

Norse Deathcare

When many people think of Viking burials, they imagine archers releasing flaming arrows aimed at a ship sailing out to sea, which contain the remains of a fallen Viking warrior. As symbolic and extravagant as these portrayals are, they are not an accurate representation of Viking burials and are not supported by archaeological evidence. Despite the Hollywood portrayals of flaming funerals, Norse deathcare practices were extremely diverse. Vikings practiced both cremation and burial, and sent their dead to the afterlife in a variety of ways.

Norse mythology was the religious system of the Vikings, and detailed a very complex system of possibilities after death.

According to the records written by Icelandic scribes, vikings could end up in various places in the afterlife. The most common was known as Valhalla, which was a palatial hall ruled by the Norse God, Odin. The Vikings believed that great warriors would be sent to Valhalla and that during Ragnarok, (the battle marking the end of the world), they would be called to fight alongside Odin. Other places people may have resided after death include Sessrumnir, Hel, the bottom of the ocean, and some parts of Midgard.

Vikings kept very few written records so most of the knowledge we have about their deathcare practices are based on archaeological evidence. We know that many Vikings were burned on pyres so that their souls could be transported to the afterlife through the smoke that rose from the pyre's flames. Some Vikings (mostly women and children) were buried in shallow graves, while some were buried underneath large mounds.

The most interesting form of burial was the practice of laying the dead to rest in ships. Huge, elaborate ships were constructed to act as the final resting place for Vikings. "Grave



Goods” were what the Vikings referred to as the treasures and possessions they buried their dead with. Jewelry, clothing, animals, tools, weapons, money, and even servants were buried with a Viking in their nautical tombs. Rather than being sent out to sea and lit on fire, the ships were



buried in giant mounds of dirt. The mounds were lined with giant stones to mark the graves. This burial practice seemed to be reserved for high-ranking men and women and offered a symbolic message of the journey to the afterlife for the Vikings that were destined for Valhalla.

Citations

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Photo 1:

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Photo 2:

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