



THEIR HOLY  
PLACES ARE WOODS  
AND GROVES:  
ENVIRONMENTALISM  
IN GERMANIC  
HEATHENRY

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In the year 2012 mankind increasingly finds itself defined and filtered through the internet, the largest, busiest, and yet least tangible archive in the history of the world. From highly amusing YouTube comments, to surprising cleaning advice, to dubious conspiracy theories of every shade, the internet is a grand, wild library of past and ongoing digital encounters. The minds of visitors navigate and dwell in an invisible repository, mentally though not physically distant from the natural surroundings that sustain them. If one follows the right hallways in these collections one may encounter an increasing amount of chatter from circles involved in the rebirth of historical Germanic Paganism. It is this chatter that inspired this article and it is for this audience that this article is written.

Several months have now passed since I found myself reading an exchange between two modern Germanic Heathens on the internet, an exchange sparked by an anonymous question: in short, ‘what is your opinion of environmentalism and Germanic Paganism?’ The terse response may be summarized as ‘there is no reconstructionist basis for environmentalism; interest in ecology seems to be a New Age phenomenon’ (for those unfamiliar with this jargon, *reconstructionist* may be understood as ‘derived from the historical source material,’ whereas *New Age* implies the opposite). Unfortunately, this is not the first time I have encountered such a view in North American Heathen circles.<sup>2</sup> This is unfortunate because it is a mistaken opinion.

In response, I will briefly trace a recurring element that appears throughout historical sources regarding the Germanic peoples—from the earliest records to well after the Christianization process, and even into Industrialization. Strong environmental arguments may be presented on the basis of the roles and implications of certain deities and beings in the mythology,<sup>3</sup> as well as on the basis of Heathen reverence and veneration of wells, lakes, mountains, or other natural features. In this

essay, however, I have chosen to present a brief survey of the great importance of holy groves and sacred trees in the mythology, as well as of connected elements of later Germanic folklore.

It should be noted that for the purpose of this brief work, vast amounts of comparative material (Indo-European or otherwise) will be ignored, and a non-comprehensive survey focusing on the Germanic peoples will be presented. This is solely to keep within a concise scope, and is by no means a result of lack of material, which is plentiful both in and out of the Germanic sphere among the Pagan peoples of Europe.<sup>4</sup>

Questions of the *why* and *how* of the sacred will not be examined in this short paper, nor will associated rituals and customs be discussed.<sup>5</sup> Rather, I seek solely to present a brief sketch of the historical record of the sacred groves and trees of the Germanic peoples, illustrating that these elements are core pillars of both Germanic myth and custom.<sup>6</sup> I will conclude with a discussion of the implications of these elements for the place of environmentalism in modern Germanic Heathenry.

## HOLY GROVES

In what we nowadays reckon to be the “first century” (1CE) a Roman historian, Cornelius Tacitus, produced an ethnographic study about those who would turn out to be the most troublesome of the Roman Empire’s northern neighbors: the Germanic peoples. Although not without exception,<sup>7</sup> much of what Tacitus reports can be confirmed elsewhere. As a result, Tacitus’s *Germania* and *Annals* are both crucial sources for the study of the Germanic peoples.

Particularly in *Germania* and, to a lesser extent, in his *Annals* and *Histories*, Tacitus repeatedly refers to sacred groves among the Germanic peoples. The title of this article bears a translation of a passage that appears early in *Germania* that quite frankly states the central importance of the forest to the Germanic peoples. This

**“Their holy places are woods and groves, and they apply the names of deities to that hidden presence which is seen only by the eye of reverence.”**

~Tacitus, *Germania*, 1 CE<sup>1</sup>

is followed by accounts of customs of various Germanic peoples contemporary to Tacitus. Famously, Tacitus relates that it is in the innermost sanctuary of an island grove that the goddess *Nerthus* (from Proto-Germanic \**Nerþuz*; ancestral to the name of an important male deity in Old Norse, *Njǫrðr*) is at certain unspecified times perceived by her attendants. After being toured across the countryside in a veiled cart led by heifers, the cart containing the peace-giving effigy of Nerthus is returned to the grove. The goddess is bathed in a hidden body of water there. Among those listed as particularly fond of Nerthus are notably the *Anglii*, the linguistic ancestors of all modern English speakers.

A particularly sacred grove—the Grove of the Semnones, most prestigious of the Suebi—is described by Tacitus. There, representatives of related peoples in the region come together for, we are told, a great human sacrifice (whether the sacrifice is of a prisoner of war or for some other purpose we are left to speculate). Among them this holy grove is traditionally considered to be from whence the Semnones ultimately sprung; the rites performed there are thought to be of great age. It is described as so sacred that anyone who enters it must be fettered, and if one falls while within the grove, one must literally roll back out of the grove without undoing the fetters or attempting to stand, a physical recognition of the awesome power of the (unnamed) god who rules both there and all the world.

Later in *Germania*, Tacitus describes that among the Naharvali another “ancient” grove may be found. It is attended by a priest who is “dressed in women’s clothes” and there the *Alci*, a pair of divine twins, are particularly venerated. In this grove, however, no effigy of the brothers may be found.<sup>8</sup>

The mentions of Germanic groves in Tacitus’s *Annals* and *Histories* are less informative but serve to further illustrate how commonplace the practice of grove worship was among the Germanic peoples. Arminius, enigmatic victor of the pivotal Battle of the Teutoburg Forest, is reported to have assembled his troops in a wood sacred to “Hercules”—likely *interpretatio romana* for the god Thor, an association that we will meet again in our overview of holy trees. Additionally, Tacitus relays that Gaius Julius Civilis, leader of the Batavian rebellion, also assembled his army in a sacred grove.<sup>9</sup>

In the 11th century, Adam of Bremen reports that he has heard of a Heathen grove at the Temple of Uppsala (now Gamla Uppsala, Sweden) which, every ninth year, is fertilized with the carcasses of male creatures that have been sacrificed and subsequently left to hang there. In records of Norse mythology compiled in the 13th century—over a millennium after Tacitus—we again encounter a holy grove associated with fetters where a sacrifice to a mighty god is made. In the *Poetic Edda* poem “*Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*” a grove is mentioned called *Fjǫturlundur* (Old Norse “fetter-grove”). In this grove the reborn hero Helgi is killed by the mortal Dagr with a spear given to him by Odin. He is thus a sacrifice to Odin in a grove of fetters.<sup>10</sup>

There are groves yet beyond *Miðgarðr*, the middle-yard of mankind, groves central to the gods. According to Norse mythology, outside of the famous afterlife hall *Valhǫll* exists a grove known as *Glásir*,<sup>11</sup> a name which means “glimmering, gleaming.” *Glásir* has glorious golden foliage, and is the most beautiful among those of gods and mankind. As among mankind, important meetings of all sorts seem to happen in groves and trees; according to the *Poetic Edda* poem “*Skirnismál*,” it is in a grove (Old Norse *lundr*) that the shining god *Freyr* is to meet the beautiful jǫtunn *Gerðr*. There they will consummate their holy union. The message is clear: sacred groves are so crucial that the gods also keep and make use of them.

## HOLY TREES

Outside of sacred groups of trees, individual holy trees appear throughout the written records of the Germanic peoples. Like groves, these individual trees were commonly targeted during Christianization.

According to a near-contemporary *vita* by Willibald, the Anglo-Saxon missionary Winfrid (later known as Saint Boniface) and his armed entourage gleefully waged religious terror across the 8th century Saxon countryside. One of the locations that Winfrid and his retinue visited was in the region of what is now Hesse, Germany. There, Winfrid sought out a great oak associated with the god *Donar* (a continental Germanic form of the god now widely known as *Thor*).<sup>12</sup> Surrounded and outnumbered by a growing, angry throng of apparently lapsed Christians and/or Heathens (reportedly guilty of sacrificing to trees and springs), Winfrid and his crew began hacking away at the immense holy tree.

After some mysterious rustling, the ancient tree fell and conveniently split into four sections. But Winfrid did not meet his death then and there as we might expect! Instead, according to the account, even the most vehement Heathen present blithely skipped off to baptism, and a church was built from the neatly split wood. Winfrid's campaign eventually met its end in Frisia, where he and his party were said to be killed by a more prepared band of Heathen Frisians.<sup>13</sup> The Old English place name *punreslēab* ("Thunor's grove," *Thunor* being the Old English form of Thor) may indicate similar tree-worshipping practices among the Heathen Anglo-Saxons.<sup>14</sup>

Later in the 8th century, the *Royal Frankish Annals* tell us that the forces of Charlemagne sought out and fell an *Irmīnsul* (Old Saxon "universal pillar"), a sacred pillar honored among the Heathen Saxons. A wooden pillar is little more than a step away from its previous form, a tree; perhaps the pillar was either made from a fallen holy tree or was intended as a stand-in for one.<sup>15</sup>

Adam of Bremen reports an immense holy tree near the grisly grove described earlier, green year round and yet of a type unknown. It loomed next to the famous Temple of Uppsala, and beside the tree was a sacrificial well. Whether these details were reflective of the experience of Adam's informant or whether the Sacred Tree at Uppsala is the result of a rationalized account of Norse mythology (with which the account has strong parallels, as we will soon discuss), it would seem that they fit the tree-centered cosmological pattern we find in both Germanic cult and myth.

Indeed, a vast tree was of central importance in the mythology of the North Germanic peoples. This tree, the most holy of trees in Norse mythology, is usually referred to as *Yggdrasill*. This tree, described as an ash, is the center of all things and all things therefore depend on it; even the gods hold counsel under its shade. While the tree is gnawed and consumed by a menagerie of beasts, it is also cared for by supernatural women—a trio of *norns*, female beings associated with fate—who smear white clay upon its base to protect it. One of its three major roots reaches to the sacred well *Urðarbrunnr*, the well of *Urðr* (*urðr* is a native Heathen concept of fate and also the name of a *norn*). The fate of mankind depends on this well, and from it and two other primordial wells extends the immense ash.

It is in *Yggdrasill* that two human beings (to whom we will return) will survive the burning and rebirth of the world foretold to occur at *Ragnarøk*. The world that they will return to is ideal: the fields are green, the water is clear, wildlife is abundant. Wind whispers over an emerald land once blighted by conflict and ruin.

The *Poetic Edda* poem "Grímnismál" and the *Prose Edda* section "Gylfaginning" both describe *Læraðr*, a tree that sits above (or perhaps *reaches* above) Valhøll; it may be *Yggdrasill* under another name. *Læraðr* is chewed on by the horned beasts *Eikþyrnir*, a stag, and *Heiðrún*, a nanny goat. Both have a cosmic role, making it clear that the tree, providing these creatures with nourishment, is itself to be understood as cosmic. From the horns of *Eikþyrnir* flow liquid that falls into the frigid well *Hvergelmir*—one of the three major wells at the roots of *Yggdrasill*—and from the udders of *Heiðrún* flows mead. This mead is, according to "Gylfaginning," drunk by the ghostly *Einberjar*, a ferocious horde of the dead that waits in Valhøll, preparing for the immense battle at *Ragnarøk*.

Another great tree is referred to in the source material: *Mímameiðr*. It is strongly likely that this tree is simply another name for *Yggdrasill*, and, so, in "Fjolsvinnmál" we learn that the cosmic tree is unharmed by metal or fire (fitting well with its foretold survival of the flames of *Ragnarøk*) but also bears gifts specifically for mankind; from it grows fruit that assists pregnant women.

Other trees are referred to throughout the mythology. In *Vǫlsunga saga*, we hear about the tree *Barnstokkr* (Old Norse "child-tree"), growing in the hall of a king. *Barnstokkr* had enormous bearing on the fate on an important family line in the Old Norse heroic corpus, the *Vǫlsungs*, and it was the piercing of *Barnstokkr* by the god Odin that led to a chain of far-reaching events unparalleled in the Germanic heroic corpus. According to "Havamál," Odin, too, has a special relation to *Yggdrasill*, having hung there for nine nights, a sacrifice of himself to himself, to learn the secret of the runic alphabet—the native alphabet of the Germanic peoples—which later came to mankind. And is it possible that the goddess *Iðunn*'s longevity-giving apples were collected from *Yggdrasill*? Among both mankind and the gods, we are repeatedly reminded that trees play a central role.

## MANKIND AS TREES

In the section of the *Prose Edda* entitled "Skáldskaparmál," excerpts of skaldic poems reaching

into the Heathen period are provided. Skaldic convention dictates that mankind may be referred to as types of trees: women feminine tree names such as willow (*selju*), birch (*björk*), oak (*eik*), or linden (*lind*), and men with masculine tree names such as rowan (*reynir*), fir (*þollr*), ash (*askr*), maple (*hlynnr*), or spruce (*björ*). In addition, a woman may be referred to as a log (*lóg*), forest (*mörk*), rod (*tróða*), or pillar (*stöð*), whereas a man may be referred to as tree (*viðr*), beam (*meiðr*), grove (*lundr*), box (*búss*), stave (*stafi*), or thorn (*þorn*).<sup>16</sup>

This poetic designation is hardly a surprise given mankind's descent from trees in Norse mythology.<sup>17</sup> This myth is recounted in the *Prose Edda* section entitled “Gylfaginning,” which paints the haunting image of three gods wandering along the primordial seaside, where they encounter the knotted twists of ocean-tossed drift wood. In both the *Poetic Edda* poem “Voluspá” and in “Gylfaginning,” this trio of gods (the trio varies between the two sources but consistently contains Odin) bestows upon the first man and woman—imbued side by side—three crucial, identical gifts that make them human beings. These first humans were *Askr* (Old Norse “ash,” as in “ash tree”) and *Embla* (etymologically less straightforward, but commonly held to mean either “vine” or “elm”).

As mentioned above, flames and the subsequent immersion of the world in water are dual threats to Yggdrasill during the events of Ragnarök. Center of the cosmos that it is, it nonetheless survives; two humans, *Líf* and *Lífþrasir* (Old Norse “life” and “life-lover”), will seek shelter in the woods or foliage of Yggdrasill (which in the *Poetic Edda* poem “Vafþrúðnismál” are referred to as *Hoddmímisholt*; to be understood as a protective wood, or perhaps even a sacred grove, on Yggdrasill), and so thus also survive Ragnarök. Echoing the tree origins of *Askr* and *Embla*, *Líf* and *Lífþrasir* step from the tree to rekindle mankind in the freshly revived world, brimming with hope and vitality.

This birth and rebirth of mankind from trees has echoes in later Germanic folklore, pointing to a pan-Germanic belief outside of the North Germanic spectrum.<sup>18</sup>

## TREES IN GERMANIC FOLKLORE

Veneration of trees among the Germanic peoples was not extinguished with Christianization. In the 11th century, the tail end of the Old English period, legislation

in England was still being passed to keep Christians from doing Heathen things, like indulging in their ancient habit of tree worship:

“Concerning Heathen worship. We earnestly forbid every kind of Heathen worship. That is that men worship idols, Heathen gods and the sun or the moon, fire or flood, springs or stones or any kind of tree of the wood, or practice witchcraft, or brings about death by any means, either by sacrifice, or by divination, or by having any part in such nonsense.”<sup>19</sup>

Records of folklore about sacred and animate trees into even the modern period would no doubt cause dendrocidal church heroes like Winfrid to reach for an axe; through the 19th century and into the 20th, folklorists have collected information about beings which informants have described as protecting, embodying, or dwelling in various types of trees. These beings are usually said to provide benefit to those residing near them and harmful consequences to those that would harm or disrespect them.<sup>20</sup> These trees were thus thought to have direct bearing on the lives of nearby residents, and were believed to have great influence on family fortunes and well being.<sup>21</sup> The trees are frequently identified by their species, location, or function, and are often female. Examples include the *Askafroa* (Swedish “Ash Lady”); the *Hyldeemor*, *Hyllefroa*, or *Frau Elborn* (Danish “Elder Mother,” Swedish “Elder Lady,” and German “Lady Elder,” all referring to the elder tree); the *tuntre* and *bosträd* or *boträ* (Swedish “enclosure tree” and “domicile tree”); the *Ellefru* (Danish “Alder Lady”); and the *vårdträd* (Norwegian “ward tree”).<sup>22</sup>

Other customs are nowadays more visible in the western world. The custom of the Maypole may have its roots in ancient Germanic tree veneration,<sup>23</sup> and, if not a later innovation, perhaps so too does what we now call a “Christmas tree,” the vibrant evergreen that we customarily bring into our homes as a central focus of the most barren time of the year.<sup>24</sup>

## HEATHENRY TODAY

While the life of the Heathens of the past was agrarian, with environmental consequences restricted to the local, our days are filled with the hum of fossil-fuel-dependent machines, while untold amounts of trash wash up on our shores, and wind-blown plastic bags flutter by

vast, empty concrete parking lots. Very few of us live on a self-sufficient farm. Rather, most of us receive our food in colorful plastic. Among those rare few of us who do farm, nearly all depend on poisonous chemicals for our crops and antibiotics for our animals. We have radiation and asbestos. Earth now houses over 7,000,000,000 human mouths. Unlike our ancestors, our problems are global.

As modern Heathens living well into the industrial age (or after, depending on one's reckoning), we must ask ourselves questions that the ancient Heathens did not, questions provoked by environmental difficulties very different than the environmental issues the Heathens of yore faced as their population expanded. In the name of short-term profit and convenience should we continue to consume more than we need, despite the consequences to us and ours? Should we allow a greedy few to copyright and poison our resources, while we are fed on artificial mock-ups disguised as the organic, hand-grown food that our grandparents were nourished on?

Yet what if we were to consider in our daily decisions how we might maintain and keep healthy our air, water, and soil? What if we were to live *with* rather than *against* the natural processes that we depend on? As Heathens, should we not consider the worldview of our ancestors and how it may be applied to a modern context, including care for the wights and beings they believed to have inhabited the natural world?

*Environmentalism* is simply belief in the importance of protecting the environment. While our Heathen forebears were almost entirely farmers living in the pre-industrial era and spent their days both struggling with and taking joy in the whims of the seasons, they were nonetheless inarguably Heathen *environmentalists* when it came to the preservation of their holy groves and sacred trees. As demonstrated, they felt even the ground and essence of their own humanity to be born (and reborn) of trees. If we are serious about recovering their ways now, then we, as modern Heathens, should learn from this and continue these beneficial practices, so needed in a modern world where more and more natural habitat disappears by the day. Sacred groves (and similar preserves) dedicated and funded by Heathen groups wherever they may be could assist in mitigating the problem while continuing a fundamental Heathen practice, one deeply rooted in our history.

Although this study focuses on sacred trees and groves, in the same light we must also consider other aspects of our Heathen forebears' sacral landscape, that mental and physical holy realm that included lakes, rivers, streams, meadows, stones, seas, sky, and mountains. Outside of our virtual discussions about Heathenry there is a whole world being gutted: the landscape that the Heathens of yore would have deemed brimming with life, the oceans whence we mythological (and biologically) stem, are ever more tarnished by our collective wastes and excesses.<sup>25</sup>

In recent years some Heathen organizations and individuals have voiced concerns similar to those mentioned in this article. Iceland's *Ásatrúarfélagið* has long held a strongly environmentalist stance, in 2003 calling for the assistance of the wights and gods in halting those that blight the land.<sup>26</sup> While highlighting the existence of holy groves among Hindus in modern day India (and the tremendous ecological benefits thereof), Siegfried Goodfellow argues that Heathenry is an "Earth-centered religion."<sup>27</sup> In a 2012 article, Erik Lacharity proposes a revival of tree cults in reconstructive Frankish Heathenry.<sup>28</sup> There are other voices in the Heathen sphere calling for an environmental focus; while few at this time, these voices are sowing the seeds. It is not too late.

A religious tradition with a core of ecological principles may be influential in ways that environmental initiatives by other means may not be.<sup>29</sup> Outside of modern Germanic Heathenry, a struggle of increasing intensity is waging among other religious groups, monotheistic and otherwise, caught in the crossfire of corporate interest and modern throw-away consumerist lifestyle. In the United States, as mentioned above, some major Christian organizations have joined hands with deep-pocketed business interests to form organizations such as the Cornwall Alliance, with the intention of shutting down environmental initiatives. On the other hand, these efforts have no monopoly on the environmental debate; other religious groups, monotheistic or otherwise, have begun to address the raging environmental crisis more and more.<sup>30</sup>

Like a sprout from an old stump, Heathenry now returns after a long dormancy. If we are to continue this revival, it is only true to our gods and to those that came before us and those that will come after, to bring back

these essential elements of Germanic Heathenry. Let us come together as the Heathens of old and rededicate our holy trees and groves, and with them establish a foundation of respect and desire to maintain our surroundings in as pristine and healthy a state as possible.

In short, the remnant Heathen lore offers numerous arguments in favor of an environmentalist Heathenry. Where better to begin than our holy places? ☉

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## ENDNOTES

1 Cornelius Tacitus, *Tacitus on Britain and Germany: A Translation of the Agricola and the Germania*, trans. Harold Mattingly (Penguin Classics, 1965) 109.

2 Anti-environmentalist politics are highly visible in the United States, reaching into budding Heathen circles and overlapping with the influence of groups such as the Cornwall Alliance. It is commonplace in the American media to see the billionaire Koch brothers (or groups or individuals they fund) and high profile politicians such as Ron Paul arguing for closure of the Environmental Protection Agency, a US government agency that its opponents declare an example of government overreach, condemn as beyond reform, or label simply a case of wasteful spending in favor of private litigation. I have, however, experienced precisely the opposite on the other side of the Atlantic; environmentalism seems to be the default mainstream position in Scandinavia and much of Northern Europe, modern Germanic Heathen groups being no exception.

3 Such as the personified Sun (a goddess; Old Norse *Sól*, Old High German *Sunna*), Earth (a goddess; Old Norse *Jǫrð*), beings such as *Byggvir* and *Beowa* (Old Norse and Old English “barley” respectively), and even the well known god Thor (whose name, extending from Proto-Germanic *\*þunraz*, literally means ‘thunder’ and notably not ‘the Thunderer,’ and is the son of the aforementioned goddess *Jǫrð*).

4 For example, in his encyclopedia *Naturalis Historia*, first century Roman author Pliny writes that “The trees formed the first temples of the gods, and even at the present day, the country people, preserving in all their simplicity their ancient rites, consecrate the finest among their trees to some divinity; indeed, we feel ourselves inspired to adoration, not less by the sacred groves and their very stillness, than by the statues of the gods, resplendent as they are with gold and ivory,” John Bostock

and H. T. Riley, *The Natural History of Pliny*, vol. 3 (G. Bell and Sons, 1892) 102.

In inner Lithuania in 1458—nearly a millennium and a half after Pliny—the Bohemian monk Hieronymus Pragensis targeted sacred oaks for destruction; see Jaan Puhvel, “Indo-European Structure in the Baltic Pantheon,” *Myth in Indo-European Antiquity* (University of California Press, 1974) 76-77.

Later in Lithuania, an 18th century account describes intense dairy, fat, and beer sacrifices to specific trees: Ken Dowden, *European Paganism: The Realities of Cult from Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (Routledge, 2000) 73.

5 For readers who wish to delve deeper into scholarship surrounding the functions of holy trees and holy groves, I recommend Dowden’s extensive treatment of the subject: Ken Dowden, *European Paganism: The Realities of Cult from Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (Routledge, 2000) 66-76, 89-114).

Readers able to look beyond Dowden’s lack of familiarity with (and thus apparent dismissal of—see Dowden xiv) modern Germanic Heathenry will be rewarded with great erudition and a sharp wit.

6 An extensive review of holy trees and groves among the Germanic peoples and possibly connected later folklore may be found in volumes I and II of Jacob Grimm’s *Teutonic Mythology*:

\* Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology: Translated from the Fourth Edition with Notes and Appendix*, vol. 1, trans. James Steven Stallybrass (London: George Bell and Sons, 1882) 68-79.

\* Jacob Grimm *Teutonic Mythology: Translated from the Fourth Edition with Notes and Appendix*, vol. 2, trans. James Steven Stallybrass (London: George Bell and Sons, 1882) 647-654.

7 For example, modern knowledge of bog bodies paints a far more complicated picture than the simple explanation Tacitus provides. In addition, at times Tacitus seems to contradict himself between his *Germania* and his *Annals*, and, like in his *Agricola*, at times uses his work as a mouthpiece for his own moral commentary on matters of then-contemporary Rome.

8 The *Alci* represent a Germanic extension of the horse brothers widely attested among the Indo-European peoples, again encountered on the Germanic record among the Old English and in 19th century Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Saxony as Hengist and Horsa. Rudolf Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, trans. Angela Hall (D. S. Brewer, 2007) 7, 139. Also Martin Litchfield West, *Indo-European Poetry and Myth* (Oxford University Press, 2007) 190.

9 M. Munro Chadwick, "The Oak and the Thunder-God," *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 30 (Trübner & Co., 1900) 29.

10 Regardless of the reasons for the historical practice of human sacrifice—whether for execution of prisoners of war or otherwise—this article is by no means an argument for its reinstatement. Sacrifice, a fascinating subject, is beyond the scope of this article and will not be handled here, but see Dowden 179-188 for discussion on the subject.

11 *Glafir* may in fact to be understood as a holy tree rather than a grove; there is some question between references to the location between the *Poetic Edda* and the *Prose Edda*.

12 In fact described as the Oak of Jove. This is a result of Roman Interpretation of a Germanic deity; in this case evidently the continental Donar, a form of the god widely known in modern English as *Thor*.

13 *The Life of Saint Boniface by Willibald*, trans. George W. Robinson (Harvard University Press, 1916), 62-64, 82-84.

14 Chadwick 35.

15 Dowden 118-119.

16 Snorri Sturluson, *Prose Edda*, trans. Anthony Faulkes (Everyman, 1995) 115-117.

17 *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Carolyne Larrington (Oxford World's Classics, 1999) 279.

18 Simek 189.

19 Michael D. J. Bintley, "The Byzantine Silver Bowls in the Sutton Hoo Ship Burial and Tree-Worship in Anglo-Saxon England," *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology*, vol. 21 (University College London, 2011).

20 Notably, the *Hyldeemor* is recorded as requiring formulaic acknowledgment as early as 1722: Wilhelm Mannhardt, *Der Baumkultus der Germanen und Ihrer Nachbarstämme*. (Berlin: Gebrüder Borntraeger, 1875) 10-11.

Readers may be interested in a 19th century English travel writer's firsthand account of the Jutlandic belief in the wrath of the *Hyldeemor*: "Mademoiselle Thérèse in her ignorance, had plucked during our halt in Tulstrup a branch of these flowers [elder flowers]...without first demanding permission of the Hyldeemor [sic]...without first addressing her in the following words...These words thrice repeated, she grants permission willingly enough, but, according to the postboy's theory, it was the neglect of this observance which caused this pelting hail, this inhospitable

reception to the Highlands of Jutland...The elder-tree has been revered from the earliest times, and the peasant as well as the artizan [sic] loves to plant it near his dwelling; it brings good luck to the baker and the gardener; leave it alone, and the Hyldeemor will do you no injury." Horace Marryat, *A Residence in Jutland, the Danish Isles, and Copenhagen* (University of Toronto Press, 1860/2011) 23-24.

21 Mannhardt, 10, 51-53, 59-61; H. R. E. Davidson, "The Sword at the Wedding," *Folklore*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (Taylor & Francis, 1960), 4.

22 Manhardt 10, 51-53, 59-61; Davidson 4.

23 Dowden 119.

24 The first Christmas tree on record is found in the 1604 *Memorabilia qua edam Argentorati observata*. The Christmas tree is mentioned in an overview of Christmas customs among the population of what is now the German-speaking French city of Strasbourg. In his coverage of the history of the Christmas tree, Alexander Tille additionally cites a 1598 account by John Stow of a violent storm in 1444 England that destroyed "a Standard of tree being set up in the midst of the pavement, fast in the ground, nayled full of Holme and lvy, for disport of Christmas to the people," Alexander Tille, *Yule and Christmas: their place in the Germanic year* (Glasgow University Press: 1899) 105-106. See also Alexander Tille, "German Christmas and the Christmas-Tree," *Folklore*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Taylor & Francis, 1892) 172-173, 178-179.

Given the Heathen and post-Christianization record, and the explicitly extra-Biblical nature of the custom of the Christmas tree, one is justified in asking whether the Christmas tree custom may have simply been a continuation of folk practice of tree veneration, subsequently popularized (or *repopularized?*).

25 Roger S. Gottlieb, "Introduction," *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology* (Oxford University Press, 2000) 4-5.

26 *Morgunblaðið*, October 26, 2003, [http://timarit.is/view\\_page\\_init.jsp?pageId=3482457&issId=251776&lang=en](http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?pageId=3482457&issId=251776&lang=en)

27 Siegfried Goodfellow, "Heathenism: An Earth-Centered Religion," *Hex Magazine* 8 (2011).

28 Erik Lacharity, "Frankish Sido – Tree Cults," *Óðrœrir* 2 (2012), <http://odroerirjournal.com>

29 Gottlieb 12-13.

30 Gottlieb 12.