

VALHALLA



Valhalla literally means 'hall of the slain'. The poem Grimnir's sayings says Valhalla has 640 doors through which 960 warriors can walk abreast. The hall is described as 'gold-bright' with spears for rafters and shields for roof tiles. A wolf hangs above its west doors with an eagle above it. A magical goat and tree stand on the roof.

The interior is lit with shining swords and long benches are strewn with suits of armour, ready to be put on by the warriors.

Tjängvide image stone thought to show Valhalla, 9th Century, Swedish Museum of National Antiquities



Odin is described as both the father of the gods and the father of those slain in battle. He rules over Valhalla and presides over the feasting but does not eat himself. In two 10th Century poems he sends out other gods and heroes to welcome new arrivals.

Odin has one eye and some sagas suggest he gave up his other for knowledge. He has two ravens that perch on his shoulders called Hugin (Thought) and Muninn (Desire). These birds bring information back from all around the world. Odin holds a spear, called Gungnir, which never miss its target. He also has two wolves, Freki and Geri, who sit at his feet.

Icelandic manuscript, SAM 66, Arni Magnusson Institute for Icelandic Studies

HEIDRUN



Heidrun is a magical female goat perched on the roof of Valhalla. She eats the leaves of a special tree called Laeraor, and instead of milk she produces the finest mead. Filling a giant cauldron every day, Heidrun ensures the drinking horns in Odin's Hall never run dry.

Heidrun pictured in a 1760 manuscript, Arni Magnusson Institute for Icelandic studies

WARRIORS



Viking warriors who go to Valhalla after dying in battle are known as Einherjar. During the day they leave Valhalla and battle each other. This may be to prepare for the foretold final battle between gods and giants at Ragnarok. After the fighting the wounded are healed and the slain are resurrected.

In the evening the Vikings feast together on the magical boar Saehrimnir and mead from the goat Heidrun. The food and drink never runs out – a dream for warriors who would have been used to subsistence farming.

Lewis chessmen, 12th century, British Museum

Retrieval

- 1) What reason do some sagas suggest for Odin only having one eye ?
- 2) Give two reasons Vikings might want to go to Valhalla when they die.

Words in context

- 3) Find and copy a word which means 'killed in a violent way.'
- 4) Find and copy a word which means 'side by side'.
- 5) Find and copy a word which means 'to be in charge of'.
- 6) Explain what 'never run dry' means.