

# Renewal

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## Vinland Map – the state of play

**R**enewal has mostly been agnostic on the many controversial claims regarding Norse contact with North America.

The two main sagas are clearly genuine records of Norse visits to the Americas, but they are confused, terse, and not at all the sort of history that Herodotus wrote. The Viking-age settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows on Newfoundland is accepted by all scholars. However, it tells us little other than that the Norse were there at some time in the 10th or 11th century – as the sagas had already told us.

As to all the other artefacts, structures, inscriptions and so that have been offered by enthusiasts as evidence of a greater Norse presence in the New World, we think caution is the best approach. The Kensington Stone, for instance, seems more likely to be genuine than not. The Newport tower on Rhode Island, by contrast, seems more likely to be British rather than Norse. Perhaps one day some incontrovertible archaeological evidence will turn up, but until then we have little else to go on. Unless, that is, the Vinland Map turns out to be genuine.

The discovery of this map was announced by Yale University in October 1965. It appears to show recognisable parts of the North American coast, and it mentions the visit of a papal legate to Vinland in 1116-17. It also refers to "the island of Vinland, discovered by Bjarni and Leif in company". In appearance it looks like a 15th century German copy of a 13th century original.

If the Vinland Map is genuine, it suggests that Norse contact with the Americas was either more prolonged or more methodical than the sagas indicate. Either (or both) of these conclusions would add to our knowledge of this subject. The trouble is that no-one can agree on whether the Map is genuine, or a deliberate forgery.

The Map came to light in 1957. In that year a genuine 15th century manuscript called the *Tartar Relation* was offered for sale, by an Italian bookseller on behalf of an anonymous client. The Map had been bound in with the manuscript in more recent times.

The British Museum dated the manuscript to about 1440, but declined to bid for the Map because Bertram Schofield, its keeper of manuscripts, thought it was a forgery. Part of the problem was that the Latin on the map was dodgy, its provenance was unknown, and wormholes in the Map didn't line up with those in the manuscript.



***The Vinland Map – to orient yourself, find Britain, Iceland and Greenland***

Despite this unpromising start, the Map was eventually bought by an antiquarian bookseller. Then Thomas Marston, of Yale University, found that the wormholes in the Map matched those of another 15th century copy of a 13th century document, the *Speculum Historiale*. Furthermore, other wormholes in the *Speculum* matched those in the *Tartar Relation*, so all three documents had once been bound together.

This suggested that the Map was a genuine 15th century document. A wealthy philanthropist named Paul Mellon then bought it for \$300,000 and donated it to Yale University. Yale acclaimed the Map as "the most tremendous historical discovery of the twentieth century". That declaration, however, did not end the controversy.

In 1973 an American scientist named Walter McCrone analysed the ink residues on the Map and detected traces of anatase, which is a version of titanium dioxide that was not manufactured until the 1920s. This seemed to be damning evidence that the Map was a 20th century fake.

If that had been the end of the story, we could all have rested easy. Some crank had forged a map, for whatever reasons, but its exposure as a fake by modern science didn't at all detract from what we already knew about Norse contacts with the New World.

Then, in 1995, the plot took another Byzantine twist. Jacqueline Olin of the Smithsonian Institute carbon-tested a shaving of the parchment and found that it dated to about 1434 – which was pretty

much the date to which it had originally been ascribed.

For a while the headlines in the media made it seem that the Vinland Map was indeed vindicated. Before long, though, sceptics were suggesting that a very cunning forger had probably drawn up his fake map on a blank bit of medieval parchment.

Then, in mid-2002, Robin Clark of University College London tested the ink again and confirmed McCrone's finding. Yes, the ink contained anatase, but it also contained carbon black, which was used in medieval times.

This finding cut both ways.

Those who claimed that the Map was a forgery simply upped the ability of the alleged forger. He had, they said, used a 20th century ink to simulate the yellow outline that forms a natural shadow around surviving medieval inscriptions on parchment, then used carbon black to "fill in" the shadow.

Scientists who think the Map may be genuine took a different view of the new evidence. Jacqueline Olin, for instance, argued that the deterioration of medieval iron inks might well have left a titanium residue. Apparently there has been very little research into the chemistry of 15th century inks, so she may be right.

Dr Garman Harbottle has also weighed into the argument. He reminded the media that everyone agrees the Map's parchment is genuine, then added: "If it is a forgery, then the forger was surely one of the most skilful criminals ever to pursue that line of work."

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One strange take on the new evidence is from a historian named Kirsten Seaver. She is writing a book on the Map, and she is clearly in the conspiracy camp. According to media reports, Seaver believes the Map was forged by an elderly Austrian Jesuit priest named Joseph Fisher. His motive? According to Seaver the forgery was mostly "... a private doodle, but with the knowledge that if found it could cause a Nazi scholar no end of pain".

Leaving aside the question of why Father Fisher (if he existed) would go to such lengths over "a private doodle" that he deserves to enter the history books as the Napoleon of forgery, it is interesting to try to follow Seaver's logic as to how his "doodle", if ever discovered, would have caused "... a Nazi scholar no end of pain".

According to Seaver, it's all very simple. Jeff Hecht summed up her views in the 10 August 2002 issue of *New Scientist*:

The Norse explorers hailed by the map were in fact Catholic, so it would have affirmed Nazi claims of Norse achievements but also challenged their hatred of Catholics. If a Nazi wanted to believe the Norse discovered America, 'he would have found the Roman Church was there first,' she [Seaver] says.

Inexcusably – for an "historian" – Seaver totally ignores the fact that all the main German National Socialist leaders were Roman Catholics. That includes their Fuhrer. So why would these German Catholics be miffed by the fact that some of their co-religionists had achieved noteworthy deeds?

More importantly, the relevant sagas make it clear that the leaders of the Norse visits to America – but not all their crews – were Christians. So there would be no need for Father Fisher to forge a map just to remind everyone that Leif Eiriksson and most of his mates were Catholics.

Anyway, the scientific jury is evidently still out on the Vinland Map. The interesting question is this: If the Map is eventually confirmed to be genuine, what would it tell us about our ancestors?

A very curious aspect of the Map is a Latin annotation that has been translated as:

Henricus, Bishop Legate of the Apostolic See in Greenland and the neighbouring regions, entered this extensive and most wealthy country (Vinland) in the last year of our most Holy Father Pascal, in the name of God Almighty; he remained for a long time both in summer and in winter, and then returned northeast to Greenland, whence in most humble obedience to superior command he proceeded ...

Before continuing, it should be pointed out that "Henricus" is a Latin form of the name Eirik, and the bishop mentioned here is the historical figure Eirik Gnipson. He is known from other sources to have visited Greenland some time between the years

1112 and 1121, and to have sailed on westwards specifically to visit Vinland.

George Painter of the British Museum said of this inscription:

This sober and weighty statement both as a whole and in detail seems hardly open to adverse criticism. ... When seen in its historical context it is both confirmed and illuminated. Bishop Eirik's mission falls precisely within the period when Pope Pascal II (1099-1118) was spreading and reorganising the papal control of Scandinavia and the north colonies. In 1106 Pascal had appointed John the first Bishop of Holar, the northern see of Iceland, and the establishment of a Greenlandic bishopric was the natural next step. The motives of Rome, as shown by the emphasis on the proper collection of Peter's pence in the thirteenth-century bulls relating to Greenland, were in part hierarchical and financial; but the obligation to improve the pastoral ministrations of the Church among the little-tended Greenland flock was no doubt paramount. Similarly, the motives of the Greenlanders in requiring a bishop must have been not only religious but also political and commercial.

Given this background, the inscription on the Vinland Map suggests that there may have been a reasonably large and viable Norse colony in Vinland in 1116-17. A papal legate was an important ecclesiastical ambassador, not just some expendable minor priest who might be sent to a tiny and temporary frontier settlement like L'Anse aux Meadows.

But *why* would such an important Vatican representative be sent to Vinland anyway? Evidently Pope Pascal was asserting his authority over the Scandinavian mainland and its colonies abroad, but why would he send someone as irreplaceable as Bishop Eirik Gnipson on a hazardous journey to the "extensive and most wealthy country" of Vinland?

The most obvious answer is money. Yet even though Greenland was something of an economic goldmine in those times, it is known that bishops appointed to that valuable island regularly failed to put in an appearance. So to account for a high-ranking papal legate being sent to America, we need to postulate a motive more important to the Vatican than simple greed.

Furthermore, we have to ask, assuming for the moment that the annotation on the Map is correct, why Eirik would have stayed so long in Vinland.

Realistically, there may have been many reasons. Perhaps he was just a born adventurer. Perhaps he was delayed by boat problems, or illness. Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps ... One possibility, however, is particularly intriguing.

For the last two hundred years of the Greenland settlement there were persistent rumours that the colony's inhabitants had abandoned Christianity and become heathen

again. The Annals of Bishop Gisli Oddsson even give a date for this event: 1342, when "The inhabitants of Greenland of their own will abandoned the true faith and the Christian religion, having already forsaken all good ways and true virtues, and went over to the people of America (*ad Americce populos se converturent*)." So common were claims like this that when the missionary Hans Egede arrived in Greenland he fully expected to face the task of converting any surviving Norsemen back from heathenism to Christianity.

Yet we know that the Greenlanders, at least in the main settlements, remained staunchly Christian to the end. It is therefore difficult to account for the persistent rumours of apostasy.

What the Sagas tell us, however, is that in the early days after the imposition, many Greenlanders remained loyal to their old faith. Eirik the Red remained a heathen to his dying day, and would even have led an expedition to Vinland but for a fall from his horse. Thorhall the Hunter is another Greenland heathen who is named in the sagas. Unlike Eirik, he actually made it to Vinland, where he was very bitter toward the Christians in his party.

It is possible that the heathens simply died out in Greenland, as their Christian successors are supposed to have done many years later. It is equally possible that they chose to relocate to Vinland for the sake of their religious freedom. If they did, certain conclusions seem to follow. First, the Christians in Greenland and Iceland may not have wished to write about the partial failure of the Christian conversion process. This may be why so little was written about Vinland after the two main sagas, even though visits were made until at least 1347. Second, a continuing heathen presence in Vinland *originating from Greenland* would account for the fact that the Greenlanders themselves were frequently accused of reverting to Odinism. Third, it would explain the very curious phrase *ad Americce populos se converturent*, which is otherwise so strained an expression that most scholars feel obliged to try to explain it away. Fourth, it could account for the presence of a Vatican ambassador in Vinland, and for the length of his stay. Fifth, it could account for the strange disappearance of the Western Settlement in Greenland.

We may never know whether the Vinland Map is genuine. If it turns out to be a forgery that will not detract from what we know about the Norse presence in Vinland. If it is genuine, however, it may shed extra light on what we already know from other sources.

Still, we counsel caution. Even without the conflicting interpretations of the chemical evidence, that outline of Greenland looks a bit too modern for comfort!

# Daily paper honours our ancestors

**O**nly three times before has *Renewal* reproduced an article from another source. What follows now is the fourth - but it is a first in that, remarkably, it comes from a mainstream rather than an "alternative" publication. The ripples of the New Awakening are clearly spreading far beyond those of us who already have a firm grasp of our spiritual heritage, and consequently a spiritual reverence for our ancestors.

The item below comes from the *Independent* newspaper (UK), and is written by that paper's science editor, Steve Connor. The date of the article is 3 December 2002. That's all you need to know. Enjoy!

**S**cientists in Britain have identified the oldest skeleton ever found on the American continent in a discovery that raises fresh questions about the accepted theory of how the first people arrived in the New World.

The skeleton's perfectly preserved skull belonged to a 26-year-old woman who died during the last ice age on the edge of a giant prehistoric lake which once formed around an area now occupied by the sprawling suburbs of Mexico City.

Scientists from Liverpool's John Moores University and Oxford's Research Laboratory of Archaeology have dated the skull to about 13,000 years old, making it 2,000 years older than the previous record for the continent's oldest human remains.

However, the most intriguing aspect of the skull is that it is long and narrow and typically Caucasian in appearance, like the heads of white, western Europeans today.

Modern-day native Americans, however, have short, wide skulls that are typical of their Mongoloid ancestors who are known to have crossed into America from Asia on an ice-age land bridge that had formed across the Bering Strait.

The extreme age of Peñon woman suggests two scenarios. Either there was a much earlier migration of Caucasian-like people with long, narrow skulls across the Bering Strait and that these people were later replaced by a subsequent migration of Mongoloid people.

Alternatively, and more controversially, a group of Stone Age people from Europe made the perilous sea journey across the Atlantic Ocean many thousands of years before Columbus or the Vikings.

Silvia Gonzalez, a Mexican-born archaeologist working at John Moores University and the leader of the research team, accepted yesterday that her discovery lends weight to the highly contentious idea that the first Americans may have actually been Europeans.

"At the moment it points to that as being likely. They were definitely not Mongoloid in appearance. They were from somewhere else. As to whether they were European, at this point in time we cannot say 'no'," Dr Gonzalez said.

The skull and the almost-complete skeleton of Peñon woman was actually unearthed in 1959 and was thought to be no older than about 5,000 years. It formed part of a

collection of 27 early humans in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City that had not been accurately dated using the most modern techniques.

"The museum knew that the remains were of significant historical value but they hadn't been scientifically dated," Dr Gonzalez said.

"I decided to analyse small bone samples from five skeletons using the latest carbon dating techniques. I think everyone was amazed at how old they were," she said.

Robert Hedges, the director of Oxford's Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit ... carried out the radiocarbon analysis, which is accurate to within 50 years.

"We are absolutely, 100 per cent sure that this is the date," Dr Gonzalez said. The study has been peer-reviewed and accepted for publication next year in the journal *Human Evolution*.

At 13,000 years old, Peñon woman would have lived at a time when there was a vast, shallow lake in the Basin of Mexico, a naturally enclosed high plain around today's Mexico City, which would have been cooler and much wetter than it is today.

Huge mammals would have roamed the region's grasslands, such as the world's largest mammoths with 12-foot tusks, bear-sized giant sloths, armadillos as big as a car and fearsome carnivores such as the sabre-toothed tiger and great black bear.

The bones of Peñon woman, named after the "little heel" of land that would have jutted into the ancient lake, were well developed and healthy, showing no signs of malnutrition.

Dr Gonzalez found that the two oldest skulls analysed were both dolichocephalic, meaning that they were long and narrow-headed. The younger ones were short and broad - brachycephalic - which are typical of today's native Americans and their Mongoloid ancestors from Asia.

The findings have a resonance with the skull and skeleton of Kennewick man, who was unearthed in 1996 in the Columbia River at the town of Kennewick in Washington state. The skull, estimated to be 8,400 years old, is also long and narrow and typically Caucasian.

James Chatters, one of the first anthropologists to study Kennewick man before it had been properly dated, even thought that the man may have been a European trapper who had met a sudden

death sometime in the early 19th century ...

Dr Gonzalez said that the identification of Peñon woman as the oldest known inhabitant of the American continent throws fresh light on the controversy over who actually owns the ancient remains of long-dead Americans.

"My research could have implications for the ancient burial rights of North American Indians because it's quite possible that dolichocephalic man existed in North America well before the native Indians," she said.

But even more controversial is the suggestion that Peñon woman could be a descendant of Stone Age Europeans who had crossed the ice-fringed Atlantic some 15,000 or 20,000 years ago.

This theory first surfaced when archaeologists found flint blades and spear points in America that bore a remarkable similarity to those fashioned by the Solutrean people of south-western France who lived about 20,000 years ago, when the ice age was at its most extreme. The Solutreans were the technologists of their day, inventing such things as the eyed needle and the heat treatment of flint to make it easier to flake into tools. They also built boats and fished.

Bruce Bradley, an American archaeologist and an expert in flint technology, believes that the Solutrean method of fashioning flints into two-sided blades matches perfectly the Stone Age flint blades found at some sites in America. One of these is the 11,500 year-old flint spear point found in 1933 at Clovis, New Mexico.

Dr Bradley said that the flint blades that came into America with the early Asian migrants were totally different in concept and mode of manufacture. Both the Clovis point and the Solutrean flints shared features that could only mean a shared origin, according to Dr Bradley.

Studies of the DNA of native Americans clearly indicated a link with modern-day Asians, supporting the idea of a mass migration across the Bering land bridge. But one DNA study also pointed to at least some shared features with Europeans that could only have derived from a relatively recent common ancestor who lived perhaps 15,000 ago - the time of the Solutreans.

Not every specialist, however, is convinced of the apparently mounting evidence of an early European migration. "I personally haven't found it very convincing," Professor Chris Stringer, the head of human origins at the Natural History Museum in London, said ...

Nevertheless, the remarkable age of the young Palaeolithic woman who died by an ancient lake in Mexico some 13,000 years ago has once again stirred the controversy over the most extraordinary migration in human history.

# The “conversion” of Iceland:

## *Thorgeir’s terrible choice*

The “settlement period” in Iceland lasted from 874 to 970, and most of the settlers who founded this new nation were heathens. (There were a few Christians from the beginning.)

The chief gods worshipped were Thor and Frey, but Freya, Njord and Odin also had their adherents. The Icelanders established a form of priesthood in which the chief men of the different regions performed both sacral and judicial duties. Each priest, known as a *goði*, was responsible for maintaining a cult centre, a *hof*, of which 37 can be identified today on the basis of place-name evidence.

All of this smoothly ordered heathen society came to an end in about the year 1000, when the Icelanders voted to become Christians. Modern heathens often wonder what made them come to this decision.

As it happens, we know more about the Christianisation of Iceland than of any of the other northern lands. A man named Ari frothi wrote a meticulous history of his country, called *Íslendingabók*, shortly after the year 1120. Carefully citing and evaluating his sources, Ari gives an account of the conversion that seems entirely dependable and untainted by the writer’s own Christianity. There are also numerous secondary accounts that confirm Ari’s history.

As with other Christian sources, though, we have to be careful in how we approach Ari. Everything he wrote may have been truthful, but he doesn’t give the full story.

This is what seems to have happened:

From about 980 onwards various missionaries visited Iceland. They mostly received short shrift. Two of them, Thorvald and Frithrek, were driven out after being involved in some killings. Another, who was sent directly by Olaf Tryggvason, the vicious Christian king of Norway, was outlawed for destroying sanctuaries of the gods.

Olaf’s next missionary was a man called Thangbrand, who roamed the countryside with his Christian supporters in about 997-9, and left in a hurry after killing three heathens. He had converted very few people, and had even been derided in verse by a female poet named Steinunn when his ship was wrecked. Thor, she mocked, had brought on the storm, and “Christ did not protect the ship”.

Thangbrand returned to his Norwegian boss and reported that there was no hope for Christianity in Iceland. Olaf was furious. His first reaction was to “kill or maim” every Icelander who was in Norway at the time.

Two recently-converted Icelandic chieftains, Gizurr and Hjalti, managed to talk Olaf out of this vile plan. They had to promise to have another go at converting the reluctant Icelanders. Olaf kept four prominent men of leading Icelandic families as hostages.

Gizurr and Hjalti, together with a

Christian priest, landed on the Vestmann Islands off the south coast of their homeland. From there they travelled about ninety miles inland to Thingvellir where the Icelandic parliament, the Althing, was in session.

Hjalti had been banished the previous year for blaspheming against Odin and Freya. According to law he was not allowed to set his unholy foot on the hallowed ground at Thingvellir. Nevertheless, he turned up anyway. Two factors probably gave him confidence. First, word had been sent ahead instructing all Christians to attend the Althing and to bring their weapons. Second – and here we have to surmise beyond Ari’s account – it is likely that the heathens in Iceland were unaware of Olaf’s hostages or of his murderous intentions.

The two factions, the Christian minority and the heathen majority, were both armed, and Ari says they nearly came to blows. For some reason not given by Ari, they didn’t. It is most likely that at this point Gizurr and Hjalti told the heathens what would happen to Olaf’s hostages if they resisted.

The Christians then made speeches claiming that their religion was in conformity with the laws of Iceland. The heathens made the same claims. If either side had prevailed in this legal argument, the opposition would have forfeited their protection under law, and civil war might well have broken out.

The most significant man at the Althing was the “lawspeaker”, a man called Thorgeir the Priest. The Christians asked him to make a binding decision. They also bribed him, as Ari makes clear. A later account, in *Njal’s Saga*, says the bribe was “three marks of silver”, adding that “It was taking a risk, for Thorgeir was a heathen”. (In fact, the bribe may have been much larger than this. *Olaf Tryggvason’s Saga*, which is admittedly not very reliable, says that the king had given Gizurr and Hjalti a large sum of money before they left for Iceland.)

Thorgeir thought about this proposal overnight, and the next morning he decreed that the answer was a compromise. He warned against settling the dispute by violence, saying: “If we tear law asunder, we tear asunder peace”. Both parties then formally agreed to abide by Thorgeir’s decision.

When his verdict was announced the heathens must have been dismayed. All Icelanders, declared Thorgeir, had to be baptised as Christians. Anyone who chose to could go on sacrificing to the gods, but only in secret. If they did so in public they would be banished for three years.

As *Njal’s Saga* relates, “The heathens felt they had been grossly betrayed”. Even so, as honourable men, they abided by Thorgeir’s edict. What else could they do? They had given their word, had plighted their sacred

heathen troth.

The Christians, of course, had behaved abominably. There was nothing new in that. Given their experience with Christian missionaries, the heathen majority in Iceland should have expected the worst.

What is particularly interesting, though, is what Thorgeir may have been thinking. He had taken a bribe, as all the Christian sources acknowledge, but he could have passed that off as the customary fee for his work as a lawspeaker. Or given it back.

It seems that the heathens trusted him implicitly. He was, after all, a respected heathen priest. The bribe was therefore probably not decisive. If he had been totally corrupt he need not have proclaimed the “let-out clause” allowing secret sacrifices, which must have infuriated the Christians.

Thorgeir was no doubt worried about the fate of the Icelandic hostages over in Norway, whom Olaf could “kill or maim” whenever it suited him. It is unlikely, though, that this was his main concern.

To understand Thorgeir’s thinking, we need to consider the international situation at that time. The deranged Olaf was busy torturing and killing anyone in Norway who wouldn’t convert to Christianity. Iceland, originally founded as a Norwegian colony, was dependent on Norway as a trading partner. Olaf also had a stranglehold on the Hebrides, Orkney, Shetland and the Faeroes. Ireland and England were also largely Christian. Given all these realities, Olaf could have used trading sanctions to reduce the Icelanders to starvation almost at will.

Even worse, if civil war had broken out Olaf probably would not have hesitated to invade in support of the Christians. Iceland would then have lost its sovereignty (as it did eventually in the thirteenth century) and then even Thorgeir’s careful compromise would have been lost.

Finally, most Icelanders still had family ties with Norwegians. And every Norwegian relative of an Icelander was a potential hostage to the psychopathic Christian king. That thought must have been unbearable to a noble and pious heathen like Thorgeir.

All in all, it seems that the lawspeaker played the best hand that he could in the circumstances. Let us honour him for that. He almost certainly saved the lives of thousands of good heathens.

And the consequences of Thorgeir’s painful decision?

Some aspects of the old faith became part of the new Icelandic Christianity. Others survived as folklore among the common people. Heathenism also went underground in Iceland for centuries, as we know from the fact that Christians there were still burning people for casting runes in the 17th century.

Thorgeir faced a terrible choice, but he probably had the last laugh – when Iceland became the first “Christian” country to restore Odinism as an “official” religion in the early 1970s.

# We notch up ten years!

***Renewal*, the journal of Australian Odinism, has reached its tenth birthday. We were never entirely sure that we would make it, so perhaps a little bit of introspection can be excused – as well as a call for help.**

**W**e began, obviously, in June 1993. The immediate impetus was the temporary closure of the journal *The Odinist*, after its founder and editor, Else Christensen, had been charged on trumped-up drug charges.

Yet unlikely as it may seem at first sight, Australia had been the first English-speaking nation to experience the New Awakening of Odinism. In the 1930s Alexander Rud Mills, a Hobart-born lawyer and poet, set up a formal Odinist church in Australia. Mills and other Aussie Odinists including Les Cahill were incarcerated, without trial, in Australian concentration camps during the 1939-45 war – on the ridiculous suspicion that they might have been pro-German. (At the same time, their co-religionists in Germany were also being

locked up in *German* concentration camps!) Quite understandably, most of the Mills/Odinist circle dispersed in the face of this government oppression, and they tended to keep a very low profile for the rest of their lives – although Mills himself published prolifically after his triumphant release from behind barbed wire and machine-gun turrets in the South Australian desert.

In the decades immediately following WW2 the Christian Establishment in Australia continued to persecute Aussie Odinists. The victim who achieved the highest profile was a Sydney woman named Annie Lennon, who was repeatedly charged with “blasphemy” because of her impassioned public speeches against the Judeo-Christian God.

Fast forward to the early 1970s. Else Christensen’s Canadian publication, *The Odinist*, was circulating widely in Australian heathen circles. Yet there was still a legacy of government oppression of Odinists. A young female university student decided to test the limits. She wrote to the Australian Attorney-General, seeking a written guarantee that the Federal government would henceforth accept the (constitutional) right of Australians to freedom of religious belief. Perhaps surprisingly, the Attorney-General gave that undertaking.

No-one in those days felt any need to establish an Aussie Odinist publication, for the simple reason that Else Christensen’s journal hadn’t been censored or proscribed in Australia, and it was satisfying our requirements. Furthermore, other Odinist mags were springing up all over the world, from London (Stubba’s *Raven Banner*) to California. Some of these publications were a bit alien to the Aussie ethos, but Else’s seemed appropriate to the times. We therefore assumed, complacently, that it would go on forever.

Then Else was framed on a fraudulent drugs charge. *The Odinist* obviously had to close down for a while. No-one knew how long that “while” would be. So a few Aussies decided to partially fill the massive void that Else had left by publishing a new Odinist journal from Australia.

We hoped that we could do one thing, at least, that no other Odinist zine had ever done – to highlight the overlap between the spiritual beliefs of our ancestors and modern science.

Looking back over our ten years of publication, it seems that we have succeeded (at least) in that aim. We have run many articles, for instance, on the magnificent but under-appreciated technology of our ancestors in earlier periods of history. We have run almost as many articles showing how their core spiritual beliefs have been vindicated by

cutting-edge scientific insights.

During this ten-year travail, we have also drawn attention to the artistic, musical, architectural, poetic and downright-practical brilliance of our ancestors, ancient and modern.

Strangely, perhaps, we have occasionally been criticised for doing just this. Some non-subscribers have alleged that our Odinist emphasis on ancestor-worship, (which is thoroughly attested to in the Eddas) places too much emphasis on race. Yet the simple fact is that our ancestors *were* all of the one race. Wherever members of that race have travelled, from Europe to India to China to the New World, they have taken with them a culture that is enlightened by its Odinist, or in modern times residually Odinist, values. So when prehistoric blond mummies were discovered in China, it is no surprise that one of the richest burials is that of a woman.

As far as ancestor-worship is concerned, we’d like to quote from a modern film that has been popular on the heathen circuit. That film is called *The Thirteenth Warrior*. It’s a bit of a mish-mash, linking *Beowulf* and a disputed account by an Arab historian who might possibly have witnessed a Viking funeral service in what is possibly now Russia. At the climax of the film, when the Odinist heroes are braving almost certain death, they launch into this liturgy:

**Lo, there do I see my father. Lo, there do I see my mother, and my sisters and my brothers. Lo, there do I see the line of my people back to the beginning. Lo, they do call to me. They bid me take my place among them in the halls of Valhalla, where the brave may live forever.**

Anyone for whom this affirmation rings no emotional bell is clearly not an Odinist.

But if you really feel the call of your ancestors, please do something to spread the word about *Renewal*. Tell your friends and relatives. Spread the word on newsgroups. Anything! If our readers don’t take up this challenge, we may never reach our twentieth birthday. We refuse to accept paid advertising, so we rely on subscriptions to keep going – but we don’t have enough subs to remain viable. Obviously a publication like this can’t continue to run forever at a loss.

## Renewal

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*Renewal* exists to share the views of modern Odinists, both within Australia and world-wide. In Australian and British law Odinism is described as “the continuation of ... the organic spiritual beliefs and religion of the indigenous peoples of northern Europe as embodied in the Edda and as they have found expression in the wisdom and in the historical experience of these peoples”.

*Renewal* is an independent Odinist journal. **Opinions in articles and letters are those of their authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor.** *Renewal* will not accept paid ads under any circumstances, but is happy to inform readers of products or services that seem to be of likely interest.

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● *Odin's Raven Magic* ● *Christian woes* ● *A very late Viking-style ship* ● *Lies about proto-Odinist philosopher debunked*

# What's new

## Odinist music

An Icelandic band called Sigur Rós recently wowed the critics and packed London's Barbican Hall with what were described as "cool young hipsters".

Their show was called "Odin's Raven Magic". The playlist, backed by the London Sinfonietta, comprised extracts from the Eddas, in both prose and verse. There were nine extracts, and these were related to the nine "lays of power" that Odin acquired while he hung on "the wind-swept tree".

Here is how the (London) *Evening Standard's* critic, David Smyth, described the concert:

Much of the music, however, was mournfully haunting. Slow, sinister strings set the atmosphere, before friend of the band, Steindor Andersen, began to sing. Bald, bearded and the chairman of a society dedicated to traditional Icelandic song, Andersen cut an imposing figure as he sang in his deep, portentous voice.

At times the performers sounded a thousand years old, at others they were almost futuristic, swathing the strings in scratchy drum-and-bass rhythms and sounds like submarine radars ... [T]his was a bold piece which united the ancient and modern in frequently beautiful, brilliant ways.

In *Renewal's* opinion it is high time that modern artists should explore innovative and contemporary ways of presenting the eternal verities of our spiritual heritage. We have not been privileged to hear Sigur Rós perform, but we certainly believe that art and religion are closely related.

After all, the main residual appeal of Christianity is its traditional architecture, music and poetry. Take these away and all that would be left is a hideous psychopathic "God" who, if human, would justly be confined in a strait-jacket. On the other hand, though, the New Awakening of Odinism has not yet produced any artistic works that could be compared to Gothic cathedrals.

Maybe Sigur Rós is a start in the right direction. The fact that they filled the Barbican Hall with youngsters at least suggests that they are communicating their message.

## Archbishop says: "church could topple"

Dr George Pell, the Catholic Archbishop of Sydney (pictured above right) has predicted that the Catholic church in Australia is about to "topple over".

The problem is that most Catholic priests, sisters and brothers are elderly. Young people are simply not entering these callings. And it



seems that very few Catholics really care much anyway: Only 17% of Australian Catholics can be bothered to attend Mass.

Over the years from 1996 to 2001, the number of Catholic priests fell by 18.2%. Most of those still practising are over 60 years of age. Dr Pell himself is 62.

It seems obvious to us that traditional Australian Catholics will die out within a generation or two. Their places will be filled, for a while, by Catholic immigrants from places like the Philippines.

This doesn't really fill *Renewal* with pleasure. Yes, we are glad that the baleful influence of Christianity on our increasingly heathen/pagan Australian society will be diminished, but we're a tad sorry for the Christians. It seems that everyone feels entitled to kick them now that they're down.

All three of the Abrahamic religions should go. It's just a trifle sad to see the faith of the formidable Crusaders or the vile Charlemagne collapse without a whimper.

## The "Welsh Gokstad"

In 2002, excavations for a new arts centre were being conducted on the bank of the Usk River in Newport, south Wales.

In the course of digging the new foundations a Viking-style ship was found, excellently preserved in the alluvial clay. It was clinker-built, mainly of oak with a beech keel. The ribs were fastened with wooden pegs known as "trenails", and the overlapping strakes were fastened with iron nails. The ship was over 23 metres long, and 8 metres at its broadest width.

Although it was built in the tradition, and had the shape, of Viking-era ships, tree-ring analysis of one of the timbers dated the vessel to the mid fifteenth century.

It was not possible to lift the ship intact, so

all the timbers have been dismantled and are currently stored in water tanks pending reassembly.

For further information, see: [www.britarch.ac.uk/sosnewport](http://www.britarch.ac.uk/sosnewport)

## Nietzsche didn't have syphilis

Friedrich Nietzsche was a proto-Odinist philosopher. One thing about him, though, sticks in the craw: it is said that he died of syphilis. Logically, this shouldn't in any way affect the way we perceive the great man's work – syphilis is a disease like any other – but human beings aren't entirely logical. It seems rather demeaning that such a brilliant mind should have been lost simply because its possessor was weak enough to cavort with poxed 19th century sluts.

We are therefore pleased to be able to report that the syphilis claim has now been exposed as just a political lie. As reported by Robert Matthews in *The Telegraph*, London, May 5, 2003, Nietzsche was the innocent victim of a vicious smear campaign by anti-Nazis. What actually sent him mad and then killed him was brain cancer.

The doctor who came to this conclusion after studying all the medical records was Dr Leonard Sax, the director of the Montgomery Center for Research in Child Development in Maryland, USA. Dr Sax's name is presumably not a contraction of "Saxon", and since Jews tend to be very edgy about Nietzsche we are more than happy to praise his impartiality, honesty and courage.

"Nietzsche exhibited none of [the] symptoms" of syphilis, according to Dr Sax. Instead, he was suffering from a slowly developing brain tumour. In Matthews' summary:

According to Dr Sax, the suggestion that Nietzsche caught syphilis from prostitutes arose in 1947. In a book condemning Nietzsche's role in Nazi philosophy, Lange-Eichbaum alleged that a Berlin neurologist had once told him that the philosopher "had infected himself with syphilis in a Leipzig brothel during his time as a student there, and that he had been treated for syphilis by two Leipzig physicians".

Despite the lack of documentary or medical evidence, the allegation has since been repeated without question by generations of academics, said Dr Sax. "Extraordinarily, this single passage in Lange-Eichbaum's obscure book is the chief foundation, cited again and again, that Nietzsche had syphilis."

Even the best-tended lies have a use-by date!



**H**ere's a bit of fun from the internet.

Even though I am not personally into "tipping the velvet", I thought it contained a fair quota of wisdom.

Dr. Laura Schlessinger is a US radio "personality" who dispenses advice to people who call her radio show. She said that, as an observant Orthodox Jew, homosexuality is an abomination to her according to *Leviticus* 18:22, and cannot be condoned under any circumstance. The following is an open letter to Dr. Laura penned by a US resident, which was posted on the net:

Dear Dr. Laura:

Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's Law. I have learned a great deal from your show, and try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind them that *Leviticus* 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination ..... End of debate.

I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some of the other specific laws and how to follow them.

1. When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odour for the Lord – *Lev. 1:9*. The problem is my neighbours. They claim the odour is not pleasing to them. Should I smite them?

2. I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in *Exodus* 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?

3. I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanness – *Lev. 15:19-24*. The problem is, how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offence.

4. *Lev. 25:44* states that I may indeed possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are purchased from neighbouring nations. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify? Why can't I own Canadians?

5. I have a neighbour who insists on working on the Sabbath. *Exodus* 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself?

6. A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination – *Lev. 11:10*, it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle

this?

7. *Lev. 21:20* states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle room here?

8. Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by *Lev. 19:27*. How should they die?

9. I know from *Lev. 11:6-8* that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?

10. My uncle has a farm. He violates *Lev. 19:19* by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread (cotton/polyester blend). He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of getting the whole town together to stone them? – *Lev. 24:10-16*. Couldn't we just burn them to death at a private family gathering?

I know you have studied these things extensively, so I am confident you can help. Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging.

Your devoted disciple and adoring fan.

**O**kay, so it's child's play to take cheap potshots at Christianity. It's much harder, as I have found out, to take equally cheap potshots at Islam. And I can assure you from personal experience that any attempt to do the same with Judaism will lead to furious lamentation and gnashing of teeth ... roughly along the lines of: "Send that witch to the Gulag!"

Now, the ducking chair I could maybe cope with. The Gulag? Not today, thank you very much! So this time around I won't criticise Islam or Judaism. I'll confine myself to criticising modern Odinists.

"What?" Do I hear you say? "Criticise Odinists? But everyone knows they're the good guys. Has Ota finally flipped her lid?"

No, she hasn't. She has merely decided that it's time to be a big, big man and tell a home truth or two.

(The fact that Ota is neither large, nor male, is quite irrelevant.)

The real trouble with Odinists is that we are not serious. If we really, genuinely, in our heart-of-hearts, wanted a resurgence of Odinism in countries whose ultimate spiritual heritage is Odinist, we would tailor our approach to the degeneracy of the

modern world in order to change it. But we don't, and as far as I can see we won't.

For instance, by refusing to have a priestly class, we Odinists condemn ourselves to obscurity. The only place where the nastiest version of Christianity seems to be growing is the USA, and as we can see from Yank-TV the tub-thumping preachers clearly believe they have a direct line to their God. Their audiences certainly agree.

Yes, it's crass – and trash. But refined and intellectual Odinists, who have infinitely more knowledge of true spirituality than the holy rollers of Yank toxic TV, will never even be noticed by the majority of The Majority. Christian cranks who pretend to speak in tongues will grow their following, provided they keep appealing to the lowest elements of the low in the style of naked witch doctors. Meanwhile, educated Odinists, who could wipe the floor with their opponents in any rational debate, will continue to be ... well, rational. And therefore unheard.

Modern Odinists remind me of some of the last great heathen emperors of Rome. Marcus Aurelius and Julian "the Apostate" were refined philosopher-kings who made the mistake of thinking that the Roman mobs were still ... rational. In reality, the Roman masses were by that stage neither genuinely Roman nor in any way rational. They showed their true colours when they dragged the heathen mathematician, philosopher and martyr, Hypatia, from her chariot, stripped her naked, and gruesomely killed her by cutting all the flesh from her bones.

The wise words of Marcus Aurelius would have meant nothing to those scum. Neither will the modern equivalents of Marcus or Julian mean much to the masses currently pullulating and ululating in the cities of what was until recently "The West".

Unless we Odinists are prepared to get our hands dirty, we will keep failing to advance our cause. If we really want to change the world for the better, a rethink is required. Now!

## Ota's Talking Point



# FRÖJEL

## Fröjel Gotlandica. Viking Re-enactment Society.

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## Dear Ed ...

□ I'm really enjoying the journal, very informative and entertaining.

After I've finished reading it, it usually gets passed round some friends who are interested in "our path". Though not exactly Odinists they are on our side – mainly a bit Wiccan but I guess it's better than Xtian or new age.

Geoff New South Wales

*We have finally reached our tenth year of publication, but if the journal is to continue we certainly need more subscribers. So could everyone please emulate Geoff and help "spread the word" about our existence, in any suitable way?*

□ I have just received the March 2003 edition of *Renewal* – my thanks. There are a few issues I wish to comment upon, but first let me say that the lead article "Ancient Odinist cosmogony" was inspirational. And the notice about the Australian Viking Ships Museum – what a wonderful way to educate and inspire others about the heathen heritage. I enjoyed Ota's piece about the two American cultures – there's little that I can disagree with there (other than that I like jazz.)

Louise, South Australia

□ "Ancient Odinist cosmogony" was brilliant. We need more articles like this – deeply informed, authoritative, and a magnificent blend of the New Physics and the old spirituality. Please convey my deepest admiration to the author.

I know that articles like this can't be conjured out of thin air. You are dependant on a tiny team of regular writers, plus the odd brilliant submission from left field. I also understand perfectly well why many articles can't be signed – the creeping loss of intellectual freedom in Australia is becoming disgusting. But please encourage people like the "cosmogony" author. Even if they can't sign with their names, they are still achieving far more than they perhaps realise.

Jan, Perth

□ No, I haven't yet passed into Shadow! Although now in the middle of my 9th decade I still feel that I have a future of sorts.

*Renewal* seems to get better with each issue. I pass my copy on to my local bookseller, who runs an Odinist group on the internet.

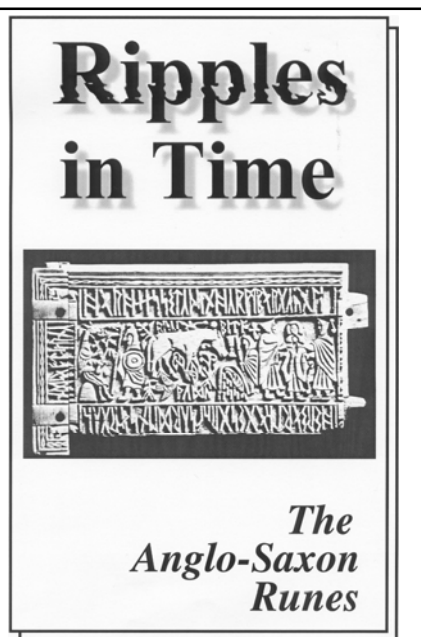
Let me know if ever you visit this part of the world, although I can't see why anyone would want to visit London again – it's coming to resemble a jungle, and crime is worse than New York.

*Renewal* is right! Islam is the real enemy now – not the corpse of Christianity!

Stubba, London

□ All in all, we're growing. I still remind myself and people who think things are going too slow, that we hardly started out 50 years ago. We didn't know about Rud Mills' book until the 60s and our first newsletter came out in 71, Steve's first effort in 72. I think it is important to remind ourselves every now and then that we've come a long way in a short time. A prison clergyman in Florida recently called me a "colleague". Life always has its laughs!

Else, British Columbia



Our original 21-part series has now been combined in a self-contained A4 size saddle-stitched booklet of 20 pages, with a 120 gsm clay cover (as illustrated).

This really is the complete guide to runes from an Anglo-Saxon perspective.

Fully up-to-date in terms of research, *Ripples in Time* reveals, for instance, that Germanic runes probably relate to pre-Classical Greek letter shapes. That is much earlier than most current New Age and even scholarly accounts suggest. The booklet also establishes that our Anglo-Saxon ancestors used runes for a variety of purposes, including divination, magic, and the control of occult powers.

*Ripples in Time* is available for \$Aus10.00 within Australia. (This price includes postage and handling). Overseas residents can obtain *Ripples in Time* for \$US15.00 (US cash), which covers airmail anywhere plus handling.

There is no way around it: you *need* this booklet if you are serious about our ancestral runic heritage.

## Notice Board

For updates on the *Australian Viking Ships Museum*, see:

[www.australianvikingshipsmuseum.surf.to](http://www.australianvikingshipsmuseum.surf.to)

The AVSM aims to build a replica of the Gokstad ship, and also to collect other replica ships that have been built in Australia. In addition there will be a land-based interpretation centre, through which thousands of people will be exposed to our heritage.

*The National Prison Kindred Alliance* aims to help Odinists who are incarcerated in US prisons. Contact: NPKA, PO Box 6493. Napa, CA 94581, USA;

email: [Himmingbjorg@aol.com](mailto:Himmingbjorg@aol.com)

*The Odinist* is back! The world's longest-running Odinist journal has returned after a necessary break. For details write to: PO Box 1973, Parkesville, BC, V9P 1R8, Canada.

*The Scorpion* is an independent magazine dealing in depth with matters relating to the survival of European culture. Its address is: *The Scorpion*, BCM 5766, London, WC1, England or [stormloader.com/thescorpion](http://stormloader.com/thescorpion). A sample issue costs £5.00 sterling.

*éléments: pour la civilisation européenne* is a stylish and intelligent magazine sympathetic to the heathen world-view. Published in French, a year's subscription costs 180 F or 240 F by air. Address: 41 rue Barrault, Paris, France. This is an often brilliant publication!

*Odinic Rite Briefing* is a quarterly publication of the (British) Odinic Rite. Enquiries to: BCM Runic, London, WC1N 3XX

*The Runestone* is a quarterly journal of Asatru, "dedicated to our Gods and Goddesses, to the people of the North, and to the values of courage, freedom, and individuality within the context of kinship". Cheques for \$US15.00 airmail should be payable to S. A. McNallen, PO Box 445, Nevada City, Ca, 95959, USA.

The *Asatru Alliance* believes in "standards of behaviour which are consistent with the spiritual truths of the Norse gods and goddesses and harmonious with our deepest being". The Asatru Alliance, PO Box 961, Payson, Az 85547, USA.

*Theod* has suspended regular publication, but plans to put out occasional special issues from time to time. All back issues will be kept available, and a free brochure is available for the asking at any time, from PO Box 8062, Watertown, NY 13601, USA.

*Pagan Times* Australia's oldest continuing pagan publication, published quarterly, 4 issues: A\$22 (within Australia), A\$30 (within Oceania), (A\$40 (rest of the world). Sample copy A\$6. Payment by cheque, MO, Bankcard, Visa or Mastercard within Australia, elsewhere Visa or Mastercard only. Subscription form available from:

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