

Belly Up! Bulletin

December 2021

A note from the editor:

It's the final month of the year. How the hell did that happen?? I sure don't know, so if you figure it out, please, let me know. 2020 was hard. I'm not sure 2021 was any easiers. I have hopes for 2022. What about you? Do you have hopes for 2022? What are they? We want to know.

But first... Yule. I've finished all my gifts for Yule giving. I've got my vacation from work scheduled, the menu planned, and for once, I'm excited about the holidays. I'd love a white Christmas, but then I'd worry about my Grandparent's driving, so I'd be okay putting it off till the 26th.

What are you looking forward too this Yule season?

--Rio Durante, Editor

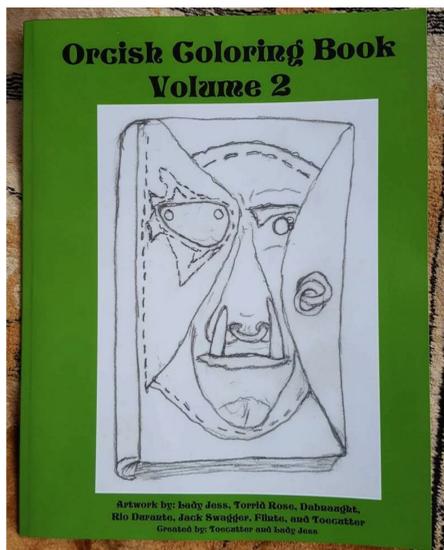
Ah, Christmas. That time for caroling, hot chocolate, and yuletide cheer. Wait, what on Earth is a yule? And what do the tides have to do with Christmas?

Yule is an incredibly old word (for English, anyway) that may trace back to celebrations of the new year, Christmas, and may or may not involve a lot of drinking and eating, sacrifices, and making oaths. According to Old Norse expert Jackson Crawford, jól was a three-night festival starting on Midwinter (the winter solstice). Those are the basics.

Happy Yule!!

Sadly, in the words of Göteborg University professor Britt-Mari Näsström, "the scarcity of the sources restricts our knowledge of the pre-Christian yule/jól." But it's still a fun puzzle to put together—even if world-class scholars are only able to agree on the basics.

Featured Item of the Month



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According to the Oxford English Dictionary, in 726, St. Bede, a monk and scholar, mentioned Giuli (an old spelling of Yule) as a name for both December and January. The picture gets murky when we learn from Bede that there was also a pre-Christian festival celebrated on December 25 called Modranecht, or "mother's night." Some scholars propose that there's a connection between Bede's Giuli (December and January), mother's night, and the Norse celebration jól, thought to have taken place around the same time.

To be clear, not everyone agrees. The Oxford Companion to the Year comments that, "Before the Norman Conquest this day [December 25] was normally called

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December Birthday's

Rachel Lynne Gunn - Dec 2
Lor Brule - Dec 4
Gabe Kreb - Dec 15
Bethany Howland - Dec 17
Ryan Johnson - Dec 19
Wilma Bonsanti - Dec 19
Shae Dravenmore - Dec 19
Emry Watson - Dec 21
Virgil Reed - Dec 23
Shy Fox - Dec 26

'Midwinter' in Old English; it was not called 'Yule', which ... is more Scots than English." And contrary to what you might think, the word Yule is thought to be from the same mysterious Germanic origin as jól, not that one name is descended from the other.

Popular tales of the Old Norse jól, which have less support, claim that it was a day when the veil between the living and dead was thin. Some even argue that Jólnir, one of Odin's many names, indicates that Odin features prominently in the celebrations, which, since he also had a role as god of the dead, indicate that it was kind of a "day of the dead" celebration.



Not everyone agrees with this, either. In 2018, Bettina Sebjerg Sommer of the University of Copenhagen wrote an article entitled "The Pre-Christian Jól: Not a Cult of the Dead, but the Norse New Year Festival." She proposes that folkloric elements assumed to be related to a cult of the dead have other explanations, like a custom of leaving a table full of food out during the night might be for dead ancestors, or it might be for angels, trolls, or "other supernatural visitors." And that some scholars now think that Odin might be connected to the day because of his roles with ritual drinking and the aristocracy.

Upcoming Events...



Instead, as can be gleaned from the title, Sommer argues that jól was a pre-Christian New Year festival, saying (and using jól and Yule interchangeably) that the folkloric sources indicate that "in the Yule period the coming year is not predicted, it is created. In this period, the impending year comes into being and that is why the coming year is shaped by the Yule period: everything that happens in this period influences and creates the coming year [emphasis is original]."