

VIKING RELIGION AND GODS

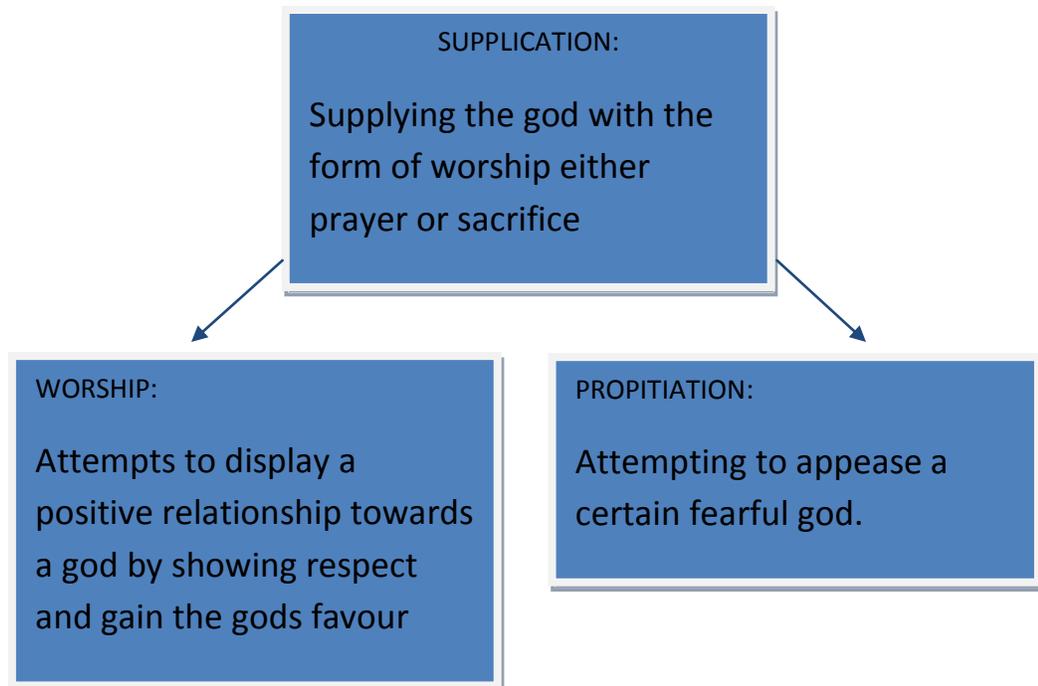


VIKING RELIGION

The Vikings religious doctrine was adopted from the traditional regime of Norse or Scandinavian mythology. According to studies this doctrine was polytheistic (meaning the acceptance of worshipping more than one god); the gods and goddesses themselves were seen to be directly related to the human form. The god's human representation and likeliness is furthered acknowledged through their ability to show human emotion, such as thunder god Thor's great anger or Frigg's sense of grief.

Importantly Norse Religion or belief was seen as normal

feature of life, where praise was associated as worship, supplication and propitiation.



These supplications vary on whenever the god is one of power or one of peace and life. For Instance a god such as Odin known for his power and war like nature would be offered a sacrifice as opposed to Frey a god known for fertility which usually would be given a prayer.

Activities:

1. Using the table below and research of your own, discover the nature of the god/goddess and tick the box that is more attuned to the specific supplication.

God	Worship	Propitiation
Odin		
Freyr		
Freya		
Tyr		

2. In pairs repeat activity 1 with 3 Norse gods of your own.

God	Worship	Propitiation

Valhalla and Afterlife

SOURCE A

From Ymir's flesh the earth was shaped,

And the mountains from his bones;

The sky from the skull of the frost-cold giant

And the sea from his blood

Vafþrúðnismál (What Vafþrúdnir had said) as cited in O' Donohue, 2008, pg. 13

According to Norse belief the earth was formed by the first giant Ymir, his existence pre dating both gods and men. Poets recount that Ymir's body is later used as the means to shape this earth. (See Source A.) Poet Snorri later accounts frost giant, Ymir being raised by a cow known as Audumbla, which had been created from melted ice. Ymir uses Audumbla as a form of survival as he drinks the cow's milk. The next form of creation spawns from Ymir as he licks a block of ice and releases the giant Buri. After Buri's release from the block of ice, the notions of creation appear much more frequently as his giant son Bor marries giantesses Bestla and have three sons known as Odin, Vili and Ve. Together these three gods murder Ymir their giant relative, to use his body to form the earth.

Earth or Midgard is only one realm of the Norse complex.

There are three known Norse realms:

Asgard: The realm of the gods, this realm also contains Odin's hall known as Valhalla.

Midgard: The realm of humans, which poets describe Midgard as a buffer or protective zone for the gods of Asgard.

Niflheim: The foggy underworld that contains the dead. Niflheim is ruled by the goddess Hel and as Snorri explains it is for those who die of illness or old age.

Once a Viking had passed on his/her remains would be either buried or cremated. Vikings also offered foodstuffs to the dead; however the nature of this offering remains a puzzling one as archeologists cannot determine whether these were a sacrifice or food for the journey towards the otherworld.

Another common occurrence of Viking burials is funerary ships. This form of burial was not given to regular Viking men but to kings, war chiefs and perhaps their own warriors. Sources explain that these ships may have been tied to a boulder which would anchor the boat down into the depths of the sea onto the otherworld.

ACTIVITY:

SOURCE B

King Haki was so badly wounded that he realised that his life was almost at an end. So he had a warship loaded with dead warriors and weapons, and had it launched out to sea ... and a funeral pyre built on the ship, and set alight. The wind blew from the land. Haki was by then nearly dead, or actually dead, and he was laid on the pyre. Then the ship sailed out to sea, burning, and this was celebrated for a long time after.

Snorri Sturluson, Ynglinga as cited in as cited in O' Donohue, 2008, pg.70

Using Source B describe and list features of a Viking ship burial. TIP: try to examine specific features of the source such as social class, order of events and the nature of events.

The Vikings saw one of the most rewarding features of afterlife in the form of a hall, this hall being Valhalla. Valhalla or otherwise known as the hall of the slain was a mythical place that allowed its occupants to consistently feast and fight. Valhalla's doors were open to all warriors (throughout history) that have ever died in the heat of battle. Importantly Valhalla is no confined space as it can fit as many warriors as it likes. Its resources too are infinite as warriors of the hall feast on the meat of Saehrimnir, which is a boar that reanimates itself after the evening has passed. Warriors also have an infinite supply of mead given to them by the udder of the goat known as Heidrum. To Viking warriors Valhalla was seen as a nirvana, the prospect of Valhalla promoted dying for one country in the hope that they will get to spend time with their beloved gods.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

http://www.skwirk.com.au/p-c_s-14_u-473_t-1288_c-4948/VIC/8/Vikings-as-pagans/

http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/vikings/beliefs_and_stories/

References

O' Donoghue, H. (2008), From Asgard to Vahalla: The Remarkable History of the Norse Myths.

<http://site.ebrary.com.ezproxy2.acu.edu.au/lib/australiancathu/docDetail.action?docID=10310805&p00=viking%20mythology>

Lindow, J. (2002). Norse Mythology: A guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals and beliefs.

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