

Testing the Temperature
of a 50-year-old New Religious Movement

Ásatrúarfélagið

3/16/22

6WXGHQW QDPH, VWXGHQW HPDLO DGO
)DFXOW\ PHPEHU QDPH IDFXOW\ HPDLO

WUDGLWLRQV DQG WKR VH RI Ásatrúarfélagið. Þessi bók er um hvernig fólk hefur verið að vinna með gúðum sínum í dag. Þetta er einn af þeim bókum sem eru gefnar út af Ásatrúarfélagið. Þetta er einn af þeim bókum sem eru gefnar út af Ásatrúarfélagið. Þetta er einn af þeim bókum sem eru gefnar út af Ásatrúarfélagið.

to be central to their work and faith. In these ceremonies, teenagers take a series of preparatory courses run by ordained priests in the organization, and the morality ceremonies are understood to be pagan ethics based on Poetic Edda and Hávamál two books of Ancient Norse poetry.

The priests also organize discussions around current social and political issues with the goal of encouraging teenagers to express themselves and engage in philosophical speculations about life and existence. Participants explore topics such as the responsibilities of humans and gods. Nature and the environment. What responsibilities do we have as

ceremonies function within the central mission of Ásatrúarfélagið to promote tolerance and respect for every person, tradition, and culture, within a framework grounded in Icelandic identity and ancient Norse tradition.

complementing their own ethnic identity complicates current scholarship of other pagan movements that, like Ásatrúarfélagið, ground themselves in ancient Norse tradition, often to construe racially bound identities into a supremacist narrative. Since the 1970s there has been an outburst of numerous neopagan revival movements in the US and in Europe. Some of these movements fit well into scholarly frameworks of naturalizing racial power and producing supremacist doctrines. One movement that fits more clearly into such racial frameworks

⁴ <https://asatru.is/um-asatruarfelagid/>

⁵ <https://asatru.is/sidfesta/>

⁶ Sylvester Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000: Colonialism, Democracy, and Freedom* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

is the Asatru Folk Assembly (AFA), a US-based new religious movement that uses Norse WUDGLWLRQ WR OHJLWLPLJH ZKLWH ³IRON LGHQWLW\` DQG noticed, however that while Ásatrúarfélagið shares the same root historicization as AFA, the rationale and consequence is considerably different. As a subject for comparative study, then, Ásatrúarfélagið appears to strain scholarly frameworks currently deployed to analyze resurgent religiosity that are keenly attentive to the AFA and similar NRMs in North America: naturalized power, appropriation, and white supremacy. Part of why Ásatrúarfélagið complicates μQDWXUDOLJHG SRZHU† DSSURDFKH to promote Kultural Work that P R Y H P H power agendas; the movement publicly portrays themselves as actively teaching progressive values and practices such as tolerance, ethical behavior, and respect for ancient cultures beyond just their own ancient culture. In other words, Ásatrúarfélagið historicizes their identity and SUDFWLFH WR ³DQFLHQW WUDGLWLRQ ` DV WKH \$VDWUX)R does not proclaim a naturalized superiority or racial hierarchy.

The study of New Religious Movements is a defined field within the American Academy of Religion, and considerable work has been performed on white supremacist NRMs, several of which historicize themselves with reference to Norse tradition. Ásatrúarfélagið, as an insular NRM in Iceland, is understudied and largely unrepresented in any extensive scholarship. Humanistic scholarship on Ásatrúarfélagið, grounded in reading its core texts recommended to us by our contacts and based on first accounts garnered through interviews, is an important corrective to dominant social scientific scholarly theories, which

⁷ For example, they permit but do not encourage proselytizing missionary work.

⁸ \$QRWDEOH H[FHSWLRQ LV OLFKDHO 6WUPLVND ³ÈVNDWRReligio, F H O D Q G The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions, Vol.4, No.1 (October, 2000), pp. 106-12. This decade old

perhaps inadequately generalize race and identity agendas to all neopagan movements. Use of Norse mythology and tradition in our case study cannot best be understood as appropriation or as tools of race power legitimization. As former Ásatrúarfélagið Lawspeaker Jón Ingvar Jónsson VDLG 3:KDW ZH DUH WU\LQJ WR GR LV EXLOG RQ RXU DQFL to live and understand our background.

5HOLJLRXV VWXGLHV UHVHDUFK WHQGV WR JUDYLWDWH monolithically framed as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism. Yet, according to Gordon Melton, the executive director at the Study of American Religions at UCSB, 4045 new religious movements emerge each year in the US alone. Considering how rapidly NRMs are erupting and gaining ground, it is the responsibility of religious studies scholars to conduct rigorous study so that we better understand this rapidly expanding phenomenon in lived religion. As a neopagan NRM using pre-Christian, Norse-originating, Icelandic ethnic identity to ground their neopagan religion in Iceland, Ásatrúarfélagið represents a potential complication to the current frameworks scholars apply to understand new religious ethnic movements, and an enticing problem for theorists in the study of religion to explore.

focuses on the intersection of religion and imperial/colonial ideologies, to begin to understand how
imperial and anti-racial-
hierarchy ideologies!

I Q R U G H U W R T D I Q W Z H B Q W K S L M Q U G R L P J H S S G T U R D B X O D W Q G Q D P H
6 W X G H Q W W conduct interviews with members of Ásatrúarfélagið (known as
Ésatr ~armenn) and ask them questions about what drew them to the movement, and if (and how)
they consider Ásatrúarfélagið to be similar or different to other

present our research in an early September Religion Symposium at Reed, and submit our enriched manuscript to the esteemed journal *Nostra Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*. We also plan to present our paper at the Pacific Northwest regional American Academy of Religion conference in May, 2023.

Project Design and Preliminary Bibliography:

March-May 2022 IRB submission, establish initial contacts with Ásatrúarfélagið

- a. Jóhanna Harðardóttir johanna@hlesey.is
- b. Árni Hegranesgoði arnisve@simnet.is

June 2022, M/F meetings in ETC 209

- D Secure zoom interview dates/times with Ásatrúarfélagið members 6 W X G H Q W Q D P H
- E Review primary literature recommended by Ásatrúarfélagið priests 6 W X G H Q W Q D P H
I D F X O W \ Q D P H

L Poetic Edda, a collection of old Norse narrative poems. Ásatrúarfélagið uses this as a reference point of pagan-ethics in their ethics workshops for teenagers.

Carolyn Larrington, *The Poetic Edda* (2 [IR U 1 B Z R U 2] IR U G 8 Q L Y H U V L W Press, 1999), as well as Paul Acker and Carolyn Larrington, *Revisiting the Poetic* (G G D ß (V V D \ V R 0 2 L G 0 (New York: Routledge, 2013).

L L Hávamál, another collection of old Norse narrative poems, which Ásatrúarfélagið uses in their ethics workshops. David A. H. Evans, *Hívam il* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College, 1986).

F Consult the Ásatrúarfélagið website and social media 6 W X G H Q W Q D P H

G Review literature on Ásatrú (6 W X G H Q W Q D P H \ Q D P H

L (0-D.F064B0F57005CB05CC8280056005606 0 Td 7BD7001E00a A0 005601570j /G (o((

- ii. Damon T. Berry *Blood and Faith: Christianity in American White Nationalism* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2017)
- iii. Jeffrey Kaplan, *Radical Religion in America: Millenarian Movements from the Far Right to the Children of Noah* (New York.: Syracuse University Press, 1997).
- iv. Jefferson F. Calico *Being Viking: Heathenism in Contemporary America* (Bristol: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2018).
- v. Urban, Hugh B. 2015. *1HZ \$JH 1HRSDJDQ DQG 1HZ 5HOLJLRX Alternative Spirituality in Contemporary America* Oakland, California: University of California Press.
- vi. *5REHUW \$ 6DXQG HUV Progress in Human Geography* (6)Q (2013), pp.786-810.
- vii. *6 0DJOLRFFR 31HRSDJDQLVP ´ LQ 2 #DEPPHU DQG C Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

July 2022 (M/F meetings in ETC 209)

D Think alongside theorists in the study of religion (who actively complicate religio-racial identification, or who theorize the utility and history of the discipline of religious studies in projects of re-enchantment that push against Protestant presuppositions in our field.

(6 W X G H Q W \ Q D P H

L Sylvester Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000: Colonialism, Democracy, and Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

LL - X G L W K : H L V H O R I X I O G : H 7 / K M H - R a c i a l T h e o r y a n d t h e 6 W X G \ R I 5 J u n e 2 0 2 0 A m e r i c a n A c a d e m y o f R e l i g i o n J u n e 2 0 2 0, Vol. 88, No. 2, pp. 440 ±459.

LLL - D V R Q - Q D Q G D - R V H S K V R Q 6 W R U P 3 * R G ¶ V 6 K D G R Z * H Q H D O R J \ R I H i s t o r y o f R e l i g i o n V o l . 5 2 , N o . 4 (M a y 2 0 1 3) , pp.309-339.

E Conduct interviews via zoom (6 W X G H Q W \ Q D P H

F Transcribe interviews (6 W X G H Q W \ Q D P H

G Outline paper (6 W X G H Q W \ Q D P H

August 2022 Write paper (6 W X G H Q W \ Q D P H

September 2022

D Submit paper to Jolie Griffin (I D F X O W \ Q D P H

E Public presentation of paper to Reed Religion Symposium (Wednesday, 9/21/22)

(6 W X G H Q W \ Q D P H

F Submission for peer review and publication to Nova Religio: The Nova -422j /C2C2_18 12 Tfj 0 Eme