

Viking Rituals and Celebrations



Norse Mythology Details

Norse Mythology was a folk religion. This means that it was not a largely established religion. It was mainly told through oral stories and could have slight variations depending on the clan.



Quick Write #1

How can oral stories cause "variation" in a story, religion, or tradition?

Write a brief (2-3 sentence) explanation by giving your theory and at least one example/idea to support that theory.

As you are thinking of an example, consider the concept of rumors, the game of "telephone" or other examples that simulate the idea of "oral" storytelling.

Norse Mythology Details



Its main purpose was the survival and regeneration of society. Therefore, the faith was decentralized and tied to the village and the family, although evidence exists of great national religious festivals.

Norse Mythology Details

- Norse religion was a conglomerate of related customs and beliefs. These could be inherited or borrowed, and although the great geographical distances of Scandinavia led to a variety of cultural differences, people understood each other's customs, poetic traditions and myths.



Norse Mythology Details- Blót



- Blót- meant sacrifice.
- These were a major part of each celebration, festival, and plea to the gods.

Norse Mythology Details- Blót

- Sometimes this meant animal sacrifices- usually for large calendar celebrations. The blood would be used in some way and then they would feast on the meat of the animal.
- Everyday practices would utilize things such as grains.



Norse Mythology Details- Blót

On select occasions, human sacrifices were made.



Norse Mythology Details- Blót

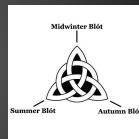
The purpose of these sacrifices was to ensure fertility and growth. However, sudden crises or transitions (such as births, weddings, and burials) could also be the reason.



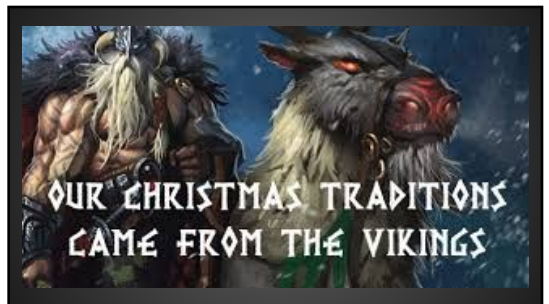
Norse Mythology Details- Major Celebrations

Odin's Law for Blót- *Þá skyldi blóta í móti vetri til árs.*

- There should be a sacrifice at the **beginning of winter** for a good year,
- *en at miðjum vetri blóta til gróðrar.*
- and in the **middle of winter** for a good crop,
- *hit þriðja at sumri, þat var sigrblót.*
- the third in **summer** day, that was the sacrifice for victory.



Major Holidays/Celebrations



Norse Mythology Details- Major Celebrations

Jul- Norse New Year: a festival of 12 nights. This is the most important of all the Norse holidays. On the night of December 20, the god Ingvi Freyr rides over the earth on the back of his shining boar, bringing Light and Love back into the World. Jul signifies the beginning and end of all things; the darkest time during the year and the brightest hope re-entering the world.



Norse Mythology Details- Major Celebrations



Jul- During this festival, the Wild Hunt is at its greatest fervor, and the dead are said to range the Earth. The god Odin is the leader of this Wild Ride: charging across the sky on his eight-legged horse, Sleipnir. Germanic and Norse children would leave their boots out by the hearth on Solstice Eve, filled with hay and sugar, for Sleipnir. In return, Odin would leave them a gift for their kindness. In modern times, Sleipnir was changed to a reindeer and the grey-bearded Odin became the kindly Santa Claus.

Norse Mythology Details- Major Celebrations



Jul- The evergreens in Scandinavian countries were symbols of life. To the Vikings it represented the promise of life that even in the midst of winter at the death of the year there was still a seed of life to begin the new cycle.

As the evergreen trees were so revered, at Yule they would be decorated with fruit, small carvings, and gifts for the spirits of the trees and plants to encourage them to come back soon and start the new spring.

Norse Mythology Details- Major Celebrations

Jul- Vikings would use holly leaves and berries to make into circular wreaths, these wreaths to decorate their homes during the Yul celebrations. It symbolized life and the wheel of the sun.



Norse Mythology Details- Major Celebrations



Jul- This Midwinter Feast lasted twelve days which is where our modern twelve days of Christmas comes from. The Vikings made sure to honor their Gods with traditions, feasting, and religious rituals. One of their rituals required a sacrificial wild boar (roasted ham) to the god Frey of fertility and farming in hopes for a productive season.

Norse Mythology Details- Major Celebrations

Jul- The Mistletoe is another interesting one. Balder the god of light and goodness was killed by an arrow made of mistletoe. The tears of Frigga while in mourning over her son's body fell on the red berries which turned them white. The power of the white berries resurrected Balder. The Vikings believe the mistletoe has the power to resurrect people which is why we still use it today in our Christmas traditions.



Norse Mythology Details- Major Celebrations



Jul- The Yule log was a large decorated oak log. It had runes and various symbolism. From what we understand the carvings was a sort of prayer of protection against misfortune. Our ancestors would save a part of the log for protection.

Norse Mythology Details- Major Celebrations



Ostara- is celebrated on the spring equinox around March 21. This feast marks the beginning of the summer half of the year. It is named after the goddess Ostara (Anglo-Saxon Eostre).

Norse Mythology Details- Major Celebrations

Ostara- She was such an integral part of heathen Germanic cultures that the Christians stole and absorbed it as their own spring feast which was adapted for the Paschal holiday, and was converted to the Christian Easter. Her name is related to the Germanic words for "east" and "glory"; she was the embodiment of the springtime and the renewal of life.



Norse Mythology Details- Major Celebrations



Ostara- The holiday is a celebration the rejuvenation of the Earth, fertility and growth; traditional decorations include budding boughs, flowers, decorated eggs and the Rabbit motif. Ostara's feast customs included the painting and hunting of Easter eggs, which, according to German tradition, were brought or laid by the 'Easter Hare'. The Hare was the holy beast of Ostara, slain and eaten only at her blessing.

Norse Mythology Details- Major Celebrations

Ostara- Another common folk-custom which still survives in rural areas is the performance of plays at which Summer battles with Winter and drives him out, or at which an effigy embodying Winter is beaten, burned, or drowned.



Norse Mythology Details- Major Celebrations

The **Summer Solstice**- is an astronomical term regarding the position of the Sun in relation to the celestial equator. The Summer Solstice is the date with the longest day and hence with the shortest night. This date usually falls near June 21



Norse Mythology Details- Major Celebrations



The **Summer Solstice**- Bonfires, speeches, songs and dancing are most traditional. Folk traditions include the making of wreaths, the kindling of fires, the burning of corn dollies (human figure made out of straw), and the adornment of fields, barns, and houses with greenery.

Norse Mythology Details- Major Celebrations

The **Summer Solstice**- Midsummer is a time to make blessings to Baldur. Model Viking ships are also sometimes made out of thin wood, filled with small flammable offerings, and burned at this time.



Norse Mythology Details- Death

In the words of historian H.R. Ellis Davidson, "There is no consistent picture in Norse literary tradition of the fate of the dead," and "to oversimplify the position would be to falsify it."



Norse Mythology Details- Death



However, there *are* discernible patterns in the way the Norse conceived of death and the afterlife, even though those patterns don't hold absolutely, and the details of what one source tells us are almost invariably contradicted by another source- this goes back to it's folk religion roots.

Norse Mythology Details- Death

The most famous of these dwelling-places of the dead is undoubtedly Valhalla (Old Norse *Valhöll*, "the hall of the fallen"), the resplendent hall of the god Odin. Those chosen by Odin and his valkyries live there as celebrated heroes until they're called upon to fight by Odin's side in the doomed battle at Ragnarok, the downfall of the gods and the rest of the universe.



Norse Mythology Details- Death

The goddess Freya is said to welcome some of the dead into her hall, Folkvang (Old Norse *Fólkvangr*, "the field of the people" or "the field of warriors"). Unfortunately, Folkvang is mentioned so sparsely in the sources that we today don't have any idea what it was thought to be like.



Norse Mythology Details- Death

But the afterlife world to which the dead are most commonly portrayed as going is Hel, a world beneath the ground presided over by a goddess who is also named Hel. They typically eat, drink, carouse, fight, sleep, practice magic, and generally do all of the things that living Viking Age men and women did.



Norse Mythology Details- Death

The repeated ideas recorded was that if you died valiantly in battle, you went to Valhalla. If you died of any other cause, you went to Helheim. Neither were particularly bad. Those unworthy of an afterlife were barred from all gates.



Norse Mythology Details- Death

It was normal in Norse times to cremate the deceased body before a land or sea burial, a practise that had significant reach to their afterlife. By cremating their dead the Vikings believed the smoke would carry them to their rightful destination in the afterlife. Successful cremation in Viking times required a very hot fire, hot enough to burn flesh and bone to ash, and to achieve this a pyre was required.



Norse Mythology Details- Death

- The lore of this practise often involves the burning of the ship before the dead are cast out. However, it's believed that this was not always the case, with many believing the body to be cremated before the ship was sailed. Either way it was common for the dead's goods to travel with them out into the water. - This type of burial was not common however, and was likely reserved for sea captains, noble Vikings and the very wealthy.



Quick Write #2

After learning some basic information about the rituals and celebrations of the Vikings, explain some of your thoughts here. Consider discussing:

- What were the most interesting connections between Norse Mythology (the Vikings' religion) and modern-day religious traditions that you know?
- If you are already familiar with Norse Mythology and its stories, was there any new information you learned that gives further insight to the stories you know, or was this presentation missing some information about their religion that you want to share?
- What further questions do you have about their religious practices?

You do not need to respond to all of these questions. Select the one(s) that apply best to you, and respond in 3-4 sentences.