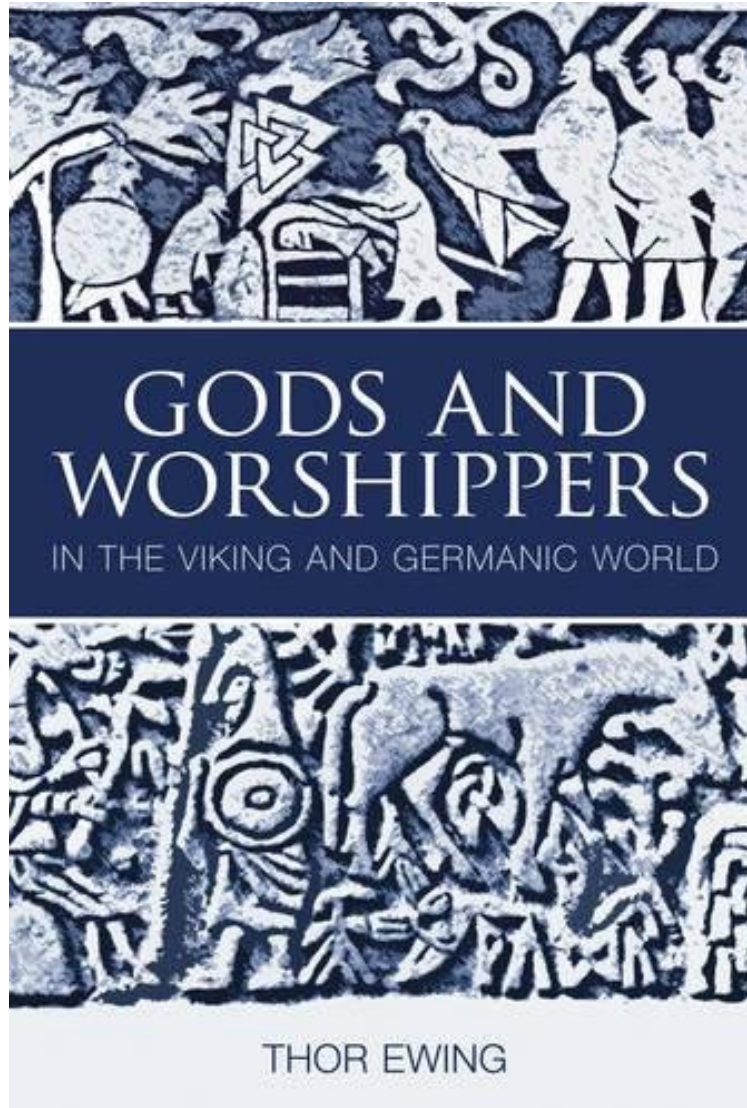


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Gods and Worshippers: In the Viking and Germanic World

Thor Ewing

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Thor Ewing : Gods and Worshippers: In the Viking and Germanic World before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Gods and Worshippers: In the Viking and Germanic World:

18 of 19 people found the following review helpful. A good first half, then it degenerates into New Age drivel. By Spence the Elder "Gods and Worshippers", is a work that was much anticipated in the Heathen/Asatru community. I think these expectations were too great for the book to meet. If the author had only published Part 1 of the book I would be much kinder in my review. This alas, is not the case. Part 1 of this work is quite good and well written. It broadened my outlook a bit without pushing the envelope too far. I liked Ewing's look at ritual songs and how they

may have been passed down through the years and avoided clerical censorship. Additionally, Ewing's comparison of the similarities in the various political gatherings of the Althing, Gulathing, etc. and how that these gatherings were likely to be as much religious/spiritual as they were secular was quite intriguing. When you think about it just makes sense. I hadn't seen it stated so plainly before. The book itself is well put together with a nice glossy cover, quality paper and decent size type face. A few of the photos were a tad blurry but overall well done. Part 2 however, steps off the edge of reason into the realm of circular logic that is at best flawed and at worst down right fantasy. A separate society of priests and seer's living within the culture? Based on secluded islands or hidden enclaves while practicing bisexual and incestuous rituals? Show me a shared of creditable hard evidence to support this. A troop of one eyed wanderers tramping around Northern Europe? All of them claiming to be the All Father while begging for food and coin is a bit much, don't you think? I also noticed that Ewing's sections on Norns, Mothers and Maiden Norn/Valkyries rang very similar to the "Maiden- Mother-Crone", concept of contemporary Celtic witchcraft. I don't know if this is an attempt to merge the Germanic and the Celtic traditions or just a coincidence. All and all I do recommend reading this book. If nothing else Ewing makes you think and question your premises. I would however, place it at the bottom of your priority list. In Frith, Spence the Elder "Sic gorgiamus allos subjectatos nunc" M. Addams 39 of 41 people found the following review helpful. Clever, but too fanciful to be taken seriously. By Ned There is a school of thought in mythological scholarship called "Euhemerism" which searches for real events in history to explain the happenings in mythology. Both Saxo and Snorri indulged in such speculation, and a more recent theory, that a peace-loving, agrarian matriarchal society was once overrun by an aggressive, patriarchal warrior society, which explains the myth of the Aesir/Vanir wars, was once in such vogue that it has impacted scholarship and new age philosophy to this day, despite the fact that it has long since been discarded as a feminist fantasy by serious scholars due to a lack of historical and archaeological evidence. Thor Ewing creates a new brand of Euhemerism with his "Gods and Worshipers". Part One consists of familiar territory to any student of Germanic society, with occasional new angles on old ideas, but nothing revolutionary. It is a walk through a familiar wood, perhaps during a different season. The tome itself is pleasing, printed as it is on glossy paper with illustrations of most of the archeological evidence Ewing refers to, which is a welcome change from the numerous texts which describe but never illustrate such artifacts. The two stars I gave this book refer primarily to this first part and the quality of the book and its illustrations. Part Two, however, suggests that there was a subculture of magic practitioners in Germanic society who both modeled themselves after and, in an atavistic sense, "were" Odin, Freyja, valkyries and norns, and who wandered the land as seers and magicians when not making their home on special islands practicing the (bi)sexual promiscuity and sibling marriage attributed to Odin and the Vanic gods. Ewing proceeds by a sort of circular reasoning which criss-crosses wantonly from literature to history and back again. For example he notes that 1) though Odin is well-known in poetry and saga to travel as a one-eyed, hooded wanderer, mortal characters in the poems and sagas rarely recognize him by his appearance, therefore 2) in historical Germanic cultures there must have been numerous followers of Odin who put out one of their eyes and wandered hooded, creating "red herring" odins everywhere, which 3) explains why in the poetry and sagas the characters do not recognize Odin. A more simple explanation may be that this inability to recognize Odin in the poetry and sagas is a literary device. If the mortal characters recognize Odin as a god right off the bat, they will simply fall to their knees and do whatever he says. By not recognizing him, they make meaningful errors in their treatment of him and his words, which reveals their true natures, and thus brings out the meaning of the story. On the mythological side one might add: if the god of mind-fetters does not wish to be recognized, he won't be, regardless of his appearance. Furthermore, if there were followers of Odin who put out one of their eyes and wandered as seers, where then are the followers of Tyr who lopped off one of their hands? Or worshipers of Thor who pounded whetstones into their skulls? Once you begin to read myths with such literalness, where do you stop? Had this idea been presented in the context of a fantasy novel, it would have been very clever. Presented, however, as a serious academic study, it seems more like conspiracy theory than real scholarship. Ewing challenges the skeptical reader in his conclusion, claiming that anyone who doubts his theory must caution themselves "against allowing personal preconceptions based on modern society from colouring our judgment about what might have been likely in past societies." I would turn this question about to the author and ask what preconceptions he possesses which encourage him pick and choose bits of lore to read literally in order to create a sort of "hippie" subculture in Germanic Europe? Ewing's second challenge to doubtful readers is to find another theory which explains the "multitude of norns", "earthly valkyries" or the numerous names of Odin. I would reply that multiplicity and contradiction are well-established aspects of mythology the world over because the human psyche, which created these myths, has a tendency to create multiplicity and contradiction. And, in the words of H.R. Ellen Davidson: "Attempts to interpret the descriptions in the poems literally...have never wholly succeeded, because the impression the poems give is not a planned and rational world, but rather a series of vivid images which build up a vague but powerful world-picture." When fragmentary sources which span hundreds of years are assembled to create a neat and complete puzzle picture, one wonders if this picture has not been inspired more by cleverness than truth. I would suggest that the tension between the law-giving Aesir and the natural and instinct-driven Vanir in poetry and saga is one that existed in the hearts of men and women in ancient times, as it does to this day, and not in two separate societies. Those Heathens inspired by occult, new age or neo-shamanistic interpretations of the lore may find

Ewing's tale of an organized subculture of sexually free magic-users operating within Germanic culture compelling. Those who take a more sober and scholarly route along the Northern path may find that Ewing's premise requires a suspension of their learned disbelief that reaches rather too far up into the clouds. 7 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Essential Reading By Eric the Unfashionable This is really a great book that has been unfairly misrepresented by some of the reviewers. For instance, I don't think it has anything to do with euhemerism. Even the first part of the book is quite original - in fact it's more original than Ewing makes out. It's one of the best descriptions I know of Viking temples, rituals and so on - certainly the best you can get hold of easily - and with some great insights. I found things I'd never come across before, but the main thing is that it's a completely fresh angle on the whole thing. The second part is pretty revolutionary, and it looks like some people really don't get on with it. Ewing's conclusions might be radical, but it's not true that he doesn't argue the case well. It's carefully argued with a sense of caution, and I really don't think it relies on circular logic - in fact everything seems to be argued from about three angles. And the breadth of evidence is really impressive. I'm not sure yet what to make of Ewing's conclusions, but I don't want to prejudge the issue. It seems pretty outlandish, but you can't knock it down easily without simply ignoring a lot of the argument and evidence he presents. I'm beginning to think he's probably right. Because of the debate it raises, I don't think you can be a real student of Viking religion unless you've read this book - there's also an excellent summary of Viking and Germanic funeral customs. But steer clear if you don't want to shake the old romantic view of Germanic paganism.

What was paganism really like? Who were the gods and how were they worshipped? Thor Ewing uncovers the world and the worldview of our pagan ancestors. In particular he looks at Viking and Germanic paganism, drawing on archaeological evidence as well as their myths and poetry. He analyzes their gods and the realities of pagan worship such as temples, sacred groves, and magical practices, considers their beliefs concerning the dead and funerary rites, and examines the interaction between paganism and Christianity in England, Ireland, Scandinavia, and Russia. In conclusion the author argues that over many centuries paganism was a vital tradition open to continual change.

About the Author