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Reincarnation in Odinist belief

Linguists can observe the relationships between the various Indo-European languages, and through a process similar to triangulation they can even reconstruct the original speech of our shared ancestors 6,000 years ago.

In a similar way, scholars of comparative religion can deduce the original structure of the common Indo-European faith before our ancestors spread out far and wide and aspects of their beliefs began to diverge.

Georges Dumézil, for instance, has made it very clear that the Vedic Indian gods Mitra and Varuṇa correspond to the Roman gods Jupiter and Dius Fidius and the Germanic gods Odin and Tyr. In the same way, Indra corresponds to Mars and Thor, while the Vedic Aśvins are clearly an eastern equivalent of the Greek Dioscuri and the Germanic Frey and Njord.

Sometimes, in some regions, an aspect of the ancestral faith has been lost. For instance, in Vedic India, in Greece, and in the heathen North the two pre-eminent “third function” gods were closely related male kinsmen. In Rome, however, these “twins” became regarded as a single god, Quirinus. Even so, we can be confident that the earliest Romans originally thought of Quirinus as a pair of gods similar to Njord and Frey. They must have, since their and our earlier Indo-European ancestors clearly did.

It is sometimes found that even key concepts of the original, unified Indo-European faith have vanished in certain cultures. That happened to a tragic degree among the later Kafirs of Afghanistan (see *Renewal* Vol 4 No 2, “Our forgotten heathen cousins of the Hindu Kush”). Yet it is not hard to deduce what the medieval ancestors of the Kafirs must have believed, even if their later descendants, besieged by Muslims on all sides, failed to maintain those beliefs.

In the case of the Kafirs there is no surviving evidence that they believed in reincarnation. Since almost all the other branches of the Indo-European peoples retained this belief, we can be sure that this had been a key concept for their mutual ancestors. This idea of personal rebirth was shared by, among others, the Sanskrit-speakers of Vedic times, the Pythagoreans and Platonists of ancient Greece, the Celts and even the Romans.

It can therefore be assumed that our Anglo-Saxon forebears also believed in reincarnation, even though no clear *literary* evidence to that effect has yet been discovered in the rather scanty surviving texts.¹ The appropriate evidence therefore has to come from our closest relatives, the Scandinavians.

Two out of the three Helgi Lays of the



Elder Edda refer to the reincarnation of both valkyries and their male human lovers. Helgi and Sigrún, for instance, are specifically said to have lived on this earth more than once.

From the prose sentence at the end of *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* we learn that “Of Helgi and Sváva it is said that they were born again”. From *Helgakviða Hundingsbana* we learn that Sigrún “was Sváva born again”. At the end of this poem the prose gloss states:

Sigrún lived but a short while longer, for grief and sorrow. It was the belief in olden times that men were born again, but that is now called old women’s superstition. Helgi and Sigrún are said to have been born again as Helgi Haddingjaskati and Kára, the daughter of Hálfðan, as is told in the “Lay of Kára” (*now lost – Ed.*)

This last prose comment dates from the thirteenth century, whereas the Helgi poems are usually regarded as being of late Viking Age date. The statement about “old women’s superstition” was therefore written by a Christian, but no-one doubts that his general interpretation of the older poems is correct. This indicates that belief in reincarnation had

been sufficiently widespread to be accurately recalled hundreds of years later.

The Christians were, of course, utterly opposed to the idea of reincarnation. That this hostility also prevailed in the north becomes very clear from *Flateyjarbók*, which gives us a revealing impression of the thoughtful Odinist belief in reincarnation, as opposed to the ignorant Christian fear of this concept.

In *Flateyjarbók*, the Christian King Olaf “the Holy” was descended from an earlier, much-loved heathen king. At one stage Olaf’s Odinist bodyguard rides past the burial mound of the elder Olaf. One of the bodyguards asks, “Tell me, lord ... were you buried here?” Olaf replies that his soul “has never had two bodies, it cannot have them, either now or on the Resurrection Day”. The Odinist warrior persists, saying that when Olaf had ridden by this spot in his previous life he was meant to have said ‘Here we were once, and here we fare now’. The Christian Olaf doesn’t want to hear this. The narrative says:

“And the king was much moved, and clapped spurs to his horse immediately, and fled from the place as swiftly as he might.”

Perhaps the most useful aspect of this scene in terms of its evidentiary value is that the Christian king is clearly familiar with his heathen subjects’ idea of reincarnation; and, unable to counter adequately, he can only bolt from his heathen questioner.

A few other examples of belief in individual reincarnation can be teased out of the surviving literature, but there’s little point in attempting to do so here.² The entire Odinist cosmology involves great cycles of time, with age succeeding age, and with the process beginning again after Ragnarok. This dovetails well with the surviving Eastern versions of our original Indo-European religion, and within this larger cosmology it is obvious that the fate of some soul-complexes would be to be reincarnated.

Significantly, the aim of reincarnation in the eastern versions of our once-common faith was to acquire enough wisdom to avoid the need to be re-born.

Plato also discusses the higher moral purpose of reincarnation in the last chapter of his *Republic*. Essentially, Plato says rebirth

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provides an opportunity for the soul to grow spiritually by encountering different life circumstances.

Perhaps the most touching reference to reincarnation in the surviving Odinist literature is closer to the eastern view.³ In the *Poetic Edda*, Brynhild determines to be buried alongside the dead Sigurd, and it is said:

*Delay her not longer from dying
That born again she never may be.*

There can be no dispute that our early Indo-European ancestors believed in reincarnation, and all the indications suggest that our more recent Germanic ancestors retained that belief.

A materialist, however, might legitimately object that this ancestral belief may have been misplaced. Perhaps our forebears were simply wrong; or (more subtly) perhaps they drew incorrect conclusions from their direct observations. So it is reasonable to ask whether there is any genuine evidence to back up this core aspect of the Indo-European religious outlook.

In recent decades, many people have claimed to remember some aspects of their past lives. There have been a few objective modern studies of these claims. Here is Rupert Sheldrake's summary of the results of these studies:

Some young children spontaneously claim to remember a previous life, and sometimes give details about the life and death of the previous person whom they claim to be. Careful research has shown that some of the details they give cannot have been known to them by normal means. Dozens of case studies of this type have now been documented in detail. (Descriptions of previous lives have also been given by adults under hypnosis, but many seem to contain a large element of fantasy and the evidence for "paranormal" memory is much less impressive than in the spontaneous cases in young children.)⁴

Against this hard evidence, materialists usually offer only a limited range of supposedly logical objections.

For instance, it is often argued that reincarnation cannot be useful to us if we can't recall our former lives. The traditional response to this has usually been that we don't recall being babies, either; but that was still a vital developmental stage. Odinists might well add that our traditional concept of the soul is not unitary, and that only certain aspects of the soul-complex can be reborn.⁵ Hence memory of previous lives is even less likely than memory of our earliest months in this present life.

This brings us to the problem that although we know our Odinist ancestors believed in reincarnation, unfortunately we don't know exactly *how* they believed in it. It seems to the present authors that there are at least five

possibilities:

(1) They believed that the essence of their identity (call it a "soul" for convenience) was reborn into different bodies on the current earth. There is no inherent reason why this has to be time-directional. Modern physics has pretty much abolished the idea of past, present and future, so there's no necessary reason why people dying today shouldn't be reborn next time into an earlier era.

(2) They believed that there are many aspects twined into what we simplistically call a "soul", and that one or more of these aspects is reborn into a new body – again, on this current earth.

(3) They believed in endless universal cycles, just as many modern scientific cosmologists do.⁶ According to many scientists, the force of the Big Bang may eventually diminish to the point at which gravity becomes stronger. Then comes the Big Crunch. The universe will begin to contract – slowly at first, then faster and faster. Time itself may then go into reverse, like playing a video on rewind. After a few billion years "we" will be sitting here on these chairs, wearing these clothes, writing exactly this column. Then the universe will reach maximum compression and therefore infinite gravity, and time will cease to exist. Then there may be another Big Bang, and after more billions of years "we" will again be sitting on exactly these chairs ... And so on. This is all quite possible according to one current scientific theory. But could our ancestors have conceived of? *Yes!* The great emperor and brilliant pagan philosopher Marcus Aurelius wrote:

All things from eternity are of like forms and come round in a circle.

(4) They believed in a multiplicity of universes, and that our "soul" is "reborn" in another universe. This isn't as fanciful as it seems. Many scientists believe that there really is an infinity of almost-disconnected universes. Some think it may be possible to go from one to another via a "tunnel" in a black hole. From what we know of their technology our ancestors shouldn't have been able to imagine black holes (unless the gods told them), but they certainly believed in different but partially-connected universes. Their poetry specifically tells of the Nine Worlds – Midgard, Asgard, and the others.

(5) They had a concept similar to Rupert Sheldrake's idea of "morphic resonance". According to Sheldrake, events in the past directly influence the present via some field that science has not yet been able to detect. He points out, for instance, that it is actually easier to learn a list of real words from a dead language than it is to learn a list of made-up words that have never been spoken before. Sheldrake thinks this is because we can "tune in" to the lingering "resonance" from the very dead people who long ago spoke that language. So maybe memories of reincarnation are partly a similar matter of "tuning in" to former manifestations of our

own "selves".

Some of these ideas might seem rather wild at first glance, but they don't conflict with what scientists are now telling us. And it must be remembered that if it hadn't been for two millennia of Christianity, science would *now* be wherever it *will* be in two thousand years' time. After all, the ancient Greeks knew that the world was a sphere – they even calculated its circumference. So there's no reason why our heathen ancestors couldn't have deduced something like these ideas from pure reasoning.

One aspect of our ancestors' beliefs that is perhaps beyond reconstruction from the remaining evidence is the *purpose* of reincarnation – or, from a different perspective, its goal in terms of our individual lives.

As we have seen, the Brynhild poem seems to suggest that the whole point may be to avoid the need for future incarnations. The poem is, however, rather flimsy evidence, and seems to be composed from a rather uneducated and naive perspective.

On the other hand, a soul that has progressed through hundreds of incarnations, learning moral lessons from all of them, would inevitably be more acceptable to the company of higher beings. In our native spiritual tradition we call such beings "gods". Perhaps the reward of successful reincarnations is to become one with the gods of our ancestors. Yet if a Germanic poem ever actually made such a claim, we can be sure it will have been suppressed by the Christians.

- by Edith and Osred

1. Despite some highly selective quotes from Book 5, Chapter 12 of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, which appear in various new-age writings. The soul of the man in Bede's story seems to return to his own body.

2. However, for a comprehensive summary, see Kragerud, Alv (1989), "Helgediktningen og reinkarnasjonen", *Scripta Islandica* 40, 3-54

3. This may be corroborated by Ibn Fadlan's description of a possibly Scandinavian burial on the Volga, in which the mourners take various precautions aimed at saving the dead chief from being reincarnated. Unfortunately, there is no certainty as to which people Ibn Fadlan actually encountered.

4. Sheldrake, R., *The Presence of the Past*, Harper Collins, 1988, Chapter 12. (Sheldrake was a research fellow at Cambridge with an international reputation as a botanist.)

5 See: http://www.geocities.com/osred/after_death.htm

6. On the correlation between Odinist cosmological beliefs and modern science, see: <http://www.geocities.com/osred/cosmology.htm>

The Trial of Loki

In 1999 we published a pamphlet titled *The Trial of Loki: A study in Nordic heathen morality*. That volume is now out of print in Australia, although the US edition is still available from our friends at Theod (see page 8 for their address).

Having received several requests for information about how Loki “fits in” to Odinism, we have decided to serialise this important work, for the first time, in *Renewal*.

2. Characterisation and perspective

In modern literature we seldom accept a character’s self-assessment at face value. The key characters, the ones whose moves determine the plot of the story as it unfolds, and who therefore set the overall mood, may reveal their character failings through their own words or deeds. Fictional characters, even the ostensible heroes, can and frequently do condemn themselves out of their own mouths. A well-known example of this occurs in Tom Wolfe’s 1988 novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, in which the plot twists progressively reveal that those traits of which Sherrnan McCoy is initially proud amount to little more than greed and amoral vanity.

In religious or mythological literature, however, the modern western reader, conditioned primarily by the Bible, is perhaps less likely to be sceptical about such self-assessment, especially when the author appears to acquiesce in the character’s view of himself. Following the Biblical account of David, for instance, we tend to accept the king’s unpleasant secular deeds as being in some way motivated by worthy religious intentions.

Loki is the main character in *Lokaremma*. His is the voice in 32 of the 65 stanzas. It is Loki’s decision to return to Ægir’s hall, Loki who wishes to stir up strife and hate, and Loki who chooses the moral ground on which to assail the individual gods and goddesses in turn. At this structural level, the poem tempts us to identify with Loki – or at least to give him the same sort of sympathetic hearing that we initially extend to Tom Wolfe’s modern fictional creation.

McKinnell’s analysis seems to take Loki

at face value. According to McKinnell’s reading, Loki’s purpose is simple. He wishes to provoke a final confrontation, with the gods in order to hasten Ragnarök. The gods, for their part, wish to placate Loki in order to defer Ragnarök for some reason. One after another the gods and goddesses give placatory or ineffective responses to Loki’s taunts, and only succeed in confirming that there is some truth in Loki’s accusations. At last Þórr returns from the East. His repeated threats force Loki to flee, after which he is caught and bound.

McKinnell’s blow by blow interpretation of the structure of this poem, including the tactics of why certain gods choose to enter the altercation at specific points, makes a great deal of sense. If we also assume that Loki does not understand Fate, that he cannot see the outcome of Ragnarök, McKinnell’s understanding of Loki’s motives is at least totally consistent. It does not, however, shed much light on the motives of the gods.

On this reading of the poem the gods are, at best, gullible victims of Loki’s provocation, and Þórr, by causing the final rupture, “is merely stupid”. Noting that the poem “gives no hint of” the renewed and purified world after Ragnarök that we glimpse in *Völuspá*, a poem familiar to the author of *Lokasenna*, McKinnell argues that “... the gods have it in their power to delay Ragnarök indefinitely; after they have driven Loki out and subsequently bound him, the initiative passes out of their hands”.

And yet it is clear that Fate is a major theme in *Lokasenna*. It is announced from the moment at which Óðinn tells Viðarr to make space for the Wolf’s father, and is

alluded to many times after that. Most of the gods clearly understand Fate, and there is no obvious reason why they should want to delay it. There is also no particular reason to insist that they have it in their power to delay Ragnarök. After all, with Baldr dead before the poem begins, everything has already been set in motion.

Perhaps the argument that McKinnell puts forward could be seen as being merely Loki’s understanding of the situation. But *Lokasenna* does not insist that we accept Loki’s view of either himself or the gods. Given that a contemporary audience would have been aware of the punishment that Loki brings upon himself by his scandalous outbursts, it may be possible that the author of this remarkable poem had a more complex purpose in mind than even McKinnell’s subtle analysis concedes. At the very least we should remain aware that, however the Loki character in the poem sees things, we are not obliged to accept his perspective. Perhaps the Æsir are wiser than Loki thinks, and perhaps the poet would have expected a contemporary audience to draw this conclusion.

If it is valid to suggest that the poet may have intended to subvert Loki, perhaps to show him up as a traitor who fully deserves the treatment that the gods mete out, then we should ask whether there can be another explanation of why the Æsir tolerate his provocations for so long, one in which the gods’ behaviour is honourable on heathen terms. As McKinnell says, “Verbal contests in Eddic poetry are not motiveless, but have some practical intention and result”. It could be added that in all other such contests, the gods win.

Is *Lokasenna* really an exception?

Check out Mark’s new Odinist website, largely devoted to his own original studies of the *Œra Linda Book*:

www.angelfire.com/folk/skjoldung

More material will be added to this site in the future.



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Hárbarðsljóð and Lokasenna

Part 1, by Mark

The purpose of this essay is to clearly define the relationship between the two Eddaic poems *Hárbarðsljóð* and *Lokasenna*, while at the same time attempting to clear up some misconceptions surrounding them. It shall be demonstrated that, for the most part, the reason they have been misinterpreted for so long is due to the false identification of Odin to Harbard in *Hárbarðsljóð*. Once the evidence is shown that leads to the conclusion that Harbard is Loki in disguise and using one of Odin's names it shall be easier for people to see the link between the two lays. As we notice the points where they meet, Harbard's identity should become apparent, and may even lead some to wonder why Odin was ever placed in the position of a hateful, spiteful mocker of the gods and goddesses.

It has been surmised that *Hárbarðsljóð* was developed from or inspired by *Lokasenna*, given their probable dates of origin and the similarities of their contents. It may even be possible that the poems were composed by the same person or by two individuals within the same skaldic circle. We know that both poems were composed in Norway in the 10th century; i.e. during the final years of heathendom in that region. Once we examine closely the episodes that these two poems present we can see that it is very likely that they both describe the same mythic event.

To begin investigating their content we must first eliminate the greatest obstacle between the two poems, that which led to their separation and misinterpretation: the true identity of Harbard. That this poem, *Hárbarðsljóð*, represents some sort of vulgar domestic dispute between father and son, a "symbolic" conflict between the noble and peasant classes is spurious. Even Bellows argues against the authenticity of this (*The Poetic Edda: The Mythological Poems*, pages. 121-2). The only evidence to support this idea is *Grimnismál* 49 where Harbard is listed as one of Odin's names, and *Hárbarðsljóð* 24, which states, in third person no doubt: "Odin has all the jarls that in conflict fall, but Thor the race of thralls". Nowhere else is such a claim made, that Thor and Odin split the einherjar between them by class; nor does this imply any sort of conflict between the two.

It is true that Harbard is one of Odin's names, but there is no reason why we could not assume that Loki once used this name as well. In fact, the very first strophe of *Hárbarðsljóð* lets us see that Harbard's designation is in itself a falsehood. The name is a kenning for an old man, yet Thor sees him as a "knave of knaves", a "youth of youths" (*sveinn sveina*) and later calls

him a "tot", a "trifling boy" (*kögursveinn*, str. 14, see UGM II pt. 2 pg. 111). So it is definite that the name Harbard, "Hoar-Bear", though perfectly describing Odin, here falsely represents the person who claims it.

It is without a doubt that Odin's association with Harbard in *Hárbarðsljóð* had its foundation in Christian scholarship. It is easy for the Christian writer, who thinks of Odin as a demon without morals or familial devotion, to see the Asagod spewing the venomous bile at Thor that we see in the poem and then have his own son, likewise a demon in their eyes, return hateful remarks back at him. Rydberg notes in UGM II part 2 pg. 129 "... in a number of Icelandic tales, their Christian authors have given Odin the character he was thought to have as a demonic being." Modern scholars often see Odin here as the cunning trickster and Thor as the stupid oaf, which also betrays their Christian bias. With all of this in mind, these authors have no problem seeing Odin as the one who turned princes against each other "But never reconciled them" (*Hárbarðsljóð* 24). One must never confuse a god of war with a demon of discord and strife.

None of the incidents mentioned in *Hárbarðsljóð* can in any way be linked to any known adventure of Odin's. However, Rydberg has proven that all of them either relate Loki's adventures as known in other sources or allude to his nature. Since my goal here is to demonstrate the connection between *Hárbarðsljóð* and *Lokasenna*, and Rydberg has already done an excellent job of interpreting the former in UGM II part 2 pages 103-130, I will only briefly outline the proofs that Loki is in fact Harbard of *Hárbarðsljóð*.

Strophe 8 is a sexual metaphor. Hildolf (Maid-wolf) designates the phallus while Radsey sound, the sound of "rad", (a sexual union) is a euphemism for a vagina. Thus Harbard is saying that his penis (Hildolf), whose "home" is a vagina (Radsey sound) told him to make the boat (an obvious jest). This may have some connection to Thor's journey to Geirrod where giantesses, urinating in the river Vimur (the Elivagar) caused it to swell. Rydberg states that "one event refers to the other", i.e. that the body of water that obstructs Thor's path in *Hárbarðsljóð* is the same as that which caused him trouble before (UGM II part 2. Page 111). Loki's position to make such a vulgar statement, that of the representative of unbridled lust, is well attested to.

Strophe 16, Fjölvar is one of the frost-giants who led the attack on Midgard during the first Fimbulwinter (see *The Prose Edda*, Tröllkonur Nafnapular and UGM II part 2

pages 111-112). This shows that Harbard is an ally of the powers of frost and an enemy of the gods. "All-green" is an epithet of Midgard. When Loki-Harbard then claims, in strophe 18, to have had sex with seven sisters who "seek to wind ropes of sand" during this war this refers to Hymir's daughters, mentioned in *Lokasenna* str. 34, who, just as Gjalp, Greip, Stikla and Rusila, are "personifications of the wild, overflowing rivers that surge through dales, digging riverbeds in their depths and leaving long, continuous sandbanks, 'ropes of sand', along their paths to the sea." (UGM II part 2 page 112). These maidens represent the dangers of overflowing rivers and flash floods.

In strophe 20 Harbard is the lover of myrk-riders, the Teutonic equivalent of evil witches akin to Gullveig-Heid in most cases. However, the rest of the strophe leads us to hypothesize that there may be something more to these riders. In UGM I no. 116 Rydberg identifies Hlebard with Thjazi-Völund (Thjazi and Völund's identity is proven in no. 115) and states that the "stealing of his wits" refers to the event when "Thjazi, who, seeing his beloved (Idun) carried away by Loki and his plan about to be frustrated (this would be his revenge against the gods in the form of the first Fimbulwinter, see below), recklessly rushed into his certain ruin." The "wand" he gave to Loki was the mistletoe, the arrow made of mistletoe that Loki gave to Hödr to shoot at Balder, which caused the latter's death.

William Reaves has postulated that these myrk-riders may be identical to the swan-maids of *Völundarkviða*. Rydberg shows that Hervor is identical to Idun, Olrun is identical to Sif, and Hladgun is the same as Auda. These three maidens are the lovers of the Ivaldi sons Völund, Egil and Slagfinn. Hrafnagaldr. Odins 8 states that Idun "changed disposition, delighted in guile, shifted her shape." Thus these women, who have left the divine clans to be with their scorned lovers in the Myrkwood (*Völundarkviða* 4), may both literally and figuratively be called myrk-riders. If we then compare their longing to leave the Myrkwood with other instances in the lore where such longing occurs and witchcraft, Seidr, is suspected (such as against Frey in *Skírnismál*) then it may be possible that Loki had something to do with their longing, which led to their leaving their "husbands", the Ivaldi sons. This may also relate to Loki's words in *Hárbarðsljóð* 48 and *Lokasenna* 54 about his relations with Sif.

Strophe 24 refers to Loki as Lokerus, Sifka-Bekki and Blind Bölvis in Saxo's *Historia Danica* and Beowulf. Here he has

turned Gudhorm and Hadding against one another, a conflict which led to many deaths, and never brought about reconciliation. This is the same disposition that Loki held when he was amongst the gods.

Strophes 30-32 refer to Loki's exploits with Idun, when he was sent off to find her. It was then that he held the linen-white maid after turning her into a nut and flying off in falcon form. He needs Thor's help because Thjazi-Völund was chasing him in eagle-guise towards Asgard. This help Thor gladly gave for the security of Idun and the Asa-citadel.

Strophes 40-42 refer to Loki's part in Thor's campaign against Geirrodd where he had led Thor astray with his lies, telling him that "green paths lead towards Geirrodd's home" (*Pórsdrápa* 1). Thor's statement about Harbard offering the war party "hard terms" refers to this.

Now that proofs of Harbard's true identity have been given we shall examine the actual relationship between *Hárbarðsljóð* and *Lokasenna*. To begin with, let's look at what Rydberg has to say about this: "In plan and construction,

(*Hárbarðsljóð*) closely resembles *Lokasenna*. The main figure in both is Loki. *Lokasenna* places him in the midst of a gathering of gods and goddesses and thus he gets the opportunities to give his desire for abuse a multi-faceted workout. But the multitude of figures there prevents a more thorough characterisation of them. The whole legacy of objectionable incidents, which the ethically perfected mythology inherited from a time when the gods were more forces of nature than personalities, is exposed, made worse, garnished with lies by an enemy of the gods and cast in their face. *Hárbarðsljóð* with just its two figures has an incomparably better opportunity to characterise them and do so in a lively manner." UGM II part 2, page 129.

In investigating the connection between these two poems it is important to consider their placement within the Teutonic epic as proven by Rydberg. Such placement is not difficult when we look at passages that describe events that have already taken place. For instance, we know that the episode described in *Lokasenna* would be placed towards the end, because Loki describes so many things that have already happened, such as the slaying of Balder (str. 28), the slaying of Thjazi-Völund (str. 50-51), Thor's adventures at Fjalar's (str. 60) and his battle against Hrugnir (str. 61). Furthermore, as we learn from the concluding prose, this is the last time Loki interacts with the gods and goddesses before they capture him and bind him until Ragnarok (see UGM II part 2 page 208 #146 & FG page 136-7). Upon close inspection of *Hárbarðsljóð* we also find that this episode would have to have taken place near the end of the epic. If Rydberg is correct in assuming that strophe 24 of *Hárbarðsljóð* refers to Loki's role as Sifka and Blind among the Teutons, when he turned Gudhorm-Jörmunrek and Hadding-Thjodrek against one another "but never reconciled them", then it is from this that we get our key to *Hárbarðsljóð*'s placement. This episode is one of the last known the *ár alda*, the age of mythological events, but takes place right before the events described in *Lokasenna* (see UGM II part 2 pg. 204-205 #s 130 & 132; and FG pages 123-129). Thus, if Loki is describing this event in *Hárbarðsljóð*, then his meeting with Thor on the Radsey Sound must have taken place after Sifka-Blind-Loki's treachery against Halfdan's sons, Gudhorm and Hadding. Consequently, this would place *Hárbarðsljóð* in exactly the same time frame as *Lokasenna*.

From this we can conclude that *Hárbarðsljóð* and *Lokasenna* are two parts of the same mythic event. By connecting the two it is easy to see how they can fit together. Rydberg has noticed that "Harbard's task, as the song expressly points out, is to delay the world-protecting god on his way home." However, it is not his journey home that Loki inhibits, it is his journey to Aegir's annual mead feast, an event special enough to have such a poem (or two poems) written about it. Thus, in *Hárbarðsljóð* Loki is purposefully delaying Thor, while in *Lokasenna* Thor is late for the gathering. With this delay Loki has enough

time to abuse the gods and goddesses and even to kill one of Aegir's servants before Thor arrives. The Asagod has had to find his way across the sound to the meadhall. It is possible that Thor expected to find a ferryman on the sound, perhaps one of Aegir's servants, and that Loki presumably killed the servant to take his boat when Thor shows up.

conclusion in next issue

It is also probable that Loki remains there for the purpose of deterring Thor from going to the feast at all. He originally tries to

Renewal

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Ripples in Time



The Anglo-Saxon Runes

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.

- *News on Norse England* ● *The Clans of Dixie*
- *Ritual Mutilation*

What's new

Getting on together

Most historians have traditionally assumed that the speakers of Old Norse and Old English in Viking Age England could only communicate through interpreters.

A recent book by Mathew Townend (see details below) questions this assumption. Townend brings to his study expertise in what is called "intelligibility testing", a set of procedures used to measure the differences between dialects in Third World countries.

There is no shortage of evidence, ranging from the adaptation of personal and place-names from one language to the other, through to records of the historical social interaction between the two peoples.

Perhaps most tellingly, Townend notes that many surviving sources show Anglo-Saxons and Norse speakers having to use interpreters when dealing with entirely different folk, whereas Englishmen and Norsemen are not depicted as needing interpreters.

From these and other arguments Townend concludes that there was "adequate mutual intelligibility" between Old English and Old Norse. By this he means that speakers of one language could be more-or-less understood by speakers of the other. Indeed, both groups smoothed off the rough edges of their native tongues at about the same time, for instance by dropping unwieldy inflexions

This has implications for the question of how long Norse continued to be spoken in England. There are Norse runic inscriptions from Cumbria, in the north-west, that probably date from the 12th century. According to earlier scholars, Norse had probably died out in this region and been reintroduced by later settlers. Townend's book suggests that the language of the Vikings was still spoken in parts of England in early Plantagenet times.

It is a shock to think that during the quarrel between those two proud Normans, Henry II and Thomas à Becket, parts of England may well have been Norse-speaking.

★ *Language and History in Viking Age England. Linguistic relations between speakers of Old Norse and Old English*, by Mathew Townend, Turnhout, 2002.

Clash of cultures

While on the subject of white ethno-history, some readers may be unaware of a relatively new trend in American historiography.

The Civil War, it seems, may have been largely a class between the predominantly Celtic South and the mainly Anglo-Saxon North.

According to Grady McWhiney's 1988 book *Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South* (University of Alabama Press), about three-quarters of the whites in the American South came originally from Ireland, Scotland and

Wales, while a similar percentage in the North was of English and Scottish lowlands extraction (together with a sizeable German and Scandinavian minority in some parts).

Their cultures reflected this difference. In the South there was more emphasis on open-range grazing, and a sensual lifestyle that combined extreme hospitality with extreme violence. In the aptly named New England, by contrast, commerce, self-discipline and frugality were emphasised.

It has even been argued, and quite convincingly, that the military tactics of the Southerners, which contributed to their defeat, were grounded in their Celtic past. One of the greatest weaknesses in Southern tactics was the mass-formation infantry charge. By at least 1850 it had been made redundant by technological changes. Yet the Southerners persisted with it, and were mown down like the charging clansmen at Culloden.

This publication sees no romance whatsoever in the American Civil War, a conflict that killed off two percent of the American population. Nearly 700,000 descendants of the Nation of Odin were slaughtered in those dismal and bloody years, and the cultures they fought for would now be unrecognisable to them.

Yet we have nothing but praise for the efforts of historians who dig beneath the surface and rediscover long-forgotten facts about our own people, including the survival of some aspects of our ancient cultures – for good or ill – until comparatively recent times.

The unkindest cut

Until recently very few Australian boys, and absolutely no girls, were circumcised. Times change, alas.

For the last fifteen years or so there have been reports in the media that Australian-born young girls of Muslim descent, mainly from Africa, are being castrated at the wishes of their parents. At its worst this barbaric process involves removal of the labia and clitoris and sewing up the vagina. (The mainstream media coyly refer to this as "female circumcision", but *Renewal* will stand by the more honest word, "castration".)

The purpose of this procedure is – and the scare quotes are appropriate – "religious". It seems that the desert god enjoys the sacrifice of helpless little girls' private parts.

What has been only very briefly reported on in the media is the growth in male circumcision among little boys unfortunate enough to be born into fundamentalist Christian cults.

Male circumcision is also a "religious" rite, widely practiced by Jews, Muslims, and Christians in America. It is thought to have been an Egyptian invention. Apparently the ancient Egyptians circumcised their slaves to make them easily identifiable. For reasons

unknown it became a means of tribal identification among the descendants of those slaves.

It is a process that has no health benefits. Some people argue that the foreskin can collect secretions, but so can the ears, eyes and nose. All that is necessary is elementary hygiene.

Cancers of both the penis and the cervix have been linked to the absence of circumcision. There seems to be no scientific evidence to support this claim. In fact, cervical cancer appears to be related to the woman's personal hygiene, among other factors – mainly hereditary. Yet even if a link could be established beyond doubt, that would not be a reason for surgery. The most common cancers could be avoided by surgical removal of girls' breasts or boys' prostates. No-one advocates such radical measures.

Male circumcision also brings with it severe risks, including gangrene, infection, septicemia, ulceration, and the need for later skin grafts. There are even recorded cases of complete loss of the penis as a result of circumcision.

Our Odinst ancestors had never heard of circumcision, at least not in their own homelands. No doubt they held the healthy view that nature gave us the bodies we are born with for a very good reason. (In fact, the male foreskin seems to help prevent ulceration during the nappy stages of infancy.)

We at *Renewal* wish that, like our ancestors, we also had never heard of such cruel and disgusting practices. Unlike the desert god, our beautiful deities would never demand that small children should be subjected to torture and sexual mutilation.

Yet as this issue is being prepared, animal welfare groups in America are trying to ban the importation of Australian lamb. They argue that the Australian sheep-farming practice of "mulesing" is cruel. This operation involves removing two pieces of wrinkly skin from the britch of the sheep, where blowfly infestation typically occurs. Mulesing actually saves millions of sheep every year from being consumed alive by maggots. Until a better prevention may be found, it is a very humane procedure.

Given that America has more than its fair share of Christians, Jews and Muslims, many of whom are happily mutilating their own children for no good reason at all, we suggest that our animal-loving cousins in Vinland could find more fitting targets for their anger and outrage.



Dear New Pontifex Maximus,

Sorry to hear about the death of the last bloke. Pope John Paul Ringo, wasn't it? Anyway, I hope you're an instant hit with his billion or so fans. I know it can be hard to stand in for a band leader who has moved on, but it's been done before. Not many people nowadays spend every waking moment asking "Whatever happened to Pete Best?", do they now? Even Crowded House might still reform without Paul Hester.

So good luck, and I'm sure you'll make it. My advice is to take a deep breath, get straight out there on stage, and wow them. But just in case things are a bit rocky at first, I've decided to try to give you a hand.

I was interested in pontiff Ringo's last message to the groupies. "To humanity," he said, "which sometimes seems to be lost and dominated by the power of evil, selfishness and fear ..." You know the rest ...

Well, I suppose the character he had in mind, that evil one who wants to dominate other people, could well be someone like yours truly, Mistress Ota. Still, I've had a bit of a think, and I'm ready to give this "forgiveness-and-reconciliation" gig a whirl.

Now, here's the plan. Despite all his years in the band the last bloke left quite a few things undone (as did some of his priests, but that's a different matter), and I noticed that in a few of the final reviews he copped a fair bit of stick over some of them.

It seems to me that the big gap is in the matter of saints. You see, his former eminence made 1340 people into Blessed, but didn't get around to promoting them to the senior division, of saints. My understanding is that Blessed are allowed to appeal to the Big Critic in the sky, but everyone knows they're just warm-up acts and not what the fans really come for.

Now, one of those 1340 also-rans is an Australian, Mother Mary MacKillop, aka "Blessed Mary of the Cross". I don't expect you to be on top of the back-list just yet, so I'll fill you in a bit.

Mary was born in Melbourne in 1842, then excommunicated in Adelaide in 1871, then de-excommunicated in Rome the next year. She died in 1909. Since then people have been agitating for her to become a saint. Way back in 1926 your Vatican CSIs interviewed witnesses to her life. In 1995 Pope Ringo beatified her. It's taken a while for her just to get that far, and there's still no end in sight. And you know, your fans down

Ota's Talking Point

here in Oz are starting to get just a tad impatient. They want a real saint on the official play-list, one who's had a bit of experience Down Under.

And I reckon I'm just the girl for the gig.

Sure, there's a teensy weensy problem. You're meant to be a Catholic before you can be a Blessed, much less a saint. Still, a lot of people have criticised the last bloke for being a stickler for rules like "no frangers", for instance, or bans on married priests. So if it's okay for a new pontiff to show a bit of flexibility on really serious bizzo like that, surely the fact that I'm not a Mick is pretty much a mere technicality. Even the last bloke bent the sainthood rules a bit in his own day. Remember Edith Stein, who was sent to Auschwitz for being a Jew? That minor doctrinal hiccup didn't stop Pope Ringo from canonising her.

Besides, I've got a better CV than Blessed Mary of the Cross. Okay, I admit I made most of mine up, but so did Blessed M's fans. Still, even the bits that I didn't make up are pretty impressive.

Hey, did you know that in 1961 a woman reckoned she'd been cured of leukemia after praying to good old Momma Mozza? Well, only the other day my flatmate had a sore tummy. She said, "Stop laughing, Ota, you bitch, and do something to help." And guess what? Three days later she was cured! Now I ask you, is that not a miracle? And I promise you, your expert dudes from Rome are free to pop down here and authenticate it.

But wait, there's more. Let's face it, apart from her alcoholism, and maybe her on-again-off-again excommunication, Mother Mozza's life was pretty boring. Whereas canonising a wild heathen kid from inner Sydney would give your rather tired-looking church a bit of an overdue make-over.

And talking about facing things, you couldn't really say Mozza was much of a looker. Better than Mother Theresa, admittedly, though that's not saying much. Now I'm not suggesting you need to go really upmarket in your search for a new image. No need to offer a blank cheque to, say Claudia Schiffer (hiss! scratch!). But at least a girl who knows what to do with a tub of Vaseline would be a good start. (What's that, Your Pontyness? No, don't be silly! You spread Vaseline on your teeth before a photo shoot. It gives them a glossy look.)

Then of course there's the whole matter of merchandising. I know your church has always been pretty big on selling kitschy trinkets to the cultists – bits of the One True Heart and things like that. Really, though, what could you do along those lines with Mother Mozza? Cigarette lighters shaped like booze bottles, maybe, or at best fridge magnets with little holograms. You know: from one angle you see her excommunicated, and from the other view she's happily back in the cult.

That's about it with Mother Mozza of the

Cross. But just think of the marketing possibilities that would be opened up if you made me Mistress Ota of Down Under. Mobile phone covers made of carpet spring immediately to mind. Well, maybe your team isn't quite ready for that. So perhaps I'd better be called something like Mistress Ota of King's Cross.

(Pardon, your Maximus? Oh, sorry! Of course you've never heard of "the Cross". It's a grungy inner suburb of Sydney, Australia. "Grungy"? Well, that means ... Oh, let's just say it's the sort of place where puffers dress up as nuns for the annual gay and lesbian parade. You still don't get it? Well, it's a bit like ... You know those priests of yours with the to-die-for frocks who have a special mission to little boys? Yeah, a bit like that.

(What's that? No, I'm perfectly aware that Mother Mozz isn't famous for any special compassion toward little boys. No, I'm certainly not suggesting she was really a man in drag – though now you mention it, when you look at her face in the photos ... Actually, let's not go down that path.)

Getting back to Mistress Ota of King's Cross, let's concentrate on the merchandising opportunities. Forget about silly mementos like genuine sweat-stains from Mother Mozza's wimple. My canonisation would give your Vatican MBA gurus the chance to think really big.

Let's just briefly brain-storm the idea of "the Cross". Some of your fans would probably think of a couple of planks nailed together. Well, we have plenty of those in establishments around King's Cross that cater to the leather crowd. Should be able to prise off quite a few genuine splinters to flog to your fans. (The "leather crowd", your Pontymax? They're, umm ... well, they're into being scourged. Yes, very much like Mel Gibson's *Passion* film, though not quite as bloody.)

Well, by now I'm sure you get the general idea. By canonising yours truly, you'll start to clear up that back-log of 1340 wannabe saints. You also lock in your Antipodean fans by giving a halo to a chick from Down Under – and one who's much less dowdy than Momma Mozz. To cap it off, you can open up a whole new range of kinky kitsch.

Of course, I know saints are meant to be dead, while I'm very much alive. I don't think that's too much of a problem, though, given that the legend who founded your band in the first place can be promoted as being both dead and alive at the same time. Just bill me as "the nightmare life-in-death". Anything you like, as long as we both become zillionaires.

Dear Ed ...

☐ Allow me to congratulate you on a culturally and spiritually enriching publication.

Autumn, Queensland

☐ I really enjoyed your article on "Odinism and carols". This is something that is of particular importance to my fundamentals investigations. Your plan for an Odinist song-book is precisely what I would like to see done with the music fundamentals. I have a few added suggestions for this: there are certain strophes in the Eddas and Sagas that seem to have originally been part of ancient Teutonic hymns. The "Hail to Dag" in *Sigrdrifumal* first comes to mind. We can possibly take Eddaic fragments and piece them together to create new Odinic paeans. I have already done this with the above and other strophes found elsewhere.

I also think that it would be very important for a person to collect all of the works that would be used in such a book, then make sure that each song not only represents our heritage well, but also sounds good. For this purpose it would be important to enlist the aid of a composer and some folk musicians in the project. There is a wealth of sources we could use for such a book, even the Rig Veda could provide some hymns we could change to fit our faith, but their musical worth should be as valuable as their literary worth. Thus both scholars and musicians should go over every song with a fine-toothed comb before accepting it into the song-book.

We should also focus on making sure that the songs introduced into the text suit all of the religious needs for such music. If I were to prepare such a text I would make a checklist of all the circumstances in which we would need music and try to have songs fitted for each purpose. Mainly these would be for seasonal rites, rites of passage and devotional songs to particular deities, but other needs may become apparent.

You know, I read somewhere that "Deck the Halls" has a Welsh pagan origin, so that might be one to include as well.

Mark, Vinland

☐ *Despite some earlier interest expressed on a couple of lists, no-one has come forward to co-ordinate an Odinist musical project of this kind. Mark's suggestions are a great input to the general idea, but there will be no project until a suitable person comes forward.*

☐ Please accept my dues for more great issues of *Renewal*. Always interesting and varied articles and features.

Edwulf, New Zealand

☐ Got the *Renewals* the other day. Interesting topics covered, I especially enjoy Ota's *Talking Points*.

By strange coincidence, not long ago a friend lent me several of Stirling's "Draka"

novels, and so I blinked a few times when I saw that these were a subject of conversation from *Renewal* readers. (The writing is a bit "B-grade", I even found a line ripped straight out of the movie *Platoon*. But interesting still.)

Sam, Western Australia

P.S. I'm pretty sure that line from *Platoon* is where Sgt Elias says after the disastrous ambush: "Lace up all your extra ammo and frags. Don't leave nothing for the dinks." I'll have to hunt for that in *Marching Through Georgia*, but I think it's that line, from which Stirling only changes a few words.

☐ *This publication is currently interviewing S.M. Stirling, the author of the Draka series. The transcript should appear in the next issue.*

☐ Welcome to the Wolfhearthandfriends group at Yahoo! Groups, a free, easy-to-use email group service. Please take a moment to review this message.

The Wolf Hearth is a Melbourne based group of Heathens. This list however, is an open forum for all Melbourne Heathens, including non-members of the Wolf Hearth. Interstate and international friends are also welcome.

To learn more about the Wolfhearthandfriends group, please visit <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Wolfhearthandfriends>

To start sending messages to members of this group, simply send email to Wolfhearthandfriends@yahoo.com

If you do not wish to belong to Wolfhearthandfriends, you may unsubscribe by sending an email to Wolfhearthandfriends-unsubscribe@yahoo.com

Regards,

Moderator, Wolfhearthandfriends

☐ The British census of 2001 reveals that Christianity is still the main religion in England and Wales, appealing to 71% of the population. Islam comes next.

Among the interesting smaller religions, spiritualism was the eighth largest faith, with 32,404 adherents. Paganism appealed to 30,569 people. This figure does not include Wiccans or Druids, who even when combined came to fewer than ten thousand.

Let's assume the worst, and estimate that two thirds of the self-declared "pagans" are "fluffy bunny" types. That would still leave ten thousand hardline pagans in England and Wales, about the same number as Wiccans and Druids combined. That is more than enough people to pay for and justify a major pagan temple, probably of necessity in one of the big cities.

Caro, Sydney

Notice Board

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

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

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. 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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