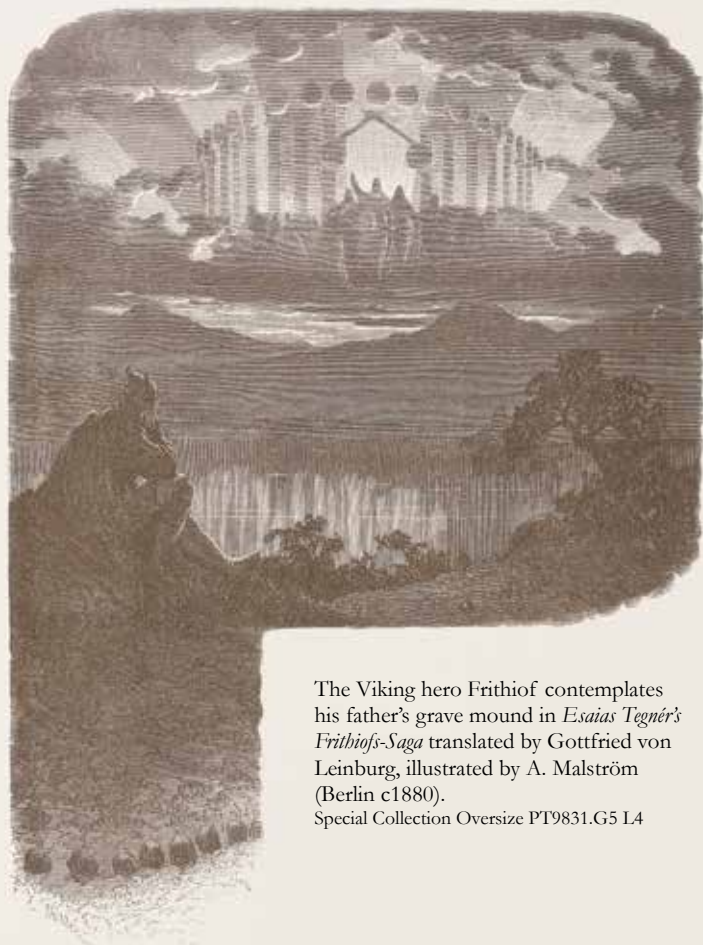


Belief and the Afterlife

When the Scandinavians arrived in the East Midlands they brought their own religious beliefs with them. We know much about these beliefs and their lifestyle from their elaborate burials.



The Viking hero Frithiof contemplates his father's grave mound in *Esaias Tegnér's Frithiofs-Saga* translated by Gottfried von Leinburg, illustrated by A. Malström (Berlin c1880).
Special Collection Oversize PT9831.G5 L4

Women were buried with their finest jewellery as well as items denoting their activities, like spindle whorls used for spinning or keys which are often thought to symbolise a woman's role as manager of the household. Men were generally interred with weapons and their own personal ornaments. A burial was an opportunity to demonstrate the wealth and power of both the deceased and the survivors and to make a public statement. Pagan burials could be richly furnished.

As the Vikings assimilated with the Anglo-Saxons, they slowly became Christianised. Conversion could happen quickly as with the Viking leader Guthrum, who was baptised in 878 after his defeat by King Alfred the Great at Edington. This was part of the peace process that led to the Treaty of Wedmore and the foundation of the Danelaw. However, conversion did not mean that the Vikings immediately abandoned all their old beliefs. Christianisation was a slow process and Anglo-Scandinavians might have worn both Thor's hammers and crosses at the same time. Does this mean that the person

believed in both religions or was wearing a hammer or a cross just a fashion statement? The evidence points to a gradual shift towards Christianity. Unlike Viking burials with multiple objects, Christian burials were generally plain, featuring only the body. They provide scarce evidence for the material culture of Anglo-Scandinavians.



Above: The Norse god Thor and the Mountain by JC Dollman in *EM Wilmot-Buxton, Told by the Northmen* (London 1908).
Eirikur Benedikz Icelandic Collection Juvenile PZ8.1.W4

Left: A common misconception is that the Vikings buried their dead at sea. Geneva Snedden, *Leif and Thorkeel: Two Norse Boys of Long Ago* illustrated by M. Meredith Williams (London 1922).
Eirikur Benedikz Icelandic Collection Juvenile PS3537.N43