

# Skylands Report



The e-newsletter of the Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship

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[www.skylandsasatru.org](http://www.skylandsasatru.org)

December 2017

## Celebrating Winter Nights

On a wonderful Saturday afternoon, members of the Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship and several close friends gathered to celebrate Winter Nights. Members of the Cooking Team and participants in our first-ever Chili Cook-Off took a quick break from food preparation to participate in our Skylands auction. Several members donated items that were offered for sale with the proceeds going to benefit the SAF. The Chili Cook-Off had been months in the planning. In the run up to the event, our chefs worked to perfect their recipes to win bragging rights and a bottle of Chaucer's mead. After the votes were counted, Joseph goði was declared the winner. We give special thanks to Maclean D., Jeremy G., and Randi R. for their delicious entries in the contest. Needless to say, everyone had an opportunity to sample several bowls of Chili accompanied by a scrumptious tray of fresh cornbread.

Throughout the afternoon attendees enjoyed each other's company and played friendly games of kubb.

As the afternoon drew to a close, all participated in a *Disablót* to honor the female spirits or deities called *Disir*. An offering was made and there were signs that it was accepted. Surely, we can all expect a good year



*Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship and friends celebrate Winter Nights*



*Randi R. serves as Seiðkona*

ahead. Following the blot, all sat down to enjoy a bountiful feast of roasted pork loin with apples and sausage.

As the sun set and the moon rose along the tree line, we held a Seiðr ritual with Randi R. serving as the *seiðkona*. After members had the opportunity to ask questions of the *seiðkona*, all moved indoors to conduct our Sumbel. There were several heart-felt toasts as the horn was passed.

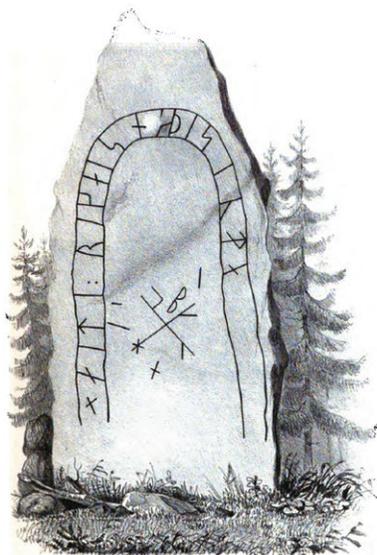
The celebration finally drew to a close, leaving all that attended feeling uplifted for having honored the Gods, the Earth, and our ancestors. All were reminded once again that Ásatrú offers a way of living that is deeply fulfilling. 🏴



*Wick M. raises the horn during Sumbel*

## Exploring the Magic of Bind-Runes

At the latest Rûna Workshop, Joseph goði continued to lead the class on our exploration of the Younger Futhark. This system of runic inscriptions was in use from around 750 CE to 1150 CE. This 16-rune system used throughout Scandinavia. The reduction in the number of runestaves from the Older Futhark may have been a purposeful attempt by some guild of runemasters to make the system more difficult and more obscure.



The class practiced a staða exercise (Runic Yoga) forming the various runes of the Younger Futhark with our bodies. We also began a consideration of the magic of bind-runes – the combination of two or more runic shapes into one figure. Students developed affirmative formulas using the Younger Futhark. Then each of these formulas was converted into a bind-rune or a series of bind-runes.

Students are encouraged to purchase and read *ALU: An Advanced Guide to Operative Runology* by Edred Thorsson. If you are interested in learning the magic of the North, then this series of workshops is for you. Rûna Workshops are runic-study groups sponsored by the Rune-Gild. The workshops are non-religious in nature, and are open to all. 

## Tribal Milestones

Gene H. celebrates a birthday on 3 December. Happy Birthday Gene!



## The Big Day: Yule (Part One)

There is a wealth of winter traditions leading up to Yule:

- A week before the longest night of the year, also the start of the old Heathen month of *Mörsugur* ("marrow-sucking"), we see *Krampusnacht* (Krampus Night), originally connected with the story of the laming of Thor's goats. Thor and the goats visit homes, punishing naughty children and rewarding good ones.
- On the longest night of the year, we have Lussinatta, where the goddess Frigg visits homes to make sure they are prepared for the long cold winter, the Wild Hunt begins its ride, and an all-night vigil is held to welcome the return of the goddess Sunna and celebrate her return to strength as the days begin to grow longer.
- A week after the solstice, we have a reminder that the Yule Ale had better be brewing, because if it's not started by now, it'll be too late for Yule.
- On New Year's Eve, we have Mothers Night, when the Three Mothers (aka the Norns) are invited to our homes with a feast, in return for their favor in the coming year. It's also a good night for divination, to foresee the coming year's events.
- On New Year's Day, we have a number of customs and traditions around the Calends of January, which sets the tone for the entire year to come. First-stepping, New Year's wishes and resolutions, marking the weather, setting up effigies of livestock and game animals to ensure prosperity, as well as donning animal guises for the same purpose, and more are all designed to influence the luck of the coming year.

Now we come to the mid-winter sacrifice and celebration itself; Yule; specifically, *sónarblót*, or "Son's sacrifice" (which is interesting to contrast to Mothers' Night), which takes place on the first night of Yule. The practice is specifically described in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* (ch. 10):

*Ok skyldi þeim gelti blóta at sónarblóti. Jólaaftan skyldi leiða sónargöltinn í höll fyrir konúng; lögðu menn þá hendr yfir burst hans ok strengja heit.*

And they would sacrifice a boar in the sonarblót. On Yule Eve (i.e., the first evening of Yule) the sonar-boar was led into the hall before the king; then people laid their hands on its bristles and made vows.

It is also mentioned in one of the poems of the *Poetic Edda*, *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* (IV):

*Heðinn fór einn saman heim ór skógi jólaaftan ok fann trollkonu. Sú reid vargi ok hafði orma at taumum ok bauð fylgð sína Heðni. "Nei," sagði hann. Hon sagði: "Þess skaltu gjalda at bragarfulli." Um kveldit óru*



**Bringing in the Boar's Head**

*heitstrengingar. Var fram leiddr sónargöltr. Lögðu menn þar á hendr sínar ok strengðu menn þá heit at bragarfulli.*

Returning home alone from the forest on a Yule Eve, Hedin met a troll-wife riding on a wolf, with serpents for reins, who offered to attend him, but he declined her offer; whereupon she said: "Thou shalt pay for this at the council." In the evening solemn vows were made, and the son-hog was led forth, on which the guests laid their hands, and then made solemn vows at the council.



**The god Freyr stands with his boar Gullinbursti**

This recalls very strongly the English tradition (since exported to the United States and elsewhere) of the Boar's Head Feast, where the cooked and garlanded head of a boar is brought into the hall to inaugurate the celebration, accompanied by specific carols, dating back to at least the 15th century (although the ceremony itself goes back to at least 1340).

The association of the boar with both Freyr and Yule is well known. Freyr is said to ride a golden-haired boar, named *gullinbursti* (golden-bristles) and feasts of pork around the solstice (originally associated with Yule, and transferred to the new Christmas holiday) were traditional well into the Christian era. In modern Sweden, boar-shaped cakes are a traditional Christmas dish, and Christmas Ham is a staple across Scandinavia. Even as late as the 18th century, December 17th was called Sow Day in the Orkneys, and the best sow of the herd would

be slaughtered (add 8 days for the calendar conversion, and Sow Day becomes Christmas Day, upon which Yule traditions were mapped during the conversion process, as we have seen).

The winter solstice sacrifice was associated with the god Freyr. According to *Ynglinga Saga* (ch. 8), the mid-winter, or Yule, sacrifice was made "for a good crop":

*Þá skyldi blóta í móti vetri til árs, en at miðjum vetri blóta til gróðrar, hit þriðja at sumri, þat var sigrblót.*

On winter day there should be blood-sacrifice for a good year, and in the middle of winter for a good crop; and the third sacrifice should be on summer day, for victory in battle.

Remembering that "the middle of winter" here is describing the actual climactic winter, not the astronomical solstice, which in reality happens way before the point where there are as

many colder days behind it as ahead of it. So, approximately the middle of what we call January.

While *Gylfaginning* (ch. 24) makes it plain that it is in fact Freyr to whom such supplications for good harvests were made:

*Freyr er inn ágætasti af ásum. Hann ræðr fyrir regni ok skini sólar ok þar með ávexti jarðar, ok á hann er gott at heita til árs ok friðar. Hann ræðr ok fésælu manna.*

Freyr is the most renowned of the Æsir; he rules over the rain and the shining of the sun, and therewithal the fruit of the earth; and it is good to call on him for fruitful seasons and peace. He governs also the prosperity of men.

And that, I think, is the kick-off of the three-day Yule celebration. We have the "son's sacrifice" on the first night, of a boar or swine, in honor of Freyr, accompanied by a great feast, and specifically the swearing of oaths on the head or body of the sacrificial animal.

In modern practical terms, when most Ásatrúar don't have it within their means to sacrifice an actual boar, it seems clear that at least featuring pork (as the famous Christmas Ham of Scandinavia, or in some other form) would be indicated. A ceremony involving the swearing of oaths would also seem to be a critical piece of the celebration (again, setting the stage for the coming year with events happening near its start); I might go so far as to roast a swine head specifically for the occasion, even if it didn't necessarily form part of the feast itself. In my own tribe, we use a pig effigy made of straw, and make our promises and state our hopes upon it, before offering it to Freyr.

The only mystery, to my mind, is the significance of the name of the sacrifice. I might have expected something like *Jólablót*, but it turns out that the word doesn't exist in Cleasby-Vigfússon's dictionary of Old Icelandic. So why *sónarblót*? Why "son's sacrifice"? I think I might have an idea.

Yngve-Freyr is said to have been the progenitor of the Swedish line. His name appears in the royal lineages, he founded Uppsala, most of the place-names associated with him are found in Sweden (in and around Uppsala, as a matter of fact), and is even referred to as the father of the Swedes:

Shall it be said of Frey's brave sons,  
The kingly race, the noble ones,  
That they have fought in deadly battle  
With the head-gear of their cattle? (*Ynglingatal* 23)

It's purely speculative, of course, but it seems to fit the available information. I'll keep digging, and if I unearth additional information, I'll certainly pass it along. But it seems to point to the Yule sacrifice to Freyr as being particularly ancient, and eventually disseminating across the Norse world, only to be co-opted by the incoming Christian empire. 

*By Joseph goði 18 December 2016*

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# Skylands December Calendar

## **Krampusnacht!**

Join the Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship for our first Krampus Night Celebration. Snacks, games for the kids, story telling, and a visit from Krampus and Thor! Cold cut buffet, dessert, ale, merriment for the entire family!

This event is limited to members of Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship and invited guests and their children.

There will be a minimum \$15 donation per adult to offset the cost of food and beverages at this event.

Krampus and Thor will be visiting our event, to chasten the naughty and reward the good (and aren't all kids good, deep down?).

Date: Saturday, December 9, 2017

Time: 01:00 PM to 5:30 PM

Location: Columbia, NJ

## **Ásatrú 101**

*Ásatrú 101* classes are designed for both the beginner who wants to learn the very basics, to the advanced Ásatrúar who is interested in hearing new perspectives, and learning how we at the Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship do things.

The subject of this week's class is Fate and the Soul. What is the Germanic concept of the soul, how is it different from modern conceptions, and how is it related to the Germanic concept of fate?

Date: Sunday, December 3, 2017

Time: 02:00 PM to 04:00 PM

Location: Morris County Library, 30 E. Hanover Ave., Whippany, NJ

## **Full Moon Offering**

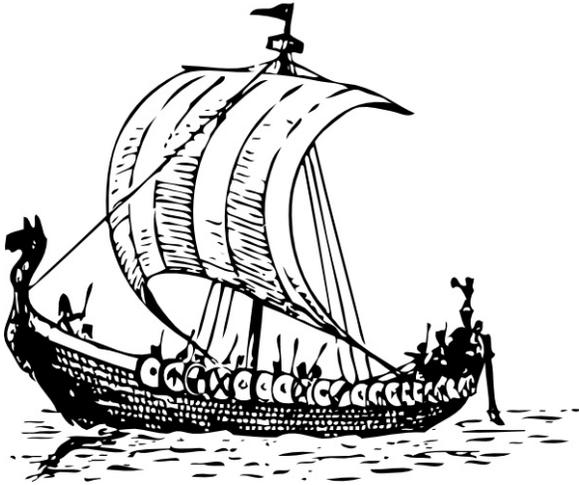
Date: December 3, 2017

## **New Moon Offering**

Date: December 18, 2017

Everyone is encouraged to make an offering to his or her local land-spirits. By making regular offerings, we increase our bonds of friendship with the spirits of the earth. Such offerings may be made on the Full Moon or the New Moon.

## Save the Date!



- **Krampusnacht!** – Saturday, Dec. 9
- **New Years Eve** – Sunday, Dec. 31
- **Yule Celebration** – Saturday, Jan. 13
- **Sumarmál** – Saturday, Apr. 21
- **Midsummer** – Saturday, Jun. 23
- **Winter Nights** – Saturday, Oct. 27

## Help Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship

Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship runs both *Ásatrú 101* classes and *Rúna Workshops*. We hold celebrations for the major holidays in the heathen calendar. We run several on-line sites and produce this newsletter. All of this is possible through donations from members and friends. Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship.

Donate today! [http://www.skylandsasatru.org/?page\\_id=183](http://www.skylandsasatru.org/?page_id=183)

## Follow Skylands On-line!

For more information about our tribe and upcoming events, please visit our website at [www.skylandsasatru.org](http://www.skylandsasatru.org)

Don't forget to *friend* us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/skylandsasatru/>

Remember to sign up for our events on our Meetup page: <http://www.meetup.com/NJ-Asatru/>

Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship is also on Twitter. Follow us at: [https://twitter.com/Skylands\\_Asatru](https://twitter.com/Skylands_Asatru)

## About Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship

The Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship is a recognized 501(c)(3) religious organization based in northwest New Jersey. We practice the religion called Ásatrú, which is the modern expression of the ancient religion of the people of northern and western Europe before they converted to Christianity. We hold regular gatherings, some religious, some educational, and some social.

We encourage anyone whose ancestors once worshiped the Gods and Goddesses of the North to “come home” to Ásatrú. You're welcome here!

***Skylands Report*** is the official newsletter of the Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship (SAF). It is a celebration of the accomplishments, the activities, and the plans of the SAF.

We welcome submissions of essays, short stories, poetry, and artwork. Write to us at [fellowship@skylandsasatru.org](mailto:fellowship@skylandsasatru.org). We would love to hear from you.

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