

# Rhythm, Song, and Dance in Ritual



**Workshop by:**  
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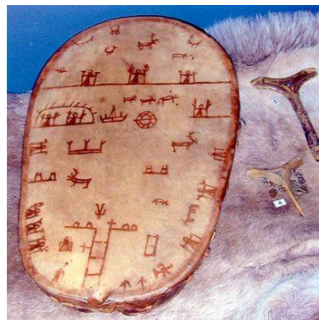
This discussion/presentation will be about song, dance, rhythm, and their benefits in a ritual context. From the “Growling Hounds of Hedeby” to “Constantine's Galavantiing Guards” and the “Rockin’ Dancing Dude” there are many examples showing the existence and importance of these ecstatic-inducing practices of pagan Northern Europe in archeology and literature.

# Stone Age, and Bronze Age, and Iron Age...OH MY!

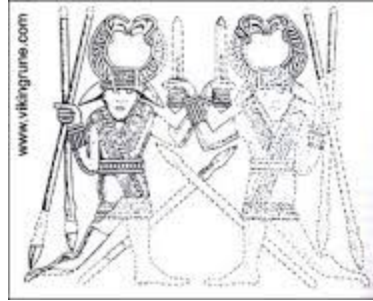
“Dance in tribal societies seeks to link or identify the dancer with another entity, whether corporal or supernatural. Dance stresses belonging, in communal movement with a group or with one other person. The function of dance in primitive communities was, and remains, all embracing. It is a strong, binding influence in tribal life, a means of defining social identity of a group through the acceptance of rituals which mark the progress of the individual from cradle to grave. The spiritual as well as the physical image of the group is no less well-marked by dance appeals to gods, and propitiations of the spirits of the dead. In health and sickness, joy and fear, the dance is central to tribal life. Religious experience is strengthened by its function as a communal dance experience. Dance rites celebrate the nature of tribal divinity; they invoke the divine presence; they partake of sympathetic magic in seeking protection for crops, requesting sun or rain, and they define the area for belief.” -- *The History of Dance*, by Mary Clarke & Clement Crisp



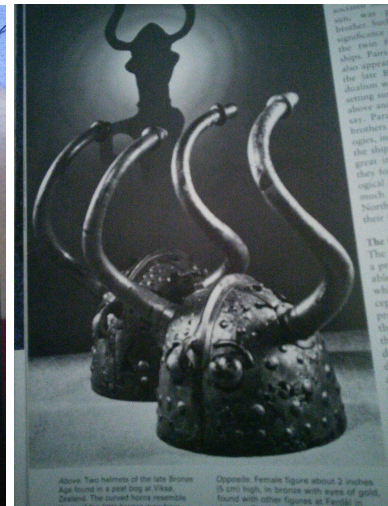
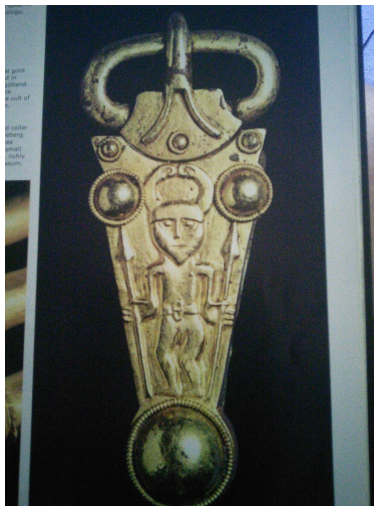
Above: Bronze Age rock carvings of Bohuslän, Sweden & Østfold, Norway



<--Sami Ritual Drum & Striker



Above Left: Torslunda, Oland, Sweden Center & Right: Sutton Hoo Helm, England



Left: Buckle from Finglesham, Kent, England Center: Helms Viksø, Zealand Right: Silver figure Birka, Sweden & Bronze figure Ekhammar, Sweden



Above: Golden Gallehus Horns, Tønder, Denmark (5th Century)

## Accounts:

"Naked youths, trained to the sport, dance about among swords and spears leveled at them. Practice begets skill, and skill grace; but they are not professionals and do not receive payment. Their most daring flings have their only reward in the pleasure they give the spectators."--Tacitus, *The Agricola and the Germania* pg.181

"Then he (\*Starkather) entered the Swedish territory where he spent seven years in a leisurely stay with the sons of Frø, after which he departed to join Haki, the lord of Denmark, for, living at Uppsala in the period of sacrifices, he had become disgusted with the womanish body movements, the clatter of actors on the stage and the soft tinkling of bells." --Saxo Grammaticus, *The History of the Danes* Book VI, pg 172

"Next, the men came with shields and sticks. She was given a cup of intoxicating drink; she sang at taking it and drank. The interpreter told me that she in this fashion bade farewell to all her girl companions. Then she was given another cup; she took it and sang for a long time while the old woman incited her to drink up and go into the pavillion where her master lay."--Ahmad Ibn Fadlan, *Risala* pg. 52

"I have not heard an uglier singing than Shalshaweeq (Hedeby, Denmark 950) people. It is a humming coming from their throats that's worse than dogs barking."--Ibrahim Al-Tartushi, *Monument of Places and History of God's Bondsmen* (transl. Prof Rawia Azzahrawi University of Manitoba)

**\*This is not a first hand account, but I can't read Latin or Greek, so....**

"The performance is described in some detail in Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus' *Book of Ceremonies* (c.953). According to the account, the 'dance' or battle representation was performed by two groups of men (possibly representing the two ruling Hippodrome factions the 'Blues' and the 'Greens') accompanied by two pairs of skin-clad warriors who wore 'various masks'. The performance itself involved two kinds of circle dance. The first involved one group dancing in a ring within a circle made by the other, while in the second, two separate circle dances were conducted around the individual leaders of the two groups. Both dances were accompanied by not only the clashing of staves on shields, and rhythmic shouts involving the word 'Toúl!' but also by chants of praise in a conglomeration of languages..."--Terry Gunnell, *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia* pg 74

## Literary

"From the son of Bolthorn, Bestla's father, I mastered mighty songs nine, and drink I had of the dearest mead, got from out of Óðroerir."--Lee M Hollander transl. *Hávamál, Poetic Edda* stz 140, pg 36

"She asked for women who knew the chants required for magical rites(*seiðr*), which are called Varðlokur. But such women were not to be found. Then the people of the household were asked if there was anyone with such knowledge. Then Guðríðr answered, 'I have neither magical powers nor the gift of prophecy, but in Iceland my foster-mother, Halldis, taught me the chants she called Varðlokur.'"-- *Eirik the Red's Saga*, Ch 4 (transl. Keneva Kunz)

"When the memorial cup consecrated to Thor was carried into the hall, 'Sigurd' changed the tune again, and this time he played so loud, the music rang through the entire palace. All the people jumped to their feet, except the king and the bride couple."

“...it was time for Odin’s toast to be drunk. Then ‘Sigurd opened the harp....all the men and women jumped to their feet, and not a thing remained still in its place.”

“...the toast dedicated to Freyja...and told the king to get ready for the tune called”Powerful”...the king was so startled at this tune that he jumped to his feet and the bride and bridegroom too, and nobody danced as vigorously as they did.”--*Bosi and Herraud 12 (Seven Viking Romances)*pg 220 (transl. Pálsson & Edwards



## Science?

### **Melinda Maxfield, Ph.D. (Abstract excerpt)**

The purpose of the research was to determine whether various drumming patterns would be associated with different brain wave activity, as measured by cortical EEG, and to determine if the subjective experience of percussion in general, and rhythmic drumming in particular, would elicit images or sensations with a common theme.

Twelve participants were divided into three groups and monitored for EEG frequency response to three separate drumming tapes. These tapes included: Shamanic Drumming, at approximately 4 to 4 1/2 beats per second; I Ching Drumming, at approximately 3 to 4 beats per second; and Free Drumming, which incorporates no sustained rhythmic pattern. Four cortical sites, bilateral parieto-temporal and parieto-central areas, were monitored for each participant during three sessions. At the conclusion of the sessions, each participant prepared a brief written account and was given a tape-recorded interview of his or her subjective experience. These subjective experiences were then categorized according to recurring themes and consensual topics.

This research supports the theories that suggest that the use of the drum by indigenous cultures in ritual and ceremony has specific neurophysiological effects and the ability to elicit temporary changes in brain wave activity, and thereby facilitates imagery and possible entry into an ASC (altered state of consciousness), especially the SSC (shamanic state of consciousness).

Drumming in general, and rhythmic drumming in particular, often induces imagery that is ceremonial and ritualistic in content and is an effective tool for entering into a non-ordinary or altered state of consciousness (ASC) even when it is extracted from cultural ritual, ceremony, and intent. The drumming also elicits subjective experiences and images with common themes. These include: loss of time continuum; movement sensations, including pressure on or expansion of various parts of the body and body image distortion, "energy waves," and sensations of flying, spiraling, dancing, running, etc.; feelings of being energized, relaxed, sharp and clear, hot, cold, and in physical, mental, and/or emotional discomfort; emotions, ranging from reverie to rage; vivid images of natives, animals, people, and landscapes; and non-ordinary or altered states of consciousness (ASC), whereby one is conscious of the fact that there has been a qualitative shift in mental functioning., including the shamanic state of consciousness (SSC) journeys, out-of body experiences (OBEs), and visitations.

A pattern that incorporates approximately 4 to 4 1/2 beats per second is the most inducing for theta gain. (Theta frequency is usually associated with drowsy, near-unconscious states, such as the threshold period just before waking or sleeping. This frequency has also been connected to states of "reverie" and hypnogogic or dream-like images.)

The pattern of the drumbeat as it relates to beats per second can be correlated with resulting temporary changes in brain wave frequency (cycles per second) and/or subjective experience, provided the drumming pattern is sustained for at least 13-15 minutes.

## Questions to Ask Ourselves:

\*How can this be useful to us?

\*How can this expand our understanding/experience spiritually and religiously?

\*Does this (psychological, biological, neurological) mean it's in our heads? Or is it just the explanation for the mechanisms of experience?

\*Is it time (speaking generally as a movement) for more ecstatic practices and incorporations?

\*How do we develop it consciously, but still organically?

## Cited & Helpful Works:

### Books:

Mary Clarke & Clement Crisp, ***The History of Dance***

Peter Fisher (transl), ***Saxo Grammaticus: The History of the Danes***

H. Mattingly (transl) ***Tacitus: The Agricola and the Germania***

Ibrahim Al-Tartushi, ***Monument of Places and History of God's Bondsmen***

Lunde & Stone (transl), ***Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness***

Terry Gunnell, ***The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia***

Lee M Hollander (transl), ***The Poetic Edda***

Pálsson & Edwards (transl), ***Seven Viking Romances***

Örnólfur Thorsson & Bernard Scudder (Ed), ***The Sagas of the Icelanders***

Müller-Ebeling, Rättsch, & Storl, ***Witchcraft Medicine: Healing Arts, Shamanic Practices, and Forbidden Plants***

Neil Price, ***The Viking Way: Religion and War in Late Iron Age Scandinavia***

H.R Ellis-Davidson, ***Viking & Norse Mythology***

John Coles, ***Shadows of a Northern Past: Rock Carvings of Bohuslän and Østfold***

Mircea Eliade, ***A History of Religious Ideas: Volume 1 From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries***

### Papers/Articles:

Alissa Sorensson, "Dance in the Northern Tradition" (Frigga's Web)

Anette Kjellgren & Anders Eriksson, "Altered States During Shamanic Drumming: A Phenomenological Study"

Melinda Maxfield, "Effects of Rhythmic Drumming on EEG and Subjective Experience"

Joshua Rood, "Ascending the Steps to Hliðskjálf: The Cult of Óðinn in Early Scandinavian Aristocracy"

Noel Braucher, "Throat Singing in Old Norse Culture?"