

Adam of Bremen

AN EXCERPT FROM THE *HISTORY OF THE ARCHBISHOPS OF HAMBURG-BREMEN*,  
DESCRIBING THE CULT-CENTER OF THE HEATHEN SWEDES AT UPPSALA

tr. Francis J. Tschan

xxvi (26). That folk has a very famous temple called Uppsala,<sup>1</sup> situated not far from the city of Sigtuna and Bjorko.<sup>2</sup> In this temple, entirely decked out in gold, the people worship the statues of three gods in such wise that the mightiest of them, Thor, occupies a throne in the middle of the chamber; Wotan and Frikko have places on either side. The significance of these gods is as follows: Thor, they say, presides over the air, which governs the thunder and lightning, the winds and rains, fair weather crops. The other, Wotan-that is, the Furious-carries on war and imparts to man strength against his enemies. The third is Frikko, who bestows peace and pleasure on mortals. His likeness, too, they fashion with an immense phallus. But Wotan they chisel armed, as our people are wont to represent Mars. Thor with his scepter apparently resembles Jove. The people also worship heroes made gods, whom they endow with immortality because of their remarkable exploits, as one reads in the Vita of Saint Ansgar they did in the case of King Eric.

xxvii (27). For all their gods there are appointed priests to offer sacrifices for the people. If plague and famine threaten, a libation is poured to the idol Thor; if war, to Wotan; if marriages are to be celebrated, to Frikko. It is customary also to

1 Scholium: Near this temple stands a very large tree with wide-spreading branches, always green winter and summer. What kind it is nobody knows. There is also a spring at which the pagan are accustomed to make their sacrifices, and into it to plunge a live man. And if he is not found, the people's wish will be granted.

2 Scholium: A golden chain goes round the temple. It hangs over the gable of the building and sends its glitter far off to those who approach, because the shrine stands on level ground with mountains all about it like a theater.

solemnize in Uppsala, at nine-year intervals, a general feast of all the provinces of Sweden. From attendance at this festival no one is exempted.<sup>3</sup> Kings and people all and singly send their gifts to Uppsala and, what is more distressing than any kind of punishment, those who have already adopted Christianity redeem themselves through these ceremonies. The sacrifice is of this nature: of every living thing that is male, they offer nine heads,<sup>4</sup> with the blood of which it is customary to placate gods of this sort. The bodies they hang in the sacred grove that adjoins the temple. Now this grove is so sacred in the eyes of the heathen that each and every tree in it is believed divine because of the death or putrefaction of the victims. Even dogs and horses hang there with men. A Christian seventy-two years old told me that he had seen their bodies suspended promiscuously. Furthermore, the incantations customarily chanted in the ritual of a sacrifice of this kind are manifold and unseemly; therefore, it is better to keep silence about them

3 Scholium: When not long ago the most Christian king of the Swedes, Anunder, would not offer the demons the prescribed sacrifice of the people, he is said, on being deposed, to have departed "from the presence of the council, rejoicing" that he had been "accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus."

4 Scholium: Feasts and sacrifices of this kind are solemnized for nine days. On each day they offer a man along with other living beings in such a number that in the course of the nine days they will have made offerings of seventy-two creatures. This sacrifice takes place about the time of the vernal equinox.