

How to be a Viking and reach Valhalla by the Vikings!

Live bravely, die in battle

Life for a Viking warrior was usually brutal and short. Perilous voyages, bloody battles and a hard life of raiding and subsistence farming meant few survived beyond their 40s. Valhalla, where battle wounds were healed and the mead (beer) never ran out, was their idea of heaven. Knowing they might end up there encouraged them to embrace the dangers of the battlefield.

Worship Odin

Valhalla was run by Odin, a god favoured by aristocratic warriors. Norse sagas reveal that while many people worshipped other gods such as Thor to ensure the fertility of their land, warriors and rulers looked to Odin. They may have even sacrificed people to him for success in war. So men from this elite section of Norse society would have expected to be chosen to join Odin's warriors after death.

Be honourable

Sagas and skaldic verse (poems composed at the courts of Norse rulers) take it for granted that those invited to Valhalla had shown the warrior qualities of bravery and honour. But those who acted dishonourably could face eternal exclusion. The Old Icelandic Njal's saga tells us that a Viking who had committed a number of crimes would be "banished from Valhalla forever."

Die on the battlefield

According to the 13th Century Christian scholar Snorri Sturluson, Odin was known as the 'Valfather' or 'Father of the Slain'. This was because "all who fall in battle are his adopted sons. With them he mans Valhalla." Becoming one of the chosen would drive Viking warriors to risk a bloody death for their chief.

Have a good funeral

Before they converted to Christianity in the 11th Century, Vikings were buried with all the belongings that they would need in the next world. The wealthiest were buried in ships and a warrior's burial would include his highly prized weapons.

Burial ships would be covered with mounds of earth or set alight in funeral pyres. An account of a Viking chieftain's burial in 9th Century Russia described animals and even a slave woman being killed and placed alongside his body before it was set alight.