

The Heathen Hereafter

An examination of the primary realms of the dead within Old Norse myth

Blake Middleton

If I were to ask ten people with only general knowledge of Old Norse mythology: *Where do you think pagan Scandinavians expected to go after they died?* I am certain at least nine of those ten would answer “Valhalla”.¹ This assumption is based on modern culture’s recent love affair with anything “Viking”. From Wagner to Marvel’s *Thor*, Led Zeppelin to *Vikings*, modern audiences are informed that were a “Viking” to die in battle, beautiful armour-clad valkyries would swoop down, take up the dead warrior, and usher him into Óðinn’s mighty mead hall. Unfortunately, for this popular view, the sources are not so clear-cut. This paper will examine Old Norse mythological sources to clarify these modern misconceptions. In doing so a more accurate account of who would gain entry into the aforementioned hall and where those who did not would go instead.

Since at least 1876, with the first production of Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, western society has taken liberties with the Viking Age Norse.² In the case of Wagner’s opera, Old Norse scholar Roberta Frank notes that before that time, not a single image or artefact related to Scandinavians existed depicting horns on their helmets; however, within two decades of said production, nothing said “Viking” better than a horned helm.³ This and many other misconceptions have continued in more recent decades via popular media with have each presented the image of Scandinavians to varying degrees of authenticity. This representation not only alters the portrayal of these “Vikings” whilst alive, it continues into their concepts of death and the hereafter.

In order to discern if this assumption is correct a small, ten family members and friends were contacted and asked the above question. To that end, all ten answered Valhalla, one suggested a

¹ Within this article, the titular ‘Hall of the Slain’ is presented both as Valhǫll and as Valhalla. Each is used to reflect different conceptualizations of the location. The Old Norse Valhǫll refers to the hall presented within the source material, while Valhalla refers to the modern popularization of the former. However, it must be noted that Valhalla will also appear below within the direct quotations of other scholars referenced.

² Rudolf Simek, “Doeplar, Karl Emil.” *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, trans. Angela Hall. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993), 62.

³ Roberta Frank, “The invention of the Viking horned helmet,” *International Scandinavian and medieval studies in memory of Gerd Wolfgang Weber*. *Hesperides: Studies in Western Literature and Civilization* 12 (2000):199-200.

dichotomy of Valhalla and Hel, and all participants said they drew their answers from popular media rather than the source materials.⁴

Before delving into the wonderful worlds of the Old Norse dead, it would be prudent to give the briefest of overviews of the sources utilized throughout this paper and make note of the inherent complications of their use. This paper will take up the current line of inquiry through a focused investigation of the two main sources: *The Poetic Edda* and *Snorra Edda*, alongside two skaldic poems: *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál*. Likewise, due to length restrictions, I cannot fully examine each of the eleven different afterlife destinations referenced within the sources. For brief overviews concerning each of those realms, please see the appended table. As it pertains to the complications, there exist within these sources numerous conflicting details, which are partly due to the inherent development of these afterlife concepts over the course on multiple centuries spanning both paganism and Christianity.

The Domain of Hel

The first realm to be discussed was the realm called *Niflheimr*. Otherwise referred to in the sources (somewhat interchangeably) as *Niflhel* or simple *Hel*, this is the realm of the dead proper. However, despite the similarly sounding Christian locale this particular Norse afterlife was not a place of punishment, à la fire, brimstone, torture, or despair. While Hel did eventually impart its name to the Christian *Hell*, the idea that the pre-Christian location was likewise intended solely for sinners is unfounded.⁵ Instead, for the majority of its denizens, this realm was simply the continuation of the lives that they previously held before death.⁶ Deriving from the Proto-Germanic reconstructed verb **helan*, hel simply meant ‘to cover, hide, or conceal’⁷ primarily in the sense of burying a dead body.⁸ In an extension of this definition, it is possible that Hel served as a general underworld where

⁴ Unfortunately, within the current age of bite size information, the majority of those interested in the subject will not take the time to read the source material, opting instead to “google it”; or, as my brother would say “I’ll wait for the movie.”

⁵ Hilde Ellis Davidson. *The Road to Hel: A Study of the Conception of the Dead in Old Norse Literature*. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 86.

⁶ Heinrich Beck, “Hel.” *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde* 14 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999), 257-260.

⁷ Jan de Vries, “hel.” *Altnordisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*. (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 220.

⁸ Christopher Abram, “Hel in early Norse poetry,” *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 2(1) (2006), 2.

everyone, regardless of rank or gender would go after death.⁹ This concept was later personified within the mythology as the jǫtunn ('giant') daughter of Loki, likewise named Hel.¹⁰

John Lindow notes the innate conflicts of the realm's three titles by identifying each with specific aspects of the combined whole. Hel, Lindow associates only with the general concept of death, i.e. "the grave", and the personified aspect of that concept in the form of Loki's daughter.¹¹ Niflhel, which appears in both verse and Snorri's prose, Lindow and other scholars such as Rudolf Simek identifies with a deeper, more "hell-like" portion of the greater realm. Simek particularly understands that the term was most likely originally a poetic intensifier of "the grave" that later gained, through Snorri, a Christian sense of punishment.¹² Niflheimr, which is only found within *Snorra Edda*, was a primordial land of mist and cold, existing before the creation of the cosmos.¹³ It was occupied by Hel's jǫtnar ancestors, the majority of whom were killed as a consequence of the universe's creation.¹⁴ Those who resided there before that event appeared to do very little, perhaps in part due to the locations icy climate. Again, Lindow highlights that of the four manuscripts of *Snorra Edda* only two contain the word Niflheimr, while the other two utilize Niflhel in its place, suggesting that simple scribal error was responsible for the term.¹⁵

Despite the confusion in the locations title, or the idea that it originally served as the only conceptualised world of the dead, eventually, possibly due to the stratification of Old Scandinavian society, Hel became only one of the many places the dead would journey. As to who it was that went to the Domain of Hel following their earthly death and this stratification of the afterlives, according to Snorri, following the gods' creation of the cosmos, Niflheimr remained and was granted to Loki's daughter:

Hel kastaði hann í Niflheim ok gaf henni vald yfir níu heimum at hon skipti ǫllum vistum með þeim er til hennar váru sendir, en þat eru sótt dauðir menn ok ellidauðir.

⁹ Anders Haltgård, "Óðinn, Valhǫll and the Einherjar. Eschatological Myth and Ideology in the Late Viking Period", *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages: Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 298.

¹⁰ Simek, "Hel (2)." *Dictionary*, 138.

¹¹ Lindow, "Hel." *Norse mythology*, 172.

¹² Simek, "Niflhel." *Dictionary*, 232.

¹³ Lindow, "Niflheim (Fog-World) and Niflhel (Fog-hel)", *Norse mythology*, 240-1.

¹⁴ Details of this episode within the mythos can be found in several sources, including *Þkv.* 21 and *Gylf.* 4-9.

¹⁵ Lindow, "Niflheim (Fog-World) and Niflhel (Fog-hel)", *Norse mythology*, 240-1.

Granite- online first
© Author

'Hel he threw into Niflheim and gave her authority over nine worlds, such that she has to administer board and lodging to those sent to her, and that is those who die of sickness or old age.'¹⁶

In essence, she watched over those too stubborn to die in battle.

So, from the available sources, it is possible to suggest the following: Hel, the jötunn, ruled over those who died of natural causes in her kingdom of Niflhel (or that this was a specific district within her realm that dealt exclusively with those who were to be punished), which in itself was situated within the primordial realm of Niflheimr, which once had been occupied by her ancestors. For the majority, if not all, of those who dwelt in Hel's Domain, there was nothing to suggest that these denizens were being punished for misdeeds committed during their lives; instead, their time in Hel's care was simple what was next.

Halls for the battle slain

Moving on to those that did not die a natural death, Jens Peter Schjødt have noted that early pagan Norse culture was to a large part a warrior / hall culture.¹⁷ Those who shared that culture would have been a part of the upper strata of Scandinavian society as they were better armed and subsequently had the time available for dedicated martial training.¹⁸ The importance of this warrior-centric culture also continued after death. It was from this cultural view that may have influenced the earliest stratification of the afterlives, changing one "grave" to a near dozen locations. By the time of the compilation of the *Eddur*,¹⁹ the warrior dead went to one of three destinations: Valhøll, Vingólf, and Fólkvangr.

Beginning with the least well known within pop culture, *Vingólf* ('the friendly house') is only found within Snorri's *Edda* in three locations, each of which describes the locale differently. *Gylfaginning* 20, relate that Vingólf, was a second hall meant to house Óðinn's *einherjar* ('lone-warriors'), those who would serve as the gods' vanguard during Ragnarøk.²⁰ This is an expansion on Snorri's earliest

¹⁶ *Gylf*.34, p.27:14-6; Faulkes, *Everyman Edda*, 27.

¹⁷ Jens Peter Schjødt, *Initiation between Two Worlds: Structure and Symbolism in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religion*. (Odense: The University of Southern Denmark, 2008), 286.

¹⁸ see Haltgård, "Óðinn, Valhøll and the Einherjar." and Jens Peter Schjødt, "The Warrior in Old Norse Religion," *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages: Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

¹⁹ Icelandic plural of "Edda."

²⁰ *Gylf*. 20, p.21:28-9.

description from *Gylfaginning* 3 where he states that those who were righteous in life would reside with the All-father after their deaths.²¹ In both cases, Vingólf appears to be utilized as overflow housing for the honoured dead. However, the third of Snorri's references to Vingólf is completely different.

Gylfaginning 14 describes Vingólf as a sacred and beautiful hall, used by and dedicated to the goddesses.²² From this, Vingólf is juxtaposed with another hall, *Glaðsheimr* ('glad-home'), where thirteen thrones for the male gods were arranged.²³ From this two questions arise. Firstly, why would Snorri, drastically change his understanding of the location and then change it back? And secondly, as both *Glaðsheimr* and Vingólf are stated to be 'on earth' within *Gylfaginning* 14, how effective of an afterlife location would the hall be? While impossible to answer with complete certainty, I do think answers are available that would alleviate both. As to the first, 19th century scholar Wilhelm Braune suggested²⁴ that Vingólf had been miss-transcribed from *Vingólf* ('wine house'), and as such would simply be a synonym for Valhøll created by Snorri. If accurate, we could then suggest that the changing nature of Vingólf in *Gylfaginning* 14 was a second, correctly transcribed location with an unfortunately, extremely similar title. Noted Icelandic scholar Finnur Jónsson disagreed with Braune however, noting that the term was well developed circa 800, well before Snorri's compiling.²⁵ Simek, however notes that the hall's name could just as well have been correctly transcribed and still be a synonym of Valhøll, if *vin* ('friend') is taken in the sense of something akin to "friend of Óðinn" and thus meaning the einherjar.²⁶ Concerning the location of Vingólf, as an afterlife, being located 'on earth', this would not have been any cause for concern amongst pagan Scandinavians, who maintained the belief that some individuals would reside within a family oriented afterlife under a particular mountain or large hill within their area of influence.²⁷

The use of a goddess' hall or grounds to house the dead is however, not-unknown within the mythology. While popular culture relates that the All-father took the battle-dead, what it does not mention is that he did not receive all of them. In *Grímnismál* 14 Óðinn himself describes: 'Folkvang is

Faulkes, *Everyman Edda*, 21 'He assigns them places in Val-hall and Vingolf, and they are then known as Einheriar.'

²¹ *Gylf* 3, p.9:2-4; Faulkes, *Everyman Edda*, 9.

²² *Gylf*. 14, p.15:25-6; Faulkes, *Everyman Edda*, 16.

²³ *Gylf*. 14, p.15:21-4; Faulkes, *Everyman Edda*, 16.

²⁴ Wilhelm Braune, "Vingólf." *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 14 (1889): 369-76.

²⁵ Finnur Jónsson. "Vingólf." *Arkiv för nordisk Filologi* 6 (1890): 284-88

²⁶ Simek, "Vingólf." *Dictionary*, 363.

²⁷ Gro Steinsland and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen. *Människor och makter i vikingarnas värld*. (Ordfront: Stockholm, 1998), 91.

the ninth, and there Freyja fixes / allocation of seats in the hall; / half the slain she chooses every day, / and half Odin owns.’²⁸

Semantically, it is not entirely clear if those warriors chosen by Freyja resided with her at *Fólkvangr* (‘people-field’ or ‘army-field’) or in Valhøll. If we understand *Grímnismál* 14 as Freyja chooses half the dead, but does not take possession of them, it is possible to connect the field with the location where the Einherjar trained; meaning that all the slain warriors would actually be sent to Vingólf and Valhøll to reside. Not only does this interpretation provide a vastly different understanding of Freyja’s role with the dead, it more importantly halves the number of warriors available to the Æsir at Ragnarøk.²⁹ However, while this makes perfect sense linguistically,³⁰ it is generally interpreted that Freyja claims and houses half the slain with her, most likely in her hall *Sessrúmnir* (‘seat room’) located on Fólkvangr.³¹

Finally, *Valhøll* (‘the Hall of the Slain’), known more commonly as “Valhalla”. Within the eddic material Valhøll is only directly mentioned twenty-six times. The first ten occurrences within *The Poetic Edda*, specifically nine times within *Grímnismál* and once in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*, while the remaining sixteen are within *Snorra Edda*; ten in the *Gylfaginning* section and six within *Skáldskaparmál*. This simple breakdown of occurrences is, however misleading, as at least six of the ten occurrences within *Gylfaginning* are either direct quotations from *Grímnismál* or are references to material found within that same poem. Furthermore, the vast majority of these twenty-six eddic occurrences have absolutely nothing to do with who specifically occupies the hall. Most of the verse and prose detail the appearance and construction materials of the hall: *skoptum er rann rept, / skjoldum er salr þakiðr, / brynjum um bekki strát.* (‘spear-shafts the building has for rafters, it’s roofed with shields, / mail-coats are strewn on the benches’),³² and light provided by shining swords;³³ leaving only five occurrences between the Eddur that deal with anything akin to Valhøll equalling the residence of dead warriors.

²⁸ Larrington, *Poetic Edda*, Gm. 14

²⁹ 1,228,800 Einherjar instead of 2,457,600. This number is based on both uses of *húndreð* to mean the ‘long hundred’ equalling 120. (5x120+40 [640] doors in Valhøll + 960 [8x120] *einherjar* from each door x2 [Valhøll and Vingólf] x2 [half to Freyja and half to Óðinn]).

³⁰ This semantic argument is, I think interesting, however after further evaluation of the sources, it seeming falls flat on its face. This is due to the same term *kýss* from the ON verb *kjósa* ‘to choose’ being used in reference to Óðinn’s half of the dead.

³¹ Faulkes, *Everyman Edda*, 24.

³² Gm. 9:4-6; Larrington, *Poetic Edda*, Gm. 9:3-4.

³³ Faulkes, *Everyman Edda*, 95.

That is not to say however, that the descriptive verses are not important. All the information presented points to Valhøll as a prime example of the martial hall culture of pre- and early Viking Age Scandinavia. Terry Gunnell has previously noted that *Grímnismál* is most definitely a poem originally composed in mainland Scandinavia, sometime before the settlement of Iceland.³⁴ He notes that this understanding is due, in part, to the poem's hall setting and protagonist of Óðinn.³⁵ Though collected and preserved in Iceland, Óðinn was never as central a deity on the North Atlantic island as he was in mainland Scandinavia.³⁶ It was within these proto-nations that the martial hall milieu was far more visible, where warrior lords and retinues were more likely to appear.³⁷ Moreover, while a large percentage of the references to the hall concern themselves with decorations and building materials, those same descriptors reiterate a very battle-oriented appearance and thus help to suggest to the audience that Valhøll is a place for those who die in battle.

The Einherjar were noted to have continually trained throughout their post-death days, which was, as previously stated, in preparation for serving as the Æsir's vanguard at the onset of Ragnarøk. However, not just any warrior could pass into Óðinn's hall; entry had at least two prerequisites. First, the individual would have been a devotee to Óðinn before his death, which meant that the individual was likely a member of the upper echelon of Norse society.³⁸ Secondly, the individual would have died in battle. An individual who praised the All-father in life, but did not die a violent death was not guaranteed a future existence in Valhøll; a prime example of this was the hero Sigurðr. A descendant of Óðinn and possibly the greatest human hero within Old Norse mythology, Sigurðr was killed in his sleep and is stated to have gone to reside with Hel.³⁹

Further understanding of Valhøll as a destination of some exclusivity can be gleaned from *Gylfaginning* 39 with the response to Gylfi's question concerning what the warriors there drank. As the number of occupants was quite high, approximately 600,000 warriors, King Gylfi asked if the einherjar drink water in the hall.⁴⁰ Hár responds by questioning Gylfi's intelligence and common sense:

³⁴ Terry Gunnell, "On the dating and nature of Eddic Poetry – with some considerations of the Performance and Presentation of *Grímnismál* and *Þrymskviða*" (paper presented at the Centre for Scandinavian Studies Seminar Series, University of Aberdeen, January 28th, 2016).

³⁵ Terry Gunnell, "On the dating and nature of Eddic Poetry."

³⁶ Olof Sundqvist, *An Arena for Higher Powers: Ceremonial Buildings and Religious Strategies for Rulership in Late Iron Age Scandinavia*. (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 521.

³⁷ Sundqvist, *Arena*, 521.

³⁸ Schjødt, *Initiation between Two Worlds*, 284-6

³⁹ See the majority of the 'Hetjukvæði' of the *Poetic Edda*.

⁴⁰ Faulkes, *Everyman Edda*, 33.

‘This is a strange question you are asking, whether All-father would invite kings and earls and other men of rank to his house and would give them water to drink, and I swear by my faith that there comes many a one to Val-hall who would think he had paid a high price for his drink of water if there were no better cheer to be got there, when he had previously endured wounds and agony leading to his death.’⁴¹

Hár’s answer accentuates the understanding that only men of rank, who would expect more than the bare essentials, could be billeted in Valhøll following death.⁴² This is further clarified in *Hárbarðsljóð* 24: ‘I was in Valland, and I followed the war, / I incited the princes, never reconciled them; / Odin owns the nobles who fall in battle / and Thor owns the race of thralls.’⁴³ Here we see that Óðinn was particularly interested in collecting men of position, who were well trained and well-armed to fill the ranks of his Einherjar.

Both the poems *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál* likewise suggests the importance of those of higher rank proceeding to Valhøll following their deaths. Both poems deal with the arrival of two kings to Valhøll. Though only the first nine stanzas are extant, *Eiríksmál* relates the arrival of Eiríkr “Blood-Axe” while *Hákonarmál* detailed the arrival of his brother. Within *Hákonarmál*, Gautatýr (Óðinn) sends a pair of valkyries to ‘choose among kings, which of the kin of Yngvi should go with Óðinn and live in Valhøll.’⁴⁴ These two shield-maidens quickly find the well-armed King Hákon ‘the good’ amongst the slain. If we follow the understanding of the criteria above, that is the dead must be an Óðinn worshipper, or at the very least a pagan, Hákon should not be admitted to Valhøll. Fostered in the Christian, Anglo-Saxon court of Æthelstan of Wessex Hákon was baptised and instructed in the Christian faith,⁴⁵ Hákon unsuccessfully attempted to convert Norway to Christianity upon his return to the country following his father’s death.⁴⁶ It is however completely possible that sometime during his

⁴¹ Faulkes, *Everyman Edda*, 33.

Gylf. 39 p.33:6-10 *Pá segir Hár: ‘Undarliga spyrðu nú at Alfǫðr mun bjóða til sín konungum eða jǫrlum eða ǫðrum ríkismǫnnum ok muni gefa þeim vatn at drekka, ok þat veit trúa mín at margr kemr sá til Valhallar er dýrt mundi þykkjask kaupa vazdrykkinn ef eigi væri betra fagnaðar þangat at vitja, sá er áðr þolir sár ok sviða til banans.*

⁴² Further reading of the passage might suggest that Hár distinguishes within his answer two groups, leading to a reading that not only men of rank could gain entry. 1) That kings and jarls would want more than water, and 2) that “many a one” comes through pain and agony and would hope for something more than water on arrival. However this second instance, the “many a one” is most likely a poetic referent to those kings and jarls, however neither reading is perfectly clear.

⁴³ Larrington, *Poetic Edda, Hrbl.* 24

⁴⁴ *Hkm.* 1:4-6; R.D. Fulk, ed. and trans. “Eyvindr skáldaspillir Finsson, *Hákonarmál*,” in *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c.1035*, edited by Diana Whaley. Vol. 1 of *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* (Skald 1) (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 174.

⁴⁵ Snorri Sturlusson, *Heimskringla*, translated by Lee M. Hollander. (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1964), 93.

⁴⁶ Snorri Sturlusson, *Heimskringla*, 108-9.

reign Hákon reverted to his previous pagan faith, as *Hákonarmál* praises the fallen king for revering pagan sanctuaries.⁴⁷ Again, however, this praise could just as likely be due to the skald's patron's requirements for the poem. Regardless of whether or not Hákon should have been granted entry into Valhöll, *Hákonarmál* relates that once there Hákon was greeted and was mustered into the ranks of the einherjar.⁴⁸ This likewise occurs within *Eiríksmál*.

So why would the gods prefer to have those who had died by the axe, sword, and spear over those who lead a good, long life? Possibly, it was because those in the service of Óðinn (and/or Freyja) were risk takers, presumably physically younger, fitter, and most likely better equipped as they were as previously mentioned, from the upper echelon of Norse hall/warrior society. According to *Eiríksmál* however, the specific reason for the taking of well-armed men of rank, as opposed to allowing them victory was *'Því at óvíst es at vita, / nær ulfr inn hǫsvi / sækir á sjǫt goða.'* ('Because it cannot be known for certain when the grey wolf will attack the home of the gods.')⁴⁹ The skald's understanding is thus more dependent on even the gods' inability to know how far off the event of Ragnarǫk was; they were more interested in insuring that they had a top quality fighting force, with some experience of victory, but did not want veterans who had lived to old age and retirement.

Thus, after a long meandering through the major afterlife locations of the Vikings, we can now see that the location that nine out of ten individuals associated with the sole, or at least better half of the afterlife was in fact a location that few of the everyday Norse would have expected to go. If we are interpreting the sources correctly, we can see that a large proportion of pagan Norse, would have most likely gone to the Domain of Hel, where they would mostly continue to exist as they had before, with no sense of retribution for accumulated earthly sins. This was in keeping with earlier understanding of life after death amongst the Scandinavians. Likewise, we can say that, once the understanding of the afterlife had changed, partially due to the stratification of Old Norse society, only those who were of what we would classify as an semi-professional warrior elite who had died in combat would have entered Valhöll, the aptly titled 'Hall of the Slain.'

⁴⁷ *Hkm.* 18; Fulk, "*Hákonarmál*", *Skald* 1, 192.

⁴⁸ *Hkm.* 16; Fulk, "*Hákonarmál*", *Skald* 1, 192.

⁴⁹ *Em.* 7:3-5; Fulk, "Anonymous, *Eiríksmál*," in *Skald* 1, 1011.

Appendix

Abbreviations for Old Norse Poems and Prose titles, and Table of Realms of the Dead

Abbreviations

These abbreviations are used within the footnotes above and (*) within the table below

<i>Egil S</i>	<i>Egils saga</i>
<i>Em</i>	<i>Eiríksmál</i>
<i>Frið S</i>	<i>Friðþjólf's saga hins frækna</i>
<i>Gesta D</i>	<i>Gesta Danorum</i>
<i>Gm</i>	<i>Grímnismál</i>
<i>Gylf</i>	<i>Gylfaginning</i>
<i>Helr</i>	<i>Helreið Brynhildar</i>
<i>HHjv</i>	<i>Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar</i>
<i>HHund I</i>	<i>Helgakviða Hundingsbana I</i>
<i>HHund II</i>	<i>Helgakviða Hundingsbana II</i>
<i>Hkm</i>	<i>Hákonarmál</i>
<i>Hrbl</i>	<i>Hárbarðsljóð</i>
<i>Ls</i>	<i>Lokasenna</i>
<i>Skm</i>	<i>Skírnismál</i>
<i>Sksm</i>	<i>Skáldskaparmál</i>
<i>Stor</i>	<i>Sonatorrek</i>
<i>Vsp</i>	<i>Völuspá</i>
<i>Vþm</i>	<i>Vafþrúðnismál</i>
<i>Yng S</i>	<i>Ynglinga saga</i>

“Oh, the Places You’ll Go”... once you’re dead

Afterlife locales found within the *Eddur*

Place name	Location	Who gets in	Ruling deity	Gender	Attestation
Valhöll (‘Hall of the Slain’)	Ásgarðr	Noble battle dead	Óðinn	Men	<i>Em</i> <i>Gm.</i> 8-10, 18-9, 22-3, 25-6 <i>Gylf</i> 2, 20, 36, 38-42, 49 <i>HHund II</i> 39 prose <i>Hkm</i> <i>Sksp.</i> 2, 17, 33-4 <i>Yng S</i> 8
Fólkvangr (‘Army-field’ or ‘People-field’)	Ásgarðr	Half of the Noble battle dead? Noble women	Freyja	Both	<i>Egil S</i> 79 <i>Gm</i> 14 <i>Gylf</i> 24
Hel	Niflheimr (below 1 of the roots of Yggdrasil)	The old, sick, wicked	Hel (jötunn)	Both	<i>Gesta D I</i> <i>Gm</i> 31 <i>Gylf</i> 3, 34, 49-50 <i>Helr</i> prose intro <i>Ls</i> 63 <i>Skm</i> 25 <i>Vsp</i> 43 <i>Vþm</i> 43
Hall of Rán	Under the sea	Drowned	Rán	Both ?	<i>Egil S</i> 78 / <i>Stor</i> 7 <i>Frið S</i> 6 <i>HHjv</i> 18
Bilskirnir ?	Ásgarðr ?	Þrælar	Þórr	Both	<i>Hrbl</i> 24
Vingólf (‘the friendly house’)	Ásgarðr	Hall for goddesses or More battle slain	Óðinn *if more battle slain	Men	<i>Gylf</i> 3, 14, 20
Vingólf ? *If this location is seen as Hall of the Goddesses.	Ásgarðr ?	Virginal Women, Unmarried	Gefjun	Women	<i>Gylf</i> 35
Gimlé **	“in heaven” / Ókolnir ?	‘all men who are righteous’, those who ‘take	Óðinn ?	Men, Women ?	<i>Gylf</i> 3, 52 <i>Vsp</i> 62

[may not be realm of the dead]		pleasure' in plenty of good drink			
Niðafjöll ** (‘dark mountains’)	“in heaven”	‘good and virtuous people’		Both ?	<i>Gylf</i> 52 <i>Vsp</i> 63
Náströnd ** (‘corpse-shore’)	Niflheimr (w/in Niflhel?)	Oathbreakers, seducers, and murderers	Hel	Both ?	<i>Gylf</i> 52 <i>Vsp</i> 37-8
Hvergelmir ** (‘bubbling cauldron’)	Niflheimr (w/in Niflhel?)	Oathbreakers, seducers, murderers, and the wicked.			<i>Gm</i> 26 <i>Gylf</i> 4, 15, 39, 52
** = post Ragnarøk					

References

- Abram, Christopher. "Hel in early Norse poetry." *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 2(1) (2006): 1-29.
- Beck, Heinrich. "Hel." In *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, vol.14, edited by Dieter Geuenich, 257-60. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999.
- Braune, W. "Vingólf." *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 14 (1889): 369-76.
- Ellis Davidson, Hilda Roderick. *The Road to Hel: A Study of the Conception of the Dead in Old Norse Literature*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1968.
- Finnur Jónsson, "Vingólf." *Arkiv för nordisk Filologi* 6 (1890): 284-8.
- Frank, Roberta. "The invention of the Viking horned helmet," *International Scandinavian and medieval studies in memory of Gerd Wolfgang Weber*. Hesperides: Studies in Western Literature and Civilization 12 (2000): 199-208.
- Fulk, Robert D., ed. and trans. "Anonymous, *Eiríksmál*." In *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c.1035*, edited by Diana Whaley. Vol. 1 of *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* (Skald 1), 1003-13. Turnhout: Brepols, 2012.
- ., ed. and trans. "Eyvindr skáldaspillir Finsson, *Hákonarmál*." In *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c.1035*, edited by Diana Whaley. Vol. 1 of *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* (Skald 1), 171-95. Turnhout: Brepols, 2012.
- Gunnell, Terry. "On the dating and nature of Eddic Poetry – with some considerations of the Performance and Presentation of *Grímnismál* and *Þrymskviða*." Paper presented at the Centre for Scandinavian Studies Seminar Series, University of Aberdeen. January 28th, 2016.
- Haltgård, Anders. "Óðinn, Valhöll and the Einherjar. Eschatological Myth and Ideology in the Late Viking Period." In *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages: Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes*, edited by Gro Steinsland, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Jan Erik Rekdal, and Ian B. Beuermann. Vol. 52 of *The Northern World*, 297-328. Leiden: Brill, 2011.

Granite- online first
© Author

Jónas Kristjánsson, Vésteinn Ólason and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, eds. *Eddukvæði*, 2 vols. (Íslensk fornrit), Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2014.

Larrington, Carolyne, trans. *The Poetic Edda* (Oxford World's Classics), Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Lindow, John. *Norse mythology: A guide to gods, heroes, rituals, and beliefs*. Oxford University Press, 2001.

Schjødt, Jens Peter. *Initiation between Two Worlds: Structure and Symbolism in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religion* (The Viking Collection 17), Odense: The University of Southern Denmark, 2008.

———. "The Warrior in Old Norse Religion." In *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages: Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes*, edited by Gro Steinsland, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Jan Erik Rekdal, and Ian B. Beuermann. Vol. 52 of *The Northern World*, 269-96. Leiden: Brill, 2011.

Simek, Rudolf. *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, Translated by Angela Hall. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993.

Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*. Translated by Anthony Faulkes. London: Everyman, 1987.

———, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*. Edited by Anthony Faulkes. Viking Society for Northern Research: University College London, 1982.

———, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál. 1. Introduction, text and notes*. Edited by Anthony Faulkes. Viking Society for Northern Research: University College London, 1998.

———, *Heimskringla*. Translated by Lee M. Hollander. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1964.

Steinsland, Gro and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen. *Människor och makter i vikingarnas värld*. Ordfront: Stockholm, 1998.

Sundqvist, Olof. *An Arena for Higher Powers: Ceremonial Buildings and Religious Strategies for Rulership in Late Iron Age Scandinavia*. Leiden: Brill, 2015.

de Vries, Jan, ed. *Altnordisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Leiden: Brill, 1977.

Granite- online first
© Author