More Than Mythology – Narratives, Ritual Practices and Regional Distribution in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religions, asks this relevant question regarding the old Nordic belief systems and religions in a publication comprising together a vast array of scholars of Pre-Christian Scandinavian cultures and a handful of views on the Sámi-Finnish tradition. The 286-page book opens new horizons in the understanding of the past and the present of the Northern part of Europe.

Central to the diverse papers are the overarching themes of narrative studies, the role of rituals and the discussion of regional difference and distribution, and perhaps secondly also religion as a communal practice. Price opens the book with an in-depth and conclusive view on "Mythic Acts", stressing the need of assessing burials, rituals and other practices as series of "performances" sometimes spanning over decades in the same geographical place, such as the gravesites in the Oslo Fjord. He refers to such a process as the "theatre of death" where these "performances" have taken place. Furthermore, in his splendid essay, he makes the case for the need to combine archaeological data with ethnographical, anthropological and other textual sources. He makes a strong case for diversification of views regarding the pre-Christian Nordic context, given the reported 500,000 different grave- and other dug sites, stressing the need to avoid any "unified view". Price also proceeds to provide the reader with an eyewitness' account of a "Viking" funeral along the Volga River in Russia, through the text of Arab geographer and historian Ibn Fadlan – such a description remains a pivotal text on the topic, despite the possibilities of misinterpretation and culture-specific lenses that Fadlan's testimony gives rise to. Again, the notion of performatory function of the rituals comes to the fore.

Jackson investigates the merits and limits of comparative philology. He positions the crucial difference of nomadic and settled communities of the "pre"-Indo-European peoples of the Steppes as a topic worth paying attention to in the linguistic context. One can almost see the vast expanse of the pre-historic Indo-European society from India to the West Fjords in Iceland, spanning continents, nations, cultures, over time and space. Jackson investigates the rituals of the past using key linguistic possibilities, employing such concepts as the "blót" qua shared cultural heritage. Dumezils' notion of an "Indo-European" ideology is mentioned, but Jackson stresses that the "present now" of any belief system makes the unique characteristics of such systems.

DuBois makes an excursion into the diets and deities of the Scandinavians and the Sámi. This is a good overview of the differences between the settler-farmers of Scandinavia and the hunter-gatherers belonging to various Sámi Nations. He positions different animals as a

source of cultural-religious similarity and difference between the two cultures – as a result the Nordic communities hold in reverence mostly domesticated animals, as opposed to the Sámi, who have preserved other worldviews centred on "wild" animals, even though the reindeer, as a semi-domesticated herd animal falls between these categories. Within the Scandinavian life-world, the role of sheep and goat is very interesting. Differences come to the surface with regard to fish and their cultural interpretations in the communities. Interestingly, some animals, such as horses, have a meaning for both peoples, but they are of a very different kind – to the Sámi the horse possesses a demonic association. DuBois discusses the notion of a "mythic lag" on community change – how some attachments from "prior" systems [hunter-gatherer] manifest "still" or persistently in the "more advanced" life stage of a people.

As he is the only author who, to a certain extent, discusses Sámi worldviews and compares them to the Scandinavians, his text requires some reflection. The article has merits. At the same time, it has serious flaws too, for the viewpoint is fixed upon the Finno-Ugric side. According to DuBois, "both Scandinavians and the Sámi differentiated themselves from each other through the religious imagery related directly to the species they chose to consume". It is true that the Sámi stress their connection with fish and reindeer as opposed to domesticated animals, but there is a set of reasons for this. DuBois avoids stressing the Scandinavian and, since the 1800s, the Finnish colonisation of the Sámi across the region; meaning the hunter-gatherer-herder systems as opposed to invading and expanding farming settlers. It is reasonably safe to assume that already the early historical meetings [while trade was certainly also a part of them] between the farmers and the Sámi in various parts of the region led to land use conflicts, as the subsistence rounds of the hunters required large, stable old-growth territories, as opposed to the needs of the farmers to clear forests for farms. As several Sámi scholars and leaders, such as Elina Helander, Jelena Porsanger, Pauliina Feodoroff and others have done, the emphasis in the cultural discourses on reindeer and fish, and other "wild" foods and animals, are also mechanisms of resistance against invasion.

DuBois utilizes some photographs from Eastern Sápmi (or Finnmark) in Norway in his article. They should be seen in a critical light. Especially the famous "Grease Stone" of Mortensnes (p.81) receives special attention. Having worked in the villages and areas around the stone since 1996, I have another opinion. My Sámi friends indicate strongly that the stone is, in fact, a Scandinavian imposition on their landscapes – while other stones and other sites of Mortensnes are indeed of the Sámi world. DuBois utilizes little-known and well-established sources from the Sámi side, but the big change and sites of resistance are not expressed clearly enough.

Raudvere establishes religion as a mechanism to interpret local reality. Cosmic histories and transcendental realities of past community life are a text for the scholars but a lived reality for the people themselves. She utilizes Völuspá to explore ritual and meaning. Readers could have benefitted from a more thorough discussion on the various versions of Völuspá.

Nordberg presents a significant methodological paper on the study of Old Norse religion. Importantly, he stresses the need of geographical diversity and difference.A Map could have helped this article. Secondly, Nordberg importantly distinguishes between farms and coastal fishing villages, and stresses the shifts within religions in times of change. Some old colonial ghosts loom within the text with the references to "advanced religions" [of farming societies] – such terms having been deconstructed a long time ago to their proper place by postcolonial research.

Stark and Anttonen offer us the only views of the Finnish-Karelian tradition. They dwell little on the difference between the Scandinavian and the Sámi tradition; however Stark reminds us that "some elements of the Finnish folk practice…clearly have Finno-Ugric roots…[deriving from] Eurasian shamanism." According to her, these constitute a "loosely structured ethno-theory for illness aetiology." This is in line with the claims by Clive Tolley, who has not found evidence of shamanism in the Old Norse religion. Stark employs a strong feministic view on the recorded texts and identifies the year 1860 as a big change for the Nordic traditions and the complex cultural layers of religious imagery. Anttonen, by quoting at length the earliest Nordic folk tradition text by Agricola, investigates the influences and context of Finnish and Karelian deities in early times. He argues that no single coherent pagan system existed here and makes the case for the slow speed of religious change. Both texts are an important and distinct introduction to the Finnish tradition and its difference compared to the Sámi and Scandinavian ones. Stark's conclusions could benefit a Finnish popular audience too.

Sundqvist investigates the sacral kinship and proposes a "religious ruler ideology" instead as a defining term. It would consist of relationships with the mythic world, its rituals, symbols and cultic organisation. He convincingly argues that there is a need of an all-inclusive rethink – and using empirical materials makes a strong case between the Swedish-Norwegian situation and the strongly independent Icelandic Commonwealth, leading to the conclusion that there was no uniform religious ruler ideology in the Nordic space.

Schjödt brings the far-reaching volume to its close by offering new aims and methodological discussions. Shortly stated, contemporary sources such as archaeology and the medieval sources, such as cultural texts of the time, need to go to together to widen the scope of

studies on the Old Norse religion. Sagas and Eddas are to be viewed as a blend of skills of the author, oral traditions and influences of the time-space in which they were composed. Models, discourse analysis and comparative views will open the doors to new understandings. The hunt for the "original text" remains an enigma, even though, according to Schjödt, an Indo-European kernel of stories and myths existed – but, despite this and Dumezil, the "old" religion was not a coherent worldview, rather a "discursive space of diversity".

Technically, this surprisingly good book could have benefitted from maps. Contemporary views of Norse religion, the role of Sigur Rós in Iceland and other followers would have enlightened the views expressed in the book too. A clear distinction between Karelian hunter-societies in the period 1600-1800 and the Sámi hunters, as opposed to the colonial impact of the farming societies of Scandinavia, would have made clearer the expanding nature of the Old Norse world. And lastly, what happened to the dragons?

And thus we come to a close of "More Than Mythology" – in the opening line I asked, borrowing from Schjödt, what kind of evidence is needed to propose convincing interpretations? The main problem with the critical study of religion is that it is often done by people that do not believe. Therefore the "materials" are seen as "texts" and interpretations abound, but yet the "source" is missing.

I am pondering this in the Karelian village of Selkie, one of the westernmost of our communities, where a hundred years ago Kalevala-style incantations and poems were collected by the scholars of that day. Snow has fallen on trees and our fishing season for open waters is at a close, boats are up and we eagerly await for the arrival of proper lake ice so that we can spread the nets under the ice again. As I reflected about the More Than Mythology, on the lake, the last of the migratory birds flew by on their way to the south – soon we will meet again, I said to them. And the realisation came to me – if we are to understand the views of our ancestors, we need to live in that nature, or remnants of that nature, that sustained them – that is the source. Then the scholar, removed from the yearly cycles of the European North with his analytical or even her feminist apparatus, can return to see that time and space are not a line, indeed many things remain, of the "old" and of the "new", of the things the wind only whispers of, but which are already emerging.