

**Save Ancient Studies Alliance**

**January 2024 Texts-in-Translation Master Class**

**Valhalla – An Aristocratic Myth?  
Lead by Dr. Irina-Maria Manea**

The aim of this masterclass would be to delve into the origins and meanings of Valhöll as representative for the conceptions of death among a particular class of people – the aristocracy. Several clues point to the possibility that Valhöll—which translates to "the hall of the warriors killed in battle"—was first used as late as the 900s. Most likely, the name originated from being employed as a mythological designation for a previous interpretation of Odin's dwelling. In the realm of the gods, he introduced notable fighters who had perished in combat. One common line of thinking was in terms of evolutionary mythology, from the more general afterlife in Hel, in and underneath the grave, towards a more specialized Viking heaven. The multitude of motifs we find linked to Valhöll – splendor of the palace, shielded roofs, never-ending liquor, everlasting boar meat, glorious deeds performed by the Einherjar – point out a well-defined social context with chieftains and warriors residing among gods in a world that reproduces a mead hall but mythologized as a cosmic center where Odin and the dead unite in a mystical communion. Potential differentiations could also be identifiable in the grave goods or the potential rituals performed in the hall. On the other hand, the obscurities and inconsistencies of Valhöll's depiction only reinforce the idea of an originally vague and unsystematic religion – probably due to people's personalized approach to the mythical realities of the afterlife and the gods. Gain an in-depth understanding of the cosmological myth of Valhalla and the diversity of afterlife concepts in the Norse world

## Meet Your SASA Educational Ambassadors:



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## Links to Readings

Please find PDFs of the reading in this [Google Folder](#).

2 Interpreting the concept

3 Description and motifs

4 The theme of Odin's undead warriors

5 The social context – The aristocratic mead hall and its similarities to Valhöll

6 Conclusions

### Readings:

Poetic Edda – Völuspá, Grimnismál, tr. J. Crawford, Hackett 2015

Snorri Sturluson – Gylfaginning chapter 2, tr. A. Faulkes, Everyman 2008

Hilda Ellis Davidson – The Road To Hel, Chapter 3, Praeger 1968 (reprint)

Hilda Ellis Davidson – Gods and Myths of Northern Europe, Gods of The Dead esp. The Realm of Odin, Penguin Books 1990

John Lindow, A Guide to Gods, Rituals, Heroes – The entry for Valhalla, Oxford 2002

Rudolf Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology – The entry for Valhalla, Boydell&Brewer 1993