

MEDI 360 (F01) 2006

Selected Topics in Medieval Culture: “Old Norse Gods and Heroes”

David Strong Building -
C108

T. W. F: 1:30 - 2:20

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Required Texts

1. Edda
2. The Poetic Edda
3. Nordic Religions.in the Viking Age
4. Eyrbyggja Saga
5. The Saga of the Volsungs

Coursepack

Reserve Texts



Course Description

This course will provide an overview of the myths, religious beliefs, and heroic traditions of the Vikings up to and including their conversion to Christianity. Primary sources will be studied (in English translation) to provide an understanding of how this knowledge has been preserved and the inherent biases of such material. We will read introductory excerpts from non-Germanic sources including Tacitus and Ibn Fadlan. The major focus of the course, however, will be on medieval Scandinavian sources such as Saxo Grammaticus, Snorri Sturluson, the Icelandic Poetic Edda, and several Icelandic sagas. Examples drawn from archeological artifacts, art works, and movies will also be discussed.

Course Objectives

1. To discuss the original sources that preserve knowledge of Norse mythology.
2. To consider concepts and theories relevant to mythological sources.
3. To discuss the Norse world view and religious practices.
4. To examine tensions inherent in the conversion to Christianity.
5. To explore how this mythology has been used in the past and the present.

Course Outline for Fall 2006

Texts: **NR** = Nordic Religions; **SE** = Snorri's Edda; **PE** = Poetic Edda;
SV = Saga of the Volsungs; **ES** = Eyrbyggja Saga; **CP** = Coursepack; **CWeb** = Course webpage

Week 1: Sept. 6 – 8, 2006

WEDNESDAY: Introduction to the course.

FRIDAY: Overview

CP: “Pagan Myth and Religion”.....p. 3 - to the end of the first paragraph top of p.10

NR: Ch. 1 - "The Cultures and History of the Viking-Age North"..... p. 10 - 28
(you can skim over the sections on “Sámi and Baltic Finns” and “Scandinavian, Sámi, and Balto-Finnic Interrelations”)

Week 2: Sept. 12 – 15, 2006

TUESDAY: Tacitus - *Germania*

CP: Tacitus (Part 1):p. 21 - 28
(focus on sections: Inhabitants; Government; Deities; Auguries; Punishments; and Funeral Rites;
Their Children; Sports. Passion for Gambling)

CP: Tacitus (Part 2)p.29 - 36
(focus on sections numbered: 31, 39, 40, 43, 45)

WEDNESDAY: Ibn Fadlan and Adam of Bremen

CP: “Ibn Fadlan's Account”p. 37 - 41

HANDOUTS: 1) The Risala and Haddingus 2)Adam of Bremen

FRIDAY: Saxo Grammaticus and Snorri Sturluson
NR: Ch. 2 - "Religions in the Viking Age: Contexts and Concepts for Analysis" p. 30 - 44

Week 3: Sept. 19 –22, 2006

TUESDAY: *Heimskringla*
CP: “The Saga of the Ynglings” (“Snorri’s Foreword” and the saga).....p. 42 - 67

WEDNESDAY: Kings and Gold
PE: “Grottasongr” (“The Song of Grotti”)p. 260-263
SE: The story of Frodi's magic mill, Grottibottom of p. 106 - 107
Two stories about Hrolf Kraki.....p. 110 - 112
The story of King Holgi who was buried in a mound of gold and silverp. 112 - 113
HANDOUT: Saxo - Vol. I - Bk. II - p. 47 - 50

FRIDAY:QUIZ # 1

Week 4: Sept. 26 – 29, 2006

TUESDAY: Intro to the Eddas (Poetic and Prose), kennings and heiti
CP: “Pagan Myth and Religion”2nd paragraph p. 10 - 20
SE: “Introduction” p. vii-xix
“Prologue” p. 1-5; and from the bottom of p. 64 - top of p. 66

WEDNESDAY: Creation, Yggdrasil, Giants, Gods & Goddesses
HANDOUT: 1) Yggdrasil 2) Odin’s Genealogy
SE: creation plus lists of gods and goddessesp. 7 - 31
NR: Ch. 3 - "Gods, Guides, and Guardians: Spiritual Aids"p. 47 - 68

FRIDAY: Odin
PE: “Völuspá” (“The Seeress’s Prophecy”).....p. 3 - 13
“Hávamál” (“Sayings of the High One”).....p. 14 - 38
SE: Odin’s hall and the food served there etc.p. 32 - 34
Building of the gods’ strongholdp. 35 - 36

Week 5: Oct. 3 – 6, 2006

TUESDAY: Odin and seiðr, Freyja, Od
PE: “Vafþrúðnismál” (“Vafthrudnir’s Sayings”).....p. 39 - 49
SE: The story of how poetry originated(bottom of p. 61 - top of p. 64)
NR: Ch 6 - "The Intercultural Dimensions of the Seiðr Ritual"p. 122 - 138

WEDNESDAY: Odin, Valkeries, Freyja
SE: The story of the eternal battle of the Hiadnings.....p. 122 - top of 124
CWeb: “The Tale of Sörli” (“Sörla þátrr” - Hjadningavíg)(this equals 7 pages)
CP: Saxo - “Book Eight” and notesp. 68 - 71
PE: “Volundarkviða” (“The Lay of Volund”) p. 102 - 108

FRIDAY: Thor
PE: “Hymiskviða” (“Hymir’s Poem”)..... .p. 78 - 83
“Þrymskviða” (“Thrym’s Poem”)..... .p. 97 - 101
SE: The story of Thor’s expedition to the court of Utgarda-Loki p. 37 - 46
The story of Thor’s fishing for the Midgard serpentp. 46 - 47

Week 6: Oct. 10 – 13, 2006

TUESDAY: Thor
PE: “Harbarðsljóð” (“Harbard’s Song”)p. 69 - 78
“Alvíssmál” (“All-Wise’s Sayings”)..... p. 109 - 113
SE: The story of Thor's encounter with the giant Hrungnirp. 77 - mid 81
The story of Thor's visit to Geirrod's courtsmid p. 81 - top of 86
CWeb: “Haustlong” (“Autumn Long” - Thor’s dual with Hrungnir scene)(equals 1 ¼ pages)

WEDNESDAY: Loki
SE: Loki's mini-bio.....p. 26
The story of Loki's 3 offspring with the giantess Angrbodap. 27 - 29
The story of Thiassi’s abduction of Idunnp. 59 - 60

The origin of Sif's golden hair and 5 other treasuresp. 96 - 97

CWeb: “Sörla þáttir” (“The Tale of Sorli”) - Loki steals Freyja's necklace..... (see Wk. 4 - Wed.)

“Haustlong” (“Autumn Long” - Idunn scene)(equals ½ page)

FRIDAY: Loki’s Flyting; the Death of Baldr; the Binding of Loki

PE: “Lokasenna” (“Loki’s Quarrel”)..... p. 84 - 96

“Baldrs draumar” (“Baldr’s Dreams”)..... ...p. 243 - 245

SE: Death of Baldr and Binding of Loki.....p. 48 - 52

Aegir’s Feast and references to “Lokasenna” first ½ of 2nd paragraph p. 95

CP: : Saxo - “Book Three”p.72 - 79

Week 7: Oct. 17 – 20, 2006

TUESDAY: Freyr; Heimdal; Ragnarok

PE: “Skírnismál” (“Skirnir’s Journey”)p. 61 - 68

SE: The story of Freyr's wooing of Gerdp. 31 – middle of 32

The twilight of the gods (Ragnarok)bottom of p. 52 – middle of 57

WEDNESDAY: Guest Speaker

Anatoly Liberman - "Baldr and the Mistletoe"

This lecture will be in Clearihue C112 and it will also open to the general public.

FRIDAY: Loki’s Pre-trial Discussion

Week 8: Oct. 24 – 27 , 2006

TUESDAY: Loki’s Trial

- Position Paper assignment must be handed in for admission to class discussion.

WEDNESDAY: Interactions Between Gods, and Humans

PE: “Grímnismál” (“Grimnir’s Sayings”)p. 50 - 60

“Rigspula” (“The List of Rig”)p. 246 - 252

“Hyndluljóð” (“The Song of Hyndla”).....p. 253 - 257

FRIDAY: QUIZ # 2

Week 9: Oct. 31 - Nov. 3, 2006

TUESDAY: The Volsungs - Selection of Poems

PE: “Helgakviða Hundingsbani II” (“A Second Poem of Helgi Hundingsbani).....p. 132 - 141

“Sigdrífumál” (“The Lay of Sigdrifa”)p. 166 - 173

“Helreið Brynhildar” (“Brynhild’s Ride to Hell”)p. 192 - 194

“Atlakviða” (“The Lay of Atli”)..... p. 210 - 216

WEDNESDAY: The Volsungs (part 1)

SE: The history of the gold of the Niflungs. middle of p. 99 - 106

VS: *The Saga of the Volsungs*: Ch. 1 - 23:.....p. 35 - 73

FRIDAY:The Volsungs (part 2)

VS: *The Saga of the Volsungs* - Ch. 24 - 44:..... p. 73 - 109

Week 10: Nov. 7 – 10, 2006

TUESDAY: Saxo: Starkad

CP: "Book Six from the History of the Danes".....from 2nd paragraph on p. 84 - 96

"Book Eight from the History of the Danes".....p. 97 - 101

WEDNESDAY: *Gautrek’s Saga*: Starkad

CP: *Gautrek's Saga*.....p. 102 - 117

FRIDAY: QUIZ # 3

Week 11: Nov. 17, 2006

FRIDAY: *Eyrbyggja Saga*
ES: Chapter: 1 - 38..... p. 25 - 102

Week 12: Nov. 21 – 24, 2006

TUESDAY: *Eyrbyggja Saga*
ES: Chapter: 39 - 55..... p. 103 - 166

WEDNESDAY: Interactions with Ghosts and Healers
NR: Ch 4 - “Visitors from Beyond”.....p. 70 - 91
Ch 5 - “Concepts of Health and Healing”..... focus on: p. 104 - 116

FRIDAY: The Conversion to Christianity (**ESSAY DUE**)
NR: Ch 7 - “The Coming of the Cross”..... focus on: p. 152 - 163
CP: Ch 154 - 157 from *Njal's Saga*p. 124 - 130

Week 13: Nov. 28 - Dec. 1, 2006

TUESDAY: The Conversion to Christianity
NR: Ch 8 – “Achieving Faith” focus on: p. 191 - 204

WEDNESDAY: The Conversion to Christianity
CP: Ch 100 - 105 from *Njal's Saga*.....p. 118 - 123

FRIDAY: CP: “The Tale of Thorstein Shiver” p. 131 - 133