Vikings: Religion And Culture

Believes

Vikings believed that there were different worlds in their universe. There were nine in total and each was inhabited by different beings.

Niflheim was on the lowest level of the Norse universe, it was the realm of ice. It was a place for cold-blooded murderers, people who broke the Viking oaths and vagrants.

Midgard was the middle realm, the land of human mortals. This realm was connected to the home of the Gods (Asgard) by the rainbow bridge Bifrost.

Asgard was the home of the Aesir gods*, led by Odin. Asgard was home to many realms inside its boundaries, including Valhalla. It was located in the middle of the Viking world, and at the top of the Norse universe. *The Aesir were elite gods. Odin, his wife Frigg, Thor, Tyr, Loki, Baldur, Heimdall, Idun, and Bragi were all Aesir.

Vanaheimr was the home of the Vanir. The Vanir were another group of gods, including Freyja, Freyr, and their father Njord. These gods were known for love, passion and beauty. The gods of the Vanir later joined with the Aesir.

Jotunheim was the land of the Norse giants, who were the enemy of humans and gods living in the Viking realms. Fun Fact: Loki is known as the trickster God, but Loki is not a God, he is a giant. He lives in Asgard even though he is from the land of the giants.

Alfheim was home to the light elves, who were very beautiful. The other group of elves were the dark elves; they did not live in Alfheim, but deep in the realm of Svartalfheim.

Svartalfheim was the home of the dark elves. Many sources claim this realm was the home of the dwarves as well.

Muspelheim was the realm of fire, ruled by the Giant Surtr. It is told that the two realms of Muspelheim and Niflheim met, and fire and ice joined, creating water.

Helheim was the underworld of Norse mythology and was home to Hel. Hel was Loki's daughter, and her realm, Helheim, was in Niflheim. Helheim was the place where Vikings would go if their death was not in battle. It was impossible to leave Helheim because it was surrounded by a river and guarded by a giant dog.

Religion

The Vikings had a pagan religion, meaning they weren’t Christian. They believed in gods, goddesses, giants and monsters. Each of the Viking gods looked after different things, some gods wereresponsible for the good harvest of crops and others that looked after health and family. Others watched over battles and wars. The Vikings believed in realms or homeworlds in

their universe. There were nine in total inhabited by the gods, humans, the giants and the sinners. Realms were connected by the Viking world tree, Yggdrasil, which was an ash tree with special powers. Yggdrasil sat in the middle of these realms. The traditional stories that Vikings told about gods, giants and monsters are known as Viking mythology or Norse mythology. Lots of these stories portray the creation of the world and were put in a collection named the Viking sagas. Viking mythology influenced many aspects of their society. For example, when a warrior was killed in battle he was believed to go to Valhalla, which was a giant hall in Asgard, it was the Viking equivalent of heaven. Dead heroes ate at long tables and spoke of their adventures for all eternity. Later on, from the 700s to 800s, English and Frankish Christian priests went on missionary tours to Scandinavia. Some Vikings were faithful to their religion, even if their king became Christian and ordered his people to be Christians as well, they still prayed to and worshipped their old gods. By the end of the Viking Age, most Vikings had become fully Christian and were baptized.

Burial Customs

Most Vikings were sent to the afterlife by either cremation or burial.

Vikings were cremated on a funeral pyre, which was made of wood, and their bodies were placed upon it and burned. This was common among the early Vikings, who thought that the smoke from the fire would help carry the dead to the afterlife. After they were cremated, the ashes were buried in an urn. The other way of honouring the dead was a burial. The deceased Vikings were buried in many different occasions. Shallowly dug graves were often used for women and children. Others were buried in burial mounds that could hold multiple bodies or grave fields that were the Viking version of cemeteries. The biggest burial site in Scandinavia has more than 600 graves from the Viking Age. In Norse mythology, boats also were thought to give safe passage into the afterlife so they were an important part of Viking funerals. Some graves were dug in the shape of ships, with stones to outline the shape. But for powerful or wealthy men, it was taken a step further, they were buried or burned on their actual ship.

Weapons

In the Viking Age, all men who weren’t slaves were expected to carry weapons. These weapons were for protecting their families and community from attacks and other things. Poor men only had an axe and a shield, but wealthy men would also have a helmet, a coat of mail, a sword, and a spear. Swords were the high end weapon of Viking society. To be given a sword was a high honour. Axes were the typical weapon for commoners in the Viking Age. Axes were made of iron, and used as both weapons and tools. Some were decorated with copper, silver, or even gold decorations. Battle axes were different from normal axes because they had especially broad blades and pointy spurs. Spears were one of the most popular Vikings weapons. They were 3-10 feet in length and were used for throwing and thrusting. Spears had different lengths, designs and shapes - each with a different purpose. Some were designed to be thrown at a great length while others for close impact. The Bow and Arrow were initially used for hunting, but the Vikings soon realised their potential in fighting enemies. The Vikings shot arrows at their enemies to weaken them before going in with close-range weapons. The arrows were so strong that they were often able to go through enemy shields.

Ships

The Vikings were expert shipbuilders, and they had easy access to wood because they were surrounded by forests. They built rowing boats, ferries, trade ships, fishing vessels and ceremonial longships. Viking ships were very versatile. They were effective against the dangers of sea travel and the dangers of narrow rivers. This versatility allowed the Vikings to explore lands that were far away, like Canada, Russia and Africa. They were skilled at navigating using the environment, such as the sun and stars and weather. They used longships for raids. The Vikings called them Drakkar, meaning dragon. Carved animal heads were placed at the front of the longships to intimidate enemies and victims of their raids.

Viking ships had rowing positions along their entire length, with one big square sail made of wool. These ships steered with a single oar at the back of the ship. Viking ships were double-ended, which is a very smart and convenient idea. Having a double-ended boat allows them to swiftly reverse or change course.

Why did the Vikings go on their raids?

Most Vikings lived on islands and were confined to that space. The land there wasn't the best for farming, and it was cold. One of the reasons vikings raided was to find new lands to settle and farm in. The oldest Vikings started a tradition by going on raids, so why break a long-time tradition for no reason. The biggest reason in my opinion was because the wanted more valuables. They usually acquired these things through trade, but when there was an opportunity to take something, why wouldn't they?

Why were the Vikings so successful in war?

"Intimidating war tactics, skillful hand-to-hand combat, and fearlessness." - Wikipedia

The Vikings were training as warriors their entire lives, even the women and children. They also devised many successful battle strategies and tactics. Another thing that helped them win wars was their mobility. Their boats could navigate almost all bodies of water. This was helpful because they could sail around soldiers on the land as well as escape quickly after a battle.

List some places where the Vikings settled, why did they settle in these places and what changes did they bring to these places?

Scotland, Ireland and England. The Vikings are credited with creating the first trade routes between Ireland, Scandinavia and England. They also brought their knowledge and goods to sell to the people inhabiting these countries.

Why did Viking raids come to an end?

"The raids slowed and stopped because the times changed. It was no longer profitable or desirable to raid." - Hurstwic. The Vikings stopped raiding because there was little to no profit to make, and they had started to make peace with the lands they would have once raided. Instead of raiding to acquire valuables and money, the started to acquire it through work, selling things and land deals.

What, in your opinion, what was the most important LEGACY that the Vikings have left on the

world today? Give reasons for your answer.

Vikings were one of the only communities with a (crude) democracy. The Vikings “Things” share a lot of similarities with modern day democracy. Although they were portrayed as savages when attacking and conquering lands, they were a civilized society of traders and farmers that had their own political system. I believe that the most important legacy that vikings left behind was the idea of Democracy. If Vikings never introduced democracy, Australia could be a dictatorship!