



From Asgard to Valhalla: The Remarkable History of the Norse Myths

Heather O'Donoghue

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Whether they focus on Thor's powerful hammer, the wailing Valkyrie, the palatial home of the gods - Asgard - or ravenous wolves and fierce elemental giants, the Norse myths are packed with rowdy incident. But at the centre of their cosmos stands a gnarled old ash tree, Yggdrasil, from which all distances and times are measured. When the old tree creaks, Ragnarok - the end of the world and of the gods themselves - is at hand. It is from this tree that Odin, father of the gods, hanged himself in search of the wisdom of the dead: a disturbing image of divine sacrifice far removed from the feasting and fighting of his otherworld home, Valhalla. And an image so problematic for thirteenth century Christians that they left it out when they wrote the myths down.

From Asgard to Valhalla is the first book to show how and why the Norse myths have so powerfully resonated from era to era: from Viking-age stories of ice and fire to the epic poetry of Beowulf; and from Wagner's Ring to Marvel Comics' Mighty Thor. Heather O'Donoghue, who is an expert on Old Norse culture, shows in what ways the Norse myths have impacted on the western mind, across the fields of literature, art, music and politics. She considers the wider contexts of Norse mythology, including its origins, medieval expression and reception in post-medieval societies right up to the present. From Asgard to Valhalla is a book that will intrigue and delight anyone who is keen to understand how the Norse myths have so profoundly shaped, and continue to shape, the western cultural heritage.

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