



Slektforskingklubb

Fjell dalen Lodge #6-162

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**SONS of
NORWAY**

Norwegian origins of the Christmas Tree

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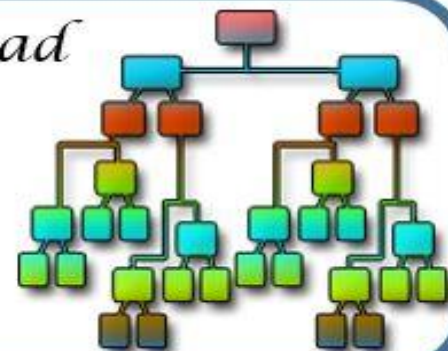
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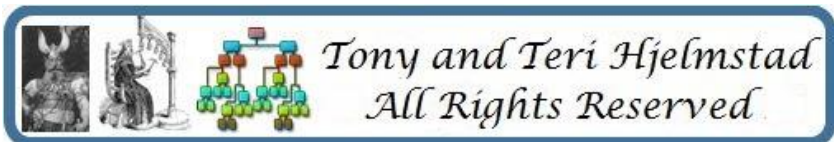
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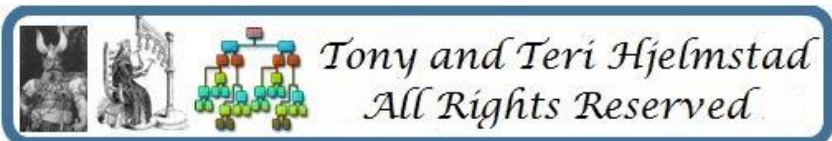
Norwegian origins of the Christmas Tree

- This is a lecture
 - We'll be discussing the history and opinions on it
- This is designed to take about an hour
 - Questions will be taken and answered if I know the answer
 - Afterward there will be an open forum



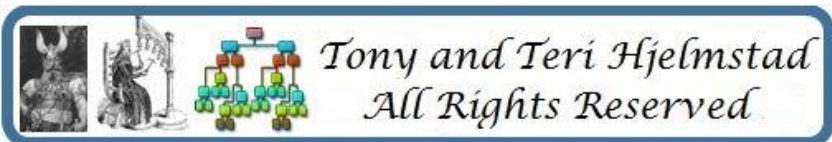
Norwegian origins of the Christmas Tree

- Where did the tradition of the Christmas tree come from?
 - Most attribute it to olden Germany – which includes areas as far north and east as Poland and north and west as Denmark
 - Latvia and Estonia both claim to be home to the first Christmas tree
 - Possibly the first “Christian” Christmas tree was in Strasbourg in 1539.



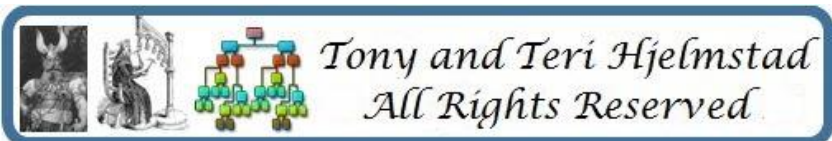
Norwegian origins of the Christmas Tree

- In ancient Europe, long-lived and large trees were venerated and associated with heathen gods.
- Out of these old tales, the tale of Yggdrasil – the tree of life originated.
- The first written records of Yggdrasil were in the Poetic Edda.
- We find the oldest written source of the Viking Yule celebrations in Hrafnsmál, which means "raven speech" in Old Norse. This poem was composed around the 9th century by the Norwegian skald Þorbjörn Hornklofi about Harald Fairhair.



Norwegian origins of the Christmas Tree

- Yule was the most important Norse festival. The Vikings had their Yule tree. The Yule tree was a pagan symbol of the tree of life – Yggdrasil.
- Vikings believed spirits known as vættir (vättar in Swedish) lived in trees. They didn't want to let these small creatures freeze during winter, so they took the trees inside letting the spirits enjoy a warm, comfortable space.
- The green tree was often decorated with small statues of their Norse gods, food, and clothes. They attempted to call for the spirit of the forests.
- Since many of the trees in the Viking lands were fir trees, that was what they used.



Norwegian origins of the Christmas Tree

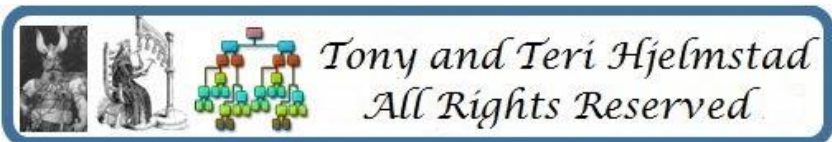
- Christians did not celebrate with Christmas trees before the reformation – which started in 1517.
- The earliest Catholic reference to Christmas is by Hippolytus in 204 AD. The first recorded celebration occurred 25 December 336 AD.
- December 25th, roughly the winter solstice. The Jews had their festival of lights. Germans had a yule festival. Celtic legends connected the solstice with Balder. The Romans and Greeks had the festival of Saturnalia.



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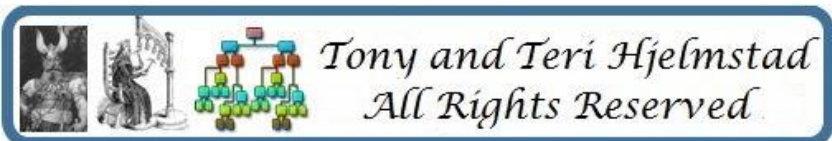
Norwegian origins of the Christmas Tree

- Caroling started in the thirteenth century. Psalms and hymns had been around for thousands of years, but monasteries started “publishing” written music for church singing groups in the 13th century. Christmas carols became part of that as the church choir members would memorize a piece and then teach it to family who would then go out caroling.



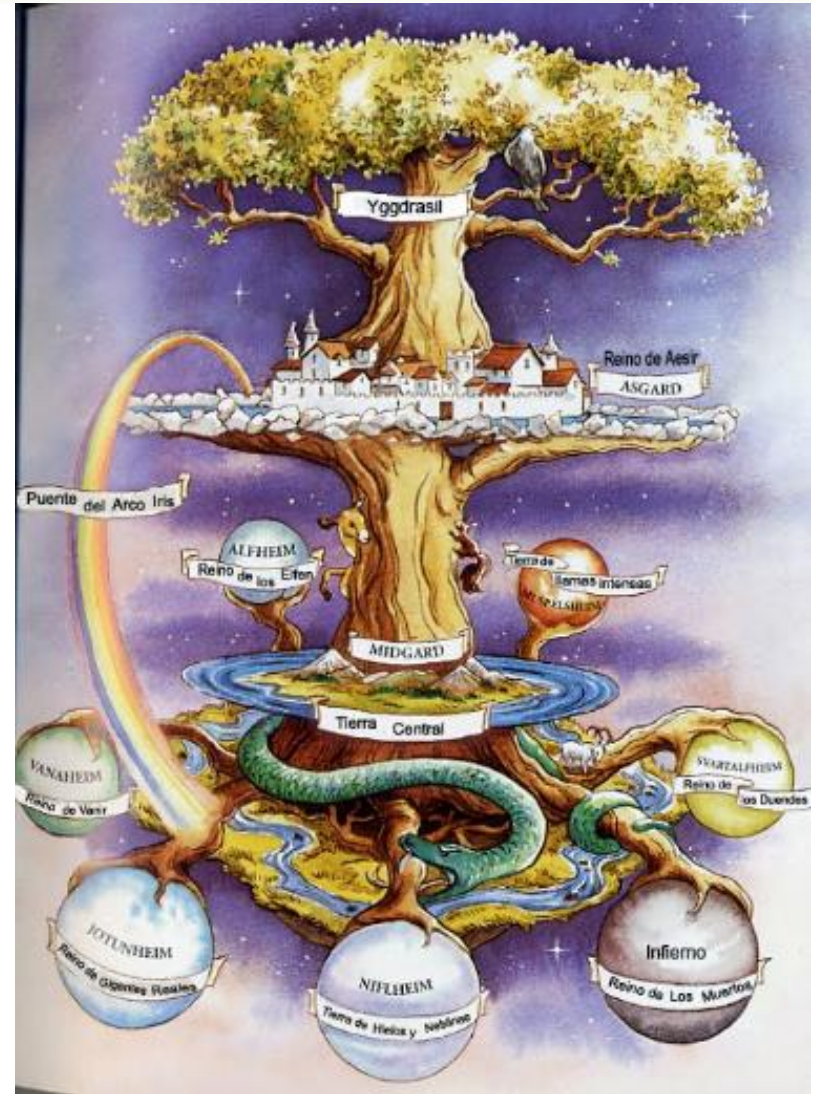
Norwegian origins of the Christmas Tree


- Yggdrasil – an ash tree – and the legends and tales behind, were known in all the lands the Vikings raided – including Germany.
- Germans tended to revere the oak tree over the ash, and Donar's Oak became a symbol of Thor. Yggdrasil was the master tree of life, but – as Thos was to Odin, Donar's Oak was to Yggdrasil.



Norwegian origins of the Christmas Tree

- Yggdrasil



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Norwegian origins of the Christmas Tree

- Yggdrasil



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Norwegian origins of the Christmas Tree

- Donar's (Thor's) Oak – or one like it used to be



Norwegian origins of the Christmas Tree

- In the seventh century, a monk from Crediton, Devonshire, went to Germany to teach and spent much time in Thuringia, a region later which became the center of the Christmas decoration industry.
- His name was Saint Boniface and tradition has it that he used the triangular shape of the fir tree to describe the Holy Trinity of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The tip of the tree points to a marvelous world that is Heaven.
- The converted people began to revere the fir tree as God's tree, as they had previously revered the oak.
- By the twelfth century it was being hung upside-down, from ceilings at Christmas time as a symbol of Christianity and was referred to as the 'Tree of Christ'.



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Norwegian origins of the Christmas Tree



Norwegian origins of the Christmas Tree

- Hold It!!!! We're after the origins and "as they had previously revered the oak" sure implies we aren't there. We just have the origin of the modern Christmas Tree. What about this oak?
- This takes us back to the Norse Mythology – Yggdrasil – the tree of life, and Donar's Oak also known as Jove's Oak, Thor's Oak, Thunder Oak – the "revered Oak" – a real tree that existed around Hesse, Germany until it was cut down by St. Boniface to build a church.
- The Legend of Donar's Oak goes back to Yggdrasil – an ash tree.



Norwegian origins of the Christmas Tree

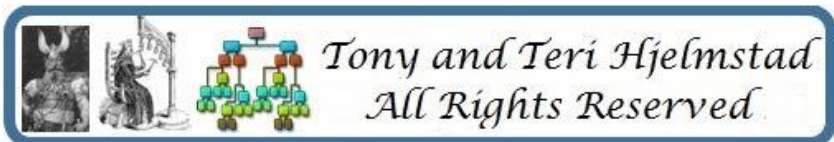
- Bottom Line
 - If you're from Northern Europe, Yggdrasil, represented by the fir tree, is the predecessor of the Christmas Tree.
 - If Christian and from Central Europe, Donar's Tree, which was a descendent of Yggdrasil, was destroyed and the fir Christmas tree took its place.
 - Either way, Yggdrasil is the real precursor to the modern Christmas Tree.



Norwegian origins of the Christmas Tree

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