

A Contemporary Bifröst: The Connection between the Ásatrú and the old Norse Religion

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Abstract

In May 1973, a religious organisation was officially recognised by the Icelandic government. This new religious organisation, the Ásatrúarfélagið, was comprised of a handful of Icelanders eager to reconnect to the old Norse religion. The paper aims to evaluate the attempt made by the members of the Ásatrúarfélagið to revive the old Norse religion and determine whether it is a modern adaptation or direct successor of the old Norse religion. Evidence produced in the following chapters testifies to this attempt, yet also shows the discrepancy between the old Norse religion and the Ásatrúarfélagið. One of the main reasons is a lack of literary sources which have not been heavily influenced by Christian frameworks and motives. This lack of knowledge on acts such as the rituals performed by the members of the Ásatrú is consequently amended through improvisation and assimilation. Personal connections to the old Norse religion through the bloodlines of current members exist, yet whether this is a continued tradition or a revived interest because of German Romanticism is not known. The resulting conclusion is that the Ásatrú is a modern adaptation of the old Norse religion.

Introduction

Ragnarök will come to pass with the arrival of a Great Winter. Three whole years it shall last as the unprecedented cold plunges mankind into a world of darkness. The twin wolves Sköll and Hati will devour sun and moon as the last stars fade away in the sky. The hordes of hell will then march upon Asgard to enact revenge upon the merciless gods that inhabit this realm. Upon Vigrid, the battlefield where the gods and the einherjar shall face Loki's kin, all shall lose their life in a final clash that spells the end of an era. Yet, not all is lost. While some versions of this cataclysmic event state that this is the end of the tales and consequently all tales, there are other versions which state that a new world shall arise from the ashes. Four of Odin's sons, Vidar, Vali, Baldur and Hodr, and Thor's sons Modi and Magni will be spared the fate of their fathers and live in this new world. Alongside them two humans, Lif and Lifthrasir, shall inherit this new and green world. And from the ashes shall arise a new kingdom of man.¹

What this shortened and less articulate version of the *Völuspá*, or the Vala's Prophecy, tells us is that even the supposed destruction of almost all living beings, Ragnarök, did not mark the end of the world. It is not only within the realm of mythology that an event of supposed annihilation could turn into reconstruction. Much like the mythological tales present within its literature, Norse religion itself also experienced a revival after its supposed destruction. More than a thousand years after the Norse religion was no longer recognized as an official religion in Iceland, it was reintroduced in the 1970s by a small group of followers under the name of the *Ásatrú* or 'Æsir belief'.

This paper is dedicated to this new form of Norse religion officially recognized within the latter half of the twentieth century. Its precise purpose is to determine whether the *Ásatrú*-faith is a modern adaptation or a direct successor of the old Norse faith. Note that neither result supports the idea that the *Ásatrú* are unconnected to the old Norse religion. The aim is to determine the degree to which it is connected. It builds upon the papers written by historians in the last couple of decades on the rise of Neopaganism. Papers dedicated to uncovering how faiths such as

¹ The original version of the *Völuspá* can be found in e.g.: *The Poetic Edda: Scandinavian Classics Volumes XXI and XXII*, translated by Henry A. Bellows (New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1923), <https://www.globalgreyebooks.com/poetic-edda-ebook.html>, accessed May 8, 2021, 1-27.; For those unfamiliar with the many gods, beasts and beings that inhabit the nine realms of Norse mythology there will be a short appendix at the end of this thesis.

Norse paganism, a religion whose flame was supposedly extinguished over a millennium ago, has found new life. But in what form has it returned?

At the core of this paper are interviews and articles created by members of the Ásatrú-faith. While analyses and comparisons for the three chapters could have been drawn without the aid of personal and arguably more subjective articles, they add another dimension to this paper. This dimension is the personal experiences of the Ásatrú and their view on their own religion. This is not the first paper in which interviews with the Ásatrú have shed light on the connection between the modern form of the Norse religion and the old. Stefanie von Schnurbein's book, *Norse Revival: Transformations of Germanic Neopaganism*, includes over thirty interviews with members of the Ásatrú.² Yet, while her book, which was created after thirty years of research, concerns itself with all different facets of Ásatrú in many Nordic countries and other forms of Neopaganistic life, this smaller paper offers a more concise view of the Ásatrú in Iceland. Von Schnurbein's thoughts concerning this paper's thesis is that the Ásatrú, like other forms of Neopaganism, is an attempt at mythological revival which is thwarted by the practitioners' holistic approach to addled sources.³ There is a desire to recreate a mythological world. Yet, practitioners of these religions should remember that contemporary ideals and theories sneak in and distort our image of the past. Due to the lack of viable sources, our understanding of the pre-Christian "ancestors" remains obscure.

Papers on the Ásatrúarfélagið, or the 'Fellowship of the Æsir belief', exist as well. Michael Strmiska studied this fellowship in his paper *Ásatrú in Iceland: The Rebirth of Nordic Paganism*.⁴ The problem which Strmiska identified for any Neopagan group was that, with the fragmentary materials available to them, there is a need for the practitioners to "[A]dd ideas and practices either improvised in the present or borrowed from other sources."⁵ The dilemma which arose from this fact is that, should the Ásatrú fill in these missing pieces themselves, they risk 'losing their touch' with the original faith. Yet, should they stick firmly to these sources, they will lose the spiritual vitality which this religion needs. Strmiska both believed in 2000 that the Ásatrú managed to blow life in an old religion, yet doubted whether it would manage to survive the death of its charismatic leader. Twenty years later, we can find

² Stefanie von Schnurbein, *Norse Revival: Transformations of Germanic Neopaganism*, Studies in Critical Research on Religion, Volume: 5 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2016), Doi: <https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1163/9789004309517>.

³ Ibid., 353-358.

⁴ Michael Strmiska, "Ásatrú in Iceland: The Rebirth of Nordic Paganism?" *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 4, no. 1 (2000): 106-32.

⁵ Ibid., 128.

the answers to his questions and revisit his predictions, comparing them to the contemporary form of the *Ásatrúarfélagið*.

As the more observant of readers might have observed, there are distinctions made in the previous paragraphs between Neopaganism and the *Ásatrú*. While the *Ásatrú* is a religious movement which falls under Neopaganism, Neopaganism does not solely consist of Neo-Germanic religions. It is ergo an umbrella term. A distinction shall now be made to differentiate members of the *Ásatrú* and Neopagans in general. *Heathens* shall henceforth refer to members of the Icelandic *Ásatrú* while *pagans* refers to members of Neopaganism.⁶ While this is not a semantically accurate division between the two groups, it is useful to distinguish between these groups for this paper. Incidentally, the term Germanic has also been used as an umbrella term for the similar yet not identical religions originating in the northern parts of Europe. Yet, anachronisms have been made in the two eras discussed in the following paragraph. German nationalists used the Norse sagas to identify themselves, hereby excluding the Anglo-Saxon and Gothic gods from said umbrella term. But, as this paper focuses on the Norse gods, this anachronism shall remain unchanged.

While I argued in my second paragraph that the *Ásatrú* was officially recognized as a religion in the 1970s in Iceland, the foundations of the neo-Germanic faiths were made in two previous eras of increased interest in the German myth.⁷ These two eras are: German Romanticism around 1800 and *völkisch* nationalism in the first third of the twentieth century. The German Romanticism of the eighteenth century was defined by scholars such as Johann Gottfried Herder, and Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. Part of the nationalistic movements which took hold of Germanic, Scandinavian, Anglo-Saxon and Baltic countries alike, these scholars searched for a deep past which connected the nation through environment, language and history.⁸ This deep past would lay the foundation for a community or *Volk* through which these communities were to be represented. The second era can be characterized by the Romantic ideas about the *Volk* which culminated into the first neo-Germanic faiths.⁹ The yearning for an organic culture and its rejection of modernity culminated in the formation of said faiths.

⁶ Sidenote: Both the terms *heathen* and *pagan* are not meant as a derogatory term. Many Neopagans define themselves through these terms albeit with a different meaning in mind.

⁷ von Schnurbein, *Norse Revival*, 17.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid, 37-48.

Iceland itself has always been a bit of an odd duck when it comes to the strictness of the rules implemented by religions. Even though Iceland formally adopted Christianity as the official state religion in the year 1000 C.E., “Iceland has never been a fanatically Christian country nor particularly orthodox in its Christianity.”¹⁰ Pagan religion was first restricted to private observance and later banned outright, yet few persecutions took place in comparison to mainland Europe. The connection with the Norse mythology remained to a degree as can be seen by the nomenclature of the streets and people in Iceland derived from said mythology.¹¹ Although this might seem like a minute detail, the continuation of these words in everyday life is evidence of a (sub)conscious connection with the past. Similarly to the movements observed in Germany, Iceland experienced an increasing interest in the mythical Eddas and semi-historical sagas during the nineteenth century.¹² These literary sources formed the backbone of the educational curriculum on pre-Christian culture.

The origin of the *Ásatrú*, both in name and in purpose, was accidental. The creators of the movement, among which were leader Sveinbjörn Beinteinsson (1924-1993) and previous *Allsherjargothi* (High-Priest) Jormundur Ingi Hansen, wanted to create an association committed to researching and discussing the pre-Christian myths, customs and beliefs of Iceland.¹³ What is interesting to note was that this broad interest in the old Norse community caused the founders to choose between becoming a primarily scholarly society or an explicitly and self-conscious religious group. They ultimately chose the latter. After approaching the Ministry of Justice to request official recognition, in order to obtain the rights to perform religious ceremonies and arguably revenues generated by the national religion tax, the government officially recognised the movement in May, 1973. While remaining a small community until the start of the new millennium, the *Ásatrúarfélagið* had 4126 members in 2019.¹⁴ To add some context, this makes it the largest non-Christian religious organisation in Iceland.

The first chapter is dedicated to the literary sources used by the *Ásatrú*. Through the evaluation of the Prose Edda and the Poetic Edda made by members of the *Ásatrú* and myself,

¹⁰ Strmiska, "Ásatrú in Iceland," 109.; Jewells Chambers, "Ásatrú – Iceland’s Fastest Growing Non-Christian Religion," All Thing Iceland, Published December 7, 2019, <https://allthingsiceland.com/asatru-icelands-fastest-growing-non-christian-religion/>, accessed May 3, 2021.

¹¹ Ibid, 109-110.

¹² Further information on these sources will be given in the following chapter.

¹³ Strmiska, "Ásatrú in Iceland," 112.

¹⁴ Chambers, "Ásatrú– Iceland’s Fastest Growing Non-Christian Religion."

the reliability of the literature used by the Ásatrú and its connection with the old Norse religion shall be determined. Interviews detailing the usage of the old Norse texts in everyday Ásatrú life are key to this chapter. By showing what parts of the 'sacred' texts are used in their life and believed to be true, we can determine their value to this form of Neopaganism. The second chapter is dedicated to the customs and rituals present within the culture of the Ásatrú. What old Norse practices and customs are either no longer used within the Ásatrú society or adapted to modern society? Websites and secondary literature dedicated to describing these practices explain how the customs and practices of the Ásatrú society have changed over the years while also showing the continuity with the old Norse religion. The third and last chapter describes the reasons why members of the Ásatrú chose to join this Neopagan faith. Are the Ásatrú joining the contemporary religion to reconnect with the old Norse religion or influenced by external factors? Articles, interviews and secondary literature describe the different push and pull factors which cause the members of the Ásatrú to join this Norse faith. The different types of factors illuminate the degree to which the members of the Ásatrú are actually invested in reviving the old religion.

1. Evaluation of the pre-Christian Literature

I introduced this paper with an altered version of the *Völuspá*. While it served as my own *Bifröst*, or mythological bridge, between the thesis and relevant old Norse literature, there is a slight problem with using snippets from the Eddas. The integrity of both the *Prose Edda* and the *Poetic Edda* as Norse literature remains disputed even to this day. Both sources were created after Christianity was officially established as the main religion of Iceland. The *Prose Edda* is a text of old Norse poems, written about the year 1200 by the Icelandic scholar and politician Snorri Sturluson. Who created the *Poetic Edda*, or *Elder Edda*, in the thirteenth century is disputed. The collection of poems that also goes by the name of *Konungsbók*, or King's book, has been attributed to Sæmundr the Learned by bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson.¹⁵ Whether Sæmundr truly is the creator of the *Poetic Edda* or not is a matter which will not be solved in this paper. For the sake of clarity, we shall therefore assume that Sæmundr is not the creator of the *Elder Edda*.

This paper uses the translation of the *Poetic Edda* made by Henry Adams Bellows in 1927.¹⁶ Bellows shows a great understanding of the Norse realm and elaborates on the alterations occurring with the translation of the text. The version of the *Prose Edda* used in this paper is the recent translation of Anthony Faulkes from 1995.¹⁷ In addition to an eloquent and comprehensible translation of the original source, the contribution of the translator to the text is informative and welcoming to a reader unfamiliar with contemporary pagan life.

The Ásatrúarfélagið

But the question that remains is how do the Ásatrú value the *Prose Edda* and *Poetic Edda*? As it is impossible to discuss the views of all members of the Ásatrú on said sources, there is a limited number of people represented in this paper. These people have been selected on a basis of seniority within the organisation and their contribution of information to this paper. For this chapter the main characters are Jóhanna G. Harðardóttir, Hilmar Örn Hilmarsson and Karl E. H. Seigfried. The former two are part of the Ásatrúarfélagið, or Fellowship of the

¹⁵ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Codex Regius," Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Codex-Regius>, accessed May 12, 2021.

¹⁶ *The Poetic Edda: Scandinavian Classics Volumes XXI and XXII*.

¹⁷ Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, translated by Anthony Faulkes (London: Everyman, 1995), <http://vsnrweb-publications.org.uk/EDDArestr.pdf>, accessed May 5, 2021.

Æsir Faith, the Icelandic community which was officially recognised by the government.¹⁸ Harðardóttir bears the title of Staðgengill Allsherjargoða, or Deputy High Priestess, and Hilmarsson the title of Allsherjargoði, or High Priest. The third of the trio, Karl E.H. Seigfried, is the only member of the faith who does not reside within Iceland. He has, as will be proven in the following chapters, a strong connection with the previously mentioned members of the Ásatrúarfélagið. Being an expert on Norse mythology, Seigfried is part of the Theology and Religious History Faculty at Cherry Hill Seminary and Adjunct Professor, Pagan Chaplain, and Pagan Forum Faculty Advisor at Illinois Institute of Technology. Seigfried has written numerous papers on the Ásatrú and interviewed the aforementioned leaders of the Ásatrúarfélagið which can be found on his website.¹⁹ These interviews form the core of this chapter. By applying these sources to the thesis, the answer to the following questions can be found. How important are literary sources to this religion? And to what degree do the Ásatrú implement the Eddas in their daily life? By finding the answers to these questions we can determine what the value of the Eddas is to the daily life of the Ásatrú.

Relevance of Literature for a Religion

The first thing which one must remember when talking about the relevance of literature is context. The Abrahamic religions, which nowadays have 3.8 billion adherents, put a lot more importance on the written word. The Torah, Bible and Quran have all been written by believers of the faith and are seen by a great majority of their followers as dogma. The Eddas on the other hand, as previously said, have been written well after Christianity was made the official religion in Iceland. While this does not immediately prove that the writers of said sources were entirely Christian themselves, it does call into question the validity of the sum itself.

Yet, despite this known ‘Christianisation’ of the texts, they still form an integral part of a heathen’s life. To Harðardóttir the Poetic Edda contains “[T]he best lessons you can learn about getting along with people in life. The world has changed, but people are still the

¹⁸ “Ásatrúarfélagið,” Ásatrúarfélagið, <https://asatru.is/>, accessed may 3, 2021.

¹⁹ Karl E. H. Seigfried, “Archive of Articles and Interviews by Dr. Karl E. H. Seigfried,” *The Norse Mythology Blog*, <https://www.norsemyth.org/p/archive.html>, accessed March 17, 2021.; Future notations which fall under this archive will be adjusted as can be seen in note 21.

same.”²⁰ Lessons can be learned from the Poetic Eddas and even applied to this day. Seigfried concurs with this idea as he believes that the Poetic Edda is not a rulebook for orthodoxy and orthopraxy but that “[T]he poems, myths, sagas, legends and histories of Northern Europe provide a way for seeing, a means of interpretation, a philosophical orientation.”²¹ A connection between the contemporary world and the world of yore can be made as these lessons and myths can be found in everyday life.

The conclusion drawn from this is that there is an essence, a core of the Eddas, which the Ásatrú see as truthful. These are not the exact details of the sagas, nor the framework in which they are set. It is the gods themselves and the aggregate of the stories which is taken as truthful, as close to dogma as this religion gets. In an interview with Seigfried, Hilmarsson states that “[A] lot of the heroic poems were recited all over Europe, and we have runestones showing Sigurd and the Dragon.”²² Through this representation of the saga on the runestones and lines of the Wessobrunn Prayer, Hilmarsson agrees that these heroic poems featured in the Poetic Edda must have been truthful.

But that does not mean that everything is taken as the truth. Indeed, in an interview with Iceland Magazine called *Heathens against hate* Hilmarsson showed that he had been under fire from heathen “fundamentalists” for having proclaimed that he does not take the stories of the gods literally.²³ All three members of the Ásatrú show that there are, in their eyes, indeed truths to the Poetic Edda but that the position of the gods is up to the interpretation of the individual. It is this individuality, reminiscent of a key feature of the Romanticism movement, which is most important to the Ásatrú. A great example of this can be found in a discussion between Seigfried and Harðardóttir on the importance of runes.²⁴ After Seigfried quotes a piece from the *Hávamál*, a poem from the Poetic Edda in which Odin discusses the mystical properties of runes, he asks Harðardóttir how she views this passage. Harðardóttir states, in

²⁰ “Modern Heathens and the *Poetic Edda*,” Karl E.H. Seigfried, <https://www.norsemyth.org/2020/07/modern-heathens-and-poetic-edda.html>.

²¹ “Three Ásatrú Worldviews, Part One,” Karl E.H. Seigfried, <https://www.norsemyth.org/2014/12/three-asatru-worldviews-part-one.html>.

²² “Interview with Hilmar Örn Hilmarsson of the Ásatrúarfélagið, Part Two,” Karl E.H. Seigfried, https://www.norsemyth.org/2011/06/interview-with-hilmar-orn-hilmarsson-of_30.html.

²³ Magnús S. Helgason, “Heathens against hate: Exclusive interview with the high priest of the Icelandic Pagan Association,” Iceland Magazine, published in July 25, 2015. <https://icelandmag.is/article/heathens-against-hate-exclusive-interview-high-priest-icelandic-pagan-association>, accessed March 17, 2021.

²⁴ “Interview with Jóhanna G. Harðardóttir of the Ásatrúarfélagið, Part Two,” Karl E.H. Seigfried, https://www.norsemyth.org/2011/01/interview-with-johanna-g-harardottir-of_27.html.

continuation with her answer before this question, that what is good for every human being is thinking. It is not an immediate answer that is given by Odin but a riddle which one must figure out for themselves.

Evaluation

How can these examples help us answer the question of this chapter? What can we say about how the Ásatrú interpret the Eddas? The heathens of Iceland understand that these sources should not be taken at face value, as can be seen in the examples above. There is a limited amount of sources and none are free of influences from the Christian world. An example of this is the Snorri Edda or Prose Edda which has remained unmentioned by the heathens in this paper up until this point. Seigfried states in an interview about the Ásatrú and Heathenry that much of what is known about the myths comes from Snorri Sturluson.²⁵ But he continues by saying that the source has been altered by a hodgepodge of medieval Latin learning and that Snorri's interpretations contradict religious beliefs and practices of earlier eras.

Moving towards the idea of the Ásatrú being a modern adaptation of the old Norse faith and not a successor, I believe that there are arguments to be found in the value attached to the Norse literature. It is this openness to interpretation of the available literature which causes the Ásatrú to become a modern adaptation of the old Norse faith. Contrary to the Abrahamic faiths and Norse 'fundamentalists' who look upon their literary sources as dogma, the insistence of thinking for oneself and the limit of primary sources causes a blur in the connection with the past. By allowing the community to think for itself, alterations and adaptations to the story according to one's own view will occur. Consider the example of the runes. The interpretation of the magical nature of the runes and their purpose can differ per person. Instead of a coherent faith following the Christian-influenced sources, many forms of a world view appear adapted to one's own needs and wishes. The Ásatrúarfélagið is therefore, in this instance, a modern adaptation of the old Norse religion.

²⁵ Karl E. H. Seigfried, "Dr. Karl E. H. Seigfried talks Ásatrú, Heathenry and beard," [sic] interview by Seamus Bellamy, published March 25, 2018, <https://boingboing.net/2018/05/25/interview-dr-karl-e-h-seigfr.html>, accessed March 15, 2021.

2. Customs and Rituals

Before applying the thesis of this paper to the customs and rituals present in Ásatrú-society, we must first distinguish what kind of social activities will be discussed in this chapter. And then the question of how we can determine whether the Ásatrú-faith is a modern adaptation or a direct successor of the old Norse rituals can be answered. The first distinction to make regarding the different kinds of social conventions are the personal and communal sphere. The former are the customs and rituals performed by the individual heathen at home and the latter refers to said social activities performed within the local community. Since the thesis of this paper aims to answer a question based on a community, the communal sphere shall stand at the centre of the research.

Method

The way to prove that the customs and rituals support the thesis is if enough evidence can be found that supports the idea that there is a deviation between the rituals practiced by the old Norse and the Ásatrú. These deviations can be found through the following methods. Has the contemporary custom or ritual changed in any shape or fashion due to current ethics? Or have parts of the contemporary custom been invented due to a lack of knowledge of the old rituals? If we can provide enough data to create an affirmative answer to either of the previous two questions, we can argue that the customs and rituals are adapted to modern standards. This will, in turn, support the thesis that the Ásatrú is a modern adaptation of the old Norse religion.

The Blót

The first item to discuss for the communal sphere are the public ceremonies. The website of the Ásatrúarfélagið, originally written in Icelandic, offers a great amount of information on the activities organised within the communal sphere.²⁶ The first sort of events are the *Blót*. These are fixed points on the Ásatrúarfélagið calendar where sacrifices are made to enhance the connection with the Nordic deities. In Germanic societies, the *Blót* often featured an animal as sacrifice where its blood, from which the term arguably arrives, is offered to the

²⁶ “Ásatrúarfélagið,” Ásatrúarfélagið, <https://asatru.is/>, accessed May 8, 2021.

gods.²⁷ To the Ásatrúarfélagið there are six days marked for the *Blót* sacrifices.²⁸ These important dates coincide with summer and winter solstice, and spring and autumn equinoxes.

The reason behind three of these dates is that, in the eighth chapter of the *Ynglinga* saga, Snorri Sturluson writes that three of the major sacrifices of the year should be made “[T]owards winter for a good year, and in the middle of winter sacrifice for a good crop, a third in summer; that was the sacrifice for victory.”²⁹ Contrary to the early Germanic societies and contemporary American heathens such as Ron Branga, Mike Smith, Jon Cyr and Galina Krasskova, the Ásatrúarfélagið do not currently offer any animal sacrifices during their *Blóts* but offer a substitute through for example alcohol.³⁰ Going back to the two questions I posed at the beginning of the chapter, we can apply these to the public ceremonies. The current conclusion drawn here is that contemporary ethics concerning humane treatment influenced the Ásatrúarfélagið to perform bloodless rituals as Michael Strmiska offers in his paper on animal sacrifice in Modern Nordic Paganism.³¹

The problem is that, also similar to findings in Strmiska’s paper, these ethics do not play a major role in the eyes of the founders. In an article written in 1978, Sveinbjörn Beinteinsson commented that while this would not be morally problematic it was not practical as “[I]n earlier times it was normal to slaughter the animal in place because people couldn't store meat. But in modern circumstances it's completely unnecessary and too much trouble.”³² The result of this statement is twofold. On the one hand, it disproves the earlier idea of contemporary ethics influencing old Norse practices in such a way that they are altered. But, on the other hand, we could also argue that as animal sacrifices are deemed wasteful and unnecessary to contemporary heathens, it proves that fiscal and logical thinking trumps a yearning for a replication of the past.

²⁷ Current scholars debate over the exact meaning of the word. While most scholars accept the term to be connected to sacrifice, its etymological origin and therefore its definition are still unknown.

²⁸ “Ásatrúarfélagið,” Ásatrúarfélagið, <https://asatru.is/>, accessed May 8, 2021.

²⁹ Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, translated by Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (London: Short Run Press Limited, 2011), 27, <http://vsnrweb-publications.org.uk/Heimskringla%20I.pdf>.

³⁰ For practitioners of animal sacrifice and their reasoning behind it, look at: Michael Strmiska, “Putting the Blood back into Blót: The Revival of Animal Sacrifice in Modern Nordic Paganism” (London: Equinox Publishing, 2007), 165-176.; For evidence that the Ásatrúarfélagið practice bloodless sacrifice, look at footnote 28 of: Strmiska, “Ásatrú in Iceland,” 131.

³¹ Strmiska, “Putting the Blood back into Blót,” 154.

³² Sigurður H. Engilbertsson, “Rætt við Sveinbjörn Beinteinsson allsherjargoða: skáld og bonda að Dragkálssi um Ásatrú, skáldskap og sitthvað fleira,” [sic] (Interview with Sveinbjörn Beinteinsson: High-priest, poet and farmer at Dragkálssi about Ásatrú, poetry and a bit more), published on August 19, 1978. Tímarit.is, <https://timarit.is/page/3376503#page/n13/mode/2up>, accessed on May 20, 2021.

Ceremonies of the Ásatrúarfélagið

While this is not a strong argument in favour of the thesis on its own, it is also supported by the limited literary sources discussed in the previous chapter. As explained in the previous chapter, the sources which the Ásatrúarfélagið are able to extract useful information from are limited. Take for example *Sigurblót* (Victory sacrifice). It is specified on the website of the Ásatrúarfélagið as the first day of summer in April.³³ This is both important as it is the day when the lifecycle starts anew and the establishing date of the Ásatrúarfélagið itself. What is important to note here is the first reason for celebration, the coming of summer. Seigfried's article *Sigurblót: What is Victory?* Explains that the meaning of *sigur* or victory differs among the members of the Ásatrú, one of which is the victory of death over life.³⁴ Since this day marks the point when life returns to the fields of Iceland, it is celebrated. This imprecise term and the consequent acceptance of the individual heathen's own interpretation provides us with an affirmative answer to the second question. Information on the old ritual has been lacking, the resulting consequence is that it has been open to the interpretation of the individual.

What should be noted, however, is the effort which the Ásatrúarfélagið take when trying to reconnect with the old Norse religion. This conscious attempt to recreate or at least pay tribute to past tradition is both present during these *Blót*-rituals and the second type of communal social activity, the personal ceremonies. The types of rituals which fall under this category are namings, weddings and funerals. During all activities that fall under the communal sphere, the heathen priests and their followers try to reconnect with the past in several ways. The first way is by the usage of quotes and phrases from the Poetic Edda.³⁵ During a wedding or a *Blót*, parts of the Edda most suitable to the occasion will be recited by the priests of the Ásatrúarfélagið. Once they are recited, the priests will call onto a wide variety of gods to witness this occasion and give their blessing. Another way in which the Ásatrúarfélagið try to replicate the rituals from the past, with this source being a *Blót* attended by Strmiska in 1996, is by dressing up in traditional Norse clothing.³⁶ The third way is by using carved wooden drinking cups instead of contemporary mugs or glasses, old-style stone enclosures instead of

³³ "Ásatrúarfélagið," Ásatrúarfélagið, <https://asatru.is/>, accessed May 8, 2021.

³⁴ "Sigurblót: What is Victory?," Karl E.H. Seigfried, <https://www.norsemyth.org/2014/04/sigurblot-what-is-victory.html>.

³⁵ Strmiska, "Ásatrú in Iceland," 118-120.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

newer houses, and fire instead of electric light. What the previous examples show is that there is a wide variety of ways in which the Ásatrú try to replicate the rituals of yore.

Evaluation

The problem is, as I have already explained in previous parts of this paper, that this clear attempt to reconnect with the past does not change the fact that there is a lack of sources on past rituals. This lack in knowledge urges the contemporary practitioners of the Norse faith to add, omit and change details which are unknown to them. Despite the dedication of the members of the Ásatrúarfélagið to replicate the old rituals, there are two things that stand in their way. The first is that, no matter how educated one might be, the years of undocumented rituals between the year 1000 and 1973 and the subsequent anachronisms highly increase the possibility that the contemporary rituals are at best adaptations of the old. The second factor is the willingness of the priests to adapt the ceremonies to personal preferences. By allowing personal preferences to influence these ceremonies, they deviate from the original rituals.³⁷ Going back to the two questions posed at the beginning of the chapter, the only conclusion to be drawn is that the adaptation of the Norse rituals by the Ásatrúarfélagið supports the idea of the Asatru as a modern adaptation of the old Norse religion.

³⁷ This does not mean in any way that the wedding fails to be heathen. Once again, this is merely a comparison between old and new rituals.

3. Motivation for Joining

This last chapter focuses on the reasons why different members of the *Ásatrúarfélagið* joined the religion. As explained in the introduction, we must find out what push- or pull factors caused contemporary heathens to follow the *Ásatrúarfélagið*. If the conclusion is that these factors are sufficiently connected to the pre-Christian heathens, it provides an answer for our thesis.

Moving to the question posed at the end of the introduction. Are the *Ásatrú* joining the contemporary religion to reconnect with the old Norse religion or influenced by external factors? And how can we draw such a conclusion? The first step is to distinguish what factors are relevant for discussion. There are four factors which can again be divided into two categories. First are the continuous and spontaneous factors. The former are factors which are present within the sphere of influence for a longer time and allow us to argue that the contemporary heathen has a stronger connection to the old Norse religion. An example of this is a continued tradition of veneration. The latter refers to factors which have not been present for a longer period of time and argue in favor of the *Ásatrú* as a modern adaptation. Examples of such factors are the dissatisfaction with monotheistic religions or an interest in the culture through modern forms of media such as superhero movies.

The second category are the push- and pull factors. The former are factors outside the Icelandic communal and religious sphere, the *Ásatrúarfélagið*, which pushed the heathens towards the *Ásatrú*. An example of a spontaneous push factor is the dissatisfaction with monotheistic forms of religion. An example of a continuous push factor is the continued interest in the Norse mythology from a purely academic perspective. The latter are factors inside the Icelandic sphere which pulled the heathen towards the *Ásatrú*. An example of a spontaneous pull factor could be the introduction to the religion via personal relations such as a friend. An example of a continuous pull factor is exposure to the Norse religion from a young age onwards. To elaborate on the sub question, the way in which an answer can be found is by comparing the amount of influences from within the *Ásatrúarfélagið* community, the pull factors, to the ones outside of it, the push factors. Should there be an imbalance towards the former, it shows that the *Ásatrúarfélagið* is composed mostly of people who want to reconnect with the old religion. An attempt to be a direct successor of the old Norse religion. If there is an imbalance in favour of the latter, it proves that reviving this religion is not the main purpose of this community and that it is a modern adaptation.

Factors for Neopaganism

Interpretations in academic literature of the push- and pull factors for contemporary pagans already exist. Von Schnurbein argues that there is a reason why people are continually attracted to the discourse on Nordic myth. “At its core, it comes down to the combination of the thrill of exoticism and the safety of familiarity or alleged ownership. The imagined return to ‘the old Gods,’ to ‘the gods of the ancestors,’ implies that the ‘innocent native,’ the ‘noble savage,’ and the ‘repressed origin’ are located not in a repressed other, but in the individual itself.”³⁸ There is excitement to be found in the mysterious, yet pagans also believe to belong to said mysterious group. Identifying themselves as being a descendant of the innocent natives, von Schnurbein argues, allows neo-pagans to ‘escape’ from their roles as perpetrators or beneficiaries of Western colonialism. Since von Schnurbein used these terms to define the motivating factors for all Germanic Neopagans, adjustments must be made to better reflect upon the examples from the primary sources given by the Icelandic community.

In the case of Iceland, only a part of these push- and pull factors can be applied to modern practitioners of the Nordic myth. The heathens who did not grow up within the confines of the Ásatrú-community can be fitted within the concepts of familiarity and alleged ownership, and to a degree with the concept of exoticism. Since these members, often from earlier generations, experienced a period in which the Ásatrúarfélagið did not exist, it is related to the concept of exoticism. Nevertheless, the concept of familiarity and alleged ownership applies to this group as well given, for example, the (sub)conscious familiarity with the eddas and the survival of old Norse nomenclature on Icelandic street signs.³⁹ It is far more difficult to evaluate the motivation for the second group, the younger heathens who grew up within the Ásatrúarfélagið, as this current existence might simply seem natural to them given the status of their parents as heathens.

Strmiska argued in his paper that members and observers of the Ásatrúarfélagið gave four reasons why there is a steady growth in membership.⁴⁰ The first reason is the reawakened interest by the local population in the Ásatrúarfélagið after the funeral of the charismatic leader Sveinbjörn Beinteinsson. Secondly, a series of scandals in the state Lutheran church which caused church members to search alternative religious organisations. Thirdly, a growing popularity among young people to join a religion that is at the same ultra-traditional

³⁸ von Schnurbein, *Norse Revival*, 356.

³⁹ Previously addressed in the introduction.

⁴⁰ Strmiska, “Ásatrú in Iceland,” 114.

and ‘alternative’. And last but not least, a growing acceptance of Ásatrú due to it having not only survived but flourished into its third decade of activity and now becoming part of the mainstream Icelandic culture.⁴¹ Although the first factor might have breathed life into a supposedly ‘dying’ organisation, its true effect as a true push factor today is questionable. This is due to Beinteinsson’s funeral occurring nearly three decades ago. The heavily publicised funeral attracted many to this religion but, as the story became less relevant for the newspapers, Beinteinsson’s death became a less important push factor. It has, however, been a relevant factor in the earlier stage of the Ásatrúarfélagið and should not be forgotten. This reason supposedly disproves the scandals in the state Lutheran church as well since the scandals which Strmiska mentioned in his paper occurred over two decades ago. Yet, recent scandals and controversial statements by the church caused a dramatic decrease in the population considering themselves Protestant.⁴² Trust in the Lutheran church steeply declined, causing this push factor to remain relevant even to this day.

By categorising the push and pull factors given by von Schnurbein and Strmiska between the continuous and spontaneous factors, an imbalance in favour of the spontaneous factor can be found. There are three clear spontaneous factors. These are the exoticism, the scandals in the Lutheran church and young people joining something ‘ultra-traditionalistic’ and yet so alternative and rebellious. Then there are two factors which can arguably be categorised under both spontaneous and continuous factors. These are the concepts of familiarity or alleged ownership, and a growing general acceptance. The first is spontaneous if the target group is the earlier generations, given their limited time to be familiarised with the Ásatrú or Norse religion. It is continuous if it concerns the later generations who have been influenced by the Ásatrúarfélagið for a longer time and feel a strong connection to the old religion. The growing general acceptance making the Ásatrú mainstream is a continuous factor for the newer generations as they will be influenced over time by the media. Yet, the effect of such media is disputable and the precise point at which it became effective is yet to be proven.

⁴¹ Remember that this is in context of Strimiska’s paper which was published in 2000.

⁴² Sam O’Donnell, “Decline of Icelandic Church: Scandals and Controversy Lead to Mass Exodus,” Reykjavík Grapevine, <https://grapevine.is/news/2019/11/08/decline-of-icelandic-church-scandals-and-controversy-lead-to-mass-exodus/>, accessed May 1, 2021.

Push- and Pull Factors in Primary Sources

Now we have to define the following examples by the categories of push- or pull factors. Do the primary sources indicate a gravitational pull towards the old Norse religion within the context of a reconnection with the past? Or are the members of the Ásatrú either pushed away from other forms of religion or accepting Norse mythology on the basis of a spontaneous source? Based on examples supporting either question a conclusion can be drawn for our thesis.

That the heathens are aware of their supposed heritage is undisputed. As Hilmarsson explained in an interview with Seigfried “A lot of the saga material [*Grettis Saga*] is still part of everyday language. We have things from *Hávamál* written on headstones in Christian cemeteries.”⁴³ There is an unbroken line of thought and understanding of the connection with the past. In the case of Hilmarsson what was partly the reason for joining the Ásatrúarfélagið was this unbroken line. He gave the example of his father handing him the *Grettis Saga* after finding out that Hilmarsson was reading superman. We can categorise this instance as a continuous pull factor as it is a connection already present for several generations.

In the case of Harðardóttir, what drove her to the Ásatrúarfélagið was a combination of multiple factors. Similarly to Hilmarsson, Harðardóttir had a connection with the Ásatrú, before the community was established, through her father.⁴⁴ Her father taught her about the old gods and this religion despite her not realising he was a heathen. Another factor was that Harðardóttir discovered, after her confirmation in the Lutheran Church, that she did not believe in the Christian god.⁴⁵ Not feeling truly at home within the Christian community, Harðardóttir left the Lutheran church and joined the Ásatrúarfélagið. Whereas this connection with the Ásatrú through her father can be seen as a continuous pull factor, her departure from the Lutheran church and disillusionment with the Christian god can be seen as a spontaneous push factor.

In both cases is that there is a familiarity with the Icelandic sources. Although it is good to keep in mind that Harðardóttir and Hilmarsson are priests within the Ásatrúarfélagið and

⁴³ “Interview with Hilmar Örn Hilmarsson of the Ásatrúarfélagið, Part One,” Karl E.H. Seigfried, <https://www.norsemyth.org/2011/06/interview-with-hilmar-orn-hilmarsson-of.html>.

⁴⁴ “Interview with Jóhanna G. Harðardóttir of the Ásatrúarfélagið, Part One,” Karl E.H. Seigfried, <https://www.norsemyth.org/2011/01/interview-with-johanna-g-harardottir-of.html>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

likely to have been more in contact with the sagas than other heathens, their connection and familiarity to the old Norse sources is arguably better.

Coming back to von Schnurbein's hypothesis of the imagined return of the 'innocent native', there are indeed examples supporting this idea. Jón Ingvar Jónsson, a former Ásatrú Lawspeaker, explained that the members of the Ásatrúarfélagið "[H]ave more in common with native peoples and religions than with [foreign forms of] Ásatrú."⁴⁶ While Jónsson was referring in particular to the Neo-Nazi Ásatrú groups from which the Ásatrúarfélagið distances themselves, it is evident that they feel a strong connection with other 'natives'. This is because, according to Jónsson, what the Icelandic Ásatrú is trying to accomplish is to "[B]uild our ancient tradition, to know our history, to try to live and understand our background."⁴⁷ Indeed, it is the idea of a suppressed origin, the native, with which Jónsson is trying to reconnect. It is a pull factor which can be identified as spontaneous at the moment of the Ásatrúarfélagið's foundation, yet continuous in its supposed pursuit both openly and in their own homes to reconnect with the old religion.

Evaluation

By looking at the answers given by the primary sources we can see some interesting results. All three interviewees expressed great interest in reconnecting with the old Norse religion. Hilmarsson and Harðardóttir explained that there had already been a connection through their family tree and, while Jónsson did not utter the same words, it can be taken from context that he believes there is a connection between his family and the heathens of yore. This suggests that the Ásatrú see themselves as a direct successor to the old Norse religion. Nevertheless, we can also conclude from the information given by Harðardóttir and Jónsson that more contemporary matters motivated them to join this religion. In the case of Harðardóttir it is a disillusionment with the Christian god and a personal journey to search for her own beliefs. In the case of Jónsson there is a connection to the innocent native, a belief which developed

⁴⁶ Strmiska, "Ásatrú in Iceland," 118.; The Lawspeaker's role, based on the position of the same name in ancient times, is to preserve official documents and promote knowledge of the laws of the organization, appoint board members to specific positions, except for his own position, which is decided by the Administrative Council, and to organize board meetings and call them to order. Source: Strmiska, "Ásatrú in Iceland," 116.

⁴⁷ Strmiska, "Ásatrú in Iceland," 117.

during the age of German Romanticism in the eighteenth century.⁴⁸ Both these factors support the idea of the Ásatrú as a modern adaptation of the old Norse religion.

Drawing a conclusion based on the available sources is still difficult. While the interviewees address the existence of a connection with the old Norse religion through their family, the degree to which these families practiced this religion is still largely undocumented. As Hilmarsson explained in his interview with Seigfried, he met an old man near a shop who explained that, after he was confirmed in 1920, his grandmother came up to him and handed him the Eddaic poems explaining that this was also something the Icelandic people believed in.⁴⁹ These primary sources explain the connection with the Eddas throughout the older generations, yet we cannot state for certainty whether this process was interrupted. Perhaps this interest in the Eddas was once again reawakened through the Romanticism movement. Perhaps several families did practice the Norse religion in private throughout the ages. The fact for now is that there are factors both in favour and against the idea of the Ásatrúarfélagið as a modern adaptation of the old Norse religion through the lens of motivation.

⁴⁸ For a small explanation, look at the introduction. For further information look at: von Schnurbein, 17.

⁴⁹ “Interview with Hilmar Örn Hilmarsson of the Ásatrúarfélagið, Part One,” Karl E.H. Seigfried, <https://www.norsemyth.org/2011/06/interview-with-hilmar-orn-hilmarsson-of.html>.

Conclusion

As this paper draws to a close, I would like to point the reader's attention to the title of this thesis. Throughout the paper no clear explanation has been given on the correlation between the title and the text itself. The Bifröst, known as Bilröst in the Eddas, is a burning rainbow bridge that connects Asgard and Midgard. It is the connection between the world of the gods and the world of man. The aim of this paper was to test the connection between the Ásatrú, the new world of man, and the old Norse religion, the elder world. Weaving it into the topic of the opening quote, Ragnarök, the conclusion drawn in this chapter could be supported with a beautiful illustration from the saga. Have the old gods survived Ragnarök and has the Bifröst endured throughout the centuries? Or has Ragnarök come to pass, the old gods handing the reins of power to a newer generation? The Bifröst is broken but already being repaired by this new generation of man.

The function of the first chapter was to evaluate the pre-Christian literature both from the point of view of an academic and that of the members of the Ásatrú. Within this chapter, it became clear that the value of literary sources is not as significant to the Ásatrúarfélagið as it is to, for example, the Abrahamic religions. There is still value attached to descriptions and sagas told within the Poetic Edda and the Prose Edda, yet caution is advised when reading as both books have been influenced by Christian rhetoric and framework. Keeping these alterations in mind, the heathens try not to confine other members by stating in what way these sources should be read. There exists an openness to interpretation and discussion which give the members of the community the opportunity to create their own world view. It is also this openness to interpretation which causes the Ásatrúarfélagið to become a modern adaptation of the modern religion. By creating a personal worldview, the gods gain functions and relevance according to one's own contemporary needs and preferences. This shows that the Ásatrú is a modern adaptation of the old Norse religion.

The greatest integration of these literary sources in everyday life is visible during the ceremonies performed by the priests of the Ásatrúarfélagið. During ceremonies, such as the yearly Blots, these priests recite parts of the Sagas most applicable to said ceremony. Similarly to the literary sources, the heathens actively try to reconnect with their supposed ancestors. There are, however, two factors which stand in the way of completing this task. These are the thousand years of poorly documented rituals by the old Norse religion and the subsequent willingness of contemporary priests to adapt the rituals and ceremonies to

personal preferences. The consequence of the first factor is that the anachronisms, which cannot be avoided, cause the contemporary rituals to be adaptations of the old rituals at best. The consequence of the latter is that contemporary preferences cause the new rituals to deviate from the framework of old rituals. The conclusion to be drawn here is that the Ásatrú is a modern adaptation of the old Norse religion.

Lastly, there are the reasons why contemporary heathens join the Ásatrúarfélagið. A clear conclusion in favour of or against the thesis this paper cannot be drawn in this chapter. There have been influential factors from within the Icelandic heathen communal sphere, the pull factors, and external, push factors, which motivated current members to join the organisation. On the one hand, it is evident from primary sources within this chapter and previous ones that contemporary heathens believe there is a strong connection with the pre-Christian past. The motivating pull factor here was an early introduction to the Norse sagas, often accompanied by the continued coaxing of an older family member. This argues in favour of the Ásatrú as a direct successor of the old Norse religion, although we cannot say for certain whether this interest in Norse mythology continued throughout the ages or was revived by German Romanticism. On the other hand, there are also factors named in both the primary sources and secondary sources which argue that current members of the Ásatrúarfélagið were influenced by external factors, or push factors. Two examples of these are the disillusionment with contemporary monotheistic religions and the supposed connection with other ‘innocent natives’, a feeling which gained ground during the period of German Romanticism.

But, while these summaries might explain the results, it is important to also look at the framework of this paper. This means a critical analysis of the method and sources used within this paper. Regarding both the method and the selection, one factor heavily influenced this paper which should future researchers should avoid. This is the inability to travel to Iceland. The Ásatrú is a living religion and the sources selected in this paper are limited to the amount of people who have taken the time to write about their religion. The main contributors to this paper all have had higher positions within the Ásatrúarfélagið. There are two consequences to this selection of sources. The first is that these sources do give an accurate statement of the core of the religion as they are more influential to the present and future of the organisation. The second consequence is that the heathens who joined at a later stage and could arguably have a life less influenced by Northern mythology. This problem could be solved by traveling to Iceland directly or through extensive contact with multiple members of the Ásatrúarfélagið in a digital manner.

Another new source, one which is often avoided by historians but which's value should not be underestimated, is social media. Through platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, members of the Ásatrúarfélagið and other Neopagans express their faith more clearly and often than is featured within newspapers. Naturally, these sources are more personal and could give a better representation of motivating factors but often also lack depth.

Regarding the method, clear questions and factors have been written at the beginning of each chapter. While I do believe that the delineating factors provide conclusive answers, future endeavours should focus on researching the period between the year 1000 and 1973. In order to fully comprehend the extent of pull factors, such as the multiple generations who supposedly practiced the old Norse religion, it is wise to search for sources which provide data on this. Sources which could contribute data are, for example, a census taken by the Icelandic government or a report made by the Reykjavik police.

If we return to the earlier summarisation of the chapters and combine them all it is evident that there are factors in favour and against the Ásatrú as a modern adaptation of the old Norse religion. There is a genuine attempt by contemporary heathens to revive this old religion. Yet, the fact is that there is a discrepancy between the old religion and new religion caused by a lack of relevant, detailed or complete literary sources. In the end this discrepancy, which can only be solved by new archaeological findings, causes the Ásatrú to be a distorted vision of the old Norse religion, a modern adaptation.

Appendix

Norse Mythology:

- **Asgard:** (Enclosure of the Æsir) Realm where most of the Norse gods reside.
- **Æsir:** (Gods) A branch of gods from Norse mythology. Well-known gods include Freya, Odin and Thor.
- **Baldur/Baldr:** (Prince) The favourite of almost all the living being in Norse mythology. Born to Odin and Frigg, his mother persuaded all living things to not harm her perfect child. In the end, Baldr was killed by a mistletoe thrown by his blind brother Hödr, the only thing which Frigg did not persuade.
- **Bifröst:** (Shimmering Path) Burning rainbow bridge attested in the eddas as being the bridge between Asgard and Midgard. Is alternately referred to as Ásbrú (Æsir's bridge) in the Eddas.
- **Hávamál:** (Words of Havi) A curious collection of wisdoms of Hávi or Hárr (High), a pseudonym of Odin, in which he gives advice on runes, women and the results of one's own deeds.
- **Hodr/Hödr:** (Warrior) Blind god who is the son of Odin and Frigg. Was tricked by Loki and shot the mistletoe arrow which slew the otherwise invulnerable Baldr.
- **Jötunn:** The jötnar inhabit the realm of Jotunheim. Most commonly known for being at the receiving end of Thor's hammer, Mjöllnir. One of the most famous giants is Loki.
- **Lif/Líf:** (Life) Lif and her boyfriend Lifthrasir are two mortal humans who will escape the cataclysms of Ragnarok by hiding in the forest of Hodmimir.
- **Lifthrasir/Lífprasir:** (Lover of Life) Lifthrasir and his girlfriend Lif will sleep through the end of the world and wake up at the beginning of the next.
- **Magni:** (Mighty) Son of Thor and Járnsaxa. He was only three days old when he saved his father by lifting a giant's foot off of his father's neck.
- **Modi/Móði:** (Wrath) Son of Thor. Little is known about Modi apart from his role after Ragnarök.
- **Midgard:** Realm of man. More commonly known as 'Earth'.
- **Odin:** (Inspiration, Rage, Frenzy) God of wisdom, known to many as the all-father or his pseudonym of Hávi (High). Chose to sacrifice his eye in search of wisdom.

- **Ragnarök:** (Twilight of the Gods) It is the final hour where almost all living things in the nine realms will turn on each other and perish. As stated in the introduction, it might not be the end at all.
- **Sköll and Hati:** Sköll (One Who Mocks) and Hati (One Who Hates) are two wolves who are only mentioned in passing references. Their purpose is to chase the sun and moon, which they will devour during Ragnarök.
- **Thor:** (Thunder) God of thunder. Red-headed and red-blooded deity who settled many a dispute by silencing the opposition with his hammer.
- **Váli:** (Uncertain) Son of Odin and the giantess Rindr. Váli was born for the sole purpose of avenging Baldr, the perfect god, and slay Hödr, his brother who killed Baldr with a mistletoe. All three are brothers, imagine how fun a family reunion would be.
- **Vidar/Víðarr:** (Wide Ruler) God of Vengeance. Víðarr is described as the son of Odin and the Jötunn Gríðr, and is foretold to avenge his father's death by killing the wolf Fenrir at Ragnarök.
- **Vigríð/Vígríðr:** (Place on which Battle Surges) Large field where almost all living things will perish.

Sagas:

- **Grettis:** (Saga of Grettir). Icelandic saga written down in either the thirteenth or the fourteenth century, recording stories of events that supposedly took place between the ninth and the eleventh centuries in Iceland. Whoever wrote it supposedly based this story on the account of Grettir, the protagonist of the story, by Sturla Þórðarson, an Icelandic chieftain during the thirteenth century.
- **Völuspa:** (Prophecy of the Seeress). First poem of the Poetic Edda. It tells the story of the creation of the world and its coming end, related to the audience by a völva, seeress, addressing Odin.
- **Ynglinga:** Eighth chapter of the *Heimskringla*, or the saga of the Swedish Yngling dynasty. The saga deals with the arrival of the Norse gods to Scandinavia and how Freyr founded the Swedish Yngling dynasty at Uppsala. Then the saga follows the line of Swedish kings until Ingjald after which the descendants settled in Norway and became the ancestors of the Norwegian King Harald Fairhair.

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