This thesis investigates the religiosity of some Germanic peoples of the Migration period (approximately AD 300-800) and seeks to overcome some difficulties in the related source material. The written sources which describe pagan elements of this period - such as Tacitus’ *Germania*, Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, and Paul the Deacon’s *History of the Lombards* - are problematic because they were composed by Roman or Christian authors whose primary goals were not to preserve the traditions of pagans. Literary sources of the High Middle Ages (approximately AD 1000-1400) - such as *The Poetic Edda*, Snorri Sturluson’s *Prose Edda*, and Icelandic Family Sagas - can only offer a clearer picture of Old Norse religiosity alone. The problem is that the beliefs described by these late sources cannot accurately reflect religious conditions of the Early Middle Ages. Too much time has elapsed and too many changes have occurred. If literary sources are unavailing, however, archaeology can offer a way out of the dilemma. Rightly interpreted, archaeological evidence can be used in conjunction with literary sources to demonstrate considerable continuity in precisely this area of religiosity. Some of the most relevant material objects (often overlooked by scholars) are bracteates. These coin-like amulets are stamped with designs that appear to reflect motifs from Old Norse myths, yet their find contexts, including the inhumation graves of women and hoards, demonstrate that they were used during the Migration period of half a millennium earlier. In view of this puzzle, the present thesis proposes to analyze both the lacunae of the literary evidence and their potential solution in the iconography of bracteates. I document the transition
of Northern European pagan religiosity beginning with a set of beliefs based around healing and fertility, which, by the fifth and sixth centuries, developed into a set of beliefs focused around war and ancestor worship. This thesis will assess the value of these amulets as an empirical guide to early Germanic religiosity.
BRACTEATES AS INDICATORS OF NORTHERN PAGAN RELIGIOSITY
IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of the Arts in History

By Savannah DeHart
May, 2012
BRACTEATES AS INDICATORS OF NORTHERN PAGAN RELIGIOSITY

IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

By

Savannah DeHart

APPROVED BY:

DIRECTOR OF THESIS ____________________________________________

Michael J. Enright, Ph.D.

COMMITTEE MEMBER ____________________________________________

Jelena Bogdanović, Ph.D.

COMMITTEE MEMBER ____________________________________________

Antony J. Papalas, Ph.D.

COMMITTEE MEMBER ____________________________________________

Jonathan A. Reid, Ph.D.

CHAIR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY ____________________________

Gerald J. Prokopowicz, Ph.D.

DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL __________________________________

Paul J. Gemperline, Ph. D.
For Anneliese Helene Loop Fryzlewicz

1931-2008
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter I: The Early Sources for Germanic Religiosity and Their Problems</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter II: The Contribution of Old Norse Sources</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter III: Bracteate Iconography and Early Germanic Religiosity</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter IV: Conclusions and Further Research</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figures</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ILLUSTRATIONS

Figures

1. Type – A Bracteate Example .................................................................112
2. Type – B Bracteate Example .................................................................112
3. Type – B Bracteate Example .................................................................113
4. Type – B Bracteate Example .................................................................113
5. Type – B Bracteate Example .................................................................114
6. Type – B Bracteate Example .................................................................114
7. Type – C Bracteate Example .................................................................115
8. Type – C Bracteate Example .................................................................115
9. Type – C Bracteate Example .................................................................116
10. Type – C Bracteate Example ..............................................................116
11. Type – D Bracteate Example ...............................................................117
12. Type – F Bracteate Example ...............................................................117
13. Type – E Bracteate Example ...............................................................118
INTRODUCTION

One of the most fascinating topics of the Early Middle Ages is the investigation of Northern European pagan beliefs. Although countless books attempt to describe the religiosity of the peoples dwelling beyond the Rhine, none provide a solid account of pagan religiosity of the Migration period, approximately AD 300-800. One problem lies with the available sources. Most sources that describe pagan belief or practice for this period are the product of Christian authors whose primary goal was to promote Christianity. Consequently, these sources are subject to question. The Northern pagans did not have a literary tradition and therefore did not preserve their religious beliefs in writing during this period, so historians must be thankful for what the clergy preserved.

While relevant written sources dating to the Early Middle Ages are limited, Scandinavian literary sources from the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries describe Northern pagan religiosity in greater detail. Here again, however, is the problem of authorship and Christianization. Not only were the Old Norse sources written down from oral tradition three to seven hundred years after the period in question, thus creating difficulties of accuracy and verification, they were probably themselves the work of Christian authors since most of them survived in Iceland in manuscripts dating after AD 1000, the official date of the island’s conversion.

_____________________

1 Bernadette Filotas, Pagan Survivals, Superstitions and Popular Cultures in Early Medieval Pastoral Literature (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2005), 35-36.
2 Carolyne Larrington, trans., The Poetic Edda (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996). This selection of recorded poems describes gods, goddesses, various mythological beings and the cosmos of Old Norse world.
3 The conversion itself was a peaceful one allowing three pagan practices to survive as a compromise including the right to expose unwanted children, the freedom to consume horseflesh, and the ability to sacrifice in secret, see Gunnar Karlsson, Iceland’s 1100 Years: The History of a Marginal Society (London: Hurst & Company, 2000), 33-37.
Given the problematic nature of the written sources, many scholars, from the nineteenth century onwards, turned to archaeological evidence to help clarify the status of the written sources describing Northern European pagan religiosity. Despite the long tradition of combining the disciplines of historical textual analysis and archaeological investigation, our understanding of Northern pagan religiosity remains obscure. Regardless of the cloudy picture the sources of these periods leave us with, scholars must continue to strive to understand the early Northern pagans with the help of not only archaeology and historical analysis, but also social theory, philology, theology, folklore, and art history among other specialized fields. In the words of Marc Bloch: “it is indispensable that the historian possess at least a smattering of all the principal techniques of his trade, if only to learn the strength of his tools and the difficulties of handling them.” While all the techniques and evidence cannot be considered in one student’s work, this thesis examines important written sources from the Early and High Middle Ages, in addition to rarely discussed (in English) archaeological evidence from the Migration Period, in order to attempt to define some continuous characteristics of Germanic pagan religiosity.

The Migration period was an era of change and development such that groups of people who existed north of the Roman limes during the first century AD had, by the fourth century, generally relocated further south, nearer to or within the empire. By the fourth century, these peoples gathered into larger and more coherent groupings. At the risk of oversimplifying several competing theories about the movement and political development of these peoples, a

---

8 Ibid.
brief summary of the circumstances of the European Migration period is necessary as this work attempts to understand the religiosity of many of these migrating peoples. To begin with, it is clear that non-Roman peoples located north of the *limes*, commonly served as auxiliary troops for the Empire. Contact between the two groups provided these non-Romans with new farming techniques and technologies, as well as new forms of wealth. These new technologies stimulated agricultural production, which provided sustenance for a larger population. Trade occurred, especially for amber and barbarian slaves, and groups organized to benefit financially from new trading routes. Such groups became wealthy and powerful because they could afford to maintain armed men. They began challenging the Roman Empire, which had other economic and military problems to solve. It is on these major groups (Goths, Anglo-Saxons, Franks, Lombards, etc.), which appear to be Germanic based primarily on their language and material remains, that this thesis focuses.

As will be discussed in chapters one and two, the written sources are not without problems. The sources of the late empire and Early Middle Ages give some specific glimpses of particular Germanic rituals and peoples, as well as of the conversion process, but no sources give as structured or clear a picture of Northern Germanic paganism as Old Norse literature. The

9 Most theories generally argue that the stimulus for moving was either economic, fear of domination, or overpopulation. Recently, historians studying this transformative period in Europe have focused less on the idea of mass migrations and more on the social, economic, and political changes that occurred during this period. While it is true that the concept of mass migration is too simple, Peter Heather argues that social, economic, and political factors did, and still do, contribute to the migration process, which should not be dismissed. Although migration might not have occurred on such a grand scale, the concept that migration did affect these changes should not be ignored. Heather, *Empires and Barbarians*, xvi-xvii.

10 Ibid., 91.

11 Ibid.

12 Not least the threat of Sasanian Persia, which forced Rome to focus its resources and military on its eastern frontiers. Heather, *Empires and Barbarians*, 137.

13 In reality, these “Germanic” groups were composed of peoples who did not necessarily speak a Germanic language. Even Tacitus, who is discussed in chapter one, comments on tribes whose language was similar to other Celtic languages. The histories and primary written sources which this thesis refers to, however, are based on large groups identified as Germanic peoples. Herwig Wolfran, *The Roman Empire and Its Germanic Peoples*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Berkeley: University of Californian Press, 1997), 3.
problem, then, is to plausibly connect the sources of the earlier period with the later. Hence, one must utilize other types of evidence if we are to prove that such a connection exists.

Chapter three argues that the archaeological materials with the greatest explanatory potential are bracteates – small coin-like objects most likely used as amulets.\(^\text{14}\) As will be demonstrated, the iconography portrayed on some of the bracteates helps to bolster the argument that they were used as amulets. This thesis analyzes the iconography of the various types of bracteates and assesses the potential of using them as an empirical aid to assist historians attempting to identify continuous features of Germanic pagan religiosity in the Migration period.

Chapter four then presents my conclusions, as well as a summary of the most recent bracteate scholarship. While previous scholarship on bracteates has focused on the categorization and iconography of these items, contemporary scholars are now focusing on the find contexts of the bracteates as well as individual workshop designs.\(^\text{15}\) The goals of the newest studies are aimed at understanding the social aspects of these seemingly high-status items and the locations of their production sites.

It will be argued that bracteates have the potential to help scholars understand the religiosity of some Germanic peoples and, more specifically, some Germanic elites. While the social aspects of peoples who did not keep a written record of the development of their societies are difficult to understand, these barbarians are part of the puzzle that helped shape Western civilization and are deserving of our attention and interest. Although this period is not easy

---

\(^\text{14}\) Bracteates are almost certainly amulets for two reasons: first, they are commonly found in the graves of women who carried various amulets with them to the afterlife, and second, because the images depicted on the bracteates appear to have religious significance. For further discussion on amulets, see Audrey Meaney, *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones* (Oxford: B.A.R. British Series, 1981), 27.

understand, literary and archaeological evidence is available, and that evidence should be examined simultaneously in order to understand the Early Middle Ages, as well as the religiosity of some Germanic peoples.
CHAPTER 1: THE EARLY SOURCES FOR GERMANIC RELIGIOSITY AND THEIR PROBLEMS

In this chapter, I will focus on the early written sources for Germanic religiosity. These written sources are insightful; however, they are not wholly reliable. A significant part of the problem is that an examination of these sources cannot answer all questions concerning the Germanic peoples. The Germanic peoples did not write down their own history, and the earliest written information pertaining to them comes from Roman or Greek sources. In addition, one encounters the problem of the interpretatio Romana – the Roman interpretation – of the Germanic gods and goddesses that is famously evident in the first source this chapter discusses, Tacitus’ Germania. Philologist and historian D.H. Green, whose work will be examined shortly, also notes that by the time the Romans were writing about the Germanic peoples, Germanic culture had already been influenced by the Mediterranean world. Although the information we can obtain about the Germanic peoples from these early written sources has its problems, historians should not discount aspects of Germanic religiosity from the Roman sources. Indeed the sources are not Germanic and are biased, however, they are the only sources historians have outside of archaeology, which should also be used alongside the written sources for a clearer picture of pagan Germanic religiosity.

Concepts

I start with analyses of the available written sources from the Early Middle Ages. First, however, I would like to briefly discuss why I have chosen to speak about Germanic religiosity

17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., 12.
instead of the more definitive concept of Germanic religion. I emulate James C. Russell’s concept of “religiosity” which explains that generally, the use of the term “religion” often applies to universal religions, such as Christianity, that are clearly defined and have a clear doctrine. The term “religiosity” is a looser one that is often “used when referring to the religious elements of Indo-European and particularly Germanic societies.” There is not a single clear definition of pre-Christian Germanic religion, and there are no clear notions that Germanic pagans sustained a specific doctrine that applied universally to all Germanic peoples. It is more appropriate to acknowledge that Germanic pagans appear to practice similar rituals and that certain beliefs appear to be consistent in the works written about them; hence, the concept of Germanic religiosity incorporates those similar elements. Discussed below, comparable religious elements are identifiable throughout many of the written sources of the Early Middle Ages.

As will be demonstrated, it is very hard to deduce the reliability of the information concerning pagan beliefs in the written sources from the outset. One of the problems is that primarily Christian authors, whose main objective was to promote Christianity, composed the sources. Hence, they are probably biased. As stated above, the Northern pagans did not have a literary tradition and did not preserve their religious beliefs in writing during this period, so historians must be thankful for what the clergy preserved. Following the source analyses, using the contributions of previous scholars, I will argue that while the sources are flawed, there are certain features that are possibly useful to this study.

Two key concepts pertinent to the evidence indicating pagan practices, not easily recognizable in the sources, but discussed in most works concerning the study of religions are the

---

20 Ibid.
concepts of “popular religion/customs/cultures” and “syncretism.” Mircea Eliade defined popular religion as “the religion of the laity in a religious community in contrast to that of the clergy. The clergy is the bearer of a learned tradition usually based upon the prestige of literacy.”  

Bernadette Filotas, another historian whose work focuses on pagan religiosity, notes that this definition is not wholly reliable because, throughout the Early Middle Ages, popular customs did not belong solely to secular societies or the illiterate and underprivileged. Filotas points out that even learned men, such as Gregory of Tours (539/40-594), believed in sorcery, a non-Christian belief, demonstrating that popular beliefs belonged not just to the majority of the population, which was illiterate, but were clearly shared by some clergymen. Through the primary sources below, it becomes clear that many other clergy members shared this belief in popular customs. Popular religion may also represent popular customs that were formerly pagan but eventually became practices that had lost their original significance. Though historians define popular customs, practices, and religions with slightly different variations, the basic definition that popular customs are those that span beyond classes seems to be the most useful description. Condoned or accepted by the church, popular customs are not necessarily adapted to new religions with new meanings. How prevalent these beliefs were throughout class levels is not easy to ascertain, yet we know that peoples perpetuated these beliefs whether they feared them or practiced them. The case of pagan customs adopted by the church and given a new Christian meaning, instead of simply remaining a popular belief, represents the concept of “syncretism.”

24 Ibid.
The concept of “syncretism” has evolved over time. Adapted from the Greek synkrētismós, which originally meant “banding together of Cretans,” by the fifteenth century, Erasmus used the term in its Latin form syncretismus to describe “an alliance of unlike partners based on usefulness, not on mutual attraction, and he applied it to the changing coalitions in the religious fights of his own time or ideological enemies.” Today, it describes how different religions that have been exposed to one another adopt and merge each others’ practices, whether consciously or unconsciously. Applied to specific contexts, the term describes either a process or a state of a religion. In the present case, the concept of syncretism refers to the process of the church hierarchy tolerating pagan customs and subsequently adopting those customs imbued with new Christian meanings. When presented by the written sources, examples of syncretism are noted and described throughout this text. In sum, popular customs, which might originally have been pagan customs, are those that peoples of all statuses might practice and believe in. Popular customs were not commonly tolerated by the church, but even clergymen could believe in them. The adaptation of pagan customs by the church that received new Christian meanings represents the process and concept of “syncretism.”

Methodology

Many scholars have gone through these early sources in order to find information about early Germanic paganism, magic, amulets, and popular beliefs. This chapter deals with the fundamentals, but we must keep in mind that the sources have a repetitive nature. In general, I find the argumentation of previous scholars in the field, such as Bernadette Filotas, D. H. Green, Valerie Flint, Audrey Meaney, and Richard North, to be helpful. They have all consulted these

---

27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., 8935.
early sources from different angles and all study and address concerns, including the reliability of the early sources.

Valerie Flint acknowledges in her work *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* that many early Medieval sources can contribute to the study of the evolution of magic, and thus to the study of early pagan religiosity.\(^{30}\) The sources that she chose to include in her work were ones that were most influential during the Early Middle Ages and many appeared before the period in question. She has also chosen certain sources from specific geographical areas such as Merovingian Gaul and Visigothic Spain in order to attempt to give a wider, geographic analysis.\(^{31}\) Focusing specifically on emotional history, Flint discusses the emotional need for certain aspects of “magic” – defined in this case as the desire to use *magi* to control nature. Flint argues that this attempt to control nature blurs science and religion – a mixed belief which, in the beginning, the organized church attempted to suppress, but realized that it needed to co-opt in part in order to succeed in converting the population.\(^{32}\) Flint argues that this is especially true concerning healing, which, according to Merovingian sources, was the job of the local *magi* before the church had a replacement for such a position.\(^{33}\) Divination and astrology also dealt commonly with healing and both of these practices were at first condemned by the church.\(^{34}\) While Flint gives several examples of popular and, specifically, pagan beliefs, her work does not focus on which rituals or beliefs were specifically pagan at a specific point in time. Her study is particularly useful because it brings up an important point about anxieties focused around health problems in the Early Middle Ages. As will become evident throughout this study, the ability to overcome various health issues including childbirth and infection, was extremely important

\(^{31}\) Ibid.
\(^{32}\) Ibid., 3-9.
\(^{33}\) Ibid., 69-70.
\(^{34}\) Ibid., 88-106.
during the days before antibiotics and other monumental health-related advancements.\textsuperscript{35} Healing, whether achieved through Christian prayer or pagan ritual, appeared to be an important concept to everyone during this period and, as Flint points out, this is evident in the Early Medieval sources.

Working specifically with pastoral literature of the Middle Ages – texts reflecting the clergy’s attempt to deal with the ordinary, illiterate laypeople including sermons, church councils, and penitentials - Bernadette Filotas has been able to reconstruct three pagan practices involved both in Mediterranean paganism and Northern (Germanic and Celtic) paganism. Sacrifice, feasting, and divination were all fundamental rituals described in early literary sources.\textsuperscript{36} Though pastoral literature treats non-Christian rituals and beliefs in a negative light, Filotas argues that it provides a synthesis of beliefs for geographic areas as well as changes in what concerned the Christian hierarchy over time, if studied properly.\textsuperscript{37} Pastoral literature, as discussed by Filotas, also provides evidence for the immediate and primary concerns of clergy members during this period. The following paragraphs briefly describe the common types of pastoral literature.

Penitentials were guidelines provided to clergy members to help control pagan beliefs and rituals often practiced in a syncretistic way. They provided specific penances for specific sins both individual and public.\textsuperscript{38} The first documented penitentials came from the Celtic/Irish church whose version of Christianity was slightly different from the Roman Christianity of the Anglo-Saxons and of the Christianity eventually practiced on the European continent.\textsuperscript{39} This difference was primarily because of the dating of Easter; the Irish acknowledged an older way

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{35} Meaney, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones}, 7.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Filotas, \textit{Pagan Survivals, Superstitions, and Popular Cultures}, 37.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 10-11.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 53-54.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 53.
\end{itemize}
once accepted by the Roman church and approved by Saint Jerome (342-420), that contradicted that of the contemporary Roman church.\footnote{40}

Sermons, though they are rare sources, except for those from Caesarius the bishop of Arles (470-543), were not necessarily specifically for the laypeople listening to them, but also used to instruct members of the Christian hierarchy. The sermons also indicate individual problems pertaining to specific areas. Not always necessarily copied from previous works, many sermons addressed independent issues and many do resemble the preceding work of church Fathers.\footnote{41}

Church councils, another individual and unique pastoral source, rarely speak about pagan beliefs. Filotas gives an example of Gallican councils between AD 511 and 695, and out of around five hundred and fifty canons from these councils, only around thirty mention anything about pagan beliefs or behaviors that may be representative of syncretism.\footnote{42}

The main contribution of Filotas’ work to this study is her compilation of rarely accessible sources that deal specifically with the people who were in the process of accepting Christianity. Also, her work assembles and presents solid evidence for the three rituals of sacrifice, divination, and feasting that remain consistent elements of Germanic pagan religiosity. Filotas does not exaggerate information in the sources even though the information is not specific. The solid evidence Filotas provides for Germanic pagan beliefs aids this study because

\footnote{40} Peter Brown, \textit{The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000}, 2nd ed., (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 248. Not only was the dating of Easter important, but it was also a matter of church organization. The Irish favored a doctrine that focused on the aesthetic and scholarly aspects of Christianity and the Roman church, which was slightly more willing to be diplomatic, favored the Pope as the central authority in a highly organized system. Eventually, the Roman view won out at the Synod of Whitby in 663. \textit{The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany}, trans. C. H. Talbot (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1954), x-xi.
\footnote{42} Ibid., 45.
these beliefs are sustainable through archaeological evidence, such as the bracteates, as well as later medieval sources, such as the sagas.

D.H. Green, as mentioned above, argues that the biggest problem, when referring to these sources at the outset, is their Roman and Greek bias. He contends that ritual was the most important aspect in Germanic religiosity, and more specifically, sacrifice. He tends to lump the Germanic peoples together based on the etymology of their languages and concludes that their religions must also be similar. He proves that ritual was the most important aspect of Germanic religiosity by explaining that there were many different terms for rituals associated with the Germanic religious practices.43 Though Green’s work *Language and History in the Germanic World* does not solely focus on Germanic religion, he acknowledges a connection, through language, between the Old Norse sources and early Germanic words adopted by Christianity.44

Green’s study of early Germanic languages assists in this thesis because he connects the languages of the various Germanic peoples throughout Early Medieval Europe (300-800) to the languages of the future generations of Germanic peoples in the High Middle Ages (1000-1300). This helps to bolster the argument that the later sources, since written by peoples whose languages relate to the peoples discussed in the earlier sources, have the potential to help describe the religiosity of their ancestors. His argument also helps to confirm Filotas’s work about the various important rituals associated with Germanic religiosity.

Apart from the written sources, Audrey Meaney has taken an approach based on archaeological finds associated with pagan religiosity. In her study *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones*, Meaney emphasizes that archaeological evidence is extremely important in understanding past cultures but that for illiterate peoples, it is very hard to “interpret their modes

---

44 Ibid., 13.
of thought without using evidence provided by their continental contemporaries or their literate Christian descendants." Combining written evidence and material evidence, Meaney argues that there was a great need for amulets and that they came in many different forms. Meaney argues that amulets, at first glance, might have been used as ‘lucky-charms’ in the same way that people maintain superstitions today. In Meaney’s study, and generally, amulets appear to be most often associated with protection and healing, their effects being supernatural. During the Early Middle Ages, amulets were associated with magic and thus non-Christian religiosity. The clergy often condemned amulets and amulets appear to be associated with Roman and Northern pagans.

Meaney’s main contribution to this study is that she shows, through her study on the classification of grave-goods as amulets, that Anglo-Saxons believed in and used many amulets and that these items were primarily associated with women, though men and children are often found buried with them as well. She acknowledges that bracteates, the focal material source of this thesis, were not included in her study but that Roman coins, perhaps worn first for their beauty, are often found in graves with women wearing or carrying other amulets and thus probably should be considered amulets as well. She goes on to emphasize that bracteates were created by Germanic goldsmiths and contends that they had mythological designs. This thesis borrows and expands on Meaney’s conviction that bracteates were indeed amulets and emphasizes that bracteates are convincing amulets because their designs appear to be associated with Germanic religiosity and healing.

---

45 Meaney, Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones, 3.
46 Ibid., 5.
47 Ibid., 8.
48 Ibid., 239.
49 Ibid., 220.
Richard North focuses specifically on Anglo-Saxon paganism in his work *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature*. Starting with Tacitus, North analyzes the literature possibly connected to a more specific version of Germanic paganism associated with the Angles and Saxons. He also refers to and connects Old Norse literature to the earliest literature discussing Germanic pagan religiosity by explaining that the Scandinavians influenced the Angles, based on evidence such as the archaeological remains from the Sutton Hoo ship burial. Through etymology, North makes the argument that the god “Woten, Woden or Óðinn (as the god was known in Scandinavian sources)” was not as important in Anglo-Saxon paganism as the god/goddess Nerthus until the seventh century. Before the seventh century, North argues that Anglo-Saxon pagans were more interested in the renewal of their farms through worshipping the fertility god/goddess Nerthus than worshipping a warrior god, such as Woden.

North touches briefly on the topic of sacral kingship in that he establishes that Woden was eventually used in the seventh century in Anglo-Saxon England, but that Nerthus, a god/goddess described in Tacitus’ *Germania*, was the core component of Anglo-Saxon religiosity and the core component of sacral kingship before the seventh century. North argues that Nerthus - associated with fertility and the farming year, as exemplified below in the discussion of Tacitus’ *Germania* - was more troublesome for the conversion effort by Christians than Woden because Woden was a war-god and Nerthus was a god associated with the practice of farming.

---

51 Ibid., 16.  
52 “The term ‘sacral king’ describes a king who is both married to his country and descended from a god to whom he sacrifices on behalf of his people.” Ibid., 17.  
53 Ibid., 17. According to North, Woden was useful to Anglo-Saxon chroniclers, including Bede, because he could be equivocated with the military kings of the Jewish people discussed in the Old Testament. The church in England during the seventh and eighth centuries viewed kings as “the secular arm of the church” and the church found it an easy and convenient to model their genealogies from it during an “age of conquest and expansion.” Ibid., 116-124.
While the works of many other scholars have influenced my views on Germanic pagan religiosity, the five mentioned above contribute greatly to this chapter and therefore this entire study. Using a combination of their methodologies, the following section discusses the evidence of Germanic pagan religiosity by analyzing key sources from the Early Middle Ages.

The Sources

The first source this chapter discusses is Tacitus’ *Germania*. Dating to AD 98, *The Germania* gives an ethnographical depiction of several non-Roman peoples that lived beyond the boundaries of Rome during the first century.\(^54\) *The Germania* is brief and describes the morals, habits, and several religious aspects, including rituals and Romanized gods, of these non-Roman peoples.\(^55\) *The Germania* gives the most detailed examples of Germanic rituals from the perspective of a non-Christian and, though it is likely our most important source, it is not without problems. The first difficulty involving this work is the question of how and from whom exactly Tacitus received his information. The second problem involves the question of why Tacitus, a senator, priest, and historian of Rome, would write a work based on the Germanic peoples. The third problem is that the earliest copy of *The Germania* probably came from the Hersfeld codex, which resurfaced in Rome between 1429 and 1455, giving the impression that it may not have been a very important work or a work that was not copied for a reason. The only surviving part of the Hersfeld codex is a part of *Agricola*, the rest of which has been lost, and all of our copies

---


\(^{55}\) Tacitus compares Germanic gods and goddesses to Roman deities and often, when a Germanic name is missing, he appears to simply replace it with a Roman name. Peter Buchholz. “Perspectives for Historical Research in Germanic Religion,” *History of Religions* 8, no. 2 (Nov., 1968): 119.
come from the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These copies, it has been concluded, derived from the Hersfeld codex.\footnote{Rodney Potter Robinson, \textit{The Germania of Tacitus: A Critical Edition} (Middletown: Connecticut: American Philological Association, 1935), 1.}

Tacitus himself, as far as historians know, had never visited territory beyond the \textit{limes} – the boundaries of the Roman Empire - and probably accumulated his information from other sources.\footnote{Alfred Gudeman, “The Sources of the Germania of Tacitus” \textit{Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association} 31, (1900): 110.} In an article describing Tacitus’ possible references, Classical philologist Alfred Gudeman traced the possible available sources relating to non-Roman peoples to Tacitus and showed that it is nearly impossible that Tacitus relied on any one specific source. One source that Tacitus might have relied heavily on was Julius Caesar, but even Caesar’s information pertaining specifically to Germanic peoples was more than likely from people who had, at one time or another, been in Germanic territory and not necessarily Germanic peoples themselves, thus the accuracy of the possible sources for \textit{The Germania} is questionable.\footnote{Ibid., 97.} There is also an argument that Tacitus may have consulted multiple historical works concerning the Germanic peoples, however, these works are not always preserved and we cannot tell to what extent Tacitus utilized these sources.\footnote{Pliny the Elder’s \textit{Belle Germaniae} is an example of one such source. Other sources such as Livy’s 104\textsuperscript{th} book of his \textit{History of Rome} and Posidonius’ thirteenth book of his \textit{Histories} were probably in existence during Tacitus’ time and it is impossible to tell which relied on the other as these sources are also no longer available. Ibid., 111.} Though there is a problem of Tacitus’ sources, it is the least of our worries concerning Tacitus as a reliable historian.

Tacitus was, like most people, biased and most likely had a motive behind his works. Born in AD 56, Tacitus lived as a senator during a time of civil strife in Rome about half a century after Augustus Caesar’s death.\footnote{Tacitus, \textit{The Agricola and the Germania}, 1.} He often praised the morality of the Germanic peoples as he regretted contemporary attitudes in the Roman Empire; he wanted to return to a time when

---

\footnotetext[57]{Alfred Gudeman, “The Sources of the Germania of Tacitus” \textit{Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association} 31, (1900): 110.}
\footnotetext[58]{Ibid., 97.}
\footnotetext[59]{Pliny the Elder’s \textit{Belle Germaniae} is an example of one such source. Other sources such as Livy’s 104\textsuperscript{th} book of his \textit{History of Rome} and Posidonius’ thirteenth book of his \textit{Histories} were probably in existence during Tacitus’ time and it is impossible to tell which relied on the other as these sources are also no longer available. Ibid., 111.}
\footnotetext[60]{Tacitus, \textit{The Agricola and the Germania}, 1.}
the senate mattered, and part of his reasoning for admiring the Germanic peoples was that they were like the original Romans who farmed and sustained themselves. Several scholars have commented on Tacitus’ biased attitude towards the Germanic peoples, including Latinist and Classicist W. Beare who strongly supports this argument.

Beare believes that Germanic families reproduced frequently and took no shame in having many children; he mentions this to express his opinion that Tacitus was disappointed in the old wealthy Roman families’ disinterest in reproducing. According to the passage he cites from The Germania, the Germanic peoples allowed their children to play outside and be around the farming and livestock. Beare also mentions that Tacitus claimed that Germanic mothers nursed their children, which was something that upper-class Roman mothers rarely did and had wet nurses do for them. Beare argues that these opinions of Tacitus show the senator’s favor of a traditional and self-sustaining lifestyle and thus a motive beyond describing the Germanic peoples as solely part of an ethnographical study.

The reader, at this point, might wish to ask how one should use Tacitus if he was biased and his information was second-hand at best, and, if Tacitus is our best source, how are we supposed to use any of the other written sources from the Early Middle Ages? Despite Tacitus’ obvious biases, his descriptions of Germanic rituals and beliefs are more reliable because he did not praise or discredit the Germanic peoples while describing those rituals. Tacitus simply described the rituals and did not resort to positive or negative commentary about them. These descriptions are the most useful aspects of Tacitus’ Germania, and because of these descriptions, the work is probably the most useful early source for studying Germanic pagan religiosity. Also,

62 Ibid.
if Tacitus did have a motive for writing *The Germania*, it does not necessarily prove that his information about the Germanic peoples was completely false.

For an example of a particular ritual, Tacitus mentioned in chapter forty that the individual tribes of Suebi group, known as the Reudigni, Aviones, Anglii, Varini, Eudoses, Suarines, and Nuitones, worshipped Nerthus, or Mother Earth, a goddess that rode in a chariot drawn by cattle. A priest was the only person able to touch her chariot, which was stored on an island and covered with a cloth. As worship of Nerthus commenced within these tribes, all fighting subsided and the people became peaceful. After these peoples finished with this ceremony, the chariot and the goddess went through a cleansing ritual, and the slaves given this task faced sacrifice via drowning after it was completed. These types of rites may show a certain respect of the Germanic peoples towards fertility and the importance of sacrifice, in this specific instance. The ritual of sacrifice appears to be a broad aspect of Germanic religiosity throughout the Early Middle Ages and both Green and Filotas’ arguments attest to this as mentioned above.

Not only did Tacitus recount rituals, he also described several Germanic gods and goddesses in various ways. At the beginning of *The Germania*, Tacitus mentioned that the

63 Richard North recognizes and comments on Tacitus’ description of Nerthus’ wagon-tour. Tacitus was a priest of “Magna Mater” otherwise known as “Cybele” in Rome and the ritual of washing the image of Magna mater on March 27 was one that Tacitus presided over. This ritual is similar to the one associated with Nerthus in Tacitus’ *Germania* and scholars have argued that once again, Tacitus was projecting Roman traditions on to Germanic ritual descriptions. North argues, however, that he did not use the name Magna Mater and therefore did not view Terra Mater and Magna Mater as the same being and therefore, the name “Nerthus” must have come specifically from a Germanic source. North concludes this argument by stating: “If Tacitus heard details of a genuinely Germanic wagon-tour, he would have been inclined to perceive this tour as if it were the same as Cybele’s procession in Rome.” North also mentions Tacitus’ interpretation of Nerthus being female. First, North notes that Tacitus probably misinterpreted his source on Nerthus by arguing that Nerthus and Terra Mater were not the same being and that the ritual being described was part of a divine marriage between a male god “Nerthus” and the earth “Terra Mater” that was seasonally reenacted by human hypostases. North, *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature*, 21.

64 Tacitus *Germania* 40.

Germans did not envision their gods and goddesses in human-form and that the Germans worshipped “woods and groves, and they apply the names of deities to that hidden presence which is seen only by the eye of reverence.”\textsuperscript{66} Yet, Tacitus also mentioned that the Germans worshipped Mercury, Hercules, Mars, and sometimes Isis. These are not Germanic names and the use of these names demonstrates that Tacitus was applying Roman nomenclature to Germanic gods that may have had similarities to Roman deities, but were not necessarily the exact same divine beings. Beare also specifies that Tacitus was perhaps referring once again to the beliefs of the early Romans of the Republic.\textsuperscript{67} In primitive pagan Roman religiosity, the Romans worshipped \textit{numina} - spirits that “were not conceived in human or indeed visible form.”\textsuperscript{68} Once again, the political purposes of the composition of \textit{The Germania} are evident through Tacitus’ explanation of Germanic religious practices; however, some accurate aspects of the religiosity of the Germans are evident as seen through the plain description of the ritual involving Nerthus. These details could also indicate that some Germanic peoples did worship anthropomorphic gods and goddesses while others worshiped nature and/or anthropomorphic beings and nature.

Tacitus spoke of another set of tribes, also part of the Suebi group, who practiced sacrifice.\textsuperscript{69} According to chapter thirty-nine, the oldest group within the Suebi tribal faction was the Semnones and they were involved in a ritual, which included other Suebi tribes that gathered at a specific grove to participate in this rite. The first part of this ritual was the sacrifice of a

\textsuperscript{66} Tacitus \textit{Germania} 9. It should be noted that this quote might also indicate an \textit{interpretatio Romana} by invoking a Stoic topos, however, D.H. Green has indicated that it could also be true of the Germanic peoples because most of the more specific rituals discussed in \textit{The Germania} did take place in sacred groves and woods. Also, the linguistic evidence supports the importance of trees and groves in Germanic religiosity. D. H. Green, \textit{Language and History in the Germanic World}, 24.
\textsuperscript{67} Beare, “Tacitus and the Germans,” 71.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{69} Apparently this group of Germanic peoples known together as the “Suebi” made up more than half of the Germanic territory Tacitus discussed. Tacitus \textit{Germania} 38.
human. No one was to enter the grove unless they were tethered with a rope showing their weakness to the god or goddess.\textsuperscript{70} Here again is an instance of sacrifice within two groups (deemed by Tacitus) of Germanic peoples that share this practice.

There are also less detailed references to the religiosity of the Germanic peoples throughout \textit{The Germania} that may be of use to this study as well. According to chapter seven, the Germanic peoples took emblems into battle with them that once belonged to the sacred groves that they worshipped.\textsuperscript{71} These emblems could have been amulets since they were worn into battle implying that they were perhaps worn for protection.\textsuperscript{72} Tacitus also mentioned in chapter eight that the Germanic peoples believed that women were able to prophesize and that there was “an element of holiness” within them.\textsuperscript{73} The Naharvali, in chapter forty-three, also worshipped a particular grove and their sovereign priest dressed as a woman. Once again, Tacitus “Romanized” Germanic gods by identifying the Naharvali’s gods as being the equivalent of Castor and Pollux, but that this tribe referred to their gods as the “Alci.”\textsuperscript{74} Another tribe living beyond the “Suebian sea” known as the Aestii, who spoke a language more similar to British and therefore most likely Celtic, worshipped a Mother goddess.\textsuperscript{75} The Aestii wore an emblem resembling a wild boar instead of armor for protection.\textsuperscript{76} These emblems possibly represent

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 39. This concept of being bound before gods and goddesses is complemented by Old Norse sources, see Ursula Dronke, “Eddic poetry as a source for the history of Germanic religion” in \textit{Germanische Religionsgeschichte: Quellen un Quellenprobleme} (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1992):656-684.
\textsuperscript{71} Tacitus \textit{Germania} 7.
\textsuperscript{72} Meaney’s work \textit{Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones}, supports and adds to W.L. Hildburgh’s definition of amulets as being items “through whose retention there is sought the averting of some result displeasing, or the obtaining of some outcome pleasing, to the possessor of that object, and in a way which seems to be beyond natural laws as proclaimed by persons best able to understand them.” Meaney, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones}, 3.
\textsuperscript{73} Tacitus \textit{Germania} 8.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 43.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 45
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
amulets, which appear to be another key component in Germanic pagan religiosity alongside sacrifice, feasting and divination.  

In general, historians can see in Tacitus a common theme of sacrifice that seems prevalent among many of the tribes he describes. Another commonality amongst Tacitus’ Germanic peoples involves their place of worship, in groves and woods, and that only certain people undergoing a certain change of state, such as being bound, are allowed to enter these areas at specific times. An additional common theme involves the use of amulets or emblems as protection. This is evident from both the Celtic peoples Tacitus described as well as the Germanic peoples. While Tacitus gives us many common themes prevalent in early Northern Germanic religiosity, the exact purpose of the rituals described, the bodily location of the amulets in relation to the person wearing them, and the names of all the Germanic gods and goddesses are not specific in every instance. Tacitus, as our most informative source, sets the stage for research in this field by making it clear that historians must build a concept of early Germanic religiosity based on small pieces of information. Scholars must rely not solely on written sources, but archaeology, theology, philology, art history, folklore, and sociology as well.

Another important source is a fourth century document known as “The Passion of St. Saba the Goth” and it gives a glimpse of Gothic society during this period. While the earliest copies of this document survive in manuscripts dating to the 10th century, the source described

---

77 The most thorough work on Germanic amulets and more specifically Anglo-Saxon amulets is that by Meaney who confirms that many substances were amuletic and provided protective services to Germanic peoples. Meaney also discusses the significance of boars to Germanic warrior culture, which is demonstrated by archaeological evidence throughout the Migration period. Such examples include images of boars stamped on to swords and boars located on helmets, see Meaney, *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones*, 9, 133 and 241.

78 Buchholz, “Perspectives for Historical Research in Germanic Religion,” 111.
this martyrdom as having occurred in 372.\textsuperscript{79} The difficulty in using this text is that it is a liturgical martyr tale with the beginning and end of the passage resembling another martyrdom - “The Passion of St. Polycarp” - and it evokes the Greek New Testament. However, it is one of historians’ most valuable sources in that it describes social relations within a Gothic community.

To summarize the liturgical story, St. Saba, a Gothic Christian living in a Gothic community, would not eat meat sacrificed for pagan idols. The first time the community was asked to do this by their \textit{megistanes} ‘lords’ or ‘chiefs’, several Goths attempted to trick the authority figures by replacing the sacrificial meat with meat that had not been sacrificed to pagan gods.\textsuperscript{80} Saba publically stated at the council that he would still not participate in this ritual and told other members of the community that if they ate the meat, they were not Christians. The \textit{megistanes} exiled Saba from the village.\textsuperscript{81} Upon returning to the village after his exile, Saba encountered another instance of the persecution of Christians. While participating in sacrificial rituals, several pagans attempted to swear to the unnamed persecutor that there were no Christians in their village. Saba would not allow this and publically announced at the council that he was a Christian.\textsuperscript{82} Once again, the council exiled Saba from the village. Next, while on his way to spend Easter with another Christian in a distant village, Saba had a vision that he needed to return and spend Easter with the presbyter Sabsalâs. After celebrating Easter, the two were seized by a royal Goth named Atharidas and a gang of bandits. These men made St. Saba march in the street naked and they beat them along the way. St. Saba did not bear any injuries from all

\textsuperscript{80}According to Michael Kulikowski, this act shows that the Gothic people in this particular community were willing to ban together against certain authority figures and that some groups of Goths were more willing to accept Christians within their communities. Michael Kulikowski, \textit{Rome’s Gothic Wars: From the Third Century To Alaric} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 119.
\textsuperscript{81}“The Passion of St. Saba the Goth,” 113.
\textsuperscript{82}Ibid.
his torture. As another form of punishment, Atharidas then sent sacrificial meat to Saba and the presbyter being tortured, and the Christian men refused to consume it once again. At this point, Atharidus ordered Saba to be put to death by drowning. The guards, ordered to kill him, arrived at the river and wanted to set him free, however, in good martyr fashion, Saba told them to obey their orders.83 Thus St. Saba was drowned and his body was not buried, but nothing disturbed it until it was recovered by Christians and moved to Romania.

This passage is one of the most informative pieces of information historians have about Gothic society. Here is a glimpse of a Gothic community wishing for all its members to participate in a pagan custom – eating sacrificial meat. The passage is not very clear about the number of Christians in the community; however, it seems that Saba was one of the few Christians that went against the wishes of the authority figures. Not only does the passage exemplify a continuous belief in the custom of sacrifice, but it also demonstrates a societal expectation that everyone should be involved in eating this particular meat. E. A. Thompson has written about St. Saba’s martyrdom and believes that “Saba, as we shall see, had offended against the gods of the community by refusing to share their meal; and an offense against the gods was an offence against the community itself…” Thompson goes on to state that “the man who refused to eat the sacrificial meat with his fellows thereby dissociated himself from their religion and from their social duties and rights: he had made himself an outcast.”84 It seems that the ritual of sharing a communal meal was an important aspect of pagan religiosity in this particular group of Goths. It did not matter if Saba proclaimed himself a Christian, what mattered was that he participated in the ritual.

83 Ibid., 116.
Another important fourth-century history dealing with pagans and barbarian relations is Ammianus Marcellinus’ *The Later Roman Empire*. Audrey Meaney mentions him in her study of amulets as being able to show “the indignation of a cultured pagan at the forceful suppression of what he regarded as petty, harmless magic, ‘for if anyone wore on his neck an amulet against the quartan ague or any other complaint…he was condemned to capital punishment and so perished’.”

Ammianus Marcellinus was a Greek soldier and was most likely a member of the elite class in Antioch. His history, however, was written in Latin and from a classical pagan perspective. Ammianus was not a Christian and his work is not told from the perspective of a Christian author trying to cover-up Mediterranean pagan beliefs. However, he does not go out of his way to emphasize Germanic paganism because he himself was not a Germanic pagan. Once again, through Ammianus’ history, only glimpses of pagan rituals appear every now and then, nonetheless, it still gives the historian a vague view of Germanic pagan rites.

Ammianus described the situation in which Julian (r. 361-363) became emperor. He mentions that Julian stated “since the death of rebel usurpers, whose designs were inspired by rage and madness, the barbarians, as if to appease those unhallowed spirits with an offering of Roman blood, have disturbed the peace of our frontier…” Here we do not have an exact account of pagan sacrifice, but a continuation of the belief that Germanic pagans did sacrifice. During one of Julian’s campaigns in Germany, Hortar, a Germanic king, who the Romans took to be on their side, decided to invite all the powerful members of the neighboring Germanic peoples to a feast, a Germanic custom. After leaving the feast the guests were attacked by

87 Ibid., bk. 15, 8.2.
It is not mentioned whether this particular feast was specifically a pagan ritual, however, as Filotas confirms, feasting was commonly a Northern pagan ritual.

Ammianus also writes about the Gauls in AD 359. He mentions that on a dark night, the Gauls intended to attack the Romans and that this particular evening was the night before the new moon. The Gauls apparently prayed to the heavens for the blessing to defeat the Romans. Here again, we cannot be sure if this was an interpretatio Romana. In another passage dealing with a Gallic rhetorician, he mentions that this rhetorician was a master at divination and was able to aid the emperor Julian (Caesar form 355-360 and Emperor from 360-363) by foretelling the future by inspecting a liver that was covered with two layers of skin. Of course, it seems more likely that this is a reflection of Mediterranean paganism. As will be discussed below, the situation in Gaul was a melting pot of various cultures and groups of people who had been moving in since the first century. It also seems a safe bet that in Mediterranean paganism, certain animals were held in high esteem when it came to sacrificial ritual. Ammianus gives a brief explanation of two animals that were considered sacred to the sun and moon. Mnevis corresponded with the sun and Ammianus does not give us any other details. Apis, on the other hand, was a bull and belonged to the moon. This particular bull had to be marked a certain way and was drowned in a precise sacrificial manner as an offering to the moon. Each year, people would look for the bull with the markings of a crescent moon on its right side. This particular ritual often happened in Memphis and even though it is clearly a Mediterranean pagan ritual, it is at least comparable with Northern pagan religiosity because it involved sacrifice. It is possible that Germanic peoples inherited many Mediterranean customs.

88 Ibid., bk. 18, 2.6.
89 Ibid., bk. 19, 6.5.
90 Ibid., bk. 22, 1.
Let us now examine other written sources of the Early Middle Ages and their examples of Germanic pagan religiosity. The next group of source material this chapter discusses, and which Filotas relies heavily on for her arguments, are the Sermons of Caesarius of Arles. Caesarius was a Christian from birth and served as bishop of Arles from AD 503-543. Three different barbarian groups occupied Arles during that time - the Visigoths until 507, the Ostrogoths from 508 to 536, and the Franks from 536 until the time of Caesarius death in 543.\textsuperscript{93}

The sermons of Caesarius are a helpful source because the language of the works appears to be intentionally simple, which made them possibly easier for all peoples to understand. In addition, the sermons are short and to the point. Hence, these sermons were most likely meant for a newly Christianized society and they addressed the previous non-Christian habits of the people. Caesarius did not only write sermons for his own diocese, he wanted to influence other non-Christian peoples living north of the Alps. He set up an institution in which he had clerical students assemble collections of sermons. He would have his students compile these sermons using the writings of the church Fathers, especially St. Augustine, and Caesarius would go back over the compilations and simplify the language so that the majority of the peoples could understand them.\textsuperscript{94}

One pagan practice that Caesarius condemns is the use of amulets or ligatures – “something tied in a knot” and phylacteries – “a protective device.”\textsuperscript{95} He mentions in several sermons that one should not “hang on yourself or your family diabolical phylacteries, magical letters, amber charms and herbs.”\textsuperscript{96} Caesarius identifies these amulets with pagans specifically when he states in one of his sermons: “anyone who makes these phylacteries or asks to have

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[94]{Saint Caesarius of Arles, \textit{Sermons}, xxii.}
\footnotetext[95]{Meaney, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones}, 9.}
\footnotetext[96]{Saint Caesarius of Arles, \textit{Sermons}, 82.}
\end{footnotes}
them made, as well as those who consent to it have become pagans, and unless they perform sufficient penance they cannot escape punishment."\textsuperscript{97} This specific sermon also mentions that several priests were giving these “charms” out to persons seeking them and that those priests who did such a thing were the devil’s helpers.\textsuperscript{98} This indicates that the use of charms was once a popular custom because both those associated with the laity and some of those connected to the church possibly believed in them. Also, Caesarius condemned this practice showing that it had not adapted to the new Christian religion. Historians do not know the composition of the charms of which Caesarius was referencing. Peter Brown, however, argues that Christianity had its own cult of relics and relics served a similar purpose to amulets.\textsuperscript{99} The difference being that a relic brought one closer to the holy and the holy had the power of healing. It appears that amulets were primary used for healing but exactly how they were thought to work is currently unattainable.

Occasionally, in Caesarius’ sermons, these amulets appear to be associated with helping people with physical ailments. According to one sermon, Ceasarius tells us that those who cannot have children should not resort to the use of charms, herbs, or magical signs. Instead, he reminds his readers and listeners that God has decided the right course for each Christian and those seeking to have children should not resort to birth control efforts.\textsuperscript{100} Still, it is not specified what exactly constitutes a charm, however, in another sermon concerning peoples with “various trials and infirmities,” Caesarius explains that some people normally consult a “soothsayer, seer, oracle, or witch” when their child is sick and that these peoples say “let us offer some magic

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 254.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{99} Peter Brown specifies that relics were sought after because they made one closer to the holy dead or they provided “praesentia.” Peter Brown, \textit{The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity} (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 88-94.
\textsuperscript{100} Saint Caesarius of Arles, \textit{Sermons}, 258.
letters, let us hang some charms on his neck.”  Caesarius continues by adding that “in all this the Devil has one aim: either to cruelly kill the children by abortion, or to heal them still more cruelly by the charms.” Here it seems that some charms were hung from the neck, thus constituting that they were physical objects and most likely amulets. Even more interesting about this passage is that Caesarius himself does not state that the charms do not work, rather, he states that the Devil cruelly heals them by the charms. This is a possible example of a popular belief that even Caesarius perpetuated.

Amulets are not the only pagan remnant that Caesarius condemned. He also mentions that “if anyone knows that near his home there are altars or a temple of profane trees where religious promises are made, he should be eager to destroy them by pulling or cutting them down.” The motif of worshiping a tree or nature might possibly be a continuation of a belief expressed by Tacitus that the Germanic peoples worshipped woods and groves. Caesarius not only encourages those with altars on their property to destroy them, he also warns his listeners to “destroy all the temples which you find” and “do not make vows to trees or pray to fountains.”

Interesting here is that Caesarius is asking for pagan temples to be destroyed knowing that his message of not vowing to trees will never be heard among all the pagans. He is insinuating that paganism is conquerable by removing the temptation to participate in pagan practices by removing what appear to be some fundamental components of the religion.

Although Caesarius often mentions amulets in his sermons, we cannot assume that he was referring specifically to Germanic pagans living in Arles. Christians, Romans, and Greeks

101 Ibid., 262.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid., 83.
104 Ibid., 82.
visited and stayed in the area before various Germanic peoples occupied it.\textsuperscript{105} Meaney points out that those pagans who lived in Arles “were the town dwellers who formed the largest part of the metropolitan bishops’ congregations, and the unchristian elements in their religion were likely to be partly international, late classical ‘paganism’ and partly ‘the religion of the towns’.”\textsuperscript{106} While acknowledging this flaw in assuming that the use of amulets was specifically a Germanic practice, Meaney also notes that, for the last two hundred years, Roman forces were composed partially of Germanic fighters. It is possible that these men copied the fashions of their Roman leaders and these Germanic mercenaries might have learned that objects that pleased the wives of their Mediterranean leaders might also be appealing to their own wives back home.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that Meaney acknowledges that there were parallels in the archaeological record showing amulets being used by free Germanic pagans such as Anglo-Saxons and Jutes before and after they came in contact with Roman Britain.\textsuperscript{107} The point is that whether the peoples of Arles were copying Roman customs or participating in their own, Caesarius acknowledges in several of his sermons that the belief in amulets was widespread and not Christian. With Caesarius’ added condemnations of amulets, it seems more reasonable to include the use of amulets as a broad theme connected with pagan religiosity alongside divination, sacrifice, and feasting.

Jordanes is the author of another primary source that might possibly describe Germanic pagan practices. \textit{The Getica} of Jordanes is not without its problems, including the date of its composition. Jordanes was writing in the mid-sixth century and his origin story of the Goths

\textsuperscript{105} Audrey Meaney, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones}, 11.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
goes back 2,030 years to island of Scandza. While he claimed to be of Gothic decent, his writings indicate that he was a “Latin-educated Constantinopolitan.” Much of the information that Jordanes relates possibly came from a historian and senator known as Cassiodorus (490-585) who wrote a twelve-volume history of the Goths. Cassiodorus’ history is, however, lost and therefore, historians do not have the luxury of having the details that Jordanes was exposed to when he wrote his summarized version. However, historians have archaeological evidence that indicates that it was highly unlikely that the Goths originated from what is known today as Scandinavia. That being said, Jordanes still gives us valuable information concerning etymology.

Walter Goffart, a historian of the late Roman Empire, also makes the argument that the Getica was written apart from Cassiodorus’ history to celebrate the destruction of the Goths in the West. Jordanes’ purpose was not to simply condense Cassiodorus’ work but to eradicate suggestions that a Gothic king was the rightful heir of Italy. Cassiodorus was a trusted Romano-Italian official to the Ostrogothic kings. His history was composed before 533 when the Gothic regime still appeared to be thriving. Jordanes’ goal was not to glorify the Goths but it was written in part of an effort to get rid of Gothic rule in Italy and Spain. Emperor Justinian (r. 527-65) had worked hard to stamp out Gothic hegemony in the West and Goffart believes that Cassiodorus’ history is missing because Jordanes’ task was to bring “Cassiodorus’ history into

---

109 Ibid., 397.
110 Ibid., 381.
111 One theory included the investigation of similar artifacts found both in Scandinavia and near the Vistula river area south of the Baltic. Seven categories of artifacts and practices were found and compared including inhumation burials, stone circles, pear-shaped metal pendants, lack thereof of weapons in graves, serpent-head bracelets, S-shaped pendants and a specific type of pottery design method. If the archaeological remains could be shown to have originated in Scandinavia by dating the artifacts, then the theory that the Goths originated from that area would be more acceptable, however, it seems that only the stone circles originated in Scandinavia. See, Peter Heather, The Goths (Blackwell Publishers: Oxford, 1996) 11-14.
harmony with what Justinian had done to the Gothic kingdom."  

Goffart argues that Jordanes’ purpose was to expurgate Cassiodorus’ Gothic history by taking out most of the positive information pertaining to the success of the Goths.

Jordanes briefly mentioned that the Goths always worshipped Mars. They sacrificed captives to him because they believed that human blood was sufficient for the god associated with war. The Goths also hung the armor of their enemies from trees in dedication to him. 

Jordanes also declared that the Goths had a very deep spirit of religion that went back to their ancestors. Jordanes mentioned several Gothic kings and that once one named Tanausis had died, the Goths worshipped him as one of their gods. Other Gothic kings were actually descendants of the gods according to Jordanes. 

A certain group of Goths who defeated Emperor Domitian’s (r. 81-96) forces in Illyricum henceforth called their leaders the Ansis or demigods, the first of which was named “Gapt.” According Jacob Grimm’s Teutonic Mythology, “Gapt” might have been a corruption of “Gaut” or the Anglo-Saxon “Geat.” E. A. Thompson also mentions the argument that Ansis or Anses has been identified with the Æsir in Scandinavia mythology. North’s investigation of the word is a bit more detailed and he identifies Aza (Late Gothic), ese in ese geschot (Old English), and Áss (singular in Old Icelandic) and Æsir (plural in

__________________________

113 Ibid., 396.
115 One of Odin’s many names was ‘God of the Hanged’ and this is equivocal to Mars in that both were gods of war. Hilda Ellis Davidson emphasizes that hanging was a traditional means of sacrifice, both animal and human, to Odin. It appears plausible that armor could have been given alongside the sacrificed men to the god. Hilda Ellis Davidson, The Lost Beliefs of Northern Europe (Routledge: London, 1993), 60 and 77.
116 Jordanes The Gothic History of Jordanes (1915) VI.
117 Telfus was one such king who was a decedent of Hercules, see Ibid., IX.
118 Jacob Grimm believed that the term “Æsir,” describing the gods of the Northmen of the High Middle Ages was a derivative of the term “Ansis.” Ibid., XIII, see note 78.
Old Icelandic) as being cognates of the word.\textsuperscript{120} Women are also mentioned in Jordanes’ history as defending their territory while their husbands were away and drawing lots for the protection of their land and the destruction of their enemies’ lands.\textsuperscript{121}

At this point it seems helpful to emphasize that Germanic religiosity appears to have shifted in its core purpose, at least for some Germanic nobles. Above we see that Jordanes mentions that the Goths always worshipped “Mars.” Historians cannot be certain of the reliability of this statement and most likely, it was true of the Goths of the mid-sixth century. It appears that war and conquest was becoming a more important aspect of the lives of some Germanic barbarians and that coincidently some of their religious beliefs were beginning to shift.\textsuperscript{122} We also must acknowledge that, according to Jordanes, the Goths had a deep sense of religion that corresponded with their ancestors and that they worshipped one of their kings, Tanausis, after his death as a god.

The emphasis on war and ancestor worship appears to be associated with other Germanic tribes as well, including the Franks. It appears that king Clovis (466-511) was influenced by the impressive and miraculous powers of the saints and these powerful miracles contributed to his choice to convert to Catholicism instead of Arianism.\textsuperscript{123} This attitude towards power and the

\textsuperscript{120}North, \textit{Heathen Gods in Old English Literature}, 136. See also, Vladimir Orel, \textit{A Handbook of Germanic Etymology}, (Boston: Brill, 2003), 21.

\textsuperscript{121} Jordanes \textit{The Gothic History of Jordanes (1915)} VII.

\textsuperscript{122} Michael Enright argues that the cult of Wodan, the war god, appeared as early as the first century AD. It seems as though “many attributes of Wodan and the practices associated with his worship were first borrowed from the Celts” and that the Germans probably learned these attributes and traditions from the Treveri – a Celtic tribe who Tacitus mentions claimed themselves of Germanic descent in chapter 28 of \textit{The Germania}. Enright argues that the general Civilis was able to gain Celtic and Germanic followers during the Batavian revolt because he had one eye (like Woden as described in Old Norse literature). Enright also states that legends of other Mediterranean generals (Hannibal and Sertorius) were know by the peoples that Civilis wanted as followers. Enright contends that these legends were influential enough that Civilis wanted to have a sacred connection to these generals whom also embodied aspects of Woden. Michael Enright, \textit{Lady with a Mead Cup: Ritual, Prohecy and Lordship in the European Warband from La Tène to the Viking Age} (Portland: Four Courts Press, 1996), 217-239.

church is seen in several correspondence letters between Clovis and the bishops stationed in the areas he conquered.

In a letter from bishop Avitus of Vienne to Clovis dating to 496, the bishop explains that Clovis chose to follow the Catholic faith and that he was superior to those peoples who had chosen the Arian faith because they still “observe a futile reverence for their parents.” Avitus goes on to state that “your ancestors have prepared a great destiny for you; you willed to prepare better things [for those who will follow you]. You follow your ancestors in reigning in this world; you have opened the way to your descendants to a heavenly reign.” Here the bishop is both glorifying Clovis’ ancestors and creating a new type of admiration for his descendants and in this case, his people.

Other aspects of an evolving Germanic pagan religiosity can be deduced from the letter. Avitus gives a description of Clovis’ baptism and describes him as originally dressing as a war-king. Avitus stated:

> when your royal locks, hidden under a helmet, were steeped in holy oil; when your breast, relieved of its curiass, shone with the same whiteness as your baptismal robes. Do not doubt, most flourishing of kings, that this soft clothing will give more force to your arms: whatever Fortune has given up to now, this Sanctity will bestow.

Instead of appealing to Clovis with the more peaceful aspects of Christianity, Avitus explained to the conqueror that his conversion made him more powerful. At least among the Germanic kings that the clergy came in to contact with, Germanic religiosity, as demonstrated from the sources, appears now to be based around war and conquest. Avitus’ letter does not give any specific examples of pagan rituals, sacrifice, or divination at this point. Health and healing, as

\[124\] Ibid., 75.
\[125\] Ibid., 76.
\[126\] Ibid., 76.
demonstrated below, however, are consistent anxieties and remain focal points of the church’s message to its new converts.

The next source this chapter discusses is that of Gregory of Tours, his *History of the Franks*. Since this source dates to the sixth century, five hundred years after Tacitus’ *Germania*, is a fascinating history of the Frankish kingdom, its contribution to the study of pagan Germanic religiosity is small indeed. What the *History of the Franks* demonstrates is the importance of literacy through the clergy and Catholic Church.¹²⁷ This survival through the Christian hierarchy is one of the reasons why the perception of paganism, in general, was negative.

This negative viewpoint is particularly evident in the *History of the Franks* as Gregory often mentions that certain Germanic tribes sacrificed to devils.¹²⁸ The first example of this was in chapter thirty-two of book one when a certain bishop’s town was being attacked by the Alamanni. The bishop, Privatus, was hiding in a cave when he encountered the Alamanni who tried to make him sacrifice to their deities. Eventually, this man died from severe injuries from being beaten for not sacrificing with the tribe.¹²⁹ Once again, we have a continuation in the belief of sacrifice and communal responsibility.

Not only did Gregory believe that these pagan gods were devils, but he also believed that certain people had the power of prophecy. In chapter fourteen of book five, Gregory described a certain woman who possessed the ability to prophesize. In this instance, this woman told a certain man named Guntram Boso that he would serve as military leader of one of the Frankish lords by the name of Merovech. This would happen because the current ruler would perish, as

---

¹²⁸ Often the terms “demons” and “devils” are mentioned as being associated with pagan religiosity. The Greek “δαίμων” or “daemons” and Latin “daimon” were originally terms for invisible beings in the ancient world that brought luck or misfortune. Naomi Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World: Pagans, Jews and Christians* (Routledge: London, 2001), 27-34.
¹²⁹ Gregory of Tours *The History of the Franks* I.34.
she gave an exact date that the new leader, Merovech, would come into power.\textsuperscript{130} Gregory discredits her power by stating that this all happened at a later date than she had prescribed. Gregory again mentions that “one should put no reliance on the Devil’s promises.”\textsuperscript{131} Another female with the ability to perform divination is mentioned by Gregory in book seven, chapter forty-four. This woman had apparently acquired so much wealth from her ability that she was able to purchase herself a great amount of jewelry. As she walked about in public, she wore so much jewelry that people thought that she might be a goddess.\textsuperscript{132} Perhaps this prophetess purchased this jewelry for amuletic purposes, though Gregory’s text implies that the jewelry was for business purposes and vanity. Filotas and Flint, as mentioned earlier, point out that divination is yet another aspect of Germanic religiosity, and, in \textit{The History of the Franks}, it represents an aspect of pagan religiosity that the church, in the sixth century, wanted to discredit.

In book nine, chapter six, Gregory described a man who staged himself as a carrier of relics. The man was exposed by bishop Ragnemond as an imposter and carried with him a bag containing various animal bones and plant roots. Gregory made it clear that the bishop knew that these types of items were associated with witchcraft and the bishop poured the contents of the bag in a nearby river.\textsuperscript{133} The items described match the criteria of amulets as defined by Meaney.\textsuperscript{134} Another man that Gregory described as a necromancer in the same chapter did not, as far as Gregory’s text confirms, carry any types of amulets though the man himself posed as a healer with an ability, in Gregory’s work, that only high-ranking Christians performed successfully.\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., V.14.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., V.14.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., VII.44.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., IX.6.
\textsuperscript{134} Meaney, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones}, 4.
\textsuperscript{135} Gregory of Tours \textit{The History of the Franks} IX.6
Other times that pagans are mentioned specifically in *The History of the Franks* involve instances in which those who were labeled as pagan had yet to receive the right type of education from a Christian missionary. One such instance involved the first bishop of Tours, Gatinus, who managed to convert some of the original residents of Tours that had previously worshipped idols.\(^{136}\) Gregory does not shy away from mentioning that the great bishop of Tours, Martin (315-397), had parents who were pagan.\(^{137}\) It seems clear from Gregory’s work that what concerned the Christian hierarchy the most during this period was not necessarily pagans, but those pagans that might draw power from the church from practicing sacrifice, divination, or proclaiming with or without amulets to possess the power of healing. How many of these men or women were pagan, in the sense that they believed in specific pagan gods, and how many were simply people attempting to make a living off of the beliefs of others cannot be accurately assessed through Gregory’s work.

Returning to the aspect of power, as was demonstrated in the above paragraphs, the Christian church seemed to want to convince its future generations that the power of the Saints and Christian miracles was far more powerful than pagan and popular traditions. This emphasis on power and the Christian religion demonstrates that not only were the religious aspects of Germanic paganism evolving, but also that the Christians recognized a need to demonstrate that their religion was more powerful and thus, Christianity also accommodated this new idea in hopes of more members.\(^{138}\)

This is also demonstrated through Gregory’s description of Clovis’ conversion. The conversion of Clovis is described in much the same way as the conversion of Constantine in AD

---

\(^{136}\) Ibid., X.30.  
\(^{137}\) Ibid., I.36.  
Clovis was battling the Alamanni and after calling on his own gods to aid in the battle with no avail, Clovis looked to heaven and cried out to Jesus Christ by asking him for help in granting him victory over his enemies. He proclaimed that his gods had both abandoned him and that they obviously had no power since they were not answering to him. As he pleaded to heaven, the Alamanni retreated and surrendered to Clovis.\textsuperscript{139} Clotild, his queen, also played a prominent role in his conversion. She pleaded with Clovis to have her first child baptized and exclaimed that Clovis’ idols “are images carved of wood or stone, or metal. Moreover the names which ye have given them are the names of men and not of gods.”\textsuperscript{140} Gregory goes on to reference that the Romanized names of Saturn and Jupiter were names of people and not gods.\textsuperscript{141} Gregory then writes that Clovis’ reply was “it is by command of our gods that all things are created and come forth; it is manifest that thy god availeth in nothing; nay more, he is not even proven to belong to the race of gods.”\textsuperscript{142} Here we have three aspects of pagan religiosity exemplified. First, Gregory seems more concerned with making the Christian god more powerful than the pagan gods because he wins over Clovis by granting him victory in war. It appears that Germanic pagan religiosity was indeed moving towards war ideology and away from fertility. Second, Gregory describes Clovis’ gods as being physical images carved out of metal, wood, or stone. Again this demonstrates moving away from Tacitus’ description of worshipping woods and groves to actual carved idols. Third, in Hillgarth’s translation, Clovis refers to his gods as being part of a special race. Along with ancestor worship, now the gods appear to belong to a specific and divine hierarchy associated with kingship. This text offers a mid-point, in the sixth century, between

\textsuperscript{139} Gregory of Tours, \textit{The History of the Franks} II.29 and II.30.
\textsuperscript{140} Hillgarth, 80.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.
the earliest Medieval sources and the Old Norse sources and we can see a clear shift in pagan religiosity.

The next primary source this chapter discusses is *The History of the Lombards* by Paul the Deacon (720/30-797/99). Dating to the late eighth century, *The History of the Lombards* offers specific information about the names of the gods of this Germanic people’s religion. Paul the Deacon also mentions several non-Christian practices throughout the work. It is far more specific than *The History of the Franks*, yet its credibility is still questionable. Paul the Deacon, like Tacitus, compared these Germanic gods and goddesses to gods and goddesses with similar functions in early Rome. The following paragraphs give several specific examples as well as an explanation of their value to those interested in early Germanic pagan religiosity.

A continuing theme evident in both *The History of the Franks* as well as in *The History of the Lombards* is the theme of a female prophetess. Paul the Deacon begins his work by recounting the origin story of the Lombards, his own people. In chapter three of book one, a certain high-ranking woman named Gambara, who happened to be the mother of two leaders of the Lombards named Ibor and Aio, has been compared to another Gambara described as a prophetess in the *Chronicon Gothanum*. Gambara compelled the Winnili (Lombards) to migrate south from their island Scadinavia in the *Chronicon Gothanum*. In *The History of the Lombards*, she is simply the mother of the two leaders and “most prudent in counsel among her people.” The name “Gambara” is also significant because it has been suggested that it be interpreted as “Gand-bara, carrier of the magical staff.” Gandr in Old Norse means “magical staff” and if indeed Gambara’s name reflected her position in her society, then not only can

144 Ibid., I.3.
historians see a continuity in etymology but also continuity in tradition, which spans from Paul’s
time to the Late Middle Ages and is reflected in Old Norse sources.

Before the brief description by Paul of Gambara, he notes that the Lombards chose who
would leave their homeland by drawing lots. Some members of the tribe left because the island
they inhabited could no longer sustain them. Drawing lots might have originated as a pagan
practice, although it is unclear if the practice was truly pagan or viewed as a popular procedure at
this point in time. Regardless of the origin of the practice, with pagan connotations or not, Paul
the Deacon did not speak negatively about the situation and told the story without a biased
opinion.

Perhaps the most useful and interesting aspect of the *History of the Lombards*, for this
study, are the gods and goddesses described in chapter eight of book one. Here we have a
glimpse of several names that are also available in later, Old Norse sources. Paul the Deacon
relates a particular story about the god “Godan” and the goddess “Frea.” Gambara, the woman
who in other versions of the story was able to prophesize, apparently went to Frea before there
was to be a battle between her tribe and another tribe known as the *Wandals*. The Wandals had
already asked Godan for assistance but his reply was to give victory to the first peoples he saw at
daylight. Frea’s advice to Gambara was to have all the women in her tribe let down their hair
and tie it under their chins so that they appeared to be men. She also advised them to be in view
from the east, the direction that Godan looked every morning. When he saw all these peoples
with “facial” hair, he asked Frea who the long-beards were and thus the Lombards received their
name. Frea then suggested to Godan that he give victory to the people he just named. Paul
copied this story down from another source known as the “*Origo Gentis Langobadorum*.” Ibid., I.8.
justifies the retelling of this story by agreeing that the Lombards gained victory in this particular battle, but he states that the assumption that the victory was given to his people by anyone other than the Christian God was a senseless assumption to make.\footnote{Ibid., I.9.}

In the next chapter, Paul mentions that the origin of Godan’s name is from the more common name “Wotan” whom, Paul does not fail to mention, is the same god as Mercury in Rome.\footnote{Ibid.} Wotan was apparently a god that “all the peoples of Germany” worshipped.\footnote{Ibid.} Paul even goes on to say that the god did not originate in Germanic territory but actually had origins from ancient Greece.\footnote{Ibid.} The names “Wotan” and “Frea” are quite interesting in this context as “Frea” is often mentioned in later sources while “Wotan” is more commonly used in earlier sources. The use of the two names together in one particular story interacting with one another suggests that both deities might be older than their individual sources suggest. Among specific names of gods, Paul the Deacon also mentions several other pagan practices and stories throughout Germanic territories.

Another example includes the Frankish king, Gunthram, whom is also mentioned in the \textit{History of the Franks}. Gunthram’s tale focuses around a dream sequence. While hunting in the forest with his friend, Gunthram decided to lie down for a bit and he went to sleep. Out of Gunthram’s mouth a small reptile appeared and crossed the stream in front of him by use of Gunthram’s friend’s sword, which he had laid across the stream. After crossing the stream the creature went inside the cave of a mountain and then returned across the stream and back into Gunthram’s mouth. Gunthram woke up and told his companion that he had had a strange dream in which he crossed an “iron bridge” and went into a mountain where he saw great amounts of...
gold. His companion likewise told him what he saw. The area was excavated and apparently, a
great treasure was found. Gunthram apparently tried to send a solid canopy of gold to Jerusalem
but had to settle by giving it to a more local church to be placed over the body of St. Marcellus. 153  This story can be interpreted in a number of different ways. First, the idea that a
king had the ability to turn into an animal and discover buried treasure does not appear to be a
common Christian motif, however, the story can also be taken as a type of propaganda to support
the donation of such treasures to the church.

While obvious that these works were not designed to commemorate the old religion of
the peoples being described, the History of the Lombards gives plenty of details about the origins
of the Lombards. The story of Gambara’s prophecy supports the concept that divination
remained an important part of Germanic religiosity. Specific Germanic names of a god and
goddess are introduced and those names are referred to in the Norse sources as well as Bede’s
Ecclesiastical History of the English People, the next source this chapter addresses. Further, the
concept of Germanic religiosity turning towards war as a central motif is confirmed by Goden’s
decision to make the Lombards the victors in the battle against the Vandals. In addition, Paul
the Deacon gives us a new motif of a king being able to shape-shift by turning into an animal in
order to locate treasure. While new for sources composed during this period, this motif appears
to be consistent throughout the Old Norse sources. 154

Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People, dating to the early eighth century, is
particularly useful because it specifically describes the Christianization of peoples occupying
England. This source, in many ways, confirms what the other sources above have already stated.

153 Ibid., III.34.
154 Odin is also associated with the shamanistic ability to shape-shift. Throughout the later, Scandinavian (Norse)
mythology, he can travel between worlds, transform his figure, and speak with the dead. Hilda Ellis Davidson, The
Lost Beliefs of Northern Europe, 77.
Pagan customs are vaguely labeled and the author does not give too much detail about them. In chapter fifteen of book one, Bede mentions the name “Woden” as the progenitor of many Royal families. This is the first mentioning of Woden involved with the genealogy of the original kings of Kent, “Hengist” and “Horsa.” Richard North has commented on the appearance of the name “Woden” in the early eighth century but continues to argue that the paganism of Anglo-Saxon England was not so much based on a warrior-cult but on a cult based around the renewal of nature. Consequently, Woden was known in all other Anglo-Saxon genealogies other than the East Saxons.

One of the most important examples of paganism in Bede’s work is in Book two, chapter thirteen. King Edwin and Coifi, a high priest in Goodmanham, were convinced by Paulinus, the archbishop of York, to accept Christianity over their old heathen gods. Bede’s recount of the story suggests that Coifi was more than willing to listen to what the bishop had to say about Christianity. Coifi admitted to the king and the bishop that the gods of their current religion were not bestowing much profit on him and as a declaration to the new faith, he asked for arms and a stallion. Bede declared that a high-priest of their religion was not allowed to carry arms and was only permitted to ride mares. With a spear and the king’s stallion, he rode to the shrine of the gods and threw the spear at it. Next, he ordered his followers to burn the remains of the shrine. Richard North notes that this gesture can be interpreted as a pagan one in which this

157 The East Saxons started losing their independence before the other Anglo-Saxon tribes and kept referring to *Seaxneat* as their founder, North explains that this was possibly an indication of their independence. See, Ibid., 13.
158 Bede *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* II.13. It should be noted that Bede’s authenticity with this specific story has been questioned because “priests and buildings specifically for worship are not considered to be a feature of religion in the Germanic homelands.” Despite this difference, it has been noted both by Barbara Yorke and Richard North that Anglo-Saxon paganism had its differences with the Germanic paganism of the content because of the different peoples who occupied Britain (Romans, Celts, Picts). See, Barbara Yorke, *The Conversion
particular priest had knowledge of Wodan or Óðinn because the act of throwing a spear at one’s enemies is a gesture performed by the god himself.\textsuperscript{159}

Another important situation is recounted in chapter thirty of book one. Bede often refers to the great church fathers throughout his work and he recounts a letter from St. Gregory (540-604) in which Gregory endorses the policy of maintaining the old temples of the pagans rather than destroying their structures. Gregory believed it would be easier to win converts if the true God replaced the pagan gods. He also noted that since the pagans sacrifice to their idols, it would be wise to have them sacrifice to the one true God and/or have feasts for holy martyrs.\textsuperscript{160}

Bede’s history is extremely useful because it describes pagan Germanic religiosity in a stage of transformation. It confirms that an act associated with Wodan, the war god, was capable through one of the old pagan priests with the example of Coifi throwing his new spear at the altar of his old gods. It also becomes evident in Bede’s history that ancestor worship was a part of the religiosity of the kings. From North’s work on Anglo-Saxon paganism, it can be deduced that the Anglo-Saxon chroniclers also copied down ancestries of the kings and that, indeed, there was a shift towards accrediting Wodan as progenitor of many kings sometime in the eighth century. Feasting is another consistent aspect of pagan religiosity described by Bede in that he notes that Gregory the Great did not want to completely destroy the traditions of the pagans by taking their temples and feasting rituals away, but he wanted to give those rituals and sacred spaces new Christian meanings.

The final group of Early Medieval sources this chapter discusses are \textit{The Life of Saint Boniface} and the correspondence letters of Saint Boniface (675-754). The later, dating to the


\textsuperscript{159} Bede \textit{The Ecclesiastical History of the English People} I.7. and North, \textit{Heathen Gods in Old English Literature}, 11.

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., I.30.
early eighth century, were a product of the Christian mission on the continent. Boniface, whose original name was Winfrid, sailed to the continent from London in 716 to pursue a life of missionary work.\textsuperscript{161} We cannot be certain about Boniface’s primary reason to go to the continent but it appears that there were several reasons including his own personal endeavor in converting his ancestors living on the continent.\textsuperscript{162} In his letters, he constantly sought approval from Rome and the papacy, which shows that he felt loyal to the Roman church and that he believed in a strong, organized, and authoritative system. His letters address the concerns he had for pagans on the continent as well as anxieties about establishing new bishoprics in Germanic territory. It is hard to gage the numbers of pagans that missionaries like Boniface were up against, as well as the type of beliefs those peoples held, because Irish missionaries, starting with Columbanus in the sixth century, had been working on the continent.\textsuperscript{163} The problem was that pagan religiosity was still alive and that the beliefs of some pagans were now possibly blended with Christianity.\textsuperscript{164}

One of the most famous examples of Boniface’s contact with pagans is evident in \textit{The Life of Saint Boniface}, written by a priest named Willibald (700-786) within thirteen years after Boniface’s death around 755. In chapter VI, in a town called Gaesmere, Boniface destroyed a huge Oak tree known to the pagans as “the Oak of Jupiter.”\textsuperscript{165} Not only did Boniface cut the tree down, he had a church built in the same spot out of the tree’s wood.\textsuperscript{166} Here we have a connection to worshipping in groves and woods rather than in a temple. Also, it appears that the tree was associated with the gods, meaning that the tree might not have been worshipped as the

---

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., ix-x.
\textsuperscript{163} \textit{The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany}, vii-ix.
\textsuperscript{164} \textit{The Letters of Saint Boniface}, trans. Ephraim Emerton , ix.
\textsuperscript{165} Willibald, \textit{The Life of St. Boniface}, trans. C. H. Talbot in \textit{The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany}, VI.
\textsuperscript{166} \textit{The Letters of Saint Boniface}, trans. Ephraim Emerton , xiv.
god as mentioned in Tacitus’ work. Other pagan rituals are also described in this chapter including the offering of sacrifices to springs, divination by inspecting entrails, paying attention to auspices and auguries.¹⁶⁷

Boniface’s correspondence letters also offer glimpses of the types of pagan behaviors Boniface was attempting to put a stop to. In a letter dating to 723/4, bishop Daniel of Winchester gave Boniface some advice on how to deal with questions that pagans might ask. Concerning convincing the pagans that their gods are false, Daniel states:

Do not begin by arguing with them about the origin of their gods, false as those are, but let them affirm that some of them were begotten by others through the intercourse of male with female, so that you may at least prove that gods and goddesses born after the manner of men are men and not gods…¹⁶⁸

Interesting here is that Daniel emphasizes that some of the gods were born like humans and that this was one way to distinguish the more powerful God. The pagan element of worshipping their leaders is also apparent when Daniel goes on to state: “Ask your opponents who governed the world before the gods were born, who was the ruler? How could they bring under their dominion or subject to their law a universe that had always existed before them?”¹⁶⁹ Here it seems that Daniel’s line of thought on convincing the pagans that their gods are false is not to tell them outright that their gods do not exist, but to emphasize that the Christian God is the most powerful. Also, it shows that gods are connected to rulers and leadership, which indicates that the pagans themselves might have been more inclined to accept this if they already believed that their leaders were connected to the gods.

¹⁶⁷ Willibald The Life of St. Boniface VI.
¹⁶⁸ Willibald The Life of St. Boniface XV.
¹⁶⁹ Ibid., XV.
Daniel also mentions that it does not make sense for the pagans to sacrifice to their gods because apparently their gods already have everything.\textsuperscript{170} Sacrifice is also brought up in other letters addressing Boniface’s conversion methods. In a letter from Pope Gregory II commending Boniface to the Thuringians, Gregory tells the people to “Worship not idols, neither sacrifice offerings of flesh to them, for God does not accept such things….”\textsuperscript{171} In reply to some of Boniface’s questions on dealing with proper doctrine, Gregory wrote that the pagans are allowed to consume sacrificial meat if they do not believe in idols and are not dedicating it to idols.\textsuperscript{172} In Boniface’s arguments against the pagans, we begin to see a glimpse of associating leaders with gods, new-anthropomorphized gods, and the continuation of the ritual of sacrifice. It appears that pagan religiosity has shifted from being a religion based on fertility and nature to a religion based on war and power around the last four centuries. The Old Norse sources reflect this change and are subsequently discussed in chapter two.

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., XV.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., XVII.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid., XVIII.
CHAPTER 2: THE CONTRIBUTION OF OLD NORSE SOURCES TO THE STUDY OF GERMANIC PAGAN RELIGIOSITY

While chapter one focused on some of the earliest written sources for Germanic pagan religiosity, this chapter focuses primarily on some of the most informative yet troublesome sources from the High Middle Ages, the Old Norse sources. Since the early seventeenth century, scholars of Old Norse literature have argued about the nature of these fantastic works, and this debate persists today. Many argue that these sources can only be used in the context of the period in which they were written, usually the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and not for the period to which they refer, the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries. Not only are the sources fantastic, but most were found in manuscripts in Iceland dating to after the island was converted in AD 1000, thus they have their own problems of Christian influence and censorship. Despite these debatable aspects, the Old Norse works do offer a detailed look at Old Norse mythology and thus, as this chapter argues, can be linked to earlier Germanic religiosity.

In order to understand the problems and value of the Old Norse/Icelandic written sources, the various forms of Old Norse literature and the quality of their historicity need a brief explanation. These forms include sagas, poems, and settlement records. The following paragraphs will explain the most important forms of Old Norse literature to this study and explore several debates surrounding their value as historical sources. Starting with records composed before Iceland’s conversion, this chapter presents and analyzes elements of pagan religiosity in the High Middle Ages.

173 As mentioned in note three of the introduction, the conversion itself was a peaceful one allowing some pagan practices to survive as a compromise. For more information on the conversion process, see Karlsson, Iceland’s 1100 Years: The History of a Marginal Society, 33-37.
Íslendingabók or The Book of Icelanders and Landnámabók, The Book of Settlements are the first two chief sources of Icelandic history and thus the first sources that exemplify pagan religiosity. They prove useful to the study of pagan religiosity because they discuss some of the religious practices of the settlers of Iceland and the conversion process. The earliest surviving version of The Book of Icelanders was written by Ari Thorgilsson (1067-1148) and his history begins with the ninth century. The records are known for being of a “less-fantastic” nature than other Old Norse sources and scholars use them as authenticators for several family sagas, described below. The settlement records correspond with the names, settlement topography, and chronological order in the family sagas. Five versions of the Book of Settlements exist today. Partially written by Ari Thorgilsson (1067-1148), scholars believe that the earliest version of the Book of Settlements dates back to the eleventh century.

If a continuum of pagan beliefs exists between the Germanic peoples of the Migration period and the Old Norse peoples of the later Middle Ages, then they should share some of the basic elements of Germanic pagan religiosity. Divination, feasting, sacrifice, and amulets are all indicators, as will be demonstrated below, that Germanic religiosity had some consistent elements spanning the periods in question. Further, other elements including names of gods and goddesses are also traceable to the Migration period from these Old Norse sources. The following source analyses continue with the methodology used to investigate sources from the Early Middle Ages as described in the previous chapter.

Feasting and sacrifice are often mentioned in The Book of Settlements, though, it is not always clear as to whom sacrifices are made and what exactly is being sacrificed. In chapter

---

175 See chapter one, pages 9-16.
142, an autumn feast is mentioned in which a man named Gest is said to have given advice and foretold the future.\textsuperscript{176} Feasting is mentioned for other occasions such as marriages and funerals as well.\textsuperscript{177} In chapter 7, for example, Ingolf, one of the original settlers of Iceland “held a great sacrifice to discover what the future had in store for him…and, the oracle told him to go to Iceland.”\textsuperscript{178} In chapter 149, a man is mentioned by the name of Vegeir who acquired this name because he was a “great sacrificer.”\textsuperscript{179} A skaldic poem is also exemplified in chapter 377 of \textit{The Book of Settlements} and, in the poem, Odin – “the gallows-god” is mentioned as receiving a sacrifice and “the raven a corpse.”\textsuperscript{180} Though this work is primarily concerned with genealogy and settlement patterns, sacrifice and feasting are indeed mentioned and so are the names of specific gods and animals associated with those gods.

Interestingly, Odin is rarely mentioned throughout the work but other gods, which appear to be less common in the earlier literature, are mentioned often throughout the settlement records. Names of the settlers of Iceland are also often associated with gods and goddesses. For example, the most commonly mentioned god is Thor and many of his worshippers have his name or gave their children his name.\textsuperscript{181} For example in chapter 85, Thorolf “was a great sacrificer and worshipped Thor.”\textsuperscript{182} Also, it appears that some of the first settlers of Iceland held both Christian and pagan beliefs. In chapter 218, for example, a man named Helgi had mixed beliefs and “he believed in Christ but invoked Thor when it came to voyages and difficult times.”\textsuperscript{183}

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 207 and 110.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., 149.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid., 377. As will be demonstrated below, the Raven was an animal normally associated with Odin.
\textsuperscript{181} Out of around 1000 names recorded in \textit{Landnámabók}, around a quarter of them have the word Thor in them. The god Thor, however, does not appear to be mentioned in the earlier written Germanic sources and appears to be specifically part of the Scandinavian tradition. Hilda Ellis Davidson, \textit{The Lost Beliefs of Northern Europe}, 58-59.
\textsuperscript{182}\textit{The Book of Settlements: Landnámabók} 85.
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 218.
The god Frey is mentioned as being an image on a piece of lost silver in chapter 179.\textsuperscript{184} Though there is no way to confirm, the image of Frey being on a lost piece of silver could be an indication of an amulet. Coincidentally, the lost piece of silver was also associated with divination.

A seeress is mentioned in chapter 179 as proclaiming a prophecy about three men who would go and settle in a new land.\textsuperscript{185} One of the men, Ingimund, did not believe the seeress when she told him that “he couldn’t prevent it, and as a proof she said that something had vanished from his purse and wouldn’t be found till he started digging for his high-seat pillars in the new country.”\textsuperscript{186} The item which Ingimund had lost was the coin with Frey’s image discussed above. Ingimund found the coin by sending “two Lapps on a magic ride to Iceland to look for the object he’d lost…The Lapps came back—they’d found the image but couldn’t get it…”\textsuperscript{187} This passage is both unusual and important as it mentions a seeress and the Lapps, a people whom scholars believe had a shamanistic religion, might also have influenced later Germanic pagan religiosity. However, the coin helped Ingimund to settle in a new land and thus, the coin had an amuletic purpose.

While \textit{The Book of Settlements} does not provide many details about rituals, it certainly shows that pagan rituals practiced during the settlement period of Iceland, the ninth and tenth

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 179.
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{187} Ibid. In his work, \textit{The Viking Way}, Neil Price, an archaeologist from the University of Uppsala, has compiled and analyzed a large and extensive collection of archaeological objects that seem to be associated with the Old Norse pagan religiosity. Price’s work compared Old Norse pagan beliefs with the shamanistic religion of the Saami people, a culture that existed during the Viking age and still exists today. This comparison is warranted because the old Scandinavian cultures did have contact with the Saami people, whose religion involved what anthropologists call shamanism. Shamanism is a constructed term, much like magic, used to describe the rituals of those who “attained altered states of consciousness in order to mediate between human beings and the supernatural world.” It is argued that the “shamanistic” elements associated with Odin are a contribution of these peoples to Old Norse religiosity, and thus Germanic religiosity. Neil S. Price, \textit{The Viking Way: Religion and War in Late Iron Age Scandinavia}, (Uppsala: The Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, 2002), 233-235.
\end{flushright}
centuries, had some similarities with those practiced by Germanic peoples in the first century, specifically the ritual of sacrifice. It also mentions the names of several gods that appear to be linked to gods mentioned by Paul the Deacon. The use of amulets also appears to be a consistent practice throughout both periods. The next group of sources this chapter discusses are the Icelandic sagas which tend to be slightly more detailed and fantastic than the settlement records. These works also provide evidence for a continuous pattern of beliefs.

The most frequently cited Old Norse literary works are the sagas. There are various types of sagas. The most important for this study are those classified as “family sagas.” The family sagas are novelistic stories including tales about the lives of Icelanders during the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries without direct emphasis on leaders or kings, although men of this status were involved in them. Like the early medieval sources, the family sagas were written in the thirteenth century - at least two hundred years after the events they describe.  

Associated with a pre-Christian ideology and religion, elements of sorcery and magic are prominent in the Icelandic family sagas. One reason family sagas are controversial is because of their composure date and probable Christian authorship. There are also questions about whether the family sagas represent an early oral tradition, or if they were simply novelistic fictions created during a European-wide movement towards Latin prose in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Other debates include questions about the influence of Celtic motifs in Icelandic literature as well as to what extent the sagas reflected contemporary folklore. Even if the sagas were written by

---

189 Bernadine McCreesh emphasizes that most of the family sagas were composed in the thirteenth century and that if they were not written by clerics then they were most certainly composed by men who were educated by the clergy. Bernadine McCreesh, “How Pagan are the Icelandic Family Sagas,” in The Journal of English and Germanic Philology 79, no. 1 (Jan. 1980): 58.
churchmen, novelistic, and not representative of a historical reality, they still show a continuity of religious pagan elements that can be linked to the Early Middle Ages. Scholars can still see instances of sacrifice, divination, and feasting, which Filotas categorizes as elements of Germanic paganism, as well as the added themes of war as a central motif and amulets as a means of healing. The following pages compile evidence from the sagas that represent a continuation of these beliefs starting with divination.

There are several instances of divination known throughout the sagas. Perhaps the most detailed account of an Old Norse ritual is one described in “Eirik the Red’s Saga.” Depicted in a positive light, chapter four of this work is about a seeress who encounters people at a farm in Greenland. Her name was Thorbjorg and after an invitation to the farm, she predicted the future of that household and determined when the difficult times that were occurring would end.¹⁹² Thorbjorg is described as wearing

a black mantle with a strap, which was adorned with precious stones right down to the hem. About her neck she wore a string of glass beads and on her head a hood of black lambskin lined with white catskin. She bore a staff with a knob at the top, adorned with brass set with stones on top. About her waist she had a linked charm belt with a large purse. In it she kept charms she needed for her predictions.¹⁹³

Before she traveled to the farm, the inhabitants of the household constructed a high seat for her as well as a platform for sorcery a “seiðhjallr.” Thorbjorg asked for women in the audience to participate in her ritual; these women were to chant in order to attract spirits. Thorbjorg then stood on top of the platform and was able to foresee the future of the farm.¹⁹⁴ Despite the detail

¹⁹³ Ibid.
¹⁹⁴ Ibid. Perhaps the seeress stepped on the platform in order for her to communicate with the gods, like the seeress in “The Seeress’s Prophecy” explained below. This example is comparable with definition of shamanism, because Thorbjorg wanted to attract supernatural beings in order to communicate with them and predict the future of the farm.
of this particular rite, some scholars see this passage as unrealistic and not reflective of actual circumstances.

Thorbjorg, a woman of power and prestige, is simply an archetype some scholars argue, because the passage is too detailed. Anne Stine Ingstad and Helge Ingstad, known for their work *The Viking Discovery of America*, argue that “this lengthy séance, which culminates in the prophecy…leaves the reader with a strong impression of being confronted with a literary product.”

Although Thorbjorg may not have been a historical figure, archaeological evidence serves to support the motif that some powerful Norse women performed rituals like hers. In addition, Thorbjorg’s detailed description reveals certain items that seeresses were likely to carry. For one, she was said to have been carrying a highly adorned staff and, if we recall the motif of Gambara from the Lombards, we see that divination (something that both Gambara and Thorbjorg performed) and the instance of carrying the symbolic staff are possibly related. Etymology suggests also that the name “Gambara” could be interpreted as “Gand-barra” or “magical-staff carrier.” Further, Thorbjorg is described as wearing highly specific clothing and carrying a bag of charms. It appears that these charms, since they are described as being able to aid Thorberg with her predictions, were amulets as defined by Meaney in chapter one.

Neil Price analyzed a specific passage in “The Saga of the People of Laxárdal” that addresses the grave of a woman known for prophecy. A woman dreamed that a seeress was buried underneath a church. The seeress came to the woman in her dreams because too much holy water was being spilt on her bones. Price’s translation of the saga states that after the women told others of her dream, they started digging under the church and “underneath they

---

197 See above, pages 22-23.
198 Ingstad and Anne Stine Ingstad, *The Viking Discovery of America*, 72.
found bones, which were blue [or black] and ill-looking, together with a brooch and a great seiðr-staff [seiðstafr]. People then realized that a seeress must have been buried there. The bones were moved to a remote place, where people were less likely to pass by.”

Like Thorbjorg and possibly Gambara, this seeress carried a staff and had a brooch. These passages suggest that divination was a religious belief shared by some Germanic peoples throughout the Middle Ages and that, at least according to the Old Norse sources, divination appears to have been associated with certain types of objects including staffs and brooches.

There are also instances of feasting accompanied by sacrifice depicted in the family sagas. The descriptions of many feasts are, however, ambiguous and it is hard to determine if the particular feast in question was part of a specific pagan ritual. Feasting is mentioned in chapter 10 of “The Saga of Gisli Sursson” – a popular saga about an outlawed man (Gisli) who must hide from and trick his pursuers in the Western Fjords of Iceland. The author of this saga, which scholars estimate was written sometime between 1270 and 1320, describes that “in those days (the saga is set sometime between 940 and 980) it was the custom to celebrate the coming of winter by holding feasts and a Winter Night’s sacrifice.”

Feasting is mentioned again in the saga with specific reference to the Norse god Frey. Chapter 15 mentions that Thorgrim and Gisli were going to have separate winter feasts and that Thorgrim was planning to have a sacrifice for Frey. The saga also mentions that there was going to be drinking at both of the feasts and that at least sixty people were expected to attend Gisli’s feast.

“Egil’s Saga” is another famous saga that depicts feasting and sacrifice. Egil was a poet-warrior whose family left Norway because of the new political structure being enforced by king

199 Price, The Viking Way, 176.
201 “Gisli Sursson’s Saga” trans. Martin S. Regal Kunz, 10 and Faraday, “Custom and Belief in the Icelandic Sagas,” 416.
Harald Fair-hair. The story depicts Egil as an angry and stubborn viking with the gift of poetry. Possibly written between 1220 and 1240, the action of this saga takes place between 850 and 1000 (before the time of conversion). In chapter 44, the saga mentions that a feast was prepared for king Eirik “because a sacrifice was being made to the disir. It was a splendid feast with plenty to drink in the main room.” Dísir in Icelandic is plural for Día and is a general term used to describe female deities though, in its singular form, is used to reference specific goddesses like “Freyja.”

In both cases above, specific gods/goddesses and/or specific seasons are associated with the feasts. Frey is mentioned in Gísla saga Súrssonar and, it can be argued that this god was associated with fertility especially since he is, in the case, also associated with the changing of seasons. In both cases, drinking was involved as well. The tradition of feasting seems to be a continuous practice that possibly dates back to at least the fourth century with the example of St. Saba, though the practice is probably much older.

Sacrifice is at times not obvious in the family sagas. For example, as mentioned above, when Iceland accepted Christianity in or around AD 1000, a strange un-Christian practice was forbidden. Retold in chapter 105 of “Njal’s Saga,” the conversion process involved a certain Thorgeir, a chieftain in Iceland, who was asked to deliberate on the wishes of the Christians who came to the Law Rock along with pagans to argue and proclaim that each was not bound to the other by law. Thorgeir was given three silvers and he was asked to decide on the new law. In order for Thorgeir to reach a decision he “spread a cloak over his head and lay this way for a

204 Davidson, The Lost Beliefs of Northern Europe, 113.
205 Turville-Petre, Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia.
The next day, after asking for silence Throgeir asked the audience, both pagan and Christian, to accept his law whether they agreed with it or not. Then he said that they would henceforth be Christians and that they would “give up all worship of false idols, the exposure of children, and the eating of horse meat. Three years’ outlawry will be the penalty for open violations, but if these things are practiced in secret there shall be no punishment.” Within a few years of this statement, these pagan practices were completely banned. The practice that seems out of place is the consumption of horse meat. Horses appear to be one of the sacred animals that were often kept and dedicated to certain gods. The fact that the consumption of their meat was banned indicates that they were used during feasting and as sacrificial meat.

Perhaps the most detailed passage in the sagas related to sacrifice is in “The Saga of the People of Eyri,” a work filled with supernatural occurrences. In chapter 4, Thorolf (the same Norseman mentioned in The Book of Settlements) is described once again as sacrificer. Apparently, Thorolf “held a great sacrificial feast during which he consulted his dear friend Thor (a person) about whether he should reconcile himself with the king or leave the country…” Thorolf then decided to take apart and pack up his own temple dedicated to Thor (the god) in order to move it to Iceland. While approaching the island, he threw out his “high-seat pillars...
which had been in his temple, one of which had Thor carved on it.” Thorolf decided he would settle wherever Thor directed him to settle or where the pillars landed and he rebuilt his temple in the same area. The most fascinating aspect of this saga is the description of the temple. According to the saga, the temple was considered a sanctuary and a ring “weighing twenty ounces and fashioned without a join was placed, and all oaths had to be sworn on this ring.”

At all public assemblies, the temple priest had to wear this ring. Also,

a sacrificial bowl was placed on the platform and in it a sacrificial twig – like a priest’s aspersgillum – which was used to sprinkle blood from the bowl. This blood, which was called sacrificial blood, was the blood of live animals offered to the gods. The gods were placed around the platform in the choir-like structure within the temple. All farmers had to pay a toll to the temple and they were obliged to support the temple godi in all his campaigns, just as the thingmen are now obliged to do for their chieftain. The temple godi was responsible for the upkeep of the temple and ensuring that it was maintained properly, as well as for holding sacrificial feasts in it.

It appears that the author of this saga was describing a pagan temple in almost the same manner of a description of a church, however, this description presents concrete evidence that animal sacrifice was most likely one type of sacrifice that occurred in Iceland. It also tells us that multiple gods might be worshipped in the same temple.

There are many other instances of sacrifice in the sagas and not all are specifically associated with feasting. In chapter 101 of Njáls saga, sacrifice is mentioned vaguely as being part of a malevolent ritual, which coincides with the fact that the authors of the sagas were Christian. The saga says that there was a sorcerer and that certain pagans paid him to put someone to death and “he went up to Arnarstakk heath and performed a great sacrifice there.”

215 Ibid.
216 Ibid.
217 Ibid.
218 Ibid., 133-134.
219 Njal’s Saga, 101.
The saga does not specify what the great sacrifice was or what exactly was sacrificed but the practice was considered, to this particular saga author, related to a criminal act.

While the sagas and, more specifically, the family sagas are important, other significant Old Norse sources include Eddic and Skaldic poetry. *The Poetic Edda* is a compilation of Eddic poems that depict stories of the Old Norse gods and goddesses as well as other mythological beings. The original authors of the Eddic poems are unknown. Although most of the earliest examples of this type of poetry are in a manuscript known as the “Codex Regius,” which dates to about 1270, scholars suspect that the motifs are much older.\(^{220}\) These poems gained the collective definition of “Eddic” because they are related to a prose work, Snorri Sturluson’s *Edda*, which was composed after the *The Poetic Edda* but discovered by scholars before the Codex Regius, hence the scholars named the group of poems after Snorri’s work.\(^{221}\) Even though Snorri, a learned Christian, lived from AD 1179-1241, the earliest manuscript containing his *Edda* dates to AD 1300.\(^{222}\) Snorri’s *Edda*, like *The Poetic Edda*, has many Christian overtones and Snorri was a prominent Christian writer. These aspects make his works controversial in this study, which will be demonstrated below.

Skaldic poetry differs from Eddic poetry in several ways. First, most of the authors of Skaldic poetry are known and most of the poems date to their author’s own time.\(^{223}\) The meters of Skaldic poetry differ from those of Eddic poetry and Skaldic poetry often refers to people who probably existed and historical events. Often, however, these Skaldic poems refer to the Old


Norse gods through metaphorical phrases known as kennings. Kennings are phrases that contain a noun qualified by a genitive word. For example, “Steeds of the sea” is a kenning for “ships” and a kenning of Odin would be “god of ravens.” Many skaldic poems are found within the sagas. One example is the poem called “Sonatorrek” in “Egil’s Saga,” in which the main character laments the death of two of his sons. In this poem, several gods and goddesses are mentioned multiple times. Since the author frequently referred to these deities, it appears that the hierarchy of the gods (described in The Poetic Edda) was well known amongst some skalds.

Eddic poetry offers some of the greatest details concerning Old Norse religiosity and many of these details can be related back to sources from the Early Middle Ages. Each Eddic poem describes a story that includes the Old Norse gods and goddesses. This thesis will only analyze those poems that appear to contain the most details and appear to have the most significance concerning the Old Norse world. The first poem this chapter analyzes is “The Seeress’s Prophecy,” translated by Carolyne Larrington. The poem is found in two different manuscripts and basically tells the story of Odin’s interrogation of a seeress about the fate of the world. The way in which the seeress is described is quite different from the way Gambara was described by Paul the Deacon in the eighth century. In the poem, the seeress seems to be having a conversation with “all the sacred people, greater and lesser, the offspring of Heimdall” and specifically the “Father of the Slain.” Both quotes are kennings or synonyms for beings within the Eddic pantheon.

---

227 The Skalds: A Selection of Their Poems, 90.
the Old Norse cosmos and the example of “Father of the Slain” is a specific kenning for Odin.\textsuperscript{229} The seeress’s task is to reveal information about the past and future for the world of the gods. The poem never specifies where the seeress came from or if she was actually a mythological being. At the end of the poem, the seeress sinks down indicating that she arose from somewhere in the first place.\textsuperscript{230} So, within the first couple of stanzas we are given an example of the continued belief in divination and we are given kennings representative of specific gods. Odin is once again referred to as a war god indicating a continued theme of war within Germanic religiosity. Also, it is interesting that the prophecy is being made by a woman, which also demonstrates a continuity of tradition.

In “The Seeress’s Prophecy,” a prophetess tells Odin and the gods about the approaching storm of Ragnarok. In this poem, other gods and goddesses are mentioned. The seeress mentions Thor and he must face \textit{iormungand} or the World-serpent, a giant-figure who circles the world in the ocean. Both Thor and the serpent kill each other in this final battle of the gods and giants.\textsuperscript{231} In another Eddic poem, Thor and the other gods show up to a house and expect a feast from a giant. At one point in the poem, Thor goes fishing with one of the giants. Using a goat’s head as bait, Thor caught the World-serpent, smashed it on the head, and returned it to the sea.\textsuperscript{232} This serpent, as will be discussed in chapter three, might be represented on some bracteates.

The last Eddic poem discussed, that might represent a motif depicted on the bracteates, is \textit{Baldrs draumar} or “Baldr’s Dreams.” In this poem, Baldr, a son of Odin, is described as having sinister dreams of dying. A council of gods decides to send Odin to the underworld to

\textsuperscript{229} Price, \textit{The Viking Way}, 104.
\textsuperscript{230} Ibid., 13.
attempt to find the reasons for the dreams. Odin rides Sleipnir to this realm and awakens another prophetess by speaking a spell to find the answers he seeks. Odin does not reveal who he is at first, but the prophetess eventually figures it out. In the end, the seeress tells Odin that his son, Baldr, will be killed by his brother, Hod. This poem is also represented in the next source this chapter describes, Snorri Sturluson’s Prose Edda.

Part one of Snorri’s Prose Edda, “Gylfaginning” or “The tricking of Gylfi” is most important to this thesis because it describes a Norse creation myth, adventures of the gods, and the death of Baldr. Snorri Sturluson was a Christian but not a cleric. As a law speaker for two terms in Iceland, he became involved in Norwegian politics. His reasons for writing the Prose Edda are probably linked to his desire to preserve the past, including traditions of skaldic poetry. While The Poetic Edda preserves many stories involving the gods, Snorri’s Prose Edda explains the functions of the gods and goddesses in much greater detail. The work starts with a king named Gylfì who wants to obtain knowledge and he finds three other kings (gods disguised as kings) that appear to be learned (especially concerning the gods). Thus Snorri presents the myths in the “pedantic medieval form of question and answer.” What follows is a brief explanation of the Old Norse pantheon as described by Snorri Sturluson, but it should be noted that Snorri derived much of his information from previous skalds.

The primary god in the Old Norse pantheon is Odin and he is known for being the god of the slain, the god of war, the all-father, and the god of poetry. Odin is comparable to the Christian God in Snorri’s Edda because, as Snorri states: “he lives throughout all ages and rules

234 Ibid.
235 Ibid.
236 Snorri Sturluson, Edda, xii.
237 Ibid., xiv.
238 Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway, xvi.
239 E. O. G. Turville-Petre, Myth and Religion of the North, 35.
all his kingdom and governs all things great and small… . He made heaven and earth and the skies and everything in them… . But his greatest work is that he made man and gave him a soul that shall live and never perish though the body decay to dust or burn to ashes." Though given distinctively Christian attributes in Snorri’s Edda, Odin is also described in the work as a god with many pagan attributes. Those pagan attributes are survivals and are not always portrayed negatively. One might be compelled to believe that Snorri wanted to preserve knowledge of some aspects of the pagan past.

Snorri lists forty-nine names for Odin and explains that the “All-father” has all these names because he is known to others in different languages. He mentions that Odin is also known as “Val-father” or the “father of the slain” and explains that all people who die in battle belong to him and that he is also known as the “Hanga-god” or the “god of the hanged.” This name could indicate that he was associated with sacrifice. Recall also that some Germanic peoples would hang their enemies’ armor in sacrifice to their war-god. Snorri explains that Odin’s wife is Frigg and that she knows the fate of men but does not involve herself with prophecy. Snorri does not explicitly name Frigg as a goddess. Two ravens, “Hugin” and “Mugin,” are described as being associated with Odin they are responsible for telling him all the news of the world. Their task was to fly out during the day and return to Odin in the evening with new information. Another animal associated with Odin is his eight-legged horse named “Sleipnir” and the story of how Odin received this horse is portrayed in the Edda as well. The last items described which are associated with Odin are his golden helmet, a fine mail-coat, and

240 Snorri Sturluson, “Gylfaginning” in Edda, 3-4 and Turville-Petre, Myth and Religion of the North, 35.
242 Ibid.
243 Ibid.
244 Ibid., 38-39.
245 Ibid., 42-44.
his spear named “Gungnir.” These items are obviously of value if they are to be worn by the “All-father” and they are clearly associated with war.

Next, Thor is described as being the strongest god among the gods and men. Snorri describes him as owning two goats who pull his chariot and three objects that aid in his strength: the hammer Miollnir used to smash the skulls of frost-giants, a belt that he buckles on himself to double his strength, and a pair of iron gloves that he must use to grip the hammer. There are several Eddic poems that describe Thor’s exploits. Snorri then describes Baldr as being the second son of Odin. Baldr was very bright and beautiful and his home was located in a very pure hall.

The forth god that Snorri described was Niord who “rules over the motion of the wind and moderates sea and fire. It is to him one must pray for voyages and fishing.” Snorri specifies that Niord was not of the same race as the Æsir, but part of a group of gods known as the Vanir. At one point, he was exchanged to the Æsir as a hostage with a god named Haenir as a truce arrangement between the two groups. This description of a truce indicates that there was some type of war in the cosmos. North believes that this war is the cosmological explanation for the evolution of Germanic pagan religiosity starting as a religion based on fertility and ending as a religion with the central element of war. Also, adding to the Christian element of the work, Snorri introduces the concept of praying to certain gods for certain things rather than sacrificing to the gods.

---

Ibid., 51.
Ibid., 20-21.
Ibid.
Ibid., 21-23.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Niord’s wife was Skadi and she “generally travels on skies and carries a bow and shoots game.”\footnote{Snorri Sturluson, “Gylfaginning,” in \textit{Edda}, 23-25.} It is not specified if this Skadi was a goddess among the \textit{{Æ}sir}. Introduced next are the children of Niord named Freyr and Freya. Freyr is described as being “the most glorious of the \textit{{Æ}sir}. He is ruler of rain and sunshine and thus of the produce of the earth, and it is good to pray to him for prosperity and peace.”\footnote{Ibid.} Freya is described as being an \textit{Asyniuur} (the Old Norse feminine plural of \textit{{Æ}sir}) and as a deity who rides into battles and receives half of the killed men that would normally be received by Odin. She is also described as traveling with two cats.\footnote{Ibid.} Snorri mentions that it is good to pray to her in terms of relationships and love. It appears that Freyr and Freya are associated with fertility because their attributes deal with reproduction, nature, and relationships.

Several other gods and goddesses are described in the \textit{Edda}, but their descriptions are not nearly as detailed. Next, Snorri describes Tyr as “the bravest and most valiant and he has great power over victory in battles.”\footnote{Ibid.} Tyr, as the bravest of gods, helped to subdue a wolf by placing his hand inside the wolf’s mouth. The other gods wanted to keep the wolf chained because they knew he would be destructive during the Ragnarok. So, the gods devised a plan to make the wolf compete in a contest to see how strong a chain needed to be to keep him restrained. The wolf allowed the gods to tie him up under the condition that one of the gods place their hand inside his mouth, so Tyr volunteered to do this and subsequently lost his hand.\footnote{Ibid.} This myth, as will be discussed further in chapter three, is possibly depicted on certain bracteates.\footnote{See below, pages 98-99.}
Bragi is the next god discussed and he is described as being the opposite of Tyr. Bragi was a god that could be useful to women and men because “he is knowledgeable about poetry, and because of him poetry is called brag [chief] of men or women who had eloquence beyond others, whether it is a woman or a man.”\(^{259}\) Bragi’s wife was Idunn and she was responsible for the growth of apples that the gods consumed in order to stay young. It is not clear if she is considered a goddess in this work.\(^{260}\) Heimdall is described as a white god with golden teeth with the occupation of guarding the gods from frost-giants.\(^{261}\) After, Heimdall, the descriptions of the gods become even more vague and only specific attributes are mentioned. For example, Hod, the next god Snorri described was only known for being blind and strong, while Vidar, another god, was known for being silent.\(^{262}\) Four other gods are described and their attributes appear to be ones shared with previously mentioned gods. One of Odin’s sons named Ali, a god, was an excellent fighter and shooter while Ull, a son of Thor, was beautiful and an excellent skier and bowman.\(^{263}\) One god that does stand out, however, is Foresti, who Snorri described as being the son of Baldr. This god appears to be associated with justice.\(^{264}\)

The last god that Snorri goes into detail about is Loki and he “is pleasing and handsome in appearance, evil in character, very capricious in behavior.”\(^{265}\) Loki, according to Snorri, was the trickster and trouble-maker amongst the gods. He does not seem to possess any sort of attribute that Snorri suggests men prayed or sacrificed to him specifically for, although, Snorri suggests that Loki “possessed to a greater degree than others the kind of learning that is called

\(^{259}\) Ibid., 25-7.  
\(^{260}\) Ibid.  
\(^{261}\) Ibid.  
\(^{262}\) Ibid., 27-34.  
\(^{263}\) Ibid.  
\(^{264}\) Ibid.  
\(^{265}\) Ibid.
cunning, and tricks for every purpose." Snorri mentions that Loki had children that were destined to create major problems for the gods. The children are described as being a wolf named “Fenriswolf,” the Midgard Serpent named “Iormungand,” and the keeper of the underworld or Niflheim named “Hel.” Those that are sent to the underworld are those who die of sickness or old age. Interesting is that Snorri still described the underworld as a place for those who die of natural causes instead of those who die while trying to bring harm to others. It appears that Snorri was recounting the beliefs that some Norse pagans held which were that a glorious death was one obtained by battle, a non-Christian belief.

Another very important story, linked to Loki, which depicts the beginning of the Ragnarok, is the story of Baldr’s death. The prose version of the story described the young Baldr as having reoccurring dreams about dying. The rest of the gods in the Norse pantheon decided to request the goddess Frigg to have Baldr made immune to different types of death such as stabbing, snake bites, and other various diseases. She agreed and performed the task and the gods gathered in a sort of assembly in order to test Baldr’s immunity. They started throwing various objects at him and Baldr remained unharmed. Eventually, Loki decided to transform himself into a woman in order to find out from Frigg what item would actually hurt Baldr. Frigg told him that the only thing that could possibly hurt Baldr was the mistletoe because it seemed pointless to make him immune from this small plant. As soon as Loki heard this, he ran out and fetched a mistletoe plant. Loki came back to the assembly and asked one of the gods why he was not participating in throwing items at Baldr. The god was was Baldr’s brother, Hod, who had previously been blinded, and Hod’s reasoning was that he could not see where to aim. Loki gave

266 Ibid.
267 Ibid., 27-34.
268 Ibid., 34.
269 Ibid., 49.
Hod the mistletoe, told him where to throw and “the missile flew through him (Baldr) and he fell to the ground, and this was the unluckiest deed ever done among gods and men.” This particular myth is important because, as will be demonstrated in chapter three, it might also be represented on bracteates dating to the Migration period.

Not only did Snorri discuss the gods and goddesses in this work, he also described the cosmos in which they dwelt as well as some of their activities. Most importantly, he mentioned that the gods lived in sacred places specifically connected to nature. For instance, Snorri described the “chief centre holy place of the gods” as “the ash Yggdrasil.” It was there that “the gods must hold their courts each day.” Yggdrasil had branches and roots which extended and contained various parts of the world. For example, one root led to the home of the gods (heaven, where the gods held their court), one to the Underworld (described below), another to the frost-giants (the adversaries of the gods). Clearly, there are some Mediterranean and Christian overtones in this description of the cosmos, because of the linear description and the interpretation of judgment occurring in heaven, but the motif of a tree being the sacred area dates to at least the first century as Tacitus stated that the sacred places of Germanic peoples were in woods and groves. Further, the motif that the gods were associated with kings, who also held court, could also be taken as a continuance of the concept that the gods were being recognized as the ancestors of kings.

The final clue that the gods were connected with ancestor worship is given in the final paragraphs of Gylfaginning. Snorri explained that the gods assigned their names to the names of men “in [Sweden], so that when long periods of time had passed men should not doubt that they

---

270 Ibid., 49.
271 See below, page 97-98.
272 Ibid., 14-15.
273 Ibid.
were all the same, those Æsir about whom stories were told above and those who were now given the same names.”

Essentially, this paragraph appears to be Snorri’s justification to pagan peoples of how their religion (on their terms and not Christian terms, as described in the Letters of Saint Boniface) was passed from the gods to kings.

In Antony Faulke’s introduction of Snorri’s _Edda_, he explains that though there are obvious Christian elements contained in this work, Snorri presents these beliefs as mythology and warns against such pagan beliefs at the beginning of the second part of the work, _Skaldskaparmal_ – “The Language of Poetry.”

Snorri presents the gods in the same way that he presented them in the beginning of _Heimskringla_ or “The History of the Kings of Norway” as “kings of great power who came to be worshipped by ignorant people.” This idea, however, is also reminiscent of the ancestor worship which may have started in the sixth century as recorded in Jordanes’ _History of the Goths_. Snorri’s _Edda_ not only preserves the “mythology” of Snorri’s ancestors but he believed that the ancient styles of skaldic poetry should also be remembered.

Mythological themes were continuously present in the ancient poetry and as such, Snorri’s work may have been designed to help preserve and guide new skalds to continue to produce this type of poetry “as an important part of the contemporary culture of Icelanders, Christian and literate though they now were.”

One of the more noticeable aspects of Snorri’s work was his recognition of the development of religion, language, and poetry. He understood that the Norse version of pagan religiosity began with peoples who worshipped the earth and nature. Eventually, these forces were anthropomorphized and that there was one supreme ruler known as Odin in the North, but

---

274 Ibid., 53-54.
275 Ibid., xvii-xviii.
276 Ibid., xviii.
277 Ibid.
278 Ibid., xviii-xix.
in other areas of the world, this god was known by other names. Snorri also specified that Woden and Odin were the same being.\textsuperscript{279} It appears that Snorri, in the thirteenth century, rationalized that pagan religiosity had taken a long time to evolve. Perhaps he wanted to justify that his ancestors were not far off from being Christians, however, he recognized that the mythology he believed should be preserved was originally based in nature. This also supports Richard North’s point that the original gods/goddesses worshipped by rural Germanic pagans were fertility beings and not war gods/goddesses.

Another source attributed to Snorri Sturlusson is \textit{The History of the Kings of Norway}. This is a compilation of sagas devoted to the origins and histories of kings throughout Scandinavia. It starts with “The Saga of the Ynglings” and this work, according to Snorri, refers to the genealogical poem \textit{Ynglingatal} or “Enumeration of the Hálogaland Chieftains”\textsuperscript{280} In this work, Snorri provides a slightly more realistic origin story of the gods and he started by explaining the layout of the land. He told his readers that there were three continents and that Asia lied to the east while Europe lies to the west.\textsuperscript{281} He described at least two peoples that dwelt in the east, the \textit{Vanir} and the \textit{Æsir}, and that the capital of the \textit{Æsir} was in Ásgarth and that it is ruled by Óthin (Odin).\textsuperscript{282} Snorri described Ásgarth as “a great place for sacrifices,” which were under the direction of twelve temple priests.\textsuperscript{283}

Snorri also mentioned the qualities of Odin, which do not differ much from his attributes described in other works, i.e. he is a warrior that is involved every battle, he has the gift of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[280] Snorri Sturluson, \textit{Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway}, xix and 3.
\item[281] \textit{Ibid.}, 1.
\item[282] \textit{Ibid.}, 1-2.
\item[283] \textit{Ibid.}, 2.
\end{footnotes}
prophecy and is skilled in magic, and that he could shape-shift.\textsuperscript{284} Perhaps one of the more interesting descriptions of Odin is that he took the severed head of Mímir “a very wise man” and “embaled it with herbs so that it would not rot, and spoke charms over it, giving it magic power so that it would answer him and tell him many occult things.”\textsuperscript{285} When describing his shape-shifting abilities, Snorri stated that Odin would shape in to various animals including birds, serpents, and fish and that “when he did so his body would lie there as if he were asleep or dead.”\textsuperscript{286} The chapter goes on to reference that “Óthin knew all about hidden treasures, and he knew such magic spells as would open for him the earth and mountains and rocks and burial mounds; and with mere words he bound those who dwelled in them, and went in and took what he wanted.”\textsuperscript{287}

Interestingly, Odin, in this work, is never called a god specifically. He was a ruler or lord and after his death, when he had himself killed with a spear instead of dying of old-age, “the belief in Óthin arose anew, and they [the Swedes] called on him. Often, the Swedes thought he revealed himself before great battles were fought, when he would give victory to some and invite others to come to his abode [the hall of the slain].”\textsuperscript{288} Here, Snorri pinpointed a genealogy tale in which the god Odin is an outstanding warlord and magician of sorts. The emergence of the Odin myth and the belief in his abilities as an outstanding leader are clues as to how “Odin” became regarded as a god. Other gods and goddesses or kings and queens are mentioned throughout this origin tale. We can also see how some gods are connected to fertility and their land, a belief that is present throughout the ages as well.

\textsuperscript{284} Ibid., 2, 5, and 6. The ability to shape-shift is important as a legend about shape-shifting is also attributed to a Lombardic king, and the Paul’s history also associates the Lombards with Odin, see above, pages 40-41.
\textsuperscript{285} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{286} Ibid., 7. This particular motif appears to be related to the dream-state described in Paul’s History of the Lombards, see pages 41-42 above.
\textsuperscript{287} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{288} Ibid., 9.
Sacrifice, as mentioned above, was a central component in all the sources dealing with Germanic pagan religiosity. It is also mentioned throughout the “Saga of the Ynglings” and it is also a ritual connected to fertility and nature in the saga. Snorri gave the example of king Dómaldi who, under his rule, the Swedes made sacrifices in Uppsala in order to end starvation and famine. Snorri went on to describe that first, oxen were sacrificed, but the famine did not improve. Next, the Swedes sacrificed people and this apparently made the famine even worse. Finally, after the third season, “the chieftains held a council, and they agreed that the famine probably was due to Dómaldi, their king, and that they should sacrifice him for better seasons, and that they should attack and kill him and redden the altars with his blood; and so they did.”

Here we have an example of the recognition that the ancestors of Germanic peoples sacrificed humans and began to associate their wellbeing with the king.

Other significant gods/kings and goddesses/queens are mentioned in this saga. Njord (Niord) and Frey are mentioned as being priests, appointed by Odin, of sacrificial offerings and that they were known as the diar [gods] among the Æsir. Niorth was next in line after Odin died and “the Swedes believed that Niorth had power over the harvests and the prosperity of mankind.” After Niorth died, Frey was the next ruler in line and he was responsible, according to Snorri, for erecting a temple in Uppsala and he was credited with keeping the harvests productive during his lifetime. He is the first king that is referenced as a god in the work. Snorri stated: “he was worshipped more than other gods because in his days, owing to peace and good harvests, the farmers became better off than before.” Snorri also mentioned

289 Ibid., 15.
290 Ibid.
291 Ibid., 4.
292 Ibid., 9.
293 Ibid.
294 Ibid., 10.
that in the days after Niorth and Frey, most of the diar died but they received sacrifices after their death.

Other goddesses/queens mentioned by Snorri include Skathi, who is simply described as being the wife of Niorth who eventually married Odin because she would not have intercourse with Niorth. Freya, the daughter of Niorth, was given a more detailed description of her abilities and she is described as “the priestess at the sacrifices. It was she who first taught the Æsir magic such as it was practiced among the Vanir.” Geifun was another prominent woman described by Snorri. Geifun was sent by Odin in to the lands to the North to find fertile soil to plough. She met up with a king who gave her land to plough. She, in turn, traveled to the land of giants and bore four sons. She had the ability to transform her sons into oxen and she ploughed out the land that she was given. She was rarely mentioned in other tales but Snorri did cite a skaldic poem that described this event. In any case, women are associated with some of the same powers that Odin was attributed with, including magic and transformation.

As was demonstrated above, the myths referred to and described in the Old Norse sources offer many puzzles to scholars. Generally, however, we have a clearer picture of a Germanic cosmos. Historians cannot be certain if the cosmos described by these sources is the same cosmos that the Germanic peoples of the Migration period believed in, indeed that is unlikely. However, certain myths and motifs related to them do appear to be reflected in the sources of the Early Middle Ages. The most promising evidence in this regard are the bracteates of the Migration period which are discussed in the following chapter. The images on the bracteates

295 Ibid., 8.
296 Ibid., 4.
297 Ibid., 5.
might be iconographic representations of gods and goddess and have the potential to confirm a continuum of Germanic beliefs from the Migration period to the High Middle Ages.

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated that certain rituals that were practiced during the Early Middle Ages (sacrifice, feasting, divination, and amulet use), were still in practice during the High Middle Ages in Germanic territories and, more specifically, Scandinavia. These practices alone do not necessarily demonstrate that Germanic religiosity during the Migration period had the same or a similar structure to the one described by Snorri Sturluson’s works. The names of gods and their functions, however, might hold a clue as they are indeed mentioned occasionally in the Early Medieval sources. More evidence is necessary, however, to demonstrate any sort of clear continuity. This study now turns to archaeology as an aid to understanding pre-literate societies.
The previous chapters discussed the written evidence for early Germanic religiosity and four Germanic pagan elements (i.e. feasting, divination, sacrifice, and amulet use), which occur in many of the sources. This chapter focuses on archaeological evidence - specifically the bracteates - and their ability to contribute to our knowledge of Germanic pagan religiosity.

Bracteates have the potential to aid scholars in this study for a number of reasons. First, the bracteates depict multiple scenes, which are plausibly associated with Germanic religiosity (see Figs. 1-13). Second, the bracteates, as will be described below, are most commonly made from gold, which could indicate that only members of the elite could obtain and/or give them out. Third, their find contexts and their suspension loops indicate that they were meant to be worn, and that they were probably worn by women.\(^{298}\) While all of these reasons point to the significance of bracteates, this chapter discusses interpretations of the iconographic scenes depicted on the bracteates and the potential of these scenes to create a link between the sources of the High Middle Ages and the Migration Period.

**Bracteate Classification**

Bracteates are thin metal coin-like objects usually made of gold. They range in size from 1.4 cm to about 12.2 cm in diameter, with the average diameter measuring 3.11 cm.\(^{299}\)

---

\(^{298}\) When bracteates are found in graves, they tend to be found in female inhumation graves. Stephen Pollington, Lindsey Kerr, and Brett Hammond, *Wayland’s Work: Anglo-Saxon Art, Myth and Material Culture from the 4th to the 7th Century* (Ely, UK: Anglo-Saxon Books, 2010), 281-284. Currently, only three bracteates have been found buried with men. Nancy Lynn Wicker, “Migration Period Bracteates: Art Historical Constructs and the Archaeology of Crafts Production and Distribution” (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1990), 24. Also, bracteates have been found alongside Roman coins, which have been altered with suspension loops that appear to have been heavily worn. Helle W. Hornsøe, “New gold hoards from Bornholm with rare types of Valentinian III solidi,” *Revue Numismatique*, 6 série Tome 158 (2001): 131-138.

Typically, they are just a little larger than a United States quarter. The term “bracteate” comes from the Latin “bracteatus,” which originally defined single-sided coins that were in use during the Middle Ages. By 1700, the term “bracteate” came to describe specific coin-like pendants dating to the Migration Period, or the fourth-ninth centuries. Most of the bracteates discussed in this chapter, however, are those that date to the fifth and sixth centuries. Originally modeled from Roman *solidi* and medallions, bracteates tend to have designs stamped on one side while the Roman *solidi* have impressions on both sides. Some of the designs of the Roman medallions are similar to the motifs depicted on certain early bracteates. Bracteates are found in inhumation graves, hoards, votive deposits, and sometimes with other metal-working supplies. These curious coin-like objects have been located throughout northern Europe and, more specifically, modern-day Sweden, Germany, Norway, Denmark, and England. Most bracteate finds from Denmark and Sweden come from hoards or votive deposits, while bracteates from Anglo-Saxon England and continental Europe come primarily from the inhumation graves of women.

Currently, there are over nine hundred gold bracteates known from four hundred different find sites. They are characterized by the nature of their various depictions. In 1869, Oscar Montelius, one of the first scholars to classify the bracteates, organized them by their similar motifs using letters for different groups. Current category types have not been drastically altered since Montelius’ time (see Figs. 1-13).

---

302 Ibid., 44-49.
bracteates, (see Fig. 1) which are the most like their original Roman models. They depict an enlarged head similar to the imperial bust found on Roman medallions and *solidi*. Type-B bracteates portray one to three full human-like figures and the main figure is occasionally depicted with an anamorphic character, (see Figs. 2-6). Type-C bracteates, the largest group of the collection numbering around 400 in total, display the head of a figure in profile while underneath the head appears a four-legged animal often described as a horse, (see Figs. 7-10). Often on type-C bracteates a bird, or another apotropaic symbol such as a swastika – a symbol associated with healing at this time, is visible. The second largest group is composed of type-D bracteates. Type-D and F bracteates (a subcategory of type-D) do not show an anthropomorphic figure; instead, they depict stylized anamorphic images, (see Figs. 11-12). Found primarily on Gotland, bracteates categorized as type-E, also known as Vendel period (AD 550-793) bracteates, were developed at the end of the Migration period. Type-E bracteates, even more stylized than types-D and F, depict three animal heads in the middle of the pendant rotating from the center. A round semi-circular shape, often categorized as a human head, is often found above this design, (see Fig. 13). Within these categories, scholars have begun to create and revise subcategories, which will be discussed further below.

Many of the bracteates have anamorphic figures alongside anthropomorphic ones, indicating the use of animals as symbolic images. Though the sources of the Early Middle Ages do not give many details about specific sacred animals, the animals that are mentioned appear to

---

305 Wicker, “Migration Period Bracteates,” 22.
307 Ibid., 375-376.
308 Ibid.
be significant. In the sources of the Late Middle Ages, on the other hand, sacred animals are often mentioned and are frequently identified as counterparts to specific gods and goddesses. Before we can understand the iconographic motifs depicted on the bracteates, we must attempt to understand the significance of animals to the Germanic peoples. The following paragraphs discuss animal art and Germanic religiosity.

**Germanic Animal Art and Pagan Religiosity**

Animals seem to have been a significant aspect in the lives of Germanic peoples as many Germanic archaeological items (buckles, weapons, helmets, jewelry, etc.) appear to depict anamorphic images. Most of the archaeological items depicting Germanic art, however, are practical items and are usually examples of metalwork. Not many textiles, paintings, or wooden objects survived and we cannot be sure that metal objects displayed the most sophisticated Germanic art. Many examples of Germanic jewelry, however, appear to have been constructed to resemble animal figures. It is even argued that barbarian peoples adopted the zoomorphic and anamorphic style from Roman, Scythian, and Sarmatian designs. Many cultures spanning many time periods have used animals in their art, and it is safe to say that the Germanic peoples did not originate this motif. However, their zoomorphic designs, and especially those of the north and west Germanic peoples, “are stiffer and more stylized – one is tempted to say, more ornamental.” The Germanic peoples did not have a tradition of writing and animal art was probably used for symbolic reasons and as a way to communicate certain ideas. George Speake, a historian of Anglo-Saxon art, in response to the notion that the art of the Germanic peoples was primitive, argues that animal art was not just a simple way to

---

311 James, *Europe’s Barbarians, AD 200-600*, 150.
313 Ibid., 12.
communicate ideas because the Germanic artisan was restricted to these designs.\textsuperscript{314} Speake emphasizes that important animals like the serpent, horse, boar, bird, fish, and deer “had a talismanic and apotropaic significance, being intimately bound up with cults and beliefs.”\textsuperscript{315} Other scholars tend to agree and emphasize that the use of animal images is “probably related to Iron Age people’s religious ideas about the mission of these creatures, as messengers between the worlds of man and the gods.”\textsuperscript{316} Animals appear on all types of bracteates and on most of the bracteates in the corpus. Let us now briefly return to the sources that refer to animals and examine the presence and significance of animals in the archaeological record.

As we recall from the written sources, it appears that domesticated animals were primarily used for sacrifice. Though direct references to specific animals are rare, it looks as if cattle were used during sacrifices and that bulls were also commonly the subjects of ritual sacrifice. Take, for example, the Nerthus ritual described by Tacitus and discussed in chapter one.\textsuperscript{317} The chariot in which the goddess rode was considered sacred and it was drawn by cattle. Cows are also mentioned in religious contexts.

In Snorri’s \textit{Edda}, a mystical cow is part of the process that created Odin’s great-grandfather Buri.\textsuperscript{318} This cow apparently licked Buri out of a rime stone and was also responsible for nourishing Ymir, a giant who after being killed by Odin and his brothers, was divided up and became the earth, sky, and sea.\textsuperscript{319} Another goddess, which Snorri describes in both the \textit{Edda} and \textit{Heimskringla}, transformed her four giant sons into oxen in order to plough

\textsuperscript{315} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{316} Pollington, Lindsey Kerr, and Brett Hammond, \textit{Wayland’s Work}, 389.
\textsuperscript{317} See above, page 19.
\textsuperscript{319} Ibid.
and claim land for herself. It appears that domesticated animals and, more specifically cattle, were important for nourishment and labor. Bovine-like creatures are also commonly depicted on Germanic artifacts. Some have even suggested that the horse-like animal on type-C bracteates might possibly be a representation of a bull because the animal often has cloven hooves and horns (see Figs. 7-10). Horses, however, were also important to the Germanic peoples and appear to be depicted on many artifacts of the Migration period.

Horses are frequently mentioned throughout the sources of the High Middle Ages. During the conversion process in Iceland, three pagan practices were permitted to continue in secret after Christianity was declared the new religion of the island. One of those practices was the continued consumption of horsemeat. The archaeological record suggests that Germanic and Scandinavian peoples seem to have sacrificed many horses and used them in burial ceremonies during the Viking Age (AD 750-1000) and Migration Period (AD 300-800).

Other examples of horses are found in Old Norse mythology, the most famous of which is Odin’s horse Sleipnir. Sleipnir, an eight-legged horse, was responsible for carrying Odin and his son to the world of the dead in order to fetch Baldr after his death from the mistletoe. Horses are also recognizable on artifacts dating to the Viking Age and picture stones from Gotland show images of horses carrying “a departed hero to the realm of the dead.” The ability to traverse long distances in a shortened amount of time appears to be one of the reasons

321 For example, feasting cauldrons appear frequently in the Danish archaeological record and several items from Sutton Hoo, including the Sutton Hoo stand, and several drinking horns feature bull-like creatures with horns, see Pollington, Lindsey Kerr, and Brett Hammond, Wayland’s Work, 403-404.
322 Pollington, Lindsey Kerr, and Brett Hammond, Wayland’s Work, 404.
323 Ibid., 409.
324 See above, page 63.
326 H. R. Ellis Davidson, Myths and symbols in pagan Europe: Early Scandinavian and Celtic religions (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 53.
peoples living during this time period respected the animal. Horses were also commonly used during war, which is probably another reason they were associated with Odin, the war god.\footnote{Pollington, Lindsey Kerr, and Brett Hammond, \textit{Wayland's Work}, 409.} 

Horses also appear to be important animals in the Early Medieval sources through their etymological association with Germanic kings and the prevalence of horse remains and depictions in the archaeological record. Bede mentions that the god Woden was the progenitor of two kings of Kent, “Hengist” or “horse” and “Horsa” or “stallion.”\footnote{Yorke, \textit{The Conversion of Britain: Religion, Politics and Society in Britain c.600-800}, 107. It should be noted that quite a few type-D bracteates have been located in Kent, though type–D bracteates do not appear to portray a horse. Sonia Chadwick Hawkes and Mark Pollard, “The gold Bracteates from sixth-century Anglo-Saxon graves in Kent, in the Light of a new Find from Finglesham” \textit{Frühmittelalterliche Studien} 15, (1981): 320-321.} Bede also mentions that Coifi, a pagan priest in Goodmanham, was part of a cult whose priests were only allowed to ride mares. In this instance, it appears that the sex of the horse was also significant to some pagan peoples. Horses were also used in divination rituals by the Germanic tribes of the first century, though it is not certain that Germanic peoples continued this practice up through the Migration period.\footnote{Davidson, \textit{Myths and symbols in pagan Europe}, 150.}

As stated above, type–C bracteates appear to have horses depicted on them. Horses seem to be another animal that other Germanic artifacts dating to the Viking and Migration periods commonly display.\footnote{Pollington, Lindsey Kerr, and Brett Hammond, \textit{Wayland's Work}, 409.} Horse bones and teeth, found in both continental Germanic and Anglo-Saxon burials, may have also been used as amulets. Buried with adults, horse teeth may have symbolized the journey of the departed, though it is not certain if they were used for decorative purposes, or as amulets for the living.\footnote{Pollington, Lindsey Kerr, and Brett Hammond, \textit{Wayland’s Work}, 409.} Horses were significant in Germanic and Celtic myths and rituals, and this helps to explain the common appearance of their teeth and bones as amulets and their depictions on amulets. 

\footnote{Meaney, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones}, 131-32.}
In early Anglo-Saxon England, horse mutilation associated with pagan rites occurred until at least AD 786/7. Horses were also special to the Celts. Even though this work does not address Celtic influence on Germanic peoples, Germanic and Celtic peoples were in contact with one another and they most likely influenced each other. Lug, an older Celtic god to whom Odin is probably related, had a horse that was able to take him over sea and land. This horse’s name was Aenbarr and her rider could never be killed while she was carrying him. In addition, some first century Celts on the borders of Gaul and Germania seemed to have believed in the cult of Epona. Perhaps related to Macha, a woman who could out-run the king’s horses in Irish tales, this goddess was often portrayed as riding and sitting beside horses. Horses also appear to have been important to some Irish peoples for their use during coronation ceremonies.

The last domestic animal that this section discusses is the goat, which is not mentioned in the Early Medieval sources discussed in this work. According to Old Norse sources, however, the god Thor had a chariot that was pulled by two goats. These goats, according to Snorri’s Edda, were able to rejuvenate after Thor slaughtered them as a meal for himself and some people he encountered on a journey. Goat and sheep remains are common in Anglo-Saxon graves.

---

332 Pope Hadrian received reports that pagan rites involving horse mutilation were still present in Anglo-Saxon England. Such mutilations included fastening the horse’s ears together, slitting their nostrils, and docking their tails. See, Ibid.
334 Ibid., 53.
335 Davidson, Myths and symbols in pagan Europe, 90.
336 Pollington, Lindsey Kerr, and Brett Hammond, Wayland’s Work, 362. One such ceremony is described in the writings of Giraldus Cambrensis. He describes a coronation ceremony of a tribe in Ulster in the twelfth century. According to the description, as his people were watching, the king, on hands and knees, approached a white mare and mated with it as if he was a stallion. After this was finished, the horse was killed and then cooked and the king consumed and bathed in the remains. Davidson, Myths and symbols in pagan Europe, 54.
337 See above, page 64.
and goats were also sacrificed during the Viking Age.\footnote{Pollington, Lindsey Kerr, and Brett Hammond, \textit{Wayland’s Work}, 408.} On the type-C bracteates, the four-legged creature that is commonly identified as a horse is often displayed with horns and a beard, (see Fig. 9). Some scholars suggest that this creature might be more reminiscent of a goat than a horse.\footnote{James, \textit{Europe’s Barbarians, AD 200-600}, 149.} Though there are many horned animals represented by Germanic art, the goat is not easily identified.\footnote{Pollington, Lindsey Kerr, and Brett Hammond, \textit{Wayland’s Work}, 408.}

While domesticated animals were certainly important to Germanic peoples for these reasons, wild animals were also important and perhaps even more revered than domesticated animals. These animals were respected because they were often dangerous. Mentioned occasionally in the Early Medieval sources, and more frequently in the Old Norse sources are boars, reptiles, horses, birds, and wolves. The following paragraphs assess wild animals and their association with early Germanic religiosity.

In \textit{Germania}, Tacitus specified that the Aestii wore an amulet that resembled a wild boar for protection. The Aestii, as Tacitus notes, were probably a Celtic people and, as mentioned above, even though this work does not address the differences and commonalities between Celtic and Germanic peoples, they were in contact with one another. This reference is particularly useful because Germanic archaeological items dating to this period, including the bracteates, commonly have boar-like animals depicted on them.\footnote{James, \textit{Europe’s Barbarians, AD 200-600}, 149. Take for example the Wollaston and the Bently Grange helmets, which have what some scholars believe to be a boar mounted on top of them. Helmets such as these might also be depicted on the Franks Casket. Pollington, Lindsey Kerr, and Brett Hammond, \textit{Wayland’s Work}, 28-29 and Speake, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Animal Art and its Germanic Background}, 80.} This reference to the boar, as depicted on a protective device, also indicates that the boar was respected as an animal able to defend itself, possibly because it had a thicker layer of skin in comparison to other hunted animals. The

---

\footnotetext{339}{Pollington, Lindsey Kerr, and Brett Hammond, \textit{Wayland’s Work}, 408.}  
\footnotetext{340}{James, \textit{Europe’s Barbarians, AD 200-600}, 149.}  
\footnotetext{341}{Pollington, Lindsey Kerr, and Brett Hammond, \textit{Wayland’s Work}, 408.}  
\footnotetext{342}{James, \textit{Europe’s Barbarians, AD 200-600}, 149. Take for example the Wollaston and the Bently Grange helmets, which have what some scholars believe to be a boar mounted on top of them. Helmets such as these might also be depicted on the Franks Casket. Pollington, Lindsey Kerr, and Brett Hammond, \textit{Wayland’s Work}, 28-29 and Speake, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Animal Art and its Germanic Background}, 80.}
wild boar was also probably perceived as an aggressive animal and is mentioned in the Old Norse sources.

The boar appears to be significant in the Old Norse sources because of its connection to fertility and sacrifice. Frey, a god associated with fertility, also owned a sacred boar created by a dwarf. The boar “would gallop through the air and over the sea more swiftly than any horse, while his glowing bristles gave light in darkest night.” Another boar mentioned by Old Norse mythology was named Sæhrimnir and this animal was slaughtered every day to be used as a meal served to the fallen warriors every night in Odin’s Val-hall. This boar “was cooked each day and was whole again by evening.” Hence, in this particular instance, the animal was able to rejuvenate itself and was specifically fed to warriors, indicating that it was both associated with strength and rejuvenation. Frey’s boar could also cross land and sea, a feature most often associated with horses. While the boar appears to have been a respected animal, other wild animals, such as the “wyrm” or snake/dragon-like creature appear to have been associated with more stealth-like and deviant behaviors.

A reptile was mentioned in connection with a shamanistic dream sequence described in the *History of the Lombards*. Gunthram, a Frankish king, took a nap in the woods and, while he was napping, a small reptilian animal appeared from his mouth, went into a cave and found a treasure hoard. This passage indicates that reptiles may have been associated with knowledge and the ability to locate treasures. The Lombards were also known to have worshipped a golden snake. The snake was also probably considered special because it could shed its skin, a
rejuvenation process associated with healing and immortality.\textsuperscript{350} Other scholars assert that the snake was a symbol of power and protection for warriors. Many myths, of Germanic and Celtic origin, refer to the serpent as a protector of some kind of treasure hoard.\textsuperscript{351}

The most famous serpent in Old Norse mythology was Thor’s nemesis and the offspring of Loki, Iormungand.\textsuperscript{352} This serpent lived in the ocean and encircled the world (perhaps as an expression of the dangers of the sea). Bragi, a skald from the ninth century, composed a poem describing a fishing trip Thor took in order to catch the serpent. Thor and a giant companion went out to sea to catch Iormungand with the head of a goat as bait. Indeed Thor caught the snake but, out of terror, the giant cut the line and the serpent returned to the sea.\textsuperscript{353} Scholars believe that picture stones dating to the eleventh century from Sweden and England depict Iormungand, and serpents are one of the most common reptilian animals depicted by Celtic and Germanic art. Snake-like creatures are also primarily found on type-D, F, and E bracteates (see Figs. 11, 12, and 13).\textsuperscript{354}

Celtic peoples also revered the snake and the Gauls revered the eggs of serpents.\textsuperscript{355} Another mythological story dealing with snake-like creatures and the archaeological record comes from an Irish tale dating to the eighth century. The famous Conall Cernach, along with a man called Fraech, went on a journey to Italy to defeat a serpent-guardian of a treasure in a fortress. The snake surrendered to Conall Cernach by crawling onto his belt. The imagery of

\textsuperscript{350} Meaney, Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones, 142.
\textsuperscript{351} Ibid., 90.
\textsuperscript{352} See above, page 67.
\textsuperscript{353} Turville-Petre, Myth and Religion of the North, 75. Turville-Petre also suggests that the myth has an older version in which Thor does kill the snake.
\textsuperscript{354} The Gundestrup cauldron, which has been given a broad date range between 200 BC and AD 300, shows the main character, probably the Celtic god Cernunnos, grasping a serpent. Other, later Germanic artifacts, including the Gallehus horns from the fifth century appear to show snakes linked and coiled together. George Speake, Anglo-Saxon Animal Art and its Germanic Background, 85-86.
\textsuperscript{355} Speake, Anglo-Saxon Animal Art and its Germanic Background, 86.
actually wearing a snake comes immediately to mind when thinking about Germanic belt-buckles with snake-like ornamentation.\(^{356}\) The snake can be seen, therefore, as both a symbol of protection of a wearable treasure, or a danger to those who want to obtain the treasure.

Another type of animal typically found on bracteates are birds. Ravens appear to have been revered by most of the Germanic peoples as demonstrated by their common appearance in the archaeological record. No specific birds are mentioned in the Early Medieval sources this work discusses, but Tacitus did tell us that Germanic peoples took auspices from the cries of birds.\(^{357}\) The Old Norse sources, however, reveal that ravens were identified with Odin. As mentioned in chapter two, Odin had two ravens “Hugin” and “Mugin” or “thought” and “mind,” which were dispatched by him to bring back news of the world.\(^{358}\) Ravens are birds of prey and “above all the bird of battle, the carrion bird of the battlefield.”\(^{359}\) Also, probably because Odin was associated with war and was held to be “father” of the fallen warriors, the god was often identified as the “god of ravens.”\(^{360}\) Odin, as the “god of ravens,” is comparable to Lug or Lugus, a Celtic god that was also associated with the raven.\(^{361}\)

Birds of prey are commonly portrayed on Germanic artifacts from the Migration period and are frequently found on Anglo-Saxon weapons and shields. These birds, however, are ambiguous in appearance and there are debates about whether they are eagles or ravens.\(^{362}\) This ambiguity exists because their only distinguishing feature is usually their curved beak. Predatory birds are also common on artifacts from Viking-Age Scandinavia including brooches and shield

\(^{356}\) Ibid.
\(^{357}\) Tacitus *The Germania* 10.
\(^{358}\) See above, page 63. Some scholars argue that the raven motif is evidence of Odin’s shamanistic abilities as he sends “thought” and “mind” out into the world to collect information for him. Lindow, *Norse Mythology*, 186-188.
\(^{359}\) Speake, *Anglo-Saxon Animal Art and its Germanic Background*, 82.
\(^{360}\) See above, page 63.
\(^{362}\) Ibid., 82.
mounts. Throughout the rest of continental Europe, birds are commonly portrayed on knobs, belt-buckles, and brooches. 363 Birds of prey are usually found on type-C bracteates and, as will be discussed below, Karl Hauck argued that they were ravens, which could indicate that the central figure displayed on the type-C bracteates was Odin. 364

The last wild animal to be discussed is the wolf. The wolf appeared less frequently on Germanic artifacts, though it did occasionally appear and held an important place in Old Norse mythology. Examples of wolf portrayals are present on the Sutton Hoo purse lid and on the lid of the Franks casket. Lupine-like animals are also found on Scandinavian arm bands, which were most likely worn by women and it has been suggested that “the women who wore such powerful symbolism on their jewelry were important persons within the ritual life of their communities.” 365 The wolf, however, was ferocious and apparently feared. Like the boar, it was respected, but it appears most often to be associated with deviant gods and the underworld. 366

The Old Norse myths involving Fenrir come to mind first when discussing the wolf and Germanic symbols. Recall from chapter two that Tyr, as a way to trap the Fenris wolf in order to prevent the animal from killing Odin during Ragnarok, placed his hand inside the wolf’s mouth and lost it when the wolf was tied up by the other gods. 367 This particular motif appears to be visible on certain type-B bracteates, which show a figure with its enlarged hand inside a lupine-like animal’s mouth (see Figs. 4 and 5). 368

While this section has discussed the prevalence of animals in the written sources and archaeological record, the final section of this chapter discusses the iconographic aspects of the

363 Pollington, Lindsey Kerr, and Brett Hammond, Wayland’s Work, 397.
364 Speake, Anglo-Saxon Animal Art and its Germanic Background, 82.
365 Pollington, Lindsey Kerr, and Brett Hammond, Wayland’s Work, 397.
366 Ibid., 416.
367 See above, page 65.
368 Pollington, Lindsey Kerr, and Brett Hammond, Wayland’s Work, 284.
bracteates. Many of the bracteates have animals depicted on them. Many of the animals appear
to have been considered sacred to the Germanic peoples of both the Early and High Middle
Ages. Animals alone, however, are hard to interpret and the motifs depicted on the bracteates
appear to be more than simply anthropomorphic and anamorphic symbols hastily combined into
imagery. Because they are made of gold and because of their find contexts, bracteates seem to
be high-status items that date to the Early Middle Ages. It has already been argued that the
images depicted on them are related to the myths recorded in the sources of the High Middle
associated with the pagan religiosity of the Early Middle Ages.

**Bracteate Iconography**

The most prolific scholar of bracteate studies was Karl Hauck. Few works on bracteates
go without citing Hauck because he has produced over sixty articles about bracteates and the
iconographic scenes displayed on them. Our current published corpus of bracteates is a three-
volume work that has been divided into seven parts, and it too is the product of Hauck’s
leadership.\footnote{Wicker, “Scandinavian Migration Period Gold Bracteates,” 2 and 10. Karl Hauck, Morten Axboe, Klaus Düwel, Lutz von Padberg, and Heike Rulffs, \textit{Die Goldbrakteaten der Völkerwanderungszeit}, 3 vols. (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1989).} This corpus known as the \textit{Ikonographische Katalog} has both enlarged pictures and
illustrations of the bracteates, usually at a 4:1 scale. Not only has Hauck been primarily
responsible for publishing this corpus, but he is also responsible for the argument that the
iconographic designs displayed by bracteates are visual depictions of gods and mythological
scenes only later recorded in the High Middle Ages. Accepting Hauck’s argument, the
bracteates then become a key link between the mythology recorded in the High Middle Ages and

---

the religious beliefs and practices of the Migration Period. \footnote{Ibid. and Gaimster, “Vendel period bracteates on Gotland,” 36-37.} They are thus an enormously important bridge to a scientific understanding.

Hauck’s main argument involves the type-C bracteates, which currently make up most of the bracteate corpus. Hauck argued that the main god displayed on the type-C bracteates was Odin. Hauck concluded that this figure was Odin based on what he called Kontext-Iconographie whereby he consulted sources from the High Middle Ages and observed “place names, image traditions, archaeology, and motif details such as figure attributes and gestures.”\footnote{Karl Hauck, “Gott als Arzt: Eine exemplarische Skizze mit Text- und Bildzeugnissen aus drei verschiedenen Religionen zu Phänomenen und Gebärden der Heilung (Zur Ikonologie der Goldbrakteaten XIV),” Text und Bild: Aspekte des Zusammenwirkens zweier Künste in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit, eds. Christel Meier and Uwe Ruberg, 19-62 quoted in Wicker, “Context analysis and bracteates inscriptions in light of alternative iconographic interpretations,” 1.} The primary written source that Hauck relied on for his arguments about the type-C bracteates was the “Second Merseburg Charm,” an Old High German work that mentions gods (i.e. Woden and Balder), that are also mentioned in Old Norse sources. The following is a translation of the “Second Merseburg Charm” found in John Lindow’s: Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs:

Phol and Wodan went to the forest
Then Balder’s horse sprained its foot
Then Sinthgunt sang charms, and Sunna her sister
Then Friia sang charms, as he well could:
be it bone-sprain, be it blood-sprain, be it limb-sprain:
bone to bone, blood to blood,
limb to limb, so they be glued together. \footnote{Lindow, Norse Mythology, 227.}

The type-C bracteates appear to have a horse-like animal depicted on them and they all have the head of a person in profile located above the animal (see Figs. 7-10). Hauck believed that the motif depicted on the type-C bracteates was that of Woden/Odin curing a horse because Odin
was mentioned in a healing scene in the Second Merseburg Charm.\textsuperscript{374} The main human figure is occasionally depicted with a line protruding from its mouth (see Fig. 10). Hauck interpreted this line as a symbol for a “healing breath.”\textsuperscript{375} Further, an occasional hand is depicted on the type-C bracteates and Hauck believed this was “the healing hand of the god.”\textsuperscript{376} Finally, Hauck concluded that this motif is a healing scene because the horse’s legs appear to be twisted and “in need of medical attention.”\textsuperscript{377} Hauck also noted that the healing method of using one’s breath to cure an animal was known to Romans through a letter addressed to Constantine the Great (emperor from AD 306-337) describing “the healing of lame horses through a surgical incision above the lame shoulder, into which air was blown.”\textsuperscript{378}

In addition to the anthropomorphic and anamorphic figures, some type-C bracteates also have runic inscriptions. One such bracteate, found in Fünen (Fig. 7) has an inscription in which the name “houaR” or “the High One” is recognizable.\textsuperscript{379} “The High One,” Hauck noted, is one of Odin’s many names, and the Eddic poem \textit{Havamal} or “Sayings of the High One” describes the advice and wisdom of the god.\textsuperscript{380} In stanzas 146 and 147, the author of the poem, who often reflects the voice of Odin, tells us that he (Odin) knows two spells/songs for healing.\textsuperscript{381} The poem states:

\begin{quote}
I know those spells which a ruler’s wife doesn’t know,
nor any man’s son;
‘help’ one is called,
and that will help you
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{375} Ibid., 386.
\textsuperscript{376} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{377} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{378} Gaimster, “Vendel period bracteates on Gotland,” 45.
\textsuperscript{379} Wicker, “Context analysis and bracteates inscriptions in light of alternative iconographic interpretations,” 2.
\textsuperscript{381} Starkey, “Imagining an Early Odin,” 387, and “Sayings of the High One” in \textit{The Poetic Edda}, trans. Carolyne Larrington.
against accusations and sorrows
and every sort of anxiety.

I know a second one which the sons of men need,
those who want to live as physicians.  

This poem is also referred to in justification of the argument that Odin was associated with healing. However, there do not seem to be any other solid references to Odin involved in healing Balder’s horse or any other horses outside of the “Second Merseburg Charm.”

In addition to the argument that the motif is one of Odin curing a horse, because there is written evidence describing him in healing situations with the ability to “help” persons, there are other rationales that help justify Hauck’s argument that the central character portrayed on type-C bracteates is Odin. These arguments are based around the bird-like animals displayed on the type-C bracteates. Type-C bracteates often depict one or two predatory birds looking at the profiled face (see Figs. 7 and 10).  

According to Katheryn Starkey, a historian who opposes Hauck’s argument, the bird was supposed to represent a healing-helper which might be representative of a Valkyrie or goddess.  This bird, Hauck argued could have also represented one of Odin’s ravens as described above.

Starkey’s argument that the central figure is not Odin is based on three observations. She opposes Hauck’s theory by suggesting that Odin was not well known during the Migration period because there is little evidence of him in the written sources of the Early Middle Ages. Second, she discusses the anamorphic figures portrayed on the type-C bracteates and concludes

---

383 Starkey, “Imagining an Early Odin,” 387.
384 Ibid., 386. Another fantastic work, “The Saga of the Volsungs,” features the epic tale of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer, which is also clearly related to the Middle High German work “The Song of Nibelungs.” In this saga, Odin is responsible for keeping Sigurd’s ancestors alive so that the Dragon Slayer will be born. Odin does this by sending Sigurd’s great-grandfather an “apple of fertility.” The apple is brought to the man by a “wish-maiden,” a woman disguised as a crow and described as one of Odin’s helpers. The Saga of the Volsungs, trans. Jesse L. Byock, (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 1.
385 James, Europe’s Barbarians AD 200-600, 149.
that there is not enough solid evidence to assume they are the same animals associated with Odin as discussed in the Old Norse sources. Finally, she discusses Odin’s role as a healing god and suggests that there is not enough written evidence to prove that he was the primary god of healing. The most convincing aspects of Starkey’s argument, in my opinion, are her observations about Odin and his healing powers.

Starkey observes that within Old Norse mythology, there is “no mention of touching or blowing breath in conjunction with healing.” She suggests that the line issuing from the main character’s mouth is a visual representation of chanting. Perhaps so, yet, while it is true that there is not as much evidence indicating that Odin was presumably a healing god, the Old Norse sources do not indicate that any one such existed. It appears that many gods and goddesses were vaguely attributed with the ability to heal or rejuvenate. Take, for example, Thor and his lame goat, which he revived after slaughtering it for dinner. Also, every evening in Odin’s Val-hall a sacred boar was slaughtered and consumed, but was alive the next day to repeat the process. Goddesses can also be credited with healing. Idunn, for example, was the caretaker of apples that could keep the deities young. With these references in mind, it remains true that Odin might not have been perceived as a god of healing primarily, but that now seems less significant. Confirmed by our above analysis, we know that he was primarily the god of war. Odin or a proto-war god attributed with the same aspects, appears frequently (more frequently than other gods in both the sources from the Early Middle Ages and the sources from the High Middle Ages) and seems to be the primary god in Germanic religiosity. He is known as the “all-father” in Old Norse sources and the progenitor of the Aesir. Kings in the Early Middle Ages attributed

386 Starkey, “Imagining an Early Odin,” 388.
387 Ibid., 389.
388 See above, page 66.
their own lineages to him and, further, his name is mentioned in the sources. Although infrequently mentioned in the earlier sources, Odin appears to be closely enough associated with healing for the link to be plausible, even if healing was not his primary attribute. Further, the bracteates, as stated above, were most likely worn as amulets and/or status symbols. Amulets, by definition, are items associated with healing. The appearance of the swastika as a healing attribute on type C-bracteates also coincides with this concept of curing.

Starkey also disputes Hauck’s argument by observing that there is no way to be certain that the bird depicted on the type-C bracteates is specifically a raven or healing helper. Some have argued that portraits of birds with a curved beak, such as the one displayed on type-C bracteates, are more representative of an eagle, another bird possibly associated with Odin. Starkey also notes that the type-C bracteates usually only display one bird and sometimes up to three. While it is true that Odin is specifically identified with two ravens, “Hugin” and “Mugin,” ravens were also scavengers and “in the Old Norse world they were well known from the battlefield, pecking the bodies of the fallen.” Odin was the god of war, “god of the hanged,” and “father of the slain,” the raven and or other scavenger birds appear to be sensible animals to have been associated with such a god and the two specific birds named in the Old Norse sources might not have been conceived of in Germanic minds during the Migration period. If, indeed, the bird was meant to be perceived as an eagle, it could have been because the eagle was “primarily a symbol of the sky and also of sovereignty because of its association

389 Starkey, “Imagining an Early Odin,” 390.
391 Starkey, “Imagining an Early Odin,” 390.
393 For more on Odin’s names, see Turville-Petre, Myth and Religion of the North, 61-63.
The bracteates appear to have been based originally on Roman medallions and *solidi*, and even though the imagery between the two types of items appears similar, the artisans of the bracteates reproduced these items with variations. These differences indicate that the Germanic artists were not simply copying Roman designs, rather, they were emulating the designs and adding Germanic elements. Therefore, it appears that the Germanic peoples were not simply conforming to Roman ideologies, but were syncretizing new styles to portray their own views. Regardless of whether the bird was meant to be an eagle or a raven, both of these creatures are associated with power whether through victory on the battle field or as a symbol of sovereignty to the Roman Empire.

Other arguments involving the anamorphic designs on the bracteates question whether the horse-like animal displayed is a representation of a horse running or a horse being healed. Further, the animal is often depicted with what appear to be cloven hooves, horns and a beard (see Fig. 9). In the nineteenth century, scholars believed that the horse-like animal might be a representation of one of Thor’s goats, which could also have been in the process of being healed as Snorri’s *Edda* describes Thor and his goats in one such situation. Hauck, on the other hand, argued that “it is a horse – wearing ritual horns; and that the ‘bearded horse’ is not actually Thor’s goat.” Moreover, Hauck noted that older species of horses commonly had beards. Despite the arguments that the figure on the type-C bracteates represents one “Princely god that was modeled on the image of Constantine and his followers,” there is no reason to assume that this Princely god was the only god portrayed on the type-C bracteates. If the bracteates were

---

394 Davidson, *Myths and symbols in pagan Europe: Early Scandinavian and Celtic religions*, 91.
395 Starkey, “Imagining an Early Odin,” 385.
397 James, *Europe’s Barbarians, AD 200-600*, 149.
398 Starkey citing Hauck, “Imagining an Early Odin,” 384.
399 Gaimster, “Vendel period bracteates on Gotland,” 40.
amulets worn for healing, and there are multiple examples of gods healing recorded in the sources, then there is a possibility that the iconographic scene depicted on some type-C bracteates is Thor healing the goat with the broken leg as portrayed in Snorri’s *Edda*.

While the evidence proving that Odin was a healing god is scarce, there is sufficient evidence linking multiple gods to the practice. The type-C bracteates may not specifically represent one god, but it seems that these items were most-likely amulets associated with healing. Which god is displayed by the type-C amulets is debatable, but Hauck’s concept of observing the scenes on the bracteates as a collective motif and not as random individual symbols, is perhaps the most logical approach to take when studying bracteate iconography. Using Hauck’s *Kontext-Ikonographie* identification methods, other scholars have proposed that the scene represented on the type-C bracteates is not simply a healing scene, but one in which the main character is practicing a shamanistic ritual.\(^{400}\)

Several scholars have put forth theories that Old Norse religiosity involved shamanistic rituals. “Shamanism” is a constructed term, much like the term “magic,” and it is used to describe the rituals of those who “attained altered states of consciousness in order to mediate between human beings and the supernatural world.”\(^{401}\) Currently, Neil Price, an archaeologist with the University of Uppsala and Lotte Hedeager, an archaeologist with the University of Oslo, promote the study of shamanistic practice in Old Norse religiosity. Price has compiled and analyzed a large and extensive collection of archaeological objects that seem to be associated with Old Norse pagan religiosity and shamanism. Price’s work also compared Old Norse pagan beliefs with the shamanistic religion of the Saami people, a culture that existed during Viking


Age Scandinavia and still exists today. This comparison is warranted because the old Scandinavian cultures appear to have had contact with the Saami people, whose religion involved shamanism. While Price’s work focuses primarily on seeresses and wise women, like those related to Gambara of the Lombards, other scholars believe that the scene depicted on type-C bracteates is a portrayal of Odin’s journey to the supernatural world.

Lotte Hedeager does not disagree that the primary figure displayed on the type-C bracteates is Odin, yet she emphasizes that the motif is not a scene of healing, rather it is a depiction of a shamanistic journey. Referring to Odin’s journey to Hel in the Eddic Poem “Baldr’s Dreams,” Hedeager notes “the large number of bracteates with this motif underlines the importance of the soul journey, and it suggests that it was a new element in Old Norse religion that had to be propagated.” Not only does she claim that this particular motif shows Odin crossing into a supernatural world, but she also believes that Odin is transforming into a bird as depicted by the headdress on some bracteates (see Fig. 8). Shape-shifting, as described above, was one of Odin’s attributes and is also a key element of shamanism. Another element of shamanism includes helping spirits, which often take the form of animals. Hedeager notes that the motif of the birds on type-C bracteates “is traditionally related to the trance-state journey of shamans.” Yet Hedeager also believes that the depictions of the birds on the bracteates are ambiguous and because of the differences in beak structure, cannot all be considered Odin’s ravens. Further, Hedeager does not counter the argument that the four-legged creature located

402 Ibid., 235-238.
403 Hedeager, Iron Age Myth and Materiality, 159.
404 Ibid., 207.
406 Hedeager, Iron Age Myth and Materiality, 207.
407 Ibid.
below the anthropomorphic head is specifically a horse. Rather, she agrees with Hauck that the animal is a horse wearing ritualistic horns.  

Both shamanistic abilities, such as crossing into another world, and healing, by making animals rejuvenate, are abilities ascribed to several Old Norse gods, described in the sources of the High Middle Ages. Reading the images on the bracteates as a collective whole, though it produces various arguments, at first glance, does not appear to be helpful when considering only the type-C bracteates. The argument that only one god, Odin, is presented on all of the type-C bracteates does not appear to be sustainable. However, the argument that the bracteates present pre-Christian religious motifs does appear to be reasonable. The motifs on the bracteates are not clearly identifiable as many elements are inconsistent throughout the category types. This concept of reading the images as a collective whole, when applied to other bracteate types, becomes more justifiable. I now turn to type-B bracteates and their possible depictions of religious motifs.

Type-B bracteates tend to depict the full bodies of anthropomorphic and anamorphic figures together. Although the corpus of type-B bracteates is considerably smaller than the corpus of type-C and D bracteates, within this group are key depictions that appear to be even more helpful to the project of linking the sources of the High Middle Ages to the Migration period. The type-B bracteates are even more varied in appearance than type-C and most represent full-length human and animal-like forms in different positions doing different things. According to Hauck, some subgroups of type-B bracteates represent Baldr’s death and the motif of Tyr sacrificing his hand to Fenrir, while others, argues Michael Enright, appear to depict goddesses with a talent for prophecy.

408 Ibid., 75.
The first subgroup of type-B bracteates that I would like to address are the so-called *Drei-Götter* or “three-gods” bracteates (see Figs. 2 and 3). This subgroup, with depictions that appear to have been originally based upon a Roman coin design showing Victory crowning the Emperor, Hauck argued, were not simply Roman imitations.\(^{409}\) Hauck believed that the *Drei-Götter* bracteates represented the motif of Baldr’s death and the beginning of Ragnarok as described above in chapter two.\(^{410}\) On two of the *Drei-Götter* bracteates, the central figure appears to have a branch-like object protruding from its abdomen.\(^{411}\) Hauck believed that this figure was Baldr in the process of being stabbed by the mistletoe. Hauck believed that the winged figure, thought to have originally represented Victory, was Loki, the instigator of the incident and that Odin was the figure represented with the spear.\(^{412}\) While the specific instance of a plant-like object protruding from the central figure’s abdomen is a more solid basis for an iconographic representation of a myth described in the High Middle Ages, there are currently only two of the *Drei-Götter* bracteates with the branch-like object protruding out of the central figure’s abdomen. Other examples of the *Drei-Götter* bracteates show three gods, but the figure in the middle does not appear to have been stabbed by anything (see Fig. 3).

Perhaps the most convincing link between a type-B bracteate motif and the Old Norse myth of the Ragnorok, described in Snorri’s *Edda*, is that of the wolf (see Figs. 4 and 5). Several of the type-B bracteates display an anthropomorphic figure with its hand in the mouth of, or near the mouth of, a lupine-like creature. Hauck interpreted this depiction as “an early illustration of

\(^{409}\) Gaimster, “Vendel period bracteates on Gotland,” 30.

\(^{410}\) See above, page 67.

\(^{411}\) Before the most recent discoveries at Sorte Muld, we only had one bracteate with a branch-like object protruding directly from its abdomen. Christian Adansen, Ulla Lund Hansen, Finn Ole Nielsen, and Margrethe Watt, eds. *Sorte Muld: Wealth, Power, and Religion at an Iron Age Central Settlement on Bornholm*. Denmark: Bornholms Museum, 2009.

\(^{412}\) Gaimster, “Vendel period bracteates on Gotland,” 30.
Tyr’s binding of the wolf resulting in the loss of his hand.\textsuperscript{413} While the story of Romulus and Remus being taken care of by the she-wolf is a common Roman motif, and is demonstrated in Roman art, the act of physically placing a hand inside the mouth of a wolf is a specific occurrence in Snorri’s account of Tyr losing his hand.\textsuperscript{414} This visual representation appears to be a clear link between the sources of the High Middle Ages and Migration period. If this group of bracteates represents a god, and more specifically Tyr, then it stands to reason that more than one god could be represented on the type-C bracteates. Perhaps even a proto-god, one that would later be identified as two gods, was also represented on the type-C bracteates.

The final group of type-B bracteates discussed in this chapter are those known as the Fürstenberg type. Hauck and Michael Enright suggest that this group of bracteates seems to depict female characters and perhaps even goddesses (see Fig. 6). Comparing references from Irish, Greek, and Old Norse mythology, Enright demonstrates that weaving was associated with prophecy.\textsuperscript{415} Prophecy appears to be connected to women (i.e. Gambara and the Seeress in “The Seeress’s Prophecy”), and there are arguments for a goddess linked to this specific ability.\textsuperscript{416} Enright cites a poem quoted in \textit{Njal’s Saga} in which twelve Valkyries are described as weaving the fates of men before the Battle of Clontarf.\textsuperscript{417} In this poem, the women “sat weaving on a grisly loom, with severed heads for weights, arrows for shuttles, and entrails for the warp.”\textsuperscript{418} Enright provides strong arguments that the woman depicted on this bracteate group is indeed a

\textsuperscript{413} Davidson, \textit{The Lost Beliefs of Northern Europe}, 40.
\textsuperscript{416} Davidson notes that female deities, such as norns and valkyries, are linked to this ability but that there are no specific goddesses described with the attribute of weaving. It is implied, however, that the goddess Frigg knows the fate of men in both Snorri’s \textit{Edda} and the Eddic poem “The Insolence of Loki.” Hilda Ellis Davidson, \textit{Roles of the Northern Goddess}, (Routledge: London, 2008), 121.
\textsuperscript{417} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{418} Davidson, \textit{Myths and symbols in pagan Europe}, 94.
Northern pagan goddess, because the items in her hands can be interpreted as weaving implements.\footnote{Enright, “The Goddess Who Weaves: Some Iconographic Aspects of Bracteates of the Fürstenburg Type”: 70.}

Other arguments about the Fürstenberg bracteates question whether the depiction is actually a reproduction of a Christian motif.\footnote{Ibid., 57-59.} For example, D. Ellmers puts forth the argument that the woman depicted on this group of bracteates is the Virgin Mary. Ellmers believes that these bracteates were copies of Byzantine medallions, and gives the example of a disc brooch in which “Mary is shown facing forward, seated on a kind of throne, holding a distaff in her right hand while the other hand is raised in a gesture of adoration.”\footnote{Davidson, Roles of the Northern Goddess, 114-115.} Enright argues that the Fürstenburg bracteates are less likely to be Christian because the object that the central character is holding has a cross beam at both ends making it “hardly possible for a Christian symbol,” although it might be a scepter of some kind.\footnote{Ibid., 115-116.} Hilda Ellis Davidson supports Enright and adds that the Byzantine medallion depicting Mary is representative of a Mediterranean pagan motif of a spinning goddess that wove the fate of the world and people.\footnote{Ibid., 115.} Davidson supports her argument by adding that a favorite tradition of Byzantine art was to depict Mary as spinning during the moment of Annunciation and that the tradition of weaving is also an attribute of Greek goddesses thus making the connection to weaving an ability associated with women and goddesses and not necessarily Mary specifically.\footnote{Ibid.}

If the figure on the Fürstenberg bracteates is indeed a goddess associated with weaving, then again it stands to reason that other bracteates do not necessarily depict one god, i.e. Odin.\footnote{Davidson adds that several Greek goddesses and women with supernatural powers are commonly associated with spinning and weaving such as Calypso and Circe from the Odyssey. Davidson also notes that the goddess most often associated with spinning and weaving is Athene and that her role, among insuring stability in cities and domestic situations, was also to teach young women to weave and embroider. Ibid., 95 and 113.}
The final group of bracteates possessing the potential to be related to Old Norse myths, are the type-D bracteates. These, with their snake-like figure depictions, might be representative of myths involving Iormungand, or the World Serpent described above.\(^{425}\)

The depictions on type-D bracteates might have been based on the biblical story of Jonah, which possibly influenced the Iormungand myth.\(^{426}\) These portrayals might also demonstrate a shamanistic initiation-cycle.\(^{427}\) Some of the type-D bracteates appear to have human appendages tangled with the snake-like design (see Fig. 11). Hauck believed that these human-like limbs were a representation of Odin being consumed by Iormungand. The act of being devoured is part of a “well-known initiation-cycle, where the shaman gains his mystical knowledge by symbolically entering the other-world.”\(^{428}\) While this is a fascinating argument, the type-D bracteates are extremely stylized. Although the creature in the center of these bracteates appears to be twisting and weaving, there is no clear evidence that the creature is specifically a snake or that the twisting lines are intended to represent an animal. Old Norse myths, however, appear to be represented on other bracteates and the argument that the type-D bracteates might represent the Iormungand myth is not outlandish.

While other types of bracteates have been analyzed for their iconographic messages, type-C, B, and D bracteates tend to be those that appear to be most related to Old Norse religiosity. Though the most convincing depictions, such as the Tyr motif on certain type-B bracteates, are few in number, they provide convincing evidence for a continuity of Germanic pagan beliefs. If, indeed, the C-bracteates portray a healing scene, the argument that Odin alone was represented on type-C bracteates does not appear to stand as other gods and goddesses

\(^{425}\) Gaimster, “Vendel period bracteates on Gotland,” 42-43.
\(^{426}\) Ibid., 40.
\(^{427}\) Ibid., 43.
\(^{428}\) Ibid.
described by sources dating to the High Middle Ages were also associated with healing.

According to the written sources, Thor was most commonly associated with goats, and many of the type-C bracteates appear to have goat-like animals portrayed on them. If multiple gods are not presented on the type-C bracteates then perhaps a proto-god, one that would eventually be the basis for both Thor and Odin (as described in Old Norse sources), was represented.

Animals were sacred to the Germanic peoples and animals were a key component in their pagan religiosity. Animals are represented commonly on items dating to both the Viking Age and Migration period, and tend to be identifiable with particular gods. Hauck’s methods of reading the images as a collective whole within a context of later written sources, appears to be the most useful way to analyze the bracteates images. These items, though dating to the Migration period, potentially show a continuity of beliefs from the Migration period to the Viking Age and beyond.
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This thesis has focused on written sources that exemplify Germanic pagan religiosity and religious iconography, displayed on bracteates, that is likely related to the textual sources. As has been demonstrated in the first two chapters, these literary sources are problematic because of their bias nature, yet they are not useless. When the sources are carefully analyzed, pagan elements emerge, even if they are vague and scarce. Many scholars, including Filotas, Green, Meaney, North, and Flint have approached these sources with different questions, but are all concerned with pagan religiosity in some way. Each scholar here brought a relevant element or argument to the field and, when added together, their observations give us a clearer perspective.

Combining the works of Filotas, who after examining pastoral sources, recognized three continuous northern pagan practices i.e. feasting, divination, and sacrifice, and Meaney, whose work focuses on healing and amulets, I argued that amulet use should also be considered among these practices. Flint’s examination of magic in the sources addresses the emotional need to believe in magic, especially concerning healing magic, and helps to bolster the argument that heath and survival was a major concern during this period, and another reason amulet use appears to have been common. The bracteates seem to exemplify healing scenes and, for this reason, as well as their find contexts, were most likely used as amulets.

Green and North’s works help to link the sources of the Early Middle Ages to those written in the High Middle Ages. Green’s study of linguistics (another field scholars of this era must be familiar with) helps to bolster the argument that the languages of the Germanic peoples discussed in the early sources are related to the languages of those discussed in the later written sources. Finally, North’s work on Old English literature confirms that, during the seventh
century, most Anglo-Saxon kings were attributed with genealogies that claimed Woden/Odin as their progenitor. Odin is the most commonly mentioned god in the written sources (especially the sources of the High Middle Ages) and is likely depicted on some bracteates dating to the Migration period.

As demonstrated through the early sources, it appears that the core components of Germanic religiosity were originally based around fertility and agricultural production. This is suggested by Tacitus in his *Germania*. By the sixth century, if not earlier, the core components of Germanic religiosity appear to have shifted to be centered around war and conquest. During this shift, it appears that some Germanic deities became anthropomorphized and specific gods and goddesses were more frequently referenced in the sources. One of the most informative early sources (dating to the late eighth century) was *The History of the Lombards* by Paul the Deacon. In this history, a female prophetess is discussed as well as two deities often mentioned in the later sources, Godan/Wodan/Odin and Frea/Freya. Godan, in Paul’s work, is linked to Wodan not only by the etymological similarity, but also because the god was responsible for deciding the victory in a certain battle. Hence, Godan was a war-god. These characters (Odin and a woman attributed with the ability to prophesize) appear to be represented on some bracteates.

The earlier sources alone, however, do not tell us much about specific deities. It is the Old Norse sources that attributed the gods and goddesses with specific abilities, associated them with specific animals, and described, in detail, the cosmos in which these beings lived and ruled. It is through these sources that Karl Hauck deduced that bracteate iconography exemplified religious motifs and thus a continuum of beliefs from at least the Migration period to the High Middle Ages. Chapter three summarized some of Hauck’s main arguments as well as the
arguments of several other scholars and concluded that bracteate iconography appears to indeed reflect mythological motifs. While I do not agree that Odin was the only god displayed on type-C bracteates, the argument that the bracteates indeed displayed gods and goddesses is justified. I suggest that some of the type-C bracteates might also display Thor or a proto-god associated with goats, an animal which appears to be depicted on some type-C bracteates, and healing, as Thor is able to rejuvenate his goats after consuming them in Snorri’s *Edda*.

The bracteates are still being found in various contexts, around half of them have been discovered in continental Europe and England while the other half have been found in southern Scandinavia. Most of the bracteates from Scandinavia are part of hoards and/or votive deposits. Other bracteates, outside of Scandinavia, are usually located in the graves of women. Not only do the bracteates appear to have religious iconography depicted on them, but they are also made from gold. These high-status amulets might have meant a number of different things for their owners, particularity if the bracteates portrayed religious motifs that were recognizable to their owners. More research, however, is needed to pursue these questions. Contemporary bracteate scholars are moving towards answering social questions such as these as well as questions about the production sites of bracteates. There are also trends towards categorizing the bracteates into more specific groups.

**Further Research**

While the iconography of the bracteates remains at the forefront of any debate surrounding their use as an aid to understanding Germanic religiosity, perhaps the next important question to be addressed should focus on their particular find contexts. Several scholars have

---


430 Wicker, “Migration Period Bracteates,” 44-49.
recently alluded to questions about the find contexts of bracteates including Michael Enright, Nancy Wicker, Alexandra Pesch, and Svante Fischer among others. All address the religious and social connotations bracteates might provide to their wearers. Enright emphasizes their probable use as amulets and/or status symbols possibly showing the wealth of their wearers’ husbands and asks

might not some consideration be given to the social as well as to the religious reasons for wearing bracteates? … an amulet not only says something about the religious beliefs of the wearer but may also say something noteworthy about social status and concepts of aristocratic display. It is an intriguing datum that many if not most of the wearers of the golden amulets appear to have been women. Why?\(^\text{431}\)

Generally, it appears that current bracteate research has followed in Enright’s questions and seeks to continue to analyze bracteate iconography while keeping the social aspects of their wearers in mind.

Svante Fischer, an archaeologist at the University of Uppsala, has also begun to answer questions such as these by observing the images portrayed on the bracteates. Though bracteates are not Fischer’s primary research focus, he believes that the bracteates with masculine depictions were worn by some elite women to “express descent and political affinity.”\(^\text{432}\) This seems probable, but this does not mean that all women buried with bracteates all wore them for the same reasons. The Fürstenburg bracteates, for example, have been found primarily in central and southern Germany, and they appear to depict women with weaving implements, hence


feminine portrayals. Perhaps these amulets were worn in order to aid with the weaving process and/or as a symbol for women responsible for divination. If the bracteates were worn by women to assist with the weaving and/or divination processes, then, it stands to reason that these items displayed a specific goddess(es) associated with that ability, and thus a specific type of following. Perhaps they were worn for a number of different reasons. More research, however, is needed to understand the purpose of the bracteates.

Fischer’s work is primarily concerned with runology, however, he also poses questions about women wearing bracteates with runic inscriptions. He suggests that bracteates with runic captions might be a possible indication of literacy for their wearers. While this is a fascinating topic, it is one that would be very hard to research and prove. It is hard to gauge if the bracteate wearing women understood runic inscriptions. Even if they did, does this mean that they understood all runic inscriptions? Further, it poses questions about the general literacy rates of the people in contact with the women. Were they too able to see and understand these runes? The bracteates and inscriptions are relatively small and, if used during life, it’s possible that they meant something highly specific to their wearers, but again, this is not easy to prove. In any case, there are several arguments about what the runic inscriptions on bracteates actually meant and it appears that some of the runic captions were words for plants, items often used for medicinal purposes. If the inscriptions described plants, as Hauck noted, then the argument that the bracteates were amulets is even more convincing. Fischer opposes this theory and suggests that the runic inscriptions were taken to represent the names of the Roman Emperors represented

434 Fischer “Alemannia and the North – Early Runic Contexts Apart (400-800),” 289-290. It should also be noted that only around twenty percent of the bracteates have runic inscriptions and most of the writing is done in what appears to be elder futhark. Wicker, “Context analysis and bracteates inscriptions in light of alternative iconographic interpretations,” 1.
on the coins from which the bracteates were designed.\footnote{Ibid.} In either case, we are still left with questions about why these objects appear to have been worn by women.

Other scholars such as Nancy Wicker, recognize that the bracteates were modeled from Roman coins and medallions, which were originally worn by men. She emphasizes that the process of a masculine object evolving into something worn by women to the grave is one that scholars do not yet understand.\footnote{Wicker, “Context analysis and bracteates inscriptions in light of alternative iconographic interpretations,” 4.} Wicker’s research does not only address bracteates found in the graves of women, but she also considers the bracteates found in hoards and votive deposits. Wicker’s work involves organizing the bracteates according to specific markings indicating specific dies and workshops. She notes that, because bracteate iconography is so diverse, different bracteate styles could be an indication that bracteates might have had different meanings to their wearers. Wicker emphasizes most of all that they were probably designed and made in a specific style that probably belonged to a specific culture or workshop. Wicker also calls for further research dedicated to the find contexts of bracteates and notes that “it is possible that bracteates found in hoards in the heartland of southern Scandinavia may have been used differently from bracteates discovered in women’s graves in far-away England and the Continent.”\footnote{Ibid.} This is a logical observation and one in which scholars are currently investigating.

Alexandra Pesch, a professor at The Center for Baltic and Scandinavian Archaeology and one of Hauck’s students, continues to assess the iconographic designs displayed on bracteates. In her book, 

\textit{Die Goldbrakteaten der Völkerwanderungszeit – Thema und Variation}, she further subcategorizes the bracteates based on their portrayals but also adds maps for each subcategory.
in an effort to further understand their locality as well as find contexts.\textsuperscript{438} Pesch also suggests that bracteates designs were controlled by elite groups and that these images were distributed in order to consolidate power.\textsuperscript{439} Further, Pesch does not rely solely on Old Norse sources to interpret the iconography of the bracteates, rather she considers other religious cults that also appear to have influenced Germanic pagan religiosity during the Migration period, such as Mediterranean pagan influences.\textsuperscript{440} Pesch continues to publish frequently and also focuses on central production sites, such as Gudme, where it appears that many bracteates and other high-status items were produced.\textsuperscript{441}

High-status items, particularly portable ones made from gold, might also have been used to identify elite groups and could have been gifts. Birgit Arrhenius believes that the bracteates were “morning gifts” that brides received from their husbands after the marriage was consummated.\textsuperscript{442} She argues that bracteates identified Scandinavian elites who married outside of their original groupings and into Anglo-Saxon or Lombardic groupings. She suggests that the bracteates symbolized Nordic descent.\textsuperscript{443} While this is another possible answer, the concept that the women were marrying into these groups and keeping their original identities, if that is what the bracteates symbolized, seems unlikely. However, that the histories of both of these peoples

\textsuperscript{438} Pesch, \textit{Die Goldbrakteaten der Völkerwanderungszeit – Thema und Variation}, 44-63.
\textsuperscript{441} These sites have not been discussed in detail in this work, however, there do appear to be sites, such as Gudme and Sorte Muld on Bornholm, where a large amount of metal and precious metal objects have been excavated. One consensus is that these sites appear to have been central areas of trade. According to an article by Lotte Hedeagar, Gudme, because of its importance concerning trade and that the literal meaning of “Gudme” is “home of the gods,” might also have been a central place in the Germanic-Norse cosmos. Hedeagar argues that while iron working was central to survival, gold manipulation was part of social requirements. She emphasizes that gold was part of the gift giving system which was highly ritualized and competitive. Lotte Hedeagar, “Scandinavian ‘Central Places’ in a Cosmological Setting” in \textit{Central Places in the Migration and Merovingian Periods}, ed. Birgitta Hardh and Lars Larsson (Lund: Almqvist &Wiksell International, 2002) 9-10.
\textsuperscript{443} \textit{De re metallica: The Uses of Metal in the Middle Ages}, 58.
attribute their genealogies to Odin and recognize him as being part of their pagan religious cosmos, suggests that these groupings in particular shared some of the same religious elements as their later Scandinavian neighbors and descendants. Further, if the men were giving them out to their brides as marriage gifts, it seems more likely that they might represent the gods and goddesses of their new grouping if the new group was that different from the one in which they came.

While the bracteates were likely worn for a number of reasons and because it is clear that they were based from Roman models, it should be noted that Roman coin necklaces themselves were popular from AD 250 onwards in the Eastern Roman Empire. Some of the most recent bracteate and Roman coin finds from Sorte Muld have been reconstructed by archaeologists to resemble large coin necklaces. Alongside these bracteates, Roman *solidi* with suspension loops, golden beads, and pendants were also discovered. Perhaps one of the easiest ways to date an object, such as the constructed necklace, is by looking at Roman coins. Helle W. Horsnæs is one scholar who has published on the Sorte Muld hoard finds in 2001. Horsnæs explains that two of the six Roman coins found with the bracteates show signs of heavy use, indicating that they were worn during life. The other four Roman coins, however, do not appear to have been worn as much and “it seems possible to suggest that these four coins have been refitted with new eyes, although no traces of older eyes have been preserved.” Five of the six Roman coins are similar with the markings VOT X MVLTX and are “datable to the tenth year of Valentinian’s

---

447 Ibid, 134.
448 Ibid.
reign, *i.e.* 435 AD"\(^{449}\) The *solidi* are dated to the time of their mint; however, this does not mean that the Germanic bracteates were made at the same time or that they were worn together at the same time. It does give us the earliest date that these bracteates could have been buried.

Interestingly enough, the beads of the Sorte Muld bracteate necklace have been compared with others excavated in Udovice, a village in Serbia, by Ivana Popović. The Udovice beads were also found alongside Roman coins which have been reconstructed into a necklace.\(^{450}\) Popović concludes that this particular find had very similar tubular beads to those excavated from Sorte Muld.\(^{451}\) The similarity in the beads bolsters the argument that the Germanic peoples modeled their own necklaces after Roman ones and that there was a vast trade network between the Roman Empire and their neighbors. Popović notes that “the tubular pendant loops with *solidi* are a fine example of these complex connections and relations.”\(^{452}\) It is unlikely, however, that Roman coin necklaces had the same meaning in the North, particularly since the Germanic peoples were producing their own bracteates with their own religious iconography.

In conclusion, scholars studying the bracteates are still primarily concerned, and rightly so, with bracteate iconography. Karl Hauck published and investigated the bracteates most thoroughly and scholars interested in this subject must take his research into account. While debates persist on the meanings behind the iconographic images, there are many other questions that should be addressed. Ongoing bracteate research must include questions of not only iconographic interpretation but of the social aspects the bracteates present. The wearers of the bracteates must also, themselves, be taken into account.

\(^{449}\) Ibid.
\(^{450}\) Popović, “Solidi with Filigreed Tubular Suspension Loops from Udovice in Serbia,” 77.
\(^{451}\) Ibid, though it is unclear whether she is talking about beads or the attached loops for suspension on the coins. According to the article, only two coins were found and no beads.
\(^{452}\) Ibid.
Fig. 1. Type-A Bracteate from Karl Hauck, *Die Goldbrakteaten Der Völkerwanderrungzeit*. Vol., 1,3 Tafeln. Bracteate 76 from Wurt Hitsum.

Fig. 2 Type-B Bracteate from Hauck, *Die Goldbrakteaten Der Völkerwanderrungzeit*. Vol., 1,3 Tafeln. Bracteate 51.1 from Fakse.
Fig. 3 Type-B Bracteate from Karl Hauck, *Die Goldbrakteaten Der Völkerwanderrungzeit*. Vol., 1,3 Tafeln. Bracteate 40 from Denmark.

Fig. 4 Type-B Bracteate from Karl Hauck, *Die Goldbrakteaten Der Völkerwanderrungzeit*. Vol., 1,3 Tafeln. Bracteate 190 from Raum Tollhättan.
Fig. 5 Type- B Bracteate from Karl Hauck, *Die Goldbrakteaten Der Völkerwanderrungzeit*. Vol., 1,3 Tafeln. Bracteate 71 from Hamburg.

Fig. 6 Type- B Bracteate from Karl Hauck, *Die Goldbrakteaten Der Völkerwanderrungzeit*. Vol., 2,2 Tafeln. Bracteate 350 from Südwestdeutschland (South-West Germany).
Fig. 7 Type- C Bracteate from Karl Hauck, *Die Goldbrakteaten Der Völkerwanderrungzeit*. Vol., 1,3 Tafeln. Bracteate 58 from Funen.

Fig. 8 Type- C Bracteate from Karl Hauck, *Die Goldbrakteaten Der Völkerwanderrungzeit*. Vol., 1,3 Tafeln. Bracteate 79 from Hjørlunde Mark.
Fig. 9 Type-C Bracteate from Karl Hauck, *Die Goldbrakteaten Der Völkerwanderrungzeit*. Vol., 1, 3 Tafeln. Bracteate 62 from Gerete.

Fig. 10 Type-C Bracteate from Karl Hauck, *Die Goldbrakteaten Der Völkerwanderrungzeit*. Vol., 1, 3 Tafeln. Bracteate 135 from Ølst.
Fig. 11 Type- D Bracteate from Karl Hauck, *Die Goldbrakteaten Der Völkerwanderrungzeit*. Vol., 3, 2 Tafeln. Bracteate 405.1 from Wurt Achlum.

Fig. 12 Type- F Bracteate from Karl Hauck, *Die Goldbrakteaten Der Völkerwanderrungzeit*. Vol., 2, 2 Tafeln. Bracteate 309 from Nebenstedt.
Fig. 13 Type-E Bracteate from Märit Gaimster, *Vendel period bracteates on Gotland: On the significance of Germanic art*. E-bracteate 10 from Norrgärda.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


Arrhenius, Brigit. “Connections between Scandinavia and the East Roman Empire in the Migration Period.” In From the Baltic to the Black Sea studies in Medieval Archaeology, 18 (1990): 118-137.


Popović, Ivana. “Solidi with Filigreed Tubular Suspension Loops from Udovice in Serbia.”


