

**Marianne Moen:** Members of the press, honoured guests, we welcome you to the university of Oslo for our special debate in honour of exciting recent discoveries that may change our ideas of the Viking world forever. In 1878, archaeologists excavating the Viking town of Birka, in Sweden, uncovered this 10th-century burial tomb believed to hold the remains of a great warrior. In 2017 archeologists proved that the body at the site was actually a woman. Today, we open up for discussion the existence of Shieldmaidens. This is the lead archeologist of the site, Anna Kjellström defending the team's claims, and the historian, Dr. Judith Jesch, who has been extremely vocal about her skepticism of the discovery.

**Anna:** The genomic evidence is clear, it is a female body. The grave is of a highly ranked figure, and indeed a warrior. Of the 1100 tombs we have examined at Birka, her grave is one of only two that contain a full set of weaponry. It was filled with a trove of weapons, including a sword, spear, shield and two horses, as well as a game board likely used to map out military strategies.

**Judith:** Just because she was buried with the tools of war did not make her a warrior.

**Anna:** At the same time, it would be highly unusual to bury her like that, if she was not. Before this grave was found to be a woman's, no one questioned whether it was the tomb of a warrior.

**Judith Jesch:** That is just guess work, and poor scholarship. Now, I may not be a scientist, but I would love people to take into account historical research, evidence, before tweeting all over the world about women warriors in the Viking Age. It's too

easy to take the title of an article at face value and send it round the Twittersphere without further thought. I know I'm banging my head against a brick wall: I have blogged, spoken and written about these matters before and come to realise that the emotional lure of the woman warrior, especially in the Viking Age, is too strong for reasoned argument.

**Marianne:** I do not believe we can continue to argue for women in the margins when faced with clear evidence of women buried alongside men, in the same types of locations, and with the same types of remains and rituals.

**Judith:** Is this not just seeing what we want to see in the graves?

**Anna:** We did not go looking for a female at Birka; we found that the body in the grave is a woman. We did not make any gender assumptions, but the DNA evidence is clear. Since releasing our findings, we've had nothing but hostility from journalists, scholars, and the general public. Why so much interest in one grave? I don't understand the hostility. Why does evidence of a female warrior cause such concern?

**Judith Jesch:** I have always thought that the fascination with women warriors, both in popular culture and in academic discourse, is heavily influenced by 20th- and 21st century desires.

**Anna:** What we know is that this grave, which has been claimed for over a century as the largest and most perfect warrior grave of the Viking era is the grave of a woman. That there is growing physical evidence of warrior women is increasingly clear. I am not saying this is *true*. But I also do not say it is *untrue*. Stories of Shieldmaidens exist, graves exist with spears, arrows, swords; there are even

sculptures of women warriors found. Why is it so impossible to believe the evidence surrounding us? The sagas are full of them.

**Marianne:** The sagas have much to tell us about the underlying tensions of the society that produced it. The women in the sagas, taken alongside our new archeological evidence, paint a clear picture that the Shieldmaidens existed.

**Judith:** Sagas are also full of dragons, of trolls, of magical sorcerers, are they real too?

**Anna:** Judith, many of the characters in the sagas were based on real people. Eirik the Red who founded Iceland was real. As was Gudrid, the female traveler who sailed to the New World, and went on a pilgrimage to Rome. Why should stories of women warriors not also be based on facts?

**Judith:** A Woman Warrior? I try to keep an open mind, but the Viking period was highly patriarchal.

**Anna:** Women had rights, more rights than many at that time.

**Marianne:** They could have affairs, divorce their husbands.

**Anna:** Own land.

**Marianne:** Be leaders of communities.

**Anna:** And explorers

**Marianne:** Hold wealth.

**Judith:** (*angrily*) But they couldn't choose who they married; they were under the authority of their father and their husband. They couldn't speak at the Thane, the

council of elders. They couldn't become a chieftain. They still were the only ones primarily left at home when the men went off to fight at sea. They were the ones who took care of the children; they were in charge of the farm when the men were gone. They wove the cloth, milked the cows, all the things we would expect women to do. Even in your precious sagas female warriors gave up being Shieldmaidens when they married, and settled down to be "decent women." It was illegal for them to cut their hair or dress like a man. Most Norsewomen are strong in the stories, but not with a sword. They make their men do the violence for them. Which shows warriors weren't women.

**Marianne:** They're in there, though. They are in the sagas. Fine, maybe we see women who rebel against the will of their fathers, who refuse to submit to the patriarchal system; maybe they are special; unusual. But I am convinced just as we have superheroes like Wonder Woman in our stories, Shieldmaidens are also extreme versions of real women. Real fire fighters, real soldiers, real heroines.

**Anna:** I leave it up to you two to argue over the sagas. I work off of physical evidence. Recent finds show a strict link between weapons, women and warfare. Why doesn't our evidence at least make you consider the possibility that Shieldmaidens existed?

**Judith:** I'm sorry; it still seems like a paradox.

**Marianne:** I have learned to make my mind large, as the universe is large, so that there is room for paradoxes. Here is more evidence of truth in the sagas. In the tomb of Birka they have found a strange sword. Anna, look at the markings on it? This might be Tyrting.

**Judith:** The sword of the legends?

**Anna:** The cursed sword. Could we have actually found it?

**Judith:** (Reciting) “We are the Valkyries, the Spear Women. The ribs of our loom rain down blood. Warrior’s lives fill our grey web. Our cloth is heavy with the heads of men. With red threads we work the loom, weave the sword of Tyrfing for Odinn’s will.”

*(Tyrfing is unsheathed. The drum begins to beat)*

**Marianne:** There were many Shieldmaidens stories tied to this sword.

**Anna:** Lothgera

**Judith:** Hervor.

**Marianne:** Aslog

**Judith:** Whose story do we tell?

**Anna:** Let us tell them all.

**Marianne:** This is a story in a story, and a journey through time. It is hard to see the past for what it was, rather than what we *need* it to be. Byzantine historians recorded that when the Varangians suffered a devastating defeat in the Siege of Dorostolon, the victors were stunned to find armed women among the fallen warriors. One of the earliest records of Shieldmaidens is described through the pen of a medieval monk.

**Judith:** *(As Saxo Grammaticas, a bit of a book worm)* “There were once women in Denmark who dressed themselves to look like men and spent almost every minute

cultivating soldiers' skills. ...They courted military celebrity so earnestly that you would have guessed they had unsexed themselves. Those especially who had forceful personalities or were tall and elegant embarked on this way of life. As if they were forgetful of their true selves they put toughness before allure, aimed at conflicts instead of kisses, tasted blood, not lips, sought the clash of arms rather than the arm's embrace, fitted to weapons hands which should have been weaving, desired not the couch but the kill..."

**Anna:** Well, we know his opinion of women warriors.

**Judith:** Which shows that the idea of female soldiers was unusual, if not unnatural.

**Anna:** Or at least how a Christian monk living two hundred years later would think them!

**Marianne:** Ladies, please, are we telling this story or are we not? Do you want to take up the sword Tyrfing and see for yourself if the stories are true? (*They both shake their heads*)

**Judith:** (*awkward, a bit of an offer of peace*): Well then, if we're telling the story of Tyrfing, how should we begin?

**Anna:** Perhaps we should start at the beginning. The stories of the legends and sagas might tell us much we do not know.

**Marianne:** Burning ice, biting flame; that is how life began. The south is a realm called Muspell. That region flickers with dancing fires. It seethes and it shines. No one can endure it except those born into it. Black Surt sits there; on the furthest reach of land, brandishing a flaming sword;

**Judith and Anna:** Tyrfing.

**Marianne:** He sits and waits for the end when he will rise and savage the gods and cover the whole world in fire.

**Judith:** In the North is a realm called Niflheim. It is packed with ice and covered in vast sweeps of snow.

**Anna:** In the middle is the land of Giunungegap, mild as hanging air on a summers evening. This is where life began.

**Marianne:** Words began to form, began to sing out of the earth. Telling the stories of the world. This is the magic that Allfather learned when he hung on the tree Yggdrasill.

**Anna:** Allfather?

**Marianne:** You know him by a different name, the God of all Gods, Odin.

**Judith:** *(in awe)* The wanderer.

*(Marianne moves the sword into the centre of the stage; all three come together, singing the song of the Yggdrasill)*

**SONG OF Yggdrasill (actors transform into Viking women).**

Yggdrasill

(Yggdrasill)

Old Norse

Ask veit ek standa,

heitir Yggdrasil,

hár baðmr, ausinn

hvíta auri;

þaðan koma döggar

þærs í dala falla;

stendr æ yfir grœnn

Urðar brunn.



I know of an ash tree

It is named Yggdrasil,

A tall tree, sprinkled

With clear water;

It came from the dew

That falls on the valley;

It stands always green

Over Urd's well.

**Marianne:** Odin travelled the earth, a perpetual wanderer. And the men who worshiped him built great ships that could move faster than the wind could take them. They sought their fortune on the waters.

**Judith:** The sea kings swarmed on the waves, defying the wild ocean with its monsters, and all men and things.

**Anna:** The brides of the Norsemen would become Queens of the Sea. The bark of a sea king will be her palace, and mad waves and winds her true subjects.

**Judith (as the Brides):** The waves make me weep. I don't wish to see them, since my sweetest companions sank under the sea-cliffs. The dark seas are dangerous to the Norsemen. Cruel grief is brought by the burden of the waves, it buries our kin, buries our joy.

**Marianne:** From the fires of the south, ruin was forged in a sword. Misspell the Destroyer whispered into the ears of the dwarves in the earth secrets of destruction. He gave them the skills to forge his flaming sword.

**Anna:** Named Tyrfing, forged by the dwarves for Angantyr.

**Marianne:** Angantyr, King of the Berserks, who used magical means to harden their bodies so they could not be injured by fire or sword. The Berserks sang songs in battle, they drove themselves mad with the fierceness of the fight, and killed everyone in their path.

**Anna:** But Angantyr longed for more power, more strength. He forced the dwarf to make him a sword like no other.

**Judith:** Now, everyone knows that when you force a dwarf to make a magical weapon for you, chances are the dwarf is going to curse it, and Tyrfing was no exception.

**Marianne:** Tyrfing had great power. It would make the owner of it invincible in battle. It would kill anyone struck by it, whether they received a mere scratch or a mighty

blow. Angantyr took the sword believing he would be the greatest warrior on earth. A berserk who all would fear.

**Judith:** But the dwarf was clever. The sword would be as powerful as desired. But worse. The sword Tyrfing could not be stopped. No one could return the sword to its sheath unless it was wet with blood. It would kill without control. It would kill foe and friend, and brother, and son.

**Marianne:** Angantyr used the sword in battle, becoming the greatest Sea King ever known. His ships were feared when sign of their sails appeared in the distance. Until he came to the Island of Munarvágr. There the sword was not to be stopped. He and his brothers killed all in their path, leaving an island of burial mounds, of bones and tombs. But Angantyr found he could not return the sword to its sheath. His brothers tried to help him return it, but they were killed in his path. Angantyr cried in despair, finding no end for Tyrfing's need for blood. He builds his own grave, falling on the sword to silence it forever more.

*SONG (RECORDING OR LIVE) Release of the flame graves from the balcony)*

Wardruner song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7gY5uYDb1lo>

Pinned by Þrúðr

[Leon Moore](#) 7 months ago

Binder deg til meg Tráðar tri eg tvinner Tri gongar gjél for deg Tri songar syng for deg For á skilje For á sjá Kvér eg yver deg Ramme runar hjalar Ris opp med Hugen Rir ut med Hugen No vender eg mi vise Den fylgjer nye far

**Anna:** Now Angantyr had a daughter named Hervor, one who drew breath shortly after her father's death. She was brought up to be a lady, skilled at weaving beautiful tapestries, dancing fine dances, and singing fine songs.

**Hervor:** But I do not want to be a lady. I want to fight battles. My father was a great warrior, why shouldn't I be the same?

**Anna:** She grew up and was strong like men, and when she could, she practiced more with a shield and a sword than with sewing. She grew up wild and free, doing more bad than good, and causing trouble. She was lawless, like her father, sneaking into the forest and killing men for their money."

**Bjarmar:** Hervor. You are causing trouble amongst the townsfolk. You must stop terrorizing the countryside, and grow to be the lady you are born to be.

**Hervor:** But Hervor felt a deep need inside her to fight. Once in the forest she came across a dwarf, and fought him for his bag of gold.

**Dwarf:** You are just like your father, stupid girl. It will be your downfall.

**Hervor:** What do you mean? Bjarmar is my father; a wiser and nobler ruler does not walk this earth.

**Dwarf:** He is no father of yours. Your father, Angantyr, was a Berserk who died far off on an island in the Northlands. He had the dwarves make him a sword, named Tyrfing. This sword killed him for his ruthlessness. It will surely kill you too if you continue on your chosen path.

**Marianne:** Hervor could not rest after hearing of her father, Angantyr. The sword of power caught her in its spell and she dreamed of finding it, and her birthright.

**Hervor:** Mother, make for me man's clothing, the kind you would if I were your son. My dreams have shown me but one destiny. I'll not find happiness here at home.

**Marianne:** So she took on the clothes of a man (forbidden in her land) and ran away on a Viking ship to seek out the island where her father died.

**Hervor:** Hervor travelled for years on the Viking ship, marauding and sailing across the sea. She became so fierce in battle that she was given the title of Captain.

**Marianne:** It was not to long before she heard word of where her father died.

**Hervor:** I'll go there and see the graves. A fine blade might be buried there; that prize is mine unless I die first.

**Marianne:** She landed on the shores of an island where the wind never stopped blowing. Her fellow sailors would not harbor at such a cursed place. They left Hervor on shore, and sailed off to more adventures.

**Hervor:** This Island is haunted with the ghost of my father; I can feel him all around. Excuse me? I am strange to these lands and do not know my way. I am looking for the site of a battle long ago? Perhaps you know where it is?

**Old Woman:** Go back to your home, girl. To come to this island alone is unwise. Do you not know this land, and all in it is cursed?

**Hervor:** I have no home. But even if I did, I would not go back. Please, I am looking for the graves of those who fought and died here.

**Old Woman:** Hush. Do not speak of that dreadful place. You do not know the danger you are in. Run away from this place, as fast as your feet will take you. There is nothing here for you but sorrow and death.

**Hervor:** Please. My father's grave lies here. I have fought many battles, and travelled long to find him. Please, show me the way: as a reward you shall have this gold necklace. Please, it is very valuable; it could feed your family for a year.

**Old Woman:** You do not understand. To come to this land of shadows all alone, is sheer folly. Look, do you see those flames all around us? Over the fen and bogs of this island the fires of the dead are lit to lure lost travelers to their doom. Look foolish girl, the graves are opening. I will not stay here past sunset. Come with me now. We must go quickly.

**Hervor:** *(as if under a spell)* Fear not the fire, fear not the graves: Although the island be all aflame. Never should warriors while they live yield to terror. I am a warrior, even if I am a foolish girl as you call me. If you won't go with me, tell me the way and I will go alone.

**Old woman:** I dare not. May the gods grant you luck, girl. You will need it.

**Marianne:** Hervor walked towards the burial mounds. She saw the grave-fires and the graves standing open. She was not afraid. She passed the fires as if they were smoke, until she reached the graves of the berserks. Bloated with blood, red clouds veil the sky—gruesome to gaze on, ghastly to view. The blood of heroes hues the heavens, but the battle-women can still sing.

**Song:**

***(Hervor Alone sings)***

Hvem skal syngje meg \_\_\_\_\_ Who shall sing me  
i daudsvevna slynge meg \_\_\_\_\_ into the death-sleep sling me  
når eg på Helvegen går \_\_\_\_\_ When I walk on the Path of Death  
og dei spora eg trår er kalda, så kalda \_\_\_\_\_ and the tracks I tread are cold, so cold

***(Other two join in)***

Eg songane søkte \_\_\_\_\_ I sought the songs  
Eg songane sende \_\_\_\_\_ I sent the songs  
då den djupaste brunni \_\_\_\_\_ when the deepest well  
gav meg dråper så ramme \_\_\_\_\_ gave me the drops so touched  
av Valfaders pant \_\_\_\_\_ of Death-fathers wager  
Alt veit eg, Odin \_\_\_\_\_ I know it all, Odin  
var du gjømde ditt auge \_\_\_\_\_ where you hid your eye

Hvem skal synge meg \_\_\_\_\_ Who shall sing me  
i daudsvevna slynge meg \_\_\_\_\_ into the death-sleep sling me  
når eg på Helvegen går \_\_\_\_\_ When I walk on the Path of Death  
og dei spora eg trår er kalda, så kalda \_\_\_\_\_ and the tracks I tread are cold, so  
cold

Årle ell i dagars hell \_\_\_\_\_ early in the days end  
enn veit raven om eg fell \_\_\_\_\_ still the raven knows if I fall

Når du ved Helgrindi står \_\_\_\_\_ When you stand by the Gate of  
Death  
og når du laus deg må riva \_\_\_\_\_ And you have to tear free  
skal eg fylgje deg \_\_\_\_\_ I shall follow you  
over Gjallarbrua med min song \_\_\_\_\_ across the Resounding Bridge  
with my song

Du blir løyst frå banda som bind deg! \_\_\_\_\_ You will be free from the  
bonds that bind you!

Du er løyst frå banda som batt deg! \_\_\_\_\_ You are free from the bonds  
that bound that you!

**Hervor:** Father? (*Silence*) I know you are there. You know what I seek. (*Silence*)  
Please, Angantyr, wake! Your only daughter calls you. Give up from the grave the  
gleaming sword that the dwarves named Tyrfing. Father, Uncles, awake! Hear me,  
all of you, under the tree-roots, with sharp swords, with shields and red spears, the  
weapons of war (*silence*). What? Are you afraid to return to the land of the living?  
Much are you changed, children of Arngrim, Once so mighty: are you now afraid?  
Will the sons of the great Berserks refuse to listen or speak with me?

*(She listens, no one speaks)*

**Hervor:** Fine. May the earth shred you all to pieces; may you rot. Father, I command you to give back the sword. It is my birthright. You know this is true. Fine weapons are unfit for ghosts.

**Angantyr (Marianne):** And Angantyr, once a warrior stronger than any Norseman. A berserk, whose frenzy made the bravest tremble before him, rose from the dead.

*(To Hervor)* Evil it is, Hervor, my daughter, to call down such curses upon us:

Your words are mad. Why do you wake the dead? Why do you want this sword which gives nothing but blood and misery to those who use it? Look at me? No family buried me deep, but I was left, like all here, to rot here on the battle field. Tyrfing destroys all in its path.

**Hervor:** Tell me the truth, that the gods May bless your grave. Do you have the sword? Why are you unwilling to yield your heritage to your only child?

**Angantyr:** Look around you, my daughter. You see the fires on the graves? The island is nothing but one searing flame; all is a pathway to hell itself. All caused by the sword you seek. Go, while there's time: return to your ship.

**Hervor:** With no fire can you frighten me. I am not afraid of the dead.

**Angantyr:** Hear me, Hervor; hear from me now, Daughter of princes, the doom I foretell: This Tyrfing will destroy your family, destroy your children, kill them all. You will bear a son, a bold warrior, who shall wield Tyrfing, trust in its strength: But he will be doomed and take with him his only brother.

**Hervor:** You are nothing but cowards. I curse you all Give back the wondrous sword. Son of Vikings, it is foolish to hide it in the earth. The sword must be returned to the living.

**Angantyr:** Little do you know. Wretched woman, I tell you again, this Tyrfing will destroy your children, kill them all.

**Hervor:** *(Hervor takes the sword from her father)* Little do I care what may come. What fate it holds for my family.

**Angantyr:** Take care with a sword of such power. Use it with respect and Tyrfing will be good to you. Use it carelessly, and it will ruin all you hold dear.

*(Angantyr hands the sword over to Hervor who stands with the sword as if under a spell and begins to move in triumph to the sword dance of the Shieldmaiden)*

**Hervor:** Hervor took the sword and sailed the seas, and used the sword well. She dressed as men do, wielding the mighty Tyrfing and gaining power and bounty wherever she went.

**Judith:** Others were not as careful with the sword.

*(Hervor glances up in fear)*

**Judith:** As her father warned her, Hervor's sons destroyed each other with the cursed Tyrfing. The Shieldmaiden was the only warrior who was able to keep the curse at bay.

*(Hervor moves through the land, dancing a dance of the shieldmaiden with her sword to the song Trøllabundin and the sound of the drum, her movements are seductive to Brunhilde who begins to copy the movements of Hervor and eventually takes the cursed sword from her side)*

**Song:**

Trøllabundin eri eg eri eg

Galdramaður festi meg festi meg

Trøllabundin djúpt í míni sál í míni sál  
Í hjartanum logar brennandi bál brennandi bál

Trøllabundin eri eg eri eg  
Galdramaður festi meg festi meg  
Trøllabundin inn í hjartarót í hjartarót  
Eyga mítt festist har ið galdramaðurin stóð

Spellbound I am, I am  
The wizard has enchanted me, enchanted me  
Spellbound deep in my soul, in my soul  
In my heart burns a sizzling fire, a sizzling fire

Spellbound I am, I am  
The wizard has enchanted me, enchanted me  
Spellbound in my heart's root, my heart's root  
My eyes gaze to where the wizard stood

*(Brunhilde takes the sword from Hervor; she holds the sword in her hand as if spellbound)*

**Marianne:** Be wary of the power of Tyrfing, it holds much power, but also much ruin.

**Hervor:** Ruin to those you love.

**Marianne:** Ruin to *all* you love.

**Anna:** There was once a goddess named Brunhilde, a beautiful Valkyrie as strong as the rock in the mountain, and as fair as the river which dances in the sunlight. She fell under the thrall of a giant snake which hypnotized her to keep her in his power.

**Brunhilde:** A great warrior named Sigurur freed her from the venomous creature, and she loved him with all her heart.

**Gudrun:** But so did another lady, a scheming lady named Gudrun.

**Brunhilde:** Sigurur returned her love and they lived in peace together, having a baby daughter named Aslog.

**Gudrun:** But Gudrun tricked Sigurur, giving him a magic potion of forgetfulness, and lured him away to forget all about Brunhilde. She then tricked Brunhilde into marrying her brother instead.

**Brunhilde:** Betrayal after betrayal caught the lovely Brunhilde and her lost love. Now, it never bodes well to betray a Valkyrie, and, Brunhilde took up Tyrfing at last. She first killed her lover Sigurur's son and showed the child to his father. She then killed Sigurur, for deserting her, and killed her false husband. No one tricks a Valkyrie.

**Aslog:** As Brunhilde looks around, all she sees are the dead. Her rival Gudrun, she drove mad. Gudrun served her own children's blood to her husband as wine, destroying all of her kin, leaving Brunhilde alone with the dead.

**Brunhilde:** What have I done? I have killed all I love, all I desired in this world. There is nothing left but to kill the last on earth. Myself.

**Aslog:** But Brunhilde forgot the child she and Sigurur had born. Forgot her poor little girl, left alone and friendless in the world.

### **SONG:**

Sofðu unga ástin mín.

Úti regnið grætur.

Mamma geymir gullin þín,  
gamla leggi og völuskrín.  
Við skulum ekki vaka um dimmar nætur.

Það er margt sem myrkrið veit,  
minn er hugur þungur.  
Oft ég svarta sandinn leit  
svíða grænan engireit.  
Í jöklinum hljóða dauðadjúpar sprungur.

Sofðu lengi, sofðu rótt,  
seint mun best að vakna.  
Mæðan kenna mun þér fljótt,  
meðan hallar degi skjótt,  
að mennirnir elska, missa, gráta og sakna.  
Sleep my little love,  
Outside the rain is weeping.  
Mommy keeps watch over your gold,  
Old leg bones and a little treasure chest.\*  
Let's not stay awake through dark nights.

There is much that darkness knows,  
My mind is heavy.  
Often I've seen the black sand  
Scorching green meadows.

In the glacier rumbles deadly-deep cracks.

Sleep long, sleep tight,

It's best to wake up late.

Hardship will teach you soon,

While the day becomes night,

That the people love, lose, cry and mourn.

*(Aslog weeps for her dead mother. Lothgera comes to comfort her).*

**Aslog:** That song is sorrow to me so long as I'm alive.

**Lothgera:** The curse of the sword is like the curse of a man's love.

**Brunhilde:** The song reminds me of him. The one man I sang oaths of love. I wanted that bright warrior, like no other. I loved him well.

**Aslog:** Poor Brunhilde. All her magic could not save her from her love. Men deceive women. The fairer their words, the falsier their thoughts.

**Lothgera:** Let no one mock what touches all. Time and again wise women have behaved like idiots in the name of some grand passion.

**ALL THREE WOMEN:** Ragnar Lothbrok

(They look at each other)

**Lothgera:** Do we tell his story or ours?

**Aslog:** We were his wives.

**Lothgera:** He had many.

**Aslog:** So did you.

**Lothgera:** Well, what was I supposed to do? Wait and pine?

**Aslog:** You were quick to run back and help him when he needed you though.

**Lothgera:** Well, that was what I was good at. Fighting. Marriage... Less so.

**Aslog:** Ragnar Lothbrok was the ruler of Sweden. He soon left his kingdom to sail over the waters and invade other lands across the ocean. Soon he became ruler of Norway and all the North Lands.

**Thora:** Ragnar Lothbrok was as beautiful as he was powerful a warrior.

**Lothgera:** I guess he was alright.

**Aslog:** And so were we.

**Lothgera:** A shieldmaiden

**Thora:** A Princess.

**Aslog:** A Goddess.

*(All three women try and grab the attention of the audience with their stories)*

**Lothgera:** Give me the sword. It is my story to tell. I am the first of his wives. And the bravest.

**Thora:** This is what I do not understand. Just because you are a Shieldmaiden, why does that make you braver? Or better? I managed to land, gave advice, raised the children, built the sails for the ships, and wove linen prized throughout the land as valuable gold. Without me there would be no power of the Norse. Why are you so special?

**Lothgera:** There was once the daughter of a great warrior. She learned how to hold and hoist a shining shield, and to wield a lance. Like her father, she twisted bowstrings and shaped bowshafts and loosed quivering arrows. She learned the art of sword-play, and could swim across sounds. Her name was Lothgera, Shieldmaiden.

**Marianne:** One day, unannounced, a goddess walked out of the forest. (*To Lothgera,*) I have brought you a gift. These are the runes; they will give you the words of the heroes of old.

**Lothgera:** Do you know the words against the pain of the mind, pain of the heart, pain of the body?

**Marianne:** I will teach you, my daughter, to know what it means to temper your weapons with the blood of the enemies. But take care; do not go seeking after bloodshed. For you hold Tyrfing, the cursed sword.

**Lothgera:** I do not fear the sword's curse. I am the daughter of warrior women. Women who could send their lovers into battle with a smile, and slay them with their own hands, if they returned with dishonour. Any lover of mine must scorn the peaceful life. No land bound hero for me but one who seeks out danger. My lover must be a Sea King.

**Anna:** Lothgera was a fearless warrior and ruler of a beautiful land of the Norse. Her green valley was sought by many powerful rulers, and she fought hard to protect it from enemies bound to grab all of Norway for themselves.

**Lothgera:** Her dark hair fell in rich profusion over her neck and shoulder. She didn't feel the need to dress as a man. She rode before her soldiers, cheering them on, and fought the enemy herself with sword and spear. Many fell beneath her strokes, but the enemy became too strong for her little band to resist and they were forced to retreat. Not so this heroic maiden. Captivity or death threatened to be her doom, but she fought on, her bright silver armour making her conspicuous wherever the battle was hottest.

**Ragnar:** Ragnar Lothbrok, seeing that she stood in sore need of help, seized his sword, hastened to her side and fought desperately with the enemy.

**Lothgera:** These princes are powerful: their blades are bloody, their swordpoints poisoned. Hope for victory is vain.

**Rothgera:** Who are you, monstrous maiden? You can hardly win against these warriors. This army is a strong one, it is best to seek safety. I will stay and fight.

**Lothgera:** Where are your manners, master of men? I'll turn my sword on you before I let you protect me. This is my army, my battle. I feel no fear. I will fight until I can fight no more.

**Anna:** Side by side the two fought until the enemy was defeated and left in retreat.

**Ragnar:** What is your name, fair warrior Queen? I am the great Ragnar Lothbrok, and you should be my bride!

**Lothgera:** My playful paws you can see here, King. You ask for my hand? I'll rip up your robes, royal one, when we meet. My embrace is not soft for you, Southern king. I know you want what all want, the richness of my green valley.

**Anna:** The mighty Lothgera set a bear on Ragnar when he approached her palace.

**Ragnar:** But Ragnar was not to be deterred. He tried again. Fair queen, I saw you in battle against enemies trying to capture your land. My land is rich and vast, I do not need your valley. Please, remember I fought by your side. I fell in love with you for bravery and skill on the battlefield.

**Lothgera:** Just a hasty kiss I'll have from you; then you'll have from my hand the sword I hold. See? You are no fit playmate for women, Ragnar. If you want me, you must get past wild animals I leave at my gate. You can hardly win against them. My warriors are powerful, their blades are bloody.

**Ragnar:** But Ragnar went again to the dwelling of the maiden with axes ready. He caught the beasts by the throat and rung their necks. Lothgera, come out of your fine halls. You cannot keep me away with wild animals. I do not want your land, I do not want your kingdom, I have my own. I want a bold warrior for my bride.

**Lothgera:** Ragnar, if I take you for a husband, we must promise each other to put aside our battles. Bloody feuds consume the lives of women and men in this mortal world. You and I shall never be separated if we can meet as equals. But do not ask me to give up what is mine.

**Anna:** They lived happily for some time. The warrior took refuge from his enemies in the Queen's green valley. Stayed for three years with his beautiful warrior bride.

**Ragnar:** Lothgera was an excellent wife to Ragnar, but soon the warrior grew restless. The time came when he needed to return to his kingdom. *(to Lothgera)* Come with me, Lothgera, to my kingdom across the sea. I must return, I hear troubles are brewing. The Jutlanders think I will never return and are raising an army to seize my land. Use your sword, help me regain my kingdom.

**Lothgera:** I will not leave my country. And you cannot ask me make you ruler of the land where I am Queen. If you leave me and return, I will divorce you and marry another. But Ragnar, if you go, listen to what I tell you. Behold the sword of Tyrting and be warned. Beware of your restlessness. Your search for power will put fetters on your flesh. Leave you with nothing but earth-wounds, a grave. Will you still leave me knowing your fate? *(Ragnar turns. She watches him leave)* Ambition burns with anger, I see it now. Both for him, and for me. His love would never have faded had I not divorced him. *(defending herself to the audience)* He wanted me to leave my kingdom. Why should I give my own Queendom to follow him to his land far away? I

will not do it. I came to his aid later though. When his enemies tried to take over his kingdom yet again, I fought beside his son, as I had fought beside him.

**Marianne:** Lothgera took out Tyrfing again and proved herself on the battlefield.

**Lothgera:** I went then to Sweden to help the army of Ragnar's son. Walking amongst the warriors, I raised my army and shouted once more, "I am Lothgera, Shieldmaiden! Old friend of Ragnar" I have done more deeds in days long gone than any of you. Oh hear me, Jutlanders, the wives of my people will kill all your men and make corpses out of them. I flew round to the rear of the enemy, taking them unawares, and destroyed many of Ragnar's foes. With sharpened spears I slashed and wounded all around me, feeling alive once more. Tyrfing glowed red with blood. Ragnar's son Harald looked so much like his father that my heart sang once more. We fought shoulder to shoulder, making me drunk on the bloodshed. I returned home with thoughts of Ragnar and my youth, but the fire died as I entered my home once more. There was my Green Valley. There was peace. Boredom. My second husband stood there with his army. He had not seen any of my deeds. He did not know what awoke inside me once more. Rage overtook me. Tyrfing's power took over my soul. I did not return the sword to its sheath, but killed my husband, his army, and only when all the men were gone did I put the sword away. Finally, I ruled alone once more.

**Thora:** Love can be powerful; it can grab hold like the tight coils of a snake.

**Lothgera:** Maybe the best idea is mine, to end up alone..

**Thora:** I may not have had a sword, but I gave Ragnar his name. His purpose.

**Aslog:** Snake Charmer.

**Thora:** Well technically, hairy breeches.

**Lothgera:** It doesn't translate well.

**Marianne:** There was once a princess who was as wise as she was beautiful. Her father asked her advice on all things, and found when he followed it; he was successful in anything he set out to do.

**ANNA:** Now however, the King and his daughter are in great distress. Some time ago, two of his warriors presented him with a griffin's egg, which was part of the plunder they had brought home with them from a foreign land. At the King's orders, it was hatched by a swan, and a curious little winged serpent came out of it. He gave the creature to his daughter, who put it in a golden cage and fed it from her own hands. It grew so quickly however, that it was too large for the cage, and even for the room, and now it surrounds the whole house in which the princess lives. The monster listened to her alone, following her commands, loving her as no other.

**JUDITH:** But he guards her with a jealous eye, and won't let her leave the house, or receive food from anyone but the man who brings his own food. No one dares to touch him, for his eyes are like flaming fire, his breath is deadly poison, and with his tail he can break the strongest oak tree, as easily as if it were a reed. The king therefore, in order to rid himself of this curse, has promised the hand of his daughter to whoever shall succeed in slaying the monster."

**MARIANNE:** Ragnar Lothbrok heard of the lady's plight and lost no time in procuring a garment of thick wool and ox hide, which he steeped in tar, for he knew that through such a garment neither poison nor venom could penetrate. He set out with his strongest warriors to save her from the serpent.

**Judith:** Ragnar found the snake coiled around Thora's home, but apparently asleep. He tried to stab the snake with his sword, but his skin was as strong as any metal. Presently the monster raised its huge body, and tried to seize Ragnar in its jaws, hissing with rage, and spitting its deadly venom at him. But as it thus coiled

itself about, Ragnar perceived an exposed spot under its throat, where the scales appeared to be soft, and at this spot he aimed his spear, with all the strength he could muster. For a few moments the creature writhed and turned in agony, so that the house was shaken to its foundation, and then suddenly the great monster sank to the ground dead.

**Thora:** The Princess, awakened by the noise, stepped to the window, and beheld the victor, but before she had time to look upon him more closely he withdrew himself from her gaze. Herrod, as soon as he received the news of the event, ordered that the people should meet together, in order to decide to whom the prize should be awarded. On the appointed day Ragnar took his place in the assembly, clothed in his tarred garments. The king asked for the man who killed the snake to come forward with proof and take his prize. They produced the broken spear for all to see. When Ragnar fit the spear to his shaft, they stared at him in disbelief. He then revealed that he was indeed King Ragnar Lothbrok, and Thora gladly consented to be his bride.

**Lothgera:** Not for long though.

**Thora:** No not for long. I walked awhile with him, but I wanted to walk longer. My feet just passed the fence; my heart followed still further. If waves had been wide lands, had seas been grassy pastures, there would have been no limit to the length of my walk with him.

**Aslog:** But then...

**Thora:** I died.

**Aslog:** You died.

**Thora:** I gave him two sons. But childbirth was the end of me.

**Lothgera:** Like so many women.

**Thora:** Is that it? Is that all of my story? I give him his name, he rescues me, I die?

**Lothgera:** How many stories of women offer little else? I refuse to be some man's story.

*(Song of comfort for Thora, other women lay flowers at her feet, final image her lying as the dead Brunhilde)*

SONG (Recorded or live)

Rún  
SKÁLD

Eru vödur allar frá viðolfi  
Vitkar allir frá vilmeiði  
En seiðberendr frá svart-höfða  
Frá svart-höfða

Fehu, uruz, thurisaz; ansuz, raido, kenaz  
Gebo, wunjo, hagalah, naudhiz, isa, jera, heiwaz

Eru vödur allar frá viðolfi  
Vitkar allir frá vilmeiði  
En seiðberendr frá svart-höfða  
Frá svart-höfða

Fehu, uruz, thurisaz; ansuz, raido, kenaz  
Gebo, wunjo, hagalah, naudhiz, isa, jera, heiwaz

Pertho, algiz,...

**Aslog:** My parents died also, but they did not have to. Brunhilde, Sigurur. They were so caught up in their own tragedy, they didn't care what happened to anyone else.

**Lothgera:** It is an old story.

**Aslog:** I could take up Brunhilde's sword. But I will not. We need to learn from the mistakes of our parents. My mother thought not once about what might happen to me in her last moments. I only survived because was rescued by an old man, a faithful bard from court. He wandered through the lands. I used to fall asleep to his songs, hiding in his harp.

**Bard:** Let me sing the song of Brunhilde and her love.

**SONG** (Recorded Brunhilde and Sigurur) SONG Brunhilde und Sigurd (recorded)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xcZxY2qX7Ek>

**Aslog** (*Begins to weep for her lost parents*)

**Bard:** Hush my little one; you have me still who loves you, and the good god Balder, Odin's most beloved son, the God of Light and Song. He will protect you when I am dead and gone. Your parents are together in Valhalla. Do you know, child, those warriors who listened to my song thought the hearth bewitched after hearing your cries. I shall have to call you my little witch, and you would not like that, King Sigurur's daughter! Give me a kiss and say you love me and I won't let you cry. You are the daughter of a famous hero and a Valkyrie! Now let us have no more tears.

**Aslog:** And with the blessing of the night, the fugitive princess child crept back into her hiding place inside the harp. A little prisoner cradled in music.

**Bard:** The old man now reached a hut and saw an old woman who was alone at the door. "Please, dear woman. Would you not give shelter to an old man on a cold night? If you give me food to eat and a bed to sleep in, I will pay you for your trouble. For I am weary and cold.

**Evil Woman:** I do not have much, and I don't like strangers. But I suppose you can stay, show me your gold now and I will light a fire. – (The Bard stretched out his weary limbs at the fire). The woman suddenly started at the glitter of his gold rings. When she went near his harp, she saw a piece of rich embroidery peeking through and an evil gleam of greed was seen in her eye.

**JUDITH:** Late in the night as the old man slept, she called to her husband,

**Evil Woman:** Ake, my love, look at what fate has brought us! This old man may not look like much, but I believe he is some rich man in disguise. Kill him now, and we will never have to work again. He has riches hidden in that harp, I know it.

**Ake:** I would not kill a man who has been offered safe harbour; it would not bring us luck.

**Evil Woman:** Don't be foolish, who would know? He is a stranger here. Kill him now.

**(JUDITH)** And the two murdered the loyal bard as he slept. When they reached the harp, however, rather than find riches, they found a little girl instead.

*(Running to her protector, she cried over the old man's body in despair.)*

**Ake:** The old couple found they hadn't the heart to kill the little child, and kept her instead to work for them in their wicked house and changed her name to Kraka.

**Kraka:** Kraka grew up strong and wise. She hated her foster family and every night sang the bard's song of her heroic parents.

**Judith:** One day, while she was singing, a Viking ship sailed into the harbour, and the men went looking for provisions from on the land. When they saw the beauty of Kraka, they ran back to their leader, Ragnar Lothbrok, speaking of the peasant girl's beauty.

**Ragnar:** Who is this girl you speak of?

**Men (Judith):** She is the daughter of a fisherman. Though how that ugly old couple could have such a beautiful daughter is a mystery. She has the bearing of a Queen, not a goatherd.

**Ragnar:** Impossible! I cannot believe it. You have all seen my grief over my lost wife, Thora. How can you speak of another woman's beauty in my presence? It could not compare.

**Men:** She is worthy of admiration. She is as lovely as Thora.

**Ragnar:** Well, then I would like to see her, but to compare to Thora she must be wise as well as beautiful. Tell her to come to me neither dressed nor undressed, fasting nor eating, alone or in company.

**Kraka:** The men came to Kraka and told her of their great lord, Ragnar and his request. Kraka, who longed to get away from the evil family who killed her protector, thought this over carefully. She came to Ragnar Lothbrok, wearing a net instead of clothing, eating an onion, and with only a dog by her side.

**Ragnar:** Who are you lady? Are those poor folk your family?

**Kraka:** I will not answer your question. I will go with you on your ship, but only if you marry me. I have not been raised to be the captor of anyone. Be careful how you answer.

**Ragnar:** Very well. Though you are not of royal descent, I will make you my wife and queen.

**Judith:** Here me Ragnar, though you think me poor and lowly, I am the child of brave hearted folk. If I found out that you were fallen, brought low by blades or slain in battle—that man who did it would be my foeman, and should best beware my bitter vengeance.

**Ragnar:** No such man exists who can defeat me.

Kraka became a loving stepmother to Ragnar's children, and a wise queen. Many years of happy married life followed, and she bore Ragnar five sons, all of whom lived to become powerful heroes and soldiers.

**Kraka:** Ragnar than went off to sea. And Kraka heard that he had been captivated by another chief's daughter. Suddenly her husband was tempted away from her, thinking that as she was from a poor family, she was not a fitting queen for his kingdom. But Kraka did not act hastily. She thought again of her own mother and father. Of how betrayal brought ruin to all she loved. She thought. And thought. And suddenly an idea came to her. She would not tell him that she knew of his plan. Ragnar returned and Kraka was more loving and more charming to him than ever before. One evening, she took out her old harp and sang the song of her parents Brunhilde and Sigurur. The harp began to glow with the power of her song, shining a light on Kraka's head and body.

**Ragnar:** What magic is this? Kraka, why does the song create such a change in you? You seem like a goddess, not a queen.

**Aslog:** My real name is Aslog. I am not the daughter of those murderers who called me their daughter. This song is my story. I am the daughter of the Valkyrie Brunhilde and her warrior King Sigurur. Surely you have heard their story before? I am the lost child.

**Ragnar:** Oh my love. I have been weak, and thought to marry another out of vanity. But I see you are nobler than even I. Please forgive me.

**Aslog:** Ragnar loved her as never before, but their happiness was put an end too shortly. On one of his trips, the Snake Charmer fell into the hands of an old enemy, King Ella of Northumbria, who threw Ragnar Lothbrok into a pit of snakes.

**Lothgera:** The magic of Aslog protected him for a short while, but soon the power of the snakes was too much for him. Oh my lord Ragnar. No more will your ship slide

upon the sea foam. Winds have torn your sail to splinters. The gods have torn your ship asunder.

**Thora:** I see your fallen body bathed in tears of blood. Ragnar, snake killer, will return no more.

**Lothgera:** (*Lothgera looks at the sword Tyrfing*) Strife eats my soul. In pain I will pine for my passion, once pure, glad and strong, that I had. I am full of grief for what could have been. I whisper sorrow to myself alone. My time has past. Here Aslog, take up the sword; it is your turn to fight.

**Aslog:** Here me King Ella! You force me onto the wolf's road. It is dangerous to act wolfishly against the daughter of wolves. You have awoken the daughter of a Valkyrie. I warn you, beware, warrior! I will remain no more in my peaceful Kingdom. You have killed Ragnar Lothbrok. His wife and his sons will revenge him. Here I stand, I will take up the sword Tyrfing used by my mother to kill all who crossed her.

**Lothgera:** The sword Lothgera used to gain power over her land.

**Hervor:** The sword Hervor used to control the seas.

**Aslog:** We are not afraid of a sword cursed in the hands of men. For we are not men.

**Lothgera:** Aslog took up the sword Tyrfing, and led her five sons to revenge his death, killing King Ella as he had destroyed Ragnar.

**Thora:** Her sons fought, ruled, and died for their blood vengeance. But there story is for another day.

**Song: Helvegen Reprise (recorded)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UIHOV07XoDQ&list=RDGQA7RQEo-ss&index=11>

*(The three women return to the Birka grave site)*

**Judith:** What do these stories prove? We don't need a cursed sword to show what power women had in the Viking era. It is all around them. Do women need to do the acts of men to be proven powerful?

**Anna:** Maybe it is too early to prove whether they actually exist or are only creatures of legend. But they are important to tell the story of women, none the less. We see their power, their need for justice, their fighting against the rights they hold.

**Marianne:** And the rights the Norsewomen had would not return to women in Europe for almost a thousand years. We should give them that credit at least.

**Judith:** Should we put our sword to rest?

(They return the sword of Tyrting to the gravesite).