

Astronomy Talk 9th November 2021

Viking Astronomy

Martin Lunn gave us this talk on Zoom. He started with Viking mythology, which among other things gave us the names of the compass points. The Milky Way was seen as a connection between Asgard (gods), Midgard (people) and Hel. The rainbow similarly connects Asgard and Midgard.

Martin then looked at the constellations at various times of the year. The plough in Ursa Major was Thor's wagon, Ursa Minor was the throne of Thor, Polaris was a nail driven into the heavens holding them in place. Orion was Frigg, the mother Earth goddess. And many other examples.

The year 912 was notable for 2 reasons. There was a solar eclipse on midsummer's day. A wolf comes to eat the Sun, and by loud screaming and banging of drums it can be scared off. Secondly there was an appearance of Halley's comet in July and August in Leo. It is the spear of Gungnir: throw it and it comes back.

Auroras were the Valkyrie, who choose who will live and who die in battle.

The Vikings spread over all of Europe, as well as across the America, and the elite troops of Byzantium were the Varangian Guard, composed of Norsemen. Hence many of their myths are incorporated into other European cultures. And they live on in probes to Mars.

Unfortunately, when the Vikings became Christian, the church set about destroying as much of the pagan culture as they could, and we don't have a large amount of information about it.

A well-attended talk with 84 present, and some knowledgeable questions and views from the audience.