

Sources: Our knowledge of Viking-Age religious beliefs and mythology comes from a combination of later medieval texts, contemporary foreign accounts, and archaeological evidence (Clunies Ross, 231). The main written sources were compiled in Iceland centuries after the conversion to Christianity: 1. The *Prose Edda* (by Snorri Sturluson in the 1220s). 2. The *Poetic Edda* (anonymous collection incl. *Völuspá*, *Hávamál*, *Grímnismál*, *Vafþrúðnismál*) (Nanoushka; Clunies Ross, 232; Jesch, 291). 3. The *Gesta Danorum* (by the Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus, a Latin work from the early 13th century) presents historicized versions of pagan myths (Clunies Ross, 233). Because these texts were written by Christians long after the Viking Age, they often filtered the old myths through a medieval European lens (Hultgård, 212). Contemporary written accounts come primarily from foreign observers: 4. *Risāla*, by the Arab diplomat Ibn Fadlan, who witnessed a Rus chief's ship cremation near Bolghar in the 10th century. 5. *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, *Descriptio insularum aquilonarium*, by the Christian cleric Adam of Bremen, who described the great sacrificial temple at Uppsala in the 1070s (Price, 257; Hultgård, 215). 6. Material and archaeological sources are thus crucial. They reveal religious practices that we can't see in texts (Price, 257). Evidence includes burial customs, Gotlandic picture stones depicting mythological scenes like Thor fishing for the World Serpent, and personal amulets such as miniature Thor's hammers and Valkyrie figurines (Wilson, 326; Gräslund, 253). 7. Toponymic evidence (place-names) containing elements such as *vi*, *hov*, or *lund*, combined with deity names (e.g., *Odensvi*, *Torsåker*), maps the geographic spread of specific pagan cult sites across Scandinavia (Brink, 64; Hultgård, 212).

Beliefs: Viking-Age religion was a polytheistic, pagan, nature-based religion without strict boundaries, and a non-doctrinal community religion deeply integrated into social life, warfare, and agriculture, focusing more on the correct performance of rituals and *siðr* (acts and customary behavior) than on personal faith (Nanoushka; Haywood, 48; Hultgård, 212). The cosmos was envisioned around the World Tree, Yggdrasil, which connected different realms such as Midgård (the world of humans), Asgard (home of the gods - culture, stability), and Utgard/Jotunheim (the realm of the hostile giants - nature, chaos) (Nanoushka; Byock; Hultgård, 213). The Scandinavians believed the world would eventually be destroyed in the apocalyptic Ragnarök and then reemerge (Hultgård, 213; Byock). The mythology featured two main families of gods, the Æsir and the Vanir, who lived together after a ceasefire (Byock). Odin was the complex god of wisdom, poetry, war, and death, especially associated with the ruling elite and warriors (Schjødtt, 219). He was also associated with magical skills and shamanic practices, having sacrificed himself on Yggdrasil to obtain the runes (Schjødtt, 220; Byock). Thor was the thunder god and the primary defender of the cosmos against the chaotic giants, wielding his hammer Mjöllnir (Schjødtt, 220). He was widely popular among farmers and the general population as a protector of order and weather (Byock). The Vanir, primarily Njord, Freyr, and Freyja, were deities of fertility, wealth, and sexuality (Schjødtt, 221). Beyond the main gods, popular religion included many supernatural beings (Raudvere, 235): the Norns managed the past, present, and future, while the Valkyries chose the dead on the battlefield and guided them to Valhalla (Raudvere, 238; Byock). *Seiðr* was primarily practiced by female seers known as *völur* (Price, 245). Burial customs reflected a belief in an afterlife requiring provisions (Price, 257). Funerals often involved highly orchestrated, dramatic rituals lasting several days, sometimes including animal and human sacrifice (Price, 267). The dead were cremated with expensive grave goods to equip the dead for the afterlife (Price, 258).

Changes: The religious landscape changed profoundly during the Viking Age (c. 800–1100), due to the gradual integration of Scandinavia into Christian Europe (Brink, 621). This transition was a prolonged elite-driven process that underwent phases of infiltration, mission, and institutional organization (Gräslund, Lager, 635; Brink, 621–622). In the early stages, the two coexisting belief systems fused (Gräslund, 642). As the Church established a formal organization, traditional Viking-Age material culture (runic, burial) underwent a radical transformation (Gräslund, 639), and eventually the Old Norse mythology gradually disappeared (Haywood, 78; Brink, 621).