

Valkyries and Vikings and Mermaids! Oh my!

Louis Moe's Old Norse Worldview in *Ragnarok: En Billeddigtning* and *Valkyrien: Romantisk Billeddigtning*.



Louis Maria Niels Peder Moe (April 20, 1857 – October 23, 1945)

Louis Moe was born in Norway in 1857 but spent much of his life in Denmark and became a Danish citizen in 1919. He is best known for his illustrations of children's nursery rhymes and H.C. Andersen stories, and also for mythological and historical illustrations. Moe was talented at drawing animals and he is sometimes referred to as "Denmark's Walt Disney."

We will be primarily be looking at illustrations of mermaids in two of Louis Moe's books. Both books concern Viking mythology and the prehistory of the Norse people. However, Vikings did not believe in mermaids, i.e., beings who were half human and half fish with tails instead of legs. Many of the mermaids that Moe drew are bicaudal, i.e., they have two scaly lower limbs that end in fins rather than feet.

Ragnarok: An Illustrated Poem - Ragnarok: En Billeddigtning (1929)

Moe based his account of Ragnarok on the events described in the Old Norse poem *Völuspá*.

- **Ragnarok** – *Ragnarök* (Old Norse) – a series of events leading up to a final great battle between the Old Norse gods and their enemies, a race known as giants but they were not necessarily gigantic in size. Ragnarok is often called "The Twilight of the Gods" or "The Doom of the Gods."
- **Fimbulvetr** – a series of three unusually harsh winters, without intervening seasons, that preceded Ragnarok. Fimbulvetr is also a time of strife and social discord.
- *The Song of the Seeress - Völuspá* (Old Norse) – a poem in which a seeress recites the history of the world to Óðinn, the chief of the gods. She then prophesizes the destruction of the world at the Battle of Ragnarok and its rebirth after the battle. *Völuspá* is preserved in the late thirteenth-century Icelandic manuscript Codex Regius.

Resources:

- 44 illustrations on MyNDIR's site: <https://myndir.uvic.ca/Moe-RagRok-1929.html>
- E-book online: https://vault.library.uvic.ca/concern/generic_works/b812aaf4-541b-49ec-8461-580dd67f75b8?locale=en

Valkyrie: An Illustrated Romance -- Valkyrien: Romantisk Billeddigtning (1931)

Moe based his character of Vébjörg on a shield maiden in Saxo's *History of the Danes* who died at the legendary Battle of Brávellir c. 770 A.D. Moe's invents the detail that she had to die in battle in order to become a Valkyrie.

- **Valkyries** - supernatural female warriors who are closely associated with Óðinn and decide the fate of warriors. They convey those who die in battle to Valhöll to join the group of warriors known as einherjar who will fight on the side of the gods in the Battle of Ragnarök.

Resources:

- 11 illustrations on MyNDIR's site: <https://myndir.uvic.ca/VIKm1930.html>
- E-book online with translation: https://vault.library.uvic.ca/concern/generic_works/b812aaf4-541b-49ec-8461-580dd67f75b8