouncing the Heathen gods and goddesses and then to face east when accepting the one god and Christ. (280)

Offerings

The types of offerings made by Heathens were varied. I'll talk later about animal sacrifices in more detail but for now I would like to concentrate on other types of offerings that were made. Two places of offering that have been extensively excavated are Skledmosse and Käringsjön in Sweden. Besides animal sacrifices and offerings of weapons there are other offerings as well. Gold rings and various other ornaments have been found there. (281) There doesn't seem to be any set rules for what was offered judging from the variety of things found at sites. There were ships and boats left as votive offerings, presumably to Freyr or Njörth and also food, cloth and other ornaments that might indicate offerings made specifically by women. (282) 100 tiny golden miniature boats where found in a moor near Nors in Jutland and these were presumed to be offerings for safe journeys. Deliberately broken weapons were found in Danish moors and there were also gifts of food and domestic implements. (283) Grimm also gives

examples of fruit, grains and nuts being used as offerings. (284)
One practice in offerings that seems to have been very wide spread is the throwing of offerings into lakes or bogs. One of the larger bog finds is at Thorsbjerg in Denmark. Here there were gold rings, personal possessions, pottery, textiles and wooden objects. The wide range of objects suggests that these were family and/or community offerings and that women participated in the offerings as well. Gregory of Tours tells of a lake in the territory of Gabalitani where similar offerings were made. He says, 'Into this lake the country people used to throw, at an appointed time, linen cloths and pieces of material used in male attire, as a firstling sacrifice to this lake. Some threw in woolen fleeces and many also pieces of cheese, wax and thread and various spices, which would take too long to numerate, each according to his ability. They also used to come with carts, brought with them food and drink, slaughtered animals for the sacrifice and feasted for three days.' (285) This account tells us an important feature of the offerings, that is, that the person gave offerings that were accordance with their ability. We might be able to take from this that what a person gave was not so important as what those things given meant to that person. While someone who was less prosperous might give some cheese and this might be, to them, a valuable offering, for the wealthy Jarl this offering would almost be considered an insult to the gods because the Jarl would be capable of offering more. The main period in which these offerings were made, according to Davidson was from the 3rd century C. E. to the 6th century C. E. (286) Whether these bog/lake offerings were made to landvættir (land spirits) or to gods and goddesses is not certain. Accounts to survive of offerings being made to landvættir in lakes, water falls and other bodies of water. Grimm cites various practices of offerings to water spirits and more especially to whirlpools which black lambs or goats were offered to. (287) The destroyed weapons and armor seem to point to thank offerings made in thanks of victory in battle and it is quite possible that these offerings might be made to at times to landvættir, and other times to the gods and goddesses.
There are descriptions in the lore about the offerings made to specific deities and beings. For instance in Fridthjof's Saga we find that when Fridthjof and his crew fear that their ship is about to capsize in a storm, Fridthjof passes out gold to each of the crew so that they will have something to offer to Ran when they fare to her halls (drown). (288) Offerings of a bull were made to the Alfs (Elves) so that they would aid in healing. (289) Offerings were made to the mounds of dead rulers so that there good influence on the land would continue. This is connected with the Scandinavian belief that the prosperity of the land and its people was directly connected to the chief or king. Anyone who has seen the movie Excalibur would have seen this same concept depicted there with King Author. (290) Likewise gifts were offered at Freyr's mound in Sweden so that he might continue to exercise his good influence on the land. (291) Another well documented tradition is the leaving of food for house spirits. At banquets and on Holy days it was customary to set aside a portion of the meal for the house spirits and before taking the first drink the drinker would pour some of it in a bowl for the house spirits or the gods. The Lituanians would spill some of it on the ground for their earth goddess. There was a Christian practice that most likely is Heathen in origin, in which travelers would vow to offer a silver ship to their church upon return from their trip so that the trip would be without trouble. (292) Another well attested custom was the offering of food and other items to dead ancestors at their grave mounds. Archaeological evidence in Finland and in Sweden support this. (293)
When a person made an offering the deities the offering was made to might send an omen to show the person making that offering that their offering had been accepted. In the Saga of Olaf Tryggvasson Jarl Hakon makes a sacrifice to Othinn. He saw two ravens flying, both of them croaking loudly. He took this as a good omen that Othinn had accepted his sacrifice and set fire to his ships and moved inland, eventually meeting Earl Ottar in battle, whom he defeated. (294) Before leaving his land, Thorkell sacrificed a bull to Freyr asking that Freyr might drive his enemy Glúmr out of the land as well. When Orkell asked for a sign that the sacrifice was accepted the ox bellowed loudly and died. Thorkell took this as an omen that Freyr had accepted his offering. (295)
Various food items were offered to the gods and to the landvættir. In an instance mentioned earlier we saw that cheese was offered. Animal sacrifices is the most often mentioned offering but those with less means offered fruit, flowers, milk or honey. (296) Offerings of four loaves of bread were made daily to a statue of Thor at Hundsthorp in Gudbrandsdal. (297) Offerings of meat baked in the shape of idols were made as well according to Grimm. Baked bread in the shape of animals was offered as well and this practice continued long in-

to the Christian conversion. (298) One such tradition is still performed in some parts of Sweden up to this day. It is traditional to bake cookies and bread in the shape of a boar during Yule and in France on New Year's Day. (299) In the Swedish custom cakes in the shape of a boar are baked on Yule-eve. A superstition of Gelderland is most likely a later variation on a Heathen tradition concerning Freyr. On Christmas-eve Night a hero called Derrick (Derk) goes around riding on a boar. The people are careful to get all their implements of husbandry in doors lest the boar trample them and make them unfit for use. (300)
It was also customary to offer the gods and goddesses the first portion of the meal, drink or harvest. (301) At feasts, the appointed portions was set before the gods and only then was the rest cut up and cooked for those assembled at the feast. In this way the people considered that they were partaking in the meal with the gods. (302) Many of these traditions have survived to this day (the beginning of the 20th century) according to Grimm. When the husbandman cuts corn, he leaves a clump of ears standing for the god who blessed the harvest, and it is adorned with ribbons. When gathering fruit in Holstein, five or six apples are left hanging on each tree and it is because of this that the next crop will thrive. (303)

Another form of offering was the oath. An oath to perform some action might be uttered as an offering to the Regin or the landvættir. During a severe winter the people of Reykdal agree to all take oaths so that they can obtain better weather. These vows were to give gifts to the hof. (304) When Hallfred Vandræðaskald, who was a Heathen, wanted to get away from Norway and Olaf Tryggvasson, he and his crew agreed to make oaths to the gods so that they could get fair winds to any Heathen country. They promised three barrels of ale to Freyr if they got a wind to Sweden, or to Thor and Othinn if they came back to Iceland. The meaning of this was that they would hold a feast for which ever god aided them. (305) During Yule oaths were made during the sónarblót (boar-sacrifice) on the sónargöltr (sacrificial boar). (306) (307) The boar itself seems to have been sacrificed to Freyr quite often and was sacred to him. Both Freyr and Freyja are said to have golden boars. (308)

Prayer

Prayers to the Regin seems to have been a common practice among Heathens. One of the gods prayed to most often, judging from the literature was Thorr. Thorr was called on for protection during voyages. Even those who had converted to Christianity trusted Thorr more than Christ when it came to long voyages, as is seen in the account in Landnámabók, of Helgi the Lean, who was a Christian. Despite this, when he had to go on a sea voyage or make a difficult decision or any matter he considered of great importance it was Thorr he called on. (309) It was Thorr that was called on during draught as well. When rain was needed prayers to Thorr were given.
The gods were normally consulted on major decisions. Besides Thorr, Freyr was another god that received prayers quite often. It was thought Freyr would send visions to those who had his favor and called on him. (310) Jarl Hákon offered many a prayer to Thorgerd Hörgabrúð. It was only when these prayers were accompanied by tears and a silver ring that she listened. (311)

Animal Sacrifices

Animal sacrifices were an important part of Heathen religious practices. It is also one that is misunderstood by quite a few people. This occurs because when people think of animal sacrifices they most often think of middle eastern practices or practices from other cultures. In its most mundane and practical sense, the animal sacrifice of our ancestors was no different than going to your butcher for some prime cuts of ribs for a 4th of July cookout. The animal sacrifices of the Heathen had sacred qualities of course, but unlike some cultures where the animal is burnt to ashes, the animals sacrificed by Heathens were eaten in the sacrificial feasts. The whole community/family shared in the meal and the eating of it was considered sharing a meal with the gods and goddesses. (312)
Examples of animal sacrifices abound in the lore. In Denmark there was said to be a great sacrifice every nine years in the month of January that consisted of ninety-nine human sacrifices and ninety-nine horses, dogs and cocks. This account comes from Thietmar's chronicle (313) and like the one given by Adam of Bremen when he described the great sacrifice at Uppsala, it is considered to be an invention of legend, (314) and is likely an exaggeration. We know that dogs were not sacrificed normally as only animals that were eaten by man were sacrificed and dogs were not normally eaten by Northern Europeans.
Though various things could be offered to the gods and goddesses, the offering of blood sacrifices and

the life force that used that blood as a vehicle of existence were considered to be stronger offerings. These sacrifices would normally be thank offerings but might also be offerings made when asking for help from the Regin. (315) In Íselendinga Sögur the victor of a duel sacrifices a bull with the same weapon he won the duel with.

As with other types of sacrifices the first part of the sacrifice belonged to the gods. This was the blood and certain parts of the animal, like the head, hide, liver, heart and tongue. As mentioned before this was common no matter what the offering was, whether animal or crops. I would like to here quote Grimm on this as it bears repeating. "At the same time these sacrifices appear to be also banquets; an appointed portion of the slaughtered beast is placed before the god, the rest is cut up, distributed and consumed in the assembly. The people thus became partakers in the holy offering, and the god is regarded as feasting with them at their meal . At great sacrifices the kings were expected to taste each kind of food, and down to late times the house-spirits and dwarfs had their portion set aside for them by the superstitious people." (316)

There is also evidence to believe that only male animals were sacrificed. According to Grimm this was the case in more than one account given in the literature. (317)

Another strong tradition that appears in many sources is the hanging of carcasses/skins of animals either on poles or in trees. I believe what eye witnesses saw as carcasses were actually the head and skin of an animal that was sacrificed. These heads and hides of the animals were many times, hung in the limbs of sacred trees or in the limbs of trees in sacred groves. (318) A traveler in Denmark in the Viking Age described how he saw cattle hanging up outside the house in which sacrifices had been made. Davidson agrees that this was most likely only the hide with the head, horns and hooves attached, as the meat would have been eaten at the sacrifice. According to Davidson this was a practice that could be traced back to very early times in Northern Europe and that it was kept up until recent times by some of the people of the Steppe. In 1805 the hides of horned creatures were given to the church in one remote district in Sweden until a bishop objected because he thought (rightly so) that it looked too much like a Heathen custom. (319) The account of the great sacrifice at Uppsala given by Adam of Bremen also states that it was carcasses that were hung in the trees of the sacred grove that was next to the hof but here again it was probably the case of an outsider seeing hides with hooves and head still connected mistaking them for carcasses. (320) Grimm confirms that the head was not eaten but instead consecrated to the gods. He also confirms that it was the head and hide of the animal and not the carcass (321), that were hung on the limbs of sacred trees. (322) It is likely from accounts such as those from a Traveler's account of the Viking city of Hedeby that if a sacred tree was not available that the hides were hung on poles. In Hedeby the carcasses of the animals killed for sacrifice were hung on poles outside the house where the ritual was taking place. Here again it is more likely that what is being described is the hooves, head and hide of the animal. (323) On the sacred oak in Romove the Prussians would hang clothing on the limbs. (324) Does this indicate that the tradition of hanging offerings in the limbs of trees was one that was used for other offerings besides animals?

The animals that were sacrificed might be sometimes chosen by lot. In the account of the Rus Traders who sailed the Dnieper, we are told that they chose the cocks they would sacrifice by choosing lots. The lots decided which would be sacrificed, which would be eaten and which would be kept alive. (325) Using lots in this fashion was seen as letting the gods decide which should be sacrificed, for it was they who controlled the outcome of the drawing of lots. (326) Another method which some scholars believed may have been used were the horse fights and horse races that were said to have been held at the great feasts. (327) It is thought that the fights and races would decide which animal would be kept for breeding and which would be sacrificed. (328) This would be logical as it would be preferable to breed the strongest and most virile horse and thereby guarantee the line continued with the strongest horses. We know definitely that horses were sacrificed and it was the eating of horse flesh that was considered a sign of being Heathen. In the saga of Hákon the Good, the Christian king Hákon refuses to eat horse flesh at the feast as it was considered sinful by the Christians.

The types of animals sacrificed might depend on circumstances or to whom the sacrifice was intended for but we do know that only animals that were eaten were sacrificed to the Regin. We know that the sacrifice almost always was accompanied by a feast and that this feast was considered to have been shared with the gods and goddesses. Sacrificing an animal that was not eaten by man could have been seen as insulting to the gods. Grimm agrees with this when he says, "... only those animals were suitable, whose flesh could be ea-

ten by men. It would have been unbecoming to offer food to the god, which the sacrificer himself would have disdained. At the same time these sacrifices appear to be also banquets; an appointed portion of the slaughtered beast is placed before the god, the rest is cut up, distributed and consumed in the assembly. The people thus became partakers in the holy offering, and the god is regarded as feasting with them at their meal (see Suppl.). At great sacrifices the kings were expected to taste each kind of food, and down to late times the house-spirits and dwarfs had their portion set aside for them by the superstitious people.- (329)

Although dog skeletons have been found in sites that have ritual significance these are most likely grave sites because they were found with human skeletons and we know that from various sources that it was common to kill animals owned by the deceased so that they could be buried with him or her. (330) So even though these animals were killed in a ritual way, we probably should not consider them in the same light as the blót sacrifice. Additionally, in the many accounts we have of animal sacrifice in the literature there is never a mention of a dog or any other animal that was not eaten by man. Bears, wolves or foxes were likewise never sacrificed. It was believed that they possessed a 'ghostly being.' The only blood sacrifice that was given but not eaten was man himself. Of human sacrifices I'll examine more closely in another place. (331)

Among the types of animals that were popular for sacrifice were goats, oxen, sheep, swine, horses and various eatable fowls. (332) (333) The boar seemed to have been especially popular. Grimm says that the swine offered to the gods was destined for the king's table among the Welsh. (334) The boar was such an important sacrifice that it was named specially. The blót was called the sónarblót which signified a sacrifice of a boar and the boar itself was called the sónargöltr (sacrificial boar). (335) Oxen and horses were also very popular sacrifices and as has been mentioned it was the eating of horse flesh that was considered a sign of being heathen. (336) Domesticated fowl were also offered, most popular among these being the cock and the goose. (337) There is also an account of in Kormak's Saga of a seithkona (spell-woman, witch) who sacrifices geese in order to work magic for the name sake of the saga. (338)

The color of the animal also had significance for which animal would be sacrificed. White animals were considered favorable. White horses are spoken of as sacred in Tacitus' Germania. Later law records pronounce white pigs as inviolable. Other colors were considered desirable as well. Black animals were sacrificed by the sami (339) and later folklore has water spirits demanding a black lamb as sacrifice. Witches (seithkonar, spell-women) also use animals of a specific color, black lambs or black cats were sacrificed in order to work magic. The Votiaks sacrificed a red stallion and the Tcheremisses a white one. (340) Grimm notes black lambs or goats being offered to fossegrim (waterfall spirit) (341), and that there was a superstition about not killing black oxen or cows for household use. He believed that this may have been because thy were used in sacrifices only. (342)

Although we have many accounts of animals being offered to one or the other of the gods and goddesses, we can't really say that one animal was especially used to offer to one particular deity. For instance we know from accounts describing practices in Hedeby that goats were sacrificed and these may have been sacrificed to Thorr (343) but we also have accounts of bulls being sacrificed to Thorr such as at the Althing held at Thingvellir every year. (344) Oxen were also offered to Freyr as in Víga-Glúms saga. (345) In Saxo's account the name of the blót that was in honor of Freyr was called Fröblót. Oxen were particularly offered to Freyr and his name was used as a poetic kenning for the ox. We also know that the boar was sacrificed to him on New Years eve and that oaths were taken at that time to Freyr with hand laid on the bristles of that sacrificial boar. (346) We also know that horses were sometimes kept on sacred ground that were considered sacred to Freyr. Ground sacred to Freyr in Sweden and Norway had sacred horses that were kept on the ground, as we find in Flateyjarbók and in Óláf's Saga Tryggvasonar I. (347) In Hrafnkel's Saga there was a sacred horse dedicated to Freyr which no one was allowed to ride on penalty of death. The horse was named Freyfaxi (Freyr's mane). (348) Sacred horses were also used for divination as is described in Tacitus' Germania and in Saxo's account where there was also mentioned a white horse that no one was allowed to ride. (349)

The blood from the sacrifices was many times drank by those present at the blót. Although we do know that blood was consumed we are not told exactly how it was consumed. We may, however, have clues as to how it was consumed. In the account of the Christian king Hákon's attending of the Heathen blót-feast at mid-winter that was hosted by Jarl Sigurd we find that, after much he-

sitation, that the king agreed to eat some of the horse liver from the sacrifice and to drink from the minni bowls. It was important that the king should consume some of the blood of the slain horse to insure the well-being of the land, which was connected intimately with the actions of the king. (350) Now we know that these minni bowls were usually filled with ale, but the implication here is that blood was drank from them. We know that the blood of Kvasir was made into mead after being mixed with honey and this is the origin of the famed mead of poetry. Is it possible that the blood that was drank at feasts in the sources we have was actually mead that was brewed from blood mixed with honey, mirroring the sacred mead of poetry? My own personal opinion on the matter is that this is quite possibly the case. A quote from Grimm points to this possibility as well when he says, "Apparently divination was performed by means of the blood, perhaps a part of it was mixed with ale or mead, and drunk. In the North the blood bowls (hlautbollar, blôtbollar) do not seem to have been large; some nations had big cauldrons made for the purpose (see Suppl.). The Swedes were taunted by Olafr Tryggvason with sitting at home and licking their sacrificial pots, 'at sitja heima ok sleikja blôtbolla sîna,' Fornm. sög. 2, 309." (351) This, I believe, points to the distinct possibility that a portion of the sacrificial blood was, like Kvasir's blood, used to brew mead or ale or mixed with it and drank as part of the sacred full. The consuming of blood was used as a means of mocking the Heathen Swedes after Iceland converted to Christianity. They mocked them by saying they licked their sacrificial bowls in an attempt to get every last drop of blood from the sacrifice. It is likely this is an exaggeration and that the blood consumed was actually mixed with mead or ale. (352)

Part of the blood from the sacrifice was used to hallow both people and objects. The sacrificial blood was called hlaut. It was poured into the hlautbolli (sacrificial blood bowl) and with the hlautteinn (sacrificial blood twig) it was sprinkled on the altar, the walls of the hof (353) and other sacred instruments as well as the people present at the blót. (354) This was called rjóða which meant 'to redden or smear with blood.' (355) Some references say specifically that the hlautbolli was made of copper while others do not specify. (356)

The animals that were sacrificed were treated with the greatest care and were fed well. They were set apart and may have been set apart from birth. Animals set aside for sacrifice were also not allowed to be used in work. Oxen had to be those which had never drawn a plow or wagon. The animals would many times be adorned with garlands and other decorations on the day of the sacrifice and might be led on a procession to the sacred site where they would be sacrificed.

Sacred Fire and Holy Water

The concept of sacred fire and holy water are concepts that are strong in Heathen tradition. These traditions also lasted well into the Christian conversion and beyond, and in the case of holy water was appropriated by the Christians. The baptizing of children just after birth was a tradition that was most likely taken from a Heathen tradition. Before the introduction of Christianity Heathens hallowed their new-borns with water. They called this vatni ausa, sprinkling with water. The similarities between the Heathen baptism of infants and the Catholic Christening are so similar that the later must have been appropriated from Heathen customs as the custom is attested to and was wide spread long before Christianity came to Northern Europe. (357)

That Heathens considered water as sacred can be seen in the large number of instances where lakes, waterfalls, pools, wells and springs were considered sacred and therefore the water in them would have been as well. Whirlpools and waterfalls were considered to have been put in motion by river spirits (358) so in some cases it could be water spirits that were being venerated instead of the water itself but in other cases it is specifically the water that is considered sacred. The Goths buried king Alaric in the bed of a river. They actually dug the river out of its normal course, buried king Aluric in the river bed then returned the river to its normal course. When crossing the river they would make offerings to him. (359)

Oaths were also sworn on rivers and there are instances in which sacred groves were next to sacred springs. Near a village in the Odenpä district there is the holy rivulet of Livonia. The source is in a sacred grove, which no one dares to break a twig and it is said those who do are sure to die within the year. The brook and fountain are kept clean and are 'put to rights' once every year. If anything is thrown into the spring or the small lake through which it flows, storms are said to be the result. As mentioned earlier the land where "the sacred water of a river sweeps round a piece of meadow land, and forms an ea (aue)" is marked as a residence of the gods. (360)

There was also a tradition of drawing water during holy nights which is very likely to be the survival of

a Heathen custom. During a the holy season water was drawn at midnight in complete silence before sunrise. It is Grimm's opinion that this tradition is deeply rooted in Heathen tradition. Also it was a tradition that holy water must be drawn fresh from the spring. There is also a tradition of seithkonar watching the eddies of rivers and from them divining the future. In the Islandinga Sögur the exact expression used is 'worshipped the foss (water spirit of whirlpool).' (361)

Salt Springs

Salt and especially salt springs were considered holy by Heathens. Salt springs were considered as a direct gift of a nearby divinity and the possessing of this location was considered worthy of going to war over. One account of this comes from Tacitus in his Annals XIII, 57. In the first century, two Germanic tribes , the Hermundari and the Chatti had a dispute over who had the rites to a piece of land beside some salt springs that they considered holy. (362) The Chatti vowed that if they won they would sacrifice their foes to Mars and Mercury (Tiwaz and Woden). The Hermundari ended up winning the battle and felt that they should likewise sacrifice their defeated foes and sacrificed the Chatti after defeating them. (363) Grimm also says that the Burgundians and Alamanns also fought for salt-springs. (364)

Grimm points out that a very large number of the names of rivers and towns that produce salt have the roots hal and sal in their names. These roots originally signified 'the same wholesome holy material.' (365)

According to Grimm the distributing of salt was a holy office and he speculates of the possibility of festivals connected with salt-boiling. He further theorizes that this office was held by women and that it could be the roots of the traditions surrounding witches in the middle ages. I would like to quote his theory as it does have a ring of truth to it.

> "Suppose now that the preparation of salt was managed by women, by priestesses, that the salt-kettle (cauldron), saltpan, was under their care and supervision; there would be a connection established between salt-boiling and the later vulgar opinion about witchcraft: the witches gather, say on certain high days, in the holy wood, on the mountain, where the salt springs bubble, carrying with them cooking-vessels, ladles and forks; and at night their saltpan is aglow." (366)

It is easy to see how that, if the wise-women were charged with boiling the salt in cauldrons at holy rites, the Christians would have taken this picture and turned it into devil worshiping witches cackling with glee over bubbling cauldrons. The reasons for this are easy to see. Before the coming of Christianity the wise-woman or spaekona was treated with great respect and in some cases even revered in near goddess-like status. They were consulted before going into battle and in all important matters. This, of course, was a threat to the authority of the church and they wasted no time demonizing the wise-woman. She went from being the wise-woman and treated with respect to being a devil worshiping witch whose only purpose was to bring ill to man. After transforming the wise-woman into the evil witch the Church wasted no time following the biblical injunction to "not suffer a witch to live." Christians made sure that the sanctifying of salt was their domain alone. I'll, hear, quote Grimm again.

> "As Christians equally recognized salt as a good and needful thing, it is conceivable how they might now, inverting the matter, deny the use of wholesome salt at witches' meetings, and come to look upon it as a safeguard against every kind of sorcery (Superst. I, no. 182). For it is precisely salt that is lacking in the witches' kitchen and at devil's feasts, the Church having now taken upon herself the hallowing and dedication of salt. Infants un-baptized, and so exposed, had salt placed beside them for safety, RA. 457. The emigrants from Salzburg dipped a wetted finger in salt, and swore. Wizards and witches were charged with the misuse of salt in baptizing beasts. I think it worth mentioning here, that the magic-endowed giantesses in the Edda knew how to grind, not only gold, but salt, Sn. 146-7: the one brought peace and prosperity, the other a tempest and foul weather." (367)

As we'll see later, when talking about Spring rites, the fertility rites of May, may also have been turned into witches jaunts for the same reasons.

Sacred Fire

Sacred Flame is a very important part of Heathen practice. It can be found in some form in most all rites. Whether it be the Summer Finding and midsummer fires or the fires of the blót-feast which were used to hallow the mead or ale. Fires were

jumped through during midsummer rites and cattle might be herded between fires to protect them from disease. (368) Fire, like water, was a living being to Heathens (369) with the power to carry things between the nine worlds. Grimm describes the need-fire as tüfel häla which means 'despoiling the devil of his strength.' He believes that this is possibly "one of those innumerable allusions to Loki, the devil and fire-god. (370) See the article on Loki for more information concerning this. <<link>>.

Fire was thought to take people and materials to the other-worlds. We'll examine the more esoteric implications of this in the second part of this article dealing with how we might incorporate these practices into modern practice. But for now we'll limit ourselves to specific evidence in the lore. Davidson states that the heating and cooking (fire) of meat on the hearth was an image of the link between man and the other-world. (371) In Ynglinga saga it was Othinn's law that dead men should be burned along with their belongings. If they did this they would come to Valhalla. (372) It seems form this description that it was the burning that took the dead men and their belongings to Vallhöll. Even more convincing evidence of this comes from the account of Ibn Fadlin, in which he describes the funeral of a Rus Chieftain. In it, one of the Northmen attending the funeral where the chief along with his belongings were burned said, "You Arabs are fools." When the Rus was asked why he said that he replied, '"You take the people who are most dear to you and whom you honor most and put them into 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 why he laughed, he said, "His Lord, for love of him, has sent the wind to bring him away in an hour." And actually an hour had not passed before the ship, the wood, the girl, and her master were nothing but cinders and ashes.' (373) From this account is very easy to see that the Rus considered the fire as the primary element that carried their dead chief and his possessions to Vallhöll. He is further pleased when a wind comes to fan the fire so that his chief will get to his destination even quicker.

The one type of sacred fire we have the most material on was called the need-fire. There is no doubt that this practice can be traced back to Heathen times. It was considered, by Heathens, to be the most holy method of starting a fire. It was produced by rubbing two sticks of wood together until the friction generated enough heat to start the fire. Flame that had been kept for some time and/or had been passed from one fire to another was thought not to be of the sacred quality needed for various religious and/or magical purposes. For sacred use the fire must be newly struck was called 'wild fire.' As fires that had been burning a long time or had been transferred from other fires were not sufficient for sacred purposes, neither were fires struck with flint and steel of use for sacred needs. The obtaining of fire from the friction between two pieces of wood being rubbed together was the most holy and most desired. (374) Lindenbrog in the Glossary to the Capitularies describes the following method of starting a need-fire: 'If at any time a grievous murrain have broke out among cattle great or small, and they have suffered much harm thereby; the husbandmen with one consent make a nothfür or nothfeuer (need-fire). On a day appointed there must in no house be any flame left on the hearth. From every house shall be some straw and water and bush-wood brought; then is a stout oaken stake driven fast into the ground, and a hole bored through the same, to the which a wooden roller well smeared with pitch and tar is let in, and so winded about, until by reason of the great heat and stress (nothzwang) it give out fire. This is straightway catched on shavings, and by straw, heath and bushwood enlarged, till it grow to a full nothfeuer, yet must it stretch a little way along betwixt two walls or hedges, and the cattle and thereto the horses be with sticks and whips driven through it three times or two. Others in other parts set up two such stakes, and stuff into the holes a windle or roller and therewith old rags smeared with grease. Others use a hairen or common light-spun rope, collect wood of nine kinds, and keep up a violent motion till such time as fire do drop there from. There may be in use yet other ways for the generating or kindling of this fire, nevertheless they all have respect unto the healing of cattle alone. After thrice or twice passing through, the cattle are driven to stall or field, and the collected pile of wood pile of wood is again pulled asunder, yet in such a wise in sundry places, that every householder shall take a brand with him, quench it in the wash or swill tub, and put the same by for a time in the crib wherein the cattle are fed. The stakes driven in for the extorting of this fire, and the wood used for a roller, are sometimes carried away for fuel, sometimes laid by in safety, when the threefold chasing of the cattle through the flame hath been accomplished." As we can see from this description grease was used to aid in the starting of the fire. Also interesting is that the main post mentioned is made of oak. In Sweden there were

accounts of nine sorts of woods being used. (375) As we know the importance that Heathens put on the oak tree, it is no surprise that oak was used for the generation of the sacred need-fire.

Another description comes from the Scottish highlands. "Upon any small river, lake, or island, a circular booth of stone or turf is erected, on which a couple or rafter of a birch tree is placed, and the roof covered over. In the center is set a perpendicular post, fixed by a wooden pin to the couple, the lower end being placed in an oblong groove on the floor; and another pole is placed horizontally between the upright post and the legs of the couple, into both of which the ends, being tapered, are inserted. This horizontal timber is called the augur, being provided with four short arms or spokes by which it can be turned round. As many men as can be collected are then set to work, having first divested themselves of all kinds of metal, and two at a time continue to turn the pole by means of the levers, while others keep driving wedges under the upright post so as to press it against the augur, which by the friction soon becomes ignited. From this the need-fire is instantly procured, and all other fires being immediately quenched, those are rekindled both in dwelling house and offices are accounted sacred, and the cattle are successively made to smell them." (376) As with the previous description we see that the all other fires are put out before the need-fire is started. It is also interesting to note that in this description the men involved in making the need-fire are sure to take anything made of metal from themselves

A third description is quoted by Grimm which comes to us from Martin. "The forced fire, or fire of necessity, which they used as an antidote against the plague or murrain in cattle; and it was performed thus: all the fires in the parish were extinguished, and then eighty-one (9 x 9) married men, being thought the necessary number for effecting this design, took two great planks of wood, and nine of 'em were employed by turns, who by their repeated efforts rubbed one of the planks against the other until the heat thereof produced fire; and from this forced fire each family is supplied with new fire, which is no sooner kindled than a pot full of water is quickly set on it, and afterwards sprinkled upon the people infected with the plague, or upon the cattle that have the murrain. And this they all say they find successful by experience: it was practiced on the mainland opposite to the south of Skye, within these thirty years." (377)

The need-fire is a practice that is still practiced in some parts of Germany in the modern era. Grimms tells that the common folk still distinguish between fire and the wild fire which is started by rubbing two pieces of wood together. He states that fire started through friction is the surest mark of Heathenism. (378)

One of the main uses of the need-fire was the health of domestic animals. Many times after the need-fire was started cattle and horses were driven between two fires started from it. Swine were also drove between the fires to keep disease from cropping up. In Kuhn's Märkische sagen is described another need-fire tradition. "Before sunrise two stakes of dry wood are dug into the ground amid solemn silence, and hempen ropes that go round them are pulled back and forwards till the wood catches fire; the fire is fed with leaves and twigs, and the sick animals (swine in this case) are driven through. In some places the fire is produced by the friction of an old cartwheel. (379)

One more description of a need-fire I would like to, here, quote. "In many villages of Lower Saxony, especially in the mountains, it is common, as a precaution against cattle plague, to get up the so-called wild fire, through which first the pigs, then the cows, lastly the geese are driven. The established procedure in the matter is this. The farmers and all the parish assemble, each inhabitant receives notice to extinguish every bit of fire in his house, so that not a spark is left alight in the whole village. Then old and young walk to a hollow way, usually towards evening, the women carrying linen, the men wood and tow. Two oaken stakes are driven into the ground a foot and a half apart, each having a hole on the inner side, into which fits a cross-bar as thick as an arm. The holes are stuffed with linen, then the cross-bar is forced in as tight as possible, the heads of the stakes being held together with cords. About the smooth round cross-bar is coiled a rope, whose long ends, left hanging on both sides are seized by a number of men; these make the cross-bar revolve rapidly this way and that, till the friction sets the linen in the holes on fire. The sparks are caught on tow or oakum, and whirled round in the air till they burst into a clear blaze, which is then communicated to straw, and from the straw to a bed of brushwood arranged in cross layers in the hollow way. When this wood has well burnt and nearly done blazing, the people hurry off to the herds waiting behind, and drive them perforce, one after the other, through the glowing embers. As soon as all the cattle are through, the young folks throw themselves pell-mell upon the ashes and coals, sprinkling and blackening one another; those who are most blackened and besmudged march into the village behind the cattle as conquerors, and will not wash

for a long time after. If after long rubbing the linen will not catch, they feel sure there is still fire somewhere in the village, and that the element refuses to reveal itself through friction: then follows a strict searching of houses, any fire they may light upon is extinguished, and the master of the house rebuked or chastised. But that the wild fire should be evoked by friction is indispensable, it cannot be struck out of flint and steel. Some localities perform the ceremony, not yearly as a preventive of murrain, but only upon its actually breaking out." (380) This example is like the other examples in all its major features.

The need-fire seemed to take place at different times depending on what area you were in. Some areas held it at or around the spring equinox while others held it at midsummer. The Danes and Scandinavia hold midsummer fires. Grimm gives an account of a tradition performed on Whitsun morning. On that morning some stablemen were seen to make a need-fire and boil their cabbage over it. They believe that by eating it, they would be protected from fever in the coming year. On June 20th 1653 the Nürnberg town council issued the following order: "Whereas experience heretofore hath shown, that after the old heathenish use, on John's day in every year, in the country, as well in towns as villages, money and wood hath been gathered by young folk, and thereupon the so-called sonnenwendt or zimmet fire kindled, and thereat winebibbing, dancing about the said fire, leaping over the same, with burning of sundry herbs and flowers, and setting of brands from the said fire in the fields, and in many other ways all manner of superstitious work carried on--- Therefore the Hon. Council of Nürnberg town neither can nor ought to forbear to do away with all such unbecoming superstition, paganism, and peril of fire on this coming day of St. John (Neuer lit. anz. 1807, p. 318)." St. John's Day was the Christian adaptation of Midsummer. Although the need-fire was resorted to in times of an outbreak of murrain, it was also done at set times of the year as a preventative measure, especially at Midsummer. (381)

Although the need-fire was normally started either at times of disease or during Midsummer as a preventative measure the need-fire was also a part of the major feasts. The wild-fire (need-fire) was considered most sacred so it is easy to see why it would have been used at the major feasts and most likely at any rite that was sacred in manner. Indeed the need-fire seems to have been common all over Europe. (382)

Just as the need-fire was especially important during Midsummer so was there were fires lighted at the opposite point in the year, at Yule. This was the burning of the yule log. At Marseille it was a large oaken log which was sprinkled with wine and oil and it was the master of the house who would light the log. In Dapuphiné they called it chalendal and lighted it on Christnas eve and sprinkled it with wine. It was considered holy and it was allowed to burn in peace. The English called it yule-log and the Scandinvians called it julblok. (383) Part of the yule-log was saved for the following year where it would be used to start the new yule-log fire. (384)

There is also a Candlemas tradition that, according to Grimm, most surely has its roots in a Heathen tradition. Candlemas is held at Midwinter. In this tradition the head of the household would gather all her servants in a half-circle in front of the oven door and all bent down on one knee. They then would take one bite of cake and drink to the fire's health. The remainder of the cake and drink was cast into the fire. (385)

Before moving on to discussing the Landvættir I would like to relate some of the miscellaneous traditions concerned with fire. A Norwegian custom holds that so long as a child is un-baptized the fire must not be allowed to go out. The fire used for a magic bath was not to be heated with common flint and steel fire. The instructions for making the fire were again much like the wild-fire (need-fire). "Go to an apple tree which the lightning hath stricken, let a saw be made thee of his wood, therewith shalt thou saw upon a wooden threshold that much people passeth over, till it be kindled. Then make firewood of birch-fungus, and kindle it at this fire, with which thou shalt heat the bath, and on thy life see it go not out" In the Midsummer fire it was traditional to throw into the fire, herbs of all kinds and to leap through it. When tossing in the herbs the person throwing them in would say, "May all my troubles go off in the fire and smoke!" The jumping over the fire during Midsummer seems to have been a very wide-spread practice and most certainly has its roots in Heathen tradition. At Nürnberg they jump over the fires and in doing so have good health for the coming year. On St John's Day (Midsummer) they leaped over the fire and drank mead over it. (386)

The Landvættir

A very important part of the life, both sacred and mundane, of Northern Europeans were the landvættir (guardian land-spirits). (387) As the landvættir were such an integral part of the religi-

ous practices of the Northern Europeans, I think it would be good to, here, examine them in detail before continuing on. The belief in the landvættir was almost universal among Northern Europeans. (388) The dwelt in trees, stones, groves, houses, wells, and rivers. (389) All of nature, even rocks, were thought to have living spirits connected with them. (390)

The way of Heathenism was closely linked to the land. Unlike the Christians who saw nature as something to be conquered and controlled Heathens saw that nature was something sacred, something which should be cooperated with. If man honored the land spirits and treated them with respect the crops would come in fuller, the domestic animals would be healthy and reproduce. On the other hand, to anger the land spirits was to bring certain disaster. (391) The gods might be turned to for the larger more important matters, but it was the landvættir that were turned to often for the practical every day needs. Their favor was often sought. (392)

The line between the honoring of ancestors and the guardian land spirits seems sometimes to be a little blurry but it seems that over-all the two were separate. The ancestors were always honored as can be seen from the fact that one of the fullar, the minni-full, was dedicated to ancestors and/or friends. Even though offerings were made to the grave mounds of previous kings for prosperity of the land this is still different from the concept of landvættir.

The domain in which the landvættir had influence was wide. They had influence in the cultivation of the soil, in weaving and spinning and in the raising of animals. They also had influence in the upbringing of children. (393)

The landvættir would some times enter into partnerships with men. One example of this is in Landnámabók. In the account a family of brothers was forced to move their farm because of an intruding lava flow. Because of this they were left with few animals. One night one of them (Bjorn) had a dream that a rock-dweller came to him and offered a partnership. Bjorn agreed to the partnership and immediately afterward his goats increased at a great rate, so much so that they began to call him Goat-Bjorn. It was said that people with second site could see the land-spirits following Goat-Bjorn to the Thing and accompanying his brothers whenever they went to hunt of fish. Goat-Bjorn, with the help of the landvættir, became a man of renown and many great men in Iceland were descended from him. (394)

The word rock-dweller is sometimes translated as giant but this should not be considered the same as the frost-giants who oppose the Regin. Another account we have of a rock dweller comes from Barðar Saga Snæfellsáss. I would like to quote Davidson's description of this saga. "The most detailed account of a rock-dweller is to be found in a strange saga, Barðar Saga Snæfellsáss, which is included among the 'Family Sagas' because it is set in Iceland and not in remote lands of magic and adventure. However it is filled with supernatural characters, and the hero, Bard, is called 'god of Snæfell'. He was a Norwegian, fathered by a giant, and fostered by another giant, Dofri of Dovrefjeld in Norway. From Dofri Bard learned history and genealogies, feats of arms and knowledge and of the future, while the giant's daughter became his wife. Later Bard avenged his father after a killing, and then left for Iceland. Things did not go well for him there, and after a time he disappeared from among men, moving across a glacier andliving in a cave in the mountain beyond it. The Saga states that he was more of a troll than a man, so people called the god (Áss) of Snæfell. People in that district made vows to him as to a god, and they called on him when they were in trouble. He helped on man in a wrestling match, and another after an attack by a troll-woman, and was always ready to defend men against evil and hostile beings. From time to time he was seen wearing a gray cloak and hood with belt of walrus hide, carrying a two-pronged stick with a spike for crossing the ice. Like his foster-father Dorfi, he acted as fosterer and teacher to promising young men. A twelve-year-old boy called Odd accepted an invitation to visit him in the mountains, and found himself in terrible conditions of storm and cold: 'He stumbled on, not knowing where he was going, and at last became aware that a man was walking through the darkness with a great staff, letting the point rattle on the ice . . . Odd recognized Bard, god of Snæfell.' (Barðar Saga 10). Odd stayed a winter in Bard's cave studying law, and was later known as one of the wisest of the lawmen. He married one Bard's daughters, but she died three years later. Bard was said to have nine daughters, and one, Helga, was a strange figure who wandered about the land,' usually far from men', and made secret visits to farms. she would say up most of the night playing a harp, but resented intrusion, and a Norwegian who tried to discover who she was had his arm and leg broken to punish his curiosity. Bard associated with various super-natural beings and was respected as the strongest among them. Although he gave protection against evil spirits and trolls, he was hostile to Christianity, and

after his son Gest became a Christian he deprived him of his sight." (395)
As mentioned earlier the favor of the landvættir was very often sought. One way to gain the favor of the landvættir was through giving them offerings. One Icelandic settler gave offerings of food to a waterfall near his house. Because of this his sheep greatly increased because he made good decisions as to which were slaughtered and which should be kept. Another man made offerings to 'one of the rare woods in Iceland.' Another man trusted in the spirit that dwelled in a great stone near his house. The man continued to trust in this spirit until a Christian bishop dropped holy water on the stone and drove it away. The two versions of this story show what the function of the landvættir was. In one version it is named ármaðr. (396) One of the meanings of the word ár is 'plenty, abundance, fruitfulness.' And maðr means man (irrespective of sex). (397) It is easy to see that the fruitfulness of the land considered to be within the domain of the landvættir. Another version of the story names the landvættir as spámaðr which could be litereally translated as 'prophecyman.' Being able to foretell the future was an ability that is commonly connected with landvættir. Of the spámaðr it is said, "He tells me beforehand many things which will happen in the future; he guards my cattle and gives me warnings of what I must do and what I must avoid, and therefore I have faith in him and I have worshipped him for a long time." (398) Offerings were also made to 'house-spirits' which we can put in the same category as the landvættir. Like the landvættir, the house-spirits were offered food in order to gain their good favor. Any time a banquet was held it was customary to set aside part of the food for the household spirits. The drinker would, before drinking any himself, pour out some of drink for the house spirits. Here we see the mirroring of the tradition in which the gods and goddesses always got the first portion of the sacrificial feast. (399)
The landvættir could be offended by violence. It was said that for a long time no one would dare settle in the southern part of Iceland where Hjorleif, who was one of the first settlers there, was killed by his Irish thralls. It was not because the place was thought to haunted that no one would settle there. The reason was that the landvættir were angered by the violence done on their land. (400) Early Icelandic laws prohibited ships with dragon-heads on their prow from coming into the harbor lest the land-spirits were offended by a threat of hostility. The ships were required to take the dragon-head off the prow before they could enter the harbor. (401)
In an interesting account from Egil's Saga (Chapter 57) we find the landvættir being called upon to avenge a wrong committed by the king of the land. King Erik Bloodaxe had flouted the law, not allowing Egill Skallagrimmsson from gaining justice. In return Egill raised the nithstangr. In two verses composed by Egill he calls on Othinn, Freyr and Njörthr for justice and he calls on the land spirits who dwell in the land to wander about restlessly and never find their homes until king Erik and Queen Gunnhild are driven from the land (Norway). (402)
It is possible that the landvættir were connected with or worked in cooperation with the dísir (female ancestral guardian spirits). They both were considered guardians, one of the land, and one of kin and family. An interesting account of a nineteenth century Icelandic clergyman recorded that certain stones in North-eastern Iceland were called 'Stones of the Landdísir' (guardian land goddesses). It was said unwise to make loud noises near them and children were forbidden to play near them for fear that bad luck would come if they were not treated with respect. Sacrifices were given both to the dísir and landvættir during the Winter Nights feast. (403)
There are also two groups of beings that may have connections to the landvættir and the dísir. They were called the Matres or Matrones and the Hooded Ones. The Matrones, as their name implies, were females and very possibly could be the dísir. The Hooded Ones appear to be male. This is interesting as from the account of one land spirit we found that the name given to it spámaðr and ármaðr both end with the word maðr which, in Old Norse can mean a non-gender specific "person" or a man. (404) It is unclear whether or not these Matrones and Hooded ones are native cults or cults that originated from elsewhere and were brought in through the Roman occupations. (405) My own opinion is that these Matrones are of Roman origin, but it is striking the number of similarities the Matrones and Hooded Figures share with the landvættir and the dísir. It is well known that the Romans would assimilate the local deities and give them Roman names. Are the Matrones and Hooded Figures the Roman version of Dísir and landvættir? I think this is a possibility given that these figures are found in areas that were occupied by Roman armies and no in the more Northern areas.
In images of the Matrones they are shown carrying fruit, horns of plenty, baskets, bunches of grapes, loaves of bread and/or eggs and they are many

times shown holding infants. They are often accompanied by a small dog and the prow of a ship. They are shown with robes of varying length and some are young while others are old and others are matrons. They are found either sitting singly or in groups. They are many times found in groups of three but other numbers are found as well. They are found in the vicinity of rivers, healing springs or temples most often but have also been found house sites that may have been household shrines. They are pictured also of having what some believe to be the scroll of destiny along with a sphere and/or spindle. It is thought that, because of this, they told the future of men, and especially of young children. Most dedications to the Matrones found were made by women but there are a number that bear the names of men in the lower ranks of the Roman army. (406) Besides the altars that these Matrones appear on there are a number of small figurines made of pipeclay found in Gaul and the Rhineland, some of them dating from the first century C. E. Some show a goddess in a high backed chair while others are of a naked female with sun-symbols such as wheels and rosettes either on the body or beside it. It is Davdison's belief that these along with the Matrones could be viewed as belonging to a company of nature spirits such as those found in Viking Age Scandinavia. (407)

The hooded figures are generally found in groups of three and are most frequently found around the area where Hadrians Wall was in Britain. These hooded figures appear to be male. Some are child-like while others are bearded. They tend to be short and stocky, much like we might picture the dwarfs. They are sometimes accompanied by a goddess who carries items of the same kind as the Matrones who were described earlier do. In Gaul the Hooded men are most often found as single figures. The hooded cloak as a very popular garment in Northern Europe and in a study done by Deonna it was shown that it was a symbol of the supernatural world and was worn by beings that were normally invisible to men. They were considered to be connected with protection, healing, fertility, sleep and death. In the study it was pointed out that the hooded cloak was used in later times to mark someone set apart form the normal world, such as monks, mourners or the bride in her veil. Davidson postulates that these hooded men were the forerunners of the Brownies which included figures such as Robin Goodfellow and his men. Brownies appeared as small male beings who could be benevolent when not angered, and bring prosperity to animals and crops and also helped in the work of the house. They were considered merry and mischievous. (408) It is easy to see how the brownies resemble, almost exactly, descriptions of landvættir and we would likely not be off the mark in saying that they are the English version of landvættir.

We would not be remiss if we say that these landvættir were very possibly connected with the Vanir. The landvættir were connected with issues of fertility which Vanir gods like Freyr and Freyja, as well as Njorthr, were intimately connected with as well. (409) Freyr is lord of the alfs and previously we have seen how alfs would be connected to specific trees. Folklore is full of tales of spirits that are attached to trees. (410) In the Eddas one would expect, when mentioning the combined tribe of the Aesir and Vanir for them to be named exactly in that fashion, that is, 'Aesir and Vanir.' But more than once we find, instead, the phrase 'Aesir and Elves.' (411) It is possible that the landvættir are a kind of alf that is connected to specific object, or area of land.

The landvættir were normally considered in that fashion. They were connected to specific areas and did not travel to new lands with settlers. (412) All indications are that the travelers who came and settled Iceland did not bring the landvættir with them. They were considered to have already been there.

Another aspect of the landvættir that point to there being connected to the land they inhabit is that they were also willing to defend the land on which they were connected to. Snorri gives us one such account. In this account Icelanders made insulting verses about King Harald Gormsson of Denmark because he had impounded cargo from their ships. This, of course, angered the king and he sent a wizard to Iceland in the form of whale to scout it out. When the wizard neared the land of Iceland he saw vast numbers of landvættir ready to defend the land. A dragon accompanied by snakes advanced to meet him while from other parts of the Island came a huge bird, a bull and a rock-giant with a staff. (413) Another similar account is recorded by Thiele. The 'underground people' who were normally invisible, became visible when they defended the island of Bornholm from attack in 1645 when two Swedish warships attempted to land. In a later version related by Bødker, a solitary soldier on sentry saw the Swedish ships coming. He heard whispering voices say, "Load and shoot!" When he shot at them scores of little red-capped men became visible and shot at the Swedes until they drove them off. (414) In the previous account given in Egil's saga when he rose nithstangr against king Erik Bloodaxe and Queen Gunnhild when he asked

that the landvættir wander about restlessly and remain homeless until the king and queen were driven from the land, might be considered in the same light as defending the land. (415)
The landvættir were inimical to Christianity and it is not hard to see why, with Christianity's attitude that nature, both within man and as a whole was evil and must be overcome and controlled. Christians worked hard to expel landvættir any where they could find them. We saw this from the account of the bishop that expelled one from a rock by pouring holy water on it. Never mind that the spirit did nothing but aid the man who made offerings to it. The landvættir were considered as evil and demonic by the Christians. More than a few stories exist of landvættir being driven from their abodes by Christians. The fanaticism that the Christians went about this business is shown by numerous tales in which bishops would have themselves let down the sides of cliffs on ropes so that they could bless the cliffs where seabirds nested. Accounts say that at these times a voice would call to them, saying 'Wicked folk must have somewhere to live.' Sometimes a skinny arm holding a knife would appear threatening to cut the rope on which the bishop was suspended. In these cases the cliff was left unblessed and was afterwards called the 'Cliff of the Heathen.' (416) On account of this the landvættir were said to have retreated to the most harsh inhospitable lands where few men could be found.

The Annual Feasts

There were a number of feasts that were conducted annually. We have a good deal of information on these. Of the feasts there are two which we have more information on than any of the others. If we take this wealth of information as a sign of their importance then we can say that the two feasts that were most important were Midsummer and Jól (Yule). The fact that they both survived into modern times because the Christians could not stamp them out and instead decided to appropriate them for their own use, is a testament to how important these two tides were. Grimm agrees with this when he says, "Our two great anniversaries, the summer and winter-solstices, marked off two seasons;" There were other tides that were important as well. The Harvest Feast, Summer Finding (417), which the Christians would turn into Easter after the goddess Ostara and Winter Nights were feasts that were observed across Northern Europe. Besides these feasts it was common to give feasts at weddings, births and deaths.

Snorri gives the three major feasts in Scandinavia as the beginning of Winter for plenty in the coming year, midwinter for growth of crops and in summer for victory. (418) These three are described in the Saga of Olaf Haraldsson. There is says that a sacrifice was made in autumn for a good winter, at midwinter and in summer. (419)

The Harvest Feast

The first feast I would like to examine is the Harvest feast. This feast was also called the Feast of the Wains (wagons) by the Anglo-Saxons because it was in honor of the Vanir whose association with wagons was quite strong. This feast took place at the end of September. (420) Many times there is a mention of an autumn sacrifice (421) such as in the Saga of Olaf Haroldsson but this may be referring to the Winter Nights sacrifice as opposed to the Harvest Feast. There is very little information on this feast available but we could assume that the Vanir were honored at this time as well as the Alfs. One custom that survived the Christian conversion was the leaving of some of the harvest for the gods or in some instances, for Othinn's horse, Sleipnir. When the corn was being cut one clump of ears was left standing and was adorned with ribbons. This clump was for the god who blessed the harvest. Which god that was, we are not told. It was also customary to leave five or six apples hanging on each tree when gathering in all the fruit. This practice was still being performed in late 18th century Holstein. (422) We can assume that the Harvest Feast was one that was conducted in the fashion of the Vanir rites and would probably have much in common with the May Day/Ostara rites.
The Christians here converted this feast to their use as they did with so many others. On the 28th of September was St. Michael's day. (423)

Álfablót

The Álfablót (sacrifice of the elves) is mentioned in Old Norse sources three times. This feast was in honor of the elves and we know that it was practiced very late in Norway. One account comes from the early 11th century from Sweden. The source is Austrfaravísur, written by the Christian skald, Sigvatr Þórðarson. (424) Sigvatr was on a mission for the Christian king of Norway, in which he was to travel to Sweden and arrange a marriage between his king and the daughter of the king of Sweden. As this time we are told that Norway was Christian but that Sweden still retained the old ways. While

traveling in Sweden late in autumn he was seeking shelter but could not find any despite going to numerous farms. Every farm he came to would not allow him entry because they were holding the Álfablót at the time. He was told that the halls were hallowed and he, being a Christian, could not enter. The farm wife of one farm specifically said that if she were to let him in, she feared the anger of Othinn. In Sigvatr's own words he said, "She thrust me away as if I were a wolf." (425)
We don't know much about what went on in these feasts and in fact we know little more than when they were held. Since we know that the Alfar and the Vanir were closely connected and that the Harvest Feast and the Álfablót were both held in autumn, we could say that it is possible that the Álfablót was part of the Harvest Feast, just as the Dísablót was part of the Winter Nights Feast.

Winter Nights

In Iceland between what was October 11th and October 18th was the feast called Winter nights. This feast today is held in October 13th-15th. It was a feast which lasted three or more days. (426) Winter Nights was one of the three feasts that Snorri mentions as being one of the three most important feasts of the year. It was held on the beginning of the Old Norse month of Gormánaðr which is equivalent to October 14th. In Norway this night is still called Winter Nights and is considered to be the beginning of Winter. It was made in order to bring a good year or more specifically a good winter. (427) The Old Norse name for this feast was Vetrnætr (Winter Nights) which was the first three nights of winter. (428)
We know from the Saga of Olaf Haraldsson that there was a sacrificial feast on what the saga calls "winter-day's eve, in which there was much drinking (fullar) and numerous people were in attendance. There was a prayer given at the sacrifice that was made in order to obtain good seasons or a good winter. (429) The feast mentioned as being on Winter-day's eve we could assume was held on the first night of the feast, that is, on the 13th of October. We know also that the landvættir and the dísir were honored at this time as well, perhaps on the two succeeding nights. (430)
This feast continued on under a Christian guise after the conversion where it was known as the feast of St. Michael. (431)

Dísablót

According to most sources the Dísablót was held during Winter Nights. It was a sacrifice that honored the Dísir (female ancestral guardian spirits). (432)(2. p. 51) In Hervarar we have a description of one Dísablót. In this account the daughter of King Alf, Alfhild, was conducting a sacrifice during the dísablót. While she was reddening the hörg with blood, she was kidnapped by Starkad Aludreng. (433)(18. v.1 p.411-412) What we find from this account is that very likely, the Dísablót was to be conducted by a woman instead of a man. As most sacrifices and feasts probably were, it was held at night. (434)(7) We also know that like all sacrifices, a feast followed where there was great drinking and celebration. (435)(24. c.44) In the description of the Dísasalr (Hall or temple of the Dísir) (436)(25) from Fridthjof's Saga, the hof was the tallest building there at Baldr's Grove. It was said to have fires along the floor with seats on either side, matching the descriptions common to the feasts halls of Northern Europe. (437)(7)

Jól (Yule)

One of the two most important feasts of the year was the Jólablót. It takes its name from Jólnir which is one of Othinn's name. A great majority of customs from modern day Christmas have their roots in the Heathen rite of Jól which was a multiday event. There is some debate as to when this blót was celebrated, some identifying it with January 12th and the Thorrablót, while other sources simply say Mid-winter would imply the winter solstice. Most scholars choose the winter solstice as on or near when the feast was conducted. (438)
This great blót was held over a number of days. Different numbers are given and we probably should allow for variations depending on what area it was celebrated. Some sources give three days (439) while other's give up to twelve (440) which would, of course, be the origin of the "Twelve Days of Christmas." In Olaf Hararldsson's Saga, Two brother's-in-law are described as spending Yule in drinking feasts half at one house and half at the other's house. (441) Although we don't know the exact number of days from this account it is obvious that Jólablót was considered to be a multiday affair.
There were a number of reasons for the Jólablót, different nights being used to honor different deities and/or spirits. According to the Gulathingslög 7, it was overall celebrated for a fertile and peaceful season. A number of sources mirror the Gualthingslög in its stated reason for the Jólablót, including (Ketil Hæng's Saga, c.5) (442)
The time of Jól was also a time of year when the borders between the Nine Worlds was at its thin-

nest, especially between Mithgarthr and the land of the dead. It was during Jól that Othinn's Wild Hunt was conducted, which was thought to be a procession of the dead lead by Othinn. These processions of the dead were thought to occur all during the twelve days of Jól. This connection with the dead is one that most certainly was carried down from the Stone and Bronze ages. This time of year the dead (draugar) were more active than in any other time of the year. (443)
As the phrase 'Yule-drinking' shows, it was deeply rooted in Heathen rites. Snorri represents it as a communal feast, that is, one that the whole community gathered to partake in. (444)
Many of the modern traditions we have for Yule are very likely to have been traditions that are Heathen in origin, such as the Yule Log, Yule Boar and Yule Singing. (445) As with most of the major feasts there was a sacrificial feast in which an animal was sacrificed and eaten at a great feast in which the people of the community gathered. (446)
One tradition that was strongly connected with Freyr was the Oath-Boar. This was done on Yule-Eve (the last night Yule) and is very likely the origin of the modern practice of New Year's Eve Resolutions. In later times it would take on a Christian veneer and was called the Atonement-Boar, but it was originally used to make solemn oaths for the coming year at a feast dedicated to Freyr. On Yule-eve a boar consecrated to Freyr was led out or the cooked boar itself. The people present would lay hands on the boar and make solemn oaths for the coming years. (447) This oath was called the heitstrengingar (solemn oath). (448) In later times in Sweden, it was customary to bake cakes and the shape of a boar on Yule-eve. This tradition of baking in the shape of a boar was very wide spread even in lands outside of Sweden, where Freyr was most venerated. (449) This tradition is very likely to have been the source for folklore concerning this time of year.
Later traditions are very likely connected with the tradition of the Yule-boar. In the customs of Wetterau and Thuringia there is mention of a clean gold hog. A folk belief concerning a golden boar that is ridden by the hero Derk (Derrick). He goes round on Christmas-eve night and all the people must get all their implements of husbandry within doors lest the boar trample them and make them unusable. (450) It is almost certain that this was a tradition connected with Freyr and that in later times Derk was put in the place of Freyr. The connection with fertility (implements of husbandry - Freyr as god of Fertility) and the golden boar (Freyr's boar Gullinborsti) make this almost certain in my opinion. There is a sacrificial play that was still performed in the latter part of the 19th century in some parts of Gothland. In it, young fellows blacken their faces. One of them plays the part of the sacrificial boar by wrapping himself in fur and sits in a chair while holding in his mouth a bunch of straw cut fine which reaches as far back as his ears. The straw is meant to represent the bristles of the boar. In England the boar eaten at Christmas is decked with laurel and rosemary. (451)
The Yule Log was a very widespread tradition as well. At Marseille this was a large oaken log that was set alight and on which was poured wine. The master of the house had the responsibility of lighting the log. The hewing of a Christmas block is mentioned in the Weisthümer and the English Yule-log and Scandinavian Julblok are well known in those lands. The Lettons call Christmas eve blukku wakkars (block evening), from the burning of the log. Grimm also makes mention of a Yule-tide fire which very likely could have been connected with the Yule-log. He also relates how the Servians light a newly cut log of oak at Christmas and pour wine over it. They bake a cake over this fire and hand it all around. (452)
Another tradition observed by the Anglo-Saxons was Modraniht (Mother Night). It was in honor of the mothers and was observed the night before Christmas. Food was left for them as well as the alfs on Christmas Eve. (453) This may have been connected with the veneration of the ancestors in general since this time of year was thought to be specially connected to the dead.

The Wild Hunt

The Wild Hunt or the Jól-ride was a procession of the dead led by Othinn that occurred all during Jól-tide. These ghostly riders rode through the storms that were common during the twelve nights of Jól. The boundaries between the living and the dead were at their thinnest during Jól. Dogs and horses were commonly among the procession of the Wild Hunt. Dogs have long been connected with death throughout Northern Europe and the horse has taken many a rider between the nine worlds. (454)

The Oath Boar

The custom of the Yule-boar was performed on Yule-Eve. A boar that was consecrated to Freyr was led out and everyone one present would lay their hand on the boar and swear a holy oath. This oath

was called the "heitstrengingar" (a solemn vow). This part of Yule was, of course, to honor Freyr and for peace and fruitfulness in the coming year. (455) The boar was called sónargötlr (sacrificial boar) and the sacrifice it was sacrificed at was called specifically, the sónarblót (special sacrifice of a boar). (456) Some sources say that after placing hands on the boar and swearing the solemn oath, that the Braggi-full was drink and this would make sense, since the Braggi-full was many times an occasion for the swearing of a solemn oath. (457) That vows were taken at the Yule-tide feasts is shown in more than one source, including, Helga Kvida Hjörvardssonar, c.14; Hörd's Saga and Hervarar Saga and Fornmanna Sögur. (458)
The practice of the offering of the Yule-boar was continued into modern times where it became the baking of loaves and cakes on Yule-eve in the shape of a boar. A popular belief in Thuringia said that, "..whoever on Christmas eve abstains from all food till suppertime, will get sight of a young golden pig, i.e. in olden times it was brought up last at the evening banquet. A Lauterbach ordinance (weisthum) of 1589 decreed (3, 369), that unto a court holden the day of the Three-kings, therefore in Yule time, the holders of farm-steads (hübner) should furnish a clean goldferch (gold-hog) gelded while yet under milk; it was led round the benches, and no doubt slaughtered afterwards." (459) In England the custom of the boar-vow lasted very late. Even in modern times during festive occasions a wild boar's head is seen among the other dishes as a show-dish. In the Middle Ages it was served up with laurel and rosemary and was carried about with all manner of pranks. In one ballad about Arthur's Table it was said that only a virtuous man could carve the first slice from it. And lastly, at Oxford they exhibit the boar's head on Christmas day and carry it around solemnly singing, "Captu apri defero, Reddens laudes Domino." (460)
As with many of the traditions of the people, the Christians decided it wiser to incorporate the Jól traditions into their Christmas instead of trying to stamp them out altogether. (461) There is little doubt that such Christmas traditions as the Yule-log, the Christmas Tree, the song "the Twelve Days of Christmas" and even ole Santa Claus have their roots in Heathen traditions.

Thorrablót

There is some debate about whether Midwinter sacrifice was performed at midwinter or if it was celebrated in what would have been mid-January by the name Thorrablót. Some modern Heathens have taken to celebrating this blót in honor of Thorr but that is not what it was celebrated for despite the similarity to the name of the red-bearded one. The name actually comes from the name of the month that the blót was conducted in. It was conducted at the beginning (or first day) of the month of Thorri (462) which began in the middle of January and ran until the middle of February. So the blót got its name not from the god Thorr but from the month in which it was celebrated. Again, despite the similarity of the name it was not named for the god Thorr. How the month of Thorri came to have its name is explained in Orkneyinga Saga. There we are told that King Snær, the descendant of a giant named Fornjótr had three sons and a daughter. They were Thorri, Norr and Gorr and the daughters name was Goi. Thorri was said to be a great performer of sacrifices and it was because of his sacrifices that the month of Thorri and the Thorrablót got their names. So we see from this that the month and the sacrifice came by their name from a descendent of a giant and not the slayer of giants. (463)
Yule is the same festival that Procopius says the Thulites (Northmen) celebrated on the return of the sun after it had been forty days below the horizon. (464) If we take this in a more general term it is the return of the sun from its lowest point which would be the winter solstice. So when the celebration of Yule/Mid-winter was carried out could very well have depended on how far in the Northern latitudes one happened to be.

Class, Location and the Tides

At this point it would be good to talk a little on the relation of the celebrating of the tides and class and location. Even though one of my main reasons for writing this article was to develop a Holy Night Calendar based on the actual rites there were performed by Northern European Heathenry, it should not be thought that all these rites were performed uniformly throughout Northern Europe. Although the belief and practice of Heathenry were, for the most part, uniform in most areas, there were variations in belief and in the celebration of the tides. Many of the rites were celebrated not on a certain day but according to the turning of the tides. Heathens were connected with the land. They cooperated with the spirits of the land and honored them. Some of the accounts of the spring rites relate that they were conducted when the first flo-

wer bloomed. Midwinter and Winter Nights might be conducted at different times depending on when winter started and this could vary depending on how far North latitude one was. This also would mean that spring would come at different times of the year depending on location.
Another variation we must take into account is the fact that some deities might be more honored in certain areas, such as Freyr was in Sweden. Another area might hold a special connection with Thorr or Othinn. Also there were also local deities that were honored. Thorgerd Hördabrud could have been an examples of this.
Also we must take into account class. Vanir rites were more often concerned with fertility whereas Aesir rites might be more concerned with issues important to the ruling' chiefs and later on, kings. The farmer would naturally be more interested in ensuring the fertility of his land and therefore might put more importance on Vanir rites. The chief of an area or tribe, on the other hand, might be more interested in insuring success in the defending of his tribe.

The Spring Rites

Of all the rites I studied, the Spring rite was the most difficult when it came to trying to make sense of the various references I had to it. Some accounts had it being conducted in March, while others had it as late as May. Some had it being celebrated for success in upcoming ventures while others had an obvious connection to fertility. It wasn't until I had written my first draft of this section of the article that I realized what I believe explained the divergent sources I had. I must point out that this is a theory on my part but one I think I can show to be quite possible.
I hope to show that there were two different types of rite that were performed for spring. One was what I would call an Aesir rite, that is, it was performed for success in the ventures that many men would soon be embarking on after the long winter. The second was a Vanir rite that was for fertility of the land and of animals. It is possible that both rites were celebrated in communities or one or the other. As mentioned before we must not forget that spring came at different times depending on the latitude of the location.

Sigrblót/Summer Finding

The Sigrblót (Victory blót) also called, Summer Finding, I believe, was an Aesir rite. It was held between the dates of April 9th and 15th. It was held for good luck in raids in expeditions that were about to be embarked upon. (465) Sigrblót was mentioned by Snorri as one of the three major feasts that were held by the Northmen. It is quite possible that this blót was done in honor of Othinn who was often sacrificed to in order to gain victory. (466) Some authors have presented this blót as solely for victory in Viking raids which is far from the case. Expeditions for trade and exploration were common as well, perhaps more so. It was also the opening of the fishing season and expeditions that were undertaken in order to make a name and wealth for oneself. This rite was also called Summer Finding because it was the 'opening of Summer' (467) or the 'bringing or fetching in of Summer.' (468) As mentioned before many Northern Europeans had two seasons instead of four. Summer began with what we would consider spring. In Svithjod it is said that in the month of Góe, a great feast was held for peace and for victory of their king. The month of Góe (Gói) was from February 14th to March 13th and this would have been a Summer Finding or Sigrblót. In the account it was called the (höfudblöt) or chief blót so it is easy to see how important it was considered. (469)

Ostara (Eastre/Easter)/Walpurgis Day/May Day

The Christian rite of Easter is based on the old Heathen rites of spring. The Anglo-Saxons celebrated their spring rite in honor of the goddess Eastre for which the rite got its name and from which the Christian Easter would later take its name. (470) In my opinion, Ostara and the later Easter rites that the Christians developed from it as well as Walpurgis Day are examples of the Vanir spring rite. Depending on what area you resided in, you might have celebrated the Ostara rite while others celebrated Walpurgis Day. Grimm states this as a possibility as well when he says, "Were the German May-fires, after the conversion, shifted to Easter and Midsummer, to adapt them to Christian worship? Or, as the summer solstice was itself deeply rooted in heathenism, is it Eastertide alone that represents the ancient May-fires?" (471) The descriptions for all these rites are virtually identical and it is very easy to see in some cases a direct continuation of Vanir "wagon-rites" from the times of pre-Christian Heathenry. Grimm says that the arrival of Summer, of May, what we now call spring was kept as a holiday of old. It was welcomed by sacrifices, feasting and dancing and was a time of great celebration and fellowship. Brides

were chosen at this time and proclaimed, servants changed, and houses were taken possession of by new tenants. Bonfires were started at this time as with May Day and these were similar to those started at Midsummer. Grimm notes the similarities between the Heathen Easter and the May-Feast. Both where a reception of spring, had bonfires and were celebrated with great merry-making. The so called Easter-games which accompany the Christian Easter such as the Easter Egg hunt were Heathen in origin and allowed to continue only because "the church itself had to tolerate (them)." (472) The tradition of colored eggs is one that goes back very far in folk tradition. In modern Russia, eggs are still given as presents on the graves of ancestors at the beginning of spring. Other Easter traditions were Heathen in origin as well. The Easter Bunny originates from Ostara as well. The rabbit was sacred to her and a major symbol of fertility for obvious reasons. (473) The Christian tradition of Hot Cross Buns is based on a Heathen custom as well. It comes from the tradition of the Eastre rite where an ox was sacrificed. Ritual bread was baked and on that bread, the images of the horns of the ox were carved. Later, after the conversion crosses were carved into the buns instead of horns. The word "bun" is derived from the Saxon word 'boun' which means 'sacred ox.' (474) The shape of Easter scones (moon shaped) was Heathen in origin as well. (475)

The difference between the bonfires of Easter/May-Feast and Midsummer was that the Midsummer fires were normally held in the streets and market places while the Easter/May-Feast fires were held on mountains and hills, that is places in nature. This is perhaps harkening back to the lunds (sacred fields) and ve's (sacred enclosure/grove) of the Vanir. Grimm relates some of the customs of these Easter fires. In one account all the cities, towns and villages of the area participate. On the evening of the first or third day of Easter there was lighted great bonfires on every hill and mountain. This is accompanied with great jubilation by young and old alike. On the Weser, they tie up a tar-barrel to a fir tree and set it alight. Men and women dance around the fire with great joy, hats are waved and handkerchiefs are thrown in the fire. It was said that if a person were to climb to higher points and to look out over the land they would see a vast number of hills and mountains lit up with fires. In some places the bonfire was proceeded by a "stately" procession up the hill, carrying white rods. They would sing songs and clash the rods together. (476) It is easy to see the similarities between these descriptions and those of the wagon processions of Nerthus and, later, of Freyr.

When we examine accounts of May Day rites we'll see the strong connection they have with accounts of earlier Vanir rites and how they are virtually identical to the descriptions of Easter/Ostara rites we have examined so far. The beginning of May was kept as a great festival from of old and it now regarded as the trysting-time of witches who were once known as wise-women and who were very much revered. (477)

One account relates that when Whitsuntide (roughly, Summer Finding) approached the 'maigreve' (probably equivalent to May-king) was elected and the May-wagon was built from timber hewed from seven villages. All the 'loppings' were then loaded on the wagon which was drawn by only four horses. A procession from the town came to take the wagon and the burgonmaster and council received May-wreaths from the commoners. They in turn handed it over to the maigreve. The wagon would hold from 60 to 70 bundles of may (birch), which was delivered to the maigreve, who then distributed it. The floors of the church were strewn with clippings of boxwood and field-flowers. At this feast dishes of crabs were served up to all present. (478) If we compare this rite to the rites of Nerthus described in Tacitus and of later descriptions of the wagon processions of Freyr we cannot help but see the similarities. That these later May Day rites were almost certainly continuations of Vanir wagon rites is almost certain. Both have processions of wagons that are led from place to place and are accompanied with great celebration and joy.

In Swabia, at sunrise on May Day, the children go into the woods, the boys carrying silk handkerchiefs on staves and the girls carrying boughs with ribbons tied in them. The leader, who is called the May-king, has the right to choose his queen. In Gelders on Mayday-eve they decorate the trees with hanging tapers much like those the Christmas tree is decorated with and sing while dancing around the tree with great joy. Grimm says that up to his time, May-bushes were still brought in houses at Whitsuntide. (479) The choosing of a queen by the May-king sounds very much like it could be the vestige of an old Vanir rite. The boy who is May-king playing the part that would have been played by a Freysgothi (priest of Freyr) or Freyr himself and the queen playing the part of his consort. These rites would have, of course, been to bless the fertility of land and animal for the coming season.

Like descriptions we have of Easter customs, there

are descriptions of May-games or "Mayings" that were performed as late as the 16-17th century. On May Day morning the boys and girls set out soon after midnight, playing horns and other music to a neighboring wood and break boughs of trees to make wreaths. Wearing these wreaths and posies they then head back home at Sunrise and set these May-bushes at the doors and windows of their houses. They also bring with them a tall birch tree which they had cut down and named the May-pole. It was drawn by 20-40 oxen, each with a nosegay between his horns. The tree was set up in the village and the people danced around it. The whole festival was presided over by the Lord of the May who was elected by the people and he had his Lady of the May. (480) The strong focus on fertility focus of these rites in unavoidable as is the obvious connection between the May-lord and Freyr and the May-queen/lady and Freyr's consort. Another very similar rite is described as happening in Denmark. The 'jaunint' began on Walburgis Day (May 1st), and was called (roughly) 'the Summer ride.' The young men would ride out front. The May-grave wore two garlands, one on each shoulder. The rest of the young men wore only one garland around their neck. They go a-singing into the town and the young women form a circle around the May-grave and he picks one of them to be his 'maiînde,' by dropping one of his two wreaths on her head. In some places in Denmark the May-fire was called the 'gate-fire', the May-king was called the 'gate-bear' and the May-queen was called the 'gate-lamb.' (481)

We can also see that certain herbs and woods were used in this celebration. The account just related specified that birch was distributed and box-wood and field-flowers for the floors of the church. Could this have been based on Heathen custom where the floors of a hof were spread with the same? Grimm also mentions that in later times the May-feast devolved into a rite for cattle in which each cow was bedecked with a garland of beech-leaves. There is the custom of the May-drink which continued into modern times in the Lower Rhine and Westphalia. The drink used for this was a wine and certain herbs. It was said that on no account was woodroof (asperula) to be omitted from its preparation. (482)

In later Christian times it is quite possible that the May Day rites were depicted, by the Christians, as the 'Jaunt of the Witches.' This annual event is said to be on the eve of May Day. As we saw when examining Mountains as Sacred Places the many 'witch mountains' are thought to originally have been sacred places of sacrifice to the Heathens. We shouldn't be surprised of this common tactic of the Christians, who at every turn attempted to demonize any Heathen practice they could.

Rites of Spring Summary

I think that, from the accounts we have, it can easily be seen how the May Day rites and the Ostara rites were most likely the same rites. People in one location might celebrate May Day. Another location might celebrate Ostara earlier in April or late March. Despite this they were both essentially the same rite, that is, a Vanir fertility rite. In the same way we could see that Summer Finding and Sigrblót were most likely the same rite in the same way that May Day and Ostara were. The Sigrblót/Summer Finding rite was conducted to bring success in battle and ventures. It was definitely Aesir in nature. Communities would have celebrated one or the other depending on class or the devotion of the community leader to one god or the other. They could have also celebrated both rites. Grimm quotes four different ways of welcoming Summer. In Sweden and Gothland, he describes a mock battle between Winter and Summer, with the latter winning and making a triumphal entry. The Second, in Schonen, Denmark, L. Saxony and England is the May Day rites which include processions and the May-wagon or riding. The third, on the Rhine, a mock battle between Winter and Summer but without the triumphal entry and the fourth, in Franconia, Thuringia, Meissen, Silesia and Bohemia, only the carrying-out of wintry Death with no battle and no introduction of Summer. The first two fall in May and the last two in March. In the first two the whole population takes part and the second two only the lower classes take part. However the second and fourth have no anti-thesis battling as the first and third do. (482a) In any case though I will leave it to the reader to decide from the evidence presented as to whether or not my theory holds any water.

Sun's Wending (Midsummer)

The second of the two great tides was Midsummer or Sun's Wending. Like Jól it marked off one of the two seasons of the year. (483) It was the counterpart of Jól and like it, we have quite a few customs that have survived concerning it. A the name suggests this feast was held in the middle of summer, most likely around the summer solstice. This was later called St. John's Day by the Christians and was celebrated on June 24th. It was of old associated with Baldr and in was called Phol-days (Baldr-

days). The jumping over of bonfires and rolling burning sun-cross wheels down hills were features from this rite from days of old. (484)

One of the most well attested customs connected with Midsummer was the bonfire over which the youth would jump. Unlike the Ostara/May Day fires which were on hills and mountains, the Midsummer fires were more often in fields and in or near the towns and cities. They wore garlands of flowers and threw herbs into the fire. In one account the garland was to be made of nine sorts of flowers. The same account gives that all manner of herbs were thrown into the fire and the problems and troubles of the person who threw the herbs would go off in the fire and smoke. Some of the herbs thrown in were mugwort, monks-hood, larkspur, mullein and walnut leaves. In another account it is said that wreaths of mugwort and 'monks-hood.' Everyone was said to carry a blue plant called larkspur and while looking into the fire they said, "So depart all mine ill-fortune and be brunt up with this herb!" and then they threw the plant into the fire. Some accounts tell of pranks being played on passers by with hidden fireworks as well. Some sources describe the wreaths worn by the those celebrating as being made of motherwort and vervain with violets being carried in the hand. (485) Other customs included the baking and distributing of large loaves or cakes and circular dances like those performed on May Day. The dances, in some places evolved into plays and dramatic presentations. (486)

At Nürnberg the young men wetn about begging for wood and carted it to the Bleacher's pond by the Spital-gate and made a fire which they jumped over. This was thought to give them good health for the whole year. They also charged passers by for the privilege of jumping over the fire. This tradition was continued when Mid-Summer was Christianized into St. John's Day. On St. John's Day eve the bonfire was started and it was jumped over just as in the Mid-Summer rite. Mead was also drank over it. Nicolaus Gryse (1593) mentions a regular practice on St John's Day. In his account the fire was the need-fire and they jumped over the fires and drove the cattle by it as well. They were described as passing the night 'in great sins, shame and harms.' These fires were kept burning up till midnight and sometimes up until dawn. (487)

Another very good account comes from a German village on the Moselle, near Sierk and Thionville. Every house delivers straw to the top of the Stromberg and the men and boys assembled there when it gets close to evening. Women and girls were stationed by the Burbach spring. They took a huge wheel and wraped it all over with straw, so much so, that none of the wood from the wheel could be seen any longer. They then would put a strong pole through the center that stuck out about a yard on each side and it is there that it was grasped on each side by those that guide the wheel. Any straw that was left over from the covering of the wheel is used to make torches. At a signal given by the 'Maire of Sierk (who, according to ancient custom, earned a basket of cherries for the service), the wheel was lighted and it would begin its roll down the hill. A shout of joy was raised at this and everyone waved their torches. Part of the men stayed on the hill while the other part followed the wheel down the hill. If the wheel was still on fire when it reached the river it was considered an omen of an abundant vintage from the nearby vineyards. While the wheel was rushing past the women and girls they would erupt in cheers and they would be answered by the men on the hill and the inhabitants of the neighboring villages who were in attendance. In similar fashion the butchers of Treves are said to send down a wheel on fire every year, and in France fires and burning wheels are attested to as early as the 12th century. (488)

Other similar rites were performed in Slavic countries and in Russia. In Carinthia the rolling of 'St. John's' fiery wheel is described. They also leaped over bonfires as well did they lead their cattle by the fires to protect them against witchcraft. It is interesting to note that protecting the cattle from disease (the original purpose of this rite) is turned into protecting them from witchcraft, an obvious Christianizing of the rite. In Russia young men and women, garlanded with flowers and girt with 'holy herbs' all got together on the 24th of June and lighted a fire which they lept over and led their flocks over while singing songs. This was thought to protect the cattle from wood-sprites. Sometimes a white cock was burned in the fire as well. (489)

The charcoal and partially burned limbs from the fire were considered as having magical protective properties. Some of the charred branches were taken home and it was believed to have been good luck and protective. Some would jump three times round the fire with a branch of walnut in the their hands. Father's of families would whisk a branch through the fire which they would than put up over their cow-house door. The old men would put some of the coal from the fire in their wooden shoes which was thought to safeguard them from various woes. Other customs had large burs of mugwort being hung over the gate or gap through which cattle would always pass. (490)

That these customs described are Heathen in nature is shown by the issuing of the following order by the Nürnberg town-council. "Whereas experience heretofore hath shown, that after the old heathenish use, on John's day in every year, in the country, as well in towns as villages, money and wood hath been gathered by young folk, and thereupon the so-called sonnenwendt or zimmet fire kindled, and thereat winebibbing, dancing about the said fire, leaping over the same, with burning of sundry herbs and flowers, and setting of brands from the said fire in the fields, and in many other ways all manner of superstitious work carried on---Therefore the Hon. Council of Nürnberg town neither can nor ought to forbear to do away with all such unbecoming superstition, paganism, and peril of fire on this coming day of St. John (Neuer lit. anz. 1807, p. 318)." Sun's Wending fires were forbidden in Austria in 1850. (491)

Feasts Held Regularly at Longer Intervals

There were instances of feasts that were held regularly but at longer intervals than a year. We have accounts of great feasts held every nine years, one in Uppsala and one in Denmark. Adam of Bremen tells of the great sacrifice that was held at Uppsala every nine years. Snorri called this the 'chief blót,' and was held to obtain peace and victory for the Swedish king. Kings and commoners alike sent gifts to Uppsala. Those who subscribed to the Christian religion had to pay for not coming to the blót. They would sacrifice nine of every living creature each day, including men and they would hang the bodies in the tree that was considered to be divine. 72 men were said to be hanging on the tree according to one account. The festival lasted nine days and sacrifices were made on each day. It was held at the beginning of Summer at the same time the Sigrblót was held. The second account comes from Thietmar of Merseburg. He wrote of a great feast that was held every ninth year in which 90 men along with horses, dogs and cocks were offered to 'the powers of the Underwold.' Many scholars consider the account to be unreliable and likely a copy of Adam of Bremen's account. (492)

Time-Keeping
The Two Great Seasons

The major unit of time keeping for Heathens was the two great seasons. Unlike our four seasons, they had two which consisted of Winter and Summer Sometimes they were called Spring and Autumn but it was still only two seasons that were meant. Each one was 26 weeks long. This practice turned into four seasons the farther South one went but for the most part, the Northern Europeans seemed to have kept a two season calendar. (493) The beginning of each season was marked with a great feast. These would have been Winter Nights on Oct. 14th and Sigrblót or Summer-finding on April 14th. The passage of time was counted in Winters and nights. (494) So instead of saying I will see you three days they would have said, I will see you in three nights time. Instead of saying I moved here 3 years ago they would have said I moved here three winters ago. (495) The year was seen as a ring and the completion of one ring (year) and beginning of a new ring was seen as a time of great festivities as is evidenced from the importance that was placed on Jól. The two halves of the year were called misseri, which was equal to six months. The plural misserum indicated twelve months. (496) Both the Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse have terms that support this two-fold division of the year. Just as the year fell in two halves so did the night (24 hours) fall in two halves of 12 hours each. (497)
Although the beginning of Summer is given as April 14th this time might actually start earlier or later officially as some areas considered the beginning of summer when the first flower bloomed or when certain birds returned from their Winter roosts. This is the origin of the title 'Summer-finding.' The finding of this first flower blooming or the return of the bird was then, in affect, 'finding' summer. In some places whoever saw the first bird to return ran to the spot and stuck a pole there and put flowers on the pole and danced around it and sang songs. One of the birds that was especially considered to be the harbringer of Spring was the cuckoo. (498) In fact, the 1st Summer month was named gaukmánuðr which translated means "cuckoo month." (499) This month ran from April 14th through May 13th. Farther South the Germans considered the arrival of spring to be March with the arrival of the stork and the swallow along with the first blooms of the violet. (500) The two half years of the Icelanders was made up of 364 days. This would, of course, cause the seasons to shift with time. This caused the Icelanders much consternation when they noticed that, by their method of time-keeping, that the Summer was moving backwards into Spring. Ari the Learned tells us how they addressed this. One night Thorstein Surt had a dream. He dreamed that he was at the Althing (Great Law Assembly) which was held every Mid-Summer at Thingvellir. In his dream he was

the only one awake there but when everyone else was awake, he fell asleep. Ari interpreted this as signifying that when Thorstein was speaking at the Althing everyone else would be quite. The meaning however could also symbolize that by reckoning the seasons wrongly, they were being active when they should be inactive and vice versa. Thorstein came up with a solution which was enthusiastically accepted. He suggested that an extra week be added to the year every seventh year. It is interesting to note that the determination of time and dates was the responsibility of the Althing. The Lawspeaker proclaimed the misseristal for the coming year at the close of the assembly, thus making the keeping of time under the aegis of the gods. (501)

The Turning of the Moon

Even though Northern Europeans had a solar calendar they also had a lunar calendar for common use because it was much easier to reckon time by the moon then by the sun. For this reason they counted by nights instead of by days. A section of time was counted by number of nights, then seennights (7 days), fortnights (14 days), turns (of the month - 29-30 days) and Winters (years). (502) Tacitus confirms that they did count by nights instead of days as well and says that barring accidents or emergency they assembled on the new and full moons because they believed that it was most fortunate to begin transactions during this time. (503) He does not tell us which actions were best for which turn of the moon but we can assume that some actions were better performed on the full moon while others might be better performed on the new moon. These customs were so entrenched in the common people that the church could not rid the people of these customs and were forced to allow them. To this day almanacs give good planting times according to the phases of the moon and if we look at folk-lore we can easily see what actions were best performed on what phase of the moon. Grimm's 19th century accounts of folk-lore give us ample information on this subject. We know from Caesar that it was thought best to fight a battle on the new moon. The new moon (or any day of its increase up until the full moon) was an auspicious time for beginnings. Marriages should be done on the New moon as well as the beginning of building a house or moving into one. The belief was that if done on the new moon or its increase that money, married bliss and house stores would grow or increase with the increase of the moon. Hair and nails were cut at new moon to give them a good chance of growing and cattle were weaned in the waxing light of the moon. It was believed that if they were weaned in the waning light (that is, from the full moon until the next new moon) that they would get lean. Babies were to be weaned by the course of the moon as well. Boys were to be weaned at the full moon and girls to be weaned at the waning moon. Grimm theorizes this was so the boy would grow to be stout and strong and the girl would be slim and elegant. Also if one was to gather healing herbs they should be done on the new moon or its increase because they were considered to be fresh and 'unalloyed' at that time. (504)
Just as there were things believed best done on the new moon and its increase there were things believed best done on the full moon and its decrease. On the full moon and its decrease things involving separating or the ending of things were to be performed. During this time marriages were to be annulled and houses knocked down. In a Calendar printed in 1511 it stated that it was good to chop wood on the moon's waning. There was also a tradition that no wood should be felled during the crescent moon. Grass was not to be mown at new moon but at full. It was also tradition to shoot game on the full and waning moon and treasures must be lifted at full moon. A bed should not be stuffed during the new moon or its increase because it was thought that the feathers would not lie still. It was thought that if you opened a trench by the waxing moon that it would soon close over again and if opened by the waning it would get wider and deeper. It was considered bad to open a vein during the waning moon because it was thought that the blood would gather in the legs. Sevian women believed it not good to wash clothing at the new moon because they believed it would cause the shirt to tear soon. Grimm speculates that another reason for washing by the waning moon could have been because the stains would disappear with the dwindling light. (505)

Old Norse Day Name	English Translation	Modern Day Name
Sunnudagr	Sunna's Day	Sunday
Mánadagr	Mani's Day	Monday
Týsdagr	Tyr's Day	Tuesday
Óðinsdagr	Othinn's Day	Wednesday
Þórsdagr	Torr's Day	Thursday
Frjádagr	Freyja's/Frigg's Day	Friday
Laugardagr	Washing Day	Saturday

The Sacred Enclosure

As we have seen the variety of sacred enclosures is quite high. They included sacred groves, sacred fields, sacred stones, hills and mountains, springs, waterfalls as well as built structures. What you use for your sacred area will depend on what you have available. Not everyone has access to wilderness areas. In this case a personal stalli can be set up in a corner of a room. This stalli could be as simple as a table on which you set your sacred instruments and any images or symbols you wish to use to represent the Regin and/or your fulltrúi. The stalli should be oriented in such a way that you when you stand before it you are facing north. The northward direction was considered as holy so any sacred act should be done facing north.
Some might wish to set up a hörg in their back yard and again this should be oriented in a north-south direction so that when standing before it to perform a blót you are facing north. For those who have access to more rural settings or can build their own hof so much the better. The main emphasis is to set an area apart that was considered sacred. This area should not be used for anything other than the blót. Even if we are talking about a small stalli in one corner of your room, that table should be used only for the purpose of your blót. I have such a stalli in my living room and I do not set anything on it even for a moment unless it is the instruments and symbols I use for my blóts. I do not do this out of fear but out of a desire to show respect for my ancestors and for the Regin.

Rules for Sacred Ground

When treading on sacred ground there were certain rules that were observed. We know that no one was allowed to look on (pray to) the holy mountain at Helgafell without being washed so we would not be remiss in saying that a person should wash before entering holy ground. We know that salt and salt spring were considered holy so the taking of a ritual bath with salts would be completely within the Northern Way framework. We know also from the Old Norse word blótkæði (garments worn at sacrifices) that there was a special name given to clothing worn to blóts, so special clothing that is worn only at blóts would be something to consider as well. This clothing need not be Viking Age period garb, though some may choose that. It could be modern clothing as well. The emphasis should be on clothing that is only worn at the blót. I have an amber necklace and an amber ring that I wear only during blóts. Anyone who knows anything about ritual knows that drama plays an important part in the rites and having special clothing or items that one wears only to blóts helps one get into the proper state of mind. Of course this isn't something that has to be done but it can only add to the rite. We also know from Grimm that no covering should be worn on the head.
Probably one of the most important rules concerning sacred ground was the prohibition against violence of any kind on sacred ground. The person who violated this law was called varg í véum (wolf in the enclosure). I think it would be safe to say that, barring the Thing (legal assembly) disputes of any kind should be saved for another time. The purpose of the blót is the strengthening of bonds and this is a time when the chaos that can result from disputes should be avoided at all costs. Another rule closely related to this is the prohibition against bringing weapons onto sacred ground. These two prohibitions seem to have been universal so the following of these two prohibitions are definitely two we should be following.
Lastly comes a matter of a practical nature. We saw that a place to answer the call of nature was to be provided just off the sacred ground. Defecating or urinating on sacred ground was one of the prime ways of defiling it. The call of nature should never be answered on sacred ground.

Images of the Gods and Goddesses

We know from Tacitus that the Germans around the 1st centuries C. E. did not have images of their gods and goddesses. They considered it unsuitable to depict them in human likeness. Despite this we know they did eventually develop the practice of depicting the gods in human form. This may have developed from contact with the Romans who we have many fine examples of their gods and goddesses being depicted in human form. My own choice in this matter is to not depict them in human form but to use their symbols instead. This could range from animals associated with them to runes, and other similar symbols. This in no way should be taken as the recommended course to take. Each person should decide this matter on their own. I simply offer the course I personally will take. I would like to offer, then, some suggestions for symbols relating to various of the Regin, including the runes associated with them.

Othinn: Valknot; *This should never be worn or tattooed oneself unless you are willing to offer you life up at his whim.* Ravens; *His two ravesn Hug-*

hinn and Munnin. Wolves; *His two wolves Geri and Freki* . The Spear; *His spear Gungnir. Also the spear was thrown over ones foes to dedicate (sacrifice) them to Othinn.* The eagle; *Othinn was known to turn into an eagle.*

Frigg: Keys; *Frigg was considered patron of the household and in Old Norse tradition the new wife was given the keys to the house as a symbol of her control of that aspect of life.* The spinning wheel; *Frigg was connected to spinning.*

Freyr: The horse and the boar; *Both animals were strongly connected to Freyr and the boar was his symbol both for war (its fierceness) and fertility. There are mentions of horses dedicated to Freyr and also of sacred horses that were kept on the land adjacent to hofs dedicated to Freyr. Freyr also had a golden boar named Gullinborsti.*

Freyja: The Falcon; *Freyja had a falcon cloak which Loki borrowed on occaision.* The boar and the sow; *Freyja like Freyr had a golden boar whose name was Hildisvini and one of Freyja's many names was Syr which means 'sow.' The sow was a major symbol of fertility.* The cat; *Two cats are said to pull her wagon.* The swastika; *This symbol is usually connected with Thorr but I would submit that it belongs more properly with Freyja. It is a cyclic symbol and female statues have been found with the swastika drawn over their reproductive area. This shows that it was considered a fertility symbol and its revolving nature shows the possibility of a cyclic symbol, all of which would have been under the aegis of Freyja.* The ladybug; *The ladybug was thought to be sacred to Freyja.*

Thorr: The hammer; *The symbol of our tradition as well as a symbol of Thorr. It is used to hallow and represents his hammer Mjollnir.* Goats; *Two goats, named Tanngnostr (Teeth-grinder) and Tanngrisnir (Teeth-bearer) pull Thorr's wagon.* Oak; *The oak tree is sacred to Thorr.* The Stag bettle; *The stag beetle was thought to be sacred to Thorr.* Rowan tree; *This tree is also sacred to Thorr.*

Loki: Fire/flame; *Loki's powers are related to fire.*

Ullr: The bow and skis; *Ullr is connected strongly with both of these and said to be the best shot with the bow.* **(isa)**

Baldr: The ring; *Baldr was given the ring Draupnir by Othinn.*

Njorth: The ship; *Njorthr's hall was called Noatunn (ship yard) and he was prayed to by those who made money while using ships (merchants).* The Foot-print; *Njorth has the most beautiful feet of all the Regin.*

The Vanir: The wagon; *The wagon is a symbol of the Vanir in general.*

The Nine Worlds: A large old tree; *The nine worlds are symbolized by the world tree, Yggdrasill. The tree is usually depicted as an ash or yew.* The double-algaz rune.

Ithunn: The apple; *Ithunn cares for the apples of immortality which the gods and goddesses use to keep themselves young.*

Tyr: The North Star; *The North Star is connected to Tyr.* The Irminsul or Universal pillar; *This is associated with Tyr*.

The Mead of Poetry: The Cauldron; *Mead was made and served in cauldrons in the old traditions. This also symbolizes the pact made between the Aesir and Vanir which has never been broken.*

Ran: The net; *Ran was said to have a net in which she caught up those who drowned.*

Aegir: The cauldron; *The cauldron might also be a symbol of Aegir because he was a great brewer of mead.*

Sif: Golden wheat; *Sif's golden hair is often equated with wheat.* Any of the Asynjur may be represnted by the Berkano rune.

Vitharr: A shoe or boot; *Vitharr will avenge the death of his father Othinn by kicking to death the Fenris wolf with a strong boot or shoe that he has.*

Mani: The moon; *Mani is the god of the moon.*

Sunna: The sun; *Sunna is the goddess of the sun.* Solwheel (Swastika); *A symbol of Sunna.* Solcross; *Another symbol of Sunna.*

Heimdallr: The horn; *Heimdallr will blow his horn at the approaching of Ragnarok.* Sheild; *Heimdallr's jog is to guard or shield the bridge Bifrost from the frost giants.*

Nerthus: The wagon; *Her rites included the procession of a sacred wagon.*

Rinda: The rune isa .

Var:

Gefjon:

Hermothr:

Eir:

The Wild-fire

The wild-fire (need-fire) was the most holy form of fire and it is suggested that whenever possible to use fire started from a wild-fire, that is, started from friction caused by the rubbing together or two pieces of wood. In on description of the need fire we saw that those making it removed articles of metal from their self before starting and I would suggest that this be done for your wild-fire as well. Creating wild-fire is no easy task, especially if one has no experience with it, so if you decide to use wild-fire for your next blót be sure to practice it ahead of time. In any case, however you get the fire started, you should always have fire in your blót even if it is as simple as lighting a single candle. Fire carries your words and your offerings to the other worlds.

The Blót-feast and the Full

The blót-feast is the major religious observance in Regintroth. It is our recommendation that the full blót-feast be conducted at least twice each year, on Midsummer and Jól. It is, of course, all right to conduct blót-feasts more often. As we established before, the blóts primary purpose is the strengthening of bonds, both between kin and between us and the Regin. The blót also serves to keep us connected with nature, as we know our Northern European fore-fathers were. In these modern days, where most of us may not be dependent on the land, and its bounty, it is even more important to observe the turning of the seasons so that we can stay in sync with nature. I would like to now discuss some ideas on how we might conduct a blót-feast from a practical standpoint as opposed to the more esoteric and/or spiritual reasons. We might break the feast-blot into five major sections. These sections would be the procession, the offering, the celebration, the feast and the full. I'll discuss each one in turn.
The procession: I happened to be flipping around the channels on TV one day when I happened across a documentary on Leif Eriksson. This was an older documentary that was, from the appearance, from the 70's or 80's. Part of the documentary centered on the reclaiming of the Pre-Christian traditions by Icelanders. They profiled the man responsible for getting the Elder Way (Forn Sedh as it is called in Europe) recognized as an official religion in Iceland, Sveinbjorn Beinteinson. They filmed a blót which he conducted which was quite moving and impressive to see. The blót began with a procession. Sveinbjorn was in the lead in white robes and he as well as others carried various standards as they made the trek up the holy mountain where the blót was to be held. It was a stately and solemn affair. We know from sources in the lore that this practice was often used in one way or the other especially in Vanir rites. A procession, in which standards and the tools of the rite are carried to the sacred area can serve very well to get the participates in the right frame of mind for the rite. Chants and songs which we know were done on processions can also serve to enhance the experience. The procession's purpose should be viewed as for preparing the minds of the those participating for the blót.
The blót: This is where the offerings are made. Animal sacrifices would be done here and the blood sprinkled on those present. Other offerings would be left at this time as well. Other than that we don't know much about how the blót was conducted. We, at MSR, have chosen this time to perform what we call the blót-full (strengthening toast). This is a toast in which the participants strengthen the bonds between them and their ancestors and the Regin.
The Celebration: At this point in the blót the participants gather together and celebrate. This could include dancing, singing, story-telling and competitive games. These activities may vary depending on the purpose of the blót-feast. For instance, during the Midsummer blót-feast it was traditional to build a great bonfire and for the youth and any others that would venture it, to jump over the fire.
The Feast: The feast was a time of joy and fellowship. The animal that was sacrificed was cooked and everyone enjoyed a sacred meal in which it was considered that the participants were taking part in the meal with the ancestors and the Regin. The meat was boiled in a kind of stew in cauldrons and the mead was served from cauldrons as well. Everyone should give the first portion of their food to the fire (or in a container to be taken later and burned outside or left at the food of a tree) in honor of the Regin and the Ancestors. Although animal sacrifice is still viable in my opinion, most people will not have the skills or means to do so. Animals sacrifices should be done only by those skil-

led in the methods that will bring the animal's life to an end as quickly and as painlessly as possible. Also needed would be someone who knows how to butcher an animal properly and there might be city, state and county laws that apply as well. Everyone participating in the blót-feast should contribute food and drink toward the feast and this will, of course, require prior planning. I think it would be good, if possible, to have a cauldron to keep the mead in (or whatever you use for the sacred drink). The feast should continue until everyone has had their fill and the feast-jarl calls for the full. The Full: The full consists of five specific toasts and then an unspecified number afterwards. The first five are, Othinns-full, Freyrs-full, Njorthrs-full, the Braggi-full and the minni-full. The feast-jarl as the right to call for the full. He calls for it and hallows the mead. Then he begins with Othinns-full which is a toast to honor the chief of the tribe of the Regin. Each person starting on the feast-jarl's right honors Othinn with a toast until all have done so. Then the feast-jarl will begin the next full and it is conducted in the same manner for each full. Freyrs-full is a toast given in honor of Freyr for peace in the coming season. Njorthrs-full is given for prosperity in the coming season. The Braggi-full is a toast in which the person either boasts (brags) about a previous oath completed or makes a solemn oath to complete some task. And finally, the minni-full is given to honor one's ancestors and friends that have passed to the other worlds. These fullar could go on for some time and include multiple rounds of toasts.

The Solemn Oath

I feel I should speak a little on the solemn oath. Contrary to the way some would picture the oath, the oath is not every statement that comes from one's mouth. Saying you will meet someone in one hour is not an oath. Giving your word is not an oath. Although you will certainly suffer a loss of reputation from breaking your word it still is not the same as a solemn oath. A solemn oath is sworn to the gods themselves and is a spiritual action. The solemn oath is a formal statement, the swearing of which affects your orlog. It always has profound effects on your life. Whether or not these effects are beneficial or detrimental all depends on whether or not the oath has been fulfilled or not. Great care should be taken before swearing a solemn oath because you will be held to it by the forces of wyrd. Never ever swear an oath unless you fully intend to fulfill it, because no matter how rash it was, you'll be expected to fulfill it. Stories abound in the lore of people taking rash oaths and having to fulfill the oath even though it might cause their death. I cannot stress this strongly enough. Those who swear solemn oaths lightly and break them just as lightly are, to put it in the vernacular of my homeland, in for a whole heap of trouble. Take as much care in swearing a solemn oath as you would in fulfilling it. I give this caution here because I think it is something that is important to keep in mind while drinking the fullar. The Braggi-full includes the swearing of solemn oaths and each person should keep these cautions in mind because the drinking of mead has caused many a person to act rashly.

Offerings

The types of offerings given were many and varied. What seemed to be the case was that it was not so much important what was offered as much as it was that what was offered was valuable to the person offering it. Everything from fruit, bread and clothing to gold, weapons and animals were offered. But the one thing that was common among them all is that they were considered of worth by those giving the offering. While a loaf of bread might be considered a good offering for a poor farmer to make, it might be considered an insult to the gods for a wealthy jarl to offer the same. Offerings were often thrown in lakes, bogs, pools, springs or waterfalls. They also were commonly left at the foot of trees or holy objects such as sacred stones. Offerings were also made by throwing them into a fire. Only animals that were eaten by man were considered as worthy to offer the gods. So in modern practice we could say that the most important aspect of the offering should be that it holds value to the person giving the offering. Don't offer something you do not personally value.

Hallowing

A few different methods can be used for hallowing. Any object or land could be hallowed simply be dedicating it to one of the Regin. This could be done at a special blót for the purpose. Using a hammer or the sign of the hammer can be used as well. Fire was also used as we saw from accounts describing how it was used to hallow the mead drank in the full by passing the mead either over or around the fire. In descriptions of blótar we know that the blood of sacrificed animals were used to hallow the hof, instruments and those participating in the blót by sprinkling the blood on them with a tine or

twig. We might consider a similar use of the hallowed mead.

When to Blót

One of the hallmarks of The Northern Way is its connection to the land. The Pre-Christian Northern European lived in cooperation with the cycles of Nature. He did not attempt to control nature or see it as something evil to be overcome. In modern times we can easily get out of sync with nature. We no longer need to depend on Mother Nerthus for food or for the hunting of animals. We need only go to the local supermarket. Observing the major tides is a way we can reconnect with nature. Even though, for my reconstructed holy night calendar, I list specific dates for the blótar I suggest that each person try to use the actual tides to decide when a blót should be held as the Northern Europeans once did. The summer finding blót could be held when the first flower blooming is spotted or when the a migratory bird makes its first appearance after returning from its winter time roost. Winter Nights could be conducted when the last leaves have fallen from trees. We also know that the phase of the moon was always an important consideration for when blótar were conducted.
More practical considerations sometimes come into play as well. Sometimes it may be better to delay a blót for a few days so that it can be held on a weekend, when more people will be able to attend. It is also likely that our Northern European ancestors gathered together more often than on the major tides, perhaps monthly on the full moon, and we know that they also held blót-feasts for special occasions such as marriages and births.

Blót Activities

Many times there were other activities at blóts. Singing, dancing, story-telling and games were some of the activities that are attested to in the lore. Specific blóts sometimes had specific activities that were associated with them, which I'll talk more about in the blót instructions for those specific blóts. We should feel free to improvise these activities because, in essence this part of the blót-feast was always about kin getting together and having a good time. This would be a great time for story-telling. Stories from the Sagas and the Eddas could be told in such as a way that they relate the values that The Northern Way holds as desirable in order to teach them to the young ones. In times of old, it was the one of the best ways to teach the young what ideals they should value. This was one of the most important aspects of what the skalds did. They used their stories to relate these values and reinforced them upon the whole culture. This is a tradition that we modern follwers of the Northern Way should work hard to revive. The power of story to teach and reinforce our values while at the same time entertaining should not be overlooked.

Conclusion

I think I have shown that contrary to popular opinion, there is quite a bit of material to be found concerning the traditions of our Northern European ancestors. If one looks hard enough they can find many many pieces to the puzzle that was the religious practices of Pre-Christian North. Although I gathered almost 200 pages of notes which translated into nearly 80 pages of article I, by no means, exhausted the store of information that is out there waiting to be collected. Although I did not find all the pieces of the puzzle (we are unlikely to ever find all the pieces) , I do believe that I found enough to get a good picture of what the true practices of The Northern Way were. I believe that there is enough here for us to take up and rebuild genuine Northern custom. In Regintroth: A Book of the Northern Way, I'll offer guides for these rebuilt customs, but it is my hope that the reader will take this information I have gathered and use it to build their own traditions. It is my hope that these traditions will be passed down from father to son, from mother to daughter just as they were in times of old. We modern followers of the Northern Way have been cut off from the ways of our ancestors for a century by the religion of the desert god. It is time now that we take back the ways of our forefathers. If this article helps one person do that, then I will be satisfied that the considerable effort I expended to research and write this article will have been well worth it.

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