Knockadoone Burial Site
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The Isle of Man, located between Ireland and Great Britain, contains a long list of burial sites; these sites are full of evidence about Norse society, paganism, and the afterlife. When exploring the Viking Age and Norse society, the Isle of Man is of monumental significance because it is the place where Norse settlement was the heaviest; scholars and archaeologists have come to this conclusion by looking at the Isle of Man's "pagan Viking burial mounds, by the place names, and by the distribution of the tenth- to early eleventh-century Norse cross-slabs" (Cubbon 14). Located in the northern part of the Isle of Man in Andreas is the burial site of Knock y Doonee, also known as Knockadoone. This site is known specifically forholding a ship that contains a buried pagan male warrior, grave goods, and stone inscriptions (Graham-Campbell 156-7). Other sites, notably that at Sutton Hoo, reveal additional information on similar burials.

There were several types of pagan burials conducted in the Isle of Man after the Vikings settled in it around the year 900. Like many religions, Norse paganism is a doctrine that promotes the idea of life after death; grave goods and elaborate burials were essentially linked to this concept. During the Viking settlement on Man, the main type of "disposal of the dead was by inhumation", and in rare occasions, cremations were performed (Wilson 25). Most burials were conducted according to a somewhat standard model:

> For a poor man, they make a small boat, place him in it, and then burn it; but if he is rich, they gather together his wealth and divide it into three – one part for his family, one part to provide clothes for him, and a third part for nabidh [a fermented drink], which they drink on the day that the slave woman is killed and burned together with her master... When a chief has died his family asks his slave women and slaves, "Who will die with him?" Then one of them says, "I will". When she has said this there is no backing out ... most of those who agree are women slaves... (Wilson 26).

Such a division gives us plenty of insight concerning the stratification of Norse society and how burials differed between people belonging to different classes of society, and what exactly these burials were like; they were performed in such a manner due to the importance that the Norse placed on the afterlife. According to *Ynglingsaga*, Odin ordered the dead "to be burned and their possessions with them ... that everyone should arrive in Valhalla with such wealth as he had with him on his pyre" (Wilson 26). Therefore, *Ynglingsaga* reveals to us that grave goods were of the utmost importance to Norse society because they were necessary in the next life. The ultimate purpose of Valhalla would be to abide there with Odin, and ultimately to fight with the gods during the last battle, known as Ragnarok, before the world is destroyed.

The myth of the Norse apocalypse is not the only such belief associated with these burial rituals. Indeed, a lot of magical and supernatural phenomena were attributed by the Vikings to dead people in their journey from the grave to the afterlife. It was thought that a person's death was followed by their immortal spirit being manifested as a light, and this light of the dead person would come out of the door of the funeral house and move towards the churchyard; the light was supposed to be a fire that indicated the continuation of life for the dead. Additionally, the dead could not have any restrictions binding them when preparing for burial (not even clothes) in order for the spirit to have a successful resurrection after departing. Additionally, people feared the spirits of the dead because of their "restless nature", so "the pagan tried to keep them in their graves with gift offerings, but there were other methods resorted to" such as putting a cross of iron on the grave to keep the spirit from coming out (Killip 83-84). This indicates that, apart from grave goods, people would put offerings in graves in order to appease the spirits because Norse culture placed great significance upon material goods. There were myriad superstitions and myths surrounding death, burial, and the afterlife in the Pagan culture, and in some ways the rise of Christianity amplified these beliefs even further.

Although the Isle of Man had Norse settlers at the time of the conversion, as Christianity was on the rise in Man, there were many Christians who had pagan burials in order to guarantee a proper passage to the afterlife in case Christianity didn't work. Indeed, there were at least twenty-four pagan, or semi-pagan Norse burial sites in Man, dating to the period of conversion that had settlers who were still pagan or who were about to convert to Christianity (Wilson 27). These twenty-four burial sites contained exclusively burials rather than cremations. The burial mounds were usually built on low hills overlooking the sea in a fashion similar to pagan mounds in Scandinavia (Cubbon 16). There are four Viking-age burials in mounds that have been excavated in Man; these include that at Ballateare, Cronk Moar, Ballachrink, and Knock y Doone.

The burial mound at Knock y Doone was excavated by P. M. C. Kermode in 1927, and it contained many grave goods including “a sword, battle axe, spear, knife, shield boss, smith's hammer and tongs, an iron cauldron, a silver-inlaid bronze cloak-pin, a set of harness and a lead fishing-line weight” (Cubbon 18). Weapons were commonly used as grave goods. In addition to this, a horse-harness and a horse often were found in the Irish Sea region. Horses were a symbol of status and were occasionally used as grave goods in the graves of the very rich. In fact, horses served mainly as a status symbol, since Vikings fought on foot and, in the grave, horses also served as “symbolic of the possibility of travel to, and in, the next world” (Wilson 44). Many of these grave sites, especially at Balladoole and Knock y Doone, were farms as well as burial mounds; these areas “were a series of family estates known as 'quarterlands', which generally comprised an area of between 20 and 73ha (most normally about 36.5ha) and occupied the best farmland of the lowlands” (Wilson 90). Some believe that these burial mounds were distributed evenly toward the same number of 'quarterland' estates in order for each land-taker to lay down in their own lands with pagan ritual after they died. Looking at this correlation between land and burial mounds then, it can be concluded that the mounds also serve as “statements of power, set in the landscape to emphasize a new regime and the establishment of a new hierarchy of land-holding” (Wilson 92). In the same manner that there was a relationship between a person's social status based on wealth and the prominence of this grave sites, the lands he possessed also affected his place of burial; some of the men who had quarterland farms at Knock y Doone and Balladoole would be buried at the highest point of their estates (Wilson 91). Additionally, some horses were buried in ships: “some twelve were buried with the great Norwegian Gokstad ship, and fifteen – all decapitated – with the Oseberg vessel” (Wilson 37-38).

Boat-burial is a rite that was mainly performed on the Isle of Man at Balladoole and Knock y Doonee, and is not common in the Scandinavian settlements elsewhere in the British Isles. Naturally, a boat in a grave serves as a symbol of importance for the dead person, but these boats were more than that. The symbolism related to a horse in a grave might also apply to boats; they were vessels that gave the spirits of the deceased the ability to travel to the next world. Moreover, depictions both of boats and of riders is seen in the art of early Viking-age Sweden on the memorial stones from the Baltic island of Gotland; these stones “show ships under sail, often together with mounted men apparently being welcomed to Valhalla by women bearing drinking-horns” (Wilson 45). Moreover, the role of the boat as a symbol of status was also a significant one to the deceased, because it was society's way of recognizing this person's superiority over an ordinary warrior, who would simply be buried with his single weapon (Wilson 46). Boat burials and other forms of pagan burials started to fade away during the tenth-century as the Isle of Man shifted more fully from paganism to Christianity.

The change from pagan to Christian burial rites occurred during the first quarter of the tenth century; this conversion can be seen through the sculpture in the Isle of Man and it serves as one of the first examples of conversion to Christianity during the Viking Age. Moreover, although a lot of the religious rites performed by pagans are unknown or are distorted in the sagas, there are some hints of these in place-names. According to written Icelandic sources, secular men who lived at the Isle of Man after it converted to Christianity organized pagan rituals in their houses or in the open air, but there is no concrete physical proof of these assertions (Wilson 57-8). Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Christianity was spreading throughout Man at this time.

Stone memorials did not at this time exist in Scandinavia, but plenty were carved in the Isle of Man as Christianity became the main religion. Pagan incomers to the Island adopted this practice after converting to Christianity and would bury their dead in existing cemeteries. Viking settlers in England adopted stone memorials as well; this was also true to a lesser extent in western and northern Scotland. These memorials were erected with the Christian cross engraved on them. The cross was the main feature of these stones, and even the word “cross” was engraved in many of them. These memorials commonly were made from “grey slate or mudstone” and they were “ornamented on one or both sides, and occasionally on the edges [and functioned as] grave markers, or at least memorials to the dead” (Wilson 58). The inscriptions in these crosses were written in the settlers' language, Old West Norse. In addition to this, the decoration motifs on the stones were mainly Scandinavian, such as groups of warriors riding to Valhalla, but some stones had English and Scottish elements, as well.

Perhaps the most famous ship burial is that at Sutton Hoo, located along the coastline of Suffolk. An archaeologist named Charles Phillips dug up this grave in 1940, and it contained an extremely wide array of grave goods. The ship had such goods in most of its chambers, and these included items made out of metal, such as gold, silver, bronze and iron, clothes, bags, and shoes made out of leather and woven fabric, several bowls and dishes, an iron axe, a rusted iron chain-mail, jewelry, and many other items (Green 38-40). These grave goods are supposed to be grouped around the “place of honour” which, according to a landmark study of the site,

> would seem to have been on the central line towards the west end, below the gold and jeweled harness-fittings. Here the buried body would be expected to lie. But neither here nor, indeed, anywhere in the chamber could the slightest trace of a body be discovered...Later...tests were carried out in the British Museum laboratory. These were designed to reveal, if indeed they existed, traces of a decayed body left on the remaining grave-goods. All these tests have failed to produce the slightest positive evidence. It is, therefore, now certain that an unburnt body never lay in this burial-chamber. The other possibility, that of a cremated body, is equally negated...Not a single receptacle in the chamber contained the smallest fragment of burnt bone nor was any found lying in the filling of the chamber (Green 43).

As this makes clear, there were burial sites with grave goods that did not have corpses at all. The Sutton Hoo burial is an example of a memorial or cenotaph used as a memorial for a person who was likely to be a man, and whose body was deposited elsewhere for some reason (Green 43). This form of burial of the grave goods is different from the ones mentioned before, but they still served the same purpose. It still worked as a form of religious ceremony in which the grave goods were supposed to lay there without anyone ever finding them; they were simply there for the deceased in the afterlife. In general, the settlers at the British Isles did not place a supernatural meaning on burials; according to Christopher Fee, Sutton Hoo was the exception to this situation because it was associated with King Raedwald who converted into Christianity. Additionally, Fee mentions that "the Sutton Hoo excavations brought to light an amazing collection of valuable objects of primarily 'pagan' or non-Christian origin. We know that Raedwald's wife was an adamant follower of the old Germanic religion and that her husband, even after his conversion, placed both Christian and non-Christian objects and altars in his place of worship" (116). Thus these grave goods had folkloric significance, and there were both pagan and Christian ones, which further amplifies Sutton Hoo's cultural value because of the combination of Christian and pagan influences.

The burial sites dating from the Viking Age in the British Isles represent the duality of religions that existed at the time. Sutton Hoo at Suffolk, the site of Knock y Doone at the Isle of Man, along with several others, and the grave goods that were found therein, all reveal extensive information about the culture, social stratification, and religious beliefs of the society of the period. Looking at burials and myths on the afterlife is essential in order to fully understand the state of mind and the way of life of the Norse.

Knockadoone Project Site Report Bibliography

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