

Chapter XLVII

YULE

"Heðinn fared home alone through the woods on Yule evening and found a troll-woman; she rode a warg and had wyrms for reins, and offered her following to Heðinn. 'No', he said. She said, 'You shall pay for that at the bragar-cup.'

"In the evening was the swearing of oaths. The sonargöltr (sacrificial boar) was led forward, folk laid their hands upon it, and folk swore their oaths at the bragar-cup..." ("Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar")

Of all the high feasts of our forebears, Yule is by far the highest, the holiest, and the most fraught with might. During the thirteen nights of Yule, all the worlds meet in the Middle-Garth: the god/esses and the dead walk freely, trolls and alfs come into the homes of humans, and those folk who are closest to the Otherworld may leave their human selves altogether to become the riders of the Wild Hunt or oskorei (Ásgarð-Ride), werewolves, or the embodiments of various of the wights that wander the earth at Yule-tide. But Yule is also the time of the greatest feasting and joy, because it is at Yule that the whole clan, living and dead, gathers as one, sure in the knowledge that even as the Sun rises every year from her greatest darkness, so there will ever be rebirth for us as well. It is not by chance that Yule has preserved the most Heathen customs of any feast: the promise of the Yule log and the ever-green tree also stood as the promise that our folk-ways should live through the long dark winter and rise bright again.

The traditional Yule season is thirteen nights long - called the Weihnachten, or wih-nights, in Germany. These thirteen nights are the march-space between one year and another, the border where the worlds overlap. All that happens between the first sunset and the last dawn of Yule is mightier than at any other time of the year: these are the nights when Wyrð may be turned, when doom is set.

In early times, at least according to the Anglo-Saxons, Yule began on the night before the solstice (that is, either the 19th or 20th of December - varying from year to year; check your almanac), which Bede calls the "Mother-Night". The name suggests that this night was particularly given to the idises and perhaps to Frija; today we think of it as a night for the close family to spend together in the home with each other and their ghosts. This night is ruled over by the house-mother, who stands for all the womanly wights who care for their kin.

The mightiest night of Yule is the solstice itself, the longest night of the year when all the wights who wander in darkness are freest and the human hold on this earth is weakest. The word "Yule" itself is ur-old, its meaning clouded; it could have sprung from roots meaning "wheel"; "time of joy"; "year-turning", "time of sacrifice", or perhaps "blind (dark) time" (de Vries, Wörterbuch, p. 292; Ásgeirr Blondal Magnússon, Órðsifjabók, p. 433). This is the night on which the Yule-log should be burned and the watch kept; this is the night on which the holiest oaths are sworn. It is not good to be alone on this night, for then the only folk about one are trolls and the dead - chancy companions at best!

The Yule-tide ends at "Twelfth Night" (actually Þrettáandi, "thirteenth night" in Old Norse), which was January 6th in christian reckoning (counting from December 25), but for us, is usually held to be the eve of January 1 (counting from December 19). As the first day of the new year, this is itself a day of ørlög, and

what is done and said this day shall set the year to come. No sýmbel is mightier than the one held at midnight on "Twelfth Night"; there is no gainsaying the words that are spoken then, for weal or woe. It should also be mentioned that there are some suggestions that the Norse may actually have held their Yule later than did the Christians (cf. Cleasby-Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, p. 309), though quite how much later is a matter of some guesswork. In Norway, the "twentieth day" of Yule or "Knut's Day" (January 13) was seen as the end of the festival period (Fejlberg, *Jul*, II, p. 303), and de Vries is of the opinion that "in heathen times Midwinter fell about the 14th of January" (*Religionsgeschichte*, II, p. 305). Modern Ásatrúar, however, tend to prefer the solstice - New Year's span. From the Old Norse sources, we know that Yule was most particularly thought of as the time to swear oaths on the holy cup (bragarfull) and the holy boar (sonargöltr), as spoken of in the quote above and described in more detail in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, where the Yule boar is especially mentioned as a beast of Freyr (or, in another manuscript, Freyja). While all oaths are holy - their keeping the measure of the speaker both among humans and god/esses, their breaking a call to the worst luck and a cause for the worst contempt of the folk - those of the Yule night are the holiest of all. The toasts spoken of in the chapter on "Sýmbel" were also part of the traditional Norse celebration; *Orkneyinga saga* describes the drinking of the minni (memory-toasts) - even following a Christian Mass. As discussed below, Yule was a time when strange things often happened, and the greatest feast of the year. It was a time in which peace had to be kept: both the phrases jólafriðr (Yule-Frith) and jólagrið (Yule-Griths) were known.

The might of the Yule time is shown forth in the fact that the god/esses themselves are called jóln (Yule-Beings) in Eyvindr skáldaspillr's "Háleygjatál". It is worth marking that Christopher Arnold, writing in 1674, mentions "neither good nor evil spirits, which are particularly in the air around the birth-time of Christ, and are called 'Juhlafolker', that is, Yule-folk, by the Lapplanders" - a name which bears a suspicious resemblance to the Old Norse jóln. He then describes how the Lapps make sacrifice by taking pieces of their meals on holy days and lifting them up, then putting them in a piece of birch-bark and making a little ship provided with sail and rudder, which they also pour a little fatty gravy into. They hang such ships on a tree behind the house, so that the swarming Yule-host has something to eat (Meisen, *Sagen der wütenden Heer und wilden Jäger*, p. 134). This may well have been a borrowing from Norse custom, in which the ship played such a great part as the sign of the faring from one world to the next; although the elder sources do not mention ships as sacrificial vessels (except in the context of burial), this seems wholly in keeping with the general beliefs of our forebears.

Of all the god/esses, Wodan has the most to do with the Yule-time; indeed, one of his heiti is Jólnir. In *Halfdanar þáttur svarta* (Flateyjarbók, Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar), Óðinn appears in the form of an old Finn to King Hálfðan at a Yule-feast and causes all the food to disappear. Hálfðan tortures him until the king's son Haraldr (later Haraldr inn hárfagri) first asks his father to let the old man go, then frees him himself. Haraldr goes away with him until they come to the place where a banquet is being held, and it turns out that this is where the vanished food has gone; it is then prophesied for Haraldr that he shall become the sole ruler of Norway, which he

does in time. It is then mentioned that Óðinn was especially worshipped by Heathen folk at Yule time. Throughout the winter, but mostly during the twelve nights of Yule, Wodan appears as the leader of the Wild Hunt. The spread of various forms of "Woden's Host" goes down to Switzerland and up through Sweden; although various historical figures or folk from local legends (for instance, the German Dietrich af Bern, the Danish King Valdemar and Christian II; and the English Francis Drake, among others) are named in these legends as well, derivations from the woð-root are the most common; it seems probable that this is one of the god's oldest aspects, if not the very oldest. "Oden" appears in Sweden and Denmark, but not in Norway, where the host is led by Guro Rysserova (Guðrún of Völsunga saga) and her husband Sigurðr - who, despite the fact that he is called "Sigurd Svein" (Young Sigurðr) and all variants of the story describe his early death, is described in Norwegian Wild Hunt legends as terrifyingly old, and decrepit to the point of blindness, so that when he should see, his eyes need to be opened with a hook. This old man with seeing difficulties has nothing in common with Sigurðr Sigmundsson, but bears an eerie resemblance to Sigurðr's godly patron, the aged Óðinn who also goes by the names Bileygr (Weak-Eyed), Herblindi (Host-Blind), Tvíblindi (Double-Blind), and Helblindi (Death-Blind), leading to a very strong suspicion that Norwegian folk tradition might have replaced the name of the god with the name of the hero.

The human side of the Hunt was spoken of under "Man-Making"; it is also clear from the legends, however, that the company included the actual dead. In the Strassburger Chronicle of 1516, it is described how a woman saw her husband, whose head had been split asunder in war, among the host; Hans Sachs' poem "Das wutend heer der kleinen dieb" (1539) describes the wod-host in gruesome detail, including the ravens flapping above to pick out the eyes of the dead, until at last 'there came one behind, who had been hanged the same day, still had his eyes and saw me'. Involvement of folk who are not in a full state of wod with the host can be dangerous: the Zimmerische Chronik tells how one man bandaged a ghost and became ill, while another answered the hunt with the same result. In Pomerania and Westfalia, the Hunt chases travellers to death. M. Landstad cites a Telemark story of the Aasgardsreid leaving a dead man hanging where they had drunken the Yule ale. "He was dressed as a Nummedaler and had silver buttons on his vest. The Aasgardsreid had taken him in Nummedal and carried him along, and they had presumably ridden him so hard that he had burst" (Norsk folkeminnelags skrifter 13, p. 20). The motif of the living person who is picked up by the horde and carried elsewhere is particularly common in Germany and in Norway. A curious form of this theme which is unique to Norway had people undergoing a sort of involuntary separation from their bodies, which lie as if dead while their souls are faring with the oskorei, as Landstad describes: "She fell backwards and lay the whole night as if she were dead. It was of no profit to shake her, for the Aasgardsreid had made off with her". The woman then awakes to tell how she had ridden with the host "so that fire spurted under horse-hooves" (p. 15). In Pomerania, doors are closed against the Hunter to keep children from being carried off; in Bohuslän (Sweden), it was said that "Oden fares from up in the air and takes creatures and children with him". In Denmark, we see two opposing beliefs: houses which were built along "King Valdemar's road" had to leave their doors open so that the Hunt would have free passage, but it was also believed that doors should be

shut, as "Oden's" visit would bring bad luck. De Vries is of the opinion that the original belief was that the Wod-Host's passing was thought to bring blessing, and that it was only after christianization that it was seen as a horde of demons ("Wodan und die wilde Jagd", p. 50).

As spoken of in "Man-Making", gifts of food and drink were often left out for the Hunt. As well as being a thing of terror, the Wod-Host also brought fruitfulness to the field: it was said of the Norwegian jolasveinar that as high as they were able to spring over the ground, the grain would grow to that height. The Northern German Last-Sheaf charm also bears that out: "Wode, give your horse now fodder. Now thistle and thorn - the next year better grain". De Vries comments that "(Wodan's) relationship to the Yule-time, in which he came to Earth with his host of einherjar, led the thoughts to the return of the dead to their old homesteads...They gave out luck and blessing, but especially a blessed harvest...The host of the dead, that roared about in field and meadow at this particular time, must tread forward in just such a mystical connection: its leader Wodan had also a certain might over the success of the harvest" ("Wodan und die Wilde Jagd", p. 51). This was true of both the ghostly host and the wod-taken men who ran about in their masks.

Closely tied to these beliefs is the Scandinavian masking-custom of the Yule-buck - a goat's head on a stick, carried about from house to house by a young man under a furry cloak, who engaged in all manner of wild things. His visits could mean either good or ill luck; but in many communities, he was welcomed in with singing and dancing. However, the Yule-buck was more a frightening figure than an amusing one; one Danish folktale tells of a girl who dared to dance with it alone in the barn at midnight, whereupon it came to life and battered her against the beams until she was thoroughly dead (Simpson, *Scandinavian Folktales*, pp. 80-81). In Norway and Sweden, as well as being a guiser, the Yule-buck is also seen as a wholly supernatural wight, boneless and bloodless, with hair long enough to hide its legs; in earlier days, it hid under the cooking-house and had to be given Yule ale, snaps, and porridge to keep it from destroying everything inside. In Søndmøre, it is called "Howe-buck" and thought to dwell in the burial mound; in Sweden, sudden sicknesses at Yule-time are blamed on this buck (Fejlberg, Jul). It is also sometimes said that the "New Year's-buck" will take whoever does not have new clothes at this time. The Yule-buck may possibly be related to Thonar's goats (and we will remember that in Germany, "Santa Claus" is sometimes said to drive a wagon drawn by two goats), or it may embody that same wild might of death and fruitfulness which we see in the Wild Hunt. A Yule-playlet from Øland has two people, "father" and "son" together with a "buck", singing alternating lines in which they bargain for the buck's life and horn. The "buck" is "shot" at the end of the third verse, falling down and lying as if dead. They then spread a red cloak and a white cloak over the buck; the last verse tells how it gets up, shaking its beard and springing about, and the guiser playing the buck does as described. Another version has a red cloak laid on the goat before the slaughter; then a blue cloak (because he was gray), then a white cloak (because he was a corpse), then a gold cloak, because Yule was near; and before he could be salted away, he got up and shook his beard (Fejlberg, Jul, II, pp. 231-32). This is suspiciously close to the mythic description of Þórr's goats, which can be slaughtered and eaten, then brought back to life by the swinging of the god's Hammer.

Goats made of straw, both small and large, are seen all over the place in Denmark and Sweden at Yule-time. A common Yule decoration in those countries is a small wreath of straw with little straw-goats dangling from it. These creatures - especially the larger ones, whose beards are made from the heads of barley or wheat - suggest that same tie with death and fruitfulness. The goat itself is a rather uncanny beast, and, as Thonar's wain-drawing goats show us, it is as able as a horse or a boar to fare between the worlds.

Although the Last Sheaf was a harvest-custom, special sheaves were also put out at Yule-time "for the birds" - sometimes in the tops of fruit-trees. This was the custom in Norway, Swabia, and the most southerly parts of Germany (Fejlberg, *Jul*, I, 143). Since the Last Sheaf has a special connection with the host of the dead, as does the practice of hanging gifts in trees, it may well be that these "Yule-sheaves" were first meant as gifts to the god/esses and ghosts, who might come to take them in the form of birds (especially crows or ravens?).

As well as Wodan, the Hunt also had a female leader - Perchte/Berchte or Holda, who, as spoken of under "Frija", may well be a German survival of aspects of Frija which were forgotten in the Norse tales. In folk processions of Upper (Southern) Germany, the maskers were called "Perchten", and there were both ugly and beautiful "Perchten" - the former masked as animals and monsters, the latter decorated in fantastic costumes. The beautiful ones often gave gifts, while the ugly ones ran and leapt about most furiously. As with the Norwegian jolsveinar, the higher the Perchten could leap and the more wildly they shouted and ran about, the more blessing they brought to the steads where they came (de Vries, *Religionsgeschichte*, I, p. 451). In a lighter vein, the young boys of a kindred might be allowed to mask as Yule-Swains and come about to the grown folk with some sign of blessing - perhaps dried stalks of grain - which they would give in return for money and candy, as the Easter-Witch girls do at Ostara's feast.

The Wod-Host is not the only band of ghosts that roam at Yule-time. All manner of dead and undead are abroad. In Grettis saga, Glámr meets with the wight that slays him and causes him, in turn, to become a frightful draugr; the hauntings in Eyrbyggja saga also take place during the Yule-time. Trolls are quite common at this time, especially in Iceland, but generally throughout Scandinavia; there are, indeed, a number of stories about bands of trolls who break into people's houses to hold their own feasts, driving the human householders out. In Hrólfs saga kraka, an alf-woman comes to King Helgi at Yule, and he gets the daughter on her who, in time, brings about Hrólfr's death. The mound-alfs are especially active at this time, and are often seen traveling in bands from howe to howe; those who look well at the hills and stones where they live can see them feasting and dancing for Yule.

Christians spent much time warding themselves from the Wod-Host and the other wights that walked at Yule-time; Fejlberg describes how Norwegians put crosses over all the doors of their houses and barns, and cast steel into all springs and wells (*Jul*, I, pp. 141-42); how crosses of straw, rowan, and other materials were common, and knives were laid edge-up on windowsills and door-frames (II, pp. 64, 69). Icelanders, however, kept up a custom which was probably closer to the original: the "bidding the alfs to home" (bjóða álfum heima). The house-mother would sweep everywhere, in every corner, then kindle lights all through the house, where-ever there might be a shadow. She

then went out and around the dwelling, some say three times, and spoke "Come, those who wish to come; stay, those who wish to stay; and fare, those who wish to fare, harmless to me and mine (Komi þeir sem koma vilja, veri þeir sem vera vilja, og fari þeir, sem fara vilja, mér og mínum að meinalausu)" (Árni Björnsson, *Jól á Íslandi*, pp. 138-39). This is the form of the custom recommended to true folk. For those who are troubled by trolls or ill-willing ghosts, rowan and the sign of Thonar's Hammer are the best wards against such wights. Many of the dead were, in fact, very welcome at the Yule feasting: it is particularly important to give the house-ghosts (tomtes, nisses, kobolds, or whatever you choose to call them) their food, beer, and perhaps tobacco at this time. But most of all, it was believed that the dead came back to visit their kin and their old homes, and to see that all was being done rightly; and great trouble was taken to see that everything would suit them. In many homes in Norway, the beds were left to the ghosts, while the living kin slept in the Yule-straw on the floor; in Bornholm, it was important to leave the food standing overnight on the Yule-table (Fejlberg, *Jul*, II, p. 9). Not only were the dead bidden to the home, but the folk went out to pay their worship to the dead; the practice of making offerings to or upon howes continued in Sweden up into this century.

Fruit-trees were especially important at Yule-time. In the *Country Life Book of Old English Customs*, Roy Christian tells how, in Carhampton and other West Country villages on Old Twelfth Night (Jan. 17), "The villagers form a circle round the largest apple tree in a selected orchard. Pieces of toast soaked in cider are hung in the branches for the robins, who represent the 'good spirits' of the tree. The leading wassailer utters an incantation and shot-gun volleys are fired through the branches to frighten away the evil spirits. Then the tree is toasted in cider and urged in song to bring forth much fruit" (p. 133). In Denmark, folk went out and shook all the fruit-trees, then tied straw bands or wreaths around their trunks: thus they assured a good fruit-harvest in the coming summer (Nordisk Bondereligion, p. 39). The Swedes strewed the crumbs and leftovers from the Yule meals around their fruit-trees (Fejlberg, *Jul*, I, p. 201). When we think on the meaning of the apple and of fruit in general, this is little wonder: for the fruit-tree was especially the sign of life through death, the apple the embodiment of the hope of rebirth and the seed bearing the soul of the clan. The fruit-bearing tree was thus treated as an honoured member of the family - as the very Bairn-Stock - at this holiest of all times. Those who do not have actual fruit- or nut-trees to wassail should hang apples upon their Yule tree and wassail it in the same way. Special, very strong, ale was brewed for Yule time - something many small European breweries still do; the strongest beer in the world is "Sanniklaus", at 13.5 %, which is only brewed at Yule. The brewing of the beer that is drunk at Yule should be done as late as possible - certainly after Winternights - though strong beers tend to need longer in the bottle than lighter ones. Beer which is actually brewed at Yule-time is full of magical strength, and may be used throughout the year whenever the special might of the Wyrð-shaping Yule season is needed.

The decorating of the house with greenery - that is to say, evergreen branches - is very traditional. The superstition that it is unlucky to bring greenery into the house before December 21 probably stems from the fact that this day was one for Heathen celebration, and therefore only Heathens decorated their houses in preparation for it

(as opposed to the christians, whose holiday was carefully set four days later). The evergreens, of course, show life going on even in the darkest part of the year when all the other trees are bare. Bringing their branches into the house also may be thought to act as a bidding to the alfs, idises, and other kindly ghosts; holly has been thought in modern times to be especially close to the mound-alfs. Together with the apple, the yew is the greatest of Yule-trees, but its branches should not be brought indoors if you have children or pets, since its bark, berries, and needles are all very poisonous. The toxins of the yew are also supposed to be released into the air by heat, which suggests that having a lot of yew-branches in an enclosed, heated room may not be a good idea. However, in *The English Festivals*, Whistler does cite Coleridge's 1798 description of a German family which brought a huge yew-branch into the house, which they set burning candles in and gifts under (p. 29). The mistletoe is fitting to the whole season, when folk pass so easily between the worlds; but remember, likewise, that its berries are very poisonous. The Yule tree is a southern German custom (almost certainly stemming from Heathen roots), which only reached Scandinavia in the last century; Edred Thorsson suggests that this tree was originally the same as the live Bairn-Stock, which was only cut down and brought inside when it became unsafe to hang the gifts to the alfs and idises upon a tree in public. The earlier-quoted description of the Lappish gifts to the "Yule-folk" lends strength to this theory: the tree was the center of the holy feast, the means of making the offering to the god/esses and ghosts as well as itself being a mighty wight to whom offerings were given. In modern Ásatrú, as well as seeing the Yule tree as the kin-tree, many folk also see it as the embodiment of the World-Tree, so that it is sometimes crowned with an eagle and has a wyrm or dragon wrapped about the bottom.

Especially fitting things to hang on the Yule-tree are apples, nuts, and strings of cranberries; small images of swans, horses, swine, and other such holy beasts; and, as spoken of above, little ships. Cookies or little breads in the shapes of animals are also very fitting to hang as gifts to the holy ones. It was not long ago that it was customary to fasten candles to the branches of fir trees. This is still sometimes done in Germany, but is so dangerous, especially when dealing with a cut tree inside the house, that the practice is not recommended: the standard strings of electric lights serve the purpose well enough. The practice of putting the family gifts under an indoors Yule tree also go back to the earliest mentions of the tree-custom.

In Scandinavia, the centre of the Yule festivities (especially before the German tree was adopted) was the Yule wreath; many families have wrought-iron candleholder wreaths as family heirlooms, and these are also woven with evergreen branches. The ring of the wreath may have been thought of as showing the ring of the year, and perhaps, with the candles burning about its circle, the wheel of the Sun. As well as the iron wreath, wreaths were also made of pine branches and/or woven straw. This is a custom true folk have taken up: at the beginning of the Yule season, we often make wreaths with evergreen branches, apples, nuts, and other such signs of frith and good luck, into which wishes and blessings written in runes on thin strips of paper may be woven. These wreaths are then burned at Twelfth Night. Whistler mentions that while the Yule-tree was German, the "Yule-Bough", a great hanging sphere or half-sphere of evergreens with a ring of apples dangling from it, was characteristically English (pp.

44-47).

Work was supposed to stop at Yule; under "Frija", we spoke of the ban on spinning during the Holy Nights. Especially, no wheel was supposed to go round - not whetstones, grinding querns, mill-wheels, or any other sort. This likely bears some relationship to the importance of the Sun and the sun-wheel to the Yule-feast. For these twelve days, also, we are outside normal time and free of the usual need for ceaseless work: the Yule nights are a time for the mind and body to rest while the soul reaches out to the god/esses.

Special cakes are baked for Yule: traditional shapes include boars, sun-wheels, and interwoven snakes - all of which were being used in the 17th century, and probably do indeed stem from Heathen times (Nordisk Bondereligion, p. 40). Lutefisk is a traditional Norwegian Yule-food. Most folk of Norwegian descent who have been fed the stuff in their youth consider it very optional. Most important, however, is that the food and drink not be stinted at Yuletide: whoever comes must be fed lavishly, for guest-friendliness means more at this time (when the god/esses and ghosts walk) than at any other time in the year. In Sweden, the feast-table was prepared with two "Yule-hoves", one for the husband and one for the wife. A big cheese was laid at the bottom, then two "Yule-buns" of unequal size; on top of the pyramid was a crown of wheat-dough, in which the "frith-dove" sat with a stalk of barley in its beak and an egg under its tail - a symbol that the farmer should have a fruitful year. Around the edge of the table were tree-branches, hung with pretzels and all with apples stuck on the ends. The other house folk also got their "hoves", though not such impressive ones as the man and wife of the home had. From Yule evening until the third day of Yule, New Year's Day, and Twelfth Night, the "Yule-hoves" were supposed to lie on the great table and got special power from the Yule-feasting. Thereby, the Yule-bread got the power to heal illness. In Halland, the *jugalt* or "Yule-boar", a boar-shaped cake, lay on the top of the "hove" with an apple set on it; another traditional crown for the Yule-hove was a ring-shaped cake with three lovely red apples (Fejlberg, *Jul*, I, pp. 182-83). Such things show the setting of *Wyrd*: by laying them out as part of the feast to be shared with the god/esses and ghosts, the householders made sure that they would have a rich and joyous year.

In Sweden, the Yule-boar was especially important: this was often a great boar-shaped bread of rye- or wheat-meal, up to a foot and a half long, complete with eyes, nostrils, and bristles. It was borne in at mid-day on the first day of Yule; the house-mother then cut a sun-wheel upon it and laid it before the house-father's place, decked in a white cloth. It was eaten on New Years' or Three Kings' Day, but one piece would be kept to share between the plough-oxen on the first day of work in the spring, and another would be saved until the next Yule (Fejlberg, *Jul*, I, p. 192). This boar was clearly a survival of the original *sonargöltr* on which oaths were sworn in Heathen times. In Västergötland, a block of wood had a pig-skin set upon it; the man would put his hand on this and swear to be a good father and mild husband, and the wife and the serving folk would plight similar troths. For those who do not keep and butcher their own pigs, such a Yule-bread or mock boar is clearly the most practical alternative to the sacrificial boar of elder days.

Dogs and cats got the same sort of food as humans at this time, and dogs were supposed to be kept inside (Nordisk Bondereligion, p. 40), perhaps because their barking at the many ghostly wights who wandered

through the Yule night was thought to be an ill thing. Many fire-customs are important at Yule-time. The best-known of these is, of course, the Yule-log, which must burn the whole night through with someone keeping Yule-watch over it. Pieces of the Yule-log are then kept through the year and thought to bring good luck; one year's Yule-log should be kindled with a piece of the last. This fire in the darkest night embodies the ever-living fire of the clan and the soul, the ever-springing hope of the worlds. In modern times, those folk who do not have fireplaces in which a log can be burned all night use a large (24-hour) candle instead, by choice either black, purple, or deep green. Hákonar saga ins góða (Heimskringla) tells how the cups for drinking the holy toasts were borne around the fires; Grimm thinks that this may have been an integral part of the Germanic customs concerning the giving of drink to the god/esses (Teutonic Mythology II, p. 628). The candle-wreath and burning of the Yule wreath have already been spoken of; Grimm cites the Franconian custom of going up on a peak with a wagon-wheel wrapped in straw, then setting it alight at evening and letting it run down so that it looks like the Sun running from the sky (II, p. 627) - though most of the examples of burning Sun-wheels which he cites are part of the Midsummer festivities.

In Norwegian tradition, the first person to get up on Yule morning should bring everyone else a drink of snaps (vodka or akavit) in bed (Fejlberg, Jul, I, p. 154). This is very like the "Lucy"-tradition of a light-crowned maiden coming about with cakes and coffee or gløgg, which has already been spoken of under "Frija", and may well be related.

When the Yule-season was over, there were certain customs of "chasing Yule out". If there was any ale left in the keg, a "sleep-draught" would be drunk with it. Yule could be rung out with bells or beaten out with birch-sticks. This served to mark the end of the wih-nights and the return to normal life; it also chased out any trolls or spooks who might have meant to stay past their time.

Strophe 33. "An early meal a man should usually eat, unless he is going on a visit; he sits and guzzles, acts as if he's starving, and doesn't make any conversation." Sayings of the High One, 'Havamal',
Recommended reading:

THE POETIC EDDA, Carolyne Larrington - translator. 1996 ISBN 0-19-282383-3 (paperback), Oxford University Press

THE PROSE EDDA of Snorri Sturluson, tales from Norse Mythology, Jean I. Young - translator. 1954 ISBN 0-520-01232-1 (paperback), University of California Press